

# Negotiating Protection: Ottoman-Swiss Relations and the Inclusion of Switzerland into a Diplomatic Germansphere during the First World War

Giorgio Ennas

## ABSTRACTS

When the Ottoman Empire began to develop its diplomatic network across Bern, Geneva, and Zürich at the end of the nineteenth century, the simultaneous absence of a Swiss representative in Constantinople was interpreted by the Ottomans as an issue of inequality. During the First World War and with the mediation of Germany, the Ottoman government and Switzerland finally negotiated an agreement on diplomatic relations based on international law and reciprocity. Despite the affinity of part of the Swiss population with France, Swiss citizens were temporarily placed under German protection, creating a *modus vivendi* between the Ottomans and the Swiss. In this way, Swiss interests in the Ottoman Empire were included in a diplomatic system dominated by Germany and its Austrian ally.

Während das Osmanische Reich in der zweiten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts sein diplomatisches Netz in Bern, Genf und Zürich ausbaute, wurde das gleichzeitige Fehlen eines Schweizer Vertreters in Konstantinopel von den Osmanen als Ungleichheit interpretiert. Während des Ersten Weltkriegs handelten das Osmanische Reich und die Schweiz unter deutscher Vermittlung schließlich ein Abkommen über eine „diplomatische Grenze“ auf der Grundlage des Völkerrechts und der Gegenseitigkeit aus. Trotz der Verbundenheit eines Teils der Schweizer Bevölkerung mit Frankreich wurden die Schweizer Staatsangehörigen vorübergehend unter deutschen Schutz gestellt, wodurch ein *Modus Vivendi* zwischen Osmanen und Schweizern geschaffen wurde. Auf diese Weise wurden die Schweizer Interessen im Osmanischen Reich in ein von Deutschland und seinem österreichischen Verbündeten dominiertes diplomatisches System einbezogen.

## 1. Introduction

Despite the geographical distance between them, since the fifteenth century, the Swiss and the Ottomans enjoyed a long tradition of indirect relations. The history of these relations has been investigated by several historians, such as Hans-Lukas Kieser, Stefan Sigerist and Beat Witschi.<sup>1</sup> Witschi studied the Swiss commercial relations with the Levant between 1848 and 1914, while Sigerist analysed different aspects regarding the history of the Swiss diasporas in the Ottoman Empire and in Asia during the long nineteenth century. Finally, Kieser investigated the history of the Ottoman elitist diaspora in Switzerland, paying particular attention to the communities of Geneva and Lausanne. They explored the nature of Ottoman-Swiss cultural, diplomatic and economic relations and the history of their diasporas in their respective countries, demonstrating that much still needs to be studied in this too-often neglected field. The question of the protection of Swiss citizens in Ottoman territories is only a limited part of this rich and complex history, which I analyse here in a preliminary manner. In particular, this article focuses on two main areas, namely; the development of Swiss diplomacy in relation to France, Austria-Hungary, Germany and the Ottoman Empire in the nineteenth century; and, the issue of the protection of Swiss citizens in the Ottoman territories during the First World War.

In doing so, I employ the heuristic concept of the “Germansphere” to designate a transnational space shaped by the strong influence of the German language and shared forms of cultural literacy, which comprised countries such as Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Switzerland at its core. Simultaneously, building on this heuristic concept of Germansphere, I elaborated the concepts of diplomatic “Francosphere” and “Germansphere”. If the former term generically designates the French-speaking global diplomatic culture and space that characterised international relations during the nineteenth century, the latter indicates an alternative diplomatic space to that of the liberal powers and dominated by the German-speaking powers, specifically the German Empire and Austria-Hungary, formed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century and strengthened during the First World War. From this perspective, it will be possible to better understand the relations between the Ottoman Empire and Switzerland, going beyond simplistic comparisons between Europe and the Ottoman Empire.

This article is divided into three sections. The first briefly summarises the development of Swiss diplomacy after the Congress of Vienna and its relations with the Ottoman Empire in the first half of the nineteenth century. The second section describes the oscillation of Swiss diplomacy between opting for French and German protection. It also considers the desire of a part of the Swiss government to establish an autonomous Swiss consular net-

1 See H. L. Kieser/A. Meier/W. Stoffel (eds.), *Revolution islamischen Rechtes. Das Schweizerische ZGB in der Türkei*, Zürich 2008; H. L. Kieser, *Vorkämpfer der “Neuen Türkei”: Revolutionäre Bildungseliten am Genfersee (1870–1939)*, Zürich 2005; B. Witschi, *Schweizer auf imperialistischen Pfaden: Die schweizerischen Handelsbeziehungen mit der Levante 1848 bis 1914*, Stuttgart 1987; S. Sigerist, *Schweizer im Orient*, Schaffhausen 2004.

work in the Ottoman Empire, and to maintain the status quo under French protection. The third reconstructs the Ottoman-Swiss negotiations concerning the establishment of official and stable diplomatic relations during the First World War, and the definitive entry of Switzerland and its diplomatic relations with the Ottoman Empire into the diplomatic Germansphere.

## 2. Switzerland within the Diplomatic Francosphere

To better understand the development of diplomatic relations between the Ottoman Empire and Switzerland, it is necessary to look back to the origins of Swiss diplomacy in the Empire. Lacking direct diplomatic relations with the Ottomans, the Swiss in the Ottoman Empire were deprived of the privileges and immunities granted by the Capitulations. Therefore, the Swiss had to choose between remaining under Ottoman jurisdiction or placing themselves under the protection of France, which had enjoyed the Capitulations since the sixteenth century.<sup>2</sup> In the eighteenth century, the attempts to establish diplomatic contacts between the Ottoman Empire and Switzerland failed. For this reason, and for protection, Switzerland was forced to continue to turn to powers which enjoyed the Capitulations and had their own representatives in Constantinople.<sup>3</sup> At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Swiss community of Constantinople grew, due to the growth of commercial trade between the two countries. Before the Congress of Vienna of 1814/15, France was the only European power entrusted to represent Switzerland in the Ottoman Empire. Only after the Congress did Swiss citizens have the possibility to freely choose between the protection of powers such as the Austria or the kingdoms of Prussia and Sardinia.<sup>4</sup> Simultaneously, the Congress of Vienna forced Switzerland to modify its foreign policy and diplomatic system. Beginning in 1815, Swiss diplomacy followed a peculiar path in comparison to that of other European states.<sup>5</sup> Swiss diplomacy was mainly focused on the preservation of independence and neutrality. It also strived to guarantee the security of Swiss commercial and industrial interests, limiting as much as possible unnecessary expenses and investments.<sup>6</sup> Simultaneously, Swiss diplomacy was characterised by a desire to achieve results while saving as many economic resources as possible and using the European Great Powers as intermediaries. For this reason, until the beginning of the 1870s, Switzerland only had three permanent diplomatic representatives located in Paris, Vienna, and Turin. As part of this diplomatic strategy, Swiss relations with France played a fundamental role, and this was highlighted by the fact that the only existing Swiss plenipotentiary minister was positioned in Paris,

2 Witschi, *Schweizer auf imperialistischen Pfaden*, p. 107.

3 Sigerist, *Schweizer im Orient*, pp. 25–26.

4 *Ibid.*, p. 20.

5 *Diplomatische Dokumente der Schweiz* (hereafter DDS), I, Bern 1990, p. XIII.

6 *Ibid.*, pp. XIV–XVI.

and that, until the beginning of the 1870s, Swiss citizens in the Ottoman Empire mainly turned to France as their protecting power.<sup>7</sup>

In general, during the nineteenth century, French culture and language played a fundamental role in the development of international law and diplomatic corps, favouring the creation of a global diplomatic “Francosphere”. This space brought together all those states that found in French diplomatic culture and language a model upon which to build their diplomacies, such as the Ottoman Empire, the Kingdom of Sardinia and many others.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, even if the Swiss citizens had the possibility to freely choose the Great Power under whose protection they wished to place themselves, Switzerland generally preferred to negotiate with the Ottoman government and local administrators through the French consular network.<sup>9</sup> In this way, in the first half of the nineteenth century, Ottoman-Swiss diplomatic relations were included within the French diplomatic system. This system, which involved French mediation between its European *protégés* and the Mediterranean Muslim states, such as Egypt and the Ottoman Empire, initially met the expectations of both the Swiss government and diaspora in the Ottoman Empire.

In the 1830s, Swiss textile merchants from Glarus, St. Gallen and Appenzell established themselves in Constantinople and other important commercial centres, such as Smyrna. The demand of Swiss textile products increased among the local populations.<sup>10</sup> In 1838, Swiss trade was included into the French-Ottoman commercial treaty, allowing the Swiss residents in the Ottoman Empire to enjoy the privileges and the protection of the Capitulations.<sup>11</sup> The *Schutzgenossenschaft*, or “protective association”, was a legal status granted to foreigners in the Ottoman Empire, whose states did not have a representative. These foreigners enjoyed the protection of a Great Power as citizens of their own state.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, although most Swiss citizens required French protection, they were free to choose the protection of any other state with Capitulations and representatives in the Empire.<sup>13</sup> In the first half of the nineteenth century, the Swiss citizens and chambers of commerce took advantage of this collaboration between their government and France. The collaborative relationship started to change in the 1850s. Although the Ottoman Empire still lacked a permanent representative close to Switzerland and vice versa, since the very beginning of the 1850s, Switzerland started to consider the possibility of inaugurating stable relations with the Ottoman government.<sup>14</sup> This decision was

7 Sigerist, *Schweizer im Orient*, p. 26.

8 See A. Massé, *Un empire informel en Méditerranée. Les consuls de France en Grèce et dans l'Empire ottoman: images, ingérences, colonisation (1815–1856)*, Paris 2019.

9 DDS, I, d. 295, E 2/1319, the Swiss minister in Paris, J. C. Kern, to the director of the Department of Commerce and Tolls, C. Fornerod, 11 January 1858, Paris, pp. 583–585.

10 Sigerist, *Schweizer im Orient*, p. 19.

11 Witschi, *Schweizer auf imperialistischen Pfaden*, p. 109.

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid.

14 Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi (hereafter BOA), Annexed, Copy of a letter sent from Napoleon De Szostakowski to the Ottoman minister of Finances, Tevfik Pasha, 10 June 1861, London, Hariciye Nezareti (hereafter HR), Londra Sefareti (from now onwards SFR\_3)\_3\_00059\_00018\_001\_001-002. It was possible to collect the documents

due to the insistence and pressure of the Swiss communities in the Ottoman Empire, especially in Constantinople. In 1851, the Federal Council (Conseil fédéral or Bundesrat) investigated if the existing trade relations between Switzerland and the Ottoman Empire “were important enough” (*étaient assez importantes*) to justify the establishment of a trade consulate in Constantinople.<sup>15</sup> However, even though the increasing importance of the export of Swiss products favoured a positive answer, some of the institutions questioned by the Federal Council, such as the Chamber of Commerce of St. Gallen, feared that the inability of the Swiss government to support the authority of its representatives through military means could lead to potentially humiliating situations.<sup>16</sup> Unable to impose itself militarily on the Ottoman government, Switzerland would have been forced to humiliate itself by asking for the assistance of a Great Power. For this reason, considering that French protection had worked effectively until that point, and that, as with citizens of other states without direct representation in the Ottoman Empire, Swiss citizens had the possibility to freely choose the Great Power under whose protection they wished to place themselves, the Federal Council in the end decided to preserve the status quo.<sup>17</sup> This privilege was accepted by the Ottomans and the Great Powers as well, which benefited from extending their influence in the Empire outside the “boundaries” of their own national communities.

During the 1850s, despite the insistence of Swiss citizens in Constantinople, the Federal Council continued to have concerns regarding the creation of a diplomatic network in the Ottoman Empire due to possible consular expenses,<sup>18</sup> the risk of losing the protection of the Great Powers for its citizens and the instability which, in their opinion, still characterised the Ottoman state. Last but not least, one of the main problems for Switzerland was the clause of reciprocity requested by the Ottomans.<sup>19</sup> In fact, if Switzerland entered into negotiations with the Ottomans, the Federal Council would not be able to avoid demands from the imperial government for a reciprocity clause for its citizens, regardless of religion, concerning the right to settle in Switzerland. This demand would stem from the principle of international relations whereby one state grants certain rights to another only on the condition that the latter does the same. However, the Federal Constitution did not give the Council the right to force the cantons to grant settlement to non-Christians. For this reason, it was possible that some cantons would oppose gran-

used in this article thanks to the financial contributions of the European University Institute (EUI) of Fiesole and the Swiss Network for International Studies (SNIS).

15 French and German quotes in this article have been translated into English by the author. Schweizerisches Bundesarchiv (from now onwards BAR), Report concerning the establishment of diplomatic representation in the Ottoman Empire, 22 December 1858, Bern, pp. 1–26, 1000/00044, E2#1000/44#531\*.

16 Ibid., pp. 2–3.

17 Generally, Swiss trading houses opposed the creation of a Swiss autonomous consular network in the Ottoman Empire, because of their conviction that the protection of the Great Powers guaranteed a greater protection for their interests and for Swiss citizens (Sigerist, *Schweizer im Orient*, p. 28).

18 Ibid., p. 20.

19 BAR, Report concerning the establishment of diplomatic representation in the Ottoman Empire, 22 December 1858, Bern, 1000/00044, E2#1000/44#531\*, p. 23.

ting settlement rights to Ottoman Muslims, placing the Council in a delicate position. Therefore, in this period the Federal Council decided to maintain its position within the French diplomatic system, reserving the right to reconsider this issue in the following years.<sup>20</sup> Finally, after the signature of the French-Ottoman Commercial Treaty of 1861,<sup>21</sup> the diplomatic and economic relations of Switzerland with the Ottoman government were included within the French diplomatic system for another decade.

### 3. Between France and Germany

With the beginning of the 1870s, Swiss citizens began to turn to other powers for protection, often on the basis of linguistic and cultural proximity: those from German cantons preferred the protection of Germany and Austria-Hungary; those from French cantons favoured France; finally, those from Ticino chose Italy.<sup>22</sup> Even though France continued to play the role of main protector of Swiss interests in the Ottoman Empire, in 1872 the Federal Council sanctioned, through an exchange of notes, the full freedom of its citizens to choose the power under whose protection they wished to place themselves.<sup>23</sup> In this way, Swiss citizens in the Ottoman Empire had the possibility to take advantage of the Capitulations, while their government did not need to create an expansive diplomatic network in these territories. Once again, the acquiescence of the Ottomans and the interest of the Great Powers in extending their protection to the citizens of other countries allowed the Swiss government to maintain the status quo.

Despite this compromise, on several occasions between the 1870s and the 1880s Switzerland considered not only the possibility of establishing official relations with the Ottomans, but also placing Ottoman-Swiss diplomatic relations directly under the protection of Germany or Austria-Hungary. This consideration was linked to several factors. First of all, this period represented a turning point for European diplomacies.<sup>24</sup> In the 1860s and early 1870s, several historical events, such as the unifications of Italy and Germany, and the Austro-Prussian and Franco-Prussian wars marked the gradual modification of the diplomatic Francosphere.<sup>25</sup> French language and diplomatic culture continued to play a key role, despite the shift from a “multilateral contract system” to a system of “autonomous nation states each pursuing their individual power politics”.<sup>26</sup> Secondly, the Italian and German unifications downgraded France’s role as mediator in the Mediterranean, and in the 1870s, French diplomatic isolation limited the control of its diplo-

20 Ibid., p. 26.

21 DDS, III, 61, E 13 (B)/271, B, Confidential, the Swiss Ambassador in Vienna, J.J. von Tschudi, to the President of the Confederation and Head of the Political Department, J. J. Scherer, 8 February 1875, Constantinople, p. 137.

22 Sigerist, *Schweizer im Orient*, p. 27; Witschi, *Schweizer auf imperialistischen Pfaden*, p. 110.

23 BOA, Verbal Note, 26/20, from the Embassy of Austria-Hungary in Constantinople to the Ottoman Imperial Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 29 January 1916, Constantinople, HR, Siyasi (from now onwards SYS)\_00767\_00011\_008\_001.

24 DDS, II, Bern 1985, p. XIII.

25 Witschi, *Schweizer auf imperialistischen Pfaden*, p. 142.

26 R. Bavaj/M. Steber, Introduction. Germany and ‘The West’: The Vagaries of a Modern Relationship, in: R. Bavaj/M. Steber (eds.), *Germany and ‘the West’: The History of a Modern Concept*, New York 2015, p. 15.

macy over the relations of other states. Therefore, in the Ottoman Empire, an increasing number of Swiss citizens began to prefer German protection.<sup>27</sup> This impact also led to the enlargement of the Swiss permanent consular network in Europe which, in this period was extended towards Berlin and Rome.<sup>28</sup> Thirdly, during the Bismarckian age, the convergence between Switzerland and Germany increased due to the *Kulturkampf*.<sup>29</sup> In this struggle between Protestant elites and Catholic subjects over state control, Germany and Switzerland's relations with Catholic powers, such as France, deteriorated. Also, it was most likely for this reason that the number of Swiss who placed themselves under Austro-Hungarian protection remained inferior to those protected by Germany.<sup>30</sup> This worsening of relations between Protestant and Catholic powers nourished the aspirations of part of the Swiss government and diasporas in the Ottoman territories regarding the creation of an autonomous consular network in the Empire. Finally, the Swiss desire to create autonomous relations with the Ottoman Empire was also due to the discriminatory nature of the French consular practice. This discrimination favoured French citizens, and generally excluded Swiss from the French consular courts - whereas Germany and Austria-Hungary also included Swiss citizens as assessors.<sup>31</sup> Simultaneously, the Ottomans reportedly favoured Swiss emancipatory efforts because of their desire that the Swiss would agree to adhere to the country's laws rather than place themselves under the Capitulations regime, thus setting an important precedent.<sup>32</sup>

For all these reasons, during the 1870s, Switzerland re-considered its interest in developing an autonomous consular network in the Ottoman territories. One of the main problems was related to the issue of land ownership. In fact, while the Capitulations generally applied to real-estates as well, the properties acquired by Swiss citizens were automatically put under Ottoman jurisdiction. Due to the lack of diplomatic representation, the Swiss were deprived of their privileges and put in a delicate position in front of Ottoman authorities. They generally solved this problem by asking the protecting power to "legitimise them as citizens".<sup>33</sup> Between the 1870s and 1880s, this practice became gradually untenable due to the increasing volume of commercial exchanges. Therefore, the Swiss plenipotentiary minister in Vienna, Johann Jakob von Tschudi (1818–1889), using the privileged channel offered by the Ottoman ambassador, negotiated this issue and that of the inclusion of the Swiss citizens in the Law of 7 Safer 1284 (9 June 1867). This law permitted foreigners to own property in the Ottoman provinces, with the only exception of Hijaz, thus avoiding the application of the Capitulations.<sup>34</sup> Von Tschudi's efforts were

27 Witschi, *Schweizer auf imperialistischen Pfaden*, p. 142.

28 DDS, II, p. XIII.

29 DDS, III, Bern 1986, p. XVI.

30 Witschi, *Schweizer auf imperialistischen Pfaden*, p. 144.

31 DDS, III, 27, Annexed, E 2200 Vienna 1/54, the Swiss ambassador in Vienna, J.J. von Tschudi, to the Swiss merchant, A. Heer, 15 October 1873, Constantinople, p. 70.

32 Ibid.

33 Sigerist, *Schweizer im Orient*, pp. 30–31.

34 DDS, II, 395, E 13 (B) 271, Proposition of the head of the Political Department, E. Welti, to the Federal Council, 3 February 1872, Bern, p. 614.

directed towards obtaining “accession to the Protocol without Capitulations”.<sup>35</sup> These Swiss emancipatory efforts were discovered by the French ambassador in Constantinople. In October 1873, von Tschudi reported on the “intrigues” of the French ambassador, Count Charles-Jean-Melchior de Vogüé (1829–1916), to officially keep the Swiss communities of the Ottoman Empire within the French diplomatic system.<sup>36</sup> When de Vogüé became aware of Switzerland’s attempts to establish an autonomous diplomacy, he declared his intention to sign the protocol regarding land property on behalf of the Swiss Federal Council. If he had done so, it might have appeared to the Ottomans that the Swiss government was still under French protection, preserving French international “prestige” (*Ansehen*) that had been deeply compromised by the country’s defeat in the Franco-Prussian conflict.<sup>37</sup> After long negotiations, in the summer of 1875 the Swiss Federal government decided to maintain the status quo. It preferred to remain within the realm of the French diplomatic system.<sup>38</sup> At the same time, there was complete unanimity in the Swiss government regarding the need to avoid a mandatory French protectorate and protect the right of its citizens to choose their own protector.<sup>39</sup> In several cases, such as disputes with French nationals, the possibility of changing protectors represented an important resource for Swiss citizens.<sup>40</sup> This flexibility permitted the Swiss government to oscillate between France, Germany and Austria-Hungary in a period of modification of the international equilibrium between the Great Powers.

In 1883, with the French government on its side, Switzerland was interested in re-opening negotiations with the Ottomans. At the beginning of the 1880s, France, in contrast to Germany and Austria-Hungary, still did not assist non-French citizens to benefit from the Law of 1867, which permitted foreigners to own properties in the Ottoman Empire.<sup>41</sup> In this way, Germany and Austria-Hungary could extend their protection to citizens of other nationalities as well, offering a status similar to that of their own subjects.<sup>42</sup> Finally, on 9 July, the Swiss government decided to take advantage of French diplomatic support to request the accession of Switzerland to the Law of 1867 through the mediation of the French ambassador in Constantinople.<sup>43</sup> Although the Ottomans officially rejected the French proposal in 1884, they followed the instructions of the French go-

35 DDS, III, 27, Annexed, E 2200 Vienna 1/54, p. 71.

36 Witschi, *Schweizer auf imperialistischen Pfaden*, p. 142.

37 DDS, III, 27, E 13 (B)/271, the Swiss ambassador in Vienna, J.J. von Tschudi, to the president of the Confederation and head of the Political Department, P. Cérésolle, 29 October 1873, Vienna, p. 67.

38 DDS, III, 76, E 1004 1/102, Protocol of meeting of the Federal Council of 20 August 1875. Negotiations with the Porte concerning the acquisition of land property by the Swiss, Political Department, Proposal of 15 August 1875, p. 166; Annexed, E 13 (B)/271, the landman of Glarus, National councillor, J. Heer, to the president of the Confederation and head of the Political Department, J.J. Scherer, Glarus, 25 March 1875, p. 167.

39 *Ibid.*, p. 168.

40 *Ibid.*

41 DDS, III, 247, E 1004 1/134, Protocol of the meeting of the Federal Council of 28 September 1883, 4774. Acquisition of real estate in Turkey, Political Department, Application of 22 September 1883, pp. 526–527.

42 Sigerist, *Schweizer im Orient*, p. 31.

43 DDS, III, 247, E 1004 1/134, pp. 526–527.



vernment to put the Swiss on an equal footing with French citizens.<sup>44</sup> Consequently, it was possible to preserve the unofficial agreement with the Ottoman government and favour the permanence of the Swiss diplomatic and economic interests within the French diplomatic sphere of influence.

Ultimately, Switzerland, more voluntarily than before, decided to remain within the realm of French diplomacy. Despite the crisis of the international Francosphere, of the French diplomatic system and the rise of the German Empire, Switzerland preferred to preserve the status quo until the First World War. The long-lasting attractiveness of the French diplomatic sphere was linked to several factors, such as its flexibility, which ensured the right of the Swiss citizens to freely choose their protector. Finally, Ottoman acquiescence favoured the permanence of Ottoman-Swiss relations within the French diplomatic space. This status quo was destined to change with the First World War, the end of the Capitulations in the Ottoman Empire and the rise of the diplomatic Germansphere.

#### **4. The Inclusion of Switzerland in the Diplomatic Germansphere**

At the turn of the twentieth century, the Swiss government increased its diplomatic activity and its commitment to international multilateral diplomacy. The crisis and the end of the diplomatic Francosphere gradually polarised the position of the Great Powers into two blocs: the Triple Entente Powers and the Central Powers. As written above, the latter represented an alternative diplomatic space to that of the Entente, led by the German Empire and Austria-Hungary, which included relations between the two powers, their respective allied and occupied countries. While trying to preserve its neutrality and promote international peace, Switzerland was diplomatically closer to the Entente.<sup>45</sup> However, during the First World War the Ottoman Empire was gradually included into the diplomatic system of Germany and close to the Germansphere.

At the beginning of First World War, Switzerland proclaimed its neutrality and intention to preserve this status.<sup>46</sup> For this reason, the efforts of Swiss diplomacy were initially focused only on preserving independence and neutrality against the pressures of the belligerents. In spite of the marginal position of Switzerland in the conflict, the main objective of the belligerents remained essentially that of not having to impose direct military control on its territory and preventing their adversaries from doing so.<sup>47</sup> Simultaneously, the prolongation of the conflict and the necessity for Switzerland to protect its economy gradually forced its government to move away from a defensive diplomacy towards a policy of “active neutrality”, which led to Arthur Hoffmann’s (1857–1927)

44 Witschi, *Schweizer auf imperialistischen Pfaden*, pp. 155–156.

45 DDS, IV, Bern 1994, p. XIII.

46 DDS, VI, Bern 1981, p. XIII.

47 Ibid.

“ambiguous” (*janusköpfung*) diplomacy.<sup>48</sup> In the Ottoman context, this would lead to the gradual inclusion of Switzerland in the diplomatic Germansphere.

During the First World War, the absence of a Swiss representative in Constantinople and the issue regarding the protection of Swiss citizens in the Ottoman Empire became significant. Until 1914, the properties and the protection of Swiss citizens in the Ottoman Empire were safeguarded by the Capitulations and the exchange of the notes of 1872. In 1914, the Ottoman consul general in Geneva, Yusuf Ziya Bey (life data unknown), informed the Swiss government of the abrogation of all the privileges included in the Capitulations.<sup>49</sup> The abolition of the Capitulations and the absence of a Swiss representative in Constantinople created a climate of uncertainty concerning the rights of Swiss citizens and their properties in the Ottoman territories.<sup>50</sup> Due to the end of the Capitulations, Swiss citizens in the Ottoman Empire risked finding themselves without the protection of any European power, remaining simply under the generic protection of international law, like citizens of any state that did not have direct diplomatic relations with the Ottoman state. Furthermore, their real-estate risked confiscation at any moment as enemy property, due to Swiss proximity to France.<sup>51</sup> The Ottoman foreign ministry made it clear that, after the abolition of the Capitulations, the privilege of Swiss citizens in the Empire to freely choose their protector would no longer be recognized by the Ottoman government, until an agreement between Constantinople and Bern would determine the countries from which Swiss citizens could claim protection.<sup>52</sup> The informal agreement of 1872 worked only by virtue of the informal acquiescence of the Ottoman government. However, in the new international environment created by the First World War, the formal approval of the Ottomans and a limited list of potential protectors was needed to guarantee the protection of Swiss citizens by another state.

To replace the privileges lost with the end of the Capitulations, Germany and Austria-Hungary negotiated new settlement treaties with the Ottomans.<sup>53</sup> Following their example, Switzerland began negotiating an official Ottoman-Swiss agreement through the consul general in Geneva.<sup>54</sup> After several meetings with the directors of the Federal Political Department and the Department for Foreign Affairs, the Ottoman representative in Bern, Fuad Selim Bey (1874–1930), reported that the Swiss government had decided to create an autonomous diplomatic network in the Ottoman Empire and in

48 M. Mayer/C. Müller (trans.), Arthur Hoffmann, in: *Historisches Lexikon der Schweiz* (hereafter HLS), <https://hls-dhs-dss.ch/de/articles/003991/2022-03-14/> (accessed 13 April 2022); T. Maissen, *Svizzera. Storia di una federazione*, Trieste 2015, p. 271.

49 BAR, dispatch, from the consul general in Geneva, Yusuf Ziya Bey, to the president of Switzerland and head of the Politic Department, A. Hoffmann, 15 September 1914, Geneva, p. 1, 1000/00045, E2001A#1000/45#1776\*.

50 BAR, Letter from Mr. César Lebet-Diemer to the Section of Foreign Affairs of the Political Department in Bern, 2 February 1915, Buttes, 1000/00045, E2001A#1000/45#1776\*.

51 Sigerist, *Schweizer im Orient*, pp. 31–32.

52 BOA, Notice, 36982, from the Ottoman Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the Embassy of Austro-Hungary, Constantinople, HR\_SYS\_00767\_00011\_012\_001-002.

53 BAR, Copy of Letter of 13 June 1916, Constantinople, 1000/01501, E2001B#1000/1501#526\*.

54 BAR, Report from the Political Department to the consul general in Geneva, Yusuf Ziya Bey, 15 June 1915, Bern, 1000/01501, E2001B#1000/1501#526\*.

the Balkans, following the end of the conflict. They asked the imperial government to maintain the status quo until that moment. During the negotiations, the Ottoman and German governments put pressure on the Federal Council to regularise the situation of the Swiss in the Ottoman Empire by placing them under German protection until the end of the conflict. Selim Bey justified Swiss hesitations by listing the possible economic and political difficulties Switzerland might face in establishing permanent relations with the Ottoman Empire at that moment. By caving to German-Ottoman pressure to place Swiss citizens under German protection, the Federal government risked irritating the Allied Powers, and in particular, France, which considered the Ottoman-Swiss diplomatic and economic relations as part of its traditional sphere of influence.

In the same document, Selim Bey confirmed that an exchange of notes about this “relocation” was taking place in Berlin, between the Swiss ambassador, the Ottoman ambassador, İbrahim Hakkı Pasha (1863–1918), and Johannes Kriege (1859–1937), *ministerialdirektor* of the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs.<sup>55</sup> At the beginning of August, the approaching signature of the German-Ottoman convention to regulate the legal relations between the two empires on a new basis forced Swiss and Ottoman diplomats to accelerate the negotiations.<sup>56</sup> Therefore, Selim Bey solicited an answer from the Ottoman government regarding the Swiss request to put its residents in the Ottoman Empire under the protection of Germany.<sup>57</sup> In his Telegram of 16 August, the Minister of Foreign Affairs Halil Mentеше Bey (1874–1948) highlighted the principle of “reciprocity” (*réciprocité*) which from that moment onward would guarantee the security of Swiss citizens in the Ottoman Empire and of Ottoman *Staatsangehörige* in Switzerland.<sup>58</sup> In the same document, he confirmed Ottoman willingness to provisionally put Swiss citizens under the protection of the German Empire and of a second power until the end of the conflict. They would be granted the same rights as German subjects.<sup>59</sup>

In a second proposal, the Swiss government requested that the same rights granted by the Ottoman government should be extended if the Swiss placed themselves under the protection of states bound by treaties with the Ottomans other than Germany. Halil Bey replied that this proposition was “absolutely unacceptable”, as, after the suppression of the Capitulations, the Ottomans did not wish to conclude any international treaty unless based on principles of reciprocity.<sup>60</sup> For this reason, the Ottoman diplomats insisted

55 BOA, dispatch, 540/290, from the Ottoman ambassador in Bern, Fuad Selim Bey, to the Ottoman minister of Foreign Affairs, Halil Bey, 23 July 1916, Bern, HR\_SYS\_00767\_00011\_013\_001-002.

56 BAR, Draft Note from the German State secretary for Foreign Affairs, G. von Jagow, to the Ottoman ambassador in Berlin, Hakkı Pasha, August 1916, Bern, 1000/01501, E2001B#1000/1501#526\*.

57 BOA, Telegram, 308, from the Ottoman ambassador in Bern, Fuad Selim Bey, to the minister of Foreign Affairs, Halil Bey, 4 August 1916, Bern, HR\_SYS\_00767\_00011\_015\_001.

58 BOA, cyphered telegram, 85870/146, from the Ottoman minister of Foreign Affairs, Halil Bey, to the Ottoman ambassador in Bern, Fuad Selim Bey, 16 August 1916, Constantinople, HR\_SYS\_00767\_00011\_014\_002.

59 BOA, BOA, Telegram, 37468, from the Ottoman Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the Embassy of Berlin, HR\_SYS\_00767\_00011\_018\_001.

60 Ibid., p. 2.

on the German Empire as the only protector of Swiss citizens.<sup>61</sup> Considering that the German-Ottoman agreements were the result of a special convention between the two allies and concluded on the basis of reciprocity, Selim Bey concluded that the imperial government could simply reject the Swiss proposal, basing the negotiations on the Telegram of 16 August.<sup>62</sup> In his opinion, there was no reason to accommodate the Swiss, who, since the beginning of the conflict, had demonstrated their hostility towards the Central Powers, particularly the Ottomans. However, if the Ottoman government needed to show a conciliatory attitude, the Ottoman minister underscored that there would be no disadvantage in accepting the Swiss notes with some modifications.<sup>63</sup>

In January 1917, Selim Bey reported the desire of the Swiss government to regulate the transitional period that put Swiss subjects under the protection of the Germans and of a third power. Those who remained without protection should be treated in accordance with the principles of international law.<sup>64</sup> Hakki Pasha prepared a draft officially informing the German government that the Ottomans recognized the German protection of Swiss citizens and that the Ottoman-Swiss negotiations had reached an agreement on the provisional protection over Swiss citizens.<sup>65</sup> He also reported on Kriege's approval with several modifications to the text proposed by the Ottoman government regarding German provisional protection over Swiss citizens, which would be extended from that moment until the end of the conflict.<sup>66</sup> From these documents it clearly emerges how, thanks to German intermediation, an Ottoman-Swiss agreement had finally been reached. This agreement placed the Ottoman-Swiss relations within the German diplomatic system, the Germansphere and demonstrates the active collaboration between the German and Ottoman diplomatic elites in order to reach a mutually satisfactory agreement. One month later, Hakki Pasha reported to the new foreign minister, Ahmed Nesimi Bey Sayman (1876–1958), that the Swiss government finally accepted to negotiate in Berlin and to appoint the new Swiss ambassador as delegate.<sup>67</sup> Once more the issue that, at least until the end of the conflict, the Swiss government could not sign important treaties with the Central Powers without compromising its position towards the Allied Powers emerged. Therefore, Hakki Pasha underscored the need for Germany and its allies to be as compliant as possible towards Switzerland in that moment.<sup>68</sup> Answering to the insi-

61 BOA, dispatch, 652/350, from the Ottoman ambassador in Bern, Fuad Selim Bey, to the minister of Foreign Affairs, Halil Bey, 9 September 1916, Bern, HR\_SYS\_00767\_00011\_019\_001.

62 Ibid., p. 2.

63 BOA, Telegram, 37468, from the Ottoman Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the Embassy of Berlin, HR\_SYS\_00767\_00011\_023\_001-004.

64 BOA, Telegram, from the Ottoman ambassador in Bern, Fuad Selim Bey, to the minister of Foreign Affairs, Halil Bey, 5 January 1917, Bern, HR\_SYS\_00767\_00011\_049\_001-003.

65 BAR, dispatch, from the Ottoman ambassador in Berlin, Hakki Pasha, to the German State Secretary of Foreign Affairs, A. Zimmermann, 8 January 1917, 1000/01501, E2001B#1000/1501#526\*.

66 BOA, Telegram, 29, from the Ottoman ambassador in Berlin, Hakki Pasha, to the minister of Foreign Affairs, Halil Bey, 10 January 1917, Berlin, HR\_SYS\_00767\_00011\_054\_001-002.

67 BOA, Telegram, 237, from the Ottoman ambassador in Berlin, Hakki Pasha, to the minister of Foreign Affairs, Nesimi Bey, 8 February, 1917, Berlin, HR\_SYS\_00767\_00011\_067\_001.

68 Ibid., p. 2.

stence of the Ottoman foreign minister for an official clause of reciprocity, Hakkı Pasha underscored that the time to negotiate this question was too limited and that, in that particular moment, the issue was not so relevant, considering that both regimes were based on general international law.<sup>69</sup> Moreover, Kriege highlighted the negative effect that the Ottoman insistence on this issue might produce, especially at a moment in which the Swiss government had assumed the protection of German interests in America.<sup>70</sup> Finally, Hakkı Pasha received permission to close the question as soon as possible, leaving aside the issue of reciprocity if necessary.<sup>71</sup>

Between 21 and 22 May 1917, the Ottoman and Swiss governments achieved a provisional agreement that regulated the status of respective citizens in both countries.<sup>72</sup> An even more important result was achieved: Switzerland and Ottoman-Swiss relations were under German protection and included within the diplomatic system of Germany and the Germansphere. In fact, as requested by the Federal government, Swiss citizens in the Ottoman Empire were afforded the protection of German diplomacy. Moreover, they obtained the same provisions as those applicable to Germans by virtue of the German-Ottoman conventions concerning judicial protection and mutual assistance between judicial authorities in civil matters. Finally, Swiss citizens received the same provisions of the German-Ottoman Extradition Treaty. Simultaneously, Ottoman subjects in Switzerland enjoyed the rights granted to Germans as well as the provisions of the German-Swiss Extradition Treaty.<sup>73</sup> Last but not least, the Ottomans granted the Swiss the right to request the protection of another power designated by the Swiss government as well.<sup>74</sup> After more than a century of Switzerland belonging to the global Francosphere and of depending on French mediation, the German-Ottoman objective of integrating the country and bringing Ottoman-Swiss relations under German protection within the diplomatic Germansphere had finally been achieved. This result was obtained thanks to the mediation of the German government and the active role played by Ottoman diplomacy. The German protection of Swiss citizens in the Ottoman Empire and of the Ottomans in Switzerland essentially meant the inclusion of Ottoman-Swiss relations in the diplomatic system of Germany, within the Germansphere, and a consequent strengthening of German influence in these two states. For the Swiss in the Empire and the Ottomans in Switzerland, it meant a strengthening of their position and an end to their precari-

69 BOA, Telegram, 139, from the Ottoman ambassador in Berlin, Hakkı Pasha, to the minister of Foreign Affairs, Nesimi Bey, 18 February, 1917, Berlin, HR\_SYS\_00767\_00011\_068\_001.

70 BOA, Telegram, 148, from the Ottoman ambassador in Berlin, Hakkı Pasha, to the minister of Foreign Affairs, Nesimi Bey, 23 February 1917, Berlin, HR\_SYS\_00767\_00011\_070\_001-002.

71 BOA, Telegram, 37758, from the Ottoman minister of Foreign Affairs, Nesimi Bey, to the ambassador in Berlin, Hakkı Pasha, 20 February, 1917, Constantinople, HR\_SYS\_00767\_00011\_069\_001.

72 BAR, Notes between the Federal government and the Ottoman Embassy in Berlin, 21–22 May 1917, 1000/01501, E2001B#1000/1501#526\*.

73 BOA, Note of the Swiss secretary of State for Foreign Affairs to the Ottoman ambassador in Berlin, HR\_SYS\_00767\_00011\_079\_001-002.

74 BOA, Answer of the Ottoman ambassador in Berlin to the Note of the Swiss secretary of State for the Foreign Affairs, HR\_SYS\_00767\_00011\_080\_001-002.

ous status as foreigners placed under the generic protection of international law. From the point of view of the Swiss international position, the agreements marked a partial estrangement from the Allies and a rapprochement with the Central Powers. From a diplomatic perspective, even if the Ottomans were not directly included in this diplomatic Germansphere, they supported its enlargement for their own interest. This inter-imperial collaboration provided them with a privileged platform for diplomatic negotiations, increasing the interconnectedness among the powers included in this alternative diplomatic system. Thanks to the mediation of the German government, after almost a century of unfruitful negotiations, official Ottoman-Swiss diplomatic relations were established.

## 5. Conclusion

This article has analysed the development of Swiss diplomacy in relation to France, Germany and the Ottoman Empire during the long nineteenth century. It has depicted how Swiss diplomacy was capable of oscillating between different Great Powers in the development of its diplomatic relations with the Ottoman Empire. Moreover, this analysis has demonstrated that the Germansphere is a concept that historians can apply to historical events and diplomatic negotiations to grasp certain developments more clearly. Based on this heuristic concept, the division between diplomatic Francosphere and Germansphere helped to reconstruct the oscillations of Swiss diplomacy between the French and German areas of influence and its final inclusion in the system of alliance of the Central Powers. From the description of these long diplomatic negotiations, it clearly emerges that the concept of the Germansphere can be used to go beyond the traditional paradigm of the age of imperialism, reinterpreting inter-imperial negotiations, exchanges, and active collaboration among great, secondary and small powers. In fact, the European-conqueror and non-European-subordinate relationship does not fully correspond to the image of the Ottoman Empire, Switzerland and Germany that emerges from the documents analysed. The chain of events analysed highlights the existence of alternative dynamics of domination, resistance, and solidarity in the age of imperialism. The adoption of the idea of Germansphere as a heuristic concept played a pivotal role in the analysis of the diplomatic relations of a small power such as Switzerland with the Ottoman Empire, focusing on these relations and relocating the international position of other imperial powers as well.

Moreover, from this description, the image of a Swiss diplomacy capable of autonomously moving from the global diplomatic Francosphere, described here as the global diplomatic system characterised by the French language and culture, towards the new diplomatic system of the Central Powers, or Germansphere, in an attempt to ensure the protection of its citizens in a complex context of international crisis, clearly emerges. From the point of view of international influence, 1917 marked a turning point in the development of an autonomous diplomatic space that included Germany, Austria-Hungary and, towards the end of the conflict, Switzerland. As both the Germans and the

Ottomans resented French influence over the Swiss, the partial rejection of this influence and the Swiss decision to protect German interests in America,<sup>75</sup> allowed for the inclusion of Ottoman-Swiss relations into the diplomatic Germansphere.

The transformation of Ottoman-Swiss relations during the First World War can be effectively contextualised within the enlargement of this diplomatic system, which included numerous states with different statuses: The German and the Austro-Hungarian empires, their allies, the occupied territories, the Ottoman Empire and Switzerland. Ottoman-Swiss relations during the First World War were characterised by the Ottoman will to finally obtain from the Swiss government the reciprocity desired by the Ottoman elites. At the same time, Switzerland's theoretical position of inferiority in diplomatic negotiations was largely compensated by German protection, which aimed to strengthen the inclusion of these two actors within the diplomatic system of the Central Powers. Therefore, it is possible to say that Germany, Austria-Hungary, Switzerland, and the Ottoman Empire were the real protagonists of this phenomenon, making a decisive contribution to the enlargement of the diplomatic system of the Central Powers. In particular, the emergence of a diplomatic Germansphere helped Ottoman efforts at emancipation in international relations.

Further investigation into this topic is required to piece together a complete and more coherent picture. In particular, studies on the role of Austria-Hungary would let us complete the picture outlined so far. Nonetheless, from our understanding of the development and action of Ottoman and Swiss diplomacies, some conclusions can be drawn. In general, it is possible to say that the history of the Ottoman-Swiss negotiations and their development during the First World War contradict the teleological narration of the late age of imperialism, demonstrating the existence of inter-imperial collaboration and solidarity dynamics. At the same time, the picture of an active and sometimes aggressive, Ottoman diplomacy comes to light. This diplomatic corps was interested in accelerating its inclusion within the diplomatic system of the Central Powers, and in its expansion, and sought to obtain a status of perfect equality among the powers included. From this point of view, the negotiations with Switzerland represented a good opportunity for the late Ottoman elites to obtain the recognition of their status from a European state, which the Germans sought to place under their protection. Simultaneously, for the Swiss government, these negotiations represented a moment of remarkable diplomatic activism as well as a risk, as its inclusion within the Central Powers system risked compromising Swiss neutrality and its relations with the Allied Powers. In any case, the official negotiations and the final Ottoman-Swiss agreement between these two states represented a positive result for both governments, which temporarily removed some of the obstacles in their diplomatic relations.

75 BOA, Telegram, 148, from the Ottoman ambassador in Berlin, Hakkı Pasha, to the minister of Foreign Affairs, Nesimi Bey, 23 February 1917, Berlin, HR\_SYS\_00767\_00011\_070\_001-002.