

Adrian Brisku

Political Reform in the Ottoman and Russian Empires

A Comparative
Approach



EUROPE'S LEGACY IN THE MODERN WORLD

B L O O M S B U R Y

Political Reform in the Ottoman and Russian Empires

Europe's Legacy in the Modern World

Series Editors: Martti Koskenniemi and Bo Stråth
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Introduction

*We must all obey the great law of change. It is the most powerful law of nature, and the means perhaps of its conservation.*¹

What would be a conceivable reason for bringing together the political projects and deeds of prominent nineteenth-century Russian historical figures such as Tsar Alexander I, statesman Michael Speransky, Tsar Alexander II, 'enlightened bureaucrat' Nikolai Miliutin, and Ottoman statesmen Reshid Pasha, Ali Pasha, Fuad and Midhat Pasha? The answer to this question, however awkward it might initially appear, is their embrace of the language of political reform; a language that seems to evoke – beyond the frame of time and space of the so-called 'European century' (1815–1914)² – a sense of immediacy and recurrence. This is not to say that prior to this century such language did not exert political traction in the Ottoman and Russian empires. It did, but it had a particular meaning and relevance. In the constantly shifting eighteenth-century international scene of European alliances and wars – more importantly of cut-throat wars against each other – improving their military standing remained the most important aspect for these essentially militaristic and bureaucratic land empires. So, in the recurring efforts for renewal, the underpinning of which still had this relevance, these historical figures were foremost articulators and arguably less successful implementers of this language and its new vocabularies.

Certainly, these vocabularies concerned not only the stability and survival of the Ottoman and Romanov dynastic houses, but also the regeneration of the imperial states: their internal conditions, political and administrative arbitrariness, public indebtedness, religious and social tensions, as well as their external relations and their status as great powers (with questions of the nature of alliances and world order). Thus, the survival of the dynastic houses was crucial in these efforts, but given the growing nineteenth-century political and economic pressures (domestic and inter-state), the stability of dynastic rule could no longer be guaranteed without engaging with change in state and society. This most

certainly represented a semantic rupture in their political language, manifested thus in exalted yet contested new vocabularies on the primacy of new permanent laws and institutions, political economy and political representation. But the language of political reform, or engaging in change while preserving stability, and of having the best possible outcomes from the two, was, at best, a double-edged sword. It could either serve as a source for raising hopes and expectations or, as yet another meaningless move towards the *status quo*, disappointment, and even repression. From the perspective of the imperial state – an idea certainly conveyed by recalling the titles of the historical figures mentioned above – the new vocabularies could undermine the very power that each of these houses enjoyed in previous centuries. This was the kernel of the tensions that manifested in the attempts of each of the historical figures. Engaging with these concepts and, perhaps, projecting some notions of future based on the rule of law could range from providing for basic legal guarantees of life and property, the establishment of permanent laws and new institutions, to granting constitutions, or relapsing into arbitrariness and despotism. Notions of future were trumpeted based on political economy, from creating national wealth by opening up imperial economic space (labour, capital and monetary policy, attitudes with regard to agricultural or industrial sectors) to tenets of economic liberalism, or closing it in by upholding principles of economic paternalism and development, in fact ‘two sets of policies which were in each case reforms of an elaborate system of “protection”, external and internal.’³ Or, furthermore, based on the possibilities for political representation: would the source of ultimate power, and hence the power to legislate, still be derived from the monarch, or from the nation? Would there be a genuine division of this power between the two (constitutional monarchy), or would it simply be the creation of representative structures that would ultimately be to ‘counsel’ the monarch rather than to legislate in his stead? How realistic was the application of the notions of the separation of powers? Dilemmas in foreign affairs ranged from war and isolation to peace, diplomacy and alliances, where the goal was to remain an important player in the emerging and changing nineteenth-century European inter-state order.

With the advantage of hindsight we know that with all of these intensified efforts of state-led regeneration and political change – with perhaps some of the most prominent ones being unravelled in this book – and the range of alternatives and possibilities opened up in the domains of law, politics and economy, the end of the ‘European century’ was also the end of these two empires. It is only natural to pose the re-occurring questions: how and why? Eminent American historian Charles Tilly had already pointed out in his reflection on ‘How Empires End’ that:

‘From Herodotus to Montesquieu and beyond, poets, historians, and philosophers have recurrently produced one of our culture’s standard literary forms: the dirge for a fallen empire.’⁴ How, with all these attempts, was it not possible for their governments to avoid the downfall? Contemporaries with influence in politics, in both empires, sensed and articulated domestic and external dangers that threatened the respective entities. But they also thought they could be averted with political solutions that came to be articulated in certain vocabularies, as alluded to above. Of course, they could not predict the future, and so the future remained open and uncertain. The attempts, then, of *ex-post* explanations raises questions of their being rather simplistic, and particularly when it comes to a comparison, ‘the search for point by point correspondence should in principle have very little utility.’⁵ Prominent Marxist historian Eric Hobsbawm, even though dismissing the attempt to offer explanations and compare these empires, did so briefly (including the Habsburg Empire) in order to move on to examine the consequences of their downfall, in an article titled ‘The End of Empires’, by writing that ‘all were obsolete political entities in an era of nation-state building, to which they offered no alternative. All were weak . . . and therefore endangered players in the international power game.’⁶ But, as this book argues and shows, there was an alternative offered in the language of political reform, traceable in the political moves and their articulation by these influential contemporaries for mastering their time and space in the face of an unknown and uncertain future. These *ex-post* explanations need to be considered, nevertheless: even more so when there is not much direct comparison between the two empires.

There are in fact two somewhat contending traditional explanations or narratives. The first explanation, as Hobsbawm pointed out, focuses on the rise of nationalisms in the Ottoman and Russian empires. All successor nation states from these empires constructed their collapse as a prelude to the establishment of these new states.⁷ The second explanation points to the consumption of these empires from geopolitical rivalry, particularly the long and enduring wars against each other. The only – and most direct – comparison of the two empires on this point, which deals with the last decade of their military confrontations and subsequent human devastation, comes from Michael A. Reynolds’s book, *Shattering Empires: The Collapse of the Ottoman and Russian Empires, 1908–1918* (2011). It argued that, ‘fear of partition led the Ottoman state to destroy its imperial order, whereas the compulsive desire for greater security and fear of an unstable southern border spurred the Russian state to press beyond its capacity and thereby precipitate its own collapse and the dissolution of its empire.’⁸ For all its merits, this book still argues within much of the established narrative (each

empire, Ottoman and Russian, considered separately) of ‘decline and fall’⁹ – a heightened geopolitical determinism which thwarts reflections on whether the collapse was due to the possible future-oriented alternatives in the domains of politics, law and economy, and emerging geopolitical internal and external tensions that these imperial states (i.e. imperial houses and their central governments) were in themselves not able to negotiate. In other words, it was not only the military machines’ overstretch but also the unfulfilled political projects¹⁰ of the future of the bureaucratic apparatuses – the two legs on which the respective dynastic houses commanded and relied – that led to the collapse of their empires. Thus, their collapse, as with many other modernizing or modern empires, such as the Soviet Union, could be largely considered as a process triggered by ‘some combination of external conquest and internal defection’.¹¹

It might be obvious by now that this language of political reform was a bureaucratic one, and the articulation of the efforts in these empires to solve emerging as well as deeply embedded (*inter*)national, or simply imperial, issues of the time. Having underlined this, two important points urgently need to be addressed. First, notwithstanding internal dynamics, degree and effectiveness, both empires increasingly became powerful bureaucratic states during the ‘European century’. This is a crucial point to make against a widely held notion in the literature, as discussed further below, of these two Eastern empires as weak and unstable in contrast to Western empires (the French, British, and later the Austro-Hungarian and German ones). In fact, one can go against the grain of the usual positive–negative binary categorization of Western empires/states – as moving from autocracy to constitutionalism; from unstable to stable international actors; from economic paternalism to that of liberalism; from lawless to a law-based state versus the Ottoman and Russian empires unable to do so – by arguing that bureaucratic machines and political elites of ‘Western empires’ actually felt less secure and stable because of emerging social and economic pressures caused by technological advancements in industry and agriculture as well as demographic explosions. Therefore, they had to resort to exporting these pressures to their own colonial territories, giving political power to a rising middle class (in Britain), or (as with the example of the French Revolution) resisting but then succumbing to it. Meanwhile, for the greater part of the century, the Ottoman and Romanov dynastic houses – and particularly reforming voices in their governments – did not feel any great insecurity in those terms. They seemed confident enough believing that, irrespective of internal and external issues, it was still possible to engage with change without actually involving more people in their political processes, even though they would be

critical. Hence, a generational confidence in a state-led bureaucratic, that is top-down, change from within remained steady until the point when it was challenged by revolutions at the turn of the twentieth century: namely, the Young Turk Revolution (1908) and the Russian Revolution of 1905 as well as the October Revolution (1917). Thus, in embarking on *islahat*, ‘improving, reforming, putting defective things into more perfect condition’¹² in the Ottoman case, and *peremiéna* (change), *reformy* (reforms) in the Russian, these proponents of change and stability evoked existing political vocabularies of order and prosperity, respectively: *asayiş* (public order, public tranquillity), *mülkün mamurluğu* (flourishing condition, prosperity), together with *adalet* (justice, equity),¹³ and *stabil’nost’* (stability), *blagosostoyanie* (welfare) and *spravedlivost’* (justice). They believed that the language of political change (modernity, secularization, nation and West) and that of stability with its corresponding opposites (tradition, religion, empire and East), however contentious, could be reconcilable at some level to ensure both the survival and welfare of the imperial state and societies. There is a strong parallel in this including the way in which the collapse of the language of political reform due to these revolutions gave, for most of the twentieth century, political relevance solely to the vocabulary of political change through revolution: respectively, nationalist and communist.

This leads us to the second point, which is familiarity of this prevailing, nineteenth-century, political language to the late twentieth and early twenty-first century one.¹⁴ The projects of nineteenth-century Ottoman and Russian political figures, such as Michael Speransky’s *True Monarchy*, Tsar Alexander I’s *Holy Alliance* of 1815, or Reshid Pasha’s sponsoring of the 1839 *Imperial Decree of Gülhane* (to name but a few), are interesting to revisit and juxtapose as accounts for reflecting on the nature of political reform: the perpetual dilemma of how to affect change aimed at ameliorating the existing order of things without undermining the powers that would allow for this process to happen – the middle ground between what was possible and what was necessary.¹⁵ But also, they are to be taken as illuminating historical accounts of projects, naturally with their own context-bound peculiarities, which entail future-oriented, bureaucratically led changes in multi-cultural and multi-ethnic populaces. These were political projects that from a twenty-first-century perspective can also be seen as undemocratic – progress is weak, if at all. The *presentism* from which probably no book project can escape makes the case for a reflection on the post-Second World War European political project as well as vicissitudes of political reform in these empires’ core successive entities, respectively, Russian and Turkish states. As a bureaucratically led endeavour, geared towards a pre-determined goal of ensuring

lasting peace and progress, the European political project, with its concepts of peace (stability) and economic prosperity (change), can be seen as an illustration on its own of this dilemma. It is in this sense that the language of politics surrounding it, strangely perhaps, sounds much like those articulated in the Ottoman and Russian empires during the 'European century'.

The prevalence of politics of change (meaning revolutions) in the twentieth-century Russian (Soviet) and Ottoman (Turkish) political landscapes is largely reflected by the ways respective historiographies – in their own separate ways (prisms and presentisms) – have understood and interpreted nineteenth-century imperial political developments. In this process of understanding and interpreting, contestation of more entrenched paradigms by new ones has become apparent; yet, as *ex-post* attempts to explain these political developments, these paradigms are unable to do so fully. As early as the 1960s, nineteenth-century Ottoman history has been scrutinized under the lens of modernization theory – a useful analytical tool for both a Turkish nationalist viewpoint and a wider Western scholarship. One of the most enduring interpretations held is the secularization thesis, which draws a direct link between the emergence of secularization of Ottoman politics and the rise of constitutionalism, parliamentarism and westernization.¹⁶ It did not take much to undermine this *telos* by those who pointed to the neglect in the analysis of internal drives in Ottoman state and society.¹⁷ If this was, at all, a historical analysis, then how could one make the case for the pre-eminence of secularization in the late nineteenth century, the 'upward march from Islamic empire to secular republic', when not more than a decade later it was being undermined by the Islamic resurgence?¹⁸

The other prism for analysing the nineteenth-century Ottoman Empire has been through an even more entrenched thesis, namely that of 'decline'. This thesis has also been challenged, but in quite the opposite direction to the modernization thesis, meaning pre-determined regress rather than progress of empire.¹⁹ For instance, in the economic sphere a widely held claim that economic liberalism de-industrialized Ottoman nascent industrial economy and brought about its dependency in world economy has been contradicted by the view of an Ottoman economic dynamism which, despite territorial losses accumulated during a century, was characterized by a vitality of its local workshops.²⁰ In fact, the trope of decline had a strong presence in the seventeenth-century Ottoman political advice literature as a way for Ottomans to express this sense with regard to their dynasty 'both as a prescription and a warning that Ottoman institutions needed rejuvenation to the state of vigour of previous generations'.²¹ This trope took centre stage in the realm of nineteenth-century foreign affairs, depicting

active British, Russian and French empires, as opposed to a passive Ottoman state doomed for extinction. Here, the persistence of the 'Eastern Question' (a British Foreign Office political and diplomatic term),²² and Russian Tsar Nicholas I's sticky 'sick man of Europe'²³ metaphor, perpetuated this trope. But this was not so. For even some nineteenth-century literature,²⁴ as well as new research,²⁵ has pointed to the dynamism of Ottoman internal and foreign politics. This active role entailed a re-orientation within Ottoman politics towards a larger frame of European alliances and rivalries as well as changing avenues for participation of foreign states in Ottoman politics.²⁶ Perhaps a good illustration of this was the remark of Ottoman statesman Fuad Pasha to a Western diplomat in the mid-nineteenth century, where he said: 'our state is the strongest state. For you are trying to cause its collapse from the outside, and we from the inside, but still its does not collapse.'²⁷

Three interpretative frames have dominated the historiographical discourse on nineteenth-century Russian imperial history. The pre-1917 revolutionary (the nineteenth-century 'state school'²⁸) historiography, and the Soviet interpretive frame (for instance Nathan Eidel'man's 'Revolution from Above'²⁹) – in contrast to Western scholarship on Russian nineteenth-century history – share a common approach in upholding 'centralistic' and teleological visions on the transformative role of the Russian state and its ability to bring about socio-economic and cultural change. To a great extent, this cannot be denied. Seen as a 'unitary, more or less centralised national state, dedicated to international recognition, the attainment of social-economic prosperity, and a high cultural level of a European type',³⁰ the state, however, was conceived without taking into account the international context it found itself in. It particularly overlooked diplomatic and military history in justifying its great-power status, and disregarding the multi-ethnic and multicultural aspects of the empire. These two interpretative frames shared understanding of an inherent self-propelling historical determinism of 'vast impersonal forces' and underlying laws of history seem to be at work here. With such a perspective, they completely disregarded any possibility for chance, or alternative developments, having any role to play.³¹ Meanwhile, Western scholarship, dwelling (like its Ottoman counterpart) on modernization theory, has been criticized for using concepts that confuse and misrepresent the language of politics of this century. Its descriptive dichotomies – liberal versus conservative, red versus reactionary and bourgeoisie versus feudal – appear as politically highly charged, serving to name enemies, or friends and supporters, rather than anything else.³² What all these three historical interpretations have in common is that they recognize the primacy of the transformative but insular role of the

Russian imperial state – change from above – but disagree on whether this change was cyclical³³ or progressive.³⁴

Marked differences can be noted when Ottoman and Russian historiographical interpretations of the nineteenth century are juxtaposed: particularly on the theme here, namely political reform. The Russian side, in which reform became a major theme between the concepts of revolution and repression in Russian and Soviet political history only after the mid-1980s *perestroika*,³⁵ pays little attention to the *Primat der Aussenpolitik* (primacy of foreign affairs), or the *Primat der Innenpolitik* (role of domestic politics) on the need for change,³⁶ whereas their Ottoman counterparts debate both.³⁷ Thus, the major contrast between the two is that while similarly the state (hence the top-down approach) is the key agent of change in both empires, in the Russian case it is understood as acting independently of internal and external pressures, whereas in the Ottoman case it is not. This was not entirely so. Speransky, Tsar Alexander I, Miliutin, Tsar Alexander II, as well as Reshid Pasha, Ali, Fuad and Midhat Pasha, all embraced the language of political reform because of pressures from the society within and from the European states without. Indeed, it is the argument of this book that both empires share a strong parallel in the nexus between domestic political reform and a search for a status among the other European empires and states. Therefore, political reform was deployed as a device (tool) for long-term stability. In this light, the aforementioned legal, religious, economic norms and orders were instruments to connect reform to stability. The contrast between the two in this regard is that Russian reform also had international relations as a target, whereas over time Ottoman reform became the target of the Concert of Europe (see p. 47), including of Russia.

The trope of 'decline' is also a term that similarly accompanies both empires in the nineteenth century, with the important qualification that the Ottomans self-applied it throughout the century, whereas the Russians only did so during the second half of the century. Thus, these interpretative and conceptual parallels and contrasts make the case for having a comparative approach on political reform in the two empires. This even more so when considering how persuasively the modernization theory, in both cases, has been used to inject that *telos*,³⁸ the end-goal, Hegelian notion of a self-propelling role for the state in change and stability and of dialectical progression of time that leaves no room for chance. Such a-historicity³⁹ is easily undermined by offering such historical accounts, as this book does, of projects that emerged for establishing new permanent laws and institutions, of developmental political economy and of political representation, projects introduced by prominent people, which were constantly contested.

It is a-historicity, however, that can be ascribed not only to these two historiographies but also to that surrounding the political project of Europe, the EU. Indeed, the literature on the processes of EU political and economic integration⁴⁰ and European modernity and identity,⁴¹ despite recognizing existential problems arising along with these processes – such as the 2011 Euro and Greek Crisis, the 2015 Syrian Refugee Crisis and the 2016 Brexit referendum (the UK's decision to leave the EU) – continues to not reflect beyond what proponents of the 'European political project' advance as a self-congratulatory and self-propelling, bureaucratically led vision that will continue to ensure peace and progress.⁴² Even though the fallout from the impact of Brexit remains to be assessed, such a historical event most certainly will be considered as a potential watershed moment of the EU 'disintegration'. This is because such a literature in its analysis has been solely engaged with the alternative of integration, through crisis and reform, without even doubting the possibility of disintegration. It has also been arrestingly introspective. Scholars of the EU integration have not paid any attention to the not so distant forms of integration in the post-state socialist bloc – viewed as inferior to the EU⁴³ – as well as to their subsequent disintegration. Even more lacking has been a retrospection on the nineteenth-century European legacy. The historical reflection on this legacy within and without the European continent reveals how 'the conventional master narrative about Europe as a self-propelling machine fuelled by Enlightenment values and progress' has unwittingly sidelined 'a negative counter-narrative about a continuous European tragedy of fate from post-war to pre-war and war', and how rather than impersonal forces, it is human agency with the choices it made⁴⁴ that have forged this legacy.

The Ottoman and Russian experiences in the nineteenth-century political reform and the instigators of these major reform projects, as this book will explore further below, are also part of this nineteenth-century legacy of struggles for emancipation, retreat, regression and certainly war. Exploring how this master narrative about the contemporary Europe of the EU with its teleological assumptions in the Europeanization project in the scholarship is as problematic as master narratives of westernization and modernization in Ottoman and Russian historiographical scholarship. They also share an evolutionary approach to change, as opposed to revolutionary, as the only legitimate and viable option, even though by surveying the historical literature in both cases a cyclical mode to change also becomes available. These themes alone explored through such historical accounts that dwell on attempts to politically reform – contextualizing also how easily they are replaced by reaction and suppression as well as followed

by revolution – make the case for this Ottoman and Russian comparison on reform as an integral part of this nineteenth-century European legacy. These themes are crucial in reading this book for usually – as the British historian on Russia, Dominic Lieven, rightly suggested – historical comparisons are a messy web of stories and events within unique societies.⁴⁵

But this also has not refrained scholars, Ottoman in this case, of seeing a potential richness in studying Ottoman–Russian history because of its common history, including the contrast between the late seventeenth and the early twentieth century.⁴⁶ Also, in fact, it has not refrained commentators of twenty-first-century Russian and Turkish relations to draw direct parallels between the two states, regarding their domestic politics dominated by ‘strong, authoritarian leaders’⁴⁷ (a major theme of this book is framed as Men versus Institutions), more particularly towards Russian and Turkish presidents Vladimir Putin and Recep Tayyip Erdogan, leaders who see themselves as ‘heirs to the two mantles of these too long-gone [Ottoman and Russian] empires’,⁴⁸ and who conduct their foreign policy in a nineteenth-century style of balance of power and zero-sum game.⁴⁹ But to return to the scholarship, these two empires have indeed been compared, but not yet as one to one basis. Existing comparisons have been framed in the format of edited volumes where, aside from these two, other empires have been lumped together from the perspective of what caused and what were the consequences of their collapse⁵⁰ from the aspect of their imperial modes of rule and legitimacy;⁵¹ from the prisms of political conflict, infrastructure development, ethnic pluralism and war experiences.⁵² But there is a more direct parallel to be drawn between the two empires in that, unlike all the European Powers in the continent, both Russian and Ottoman monarchies, while subscribing discursively to the rule of law for respective states, in practice denied the ‘very principal of a law-based state’⁵³ to their respective realms. A scholar of Russian history, Peter Holquist attributed this distinction solely to the case of nineteenth-century Russia but in juxtaposing the trajectories of reform projects by the aforementioned figures, as will be done below, such a description is applicable to the Ottoman case, too. Historian of the Ottoman Empire, Carter C. Findley, in his book *Bureaucratic Reform in the Ottoman Empire* (1980), pointed out also that these two empires indeed shared the same legal vocabulary, namely ‘rational legalism’. Referring to historian George Yaney’s assertion that in Russia rational legalism was part of official discourse,⁵⁴ which certainly began with the Petrine reforms of the early eighteenth century, Findley drew a parallel with how similarly this vocabulary ‘was coming to exist in the minds of Ottoman statesmen as a myth and ideal, even if it did not exist in day to day working of the administrative system.’⁵⁵ And, aside

from this parallel with regard to the vocabulary of law (rational legalism), scholars draw similar lines on the nature of reforms *per se* as being ‘conservative’⁵⁶ and of its agents as being ‘reformist conservatives’.⁵⁷ One perspective, or paradigm as the prominent scholar of nineteenth-century Russian history Marc Raeff put it, for exploring that potential is Reinhart Koselleck’s *Vergangene Zukunft* (futures-past) approach.⁵⁸ For it makes possible doing away with the determinism attributed to the Russian imperial past by focusing on human agency and the ‘accidental, fortuitous, and unpredictable features that make for the appeal, variety, and suspensefulness of the irretrievable past experience’.⁵⁹ This is indeed an alternative way to engage also with the imperial Ottoman reform and survival strategies as opposed to rehashing teleologies of decline, westernization and modernization, which are deeply embedded in the narratives on the Ottoman Empire.⁶⁰ Thus, both Russian and Ottoman historiographies could greatly profit by the analysis of political language of the nineteenth-century political projects (conceptualization by prominent figures, followed by debates, successes and/or failures), so far having been outside of their focus.⁶¹ Moreover, the insight of British intellectual historian Quentin Skinner about considering the intentions and background ideologies of texts⁶² and projects when reconstructing meanings in the past is elucidating. As such, this book does not build on new archival material. Rather, its novelty rests on a unique comparison: a contrast of contexts⁶³ on the theme of political reform and historical concept of reform in the two imperial settings and the parallels in their meaning emerging from a futures-past historical perspective. Thus together with Skinner’s insight, Koselleck’s perspective with its conceptual metaphors of ‘horizon of expectations’ and ‘space of experience’, as well as a set of questions developed within it – such as: what visions were articulated, accepted or rejected?; how was resistance to change manifested and articulated?; and what was at stake internally and externally when change and reform(s) were proposed? – is helpful in uncovering the long-term tensions of the political reform and search for stability in these two powers, which spilled over as tensions between domestic and foreign politics. If ‘horizon of expectation’ and ‘space of experience’ are *ex-post* historical categories – as Koselleck posits, purported to ‘indicate a general human condition’⁶⁴ – it is possible to view the Ottoman and Russian nineteenth century as the onset of a future-oriented notion of time, of political projects, amidst renewed calls for a return to traditions and informal conventions, whereby generated expectations became heightened by the opening up of alternatives and tensions to which experiences were not always matched.

This book is divided into two parts, in which the respective chronologies of the two empires do not necessarily converge. Each part contains two chapters.

The first part titled 'Men versus Institutions: Law and Religion' loosely covers the first half of the nineteenth century. What binds this part together is the notion that political reform is strongly entrusted to the rather miraculous effects attributed to new and permanent laws, domestically as well as in foreign relations, and new institutions. But tensions that arise in their constraining the unlimited political authority of powerful men remains unresolved. This is because even though renewal of the empires through 'modern' law, the rule of law, gains high traction, its nature and function are strongly contested. Would it be to curb the despotic power of powerful men or solely for regulating the workings of state institutions? Would laws, as in the Russian case, find their legitimacy from the unlimited power of the monarch, or would they be, as in the Ottoman case, disputed between the religious and secular domains? Would religion have an important role in domestic and international politics? These are some of the most important tensions tackled within this section.

The first chapter, 'Quests for Fundamental Change: "True Monarchy" and the "Holy Alliance"' is an account built around two prominent early nineteenth-century Russian imperial figures and their 'projects': Russian statesman Michael Speransky with his idea of 'True Monarchy' for internal constitutional change, and Emperor Alexander I with his European peace project of the Holy Alliance in the post-Napoleonic European restoration. The second chapter, "Alternation and Complete Renewal of Ancient Custom": An Unattainable Pledge, is an account on Ottoman modern reformer, statesman Reshid Pasha – from the latter part of the first half of the nineteenth century to the conclusion of the Crimean War in 1856 – around his project for new, permanent laws and institutions to engineer change internally and externally in the Ottoman Empire. Amidst a myriad of structural differences, their stories reflect unexpected mirror-like paths, efforts and destinies. Speransky's 'True Monarchy' and Reshid Pasha's 'Permanent Institutions' relied heavily on a similar legal vocabulary – permanent laws (European, French civil codes) that ran short of any contemporary constitutional conceptions – as well as a shared idiom of political economy. Whereas, in foreign relations, Tsar Alexander I's geopolitical dilemmas in a post-Napoleonic European restoration entailed the use of constitutionalism in tandem with a paradoxical employment of the religious idiom (based on Christian precepts) in the project of the 'Holy Alliance' to forge a durable European peace. This, however, was not the idiom with which Reshid Pasha's Ottoman Empire could make peace and forge alliances with European states. The vocabulary of civilization, with which European powers articulated their influences in inter-state affairs, was acceptable to him not in the sense of reinforcing an antagonistic religious dichotomy of Islam versus

Christianity, but rather, a secular understanding of civilization that necessitated new laws and institutions was, in Reshid Pasha's conception, the future for bringing the Ottoman monarchy closer to the Concert of Europe, as well as for regenerating the empire. Compelled by persistent immediate political concerns and personal shortcomings, their visions and efforts seemed daring, but met insurmountable resistance. Their political projects remained incomplete; while their drive for change faded so did the alternative to a future based on the prominence of laws.

The second part, 'Managing the Future: From Law to Political Economy and Political Representation' is largely set between the mid-nineteenth century, the aftermath of the Crimean War (1853–1856), and the 1870s and 1880s, highlighting the urgency of political economy and political representation as key ideas for managing the future of the empires. But again, these concepts are highly contested. The ensuing chapter 'Empire and Progress' traces the diverging and occasionally converging visions and trajectories of three influential figures in the post-Crimean Russian wave of political and socio-economic change. They are: the reformist bureaucrat Nikolai Miliutin, embarking on a well-trodden path to change in order to prepare the most ground-breaking draft legislation in nineteenth-century Russian history (Emancipation of Serfs in 1861); the timid but determined Emperor Alexander II whose fear of Russia losing its Great Power status takes him into dangerous paths of change internally and externally; and hereditary bureaucrat, and minister of internal affairs Peter A. Valuev who saw a direct link between reforming the politics and the economics of the provinces of the empire with extending political rights of nobility as well as peasantry to the imperial level through a constitutional project.

The final chapter titled 'A Constitutional Empire' is an account of the interactions of key Ottoman political figures, Ali, Fuad and Midhat Pashas, from the negotiations of the Paris Treaty in 1856 to the aftermath of the Berlin Congress of 1878, also in the context of the rise of the Young Ottoman intellectual movement and the 1870s Ottoman debt crisis. The chapter contextualizes the search for new imperial politics (in political representation and economic welfare) in the practice and the reflections of these three figures, particularly Midhat Pasha's pragmatic move – grounded on his successful provincial Ottoman reforms – towards formalizing constitutionally what Ali and Fuad Pasha de facto had established, namely, the preponderance of the Porte as the fulcrum of the Ottoman political power over the Palace. By the end of their political careers both Fuad and Ali Pasha had seen the limits of Reshid Pasha's spearheaded Ottoman reform project – a European-inspired, rule-based and

economically liberal approach – either because of the impossibility of its rules and regulations to unify the diverse peoples of the empire, with Fuad suggesting to think otherwise in terms of forging a ‘union’, or because of an unsustainable combination of such reforms with European political intervention, with Ali calling for a rethink of Ottoman politics in terms of ‘common interests’. Meanwhile, taking on imperial politics where Fuad and Ali left it, Midhat Pasha’s alternative, for reforming the imperial centre, became constitutionalism – a fortuitous combination of his experience as a successful reformer of the Ottoman province, applying ‘developmental’ economy and ‘national’ political representation with the language of constitutionalism already articulated by the main proponents of the Young Ottoman movement. The ‘Epilogue’ reflects on whether the language of political reform in the two states was completely undermined, respectively, by the 1908 Young Turk, the Russian 1905 Liberal and the 1917 Communist political revolutions.

Part One

Men versus Institutions: Law and Religion

Preface

The first vocabularies regarding the politics of reform that came into prominence in both empires during the first half of the nineteenth century were those of new permanent laws – what Findley retrospectively referred to as ‘rational legalism’ – new institutions and religion. They were elevated and articulated as the fundamental means to think about, and act upon, the ordering of the imperial states and societies from within and in their relations to other European powers when the question of a single individual or a state threatened the internal and external power balances. In contextualizing them thus, a much more fruitful link is established between the ‘international’ and the ‘politics of domestic, social, economic and cultural transformation’.¹

For a long time, the notions of law and religion had been used as tools for stability, in forging state order as well as alliances and boundaries within and between states. But they acquired the valence of change with the rapid political, military and economic transformations taking place in the continent in the nineteenth century. That had to do with what modern legal theory recognizes as a shift from a ‘view of law as the word of sovereign giver’ to that in which ‘law follows the dictates of reason for the welfare of mankind’.² In the Ottoman case, the matter was directly more sensitive because secular law was entangled with the religious law. But even in the Russian case, following Speransky’s understanding of law, a similar entanglement was present, too. If in both empires legal, institutional and maybe constitutional (at this point) reforms became the means to constrain extreme political and economic imbalances, hence expand the power of central governments at the expense of nobility and regional notables, and so to revive imperial and European politics, Russian and Ottoman

statesmen and rulers in discussion here differed on the role of religion, and its ultimate purpose, *telos*, in this renewal. Imperial Russian reformers sought to bring in religion for its perceived unity, while the Ottomans struggled with it, because of its divisiveness not only within the empire but also in relations to other Great Powers of Europe.

However, unlike the Ottomans, more precisely Reshid Pasha, the Russians, with Tsar Alexander I as the main protagonist, reform through the vocabulary of religion had European and even global relations as its main target. In addition, because Russian centralizing efforts, bureaucratic and military (modern standing army), had begun with Peter the Great's 'Europeanizing' reforms of the early eighteenth century – a century in which the Ottoman Empire had allowed for more provincial autonomy in its realm – the early nineteenth century found the Russian Empire more centralized than its counterpart. And thanks to it being connected to the Enlightenment intellectual currents, more than the Ottoman Empire, it had an emerging public opinion. Nevertheless, in their efforts to promote the state-led efforts for new institutions and permanent laws, Speransky and initially Sultan Mahmud II, on new institutions, would initiate the publications of official bulletins or newspapers (Speransky with *Sankt Peterburgskii Zhurnal*³ and Mahmud II's *Le Moniteur Ottoman*⁴) as way of promoting and educating existing or emerging public opinion on these fundamental changes.

Quests for Fundamental Change: ‘True Monarchy’ and the ‘Holy Alliance’

For a ‘true monarchy’

Permanent laws against despotism: the realm of constitution and the Russian ‘trinity’ (autocracy, nobility and serfdom)

In 1809 rumours were growing in the Russian imperial court in St Petersburg, and within Muscovite high nobility, that the most trusted adviser to Emperor Alexander I (1777–1825), Michael M. Speransky (1772–1839), was secretly preparing a draft constitution. To be revealed only to the Emperor and his small, entrusted circle, the draft entailed great changes for imperial Russia. Fuelled by the fact that only a few parts of it were published¹ – the full scope and the aims of changes proposed remained unknown to all but the Emperor until the middle of the century² – these rumours turned into sharp negative reactions. Disgruntled by the immense political power that Speransky (an upstart, son of a village priest from the province of Vladimir)³ enjoyed as the State Secretary and a close confidant to the Tsar, members of the nobility anxiously wondered what the Emperor would do with the draft. There was no love lost between them and Speransky, even more so if those changes would mean the fruition of his vision of ‘True Monarchy’.⁴

We will return to this declared animosity between Speransky and the nobility much later, although some of the tensions will become obvious within the text, but it first needs to be laid out what makes Speransky relevant here: his historiographical significance and more importantly his conception of ‘True Monarchy’. Thus, his political language (change through new permanent laws and institutions) and constitutional ideas expressed by Alexander I, his high political position, and the reaction against these, make him a prime example of a contemporary whose thinking, deeds and interactions with his Emperor and others would shed light onto Tsar Alexander I’s two decades or so of attempts of

political reform in imperial Russia. His significance as probably the most important statesman of nineteenth-century Russia has been duly recognized in historiographical trends over the last centuries. Already by the mid-nineteenth century, not long after his death, Russian intellectuals became divided over his legacy – whether he was a liberal or a conservative.⁵ Whilst at the onset of the twentieth century, and in the wake of the establishment of constitutional monarchy, Russian liberal historians firmly established him as ‘liberal constitutionalist’;⁶ in the Soviet period he was characterized as the defender of the feudal order by the Soviet historiography.⁷ For most Russian readers in the second half of the nineteenth century, however, the image depicted by Leo Tolstoy in his famous work *War and Peace*⁸ of Speransky as a soulless face of abstraction – and as hypocritical and slippery as an eel⁹ – must have made a curious impression. More recent readings of his historical role, which include late-Soviet, post-Soviet and Western scholarship, have reiterated his liberal credentials¹⁰ some going even further in suggesting that Speransky synergized two great intellectual currents in Russia – both investing great hopes in political change at the dawn of Tsar Alexander I’s reign. On one hand stood the old-fashioned rationalist of the Enlightenment (influenced particularly by Scottish Enlightenment), who developed the concept of *grazhdanskeo obshchestvo* (civil society), underpinned by private property and legally safeguarded rights of men, and who entered into a path of political and constitutional change that would entail transformation of Russia from a military to a commercial state, hence secular liberalism. And on the other hand, it was the political mysticism of members of the mystical freemasonry, known as Illuminati or Martinists, who envisaged a religious rejuvenation of humanity, and aimed for a supra-ecclesiastical and universalistic understanding of Christianity.¹¹ To his most important biographer, Marc Raeff, the first link is questionable; however, he would certainly agree with the second association. What remains is the labelling of Speransky as a liberal; a rather limiting adjective when his vision of ‘True Monarchy’ is unravelled further, as below.

The much rumoured 1809 *Vvdenie k ylazheniju* Draft Statute was crucial, for it finally provided a materialization to the high expectations raised by Tsar Alexander I, at the onset of his reign, for a constitutional imperial state. Those expectations, whilst accelerating, had been derailed due to the Napoleonic wars in the European continent. It seemed as if there was a breathing space for the Russian state to engage with domestic reforms when the War of Fourth Coalition came to an end following Emperor Napoleon I signing the Treaties of Tilsit with Emperor Alexander I and the Prussian Emperor in the summer of 1807.¹² The

draft constitution would make a serious intervention in an already vibrant debate on the constitutionalism of influential political factions in St Petersburg and Moscow. The debate – to which Speransky contributed with the idea of ‘True Monarchy’, inspired by Montesquieu – had focused on changing the nature of monarchical power, limiting it through permanent laws,¹³ so to do away with the despotism that had characterized the short-lived reign of Alexander’s father, Emperor Paul I (r. 1796–1801). Emperor Paul I’s despotism had irritatingly manifested, particularly within two policy areas. He had disregarded what, during his mother Empress Catherine the Great’s reign (r. 1762–1796), had been a vital national interest: namely, foreign policy.¹⁴ For instance, by undertaking a serious quarrel with Britain over the island of Malta, the Emperor was seen as a great fool by his opponents. Gravely disregarding in the eyes of the nobility, the Emperor, by revoking his late mother’s Charter of the Nobility (1761) and Charter of the Towns (1875), was forcing them back into compulsory state service.¹⁵

Hence, a sense of urgency was given to the political debate among the nobility on the role and nature of Russian *samoderzhavie* (autocracy), which had been recurring in eighteenth-century Russia, whereby a dramatic shift gained currency by the end of the century for a role as a trigger of ‘dynamic change’, as opposed to solely being for the ‘maintenance of stability’. Emperor Paul I’s despotism brought into question, once again, the contention of whether it was beneficial for monarchical power to be unlimited, or limited and based on the rule of law.¹⁶ In addition to this fundamental political question, there was the pressing issue of serfdom: whether to emancipate the peasants or simply improve their conditions, and what the role of nobility would be – which was debated initially in the confines of the newly established Free Economic Society instigated by Catherine the Great in 1766.¹⁷ Speransky’s ‘True Monarchy’ represented rather systematic answers to these contentions, answers which did not necessarily convey a general and shared view of the whole Russian political spectrum. His contribution was about reforming the nature of monarchy through the establishment of new and permanent laws. In a wider sense, the ‘True Monarchy’ entailed a state based on law, guiding the spiritual and material progress of the nation,¹⁸ and reforms that ‘consist in establishing and founding the government, *hitherto absolute*, on unchangeable laws’.¹⁹

For his part, the twenty-four year-old Tsar Alexander I, in his proclamation of accession in 1801, had raised the expectation for a constitutional and legal state. He pledged a return to the principles of his grandmother Catherine the Great – hence tacitly agreeing that his father’s despotism had been unsupportable. ‘We

accept', he had declared, 'the obligation to rule the people entrusted in us by God, according to the laws and spirit of Our August late grandmother, Empress Catherine the Great, whose memory will be eternally dear to us and the entire fatherland.'²⁰ It was a political promise that future imperial politics would not be characterized by arbitrariness and despotism, but instead would be mediated by laws. This excited old dignitaries of Catherine the Great's time, and the rest of the high nobility, who wished to firmly secure their privileges as the first estate of the empire. They were convinced that the concept of '*constitution*', or better terms such as '*fundamental laws* and *fundamental institutions*' – which did not evoke any associations with the French and American revolutions – would be the vessels that would contain those privileges.²¹ Their enthusiasm on Alexander's seriousness to abide by his pledge was reinforced by an image of the young Emperor as a liberal idealist, influenced by republican Swiss tutor Frédéric César de La Harpe (1754–1838), and his liberal friends of the so-called *Unofficial Committee* (particularly his friends Victor Kochubei (1768–1834) and Prince Adam Czartorysky (1770–1861)),²² to whom he had expressed, respectively, the desire to give Russia a constitution and then retire on the banks of the river Rhine and the hatred against 'despotism, wherever and by whatever manner it was exercised and that he loved liberty, that liberty was owed equally to all men'.²³

The impression that laws would mediate imperial political interests was coupled by the promise that the chaotic legal structure of the empire would also have to be seriously dealt with. Within months of his ascension to the throne, Tsar Alexander I sought to address this chaos by demanding the establishment of a 'single law' for the whole empire. This was to be carried out by a new Commission on Laws – new in that it was his first, but actually the tenth established in the empire's recent history. The Emperor told the president of the Commission that the goal was that of 'basing the foundation and source of the people's happiness in a *single law* [sic]' [and change existing situation of the body of law, which] 'had no connection with each other, no unity of purpose, no permanence in effect' and that it had 'resulted a general confusion on the rights and obligations of everyone'.²⁴ His was the vision for a new legal code that provided clarity and efficiency for the Russian state. However, it was a vision that could not be implemented because the people assigned to make it happen could not, for a long time, decide on what should be the *principia juris* (legal principles) for the codification – whether to use a historical approach or apply enlightened legal principles. These rather technical choices were highly charged politically, for the historical approach implied bowing down to the demands of the old

dignitaries, and in more technical terms it meant relying solely on old Russian legal codes – riddled with their own insufficiencies.

The enlightened, rational, legal principles, on the other hand, were even more political because in technical terms it meant opting for a clean slate in legal reasoning; disregarding historical examples whilst more directly adopting these principles called for drawing on the most developed European legal codes of the day. In the Ottoman case, as we will see, it would not be a variety of legal historical precedents which would be challenged by the new legal reasoning and codes, but a robust religious system of law that already had defined the identity and the workings of the Ottoman state and society. These were the *Code Civil* in France (*Code Napoléon*), as well as those of Austria and Prussia. This legal and political ‘hot potato’ had finally landed in 1808 in the hands of Speransky, who was appointed the new chief of the Commission, as well as nominated Assistant Minister of Justice. Speransky, who was still by this time not well-versed on the technicalities of law, opted for the European models, which would have left him dealing with what he referred to as the ‘barbarian laws’ of the empire. Certainly, Speransky’s take backfired, and the code would not survive the political attack. Compiling the code in a rush in 1812, Speransky submitted it to the Council of State (this being a new institution he proposed, to be discussed below). As Russia was preparing for the war of 1812 against Napoleonic France, Speransky’s opponents accused him of imposing on monarchical, autocratic and orthodox Russia a code of laws copied from radical, revolutionary, atheistic France. Russian contemporary court historian Nikolai Karamzin (1766–1826) attacked him, asserting that the code was a complete copy of the French Civil Code.²⁵ Later, during the reign of Tsar Nicholas I, Speransky would revise his *principia juris* by accepting the historical approach when compiling the Russian code; however, it was too late for this attempt to establish a single law for the empire.

The process of codification, seemingly of a technical nature, was played out with geopolitical undertones, too. Unlike this process however, the expressed ambition of limiting the power of the monarch through the establishment of permanent laws was directly political. It would seem rather strange that the young Emperor actually asked the elder statesmen, many of them active in the regicide of Paul I on 11 March 1801, to reform the institution of the Senate by redefining its powers. As vocal representatives of this group, brothers Counts Alexander (1741–1805), who was main chancellor to Tsar Alexander I, and Simon Vorontsov (1744–1832), a long-standing Russian Ambassador to Britain, drafted what came to be known as the Charter to the Russian People, which they wanted to promulgate at the coronation of Alexander I. Drawing on the