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Balta Limanı Commercial Treaty

The **Balta Limanı Commercial Treaty** (25 Cemaziülevvel (Jumādā I) 1254/16 August 1838) was an official agreement between the Ottoman Empire and Britain that reaffirmed previously granted rights and privileges of British subjects to trade freely in the Empire. It was signed in the wake of Hünkar İskelesi Treaty of 19 Safer (Şafar) 1249/8 July 1833.

The Hünkar İskelesi Treaty represented the peak of Russian diplomatic achievements vis-à-vis the Ottoman Empire. While the Russians viewed their accomplishment as a major success in reducing the Empire to a protectorate, the British, much affected by increased Russophobia, adopted a more vigorous policy to increase British influence after the conclusion of the aforementioned treaty. During this period, the British advised the Ottoman leaders (who were desperately seeking a Great Power ally to fend off the threat posed by the rebellious governor of Egypt, Mehmed Ali Paşa) to implement political and economic reforms. On the economic front, the British pressed the Ottomans to replace their traditional protectionist economic policy with that of free trade. New economic protectionism had gained momentum in continental Europe in the first quarter of the nineteenth century, which made the large Ottoman market more attractive to the British. Thus, when the Ottoman government initiated discussions regarding the renewal of the customs tariffs set in 1235/1820 for fourteen years, the British proposed a new agreement based on the principle of free trade. From an economic viewpoint, such a settlement was undesirable for the Otto-

man government, which benefitted from monopolies on major products of export such as opium, olive oil, and silk. In practice, the 3% customs tariffs for Ottoman exports set by the 1235/1820 regulations had been reduced to 1.5% or even less due to inflation. Hence, the Ottoman government was inclined towards renewing the agreement by accepting some of the liberalization measures proposed by the British. Nevertheless, it did not wish to adopt a wholesale liberalization; allowing British merchants to purchase commodities directly from producers at lower prices would mean a major loss of revenue. The political pressure created by Mehmed Ali's revolt, however, forced the Ottoman government to sign the new treaty, which included more extensive liberalization measures than desired.

The Balta Limanı Commercial Treaty confirmed the privileges and immunities that had been granted to British subjects by previous capitulations and treaties. It permitted British subjects to purchase goods at all places in the Ottoman Empire instead of only at export ports. Moreover, the Ottoman government agreed to abolish all monopolies on all goods, as well as the permits granted by local governors for purchase and transport of goods. In any type of purchase, British subjects would not pay more than the most favoured class of Ottoman subjects engaged in internal trade. Besides the 3% export tariff, British merchants would pay an ad valorem 9% interior duty for Ottoman exports and 2% for Ottoman imports instead of all previous taxes and fees collected under different titles. Thus, they would pay a total of 12% for exports and 5% for imports. The continuation of domestic customs for Ottoman subjects provided a major edge to the British merchants.

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