**THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE and THE CAUCASUS in WWI**

***ARSLAN Ozan***

The Ottoman Empire, a constantly declining power in the European system of international relations between the 18th and the 20th centuries joined in October 1914 the list of the belligerents in WWI on the side of Central Powers with a highly controversial decision. For many, this last move of the “Sick Man of Europe” was an eventual manifestation of a new and Panturkist foreign policy orientation of the Young Turk elite, which has increasingly been in control of successive Ottoman cabinets since 1908. This alleged war aim of the Young Turk administration was to unite all the Turkic speaking peoples of the Romanov’s empire under an expansionist and ethnically more homogenous realm of the house of Osman. Those who argued that the Young Turk decision-makers pursued Panturkist policies in WWI emphasized the rise of a nationalist discourse in the Young Turk circles on the eve of the Great War, following the Empire’s crushing defeats at the hands of the Balkanic Powers and the subsequent loss of most of the Sublime Porte’s European domains. They also argued that an Ottoman “*Drang nach Osten*” targeting the Caucasian and even Central Asian provinces of the Russian Empire was a rational choice for the crumbling empire.

However, my approach will question whether the real aim of the Sublime Porte in WWI was to build a Panturkic empire on the Caucasian and Transcaspian provinces of the Tsar. A precise analysis of the Sublime Porte’s open and secret negotiations with the successors of the Romanov Empire in the Caucasus following the Russian revolutions of 1917 as well as of the Ottoman High Command’s strategic planning of military operations during the period of 1914-18 displays a very different picture. I will argue in my presentation - in the light of Ottoman and foreign primary sources such as the diplomatic and military archives and memoirs of several politicians and diplomats – that the Ottoman war aims in the First World War were a product of a rather cautious calculation of the capabilities of “New Russia” and thus based on a limited Turkish nationalism with a limited geographical scope.