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*Russian-Oriental Relations: Thought, Notes, and Desire*¹

Preface

In 1881, I published a pamphlet entitled *Russian Islam [Russkoe musul'manstvo]* in which I discussed measures for the education of Russia's Muslims and their most intimate possible rapprochement [*sblizhenie*] with the Russians. Among other remarks I stated "the Russian takes up easily and gets along splendidly with other nationalities, charming them by the simplicity, responsiveness, and humanity natural to the Russian character. This explains why the Muslims do not feel as strangers in Russia and do not shun personal contact and rapprochement with the Russian people."

These words were written neither lightly nor for effect. Having grown up in Russia, and having lived in the West and the Orient from 1871 to 1875, I have shaped the aforementioned view from personal observations and impressions. Since that time fifteen years have passed, yet my opinion has grown all the firmer despite certain voices—emanating from people with narrow or partisan views on Russian-Muslim relations and on Islam in general—that one comes across in the press. As in everything, however, life compensates for reservations and rejects errors no matter where committed.

In that same pamphlet I urged the small number of educated Russian Muslims to work to enlighten the Muslim masses by expanding the curriculum of the religious schools, publishing in the vernacular [*rodnoi iazyk*], and popularizing Russian schools and the sciences. While exhorting others I could not sit with my own arms folded. In 1883, on a weekly basis, I began publishing a [bilingual] Russo-Tatar newspaper, *Interpreter [Perevodchik/ Tercüman]*. Although my publication was ear-marked for the Muslims of Russia and was adapted to their comprehension and thinking, its dissemination abroad in other Muslim lands led me to study both the economic and political situations there as well as the peculiarities of their relations with Russia.

At this point I propose to discuss briefly my views on these relations. I recognize, of course, that I could easily err while treating complex international questions, that I am a dilettante in matters political, and that I am little more than a publicist for whom the view

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from beautiful Bakhchesarai may distort reality. Nevertheless, I shall write what I think with conviction but without any pretension.

By offering my opinions, I hope only to have them discussed and weighed by my Russian and Oriental readers.

I

Were we to cast our eyes over a map of the Eastern Hemisphere, we would see that [several] Muslim countries and Russia share a long common border and certain seas like the Caspian and the Black. The Russo-Muslim world—if such an expression may be permitted me—stretches, in the one direction, from the Arctic Ocean to the depths of equatorial Africa and, in the other direction, from the Baltic and Adriatic to the great China Wall and the Indian Ocean. To the east of Russia and the Muslim lands throng some five to six hundred million people within the Mongol-pagan world, and to the West seethes and churns a vigorous Europe with two hundred and fifty-million inhabitants. Thus situated between the Europeans and Mongols, the Russo-Muslim world finds itself in the center of the hemisphere, at the crossroads of all commercial, cultural, political, and military routes and relations.

Both these neighboring worlds—the European and the Mongol—are overpopulated, and their excess forces them to seek the less crowded territory that is settled precisely by the Russians and Muslims. Thanks to the advantage of maritime transportation, the Japanese and Chinese have already flooded the Pacific Ocean and Southeast Asia with their surplus population. The United States struggles against this influx with restrictive measures. As soon as steam-driven transportation reduces overland distances within the Chinese Empire, we can expect that Chinese emigration and then political views will turn of necessity westward, threatening the Russo-Muslim world. That China was defeated not long ago by little Japan ought not reassure us; rather, the rapid development of Japanese military power shows that the same could be repeated with China. Thirty years ago no one could have imagined Japan as presently constituted. And it, like China, was considered as closed off as a sepulcher and distinguished by deathlike immobility, amusing customs, and a ridiculous army.

From the West, Europe applies pressure to the Russo-Muslim world. For now the pressure points are few—German colonies dispersed through out the Russian south and extending already into the territory of Turkey, including Palestine—but they hint at a not-very-distant future when such movement by necessity will be directed at “land more or less spacious.” The political aspirations of the West seem perfectly clear. The scorn for a savage and schismatic Muscovy prior to Peter I as well as the struggle with Russia during the last two centuries are nothing other than the consequence of Europe’s inevitable expansion eastward. This tendency, sometimes conscious, sometimes instinctive, explains European politics beginning with Charles XII’s conflict with Peter the Great and ending with the

recent disorders in Armenia so exaggerated by the English. Are not the occupation of Polish territory by the Germans, the seizure of Algeria and Tunis by the French, Bosnia and Herzegovina by the Austrians, Cyprus and Egypt by the English, and the shores of Abyssinia by the Italians tangible evidence of this movement? And this is not all. Having encircled the East, Europe, represented by the English, has already contested Russian interests in South Asia, in Afghanistan, and on the Pamir plateau.

Acting in this manner vis-à-vis both Russia and the Muslims, Europeans, in each instance, extract profit and advance. Thus, they supported and then pressured Turkey during the reign of Catherine the Great. They wanted to divide up Turkey with Russia in the days of Napoleon I, and worked together with her for the liberation of Greece, but then protested the Treaty of Unkiar-Skelessi between Russia and Turkey. Subsequently they incited the Porte to war and together besieged Sevastopol'. Finally, after venomously applauding the recent war of liberation, they met in Berlin and turned upside down the results of that difficult and costly conflict. Having ceded to Russia one fortress and one port—Kars and Batum—they took for themselves nearly a third of the territory remaining to Turkey.

If we examine with what callousness Europe oppresses the entire Orient economically and with what brutality it acts in every situation over a pence, a centime, or a pfennig, then it becomes obvious that the East can expect nothing good from the West.

In my opinion, neither Western Europe nor the Mongol-pagan East can or will entertain positive sentiments toward the peoples who inhabit the central regions of the Eastern Hemisphere. Advancing one *arshin* [28 inches] or a hundredth of a mile, both must by necessity expand ethnographically, economically, and politically to the central, less populated Muslim and Russian lands.

II

If the future of the Mongol-pagan world appears obscure and uncertain, the tasks and aspirations of a vital, civilized West are delineated. To sow distrust and enmity toward Russia among Muslims, to present Russia as a destructive and implacable enemy of Islam and Western culture—these are the frank calculations of the Europeans. Adroitly and systematically (here I beg the forgiveness of Russian and Oriental diplomats) they exploit misunderstandings in the relations between Muslims and Russians, misunderstandings fatal [to both] but remarkably beneficial to the Europeans. To plunder economically the entire Orient, while maintaining the appearance of friendship, and to weaken Russia by periodic wars with Muslims equipped and armed by Western friends—such is the policy that the West never sheds, for even those small nations liberated by Russia and related to her, with the exception of the glorious Montenegro, turn their hands to the West, even though the powerful and fraternal help of Russia might be indispensable. This observation,

to be sure, does not concern the simple folk, the masses, who, we know, never play a leading role [in public affairs].

Muslims who receive an education in the West or who hear lectures by professors invited from there or who study the science in translation from Western books and newspapers gain, of course, an extremely vague and incorrect idea about Russia and the Russian people. Arabs, Turks, Persians, let alone Indian Muslims, knowing Russia from English, German, and French sources, and not having a single independent work on their great northern neighbor, always yield easily to their Western friends and see the world willingly through the latter's spectacles. From readers of *Interpreter* in Egypt, Turkey, and Persia we frequently receive questions about how long *medreses* [Muslim religious schools] have been opened in Russia, how long Muslims have been permitted in civil service and in the universities, when is the call to prayer from the minarets allowed, and so forth. Obviously, these gentlemen are surprised that Muslims live in Russia as they do in any Muslim country. Unfortunately, [one must admit,] for us in Russia the study of and acquaintance with the Orient has not achieved its proper development either. In spite of the fact that more than twelve million Muslims inhabit the territory of Russia, there are few among us who are familiar with the teachings of the Qur'an and with the way of life and situation of the Muslim people. It is impossible to speak of "study and knowledge" when the Qur'an is viewed as a pernicious book in which, nevertheless, some two hundred million people believe to the point of abnegation; it is impossible to call "understanding" the opinion that Muslims are incorrigible fanatics and the enemies of all knowledge and civilization [*obshchezhitie*].

To our extreme regret, literary work and pamphleteering about the Orient fails to dispel such absurd ideas. We have only the instinct and happy turn of the Russian character to thank for the amicable and trusting relations that continued to be strengthened and improved. It would be desirable if Russians and Muslims came to know one another better and directly, without either preconceived [ideas] or prejudice. Thus, they might see that, *except for religion, everything else* draws them together and binds them fast. Religion, the domain of God, should not impede the good in secular life and activity; and it does not, for the Qur'an has not been an obstacle to an alliance between the Turks, the English, and the French, and the Gospels have not prevented Emperor Nicholas [I] Pavlovich from concluding a treaty of friendship with Turkey. In private life and activity we quite often see excellent relations between Christians and Muslims. These need to be developed, expanded, and consolidated while by no means infringing the religious sentiments so dear to each of us.

For Muslim peoples, Russian culture is closer to their own than is the West's. The economic and industrial might of the Russian people is incomparably less dangerous than is the West's. Together or side by side the Muslim and the Russian can still plow, sow, raise their livestock, earn their living, and engage in commerce. Their skills are not essentially different,

but next to the European the Muslim is impoverished and becomes a farm laborer. And so it is. But in Russia, with the exception of the nomadic Kirghiz [Kazakh], Muslims do not fall into poverty; on the contrary, they enrich themselves. Undoubtedly, in the future the Kirghiz will build their lives on more civilized bases.

The cultural, that is, elemental, affinity existing between the Oriental and the Russian peoples manifests itself by the fact that nowhere do the sons of the East live more easily than in Russia. Neither in Marseilles nor in Paris do you find a colony of Algerian Arabs; nor is there an Indian quarter in London, nor should one look for a single Achits or Malay Muslim in the Hague. Yet thousands of Muslims inhabit Moscow and St. Petersburg, where they have their own streets, mosques, and so forth. While the greater part of them are Tatars, you will also find in all the large cities of central Russia, let alone in frontier areas, Persian merchants and Turkish bakers.

What leads them to and keeps them in Russia other than elemental affinity? Why is the man of the Orient not drawn to trade or to earn his living in the West? Could it be more difficult to get from Algeria to Marseilles than from Kazan to St. Petersburg or A.rkhangel'sk?

One prominent Turkish writer—whose name I do not have the right to reveal—said to me: “The Ottomans must and will defend their independence to the very last, sacrificing to that end what is humanly possible; but, if the fatal hour must strike, then I would rather our people pass under the authority of Russia than of any other power. The reason is not Russophilism—I am an Ottoman and nothing more; rather, to live with the Russians would be better and easier. They are closer to us in spirit and culture than are the peoples of the West.”

We have much to gain from good relations with the Orient and from the latter's goodwill toward Russia. Taking advantage of the geographic proximity of Russia to the East, we must develop the most brisk and wide ranging commerce. The Orient needs the finished products of Russian industry, while Russia requires the raw materials of the hot, southern lands. Why, then, do Russia and the East not work out mutually advantageous commercial ties as an example to other countries? To be sure, Europe will not appreciate this; nevertheless, we must strive for its achievement so as to prove the value of establishing such relations.

III

It is advantageous and satisfying to the West if in Russia and the Orient people find historical, geographic, and theological reasons for mutual enmity and distrust. But would it not be better, in that same history and geography, to search for arguments and a *raison*

d'être favoring reciprocity and agreement? I think that it would be better, although the West would fulminate endlessly about it to the Russians and the Muslims.

As early as the beginning of my publishing career, in an article entitled "Russia and the Orient," which appeared in *Interpreter* (No. 8 [1883]), I wrote: "Russia was forced into war with Muslims in part for reasons of its own development and in part so as to ameliorate the condition of eastern Christians. These wars did not have as their goal the destruction or weakening of Muslim countries; rather, such were the consequences of wars for which the Turks themselves must share the blame by failing to acknowledge Russia as a good neighbor and by listening only to their Western friends. The latter always cleverly took advantage of hostility between Turkey and Russia in order to exploit the former while sapping the strength of the latter as much as possible. We think that it would be reasonable and beneficial to forget the past for the sake of the sincere rapprochement of Turks and Russians. Since Europe will not want or permit this to happen, all the more reason to press for its benefits and utility. Europe is the common enemy of Turkey and Russia." Today this viewpoint is all the more valid and significant.

By proposing little by little, yet systematically, the idea of rapprochement between Russia and the East, by transmitting without bias information about Russia, by entering freely into polemics with Russian publications whenever necessary, and by throwing light on the calm and peaceful life of Muslims in Russia, I have achieved a success that I dared not hope for. Not only the simple folk, for whom I have written and continue to write, but also educated ulema, great khans, and enlightened pashas have begun to read *Interpreter*. We cannot explain the success of *Interpreter* other than by the emergence of interest in Russian affairs by Orientals, something that [foreign] Muslim newspapers evidence by continually reprinting verbatim all the information on Russia to be found in *Interpreter*. Presently, the Muslim East comprises Afghanistan, Persia, Egypt, and Morocco. Leading the way is Turkey with its sultan, also recognized as caliph, that is, the religious head of all Islam, the vicar of the Prophet. All these Muslim states are considered independent, yet to a significant degree they are deprived of their independence and exist thanks to the political competition of the great powers and their support for "equilibrium" in Europe and, now, in Asia. But what is it about these Muslim countries that disturbs Russia, and what is it about Russia that disturbs them? It is said that Russia needs the Straits in order to have free access to the Mediterranean and defend its southern border. The Straits are in Turkish hands. An outlet to the Mediterranean, Persian Gulf, or Indian Ocean is needed for the vast expanses of Asiatic Russia. Persia, however, separates us from the Gulf, while Persia and Afghanistan do so from the second. Owing to this, it is claimed, Russia must break up and destroy these states so as to take their place. It is said, moreover, that Russia has the highest moral duty to demolish and carry off the Crescent everywhere and replace it with the Cross.

I do not give much credence to these opinions, for the following reasons. Imagine that it is the Serbs and Bulgars who are masters of Kazan' and Crimea, and not the Tatars; and that they alarm Russia with continual raids and block her roads to the east and south. And imagine that it is the Greeks and not the Turks who control the Straits, watched over by the Europeans. In these circumstances would Russia deny its natural and pragmatic push toward open space and the ocean? She would take possession of Kazan' and Crimea just as she had done from the Tatars, and she would be just as interested in the question of the Straits [which serve as] a gateway to and from Russia. In general, I do not find sufficient reason for considering the actions of states or popular movements in the abstract, without taking account of actual causes. Many say and write that the Arabs engaged in conquest for the sake of Islam and the Qur'an. I cannot accept that because I understand well how the Arabs, united by their new religion, rushed to conquer the rich, profitable lands of Syria, Iraq, and Egypt, having left behind the barren, deserted lands of Arabia, where the faith was not yet consolidated. While preparing the conquest of Constantinople, Mehmed II hardly thought about converting St. Sophia into a cathedral mosque; rather, his granting of concessions to the defeated Christians shows him to have been an astute politician and not a warrior of God. Moreover, an earlier warrior, Caliph Omar, on seizing Jerusalem, made clear that he had not come to take possession of houses of worship or see their destruction.

All the more reason that I cannot admit that the Russians have played the role of crusaders in the twentieth *[sic]* century.

It would be much better to examine the question from its practical positive side alone. All the more so because, if Russians and Muslims are occupied with abstractions, then others, probably, will grasp reality, and that would not be desirable.

The significance for Russia of the Straits and a southern outlet to the ocean is patent. The natural (and, consequently, legitimate) push to the open seas of the most extensive continental country is determined by its economic and political life and development and therefore ought not to be considered by Muslims as [reflecting] a "thirst for conquest" or, even more, as "hostility toward Islam." For the statesmen of the East to admit the natural necessity of a powerful neighboring people, while preserving their own situation, would be proof of the greatest political sagacity. On the other hand, we dare to believe that it would be equally important for Russia to find the means for an understanding with its eastern neighbors so that it can peacefully and without sacrifice achieve what is necessary to ensure the defense of its southern borders and the development of its commerce.

The entire series of military clashes between Russia and the East during the last two centuries, having had enormous consequences for the emancipation of Eastern Christians and the amelioration of their lives, has not brought us closer to a resolution of the [fundamental] question of Russia's proper well-being and needs—the question of the Straits. Europe has and will have no objections to measures leading to the creation of

Christian principalities in the Balkan Peninsula, but with the indispensable condition that Russia be confined to the Black Sea and that Europe could elbow its way through the Straits as needed. After the unsuccessful [Crimean] War, the Treaty of Paris deprived us of [access to] the Straits; after the successful [Russo-Turkish] War, the Berlin Congress affirmed this loss even more. There is no reason to expect that in the future Europe will not maintain this situation with all its power, given that to do so is to its advantage.

IV

Many will recall, I think, the agitation that seized Europe as a result of rumors that circulated at the beginning of this year concerning the conclusion of a Russo-Turkish alliance. Why did these rumors so alarm the European press? Why did they force the diplomats to prick up their ears so that in Constantinople and in St. Petersburg [the authorities] found it necessary to refute them? It goes without saying that Europe was not troubled by the expectation of a Russo-Turkish invasion but understood that an alliance between the white czar and the Islamic caliph would completely jumble the cards with which Europeans are accustomed to playing. That such an alarm could be raised in Europe, each time a rumor circulates about a Russo-Turkish rapprochement or alliance, is testimony to the major significance [such a rapprochement] could have. Yet its significance would be even greater if the question were placed in a broader context and not limited to Turkey, if it entailed—think of it!—the rapprochement and solidarity of the entire Orient with Russia.

Imagine that Russia has entered into sincere, amicable relations with Turkey and Persia. This friendship would affect rather perceptibly relations with Egypt and the Arab world, on the one hand, and with Afghanistan and the Indo-Muslim world, on the other.

Under the enormous authority of the caliph, the entire Muslim community would turn its trust and sympathy to Russia. At the Straits, which lead to southern Russia, would stand not simply the Turks but friends of Russia with whose [Russian] aid the Straits could be so reinforced that they would actually become impassible to enemies that border them. At the Persian Gulf, on the left flank of Asiatic England, would stand Persia and perhaps Afghanistan, who would be sympathetic to Russia. Securing Russia's southern border in Europe and Asia by means of solid relations with neighboring Muslim states would provide extraordinary freedom to Russian might in the West and the Far East.

Such relations are more easily achieved than by the conquest of these countries. As for Russian outposts in the Mediterranean and anywhere in the vicinity of the Indian Ocean, they could be acquired or obtained from Turkey and Persia. In its agreement with Turkey, England has received for its fleet [access] not only to a port but to an entire island, Cyprus. Why could not a similar accord be worked out between Russia, Turkey, and Persia once they establish mutually advantageous conditions and desire to enter such an agreement?

The Russo-Eastern accord has a purely defensive character, without menace to whomever might not be involved. It could be strengthened by the fullest commercial relations based on the concession of special privileges for the products of the contracting countries.

For Turkey and Persia an accord with Russia would mean that they might better defend themselves against European exploitation and might not be dependent on the whim of every power or the caprice of the theory of equilibrium. Relying on this accord, they might more boldly and more composedly envision the future and more tranquilly busy themselves with a domestic renaissance, adopting forms *not from the West but from Russia*, a country closer to them in terms of civilization and mode of national life.

I will not expatiate on the mutual benefits of a Russo-Oriental rapprochement; they are self-evident. Moreover, the principalities of the Balkan peninsula would find themselves in more comfortable circumstances. As for how such a rapprochement could be realized, it is necessary to note that every accord implies obvious responsibilities whose acceptance, in any event, binds the negotiating parties. This, of course, is inevitable. It is up to the statesmen to determine whether the expected advantages balance the obligations acquired. Russia must be convinced that she has in the Muslims faithful and reliable allies, and the Muslims must be assured that Russia and her people do not have any need or desire to encroach on their political order or religious beliefs. For this to occur, the accord must be founded on clear and precise stipulations. The contracting parties must grant one another every term and advantage possible. While negotiating, [the two parties] ought not to dupe one another but ought to find a solid basis for an honest accord and a guarantee of mutual interests and the peaceful development of peoples. It is incumbent on statesmen to elaborate the most appropriate conditions for such an accord.

Having risked discussing this subject, I make only one claim: that such an accord would be beneficial to both the Russians and the Muslims.

V

Against a Russo-Oriental rapprochement various domestic and foreign policy objections could be raised. Above all, we suppose the following: while guaranteeing the security of the Muslim lands, such an accord would tie Russia's hands and alter her historic mission. I do not think [this would happen]. Among the great powers Russia is not a stranger to such guarantees; and by giving them freely she, of course, will ensure corresponding advantage for herself.

To me, as a Muslim, it is improper to speak of Russia's mission in the religious sense, but I can say that her rapprochement with the East will facilitate her civilizing mission in the wider sense.

In Istanbul and Teheran one can hear people talking and whispering, suggesting that an intimate accord with Russia would deprive these states of their independence, that the Turkish sultan and Persian shah would find themselves in a position comparable to that of the khans of Bukhara and Khiva. This is not true at all. On the contrary, the accord would strengthen the position of these governments and countries, by delivering them from the, at times, intolerable influence of one or the other great power. What kind of independence in the international arena does Turkey presently exercise when she could not, in 1885, save her own Rumeli governor-general from a small band of Bulgarians, let alone respond effectively to the seizure of Tunis, Egypt, and other [countries]? Rather than diminishing the power of the sultan and shah, an accord with Russia would assure them both great [political] stability and considerable spiritual and material power.

Europe will, to be sure, struggle against such an accord with every truth and untruth. She will pull out all the stops in St. Petersburg, Istanbul, and Teheran, bristling and threatening war, but this accord could nevertheless be effected through the goodwill of the leaders of Russia and the East.

Allying itself to Turkey and Persia, Russia would draw close to the entire Islamic East and, thanks to the especially pleasant quality of the Russian national character, would actually provide leadership for the Muslim people and their civilization, something that England so stubbornly pursues.

Good relations between the White Tsar and the Muslim caliph would give to the thoughts and sympathies of seventy-million Islamic faithful in India a completely different orientation, and the English would find it difficult to spread tales about the [alleged] mission of the "Cossack" to destroy Islam, as if it were defended by England and its free institutions.

In Russia we are poorly acquainted with the system by which England treats the Muslim peoples. This system is well considered, yet British conceit and aloofness undermine it. If the British were as easy to get on with and were as simple of character as the Russians, the East would adore them in spite of their money grubbing and cupidity. In any event, until now the English have marched along with the East as friend to caliph and Muslim. They have persuaded the East that they are protecting Moscow from the feeble impulses of France and Spain, that they continually defend the caliph and Persia against Russia, that they have temporarily occupied Egypt in order to save it from the grasp of France, and that in India they are not lords but allies of the local princes and people. To convince the Muslims further, they obtained from the *sherif* of Mecca [the declaration] that "India is an Islamic country" and that Muslims ought to reconcile themselves to British rule. English policy can be summed up as, "Give us commercial advantages, and we will defend you and provide you with the fruits of civilization, while encroaching on neither your politics nor your religion." Even recent attacks on the sultan and the notorious "Armenian Affair" are

explained in no other manner than by the wish to strengthen Turkey, having compelled the latter to take up reforms and grant free institutions to its people. By playing with the facts or putting them in a false light, the English will convince the Muslims of Russian enmity to them and their world. Nevertheless, the Armenian events and the “protection” of Egypt that has already lasted too long have raised the curtain from the English game, and the East has begun to look more critically at the whole history of English friendship.

How far the reaction of the Oriental public against their longtime friends has progressed is manifest in Muslim newspapers: those that hew the English line find themselves without many readers, while those of nationalist character are filled with anti-English articles.

The newspapers *Vatan* (Bosnia), *Gayret* (Bulgaria), and *Kipr* (Cyprus), as well as part of the Arab and Indian press, have begun to speak out, in seeming concert, against England. And I will not even discuss the bitter truths that were revealed at a meeting of Muslims this very year in London itself, nor will I cite the complaints of Indian newspapers about English invective against the sultan-caliph. I will limit myself only to noting the speech given by the Indian scholar Muhammed Abdulgani Efendi on 2 (14) February of this year in Newcastle, at a gathering of the local geographic society. Having apprised the audience of the global distribution and significance of the two hundred-million Muslims inhabiting the planet, the aforementioned Muslim scholar completed his speech with the following relevant words:

One-fourth of the entire Muslim population in the world finds itself under English governance. This imposes on those Muslims well-known obligations of a civil and political character. But we should not forget that deeper and more subtle ties bind this population to the caliph as Islam's religious leader. It is true that this fact does not hinder Muslims in fulfillment of their civil duties to Great Britain, but it would be tactless to subject to some great test the feelings that Muslims have toward the state and those they have toward their religion and caliph. We must not forget that, wherever Muslims are maltreated, they and their brethren throughout the world will be displeased because all Muslims belong to a single religious community.

It is well known that Russia can count on a number of supporters from among the so-called Old Turks and the Persian nobility. But the Young Turks, partisans of a constitutional order, understand the value of good relations with Russia. In their own publication *Meshveret* (Deliberation), which appears in Paris, they acknowledge that Turkey can have an agreement with Russia, but not now when Turkey is weak. The latter must strengthen itself first; otherwise an entente with Russia would place Turkey in the position of a vassal. In its French supplement, this newspaper wrote: “We do not profess any animosity toward Russia. While she has her historic mission we have concern for our independence and dignity. Are

there no means to reconcile what appear to be two irreconcilable points of view? *We* believe there are.”

However and whenever the existing cycle of political dependency or semi-dependency ends for Muslim monarchs and princes, the two hundred-million-strong mass of Muslims, solid and united by the Qur’an, will be there. This mass, which attributes the highest significance to faith, and which attaches no importance to differences of birth, language, or country for men who follow the Qur’an, cannot be underestimated on any account.

One should not be nonchalant about the goodwill and sympathy, the hostility and distrust, of this massive part of humanity toward the states and peoples who have been called by history to have the closest ties with them—whether as neighbors, allies, or rulers.

They understand this perfectly well in London. So too does that [English] subsidized part of the Arab/Indian press that continually pushes on the Muslim masses the idea of solidarity between English and Muslim interests. In the words of these organs, only Russia is a threat, not only to Muslim rulers, but to the very way of life and religion of Muslims. England, they say, because of its interests (witness the frankness!) is called to protect the rulers and people of Islam; and, for Muslims under such protection and governance, England guarantees a free life, religious toleration, and [economic] development.

It seems to me that it would be of some use for the Muslim world to know the truth about Russia since it holds a very distorted view of that country at present. Muslims should be persuaded that Russia does not harbor any hostile sentiments toward Islam or the people who profess it. Muslims who inhabit or visit Russia can confirm this by their personal examples and words.

Russia has nothing to lose and everything to gain from the good opinion of Muslims.

Completing my remarks, there remains for me to add only that, by submitting to the influence of England and Germany, Turkey would acquire sufficient guarantee for a proper existence for the caliphate and [Ottoman] dynasty, but an existence that would be limited to external pomp. Turkey would also acquire guarantees regarding religious affairs. We know that the Emperor Wilhelm has personally visited the sultan in order to draw him into the Triple Alliance; but the sultan preferred the strictest “neutrality” and made his point so tactfully that he preserved the best relations with Germany. Evidently, the sultan sought more than the Western alliance could grant him.

We want our Oriental readers to know that while suggesting a Russo-Oriental entente we do not mean to impose our views. Let the Muslim states exist and develop outside such an entente. But, if at some point they feel it necessary to pursue this or that political combination, we suggest that they remember mighty Russia and the wonderful Russian

people. Russia can live and flourish on her own, without any alliances or agreements, but Muslim states do not have that luxury. We cannot lose sight of this fact.

It is also important not to forget that the traditional friend of the East—the *Ingelez-efendi*—has established himself at the Suez Canal and at the Straits of Bab el-Mandeb. He has transformed an Arab sea into an English lake; that is, he has appropriated for himself the keys to Mecca and Medina, without having compensated the amicable but needy caliph with a single commercial or tariff concession. What kind of “friendship and community of interests” is this, gentlemen?

I have said my piece. Now I will readily listen.

Bakhchesarai (March, 1896)

Ismail Gasprinskii, *Russko-vostochnoe soglashenie: Mysli, zamietki i pozhelaniia*. Bakhchesarai: Tipo-Litografiia Gazety “Perevodchika,” 1896.