Here we intend to bring evidence on the fact that European countries had very little interest on what was going on in the Byzantine Empire and were much more concerned with their internal interminable struggles. Therefore the Ottoman expansion in Europe, started by Ghazi Suleyman Pasha, and continued in the subsequent years by Murat I and Bayezid I happened in a troubled situation in Europe and in the Balkans.\footnote{1}

The war between England and France that at the beginning seemed would last for a short time continued and proliferated for over a century and half, from the wars of the 1290s up to the final battle of the Hundred Years War at Castillon and the peace of Lodi, in 1453 and 1454 respectively, which brought peace at last to France and Italy.\footnote{2}

In the fourteenth century, in Europe, had emerged plans for a crusade whose intention was not Jerusalem, but to save Constantinople from the Ottomans and the union of the two Churches, project was considered with great zeal.\footnote{3} But the attitude of the Byzantines was conditioned by the need to stop the Ottoman danger and not a sincere desire for unity of the two Churches, or to bring Latin crusaders to Constantinople.\footnote{4}

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Not only the war in France and England but also the fall of the Stephan Dushan state were important international developments that gave a good opportunity to the Ottomans to show their different and very special way to deal with the strongest point that connects Europe and Asia, the Marmara Sea and Constantinople. After the Battle of Kosovo, the Balkan princes accepted, one after another, the Ottoman suzerainty and the Emperor became virtually an Ottoman vassal. But even more important than the fall of Stephan Dushan’s State for the balance of the international situation was the Hundred Years War.

Although the Ottomans were very weak at sea, having not yet learned to set and conduct a genuine fleet, to be able to impose to the Western powers, the Hundred Years War kept away any potential threat to the Ottomans. The crusades of the twelfth and thirteenth century were in their vast majority maritime enterprises. The most important country that provided the basis of the naval force of the crusades was France. But the Hundred Years War made impossible for the French to serve as maritime base for the crusading armies. The strongest Western power in the sea, Venice, had signed peace treaties with the Ottomans, to ensure their trade in the Levant.

Crusade in the fourteenth and fifteenth century was transformed into a fundraising activity to finance the war between European powers. We can bring countless of examples when during the fourteenth and fifteenth century the money collected for an imaginary or a hypothetical crusade in fact was used to fight other Christian adversaries instead of Muslims. In April 1335, King Philip VI of France pressed the Pope of Avignon Benedict XII to give him some of the money that had gathered for a new crusade, request that the Pope did not satisfy. Until 1340 Philip VI respected the decision of the Pope, but because of the needs of financing the war with England in the spring of this year, he did not hesitate and appropriated the crusade’s money.

An interesting fact to point out is the mutual accusations between the European powers fighting each other about the depiction of the enemy as friend of the Ottomans. This kind of war propaganda based more on deliberate plans to invent imaginary plots between the Ottomans and the European adversary dates very early, from the early stages of the Hundred Years War. As early as 1346, on the eve of the Battle of Crécy, the British supposedly had information that Philip VI of France, through the Genoese, was planning to call contingent of Turkish mercenaries to their aid.

This kind of war propaganda remained a powerful tool against Christian adversaries. When in the first days of July the news of the fall of Constantinople reached Naples, Alfonso V declared that he was ready for a crusade. But hostilities with Genoa remained and the money that was due for the crusade had served to prepare the ships that were sent against Genoa. In July 1456 Alfonso V accused the Genoese as “the true Turks of Europe”, repeating the accusation that they were the first who brought the Ottomans to Europe. The attitude of Alfonso V in relation to the crusade was not very different from that of European princes, who, as he said, were watching what others could do.

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5 Halil Inalcik, The Ottoman Empire, p. 12.
10 Enrico Basso, De Boucicaut a Francesco Sforza, p. 69; Ryder, Alfonso the Magnanimous, p. 401.
It is very interesting that the Hundred Years War brings a new dimension to the crusade propaganda. This new approach was that of depicting the war against a European adversary, in most cases, a neighbour state, as a crusade. So the English depicted their war against France, Scotland and Castile as a crusade. And on the other hand the French, Castilian and the Scots depicted their war against the former also as a crusade. From the English point of view, many contemporary authors have described the Hundred Years War as ‘a form of national crusade’ epitomising the connection between it and the constructions of Englishness.11

So, what were the dimensions of the internal European conflicts of the 14th century, especially the biggest and the longest conflict among them, that between the French and the English? As an early example that illustrates better than anything the European tragedy, is the work of Henri Denifle, on the destruction of the churches in France during the Hundred Years War. Only in one case were burned alive inside a church 600 people that sought refuge in the church. Hundreds of churches across France were looted periodically from the armies and bandits. The troubles of the fourteenth century began to be obvious very early on. In the thirteenth century it is difficult to find examples of overall insecurity such as in the fourteenth century. For example, when Pope John XXII needed to pay 60,000 florins to the papal army in Lombardy in the summer of 1328, he had to send it all in coin. That episode provides an excellent example of the risks involved in carrying coin in the fourteenth, for, despite a guard of 150 cavalry, the convoy was ambushed, and the animals and the money were robbed by bandits on the way.12

Exists a clear connection between the dynamics of the Hundred Years War and the European intervention in the Near East and in the Balkans. It is easy for modern historians to note a correspondence between the dates of the invasions of the Ottoman in Eastern Europe and the German domestic chaos and the Hundred Years’ War in central and western Europe. During the few brief times of peace, some westerners did respond to calls for crusades by diligently planning anti-Turkish campaigns. Such had been the case with the Nicopolis crusade, which directly followed the marriage of Richard II to Isabel, the daughter of Charles VI, and the signing of a peace treaty between Richard’s England and Charles’s France early in 1396. After more than 50 years of fierce rivalry and military clashes between France, Castile and Genoa in one hand and England, Portugal and Burgundy on the other, the last decade of the fourteenth century was a decade of peace between the opposing sides. The armies and the companies of adventurers now idle in Europe because of the peace in France, England and Iberia, were ready to gather and join forces in a new campaign, this time, for the last time until the 16th century in the east, now against the Ottomans. The immediate effect of this European reconciliation and peace was the crusade of Nicopolis.

On 25 September 1396, on the plains south of the central Bulgarian city of Nicopolis, a battle what military historians used to call a “decisive battle” was fought, a battle that changed history. A very diverse soldiery took the field that day. On the one side, Bayezid I, led a force manned by troops from Asia Minor, and from his conquered vassal countries, namely Serbs, Bulgarians, Bosnians, and Albanians. Opposing Bayezid was a force composed of allied troops from throughout western and central Europe. Called a crusade army by all contemporary western authors, it was composed of Hungarian, Wallachian, Tran-

12 Spufford, Power and Profit, 37.
sylvanian, German, Burgundian, French, and English soldiers. Fewer in number than the Turks, although closer to a total of 12,000 than to the 100,000 found in contemporary sources, it was controlled by the Franco-Burgundian cavalry troops. This control became a problem, for these soldiers were foreigners to the region, and they refused to listen to the advice of those who lived closer to this enemy. The crusade of Nicopolis was the last crusade. Note even the fall of Constantinople in 1453 inspired a western European military response. After its failure, the western European princes found that they were too busy with conflicts against their Christian neighbours.

From the very beginning of the Hundred Years’ War, popes had tried to use the call to crusade to bring peace between these warring states. In 1345, Pope Clement VI wrote separate letters to Kings Philip VI of France and Edward III of England asking them to stop fighting and to unite to go on crusade. “Oh, how much better to fight against the Turkish enemies of our faith, than the present fratricidal strife,” the pontiff wrote to the English king. But the following year brought the battle of Crecy and the siege of Calais, and distant Turkish incursions became unimportant. In 1370, a new pope, Urban V, repeated a call to crusade to the kings of France and England, hoping that the peace brought about with the Treaty of Bretigny, signed ten years previously, might encourage them to unite. But, his timing was poor, as the conflict had just begun to heat up again. Again in 1451, Pope Nicholas V wrote to Kings Henry VI of England and Charles VII of France to plead with them for peace so that they might help to avert the fall of Constantinople. Again no peace was made.

Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini, Pope Pius II, in his sermons given at the conference of Mantua, held in 1459 attempting to call a crusade against the Ottomans, thinks that there were two reasons why there had not been a western response to Turkish incursions in South-eastern Europe since the battle of Nicopolis: first, the western European Christian powers had been too busy fighting other Christians, either in international civil wars; and second, the western European realms were too frightened by the Ottomans. Pius II had to recognize that he would have to “take measures to settle the conflict between the French and the English and to assure the peace of Germans.

It was simply too difficult to expect warring princes to abandon their fights against each other and to potentially weaken their defences in order to fight enemies far from home. As Pius writes, “nothing could be found who did not stand in terror of his neighbour and fearto leave his own house empty.” Peace between them all was needed, and it would be a diplomatic nightmare to try to arrange such: all of this would take a long time; ambassadors would have to be sentand the contestants would have to be summoned from distant regions; for how could the enmities of many years be dispelled in a few days?

Of course, Pius II was not the first person to recognize the need for peace, especially between England and France, before a unified effort could be made against the Turks. The list of those making such claims is numerous and includes some of the most important writers of the late Middle Ages. In the early fourteenth century, a French “travel writer” warned Philip VI that the Turks were so powerful that should there not be a unified effort by all western nations, a crusade would fail. In about 1380, John Gower also recognized this need for harmony, writing: “Instead we are fighting open battles over worldly possessions with our brothers.”

And in 1420, Emmanuel Piloti made a plea for the Venetians to solve their problems with the German Emperor and for the duke of Burgundy to stop his war against the French king. Others who called for an end to warfare in Western Europe so that a crusade against the Ottomans could be undertaken include Pierre de Thomas, John Mandeville, Eustace Dechamps, Christine de Pisan, etc. Perhaps the most influential of these late medieval proponents of peace in Europe as a prerequisite of crusade was Philippe de Mezières. In almost all of his writings and sermons, he asks for peace between the warring kingdoms, especially between England and France.

It was not easy to convince anyone in Europe to leave his house and go to the Near East when his family was not safe in his home country. The insecurity in Europe was such that, even in Paris, people were not secure. Although Paris had never been subjected to looting during the Hundred Year War, a huge political and economic crisis affected the city at the turning point of the 14th and 15th centuries. Some documents reveal that the violence of the companies has in fact much in common with symbolic violence and that levies imposed on villages, far from being at random, can be interpreted as another form of seigniorial imposition. To meet the threats, rural populations set up a whole range of means, from the building of forts to taking arms passing by a deep reformation of institutions, and endeavoured to create “defence communities” associating hamlets and villages on the basis of both passive and active solidarity.

The second reason given by Pius II, was that the western European realms were too frightened by the Ottomans. This myth of the “evil” Ottoman continued to be propagated and expanded by fifteenth-century travellers to the east, pilgrims and spies, whose writings were copied and popularized throughout western Europe. Some, such as John of Segovia, and Bertrand de la Broquiere, believed that the image of the Turks was wrong, that they were benevolent and humane people who treated foreigners, regardless of religion, with kindness. In fact, after a lengthy stay in the Turkish lands, Bertrand wrote: “I have found that the Turks are much more friendly to me than are the Greeks.” Pope Pius II also, did come to realize that the image of Turkish evil and violence was untrue, a sentiment he expressed frequently throughout his lengthy stay to Mehmed II, written sometime around 1459.

Pius II understood the fear of the western armies in fighting against these legendary images of violence: “A crusade against the Turks demanded very great strength, since, having been victorious for so many years; they inspired terror in Christians by their mere fame and prestige.” But this was an unfounded fear, he said, for the Turks “had achieved their fame through the cowardice of the Greeks, who had been conquered because they were unarmed and weaklings.”

We can conclude that, one might even say that had there been a strong and united western European military response to the Ottomans that Constantinople might not have fallen, or that, had the crusade of Philip the Bold gone forward in 1456 as planned, to follow up on the Hungarian victory over the Turks outside Belgrade, that Constantinople might have been reconquered. Probably, if the European conflict had settled earlier and had not spent the Anglo-French forces, perhaps the Western Christendom had been one of the pretenders to the Byzantine crown. But such conclusions would be only conjecture.

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14 Bertrand de la Broquiere, Le voyage d’Ultremer de Bertrand de la Broquiere, ed. C. Shefer, in Recueil de voyages et de documents pour servir l’histoire de la geographie depuis le XIIe jusqu’a la fin du XVIe siecle, vol. 12 (Paris: 15. Leroux, 1892), 149.