Identity is one of the notions frequently debated in modern historiography. One can discuss about assumed or denied identity, collective or individual identity, multiple or unique identity and real or invented identity. The present paper is a case study supporting the idea of invented identity, but in a close connection with the other types of identity. The case analyzed is that of the Ottoman citizenship, a notion created at the first half of the nineteenth century. The aim of this analysis is to present in what extent the notion of the Ottoman citizenship, proclaimed by the Gulhane Imperial Edict from 1839, was receipted by the Ottoman society and at the same time assumed by the inhabitants of the great empire. The sources for this analysis are the observations of the foreign travelers in the nineteenth-century Ottoman Empire, with a special interest on the French travelers.

The main aim of the present article is to understand how the inhabitants of the Ottoman Empire, both Muslims and non-Muslims receipted the new Ottoman identity invented at the level of the political elite. It is the same period when the collective mentality of the non-Muslim population experiences another major challenge. This challenge is the discovery of the national identity which is added to the traditional religious identity. Also, the moment 1839 takes place after Greece and Serbia gained their autonomy. Consequently, the Ottoman citizenship is created in a very agitated period, from both political and social perspectives.

It is important to present the circumstances in which the Ottoman citizenship was created, before analyzing its impact on the society. Until November 3, 1839, the moment when the hatt-i sherif of Gulhane was proclaimed, the inhabitants of the Ottoman Empire were identified, from the elite's perspective, with two types of identity. These two identities were first the social identity, askeri/soldier and re'aya/subjeqt, peasant and secondly, the religious identity, Muslim/non-Muslim. This was a simple structure from the perspective of the present society, but it was perfectly adapted to the financial interest of the Ottoman Empire.

The taxes are paid according to people's affiliation to these categories. For clarifying, the non-Muslim pays djiziya, a tax per family which confirms the acceptance of the sultan's authority, while the Muslim pays zakat, a tax which has as its main aim to help the poor. From this perspective, one can claim that the Ottoman Empire was a pragmatic state and its target was to assure the necessary resources for its good functioning.

Social identity in the Ottoman Empire is in fact influenced by religion. Askeriye, the soldiers, are not only the components of the Ottoman army but also the whole "army" of clerks and members of the central and provincial administration. The essential condition to be askeriye is to follow Allah's word, to be a Muslim.
Consequently, while re'aya are both Muslims and non-Muslims subjects, askeriye are only Muslims, both born and converted to this religion. Consequently, one can claim that conversion to Islam is a possibility of changing not only religious identity but also social identity. Except the impact which the adherence to one of the mentioned religious identities has on the financial status of the inhabitants of the Ottoman Empire, it must be clarified also the impact on their juridical status. To be clear, a Muslim has always priority in front of the judge, kadi, a process between a Muslim and a non-Muslim follows this rule.

The notion of Ottoman citizenship was initiated by the Imperial edict from Gulhane, issued on November 3, 1839. The imperial edict, hatt-i sherif, covers different aspects of Ottoman reality, but for the present analysis only the articles connected with the non-Muslims are important. In the hatt-i sherif, the notion of Ottoman citizenship is used by the Ottoman State as a compromise for constructing a uniform society, a society undivided in Muslims and non-Muslims. In the paragraphs of the edict is mentioned that all the inhabitants of the Ottoman Empire, sultan’s subjects, are equal, despite their religion or race. Also, the legal system is modified, the inhabitants of the empire are considered equal in front of the law. “The law is the same for all of us” becomes the main slogan of the Ottoman judges, kadis. Also in this case, as in other similar cases, the equality must not be accepted in an absolute proportion or the corruption of the clerks considered abolished, but not the functioning of the Ottoman legal system represents the main subject of the present study.

Creating the notion of Ottoman citizens and also that of equality of the Ottoman Empire inhabitants, a first step is made towards the opening of the imaginary border between Muslims and non-Muslims. A new act was issued in 1856 under the pressure of the European powers, states that, as it is well known, had different political interests connected to the Ottoman Empire. The new act is a consequence of the Crimean War and it has as major achievement the enlargement of the privileges provided through the 1839 edict, if one considers only the articles connected to the non-Muslims’ status. Religious freedom is recognized once again as well as the equality with Muslims in financial aspects. There are also new regulations, as for example the guarantee of free access of the non-Muslims to administrative positions, positions forbidden to non-Muslims before. Another article focuses on free maintenance of the traditional immunities of the non-Muslims, especially those connected to the internal organization of the non-Muslim communities. Also, non-Muslim subjects receive the right to pass the military service. All these new rights are received and guaranteed to the non-Muslims in their hybrid quality of Ottoman citizens.

Constitution of 1876 written by Midhat Pasha represents the third important act from the series of those that guarantee the reforms initiated by the Ottoman Empire in its way to liberalism. For the non-Muslims, the constitution renews the

1. Translated fragments into Romanian of the hatt-i sherif are published in Mihai Maxim, Culegere de texte otomane (București, 1976).
2. For details regarding the Tanzimat, reform era, see Roderic Davison, Reforms in the Ottoman Empire, 1856-1876 (New York, 1973).