



Greek Deputies in the Ottoman Parliament

Summary :

Presentation of the Greek-Orthodox participation in the Ottoman parliaments of the period 1908-1914.

Date

1908-1914

Geographical Location

Ottoman Empire

1. Patriarch Ioakeim III and nationalism

The transformation of the “Rum millet” into the “Greek nation” was made possible not only by the enlightened concept of the nation - state that preceded independence and inspired modern state – building, but more effectively by the educational system of the new Kingdom itself. The transition was less clear among the Ottoman Greeks and the domain where the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople still constituted the spiritual authority of the Christian Orthodox flock.

Patriarch Ioakeim III was an extraordinary prelate who strove to bring the wayward **exarchate church** of the Bulgarians back into the fold of the Great Church. The Patriarch looked to the secular agenda of the Young Turks and irredentist views of the Greek State with equal disdain. When his church had condemned in 1872 the ecclesiastical “ethno - racial” (*ethnophyletiki*) rebellion of the Bulgarians, it was in fact defending an ecumenical parish based on the sacred language associated with the second century BC translation of the Old Testament and subsequently three of the four gospels. The adoption of the same linguistic tradition by the Greek nation-state should not be confused with the ideology of the Patriarchate. Yet the seeds of the communal disarray among the Ottoman Greeks had been planted long before the 1908 revolution of the Young Turks. The intrusion of Greece’s policy in the Ottoman realm and the struggle in Macedonia among people of the same religion, diminished the conciliatory role of the patriarchate and increased the prestige of lay and clerical activists who championed Greek nationalism over the ecumenical spirit of the Patriarch.

2. The elections of 1908

The decade between 1908-1918 witnessed the transformation of the Ottomans into Turks. The nationalist element in the committee of Union and Progress (CUP) controlled the Young Turk movement which became the arbiter of imperial affairs throughout most of the decade. The CUP dominated all three general elections (1908, 1912 and 1914). According to the electoral law of 1908, taxpaying male Ottoman citizen over 25 years of age were entitled to vote. The law stipulated a system of indirect, two-stage elections, in which the electorate would vote for electors to select the deputies for parliament. Faced with formidable challenges from within the empire, as well as from the realm of foreign policy, the CUP made great effort to control the electoral outcome.

The Ottoman Greeks constituted a significant minority of the empire, both in terms of numbers and economic standing. Despite their long experience in municipal organization the Greek communities were caught unprepared by the CUP strategy to eradicate millet privileges and confer a single citizenship based on the ethnic identity of the Turkish majority. The Greek constituency was also divided between adherents of the Patriarch, members of the “**Political League**” (*Politikos Syndesmos*), supporters of the Ottoman Liberals, members of the CUP and exponents of Greek irredentism.

From the outset of the 1908 elections the CUP insisted that an equal number of Turkish deputies be elected in constituencies where Greeks formed the clear majority and asked the Greek electors to support candidates who belonged to CUP. In spite of Greek protests and threats to abstain, the Ecumenical Patriarch managed to reconcile his flock with the CUP and secure the **election of 24 Greeks** into the Ottoman parliament. Ioannina, Kozani, Lemnos, Mytilene, Chios and Rhodes, produced only Greek deputies. A “Greek Party” (*Ellinikon Politikon Komma*) was founded toward the end of 1910 with the initiative of the “Political League” and



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succeeded in splitting the Ottoman Greeks in two adversarial positions. Of the 24 Greek deputies, 16 agreed to become its members and supported the Liberal opposition organized into a party called "Freedom and Understanding".

3. The elections of 1912

In 1912 the CUP dissolved parliament and proclaimed elections. Despite its attempts to attract support through the Patriarch, Greek votes went mainly to the Liberals. Greek deputies of the CUP, such as Narles, Orfanidis and [Kofidis](#) and others such as [Karolidis](#), [Savvopoulos](#) and [Emmanouilidis](#) who believed the CUP would guarantee their reelection, did not fall in line with the Liberals and joined the Unionist ballot. As a consequence of internal squabbles the Greek deputies were reduced to 16, most of whom belonged to the CUP ballot. Only four candidates backed by the "Political League" were elected: two in Ioannina, one in Gelibolu (Kallipolis) and one in Serres.

The life of the 1912 parliament was short. Several months after the elections the CUP was ousted from power. The Balkan Wars however brought back the parliamentary regime. In the winter of 1914 the CUP was again the only credible contender. The liberal party had, in fact, ceased to exist, while the "Political League" was dissolved. Some of its ardent supporters such as Bousios and Kosmidis, who had failed in the 1912 elections, were deported and deputy from [Smyrna](#), Karolidis, returned to his university post in Athens. Also, since the Ottomans had lost most of their European possessions by 1914, deputies from Macedonia, Epirus and the islands, ceased to enter the Ottoman Parliament.

4. The elections of 1914

Negotiations with the CUP for the Greek participation in the election of 1914 were held by the new patriarch, [Germanos V](#). Once again 16 deputies were elected to the Ottoman parliament – not all unionists. During the years of the First World War the fortunes of the Ottoman Greeks deteriorated rapidly as the multi-national empire was being transformed into a Turkish nation state. Through a series of laws the collective representation of ethnic groups in the empire was abolished and privileges of the patriarchate were curtailed.

After Greece entered the war on the side of the Triple Entente in 1917, the Greeks of [Constantinople \(Istanbul\)](#) and Smyrna suffered deportation, imprisonment, economic boycott and exile. Naturally the Greek deputies could do little to improve the lot of their community, except for extending limited relief to those stricken by such measures. After the armistice of 1918 the Greek deputies raised their voice in the Assembly testifying against the CUP atrocities. In the general elections of 1919 the Greeks chose not to participate part declaring themselves free of their civil responsibilities toward the Ottomanstate that was expiring.

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Glossary :

	Bulgarian issue
	The Bulgarian struggle for ecclesiastical autonomy. Since the 1850's the Bulgarians claimed the establishment of an autonomous church (exarchate) which would retain typical relationship with the Ecumenical Patriarchate. The latter opposed to this movement as its role had been undermined. After long lasting negotiations and the failure of any attempt for reconciliation, an Ottoman firman promulgated in 1870 established the Bulgarian exarchate, although the Patriarchate declared the Exarchate schismatic. Naturally, the main character of the struggle of the Bulgarians for ecclesiastical independence was not religious. It was bounded to the Bulgarian nationalism emerged at that time and had clear political dimension (Bulgarian political independence).
	millet
	The millet system was based on the division of the Ottoman subjects according to religion. The millets were the central communal institutions for the members of the respective ethno-religious groups, in particular for the non-Muslim subjects of the Empire. The millets had its own institutions and functions concerning self-administration, religion, education, justice, and social coherence. Although the division of the subjects according to their religion had always been fundamental in the Empire, the millets in their fully organized form originate in the end of the 18th century. In the 19th century, in particular during the period of the tanzimat reforms, the millets became the main institutions through which the non-Muslim subjects were incorporated in the Ottoman Empire.