



Summary :

The Organization of Constantinople ("Organosis Konstantinoupoleos") was founded in the beginning of 1908. Its founder was Athanasios Nikolaidis in cooperation with Ion Dragoumis. Having its seat in Constantinople (Istanbul) the organization aimed at confronting the Bulgarian national movement in Macedonia and Thrace and at achieving a political coordination of the Greeks in Constantinople. At the same time it promoted a cooperation between the peoples of the Balkans and Asia Minor. The Organization dissolved in October 1912 after having accomplished a significant advancement of its goal.

Date

1908-1912

Geographical Location

Constantinople (Istanbul)

1. Historical context

The Struggle for Macedonia (in Greek: *makedonikos agon*) had been the purgatory fire for the generation that experienced the defeat of 1897 and the obligatory inertia of the years that followed. For Athanasios Souliotis, the young officer with the aristocratic bearing, as well as for Ion Dragoumis, his close friend, Macedonia signified the escape from an graceless capital of a small state without perspectives.¹ For Souliotis, his involvement in the cause started in 1906 with the Organization of Thessaloniki. As a merchant under the name "Nikolaidis" he committed himself with the "sad and bothersome" task of being a commercial agent and at the same time a spy. His service in the multiethnic Macedonian capital offered him the adequate training for his next significant mission. From the recovery of Macedonia for Greece to the maintenance of Hellenism within its eastern context. Beginning with a commissioned national service, he went on to the conception and realization of a personal vision: the unification of all the peoples of the East in a single cultural unity. The gap between the Greek capital –the "provincial woman who pretends to be a cosmopolitan European lady- and the actual capital of the East, [Constantinople](#)", emphasized in Souliotis' understanding the inferiority of the Greek Great Idea (*megali idea*).

Similar reflections were put forward by the diplomat Dragoumis when comparing the decline of the Greek (Helladic) territory to that of the cosmopolitan East. "The Greeks of the Greek state have ended up being "Helladic" (elladikoi), a different species."² For Souliotes he had written: "You are better than me in the task that we both took over and I would envy you for your superiority if I had not the feeling that we must accomplish what we have undertaken and if I did not love you so much that I enjoy to see you succeed".³ Both men's reflections fit in the context of the so-called Eastern Ideal, the political ideology of the early 20th century that aimed at the advancement of the cooperation among the various ethnic groups [within the Ottoman Empire](#) so that both the Bulgarian influence and that of the Great Powers in general could be dealt with.

2. Foundation and goal

The Organization of Constantinople was founded in the beginning of 1908. Its founder was Athanasios Souliotis-Nikolaidis while Ion Dragoumis offered his unreserved support. The Organization was created therefore before the [Young Turks' movement](#) in order to confront from within the Ottoman capital the Bulgarian movement in Macedonia and Thrace. The goal of the Organization was the political coordination of the Constantinople Greeks and its ideal was the communication and cooperation of the peoples of the East, namely the Balkans and Asia Minor.

3. Activity

The European part of the Ottoman Empire was not only the territory with the richest ethnic diversity but also a field open in foreign interventions. The Ottoman Empire, therefore, ran the risk of losing this area.



The Young Turks initially intended to reconcile the warring parts so as to face the danger from the western world. The main obstacles to this aspiration, however, were not only the rival Balkan nationalisms, but also the very Turkish nationalism which emerged delayed on stage.

Souliotis, even though he did not cherish many hopes for the pacification of Macedonia, considered the peaceful coexistence with the Turks a feasible scope that would lead to the Grecization of the Ottoman state. He proposed Greece's renunciation of any expansion towards the Ottoman territory as a prerequisite for the removal of the mistrust between the two states, and invited the Greeks of the Empire to develop their full civilizational activity.

The 1908 Ottoman constitution consolidated in theory the equality before the law among all the peoples of the Empire. This development seemed to favour Souliotis' plans. He envisaged an ideal greater than the scopes of the Greek-Bulgarian confrontation. The new order laid the foundations for cooperation among the peoples of the East and created the preconditions for a more extended participation of the Greeks with their considerable economic vigor. The policy that the Constantinople Organization aspired to put into practice sought the preservation of the Greek identity within the Ottoman Empire. The Young Turks in their turn aimed at abolishing cultural / ethnic differentiations among the subjects of their state.

In September 1908 Apostolos Alexandris, the Greek government's envoy to the Young Turk's Committee "Union and Progress", observed that Greeks had a "chaos of views on the issues that concern Hellenism [...]". I. Dragoumis thought that Hellenism's intellectual and material superiority made its presence felt quickly in the regenerated Empire. Bousios went as far as to maintain that Turkey through the dissemination of Greek views and political principles in the Parliament, would be transformed into a new Byzantium.⁴

The Young Turks, being the masters of the situation, took measures in order to impose their power and establish the centralized state they aspired. At that time, they appeared ready to cooperate with the non-Turkish communities of the Empire on the condition that the latter would declare their obedience to the Turkish state and dispose of their own minority status.

In 1910 the Committee resumed its effort to gain more control applying the article 18 of the constitution, according to which all schools would have to come under the state's supervision, the teaching would take place in the Turkish language, and a uniform educational method would be implemented. In July 1910 the Ottoman Parliament voted the law concerning the churches of Macedonia, by which it provided new concessions to the **Bulgarian Exarchate**. The Ecumenical Patriarchate in coordination with the Organization asked for a convocation of the Ottoman Greeks' National Assembly in order to meet this new development. The National Assembly's proceedings started on the 1st of September 1910 but its members' arrests obliged the Patriarch to cancel the convocation.

The declaration of the First Balkan War against the Ottoman Empire put an end to any effort of its Greek subjects to get reorganized. Souliotis himself manifests his disappointment in his correspondence to Ion Dragoumis. "It is a pity", he said, "a pity after so much work".⁵

However, the Organization of Constantinople had several lines of defense. Although Souliotis himself preferred the option of the subjects' equality before the law, after 1910 the nationalism of the Young Turks' made him turn initially to prince Sabaheddin's Liberals through the Political League of **Pera**, which was under the control of the Organization, and later to the defense of the ethnic minorities' privileges.

Souliotis remained in Constantinople until October 1912, when the Organization dissolved. Following the war declaration he found himself together with Ion Dragoumis at the Balkan front. The Organization until its dissolution had achieved a considerable infiltration. By 1912 almost 500 members had been initiated. Among its most active members were A. Ch. Chamoudopoulos, Spiliotopoulos, Kobotheckras, Vatikiotis, I. Zagorianakos, G. Skalieris, G. Bousios, G. Karavangelis, M. Theotokas, **Chysanthos of Trebizond**, D. Digas, H. Vamvakas, P. Kosmidis, G. Theoharidis.



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3. Δραγούμης, Ί., *Όσοι ζωντανοί* (Athens 1926), p. 123
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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).

Sources

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