

THE PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS OF 1908: CIVIL RIGHTS AND ETHNIC DEMANDS OF THE GREEK ORTHODOX COMMUNITY OF MYTILENE*

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This paper focuses on the electoral behaviour of the Greek Orthodox community of Mytilene. It argues that the change of the regime in the Ottoman Empire and the proclamation of parliamentary elections in July 1908 gave rise to new political practices within the community, which had not manifested themselves earlier due to the totalitarian nature of the regime. The leading groups of the community welcomed the Young Turk regime as a unique opportunity to add political power to complement their economic and social position. The election result lived up to their expectations. However, it triggered significant political changes, since it marked the first manifestations of Turkish and Greek nationalism. The present paper, focusing in the case of Lesbos, is an attempt at perceiving the two rival nationalisms not only as responses to the ideological precepts of the West, but also as a result of domestic challenges.

By promulgating the Constitution in July 1908 and announcing parliamentary elections immediately afterwards, the Young Turks managed to dispel the negative atmosphere that had taken hold of their country, thereby delivering the kiss of life to the Sultan's diminishing, though still vast, territory.¹ The acceleration of the Young Turk movement

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1. The Young Turks reinstated the Constitution of 1876, which Sultan Abdul Hamid had suspended in 1878. For the first constitutional period in the Ottoman Empire, see Devereux

was aimed primarily at keeping Macedonia in Turkish hands, given that the Russo-British rapprochement at Reval in June that year had brought Turkish dominion in this region into question.² The Young Turks also sought to modernize the Empire as a means of convincing Europe of the innocence of their intentions and persuading the non-Muslim Ottoman communities to adopt a more favourable stance towards their homeland. This new modern state modelled on parliamentary liberalism in which every people could live together in harmony, irrespective of religion, was to be created through the abolition of the traditional millet system.³

The Young Turks' pronouncements on *equality*, *liberty* and *justice* were welcomed with considerable enthusiasm by the majority of the Empire's Christians, including those of *Mytilene*.⁴ Obviously, the restoration of the 1876 Constitution by the Young Turks was something the people of the Empire had both wanted and hoped for. For this reason, as soon as the granting of the Constitution and the proclamation of elections had been confirmed, the Turks, Arabs, Jews, Greeks, Serbs, Bulgarians, and Armenians in the Ottoman Empire felt as though they had been set free and "took to the streets to express their happiness". Everyone in the Empire assumed that "the Young Turks' promises to grant constitutional freedom, justice and equality before the law to all, regardless of creed, would immediately solve all the problems that had crept in during the era of autocracy".⁵ The Constantinopolitan daily *Sabah* noted that on the day the Constitution was proclaimed "freedom glowed in people's eyes. [...] Men and women expressed the conviction that they and their children would live happy lives under the wings of freedom, justice and equality".⁶ At the same time the newspaper *Amaltheia* pointed out that "Smyrna celebrates one of the most beautiful moments in Turkish history, with which the history of the two brotherly peoples, Greeks and Turks, is connected; these people have common living conditions, common interests and shared sorrow for the violation of the law by the autocracy". Furthermore, *Amaltheia*

1963. One of the MPs of the first constitutional period was Zafirakis Ipandrevmenos from Lesvos.

2. See Karavas (2011), which includes the relevant bibliography.

3. On the Young Turk revolt, see indicatively Ahmad 1969 and Hanioglu 1995.

4. The island of Lesvos (Midilli), located in the north-east of the Aegean Sea, was part of the Ottoman Empire from 1462 to 1912.

5. By way of illustration, see Shaw & Shaw 1977: 273.

6. Cited in *Amaltheia*, 14/27 July 1908.

praised the abolition of press censorship, underlying that “freedom of the press is the main condition for the existence of a civilized state”.⁷



Images 1: Christians and Muslims celebrating together the proclamation of the Constitution in Mytilene, July 1908, photo: Fritz J. Mraz, available at <<http://www.lesvosoldies.gr>>

The celebrations in Mytilene, the capital of Lesbos, lasted for two weeks or so. The Smyrna newspapers referred to Christians and Muslims “of all social classes”, who were demonstrating in the streets of the town accompanied by music and Greek and Ottoman flags.⁸ According to Ioannis Karatzas, the vice-consul of Greece in the island,⁹ “In general, people in

7. *Amaltheia*, 15/28 July 1908.

8. *Amaltheia*, 18/31 July 1908 and *Hēmerēsia*, 19 July 1908. In 1908 the press had not yet appeared in Mytilene. Thus, for data in 1908, I turned mainly to the *Amaltheia* and *Hēmerēsia*, two Greek newspapers published in Smyrna.

9. The reason that led Athens to be interested in establishing a vice-consulate in the island quite early (1834) was the considerable size of the Greek population there and the increasing rate of economic and commercial growth. See Kardaras 1992: 90. Vice-consulates were maintained in Mytilene by other states, too, including Russia, Britain, France, Germany, the Austro-Hungarian Empire and Italy, primarily to protect their respective subjects, but also to promote their economic and political interests in the North-East Aegean.

Mytilene keep on speaking incessantly”, with “people making speeches in coffee houses”, with Christians and Muslims embracing and “wishing for a Greek-Turkish alliance”.¹⁰



Images 2: Christians and Muslims celebrating together the proclamation of the Constitution in Mytilene, July 1908, photo: Fritz J. Mraz, available at <<http://www.lesvosoldies.gr>>

It seems that a Greek-Turkish alliance was, at the time, a shared demand of Greeks both outside and inside the Greek state. As the Athenian newspaper *Empros* underlined, “this enthusiastic brotherhood of Greeks and Turks is both instructive and courteous; it testifies that the two powerful nations of the East, the Greeks and the Turks, foresaw the approaching dangers and at last decided to cooperate for the good of the East, which should remain Greek-Turkish”.¹¹ The newspaper also refers to the Bulgarian threat that dictated to G. Theotokis’s government in Athens cooperation and not conflict with the Porte (Gianoulopoulos 1999: 115). And it is

10. ΙΑΥΕ (Ιστορικό Αρχείο Υπουργείου Εξωτερικών/Historical Archive of the (Greek) Ministry of Foreign Affairs) 1908/111, no 580, Karatzas to MFA (Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs), 17 July 1908.

11. Cited in *Amaltheia*, 17/30 July 1908.

not a coincidence that one of the Christian speakers of the great demonstration on 18 July in Mytilene, M. Katsanis pointed out that at the time, more than ever, Greeks and Turks needed to “cooperate” in order to defeat their “common enemies, the Bulgarians, who committed atrocities in Macedonia”.¹²

During the celebrations of those days, Christians and Muslims alike blamed some local authorities for absolutist behaviour, associating them with the old regime. More specifically, the angry mob denounced the Muslim governor (*mutasarıf*) of the island, Ali Nosrend Paşa, as “anti-constitutional” and forced him to resign on 19 July/1 August 1908.¹³ The metropolitan of Mytilene, Kyrilos Moumtzis,¹⁴ had been also an object of popular disapprobation, being considered an accomplice “in the Ottoman governor’s debaucheries and abuses”, probably on account of his friendship with him and his attempt to support the latter in the demonstration held in the cathedral against the governor’s “anti-constitutional” behaviour. He ultimately retained his position, though two clergymen, “both of suspicious behaviour”, were forced to resign to appease popular demands.¹⁵

Similar demonstrations vis-à-vis religious prelates were also staged in Smyrna, Chios and other part of the Empire.¹⁶ In all likelihood, the original phenomena were amplified by the negative stance that the Ecumenical Patriarch Ioakeim III (1878–1884 and 1901–1912) initially took towards the Constitution, which he believed would curtail the prerogatives the Patriarchate had enjoyed until then as the highest authority of the Greek Orthodox millet from both a religious and a political point of view. Ioakeim III was attached to the old regime, “knowing full well from the long experience of centuries that loyalty to the Sublime Porte was the key to the survival both of the Church and its flock in the Empire, and of the continued guarantee of the Patriarchate’s traditional privileges”. (Kitromilides 1994: 184). On the other hand, the Orthodox Greeks were bound to be disappointed with the Patriarch’s negative stance, since they nurtured so many hopes concerning the new regime. Besides, they were not particularly up-

12. *Hēmerēsia*, 22 July 1908.

13. The new governor Galib Paşa arrived in Mytilene in August 1908. *Hēmerēsia*, 26 August 1908.

14. Kyrilos Moumtzis (1867–1925) became metropolitan of Mytilene in 1897 and retained his position until 1925. See Delis 2005.

15. IAYE 1908/111, no 674, Karatzas to MFA, 22 July 1908. For the events of these days in Mytilene, see Mandamadiotou 2013: 73–8.

16. On Smyrna, see Anagnostopoulou 1998: 460 and Kechriotis 2010.

set by the curtailment of the Patriarchate's political authority, since the Young Turks were transferring a part of it to the people themselves via participation in the administration of their local communities and, more importantly, their future representation in the Ottoman Parliament. The incidents in question thus indicate quite clearly that the lay members of the community were ready to accept the changes promised by the Young Turks, even if this implied their opposition to the Patriarchate, which had until then led the Greek *genos* in the East. As regards the Patriarch, in the months that followed, he would change his stance towards the new regime. As it has been noted, the Patriarchate's ability to survive rested largely in the fact that "it managed, on almost every occasion and sometimes paying the price attached to such practices, to adapt the capital of symbols of which it was the keeper to the necessities stemming from the dominance of novel constitutional structures and the discourses to which the latter eventually gave birth" (Stamatopoulos 2003: 377).

In addition, the change of the regime would raise expectations of improving the working conditions in the Empire. People in employment—and manual workers, in particular—seem to have become conscious both of their power and the fact that they could make their voice heard via forms of collective action, and a number of farmers' and labourers' movements and strikes were reported in cities across the Empire from the summer of 1908 onwards. Reporting a number of strikes by soap workers and boatmen in Mytilene, *Amaltheia's* correspondent noted that "the Constitution set the dream of freedom alight in the minds and hearts of the lowest, as well as the upper and middle classes".¹⁷

The "reborn Turkish nation" and the "benefits for our people"

This paper argues that from the summer of 1908 onwards new political practices came to light, which had not been manifested earlier due to the absolutist nature of the regime.¹⁸ Before focusing on the electoral behaviour of the Greek Orthodox community of Mytilene, a brief reference will be made to the social and economic profile of its members and to the regulations under which the first elections were held in the Ottoman Empire. During the period of the reign of Abdülhamid II (1876–1909) the peo-

17. *Amaltheia*, 6/19 September 1908.

18. In the wake of constitutionalism and the expectations of freedom and equality by the new regime, the local press first appeared in Mytilene in early 1909. The *Mytilēnios*, a weekly political/satirical newspaper written in verse, was the first to appear on 21.2.1909. This was followed shortly afterwards, on 15.3.1909, by the *Salpinx*, a three-weekly political newspaper.

ple and economy of Lesvos embarked on a process of urbanization which was largely a result of the Tanzimat reforms (1839–1876). The leading upper and middle social groups¹⁹ that would manage the Greek community of Mytilene were formed during Abdülhamid's reign.²⁰ Their members would introduce a powerful system of local self-government into the Ottoman political framework as they grew aware both of their economic power and of their cultural distinctness. On the contrary, the lower socio-economic groups and the majority of Muslims, who were agrarian and poor, would remain on the fringes of these developments.²¹

As regards the Christian leading groups, they welcomed the regime change of July 1908 and the proclamation of parliamentary elections as a unique opportunity to add political power to complement their economic and social position (Mandamadiotou 2013: 65 ff). Thus, it was not by chance that, during his visit to Mytilene on 13 August, Dr Nazim Bey, a parliamentary candidate for Smyrna and a core member of the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), and his associate Jemal Bey thought it wise to assure the Christian mayor and city notables that "the situation of the the Greeks will be better after the change of the regime, and that neither their language nor their privileges will suffer".²²

In view of the elections, the CUP drew up the lists, set the parliamentary seats, and asked the different ethnic groups to name their representatives. Candidates were elected by a body of electors rather than directly by the voters, and every *sancak* was considered an electoral constituency. The male members of every district who were at least 25 years of age and had no pending tax obligations could choose the electors by vote; these were usually eminent members of the local community, men of the upper and middle social groups who had already participated in the administration of their respective communities. The municipal headquarters (*nahes*) served as polling centres. Every municipality with between 500 and 750

19. The terms "upper", "middle" and "lower" social groups are descriptive and used because the term "class" is not quite representative of a Mytilenean society-in-the-making.

20. The urbanization and agricultural commercialisation in Lesvos were accompanied by an unequal distribution of wealth and marked social inequalities. Indicatively, see Sifneou 1995, Argyris 1995: 54–5 and Mandamadiotou 2013: 59–64.

21. By the final years of Ottoman rule, Muslims accounted for some 12 to 15 per cent of the population, and lived mainly in the town of Mytilene and the western part of the island. The large number of Muslims on the island was mainly the result of Islamization, which occurred during the first centuries of the Ottoman rule, sometimes on the scale of entire Christian villages, seeking to lighten their taxation burden. See Karavas 1996: xx–xxii.

22. *Amaltheia*, 19/1 August 1908.

voters had the right to elect one secondary elector; those with between 750 and 1,250 could elect two, and those with between 1,250 and 1,750 three. Should a municipality have more voters, additional secondary electors would be elected at a ratio of one to every 500 additional voters.²³ Every constituency/*sancak* with a population of up to 75,000 was allocated one seat; districts with a population of between 75,000 and 125,000 were entitled to two seats.

The Committee entrusted the religious authorities with the responsibility to conduct the elections. The Greek Orthodox communities' candidates were to be handpicked by the Patriarch and the local metropolitans. This is rather interesting in view of the Young Turks' stated intention of curtailing the political role of the Church. Clearly, though the role of the Church as "head of the *ethnos*" was being called in question, the organization of the Orthodox Greeks into a political body was modelled on and orchestrated by the Church. This contradiction, largely a result of the period of transition the Empire had entered into, also highlights the limits of the modernization drive espoused by the Young Turks. (Anagnostopoulou (1998: 467–9)

The number of deputies in the Ottoman Parliament was set at 314, of whom 254 were to come from the European and Asian provinces and 60 from the Empire's Arabian territories.²⁴ Following intense consultations between the Young Turks and the leadership of the Greek community in Istanbul, the Greek side compromised and agreed to elect up to 24 MPs throughout the Empire. It is clear that the CUP began the discussions by rejecting the principle of proportional representation for the Empire's different ethnicities in the Ottoman Parliament. It should be noted that in the most recent census of 1906/1907, 13.5% of the Sultan's subjects had described themselves as Greeks (*Rum Ortodoks*).²⁵ On a proportional basis, the Greeks would have been entitled to 42 seats in Parliament.

The Committee's general policy for nominating and supporting candidates stated that it would back all potential candidates "with the neces-

23. *Οδηγία περί της εφαρμογής του περί βουλευτών κανονισμού* (1908); see also Kansu 1997: 194.

24. According to Souliotis-Nikolaidis (1984: 81), 254 MPs took part in the Ottoman Parliament's first session in December 1908, of whom 207 were Muslim (128 Turks, 44 Arabs, 25 Albanians and 10 Kurds), 42 were Christian (24 Greeks, 9 Armenians, 4 Bulgarians, 3 Serbs, 1 Rumanizon [i.e. inclined towards the Romanians], 1 Catholic Arab, and 1 Catholic Albanian) and 4 Jews. As he notes, a few provinces, mostly Arab, still had to elect MPs, up to 60 in number.

25. 2,823,063 *Rum Ortodoks* out of a total population of 20,884,639. Karpas 1985: 168–9.

sary moral and intellectual qualifications". In districts with no Unionist candidates, the Committee would support the candidacy of those "who met its standards". At the same time, the opposition, gathered principally around Sabahaddin Bey, who was also actively conducting propaganda for his own candidates in the capital and the provinces.²⁶

During this period, the involvement of the Greek state in the election process, through the collaboration between Greek consular authorities and the local metropolitans, was obvious. The Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs was well aware that local metropolitans had great influence in their provinces. A patriarchal circular addressed to the archpriests and provincial notables in late July 1908 exhorted them to take action to ensure "our element is adequately and worthily [represented] in the forthcoming Parliament".²⁷ Shortly afterwards, the Greek Foreign Minister, Georgios Baltatzis, issues instructions to the Greek consular authorities in the Empire to seek collaboration with the local metropolitans with a view to ensuring that the secondary electors and MPs of their choice were selected. The document in question, as Baltatzis noted, was a copy of the *private* and *confidential* instructions issued by the Patriarchate to the metropolitans.²⁸ In all likelihood, the original document was provided to the Patriarchate by the Greek Foreign Ministry.

At this time, the Greek state due to its unstable political situation employed a "wait-and-see" policy towards both the Young Turk regime and the Ottoman Greeks. Thus, the Athenian daily *Patris* welcomed the change of the regime and the proclamation of elections "because Greek deputies will also participate in the Parliament which is soon to be constituted, who will be entitled to protect our ethnic rights and interests in many ways".²⁹

In the same spirit, the Smyrna newspaper *Amaltheia* noted in August 1908 that the Young Turks "had appeared suddenly out of a formerly sluggish Turkey as giants with courageous souls, an outpouring of feelings and a breadth of dialogue. And this nation reborn, whose formerly exiled leaders are imbued with the principles of the first French Republic, will despatch deputies chosen by it to sit in the Chamber as its representatives". Alongside the Young Turks, however, the *Amaltheia* underlines, "we will

26. On the different political parties in the Empire and the party affiliations of the deputies, see Kansu 1997: 196ff.

27. IAYE 1908/99, no 5876, Constantinople, July 1908.

28. IAYE 1908/101, no 4859, 10 September 1908.

29. Cited in *Amaltheia*, 18/31 July 1908.

see other illustrious figures". Thus, the newspaper called upon the Greeks of the Empire to make every effort possible to ensure that its parliamentary representatives were "select members of the nation, graced with the quick wits, verbal and diplomatic ability required for them to act in concert to benefit the entire country but also, in their legislative and other work, to secure benefits for our own people".³⁰

Similarly, the Constantinople Organization (CO), founded by Ion Dragoumis and Athanasios Souliotis-Nikolaidis in April 1908, was working towards the same goal.³¹ The CO was one of the most active advocates of the idea of Helleno-Ottomanism, a vision of gradually Hellenizing the Ottoman Empire through the penetration of Greek elements into both the economic and administrative spheres (Skopetea 1999: 30). As Ion Dragoumis characteristically noted, "since the East will be civilized, Hellenism, due its nature, will prevail in trade, industry, education, art, and science. But when a nation prevails over rival nations in one area, namely in culture, it will eventually prevail in politics as well" (Dragoumis 1908: 7). In fact, the political programme of the Greeks in the Empire was established from July 1908 onwards in Constantinople by the CO, the Patriarchate and the Greek consular authorities. All the above co-operated, not without disagreements among them, to ensure the election of the "appropriate" MPs. As regards the local metropolitans, they maintained their influence in their provinces, even after the Young Turk revolt, and were among the most important political actors in the Ottoman territories, sometimes cooperating with the Greek consular authorities and/or the Patriarchate and sometimes disagreeing with them and following their own decisions.

In July 1908, eminent members of the Greek Orthodox community in Constantinople made their first attempt at founding a Political Association (Πολιτικός Σύλλογος). They were convinced of the necessity of such an association "to ally the Greek element in the Ottoman constitutional Empire" in view of the upcoming elections. Otherwise, the *Amaltheia* reported, they feared the risk "of our appearing below our real strength and of, one day, seeing issues critical to us resolved without our participation and, in all likelihood, at our expense". The eminent Constantinopolitans believed that membership of such an association would furnish them with a "road map at this new crossroads in our political life and allow us to pre-

30. *Amaltheia*, 4/17 August 1908.

31. For more on the aims of the Constantinople Organization and the activities of its members, see Chamoudopoulos 1946, Xanalatos 1962, Souliotis-Nikolaidis 1984, Panayotopoulos 1980, Veremis 1997–8.

sent ourselves to our Turkish fellow citizens with given virtues and a single voice, united as *ethnos* and not as individuals each charting his own course".³²

Such Political Associations were established by the Greek Orthodox communities in other areas as well, such as in Smyrna, Kydonies (Ayvalik) and Moschonisi (Yunda).³³ In Mytilene, the local Church considered the formation of a branch of the Political Association a task of "great importance to the nation and timely in the utmost".³⁴ As vice-consul Karatzas noted, such an association was necessary for "the promotion of national interests",³⁵ while its more immediate aim would be to coordinate the preparations for the parliamentary elections. Although there is no information, it is possible that such an association was established in Mytilene.

The "catechism of the working class" and the need to boost the number of male electors

The parliamentary elections were held in Mytilene between September and October 1908. In early August, the municipalities were instructed to start registering male electors.³⁶ In essence, this was not a new census, but rather an update of the recent census taking into account all new males registered in the municipal and parish registers.

The island was then part of the Archipelago *vilayet*, which consisted of four *sancaks*: Rhodes, Chios, Lesvos and Lemnos. According to the latest official census for the years 1906/1907, the *sancak* of Lesvos had a male population of 67,913 and was thus entitled to elect one MP.³⁷ Moschonisi was also included in the *sancak* of Lesvos, which had a male population of 2,573 in the census for the years 1881/82–1893.³⁸ Even if this were the case, however, the total male population would still be below the limit of 75,000 set by the regulations for the election of a second MP.

In early August, vice-consul Karatzas confirmed to the Greek Foreign Ministry that the MP to be elected for Mytilene "would be Greek (ομογε-

32. *Amaltheia*, 28 July 1908. See also Boura 1983: 72.

33. *Hēmerēsia*, 1 and 12 September 1908.

34. *Amaltheia*, 23/5 August 1908.

35. IAYE 1908/111, no 4508, Karatzas to MFA, 22 August 1908.

36. IAYE, 1908/99, no 689, Karatzas to MFA, 5 August 1908.

37. Specifically, the male population of Lesvos consisted of 58,169 Greeks/Christians, 9,697 Muslims, 39 Armenian Christians, 7 Armenian Catholics and 1 Bulgarian. Karpat 1985: 162.

38. The male population of Moschonisi consisted of 2,358 Christians, 50 Muslims and 165 foreign citizens. Karpat 1985: 130.

νής)". However, he went beyond this and organized a network of *appropriate* individuals in each of the island's communities with a view to ensuring that "the census of males to be conducted will be in excess of 75,000". This would mean that two MPs would be elected for the island. Knowing that this would be no easy feat, he asked the Greek Foreign Ministry to intervene and ask the Patriarchate to send strict orders to the two metropolitans of the island, the metropolitan of Mytilene and the Metropolitan of Mithymna, to cooperate with him.³⁹

In his next report, a few days later, Karatzas estimated, though without elucidating further, that the male population had increased since the last census "due to immigrants". Thus, Karatzas stressed that all his efforts and those of the metropolitan of Mytilene, who would now appear to be cooperating well, would focus on "presenting the new census of males as being above 75,000".

According to the vice-consul, this goal could only be achieved if the unwillingness of the priests to instruct their flocks accordingly, "so as not to conceal, as almost always happens, the real number of males", and the fear of tax increases on the part of the *popular class* could be both overcome. Should the implementation of these two measures prove insufficient to surpass the 75,000 level, then, according to Karatzas, it would be "necessary to inflate the actual number of males on the census returns".⁴⁰ Karatzas implicitly places the burden of this *necessary* misrepresentation of the census data on the priests and *muhtars*.

The whole operation was finally proved successful. Of course, we do not know the degree to which the census data were distorted with regard to the number of males. What is certain, though, is that it was enough for the *sancak* of Lesvos to present 75,200 males and to ultimately be represented by two Greek (ομογενείς) MPs in the Ottoman Parliament. In a telegram sent on 18 September 1908, a clearly satisfied Karatzas wrote to his minister: "Census result 75,200, so Mytilene will be electing two MPs".⁴¹

As regards the city of Mytilene, *Amaltheia* informs that it had 3,500 voters and that 9 secondary electors would be selected. This, too, fails to accord with the electoral regulations, which specified seven secondary

39. IAYE, 1908/105, 18 September 1908. The metropolitan of Mytilene Kyrillos had fifty-two villages and the island of Tenedos under his jurisdiction, whereas the metropolitan of Mithymna Stefanos had thirty-one; see Archontopoulos 1894: 21.

40. IAYE, 1908/99, no 689.

41. IAYE, 1908/105, 18 September 1908.

electors for municipalities with between 3,250 and 3,750 voters.⁴² The metropolitan of Mytilene Kyrillos, "having previously consulted with the people (λαός)" undertook to draw up a "single combination [of secondary electors] in order to avoid a perilous division of votes".⁴³ The combination in question consisted of "nine respectable citizens well-suited to serving as secondary electors" and according to the *Amaltheia*, "would succeed despite the opinion of the opposition camp which has begun to form".⁴⁴

The above makes clear both Kyrillos's involvement in the electoral process on behalf of the *Greek party* and the weakness of the *opposition camp*. Kyrillos was one of the anti-loakeimist metropolitans⁴⁵ and a member of the Constantinople Organization (Souliotis-Nikolaidis 1984: 223). It is more likely that Kyrillos's membership in the Organization took place during or just after the 1908 elections. The cooperation of the metropolitan of Mytilene with the Greek consular authorities was crucial for both the election of the secondary electors and deputies and the increase in the number of males on the electoral census, so that two MPs could be elected in Mytilene. Unlike other parts of the Empire, in Mytilene the laity does not seem to have made any systematic efforts to curb the power of the local Church, which remained the unchallenged leader of the Christian population.⁴⁶ This vindicates Karatzas's view that "a great deal depends" on excellent cooperation with the two metropolitans of the island.⁴⁷

The parliamentary candidates and the Greek "just claims"

Extant sources record as parliamentary candidates seven Christians and only one Muslim:⁴⁸ Periklis Ambatzis (merchant), Pantelis Vlachopoulos (lawyer), Panagiotis Vostanis (landowner and entrepreneur), Lesvoklis

42. See *Οδηγία περί της εφαρμογής του περί βουλευτών κανονισμού* (1908), and herein p. 123-4.

43. *Amaltheia*, 2/15 October 1908.

44. *Amaltheia*, 26/9 September 1908.

45. Patriarch loakeim III refused to accept as members of the Holy Synod in January 1910 the metropolitans of Kadiköy/Χαλκηδόνα, Midilli/Μυτιλήνη and Karahisar-i Şarki/Κολώνεια, "on the grounds that they had shown hostility toward him for years and it was, therefore, impossible for him to work with them". See, Nobuyoshi 2009: 4.

46. For example, in Chios the promotion of Theotokas by the local metropolitan ruined his chances of being elected, since the Christian community was involved in a bitter conflict with the metropolitan. See, Panayotopoulos 1977.

47. IAYE, 1908/105 and IAYE, 1908/99, no 3462.

48. Kambouris 1962: 12; *Amaltheia*, 23/6 September 1908, 24/7 September 1908, 26/9 September 1908, 2/15 October 1908 and 13/26 October 1908.

Grimanis, Theodoros Kourtzis (entrepreneur, director of the Bank of Mytilene), Alexandros Mitrelias (judge), Michail A. Saltas (professor of law and landowner) and Halim Koulaxiz (landowner).⁴⁹ Admittedly, we know very little about the above candidates.⁵⁰ However, it is certain that all of them were members of the middle and upper social groups who emerged in Lesvos in the second half of the nineteenth century due to the Tanzimat reforms.

In a report to the Greek Foreign Ministry, Karatzas expressed his apprehensions about an eventual division of the population due to the plethora of candidates aspiring to become deputies. As he noted, “the proclamation of the Constitution has given rise to ambitions on the part of many and Mytilene already has four to five parties, each of which supports a parliamentary candidate”. At the same time, he informed the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs that, with the consent of the metropolitan of Mytilene, he would visit the island’s most important small towns where, as he observed, the consulate exerted a far greater influence than it did in the capital. His aim was to consolidate cooperation and understanding between the Orthodox Greeks with a view to getting the chosen deputies elected.⁵¹

In the contemporary sources there is no information relating to the activities of different parties on the island or their political programmes. The *Amaltheia* published a series of articles by just one of the parliamentary candidates, the Professor of Law Michael Saltas, on the “Constitutional regime”. The purpose of these articles was to convince the European powers that “the principles of freedom and equality are the true basis of our great reform” and that “the Constitution is not a promise, but a real and explicit act and property of all Ottomans”. As Saltas noted, it was important to consider, from a legal point of view, the new constitutional system and the “general concepts of justice” at the very moment “when the shackles constraining rationality have been shattered” and “we have acquired the ultimate human good: intellectual freedom”.⁵²

A few days before the elections, the same newspaper published Saltas’s pre-election statement in which he emphatically declared that his goal was to defend Greek interests.

49. For the wealthy family of Koulaxiz in Mytilene, see Samaras 1946.

50. Among these candidates, at least two, Kourtzis and Ambatzis lived in Constantinople.

51. IAYE 1908/99, no 689, Karatzas to MFA, 5 August 1908.

52. *Amaltheia*, 23/5 August 1908. See also *Amaltheia*, 27/9 August 1908, 28/10 August 1908, 4/17 September 1908, 6/19 September 1908 and 8/21 September 1908.

With head held high, I declare this and this alone: that I have never forgotten and will never forget that I am a Greek, suckled on the most divine of all languages, formed in the history of the fatherland, which has taught us that the most sacred mother and father of all is the homeland, whose teachings all civilized peoples hold close to their heart. This I say, and I shall remain steadfast and loyal to that flag until my dying breath. By my word of honour.⁵³

Through the pages of the *Amaltheia*, Saltas made clear his political intentions, which were perfectly in line with the political climate of the time. He declared his main concern to highlight the promotion of Greek claims and interests within the framework of the modernized by the Young Turks Ottoman Empire. He believed that “only a precise definition of what is what, only the granting of our people’s just claims to guarantee securities will convince us all that all noble intentions and eager promises can be fulfilled”.⁵⁴

In addition, at the heart of the elections, another candidate, the lawyer Pantelis Vlachopoulos supported the request that the “election of parliamentarians should be made by ethnicity”. This ethnicity-based request, which the Patriarchate was already pursuing, was also supported at this time by the metropolitan of Mithymna, in a telegram to the Patriarchate.⁵⁵ In an article published in the *Amaltheia*, P. Vlachopoulos stressed that conducting the elections “by ethnicity” was “a crucial issue for the Greek *ethnos* in Turkey, because only if we have a respectable number of MPs in Parliament, and only then, will we be in a position to defend our rights”.⁵⁶ This digging in around the issue of ethnicity mainly reflects the desire of the Christians of Mytilene to ensure their political presence in the Empire, at precisely that time when their economic and social strength is given in relation to the Muslim element of the island.

And this manifested itself at the period when the Young Turks were trying to implement their reformatory program, abolishing the traditional *millet* organization. However, if the elections were held “by ethnicity”, the very concept of Ottomanism, the vision of peaceful coexistence of all the people of the Empire under the conditions of equality and freedom, would be abolished. Plausibly, therefore, the Young Turks refused the specific request. They counter-proposed that there should be equal numbers of

53. *Amaltheia*, 7/20 October 1908.

54. *Amaltheia*, 23/5 August 1908.

55. *Amaltheia*, 26/9 September 1908.

56. *Ibid.*

Christian and Muslim MPs in areas where the Christians were in the majority. However, as we will see below, this would not happen in the case of Lesvos.

The election result

The secondary electors, 71 Christians and 3 Muslims, were appointed in the last week of September.⁵⁷ In their turn, on 18 October, they selected M. Saltas and P. Vostanis to represent the island in parliament.⁵⁸ This was no small achievement for the Greek Orthodox community. Mytilene had managed to be one of just six “privileged” regions which elected two Greek Orthodox MPs. This achievement becomes still more impressive when it is borne in mind that the six regions included both Constantinople and Smyrna, which had the densest Greek populations.⁵⁹

The election of the two MPs was enthusiastically celebrated by the Greek Orthodox inhabitants of Mytilene. *Amaltheia* pointed out that,

admittedly, the electors of Lesvos could not have exercised their vote better, as a result of which the people of Mytilene spontaneously and unanimously expressed their pleasure and applauded their successful election with all their heart. It was to this the sea of humanity bore witness as it paraded through the marketplace and along the quayside cheering and calling the names of the honourable Members of Parliament at their head. [...] It was thanks to this most joyous and auspicious event that the island echoed with the report of fireworks, and it was this success that Mytilene’s fine orchestra [celebrated].⁶⁰

Vostanis and Saltas belonged to the upper social groups, who emerged in the Ottoman Empire due to the Tanzimat reforms.⁶¹ Saltas was a Professor of Law, the son of a doctor from Kydonies, whose wife came from one of the wealthiest families in Mytilene (Svoronou 2006: 43–6). Vostanis, on the other hand, was a rich landowner and entrepreneur.⁶² They did not know the Turkish language, although this was set as a precondition by the

57. IAYE 1912/AAK–D, unsigned and undated document.

58. For the number and names of Greek MPs in the Ottoman Parliament, see Souliotis-Nikolaidis 1984: 81, and IAYE 1909/D/1.

59. The other three provinces which elected two Greek MPs were Thessaloniki, Ioannina and Kozani-Grevena. See Souliotis-Nikolaidis 1984: 81.

60. *Amaltheia*, 21/3 October 1908.

61. On the newly emerged social groups in Mytilene in the post-Tanzimat era, see Mandamadiotou 2013: 35ff and herein p. 122-3.

62. For the Vostani family and its economic activities, see Koutzamanis 2006.

Young Turks for the election of the candidates. Both were considered “independent”, because they did not publicly come out in favour of either the CUP or the Liberals (Kansu 1997: 26). They are also mentioned by Souliotis-Nikolaidis as members of the CO, though he did not specify whether they became members before or after their election (Souliotis-Nikolaidis 1984: 82). However, it is certain that they collaborated with the CO, at least on some issues, and they also participated in the Greek Group of deputies which was formed in Parliament in 1911, in order to promote the Greek ethnic rights (Boura 1983: 77).

During the electoral process the Young Turks were accused of maladministration and the violation of the rights of non-Turkish ethnic groups throughout the Empire. Specifically, efforts were made to restrict the number of candidates to be elected by non-Muslim provinces or to reduce the number of voters by various means.⁶³ Such arbitrariness was committed by the Young Turks because they were afraid that their political dominance would be challenged and by ignorance in the face of a process with no precedent in the history of the Empire. Also, it is clear that in many cases this arbitrariness caused, or even reinforced, the interference of the Greek consular authorities in the electoral process.⁶⁴

In the case of Lesbos, no accounts of infringements on the part of the state have come to light. On the side of the Christians, however, some activities must have caused great concern to the Young Turks. As aforementioned, the interference of the Greek consular authorities in increasing the male population in the electoral rolls of Lesbos and their cooperation with the local metropolitans to nominate the “appropriate” candidates must have been provocative for the Ottoman authorities. Moreover, since the proclamation of the Constitution and during the elections, there is evidence of the expulsion of Muslim authorities across the island. The resignation of the governor of Mytilene,⁶⁵ was followed by the dismissal of officials in Plomari and Polychnitos. An anonymous columnist from Polychnitos reported to the newspaper *Hēmerēsia*, in early August 1908, that the residents were happy with the change of the regime, because they had been relieved of the authoritarian behaviour of the court president Meh-

63. IAYE 1908/KTH 100, *Amaltheia*, 1/14 October and 11/24 October and Anagnostopoulou 1998: 466.

64. Cf. the strict recommendations made by Hilmi Paşa to the Patriarch concerning the cooperation of the metropolitans with the Greek consular authorities in IAYE 1908/88, no 1251, Gryparis to MFA, 4 December 1908. Also, see Boura 1983: 73 and Alexandris 1980: 394.

65. See herein, p. 121.

met Resit and a clique of officials. As he characteristically notes, lately “we were worse than slaves, surrendered to the fun of every greedy clerk, who came with a hole in his trousers and left with full pockets and a lot of luggage”.⁶⁶ All these persecutions obviously alarmed the Young Turks. Moreover, according to *Amaltheia*, on the day of the inauguration of the *Diagoras* sport club in early October 1908, the athletes “in their blue and white strips and during the games, secretly sang the verse ‘That day took long to come, and everything was silent’ as they marched with joy on their faces”.⁶⁷

The most annoying, however, for the Young Turks was the result of the elections.⁶⁸ It was inevitable, however, from the moment that Mytilene could muster just one Muslim parliamentary candidate, Halim Koulaxiz, and still more, because the island raised just three Muslim secondary electors. The ratio of secondary electors, 71 Christian to 3 Muslim,⁶⁹ reasonably raises questions, given that the Muslims accounted for 13.7% of the island’s population, a far from negligible percentage.⁷⁰ Given this population ratio, 10 of the 74 secondary electors might have been expected to be Muslim. The actual result 3:71, is possibly due to the distribution of the Muslim population across the *sancak*’s municipalities, the administrative unit in which the number of secondary electors was set. It is, however, also indicative of the absence or inability of state intervention in Lesvos during the electoral process. At the same time, it indicates the unavailability of Muslim parliamentary candidates and secondary electors and, consequently, the inability of the local Muslim community to keep up with the Young Turks’ programme of modernization.

In other words, having failed to create the preconditions for an autonomous economic and social presence, the Muslim element of the island found itself excluded from the political game at the critical juncture. As has been noted, the vast majority of the Muslim population were part

66. *Hēmerēsia*, 1 August 1908.

67. *Amaltheia*, 3/16 October 1908. The lines are from the fourth stanza of Solomos’s “Ode to Liberty”; Trypanis 1971: 501. For the Greek sports club at the turn of the nineteenth century, see Koulourē 1997.

68. In every province of the Archipelago prefecture, only Christian MPs were elected. In Chios, Tselepidis; in Lemnos, Stelios; in Rhodes, Konstantinidis.

69. This ratio would change radically in the next parliamentary elections in the spring of 1912, as would the election result. See, Mandamadiotou 2013: 165.

70. In the early years of the Greek rule, Major N. Spyropoulos in his confidential report to the Greek War Office raised the Muslim proportion considerably, noting that Lesvos was home to “17,476 Turks, 115,753 Greeks and 491 Jews”. Spyropoulos 1917: appendix, table III.

of the local proletariat and remained poor farmers, unable to join the march towards modernization and urbanization on which the island's economy had embarked in the mid-nineteenth century.⁷¹ In essence, it was the unavailability of Muslims to undertake political positions that must have been of most concern to the country's new leaders.

On the other hand, the election of the two Greek Orthodox deputies enhanced the self-reliance of the Christian community of Mytilene, which had its own parliamentary representatives to lobby on its account, and annoyed the Young Turks to a considerable degree. Simantiris, the Greek vice-consul of France noted that "the enthusiastic demonstrations which took place on the day the two Christian deputies were elected irritated the Muslims, who looked ahead, not without anxiety, to a time when the indigenous Muslims would be deprived of their local offices, given that the Christians constituted the majority of the island population" (Kambouris 1962: 122). Obviously, the Christians faced the Young Turk modernization drive as an opportunity to shore up their political presence in the Empire.

Tanin, the Constantinopolitan official newspaper of the CUP, criticized the Greek element of the island, attributing reactionary and revolutionary tendencies to it. In a show of force, the Young Turks sent military troops to the island, which often led to friction with the locals. The *vali* of the Aegean, Ekrem Bey, came to the island to see the situation for himself; before leaving, he published an announcement in the Constantinopolitan press to the effect that the locals were in compliance with the law (Kambouris 1962: 123). In the same spirit, Karatzas, in his report to Athens, wrote that "some local Ottomans [Muslims] here from excessive irritation" misunderstand deliberately "sporadic events that are not a sign of hatred or challenge against the Turks, but they just happen, as everywhere in the world".⁷² The vice-consul makes no mention of the Christian element's recent success in the parliamentary elections, though this was surely the main cause of the "irritation" and the concern on the part both of the Young Turks and the local Muslims.

However, Mytilene was neither the only nor the main cause of concern for the Young Turks at the time. Another event that undermined relations between the Young Turks and the Greek element of the Empire was the declaration by the Greeks of Crete of the island's union with Greece on 6

71. See herein p. 123.

72. IAYE 1908/88, 14 November 1908.

October 1908, which is to say while the election procedure was under way. It coincided with the annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina by Austria Hungary and the unilateral proclamation of Bulgarian independence. These incidents dealt powerful blows to the prestige of the Ottoman Empire, and most probably strengthened the Young Turks' dissatisfaction with the Christians in the Balkans. In Turkish eyes "this response by Europe and the Balkan Christians" to the new regime was what could only be described as "aggression and betrayal" (Lewis 1961: 210).

Conclusion

Certainly, the 1908 election was an entirely new process both for the Young Turks and for the leaderships of all the people of the Ottoman Empire. Although it is somewhat misleading to consider the Young Turks as being determined to pursue a policy of "Turkification" from the early days of the Second Constitutional Period, they definitely focused on attempting to maintain and shore up their political dominance (see, Arai 1992). The more organized *millets*, the Greeks included, approached the elections as a golden opportunity to establish and consolidate the position of a quasi-political party with national characteristics. To achieve this, Athens and Constantinople provided the means through their official representatives. Nonetheless, the strategy in question served a *de facto* logic of separatism and undermined the harmonious coexistence of the Sultan's Greek subjects with their compatriots of different race or creed. The future of democracy and equality promised by the Young Turks and welcomed by the Greeks with enthusiasm was undermined by the latter, too, at the first opportunity. The case of Mytilene is sufficiently eloquent.

In this case, the opponent, namely the Muslim minority, had already been defeated both economically and socially before the dawn of the twentieth century. In the 1908 elections, it seems as if it did not even give the political battle. Therefore, the battle fought by the leadership of the Greek Orthodox community, guided by the representative of the Greek state, was not against the Muslim population of the island, but directly against the Young Turk regime, or, more accurately, in favour of the Greek-Ottoman perspective of the regime. Undoubtedly, the election of two, rather than one, Greek MPs was a resounding victory for the Greek colours.

It was, however, a short-lived victory that foretold what was to come; the changes that took place over a period of about four years are highly eloquent in the election result of 1912. The candidate who was elected, al-

though he was a Greek, symbolically at least, during this election race was the Muslims' horse. And it was on him that the CUP and the local Muslim element placed their bets. His success was the success of the minority which in 1912 had "its own" member in Parliament, while four years earlier the island's two elected MPs had exclusively represented the Greeks of the island.⁷³ Thus, it could be argued that the events of 1908 coincided with the peak of the growth of the Greek Orthodox community and also constituted a turning point, a point of transition, since they mark the first manifestations of the two competing nationalisms, the Young Turk and the Greek.

73. For more on the parliamentary elections of 1912, see Mandamadiotou 2013: 150–68.

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