

G. S. GEORGHALLIDES

TURKISH AND BRITISH REACTIONS TO THE EMIGRATION
OF THE CYPRIOT TURKS TO ANATOLIA, 1924-1927¹

As far as Cyprus was concerned the significance of the Treaty of Lausanne of July 24, 1923, lay in Turkey's formal renunciation of all its claims over Cyprus and its recognition of British sovereignty over it². This change in the international status of Cyprus affected also the position of the Turkish minority in the island. For the first time since the 1878 British occupation, the Turkish Cypriots were given an explicit choice between their loyalties. They were asked to decide whether they wished to stay in Cyprus and to assume British nationality or whether they preferred to remain faithful to their Moslem traditions and emigrate to the new Turkish Republic. By their response to this dilemma the Turkish Cypriots showed that in their great majority they were determined to avoid any deviation from their usual policy of expressing loyalty to Great Britain. During the two or three years after the Treaty of Lausanne, their continuous loyalty to Britain was equivalent to a rejection of Turkey's call on them to emigrate to Anatolia. The free movement to Turkey of the Cypriot Moslems had been provided for in Article 21 of the Treaty of Lausanne. That article stipulated that the permanent residents of Cyprus living in the island on November 5, 1914, would acquire British nationality subject to the conditions laid down in the laws of Cyprus. Those of them who chose to keep their Turkish nationality would, in the words of the article, "auront la faculté, pendant une période de deux ans à dater de la mise en vigueur du présent Traité, d'opter pour la nationalité turque; dans ce cas, ils devront quitter l'île de Chypre dans les douze mois qui suivront l'exercice du droit d'option"³. The operative period for the Moslem Cypriots to exercise their right to opt for Turkish nationality was the 6th of August 1924 to the 6th of August 1926. Those who declared their option on the latter day would have to leave Cyprus by the latest on August 6th, 1927.

For the Turkish Government these provisions were not empty formalities. The pan-Turkish territorial ambitions of the Young Turk regime had

1. This paper is a excerpt from a longer study of the political history of Cyprus from 1919 to 1932.

2. Article 20 of the Treaty of Lausanne stated: "La Turquie declare reconnaître l'annexion de Chypre proclamée par le Gouvernement britannique le 5 novembre 1914", *Treaty of Peace with Turkey*, Cmd. 1929, London, 1923, p. 22.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 22.

been frustrated by the Turkish defeat in the First World War. Following the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, Mustafa Kemal, in the Turkish National Pact of January 28, 1920, gave up Turkey's claims over areas inhabited by non-Turkish or non-Muslim majorities⁴.

After the Treaty of Lausanne Kemal, "renouncing all foreign ambitions and all pan-Turkish, pan-Ottoman, or pan-Islamic ideologies, ... deliberately limited his actions and aspirations to the national territory of Turkey as defined by treaty, and devoted the rest of his life to the grim, laborious, and unglamorous task of reconstruction"⁵. In the context of this peaceful policy of national retrenchment and reform the Cypriot Turks, inhabiting an island over which the Turkish state had no claims, were invited by the Angora Government to emigrate to Turkey. This they were loathe to do exhibiting, from the beginning of the period of opting for Turkish nationality, an unwillingness to change their status as a well protected minority in a predominantly Christian country for a life of greater political prospects and advantages, but also of greater risks, in the Turkish Republic. In a rare, but revealing, reference in the Legislative Council to Turkey's encouragement of Moslem emigration from Cyprus, and Turkish-Cypriot reactions to it, Mussa Irfan bey (Turkish delegate of Evcaf and member of the Executive and Legislative Councils) made the following declaration during the December, 19, 1924, debate on the appropriations of the Quarantine Department:

...certain persons of the Moslem section of the population had been led to believe that they would live in a fool's paradise if they emigrated to Asia Minor. These unfortunate people had sold all their belongings in Cyprus before emigrating and now returned to the Island absolutely penniless. They had to undergo quarantine restrictions, and they were a burden both on the Government and on the community. He would ask the Government to make some allowance for these persons during their stay in quarantine in view of the exceptional nature of their case. They were of course themselves to blame for their present condition. The Government had the right to refuse them to land in Cyprus, and he was thankful for the latitude already allowed them⁶.

The seriousness with which the Turkish Government pursued the emigration of the Turkish Cypriots furnishes one of the most interesting episodes in the recent history of Cyprus. In order to encourage and assist the move-

4. J. C. Hurewitz, *Diplomacy in the Near and Middle East*, II, New York, 1972, pp. 74-5. Frank Tachau, "The face of Turkish nationalism as reflected in the Cyprus dispute", *The Middle East Journal* 13 (summer 1959) No. 3, pp. 262-72.

5. Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*, London, 1961, p. 250.

6. *Minutes of the Legislative Council of the session of 1924*, XXXVI, Nicosia, 1925, p. 72.

ment of the Turkish Cypriots, in June 1925, the Turkish Government opened a consulate in Nicosia with A. Assaf bey as consul⁷. His principal task was to advertise the opportunities which presented themselves in Anatolia after the forcible uprooting of the Armenian and Greek minorities. Easy promises were made to the Cypriot Turks about the prosperity which was awaiting for them; and the natural result was that some of the disappointed emigrants lost no time in returning to Cyprus⁸. The British authorities on the island were bound by the Treaty of Lausanne to place no impediment to the free emigration of the Turkish Cypriots⁹. Nevertheless, the administrative procedures which they enforced fell short of the expectations of the Turkish Government. Impossible though it may be to determine the exact proportions of political calculation and administrative muddle responsible for the obstructive tactics adopted in this matter, it is quite clear that the Cyprus Government disliked the idea of losing the Cyprus Turks, since apart from other considerations 57 per cent of the Police were Moslems¹⁰. The loss of the Turks was also considered by the Colonial Office to be against British interests. In an unchallenged minute of May 21, 1929, A.J. Dawe, principal clerk of the department dealing with Cyprus, bluntly observed that "the presence of the Turkish community [in Cyprus] is an asset from a political standpoint"¹¹. In other words, the virtue of the Turkish minority was that it offered Britain a cover for rejecting the Greek Cypriots' calls for union with Greece. The uniqueness, indeed the irony, of the period 1926-7 was that the Turkish Government chose to protest at the Cyprus authorities' devious methods for discouraging Turkish emigration to Turkey.

The first Turkish diplomatic protest to the London Government was a note dated August 2, 1926, from the Turkish embassy in London to the Foreign Office. It stated that several Moslem Cypriot policemen and guardians of Moslem cemeteries had applied to the consulate of Turkey in Cyprus, declaring their wish to benefit by their right of option in accordance with the Treaty of Lausanne. However, a local regulation was in existence obliging these persons to pay a fine of from £3 to £5 in the event of their resignation from their posts before the end of the five year period of their enlistment.

7. Cyprus Secretariat Archives (S.A.) No. 169, Storrs to Amery, May 18, 1927.

8. Colonial Office Correspondence (C.O.) 67/221/22301 No. 298, Nicholson to Amery, September 7, 1927, and minute by A.J. Dawe, October 16, 1927.

9. Article 35 of the Treaty stated: "Les Puissances contractantes s'engagent à n'apporter aucune entrave à l'exercice du droit d'option prévu par le présent Traité..." Cmd. 1929, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

10. C.O. 69/38 *Annual Report of the Cyprus Military Police, 1922*. In 1922 of the 933 members of the Police 533 were Moslems.

11. C.O. 67/227/39536 Minute to No. 154, Nicholson to Amery, May 8, 1929.

Given their extreme indigence and penury and their utter inability to pay, the Turkish embassy asked the Foreign Office to intercede on behalf of these Moslems with the Cyprus authorities and to secure the waiving of the fine in their special cases¹². Upon the matter being referred to the Cyprus Government the Acting Governor, R. Popham-Lobb, did not deny the Turkish statements. On September 22, 1926, he reported to the Secretary of State Leo Amery that he and the Executive Council had now come to the decision that all those Moslem non-commissioned officers and men who had opted for Turkish nationality should be permitted to leave the Cyprus Police unconditionally¹³. This decision solved the problem for those policemen who had already declared their wish to opt for Turkish nationality and who had not bought their way out of the Police. The concession, however, had come too late to encourage more of the Moslem policemen who might have exercised their options from August 1924 to August 1926, if the Government, from the beginning, had waived the penalty for premature resignations from the police. As it was the number of Moslem policemen declined from 533 in 1922 to 341 in 1925-6. The corresponding number of Christians went up from 393 (including 6 Roman Catholics and 3 Armenians) to 420¹⁴. Thus for the first time under British rule the Cyprus police came to consist of a majority of Christians over Moslems.

The second Turkish diplomatic note to the British Government revealed an even more curious practice employed by the authorities in Cyprus. Writing to the Foreign Office on October 13, 1926, the Turkish embassy in London stated that the Cyprus Government demanded the payment of sixteen shillings for the visa of the passports of Moslem emigrants to Turkey. Foreigners leaving Turkey paid only ten piastres for the equivalent visa. The payment demanded by the Cyprus Government was causing enormous inconvenience to the Turkish emigrants; therefore, the Turkish Government again asked for the intervention of the British Government in order that the payment might cease¹⁵. In a despatch dated December 22, 1926, the Cyprus Government explained to the Colonial Office that whilst neither aliens nor British subjects were required to possess a passport before leaving Cyprus, those Moslem optants of Turkish nationality who, of their own initiative, presented to the Colonial Secretary's Office the emergency passes which the Turkish consul had been issuing to them were always given visas and, according to regulations in force,

12. S.A. No. 188, Amery to R. Popham-Lobb, August 21, 1926 and enclosures.

13. S.A. No. 313, Popham-Lobb to Amery, September 22, 1926.

14. *Annual Reports of the Cyprus Military Police for 1922 and 1925-6* in C.O. 69/38.

15. S.A. No. 265, Amery to Popham-Lobb, November 20, 1926, and enclosures.

charged sixteen shillings¹⁶. Not surprisingly, this reply was considered inadequate by the authorities in London who on February 28, 1927, instructed the new Governor, Sir Ronald Storrs, to stop issuing exit visas and collecting money for them¹⁷. It should be noted that the settlement of the question of the visas took five months and that the formal abolition of the visas for Turkey was in force for the last five out of the thirty-six months provided for Turkish emigration to Turkey.

The subject of a third Turkish diplomatic note of March 23, 1927¹⁸, was more complicated. The Turkish embassy in London complained that a number of Turkish Cypriots who had opted for Turkish nationality within the prescribed period but who had not managed—for various reasons, including problems with the liquidation of their properties—to leave Cyprus one year after exercising their option, were impeded by the Cyprus Government from leaving, the authorities considering their failure to emigrate as tantamount to their acquisition of British nationality. The Turkish Government again asked for the intercession of the Foreign Office, stating that the proceedings of the Cyprus Government rested on no legal foundation. The legal position of the individuals concerned was clear and beyond dispute, and it would be inconceivable to force people who had expressed their wish to remain loyal to their nationality to acquire, against their wishes, another nationality. What the British authorities had a right to do was to make the necessary arrangements for facilitating the departure of the Turks—not to query their nationality. Some of the individuals lingering in Cyprus were ill and the Turkish Government hoped that for humanitarian reasons Britain would allow them to recover their health before leaving Cyprus. The Turkish note forced the Foreign Office to examine the legal implications of article 21 of the Treaty of Lausanne and, as it informed the Colonial Office on April 28, 1927¹⁹, the Foreign Secretary's conclusion was that "once a person has opted for Turkish nationality under article 21 of the Treaty, he has finally become a Turkish citizen instead of a British subject; and if he does not leave Cyprus within the specified period, the position is, not that his Turkish nationality disappears, but that the local authorities have the right to expel him from the island". Therefore, if the Cyprus Government was preventing the Turks from going to Turkey, such action was illegal. In truth, this was precisely what it was doing, justifying its action on an erroneous interpretation of the relevant article. In a despatch of June 1, 1927, to Amery, Storrs for the first time revealed

16. S.A. No. 428, Storrs to Amery, December 22, 1926.

17. S.A. No. 53, Amery to Storrs, February 28, 1927, and enclosures.

18. C.O. 67/221/22301 Embassy of Turkey to Foreign Office, March 23, 1927.

19. C.O. 67/221/22301 Foreign Office to Colonial Office, April 28, 1927.

to the Colonial Office that "whenever an optant has failed to leave the island within twelve months of the date of opting, it has been the practice of this Government to impound the Turkish passport of these individuals and return it to the Turkish consul for his information". Storrs dismissed the possibility that the Turks had been unable to proceed to Turkey because they had not wound up their affairs within the period of twelve months. Nor had the Government heard of any cases who had been unable to leave in time because of illness. On the contrary, there were cases of Turks who, having originally registered as optants with the Turkish consulate, had subsequently changed their minds. Whenever these persons were otherwise qualified the Cyprus Government had issued them certificates of British nationality under the Cyprus (Annexation) Orders-in-Council 1914-1917²⁰. These explanations made no difference to the Foreign Office's ruling which on July 29, 1927, the Colonial Office conveyed to Storrs with instructions to change his policy²¹. Bowing to its superior authorities the Cyprus Government duly notified the Turks concerned that they were free to proceed to Turkey. According to the September 7, 1927, despatch by the Acting Governor R. Nicholson²², it was anticipated that 300 or 400 Cypriot Turks would take advantage of the opportunity to go to Turkey. He added that of the 9,310 travel documents issued to as many Turkish Cypriots by the consul of Turkey for the purpose of emigrating to Anatolia it was believed that until that time "the total number of departures did not exceed 2,500 to 3,000 persons". Nicholson strongly denied the veracity of a report from the British embassy at Constantinople²³, quoting Turkish newspaper reports, that five or six thousand (out of a total Moslem Cypriot population of 62,000) of the optants of Turkish nationality had actually moved to Turkey. Concerning the future of those remaining optants who were showing no interest in going to Turkey, Nicholson stated that the Cyprus Government thought it undesirable (except in special cases) to expel them to Turkey, considering that "it may be assumed that the majority of such persons have by this time abandoned their intention of leaving the island"²⁴. The Foreign Office, which received a copy of Nicholson's despatch, immediately raised objections to the Cyprus Government's plan to keep on the island a minority of Turkish citizens within the Turkish community. In a letter of

20. S.A. No. 179, Storrs to Amery, June 1, 1927.

21. S.A. No. 185, Ormsby-Gore to Storrs, July 29, 1927.

22. The new name assumed by Popham-Lobb in order to benefit from a legacy of a relation.

23. S.A. No. 388, Clerk to Chamberlain, July 20, 1927.

24. C.O. 67/221/22301 No. 298, Nicholson to Amery, September 7, 1927.

October 4, 1927²⁵, it warned against the abnormal creation of a 5,000 to 6,000 strong Turkish "colony" in Cyprus which might in the future offer the Turkish Government a means of interfering in the internal affairs of Cyprus. While the Foreign Office understood and respected the Cyprus Government's humane desire not to expel immediately the optants for Turkish nationality—a generosity which the Turks had not shown in their treatment of the non-Turkish elements in their population—it pointed out that the purpose of article 21 of the Treaty of Lausanne was "to clear the island of persons who acquired Turkish nationality by the fact of having opted for it". The Foreign Office letter ended on a sombre note by pointing out that Turkey would not necessarily admit the validity of certificates of British nationality issued under the laws of Cyprus to former optants of Turkish nationality. Chastened by this warning the Colonial Office on November 28, 1927, instructed the Government of Cyprus to cease issuing certificates of British nationality. It refrained, however, from recommending the expulsion of the Turkish optants from Cyprus. The decision of the Colonial Office was that those Turks who had changed their minds could be told that they would be able "in due course" to acquire British nationality by naturalization under the British Nationality and Status of Aliens Act, 1914²⁶.

This ruling from London completed the reversal of practically all of the Cyprus Government's *ad hoc* decisions of the past three years on the tricky issues arising from the Turkish emigration. But disagreement between the Cyprus Government and the London Government on what to do with the optants for Turkish nationality still living in Cyprus dragged on during 1928 and 1929, with the Cyprus authorities bent on keeping as many Turks as possible in Cyprus. On November 22, 1928, in a despatch to Amery, Storrs admitted that part of the confusion over Turkish emigration had been due to the Government's failure in 1924-6 to exercise its right under international law—as the authority from which the Turks wished to obtain release in the matter of their nationality—to require all prospective Turkish optants to register with the Cyprus Government their formal declarations of intent. In the same despatch Storrs mentioned that the Turkish consulate in Cyprus which, following the passage of the time-limit for Turkish emigration, had been closed on June 1, 1927²⁷, had re-opened one year later again under Assaf bey. The re-opening of the consulate had been followed by the departure as emigrants for Turkey of a number of Cypriot Moslems bearing Turkish emergency passes. The continuing flow of Moslem emigrants disturbed Storrs and he

25. C.O. 67/221/22301 Foreign Office to Colonial Office, October 4, 1927.

26. S.A. No. 302, Ormsby-Gore to Storrs, November 28, 1927.

27. S.A. No. 169, Storrs to Amery, May 18, 1927 and enclosures,

now proposed to the Colonial Office that in order to ensure that only those Turks should leave Cyprus who had truly registered their options, either with the Government or with the Turkish consul, during the twenty-four months from August 1924 to August 1926, he should do the following three things: refuse to recognise the validity of the options if these had not been "notified to this Government either in writing or verbally in such a manner that a written record of it was made at the time"; demand that all persons leaving Cyprus should bear valid passports; and require that all Cypriots possessing Turkish passports should present them to the Colonial Secretary's Office for a free visa "failing which they will not be allowed to leave the island on Turkish papers"²⁸. Storrs's despatch, for the first time revealing the full extent of the Government's confusion over the question of the emigration to Turkey, gave rise to exasperation in the Colonial Office. In a minute of December 5, 1928, Sir John Risley, the Office's legal adviser wrote that "the failure to lay down in clear and express terms *ab initio* the formalities which would be required with regard to the exercise of the option is really beyond any comment"²⁹. The reaction of the Foreign Office was more specific though equally unfavourable. On January 8, 1929, it informed the Colonial Office that Storrs's latest proposals were legally inadmissible because "the requirement that persons leaving the island should produce valid national passports would be equivalent to an exit visa"³⁰. This new humiliation forced the Cyprus Government to admit that it would be pointless to try to obstruct the small number of Turks still departing for Anatolia on Turkish emergency passes. As if suddenly realising the absurdity of the situation, Nicholson in his May 8, 1929, despatch to the Colonial Office, stated that the retention "within the British fold of a few unwilling subjects is a matter of far less urgency than that of admitting to it many who are anxious to enter". The Cyprus Government now said that it only wanted to find a means of restoring British nationality to those Turkish Cypriots who had gone through the formalities of opting for Turkish nationality under the impression (which at that time was shared by the Cyprus Government) that their option would remain provisional until their departure from Cyprus. These people, whose numbers were now estimated by Nicholson to be about 9,000, having ascertained the true state of conditions in Turkey, had lost all interest in settling there. As a result of the legal rulings from London "some 9,000 persons on the colony have become Turkish subjects almost in spite of themselves" and their wish to become British subjects would be unattainable "otherwise than by naturalization, for which they cannot

28. S.A. No. 415, Storrs to Amery, November 22, 1928.

29. C.O. 67/226/39489 Minute by Sir J. Risley, December 5, 1928.

30. S.A. No. 12, Amery to Nicholson, January 17, 1929, and enclosure.

ordinarily be considered until after the elapse of ten years from the date of the termination of the war". In order to overcome this inconvenience Nicholson submitted for the Colonial Office's consideration a new proposal: that British nationality, under the laws of Cyprus, should be given to those optants for Turkish nationality who could produce a release from the Turkish authorities³¹. Nicholson's suggestion did not find ready acceptance in London. The Colonial Office agreed with Nicholson that the retention of the Turks was desirable and that in order to be useful it should be combined with full British nationality which would qualify the Turks for office under the Government and for participation in the elections. It could not, however, anticipate that the Turkish authorities would be willing to grant the necessary releases to the optants for Turkish nationality³². The Colonial Office again sought the advice of the Foreign Office and also of the Home Office. The result of complicated inter-departmental consultations was that on December 24, 1929, the Colonial Office reiterated to Nicholson the British Government's decision that the Cyprus Government had no right to issue exit visas to prospective emigrants. On the nationality question the wishes of the Cyprus Government were at length accepted by London. On December 24, 1929, the Colonial Office conceded that the only way of conferring British nationality on the 9,000 or so Moslems who had opted for Turkish nationality, without asking them to apply for British naturalization, lay in issuing to them, whenever needed, under the statute laws of Cyprus, certificates of British nationality. These certificates could be granted without any reference to the Turkish authorities³³.

With that decision the Turkish nationality question was settled. Since the Cyprus Government had neglected to institute its own system of registration of options and of exits, the precise number of Moslems who emigrated to Turkey cannot be established. What is available is the calculation made in mid-1928 by the writer (Mr. B. J. O'Brien, Assistant Secretary in the Colonial Secretary's Office) of the 1927 Cyprus Annual Report. According to the information at his disposal about 5,000 Turks—out of a total Moslem Cypriot population of 61,399 in 1921—had since 1924 left Cyprus for Anatolia in accordance with the Treaty of Lausanne³⁴. In the 1928 Annual Report, which was prepared towards the end of 1929, the same writer merely stated:

31. S.A. No. 154, Nicholson to Amery, May 8, 1929.

32. C.O. 67/227/39536 Minute by A. J. Dawe, May 21, 1929.

33. C.O. 67/227/39536 No. 118, Passfield to Nicholson, December 24, 1929.

34. S.A. No. 233, Nicholson to Amery, June 22, 1928, enclosing text of the Annual Report for 1927. Proof of the limited extent of Turkish emigration was that, according to the official Census Reports, between 1921 and 1931 the Turkish Cypriot population registered an increase from 61,339 to 64,238.

“The emigration of Moslems to Asia Minor continued during 1928 but on a small scale. Many of those who took advantage of the terms of the Treaty of Lausanne and departed for Asia Minor on opting for Turkish nationality have since returned to Cyprus”³⁵. Those (and their descendants) who did not return to Cyprus severed all legal connection with the island.

Cyprus Research Centre, Nicosia

35. S.A. No. 393, Storrs to Passfield, December 4, 1929, enclosing text of the Annual Report for 1928.