

EARLY RELATIONS BETWEEN THE GREEKS AND THE YOUNG TURKS

This paper deals with the relations of the Greeks and the Young Turks before the July revolution in 1908. My intention is to indicate that the Young Turks had undertaken the initiative to contact the Ottoman Greeks and the representatives of the Greek Kingdom and ask their cooperation for the establishment of the constitutional regime; however, the Greeks responded with considerable cautiousness. The Sultan's men also made an attempt to associate themselves with the Greeks in order to get information about the Young Turks, but the Greeks were equally reserved towards them.

There are three points, which I would like to suggest: First, the Young Turks tried to establish relations with the Greeks, second, the Greeks were hesitant to accept the Young Turks' proposals, and third, the July revolution did not take the Greeks by surprise, which means that they should have adopted a concrete policy towards the new regime.

Most of the information on which this paper is based on is from primary sources, i.e. Greek consular reports kept with the Historical Archive of the Greek Foreign Ministry.

The Young Turkish Committees which were active in Paris, had established certain relations with the Greeks as early as February 1902, when they held a Congress in the French capital.

More than forty delegates arrived in Paris to participate at the Congress¹, despite the protests of the Ottoman Ambassador in Paris Munir bey. Prince Sabaheddin, defending the cause of the conference as well as the participants, wrote to the French Foreign Minister Delcassé that those who defied the Sultan's power and bribes², would not be frightened by any "procédé d'intimidation puérile"³.

1. The French newspaper "Le Temps" mentioned 40 delegates, whereas Hércule Diamantopoulos and Paul Fesh 47; in Historical Archives of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, N. S. Dossier Général, Les Jeunes Turcs; also H. Diamantopoulos, *Le réveil de la Turquie*, Alexandrie (1909?), p. 19, and Paul Fesh, *Constantinople aux derniers jours d'Abdul Hamid*, p. 365 (no place and date of printing.)

2. Bribes offered by, among others, the Ottoman Greek Phanariot Karathéodory bey; in Prince Sabaheddin to Th. Delcassé, letter of 27 January 1902.

3. Ibid; see also Munir bey's letter to Delcassé, dated 20 Jan. 1902.

There were three Greek delegates, Sathas, Adossidis and Musurus, apparently Mousouros. According to a brochure printed after the conference, Sathas held the vice-presidency and Adossidis was elected secretary of the meetings; while Mousouros is not mentioned at all⁴.

However, we do not know anything else but their names. Did they represent any organization, or were they only influential Greek personalities⁵? Even more, one may ask whether they were Ottoman Greeks. The case of Sathas and Adossidis, whose names appeared in the resolution of the Congress suggest that they were not afraid of Abd-ul Hamid's revenge. We may conclude, therefore, that their links with Ottoman Turkey were rather weak.

Things are even more obscure with a second Young Turkish Congress held in 1907.

We only know that this Congress had been attended by representatives from "all parts of the Ottoman Empire" in an attempt to conciliate the divergent views of the Liberal Young Turks and the Committee of Union and Progress. It is not certain, however, whether Greek representatives did participate⁶. According to Berkes, while there was unanimity for the deposition of Abd-ul Hamid and the restoration of the constitution, there was no agreement over the questions of the unity or confederation of the Ottoman "Millet" and their respective degrees of autonomy⁷.

Nevertheless, subversive Young Turk literature was smuggled in the Empire through Greece. The Italian Gendarmerie Adjoint in Macedonia, reporting on this activity, maintained that the Young Turkish Committee resembled with the Greek and Bulgarian Macedonian Committees. "On dit encore", he went on, "que les chefs des populations Chrétiennes et les chefs de l'Association [Jeune Turc] se sont déjà mis d'accord sur certains points,

4. "Le Congrès des Libéraux Ottomans", brochure containing the speech of Prince Sabaheddin and the resolutions. The name of Mousouros, along with that of Sathas, is mentioned only by P. Fesh, *op. cit.*

5. We know for instance, that the Armenian delegates represented the organizations "Drochak" and "Hentchak"; on that purpose, they declared that they would collaborate for the transformation of the Hamidian regime and moreover, as members of those particular organizations, they would fight for a regime "qui respecterait les formes spéciales et locales, prévues par le traité de Berlin et les actes internationaux qui en découlent"; *op. cit.* "Le Congrès de Libéraux Ottomans".

6. See a report by Ovey, 3rd Secretary of the British Embassy in Paris, dated 28 Feb. 1907, in F. O. 371/346/6840. Ovey spoke about representatives from "all parts of the Empire" and not from the nationalities, while N. Berkes spoke about national delegates; in N. Berkes, *The development of secularism in Turkey*, Montreal 1964, p. 313.

7. *Ibid.*

et que sur d'autres l'accord n'est pas encore complet. On ne connaît pas encore les accords, mais à ce propos il ne faut pas oublier la sympathie qu'a toujours montrée l'élément jeune de l'armée pour les Grecs, et qui s'est exprimé par le peu de zèle qu'ils mettaient dans la recherche de leurs bandes et par leur non intervention dans beaucoup de cas.

L'on dit que les Grecs de la Grèce et les Grecs de la Macedoine, très au courant de ce que préparent en cachette les officiers et les populations Musulmanes, veulent se trouver prêts en cas de manifestation, afin d'intervenir en Thessalie sous prétexte de défendre le Chrétiens, ce qui motiverait l'arrivée toujours croissante des armes et des munitions"⁸.

This report apparently overestimated the contacts between the Greeks and the Young Turks. However, it should not pass unmentioned that in 1907 the Greek Macedonian Committee helped Dr. Nazi bey move from Paris to Salonica and Dr. Zannas offered his house to the Young Turkish triumvirate Talaat, Rahmi and Cavit beys, in order to meet safely there⁹. The above evidence, however, is not sufficient and for that reason it is misleading. It suggests that the Young Turks had the full support of the Greek Macedonian Organization, which is not correct. Certain reports from Greek Consuls in the Ottoman Empire give better account of the proposals made by the local Young Turkish groups to the Ottoman Greeks and their response to them.

For the first time, to the best of our knowledge, the Greek acting Consul-General in Salonica E. Kanellopoulos reported the Young Turkish unrest in February 1908. His information was obtained from the Ottoman authorities and labeled the army officers involved in the affair as liberals¹⁰.

Soon afterwards, in the month of April, Kanellopoulos was contacted directly by the influential Young Turk Rahmi bey, who spoke to him about the need of a political change and how a cooperation with the Greek element would be useful. Rahmi bey argued that Macedonia was in great danger because of Bulgaria's expansionist plans; that is why the Young Turks would like to cooperate with the weak Greeks in order to avert such an eventuality. However, Kanellopoulos' answer was as vague as Rahmi's suggestions, namely he stated that any change ameliorating the living conditions of the population would be welcome by the Greeks¹¹.

8. This report had been written before the July revolution and circulated by General di Robilant; it is enclosed in a report by G. Barclay to E. Grey, in F. O. 371/544/25303.

9. D. Dakin, *The Greek Struggle in Macedonia, 1897-1913*, Thessaloniki 1966, p. 377; also A. Zannas, *The Macedonian Struggle - Memoires*, Thessaloniki, 1960, p. 36.

10. Kanellopoulos to G.F.M., rep. No 122/14 Febr. 1908.

11. Kan. to G.F.M., rep. No. 619 Conf./6 July 1908.

One month later, in May, the Young Turks of Salonika renewed their suggestions for cooperation, this time towards the leadership of the Hellenic community. Nevertheless, they insisted on having Kanellopoulos' opinion as well, on the matter. This insistence, which obviously aimed at sounding the Greek Macedonia Committee to which Kanellopoulos belonged, made him and the other Greeks suspicious, because the Young Turks still had not forwarded any concrete scheme of collaboration. Kanellopoulos advised the heads of the Hellenic community to keep in touch with the Young Turk Committee and try to get as much information as possible¹².

It is almost on that same pattern that other contacts had taken place. From Elassona, the Greek Consul Enyalis reported that a major of the Ottoman army disclosed the Young Turkish plans to a Greek doctor, named Brovas. The major assured him that also the Armenians and the other nationalities would join forces for the success of the Young Turkish goal. Eventually he made Brovas swear to keep their discussion secret¹³.

Similar proposals were addressed to the Hellenic Communities of Kozani, Monastir and the towns of the Monastir district, and of Serres, where the spirit of Young Turkism was so widespread that even the higher Ottoman civil servants expressed themselves against the Sultan's regime¹⁴.

The reports by Consul Sachtouris from Serres, and Consul Dimaras from Monastir¹⁵ deserve more than a passing mention. They both advised mistrust to the Young Turks, as not being able to take a serious political initiative. In case the Young Turks fail, Dimaras argued, the Sultan's wrath will fall on Christian heads, while the Muslims will be in considerably less awkward predicament. "Besides", he reported, "such a political change will not be for the Greek interests, from the national point of view; the Greek must be educated with hatred against the despotic administration of the Turks, and any improvement of his fate must be due either to himself or to foreign intervention (ἐξωτερικὴ ἐνέργεια). Thus his dislike against the Turk would remain undiminished and vivid for ever"¹⁶.

Sachtouris was also of the same opinion, e.g. that a Young Turkish success would be to the detriment of Hellenism, because it would result to the awakening of the national consciousness among the Muslims. In Sachtouris' view, if one admitted the principles of Young Turkism, namely equality

12. Kan. to G.F.M., rep. No 425/12 May 1908.

13. Enyalis to G.F.M., rep. No 148/18 April 1908.

14. Sachtouris to G.F.M., rep. No 237/1 June 1908.

15. Dimaras to G.F.M., rep. No 575/27 May 1908.

16. *Ibid.*

before the law, constitutional freedom and fraternity, as sincere, one practically had also to refuse the Muslim dominance, the cornerstone of the age old Ottoman policy. In addition to that Sachtouris feared that in case of troubles in the Empire, Bulgaria would make quick use of the situation by annexing "the purely Bulgarian regions"¹⁷.

An opposite view by an anonymous Greek diplomat is given by G. F. Abbott as evidence of the favourable Greek response to the Young Turks' appeal. This diplomat according to Abbott, put the case in these terms: "The Great Idea in its political sense is impracticable for the present and will indefinitely remain so. Why then should we Greeks...quarrel with the Turks? Why should we object to living under a Turkish sovereign in Turkey as we live under a Danish sovereign in Greece? All that we ask from the Young Turks is not to interfere with our national language and customs"¹⁸. Abbott concluded that all Greeks he met had realised that the maintenance of the Empire was indispensable for the future of Hellenism, because it was regarded as a common inheritance. "Their ideal at most is a well-governed and powerful Empire, which while protecting them all against aggression from outside or from each other, shall enable each of them to continue developing its sense of national individuality"¹⁹.

The strong attachment of the Greek diplomat to the Ottoman Greeks, shown in the above statement and Abbott's conclusions, indicate that he might well be Ion Dragoumis²⁰. There is no further information, however, to the best of our knowledge, concerning Dragoumis' involvement, with the Young Turkish movement.

At the end of the month of May and the beginning of June, the revolutionary unrest had so much intensified that the Yildiz was obliged to increase its surveillance. We should mention the case of a special emissary Hadji-Ismaïl Hakki bey, whose mission among other things was to investigate to what extent Ottoman Greeks supported the Young Turks.

Hakki bey was labeled as a spy of the absolute confidence of the Yildiz, and as a free-mason. He went to Salonika via the island of Mitylene where he asked the assistance of his Greek friend P. Kourtzis, manager of the "Bank

17. *Op. cit.*, Sachtouris' report.

18. In G.F. Abbott, *Turkey in Transition*, London 1909, p. 85-86.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 86.

20. For Dragoumis' views before the Young Turk revolution, see his diary-style book: *My Hellenism and the Hellenes*, ed. by Philip Dragoumis, Athens 1927, especially p. 21: "Greece forgot to ask the unification of all Hellenic parts; she makes a false, petty foreign policy directed by the king at his whim. And the king is not Greek".

of Mitylene". Kourtzis told the Greek Consul Karatzas what he learned from Hakki, and Karatzas, in his turn, informed the Greek Foreign Ministry. According to this record, Hakki bey would present himself in Salonica as the legal adviser of this Greek Bank in order to have the support of its Salonica Branch. Hakki was in possession of official papers which he showed to Kourtzis and told him that he was also investigating whether the Hellenic element of Smyrna and Salonica were involved in the revolutionary movement. Yet, he knew for sure that the Bulgarians, the Armenians and the Roumanians helped the Young Turks²¹.

In Salonica, Hakki bey visited twice the Greek Orthodox Metropolitan and asked his assistance for tracing the Young Turks' whereabouts. He told the Metropolitan that it was a Greek Macedonian student in Athens, who, trying to proselytize a Muslim friend of his, disclosed the ritual for joining the Young Turk Committee. The Muslim betrayed the information to the authorities and put them on the revolutionaries' track²².

Hakki bey assured also the Metropolitan that only the Greeks were not involved in the mutiny, but nevertheless he insisted on being recommended by the Metropolitan to a Greek Orthodox clergyman in Skopja, who would be able to put him on the track of the Young Turkish committees²³.

We do not know the Metropolitan's answer to this request. Anyhow, one would wonder whether this clergyman could be of any help for Hakki, since the Greeks, according to his saying, were not involved in this affair. It seems likely, therefore, that Hakki was sounding the Hellenic authorities on the one hand, and on the other was trying to get them committed on the Sultan's side, so as to neutralize any Young Turkish influence on them.

On this matter, Kanellopoulos complained that while the Young Turks made many suggestions to the Ottoman Greeks the Imperial Government "did not demonstrate towards them the slightest impartiality, let alone good will".

Kanellopoulos felt that this attitude complicated things: Bulgaria encouraged this political change and was ready to make use of the troubles for its own interest, while the Greeks, the only ones who could cope with the situation, would stay apathetic because of the Imperial Government's stance²⁴.

21. Karatzas to G.F.M., rep. No 528/3 June 1908.

22. Kan. to G.F.M., rep. No 539/12 June 1908. A similar version of this story is recorded by F. Ahmad, *The Young Turks in Turkish politics, 1908-1914*, Oxford 1969, p. 1, fn. 1.

23. Op. cit., Kanellopoulos' rep. No 539.

24. Kan. to G.F.M., rep. No 600 Conf./29 June 1908; Kanellopoulos also reported

Kanellopoulos overtly admitted that "the Hellenic element had no interest in supporting this movement" and was wondering "whether it would be possible and expedient to make blinded Turkey think and appreciate, what valuable service the Hellenic element offered by abstaining from any cooperation with the Young Turks"²⁵.

Kanellopoulos, of course, did not like the Sultan's regime more than the Young Turkish constitutional declarations. His attitude towards them was dictated by the developments of Macedonian struggle and his antipathy against Bulgaria's intentions. The Sultan's regime was simply keeping a balance, and that is why it was accepted. While the Young Turkish factor with its strong patriotic tones seemed to be beyond any control.

The above reports provided sufficient evidence of an impending political storm. But the Greek and the Hellenic side either ignored these signs or did not take them seriously into account. Particularly the Greek Foreign Ministry in the beginning believed that the Young Turkish agitation was not but simple grievances restricted to certain regions only and for that reason were of limited importance. It was only in late June that the Greek Foreign Ministry realized that the Young Turks were able to turn their ideas to practical purpose, and hurriedly sent instructions to all Consular authorities in the Ottoman Empire²⁶.

According to these instructions, any involvement of the Greeks in the Young Turkish movement would only draw disasters on them, and "generally examining the situation", the Minister argued, "we think that a violent...subversion of the Turkish regime would cause critical complications, harmful to our national interests". Therefore, for reasons of personal security as well as for national reasons the Hellenic element should remain "loyal towards the dominant authority", but also keep an open eye on the Young Turk activity. In other words the Ottoman Greeks ought not to care about developments, which very soon proved to be fatal for them. Anyhow the seriousness of the situation was obvious as was obvious the weakness of the Imperial Government to suppress the movement. Signs of that seriousness and of that weakness were the cautiousness and the moderation with which the Imperial Government attempted to propitiate rather than to punish the Young Turks²⁷.

that I.M.A.R.O. disagreed with that policy on the grounds that it would put in danger the local Bulgarian population.

25. *Ibid.*

26. Baltazzi to Consular Authorities Circ. No 3006 Conf./27 June 1908.

27. *Ibid.*

Let us summarize now and draw some conclusions. One point is that the Greek and the Hellenic sides were aware of the developments. They had already been contacted not only by the Young Turks of Paris but also by their revolutionary committees in Macedonia, consisted largely by army officers²⁸. These contacts were not only restricted to the leadership of the Hellenic communities. The Young Turks wanted to know the opinion of the Greek Macedonian Committee. This was necessary for the Young Turks, because they could not ignore past rebellions of the Greeks of Thessaly, Epirus, Crete, Macedonia, not even the disastrous Greek-Turkish war of 1897, which rebellions though unsuccessful, eventually resulted in certain gains for Greece²⁹. Nevertheless the Young Turks did not clarify what they meant by cooperation. It is true that their movement was a patriotic movement of young officers "little interested in ideologies and social panaceas" and that their primary concern was "the survival of the Ottoman state"³⁰. But they certainly did not ask for military assistance by the Ottoman Greeks. It seems, therefore, likely that the Young Turks were rather sounding the reaction of the Greek and Hellenic sides and wanted only to predispose them favourably towards their plans.

However, they were hesitant to cooperate, and this is our second point. The Ottoman Greeks found themselves in perplexity and asked the advice of the representatives of the Greek Kingdom. But they were also in perplexity to decide for practical and theoretical reasons. The practical reason was that they were not convinced that the Young Turks could overthrow the Sultan's apolytarchy. The theoretical reason was that they did not believe in the Young Turkish constitutional declarations.

This mistrust was rather due to their fear that any political change of incipient nationalism, as was the case of the Young Turks, would endanger the Orthodox Patriarchate's privileges and consequently the living conditions of the Ottoman Greeks. Greek preference, therefore, for the Sultan's regime was not a matter of principle but a matter of need. In a way, the survival of Hellenism was linked with the preservation of the Khalifate, as the awakening of Turkish nationalism was linked with the abolition of the old regime. However, one could not but remark that the Hellenic population, everywhere in the Empire, rejoiced at the establishment of the constitution.

28. Niyazi Berkes, *op. cit.*, p. 305.

29. H. Psomiades, *The Eastern Question: the last phase—A study in Greek - Turkish diplomacy*, Thessaloniki 1968, p. 19.

30. B. Lewis, *The emergence of Modern Turkey*, London 1961, p. 208.

Thus we come to our third point, e.g. that the Young Turk revolution did not take by surprise the Greeks. Eventually, they realized that the Young Turks' coming to power was more than a probability. Despite this fact the Greek Government stubbornly advised cautiousness and adopted an attitude of "wait and see", which certainly showed lack of perspicacity.

As a matter of fact the policy that the Ottoman Greeks ought to adopt was more than a political decision. For over than five centuries the dominant Ottomans were considered as the ruling newcomers. Now, in a few months' time the Greeks who lived in the Empire were called to admit the legacy of coexistence with the Turks, and presumably turn it into a coexistence of citizens equal before the law, living in a common fatherland constitutionally governed. Certainly, this was a duty shared equally by the Ottoman Greeks and Turks.