

The Anatolian Greeks and Their Political Activities during the National War of Independence

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Abstract

The Ottoman Greeks, who focused on their social and cultural activities during the Reformation (*Tanzimat*) period, had the opportunity to openly practice those activities through many associations they founded, and started to politicize their activities gradually, influenced by the freedom spirit of the Constitutional (*Meşrutiyet*) Period. In the Balkan Wars and the First World War, the political ties in their interaction with Greece became stronger.

In the occupation period, which started with the Armistice of Mudros and ended the First World War for the Ottoman Empire, the political cooperation of Greece with the Entente Powers also influenced the Greeks of İstanbul and Anatolia, adding courage to the idea of uniting with Greece or creating an autonomous structure. With the landing of Greek soldiers in İzmir on May 15, 1919, Greece's approach to the Anatolian dream one more step closer was a hope not only for the Greeks living in İzmir, but also for the Greeks living in other parts of Anatolia, and the consciousness of Greekness, which was attempted to be raised by the attempts of spreading the Greek language, started to gain a political appearance.

At this point in time, while the military and political activities gained momentum among the Greeks living in various parts of Anatolia, many organizations that seemed to have varying characteristics but served for the Greek Megali Idea became active by acting in cooperation with Greece. Many incidents took place such as arson and looting carried out by the Greek Army between 1919 and 1922, which damaged not only the civilians, but also the Muslim population living in the Aegean and Marmara regions.

Keywords: National War of Independence, Anatolian Greeks, İzmir, Pontus, Turco-Greek.

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Millî Mücadele Döneminde Anadolu Rumları ve Siyasi Faaliyetleri

Öz

Tanzimat döneminde sosyal ve kültürel faaliyetlerine ağırlık veren Osmanlı Rumları, kurdukları çok sayıdaki cemiyetlerle bu faaliyetlerini açık bir şekilde uygulama fırsatı bulmuş, Meşrutiyet döneminin hürriyet ruhundan da etkilenerek bu faaliyetlerini yavaş yavaş siyasallaştırmaya başlamışlardır. Balkan Savaşları ve Birinci Dünya Savaşı'nda ise Yunanistan ile olan etkileşimlerindeki politik bağ güçlenmiştir.

Osmanlı Devleti açısından Birinci Dünya Savaşı'nı sonlandıran Mondros Mütarekesi ile başlayan işgal döneminde ise Yunanistan'ın İtilaf Devletleri ile olan siyasal iş birliği, İstanbul ve Anadolu Rumlarını da etkileyerek, Yunanistan ile birleşme ya da özerk bir yapı oluşturma fikrine adeta cesaret katmıştır. Yunanistan'ın 15 Mayıs 1919 tarihinde İzmir'e asker çıkarması ile Anadolu hayaline bir adım daha yaklaşması, yalnızca İzmir'de yaşayan Rumlara değil diğer Anadolu Rumları için de bir "umut" olmuş, daha öncesinde Yunan dilinin yaygınlaştırılma çabası ile yeşertilmeye çalışılan Yunanlılık bilinci, bu aşamada politik bir görünüm kazanmaya başlamıştır.

İşte bu esnada Anadolu'nun çeşitli bölgelerinde yaşayan Rumlar arasında askerî ve siyasi faaliyetler hız kazanırken, Yunanistan ile iş birliği içinde hareket ederek farklı nitelikte gibi görünen ancak Yunan Megali İdea'sına hizmet eden pek çok oluşum etkin hale gelmiştir. Yalnızca sivil olmakla kalmayıp, Yunan ordusunun 1919-1922 yılları arasında gerçekleştirdiği kundaklama ve yağma gibi pek çok olay da özellikle Ege ve Marmara bölgelerinde yaşayan Müslüman nüfusa oldukça zarar vermiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Millî Mücadele, Anadolu Rumları, İzmir, Pontus, Türk-Yunan.

The Anatolian Greeks and Their Political Activities during the National War of Independence

By the Greek independence in the consequence of the rebellion that the Greeks carried out against the Ottoman State and the following period of Reformation (*Tanzimat*), a cultural mobilization started among the Greeks of İstanbul and Anatolia, and in the last half of the 19th century, the Ottoman Greeks started to carry out activities through various organizations in many different fields such as education, culture and charity. On the other hand,

this mobilization gained a momentum in the Constitutional (*Meşrutiyet*) period in relation to the liberal spirit of that period.¹

In the first stage, those activities starting from Western Anatolia and spreading into the Marmara and Black Sea regions and assuming the characteristics of a mobilization led to the establishment of many associations whose number exceeds one hundred through the organization of the Greek women among themselves.² The Anatolian Greeks who emphasized educational and cultural activities during the Reformation and Constitutional periods had connections with Greece in this regard and they increased their activities by gaining the support of formations in mainland Greece in addition to the Patriarchate and wealthy Greeks.

In the periods of action that left their mark on the first half of the 20th century and started with the Balkan Wars, in general terms the Ottoman Greeks started to display a political stance in accordance to the atmosphere created by the war, developed an open cooperation in those wars where Greece was also involved and escalated the level of their activities to a political one. During the First World War, although their activities were interrupted due to the Ottoman State's dilemma, the signature of the Armistice of Mudros³ became a breaking point not only for the Ottoman State, but also for the Greeks.⁴ At this point, the Greek Megali Idea infiltrated the Greeks fully and the excitement that it created among the Greeks caused the Greeks of İstanbul and Anatolia to engage in activities which were openly for the benefit of Greece.

Although those activities looked like educational or cultural activities during the National Struggle, the manner of education of the Greek schools in Anatolia and İstanbul reveals how the Greeks were politicized. It is possible to say that certain important changes took place in the contents of the lessons in schools where this type of politicization openly revealed itself. Besides the increase of the nationalist emphasis in history, religion

1 Hasan Taner Kerimoğlu, *İttihat Terakki ve Rumlar 1908-1914*, Libra Yayınevi, İstanbul 2009, p. 55.

2 Mamoni Kyriaki-Lida İstikopolou, *Somateiaki Organosi tou Ellinismou sti Mikra Asia (1861-1922)*, Vivliopoleion tis Estias, Athina 2006, pp. 130-131.

3 Seha Meray-Osman Olcay, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun Çöküş Belgeleri (Mondros Bırakışması Sevr Antlaşması, İlgili Belgeler)*, Ankara Üniversitesi Siyasal Bilgiler Fakültesi Yay., Ankara 1977, p. 1-5; Tefik Bıyıklıoğlu, *Türk İstiklal Harbi I, Mondros Mütarekesi ve Tatbikatı*, Genelkurmay Basımevi, Ankara 1962, p. 32.

4 *Atı*, 15 November 1918.

and language education, especially the subject matter of the geography lessons encountered a significant transformation. Beginning teaching the Anatolian geography or in other words adding the Anatolian geography into the curriculum became pretty important “in terms of educating the new generation regarding the lands that they were going to live in the future”. Thusly, the geography of the Megali Idea was added to the curricula.⁵ The boy scouting organizations, whose activities reached to a maximum level in the same period, were added and as it was already known, the Greek boy scouting organizations started to serve the Greek Army during the period of National Struggle. Those formations were supported and financed by the Greek Metropolitans in their areas of activity in addition to the İstanbul Greek Patriarchate.⁶

While the years between 1919 and 1922 signify the process of Armistice in İstanbul and the period of National Struggle in Anatolia, the same years were regarded by Greece as the Anatolian Campaign and the excitement and enthusiasm created by this campaign. Therefore, through the occupation of İzmir by the Greeks in May 15, 1919, the Greeks living in the Aegean, Marmara and Black Sea regions acted with the Greek Army from time to time and they either assisted the Greek Army personally or carried out activities for placing the Greeks in Anatolia under Greece’s control. Establishment of the mentioned boy scouting organizations, conversion of the Greek schools into hospitals⁷ from time to time and into arsenals mostly and the Greek Red Cross’ arming the Anatolian Greeks under the disguise and justification of humanitarian assistance may be counted among a few of those activities.⁸ Activities in different locations of Anatolia varied based on the intensity, social status or the level of connection with the Greek mainland of the Greeks living in those locations. In this regard, the region that displayed variety and more functionality in terms of activities was the Aegean region; and it may be argued that the Greeks of İzmir became a prototype for the Greeks of other regions with their attitudes and models of organization.⁹ The effective usage of publishing and media mechanisms

5 Haris Spataris, *Biz İstanbullular Böyleyiz 1906-1922*, Kitap Yayınevi, İstanbul 2011, p. 127.

6 *Arşivo Belgeleriyle Rum Faaliyetleri 1918-1922*, Vol. I, Genelkurmay Askeri Tarih ve Stratejik Etüt Başkanlığı, Genelkurmay Basımevi, Ankara 2009, p. 31.

7 *Benaki Musio, Arhivo Venizelu*, 173.154.049-2.

8 *Arşivo Belgeleriyle Rum Faaliyetleri 1918-1922*, p. 31.

9 For details see: Çiğdem Kılıçoğlu Cihangir, “Osmanlı Rumlarında Cemiyetleşme Olgusu ve

by the Greeks and the establishment of soup kitchens and assistance centers with the influence of Stergiadis, the Greek High Commissar in the region became an indicator of annexation of İzmir by Greece.¹⁰ On the other hand, the political activities of Greeks of İzmir were personally followed up and supported by Hrisostomos, the Metropolitan of İzmir.

The Asia Minor Defense Organization (Mikrasitiki Amina) which was established in İzmir in 1921 worked in close cooperation with the formations in İstanbul and it was followed up and encouraged by the wealthy Greeks and the Metropolitan Hrisostomos.¹¹ This organization carrying out activities for the purpose of establishment of an autonomous state in Anatolia and also worked for organizing the Greeks. The Patriarchate which used discourses such as saving “the Greeks under the yoke” or “the endangered nation” openly supported the activities of Greeks in the entire Anatolia. The organization which also gathered supporters from volunteers influenced the Greeks regarding their enrollment into the Greek Army.

On the other hand, in addition to this organization many women’s organizations carrying out similar activities individually worked for the Greek Army also. For instance, as it may be understood from their names, many women’s organizations such as “Organization of Soldiers’ Sisters From Asia Minor” (Sundesmos Mikrasiatis Adelfh tou Stratıwtou), “Greek Women’s High School of İzmir” (Lukion Ellinidon Smyrnis), “Asia Minor Greek Women’s Defense Organization” (Amina Ellinidon Mikrasias), “Union of Asia Minor Women’s Organizations” provided great amounts of support for the Greek Army in İzmir regarding health, tailoring, and educational services.¹² Among them, the most active one was the Asia Minor Greek Women’s Defense Organization, and it carried out activities for the

Rum Kültür Cemiyetleri: İzmir Örneği”, *Çağdaş Türkiye Tarihi Araştırmaları Dergisi*, XIX/39, pp. 395-440.

10 Çağla D. Tağmat, “İşgal Yıllarında İzmir’de Yunan İdari Sistemi”, *1918-1919 Mütarekeden Milli Mücadeleye (Hayal kırıklığı, Uyanış, Örgütlenme ve Direniş)*, Türk Ocağı Yay., İstanbul 2020, p. 123, 126.

11 Engin Berber, “Batı Anadolu Rumlarının Son Fedakârlığı ya da 9 Eylül 1922’yi Önleyemeyen Bir Askeri Yapılanma – Küçük Asya Savunma Örgütü”, *Cumhuriyet Gazetesi 9 Eylül İzmir’in Kurtuluşu Özel Eki*, 9 Eylül 2006, p. 64.

12 Çiğdem Kılıçoğlu Cihangir, *İkinci Meşrutiyet’ten Milli Mücadele’ye Anadolu’da Sosyo-Ekonomik ve Kültürel Boyutlarıyla Rum Örgütlenmeleri (1908-1922)*, Ankara University Institute of Turkish Revolution History Unpublished PhD Thesis, Ankara 2017, pp. 176-177.

purpose of maintaining and making up the deficiencies of the Greek Army in Anatolia and gifted books. The organization received congratulations and thanks from Hrisostomos, the Metropolitan of İzmir and this increased the Metropolitan's interest in the women's movements.¹³ On the other hand, many formations in and around İzmir with similar characteristics maintained their presence.

Many political formations supported by the Metropolitan of Trabzon in regions such as Kastamonu, Sinop and Giresun and primarily İnebolu focused on the density of population for the purpose of establishing an independent Pontus State and those regions were attempted to be Grecized through the Greeks settled to those regions. It is also possible to say that many organizations centered in İstanbul opened up branches in the Black Sea region. For instance, while the General Commission of Greek Immigrants established in 1919 in the Minerva Inn in Galata was carrying out secret activities, it also carried out activities such as settling Greeks in the Black Sea region. This organization which was also known as Kordus carried out activities intensely for the purpose of increasing the Greek population in Anatolia.¹⁴ The Greek organization named Legitimate Defense (*Meşru Müdafaa*), which was established in Samsun and had a branch in İnebolu, carried out activities in that purpose.¹⁵

The Greeks of Safranbolu displayed a distant stance from Hellenism especially during the Armistice period, defined themselves as Orthodox Christian Turks and stayed away from the expansionist activities of Greece.¹⁶

Regarding İzmit and the surrounding areas, the Greeks of those regions who had a lifestyle heavily based on agriculture and trade, were defined as Orthodox Greeks having the Armenian consciousness (Hayhorums) due to the fact that they were speaking Armenian in addition to Greek and Turkish.¹⁷ In and around İzmit, the direct political ties of those organizations with the

13 For detailed information regarding the Organization, see: Nilüfer Erdem, "Anadolulu Rum Kadınlar Savunma Örgütü ve Faaliyetleri", *Balkan Araştırma Enstitüsü Dergisi*, Vol. 9, No. 2, Aralık 2020, pp. 331-361.

14 Cengiz Mutlu, *Mütareke Döneminde Rum Nüfus Hareketleri 1918-1922*, Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi Yay., Ankara 2014, p. 110-111; Mustafa Turan, *Yunan Mezalimi, İzmir, Aydın, Manisa 1919-1923*, Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi Yay., Ankara 2006, p. 32.

15 *Pontus Meselesi*, ed. Yılmaz Kurt, TBMM Kültür, Sanat ve Yayın Kurulu Yay., Ankara 1995, p. 126.

16 *Hâkimiyet-i Milliye*, 1 May 1921.

17 Kılıçoğlu Cihangir, *ibid*, p. 289.

formations in Greece were salient. On the other hand, the occupation of İzmit in 1918 by the British and the transfer of the city to the Greeks in October of 1920 created a serious public disorder and by the occupation, the Greek Army and the gangs created by the Greeks of the region started to act together. And at this point, the just war was followed by acts of brutality and a destruction was experienced which was similar to the one in the Black Sea region but somewhat different in terms of the involvement of the Greek Army into the situation. In June of 1921, the acts of arson, looting and pillaging that the Greeks started while receding from İzmit had a great influence and they even harmed the Muslim population living there.¹⁸ The Greeks living in İzmit receded from the region along with the Greek Army.

Although the number of the organizations established in the central regions of Anatolia during the period of National Struggle was very limited, it may be argued that those organizations mainly focused on activities for the purposes of mostly receiving donations for churches and schools. The Orthodox Greeks of Karaman among the Greeks of central Anatolia, who were displaying a more impartial attitude against the Greek occupation when compared to the Greeks of other regions, got separated from the Fener Greek Patriarchate in 1922 and established the Orthodox Turkish Patriarchate.¹⁹

At the end of the National Struggle, some organizations burned their libraries and documents so that they would not be taken by the Turks. On the other hand, almost all of the activities that the Greeks performed during the National Struggle under the name of education, charity and assistance for the poor ended up serving Greece and the Greek Army. During the National Struggle, while roughly about 500 Greek organizations carried out activities only in İstanbul, it may be argued that the number of such organizations tripled in Anatolia.

On the other hand, when İstanbul is evaluated from a different window, it is possible to argue that this city assumed a role as the center of politicization of the Greek organizations. This, for sure, was caused by the existence of the Patriarchate. Because the İstanbul Greek Patriarchate, which was expected

18 See: Çağla D. Tağmat, "Milli Mücadele'de Yunan Ordusunun İzmit Katliamı", *Uluslararası Orhan Gazi ve Kocaeli Taribi-Kültürü Sempozyumu V- Bildirileri*, Vol. II, Kocaeli Büyükşehir Belediyesi, Kocaeli 2019, pp. 883-888.

19 Mehmet Biçici, "Papa Eftim ve Milli Mücadele'deki Yeri", *Gaziantep University Journal of Social Sciences*, April 2017, p. 456.

to serve as a spiritual organization, became almost integrated with Greece between the years of 1919 and 1922 and became a great supporter of the Greek occupation in Anatolia.

Another important matter is the similarity between the organizations of the Greeks of İstanbul and the Greeks of Anatolia. The experience that the Greeks of İstanbul had in this matter (when İzmir is left aside) became a driving force for the organizations established in other regions of Anatolia and for their politicization. Indeed, we need to not forget the financial support of the wealthy Greeks while evaluating this matter. Because the wealthy Greeks who opened up schools and made donations with high amounts for education did not hesitate to provide their support to the Greek Army in Anatolia during the National Struggle.

Conclusion

Greek organizations, which began to mobilize during the Tanzimat period, took on a new face in the atmosphere created by the Constitutional Monarchy period. Especially in the first years of this period, the ideal of freedom was at the forefront, which constituted the starting point of this mobilization. Leaving İstanbul aside, Greeks living in different parts of Anatolia also started to establish associations in parallel with the dynamics of their regions. After the stagnation of the organization during the years of the First World War, it is possible to say that the cultural and educational activities idealized by the Anatolian Greeks gradually began to change shape between 1919 and 1922, when Greece put its goals on Anatolia into practice. In particular, the hallmark of this period was the support and assistance to the occupying Greek forces in Anatolia.

The proliferation of activities in the Aegean and Black Sea regions during this period, where women's and scout organizations came to the forefront, became remarkable. This situation can be considered quite natural considering the density of the Greek population living in these regions, their connections with Greece and even the support they received from foreign states. Another important point is the support provided by churches and schools in organizing. During the period of the National Struggle, it was noteworthy that churches and schools in Anatolia were often used as centers of organization or as ammunition. On the other hand, these political and at the same time separatist formations, to which wealthy Greeks also poured their financial aid, created a perception that Greece and other financiers did not forget or disregard the Anatolian Greeks.

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