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ARMENIANS IN THE 1908 TRABZON ELECTIONS*

(1908 TRABZON SEÇİMLERİNDE ERMENİLER)

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Abstract: *The 1908 elections, which constituted the first parliament of the Second Constitutional Era, was one of the most important phases of Turkish political life and was one of the most debated developments in recent Turkish history. Various disputes have been experienced over the elections that have been held throughout Turkish political life. However, what made the 1908 elections more specific and meaningful than the others were the high expectations of the millets (nations) forming the Empire from the Constitution and the Committee of Union and Progress. The Second Constitutional Era, which was re-declared after a protracted struggle, had led the Muslims as well as the non-Muslim millets to have great hopes and expectations that all the problems in the Empire would come to an end.*

The 1908 elections elicited much public interest in the multi-national, religious, and cultural places of the Empire that also possessed strong social organizations. In this respect, disputes over the application of the elections and allegations of election fraud occurred especially in the cosmopolitan cities of the Empire. Cities that reflected bourgeois cosmopolitanism, especially important cities such as Istanbul, Izmir, and Trabzon, were the main places where discussions about the elections took

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place. The province of Trabzon was an important Turkish city that had to be taken into consideration especially by foreign diplomats due to the fact that, along with its non-Muslim population such as the Armenians and Greeks, etc., it also was accepted as a port of origin for trade. Thus, the Armenian issue, which was one of the leading problems that was attempted to be created in the critical cities of the Empire for quite a while, was attempted to be made into a problem in Trabzon as well under the pretext of the elections. For this reason, the French Consulate in Trabzon showed a special interest in the disputes related to this election and recorded the developments in its reports.

Keywords: *Second Constitutional Era, Black Sea, 1908 Elections, Trabzon, Armenians*

Öz: *II. Meşrutiyet Dönemi'nin ilk parlamentosunu oluşturan 1908 seçimleri, Türk siyasal hayatının en önemli evrelerinden ve yakın dönem tarihinin çok tartışılan gelişmelerinden birisi olmuştur. Türk siyasal hayatında gerçekleştirilen seçimler üzerinden çeşitli münakaşalar ortaya çıkmıştır. Ancak 1908 seçimlerini diğerlerinden daha özel ve anlamlı kılan durum, İmparatorluğu oluşturan milletlerin Meşrutiyet ile İttihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti'nden beklentilerinin bir hayli yüksek olmasından ileri gelmiştir. Zira uzun erimli bir mücadeleden sonra yeniden ilân edilmiş bulunan II. Meşrutiyet, Müslümanların yanı sıra gayrimüslim milletleri de İmparatorluktaki bütün sorunların sona ereceğine dair çok büyük umut ve beklentilere sevk etmişti.*

İmparatorluğun cemaat örgütlenmesinin güçlü olduğu ve çok etnili, mezhepli ve kültürlü yerlerinde 1908 seçimleri oldukça ilgi çekici bulunmuştur. Bu bağlamda, seçimlerin uygulanması ve seçimlerle ilgili iddia edilen bazı usulsüzlükler hakkındaki tartışmalar daha ziyade İmparatorluğun kozmopolit şehirlerinde cereyan etmiştir. İstanbul, İzmir ve Trabzon gibi önemli şehirler başta olmak üzere burjuva kozmopolitizmini yansıtan şehirler, seçimlere ilişkin tartışmaların yapıldığı başlıca yerler olmuştur. Trabzon vilâyeti, barındırdığı Rum, Ermeni vb. gayrimüslim nüfusunun yanı sıra, aynı zamanda bir mahreç kapısı olarak da kabul edilmesi, özellikle yabancı diplomatlar için göz önünde bulundurulmasını gerektirecek derecede önem taşıyan bir Türk beldesiydi. Dolayısıyla bir süreden beri imparatorluğun kritik beldelerinde yaratılmaya çalışılan sorunların başını çeken Ermeni konusu, bu sefer de seçimler bahanesi ile Trabzon'da soruna dönüştürülmek istenmiştir. O nedenle Fransa'nın Trabzon Konsolosluğu vilayette yapılan seçimlere ilişkin tartışmalara özel ilgi göstermiş ve gelişmeleri raporlarına yansıtmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *II. Meşrutiyet, Karadeniz, 1908 Seçimleri, Trabzon, Ermeniler*

The 1908 elections, which constituted the first parliament of the Second Constitutional Period (one of the most important phases of Turkish political life), has been one of the most discussed developments in the recent history owing to the idiosyncrasy of the social structure of the Ottoman Empire. Although it is possible to come across debates and arguments in Turkish election history just like in its political life, the debates regarding the 1908 elections have a special importance compared to the 1912 elections, which brought about much more vigorous and bitter disputes. Such a situation, which makes the 1908 elections more meaningful than the others, is associated with the lofty expectations of the *millets* (nations) forming the Empire from the Constitutional Monarchy and the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP). This is because the Constitutional Monarchy (or the “10 July Revolution” according to the prevailing jargon of that time) was declared again after a long struggle, which led non-Muslim nations as well as Muslims to foster great hopes and expectations that the main problems in the Empire would be overcome.

The Ottoman Empire entered the election process once again after the 93 Constitutional Monarchy with the Sultan Abdülhamit II’s call to a meeting of the Chamber of Deputies with the imperial decree dated 23 July 1908 and the resumption of the Constitutional period. For the execution of the Chamber of Deputies election, which had not been held since 1877, the election law called as “*İntihâb-ı Mebusan Kanun-ı Muvakkati*” was published with the Sultan’s decree of 2 August, and also the general public and the authorities were informed about how the elections would be conducted.¹

The process of the first elections of the Second Constitutional Era, which started with the distribution of the election law to the sanjaks (districts) across the Empire, lasted about four and a half months until the opening of the Chamber of Deputies on 17 December 1908. During this period, the preparation of the lists was dealt with in August, and the elections to determine the second voters were started by mid-September. These elections were held in October, and parliamentary elections were held from the end of the month until the middle of November and December. In this respect, the period when the election activities intensified was November and December.² This period was a phase when the Ottoman Empire was faced with complex domestic and foreign political developments, and this situation demonstrated its effects in various dimensions in the election process. Although there was no physical war in this period, a state of diplomatic warfare in the context of external developments, and the efforts to increase the nations’ representation power in

1 Aykut Kansu, *1908 Devrimi*, çev. Ayda Erbal (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1995), 273-274.

2 Fevzi Demir, *Osmanlı Devleti’nde II. Meşrutiyet Dönemi Meclis-i Mebusan Seçimleri 1908-1914* (Ankara: İmge Kitabevi Yayınları, 2007), 61.

the Chamber of Deputies in parallel with the problems created by this situation prepared an environment in which the election process was conducted in a relatively problematic and controversial manner. The most important complaints that came to the agenda during the election process were electoral abuses by non-Muslims to gain more representation power in some places, pressure and threats made during the elections, violations in some places of the agreements between the CUP and the nations, and desires to send some people who were alleged to be of questionable pasts as deputies to the parliament.

In fact, complaints from the Empire's Armenian subjects continued uninterrupted during the election process. The prominent Armenian delegates or ordinary Armenian citizens sent their complaints about their regions either to the Armenian Patriarchate of Istanbul or to the Armenian newspapers. The essence of these complaints was the dissatisfaction of the people with the current situation, the pressure of the local administrators, and the allegations that they would be subjected to atrocities. However, as the results of the investigations conducted showed that none of the complaints brought up in this process went beyond allegations, the Government took a decision to not to send these correspondences directly to the Patriarchate for a while, and instead instructed the transference of the allegations from the villages to the sub-district directorates, and from there to the districts, thus to follow the sequence of administration from the lower units to the higher ones.³

Disputes about the course of the elections and the alleged irregularities emerged mostly in the cosmopolitan cities of the Empire. In this context, cities such as Istanbul, Izmir, and Thessaloniki, which reflected bourgeois cosmopolitanism, as well as cosmopolitan Anatolian cities such as Trabzon, were among the electoral constituencies where disputes and conspiracies emerged. Thus, the elections aroused interest in places where the Empire's multi-ethnic, multi-denominational, and multi-cultural organization as well as the community structure was strong. In addition, the elections in the cities that clearly reflected all these features had a special place in the discussions.

Trabzon province, in addition to having a considerable non-Muslim population, was also accepted as a gateway and, owing to this feature, was considered as an important Turkish region by the foreign diplomats. In fact, the Consulate of France in Trabzon paid special attention to the disputes regarding the elections held in the province. The reports prepared at the French Consulate show that serious disputes were on the agenda regarding the elections and election results in the province. The fact that the Armenians residing in the

3 Recep Karacakaya, *Türk Kamuoyu ve Ermeni Meselesi 1908-1923* (İstanbul: Toplumsal Dönüşüm Yayınları, 2005), 82-83.

province of Trabzon could not get any deputy elected despite all their efforts, the activities aimed at provoking the Armenians in the province, and the accusations that some persons who allegedly played a role in the events of 1895 were elected to the parliament should be evaluated as the apparent reasons for the disputes that took place in Trabzon regarding the elections.

1. Observations of the French Consul on the Trabzon Elections and the Elected Deputies

As one of the most important trade centers of the Black Sea, Trabzon was one of the provinces that had a great importance in the elections due to its population. As a province that attracted attention with its three important sanjak centers in the 1908 elections, the elections in the central sanjak of Trabzon ended on 15 November. Although large-scale events against the old regime took place in Trabzon before 10 July, it is stated that none of the deputies in the central sanjak were CUP members (*İttihatçı*).⁴

As we mentioned before, the elections and the debates on the elections, due to the importance of the Trabzon province, were closely followed by the French Consulate and diligently reported. In fact, a detailed report written by the French Consulate sent to the Istanbul Embassy contains valuable information, from the personality traits to the political tendencies of the deputies who were elected to the Chamber of Deputies. When the aforementioned report is evaluated, it is seen that the deputies elected to represent Trabzon province had different political tendencies, including professing CUP ideology (*İttihatçılık*).⁵ Although the Trabzon province was far from the center, the results of the election are of significant importance in terms of reflecting the political atmosphere in the countryside of the Empire, since Trabzon had a characteristic that reflected all the features of the region.

The ethnic and religious social fabric of Trabzon requires that all developments in the city be evaluated with great care. In this respect, according to the French Consul, although there were certain complaints about some of the elected deputies, the resulting discontent originated from the fact that the elected ones seemed to be supporters of the new regime. As a result, 8 of the 15 deputies elected in all the sanjaks of the province were of liberal ideology.⁶

4 Kansu, *1908 Devrimi*, 313.

5 Archives du Ministère des Affaires Étrangères (AMAE) / Centredes Archives Diplomatiques de Nantes (CADN) *Ambassade de France A Constantinople, Carton 74/190*, "The Report Dated 27 November 1908 Sent by France's Trabzon Consulate to the İstanbul Embassy Concerning the Elections," Nr.33 /1.

6 AMAE / CADN, *Ambassade de France A Constantinople, Carton 74/190*, "The Report Dated 27 November 1908 Sent by France's Trabzon Consulate to the İstanbul Embassy Concerning the Elections," Nr.33 /2.

Although Christians in Trabzon province had some objections or complaints regarding the voting procedure of Muslims, there was a calmness for a while as of 26 November. However, the fact that the evaluations about the elected people caused such controversy following the results were finalized mainly originated from the lack of agreement among non-Muslim nations in the province, because non-Muslim nations or communities could not come to an agreement in accordance with their objectives in the elections. The fact that the Greek and the Armenian nations participated in the elections with separate slates caused the votes to be split, preventing the attainment of the desired results. The resulting situation was to the advantage of the Muslims, leading to the Turk and Muslim people attaining a considerable advantage in the elections.⁷ It is clear that the problem of reaching an agreement among non-Muslim communities in Trabzon had a significant impact on their inability to achieve significant electoral success. It can be also said in this context that this situation revealed an important problem regarding the power and influence of the sections represented by the Armenian Patriarchate of Istanbul in the Ottoman provinces.

2. Observations and Evaluations of the French Consul on the Elected Deputies in Trabzon Province

2.1. Sanjak of Trabzon

In the 1908 elections, a total of seven deputies were elected from the central sanjak of the Trabzon province. There is a great deal of information in the literature regarding the votes gathered by the elected deputies.⁸ These deputies were the Mufti of Trabzon Mehmet Emin Efendi, (Saraçzade) Ali Efendi, Attorney (*Dava Vekili*) Eyüpzade İzzet Bey, Treasurer (*Hazinedarzade*) Mahmut Mazhar Bey, former Mufti Mahmut İmameddin Efendi, (Nemlizade) Hacı Osman Efendi and Matheos Cofidis from the Greek community. Apart from the central sanjak of Trabzon province, the other three sanjaks consisting of Samsun, Gümüşhane and Lazistan sanjaks had a total of eight deputies. The French Consulate in Trabzon made some evaluations about the fifteen elected deputies in this province. It is possible to note the views and evaluations of the Trabzon Consul regarding the elected deputies as follows:

Mehmet Emin Efendi is a former trade official and was appointed as a mufti following the re-proclamation of the Constitutional Monarchy. He

7 AMAE / CADN, *Ambassade de France A Constantinople, Carton 74/190*, "The Report Dated 27 November 1908 Sent by France's Trabzon Consulate to the İstanbul Embassy Concerning the Elections," Nr.33 /2.

8 Feroz Ahmad ve Dankward A. Rustow, "İkinci Meşrutiyet Döneminde Meclisler: 1908-1918," *Güney-Doğu Avrupa Araştırmaları Dergisi* 4-5, (1976): 277 ; Kansu, *1908 Devrimi*, 313 ; Demir, *Osmanlı Devleti'nde II. Meşrutiyet Dönemi Seçimleri*, 375-376.

is a member of the Young Turk Party and is a popular person equally known for his fanatical characteristics.

Ali Nâki Efendi was a school administrator in Trabzon for thirty years. He was later appointed as the Head of the Ministry of Education Commission. He worked as a teacher in the Khedivate of Egypt for a long time. He is considered a truly knowledgeable and liberal-minded person.⁹

Eyübzade İzzet Bey is a very influential person in Trabzon, his father had served in the Chamber of Deputies in the previous term, and he himself is a person who has held various positions in Trabzon. Following his duties in Trabzon, he was assigned to Giresun - Tirebolu. He continued his duty as the district governor until he was dismissed by the Trabzon Governor last October. He is considered to have extremely conservative views and thoughts.

Hazinedarzade Mahmut Bey is known as a merchant and property-rich personality in Trabzon. He is knowledgeable, upright, and has a straightforward character. He is known as an exceptionally talented person who did not hide his liberal, developmental, and progressive thoughts even before the proclamation of the Constitutional Monarchy.

Former Mufti *Mahmut Imameddin Efendi* served as a mufti for twenty years and was dismissed from his duty due to intense appeals as soon as the Ottoman Basic Law (*Kanun-i Esasi*) was proclaimed. He is quite intelligent and is one of the personalities who know Ottoman laws the best. Mahmut Imameddin Efendi, who was an ardent supporter of the old regime, also has an effective influence in the Provincial Administrative Council. In this respect, it does not seem likely to dissuade him from his principles and to compel him in the desired direction.

Matheos Cofidis Efendi is a Greek from Trabzon and also an Ottoman who is a literate and proficient in Turkish. He works as an inspector and expert in the Trabzon Branch of the Ottoman Tobacco Regime Administration. Although he is not an exceptionally talented politician, he is known for his liberal views.¹⁰

9 AMAE / CADN, *Ambassade de France A Constantinople, Carton 74/190*, "The Report Dated 27 November 1908 Sent by France's Trabzon Consulate to the İstanbul Embassy Concerning the Elections," Nr.33 /3.

10 AMAE / CADN, *Ambassade de France A Constantinople, Carton 74/190*, "The Report Dated 27 November 1908 Sent by France's Trabzon Consulate to the İstanbul Embassy Concerning the Elections," Nr.33 /4.

Nemlizade Osman Efendi belongs to the richest and most influential Muslim family in Trabzon. Apart from periodically performing honorary duties such as a judge of the court of appeal and a member of the provincial administrative council, he is a person engaged in trade, and is known for his extreme conservative tendencies rather than having a great wisdom.¹¹

2.2. Sanjak of Samsun

Although *Mustafa Nail Bey* is an exceptionally talented person who serves as the Head of the Education Council in the Ministry of Education, he is a staunch member of the old regime.

Abdullah Bey is the ex-president of the Kosovo Court of Appeal, is known as a very capable and intelligent personality and is a member of the Young Turk Party.

Hacı Ahmet Efendi is a professor (*mudarris*) of Islamic Sciences and is a person with extremely conservative views and thoughts.

Mehmet Ali Bey, the President of the Canik High Criminal Court, is a truly knowledgeable person who is also a member of the Young Turk Party and has very liberal views and thoughts.¹²

2.3. Sanjak of Gümüşhane

Mısırlızade Hayri Efendi is a member of the Bayburt 1st Civil Court of First Instance. Although he has a brave and bold personality, it cannot be said that he is exceptionally talented. It is known that he was a supporter of the Abdülhamit regime.

Kadribeyzade Hafız İbrahim Pasha is the former governor of Ergani and is known for his strong conservatism.¹³

11 AMAE / CADN, *Ambassade de France A Constantinople, Carton 74/190*, "The Report Dated 27 November 1908 Sent by France's Trabzon Consulate to the Istanbul Embassy Concerning the Elections," Nr.33 /4-5.

12 AMAE / CADN, *Ambassade de France A Constantinople, Carton 74/190*, "The Report Dated 27 November 1908 Sent by France's Trabzon Consulate to the Istanbul Embassy Concerning the Elections," Nr.33 /5.

13 AMAE / CADN, *Ambassade de France A Constantinople, Carton 74/190*, "The Report Dated 27 November 1908 Sent by France's Trabzon Consulate to the Istanbul Embassy Concerning the Elections," Nr.33 /5.

2.4. Sanjak of Lazistan

Miralay (colonel) *Ahmet Rıza Bey* is a former military attaché in Belgrade. He is a staunch Young Turk and is in favor of the new regime. French is among the foreign languages that he knows and speaks.

İbrahim Ferit Efendi is currently serving as regent in Hudeyda (Yemen) and is a militant member of the Young Turk Party.¹⁴

3. Allegations and Objections against the Elections in Trabzon

Because the 1908 elections were the first parliamentary elections in more than 30 years, certain disputes arose in some places due to the inadequacy of the election legislation, the ignorance of the officials conducting the proceedings, or the possible abuses in several places. It is known that especially the Armenian and Greek sections complained about the general course of the 1908 elections.

It is also known that while the preparations for the elections were made after the re-declaration of the Constitutional Monarchy, the Armenian and Greek elements prepared and tried to enter the elections in alliance in some places and started to negotiate to determine the policy they would follow and to act together. A delegation appointed by the Armenian Patriarchate went to the Greek Patriarchate and negotiated about the election of the deputies and to nominate the candidates in unity. It is understood that although the Greek Patriarchate Community Association gathered in an extraordinary session to discuss the proposals made by the Armenian community and took initiatives before the Grand Viziership (*Sedaret*), these attempts did not yield positive results.¹⁵ The fact that both the CUP and each of the basic elements of the society had high expectations from these elections, and the disappointment of those who could not find their hopes in the elections caused objections and became the subject of dispute. In this respect, complaints about fraud, corruption, and abuse in the elections or about the election law and election procedure created tensions not only in Istanbul, but also in Trabzon, which was a critical city of the Black Sea where there were tensions even before the constitutional monarchy.

Although the elections were completed in Trabzon, as in other cities, and the Chamber of Deputies was opened on 17 December with a grand ceremony

14 AMAE / CADN, *Ambassade de France A Constantinople, Carton 74/190*, "The Report Dated 27 November 1908 Sent by France's Trabzon Consulate to the İstanbul Embassy Concerning the Elections" Nr.33 /5.

15 Karacakaya, *Türk Kamuoyu ve Ermeni Meselesi*, 75.

attended also by Sultan Abdülhamit II, the election disputes in Trabzon did not subside. The Armenian Archbishopric in Trabzon on the one hand, and the Istanbul Patriarchate on the other, tried to keep this issue on the agenda for some time.

The report dated 30 December 1908 that was sent by the French Consul in Trabzon to Ambassador M. Constans in Istanbul explains that the Armenian Archbishopric of Trabzon was quite dissenting about the elections in the province. The Armenian Archbishop of Trabzon brought to the agenda the complaints spread throughout the election process that there were irregularities in the Trabzon elections, that some people who had allegedly played a role in the 1895 Trabzon events were elected as deputies, that Armenians were intimidated and threatened, and through these allegations, endeavored to gain ground.

According to the French Consulate in Trabzon, the Armenian Patriarchate of Istanbul, upon intense complaints about the elections, sent an instruction to all the religious chiefs present in all cities on 5 December, and stated that it was necessary to act according to this instruction and to respect the call made by the Patriarchate.¹⁶ It is understood that the intense complaints from Trabzon were effective in the Armenian Patriarchate's decision to take action in this direction. In fact, the Consular report included some objections and concerns of the Armenian Archbishopric of Trabzon regarding the elections that took place in Trabzon and the elected deputies. In addition, the Armenian Archbishop of Trabzon informed his entire congregation about the content of the letter in which he informed the Patriarchate about what was going on in Trabzon. The main complaint of the Archbishopric of Trabzon regarding the developments was about the election of Nemlizade Osman Efendi, a member of one of the richest and most influential Muslim families in the city, as deputy.¹⁷

The Trabzon Consul in his reports on the subject transmits the following information: "I learned that an investigation was carried out targeting Nemlizade Osman Efendi, who was recently elected deputy in this city. Osman Efendi is known among Armenians as one of the main instigators of the events in Trabzon on October 8, 1895." The French Consul indicates that, apart from the information that was relayed to him concerning the developments in Trabzon, he has in command of the topic in the framework of the reports that

16 AMAE / CADN, *Ambassade de France A Constantinople, Carton 74/190*, "The Report Dated 30 December 1908 Sent by France's Trabzon Consulate to the Istanbul Embassy Concerning the Elections" Nr. 39 /1.

17 AMAE / CADN, *Ambassade de France A Constantinople, Carton 74/190*, "The Report Dated 30 December 1908 Sent by France's Trabzon Consulate to the Istanbul Embassy Concerning the Elections" Nr. 39 /2.

were prepared during the time when the controversial events in Trabzon took place. In fact, M. Cilliére, who was serving as the Consul in Trabzon during the 1895 events, had prepared a report on the incidents involving the Armenians and had frequently mentioned the name of Nemlizade Osman Efendi in this report. The Consul states that there was a large amount of varying information regarding the role of Nemlizade Osman Efendi in these events. The Consul also notes that Osman Efendi, who had a considerable and respected place in Trabzon, showed a calming attitude during the events according to some, and was considered as the main culprit for the events according to others. According to the impressions of the Consul, Nemlizade Osman Efendi disappeared for a while to prevent the events from escalating and to calm down those who could not restrain their excitement. The Consul also claims that his presence and his appearance further provoked his coreligionists and caused the formation of a joint criminal group.¹⁸

Concerning the 1895 events, the French Consul in Trabzon, although he had an opinion on the subject, preferred to give information about the investigations conducted in relation to these events rather than revealing his thoughts on Nemlizade Osman Efendi's involvement in the events. In fact, as a result of the investigation carried out regarding the events that took place 13 years ago, Fuat Bey, one of the Muslim officers who took part in the investigation, was elected to the Presidency of the Heavy Penal Court. Fuat Bey was known as a respected name among Armenians with his courageous stance and calming demeanor in the events of 8 October.¹⁹

M. Cilliére, when completing his duty on 11 November 1895 and paying a farewell visit to the Ambassador in Istanbul, presented a joint evaluation report on not only the 1895 Events, but also the 1889 Events. After the evaluation of these reports, it was decided that the heaviest responsibility in these events was focused on Nemlizade Osman Efendi, and the report concluded with this assessment. However, it is clear that the Armenians had certain prejudices. At the end of his report, the Trabzon Consul, before passing on the declaration of the Armenian Archbishopric, submitted the following opinion to the Ambassador and considered it necessary to issue a warning:

“In fact, all their stories and narratives, whether in their clubs [of the Armenians] or in other places, focus now on the themes related to the developments that will take place in the Chamber of Deputies. It is

18 AMAE / CADN, *Ambassade de France A Constantinople, Carton 74/190*, “The Report Dated 30 December 1908 Sent by France’s Trabzon Consulate to the Istanbul Embassy Concerning the Elections,” Nr.39 /2.

19 AMAE / CADN, *Ambassade de France A Constantinople, Carton 74/190*, “The Report Dated 30 December 1908 Sent by France’s Trabzon Consulate to the Istanbul Embassy Concerning the Elections,” Nr.39 /2.

necessary to consider and think of their narratives, their approaches to events, their perspectives and all their evaluations as warnings and disclosures that constitute the reasons for the disputes and problems of acceptance among the deputies which will take place in the Chamber of Deputies from now on. Your Excellency, I believe that you will focus your attention on this report and deal effectively with the matter.”²⁰

4. The Instruction Sent by the Armenian Patriarchate to the Armenian Churches

In his report sent to the Embassy in Istanbul, the Consul of France in Trabzon stated that the instruction sent by the Patriarchate was valid for all Armenian churches and people. For this reason, it was requested that necessary actions be taken in accordance with the issues specified in the instruction, and it was stipulated that churches or archbishoprics in the cities would make the necessary effort to fulfill the instructions. It was stated in the instruction of the Armenian Patriarchate that “If there was corruption or fraud in the election of the deputies, if they treated the people in a way that upset and harmed them, if the elected deputies were involved in atrocities and hence are under the suspicion of being guilty, if they are convicted in this regard, and they continue to threaten Armenians during the elections, they should be protested immediately without losing any time”. To ensure the manifestation of the held elections in accordance with the interests of the state and the people, also in line with the law of the administration and of course with the provisions of the Basic Law, it was suggested that the remonstrations be conveyed to the Presidency of the Chamber of Deputies. In this context, it was also recommended that the petition of objection, which would include the signatures to be taken from first and second degree voters regardless of religion and nationality, be submitted to the high court. To conclude, it is stated that this attempt should be made without delay and the Patriarchate should be informed about the actions taken.²¹

The Armenian Archbishop of Trabzon also demanded the fulfillment of the issues in Trabzon specified by the Patriarchate from his congregation and highlighted the view that the fulfillment of these issues was the responsibility of the subjects and the community. According to the French version of the text included in the report of the French Consul, it is suggested that “For protests to be made about the person in question or for some considerations about the

20 AMAE / CADN, *Ambassade de France A Constantinople, Carton 74/190*, “The Report Dated 30 December 1908 Sent by France’s Trabzon Consulate to the İstanbul Embassy Concerning the Elections,” Nr.39 /3-4.

21 AMAE / CADN, *Ambassade de France A Constantinople, Carton 74/190*, “Attachment To The Report Dated 30 December 1908 Sent by France’s Trabzon Consulate to the İstanbul Embassy Concerning the Elections,” Nr.39 /1-2.

way one of the deputies was elected in Trabzon, there is a need for everyone to hastily come to the Archbishopric within 3 days without losing any time, to explain the facts in a way befitting a free citizen and to tell what s/he knows about the subject without fear.”²²

It would be appropriate to evaluate the following statement made by the Archbishop of Trabzon as an example of bringing the results of the election into question and to undermine the efforts of the CUP to rebuild the unity of the country:

“In an environment where it is expected to act in accordance with the general interests of the country, allowing those who set traps for the freedom of the people to enter the Chamber of Deputies by way of either hiding the truths or refraining from taking responsibility will be the cause for allowing public enmity and jeopardizing freedom of people.”²³

5. The Provocation Efforts of the Dashnaks Concerning the Trabzon Elections and the Reactions to These Efforts

The Committee of Union and Progress has been in close relations with the Dashnak elements of the Armenian community for a long time. It is known that this closeness and these relations were conducted in a manner that can be considered very warm even after the Constitutional Monarchy, lasting until the election process. In fact, it is claimed that this rapprochement originated from the policy of the CUP to keep the supporters of Dashnaktsutyun on their side, and the policy of the Dashnaks to benefit from the political and administrative power of the CUP.²⁴ As it is known, it is accepted that many Dashnak administrators who returned to Istanbul after the re-proclamation of the Constitutional Monarchy were originally from Russia and did not know the Young Turks well enough, and they did not even know enough about the conditions in the Ottoman Empire. In this respect, although the Dashnak militants, who could not fully comprehend the distribution and balance of political power in the Ottoman Empire, were convinced that the struggle was over with the re-declaration of the Constitutional Monarchy and that it was necessary to work in line with the interests of the people, the representatives

22 AMAE / CADN, *Ambassade de France A Constantinople, Carton 74/190*, “Attachment to the Report Dated 30 December 1908 Sent by France’s Trabzon Consulate to the İstanbul Embassy Concerning the Elections,” Nr.39 /2.

23 AMAE / CADN, *Ambassade de France A Constantinople, Carton 74/190*, “Attachment to the Report Dated 30 December 1908 Sent by France’s Trabzon Consulate to the İstanbul Embassy Concerning the Elections,” Nr.39 /2. Please see Appendix 1 for the Armenian version and Turkish translation of the text.

24 Feroz Ahmad, *İttihatçılıktan Kemalizme*, çev. Fatmagül Berktaş (Baltalı) (İstanbul: Kaynak Yayınları, 1999), 118.

of the Ottoman branches of the party, who had passed through the ranks of the *fedais* (those who were willing to endure dangers and sacrifice themselves for their cause), were not sure that the constitutional order would be long-lasting and thus did not place their hopes in it. They thus thought that it was necessary to maintain a distance in relations with the CUP. The emergence of two different currents within Dashnaktsutyun was as follows: the “central” movement, which advocated full solidarity with the CUP, and the “provincial” movements, which rejected any method other than revolutionary struggle, demanding the revolutionary organization of the Party.²⁵ Thus, the efforts of the CUP to strengthen its position among the Armenian community through the Dashnaktsutyun, which it tried to carry out before the 1908 elections, and to cooperate based on mutual benefits, also indicate a significant break in the election process.

In fact, a report prepared by the French Consulate in Trabzon and presented to the Ambassador M. Constans in Istanbul points to the guiding leadership of the Dashnaks in this city. The Dashnak Committee took action to protest the elections and election results in Trabzon, put forth its complaint and reaction regarding it, and distributed a circular inviting the public for protests. In essence, this call, which invited the people of Trabzon to protest, was aimed at reinforcing the strength of the statement made by the Patriarchate and raising the reactions. The Dashnaks’ call to protest and complaint about the Trabzon elections, just like the Patriarchate’s statement, aimed to provoke not only the Armenian community, but also all the nations living in the city, all Muslim, Armenian and Greek nations, to protest.²⁶

It is understood that the attempt of the Dashnak Committee to interfere in the elections in Trabzon was not supported by the Armenian Archbishopric of Trabzon. According to the observation and opinion of the Archbishopric, although this initiative of the Dashnaks would give the Armenian community an opportunity to integrate around these problems and bring it to their senses, it also raised the concern that the Dashnaks would constantly intervene in future problems. In that respect, this challenge also manifested itself as a problem of influence and power within the unity of the Armenian community itself.²⁷

25 Arsen Avagyan ve Gaidz F. Minassian, *Ermeniler ve İttihat ve Terakki, İşbirliğinden Çatışmaya*, çev. Ludmilla Danisenko- Mutlucan Şahan (İstanbul: Aras Yayınları, 2005), 39-40.

26 AMAE / CADN, *Ambassade de France A Constantinople, Carton 74/190*, “The Report Dated 3 January 1909 Sent by France’s Trabzon Consulate to the İstanbul Embassy Concerning the Elections,” Nr.2 /1.

27 AMAE / CADN, *Ambassade de France A Constantinople, Carton 74/190*, “The Report Dated 3 January 1909 Sent by France’s Trabzon Consulate to the İstanbul Embassy Concerning the Elections,” Nr.2 /2. Also, for the dispute and animosity between the Dashnaks and the Patriarchate that occurred in Trabzon, see: Nejla Günay, *Zoraki ittifaktan Yol Ayrımına İttihat-Terakki ve Ermeniler* (Ankara: Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi Yayınları, 2015), 134.

Due to the repercussion created by the elections held in Trabzon, the CUP, without coming to the fore, formed a committee of Armenians in the city and organized a meeting for the Armenian nation to express their views and opinions about the deputies. This meeting, which is thought to have been held on 1 January 1909, was held in the Ottoman Club and approximately two hundred Greeks and Armenians attended the meeting. Although details about the meeting were not reflected in the reports, reactionary questions were asked to the re-established committee on how to explain the election of persons known to be incompatible with the deputyship to the Parliament, and silence prevailed in the meeting environment. It is understood from the report of the Consul that the reconstituted committee dominated the meeting in Trabzon to a considerable extent, that there was no reactionary quarrel and intense debate, and that the meeting took place with long negotiations on a telegram that would be unanimously accepted and sent to the Grand Vizier and the Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies. In this respect, after the above-mentioned reaction, no action was taken to accuse or denigrate the elected deputies; on the contrary, it was stated that they had great confidence in the deputies and their voters from Trabzon. They expressed these feelings and thoughts in the letter they sent to the Grand Vizier and the Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies.²⁸

In the report of the French Consul in Trabzon dated 3 January 1909, a copy of the decision, which was taken unanimously with applause at the Trabzon meeting in which Greeks and Armenians participated, and which was sent by telegram to the Grand Vizier and the Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies, is presented as an appendix. In the enclosed document to the report, there is the title of “Attachment of the letter dated 03 January 1909 and the summary of the telegram to be presented to the Grand Vizier and the Speaker of the Parliament”. Although there are twenty-nine signatories on the telegram, no information could be found on who the signatories were.

However, the telegram briefly states the following:

“Although they were elected and sent to the Parliament by us as our elected religious reverences, the views and thoughts published on behalf of the Armenian Dashnaks Committee, and through some intrigues working in line with these thoughts, it was sought to make our deputies insignificant and discredited, and their dignity was sought to be tarnished. Due to this depressing situation, the Armenian community felt the need to declare its deputies as its representatives, without considering the maneuvers inspired by feelings and thoughts ranging from intrigue to revenge, and to declare their loyalty and subordination

28 AMAE / CADN, *Ambassade de France A Constantinople, Carton 74/190*, “The Report Dated 3 January 1909 Sent by France’s Trabzon Consulate to the İstanbul Embassy Concerning the Elections,” Nr.2 /2-3.

to the Presidency of the Parliament and the Grand Vizier, which are the representatives of our country and nation, through a general meeting in a joint agreement.”²⁹

In fact, this situation shows a significant deviation in the countryside from a long-known cooperation policy between the Young Turks and the Dashnaks. Alongside this, it is possible to see from this occasion that the CUP had the ability to act in alliance with local elements in events that had a tendency to get out of control.

The parties who wanted to create turmoil and doubt regarding the Trabzon elections preferred to focus their acts on some of the elected deputies. As explained above, the main target here was Nemlizade Osman Efendi. The French Consul in Trabzon also touched upon the same issue. He pointed out that “As stated in the report dated 30 December, the person targeted by the Armenians was Nemlizade Osman Efendi, but rather than the importance of this, it is necessary to consider that the increasing mentality change among the Armenians has started to become more important than this issue.”³⁰ Essentially, the French Consul put forward the expectation that with the re-declaration of the Constitutional Monarchy and as the new regime established itself, the situation of the Armenians would improve visibly. He also asserted that as long as they would meet in common interest and cooperation, the feelings and thoughts of conflict and revenge would be replaced by an understanding that would serve freedom. But no matter what, the stance of the CUP on this issue was clear. The Consul believed that the attitude of the Young Turks in this investigation, which was conducted, albeit covertly, against a member of an influential Muslim family like Nemlizade, gave sufficient insight into the future developments.³¹

Trabzon Governor Arifi Bey, in the face of developments aimed at sabotaging the elections to a considerable extent through the Trabzon elections, and at the same time discrediting some deputies with dubious election allegations for casting a shadow on the Chamber of Deputies, sent a telegram to the Ministry of Interior on 2 January 1908 and conveyed information on the smear campaign which had been conducted for some time by the Dashnaks in Trabzon. In this

29 AMAE / CADN, *Ambassade de France A Constantinople, Carton 74/190*, “The Text of the Telegram to be Presented to the Grand Vizier and Presidency of the Chamber of Deputies, Attached to the Report Dated 3 January 1909 Sent by France’s Trabzon Consulate to the İstanbul Embassy Concerning the Elections,” Nr.2 /1.

30 AMAE / CADN, *Ambassade de France A Constantinople, Carton 74/190*, “The Report Dated 3 January 1909 Sent by France’s Trabzon Consulate to the İstanbul Embassy Concerning the Elections,” Nr.2 /3.

31 AMAE / CADN, *Ambassade de France A Constantinople, Carton 74/190*, “The Report Dated 3 January 1909 Sent by France’s Trabzon Consulate to the İstanbul Embassy Concerning the Elections,” Nr.2 /4.

context, Mithat Bey, who was a member of the delegation that visited the provincial authority on 2 January representing the people of Trabzon, made a statement and drew attention to a declaration published on behalf of the Dashnak Association in Trabzon. Mithat Bey stated that there were complaints and provocations in the Dashnak declaration which alleged that there was corruption in the elections, that objectionable persons were placed among the deputies, and that personalities who did not conform to the prestige of the Constitutional Monarchy and to the dignity of deputyship were sent to the Parliament. He declared that these accusations were groundless and untrue. In his statement, Mithat Bey said that the deputies were chosen with full freedom, that care was taken to ferry them with an unprecedented farewell, and that they were given a warm welcome in *Dersaadet* (a word used for İstanbul that meant “Door of Happiness”). Mithat Bey further highlighted that these groundless accusations against these deputies were seen as an infringement on the honor and dignity of the approximately one and a half million inhabitants of Trabzon province and stated that “these allegations are completely rejected.”³² The Ministry of Internal Affairs informed the Presidency of the Chamber of Deputies on 4 January that “the public demanded that the statements made by some rancorousness people that the Trabzon Deputies do not meet the legal requirements should not be taken into account”, and sent the copy of the telegram received from the Trabzon province to the Parliament.³³

On the other hand, the attempts of the Dashnaksutyun to cast a shadow over the Trabzon elections and to discredit some of the deputies caused a reaction not only in Trabzon but also in the nearby cities. In another official letter sent by the Ministry of Internal Affairs to the Presidency of the Chamber of Deputies dated 27 January 1909, as an addition to the letter of 11 January 1909, several testimonies conveyed by the people of Ordu were submitted to the Parliament. In the testimonies, it was stated that the complaints of certain people about the former Mufti of Trabzon, Imameddin and Eyyübzade İzzet and Nemlizade Hacı Osman Efendi, originated from personal enmity and that the said deputies had honor and dignity.³⁴

Thus, after the meeting held on 1 January and the acceptance of the will to protect the deputies with the initiative of prominent Armenian personalities, the disputes on the Trabzon elections brought to the agenda after the elections were held and the attempts to cause doubts on these elections with the considerable efforts of the Patriarchate of İstanbul and the Archbishopric of Trabzon gradually lost their importance, and the situation in the city returned to normal.

32 Ottoman Archives of the Turkish Presidency (*BOA.*), *DH. MKT.*, 02700.00067.001, 20 Kanun-1 Evvel 1324.

33 *BOA.*, *DH. MKT.*, 02700.00067.002, 22 Kanun-1 Evvel 1324.

34 *BOA.*, *DH. MKT.*, 027380.00019.001, 14 Kanun-1 Sani 1324.

6. Conclusion and Assessment

The 1908 elections, the first parliamentary elections of the Second Constitutional Era, were held in November-December following the completion of the legal preparations for the election process. The 1908 elections, as they were the first parliamentary elections in more than thirty years, brought about certain disputes in some places owing to the inadequacy of the election legislation, the ignorance of the officials who conducted the proceedings, or the occasional abuses that occurred in some cases. Regarding the general course of the 1908 elections, it is known that especially the Armenian and Greek elements complained about the developments in the election process and the election results. The fact that the results of the elections did not meet their expectations had a significant impact on the complaints of the Armenian and Greek communities regarding the election procedures and more broadly about the elections. In fact, after the re-proclamation of the Constitutional Monarchy and following the preparations for the elections, the Armenian and Greek elements had some initiatives in some places to participate in the elections by forming an alliance. However, these attempts and efforts did not yield a positive result.

The non-Muslim elements, who could not achieve the results they hoped for in the elections and who came from quite different ethnic, religious, cultural, and even ideological backgrounds, tried to make the elections controversial in a process in which many factors played a role. The fact that both major non-Muslim communities turned the disputes about the elections into the dominant problem of the election process, rather than solving the problem, led to the strengthening of the sense of in-group solidarity in their communities. This situation caused doubts and hesitations about the Ottomanism project which the CUP insistently defended. In this context, concerning the election process and its aftermath, it is necessary to consider both the CUP and the irredentist feelings and effects supported by the economic and social power-based class structures of the two communities that stood out in this issue. The irredentist tendencies in the Armenian and Greek communities seemed to have been somewhat expressed through the elections, although both communities were persuaded to join different movements, and those who protected them preferred not to come forward for the time being. As a matter of fact, although the objections and reactions in Istanbul, Izmir, and Trabzon, where there was a lot of tension before the Constitutional Monarchy, were presented as a natural objection and an innocent legal pursuit, in reality, it is possible to consider this move as a test and a subtle probe against the political understanding that the CUP wanted to develop again. In this context, following the failure to get expected results in an election held in November 1908 and the regret of the communities failing to participate in the elections with an alliance list, it is significant that unfounded accusations against some deputies were brought to

the agenda on the pretext that they took part in the events of 1895. In the event that there were some allegations and doubts about some deputies, the procedures and conditions of the way to object to the candidacy of these people during the election process were clear. However, there is no reasonable and logical answer to the question of why this issue was not objected to at that time.

In this case, even after the opening of the Chamber of Deputies, there may be more than one answer to the question of why the Dashnaks on the one hand and the Patriarchate on the other tried to keep the Trabzon elections on the agenda. There is no doubt that the existence of a power struggle and struggle for leadership between the Patriarchate, which dominated the ruling classes in economically strong cities such as Istanbul and Izmir, and the Dashnaks, who were partially effective on a weaker provincial bourgeoisie, constituted an important aspect of this issue. Considering the friendly relations between the CUP and the Dashnaks in the Ottoman provinces, it is not possible to assert that the 1908 elections created such a deep problem as to cause the two sides to reach a crossroads. Alongside this, while one aspect of the issue shows the struggle between the Patriarchate and the Dashnaks, another aspect shows that the Dashnaks acted with the calculation that they would take advantage of their closeness with the CUP and strengthen their influence in the Armenian community through the problems in the elections. However, the CUP, with a sincere intention dedicated to serving the harmony and development of the unity of the empire, believed that it could rebuild the political order that would ensure the Ottoman union through elections. In this respect, it would be appropriate to evaluate the 1908 elections from the perspective of the CUP's policies regarding nations and different dynamics in the political and social fabric.

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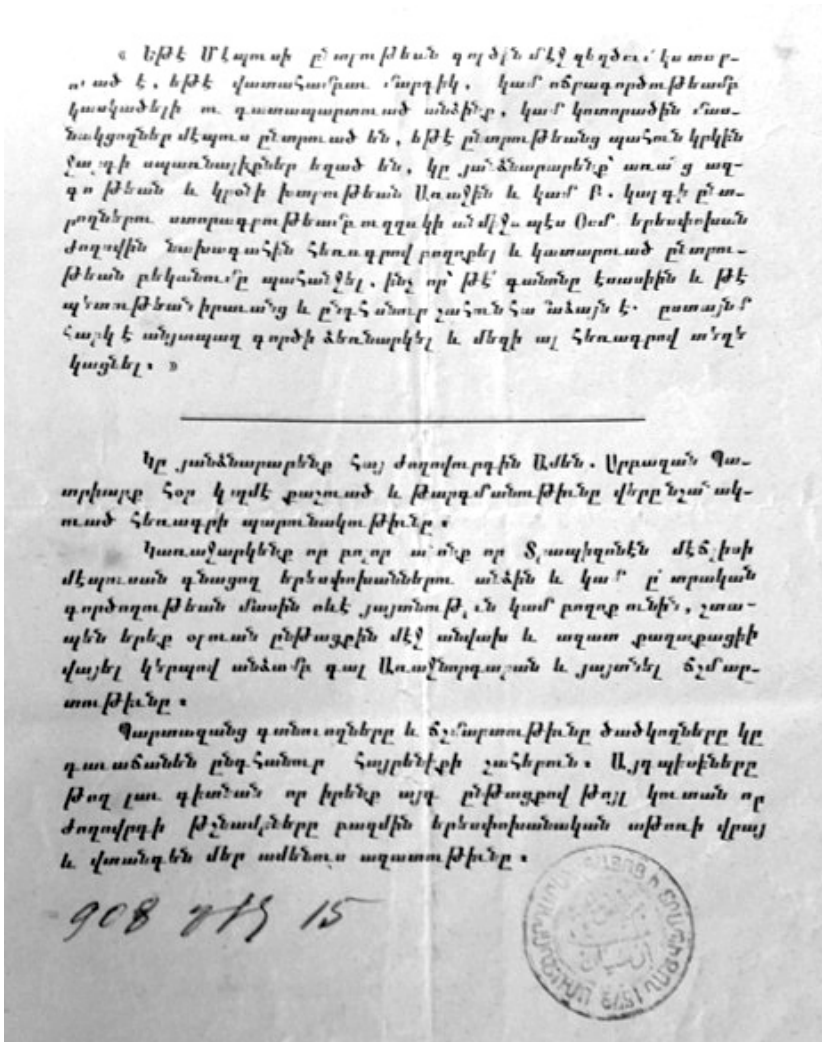
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APPENDIX

Appendix 1: The text of the appeal made by the Armenian Patriarchate of Istanbul and the Armenian Archbishopric of Trabzon - AMAE / CADN, *Ambassade de France A Constantinople, Carton 74/190*, Report Annex dated 30 December 1908, Nr.39#



The author would like to thank Ms. Dr. Doğanay Eryılmaz (faculty member of Ankara University, Faculty of Languages and History-Geography, Department of Caucasian Languages and Cultures) and Mr. Ercan Cihan Ulupınar (instructor at Social Sciences University of Ankara), who translated the Armenian text shown in Appendix 1.

Appendix 1 (cont.)

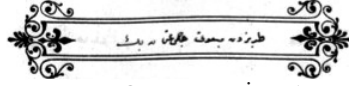
“If there is fraud in the election of the deputies, if people who are notorious or suspected of crimes and those on trial or those who participated in the massacres are elected deputies, if there is a danger of massacres again during the elections; the first and second tier voters, regardless of nationality or religion, with your signatures, immediately transmit your complaints by telegram to the Ottoman Speaker of the Deputies and request that the held election be nullified. We give you the task of taking immediate action and notifying us by telegram so that everything is in accordance with the Basic Law, the laws of the country, and the general interests.”

“We are forwarding to the Armenian people the translation of the above-mentioned telegram sent by the holy Patriarchate.

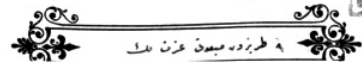
We recommend that anyone who has a complaint about the deputies going to the Chamber of Deputies from Trabzon or anybody who has any explanation concerning the election activity should come to the archbishopric within three days, without fear and as free citizens, and tell the truth.

Those who do not fulfill their responsibility and hide the truth betray the interests of the entire state. Such people should know that in this process, they allow the enemies of the people to take seat in parliament as deputies and, most of all, they endanger freedom.

Archbishopric of Armenians in Trabzon, 1879



Photograph 1: Trabzon Deputy Hacı Osman Bey. İBB Atatürk Kitaplığı Albümler, ALB. 32/185



Photograph 2: Trabzon Deputy İzzet Bey. İBB Atatürk Kitaplığı Albümler, ALB. 32/186