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The constitutional revolution of 1908 and its aftermath in Trabzon
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CONCLUSION

In the most general terms, this study examines the events that transpired in Trabzon, which was a major center in the Ottoman territories, taking as its timeframe the period between the proclamation of the constitution in 1908 and the outbreak of World War I in 1914. As a result of the rebellion in Rume-
lia against Sultan Abdülhamid II, the Committee of Union and Progress was able to secure the reinstatement of the constitution and the reopening of the Ottoman Parliament. While they were unable to dethrone Sultan Abdülhamid II, who they despised, they were able to start playing a considerable role in the administration of the central government, which in turn paved the way for the Committee to start taking control in the provinces as well.

Before the proclamation of the constitution, there was an opposition movement in Trabzon, although it was rather weak, and it appears that the local nobles were not overly eager to make their positions clear until it became obvious who was going to come out on top in the struggle between Sultan Abdülhamid II and the Committee. After the Committee achieved its goal of reinstating the constitution, all of the dignitaries in the city sided with the opposition in an attempt to maintain their social standing. Such an approach was also reflected in the elections; the nobles of Trabzon used their power in the elections and managed to win seats. The fact that it wasn't Committee members, who made a great effort to win, but local nobles who became members of parliament is indicative of how the local nobles were able to open up a space for themselves in politics by maintaining their strength and position.

The people of Trabzon, who were initially not overly enthusiastic about the proclamation of the constitution, slowly started to take action as the result of the propaganda efforts of the Unionists. A decision was made to intervene in bureaucratic operations by holding celebrations in honor of the new freedoms that had been obtained and request that previously appointed civil servants, who were disliked by the population, resign from their positions. It is notable that in the early days of the Second Constitutional Era, little changed for ordinary citizens except for the speeches and fanfare, and most everyone tried to show that they themselves were supporters of the Committee, as people who weren't members of the Committee of Union and Progress were deemed to be traitors.

The newspaper *Trabzon'da Meşveret* was put out by Naci Bey, who was a great supporter of the Committee. The newspaper became the mouthpiece of the Committee through the articles it published and as it tried to get the people of Trabzon to adopt a particular understanding of the Unionist regime, it also attempted to sway them in the direction of Unionist policies. In their propaganda efforts, the members of the Committee and *Trabzon'da Meşveret* emphasized the need to carry out work hand in hand to strengthen the homeland and nation, which was depicted as being the home of all Ottomans, Muslim and non-Muslim alike. This was presented as having been made possible by the pathway hewn by the Committee of Union and Progress, which in turn was presented as the champion of freedom. The results of this propaganda and the social mobilization efforts launched by the Committee materialized quickly, as evidenced by the enthusiastic celebrations held in honor of the opening of the Ottoman Parliament. After the opening, the Committee started directing the complaints of the people, which had previously been directed to them, to parliament and make it clear that parliament, which was dominated by Committee members, was going to solve all of the nation's problems. Reactions to the Press Law, which had been drafted with the aim of taking control of the press, was the work of supporters of constitutionalism. As a result of these efforts, a gathering was held in which the participants, consisting of Turks, Greeks and Armenians, all spoke their mother languages. This gathering is indicative of the desire of the people of Trabzon to protect the gains they had acquired through constitutionalism. The events that transpired in the city regarding the 31st of March Incident are one of the most important signs of the fact that Unionists had established a strong organization and were successful in their efforts to shape public opinion in line with their goals. In the same vein, the violent reaction to those counterrevolutionary efforts is further proof of just how effective Unionist propaganda had been in the city.

The Unionists had originally been established in opposition to the authoritarian regime of Sultan Abdülhamid II on the basis of the slogan "Equality, Justice, Brotherhood and Liberty!" with the aim of creating a system of administration based on freedom. Over time, however, an opposition movement arose, and the Committee opted to suppress it in turn. The most salient example of this shift away from freedom were the elections of 1912, which today we would call in Turkey "elections with the stick." In order to protect their positions against the opposition which had risen up against them, Unionists resorted to suppressive measures in taking control of the elections. At the end of the elections, which were marked sporadically by major bouts of violence, the Committee achieved its ends. Just as in the rest of the country, in Trabzon the results of the elections of 1912 were contentious and questionable, and while the opposition claimed

that the election had been rigged and tried to call the results into question, their efforts were in vain. Their efforts weren't forgotten by the Committee members; after Mahmut Şevket Pasha was assassinated on the 11th of June in 1913 and an empire-wide witch hunt began, the Committee took advantage of the situation to persecute the local opposition. Hasan Hicabi Bey, the leader of the opposition in Trabzon, was exiled to Sinop, and the opposition newspaper *Tarık* was closed down. With matters as they stood, the Committee, which had critiqued Sultan Abdülhamid II for ruling the country with an iron fist, was now adopting the very same technique. However, it should be borne in mind that an administration that had just taken over from an authoritarian ruler was likely to become authoritarian itself in the process of establishing an administration based on freedom, equality and justice.

Between 1908 and 1914, what could be called the first half of the Second Constitutional Period, Ottoman society experienced a major trauma as the empire faced an increasing number of problems including wars and waves of Muslim refugees fleeing lost territories to Anatolia. The fact that Europe remained silent about the difficulties the empire was facing only served to pour salt on the wound, paving the way for that trauma to be transformed into a powerful sense of nationalism among Muslim Ottoman subjects.

As this study demonstrates in detail, that trauma and the cresting wave of nationalism that resulted from it had a significant impact on Trabzon, which in those times was a very multicultural city. In particular, the negative atmosphere created by the Ottoman defeats in the Balkan wars started slowly eating away at the sense of social peace in the city. The tensions that began developing between the Muslims living in the city and its Greek and Armenian population were a harbinger of the fact that in the next ten years, those tensions would only escalate, leading to even greater problems. In the first half of the Second Constitutional Period, social life in the multicultural city of Trabzon broke down within a matter of ten years as a result of the events that transpired there.

In the latter half of the nineteenth century, Trabzon grew in importance because of its strategic position and developments in international trade. As both Muslim and non-Muslim merchants grew wealthy thanks to the expanding trade network that ran through the city, the opening of consulates, foreign companies, banks and insurance firms further contributed to the string of positive developments that were occurring.

The railway and port projects drawn up after the proclamation of the constitution were intended to increase the trade capacity of the city, but they never came to fruition despite public support because of the political and economic problems the state was facing in the international arena. Trabzon was one of

the places where the boycotts organized by the Unionists to protest the political crises were the most effective, but it must be noted that the boycotts, which were bolstered by increasingly strong nationalist sentiment, had a negative impact on the city's economy. As the developments which led to the boycotts in Trabzon were negatively affecting social and economic life in the city, the foundations were being laid for the national economic policy that the Unionists were trying to implement.

Following the political revolution, the Committee started major reforms across the empire in the field of education with the aim of bringing Ottoman society up to the level of modern civilization. The primary goal was to modernize the education system and the second aim was to increase the number of educational institutions in all regions, and the effects were felt in Trabzon as well. The main problem that the city's notables were trying to solve was the lack of teachers capable of providing an education steeped in modern methods and insufficient resources. It was thought that religious bigotry in education could be eliminated by replacing the instructors who had been trained in religious schools with those who had graduated from teacher training schools.

The fact that there weren't enough school buildings was another critical problem in the field of education in Trabzon. While all of the Greek and Armenian villages in the outlying areas of Trabzon had schools and churches, most of the Muslim villages lacked schools, and that prompted state officials to take swift action. One of the issues raised in this study is the effect of the propaganda activities carried out with the aim of securing public support in terms of finances to cover the costs of constructing school buildings, paying for their upkeep and ensuring that the teachers received suitable salaries. Another reason why there was so much concern about increasing the level of education in poor villages was that it was thought that by doing so, they could counter the efforts of Christian missionaries secretly working in the region.

Another issue raised in this study is the night classes that Unionists organized for people who couldn't attend the courses offered during the day because they had to work. While the aim was to teach attendees how to read and write as well as provide a basic education, the classes were also used to indoctrinate them with the ideas of the Committee of Union and Progress.

After the proclamation of the constitution, the city of Trabzon, which was already multicultural, became even more culturally dynamic, and this cultural variety had an impact on the local press. Plays and film screenings that brought to the fore public concerns were an important means of spreading Unionist ideas and encouraging people to take part in charity projects.

The dynamism created by the Unionists in the social arena was also effective in Trabzon. Associations and clubs were established by the Unionists as a way to fill in the gaps of state services, and the charity campaigns they launched offered support to those in need and lent a helping hand to people beyond the reach of the state. All of these issues are taken up in this study as a reflection of the impacts that the Second Constitutional Period had on the city of Trabzon.

In conclusion, the projects that the Unionists set into motion after the proclamation of the constitution to bring about transformation and change affected the entire empire, but their effects were strongly felt in Trabzon. Ultimately however, Trabzon, which was devastated politically, economically, culturally and socially as the result of wars, lost its multicultural character.

