

7 Ottoman parliamentary procedure in the Chamber of Deputies (*Meclis-i Mebusan*) and the Great National Assembly of Turkey (*Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi*), 1876–1923

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Introduction

Sometime in the late 1980s, my mother and I were visiting a Turkish family in western Turkey. We were sitting with several women and small children in the living room, where, as was the custom, the TV was on, showing a parliamentary debate. Nobody was paying attention to the TV, until suddenly a fistfight involving at least a dozen deputies broke out on screen. Twice as many deputies rushed over, trying to separate the fighting ones. The women in the living room reacted with mildly amused disapproval: “Look what kind of deputies we have! This is what they call democracy and civilization! Don’t they know that foreigners are watching?!”

To this day, it is not uncommon for such brawls to break out in the Turkish National Assembly, as well as in many other (but, interestingly, not all) parliaments around the world.¹ Parliamentarians, like all other people, sometimes do not follow their own rules, the internal regulations (Turkish: *içtüzük*, Ottoman Turkish: *nizamname-i dahiliyesi*), which, across the globe, ban the use of physical violence in the house. Such rule-breaking by deputies, however, is of specific delicacy, as parliaments not only *have* laws, but also *make* them. To put it differently: internal regulations are laws that prescribe how laws ought to be made. Nonobservance or bending of internal rules (such as election fraud, manipulation of votes, threats or violence against political adversaries, nonobservance of quota rules) may happen in the very process of passing legislation, and may therefore jeopardize either the legitimacy of the laws enacted by such illegal means or, even worse, that of the parliamentary system as such.

From a historian’s point of view, internal regulations and their more or less faithful observance by deputies can be instructive for a better understanding of parliamentary systems and their change over time. To check regulations against their application means to study the relationship between parliaments and the other institutions in constitutional regimes. This is what the present chapter aims to do for the parliamentary experience of the late Ottoman Empire during its First

(1876–1878) and Second (1908–1920) Constitutional Periods, as well as for the years leading up to the establishment of the Republic of Turkey (1920–1923). During those three years, and in fact until 1927, the Great National Assembly (*Büyük Millet Meclisi*, from 1921 onward: *Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi*, henceforth: TBMM) officially followed the internal regulations of the last Ottoman Chamber of Deputies (*Heyet-i Mebusan*, from 1908 onward: *Meclis-i Mebusan*). However, faithfulness with the late Ottoman internal regulations decreased massively during the period of transformation from empire to nation-state. I will argue that these violations can be explained as results of two diverging yet parallel trends that had already been present in late Ottoman times: the first was a drive toward a strengthening of parliament vis-à-vis other constitutional institutions. The second may be described as the prevailing of an authoritarian spirit in the guise of parliamentarism.

Historical context: the Tanzimat period

Compared to many other monarchies among its contemporaries, the Ottoman Empire was not particularly late at becoming a constitutional state: the first Ottoman Constitution was promulgated in 1876, roughly 5 years after that of the German Reich, 35 years after that of Belgium, and 18 years prior to that of Japan. This first experiment in representative government, however, was short-lived, starting in 1877 with the assembly and ending in 1878 with the dissolution of the lower chamber, which was followed by 30 years of autocratic rule under Sultan Abdülhamit II (r. 1876–1909).²

The Ottoman Constitution of 1876 was not the first modern text to lay down certain principles of government: the famous reform Edict of Gülhane, proclaimed in 1839, promised security of life, honor, and property, as well as regular and fair taxation and conscription systems for all Ottoman subjects.³ The document, which promised a long list of reforms, is today considered the starting point of the modernization period known as Tanzimat.⁴ Its text, however, makes frequent reference to Islamic divine law, the *Sharia*. The Edict was firmly grounded in a traditional Islamic, premodern understanding of governance, in which inequality before the law was considered normal and subjects, in return for just rule, were obliged to obey their ruler.⁵ A second reform edict was issued as a result of massive Western diplomatic pressure in 1856. This document, which is known as Reform Edict (*Islahat Fermani*), no longer mentions the *Sharia*. Instead, the Sultan declared that “my subjects, who in my sight are all equal, and equally dear to me”⁶ would be taxed equally and would all be subject to military service (which they would be able to avoid by sending proxies or paying a fee). The text thus implicitly contradicted the conception of Islamic law, in which non-Muslims were considered as protected, yet inferior subjects who were not allowed to bear arms and who had to pay a special head tax, the *cizye*.⁷ Apart from introducing the idea of equality, the document also contained a long list of rights and privileges granted to Christian communities, such as that to establish and renovate churches. It thus contained *in nuce* the contradiction

between the two modern principles of equality before the law on the one hand and minority rights on the other.

We know today that the Tanzimat reforms, despite and possibly because of their rhetoric of justice and reordering, were accompanied by a strong and increasing sense of injustice among the population.⁸ Probably the most important reason for this was that the political project promising political equality contrasted sharply and coincided with increasing economic inequality.⁹ Moreover, the era of reform provided the populace with a new set of concepts that they could use when expressing their grievances, of which there were many.¹⁰ To name but a few: those living in the countryside suffered from arbitrary taxation, indebtedness, and rampant banditry, while city dwellers witnessed the twin effects of the Ottoman economy's integration into world markets: the Ottoman producing sector faltered in the face of cheap European imports, the very goods that the *nouveau riche*, in violation of traditional sensibilities, were displaying more and more openly.¹¹ Moreover, local conflicts in the provinces, which were usually triggered by economic conflict, came to be framed as inter-religious strife, facilitating interventions of the European Great Powers into Ottoman domestic affairs.¹²

By far the best-studied current of criticism of all these developments is that voiced by the so-called Young Ottomans, a group of bureaucrats and intellectuals who, from the 1860s onward, used the new medium of the newspaper, first at home and then from their European places of exile, to rally for the promulgation of an Ottoman constitution and the establishment of an Ottoman parliament.¹³ The introduction of government accountability and public discussion of all matters pertaining to the state, they believed, would finally bring about the security of life, honor, and property that the 1839 Gülhane Edict had so utterly failed to bring about. They further believed that a parliament, by helping to redress their grievances, would satisfy those Christian populations within the Ottoman realm who were increasingly drawn toward nationalist ideas. The introduction of a constitution and a parliamentary system was, in other words, expected to do nothing short of saving the Ottoman state, and quite instantly so. Like political counselors in earlier Ottoman centuries, the Young Ottomans presented the idea of political consultation not as a new idea but as the reinstatement of an ancient principle of Islamic governance, thus trying to make it palatable to an inherently conservative society in which innovation was not considered a virtue, but rather a threat.¹⁴

By the 1860s, several territories that still – if only nominally – belonged to the Ottoman state already had constitutions and representative assemblies. This was true for Serbia (autonomous since 1830, constitutional since 1859), Bulgaria (1879), the Danube Principalities (1859), and Tunisia (1860).¹⁵ Representative government was on the rise in those territories that were still under full Ottoman sovereignty as well. On the local level, forms of representation such as councils of elders and headmen in villages, as well as councils of notables and guild leaders in cities, had been around for a long time.¹⁶ Over the course of the nineteenth century, these local institutions were reorganized by the central state and complemented by provincial councils. A Sultanic decree issued in 1840 stipulated

the formation of councils that would have at least some members elected among the population, usually from among the religious leaders and other notables in all provinces and sub-provinces of the empire.¹⁷ Moreover, between 1862 and 1865, the Armenians, Orthodox Greeks, and Jews of the empire were allowed to draw up organic laws for their communities, establishing councils that resembled small parliaments insofar as their lay members were elected.¹⁸ The Young Ottoman Namık Kemal pointed to these assemblies “as possible models for a chamber of deputies.”¹⁹ The provincial law of 1864 foresaw the establishment of elected provincial councils not only in all Ottoman provinces, but also in the district centers, a principle extended to municipal councils in 1870. The implementation in cities and towns, however, appears to have taken some time. Only males had suffrage, and both (male) active and passive voting rights were tied to tax qualifications that excluded the poor. There were quotas for non-Muslims on the councils, who would be elected by their respective communities.²⁰

The Constitution of 1876

The promulgation of the Ottoman Constitution in 1876 can be attributed to a contingency of domestic and international factors. A serious financial and economic crisis during which the empire defaulted on its foreign debt led to a coup d'état led by reformist forces around Midhat Paşa. In the course of these events, Sultan Abdülaziz (r. 1861–1876) was first deposed and then died under suspicious circumstances. The putschists brought crown-prince Murat to the throne, who was known to be leaning toward a constitution but soon turned out to be mentally ill. After only six months, he was replaced by his brother Hamit (Abdülhamit II), who agreed to promulgate a constitution.²¹

The Constitution that was drafted in the following months was built on the existing structures and practices discussed above. It declared Ottoman territory to be inviolable and allocated sovereignty with the eldest prince of the house of Osman (art. 3). The Sultan could not be held accountable in any way, his person was declared sacred (art. 5). The Constitution introduced a parliament composed of two chambers: the Senate (*Heyet-i Ayan*), whose members would be named for life, and the Assembly of Deputies (*Heyet-i Mebusan*), who would be elected for a legislative period of four years (art. 69).²² There would be one deputy for every 50,000 male inhabitants (art. 61) (in practice, however, the representation rate differed considerably between different parts of the empire).²³ All male Ottoman citizens above the age of 30 who could speak Turkish could run as candidates, unless they claimed to hold citizenship of another state, were domestic servants of another person,²⁴ were standing trial or had been sentenced in court, had gone bankrupt without rehabilitation, or “lay notoriously in disrepute for their conduct.”²⁵ After another four years, potential deputies would be required to also read Turkish and, “to the extent possible,” write it (art. 68). Unlike their peers in other countries, such as the German Reich,²⁶ the Ottoman deputies were salaried, being entitled to 20,000 *kuruş* (equalling 200 gold Lira) plus travel expenses per parliamentary year (art. 76).²⁷ Both chambers would sit four months per year,

from November until the beginning of March (art. 43). Deputies were not allowed to hold any other public office except a minister post (art. 76). They were free to express their opinions and to vote as they liked (art. 47). They could not be prosecuted for their opinions, unless a two-thirds majority of the chamber decided to strip them of their immunity (art. 48). The lower chamber had a quorum of half the deputies plus one (art. 51). Bills or changes to existing laws would usually be brought forward by the cabinet. Deputies could also ask for laws to be changed but had to send their proposals to the Grand Vizier, who would submit them to the Sultan, who would decide whether or not to charge the State Council (*Şura-yi Devlet*) with preparing such a bill (art. 53).²⁸

The first and second elections of 1876 and 1877 were performed according to a provisional electoral law, stipulating that deputies would be elected by and from among the existing district and provincial councils, which were controlled by the respective local notables.²⁹ The candidacy age was set at 25 (5 years younger than prescribed in the Constitution).³⁰ Autonomous regions such as Mount Lebanon and de facto independent ones such as Egypt were not represented in the chamber. The number of deputies for each district and province was set by the central government, while the provincial governments decided about quotas for Muslims and non-Muslims.³¹ Apart from allowing for a relatively quick election process, electing deputies from among the existing councils had the advantage that those who were sent “happened to be eminently conversant in imperial issues.”³² As for the deputies’ social backgrounds, Kemal Karpat has noted that almost all deputies, regardless of the professions they named in the parliamentary statistics, were part of the “upper propertied class” in the provinces.³³ This was a social background very different from that of the Young Ottomans, who, as part of the new bureaucracy-intelligentsia, usually depended on salaries and hailed from Istanbul.³⁴ Since property in (still officially state-owned) agricultural land had only become fully tradeable since 1858, and land, now under increasingly capitalist conditions, continued to be the main means of production, we may well say that the chamber represented the interests of the economically dominant class (Karpat makes this point but, somewhat misleadingly, speaks of a “new middle class”).³⁵ Unlike the European bourgeoisie, however, this class was often identical with those urban elites of the ancien régime (higher *ulema*, guild leaders and merchant families) who had managed to acquire landed property. As property owners, the deputies were interested in reliable, accountable governance and liberal legislation, but their interests were far from adversary to those of the state. There was also no aristocracy standing in their way. With regard to their ethno-religious background, the deputies were quite diverse: the first *Heyet-i Mebusan* (HM) had 119 deputies, of which 71 were Muslims, 44 Christians of various denominations, and 4 Jews. The second had 113 deputies: 64 Muslims and 49 non-Muslims.³⁶

The *Heyet-i Mebusan* was initially a relatively weak parliament (just like the contemporary ones in Prussia and Austria-Hungary).³⁷ Compared to the three other constitutional institutions that were involved in law-making (the Sultan, the State Council, and the Senate), the *Heyet-i Mebusan*’s rights were limited to grilling ministers and merely asking for investigations against them. Whether pertaining

to legislation or disciplinary action, all final decisions were taken by the Sultan, who possessed an absolute veto right and was not responsible before the law.³⁸

The First Constitutional Period was rather short: the first Chamber of Deputies sat between March 19, 1877, and June 28, 1877. Following a second round of elections, the second legislative period started in December 1877, ending prematurely in February 1878, when Sultan Abdülhamit II, in the midst of the Russo–Ottoman War of 1877–1878, dissolved the chamber and abrogated the Constitution.

Within these five months, the chamber managed to discuss (among others) such important public matters as a major uprising in Montenegro,³⁹ the Russian declaration of war in April 1877,⁴⁰ the resulting further aggravation of the Ottoman state's financial situation,⁴¹ and the budget law.⁴² (Robert Devereux notes that “parliamentary control of financial matters was the one field in which both Palace and Porte appear to have scrupulously observed both the letter and the spirit of the Constitution”).⁴³ The HM also debated the question of military service for non-Muslims and notions of a shared Ottoman citizenship.⁴⁴ It refused to change the law for the proclamation of a state of emergency,⁴⁵ insisted on a liberalization of the press law,⁴⁶ passed a new provincial law,⁴⁷ and an electoral law. The last-mentioned, however, only came into effect during the Second Constitutional Period (1908 and onward) because it had not passed the Senate by February 1878.⁴⁸ The very first legal document to be passed by the chamber were the rules of conduct for its own work. They were discussed in the third, fourth, and fifth sessions, on March 23–25, 1877. Following the Sultan's approval, the *nizamname* was published and came into force on May 14, 1877.⁴⁹

Researchers disagree about the models followed by the committee that was in charge of drafting the text of the *nizamname*. According to Servet Armağan, it was the Italian and Belgian regulations, according to Devereux, “contemporary European parliaments, especially the French and the British.”⁵⁰ Al-Barazi gives the names of the committee members as Ziya Bey, Namık Kemal, Chamich Ohannes, Ramiz Efendi, Sava Paşa, Abdin Bey, and Hayrullah Efendi.⁵¹ Unfortunately, there are no minutes of this committee available. We only know that the draft was submitted to the State Council on February 17, 1877, and ready for discussion in the HM by March 23, 1877.⁵²

The *nizamname* of 1877 was composed of 16 sections setting the rules for the following procedures: (1) the appointment of preliminary chairmen and preparation of election documents, (2) the election of chairmen and minute takers, (3) formation of branches and committees, (4) preparation of and voting on bills, (5) the interpellation of bills by ministers, (6) complaints about ministers, (7) discussion of bills, (8) petitions to the parliament, (9) declaration of urgency for bills, (10) voting, (11) minutes, (12) deputies' absence, (13) punishments for violations of the rules, (14) discipline in the chamber, (15) the relationship with the Senate (*Heyet-i Ayan*), and (16) miscellaneous articles dealing with protocol, deputies' resignation, and the coming into force of the *nizamname*.⁵³

According to the *nizamname*, the Chamber President ought to have been elected by secret ballot, and the deputies' choice ought to have been sanctioned by the Sultan. Instead, Sultan Abdülhamit II, in a “flagrant violation of Article

77” of the Constitution, had already named Ahmet Vefik Efendi⁵⁴ (later Paşa, an experienced diplomat and respected intellectual) as President in February. Since the Istanbul elections had not taken place at this point, Ahmet Vefik was not even a deputy yet, and the electors later had no choice but to sanction the Sultan’s decision.⁵⁵ Although the document was technically not in force yet, this was also a violation of articles 9 and 10 of the *nizamname*. According to a British newspaper, Yusuf Ziya[eddin Al-Khalidi],⁵⁶ deputy for Jerusalem and former mayor of that city, delivered a 20-minute speech denouncing this action.⁵⁷ The speech appears to have been censored from the minutes, and it is likely that such censorship was also performed later on. This point limits the minutes’ source value considerably. Another caveat when dealing with the minutes is that only those of the public sessions were published. The public ones sometimes mention decisions taken in nonpublic sessions, such as the one taken during the third session that the HM, in addition to Fridays, would also not sit on Sundays.⁵⁸ There were also secret meetings, which are not discussed in the minutes at all.⁵⁹

Ahmet Vefik Efendi, President of the first HM, assumed that the rules of procedure, such as those about leave of absence for deputies, were already to be observed even before the deputies were aware of them. This created some irritation.⁶⁰ Overall, however, the minutes of these three sessions convey the impression that the deputies, far from challenging the *nizamname*, simply asked questions: what exactly were the five branches (*şubeler*) that the assembly would often be divided into for, and how were they different from committees (art. 2)?⁶¹ Why were bills that had been rejected by the assembly only to be brought back in after two months’ time? What exactly was an absolute majority? Why would budgetary laws be debated only once, and all others twice? This apparent tameness of the debate is probably partly due to the above-mentioned censorship. Another reason may be the deputies’ relative lack of experience, or their awareness of the quite authoritarian constitutional framework that they were operating in. That said, it is interesting to note that the deputies’ right to “grill” ministers was debated quite extensively.⁶² It was exactly this practice that would turn out to be the most challenging for governments.

Overall, the *nizamname* prescribed a rather authoritarian framework. Attendance was mandatory, and a deputy who, without asking for permission, did not show up for more than five sessions (or committee/branch meetings) in a row would be counted as absent without leave, being punished by publication of his name in the official gazette (art. 88). The President had far-reaching competences, and Ahmet Vefik Paşa, who held that office during the first period, made ample use of them, enforcing attendance, observance of time limits, and thematic coherence of speeches. His successor during the second parliamentary period (1877–1878), Hasan Fehmi Paşa, is said to have maintained a less strict style. Both fulfilled their duties rather faithfully, only rarely letting the vice presidents chair sessions.⁶³

A peculiarity of the *nizamname* are the five branches (*şubeler*) of the chamber. These were to exist parallel to thematic commissions (for defense, petitions, etc.) and to review bills one by one, so that all branches would have seen all documents

before they were debated in plenary sessions. Devereux speculates that this rule was deliberately designed to slow down the parliament's work.⁶⁴ Another reason may be that these branches, which were supposed to be reshuffled every two months by lot, were designed to provide substitutes for party groups, which did not exist in the first HM, in order to allow deputies to discuss matters in relatively small groups. Indeed, the branches seem to have been reshuffled every month, probably accomplishing relative familiarity of deputies among each other.⁶⁵

Section 10 of the *nizamname* (articles 57–72) described in great detail how voting would be performed. There were three kinds of voting: open voting by raising hands, open voting by calling every single deputy and him shouting “yes” “no” or “abstention,” and finally, secret voting, either by name, with red and white pieces of paper, or without, with black and white balls.⁶⁶ The *nizamname* was not always followed to the letter, but usually in spirit, for instance, when secret ballots were cast not with black and white balls but only white ones.⁶⁷ Attendance was not as bad a problem as in Prussia and later the German Reich, where usually not more than a third of the (unremunerated) deputies cared to show up.⁶⁸ The parliamentary minutes were regularly published, not only in the official gazette, but also in the Istanbul papers, a fact that in itself must have transformed Ottoman political culture tremendously. There also existed some official provincial newspapers at this point, and the minutes may have been published in them as well.⁶⁹

Judging from the (censored) minutes published in *Vakit* that contain only selected verbatim speeches, the first HM in the spring and summer of 1877 was a very orderly parliament (the second in winter 1877–1878 a little less so). The few deputies dominating the debates were experienced politicians and lawyers who, at times adamantly, insisted on proper observance of the constitutional framework. My observations fit Karpat's, who has noted that the deputies pressed the state for reliable and orderly taxation, a business-friendly legal framework, privatization of state land, and a rational, regularly paid bureaucracy.⁷⁰ The chamber also made use of its constitutional right to bring complaints against ministers and request their trial, even interpreting this to mean that former ministers could be held accountable as well.⁷¹ As a result, the relations between the chamber and the other constitutional institutions deteriorated quickly, soon reaching the point of hostility. It is telling that the second HM no longer passed bills, instead addressing the myriad of grievances and problems all over the empire, and contributing to the fall of Grand Vizier Edhem Paşa.⁷² On February 14, 1878, Abdülhamit II, making use of his constitutional right to do so, “temporarily” closed the chamber by simply having a declaration read out during its session. In it, he declared that “as a necessity of the present exceptional circumstances, the parliament be prorogued as of today.”⁷³

These exceptional circumstances were the ongoing peace negotiations with Russia, during which the Porte was probably unwilling to be disturbed (or rather: embarrassed) by an assembly that had already before, in the Montenegrin crisis, adamantly opposed any ceding of Ottoman territory to the insurgents.⁷⁴ In early 1878, the Ottoman army was facing a humiliating defeat and the Ottoman state was soon, in the Treaty of San Stefano, forced to give up major Balkan territories

and the famous three districts (*elviya-yi selase*): Kars, Ardahan, and Batum in eastern Anatolia. Several contemporary observers speculated that neither the Sultan nor the government could be bothered with a patriotic parliament more royal than the king.⁷⁵ Following the closing of parliament, ten deputies who had been particularly outspoken government critics were exiled from Istanbul.⁷⁶

In the following 30 years, the Constitution continued to be in force only on paper. It was printed in the annual provincial yearbooks, and members of the Senate continued to receive their salaries, maintaining their place in state protocol.⁷⁷ Abdülhamit II ruled autocratically, with the help of press censorship and a sophisticated spying system. The gravity center of power shifted back from the Grand Vizierate (known as the “Sublime Porte” in English), where it had been located during the Tanzimat period, to the Palace. After the territorial losses sanctioned by the Treaty of Berlin of 1878, Abdülhamit II managed to avoid another major war and further major territorial losses.⁷⁸ He continued to pursue the reforms of the previous decades, if with a more authoritarian note, establishing military and civilian high schools, building railways, telegraphs, and tightening the grip of the state in rural areas.⁷⁹ Ironically, the school system that was expanded during his rule produced the very movement that would eventually result in his downfall: his military high schools and middle schools offered social mobility and a western-style education to penniless Muslim boys from the provinces. In 1889, students of the medical military academy in Istanbul founded a secret society that came to be known as the Committee of Progress and Union (later: Committee of Union and Progress, henceforth: CUP) and quickly spread to other schools and beyond.⁸⁰ In the first years of the twentieth century, these unionists started to cooperate with other oppositional groups, such as liberals (who, unlike the CUP, favored decentralization of the Ottoman state) and socialist Armenians, their shared objective being the restoration of the Constitution and the reconvening of the parliament.⁸¹ As Tarık Zafer Tunaya has observed, all these groups tended to regard constitutionalism “not as a tool, but as a goal in itself.”⁸² Their revolutionary agenda was influenced by other parliamentary movements, especially those in Russia and Iran and the respective constitutional revolutions in 1905 and 1906.⁸³

The 1908 Revolution

In July 1908, the CUP took advantage of a general crisis in Ottoman Macedonia, forcing Abdülhamit II to restore the Constitution.⁸⁴ The reintroduction of the Constitution was met with enthusiasm and high expectations by all ethno-religious groups throughout the empire. Press censorship was lifted, and the Ottoman reading public experienced a press boom of unprecedented proportions.⁸⁵ The first international reactions to the Revolution were hostile: autonomous Bulgaria declared its full independence, and Austria-Hungary annexed Bosnia-Herzegovina, which had been under its military occupation since 1878. Moreover, many problems that had been repressed under Abdülhamit’s rule, now resurfaced, and there was a series of violent strikes.

The Second Constitutional Period

The first general elections for a new lower chamber were held in November 1908, this time according to the two-stage system described in the election law of 1877 – which had in the meantime been approved by Sultan Abdülhamit II.⁸⁶ The new number of seats (between 240 and 288, there is no agreement on this point) indicates either considerable population growth since 1876 or closer observance of the rate of representation, or both.⁸⁷ There is disagreement concerning the ethnic composition, too. According to Feroz Ahmad, 147 deputies were Turks (including Kurds, Circassians, and other Muslims from Anatolia), 60 Arabs, 27 Albanians, 26 Greeks, 14 Armenians, 10 Slavs, and 4 Jews.⁸⁸ As for the professional and class backgrounds of deputies, a contemporary observed that the biggest group were the men of religion (“nearly forty”), followed by landowners and members of the liberal professions, and finally, “seven or eight” members of the CUP, who were deputies for Salonica, Edirne and Istanbul.⁸⁹ The last category is not a professional one, but we know that the CUP-deputies were journalists, government clerks and officers – products of the Hamidian public schools.⁹⁰

The numbers given above indicate that the new parliament was dominated by members of the traditional elites, who, in this first election, were often supported by the CUP, but not necessarily in line with its program. With the exception of the Armenians, who already had two rivaling parties prior to 1908, a spectrum of political parties only started to truly unfold in the course of the first years of parliamentary practice.⁹¹ Relations between the CUP and all other groups soon cooled considerably, and an opposition party, the Liberal Union, emerged.⁹²

The new lower chamber, now called *Meclis-i Mebusan* (Chamber of Deputies, MM), was opened with a formal ceremony on December 17, 1908. Ahmet Rıza, a distinguished Young Turk intellectual who had spent almost 20 years in exile, was elected its first President. In his very first speech, he spoke of “national sovereignty,” and many deputies preferred to call their parliament “national chamber” (*millet meclisi*) rather than use the actual name.⁹³ This terminology indicates that the 1908 chamber, already during its first sessions, considered itself to be representing a nation that was not identical with the state.⁹⁴

Before discussing the application of the rules of conduct, it seems necessary to at least briefly outline the general legal and political situation within which the Chamber of Deputies worked. The Revolution of 1908 had reintroduced the Constitution, but it had also ushered in a period of heightened conflict, extralegal measures, and violence. Following the Revolution, the state of emergency was declared and not lifted until 1918 (it is a matter of debate how much this mattered).⁹⁵ The year 1908 saw an explosion of strikes, and an attempted counter-putsch in Istanbul (April 1909) triggered an anti-Armenian and anti-Assyrian pogrom in Cilicia that killed between 10,000 and 30,000 people.⁹⁶ Political assassinations, such as that of journalist Hasan Fehmi (1909) and Mahmut Şevket Paşa (1913), became more frequent. There were uprisings in Yemen and Albania in 1910 and 1911, and Italy invaded Tripolitania in 1911. With the outbreak of the First Balkan War in October 1912, the empire entered its last – and final – decade

of war. In January 1913, the CUP putsched itself into full control of the executive. During these years, the *Meclis* was dissolved four times: in February 1912 (followed by new elections), in August 1912 (with new elections only taking place in 1914), in November 1918, and, for the last time, in April 1919.⁹⁷ In the course of the decade between 1908 and 1918, 1,061 “temporary” laws, i.e., laws that were not subject to parliamentary control, were issued by cabinets, the most famous one being the law of April 1915 ordering the deportation of all Ottoman Armenians.⁹⁸ This record of extralegality and violence has to be taken into account when assessing the workings of the Chamber of Deputies.

The constitutional revision of 1909

The new MM initially operated within the rather tight framework set by the 1876 Constitution, which the deputies were determined to change. In January 1909, a parliamentary commission was formed and tasked with making suggestions for a constitutional revision. A failed coup attempt in April 1909 (known in Turkish as the March 31 Incident, the date according to the Julian calendar) provided the CUP with an opportunity to force Abdülhamit II to resign and replace him with his much more cooperative brother, Mehmet Reşat V. Following his enthronement, the MM revised the Constitution, deleting 1 paragraph, adding 3 new ones, and changing 21.⁹⁹ The revised text came into force on August 8, 1909.

In a nutshell, the revised Constitution accomplished a “transfer of sovereignty from the Sultan to the nation.”¹⁰⁰ The revised text reconfirmed such fundamental principles as personal liberty (art. 10), freedom of the press (art. 12), equality before the law for all Ottomans (art. 17), inviolability of the domicile (art. 22), protection of private property (art. 21), and the ban of torture (art. 26).¹⁰¹ Additions to the 1876 text concerned the privacy of correspondence (art. 119) and the right of assembly for all Ottomans (art. 122). The revision also strengthened the MM considerably: according to the revised text of art. 3, sovereignty continued to rest with the Sultan. However,

(o)n his accession the Sultan shall swear before Parliament, or if Parliament is not sitting, at its first meeting, to respect the visions of the Şeriat (...) and the Constitution, and to be loyal to the country and the nation.¹⁰²

The Sultan, whose expenditures, as well as those of the palace, became subject to parliamentary control (art. 6), only retained the right to name the *Şeyhülislam* (the grand *müfti*, issuer of legal opinions for Istanbul and cabinet member) and the Grand Vizier.¹⁰³ Such important decisions as the making of peace, the declaration of war, and the conclusion of international treaties could still be made by the Sultan and his Grand Vizier, but now required approval by the General Assembly (i.e., by both the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies) (art. 7). The Sultan’s absolute veto right was turned into a suspending one (art. 54), and it became possible for the Chamber of Deputies to insist on a bill (or its rejection) even against the

cabinet (art. 35).¹⁰⁴ Ministers became responsible to the Chamber of Deputies, both collectively and personally (art. 30). Both chambers could now propose bills, which would be sent to the respective other chamber, and, if approved, from there to the Sultan. The article describes his task merely as “confirming” the bill, the State Council is no longer mentioned at all (art. 53). The session period of the MM (previously November till the end of February) was extended to November – end of April every year (art. 43).

Changes to the articles dealing with changes to the Constitution (art. 116) and with the range of authority of courts were proposed, but not approved by the necessary two-thirds majority.¹⁰⁵ Some other changes, such as that to have some of the senators elected, were not approved by the Senate.¹⁰⁶ One lone deputy proposed that not only the male half of a district’s population should be represented by a deputy, and that the number of people represented per deputy should be raised to 100,000 accordingly. Such a change would not have introduced female suffrage (the election law clearly limited the vote to males)¹⁰⁷ but the other deputies reacted as if it did, refusing to consider such a change.¹⁰⁸

Adaptation of the internal regulations

The constitutional revision of 1909 made it necessary to adapt the internal regulations of the MM accordingly. A parliamentary commission that was formed to this end in 1910 submitted a draft regulation to the chamber in 1911, which in turn sent it to another committee. It is probably due to the political turmoil of 1912 that a new draft was prepared and approved by the chamber only after the 1914 elections. This text contained 20 instead of 16 sections and a total of 182 instead of 105 paragraphs.¹⁰⁹

A comparison between the internal regulations of 1877 and 1909 reveals that most changes were adaptations to the new Constitution and the increased importance that the MM had within it: those six sections that cannot be found in the 1876 text deal with issues that were either far less important or not relevant at all in 1876: Section 5 discusses the proposition of bills by the *Meclis*.¹¹⁰ Section 9 is devoted to the discussion of budget laws, which could now be rejected altogether. Section 10 regulates temporary laws, the new name for laws issued by the cabinet only – an old practice now supposed to become the exception. Section 18 regulates the internal administration of the parliament, including a library. Two other new sections seem to reflect previous parliamentary experience or insufficiency of previous rules, namely section 6, which details the conduction of sessions, and section 17 containing the duties of the parliamentary President, his vice presidents, and the minute keepers. Section 3, which discusses the examination of the deputies’ election documents, had previously been part of section 1.

Most changes, however, were additions of paragraphs to previously existing sections that reflect the increased importance of those procedures. Section 2 (previously section 3) discussing the forming and responsibilities of branches and commissions was extended from 13 to 20 paragraphs. The section about bills, which had only contained three paragraphs, now included seven. Questions and

Explanations, formerly comprised of five paragraphs, now contained 20. The section about relations to the Senate was extended from three to eight paragraphs. The stipulations concerning punishments for violations of the rules by parliamentarians (for such offenses as prolonged absence without leave, but also disruption of speeches or sessions) became more detailed.

Application of the *nizamname* in the *Meclis-i Mebusan*, 1908–1920

As the new *nizamname* would only be passed in 1914, deliberations and debates up to that point should have been conducted according to the older rules issued in 1877. It may seem that the deputies, by amending the 1876 Constitution almost single-handedly, preemptively performed tasks that they officially only gained with the 1914 *nizamname*. This was not the case, as they followed art. 116 of the 1876 Constitution, which allowed the *Meclis* to suggest changes to articles of the Constitution by a two-thirds majority, send them off to the Senate, and if the Senate also passed them with the same majority, submit them to the Sultan for approval.¹¹¹ The elderly Mehmet V acquiesced in the changes.

In the 1908 parliament, there were several cases of deputies whose election was challenged by the *Meclis*. These included one deputy whose election credentials were (initially) found to be incomplete, several accused of corruption or notoriety, and one who was found not to be resident in his electoral district.¹¹² The rule that all deputies had to know Turkish was not always observed: the four Dashnak Armenian deputies did not speak Turkish, and in at least one instance, a deputy seems to have read his resignation letter out in Arabic.¹¹³ Attendance, too, appears to have been unsatisfactory: two deputies from [Kut] al-Amara in present-day Iraq, whose election credentials had been accepted, never showed up in Istanbul. Their cases were discussed only in 1910, and it was decided to have new deputies elected from their districts. Such a procedure was not discussed in the *nizamname*, but the Senate had previously decided that 91 days of absence without leave would annul a deputy's mandate.¹¹⁴ As for the conduct of sessions, observation of rules for speeches, questions, and so forth, it seems that the chamber was generally observant of those rules. There were at times hot debates, but overall, the deputies seem to have fought with words, not fists.¹¹⁵ Outside of sessions, however, considerable violence was used against deputies. After losing its majority in the Istanbul by-elections of 1911, the CUP made use of violence, threats, and intimidation in order to win again in the early elections (known as "elections with the stick") of 1912.¹¹⁶ In 1914, the CUP negotiated quotas with the Greek and Armenian leaders, and the resulting parliament was more representative of the different ethnic groups than any previous one, also containing more Arab deputies than before.¹¹⁷ Prior to the empire's entry into the First World War, the new *Meclis* made four changes to the Constitution that can be read as strengthening the Chamber of Deputies: it became harder for the Sultan to dissolve the chamber, new elections had to be held quicker than previously (four instead of six months after a dissolution of parliament), and budget laws were specified to

be valid for only one year.¹¹⁸ In February 1915, deputy salaries were more than doubled to 50,000 *куруş*.¹¹⁹

Things deteriorated quickly with the Ottoman entry into the First World War. In what is today considered the beginning of the Armenian Genocide, more than 200 Armenian intellectuals and community leaders in Istanbul, including four current members of the MM, were arrested and deported in April 1915.¹²⁰

During the war years, the MM continued to work, helping to keep up the appearance of a constitutional regime that had actually been turned into a dictatorship.¹²¹ The session period was shortened again from six to four months, and the chamber often merely sanctioned “temporary” laws that had previously been passed by the cabinet.¹²² Some browsing in those years’ minutes conveys the impression of business as usual, the subject mostly being budgets of state institutions and minor regulations. Moreover, the more political bills betray the chamber’s character as a mere accomplice of CUP policies: In 1916, Turkish was made the empire-wide compulsory language for business transactions and correspondence of foreign companies (such as those running railways, tramways, etc.). Additional changes to the Constitution accomplished a strengthening of the central administration: in 1916, it became easier for the Sultan (by now a puppet of the CUP) to dissolve the chamber and harder to dismiss a cabinet.¹²³ Another change made it possible for nonresidents to run for deputy of up to three electoral districts.¹²⁴

On November 4, 1918, during the first postwar session of the MM, several Greek deputies put forward a motion concerning the wartime massacres against Armenians and forced deportations against Greeks. During the ensuing debate, however, most of the Muslim deputies no longer listened to them.¹²⁵ At this point, the CUP had officially dissolved itself, and the Armistice of Moudros had been signed. From November 13, 1918, onward Allied troops started to occupy parts of the country: the French occupied Cilicia and the Italians occupied the south-western part of Anatolia around Antalya. In May 1919, Greek forces landed in Smyrna/İzmir. These landings provoked at first scattered and then more organized resistance on the part of the Muslim population, especially in those areas where Muslim refugees had been settled in houses of Christian deportees: wartime policies of social engineering now pitted returning survivors against incoming refugees.¹²⁶

The last Ottoman election in late 1919 was boycotted by Armenians, Greeks, and the Liberal Party, and the resulting *Meclis* was dominated by the movement of the “Societies for the Defense of Rights,” a coalition of former CUP members and provincial Muslim notables from Anatolia and Thrace. This movement held several congresses in 1918 and 1919. The Erzurum (July–August 1919) and Sivas (September 1919) congresses elected a preliminary government called the “Representative Commission” (*Heyet-i Temsiliye*). The last MM convened in January 1920, adopting the “National Pact,” a document that famously stated the territorial claims of the nationalist movement, on January 28, 1920.¹²⁷ The chamber was dissolved in March 1920, following the full Allied military occupation of Istanbul. At this point, the *Heyet-i Temsiliye* issued a call for new elections to a Great National Assembly (*Büyük Millet Meclisi*, henceforth: BMM) to be convened in Ankara. The call explicitly stated that non-Muslims must not be

elected to the new parliament, which indeed did not happen.¹²⁸ It also lowered the threshold for electability to the age of 25.¹²⁹ Eighty-eight former members of the MM became part of the BMM, which first convened in Ankara on April 20, 1920. The other deputies were representatives of the Societies for the Defense of Rights from all over Anatolia and Thrace.

With the BMM (the adjective “Türk” would only be added in February 1921), the movement against the Allied occupation and partition of the remains of the Ottoman Empire gained a pillar of legitimization whose importance can hardly be overstated. Based on the BMM, which claimed to represent the nation (understood as the community of all non-Arab Muslims in the empire), the movement could form a government that would, for the next three years, function as a counter-government to that in Istanbul. The BMM was clearly a continuation of the MM insofar as it adopted its internal regulations and, at least theoretically, operated within the Ottoman constitutional framework. In 1921, it passed a number of additions to the Constitution that are considered the embryo of the modern Turkish Constitution, famously stating that “sovereignty is vested in the nation without any condition.”¹³⁰ On the other hand, however, the new parliament had revolutionary character insofar as its function differed fundamentally from that of its predecessors: it was cut off from the other Ottoman constitutional institutions, namely the State Council, the Senate, and the cabinet in Istanbul, which, according to the Ankara government, were hostages of the Allied occupation. The Ankara governments were formed out of the BMM, which was their sole source of legitimacy, and, as there was no new state yet, Mustafa Kemal had himself elected President of the parliament in order to legitimize his *de facto* leadership. As a result of this central legitimizing function, the first BMM was much more powerful than any of its predecessors (and all successors, too). It initially had legislative, judicative, and executive functions, the latter being represented by the Ankara governments, which called themselves “government of the (T)BMM.” In line with its indispensability, the TBMM sat year-round. Vested with the right to draft and pass laws by the MM’s rules and the Ottoman Constitution, and no Sultan or Senate to block bills, the BMM was able to pass even such laws that its own governments violently opposed. In the following years, the Ankara cabinets passed many decrees and other minor legal texts, but anything that was called a law had to pass through the BMM. This bottleneck function led to many rather serious conflicts between governments and the BMM, especially during the first legislative period (1920–1923). A case in point is the 1920 law for the prohibition of alcohol.¹³¹ The Ankara government opposed the bill due to fiscal concerns – alcohol taxes were an indispensable source of revenue – but the chamber nevertheless passed the law.¹³² It is telling that Ali Şükrü, one of the most prominent advocates of that law who later evolved into an important member of the opposition, was murdered in March 1923 by Mustafa Kemal Paşa’s bodyguard.¹³³

As mentioned above, the BMM theoretically combined legislative and executive powers. The latter, however, could only be fully implemented over time, and with the help of the notorious “independence tribunals” from 1920 onward.¹³⁴ Unlike all later TBMMs, the first one of 1920–1923 was really elected by local

people, and it was a very “heterogeneous and unruly body” that frequently opposed legislation proposed by the government.¹³⁵ Therefore, the minutes of the first legislation period are much more instructive (and more fun to read) than the ones dating from later periods. Similar to the late Ottoman MM, the TBMM was initially united, but soon split up into two major groups (known as the first and second group) that later crystallized into parties. As already in 1912, the main point of contention was the role of the state: the first group, which would evolve into the People’s Party, favored a strong central state, while the second group called for more liberal, accountable and business-friendly policies. Members of the second group tended to be from areas that were not under Allied occupation (also not from the lost Balkan territories, where most former CUP members hailed from), and were more likely to have a liberal profession than a state job.¹³⁶

The first TBMM was dissolved in 1923, after it had become clear that a majority for the acceptance of the Lausanne Peace Treaty would not be reached.¹³⁷ The ensuing elections were performed according to a new election law (passed in April that year) that no longer contained tax requirements for voters and lowered the voting age (still only for males) to 18.¹³⁸ Only three candidates belonging to the oppositional “second group” and very few independent candidates were elected to the TBMM.¹³⁹ All others belonged to the newly formed People’s Party (*Halk Fırkası*) led by Mustafa Kemal (later Atatürk). Like this, the power of the TBMM was brought under control of the People’s Party. In the following three decades, there were only two short experiments with oppositional parties in 1924–1925 and 1930. The period between 1923 and 1946 in Turkey is therefore known as the “single-party period.”

Throughout this period, discontent can only rarely be traced through the parliamentary minutes. Bills were voted through with only very little or no previous deliberation, and the parliament “functioned more as an extension of the executive than as a real check on the government.”¹⁴⁰ Instead, resistance seems to have been voiced mostly in two arenas whose minutes are unfortunately unavailable: first, the meetings of the parliamentary group of the People’s Party, and second, the meetings of the commissions in charge of certain parts of the legislation.¹⁴¹ There are two other indications of discontent in the TBMM: the first is newspaper reports from behind the scenes (which are instructive only until 1925, when the oppositional press was closed), and the second is the number of deputies who put up passive resistance by voting with their feet.¹⁴² The number of deputies actually voting was often lower than that of those who were either present, but did not bother to vote, or did not show up in the first place.¹⁴³ The casting of dissenting votes was a risky business: according to F. W. Frey, only five deputies who dared do so during the single-party period were reelected.¹⁴⁴

When the TBMM first convened in April 1920, there were some discussions concerning the procedural rules for this new parliament. Deputies were aware that the 1914 *nizamname* of the MM did not fully match the new parliament anymore, and therefore decided to task a commission with changing it accordingly.¹⁴⁵ It is not entirely clear which articles were changed between 1920 and 1927. The few changes that were actually recorded concerned very minor points,

but surprisingly left issues such as the person of the Sultan and the number of commissions untouched.

In the following section, I shall discuss the text of the internal rules of conduct (according to the 1914 text) and compare it to the actual procedure followed in the parliament. First, I shall point at some obvious but mostly organizational issues. Second, I shall study one of the parliament's most important decisions, namely the 1923 alteration of the Basic Law (*Teşkilat-i Esasiye Kanunu*) which changed the form of the Turkish state to a republic, and show in which points the procedure followed here deviated from the *nizamname*. At the end of the paper, I will make some remarks concerning the changes made in the 1927 *nizamname*.

Rules for plenary sessions

Both the 1914 and the 1927 rules mention that plenary sessions were usually open to the public, but could be made nonpublic or secret upon a request by at least 15 deputies or by a minister. Nonpublic sessions were relatively frequent in the 1920s and especially common when ministers were grilled about possible cases of misconduct or corruption. In those nonpublic or secret sessions that I have studied, there is a sense of disappointment among the deputies, who had expected to hear more, or had anticipated disciplinary consequences that eventually did not materialize.¹⁴⁶

According to §44 of the 1914 text and §81 of the one from 1927, a plenary session was only valid if more than half of the deputies showed up. In both public and secret sessions, the chairman would have a list of speakers, and only those on the list were allowed to speak. Interruptions were officially illegal, but, at least in the TBMM, appear to have been fairly normal: the minutes convey the impression of a natural discussion, with frequent short comments being made and questions asked to the speakers. (§84 of the 1927 text mentions the possibility for deputies to ask the chairman for permission to make short comments). Speakers had to speak from the lectern and were not allowed to speak for longer than 15 minutes (so, filibustering was not possible, §48). This rule was not applied to government policy statements. (Atatürk's famous six-day speech of 1927, known simply as "the Speech" (*Nutuk*) in Turkish, was delivered at a Party congress.)

As before, bills had to be read twice before they could be voted on, and they had to be scrutinized by at least one commission before they could be put to vote. The rule introduced in 1877 according to which at least five days needed to pass between the first and second reading, in order to allow deputies to contemplate the bill, was maintained (§63 in 1914, §76 in 1927). It was possible to declare a bill "urgent" and have the assembly vote on that matter. If a bill was approved as "urgent," it could be passed without a second reading. The new rules passed in 1927 also mention that the rule could only be changed upon written request submitted by the government.

Both *nizamnames* mention three kinds of voting: open voting by raising hands, open voting by calling every single deputy and him shouting "yes," "no," or

“abstention,” and finally, secret voting, either by name or without it, with colored pieces of paper.¹⁴⁷ This, too, was a continuation of the 1877 rules.

The most obvious deviation of the TBMM practice from the 1914 *nizamname* is the number of chairmen. Unlike his predecessors in Ottoman times, the official TBMM Chairman was also (de facto) state President and head of the government. Mustafa Kemal, who was elected to that office in April 1920, clearly was not interested in chairing the parliament in its day-to-day affairs, preferring to act as a grey eminence in the background. (He was more of a night person, and important policy decisions were usually anticipated at his *rakı* table.) He needed the title of parliament Chairman merely as a source of legitimization for his *de facto* office of state President. Therefore, the three (rather than two) vice chairmen were the de facto “real” chairmen until 1923, when Mustafa Kemal became President of the new state.

Commissions and branches

The system of a division into five branches (*subes*) of Ottoman times seems to have been all but abandoned in 1920: deputies were no longer recorded as members of certain branches in roll calls. In 1920, one deputy suggested that branch meetings were impossible due to an insufficient number of rooms in the new parliament building in Ankara.¹⁴⁸ However, in 1923, the purely administrative task of checking electoral credentials of new deputies was clearly performed by five branches.¹⁴⁹

The TBMM also deviated from the *nizamname* in initially having only 11, rather than 15, commissions. According to art. 12 of the *nizamname*, the 15 permanent commissions of 15 members each were to deal with (1) petitions, (2) forests, mining, and agriculture, (3) land registry and immovable property, (4) postal and telegraph services, trade and industry, taxes and customs, (5) foreign affairs, (6) domestic affairs, (7) public health, (8) justice, (9) military affairs, (10) religious affairs and pious endowments, (11) financial law, (12) bills, (13) education, (14) budget law, and (15) public works.¹⁵⁰

The TBMM initially had only 11 commissions, whose members were not elected (another violation of the rules) but (according to İhsan Ezherli) simply decided by themselves which commission they wanted to join.¹⁵¹ The TBMM (at least in this first period) lacked commissions dealing with petitions and with budget law. Some other tasks were now named differently (such as “national defense commission” instead of “military commission”). Some commissions had as few as 5, others as many as 25 members. A commission tasked with drawing up a constitution was soon added,¹⁵² and a commission for petitions seems to have been formed again by 1927.¹⁵³ According to the 1914 *nizamname*, all deputies had the right to attend all commission (and branch) meetings, and to ask for the documents considered there.¹⁵⁴ The *nizamname* of 1927 changed this rule by stipulating that particular ministers or one-third of the commission members could ask for closed (so-called “secret”) meetings.¹⁵⁵ According to a specification added in 1947, “secret” meant that any information shared there was supposed to remain secret.¹⁵⁶

A case in point: the declaration of the Republic in October 1923

An interesting case in point against which to compare practice to the rules is the October 1923 change of the Basic Law (*Teşkilat-i Esasiye Kanunu*) that officially changed the form of state to a republic. This may seem a minor change at first sight: after all, the Sultanate had already been abolished in November 1922, and the civil authorities of Istanbul had accepted Ankara's rule in early 1923. That said, Turkey had been a monarchy for at least 400 years, and the Sultan still acted as the Caliph of Islam, not least because loyalty to him continued to be an important pillar of governance in the country. The word "republic" had never been a part of nationalist propaganda during the War of Independence, which many people had joined simply to get rid of Allied occupation (and their returned former Christian neighbors). It therefore does not come as a surprise that an interview in late September 1923, in which Mustafa Kemal casually mentioned that the time had come to call the state what it was anyway – a republic – caused serious opposition in the TBMM. We know from newspaper reports that many deputies opposed not so much the idea of a republic itself but that of creating the office of a state President whose holder would be able to act much more independently from parliament than he previously had as President of the TBMM – one is tempted to say: his powers would be reminiscent of those of the Sultans.¹⁵⁷ The issue, in other words, was that a division of powers was proposed to the parliament that was holding them alone and was unwilling to share them.

Mustafa Kemal, whom we must call the *de facto*, if not *de jure* President of the nascent state, tasked an expert commission that was comprised of several ministers, the parliamentary commission for the Constitution, and several hand-picked experts to work out the relevant changes to the constitutional text. He did this without even consulting the TBMM. The special commission met in the Ankara train station, a point that an oppositional newspaper satirized like this:

As far as we know, republics are born not in train stations, but in national assemblies. The only thing that emerges from train stations are – trains. But gentlemen like Ağaoğlu Ahmet and Ziya Gökalp [two of the experts, who were not deputies] have quite some self-confidence. As far as they are concerned, it is the easiest thing for a train station to produce a republic or a constitution, and for a national assembly to produce an express train.¹⁵⁸

We know from contemporary newspapers that the proposed changes were also discussed in several meetings of the Party group in parliament (which, given that almost all deputies were Party members, was almost identical with the General Assembly). According to the newspaper reports, many deputies strongly opposed the bill in those meetings, and were adamant at refusing to grant constitutional rights to the President that were quite similar to those previously enjoyed by the Ottoman Sultan. We do not know much more about those meetings, but it is likely that some changes were made in order to appease parliamentary opposition within the Party. Apparently, opposition was so strong as to suggest that a majority would not be found. At this point, Mustafa Kemal saw to it that the government resigned.

He basically blackmailed the assembly by only letting them have a competent government if they first approved of the republic.¹⁵⁹

The bill was brought to the General Assembly on October 29, 1923, as an “urgent” bill, meaning that only one consideration was enough and that the text did not have to be circulated several days before consideration. (This was in conformity with the rules.) The bill included some very serious changes, including the stipulation in art. 12 that the Prime Minister (who was to be named by the President) could form governments even when the parliament did not sit, and have the government approved by the parliament later. Yunus Nadi, the chairman of the constitutional committee, rather lamely explained that this “not sitting” merely referred to holidays and other short periods of time.¹⁶⁰ I think that this point must have raised red flags, as it was reminiscent of Sultan Abdülhamit’s “temporary” dissolution of the parliament in 1878, which had actually lasted 30 years.

The deputies, however, did not raise this point. Apart from one lone deputy who suggested that the presidential election be left to the next assembly, the law was voted through, first paragraph by paragraph, and then as a whole (this again was in accordance with the rules). What is intriguing, however, is that neither the number of deputies present nor their votes were recorded in the minutes (as was usually done). According to §105 of the *nizamname* of 1914, constitutional changes had to be supported by at least two-thirds of all deputies (including absent ones) for the change to be valid. (The rules passed in 1927 are even clearer on this point: one-third of all deputies had to declare their willingness to change the Constitution in writing, and the Constitution could only be changed by a two-thirds majority.)¹⁶¹ It is possible that İsmet (Eker), who was chairing the session as second vice president, refrained from performing a roll call because he knew that the quorum would not be met. Nobody mentioned the two-thirds majority requirement. The law was simply voted on openly, by raising hands. The minutes of this session, however, never mention any numbers, merely stating that the “bill was accepted unanimously” (*müttefikan kabul edilmiştir efendim*).¹⁶²

How many deputies voted for the republic? The total number of deputies elected to the second assembly in 1923 was 325, so a two-thirds majority would have required 216 or 217 votes.¹⁶³ Judging from the minutes of other sessions around that time, during which votes were counted, it is highly unlikely that even 200 deputies bothered to show up. For instance, Mustafa Kemal was elected chamber President on August 13, 1923, with 196 of 197 votes cast.¹⁶⁴ His election as President of the Republic on October 30, 1923 (the day after the suspicious decision concerning the republic) was accomplished unanimously with only 159 votes.¹⁶⁵ These numbers, together with the suspicious non-counting of votes on October 29, 1923, strongly suggest that the decision to turn the Ottoman state into a republic was taken in violation of both the Ottoman Constitution and the TBMM’s internal rules.

For a historian of early Republican Turkey, it is not particularly surprising to discover that one of the most important constitutional changes in that country’s history was voted on in a fashion that was technically illegal. People lived in revolutionary times, and they were not only aware of it, but said so. Mustafa Kemal Paşa said more than once that “the revolution’s law is superior to preexisting

legislation.”¹⁶⁶ To be sure, the establishment of the TBMM and of a government in Ankara in themselves violated the Constitution, and many of the laws issued between 1920 and 1923 – such as the one abolishing the Sultanate, issued in late 1922 – had revolutionary character. One may well say that that Ottoman Constitution was merely an empty shell by 1923, when the republic was declared.

The issue at hand, however, was different in the case of the 1923 vote because what was at stake here was not legality, but legitimacy. At least in their own perception, the deputies in the TBMM had started off with very little of the former and much of the latter – but they were rapidly losing their legitimacy by 1923, when the Independence War had been won and the common enemy had been crushed. If the constitutional change of 1923 was indeed made by a chamber that did not meet the quorum, this happened not because the deputies wanted a republic but because they did not: it was a decision taken by a parliament against itself. The lack of a counting of votes strongly suggests that not only the Ottoman Constitution but also parliamentary freedom, and thus the internal regulation, were an empty shell, too: maintaining its tremendous power only on paper, the parliament had been hijacked by its own government, whose decision it could merely sanction, but no longer challenge in any meaningful way. In this, the TBMM had started to resemble the wartime MM under CUP rule. Now, however, it was not the government that broke the rules, but the parliament itself.

The *longue durée* approach followed here suggests that, in authoritarian states such as inter-war Turkey, there is a direct relationship between the constitutional rights of an assembly and the level of violence and threats used against its members. The Ottoman Empire, and later Turkey, remained first an autocratic and then an authoritarian state throughout the period studied here. During this time, however, the Chamber of Deputies saw an increase in its constitutional powers, such as that to draft and pass laws by itself and pass them on directly to the Sultan (according to the 1909 constitutional amendment). This competence was even further bolstered when the BMM started to operate without the Sultan, the Senate, and the State Council. It is striking that the two earlier Ottoman Chambers of Deputies were rather pedestrian institutions that usually played by their own rules, confining themselves to criticizing governments and holding debates about important issues. This, I argue, is due to their relative insignificance compared to the other constitutional institutions, which broke the rules quite frequently. Once parliamentary power increased, however, there was a surge in violence used against deputies, in electoral fraud, and eventually, in rule violations by parliament itself. This, I argue, was due not to the increase in powers as such but to the relationship between *de jure* and *de facto* powers of parliament and the importance of parliamentarism for the political legitimization of the emerging one-party regime in Turkey.

Notes

- 1 Youtube contains at least a dozen such videos of fights among deputies that were recorded in various countries in the last ten years. For Turkish examples, combine the search terms “kavga” (fight) and “TBMM.”

- 2 For historical context for nonspecialists, I recommend Erik Jan Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History*, new rev. ed. (London: I.B. Tauris; Distributed by St. Martin's Press, 1998). A good selection of articles dealing with the first Ottoman parliament, its legal status and the identity of its members is provided in Herzog, Christoph, and Malek Sharif, eds., *The First Ottoman Experiment in Democracy*. Istanbul: Texte und Studien 18. (Würzburg: Ergon, 2010).
- 3 See Butrus Abu-Manneh, "Gülhane, Edict of," in *Encyclopedia of Islam*, THREE. doi: 10.1163/1573-3912_ei3_COM_27541. For an English translation of the original document, see Jacob C. Hurewitz, ed., *The Middle East and North Africa in World Politics: A Documentary Record*, 2nd ed., rev. and enl (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1975), 269–271. I have worked with the transliterated Ottoman text in A. Şeref Gözübüyük, *Türk Anayasa Metinleri: Tanzimattan Bugüne Kadar* (Ankara: Ajans Matbaa, 1957), 3–5.
- 4 See R. H. Davison, "Tanẓīmāt," in *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd ed. doi: 10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_1174.
- 5 See Butrus Abu-Manneh, "The Islamic Roots of the Gülhane Rescript," *Die Welt des Islams* 34, no. 2 (1994), 173–203. The underlying principle, known as the circle of justice, can be traced back to pre-Islamic empires in Mesopotamia. See Linda T. Darling, *A History of Social Justice and Political Power in the Middle East: The Circle of Justice from Mesopotamia to Globalization* (London: Routledge, 2013).
- 6 Hurewitz, *The Middle East*. The Ottoman original text does not mention individuals, but "classes of subjects": ((N)azarı madalet eseri müşfikānem de müsavi bulunan kaffe-i sunufi tebeai): Gözübüyük, *Türk Anayasa Metinleri: Tanzimattan*, 7.
- 7 This status of inferiority and protection for Christians and Jews was known as *dhimma* (in Ottoman Turkish: *zimmēt*). See Cl. Cahen, "Dhimmā," in *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd ed. doi: 10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_1823.
- 8 Probably the thorniest area of reform was that of rural taxation. The abolition of tax farming, though promised as early as 1839, could not be implemented: see Stanford J. Shaw, "The Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Tax Reforms and Revenue System," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 6, no. 4 (1975): 421–459. Attempts at tax reform often led to uprisings such as the one 1841 in Niş. See Ahmet Uzun, *Tanzimat Ve Sosyal Direnişler: Niş İsyanı Üzerine Ayrıntılı Bir İnceleme (1841)* (Istanbul: Eren Yayıncılık, 2002).
- 9 The contrast between promise and implementation of reforms was probably most pronounced in eastern Anatolia, where the Ottoman state, having destroyed traditional power structures in the 1840s, was unable to maintain law and order. The resulting power vacuum was filled by local warlords who often "taxed" the sedentary population in addition to regular state taxes. See Nadir Özbek, "The Politics of Taxation and the "Armenian Question" during the Late Ottoman Empire, 1876–1908," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 54, no. 4 (2012): 770–797.
- 10 On the use of Tanzimat rhetoric in petitions, see Attila Aytekin, "Peasant Protest in the Late Ottoman Empire: Moral Economy, Revolt, and the Tanzimat Reforms," *International Review of Social History* 57, no. 2 (2012): 191–227. Masayuki Ueno, "'For the Fatherland and the State': Armenians Negotiate the Tanzimat Reforms," *International Journal of Middle East Studies (IJMES)* 45, no. 1 (2013): 93–109.
- 11 See Şerif Mardin, "Super-Westernization in Urban Life in the Ottoman Empire in the Last Quarter of the Nineteenth Century," (1974) in Şerif Mardin, *Religion, Society, and Modernity in Turkey* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2006), 135–163.
- 12 Virtually all "nationalist" uprisings of the nineteenth century were triggered by very non-nationalist, local conflicts. See Ramazan H. Öztan, "Nationalism in Function: 'Rebellions' in the Ottoman Empire and Narratives in Its Absence," in *War and Collapse: World War I and the Ottoman State*, eds. M. H. Yavuz and Feroz Ahmad (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2016), 161–202.

- 13 See Şerif Mardin, *The Genesis of Young Ottoman Thought: A Study in the Modernization of Turkish Political Ideas*, Modern intellectual and political history of the Middle East (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2000); Nazan Çiçek, *Young Ottomans: Turkish Critics of the Eastern Question in the Late Nineteenth Century*, Library of Ottoman Studies 20 (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010).
- 14 To legitimize the idea of parliamentarism, they cited suras 3:159 and 42:38 from the Qur'an. Namık Kemal used the Qur'anic verse "and seek their counsel in all affairs" from sura 3:159 as the title of one of his most famous articles. For a detailed discussion of his thought, see Mardin, *The Genesis of Young*, 283–336.
- 15 Louise Fawcett, "Neither Traditional nor Modern: Constitutionalism in the Ottoman Empire and Its Successor States," *Journal of Modern European History* 6, no. 1 (2008): 116–136.
- 16 On earlier forms of (limited) representative government in cities, see Roderic H. Davison, "The Advent of the Principle of Representation in the Government of the Ottoman Empire," in *The Beginnings of Modernization in the Middle East. The Nineteenth Century*, eds. William R. Polk and Richard L. Chambers (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1968), 93–108; Nora Lafi, "The Ottoman Municipal Reforms between Old Regime and Modernity: Towards a New Interpretative Paradigm," in *1. Uluslararası Eminönü Sempozyumu Tebliğler Kitabı - 1st International Symposium on Eminönü the Book of Notifications* (sic), ed. Fatih Sadırlı (Istanbul: Eminönü Belediyesi, 2006), 348–355.
- 17 Davison, "The Advent," 96.
- 18 For a discussion of the organic laws for the Armenian, Orthodox, and Jewish communities, as well as other possible sources of inspiration for the Ottoman Constitution of 1876, see Aylin Koçunyan, "The Transcultural Dimension of the Ottoman Constitution," in *Well-Connected Domains: Towards an Entangled Ottoman History*, eds. Pascal Firges et al., The Ottoman Empire and Its Heritage (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 235–258.
- 19 Davison, "The Advent," 102.
- 20 B. Lewis et al., "Baladiyya (Turkey)," in *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd ed. doi: 10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_0095.
- 21 See Stanford Jay Shaw and Ezel Kural Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey: The Rise of Modern Turkey, 1808–1975/Stanford J. Shaw, Ezel Kural Shaw*, 1st ed., 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976); Zürcher, *Turkey*.
- 22 I have worked with the Ottoman transliterated text in Gözübüyük, *Türk Anayasa Metinleri*. The first 34 articles of the original Ottoman text are available online at <https://anayasa.tbmm.gov.tr/docs/1876/1876ilkmetinler/1876-ilkhal-osmanlica.pdf>. For an English translation (which also includes translations of the two reform rescripts mentioned above), see <http://genckaya.bilkent.edu.tr/documents1.html>
- 23 According to Shaw and Shaw, in the first Chamber of Deputies of 1877, there was 1 deputy for 88,282 males from the European provinces, 1 for 162,148 in the Anatolian provinces, and 1 for 505,000 in "Africa" (sic, probably meaning to include the Arab provinces in Asia – the only African province that sent representatives was Tripolitania). The Shaws are correct in stating that non-Muslims were overrepresented. However, their calculation is problematic due to the fact that late Ottoman population statistics, especially those concerning Armenian population figures, were unreliable and continue to be highly politicized. Stanford J. Shaw and Ezel K. Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey: The Rise of Modern Turkey, 1808–1975* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 181.
- 24 The reference to "domestic servants" is probably a veiled acknowledgment of the continued existence of domestic slavery in the Ottoman Empire, which, despite legal steps aimed at banning slavery and slave trade taken since the 1830s, continued well into the twentieth century. For an overview, see Ehud R. Toledano, *Slavery and*

Abolition in the Ottoman Middle East (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 1998).

- 25 <http://genckaya.bilkent.edu.tr/documents1.html>
- 26 Expense allowances for deputies elected to the German Reichstag were initially banned in 1871. The ban was supposed to prevent a professionalization of politics (and to keep men who were not of independent means, especially socialists, out of the Reichstag), but the actual effect was a very low attendance rate. In 1894, deputies became eligible for free train rides, and in 1906, expense allowances were introduced. See Hermann Butzer, *Diäten und Freifahrt im Deutschen Reichstag: Der Weg zum Entschädigungsgesetz von 1906 und die Nachwirkung dieser Regelung bis in die Zeit des Grundgesetzes*. Beiträge zur Geschichte des Parlamentarismus und der politischen Parteien 116 (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1999).
- 27 The online English translation (“The Treasury will allot to each deputy 20.000 piastres Per (sic) session”) (see note 22) is misleading. The sum was to be paid per parliamentary year: “Mebuslardan herbirine beher sene içtimai için hazineden yirmibin kuruş verilecek.” Gözübüyük, *Türk Anayasa Metinleri: Tanzimattan*, 33.
- 28 Again, the English translation is misleading. It was not “the ministry,” but the cabinet that was in charge of preparing bills: “Mücedden kanun tanzimi veya kavanini mevcudedden birinin tadili teklifi heyeti vükelaya ait” *ibid.*, 30.
- 29 Hasan Kayalı, “Elections and the Electoral Process in the Ottoman Empire, 1876–1919,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 27, no. 3 (1995): 265–286, 266.
- 30 *Ibid.*, 267.
- 31 Kemal H. Karpat, “The Ottoman Parliament of 1877 and Its Social Significance,” in Kemal H. Karpat, *Studies on Ottoman Social and Political History: Selected Articles and Essays* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 75–89.
- 32 Kayalı, “Elections,” 267.
- 33 Karpat, “The Ottoman Parliament” in *Studies on Ottoman Social and Political History*, 79.
- 34 Kemal H. Karpat, “The Transformation of the Ottoman State, 1789–1908,” in *Studies on Ottoman Social and Political History: Selected Articles and Essays* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 56.
- 35 Karpat, “The Ottoman Parliament” in *Studies on Ottoman Social and Political History*, 80.
- 36 *Ibid.*, 78.
- 37 Rıdvan Akın, “Osmanlı Parlamentosu ve Cumhuriyete Bıraktığı Siyasal Miras,” *Galatasaray Üniversitesi Hukuk Fakültesi Dergisi* 7, no. 2 (2008): 55.
- 38 *Ibid.*
- 39 In the 8th session on March 28, 1877, *ibid.*, 53–60.
- 40 In the 21st session on April 24, 1877. Hakkı Tarık Us, *Meclis-i Meb’usân: 1293=1877* (Istanbul: Vakıf, 1940), 170–180.
- 41 In the 45th and 46th sessions on June 6 and June 9, 1877. *Ibid.*, 338–339, 342–345.
- 42 The sessions dealing with the budget law were nonpublic, but they are mentioned and their results are abstracted in the minutes of the public sessions published in *Vakit*, at times with reference to other newspapers. See *ibid.*, 382.
- 43 Robert Devereux, *The First Ottoman Constitutional Period: A Study of the Midhat Constitution and Parliament* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1963), 202.
- 44 For a list of the topics covered and short abstracts of the respective debates in modern Turkish, see İhsan Güneş, *Türk Parlamento Tarihi. Meşrutiyete Geçiş Süreci: I. Ve II. Meşrutiyet: I. Cilt* (Ankara: Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi Yayınları, 1996). I have checked the abstracts against the minutes and found them to be correct. The Ottoman Turkish spoken in the sessions was fairly simple and should be intelligible to readers of modern Turkish as well.
- 45 In the 32nd session on May 19, 1877. Us, *Meclis-i Meb’usân 1877*, 300–305.

- 46 In the 24th Session on May 7, 1877. *Ibid.*, 201–202.
- 47 The deliberations took place in various sessions between May 31 and May 3, 1877.
- 48 Kayalı, “Elections,” 267.
- 49 Güneş, *Türk Parlamento Tarihi*.
- 50 Şeref İba, *Osmanlı'dan Günümüze İçtüzük Metinleri* (Ankara: TBMM, 2007), 371. İba cites Servet Armağan, *Memleketimizde İçtüzükler* (Istanbul: İstanbul Üniversitesi Hukuk Fakültesi, 1972). Robert Devereux, *The First Ottoman Constitutional Period: A Study of the Midhat Constitution and Parliament* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1963), 155. It is beyond the scope of this paper to find out which examples were followed.
- 51 Khalid M. Al-Barazi, “The Majlis Mebusan (Meclis-i Mebusan): The Ottoman Parliament (1908–1912)” (Ph.D. diss. School of Oriental and African Studies (University of London), 2002), 100.
- 52 Devereux, *First Ottoman Constitutional Period*, 154.
- 53 I worked with the transliterated text provided in İba, *Osmanlı'dan Günümüze İçtüzük*.
- 54 For biographical information on him, see J. Deny, “Aḥmad Wafıq Paşa,” in *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd ed. doi: 10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_0426. Also Devereux, *First Ottoman Constitutional Period*.
- 55 Devereux, *First Ottoman Constitutional Period*, 156.
- 56 Al-Khalidi, member of one of the most prominent families of Jerusalem, served as mayor of that city from 1870 to 1876, and again from 1878 to 1879. See <https://islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/yusuf-ziya-el-halidi>. His biographical background fits the observation Karpat makes for many deputies: though not a “farmer” by profession, his family’s wealth was clearly based on property in agricultural land.
- 57 Devereux, *First Ottoman Constitutional Period*, 156.
- 58 Us, *Meclis-i Meb'usân 1877*, 32. The decision was taken with a simple majority, suggesting that some Muslims voted for observance of the Christian holiday.
- 59 Devereux, *First Ottoman Constitutional Period*, 183.
- 60 Vasilaki Efendi (Istanbul): bir işimiz olduğu, yahut hasta bulunduğumuz zaman ruhsat almak lazım mı? (...) Reis Efendi – bunun nizamnamede mussarah olduğunu, Vasilaki Efendi (Istanbul) (sic) – Nizamnamenin daha orası gelmediğini [söyledi]. Us, *Meclis-i Meb'usân 1877*, 32.
- 61 This is a question that I, too, have asked myself, and the chairman’s answer is instructive here: branches, unlike commissions, were not to be specialized in certain subjects. They were supposed to prepare the work of the plenary sessions, allowing for consideration of bills and other documents in smaller groups. All branches would, one after another, deal with the same documents. *Ibid.*, 32.
- 62 In session number five, *ibid.*
- 63 Devereux, *The First Ottoman Constitutional Period*, 163.
- 64 *Ibid.*
- 65 *Ibid.*
- 66 Arts. 57, 62 of the 1877 *nizamname*.
- 67 See Devereux, *First Ottoman Constitutional Period*, 175.
- 68 See M. Koß, *Parliaments in Time: The Evolution of Legislative Democracy in Western Europe, 1866–2015* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 133.
- 69 I have tried to verify this for the paper *Kastamonu*, which was published in that province as early as 1872. Unfortunately, the online collection of the Turkish National Library does not contain issues from the 1870s.
- 70 See Karpat, “The Ottoman Parliament,” in *Studies on Ottoman Social and Political History*.
- 71 See Devereux, *First Ottoman Constitutional Period*, 174.
- 72 See *ibid.*, 235–236.
- 73 Devereux, *First Ottoman Constitutional Period*, 236.
- 74 *Ibid.*, 237–238.

- 75 Ibid., 237.
- 76 Ibid., 247–248.
- 77 Akın, “Osmanlı Parlamentosu ve Cumhuriyete,” 60.
- 78 For a good overview of his reign, see François Georgeon, *Abdülhamid II (1876–1909): Le crépuscule de l'Empire ottoman*, Deuxième édition, Biblis 161 (Paris: CNRS éditions, 2017).
- 79 A case in point is the enforcement of military service. See Elke Hartmann, *Die Reichweite des Staates: Wehrpflicht und moderne Staatlichkeit im Osmanischen Reich 1869–1910*, Krieg in der Geschichte Band 89 (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2016).
- 80 On the CUP, see M. Ş. Hanioglu, “The Committee of Union and Progress and the 1908 Revolution,” in “*L'ivresse de la liberté*”: *La révolution de 1908 dans l'Empire ottoman*, ed. François Georgeon, Collection Turcica 17 (Paris: Peeters, 2012), 15–27.
- 81 On the relationship between centralists, liberals, and Armenian groups in exile, see Kévorkian, Raymond H., *The Armenian Genocide: A Complete History* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011), 43–50.
- 82 “(P)arlamento rejim (...) amaç değil amaç sayılmıştır.” (Emphasis as in the original.) Tarık Zafer Tunaya, *Türkiye’de Siyasal Partiler: I. İkinci Meşrutiyet Dönemi 1908–1918*, 2nd ed. ([İstanbul]: Hürriyet Vakfı Yayınları, 1984). This also goes for the first constitutional period.
- 83 See Nader Sohrabi, “Global Waves, Local Actors: What the Young Turks Knew about Other Revolutions and Why It Mattered,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 44, no. 1 (2002), 45–79.
- 84 For a good overview, see François Georgeon, ed., “*L'ivresse de la liberté*”: *La révolution de 1908 dans l'Empire ottoman*, Collection Turcica 17 (Paris: Peeters, 2012).
- 85 See Erol A. F. Baykal, *The Ottoman Press (1908–1923)* (Leiden: Brill, 2019).
- 86 For a detailed discussion of the procedure, see Kayalı, “Elections.” The voting age was set at 25, for male taxpayers only.
- 87 According to the census of 1907, the empire had a population of roughly 20 million, of which 15 million were Muslims. See Akın, “Osmanlı Parlamentosu ve Cumhuriyete,” 62.
- 88 Feroz Ahmad, *The Young Turks. The Committee of Union and Progress in Turkish Politics 1908–1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), 28. According to Enver Ziya Karal, who provides much lower numbers for the non-Turkish Muslims, there were only 240 deputies. See Enver Z. Karal, *Osmanlı Tarihi. IX. Cilt. İkinci Meşrutiyet ve Birinci Dünya Savaşı (1908–1918)* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1996), 62. The minutes, however, don’t support Karal’s claim: For 1 Haziran/14 June 1909, they provide the result of a roll call, giving the full number of deputies (including absent ones) as 268:
<https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/tutanaklar/TUTANAK/MECMEB/mmbd01ic01c004/mmbd01ic01c004ink092.pdf>, 338.
- 89 Charles R. Buxton, *Turkey in Revolution* (London, Leipzig (sic): Fisher Unwin, 1909), 207.
- 90 See Ahmad, *Young Turks*, 17.
- 91 For a very detailed discussion of the history of political parties, see Tunaya, *İkinci Meşrutiyet Dönemi 1908*.
- 92 See Ahmad, *Young Turks*, 65–91; Kayalı, “Elections,” 272–273.
- 93 Ileana Moroni, “Continuity and Change in the 1909 Constitutional Revision: An Ottoman Imperial Nation Claims Its Sovereignty,” in *The Young Turk Revolution and the Ottoman Empire: The Aftermath of 1908*, eds. Noémi Lévy-Aksu and François Georgeon, Library of Ottoman Studies 59 (London: Tauris, 2017), 265–317, 267.
- 94 At this point, in 1908, this would have been the Ottoman nation, whose exact character, and the relationship of different groups within it, was hotly debated during the

- first years of the second constitutional period. See Bedross Der Matossian, *Shattered Dreams of Revolution* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2014).
- 95 The state of emergency does not seem to have mattered much for the freedom of the press. See Baykal, *The Ottoman Press (1908–1923)*.
- 96 See Bedross D. Matossian, “From Bloodless Revolution to Bloody Counterrevolution: The Adana Massacres of 1909,” *Genocide Studies and Prevention* 6, no. 2 (2011): 152–173.
- 97 For a general overview of political events, see Zürcher, *Turkey*.
- 98 The number of temporary laws is taken from Tunaya, *İkinci Meşrutiyet Dönemi 1908*, 9.
- 99 For a comprehensive discussion and interpretation of the constitutional revision, see Moroni, “Continuity and Change.”
- 100 *Ibid.*, 270.
- 101 For a detailed discussion of the amended articles, which also provides a comparison to similar stipulations in the Belgian (1831), Prussian (1861), and German (1871) constitutions, see Gotthard Jäschke, “Die rechtliche Bedeutung der in den Jahren 1909–1916 vollzogenen Abänderungen des türkischen Staatsgrundgesetzes,” *Die Welt des Islams* 5, no. 3 (1917): 97–152. An English discussion largely based on Jäschke can be found in Al-Barazi, “The Majlis Mebusan.”
- 102 Art. 3. <http://www.anayasa.gen.tr/1909amendment.htm>. In my citation, (...) marks the place where I have taken out the explanation “canon law” for *Şeriat/Sharia*, which is grossly misleading, as *Sharia* law was *not* positive, despite late Ottoman attempts at fixating it in the *mecelle*, a compilation of *Sharia*-based provisions in paragraph form. The Ottoman Turkish text of the Constitution reads: “Zat-ı hazret-i padişah-i hin-i cüluslarında Meclis-i Umûmîde ve Meclis müctemi değilse ilk ictimainda şer’-i şerif ve Kanun-ı Esasi ahkâmına riayet ve vatan ve millete sadakat edeceğine yemin eder.” Gözübüyük, *Türk Anayasa Metinleri*, 50.
- 103 Akın, “Osmanlı Parlamentosu ve Cumhuriyete,” 63. The MM tried to make these posts, too, subject to approval by the chamber, but the Senate refused to sanction the changed article. See Moroni, “Continuity and Change,” 271.
- 104 According to the new article 35, in the case of such a disagreement, the Sultan could dissolve the chamber and hold new elections. If these produced a chamber that again persisted on its position, the Sultan had to accept the bill. For the changed article, see <https://anayasa.tbmm.gov.tr/docs/1876/1876-1/1876-1-degisiklik.pdf>. On the changes, also see Moroni, *ibid.*, 272.
- 105 Olgun, *1908–1912*, 131.
- 106 See Moroni, “Continuity and Change,” 271.
- 107 Article 4 of the election law stated: “in every district, all male Ottoman inhabitants shall be written into a register.” (her kazada mevcut olan osmanli nüfus-i zükurunun esas defterinin tanzimiyle.) (Emphasis mine.) *Kanun-i Esasi. Meclis-i Mebusan Nizamname-i Dahilisi. Meclis-i Azan Nizamname-i Dahilisi. İntihab-ı Mebusan Kanunu* (Istanbul: Matbaa-i Âmire, 1328 [1912/1913]). 86 (No page numbers, counted according to the pdf). Pdf obtained from <https://acikerisim.tbmm.gov.tr/xmlui/handle/11543/2463>
- 108 See Olgun, *1908–1912*, 190–191. Olgun is mistaken in believing that the deputy for Dersim, Lütfi Fikri Bey, proposed female suffrage. He actually compared women to children, who also belonged to the nation, but were not allowed to vote, and should therefore be represented in parliament (by male deputies). See <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/tutanaklar/TUTANAK/MECMEB/mmbd01ic01c004/mmbd01ic01c004ink092.pdf>, 356.
- 109 Unfortunately, Al-Barazi’s discussion of the internal regulations, despite dealing with the *Meclis-i Mebusan* after 1908, is limited to the 1877 text of the *nizamname*, not taking into account the 1909 amendments.
- 110 Unless stated otherwise, this section is based on the regulation texts as published by İba, *Osmanlı’dan Günümüze İçtüzük*.

- 111 See Olgun, *1908–1912 Osmanlı Meclis-i Mebusanı*, 119.
- 112 For a detailed discussion, see Kayalı, “Elections,” 272, Al-Barazi, “The Majlis Mebusan,” 124.
- 113 Kayalı, *ibid.*, and Barazi, 125. Raymond H. Kévorkian, *The Armenian Genocide: A Complete History* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011), 67.
- 114 Al-Barazi, “The Majlis Mebusan,” 126.
- 115 This is suggested by some browsing in the parliamentary minutes. For studies of two particularly hot debates, see Louis Fishman, “Understanding the 1911 Ottoman Parliament Debate on Zionism in Light of the Emergence of a ‘Jewish Question’,” in *Late Ottoman Palestine: The Period of Young Turk Rule*, eds. Yuval Ben-Bassat and Eyal Ginio, Library of Ottoman Studies 29 (London: Tauris, 2011), 103–124; Ayhan Aktar, “Debating the Armenian Massacres in the Last Ottoman Parliament,” *History Workshop Journal* 64 (2007): 240–270.
- 116 See Kayalı, “Elections,” 273.
- 117 *Ibid.*, 279.
- 118 Changed articles 7, 35, and 43, 27 May 1914. See <https://anayasa.tbmm.gov.tr/docs/1876/1876-2/1876-2-degisiklik.pdf>. Changed article 102, same day, <https://anayasa.tbmm.gov.tr/docs/1876/1876-3/1876-3-degisiklik.pdf>.
- 119 Changed article 76 (11 February 1915) <https://anayasa.tbmm.gov.tr/docs/1876/1876-4/1876-4-degisiklik.pdf>. This is when the law came into force. It was probably discussed in the *meclis* much earlier, possibly prior to the First World War.
- 120 Among the arrested Armenian community leaders were deputy for Istanbul Krikor Zohrab (deputy for Istanbul, arrested only later), Vartkes Serengüliyan (Erzurum, arrested later), Nazaret Dağavariyan (Sivas), and Hampartsoum Boyacıyan (a.k.a. Murad, deputy for Sis/Kozan). All four were killed. There were also a number of former deputies among the deported. For an account of the April 1915 arrests in Istanbul, see Kévorkian, *The Armenian Genocide*.
- 121 See Erik J. Zürcher, “Young Turk Governance in the Ottoman Empire During the First World War,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 55, no. 6 (2019): 897–913.
- 122 Zürcher cites one session in 1915 during which 245 laws were passed, 177 of them without any discussion: Erik J. Zürcher, “Young Turk Governance in the Ottoman Empire during the First World War,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 55, no. 6 (2019): 897–913, 900.
- 123 Changed articles 7 and 35 of 9 March 1916 (4 Cemazievvel 1334), see <https://anayasa.tbmm.gov.tr/docs/1876/1876-5/1876-5-degisiklik.pdf>.
- 124 Changed article 72, 20 March 1916 (15 Cemazievvel 1334), see <https://anayasa.tbmm.gov.tr/docs/1876/1876-6/1876-6-de%C4%9Fi%C5%9Fiklik.pdf>.
- 125 For studies of this debate, see Kévorkian, *The Armenian Genocide*, 721–733, Aktar, “Debating the Armenian Massacres.”
- 126 For the nexus of war-time and postwar violence, see Ellinor Morack, “The Ottoman Greeks and the Great War: 1912–1922,” in *The World during the First World War*, eds. Helmut Bley and Anorthe Kremers (Essen: Klartext, 2014).
- 127 See Zürcher, *Turkey*, 138.
- 128 See M. Çağatay Okutan, *Tek Parti Döneminde Azınlık Politikaları*, 1. baskı, İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi yayınları Siyaset bilimi 9 (İstanbul: İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2004). I would like to thank Şener Aktürk (Koç University) for pointing this out to me and making me aware of Okutan’s book. I think, however, that such a statement was unnecessary, given that elections were only held in areas controlled by the new movement, which usually drove out the Christian population. The one community that may have been (theoretically) able to participate was the Turkish-speaking Orthodox Karamanli community living in central Anatolia.
- 129 See Kenan Olgun, “Türkiye’de Cumhuriyetin İlanından 1950’ye Genel Seçim Uygulamaları,” *Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi Dergisi* 27, no. 79 (2011): 1–36, 10. According to Tunaya, this only happened in 1924.

- 130 The 1921 *Teşkilat-i Esasiye Kanunu* (Fundamental Law) is often presented as a constitution in its own right. This, however, is not true. It was passed as a list of additions (merely 23 articles) which, if contradicting the Ottoman Constitution, replaced it, but left the other parts of the Ottoman Constitution in place.
- 131 See Emine Evered and Kyle T. Evered, “A Geopolitics of Drinking: Debating the Place of Alcohol in Early Republican Turkey,” *Political Geography* 50 (2016): 48–60.
- 132 The conflict over the question of alcohol prohibition is usually misrepresented as one between reactionary Islamists and progressive seculars. As the minutes show, almost all deputies (including those later perceived as “secular”) argued in favor of prohibition, citing health reasons and the desire to boycott non-Muslim businesses as objectives of the law. The minister of finance argued in favor of legal alcohol sales due to fiscal concerns.
- 133 See Mete Tunçay, *Türkiye Cumhuriyeti'nde Tek Parti Yönetimi'nin Kurulması: 1923–1931* (Ankara: Yurt Yayınları, 1981).
- 134 See Ergün Aybars, *İstiklâl Mahkemeleri* (Ankara: Bilgi Yayınevi, 1975).
- 135 Zürcher, *Turkey*.
- 136 See Tunçay, *Türkiye Cumhuriyeti'nde Tek*, 46. Turkish official historiography usually depicts the second group as religious reactionaries. They may have been more outspoken in their opposition to policies that weakened religious institutions, but I think that this was a result of their relative independence from state positions, rather than of lifestyles or contentions differing from their peers in the first group. Put differently, throughout early republican times, anti-religious policies were deeply unpopular and truly anti-religious people very few in numbers.
- 137 The problem apparently was that the Mosul question was left out of the Lausanne treaty, to be negotiated later. See Tunçay, *Türkiye Cumhuriyeti'nde Tek*, 49–50.
- 138 Olgun, “Türkiye’de Cumhuriyetin İlanından,” 12. Female suffrage was introduced on the local level in 1930, and for nation-wide elections in 1934.
- 139 See Tunçay, *Türkiye Cumhuriyeti'nde Tek* 55–56.
- 140 Erik J. Zürcher, “The Ottoman Legacy of the Turkish Republic: An Attempt at a New Periodization,” *Die Welt des Islams* 32 (1992): 237–253.
- 141 For a good discussion of opposition in parliamentary commissions during the single-party period, see Yelda Kaya, “A Fissure in ‘Unanimous Democracy’: Parliamentary Contestations over Property Rights on Land in Early Republican Turkey,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 55, no. 4 (2019): 540–556.
- 142 “(M)ebusların, pasif direnişi diyebileceğimiz, tutum ve davranışları devam ettiği gibi, daha da yaygınlaşıyor (...)” Mahmut Goloğlu, *Devrimler Ve Tepkileri, 1924–1930* (Ankara: Başnur Matbaası, 1972), 221.
- 143 For instance, in a vote conducted on March 2, 1927, out of 287 deputies, only 124 voted, and 123 of them voted Yes. See *ibid.*, 221. Goloğlu states that 287 deputies were present. I highly doubt this, but rather think that most of those who did not vote did not show up. The minutes are not clear here, speaking merely of “number of deputies.” See <http://www.tbmm.gov.tr/tutanaklar/TUTANAK/TBMM/d02/c030/tbmm02030039.pdf>
- 144 Kaya, “A Fissure in ‘Unanimous,’” 540. Citing Frederick W. Frey, *The Turkish Political Elite* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1965), 369. FN 10.
- 145 TBMM ZC, April 26, 1920, 71–72. The points raised at this point were presented as merely technical ones: the new parliament had three, rather than two, deputy chairmen, the number of commissions differed from that in the MM, and the parliament building was not big enough for housing five branches (*şubeler*).
<http://www.tbmm.gov.tr/tutanaklar/TUTANAK/TBMM/d01/c001/tbmm01001004.pdf>
- 146 The debate about the looting of İzmir in September 1922 is a case in point. See Ellinor Morack, *The Dowry of the State? The Politics of Abandoned Property and Nation-Building in Turkey, 1921–1945*, Bamberger Orientstudien 9 (Bamberg: Bamberg University Press, 2017), 181–210.

- 147 §§ 96–102 in the 1909 text, §131 in 1927.
- 148 <http://www.tbmm.gov.tr/tutanaklar/TUTANAK/TBMM/d01/c001/tbmm01001004.pdf>.
- 149 See Faruk Alpkaya, *Türkiye Cumhuriyeti'nin Kuruluşu (1923–1924)* (Istanbul: İletişim, 1998) Also see the minutes of the 13 August 1923 session: <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/tutanaklar/TUTANAK/TBMM/d02/c001/tbmm02001003.pdf>
- 150 https://anayasa.tbmm.gov.tr/docs/ictuzuk/1-1877_M.M.N.D/1909sonras%C4%B1metin.pdf, § 12, paragraph 2, 306.
- 151 See İhsan Ezherli, *Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi (1920–1992) ve Osmanlı Meclisi Mebusanı (1877–1920)* (Ankara: TBMM Yayınları, 1992), 39.
- 152 Ezherli, *Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi*, 42.
- 153 TBMM Basın ve Halkla İlişkiler Müdürlüğü, “TBMM Albümü 1920–2010: 1. Cilt 1920–1950,” Türkiye/Büyük Millet Meclisi. Membership in that commission is only mentioned for deputies from 1927 onward. It is, however, clear that people sent petitions to the TBMM long before that. Those petitions were usually forwarded to the ministries in charge of the matter at hand.
- 154 Nizamname-i Dahilisi, §20, paragraph 2. p. 307.
- 155 TBMM Dahili Nizamnamesi (2 Mayıs 1927) §24.
- 156 Ibid., FN 10.
- 157 For the debates surrounding the issue of the President’s powers, see Alpkaya, *Türkiye Cumhuriyeti'nin Kuruluşu*, 60 passim.
- 158 *Tevhid-i Efkar*, 19 Teşrinievvel/October 1339/1923, “Ankara İstasyon Binası Cumhuriyet Doğurabilecek Mi?” Cited in *ibid.*, 75.
- 159 See Alpkaya, *Türkiye Cumhuriyeti'nin Kuruluşu*, 74–89.
- 160 See <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/tutanaklar/TUTANAK/TBMM/d02/c003/tbmm02003043.pdf>, 90.
- 161 1927 Nizamnamesi, Madde 146: “Teşkilâtı Esasiye Kanununun 102 nci maddesi mucibince mezkûr kanunun tadili icabettikte teklifin Meclis mürettep azasının, en az üçte biri tarafından imza edilmesi meşruttur. Tadilât, mürettep aza adedinin üçte iki ekseriyetiyle kabul olunur.”
- 162 Session on 29 October 1923: <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/tutanaklar/TUTANAK/TBMM/d02/c003/tbmm02003043.pdf>, 98.
- 163 According to the list of deputies given in the TBMM album: TBMM Basın ve Halkla İlişkiler Müdürlüğü, “TBMM Albümü 1920–2010,” 81–122.
- 164 Session on 13 August 1923: <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/tutanaklar/TUTANAK/TBMM/d02/c001/tbmm02001003.pdf>, 36.
- 165 Session on 30 October 1923: <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/tutanaklar/TUTANAK/TBMM/d02/c003/tbmm02003044.pdf>, 102.
- 166 “(İ)nkılâbın kanunu mevcut kavâninin fevkindedir.” Mustafa K. Atatürk, *Gazi Mustafa Kemal Paşanın 1923 Eskişehir - İzmit Konuşmaları*. Edited by İnan Arı (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu 1982), 79–82, cited in Alpkaya, *Türkiye Cumhuriyeti'nin Kuruluşu*, 26.

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