

# PARLIAMENT MEMBERSHIP DURING THE SINGLE-PARTY SYSTEM IN TURKEY (1925-1945)

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## INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

The single-party regime in Turkey was established de facto in 1925, and continued throughout the 2nd World War, ending at the end of 1945. It is natural that being a member of parliament (MP) during this period was very different from being an MP during the following terms. This difference can best be demonstrated if the matter is viewed through the perspectives of history, political science, law, and sociology; therefore it is necessary to adopt an interdisciplinary approach. In order to unravel the class-related aspects of the issue, it becomes, of course, inevitable to avail oneself of old Karl Marx's method, and, however much it may be said that the latter has become worn down and generally quite outmoded, I will not refrain from employing Marx's method in this paper.

Since the Turkish Republic derives from the Ottoman State, it has become almost a tradition to look back at the Ottoman period in almost all matters relating to Turkey, and to refer to a historical, political, social or cultural heritage, depending on the subject. This paper will definitely be making references to the Ottoman period, especially in terms of law-related issues, for, as it will become clear later on in the paper, it is pointless to attempt to analyse the legal norms and practices of Republican Turkey, without being on familiar terms with the Ottoman Constitution and laws: There is a direct legal and political correlation of heritage within this context.

In order to recollect the stages of the development of the Turkish parliamentary system, it is imperative to review the parliaments of this period and how they were composed in terms of deputies, as well as the election systems and other issues involved. This review does not just serve the purpose of providing a historical background, but also presents an opportunity for a useful and meaningful analysis.

### **1876 Constitution: An Analysis from the Point of View of Constitutional Law<sup>1</sup> The Executive Organ and Its Power**

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<sup>1</sup> For the original text of the 1876 Ottoman Constitution see: Türk Anayasa Metinleri (1839-1980). (edited by Şeref Gözübüyük and Suna Kili). 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Ankara: Ankara Üniversitesi Siyasal Bilgiler Fakültesi Yayını, 1982: 25-42. Türk Anayasaları ve İlgili Mevzuat. (edited by Server Tanilli). İstanbul: İstanbul Üniversitesi Hukuk Fakültesi Yayınları, 1980: 3-19. Anayasalar ve Seçim Kanunları. (1876-1982). (edited by Tarhan Erdem). İstanbul: Milliyet Yayınları, 1982:3-14. Server, Ferudin. Anayasalar ve Siyasal Belgeler. İstanbul: 1962.

It was not considered necessary for the government to get a vote of confidence from the parliament, because the government was not responsible to the parliament. As we will see below, the house of representatives (*Heyeti Mebusan*) which formed a wing of the parliament, had a right to issue petitions of complaint against the members of the government, but only in the fields under their responsibilities (*article 31*). In such a case, after long and complicated procedures, if two thirds of the house of representatives considered the petition of complaint to be justified, then the Grand Vizier (*Sadrizam*) would inform the case to the Sultan and if the Sultan also considered the complaint right and justified, the relevant member of the government would be invited to the high court (*Divani Ali*).

The Sultan also had the authority to call both wings of the parliament, the house of representatives and the senate (*Heyeti Ayan*), to a meeting and in case there was need, dissolve the house of representatives, in which case he renewed the elections (*article 44*). The members of parliament had the right to ask the members of government questions. In this case, the relevant government member could either personally answer the question or have somebody from his staff answer on his behalf. However, he also had the right to postpone the answer, providing he took the responsibility (*article 37 and 38*)– but it was not clear what this responsibility involved. The supervision mechanism of the legislative organ over the governing organ, was very limited.<sup>2</sup>

### **The Legislative Organ and Its Power**

The parliament was to convene at the beginning of November with the approval of the Sultan, and conclude its season of function at the beginning of March in the same way (*article 43*). In case of necessity, it could start functioning earlier and end later, but only with the Sultan's approval (*article 44*).

The members of the House of Representatives were elected from among the Ottoman citizens so that there would be one representative for every fifty thousand male population (*article 65*). The system of election was not described in the Constitution; there only was an article stipulating that the elections were to be by secret ballot (*article 66*). The members were elected for four years; it was possible to be re-elected (*article 69*). They were considered as representative of the whole country, not of the region that they were elected from (*article 71*). A person could not be member at both wings of the parliament (*article 50*). Members of the parliament were not to be questioned for their ideas and their votes (*article 47*). Members of the House of Representatives could not become a member of the government (*article 67*). In order to become a member of the House of Representatives, one had to be a citizen of the Ottoman state, had not to be in the service of a foreign country, had to know Turkish, had to be over thirty years of age and had not to be in the personal service of any person. In addition, to have been sentenced for bankruptcy in trade and being in the state of commercial honor not restored, to have a corrupt fame, to be under the care of a guardian, to have been deprived of civil rights, to be accused of holding the citizenship of a foreign country, were the factors that would prevent one from being elected for the House of Representatives. In the elections that were held four years later, two other conditions were added: To be able to read Turkish, and, as much as possible, to be able to write in Turkish (*article 68*). The voters were to elect their representatives from among

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<sup>2</sup> Tanör: 136-144. Tunaya: 11. Sosyal: 60. Kili: 194-209. Okandan: 151-161. Aldıkaçtı: 53-54. Jaeschke: 14-20. Mumcu: 31-47.

the people in their region of election (*article 72*). The meetings of the parliament were to be open to public, however, in case of a request and in case this request was accepted by the majority, a closed session could be held (*article 78*). The members of the House of Representatives had legislative immunity. This immunity could be withdrawn only when the relevant convention decided so with a majority, or if the relevant representative was caught red-handed while committing the crime. Otherwise the representatives could not be arrested or taken to court (*article 79*).

The legislative authority, which normally belongs to the parliament, was limited in favor of the Sultan (*article 7*). The authority to propose bills was given to the government, to the Senate and to the house of representatives. The government was authorized to propose bills on every subject, but the house of representatives and the senate were authorized to propose bills only within the scope of some of their duties (*article 53*) – regarding which no definition was given.

Changing the current laws could also come into question – but only those that were outside the field of authority of the Sultan and the government. However, in order to use even this extremely limited authority of proposing bills, the Sultan's approval was required, that is to say, first of all, the Sultan had to give permission for a certain bill to be proposed. This permission – or approval- was to be obtained through the Grand Vizier (*Sadrâzam*). Once the Sultan's approval was obtained, the text of the draft law was prepared by Council of State (*Şurayı Devlet*). It was first discussed in the house of representatives and then in the senate. If it was accepted by both wings of the parliament, then the draft was presented to the Sultan and could be enacted only if he approved. A text that the Sultan did not accept could never be enacted. The Sultan had the right to veto (*article 53 and 54*). In the process of legislation, a text that was rejected by one wing of the parliament, could not be enacted, either. A draft bill that was rejected, could not be discussed again during that year. In both wings of the parliament, decisions were taken by majority vote. In order for a bill to be enacted, each article was to be voted separately and each article had to be accepted by the majority. The same was valid for the whole of the bill (*article 54*). The Senate could examine a bill only in terms of checking if it was against religion, the Sultan's rights, freedom, the Constitution, the unity of the state, internal security, the defense of the country and common morals. If this was the case, it would either reject the bill or send it back to the house of representatives to be altered (*article 64*). The Parliament used Turkish in their discussions (*article 57*).<sup>3</sup>

### **Elections and System of Elections**

Immediately after the constitution entered effect, an election was held to elect the members of the house of representatives. Actually, the Constitution stipulated that a special bill be enacted for this purpose. However, since the same Constitution stipulated that the house of representatives was to be formed, before a bill could be enacted, a temporary arrangement was accepted and declared together with the Constitution.

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<sup>3</sup> Tanör: 136-144. Tunaya: 11-12. Sosyal: 59-60. Mumcu: 37-39. Aldıkaçtı: 55-58. Okandan: 161-165. Gencer, Ali İhsan. "İlk Osmanlı Anayasasında Türkçenin Resmi Dil Olarak Kabulü Meselesi". In *Kanun-u Esasi'nin 100. Yılı Armağanı*. Ankara: Ankara Üniversitesi Siyasal Bilgiler Fakültesi Yayını, 1978: 183-189.

According to this temporary arrangement, elections were to be made according to a two-phased, simple majority system. 80 Moslem and 50 non-Moslem representatives were to be elected. The number of representatives to be elected from each province was determined. According to this arrangement, the age for eligibility to be elected was set as 25, despite the clear, contradicting statement of the Constitution. Besides, in order to be a representative, new conditions -such as knowing Turkish, being from the province from which one was elected, being trustworthy and owning at least some property- were added. The Ottoman State was being divided into two parts, for the elections. Accordingly, İstanbul formed an electoral region of twenty sections. Five Moslem and five non-Moslem representatives were to be elected from İstanbul. The primary electors (*müntehibi evvel*) were to elect two secondary electors (*müntehibi sani*) from each section and thus, 40 secondary elector would elect the representatives. Elections were to be held in rural centers as well; however, in rural areas, a separate election was not to be held to determine the secondary electors; those who were elected for the local parliaments, were to be accepted as secondary electors and they were to elect the representatives. In order to vote and to be elected, one had to be male - women had no such right. During the First Constitutional Monarchy period, two elections were to be held.

Parliament (*Meclisi Umumi*) was able to convene in two separate periods. The first meeting of the first period of Parliament took place on the 20<sup>th</sup> of March, 1877. In a little over three months, after 56 sessions, this Parliament concluded its activities on the 28<sup>th</sup> of June, 1877. Then new elections were held, and the parliament (*Meclisi Umumi*) which convened again on December 13, 1877, concluded its activities on February 14, 1878, after a two month working period and 29 sessions. This concluding was in accordance with the relevant article of the Constitution. However, the parliament which was to meet again at the beginning of November, was never going to be called to meet again.<sup>4</sup>

### **THE PARLIAMENT PRIOR TO THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE REPUBLIC: THE FIRST TURKISH GRAND NATIONAL ASSEMBLY**

Upon the summon of Atatürk, the lower house of the last Ottoman parliament (*heyeti mebusan*), which had assembled in İstanbul before, convened this time in Ankara, on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of April, 1920. In truth, the sole reason for the convening in Ankara of this parliament was necessity, because İstanbul was under occupation and, consequently, parliament had to assemble elsewhere. Furthermore, the parliament had decided to use the French Revolution (with all its stages and developments) as model for itself. The members of parliament who assembled in Ankara were naturally the same people who were members of the parliament in İstanbul. However, this assembly was different from the Ottoman parliament. First of all, part of the members of the Ottoman parliament never ever came to Ankara. One group came immediately, and another group took quite a while to arrive. In fact, after a while, the parliament in Ankara had to announce that those who did not come to Ankara would no longer be accepted as members of parliament. However, since the number of MPs who did arrive in Ankara were just a small

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<sup>4</sup> Tanör: 152-166. Tunaya: 14-16. Okandan: 171-195. Aldıkaçtı: 57-59. Armağan, Servet. "Memleketimizde İlk Parlamento Seçimleri". In *Kanun-u Esasi'nin 100. Yılı Armağanı*. Ankara: Ankara Üniversitesi Siyasal Bilgiler Fakültesi Yayını, 1978: 147-167. Tunaya, Tarık Zafer. *Türkiye Tarihinde Seçimler*. İstanbul: 1954. Ortaylı, İlber. "İlk Osmanlı Parlamentosu ve Osmanlı Milletlerinin Temsili". In *Kanun-u Esasi'nin 100. Yılı Armağanı*. Ankara: Ankara Üniversitesi Siyasal Bilgiler Fakültesi Yayını, 1978: 169-182. For the parliament texts see: *Meclisi Mebusan 1293/1877 Zabıt Ceridesi*. (edited by Hakkı Tarık Us). In two volumes. İstanbul: 1940.

minority, elections had to be held to fill in the vacancies. Elections could be called in regions that were not under occupation – but only in theory. In many regions, elections either took a long time to be held, or did not take place at all. For those regions where elections did not take place, MPs were selected and appointed from among people either from Ankara or the region involved. Therefore, these “elections” were not so much “elections” in the actual sense, but rather, signified an assignment system aimed at legitimizing the formation of a parliament representing the people. Although the exact total number of MPs in this parliament is still a matter of debate among historians, we can say that there were around a total of 350 MPs within the 3-year period.

It may be useful to recall some important characteristics of this parliament: Firstly, unlike the Ottoman parliament, political parties or members of political parties never took place in this parliament. Members were affiliated not to parties, but to political groups. No legal statutes had been designed for these political groups, and group discipline was generally lax. Often, members would shift from one group to another; in fact, this tendency was quite frequent. Generally the balance of powers would be re-established according to the issue being debated. On the one hand there was the “First Group” with its Jacobinic tendencies, which generally supported Atatürk and his close friends; on the other hand there was the “Second Group” movement which left its mark upon the political conflicts in this parliament, going up against the First Group - liberal and liberalistic, but at the same time, extremely conservative. Secondly, again in contrast to the Ottoman parliaments, there was not a single Christian member in this parliament. That is to say, exclusively Muslim (but not exclusively Turkish) members took place in the parliament. This was the first time that representatives of non-Muslim communities were excluded from parliament. Yet another characteristic of this parliament was the fact that –contrary to the classical parliamentarian idea of “separation of powers”, which constituted one of the principles of the Ottoman constitutional system- this parliament adopted a system which was closer to that of the French Revolution, and which called for just the opposite of the “separation of powers” principle. This parliament regarded the “superiority of parliament” principle as symbol that sovereignty belonged to the nation. Everything was to start with and within parliament and was to terminate with and within parliament. No other power or sovereignty would be accepted. The parliament was a direct representative of the people and was pursuing the people’s rulership. In a way, this resembled the bolshevik slogan “All power to the Soviets” in Russia during the October 1917 Revolution: “All power to the Parliament”. The “superiority of parliament” principle stipulated that the legislative, executive and judiciary authorities belonged to the parliament. In other words, the parliament was authorized not just to make laws, but also to supervise and control the government -which in fact was its own product and which it could oust any time- and to set up extraordinary courts and to appoint its own members as judges to these courts. The government served as executive agent of the parliament.

This parliament which, in Turkish parliamentarian and political history, is referred to as the “First Assembly” (TGNA) left behind distinguishing marks both in terms of the composition of its members, as well as its working conditions and the free debates it hosted. So much so that the assertion that this assembly has been the most democratic and participatory assembly until 1950, is, to a large extent, true. A “spirit” that was never to be felt during the single-party period, was strongly prevalent in this parliament, which had the characteristic of representing a large part of society. Every type of ground-gaining idea of the period found the opportunity of being represented in this parliament. Although the members were not directly the “people” themselves, but had only come from *among* the “people”, they nevertheless had a strong “representational”

ability. On the other hand, the freedom of expression of ideas and the discussions within parliament were at such a high level as never to be seen again for long years to come. During this term, elections were held only once, and at the end of three years -a short period- the MPs announced that they had completed their duty, and dissolved the assembly on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of April, 1922, in order for new elections to be held. This decision should be assessed and accepted as an indicator of political maturity, for if the members had so wished, according to the Constitution, they could have continued as MPs without being constrained by any time limitations.

## **PARLIAMENTS AND ELECTIONS DURING THE REPUBLICAN PERIOD**

### **The 1923 Elections and the Second Turkish Grand National Assembly**

The last elections prior to the declaration of the Republic, were held in 1923. These elections were organized based on the electoral law of 1877, an inheritance from the Ottoman period. Accordingly, one MP was to be elected for each 20,000 men. Every male over 18 now had the right to vote; the condition of having to pay a certain amount of tax to be able to vote, had been lifted. To be elected, one had to be a male member of the People of the Turkish State, over 30 years of age. However, elections were still held in two rounds and a second “voter” was to be elected for every 200 people.

Prior to the elections, Atatürk had announced that he would set up a new political party based on the “First Group” which had been formed within the First Parliament. The candidates of this group, whose leadership Atatürk took up after a brief political declaration, eliminated the candidates of the Second Group –their rivals- and entered the new parliament. Only one member of the Second Group had succeeded in being re-elected; thus, there was no further opposition in parliament against the Kemalist rule. In fact, many of the Second Group MPs had not even become candidates in these elections; 16 of them had attempted to become independent MPs from Istanbul, but had been unsuccessful. “The People’s Party” (of which the adjective “Republican” was later added to the name) was set up after the elections. Except for one MP, all of the MPs were members of this (single) party.

However, it would be wrong to conclude, just based on this appearance, that the second parliament was much different from the first one. On the contrary; even though the MPs of the second parliament were all members of the same party, there were no less heated discussions and conflicts than there were in the first parliament, because there were deep differences of opinion within the People’s Party. Although being members of the same party, these MPs pursued very different political goals; this, naturally, incited the political struggle within the party and, consequently, within the parliament. During this period, it was yet possible to carry on this struggle freely and within the framework of democratic rules. Indeed, we see in some of the elections held after 1923 that also independent candidates succeeded in being elected as MPs. However, these have always been exceptional, rare cases. After this period was over, independent candidates were never again able to win an election.

Parliamentary elections were held in two rounds, just like during the Ottoman period. First, the second-round candidates for voting, put forth by the People’s Party, were presented to the first round voters, for election. The first-round voters had no alternative anyway, against this list of candidates. As for the secondary voters - they had no choice but to vote for the MP

candidates list that was set up by the People's Party: One should not forget that they themselves were also members of the People's Party and had to vote for this list, otherwise they would be expelled from the party in accordance with party discipline. And in practice, this system worked flawlessly. From the start, as lists of candidates were being set up, in most electoral regions, the number of candidates presented did not exceed the number of MPs to be elected from that region, and thus it was guaranteed that all of these persons would be elected. Often, candidates did not even know they were candidates – some even learnt of their candidacy through newspapers!<sup>5</sup>

According to the People's Party's statutes dating 1923, the party's top level executive committee was composed of the Parliamentary Group executive board members, who comprised the government members, the general executive board members and parliamentarians of the party. At the same time, this committee was authorized to determine and announce the party's parliamentary candidates, after communicating with regional administrative committees. However, party members had to vote for those people whose candidacy was declared by the party. For those party members who objected to these decisions of the committee, there were many disciplinary measures which included expulsion from the party, and refusing to vote for the candidates of the party was an offense which resulted in expulsion from the party.<sup>6</sup>

There were also articles in the statutes covering candidates to the People's Party Parliamentary Group. According to these articles, the head of the party was also to be the head of the Parliamentary Group of the party. The group was to elect an executive board from among its own members, and every kind of topic could be discussed in the group. Group members would have the right to freely express their ideas during these meetings. However, all the members had to abide by the decisions of the group. During parliamentary sessions, group members were obliged to vote in accordance with the party's decisions. However, in matters where no group decision was taken, members were free to vote according to their own views. Those members who violated these rules could be penalized in various ways, the most drastic one being expulsion from the party.<sup>7</sup>

### **The elections of 1927 and the Third Turkish Grand National Assembly**

Following the second term of Parliament, new elections were held in 1927 - but some very important political developments were to occur during the period between the two elections. Initially, there had been just one party (the People's Party) in the parliament formed after the 1923 elections. However, as a consequence of the differences of opinion that showed up within the party in a short time, one group of opponents broke off and formed a new political party, the "Progressive Republican Party" ("*Terakkiperver Cumhuriyet Fırkası*"). However, this opposition was to be short-lived. The Kurdish revolt of 1925 brought an end to this party, as well as to all opposing organizations, all opposing media, and the freedom of expression of all divergent ideas.

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<sup>5</sup> Uyar (1999), 21-31. Demirel (1995), 23-27. Demirel ( ), 584-597. Çatan (1999), 8-56. Güneş (1991) 253-264. Yücekök ( ), 98-105. Uyar (1995), 23-27.

<sup>6</sup> **Halk Fırkası Nizamnamesi (1923)**: articles 20, 26-27 and 101-103.

<sup>7</sup> **Halk Fırkası Nizamnamesi (1923)**: articles 83-100.

The special courts which were then established, played a role in the suppression of opposition of any kind. Therefore this opposition party never had the chance to take part in any elections.

In addition, the Constitution had been changed in 1924. The new Constitution was the first one adopted after the establishment of the Republic, and reflected a balance of the separation of powers system and a “union of powers”. Although there was now a divergence from the “government of the Parliament” system, the Parliament’s sovereignty was still continuing. The Parliament continued to hold the legislative and executive powers in its hand and also continued to keep its power over the government. In order to vote, one had to be male and over 18 years of age. Those men over 30 had the right to be elected as MPs. However, those who did not fulfill certain criteria could not avail themselves of these rights. Elections were to be held every four years. According to the Constitution, the MPs were free in the expression of their ideas in Parliament, and in their votes; what they spoke in Parliament they could repeat outside Parliament and would not be held responsible for this. They continued enjoying political immunity. They could be judged for certain crimes – and only with the votes of two third of MPs could they be judged at a special court.<sup>8</sup>

Meanwhile, another important political development was the congress of the People’s Party, the name of which had now been added the adjective “Republican”. At this congress, party statutes had been dramatically changed. The party’s general executive board was now composed of the party’s “Deputy Unchangeable Leader” (“Unchangeable” had during this time been added the title “Leader”), and the Secretary General. The head of the party had now also legally become the undisputable Leader of the Party. All members of the party were obliged to comply with all the decisions this board would take. It was again this board which would administer parliamentary elections and which was authorized to determine the party’s parliamentary candidates. The candidates were being announced by the party leader; thus the party leader had definite authority to decide who the MPs would be.<sup>9</sup>

Rules were set for members of the Party’s Parliamentary Group. Accordingly, the Leader of the Party was also head of the Parliamentary Group. The other rules did not change. However, now, a decision of the party group had become necessary in order to be able to ask the government a question in Parliament. Party members could not express any opinion against the Party. Measures were being taken for the prevention of corruption by party member MPs through their usage of their titles; they were banned from taking up prominent positions in public institutions.<sup>10</sup>

It was under these conditions that parliamentary elections were held in 1927. The free political competition in the country had come to a total end as of 1925, and the participation rate in the elections was only 23 %. This was the election with the lowest participation rate among almost all of the elections of this country until today. As party leader, Atatürk had personally announced the MP candidates. He had thus made it clear that he preferred the MPs to be persons

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<sup>8</sup> **Türk Anayasa Metinleri (1839-1980):** 111-136.

<sup>9</sup> **Halk Fırkası Nizamnamesi (1927):** article 21-23.

<sup>10</sup> **Halk Fırkası Nizamnamesi (1927):** article 92-123.



of his own choice, and that he expected everyone's compliance in this matter. Although a few people did put in their candidature as "independent" candidates, outside of this –in a sense– official list of candidates, these people did not succeed in being elected.<sup>11</sup>

The liberal and liberalistic Free Republican Party ("*Serbest Cumhuriyet Partisi*") that was established in 1930 as an opposition party upon the demand of the government, was not able to find the opportunity to participate in any parliamentary election, due to its short life span. However, it had found the chance to take part in municipal elections. In these elections, the opposition party achieved fairly important success and thus was able to demonstrate the power of the political opposition in the country to everyone, including the government. Thus it became clear that the success enjoyed by the ruling party in the elections of the past two terms, with no opposition involved, was not real. Nevertheless, the fact that during these municipal elections, women gained the right to vote and to be elected, should be seen as an important milestone.

### **The 1931 Elections and the Fourth Turkish Grand National Assembly**

During the Republican People's Party (RPP) congress, 8 years after its establishment, the ruling party was, for the first time, to accept a political program. Until then, despite the fact that opposition parties had twice been set up against the RPP, this party had never announced any political program. According to this first program the RPP enacted, single-round elections were accepted, as a principle. However, it was decided that until the voters gained sufficient political, social, cultural qualities that would enable them to get to better know the candidates they were to select, it would be more appropriate and more in line with democracy for them (the voters) to select the secondary voters, whom they knew closely and trusted. Until the citizens were given the necessary education and reached the high standards desired, the ruling party would prefer to continue with the two-round election system stemming from the Ottoman period. An important aspect of the program was its aim to enable women to vote in parliamentary elections, as well as for them to become MPs.<sup>12</sup>

In the newly accepted statutes of the RPP, there was no arrangement differing from the previous one. The mechanism through which the party announced its candidates in parliamentary elections, had not changed. The candidates, announced directly from headquarters, were guaranteed to win the elections. However, there are a few aspects of these elections that draw attention: First of all, in order to demonstrate the closeness of the regime to the people, special measures were taken to enable -in particular- labourers from mining regions and peasants from rural areas to enter parliament as MPs. Naturally, these types of candidates were still being chosen by headquarters and were only symbolically being added to the list of candidates. During these elections, the party demanded that the Commander of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Army (of which headquarters was in İzmir), General Fahrettin Altay, find a candidate who was a peasant. This peasant candidate, whom Atatürk personally demanded be found, was expected to own some land. Furthermore, after this candidate was elected, he was not to change his previous lifestyle and was to continue as a peasant. Except for being an MP, he was to spend his life in his village, on his

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<sup>11</sup> Uyar Çakan

<sup>12</sup> CHP Programı (1931) article 4.

land. He was to have a nationalistic world view, he was to be totally remote from any type of internationalistic thought, he was to be and to remain faithful to the principles of the ruling party, he was to participate in parliamentary meetings in his peasant's attire, but was to dress as necessary only during official ceremonies. It was sufficient that he could read and write a little. But he wasn't to be too old. He was expected to be intelligent, extrovert and to have common sense. There was to be nothing embarrassing concerning his past, and he was to be loved and respected by his peers. If the candidate had served the RPP before, this was a reason for preference, but was not that important. It was sufficient that he never have had any disagreements with the party, in the past. If these conditions were met, he was expected to become a Party member. Indeed, a peasant candidate meeting these qualifications was found in a very short time and the selected candidate served as MP for two terms, a total of eight years!<sup>13</sup>

One aspect of these elections was that also independent candidates took place on the RPP list. The fact that only part of these candidates were elected, shows that the "second round voters" were more "partisan" than headquarters, as they refused to vote for the independents even though these were nominated by the party. In these elections, we also encounter, among the independent candidates, names of people who actually constituted the opposition. For example, Arif Oruç, who supported the Free Republican Party ("*Serbest Cumhuriyet Partisi*") in 1930, Refet Bele, and General Kâzım Karabekir, one of the leaders of the war of independence and head of the Progressive Republican Party ("*Terakkiperver Cumhuriyet Partisi*") that was dissolved in 1925, were among the candidates. But naturally, they would not be elected. After these elections, General Ali Fuat Cebesoy, another of the leaders of the war of independence and Secretary General of the Progressive Republican Party, was to be made MP by Atatürk personally in 1933.

### **The 1935 Elections and the Fifth Turkish Grand National Assembly**

The most important aspect of the 1935 elections, was that it was the first elections held after women gained the right to vote and to be elected as MP. On the other hand, the legal age for voting was raised from 18 to 22. The system of calculating one MP per 40,000 citizens was put into force again. One "second round voter" was to be elected for 400 "primary" voters. There was yet another aspect to these elections: For the first time in Republican history –including the period of the national resistance movement, [*the "milli mücadele"*]- members of minority groups were also put up as candidates, in order for the communities of the non-Muslim minority to be represented as well, just like it had been in the tradition of the Ottoman parliament. These candidates were announced by the party in power. Thus, Greek-Orthodox, Jewish and Armenian Gregorian candidates found the opportunity to be elected as MPs. Meanwhile, 18 women were elected as MPs. This process had also given women the chance to join the ruling party as members and to be elected as "second round voters". At the same time, 13 independent candidates had succeeded in entering the parliament, like in the previous elections. This time, Refet Bele was among these members. However, although Hüseyin Avni Ulaş, the leader of the Second Group (which had opposed Atatürk in the first Parliament), ran for parliament as independent candidate, he lost the elections. Real opponents still did not have the chance to win.

At the RPP Congress of 1935, the new party program –which included a commitment to change the election law, which was inherited from the Ottoman period and which, save for a few minor

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<sup>13</sup> Uyar

changes, was still being implemented- was accepted. However, the idea still persevered that two-round elections were more in compliance with democracy.<sup>14</sup> Also, the process for determining the parliamentary candidates was not changed in the newly accepted party statutes – nor was there any change in the statutes covering the Party’s Parliamentary Group.<sup>15</sup>

### **The 1939 Elections and the Sixth Turkish Grand National Assembly**

The 1939 elections are the first elections succeeding Atatürk’s death and İnönü’s election as President, and therefore are politically significant in some ways. About a year prior to Atatürk’s death, in 1937, the differences of opinion between President Atatürk and Prime Minister İnönü in matters relating to politics, the economy and foreign policy, had deepened, and had resulted in the Prime Minister’s having to quit office. Celal Bayar, who had been Minister of Economy of the İnönü government, had replaced İnönü. During this period, many attempts were made to prevent İsmet İnönü from returning to political life after Atatürk’s imminent death, but were doomed to failure upon İnönü’s being elected as President towards the end of 1938. İnönü implemented a “dual” method during these elections. Now, as Leader of the Party, he finally had the authority to determine the candidates for MP. He first prevented those MPs not on his side from being re-elected to Parliament. By the same token, he undertook to return to Parliament all of his former friends who, due to political disagreements with Atatürk, had been forced to withdraw from Parliament and from political life. As a consequence, Kazım Karabekir and Rauf Orbay were to be re-elected to Parliament.

Compared to previous elections, these elections had yet another distinctive feature: prior to the announcement of the party’s candidates for MP, consultations were made with the second-round voters –who were also selected from the party list- and a meeting was organized for this purpose. Even though we cannot tell whether this consultation had any influence on the list of candidates, nevertheless, this was the first time that an exchange of opinion was even occurring at all. Like in the previous elections, again, four independent candidates took place on the party candidates’ list. These were representatives of non-Moslem minority communities. In addition, due to the fact that the party left some vacancies on the list of candidates, sixteen independent candidates were able to enter Parliament this time. However, all of these had happened in the previous elections as well. This time, fourteen women entered parliament as members.

The most important development of this period in terms of parliamentary control, was the formation of the RPP Independent Group. In accordance with the statutes accepted at the RPP congress of 1939, new arrangements were made regarding this issue, according to which the RPP congress was to select 21 members from among the RPP member parliamentarians, and these members were to form the above-mentioned Independent Group. The members of this Group were to attend the Parliamentary Group meetings of the RPP – their “actual” party- but were neither to express their opinion nor to participate in the votings. The parliamentarians who were members of the Independent Group had the right to freely voice their opinions, to join discussions and to vote for a decision only within their own Parliamentary Group. The same applied to parliamentary meetings where members would be able to express their views freely

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<sup>14</sup> CHP Programı (1935) article 4/c

<sup>15</sup> CHP Tüzüğü (1935) articles 24-28 and 81-111.

and vote according to their group decision. They could not become members of government. The Head of the Independent Group was to be personally appointed by the RPP Leader.

According to the statutes, it was the duty of the Independent Group to remain outside the control of the RPP Parliamentary Group, and to control government activities. Another duty of the Independent Group was to contribute to the success of the government. However, the necessary political and legal framework for this had not been set up. The members of the Independent Group could have no influence on the decisions taken at the RPP Parliamentary group meetings, because they neither had the right to express their views at these meetings, nor the right to vote. Yet it was at these meetings that the decisions to be taken at Parliament were being finalized and, no matter what happened, according to the RPP statutes, no MP who was an RPP member could express any opinion against this decision or vote against this decision. Otherwise, according to the statutes, disciplinary judgements would be enforced and the relevant member or members could even be dismissed from the party. Thus, no matter how persuasive, the views and suggestions or proposals of the members of the Independent Group which were brought forward at Parliament, could have no effect on the final decisions.

The Independent Group was to continue within the RPP from 1939 to 1946, that is to say, until the change of regime took place in the country. However, this experiment never yielded important results. In fact, on the contrary, the Independent Group, rather than being independent, was even more RPP-supporting than many of the RPP member parliamentarians themselves! Even if the Independent Group did on occasion criticize the activities of the government in an extremely polite way, it never voted against the government, or even cast a vote of abstention; it always supported the government unconditionally. Yet in the RPP's closed Parliamentary Group meetings, as far as we know, many parliamentarians would find the chance to criticize the government in a much harsher way.<sup>16</sup>

### **The 1943 Elections and the Seventh Turkish Grand National Assembly**

The 1943 elections had three distinctive features: the first was that these were the last elections of the single-party regime; the second, that it was the first elections held in accordance with the first election law enacted after the establishment of the Republic. The third was that this time, the RPP was to nominate more candidates than the number of MPs to be elected from a certain electoral region, and would thus provide a means for these candidates to compete.

During the last days of 1942, the election law inherited from the Ottoman period, was finally changed. According to the new law, one MP per 40,000 persons would be elected. In order to vote, one had to have completed 22 years of age and be a Turkish citizen. To have the right to be elected, one had to have completed 30 years of age. The elections were –again- held in two rounds. Indeed, according to the changes made to the RPP statutes in 1943, the need for keeping two-round elections, was emphasized.<sup>17</sup> Representatives from non-Moslem communities were again elected – a total of four members. And again there were independent MPs, but again

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<sup>16</sup> Koçak (2003), (Volume II), 30-46 and 72-90, and 303-319.

<sup>17</sup> CHP Tüzüğü (1939)

through the party list... In summary, these elections were not much different from the previous ones.<sup>18</sup>

### **PARLIAMENT MEMBERSHIP DURING THE SINGLE-PARTY PERIOD IN TURKEY**

Being an MP in Turkey during the single-party period was both easy yet extremely difficult... This situation can only be explained by analyzing the “chiefhood” [*şeflik*] system. The Constitution stipulated the establishment of a representative political system in Turkey, according to which society would be able to portray in parliament its basic political preferences, as a consequence of a free, egalitarian electoral system based on general ballot. The government was to emerge from Parliament and would only act under the control of the Parliament. The Parliament had the right to select and control both the government and the Prime Minister. The Parliament also had the authority to select the President. As an organ equipped with legislative power, it was also authorized to always control the executive power and, if necessary, to politically bring it to book. However, all of this was just on paper: In reality, the political system of the country worked in exactly the opposite way, based on another mechanism that was not visible, neither in the Constitution nor in the election law. This was the “Chief” system.

According to the Constitution, the President was a head of state with limited authority. However, the President was, at the same time, Head of the RPP. As such, he used his authority not as President, but as Head of the Party. The RPP statutes had given the head of the party the right to determine the highest decision-taking process. As Head of the Party, the President had, in fact, the authority to decide on every MP of the Party to enter Parliament - this was also a right given to him by RPP statutes. You may have noticed, I have not said, “...every candidate of the Party to enter Parliament”, because once a person was a candidate taking place on the MP candidate list of the Party, he would definitely be elected as MP, even if he got a single vote. The important thing was to enter this list. Therefore there was neither any need for propaganda, nor for political competition. All the candidate had to do was to gain the confidence of the party leader. This confidence meant absolute loyalty to the leader, to the regime, to the party, to the government. In this sense, an MP's chance to be re-elected was quite high, if he was good at performing the mission expected of him. If it was seen that he adopted a political manner of conduct that made him unworthy of the leader's trust –and this was quite rare- then it became impossible for him to be re-elected. There were provisions in the party statutes to the effect that parliamentary candidates could be discussed at the party's authorized committees, but consultation of this type was never regarded as necessary. Parliamentary elections were not the only ones being performed in this manner. The RPP determined the candidates in regional elections, as well. Even the heads of the villages (the “*muhtar*”s) were being elected in this way. It was impossible to be elected for any position without the party's approval. There could only be exceptions to this rule, in which case the elections would be renewed! In theory, or on paper, it was possible, in parliamentary elections, to apply as an independent candidate not included in the RPP list, and even as an opponent to the RPP. However, such a show would be perceived as “politically courageous”, at the most. Even though very rare, there have been a few such examples during the first elections held in the Republic. However, such performances never had the chance to yield any results. Sometimes these initiatives would result in the candidates'

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<sup>18</sup> Koçak (2003), (Volume II), 285-303 and 303-330.

somehow withdrawing their candidacy – but there was no need for this. It was almost impossible for them to receive a single vote when they had to compete with the RPP member second-round voters, anyway.

On the other hand, there were instances when sometimes political competition could cause complaints, especially in the provincial regions. Various local disagreements, in particular, could cause conflicts within the regional organizations of the ruling party, and this had negative effects on the relations between headquarters and local organizations. However, headquarters never hesitated in displaying its power. If there was ever a case of “weakness”, these rebellious groups would be expelled from the party, in accordance with the harsh disciplinary rules.

In principle, free communication was possible both in Parliament and at the RPP Parliamentary Group. However, after 1925, this freedom was to remain on paper. The MPs within the RPP Parliamentary Group would accept the decision which the party executive wanted them to take, sometimes with politely formulated criticism or wishes. Then the same members would legalise these decisions at parliament. Not even the so politely formulated criticism would be voiced at parliament. Sometimes, politely formulated suggestions would be made, but these were never important issues. Parliamentary speeches would only be of a complimentary kind. Sometimes there would be very rare cases of criticism within the Parliamentary Group, or fewer ones at parliament itself, that could be described as “daring”. In such cases, the relevant members would find themselves thrown out of parliament at the next elections. This always constituted –or was hoped to constitute- a precedent for the others.

To what degree did parliamentarians represent their region? This question has a two-fold answer: The first is that some parliamentarians had never in their lives even been to the region they were elected from, and, possibly, were never ever to visit this region as MPs, either. It was not uncommon for those who were to become MPs to hear about this either through the dailies or through radio news, just like everyone else. It would be very hard to state that these parliamentarians really did represent “their” regions. From time to time some of them were re-elected from entirely different regions. By contrast, there were also parliamentarians who were born in and had grown up in the region from which they were elected. However, these had a certain kind of relationship to the region, for they were the “wealthy” of the region. That is to say, if we answer the question from a standpoint related to political class, we can state that generally, the economically and socially powerful people in the region would become parliamentarians. There was no possibility for a representative from a rural area really representing the people, to enter parliament. Especially in areas of the country where a feudal agricultural structure prevailed, wealthy landowners were constantly in parliament, as MPs. In particular, the leaders of the Kurdish clans in the Eastern and Southeastern areas, who had positive and close relations with headquarters, easily entered and were able to remain in parliament. Other than this group, one had to be from the army or from civilian bureaucracy, to become an MP. Bureaucrats who had reached the higher echelons in state administration were generally rewarded after their retirement, by being made MPs. High rank, retired army members entered parliament in the same way. These two formed the most crowded group in parliament. According to Frey’s study, the rate of this group in the parliaments of the single-party period, ranged from 23% to 57%. The number and rate of parliamentarians who were self-employed, as well as tradesmen and industrialists from the “private enterprise”, were much lower. According to Frey, this rate ranged between 12% and 42% for the self-employed, and the rates for those from the “private enterprise”

ranged between 12% and 41% throughout the period. When we look at the self-employed, it is interesting to observe that their rate was lower at the beginning of the period, but reached its peak toward the end of the term. If we exclude the First Parliament, it was very exceptional for a man whose main profession involved religious matters, to become an MP. Another practice was the rewarding of the country's forthcoming artists, writers, poets by making them MPs. However, naturally, this applied only to those who were at the service of the regime. Journalists also had access to parliament as MPs, but again, this depended on whether or not they had represented the RPP and given expression to RPPs voice in the media. Thus control over the press was being further increased. Journalists were supposed to be foremost spokesmen of the regime.

From time to time, some parliamentarians would quit parliament in order to become Ambassador or Governor. This showed that those who worked in the public service in deep loyalty to the regime, could return to their former duties, if they wished – for being a parliamentarian was, in a way, being in the public service. The parliamentarians constituted not only the social elite of the period, but also the political elite. Those parliamentarians who had additionally also become member of government, formed an even narrower group, as there was rarely a turnover here. In fact, we see that some members of government never ever changed. They constituted the highest echelon of the regime and the political elite.

It must be said that there was a certain hierarchy amongst the parliamentarians themselves. Taking part in the important organs and in important positions of the ruling party or of parliament, was an indicator of where one stood in terms of status. Naturally, being a government member or being in closer connection with the government was also prestigious. But the real power lay in having direct access to the Prime Minister or to the President. These were the persons who formed the very top layer of the cream of the elite. Only a small minority had the chance to enjoy being at this level, and becoming a member of this group, which comprised the actual power, took a long time.

Society's contact with the MPs was either very weak or totally non-existent. There was no means to directly address them, and it would be exaggerated to state that the MPs cared about being in close touch with the public. Obedience to the authority was the foremost expectation the regime had of society, and all of the agents of the state and of the government, all of the parliamentarians, were visible symbols of this authority.

As for those persons who had become parliamentarians as representatives of non-Moslem minorities – they were well-known for their loyalty to the leader and the regime. Indeed, one could hardly say that they really represented the communities of which they were members. On the contrary, in fact, their mission was to inform their communities of what the regime expected from minorities, and they were forced to act in a manner more “Turkish” than the Turkish parliamentarians themselves. However, they were more than willing to do this, and indeed did - as this was what their status as parliamentarian depended on.

The female parliamentarians enjoyed the status of being exemplary to other women in society: They were well educated, and had succeeded in reaching important positions in public life. They were also considered to have the mission of being a good mother and a good wife. All Turkish women had to some day achieve a level of excellence– this was what was expected of them.

There was a turnover of over 60 % of parliamentarians as a result of the 1923 elections. This turnover rate had dropped to under 40 % at the next elections. As for the following elections, only less than one third of the Parliament was “renewed”. In the 1935 elections, the “renewal” rate was close to one fifth. Under normal conditions, if parliament had had a chance to witness a complete turnover, the number of parliamentarians for all six terms would have been close to 2500. However, there were barely over 1000 parliamentarians for the whole six years.<sup>19</sup>

It was impossible for the public to attend the parliamentarians’ activities, because parliamentary sessions were open to the public only on paper. In reality, the press was not allowed to attend and publicize parliamentary sessions. The only kind of parliamentary news that could take place in the media, was the information compiled by the state’s official news agency, and this was exclusive – receiving any kind of information on parliamentary debates, was not even in question. That is to say, the closedness of the regime displayed itself here, as well.<sup>20</sup>

## CONCLUSION

I hope I have thus been able to illuminate what it meant to be a parliamentarian in Turkey during the single-party period. It must be stated that this period was not permanent and that the system was always forced to remember a certain democratic traditional of the previous period. However, similar to almost all contemporary single-party regimes, in practice there was no great need for parliament in Turkey. Nevertheless, the sole legal basis for the legitimacy of the regime continued to remain the parliament. All political decisions emerged from parliament, which, on paper, created the image of being a representative organ; and this was the prerequisite of political legitimacy.

In the following term, with the transition to a political system allowing once again competition between parties (as a result of the change of regime in Turkey after World War 2), all of this was to become history. Although it cannot be claimed that the 1946 elections held in Turkey were flawless, what separated the parliamentary elections of 1950 from all the previous ones, was that it was able to cause a change of power. The regime can be considered as having proved that it had really changed, with the 1950 elections. The subsequent parliaments and their members, are to frame a very different type of structure. However, again, it would be not only hard to claim that the political culture of the single party period had completely become history, but also it would fall totally against a sociological approach to the subject. In this sense, long years were to pass before the parliament and political traditions could finally free themselves of the characteristics of the period and regime of which they were the products.

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<sup>19</sup> Demirel (2003), 84-87..

<sup>20</sup> Tunçay (1999). Koçak (2003), (Volume I and II). Uyar (1998).