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## A POWER TAKEOVER IN THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE: THE DOWNFALL OF THE COMMITTEE OF UNION AND PROGRESS IN 1912

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This article scrutinizes the government changeover in the Ottoman Empire in 1912, which was the result of a series of political events that are worthy of investigation. The events are examined through a comparative reading of memoirs, newspapers, and archival documents. The article discusses the intervention of the military in everyday politics, the struggle for power and its impact on the boundaries of political ethics, and the manipulation of constitutional interpretation in the context of the period.*

**Keywords:** Committee of Union and Progress, Liberty and Accord Party, Saviour Officers, Ottoman Constitutional Period, Ottoman Parliament

### **UN COLPO DI STATO NELL'IMPERO OTTOMANO: LA CADUTA DEL COMITATO DI UNIONE E PROGRESSO NEL 1912**

### **SINTESI**

*Questo articolo esamina il cambio di governo nell'Impero Ottomano nel 1912, che è il risultato di una serie di eventi politici degni di indagine. Gli eventi vengono esaminati attraverso una lettura comparativa di memorie, giornali e documenti d'archivio. L'articolo discute dell'intervento dei militari nella politica quotidiana, della lotta per il potere e del suo impatto sui confini dell'etica politica, nonché della manipolazione dell'interpretazione costituzionale nel contesto del periodo.*

**Parole chiave:** Comitato dell'Unione e del Progresso, Partito della Libertà e dell'Accordo, Ufficiali Salvatori, Periodo Costituzionale Ottomano, Parlamento Ottomano

## INTRODUCTION AND METHOD<sup>1</sup>

On July 23, 1908, a pivotal moment unfolded in Ottoman-Turkish history as the Ottoman subjects jubilantly celebrated the revival of the constitution, which was dormant for 31 years (Düstur Tertib-i Sani, 1329, 2). The re-establishment of the constitutional regime predominantly stemmed from the relentless efforts of the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP – İttihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti), a consolidation of various oppositional elements against Sultan Abdulhamid II. Following the promulgation, schisms surfaced within the CUP due to debates on the CUP's centralist policies and Sultan Abdulhamid II's retention of the throne. Consequently, a new political entity, the first oppositional party, later evolving into the Liberty and Accord Party (LAP – Hürriyet ve İtilaf Fırkası),<sup>2</sup> emerged from these debates – the Liberal Party (Ahrar Fırkası).<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, the political tradition of the first Turkish political party, the CUP, had not yet fully evolved to engage effectively with oppositional elements in parliament. Following an unsuccessful coup attempt known as the 31 March Incident in 1909, the CUP resorted to purging the opposition, including the abolition of the Liberty Party, creating an oppressive political environment. The CUP maintained its uninterrupted rule over imperial politics until the summer of 1912.

In 1912, the opposition successfully forged a broad alliance and ousted the CUP from power. The ensuing process involved instances of military intervention in politics, manipulations of constitutional and parliamentary mechanisms, and power struggles that pushed the boundaries of political ethics. A comprehensive exploration of this event holds significant academic merit owing to the recurrence of certain patterns in the political landscape of that era, discernible in contemporary Turkish politics. Such scrutiny could afford historical insights into the enduring dynamics and influences shaping Turkey's parliamentary and democratic trajectory. This work questions how the CUP implemented a Machiavellian strategy against the opposition in 1912 and explores why it ultimately failed within the same political framework. The examination extends how this approach led to the opposition's collaboration with Albanian separatists and a military junta within the Army. Additionally, it delves into whether the final shift in power could be characterized as a civilian or military coup.

In-depth analysis of the political events of 1912 has received scant scholarly attention. Notably, a chapter in Kenan Olgun's (2001) doctoral dissertation studies the parliamentary debates concerning the period. Another article by Olgun (1999) explores the issue of the Savior Officers (SO) primarily relying on the memoirs of witnesses from the period. While these existing works offer valuable insights,

1 I would like to express my gratitude to İsmail Yazıcı, Lara Petra Skela, and the anonymous reviewers for their feedback, which has greatly improved this work.

2 Entente Libérale in French (Zurcher, 1992, 102).

3 For further knowledge about Ahrar Party cf. Tunaya, 1988; Alkend, 2017.

they tend to focus on specific facets of the period. Compared to these two works, some new original Ottoman archive documents are used in this work. The use of new archival documents led to a deeper investigation of the events and allowed different conclusions to be drawn. In addition to unveiling new documents pertaining to the examined events, this study aims to craft a comprehensive narrative by instituting structural coherence across diverse dynamics of the period by applying a microhistory approach. For example, some of the archival documents on the mutinous army officers used in this work are of particular importance for a deeper understanding of the nature of the relationship between the SO and the Albanian insurgents and the actions of the government of the time. Furthermore, this article utilizes some previously overlooked media sources from the period.

As underlined, this study adopts a microhistory approach, focusing on a specific and well-defined subject that unfolded over a relatively short period of approximately eight months. Unlike macrohistory works that provide a broader perspective, microhistory enables researchers to conduct in-depth investigations into particular events or timelines (cf. Ginzburg, 1993; Peltonen, 2014). However, it is crucial to utilize highly reliable primary sources in such works. Recognizing the tendency of memoirs to offer a one-sided and personal viewpoint on historical events, this study prioritizes more reliable sources like archival documents and period newspapers. It is acknowledged that archival sources and press outlets inherently reflect the perspectives of the state and press patrons. However, since they are typically written shortly after events, unlike memories, the potential for comprehensive distortion is significantly reduced due to time limitations. Adding to such resources, memoirs that are supported by other documents and accounts or coherent with the unfolding of the events are utilized. This methodological choice aims to mitigate the potential pitfalls associated with subjective interpretations that some memoirs provide.

## THE BACKGROUND

In his renowned work *The Prince*, Niccolò Machiavelli contended that politicians displaying skills of cunning can often outmaneuver those known for sincerity and honesty. According to him, the key to success lies in whitewashing broken oaths by legitimizing the retraction when these oaths clash with future interests. Moreover, appearing loyal to promises while discreetly breaking them is deemed one of the best traits for achieving success (Machiavelli, 2008, 279–281).

As can be observed by the unfolding events in this chapter, the Machiavellian approach above proves relevant in representing the CUP's stance towards the implementation of constitutional law in which they swore an oath as parliament members. In their pursuit of the desired outcome in the 1912 elections and overcoming obstacles raised by the opposition, the CUP adopted this Machiavellian strategy by stretching interpretations of constitutional law and parliamentary regulations as in the following.

The Italo-Turkish War in 1911 led to a challenging military campaign and internal political conflicts in the Empire. In September 1911, Italy's diplomatic note to the Ottoman Empire<sup>4</sup> marked the outbreak of a prolonged military crisis (Yalçın, 1911a, 1). The war caught pro-CUP Grand Vizier İbrahim Hakkı Pasha off-guard and, as a result, he had to resign from his position. The new government was again pro-CUP like the previous one, and formed by Said Pasha, an experienced and elderly bureaucrat whose politically active years were in Abdulhamid II's absolutist reign. In this government, an important seat, the Ministry of War, was given to a well-known figure admired by the CUP, Mahmud Şevket Pasha<sup>5</sup> (BOA-İ.DUIT, 8/42, 1911). Meanwhile, due to possible negligence regarding the outbreak of war against Italy, there were attempts to bring İbrahim Hakkı Pasha to the Supreme Court for investigation.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, this attempt might also mean judging the political entity behind İbrahim Pasha Government, the CUP.

The political turbulence created an opportunity for the opposition,<sup>7</sup> which had been under strict pressure from the CUP following the 31 March Incident, to regroup and form an alliance under a unified banner. Thus, the LAP was established on November 21, 1911<sup>8</sup> (Birinci, 2012, 56). The party was characterized by a cacophony of differing political views among its members, including liberals, nationalists, and conservatists.<sup>9</sup> Shortly following the establishment of the LAP, the Modest Pro-Libertarians Party (MPP-Mutedil Hürriyetperveran Firkası), recognized for certain members harboring ethnic separatist ideologies<sup>10</sup> (Birinci,

4 Tanin, 28. 9. 1911: İtalyan Notası [The Italian Diplomatic Note], 2.

5 The Said Pasha government obtained a vote of confidence with 121 votes against 60, on October 19, 1911 (MMZC, 1991a, 45). Hanioğlu (2011, 180) points out that, in the Ottoman administrative structure, the post of Minister of War was enjoying more power than its European counterparts.

6 Alemdar, 13. 11. 1911: Hakkı Paşa Kabinesi Hakkında [About the Hakkı Pasha Cabinet], 2.

7 The opposition started rallying under a single banner eight months before the party's foundation (Yeni İkdam, 21. 11. 1911: Kutlu Bir Lema'yı-1 Ümit [A Blessed Light of Hope], 1).

8 Alemdar, 22. 11. 1911: Hürriyet ve İtilaf Firkası [The Liberty and Accord Party], 1.

9 As one of the founders of the party, Rıza Nur (1996, 24) states this dissonance of ideas among party members. Filibeli Hilmi (1331, 25–26) also states this dissonance in his work, in which he criticized the LAP, as a weakness of the LAP. Cavid Bey (2016, 194), who was a politician in the CUP, states that the way the LAP was founded was bizarre. According to Celal Bayar (1997, 115), İsmail Kemal Bey—a political leader of the Albanian separatists—was also a member of the LAP. However, Rıza Nur (1996, 31) denies that İsmail Kemal Bey was a direct member during the foundation phase. Zurcher (1992, 102) also underlines that the main force that paired up the politicians of different views was their shared hatred against the CUP. For instance, Rıza Nur and Rıza Tevfik, who are known for their nationalist ideas, liberals such as Mahir Said Bey and Damad Ferid, and more conservative figures such as Miralay Sadık and Gümülcineli İsmail Beys, and a madrasa scholar like Mustafa Sabri Bey were gathered under the roof of the LAP.

10 The MPP's first elected leader was İsmail Kemal Bey (Birinci, 2012, 47). Due to his efforts in the Albanian nation-building and independence movement, İsmail Kemal Bey is still considered the “father of the nation” by the Albanians (Fischer & Schmitt, 2022, 148).

2012, 47), assimilated into the ranks of the LAP.<sup>11</sup> The People's Party (Ahali Fırkası) led by Gümülcineli İsmail—a former military officer known for his Sufi orientation similar to Miralay Sadık Bey—likewise amalgamated with the LAP.<sup>12</sup> Damat Ferit Paşa, renowned for his pro-Sultan and pro-British politics in the post-WWI era, was elected as the leader of the LAP, with Miralay Sadık Bey appointed as the first deputy leader.<sup>13</sup>

In the by-elections conducted in Istanbul, wherein the LAP secured victory by a single-vote margin in the secondary vote, the CUP was filled with apprehensions pertaining to a prospective forfeiture of strategic initiative. Consequently, the CUP resolved to instigate a snap election (Eraslan & Olgun, 2006, 99–100; Zurcher, 1992, 102–103). This slight victory in the Istanbul by-elections even more encouraged the opposition. According to Şehbenderzade Filibeli Ahmet Hilmi (Şehbenderzade, 1331, 29), the number of deputies of both parties was nearly equal. Therefore, the neutrals, who did not align with either party, became a crucial force in the parliament.

The key target of the CUP was to form a new parliament with a decisive majority of CUP deputies. Given the challenges presented by the constitutional law's prerequisites for the dissolution of the parliament and the initiation of elections,<sup>14</sup> the CUP sought to amend Article 35 of the constitution with the objective of streamlining the dissolution process. However, the CUP lacked the two-thirds majority to amend the constitutional law, and the opposition was ready to make it even more difficult for them. The CUP sought to expedite the dissolution process through either avenue—via the amendment of Article 35 or by utilizing the existing version of constitutional law, which mandated parliament dissolution in the event of recurrent rejection of government-proposed legislation.

The opposition elements tried to "obstruct" the process by bringing different topics to the parliament agenda or not attending the amendment gatherings (Nur, 1996, 46–47). In response to this initiative, despite the absence of explicit regulations permitting such an interpretation, the Grand Vizier construed the opposition's successive obstructions<sup>15</sup> as indicative of a disagreement between the parliament and government (Yalçın, 1911b, 1). Therefore, the Grand Vizier

11 Yeni İkdam, 23. 11.1911: Hürriyet ve İtilaf Fırkası ve Diğer Firkalar [The Liberty and Accord Party and the Other Parties], 2.

12 Alemdar, 24. 11. 1911: Ahali Fırkası [The People's Party], 1; Sabah, 24. 11. 1911: Ahali Fırkası [The People's Party], 2. According to Rıza Nur (1996, 23), a faction within the LAP exhibited aversion towards Gümülcineli İsmail. This fact would have contributed to the dissonance within the party.

13 Alemdar, 25. 11. 1911: Hürriyet ve İtilaf Fırkası [The Liberty and Accord Party], 2.

14 Following the 31 March Incident, the military uprising that occurred on 13 April 1909, the CUP implemented constitutional changes that made it more challenging to dissolve the parliament (Takvim-i Vekayi, 4. 9. 1909: Kanun-i Esasi'nin Mevad-ı Muaddelesi Sureti [The Copy of the Amendments on the Basic Law], 1).

15 The final catalyst prompting Said Pasha's resignation was the opposition's non-participation in the assembly on December 31, which had been previously designated as the gathering to discuss the amendment (Tanin, 31. 12. 1911: Meclis-i Mebusan'da [At the Parliament], 1).

resigned on December 30, 1911 and, the next day his resignation was accepted by the Sultan (BOA-İ.DUİT, 8/47). Adding to that the Sultan assigned Said Pasha to form the new government (BOA-İ.DUİT, 190/68).<sup>16</sup>

After forming the new cabinet, Said Pasha submitted the same constitutional amendment to the parliament (MMZC, 1991b, 325). However, it was not legal to propose the amendment before obtaining a vote of confidence for the new government. Moreover, the bylaws of the parliament required two months for re-proposing a bill that had previously been rejected by the parliament (İba, 2009, 674). Despite the hard-working efforts of the opposition to prevent the dissolution, the amendment was rejected (MMZC, 1991b, 488–510). Therefore, with the second rejection, the legal procedure to dissolve the parliament was completed. The Senate concluded that the legal requirements for dissolution were completed and they approved the dissolution with a greater majority (BOA-İ.DUİT, 10/20, 1). Therefore, on January 18, 1912, the Sultan also approved the dissolution and called for new elections (BOA-İ.DUİT, 10/20., 2–3).

Faced with the resolute actions of the CUP that ultimately led to parliament's dissolution, the opposition sought alternative strategies to counter the CUP's political objectives. During the process of constitutional amendment debates, in a state of desperation, the opposition turned to dissatisfied elements within the Army and formulated a plan to storm the parliament, aiming to oust the CUP from power. The opposition placed reliance on Miralay (Lieutenant Colonel) Sadik Bey, a former Army officer and a CUP member, who later turned out to be incapable of carrying out such a bold action (Nur, 1996, 49–50). The opposition was ready to utilize whatever they had in hand, whether ethical or not. However, in light of the legal transgressions committed by the CUP, the opposition may have perceived no other lawful recourse to sustain their campaign against the CUP.

Following the parliament's dissolution, the same government retained power. In February 1912, Talat Bey, a prominent member of the CUP, was appointed as the Minister of the Postal and Telegraph Services;<sup>17</sup> while Cavid Bey, another notable from the CUP and renowned economist, was assigned as the Minister of Public Works<sup>18</sup> (BOA-İ.DUİT, 8/54., 1912). Given the ongoing elections, the inclusion of these key CUP figures in the cabinet could have raised concerns among the opposition.

## THE 1912 ELECTIONS

The elections were started in January 1912. Only two political parties, the CUP and the LAP, participated in the elections. The LAP used cultural and religious sensitivities to spread propaganda, portraying the CUP members as irreligious and

16 The formation of the cabinet was almost the same as the resigned government except for two seats, Ministry of Trade and Agriculture, and Ministry of Education (BOA-İ.DUİT, 8/48).

17 Sabah, 5. 2. 1912: Posta ve Telgraf Nezareti [The Ministry of Post and Telegraph], 1.

18 Tanin, 18. 2. 1912: Nafia Nezareti [The Ministry of Public Works], 3.

unfaithful.<sup>19</sup> The CUP took advantage of holding the government to seek their own interests. Mostly due to the tense propaganda of the LAP, which was backed by the rural gentry whose interests were adversely affected by the constitution and the CUP, some violent incidents happened during the voting process (Cavid Bey, 2016, 286; Gelmez, 1995, 95–108). The opposition dubbed the 1912 elections as “Sopalı Seçimler”, the Bludgeoned Elections, or the Big Stick Elections (Ahmad, 1969, 103) to imply that it was conducted under oppressive circumstances, disregarding their own contribution to the rising tension. Ahmad’s opinion is similar in this regard. Ahmad states that the opposition’s claims of violence are exaggerated.

During the election process, the LAP inherited the Democrat Party and formed alliances with the Socialist Party, the Rum (Greek) Alliance, and the (Armenian) Huncakians. These alliances further intensified the political discord within the LAP. On the other hand, the CUP and the (Armenian) Tashnakians reached an agreement to cooperate during the elections. The reformed Huncakians Committee also declared they would work together with the CUP (Gelmez, 1995, 65–71).

Nonetheless, the CUP achieved a landslide victory in the elections, securing almost all the seats.<sup>20</sup> The result was a devastating blow to the opposition. However, instead of engaging in self-criticism, the opposition chose to lay blame on the CUP for allegedly conducting unfair elections. According to Cavid Bey (2016, 286), even the CUP did not expect such a decisive victory over its rivals.

## THE ALBANIAN PROBLEM AND THE EMERGENCE OF THE SAVIOR OFFICERS

Machiavelli suggests that plots against a ruling power emerging from the domestic realm of politics succeed only if they can rally people to their side. Hence, rulers should avoid being disliked by key groups in the political scene (Machiavelli, 2008, 288–291). In the case of Albanian subjects of the Empire, due to CUP’s centralist tendencies, the committee seemed to fail to sustain Albanians’ support, which was initially attained during the proclamation of the constitution. Other than Albanians, the CUP incurred dissatisfaction among some certain officer circles in the army due to the reasons explained below.

19 The CUP comprised numerous Islamic scholars and intellectuals, both within the parliament and beyond. Among them was Said Halim Pasha, a key ideologist of the Islamist politics during that period (Bülbül, 2015). Elmalılı Hamdi, Hüseyin Kazım Kadri, Fatin Hoca, and Mehmed Akif were other notable Islamists amongst the ranks of the CUP (Küçükkılıç, 2021, 10). Contrastingly, figures like Miralay Sadık Bey and Gümülcineli İsmail, who were associated with Sufism, were part of the LAP. In comparison to the scholarly profile of the CUP’s Islamists, Sufism was more popular among the general populace. On the other hand, the CUP propaganda accused the LAP of undermining the power of the caliphate due to their efforts to prevent the amendment of the constitutional law’s Article 35 while defending giving more rights to the Greek Orthodox Church (Ubeydullah Efendi, 1328).

20 According to Hanioğlu (2008, 156) the CUP secured 272 seats out of a total of 278. According to Eraslan and Olgun (2006, 107), the CUP was able to win 284 seats out of 299.

The military junta known as the Savior Officers (SO) was poised to be a king-maker in the summer of 1912. However, the opposition needed more than a bunch of dissatisfied lower-ranked officers. They were in need of a perfect storm, which they acquired with the emergence of the Albanian insurgency. The storm was to be completed with a cabinet crisis—the resignation of Mahmut Şevket Pasha—the Minister of War.

After the promulgation, the political climate and the new implementations of the military system led to unrest within the army. According to Şehbenderzade (1331, 32–33), the unrest could be attributed to several key factors. The first reason was the military reformation that favored staff officers over their “alaylı” officer colleagues,<sup>21</sup> and officers did not attend the War College. Another contributing factor to the unrest was the favoritism shown towards officers who had close ties to the CUP. Moreover, prolonged military campaigns against internal threats were exhausting and a source of unrest among the low-ranking soldiers. This led to the demands of mass discharges from the military service (Hurşit Paşa, 1964b). Failure to meet this demand could potentially provide a basis for the insurgency to take root.

The Albanians were another dissatisfied and increasingly aggravated group. The ethnic group who used to enjoy privileges and law exemptions faced a reformation and equalization process due to the centralist<sup>22</sup> policies of the CUP (Fischer & Schmitt, 2022, 123; Gooch & Temperley, 1938, FO. 371/1004).<sup>23</sup> By early 1912, their unrest was on the verge of turning into an uprising. According to Şehbenderzade (1331, 32), following the elections, the government planned to send a military force to suppress the Albanians who were preparing an uprising aiming to fortify tribal order and its leaders. However, it was obvious that two distinct groups of military personnel in the region were ready to collaborate with insurgents. The first group comprised officers and soldiers of Albanian descent advocating for the Albanian cause. The second one, albeit smaller, consisted of non-Albanian officers with strong anti-CUP sentiments.

Rıza Nur (1996, 64) admits his involvement in inciting a rebellion in Albania, an act against the first article of the constitution (Kanun-i Esasi, ca. 1876), which stresses the integrity of the Empire and rejection of any partition. He claimed to have worked with rebel leaders and established a link between a prominent separatist leader and Mehmed Sabahaddin Bey who was also known as Prince Sabahaddin. More, the mutiny led by a small group of discontented army officers stationed in

21 The designation “Alaylı Zabit” in Turkish denotes an officer who did not receive military school training but was able to attain officer ranks (Hanoğlu, 2011, 182).

22 In a critical appraisal provided to a foreign media outlet, İsmail Kemal Bey expressed dissatisfaction with the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), lamenting their apparent disregard for the historic cosmopolitan and pluralistic composition inherent in the Ottoman Empire. According to him the CUP had adopted western radicalism (Werner, 1912, 13).

23 According to Ahmet İzzet Paşa (2017, 102), Mahmud Şevket Pasha promoted the military personnel’s use of violence against Albanian locals and this attitude increased the grudges against the Ottoman Empire. Such news about the violence against Albanians was seen in the foreign media in 1912 (The Sunday Star, 7. 4. 1912: Terrible Cruelties of Young Turks Match Abdul Hamid at His Worst, 6).

Albania and Macedonia further supported the opposition's efforts in the Albanian uprising.

The opposition tended to propagate the soldiers' mutiny as a political act rather than being an ethnical movement. As a soldier aligned with the opposition, Ahmet Bedevi Kuran (2000, 369–370) also expresses this narration in his memoirs and stresses that the dissatisfied officers decided to act with Albanian insurgents around April 1912. However, the facts may have been different. According to Bayar (1997, 115), bands of mutinous soldiers collaborated with the Albanian insurgents, and together they engaged in criminal activities such as armed robbery. Particularly, the mutinous officers of Albanian descent had demands for an autonomous Albania.

Contrary to the opposition's claims, a significant number of the mutinous officers and soldiers were of Albanian origin. One incident, in particular, stands out as strong evidence of this fact. On June 22, 1912, the Governor of Monastir (present-day Bitola), Ali Münif Bey, sent a telegram stating that a captain-ranked officer named Tayyar Bey, along with another lieutenant, had deserted their post with nearly 200 soldiers. According to Ali Münif Bey, the insurgents had already presented their demands prior to the incident. They demanded a cabinet reshuffle, specifically requesting a new appointment to the Ministry of War. Additionally, they called on the government to put an end to soldiers' involvement in political matters. Despite the political nature of these demands, Ali Münif Bey emphasized that the majority of the deserters were soldiers of Albanian descent (BOA-DH.SYS, 99/2/5, 2, 3). However, the nature of their demands suggests that they may have been contacted by opposition agents working in the region.<sup>24</sup>

Nonetheless, since the beginning of May 1912, the Albanian problem became the uttermost issue, together with the Italo-Turkish War, which occupied the cabinet's agenda. As a precaution, the cabinet sent its Minister of Inner Affairs to the discontent regions.<sup>25</sup> However, this effort was not enough to cease the insurgency.<sup>26</sup> The insurgency aimed to disrupt the infrastructure investments which were a part of the regional reform. The workers of the Mitrovicha-Ipek (Mitrovica-Peja/Peć) road construction were threatened, and telegram lines were cut off.<sup>27</sup>

24 According to a British Foreign Office document, contrary to the perspectives articulated by the Serbian Charge d'Affairs Slavko Grujić, British Diplomat Ralph Paget asserted that the prevailing insurgent endeavors primarily pertained to the Albanian national movement rather than completely being against the CUP (Gooch & Temperley, 1933, No. 48, FO. 33010/2031).

25 Sabah, 2. 5. 1912: Rumeli Heyet-i İslahiyesi [The Rumeli Commission of Reforms], 3; Tanin, 10. 5. 1912: Hacı Adil Bey, 3.

26 Sabah, 11. 5. 1912: Arnavudluk Ahvali [The Situation in Albania], 3; Sabah, 18. 5. 1912: Arnavudluk Ahvali [The Situation in Albania], 2.

27 Sabah, 25. 5. 1912: Dahiliye Naziri Hacı Adil Beyefendi Hazretleri Tarafından... [By the Minister of Inner Affairs Hacı Adil Bey], 2–3. Even at the end of May, the efforts of Hacı Adil Bey seemed to end up fruitless. According to the news in the U.S. media the Muslim Albanians were already working with the Bulgarian separatists in the region. Austria-Hungary was in an alarmed state and the Italian bombardment on Salonica (Thessaloniki) was an imminent threat (The San Francisco Call, 28. 5. 1912: Revolt Adds to Turks' Troubles, 1).

One of the notable claims made by the insurgents was that the government supported the CUP's intervention in the election. Despite the allegations, there is evidence that the government took precautions against such interventions as early as March 1912. In the cabinet meeting on March 13, 1912, a Navy officer who was accused of intervening in the elections was sent to court-martial. Furthermore, the cabinet warned the Ministries of the Navy and War to take necessary judicial actions in similar cases (BOA-MV, 162/67, 1912). However, there might have been differences in the cabinet members' personal opinions regarding this matter. In his memoirs, *Hurşit Paşa* (1964b) claims that Hacı Adil Bey, the Minister of Internal Affairs, supported the military personnel's intervention in the elections. However, even if this claim is genuine, it does not reflect the viewpoint of the entire cabinet. In the same memoirs, it is confirmed that the cabinet was resolute in preventing any interference from military personnel.

In mid-July 1912, some soldiers in Yakova (Gjakova/Dakovica), specifically members of the 1st and 21st Divisions, sent political telegrams to various Army divisions and local administrations. In response, the government dispatched a delegation to the region (BOA-MV, 167/21, 1912). The telegrams that came from the region expressed demands for the dissolution of both the government and the parliament (BOA-MV, 227/26, 1912).

Apart from the pro-opposition Army members in Albania, there was another group based in Istanbul. Kemal Bey (later surnamed Şenkıl) was the apparent leader of these officers, but the true orchestrators remained hidden in secrecy. According to Rıza Nur's claims (1996, 64–65), following the unrest in the Ottoman Balkans, the opposition sought to create a snowball effect by inciting further unrest in Istanbul, the Empire's capital. Rıza Nur asserts that, after contacting Kemal Bey, Prince Sabahaddin organized a rebellious armed group within the army who called themselves "Halaskar Zabitan" which means the "Saviour Officers" in English. They were able to convince several battalion-sized divisions and some Sufi-Malamî<sup>28</sup> military officers to join their cause. Şehbenderzade (1331, 34–35) also confirms that there were some military officers in the ranks of the LAP, who participated in the SO. He also adds that Prince Sabahaddin had relations with both the SO and Albanian insurgents.

Based on his interview with Kemal Bey and Satvet Lütfi Bey, who was a close friend of Sabahaddin Bey, Tarık Zafer Tunaya (1988, 313) emphasizes that the founders of the SO were a group of low-ranked officers, with Kemal Bey being the highest-ranked member as a Staff Major. However, considering the magnitude of the acts that the SO intended to carry out, this raises questions about the possibility of higher-ranked officers' involvement within the organization. Despite

28 Malamism is a Sufi sect that revolves around the concept of maintaining secrecy in private and communal religious practices. For more detailed information on the topic, cf. Gölpinarlı, 2015. According to the insights provided by Rıza Nur (1996), Sadık Bey, one of the founders of the LAP, was also a follower of Malamî belief.

the lower military ranks of its members, the scale of their planned actions suggests the potential presence of superior-ranked officers within the SO. According to Hurşit Paşa (1964a; 1964d), there were rumors about a group of generals' involvement, including Mirliva (Brigadier General) Zeki Pasha, Mirliva Nazif Pasha, Yaver Pasha, and Ahmet Abuk Pasha in the SO.

## THE FALL OF THE GOVERNMENT

During the second constitutional period, Minister of War Mahmut Şevket Paşa advocated for the military to remain detached from politics. However, events such as the military uprising on April 13, 1909 (the 31 March Incident), and the subsequent political turmoil hindered discussions on this matter (Tunaya, 1988, 314–315). The incidents involving military personnel in the Ottoman Balkans provided an opportunity to strengthen this idea through legislation. Using this opportunity, Mahmut Şevket Paşa proposed the bill of *Addendum to the Military Penal Code on the prohibition of members of the military from engaging in politics*. On July 1, 1912, the bill was debated in the parliament, with Mahmut Şevket Paşa emphasizing the need for precise measures following the Monastir Incident. Though smaller in the new parliament, the opposition contended that the bill was a response to a perceived military-political shift favoring the opposition. Nonetheless, the bill passed the next day with a substantial majority (MMZC, 1991c). Compared to the previous parliament, the smaller presence of the opposition allowed the CUP to enact the bills they aimed to legislate easily.

Despite achieving his goal, Mahmut Şevket Paşa resigned from the cabinet on July 9, 1912, stating that it would be more appropriate for a new commander to implement the new law.<sup>29</sup> However, this explanation might not reflect the true motives behind the Pasha's unexpected decision. According to Bayar (1997, 124–125), the real reason behind the Minister of War's resignation were the disputes between him and the Minister of Public Works—Cavid Bey, who was also the acting Minister of Finance. These disputes erupted around the allocation of the military budget and Cavid Bey's criticism of Şevket Paşa's handling of the Albanian problem.

In his memoirs, Cavid Bey gives an insight into the nature of the Minister of War's resignation. Cavid Bey (2016, 419–426) states that the CUP was not satisfied with Mahmut Şevket Paşa's handling of the Monastir incident. The Pasha and the CUP members had reached an agreement upon his resignation after the legislation of the law. On July 9, the central committee of the CUP and its party administration decided to request Şevket Paşa's resignation once again, and in case of refusal, they threatened him with a motion of no confidence. The resignation occurred after

29 Tanin, 10. 7. 1912: Mahmut Şevket Paşa'nın İstifası [Mahmud Şevket Pasha's Resignation], 2.

this meeting.<sup>30</sup> However, Cavid Bey does not provide any information on whether the decision was conveyed to the Pasha.

Despite their insistence for Şevket Pasha's resignation, the CUP faced difficulties finding a suitable replacement for his position. As an interim measure, Hurşit Pasha, the Minister of Navy, was appointed acting Minister of War<sup>31</sup> (BOA-BEO, 4061/304525;<sup>32</sup> Hurşit Paşa, 1964b). There was an urgent need to find a new minister of war. However, at that time, there was visible opposition both within the Army and in politics, which was not ideal for the cautious Turkish bureaucrats who preferred to avoid risky decisions. This made the task of the CUP quite complicated. They carried out negotiations for the post with Nazım Pasha, Mahmut Muhtar Pasha, and Abdullah Pasha (Cavid Bey, 2016, 428–432). However, the CUP was unable to reach an agreement with any of the potential candidates.<sup>33</sup>

During the negotiations to find a new Minister of War, the Grand Vizier unexpectedly asked for a vote of confidence in the parliament gathering on July 15. In his speech, he expressed his perspective on the Italo-Turkish War, the Albanian Question, and the Military Insurgency. The motion resulted in confidence declared by 188 votes against 4 (MMZC, 1991d, 315–335).<sup>34</sup> Despite the parliament's confidence declared in the Grand Vizier, it was evident that the non-cabinet elements within the CUP wielded substantial influence, prompting the resignation of a prominent cabinet member. The Grand Vizier found himself in a state of confusion and exhibited a lack of self-confidence in his decision-making. Given these circumstances, it became inexorable that

30 Hasan Amca (1989, 101), a political figure from that time, provides an alternative narrative of the incident. However, in Kansu's (2000, 388) work, his account is deemed unreliable. It is important to highlight that Hasan Amca's version lacks additional evidence, and his accusations against Ismail Hakkı Pasha, the chief of army logistics, are inconsistent with the fact that he retained this position during World War I. Amca's (1989, 104–105) subsequent accounts of the SO's operations and the collapse of the Said Pasha government present a narrative incongruent with the factual unfolding of events. Amca's memoir, which is widely used in some other works that investigate the SO, serves as a salient example underscoring the necessity of corroborating memoirs with other documentary sources. As a more realistic approach, Hanioğlu (2011, 186–187) states that Mahmud Şevket Pasha tried to turn the military into a ruling class at the expense of the committee.

31 Tanin, 10. 7. 1912: Mahmud Şevket Paşa'nın İstifası [Mahmud Şevket Pasha's Resignation], 2.

32 The same archive document includes the notification about Mahmud Şevket Pasha's assignment as a senator. By assigning Mahmud Şevket Pasha, an influential figure both in politics and the army, as a senator at the time he resigned from the post of the Ministry of War, the Sultan might have tried to ensure the Pasha's loyalty in case of a shift in politics.

33 Among the candidates, Mahmud Muhtar Pasha showed a willingness to accept the proposal made by the CUP (Cavid Bey, 2016, 432–434; Yeni Gazete, 17. 7. 1912: Mahmud Muhtar Paşa – Harbiye Naziri [Mahmud Muhtar Pasha – The Minister of War], 1). However, he terminated the negotiations himself after reaching out to Nazım Pasha (Cavid Bey, 2016).

34 Nonetheless, the picture behind was puzzling. Cavid Bey (2016, 433) states that the Grand Vizier was about to resign. However, when Mahmud Muhtar Pasha seemed to be accepting the post, the Grand Vizier had a change of heart and decided to request confidence from the parliament. The unfolding of events showed that there was a lack of unity and harmony in the cabinet.

the fate of the cabinet was sealed and would manifest within a matter of days. July 17, 1912 was when the destiny of the Empire turned in another direction. There were rumors in the media outlets regarding Hürşit Pasha's resignation.<sup>35</sup> In his memoirs, Hürşit Paşa (1964c) emphasizes that he decided to resign after the government received a Vote of Confidence in the parliament. However, he does not provide further details about his decision. On July 18, the media outlets reported the shocking news of Said Pasha's resignation, publishing his resignation letter. In the letter, Said Pasha emphasized that he had to resign due to the failure to find suitable ministers for the empty cabinet seats. Given the country's wartime conditions, he felt that stepping down was the only option.<sup>36</sup> The Sultan accepted the resignation but expressed his dissatisfaction with the decision, ordering the resigned cabinet to continue their duties until a new government was formed.<sup>37</sup> The dispute between the CUP and Mahmut Şevket Pasha triggered a chain reaction that led to the government's collapse. The situation rapidly spiraled out of control for the CUP, creating an opening for the opposition to seize power. Furthermore, the opposition did not rely solely on luck. They, specifically the SO, were prepared to deliver the final blow to the CUP.

## THE FORMATION OF AHMET MUHTAR PASHA GOVERNMENT

The Sultan's first candidate for the appointment of a Grand Vizier was Tevfik Pasha, the Ottoman Ambassador to London, known for his neutral political stance. According to İktiham,<sup>38</sup> he rejected this proposal by stating his health conditions.<sup>39</sup> However, Lütfi Simavi (1973), the Chief of the Sultan's Office, states that the reason behind the rejection were the disagreements in the negotiations. The main dispute was Pasha's stipulation on the dissolution of the parliament (Cavid Bey, 2016, 438).

On July 18, the Supreme Military Council convened for its third day of discussions regarding matters concerning the Army. In accordance with customary protocol, Nazım Pasha chaired the meeting in the absence of the superior officers. Hürşit Pasha also attended the afternoon meeting.<sup>40</sup> When Hürşit Pasha arrived at the gathering, he was handed an envelope without a stamp or a signature. However, the letter inside the envelope bore the stamp of the SO. The letter turned

35 Tanin, 17. 7. 1912: Bahriye Nezareti [The Ministry of Navy], 2. Sabah and Yeni Gazete even denied the rumors (Sabah, 17. 7. 1912: Bahriye Nazırı [The Minister of Navy], 1; Yeni Gazete, 17. 7. 1912: Bahriye Nazırının İstifası [The Resignation of the Minister of Navy], 1).

36 Tanin, 18. 7. 1912: İstifaname Sureti [The Copy of the Resignation], 2.

37 Tanin, 18. 7. 1912: Tezkire-i Cevabiye [Missive of Answer], 2.

38 *İktiham* and *İkdam* were the same newspaper. During certain periods, the newspapers of the period were published under secondary licenses in the event of a temporary or permanent shutdown of the newspaper due to state censorship.

39 İktiham, 18. 7. 1912: Sarayda [At the Palace], 2. In the 31 March Incident in 1909, Tevfik Pasha had stepped in and formed the government under chaotic circumstances (cf. Korkmaz, 2021).

40 İktiham, 19. 7. 1912: Şura'yı Askeri [The Military Council], 2.

out to be a threat, with the SO blaming the government for the ongoing clashes in Albania and Arabia. Their demands included the overthrow of the Said Pasha government, the dissolution of the parliament, the formation of a government under Kamil Pasha's Grand Vizierate, and the conducting of new elections. The closing lines of the letter contained a menacing threat of bloodshed if the execution of the demands was delayed.

According to his memoirs, *Hurşit Paşa* (1964a) swiftly initiated an investigation to find the individual responsible for delivering the letter to the council. His inquiry led him to Nazif Pasha, a cavalry brigadier general, and Zeki Pasha, another brigadier general. Zeki Pasha revealed that two officers with the rank of captain had delivered the letter to him. Interestingly, *Hurşit Pasha* noted that they had made a decision not to question these two captains. Their decision not to interrogate the culprits in such an important incident could raise eyebrows. Given *Hurşit Pasha*'s role in the government's downfall through his resignation, his unwillingness to pursue the officers who delivered a letter of threat raises suspicions about his potential involvement in the plot against the CUP.

Threatening constitutional bodies without being detected was a bold act. The nature of the events suggests the possible involvement of the top military officers in the SO plot. Given this opinion, *Asaf Tugay*'s (1962, 62–64) claims regarding the patronage of Nazım, Nazif, Yaver, and Ahmet Abuk Pasha over the SO make sense. *Rıza Nur* (1996, 66–67) also approves this viewpoint. According to him, Nazım Pasha was a part of the conspiracy. However, he also indicates that *Hurşit Pasha* was not aware of what was happening behind the scene.

According to *Hurşit Paşa*'s (1964a) memoirs, some cabinet members hastily convened to discuss the matter. As the acting Minister of War, *Hurşit Pasha* refused to implement strong measures, which further raised suspicion about his likely involvement in the plot. On the other hand, despite the Grand Vizier's request for him to attend the meeting, Nazım Pasha declined to participate, asserting that he was not a cabinet member. He also emphasized that if the government did not convey the letter of threat to the Sultan, he would take it upon himself to do so after waiting for half an hour.

*Hurşit Paşa* (1964d) stresses that the cabinet decided to inform the Sultan and sent him to the palace. The decision that came out of the meeting in the palace was to compose a declaration from the Sultan's pen without resorting to the government's opinion. It was a very lenient measure. In his viewpoint of the events, *Cavid Bey* (2016, 437) accuses *Hurşit Pasha* of acting cowardly and ineffective.<sup>41</sup>

On July 19, Ahmet Muhtar Pasha, a war hero and the spokesperson of the Senate, visited the Sultan with the participation of some other top officials.<sup>42</sup> This

41 *Cavid Bey* (2016, 440) also states that *Hurşit Pasha* accepted that he overestimated the number of officers supporting the SO. And the Pasha also said that was why he acted in a hurry.

42 *İktiham*, 20. 7. 1912: *Huzur-i Hümayun'a Kabul* [Admission to the Imperial Presence], 3.

meeting could potentially be seen as an indication of who would be tasked with forming a new government. According to Halit Ziya Uşaklıgil's (1992, 591–593) memoirs, he, along with Lütfi Bey (Simavi) and the Second Manager of the Sultan's Office, proposed an opinion to the Sultan. They suggested that, due to his neutrality and military fame, Ahmet Muhtar Pasha would be a suitable candidate for the position. Following the abovementioned meeting, Ahmet Muhtar Pasha and a wider group of politicians, including Hürşit Pasha and Asım Bey from the resigned government, were accepted by the Sultan on July 21.<sup>43</sup> On July 22, 1912, Ahmet Muhtar Pasha was tasked to form a new government.<sup>44</sup>

In the new government, Nazım Pasha was appointed Minister of War, while Gabriel Norandunkyan, a strong advocate for free Armenia, became the Minister of Foreign Affairs. Hüseyin Hilmi Pasha, a former grand vizier, took on the role of Minister of Justice. The cabinet also included two other former grand viziers, Ferid Pasha, and Kamil Pasha who were appointed as the Minister of Interior Affairs and the Head of the State Council respectively. Mahmut Muhtar Pasha, the son of Ahmet Muhtar, was appointed the Minister of Navy.<sup>45</sup> With the involvement of three former grand viziers, the cabinet earned the name "Great Cabinet" during that period (Sancaktar, 2009, 113).

As soon as they came into charge, the new cabinet wasted no time in making a decision that aimed to appease the opposition. In the very first cabinet meeting, the martial law was repealed.<sup>46</sup> This decision was a demonstration of their will to reckon with the demands of the opposition. In line with this policy, they also declared their resoluteness to carry out a softer approach in terms of resolving the Albanian question.<sup>47</sup> This decision included halting the military operations in the region. The insurgents in Albania would easily interpret this act as submissiveness or a sign of weakness. However, within two weeks, the same government re-enacted martial law. More, the Empire was on the verge of losing its Balkan territories including Albania.

## THE DISSOLUTIONS OF THE PARLIAMENT AND SENATE

Two days after the formation of the new government, the SO took a bold step and delivered another two threatening letters. One of the letters was addressed to Halil Bey (Menteşe), the Parliament spokesperson, threatening him with death if he did not support the SO's demands for the dissolution of the parliament.<sup>48</sup> The letter was delivered to Halil Bey's residence, possibly to amplify the impact of

43 İktiham, 22. 7. 1912: Huzur-i Hümayun'a Kabul [Admission to the Imperial Presence], 1.

44 İktiham, 22. 7. 1912: Yeni Kabine [The New Cabinet], 1.

45 İktiham, 23. 7. 1912: Heyet-i Cedide-i Vükela [The New Council of Ministers ], 2.

46 İktiham, 23. 7. 1912: İdare-i Örfiyenin Lağrı ve Meclis-i Vükela Mukarrerati [The Abolition of the Martial Law and the Decision of the Council of Ministers], 2.

47 İktiham, 23. 7. 1912: Tatil-i Harekât [Suspension of Operations], 3; Tanin, 23. 7. 1912: İş'ar [Revealment], 3.

48 Tanin, 26. 7. 1912: Meclis-i Mebusan'da Çırキン Bir Tehdit [An Ugly Threat to the Parliament], 1.

the threat. However, Halil Bey remained undeterred and brought the letter to the attention of the parliament. On July 25, 1912, the threat was read to the deputies (Bayar, 1997, 447).<sup>49</sup>

On the same day that the threats were made, a very long and poorly written manifesto of the SO was delivered to the newspapers. The next day, the manifesto occupied the newspaper pages. The manifesto, both linguistically and politically deficient, included their concerns for officer unemployment and expressed grievances about prolonged military campaigns. According to the manifesto, the SO would cease its activities once the crisis was resolved.<sup>50</sup>

On July 25, the main topic of discussion in parliament was the threats delivered. Ahmet Muhtar Pasha and Nazım Pasha were summoned for clarification, yet only Nazım Pasha attended. He expressed regret over military and police involvement in the incident, assuring due punishment for the responsible figures. Nazım Pasha, responding to a deputy's inquiry, censured media disseminating the SO's manifesto, citing resultant public panic. However, he did not refrain from criticizing the CUP with an underlying approach in his speech. He implied that such acts, just like the SO carried out, were made since the promulgation of the constitution. He criticized the CUP for its relationship with the military and the asymmetric methods it had employed in the past (MMZC, 1991d, 448–449).

On July 30, 1912, the cabinet presented its program to the parliament. The program highlighted the state servants' intervention in the elections as a major reason for current political problems, echoing the claims made by the opposition. The entire program could be seen as a critique of the CUP and the pro-CUP governments' policies. The program's primary focus was domestic politics and did not address the ongoing war with Italy. Despite the fierce arguments that took place, the cabinet acquired a vote of confidence by 112 votes against 44 (MMZC, 1991d, 533–557).

After attaining the vote of confidence, the government initiated its plans for the dissolution of the parliament. As a precaution, the government changed troops guarding the parliament who might be loyal to the CUP. However, changing the parliamentary guards was an authority that belonged to the Speaker's Office. This act raised suspicions among the CUP supporters.<sup>51</sup> It appears that, by changing the troops trusted by the Speaker's Office, the government tried to exert pressure on the deputies. The memory of a previous military raid on the parliament in 1909, known as the 31 March Incident, where a deputy and a minister were killed, was still fresh in people's minds.

49 The letter delivered to Halit Ziya Uşaklıgil (1992, 585) had less political content. The SO demanded his resignation within 24 hours, possibly presuming that he had close ties with the CUP.

50 İktiham, 25. 7. 1912: Halaskar Zabıtan Grupu Beyannamesi [The Declaration of the Saviour Officers Group], 4.

51 Tanin, 1. 8. 1912: Meclis-i Mebusan'a Fiili Tecavüz [Active Aggression Towards the Parliament], 4.

Nazım Pasha's reluctance to attend the parliamentary gathering on August 3, for which he had been summoned, foreshadowed the fate that awaited the parliament. By the motion of Bedros Hallacian, a deputy of Istanbul, Nazım Pasha was called to provide information about the SO investigation and the change in the parliament guards. Hallacian also claimed that the newly assigned troops included military personnel with ties to the SO. He further stated that some of the mutinous officers who had been apprehended in Monastir were spotted in the vicinity of the parliament.<sup>52</sup> Nazım Pasha was also invited to participate in the debates for the *Addendum to the Military Penal Code on the prohibition of members of the military from engaging in politics*. In the telegram he sent in response, Nazım Pasha stated that he did not think his participation was necessary since the bill had been presented by the previous government. However, if his presence was insisted upon, he requested postponing the discussion for five days (MMZC, 1991d, 616–617).

Nazım Pasha was likely well aware of the upcoming dissolution of the parliament, which was expected to happen in a few days. For some time, the government had already been actively seeking a way to dissolve the parliament. They were very determined about this matter. But they were also looking for a method that was as constitutional as possible. With the aforementioned objective in mind, the government petitioned the parliament to enact amendments to the constitution, aiming to facilitate an easier process for the dissolution of the parliament.<sup>53</sup>

On August 4, the Grand Vizier requested the Senate to convene a confidential meeting. Even the clerks were dismissed from the gathering (MAZC, 1989, 382–383). In the confidential meeting, the government requested the Senate to deliberate on the decision to dissolve the parliament. By employing a strained interpretation of Article 35 of the Constitution, the Senate resolved to draft a missive requesting the dissolution and submitted it for the Sultan's approval. Only five senators opposed the proposal, while one senator abstained (Cavid Bey, 2016, 447; MAZC, 1989, 383).<sup>54</sup> The decision of the Senate was conveyed to the Sultan, and his approval was obtained.<sup>55</sup>

52 Hallachian's claims were genuine. The Ministry of War acknowledged that the suspected soldiers had been released. However, in the information provided to the media outlets, it was emphasized that the judicial process regarding them was still in progress (İktiham, 26. 7. 1912: Terhisleri Söylenen Zabitan Hakkında Harbiye Nezaretinden [About Officers Whose Discharge has been Announced - From the Ministry of War], 4).

53 Tanin, 2. 8. 1912: Meclis ve Hükümet [The Parliament and the Government], 5.

54 Despite the absence of the Senate records, Ali Fuat Türkeldi (1987, 54) provides some information about the main points of the decision. Following Noradunkian's suggestion, the Senate declared that the 1912 parliament was a continuation of the dissolved parliament, which had been terminated due to disagreements with the government. The Senate also interpreted that the parliament's mandate was limited to resolving the disagreement that led to the dissolution of the previous parliament. In light of this, the Senate ruled that the parliament's responsibilities were completed and that new elections must be conducted.

55 İktiham, 5. 8. 1912: Saray-ı Hümeyun'da [At the Imperial Palace], 2.

The decision proved profoundly unsettling for the CUP, as they had not anticipated such a blatant breach of constitutional norms. While the CUP had previously stretched the bounds of constitutional interpretation within parliamentary procedures, they seemingly did not foresee the possibility of such actions occurring outside the parliament. Given that the parliament stood as the singular elected entity within the constitutional framework and was regarded as the embodiment of the people's will, the CUP may have presumed a degree of immunity. Historically, the CUP had leveraged the parliament's authority on multiple occasions. However, in this instance, it was the Senate—a constitutional body whose members were appointed by the Sultans—that wielded constitutional interpretation against the CUP, with the Sultan endorsing the process.

After almost four years of hard work, the opposition finally succeeded in defeating their arch-enemy, the CUP. However, the members of the CUP were not willing to exit the stage without one last impressive trick. The prominent CUP members called for a gathering at the party headquarters, where they decided to hold a final meeting in the parliament. During this meeting, they planned to propose a vote of no confidence against the government and subsequently call for a recess (Cavid Bey, 2016, 448).

On August 5, 1912, the members of parliament gathered for a crucial meeting. Cavid Bey delivered a lengthy, detailed, and impassioned speech in which he accused the government of having ties with the SO. According to him, the government was under pressure from the SO and lacked the freedom to act independently. He accused the Senate of being complicit in the crime and underlined that it was not elected through the people's vote. Cavid Bey asserted that, given the prevailing circumstances, all constitutional entities, including the Sultan, were bereft of free will, leaving the parliament as the sole representative of the Empire's people. Contesting the Senate's constitutional interpretations as a violation of constitutional law, he advocated for a vote of no confidence in the government and a temporary parliamentary recess. Cavid Bey's proposal was accepted, leading to the parliament issuing a vote of no confidence against the government and temporarily adjourning until a constitutionally legitimate government could be established (MMZC, 1991d, 646–655).

The government countered the CUP's last maneuver with an imperial decree that declared the legality of the government. From the Sultan's pen, the legality of the way the parliament dissolved was justified on the same day the parliament voted against the government and adjourned itself (BOA-HAT, 1648/62, 1912).

## CONCLUSION

The series of events that began at the end of 1911 and reached its climax in 1912 marked the third major political crisis of the constitutional period. This crisis occurred almost three years after the February 1909<sup>56</sup> government crisis and the 31 March

56 For more information on the incident that led to the overthrow of Kamil Pasha's government by a vote of no confidence in 1909 which was also the first example of its kind, cf. Korkmaz, 2023.

Incident. The conflict between the CUP and the mainstream opposition, initially the Liberal Party (Ahrar Party) and later the LAP, escalated into a fierce and intense battle between the two sides.

In his work on opposition patterns of Western democracies, Robert Dahl (1966) points out that in case the opposition party can attain a substantial monopoly of the oppositional elements in a two-party system, this situation leads to the highest degree of oppositional concentration. This theory, initially formulated by examining Western democracies, could be applied to some extent to comprehend the opposition that arose in the Ottoman parliament following the establishment of the LAP. Despite the existence of a group of neutral deputies in the parliament, the LAP was able to inherit several oppositional parties within itself and became a decisive actor in the legislature. However, within the framework of Dahl's classification, the LAP might be considered as a party that had a low internal unity. The mentioned unsuccessful parliament raiding plan of Miralay Sadık and the rivalry between the secular and more religious members of the party as well as some other dissonances remarked in this article underscore this feature of the LAP. Nonetheless, despite their low internal unity, due to their common short-term goal (making the CUP fall from power), the LAP was able to offer a "strictly competitive" parliament effort as can be seen by their performance in the constitutional amendment gatherings. Their initial strategy, which obviously failed, was to keep their momentum in the parliament by preventing the elections, which could result in an outcome that may exert the opposition out of the parliament. Finally, due to their lack of rural organization and the CUP's advantages in using state resources, as the results of the 1912 elections proved, it might be claimed that the LAP was unable to be competitive in the electoral campaign.

On the ruling side, despite the several crises that occurred in the constitutional period before 1912, the CUP was able to hold onto ruling power from 1908. However, their actions during this period could easily be described as those of a parliamentary despotism. French political thinker Marquis de Condorcet (2012, 164–166), who also argued that a legislative body can transform into a source of despotism, describes two kinds of despotism: direct and indirect despotism. In his explanation, indirect despotism occurs when, despite the laws requiring the opposite, a political representation becomes unequal, and a certain part of the people is forced to submit to an authority without a basis in the law. In the events that happened in 1912, both parties, the CUP, and the LAP, seemed to inherit this role. During the constitutional amendment meetings in parliament, the CUP obviously ignored or overstretched the constitutional law and the parliament's inner regulations. Doing so, they prevented the opposition's effort to delay the amendment, forced the first dissolution of the parliament, and created a pro-ruling party government during the election campaign. On the opposite side, after Ahmet Muhtar Pasha's government was founded, anti-CUP political entities dissolved the new parliament with similar

methods. This line of action also confirms the theory of public law expert Recai Okandan (1949, 28–29), who claims that during the constitutional period the parliamentary system became an instrument for establishing single-party rule. Even though the rights of the Sultans were shrunk by the constitution during the period, politicians (who mostly consisted of bureaucrats) inherited monarchic powers and became an oligarchic class. According to Okandan, the constitutional law became a “toy” in the hands of party leaders. Recai Okandan (1949, 28–29) states that the principles that were accepted in the 1909 constitutional amendments were not materialized.

However, the opposition’s unscrupulous methods provided the CUP with a base to justify their actions in the public consciousness. The LAP included some nationalists who were expected to be centralists and Albanian separatists at the same time. The party also included individuals known for their radically secular and religious attitudes. There was only one motivation that brought them together—their hostility towards the CUP. Some members of the LAP were former members of the CUP who left the party when they felt their interests were not being met, such as Miralay Sadik. The diverse composition of the LAP and its members’ varying agendas provided the CUP a propaganda opportunity to accuse the opposition of being an alliance of self-interest. The 1912 elections show that this propaganda did not serve the LAP well.

The LAP’s accusations about the CUP’s improper intervention in the 1912 elections seem exaggerated. Indeed, there were some incidents in which military personnel or CUP supporters were involved in the elections, acting in the interests of the CUP. However, these incidents gave the impression of being isolated cases and were not a determining factor in the LAP’s heavy defeat. On the other hand, the historical records show that there were other incidents in which the LAP members violated the security of the elections through their relations with Sufi sects. These kinds of actions, carried out by LAP members in rural areas, compelled the authorities to implement even stricter measures.

The defeat of the LAP in the elections was inevitable due to several factors. Firstly, as a newly established political party, they were caught off guard by the elections because they had not yet completed their organization in the vast countryside. This was what the CUP aimed for, as it was successful in reaching even the remote towns of the Empire since the promulgation of the constitution. Additionally, the eclectic structure of the LAP did not inspire trust among the public and made it difficult for people to fully embrace and support the party.

The bitter taste of the initial defeat in parliament and later in the elections led the LAP to despair, driving them to collaborate with the separatist forces and mutinous soldiers in the Army. By collaborating with the elements that directly violated the constitution as well as the territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire, the LAP became a vulnerable actor in the political landscape. In doing so, they also provided the CUP a base of justification to intensify the methods they used

against the opposition. Any harsh measures against an opposition collaborating with the “traitors” would be easily justified in political discourse.

The SO was another ally of the LAP. The SO was successful in projecting an exaggerated self-image. To achieve this, the SO entered a symbiotic relationship with the pro-Albanian elements in the Army. The CUP, having previously utilized military personnel in politics, wrongly estimated the strength and efficiency of the SO. In fact, the members of the SO were few in number, and their actions never extended beyond mere threats. However, in a state of panic, the CUP mistakenly believed that the SO had the capability to carry out actions similar to those previously executed by pro-CUP military personnel.

According to Şehbenderzade (1331, 41–42), the Said Pasha government was overthrown through a “pronunciamento” carried out by the SO. However, he does not specifically describe the actions of the SO as a *coup d'état*. According to his account, while the SO played a role in the overthrow of the government, they did not assume governing power themselves. He notes that the new government formed under Ahmet Muhtar Pasha obtained a vote of confidence from the parliament, making it a legal and constitutional entity.

However, it would be claimed that after the dissolution of the parliament in a manner that did not comply with the constitution, the “pronunciamento” transformed into a military coup.<sup>57</sup> By dissolving the parliament, the Ahmet Muhtar Pasha Cabinet effectively achieved a key objective of the SO’s declared agenda. It would be claimed that, after August 4, the cabinet became a tool of the SO. On August 5, 1912, the elected parliament declared a vote of no-confidence against the government. After this point, the government lost its constitutional legality. This further reinforces the perception that the government was no longer acting in accordance with constitutional principles. Considering the direction of the events, the process that ended with the dissolution of the parliament could be described as the first successful military coup of the constitutional period. By doing so, the government not only fulfilled the SO’s agenda but also consolidated executive power and became an uninspectable body. However, according to Şehbenderzade (1331, 45), the SO was not satisfied with Ahmet Muhtar Pasha’s Cabinet.

Ahmet İzzet Paşa (2017, 134) states that the government’s reticence concerning the conduct of new elections subsequent to the dissolution, a constitutional imperative, had augmented apprehensions regarding the resurgence of a form of governance characterized by “tyranny”—a deviation from constitutional legality as it was before 1908. Due to this characteristic of the Ahmet Muhtar Pasha government, it could be argued that the period that led to the Balkan Wars and eventually resulted in a heavy defeat could be considered an interruption in the constitutional administration period. Furthermore, it also may be asserted that subsequent to this pivotal juncture in history, the establishment of a robust multi-party democracy in Turkey did not materialize until the culmination of the Second World War.

57 Hanoğlu (2008, 156) describes this shift of power as a “putsch”.

After the perfect storm was over, the CUP was overthrown from power. However, they were only about to regain it more decisively after the heavy defeat the Empire suffered against the Balkan states in the hands of Ahmet Muhtar Pasha and Kamil Pasha cabinets, respectively. The opposition's desire to inherit the governmental power resulted in complete devastation for the Empire. These governments lost the Ottoman Balkans, the soil that gave life to the Turkish Empire and its social structure.

## PREVZEM OBLASTI V OSMANSKEM IMPERIJU: PADEC ODBORA ZA UNIJO IN NAPREDEK LETA 1912

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### *POVZETEK*

*Ob izbruhu italijansko-turške vojne leta 1911 je dolgotrajno sovraštvo med Odborom za unijo in napredok (ITC – İttihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti) in opozicijo doseglo novo stopnjo. Kriza je privedla do padca vlade İbrahim Hakkıja paše, ki je podpirala ITC, kar je povzročilo politični kaos. V tem kaosu je opozicija stopila v ospredje in izkoristila priložnost za združitev različnih opozicijskih strani v zavezništvo. Z ustanovitvijo opozicijske stranke, Stranke svobode in soglasja (HIF – Hürriyet ve İtilaf Firkası), so se spori med ITC in opozicijo zaostrili. ITC si je na vso moč prizadevala odpraviti porajajočo se opozicijo, zato je parlament razpustila na način, ki je bil sporen z vidika ustavnih načel. ITC je uspelo razpustiti parlament in izpeljati nove volitve, vendar je opozicija, ki je bila v parlamentu potisnjena v kot, uporabila nove metode, ki so premikale meje politične etike. V tem procesu je opozicija sodelovala z albanskimi uporniki in z vojaško hunto, imenovano Odrešilni častniki. Čeprav je ITC zmagala na volitvah leta 1912, se je vlada borila za vzdrževanje stabilnega političnega ozračja zaradi vmešavanja ITC. Vladna kriza, ki je na koncu privedla do njenega padca, je opoziciji ponudila priložnost, da stopi na prizorišče in prevzame oblast. Po ustanovitvi HIF naklonjene vlade je opozicija celo utrdila svojo zvezo z vojaško hunto in organizirala razpustitev parlamenta, ki je bil večinoma sestavljen iz poslancev ITC. Članek celostno proučuje ta proces, pri čemer se zanaša predvsem na primarne vire, kot so spomini, tedanji tisk in arhivski dokumenti.*

*Ključne besede: Odbor za unijo in napredok, Stranka svobode in soglasja, Odrešitveni častniki, osmansko ustavno obdobje, osmanski parlament*

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