

**Trying to Impose the Reforms in the Periphery:  
Actions and Reactions to the Tanzimat in Cyprus  
– The Case of the Muhassıl Mehmet Talat–  
Reformların Taşrada Uygulanmaya Çalışılması:  
Kıbrıs'ta Tanzimat'a İlişkin Tepkiler ve Karşı Tepkiler  
– Muhassıl Mehmet Talat Vakası–**

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***Abstract***

As in other areas of the Ottoman Empire where local elite classes had gradually developed, from the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century onwards, particular elite that included individuals from both religious communities had developed in Cyprus as well. Muslim officers of the local administration as well as wealthy Orthodox, both laymen and clergy, constituted the ruling class of Ottoman Cyprus before the reforms. As will emerge through analysis of the period of muhassıl Mehmet Talat (1840-1841), the role of the local elite is particularly decisive, both in relation to efforts to implement changes as well as steps taken backwards. The main purpose of this paper is to demonstrate the predominant climate in Cyprus, an island on the Ottoman periphery, during the first stages of the Tanzimat reforms immediately after the proclamation of firman (*Hatt-i Şerif*) as well as, to record reactions to the reforms and the groups from which these reactions originated. Highlighting the details of this climate might clarify the difficulties that the Sublime Porte faced in its effort to directly implements reformative measures. It will also help to demonstrate the Sublime Porte's will to achieve this through directions contained in the documents sent to the island and also to show the setbacks which occurred during this effort. Additionally, the purpose of this paper is to demonstrate that the first attempt for reforms on the island led to an intense unrest and to a climate of tension between the religious communities.

***Keywords:*** Ottoman Cyprus, Tanzimat, Ottoman Local Elites, Revolt, Muhassıl Mehmet Talat.

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### Özet

Kıbrıs'ta, 18. yüzyılın ortalarından itibaren Osmanlı Devleti'nin çeşitli bölgelerinde yerel elit sınıfların kademeli olarak oluşmasına paralel olarak, özel bir elit sınıf şekillenmeye başladı. Kıbrıs'taki bu elit sınıf, adanın her iki dini topluluğunun bireylerinden oluşmaktaydı. Reformlar öncesindeki dönemde, Osmanlı Kıbrıs'ındaki yönetici sınıf, gerek adanın idaresindeki Müslüman memurlar gerekse varlıklı Ortodoks din adamları ya da din adamı olmayan Ortodokslardan oluşmaktaydı. Muhassıl Mehmet Talat (1840-1841) döneminin incelenmesinden, gerek reformların uygulanmasına gerekse de geriye adım atılmasına ilişkin olarak yerel elitin belirleyici bir rolü olduğu ortaya çıkmaktadır. Makalenin ana amacı, bir yandan Hatt-ı Şerif'in ilânından hemen sonra Tanzimat reformlarının Osmanlı Devleti'nin taşrasındaki bir ada olarak Kıbrıs'ta yarattığı durumu aydınlatmak, öbür yandan da reformların yarattığı tepkileri ve bu tepkilerin kaynağı olan toplumun kesimlerini tespit etmektedir. Ayrıca Babıâli'nin reform süreci bağlamında, bu sürecin ortaya çıkardığı başarılar ve zorluklar analiz edilecektir. Buna ek olarak, makalenin amacı, reformların uygulanmasına yönelik alınan ilk tedbirlerin adada büyük bir huzursuzluk ve adanın iki dini topluluğu arasında bir gerginlik havası yaratmasına neden olduğunu göstermektir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Osmanlı Kıbrısı, Tanzimat, Osmanlı Yerel Elites, İsyân, Muhassıl Mehmet Talat.

### Introduction

On October 4, 1840 (7 Şaban 1256), a Sultan decree appointed Mehmet Talat as Muhassıl of Cyprus to replace Osman Bey, who was released from his position as he had been unable to implement the reform measures of the Hatt-i Şerif.<sup>1</sup> As evidence shows, Osman Bey seems to have kept the old practices and oppressed the reaya in various ways. Following Osman Bey's dismissal and replacement, the Sublime Porte seems to reinforce its strong will to make changes in Cyprus under the framework of the Tanzimat. Evidence of these intentions can be seen in the document to replace Osman Bey with Mehmet Talat. The document notes that

*“in his place the one whose name is mentioned, and has good qualifications, and he is aware of the rules of Tanzimat-ı Hayriye, has been appointed by me and on behalf of the Mâliye Hazîne-i Celîlesi [Great Finance Treasury] a clerk has been appointed”<sup>2</sup>*

<sup>1</sup> For Mehmet Talat and his short term in Cyprus, see also: Mehmet Demiryürek, “Tanzimat Dönemi Kıbrıs Muhassıllarından Mehmet Talat Efendi ve Tanzimat Fermanının Kıbrıs'ta Uygulanması”, in E. Causevic, N. Moacanin, V. Kursar (eds), *Perspectives on Ottoman Studies. Papers from the 18<sup>th</sup> Symposium of the International Committee of Pre-Ottoman and Ottoman Studies*, Lit Verlag, Münster 2010, pp. 441-455.

<sup>2</sup> “yerine dirâyet ve istikâmetle muttasıf ve Tanzîmât-ı Hayriye usûl-i ma'delet-şumûle vâkıf bendegân-ı Saltanat-ı Seniyyem'den bir muhassıl nasb u ta'yîn ve Mâliye Hazîne-i Celîlesi tarafından

Furthermore, according to the French Consul on the island, the newly appointed Muhassıl Mehmet Talat was a particularly active modernizer, “*far superior to the ignorant who surround him*”.<sup>3</sup>

Apart from the reports of the Sublime Porte regarding Mehmet Talat, the expectations that his appointment created in the consuls on the island demonstrate the profile of the new muhassıl in relation to the previous one. Eight months after the appointment of Mehmet Talat, the British Vice-Consul on the island, referring to Osman Bey and his replacement, notes in one of his letters that

*“Tala’at Efendi feels in him the triumph of the Cypriot party sincerely attached to the prosperity of the island and he was obliged to apply to the Sultan even to achieve the overthrow of Osman Bey and his adherents, the former notables (dimogerontes) whose views tended to conserve the old monstrous regime”.*<sup>4</sup>

According to available data and as is highlighted in a relative study, Mehmet Talat was an educated man capable of directing changes on the island; he was not simply an Ottoman officer who would perpetuate the older status quo.<sup>5</sup> In October 1840, the appointment of Mehmet Talat gave rise to high expectations for change and the application of reforms in Cyprus. However, only a year later in October 1841 and despite the expectations caused by the removal of Osman Bey and the appointment of Mehmet Talat, the Sublime Porte replaced the highly active reformer Mehmet Talat with the eighty-year-old Said Mehmet Paşa.<sup>6</sup> The latter had previously been governor on the island and was an elder officer, who, according to the French Consul on the island who had met him twice, was “*an elder man, whose intellectual abilities had obviously already disappeared, while he was uneducated and he could not read*”.<sup>7</sup> This appointment,

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*yanına bir me’mûr terfîk olunarak*”. See: Document dated October 4, 1840 [7 Şaban 1256]. *Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi* (hereafter: BOA), KŞS, Defter n. 38, p. 142.

<sup>3</sup> Letter from French Consul Furcade to the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, dated June 26, 1841. Neoklis Kyriazis, “Diakivernisis Kyprou, oi satrapai aytis”, [The Administration of Cyprus. It’s Satraps], *Kypriaka Hronika*, 9 (1933), p. 93.

<sup>4</sup> “*Tala’at Effendi résume en lui le triomphe du parti Chypriote, sincèrement attaché au bien être de l’Isle et qui fut obligé de s’adresser au Sultan même pour parvenir à culbuter Osman Bey et ses adhérents les prudents démogerontes, dont les vues tendaient à conserver l’ancien monstrueux régime*”. See: Letter from the British Acting Vice-Consul P. Vondiziano to Lord Ponsonby, dated June 23, 1841. See: The National Archives (hereafter: NA), FO 195/102.

<sup>5</sup> Marc Aymes, “*Un grand progress – sur la papier*”. *Histoire provinciale des réformes ottomanes à Chypre au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Peeters, Paris 2010, p. 185.

<sup>6</sup> Said Mehmet Paşa’s appointment firman was issued on November 22, 1841 (Şevval 7, 1257), and he began his term in Cyprus on November 16, 1841. See: Demiryürek, “Tanzimat Donemi Kıbrıs”, p. 445.

<sup>7</sup> Letter from French Consul Furcade to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, dated October 28, 1841. See: Kyriazis, “Diakivernisis”, p. 95.

according to the French Consul, had, once more, been requested by the Muslim and non-Muslim notables on the island, since “they hoped that they would be the ones governing in his place”.<sup>8</sup>

The main purpose of this paper is to demonstrate the predominant climate in Cyprus, an island on the Ottoman periphery, during the first stages of the Tanzimat reforms immediately after the proclamation of Hatt-i Şerif as well as, to record reactions to the reforms and the groups from which these reactions originated. Highlighting the details of this climate might clarify the difficulties that the Sublime Porte had to face in its effort to directly implement reformative measures. It will also help to demonstrate the Sublime Porte’s will to achieve this through directions contained in the documents sent to the island and also to show the setbacks which occurred during this effort. Additionally, the purpose of this paper is to demonstrate that the first attempt for reforms on the island led to an intense unrest and to a climate of tension between the religious communities. This tension is also noted by Mehmet Demiryürek in his work related to the Tanzimat reforms in Cyprus.<sup>9</sup> Aside from the fact that these events cannot be characterized as a general riot, the tension and the episodes were such that in order to suppress them and to restore order, military reinforcement was requested and arrived on the island from neighboring Syria. Dispatching troops to enforce order is an event whose documentation can be included in a series of texts related to the uprisings of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Cyprus. Useful conclusions can be extracted by comparing the unrest on the island immediately after the first attempt to implement reformative measures to previous unrests in the beginning of the century and by analyzing the differences between them.

In relation to the turning point in the framework of the reforms in the Ottoman Empire,<sup>10</sup> it is noted that in Cyprus, as well as in other areas of the empire, the most significant reforms took place a few years before the announcement of the Hatt-i Şerif. With the directions of the Sublime Porte to compose representative bodies of administration, changes were implemented on the island from 1830. Four years later, in 1834, it seems that these changes had collapsed and were then renewed in 1838, shortly before the

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<sup>8</sup> Letter from French Consul Furcade to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, dated October 28, 1841. See: Kyriazis, “Diakyvernisis”, p. 95.

<sup>9</sup> Demiryürek, *Osmanlı Reform*, pp. 145-151.

<sup>10</sup> Carter Vaughn Findlay notes that efforts towards modernizing reforms in the Ottoman Empire began much earlier than 1839 when Sultans Selim III and Mahmud II responded to the demand for an end to the decentralization with reform programs that opened the Ottoman reform era from the end of the eighteenth century. Carter Vaughn Findlay, “The Tanzimat”, in Reşat Kasaba (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Turkey*, vol. 4, Cambridge University Press, New York 2008, p. 11.

announcement of the Hatt-i Şerif.<sup>11</sup> Taking this into consideration, the turning point for the reforms in Ottoman Cyprus, as part of the Ottoman periphery, could be moved earlier.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, the constant failures to implement institutional changes to the administration, as had happened in 1834, demonstrate the significant and particular difficulties facing the Ottoman reforms in the periphery. As in other areas of the Ottoman Empire, where local elites had developed gradually, from the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century onwards, a particular elite is active in Cyprus also, one in which individuals from both religious communities participated. Muslim officers of the local administration as well as wealthy Orthodox, both laymen and clergy, constituted the ruling class of Ottoman Cyprus before the reforms. As will emerge through analysis of the period of Muhassıl Mehmet Talat (1840-1841), the role of the ruling class is particularly decisive, both in relation to efforts to implement changes as well as steps taken backwards.

### *The Sources*

The primary sources available for the short period after the proclamation of the Hatt-i Şerif come from various backgrounds. These include the texts of Ottoman documents from the Cyprus court registers (*Kıbrıs Şer'iyye Sicil Defteri - KŞS*) in the Ottoman Archives of the Turkish Premiership in Istanbul (*Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi - BOA*) about the dismissal of Osman Bey and the appointment of Mehmet Talat as muhassıl in Cyprus.<sup>13</sup> Additionally, these documents order the implementation of reforms in Cyprus and the investigation of issues related to some members of the administrative council (*meclis*) in Nicosia and the ex-governor Osman Bey. The dismissal of the Archbishop of Cyprus, a matter of equal importance, is also included in these documents. The publication of these documents has a long history and, to some extent, this history has added confusion: in 1964, Halil İnalcık published in Arabic script the text of two Ottoman documents with the same content but

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<sup>11</sup> For these reforms, see: George Hill, *A History of Cyprus*, vol. 4, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1972, pp. 152-155 and 170-174. Michalis N. Michael, *I Ekklesia tis Kyprou kata tin otthomaniki periodo. I stadiaki sigkrotisi enos thesmou politikis eksousias* [The Church of Cyprus during the Ottoman Period, 1571-1878. The Formation Process of an Institution of Political Power], Cyprus Research Centre, Nicosia 2005, pp. 251-267.

<sup>12</sup> Marc Aymes, "Reform Talks: Applying the Tanzimat to Cyprus", in M. N. Michael, M. Kappler and E. Gavriel (eds), *Ottoman Cyprus. A Collection of Studies on History and Culture*, Harrassowitz, Wiesbaden 2009, p. 110.

<sup>13</sup> On October 4, 1840 (7 Şaban 1256), two firmans were issued. One related to the dismissal of Osman Bey and the appointment of Mehmet Talat as the muhassıl of Cyprus, and one related to the dismissal of the Archbishop of Cyprus and the directions to Mehmet Talat to implement reforms in Cyprus and conduct research regarding the two notables accused of corruption. See: BOA, KŞS, Defter n. 38, pp. 141-142.

different dates.<sup>14</sup> A Greek translation of one Ottoman document was found and published by Ioannis Theoharides in 1987,<sup>15</sup> while Mehmet Demiryürek published parts of the versions of these documents as these were saved in KŞS.<sup>16</sup> All these partial publications underline the importance of these two Ottoman documents, a rewriting of their long history, the removal of the confusion surrounding them and a new interpretation and reevaluation of them was necessary. Another Ottoman document related to the situation in Cyprus immediately after the proclamation of the Hatt-i Şerif, dated Safar 27, 1257 (April 20, 1841), also published by Mehmet Demiryürek, is related to the army that came to Cyprus in order to stop the uprisings and the tension created on the island due to the efforts made by the new muhassıl to implement reform measures.<sup>17</sup> This document consists of a confirmation to the Sublime Porte written by the Muhassıl Mehmet Talat, noting that the imperial army came and acted according to orders.<sup>18</sup> Although these documents have been analysed by Mehmet Demiryürek in his exceptional work on the Tanzimat implementation in Cyprus, this article tries to focus only in the period of Mehmet Talat and relate the content of the Ottoman documents with the testimonies given by the European consuls.

With regard to Mehmet Talat and his efforts, some information comes from the content of the letters of the British Vice-Consul in Cyprus during that period, P. Vondiziano. These letters are located in the National Archives in London (NA).<sup>19</sup> Documents of the French Consulate in Cyprus, mostly letters of the French Consul to the Ambassador in Istanbul and the ministry in Paris, were saved and translated into Greek and published by Neoklis Kyriazis in the

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<sup>14</sup> See Halil İnalçık, “Tanzimat’ın Uygulanması ve Sosyal Tepkileri”, *Belleten*, 28 (1964), pp. 675-678. For detailed summaries of these two documents, see: George Dionysiou, *The Implementation of the Tanzimat Reforms in Cyprus (1839-1878)*, Mam Publications, Nicosia 2009, pp. 171-180. As Mehmet Demiryürek and George Dionysiou note in their work, İnalçık most probably incorrectly dated the documents. Instead of Şevval, he wrote Şaban. See: Dionysiou, *Implementation*, p. 175. Demiryürek, *Osmanlı Reform*, p. 112. Parts of the document’s content are included and analyzed in: Aymes, *Un grand progrès*, p. 35, 153 and p. 186.

<sup>15</sup> This Greek translation of an Ottoman document was found by Ioannis Theoharides, who published it. There are no details of the original document or the translator, although according to Theoharides, this must have been translated by people in the Archbishopric of Cyprus when the Ottoman document arrived there. See: Ioannis Theoharides, “Anekdototo fermani gia tin efarmogi tou Tanzimat stin Kypro”, [Unpublished Firman for the Implementation of Tanzimat in Cyprus], *Journal of the Cyprus Research Centre*, 13-16 (1984-1987), pp. 447-458.

<sup>16</sup> Demiryürek, *Osmanlı Reform*, pp. 112-120.

<sup>17</sup> Demiryürek, *Osmanlı Reform*, p. 148.

<sup>18</sup> BOA, Cevdet Dahiliye, Gömlek n. 6012, Dosya n. 121.

<sup>19</sup> See the letters from Paul Vondiziano dated January 23, April 20 and June 23, 1841. NA, FO 195/102.

journal *Kypriaka Hronika* (*Κυπριακά Χρονικά*) from 1923 onwards, and they give a great amount of information and details for this specific period.<sup>20</sup> The French Consul is very detailed in his description of the Ottoman governor of the island, with whom he met, but also in his description of the situation on the island during the first efforts to implement reforms. The consular reports and correspondence are considered of great importance for this period, since as Albert Hourani mentions in his work, the growing weight of European interests in the Near East made it necessary for the governments in Europe to be fully and precisely informed.<sup>21</sup> Less information is given in a registration included in the *Chronicle of Lysi* (*Hronikon tis Lysis*).<sup>22</sup>

### *The Dismissal of Osman Bey and the Appointment of Mehmet Talat*

Osman Bey was appointed in Cyprus shortly before the announcement of the Hatt-i Şerif, and as the French Consul notes, he arrived in Cyprus to assume his duties on July 25, 1838.<sup>23</sup> This means that Osman Bey had to implement the reform measures of the Hatt-i Şerif on the island. Before coming to Cyprus, Osman Bey was the mutassarrif in Kayseri (1830-1831) and in Tokat (1834-1835).<sup>24</sup> The French Consul notes that Osman Bey was the *bostancı başı* during the dissolution of the janissaries, an event in which he seems to have contributed quite significantly, and, therefore, the Sublime Porte appointed him to the island. He also notes that Osman Bey would be paid a significant amount every month; however, this does not appear to have been enough to maintain his entourage.<sup>25</sup> The reasons for removing Osman Bey from the administration in Cyprus are documented in various sources. More

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<sup>20</sup> Documents of the French Consulate were published by Neoklis Kyriazis in various volumes of the journal *Kypriaka Hronika*, the first of which was published in 1923. Information for this period can be found in the letters of the following dates: 28 February 1841: 9 (1933), pp. 90-92. 22 March 1841: 10 (1934), pp. 105-107. 16 April 1841: 7 (1930), pp. 218-220. 8 May 1841: 10 (1934), p. 107. 26 June 1841: 9 (1933), pp. 92-94. 28 October 1841: 9 (1933), pp. 94-95. 25 May 1842: 9 (1933), pp. 95-96.

<sup>21</sup> Albert Hourani, "Ottoman Reforms and the Politics of Notables", in R.L. Chambers and W.R. Polk (eds), *Beginnings of Modernization in the Middle East*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1968, p. 42.

<sup>22</sup> Neoklis Kyriazis, "Hronografikon Simeioma", [Chronicle] *Kypriaka Hronika*, 8 (1931), pp. 81-105.

<sup>23</sup> For a list of the Ottoman governors of Cyprus, see: Theoharis Stavrides, "List of Governors, Prelates and Dragomans of Cyprus (1571-1878)", in M. N. Michael, *Ottoman Cyprus*, pp. 357-366.

<sup>24</sup> Dionysiou, *Tanzimat Implementation*, p. 53. Although Dionysiou notes that the date of Osman Bey's appointment is not known, the letter of the French Consul is clear. In this letter, the Consul notes that the new governor arrived on the 25<sup>th</sup> of July. Letter from French Consul Guillois Gerant to the French Minister, dated July 31, 1838. See: Kyriazis, "Diakyvernisis", 9 (1933), p. 88.

<sup>25</sup> Letter from French Consul Guillois Gerant to the French Minister, dated July 31, 1838. See: Kyriazis, "Diakyvernisis", 9 (1933), p. 88.

comprehensive and perhaps more authoritative is the content of the Sultan's decree by which he is removed from his post as muhassıl of the island.

According to this decree, the Sublime Porte reacted this way because Osman Bey had been charged with the implementation of some specific measures, which were anticipated in the Hatt-i Şerif, especially in relation to the taxing procedure and the composition of administrative councils (*idare-i meclis*). According to the new administrative structure for the provinces, in the *sancak* capitals, the large councils (*büyük meclis*) were created with thirteen members. Seven of these members were ex officio representatives of the administration, and the other six members had to be selected from the local population.<sup>26</sup> One of the main tasks of the Sublime Porte was to limit the powers of the provincial administration and to secure the loyalty of all its subjects. Additionally, through these new councils, the Sublime Porte tried to better organise the tax collection system of the empire and reduce embezzlement, especially in the provinces.<sup>27</sup> As Roderic Davison mentions in his work, the system was an intelligent attempt to combine centralisation with decentralisation, balancing officials appointed by the Sublime Porte with representatives of the local population.<sup>28</sup>

However, this does not appear to have happened in the end, or at least not in the way that it should have been done. It is reported that the Sublime Porte responded positively to the request of the muhassıl to maintain the old system in relation to the taxation for another year, since the collection had been impossible to achieve. It is, however, noted that Osman Bey was given instructions to implement the provisions of the reformative measures, possibly the most significant of which was related to the consistence of an administrative council (*büyük meclis*)<sup>29</sup> in Nicosia, in which elected representatives of the religious communities on the island would participate.

The document underlines that the Sublime Porte had ascertained that the manner of composition and election of the members of the council of Nicosia, as was expected by the Tanzimat, had not been executed as it should have been.

<sup>30</sup> As it is reported in the Ottoman text, unworthy people had infiltrated this

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<sup>26</sup> Reşat Kaynar, *Mustafa Reşit Paşa ve Tanzimat*, Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, Ankara 1954, p. 254.

<sup>27</sup> İlber Ortaylı, *Tanzimat Devrinde Osmanlı Mahallî İdarerleri (1840-1880)*, Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, Ankara 2000, p. 32.

<sup>28</sup> Roderic H. Davison, *Reform in the Ottoman Empire, 1856-1876*, Gordian Press, New York 1973, p. 48.

<sup>29</sup> For the establishment of the administrative councils during the Tanzimat period, see: Stanford J. Shaw, "The Origins of Representative Government in the Ottoman Empire: An Introduction to the Provincial Councils, 1839-1876", in Winder R. Bayly (ed.), *Near Eastern Round Table, 1967-68*, New York University Press, New York 1969, pp. 53-142.

<sup>30</sup> For the establishment of the first council in Cyprus, see: Dionysiou, *The Implementation of the Tanzimat*, p. 61-68. Demiryürek, *Osmanlı Reform*, pp. 108-111.

council, and some had been willfully appointed and had not come from electoral processes, while a particular mention of the notables Chatzikirgeni and Apegito, who oppressed the residents of the island, is made. In this particular extract of the Ottoman document, it is noted that

*“furthermore, the non-Muslim [zımmî] Eci Gregory and Abido, headmen [kocabası] of the abovementioned island, for a long time now, they behaved unfairly towards the poor and they were appointed as members [a'zâ] in the abovementioned council in violation of the rules...”*<sup>31</sup>

Infiltration of the newly constituted councils by individuals who had had power before the reforms was not unusual for various areas of the empire. For example, in the area of the Middle East, at least during the first period of the Tanzimat, the wealthy, who were powerful before the Tanzimat reforms, managed to predominate in the councils.<sup>32</sup> More specifically, the administrative councils composed in cities in Syria immediately after the announcement of the Hatt-i Şerif do not appear to have kept all the relative provisions. As Moshe Ma'oz notes, the procedure for composing and operating the councils was a gradual process with various levels. In the small towns, even more difficulty to compose and operate the councils is noted, with fewer openings towards the new era of reforms.<sup>33</sup> In many other areas of the empire, the established councils worked poorly, and their members used their positions for private gain. Also, in many places within the empire, especially in small districts and cities, the newly established councils had fallen into the hands of the local wealthy and the *ağas*.<sup>34</sup> Very often, the elected representatives belonged to the same old dominant groups of *ayan* or Christian *kocabası*, who pursued their individual and class interests.<sup>35</sup>

As a French traveler quoted by Inalcik mentions in 1867, “the Turkish council members selected by the Pasha ... members representing the other communities are appointed by the religious heads of their communities ...”.<sup>36</sup> Additionally, even the

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<sup>31</sup> “ve hattâ cezîre-i merkûme kocabâşlarından Eci Gregori ve Abido nâm zımmîler öteden berü emvâl-i fukarâyı diledikleri gibi me'kel itmişler iken anlar dahi hod be-hod meclis-i mezkeûra a'zâ ta'yîn kılınmış”. Document dated October 4, 1840 [7 Şaban 1256]. BOA, KŞS, Defter n. 38, p. 142.

<sup>32</sup> David Kushner, *Palestine in the Late Ottoman Period. Political, Social and Economic Transformation*, E.J.Brill, Leiden 1986, p. 6.

<sup>33</sup> Moshe Ma'oz, *Ottoman Reform in Syria and Palestine, 1840-1841*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1968, p. 101.

<sup>34</sup> Halil Inalcık, “Application of the Tanzimat and its Social Effects”, in *The Ottoman Empire. Conquest, Organization, Economy. Collected Studies*, Variorum Reprints, London 1978, p. 16.

<sup>35</sup> Roderic H. Davison, “The Advent of the Principle of Representation in the Government of the Ottoman Empire”, in Roderic H. Davison, *Essays in Ottoman and Turkish History, 1774-1923*, University of Texas, Texas 1990, p. 100.

<sup>36</sup> Inalcık, “Application”, p. 15.

members of the councils who had been elected would often serve their own interests and those of their inner circle rather than implementing changes.<sup>37</sup> Aside from not implementing the provisions of the Hatt-i Şerif, another reason for the dismissal of Osman Bey, as underlined in a document of the Sublime Porte, was also the fact that his butler had beaten a cook harshly.

As noted in the document, *“Beside of this, the representative of the aforementioned officer, hit a re’âyâ cook with no reason and soon after the cook died of his grief”*.<sup>38</sup> Summing up, the document notes that the muhassıl is removed due to the fact that the imperial centre had been informed that during the service of this particular muhassıl, the reform measures anticipated by the Tanzimat were not implemented correctly, and additionally, there was tyranny and suffering for the Cypriot population. The Sublime Porte’s records of events in Cyprus seem to be verified by other sources as well. For example, the *Chronicle of Lysi* mentions that the residents of Limassol and Larnaca had travelled as far as Istanbul and, after denouncing the abuse of power on the island, managed to remove the Archbishop of Cyprus and some of the notables. This particular note reports that *“This year some people from Limassol and Larnaca went to Poli [Istanbul] and removed the kodjabashis and Panaretos and put others in their position”*.<sup>39</sup>

Along with Osman Bey, the Sublime Porte also relieved from duty the Archbishop of Cyprus Panaretos (1827-1840) and the naib of Nicosia because, as reported in the document, *“there are some rumours about Nicosia’s naib (vice-kadi) and the archbishop of the island. For this reason, I released them from their duties and other people have been chosen in their place under my order”*.<sup>40</sup> According to all available testimonies, Archbishop Panaretos’s eviction was brought about by those wealthy people who were interested in promoting the emergence of Ioannikios on the throne of the Archbishop. Ioannikios had escaped from the island in 1821 and travelled to Paris where he lived for almost eight years on an allowance provided to him by the French government. In Paris, he met powerful men of the Ottoman administration, Mustafa Reşid Paşa and Fethi Ahmed Paşa, who invited him to Istanbul and advised the grand vizier to send him to Cyprus, which he did. The opposition group of rich laymen, amongst them Hadjikirgenis, Apegitos and Triantafillidis, succeeded in promoting him to the Archbishop’s throne in Cyprus to replace Panaretos by convincing him to

<sup>37</sup> Mehmet Alaaddin Yalçınkaya, “The Provincial Reforms of the Early Tanzimat Period as Implemented in the Kaza of Avrethisarı”, *Osmanlı Tarihi Araştırma ve Uygulama Merkezi Dergisi*, 6 (1995), p. 367.

<sup>38</sup> *“olduğundan başka mir-i mûmâ-ileyhin vekîl-i harcı bulunan kimesne re’âyâdan bir aşçıyı bi-gayri hakken darb iderek mersûm müte’essiren helâk olmuş olduğunu”*. Document dated October 4, 1840 [7 Şaban 1256]. BOA, KŞS, Defter n. 38, p. 142.

<sup>39</sup> See: Kyriazis, “Hronografikon”, p. 89.

<sup>40</sup> *“ve Lejkoşa nâ’ibiyle cezâre-i mezbûre başpiskoposu haklarında dahi ba’zı mertebe kâl u kâl vukû’ bulmuş olduğundan onların dahi azl ve tebdîlîleriyle yerlerine âhar münâsiblerinin ta’yîni husûsuna dahi irâde-i seniyyem ta’alluk ederek”*. Document dated October 4, 1840 [7 Şaban 1256]. BOA, KŞS, Defter n. 38, p. 142.

use his contacts with the Sublime Porte for this purpose. Ioannikios returned from Istanbul, where representatives of this group of laymen opposing Panaretos had escorted him.<sup>41</sup> He had with him a letter ordering the removal of Panaretos from the Archbishop's throne and naming himself to the throne as replacement. After the Ottoman governor of the island was informed that Ioannikios was the new Archbishop of Cyprus, he was called to arrest Panaretos and put him in restriction.

Following this, Ioannikios took over the throne of the Archbishop, and Panaretos was dismissed.<sup>42</sup> A letter of gratitude was sent to the Sultan from the clergy and the laymen of the island, in which their satisfaction with the removal of Panaretos and the appointment of Ioannikios to the Archbishop's throne was expressed.<sup>43</sup> As is evident from these facts, Ioannikios, the new Archbishop of Cyprus, can be considered as a prelate whose career is representative of the new spirit in the empire, the spirit of the Tanzimat. His personal relationship with important figures of the Tanzimat, that is, Mustafa Reşid Paşa and Fethi Ahmed Paşa, their support for his enthronement as a replacement to Panaretos and his long stay in a European capital support the possibility that Ioannikios was chosen in order to help with the implementation of the Tanzimat reforms.<sup>44</sup>

Available sources refer to Osman Bey's replacement, the newly appointed Mehmet Talat, as a particularly efficient and active Ottoman officer who tried to implement reforms on the island. The contents of the decree for his appointment on the island are indicative as much to the manner and the purpose for which he was appointed as to his abilities to implement the reform measures. In the Ottoman document of his appointment, it is underlined that

*“when my command arrive, it is required that the officer of my exalted state, Osman Bey, the muhassal of Cyprus, will be dismissed from his position and instead of him, someone who is honest and skillful, has the knowledge and is capable of applying the rules of the Tanzîmât-i Hayriye must be appointed. You, your name is*

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<sup>41</sup> John Hackett, *Istoria tis Orthodoxou Ekklesias tis Kyprou* (History of the Orthodox Church of Cyprus), vol. 1, Athens 1923, p. 327.

<sup>42</sup> Michalis N. Michael, “Panaretos, 1827-40: His Struggle for Absolute Power during the Era of Ottoman Administrative Reforms”, in Andrekos Varnava and Michalis N. Michael (eds), *The Archbishops of Cyprus in the Modern Age*, Cambridge Scholar Publishing, London 2013, pp. 85-86.

<sup>43</sup> For the content of this letter, see: Pavlos Hidirolou, “Katalogos ton en to Arhio tou Kentrou Epistimonikon Erevnon Enapokeimenon Othomanikon Eggrafon” (A Catalogue of the Ottoman Documents of the Cyprus Research Centre), *Epetirida Kentrou Epistimonikon Erevnon*, 5 (1971-72), p. 326.

<sup>44</sup> For the Archbishops of Cyprus during the Ottoman period, see: A. Varnava, M. N. Michael (eds), *The Archbishops of Cyprus*.

*mentioned, have the power of doing this great duty properly and in a good intention with the one who is your peer and has the same qualifications and title as yours".<sup>45</sup>*

The Vice-Consul of Britain noted in one of his letter a few months after Mehmet Talat's arrival in Cyprus that

*"my relations with the new governor always give me motives to be very satisfied with him, whose eagerness to do justice, reconciles him to the friendship of the consular agents in general. Cyprus can only feel the good effects of his administration especially as he has been called to replace Osman Bey, ex-governor, a reactionary man who was in opposition to the spirit of the new organization of the Sultan".<sup>46</sup>*

The French Consul on the island, referring to Mehmet Talat in his letter, remarks that "Talat Efendi, as I already had the honour of telling your Excellency, is inspired by his wish to improve the luck of the Cypriots and to induce beneficial changes in his administration".<sup>47</sup> In another of his letters, he notes that he had met Mehmet Talat to discuss "the general interests of the island and its commerce and I found that he was willing to take my advice".<sup>48</sup> In a later estimation of the governor, pointing to the obstacles he was facing in implementing the reformative measures, the consul reports that "neither of these measures [which were used by previous governors] was applicable with Talat Efendi, as he had arrived determined to decidedly implement the new status quo".<sup>49</sup>

### *Mehmet Talat's Efforts and the Reactions*

Immediately after his arrival, Mehmet Talat undertook the effort of reorganizing the island according to the spirit of the Tanzimat reforms as well as to the directions contained in the document of his appointment.<sup>50</sup> According

<sup>45</sup> "tevkâ-i refî-i hümayûn nâsıl olcak ma'lûm ola ki; ricâl-i Devlet-i Aliyyem'den Kıbrıs cezâiresi muhassıl bulunan Osman Bey'in bu def'a muhassillik-i mezkûrdan azlıyle yerine müstakâm ve dirâyetkâr ve usûl-i Tanzîmât-ı Hayriye'ye vukûf ve ma'lûmâtü âşikâr birinin intihâb ve ta'yîni lâzım gelerek sen ki mûmâ-ileyhsin, sen miyâne-i emsâl ve akrânında evsâf-ı mezkûre ile muttasıf ve bu makûle mehâm ve mesâlib-i seniyyemin hüsn-i ri'yet ve ifâsına muktedir". See: Document dated October 4, 1840 [7 Şaban 1256]. BOA, KŞS, Defter n. 38, p. 141. See also, Demiryürek, *Osmanlı Reform*, p. 112-113.

<sup>46</sup> "Nos relations avec le nouveau gouvernement donnent toujours des motifs d'être très content de lui, dont l'empressement à rendre justice lui concilia l'amitié des Agents consulaires en général. Chypre ne pourra guère que se ressentir des bons effets de son administration, d'autant plus qu'appelé à remplacer Osman Bey, ex Gouverneur et homme rétrograde et en opposition avec l'esprit qui anime la nouvelle organisation du Sultan". See: Letter from the British Acting Vice-Consul in Cyprus, P. Vondiziano to Lord Ponsonby, dated June 23, 1841. See: NA, FO 195/102.

<sup>47</sup> Letter from French Consul Fourcade to the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, dated February 28, 1841. See: Kyriazis, "Diakyvernisis", 9 (1933), p. 91.

<sup>48</sup> Letter from French Consul Fourcade to the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, dated June 26, 1841. See: Kyriazis, "Diakyvernisis", 9 (1933), p. 93.

<sup>49</sup> Letter from French Consul Fourcade to the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, dated March 22, 1841. See: Kyriazis, "Diakyvernisis", 10 (1934), p. 106.

<sup>50</sup> See also: Demiryürek, *Osmanlı Reform*, pp. 113-116.

to these, Mehmet Talat first had to tend to the re-establishment and election of the administration council (*büyük meclis*) in Nicosia and then investigate the irregular election of two wealthy Orthodox who had infiltrated it as members. The document of his appointment mentioned that

*“when they arrive, the first thing they will do is that they make a gathering of the Nicosia council [meclis] and make them [the members] understand my orders about the Tanzimat-ı Hayriye, and according to the rule the folk is to elect members for the council, and then the abovementioned Gregori and Abido case has to be investigated and what is required about it [the case] must be done”*<sup>51</sup>

It also orders that the torture and death of a cook by the butler of the previous governor should be investigated. Specifically, the document notes that *“also, the case of the cook is to be investigated by the council according to the law”*.<sup>52</sup> All available sources agree to the fact that the new Ottoman officer was determined to proceed with changes on the island and to impose the spirit of the Tanzimat reforms. Indicative of his intentions is his handling of an episode against a consular agent of Britain in Paphos. It appears that during this episode, an attack against the consular agent was made while some of his objects were stolen. According to reports of the Vice-Consul of Britain on the island, the new muhassil was successful in dealing with the event and took measures to punish the culprits in an effort to create a new and modernized climate of security and justice. In his letter, the Consul reports that

*“As soon as Dr. Smith came to complain for this violent act, I addressed active demands to the Government, which demonstrated interest to satisfy my demands as regarding to the offence: as a result, the removal of Zaviti was announced and those liable to the insult, who believed that they were protected by their titles ... were tucked behind bars and they were sentenced to three months imprisonment. This exemplary punishment had the most intense effect on popular opinion and reflects the esteem for the English in Cyprus”*.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> “cezîre-i mezkeûreye vusûllerinde ervel be-ervel Lefkoşa Meclisi'nin Tanzîmât-ı Hayriye hâkâmında mü'essis olan ta'lîmât-ı seniyyem me'âl ve mü'eddâsına tatbîkan itîfâk ve intihâb-ı ahâlî ve kur'a usûl-i şer'îyesinin icrâsı ile müceddeden tanzîm ve tesviyesiyile ba'debû kocabâşlar mersûmân Gregori ve Abido'nun ma'rîfet-i şer'î-i şerîf ve meclis-i mezkeûr ve me'mûr-ı mûmâ-ileyh ma'rîfeti ile lâzım gelen muhâsabeleri rii'yet olunup”. Document dated October 4, 1840 [7 Şaban 1256]. BOA, KŞS, Defter n. 38, p. 142.

<sup>52</sup> “ve gerek açığı mâddesinin dabi vech-i şer'î üzere meclisce tedkîk ve zâhire ihrâcıyla sıbhat ve hakîkati me'mûr-ı mûmâ-ileyh mu'âvedetiyle bâ-mazbata”. Document dated October 4, 1840 [7 Şaban 1256]. BOA, KŞS, Defter n. 38, p. 142.

<sup>53</sup> “Dès que le Dr. Smith vient me porter plainte de cet acte de violence, j'adressai d'énérsgiques réclimations au Gouvernement qui se fit un devoir de s'occuper pour me rendre une satisfaction proportionnée à l'offense: la destitution du Zabiti fut conséquemment prononcée et les auteurs de l'outrage qui se croyaient protégés par leur titres de ... furent mis aux fers et condamnés à subir trois mois d'emprisonnements. Cette répression exemplaire produisit l'effet le plus impressionnable [sic] dans l'opinion publique et rejaillit sur la considération attachée au nom Anglais en Chypre”. See: Letter from the British acting Vice-

The intentions of the new muhassil are also documented in a letter of the French Consul on the island, who notes that Mehmet Talat had the intention of founding a commercial tribunal in Larnaca, members of which would be Europeans, Orthodox and Muslims living on the island. Additionally, he planned to proceed with constructing better roads between cities, founding a hospital, operating the post office, fighting the scourge of locusts and making other improvements.<sup>54</sup> Moreover, it seems that the new governor undertook the labour of counting the population's assets in order to change the tax system according to the framework of the reforms, since the first goal of the Hatt-i Şerif in 1839 was to abolish the tax farming system (*iltizam*) and to change the method of taxation.<sup>55</sup> This was also one of the points that were highlighted in the document removing the former governor, who seems to have kept the taxation system as it was before the reformations in order to satisfy many of the people involved in it.<sup>56</sup> The group of people who benefited from the tax farming system was the wealthy figures of the Christian and Muslim community, such as the ağas and officials of the administration, the land owners, the prelates of the Church and the rich monasteries and some of the merchants. All these individuals had the necessary amounts to participate in the tax farming system and gain a profit.

As noted in a related essay, Mehmet Talat's assumption of the administration of the island and the framework in which this occurred demonstrate the Sublime Porte's intention to implement the new taxing system, which was also required by the Tanzimat framework.<sup>57</sup> The change in the taxing procedure seems to have been one of the most difficult issues that Mehmet Talat had to face. In February 1841, the French Consul noted that despite his reformative movements, Mehmet Talat does not "*mean to fully suspend the old taxes, repealed by the Sublime Porte's Hatt-i Şerif*". He also adds that Mehmet Talat's predecessors and, more specifically, Osman Bey, "*in order not to displease the cavalry (sipahi), he allowed for a kind of Turkish feudalism to continue in Cyprus, for whose benefit the majority of taxes were collected*".<sup>58</sup>

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Consul in Cyprus, P. Vondiziano to Lord Ponsonby, dated January 23, 1841. See: TNA, FO 195/102.

<sup>54</sup> Letter from French Consul Fourcade to the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, dated February 28, 1841. See: Kyriazis, "Diakyvernisis", 9 (1933), p. 91. The name of a French man in Larnaca, Tardieu, is mentioned in the document as one of the first proposed members of the commercial tribunal.

<sup>55</sup> Findey, "Tanzimat", p. 25. See also: Stanford J. Shaw, "The Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Tax Reforms and Revenue System", *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 6 (1975), p. 422.

<sup>56</sup> Hill, *History*, p. 181.

<sup>57</sup> Aymes, *Un grand progrès*, p. 153.

<sup>58</sup> Letter from French Consul Fourcade to the French Ambassador in Istanbul, dated February 28, 1841. See: Kyriazis, "Diakyvernisis", 9 (1933), p. 92.

However, despite the great expectations created by the replacement of Osman Bey with Mehmet Talat, few of those expectations appear to have been achieved during his service. As the French Consul on the island reports, the fears that he had expressed shortly after the arrival of Mehmet Talat had been confirmed; in a letter he sent in March 1841, he noted that *“When in my letter on February 28, I mentioned to Your Majesty that the governor of Cyprus is facing difficulties in the implementation of the plans for the reforms, I did not believe that my predictions would be verified so early”*.<sup>59</sup> Immediately after the demonstration of the new governor’s intentions, tension and unrest are noted. According to the descriptions of the French Consul, after the first actions of Mehmet Talat, there was a certain upheaval on the island caused by rumors that roused the Muslims and Orthodox against the governor. The French Consul on the island notes in a letter in March 1841 that riots had begun as a reaction to the reforms that the Ottoman governor was attempting.

The first information about the riots on the island is contained in a briefing of the French Consul, who reports that initially, tension between the Muslims in Paphos was noted and was shortly after suppressed. However, soon after, tension between the Muslims of Larnaca and Nicosia began to appear, while it is also noted that they were constantly arming themselves out of fear of being plundered by the Orthodox. In his letter, the Consul notes that *“the symptoms which seem menacing at first are appearing everywhere where there are many Muslims. ... It was heard from many Turks that they ran to arms to protect themselves from coups from the Greeks, who as they say, are disposed to rebel and pillage them”*.<sup>60</sup> In order to understand the ease with which these rumors spread among the population, it must be noted that not many years had passed since the events of 1821 in Cyprus, in which a great number of Orthodox were executed as a result of the Müsellim Mehmet Silâhşor’s actions, despite the fact that the Greek struggle of independence was not transferred to the island. Nevertheless, as this struggle resulted in the foundation of the Greek state and a long war between Orthodox and Muslims, it made the situation in Cyprus more complicated and fostered more suspicions between the two communities. This was an additional problem to the efforts of the Sublime Porte to implement reform measures.

In April 1841, six months after the appointment of the new governor, the French Consul informs his chief officers that since March, all the Muslim inhabitants of the island were armed and they acted against the Orthodox. In the face of this situation, Mehmet Talat asks for military reinforcements, which

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<sup>59</sup> Letter from French Consul Fourcade to the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, dated March 22, 1841. See: Kyriazis, “Diakyvernisis”, 10 (1934), p. 105.

<sup>60</sup> Letter from French Consul Fourcade to the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, dated March 22, 1841. See: Kyriazis, “Diakyvernisis”, 10 (1934), p. 105

could come from Syria. At first, 250 soldiers arrived on the island, but this number gradually reached 1500 soldiers, a force, according to the Consul, capable of enforcing order on the island.<sup>61</sup> An Ottoman document sent in April to the centre informs the Sublime Porte that the army sent to the island due to the riots had managed to restore order. In this document, the Ottoman governor on the island mentions that

*“it has been obvious that the re‘āya in the island of Cyprus, in some degree, behaved against the Tanzimat-ı Hayriye and help was asked from the army in order to put an end to this as soon as possible”.*<sup>62</sup> Following this, he notes that *“this time, two troops of the abovementioned army under the command of the Mirliva Ömer Paşa reached Cyprus and thank God the unrest that happened in the kingdom has been able to be ceased in a wise manner and the application of the glorious Tanzimat-ı Hayriye has been successful without giving an excuse to anyone to say something about it”.*<sup>63</sup>

The French Consul also notes the restoration of order on the island directly and without many confrontations, stating,

*“The appearance of a small body of 250 men, who disembarked a few days later, was enough to ensure the maintaining of order. And the arrival of the new power of about 1200 men, which had been deemed as necessary in the beginning, today it is considered by those who hastily called for it as a profitless burden for the future”.*<sup>64</sup>

Regarding the situation on the island immediately following efforts to implement reform measures, it is especially interesting that events verify the writings of the consuls that the riots were caused by rumors circulated among Muslim and Orthodox and aimed at preventing the implementation of reform measures. A situation is presented where the wealthy, Orthodox and Muslim

<sup>61</sup> Letter from French Consul Fourcade to the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, dated May 8, 1841. See: Kyriazis, “Diakyvernisis”, 10 (1933), p. 107. See also, Hill, *History*, p. .... and Demiryürek, *Osmanlı Reform*, pp. 147-150.

<sup>62</sup> “Kıbrıs Cezâresi re‘āyasının Tanzimât-ı hayriye usûlüne mugâyir bazı mertebe uygunsuzluğa teşebbüsleri hiss olunmasıyla bir an evvel önü kesdirilmesiçün Ordu-yı Hümayûn tarafından asâkir-i mu‘azzama-i şâhâne istenilmiş olduğu”. See: Letter signed by Mehmet Talat, dated April 20, 1841. BOA, Cevdet Dahiliye, Gömlek n. 6012, Dosya n. 121.

<sup>63</sup> “Asâkir-i merkûme bu def‘a iki tabur olmak üzere atâfetlü Mirliva Ömer Paşa bendeleri sehâbetiyle Kıbrıs’a vürûd etmiş ve lillabulhamd sâye-i hazret-i müllükânede mahsûs olan uygunsuzluğun uslûb-ı hakîmâne ile önü kesdirilip kimesneye şudur diyecek yer bırakmaksızın Tanzimât-ı celîle usûlünün icrâsına muvaffakiyet hâsıl olmuş”. See: Letter signed by Mehmet Talat, dated April 20, 1841. BOA, Cevdet Dahiliye, Gömlek n. 6012, Dosya n. 121. See also, Demiryürek, *Osmanlı Reform*, p. 148.

<sup>64</sup> Letter from French Consul Fourcade to the French Ambassador in Istanbul, dated April 16, 1841. See: Neoklis Kyriazis, “Proksenika Eggrafa” [Consular documents], *Kypriaka Hronika*, 7 (1930), p. 220.

alike, in their effort to stop the reform measures and to maintain the old status quo, circulated rumors that the Muslim was in danger from the Orthodox and vice versa due to the changes that were attempted. The French Consul notes in a related letter,

*“as far as I understand, one thing is for certain, that this is nothing else than a slander of the notables which undertook the duty of sowing turmoil and tension among the people in order to force them into a demonstration, which they will later on be able to present as a result of the removal of the population due to the new system of governing and finances that was about to be introduced”.*

In the same letter he adds, *“the Turk agas, the leaders of the cavalry (sipahi) even the Greek notables, they all had a great interest in keeping the old system”*.<sup>65</sup> In an effort to be more specific about the interests of the Muslim and Orthodox notables who were circulating rumors and attempting to halt the reform measures of the new muhassil, the Consul reports that

*“the first [the Turkish agas] apart from the power they are familiarizing with, not only were they relieved from any taxes, but they also collected many of the possibly- and as it said restricted for the preservation of the cavalry (sipahi) –heavy taxes and through the protection that they provided to the villages and sometimes through the fear they inspired in them, they forced them to cultivate their fields without having expenses for themselves and without giving wages”.*

As for the notables of the Orthodox community, the Consul notes that *“as for the notables of the Greeks, they also knew, like the agas, how to exempt themselves and their protégées from any burdens. The financial management was entrusted without any control and they deftly exploited for their own benefit, the influence they had in relation to the cases of the island”*.<sup>66</sup> This behavior of the notables of both religious communities on the island seems to reinforce the idea that prominent individuals in the Ottoman Empire had a kind of social power and, therefore, influence, which gave them the image of ‘physical leadership’ in each particular area.<sup>67</sup> Many times they were not presented as part of an administrative power but rather, as in the case of the period of Mehmet Talat, in opposition to the administrative power. In this way, they could appear as defenders of the rights of the population against the administrative power, blocking or aborting the decisions of the administration. Additionally, as has been mentioned already, the events of 1821 and the long fighting between Orthodox and Muslims during the Greek struggle for independence made both communities develop fears regarding the other’s behavior and goals. It is exactly this activity that the French Consul also notes when he mentions that the tension was caused by the

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<sup>65</sup> Letter from the French consul Fourcade to the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, dated March 22, 1841. See: Kyriazis, “Diakyvernisis”, 10 (1934), pp. 105-106.

<sup>66</sup> Letter from French Consul Fourcade to the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, dated March 22, 1841. See: Kyriazis, “Diakyvernisis”, 10 (1934), p. 106.

<sup>67</sup> A. Hourani, “Ottoman Reform”, p. 46.

*“notables of the island in the hope that it would be possible to present this tension as an indication of the people’s adverseness to the implementation of the new status quo that Talat Efendi was attempting to apply in the administration of Cyprus. The dignitaries of the island, who will suffer great loss with the improvement of the situation in relation to the abuses, as they have managed with every means possible to postpone [the improvement] during the previous administrations, seeing that change is coming, they did not see any other hope than demonstrations, which they consider necessary in order to intimidate the administration”*.<sup>68</sup>

The British Consul seems to share the same opinion; he argues that the tension and the episodes on the island were a conspiracy against the new governor and mainly against his attempt to enforce changes under the framework of the reforms. The Consul mentions that

*“All indications demonstrate that we have to attribute it to the introduction of the new system in Cyprus in the name of Tanzimat hayriye, a system completely opposite to the interests of the Turkish dignitaries. It appears that the conspiracy was ready to burst and leave destructive consequences ... the government of Isch Talaat Effendi ... deemed as necessary to directly send a messenger to Beirut to find troops to help him and eight days later one thousand five hundred arrived under the command of Omer Pasha. And indeed, immediately after their arrival, all is calm and the people in general hope that the garrison will never be absent from the island to keep the peace”*.<sup>69</sup>

The tension that predominated the island, the constant reports of the arming of the Muslim and the Orthodox inhabitants and the growing concern of a more generalized tension and conflict between the two communities made the presence of the troops necessary. Thanks to this presence, the generalization of tensions was avoided. The goal of the instigators of this tension was successful, as they succeeded in halting Mehmet Talat’s efforts to implement the reform measures, which were expected by the Tanzimat. As the French Consul notes in May 1841,

*“it seems that the goal of the instigators, which was what I had realized, was successful, as I am informed that the messenger who has just arrived from Istanbul carrying the validation of Mehmet Talat as governor of the island, he also carried to*

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<sup>68</sup> Letter from French Consul Fourcade to the French Ambassador in Istanbul, dated April 16, 1841. See: Kyriazis, “Proksenika”, p. 219.

<sup>69</sup> *“tout porte à croire qu’il faut l’attribuer à l’introduction du nouveau system en Chypre, sous le nom de Tanzimat hayriye, system tout-à-fait contraire aux intérêts des primats Turcs. Il paraît que la conspiration était sur le point d’éclater et laisser des conséquences funestes ... le Gouvernement de l’Isch Tala at Effendi ... s’est vu dans la nécessité de faire partir immédiatement un exprès pour Beyourth pour chercher des troupes à son secours et au bout de huit jour il est arrivé quinze cents (1500) sous le commandement d’Omer Bachea. En effet depuis leur arrivée tout est tranquille et les habitants en général espèrent qu’une garnison ne manquera jamais sur l’isle pour la conservation du repos publique”*. See: Letter from the British acting Vice-Consul in Cyprus, P. Vondiziano to Lord Ponsonby, dated April 20, 1841. See: TNA, FO 195/102.

*him a decree to abandon part of the new measures that had to be implemented in Cyprus*".<sup>70</sup>

The Sublime Porte was forced to abandon its efforts towards reform measures in Cyprus – although temporarily – and to replace the ambitious reformer, Mehmet Talat. The new muhassil on the island appointed by the Sublime Porte is Said Mehmet Paşa, which the French Consul interprets as a win for the instigators of the episodes, since as he reports,

*"His appointment was intensely requested by many Ottomans and Greek dignitaries on the island ... they had already managed to dismiss him twice and they consider that this double lesson as well as the fact that he was relatively old and therefore rather weak, made him completely compliant to their advice"*.<sup>71</sup>

The fact that the appointment of this particular muhassil was requested by the Muslim and Orthodox notables of the island and the Sublime Porte consented indicates the strength of these local powers and their ability to become an obstacle to the coming administrative changes as well as the Sublime Porte's weakness, at least during the first years of the Tanzimat, and inability to enforce its will on the local powers in the periphery. The fears expressed by the French Consul in relation to the new muhassil seem to have been confirmed once more, since, in a later letter after the dismissal of Said Mehmet Paşa, which occurred only seven months after his appointment, he notes that during his short service on the island, *"he almost did not have any will of his own and he allowed the dignitaries of the island to manage affairs as they wished"*.<sup>72</sup> Additionally, the short term of the appointed muhassils in the island created more difficulties in the implementation of the reforms. As the French Consul notes in one of his letters, *"it seems that the Porte has definitively accepted the bad system of changing every six months the governors of its provinces. At least, this is what is happening in Cyprus"*.<sup>73</sup>

### **Conclusions**

The short service of Mehmet Talat in Cyprus, the framework of his appointment and also of his dismissal shortly after are, I believe, demonstrative of the prevailing climate in the empire during the first years after the announcement of the reformative decree Hatt-i Şerif. It's illustrative of a period when the Sublime Porte expresses with its actions its determination to continue with the reformation in its entire territory but also a period when steps are

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<sup>70</sup> Letter from French Consul Fourcade to the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, dated May 8, 1841. See: Kyriazis, "Diakyvernisis", 10 (1933), p. 107.

<sup>71</sup> Letter from French Consul Fourcade to the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, dated October 28, 1841. See: Kyriazis, "Diakyvernisis", 10 (1933), p. 94.

<sup>72</sup> Letter from French Consul Fourcade to the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, dated May 28, 1842. See: Kyriazis, "Diakyvernisis", 10 (1933), p. 96.

<sup>73</sup> Letter from French Consul Fourcade to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, dated May 25, 1842. See: Kyriazis, "Diakyvernisis", 9 (1933), p. 95.

taken backwards. Even with a particularly capable and determined officer who supported the reform measures in charge, it does not seem that their implementation was possible. The gradual formation of strong local powers, which seem to resupply themselves through the procedures of the system of leasing tax revenues, seems to have been an important obstacle in every attempt to implement the new measures from the central administration.

Such an obstacle seems to have been powerful enough in the case of Mehmet Talat, who despite having the necessary abilities, determination and support from the Sublime Porte to implement the Tanzimat on the island, remained in his position for only a year. He was replaced by someone who seems to have neither had the abilities, the disposition, nor the determination to implement the Tanzimat reforms. The way Mehmet Talat was dismissed and the appointment of Said Mehmet Paşa demonstrate the strength of the local powers to influence the appointments of the Sublime Porte. This replacement, however, also shows the setbacks in the Sublime Porte's efforts to enforce the reforms and demonstrates a scene where it appears that small steps are taken forward but also steps are taken backwards.

The constant changing of the Ottoman officers on the island seems to have been one of the most important reasons for the non-implementation of the reformative measures, at least during the early period of the Tanzimat. Especially in relation to the appointment of the muhassil on behalf of the imperial centre, it seems that the Sublime Porte kept replacing them in an effort to achieve its aims. However, this appears to have had negative effects, and as a result of these changes, the implementation of the reform measures was more difficult.

The tension created on the island by the reaction of the local powers to efforts to implement the measures of the Tanzimat presents a particularly characteristic example. Through rumors, an effort is made to create tension among the people of the island. With regard to the reform measures, these rumors and the people's reaction to them are used as a threat as much as for the safety of the Muslim as well as the Orthodox community. This tension in the community, which rises to the point where there is a constant arming of one community in fear of an attack from the other community, is something new for the island. The dispatch of troops to avert the danger of a generalized conflict between the communities demonstrates that the efforts to implement the Tanzimat, due to the activities of the local powers, also operated as a means to divide the two religious communities.

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