

The Cyprus Legislative Council (1878-1931) – Establishment, operation, and parliamentary controversies: Constitutional freedoms under constraint and challenges

**[Το Κυπριακό Νομοθετικό Συμβούλιο (1878-1931) –
Ίδρυση, λειτουργία και κοινοβουλευτικές
αντιπαραθέσεις: Συνταγματικές ελευθερίες υπό
περιορισμό και αμφισβήτηση]**

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It is a fact that bibliography about Cyprus under the British rule lacks studies around the institutions of British administration. For example, we know very little about the way the Executive Council worked, the atmosphere of their meetings, etc. This gap of knowledge prevents us from a better understanding of the British administration, the relations between people and the administration, and the general political environment.

For the reason above, Christos Kyriakides' book is a valuable contribution to historiography. The Legislative Council may have been a gift wrapped with restrictions, as the author aptly argues, but it became the cradle for the political life in Cyprus. During the ottoman times, only the high hierarchy of the Church was able to take part in the political/administrative life, through the Medjilis Idare. On the contrary, during the British era the Legislative Council included lawyers, merchandisers, land-owners, doctors, and created a generation of politicians who were central figures in the political life of Cyprus until 1931.

Kyriakides makes a strong argument stating that Britain's motive behind the offer of the Legislative Council was to isolate the Church's influence, creating a generation of young politicians free from the direction of the church and ready to cooperate with the British administration. It is safe to say that they were unsuccessful; the Church's influence not only did not decrease over the years, but on the contrary increased. High profile members of the Church, like Nicodemos Mylonas, were members of the

Legislative Council and had strong influence over their Greek colleagues. Mylonas is the one who urged the MPs to quit the Council just before the October riots (1931). On the other hand, British attempts were not fully unsuccessful. For example, several members, during the interwar years, remained unaffected from the church's influence and were closer to the British administration (like Triantafyllides Antonios, lawyer, who, just after being elected as a member of the Legislative Council in 1930, was appointed by the British as a member of the Executive Council, a position he accepted, leaving his position at the Legislative Council). In this category of the legislative members closer to the British administration, clearly I don't include 'Eptadikoi', their time in the Legislative Council constituted an abnormality of the legislative body, as they did not have the acceptance of the Greek people.

Going one step further, I dare say that the presence of a legislative body up to a point eased the tension of the Enosis movement and brought firebrands of the Enosis movement closer to the British administration, such as Christodoulos Sozos (MP, 1901-1906, 1906-1911), a considered hardliner of the Enosis movement, who became a member of the Executive Council (1911-1912). I think it is not a coincidence that the most hardcore union believer, Nikolaos Katalanos, by choice did not participate in the Legislative Council, wanting no cooperation with the British.

At the beginning the writer presents the case of the Legislative Council in Malta, afterwards moves on to the first Legislative Council (1878) where all the members were appointed by the High Commissioner as an introduction to the more democratic form of 1883, where the Greek and Turkish members were elected. Then Kyriakides' observant eye points out that after 1910 things got heated. As a result of the Italian-Turkish war, the anticipated Enosis for Crete, Greek members become more and more demanding. It was during those times that the Greek members of the Legislative Council decided to quit from the Legislative Council in search of more liberties. It was a turning point. The act of quitting the Legislative Council was the ultimate political act against the British administration -impolitely the Greeks return the British 'gift' of 1882. They used the 'gift' as part of their political resistance, an act that will be repeated in the years post World War I. The act of quitting, even though the members of the administration did not admit it, brought an embarrassment to the British.

Among the many qualities of this book, one can point out the amount of information on the Greek-Turkish relations inside the Council, from their first years of cooperation to the first disputes, also the warm British-Turkish relations up to the point that Kemalists such as Necati showed up in the Council causing serious damage

to the British-Turkish cooperation inside the Council. Along with the books by Sotos Ktoris¹, Altay Nevzat², Niyazi Kizilyurek³, and Alexia Koupanou's⁴ PhD thesis (University of Cyprus), Kyriakides' book provides a great understanding on the Turkish minority behaviour up to 1931. Kyriakides demonstrates the insecurities of the Turks stemming from the demand for Enosis and their strong attachment, as a result of that, to the British.

Kyriakides is analytical, goes into detail and provides a whole spectrum of the discussions on the Legislative Council, proof that he thoroughly examined the large volumes containing the discussions of the Legislative Council. 'Foros ypoteleias' or the matter of establishing an agricultural bank, seems to be among the most significant matters for discussion among the MPs. It is worth mentioning that the agricultural bank was a matter that seemed to more or less unite the Turkish and Greek members of the Council. Generally, the economy seemed to unite the two communities, unlike matters with a political aura (such as education).

It is also easy to understand that the elective members, as showed by Kyriakides, had no real powers due to the veto of the High Commissioner/Governor, giving more a sense of participation rather than a real participation. One can think: Had the British been more generous and provided real participation to the Greek members, they might have increased their chances of creating a strong party of British sympathisers (a long-standing aspiration) and eventually avoided the decisive rift between them and the Greeks with the 1931 uprising.

Kyriakides provided a book which is already considered fundamental for the understanding of British administration up to 1931 and the British administration relations with the Greeks and the Turks. He has successfully paved the way for deeper research into the aspects of the British administration.

Kyriakos Iakovides

¹ Σώτος Κτωρής, *Τουρκοκύπριοι. Από το Περιθώριο στο Συνεταιρισμό (1923-1960)*, [Turkish Cypriots, from outcasts protagonists (1923-1960)] Αθήνα, 2013.

² Altay Nevzat, *Nationalism Amongst the Turks of Cyprus: The First Wave*, Doctoral Thesis, University of Oulu, published by *Oulu University Press, Finland*, 2005.

³ Niyazi Kizilyurek, *Μια Ιστορία Βίας και Μνησικακίας. Η γένεση και Εξέλιξη της Εθνοτικής Διένεξης στην Κύπρο*, Τόμος Α', [Bicomunal relations in Cyprus, a history of violence] Λευκωσία, 2019.

⁴ Αλεξία Κούπανου, *Η Διαμόρφωση των Σχέσεων Χριστιανών και Μουσουλμάνων της Κύπρου κατά την Πρώτη Περίοδο της της Αποικιακής Διακυβέρνησης (1878-1914): Ο Δημόσιος Λόγος, τα Πεδία των Αντιπαραθέσεων και οι Αποτυχημένες Προσπάθειες για Κοινές Διεκδικήσεις* [Christian and Muslim relations in Cyprus, 1878-1914], διδακτορική διατριβή κατατεθειμένη στο Τμήμα Ιστορίας και Αρχαιολογίας του Πανεπιστημίου Κύπρου, Λευκωσία, 2017.