THE EFFECTS OF THE POPULATION EXCHANGE ON THE GREEK AND TURKISH POLITICAL REGIMES IN THE 1930S

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On 30 January 1923, after the Greek Turkish war that lasted almost three years, the two governments signed a convention in Lausanne that forced almost 2 million people to leave their homes and migrate across the Aegean. Around 1.2 million Orthodox Christians left Turkey or were not allowed to return if they had left during the war, and in exchange, around 350,000 Muslims migrated from Greece (Hirschon 2004: 14-15, Akhtar and Demirozu 2006: 85-98, Svolopoulos 2006: 99-119). The population exchange affected the economies, cultures, and politics of these countries at relatively early stages of their nation-state building. Even though recent studies have investigated the political effects of the exchange of populations (Keyder 2004: 44-51, Veremis 2004: 56-62, Akhtar 2004: 87-94, for an overview of the literature, see Yildirim 2006), there has not yet been an attempt to comparatively analyze its ramifications for the regimes during the interwar period. This article will focus on this lesser studied aspect of the exchange, namely its effects on the Greek and Turkish political regimes. Focusing on this question is important because it demonstrates how massive migration contributed to the establishment of authoritarian regimes in Greece and Turkey. The political regimes of these countries in the 1930s were not caused solely by the population exchange; however, examining the consequences of forced migration across the Aegean shows that Greece and Turkey could have followed different political trajectories during the interwar years.

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The refugees that left Asia Minor represented mostly the economic elites of the Turkish towns. In Greece, most of them were settled in urban shantytowns, were employed as industrial workers, or became small landowners in rural areas. Even though at first they supported Eleftherios Venizelos and his Liberal Party, in time their grievances accumulated to cause some of them to incline toward radical and communist ideas. The rise of communism in Greece caused conservative circles to feel threatened and led to their support for the authoritarian regime of Ioannis Metaxas in 1936. In Turkey, on the other hand, the fact that the economic elites of the newly founded republic had left the country meant that the political and military elites that won the War of Independence were left unchallenged. This became one of the reasons why the elites were able to unify under the single party authoritarian regime in the 1930s. Thus, through different mechanisms, the population exchange between Greece and Turkey contributed to the creation of authoritarian regimes in these two Aegean countries. Other reasons were also salient for this outcome. In Greece, the rise of communism, the instability of the democratic regime between 1909 and 1936, and frequent military interventions were the main reasons behind the dictatorship of Metaxas. However, the immigrants from Turkey played an important part in exacerbating these problems. In Turkey, the rural population was not yet ready to support and vote for the secular and national elites in a competitive system. This necessitated the creation of an authoritarian regime. But still, the existence of a unified political and military elite group allowed repression against the weaker opposition to be carried out much more easily. Indeed, Turkey made a transition to democracy only after a relatively strong indigenous economic faction emerged and felt threatened by the single-party.

The Emigrants and the Turkish Authoritarian Regime in the 1930s

On 24 July 1923, the Lausanne Convention ended the First World War for the Ankara government. The convention also marked the international recognition of the new Turkish state out of the ruins of the Ottoman Empire. Three months later, the elite group responsible for this military and political success established the Republican People’s Party (RPP), which single-handedly dominated Turkish politics for the
subsequent two decades. Between 1923 and 1946, there were two main elite groups in Turkey: the military and the state elites. The local notables and the landed elites were confined to a specific region in the east and there were no strong indigenous business elites. Indeed, the Turkish Republic inherited from the Ottoman Empire “a strong state and a weak civil society” (Heper 1985: 16). The population exchange contributed to this outcome. Most of the economic elites of the Ottoman Empire were obligated to migrate to Greece in accordance with the convention signed in Lausanne. Partly because the military officers and the politicians (which were sometimes fused into one group) were the strongest factions in Turkish society, they were also able to establish an uncompetitive system.

The Orthodox Christians in the Ottoman Empire

In the Ottoman Empire, business activities were carried out by non-Muslims and foreigners. A non-Muslim merchant class in the Ottoman Empire emerged after the industrial revolution, when European demand for raw materials (and especially agricultural goods) increased and the desire to find markets for manufactured goods intensified. Because the Ottoman state was militarily weak, it needed European powers to control its territories. In exchange for help put down rebellions, such as the one led by Mehmet Ali in Egypt, the Ottomans signed free trade agreements with the Europeans. Thanks to these agreements, foreign trade, which had already increased 80 percent between 1780 and 1830, quintupled during the following forty years (Zurcher 1993: 75). The dominance of small producers in Anatolia prevented foreign merchants from penetrating agricultural production effectively for the purposes of attaining their surplus. As a result, the Christian population of the Empire, who already had privileged connections with the foreign powers, assumed the role of the intermediary merchant that linked small Anatolian producers to foreign markets (Zurcher 1993: 76). In cities such as Istanbul, Samsun, Trabzon, Erzurum, Adana and Gaziantep, trade and agricultural exports became the responsibility of Christian merchant groups rather than the indigenous Muslim merchants (Aktar 2004: 90, Akgunduz 1998, Kasaba 1988: 102).
In order to increase the volume of trade, foreigners also directly invested in railroads, ports, and in the manufacturing sector. In the latter area, foreigners were partners with non-Muslims. Even though industrial production was limited (according to the incomplete 1915 census, there were only 264 industrial establishments employing more than ten people), 80.4 percent of the individually owned enterprises belonged to non-Muslims (Bugra 1994: 38-39). For instance, in Izmir, at the end of First World War, among the 391 industrial establishments that existed, 344 were owned and managed by the Greeks (Keyder 1993: 28).

The rise of the Christian businessmen was not encouraged by the Ottoman state since the Sultanate was threatened by the existence of a strong non-Muslim elite class. First, the Christian population did not view the Ottoman Empire as its own state, and in fact, believed that the continued weakness of the state was in their best interest (Ahmad 1986: 26). From the perception of the Istanbul government, the increasing power of the business groups threatened the integrity of the Ottoman Empire because the non-Muslim bourgeoisie supported the independence movements of their ethnic groups.

Second, the activities of the merchants seriously diminished the ability of the state to acquire revenue from agricultural surplus. The traditional tax system of the Empire was based on agricultural revenues and it was fixed in money terms. As trade grew, agricultural production also increased. But this surplus was going to the merchants rather than to the state. Because of favorable trade agreements with the European powers, the state could not tax the merchants either. As Caglar Keyder puts it, “while the income and output of the Empire was growing, the bureaucracy’s share was decreasing, and the new class’s share [was] increasing” (1987: 35).

Partly because of this conflict between the Ottoman state and the Christian merchants, after 1908, the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) in government attempted to create an indigenous Muslim bourgeoisie in opposition to the foreigners and non-Muslims (Toprak 1995). For this purpose, the CUP employed several methods, including boycotts on products sold by non-Muslim merchants, abolition of the free trade agreements, tariffs on imports, nationalization of foreign banks and railroads, and establishment of trade guilds for Muslim businessmen (Ahmad 1986: 31-49, Keyder 1987: 61-64, Macfie 1998: 91-92).
According to the 1913 Law on the Encouragement of Industry, businessmen were granted free allocation of state lands and exemptions from taxes and custom dues. In addition, the members of the CUP directly entered the realm of economic activities and participated in the founding of industrial and banking joint stock companies (Bugra 1994: 39-43). The Christian merchants, on the other hand, were threatened by these attempts of the CUP, and in response, they supported the Liberal Freedom and Unity Party established in 1911 (Ahmad 1986: 24).

This conflict between the CUP and the merchants was resolved in favor of the nationalist elite during the Balkan Wars, First World War, and the War of Independence. During these wars, an estimated 300,000 Greeks lost their lives and more than a million Orthodox Christians sought refugee in Greece. The exchange of populations convention signed in 1923 prevented the immigrants to return and forced the remaining 200,000 Orthodox Christians (except for those in Istanbul) to migrate to Greece (Keyder 2004, 43, Aktar 2004: 82-85, Oran 2004: 100). Thus, when the Republic’s territories were drawn in 1923, most of the Christian population of the Empire was gone partly due to the population exchange. Whereas, before the war, 80 percent of what became Turkey consisted of Muslims, according to the 1927 census, that number increased to around 98 percent (Aktar 2004: 81). As Caglar Keyder notes, “what this drastic measure indicates is that during the war years Turkey lost... [around 90 percent of the pre-war] commercial class, such that when the Republic was formed, the bureaucracy found itself unchallenged” (1987: 69, 79).

The Rise of the New Political and Military Elite during the Ottoman Empire and the First World War

Understanding Turkish politics necessarily entails analyzing the rise of a new group of political and military elites during the later stages of the Ottoman Empire. Before the reform period in the 1800s, the Ottoman ruling elite consisted of four groups: the Sultan and his servants in Istanbul; a class of religious elites called the ulema responsible for education and judicial matters; the standing infantry army, called the Janissary corps; and, finally, the cavalrymen who administered state-owned land. The Ottoman state ruled the territories it occupied (the
Balkans, Anatolia/Asia Minor – today’s Turkey – and the Arab lands) indirectly and via connections with the local elites, such as members of the ulema, priests, consulates, guild presidents, and sheiks. Partly for this reason, the bureaucracy of the state located in Istanbul was limited to around one thousand civil servants (Zurcher 1993: 23-32).

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the weakness of the Ottoman army in comparison to its European counterparts led the Sultanate to reform the military organization. In 1826, the Janissary corps was abolished and, in its place, a new military was established with modern weapons imported from Europe. In order to train this military, Prussians were invited and a new War College was set up (Zurcher 1993: 63-67, 69-70, 88-89, Macfie 1998: 14). Through the creation of an intensive European style education system, the newly trained military students were introduced to Western thinking, and along with it, they became acquainted with liberal ideas of parliamentary constitutionalism. From the mid-nineteenth century onwards, the staff colleges and especially the medical school of the army became the centers of secret political organizations determined to modernize the Empire (Rustow 1959, 515).

In the 1820s, the Ottoman state started to reform its bureaucracy as well. In order to create a more efficient bureaucracy, as a first step, the state secured the positions and the wealth of the officers by abolishing unfavorable practices, such as confiscating the wealth of the upper-level bureaucrats and appointing them to new positions each year. In 1835, Sultan Mahmut II created a hierarchical bureaucracy with the minister of interior at the top, and introduced a new division of labor among the offices. In addition, the Sultan established new advisory councils, increasing the political powers of the bureaucrats. Meanwhile, similar to the changes in military schooling, fundamental modifications were made in the educational system of the civilian bureaucrats. In 1833, the Interpretation Office, which taught French to the civil servants, was established. In the 1850s and 1860s, new secular schools (modeled on the French lycées) were opened up to train the bureaucrats (Zurcher 1993: 67-68, 70-71, 89-94, 96-97, Macfie 1998: 14).

These efforts created a new class of civilian and military elites. From 1826 until 1871, the Empire saw the creation of a pool of military officers, administrators, tax collectors, or school teachers, trained in
Western ideologies and persistent in modernizing the Empire in order to prevent its gradual collapse. However, just when these elites were ready to influence politics, the Ottoman state under Sultan Abdulhamit II started to curtail their powers and put an end to the reform program. In response, a group of exiled civilian officers, calling themselves the Young Turks, established the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) in Paris. The Committee increased its strength substantially when, in 1907, military officers from the Third Army in Salonika and the Second Army in Edirne joined forces with them. In 1908, the civilian and military arms of the CUP staged a coup against Sultan Abdulhamit and made him agree to re-open the Ottoman parliament (Zurcher 1993: 130-136, Macfie 1998: 20-30).

The CUP managed to rule the Empire until the end of the First World War. After the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in the war, the top leadership of the CUP fled the country while the victorious Allied powers prepared to carve up the Empire. However, the organizational base of the CUP in the provinces remained solid and the Ottoman army was reorganized in inner Anatolia (Rustow 1959: 519). Thus, a group of civilian and military bureaucrats was available when Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, a commander of the Ottoman army in the First World War and an ex-CUP member, started to organize the national resistance movements under one association (Tuncay 1999: 26, 27-28 ff 13, Rustow 1973: 109). The new association, which was formed against the Allied forces, managed to get representation in the 1920 Istanbul parliament. Thus, when the Allied forces seized the capital, the parliament (with new elections) had to move to Ankara on 23 April 1920.

From that day onwards, a new battle started between the Ankara government and the Ottoman Sultan and the ulema. Given their bureaucratic backgrounds, the Ankara elites (soon to be organized under the Republican People’s Party), were well entrenched in the country, both administratively and militarily, to carry out a “revolution from above.” In 1922, the Ottoman Sultanate was abolished and in 1923 the Turkish Republic was declared. In order to eliminate the ulema, the new elite used a series of secularist reforms. In 1924, the caliphate (the religious title of the Sultan) was annulled and religious schools were banned. In the subsequent years, gradually, the political power base of the ulema was eliminated, with such reforms as the adaptation of the new Latin
alphabet, confiscation of religious endowments (vakifs), and elimination of religious courts (Trimberger 2003: 49-51). With a favorable electoral law, the Republican People’s Party made sure that the number of deputies in the national assembly with religious backgrounds would decrease from 17 percent to 7 percent in 1923. More than half of the deputies in the new parliament had administrative or military backgrounds and almost all of them belonged to Mustafa Kemal’s group (Frey 1965: 312, 181, Tuncay 1999: 46-49).

In conclusion, in the nineteenth century, the Ottoman Sultans started a reform program which they hoped will save the Empire from collapsing. After the defeat in the First World War, it became apparent that they failed in this endeavor. Even though part of the elite that was created during the reform period successfully prevented Anatolia to become a territory of the European powers, ironically, the new elite facilitated the collapse of the Ottoman state, its institutions and worked to eliminate the old elites. The business class of the Ottoman Empire was also lost because of the war and the subsequent population exchange. From this process, the military and the bureaucrats emerged as the victorious and dominant elite group that would almost exclusively rule the Turkish Republic for the next twenty years. In a nutshell, this is one of the main reasons why the Turkish Republic was heir to a strong state and a weak society.

Consequences of the Emigration of the Orthodox Christians and Loss of the Economic Elites for the Turkish Single-Party Regime

It is the contention of this article that if the economic elites had stayed in the Turkish Republic, it would have been more difficult to unify significant groups in Turkish society under a single-party regime in the 1930s. We cannot expect authoritarian regimes to gather attitudinal support or legitimacy among all of its population and elites since they repress political positions that are not voiced by loyal groups. However, in strong authoritarian regimes we at least expect to see behavioral compliance and acceptance of the regime – usually, but not always, out of fear (Przeworski 1995: 54). Between November 1930 and January 1946, no opposition party among the elites formed in Turkey with the purpose of ending the dominant position of the RPP in politics and resisting single-party authoritarianism. Such unification of the elites under a
single-party regime would have been more difficult without the population exchange.

This argument can be demonstrated by two examples. First, the faith of the Free Republican Party of 1930 demonstrates the weakness of the economic elites in opposition to the RPP after the autonomous Orthodox Christian businessmen left. Second, the creation of the Democratic Party in 1946 reveals that relatively stronger economic elites successfully challenged the RPP and effectively ended the single-party regime when they were sufficiently threatened by its policies. These two examples highlight the importance of the business classes in Turkey for a competitive system and draw attention to the importance of the population exchange, which left the new republic without a strong economic class.\(^3\)

**Opposition in the Early Turkish Republic – the Free Republican Party**

Worsening economic conditions in the late 1920s caused an opposition party to the RPP to come into existence.\(^4\) Until 1929, the RPP was restricted in carrying out economic reforms because the Lausanne Treaty required the new Turkish state to continue the open trade policy of the Ottoman Empire (Keyder 1993: 91-95). Despite this limitation, however, the government continued the policy of the CUP to pursue the creation of a national industrial and commercial bourgeoisie (Aktar 2001: 113-118, 121-126). After the departure of the Christian economic class, Muslim entrepreneurs took over their businesses. The state seized the properties and status of the emigrants and distributed them to the nascent businessmen or to those that had the right connections and power. Only a few of the Muslims arriving from Greece had the necessary skills to replace the economic classes of the Ottoman Empire. Thus, most of the nascent entrepreneurs were locals who were aided by state policies (Clark 2006: 192-198, on the occupation of Greek property after the population exchange, see Ari 1995: 9-15).

In 1923, the government held an economic congress in Izmir, which mostly represented the interests of the newly established National Turkish Commerce Union (Okcun 1981, Afetinan 1989). During the subsequent two years, the government established the Business Bank and the Industrial and Mining Bank in order to provide credit to private
industrialists. In 1927, a new law on the encouragement of industry was enacted, which provided industrialists with tax exemptions, land donations, permissions to import raw materials without customs dues, and government purchases of their products (Berberoglu 1982: 24-27, Keyder 1993: 77-80, Bugra 1994: 99). As a result of these efforts, the number of industrial establishments increased from 341 factories in 1923 to 1,473 factories in 1932 (Weiker 1973: 25-26). Yet, the Turkish economy was far from being industrialized. In 1927, among the 65,245 business facilities, 78 percent of them employed less than four people and only around four percent used machinery (Karpat 1973: 54). In reality, the economic policies of this period benefited mostly the commercial sector, which grew 71 percent from 1923 until 1929 (Keyder 1993: 48).

Despite these minor achievements in creating a national bourgeoisie, there were major differences between the new republic’s economic elites and the Christian businessmen of the Ottoman Empire. In the republican era, the commercial and industrial entrepreneurs were not as autonomous as the emigrant Christians since initially their positions depended on the state, the political elite and their policies. Whereas the non-Muslim bourgeoisie of the Ottoman Empire was under the protection of the European powers, the newly emerging business groups were under the authority of the Republican People’s Party (Keyder 2004: 45-46). Indeed, this state dependence caused problems by reducing efficiency in the newly-founded enterprises (Aktar 2004: 91-92).

Toward the end of the decade, the situation in commerce did not look bright. A severe draught in 1928 brought about a decrease of at least 43 percent in the production of primary crops (Yetkin 1982: 26 ff 27). In addition, the Great Depression caused agricultural prices to decline in world markets. Commercialized farmers were adversely affected when these developments were combined with the policy of the state after 1929 to increase tariffs on agricultural inputs, such as oil and machinery (Tekeli and Ilkin 1977: 217-219). Since an important portion of the merchant activity in Turkey was based on exporting agricultural produce, the Great Depression and the crisis in the agricultural sector caused the commercial sector to face heavy losses. The total external trade volume declined more than twice between 1929 and 1932 (Tekeli and Ilkin 1977: 221). In the year 1930 alone, around one thousand
commercial companies in Istanbul and Izmir went bankrupt (Keyder 1987: 96).

In response to the worsening economic situation, Mustafa Kemal encouraged the creation of the Free Republican Party (FRP) in August 1930 by Fethi Okyar, who disagreed with Prime Minister Ismet Inonu on handling the crisis (Yetkin 1982: 29-32). The program of the party diverged from the Republican People’s Party mostly in economic matters. It advocated the abolition of state monopolies, decreases in taxes, and encouragement of foreign capital (Weiker 1973: 71). In addition, the party program expressed the intentions of the party to protect and further the interests of the manufacturing sector and the big landed elites. Reflecting this position of the FRP, the organizational base and the leadership of the party consisted of merchants, big farmers and self-employed people (Yetkin 1982: 100-106, 184-186).

Although the Free Party represented the economic elites, the creation of the party almost immediately spurred discontent with the RPP to surface among the masses (Yetkin 1982: 166-181). The most serious incident occurred in Menemen when religious reactionaries declared sharia (the code of law based on the Koran which was used during the Ottoman times) and killed three people that tried to oppose them. In response, martial law was declared in Menemen, Manisa, and Balikesir and 35 people were executed and 41 people were condemned to prison (Tuncay 1999: 303-305). Even though in the October municipal elections, the FRP won in 31 out of 502 localities, these elections demonstrated that the RPP will not allow the rise of another party. The Republicans exercised strict control, repression and fraud against the opposition. The minister of interior affairs, in his notice to the governors, ordered civil servants to use their influence and power during the election period in order to prevent the propaganda of those who wanted to destroy the republic (Yetkin 1982: 188-204). The repression exercised by the RPP during the elections and the insurgencies convinced the leader of the FRP, Fethi Okyar, to close down his own party.

The fate of the Free Republican Party is important for two reasons. First, it shows that at the beginning of the 1930s there was opposition to the RPP mainly over economic issues. Second, the party’s weakness against RPP repression and the fact that it was closed down in only three months suggest that if a stronger economic group existed at this time, the
FRP could have been more successful. In other words, if the commercial and industrial businessmen of the Ottoman Empire had not left due to the war and population exchange between Greece and Turkey, a more independent and stronger economic group could have exerted more power vis-à-vis the RPP. This is not to say that a party at this stage of the republic would have won the elections and toppled the Republicans from government. However, it is possible that without the war and population exchange, the FRP could have survived longer and exerted more influence. With a relatively stronger economic group backing up the party, repression would have been more vigorous and perhaps even bloody. Thus, at the beginning of the 1930s, unification of the elites under the single-party regime would have been jeopardized if the Christian elites were not forced to emigrate due to the Greek-Turkish agreement on the population exchange.

Opposition that Ended the Single-Party Regime – the Democratic Party

The best example that demonstrates how a strong economic group could have ended the authoritarian regime if it had felt threatened is the creation of the Democratic Party and the transition to a multi-party system in 1946.

The creation of a strong economic business class was partly the success of the RPP elites and their étatist policies. Reflecting the motto “the state does what the individual can not do” (Bugra 1994: 108), the Turkish state in the 1930s focused on developing infrastructure, manufacturing raw materials and intermediary goods, and providing cheap credit and incentives to new establishments that used raw materials produced in Turkey and that substituted foreign imports (Boratav 1982: 113-118, 181-214). As a result, state enterprises mushroomed side-by-side with private initiatives. The public sector made up close to 60 percent of annual payments made to employees, around 54 percent of the gross additions to fixed assets and 58 percent of the value added. However, in 1950, around 96 percent of the manufacturing establishments were not state owned (Bugra 1994: 44). There were more than 1,000 privately owned industrial facilities in 1941, and between 1939 and 1941, “the value of production in these enterprises as well as the total number of workers and employees had tripled” (Karpat 1973: 56). If the Christian merchants of the Ottoman Empire had stayed, the state’s in-
volvement in the economy and étatism would have been an unwelcome development. There would have been opposition against this policy of the single-party, making unification under the policies of the authoritarian regime problematic. However, for the nascent bourgeoisie of the Turkish Republic, the étatist policies of the single-party provided an opportunity. State policy in the 1930s and early 1940s established private business groups and indigenous economic elite that could act relatively independently from the RPP.

The policies of the RPP during the Second World War were the main reason for the breaking up of the RPP and new businessmen coalition. During the war, the economic policy of the state was aimed at supplying necessary substances to the big cities and to the mobilized military. For this purpose, the state bought agricultural products at cheap prices and rationed some of them (such as bread) in the cities, while sold others (such as cotton) at market prices to generate revenue for the military. But such controls proved to be difficult: as the state could not manage rationing properly, it intensified war-time scarcity and contributed to, on average, a 250 percent-rate of inflation (Yetkin 1983: 183-184). Since individuals were allowed to continue buying and selling the same products the state attempted to control, the result was the creation of a huge black-market and the accumulation of wealth by merchants who could stock scarce produce. Business flourished at a record rate: for instance, during the war, 1,982 new companies were registered with the Istanbul Chamber of Commerce and, in Izmir, the number of big enterprises increased from 9 to 41 (Timur 2003: 26 ff 6, Karpat 1959: 93 ff 33).

Because the tax system was ineffective in transferring the profits of these merchants to the state, the government decided to initiate a one-time-only wealth levy. Even though the levy was supposed to be applied to the business community in general, in practice, the Jewish and Christian populations of Istanbul (those that were spared from the population exchange) were the ones heavily taxed. Indeed, the wealth levy was the another state policy that attempted to nationalize and Turkify business since the CUP era. 2,057 non-Muslims were taken into camps because they could not pay their obligations. More than half of these were sent to the east for forced labor and 21 died there (Okte 1951, Karpat 1959: 114-117, Aktar 1992, Aktar 2001: 135-243). In addition, in 1944, the
state used the law on national defense to confiscate the machineries of some of the factories in Istanbul and Eskisehir (Yetkin 1983: 186-188). The wealth levy did not affect the Muslim bourgeoisie and the confiscations were not widespread; nevertheless, they demonstrated to the businessmen that their alliance with the state was not solid and that the RPP politicians could threaten their well-being and security.

The business community was not the only elite group that reached the same conclusion at the end of the war: the landowning elite, too, was threatened by the policies of the state. In 1944, the government initiated the ten percent agricultural produce tax and, in June 1945, it enacted the land reform law. The latter law meant the total elimination of the landowning class because it envisioned distributing lands larger than 500 hectares (or if that was not adequate larger than 200 hectares) to landless peasants or peasants who lacked sufficient land. The notorious article 17 of the law stated that, in densely populated areas, lands equal or less than 20 hectares would be nationalized and the minimum land a peasant could hold would be 5 hectares (Karpat 1959: 117-125).

The landlords in the parliament fiercely opposed the new law. Following their dissent, Celal Bayar (the ex-prime minister close to the business community), Adnan Menderes (a large landowner), Fuad Koprulu, and Refik Koraltan submitted a proposal that demanded the liberalization of the regime. Five months later, the latter three were expelled and Bayar resigned from the party. On 7 January 1946, the four formed the Democratic Party (DP) with the direct participation of the landowners and financial support from the business elites (Timur 2003: 70-73). In January 1947, a group of merchants from Istanbul founded the Istanbul Commercial Association, despite the opposition of the state-controlled Istanbul Chamber of Commerce. Even though according to the law in force professional associations were prohibited, the new association started to publish an economic journal and held an economic congress. In its publications and other activities, the association gave support to the Democratic Party and criticized the policies of the RPP (Timur 2003: 130-133). Similarly, among the 250 candidates of the DP in the 1946 elections, 41 were landowners and 39 were businessmen (Karpat 1959: 163-165).

Despite the hesitance and initial repressive reactions of the hardliner Republicans, the Democratic Party won the elections in 1950 and
ended the single-party rule in Turkey. Unlike the Free Republican Party, the pressure of the Democratic Party worked partly because of the international conjecture, President Inonu’s own persuasion, lack of insurgen-
cies spurred by the creation of the new party, and the existence of several small cliques among the junior military officers. Simultaneously with these factors, the existence of a stronger and more independent economic elite group also played an important role. After all, it was these groups that funded and incited opposition against the RPP. Their success suggests that at the beginning of the 1930s the Free Republican Party could have exerted more influence if the economic elites of the time were more powerful. Without the other contributing factors they would not have probably succeeded in toppling the RPP; but they would have at least exerted more influence, survive longer and damage the unification of the elites under the authoritarian regime.

This analysis of the Turkish single-party authoritarian regime between 1923 and 1946 focused on a hypothetical question: what would have happened if most of the economic elites of the Ottoman Empire had not been forced to emigrate due to the Greek Turkish war and the consequent population exchange in 1923? Conclusions driven from the examples of the Free Republican Party in 1930 and the Democratic Party in the 1940s suggest that the existence of a non-Muslim economic elite group that could have acted independently of the dominant state elites would have made unification under the authoritarian regime more difficult at least in its early stages. Even though it is far fetched to argue that the population exchange caused the single-party regime, its influence must still be acknowledged. The relative ease in which the RPP eliminated the opposition, sustained and strengthened its regime in the 1930s was partly due to the dominance of the state elites. The Republican bureaucracy, politicians and military were unchallenged by other groups in society – including commercial and industrial businessmen. The population exchange between Greece and Turkey deposed an important section of the economic elites, causing one of the influential opposition groups that could have potentially challenged the RPP and its policies to disappear. This, in turn, contributed to the unification of the elites under the single-party regime and strengthening of the regime.
The Immigrants and the Greek Authoritarian Regime of the 1930s

While the departure of the Orthodox Christians from Turkey enhanced the role of the state elites in the republic, the arrival of the refugees to Greece facilitated the weakening of the previous politicians. The support and votes of the immigrants for Venizelos and the Republicans in the 1920s strengthened the hands of these groups vis-à-vis the oligarchic parties and the monarchy. However, these initial effects of the population exchange started to change in the early 1930s as the refugee vote shifted away from the Venizelists. In time, some of the immigrants started to support the Communist Party and engage in contentious politics. Such alterations in politics, in turn, contributed to the creation of the authoritarian regime in 1936 under the leadership of Ioannis Metaxas and King George II.

The Settlement of the Refugees and their Initial Support for Venizelos

Before the 1909 military coup in Greece, politics was dominated by the leaders of the War of Independence and the monarchy. The political elites of Greece in the nineteenth century (often called the tzakia) came from four different groups. The first group represented the Orthodox Christians located in the capital of the Ottoman Empire before independence in 1830: diplomats, governors of the Aegean islands, and princes of Moldavia and Wallachia. The Orthodox Church was also an elite group with influence in the Ottoman Empire. The second group of elites was the local notables who served as tax collecting intermediaries between the peasants and the Ottoman rulers. The third group of elites was the armed men, who were hired by the primates in order to protect their communes. The chiefs of these irregular bands formed the disorganized military of Greece during the War of Independence. The final group of elites was the Greek merchant class. Especially significant were the tradesmen from three islands in the Aegean (Hydra, Spetses, and Psara), who owned half of the ships of the Greek merchant fleet (Petropoulos 1968). After the independence of Greece, these elites came into conflict with the monarchy that attempted to centralize the state to the disadvantage of the tzakia families. After two military coups in mid-nineteenth century, Greece became a constitutional monarchy with universal male
suffrage. The dominant elites served as deputies in the national assembly and organized themselves in loose political parties.

The supremacy of the izakia was broken in 1909 with a military coup. This coup gave the Liberal Party and Eleftherios Venizelos the opportunity to represent new groups in Greek society, especially the urban business owners and workers, who had been left out of politics (Papacosma 1977). During the First World War, Venizelos came into conflict with King Constantine over the issue of which alliance Greece must support in the war. The Republican coalition abolished the monarchy in 1924 and dominated politics until 1932. The success of the Republicans against the Royalists and the old izakia politicians was partly due to the population exchange and the arrival of refugees from Asia Minor.

Almost half of the refugees were settled as peasants and land distribution was carried out in great pace after the arrival of the immigrants. In Peloponnesus, there were no large estates thanks to the distribution of national lands left by the Ottomans after the War of Independence. However, in the newly acquired territories of the north and especially in Thessaly, Macedonia, and Epirus large landownership was common. The first phase of land distribution started in 1911 under the Liberal government; however, it could not extend too far because large estates in Macedonia and Epirus were still owned by Muslims protected by the Ottoman Empire. During the First World War, the second phase of distribution was started by the government of Venizelos in Salonika and this time it also covered northern Greece.

Given that the total population of Greece at the time was less than 5,000,000, the arrival of 1,200,000 refugees put pressure on the government to effectively settle the immigrants. The Liberal government realized that settling refugees in northern territories that were acquired during the Balkan Wars and the First World War would also alter population balances to the disadvantage of Bulgarians and other minorities (Hirschon 1998: 37, Karakasidou 1997, Kontogiorgi 2004: 65, Pentzopoulos 2002: 134, Voutira 2004: 146, Clark 2006: 51). With the aid of the Refugee Settlement Commission established by the League of Nations and foreign loans, the Greek government started an extensive settlement program. Large lands were swept aside and were distributed to both the refugees and the local landless peasants. From 1917 to 1925,
a total of 1,724 landholdings were distributed to 130,000 families. Combined with the first phase of distribution, until the mid-1930s, 310,000 families were settled in more than 3,000 holdings (around 40 percent of arable land) (Mavrogordatos 1983: 159-160, Pentzopoulos 2002: 152-153). Such land distribution prevented strong and autonomous landed elites to come into existence that could have potentially allied with the Royalists against the Republicans.

While 46 percent of the refugees were settled in rural areas (Kontogiorgi 2004: 66), the remainder was settled in or around urban areas. The majority of those that started their new lives in urban locations were accommodated in Athens, Piraeus and Salonika, with more than 100,000 refugees in each of these towns. The other major refugee settlements were in the northern cities of Kavalla, Drama, Serres, Xanthe and Komotini and on the islands of Chios, Mytiline and Crete. In most of the northern cities, the number of new arrivals was higher than the local population (Yerolympos 2004: 140-141). Indeed, even in Salonika, the refugees constituted almost half of the population (Veremis 2004: 57).

The successful distribution of land in northern Greece caused the peasants and the refugees that acquired new holdings to support Venizelos and the Republicans during this period (Mavrogordatos 1983: 198-207). In general, the refugees settled either in rural or urban areas resented the Royalists and the King. They blamed these tzakia politicians for the defeat in the Asia Minor war and their subsequent forced migration (Yildirim 2006: 48). On the other hand, Venizelos was seen as a savior. During his premiership the war in Asia Minor was going well and, when the refugees arrived in Greece, they were settled by the Cretan politician. As a result, in their local congresses, the immigrants decided to support the Liberal Party.

The Venizelists won the elections in the 1920s and the republic was proclaimed against the Royalist old elites thanks to the refugee support. Even if these voters did not have enough power to establish their own party, they represented the swing votes. If they voted in block, solely by their numbers (totaling around 300,000 voters) they could determine who would win the elections (Pentzopoulos 2002: 172-190, Mavrogordatos 1983: 182-185, Veremis 2004: 56-57, Campbell and Sherrard 1968: 141, Clark 2006: 42-43, Yildirim 2006: 51). Thus, unlike Turkey, in Greece, the population exchange contributed to the weakening of the
dominant elite groups and allowed a strong opposition against the monarchy and the *tzakia* families to ascend to power. In Turkey exactly the opposite happened: the population exchange strengthened the dominant elites by forcing the economic groups to depart.

*Increasing Grievances of the Refugees and their Support for Communism*

Even though refugee support for the Republicans strengthened the Venizelists initially, it also made them vulnerable. When the immigrants started to desert the Republican coalition in increasing numbers (along with other peasants and workers), the base of the Venizelists also started to crumble. This shift in allegiance gave the advantage back to the Royalists, who reestablished the monarchy in 1935, and contributed to the rise of communism in Greece. Apart from the Communist Party's propaganda to attract refugee votes (Yildirim 2006: 52-53), the grievances of the immigrants also played an important role in their changing political preferences. The problems of the refugees centered on their living conditions, cultural differences and the economic crisis.

Despite the relative success of the rural settlement of the refugees, in the urban centers the refugee workers lived in bad housing conditions. In 1930, there were more than 30,000 refugee families who had not been settled in proper houses. Even as late as the year 1952 there were 14,241 families that lived in huts (Mavrogordatos 1983: 188, Hirschon 1998: 42-43, Clark 2006: 207). Since the Refugee Settlement Commission and the Greek government emphasized rural placements, the immigrants sent to urban centers were not provided with means of living like the peasants (Colonas 2004: 173, Kontogiorgi 2004: 66, Clark 2006: 207). Thus, most of the newcomers in the cities experienced deterioration in their social status compared with their lives as well-to-do Orthodox Christians in the Ottoman Empire. A few built their own houses in the districts of Nea Filadelfia, Nea Smyrna, and Ymittos in Athens with the assets they managed to bring with them. These few immigrants engaged in manufacturing and commerce, continuing their privileged positions (Colonas 2004: 176). However, most of the remainder refugees in urban centers were not as lucky. They became workers, small shop-owners, artisans or peddlers (see the example of Yerania in Hirschon 1998: 77-105). In addition, rural families in Turkey were settled in urban outskirts in Greece
or vice-versa. According to a report of the Refugee Settlement Commission in 1928, 40 percent of the rural settlers did not have the necessary abilities to make progress in cultivating land. More than 25 percent, on the other hand, could not make any progress at all since they had no previous experience as peasants (Kontogiorgi 2004: 70).

The refugees had difficulties integrating into the Greek culture. The language the immigrants used was usually a special Greek dialect or Turkish, their surnames had specific suffixes and their cultural practices were different than the majority of the Greeks. These traits made them easily identifiable by the natives and caused them to feel alienated. Since the refugees competed with the natives for jobs and the latter had to pay the price of settlement, the immigrants were verbally, culturally and physically attacked by the indigenous population. Exposure to derogatory expressions, such as “Turkish seeds,” “baptised in yogurt” or “orientals,” was one of the discriminatory acts from which the refugees suffered. Additionally, in some rural areas, severe conflicts took place between the immigrants and previous residents over land (Mavrogordatos 1983: 191-198, Hirschon 2004: 19, Kontogiorgi 2004: 75, Marantzidis 2005: 97-106, Karakasidou 1997: 141-161).

Apart from the problems in living conditions and isolation, Venizelos and the Liberal Party lost support among the refugees when the immigrants were not compensated for the properties they left in Turkey. The Liberal government signed a treaty with Turkey in 1930 which agreed that the properties would not be reimbursed. In addition, the refugees became indebted to the state, merchants and banks during their settlement and demanded from the Refugee Settlement Commission and the government to cover what they owed. After some reluctance, the Venizelist government granted a debt moratorium to the peasants for five years. However, this concession came too late, after the rural refugees realized that Venizelos may not always safeguard their interests (Mazower 1991: 131-133, Campbell and Sherrard 1968: 141-142, Veremis 2004: 57, Clark 2006: 214-215, Ari 1995: 161-162, Yildirim 2006: 51).

The Great Depression also hit the refugees hard. Most of the peasants that were located in Thrace and Macedonia cultivated tobacco (Kontogiorgi 2004: 67). Indeed, the refugees were responsible from two thirds of tobacco production in 1926 (Pentzopoulos 2002: 156). Land
was initially allocated based on the value of the tobacco crop at the beginning of the 1920s. Since the prices were high at the time, peasants were distributed very small parcels. This required them to focus on cultivating cash crops rather than subsistence farming. Thus, in the 1920s, some regions, such as Kavalla, Serres and Xanthe, became reliant on tobacco export, which made up half of the export income of the country between 1923 and 1926 and a quarter of the state revenue from taxation (Mazower 1991: 78, 87, Pelt 1998: 27, Kontogiorgi 2004: 69).

Until 1929, the number of tobacco producers and the area cultivated continued to grow even though foreign tobacco demand had already started to decline in 1926 due to the Great Depression. Especially cuts in German demand affected Greek producers the most, since more than 40 percent of the sales were headed to Germany (Pelt 1998: 52). Lower levels of international demand and higher levels of cultivation led to overproduction and decline in prices. Between 1928 and 1931, prices in Thrace almost halved and the average producer income dropped 54 percent. With the devaluation of the drachma in 1932, tobacco exports even further declined (until Greece signed bilateral trade agreements with Germany), totaling to a decline of 81 percent from 1929 until 1933. The specialized peasants located in eastern Macedonia could not diversify their production and could not pay their debts because of their reduced incomes. Agitated peasants gave up hope that the Venizelist government could deliver benefits and, as it was evidenced during the Conference of Tobacco Growers organized in Salonika in January 1930, some of them redirected their support toward leftist parties (Mazower 1991: 87-88, 118-121, Stefanidis 2006: 208).

The tobacco growing peasants were not the only refugee group that defected from the Liberal Party in northern Greece at the end of the 1920s. Tobacco workers also started to support the Communist Party. The immigrants from Asia Minor constituted almost half of the workers that treated unprocessed tobacco before exportation. The tobacco workers formed the most radical group among the laboring class in Greece. Most of them supported communism for two reasons. First, employment in this sector was seasonal and volatile because production was based on foreign demand and merchants could choose to export the tobacco without first processing it in Greece. As a result, the tobacco workers had minimal job security. Second, production was carried out in large stores
with high concentration of labor. Unlike most other sectors in Greek manufacturing, hundreds of people worked together allowing for the growth of labor consciousness (Mavrogordatos 1983: 146-147). When tobacco exports were flourishing, the Tobacco Federation managed to secure several rights for the workers. But, with the start of the Great Depression, unemployment increased among the tobacco workers and their incomes were severely reduced – from 1927 to 1932 on average more than 40 percent (Mazower 1991: 126, 226).

In the urban centers, the refugees formed the largest group with grievances against the elites. Immigrants that became small-shop holders, owners of small businesses or peddlers (who usually sold imported goods) were adversely affected by the Great Depression and the crisis it caused in Greece. With decreases in peasant and worker incomes and deflation, consumption levels declined and prices fell. This led numerous small shops to go bankrupt – especially in Salonika (Mazower 1991: 135-136).

Economic distress and cultural isolation resulted in the urban refugees turning toward “the communist movement, sublimating their alienation by struggling for an envisioned international order in which ethnic minorities would not constitute political problems” (Petropoulos 1976: 158-159). Proportionally speaking, the refugees started to vote for the communists more than the natives in the 1930s (Pentzopoulos 2002: 190, Mavrogordatos 1983: 217). The Communist Party drew most of its leadership among the immigrants: from 27 central committee members 11, and from 7 Politbureau members 5 were refugees. The leader of the party, Nikos Zachariades, was from refugee origin as well. Similarly, the commander of the communists during the Greek civil war in 1946-1949, Markos Vafiades, was an immigrant from Asia Minor (Mavrogordatos 1983: 223 ff 128, Veremis 2004: 58, Clark 2006: 231). The first minor successes of the Communists in elections came in regions heavily populated by refugees. Reflecting the troubles in tobacco producing and processing regions, in the 1926 national elections, the Communist Party won 10 to 15 percent of the votes in Salonika and Kavalla. In the 1931 by-elections, the Communists increased their votes in Salonika twofold at the expense of the Liberal Party. Before the 1932 elections, Venizelos could not speak to the crowd that protested against him in Kavalla (Veremis 2004: 57, Pentzopoulos 2002: 192, Mazower 1991: 127-128,
Yildirim 2006: 51, also see Hirschon 1998: 46-47 on the votes of the Communist Party in Piraeus). In 1934, Kavalla elected a Communist Party member for mayor. As a response, the government dismissed the communists in the city council and sentenced them to prison (Mazower 1991: 228).

In the 1936 general elections, the Communist Party received 5.76 percent of the votes and won 15 seats in the parliament. The success of the Communist Party might not have been alarming if either the Venizelist or the anti-Venizelist had held the majority of seats in the assembly. However, the Royalists won 143 and the Republicans 141 seats. The major Republican party, the Liberals, won 37 percent of the votes and the major party of the Royalists, the People’s Party, received 22 percent. With these results, neither party could form a government unless it made a coalition with the other or with the communists. Negotiations between the two camps failed because the Venizelists insisted on reinstating the Republican officers in the military that were dismissed after the 1935 attempted coup. As a result of this failure, both camps started to negotiate with the Communist Party as well (Cliadakis 1979: 129).

The Liberal Party reached a deal with the communists that if they made a coalition, the Republicans would support the abolition of the repressive anti-leftist Idionymon law and pardon those that had been convicted of political crimes. Similar arrangements (though unsuccessful) were worked out between the Royalists and the Communist Party too (Campbell and Sherrard 1968: 159, Koliopoulos and Veremis 2002: 118). Thus, in 1936, the communists had a real good chance of coming to power via a coalition government. Equally important, there were signs that if the democratic regime continued, the mainstream parties might make concessions to the communists, especially on the use of repression against them, in order to form the cabinet.

Part of the reason why the communists were able to gain relative strength was the fact that the Venizelists lost the support of the refugees, especially during their last tenure in office from 1928 to 1932. Indeed, the possibility of Venizelist cooperation with the communists and the “venizelo-communism” formula signified an attempt to hold the former Republican coalition together. Of course, the increase in votes of the communists and their popularity after the January 1936 elections were determined by other factors as well (Kofas 1983: 31-41, Vlavianos 1993:
193-196). For instance, the Communist Party’s decision to cooperate with the Agrarian Party to achieve a peasant-worker coalition, its abandonment of the highly unpopular and anti-nationalistic policy of advocating independence for Macedonia and Thrace and its ability to represent the workers better than before were equally important. But, for our purposes, the most crucial point is that some of the refugee votes shifted from the Venizelists to the Communist Party.

Reactions of Metaxas and the King to Increasing Communism

The 1936 authoritarian regime was established five months after the national elections. During this year, leftists also showed their teeth in social movements. Apart from abandoning their support for the Venizelists and voting in increasing numbers for the communists, the refugees expressed their discontent with increasing levels of demonstrations and strikes. Even though the refugees never demonstrated as a single entity, they were involved in other worker and peasant activities.

In 1936, a series of disturbances preceded the declaration of the Metaxas dictatorship. These movements were mostly in regions where the refugees were abundant; however, they also spread to the rest of the country. The first serious clash between protesting workers and government forces occurred in Mytilene in February. The same month, 30,000 peasants, workers, shop-owners and artisans protested against the conditions in the tobacco business in Serres (Kofas 1983: 12-13). A similar solidarity between labor and townsmen occurred in Kavalla: in May, tobacco workers came out on a strike supported by the shopkeepers and artisans, whose capacity to do business was also badly affected by the fall in wages of the town’s workers (Mazower 1991: 286-289).

On 4 May, tobacco workers started a general strike with 30,000 people participating. Four days later the General Confederation of Greek Labor (GSEE) announced a general strike in Salonika. At least 50,000 people joined the strike and the demonstration. The protesters’ attempt to talk with the governor was prevented by the police. The following day, a larger gathering in Salonika – including students, teachers and textile, port and tobacco workers – clashed with the army and police forces. At least 12 people were killed and 200 were injured. On 10 May, 150,000 people participated in the funeral of the killed demonstrators. The same day, the government seized the unions of workers. As a
response, the GSEE organized a general strike with the participation of 500,000 people all over the country. Disturbances continued through the summer months among textile and steel workers in Volos, drivers and tram workers in Salonika, Serres and among the construction workers. In July, the government declared that mandatory settlement measures would be implemented in labor disputes. In response, the GSEE announced that there would be another national strike at the beginning of August. One day before the strike was to start, on 4 August, Metaxas and the King established their dictatorship (Kofas 1983: 15-20, 25-26, 30).

The initial reasoning provided by Prime Minister Metaxas for the authoritarian regime was the escalation of the lower class movement and the threat of communism. Metaxas wrote to the King (and later expressed the same concerns in his address to the nation):

Your Majesty, Your Government, of which I have the honor to be chief, considers it its duty to report to Your Majesty that the country finds itself in an abnormal situation and on the eve of a subversive rebellious movement. The situation is the result of the communist propaganda which has been growing daily.... [C]ommunism commenced a series of unjustified strikes to create an atmosphere favorable for the launching of its present impeding seditious offensive. The initial manifestation of this seditious action will be the general labor strike organized for tomorrow...which...is intended to develop immediately into a strike of long duration and to take the form clearly of a civil war (Kofas 1983: 44-45).

Metaxas also argued that the parliament must be permanently closed down because the political parties, weekend by their inner quarrels, could not repress the communist threat. Metaxas believed that the mainstream political parties were themselves dangerous because they considered cooperating with the Communist Party.

King George agreed with the assessment of the prime minister on the eve of his dictatorship. Indeed, the King had supported Metaxas before August. When rumors spread that the Venizelists were negotiating with the communists after the elections, the minister of war reported to King George that the military would not allow the Communist Party to take part in the cabinet. Fearful of a military coup outside of his influence, the King replaced the minister with Metaxas, who was the leader
of a Royalist minority party. In April 1936, the prime minister died and
the King appointed Metaxas as the new head of the government. The
leader of a minority party gradually became the premier thanks to the
help of the King, who feared the rise of communism and a coup against
it. Three months after the parliament recessed for summer, the Liberal
Party and the People’s Party announced to the King that they would
form a coalition when the assembly adjourned in October. But almost at
the same time, Metaxas informed the King of his intention to form an
authoritarian regime to combat lower class activism. It was King
George’s backing that allowed Metaxas to carry on with his plan
(Campbell and Sherrard 1968: 157-160). Thus, Metaxas became a dic-
tator against communism with the help of the King.

Metaxas’ rise to power was also facilitated by some of the
politicians, who legitimized his focus on the communist threat. Some
Republican and Royalist politicians, starting in the late 1920s, had
already advocated more repressive measures and warned against the
communist threat. These politicians, including Venizelos himself, were
responsible for the Idionymon law and the heavy suppression of the
movements of the 1930s. After Metaxas came to power as prime minis-
ter, similar sentiments continued among some politicians. In 1936, a
prominent Venizelist, George Papandreou, declared that “The collabora-
tion of bourgeois parties with the [Communist Party] leads towards the
legitimacy of communism in the consciousness of the masses.” In simi-
lar vein, the leader of the Republican Union, Alexandros Papanastasiou,
warned against communism and blamed communism for the birth of
fascism. In June 1936, one month before the declaration of the dictator-
ship, the leader of the Liberal Party, Sofoulis, publicly criticized the
Metaxas government for not dealing with socioeconomic difficulties.
However, when Metaxas threatened to resign in response, the influential
politician backed down and claimed that he did not mean to dissolve the
cabinet. The same month Metaxas visited Venizelos’ son (who had
become an important leader of the Liberals after the death of his father)
and received support for his dictatorship. On 3 August, a Republican
deputy, Pasidakis, urged the King to prevent communism. He wrote in a
Republican newspaper “Sir, save the country before horrible communism
lights the fire of civil war. The danger is at our gate” (Kofas 1983: 21,
28-29, 43). Not only Republicans but also Royalists perceived a threat
from leftism. The leader of the People’s Party argued that “There are no longer Republicans and Royalists, Venizelists and anti-Venizelists... There is only the great majority of the Greek people on the one side... [and] on the other side, there is a minority seeking to overthrow the social order... confusing progress with disorder, corruption and immorality” (Mazower 1991: 299-300). Such declarations strengthened Metaxas’ hand and his reasons for establishing an authoritarian regime. Indeed, after the dictatorship was declared, a number of politicians supported Metaxas. Out of 40 ministers that took part in the Metaxas governments, 19 percent were politicians and 8 percent were public officials (Close 1993: 18).

Thus, it seems that even though there was perhaps no imminent communist takeover, the conservative elites of the time believed that there was a serious threat. As Metaxas himself explained after the establishment of the dictatorship,

I do not say that the Communists would have prevailed and taken over the power immediately. But I do say that they would have created such an overturn in the great bourgeois centers, spreading their influence gradually to the smallest centers, that we should have entered, without knowing it, a revolutionary atmosphere which we surely could not have emerged without bloodshed (Cliadakis 1979: 134, Kofas 1983: 65).

It was the fear that if the current condition continued, it might be too late to prevent bloodshed which led to the creation of an authoritarian regime. Democracy was seen incapable to cope with the leftist movement and authoritarianism held out the promise of keeping the Communist Party and the lower class movements in arm’s length, out of politics and under control.

In the early 1930s, the previous Royalist versus Republican divide waned and was replaced by the right versus left conflict. The refugees contributed to this shift. First, they supported the Republican coalition, facilitated the abolition of the monarchy and helped dismantle the dominance of the tzakia families in politics. Then, they started to transfer their support from the Republicans to the communists. The rise of the communist movement both in the parliament and in the streets with
refugee, worker and peasant support triggered conservative reaction and facilitated the establishment of an authoritarian regime.

Conclusion

This article focused on the effects of the populations exchange on the authoritarian regimes of Greece and Turkey in the 1930s. More than one million refugees who left Turkey for Greece after the war in 1922, indirectly, partially and through different mechanisms contributed to the unification of elites under an authoritarian regime in Turkey and Greece. In Turkey, the departure of the independent and strong economic elites left the dominant state elites unchallenged. The nascent business groups that supported the Free Republican Party in 1930 could not prolong the rule of a single-party without an opposition. Transition to multi-party politics had to wait for the creation of stronger economic groups in the mid-1940s. This highlights the possible role the Orthodox Christians as the economic elite could have played in the early stages of the republic. In Greece, contrary to Turkey, the arrival of the refugees broke the dominance of the monarchy and old politicians relative to the Republicans. In the elections of the 1920s most of the newcomers supported Venizelos. However, increasing grievances of the refugees caused some of the immigrants to shift their allegiance to the Communist Party and contributed to its increasing strength. Prime Minister Metaxas, with the support of the King, responded to the communists by establishing an authoritarian regime in 1936. In these ways, the population exchange indirectly facilitated changes in the political regimes of Greece and Turkey during the interwar period.

Notes

1. The number of Muslims that died in the First World War was around 2,500,000. Indeed, the war caused the Anatolian population to decrease by 20 percent. This is twice the number of casualties of France, which incurred the heaviest death toll during the First World War in Europe (Zurcher 1993: 239).

2. In democracies, such unification and attitudinal support is usually referred to as consolidation. A democracy is considered to be “consolidated when all politically significant groups,” and especially the elites, perceive the institutions of that regime as the only possible political structure for policy making and when these groups
cannot imagine acting outside of the regime’s institutions (for a definition, see Gunther, Diamandouros, Puhle 1995: 6-7).

3. Another partial example is the opposition parties against the CUP in the Ottoman Empire. After the Young Turk revolution in 1908, two political parties, the Ottoman Liberal Union Party and the Liberal Freedom and Unity Party, resisted the rule of the CUP until 1913. Especially the latter party brought together all of the opposition against the CUP, including the representatives of the non-Muslim economic elite. The CUP tried to repress opposition in the first five years of its ten year lifespan. Even though the nature of the CUP rule and its opposition was different than the republican period after 1923, it nevertheless shows that opposition against a single-party rule was stronger when an autonomous Christian economic elite was present in the Ottoman Empire (for the period between 1908 and 1913, see Macfie 1998: 20-98, for more information on the two opposition parties see Tunaya 1988: 142-170, 263-313).

4. The Free Republican Party was not the only opposition party after the declaration of the republic in 1923. The Progressive Republican Party was established in 1924 against the RPP. The party was forced to close down in 1925 when its existence coincided with separatist and reactionary rebellions in the east. Among other things, the Progressives also criticized the handling of the population exchange and the settlement of the Muslim refugees in Anatolia (Ari 1995: 159-161, for more information on the Progressive Republican Party, see Zurcher 1991, Ates 1998, Yesil 2002).

5. Germany is another case which demonstrates the effects of forced dislocation of an elite group on political regimes. According to Michael Bernhard, the division of Germany into two states after the Second World War enabled West Germany to consolidate its democracy. The Junker landed aristocracy and the agrarian economy of East Elbia impeded democracy in the Weimer Republic. Therefore, the removal of this group from the Federal Republic of Germany facilitated democratic consolidation (Bernhard 2001).

6. In Turkey as well influential leaders of the leftist parties were refugees from the Balkans. Since the socialist and communist parties in Turkey never gained as much strength as their Greek counterparts, this trend is not analyzed in this article (for the origins of the Turkish leftist leaders, see Akar 1989).

References


