

# 1908: COUP D'ÉTAT OR REVOLUTION?

→ Is the Second Constitutionalist Period a revolution or a coup d'état?

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**H**ow important is it to characterize a historic event? Naming the events that took place in 1908, in the Ottoman Empire as "Coup d'état" or "Revolution" is a standpoint and an evaluation problem. History classes are generally taught by way of reducing different points of view to one, and evaluations are carried out through ambiguous criteria. Innovative history teachers are aware of the need to find more evidence and the creation of more qualitative arguments in order to look at historical events from different points of view. These teachers know that the students are more capable of understanding different points of view than they are given credit for. They encourage their students to develop their arguments based on evidence and defend these arguments in a democratic framework. With the "1908" event, students will find the opportunity to have big group discussions in the light of above said criteria.



## INTENDED LEARNING OUTCOMES

- **All students:** will identify the changes that the Second Constitutionalist Period brought.
- **Most students:** will understand the causes and results of societal and political changes resulting from the Second Constitutionalist Period.
- **Some students:** will evaluate the societal and political changes that were caused by the Second Constitutionalist Period from different perspectives.

**Grade:** 11

**Time:** 80 minutes.

### **Key Question:**

Is The Second Constitutionalist Period a revolution or a coup d'état?

### **The Aim of the Lesson:**

Using resources to evaluate the Second Constitutional Period from societal and political points of view.

### **Curricular links:**

Students will understand the changes that occurred in the state organization during the Second Constitutionalist Period.

### **Preparation**

Make copies of the worksheets according to the number of groups.



## STARTER

1. Divide students into groups of 3-4 and hand **Worksheet-1** to each group. Ask your students to evaluate the chronology stated on the worksheet-1. 5 min.
2. Hand out **Worksheet-2** to groups. Ask them the difference between "revolution" and "coup d'état"? 5 min.
3. Hand out **Worksheet-3** to groups. Remind them that constitution was written in 1876, and was amended in 1909. Ask students to compare the First and Second Constitutionalist Periods in the light of given information. 20 min.
4. Divide your class into two as "Government" and "Opposition". Tell them that the government will defend the Second Constitutionalist Period as "Revolution", and the opposition as "Coup d'état".
5. Hand out **Worksheet-4** to all groups and ask them to answer the relevant questions.. 5 min.
6. Hand out **Worksheet-5A** to the government group, and **Worksheet-5B** to the opposition. Ask them to read the resources. 15 min.
7. Ask groups to choose a speaker. Then, ask the government representative to defend that thesis that the Second Constitutionalist Period was a revolution. The opposition representative should defend the thesis that the Second Constitutionalist Period was a coup d'état. 20 min.
8. Hand out **Worksheet-6** to the groups. Ask them to use the visuals on the sheet for supporting their theses. 10 min.

time

**Evaluation:**

Ask your students to come up with three questions about what they learned in this class, and answer one of these questions.

### Chronology

- 31 August 1876:** Succession of Abdul Hamid II to the throne.
- 23 December 1876:** Declaration of the First Constitution.
- 24 April 1877:** Russo-Ottoman War.
- 22 May 1877:** Declaration of Independence of Romania.
- 13 February 1878:** Closure of the Assembly.
- 1881:** Capture of Tunisia by France.
- 15 July 1882:** Occupation of Egypt by the English.
- 18 September 1885:** Revolt of Eastern Rumelia.
- 21 May 1889:** Establishment of "Party of Union and Progress".
- 1890:** Establishment of anti-Ottoman "Committee of Macedonia" in Sofia.
- 1896:** Armenians captured Ottoman Bank in Istanbul, Revolt of Crete.
- 1897:** Greece landed troops in Crete.
- 17 April 1897:** Ottoman-Greek War, Ottomans won.
- 1900-1908:** Construction of Hejaz Railways.
- 23 July 1908:** Declaration of the Second Constitutionalist Period, Constitution came into force again.
- 1909:** Constitution was renewed with amendments.

**Source:** İ. Hakkı UZUNÇARŞILI, *Osmanlı Tarihi*, V. 8, pp. 579-584



Make a general evaluation of events that occurred prior to and after the Constitutionalist Period.



↙ The constitutional amendments made during the Second Constitutionalist Period are considered to be a revolution by some historians, while others see it as a coup d'état. The definitions of these two terms are given below. After reading these definitions, evaluate the documents that will be given to you accordingly.

### **Revolution**

*Changing or rearrangement of the established social order; on contrary to evolution which is a slow process, this is a sudden, sweeping and essential change in societal and political order.*

### **Coup d'état**

Toppling of a government or overthrowing the administration in such a way that changes the regime by using pressure in a country, and/or forcing a government to resign.



### ■ Resource A: Some articles of the Constitution of 1876

**Article 3-** The Ottoman Empire and Caliphate are inherited to the oldest member of the Ottoman Dynasty.

**Article 5-** The personality of the Sultan is sacred and he is not accountable to anyone for his actions.

**Article 7-** Government is accountable to the parliament, but to the royalty. Sultan has the right to congregate and dissolve parliaments.

**Article 12-** Publications are allowed within the limits of law.

**Article 53-** Council of Ministers can send parliamentary bills and amendments, with the permission of the Sultan and within their authority, to the Senate and Council of Deputies, which then with the approval of the Sultan could be brought to the Council of the State.

**Article 54-** The parliamentary bills and amendments, after having passed through Council of the State, would need to be scrutinized and accepted by the Senate and Council of Deputies and depending on the Sultan's decision it would go into force.

**Article 113-** The administration has the authority to proclaim martial law in case of disorder in any part of the country. The Sultan could then decide someone as political offender after investigations and send him into exile.

(It has been simplified and reorganized.)

[www.mimoza.marmara.edu.tr/.../anayasa/1876\\_KANUNI\\_ESASI.doc](http://www.mimoza.marmara.edu.tr/.../anayasa/1876_KANUNI_ESASI.doc)

### ■ Resource B: The Amendments Made in the Constitution of 1909

**Article 3-** The Ottoman Empire and Caliphate are inherited to the oldest member of the Ottoman Dynasty. The Sultan takes an oath to comply with the Constitution.

**Article 7-** The Sultan appoints the grand vizier and shaykh al-Islam, and approves the government that grand vizier selects. The right to timely commence and prorogue the General Assembly and to order its commencement during extraordinary situations is one of the sacred rights of the Sultan. The Parliament could be dissolved only if the vote of confidence cannot be attained. In case of dissolution, the country goes to elections within three months. Making laws and approval of treaties are under authority of the Parliament.

**Article 12-** Publications are allowed within the limits of law. Under no circumstances can there be any kind of investigation prior to publishing.

**Article 30-** Ministers are collectively liable for the policies of the government, and individually for the operations of their ministries to the Grand Assembly.

**Article 53-** The Senate and Parliament solely have the right to propose draft laws and make amendments.

**Article 54-** Draft bills, after having been scrutinized and passed by both the senate and the parliament, would be presented to the Sultan's approval. The laws would have to either be approved or sent back to be revised within two months. The returned laws must be re-debated and must have been passed with a two-thirds majority.

**Article 113-** The administration has the authority to proclaim martial law in case of disorder in any part of the country.

**Article 119-** Deposited documents and letters at post offices cannot be opened without a judge or a court order.

**Article 120-** So long it is not against the laws the Ottomans have the right of assembly. Foundation of associations that seek to harm the indivisibility the country, change the constitutional regime, act in violation of the Constitution, try to divide the members of the Ottoman Empire politically, behave against the general morality and customs, and secret associations is prohibited.

(It has been simplified and reorganized.)

[www.mimoza.marmara.edu.tr/.../anayasa/1908\\_KANUNI\\_ESASI.doc](http://www.mimoza.marmara.edu.tr/.../anayasa/1908_KANUNI_ESASI.doc)



Study the resources above and compare the First (1876) and Second (1909) Constitutional Periods.





1. What do you think cutting down trees symbolize?
2. Who or what do the people in the picture represent?

3. What could the people in the picture be thinking about cutting down the trees?
4. In your opinion, does this cartoon symbolize a revolution or a coup d'état?

## GOVERNMENT SOURCES: 1908 IS A REVOLUTION

**■ Source 1: 1908 is a revolution**

*Before 1908 various ethnic groups living in Turkey were just subjects and were treated as second class people by groups holding state power. There were inequalities, unthinkable in a modern state, not only between the rulers and the ruled subjects, but also among the subjects themselves. For example, subjects of Albanian descent were exempt from taxation just because they were Albanians. Subjects classified as non-muslims were banned from right of serving in the military.*

*In short, people living under this non-modern absolutist state and subject to different legal rules and regulations were powerless with respect to injustices committed by the state either against themselves or other ethnic or religious groups. With the Revolution of 1908 this pre-modern conception of justice was replaced with a modern understanding, where the new constitution aimed to treat everybody as equal and first rate citizen before the law.*

*Starting from the months leading up to 1908 and culminating within a few years after the Revolution, the established institutions of the ancien régime were attacked by a wide encompassing coalition of different classes or various ethnic groups acting in unison despite the subversive efforts of those groups who had held power and benefitted from the absolutist regime. The aim was to smash and get rid of the ancien régime and the pre-modern state, not to 'save' it.*

**Source:** Aykut KANSU, *1908 Devrimi*, İletişim Yayınları, 2006, İstanbul, Page 360-361.

1. What evidence does the author use to support his opinion?
2. In which way does the 1908 period criticize the previous one?



## A

## GOVERNMENT SOURCES: 1908 IS A REVOLUTION

■ **Source 2: Popular Uprising in Macedonia (A Newspaper Article)***Extraordinary Scenes*

*As will be remembered, it was only after all the cities in Macedonia joined the ranks of the revolutionary movement and declared the constitution that the Sultan involuntarily accepted the Constitution coming into force again. Reuters' reporter, before the Sultan had gone down in defeat, on 24 July [Friday] described the recent situation as such: Yesterday afternoon— [23 July] on Thursday—Thessaloniki witnessed a peaceful and bloodless revolution. People here already knew that peoples of Monastir, Skopje, Serres and other places had declared the constitutional regime. Rumors has it that the reason why Thessaloniki was the last city in which the constitution was declared was so that they would be ready for an incident that could be used as an excuse for foreign involvement. In addition to that, it was said that the army now was under complete control of the Young Turks—and there was enough evidence for this. But it should be noted that even the most optimistic were surprised at how easily the victory was won. In the afternoon, military officers along with the elected civilian representatives went to the municipality, government office and other government agencies informing them of the newly established constitutional order and taking oath of allegiance from them. Representative of the revolution were met with enthusiasm wherever they went. It was stated that today [24 July, Friday] the declaration of the revolution would be announced in all mosques as well. And on Saturday [25 July] in all governmental agencies the followers of the constitutional regime will take over.*

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**Source:** *The Manchester Guardian*, 29 July 1908, p. 7.

1. With regards to the news article, the Second Constitutional Period is depicted as whose victory?
2. In your view, how does the newspaper label 1908?



## GOVERNMENT SOURCES: 1908 IS A REVOLUTION

■ **Source 3: An Ottoman Pasha's Article Published in a French Newspaper**

To Mr. Gaston Calmette,

My dear friend,

*Finally! It happened: We have it—our dear Constitution! You should see how we are celebrating it, how we are caressing it, and how we have been washing the crying mold on the old calendar pages with our tears since the very day of its birth. You should witness how the Turkish people are embracing their rights with wisdom, greatness and nobility today! It is our duty to admire this people who have never doubted the virtues of this constitution. Despite the allegations of fanaticism, you should see how this people are treating their non-Muslim countrymen!*

*Thousands of people from all races and all religions are enjoying this constitution plentiful. Streets, boulevards and squares of Istanbul, Pera, Bosphorus and Prince Islands are filled with people, who are thirsty for justice and freedom. Mullahs, priests, dervishes are hugging the Turks, Albanians, Greeks, and Armenians. Kissing, hugging, and shaking of hands, everybody is united in the face of this happiness! After being divided for such a long time ruthlessly, they are singing, dancing and celebrating. As you know I have devoted myself to this happiness with a deep passion, and the role of our dear army! Such admirable people! There is neither ugly outcries, nor fighting!*

*Everybody is feeling that their wounds are healing under the shining skies of their nation.*

*What an awakening! What energy!*

*I want to apologize to my countrymen for thinking that they were asleep for a second!*

*The thing I see is both brilliant and great: When the time of nation has come to the moment of freedom, all the extraordinary citizens, respectable journalists, authors, orators started appearing from everywhere. But where were my dear citizens, who love their motherland passionately hiding? Under the coat of the Sultan! Our emperor is the fieriest of liberals, because when he accepted our demands he did not show any bad intentions.*

*Forward! Forward! Now we have legs: Let's walk! And we will walk and you will see! You, at the highest level of the Parisian press, will see that a people like us will break its fetters and get rid of the parasites that suck its blood, that it will succeed this! There are some who cry among us in these moments of excitement and joy: informer spies and the ignorant. Our awakening is as great as theirs is terrible. Dear Calmette, as someone who knows how hard I work for my country's happiness and suffer as a result, you understand jubilant happiness.*

*Dear France is also happy, because we took the first rays of freedom from her! I am sending kisses on behalf of my citizens!*

*With all my friendship and sincere wishes.*

Izzet Fuad Pasha  
Istanbul, 30 July 1908.

Source: *Le Figaro*, 1908, Friday, p.2

1. What kind of a meaning does Izzet Fuat Pasha attribute to the Constitutionalist Period?
2. According to IzzetFuat Pasha, how will Constitutionalist Period affect the relation between the state and the people?



## A

## GOVERNMENT SOURCES: 1908 IS A REVOLUTION

**■ Resource 4**

*The politically themed words that were banned to be used in the printed media during the reign of Abdul Hamid:*

*Revolution, tyranny, reform, oligarchy, parliamentary regime, parliament, association, public, republic, freedom, democracy, democrat, dictator, censorship, censor, people, senate, grand assembly, absolutism.*

**Source:** François GEORGEON, *Yasak Kelimeler*, pp.192-193.

1. Why would Abdul Hamid be troubled with these words?
2. Which of the above words could be categorized as impartial descriptions?
3. Which of the above words have propagandist attitudes?



## OPPOSITION SOURCES: 1908 IS A COUP D'ETAT

**■ Source 1: A Newspaper Article**

*That some researchers are naming the Second Constitutionalist Period as a popular revolt by highlighting the taxation uprisings does not reflect the reality. Firstly, the events with big masses, which paved the way for 1908, were confined to Macedonia. The revolts of Eastern Anatolia were under control of Jeune Turks. Hence, Jeune Turks had to cooperate with the local Dashnaks to satisfy their needs. Secondly, what the Jeune Turks understood from revolution was not any different from what Janissaries did during the Ottoman history or what the civilian and military bureaucracy that forced Abdul Hamid II to declare the First Constitutionalist Period in 1876. In other words, what 'revolution' meant was the exchange of power in the state system. Thirdly, for the Unionists this 'constitutionalist revolution' was important for preventing ethnic conflicts and separatist movements, and for reviving the glorious past, not for 'individual and citizen rights' and 'freedoms'. In the end, Union and Progress Party started out to 'restore' the present state. Therefore, though the executives of '1908' relied on philosophy of the 'Enlightenment', this was not an 'Enlightened' revolution; rather it was a 'restorationist' movement that carried the 17th century connotation of the term. Because the Unionists had sacrificed the rights and freedoms of the individual and citizenry for 'national rights', they were not 'liberal' either.*

*Lastly, It was not as though the Unionists were liberal at the beginning and became conservative over the time. On the contrary, this was an intentional decision taken before 1908.*

**Source:** Ayşe HÜR, "Sources of Inspiration for the 1908 Revolution", *Taraf*, 20 July 2008.

1. According to the author, why 1908 is not a revolution?
2. How does the author define those who declared the Constitutionalist Period?
3. Has the author provided evidence to support her claims?



## B

## OPPOSITION SOURCES: 1908 IS A COUP D'ETAT

**■ Resource 2: Popular Uprising in Macedonia**

*There is a new trend that started recently in Turkey. That is to turn 1908 into a some kind of 1789 [French Revolution]. However, when we investigate the documents of the Union and Progress, we see that such a thing does not exist.*

*1908 is not a civilian movement. On the contrary, when we compare it with the tax revolts that started in Trabzon, Erzurum, Van and other Eastern regions, the 1908 movement does not voice any collective demands. When the social requests are brought up the Union and Progress positions itself against this. "Everybody mind his own business, we are governing a state here" is the answer they give. When some people in some regions said, "we are not going to pay taxes" they would inculcate them by saying, "Don't do this. There is freedom but if you don't pay taxes how are we going to bring service?" Let alone encouraging these kinds of people, they were trying to stop it. In my view, we are making a mistake by trying to turn 1908 into a popular revolution. Even though, the Union and Progress wants to join these movements, they do not succeed. Secondly, as it is clearly demonstrated by all the documents of the Union and Progress, it was a revolution that was done by an armed group—military officers—that was organized like Tashnagsution—Armenian Revolutionary Federation.*

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**Source:** Interview with Şükrü Haniöğlu, Mostar Magazine, v. 43, September, 2008.

1. How does Şükrü Haniöğlu describe 1908?
2. When the authors talks about 1908, what does he say about the popular support behind it? What does this piece try to prove?
3. Has the author presented evidence to support his view?



## OPPOSITION SOURCES: 1908 IS A COUP D'ETA

**■ Source 3: Abdul Hamid's Thoughts on Constitutional Monarchy**

*I said it, I will say it again, I explained it and will do so again. Didn't they know that the Ottoman Empire is consisted of many nations? In such a country Constitutionalism means death for the dominant/sovereign constituents. Was there ever an Indian, African, or Egyptian member of the English Parliament; Was there ever an Algerian member of the French Parliament that they are asking us to have Greek, Armenian, Bulgarian, Serbian and Arab members in the Ottoman Parliament ... I had seen, during the conference the Great Powers had in Istanbul, that their true intentions was not, as they claimed, to guarantee the rights of Christian subjects. Rather, they want to encourage the autonomy first and then provide independence for these regions, which would pave the way for the destruction of the Ottoman Empire. They are trying to achieve this in two ways. First, they want to cause the Christian communities to revolt, create disorder and support them... Secondly, by bringing Constitutionalism they want to divide us within ourselves too.*

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**Source:** Durmuş YILMAZ, *Osmanlının Son Yüzyılı*, Çizgi Kitabevi, Konya 2004, pp. 186.

1. What reasons does Abdulhamid bring up to oppose Constitutionalism?
2. What are the real motives of the European powers that support Constitutionalism in Abdul Hamid's view?



## OPPOSITION SOURCES: 1908 IS A COUP D'ETAT

**■ Source 4: Constitutionalism in Sait Halim Pasha's View**

*The political events in the West have occurred under the feudal system for centuries. This inegalitarian system has created the political parties. Political parties, after having struggled for centuries, were able to establish constitutional regimes. For this reason, political parties in regards with their roots and goals, in the West, are the natural pillars of constitutional regimes. If we had political parties for the same reasons, no doubt they would have had the same effect. Even though, these reasons did not exist here, by founding parties for no good reason we demonstrated that we do not understand the necessities of our day and our past, which was full of solidarity and camaraderie. In the West, the deputyship system was founded thanks to the parties. We, on the other hand, tried to create parties from deputyship system. Thus, we made a big mistake.*

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**Source:** Prens Sait Halim Paşa, *Toplumsal Çözülme, Buhranlarımız*, Burhan yayınları, İst. 1983, Edited by: N. Ahmet Özalp, Summarized from the pages of 43-44.

1. What is the origin of the political parties in the West in Sait Halim Pasha's view?
2. What does Sait Halim Pasha think about the political parties that came into existence with the constitutionalism?



Use below visuals to support your arguments.

