

## The Rise and Fall of Mayoral Power in Greece, 1833–1936

Marianthi Kotea

Department of Sociology

Panteion University of Political and Social Sciences

Athens, Greece

### Abstract

*When Greece belatedly crossed the threshold into the modern world, the evolution of society and state and the relationship between the two differed greatly to the same process in other European countries. More specifically, while the powerful monarchies of Western (England- France- Spain), Central (Austria- Prussia), and Eastern Europe (Russia) flourished during the Early Modern Period, there was no Greek State to express the rise of the new economy and its society. Instead there was a Greek nation under Turkish domination. The eighteenth century saw the formation of an intellectual movement, the Neohellenic Enlightenment (influenced strongly by the French Enlightenment), which prepared the nation for the War of Independence (1821-1830). The struggle of the Greek nation against the Ottoman Empire together with the intervention of the three great powers of England, France and Russia resulted in the creation of the Modern Greek State. In other words, in the case of Greece, the creation of the modern State preceded the formation of the capitalist economy. Consequently it was the newly established Greek State that took the initiative in transforming the economy and society. In a way the State played the role which the weak, fragmented Greek bourgeoisie<sup>1</sup> was unable to play by itself until almost the end of the 19th century. Within this context the Greek State endeavored to modernize the traditional society of the 19<sup>th</sup> century “from above” by utilizing the institution of local government. For this reason a new system of local government, founded on the vision of an already unified and urbanized country, was introduced in 1833, and divided Greek territory into an equal number of large municipalities and local authorities. The municipal authorities were, on the one hand, to play an administrative and political role and, on the other hand, a social one. Unfortunately, financial difficulties, mentality inertia and population density did not allow them to play an active social role, i.e. to exercise their rights and simultaneously fulfill their obligation to provide facilities and welfare services for their citizens. On the contrary, it was their political role that took on significance in local society as well as on the central political scene until early into the 20th century. In 1912 a program of reforms reduced to some degree the power a mayor had, but it did not succeed in finding a solution to the financial difficulties the municipalities were experiencing. Therefore until the outbreak of the Second World War, only the big cities, dependent on income from excise duties, could afford to provide their residents with facilities and leisure and welfare services. During the post war period, when other European countries sought to nationalize the provision of services, the Greek State had already removed a large part of the social role from local government and taken full responsibility in order to provide adequate, uniform services.*

**Key words:** local government, municipal system, communities, modernization, political influence of mayors, excise duties

### ***1. Towards a new local government system: characteristics and targets***

The relationship between central government and local authorities was a major problem in 19<sup>th</sup> century Greece. The Greek tradition of communalism while under Turkish rule had to be adapted for the new circumstances of the Modern Greek State characterized by authoritarian governing and centralized administration<sup>2</sup>.

---

<sup>1</sup> The Greek bourgeoisie was weak and fragmented mainly because of localism, reflecting the geographical division of national land into regional, local societies and economies with significant differences between them. These differences concerned social structure, traditions, source and level of income, dependence on the State and the degree of permeation of the market economy.

<sup>2</sup> In 1830, after a nine year struggle against the Ottoman Empire, Greece was formally declared an independent State under the protection of the three great powers of England, France and Russia. Prince Otto, second son of Louis, the philhellene king of Bavaria, was crowned king of the newly established State the following year. In 1833 the new king and his royal staff arrived in Nauplia, the temporary capital and towards the end of the year Athens was chosen as the official capital of the Greek kingdom, with Piraeus as its seaport. The foundation of the State apparatus took place during the decade 1833-1843 under the government of King Otto's absolute monarchy.

Thus, in 1833, a clearly defined system of local government modeled on the French Municipal Act of 1831, was set up. The system's main characteristics were:

- The dual role of municipalities, both as lower divisions of central administration and as local government organizations.
- A single town/country structure that did not differentiate the legal status between urban and rural local authorities.

These features reflected the targets of the new system of local government whose aims were twofold: firstly to unify all land within Greek territory, consequently abolishing localism, and secondly to contribute to urbanization with the development of municipalities.

### **1.1. The dual role of municipalities**

During Turkish domination the Greek authorities of communities (koinotetes) were responsible for the allocation and collection of direct taxes from their members on behalf of the Ottoman administration. In return they were allowed to manage their own affairs<sup>3</sup>. Following the outbreak of the struggle against the Ottoman Empire, the main function of Greek communities altered since they now had, for the most part, power to carry out the decisions of the revolutionary authorities. In this way the koinotetes lost autonomy and became mere tools of the revolutionary government. As a result the latitude for autonomous communal activity was already restricted by the time the new system of local government was enforced. The Municipal Act of 1833 completely reversed the communal system of local government; its most important innovation was the principle of forming big local government organizations. Thus, small communities (koinotetes) were replaced by big municipalities (demoi), created when existent urban and rural communities were merged. These large municipalities were created in order to achieve two aims: the first being related to the reorganization of national land, which would lead to the unification of Greek territory and the abolition of localism. This process began with the division of Greece by the new administrative system into prefectures (nomoi), themselves divided into provinces (eparchies), and continued with the formation of municipalities.

The second aim concerned the viability of the new local government bodies. The 1833 Act assigned a wide range of responsibilities to the municipalities arising from their dual role. This clearly indicated that local authorities had to secure the necessary financial resources to perform their duties, something only the big municipalities could achieve.

More specifically, with the new system municipalities were primarily local administrative units for the newly founded State apparatus. Hence mayors, as the representatives of central government, were responsible for registration, voting, recruiting, tax services etc. Besides, mayors were more familiar with the personal and financial standing of the local residents than the higher officials from the sub-prefectures and prefectures, and this made them more competent for the compilation of registers relating to taxation, recruitment, jury duty, the right to vote and so on. At the same time municipalities were given legal personality in that they were considered legal entities with their own legal capacity and the right, under the supervision of central administration, to manage local affairs, to administer their property as well as that of beneficiary establishments, and to elect municipal authorities. In this capacity, then, mayors were servants of the local societies they represented.

As already mentioned, a great deal of responsibility had been assigned to the municipalities in their specific capacity as local government bodies, and included the following: a) construction and maintenance of municipal buildings (town halls, police stations, schools, orphanages, old people's homes, hospitals), b) establishment of the essential infrastructure (churches, cemeteries, slaughter houses, markets, public baths, water supply, lighting, port facilities, etc.) and c) organization of urban space (construction of roads, squares, gardens, public walks, promenades and also the defining of industrial zones). The fulfillment of certain duties was considered more an obligation than a right, and the Municipal Act gave priority correspondingly as far as expenses were concerned. Of course when the financial resources were inadequate to cover the "compulsory" municipal costs, the local authorities were forced to opt for the most "unavoidable", as were considered the costs related to the existence of the municipalities and the provision of their services. These included administration costs, the police force, tax payments and the building/renting/upkeep of schools.

---

<sup>3</sup> Under Turkish rule, administrative and financial privileges were granted to certain Greek orthodox communities without, however, embodying them into the official administrative system of the Ottoman Empire. Thus communities of the subjugate Greeks functioned as institutions of self-government but had no legal character.

## 1.2. The single town/country structure

The 1833 Act did not only stipulate the dual role of local government bodies, but also established uniform administration since there was no differentiation of legal status between rural and urban municipalities. This uniform legal status replaced the polymorphic characteristic of communities during Ottoman domination when their organization, responsibility, and authorities differed from one region to the next, and also from period to period. The basis for this polymorphism lay in the recognition of the particular local circumstances within the framework of a despotic State without centralized administration. Unlike the powerful monarchies of Europe, it was impossible for the Ottoman state to establish a highly centralized administration since the economy and means of communication were traditional. Under the circumstances, communities were allowed autonomy and managed their own affairs.

In contrast, the single town/country structure of the new municipal system ignored local peculiarities and considered Greek territory a homogenous, urbanized entity. The only distinction recognized by the 1833 Act was the classification of the municipalities into three classes according to their populations<sup>4</sup>. However this distinction did not foresee different rights and responsibilities, but merely specified the number of deputies and members of the municipal council. The uniformity established by the municipal system was based on a new notion of national land and the role the modern nation-state should play in its organization<sup>5</sup>. It reckoned that common ground was a constituent part of the nation-state<sup>6</sup>, and considered the latter responsible for designating the boundaries of national land, and for unifying all the land encompassed by these boundaries with the aim of formatting a united market and national economy. In brief, with the Municipal Act of 1833, the royal administration sought to unify the land which comprised mountainous, inaccessible regions, vast coastlines and seas studded with numerous small islands, and also to strengthen urbanization since Modern Greece was a rural country with low-density population and hardly any important cities.

## 2. The effects of the Municipal System

### 2.1. A new kind of localism

Although the creation of big municipalities (demoi) resulted in the reorganization of national land, a new kind of localism and uneven urban development arose from the effects of the municipal law. The early sanction of universal suffrage together with the direct election of municipal authorities turned the mayors of big cities into powerful local politicians who swayed voters in both local and general elections<sup>7</sup>. With the Act of 1833 municipal authorities were to some extent elective, their election taking place according to a mixed system based in part on a 'censitaire' suffrage (as regards the municipal council), and in part on the appointment of authorities (as regards the mayor) by the king. The electoral system changed after the Constitution of 1864 was introduced and a universal, equal, direct ballot was sanctioned for general as well as local elections<sup>8</sup>. There were three direct consequences of the new electoral system: Firstly, the two different electorates, one for municipal and the other for general elections, ceased to exist.

---

<sup>4</sup> Municipalities of at least 10,000 inhabitants were classified as A' class, 2,000 inhabitants as B' class and those with fewer than 2,000 inhabitants as C' class. However, the devastation of the country by the War of Independence was such that the law stipulated that even a settlement with a population of at least 300 people could form its own municipality. Such was the case when the new municipality of Piraeus was formed, but by the end of the 19th century it had a population of almost 50,000.

<sup>5</sup> This uniformity of status is clearly a legacy of the French Revolution which sought to abolish the peculiarities of the 'ancient regime' and establish a society in which all and everything was equal and founded on reason. Therefore the National Assembly divided the whole of France into uniform administrative divisions of départements, arrondissements, cantons and communes. The prevalent idea of communes with equal legal status led to the abolition of unequal parishes, villages and towns, and the Act of 14th December 1789 replaced them with the 'commune'.

<sup>6</sup> According to this notion common ground, language, culture and values are constituent parts of the nation-state.

<sup>7</sup> The sanction of universal suffrage was introduced early (by the Constitution of 1844) into the Greek political system generally, because political liberalism, which prevailed in many European countries at the time, was on the side of votes only for adult men who owned real property. As far as local government was concerned, the French municipal Act of 5th April 1884 stipulated that the mayor be appointed or elected by the members of the municipal council and only the latter was elected by universal suffrage in all cities except Paris. This exception was due to the fact that in France whoever had control over Paris also had the control of political power.

<sup>8</sup> Greek parliament voted a first constitution in 1844 that changed the absolute monarchy into a constitutional one. The 1864 Constitution changed the system of government into a democracy under the king (démocratie royale).

Secondly, all the authorities of the local government were elective from then on, even if only men had the right to vote. Thirdly, the mayors of big cities attained political influence, with a great deal of patronage at their disposal<sup>9</sup>. This last consequence of universal suffrage was due to the power and prestige associated with the office of Mayor, who was simultaneously the representative of central government and of the local society. In other words the breadth of the mayor's authorities attracted successful professionals who were at the top of local society<sup>10</sup>. This profile, on the one hand, gave the would-be mayors the advantage of being able to gain the support of voters before and after their election, regardless of the social stratum they belonged to. On the other hand the voters' support became a matter of negotiation between the mayors and the political parties fighting for the premiership. A typical example is that of Piraeus and its mayors who were distinguished members of the local bourgeoisie and successful businessmen with a great number of voters. To be more specific, for thirty seven consecutive years (1866-1903)<sup>11</sup> with a brief interval of four years (1883-1887) the office of mayor rotated between the Moutsopoulos (Demetrios [1812-1890] and his brother Trifonas [1818-1906]) and Retsinas (Theodoros [1836-1930] and his brother Alexandros [1845-1908]) families. The former were wholesalers, importers of wheat from southern Russia with the use of their own sailing-ships, bankers and shareholders in the Athens-Piraeus railway company; and the latter were industrialists, owners of five textiles factories employing over 2.500 workers.

Both families became the leaders of two powerful local parties which were supported by their fellow industrialists, wholesalers and other professionals. These parties were also voted for by the employees of the family enterprises and by the employees of their fellow supporters. Furthermore the Moutsopoulos and Retsinas brothers derived votes from the municipal servants whose jobs depended on their election; this happened because municipal workers did not have permanent positions, but were appointed by the mayor entering into office. Naturally, both families also owned newspapers (the Moutsopoulos family financed 'Sfera' and the Retsinas family 'Pronia') in order to influence public opinion. Notwithstanding the fact that both of these families contested the mayor's chair for themselves, there were certain circumstances in which they agreed to co-operate because they realized that they had common interests as members of the commercial and industrial bourgeoisie of the city. Such was the case for the period 1883-1887, when both families supported the same candidate against the 'barefooted' favorite of the lower classes, without, however, succeeding in having him elected. Also there was a mayoral period (1899-1903) in which the leaders of the two local parties agreed to administrate the municipality of Piraeus together. Thus Trifonas Moutsopoulos became mayor and Athanassios, son of Theodoros Retsinas, became president of the municipal council and afterwards they distributed all the important posts (on the port committee, on the boards of charitable institutions and in the churches) to their political friends. From the early part of the twentieth century and until the voting of the new municipal law in 1912, the two local parties held their power without however being at the head of the municipality.

The Moutsopoulos and Retsinas brothers had begun their political career as municipal councilors, later on they became mayors and presidents of the supervisory committee of Piraeus port and ended their participation in the political life of the country as members of the Greek Parliament and even as president of Parliament in the case of Theodoros Retsinas. The great political influence of both families and especially of Trifonas Moutsopoulos (who was elected mayor four times: in 1874, 1879, 1895 and 1899, making him mayor for seventeen years) and Theodoros Retsinas (who was the greatest industrialist not only of the city but of the country as well; his factories manufactured a stained, closely-woven, cotton fabric, 'drili', which was cheap and durable and dressed the working classes in Greece but was also exported to other Balkan countries and to the Ottoman Empire) forced the leaders of the political parties to go into partnership with them. In this way a relationship of interdependence was created between the mayors of Piraeus and the leaders of the two bigger political parties (the 'ethniko' party of Theodoros Deliyannis and the 'neoteriko' of Charilaos Trikoupis) which represented different sections of the bourgeoisie.

---

<sup>9</sup> In the small urban and rural municipalities a change also occurred, because their mayors, instead of remaining tools of the king, became tools of the political parties, which at the time were organized on a regional and not on a nationwide basis. In this way a relationship of interdependence between the mayors and members of the Greek Parliament in every polling district was created.

<sup>10</sup> The would-be mayors were already successful professionals like wholesalers, manufacturers, lawyers, doctors, men of letters etc. before they fought for the mayor's chair.

<sup>11</sup> This period began when the new electoral system of universal suffrage came into use for the first time in 1866.

Thus the mayors of big cities came to play an important role on the political scene of the country during the latter half of the nineteenth century for they had succeeded in becoming a distinct pole of the political system and in antagonizing the political parties. Of course from this point of view the mayors favored localism<sup>12</sup>.

## 2.2. Unequal Urban Development

The second major consequence of municipal law was unequal urban development. During the nineteenth century successive mergers and divisions of communities took place as the central government endeavored to find the ideal relationship between the administrative borders of municipalities and their population. The solution to this problem would have provided the municipalities with the necessary financial means to play their role as organizations of local government, especially socially, which was to provide utilities and welfare services for their citizens.

During the 19th century the process of urbanization in Greece was specifically determined by two factors:

1. The delayed construction of the road and railway network and
2. The commercialization of agricultural products which formed the basis for the development of the Modern Greek economy and its transformation from subsistence into a market economy.

Thus the urban centers of the country, apart from Athens which was the seat of administration, developed provided their geographical position allowed them to participate in foreign trade by sea, since the lack of overland transport favored cities on the coast.

Accordingly, we can classify the Greek cities of the nineteenth century as follows:

- 1) The big urban centers of import-export trade, that is a) the city-port of Patras, the biggest export center, mainly of currants b) the city-port of Piraeus, the biggest import center, mainly of cereals and c) Hermoupolis on Syros island, the biggest transit center in the Eastern Mediterranean, which participated in the exchange of manufactured and agricultural products between Western European countries and the Ottoman Empire respectively.
- 2) The smaller coastal towns, which developed mostly because they contributed to domestic trade by sea.
- 3) The inland towns which, in their capacity as seats of a province (*eparchia*) or of a prefecture (*nomos*), helped with local trade but also intervened between the administrative center of Athens and the rural, livestock-breeding regions.

In conformity with the Municipal Act of 1833, local revenue should have derived in main from municipal property. In reality, though, almost all the newly-established municipalities did not own any sort of property while at the same time the imposed rates and direct taxes proved to be inadequate. This forced the first local authorities to depend on a special income that was derived from excise duties (*diapilia teli*). This inland tariff referred to the consumption of certain commodities, which were either imported into a municipality from other regions of the country or from abroad, or were manufactured within the boundaries of the municipality and no other direct or indirect tax had been levied on them. However, since the municipalities did not succeed in increasing their regular revenues in the ensuing years, the local authorities were given dispensation by central government to change the category of special income, as in the case of excise duties, into regular income.

This development of course directly addressed the country's urban local authorities, which took advantage of the fact that town-dwellers did not have great latitude in self-sufficiency and therefore could not evade excise duties. On the contrary, the rural local authorities were not in a position to collect these duties because the population produced the goods they needed on their own or consumed substitutes of those commodities liable to duty. Consequently, the majority of municipalities were restricted to the lowest level of the administrative division and only urban local authorities could provide services such as education, policing and health. Besides all the above, the levy of excise duties was more efficient in big developing cities than in smaller ones. The former could impose lower rates on more goods, without, however, preventing the local economy from growing and almost without increasing the cost of living. In this way, only the urban local authorities of big developing cities (such as Athens, Piraeus, Patras, Hermoupolis) could rely on excise duties to solve their financial difficulties.

---

<sup>12</sup> This was a new kind of localism because it wasn't based on the recognition of the particular local circumstances but on the political influence of the mayors in big cities.

In spite of the fact that the municipalities could not fulfill their social responsibilities, central government only became concerned with their finances 55 years after the foundation of the local government system. During the years 1888-1894 central government attempted four times to replace excise duties with duties on imported goods. According to Prime Minister Charilaos Trikoupis, who sought to introduce this reform, it would have had two big advantages: a) the increase of municipal revenue without burdening local economies and b) income which the rural local authorities did not have access to before. In other words central government tried to abolish an indirect municipal tax which intensified, instead of reversing, the inequalities in urban development that followed the transformation of the Greek economy.

Unfortunately these attempts did not meet with success and none of the four proposed bills were passed because it was suspected that the abolition of excise duties could give the government opportunity to impose new duties and indirect taxes in order to redeem the bond loans it had floated<sup>13</sup>. Moreover, most of the municipal authorities that had taken advantage of the excise duties declared themselves against their abolition mostly because they were apprehensive of losing their financial autonomy if the municipal indirect taxes were replaced with public ones on imported goods. These apprehensions were based on the certainty that central government would share out the revenue among the municipalities founded on political, and not economic, criteria. The delayed and failed attempts to improve the finances of local government bodies played a part in the widening of inequalities in urban development up until the end of the nineteenth century, while the main reason for this evolution was the decline of all urban export centers after the outbreak of the currant issue.<sup>14</sup> The immediate result of this development was a further diminution of the number of municipalities that could carry out their social role and provide a minimum standard of goods and services for their population.

### **The Municipal Act of 1912: new prospects, old problems**

#### **3.1. The reforms of the municipal system: old targets, different principles**

The Municipal Act of 1833 was abolished 80 years later, in 1912. The new law was part of a far-reaching program of reforms, which comprised the revision of the Constitution and the voting of new organ laws. The reforms intended to modernize the political, economical and social life of the country and to create a contemporary nation-state. According to the political and ideological view on which these reforms were based, only if Greece were to become a modern and therefore powerful nation-state would it be prepared to ally with the other Balkan countries against the Ottoman Empire in order to annex new regions to its territory<sup>15</sup>.

The changes in political life aimed, on the one hand, to reorganize the State apparatus and, on the other hand, to improve the function of the parliamentary system<sup>16</sup> mainly through the strengthening of the government. The voting of the Municipal Act of 1912 was considered a way of achieving both these aims. The new law maintained the old targets, which were the abolition of localism and the revival of local government, but was ruled by the opposite principle: the creation of small organizations of local government.

The reforms of the municipal system specifically concerned:

---

<sup>13</sup> Within a period of twelve years (1881-1893), the Greek State floated eight bond loans with the purpose of constructing the necessary transport infrastructure (such as the road and railway network and the Corinth Canal) and of covering military expenses, but unfortunately this policy ended in the bankruptcy of 1893.

<sup>14</sup> The currant issue refers to the collapse of the exports of Corinthian currants during the years 1892-1895, one of the results of which was the excess production of this agricultural product, leading to the gradual decline of the urban centers that participated in the export of currants.

<sup>15</sup> Greek History cites the revolt of Goudi taking place in 1909 which led to the accession of Eleftherios Venizelos to power and to the prevalence of the 'Venizelismos' movement. This movement managed to combine the program of modernization with the decision for territorial expansion ('national' integration) of the State and therefore to prepare the country for the Balkan Wars (1912-1913), the First World War (1914-1918) and the Asia Minor War (1919-1922). After the defeat of the Greek army by the Turks of Kemal in 1922 (Asia Minor Catastrophe), the program for modernization had to be adapted for the following circumstances: a) the annexation of new regions (Macedonia, Epirus, Crete, islands of Eastern and Northern Aegean Sea in 1913 and Western Thrace in 1923) and b) the arrival of the Asia Minor refugees. Thus the assimilation of all these new regions and their population, along with the settlement of the Minor Asia refugees, replaced the previous expansionism. In the future modernization would be combined with the attempt to unify the so-called 'new countries' of Greek territory.

<sup>16</sup> The parliamentary system had been introduced into political life in 1875, when King George I accepted that the government be appointed depending on the majority support of the members of Parliament.

1. The setting up of two different organizations of local government: communities and municipalities
2. The weakening of mayoral power
3. The reinforcement of local government independence

The distinction between a municipality and a community was based on two criteria: population and administrative levels. Cities that were either a capital of a prefecture (*nomoi*) or with a population exceeding 10,000 inhabitants continued to be called municipalities (*demoi*). The remaining existing entities were divided into numerous small organizations under the name of community (*koinoteta*)<sup>17</sup>. Although these criteria did not allow for any other differentiation between communities and municipalities, the Municipal Act of 1912 reversed the single town/country structure; on the one hand it classified communities as rural local authorities and on the other hand municipalities were given urbanized status. This is evident from the fact that the community authorities did not resemble those of a municipality. In a community the power was exercised by collective leadership (the communal council), which was elected every four years by universal direct suffrage. In addition, the council itself voted annually for a president from among its members, who in reality simply chaired the council meetings and was not considered the head of the community.

The municipal authorities continued to comprise the mayor, his deputies and the municipal council, but a new organ, the municipal committee, was established by the Municipal Act of 1912. The members of the municipal committee were voted for by the municipal council. The responsibilities of the municipal committee included decision making together with the mayor and in this way the executive power of the municipality was divided between the mayor<sup>18</sup> and the municipal committee so that the mayor's power in big cities would come to an end; still, the mayor continued to be the head of the municipality because it was considered that the governing of a city, as opposed to that of a rural area, needed a powerful pole which collective leadership could not offer. Thus, although mayoral power was weakened significantly by the division of most municipalities into numerous small communities<sup>19</sup> and the creation of the municipal committee, it was not altogether abolished since the mayor's office in big cities still exercised political influence to some extent. This development of course enabled the government to become the most powerful pole of the political system. However, the weakening of mayoral power seems to be more the result of the singular political circumstances prevalent at the time, which had divided the entire society into two diametrically opposite blocs<sup>20</sup>, and less a consequence of the new law itself.

The new local government system also had as a target the strengthening of local government independence. The Act of 1912 rendered the decisions of the municipal and communal councils immediately enforceable since authorization from central administration was no longer necessary. In addition, the intention was to render the prefect's office elective and to assign the administrative control of local government to it. If this reform had been realized, the municipalities and communities would have arrived at the status of complete self-administration and the State apparatus would have disengaged from matters of local interest and could have concentrated on more serious issues. Unfortunately, however, this last reform was referred to the Greek calends.

### 3.1. The effects of the reformed local government system

The Act of 1912 opened up new prospects for the administration of local societies, since its innovations changed the situation and allowed communities to manage their own affairs without the interference of central administration. The characteristics of the new situation were:

---

<sup>17</sup> In 1911, a year before the abolition of the 1833 Act, the whole of Greece (which at that time had a population of 2.631.952 and was 63.211 square kilometres in area) was divided into 445 municipalities. In 1914, the enforcement of the new law created 2.518 units of local government in all; 2.498 communities (*Koinotetes*) and only 20 municipalities (*demoi*). Thirteen of these municipalities fulfilled both criteria, one (the city of Arta) fulfilled the criterion of administrative level and four fulfilled the criterion of population (the port-cities of Piraeus, Laurion [in which had been founded two mining industries], Volos [which helped with the domestic wheat trade] and the city of Pyrgos [ which participated in the export of Corinthian currants through the port of Katakolon]).

<sup>18</sup> The mayor continued to be elected by universal direct suffrage every four years along with his deputies and the municipal council.

<sup>19</sup> See footnote n° 17.

<sup>20</sup> The two political blocs constituted the supporters of Prime Minister Venizelos on the one hand, and those of King Constantine on the other. Venizelos had decided to be allied with the three Great Powers of England, France and Russia [Entente] during the First World War, while the King had chosen the opposite camp [the Triple Alliance of Germany, Austria and Italy]. See also footnote n° 15.

- the transition from big, non-homogeneous municipalities to small communities, which were characterized by their homogeneity and shared interests and aims of their inhabitants
- the communities' emancipation from the mayor's patronage and from the strict administrative control of central government.

However, the administrative independence of local government proved an inadequate condition because the small communities were still unable to play their social role. Their financial difficulties remained unsolved even though the Act of 1912 had already released local government from the compulsory costs of education and police services. There also arose a new problem: excise duties continued to represent considerable income only for those organizations of local government which had levied this sort of indirect tax before 1912. The rest of the communities had no authority to levy excise duties after the enforcement of the Act. The reason for this prohibition lay in the intention of replacing excise duties with duties on imported goods in the near future. Unfortunately in 1914 the attempt to pass the bill which would have abolished excise duties was not successful and the upshot was that some organizations of local government depended on excise duties while the majority of communities had no right to do so.<sup>21</sup>

In the end the strengthening of the administrative independence of communities had no effect on their chronic problem which was lack of money. The Act of 1912 did not change the fact that only the big developing municipalities of the country accomplished their task and provided their population with social services.

Furthermore, it is important to note that the government decided to postpone the enforcement of this Act on the new regions which were annexed to Greek territory after the Balkan Wars. The government arrived at this decision taking into consideration the fact that the administrative independence of communities would have favoured localism instead of revitalizing the institution of local government. This development would of course have been a disaster since the assimilation of the new regions and their population was a top priority. In the new regions the Act of 1912 was enforced in 1925, when the election of local authorities took place for the first time.

### **Epilogue**

In modern Greece municipal power was related to the mayor's political influence. The set-up of a local government system, which was modeled on the French Municipal Act of 1831, endowed the municipalities with many responsibilities of political-administrative and social character. But it was the political role of the mayor that predominated, especially after the sanction of universal suffrage in municipal elections in 1864.

From then on a relationship of dependence was established between the mayor and the political parties. In big cities the political parties antagonized each other in order to gain the support of the mayor's voters, whereas in small urban or rural municipalities the would-be mayors fought for the support of the political parties. Of course both situations favored the strengthening of the mayor's political influence not only locally but also on the central political scene of the country. In 1912 mayoral power was reduced in part by the new Act and in part by the political and social circumstances of that time. This development deprived the candidates for the Greek parliament of their local support. Moreover, the reduction of mayoral power enabled the political parties to become organized on a nationwide basis and the government to impose party discipline on its deputies more easily than in the past.

### **References**

Marianthi Kotea, a) Local Government and Urbanization: the modernization of the Municipal Administration in 19th-century Greece, Dionicos, Athens, 2007 (in Greek)

b) The abolition of the big Municipalities: an effort of Venizelismos in improving the Parliamentary System, forthcoming monograph (in Greek)

---

<sup>21</sup> The excise duties were abolished for all organizations of local government in 1948. On the eve of their abolition, in 1946, almost 2/3 of the revenue of the 75 bigger municipalities of the country were derived from excise duties.