19th Levantine Heritage Foundation Zoom lecture gathering with guest speaker Gábor Fodor 5 April 2022, 6pm (UK time)



## Changing by the Needs: The Story of the Hungarian Society in Constantinople

After the failure of the Hungarian Revolution of 1848–1849 against the Habsburg Monarchy, thousands of soldiers found asylum in the Ottoman Empire. Even though most of them left the empire within a year, hundreds preferred to stay, live, and work in a society about which they knew virtually nothing. The importance of the Hungarian refugee colony was not limited to active military service in the Ottoman Army, but a few of them succeeded in building up their civil careers as entrepreneur, shop owner, or translator. This was the period when the Hungarian Society in Constantinople was established with the aim of aiding the refugees by preserving the revolutionary spirit. Among others the famous Hungarian traveller, Arminius Vámbery, the "lame dervish" was hosted in the first building of the society after his arrival to Constantinople, but over time due to the activity of the Austrian spies and agents and the conflicts within the Hungarian community itself, the society suspended its activities. The reactivation of the society in the 1880s marked a brand new era in the life of the Hungarian community, as the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, which had a transition from a centralized state structure to a dual monarchy, started seeking her economic interests in the East. This was unequivocally reflected in the changes of the membership: director of the Constantinople branch of the Hungarian Commercial Bank Izidor Baumgartner, captain of the fire-fighter brigade Count Ödön Széchenyi Pasha and pianist Géza Hegyei, the beloved entertainer of the Sultan and Constantinople's Levantine community took a leading role in the society. Balls at the elegant Hotel de Pera, charity concerts at the Tapebasi Theater, diner at the Tokatlian Hotel and similar programs echoed the new way of advocating the Hungarian economic and political interests in the Turkish capital. This was also fueled by the spread of the Turanist ideas in Hungary and later by the military alliance between the Ottoman Empire and the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy.

The end of the Great War and the fall of empires however abolished the former accomplishments and with the foundation of the Turkish Republic the society was once again revitalized: this time as an advocate union of the Hungarian workers. The *Macar Cemiyeti Hayriyesi*'s (The Hungarian Benevolent Society) mission was to help the workers in finding jobs, providing accommodation for the job seekers, and informing the Hungarians in Hungary about the potential opportunities or restrictions imposed on foreign workers in Turkey.

How was it to be a Hungarian in the late Ottoman Empire and in the early republic? Who were the well-known characters of the community and how did they live in Istanbul? In this presentation Gábor Fodor is aiming to showcase the activities and the major changes of the Hungarian Society in Constantinople through personal narratives of the leading members.



Booking essential: https://gabor-fodor-presentation.eventbrite.co.uk



Gábor Fodor graduated from the departments of Turkology and History of the Eötvös Loránd University in Budapest, where he also finished his PhD. His main research interests cover the Turkish-Hungarian relations in the 19-20th century in general, in particular the Hungarian autobiographies and memoirs from the late Ottoman period and the Hungarian scientific endeavours in Istanbul. He started his career at the research group of Turkology of the late Prof. György Hazai as a young research fellow of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. Later he was appointed as the director of the Liszt Institute - Hungarian Cultural Center in Istanbul in 2015 where he still works. His first book entitled *Visit to the Ottoman Empire. Dr. Dezső Bozóky's Photographs (1905-1916)* was published in 2019, while his latest publication has come out at the end of 2021 under the title *Hungarian Science and Archaeology in the Ottoman Empire. The Story of the Hungarian Research Institute in Constantinople (1916-1918)* (in Hungarian).

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