

The Mukhtar (Mayor) and the Village Council of Lania

How Local Leadership Worked — and Still Works — in Cypriot Villages

1. Who is the Mukhtar?

The **Mukhtar** (Greek: *Μουχτάρης*, Arabic origin meaning “**the chosen one**”) is the **elected head of a village** in Cyprus. The role was introduced during the **Ottoman period in 1571**, when the empire installed a mukhtar in nearly every village to act as the lowest level of state authority.

Today, the Mukhtar remains the **local community leader**, functioning much like a village mayor. The position is still active across the Republic of Cyprus.

2. What Does the Mukhtar Do?

The Mukhtar’s responsibilities are both **administrative** and **community-based**. According to the Cyprus Traveller Guide, the Mukhtar:

- verifies identity and cohabitation for residents
- stamps and certifies official documents (rental contracts, residence confirmations, utility registrations, bank account paperwork)
- manages local budgets
- oversees postal services
- maintains village roads
- keeps public order
- certifies photos for passports
- assists with tax collection
- reports serious crimes or accidents
- keeps records of births and deaths

In essence, the Mukhtar is the **first point of contact** for almost every practical matter in village life.

3. The Village Council (Azades / Elders)

Historically, the Mukhtar did not work alone. Under the Ottomans, he was supported by **up to four Azades** — respected village elders who acted as his assistants.

This group functioned as the **village council**, helping with:

- dispute mediation
- community decisions
- managing shared resources
- representing the village to higher authorities

This structure continued into the British period and still survives in modern form: today's village councils are elected bodies that work alongside the Mukhtar to manage local affairs.

4. The Mukhtar in the Context of Lania

While our search results do not list the *names* of Lania's mukhtars, the role in a village like Lania would have been especially important because:

- Lania is a **small, close-knit community**, where the Mukhtar acts as the bridge between villagers and the state.
- The Mukhtar historically oversaw **vineyard disputes**, land boundaries, and agricultural matters — crucial in a wine-producing village.
- Before widespread radio or television, the Mukhtar and council were the **primary source of political news**, often delivered in the coffee shop or village square. (This aligns with your earlier archival notes about village gatherings.)
- The Mukhtar's stamp was essential for villagers emigrating, buying land, or proving family lineage.

In villages like Lania, the Mukhtar was not just an official — he was a **trusted figure**, often from a long-established family, known personally by every resident.

5. How the Mukhtar Is Chosen

The Mukhtar is **elected locally**, separate from political parties. Candidates run as individuals, not as party representatives.

This preserves the role's traditional character: **leadership based on trust, reputation, and service**, not national politics.

6. Why the Role Still Matters

Even in 2026, the Mukhtar remains essential because:

- Cyprus still relies on **local verification** for many bureaucratic processes.
- Rural communities value **face-to-face governance**.
- The Mukhtar provides continuity in villages where population numbers are small and aging.
- The office preserves a **direct link to centuries of Cypriot village administration**.

In a heritage village like Lania, the Mukhtar and council are part of the **living fabric** of community identity.