

# Turkey

*Aygen Erdentug*

## Chronology

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- 1923 The proclamation of the Republic of Turkey; Ankara becomes the capital.
- 1924–1925 The caliphate is abolished, together with religious courts and orders. The international calendar and system of time is officially adopted.
- 1926 New civil, penal, and commercial codes are adopted. They are based on the Swiss, Italian, and German codes, respectively.
- 1928 The Latin alphabet is adopted.
- 1934 Extension of suffrage to women; adoption of family names.
- 1938 The death of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk.
- 1942 The Wealth Tax is enacted, which leads to impoverishment or displacement of mainly non-Muslim citizens.
- 1950 The Democratic Party wins the 1950 general elections, ending the monopoly rule of the Republican People's Party, which had been in power since 1924.
- 1952 Turkey becomes a full-fledged member in NATO.
- 1955 Anti-Greek riots take place in three major cities.
- 1960 Officer coup d'état to stop corruption and unconstitutional acts.
- 1969 The Nationalist Action Party is formed.
- 1970–1971 The first pro-Islamic party is formed but is closed down due to antiseccular activities. (A religious party eventually becomes a member of the coalition government in 1996 but is also closed down in 1998.)
- 1971 The Labor Party is closed down for separatist and communist propaganda. (In 1989, the Communist Party is legalized in Turkey.)
- 1974 Turkish forces enter Cyprus to prevent further massacre and to protect the rights of Turks on the island.
- 1980 A coup d'état by Turkish armed forces to reestablish law and order.
- 1987 The Nationalist Action Party is accused of ultranationalist activities; the chairman is imprisoned. A national referendum lifts the ban against former political leaders. Turkey recognizes the right of its citizens to apply to the European Human Rights Commission.
- 1991 A bill revoking the ban on the spoken use of Kurdish passes in parliament.
- 1993 Sunni Muslims set fire to a hotel in Sivas; 37 Alevis are burned to death.
- 1999 The outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (Partiya Karkeren Kurdistan—PKK) leader, Abdullah Öcalan, is captured, tried, and convicted of treason. (Capital punishment is abolished; his death sentence is not carried out.)
- 2000 The Court of Appeals decides in favor of freedom to use Kurdish names.
- 2001–2002 Economic crisis and recession forces coalition governments to generate new economic programs and reorganize financial institutions.
- 2003 Suicide bombings, allegedly Al Qaeda attacks, of two synagogues in Istanbul.
- 2004 In accordance with the integration negotiations with the European Union (EU), Turkish Radio and Television (TRT) begins limited broadcasting in the Kurdish, Bosnian, Arabic, and Circassian languages.

- 2005 The EU opens accession negotiations with Turkey for full membership.
- 2006 The court cases of writers charged with “insulting Turkishness” are publicized in the mass media, spurring various forms of aggression from the ultranationalists against the defendants.
- 2007 (April 14) The Republic Protests—huge, peaceful mass rallies in support of secularism in Turkey—take place successively in Ankara, İstanbul, Manisa, Çanakkale, İzmir, Samsun, and Denizli.

## Situating the Nation

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Turkey has its roots in the semi-theocratic Ottoman Empire that lasted for 600 years. At its zenith in the 16th century, its borders stretched from central Europe to North Africa and the Arabian Peninsula in the south, and to Persia in the east. İstanbul (Constantinople) became the capital in 1453. The modern Republic of Turkey emerged, with Ankara as its capital, in 1923. It is the only completely secular Muslim nation-state that has a legal system based on codes adopted from European nations.

Ankara was at the core of the Turkish struggle for independence during World War I, when the Ottoman Empire was divided by European powers. Mustafa Kemal was the national hero who led the liberating resistance and became the head of the countergovernment in Ankara. In recognition, the Turkish parliament later awarded him the surname *Atatürk* (the father of the Turks). The nation-building process consisted of a series of sweeping reforms aimed at modernizing the country and transforming Ottoman subjects into Turkish citizens. This process was carried out during the first two decades of the republic by Ankara’s political elite, who had emerged from Ottoman bureaucracy and from the military. However, the target of this modernizing, also known as the “revolution from above,” was not only the civil bureaucracy but also the illiterate and tradition-bound peasantry, who constituted about 83 percent of the republic in 1927. Atatürk defined this group as “the true masters of the nation” during his opening speech of the Grand National Assembly in 1922 in which he also drew attention to the importance of rural development.

Turkey is in southeast Europe, next to Greece and Bulgaria, and it bridges the continents of Europe and Asia. It is located in the Anatolian peninsula in southwest Asia, with a small portion of its territory (Thrace) stretching into the Balkan region of southeastern Europe. The fertile coastal regions are densely populated, particularly in the northwestern provinces. As one of the countries bordering the south shore of the Black Sea, Turkey is a neighbor to Ukraine, Russia, and Georgia. Its territory is flanked by Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Iran in the east and by Syria and Iraq in the south. Turkey is at the crossroads of politically active and economically viable areas, and its geopolitical importance has invited both alliances and hostilities throughout history.



The Ottoman economic legacy of a weak industrial base, coupled with a decline in agricultural production, had led to an impoverished population. During the Ottoman era, non-Muslim minorities monopolized urban economic life and commerce. In the mid-1920s, when a considerable number of these minorities became victims of war or emigrated, an economic vacuum emerged. Neither economic liberalism nor the succeeding statist era (1930–1950) improved the backward, agriculture-based economy, and the growth of a middle class was postponed until later.

In the 1950s, the introduction of a multiparty system generated another set of political, economic, and social changes in Turkey. Since that time, the regions to the northwest, west, and south of the capital have become more developed and modernized. In contrast, the east and southeast regions remain relatively underdeveloped and conservative; tribal traditions and sectarian ties are still decisive.

It was only in the 1960s—after the first coup d'état in the republic and a new constitution ratified by national referendum in 1961—that planned development with broader economic and social goals was possible. Yet, the confrontations between the Marxist, the ultranationalist, and the Islamic fundamentalist groups led to student unrest and a military coup by memorandum during 1971–1973. The ensuing numerous coalition governments, shortages due to deteriorating economic conditions, and an inflation level reaching the triple digits brought insta-

bility to the country by the late 1970s. The 1975–1978 American arms embargo on Turkey, which was imposed as a result of Ankara’s Cyprus operation of 1974, also had economic repercussions. Foreign financial/economic institutions moved slowly on aid and credits and refused to reschedule Turkey’s debts. The concomitant political instability and clashes between student groups, complemented by nationwide strikes of leftist unions and bloody anti-Alevi reactions in two cities, resulted in another military intervention in 1980–1983. Political parties were dissolved. The backlash was another constitution ratified by national referendum in 1982 that was more restrictive with regard to civil liberties than the previous, liberal one had been.

Between 1983 and 1991, imports were greatly liberalized and an export-oriented economic policy placed a greater emphasis on international competition. Succeeding governments from 1991 to 1999 tried to improve the persistent gap in income distribution and managed to control inflation to some degree. However, in 2001, an unexpected devaluation of the Turkish currency plunged the country into a serious financial crisis. This crisis brought back political bickering, unpunished corruption, rampant inflation, and soaring unemployment. Political stability was possible in 2002, when an Islam-based party that had turned conservative came to power alone with the support of about 35 percent of the electorate. This party was able to initiate the accession negotiations of making Turkey—with a population of 70.5 million in the year 2007—a full member of the EU.

## Instituting the Nation

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The Young Turk movement in the last decades of the 19th century was a turning point in the Ottoman Empire. It was the voice of opposition dedicated to replacing an absolute monarchy (i.e., the autocracy of Abdulhamid II) with a constitutional one. This movement also laid the foundation of the nationalistic official ideology of the republic. The Young Turks first had the utopian dream of binding all by “Ottomanism”—a patriotism that would disregard religion or ethnicity, contrary to the reality of the Christian-Muslim dichotomy and the multiple ethnicities of the empire. With the secession of the Balkans and Greece (Christian territories) after the Balkan Wars (1912–1913), they turned to Turkish nationalism; they did not want to embrace pan-Islamism, an identity based on religion. Hence another political movement, pan-Turkism, emerged and was aimed at uniting the Turkic-speaking peoples under one state. It was adopted by the younger generation of Turks who had been drawn to the idea of cultural nationalism, an identity and loyalty based on “Turkishness.” A concomitant movement was Turanism, or pan-Turanism, that embraced the unity of Ural-Altai peoples together with those of Finno-Hungarian stock (i.e., the union of Eurasian peoples stretching from Hungary to the Pacific Rim; “Turan” was the region from which these peoples had originated).

With the establishment of the Republic of Turkey, ethnic nationalism gave way to territorial nationalism, a patriotism seeking allegiance only to Turkey. Atatürk expressed this identity transfer with the popularized statement that ended his address to the nation on the 10th anniversary of the foundation of the Turkish republic: “Happy is he who calls himself a Turk!” One crucial component of Atatürk’s nation-building strategy was to make citizens of the new nation proud of being Turks. Their self-image had been battered by the demoralizing shrinkage of the grand Ottoman Empire and by Western prejudice. However, Atatürk’s quote was to be challenged in later decades by ultranationalists and Kurdish separatist groups who felt his words demonstrated the ethnic hegemony of citizens of Turkic origin.

The campaign to restore self-respect to the Turks embraced their bio-cultural origins and included their language and history, cornerstones of the official agenda. The zeal of some Turkish scholars of the time went to extremes, resulting in research of dubious scientific merit that served political ends; it created the Anatolian movement that, by the 1930s, had become the official ideology. The movement came to an end with the death of Atatürk, in 1938, when its proponents abandoned the cause.

The primary factors in sustaining national identity in Turkey have been Atatürk, a pro-nationalist education policy dating to the 1930s, the Turkish flag (red with a white crescent and star), and the military. The citizens of Turkey and the Turkish diaspora are proud of the fact that Atatürk has become a universally recognized Turk. He remains a unifying figure for all age categories and culturally or politically disparate groups, through an emphasis on or an embracement of

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### Early Ethnocentric Theories (The Anatolian Movement)

During the 1930s in Turkey, research of dubious scientific merit produced theories arguing that all history and languages had a basis in Turkish history and language, since they originated from Central Asia, “the cradle of human civilization.” This was the homeland of the Turks, who had migrated in waves to different parts of the world. In this respect, the “Turkish Historical Thesis” maintained that the history of Turkey went beyond the history of the Ottoman Empire to that of Central Asia; for example, the Sumerian, the Hittite, the Chinese, the Roman, and the ancient Greek histories were all derivatives of the Turkish one. Likewise, the “Sun Theory of Languages” claimed that Turkish was the first language spoken, and hence was the foundation for all human languages like Latin and the Romance languages, classical Greek, and even Anglo-Saxon. Though these theories were abandoned in later years, they remained in the national curriculum in schools. They have also affected the configuration of the presidential seal. The radiating sun at the center of this red seal represents the Republic of Turkey, while the circle of 16 stars around this sun signifies the 16 Turkish states in history (the number of these states has been a contentious issue). Recently, a similar theory has linked the Turks—through those who crossed the Bering Strait—to the early American Indians on the basis of their artifacts and language.

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**Mustafa Kemal Atatürk: The Eternal Leader (1881–1938)**

Primary school children begin their day by taking an oath in which they express what it means to be a Turk, their dedication to the Turkish existence, and their allegiance to Atatürk's principles (i.e., republicanism, secularism, nationalism, populism, and revolutionism-reformism). Atatürk rests in his eternal abode at the Atatürk Mausoleum in Ankara. He is omnipresent in Turkey. His busts or statues are seen in the yards of all institutions of education and in at least one square in urban settlements. Practically every city has a main street, if not a stadium or a cultural center, named after him. His portrait hangs on office walls in public buildings, private enterprises, and homes, and it is also seen on postage stamps and bank notes. Law 5816, passed in 1951, states that the defamation of Atatürk or the disfiguring of his images is a criminal offense, the punishment of which is imprisonment up to three and five years, respectively. The sentence can be increased if coercion or the media is involved. To outsiders who are not familiar with the Turkish psyche, Atatürk may be seen as a cult figure. There is a lucrative market in Atatürk memorabilia, similar to the one for the icons of the Western world.

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different facets of his identity and accomplishments, such as “a national hero,” “a secularist and republican,” “a nationalist,” “a father figure.”

The military is the only institution that enjoys the complete faith of the majority of Turks, whether during war or in peace. In retrospect, the military has taken on three roles. One of these roles has been as the self-proclaimed guardian of secularism, persistently vigilant against Islamist retrogression. In its second role, as the protector of an idealized version of democracy, the military has intervened in Turkish politics when the governments were incapacitated or when extreme political activities threatened the regime. Its third role has been an assimilative one; mandatory military service for men has served as a catalyst, enhancing patriotism and emotional attachment to the Turkish flag. Martyrdom, dying in military action for Turkey, is an exceedingly honorable status, and slighting the Turkish flag is a criminal offense that can provoke outbreaks of violence against perpetrators and trigger the nation to rally around it.

## Defining the Nation

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In 1923, the Treaty of Lausanne determined the initial territory of Turkey. In 1926, the border with the new state of Iraq was redrawn to create the present southeastern frontier. By 1939 the province of Hatay was ceded from Syria to join Turkey, finalizing the boundaries of the country. The official doctrine at the time was to create a homogenous Turkish-speaking nation, as stated in the successive constitutions of the republic. This meant that any threat to national unity and

“Turkishness” was suppressed, persecuted, or prosecuted. At present, article 301 of the Turkish penal code, which limits freedom of speech and prosecutes anyone insulting the Turkish state or its citizens, has become a stronghold for ultranationalists. It is also a matter of contention between Turkey and the EU.

The only minorities that were officially recognized were the preexisting non-Muslim communities (usually understood as Jews, Greeks, and Armenians, although there were other groups), whose protection and rights had been determined by the Treaty of Lausanne. In practice, governments violated these rights through restrictions on their education and curriculum, free expression, and charitable institutions. Particularly in the 1930s, the Greeks in İstanbul were barred from entering a large number of professions. The population of non-Muslims in Anatolia decreased with World War I as a result of forcible relocation, repatriation, or population exchange, followed by emigration to Western nations in later decades. A considerable number of those remaining have penetrated the affluent professional groups or established businesses in Turkey.

Following World War I, with the Armistice of Mudros (1918) that marked the defeat and commenced the partitioning of the Ottoman Empire, İzmir (Smyrna) was occupied by Greek forces. What the Greeks referred to afterward as the “Asia Minor Catastrophe” was set in motion when the Greeks left İzmir, after the city was taken back by Turkish forces in 1922. An agreement between Turkey and Greece to exchange populations took effect in 1924, leading to the deportation of Greeks from Anatolia (i.e., Asia Minor) and Muslims from Greece. Only the Muslims in western Thrace and the ethnic Greek communities in İstanbul and on the Aegean islands of Bozcaada (Tenedos) and Gökçeada (Imbroz) were exempt from this reciprocal expulsion. Some of the ethnic Greeks in İstanbul emigrated after a violent incident in 1955. The distorted reports in Turkey on a glass-shattering bomb attack on the Turkish consulate in Salonika (Greece), near the house where Atatürk was born, triggered wholesale anti-Greek riots in İstanbul, Ankara, and İzmir and ended with the destruction of commercial property belonging to ethnic Greeks and the desecration of Greek religious sanctuaries. Yet another evacuation of thousands, and the confiscation of their property, occurred in the mid-1960s. This time, it was in retaliation to the stalemate in discussions on the rights of the systematically intimidated and murdered ethnic Turks in Cyprus. The agreements in 1960, which created the Republic of Cyprus, made Turkey and Greece (together with the United Kingdom) guarantor powers of the constitutional rights of their respective communities in Cyprus.

During the Caucasus Campaign (1914–1918), the loyalty of the Ottoman Empire’s Armenian subjects became unclear; Armenian nationalists collaborated with the Russian armies, and separatists staged rebellions and raided Turkish villages. The Young Turk government decided to relocate the Armenians outside of the war zones with the objective of dispersing them; however, many Armenians—artisans and civil servants, families whose men were serving in the Ottoman armies, Catholic and Protestant Armenians—were exempt from this resettle-

ment. Nevertheless, the Armenian experience during World War I, referred to as the “Great Calamity,” has led to the most controversial and highly politicized issue in Turkish history. Some historians and the Armenian diaspora claim that the Great Calamity was genocidal, considering the thousands who became victims of atrocities during this forced relocation in 1915. Their opponents argue that it was not annihilation and that the death toll was an unfortunate consequence of the mismanagement of resources and the austere conditions that prevailed during the war. Some of the groups being transferred contracted contagious diseases or were attacked and murdered by marauders along the way—a common risk for travelers at the time. Today, historians continue to search the Ottoman archives in an effort to find the truth. It is considered offensive to speak or write in support of the claim of the Armenian diaspora, since that viewpoint is seen as “insulting Turkishness.” Many scholars and authors, including Orhan Pamuk, the 2006 Nobel Laureate for literature, were taken to court and faced imprisonment for this offense; however, all were acquitted.

Relationships with the Jews in Turkey—the majority of which are Sephardic—have comparatively been more peaceful. Jews expelled from Spain in the 15th century took refuge in the Ottoman Empire. This was followed by waves of Jewish refugees during the 19th century, who were escaping the harassment, oppression, or ethnic cleansing in Europe and the Balkans. Jews fleeing Nazi Germany again found sanctuary in Turkey. In 1933, Atatürk invited professors of Jewish origin to contribute to intellectual progress in the country; the German school they represented had an impact on the development of the university system, scientific institutions, fine arts, and performing arts in Turkey. Between 1940 and 1950, many Turkish Jews migrated to Palestine, which became the State of Israel as of 1948, out of a desire to return to their millennia-old homeland. Anti-Semitic activity in Turkey has been restricted mainly to news in the mass media; Islamists or ultra-nationalists have demonized Israel and the Jews in their reports to produce a negative image. Most of these have ended up at court. Recent instances of violence have included tomb desecrations by Islamic fundamentalists and suicide bombings (allegedly by Al Qaeda) of two synagogues in İstanbul.

Anthropologically, outside the non-Muslim communities, there are innumerable subcultures in Turkey—as reflected in the variations of local traditions, folklore, and costumes—all contributing to the greater national culture. Though the influx of migrants from villages to metropolises and the ensuing acculturation has somewhat homogenized this cultural diversity in the urban environment, the new urbanites still identify more with their native villages or hometowns than with their city of residence. Regionalism or hometown-based social networks are important frames of reference in supporting or eroding nationalistic sentiments. There are hundreds of hometown associations in metropolises that maintain economic and emotional ties with an Anatolian town or its administrative unit. Each association aims to sustain its culture among its emigrants by organizing picnics and annual outings, and by providing events and courses for the younger

generation that promote their ethnic characteristics such as local food, folklore, crafts, and even dialect or language.

The definition of a Turk has come to mean one who is Sunni Muslim and speaks Turkish as the native tongue. Factions within Turkish society claim that this definition places others in a secondary position. New terms like “citizen of Turkey” and *Türkiyeli* (someone originating from and/or a resident of Turkey)—as opposed to “Turkish citizen,” which had overtones of ethnicity—were recently coined to unify the citizens of the republic. These terms generated further discussions but failed to produce a consensus.

In Turkey, historical and environmental circumstances have produced different cultural groups within the population identified as “true Turks” (ethnic Turks). The Anatolian Turks are the most widely dispersed and most numerous, showing significant variations in cultural patterns; they were the group targeted for the republican reforms. Another entity, known as the “Balkan immigrants,” are ethnic Turks (Sunni Muslims) and their descendants from the Balkans, who resettled primarily in the Thrace and Marmara regions starting in the 1870s and continued in sporadic waves until the early 1990s. Other Turkic-speaking immigrants and their descendants from southern Russia (e.g., Crimean Tatars) and Central Asia (e.g., Turkomans), along with groups from the Caucasus (e.g., the Laz, the Circassians, the Muslim Georgians), can be lumped together into a third group. Their communities have been scattered all over the country due to settlement policies at the time of their immigration. Muslim refugees, such as the Bosnians and the Afghans, are a more recent addition to the population.

Due to the liberal atmosphere of the 1961 constitution, the 1965 census registered population details according to ethnic, linguistic, or religious distinctions; however, since then it has not been possible to correctly enumerate the citizens according to this information. The Kurds have been the biggest and most significant group to challenge the image of a homogenous nation. In fact, like the ethnic Turks, they show regional and sectarian differences (most are Sunni Muslims, the rest are Alevis of the Shiite sect), as well as class distinctions. They are estimated to constitute at least 10 percent of the population and live predominantly in the southeast, with some groups in the eastern provinces. Within the last two decades, many Kurds have migrated to cities in the west. Governments first labeled them “mountain Turks,” then “eastern Turks,” not only rejecting the existence of a Kurdish language, but also failing to distinguish between the different Kurdish groups. However, since the 1990s, and particularly as of the turn of the 21st century, most of their cultural and political rights—with some assistance from the EU—have been granted.

Arab-speaking communities are not uncommon along the Syrian border of Turkey. Most are Alevi (Alewife) though there are also Assyrian (Christian) communities among them. Discriminatory administrative practices, along with the terrorism of the late 1980s, forced the village-based Christian population to immigrate to nearby cities or even seek refuge in Western countries. Though the

border of 1939 divided Arab Alewite lineages, their members in Turkey have maintained their ties with kin and with Syria.

## Narrating the Nation

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In spite of projects to educate and develop peasant communities, the republican reforms created a two-tiered Turkish society: a Western-oriented and secular elite contemptuous of the masses that are heavily under the influence of traditions and religion. The political affiliations in later decades perpetuated this polarization, setting off political and economic turmoil. The nation is still haunted by the unwarranted leveling mechanisms that took place in the 1970s; long queues for staple goods, shortages of industrial and intermediary goods that led to facility failures, and the regional PKK terrorism of the 1980s that spread nationwide in the 1990s.

Atatürk frequently bolstered the self-respect of his citizens—as he did in his address on the 10th anniversary of the foundation of the Turkish republic—with statements such as, “The Turks, as a nation, are intelligent!” and “The Turks, as a nation, are industrious!” The achievements of his period made the public proud, as summarized in the lyrics of the “10th Year March.” For each year after his death, until the 1990s, the nation was in a state of mourning on November 10. Since then, the commemoration of Atatürk during this occasion has stretched to a week of various activities that are named after him. The goal of these activities is to help the nation better understand his reforms.

Turkish ethnocentrism became somewhat eroded due to the crippled economy, the corruption, and the political unrest of later decades, causing some Turks to question their self-esteem. This state of morale was reflected in the popular expression, “We will never grow up.” However, their pride in Turkish hospitality and communal traits, such as solidarity in the face of adversity, was persistent and remained. Public protests during this period included blowing tin whistles, hitting pans, and turning out the lights at home for one minute each evening. One of the popular mass media cartoons of this pessimistic period depicted the republic as a young woman draped in the Turkish flag, prey to the sinister intentions of men surrounding her.

A chain of events occurred that began to restore confidence and kindle nationalist sentiments. In 2001, the gratifying performance of Turkish soccer teams and the national basketball team’s participation in international matches created euphoria and triggered an upsurge in Turkish flag sales. “Turkey is the greatest / There is none other greater!” was chanted for almost every following occasion.

Another development was the anxiety over increasing threats to secularism. This concern incited droves of prosecular citizens to organize demonstrations of national unity during which hundreds waved the national flag and chanted in

support of secularism. They wore Atatürk badges or carried his portrait. Even preschool children wore red headbands with the words *ATAM İZİNDEYİZ* (“We walk your path *Atam*”; *Atam* is a popular possessive form of address and reference to Atatürk) in white letters. The headbands were in response to the green headbands with Arabic inscriptions observed during the demonstrations of the Islamists. Since the 75th anniversary of the republic in 1998, the republican spirit has been revived with a popularized version of the “10th Year March” that is now sung spontaneously by prosecular citizens of all ages and classes when they are in a jubilant mood.

Ethno-political confrontations also created a surge in nationalism. The twists and turns of foreign intervention on nationally sensitive issues—such as the Cyprus issue, the PKK, the Armenian question, U.S. policy in the Middle East and Iraq, and EU accession—infuriated the nation, causing it to close ranks.

Turks are predisposed to react promptly, even aggressively, to any provocation involving an insult to their national icons, to their pride, or to Islam. They mount nationwide protests with hate demonstrations or campaigns boycotting the commodities of the foreign countries concerned, sometimes publicly destroying these goods. At the very least, they will protest by placing a black wreath at the gate of the embassy of the country involved.

## Mobilizing and Building the Nation

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Standard Turkish, taught and maintained through state channels, was essential in the establishment of a national identity and central to the assimilative strategy. Mandatory military service and intercultural marriages have been other channels of integration and assimilation. The adoption of the Latin alphabet, a secular national curriculum, and compulsory, free, primary school education have increased access to schooling. These measures have proven to be effective: children of immigrant groups have assimilated into the national culture, partially maintaining parental traditions yet ignorant of their parents’ native tongue.

In the years 1925 and 1940, another assimilative strategy involved giving Turkish names to villages with non-Turkish names. Though this renaming process covered all of Turkey, the percentage of renamed villages has been particularly high in the eastern Black Sea region and east and southeast of Turkey. These were villages originally inhabited by Christian groups or people of Tatar (Crimean), Circassian, Laz, Arabic, Persian, and Kurdish origin. Over time, the older generations—who communicated in the local dialect or tongue—have ignored and left the usage of these imposed names to the younger generations attending school.

Apart from the proclamation of the republic—which has become a national holiday attracting increased participation since its 75th anniversary when it was unofficially claimed by civil society to activate solidarity against antiseccular

movements—official public holidays are dedicated to certain groups. The anniversary of the first opening of the Turkish parliament honors the children. On that day, designated children sit in the seats of power and act like the incumbents of those posts. The anniversary of the beginning of the national liberation movement is set apart for youth and for commemorating Atatürk (in addition to November 10, the day he died), and the day celebrating the victory of the War of Independence is dedicated to the armed forces.

National celebrations used to be instigated by the state and consisted of gymnastics, marching bands in stadiums, and military parades in the streets. Since the late 1980s, local administrations have taken the initiative to also organize street parties, including pop concerts and fireworks. The Turkish flag and images of Atatürk are an integral aspect of these celebrations.

In spite of the equality of citizens decreed by the constitution of the republic, there is still a Muslim–non-Muslim cleavage that overrides national citizenship and impinges upon the psyche of the ethnic Turks with provincial roots. More often than not, the non-Muslim citizens of Turkey are uneasy about the prejudice and interpersonal (and sometimes institutional) discrimination of fanatical Turkish nationalists and Islamists. This apprehension has been justified with the 2007 assassination of a prominent Armenian-Turkish citizen and journalist who had been conciliatory in the Armenian question of whether there was an Armenian genocide in 1915, during the Ottoman period; those who misconstrued his views made him a victim of article 301 and an open target.

New or amended legislation has somewhat relaxed the tensions caused by factions, but three cultural fault lines have emerged: secularists versus Islamists, Sunni versus Alevi, and Turks versus Kurds. Each group is adamant in its stance and ready to look for ulterior motives in any steps taken by its opponent; they usually disagree over major issues.

Since the proclamation of the republic, the city-based political elite, and later the middle class, have become secularists and die-hard proponents of the tenets and reforms of Atatürk, practicing a form of ancestor worship. However, religion is no longer a matter solely of private conscience. The provincially based Islamists, proud of Turkey's Islamic heritage, were traditionally confined to the lower strata of Turkish society. They have gained ground in the past decade and infiltrated the cultural mainstream through upward mobility; some entrepreneurs have penetrated into the upper economic class. They accept Atatürk as a national hero for "saving the country from the infidels [the Christians]," but they reject his antireligion and pro-Western stance. Some fanatics, when not in quest of an Islamic state, have sporadically defaced Atatürk busts or statues. Women in clothes that conceal all but their face and hands are perceived as a symbol of the rejected Islamic traditionalism. This has become a divisive issue because covered women are banned from institutions of education and from working in public office, and they are overlooked in some state functions—all of which are bastions of prosecular women in Western clothes.

The tug-of-war between prosecular citizens and political Islam came out into the open in April 2007, prior to the election of a new president by parliament. There were mass rallies against the Islamic-rooted government to prevent its candidate from taking the post. The protestors flooded streets and squares, creating a sea of red Turkish flags and chanting, “Turkey is secular and secular it will remain.” The “Republic Protests” of the prosecular were a show of strength that had previously not been seen in the republic; the Western press reported the protests as an indicator of the cultural and political cleavage in the country. The main concern of those who participated—the majority being women from every region of Turkey and from various backgrounds—was the possible concentration of power in the hands of the Justice and Development Party, the Islam-based party that had turned conservative and already controlled parliament. Subsequent parliamentary tinkering with the legislation in question ended in an early general election in 2007. However, the same party again came to power—the electorate proved to be also concerned about prolonging political and economic stability—and their candidate was elected as president.

Alevi is a blanket term referring to the heterodox religious communities of Anatolia, which are estimated to make up 15–20 percent of the total population. Some of these groups are also Kurds. The directorate of religious affairs, looking



Turkish people shout slogans in support of secularism as they hold a huge Turkish flag at the Mausoleum of Ataturk, founder of modern Turkey, during the “Republic Protests” in Ankara in April 2007. (Tolga Bozoglu/epa/Corbis)

upon the Alevi communities as Shiite (Shia) Muslims, has always imposed Sunni practices on them; for example, undertaking the building of mosques in their villages and paying the salary of the Sunni *imam* (Muslim cleric) appointed there, and requiring their children to attend Sunni religious and ethics courses at school. This offensive attitude toward the Alevis has increased their alienation from the state and forced them ultimately to contest this religious discrimination in court. Until recently, they were not allowed to open a house of gathering or communal building (*cemevi*), which is a place of fundamental importance for their rituals.

Starting in the 1950s, Alevis gradually left their isolated villages in the highlands to immigrate to urban centers, usually creating distinctly Alevi quarters and refusing to mix with Sunnis through marriage. Their integration into the cultural mainstream by practicing the profession of their choice brought them into direct contact and competition with the Sunnis and fueled the overt and covert antagonism between them. Because Alevis have identified more with the left in Turkey, extremist right-wing Sunni citizens have fallen easily into bloody Sunni-Alevi clashes. During the politically and economically unstable period of the 1970s, anti-Alevi activities in some cities resulted in violent incidents and mass murders.

For decades, official policy undermined Kurdish identity, but in the 1970s, Kurdish nationalism began to challenge this view. The measures taken during the military regime of 1980–1983 to repress this movement backfired and alienated even more Kurds; they became sympathizers or supporters of the PKK, a separatist group fighting with brutal violence for the liberation of the Kurds. The PKK leader, Abdullah Öcalan, was captured, tried, and convicted of treason in 1999. The PKK took on another name, opting to defend its cause politically. Empathy for the PKK still lingers today, and some of the Kurds in southeast Turkey are known to take offense when PKK is categorized as a terrorist group.

The first half of the 1990s witnessed a bill that lifted the ban on speaking in Kurdish. Later, Kurds were free to celebrate the Kurdish New Year (*Newroz*), though displaying the Kurdish tri-colors (green, red, and yellow) of independence was considered suspect. The 1990s was also the period for ill-fated Kurdish-backed political parties. They were closed down due to separatist activity, and some Kurdish members of parliament were imprisoned for backing the PKK. As of 2000, however, people were permitted to give Kurdish names to their children and, more recently, Kurdish was among the courses offered at private language schools.

Nonetheless, PKK terrorism—which lasted from 1987 to 2000 and still continues sporadically—did take a toll both in the high number of casualties and in the nonstop out-migration that left some towns and villages depopulated. These developments made the Turks in western locations more conscious and anxious about the Kurdish presence in their midst. At the same time, the Kurdish pockets in the metropolises developed a heightened ethnic consciousness that had previously been confined to their rural brethren.

In spite of a ravaging earthquake in 1999 that hit an industrial belt in the northwest and a crippling economic crisis, Turkey has been experiencing an economic progression since the turn of the 21st century. Though its geopolitical importance is an asset in the accession negotiations for the EU, the same is not true for the majority of Turkey's young population. In spite of some highly qualified bilingual or multilingual university graduates in demand by high tech industries, the inadequate and overcrowded state education system continues to neglect vocational training; the system generally fails to equip youth with the range of skills required in the secondary and tertiary sectors. There have been radical legal reforms prompted by the EU, but the human factor in Turkey's judicial and administrative systems is in need of urgent attention. A new mentality must be adopted and internalized for the democratic implementation of this legislation that will sustain a tolerant and culturally diverse society.

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