

A YOUNG OTTOMAN GENERAL AND THE EMERGANCE OF A NATIONAL LEADER

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Macedonia is well known in history for its great sons: Alexander the Great and Justinianus are two distinguished figures among these outstanding statesmen. Another leader, who led history into new paths, was also born in this land. He created a new republic in Anatolia. The historical role of this leader has been variously interpreted and evaluated among his countrymen and among foreigners. Official turkish historiography and some popular western sources seem to argue that Turkey, a country living under the despotism of sultans, and a people with a medieval standard of living, were led through Atatürk's reforms into the modern age. According to their descriptions, Atatürk was a superman even among the leading figures of history.

On the other hand, especially some turkish authors of the last decades seem to neglect and underestimate the reforms of the Kemalist era: they say that these reforms did not change the socio-economic structure of the country, and they identify the Kemalist era with an élitist rule, of which the like had never been seen during the whole history of Turkey. Some authors claim that the Kemalist era was an automatic and inevitable result of the normal evolution of turkish history, adding that there should be no reason to glorify Kemal Atatürk's reforms. All of these interpretations are continjous re-evaluations of a great turkish statesman. The writer thinks that these variations are a result of a democratised political atmosphere, and

came about as a result of the sort of historiography which in fact was born through the Kemalist reforms.

Great leaders are neither a simple means of changing the course of history, such as proposed by Tolstoy, nor a major force, as proposed by Caryle. Great leaders play their role by using the conditions of their time to re-write history. Turkey has a more developed secular political system and is structurally closer to the metropolitan social structure by comparison to some other middle-eastern countries, even though some of these have had similar historical and economic evolutions; if so, then history cannot be analysed in an orthodox deterministic way. The role of the great leaders should be evaluated in a more flexible approach. No doubt the Kemalist reforms are neither the first, nor the last in human history. In some sense, to understand the meaning of the Kemalist policy and reforms, it would be well to bear in mind such examples as the era of Peter the Great in Russia, and even Sun Yat Sen in China. But the main point is to understand the differences between the Kemalist reforms and the earlier reforms in Turkish history. Although Kemalism used an anti-democratic expression, it enabled the emergence of democracy and created the conditions for a larger political participation. The writer thinks that in the long run every political party or ideology is fated to bless Atatürk's achievement.

Atatürk was born in 1881 as the son of a lower middle class family in Thessaloniki. At that time, Thessaloniki was one of the most cosmopolitan and westernized cities of the Ottoman Empire. Like Byrouth and İzmir, Thessaloniki also had a more liberal and westernized life style than İstanbul. In the last decades of the Empire, the city was the centre of revolutionary thought and actions.

In the boiling pot of Macedonia, Mustafa Kemal came face to face in his young years with the problems of the Empire and took his place among the people who tried to solve these problems. The year 1881 was a turning point in the history of the Ottoman Empire. The Ottoman Ministry

of Finance had proclaimed bankruptcy and the Ottoman Debt Administration (*Duyun-u Umumiye*) was established by foreign powers to control the Ottoman financial structure. In the same year, Midhat Paşa, the Father of Constitutional Monarchy and liberalism was tried and sentenced to exile. The Empire was in decline, but the Young Turk Movement was emerging. Atatürk was born in a world full of revolutionary potential. The early death of his father Ali Rıza Efendi, who was a small customs officer did not prevent his education. The *unique* scholarship system of the Ottomans, which gave young people the opportunity to study in religious, civil and military schools, enabled them to reach the highest military and administrative positions in the Empire. Since the XVth century, the Ottoman State apparatus had been recruiting young men from among the poorest classes of society, instead of members of wealthy and influential groups, who were suspected of harbouring feelings of rebellion against the full authority of the Sultan. But even those recruits who were trained to be loyal to the Sultan revolted in the last centuries of the Empire, since they considered themselves as the masters and responsible figures of the State. In the XIXth century, these civil and military Bureaucrats showed their rebellious character by introducing a parliamentary régime in the Ottoman Empire. The young officer Mustafa Kemal also took part in the revolutionary movement which aimed to change the dark future of the country. He started his political career among the progressive military and bureaucratic groups.

The Ottoman Empire did not have a hereditary aristocracy, in the sense understood in the West. Even today, it is very rare to meet a family which possesses a family-tree. The descendants of a Pasha could be discredited within one or two generations. On the other hand, children of poor families reached through education such posts as Grand-vizier or vizier. Mustafa Kemal was one of these intelligent self-made young men, and after his military training, he was well on the way to the top of the military hierarchy in the Empire. But the historical conditions and his radical

ideals led him to play a different role, as the founder of a new republic.

The Ottoman officer was different from any of his European counterparts, both in education and in his virtues. The modernization of the Ottoman Army in the XIXth century introduced a certain amount of secular and modern education. In these new military schools, young officers were given new skills in order to enable them to understand the modern world. Civil education was as important as the military one. Thus, the graduates of the military schools were not only professional officers: the result of this education was a social type: the upper class Ottoman officer and gentleman. His social manner, his worldliness, his culture and his "Weltanschauung" had flexibility and pragmatism which were more realistic than mere soldierly forcefulness and conservatism. The Ottoman officer of the XIXth and the early XXth century was in some sense anti-clerical. The reason was that the western type of education created a particular type of unemployment for those who had a religious education, namely, the members of the *Ulema*. The candidates for the *Ulema* had ceased to have brilliant prospects and hopes for a good career. This caused a struggle between the civil and religious bureaucracy. The great conflict of March 31st 1909, when the Mollas supporting Sultan Abdulhamid II started to kill every young officer and clerk (*mektepli*) whom they met on the streets of İstanbul, was a confirmation of this state of affairs.

The Ottoman officer was as brilliant and fashionable as his civil bureaucratic counterpart. He was appointed for a few years to the Dodecanese or to Macedonia, then after to Syria or Tripolis. His personal experiences and expeditions, short or long stays in three continents gave him a special ability to understand the world and human character. Mustafa Kemal was one of the prominent members of this class. The fact that his future colleagues emerged from the same class was not a simple coincidence. Although Mustafa Kemal was no believer in any political ideology, he played a prominent role in the movement

known as "Union and Progress", even though he was not a member of, and after in conflict with the central nucleus of leaders in the movement. His future colleagues and friends (İsmet, Fevzi Pasha and others) were, like him, pragmatists with no definite ideology. Because of this pragmatic attitude, Atatürk has become a leader who is invoked or appropriated by different ideological groups. His flexible, day-to-day policy has been the cause for this political phenomenon. Here we remember Hegel: "World historical individuals, who have accomplished their tasks, become a mere husk."

Kemal Atatürk was not a Kemalist; Kemalism is a post Atatürk ideology. His indisputable legacy is his peace-oriented foreign policy, especially friendship with the Balkans and Middle-Eastern countries, which was later abandoned by Turkish governments. Every republican, or person who considers the advent of the republic as a happy and necessary aspect of Turkish history, respects him deeply.

He used every political means while realising his historical mission. Unlike the Ottoman intellectuals of the last century, he has not been in Europe except for a few short visits. He has been mostly in European provinces of the Empire such as Monastir and Thessaloniki, and as military attaché he has been to Sophia, the capital of the Bulgarian Kingdom. Therefore, he could study and observe the results of westernization in these Balkan countries, more closely. Like the rest of the Ottoman intelligentsia, he also suffered the manifold problems of Ottoman semi-modernisation.

This situation led him, in earlier years, to radical ideas concerning a change in the structure of Turkish society. But till he attained full power, he followed the eclectic and permanent ways of a Ottoman Pasha. This was the character of his political leadership.

Through his reforms he opened the way for the development of capitalistic society and pluralistic democracy. His foreign policy and nationalism was different from the

Young Turks'. Unlike them, he tried to build ententes between the Balkan countries, whereas the others only hated them. He tried to understand and apply the main institutions of European civilization in Turkey where the others considered them only with xenophobia... His leading personality and activity in the foreign policy of the Balkan countries gave him a distinguished feature in the history of the Balkans.