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British Perceptions of Turkey and Turks in the Mid-Twentieth Century

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Abstract

A permanent British embassy has been present in Constantinople (İstanbul) since 1583, and William Harborne, a merchant and former member of parliament, was appointed as Britain's first ambassador. The main British interest in developing diplomatic relations with Turkey at this time was to promote trade, but even during Harborne's time, political interest in British friendship with Turkey had also gained importance. Between 1583 and the outbreak of the First World War in 1914, Britain's permanent diplomatic presence in Turkey was unbroken. Diplomatic relations between the two countries were severed for ten years between 1914 and 1924. Following the establishment of the republic in 1923, friendly diplomatic relationships between the two countries began to develop. This article presents the observations of three British Ambassadors to Turkey, Sir James Bowker, Sir Alexander Knox Helm and Sir Roderick Sarell, on the characteristics of the Turks and the situation in Turkey. A major theme of the article is British diplomats' perceptions of Turkish politics, diplomacy and society, particularly in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, an era of fundamental and lasting changes for Turkey, as it was for Britain. The article touches specifically upon the British embassy's evaluations of the Democrat Party governments of the 1950s, and the military regime that succeeded them in 1960.

Key words: Sir James Bowker, Sir Alexander Knox Helm, Sir Roderick Sarell, Turkey, Britain

1. Sir Alexander Knox Helm's Observations on Turkey and the Turks

Sir Alexander Knox Helm, (23 March 1893 – 7 March 1964) served as British ambassador to Turkey (1951-1954), and was the last Governor-General of the Sudan. He was educated at Dumfries Academy and King's College, Cambridge. In 1912, after passing the second division clerkship examination, he was appointed to the Foreign Office, where he served as a member of the East Registry. When the First World War broke out, he was keen to volunteered and was allowed by the Foreign Office to join his field artillery unit. He was promoted to second lieutenant in 1917 and served in that capacity in Palestine. As a clerk, he had performed only routine duties, but stood out because of his assiduity and retentive memory. At the end of the war, he was selected under the special recruitment scheme for filling vacancies left by the war, and consequently appointed to the Levant Consular Service. Following a short period of training in Oriental languages at King's College, Cambridge, he was appointed as Vice-Consul to Thessaloniki, and then became third Dragoman at Constantinople (İstanbul).[1] With the establishment of the Republic of Turkey, the Turkish capital moved to Ankara and the office of Dragoman was abolished. Hence, Helm was appointed there as Second Secretary. He later served there as Consul, and in 1930 was transferred to the Foreign Office, working in the Eastern Department. In 1937, he was appointed as Consul to Addis Ababa and, with the outbreak of the Second World War, was moved to the British Embassy at Washington, D.C., where he dealt with the complex issues

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[1] For more information for British diplomacy in Turkey see G. R. Berridge, **British Diplomacy in Turkey, 1583 to the present, A study in the evolution of the resident embassy**, Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, Leiden, 2009.

surrounding the supply of petroleum to the United Kingdom. In 1942, he went back to Ankara, a key post at that time, as Counsellor. In 1946, he went as British representative to Hungary, and when normal diplomatic relations were restored in 1947, he was made Minister there. In 1949, he was appointed as the first British Chargé d'Affaires, and later Minister, to Tel Aviv in the new State of Israel, where he spent two *'happy and fruitful'* years. Following this, in 1951, he was appointed as Ambassador to Turkey, where he stayed until 1954, when he reached retirement age. However, he then went to Khartoum in 1955, where he spent a brief period of time as the last Governor-General.[2] On his death, *The Times* described him as follows:

> Helm was a man of strong character and great determination. A tenacious and forceful negotiator, he had great powers of persuasion and a remarkable sense of timing – valuable gifts which were supplemented with a sense of humour and of proportion and a charm which was genuine: few people can ever have said 'No' in a more pleasant way. He was an exacting chief but popular with his staff, who always knew that he could do any of their jobs better than they could themselves. Moreover, he was always ready to listen to their advice, but equally he invariably made up his own mind. He retained to the end the accent and intonation of the Dumfriesshire farming stock from which he came and his love for and understanding of the things of the soil often stood him in good stead in posts where agricultural problems bulked large in the economy of the country.[3]

Before leaving Turkey prior to his retirement from the British Foreign Service, Helm sent a valedictory despatch to the Foreign Office on the characteristics of the Turks and the situation in Turkey between 1920 and 1953. As he said, although his final appointment dated only from December 1951, sixteen of his thirty-four years' service had been spent in Turkey. Moreover, he had witnessed first hand most of the dramatic changes which had occurred in Turkey during the years 1920 to 1953.[4]

One of Knox Helm's earliest memories of Turkey was the occupation of Constantinople (İstanbul) on the 16th of March 1920. Battleships and battle-cruisers, mainly British, but also French, Italian, Japanese, Greek, and even Russian filled the Bosphorous and the city was occupied by the Allies. However, Mustafa Kemal had already started his Nationalist movement and established himself in Ankara, which was later proclaimed the capital of the new republic in October 1923, just after the last allied troops had left Turkey. Helm was subsequently dispatched to Ankara, his first memory of which was a cold frosty January morning in 1926 on which he was in the process of acquiring the property on which the British Embassy currently stands. Its first permanent building was completed just before his first tour of duty in Ankara ended in September 1930, by which time Anglo-Turkish relations were beginning to shake off the effects of the First World War and its aftermath.[5]

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[2] ***Who Was Who,*** (1920-2008), Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2012, on line edn. [Accessed 15 July 2018].
[3] ***The Times,*** 10 March 1964, p. 16. ***The Times,*** 16 March 1964, p. 12.
[4] National Archives of Australia (hereafter NAA): A1838, 209/2/1 Part 1 (Turkey-Political Developments-General), From Sir K. Helm to Eden, 20 January 1954.
[5] NAA: A1838, 209/2/1 Part 1 (Turkey-Political Developments-General), From Sir K. Helm to Eden, 20 January 1954.

Helm's second tour (1942-46) was eventful. Turkey was a neutral yet cooperative ally, and Germany, namely Herr von Papen, was intensely and actively anti-British. The period culminated in the Adana and Cairo Conferences, both of which he attended, and the last-minute entry of Turkey into the war on Allies' side. On the latter, he comments that he doubted *'whether in the light of post-war events Turkey's general wartime policy could be seriously criticised from the British point of view.'*[6]

These two years prior to his departure from Turkey in 1954 were relatively uneventful. However, against the background of 1920 there was material enough for a volume, he said. He adds: *'Sometimes I feel the urge to write it but I doubt whether I ever will. Suffice it here merely to say that the wreckage of 1920 has given place to a dynamic State bent on modernisation within, cultivated by all the major Powers without, and by its example and precept playing a significant part on the world stage.'*[7]

However, he avoided writing about more detailed memories, and he resisted the temptation to set about forecasting future developments. These would come apparent in the years ahead. Similarly, he abstained from any detailed stocktaking, which he claimed had been covered in the course of normal reporting. However, there was one subject which he deemed to be a fitting subject for his despatch: Atatürk's aim to modernise or westernise Turkey. To what extent had the past three decades furthered his life's work? Turkey remained geographically in the Middle East, but was no longer oriental. Indeed, the country claimed to be western. To what extent was that claim justified in 1954?[8]

It was becoming fashionable to represent Atatürk as the consummator, rather than the pioneer, of reform, and to point out that the Ottoman Empire was the geographical heir of Byzantium, that it had regular contacts with Europe, and that by the end of the nineteenth century, the Sultans were beginning to acknowledge western influences. All this was true, as Helm remarks: *'Mustafa Kemal himself was the product of these influences, and even the prestige that he acquired as the saviour of his country would not have sufficed for his reforms without the active support of many of his fellow citizens and the acquiescence of many more.'*[9]

In terms of the westernisation process, Turkey had had a head start over its Middle Eastern neighbours. Nevertheless, the intellectual activities and partial westernisation of the previous century should not obscure the fact that when Mustafa Kemal rose to power, Turkey had become geographically an Asiatic State, and that Anatolian society was still dedicated to Islam, and to the political, social, economic and cultural theories

[6] NAA: A1838, 209/2/1 Part 1 (Turkey-Political Developments-General), From Sir K. Helm to Eden, 20 January 1954.
[7] NAA: A1838, 209/2/1 Part 1 (Turkey-Political Developments-General), From Sir K. Helm to Eden, 20 January 1954.
[8] NAA: A1838, 209/2/1 Part 1 (Turkey-Political Developments-General), From Sir K. Helm to Eden, 20 January 1954.
[9] NAA: A1838, 209/2/1 Part 1 (Turkey-Political Developments-General), From Sir K. Helm to Eden, 20 January 1954.

connected with that religion. Mustafa Kemal and his colleagues and heirs set themselves to remove this society from its Middle Eastern and Islamic context, to make it look westwards and to impose on it many of the forms and much of the ideology of Western society. Today's (2019) Turkey is the fruit of these efforts, and represents an hitherto unparalleled effort to transform the whole national life of a country in modern history.[10]

The claim to be western was most apparent in Turkish foreign policy. Unlike other Middle Eastern countries, Turkey went hook, line and sinker regarding relations with the western nations and was determined to make them consider it as one of themselves. At the same time, Turkey turned away from its Moslem neighbours in the east, although care was taken to maintain friendly relations with them. The Turks liked to view Middle Eastern problems from a European aspect, though often with a claim to special understanding of the mentality of their former subjects. In this many of them were occasionally betrayed by their still lively suspicions of Western *'imperialism'*, a legacy from their Middle Eastern past from which they were not yet quite freed. Hence, their sentimental sympathy for the Iranians almost balanced out their recognition of Britain's rights in Abadan, and the pressure of public opinion forced the Turkish Government to modify their original pro-French stand on the North African issue. However, this did not affect the overall outline of their foreign policy, which, ever dominated by the Russian menace, was conceived along Western lines and executed, as best as possible, in Western fashion.[11]

Turkish foreign policy was determined by an élite and strongly imbued with Western ideas, and Helm said: *'my purpose must rather be to enquire how far the Western modes of life and thought which Ataturk tried to impose have taken root and transformed Turkish society as a whole'*. At a surface level, laicism had triumphed over Islam. The whole political structure of Islam had been disposed of with the Caliphate. Nationality had replaced religion as the means of distinction between societies, and religious considerations were not allowed to have a direct influence on public policy. Religious societies were prohibitted, and the power of organised religion had been broken. The only Moslem nation to do so, Turkey had attempted to give religion a place in the national life similar to that which it held in the liberal countries of the West; and the apparent success supported the country's claim to be Western. However, Islam was a whole way of life, and the reality of religious influence ran much deeper.[12]

On life in provincial Turkey, Helm notes that visitors to many Turkish villages would be right to conclude that *'Allah has not been dethroned at all.'* For the peasantry, and the dwellers of small provincial towns, particularly in Eastern Turkey, the old Islamic way of life still had a stronghold. Although abandoned in favour of the Swiss civil code, the canon law of Islam was still widely accepted as the personal law. Although the State

[10] NAA: A1838, 209/2/1 Part 1 (Turkey-Political Developments-General), From Sir K. Helm to Eden, 20 January 1954.
[11] NAA: A1838, 209/2/1 Part 1 (Turkey-Political Developments-General), From Sir K. Helm to Eden, 20 January 1954.
[12] NAA: A1838, 209/2/1 Part 1 (Turkey-Political Developments-General), From Sir K. Helm to Eden, 20 January 1954.

decreed monogamy and recognised only civil marriage, many villagers went through a religious form of marriage, and some were said to take advantage of their Moslem privilege of polygamy. Religious observances such as prayer and fasting still flourished, mosques were still full, and anyone who had performed the pilgrimage or who could read the Arabic script was held in respect. In the villages and in towns east of Ankara the sight of veiled or partially veiled women was not exceptional. External appearance suggested that women's drudgery had not decreased, and their rights, for all practical purposes, no greater than they had been. However, the revolution had brought about great changes, even in remote communities. Unveiled women, for example, were not molested, and outside the family, the secular structure of the State had deprived religious opinion of its final sanctions, other than where these were voluntarily accepted. Thus, although the mass of people had shown a natural resistance to attempts to change their own way of life, they had generally begun to accept the fact that they would have to live with some fellow citizens who would live according to imported Western standards. On this matter Helm added, *'if the Turkish revolution maintains its momentum, these new values might be expected progressively to oust the old.'*[13]

It was at this point that Turkey's westernising elite met with their first dilemma. In the early years of the republic, their eagerness to change the Islamic way of life often led them to violate both Islamic beliefs and the ancient superstitions which constituted the fabric of Anatolia. For example, the tombs of saints were often not only closed but destroyed; and the call to prayer in Arabic was forbidden. The *'laicism'* of Atatürk and the People's Republican Party had a strong anti-religious tendency, which was probably essential for the revolution to be successful. When the Democrat Party came to power in 1950, they proclaimed that their conception of laicism was not anti-religious and that the Turks were free to practise their faith as Moslems, on the condition that religion was not used as an instrument of politics. They allowed the rebuilding of the saints' tombs and the use of Arabic in the call to prayer. New mosques, often financed by State enterprises, appeared everywhere, and there were other concessions to religious opinion. The Democrats' attitude suggested a Western, even *'Protestant'*, conception of religious belief as an influence on theological thinking and moral conduct only. However, its application to Islam was the cause of much confusion of thought, and it occasionally encouraged religious reaction.[14]

When the Prime Minister Adnan Menderes said that *'Turks were, are, and always will be Moslems and free to worship'*, he probably meant the restricted, *'laic'*, form of Islam that Helm had mentioned. However, for his audiences, who were missing the old ways, the word *'Moslem'* probably had a more comprehensive, traditional connotation. This was why the Democrats' attempt to preserve both the Moslem religion (in the Western sense of the word) and the laic State got them into difficulties. The pious Moslems and the conservative masses, who were never really touched by the reforms, were

[13] NAA: A1838, 209/2/1 Part 1 (Turkey-Political Developments-General), From Sir K. Helm to Eden, 20 January 1954.
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encouraged by the more favourable attitude of the authorities towards religion. Consequently, they had begun to practice openly Moslem customs and observances which they had hitherto temporarily abandoned or practised clandestinely. Turks from the large towns, who had developed separately from their countrymen in the rural areas and believed in the effectiveness of the reforms, were beginning to travel in the eastern provinces and return shocked by the *'reactionary'* practices they had seen. However, this *'reaction'* was not new, but the sum of the beliefs and customs to which the Anatolian peasants had always remained faithful. What was new, and potentially dangerous, was that the situation was clear and present and could no longer be swept under the carpet. It would be tempting for parties seeking power, and to the peasants themselves, who had tasted their power in the general elections of 1950, to exploit this situation. The Democrat leaders had recognised their dilemma, which could explain their bursts of panic legislation to protect the legacy of Atatürk's laicism that punctuated periods of liberalism.[15]

Regarding the peasantry, the difficulties of westernisation and the danger of reaction was largely due to the fact that it was not easy to untwine the various strands of Islamic belief and practice that had existed in Anatolia for centuries, let alone allow them to thrive in isolation. A similar danger was present, albeit less obvious and working in a different manner, with the towndwellers and the young men and women who had been brought up on the ideals of the republic. In the campaign against the Moslem way of life and thought the essential,*'religious'*, beliefs of Islam suffered. In fact, most of the young people who had graduated from the universities in the 1950s had received little or no religious education at all. Rather, they had beem brought up on Western, or pseudo-Western, ideas and methods, and taught certain Western civic virtues, in particular a crude form of nationalism. In Helm's words, they 'seemed to have created out of Ataturk a kind of national myth, the personification of the new Turk and the super-Turk to come; and as dogma, they had Ataturk's famous words *'Ne Mutlu Türküm Diyene':* how proud is he who can say, '*I am a Turk.'*[16]

The *'ill-digested violent ideas'* of Ziya Gökalp, the *'Ataturk myth'*, and the belief in Turkish superiority acted as an impetus to the new Turkey during Ataturk's lifetime and for a decade after his death. However, by the 1950s, Ataturk was fading from *'living god'* to idol, and even his infallibility was sometimes called into question, albeit cautiously. Moreover, the country was more open than before to foreign, particularly American, influences. *'Ne Mutlu Türküm Diyene'* no longer sufficed. Something more substantial than the myths and dogmas of Kemalism was needed. For many of those to whom Western materialism was not enough, Islam seemed to be the solution.[17]

[15] NAA: A1838, 209/2/1 Part 1 (Turkey-Political Developments-General), From Sir K. Helm to Eden, 20 January 1954.
[16] NAA: A1838, 209/2/1 Part 1 (Turkey-Political Developments-General), From Sir K. Helm to Eden, 20 January 1954.
[17] NAA: A1838, 209/2/1 Part 1 (Turkey-Political Developments-General), From Sir K. Helm to Eden, 20 January 1954.

The educated youth needed something to set up against a Christian West, to which they could not fully belong. As a consequence, they began to emphasise that they, and all Turks, were Moslems as well as Kemalists and laicists. However, they had little knowledge about Islam, and there was nobody to teach them. This had been the price of the attack on Islam. In a confidential minute, which Helm sent to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs about a Mufti for Cyprus, the Prime Minister was reported to be obliged to confess that the only persons in Turkey with theological qualifications were *'aged reactionaries'*. In Helm's words, *'the more thoughtful young men and women aspire to be Moslem in the way that a not very devout Englishman was Christian'*. Their hope was for a new Islam that was disestablished and separated from politics, social and intellectual life. Such an approach to faith, confined to pure religion and ethics, would be compatible with laicism and westernisation. However, it would not be justifiable within the framework of the history of Islam. Neither would it have substantial intellectual and theological content. It was doubtful whether such an approach to religion could last.[18]

Moreover, there was a small minority of the young and educated who sought a living, positive Islam. These could never be satisfied with the diluted version that Helm had described above. For them, Islam was more traditional and more assertive. Although they were unlikely to want to reject all innovations and adopt the whole social and intellectual structure of Islam, they were reactionary enough to think about excluding women from public life. Their outlook could be considered the most logical, and it was possible that they could contribute to a new form of Islam that was relieved of its old social ideas, but still spiritually and intellectually satisfying. This constituted a formidable obstacle in the heritage of the Kemalists, who had severed themselves from its intellectual foundations, and aimed to do the same for their fellow citizens. The youth were ignorant of the religion, and there was nobody to teach them a new form. There was nobody who was equipped to take on the daunting task of reconciling Islam and westernisation. Thus, the only form of active religion available to the Turkish youth was historical *'reactionary'* Islam. The only possible teachers in Turkey, as the Prime Minister had said, were elders who were opposed to the Kemalist revolutions. Although Turkey's need for modernist, but well-grounded, religious teaching was recognised occasionally, no one had yet dared to take on the problem seriously. While this was happening, it was highly probable that the number of xenophobe young Moslems might increase. This would make them a significant factor, because they belonged to the ruling classes. Moreover, they had potential allies in the conservative peasantry.[19]

The same effects were observed in the artistic and intellectual life of modern Turkey. The Kemalists aimed at replacing both Islamic styles and ways of thought by European. In the early years of the republic, only European music was played on the radio. Now, however, eastern songs and dances were as frequent as symphony and jazz, and without

[18] NAA: A1838, 209/2/1 Part 1 (Turkey-Political Developments-General), From Sir K. Helm to Eden, 20 January 1954.
[19] NAA: A1838, 209/2/1 Part 1 (Turkey-Political Developments-General), From Sir K. Helm to Eden, 20 January 1954.

a doubt preferred by all but a very small minority of Turks. In literature, Arabic and Persian models, which had begun to lose popularity in the nineteenth century, were finally abandoned with the Arabic script. The prose and poetry of the new Turkey was garbed in Western attire. Ankara's architecture was based entirely on Western traditions. Replacing the *'static, ornamental forms'* that characterised Islamic art, the art of modern Turkey, resembled that of Western Europe, that is 'expressive and dynamic'.[20]

Helm considered these developments as unsurprising, because *'the Turks had always lacked artistic originality'*. He remarks that the literary products of the revolution were *'not very inspiring'*, adding however, that these works, and translations from European classics, were all that the Turkish youth could read. Helm wrote that the Turks had been left with a poor cultural heritage, having been cut off from the Arabic script and the abundance of Arabic and Persian words and expressions that came with it. They had been severed from Islamic culture, and yet not comfortable with Western. He foresaw that the impact of the West may lead the Turks to mimic American materialism or, alternatively, may drive them in search of something purely Turkish *'and therefore inimitable'*. Meanwhile there was a reaction against the Turkish Language Association, which was Ataturk's instrument of language reform. The glories of the Ottoman Empire, which had until recently been de-emphasised in favour of the early Turks and their supposed Hittite ancestors, were now being depicted in magazines, books, films, and even strip cartoons. As an example of this tendency, Helm gave the inclusion in a recent National Day Review of a detachment in the uniforms of the Janissaries, though inspired by ceremonial display in London. All this was permissible, and compatible with westernisation. Yet the dervish orders, and in particular the Mevlevi and the Bektashi, which were unique expressions of the Turkish spirit, were prohibited. Their spirit was far from dead, however. The rituals of the largely rural Bektashi order were still celebrated secretly in some villages. In recent years the Mevlevi, which was an urban order with an intellectual appeal, had been replaced by *'a kind of mystique of Konya'*. Konya was the former centre of the order, and had almost become a place of pilgrimages for intellectuals. Significantly, Helm underlines that *'[s]o characteristic of Turkey were the religious orders, and so great the gap which their dissolution opened in Turkish culture, that some observers believed that the authorities would one day be moved to allow them to reorganise themselves, perhaps on masonic lines, provided they could be guaranteed not to acquire power in the State'*.[21]

When the religion and culture of Islam was removed, it took with it a whole system of thought whose foundations were very different from that of modern Europe. Although it defied simple definition, there was a distinction between not only the associations of ideas, but also the very processes and categories of thought in both frameworks. Helm stated that the litmus test of the westernisation of Turkey would be to investigate

[20] NAA: A1838, 209/2/1 Part 1 (Turkey-Political Developments-General), From Sir K. Helm to Eden, 20 January 1954.
[21] NAA: A1838, 209/2/1 Part 1 (Turkey-Political Developments-General), From Sir K. Helm to Eden, 20 January 1954.

whether the educated Turk thought like a European, the answer to which he thought would 'of course, be highly speculative'. Modern Turkish education was undoubtedly Western in intention – it taught Western ideas on Western subjects with Western methods. However, Helm did not believe that it was a Western education in the real sense, rather a superficial one: *'The products of this education were almost always superficial, and sometimes disconcerting. Their attitude appeared to be Western, yet few of them had truly grasped the Western values that were implicit in the education to which they had been submitted.'*[22] He continued to state that although educated Turks would write and argue on Western subjects with Western methods, they had *'sudden and unexpected blind spots, points at which one feels that they were not being 'European'*. Helm gave the imitative nature of the education as a possible explanation for this. Briefly, the Turks were being presented with *'ready-made'* ideas, to which their ancestors had had no contribution. Thus, they tended to jump to *'rash conclusions on insufficient evidence'*. Moreover, they had a limited capacity for research, and *'lacked staying power in thought and planning'*. At times they would lose self-confidence, and revert to suspicion of Western ideas, as if they did not trust the mental process that they had been taught, but did not fully understand. Nevertheless, the Turks still aspired consciously to a Western mind. Perhaps it was that they had *'achieved the forms, but not the spirit, of Western thinking'*.[23]

Helm remarked that the most significant step in the transformation of Turkish society and manners was the emancipation of women. Indeed, this had made much more advance in Turkey than in any other country in the Middle East, and was perhaps the most outwardly observable aspect of the country's westernisation. Nevertheless, it could not be said that, in reality, Turkish women had achieved the rights or social treatment that their Western sisters had. Even in the new and old capital cities, Ankara and Istanbul, few women enjoyed the freedom to the degree that had been accustomed to in the West. Feelings regarding gender equality ran very deep and were not open to change. In the less developed regions of the country, the pressure of male members of the family often denied women access to the fundamental freedoms decreed by Kemalism. Indeed, even in the most forward-thinking circles they were very few families that would allow a daughter to marry a non-Moslem, although this might be possible for a son. However, despite these setbacks developments had to be made, and Turkish women were following in the footsteps of their Western counterparts. Their new status had already had a profound effect on social life and manners, and they did not want to go back.[24]

Many new activities in the field of leisure had also been imported from the West, the success of which was particularly noteworthy in the large towns and among the youth. Similarly, there was a growth of Western-style intellectual activity that was promoted

[22] NAA: A1838, 209/2/1 Part 1 (Turkey-Political Developments-General), From Sir K. Helm to Eden, 20 January 1954.
[23] NAA: A1838, 209/2/1 Part 1 (Turkey-Political Developments-General), From Sir K. Helm to Eden, 20 January 1954.
[24] NAA: A1838, 209/2/1 Part 1 (Turkey-Political Developments-General), From Sir K. Helm to Eden, 20 January 1954.

by the *Halkevis* (People's Houses), and also expressed in institutions such as historical societies. Helm comments that although this intellectual activity was poor in quality, it was high in ideal. On Ottoman society Sir Charles Eliot had remarked that the Turkish language, in spite of its rich vocabulary, contained no equivalent for the word *'interesting'*, the reason being that the Turks had *'no conception of the active life of the intellect which can alone give meaning to the word'*. However, in 1954, the French-origin word *'enteressan'* was in common use; which, in Helm's opinion, was evidence of a new attitude and its origin. Nevertheless, the new physical and intellectual recreations of Turkish society shared a similar fate with other Western cultural imports, and were on the whole limited to a few towns and to school children. On the matter of leisure, Helm concludes that Atatürk's successors were not very active themselves, and that *'the word "hobby" would still have no meaning to most Turks: it was not only in the villages that "keyf", the bliss of inert contentment, was preferred to active recreation or even talk'*.[25]

Turkey accepted Western technology and industrial, commercial and financial methods readily and with less reserve than other countries in the region. However, they did not quite achieve Western standards in these fields, and Turkish methods of agricultural production and marketing lagged behind the Western norm. On the other hand, in industrial management and welfare the Turks had a clear lead over their neighbours: *'they run their own railways, sea and airlines well, their factories and housing estates had a Western appearance, and a "working-class" in the Western sense was beginning to emerge'*. It could not be denied that in some areas, such as trades unions and labour relations, Turkey had adopted the form but not the content of Western organisation and legislation. Nevertheless, the economic and financial structure of the country had been based on a Western model, businesses were run according to Western norms, and the Turks had made efforts to westernise their attitude towards international trade and finance. It was inexperience that held them back, because up until the revolution the Turks had left these fields to the minorities and foreigners. Moreover, a mindset that was similar to that which affected their views on *'imperialism'* did not help. For example, although they wished to attract foreign capital to Turkey, their *'inherited suspicion of exploitation'* meant that they found it difficult to acknowledge the necessity that they made conditions more attractive to foreign investors, who would be concerned with the profit they would make, not the Turks. Helm also gave the example of events that had happened a year previously, in which the Turkish Government attempted to blackmail the British Government into buying Turkish products, which he remarked was *'a little reminiscent of the old Turks'* love of plundering minorities and foreigners, many of whom, it must be confessed, had previously done well out of the Turks'.[26]

The Ottoman Government had been based on distinctions of religion, not of race or nationality. On the whole, it functioned for the maintenance of the ruling institution, and

[25] NAA: A1838, 209/2/1 Part 1 (Turkey-Political Developments-General), From Sir K. Helm to Eden, 20 January 1954.
[26] NAA: A1838, 209/2/1 Part 1 (Turkey-Political Developments-General), From Sir K. Helm to Eden, 20 January 1954.

perhaps also for the salvation of its Moslem subjects. What it certainly did not function for was material progress, improvement, or even conservation of the territories it administered. In contrast, the machinery of the new Turkish government was westernised: in structure and appearance, entirely; and in spirit and theory to a large degree. It was nationality, not religion, that was now the most important factor; and the administration was expected to work in the interests of the people as a whole. This it managed to succeed to a surprising degree. Although corruption and nepotism were still widespread, it was clear that a new *'cadre of young and able civil servants whose hearts were in their jobs and who were out to serve their country'* was emerging. They were no better paid, nor had they received a better education than their counterparts in the other regional countries. What made them stand out, like the youth of Turkey as a whole, was that they had nurtured a sense of responsibility and a positive patriotism. These were rare Western characteristic in the Middle East, where nationalism and patriotism were too often synonymous with xenophobia. Helm concludes on this matter by saying: *'A Turkish patriot may be anti-foreign, but he does work for his country's good.'*[27]

In the 1950s, parliamentary democracy was Turkey's *'latest and proudest import from the West'*. Political parties were organised according to Western criteria, and the press had considerable, if not sometimes, too much freedom. At the beginning of the decade, Turkey held its first completely free and fair general election in which a people, who had only known autocracy for centuries, were able to vote *'against the government'* and remove it from office. This was indeed a remarkable achievement; although it was still early days and therefore too soon to say whether democratic structure, and less so ideals, would take a strong hold in the country.[28]

On the domestic political scene in Turkey, Helm made the following observations. After 1950, the Democrat and Republican Parties first hurled insubstantial verbal abuse at each other with ever-increasing violence: one side alleged tyranny and the other treachery. Later, they had to put their quarrels aside to join forces against religious reaction, and they *'could find nothing better than to flatter each other's patriotism'* In 1954, with a new election on the horizon, they resumed battle. So far, no Opposition Party had been able to produce a programme that was significantly different from that of the government, while at the same time compatible with the Kemalist reforms. Helm remarked that the functions of government and opposition and the relations between them had been misunderstood. The sudden transition to party democracy from a single party regime had created problems which were not quick to solve. He added that *'it was perhaps unfortunate that apart from their current economic conditions, the peasantry, who formed the most numerous class of voters, could most readily be swayed by promises of concessions to the old Islamic way of life'*. He saw this as a temptation to any Opposition Party having difficulty in shaping a valid alternative to the policy of the

[27] NAA: A1838, 209/2/1 Part 1 (Turkey-Political Developments-General), From Sir K. Helm to Eden, 20 January 1954.
[28] NAA: A1838, 209/2/1 Part 1 (Turkey-Political Developments-General), From Sir K. Helm to Eden, 20 January 1954.

government in power.Moreover, this was the very reason why the National Party had been suspended in the summer of 1953.[29]

Helm sums up that in international affairs Turkey behaved like a Western State, that westernisation had made considerable progress in politics and administration, and that the economic and financial structure of the country had been modelled successfully along Western lines. Serious attempts at westernisation had been made in all other fields, social, cultural, educational and religious. However, while these had changed Turkish society at a superficial level, their success did not run deep as yet. Helm wanted to underline that the original reformers had not succeeded in obliterating Islam, and that current rules did not wish to do so. Neither did they consider *'reforming'* the religion to make it as compatible as it could be theoretically possible with a Western way of life. Rather, they chose to ignore it and commenced an attack its organisation and its social implications. The result was that in the places where the faith was alive and strong, it came with the baggage of the old social and intellectual ideas which prevented full westernisation. In the towns, however, where westernisation appeared to have prevailed, life was lacking in spiritual and intellectual content, and something more satisfying in this nature was required.[30]

So Turkey in early 1950s was a unique mixture of east and west, with the latter steadily gaining. Helm viewed the process as likely to continue, because although the majority of Turks in 1950s would probably favour a return to Islam and the old ways if the issue were put straight to their conscience, the ruling classes of that time meant to see that this did not happen. In addition, he notes, *'the Turks were a submissive people, lacking in originality: they were not prone, when things were quiet, to strike out new paths'*. The West in the 1950s had the power and prestige to help them, the East had neither. So long as things went well for Turkey, said Helm, it could be possible to avoid a clash over the religious issue. The greatest danger quite possibly lay in Turkish over-confidence, partly due to recent progress and success, together with their long-standing conviction of their superior military qualities. It would only take a change in luck, and moreover, a serious military defeat that discredited the new order to upset all calculations and take the country back in time. Nevertheless, Turkey had made good progress on the way to westernism and, whatever the decision made regarding Islam, a further generation of steady progress should be decisive. Helm emphasised the word *'steady'*, because even then, he was not sure that the results would please everybody. Nevertheless, he promised not to prophesy.[31]

2. Sir James Bowker's Observations on Turkey and the Turks

[29] NAA: A1838, 209/2/1 Part 1 (Turkey-Political Developments-General), From Sir K. Helm to Eden, 20 January 1954.
[30] NAA: A1838, 209/2/1 Part 1 (Turkey-Political Developments-General), From Sir K. Helm to Eden, 20 January 1954.
[31] NAA: A1838, 209/2/1 Part 1 (Turkey-Political Developments-General), From Sir K. Helm to Eden, 20 January 1954.

Sir (Reginald) James Bowker, GBE KCMG (2 July 1901 – 15 December 1983) was a British diplomat who was ambassador to Burma, Turkey and Austria. Bowker was educated at Charterhouse School and Oriel College, Oxford. He joined the Diplomatic Services in 1925 and served in Paris, Berlin, Ankara, Oslo and Madrid before being appointed Minister in Cairo 1945-47 (second to the Ambassador, and chargé d'affaires between ambassadors); High Commissioner and, after independence in 1948, Ambassador to Burma 1947-50; an assistant Under-Secretary (head of department) for the Middle East and North Africa at the Foreign Office1950-53; and Ambassador to Turkey 1954-58. Bowker's last post was Ambassador to Austria, 1958-61.[32] When Bowker left Turkey, *The Times* correspondent there commented that during his term;

> He had to deal, apart from routine diplomatic matters, with the Cyprus issue and matters concerning the Baghdad pact. The measure of his success may be gauged by the fact that at his last interview with the Turkish Foreign Minister, Mr. Zorlu, he received confirmation of the Turkish acceptance of cooperation with the latest British proposals on Cyprus, and that in spite of many vicissitudes the Baghdad pact remains still solid. These two main issues, which are now so important for Anglo-Turkish relations, have demanded the British Ambassador's almost constant care and attention during the past five years and it is generally recognized in Turkish and foreign diplomatic circles here that Sir James Bowker's patience and diplomatic acumen, often taxed to the utmost, are largely responsible for the present understanding and cooperation between Britain and Turkey in the Middle East.[33]

Bowker was appointed CMG in 1945, knighted KCMG in the 1952 New Year Honours, and awarded the additional, senior knighthood of GBE when he retired in 1961. In 1947 Bowker married Elsa Gued, whom he had met in Cairo while he was posted there. Lady Bowker (as she became) was a noted socialite. She continued to live in London after Sir James' death, and in 1992 she met, and became a confidante of, Diana, Princess of Wales. Lady Bowker died in 2000. She had no children.

The West generally views Turkey as a land of sharp contrasts and contradictions – of West and East, of old and new, of energy and sloth, and of progress and recession. These contrasts were found in every aspect of Turkey and the Turkish character at the end of the 1950s. As a result, personal impressions were seen to vary considerably. For an archaeologist or a travel writer, the country is fascinating in terms of its scenic and archaeological splendour, from the vast empty Anatolian plateau to the cobalt blue Lake Van, and from the mounds of Gordium to the Hellenistic remains on the Aegean.[34] The tourist industry in the late 1950s was still in its infancy, and these impressive sights could be enjoyed without masses of tourists. Roads had been improved during the 1950s, but accommodation was still a considerable problem. Sir James Bowker, British Ambassador to Ankara at that time, notes, *'the Turks have small idea of comfort and*

[32] ***Who Was Who,*** (1920-2008), Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2012, Online edition, [Accessed: 15 July 2018].
[33] ***The Times,*** "Sir James Bowker Leaves Turkey – Successful Term as Ambassador", 29 August 1958, p. 7.
[34] For more information on British perception of Turkey see David S. Katz, **The Shaping of Turkey in the British Imagination, 1776-1923,** Palgrave Macmillan, Switzerland, 2016.

less of efficient plumbing, and a night's rest, unless spent in the Guest House of some State Monopoly, is liable to be subjected to severe tests'.[35]

Bowker continues to note that the Turks of that time did not seem to have inherited the *'urban competence'* of their Seljuk ancestors, or indeed anything of their aesthetic sense. When describing the capital, he writes,

> Ankara, for all the money spent on it, remains a sprawling and undistinguished suburb, without clear planning or centre and devoid still of the normal amenities of a European capital. The development plans pursued with such restless energy by the present Prime Minister, M. Menderes, are no doubt beginning to provide broader vistas and easier movement, but the method of their execution has emphasised mainly the abiding Turkish delight in destruction and authority's traditional contempt for the interests and comfort of the individual citizen.[36]

With their lack of aesthetic sense, the Turks did not possess the ability of objective criticism. Bowker recounts a trip to the Dolmabahçe Palace, conducted by a young, educated Turkish girl. During the tour, she asked some of the ladies if they had ever been to Versailles. When they responded that they had, she retorted that Dolmabahçe was much more beautiful. This was not a request for opinion, but a statement of fact. It was not important that the palace in question was the work of an Armenian architect in the style of Louis Philippe; it was Turkish, and that was sufficient.[37]

This lack of subtlety tends to lead to the marked disregard for others, which is not deliberate, but the result of the general disability of the average Turk to put himself in the place of someone else. Bowker points out that while the Turks show little consideration for others, they remain deeply susceptible and take sharp and lasting offence at the slightest suspicion of criticism. This toughness towards others and tenderness towards themselves *'makes ordinary formal and informal contact with them a process which, after patient initial efforts, often appears unrewarding'*.[38]

Generalities, however, are misleading, and Bowker mentions that it must be remembered that at that time at least three-quarters of the population lived in the rural areas. *'Among these the traditions of kindness and helpfulness towards the traveller and the stranger persists and is a pleasure constantly associated with travel in Turkey'.* As

[35] The National Archives, United Kingdom (hereafter TNA), FO371/136452/RK1015/25, Turkey: Sir James Bowker's Valedictory Dispatch, Sir James Bowker to Selwyn Lloyd, 2 September 1958. Also see, FO371/123999/RK1011/1, Turkey: Annual Review for 1955, James Bowker to Selwyn Lloyd, 16 January 1956. FO371/130174/RK1011/1, Turkey: Annual Review for 1956, James Bowker to Selwyn Lloyd, 5 February 1957. FO371/136450/RK1011/1, Annual Report on Turkey for 1957, James Bowker to Selwyn Lloyd, 4 February 1958. FO371/136452/RK1015/20, Position of Turkish Prime Minister and Democrat Party, James Bowker to Selwyn Lloyd, 9 July 1958. Sir James Bowker acted as British Ambassador to Turkey from the years 1954-1958.

[36] TNA, FO371/136452/RK1015/25, Turkey: Sir James Bowker's Valedictory Dispatch, Sir James Bowker to Selwyn Lloyd, 2 September 1958.

[37] TNA, FO371/136452/RK1015/25, Turkey: Sir James Bowker's Valedictory Dispatch, Sir James Bowker to Selwyn Lloyd, 2 September 1958.

[38] TNA, FO371/136452/RK1015/25, Turkey: Sir James Bowker's Valedictory Dispatch, Sir James Bowker to Selwyn Lloyd, 2 September 1958.

in every country in the world, the simpler peasant virtues, born of the hard living conditions and the need to stand united, tend to be lost when the villager moves to the town and begins the struggle for survival.[39]

The Turkish character leaves its mark in all parts of life, one of these being Administration. Bowker has the following words to say on this matter:

I do not suppose that in the field of diplomacy the Turks are necessarily more difficult to deal with than many other nations. But, for all their superficial air of Westernisation, their diplomatic methods are more Asiatic than European and nearer to the rough ways of the Asiatic steppes ...When aims and policy coincide, the Turks are staunch and reliable friends. In negotiation they are tough, showing little compunction about pressing their full demands and little sense for compromise. They tend to think in terms of black and white and to regard an idea put forward for discussion as a concession. Quick to exploit any hesitation or imprecision shown by the other side, they will go to any lengths and resort to any forms of pressure to achieve their aim. If and when finally convinced that the aim is unattainable they will quickly drop it. In day to day contacts, their natural taciturnity and suspicion of others renders them disinclined to volunteer information. Their disinclination to commit themselves in advance to an engagement has its complicating effects both in business and social contacts. Any favours received they regard as their due and expressions of gratitude are rare and usually grudging although, just as they store resentment, so on occasions they silently record gratification.[40]

In terms of politics, being situated at the crossroads of East and West, the Turks aspired to play a role in both directions. In 1958, their attachment to NATO was the anchor of their foreign policy and their recognised guarantee against Russia, which was for the Turks the imperialist Power whose expansionist aims they had had to resist for generations. As the Eastern front of NATO, they regarded it as the duty of their Western allies to provide them with continuous aid, without being told how they were expected to implement it.

Their lack of subtlety in their diplomatic methods and their natural and often ill-concealed contempt for the Arabs, tend to reduce the effectiveness of the role which their geographical situation and former associations would otherwise render them suited to play in the Middle East area. In the Baghdad Pact they have taken, from its inception, a leading part and exercised a salutary and steadying influence at more than one moment of crisis.[41]

This toughness and lack of imagination, Bowker observes, has made the Turks unexacting in their demands on life. Accustomed to harsh government and hard-living, they are naturally dependable and docile. An instance of this is the apparent unconcern with which they accepted for over a year the almost complete lack of coffee, normally an essential part of daily life. '*As a result of this acceptance of authority, Turkey is a*

[39] TNA, FO371/136452/RK1015/25, Turkey: Sir James Bowker's Valedictory Dispatch, Sir James Bowker to Selwyn Lloyd, 2 September 1958.
[40] TNA, FO371/136452/RK1015/25, Turkey: Sir James Bowker's Valedictory Dispatch, Sir James Bowker to Selwyn Lloyd, 2 September 1958.
[41] TNA, FO371/136452/RK1015/25, Turkey: Sir James Bowker's Valedictory Dispatch, Sir James Bowker to Selwyn Lloyd, 2 September 1958.

country where internal order is rarely disturbed and the traveller need have little fear of molestation even in the remoter provinces'.[42]

Bowker believed that a country with such a dependable people, possessing substantial agricultural and mineral resources, and with powerful friends willing to help it should be certain of a steady advance to prosperity. Indeed, since the foundation of the Republic by Atatürk 35 years previously there had been rapid and substantial progress. Yet despite all that had been achieved – all the new roads, barrages, power stations, factories, ports and tractors – and despite the respected position of Turkey on the international scene of that time, the outlook for the average Turkish citizen was one of '*almost unrelieved frustration*'.[43]

This sense of frustration was most probably caused by the economic situation in the late 1950s. As a result of increasing inflation and a serious lack of foreign exchange meant a scarcity of consumer goods and raw materials for industry. Bowker held some aspects of the Turkish character responsible for this situation.

> The Turks are poor planners, though at a pinch they are good at improvisation. At the same time, they are loath to admit the need for advice from others. As a result, their idea of development is to start as many projects as possible, trusting to luck to help them out of their difficulties when the time comes to pay for them. It has been suggested that their motto in this respect should be: 'Nothing succeeds like excess'. When the difficulties come, they have little compunction in defaulting on their obligations and asking for more credits.[44]

In 1958 more economic help had been assured, and Bowker was of the opinion that although the immediate economic crisis would be overcome, in order to ensure a lasting recovery the Turks would have to apply a rigorous programme of economic retrenchment-'*requiring qualities of concentration and organisation in which they have so far shown themselves to be strikingly deficient'*.[45]

However, the roots of the frustration were much deeper than this. Until 1950, it had been possible to say that Turkey was well on the way to the democratic parliamentary Government planned by Atatürk, based on the principle of a fair deal for all. Although in 1950 the first genuinely free elections resulted in the overwhelming defeat of the PRP which had ruled the country since the establishment of the Republic, the new Government began to impose severe restrictions on the freedom of expression, and reduced the function of the Grand National Assembly, intended to be the sovereign body of the Administration, to *'that of a rubber stamp'*. Menderes's Government made little attempt to hide its contempt for the Opposition as being nothing more than an

[42] TNA, FO371/136452/RK1015/25, Turkey: Sir James Bowker's Valedictory Dispatch, Sir James Bowker to Selwyn Lloyd, 2 September 1958.
[43] TNA, FO371/136452/RK1015/25, Turkey: Sir James Bowker's Valedictory Dispatch, Sir James Bowker to Selwyn Lloyd, 2 September 1958.
[44] TNA, FO371/136452/RK1015/25, Turkey: Sir James Bowker's Valedictory Dispatch, Sir James Bowker to Selwyn Lloyd, 2 September 1958.
[45] TNA, FO371/136452/RK1015/25, Turkey: Sir James Bowker's Valedictory Dispatch, Sir James Bowker to Selwyn Lloyd, 2 September 1958.

obstacle to be reduced to ineffectiveness. The Opposition, not surprisingly, had not yet reconciled itself to the loss of power that had been in its hands for so long, and regarded its function to oppose the Government on every issue. In foreign policy only was there a lack of serious divergencies, but towards the end of the decade there were signs that this last element of concordance between the Government and Opposition was beginning to crack.[46]

The source of the sense of frustration prevalent in the late 1950s was to be found in the basic causes of these weaknesses and defects in the administration. The main objective of Atatürk's reforms was that Turkey should develop along Western lines and in close association with the West. This meant that Turkey had to rise out of the state of material backwardness and at the same time produce an intellectual element able to give the country the necessary guidance and leadership to fill the gap created by the rejection of the traditional Islamic way of life. That is, the new Turkey had to develop materially and intellectually at the same time. Bowker has the following to say on this subject; '*For a period after the death of Atatürk, the double impetus continued. But with the advent to power of the Democrat Party, composed of mainly Anatolians who lacked the former more civilising Ottoman elements of Atatürk's original supporters, the intellectual impetus gradually abated.*'[47] While although the urge to material development continued, it was not supported by development of the capacity of organisation and planning essential to enable it to be effectively applied. Moreover, an increasing tendency on the part of the Government to regard objective expression of opinion on matters of policy or administration as subversive, and a '*purely opportunist and vote-catching policy towards religion and religious education'* tended to put a stop to all intellectual effort and achievement. As a result, in everyday life the average Turk had to rely on the possibility of access to the appropriate person of influence to obtain what he needed, as he had had to in the past. The shortage of everyday requirements created a black market mentality. Bowker points out that due to the '*innate discipline and vigour'* of the population, and the continuing desire of the country's western allies to support it, Turkey would undoubtedly continue its material development whilst maintaining internal stability. However, until the means to fill the intellectual vacuum could be found, Turkey would continue to lack the basic reliability which it as the basic aim of Atatürk's reforms to create and which the requirements of its exposed position in the world demanded. In a letter to Lord Aberdeen, who headed a coalition ministry in Britain from 1852-55, Sir Stratford Canning wrote; '*There is no such thing as system in Turkey. Every man according to his means and opportunities gets what he can, commands where he dares, and submits when he must.*'[48]

Another former British Ambassador to Turkey wrote;

[46] TNA, FO371/136452/RK1015/25, Turkey: Sir James Bowker's Valedictory Dispatch, Sir James Bowker to Selwyn Lloyd, 2 September 1958.
[47] TNA, FO371/136452/RK1015/25, Turkey: Sir James Bowker's Valedictory Dispatch, Sir James Bowker to Selwyn Lloyd, 2 September 1958.
[48] TNA, FO371/136452/RK1015/25, Turkey: Sir James Bowker's Valedictory Dispatch, Sir James Bowker to Selwyn Lloyd, 2 September 1958.

When you wish to know what a Turkish official is likely to do, first consider what it would be in his interest to do, next what any other man would do in similar circumstances, and thirdly what everyone expects him to do. When you have ascertained this, you are so far advanced on your road that you may be perfectly certain that he will not adopt any of these courses.[49]

Bowker concludes by saying that it is interesting to note that despite all the progress made by modern Turkey in the first 35 years of its existence, it was still possible to apply these same remarks of a hundred years before to the Turks of that day.[50]

3. Sir Roderick Sarell's Observations on Turkey and the Turks

Roderick Francis Gisbert Sarell was born on 23 January 1913 at Dunkirk, France, where his father Philip was the British Consul. Sarell was educated at Ashdown House School before going to Radley College and then to Magdalen College, Oxford. He left Oxford with a degree in PPE and, after passing the Civil Service Entrance exam, joined the Consular Service in 1936. His first posting was to Shiraz, Iran, as probationer Vice Consul. In 1969, Sarell was appointed Ambassador to Turkey, returning to the country where his father and grandfather had been born. In the early 1970s, Turkey faced considerable political unrest and one of the most difficult episodes of this post was when four British radar technicians were killed while being held hostage by Marxist guerrillas. Their wives were in the embassy residence when news arrived of the failure of the attempted rescue by the Turkish forces. In October 1971, the Queen, Prince Philip, and Princess Anne made their state visit to Turkey, during which Sarell travelled from Izmir to Istanbul on Britannia. Shortly afterwards, he was appointed KCVO. He was able to spend some of his spare time on his interests in investigating the family's history in Turkey and on archaeology. In 1973, he retired, travelling slowly back to Britain through the countries of the Mediterranean. He married, in 1946, Pamela Crowther-Smith; she died in 1994, and he was survived by their three sons, when he died aged 88 in 2001.[51]

With his appointment in Turkey nearing an end, the British Ambassador to Ankara (1969-1972), Sir Roderick Sarell thought it time to share some of his thoughts on the discontents prospects of *'this most beautiful and fascinating country'*. Agreeing with the thoughts of a colleague in Ankara who said that any diplomat who thought he understood Turkish politics was misinformed, he starts by emphasising the diffidence with which he was to communicate his observations.[52]

Well over a hundred years previously, it was said of Turkey that:

[49] TNA, FO371/136452/RK1015/25, Turkey: Sir James Bowker's Valedictory Dispatch, Sir James Bowker to Selwyn Lloyd, 2 September 1958.
[50] TNA, FO371/136452/RK1015/25, Turkey: Sir James Bowker's Valedictory Dispatch, Sir James Bowker to Selwyn Lloyd, 2 September 1958.
[51] http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/obituaries/1338438/Sir-Roderick-Sarell.html#continue, [Accessed: 30 Nisan 2008].
[52] TNA, FCO9/1626, File No: WST 25/3, Sir Roderick Sarell's Valedictory Despatch, 27 November 1972. Also, see Annual Reviews of Turkey for 1969, 1970, 1971 and 1972.

It is difficult to understand a nation which unites two characters and is emerging from one into the other and is yet in the transmigration. They are scarcely Asiatic and have just acquired enough of the European character to destroy many of their virtues and to remove many of their vices. It is this change which is taking place and the uncertainty of the result which renders this country really interesting.[53]

Sarell commented that while, since those words were written, successive waves of reform had swept over the country; the essential situation had been slow to change. Each single reform left its mark upon the towns, but the widespread peasant population remained untouched as yet at that time. Mahmut II and European clothes, the constitution of Abdul Hamid, the Young Turk revolution each had their effect, but Turkey remained oligarchic and, without the constant injections of wealth of the period of conquest, endemically insolvent. The long process of reform was pushed into further action by the loss of empire in the First World War and the national resurgence of the War of Liberation. Atatürk, *'the Macedonian with the vision of a modern European industrial nation State'*, drove the country to his objectives with his phenomenal energy. He mobilised women in the crisis of the War of Independence against the Greeks, and he insisted on feminine emancipation, both of which earned him the adoring devotion of a generation of Turkish women. His prestige enabled him to secularise the State and to move close to Europe with the adoption of the Latin alphabet. He was a pioneer in education; and in administration he adopted the Napoleonic system of France and Italy, a written legal code and a prefectural system to guard the country from the unpredictabilities of an inexperienced Parliamentary Government. To break the power of the European financiers to whom *'the spendthrift Sultans'* had mortgaged the country, Atatürk set up State banks with money subscribed by Indian Moslems with which he began to finance State enterprises.[54]

Atatürk set the course and provided a framework but, in Sarell's words, *'he failed to convince his countrymen to forsake Islam'*, neither was he able or indeed did he have the time to alter the habits of mind which Sarell saw as *'inimical to the proper function of European industrial society'*. These contradictions grew with the passage of time. The measure of unity of the War of Independence faded but, while Atatürk's prestige grew *'almost to the proportions of an apotheosis and his policies are now accepted as an article of faith'*, the implementation of the programme remained elusive. The picture from Ankara at that time frequently seemed to be one of unrelieved gloom. However, the achievements needed to be regarded.[55]

For better or worse, Turkey had been forced into a European world, and the social appearance and dress in the towns in the 1970s were European. Universities of the highest standard in plan and equipment were built in Ankara and in the other main centres. The teaching faculties were of a high standard. Sarell commented that a middle

[53] TNA, FCO9/1626, File No: WST 25/3, Sir Roderick Sarell's Valedictory Despatch, 27 November 1972.
[54] TNA, FCO9/1626, File No: WST 25/3, Sir Roderick Sarell's Valedictory Despatch, 27 November 1972.
[55] TNA, FCO9/1626, File No: WST 25/3, Sir Roderick Sarell's Valedictory Despatch, 27 November 1972.

class with secondary education not only of its sons but of its daughters was now sending some 150,000 students to the universities. The Turks were for some time attaining the highest standards in the arts and professions. He gave the examples of the Hacettepe medical school in Ankara, which he said was so advanced as to have been chosen for study by the Royal Commission on Medical Education; and also the Turkish Ballet, which was producing dancers of international standard. He commented that the Turkish concert pianists and violinists were equally distinguished. In industry, several considerable private empires emerged for the production of consumer goods and, in co-operation with foreign manufacturers for the production of cars, lorries and communications equipment. Great progress had been made in the provision of economic infrastructure. Thousands of miles of asphalt highway had been built in the past 15 years. The generation of electric power rose rapidly, and with it, rural electrification. The countryside was being opened up by the provision of all-weather rural roads. Improved methods and the spread of mechanisation were increasing the yield from the land. Thanks to these developments and two years of unusually good rainfall, Turkey achieved an exportable surplus of wheat. Thanks moreover to the export of a labour force approaching 1 million men, the Turkish trade balance was brought to surplus by remittances almost equalling the total value of visible exports.[56]

In spite of the progress and the promise in these developments, Turkey suffered from a deep feeling of frustration among the educated young, matched by a feeling of dissatisfaction experienced by foreign observers and the more westernised Turks. The source, according to Sarell, was the continued process of transmigration from the oriental and Islamic society *'in which the man is king'* to the Western industrial democracy of Atatürk's vision. The long tradition of Ottoman Turkey as a military and administrative oligarchy remained deep-rooted, while the position of Islam, relegated to the background by Atatürk, was becoming more conspicuous and more powerful daily. Concurrently the *'almost patriarchal'* respect for age which pervaded Turkish society was causing the entrenched elder generation to block, almost on principle and for reasons of personal prestige, the plans and proposals of their educated and professionally trained young men. This attitude was, in Sarell's opinion, the more harmful because to the elder generation of Turks, as had been to the Victorian English, trade and industry were not *'the proper concern of gentlemen'*, having traditionally been left to the subject races of Greeks and Armenians. The reduction in the population of these peoples left a gap which was only now very slowly being filled. Economic progress was hindered further by the Turkish temperament: they were *'unwilling to accept advice, disinclined to sustain what they have started or to maintain what they have built'*. For all the European appearance, Turkey remained therefore *'fundamentally oriental and Islamic'*, accepting standards of performance normal in the East, which in the West were unacceptable. In Sarell's words, these were *'content with the bare avoidance of collapse or disaster with the implied corollary that if the worst happens it is the will of God'*. He added that the Puritan reply that God helps those who help themselves is not a part of the Moslem faith as practised in the 1970s. This gloomy

[56] TNA, FCO9/1626, File No: WST 25/3, Sir Roderick Sarell's Valedictory Despatch, 27 November 1972.

aspect of the situation was darkened further by the fact that tradition and temperament continued to afflict Turkey with a large, obstructive and corrupt civil service, which, Sarell remarked, complicated almost every area of life, commercial, industrial or private.[57]

Against this background of dissatisfaction and frustration, the rapidly growing student population was exposed to particular strains. Emerging from the old-fashioned constraints, both moral and social, of traditional provincial family and communal life into the unconstrained circumstances of the huge new universities of Ankara and the similar but older foundations of Istanbul, the students resorted to strikes and demonstrations, which found sympathy and even support among their intellectual and academic elders both within the universities and outside. Encouraged by example, and, suggested Sarell, perhaps even by funds from abroad, these developed during 1970 into increasingly militant violence which seemed to be going in the direction of anarchy. This situation, unforeseen by the Professors of Constitutional Law who evolved the extremely liberal Constitution of 1961, found the Government powerless, and the Prime Minister, inhibited by the example of Menderes, who had been hanged after, if not wholly because of, repressing student unrest.[58]

The crisis exemplified the Turkish dilemma. A civilised and successful Turkish industrialist remarked that in the West democracy had evolved slowly, and only then was it necessary to tackle industrialisation. In Turkey, however, the attempt to tackle both together and in a relatively short time was proving too difficult. In fact Turkey was attempting an even more difficult task: within the framework of the highly liberal professors' constitution with every check and balance to ensure democratic parliamentary government, the country was trying at once to emerge from a mediaeval, oriental, agricultural society into an educated, Western, industrial European State. It was hardly surprising, stated Sarell, that the liberals, frustrated by the innumerable obstructions of Turkish life, grew impatient with 'the lack of progress to the Promised Land' and resorted to violence. It was no less surprising that the Turkish Army, with its political tradition and its belief in its mission as guardian of the Kemalist tradition, was to step in. It was in accordance also with the Kemalist doctrine as held then that the Army should intervene to secure not only public order but also democracy and reforms. The Memorandum of 12 March 1971 thus demanded a new *'above party'* Government to restore order and to carry through the reforms within the framework of parliamentary democracy. Three successive administrations struggled to comply with the Army's demands under a regime of guided democracy. Public order was restored largely at a cost of steadily growing repression accompanied by unpleasantly circumstantial accounts of torture and the virtual abolition of free speech or free discussion of political matters in the universities. The threat of anarchy in 1970 no doubt required drastic measures, but after 18 months, the Army was showing disquieting signs of losing its

[57] TNA, FCO9/1626, File No: WST 25/3, Sir Roderick Sarell's Valedictory Despatch, 27 November 1972.
[58] TNA, FCO9/1626, File No: WST 25/3, Sir Roderick Sarell's Valedictory Despatch, 27 November 1972.

sense of proportion. Making the allowances that this was an inevitable swing of the pendulum, and the necessary, if temporary, price for the restoration of order; Sarell asked how much was to be hoped of the programme of reform[59]

The reforms proposed were needed: the excessive checks and balances of the 1961 Constitution needed to be modified, as Dr. Erim planned when Prime Minister in 1971, to give the Government the freedom of action enjoyed by Western European administration. The excessive autonomy of the universities needed to be limited. Land reform was no doubt needed, but as much to curb the reactionary influence of the hodjas (mullahs) supported by the landlords as for the economic welfare of the peasants. After the achievement of all this, there would nevertheless remain the problem of the Turkish administration, *'overstaffed, badly paid, obstructive and corrupt'*. Behind it, lay the even more intractable problem of the Turkish temperament described previously. The seeds of prosperity and success seemed to be *'sprouting on all sides'*. The infrastructure was taking shape; the young graduates were *'admirable and stimulating'* people, and behind them was a rising generation of students who might be able to *'break the bonds of oriental fecklessness and inefficiency'*, helped perhaps by the growing army of workers returning *'emancipated and with Western ideas'* from their stay in Germany and elsewhere. The problem facing Turkey was how to release the many good forces developing at that time while holding in check the impatient radicals who were hoping to find in violence a short cut to *'the Promised Land'*. Sarell saw that for some years Turkey would be in danger and may well need to continue with the *'guided democracy'* of that time, modified one would hope to restore greater freedom to the Press and the universities. Even if elections were to be held as intended in October 1973, the Government would need to retain emergency powers to avoid a renewed slide to anarchy.[60]

These stresses and strains which caused the suspension of the reality, though not the forms, of democracy had implications for Turkey's foreign policy and for its *'European Vocation'*. For that time, however, just as the Turkish Government stoutly maintained the forms of a parliamentary democracy, so it remains unswerving in support of its Western orientations through NATO, CENTO and its association with the European Community. Its long experience of Russia ensured a *'healthy scepticism and wariness'* in the country's attitude to the Soviet Union, which is proof against Soviet propaganda and flattery. Given that the country's internal problems could be solved or at least kept under control, the rulers of Turkey at that time were unlikely to vary their course in foreign affairs.[61]

Sarell finished his valedictory dispatch with the following comment:

[59] TNA, FCO9/1626, File No: WST 25/3, Sir Roderick Sarell's Valedictory Despatch, 27 November 1972.
[60] TNA, FCO9/1626, File No: WST 25/3, Sir Roderick Sarell's Valedictory Despatch, 27 November 1972.
[61] TNA, FCO9/1626, File No: WST 25/3, Sir Roderick Sarell's Valedictory Despatch, 27 November 1972.

I leave this country of outstanding beauty and infinite variety of interest, with its people delightful to know and impossible to do business with, with some misgivings for the future. Politicians of ideas seem powerless to implement them. Politicians who can survive must be content with little action. The result can only be further frustration for the rising generation with all this means in terms of tension and potential explosion. I find hope in the quality of the rising generation and in the fact that prosperity is at least beginning to spread through the country. These factors may well exorcise the ills that now seem to lie so heavily across the land.[62]

[62] TNA, FCO9/1626, File No: WST 25/3, Sir Roderick Sarell's Valedictory Despatch, 27 November 1972.

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