# THE CONCEPT OF SOCIO - CULTURAL CHANGE AND KEMALISM

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In order to understand and talk about the Great Turk who had the utmost desire and objective of raising his nation to the level of civilization enjoyed by Western societies, one must become acquainted with "the Principles of Atatürk" from the perspective of socio-cultural anthropology. Undoubtedly, such a task should be the mission of related Turkish scholars.

In fact, there has been a fair number of foreign and Turkish scholars who have taken up Atatürk's Principles from the point of view of social sciences[1] alongside those who have made him a subject of study as a politician, a statesman, a great soldier and a genius. All the same, the cultural perspective has not been fully accounted for. This article attempts to meet the demand resulting from this undue negligence.

According to Atatürk's legacy, the most effective course to take in the development and modernization of Turkey lies in "the Principles of Atatürk" reflected in the philosophy of Kemalism. By being, on the whole, a frame of reference at each endeavour and activity directed towards the development and progress of Turkey, these principles are, in a way, scientific principles finding justification in the science of culture, i.e. socio-cultural anthropology. In other

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1 One can cite the works of Mümtaz Turhan, H.Z. Ülken, Reşat Kaynar and Nermin Erdentuğ besides many a conference and symposium held in Turkey referring to this perspective.

words, one cannot perceive the meaning nor give an account of "the Principles of Atatürk" by abstracting them from such scientific concepts as modernization, progress, development and cultural cohesion.

As an answer to the realities and necessities of the time, a revolutionary change on the way to progress appears to be interwoven with the said principles. Therefore, "revolutionism" comes first in order of importance among these principles forming the gist of Kemalism. At the basis of this conceptualization lies the willingness to accept every positive innovation suited to the social and cultural structure[2] of the Turkish society. Such a change should, by all means, be appropriate to the "Turkish identity" of the Turkish society, i.e. to the national identity (basic national characteristics, attitudes and values) which distinguishes a Turk from a Japanese, Chinese, Italian, etc.. The Father of the Turks has accentuated this aspect clearly and expressively with his motto, "Proud is he who calls himself a Turk", thus pointing out the fundamental element that is to exist in the principle of revolutionism despite new necessities forcing modern innovations resulting in new modes of behaviour.

This main conception pertaining to the preservation of Turkish identity in the face of change also manifests itself in another Atatürk principle. This is "the principle of nationalism", obviously stemming from the concept of cultural cohesion since it is the values and attitudes shared commonly by a certain society that gives it its unique cultural identity and mould for becoming a nation.

From the perspective of socio–cultural anthropology, Atatürk's principle of revolutionism also conveys the meaning of "modernization." However, some anthropologists take "modernization" as a synonym for "development"[3] and development seems to have taken on, with time, the meaning of "community development". This shift in expression is mainly an anthropological process because, whatever the tag may be be ("modernization", "development" or "community development"), the process of change on the way to progress is one that ne-

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2 Each society has a cultural structure blended with its social one.

3 Cohranne Glynn, to name one.

ver comes easy nor takes place without any pains besides involving a high social cost[4].

By pursuing the objective of turning the traditional Turkish culture into a modern one in keeping with the times, Atatürk had, in fact, an insight into the basic principles concerning culture thirty odd years before their appearance in scientific publications. With this farsightedness he displays a part of his character as a deep thinker in addition to his reknown executive capacity. Just like an anthropologist, he had been aware of the fact that the cultural elements currently functional in the Turkish society would out-date themselves in time (as is the case in all societies) and that it would become necessary to discard the out-dated culture elements for the more appropriate novelties. Without any doubt, the process of cultural change constitutes the main ingredient of his "revolutionism". Accordingly, during his lifetime, Atatürk had insisted on discarding the majority of the traditional elements that had become obsolete at the time.

There is yet another principle related to culture that is to be found at the roots of Atatürk's revolutionism in the sense stated above: the principle that during the process of cultural change, the newly accepted cultural elements should have the capability of integrating into the actual cultural structure of the society in question[5]. Atatürk had also shown prescience on this issue by acknowledging this scientific principle more or less thirty years before its general acceptance and had manoeuvred his activities in accordance with it. Prior to Atatürk, it had been the incompatibility between the new and the existing elements that had produced innumerable failures during the implantation of various typically western cultural elements onto the existing technology, administration and education systems of the Ottomans. Therefore, he had opted in discarding the majority of behaviour stemming from Islam, that would have been in the way of modernization, in favour of "secularism", another of his principles pertaining to culture, thus enabling the assimilation

4 Cohranne Glynn, *Development Anthropology* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1971), *passim*.

5 George Foster, *Traditional Cultures: the Impact of Technological Change* (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), p. 77.

of essential novelties with the existing cultural structure. So, it follows suit that "secularism" best demonstrates itself with its functional importance in the process of sociocultural change. In all endeavours to modernize, the important role of "secularism" should not be underestimated, otherwise, it would be rather perplexing to overcome the resultant culture conflict.

Moreover, Atatürk's views on "populism" indicates that this principle is also an integral factor in his perception of the process of modernization. He accentuates this point by demanding consideration for the traditions and tendencies of the people in all the attempts at modernization[6].

To conclude, it is evident that the principles of Atatürk are closely linked to the process of development, or in other words, socio-cultural change, and that owing to this interdependence put forth by the science of culture, the two cannot be abstracted from each other. For this reason, the principles in question should be perceived and presented as "socio-cultural principles" by students of of socio-cultural anthropology. In addition, Atatürk's extraordinary grasp of socio-cultural circumstances as if he had been a student of socio-cultural anthropology, should also be presented in text books at all levels, alongside his widely expounded qualities as a politician, a statesman and a great soldier.

6 Gazi Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk), Nutuk [A Speech], 9th ed. (İstanbul: T.D.T. Enst.), Vol. 2.