

## **STUDY OF WORKING FURNITURE IN OFFICE AREA: EARLY REPUBLICAN PERIOD**

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**Abstract-** Furniture matter as a significant cultural element to enlighten the past times considered as bookcases, desks, and task chairs in offices. In the Early Republican period, modern working furniture meant to be highlighted as a symbol of civilized life with the proclamation of the republic. Used in last centuries of Ottoman Empire, wooden neoclassical and elaborated furniture were fundamentals to widespread of western furniture. After 1930, there was a rising requirement for furniture related with increasing institutionalization. Furniture and spaces were started to consider as entire, forms were simplified. Functional furniture designed by architects with modernity effects. Spreading of Art Deco furniture for the last 5 years of this period was seen as an effort to catch the era and being future-oriented. Also, it was the symbol of optimism after World War I. The reason to study about working furniture in office area is being a symbol of working, developing and thinking especially for creating a civilized society, and internalization of modernity. The study aims to reveal the relationships of working furniture models in offices manufactured and used in Turkey, during the Early Republican Period (1920-1940) with the notion of modern furniture by examining their general form and functional properties.

**Key Words-** Office, early republican period, furniture history, working furniture.

## **BÜRO ORTAMINDA ÇALIŞMA ODASI MOBİLYALARININ İNCELENMESİ: ERKEN CUMHURİYET DÖNEMİ**

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**Özet-** Yaşanılan dönemin anlaşılmasında kültürel gösterge olarak büyük önem taşıyan mobilyalar, büro alanında çalışma masası, kitaplık, çalışma sandalyesi olarak

*Bu makale, 4. Uluslararası Mobilya ve Dekorasyon Kongresi'nde sunulmuş ve İleri Teknoloji Bilimleri Dergisi'nde yayınlanmak üzere seçilmiştir.*

Görülmektedir. Erken Cumhuriyet Dönemi büro mobilyasında, Cumhuriyetin ilanıyla beraber vurgulanmaya çalışılan çağdaş yaşam anlayışını temsil eden modern örnekler görülmüştür. Osmanlı Devleti'nin son yüzyılında yaygınlaşan ince işçilikli ve masif ahşaptan üretilen neoklasik mobilyalar, batılı anlamdaki mobilyanın yaygınlaşması konusunda oldukça önemli yapıtaşları olarak görülmektedir. 1930 yılı sonrasında kurumsallaşmanın gelişmesiyle birlikte artan mobilya ihtiyacı artmıştır. Mimarlar mobilya tasarlamaya başlamış, modernin etkisi ile mekan ve mobilyalar bütün olarak yorumlanmaya başlanmıştır. Biçimler yalınlaşmış ve fonksiyona yönelik mobilyalar tasarlanmıştır. Dönemin son beş yılında Art Deco mobilyaların yaygınlaşması, çağı yakalama ve geleceğe dönük olma anlayışıyla, I. Dünya Savaşı sonrasında iyimserliği temsil etmektedir. Büro mobilyalarının incelenmesinin nedeni, modern bir toplum yaratma, modern kanıksama açısından mobilyaların, özellikle çalışmayı, ilerlemeyi ve düşünceyi simgeleyen büro mobilyalarının gösterge olmasından kaynaklanmaktadır. Bu çalışma, Türkiye'de Erken Cumhuriyet Dönemi (1920-1940) süresince üretilmiş ve kullanılmakta olan büro mobilyası örneklerinin kullanım özellikleri, biçimsel özellikleri ve genel özelliklerinin inceleyerek dönemin mobilya anlayışının, modern mobilya kavramı ile ilişkisini ortaya koymayı amaçlamaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler-** büro, büro mobilyası, erken cumhuriyet dönemi, mobilya tarihi.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to reveal the relationships of working furniture models in offices manufactured and used in Turkey, during the Early Republican Period (1920-1940) with the notion of modern furniture by examining their general form and functional properties.

Western-style furniture in buildings was new in the history of Turkish society. While the furnishings starts functionally take a part in the living, the symbolic meanings of the furnishings also enlighten the period. The reason to study to working furniture in office area is being a symbol of working, developing, thinking and especially for creating a civilized society and internalization of modernity.

In most of the examples examined the layouts of the rooms were not preserved, and some of the furniture has moved to different places from the places they belonged to. Therefore, we didn't consider the spaces as offices which furniture displayed.

The reason for limiting the period between 1920 and 1940 is to examine the furniture that started to be used shortly before the Republic and during the early period of the Republic that founded in 1923. After 1940, approaches to working furniture changed with influent national and international factors such as World War II.

## 2. METHOD

The study is based content analysis of information collected from the literature review and with on-site visits. Also, accessible samples were observed. Even if imported and workshop furniture were affected by different styles, neoclassical, modern and Art Deco furniture were examined to express the cultural shift in the scope of research.

## 3. FINDINGS

Some background knowledge of the period that could influence the working furniture was given to examine them.

### **3.1. Internalization Process of the Republic**

The Republic of Turkey was established on October 29, 1923, by Gazi Mustafa Kemal Atatürk after the opening of the Turkish Grand National Assembly on 23 April 1920 after the successful completion of the War of Independence.

Non-Muslims were engaged in trade in the last periods of Ottoman Empire, mostly. Due to capitulations exportation of Ottoman products were hard and the Ottoman market was available to importation because of high taxation [1]. The public used their last means for War of Independence. People were the lack of labor and equipment to produce. New economic regulations were needed. The economic program that was needed to provide the economic independence was identified in Izmir Economic Congress [2]: Protecting producers, encouragement to importation, protecting the national industry and labor. The government followed a closed economy system, supported industrialization between 1929 and 1930 to not to suffer World economic crisis. In the 1930s, Istanbul Domestic Products Exhibitions were used for encouraging the consumption and use of domestic products and increasing productivity. The government associated contemporary consumer products with revolution and their production and supported their usage and production with the aim of increasing welfare [3].

The entry of Western culture and civilization technologies and innovations into the Ottoman culture, which has a thousand years of accumulation of its own cultural development, has also led to many difficulties. Therefore, old-new and east-west conflict continued in the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries.

In 1839, with Tanzimat reform, there has been a great change in every field with the aim of Westernization. In the Tanzimat Period, besides the reforms made in the economic and political arena, there have also been changes in the art and living of the society. Every reform brought more or less the culture that it belongs to [1].

After the proclamation of Republic, in accordance with Atatürk's principles (republicanism, statism, populism, laicism, nationalism, and reformism) were made fundamental innovations in social life to proceed to become a modern nation. [4]. There were improvements to providing equal rights to women. Western code of law was adopted. Revolution has been realized in many subjects, from dress codes to international time and calendar. Adopted the new Turkish alphabet based on the Latin characters [5].

### **3.2. 19th Century Furniture Overview and Office Furniture**

Traditional Turkish House, which is inherited by the spatial organization of the nomadic life, has variable function fixed furniture. The furnishings were evolved suitable for Turkish family living as a natural extension of architecture with sitting, sleeping, and warming function.

Ottoman furniture westernization was accelerated with Tanzimat Edict announcement. Before the examined period there was an eclectic style in imported and rarely domestic production palace furniture [6]. With the organization of institutionalization and the influence of changes in architecture, Western furniture has entered as the necessity for the Ottoman living. Furniture was used as sign of the wealth has begun to be used as a distinctive cultural indicator. When we looked at the Dolmabahçe Palace in the 1850s, it was seen that the only traditional Ottoman product in the interior was the carpet. This transformation that took place in the palace and the

use of new furniture, it also started in new places like office, bank, post office, consulate, store, restaurant, apartment [7]. Handcrafts are very detailed in the furniture of the period, which are generally eclectic and neoclassical.

II. Abdülhamid came to the throne in the year 1876, set up his carpenter workshop in Yildiz Palace called Tamirhane-i Hümayun. About 60 workers from different nations were employed to supply with needs of the Yildiz Palace's wooden furniture. II. Abdülhamid transformed a large hall in Yildiz Palace to carpenter workshop for himself. He manufactured furniture such as desk, chair, cupboard, and bookcase. He used inlay technique of marquetry in this furniture.

In Pera, which was considered as the furniture center of Istanbul, a number of stores were opened. They imported furniture from Europe and started and popularized contemporary furniture production/consumption [8].

### **3.3. Early Republican Period (1920-1940) Furniture**

Furniture seemed as generally from the ottoman period neoclassical-eclectic ones in the first years of the Republic. Modern furniture examples started to be seen the 1930s and after 1930. However, there is no clear distinction. Both the influence of Europe and the prevalence of the first examples seen in the Ottoman Empire, together with the limitations of material and technical means, revealed a rather eclectic design understanding.

Arrangements of the houses became individualized. Sections were started to be seen such as bedroom, living room, study room belongs to the family member [8]. Modern furniture and space arrangements were tried to introduce in magazines that published in this period. With various examples, modern furniture desired to be pronounced and internalized as a sign of modernity.

#### **3.3.1. Furniture Technology of the Period**

The majority of large-scale furniture workshops belonged to minorities. Producers were known since Ottoman period was Kalinikos which has started manufacture in 1920 and Jean Pysalty. They manufactured copies of 19th century European furniture models in foreign catalogs. They also manufactured furniture designed by decorators and architects. Jean Pysalty manufactured for, architect Sedat Hakkı Eldem and Vedat Tek [9]. Sanayi-i Nefise Mektebi was tuned into State Fine Arts Academy in 1924. There was found a section named “Dahili Mimari” (interior architecture). Philip Ginther who was invited from Austria as head to studio in there, pioneered to modern design with new understanding of design. His understanding had influence in school in the later years [10]. Sedat Hakkı Eldem in his article published in Architect Magazine in 1931[11]:

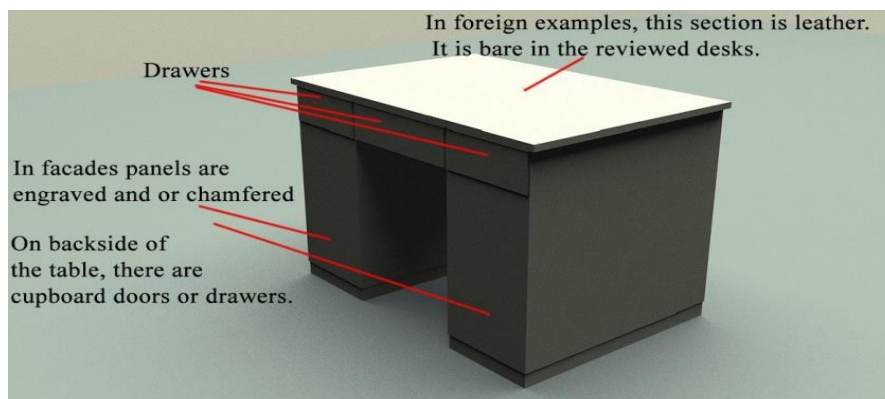
“In a period which our needs are changing and renewed continually, and in the other countries, the forms and the comfort of the day are searched, we still confine ourselves with the furniture that our workers and merchants approved for us. The architect should decide the forms of the furniture that we will give money to in order to suit our pleasures and needs, at the same time to be simple and economical.”

### 3.3.2. Movements Has Influenced on Working Furniture

#### 3.3.2.1. Neoclassical Style

Neoclassical style influences was seen in objects, paintings, fabric and architecture [12]. It became widespread in Europe between 1750 and 1830. Influences of Roman art were seen in many fields, the effects of the Roman art have begun with the archaeological expedition of Pompei and Herculaneum. As distinct from the curved shapes inspired by the repeated organic shapes in the previous periods, Geometric forms, symmetry, and the ideal classical elements became important in tables, chairs, and cabinet. Medals, lyra figures, rosettes, and horns came into prominence in the forms of ornaments. Legs of the furniture were straight, linear, in the form of grooved flute-like columns, conical-square and conical-circular and could be seen as the form of the arrow [13].

ZQueen Victoria presented an example of "partner's desk" type to the United States in the 19th century [14]. It symbolizes elitism and nobility. Pedestal desk is a common neoclassical furniture type in the period that we studied. Partner's desk is also a pedestal desk. They were developed to aid communication between partners in a business and to show equality of status in the UK banking sector in the 19th century. It's like a unified two-working table. It creates a rich and magnificent sensation with its mass appearance and is often used as an executive desk.



**Figure 1.** Visual and functional description of Pedestal Desk

The idea of designing furniture was not very prevalent because design education starts towards the end of the Early Republican Period The solid wood furniture that craftsmen produce in their workshops was continuation of the neoclassical style that was prevalent in the late Ottoman period. Neoclassical style in the period was generally influenced England (Regency, Georgian, Queen Anne) and France (Louis XVI). Furniture production in the Republic of Turkey is limited by economic reasons. As a result of this, it is likely that some of the furniture used during the period studied had been produced or imported before 1920. Apart from technical and economic reasons, using of modern furniture or rejecting modern furniture could be conscious [15].

The building of the Second Grand National Assembly of Turkey was designed by the Architect Vedat Tek. The building was put into service in October 18, 1924. Today it is used as Directorate for Republic Museum. The chairs of Assembly Speakerships Room are also located at the front of the podium in the Parliament's main hall. Some engravings are seen on the backrests of the chairs. The backrest is inclined and has neoclassical geometry.



**Figure 2.** Republic Museum, quilted leather armchair, office of the President of the Assembly [16]

**Figure 3.** War of Independence and Railways Museum, a sofa in Ataturk's Office [16]

The sofa in Figure 2 and Figure 3 are Chesterfield sofas. The reason for this name is that 4th Earl of Chesterfield is the person who first commissioned such a sofa. The sofa is perceived as a status indicator and still in use today [17].



**Figure 4.** The desk used by Ataturk exhibited in the mausoleum today [18]



**Figure 5.** The neoclassical table in the Uşakizade pavilion [19]

The table in Figure 4 was made in examined period. It has cabriole legs and seashell figures on its legs. Desk has influences of British neoclassical style Queen Anne.

Huseyin Rahmi Gurpinar was a writer in Republican Period. His house in Heybeliada where he lived in between 1912-1944 was converted into a museum by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism. Huseyin Rahmi Gurpinar's belongings are exhibited in this house, which includes a work table and chair in a neoclassical style.



**Figure 6.** Huseyin Rahmi Gurpinar's desk, chair and bookcase [8]

Desk in Figure 6 with its turned stretcher, turned legs, and slightly overflowing top, has effects of English neoclassical style.

Ataturk's Residence during the War of Independence was used as military headquarter between 1920 and 1922. It is situated in Ankara train station. The furniture of the period is displayed in War of Independence and Railways Museum as original. As seen in Figure 7, with cabriole legs and classical ornamented platform on its pedestals, the desk influenced Chippendale which is an English neoclassical style.



**Figure 7.** "Direksiyon Building", reception room created with the furniture of wealthy families for Ataturk [16]



**Figure 8.** Republic Museum, Presidents Study, furniture(1923-1933) [16]

**Figure 9.** Republic Museum, President of the assembly chamber, working table and chair [16]

Desk in Figure 8, with its curved edges and a striped front, it is a pedestal desk. Seating furniture also has Louis XVI style features with straight legs with circular cross-section and upholstered backs. Desk in Figure 9 is raised from the floor with curved feet. There are drawers on both sides as well as the pedestal desk. It is influenced by Regency style.

### 3.3.2.2. The Influence of Modern Movement to the Working Furniture in the Early Republican Period

The "Modern Movement", also defined as a contemporary style, arose at the end of the 19th century, before World War II in the Europe. Social analyzes of living was the criteria of design [20]. Architect designed furniture came to fore with furniture were started to seen as extension of architecture. Massive, geometric and functional furniture became important as seen in Arkitekt Magazine.

Gökhan Karakuş called the modernist influences in Turkish furniture as “handmade modernism” [21]. The reason for this was not to yet exist of the production methods of industrial material (steel, glass, synthetic material) in the country. Modern architecture and furniture design were associated with concepts important for Republican reforms during the 1930s.

### 3.3.2.3. Office Furniture with Modern Influences

Sait Faik Abasıyanık's house in Burgazada is used today as Sait Faik Abasıyanık Museum House, writer's belongings are exhibited there. The chair in figure 10, is produced with bending technique(bending wood with following parallel to fibres) which was invented by Thonet.. The desk has drawers on both sides. It rose above the legs. The authentically hand crafted drawer handles make the desk different.



**Figure 10.** Writing desk and bookcase in Sait Faik Abasıyanık Museum House from the examined period [22]



**Figure 11.** “Direksiyon Building”, a bookcase from Atatürk’s working room [16]

**Figure 12.** A revolving bookcase in Uşakizade Latife Hanım Pavilion [23]

These two bookcases are similar to "revolving bookcase" which was first patented by John Danner. It carries the lineament of the early modern period.



**Figure 13.** The designer of the straight wood bookcase is unknown. It designed for Ankara University Faculty of Law in the 1930. Today, it is still used there [24].



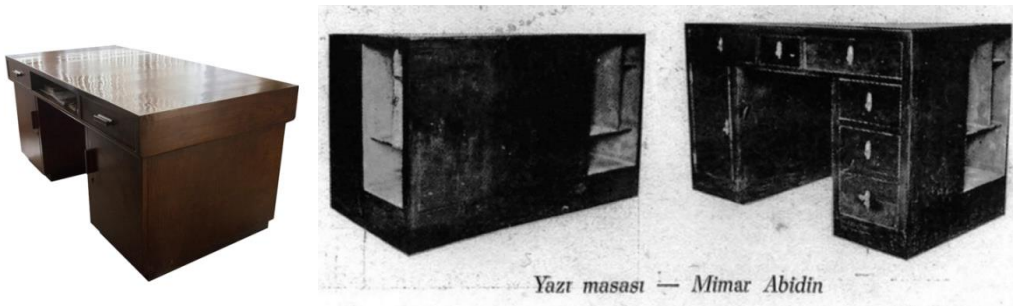
**Figure 14.** Celebrating the first anniversary of the Republic at the Government Office[25]

In Mudurnu, the replica of the desk used at the period is exhibited in a room of the Government Office, which is now used as Pertev Naili Boratav Cultural Center. The desks design is same as “pedestal desk” type. The desks design is same as “pedestal desk” type. Behind the desk with a phone on it, we see District Governor Abdurrahman Naili (Boratav) and Gendarmerie Station Command Neşet Bey. On photo in Ottoman Turkish: “Mudurnu: Makam-ı Kaim-makam Sene-i devriye-i Cumhuriyeti tesid (kutlama) ve tebrik 29.10.1340 (1924)” [25]



**Figure 15.** Office furniture in İşbank Yeni Cami Branch [26]

**Figure 16.** Study room of Muhsin Ertuğrul [8]



**Figure 17.** Solid wooden working table, designed for Ankara University Faculty of Law in the 1930s. Designer is unknown. Today, it is still used in the same building [27]

**Figure 18.** A desk mentioned as “modern” and designed by the Architect Abidin [11]

#### 3.3.2.4. Art Deco Style

In the 1920s and 1930s, Art Deco was a style in applied arts, architecture, interior design and graphic design that blends ornamental elements of late Art Nouveau and aerodynamic geometries which inspired periods industrial design. The origin of Art Deco is France. It has spread to Europe and USA, afterward. Movement becomes mentioned as Art Deco in the late 1960s. The name was derived with inspiring the name of an exhibition (Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Modernes) opened in 1925 [28]. Dynamism, bright colours, and materials, geometric lines are the defining characteristics of Art Deco. Therefore wooden surfaces use to be lacquered. Art Deco furniture developed in two different understanding; Unique furniture, led by designers in Paris until the 1930s, attracts attention to rich and valuable materials. Ivory, gold, silver, ebony, shagreen, morocco leather, tiger, leopard skins, richly patterned, bright colored silk fabrics and silk fringes are the most favorite materials. In the second half of the 1930s, more and more spread through American cinema, a simple, short and massive look dominated the forms of furniture. Burl veneered surfaces stood out. Symmetry is often not preferred in design [29].

Forms reflected the optimism of 20th century, with different reasons in different future-oriented societies. People living in Anatolia looked forward a bright, secular and democratic future. The forms of Art Deco style was reflection of this optimism [12]. Art Deco style refers symbolically or clearly to electricity, mechanization, and transportation. These three words associated with the discourse of modernity of the Republic [9].

Selahattin Refik designed ‘Study Room’ designed for Ataturk at the Ataturk Museum House between 1929 and 1930. Forms of the furniture, bearskin, color selections, the polygonal form of the room make the Art Deco style feeling. The desk in that room described as; “eight legged, with a drawer, two-lid, half decagonal, above crystal glass, white patina painted on black wooden working table” in the inventory records of the museum [30]. The polygonal form of the desk, the joining angle of wood fibers and the dark wood material used for table, confirm that the furniture is under the influences of Art Deco.



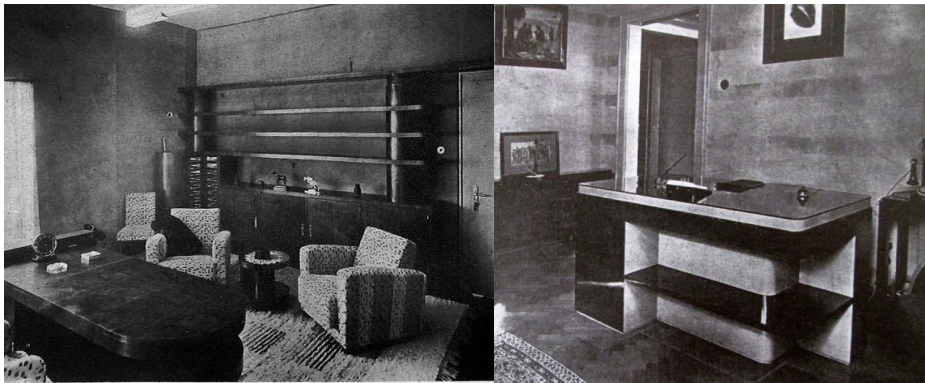
**Figure 19.** First Official Residence of the President of the Republic of Turkey, interior design of the office [31]

Resultant of Izmir Economic Congress decisions, a private enterprise, Zingal Turkish Corporation (T.A.Ş), is both a timber factory and manufactures picket fences, packing boxes, prefabricated houses, and furniture from semi-processed wood products. In 1933, Zingal Turkish Corporation was presented by a stand which Architect Sedat Emin and Suat Nazim designed, in 5th Domestic Products Exhibition. The coffee table, armchair, sofa, and sideboards on exhibition were reflecting Art Deco style [3].



**Figure 20.** Working Furniture in Turkish İş Bank Yeni Cami Branch [26]

The office furniture in Figure 20, which was exhibited in the Atatürk Room in the Turkish Business Bank Yenıcamı Branch, which was converted into a museum today, was used between 1928-2006 years. Its designer is considered to be "Decorator" Selahattin Refik Sırmalı, who designed İş Bank Central Branch in Ankara and İş Bank Exhibition in 1930s [32]. In Figure 20, with its black edges, the way of joining of wood fibers show the Art Deco's influence on the desk.



**Figure 21.** The study room in Makbule Atadan's Villa.[33]

**Figure 22.** The desk in a rental house designed by Seyfi Arkan(1925) [34]. The desk's contrasting colors and aerodynamic edges carry the characteristics of the Art Deco Style.

Makbule Atadan's Villa designed by Seyfi Arkan, in 1936. The desk in figure 21, made from solid wood [34]. The aerodynamic edges of the mentioned furniture (especially the bookcase and partly visible the desk), the large patterned; formally simple, big armchairs reflect the Art Deco Style.

The architect of the Florya Atatürk Marine Mansion was Seyfi Arkan, in 1935; Fazıl Aysu designed the furniture and had produced in a workshop named Kifiyodis in Karakoy [35]. The armchair in Atatürk's Office designed as leather on the wooden skeleton. The seat, which has leather coated on the armrests, has a lean line [36]. The one of the biggest and the most important furniture is the bookcase in Atatürk's working room which is one of the most important parts of Florya Atatürk Marine Mansion. It is made from solid materials and it has a modern simple form. The library has a massive look with dark plinth and its handles highlighted in a dark color.

#### 4. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

Furniture matter as a significant cultural element to enlighten the past times considered as bookcases, desks, and task chairs in offices. Imported and workshop furniture was affected by different styles in the studied period. Neoclassical, modern and Art Deco furniture was examined to express the cultural shift in the scope of research.

Modern furnishings representing the civilized life in the Early Republican Period, which became prominent with the declaration of the Republic, have begun to seem quite late in working furniture. Limited production due to economic difficulties of the period has also effects on this case. Contemporary design and modern furniture used as a tool to rising above the level of contemporary civilization for the young Turkish Republic. The emphasis on domestic goods is to encourage more production than consumption of imported neoclassical furniture. As a result of this, solid wooden office furniture was generally neoclassical and elaborated.

Used in last centuries of Ottoman Empire, spread as a result of necessities, wooden neoclassical and elaborate furniture were fundamentals to become widespread of western furniture. While contemporary materials and forms are rapidly becoming widespread in architecture, the internalization and dissemination of modern furniture have been quite difficult in this period, considering the new beginning of design education and its given the limited number of graduates.

At the end of the period, especially in the late of 1930, with the influence of the individualization of the spaces, the working room in the houses started to be seen. Working furniture was started to prefer in these spaces. Functional furniture designed by architects with modernity effects at the same period. As a result of this, furniture and spaces were started to consider as entire, forms were simplified.

Spreading of Art Deco style in furniture in the last 5 years of this period was a reflection to catch the era and to be future-oriented. Also, it was the symbol of optimism after World War I. Art Deco Movement was the symbol of optimism after World War I., used as a tool for reflecting the notion of the civilized life of the Republic.

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