ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE REPUBLIC OF TURKEY UNDER THE LEADERSHIP OF ATATÜRK

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Abstract. This paper aims to explore the main achievements of the early Republic of Turkey under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. Atatürk represented the nation, the Grand National Assembly, and the new government. This study opposes the position of some scholars who define the framework of political, economic, and social views to aid in the construction of the Turkish nation-state eclectic. The importance of republicanism consisted in several major aspects, which are reviewed and assessed in different ways in the range of research works. This study also opposes to the statement that The Republic of Turkey was the first republican form of government in Muslim World and Atatürk was the first to secularize the state. The results show that the changes provided by Atatürk came at the right time to keep the country between the strongest developing countries in the world.

Keywords: Atatürk, Kemalism, reforms, eclectic, leadership, nation-state, republicanism

Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of modern Turkish Republic and its first president from 1923 to 1938, was a strong nationalist leader who was successful in creating a nation-state after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. In this work we seek to illustrate the main achievements of the early Republic of Turkey under the leadership of the great Turkish statesman Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, whose motto was “Yurtta sulh, cihanda sulh”, i.e. “Peace at home, peace in the World”. Atatürk’s motto was accepted as Turkey’s foreign policy during the interwar period. The Republic of Turkey and the construction of a nation-state in it was founded on the remains of the Ottoman Empire.

However, there are some anti-Turkish scholars (e.g. Heper (1980), Aytürk (2011)), who have made attempts to define the framework of political, economic and social views to aid in the construction of the Turkish nation-state eclectic. We argue that meanwhile some aspects of republican thought and policy in Turkey came from European precedents, while others developed indigenously. The principle of modernization in Atatürk’s ideology got the great inheritance from its predecessors, the Young Turks (Dogan, 2016: 8). Hamza Eroğlu (1981:7) emphasized that Atatürk’s ideology emerged from the realities of Turkey. It contained the National Struggle in one hand and the radical changes on the other hand. Atatürk relied on the potential of his people and emphasized rational thought of the people (Roberts & Şahin, 2010: 510).

According to (Hevlacı, 2014: 357), Ahmet Emin, one of the journalists who came together with Mustafa Kemal Pasha in İzmit, said in the newspaper Vakit: “His Excellency Mustafa Kemal Pasha is the greatest power that can prepare the future. However, this power is a signifier”. Three weeks after the İzmit press conference, Mustafa Kemal answered the questions after the sermon he gave at the Pasha Mosque in Balikesir, saying that there is no classification in Turkey and that the whole nation will be represented in the party he will
establish (Atatürk's Discourses and Statements, V.II, Turkish Revolution History Institute Publications, Ankara, 1989: 97-98). Atatürk was convinced that the civil virtue is necessary for the determination of the common interest. (Tunçay, 1999:46) points out that in the elections held in this period, M. Kemal showed that the common good was determined by the Müdafaa-i Hukuk (M.H), Defense of the Law:

Our nation has made the decision to distinguish those who will undertake management in the future by elections. In the face of this decision of the nation, our M.H. organization will argue that it is reliable and reliable for the future with its competencies and qualities it has proven in the past and the nation deserves its vote. (...) The responsibility that we took courageously in the face of a thousand difficulties has been for the good and good of our country. We have full and complete courage to take responsibility for the good and benefit of our country in the tiring and difficult working period ahead of us.

Atatürk appealed to the Turkish people to embrace the new Turkish state: “All the wonders that the Turkish nation displayed during the last years and all the political and social reforms that it made belong to the nation itself,” and sovereignty was to “belong to the people without any qualifications and conditions.” The Turkish constitutional doctrine invoked the will of the people (Roberts & Şahin, 2010: 522). Engin indicated that the Kemalist revolution destroyed Islamic sharia and replaced it with the sense of community. This sense of community emerged from the nation’s high character (1938, 81-84). Bernard Lewis also underlined the positive side of Kemalism in the 1960s. He described the Kemalist revolution in his book The Emergence of Modern Turkey as “having brought new life and hope to the Turkish people, restored their energies and self respect, and set them firmly on the road not only to independence, but to that rarer and more precious thing that is freedom (1961: 293).

Turkish republicanism (cumhuriyetcilik) emerged as one of the six arrows (altı ok) articulated by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and other founders of the Republic of Turkey: republicanism, nationalism, populism, statism, laicism, and revolutionism. These six arrows are symbolized on the flag of the modern Republican People’s Party. The interaction of these foundational national principles came to be called Kemalism (Kissinger, 2014:185). The term of Kemalism, as an ideology, was coined by Ahmet Cevat, the Azerbaijani Turkish linguist, translator, and writer, in 1930. In his article, About the Great Turkish Revolution, Ahmet Cevat described Mustafa Kemal as “the Great Guide,” and he explained the content of Kemalism (Dogan, 2016: 4). The six principles of the Turkish republicanism were enumerated in the Republican People's Party Statutes of 1935, and they were incorporated in the constitution of 1937, which remained in effect until 1961, then only to be reformulated with slight modifications (Ozbudun, 2011:99). Echoing the Ottoman reform program of the nineteenth century known as Tanzimat, Turkish founders borrowed particular institutions of Kemalism, especially laicism, from the French and Swiss systems, in order to overturn usage of Islamic canon law. Other practices emerged from the influence of rural peasant groups. Irrespective of the origins of Kemalist values, a Turk was expected to support and conduct himself or herself in accordance with them (Roberts & Şahin, 2010:510).

The unified country was definitely one of the main achievements of the Republican People’s Party under the leadership of Atatürk. In 1924 The Republic of Turkey abolished the caliphate and the title of protector of the Muslim peoples claimed by Ottoman rulers, and replaced
religious schools with Western-type schools (Roberts & Şahin, 2010: 516). The nationalist Turkish writer Ziya Gökalp acknowledged in 1923 that even Turks in Anatolia, the putative heartland of Turkey, did not think of themselves as Turks. Founded by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk at the time of the Turkish Constitution of 1924, the Republican People’s Party drew on the Ottoman concept of Osmanlılık and insisted that anyone who supported Turkish national independence and the supremacy of the laws more than loyalty to family, tribe, class, or religious community could enjoy Turkish citizenship (Roberts & Şahin, 2010: 517). At the Lausanne Conference of 1923, Ismet İnönü, the Turkish foreign minister, affirmed the desire of Turkish nationalists to seek “a homogenous, unified homeland” and a collective cultural identity through a shared memory of Turkish independence and a common destiny.

The undeniable favor of Mustafa Kemal Pasha is the protection of the territorial integrity of the country. In 1922, Turkey, under Atatürk’s military and political leadership, thwarted efforts by Britain to control Istanbul and by Greece to occupy western Turkey. Turkey’s borders became largely fixed in 1923.

Arguably, statism was the main achievement of Atatürk and his followers. This statism provided government control of economic modernization and it included shifting the fiscal burden from peasants to landlords and townspeople. The Turkish Constitution of 1924 became law largely through ratification by the Turkish Parliament and declaration and endorsement by Atatürk. The parliamentary power was absolute in the republican state formation under the leadership of Atatürk until The Constitutional Court of Turkey, responsible for reviewing acts by the Turkish Grand National Assembly, was established in 1962.

This achievement of the early Turkish republic must be highly evaluated, in particularly because it suffered from the problem of dubious or undeveloped loyalty, owing to Turkey’s background in the multiethnic Ottoman Empire. Roberts & Şahin (2010:515) claim that “despite the Turkish constitution’s declaration that “sovereignty belongs unconditionally to the nation,” many citizens of the early Turkish republic had little inclination to equate the state and the nation”. Among other challenges, the Kurdish rebellions should be named, which precipitated by the Republic’s initiatives towards secularization, broke out in the country’s eastern provinces in 1925, 1927, and 1930. Meanwhile, Turkey inherited the sagging Ottoman economy of the late nineteenth century, including two-thirds of the Empire’s debts, an amount that would not be paid off until 1948 (Roberts & Şahin, 2010:519). In responding to these challenges, the leadership in Turkey under Atatürk relied on both short-term measures, designed to provide immediate insulation from dissenting groups within the new political borders, and long-term measures, designed to cultivate among the citizenry an organic sense of civic awareness and loyalty to the new nation (ibid.: 520).

A longer-term project adopted by the leader of the republic was the strengthening of their citizens’ civic identity (Roberts & Şahin, 2010: 521). Mustafa Kemal Atatürk dissociated himself from the policy of the Ottoman Empire and aimed founding the new republic on European principles, on the principles of Positivism, Rationalism, and the Enlightenment (Berkes, 1964: 481-490). To give to this nation a modern outlook, Atatürk introduced many socio-political reforms, which purpose was the modernization and secularization of the society. He wanted every citizen of Turkey to accept these principles, to modernize
themselves. Republicanism highlights the equality of all people before the law regardless of the ethnicity or religion.

The importance of republicanism consisted in several major aspects, which are reviewed and assessed in different ways in the range of research works. Among them we must oppose to the statement by Baral Dural (2007:140) and some others who claim that The Republic of Turkey was the first republican form of government in Muslim World and Atatürk was the first to secularize the state. We reject the idea of Ahmet Taner Kislali (1993:125) that Mustafa Kemal aimed to create a modern state by the help of people’s support which had never seen in the past. It was namely The Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan, ADR, (1918-1920) founded under the leadership of the great Azerbaijani statesman the Azerbaijani National leader Mehmet Emin Rasulzade, which was the first in the whole Muslim World to secularize the state and grant the equal rights to all citizens regardless of the ethnicity, religion, and gender (La Chesnais & Pierre Georget (1921), Kazemzadeh (1951), Świetochowski (1985), Raymond Duncan et al (1994), Świetochowski (1995), Vekilov (1998), Świetochowski (2004), Pope (2006), Tahirzade, Ahmad & Karimi (2018) and many others). ADR was the first state in the Muslim East to grant suffrage to women in 1918. It must be mentioned that the Azerbaijani stateman Ahmet Ağaoğlu was a close adviser of Atatürk.

The adaptation of the Swiss Civil Code by the Ataturk government in 1925 was praised for its treatment of minority rights in Turkey by the New York Times. The information “Turkey Adapts the Entire Swiss Civil Code; Ends Polygamy, Gives Equality to Minorities,” was published in The New York Times, 16 Jan. 1926. The newspaper emphasized the consequence of this adaptation as “the Lausanne Treaty provision for the protection of Greek, Armenian and Jewish minorities will automatically disappear, because the Swiss code places minorities on the same legal footing as citizens of Turkey.” The Swiss civil code was preferred by the Government because of its more democratic structure than the rest of civil codes in Europe (Dogan, 2016: 244). The new Turkish Civil Code, which with a few exceptions was identical to Switzerland’s, was approved by the Assembly unanimously on February 17, 1926 (Dogan, 2016: 247). The reform in the legal area was praised by the foreign press after it was accepted in the Turkish Grand National Assembly. The New York Times interpreted the main reason for the Kemalist legal reform as “the leaders in the new Turkish Republic were plainly making a determined effort to free themselves from the fetters which had bound them to medieval viewpoints and regulations.” (“New Codes in Turkey,” the New York Times, 5 Jul. 1926, 10).

Atatürk rejected some foreign ideologies and principles. Seref Aykut underlined that it was impossible to explain the Turkish revolution with the ideologies of Marxist and Fascist regimes (1936:15). Bernard Lewis (1961) and Lord Kinross (1965: 504), Andrew Mango (2002: 536) and many others emphasized also the democratic mentality of Mustafa Kemal and underlined that Mustafa Kemal showed respect for decency and legality, for human and political standards. Besides, Lewis described Kemalism as different from Bolshevism and fascism, but in terms of liberalism and democracy (1961: 290-291). The Early Turkish Republic, in short, created a secular sphere to legitimate government power (Roberts & Şahin, 2010: 529). The Republic of Turkey rapidly extended the franchise, granting all male citizens suffrage in 1924 and adopting women’s suffrage in 1933.
Education was one of the important pillars of the modernization under Atatürk’s leadership in Early Turkish Republic. “The primary rationale of all reforms under Atatürk’s leadership was as follows: If the people had been educated and empowered, they would have been able to protect democratic institutions and, consequently, their democratic rights” (Akgul 2019). Therefore, education was seen an important mechanism to create a new generation. From Mustafa Kemal’s perspective, individual actors were being insisted on as more important than the system; not a new educational system but teachers were seen as vital for the creation of new generations. Kemalist notion in education as the Kemalist regime aimed to create a youth liberated from superstitions derived from the past. This youth should love the hard sciences and the fine arts. They had to be free in their thoughts, conscience, knowledge, and culture. Nationalist and secular education was the main goal for the Kemalist regime in 1920s and 1930s. After the Law on the Adoption and Implementation of the Turkish Alphabet was passed in the Turkish Grand National Assembly, an educational campaign was started by the Government. The Schools of the Nation were established after the ‘Directive of Schools of the Nation’ was passed by the Minister of Education, Mustafa Necati Bey on November 11, 1928. In the directive Mustafa Necati Bey stated that every Turkish citizen between the ages of 16-45 had to join the Millet Mektepleri (national schools) and this was mandatory. The goal of these schools was to create a literate population- from those who could not read and write at all to those who could do so only in the old characters (Dogan 2016: 363). The most important educational reform of the early period of the republic was the Law for the Unification of Education in March 1924.

Women’s rights were one of the most important pillars of Kemalist modernization and its discourse. Change was seen as great progress in Turkish society. The main Kemalist assertion is that Turkish women got most of their rights from the Kemalist regime (Dogan, 2016: 250). Mustafa Kemal granted women’s rights, even though they were not accepted by some modern European states (Cecen, 1998: 109-110). The Kemalist movement took very rapid steps in the modernization of the Turkish women by the help of extraordinary laws. The Kemalist modernization tried to remove the seclusion of women totally in the social life. Mustafa Kemal and his companions were aware of the importance of women in a modern society. Mustafa Kemal’s visit to a different part of Turkey and his speeches about the emancipation of Turkish women was appraised by the New York Times. In his visit to Bursa Mustafa Kemal addressed to the teachers. Speaking before the Teacher’s Association at Bursa, he declared that the work before the nation could be perfected only if Turkish women joined equally with the men in educating themselves and in taking an active part in the nation’s affairs (Dogan, 2016: 258). Women’s suffrage was an important issue in this period, and allegedly one of the most progressive steps taken by Mustafa Kemal. It is true that Mustafa Kemal took a very progressive step in 1930s (Dogan 2016: 263). In this period, a strong feminist movement was appeared in the press and politics (ibid.: 265). After the founding of the Turkish Republic in October 1923, the Kemalist Government started its struggle for progress on women’s rights. However, conservative opinion was very strong and the Kemalist regime could not take serious action during the first years of the Republic. The progress could be seen only after the Law on the Maintenance of Order was passed in the Assembly in March 1925. By the help of this law, Kemalists started their modernization efforts from top to bottom and women’s rights were part of these reforms. The Kemalist regime managed to change many traditions by its top-down reforms (ibid.: 268).
To sum up, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk obtained huge democratic achievements in the Turkish society, but even indirectly for the whole humanity and his leadership must be highly evaluated. Atatürk opened the country to Western values. The protectionism, enclosed economic system and political and cultural inclination towards the West set by Mustafa Kemal led to the inner development of the country. Atatürk remains an important figure in the political and social landscape in Turkey and all other Turkic countries even today. The changes provided by Atatürk came at the right time to keep the country between the strongest developing countries in the world. Most of Kemalist scholars who have studied the Kemalist modernization in the early Republican era have given a huge credit to Mustafa Kemal as establishing a democratic regime in Turkey.

REFERENCES


