

## **Nationalism in Turkey: Response to a Historical Necessity**

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### **Abstract**

*The purpose of this article is to cast some light on the question as why and how nationalism appeared rather suddenly on the political stage in Turkey at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This article asserts that Turkish nationalism was an answer to the particular historical conditions that characterised the final phases of the Ottoman Empire and the birth of the modern Turkey. This article specifies some of these conditions and argues that, rather than emerging ex nihilo Turkish nationalism was in fact continuation of the attempts undertaken by the Ottoman rulers and the Young Turks in order to prevent the disintegration of the Empire by inventing integrative ideologies such as Ottomanism, Pan-Islamism and Pan-Turanism.*

**Keywords:** Ideology, Modernisation, Ottoman Empire, Political Islam, Secularisation, World War I

### **Introduction**

It was no earlier than the late 19<sup>th</sup> century that Turkish nationalism made its entrance upon the political stage of the Ottoman Empire for the first time. Until then it was almost totally non-existent and, as observed by many, “the ordinary Turk did not have a sense of belonging to a ruling ethnic group” (Mehmet 1990: 114-5). Nor did the members of the political and intellectual elite care to be called Turks even if Turkish was their native tongue (Goldschmidt 1991). In fact the term Turk as a designation referring to an ethnic origin and identity was little used in the Ottoman society, and whenever used there was not exactly a pleasing ring about it (Lewis 1968). Yet, although it appeared late and seemingly out of the blue, Turkish nationalism proved to be a strong force of impressive dimensions and of great potentials sweeping away almost too easily all the obstacles on its way, and ever since its emergence it has demonstrated a considerable ability of survival.

How was such a nationalistic turn possible? Why and how did Turkish nationalism emerge in the particular form and at the specific time it actually did? Such questions stand in the focal point of the present article, which seeks to throw some light upon them through a review of the literature describing the political developments in the Ottoman Empires before and after the Great War. The body of literature includes both accounts produced by Western historians and orientalist reflecting from the position of an external observer as well as the writings of the native Turkish scholars, reviewing and evaluating their own history. Yet any historical description is inevitably selective, and involves application of a certain order or structure upon the infinite flow of historical actions and events. It necessarily is a description from a certain perspective, a particular way of seeing things and subsequently, leaving out many other possible ways. The certain perspective adapted here however can be expressed in terms of an underlying idea or thesis, guiding the choice and interpretation of the available literature on the subject as well as structuring the presentation here.

The fundamental idea guiding the research that is reported here is that, as in the case of some other Middle Eastern countries, Turkish nationalism arose out of a historical necessity. In a time when the very existence of the Ottoman state seemed most uncertain, nationalism managed to meet the need of holding together a society which was about to fall apart. It, in other words, was an answer to the quest for national strength that was made necessary in the face of a hostile international environment, and it probably was the only realistic answer perceivable and available to the major Turkish political actors at a time when several other solutions had been tried and proved insufficient or inadequate. Which were then the urgent historical requirements that, necessitated by the specific circumstances, gave birth to the Turkish nationalism and prior to that to its forerunners as the ideological devices invented in order to meet these requirements?

### **The Islamic-Ottoman Legacy**

From the time of the early conquests of Islam beyond the Oxus River in the Central Asia during the 7<sup>th</sup> century the skilful native Turkish soldiers, after having converted to Islam, were taken up into the Arab armies and served as *ghazis*, that is the front warriors for the faith against the non-Muslim neighbours – first in Transoxania against the pagan tribes but shortly after in every corner of the Islamic world.

Soon however, these soldiers could take power the political power and build their own dynasties. One such was founded by the Seljuk Turks who in 1055 were able to conquer Baghdad, the political capital of the Islamic world at the time. The Seljuks then pushed north and after a major victory at Manzikert in 1071 over the Byzantines they opened Azerbaijan, Armenia and finally Anatolia to Turkish *ghazi* settlements. As a consequence of the Mongol storm in the mid 13<sup>th</sup> century the great Seljuk Empire itself however was eventually reduced into a small vassal in Anatolia where the new rules never had time or interest to establish their authority firmly. Instead there was at the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century a mosaic of petty ghazi emirates and principalities of which the house of Ottoman in north-western Anatolia was only one (Anderson 1974; Goldschmidt 1991).

The Ottoman Empire which emerged out of this political vacuum retained its ghazi character and, regarding itself as missionary in war found its reason for existence in the duty to battle against the infidel, military conquest and subsequent religious conversion of them. But in the course of time the Ottomans, though still in need of constant military expansion, became relatively sedentarised and took over some of the qualities of the older and more orthodox Islamic states of the past with their non-nomadic, non-crusading and tolerant administrative apparatus, driving tax from the Muslim subjects and collecting tributes from the non-Muslim ones.

Adding the new qualities to the old ones, the Ottoman state begun from the early 16<sup>th</sup> century to develop a *dual* character, revealing itself in a peculiar military-religious structure of power in which two parallel distinct columns or hierarchies could be discerned. This duality is traditionally captured by the Western analysts as a distinction between two sets of institutions, namely the Ruling and the Muslim (or Religious) Institutions of the Ottoman State. Accordingly the former comprised the whole military and bureaucratic apparatus of the Empire and was composed of the Sultan's court, the army and the executive officers of the imperial bureaucracy headed by the Grand *Visir* (Anderson 1974; Fisher 1964). Parallel with these and somewhat apart from them, stood the Muslim Institutions which welded the vast Empire together through a sophisticated educational and legal apparatus which performed the essential but more traditional ideological and juridical tasks of the system of Ottoman domination (Anderson 1974). Gradually but firmly integrated into the war machinery of the Sultanate, these Muslim Institutions with the *Ulema* (Islamic scholars) at the top, constituted an indispensable element of the Ottoman state; and as a result, there two sets of institutions "touched each other at almost every level in governmental and economic relation" (Fisher 1964: 213), and "there was never any absolute separation" between them (Anderson 1974: 366).

In this remarkable synthesis, dynastic authority and religious legitimacy came into a "structural harmony" (Anderson 1974: 363), an obvious sign of which was the co-existence of two distinct sources of law governing the state affairs. First, there was the *Sharia*, the sacred law of Islam which, accepted as emanated from God, bound the Sultan, Judges and all other lawmakers throughout the Empire. Second stood the published decrees of the Sultan, who expressing his supreme will, were either administrative in character or supplementary to the *Sharia* (Fisher 1964). Furthermore, at the top this dual structure there was the Divan which was composed of the representatives of both institutional matrixes and which "served in fact as a kind of union and capstone to the two branches of the Ottoman government" (Fisher 1964: 212). Above all however, this institutional intertwining was incarnated in the very person of Sultan-Caliph himself who enjoyed a two-folded basis of power. On the one hand his authority which was hereditary, was predominantly derived from the military power that he controlled and from the reverence and obedience that his subjects gave him. His profane power was "based on the fundamental principle that every society must have one ruler with absolute power and with the authority of issuing regulation and laws outside the religious law" (Inalcik 1964: 43, in Tachau 1984: 59).

On the other hand, The Sultan's authority originated in, and was enforced by, the Islamic religious-political tradition of Caliphate. According to this tradition the Caliph was recognised as the political leader and military chief of the Islamic *Umma* (that is, the global Muslim community) and was conceived as the direct representative or the shadow of God on earth and the living symbol of the unity of the Islamic faith and community. As such he was regarded and authorised on the one hand as political leader and military chief, and on the other hand, as the "Defender of the Faith, responsible for giving effect to *Sharia*" (Lewis 1965: 24-5). Compatible with its nature, it was Islam and nothing else which for centuries had been the prevalent ideology of the non-national Ottoman state. Embracing a number of ethnic and religious groups, subjects of the Empire were explicitly divided into two major religious categories: the essential division in the population was the one between the Muslims and the non-Muslims, and nothing in between.

The non-Muslim subjects, including both Orthodox Christians and Jews, were organised into *millet*s or religious and/or ethnic minority communities, each of which had internal autonomy under an ecclesiastical functionary with secular powers and enjoyed a considerable individual and communal freedom (Goldschmidt 1991; Mansfield 1973; Mehmet 1990; Tachau 1984). Yet, whereas this *millet* system did allow subdivisions of the non-Muslims along both ethnic as well as religious lines and applied a highly sophisticated idea of ethnicity to the non-Muslims, no such possibility existed for the Muslim subjects (Mehmet 1990). Within this system the Arabs, Turks, Albanians, and Kurds all were equal members of the Islamic *Umma* which, according to the basic tenets of Islam, embraces all Muslims as brothers and sisters, regardless of ethnic origin, language, customs, or political affiliation (Stirling 1958). Within this system not even the Turks enjoyed any special standing more than other Muslim ethnic groups and, in fact, their ethnic identity as Turks was submerged in their wider Islamic identity (Mehmet 1990). Seemingly, as it is suggested by several observers, the first Turkish people who converted to Islam “identified themselves completely with their new faith” (Lewis 1968: 331).

They appear to have become “so imbued with Islamic culture that they no longer identified [themselves] with their original tribes” (Goldschmidt 1991: 85) and forgot “their separate Turkish past with astonishing rapidity and completeness” (Lewis 1968: 332). And some observers go even further and maintain that as late as the Great War “even though Europeans continued to the Ottoman Empire as Turkey and to the Ottomans as Turks, among the Ottomans themselves the terms were largely unknown” (Tachau 1984: 64). Against this background, shared by both Western and Turkish historians specialised on the subject, it is hard to grasp how radical and fundamental a transformation the later changes in self-perception and self-identification have been. This transformation was rooted in the profound shift from the long-established and time-honoured structures of the theocratic Empire into those of a modern nation state. It was brought about by the complex conjunction of specific historical circumstances of the late Ottoman era – circumstances which constrained the freedom of the Ottoman-Turkish rules and limited the scope of their perception to the extent that the establishment of a Western-styled nation state with nationalism as its ideological foundation seemed to be the only possible option. Let us now take a closer look and see how these circumstances.

### **The War of Independence (1919-1923) and the Rise of Turkey**

Although ever since its establishment the Ottoman Empire had been one of the greatest powers of the world, the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century it was about to fall apart. Exhausted by the Russo-Ottoman and the Balkan Wars of the previous centuries, it was now known more as the Sick Man of Europe, no longer able to put up any effective resistance against the pressure of the so called Great Powers; and if it could escape the final defeat, it was “only because no European Power would permit its conquest by any other” (Mansfield 1973: 494).

It was the World War I which brought the life of the moribund Empire to a definitive end. As far the Ottomans were concerned, their fatal alliance with the Germans and the War ended in October 30, 1918, when Mudros Armistice was signed. It was a defeat treaty which entitled the Allies “the right to occupy any strategic points in the event of any situation arising which (would) threaten the security of the Allies” (Fisher 1964: 373). As the balance-sheet of the lost war, almost all European and Arab provinces of the Empire were lost; her armed forces had suffered enormously and were almost wiped out, the state treasury was drained and the administration apparatus lay in ruins. Even the evolutionary leaders, the Young Turks, who had revolted and seized power in 1908 to rescue the Empire from its ultimate and total collapse, had fled the country. What was left was a disintegrated society crushed and dissolved under the burden of years of war, over which still ruled a shadow-like Sultan who, indeed, saw the Allies all about him more like a relief than a threat, saving him from the strong hands of the revolutionary Young Turks.

The temporary absence of Russia due to the Bolshevik Revolution, and denouncement of all Russian claims to Turkish territory did not, however, stopped the other Allied countries to go on with their old business of the Eastern Question, i.e. the issue of how to divide up the Empire without causing war among the Great Powers themselves (Duignan & Gann 1981; Mansfield 1973; Mehmet 1990). During the War, the question had been solved by a number of secret agreements dividing up the Ottoman possessions in Europe, North Africa and the Middle East (Fisher 1964). But now, it had become a question of how to take over what was left of the Empire, i.e. the mainland itself – Anatolia, the fate of the Empire was to be decided in the “smoke-filled rooms” of Paris (Fisher 1964: 376) where the victorious Allied statesmen gathered to divide among themselves their newly won acquisitions. Yet the tide did turn.

The exhausted and low-spirited Turkish people of Anatolia who, demoralised by the defeat, had seemed indifferent to much of what happened, embarked upon their national resistance struggle under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal (Ataturk). What triggered off this struggle was the Greek invasion of the west Anatolian town of Smyrna (now Izmir). It was well known that the Greek nationalists had ambitions to restore around Constantinople (now Istanbul) the once-glorious Greek Christian Empire of Byzantium, which had fallen to the Ottomans in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Prior to the invasion, the Greek Prime Minister Venizelos had presented to the Peace Conference at Paris a formal claim to the town. This claim had already received the sympathy of the Lloyd George and Clemenceau, and “for not altogether creditable reasons” (Mansfield 1973: 495). Finally, when Wilson too was won over, Venizelos, receiving active military support of the Allies, acted to realise these ambitions (Fisher 1964; Goldschmidt 1991; Lewis 1965).

The invasion met no resistance from the Ottoman government but it was “the spark that lit the fires of Turkish nationalism in Anatolia” (Goldschmidt 1991: 200). In Constantinople there were protest meetings and soon in every part of Turkey patriotic societies sprang up (Lewis 1965). As the Greek army begun moving east, Anatolia guerrillas took up the struggle and started fighting them back. Acting in direct opposition to the Sultan’s orders, Mustafa Kemal begun to organise these forces into a liberation army and gathered a national congress in Sivas which soon became a centre of political power which no one could ignore. The nationalist movement however found itself at war not only with the Greek invaders and the Allied forces in the south and on the Straits (Dardanelle and Bosphorus), but also with the central government in Constantinople and with the new-born Republic of Armenia in the north-east. What saved the country was the aid it received from the Soviet Russia (Goldschmidt 1991). Furthermore, burdened with their own domestic post-war problems, both France and Italy gave up their territorial claims in Anatolia. Crossing the Dardanelle back to the European side, the French and Italian forces left the British on her own to hold the positions.

For a while Britain was able to continue to do so: occupying the Straits, controlling the Sultan, and cheering on the Greeks. But at last, short of reinforcements required from her Allies, the British government decided to cut its losses by calling another peace conference to negotiate a new treaty – this time at Lausanne in Switzerland and with the Nationalists. Meanwhile, with no more challenges from Armenia and with the Greeks short of military support of the Allies, the Turkish nationalists could decisively defeat the Greeks who then begun a tragic retreat that concluded the War of Independence on September 9, 1922 in the very place it had started. With the Greeks driven out of Turkey, the Nationalists completed the conquest of Anatolia and deposed the Sultan who, shorn of his foreign support, had fled from Constantinople. The stormy peace conference held at Lausanne (November 1922 – July 1923) established the independence of Turkey which thereby became the only defeated power in the World War I to reject the terms imposed on it by the Western victors. Short after, on October 29, 1923, the Grand National Assembly in Ankara abolished the Sultanate all together and declared Turkey republic, with Ankara as its new capital and Kemal as its first president.

### **The Kemalist Reform Programme**

Having defeated the invaders on the battle field, the Nationalists had achieved their prime objective, i.e. Turkey’s independence but another and perhaps more demanding struggle was yet to begin. It was a struggle to secure and preserve the results of the dear national victory – a struggle that arose from the concern for progress and national strength and its ultimate end was to reform a rather re-create Turkey, making it so powerful that no foreign power would ever again harass its sovereignty. The historical question now posed to the Nationalists was how this was to be obtained, and apparently – as the course of events revealed it – they had already adopted certain ideas (Lamdau 1973). More specifically, the Nationalists tended to believe that the answer to their question lay in modernisation or, as they conceived it, in the Westernisation of their Eastern country.

To design and implement the reforms which deemed necessary for the achievement of national strength they took a course most unexpected to many, turning fully around to face the West where they had found the example to be followed. Kemal officially opted for Europe, or for ‘civilisation’ as he preferred to call it (Mango 1975). “Civilisation means European civilisation” he had declared and, having accomplished some parts of the reform programme, he addressed the National Assembly in 1924 and remarked “the Turkish nation has perceived with great joy that the obstacle which constantly, for centuries, had kept Turkey from joining the civilised nations marching forward on the path of progress have been removed ... The nation has finally decided to achieve, in essence and in form, exactly and completely, the life and means that contemporary civilisation assures to all nations” (Kemal, quoted in Walz 1965: 40-41).

Yet, neither the ambition nor the direction of the desired change spelled out by was new. In fact, when put in a broader historical perspective, the reform enterprise that the Nationalists were determined to shoulder no longer seems as unexpected as it may do at the first glance. Instead it appears to be nothing but essentially another step or phase in a continuous process of reform or prolonged and “consistent policy of Westernisation” (Heper 1981: 349), which the previous Ottoman rulers, out of similar historical necessity and out of similar quest for national strength, had launched earlier and pursued almost without interruption throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and the first years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The full-scale house-cleansing reform programme called The New Order (*Nizaa-i-Jadid*) had already been commenced in the last quarter of the 18<sup>th</sup> century by Sultan Selim III (r. 1789-1792). After coming to a halt because of Napoleon’s invasion of Egypt in 1798 – then a province of the Ottoman Empire – the reform work task was resumed by Sultan Mahmud II (r. 1808-1839) who embarked the greatest Ottoman reform known as Regulations or Re-organisations (*Tanzimat*). He was followed by Sultan Abdul Majid (r. 1839-1861) who “issued a proclamation called the Noble Prescript of the Rose Chamber (*Hatt-i-Sherif of Gulhouse*) authorising the creation of new institutions to safeguard the basic rights of his subjects” (Goldschmidt 1991: 158) and promising administrative and fiscal reforms mainly to secure private property and religious equality before law.

And finally, there were the revolutionary Young Turks who, frustrated by the shortcomings of the previous attempts and their slow pace, had decided to accelerate the reform process by putting more force into it (Okyar 1984). Proceeding slowly and hesitantly, however, these reform attempts were never something of a significant success. The main factor which had triggered the move was the Europeans’ apparent military superiority urging the Ottoman rulers to aspire to modernise their own army. What had constituted the prime motive of these efforts had been the survival of the state, and in their scope they had therefore come to be mainly confined to the military and, to some extent, the central and local administration, where some achievements could be seen (Okyar 1984). They were implemented through the old traditional structures and mechanisms, and proved unable to create anything essentially new – if this ever was the ambition; and in consequence, at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the traditional complex of the Ottoman Empire had largely remained intact (Ahmed 1969; Anderson 1974; Goldschmidt 1991; Tachau 1984).

Against the background of these past experiences the Nationalists tended to believe that their quest for national strength could not be realised within the old structures of the Ottoman society. For them if there was anything to be learned from these past experiences was that if modernisation of the country was to succeed the reform project could not only seek to combine the old with the new. It rather had to replace the old with an entirely new system, and it had to be encompassing and radical enough to “effect all aspects of the Turkish society and to sweep away most, if not all, of its traditional beliefs and institutions” (Okyar 1984: 51); and once in power, the Nationalists did not hesitate to embark upon their wholesale reform project. Contrasting with the previous abortive efforts which obviously had failed to create the necessary improvements, what characterised the Nationalists’ approach in other words was the startling thoroughness and totality of their programme, designed to bring about and institute major profound changes in the most basic aspects of the life of Turkish people. This claim about the profoundness of the Nationalists’ reformism remains true even in the push for economic development did not take the prime position in their comprehensive programme (Goldschmidt 1991).

The reform programme however – defined and summed up by Kemal himself – was designed along six principles which, later introduced into the Turkish constitution, were conceived to make up a coherent ideology called *Kemalism*. Four of them were *republicanism*, *populism*, *statism* and *reformism*. Republicanism entailed, obviously, the sovereignty of the people and the selection of the leader from the citizenry, in contrast to the hereditary system of the Ottoman Empire. Pointed against social orders based upon privileges, populism meant that the government belonged to the Turkish people, working together for the common good, without distinction of rank, class, and sex. It meant “the unity of society as transcending all classes and functional difference” (Steinbach 1984: 80). Statism, or state capitalism, required the government to direct and take part in the country’s economic development. Having in mind the unfortunate Ottoman experience of dependence upon foreign loans, capital and concessions, statism was to develop the economic resources and inaugurate an industrialization without too much foreign influence. Finally, reformism (originally, revolutionism) referred to the ongoing commitment of the Turkish people and government to rapid but peaceful modernisation (Dumont 1984; Eisenstadt 1984; Fisher 1964; Goldschmidt 1991).

Yet, what may be considered as the focal point of the reform programme or “the two basic points of Kemal’s message” (Steinbach 1984: 78) were *secularism* and *nationalism*, rendering the Nationalists’ enterprise “a project of change that would reach the very soul of [their] country” (Deeb 1996: 7) turning it into what Heper (1981: 350) calls a *cultural revolution*, that is, a *cultural re-construction* of the Turkish society. But this, in turn, required a secularisation and a nation-building process to be initiated and carried out through the top-down means of revolutionary legislation necessary for wiping out the Islamic-Ottoman cultural legacy and for replacing it with a new and foreign one.

### **Secularism: The Removal of the Old**

Even if there seems to be some dispute among the scholars about the extent to which the religious basis of legitimacy mentioned before was used by the Ottoman rulers (Heper 1981), the Nationalists and Kemal, however, conceived the dual character of the Ottoman state and of the Sultan’s role as the main source of the Empire’s weakness. In their view, this duality had been “responsible for the corruption of officials and for the ignorance and indifference of the people to that corruption” (Lewis 1965: 72). For the Nationalists the Caliphate and the Sultanate (or religion and the state) should be separated “so that no longer would head of the Muslim community be the political ruler as the Sultan had been for centuries” (Lewis 1965). During the War of Independence the Nationalists had maintained some critical but yet moderate and cautious position refraining from expressing a too antagonistic attitude towards the Ottoman system or the Sultan himself (Okyar 1984). But nonetheless the Nationalists were determined to change Turkey from the bastion of Islam into a modern secular state. As the Nationalists conceived it, this faith had blocked the country’s transformation towards modernity and, therefore, it holds on the polity and the society had to be undermined and destroyed. Secularism, which perhaps constituted the most essential component of the Nationalists’ reform programme, “amounted to the removal of religious control over Turkey’s politics, society, and culture” (Goldschmidt 1991: 205-6) and Islam was “not supposed to have even the function of a *civil religion* for the Turkish polity” (Heper 1981: 350).

They thus started a merciless attack against the entire Ottoman-Islamic legacy of the Turkish society. Through a series of rapidly implemented legislation they set out to create a total break with the Islamic past and found for the new Turkey a Turkish national identity which they assumed to be more compatible with the Western model of organising political units. Within a short period of time (1924-1928) the Nationalists urged this newly founded Turkish nation to adopt a new constitution, to give up the Caliphate, the *Shari’a*, their traditional apparel and their Arabic script, all aimed at disestablishing and undermining the Islamic institutions and the power structure they upheld. As already mentioned, in 1923 the victorious Nationalists proclaimed Turkey a republic with supreme sovereignty belonging to the Turkish nation and with the highest authority residing in the Grand National Assembly. To emphasise the separation of religion and government, the Nationalists moved the political capital from Constantinople to Ankara in the Anatolian heartland. The shift was “in recognition of the fact that Anatolia was now Turkey, unencumbered by the European, Arab or African provinces” (Lewis 1965: 78). The decision stood for an emphasis on the break with the Ottoman-Islamic legacy of the past and was rooted in “a rejection of the cosmopolitan Byzantine and Ottoman past in favour of an Anatolian Turkish future” (Goldschmidt 1991: 206). In 1924 a new constitution was adopted and the Caliphate was abolished by a decision of the Grand National Assembly. Together with it, religious courts and institutions or religious learning were abolished.

The *Shari’a* courts were closed down and a modified version of Swiss Civil Code was adopted to constitute the foundation of the new legal system, replacing the one based on the old religious law. By the same token, Quaranic schools were abolished and public education was secularised under a Ministry of Education. The Grand National Assembly moved on and passed laws confiscating all the property belonging to the Muslim institutions, closing the Sufi orders and their convents which until then had acted “both as a place of prayer and as a community centre providing social, educational and mutual aid services” (Mehmet 1990: 121). Moreover, all public displays of religious observance were discouraged” (Heper 1981: 351). The use of Arabic in public acts such as Quarn recitations and the call to prayer from the minarets was forbidden and was given in Turkish instead. Even the Quran and the Traditions of the Prophet were translated into Turkish. Furthermore, the Islamic calendar was replaced by the Gregorian one; metric weights and measures replaced the customary Turkish ones; Sunday was declared as the weekly rest day instead of Friday; men were forbidden to wear fez or any other traditional head covering such a turban; and finally, to complete the reform programme, secularism was officially declared in 1928 when the second article of the 1924 constitution which declared Islam the state religion was deleted (Goldschmidt 1991; Mehmet 1990).

**Nationalism: The Search for a Substitute**

Modernisation of the newly established state, as the Nationalists believed, required secularism, i.e. the abandonment of its theocratic character and removal of any trace of religion, especially within the political sphere. But modernisation required other changes in the organisational form of the Empire as political unit too. The imperial system of the Ottoman state, with its constant ambition to absorb more territory into itself and with its subsequent multi-religious and multi-ethnic conglomeration embracing different cultures and languages, seemed to the Nationalists to be a most inadequate political framework within which no radical modernisation could efficiently be carried out (Okyar 1984). They therefore came to believe that their most important and demanding task was that of replacing the old imperial theocratic non-national structure of the Ottoman era with that of a modern political unit; and looking towards the West, what Kemal and his followers visualised and pursued from the very beginning was a secular, Western-style nation-state, with the basic preference and the ultimate objective of becoming an integral part of the West (Önis 1995).

The Ottoman state had proven to be inefficient and out-of-date, but more importantly its imperial organisation had shown to bear in itself an inherent source of instability built into its structure – an inherent source of vulnerability which could easily be used by foreign powers. What more convincing evidence could one ask for than the fact that what had functioned as the Empire's Achilles heel was nothing but its multi-ethnic and multi-religious *millet* system. As put by Steinbach (1984: 78), “the defeat of the Ottoman Empire by the European great powers and, more importantly, by the nationalist movement among the non-Turkish peoples of the Empire [had] taught Atatürk that only a purely Turkish state – a nation state – could survive as a political entity.”

The Nationalists, therefore, came to realise that not empire but nation state was the most appropriate political unit; and they were willing to take account of the implications of this insight. To build a nation state required a homogenous nation united by the bonds of a common ethnicity, history, language and culture. This primarily meant substituting nationalism for religion. Islam, the basis of the civilisation and government for the Turks since their conversion a thousands year ago, was now to cease to function as the predominant ideological source from which the legitimate goals of political life should be derived. From now on it was the Turkish nationalism which was to perform that function and be the main source of identity. Turkey was now to be a country for the ‘Turks’ and the Turks alone, and in return it required the countrymen's full loyalty and engagement. It called on the Turks to devote themselves to the needs of the Turkish nation, rejecting any special ties to the Muslim or foreign ideologies” (Goldschmidt 1991: 205).

But Turkish nationalism was by no means a naturally given substitute, and had to be invented or, more exactly, had to be developed from what had been laid down in some half-hearted efforts previously made. Out of the similar historical necessities, i.e. the maintenance and reinforcement of the integration of the Empire, the previous rules had made some attempts at the ideological revival and renewal of the Empire. In order to achieve this end, they had invented and tried a variety of ideological tools to meet the need of an effective centripetal force, namely *Ottomanism*, *Pan-Islamism* and finally *Pan-Turanism* or *Pan-Turkism*. But as the course of events came to show none of these proved adequate. The independence movements which begun to appear in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in the non-Muslim peripheries of the Empire were partly a result of the imperialist strategy of the Great Powers who, applying the policy of ‘divide and rule’ could efficiently take the advantage of the structural weaknesses of the *millet* system. This system, with its outspoken distinction between different ethnic-religious groups, had unintentionally promoted nationalism among the non-Muslims who were most exposed to the Western or Russian influence. The system therefore could be, and actually became, used by the Great Powers to raise the national conscientiousness of these peoples “more or less systematically in order to destabilise the Empire from within” (Mehmet 1990: 1112), and this had made up the “paramount objective of the Eastern Question” (Mehmet 1990: 111) consistently pursued by the Great Powers.

Becoming increasingly concerned about the integration of the Empire, the Ottoman rules Answered to this situation by inventing the idea of Ottomanism. This formula which mainly was thought to win large popular support among the non-Muslim subjects was a desperate attempt to preserve the integrity of the Empire. It “offered the notion of an Ottoman nationality common to all subject-citizens regardless of religion and/or traditional status, in diametrical opposition to the traditional view that non-Muslim deserved only a second-class status” (Tachau 1984: 65). As such it was created to maintain the coherence among the multitude of the peoples and to uphold their belief in the Empire (Okyar 1984).

It was meant to “function as a framework within which racial, linguistic, and religious groups could develop autonomously but harmoniously, preserving the loyalty to the Ottoman state” (Mehmet 1990: 115). But as it generated no support among the non-Muslims, and even less among the Muslims, it proved to be only a legal fiction or a “Chimera” (Tachau 1984: 65); and derived from “a peculiar kind of synthetic Ottoman nationalism” (Fisher 1964: 396), it could offer only a “fictive citizenship” and therefore remained “an empty label” (Mehmet 1990: 115). The pressure of the partition forces, however, continued to intensify. So did the need of an integrative ideology, especially as the nationalistic feelings and the entailing desires to autonomy begun to develop also among the Muslim subjects of the Empire in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Goldschmidt 1990). When the Albanians and particularly the Arabs too stood up against the domination of the Constantinople the development had gone too far, as the Ottoman rules saw it (Okyar 1984). What was at stake now was the unity of the Islamic community, a unity achieved in the Crusades and, ever since, not disturbed importantly but rather preserved by the Ottoman Turks.

It was against this background that another integrative ideology, known in the West as Pan-Islamism, begun to shape in the mind of some Islamic intellectuals and Ottoman rulers. This ideology experienced its heydays during the reign of Sultan Abdul Hamid (1876-1909) who seemingly more than any other Ottoman ruler was devoted to the idea. It was during his reign that the position of the Caliph and its potentials, which until then mostly remained dormant, seriously came into use. Seeming to offer a promising alternative, the idea of Pan-Islamism would “stress the common Muslim identity, which at any rate had been among the major legitimising forces bolstering the Ottoman authority over the centuries” (Tachau 1984: 65).

In addition to the enhancement of the internal integrity of the Empire, Pan-Islamism would also have assured the Ottomans of the needed unity, loyalty and support of the most Muslims outside it, i.e. Persia, Egypt, India and other parts of the Muslim world against the ruthless imperialism of the Great Powers (Goldschmidt 1990). Furthermore, activation of this title offered a device for pursuing the Great Powers that the Sultan’s spiritual status was analogous to that of the Pope or the Patriarch and that consequently the title would give him the right and duty to claim protection of the Muslim subjects of the Great Powers just as much as they had claimed protection of the Christian subjects of the Sultan (Mansfield 1973). This idea however was a short-lived one, and the Pan-Islamic attempt at holding the Empire together was brought to an abrupt end when the Young Turks took over and could force their will upon the Sultan.

At the beginning at least these new rules were not Turkish nationalists but Ottomanist, finding it difficult to oppose the Empire in which they had their prise. Gradually however, as things went wrong, they grew more and more nationalist, and facing the great losses of almost all European land within a short period and with many other dashed hopes, they begun to consider whether they should aim at a wholesale reformation and modernisation of the Ottoman system (Goldschmidt 1990). Assigning initially an important role to Islam as an integrative factor, they gradually “came to the conclusion that the idea of an Islamic community was in contradiction to that of a nation” (Dumont 1984: 30). They begun in other words to ease the stress on Islam as the prime source of identity, and were ready to render it less central an element in their worldview, reducing it into “a simple cultural factor” submerged in a wider Turkish identity (Dumont 1984: 30). What they set out instead to pursue therefore was to articulate an ideology which, emphasising the Turkish ethnicity, looked for “more limited and nationalistic solutions which as developing the Turkish element within the Empire ... as a separate and homogeneous entity” (Okyar 1984: 46).

Despite their differences, both Ottomanism and Pan-Islamism did share some features, however. They both had been articulated with no intention of abandoning Islam as the foundation upon which they were built. Moreover, they both had been imperial ideologies in the sense that the political unit that they sought to hold together was an empire and not a nation state, and in this regard the Young Turk’s Pan Islamism or Pan-Turanism was no different; and although they were inclined to lessen the emphasis on the religious element, the Young Turks tended to do so only in favour of another imperial ideology. Not willing to abandon the imperial outlook of their initial Ottomanism, their nationalism thus was not confined to the Empire, but was characterised instead by an enthusiastic interest in the Turkic people of Central Asia and demonstrated a great concern with “the establishment of some form of union of Turkic peoples” (Winrow 1995: 7). It sought to “bring together all speakers of Turkic languages under Ottoman leadership[and] as most speakers of these languages were under czarist rule or military occupation, Pan-Turanism seemed a good way to pay back the Russians for all the grief they had given the Ottoman Empire” (Goldschmidt 1990: 174).



Yet, although Pan-Turanism seemingly was able to keep “Turkish hopes alive at a time when the bases of Ottoman society were crumbling” it was “never much more than an impractical dream” (Lewis 1965: 59). It was an artificial ideology, lacking real historically existing objective foundation; therefore no wonder that not more than only a few believed that “there really was a distinct Turanian culture” and that the influence of this ideology and its inventors on Central Asia “was almost nil” (Goldschmidt 1990: 174-5). The creed of Pan-Turanism or Pan-Turkism was thus barely more than yet another artificial construction in the series of fictive tools of integrations, hardly more than “another utopian integrationist idea” that the revolutionary Young Turks for a while “toyed with” (Okyar 1984: 47). Nevertheless, despite its failure, in one important aspect Pan-Turkism was different from previous attempts. It had the Turkish ethnicity as its basis, and seemed to have given the political expression to the Turkish nationalism in its intellectual infancy, and expression to a pre-mature nationalism in its rudimentary shape – “vague and tinged with utopian ideas” (Okyar 1984: 46). Nonetheless, what is important to notice here is that, despite all its apparent deficiencies, it did open a new ideological horizon within which a variety of opinions could now be discerned, many of them hitherto unthinkable.

Though the Empire had ever since its establishment sought to acquire non-Muslim satellite possessions, the very core of its political organisation had been the Islamic *Umma* and nothing else. Out of its universalism, Islam conceived nationalism as a reductionist worldview which was to re-organise the world on the basis of ethnicity and territory, and which involved much worldly evil. Consequently, on this basis, an ethnically defined nation was an unthinkable political unit. In addition to this objection, the Ottoman rulers could also hold nationalism responsible for the disintegration of the Empire, and there was hardly a lack of political reason for their scepticism and disapproval. Although some observers argue that Pan-Islamism was not “a serious obstacle to the emergence of a non-religious nationalism” (Heper 1981: 349), others are of a different view and maintain that the Ottoman rules allowed no room for their non- or even anti-nationalistic ideas.

As already mentioned, Turkish nationalist consciousness, or at least “Turkish nationalist tendencies” (Okyar 1984: 46) were up to the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century almost totally absent from the Turkish political stage and foreign to the context of Ottoman society. But by that time it had slowly begun to penetrate the intellectual life of the country and soon “the Turkish elite was ... infected by the virus of nationalism” (Tachau 1984: 65). A significant role seems to have been played by some pre-war intellectuals, especially Ziya Gökalp commonly recognised as the “father of Turkish nationalism” (Okyar 1984: 46) who, writing newspaper articles, “devoted many emotional pages” (Dumont 1984: 30) in the main organ of the pre-war nationalists “to promote what he called Turkism” (Goldschmidt 1990: 174).

Though their definition of the Turkish nation Gökalp and his contemporaries included both racial and religious criteria (Lewis 1968), it nonetheless was the Turkish ethnicity which was pushed to the foreground. It came to be regarded as a significant, but until then neglected, aspect of the identity of the Turkish people and was now to receive the appropriate weight it had been deprived from (Tachau 1984). Thus it now was made the most prominent and distinctive feature of this new definition – not only constituting the main source of Turkish identity but also determining the boundaries distinguishing it from other identities and from other nations. But to bestow validity upon such ideas, history had to be re-told, and in search of new sources of identity the past had to be created anew. The most notable Turkish ideologies of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century thus reached out to the pre-Islamic roots of their lost Turkish national identity, seeking to unearth it not in Anatolian Turkey or Turkestan but in “the vast and eternal Turan”, the hypothetical-mythical ancestral homeland of the Turkic people in the Central Asia. They in other words turned to their mythical and legendary ancient empire before Islam in order to demonstrate that their *Turkishness* was historically prior to their *Muslimness*.

Nourished by the poems and polemics of Ziya Gökalp and some other pre-war intellectuals, the Young Turk leaders found these ideas tenable enough to hold up an imperial kind of Pan-Turkish unity based on ancient ties of blood with various distant peoples of Central Asia; and at the outbreak of the World War I they conceived the time mature to put these ideas into practice. The crucial point however is that despite their fatal failure to revive the Empire, the Young Turks and their ideas had opened up the way to a secular state ideology which, disconnected from religion, could serve Kemal and the Nationalists who had realised the necessity of separating their emerging, modern state from Islam, the foundation of all Ottoman traditions (Steinbach 1984). As Dumont (1984: 30), commenting on the origins of the Kemalist nationalism puts it,

It would ... be an error to think that the nationalism of the Republican People's Party owed nothing to the ideological concerns accumulated during the preceding decades. Upon closer examination we can see that the Kemalist approach was closely tied to conceptions elaborated by the Ottoman intellectuals of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries ... [and] even concerning the two main points on which Kemalist nationalist differed from pre-war Turkish doctrine – the religious criterion and the racial factor – the change was not as great as one might expect.

In other words, Pan-Turkism or Pan-Turanism made a major contribution to the national awakening of the Turks and as such it came to function as a necessary intermediately link, paving the way towards Kemal's non-imperial nationalism; and unless we believe in the emergence of ideas out of nothing, it seems hard to imagine how the subsequent Kemalist nationalism would have appeared and succeeded to the extent it actually did without first Pan-Turkism breaking away from the traditional ways of political thinking. It is true that what Kemal and his followers did was to liberate "the Turkish identity as much from the clutches of great power imperialism as from an anti-national Ottoman-Islamic past" (Mehmet 1990: 116), but it was equally true that they also liberated it from the imperial aspirations attached to it and stripped off its less realistic features, tailoring it so that it better would fit the historical reality. Put differently, what the Nationalists did and had to do was to abandon the imperial features which through the strong emphasis on the racial components such as comprehensive Turkish ethnicity was attached to this state ideology and thus render it more compatible with the reality they faced.

Having lost all territory outside Anatolia and hoping to avoid trouble with Moscow, the Kemalists decided to eliminate the notion of race from their official definition of nationalism. Wise and bold enough to accept actually existing constraints and to draw the necessary lessons, Kemal was one of the very few leaders who realised that "the only solution was retrenchment into the basic Turkish homeland, abandonment of the imperial concept of rule over different communities, concentrating on developing the homogeneous Turkish element in Anatolia, and leaving the rest to take care of themselves" (Okyar 1984: 47). This change is pointed out also by Winrow (1995: 7) who also asserts that "Kemal's distaste for Pan-Turkism and his desire to consolidate the newly founded Republic of Turkey, led the Turkish official largely ignoring the fate of the so-called Outside Turks ... so long as there was no open discrimination against them"

The new policy had already before demonstrated the Nationalists' pragmatism and sense of reality, when they in a treaty concluded with the Soviet Union in March 1921 Kemal had bound himself and his country-to-be not to support Pan-Turkic elements in the Soviet Union in return for Moscow's promise not to support the Turkish communists in its territory (Winrow 1995: 7). But it also found a concrete expression in the definition of nation which was stipulated in the programme of the Kemalist Republican People's Party, drawn at the beginning of the 1930s. Accordingly "a nation is a social and political formation comprising citizens linked together by the community of language, culture and ideal" (Tunaya 1952, in Dumont 1984: 29). This definition which "cleverly by-passed religious, racial and ethnic issues" (Dumont 1984: 29), marked a radical break not only with the Islamic identity prevalent in the Ottoman society but also with all three previous ideological tools invented in the transitory and turbulent period of the Ottoman decline.

### ***Summary and Conclusion***

Seeking to secure the independence of their newly founded country, the Nationalists under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal embarked upon a grand reform enterprise the ultimate end of which was national strength and a place among the more advanced nations. To pursue their objectives they turned to the West and found the example there. Accordingly, what was to replace the old regime of the Ottomans was a modern, secularised nation state. This replacement required a radical shift in the ideological foundation of the state, involving both the removal of the Ottoman-Islamic legacy and the substitution of nationalism; hence the fundamental character of Kemalism and the comprehensiveness of his approach. Yet despite its thoroughness, both in ambition for national strength and in direction towards the West Kemalism was a continuation of the previous attempts started already in 18<sup>th</sup> century rather than a radical historical break with the past. Therefore, despite its almost total absence in the pre-Kemal period, Turkish nationalism did not just come out of the blue. As this article has tried to demonstrate, it was rather an organic continuation of the earlier efforts of the Ottoman rulers, undertaken to find an integrative state ideology in the face of serious threats to its very existence and a natural consequence of the outcome of these efforts. The case of nationalism in Turkey shows how "political ideas follow political reality" (Tachau 1984: 65).

It was born out of a historical necessity and “its birth pangs were a series of wars for independence against several enemies” /Fisher 1964: 383). In other words, Turkish nationalism was the natural and perhaps inevitable outcome of particular historical circumstances which, imposed by the realities of international politics, made national survival a task of first rang priority and which made any alternative either imperceivable or impracticable. It is against this historical situation that the apparently sudden emergence of Turkish nationalism becomes more comprehensible. A more demanding question however concerns the degree to which it has been successful. Given the foreign nature of this substitution and the top-down method of the Nationalists to create and establish it, it has proven surprisingly durable until now. The major test however is yet to come. It is in the face of the recent resurgence of the religious identity that Turkish nationalism will meet its real challenge, revealing whether it has grown strong enough to withstand the forthcoming winds of change.

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