

The Foreign Policy of Atatürk Concerning the Turkish World

Ercan Karakoç*, Gökmen Kılıçoğlu*

Özet

Atatürk Türklüğü ile gurur duyan ve ömrünü Türk milletine adayan bir liderdi. O, yeni kurulan cumhuriyetin gücü ve uluslararası konjonktür elverdiği ölçüde Misak-ı Milli sınırlarını elde etmeye çalışmıştır. Atatürk, Lozan Barış Anlaşması sonrası Misak-ı Milli sınırları dışında kalmış olan Türk varlığı ile alakasını kaybetmemiş, onların sorunları ile ölümüne değin yakından ilgilenmiştir. Türkiye dışında kalan Türklerle kültürel ve tarihi köprülerin sağlamlaştırılması hususunda yoğun çabalar göstermiştir. Yeni cumhuriyeti tehlikeye düşürecek maceracı politikalarından uzak kalmış, zamanın büyük devletleriyle çatışma ortamına girmekten kaçınmış, ancak şartlar elverdiği zamanda milli hedeflere ulaşmaktan da geri durmamıştır.

Abstract

Atatürk devoted his life to the Turkish nation, felt proud of being a Turk and lived his life as a Turkish nationalist. He tried to accomplish the borders defined in National Oath as possible as the power of new republic and international conjuncture. After the Lausanne Treaty, he was interested in Turkish Diaspora living outside the borders of National Oath and paid attention to solve their problems until he died. He made great effort to strengthen the cultural and historical ties with Turkish people living outside the borders of Turkey. He did not follow adventurous policies which were dangerous for new republic, avoided conflicts with powerful countries of that period, but he did not abstain from getting national goals under the suitable international conditions.

Key Words: *Turkish World, Atatürk's Foreign Policy, National Oath, Musul, Language and Culture*

Introduction

Today, Atatürk is known as a man who was primarily interested in domestic politics, yet he also held many strong views and ideas about the Turkish existence outside of the borders of the Republic he founded. Atatürk, who himself was born outside the present borders of the Turkish Republic, keenly followed his era's political and ideological trends, allowing him to develop a skill of foresight on whether some economic and social-political strategies would work or fail. As part of his personal development, Atatürk made a concerted effort to use the day's available resources to concentrate on the historical and cultural ties with Turkish peoples who lived outside the new nation's borders. He also took great affront to the plight of Turkish communities and Republics when they were faced with attacks and threats in the first quarter of the 20th Century.

As a dynamic people, the Turks spread from Central Asia (Turkistan) to many lands in the world and during this expansion established many states. In this study, we will use the term "Turkish World" to describe those Turks who lived outside the national borders of the Turkish Republic following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and Turkish peoples living in Central Asia and the Caucasus such as the Uzbeks, Turkmens, Uygurs, Tatars, Azeris, Karakalpaks, Kyrgyz and Kazak Turks.

* Department of National Security Strategies, Institute of Technology, 41400 Gebze/Kocaeli,

Intellectual and Political Conditions Which Affects Atatürk's Nationalism

The failure of Ottomanism and Pan-Islamism as a tool to keep the Empire intact directed Ottoman intellectuals and officers towards the concept of Pan-Turkism. We can divide the believers of Turkish Union into two groups. The first group which led by Ahmet Ağaoğlu and Yusuf Akçura who are escaped from Russian imperialism, advocated both cultural and political unification. The second group which was led by Ziya Gökalp advocated cultural union among Turks [1]. However, the unrealistic and adventurous implementation of such a policy by the leaders of the İttihad and Terakki Party, especially Enver Paşa, not only failed, but also speeded up the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. After analyzing why these three philosophies failed, Atatürk settled on more realistic and attainable policies. After the establishment of the Republic, Mustafa Kemal based his policies on a cultural union among Turks and he demonstrated these tendencies via his application of a common cultural policy. He first realized the necessity of institutionalizing Turkishness; he thus found the Institution of Turkish Language and the Institution of Turkish History. By means of these institutions, Turkish History and Culture could be researched deeply and academically.

Atatürk devoted his life to the Turkish nation, felt proud of being a Turk and lived his life as a Turkish nationalist. In an introspective moment, Atatürk said the following about his roots, **"When I first read the works of poet Mehmet Emend Yurdakul, I was a student at the Manastır Military High School. The first time I felt pride in my national identity was when I first read his poem that begins with the lines 'I am a Turk my religion, my race is blessed'. Yet, I truly reached this plateau when I was serving in the army. At the time I witnessed an Arab Major, slapping an Anatolian boy because he had raised his voice to another Arabian soldier, as I watched him swallow his pride and hold back his tears it was then that I truly understood and felt what it was to be a Turk. From that day forth my Turkishness was a source of my deepest pride and inspiration".** And he added, **"In my life my only sole wealth, is my being a Turk."**[2]. As part of his belief in the existence of a natural and sociological ethnic bond and connections amongst Turkish peoples living outside Turkey's border, Atatürk highlighted this conviction when he said: **"Turkey must above all concern itself with the cultural issues of those Turks outside of Turkey. In this way we are implementing a constructive approach to the Turkish cause. We attach great importance not only to all various sources of the Turkish language, but also to its wealth of dialects and many great literary works. We do not even overlook the Turkic dialects and cultures of those Turks who live beyond Lake Baikal ...** [3].

New Soviet government did not want Anatolian Turks and Turks under the control of their territory to establish a cultural and linguistic union among themselves. Therefore, the Soviet officials changed the Arabic alphabet of Turks to Latin script in 1927-1930. Then, some Turkish nationalist intellectuals such as Yusuf Akçura, Ahmet Ağaoğlu and Sadi Maksudi warned Atatürk about the changing of alphabet in Soviet that would disrupt cultural and linguistic ties among Turkish world and added that this problem must be solved quickly [4]. Later, Atatürk accepted Latin alphabet on November 1st 1928 to stop this crucial matter easily and also to realize Westernization of Turkey. Soviet government was worried about this important alphabet reform in Turkey and they re-changed alphabet of Turks living in their territory from Latin script to Cyrillic script [5].

Atatürk's Views on Turkish Foreign Policy about Turkish World

Atatürk's policy concerning the Turkish World was based on the principles of realism, pragmatism and for neither being passive, nor adventurous. Above all, Atatürk desired that all humanity live in peace and welfare, embodied by one of his most well known statements **"Peace at Home, peace in the World."** He built solid links with Turkish peoples living outside the borders of the nation and during his lifetime he never forgot their problems and plight. With a keen eye to the ever-changing world situation, Atatürk formulated a realistic foreign policy about the Turkish World. The best example of this kind of intelligent and measured policy is one that led to the Hatay (İskenderun) region's joining Turkey.

In a speech he gave at the social club of Ziraat Bank in Ankara on the 10th Anniversary of the Republic in October 29 1923, Atatürk said perhaps his most prophetic and visionary statement of all. **"Today the Soviet Union is a friend and an ally. We need this friendship. However, no one can know what will happen tomorrow. Just like the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian Empires it may tear itself apart or shrink in size. Those peoples that it holds so tightly in its grip may one day slip away. The world may see a new balance of power. It is then that Turkey must know what to do. The Soviets have under their control our brothers with whom we share language, beliefs and roots. We must be prepared to embrace them. Being ready does not mean that we will sit quietly and wait. We must get ready. How do a people get prepared for such an endeavor? By strengthening the natural bridges that exist among us. Language is a bridge... Religion is a bridge... History is a bridge... We must delve into our roots and reconstruct what history has divided. We can not wait for them to approach us. We must reach out to them ..."** [6]. Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, October 29, 1933.

Hatay and Musul-Kerkük Question

When we evaluate the diplomatic efforts of the 1920s and 1930s to repatriate Hatay into Turkey's borders, we see this as a perfect example of Atatürk's Foreign Policy [7]. In May 1, 1920, Mustafa Kemal gave a speech in Turkish Grand National Assembly where he said: **"One of our foremost principles is the fact that our nation' border will pass South of Alexandretta. In the East, this border stretches to include Musul, Kerkük and Süleymaniye. Those are our national borders"**[8]. Thus setting out a clear goal in Hatay's case was ultimately achieved. Another example of the importance that Atatürk attached to Hatay was when on 15 March 1923 he told a young girl in Adana who had emotionally said: **"Father of our nation, please save us"** that: **"Lands that have been Turkish for 40 centuries will not remain in the hands of the enemy"** [9]. One of the most interesting aspects of the process of Hatay's joining Turkey was the incapability of France, one of the biggest states of this period, to stop this and its need to ask for help from her mandate, Syria, when Hatay's local parliament voted in favor of joining Turkey [10]. In this example, we see in Atatürk a man of vision demonstrating knowledge of both the real power and capacity of his nation and also an ability to see beyond temporary political and military success. He took a bold risk that turned out in Turkey's favor. In addition, he proved that lands that were left outside of Turkey's borders by the Lausanne Treaty in 1923 could in fact be re-integrated.

In the 1920's, he entered into diplomatic negotiations with the superpower of that period, England, to repatriate Musul and Kerkük. He also ordered the Turkish Army to be ready for any war and told those Turks living in that area that: **"the sun would once again shine on them"**[11]. However, because of both Kurdish and the radical Islamic rebellions of Şeyh Sait in Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia in 1925 his efforts for reclaiming Musul and Kerkuk failed.

Atatürk's willingness to join Hatay and Musul, where the Turkish population was dominant, to our national borders was very clear. Since, these lands were under the control of Ottoman army when Mondros Treaty was signed. Hatay and Musul were accepted in National Pact (Misak-ı Milli)¹ by Turks and Atatürk. He accomplished the first target by the help of international conjuncture of Second World War fear and Hatay joined Turkey. Nevertheless, when he tried to get Hatay, he was very careful about new republic's security. There is no doubt that Atatürk wanted to occupy Musul which has the same situation as Hatay, but he could not insist on this issue. There were two crucial reasons for this situation. One of them was that the British government did not seem to withdraw from Musul's petrol reserves. The other was the rebellion of Şeyh Sait which was both Kurdish and the radical Islamist rebellion in Southeastern Anatolia, in 1925 [12].

Cyprus and Atatürk

Atatürk was also closely interested in the island of Cyprus. Cyprus remained outside of Turkey's borders after the Treaty of Lausanne. Atatürk showed the value he held for Cyprus in two separate statements. First, during a military exercise in the South, Atatürk asked his officers a variety of questions concerning supply lines and military preparedness. After hearing a range of answers, Atatürk told his officers that **"with Cyprus in the hands of the enemy, all their plans were for naught"**, he then added that **"the island would need watching and that it was important for Turkey"**. Then, later, during the period when Hatay was getting set to join the Republic, in a conversation with Saffet Engin, a Turkish Cypriot, he told him: **"Don't worry, Saffet Bey, it's turn will come."** Meanwhile, when the island's Turkish population began to migrate from the island to Anatolia he immediately stopped this immigration [13]. In return he provided educational facilities and fellowships for students, he established an Association to help and solve the problems of Turkish Cypriots, and he gave financial support to two

¹ The Ottoman Parliament met in Istanbul on January 12, 1920, under the majority of the members of the "Defense of Rights". On January 28th the Parliament made public that it accepted the "National Pact" in conformity with the principles of the Sivas Congress and the decision of the Society for the Defense of the Rights of Anatolia and Thrace (the Society for the Protection of Anatolian and Rumelian Rights). The principles of the "National Pact" were as follows:

1 - The future of the territories inhabited by an Arab majority at the time of the signing of the Mondros Treaty will be determined by a referendum. On the other hand, the territories which were not occupied at that time and inhabited by a Turkish-Moslem majority are the homeland of the Turkish nation.

2 - The status of Kars, Ardahan and Artvin may be determined by a referendum.

3 - The status of the Western Thrace will be determined by the votes of its inhabitants.

4 - The security of Istanbul and Marmara should be provided for. Transport and free-trade on the Straits of the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles will be determined by Turkey and other concerned countries.

5 - The rights of minorities will be issued on condition that the rights of the Moslem minorities in neighboring countries are protected.

6 - In order to develop in every field, the country should be independent and free; all restrictions on political, judicial and financial development will be removed.

For the full text of National Pact; *Meclisi Mebusan Zabıt Ceridesi 17 Şubat 1336 in 'ikadî. ATASE Bşk. Tıgı Arşivi Klasör 21. Dosya 1336/6, fihrist 2, 2-5-9.*

Turkish newspapers in Cyprus, **Ses** and **Söz**. Atatürk, believing that the Turkish language in Cyprus should not be allowed to fade and after reforming the alphabet in Turkey, had the Turkish Government pay for two new printing presses from Germany. In addition, he sent the educational ship of the Naval Academy, the Hamidiye Zırhlısı, to encourage the national identity and consciousness of the Turkish people living on the island [14].

Atatürk and Crimean and Gagauz Turks

In addition, despite the hardships facing the Turks during the War of Independence, Atatürk sent food supplies to Crimean Tatars when they were on the verge of a famine in 1921-22. He established a committee in 1922, in Ankara, to help Crimean Turks who faced with starvation. Some members of this committee were Mahmut Esat (Bozkurt), Dr. Adnan (Adivar), Numan Usta, Dr. Fuad (Umay), Dr. Lütfi and Dr. Reşit [15]. The chairman of this committee was Refet Paşa [16]. As it is well known, some of them were members of Turkish parliament, minister and close friends of Atatürk. Moreover, he wanted to bring 5000 Crimean children to educate in Turkey, but Soviet officials did not allow it because of their ideological fear [17].

Also, Atatürk charged Hamdullah Suphi Tannöver who was one of the most well known leaders of "Türk Ocağı" with a duty of Turkish ambassador in Romania. He not only brought leading Gagavuz Turkish students from Romania to furnish them with better educational possibilities but also sent Turkish teachers to teach those who remained behind [18]. However, most of us do not know anything about Atatürk's idealist teachers that some of them died in Romania and some of them in Siberia, since they were accused of as a Turkish agent by Stalin during second World War.

By means of these facts, we see that he always focused on the problems of Turkish World outside the borders of Turkey whether they are Muslim, Christian or Shamanist.

Conclusion

We can observe some parameters in Atatürk's foreign policy. Dialogue outside the country is one of basic secret of Atatürk's foreign policy and on the other hand Atatürk's foreign policy manifests that an active interest in the problem of other countries [19]. Atatürk charged committees to Turkistan, Romania with a duty to search the problems of Turks. Atatürk's foreign policy based on realism; insist on national interests and beware of adventurous attitudes. Atatürk regarded both power and possibilities of Turkey and reactions of other states. There are many more examples of Atatürk's policy concerning the Turkish World. His realistic strategy was based both on avoiding dragging the young Turkish Republic into danger again and on not consuming the energy of a tired nation for goals that were unattainable in the short term. But this did not mean that he followed passive and ineffectual policies. As one may see in the Hatay case, he reached his goal in a step-by-step fashion. His long-term targets were clearly outlined in the aforementioned speech he gave to the Turkish Youth on the 10th Anniversary of Turkish Republic. In conclusion, Atatürk's foreign policy was balanced and based on an analytical evaluation of international dynamics. The Balkan Treaty in 1934, the Montreaux Treaty in 1936 and the Sadabat Treaty in 1937 and a favorable conclusion to the Hatay Question in 1939 exemplify the success of his policy.

References

- [1] Yılmazçelik, İ. (1994); "Atatürk'ün Dış Türkler Politikası ve Dış Türkler", *Türk Dünyası Tarih Dergisi*, Mayıs 1994, sayı. 89, pp. 35-36.
- [2] (1994) "Türk ve Türklük", Ankara, TSE Yayınları, Gökçe Ofset Matbaacılık, p. 19.
- [3] Kocatürk, U., (1969); "Atatürk'ün Fikir ve Düşünceleri", Ankara, Edebiyat Yayınevi, p. 152.
- [4] Yılmazçelik (1994), p. 44.
- [5] Yurchenko, A. V., (1958); "Genocide Through Destruction of National Culture and Sense of Nationality: Genocide in the USSR" series:1, No. 40, Institute For The Study of The USSR, Munich.
- [6] Özkan, S., (2000); "Atatürk ve Türk Dünyası", *Hava Kuvvetleri Dergisi*, Haziran, p. 88.
- [7] Güçlü, Y., (2001); "The Question of The Sanjak of Alexandretta", Ankara, TTK Yayınları, p. 2.
- [8] (1961), "Atatürk'ün Söylev ve Demeçleri C. 1 (1919 – 1938)", Ankara, TTK Basımevi, p.74.
- [9] Tekin, M., (1993); "Hatay Tarihi", Antakya, Hatay Kültür, Turizm ve Sanat Vakfı Yayınları, p. 124
- [10] Yerasimos, S., (1995); "Milliyetler ve Sınırlar", İstanbul, İletişim Yayınları, p. 199.
- [11] Tevetoglu, F., (1972), "Atatürk'ün Musul, Süleymaniye ve Kerkük'le İlgili Bir Mektup," *Hayat Tarih Mecmuası*, Kasım, pp. 6,7.
- [12] Oran, B., (1998); "Atatürk Milliyetçiliği: Resmi İdeoloji Dışı Bir İnceleme", Ankara, Dost Kitabevi, p. 134.
- [13] Manizade, M. D., (1975); "Kıbrıs–Dün, Bugün, Yarını", İstanbul, Kıbrıs Türk Kültür Derneği Yayınları, p.13.
- [14] Gazioğlu, C. A., (2000), "Enosis Çemberinde Türkler", Lefkoşa, Kıbrıs Araştırma ve Yayın Merkezi (CYREP), pp. 295, 300.
- [15] Hablemitoğlu, N. (1997); "Atatürk ve Dış Türkler I", *Kırım Dergisi*, Ekim-Aralık, sayı. 21, pp. 3, 6
- [16] Kırımlı, H., (2002); "The Famine of 1921-1922 in the Crimea and the Volga Basin and Relief From Turkey", *Middle Eastern Studies*, 2002
- [17] Hablemitoğlu, ibid.
- [18] Hablemitoğlu, N., (2001); "Kırım'da Açlık Yılları I", " Kırım'da Açlık Yılları II", "Kemal'in Öğretmenleri", www.hablemitoglu2002.cjb.net
- [19] Gönlübol, M., Kürkçüoğlu, Ö. (2000); "Atatürk Dönemi Türk Dış Politikasına Genel Bir Bakış", içinde, Berna Türkoğlu (edt) (2000); "Atatürk Dönemi Türk Dış Politikası", Ankara, Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi., p. 27.