

11 · The Kemalist One-Party State, 1925–45

The political system of Kemalist Turkey: party and state

From the promulgation of the Law on the Maintenance of Order in March 1925, Turkey's government was an authoritarian one-party regime and, not to put too fine a point on it, a dictatorship. We have seen how the law and the tribunals established under it were used in 1925–26 to silence all opposition and how, in his great speech of 1927, Mustafa Kemal Pasha vindicated this repression. The Law on the Maintenance of Order remained in force until 1929, when the government felt secure enough to allow it to lapse. To all intents and purposes, the Republican People's Party had established a power monopoly and, at the party congress of 1931, Turkey's political system was officially declared to be that of a one-party state.¹

Apart from an experiment with a 'tame' opposition party in 1930, no legal opposition was active in Turkey until after the Second World War. Underground opposition was limited to an insignificant communist movement and more important actions of Kurdish nationalists. There were almost continuous small uprisings in the mountains of the south-east and one major insurrection in Dersim (Tunceli) in 1937–38. This was again suppressed with the utmost severity and again tens of thousands of Kurds were forcibly resettled in the west of the country. Small groups of *émigrés* of different political colours (royalists, liberals, Islamists and socialists) continued to attack the regime in pamphlets and periodicals from places as far apart as Paris, Sofia, Damascus and Cairo, but none carried any real weight.²

According to the 1924 constitution, all power resided in the Great National Assembly of Turkey, which was the only legitimate representative of the nation's sovereign will. But one of the reactions of the RPP leadership to the emergence of opposition in 1924 had been to tighten party discipline to the extent that free discussion was only allowed in the (closed) meetings of the parliamentary party. After a decision on any topic had been reached in these meetings, delegates were bound by

the majority decision and were required to vote for it in the assembly. This meant that even before March 1925 the assembly votes were a foregone conclusion. During the one-party era they became a mere formality. Discussion was restricted, even within the meetings of the parliamentary party, which served as the forum in which the cabinet announced and explained its decisions. Although the leeway of the faction varied according to the field of policy concerned (the economy being debated much more freely than foreign affairs, for instance, which were left almost completely to the cabinet), the function of its meetings was essentially to ratify and legitimize cabinet decisions.

While the RPP had a rank-and-file organization throughout the country, which its secretary-general led, the members of the national assembly, the cabinet, the prime minister (who was also executive chairman of the party) and the president (who doubled as party chairman) dominated it. State and party were closely identified. One important result was that the party itself never developed an independent ideological or organizational 'personality' and became heavily bureaucratized. Attempts by the party's long-serving secretary-general, Recep (Peker), to make the party more independent and to develop an independent 'Kemalist' ideology failed when, at the 1936 congress, İsmet (İnönü) declared the congruency between the state apparatus and the party organization to be official policy. This meant that, to take just one example, the governor of a province would automatically be the head of the RPP branch in his province.

Four-yearly parliamentary elections were held throughout the one-party period, but they served only a ceremonial function. The slates of candidates for parliamentary seats were drawn up by the chairman of the party, the executive chairman and the secretary-general and then ratified by the party congress and there was no way in which citizens, even if they were active party members, could stand for parliament on their own initiative. Even if elections were tightly controlled, the fact that women were given the right to vote and to be elected on 5 December 1934 was still an important step in the emancipation of Turkish women. From March 1935 onwards, 18 women deputies took their places in the Great National Assembly in Ankara. In this respect at least Turkey had caught up with the most advanced countries of Europe.

Tutelary democracy: the Free Republican Party

The monolithic political system established after 1925 left very little room for the ventilation of competing ideas within the leadership, and none at all for the expression of social discontent from without. At the same time, the authoritarian behaviour of the RPP and of its regional

and local representatives, the attendant favouritism and corruption, the lack of civil liberties, and also the reform policies of the government, created widespread resentment. By the end of the 1920s, the world economic crisis, which hit Turkey very hard as it did other agricultural producers, had compounded this situation. The RPP had no real means of managing this discontent (other than suppressing its expression) since its authoritarian structure left it without the means of communication with the mass of the population. The crisis in the country was not reflected in more lively debates in the assembly at all. At the opening of the 1931 party congress party chairman İsmet not once mentioned the economic crisis.

In 1930, Mustafa Kemal, who was aware of the existence of discontent (though probably not of its scale) through reports and through his frequent inspection tours in the country, decided to allow and even encourage the founding of a loyal opposition party, with the twin aims of channelling the social discontent and of shaking up the lethargic RPP. He may also have wanted to put pressure on İsmet who, after five years in power, had gradually built up his own power base and was no longer only the president's puppet.

Mustafa Kemal approached his old friend Fethi (Okyar) with an offer to found a new party. Fethi had recently returned from a tour of duty as ambassador in Paris (where he had been sent after his defeat as prime minister in March 1925) and he had submitted a highly critical report on the state of the country and İsmet's policies to the president. The two men discussed the proposal for a few days. Fethi asked for guarantees that the government would allow his party to function and that Mustafa Kemal himself would remain impartial. For his part, Mustafa Kemal demanded that the new party remain faithful to the ideals of republicanism and secularism. When they agreed, Fethi proceeded to found the *Serbest Cumhuriyet Fırkası* (Free Republican Party). Mustafa Kemal ordered a number of his closest collaborators, among them his oldest friend Nuri (Conker), to join the new party. To prove his good faith, he also announced that his own sister, Makbule, had joined it.

In the end, only 15 representatives joined the FRP but they were all eminent members of the Kemalist establishment. The party produced an 11-point manifesto, which echoed that of the Progressive Republican Party of 1924 in that it advocated a liberal economic policy and encouragement of foreign investment, as well as freedom of speech and direct elections (Turkey still had a system of two-tier elections).

The new party was greeted with widespread enthusiasm. Its branch offices were literally inundated with applications for membership. Huge and ecstatic crowds met Fethi when he visited İzmir early in September.

There were skirmishes with the police, and when the police fired into the crowd a number of people were wounded and a boy was killed. This was a turning point in the party's short history. The RPP leaders were alarmed and demanded that Mustafa Kemal should state openly that he was and would remain at the head of their party, which he did on 10 September.³

In October 1930, local elections were held and the FRP managed to win in 30 of the 502 councils.⁴ Even though this was only a small minority of the seats, the governing party was surprised and alarmed. Then, in an assembly debate directly after the elections, Fethi accused the governing party of large-scale irregularities and electoral fraud. This in turn led to fierce attacks on the FRP, in which it and its leader were accused of high treason. Mustafa Kemal now told Fethi privately that he could no longer remain impartial in this atmosphere. Unwilling to conduct political opposition against the president himself, Fethi felt he had no choice but to close down the FRP on 16 November 1930. For the rest of his life he remained bitter about what he felt to be Mustafa Kemal's desertion at this juncture.⁵

A month later, on 23 December, an incident occurred in the town of Menemen, not far from İzmir. A group of young dervishes from Manisa, led by a certain Mehmet, walked into town, unfurled a green banner and called for the restoration of the *şeriat* and the caliphate. When word of this reached the headquarters of the gendarmerie, it sent out a company of soldiers under reserve lieutenant Mustafa Fehmi Kubilay. When he demanded the surrender of the dervishes, they attacked him and cut off his head, which they then paraded on a stick. A gendarmerie unit arrived and opened fire, killing three of the ring-leaders, including Mehmet. The aspect of the matter that was really shocking to the Kemalist leadership was not so much the action of the dervishes, however, but the fact that over a thousand bystanders had watched these events unfold without anyone raising his voice in protest. This could be, and was, interpreted as tacit support by the public for the rebels. The government took stern action, with martial law being declared and over 2000 arrests made (among them many former FRP supporters). Some 28 people were executed, but the bill envisaging the razing to the ground of Menemen and the deportation of its inhabitants, though initially supported by Mustafa Kemal, was eventually dropped.⁶

The RPP's totalitarian tendencies

The extent of resentment and opposition to the RPP regime, which the Free Party episode had brought to light were a sobering experience for Mustafa Kemal and his followers, who thereafter tightened their hold

on the country by bringing under their direct control all the country's cultural and intellectual life, suppressing those independent social and cultural organizations that had survived from the CUP era. There were no more experiments with opposition, although Mustafa Kemal tried to combat the lethargy of the assembly by having a number of seats (30 in the 1931 elections, 16 in 1935) reserved for independents. In the prevailing climate, however, this was not very effective: in 1931 not even the 30 seats left vacant by the People's Party for independent candidates could be filled and in 1935 the number of independents dropped to 13.⁷

First and foremost among the social and cultural institutions to be suppressed was the *Türk Ocakları* (the Turkish Hearth movement). It had been reactivated under the leadership of the minister of education, Hamdullah Suphi (Tanrıöver), and it tried to spread nationalist, positivist and secularist ideas in the country through lectures, courses and exhibitions. When it was closed down in 1931, it had more than 30,000 members and 267 branches.⁸ From 1932 it was replaced by the so-called *Halk Evleri* (People's Homes) in towns and by *Halk Odaları* (People's Rooms) in large villages; they served essentially the same function but were tightly controlled by the provincial branches of the party. By the end of the Second World War there were nearly 500 of these People's Homes in all parts of the country.

Another organization to be closed down was the *Türk Kadınlar Birliği* (Turkish Women's Union), which women who had been active in the national resistance movement had founded in 1924. At an extraordinary congress in May 1935 it decided, at the request of the RPP leadership, to disband officially because its aims (equal rights for Turkish women) had been achieved with the granting of the vote to Turkey's women. The Turkish Freemasons' lodges, whose members had often been prominent in the Young Turk movement from the beginning of the century, were closed down in the same year, as was the union of journalists.

All newspapers and periodicals leaning towards the liberal or socialist opposition had been closed down in 1925. From then on only government-controlled newspapers appeared, with the one exception of *Yarın* (Tomorrow), published in 1929–30 by Arif (Oruç), a left-wing journalist and – significantly – an old friend of Mustafa Kemal and Fethi. *Yarın* had been allowed to attack İsmet's economic policies (and as such it was a kind of forerunner of the FRP), but it was closed down in 1931 after the adoption of a new press law that gave the government powers to close down any paper that published anything contradicting the 'general policies of the country'.

Finally, in 1933, the old *Darülfünun* ('House of Sciences', the university) in Istanbul was given a new charter and reconstituted as the University of Istanbul. In the process two-thirds of its teaching staff, more than 100 people, lost their tenure and only the most dependable followers of the Kemalist line were kept on. It was the first of many purges the Turkish universities were to experience in the following 50 years. Starting in 1933, however, academic life in Turkey was also strengthened by an influx of German scholars and scientists, who left Germany after Hitler came to power. The Turkish government invited 63 German professors to come and teach in Turkey, where they raised the level of academic learning dramatically and provided a formative influence on several generations of students.⁹

Both the press and the educational institutions were mobilized to spread the Kemalist message. The stifling political and intellectual climate that resulted has often been overlooked in traditional historiography and needs to be given due attention. Nevertheless, it should also be pointed out that the Kemalist leadership did inspire a great many people – mostly writers, teachers, doctors and other professionals and students – with its vision of a modern, secular, independent Turkey. These people, who saw themselves as an elite, with a mission to guide their ignorant compatriots, often worked very hard and with great personal sacrifice for their ideals. This 'noblesse oblige' attitude of the Kemalist elite is something that modern revisionist writers of the right and the left tend to overlook.

The Kemalist message

The set of ideas or ideals that together formed *Kemalizm* (Kemalism) or *Atatürkçülük* (Atatürkism) as it came to be called in the 1930s, evolved gradually. It never became a coherent, all-embracing ideology, but can best be described as a set of attitudes and opinions that were never defined in any detail. As we have seen, Recep Peker's attempts to do so failed. As a result, Kemalism remained a flexible concept and people with widely differing worldviews have been able to call themselves Kemalist. The basic principles of Kemalism were laid down in the party programme of 1931. They were republicanism, secularism, nationalism, populism, statism and revolutionism (or reformism).

Secularism and nationalism had of course been among the distinctive characteristics of Young Turk ideology at least since 1913. During the 1930s both were carried to extremes, secularism being interpreted not only as a separation of state and religion, but as the removal of religion from public life and the establishment of complete state control over remaining religious institutions. An extreme form of nationalism, with

the attendant creation of historical myths, was used as the prime instrument in the building of a new national identity, and as such was intended to take the place of religion in many respects.

Republicanism had been a basic principle since 1923 (when, it will be remembered, political activity in favour of a return of the monarchy had been outlawed). ‘Populism’ meant the notion, first emphasized during the First World War, of national solidarity and putting the interests of the whole nation before those of any group or class. In a negative sense it entailed a denial of class interests (according to Kemalism, Turkey did not have classes in the European sense) and a prohibition of political activity based on class (and thus of all socialist or communist activity). Revolutionism – or reformism, as Atatürk’s more conservative followers have preferred to interpret the Turkish term *İnkılapçılık* – meant a commitment to ongoing (but orderly and state-led) change and support for the Kemalist reform programme. Statism was a new concept that recognized the pre-eminence of the state in the economic field; and it was probably the most widely discussed issue in Turkey in the 1930s and 1940s. It is treated in more detail below.

These six principles, symbolized in the party emblem as six arrows (the *Altı Ok*), were incorporated into the Turkish constitution in 1937. Together they formed the state ideology of Kemalism and the basis for indoctrination in schools, the media and the army. Sometimes Kemalism was even described as the ‘Turkish religion’. Nevertheless, as an ideology it lacked coherence and, perhaps even more importantly, emotional appeal. This ideological void was filled to some extent by the personality cult that grew up around Mustafa Kemal during and even more so after his lifetime. From 1926 onwards statues of him were erected in the major towns. He was presented as the father of the nation, its saviour and its teacher. Indoctrination in schools and universities (where ‘History of the Turkish Revolution’ became a compulsory subject in 1934) focused on him to an extraordinary degree. The fact that he was not associated with a very definite ideology that could be discredited, as fascism, national socialism and Marxism–Leninism have been, has meant that his personality cult could survive changes in the political climate. At the time of writing it is still very much part of the official culture of Turkey.

Friction within the leadership

While the political leadership was in complete control over both party and parliament, tensions gradually built up within the leadership, notably between İsmet, who served as prime minister for 12 consecutive years from 1925 to 1937, and the president, Mustafa Kemal. In his

later years the president largely withdrew from politics and left the day-to-day running of the country in İsmet's hands, while he interested himself in specific reform projects such as that of the script and language. He surrounded himself with a small group of supporters and friends with whom he spent most nights eating, drinking and discussing the country's problems and future. Experts from different walks of life were often invited to these sessions in the presidential villa in Çankaya, which as a rule lasted from late in the evening until the break of day. Suggestions were made, criticisms voiced, plans drawn up and decisions taken.

What made the situation potentially dangerous was Mustafa Kemal's relative isolation from the daily affairs of the government. His plans and decisions therefore tended to become increasingly poorly coordinated with those of the prime minister, İsmet. The fact that, even in semi-retirement, Mustafa Kemal remained the undisputed master of the country meant that he could overrule the prime minister and his cabinet if he chose to do so under the influence of his circle of friends and advisers. Over the years there were several instances of this happening, in internal, economic and foreign affairs. Twice the president forced a cabinet minister to resign without consulting İsmet. His interference irritated İsmet, who became increasingly wary of what he saw as the president's kitchen cabinet in Çankaya.¹⁰

Finally, in September 1937, there was an open row between the two men, which led to Atatürk (as he had become in 1934 with the introduction of family names) demanding İsmet's resignation. İnönü duly resigned, ostensibly for health reasons. Mahmut Celâl (Bayar), a former CUP secretary and *Teşkilât-i Mahsusa* chief in İzmir, first head of the Business Bank of Turkey (*Türkiye İş Bankası*) created in 1924 and minister of economic affairs since 1932, replaced him.

Atatürk's death and İsmet's return to power

Some of Atatürk's irritability and erratic behaviour during 1937–38 may have been due to his deteriorating health. Apart from two heart attacks, in 1923 and 1927, which seem to have left no permanent damage, he was generally healthy until early in 1937, when the symptoms of advanced cirrhosis of the liver, due to excessive consumption of alcohol over many years, started to become apparent. The illness was officially diagnosed only at the beginning of 1938 and from March onwards his condition deteriorated quickly. His illness was kept a secret from the public (even in October a newspaper that mentioned it was immediately closed for three months), but leading political circles were well aware of the impending end and a struggle for power began.

Despite the events of the previous year, İsmet İnönü was clearly the

leading candidate for the succession, but he had made many enemies during his years in office, the most determined being the members of Atatürk's 'kitchen cabinet'. They attempted to remove him (by having him appointed ambassador to Washington) and to engineer new elections for the assembly, which would have to elect Atatürk's successor and which was still packed with İsmet's supporters. There was even talk of a verbal political testament of the president, in which he pronounced himself against İsmet's succession.¹¹

All these attempts, however, proved fruitless. Mustafa Kemal Pasha Atatürk died on 10 November 1938 in the Dolmabahçe Palace in Istanbul, where he had been lying ill for the past few months. On 11 November the national assembly elected İsmet İnönü the second president of the republic. His succession was due to four factors: the refusal of the prime minister, Bayar, to cooperate with his adversaries (Bayar had kept in touch with İnönü throughout this period); his adversaries' inability to come up with a credible candidate; the fact that the parliamentary deputies, as well as the party bureaucrats, were people who had been picked by İnönü himself years before; and the decision of the military leaders to support İnönü and of the Chief of General Staff, Marshal Fevzi Çakmak, not to stand as a candidate, even though it was made clear to him that his candidacy would have considerable support in the assembly.

Atatürk's body was brought to Ankara amid widespread demonstrations of grief and mourning and laid to rest temporarily in the Ethnographic Museum. In 1953 it was finally interred in an imposing purpose-built mausoleum on what was then a hill on the outskirts of the capital but is now right in its centre.

An obituary

Under the influence of the official historiography of the Turkish Republic (and ultimately of Atatürk himself in his great speech), historians have depicted the emergence of modern Turkey as the single-handed achievement of one man. The reader will have noticed that in this book an attempt has been made to paint a different picture. Nevertheless, it remains true that it is doubtful whether Turkey would have survived as an independent state without his unique combination of tactical mastery, ruthlessness, realism and sense of purpose. Up to 1919 he had been a member of the military inner circle of the CUP with a reputation as both a brilliant staff officer and commander and a quarrelsome and over ambitious personality. His rule after 1925 may be regarded both as a daring attempt at achieving a modernization leap for Turkish society and as a regressive phase in the development of mature and democratic

political institutions in Turkey, but there can be hardly any doubt that he was absolutely the right man on the right spot during the greatest crisis in the history of his country and that he contributed more than anyone else to its survival.

İsmet İnönü as ‘National Leader’

Around the time of Atatürk’s death there had been widespread speculation about whether there would be a change in policy and even about whether the republic would endure. It was soon clear, however, that İsmet İnönü meant to continue the basic policies of his predecessor. His position as leader was formalized at an extraordinary party congress in December 1938, at which the party statutes were changed to make Atatürk the ‘eternal party chairman’, while İnönü was made ‘permanent party chairman’. The term *millî şef* (national leader), which from time to time had been used for Atatürk in the 1930s, now became İnönü’s official title.

For a few months İnönü kept Bayar as prime minister, but on 25 January 1939 the latter handed in his resignation. The main reason was the basic difference of opinion between the president and the prime minister over economic policies, but İnönü had also made life difficult for the cabinet by inspiring a number of press campaigns, inquiries and lawsuits aimed at the administration that had been in power in 1937–38. At the same time İnönü tried to broaden his political base by a policy of reconciliation with the old leaders of the independence movement who had been purged in 1926. Two of these, Ali Fuat Cebesoy and Refet Bele had made their peace with Atatürk during his last years, but the rest had remained in limbo. A number of them had lived abroad since 1926. They now returned to the country and were given parliamentary seats.

Celâl Bayar was succeeded by Dr Refik Saydam who served as prime minister until his death in July 1942. He in turn was succeeded by the foreign minister, Şükrü Saraçoğlu, who remained in power until 1945, but during these years, which were of course entirely dominated by the Second World War, İsmet İnönü was in complete control and his prime ministers (who were always at the same time vice-chairmen of the party) executed the policies determined by the president.¹²

The Turkish regime of the 1930s and 1940s, of which the main characteristics have been outlined above, thus in many ways resembled the other authoritarian regimes that sprang up all over southern Europe in this era (such as the regimes of Salazar in Portugal, Franco in Spain and Metaxas in Greece). It differed from them, however, in that it was not culturally and religiously conservative, but on the contrary attempted a far-reaching cultural revolution in a conservatively religious society.

The example of the most important dictatorship in the Mediterranean, fascist Italy, was certainly important to the Turkish leadership. The way in which Mussolini seemed to forge national unity and to energize Italian society impressed many in Turkey (as, indeed, it did in many other European countries), and a number of new laws promulgated under the republic were straight copies of Italian legislation.

There were many similarities between the Italian fascist regime and the Kemalists: the extreme nationalism, with its attendant development of a legitimizing historical mythology and racist rhetoric, the authoritarian character of the regime and its efforts to establish a complete totalitarian monopoly for its party of the political, social and cultural scene, the personality cult that developed around both Mussolini on the one hand and Atatürk and İnönü on the other, and the emphasis on national unity and solidarity with its attendant denial of class conflicts.

Nevertheless, the differences between the two regimes are greater than the similarities. Fascism came into being as a genuinely (albeit orchestrated) popular movement, in reaction to the disruption of traditional society brought about by the industrial revolution and to the threat posed by the socialist movement to the middle class; the Young Turk regimes in Turkey imposed their policies from above on an indifferent population. Unlike the fascists, the Kemalists never attempted any large-scale or permanent mobilization of the population for its goals. It has been pointed out that of all the speeches made by Atatürk in these years not a single one took place before a mass rally in the fascist style. Also, while the Kemalist state was undoubtedly authoritarian and totalitarian, the existence of an all-powerful leader was not made into a guiding political principle with its own legitimacy, a 'leader principle'. Atatürk intensely disliked being called a dictator.¹³ The semblance of a democratic system with a parliament and elections was carefully left in place. Finally, one great, and possibly decisive, difference from the Italian example is the lack of militarist rhetoric and expansionist (or irredentist) propaganda and policies in the Turkish case and the cautious, defensive and realistic policies of Turkey's leaders.

Reform policies 1925–35: secularism and nationalism

In the secularist drive, which was the most characteristic element of Kemalist reform, three areas can be discerned. The first was the secularization of state, education and law: the attack on the traditional strongholds of the institutionalized Islam of the *ulema*. The second was the attack on religious symbols and their replacement by the symbols of European civilization. The third was the secularization of social life and the attack on popular Islam it entailed.

It can be argued that the first wave of Kemalist reforms had finished the process of secularization of state, education and law, which had begun under Sultan Mahmut a century before and which had been almost completed under the CUP during its rule from 1913 to 1918. The abolition of the sultanate and caliphate, the proclamation of the republic and the new constitution in 1922–24 were the final stages in the secularization of the state, and the seal was set on this development with the removal from the 1928 constitution of the clause that made Islam the state religion of Turkey.¹⁴

Even before the birth of the republic, the role of the *şariat*, the holy law, had been limited almost exclusively to the realm of family law. Now this sector too was taken from the jurisdiction of the *ulema* with the adoption of the Swiss civil code and the Italian penal code in 1926. The penal code prohibited the forming of associations on a religious basis. The educational system, which had already been brought into the control of the Ministry of Education under the CUP, was now completely secularized through the Law on the Unification of Education in March 1924. At the same time the *medreses*, or religious colleges, were abolished, and their place was taken by schools for preachers and by a theological faculty established at the University of Istanbul.

The year 1924 also witnessed the abolition of the venerable function of *Şeyhülislam* and of the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Pious Foundations. Two directorates were created in its place, the *Diyanet İşleri Müdürlüğü* (Directorate for Religious Affairs) and the *Evkaf Umum Müdürlüğü* (Directorate-General for Pious Foundations). Both were attached directly to the prime minister's office. The establishment of these directorates clearly shows that the Kemalist perception of secularism meant not so much separation of state and religion as state control of religion.

The second area in which secularization took place was that of religious symbols. This was the most important aspect of measures like banning traditional headgear (such as the fez and turban) for men in 1925 and restricting religious attire to prayer services in the mosques, which was ordered in September of that year. It also inspired the attacks made by Atatürk and his followers on wearing the veil (although this was never actually forbidden) and, for instance, the decree of 1935, which made Sunday the official day of rest instead of Friday.

It is clear from Atatürk's own statements that measures such as the ban on religious attire were motivated as much by the desire to claim all visible expression of authority as a monopoly of the state (and its uniformed servants) as by the wish to secularize society.

A number of other reforms, which were not specifically aimed at

religion, were nevertheless symbolic. The adoption of the Western clock and calendar in 1926, of Western numerals in 1928 and of Western weights and measures in 1931 not only gave Turkey a more European image, but also made communication with the Western world much easier. It was also one more measure designed to cut links with the Islamic world. The changes in the position of women also have religious connotations, or at least were felt to do so by many people. These changes, after all, consisted not only of formal emancipation (the right to vote), but also of the active promotion of new and very different role models: professional women, women pilots, opera singers and beauty queens.

The introduction of family names in 1934 was a great step forward insofar as registration was concerned. The assembly voted to bestow on Mustafa Kemal Pasha the family name Atatürk (Father-Turk). The name was exclusive to him and his descendants, but since he died childless no other Turk has ever been called Atatürk.

Perhaps the most drastic measure was the adoption of the Latin alphabet in 1928. Ottoman Turkish was written with a version of the Arabic/Persian alphabet. While this suited the Arabic and Persian vocabulary, which made up three-quarters of written late Ottoman, it was highly unsuitable for expressing the sounds of the Turkish part of the vocabulary, Arabic being rich in consonants but very poor in vowels while Turkish is exactly the opposite. The result was that Ottoman Turkish sometimes had four different signs for one single sound, while it could not express other sounds at all. When the written language became an important means of communication with the advent of new media such as the press and the telegraph in the mid-nineteenth century, reform of the alphabet was needed. The first attempt was made by Münif Pasha, one of the statesmen of the *Tanzimat*, in a lecture in 1862.¹⁵ During the second constitutional period several Young Turk writers – Hüseyin Cahit (Yalçın), Abdullah Cevdet, Celâl Nuri (İleri) – had advocated the adoption of the Latin alphabet, while Enver Pasha had experimented with a reformed version of the Ottoman script, which the army had tried out. From 1923 onwards there had been sporadic discussions of the matter, at the İzmir economic congress and – in February 1924 – in the assembly. At that time there was still much opposition to the adoption of the Latin script in conservative and religious circles, but from 1925 the opposition was silenced. Furthermore, in 1926 the Turkic republics of the Soviet Union decided to adopt the Latin alphabet, which gave added impetus to the discussions in Turkey.

In the summer of 1928, a commission under the personal direction of Mustafa Kemal drew up a report on the matter and on 9 August the

president officially announced for the first time that the Turkish script would replace the Ottoman alphabet. An ‘alphabet mobilization’ was proclaimed and in the following months Mustafa Kemal toured the country explaining the new letters and exhorting everyone to learn them quickly and to teach them to their compatriots. On 1 November a law was passed that made the use of the new alphabet in public communications compulsory from 1 January 1929.

While there were good rational arguments for the change, the reason Mustafa Kemal and his followers pushed it through so energetically was undoubtedly ideological: it was yet another way to cut off Turkish society from its Ottoman and Middle Eastern Islamic traditions and to reorient it towards the West. The change was carried through with amazing speed and eventually gained widespread acceptance, but its effect on the struggle against illiteracy was disappointing. There was a huge effort to spread literacy (in the new script) through the *millet mektepleri* (schools of the nation) for adults, but the lack of primary education in the villages meant that illiteracy has remained relatively high, even compared with other developing countries. In the early 1990s it was still over 35 per cent. Under those people who had received their education before 1928, the old script remained in use in private correspondence, notes and diaries until well into the 1960s.

The success of the alphabet reform encouraged those who wanted to reform the language itself. By the nineteenth century the chasm between the written Ottoman of the literate elite and the vernacular of the Turkish population had become very wide. Attempts to bring the written language closer to the spoken one dated from the middle of the nineteenth century – the Young Ottomans, as the first Ottoman journalists, had played a pioneering role. During the reign of the CUP this trend had been reinforced. Ziya Gökalp and his circle advocated the replacement of Arabic and Persian grammatical elements in the language with Turkish ones and the discarding of ‘superfluous’ synonyms, but unlike the purists they accepted Arabic and Persian words that had become part of everyday language.

After the alphabet reform, for several reasons the more extreme purists came to the fore. In the first place, the success of the alphabet reform encouraged the idea that this type of ‘revolution by decree’ was possible. In the second place, the nature of the new script encouraged purism. It had been designed to reflect the actual sounds of spoken Turkish, not to transcribe the shape of the old Ottoman writing in new letters. As a result, many of the originally Arabic and Persian words looked alien and even unintelligible in the new script. In the third place, the radical solutions of the purists – to remove all Arabic and Persian

words from the language and create a pure Turkish one – were in tune with the extreme nationalism of the 1930s.

In 1932 Mustafa Kemal took the initiative in convening the first Turkish linguistic congress. During it there was a showdown between the purists and the moderates, and the former won. The moderates argued that language could not be changed by revolution or decree, which was held to be an indirect attack on the revolutionary changes the president had pushed through and a sign of a counter-revolutionary mentality. A reform programme was drawn up and a Society for the Study of the Turkish Language (*Türk Dili Tetkik Cemiyeti*, later *Türk Dil Kurumu*) was founded. Its members enthusiastically started to collect words from dialects, ancient literary sources and even Turkic languages from Central Asia to replace the Ottoman vocabulary.

The movement soon ran into difficulties. The population only adopted some of the new words and these often existed side-by-side with the word they were intended to replace, acquiring a different meaning. A kind of artificial language, intelligible only to insiders, came into existence. Mustafa Kemal himself gave a number of perfectly unintelligible speeches in the ‘new language’ in 1934, but by 1935 he had reverted to more conventional usage.¹⁶ The language reform movement was temporarily saved from deadlock by the launching in 1935 of the *Güneş-Dil Teorisi* (Sun-Language Theory). This theory held that all languages derived originally from one primeval language, spoken in Central Asia, that Turkish was closest of all languages to this origin and that all languages had developed from the primeval language through Turkish. The theory, concocted by a Viennese ‘Orientalist’ by the name of Kvergic, was greeted with scepticism among Turkish linguists, but it gained the support of Mustafa Kemal, who ordered the Society for the Study of the Turkish Language to study it in detail. The society’s third congress in 1936 officially adopted the theory, and courses in it were made obligatory at the Arts Faculty in Ankara. There was one very good practical reason for the success of the theory: if all words came from Turkish originally, there was no need to purge them now: they could simply be ‘nationalized’ through a fake etymology. Nevertheless, it is clear that many Turks, along with their president, were actually fascinated by the doctrine. After Atatürk’s death in 1938 the language reform movement lost much of its *élan*. After the Second World War it was continued, but the government no longer actively promoted it.

While it lasted, both the existence and the theorizing of the linguistic society owed much to the work of the Society for the Study of Turkish History (*Türk Tarihi Tetkik Cemiyeti*, later *Türk Tarih Kurumu*), which had been founded slightly earlier, in 1931. At its first congress, held in

Ankara in 1932, the ‘Turkish historical thesis’ was propounded for the first time. This theory, which Mustafa Kemal emphatically supported, held that the Turks were descendants of white (Aryan) inhabitants of Central Asia, who had been forced by drought and hunger to migrate to other areas, such as China, Europe and the Near East. In doing so, they had created the world’s great civilizations. In the Near East, the Sumerians and the Hittites were really proto-Turks. (It is no coincidence that the two major state banks founded in the 1930s were called *Sümerbank* (Sumerian Bank) and *Etibank* (Hittite Bank). Attila and Genghis Khan were described as executing civilizing missions. The theory aimed to give Turks a sense of pride in their history and national identity, separate from the immediate past, that is to say the Ottoman era. Declaring the Hittites (and the Trojans) proto-Turks had the added advantage of proving that Anatolia had been a Turkish country since time immemorial, thus extending the roots of the citizens of the republic in the soil they inhabited. It was one of the means whereby the Kemalist leadership tried to construct a new national identity and strong national cohesion. That is not to say that it was a purely cynical form of indoctrination. As with the linguistic theories, there is every indication that Mustafa Kemal himself, and many in the national political leadership and educational establishment, believed in it.

From 1932 onwards, the historical thesis formed the mainstay of history teaching in schools and universities. Its more extreme claims were quietly dropped from the late 1940s onwards, but traces remain even in the schoolbooks of today.¹⁷

The extreme nationalism of which the historical thesis was a part seems to contradict the admiration for and imitation of Western ways that was the other characteristic of Kemalist policies, but in fact it served to facilitate the adoption of Western ways. On the one hand, the emphasis on the Turkish heritage, even if it was largely mythical, as something separate from the Middle Eastern and Islamic civilization of the Ottoman Empire, made it easier to exchange elements from traditional Middle Eastern civilization for those of the West. On the other hand, it instilled in the Turks, especially those of the younger generations, a strong feeling of national identity and national pride, sometimes bordering on a feeling of superiority, which in a sense psychologically counterbalanced the need to follow Europe.

The most significant step in the secularization of social life was the suppression of the dervish orders (*tarikats*), announced in September and put into operation in November 1925. These mystical brotherhoods had served vital religious and social functions throughout Ottoman history. On a psychological level they offered a mystical, emotional

dimension that was lacking in the high religion of the *ulema* and at the same time they served as networks offering cohesion, protection and social mobility. As part of the reaction against Western economic, political and cultural penetration, they seem to have become even more active in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As had been the case with the Ottoman state, the relations between the Young Turks and the orders had been unstable. On the one hand, the heterodox (close to Shi'ite Islam) Bektaşî order seems to have supported both the CUP and the Anatolian resistance movement. The Mevlevî order (the followers of the mystic Celâleddin Rumi) had contributed its own battalions during the First World War. On the other hand, members of the Nakşibendî order had led both the anti-constitutionalist uprising in 1909 and the Kurdish rebellion of 1925. Whatever their political position, their widespread networks of convents and shrines, the obedience their followers owed to their sheikhs and the closed and secretive culture of the brotherhoods made them independent to a degree that was unacceptable to a modern centralist national government.

By extending their secularization drive beyond the formal, institutionalized Islam the Kemalists now touched such vital elements of popular religion as dress, amulets, soothsayers, holy sheikhs, saints' shrines, pilgrimages and festivals. The resentment these measures caused and the resistance put up against them was far greater than, for instance, in the case of the abolition of the caliphate, the position of *şeyhülislam*, or the *medreses*, which was only important to official 'high' religion.

While the government succeeded in suppressing most expressions of popular religion, at least in the towns, this did not, of course, disappear. To a large extent, the *tarikats* simply went underground. But through the simultaneous imposition of an authoritarian and – especially during the 1940s – increasingly unpopular regime and suppression of popular Islam, the Kemalists politicized Islam and turned it into a vehicle for opposition. One could say that, in turning against popular religion, they cut the ties that bound them to the mass of the population.

During the 1930s, there were government-inspired attempts to nationalize and modernize Islam, but interest in this 'Turkish reformation' was limited to a small part of the elite, and its most obvious manifestation was the replacement of the Arabic *ezan* (call to prayer from the minaret) with a Turkish one, recited to a melody the state conservatory had composed in 1932.¹⁸ This was introduced after earlier state-induced experiments with the reading of the *mevlut*, the text recited on the Prophet Muhammad's birthday and with completely Turkified Friday sermons.

Much more important was the movement the Islamic modernist Sait

Nursi, whom his followers called *Bediüzzaman* (Marvel of the Time), founded in the 1930s. Nursi had had a chequered relationship with the Young Turks, taking part in the counter-revolution of 1909, but also serving as a *Teşkilât-i Mahsusa* propagandist in the First World War, supporting the national resistance movement but warning against its secularist tendencies in 1923. From the early years of the century, Sait had acquired a reputation as a religious scholar, especially in the east. After the Sheikh Sait rebellion, he was arrested along with many other prominent Kurds and resettled in the town of Isparta in the west. From the 1920s onwards, he laid down the ideas he preached in brochures and booklets, which were later collectively known as the *Risale-i Nur* (Message of Light). In it, he enjoined Muslims to take God's unity as the basis of their lives, but also to study modern science and technology and to use them in the cause of Islam, which in his eyes was the only true basis for social cohesion.

Between 1935 and 1953, Sait Nursi was arrested and tried a number of times for alleged political use of religion. But while he preached social mobilization and rejected both secularism and nationalism, Sait did not indulge in direct political activity until the late 1950s. During the Kemalist period, his writings were banned, but his growing circle of disciples copied them by hand. After his death the *Nurcu* movement, as it is called, continued to grow and became very influential in Turkey and among Turkish migrant workers abroad.

Taken together, the Kemalist reforms literally altered the face of Turkey. The fact that a non-Western and Muslim country chose to discard its past and seek to join the West made a huge impression in the West, where the fact that an entirely new, modern and different Turkey had sprung up was generally accepted (witness the titles of well-known books about Turkey which appeared in the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s: *The Turkish Transformation* (Henry Elisha Alien, 1935), *The New Turks* (Eleanor Bisbee, 1951), *The Old Turkey and the New* (Sir Harry Luke, 1935), *Die neue Turkei* (Kurt Ziemke, 1930), *Modern Turkey* (Geoffrey Lewis, 1955) and many more).

Generally, these writers overestimated the extent to which Turkish society had changed. By the late 1930s the provincial towns had begun to change visibly. The old town centres more often than not were still in bad repair, but the Kemalists had begun to build new towns, often along the road to the (often equally new) railway station, with 'rational' modern architecture, public parks, tea gardens, cinemas and statues of Atatürk. Most provincial centres now had their own electricity plant. In the towns and cities the Kemalists succeeded in dramatically enlarging the group that supported their positivist, secularist and modernist ideals.

Typically, the backbone of the Kemalist 'revolution' in the towns consisted of bureaucrats, officers, teachers, doctors, lawyers and entrepreneurs of larger commercial enterprises. The craftsmen and small traders formed the backbone of the suppressed traditional culture.

At the same time, the reforms hardly influenced the life of the villagers who made up the great mass of the Turkish population. A farmer or shepherd from Anatolia had never worn a fez, so he was not especially bothered about its abolition. His wife wore no veil anyway, so the fact that its use was discouraged did not mean anything to him or her. He could not read or write, so the nature of the script was in a sense immaterial to him, although the fact that the only man in the village who was able to read and write was the local imam tended to strengthen the religious connotation of the Arabic alphabet. He had to take a family name in 1934, but the whole village would continue to use first names (as is still the case) and the family names remained for official use only. The new family law made polygamy illegal, but those farmers who could afford it would still quite often take into the house a second woman, without marrying her, ascribing her children to his legal wife, if need be.

There were attempts to extend the reforms to the villages, to spread modern techniques and to instil a secular and positivist attitude. The 'People's Rooms' constituted one such attempt. Another was the creation of the 'Village Institutes' (*Köy Enstitüleri*). In 1935, an alphabetization drive was begun to combat illiteracy in the Turkish countryside. At that time only about 5000 of the 40,000 Turkish villages had schools (mostly with three classes). Most of them were very primitive and had only one teacher. The man responsible for the campaign was Ismail Hakki Tonguç, Turkey's leading pedagogue, who had studied the educational ideas of Dewey and Kerschensteiner in Germany.

The first attempt to solve the illiteracy problem was to take young villagers who had learnt to read and write in the army, to have them follow a six-month course and then to send them to their villages as 'educators' (*eğitmenler*). When this solution proved unsatisfactory, Tonguç was given the chance to execute his own ideas and to experiment with institutes in which village youngsters trained as primary school teachers, and at the same time acquired modern technical and agricultural skills. The idea was to supply the villages with people who could not only teach their children to read and write, but who could also introduce the villagers to twentieth-century science and technology on a practical level. The village institutes were very successful while they lasted, but with the advent of political pluralism after the Second World War they became a liability to the government,

when the opposition accused them of spreading communist propaganda. In 1948, the government turned the institutes into ordinary teacher-training establishments. When the Democratic Party came to power in 1950, it abolished them altogether.

Economic developments in the one-party era

The one subject that dominated Turkish politics and public opinion in the 1930s was the economy. That the Turkish leadership realized the importance of economic problems is shown by the convening as early as February 1923 of the 'First Turkish Economic Congress' in İzmir. Mustafa Kemal opened the congress with a speech in which he emphasized the importance of economic independence now that political independence had been won. In this he no doubt addressed the French and British delegates at the peace conference over the heads of his audience. At the congress, 1100 delegates of farmers, traders, workers and industrialists discussed economic policies. Its resolutions were partly incorporated in the *dokuz umde* (nine principles), the nine-point programme of the People's Party, which was published in April.¹⁹ Much of the debate at the congress was devoted to the same issue that had divided the Young Turks of the prewar era: the choice between liberalism and the state intervention of the 'National Economy' programme. The congress did call for protection of local industry, but it did not oppose foreign investment, provided foreigners were not given preferential treatment. The leadership took the rather disparate resolutions of the congress to mean that it called for a mixed economy, with the state being responsible for major investments.

The minister of economic affairs at the time, Mahmut Esat (Bozkurt), announced that Turkish economic policies would be based on the 'New Turkish Economic School', which was neither capitalist nor socialist. What the new school amounted to never became very clear, however. Basically, the economic policies pursued in the 1920s were liberal, in the sense that they were based on private ownership and initiative. They were not liberal, however, in the sense of non-interference on the part of the state. The state did interfere where major investments were concerned. By far the most important investment concerned railway building. Eight hundred kilometres of track were laid between 1923 and 1929, and in 1929 another 800 kilometres were under construction. In 1924 the government decided to buy out the foreign-owned railway companies, which dominated the west of the country. By 1930, 3000 kilometres of track had been bought and another 2400 still remained in foreign hands. Eventually, all would be bought by the Turkish state.

In 1925, the other major foreign presence in the economy, the old

Ottoman tobacco monopoly, was bought out. It was turned into a state monopoly into which a number of other sectors (alcohol, sugar, matches and explosives) were integrated. The state then partly farmed out these monopolies to private companies.

The state also tried to improve the financial infrastructure. The largest bank in the country was still the Ottoman Bank, but in 1924–25 the old Agricultural Bank was reorganized and two new banks were founded; the Business Bank (*İş Bankası*) and the Industrial Bank (*Sanayi Bankası*), Mustafa Kemal took a personal interest in the Business Bank. He invested the donations sent to him by Indian Muslims during the national struggle, but the main impetus for the new Business Bank came from the forced merger with the much bigger National Credit Bank (*İtibar-i Millî Bankası*), which the CUP had founded as part of its National Economy programme during the First World War.²⁰

Turkish industry was still very weak and took a long time to recover from the effects of the departure of the Greeks and Armenians. Until 1929, the provisions of the Lausanne treaty prevented Turkey from raising its import tariffs and it has been pointed out by some historians that the disappearance of the Greek and Armenian traders actually made it easier for foreign companies to penetrate the Turkish markets directly, with their main competitors out of the way. By 1927, Turkey had slightly over 65,000 industrial firms, employing a total of 250,000 workers, but of these firms only 2822 used mechanical power; the overwhelming majority were artisans' workshops.²¹ In 1927, the 'Law on the Encouragement of Industry', which built on the similar law adopted in 1913, was passed. It provided tax exemptions for new and expanding industrial firms. When the restrictions imposed at Lausanne lapsed in 1929, the import tariffs were immediately raised drastically (which hit many Turkish trading firms harder than it did the foreign producers). The lack of entrepreneurial know-how and the lack of a prosperous market, however, prevented a quick expansion of the industrial sector.

By far the largest sector of the Turkish economy was still the agricultural one. Here, recovery in the first postwar years had been spectacular (90 per cent during the years 1923–26). The farmers were helped by the abolition of the tithe (*aşar*) in 1925 and its replacement by a sales tax. In 1927 and 1928 agriculture was hit by a long drought and over the period between 1927 and 1930 growth in this sector was only 11 per cent.

The government's financial policies were conservative, aiming at a balanced budget, low inflation and a strong lira through a tight monetary policy, but Turkey had a trade deficit with the outside world throughout the 1920s and this gradually forced down the exchange rate of the Turkish lira. Then in 1929 and 1930 the world economic crisis

reached Turkey and, like all agricultural producers, it was hit very hard. The price of wheat declined by two-thirds in a few years and if the terms of trade for wheat producers (against industrial producers) are set at 100 for 1929, they had gone down to 30 by 1933.²² There was as yet no system of buffer stocks to regulate prices so the producers felt the full impact of the crisis. As a result of the loss of the population's purchasing power and of government-imposed quotas and restrictions, imports declined from 256 million liras in 1929 to just 85 million in 1932. The import of consumer goods declined even faster. As a result, despite falling agricultural producer prices Turkey's trade deficit turned into a surplus in the 1930s, but many of the small luxuries to which Turkish citizens had become accustomed simply disappeared from the market. It also meant that autarky was no longer a political ideal but became a practical necessity. There had been successes in the building of an autonomous Turkish industry to replace imports, but they were limited to the production of sugar and textiles.

Like many governments around the world the Turkish government was at a loss over what to do about the crisis. The years from 1929 to 1932 were a period of searching. The debate between the RPP and the opposition party created by the regime in 1930, the FRP, was almost exclusively about economic policy, with the opposition advocating liberalism and the RPP under İnönü demanding a greater role for the state in the economy. At the 1931 RPP congress 'statism' (*devletçilik*) was officially adopted as the new economic policy and one of the pillars of Kemalist ideology. What this term meant exactly was never clearly defined. It was certainly not a form of socialism: private ownership remained the basis of economic life. Rather, it meant that the state took over responsibility for creating and running industries for which the private sector could not accumulate the necessary capital. A major influence on the formulation of Turkish statist policies was the Soviet Union, which had started its own first five-year plan in 1927. In 1932 a Soviet delegation visited Turkey and drew up a report on the development of Turkish industry. It recommended concentrating on textiles, iron and steel, paper, cement, glass and chemicals. The Soviet Union also made available \$8 million in gold to aid the Turkish industrialization programme.²³ In 1933 the first Turkish five-year plan was announced, which largely followed the Soviet recommendations. One result was the building of an enormous textile '*kombinat*' in Kayseri, which significantly lessened the dependence of Turkey, a raw cotton producer and exporter, on imported cotton cloth.

In Turkey, the most enthusiastic supporters of the policy of statism (apart from İnönü who was very committed to this line himself) were a

group of young Kemalist writers who published the journal *Kadro* (Cadre) from 1932 to 1934. The Kadro group went much further than the party leadership. It wanted to transform the RPP into a trained elite, a cadre that would act as a vanguard of the Kemalist revolution. They advocated state planning in all areas of social, economic and cultural life and saw statism as a viable alternative to communism and capitalism, a sort of 'third way'. In the end, their wider ideas were not taken up by the leadership, which limited planning to the economic field.

Within the leadership itself there were two conflicting currents. One, led by İsmet İnönü, saw statism as a permanent solution and as preferable to liberal capitalism in the Turkish situation. The other, headed by Mahmut Celâl Bayar, the president of the *İş Bankası* saw it as a transitory stage, necessary until Turkish industry could fend for itself. The friction between the two groups was aggravated because both the Ministry of Economic Affairs and the Business Bank were faced with limited investment opportunities, so both ended up pursuing the same projects. The conflict was resolved when Mustafa Kemal intervened and had Celâl appointed minister of economic affairs in İsmet's cabinet in 1932, thus assuring coordination of economic policies. When İsmet İnönü was ousted and replaced by Celâl Bayar in 1937, a more liberal approach was adopted, but from 1939 onwards the more statist approach of İnönü dominated once more.

Under the five-year plan two large holding companies were founded: the *Sümerbank* (Sumerian Bank), responsible for industry, in 1933, and the *Etibank* (Hittite Bank), responsible for mining, in 1935. Most state-owned economic enterprises were brought under the umbrella of these two holdings. They were given all kinds of advantages. Among other things, they were allowed to borrow from the Central Bank against 1 per cent interest. A law of 1938 regulated their operations. In theory the state economic enterprises, as they were called, were supposed to operate in a businesslike manner with as much autonomy as possible. In practice their decision-making was heavily influenced by political considerations, which were often irrational from a strictly commercial point of view. While the contributions of the state sector to the Turkish economy have been fiercely criticized over the last few decades, it should also be pointed out that a whole new generation of managers and engineers, who later played an important role in the development of private industry, learned its trade in the state economic enterprises.

The state also intervened in the agricultural sector. In 1932, the Agricultural Bank was ordered to regulate prices by building up and selling off stocks, a responsibility transferred in 1938 to the newly created Office for Soil Products (*Toprak Mahsulleri Ofisi* or *TMO*).

During the second half of the 1930s, there was a steady increase in Turkey's GNP in line with the recovery of the world economy. Trade recovered, too, although much of it now took place within the bounds of bilateral agreements between governments. Nearly 50 per cent of Turkey's trade in the years before the Second World War was with Germany or its allies, which offered more scope for this type of trade than the more liberal economies of the West. Nevertheless, the economy was still very vulnerable when the Second World War broke out.

As we shall see, Turkey managed to remain neutral and stay out of the war until the very end, but in order to do so, it increased its army from a peacetime strength of 120,000 to 1.5 million (although without official mobilization). Feeding and equipping this army brought tremendous economic strains. The Ministry of Defence's share of the national budget went up from 30 to 50 per cent. Basically, the government had no option but to finance this expenditure by raising taxes and by having the Central Bank print money, thus encouraging inflation. The official consumer price index went from 100 to 459 during the war,²⁴ and this took no account of the black market prices. The war occasioned a new wave of state intervention in all sectors of the economy, which was legitimized by the 'National Defence Law' (*Millî Korunma Kanunu*) passed in January 1940, giving the government almost unlimited powers to fix prices, requisition materials and even to impose forced labour. Forced labour was widely used during the war, especially in the mining industry.

The fact that the government used its powers to combat inflation by fixing prices at unrealistically low levels while stimulating inflation through its monetary and budgetary policies led to a booming black market economy, while fewer and fewer products were available through regular retail channels. In the second half of the war the government bowed to this reality and more or less relinquished price controls between 1942 and 1944. Turkey's GDP, which had been rising steadily throughout the latter half of the 1930s, dropped sharply during the war. It did not reach its 1939 level again until 1950. The standard of living also went down and only recovered in the early 1950s.

While for the great majority of Turkish citizens the war meant a sharp drop in their standard of living, there were exceptions. The black market on the one hand and the large degree of government intervention on the other gave those who were in a position to exploit them (big farmers, importers and traders and those officials who handled government contracts and permits) huge profit opportunities. There was a great deal of resentment against these war profiteers and the government reacted by introducing the 'wealth tax' (*varlık vergisi*) in

November 1942. But the way in which this law was applied was scandalous: local committees consisting of local government officials and representatives of the local councils and chambers of commerce made the tax assessments. There was no fixed rate. The result was that the tax was almost wholly paid by traders in the big cities, notably Istanbul, and that the small non-Muslim communities, who were subjected to rates ten times higher than those of Muslims, paid 55 per cent of the total tax revenue. In addition, non-Muslims were not allowed to spread their payments and as a result often had to sell their businesses or properties to Muslim businessmen in order to pay. Those unable to pay were deported and sentenced to forced labour. The wealth tax was withdrawn in March 1944, under the influence of criticism from Britain and the United States, but by then irreparable damage to the confidence of the minorities in the Turkish state had been done.²⁵

Five months after the passing of the wealth tax law a tax on agricultural produce was introduced to tax the new wealth in the countryside (which was concentrated in the hands of the large commercial landowners). The power relations in the countryside were such, however, that this tax (which in practice meant a return of the tithe abolished in 1925) failed to skim off excess profits from large farmers and fell relatively heavily on small subsistence farmers whose standard of living was already low and falling.

Although there are no dependable figures available, up to the early 1950s there probably was a shortage of labour in towns and countryside alike. Widespread unemployment would become a scourge in Turkey in later years, but not yet. According to the laws of economics, this should have meant that the labour force was in a good position to demand better wages and working conditions. The opposite, however, was true. In line with the Young Turk tradition the Kemalist state sided with the traders and entrepreneurs, whom it saw as the standard-bearers of a new and modern society, and it suppressed the labour movement. The Labour Law of 1936 was a direct copy of that of fascist Italy and, while it brought some safeguards to workers in industry, and promised some forms of workers' insurance (the introduction of which was actually begun in 1946), it also prohibited the formation of trade unions and the calling of strikes. When a Trade Unions Law was introduced in 1947, it still did not allow strikes. Real wages in Turkish industry declined throughout the 1930s and 1940s.

Foreign relations

The Turkish Republic's foreign policy throughout the period from 1923 to 1945 can be characterized as cautious, realistic and generally aimed

at the preservation of the status quo and the hard-won victory of 1923. Until the end of the 1920s, its relations with the Western European democracies were dogged by the aftermath of Lausanne, where a number of problems had not been solved. Most important was the quarrel with Britain over Mosul, an oil-rich province, largely inhabited by Kurds, though with Arab and Turkish minorities. The British army had occupied Mosul after the armistice of 1918, so the Turks included it among the areas whose independence they claimed in the 'National Pact'. In negotiations during 1923 and 1924 the British insisted on including Mosul in Iraq, rejecting the Turkish proposal of a plebiscite. When the parties could not agree, the issue was submitted to the League of Nations in Geneva, of which Turkey was not yet a member. The League started its discussion of the matter in September 1924. At the same time there were skirmishes between Turkish and British troops in the north of the province and on 9 October the British government issued an ultimatum in which it demanded the withdrawal of the Turkish troops. Turkey backed down and a temporary border was established. A year later, in September 1925, a commission of the League investigated the situation on the spot and, to the surprise of no one at all, announced that it favoured the inclusion of Mosul in Iraq. The League of Nations took a decision to this effect in December 1925 and in June 1926 Turkey formally acquiesced. In return it received 10 per cent of the province's oil revenues over the next 25 years. This claim was then relinquished in return for a payment by Britain of £700,000.

The main problem between Turkey and France was the payment of the Ottoman public debt, in which France had been by far the largest investor before the war. In 1928 an arrangement on the part of the debt to be shouldered by Turkey was reached, but the world economic crisis led to a suspension of payments in 1930. After prolonged negotiations, in 1933 the debt was rescheduled on more favourable terms to Turkey.

Apart from these major diplomatic wrangles, in the first years after Lausanne there were continuous irritations between Turkey and the powers. Turkey made a point of asserting its sovereign rights to the full, while France and Britain showed that they had difficulty shedding old habits acquired during the regime of the capitulations. Frictions arose over the European powers' refusal to move their embassies to Ankara, over the jurisdiction of the Turkish Ministry of Education over mission schools, over the degree of independence of the International Straits Commission established at Lausanne to supervise shipping through the Bosphorus and Dardanelles, and over the supranational character of the Orthodox patriarchate in Istanbul. All these matters were eventually settled to Turkey's satisfaction.

The late 1920s and early 1930s saw a gradual improvement in Turkey's relations with its neighbours. A non-aggression pact was concluded with Italy in 1928 and, partly through Italian diplomatic efforts, reconciliation with Greece took place. In October 1930 a friendship treaty with Greece was signed, motivated by shared fear of Bulgarian irredentism. After a number of Balkan conferences, a Balkan Pact was concluded in 1934 with Greece, Yugoslavia, Romania and Turkey as its members. In 1937 the Sadabad Pact linked Turkey to its eastern neighbours, Iraq, Iran and Afghanistan, in a similar fashion.

Throughout the period after the war of independence, when distrust of the West was still rife, the cornerstone of Turkish foreign policy had been the maintenance of good relations with the Soviet Union. In the 1930s relations with the Soviet Union remained excellent (a ten-year friendship treaty was signed in 1935) but it was no longer the sole pillar of Turkish foreign policy. Apart from the rapprochement with its neighbours, Turkey's relations with the Western powers improved markedly. At the root of this improvement lay the fact that, together with France and Britain, Turkey now definitely supported the status quo and rejected the aspirations of the 'revisionist' powers such as Nazi Germany and fascist Italy, which wanted to redraw the map of Europe. Turkey maintained good relations with Hitler's Germany in spite of this, but saw Italy's expansionism in the eastern Mediterranean as a great threat.

The fact that its ally, the Soviet Union, too, joined the anti-revisionist camp, facilitated Turkey's rapprochement with the West. In 1932 Turkey joined the League of Nations. In April 1936 it sent the signatories of the Treaty of Lausanne a note in which it asked for a change in the demilitarization of the Straits, in view of the increasingly tense international situation, and received a sympathetic hearing. A conference was held in Montreux and in the resulting treaty Turkey regained full control of the Straits. The Straits Commission was abolished. All parties accepted a number of restrictions on the passage of warships through the Straits, but commercial traffic would be free for countries not at war with Turkey itself.

The one issue over which Turkey and France clashed in the 1930s was that of the *sancak* (district) of Alexandrette, the ethnically extremely mixed area known to Turkish nationalists as 'Hatay' (Land of the Hittites, who it will be remembered were considered proto-Turks at the time) with the towns of Antakya and Iskenderun (Alexandrette). In the Franco-Turkish agreement of 1921 and at Lausanne this area had remained outside the borders of the new Turkish state, but cultural autonomy was extended to its Turkish community, which had close

links with Turkey and followed developments in Turkey closely. A *Hatay Halk Fırkası* (People's Party of Hatay) was formed and it even carried through such things as the 'hat' and 'alphabet' reforms.

In September 1936 France announced that it would grant independence to Syria and that it intended to include Hatay in the new Syrian state. This was unacceptable to the Turkish community. The issue was brought before the League of Nations, which sent a mission to the district in January 1937. The mission concluded that the Turks constituted a majority. Britain, anxious to avert a breach between France and Turkey in view of the Italian threat, now mediated and an agreement was reached whereby Hatay would become an 'independent entity', represented in external matters by Syria. An international committee of lawyers drew up a constitution and elections were held in April 1938. During the elections there were bloody riots all over the *sancak*, so the elections were annulled. By now the international situation was so threatening that France was ready to come to terms with Turkey and secure its support against Nazi Germany and Italy at almost any price. In July, new elections were held under joint Franco-Turkish military control and they produced a narrow Turkish majority of 22 in the 40-seat parliament. In its first session, the new parliament proclaimed the independent Republic of Hatay. Almost exactly a year later, on 29 June 1939, it announced the union of that state with Turkey – to the great anger of the Syrians, who even today depict the area as Syrian on their maps.

Turkey in the Second World War

Possible aggression by Italy remained the foremost concern of the Turkish leadership in the late 1930s. Concern was intensified by Italy's occupation of Albania in April 1939, which brought Turkey, France and Britain closer together.

Discussions about a treaty of mutual assistance between Turkey, France and Britain went on all through 1939. They proceeded only slowly because Turkey demanded large amounts of military and financial assistance in view of its own weakness and because it was determined to preclude any possibility of becoming embroiled in a war with the Soviet Union. The Turkish government very much hoped to include the Soviets in the alliance. The sudden announcement of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact in August 1939, in which Hitler's Germany and Stalin's Russia more or less divided eastern Europe between them, therefore came as a tremendous shock to Ankara. France and Britain now became even more anxious to secure Turkish support and on 19 October 1939 the Anglo-Franco-Turkish treaty of mutual support was

signed. With it, the Turks got most of what they wanted. A loan of £16 million in gold and a credit of £25 million for the purchase of military equipment were granted. In a separate protocol attached to the treaty, Turkey was excused from any obligation that could involve her in a war with the Soviet Union.²⁶

The treaty stipulated that Turkey would 'collaborate effectively' with France and Britain in the event of an act of aggression of a European power leading to war in the Mediterranean (a clear reflection of the importance attached to the Italian threat). A *casus foederis* had clearly arisen after Italy declared war on France and Britain on 10 June 1940. By then, however, the collapse of France had drastically changed the balance of power and, despite its obligations, Turkey devoted all its energy to staying out of the war, invoking the separate protocol as a pretext. The British government saw Turkey as a valuable source of manpower and exerted pressure to get it to enter the war, but Turkey resisted and Britain had no choice but to accept. After the German occupation of Greece and Bulgaria's siding with the Axis in 1941, the war had reached Turkey's borders. As a consequence, in June 1941, almost simultaneously with the German invasion of the Soviet Union, it concluded a treaty of friendship with Germany. Throughout the next year and a half, the period of the greatest German expansion, Turkey kept up a scrupulously neutral position, pleading lack of preparation and the need for supplies with the British government.

After the German defeat at Stalingrad (November 1942) allied pressure gradually increased, but Turkey was still very exposed to a German attack. The allies' requirements had changed and they now regarded Turkey as a forward base for allied troops and aircraft rather than as a source of manpower, but the Germans threatened that the arrival of even a single allied fighter plane would mean war. In January 1943, Churchill and İnönü reached agreement over a programme of preparations for the arrival – in due course – of allied warplanes, but the preparations were subsequently sabotaged and the building of installations intentionally slowed down by the Turks.²⁷ The pressure increased even further at a conference of İnönü, Churchill and Roosevelt in Cairo in December 1943. The allies now clearly held the winning hand and they pointed out that, if Turkey stayed out of the war for much longer, it risked being completely isolated after the war. The implied threat was that it would have to face the Red Army and any demands Stalin might make on its own. İnönü now finally accepted that Turkey would become an active belligerent on the allied side, but he asked for an overall campaign plan for the allied conquest of the Balkans first. This was a clever ploy because the allied powers differed

widely about the desirability of a Balkan campaign, Stalin objecting to any British or American interference in the area and the Americans tended to listen to him.

Throughout 1944, the Turks kept stalling, although they did break off diplomatic relations with Germany in August. Their attitude led the British and the Americans to lend a more sympathetic ear to Soviet demands. In February 1945, at the Yalta conference, they agreed to future changes in the Montreux convention. Shortly afterwards, on 23 February 1945, Turkey officially declared war on Germany in order to qualify as a founding member of the United Nations. This was a purely symbolic act and no shot was ever fired in anger by a Turkish soldier during the Second World War.

Throughout the war both domestic politics and the press were kept under tight control and they were both manipulated in Turkey's effort to stay out of the conflict. When Germany seemed to be on the verge of defeating the Soviets, there was a resurgence of pan-Turkist propaganda. A pan-Turkist committee was founded in July 1941 with German encouragement, a number of Turkish generals toured the eastern front at the invitation of the Germans and some pan-Turkist sympathizers were taken into the cabinet – all as a sort of insurance policy in the event of a German victory. When the impending German defeat had become clear, in May 1944, the pan-Turkist organizations and propaganda were suppressed.

Turkey's policies during the war have often been seen as immoral and as reneging on the treaty of 1939. The country's international reputation was damaged, but keeping out of the war was a great success in the eyes of politicians like İnönü and his successive foreign ministers (first Şükrü Saraçoğlu, then Numan Menemencioğlu, and then Saraçoğlu again), who had a clear memory of how the Ottoman Empire had allowed itself to be used as a German tool during the First World War, and the disasters that this had brought upon their country.