

The New Turkey: The Quiet Revolution on the Edge of Europe - Chris Morris

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Ch 1 THEY'VE GOT A BIT OF A HISTORY

When J. A. R. Marriott published *The Eastern Question: An Historical Study in European Diplomacy* in 1917, he set out his terms of reference in a manner which would make even Valery Giscard d'Estaing blush. He wrote:

The primary and most essential factor in the problem ... is the presence, embedded in the living flesh of Europe, of an alien substance. That substance is the Ottoman Turk. Akin to the European family neither in creed, in race, in language, in social customs, nor in political aptitudes and traditions, the Ottomans have for more than five hundred years presented to the other European powers a problem, now tragic, now comic, now bordering almost on burlesque, but always baffling and paradoxical.

No wonder the Turks think they get a bad press. It's been like that for centuries.

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For several months, local residents in the old city of Istanbul thought the small construction site which had sprung up in the grounds of a five-star hotel was something to do with repairing the sewage system. The hotel had previously been part of a prison and from the surface the hole in the ground certainly didn't look like anything out of the ordinary. But as we clambered down a series of ladders, and made our way along bits of rickety wooden scaffolding in an excavated passage, a rather more dramatic scene emerged. Archaeologists had discovered part of the lost Grand Palace of Byzantium - a modern byword for treachery and intrigue.

On the walls at the end of a narrow corridor we were confronted by a series of magnificent frescoes, hidden for more than a thousand years: floral patterns in vivid greens, reds and yellows, Historians believe the palace complex once covered a huge triangular area next to the shores of the Sea of Marmara. It contained churches, gardens and ceremonial rooms, all now buried beneath a bustling twenty-first century metropolis.

'This site is typical of Istanbul, and typical of Turkey,' said the archaeologist leading the excavation project, Alpay Pasinli, as we picked our way through the debris. 'There are so many layers, and so many discoveries still to be made. Each new layer of the city sits on top of all the old ones.'

He turned back towards the frescoes, 'Sometimes,' he said, 'the most surprising things are just beneath your feet.' Trying to understand contemporary Turkey is impossible if you don't know something of its historical roots. A country which is now ninety-nine per cent Muslim contains some of Christianity's earliest sites, such as the underground rock churches of Cappadocia, and the ancient Syriac monasteries of 'Tur Abdin, where monks still speak Aramaic, the language of Christ. The modern Turkish state which tried to craft a single ethnic identity for three-quarters of a century is the main heir of one of the greatest multi-ethnic empires the world has ever seen. When we talk about the new Turkey we

need to know about all the old Turkey's as well. History didn't begin when Kemal Atatürk proclaimed the Turkish republic in 1923.

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Anyone in search of a vantage point to watch the world go by on the Bosphorus should head for the castle known as Rumeli Hisan on the European shore. Sitting majestically between the two suspension bridges which span the strait, it offers a perfect view of the oil tankers and cargo ships which ply their trade between the Black Sea and the eastern Mediterranean. The crenellated castle walls climb steeply from the shore to dominate the surrounding area, lifting the visitor above the noise and pollution of the modern city.

Rumeli Hisan was built by the young Sultan Mehmet II - soon to be dubbed Fatih, the Conqueror - in 1452. A stunning example of Ottoman military architecture, it was intended to send a simple message to the embattled defenders of Constantinople about who controlled the supply lines down the Bosphorus; the first ship which tried to slip past the castle without paying tribute was sunk by cannon fire, its crew decapitated and its Venetian captain impaled by the water's edge.

Within a year Constantinople itself had fallen. Mehmet devised and controlled a seven-week siege which finally broke the dogged defense of the city. Ranged against him, under the leadership of the last Byzantine emperor, Constantine, was an unlikely collection of Greeks, Genoese, Venetians and Catalans. They were hugely outnumbered. Even before the siege began, the emperor had made desperate calls for more help from Europe, but it never came. Despite a good deal of talk, Latin Christianity did little to help the Orthodox in their hour of need.

Mehmet's own army was far from mono-ethnic. Turks were in the dear majority, but there were Kurds, Arabs, Persians and plenty of Christian European irregulars: Hungarians and Italians, Greeks and Germans. Even in its early days, the Ottoman Empire was not based around the idea of Islam alone. It was about accumulating power, about state-building, about identifying a winner and sticking with it. To any self-respecting mercenary in the fifteenth century one thing was clear: the Ottomans were on the up.

They already had a well-established toehold in Europe - in Thrace and Bulgaria. Sofia was in Ottoman hands, while their defeat of the Serbs on the Blackbird Field in Kosovo in 1389 was a battle which still inspired thoughts of revenge in Slobodan Milosovic six hundred years later. The first Ottoman troops had already gazed out across the Adriatic, and there had been a successful campaign against the Venetians around Salonica in the battle for trade routes and influence. But for Mehmet, Constantinople was the big prize.

In May 1453 he rode through the ruins of the defeated city on a white charger and headed for the incomparable Hagia Sophia - the greatest cathedral of Eastern Christianity. He ordered that it be protected from the wanton violence of the looters and converted immediately into a mosque. The capital of the Byzantine Empire, the Rome of

the East, was in the hands of a new dynasty. For nearly five hundred years, the city retained its official name, but it soon became known to the ordinary citizen as Istanbul.

Who were these new rulers, the Ottomans, and where had they come from? Nomadic Turcomen tribes began sweeping out of Central Asia on horseback in the eighth century AD - a massive movement of peoples which turned into a relentless tide. Some were fleeing westward from the advance of the Mongols behind them; others were restless opportunists looking for rich pickings among the settled communities which lay in their path. In the Middle East the Turks soon collided with and converted to Islam, while retaining many of the shamanistic practices they brought with them from the great plains of the east.

As some tribes paused and settled, others moved on in search of more and more land. About a thousand years ago they galloped for the first time into Asia Minor, the Anatolian peninsula, and the eastern realms of the Byzantine Empire. In these rich agricultural lands battle followed battle, and fortunes ebbed and flowed. But amid the confusion of uncertain times the Turks moved slowly westwards. A decisive defeat was inflicted on the Emperor Romanus Diogenes at the Battle of Manzikert near Lake Van in 1071, opening the floodgates for the Turkish takeover of Byzantium.

The transition from one empire to another wasn't just about Muslims against Christians and Turks against Greeks. The Venetians and the Genoese - masters of Mediterranean trade - were among those who attacked the weakened Byzantines, while Constantinople itself was occupied and sacked by the knights of the Fourth Crusade in the name of both profit and pope. Similarly the House of Osman - the future rulers of the Ottoman Empire - fought many times against other Turkish warlords and local dynasties as they slowly established a position of ascendancy.

There were real setbacks for the Turks, including a bloody nose administered by the limping Tartar warrior, Tamburlaine, and his horde of Mongols. For a brief period in the early fourteenth century, the putative empire was in disarray and came close to collapse. But the Mongols disappeared, and Byzantium was in no position to put up much of a fight.

The Turkish advance had reached the western edge of Anatolia - to the Aegean Sea, the Dardanelles and the Bosphorus - and in 1354 it was the Ottomans who were the first Turks to cross permanently into Europe at Gallipoli. The world which had nourished ancient Greece and Rome, the philosophical roots of modern Europe, was falling into the hands of new rulers. Within a hundred years the Ottomans had conquered Constantinople and announced the arrival of one of the world's great empires.

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It was to become Islam's most decisive advance in Europe, but it was hardly the first. Only a hundred years after the death of the prophet Muhammad in AD632, Berber Arab armies were at the walls of Tours on the Loire in central France and in the fields of Burgundy, pushing north-ward from their stronghold at Narbonne, in Provence. For several centuries much of the Iberian peninsula was under Muslim control, ruled from the great political and intellectual capital of Córdoba. In the Mediterranean, a cultural Islamic society flourished in Sicily from 902 to 1072 and beyond. And further

north, in the thirteenth century, the Golden Horde of Genghis Khan and his successors swept through modern-day Russia to reach parts of Lithuania and Baltic Poland.

All of these great movements into Europe have been pushed back again over time, but in one form or another, Islam has never left. As Norman Davies wrote in *Europe: A History*:

The interaction of Christians and Muslims has provided one of the most enduring features of Europe's political and cultural life. From the eighth century onwards there has never been a day when the *adhan*, the call of the *muezzin*, could not be heard morning and evening, summoning the faithful to prayer...

When the Turks and the Berbers and all the rest first appeared in Europe, they brought many things with them. A thousand years ago, most Europeans were still struggling to emerge from centuries of stagnation and decline following the fall of Rome, and the Islamic world became Europe's link with more advanced civilizations to the east.

Knowledge of medicine and mathematics, astronomy and the arts, hygiene and new agricultural techniques all flooded in with the invading armies of soldiers, sailors and merchants.

Even in the early years of Islam, thought, the rivalry between the Christian West and the Muslim East was unmistakable, on the battlefield and beyond. As well as a link, the Ottoman world became a barrier cutting Europe off from the Asian hinterland and the vast trading opportunities it represented. This was an obstacle not entirely overcome for many centuries, until first the Portuguese and then other intrepid Europeans began their great seaborne expeditions around the coast of Africa and across to the New World in the Americas.

All in all, then, Islam was quite a challenge. An aggressive upstart religion, which burst forth from Arabia at uncontrollable speed, it forced Europeans to get organized, to try to respond in kind. The crusades were the first flawed and ultimately failed attempt to hit back, and they embedded images of the Cross versus the Crescent in the popular mind. When they began, the goal of the crusades was to retake Jerusalem and the Holy Land with as much plunder as possible along the way. But over the centuries, things grew more realistic - rape and pillage was still the objective of many, but the later crusades also became the first battles in a long defensive campaign to keep Islam and the Turks at bay.

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Modern Turkey loves a good military parade - it's a chance to show off one of the largest armies in the world. But amid the tanks, the artillery pieces and the F-16s screaming through the skies above, I always tend to look out for the volunteers dressed as Ottoman troops. With flamboyant false moustaches, and a splendid variety of pointy hats, they march slowly past the reviewing stand in proper Ottoman military style - two steps forward, one step back ... two steps forward, one step back.

Unresolved feelings about the sudden loss of an empire still have modern echoes in Turkey today. For a long time the radical secularist reforms pushed through by Kemal Atatürk in the 1920s and 1930s seemed to be part of a cunning plan to lock the door on the messy Ottoman past, and throwaway the key. Atatürk himself preferred to seek inspiration from ancient Turkic roots in Central Asia, and one of the weirder theories attributed to him was that Turkish was the first language and all other languages were descended from it. For several decades in the new republic the Ottomans were associated with failure and fundamentalism.

But there has been a shift in opinion, beginning in earnest in the 1980s, and Ottomanism has been reborn. Both nationalists and Islamists like to lay claim to the Ottoman heritage and since Islamist mayors took control of Istanbul, starting with Tayyip Erdoğan, the anniversary of the conquest in 1453 has become a major public celebration. Reassessment of the Ottoman past has gathered pace in the last few years and the best of the empire is now regarded with curiosity and growing pride.

Ottoman art and artifacts are proudly displayed in museums, and lavish exhibitions (such as 'Turks' at the Royal Academy, London, in 2005) are sent abroad to showcase Turkey to the world. Ottoman classical music is more popular than ever, and during the holy month of Ramadan the old tradition of shadow puppets has become a big attraction again. In a converted *fez* factory next to the Golden Horn large crowds gather every night to watch the Ottoman characters Karagöz and Hacivat. The puppets appear as silhouettes behind a screen, acting out fables of comic incompetence and bureaucratic bungling. It all seems terribly familiar to the adults in the audience, who hoot with laughter as children run helter-skelter between the chairs, their faces full of candyfloss.

'I think it's good that the old ways are coming back again,' said Fikret Bayramoğlu, as he sat in the front row with his wife and baby daughter. 'Everyone enjoys it, and these things are part of our past. Why shouldn't we be proud of them?'

Why not indeed? At the height of its powers the Ottoman Empire stretched from the Arabian peninsula to the gates of Vienna, and it was a functioning political entity in the childhood of people still alive today. By any measure, the empire was an extraordinary achievement: a monumental mix of people and places which controlled large parts of south-eastern Europe for hundreds of years.

The fall of Constantinople in 1453 sent shock waves across Europe, and greatly enhanced the prestige of the sultan. Over the next three decades, Fatih Mehmet continued his conquests, overrunning the rest of the Greek-speaking world, moving further into the Balkans and annexing the southern Crimea. It wasn't a picture of unbroken Ottoman success, though - European armies fought back in Belgrade, and in Rhodes, where the Knights of the Order of St John held onto their island fortress. In 1480 Ottoman troops landed on the southern toe of Italy and began advancing to the north, a campaign cut short only by news of the sultan's death the following year. Europe, finally, could breathe a sigh of relief: the Conqueror was no more. There were fireworks and celebrations in Rome and Venice and services of thanksgiving across the continent. But anyone who dared hope that the Ottomans were a one-hit wonder was to be disappointed.

The empire was beginning to flourish and grow in confidence, as the old feudal order in south-eastern Europe started to collapse in front of it. In the Balkans Islam became firmly established as a native European religion at around the same time that the great Islamic civilization of Moorish Spain was being beaten back across the Mediterranean, leaving the incomparable buildings of Cordoba and Granada behind it. The Ottomans were also notable in an age of intolerance for the readiness with which they would accept outsiders into the fold. Brutal in war, they governed their people with a relatively light hand. As long as the unquestioned rule of the sultan, and an official status of inferiority before the law, was accepted, Christian subjects could rise and profit from their allegiance. Greeks and Armenians flourished in Istanbul as traders and merchants, and in 1492 Bayezit II gave refuge to thousands of Jews expelled from Catholic Spain. They, too, were respected for who they were, and settled in cities across the Balkans and beyond.

Of course, Ottoman military campaigns into southern and central Europe routinely emphasized their Islamic character. Even *then*, *jihad* was a useful, inspiring battle cry. Within the boundaries of the early empire, however, intercommunal relations were usually pretty good. There were many times when Jews and Christians were persecuted and killed, but it rarely happened with official sanction from above. Administrators were ordered to allow these fellow 'People of the Book' to practice their religion freely and play a full role in Ottoman society. At this stage of the empire's development, it was Shia Muslims who suffered more than anyone else at the hands of their Sunni Ottoman rulers.

The sultans quickly re-established Istanbul as one of the world's great cities, a place where Europe and Asia overlapped, after years of decline and neglect under the fading grandeur of Byzantium. Magnificent new mosque complexes were built - the Fatih Camii and the Eyüp Camii among them - which still grace the city today; and it was from the new imperial palace of Topkapi that Sultans and their generals would plan the next campaign of conquest. Huge armies would gather with amazing speed, before setting out with the entire Ottoman government in tow, only to return months and sometimes years later with the spoils of victory.

You can still wander through the courtyards of Topkapi Palace today, and try to imagine what it used to be like, how full of intrigue it once was. There are fabulous views along the Bosphorus, and across the Golden Horn and the Sea of Marmara. No wonder they chose this as the perfect place from which to run the family business. From the imperial kitchens, with their huge brick-domed roofs and mighty chimneys, to the mysterious harem on the other side of the great Courtyard of the Imperial Council, it really feels like the engine room of the empire. For hundreds of years this was one of the world's great seats of power, and the Turks held parts of Europe in the palm of their hand.

But the Ottoman advance was not just a remorseless push westward. In the early sixteenth century, during the short but bloody reign of Selim the Grim, the Ottomans also made decisive gains to the east. Selim started as he meant to go on, by killing eight brothers and cousins who might

have become rivals to the imperial throne. He then defeated the Mamluk Sultanate based in Cairo, bringing the Muslim holy cities of Mecca and Medina into the Ottoman fold, and giving the sultan the first real claim to the title of Caliph, the supreme ruler of Islam and successor to the prophet Muhammad. Selim also won a convincing victory against a rival Persian-Turkish dynasty, the Safevids, protecting and extending the eastern borders in Anatolia and slaughtering the ancestors of today's Turkish Alevi community.

Selim's death in 1520 was once again the cue for much rejoicing in Europe, where another campaign of Ottoman advance was much feared. 'Selim the Grim died of an infected boil, and thereby Hungary was spared,' wrote an anonymous chronicler. But not for long. The death of Selim ushered in the Golden Age of the Ottoman Empire - the long reign of Süleyman 'Kanuni' (the lawgiver), better known to the world as Süleyman the Magnificent.

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Within a decade, Süleyman had destroyed the Hungarian defences, executed thousands of prisoners, taken Budapest, and advanced for the first time in Ottoman history to the walls of Vienna. The siege of 1529 was a short-lived and rather lacklustre affair, and Süleyman withdrew his armies to Istanbul before the onset of winter. But he now controlled the whole of south-eastern Europe. Belgrade had already fallen, and Ottoman control over the eastern Mediterranean was strengthened by a brilliant campaign to overcome the doughty defenders of the island of Rhodes.

The rest of Europe looked on and shuddered within. How far could the Ottomans go? Was Vienna safe? Was Paris? The Habsburg ambassador to the Court of Süleyman, Ogier de Busbecq, writing in 1562, diplomatically praised the caution of his own emperor, Ferdinand, in confronting such a foe:

Soleiman stands before us with all the terror inspired by his own successes and those of his ancestors; he overruns the plain of Hungary with two hundred thousand horsemen; he threatens Austria; he menaces the rest of Germany; he brings in his train all the nations that dwell between here and the Persian frontier ... Like a thunderbolt he smites, shatters and destroys whatever stands in his way; he is at the head of veteran troops and a highly trained army, which is accustomed to his leadership; he spreads far and wide the terror of his name. He roars like a lion along our frontier, seeking to break through, now here, now there.

This was an empire which was at home on the move, true to its nomadic roots. In the Middle Ages the Turks used and developed military technology better than anyone else; they picked the best and brightest young men from across their domains to train and develop - being a Christian by birth was no impediment; you were packed off to Istanbul and forcibly converted. Even the most humble could rise close to the peak of Ottoman society, and for hundreds of years the sultan's elite troops, the Janissary Corps, were the best soldiers in the business.

Little wonder, then, that Europe's chattering classes were both fascinated with and appalled by this emerging superpower to the east. Ever since the crusades, Islam - specifically Turkish Muslims - had been portrayed as the enemy at the gates. The Turks were the threat against which Christendom should unite. As they moved further west, so the hysteria grew. Alongside grudging admiration for Turkish military prowess, literature in Elizabethan England was littered with warnings: Shakespeare's Othello is urged to defend Cyprus against 'the general enemy Ottoman', and when he comes across a drunken brawl he asks, 'Are we all turned Turks ...?' In *Tamburlaine the Great* Christopher Marlowe warns that '... Turks and Tartars shake their swords at thee, Meaning to mangle all thy provinces', while lesser-known contemporary works explore similar fears: *The Siege of Rhodes, Lust's Dominion, A Christian Turned Turk* and the wonderfully named *All's Lost by Lust*.

Reality, though, was a complex business. While the Ottoman advance was a clear threat to Christian Europe, neighbouring states and local politicians caught in their path often manoeuvred against each other. Political marriages into the House of Osman - under a fairly sobering amount of military pressure - could be a route to survival and advancement, even if it meant a daughter or a cousin abandoning the Christian faith. Venice had regularly made treaties which must have had the odd pope or two shaking his head in despair, even though they made good commercial sense.

In fact, by the sixteenth century Protestant countries in Europe began to look to the Muslim world for alliances of convenience against the dominant Catholic powers, especially Spain. Even the Catholic King of France was happy to form an alliance with Süleyman if it meant putting more pressure on the Habsburgs. But Protestants were to the fore, uninhibited by papal bans on trade with the infidel. Elizabeth I of England was interested in military and mercantile cooperation with the Muslim world, and so were the Dutch. Martin Luther described Turkish attacks on Europe as punishment from God for the wickedness of the ruling Catholic order, but he also reaped the benefit: the threat posed to the Habsburg Empire by the Ottoman advance gave the Lutherans a huge helping hand as they consolidated their gains in Germany.

Nevertheless, in the public mind in Europe, a conventional stereotype of the 'unspeakable Turk' began to take hold: depraved, cruel, unholy and savage - embodied in the person of the sultan and his mysterious harem, despotic and exotic all rolled into one. Even those who knew the Ottoman world, and clearly admired it in parts, like Ogier de Busbecq, made sure they pandered to such prejudice. 'You can hardly expect ...' he wrote at the end of one of his famous letters, 'elegance of style from such an utterly barbarous country as Turkey.'

Are such thoughts still embedded somewhere in the European psyche? It's hard not to conclude that they are. In an organization which operates on consensus and compromise, one can easily imagine a hidden agenda at some EU meetings about Turkey. Awkward silences, muffled coughs ... no one willing to say so openly, but many round the table hoping that if we put the problem off enough times, it will eventually go away.

Perhaps they should take their cue from the Ottomans under Süleyman, who continued to expand their empire, their economic wealth and their symbols of power. As well as being a ruthless military genius, who pushed the Ottoman borders further than ever before, Süleyman also constructed a new legal system, combining Islamic and secular law. Goldsmiths and calligraphers, poets and artists all flourished, and the great architect Sinan built a succession of superb buildings in Istanbul and elsewhere - including the Süleymaniye mosque complex for his master. On the day of its dedication, according to the Turkish chronicler Evliya Çelebi, Sinan said to the sultan: 'I have built for thee, O Emperor, a mosque which will remain on the face of the earth till the Day of Judgement.'

The mosque still stands, but amidst the military might and the imperial splendour, we can find the seeds of the Ottomans' downfall. Weaknesses in the system grew with the empire itself. Decadence and corruption were beginning to set in among the military elite and the Ottoman court. Foreign countries were given formal economic powers in Istanbul for the first time - a foretaste of the infamous 'capitulations' which dominated the final years of imperial rule. And in the decades following the death of Süleyman in 1566 the power of the sultan himself began to wane. The harem became the setting for vicious political infighting as powerful women began to wield substantial influence, and in 1622 Osman II had the unhappy distinction of being the first Ottoman victim of regicide: humiliated, raped and killed by his own mutinous soldiers.

The Ottomans were also in the process of being outflanked by rivals with a bolder global vision. Portugal and Spain (with the occasional Italian like Christopher Columbus sworn into service), followed by the Dutch, the French and the English, had already begun extensive naval explorations far from the Ottoman sphere of influence. The discovery of the New World across the Atlantic and the riches to be had there meant Turkish control of the trade routes to the east was no longer as important a strategic asset as it used to be. New-found wealth poured into European treasuries, as European adventurers took to the high seas to begin establishing their own colonies in Asia and the Americas. In 1571 the mighty Ottoman navy was crushed in its own backyard - the Mediterranean - by the combined fleets of Spain, Venice and the Vatican at the Battle of Lepanto. The victory was so unexpected, and so symbolically important, that it provoked a flurry of artistic tributes from contemporary poets, painters and writers. The Turks no longer seemed to be invincible.

Finally, the Ottomans were failing to keep pace with the intellectual ferment of the sixteenth century. Süleyman turned to a stricter vision of Islam as his long reign progressed, and Islamic scholars with a rigid interpretation of the faith stunted the growth of new ideas and achievements. Over time the empire lost its edge in military technology, and it ignored or suppressed other new inventions which were changing the face of contemporary Europe. The printing press was first memorably used in Europe by Gutenberg to create his Bible in the mid-fifteenth century, but it was banned from the Ottoman realm for nearly three hundred years.

'I allow you to laugh at me for the sensual declaration that I had rather be a rich Effendi with all his ignorance, than Sir

Isaac Newton with all his knowledge,' wrote Lady Mary Wortley Montagu - the wise and witty wife of a British ambassador to Constantinople in the early eighteenth century. Not for the first time Lady Mary's comparison was right on the money. The Ottomans were enjoying the fruits of power but they were missing out on the latest technological and scientific discoveries; the Ottoman Renaissance under Süleyman was nothing in comparison with the Renaissance in Western Europe which paved the way towards a new and more modern world. As rival countries headed into an age of revolutions and profound change, the Ottoman Empire began to sink into a long slow decline.

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There was still time for one last hurrah. The Ottomans weren't finished yet, and for much of the seventeenth century they still posed a real military threat to Central Europe. But Süleyman was followed by a succession of sultans who were variously inept, corrupt, unstable or simply deranged, and there came a turning point, a decisive date in European history. In 1683 the Ottoman army led by Kara Mustafa Pasha was routed at the gates of Vienna, a catastrophic defeat which meant that the Turks, and the flag of the prophet, would never threaten the city again.

Modern Vienna is littered with reminders of these momentous events. Opposite the university stands a statue of Johann Andreas von Liebenberg, the city's mayor during the siege, and right outside the Hofburg Palace Prince Eugene - the man who pushed the Turks back down through the Balkans - sits proudly astride his horse. In the neo-Byzantine Military History Museum there are collections of curved swords and fading turbans, quivers full of Ottoman arrows, and a pasha's tent captured in Belgrade. My favourite spot is the Kahlenberg, though. From the wooded hill which looms over the city you get a bird's-eye view of the battle site. This is where Jan Sobieski, king of Poland, appeared with his troops on 12 September 1683 and charged into the Ottoman forces below, forcing them to scatter in panic. A small church, consecrated on the two hundredth anniversary of the battle, pays him solemn tribute. This was as far as the Ottoman Empire got.

The Turks are back, of course. Nearly a quarter of a million of them live in Austria today, but migration is a sensitive subject and there are still those who seek to stir up old historical memories for their own ends. During the 2004 European Parliamentary election campaign, the rightwing Freedom Party plastered Vienna with posters saying 'Turkey in the EU? Not with me!' One supportive magazine even coined the slogan THE THIRD TURKISH SIEGE, and combined images of the EU and Turkish flags with marauding Ottoman troops from the seventeenth century. The message was hardly subtle, tapping into deep Austrian ambivalence about Turkey joining Europe. But it didn't do much for the Freedom Party, whose election results were a disaster.

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In 1699 the Ottomans were forced to sign the humiliating Treaty of Karlowitz which stripped away half of their European possessions; and the empire failed to strike back.

It fell victim instead to stagnation and internal feuding. The economy continued to grow, but not nearly as fast as the rest of Europe, and occasional military victories did nothing to reverse the overall trend of defeat on the battlefield and territorial withdrawal. The Ottomans struggled to compete economically or militarily with countries to the west, and they were forced to turn their attention to the growing power of Russia to the north as well. Meanwhile European colonizers were taking control of the riches of the Asian trade routes.

The influence of the Ottoman world was still trickling down into everyday European life - from drinking coffee to planting tulips; from playing the kettle drum and the triangle to eating rice, dried fruit and all manner of spices. Lady Mary Wortley Montagu admired the smallpox inoculations used by the Turks in Constantinople and was the first person to introduce the practice in England, while in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the craze for Oriental fashions reached its height: in clothing, carpets, textiles and design. But the image of the 'terrible Turk' in art and literature was gone, replaced by a rather comic figure with funny slippers, elaborate turbans and too much jewellery.

The Ottoman system had its fans in Europe. 'Turks,' wrote Voltaire, 'have taught Christians how to be moderate in peace and gentle in victory.' But the power of the empire itself was fading. The political and military elites became progressively more corrupt, and the loss of territory meant the loss of tax revenues as well. When Europe was reordered at the Congress of Vienna in 1814 after the defeat of Napoleon, all the continent's rulers took part - but no one bothered to send an invitation to the sultan. The Janissary Corps - once feared and respected across Europe - had degenerated into an unruly militia, terrorizing the homelands and routinely rising up in rebellion against the Ottoman court. By the time the Janissaries were finally disbanded by force in 1826, in spectacularly bloody fashion, they had become a sorry shadow of their former selves.

In other words, the Ottomans were no longer seen as a threat abroad. The empire stumbled on, mainly because the great European powers refused to let it collapse completely, fearful that their rivals would seize the advantage, and grab all the best land. A series of short-term alliances with, among others, the Russians, the French and the British did little to help the Ottoman cause - and in 1830 a landmark event which is still remembered today was brokered by the Western powers: Greece won its long battle for independence.

In the face of all this grim news for a succession of sultans and their grand viziers there were real efforts to reform the system. During the *tanzimat* or reorganization, knowledge of European affairs gradually became more important as the Ottomans tried to emulate some of the successes they faced in the West. European military advisers became part of the scenery, and knowledge of foreign languages was suddenly a valuable tool in the fight to climb the ever-greasy bureaucratic pole. A new Translation Bureau - set up to replace the old 'dragoman' system which had been run exclusively by Ottoman Greeks - was the launch pad for many a political career.

'Westernization' may sound like a familiar rallying cry to observers of modern Turkey, but for centuries the Ottomans had maintained a haughty distance from the political machinations of the rest of Europe. Many diplomatic

representatives to the sultan's court had been treated with contempt - some of them forced to sit in the rain for hours before being granted an audience with the back of the sultan's head. By the mid-nineteenth century though, out of necessity a more pragmatic approach was being adopted. The Ottomans wanted formal recognition as a European power. But when it came, it came at a time when the empire was weaker and more vulnerable than ever.

In the 1850s the Ottomans teamed up with the British and the French to see off the encroaching power of Russia in the Crimean War. You can still visit the Florence Nightingale Museum in the Selimiye Military Barracks in Istanbul where the 'Lady of the Lamp' tended to the wounded and helped lay the foundations for modern nursing care. At the end of the war in 1856, as one of the victors, the Ottoman Empire was included for the first time in the Concert of Europe - giving it a role in diplomatic consultations and meetings as part of the European society of states. But there was also a price to pay. Czar Nicholas I had already dubbed the Ottoman Empire 'the Sick Man of Europe' and the Crimean War was expensive. The Ottomans had to borrow an awful lot of money from European financial institutions and, predictably, they couldn't afford to pay it back. By the end of the century a consortium of creditors known as the Ottoman Public Debt Administration had developed a vast bureaucracy running significant parts of the imperial economy and collecting taxes to help repay the debts.

Not surprisingly, it bred resentment, especially as the mounting foreign debt came on top of the long-running system of 'capitulations', which gave foreign nationals exemption from local laws and taxes. The first of the capitulations was granted as long ago as 1352 as a casual favour to the Genoese, but over time they began to take on the form of bilateral treaties. By the nineteenth century the French, the British, the Germans and others were roundly abusing the system. Foreigners had an unfair advantage, and Ottoman sovereignty was routinely violated. Local pride was easily hurt, and the capitulations came to be seen as a symbol of inferiority, with European countries cashing in on the growing weakness of Ottoman rule. It hasn't been forgotten. Criticism of the power of foreign capital, and of economic interference from abroad, lives on in the widespread suspicion among ordinary Turks of the motives of the International Monetary Fund and foreign investors in general, as modern Turkey struggles to climb out of deep economic crisis.

In fact many of the problems facing Turkey today loomed large in the final years of the Ottoman Empire: battles for power between conservatives and pro-Western reformers, problems with ethnic minorities, and efforts to clean up the financial mess caused by years of mismanagement. And overseeing it all was one of the most secretive and paranoid men ever to sit on the Ottoman throne. Sultan Abdul Hamid II, who reigned for more than thirty years until he was deposed in 1909, developed an obsession with spying on everyone around him. He also played up his religious role as caliph - the leader of the Muslim world - to try to prop up his legitimacy in Anatolia and the Middle Eastern provinces.

Perhaps he was hoping for divine intervention, because the Ottomans suffered further territorial losses shortly after

Abdul Hamid's reign began. Romania and Serbia gained independence in 1878, parts of north-eastern Anatolia had to be handed to the Russians, and Cyprus was leased to Britain. Millions of Muslims came flooding back into the heartland of the empire from the Balkans, and with them came a change in mood - a transformation from a broadly tolerant multi-ethnic empire into a nineteenth-century nationalistic state. Alongside reforms which were supposed to sweep away the old legal 'distinctions between Muslims and the Christian minorities, came ethnic tensions and widespread killings. The killing of Bulgarian civilians by Turkish troops in the 1870s (dubbed the 'Bulgarian Horrors' by William Gladstone) was followed by the massacre of Armenians in the 1890s, when thousands of people were killed in Istanbul - a portent of the grim events of 1915.

As the twentieth century dawned, the empire was on its last legs. Within years, most of the remaining Balkan provinces won their independence, a huge blow because they were still the most heavily populated part of the Ottoman realm. Even in 1906, when the Ottomans controlled only a fragment of the territory they had once held, a quarter of the empire's citizens lived in the Balkans. The political power of the sultan was gradually being chipped away by nationalists known as the 'Young Turks', and if the House of Osman was to survive, it desperately needed a period of stability. It could have done without a young man named Gavrilo Princip pulling the trigger in Sarajevo and starting the First World War.

* * *

During the long reign of Abdul Hamid, the empire had grown close to the Germans, and in 1914 the Ottomans picked the losing side for the final time. The 'Young Turk' politicians and generals who now ran the empire dreamed of glory, but the war was a disaster. The only significant victory came at enormous human cost, as a previously unknown colonel named Mustafa Kemal commanded the remarkable defence of the Gallipoli peninsula, against attacks by troops from Britain, Australia and New Zealand. But there was also a much darker, more gruesome side to the collapse of the empire, epitomized by the slaughter of hundreds of thousands of Armenians in eastern Anatolia in 1915 (of which more later). Modern Turkey is still struggling to come to terms with what happened in those last imperial years, and furious debates about the legacy of that period continue to colour the perceptions of many outsiders looking in.

By the end of the war in 1918, the Ottomans were in disarray, and the sultan was an irrelevant puppet. The victorious allies occupied Istanbul, the Greeks took Smyrna (now Izmir), the Italians advanced into southern Anatolia, and the French and British between them gobbled up the Middle Eastern provinces. In 1920, at Sevres on the outskirts of Paris, representatives of the sultan signed a treaty imposed by the allies which carved up the empire completely. Greek and Italian gains in Anatolia were made permanent, there was the prospect of new independent countries in the east for

the Kurds and the Armenians, and the Turks were left with a rump state in the middle, of little value to anyone.

And that was that, or so the allies thought - the Eastern Question resolved once and for all. But rarely has the phrase 'cometh the hour, cometh the man' seemed so appropriate. Turkish nationalist resistance in Anatolia was led by Mustafa Kemal, soon to be known as 'Atatürk' - the 'father of Turks'. He rallied the troops of a broken, dispirited army and, against improbable odds, began to fight back.

The main battle was against the Greeks, who had been pushing ever deeper into Anatolia, and there were some fairly desperate moments for Atatürk and his supporters. The incipient Turkish uprising could have been crushed by Greek military victories. How different the world would be now if it had been. But once the Greeks were forced into a headlong retreat and were thrown (literally) into the sea at Izmir, there was little appetite anywhere else for another major war so soon after the horrors of 1914-18. Anatolia was regained in full, and Istanbul was restored to Turkish control. At Lausanne in 1923, the Turks re-established a firmer foothold in Europe, reclaiming the eastern half of Thrace as well, with new borders adjoining Greece and Bulgaria.

Mutual suspicion, laced liberally with hatred, was as strong as ever, especially with local enemies like the Greeks and the Armenians. Most of the Greeks who remained within the new Republic of Turkey were sent packing and most of the Armenians had already been killed. European perceptions remained ambivalent at best. For Atatürk, though, this was a time to turn his attention to the home front. Having secured his borders, he now needed to create a functioning country within them. He kicked out the sultan, abolished the caliphate, and threw himself into a revolutionary programme of modernization.

The net effect was that modern Turkey was born with a sizeable chip on its shoulder, which it carries to this day. The Ottomans ran a multi-national multi-ethnic Empire - there were Turks, Arabs, Greeks, Kurds, Albanians, Armenians, Bosnians, Bulgarians ... in fact, more than thirty countries can be counted as successor states, and the rise and fall of the Ottomans was about far more than the success and failure of the Turks in Europe. But the man who rescued the heart of the empire from complete humiliation was a European himself, and he fervently believed that Turkey's best hope of future success lay across its western borders.

'The West has always been prejudiced against the Turks,' Atatürk once said, with his customary directness. 'But we Turks have always consistently moved towards the West ... in order to be a civilized nation, there is no alternative.'

Eighty years on, in a very different era, the challenges identified by Turkey's latest generation of leaders remain the same: how to modernize the country, and how to claim a place at Europe's top table? And eighty years on, rather more remarkably, Atatürk is still a central figure in modern Turkish life.

Ch 2 'DEVLET': ATATÜRK AND HIS LEGACY

I came across Can and his friends outside McDonald's in Taksim Square, right in the bustling heart of Istanbul. They had set up a little table and were selling their magazine with evangelical fervour. Sport? Music? Youth culture? No, it was a paean of praise for Kemal Atatürk.

'Why are you doing this?' I asked, and Can looked genuinely surprised. 'Because Atatürk is the most important person in Turkey,' he said, speaking in the present tense.

'Why?'

'Because if it weren't for him, our country wouldn't exist as it is now.'

Well, true, but the same could perhaps be said of Britain and Winston

Churchill, and yet it's hard to imagine a group of teenage Londoners staking out a patch in Piccadilly Circus to sell magazines dedicated to the man who swore to 'fight them on the beaches'.

Now Can and his friends may not be too representative of today's Turkish youth either, but they help to illustrate a point. What is it about Atatürk, nearly seventy years after his death, which inspires such an extraordinary and emotional response?

* * *

In the run-up to the year 2000, *TIME Magazine* launched a campaign to find the most influential and important people of the twentieth century. The magazine's editors asked for votes to be cast on their website, little knowing what a storm of Kemalist enthusiasm they were about to unleash.

In Turkey it became, for a while, a national priority to promote the greatness of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk on the *TIME* website. Both the prime minister and the president appealed to all patriotic citizens to do their bit, and the Turkish media quickly took up the challenge. My bank in Ankara began handing out ready-made forms. All you had to do was fill in the details, and the bank clerk would fax it to *TIME* with a vote for Atatürk. Where else, I remember thinking, could this possibly happen? North Korea?

As the Atatürk bandwagon began to roll, the spoilers intervened. There were dark rumours of Greek Cypriots voting in droves for Winston Churchill - 'anyone but Atatürk!' - and it all became terribly exciting. When voting closed, our hero hadn't quite made it. In the 'Leaders and Revolutionaries' category Atatürk polled an impressive 33.19 per cent, but fell just a few thousand votes short of Churchill; and in the 'Heroes and Icons' category he had to settle for third, just behind Yuri Gagarin and Nelson Mandela. At one early stage in proceedings, even Bob Dylan had found himself a distant second behind the iconic Turk in the 'Artists and Entertainers' vote.

The folk from *TIME*, however, weren't impressed. They chose Albert Einstein as their 'Person of the Century', and Atatürk, a man little known outside his home country, didn't even make their top 100. There was much wailing and gnashing of teeth from Internet Turks everywhere: once again, they concluded, the rest of the world had conspired against them. One of the most successful wartime leaders of the twentieth century, and one of the boldest revolutionaries, had been ignored.

There was, you see, nothing tongue-in-cheek about the 'Vote Atatürk' campaign. It was deadly serious, and it was a vivid demonstration of how deeply Atatürk - man and myth - is embedded in the national psyche. International recognition of Atatürk means international recognition of Turkey, and vice versa. When Turkish TV hosted the 2004 Eurovision Song Contest in Istanbul, it even managed to close this modern festival of kitsch with a quote from the great leader. 'Peace in the country, peace in the world,' said the presenter proudly in English, as Ukrainian dancers cavorted onto the stage behind her.

On the one hand, it's all very appealing. There is a genuine sense of patriotism and national pride in Turkey which most countries in Western Europe have lost. On the other hand, it's appalling. Too many people in positions of power in modern Turkey remain wedded to a distorted vision of their founding father's legacy. I say 'distorted' because they seem to have become stuck in a time warp, where change often feels like something to be treated with suspicion. Atatürk, though, was a man who changed everything and, even after taking his legendary vanity into account, I think he would be surprised if he knew how his memory is sometimes kept alive today. It is a true cult of personality with an ideology - 'Kemalism' - to match. Most of all, it is a strange foundation for a country which aspires to become a modern European state.

Put that argument to Kemalist Turks, though, and they will more than likely throw it back in your face.

'Look at Britain: ruled by a family whose only qualification is an accident of birth,' a combative defender of the faith once remarked to me. 'We got rid of ours years ago.'

It was an interesting comparison, but Atatürk has risen above the ranks of mere royalty. Nearly seventy years after his death, he is still treated like some kind of demigod. It often feels as if his modern successors in the presidential palace are simply keeping the seat warm.

Take his mausoleum in the capital, Ankara. Anıtkabir is one of my favourite places in the city, with its goose-stepping guards of honour and its wonderful museum full of Atatürk memorabilia. They've kept everything from tiepins to toilet sets, from his carefully preserved rowing machine to his faithful dog, Foks, embalmed behind glass. The huge marble columns and monumental courtyard give Anıtkabir the look and the feel of a temple, and that's precisely what it is: the foundation stone of the secular cult of Kemalism. Every official foreign visitor is expected to begin a visit to Ankara with a pilgrimage to the great man's tomb. They lay a wreath and write something suitable in the visitors' book. Only after that, does the president or prime minister of the day get a look in.

In fact, you can't escape Atatürk anywhere in modern Turkey. His statue stands at the centre of every town and village square. School-children pledge their allegiance every morning. Nearly every office and shop has a picture of the father of the nation on the walls, or a gold-painted bust prominently displayed on a desk or a shelf. Not to have one is seen as strangely suspect. Many of the grainy photographic images are instantly recognizable ... Atatürk in formal Western dress, or leaning out of a train to collect a

petition; here he is again in military uniform during the war of independence, and later in front of a blackboard, teaching his people how to modernize. These are iconic moments of nation-building for Turkey, and they have seeped unavoidably into the memory of every Turk alive.

Then there are the great festivals of remembrance - 19 May, when he landed in Anatolia to begin the nationalist uprising against occupation; Victory Day in August and Republic Day in October, when the troops and tanks are on parade; and most sombre of all 10 November, the anniversary of Atatürk's death, when the air-raid sirens wail mournfully at the exact moment of his passing, and true believers get out of their cars to stand to attention in the street.

Many Turks conspicuously don't mark the anniversaries with such evangelical fervour, but they can't escape the Atatürk cult even if they want to. On every occasion huge banners are hung from the tallest buildings - massive pictorial representations of Atatürk in his prime, twenty storeys high. His face appears in the corner of television screens, and on every street you can buy his likeness on badges, pens and paperweights. You get used to it, it becomes part of the scenery, but there really is nothing quite like it anywhere else in the democratic world.

That's how hardline elements of the Kemalist elite keep the flame alive. They believe they are on a mission to protect and extend the legacy of the founding father. It keeps them constantly on guard against threats real and imagined: threats to the 'indivisible unity of the Republic'; threats to the secular system which Atatürk championed; threats at home and abroad. Their shock troops hold positions of power and influence in the judiciary, the bureaucracy and above all the military. They are the guardians of the system, suspicious of the change they see around them. Collectively, they represent 'Devlet' - the State.

'Moderate Islam?' grunted one of their leaders. 'What kind of label is that? You can drink Diet Coke for as long as you like, but you shouldn't forget that it's still Coke.'

These diehard Kemalists continue to wield real power, but they are on the defensive - partly because that is their default position, partly because they know a trend when they see one. Turkey has changed in extraordinary ways in the last few years - massive internal migration, liberalization of the media and economic upheaval have now been followed by dramatic political reform and the arrival of a new generation of leaders with new ideas. It's the biggest revolution in the way this country works since, well, a man called Atatürk.

* * *

Run the clock back eighty years and imagine a country where everything is suddenly turned on its head. Never mind the system of government or the role of religion, how about names, clothes, the alphabet? That's how profoundly Mustafa Kemal's revolution in the 1920s changed daily life, and it was an almost unprecedented achievement. Winning the War of Independence, and preserving a country worth having, was merely the beginning. When Kemal looked around at the impoverished wreck he'd inherited, he decided that radical reform was his only option. The fallen empire was archaic and backward; the new republic was to be modern and secular - part, he declared, of 'contemporary civilization'.

It didn't take him long to act. Kemal moved the capital of his new country from the worldly metropolis of Istanbul to Ankara, a sleepy backwater deep in the Anatolian heartland. He ordered the National Assembly to abolish the Ottoman monarchy and he had himself elected the first president of the new Turkish Republic. The Islamic caliphate was dispensed with, and the last caliph, Abdul Mejid, was packed off unceremoniously on a train to Switzerland (where he was nearly refused entry under a law banning polygamy). Political opponents of the Kemalist revolution from communists to rebellious Kurdish tribesmen were ruthlessly crushed. An all-encompassing law 'for the maintenance of order' and a new system of 'independence tribunals' established something close to dictatorship.

With the consolidation of power came the imposition of momentous social change, year after year. It was a crash course of reform which helped make modern Turkey so different from other states which emerged from the ruins of the Ottoman Empire: Saudi Arabia, for example, or Iraq. Even today, Turks and Arabs have a prickly relationship. Well-to-do Turks tend to look down on Arabs for tainting them by association as non-European; while many Arabs still resent their former colonial masters. Thus the Sunni and Shia of Iraq were no keener to have Turkish troops in their country after the US-led invasion in 2003 than the Kurds were.

What else did Kemal do? Religious brotherhoods were declared illegal, and forced underground; Islamic courts were dissolved. Women were given the right to vote, polygamy was banned and Muslim women were allowed to marry non-Muslim men. The Muslim calendar was replaced by the European one; Sunday became the day of rest; and the traditional Arabic script was dismissed as 'incomprehensible'. Instead Kemal gathered a group of specialists together to transliterate the Turkish language into Latin letters, and he went from town to town to introduce the new alphabet in person to his bewildered citizens.

And it wasn't just what he did, but what he wore while he was doing it: linen suits, a shirt and tie, peaked caps, panamas and homburgs. It's hard to overstate the effect it must have had on people in conservative provincial towns when the Hero of the Revolution turned up in a world of robes and turbans dressed like a Western infidel, and listening to Beethoven and Mozart. The fez and any other clothing connected to Islam were banned, at a time when most Turks couldn't even bring themselves to use the word *şapka* or hat.

The Ottoman authorities had already made various attempts to change the sartorial habits of the population, but gradualism wasn't Kemal's style. Civilization and costume were inextricably linked, and he famously told a dazed audience in the northern port of Inebolu in 1925 precisely what was expected of them: 'Boots or shoes on our feet, trousers on our legs, shirt and tie, jacket and waistcoat - and of course, to complete these, a cover with a brim on our heads. I want to make this clear. This head-covering is called "hat".'

A few years later Mustafa Kemal became Kemal Atatürk. Everyone, he decreed, should have a surname in the Western style - books full of suggestions were sent around the country for citizens who found it hard to choose. No one

else was allowed to take the president's new name the ever-modest Father of Turks. Instead the tough guys went for tough names like Kaya (Rock) or Yıldırım (Lightning); others chose to remember their fathers - Ekmekçiöğlü (Son of a Bread-seller), Kilimçiöğlü (Son of a Carpet-maker) or rather more rarely Salakoğlü (Son of an Idiot); among recent political leaders we've had President Iron Hand, Prime Minister Who Never Gives Up and Deputy Prime Minister with a garden.

In the early republican years centuries of tradition were swept away, and the dust never had a chance to settle. It wasn't a democratic revolution, it was Atatürk's personal revolution - often imposed against the will of the uncomprehending majority. It was a remarkable feat and he probably couldn't have done it any other way, but it meant that his successors inherited an incomplete model. Scattered among all the positive aspects of Atatürk's legacy - the secular state and his relentless drive towards modernity - were the autocratic tendencies and democratic flaws which still live on in the system today. The changes he wrought were so far-reaching that it is hardly surprising that they are still the subject of such intense debate.

Kemal Atatürk lived fast, he loved women, and he drank heavily. In 1938, at the age of 58, he died of cirrhosis of the liver, worn out by the extraordinary pace of his life. Scenes of mass mourning followed as Turks turned to face the future without the man who had created a country from scratch. In fifteen years as President of the Republic he had tried to take much of Turkey from medieval feudalism to the modern age. It wasn't a finished product by any means, but many people seemed to think it was. No one could replace Atatürk, and for the rest of the twentieth century the most influential political forces in Turkey, dedicated to protecting his legacy, were the ones in uniform - the armed forces.

* * *

I was once taken by the Turkish army on a three-day guided tour which began in the rebellious mountain province of Tunceli (or Dersim as the Kurds still prefer to call it). The purpose was to show us how normal things were, how comprehensively the PKK Kurdish rebel movement had been defeated, and how delighted everyone was to be Turkish. '*Ne Mutlu Türküm Diyene!*' is the army's favourite quotation from Atatürk: 'What happiness to say I'm a Turk!' It's written in huge stone letters on mountainsides across the Kurdish provinces.

A young army captain was assigned as our minder on the trip, and shadowed us wherever we went. Every time I asked an awkward question he snorted with derision at a foolish foreigner. We were flown from place to place in military helicopters, to be shown new roads and schools, smiling Kurdish folk dancers, and a row of tables in the middle of a field where a mass wedding witnessed by army officers was taking place. None of the Kurdish women cooking food for the wedding celebration could speak more than a very few words of Turkish, but their children were being moulded, the soldiers would have us believe, into identikit Turks of the future.

There was no doubt that development was desperately needed, and the army wanted to show us that their secular modernization was doing an enormous amount of good. But

this was social engineering on a grand scale - change imposed from above on the Atatürk model.

'It's our duty,' one senior officer explained, 'our responsibility as the Turkish army. All these people are citizens of the Turkish Republic.'

'I can see how much you're changing things,' I said, 'but what about individual rights, what about their ethnic identity, does that matter?' 'Their future is with us,' the officer replied as he strode away, leaving us with our angry young minder.

'I don't think you understand us at all,' the captain hissed. 'You never ask the questions we want to answer.'

* * *

You can't walk too far in any of Turkey's big cities before you come across a small red sign emblazoned with a stencilled version of a fierce-looking soldier wielding a gun. You don't have to read the small print to know what it means: 'Keep out, this is military territory, and don't forget who's in charge here.' Vast swathes of central Istanbul and Ankara are reserved for the armed forces who dominate these cities like they have dominated their country for decades. Now they face a new challenge. Not a war at home or abroad, but a political conundrum: they have already loosened their grip, but can they (should they) really abandon the central role they have played in national life for so long?

Like any military institution, the Turkish army likes things done its way. Whether it's running an errand or running the country, the army has its views. It has never fully trusted the civilians who seek power, often with good reason: Turkish politics has been littered with corruption and incompetence. So the generals still speak out routinely in a way which would get them the sack in most other European countries: on education, religion, politics and foreign policy. When they talk, the country listens and headlines are made - old habits die hard. The way it works is this: a select band of trusted journalists is summoned to a briefing with the chief of the general staff or his deputy, and they emerge to report their findings live on television. 'The General is displeased,' they tell us breathlessly, 'and the army is worried that too many people with reactionary [i.e. Islamic] backgrounds are getting government jobs.' The oracle has spoken, and the message is carefully digested by one and all.

The military has been the ultimate arbiter on the political scene for years. Generations of officers have been taught that they have a mission, and a sacred duty: to ensure that the vision of Atatürk is fulfilled. That means Turkey has to be accepted as part of the West; as a modern and 'civilized' European state. Secularism and national unity have to be protected at all costs - the enemies are fundamentalism and ethnic separatists who seek to tear the country apart. As soon as the founding father died in 1938, the fight to protect his legacy began.

For most of the Second World War Atatürk's immediate successors maintained awkward neutrality, still in shock at the loss of their leader, but they joined the Western camp before the Iron Curtain fell across Europe. Since the 1950s Turkey has had a key security role as a member of NATO, and for several decades it was a frontline state in the cold war against the Soviet Union. But the litmus test now, at the start of the twenty-first century, is joining the European

Union. It has become the biggest incentive for reform that Turkey has ever seen, and it has changed the role of the military as much as anything else.

The generals know they have some useful cards to play in the European debate. If you put the ambiguous relationship with civilian authority to one side, then Turkey's military is one of the main assets it can offer Europe. The EU is struggling to set up a credible security and defence policy because only Britain and France have armed forces with anything approaching a global reach. Turkey could help. It has the largest fleet of F-16s in the world outside the United States, and the second largest army in NATO - more than half a million soldiers bearing arms. Many, admittedly, are poorly trained conscripts, but there is also a battle-hardened core which has fought the PKK in the mountains. Turkey could give EU defence plans real muscle, and provide much-needed 'boots on the ground' for peacekeeping missions around the globe. The Turks wouldn't solve all Europe's defence dilemmas at a stroke. They may be ahead of the game in terms of manpower, but they lack many of the things the EU really needs: high-tech communications and the massive transport planes (known in the trade as 'heavy airlift') which only the Americans can really provide. But think of the alternatives, argue the strategic enthusiasts in Brussels: either have Turkey in the club and guarding the volatile eastern flank, or keep Turkey out and risk having it turn angrily for sympathy towards Russia, Iran and China.

So it stands to reason, you might think, that the generals must be delighted by the current turn of events, as Turkey looks down the road towards EU membership - an ambition shared by senior Turkish officers for many years, the fulfilment of Atatürk's dream. But it's not quite that simple. The men in uniform now have a problem, and the old guard among them are worried. The more they look at the sweeping reforms required by the EU the less they like them. Ethnic rights, democratic rights, more civilian control - could this be a threat to the very essence of Turkey they have sworn to protect? Many of them believe it is, and a Kemalist coalition of military officers, judges and other senior officials is clinging onto the status quo. It creates a constant tension between conservatives and reformers which haunts Turkey still, and will do so for the foreseeable future.

Since the turn of the new century, Turkey has been living through the most radical reforms it has experienced since the time of Atatürk. So much has changed, and the military high command - to its credit - has allowed the changes to happen. Not without a good deal of soul-searching, and plenty of dragging of feet: behind the imposing walls of the General Staff building in Ankara some ferocious debates are still taking place, and there are clear lines which the generals would not allow the country to cross. But in the last few years, in pursuit of EU membership, reforms have been pushed through parliament which would have been unthinkable a decade ago.

Most importantly the National Security Council, where government and military leaders meet regularly to discuss the issues of the day, has been put under civilian control and its power has been proscribed. As recently as the late 1990s, the council was a 'parallel government', the forum from which the military controlled the country. Squabbling politicians troop in nervously once a month to be confronted by stern-

facéd generals with thick files of information and policy 'requests' for their consideration. Now the most senior military officials say plainly that parliament is the country's supreme authority, and it is their duty to serve it. That is quite an admission for a Turkish general to make, especially at a time when parliament is run by a party with Islamist roots and the largest popular mandate for many years.

In the spring of 2004, Cyprus became a test case for this new spirit of democratization and civilian authority. The army has nearly forty thousand troops based in the Turkish-controlled north of the island, and it had many reservations about the latest United Nations plan for reunification. Cyprus gives the generals strategic depth - an 'aircraft carrier' in the middle of the Mediterranean to guard the soft underbelly of Anatolia. They know that any eventual deal between the Greek Cypriots in the south and the Turkish Cypriots in the north will include provisions for the withdrawal of all but a handful of Turkish troops, and the National Security Council was extremely sceptical.

The government in Ankara, though, had other ideas, and it threw thirty years of Turkish policy on Cyprus into the waste bin. When Prime Minister Erdogan, supported by the rest of the international community, urged Turkish Cypriots to vote in favour of the UN plan, defenders of the 'Devlet' objected loudly. But the government stood its ground, and the military high command acquiesced. The Defence Ministry still takes orders from the armed forces on a daily basis, but on this occasion civilian rule prevailed.

It may well prove to have been a turning point in government-military relations in Turkey: elected politicians with strong popular support persuaded the generals to go against their natural instincts. Military leaders had always regarded security issues like Cyprus as part of their personal fiefdom - the politicians were useful only when they needed someone to sign the cheques. For many years after 1950, when Turkey held its first free multi-party elections, the security establishment wondered whether it had simply made a terrible mistake. The voters knew that if the politicians made a real mess of things, the military would intervene. 'For a while I suppose' we had power without responsibility,' former Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit once told me, 'and it wasn't good for our system.'

In fact, between 1960 and 1980 the armed forces carried out three coups. These were not Latin American or African-style coups. None of them were for personal gain, there were no missing millions stashed away in Swiss bank accounts, and on each occasion they withdrew to the barracks after a few years. It was deeply undemocratic and a lot of people lost their lives: thousands were tortured and imprisoned without trial, and many political scores were settled. The scars left in the aftermath of the 1980 coup still haven't healed a quarter of a century later. But at the time the main motivation was simple - to put the country 'back on the right path'. The civilians couldn't be trusted, the path was too narrow, and the army had to show them the way forward.

In 1997, the military intervened once more to help remove Turkey's first Islamist prime minister, Necmettin Erbakan, from office. Erbakan had talked of an Islamic NATO, an Islamic currency and the return of religious rule. The generals took many security decisions without

consulting him at all, and they soon made it clear that Mr Erbakan had to go. There were no tanks outside the prime ministry this time, no troops on the streets - instead the military engineered it all with concerted pressure from behind the scenes, spiced with more of those famous briefings to convey their message to the country. The pundits dubbed it a 'postmodern coup' but the result was the same. Elected politicians were shown the door, and even if most people weren't that sorry to see them go, the outside world took note of who still had the final word in Turkish politics.

Could it happen again? Well, in theory it could (although it is hard to imagine the army overthrowing a government which was actually negotiating entry into the European Union). But this time the military has, on the surface, withdrawn further than ever before from routine control over the affairs of state. To take just a few examples: there are no longer military representatives on the supervisory bodies which oversee higher education and broadcasting; security courts which, with a military judge on the panel, were setup to deal with 'offences against the indivisible integrity of the state' have been abolished; and military spending - worth billions of pounds a year - has been brought under some kind of civilian control for the first time.

All these reforms are seen by hardliners among the Kemalist faithful as huge and sometimes dangerous concessions, under pressure from Europe.

'They don't understand us,' is the constant refrain. 'If you're Sweden or Luxembourg, then threats from ethnic separatism or radical Islam may seem rather distant. Here, they are our reality.'

They have a point, but sometimes they take it too far. In January 2004 army intelligence officers sent a letter to military units and local government asking them to collect information on groups who engage in 'divisive and destructive activities' in Turkey. Among them, the letter advised, could be religious orders, ethnic minorities, Masonic lodges, Satanists, and (was this worst of all?) 'individuals known to support the United States and the European Union'.

'Perhaps they've become confused and they're spying on themselves,' mused a friend in Istanbul, with memories of military service still fresh in his mind. 'These must be trying times for them.'

Trying times indeed, because many in the military thought they already had the political checks and balances they wanted. The current constitution was written under military instruction in 1982 as 'an armoured wall against those who want to split our country'. Now the reforms demanded by the EU, and strongly supported by a majority of Turks, are picking it apart line by line. On a sliding scale running from 'cautious' through 'uneasy' up to 'apoplectic', senior military officers find it hard to take. Even the most reform-minded chief of the general staff for years, General Hilmi Özkök, told reporters in May 2003 that 'it is not right to do everything in order to join the EU. We must be allowed,' he concluded, 'to join Europe with our honour intact.'

Honour and duty: the watchwords of these self-appointed guardians of the Kemalist tradition. For years, the armed forces have been the most popular and most revered institution in the country. And the most trusted. Even when the generals intervened directly in politics - in 1960, 1971 and 1980 - they did so with the support of much of the population.

They still retain respect as the heirs of Atatürk, and of the men who won the War of Independence. But that was all a long time ago, and since the 1980s, in particular, their country has been changing before their eyes.

It started with Turgut Özal, an Anatolian whirlwind of a man, who brought back civilian rule with a bang in 1983. When the generals decided to hold an election to restore parliamentary democracy, they allowed Özal, an economic technocrat, to form what they thought would be a minor opposition party. He won the election easily, routing the party favoured by the military. As prime minister and then president in the 1980s and early 90s, he went on to threaten many entrenched interests.

Born in a village and educated in America, he liberalized the economy and broke many taboos, talking about Kurds and Islam in a way which was shocking then in its frankness. He declared publicly that twelve million Turkish citizens were Kurds (his own grandmother had been one of them); he stood up to the military and once vetoed the appointment of a new chief of the general staff; he became the first Turkish president to make the *hajj* to Mecca, but he was also partial to the finest brandy; and he persuaded his people that consumerism was good, and that it was time for them all to express themselves more freely.

By giving Turkey a tantalizing glimpse of the wider world, Özal took the genie out of the bottle. If he hadn't died before his time in 1993, he might have pushed through many of the changes which Tayyip Erdogan has since accomplished. Özal was followed by a string of weak leaders, which helped the Kemalist establishment to hang onto power for a few more years. But it was clear that the pace of change in society had begun to outrun it. Turkey today is a far more open place than it was twenty years ago, more questions are being asked, and the assumption that the old ways are the only ways no longer holds good.

Even the image of the armed forces as honest and diligent has taken quite a few knocks, despite concerted efforts to keep it unblemished. You can still see proud families gathering near intercity bus stops, a troupe - of local musicians in tow, waiting to wave their sons away on military service. In an era of mobile phones and Internet cafes, being 'cut off' is not the absolute concept it used to be. But for many village boys two years of military service is often their first real view of the outside world, a rite of passage which can offer a route out of poverty and a chance to build a new life.

Some of them travel far and wide - Turkish troops have served abroad with great distinction from the Korean War to Kosovo, and lately in post- 9/11 Afghanistan. But the greatest traumas come closest to home. The Kurdish insurrection of the 1980s and 1990s was the most brutal of civil wars, and no army can escape unscathed from such an experience. Any return to full scale conflict would be a disaster. Many ordinary people from the south-eastern provinces where the conflict raged grew to fear and hate the men in uniform. The regular army was never quite as unpopular as the gendarmerie or the despised 'special team' police units, but much blood was spilt all the same, and it hasn't been forgotten.

As the war dragged on, efforts to protect the image of the loyal 'Mehmet' doing his duty intensified. The media ran a

campaign called "Hand in Hand with Mehmetcik" to raise money, support the troops and show them at their best.

'Schoolchildren gave their pocket money and our poorer citizens donated their livestock, an ox or a sheep,' the president of the Turkish Journalists Association announced. 'Mehmetcik is the substance and core of our nation, and by embracing Mehmetcik, the nation also embraced Mehmetcik its unity and integrity.'

Most popular of all was a long-running TV programme called *Mehmetcik* (literally 'Little Mehmet'), which featured soldiers doing what soldiers are supposed to do in the movies. I have to admit I was a bit of a fan of its heady combination of fierce patriotism and sentimentality. Conscripts ran through fields and fired their weapons, they looked aggressive on the parade ground, and they shouted 'I love Turkey' at the camera. Family members were brought in for surprise reunions with their sons, there was lots of cheering and crying and martial music. Intrigued by the programme's undoubted success, I went to see Mehmet Özer at TGRT, the television station which produced it. When I asked him to explain its timeless appeal, he shrugged his shoulders, and said it was simple.

'As a nation we love soldiers. It's something we've inherited from our fathers and our grandfathers. When people watch this programme they feel that they're watching themselves ... we've all been there at one time or another.'

Mehmetcik struck me as harmless fun, but it also served the army's purpose rather well. This was the image that the high command wanted the public to see: Mehmet and his comrades, proud of their army, serving their country and returning safely to their towns and villages. But as restrictions on freedom of expression began to be challenged more and more openly, a less rose-tinted version of military life emerged as well. The most powerful indictment appeared in a book written by the campaigning journalist, Nadire Mater: *Mehmet's Book* contained eyewitness accounts from forty-two soldiers who fought in the south-east against the PKK.

In graphic first-person narratives, these anonymous conscripts talk of the camaraderie and intensity of military life in a war zone. They also describe scenes of brutality and corruption, incompetence and drug-smuggling. No one in Turkey had ever read anything quite like it before:

'Filth, discipline, cursing and beating ... I can't tell you how much I was beaten.'

'One of our vehicles hit a mine and was damaged, but no one was hurt. An old couple from the village were walking by on their way to the hospital. One of the soldiers got out of his car and shot the man on the spot. He was killed. The old woman was crying ...'

'The first person I hit was a child. He was throwing stones. Five or six of us hit him. He was about thirteen or fourteen years old.'

'The military is supplied with trucks full of food and it disappears. Corruption is widespread. It's absurd. What are we dying for? The war is fought for money, for filling people's pockets.'

Nadire Mater began compiling her interviews after a neighbour sat down for four hours without prompting and poured out his story. When *Mehmet's Book* was first published it caused a sensation, quickly selling out its first print runs and producing a thriving trade in pirated copies. But it also attracted the attention of the military high command. A senior general made a formal complaint and a few days later a court in Istanbul banned the book and started legal proceedings against her.

'It's not me who has been banned by the court,' she said at the time. 'It's the soldiers who served in the south-east. If they are heroes why are they being prevented from speaking out?'

Nadire Mater was facing up to twelve years in jail for 'insulting the armed forces of the state'. Eventually, under a changing legal climate, freedom of speech prevailed and the case against her and her publisher was dismissed, although other related cases were pursued through the judicial system by zealous prosecutors for several years. The truth of course is that *Mehmet's Book* only scratched the surface. More than two million young men served in the south-east during the worst years of the Kurdish conflict, and many of them witnessed terrible events. But issues such as post-traumatic stress are rarely discussed. Nothing is allowed to sully the military's heroic role and the depiction of the war as a patriotic struggle against terrorism. Relatives of soldiers who died fighting against the PKK, known as the 'Families of the Martyrs', are often at the forefront of efforts to maintain the pretence that this was a good clean war - who can blame them for needing to believe that their sons died for the best of causes.

Many young Turks, though, have heard all about the more sobering reality of life in uniform. Many of them will now go to great lengths to avoid military service, even though the south-east became far more peaceful for several years following the capture of the PKK leader, Abdullah Öcalan in 1999. Students are forever discussing how they can avoid being drafted, whether they can beat the system, and trying to find someone who might have a quiet word about where they might be sent. So it was no surprise that when a new system was introduced in 1999, to allow would-be recruits to buy their way out of all but a few weeks of their military obligation, thousands jumped at the chance. For those who could afford it, fifteen thousand German marks was a price worth paying to avoid a year or more in uniform. They were sent off for a few weeks to run round the parade ground and listen to lectures about how great their country is.

'It was absurd,' one reluctant attendee told me, 'and I hated every minute of it. These people are living on a different planet.'

But even the new system didn't last long. It was, the armed forces explained, only a temporary measure, designed to get rid of an embarrassing backlog of cases. The length of military service has been shortened slightly but it remains compulsory. Without a good medical reason every young Turkish man passes through the military system for a short time, and all attempts by the AKP government to change the rules have failed. Many conscripts clearly believe it's a waste of their time, and they wonder whether the threats they are supposed to be

defending their country against have been exaggerated for years. There would be plenty more volunteers willing to pay to avoid life in uniform but why, asks the army, should the privileged be exempt?

Out in the villages, a majority of Turks would still agree. Imam Yasayan's family, for example, are too poor to ever imagine buying their way out of military service. They live on a remote hillside in the province of Erzurum, where they farm a small plot of land. Imam's son Bilgin was killed by the PKK while he was on military service and a second son committed suicide shortly after his brother's death. Their gravestones now stand in the windswept field behind the house where they grew up.

'I'm a proud father, but I miss them,' Imam said as we stood next to the graves, staring down at the river in the valley below. 'They had a lot to live for here, but it was God's will, and I don't think they died in vain.'

On our way back from the Yasayans' house, we were detained at a checkpoint in the middle of nowhere for passing through the same place earlier in the day without an officer's permission. We were escorted to the headquarters of the local gendarmerie and ushered in to see the boss, a major as I recall.

'Why did you go through my checkpoint?'

'Er, well, your soldiers lifted the barrier and let us through.'

'You shouldn't have done it. I'm in charge here. I should have been informed.'

He was courteous but relentlessly suspicious. What were we doing on this quiet country road? Whom were we going to see? Why hadn't the security forces been told of our plans?

Since we were a long way from anywhere which could remotely be described as rebel-infested territory, I was tempted to cry 'paranoia', 'none of your business' and lose my temper. Instead I paced grumpily up and down his office, and rather gracelessly refused his offer of a cup of tea. Our story was checked and checked again, radio messages were sent and received, and finally we were free to go. As we rushed outside to embark upon a near-suicidal drive to catch the last plane of the day from a distant airport, the major threw in a parting thought.

'The Turkish armed forces are always doing the right thing, you know. I hope that's what you're going to say.'

* * *

The father of our landlady in Istanbul was a man called Huseyin, He lived in the bottom half of our old wooden house and he had scant regard for most people in authority.

On warm summer evenings we used to sit on his small terrace and watch the world go by on the Bosphorus. Hiiseyin had worked in Germany for many years, and he'd come home to enjoy his retirement, and enjoy the view.

When he wasn't fixing the boiler in the basement, he always had a few words of advice on how to survive in the big city. No real surprise - it was all about knowing the right person.

'You have to know who does what if you want to get anything done,' he said. 'We've got three million bureaucrats in this country. Three million! Who do you think is really in charge?'

If doubts about the wisdom of reform were confined to parts of the military then perhaps Turkey's great debate could

be dismissed as an argument which has already been won. The pressure for change would be too strong for the armed forces alone to resist. But the unapologetically hardline version of Kemalism has its placemen elsewhere: in politics and the judiciary, in the media and the world of business. These are the secular fundamentalists, for whom the end justifies the means. Change is to be treated with suspicion, because change brings hidden dangers. You can read their opinions in the papers, you can listen to their speeches in parliament, and you can study the verdicts passed by a generation of judges who seem to believe their role is to protect the state from its unruly people.

Then there are the bureaucrats, and there really are about three million of them. Politicians can pass as many laws as they please, but it's the bureaucracy that has to implement them. At every level of Turkish society there are state officials who wield enormous power over everyday life - granting permission, refusing permission, taking bribes and, when it suits them, taking their time. So resistance to reform has moved into a new phase. The old establishment knows it can't stop the revolutionary changes taking place in parliament, but it can try to neutralize them in the real world of regional governors, official stamps and endless forms to be signed in triplicate.

Within the system, there are still plenty of people who aren't going to go down without a fight, but this guerrilla campaign of bureaucratic resistance could be their last hurrah. However stubborn they are, members of the old guard are suddenly under real pressure. For most of the 1990s a succession of weak coalition governments meant that opponents of democratization still had the upper hand. Fears of ethnic separatism (i.e. Kurds) and religious extremism (i.e. political Islam) added to the firm belief in parts of the establishment that now was the time to batten down the hatches.

Eagle-eyed prosecutors were encouraged to hunt far and wide for enemies of the state, and there was a mania for closing down political parties, with the usual suspects in the frame. The pro-Islamist parties, Welfare and Virtue, forerunners of the current government, were banned in the 1990s; and the main pro-Kurdish party became accustomed to reinventing itself after a succession of legal onslaughts. Between 1993 and 2003 the People's Labour Party (REP) and its successor the Democracy Party (DEP) were banned and replaced by the People's Democracy Party (HADEP), which was banned and replaced by the Democratic People's Party (DEHAP). Under threat of closure itself, DEHAP merged with the new Democratic Society Party DTP in August 2005. This alphabet soup of political labels sounds desperately confusing, but these were all deliberate variations on the same name, in essence the same party, run and supported by the same people.

'You'd never let all these separatists sit in your parliament!' an indignant lady with lifelong Kemalist sympathies told a friend of mine, forgetting for a moment about Scottish Nationalists, Welsh nationalists and Sinn Fein. Defenders of the old system weren't that interested in what the rest of the world was doing. But in the country at large the clamour for change in all walks of life was growing louder and louder, and the impetus for reform coincided with progress in Turkey's long-standing application to join the

European Union (a Kemalist goal, don't forget). In 1999 the EU decided for the first time that Turkey should have the official status of 'candidate for membership'. To many Turks it all seemed rather grudging, especially as they had just suffered the indignity of watching countries as influential as Estonia, Malta and Slovakia jump the queue. But it was progress, and the government of the day, led by Bülent Ecevit, was under pressure to prove that Turkey meant business.

It started slowly, with Mr Ecevit's awkward coalition of nationalists, conservatives and reformers bickering about what to do next and finally making some initial changes. But under the next government, led by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan - the first single-party government in more than a decade - the trickle became a flood. Curbing the power of the military was just the start. The civil and criminal codes have been thoroughly overhauled, hundreds of laws have been rewritten and dozens of institutional amendments have sailed through parliament. The death penalty has been abolished, broadcasting and education in Kurdish has been legalized, it's been made more difficult (but certainly not impossible) to close down political parties, there's much greater protection for individual rights, and many restrictions on free speech have been swept away.

In less than four years, Turkey has been transformed - on paper, at least. Most galling for the old guard is the fact that this new revolution has been led not by traditional secular republican politicians, but by a party with Islamist roots, a party many of them still fear and mistrust. They find it hard to accept that the road to Europe has been paved by the very people they think want to cut them off from 'civilization' for ever; I wonder what some of the judges I've seen in court cases in various parts of Turkey must have thought when they were asked to take part, under the government of the AKP, in the Ministry of Justice's new human rights initiative, backed by the European Union. Thousands of judges and prosecutors have been given training in the basic standards of human rights law - something they would never before have been taught in detail.

Even for the most enthusiastic reformers, the speed and scale of the legal changes is a daunting challenge. I always found attending Turkish courts a bewildering experience at the best of times, but new courts of every kind - for divorce cases, juvenile cases and intellectual property infringements - have sprung up almost overnight. There's a new court of appeal as well, and the most distinguished lawyers have been throwing out their well-thumbed books and restocking their shelves.

Canan Arm answers the door with a telephone in each hand, apparently in the middle of three conversations at once. A lawyer specializing in women's rights, she has never known such a busy time.

'It's exhausting,' she says cheerfully, 'a constant battle. Sit down if you can find a space.'

There are huge piles of paper on her desk, and the phone rings again. Everyone has to learn the new laws from scratch.

'We have to fight to make sure the laws they pass in parliament are good,' she says. 'When it comes to laws affecting women, there's no guarantee of that. Then we have to fight to make sure they're implemented properly, and that people know what rights they have.'

'Can the system cope with so much so quickly?'

'It's going to have to cope. We'll all work a little harder. We've been waiting for these reforms for a long time.'

Many modernizing judges are equally pleased, even if it will take years to get through the backlog of cases, but some of their colleagues must be dismayed by the general tone of the changes taking place. The zealots among them have long assumed that the rights of the state take precedence over the rights of the individual. That is the basic premise of the 1982 constitution, and it is being thoroughly undermined. There are many shades of opinion at senior levels of both the judiciary and the armed forces, and many high-ranking individuals in military and civilian life are torn, not quite knowing which way to turn.

The Turkish president, Ahmet Necdet Sezer, is a former chief justice of the Constitutional Court, and no one would question his Kemalist credentials, nor his defence of secularism. In the summer of 2004 he vetoed an education bill which would have allowed graduates of religious schools better access to university, and a local government bill which he thought would relax bans on wearing the Islamic headscarf in public buildings. Yet at the same time he is seen as a reformer, committed to greater freedom of speech, to anti-corruption investigations, and to Turkey's bid to join the European Union. With his strained public persona, and his deeply ingrained sense of duty, he seems to embody the dilemma of the ruling elite: how much freedom can we really afford?

And so the battle for Turkey's soul goes on, a complex many-layered debate. Just as it would be absurd to argue that all Islamists are fundamentalists, so it would be ridiculous to claim that all Kemalists are opposed to change. Many of them are passionate supporters of reform, who have been working for years to create a more modern and dynamic country. But within their ranks there is an unbending faction which wants to keep Turkey in glorious isolation. They are authoritarian supporters of a strong state, anti-Western and anti-democratic. They quote and follow Kemal Atatürk selectively, and they don't like the direction in which the new Turkey is heading.

During the NATO summit in Istanbul in June 2004, with George W Bush in town and half the Turkish navy anchored in the Bosphorus, I sat in a garden on the Asian side of the city admiring the view across the water. I'd come to see Cüneyt Ülsever - a perceptive columnist who has the interesting job of putting the alternative view to the readers of *Hürriyet*, one of the newspapers of the establishment.

As we munched cherries and watched the warships in the distance, we talked about the future for the hardline defenders of the faith.

'I call them the status quo,' he said, 'because that's what they want: no change. Think about it - no one likes to give up power, and they have a lot of it ... political power, economic power; they won't let it go without a big struggle.'

'But can they win? Can they turn the clock back again?'

'I doubt it. The tug of war will continue, but I think the old-style Kemalists are swimming against the tide.'

* * *

A lot of it has got to do with how public perceptions have changed, sometimes dramatically, during the course of the

last decade. The myth of 'Baba Devlet' - the Daddy State which knew best and would provide from the cradle to the grave - has taken some hard knocks. Many supporters of the old system grew rich and powerful because of their control over the national economy - an often unholy alliance of bureaucrats and businessmen who carved things up between them while the rest of the country was suffering from soaring inflation, rampant corruption and a string of economic crises. The worst of them, in 2001, caused untold misery for millions of Turks. It was one mistake too many for a system in which politics, business and money had formed a self-perpetuating elite.

There have been other infamous low points - devastating scandals involving shady characters and dubious links with the criminal underworld and the violent extremes of Turkish politics. Most prominent was a famous car crash in the western town of Susurluk in 1996, which sent out shock waves which were felt for years. A senior police chief died in the crash, so did a wanted gangster named Abdullah Çatlı, and his girlfriend, a former beauty queen. They had all been travelling in a black Mercedes which careered into a truck at high speed on a rainy night. The only survivor was Sedat Bucak, a powerful Kurdish clan leader and a member of parliament friendly to the state. He had made millions from running his private army of village guards during the war against the PKK. Bucak lost his memory completely in the crash, which was extremely convenient. False diplomatic passports, weapons, money and a host of incriminating documents were recovered from the wreckage.

This was what Turks call the 'deep state' unmasked. Compelling evidence emerged of collusion between politicians, the security forces and the criminal underworld - Çatlı had been a state-sponsored assassin heavily involved in the heroin-smuggling trade. Many ordinary citizens were outraged, and for a while it became fashionable in Turkish cities to turn off your lights at nine o'clock every night as part of a mass civil protest against 'deep state' corruption. People would fling open their windows and bang saucepans together as the 'One Minute of Darkness for Enlightenment' campaign launched a growing public demand for explanations.

A few middle-ranking officials were prosecuted, and a senior intelligence official, retired colonel Korkut Eken, was eventually sent to jail for 'forming an illegal gang'. But others higher up the chain of command emerged unscathed. On his release in July 2004 Eken was unrepentant. His first act was to visit Atatürk's mausoleum, where he rededicated himself to fighting for his version of the founding father's legacy.

'I never lost my commitment to eliminate threats directed at the security of the state,' he told a crowd of his supporters who accompanied him in a long convoy of cars. 'I was put in jail because of a campaign of slander waged by traitors trying to pacify us.'

Sedat Bucak was also eventually put on trial, after he lost his parliamentary seat and the guarantee of immunity from prosecution which accompanied it. The legal process was still dragging on in 2006 and Bucak still couldn't remember anything about the accident which uncovered the Susurluk scandal.

Corruption, incompetence, and shady underworld connections: add all of these things together and it was clear that the idea of the state as an all-seeing, all-knowing force

for good had lost its credibility. The state wasn't all bad, but the old sense of subservience has now gone for ever. It has been a gradual process, hastened by a growing awareness of the outside world, and an impatient desire to throw off the shackles of centralized control. But I have a very precise personal memory of when I think change became irreversible.

17 August 1999: in the middle of a sweltering summer. At just after ten in the morning I was fast asleep in Ankara when my wife got out of bed and woke me up.

'I thought someone was trying to get in through the window,' she said. 'I heard banging ... there are people out on the street. What's happening?'

We were lucky to be a long way from the epicentre at the eastern end of the Sea of Marmara, an hour's drive from Istanbul. Thousands of people died instantly in their beds, thousands more lost their lives trapped in the rubble, waiting for help that never came. The earthquake was a devastating example of the destructive power of nature, and any country would have struggled to cope. But when the Turkish state came face to face with a massive humanitarian disaster, it failed time and time again.

Snapshots from the first forty-eight hours have stayed in my mind. An elderly man armed only with a shovel trying to dig through layers of collapsed concrete, looking for his three grandchildren; young soldiers ordered to stand guard at the gate of the shattered naval base in Gölçük, as chaos reigned in the streets around them and people begged for help; the dust-covered face of a boy we could see but couldn't reach, trapped in the ruins of his home. And while the system creaked, and politicians dithered, private rescue teams of mountaineers and cavers turned up to help. Satellite trucks from local TV stations arrived faster than emergency vehicles run by the state - and when offers of foreign aid began pouring in, the Minister of Health said he didn't want any Greek or Armenian blood. Turks watched, horrified but transfixed, as the drama was played out live on their screens.

Five days after the earthquake I was looking rather forlornly for a bit of shade in the middle of Adapazarı, one of the cities worst hit by the disaster. On the other side of the road, I saw a man digging through the rubble with his bare hands. After a couple of moments he pulled something out, through a shower of dust. It was a typewriter. He set it down, cleaned it carefully with the bottom of his shirt, and walked away. It was stiflingly hot. A few minutes later he was back, with a slightly tattered piece of paper. I've no idea where he'd found it, but he sat on a bit of concrete, put the typewriter on a broken chair, and began to type.

I think he was writing a letter. I didn't ask him why, or to whom. There was nowhere he could possibly post it. Strangely enough, it didn't seem to matter. He was simply happy to be doing something. A couple of days before, I'd seen little more than people staring at the tableau of twisted buildings all around them, struck dumb by a feeling of helplessness, by the enormity of what had happened. Now there was a change of mood. The situation was still desperate, the region remained in a dangerous state of flux with almost no infrastructure and not much leadership, but human activity had resumed. Some people cycled down the road at high speed. Others picked up bits of litter, or began

to sweep small sections of the pavement. There was so much to do. And they were all suddenly doing something.

It had taken only forty-five seconds to tear their world apart. Forty-five seconds when the earth moved beneath them as they slept. Lives were broken and myths were shattered. The biggest myth of all: that the state was supremely powerful, that it would always provide. When the moment of greatest need arrived, the state could not deliver. Shock was followed by anger, and then - five days later - by action. People were doing it for themselves. They cursed their politicians, their bureaucrats and their system, and then they got on with things. Belatedly the authorities sprang into action: the paralysis of the first few days passed, but the damage had already been done.

For several generations of Turks who had been brought up to believe in their state, and in its central role in their lives, that became the biggest aftershock of all. 'Fiasco' screamed the Turkish media, 'Chaos', 'Shame'. Shadowy building contractors - the men who built castles out of sand - had been allowed to get away with murder. Development was progress, they had said, and Turkey was developing fast. But it was all about profit before safety, and when the walls came tumbling down, the thieves slipped away into the night. One contractor who failed to go to ground quickly enough was nearly lynched by an angry crowd.

Private enterprise had been given free rein, and allowed to abuse the system with petty corruption. Regulations were ignored, corners cut, and people lived in high-rise death traps. One day, warned the experts, an earthquake will come. No one in the system was prepared to listen, and ordinary people paid the price. Well-to-do -middle-class Turks were buried in their holiday homes in the seaside town of Yalova. Poor rural migrants from the east of the country disappeared under the concrete in Izmit. Few people across this vast land were unaffected by the tragedy. Almost everyone knew someone who was there, and only the lucky ones survived.

Suddenly they wanted to know who would be held accountable. The scale of the disaster was huge; any country would have been reeling. But delay and incompetence and inaction cost lives. Calls for fundamental political and social reform were in the air - and that became the earthquake's lasting legacy. Even the military, the symbol of a strong centralized state, came under fire. Soldiers were insulted on the streets. 'You could have helped us,' sobbed one woman near Gölçük, 'but you chose not to come. Please tell me why.'

In the midst of confusion and grief, some looked for answers elsewhere. The pious suggested the earthquake was a sign from God - punishing the country for abandoning its beliefs. Islamist politicians hoped to gain protest votes, and their grass-roots networks proved far more efficient in helping the survivors than the cumbersome centralized bureaucracy. The government of the time, led by the veteran Bülent Ecevit, thought it could wait for the storm to pass. It appealed for national unity as it turned to the massive task of reconstruction. But I don't think the old political order ever recovered entirely from the failures of those terrible August days. As rebuilding began, there was a nagging fear at the back of everyone's mind: will the same mistakes be made again, in a country where memories are sometimes short?

I was struck at the time by one particular campaign: Turkish newspapers urged their readers to play a simple role -

to donate at least one brick each to reconstruct cities from scratch. It was a good symbol then, and it remains one now. A wall in which every brick is important, just like a state in which every citizen plays a valued role. After the earthquake, survivors wanted to rebuild in a safer and more modern way. Not just their cities, but also their system. They wanted a blueprint for the future. The man with the typewriter in Adapazarı may have been writing the same thing.

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On the eve of the fifth anniversary of the earthquake I sought out Ahmet, Mete Işıkara, who must have been as surprised as anyone when he was voted Turkey's sexiest man in the months after disaster struck. A hunched figure with a striking resemblance to Albert Einstein, he was an unlikely candidate for such an accolade, but for years Professor Işıkara had been like a prophet in the wilderness. As the director of the Kandilli Earthquake Research Institute in Istanbul he had been preaching a message which no one chose to hear - an earthquake is coming, and we're not ready. When it actually happened (twice in the space of three months) Turks suddenly hung on his every word. He became a cult figure. Kids knew him as 'depremdede' - Grandpa Earthquake - as he launched a huge public awareness campaign to prepare the country for the next Big One.

Now retired, Professor Işıkara is kept busy with his educational work. 'It's not a question of whether Istanbul will be hit, but when,' he says. 'We know that, and we have to be prepared.'

A start has been made. Survey ships track the mysteries of the North Anatolian fault beneath the Sea of Marmara, and a network of extra seismic monitoring stations records even the tiniest movement. Building regulations have been tightened, and rules are actually being followed. A significant proportion of survivors in 1999 believed God would decide the timing of the next earthquake, and God would decide who lives and who dies. With such fatalism deeply ingrained, the battle to make sure the right long-term decisions are taken - better quality housing in safer geological areas, for example - may be harder than many people expect.

In parts of the city the only really safe solution would be to knock down thousands of buildings and relocate millions of people. Politically, that may be too hard to do, but new earthquake-proof buildings - which could have saved thousands of lives in 1999 - are now being built in Istanbul and elsewhere. It's not perfect, there is still corruption, but it's much better than it used to be. When Professor Işıkara moved into one new building development, sales there suddenly boomed. If it was safe enough for him, they thought ...

Now, sitting in the relative calm of his daughter's Istanbul cafe, he looked at his food, set down his fork, and twirled his prayer beads through his fingers one more time.

'I think we'll be much better prepared next time. At least we'll have a plan. There's always a bit of chaos, there's bound to be confusion, but it can be managed. The earthquake in 99 changed so many things: Turkey's a different place today.'