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Atatürk and the Kurds

ANDREW MANGO

Is Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founding father of the Turkish Republic, to blame for his country's troubled relationship with its Kurdish-speaking citizens? In his foreword to Jonathan Rugman's fair-minded account of the problem, John Simpson, foreign affairs editor of the BBC, wrote:

In terms of ethnicity and culture, Turkey is varied, complex and intermixed. Yet the myth which Atatürk bequeathed to his fellow-countrymen insists that there is a single ethnic group, the Turks. Nowadays the effects of this myth can be brutal; it can never, in the long run, be successful. While Turkey gives no legal recognition to its large Kurdish minority, the problem that dissident Kurds pose for the Turkish state cannot be solved.¹

The seriousness of the problem is undeniable. According to figures given at the end of June 1998 by the head of the anti-terrorist department of the Turkish police, the radical Kurdish nationalist organization PKK (Partiya Karkeren Kurdistan – Kurdistan Workers Party), had by that time launched nearly 19,000 attacks since the beginning of its armed campaign in 1984. These caused the deaths of 5,121 members of the security forces and of 4,049 civilians, while 17,248 persons described as terrorists were killed.² In spite of repeated assurances by the security forces that the back of the insurrection has been broken and that the PKK now numbers only 5,000 armed militants, the death toll continues to mount. As Şükrü Elekdağ, the former Turkish Ambassador in Washington, has recently pointed out, 'the problem of the south-east' (that is, the Kurdish problem) is acquiring a growing international dimension and constitutes the main and most urgent threat facing Turkey.³ In the circumstances, an elucidation of the genesis of the problem is a matter of current political, as well as of historical, importance. And since the actions and statements of Atatürk remain a source of inspiration of Turkish government policy, and tend to be used to legitimize it, it is as well to be clear about Atatürk's attitude towards the Kurds.

Mustafa Kemal Paşa, as he then was, did not acquire first-hand experience of Kurdish-speaking areas until April 1916, when he was

promoted Brigadier-General at the age of 35, and sent to Diyarbekir (now Diyarbakır) at the head of the 16th corps, a part of the 2nd Ottoman army, which was transferred from Thrace after the withdrawal of the Allies from Gallipoli. Enver Paşa, the Ottoman deputy commander-in-chief (theoretically, deputising for the elderly Sultan Mehmet V), had prepared an ambitious plan, requiring the 2nd Army in the south-east and the 3rd Army in the north-east to close in on the Russian troops, which had occupied Erzurum and were fanning out to the west and south. The plan failed, but Mustafa Kemal acquitted himself well, regaining the towns of Muş and Bitlis in the Kurdish area in August 1916. A little later, a Russian counter-offensive forced him out of Muş, and the front then remained more or less stable until the Russian Revolution the following year. In November 1916, Mustafa Kemal became deputy commander of the 2nd Army, when the commander Ahmet İzzet Paşa, a general of Albanian origin, went on leave to Istanbul. In March 1917, Ahmet İzzet Paşa was made commander of all the armies on the eastern front and Mustafa became substantive commander of the 2nd Army. He remained in the area until July 1917, when he was appointed commander of the 7th Army, part of the Lightning (Yıldırım) Group, brought together in Syria under the German general (Marshal in the Ottoman army) Erich von Falkenhayn for the purpose of recapturing Baghdad from the British.⁴

Mustafa Kemal kept a diary between 7 November and 24 December 1916 during his service with the 2nd Army.⁵ He records the books he read (a French novel and two books on philosophy), his thoughts on army discipline and on the emancipation of women, and a few impressions of the ravaged countryside: Bitlis made him think of the ruins of Pompeii and of Nineveh. There is a brief mention of a volunteer detachment, organized by a local Nakşibendi sheykh, of hungry Kurdish refugees, of a meeting with the tribal leader Hacı Musa who commanded the Mutki Kurdish militia. Mustafa Kemal's tone is remarkably detached: he observes his surroundings with the curiosity of an outsider. He does not express any views on the Kurds.

His chief of staff, Lt. Col. İzzettin (later General İzzettin Çalışlar) is more forthcoming in his diary.⁶ 'In the villages, there are many men capable of bearing arms', he noted on 2 May 1916. 'The enemy is pressing hard against their land. Yet most of them are not rushing to defend it. They will have nothing to do with military service. They do not know Turkish. They do not understand what government means. In brief, these are places which have not yet been conquered. Yet one could make good use of these people. They obey their tribal leaders and sheykhs, who are very influential in these parts.'⁷ On 11 November 1916, İzzettin commented: 'One must gradually set up a military organization among the Kurds. One must begin by forming

units from among those who are comparatively more used to the government and are more friendly. At the same time, the government must organize to do more and increase its influence.⁸ Like Mustafa Kemal, İzzettin notes the poverty and backwardness of local people. He hopes for a transfer from ‘these sorrowful surroundings’ and says that anyone posted from the west to the east faces a hard time.⁹

Mustafa Kemal had one close military supporter who had a good knowledge of the Kurds. This was Col. Fahrettin (later General Fahrettin Altay, the renowned cavalry commander in the Turkish War of Independence). Born in Scutari in Albania, Fahrettin was posted to the 4th Army in eastern Anatolia in 1904, after graduating from the staff college in Istanbul.¹⁰ Fahrettin describes the posting as exile, saying that the regime of Sultan Abdülhamit suspected him of holding liberal views.¹¹ However, he stayed on after the Young Turkish coup of 1908, and took part in a punitive expedition against Kurdish tribes in the Dersim (now Tunceli) mountains, west of Erzurum. The expedition was one of several mounted by the Young Turkish regime against dissident tribes – Druzes, Arab tribes in the Yemen, Albanians – which found the new constitutional order even less to their liking than Abdülhamit’s absolutism, and which were, in consequence, smitten harder than at the time of that manipulative sovereign.

Fahrettin accepted the submission of the Dersim Kurds, on condition that they paid taxes and desisted from banditry. But the arrangement he made with a tribal leader was disallowed. He comments in his memoirs: ‘It was that breakdown which made it necessary to mount another punitive expedition in these parts 28 years later.’¹² The reference is to the suppression of the Dersim rebellion by the armed forces of the Turkish Republic in 1937. In 1909, Fahrettin was put in charge of the reorganization of the Hamidiye Kurdish tribal regiments, which were renamed Tribal Cavalry Regiments (Aşiret Süvari Alayları). He claims that he would have preferred a Turkish name, such as ‘Oğuz regiments’, on the grounds that some of those who considered themselves Kurds were of Turkish origin, but that he was overruled by the Ottoman War Minister, Mahmut Şevket Paşa.¹³ In 1913, Fahrettin led some of these tribal forces against the Bulgarians in eastern Thrace at the close of the second Balkan War. There were instances of looting by the Kurds, as ‘our soldiers, who did not know Turkish, mistook local (Turkish) people for Bulgarians, on account of their dress’.¹⁴ Fahrettin says that he made the looters return stolen goods and saved them from execution by firing squad. His views match those of Major İzzettin: the Kurds were rough diamonds, their land was a place of hardship for a Turkish officer, but they could be managed if one knew how to approach them. Civilization would come with education – in the Turkish language – and would reinforce loyalty to the Ottoman state.

The same approach had been tried by Abdülhamit, who, apart from establishing the Hamidiye regiments (modelled on Russian Cossacks), had inspired the foundation of the Tribal School (Mekteb-i Aşair or Aşiret Mektebi) in Istanbul.¹⁵ But the sons of Arab and of Kurdish chieftains came to blows in the school, and it was closed down in 1907, apparently when the authorities realized that the students were tending to a nationalist critique of the administration.¹⁶ Abdülhamit was brought down by the close link between education, which he promoted, and disaffection, which he tried in vain to contain. Nevertheless, the Young Turks, and Atatürk after them, kept the faith in the merits of education in civilization, while redefining its content.

The original source of inspiration of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, as of other Young Turks, was Namık Kemal, the 'poet of liberty'. Namık Kemal had written in 1878: 'While we must try to annihilate all languages in our country, except Turkish, shall we give Albanians, Lazes and Kurds a spiritual weapon by adopting their own characters? ... Language ... may be the firmest barrier – perhaps firmer than religion – against national unity.' Elsewhere, Namık Kemal said: 'If we set up regular schools... and carry out the programmes which are now not fulfilled, the Laz and Albanian languages will be utterly forgotten in twenty years.'¹⁷

Mustafa Kemal did not have to deal with Kurdish tribes until 1916, but he was aware of the experience of his fellow-officers and was imbued with the ideology of Ottoman liberals among whom Turkish nationalism took shape. He had also encountered other tribesmen in his military career. His active military service had started in Syria in 1905–6, where he took part in operations against rebellious Druzes and was threatened by Circassians.¹⁸ Then he saw service in the suppression of the Albanian revolt in 1910; and he organized Cyrenaican Arab tribesmen against the Italians in 1911. Immediately after his appointment as commander of the 7th army in Aleppo in 1917, he criticized an agreement made by Kress von Kressenstein (Kress Paşa), German commander in Gaza, with a local Arab tribal leader, Sheykh Hajim. In a letter to the Lightning Group commander, von Falkenhayn, Mustafa Kemal argued that while relations with tribal leaders were necessary, it was dangerous to single out one leader for an agreement and give the impression of downgrading the others. To allow officials to enter into relations with individual sheykhhs would only serve to create confusion. He would, therefore, deal impartially with all tribal leaders and show no preference to Sheykh Hajim.¹⁹

Mustafa Kemal's ability to orchestrate relations with tribal leaders – in this case, Kurdish tribal leaders – was put to the test when he arrived in Anatolia on 19 May 1919 and set about organizing Turkish national resistance against the Allies. The signature of the armistice of Mudros on 30

October 1918 and the subsequent arrival of Allied troops in Istanbul and at various points in Anatolia had inspired the hope among some Kurdish leaders that they could advance their personal ambitions with British help. Mehmet Şerif Paşa, an Ottoman official of Kurdish origin, who had spent the Great War as an exile in Paris, informed the British in May 1919 that he was willing to become Amir of an independent Kurdistan.²⁰ In Istanbul, a Kurdish notable, Seyyit Abdülkadir, became president of a Society for the Rise of Kurdistan (Kürdistan Teali Cemiyeti), which was supported by the Bedir Khans (Bedirhanogulları), a Kurdish princely dynasty from the area round Diyarbekir (Bohtan in Kurdish, Jazirat ibn-'Umar in Arabic, El-Cezire in Ottoman Turkish).²¹ Another Bedir Khan, Süreyya, was the moving spirit of the Committee for Kurdish Independence in Cairo, which appealed for British help in January 1919.²² In Sulaimaniyya (Süleymaniye), Sheykh Mahmud Barzinji, began co-operating with British troops as soon as they arrived at the end of 1918. Kurdish tribal leaders of lesser importance sought contact with the British elsewhere in south-eastern Anatolia.²³

On 23 May 1919, four days after his arrival in Samsun as Inspector of the 9th Army, Mustafa Kemal requested a situation report from Ahmet Cevdet, deputy commander of the 13th corps in Diyarbekir. In his reply, dated 27 May, Cevdet detailed the activity of the tribes and of the British in his area, and said that the Kurdish club in Diyarbekir, working for Kurdish independence, was co-operating increasingly with the club of the Ottoman party Concord and Freedom (İtilâf ve Hürriyet, known as Entente Libérale in the West), whose policy was in conformity with that of the Istanbul government. The army corps was following closely the anti-government propaganda of the Kurdish club. This telegram and subsequent communications to and from Mustafa Kemal on Kurdish affairs were published in 1996 by the Military History Department of the Turkish General Staff (ATASE – Askerî Tarih ve Stratejik Etüt Başkanlığı), as part of a series of extracts from Atatürk's private archive.²⁴ The book comprises 67 documents, from May 1919 to April 1920, with photocopies of the original handwritten Ottoman Turkish texts, followed by transcription into Latin characters. Twenty of them are signed by Mustafa Kemal, first as Inspector of the 9th Army, then of the 3rd Army (when the 9th Army was renumbered, following a reorganization), and later as 'former Inspector', then as Chairman of the General Congress (in Sivas), and finally 'on behalf of the Representative Committee (*Heyet-i Temsiliye*, i.e. permanent executive)' of the Society for the Defence of (National) Rights in Anatolia and Rumelia. These 20 telegrams give a clear idea of Mustafa Kemal's tactics *vis-à-vis* the Kurds in the critical months which preceded the formation of the government of the Turkish Grand National Assembly in Ankara in April 1920.

The first telegram from Mustafa Kemal in the collection was sent from Havza (inland from Samsun) on 28 May 1919 to four Kurdish tribal leaders, including Hacı Musa of Mutki. In it he announces his appointment by 'our master, the Sultan and Glorious Caliph' and expresses the hope of visiting their area in the near future. In the meantime, he is certain that his addressees would do all in their power to show to the world that the independence of the country could be ensured if internal order was maintained and if everyone was totally obedient to the state (pp.10–11). On the same day, Mustafa Kemal sent a telegram to Kâmil, a deputy in the Ottoman parliament, who was a member of the Kurdish club in Diyarbakir. Again he speaks of his intention to visit his 'old friends' in Diyarbakir at the earliest opportunity. Referring to reports that animosity had arisen between the Kurdish club and Turks in Diyarbakir, Mustafa Kemal warns that this could produce sad consequences for both 'brothers-in-race' (*ırk kardeş*). He goes on to ask Kâmil to urge on the Kurdish club that national unity was essential and that to allow the external enemy to make use of 'problems which should be settled within the family, such as those concerning the principles of administration and the defence of the rights of the races' would constitute the greatest treachery (p.14). The word 'race' (*ırk*) tended at the time to be used to denote an ethnic community (*ethnie*).

The following day (29 May 1919) Mustafa Kemal asked the General Staff in Istanbul to notify him where exactly the British were promoting the cause of an independent Kurdistan. He notes that he had in the meantime given the necessary advice to 'many famous Kurdish emirs, whose gratitude and affection I had won fully during the war' (p.19). The Chief of the Ottoman General Staff, Cevat Paşa (Çobanlı), replied on 3 June that it could be deduced that the British wanted to set up a Kurdish government between 'Iraq, Armenia and Turkey'. As a result of pressure by General Allenby, the General Staff had to agree to disband the 13th Army corps in Diyarbakir. It would be redesigned as a gendarmerie unit. Presumably to safeguard this fiction, Cevat Paşa asked Mustafa Kemal to be careful in his communications with the 13th Corps and to make sure that his name was not bandied around in its area (p.21).

Mustafa Kemal's message to the Kurds is particularly clear in the telegram he sent on 11 June 1919 to a Diyarbakir notable, Kasım Cemilpaşazade. The plan to create an independent Kurdistan, he declared, had been hatched by the British for the benefit of the Armenians. However, 'Kurds and Turks are true brothers [*öz kardeş*, i.e. children of the same father and mother] and may not be separated'. 'Our existence requires that Kurds, Turks and all Muslim elements [*anasır* – ethnic components of the state] should work together to defend our independence and prevent the partition of the fatherland.' Mustafa Kemal went on: 'I am in favour of

granting all manner of rights and privileges (*hukuk ve imtiyazat* – the Latin transcription substitutes three dots for *imtiyazat*) in order to ensure the attachment [to the state – *merbutiyet*] and the prosperity and progress of our Kurdish brothers, on condition that the Ottoman state is not split up' (p.33). In a covering letter, Mustafa Kemal asks the 13th corps commander to facilitate the visit to Sivas of men trusted by three named Kurdish notables (p.35). In his reply of 25 June 1919, the commander, Ahmet Cevdet, objects that the notables kept brigands in their suites, and that they were, in any case, quarrelling among themselves: people would respond to Mustafa Kemal's invitation only if it served their interests. However, delegates had been elected to the congress which was to meet in Erzurum, and the Kurdish club had been closed down. It was impossible to win over many of its members. 'They do not want Ottoman rule, and prefer British rule, believing that [their area] would [then] develop and become prosperous like Egypt.' Ahmet Cevdet explained that the Cemilpaşa family and their friends, who made up the Kurdish club, wanted a change in government in order to escape prosecution for their part in the expulsion and killings (of Armenians) (pp.38–9).

Mustafa Kemal had in the meantime moved from Havza to Amasya for a meeting with his nationalist comrades, Hüseyin Rauf (Orbay), Ali Fuat (Cebesoy) and Refet (Bele). The strongest Ottoman military force in Anatolia at that time was the 15th Corps, commanded by General Kâzım Karabekir in Erzurum. On 16 June 1919, Mustafa Kemal sent him a telegram from Amasya to explain his views on the Kurds (pp.40–4). The Kurdish club in Diyarbekir, he wrote, had been closed down because it aimed at the formation of a Kurdistan under British protection. In any case, the club had been formed by a few 'vagabonds' (*serseri*) and did not represent the Kurds. However there was a problem: the people of the eastern provinces which were threatened by Armenian bands realized the need for unity. But in 'tranquil' parts of Anatolia, the position was different, as local people, who had been made the plaything of politicians, were now unwilling to join any organization. He had, therefore, made every effort to explain the need for National Defence Societies, as an instrument of national unity. Fortunately, the co-operation of military and civil officials in spreading his message had borne fruit and he had received telegrams 'from everywhere' showing that the people had seen the need to organize and that the work of organizing (resistance to the Allies) had begun.

Mustafa Kemal told Karabekir that he was determined to 'grasp the Kurds like true brothers' and thus unite the whole nation through the Societies for the Defence of National Rights. Two days later, Mustafa Kemal sent an optimistic telegram to Col. Cafer Tayyar, the nationalist commander of the 1st Corps in Edirne (Adrianople in Turkish Thrace),

declaring 'British propaganda for the formation of an independent Kurdistan under British protection, and supporters of this project, have been eliminated. Kurds have joined forces with Turks' (p.54). On 23 June, Mustafa Kemal wrote in the same vein to the Chief of the General Staff in Istanbul, General Cevat (Çobanlı). 'Important telegrams' he had received from Diyarbekir and Mamuretülaziz (now Elâzığ) proved conclusively, he declared, that the idea of an independent Kurdistan under British protection had been 'destroyed'. 'We are always ready to provide an administration which would guarantee the prosperity and happiness of Kurdistan. We expect important people from that area to come to Sivas soon', Mustafa Kemal concluded (p.57).

This suggests that Mustafa Kemal did not expect any important Kurdish personalities to turn up at the congress of eastern provinces, which had been organized under the auspices of Kâzım Karabekir in Erzurum. Events proved him right. The provinces of Diyarbekir and Mamuretülaziz (or Harput) were not represented. It seems that supporters of the Society for the Rise of Kurdistan prevented any election of delegates from Mamuretülaziz to the congress in Erzurum, and prevented delegates who had been elected in Diyarbekir from going to Erzurum.²⁵ True, the largely Kurdish provinces of Bitlis and Van, and Kurdish districts of the province of Erzurum did send delegates, but they were small fry: retired Ottoman officials, clerics, etc.²⁶

The congress of Erzurum opened on 23 July; elected Mustafa Kemal to be its chairman on the same day and on 7 August issued a proclamation, which was to form the basis of the National Pact – the charter of the Turkish nationalist movement in the War of Independence. The proclamation began by stating that the Black Sea and East Anatolian provinces (including the main Kurdish provinces of Diyarbekir, Mamuretülaziz, Van and Bitlis) were an inseparable part of the Ottoman community and that 'all Islamic elements [i.e. ethnic communities], living in this area, are true brothers, imbued with the sentiment of mutual sacrifice and respectful of their [i.e. each other's] racial [i.e. ethnic] and social circumstances'.²⁷ Article 6 of the proclamation extended this principle to all Ottoman territories within the lines of the armistice signed with the Allies on 30 October 1918, and repudiated any partition of these lands 'inhabited by our true brothers, of the same religion and race as ourselves, whom it is impossible to divide' (*yekdiğerinden gayr-ı kabil-i infikâk öz kardeş olan din ve ırkdaşlarımızla meskûn*). The formulation conceals an ambiguity: the Kurds were a 'race' (or ethnic community – *ırk*), but Turks, Kurds and all other Muslims in Anatolia and Eastern Thrace were of 'the same race' (*ırkdaş*).

The committee (or permanent executive) elected at the Erzurum congress included two representatives of predominantly Kurdish areas: Sadullah Efendi, the former Ottoman deputy for Bitlis, and the Kurdish

tribal leader Hacı Musa of Mutki.²⁸ However, neither served on the committee: Sadullah Efendi excused himself on grounds of ill health, while Hacı Musa was unable to come because he was afraid of action by tribes opposed to him.²⁹ On 13 August 1919, Mustafa Kemal communicated the decisions of the Erzurum congress to two Kurdish leaders, Şeyh Abdülbaki Küfrevi of Bitlis and Cemil Çeto of Garzan. In his telegram to the latter, he regretted that conditions had not allowed him to realize his wish of visiting the area (*oralar*) (p.69). Çeto was later to stage a brief rising (May–June 1920) against the young Nationalist government in Ankara.³⁰

Although Mustafa Kemal's party felt threatened by Dersim Kurds as they journeyed between Sivas and Erzurum,³¹ and then back again, the Kurds did not impinge on the work of the Erzurum congress. The congress which followed in Sivas was not so lucky. On 26 August 1919, the 13th Corps commander Ahmet Cevdet had instructed military authorities in Malatya to arrest a number of Kurdish notables who had been charged with trying to establish a Kurdish state under British protection.³² In fact, four of these notables, including Celadet and Kâmuran of the Bedirhan family, turned up in Malatya on 3 September, in the suite of Major E.M. Noel, who was indeed promoting the proposal put forward to the British government by Colonel (later Sir) Arnold Wilson, acting British commissioner for the Persian Gulf, that an independent Kurdistan should be formed under British auspices.³³ Two days before Noel's arrival, the provincial governor (*vali*) of Harput (Mamuretülaziz), Ali Galip, had instructed the district governor of Malatya, who was a member of the Bedirhan family, to collect a small force of Kurdish cavalry. On 7 September, Major Noel noted that Ali Galip intended to despatch the Kurds against the Turkish nationalists assembled in Sivas.³⁴

The Sivas congress had opened in the meantime on 4 September. It was meant to represent Societies for the Defence of National Rights throughout the country – from eastern Thrace to eastern Anatolia. However, only 38 delegates turned up, including Mustafa Kemal and his party. There was no delegate from any of the Kurdish areas. But a former Ottoman governor (and supporter of the Committee of Union and Progress), Mazhar Müfit (Kansu), was present as delegate of Hakkâri, and a delegate of Diyarbekir, İhsan Hamit (Tiğrel), arrived after the congress had ended.³⁵ Mustafa Kemal co-opted İhsan Hamit into the Representative Committee, the permanent executive of the countrywide society which became the source of his authority until he was elected president of the Grand National Assembly on 24 April 1920. As the nine members of the committee elected earlier in Erzurum were transferred *en bloc*, Sadullah Efendi and Hacı Musa of Mutki also became members of the new 16-member nationwide Representative Committee formed at Sivas.³⁶ But they remained sleeping members.

The proclamation issued by the Sivas congress on 11 September 1919, refined the terms used in Erzurum. It declared in its first article that: 'All Islamic elements living in the abovementioned domains [the Ottoman lands within the armistice lines] are true brothers, imbued with feelings of mutual respect and sacrifice for each other, and wholly respectful of racial and social rights and local conditions' (*Memalik-i mezkûrede yaşayan bilcümle anasır-ı islâmiye yekdiğerine karşı hüremet-i mütekeleye ve fedakârlık hissiyatıyla meşhun ve hukuk-u ırkiye ve içtimaiyeleriyle şerait-i muhitiyelerine tamamıyla riayetkâr öz kardeşitirler*).³⁷ The wording would seem to imply that Kurdish ethnicity and Kurdish customs would be respected.

Some time during the Sivas congress, Mustafa Kemal was informed of Major Noel's presence in Malatya and of Ali Galip's intention of recruiting Kurdish tribesmen to raid Sivas. On 11 September, the day on which the congress issued its proclamation, Ahmet Cevdet, the corps commander in Diyarbakir, was informed by the 3rd Corps in Sivas that the plot had been hatched by the Interior and War ministers in Istanbul. Ahmet Cevdet had by then decided to reinforce his troops in Malatya and had ordered the arrest of the district governor and of Major Noel's Kurdish companions, although not of Major Noel himself.³⁸ Having heard of the order, Major Noel and his party left Malatya on 10 September. The following day Major Noel noted that Ali Galip had produced a decree (*irade*) from the Sultan ordering him to raise a force of Kurdish cavalry against Mustafa Kemal in Sivas. Pressed to assist in the project, Major Noel claims to have refused to commit himself publicly. A day later, 12 September, Major Noel noted that Ali Galip had decided to disperse the Kurdish tribal gathering, as the idea of marching on Sivas was too risky.³⁹

As Ahmet Cevdet's measures, supported by Kâzım Karabekir in Erzurum, put a quick stop to Ali Galip's half-baked and half-hearted plan and secured the flight of Major Noel and his Kurdish companions, Mustafa Kemal sent a trusted and adventurous young officer, Lt. Recep Zühtü, on a special mission to Malatya in order to rally local support.⁴⁰ Some Kurdish leaders hastened to send messages of support to Sivas. On 15 September, in a telegram to Cemil Çeto in Siirt, Mustafa Kemal expressed the thanks of the congress for 'the loyalty of all our Kurdish brothers to this religion and state and their attachment to the sacred institution of the caliphate' (p.101). The following day, he congratulated the mayor of Malatya for having seen through the plot financed with 'British gold' (p.108).

Mustafa Kemal made maximum use of the Ali Galip plot to discredit the government of Damat Ferit, who had to resign on 30 September 1919 and was succeeded by Ali Rıza Paşa, a general sympathetic to the Turkish national movement.⁴¹ On 6 November, as elections were being organized for

the last Ottoman Chamber of Deputies, Mustafa Kemal sent a circular telegram to governors of five provinces in Eastern Anatolia, regretting claims made in the capital that the Kurds opposed the Turkish national movement, and asking that 'our Kurdish brothers, who are a noble [constituent] element of [the people of] Eastern Anatolia, should express their support for [Turkish] 'national forces' [*kuva-yı milliye*] and their opposition to the Society for the Rise of Kurdistan' (p.155). Messages of support duly followed. Replying on 3 December 1919 to one such message from the much-cited Hacı Musa of Mutki, Mustafa Kemal declared that 'the whole world knows that the noble Kurdish people [*Kürt kavm-i necibi*] feels a religious attachment to the sacred institution of the caliphate and constitutes an indivisible heroic mass with its Turkish brothers' (p.168). On 15 January 1920, Mustafa Kemal thanked a number of Kurdish tribal leaders for the telegrams which they had sent to the government and to representatives of foreign powers in Istanbul to express their solidarity with their Turkish brethren, considering that 'Kurdistan is an indivisible portion of the Ottoman community' (p.192). In another telegram sent on the same day, Mustafa Kemal spoke of Turks and Kurds as 'two true brothers joining hands in their determination to defend their sacred unity' (p.195).

On 20 February 1920, on the eve of the dissolution of the last Ottoman Chamber of Deputies in Istanbul and the subsequent opening of the Grand National Assembly in Ankara, Mustafa Kemal sent a private letter to the exiled Young Turk (CUP) triumvir Talât Paşa. It began with these words: 'The national unity created under the aegis of the Society for the Defence of [National] Rights in Anatolia and Rumelia aims at saving Turkey, as bounded by the national borders of the Turks and Kurds [*Türk ve Kürt milli hudutlariyle tahdid edilen Türkiye'yi*] ... in accordance with the principles established at the general congresses in Erzurum and then in Sivas.'⁴²

Mustafa Kemal put his views in a more general framework in his first long speech to the GNA on 24 April 1920. The Erzurum congress, he said, had marked out the borders of the country by claiming the territory within the line along which the armistice had been declared on 30 October 1918, a line which encompassed the province of Mosul. This was not only a military, but a national frontier. 'However it should not be imagined', Mustafa Kemal went on, 'that the Islamic elements within this frontier all belong to the same nation. There are within it Turks, Circassians and other Muslims. This is, however, the national frontier of brotherly nations living together and genuinely sharing the same aims. But in addition, every one of the Muslim elements living within the borders of this fatherland has its own specific environment, customs and race, and privileges relating to them have been accepted and confirmed, mutually and in all sincerity. Naturally, these have not been detailed, because this is not the time for it. The matter

will be settled and resolved between brothers when our existence is assured...'⁴³ Mustafa Kemal did not mention the Kurds specifically in this passage. But when he returned to the subject of frontiers on 1 May 1920, he said: 'The gentlemen making up your august assembly are not only Turks, or Circassians or Kurds. They are a sincere gathering of all Islamic elements.' He went on: 'There are Kurds as well as Turks north of Kirkuk. We have not distinguished between them.'⁴⁴

However, the ambiguity about race (*ırk*) persisted. In his speech opening the third session of the GNA on 1 March 1922, Mustafa Kemal said, 'The people of Turkey is a social entity united in race, religion and culture, imbued with mutual respect and a sense of sacrifice and sharing the same destiny and interests.'⁴⁵ Nevertheless, the expression 'people of Turkey' (*Türkiye halkı*) rather than 'Turkish people' (*Türk halkı*) is significant, and Mustafa Kemal used it again when welcoming the French writer Claude Farrère in İzmit on 18 June 1922.⁴⁶

Unlike the congresses of Erzurum and Sivas, the GNA which first came together on 23 April 1920 had genuine Kurdish members. The most colourful was Diyaş Ağa of Dersim, one of several tribal leaders elected to the assembly. The first constitution (lit. Law of Fundamental Organization, *Teşkilât-ı Esasiye Kanunu*), which the GNA adopted on 20 January 1921 extended the powers and status of local government, which had been established on the French model in the Ottoman state. Article 11 of the constitution declared that provinces were autonomous in local affairs. Provincial councils, elected for two years, were given the right to administer pious foundations, educational and health services, public works, farming and economic affairs generally, in accordance with the laws of the GNA.⁴⁷ Moreover, the term used for these councils was changed significantly from *meclis* to *şura*. Chosen originally by Ottoman reformers as an indigenously Islamic term for a consultative assembly, *şura* acquired after the Bolshevik revolution the connotation of 'soviet' (in modern Persian *showra*, *showravi* are the standard translations of the noun and adjective 'Soviet', respectively). The government which the Ottoman army left behind when it was forced to evacuate Kars after the armistice was called 'Kars Millî İslâm Şurası', which, I believe, can be rendered as Kars National Muslim Soviet. There was another example of Soviet inspiration in the 1921 constitution: the term used to designate the Ankara government was '*icra vekilleri heyeti*', an exact translation of 'committee of executive commissars' (shortened in Russian as *Ispolkom*), the name of the Bolshevik government in Moscow. In French texts *vekil* was translated as *commissaire* (Halide Edib in *The Turkish Ordeal* uses the word 'Commissary').

Mustafa Kemal referred to the constitutional provisions on local government in the instructions he sent to Nihat Paşa (Anılmış), who had

been appointed commander of the southern (El-Cezire) front in June 1920.⁴⁸ The instructions deserve to be quoted in full:

1. Our domestic policy requires the gradual establishment in the whole country and on a vast scale of local administrations in which popular masses will be directly and effectively involved. As for areas inhabited by Kurds, we consider it a necessity both of our domestic and of our foreign policy to set up a local government gradually.

2. The right of nations to determine their destinies by themselves is a principle accepted worldwide. We too have accepted this principle. It is expected that the Kurds will by that time have completed the organization of their own local government, and that their leaders and notables will have been won over by us in the name of this objective; when they express their votes, they should, therefore, declare that they prefer to live under the administration of the Grand National Assembly, where they are already masters of their own destiny. The command of the El-Cezire front is responsible for directing all the work in Kurdistan in line with this policy.

3. The general lines of accepted policy include such objectives as to raise by means of armed clashes to a permanent level the animosity of the Kurds in Kurdistan against the French and particularly the British on the border with Iraq, to prevent any accord between the Kurds and foreigners, to prepare gradually for the establishment of local government bodies and thus win for us the hearts of the Kurds and to strengthen the links which bind Kurdish leaders to us by appointing them to civil and military positions.

4. Domestic policy in Kurdistan shall be coordinated and administered by the command of the El-Cezire front. The front command will address its communications on the matter to the office of the president of the GNA. Leading civil officials will report on the subject to the front command, since the latter will regulate and coordinate action by provincial authorities.

5. The El-Cezire front command shall propose to the government such administrative, judicial and financial changes and reforms as it deems necessary.⁴⁹

Nihat Paşa did not win the hearts and minds of Kurdish notables, at least not of all Kurdish notables, in his area. Some of them complained to the Assembly in Ankara, accusing him of high-handed and illegal activity. Having heard his defence, the judicial committee of the Assembly reported that no action should be taken. The report was accepted on 22 July 1922, in

spite of loud protests by some deputies, notably Feyzi Efendi of Malatya. Nihat Paşa was, however, transferred to Ankara where he was appointed president of the military court of appeal.⁵⁰ Mustafa Kemal did not intervene, as he had done in an earlier case concerning 'bearded' Nurettin Paşa who, as commander of the central army, had repressed the rising of the Koçgiri Kurds on the northern edges of the Dersim mountains between April and June 1921.

Nurettin Paşa's severity and, particularly, his use of the irregulars led by the notorious Lame Osman (*Topal Osman*) of Giresun, were condemned in a motion by Emin Bey, deputy for Erzincan in whose constituency the rising had taken place. Speaking at a secret session of the assembly on 4 October 1921, Emin Bey declared that the punitive action taken against the people of Dersim would be unacceptable even for 'barbarians in Africa', and that such atrocities had not been committed even against the Armenians.⁵¹ The Assembly decided to send a commission of inquiry, which was also to look into the consequences of Nurettin Paşa's behaviour during the deportation of Greeks from Samsun. The Assembly wanted to put Nurettin Paşa on trial, but in the secret session on 16 January 1922, Mustafa Kemal argued that although Nurettin had been relieved of his command, the accusations against him needed further investigation. This was accepted,⁵² and the trial never took place. There was no love lost between Mustafa Kemal and Nurettin, but, as Mustafa Kemal said in a telegram to Kâzım Karabekir on 13 November 1921, he was worried by attacks in the assembly against military commanders he needed for the prosecution of the war.⁵³

Robert Olson⁵⁴ says on the strength of British intelligence reports that, in addition to the Koçgiri commission, another commission drew up a bill concerning the administration of Kurdistan, which, it was decided, was to be debated at a secret session on 10 February 1922. The bill, whose text is given in British documents, was apparently rejected by 373 votes to 64, most Kurdish deputies voting against it. David McDowall speaks of a debate on Dersim at a secret session of the GNA on 9 October 1921, followed by a decision on 10 February to establish 'an autonomous administration for the Kurdish nation in harmony with their national customs'.⁵⁵ But according to the published minutes, there were no secret sessions of the GNA either on 9 October 1921 or on 10 February 1922. There was a debate on the Koçgiri rebellion (and Dersim) on 3 October, when a five-member committee of inquiry was elected. The debate was continued on 4 and 5 October. On the last day, the commissioner (or minister) for the Interior, Refet (Bele) Paşa, argued against requests he had received from the people of Dersim that their district should acquire separate administrative status, and said that it was much better off as part of the richer province of (Mamuret) Elaziz.⁵⁶ On 16–17 January 1921, when

the GNA debated the possible committal for trial of Nurettin Paşa, a member of the committee of inquiry, Yusuf İzzet Paşa, said that the committee had completed its work, but was awaiting the return of two of its five members to draw up its report. In the meantime, he claimed that Nurettin Paşa had not exceeded his authority.⁵⁷ There is no reference in the debate either to a second committee or to any autonomy plan for Kurdistan.

The report of the committee of enquiry seems to have sunk without trace. Neither is there any reference to any autonomy plan in the long defence submitted by the El-Cezire front commander, Nihat Paşa, who says simply that 'the provinces of Kurdistan can be won over to the national government only by the hand of totally uncorrupt officials'.⁵⁸ Unless evidence to the contrary is found, I would suggest that the British reports quoted by Olson and McDowall concerning the existence of a precise Turkish plan for the autonomy of Kurdistan are inaccurate, like so many other British intelligence reports. The information was probably obtained from Kurdish sources, possibly Seyyit Abdülkadir, in Istanbul and was based either on documents having no legal validity, or simply on wishful thinking.

That Mustafa Kemal had not changed his mind – and continued to think of Kurdish autonomy in the framework of local government throughout the country – emerges clearly from his reference to the Kurds in the briefing he gave to journalists in İzmit on 16/17 January 1923, at a time when the Lausanne conference was in recess. Once again, the statement deserves to be quoted in full. Mustafa Kemal said:

There can be no question of a Kurdish problem, as far as we, i.e. Turkey, are concerned. Because, as you know, the Kurdish elements within our national borders are settled in such a way that they are concentrated only in very limited areas. As their concentration decreases and as they penetrate among Turkish elements, a[n ethnic] frontier has come about in such a way that if we wished to draw a border in the name of Kurdishness [*Kürtlük*] it would be necessary to destroy Turkishness and Turkey. It would, for example, be necessary to have a frontier extending to Erzurum, Erzincan, Sivas and Harput. One should not forget also the Kurdish tribes in the Konya desert. Therefore, rather than envisage Kurdishness as such, local autonomies of a sort will in any case come about in accordance with our constitution [lit. Law of Fundamental Organization]. As a result, wherever the population of a district [*liva*] is Kurdish, it will govern itself autonomously. Aside from this, whenever one speaks of the people of Turkey [*Türkiye'nin halkı*], they [i.e. the Kurds] should also be included. If they are not included, it is always possible that they

would make a grievance of it. Now, the Turkish Grand National Assembly is made up of empowered representatives both of Turks and of Kurds, and the two elements have joined their interests and destinies. They know that this is something held in common. To try and draw a separate frontier would not be right.⁵⁹

The same line was taken by İsmet (İnönü), as head of the Turkish delegation at the Lausanne conference, as he defended his country's claim to the province of Mosul, arguing that the government of Turkey was the government of the Kurds as well.⁶⁰ But I think it would be wrong to attribute Mustafa Kemal's attitude to the governance of the Kurds of Turkey to the hope of regaining Mosul, for in the same briefing to journalists in İzmit, he expressed his personal opinion that it was impossible to take Mosul by war, in other words by fighting the British (*Musul'u harben almak gayr-i mümkündür*), even although he said that the British wanted to set up a Kurdish government in Mosul, and that, if they did so, the idea might spread to the Kurds within Turkey's borders.⁶¹

In an immensely long address to the people of Izmir on 2 February 1923, Mustafa Kemal referred once again to Turkey's multiethnic character, saying, 'There is a primary element which has established the Turkish State. Then there are [other] elements which have joined their endeavours and their histories with those of this primary element. There are citizens from these elements too.'⁶² The example which Mustafa Kemal gave this time was not Circassians or Kurds, but Jews, who certainly came more readily to the mind in İzmit, since their neighbourhood in the city had survived the great fire the previous year, and the Jewish community had allowed delegates to the first Economic Congress, held later that month, to lodge in its orphanage.⁶³

The Turkish Socialist politician and publicist Doğu Perinçek who has drawn our attention both to Mustafa Kemal's instructions to Nihat Paşa and to his İzmit statement on the Kurds, wonders what happened after 1923 to prevent the incorporation of Mustafa Kemal's ideas in the 1924 constitution.⁶⁴ Why, in other words, was not a solution sought within the framework of the constitutional provisions on local government and on the basis of the recognition of the Kurds and of other ethnic elements in Turkey?

Elections were held soon after Mustafa Kemal's statements in İzmit and İzmir. Mustafa Kemal opened the first session of the second Grand National Assembly on 13 August 1923 with a speech in which he stressed the establishment of order as the first duty of the government. But he also said that the new Turkish state was a people's state.⁶⁵ The Assembly elected a committee to draw up a new constitution (*Kanun-u Esasî Encümeni*). Its

chairman was the journalist Yunus Nadi, a Turkish nationalist with radical ideas – ideas which were left-wing in the sense that Fascism was, at the start, a left-wing movement. Another influential member was Ahmet Ağaoğlu, an intellectual born in Azerbaijan and formerly active in the CUP. He tended to a liberal nationalist position. Sabiha (Sertel), who describes herself at the time as a utopian Socialist and who had newly returned from the United States, observed the discussions of the committee when she went to Ankara to join her husband Zekeriya, who had been appointed Director General of the Press.⁶⁶ Mustafa Kemal, she says, often took part in the work of the constitutional committee, which met in the stationmaster's house in Ankara. According to Sabiha Sertel, there was an intense argument on the article 4 (of the 1921 constitution) which stated 'The Grand National Assembly is made up of members elected by the people of the provinces'.⁶⁷ It appears from her account that the word 'province' was taken to mean 'chief town of a province', and that objectors argued that the people of smaller towns and villages should also be represented. She argues that behind the objections lay the fear that the provincial elites – military commanders, notables, landowners – were largely in Mustafa Kemal's pocket and that the members of the assembly they would elect would strengthen his position as a dictator. However that may be, the text was changed to 'the Grand National Assembly of Turkey is made up of deputies elected by the nation in accordance with the relevant law'.⁶⁸

Sabiha Sertel also claims that she complained to one of Mustafa Kemal's close companions, Mazhar Müfit (Kansu), who was at the time deputy for Denizli,⁶⁹ saying that there was nothing in the constitution about land reform and workers' rights, to which Mazhar Müfit replied: 'Mustafa Kemal wants to carry out many reforms. On land reform, he has talked here to landowners [*ağa*], particularly Kurdish landowners and to Kurdish deputies such as Feyzi Bey.⁷⁰ This problem of reform is very difficult. It is impossible to explain land reform to the *ağas*. Tackling the reform means losing all the *ağas* and notables. So for the moment we have closed the book on land reform.'⁷¹

Sabiha Sertel's testimony should be seen in the light of her subsequent commitment to the communist cause. But it is a fact that there were landowners from the south-east in the second GNA: two deputies from Malatya are identified as *ağa*,⁷² and none as a tribal leader, a designation which had been applied to several deputies in the first Grand National Assembly.⁷³ The main point at issue in the deliberations of the constitutional committee and then of the GNA, when the draft constitution was debated, was the power of the president, Mustafa Kemal, and matters which had a bearing on it. Local government, within whose structure Kurdish ethnicity was to have been accommodated, attracted no attention. According to

Professor Suna Kili, 'there was very little discussion on the section of the Constitution which was devoted to the administration of the provinces'.⁷⁴ In the GNA debate one deputy, Halis Turgut of Sivas (who was hanged in 1926 for his alleged complicity in the plot to assassinate Mustafa Kemal in İzmir)⁷⁵ complained that provincial councils (modelled on the French *conseils généraux des départements*) had no real powers, and that provinces should be able to run their own affairs.⁷⁶ It made no difference. The term 'autonomy' (*muhtariyet*) was dropped from the provisions of local government; so was the term *şura* for council. The six articles on local government in the 1921 constitution were reduced to two brief articles in 1924: article 90 'Provinces, cities, towns and villages are legal entities', and article 91, 'Provincial affairs are administered in accordance with the principles of extending (delegated) powers and distinguishing between functions [*tevsi-i mezuniyet ve tefrik-i vezâif esası*]'.⁷⁷ The constitution was adopted by a near-unanimous vote of the Assembly on 20 April 1924.⁷⁸

At the time there was no official opposition in the Assembly, most of whose members had been hand-picked by Mustafa Kemal. But this had not prevented successful moves to limit the president's powers in such matters as the dissolution of parliament and sending back laws for reconsideration. One of the deputies who spoke against giving the power of veto to the president was the lawyer Feridun Fikri (Düşünsel), deputy for the predominantly Kurdish province of Dersim,⁷⁹ who later became a member of the opposition Progressive Republican Party.⁸⁰ But neither he nor anyone else referred to the idea, discussed by Mustafa Kemal a year earlier, of granting predominantly Kurdish provinces the right to self-government within the framework of devolved local government. The plan had completely dropped out of the public debate. Why should this have been so?

The Mosul question was still unresolved, and, therefore, the need to secure the support of the Kurdish population of northern Iraq still remained, at least in theory. But as has been noted, the İzmit briefing in January 1923 suggests that Mustafa Kemal had written off Mosul. One could say cynically that the question of Kurdish self-government within Turkey was pushed aside as soon as the Lausanne treaty was signed on 24 July 1923, and the Turkish government's sovereign rights over its territory were recognized. But this does not explain the failure of the legal opposition and of the opposition press to pay any attention to the multiethnic character of the country's population, which Mustafa Kemal had recognized during the War of Independence.

I would suggest that the answer to the always difficult question why the dog did not bark – in this instance why Kurdish self-government dropped out of Ankara and Istanbul politics in 1924 – lies in the fact that priorities had changed. For Mustafa Kemal the priority was to create a modern,

secular Turkey. He needed absolute power to do it. Any kind of provincial self-government would have been an obstacle to his designs, particularly self-government in what he, along with the entire Turkish elite, considered to be a backward region. For the liberal opposition, the priority was to curb Mustafa Kemal's power. For the radical left, as witness Sabiha Sertel, Kurdishness or Kurdish nationalism (*Kürtçülük*) served the interests of landlords, feudal tribal leaders and other 'reactionaries'. It is beyond the scope of this study to examine at what stage Lenin's and then Stalin's adoption of what one could call phoney federalism, but what was called officially the nurturing of cultures national in form but socialist in content, was taken on board by Turkish Communists and *Marxisants*. But it was not a factor in the crucial year of 1924.

After 1923 Mustafa Kemal's principal intervention in the Kurdish question occurred in February/March 1925 at the time of the rebellion of the Kurdish Şeyh Sait. The government of Fethi (Okyar) declared martial law and put in train military measures against the rebels. The opposition Progressive Republican Party supported these government measures. But Mustafa Kemal decided that a firmer hand was needed. He summoned his trusted lieutenant İsmet (İnönü) from Istanbul and saw to it that his People's Party disowned Fethi and brought İsmet to power to take drastic action to put down the rebellion. When İsmet's draconian Maintenance of Order Law was endorsed by the Assembly on 4 March 1925, by 122 votes to 22, 37 of the deputies representing Kurdish provinces voted with the government and only seven with the opposition.⁸¹

In his proclamation on 7 March 1925, Mustafa Kemal attributed the rebellion to certain notables, who had been found guilty by the courts (*kanunen mücrim olan bazı müteneffizan*) and who used the mask of religion to conceal their purposes. He went on to declare that law and order would be safeguarded as the foundation of social and economic life.⁸² Opening the new session of the Assembly on 1 November 1925, he described the rebellion simply as a 'reactionary incident' (*irtica hadisesi*).

The opposition Progressive Republican Party was closed down in the aftermath of the Şeyh Sait rebellion. Yet the party's leader General Kâzım Karabekir had already in 1922/23 expressed the view that religious fanaticism had been used as an instrument to incite the Kurds to rebellion. Saying that what was important about the Kurds was not their number but the extent of the territory they occupied, Karabekir had proposed a characteristically idiosyncratic solution. Kurdish sheykhs, he said, should be replaced by intellectuals trained in the faculties of theology and law in Istanbul and taught Kurdish, and two Turkish corridors should be established, horizontally and vertically, around lake Van, thus ensuring that the government should dominate Kurdistan, militarily, politically and

religiously.⁸³ Mustafa Kemal, Fethi (Okyar) and Kâzım Karabekir disagreed on methods for tackling Kurdish risings. But they all took it for granted that the writ of the central government should run throughout the country.

As the government was preparing to ban the opposition Progressive Republican Party, a friend of Rauf (Orbay), who had been one of Mustafa Kemal's original companions in Anatolia but had become by then a political opponent, was questioned by the police about his links with the Kurds. The friend's name was Ömer Fevzi Mardin. He was a retired officer who had been assigned by Enver Paşa to assist Rauf in his clandestine mission in Iran at the beginning of the Great War. Ömer Fevzi Mardin told his questioners that his mother was the daughter of Bedirhan Paşa. This, he said, was his only link with the Kurds. But as an officer he had always served the cause of the unity under one flag of all the races (*ırk*) – we would say ethnic communities – living in the country.⁸⁴ Mustafa Kemal had spoken in similar terms during the War of Independence. But times had changed.

On 8 December 1925, the Ministry of Education issued a circular banning the use of such divisive terms as Kurd, Circassian and Laz, Kurdistan and Lazistan.⁸⁵ Mustafa Kemal explained the new thinking in the manual of civics which he dictated in 1930 to his adopted daughter Âfet İnan. The relevant paragraph reads:

Within the political and social unity of today's Turkish nation, there are citizens and co-nationals who have been incited to think of themselves as Kurds, Circassians, Laz or Bosnians. But these erroneous appellations – the product of past periods of tyranny – have brought nothing but sorrow to individual members of the nation, with the exception of a few brainless reactionaries, who became the enemy's instruments. This is because these individual members of the nation share with the generality of Turkish society the same past, history, concept of morals and laws.⁸⁶

There is no specific mention here of common ethnic origin. But in the same year, Mustafa Kemal approved the publication of an *Outline of Turkish History* (*Türk Tarihinin Ana Hatları*) – a title reminiscent of Atatürk's favourite history book, *The Outline of History* by H.G. Wells. The Turkish *Outline* formulated the Turkish historical thesis which claimed that many if not most civilizations had been created by people of Turkish origin. The claim included some at least of the Medes,⁸⁷ whom the Kurds consider as their ancestors, as well as the Achaemenians and Parthians.

Then, on 14 June 1934, the Law of Resettlement (*İskân Kanunu*)⁸⁸ made assimilation (*temsil*) of all the country's citizens to Turkish culture – note the word 'culture' – official government policy. The insistence on 'culture' can, of course, be traced to Ziya Gökalp, one of the main ideologists of

Turkish nationalism. The model was, as ever, France, where Bretons, Occitans, Savoyards, Flemings, etc. had all been assimilated to French culture. The government of the Turkish republic was determined not to repeat the mistake deplored the previous century by Namık Kemal when programmes – for education in Turkish – were not carried out. This time, there would be no negligence (*ihmal*).

Atatürk did not disapprove of this policy. Otherwise he would have stopped it. But his interests lay elsewhere – in the great project of modernization. Law and order was the province of İsmet İnönü's government, and Atatürk let him get on with it. As laws and institutions were changed and difficulties emerged, Atatürk made repeated tours of the provinces. But Diyarbakır and the south-east, which he promised to visit in 1919, were left out of his travels until the last year of his life. Finally, on 12 November 1937, Atatürk left Ankara by train for Diyarbakır in the company of his new prime minister Celâl Bayar. On the way, he visited the building site of a new textile mill in Malatya on 14 November. The following day he attended a concert at the People's House in Diyarbakır. 'After an interval of twenty years,' he said, 'here I am again in Diyarbakır, listening to beautiful modern music in one of the world's most beautiful and modern buildings, in the presence of civilized people, in this people's house.'⁸⁹ The following day, he inaugurated the work of extending the railway link through Diyarbakır to Iran and Iraq. He then stopped briefly at Elâziz (Mamuretülâziz): the authorities had made sure that the leaders of the last Dersim rising were executed before the visit.⁹⁰ Atatürk's adopted daughter, the military pilot Sabiha Gökçen, had earlier taken part in bombing raids against the rebels.

On 18 November, Atatürk was already in Adana. His stay in the south-east had lasted five days.⁹¹ But it left a lasting mark, for during it he decreed that Diyarbakır should be renamed Diyarbakır and Elâziz should become Elazığ in accordance with the Sun Theory of Language which found Turkish roots for all and any words of foreign origin. On his return, Atatürk declared that he had been happy to see all the people of the eleven provinces he had visited give willingly to the state treasury, without any hesitation and in a spirit of self-sacrifice, all that was surplus to their daily needs, for the sake of a rich, strong and grandiose Turkish republic.⁹²

Asım Us, a People's Party deputy and journalist, noted in his diary that, during his trip to the east, Atatürk had ordered the construction of military roads in Dersim (which was renamed Tunceli). But he cancelled the allocation of four million liras for the building of schools and of one million liras for the repair of damage done by bandits, on the grounds that it would be better to resettle mountain people in the fertile plains of the eastern provinces.⁹³

To sum up, during the years of the War of Independence, Mustafa Kemal recognized specifically the multiethnic character of the Muslim population of Turkey, while insisting on its fraternal unity. He also promised that local government would accommodate ethnic specificity. After 1923, any idea of the self-rule of individual Muslim ethnic communities dropped out of the Turkish political agenda. Mustafa Kemal devoted his energy to the consolidation of his power and to his cultural revolution. He had little time for the Kurds. Did he change his views and, as John Simpson of the BBC suggests, did he propagate the myth that the Turks were the only ethnic group in Turkey? I would say that he did so only in the sense that since everyone of note in history was of Turkish origin, so too were the Kurds.

The ideology which has shaped the policy of the governments of the Turkish republic towards its Kurdish citizens antedates Atatürk. His main contribution was to manage the Kurdish problem successfully during the War of Independence. Thereafter, the requirements of creating a modern nation state took precedence. It is true that Atatürk's cultural revolution was an additional obstacle to the preservation of distinct ethnic cultures, let alone to the introduction of local self-rule. But there was no vocal demand in Turkish society for either. In the circumstances, Atatürk could delegate the management of the Kurds to his government.

Today the Turkish historical thesis has been dropped together with the Sun Theory of Language. The diverse ethnic roots of the people of Turkey are openly discussed, and the word 'mosaic' has become a cliché in describing the country's ethnic picture. We are thus back to the language which Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk) used and the ideas which he put forward during the War of Independence. Hence the importance of recording and analysing what the pragmatic founding father of the Turkish Republic said during that crucial period of Turkish history.

NOTES

1. *Atatürk's Children: Turkey and the Kurds* (London, 1996), p.11. The book was reviewed in *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol.30, No.1 (January 1997), pp.155–6.
2. *Milliyet*, 30 June 1998, p.8.
3. 'Güneydoğu Sorunu' [The Problem of the South-East] in *Milliyet*, 10 August 1998, p.19.
4. Details in Celâl Erikan, *Komutan Atatürk* [Atatürk as a Commander] (Ankara, 1972), pp.184–217.
5. Extracts in Uluğ İğdemir, *Atatürk'ün Yaşamı* [Atatürk's Life], Türk Tarih Kurumu (Ankara, 1980), pp.79–87.
6. İzzettin Çalışlar, *Atatürk'le İki buçuk Yıl* [Two and a half years with Atatürk] (Istanbul, 1993).
7. Çalışlar, op. cit., p.102.
8. Çalışlar, op. cit., p.134.
9. Çalışlar, op. cit., p.130.
10. ATASE [Military History Dept. of Turkish General Staff], *Türk İstiklâl Harbine Katılan Tümen ve Daha Üst Kademelerdeki Komutanların Biyografileri* [Biographies of Divisional

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11. Fahrettin Altay, *On Yıl Savaş (1912–1922) ve Sonrası* [Ten Years of War (1912–1922) and After] (Istanbul, 1970), p.29ff.
 12. Altay, op. cit., p.53.
 13. Altay, op. cit., p.57.
 14. Altay, op. cit., p.70.
 15. Selim Deringil, *The Well-Protected Domains* (London, 1998), pp.101–4.
 16. *Ana Britannica*, 1st ed. (Istanbul, 1986–87), Vol.II, p.471.
 17. Quoted by Masami Arai, *Turkish Nationalism in the Young Turk Era* (Leiden, 1992), p.3.
 18. Afetinan, *Atatürk Hakkında Hâtıralar ve Belgeler* [Reminiscences and Documents Concerning Atatürk] (Istanbul, 1984), pp.43–51.
 19. Text of letter in Salih Bozok, *Hep Atatürk'ün Yanında* [Ever at Atatürk's Side] (Istanbul, 1985), pp.182–3.
 20. David McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds* (London, 1996), p.121.
 21. *Ibid.*, p.123; *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed. (Leiden, 1958), Vol.I, p.871; *Ana Britannica*, Vol.XIV, p.185.
 22. McDowall, op. cit., p.122.
 23. McDowall, op. cit., pp.121–3.
 24. ATASE, *Atatürk Özel Arşivinden Seçmeler* [Extracts from Atatürk's Private Archive], Vol.IV, Genelkurmay Basımevi [General Staff Press] (Ankara, 1996). Ahmet Cevdet's first report on pp.1–8.
 25. Mahmut Goloğlu, *Sivas Kongresi* [The Sivas Congress] (Ankara, 1969), p.120.
 26. Full list of delegates in Mahmut Goloğlu, *Erzurum Kongresi* [The Erzurum Congress] (Ankara, 1968), pp.78–80.
 27. Text in Goloğlu, *Erzurum Kongresi*, pp.201–2.
 28. Kemal Atatürk, *Nutuk: Vesikalar* [Speech: Documents], Atatürk Kültür, Dil ve Tarih Yüksek Kurumu, Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi, Ankara 1991, Document No.41, p.643.
 29. Mazhar Müfit Kansu, *Erzurum'dan Ölümüne Kadar Atatürk'le Beraber* [At Atatürk's Side from the Erzurum Congress to His Death] (Ankara, 1988), Vol.II, pp.112–13.
 30. Erikan, *Komutan Atatürk*, p.585.
 31. Şevket Süreyya Aydemir, *Tek Adam* [The Only Man] (Istanbul, 1984), Vol.II, p.89; Mazhar Müfit Kansu, pp.198–203.
 32. Date in *Diary of Major Noel* (Basra, 1919), p.19. Charge mentioned in Ahmet Cevdet's telegram of 12 September to Grand Vizier, copy 3rd Corps in Sivas (ATASE, p.78).
 33. *Diary of Major Noel*, p.1.
 34. *Diary of Major Noel*, p.21.
 35. Goloğlu, *Sivas Kongresi*, pp.74, 124.
 36. Mahmut Goloğlu, *Sivas Kongresi*, p.110.
 37. Text in Goloğlu, *Sivas Kongresi*, pp.232–4.
 38. ATASE, p.79.
 39. *The Diary of Major Noel*, p.24.
 40. Recep Zühtü's telegrams to 3rd corps in Sivas in ATASE, pp.91–7.
 41. Sina Akşin, *İstanbul Hükümetleri ve Millî Mücadele* [The Istanbul Governments and the National Struggle] (Istanbul, 1992), Vol.I, p.589.
 42. İlhan Tekeli and Selim İlkin, 'Kurtuluş Savaşında Talat Paşa ile Mustafa Kemal'in Mektuplaşmaları' [Correspondence between Talat Paşa and Mustafa Kemal during the Liberation Struggle], *Belleterin* (Ankara, 1980), Vol.XLIV, No.174, p.321.
 43. *Atatürk'ün Söylev ve Demeçleri (ASD)* [Atatürk's Speeches and Declarations], Atatürk Kültür, Dil ve Tarih Yüksek Kurumu, Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi (Ankara, 1989), Vol.I, p.30.
 44. ASD, Vol.I, pp.74–5.
 45. ASD, Vol.I, p.236.
 46. ASD, Vol.II, pp.37, 39.
 47. Original wording of the text in Rona Aybay, *Karşılaştırmalı 1961 Anayasası* [Comparative (Text) of 1961 Constitution] (Fakülteler Matbaası, Istanbul, 1963), p.199.
 48. ATASE, p.69.

49. *TBMM Gizli Celse Zabıtları* [Minutes of Secret Sessions of the Grand National Assembly] (Ankara, 1985), Vol.III, p.551.
50. ATASE, p.69.
51. *TBMM Gizli Celse Zabıtları*, Vol.II, p.270.
52. *TBMM Gizli Celse Zabıtları*, Vol.II, p.630.
53. Kâzım Karabekir, *İstiklâl Harbimiz* [Our War of Independence] (Istanbul, 1969), pp.978–9.
54. Robert Olson, *The Emergence of Kurdish Nationalism and the Sheikh Said Rebellion, 1880–1925* (Austin, TX, 1989), pp.38–9.
55. McDowall, pp.187–8.
56. *TBMM Gizli Celse Zabıtları*, pp.248–80. The context shows that the word *müstakil* (independent) refers to *müstakil sancak* or *liva* (separate district or province) rather than full state independence.
57. *TBMM Gizli Celse Zabıtları*, Vol.II, p.623.
58. *TBMM Gizli Celse Zabıtları*, Vol.III, p.559.
59. Doğu Perinçek (ed.), *Mustafa Kemal: Eskişehir-İzmit Konuşmaları (1923)* [Mustafa Kemal: Speeches in Eskişehir and İzmit (1923)] (Istanbul, 1993), p.104.
60. Stephen Evans, *The Slow Rapprochement: Britain and Turkey in the Age of Kemal Atatürk, 1919–38* (Walkington, England, 1982), pp.85–6.
61. *Eskişehir-İzmit Konuşmaları*, pp.94–6.
62. Sadi Borak (ed.), *Atatürk'ün Resmî Yayınlara Girmemiş Söylev, Demeç, Yazışma ve Söyleşileri* [Atatürk's Speeches, Declarations, Correspondence and Interviews Which Have Not Been Included in Official Publications] (Istanbul, 1997), p.225.
63. Mahmut Goloğlu, *Türkiye Cumhuriyeti 1923* [The Republic of Turkey: 1923], p.94.
64. *Eskişehir-İzmit Konuşmaları*, p.13.
65. *ASD*, I, 337, 338.
66. Sabiha Sertel, *Roman Gibi* [Like a Novel] (Istanbul, 1969), pp.68–78.
67. Sabiha Sertel calls this article 4 of the draft. In fact it was article 4 of the 1921 constitution (see Aybay, op. cit., p.99).
68. Aybay, op. cit., p.99.
69. Goloğlu, *Türkiye Cumhuriyeti*, p.320.
70. She probably means Fevzi (Pirinççi), deputy for Diyarbekir (Goloğlu, *Türkiye Cumhuriyeti*, p.320).
71. Sabiha Sertel, p.76.
72. Goloğlu, *Türkiye Cumhuriyeti*, p.324.
73. Goloğlu, *Üçüncü Meşrutiyet* [The Third Constitution(al Period)], gives the tribal affiliations of three deputies from Dersim (p.328), one from Erzincan (p.329) and one from Van (p.343).
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79. Goloğlu, *Devrimler ve Tepkileri*, pp.37–8.
80. Mete Tunçay, *T.C.'de Tek-Parti Yönetimi'nin Kurulması* [The Establishment of the Single-Party Regime in the Turkish Republic] (Istanbul, 1981), p.108.
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83. Karabekir, *İstiklâl Harbimiz*, p.1034.
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87. *Türk Tarihinin Ana Hatları* [An Outline of Turkish History], reprinted in 1996 with an introduction by Doğu Perinçek (Istanbul), p.289.
88. Law No.2510, published in *Resmî Gazete* [Official Gazette] on 21 June 1934.
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90. İhsan Sabri Çağlayangil, *Anılarım* [My Reminiscences] (Istanbul, 1990), pp.46–55.
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92. *ASD*, Vol.IV, pp.678–9.
93. Asım Us, *1930–1950 Hatıra Notları* [Notebooks 1930–1950] (Istanbul, 1966), p.234. İsmet İnönü says in his memoirs that, on the contrary, he had concentrated on education in Dersim and that by 1950, when he left the office of president, it had more primary schools than any other Turkish province. In the end, says İnönü, railways solved the problem of Dersim. Roads were later built to link the area to the rest of the country (İsmet İnönü, *Hatıralar* (Ankara, 1987), Vol.II, p.269.)