

## THE UNIVERSAL VALUES OF ATATÜRK'S EDUCATIONAL POLICY\*

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On the very day when the Grand National Assembly of Turkey unanimously resolved and declared that the new State was to be a republic, Atatürk gave an interview to the French journalist Maurice Pernot. The interview covered a number of issues concerning not only the Turkish-French educational relations but also—in fact, more significantly—Turkey's full commitment to the West and the process of modernization<sup>1</sup>. During the course of the interview, Atatürk explicitly emphasized that

*The Turkish people are the friend of all the civilized nations... Countries vary, but civilization is one, and for its own progress a people must fully take part in this one civilization. The decline of the Ottoman Empire began as soon as it cut off its ties with the European nations. This was a fault, but we will not repeat it... We want to modernize our country. All our efforts are devoted to the establishment in Turkey of a modern and, hence, western State. What country is there that has wished to take part in civilization but has not turned to the West?*<sup>2</sup>

Indeed, following the victorious conclusion of the War of Independence out of which emerged the new Turkish State universally endorsed by the Treaty of Lausanne and fully determined to take its respected and distinguished place in that "one civilization," Atatürk unrelentingly embarked with the nation on an arduous process of modernization through a series of radical reforms in all the segments of social life and institutions. Of these reforms the Republic was, as he most strongly emphasized in his most concise address to the nation on the tenth anniversary, "the greatest, the most fundamental" of all the reforms achieved in the country "in a short time"<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> For the text in Turkish of the interview, see *Atatürk'ün Söylev ve Demeçleri*, ed. Nimet Arsan, 3rd ed., 3 vols (Ankara: Dil ve Tarih-Coğrafya Fakültesi Basımevi, 1981), III, 66-70.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, III, 67-8.

<sup>3</sup> For a full text in Turkish of Atatürk's address on the tenth anniversary of the Republic, see *ibid.*, II 274-6.

In the modernization process it was with the reform and secularization of national education that Atatürk was primarily concerned. Ever since his school days he had always been convinced that outdated and irrational educational policies and systems had been the main reason for the backwardness of the country and the people. Therefore, in his address on 28 December 1919 to a delegation of the Ankara people who had paid him a courtesy visit, he pointed out that it was essential "to promote within a short time the learning and education of the nation in accordance with modern exigencies."<sup>4</sup> A further example of the great importance he gave to national education as the first step towards modernization and full membership of the civilized world was the convening in Ankara on 16-21 July 1921 of the first national educational conference. The conference was held at a time when the nation was fighting a war of survival for its independence against an enemy just outside on the plains of Ankara. Under these most painful and excruciating circumstances, the conference carried out its work for the planning of national education and for the definition of new educational strategies required for a radical sweeping reform in education and indispensable for the attainment of the objectives on the road to modernization.

Our purpose in this paper, therefore, is not so much to give a detailed account of Atatürk's educational reform as to underline what we may call the universal values of his educational policy. Probably the term "universal values" needs some clarification. In this context, we may recall Aristotle; who in his *Politics*, explained that "education itself must be made a national concern"<sup>5</sup> and that its ultimate aim must include "both virtue and utility."<sup>6</sup> Indeed, one may claim that throughout history the major concern of education has been both to provide skills needed by the community for its prosperity and to train good citizens through the inculcation in them of higher moral, human, and spiritual qualities necessary for the promotion of human dignity. Of these two major objectives the former may be regarded as the *national* aim of education and the latter as the *universal* aim. Therefore, the universal values which are to be embodied in

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 13.

<sup>5</sup> *The Politics*, trans. and introd. T.A. Sinclair (1962; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967), p. 300 [VIII.2].

<sup>6</sup> For Aristotle's discussion of the nature and aims of education, see *ibid.*, pp. 300 ff [VIII. 2 ff.].

a national educational policy are the values which contribute to the promotion of these principles and qualities which are indispensable for the progress of humanity and the preservation of civilization.

In this respect, when we study Atatürk's educational policy and go through his speeches and statements he made on various occasions, we definitely see that he always emphasized both national and universal values of his educational policy. He was first and foremost a nationalist, a great spokesman and embodiment of national values. But he was also fully committed and devoted to the universal values of humanity and its civilization. For instance, in his famous address on 27 October 1922 to a delegation of the Istanbul teachers who had come to Bursa to pay tribute to him for the great victory, he stressed that the school was to teach to young people not only the love of the country, independence and honour but also "respect for mankind."<sup>7</sup> In the same address he further pointed out that the objectives and ideals to be pursued and upheld in Turkish education must relate to the needs of social life on the one hand and to the exigencies of the contemporary civilized world<sup>8</sup>. For him,

*We cannot just close our eyes and think that we can lead an isolated life. We cannot withdraw our country into isolation by cutting off our ties with the world. On the contrary, we shall live within the bounds of civilization as a progressive and civilized nation. And this mode of life can only be attained through science and learning. We shall take science and learning wherever we find it, and we shall inculcate it in the mind of every member of the community. There can be no restriction and condition for science and learning<sup>9</sup>.*

Thus, it is obvious from this most explicit statement that Atatürk regarded education as the most fundamental element of progress, international peace and cooperation. For him, progress can only be achieved through an educational policy based upon, and guided by, the secular principles of modern science and rational thinking. Nourished and enriched by national culture and ideals on the one hand and by the universal values of human civilization and dignity on the other, education was to contribute to the cultural, social, economic, scientific and moral development of the nation whereby it could play a constructive and creative

<sup>7</sup> See Atatürk'ün Söylev ve Demeçleri, ed.cit., II, 43.

<sup>8</sup> See *ibid.*, II, 44.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 44.

part in the preservation and promotion of universal human values and civilization. This point was recurrently maintained in all his major statements on education and has always been one of the guiding principles of modern Turkish education. Indeed, addressing the national conference of the Teachers' Union, held in Ankara on 25 July 1924, he stated that

*Our national ethics must be fostered and strengthened through civilized principles and liberal ideas...Our general policy of education is based on these principles*<sup>10</sup>.

About a month later, in his Dumlupınar speech he again returned to this fundamental principle when he declared that

*Gentlemen, the aim of our people, indeed the ideal of our people, is to become in the world a fully civilized community. It is an imperative of vital importance to progress and to be successful on the road to civilization...This is the only way to develop and progress in order to be successful in social life, economic life, science and technology*<sup>11</sup>.

Again in his address on the tenth anniversary of the Republic he reiterated that "the torch the Turkish nation holds in its hand and mind on the road of progress and civilization is positive science."<sup>12</sup>

In concluding we may once again assert that Atatürk's educational policy was not confined to the national needs and values alone but also it embodied the universal values of humanity and civilization, and the relationship between the two sets of values was always emphasized. For him, it is through education that a world of peace, friendship, tolerance, independence and freedom can be created, that scientific and technological progress can be achieved and that the notions of the world can all constitute a civilized whole. Yet, the precondition of all this is world peace, which he most succinctly expressed as "Peace at Home, Peace in the World." And the Turkish Republic, which is his greatest work, has always upheld this principle and his legacy of other principles including those of his educational policy.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 173.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 181.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 275.

**ATATÜRK'ÜN EĞİTİM POLİTİKASININ EVRENSEL DEĞERLERİ**

**ÖZET**

Atatürk'ün eğitim politikası sadece ulusal ihtiyaçlar ve değerlerle sınırlı kalmamış, insanlığın ve uygarlığın evrensel değerlerini de özünde birleştirmiştir. Nitekim, çeşitli söylev ve demeçlerinde Atatürk eğitimin ulusal ve evrensel değerlerini bir bütün olarak ele almış, bilim ve teknolojinin gelişmesinde ve dünya barışının sağlanmasında eğitimin önemini vurgulamıştır.

