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Daria V. ZHIGULSKAYA
Institute of Asian and African Studies,
Lomonosov Moscow State University
Moscow, Russia
daria.zhigulskaia@rambler.ru

ЖИГУЛЬСКАЯ Дарья Владимировна
Институт стран Азии и Африки,
Московский государственный университет
им. М.В. Ломоносова
г. Москва, Россия
daria.zhigulskaia@rambler.ru

DEVELOPMENT OF DEMOCRATIZATION
PROCESSES IN TURKEY IN THE LATE OTTOMAN
AND EARLY REPUBLICAN PERIODS

ИСТОРИЯ ДЕМОКРАТИЗАЦИОННЫХ
ПРОЦЕССОВ В ТУРЦИИ В
ПОЗДНЕОСМАНСКИЙ И
РАННЕРЕСПУБЛИКАНСКИЙ ПЕРИОДЫ

Since the start of the third wave of democratization and the end of the Cold War, the study of democracy and democratization has occupied center stage in the field of comparative politics. The focus of this work has been diverse, ranging from questions such as the origins and design of democracy to its overall quality and sustainability. Turkey, which is the subject of this paper, is a unique example of a secular country with a Muslim population that has a long history of democratization processes rooted back in the late Ottoman Empire (although the quality of its present democracy is debatable). It is also worth bearing in mind that complex phenomena such as democratization are never linear, but rather experience ups and downs. This paper focuses on the early steps towards the establishment of a democratic regime in Turkey, such as adoption of the First and Second Constitutions in the Ottoman Empire, proclamation of the Republic, implementation of Atatürk's reforms, and transition to a multi-party system. Thus, it could be argued that the foundations of the democratic regime in Turkey were laid as far back as the Tanzimat period. The Ottoman experience of constitutional monarchy and parliamentary life has strongly influenced the further democratization processes in the country during the 20th century. However, the early republican period was not a democratic regime, although its legacy contributed to the formation of some background conditions for a democratic system. The real political liberalization in Turkey started in 1946 with the transition to a multi-party system.

Демократия и демократизационные процессы представляют собой ключевую область научного исследования сравнительной политологии со времен окончания холодной войны. При этом предмет изучения значительно варьировался, затрагивая широкий спектр вопросов, таких как, например, «истoki» демократии и ее «качество». Турция является исключительным примером светской страны, в которой большинство населения исповедует ислам, а история демократизационных процессов притом насчитывает уже более сотни лет (поскольку берет начало в позднеосманский период). В этой статье рассматриваются «первые шаги» на пути установления демократического режима в Турции, такие как принятие первой и второй конституций Османской империи, провозглашение Турецкой Республики, имплементация реформ Ататюрка и переход к многопартийной системе. Можно заключить, что первые попытки демократизации общества были предприняты еще в период Танзимата. Они, несомненно, оказали влияние на дальнейшие внутривластные процессы в стране в XX в. Однако режим раннереспубликанского периода нельзя считать демократическим, хотя его наследие способствовало формированию основ демократической системы в стране. Действительная же политическая либерализация в Турции началась в связи с переходом к многопартийности в 1946 г.

Keywords: Republic of Turkey, Ottoman Empire, democracy, Atatürk's reforms, Islam, Constitution, Young Turk Revolution, Tanzimat period, secularism, Kemalism

Ключевые слова: Турецкая Республика, Османская империя, демократия, реформы Ататюрка, ислам, конституция, младотурецкая революция, период Танзимата, секуляризм, кемализм

Turkey has a long history, dating back to the late Ottoman period, of seeking to fuse Islam and Westernization. Thus, the Sultan of the Ottoman Empire adopted and proclaimed a Constitution (*Kanun-I Esasi*) restricting his autocratic powers and ushering in the Constitutional Monarchy period with a Parliament on December 23, 1876. The Constitution was implemented for two years and was reinstated in 1908 as a result of the *Young Turk Revolution*, which marked the start of the *Second Constitutional Era* of the Empire.

The Ottoman Empire was able to survive as long as it did by virtue of its centralized and vertical nature. This centralization aimed to preserve imperial integrity, but from the end of the 18th century onwards it also became a source of political and economic stagnation. The reforms of the *Tanzimat* period and subsequent periods aimed to

modernize the empire and laid some of the foundations of a secular state. The reforms aimed to modernize the Ottoman Empire and to secure its territorial integrity, while also attempting to integrate non-Muslims and non-Turks more thoroughly into Ottoman society by enhancing their civil liberties and granting them equality throughout the Empire. The edict known as the Imperial Edict of Gülhane (November 3, 1839) and, later, the Imperial Islâhat Firmân, or Imperial Reform Edict (February 18, 1856), introduced important changes in the areas of education, culture, philosophy, law, literature and society, promising equality to all citizens regardless of creed. The *Tanzimat* innovations brought in significant mandatory and permanent changes in the system of State management. The most important innovation was the formation of a law force. During that time, the judicial system in Turkey became more like that in the West, though political stagnation and defeat in WWI ultimately led to the collapse of the Empire.

The transition to the secular Republic of Turkey was undeviating and rapid: on 1st November 1922 the National Assembly passed a law abolishing the sultanate; on October 29, 1923 Turkey was proclaimed a republic; and finally, on March 3, 1924, the caliphate was abolished. Turkey's first president, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, believed that Turkey should be transformed into a modern European state.

S. Benhabib says: "The creation of modern Turkey through the reforms of Kemal Atatürk can be viewed as a paradigmatic example of civic nationalism. In order to forge a new civic identity out of the old Ottoman Empire, which prided itself in being composed of seventy-two millets, Atatürk had to position the new nation in opposition to the Persian and Arab legacies that dominated the cultural life of the empire" [1, p. 9]. It seems that the term "dominated", used by Benhabib, is something of an exaggeration, though the influence of Persian and Arab cultures cannot be denied.

After the abolition of the sultanate and caliphate, Atatürk organized the new republic as a secular parliamentary regime. The 1924 Constitution guaranteed equality before the law and freedom of thought, speech, publication and association. Sovereignty lay with the people and was exercised in their name by a single-chamberment - the Grand National Assembly, - which elected the president of the republic, who then chose the prime minister [4, p. 195]. With Atatürk began the "political modernization" of Turkey. In February 1926 the Turkish Civil Code was adopted, proclaiming equality between men and women, and in 1934 women gained the right to vote.

In the context of relations between Islam and the republican system, it is important to underline that Article 2 of the 1924 Constitution stated: "The religion of the Turkish state is Islam; its official language is Turkish; its capital is the city of Ankara". But with Law № 1222 in 1928 this article was amended to read: "The official language of the Turkish state is Turkish; its capital is the city of Ankara". In 1937, Law № 3115 amended the article again to include the six cardinal principles of the state. This 1937 amendment read: "The Turkish state is Republican, Nationalist, Populist, Etatist, Laïc and Reformist. Its official language is Turkish; its capital is the city of Ankara".

One of a wide range of reforms aimed at modernizing the state and society was the abolition of the Ottoman script, which was written in Arabic letters and was a mixture of Persian, Turkish and Arabic. In its place a new official language was created: a combination of the Latin alphabet and the vocabulary of the vernacular Turkish spoken in the countryside as well as the cities. A Law on Unity of Education and a Law on Organization of the Ministry of Education were adopted, setting out the underlying principles for the organization and administration of the educational system.

One of the crucial steps on the way towards secularization of the country was the adoption of the Law on Organisation of the Presidency of Religious Affairs. It is important to point out that in the Turkish Republic secularism did not (and does not) mean

merely the separation of state and religion, as it does in most Western societies. The Kemalist state, inspired to a certain extent by the French system, insisted on the control of religion by state institutions (so that the principle of secularism was implemented in the sense of *laïcism*). Another secularist law prohibited all the institutions and organizations of all the heterodox strands of Islam: thus, the various *Sufi* and *Alevi* orders were closed down and banned from practising. According to Turkish researcher N. Saraç, the newly established Republic did not reject Islam; on the contrary, it aimed to maintain its historical experience, “but took religion under control and tried to develop its own “domesticated” Islam” [5, p. 217].

Thus, it could be argued that the foundations of the democratic regime in Turkey were laid as far back as the *Tanzimat* period and have evolved continuously thereafter. The crucial development on this path was, clearly, the establishment of the Republic of Turkey in 1923 and the implementation of a wide range of secularist reforms. Deletion of the clause stating that “the religion of the Turkish state is Islam” from Article 2 of the Constitution in 1928 and the addition of “laicism” as one of the main principles of the state in 1937, in my view, completed the formation of Turkey as a modern secular regime. However, secularization of the country did not mean the decline of Islam in Turkey. According to P. Mansfield, “Kemalist reforms were profound and far-reaching; however, they did not mean that the Turkish people as a whole renounced Islam. Though the authority of the *ulama* was destroyed, the Turkish masses, who remained peasant farmers, preserved their Islamic faith” [4, p. 195].

On the other hand, westernization of the country, its secularization and implementation of the reforms were conducted under an autocratic regime, and real political liberalization in Turkey started in 1946.

It is widely known that before 1946 there was just one functioning political party in Turkey - the Republican People's Party (RPP) (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*), established by Atatürk.

Yet between 1946 and 1952, 28 new political parties were created. Obviously, the most influential of these was the Democrat Party (DP) (*Demokrat Parti*), established on 7th of January 1946 and led by Celal Bayar. In the 1946 general election, the DP won 13% of the vote, rising to 55.02% in the 1950 election (4,391,000 votes; 416 seats), compared to 39% for the RPP (3,148,000 votes; 69 seats) [5, p. 313]. However, it should be mentioned that as the 1946 election was held using the open vote and secret count method, it cannot be described as democratic.

The transformation of the Turkish political system from one-party authoritarian rule to multi-party democracy in the aftermath of the Second World War has been the subject of extensive scholarly discussion and debate. The arguments explaining the transition to democracy can be basically divided into three groups: the first maintains that the transition to democracy should be viewed as the outcome of international pressures exerted on Turkey by Western powers and Turkey's efforts to join the group of democratic countries in a newly emerging environment of bipolarity; the second approach emphasizes the role of structural changes, and especially the growing influence of economic and business elites pushing for liberalization of economic policies; and the third view underlines the role of agency, explaining the transformation of the political system by İnönü's personal beliefs and leadership. Thus, for example, J. VanderLippe suggests that İsmet İnönü's presidency could be “seen as an intersection in modern Turkish history from which two roads could have followed...the road chosen was neither the route to complete suppression of dissent nor truly open, representative democracy” [7, p. 5].

However, the transition to a multi-party system and the victory of the Democrat Party in the 1950 election should be conceived as a combination of internal factors and

international circumstances. The emergence of the DP in 1945 may be seen as the result of continuous internal dissent among RPP members that finally led to a conflict within the party over a law that proposed giving the lands of wealthy landowners to peasants. This law led to a reaction by landowners, who later became the founders of the DP. The law was ratified on the initiative of İsmet İnönü, but because of the resistance from the landowners some steps backwards were taken later on. Thus, one of the weak points of the RPP government was its relationship with the peasantry. According to E. Gellner, it can be said that Kemalism was more popular among the higher classes of society than among the lower ones [2, pp. 81-91].

On May 19, 1945 İsmet İnönü gave a speech of great importance: he spoke of the necessity of transition towards democracy and labelled it as a primary goal for Turkey. He referred to two important features of the transition: 1) it was compulsory; 2) it should be gradual and peaceful [3, pp. 30-32].

Among the external factors that influenced the transition to a multi-party system the most important was the impetus lent by the outcome of WWII. Turkey joined the Western block in a bi-polarizing world order, and in 1952 became a member of NATO. Another relevant factor was the application of the Truman doctrine and close relations with the West: Turkey was influenced by the example of Western democracy and tried to establish a similar system.

Thus, many factors must be taken into consideration when discussing the early processes of democratization in Turkey.

The Ottoman experience of constitutional monarchy and parliamentary life (even though they can hardly be described as continuous evolution in the direction of democracy) strongly influenced the further democratization processes in Turkey during the 20th century. Democracy as an ideology was imported from Western Europe by the Ottoman military-bureaucratic elite, yet the country's socioeconomic conditions, together with its historical/cultural legacy (complex ethnic and religious composition, social class and literacy diversification etc.), generated pressures for democratization in the late Ottoman Empire and early republican Turkey.

These factors necessitated consolidation of power and nation building, implemented by the republican government and known as Atatürk's cultural and political reforms. However, the specific nature of the modernization reforms resulted in a culturally bifurcated society. According to I. Turan, "the modernizing cadres of the early republic implemented a strict policy of laicization and they tried to drive religion, as much as possible, outside the domain of politics. These factors and others left their imprint on how democracy evolved in Turkey and what kind of problems it encountered on the way" [6, p. 24].

The early republic under a single party (1923-1946) was not a democratic regime, but its legacy contributed to the formation of some background conditions for a democratic system. The fact that on the day after Atatürk's death İnönü was elected President with no succession crisis indicates a certain degree of institutionalization of the regime that later made possible a smooth transition to democracy. One important feature of Turkish democratization was the fact that it was fostered to a large extent by an intra-elite struggle. As Turan points out, "the oppositional movements were neither developed nor led by groups that were not already a part of the ruling elite though some local notables joined the new parties during the process of their formation. The intra-elite nature of political change had a tempering influence on political competition, keeping harshness to the level of rhetoric and not allowing it to develop into bloody physical struggles to force a democratic opening" [6, p. 83]. In other words, the fact that the leaders of the new opposition came from a common past with the republicans facilitated the transi-

tion. The transition to a multi-party system had also fostered integration of other groups within Turkish society - such as the rural masses and the urban poor - into the political life of the country.

It also should be borne in mind that after the 1946 election one of the main issues in Turkish politics was electoral reform. The new law on elections was passed on February 16, 1950. It stressed three basic democratic principles - secret ballot, open counting of votes and protection of elections by the judicial system - that led to the establishment of a democratic regime in Turkey.

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Information about the author:

Daria V. Zhigulskaya, Candidate of Historical Sciences, Department of Central Asia and the Caucasus, Institute of Asian and African Studies, Lomonosov Moscow State University, Moscow, Russia
daria.zhigulskaya@rambler.ru

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Информация об авторе:

Жигульская Дарья Владимировна, кандидат исторических наук, кафедра стран Центральной Азии и Кавказа, Институт стран Азии и Африки, Московский государственный университет им. М.В. Ломоносова, г. Москва, Россия
daria.zhigulskaya@rambler.ru

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