

Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of the Turkish Republic and its first President, stands as a towering figure of the 20th Century. Among the great leaders of history, few have achieved so much in so short period, transformed the life of a nation decisively, and given such profound inspiration to the world at large.

## Social Reforms

*"The major challenge facing us is to elevate our national life to the highest level of civilization and prosperity." Mustafa Kemal Ataturk*

Atatürk's aim was to modernize Turkish life in order to give his nation a new sense of **dignity, equality, and happiness**. In his program of modernization, **secular government** and **education** played a major role. Making religious faith a matter of individual conscience, he created a truly secular system in Turkey, where the vast Moslem majority and the small Christian and Jewish minorities are free to practice their faith. As a result of Atatürk's reforms, Turkey -unlike scores of other countries- has fully secular institutions.

The leader of modern Turkey aspired to freedom and equality for all. When he proclaimed the Republic, he announced that *"The new Turkish State is a state of the people and a state by the people."* Having established a populist and egalitarian system, he later observed: *"We are a nation without classes or special privileges."* He also stressed the paramount importance of the peasants, who had long been neglected in the Ottoman times:

*" The true owner and master of Turkey is the peasant who is the real producer."*

To give his nation a modern outlook, Atatürk introduced many reforms: European **hats replaced the fez**; **women stopped wearing the veil**; **all citizens took surnames**; and **the Islamic calendar gave way to the Western calendar**. A vast transformation took place in the urban and rural life. It can be said that few nations have ever experienced anything comparable to the social change in Atatürk's Turkey

## Economic Growth

*"In order to raise our new Turkey to the level that she is worthy of, we must, under all circumstances, attach the highest importance to the national economy." Mustafa Kemal Ataturk*

When the Turkish Republic came into being in 1923, it lacked capital, industry, and know-how. Successive wars had decimated manpower, agricultural



production stood at a low level, and the huge foreign debts of the defunct Ottoman state confronted the new Republic.

President Atatürk swiftly moved to initiate a dynamic program of economic development. *"Our nation,"* he stated, *" has crushed the enemy forces. But to achieve independence we must observe the following rule: National sovereignty should be supported by financial independence. The only power that will propel us to this goal is the economy. No matter how mighty they are, political and military victories cannot endure unless they are crowned by economic triumphs."*

With determination and vigor, Atatürk's Turkey undertook **agricultural expansion, industrial growth, and technological advancement**. In mining, transportation, manufacturing, banking, exports, social services, housing, communications, energy, mechanization, and other vital areas, many strides were taken. Within the decade, the gross national product increased **five-fold**.

## The New Alphabet

*"The cornerstone of education is an easy system of reading and writing. The key to this is the new Turkish alphabet based on the Latin script." Mustafa Kemal Ataturk*



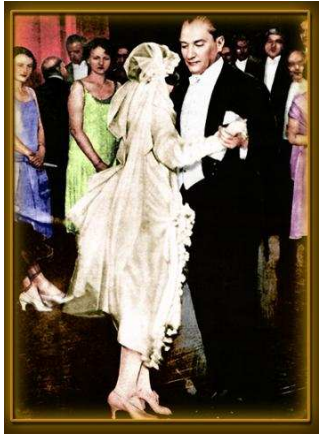
The most difficult change in any society is probably a language reform. Most nations never attempt it; those who do, usually prefer a gradual approach. Under Atatürk's Leadership, Turkey undertook the modern **world's swiftest and most extensive language reform**. In 1928, when he decided that the Arabic script, which had been used by the Turks for a thousand years, should be replaced with the Latin alphabet. He asked the experts: *" How long would it take ?"* Most of them replied: *" At least five years."* *" We shall do it,"* Atatürk said, *" within five*

*months"*

As the 1920s came to an end, Turkey had fully and functionally adopted, with its 29 letters (8 vowels and 21 consonants), has none of the complexities of the Arabic script, which was ill-suited to the Turkish language. The language reform enabled children and adults to read and write within a few months, and to study Western languages with greater effectiveness.

## Women's Rights

**"Everything we see in the world is the creative work of women."**



With abiding faith in the vital importance of women in society, Atatürk launched many reforms to give **Turkish women equal rights and opportunities**. The new Civil Code, adopted in 1926, abolished polygamy and recognized the equal rights of women in divorce, custody, and inheritance. The entire educational system from the grade school to the university became coeducational. Atatürk greatly admired the support that the national liberation struggle received from women and praised their many contributions: *"In Turkish society, women have not lagged behind men in science, scholarship, and culture. Perhaps they have even gone further ahead."* He gave women the same opportunities as men, including full political rights.

In the mid-1930s, 18 women, among them a villager, were elected to the national parliament. Later, Turkey had the world's first women supreme court justice.

## Strides in Education

**"The governments most creative and significant duty is education."**

*Mustafa Kemal Atatürk*

Atatürk regarded education as the force that would galvanize the nation into social and economic development. For this reason, he once said that, after the War of Independence, he would have liked to serve as Minister of Education. As President of the Republic, he spared no effort to stimulate and expand education at all levels and for all segments of the society.



Turkey initiated a most ambitious program of schooling children and adults. From grade school to graduate school, education was made free, secular, and co-educational. Primary education was declared compulsory. The armed forces implemented an extensive program of literacy. Atatürk heralded *"The Army of Enlightenment"*. With pencil or chalk in hand, he personally instructed children and adults in schoolrooms, parks, and other places. Literacy which had been less than 9 percent in 1923 rose to more than 33 percent by 1938.

## Peace at Home, Peace in the World

**"Mankind is a single body and each nation a part of that body. We must never say 'What does it matter to me if some part of the world is ailing?' If there is such an illness, we must concern ourselves with it as though we were having that illness."**

*Mustafa Kemal Atatürk*



A military hero who had won victory after victory against **many foreign invaders**, Atatürk knew the value of peace and, during his Presidency, did his utmost to secure and strengthen it throughout the world. Few of the giants of the modern times have spoken with Atatürk's eloquence on the vital need to create a world order based on peace, on the dignity of all human beings, and on the constructive interdependence of all nations. He stated, immediately after the Turkish War of Independence, that *"peace is the most effective way for nations to attain prosperity and happiness."* Later as he concluded treaties of friendship and created regional ententes, he affirmed: *"Turks are the friends of all civilized nations."* The new Turkey established cordial relations with all countries, including those powers which had tried a few years earlier to wipe the Turks off the map.

## Ataturk and The Youth

**"Turkish Youth! Your first duty is forever to preserve and to defend the Turkish Independence and the Turkish Republic."**

*Mustafa Kemal Atatürk*



Ataturk attached particular importance to the young population in his newly founded republic. He knew that it was the Turkish youth who would take the republic a step further in the future after him. In order to make people understand

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the significance of young populations, he declared two very important days, 23rd April and 19th May.

## What is Said After Him?

*"History has seen many great people. It has seen Alexander the Great's, Napoleon's, Washington's. However, in the twentieth century the record for greatness was broken by Atatürk, this Turkish son of a Turk."* **L'Illustration Newspaper, France**

*"I obtained information concerning Mustafa Kemal from someone who knows him very well. When talking with Foreign Minister Litvinov of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, he said that in his opinion, the most valuable and interesting statesman in all of Europe does not live in Europe today, but beyond the Bosphorus, he lives in Ankara, and that this was the President of the Turkish Republic, Gazi Mustafa Kemal Atatürk."* **Franklin D. Roosevelt, President of the United States of America**

*"Atatürk's death is not only a loss for the country, but for Europe is the greatest loss, he who saved Turkey in the war and who revived a new the Turkish nation after the war. The sincere tears shed after him by all classes of people is nothing other than an appropriate manifestation to this great hero and modern Turkey's Ata."* **Winston Churchill, Prime Minister of the United Kingdom**

*"In connection with the permanent memorial facility for Kemal Atatürk, I take pride in presenting my congratulations to Turkey. Your great country that is advancing on the course that he demonstrated has obtained very significant successes. This ceremony that is being held to commemorate the memory of Atatürk, the architect of progress and Turkish unity, is a very appropriate respect to a person who became a source of inspiration to free peoples throughout the world."* **Dwight D. Eisenhower, President of the United States of America**

*"In our times, it is Atatürk who brought Turkey to its current status as a modern republic with his farsighted and courageous political, social and economic reforms. At the same time, it was also he that prepared the foundation of the modern economy that will ensure today Turkey's attaining the strength to be able to enter the European Economic Community."* **Joseph Luns, Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Netherlands**

*"In no other country have women advanced this rapidly. It is truly an unique event in history for a nation to change to this degree."* **Daily Telegraph Newspaper, England**

