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The origin of the Turkish Armed Forces: Kemalism and the proclamation of the Turkish Republic

The military has always played a significant role in Turkish consciousness. The first ever mention of Turks in global history refers precisely to the military structures from Central Asia. Following Albert H. Lybyer, the Ottoman Empire, which was “more an army than anything else,”¹ had been created in the course of conquests and was administered by military dependencies. Researchers estimate that both structures – the Ottoman state and its society – actually played a supporting role in relation to the armed forces.² Gareth Jenkins points out that “the role of the military in Turkey is rooted in Turkish society, history, and culture. The military became the basis for the Turks to define themselves, and the army, as the most respected institution, remains the embodiment of the entire nation’s virtues and values.”³ The Turkish army has a unique status in the state’s political and legal system, confirmed in many key legal acts, often becoming a major obstacle in terms of domestic

¹ A.H. Lybyer, *The Government of the Ottoman Empire in the Age of Suleiman the Magnificent*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1913, p. 90.

² D.B. Ralston, *Importing the European Army*, London: The University of Chicago Press, 1990, p. 43.

³ G. Jenkins, *Context and Circumstance: The Turkish Military and Politics*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, p. 8.

and foreign policy.⁴ Although the initial ancestor of modern military and state institutions of contemporary Turkey can be found in the Ottoman Empire, in particular during the period of the Tanzimat reforms (1839–1871), and the first constitutional period (1876–1909), it must be acknowledged that the proclamation of the Republic of Turkey by the kemalist government in 1923 became the final farewell to the *ancien régime*.⁵

The goal of this article is to discuss the role and importance of proclaiming the Republic of Turkey, as well as the principles of kemalism in the process of creating the contemporary armed forces and civil-military relations in this country, which to this day constitute a unique example on the international arena. This specific research problem constitutes an attempt to answer two research questions. First, how did historical events and the direct participation of the army as a revolutionary and decision-making factor during the first two decades after the proclamation of the Turkish Republic impact the position and role of the armed forces in Turkey? Second, what role did the principles of the state ideology of Kemalism play and still play in building the political system and civil-military relations in Turkey?

The answers to the above questions require taking into account the following research methods: factorial and historical. The empirical method, in the form of identifying and describing the problem on the basis of a variety of materials and general technological methods: synthesis, induction and deduction, has also proved to be helpful. The essential elements in terms of researching the origins of the modern Turkish state and its army consist in monographs detailing the multidimensional history of the Republic of Turkey, as well as those that look at the functioning of internal policy and foreign policy, the whole political system, and core institutions of the Turkish state. It must be stated that the achievements of Polish researchers of this topic lack a comprehensive and multidimensional analysis of civil-military relations and their reforms, as well as the consequences of this state of affairs on the functioning of the state. Therefore, the knowledge gained from foreign publications, devoted to a large extent to the role and position of the Turkish army in the country, has turned out to be an invaluable source that enjoys an equal research status.

Young Turks revolution

In opposition to the governance of Sultan Abdulhamid II and the conviction of the need to carry out the state's modernist reforms, in 1907 the Ottoman Freedom

⁴ Z. Sarigil, *Europeanization as Institutional Change: The Case of the Turkish Military*, "Mediterranean Politics", vol. 12, issue 1, 2007, pp. 3957.

⁵ S.A. Cook, *Ruling but not Governing. The military and political development in Egypt, Algeria and Turkey*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007, p. 94.

Association (Tur. *Osmanlı Hürriyet Cemiyeti*) has been formed in Thessaloniki, which was headed by an official named Mehmed Talât, who was joined by young officers from the Third Army, including Major Ismail Enver, and the then captain Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. That same year, activists established cooperation with the Paris Committee of Unity and Progress (Tur. *İttihatve Terakki Cemiyeti*), an organisation of political emigrants whose members were also referred to as Young Turks (Tur. *Genç Türkler*), criticising the authorities for carrying out Tanzimat's policy in an authoritarian manner, chiefly the large-scale reforms announced by Sultan Abdülmeccid in 1839.⁶

As a result of external plans to take away the Ottoman sovereignty over the provinces in Macedonia by Tsar Nicholas II and the English king Edward VII, as well as initiating an investigation against the conspirators in Thessaloniki, an armed battle broke out in July 1908, also known as the Young Turks Revolution. The conspirators demanded to restore the constitution of 1876 and introduce multi-partyism as part of a two-tier electoral system. As a result of effective actions, the grand vizier was changed and a decree restoring the constitution was approved throughout the empire, which became the beginning of the Young Turks era in Turkey, which lasted continuously until the end of World War I.⁷

From the perspective of the conducted analysis, it is worth emphasising the fact that the two recurring problems for the state's system during this period consisted in the influence of the military on internal politics, as well as on the relations between the Committee and the parliament. The Committee had an undefined legal status, being a secret underground organisation until 1912 that never evolved into a political party. Until 1911, the Young Turks had informally controlled the parliament with only a few representatives in the government that was still run by members of the old civilian and military elite.⁸ The Committee had virtually unlimited legislative power, as long as its actions did not have a negative effect on the army's interests. Another threat to military discipline and unity consisted in the significant influence of relatively low-ranking officers on the political realities in the state, thanks to their position in the Committee of Unity and Progress. In fact, the situation was quite similar in terms of the second justified allegation against them, namely

⁶ D. Chmielowska, M. Sobczak, "Demokracja po turecku", *Studia Europejskie*, no. 4, 2016, pp. 205–206.

⁷ D. Kołodziejczyk, *Turcja*, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Trio, 2010, pp. 49–50; E.J. Zürcher, *Turcja. Od sultanatu do współczesności*, Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2013, pp. 93–94; E. Ramsaur, *The Young Turks: Prelude to Revolution of 1908*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957, pp. 1–13.

⁸ G.W. Swanson, *Mahmud Şevket Paşa and the Defense of the Ottoman Empire: A Study of War and Revolution during the Young Turk Period*, Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms, A Xerox Company, 1970, pp. 74–86.

the unofficial relations between the Committee and the parliament, influencing its decisions without taking political responsibility.⁹

In the parliament, dominated by representatives of the Committee, a new law on military service was passed, imposing the obligation for every man with an Ottoman citizenship, regardless of religion, to serve in the army. At the same time, the officer corps was reduced and reorganised, which resulted in early retirement and degrading soldiers.¹⁰ It is estimated that more than 10,000 officers were removed from the army over the next few years.¹¹ As a result of the army's deepening internal conflicts, an additional record was prepared to be introduced into the military code, recognising the participation of a soldier in the Empire's politics as a punishable act, which resulted in the Committee's expected opposition.

In the following years, three military men who were members of the Young Turks since its beginning, became political leaders – Cemal Pasha as the minister of the navy, Talât Pasha as the minister of internal affairs, and Enver Pasha, who headed the ministry of war in 1914.¹² The government regime established at that time, over 4 years after the original Young Turks revolution, is sometimes referred to as another “triumvirate” of young radicals; however, it is just a simplified label. The Young Turkish government gradually introduced a large-scale reform scheme. From an analytical point of view, it is necessary to mention the changes within the administration, especially concerning the armed forces, coordinated by Enver Pasha. In 1914, the reorganisation of the army took place primarily as a result of the several purges in the former officer corps. The German military mission under the command of General Liman von Sanders was involved in reforming the army's structure and functioning.¹³ Members of this mission were appointed to commanding positions, and their influence was strong, especially during World War I.¹⁴ However, the early end of the state reform program and the slow collapse of the Young Turks regime due to the military defeat in 1918 were inevitable. At the beginning of November, Enver, Cemal, and Talât sailed to Germany on a German warship, and during their absence in the Empire, the Committee of Unity and Progress was dissolved and their property confiscated.¹⁵

In sum, in the long-term perspective, it was not the lack of modern equipment or soldier training that constituted the greatest obstacle in developing the army during

⁹ E.J. Zürcher, *Turcja...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 100–101.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 100.

¹¹ M. Naim Turfan, *The rise of the Young Turks: Politics, the military and the Ottoman collapse*, London: I.B. Tauris, 2000, p. 243.

¹² W. Hale, *Turkish Politics and Military*, London 1993, p. 45.

¹³ L. von Sanders, *Five Years in Turkey*, Annapolis: MD: United States Naval Institute, 1972, p. 3.

¹⁴ E.J. Zürcher, *Turcja...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 122–127; U. Heyd, *The Foundation of Turkish Nationalism*, London: Luzac & Company Ltd, 1950, chapter 4.

¹⁵ W. Hale, *op. cit.*, pp. 53–54.

that period, but rather the cultural, social and, of course, political elements. Thanks to the fierce fight to build a new order, officers of the Turkish military saw themselves from the very beginning as guardians of reforms and precursors of enlightenment. Radical political activism, which depended primarily on the army as the strongest revolutionary power in both 1876 and 1908, was born out of the conviction about the Empire's weakness resulting from political traditionalism and technical underdevelopment. Moreover, assuming the role of a political determinant of the Empire's future in 1908 and 1909, the military became completely involved in the state's political system, eventually losing its position as a national neutral institution.¹⁶

The proclamation of the Republic of Turkey with a modern army

Despite the defeat in World War I, the epidemic, and the numerous desertions, the Ottoman army still maintained unity in Anatolia, with the command structure especially intact. However, the military potential was not high – the army consisted of circa 35,000 soldiers, scattered over a large area of Thrace.¹⁷ The government administration gradually rebuilt itself after the fall of the Young Turks regime. As a consequence, military officers, bureaucrats, and landowners – the middle rank of the Young Turkish power structure – formed a leading layer of the new resistance movement.¹⁸ The period from May 1919 to 1923 can be described as an active war for independence or a liberation war (Tur. *kurtuluşsavaşı*), which went through two noticeable stages.

During the first phase of the liberation war, in June 1919, the building of a broad resistance movement began under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal, one of the most popular war heroes at the time. He was appointed Inspector General of the 9th Army, responsible for Eastern and North-Central Anatolia, with its base in Samsun on the Black Sea. His competences included restoring public order and safety, securing Ottoman weapons and ammunition during demobilisation, as well as suppressing protests against the government. He was entrusted not only with authority over the army, but also over the civilian clerical staff in the region.¹⁹ A nationalist organisation by the name of the Association for the Defence Rights of Anatolia and Rumelia, headed by Kemal, organised a congress in Erzurum and Sivas and announced the demand for complete and undivided sovereignty of the Empire's territories inhabited by Turkish people, in fact including today's territory of the

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, pp. 54–55.

¹⁷ E.J. Zürcher, *Turcja...*, *op. cit.*, p. 149.

¹⁸ W. Hale, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

¹⁹ M. Kemal, *A Speech Delivered by Ghazi Mustapha Kemal, President of the Turkish Republic*, October 1927, t. 1–2, Leipzig: K.F. Kochler, 1929, pp. 28–30.

Republic of Turkey.²⁰ As a consequence, on October 22, 1919, Salih Pasha, the Minister of the Navy, during a meeting with Kemal in Amasaya, made a five-point agreement that assumed carrying out the nationalists' program, including guaranteeing a new election as well as establishing a new chamber of deputies outside the capital. The nationalists, on the other hand, were supposed to officially accept the sovereignty of power in Istanbul.²¹

At the same time, there was a growing dissatisfaction of the occupiers, especially the British, who finally led the Grand Vizier Ali Rıza to resign on March 3, 1920. The capital officially got under martial law and the parliament was dissolved.²² Kemal's call for deputies and activists to return to Ankara was finally answered by 92 deputies who, together with 232 representatives elected by local resistance movement organisations, established the Grand National Assembly of Turkey (Tur. *Büyük Millet Meclisi*). The first meeting took place on April 23, 1920, when the parliamentarians appointed Kemal as the chairman and Mustafa İsmet İnönü, Kemal's friend, a deputy from Edirne, as the commander of the general staff.²³

The explicit measures undertaken against the nationalists by the authorities of Istanbul and the occupiers officially opened the second stage of fighting for the Empire's independence. The new nationalist government strictly separated itself from the Istanbul government, but remained loyal to the Sultan-Caliph. During the first session, a declaration was passed, assuming that the country's real power belongs to the sovereign people represented by the parliament, and that the Grand National Assembly constitutes the supreme authority.²⁴

The key campaigns of the second stage of the war for independence took place in western Anatolia during the summer of 1921 and 1922 against the Greeks, ending in victory for the Turks. Ultimately, the Entente states, whose superior goal was to prevent initiating another armed conflict, on July 24, 1923, signed the final document implementing the independence goals of the nationalists.²⁵ With the exception of minor concessions, the treaty restored Turkey's complete sovereignty under international law, abolishing capitulation privileges and the Western control of the straits that were supposed to be demilitarized.²⁶

The events of July 1923 marked the beginning of a series of major changes in the Turkish state. First of all, the power of Mustafa Kemal has been consolidated, the

²⁰ *Modern Turkey*, eds. E.G. Mears, New York: Macmillan, 1924, appendix III, pp. 627–628.

²¹ W. Hale, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

²² S.J. Shaw, E.K. Shaw, *Historia Imperium Osmańskiego i Republiki Tureckiej 1808–1975*, t. 2, 1808–1975, transl. by B. Świetlik, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Akademickie Dialog, 2012, p. 528.

²³ E.J. Zürcher, *Turcja...*, *op. cit.*, p. 151.

²⁴ S.J. Shaw, E.K. Shaw, *op. cit.*, pp. 529–530.

²⁵ W. Hale, *op. cit.*, pp. 62–63; E.J. Zürcher, *Turcja...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 155–156.

²⁶ D. Kołodziejczyk, *op. cit.*, p. 118.

last political ties with the Ottoman Empire were broken, and the national culture was redefined on a non-religious level. As a result of the following election held in September 1923, the majority of parliament members included supporters of the reformist direction of changes proposed by Kemal, who registered the new People's Party (Tur. *Halk Fırkası*). In October 1923, as a result of a government crisis, the National Assembly officially voted to change the state capital to Ankara, and on October 29 the Republic of Turkey has been proclaimed. As expected, Mustafa Kemal has been elected as the first president, while İsmet Pasha İnönü was appointed as both the prime minister and the minister of foreign affairs. On March 3, 1924, the caliphate has been finally abolished, while Abdülmecid and the rest of the Ottoman dynasty were expelled.²⁷

The new constitution was adopted on April 20, 1924, and it reaffirmed the superior power of the parliament to elect the president and the government.²⁸ However, in reality, Kemal's personal power was absolute: he controlled the entire parliament through a legally operating party, which changed its name to the Republican People's Party (Tur. *Cumhuriyet Halk Fırkası*), which he still headed, despite taking the office of president. Establishing the Republic of Turkey as well as his grand ambitions resulted in multifaceted and wide-ranging reforms aimed at radically modernising the country, understood in the Western way. However, it is worth emphasising that the president was not attached to such democratic values as the rule of law, freedom of speech and the press, or political pluralism.²⁹ The pattern of fighting for power and the transition from a pluralist to a two-party system, known from the second constitutional period, once again took place and ended with the authorities having monopoly to implement radical modernist and secular changes in the state. The Republican People's Party established a monopoly of power, which was officially announced in 1931 at a party congress, during which the most important elements of the Kemalist ideology were also elaborated. Kemal, together with his associates, tightened their control over the state by taking direct supervision over all cultural, social, and intellectual life.³⁰

The ideological and cultural image of Turkey, which also inextricably shapes the political, institutional, and the national security system, would not be complete without mentioning the phenomenon of the aforementioned set of ideas that make up kemalism (Tur. *kemalizm*, used by Western authors) or Turkish atatürkism (Tur. *Atatürkçülük*).³¹ Initial kemalism included six principles, symbolised by six arrows

²⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 122–123.

²⁸ S. Kili, *Turkish Constitutional Developments and Assembly Debates on the Constitutions of 1924 and 1961*, Istanbul: Robert College Research Center, 1971, pp. 197–208.

²⁹ D. Kołodziejczyk, *op. cit.*, pp. 120–121.

³⁰ E.J. Zürcher, *Turcja...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 176–181.

³¹ A. Szymański, *Między islamem a kemalizmem – problem demokracji w Turcji*, Warszawa: Polski Instytut Spraw Międzynarodowych, 2008, p. 56; E.Z. Karnal, *The Principles of Kemalism*,

(Tur. *Altı Ok*): republicanism, secularism, nationalism, populism, statism, and revolutionism. These principles have been included in the Turkish Basic Law in 1937, thus becoming principles of the Turkish constitutional order. Moreover, they were also included in following Turkish constitutions – dated 1961 and 1982. To this day, these principles constitute the foundation of dogmatic kemalism, in the name of which there were four military coups in 1960, 1971, 1980, and 1997, as well as one failed attempt in 2015. Due to the purpose of the conducted analysis, attention should be pointed to the issue of two principles that are crucial for the Turkish army and used in confirming the legitimacy of actions interfering with the state's national policy – secularism and nationalism.

The question of nationalism (Tur. *milliyetçilik*) has raised many doubts since the beginning of the Turkish state. It was already during the liberation war that the idea of a nation-state appeared, along with the idea of political nationalism, binding the nation with the state and its territory. The presented view assumed that the term “Turk” meant every citizen of Turkey, regardless of that person's religion or ethnic origin, and thus a forced assimilation of minorities. However, Turkey stood out from the Europe of that time, with its rich political and social openness, which did not exclude any religious minority or ethnic *a priori*.³² Since the 1930s, the role of the second element of Turkish nationalism – “ethnic nationalism” – has been growing, with its base in the notion of a “cultural nation” based on a common language, history, as well as culture or origin, and a decade later also in Islam. Both elements of nationalism have been reflected in constitutions and other legal acts, as a consequence combining both elements into an inseparable whole. Contemporary Turkish nationalism stands for patriotism, attachment to national symbols, a sense of national pride, and territorial integrity, creating a kind of civil religion – the phenomenon of the nation's sacralisation, its symbols and Atatürk, as well as martyrdom.³³ Secularism (Tur. *laiklik*), in turn, was understood not only as separating the state from religion, but also as eliminating religion from public life and establishing state control over still operating religious institutions.³⁴ This principle has been included in all historical and currently binding constitutions.

It was often possible to accuse this ideology of a lack of consistency, but more importantly, also no emotional attractiveness. This gap was, without a doubt, filled by the cult of Mustafa Kemal, personally surrounding him during his lifetime and even more intensely after his death. At the same time, it should be admitted that the described principles were characterised by dynamism, flexibility, and the ability to adapt to the emerging conditions. As a result, the kemalism of the 1930s has

[in:] *Atatürk: Founder of Modern State*, eds. A. Kazancigil, E. Özbudun, London: C. Hurst & Co., 1997, p. 16.

³² D. Kołodziejczyk, *op. cit.*, p. 147.

³³ A. Szymański, *op. cit.*, pp. 60–65.

³⁴ E.J. Zürcher, *Turcja...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 181–182.

currently evolved into neo-kemalism, which has effectively grown into the political culture of Turkey. In particular, both principles of initial kemalism – nationalism and secularism – are still valid in domestic politics and resonate mostly in the area of security policy, although they have undergone transformation. Nationalism is not only based on the idea of a state nation, but also relates more strongly to cultural identity. In the Republic's history its importance has grown multiple times, especially during internal conflicts with Kurdish militants, or during foreign events, such as the Iraqi crisis, taking down relations with the US, or problems with the negotiation process with the EU, as well as the Cyprus or Armenian issues. Secularism still plays a key role as an element of the constitutional order, although its modification is visible, especially since the second term of the Justice and Development party's (Tur. *Adaletve Kalkınma Partisi*, AKP) rule. For decades, the issue of the state's secularisation constituted an element of military interest, and even a reason for entering into direct conflict, as well as a military intervention against the civilian authority.³⁵

Coming back to the period of building a new Turkey by Kemal Atatürk, it should be remembered that there was a parallel internal fight for influence and power within the nationalist camp, forming the position of the army itself in the state system. The greatest threat to Mustafa Kemal turned out to consist in the military and political elites in Ankara. As power was consolidated, the group of opponents grew, gathering also Kemal's former supporters or even associates and friends. They were primarily the deputies of the Grand National Assembly, whose views can be described as liberal. They expected the creation of a new Turkey in a model of a representative, multi-party democracy in a European fashion. The second group of opponents was motivated by Islamic conservatism. They were the supporters of preserving the sultanate and the caliphate for intellectual or sentimental reasons, who opposed such a drastic separation from the Ottoman Empire's Muslim past. The last group reluctant towards Kemal were his personal political competitors, especially members of the military elite, who, while fighting equally fiercely for Turkey's sovereignty, could not accept Kemal's personal domination. In many cases, all three motives – political liberalism, religious conservatism, or personal ambition – for opposing Mustafa Kemal were intertwined, so in the end, it is difficult to unequivocally identify the reasons for the attacks on Kemal.³⁶ In 1926, security services uncovered a real conspiracy to murder the president. These events led to two show trials that ultimately eliminated all of Atatürk's contemporary and potential rivals from the Republic's political life.³⁷

³⁵ A. Szymański, *op. cit.*, p. 71.

³⁶ W. Hale, *op. cit.*, p. 66.

³⁷ E.J. Zürcher, *Turcja...*, *op. cit.*, p. 174; E.J. Zürcher, *The Unionist Factor: The role of the Committee of Union and Progress in the Turkish National Movement, 1905–1926*, Leiden: Brill 1984, pp. 144–158.

In the meantime, serious steps were undertaken to exclude professionally active officers from future political life. In December 1923, the National Assembly passed a law requiring all soldiers and officers to retire before their appointment to parliament, while military leaders who were members of the Assembly's at that time were deprived of the right to vote until they resigned from service. On March 3, 1924, immediately after abolishing the caliphate, the chief of the general staff has been deprived of his position in the government, and was held responsible for his actions directly before the president. The significance of Section 23 of the Constitution of April 1923 has been emphasised, which stated that it was forbidden to hold a deputy and government office at the same time, and which could legally apply to the terms of the military commissions at that time. Furthermore, Article 40 entrusted the supreme authority over the Turkish army to the Grand National Assembly, represented, of course, by the president of the republic. In legal terms, the army was to be completely removed from the legislative process in every dimension of the state's functioning. Additionally, the ban on serving political functions by active military was also secured by Section 148 of the Criminal Code, which recognised it as criminal to join a political party, organise or participate in political meetings, public appearances of a political nature, or prepare, sign, and send any political declaration to the press, by every member of the armed forces of the Republic of Turkey.³⁸ Furthermore, in order to complete the process of military influence in the parliament, Kemal personally forced most of his military associates to renounce their parliamentary seats or retire.³⁹

However, it is worth mentioning that despite the above reforms, civilian control over the state's defence policy or the performance of the military within their professional functions has been limited. However, a compromise with the military elite has been achieved, and provided for the prime minister's control over the chief of the general staff, as well as the possibility for the chief of staff to receive instructions directly from other ministers during exceptional or important situations. Additionally, he was to be appointed by the government, after a recommendation by the prime minister.⁴⁰ In practice, over many following years, the general staff remained largely independent in the field of the defence policy.

In conclusion, the words of researcher Georg S. Harris seem significant. He argues that the greatest concern of Kemal Mustafa was not to keep the military far from the state's internal politics, but to maintain their absolute loyalty towards the

³⁸ W. Hale, *op. cit.*, p. 72.

³⁹ W.F. Weiker, *Political Tutelage and Democracy in Turkey: The Free Party and its Aftermath*, Leiden: Brill, 1973, pp. 46–51; R.W. Olson, W.F. Tucker, *The Sheikh Sait Rebellion in Turkey (1925)*, *Die Welt des Islams*, vol. 18, issue 3/4, 1978, pp. 198–201; E.J. Zürcher, *Turcja...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 172–173, W. Hale, *op. cit.*, pp. 74–75.

⁴⁰ G.S. Harris, "The Role of the Military in Turkish Politics. Part 1", *Middle East Journal*, vol. 19, 1965, p. 63

president and the Republic.⁴¹ While the superior reason for the processes of isolating officers from political activity consisted in splits the army that turned into opposition groups. However, looking from a broader perspective, as an experienced soldier and commander, Kemal believed primarily that political commitment weakened the effectiveness and efficiency of performing military duties. Basically, the formal separation of the military from the most important state institutions was respected during the interwar period. On the other hand, the Ottoman tradition of including both civilian and military leaders in political bodies in the provinces was maintained, with officers acting also as governors in border regions.⁴²

The most important reforms concerning the functioning and organisation of the armed forces during the period of Kemalist reforms should also be discussed. In the summer of 1923, the position of the Turkish army as a whole was under dire threat. As a consequence of the crisis, the army has been demobilised and reorganised into nine territorial divisions under three inspectorates: in Ankara, Konya and Erzurum, with nine army corps. The first reforms strengthened the government's control over the army and distanced the most significant rivals from the central Turkish political scene.⁴³ The Supreme Military Council, which performed primarily advisory functions, acted under the leadership of the president, and also consisted of the chief of the general staff, the minister of defence, as well as three inspectors. The meagre air force, originally established in 1911, was created. In 1930, control of the gendarmerie was transferred to the minister of internal affairs, but recruits were able to carry out their civil service in the ranks of the gendarmerie, and in this regard, they were still perceived as part of the Turkish military.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, military modernisation during that period was neglected by the central authorities, thus making the Turkish army dangerously obsolete by the 1940s.⁴⁵ Therefore, military expenditure regularly decreased from 40 percent in 1926 to 23 percent in the years 1932–1933, only to increase to 30 percent in the following years.⁴⁶ This stagnation resulted in an intellectual and generational gap between experienced generals and a new fraction of officers who would take power over the Turkish armed forces in the 1950s.⁴⁷

⁴¹ *Ibidem*, p. 56.

⁴² D. Rustow, "The Army and the Founding of the Turkish Republic", *World Politics*, vol. 11, 1959, pp. 546–550.

⁴³ M.M. Finefrock, *From Sultanate to Republic: Mustapha Kemal Atatürk and the Structure of Turkish Politics, 1922–1924*, Princeton: Princeton University, 1976, pp. 107, 180–181, 218–219, 225–227, 237–238, 260–262; M. Kemal, *op. cit.*, pp. 589–590.

⁴⁴ W. Hale, *op. cit.*, p. 80.

⁴⁵ R.D. Robinson, *The First Turkish Republic: The case study in National Development*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963, pp. 239–240.

⁴⁶ Z.Y. Herslang, *Turkey, an Economy in Transition*, Hague: Uitgeverij van Keulen, 1958, pp. 113–114; G.S. Harris, *op. cit.*, pp. 60–61.

⁴⁷ W. Hale, *op. cit.*, p. 79.

However, from the political point of view, the military was to fulfil an extremely important function in the kemalist regime – promote the ideas of modernism and nationalistic secularism, especially among recruits. Indeed, every young man was obliged to undergo one to two years of military training. In terms of image, the army presented itself as a “school for the people”, in which every recruit received basic education and strengthened the love for his homeland, and additionally improved his condition and found passions.⁴⁸ However, from a legal point of view the roles and functions of the army were recorded in the Internal Military Service Act, which came into force in 1935. Section 34 of the Act provided that the duty of the army is to defend and protect the Turkish homeland and the Republic of Turkey, as in the constitution. This record, repeated in the legislation of 1960, was used multiple times by following military activists to authorise interventions in the political sphere when the existence of the state was seriously threatened. In fact, Kemal himself took advantage of a broad interpretation of this provision, convincing young recruits that in terms of world history, the military generally stood in opposition to development, but not in the case of Turkey. The Turkish military has always presented the highest level, thanks to heroic soldiers who made laudable national ideas real. Such a doctrinaire approach to building a soldier’s identity was reinforced by a radical system of military education, which is used to this day.⁴⁹

Conclusions: the importance of the proclamation of the Turkish Republic and Kemalism in the evolution of the armed forces

The state’s revolution and reform, designed and carried out by Kemal Atatürk and his successors, laid the foundations for a modern Turkish military, taking the form of a supreme guardian of the new republic’s system, at the same time largely separating their influence from civil power. However, this tradition was first redefined in 1960, then in 1972 and 1980, when the military elite intervened effectively to overthrow the legally operating government. Referring to the legacy of kemalism as well as the ideological foundations of the Turkish Republic, an attempt was also made to seize power by a fraction of rebellious military men against the currently ruling AKP also in 2015. During all military interventions, the Turkish military took advantage of its role as well as formal or informal tools of influence, legitimising its actions with a specific kind of consent resulting from the general provisions of law, history, the role of the guardian of the principles of kemalism, and the society’s expectations. It is possible to define this attitude as an image of hegemony based on dispersing the values and principles in society as well as the bureaucratic process

⁴⁸ L. Linke, *Allah Dethroned: A Journey through Modern Turkey*, London: Constable, 1938, p. 329.

⁴⁹ W. Hale, *op. cit.*, pp. 80–81.

through the domination of the military in the political system, in tactical terms.⁵⁰ Ersel Aydınli believes that this is precisely the result of the centuries-old historical experience of the Ottoman Empire, the war for independence, the Young Turks era and the Cold War, as well as many grand modernisation projects in modern Turkey, which have been largely and effectively implemented in the Turkish military.⁵¹

What is important is the fact that, as a result of the permanent introduction of multiparty parliamentary democracy in 1946, the army never exhibited classic politicisation or political participation with or as an instrument of an active parliamentary party. However, in setting itself up as a supra-systemic guardian of the principles of kemalism, the military has never limited itself to serving merely a defensive function of the armed forces known from the mature democracies of the Western world. Turkish generals constantly participated in managing and governing the state, especially in areas considered as most important to Turkey's security and defence, and in strong political and social crises, when the generals decided four times to take civil power from politicians and to temporarily introduce a military regime. However, the appropriation of absolute power over the state administration was each time temporary and limited by the organisation of a following general election, after which the army officially withdrew from politics, giving freedom to the new government and parliament. However, it must not be forgotten that also every military intervention, the subsequent military regime, as well as the following period of restorative reforms were used by the military to strengthen its autonomous position as well as the instruments of influence in the constitutional and legislative order.⁵²

Mentioning the most important examples, thanks to the strong position of the military, which had derived from the republican period, the generals secured the key privilege of intervening in the National Security Courts under the Military Service Act, the right to elect one member of the Higher Education Council, as well as the right of the General Secretary of the National Security Council to nominate a member of the Radio and Television Supreme Council. With the help of reforms assuming the direct sovereignty of the prime minister over the army, holding the position of a president by a representative of the military community and the high precedence in the diplomatic protocol of the chief of the general staff, for decades guaranteed sufficient autonomy for generals, and thus a strong position in relations with political leaders of the civilian authority, which was often used not only

⁵⁰ M. Gurcan, *Opening the Black Box. The Turkish Military before and after July 2016*, Warwick: Helion & Company Limited, 2018, p. 22.

⁵¹ E. Aydınli, "A paradigmatic shift for the Turkish Generals and the End to the Coup Era in Turkey", *Middle East Journal*, vol. 63, no. 4, 2009, pp. 581–596.

⁵² A.L. Karaosmanoğlu, *Silahlı Kuvvetler ve Demokrasi*, Bilge Adamlar Stratejik. Araştırmalar Merkezi, Rapor No: 33, İstanbul: Bilgesam Yayınları, 2011, p. 8.

in the area of security or state defence, but also in matters concerning the judicial and legislation issues, state budget, the education system, and public media.⁵³

Also, one cannot ignore the issue of the attitude of society itself towards the Turkish army, which is in a way a phenomenon in the modern world. For decades, the military has been regarded as the most trustworthy institution. Explaining this state of affairs partially relates to the cultural aspect. In the Turkish collective national identity, coming from both history as well as religion, military service is firmly and deeply rooted. For most citizens, the obligation to undergo military service is considered an honour, a sacred duty, and also as part of becoming a full-fledged man.⁵⁴ The army's popularity is also explained by its widespread perception as meritocratic, successful, altruistic, and not corrupted.⁵⁵ The image of the military as an altruistic and honest social group is gaining momentum because it is created largely as a counterpoint to politicians, businessmen, and the media – the elements of civil society, assessed in research as the most corrupt, selfish, and untrustworthy.⁵⁶ What must be said is that the Turkish army is considered so trustworthy, because the propaganda machine that creates this institution's image, conveyed to citizens at every possible step, is extremely effective – both throughout the entire educational path, in individual media, through the information channels of the army itself, as well as by many supporters in society itself. Moreover, despite the army's extremely respected position, the public in fact knows very little about its actual functioning, capabilities, current activities, and impact on the functioning of the state.⁵⁷

On the whole, since the establishment of the Republic the Turkish army perceived itself as the guardian of the Turkish state, which has a moral and legal obligation to defend the Turkish Republic against threats or dangers that may threaten its existence and contradict the principles of kemalism that are indisputable for the army, especially secularism, republicanism, and nationalism. Researcher Mevlut Bozdemir suggests that the idea of a guardian of state values constitutes a type of “elite revolutionism,” fuelled both by high military self-esteem resulting from significant participation in the proclamation of the Republic, as well as a sense of the lack of trust from “Others” – mainly uncontrolled masses, populations in general. Hence, the need to protect the principles of kemalism stands primarily for the need to have

⁵³ K. Akkoyunlu, *Military Reform and Democratization. Turkish and Indonesian experience at the turn of the Millennium*, London: Routledge, 2007, p. 23.

⁵⁴ G. Jenkins, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

⁵⁵ M. Heper, The Military-Civilian Relations in Post-1997 Turkey, [in:] *Globalization of Civil-Military Relations. Democratization, Reform and Security*, eds. G.C. Maior, L. Watts, Bucharest: Enciclopedica Publishing House, 2002, p. 58.

⁵⁶ B. Aliriza, *Turks Have an Unavoidable War To Fight Against Corruption*, The New York Times, 16 March 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2001/03/16/opinion/IHT-turks-have-an-unavoidable-war-to-fight-against-corruption.html> [accessed: 1 April 2021].

⁵⁷ G. Jenkins, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

supervision, and ultimately a monopoly in controlling the fate of the Turkish state and society.⁵⁸

In conclusion, the analysis carried out on the basis of the author's research in terms of the impact and significance of the Kemal Atatürk era on the evolution of the Turkish armed forces, has led to the following conclusions, which correspond with the aim and research questions formulated in the introduction.

First, the revolution and reform of the state, designed and carried out by Kemal Atatürk and his successors, laid the foundations for a modern Turkish military taking the form of a supreme guardian of the system of the new republic. Second, since the proclamation of the Turkish Republic, the Turkish army has had a significant impact on the domestic and foreign policy of the state due to the unique model of civil-military relations, based on the kemalist state ideology, regarding the army as a guardian of the state's principles of secularism and kemalism. This position resulted in that the armed forces did not serve the state, but *vice versa* – they supervised the political class. If necessary, the military overthrew governments and changed the legal order. Third, at the same time, during the discussed historical period, no real restrictions and control mechanisms were introduced in terms of the armed forces, providing the army with both formal and informal tools to interfere in political matters, which was used multiple times by generals over the following decades. Also, due to its strong Kemalist identity, the military has traditionally gathered political, clerical, and economic elites, as well as opinion-forming environments. This way, it constituted the keystone of the entire system, in which political (and with it also economic and cultural) hegemony was exercised by the elites dating back to the late Ottoman Empire. Finally, the army's control function, resulting from the ideology of kemalism, is additionally rooted in the Turkish society, history, and culture, and gives a social legitimacy to the army's decisions.

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⁵⁸ M. Bozdemir, *Türk Ordusunun Tarihsel Kaynakları*, Ankara: S.B.F. Basın ve Yayın Yüksek Okulu Basımevi, 1982, p. 157, [after:] K. Akkoyunlu, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

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The origin of the Turkish Armed Forces: Kemalism and the proclamation of the Turkish Republic

Abstract

The goal of this article is to discuss the role and importance of proclaiming the Republic of Turkey, as well as the principles of kemalism, in the process of creating the contemporary armed forces and civil-military relations in this country, which to this day constitute a unique example on the international arena.

Key words: Turkey, Turkish Armed Forces, Kemal Atatürk, kemalism, civil-military relations

