



Turkey

THIS report covers the period from mid-1956 to mid-1959. The victory of the government in the violent electoral campaign of October 1957 merely served to intensify the rivalry of the ruling Democratic party and the opposition Republican People's party. The Republican People's party, headed by Kemal Atatürk's old companion in arms, ex-President Ismet İnönü, at first was deaf to all proposals that it merge with another of the opposition parties, but after its defeat agreed to merge with the Liberty party, whose executive committee consisted mostly of dissidents from the Democratic party. The latter had itself originally been formed by dissident members of the Republican People's party, which had been the sole party in existence under the regimes of Atatürk and İnönü.

The 1957 election gave the Democratic party 424 seats, the Republican People's party 178, and the Liberty party and the right-wing National Republican party 4 seats each. After the elections all the defeated parties directed a continuous barrage of criticism against the Democratic party and especially Prime Minister Adnan Menderes, centering their attack on the government's restrictions of freedom of the press and its economic policy. The press law, passed in March 1954 after sharp attacks by the opposition on members of the government, imposed severe penalties for personal attacks on officials. The opposition particularly objected to the fact that persons accused under this law were not permitted to prove the truth of their accusations. The press was permitted to publish criticisms of public affairs, but was also compelled to print the replies the government might see fit to make. Government authorization was required for all public meetings. These laws, together with steps taken to prevent the publication of reports on certain political matters and the imposition of severe sentences on a number of persons, brought a large part of the press over to the side of the opposition.

In foreign affairs, and especially where the question of opposition to Communism was involved, the Republican People's party supported the main lines of the government's policy. But it also tried to take advantage of what it regarded as the government's mistakes, like the Baghdad Pact. The opposition was against letting this pact become a means of pressure on Israel, and it held the pact responsible for the formation of the United Arab Republic.

The Democratic government did not renew ambassadorial relations with Israel, which it had broken off at the time of the Suez affair, in 1956. But trade between the two countries continued, and Israeli companies, notably Solel Boneh, won a number of construction contracts for roads, airports, and buildings.

Concerning Cyprus, the opposition strongly supported the government's

demand for partition. The opposition was against relying exclusively on American aid, on the ground that American progress in military technology might some day make the United States place less value on the support of other countries, including Turkey. Moreover, political independence, the opposition maintained, was impossible without economic independence. But it offered no practical formula for the country's economic rehabilitation.

Economic Situation

In the economic field, the opposition charged that the government had launched a program of industrial development and investment without a long-range plan, that it had increased purchasing power without providing a parallel increase in consumer goods, and that it had thus opened the way to inflation. The government's policy was aimed at securing a rapid development of the economy, so as to remove Turkey to at least a considerable extent from the category of underdeveloped countries. Without questioning the desirability of this goal or the necessity of a large-scale effort, the opposition criticized the methods employed and charged that out of fear of unpopularity the government had not adopted necessary measures.

In any case, the country was in the midst of a vast construction program, which included roads, railroads, power plants, ports, dams, cement factories, and sugar refineries. Turkish electric power production had risen from 757 million kilowatt hours in 1950 to four billion in 1958, and was scheduled to reach five billion in 1960. Investment in 1949 had been 258 million Turkish pounds; ten years later it was at the rate of two billion a year. (From 1949 to 1959 the price index went from 100 to 210.) These achievements were made possible by loans made available either directly by various Western countries or through international institutions. The opposition press asserted that the interest alone on the foreign debt came to \$81 million, and that the total debt exceeded a billion, of which \$424 million had to be repaid within 12 years. The government had also borrowed another \$135 million against its gold reserve, owed about \$41 million for petroleum imports, and had debts of \$35 million as a result of the dissolution of the European Payments Union. At the same time, Turkish exports in 1958 came to only \$247 million, as against the \$335 million the government had predicted. Nevertheless, new loans and the promise of a firm stabilization policy gave some reason for optimism.

For the moment, the opposition contented itself with championing freedom of the press, assembly, and worship, and the right to strike and to form professional groups—essentially the same points that the Democratic party had stressed when it was trying to win power between 1946 and 1950. The similarity was recognized by a large part of the public, who had at that time responded to the Democratic party's campaign by giving it an overwhelming majority; they now found it difficult to understand why the present opposition leaders had not, when they were in power, established the liberties they now demanded. The Democrats did not fail to point out this paradox, but without placing undue stress on it, since their own leaders had held office during the period of one-party rule.

Tradition and Modernity

As a result of these circumstances there appeared to be a tendency for people to look for new faces and new formulas. The desire for westernization kindled by Atatürk was still alive in the hearts of the intellectual elite of the youth, and indeed of a great part of the population, and had played an important part in bringing the Democratic party to power in 1950. The attempt of some Democrats to win the votes of the religious masses by accusing the opposition of atheism drew unfavorable comments from many observers, who considered respect for the letter and spirit of the constitutional principle of secularism as the best guarantee of freedom of religion and worship. Kemalist doctrine saw secularism as the surest guarantee of the country's westernization, regarding any concession in that field as a dangerous encouragement to a latent obscurantism, falsely identified with tradition. But the Democratic government, while it authorized sermons on the radio, prayers in Arabic, and religious instruction in the schools, also sought to prevent religious fanaticism.

The opposition charged the government with trying to assure itself the votes of the devout by its religious policy, as it had previously obtained the support of the rural population by its agrarian policy. However, while religious publications were freely sold, to the accompaniment of a good deal of propaganda in favor of the Democrats, their circulation was much smaller than that of the numerous Western-oriented and secular dailies and weeklies. All attempts at fanatical practices by Islamic extremists were prosecuted, while no limitation was imposed on the freedom of religious minorities to practice their faiths, so long as these did not involve any aspect of foreign policy.

In the 1957 elections the three Jewish publications—the French daily, *Journal d'Orient*, and the two bilingual (Ladino and Turkish) weeklies *Salom* and *La Vera Luz*—firmly supported the Democratic party. In Istanbul, where the Jewish population was substantial, this party included two Jewish candidates on its list, whereas the other parties nominated only one each. The two were Yussuf Salman (Joseph Salmona), former secretary of the Council of the Grand Rabbinate and a Democrat from the party's foundation, and Izak Etabaki (Isaac Altabev), former president of the Council of the Grand Rabbinate; both were elected.

The electoral campaign was marked by oratorical duels between the Jewish candidates nominated by the various parties. The Democrats cited the bitter experience of the capital tax (*Varlık*) imposed by the previous regime in 1942 (AYJB, 1947-48 [Vol. 49], p. 437) on the members of the minorities. The candidate of the Republican People's party replied that certain Democratic candidates had then been prominent advocates of this tax. The opposition's bitterness as a result of the minorities' heavy vote for the Democrats was intensified by the fact that it was concentrated in Istanbul, where the victorious party stood to win more seats than in any other district.

From time to time the opposition's opinions were reflected in unflattering articles addressed to minority groups in certain papers supporting the Republican People's party, such as *Hürriyet* and *Cumhuriyet*. Official Demo-

cratic organs, such as *Havadis* and *Zafer*, denounced these articles as "provocations." The events on Cyprus also contributed to the development of a vague antiminority feeling; the resentment felt toward one group, the Greeks, was extended to others. But despite the appearance of a very few openly hostile articles in publications known for such attitudes, the security of Jews, Greeks, and Armenians was not disturbed in 1958 and 1959.

Antisemitism

Organs of the extreme right, which had suffered under the previous government, were now resolute defenders of the party in power, but still continued antisemitic attacks. Thus they printed the old clichés about the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* and "world-conquering Zionism," and in general took up the slogans of the Arab cause. But these publications, *Hur Adam* ("Free Man") and *Büyük Doğu* ("Great East"), had lost much of their importance. The first sought a popular audience, while the second put on a false air of intellectuality. The major newspapers regarded them with contempt, denouncing them for their reactionary tendencies, objecting to their distribution, and criticizing the government for having permitted it so long. Moreover, their antisemitic propaganda came up against the fact that there was practically no "Jewish question" in Turkey, if only because the Jews were so few in comparison with the great majority of Moslems, except in Istanbul. There, together with the other minorities, they formed a group of which the parties had to take account in their electoral campaigns.

Jewish Population

In Istanbul the Jewish community was divided into 11 major groups, according to the sections of the city in which they lived. Most were Sephardi, but there were small Ashkenazi and Italian communities as well. According to the most recent statistics available (1950), the mother tongues of the Istanbul Jews covered a wide range, including Turkish, Albanian, English, French, German, Ladino, and Serbian. The total number of Jews in Turkey was estimated at about 42,000,¹ as compared with 81,000 in 1927. The total Turkish population was about 26,000,000.

In 1950 there were 49,237 Jews in Istanbul, but in 1958 the number had fallen to 32,946. (Istanbul also had 64,000 Greek Orthodox, 37,000 Gregorian Armenians, 12,000 Catholics, and 2,000 Protestants; its total population was about 1.5 million.) Many Jews had emigrated to Israel at various times, particularly just after the proclamation of the state in 1948. The greatest part of the emigrants, however, had come from Anatolia and Eastern Thrace. Except for Izmir (Smyrna), with about 5,000 Jews, the Anatolian Jewish communities were very small; there were 125 families (600 persons) in Brousse, 100 in Ankara, and a few in Mersine and Adana. In Thrace there were 25 families at Kirklareli, 60 at Tekirdagh, and slightly more at Edirna (Adrianople).

¹ But see p. 352.

Community Organization

The Jews of Turkey were represented in the Council of the Grand Rabbinate, which named the various committees responsible for the functioning of the educational and welfare institutions, as well as of the Grand Rabbinate itself. The education committee of the Grand Rabbinate administered four primary schools, with 1,400 students, and one secondary school, with 600. The deficit of these schools was considerable, and the secondary school had to be expanded if it were to keep up with the demand, which was increasing each year; the sixth grade had 35 students in 1954, 80 in 1956, 130 in 1957, and 177 in 1958. (In proportion to their numbers, the other minorities had substantially greater numbers of schools, the Armenian community having 32 and the Greek community 46). Efforts to build a new secondary school ran up against a lack of funds, and there was not enough money to supply the existing school with modern equipment or pay the teachers adequate salaries. The deficits of the schools were due primarily to the scholarships given to students unable to pay.

The Jewish orphanage of Istanbul cared for some 50 children. After the completion of their primary education, they were placed with merchants through the efforts of the members of the committee in charge of the institution. In rare cases, they went on to secondary school. The school of the Izmir Society for Aid to Orphans educated over 400 children, of whom 170 were fed and clothed by the institution.

The Mahazike Torah continued to play an important role in the religious life of the community, furnishing cantors in the various districts and suburbs of the cities, giving advice on questions of religious law, and taking responsibility for a number of students. The lack of officiating rabbis was felt less than in previous years, although it recurred in Izmir. That city had a number of synagogues in old quarters without a Jewish population, and proposals were made for their liquidation.

About 460 poor students were aided by the Mishneh Torah, founded in 1899, some 300 others by the Tzedakah u-Marpe, and a hundred by the Goutte de Lait, founded in 1907. The Or ha-Hayyim hospital, founded in 1885 with eight beds, had 109 in 1957. In the course of a year its clinic served some 8,000 patients; 900 were hospitalized, and 400 were operated on. It received a subsidy from the Turkish government. Its staff, including that of the clinic, consisted of 100 persons, of whom 40 were physicians. At Izmir there was a hospital with 30 beds, and about 150 operations were performed annually. Istanbul also had a dispensary, operated by the Bikkur Holim, which additionally gave small monthly amounts to 300 needy families. The Veren aided between 200 and 300 persons with tuberculosis; in 1954 it was estimated that seven per cent of Istanbul's Jews either suffered from this sickness or were predisposed to it. In the summer the Veren sent some young invalids to a rest home in the country. Thirty indigent old people received meager care in a private home so inadequate in its means that applicants had to be rejected.

All these activities were administered and supported financially by a central organization connected with the Grand Rabbinate. Its budget for

these purposes came to 350,000 Turkish pounds (about \$29,000) in 1957. Since almost half of this went to the Or ha-Hayyim hospital, the others were each limited to the average budget of 15,000 pounds (about \$1,250). Necessary reforms in their administration were slow, partly because of the lack of funds and partly because there were few able and dynamic young people. However, an increasing number of young people were beginning to take an interest in communal affairs and to seek a voice in them. This was shown by their criticisms in the Jewish press of the administration of the various institutions and even of the Grand Rabbinate. But they had not yet organized themselves.

The desire for social and intellectual activity had declined gradually, and the only meetings that achieved real success were those organized in connection with lectures at the Italian Temple of Istanbul, which had a faithful public. At these lectures the subjects ranged from agriculture to religion. The Istanbul Cultural Club, founded in 1953 by some young people, organized sporadic debates and athletic activities. Others put on plays, including the *Diary of Anne Frank*, which had considerable success.

The artists Edith Assa, Albert Bitran, and Sarah Farhihad had their works exhibited. Jacques Fermon was in the chorus of the State Opera of Istanbul, and Victor Birsel and Glazer played in the Philharmonic Orchestra of Ankara. During the period under review Habib Gerez published collections of poems which were favorably reviewed by the Turkish press, as did Mathilde Altchek in 1954. In 1958 Sami Cohen, political editor of the important daily *Milliyet*, won second prize in a competition run by the Istanbul Journalists' Association. Abraham Galante, at the age of 85, was still working on his history of the Jews of Turkey.