THE SEARCH FOR NATIONAL IDENTITY
AMONG THE TURKS *)

BY

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One of the critical turning points in the process of social, political and intellectual transition in Turkey occurred at the time of the First World War. It was symbolized by the final and irrevocable collapse of the multi-national Ottoman Empire and the rise of the territorially limited, nationalist Republic of Turkey. Much insight into the nature and intensity of this transition may be gained from a study of the confused welter of ideas which blossomed forth during the years preceding and following the collapse of 1918. The political collapse of these years brought in its wake an intellectual crisis of rather severe proportions. The downfall of the old political and social order undermined the belief system which had nurtured and supported it. The construction of a new social and political system correspondingly required the adoption of a new ideology 1. Our attention in this article will focus on the phase which followed the collapse of 1918 and saw the establishment and consolidation of the new regime. More specifically, the discussion will concentrate on the ideas of Turkish nationality and nationalism. These ideas played a crucial role in the search for a viable ideological basis for the new political community.

It would be a mistake to assume that the idea of a specifically Turkish nationality constituting a specifically Turkish state gained immediate and universal acceptance with the military and political triumph of Mustafa Kemal. With the benefit of hind-sight, we may be tempted to view the territorial diminution of the Turkish state

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1 For a trenchant statement of the relation between ideology and social and political transition, see N. Safran, Egypt in Search of Political Community, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1961), Introduction.
and the supporting nationalist movement as inevitable. To those who lived at the time, however, this inevitability was not quite so apparent. Certainly such broad criteria of identification as Islamism and Ottomanism were finally discredited, at least in the political arena. The idea of pan-Turkism died a somewhat slower death, despite the unequivocal rejection of irredentism embodied in the so-called National Pact (Misak-i Milli) of 1920 and in the public statements of Mustafa Kemal. These considerations are reflected in Professor Bernard Lewis' recent monumental study of modern Turkish history. In the course of his discussion, Lewis contrasts the traditional concepts of loyalty in the Ottoman-Muslim environment with such European-inspired ideas as fatherland, patriotism, and nationality. He further traces the adaptation of these European ideas to the Turkish environment, culminating with the Kemalist Republican era. What is missing from Lewis' treatment, however, is an indication that the ongoing heated debate concerning the proper ideological and conceptual content for the newly imposed political, cultural, and social forms, did not end with the establishment of the Republic in 1923.

One of the striking features of the very early days of the Kemalist regime is the lack of any clear definition of Turkish nationality. Even after Kemal gradually dropped the use of the terms "Ottoman" and "Muslim" in favor of "Turk" and "Turkish", he did not clearly indicate what he understood by the concept of the Turkish nation. There were two potentially troublesome points at issue here, one involving the relations with Turkic peoples outside the boundaries of the Republic, the other embodying the problem of the minorities remaining within the confines of the new state. What was needed was a criterion for national identification that would appeal to the emotions of the Turkish majority while neither over-emphasizing the cultural kinship with the Turks of Central Asia and elsewhere nor alienating the non-Turkish groups within the new body politic. A number of answers were suggested during the 1920's. We shall first concentrate on the concept that went by the name of Anatolianism (Anadoluculuk).

1 The Emergence of Modern Turkey (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961), reviewed in W.I., N. S., VII, pp. 222-23 (Ed.).
2 This name had, for the first time, been used by Halide Edib, in 1918: G. Jäschke, Der Turanismus der Jungtürken, W.I. 23, 1941, p. 16 (Ed.).