

The History of the Twentieth Century

Episode 196

“1919 – Turkey and Greece III”

Transcript

[music: Fanfare]

Just months after the signing of the Treaty of Sèvres by the Allies and the Ottoman Empire, the agreement was in tatters. The Sultan’s government was compliant with Allied demands, but nationalist rebels in the interior of Anatolia, led by Mustafa Kemal, remained defiant. If the treaty was to be enforced, it would have to be at gunpoint.

France, Italy, and the United States had already bowed out. The British prime minister, David Lloyd George, wanted to enforce the agreement, but there was little stomach in Britain for sending the British Army back into battle against the Turks.

That left the Greeks as the only government and military prepared to enforce the agreement. But can they?

Welcome to *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

[music: Opening Theme]

Episode 196. 1919: Turkey and Greece, part three.

When we left off last week, I was just finished telling you that David Lloyd George was in a difficult political situation at home, and needed a win. He was hoping the Greeks would get one for him, by salvaging the Treaty of Sèvres, which I compared to taking all your chips and putting them on 14 red.

But if Lloyd George’s political future was becoming dicey, the political situation in Greece was—well, maybe a quick recap is in order. Eleftherios Venizelos became prime minister of Greece all the way back in 1910, when George was King of the Hellenes. Venizelos led the government through the two Balkan Wars, which doubled the size of Greece. King George was assassinated by an anarchist in 1913, and his son Constantine took the crown. Constantine had become a war hero during those conflicts, but it was also the beginning of bad blood between the two Greek leaders.

When the Great War came, Venizelos and his Liberal government wanted to enter the war on the Allied side, but King Constantine resisted both domestic and international pressure to do so, to the extent of dissolving the Greek parliament to undermine Venizelos' pro-Allied policy. Naturally, the Allies were angry and cast Constantine as a German puppet.

This led to the National Schism, in which Greece was all but split in two, with a Venizelos government based in Salonika welcoming Allied troops into Greece and a royalist government in Athens, with a prime minister named Dimitrios Gounaris, telling the Allies to get the hell off of Greek soil.

The National Schism ended when the Allies threatened military intervention. They forced Constantine into exile and put his second son, Alexander, on the Greek throne. Greece joined the Allies and won further new territories in the Treaty of Sèvres.

Venizelos was acclaimed internationally. He'd been called the greatest Greek statesman since Pericles. The dream of uniting all Greek-speaking peoples, the *Megali Idea*, was almost a reality.

But all this victory and glory obscures the fact that Greece remains a country bitterly divided between the Venizelists and the royalists, who never accepted the Allied ouster of the man they regarded as the true king, Constantine.

I told you last time about the two dramatic events in the autumn of 1920 that completely reversed the political situation in Greece. First, the young King Alexander unexpectedly died, and then Venizelos unexpectedly lost his bid for re-election and a new government. This led to Constantine restored to the Greek throne, and Gounaris back in as his prime minister.

The restoration of Constantine and his old pro-neutrality prime minister angered the Allied governments and gave France and Italy the excuse they were looking for to walk away from the Treaty of Sèvres. In fairness, they probably would have done so anyway, Constantine's restoration functioning mostly as a convenient excuse.

But on the Greek side, the King and the prime minister were also getting pretty darn sick of being cast as the heartless minions of Germany who sold out their Greek sisters and brothers living under Ottoman oppression in order to stay in Wilhelm's good graces. This is how Venizelos and his supporters had depicted them, as had Allied propaganda. The bitterness of the National Schism had very much not yet worn off. Greece politics was highly polarized, and after three years in the wilderness, the King and his supporters were back in power, and they had a score to settle.

Venizelos supporters were purged from government and from the military. Now, dismissing some of your most talented and experienced military officers simply because you don't like their politics is always problematic, especially when your Army is about to undertake a demanding mission in Anatolia. On the other hand, the accession of the royalists also permitted the return of

Greece's most senior and experienced military officer, Ioannis Metaxas, who had been among the royalists exiled when Venizelos brought Greece into the war. Now he was back in Greece and back in uniform, but only briefly. He was offered command of the upcoming Greek offensive but turned it down and resigned his military commission, just weeks after reclaiming it.

He turned it down because he didn't believe that the Greek Army was capable of subduing the Turkish nationalists. So you can add Metaxas to the roster of military figures who think the Turkish nationalists are too strong to be defeated in the field. So you might wonder at this point, why did the Greek government go through with this anyway? This is the Greek government that won the election on an anti-war manifesto. So if the government is against it and the military people are divided on the wisdom of proceeding, why do it?

I have to confess that I am wondering this myself. The answer I think lies in that remark Venizelos made to Lloyd George that I mentioned last time, that the project of Greater Greece had advanced too far to be stopped. How would you stop it? Kemal and his government in Angora were demanding all of Anatolia for the Turks, but a Greek withdrawal from Smyrna would leave behind the ethnic Greeks of Asia Minor to an uncertain fate and would surely be rejected by the voters at home, a majority of whom voted for Venizelos and the Liberal Party last November, whatever the numbers in the parliament might say.

While the Greek royalists dithered, hammering out their disagreements and settling on a policy, purging the Army of Venizelos sympathizers, and waiting for the summer campaign season, the Turkish side was only growing stronger. The French and Italians were already in secret negotiations with the Kemal government, the Armenians and Kurds in the east of Turkey had been suppressed, and the agreement with the Russian government in Moscow was now official, meaning all threats to the east and south had been neutralized, and Angora could deploy all its fighters to the west, against the Greek enclave around Smyrna. The Russians were also now providing military and financial aid to the Turkish nationalists.

On June 22, the Allies proposed yet another conference in the hope of settling the dispute peacefully, but the Greek government rejected the invitation. Five days later, the Greek offensive began. The Greek Army had learned from its earlier mistakes. This was a careful three-pronged advance with nine divisions, aimed at the western Anatolian city of Eskişehir, a crucial railroad junction that Greek military planners viewed as the key to controlling western Turkey. King Constantine was shipped over from Greece to lead the final assault on the city personally. The Greeks fielded about a hundred thousand soldiers; estimates of the number of Turkish soldiers vary, but it was somewhere between fifty and a hundred thousand.

The Turkish commander here was Mustafa İsmet Pasha, an experienced Ottoman military officer who served under Mustafa Kemal during the British Palestine offensive in the final years of the Great War. More recently, he had been among the army officers who had followed Kemal in moving inland and serving in the nationalist forces. The Angora government had made him

commander of its troops in the west, putting him in the difficult position of organizing Turkish resistance to the Greek advance.

Kemal judged the defense of Eskişehir to be hopeless and ordered İsmet to retreat. The fiercely patriotic İsmet could not bear the responsibility for surrendering Eskişehir to the hated infidel Greeks. Kemal spared him this burden by traveling to the scene in order to take command personally and order the retreat himself.

In Greece and in the West, the fall of Eskişehir was seen as a great victory for the Greeks, and evidence that the Turkish nationalist movement was collapsing. British prime minister David Lloyd George, who had a lot riding on this particular gamble, could not help crowing. He wrote to his new war minister, Sir Laming Worthington-Evans, one of the many ministers who had opposed his pro-Greek policy in Cabinet, "I hear from Greek quarters that Eski Shehir has been captured and the Turkish Army is in full retreat...The future of the East will very largely be determined by this struggle, and yet as far as I can see, the War Office has not taken the slightest trouble to find out what has happened...Have you a Department which is known as the Intelligence Department in your office? You might find out what it is doing. It appears in the [budget] at quite a substantial figure, but when it comes to information, it is not visible."

You'd think someone who was such a fan of Greeks and Greek culture would have a better handle on the concept of *hubris*.

Kemal had correctly understood the cold reality that preserving the army was more important than holding onto a point on the map. But the fall of Eskişehir emboldened the Greeks and dismayed the Turks, including many in the provisional government. Some were defeatists, who thought the war was lost and it was time to negotiate in the hopes of retaining some fragment of an independent Turkey. Others opposed Kemal and wanted Enver Pasha to take command.

David Lloyd George had gambled his political career and his reputation on a Greek victory. Now Mustafa Kemal would gamble his own. He made a proposal to the Angora government that Julius Caesar would have well understood: give him absolute control over the military and the government and he would turn the situation around in three months. If he could not, then he would accept full responsibility for the failure and resign.

Meanwhile, back at Eskişehir, Greek political and military leaders debated their next step. Flush with victory, many Greeks wanted to push on to Angora itself, capture the Turkish nationalist capital, and force the provisional government into flight and collapse. Others were more cautious. The Greek Army's supply lines would be stretched to the limit by a march on Angora. The farther east you go, the more Turkish and the less Greek the local populations become, meaning there would be increasing resistance. The march would be across the barren Anatolian plateau, which would strain Greek supply lines and provide little or no cover. The Turks would have plenty of warning of their approach.

After a month of deliberation, consolidation, and resupply, the Greeks made the fateful decision to press on. You could attribute this to overconfidence, but it's likely that Greek desperation was at least as important a factor. Greece was a poor country, and it had been at war, on and off, for almost a decade now. The nation was tired of war; it was deep in debt. Even the most optimistic Greek would have to consider that time is not on their side, and the best hope of victory was a bold stroke before the Turks became too strong.

But Kemal was ready for them. He had chosen to take his stand along the Sakarya River, a formidable natural obstacle about fifty miles from Angora. He exercised his extraordinary powers to requisition food and horses and clothing and sandals from the civilian population. By August, when the Greeks began their advance, Turkish forces were dug in to defend their capital.

The Greek Army began its assault of the Turkish line on August 26. Greek infantry had to cross the river, then fight their way up the slopes on the far side, into the teeth of the tenacious Turkish defenses. The Greeks captured the high ground in some places, and even broke through the Turkish lines here and there. At one point, Greek units were barely thirty miles from Angora. But they did not get the decisive breakthrough they needed. Supply lines gave out. Some Greek units had to hang on for days without food or ammunition. After three weeks of fierce fighting, Greek commanders ordered their army to withdraw back to Eskişehir.

Kemal returned to Angora in triumph. The National Assembly granted him the rank of field marshal and the honorific *Ghazi*, which in the Ottoman Empire was traditionally reserved for the Sultans.

[music: *Istanbul Dawn*]

There followed afterward a lull in the fighting, a standoff between the Greeks and the Turks that lasted another year, during which Greece's international position continued to deteriorate. The Greek government went hat in hand to Rome, Paris, and London, begging for help, but found it nowhere. The French formalized their peace with the Turkish nationalists in October, with a treaty agreement under which the nationalists recognized French control over Syria and Lebanon, in return for which France effectively recognized the Angora government and ceded to Turkey a portion of Syrian territory around the city of Alexandretta, on the Mediterranean coast. This agreement was received with bitterness in London. British Cabinet ministers saw it as a stab in the back and likely the end of the British-French alliance that had been the cornerstone agreement of what we've been calling the "Allies," since 1914. Now you could ask whether there was anything left of that alliance. And a lot of people were asking.

Lloyd George still believed in the Greek cause, but he was increasingly isolated within his own Cabinet. Even the foreign secretary, Lord Curzon, was putting out feelers to the Angora government to explore the possibility of some kind of accommodation with the nationalists. But Kemal and his government would not bend from their key demand: a complete withdrawal of Greek forces and Turkish sovereignty over all of Anatolia.

In desperation, the Greek government came up with one last ploy to force the Allies' hand. The Greek Army redeployed a few regiments from Anatolia to Thrace and combined them with Greek units already stationed there to create a new force equal to about two divisions. The Greek government then announced it would occupy Constantinople, as a way of forcing the Turks to bargain. The Greek force was larger than the token Allied presence in the city, and the Greeks apparently calculated that either the Allies would have to let them take the city, or at least pass through into Anatolia, where these units could be used to threaten the Turkish flank. Either way, they hoped this would force the Allies to recognize that the status quo in Turkey was unsustainable and that they must intervene to settle the conflict.

But the ploy failed. The Allied occupation forces in Constantinople called the Greek bluff and refused to allow them into the city. The Greeks were not willing to fire on Allied soldiers, and that was that.

In August 1922, with the Greeks demoralized, and a portion of their army now unwisely redeployed to Thrace, Kemal saw his chance and began a Turkish offensive. In a matter of days, the year-long standoff had been broken and the beaten and demoralized Greek Army was in full retreat back to Smyrna.

The officer in command of the Greek forces in Anatolia, Georgios Hatzianestis, was relieved of command. He would later be denounced as a madman or a "mental case," in David Lloyd George's words. General Nikolaos Trikoupis was ordered to take command, but you can get an idea of the kind of disarray the Greek Army had fallen into when I tell you that General Trikoupis was already a prisoner of the Turks when the Athens government appointed him. It is said that he received the news of his new command from Mustafa Kemal.

The Greek Navy assembled enough ships to evacuate the Greek Army from Anatolia by September 8. The following day, the first Turkish fighters entered Smyrna.

There were a number of Allied warships in the harbor at Smyrna, including two British dreadnoughts and a number of smaller Royal Navy ships, plus US, French, and Italian naval vessels. These ships landed marines to protect their respective diplomatic installations and to evacuate their own nationals. It was hoped their presence in the city would deter Turks seeking revenge. They did not.

The Greek forces had been brutal to Turkish soldiers and civilians during the landing at Smyrna and their advance across Anatolia. The Greeks pursued a scorched-earth policy during their retreat, putting dozens of rural Turkish villages to the torch. As the Turks advanced and encountered burnt-out town after burnt-out town, their anger grew, and when they reached Smyrna, they vented their rage upon the city.

One of the first victims was the Greek Orthodox bishop of Smyrna, who was attacked by a mob of Turkish civilians armed with knives, in full view of Turkish and French troops who did

nothing to intervene. The bishop was beaten, stabbed, and mutilated until he finally died of his wounds. Turkish troops looted and pillaged, raped and murdered. After four days, a fire broke out, or was set. It burned for days with no attempt to put it out, all but destroying the Greek and Armenian quarters of the city. The Turkish quarter was left intact.

The Allied warships in the harbor abandoned their neutrality and began taking aboard Greek refugees, evacuating them from the city. Some Greek ships also helped evacuate civilians, although much of the Greek government and military were paralyzed owing to the revolt in Athens. More about that in a minute.

The exact number of deaths is not known, but 30,000 is a fair middle estimate. Somewhere in the neighborhood of 100,000 to 150,000 refugees were evacuated. The city of İzmir was devastated; the Greek city of Smyrna no longer existed. The fire is widely believed to have been deliberately set by the Turkish nationalist forces, although the official Turkish position is to deny responsibility.

Days after the fires raged in Smyrna, in Greece the military went into revolt. Junior officers, most of whom were Venizelists, mutinied and overthrew the government in Athens. King Constantine was forced into exile for a second time. Parliament was dissolved. In November 1922, a military tribunal convicted General Hatzianestis and five senior members of the previous government, including Prime Minister Gounaris, of treason. Four of the six defendants were executed just hours after the verdicts were rendered, including Hatzianestis and Gounaris. Another of the defendants, King Constantine's younger brother Prince Andrew, had his death sentence commuted to exile, and he and his family, including his infant son, the future Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh, left Greece never to return. In 1924, Greece would abolish the monarchy and declare itself a republic.

With İzmir under Turkish control and the Greek Army expelled from Asia Minor, the nationalists in Angora had won almost everything they had demanded. The glaring exception was Constantinople and the Straits, which were still under Allied occupation, albeit by a very small occupation force. Once the Greeks were gone, the Turks turned toward Constantinople.

The British Cabinet met in emergency session on September 15. The British government had been mere bystanders during this unfolding Greek tragedy, but now the conflict was on their own front doorstep. Either Britain had to surrender Constantinople, the Straits, their forts, Gallipoli—valuable prizes that had been won at a terrible cost during the Great War—or else Britain had to prepare to go to war once again, less than four years after the Armistice.

Late that night, Lloyd George and Churchill sent a coded telegram to the prime ministers of the five Dominions, asking them for troops to defend the Straits. They also released a public statement to the British press. The statement said that while the government hoped to end the conflict with the Angora government through peaceful negotiation, that was impossible to do so as long as British forces were under a Turkish military threat. It warned that if Muslim Turks

defeated the British Army, it would encourage the British Empire's large Muslim population to rise up against British rule, and it closed by noting that the British government was in consultation with the French, Italian, and Dominion governments over a common military response.

That public statement, which Lloyd George and Churchill had drafted together, without input from anyone else in the Cabinet, backfired horribly. On the domestic front, it sparked an immediate backlash against Britain entering any new war. The French and Italian governments were infuriated by what appeared to be the British government announcing their cooperation in a military response, cooperation which had never been offered.

The Dominion prime ministers were equally provoked. The public statement came before they had had any opportunity to respond to the secret cables they had just received, and it seemed to them that the British Cabinet were trying to publicly pressure them into a military response. Canada's new Liberal prime minister Mackenzie King and his Cabinet decided that Canada could go to war only on the say-so of its own parliament, not of the British government. The Australian government similarly refused. South Africa did not reply. Only Newfoundland and New Zealand, the two smallest Dominions, offered support.

At the Paris Peace Conference, the Dominions had insisted on separate representation, and on signing the treaties as independent sovereign states. The possibility was even raised then that they might refuse to participate in the event of some future British war. Now, that theoretical possibility had become a reality, far sooner than anyone would have predicted.

Meanwhile, the Turkish advance developed into a military confrontation at Chanak, the Turkish fortification on the Asian side of the Dardanelles, opposite Gallipoli. With French and Italian troops standing down, a small British force found itself with only barbed wire between it and a much larger Turkish force.

But the Turks did not attack. They held their position, confronting the British, refusing to assault or to withdraw. The British and the Turks agreed to an armistice in October, based on a peace formula under which the Allies would withdraw from Constantinople and the Straits. Kemal's government would get everything it demanded under the National Pact; the Allies would get a face-saving grace period for their withdrawal, so the settlement would appear negotiated, rather than imposed on the Allies at gunpoint.

A few weeks later, the Angora government deposed the Sultan. The Ottoman Empire was gone. In its place stood a new Republic of Turkey, though this would not become official for another year.

[music: *Istanbul Dawn*]

On October 9, 1922, at the height of the Chanak Crisis, *The Times* published a letter from the former Conservative leader, Andrew Bonar Law. While formally expressing support for the government in its confrontation with the Turks, Bonar Law argued that the positions Britain was taking, in support of the internationalization of the Straits and the protection of Christian minorities in Turkey, were not specifically British national interests, but in the interest of the whole international community. It was therefore not right that Britain and her Empire should bear the burden of defending these interests alone. Italy, France, and the US had equal obligations to respond. If they refused, then Britain must be prepared to follow suit. In a metaphor that will be much repeated over the next century, Bonar Law insisted that “We cannot alone act as the policeman of the world.”

A few days later, with his coalition collapsing, David Lloyd George resigned as prime minister. Bonar Law would succeed him. Lloyd George’s political career was over. He would retain his seat in Parliament until 1945, but he would never again serve in a British cabinet.

I’ll return to the goings-on in the UK and the fall of Lloyd George’s government in a future episode. For now, just note that the Chanak Crisis was the last straw for a government already overburdened with unpopular policies.

In the British government, they blamed their allies, France and Italy, for the collapse of the Treaty of Sèvres. They also blamed the Bolsheviks. But the British reserved their harshest criticism for the United States. Their complaint went like this: Britain and the Allies had agreed to the American proposal to occupy and partition the Ottoman Empire through the new and untested Wilsonian scheme of League of Nations mandates. This had been complex and difficult work, undertaken when the Allies could have just divvied up the conquered lands the old-fashioned way. This time-consuming process, undertaken to please the Americans, had given the Turks enough time to regroup and take up arms once more, while the United States had abandoned its commitment to the League of Nations and to Armenia and had stuck the UK with the job of maintaining and protecting the American program in the Near East.

But Woodrow Wilson was now out of office. This was Warren Harding’s administration, and his Secretary of State, Charles Evans Hughes, rejected the British criticism. The United States had never sought to hand out spheres of influence in Anatolia, Hughes said, nor concerned itself with control of the Straits. The US could surely not be blamed for the collapse of the Greek Army. Rather, European diplomacy had wrought the difficulties now facing the Europeans, while the new foreign policy of the United States in the Near East would be limited to defending American interests there.

Which you can take as a euphemism for petroleum.

Following the agreed-to armistice, peace talks opened in November 1922 between Turkey and the Allies on the neutral ground of Lausanne, Switzerland. Lord Curzon, still foreign secretary in the Bonar Law government, represented Britain, with now-prime minister Raymond Poincaré

appearing for France and now-prime minister Benito Mussolini appearing for Italy. Foreign minister Georgy Chicherin led a Russian delegation, which was invited to participate in discussions on the future of the Straits. The Turkish delegation was led by İsmet Pasha and included Chaim Nahum, the Chief Rabbi of the Ottoman Empire.

This peace conference dragged almost three months, into early 1923. İsmet proved a dogged, stubborn negotiator. Lord Curzon once said to him, “You remind me of nothing so much as an old music box. You play the same old tune day after day until we are heartily sick of it—sovereignty, sovereignty, sovereignty.” İsmet had a hearing impairment and used a hearing aid. These were pretty big and bulky devices at this time, and İsmet became famous for visibly shutting it off whenever Lord Curzon spoke.

The Turkish position at the talks truly was “sovereignty, sovereignty, sovereignty.” Full sovereignty for the Republic of Turkey over all Turkish lands. This includes Anatolia plus Constantinople and eastern Thrace. Full sovereignty also meant an end to the Capitulations. The Turkish government would manage its own affairs, and foreigners in Turkey would be subject to the same code of laws as Turkish citizens. The Allies would eventually agree to these demands. The Straits question was resolved, though it would be reopened in 1936 and a newer agreement reached that would give Turkey full control over the Straits while guaranteeing free passage of civilian vessels and some kinds of warships. That agreement is still in effect today, although the Straits question still occasionally sparks controversies, even in our time.

In exchange, Turkey would give up its claims to the Arab Near East, and to Egypt, Libya, Cyprus, and the Dodecanese. One issue that remained contentious was the disposition of the Ottoman province of Mosul, which the British claimed as part of the new nation of petroleum. Sorry. I meant Iraq, of course. The Turkish position was that the British had occupied Mosul after the Armistice of Mudros went into effect, making their occupation illegal. The Turks also claimed that the Kurds who lived in the region were actually Turks, and therefore Mosul province was properly part of Turkey. This dispute never was settled at Lausanne. In the end, the parties agreed to submit the dispute to the League of Nations, which agreed with the British position, and so Mosul became part of Iraq. The agreed-upon provisions were drawn up as the Treaty of Lausanne, which superseded the Treaty of Sèvres.

Peace treaties are all well and good, and should be welcomed, but there was another, darker, outcome of this conflict. Last September, following the collapse and withdrawal of the Greek Army from Anatolia and the violence that followed, hundreds of thousands of ethnic Greeks fled Anatolia for Greece. In January 1923, as the talks went on in Lausanne, the Greek and Turkish governments agreed to a massive exchange of their ethnic minority populations, an agreement virtually without historical precedent. More than 1.2 million Greeks in Turkey would lose their Turkish citizenship and be forced to migrate to Greece, while about 350,000 ethnic Turks in Greece would similarly be forced to relocate to Anatolia.

I should clarify here that calling these transferred populations ethnic Greeks and ethnic Turks, as the history books often do, is a bit euphemistic. The so-called Greeks that were forced out of Anatolia included Armenians and Turkish-speaking Orthodox Christians, neither of whom can fairly be described as “ethnic Greeks.” It would be more accurate simply to describe them as Orthodox Christians. Similarly, those sent out of Greece included Greek-speaking Muslims and Roma Muslims among others, and it would be more accurate to describe these people as Muslims rather than as “ethnic Turks.”

So the bottom line here, after the Treaty of Lausanne went into effect and the fighting ended, we find two important results that came from these conflicts. The first is that the newborn Republic of Turkey successfully resisted by force of arms the efforts of European colonial powers—Britain, France, and Italy—to divide it into spheres of influence and impose special legal privileges for Europeans, as had been done in other non-European nations such as Iran and China. All the way back in the first episode of this podcast, I argued that the most important change the world would see in the twentieth century was the end of empires. Surely this moment right here marks the beginning of their end. For the first time in modern history, or at least since Ethiopia and the Russo-Japanese War, a non-Western nation stood up to the encroachment of European imperialism, said “no,” and made it stick. This will be the beginning of a trend.

I would call that a positive development, and fierce Turkish nationalism was the force that drove it. But Turkish nationalism also has a dark side. In 19th-century Europe, nationalism was generally a force for freedom and liberalization. Here we see the early stirrings a different sort of nationalism, one that defines the nation by religion and ethnicity, and denies equal rights to minorities, even going so far as to deny citizenship to people born in the nation and expel them from the country, or, as in the case of the Kurds, denying their very existence as a minority ethnicity. A nationalism that insists that the mere assertion of minority status amounts to a crime against the state. Turkey is certainly not the first country to mistreat or bully its minority residents; it’s happening in many places in the early twentieth century even as this story unfolds, as you well know if you’ve been listening to this podcast. But even so, the formalization and institutionalization of ethnic identity as integral to one’s citizenship and the rejection of the ideal of a multicultural community as not only impractical but actually dangerous to the state represents a darker and more troubling kind of nationalism. This is a trend that we are going to see develop in many places in the decades to come.

In the months following the conclusion of the Treaty of Lausanne, the government in Angora officially proclaimed the Republic of Turkey. Mustafa Kemal became the first President of the Republic and he would hold that office until his death in 1938, at the age of 57. Kemal took office as the undisputed leader and hero of the Turkish nation, which gave him a great deal of political capital in the new republic. He applied this capital to enact a sweeping set of reforms meant to promote the unity, secularization and modernization of the Turkish republic.

“Unity” meant strict imposition of Turkish language and culture on the entire population. The government promoted the use of the Turkish language and banned other languages. Even surnames were affected. Family names that suggested a Greek or Armenian or Kurdish or Arab or Georgian background were prohibited and those families forced to adopt Turkish surnames. Likewise, geographical place names that came from other languages were replaced with Turkish names. And given the experience of the recent wars, the city of Angora was made the permanent capital. It had the advantage of a secure and central location in Anatolia, whereas Constantinople had been shown to be too vulnerable to foreign occupation, three times in the past decade, in fact.

“Secularization” meant the strict separation of Islam from the state, which marked a radical departure from the way the Ottoman Empire operated, where the Sultan was also the Caliph. The Angora government had already abolished the sultanate. In 1924, it abolished the caliphate. This was a controversial decision within Islam, with some Muslim leaders arguing that the Turkish government did not have the authority to abolish the caliphate unilaterally, although no one since has been able to propose a new Caliph and make their choice stick, so I suppose we’d have to say that whatever the *de jure* status of the Caliphate is, it was abolished *de facto*.

Within Turkey, the new secular state abolished sharia courts, cut off public funds for religious purposes, and eliminated religious tests for public office. Education and the legal system were made secular. The Republic granted freedom of private religious belief while imposing secularism in public spaces, along the lines of the French model.

“Modernization” included the secularization of the legal code and the education system. The new government enacted land reform, banking and economic reform, and equal rights for women. Reforms were introduced to the Turkish language, to purge it of foreign words, and to introduce a new Turkish alphabet. Turkish had previously been written in Arabic letters; under Kemal’s government, a form of the Latin alphabet was introduced, adapted to account for the phonemes of the Turkish language.

One of the consequences of this alphabetic reform for us Westerners is that Turkish names become easier to read and understand, and this facilitated the process of Westerners embracing Turkish place names over the more traditional, usually Greek, names that were previously more commonly used in Europe and North America. In 1930, the same decade in which the Iranian government began asking everyone to call their nation Iran and the government of Thailand began asking everyone to call their nation Thailand, the Turkish government began promoting the use of Turkish place names to the international community. The Turkish post office did its share by refusing to deliver mail that was addressed to a non-Turkish place name.

So this is the moment in which foreigners generally stop using place names like Adrianople or Smyrna or Angora, and began calling these cities by their proper Turkish names: Edirne, İzmir, Ankara. And of course the most famous of these name changes: Stop calling it Constantinople;

from now on, it's İstanbul. In fact, even in Ottoman times, the city was sometimes referred to by its historic name, but in the new Republic of Turkey, you call it İstanbul or your mail doesn't get delivered. So there.

These reforms changed the nature of the Turkish state in a fundamental way, and arguably Mustafa Kemal was even more important a figure in Turkish history as a peacetime President than he was in war as a military leader. In 1934, the Turkish Parliament recognized Kemal's outsized role in reshaping modern Turkey by bestowing upon him the surname Atatürk—"Father of the Turks."

Finally, I should mention that Eleftherios Venizelos would resume the premiership of Greece a few times, actually, in the 1920s and early 1930s. With both of their countries still struggling to overcome the traumas of their wars and the population transfers, Venizelos and Atatürk agreed to a treaty of friendship between Turkey and Greece in 1930, and the relationship between the two nations since then has been...uh, an improvement?

We'll take our progress wherever we can get it.

We'll have to stop there for today. Thank you for listening, and I'd especially like to thank Paul for his donation, and thank you, Gunnar, for becoming a patron of the podcast. Donors and patrons like Paul and Gunnar help keep the words flowing and the bits going. If you'd like to help out, please visit the website, historyofthetwentiethcentury.com, and click on the PayPal or Patreon buttons.

While you're there, you can leave a comment and let me know what you thought about today's show. I also post playlists of the music used on the podcast, along with composer credits and other information, so if you hear a piece of music you'd like to know more about, that's the place to look. Most of the music I use here is free and downloadable, and you'll find links to sites where you can download it, if you like.

You can also help support the podcast by leaving a rating and review at the iTunes store or wherever fine podcasts are distributed, although iTunes remains the 800-pound gorilla of podcasting, so that's a great place to start. You don't have to be listening to the podcast through iTunes yourself in order to leave a review there; just create a login and you're ready to go. Ratings and reviews help other people find the podcast, people who hopefully will enjoy it as much as you do.

Next week is a bye week for the podcast, but I hope you'll join me in two weeks' time, on *The History of the Twentieth Century*, as I fulfill my promise to bring you the story of postwar Italy, and explain this whole "Prime Minister Benito Mussolini" thing. Italy, in two weeks' time, here on *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

Oh, and one more thing. I would be gravely remiss if I did not acknowledge that in 1953, the songwriter Nat Simon and the lyricist Jimmy Kennedy—whom we’ve met before on this podcast, all the way back in episode 17, when I told you that he wrote the lyrics to “The Teddy Bear’s Picnic”—Nat Simon and Jimmy Kennedy wrote a novelty song entitled “Istanbul (Not Constantinople),” a comedic commentary on the adoption of “Istanbul” as the official name of the former Ottoman capital. 1953 also happened to be the 500th anniversary of the fall of Constantinople to the Turks, although I expect that’s just a coincidence.

The song was recorded by The Four Lads, a Canadian quartet, and it became their first gold record. It reached number ten on the charts in the United States that year. I can still remember my mother singing it when I was a little boy.

The song’s been covered a few times and its lyrics are frequently referenced, but I suppose in our day the best known version is the cover recorded by the band They Might Be Giants, from their third album, *Flood*, in 1990. It was also released as a single. A year later, the children’s animated television series *Tiny Toons Adventures* broadcast a music video set to the They Might Be Giants version of the song, and am I going to post it on the website? Of course I am.

[music: Closing Theme]