

Nov. 10, 2002

Dear Guests, PSU faculty and Students, TSA and TASK members, first of all I would like to thank you for attending this presentation today.

This is the last event of “Secularism Week” announced by TSA and TASK for the first time this year. We are hoping this will become a tradition and every year we will see richer and better events. The time period runs from Oct. 29 which is the date of the declaration of secular modern Turkish republic 79 years ago in 1923, till Nov. 10 which is the date Turks commemorate the founding father of the secular republic Mustafa Kemal Ataturk who passed away in Nov. 10 1938 , 64 years ago, however his legacy is still living in real example of Turkey and in the hearts and minds of most of its citizens.

During the start of the “Secularism Week” republic of Turkey was celebrated with a ceremony. Second event was a poetry night presenting poems from many modern Turkish poets as well as world famous Turkish Poet Nazim Hikmet and his friend Pablo Neruda The goal of this event was the presentation of contributions to liberal arts by Turkish intellectuals as symbolized by poetry. Third event was the showing of documentary film “Jihad in America”. This PBS documentary by Steven Emerson showed the dangers of fundamentalism to the world including modern and moderate Moslems.

Today is the climax of these events when we remember Mustafa Kemal Ataturk and his legacy secular Turkish Republic.

First, I would like to talk a bit about Ataturk, then about secularism and its importance today in struggle against fundamentalist terrorism. Secularism was one of the important principles of Ataturk. It stood the test of time for almost 80 years.

Kemalist secularism did not merely mean separation of state and religion, but also the separation of religion from educational, cultural and legal affairs. It meant independence of thought and independence of institutions from the dominance of religious thinking and religious institutions. Thus, the Kemalist revolution was also a secularist revolution. Many Kemalist reforms

were made to bring about secularism, and others were realized because secularism had been achieved. The Kemalist principle of secularism did not advocate atheism. It was not an anti-God principle. It was a rationalist, anti-clerical secularism. The Kemalist principle of secularism was not against an enlightened Islam, but against an Islam which was opposed to modernization.

Turkish constitution defines Turkey as "**democratic, secular, and social state governed by the rule of law**". Article 5 vests sovereignty in the nation, stipulating that it is not to be delegated to "any individual, group, or class."

Here is what some famous personalities said about Atatürk.

"Winston Churchill paid tribute to him, as "a great hero". To John F. Kennedy, he was "one of the great figures of our century", to Ronald Reagan, "a towering figure". Prime Minister David Ben Gurion, a founder of Israel, said; "I know of no greater statesman." For India's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, he was "one of the creators of the modern age." Dwight D. Eisenhower praised him as "a source of inspiration to independence-seekers around the world." French President Charles de Gaulle said: "He was the greatest achiever among all the world leaders, because he modernized his nation." In 1934, Greek Prime Minister Venizelos, who nominated him for the Nobel Peace Prize, observed that "in the life of a nation it is very seldom that changes to such a radical degree were carried out in such a short period of time ... these extraordinary activities have earned him fame as 'a great man', in the full sense of the term."

Here is briefly what a famous Turkish Historian Talat Halman said about Atatürk.

“It was in 1923 that "the hero of the Turks" created a republic out of an antiquated empire. From 1923 to his death on November 10, 1938, in just 15 years, he introduced sweeping reforms to modernize the nation: Arabic writing was replaced with the Latin alphabet; government and education were separated from religion; the legal system was overhauled on the basis of European models; women were given equal rights under the law; hats

replaced the traditional headgear and women were discouraged from wearing the veil. A vast transformation took place especially in urban life: Turkey's cultural life embraced many aspects of Western civilization, technology and arts, including opera, ballet, sculpture. Schools and universities, too, became Westernized.

The Turkish Republic, based on the Kemalist principle that "Sovereignty belongs to the nation," took impressive strides towards a secular democratic parliamentary system. Ataturk was dedicated to the ideal of peace and harmony. His slogan was "peace in the country, peace in the world." Having lived through many battles and wars, he was able to say: "Unless a nation's life faces peril, war is a crime."

Ataturk was a humanist and international peacemaker. Few statesmen have served the cause of secularism and progress more successfully than he did. The Turkish nation, inspired by him, will not allow the religious fundamentalist, fanatics, and zealots to create an oppressive regime."

As we can see when people talk about Ataturk and Turkish republic "secularism" term stands out almost in every line. In presentations today we also saw many features of secularism and its importance in struggle against fundamentalism. I think it is very important that people who believe in democracy, freedom and human rights should try to understand and educate themselves on what is going on today and what has been happening in the past on the issue of "threats against democracy, freedom and human rights." These issues affect our lives and the lives of people around the world directly.

In Turkey history of fundamentalist terror goes back to Ottoman times. One example of such could be seen in the attack against Khartoum in Sudan in 19th century. Fundamentalist groups under the leadership of Mehdi attacked Khartoum in the name of Allah. The city was being defended by General Gordon who was cooperating with Ottomans and was known to Turks as Gordon Pasha term for general in Turkish. The reinforcements were late in arriving so General Gordon offered Mehdi the city if he spared the population. The answer was "infidel blood needed to be shed to the name of Allah" and this was to be example to others. Gordon with a small Garrison fought them and lost and he and many civilians in the city were killed. The

city at the time was occupied by Moslems, but in the eyes of the fundamentalist they were also infidels.

Another example of fundamentalist terror could be seen in the times of Ataturk. In 1930 a group of fundamentalists butchered a young school teacher in the town of Menemen to the name of Allah because he was the teacher of a secular school. In 1993 in the city of Sivas a crowd of Fundamentalists after Moslem holiday, Friday prayers in a mosque attacked a hotel where many Turkish Folk singers and poets were having a meeting. They burned the hotel down killing 37 intellectuals. Many other Turkish journalists, university students, professors and intellectuals were murdered by fundamentalist terrorists in the last 20-30 years.

In the international scale many murders were carried out by fundamentalist terror groups in Egypt, in Algeria , in Indonesia, in Israel and in many other countries. One of the most recent and horrifying attack of fundamentalist terror was against United States on Sept. 11, 2001. As we all know and more aware now similar attacks and threat of attacks are continuing. The dark day of Sept. 11 brought here attention to this terror which led to declaration of “war against terror” by president Bush. He mentioned that this will be a long struggle and he is right. The war on terror will not be won only in the battle field. It would require a change of mind set that produce these terrorists through education . One of the most important answer is “secular education” through which young minds could learn scientific way of thinking, respect for human rights, tolerance, love of others and freedom. Unfortunately, some of the religious schools in Moslem countries teach hate of others instead of love of god. It is very important that this type of teaching and poisoning of young minds should stop.

There were many enemies of secular state in Turkey in the past and there are many enemies of it currently. They are the enemies of this positive institution because it takes away power from these dark forces who try to control people through illiteracy and ignorance.

The aim of Sept. 11 attacks and atrocities against the people of the United States and other attacks in different countries is to terrorize the free thinking people of the world and in the long run hope to eliminate the freedoms we enjoy. Terrorist will not succeed in their aim. Radical Islam and terrorism

try to impose their vision of the world on other Moslems and the people of the world either by deceit under the guise of democracy or by force as seen in terror acts. The enemies of freedom use democracy and human rights for their ultimate goal of destroying these invaluable institutions. Our duty is to watch out against these attacks by recognizing the deceit by educating ourselves about it and by thinking with reason and wisdom. After all, we live in an imperfect real world; wise person's chore is to separate the real threat from muddy waters of the world events so that our future generations could live in peace and better world than we do. We have to be in constant watch so that the philosophy of dark ages does not cast its shadow on the world ever again.

Today we have seen how Turkey under the great leadership of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk took a step towards light and enlightenment. Although not perfect, this advance is still continuing and will continue.

I wish all of you peaceful world and a bright future for our children. Hoping to see you in the secularism week next year hopefully with better news of the world.

Thanks for coming again.

Savas Yavuzkurt