A faint, grayscale portrait of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk is visible in the background, showing his face and beard. The text is overlaid on this image.

# ATATÜRK ALIVE IN HIS OWN WORDS

Prof. Talat S. Halman



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## Introducing “Atatürk Alive in His Own Words”

Destiny has endowed very few individuals with any of Atatürk’s achievements. Protagonist of his nation’s sovereignty. Undefeated commander. Pioneer of anticolonialism. Staunchest foe of imperialism at home and abroad. Creator of a republic. Transformer of the political, legal and socio-economic systems. Spellbinding orator. Cultural revolutionary. Secularist visionary. Humanist and international peacemaker. Model for the leaders of emancipation and of emerging nations. The hero of a 20th century renaissance.

Still fewer are those, in the East or in the West, in this century or earlier centuries, who gained distinction in many of the same accomplishments. It is virtually impossible to think of any historical figure who achieved it all in so short a period with as much enduring impact.

Atatürk’s oratorical legacy stands as one of the most successful for its time as well as for later decades. His statements on peace at home and peace in the world, freedom and independence, human dignity and economic development, education for all, the vital importance of science, culture and the arts, and the supremacy of humanistic values continue to inspire forward-looking Turks and progressive nations throughout the world.

The present book contains many of his most effective statements selected from his diverse speeches, interviews and writings. The selection starts with the dramatic opening of his historic 6-day speech of 1927 delivered in the Turkish

Grand National Assembly. His memorable quotations collectively express the essence of this great statesman’s vision and eloquence. The text of “Atatürk Alive in His Own Words” originated as a presentation with authentic slides that I had the honor of performing at United Nations Headquarters in New York City in 1992. As the title suggests, it consists of Atatürk’s own words exclusively. Nothing has been added to it even by way of introduction or explanation.

Although Atatürk was an extremely communicative leader who delivered a huge number of speeches, very few of them were recorded or filmed. Even fewer have come down to our times. Fortunately those spellbinding speeches have been preserved in print for posterity. The present selection is a tiny portion of the available corpus: it represents the quintessence of the powerful ideas articulated by one of history’s most inspiring national leaders.

Those ideas are presented here in dramatic form vividly illustrated by authentic photographs. Thanks go to Feyyaz Berker, who helped create this book of tribute.

“Atatürk Alive In His Own Words” is a testament to the foresight of a genius leader as well as a quintessential historical account of a revolutionary republic and reforms for the creation of democracy.

Prof. Talat S. Halman

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First Minister of Culture and first Ambassador for Cultural Affairs of the Turkish Republic. Currently Dean of Humanities and Letters at Bilkent University. President, Turkish National Committee for UNICEF. Between 1953 and 1997, faculty member at Columbia, Princeton, Pennsylvania, and New York Universities. Served four years as a member of UNESCO’s Executive Board. Published 70 books and some three thousand articles in Turkish and English.



THE WEAPONS AND THE AMMUNITIONS OF THE ARMY  
HAD BEEN AND WERE STILL BEING TAKEN AWAY.



On the 19th of May, 1919, I set foot in Samsun.  
The situation, the panorama was as follows:

The group of powers with which the Ottoman State had been allied had suffered defeat in the Great War. The Ottoman army had been routed on every front. An armistice had been signed setting harsh conditions. During the protracted course of the Great War, the nation had become exhausted and impoverished. Those who had dragged our nation and the country into the war had fled abroad since now they only thought of their own lives. Vahdettin, the depraved occupant of the sultanate and the caliphate, was seeking some reprehensible measure which, he imagined, could save himself and his throne. The cabinet headed by Ferit Pasha, the son-in-law, was inept, shorn of dignity, cowardly, subservient to the will of the sultan alone, and ready to accept any arrangement designed to protect the sultan and his entourage.

The weapons and the ammunitions of the army had been and were still being taken away.



The Entente Powers did not even find it necessary to respect the terms of the armistice. On some pretext or other their battleships and troops remained in İstanbul. The Adana province was occupied by the French; Urfa, Maraş, and Antep by the British. The Italian contingents were in Antalya and Konya, and British troops in Merzifon and Samsun. Everywhere foreign officials and functionaries and their private agents were active. Finally, on May 15th, 1919, four days prior to the events with which my account begins, the Greek army, with the approval of the Entente Powers, had landed in İzmir.

Hostile nations, in their aggression, were determined to destroy and dismember the Ottoman State and its territory. The person who served as sultan and caliph had but one concern – to save his own life and to safeguard his comfortable lifestyle. The same was true of his government. The nation had been left without a leader although it was not aware of this: Standing in darkness and uncertainty, it waited to see what might happen.



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The armed forces existed in name only. Commanders and other officers still suffered from the exhaustion of the Great War. Their hearts were bleeding because of the disintegration of their country. On the brink of the dark abyss deepening before their eyes, they racked their brains to find a way out.

The nation and the armed forces had no inkling of the sultan-caliph's treason. On the contrary, due to the traditional religious ties strengthened by long centuries, they remained loyal and obedient to the occupant of the throne. When the nation and the armed forces considered solutions, they placed the salvation and protection of the sultanate and caliphate above their own. They were unable to conceive of a deliverance without the caliph and the sultan. Those who would oppose or even think differently would be inviting serious trouble. They would immediately be branded atheist, unpatriotic, traitor, renegade!

COMMANDERS AND OTHER OFFICERS'  
HEARTS WERE BLEEDING BECAUSE OF THE  
DISINTEGRATION OF THEIR COUNTRY.



The foundations of the Ottoman State had come crumbling down. Time had run out on it. Ottoman lands had disintegrated. What remained was only an ancestral homeland in which a handful of Turks still found haven.

Under these circumstances, there could have been one decision alone – and that was to create a new Turkish state based on national sovereignty and unconditional independence!

The essential point was that the Turkish nation should live in dignity and honor. This could only be attained through full independence. Regardless of how wealthy and prosperous it may be, a nation deprived of independence is not worthy of a status higher than that of a slave in the eyes of the civilized world.

To accept the tutelage or protectorate of a foreign power is nothing less than surrendering to impotence and ineptitude or lack of fundamental human decency.

But the Turk stands proud in dignity and honor. Such a nation would rather perish than live enslaved.

Therefore independence or death!

SUCH A NATION  
WOULD RATHER PERISH THAN LIVE ENSLAVED.

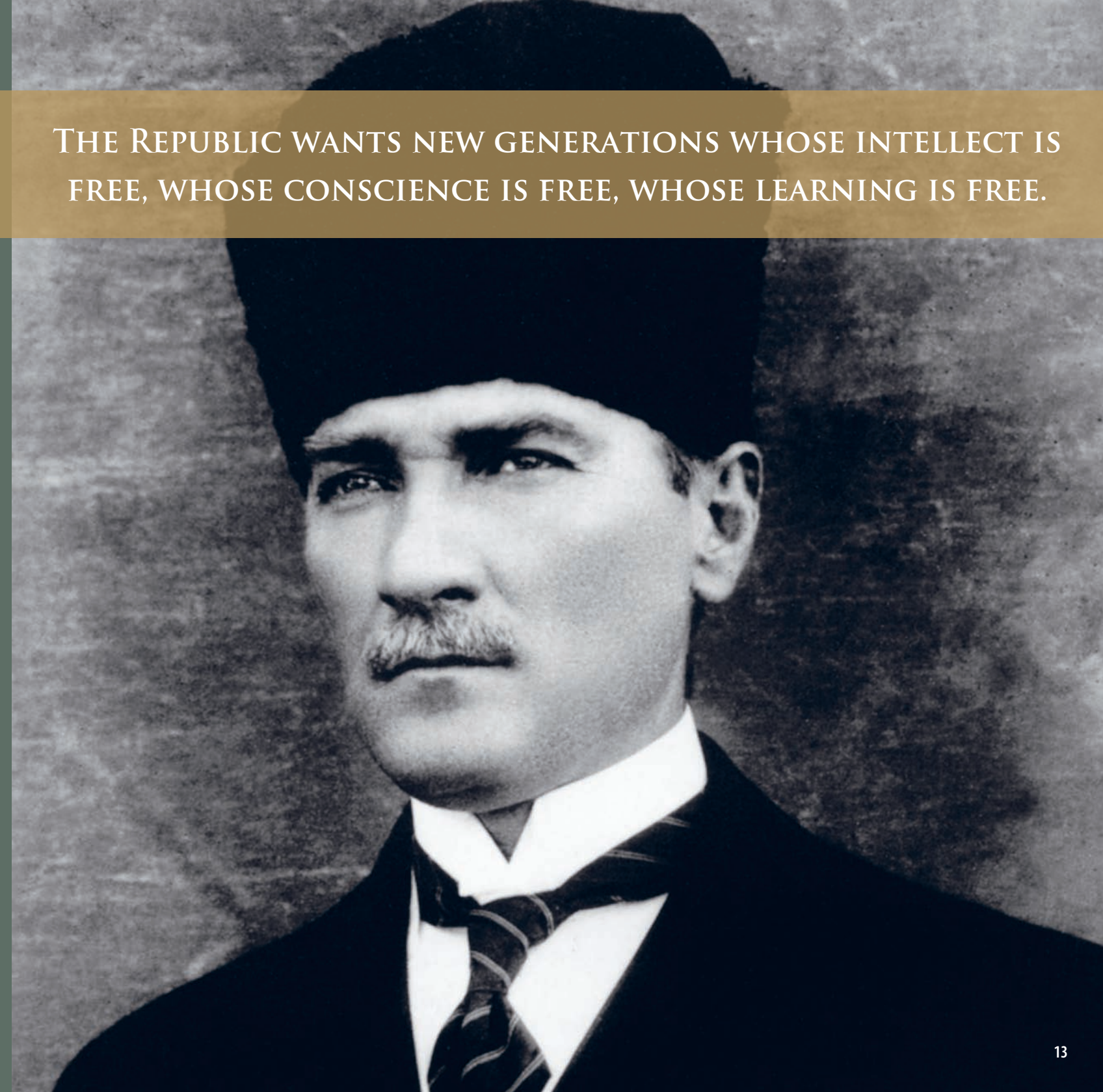






THE REPUBLIC WANTS NEW GENERATIONS WHOSE INTELLECT IS FREE, WHOSE CONSCIENCE IS FREE, WHOSE LEARNING IS FREE.

- There are two Mustafa Kemals. One is the flesh and bone Mustafa Kemal who now stands before you and who will pass away. The other is you, all of you who will go to the far corners of our land to spread the ideals which must be defended with your lives if necessary. I stand for the nation's dreams – and my life's work is to make those dreams come true.
- In order for honor, dignity, honesty and humanity to take shape and to survive in a nation, it is essential for that nation to enjoy freedom and independence. In a country where there is no freedom there is death and destruction.
- Culture is happiness through nature's highest gifts and yields. Culture will elevate the Republic. The Turkish revolution will secure for us the place we deserve in the civilized world.
- The Republic wants new generations whose intellect is free, whose conscience is free, whose learning is free. Freedom is the mother of all progress and salvation.





THE TURKISH  
REVOLUTION IS  
CREATIVE:  
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IDEAL.



Nothing important may be achieved without ambition. That ambition, however, must seek to serve the good of the nation. A leader must act in accordance with the nation's ideals and conform to its preferences once he has become fully aware of its spirit. Above all we must work hard. Wealth as well as the welfare and the happiness which are a natural outcome of wealth are a right earned only by those who work hard.

The Turkish revolution is creative: It is a work of patriotism blended with a lofty humanist ideal.

The great George Washington, the foremost modern pioneer of liberty, who won independence for his country by driving out the foreign despots oppressing it, is that man whose example inspires and influences me most deeply. America is the oldest democracy in the west and ours is the youngest in the ancient world.



## KEEP YOUR HEARTS OPEN TO THE TURKISH PEOPLE WHO ARE FIGHTING FOR FREEDOM AND INDEPENDENCE.

☞ To the great American nation:

You expelled tyranny and despotism from your country. You gained and established your freedom and independence after a long and bloody struggle, and you built up a civilized, strong, democratic state based upon the sovereignty of the people.

On the opposite side of the earth there is today another nation that is struggling and shedding her blood for the same aims of freedom, independence and democracy. Turkey's detractors seek to blind your eyes to the purity and loftiness of those aims. The authors of this propaganda are either ignorant fanatics or the agents of those who are openly or secretly fighting against us to frustrate and destroy our newly won liberty. Do not believe the slanderers.

Keep your hearts open to the Turkish people who are fighting for freedom and independence, who are striving to achieve progress and justice in the world, like yourselves.

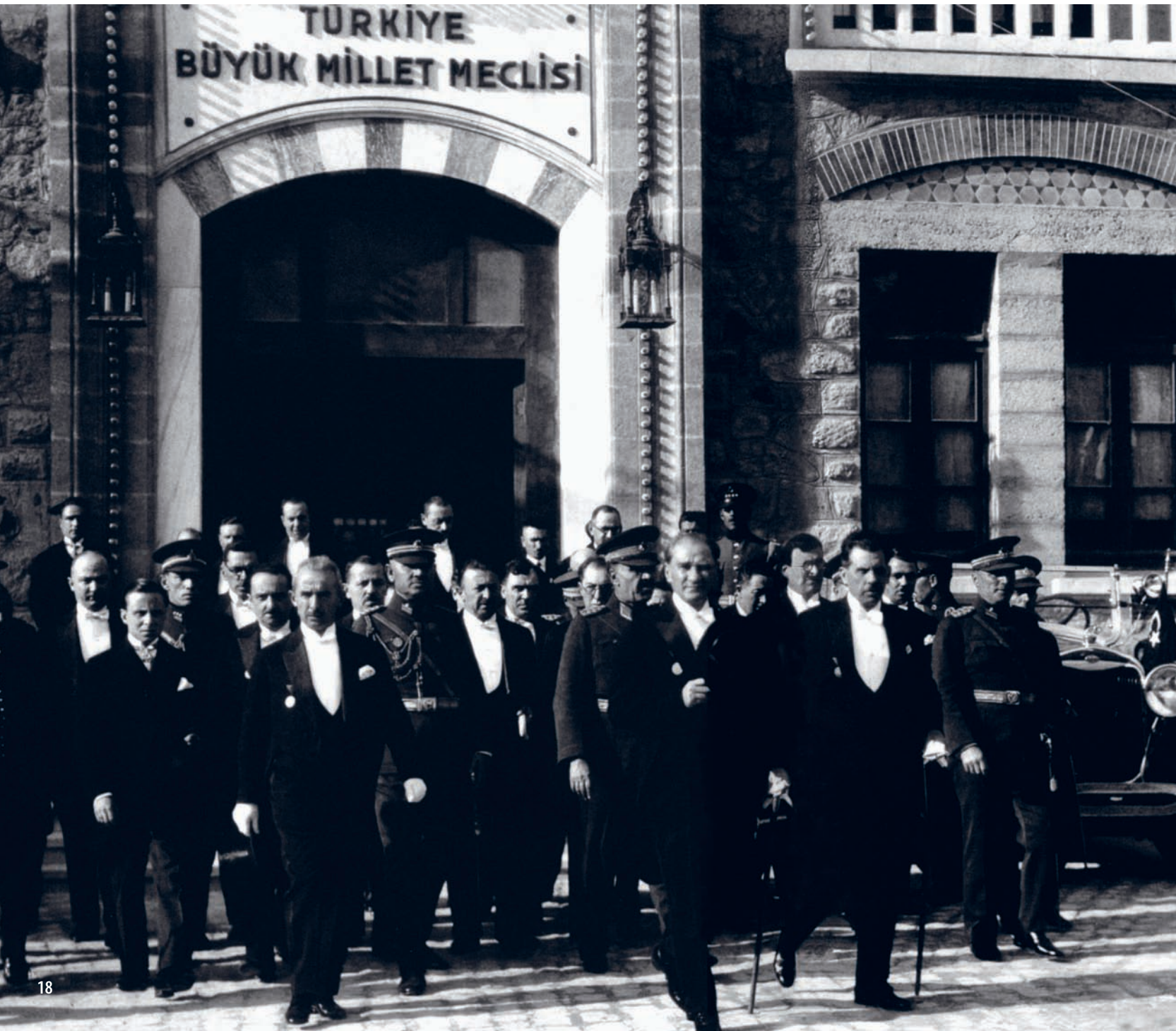
☞ Turkish democracy has followed the path of the French Revolution, but it has evolved on the strength of its own character, because every nation brings about its revolution or transformation on the basis of its own social needs and challenges.

☞ Personal freedom is sacred. One must work to protect it. But in so doing, the power and the authority of the state must not be destroyed... If the will of the state is done away with, there would be no power or means left to protect individual liberty.





## SOVEREIGNTY BELONGS UNCONDITIONALLY TO THE PEOPLE.



- Our ideal is to raise the Turkish nation to the level she is worthy of among civilized nations and to make the Turkish Republic far more powerful on its unshakeable foundations - and to this end, to destroy the thought of tyranny.
- I feel it is superfluous to remind my colleagues of the grave period our country is going through. We have important duties to perform for our unfortunate country. Our sole objective is to save her. Our homeland is under the partial or effective tutelage or domination of foreigners. The sultan is a despicable person who thinks only of his own pleasure and the monarchy. He is capable of committing every kind of ignominious act. The nation is crushed under repression and tyranny.
- We have started a struggle against despotism. I am inviting you to confront this brutal tyranny with revolution, to do your duty to destroy the antiquated, rotten government, to make the people sovereign; in short to save our motherland.
- There are many sister nations who will attain independence and sovereignty. They will triumph in spite of all the impediments. Colonialism and imperialism will disappear from the face of the earth and a new age of harmony and cooperation without any discrimination as to color, creed and race will prevail among nations.
- This nation has never lived without independence. We cannot and shall not live without it.
- Sovereignty belongs unconditionally to the people.



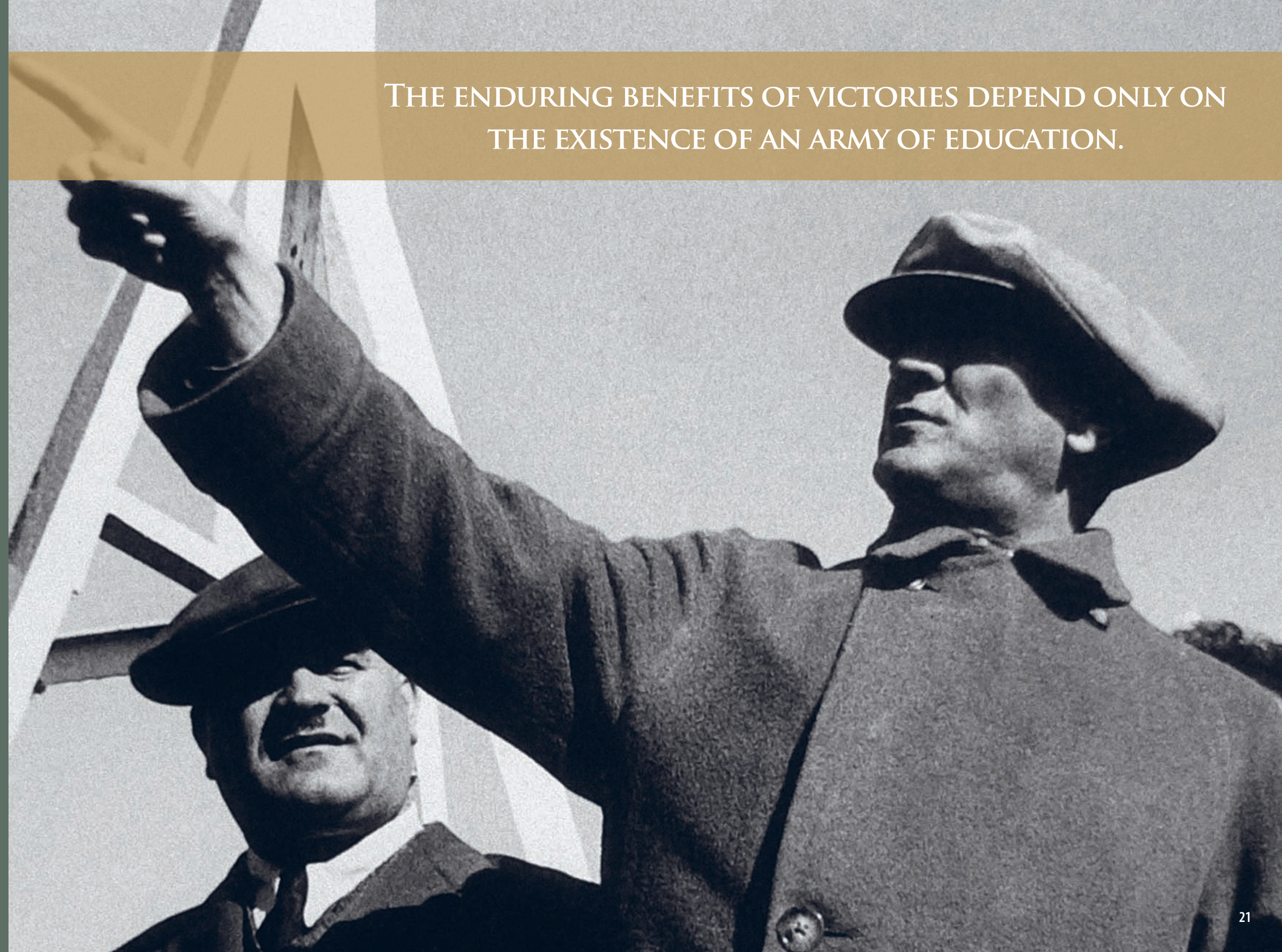
Following the military triumphs we have accomplished by bayonets, weapons and blood, we shall strive to win victories in such fields as culture, scholarship, science and the economy.

The enduring benefits of victories depend only on the existence of an army of education.

We want nothing other than to lead a free and independent life within our national boundaries. We want our rights to remain inviolate. Our foreign policy does not infringe on the rights of any other nation. But I am the implacable enemy of any nation that wants to enslave my people until that nation abandons its designs.



THE ENDURING BENEFITS OF VICTORIES DEPEND ONLY ON  
THE EXISTENCE OF AN ARMY OF EDUCATION.







WE HAVE RECEIVED OUR INSPIRATION NOT FROM  
HEAVEN OR FROM THE UNKNOWN, BUT DIRECTLY  
FROM LIFE ITSELF.

- ❧ The only real representative of the Turkish nation is the Grand National Assembly.
- ❧ Life means strife and struggle. Success in life is possible only by means of absolute success in strife which requires power and fortitude both moral and physical.
- ❧ I have become aware of one fact: Danger flees from the man.
- ❧ We have received our inspiration not from heaven or from the unknown, but directly from life itself.
- ❧ Being a great leader means that you will not show favoritism to anyone or deceive anyone, that you will perceive the nation's true ideals and march straight towards that objective. Innumerable people will oppose you and speak against you and try to lead you astray. They will place on your path countless obstacles which you will have to overcome by regarding yourself not as great, but as humble, weak, devoid of the necessary means, as perhaps nothing. And then if they call you "great" you will laugh at those people as well.
- ❧ The guiding principle of progress in a government is its ability to convince the nation about the government's power as well as its kindness.



- ❧ Fatigue is a natural state for every human being, for every creature. But human beings have a moral strength which can defeat fatigue and keep them marching on nonetheless. Those who are determined to forge ahead without resting never, never get tired. The youth of Turkey will tirelessly march towards their destination, towards their lofty ideals.
- ❧ The heroic Turkish soldier has understood the significance of the battles of Anatolia and has fought for a new ideal.
- ❧ There are many countries, but a single civilization. In order to make progress, every nation must join this one civilization.
- ❧ No part of our fatherland can be evacuated before it is wetted by the blood of the citizens.
- ❧ Freedom, equality and justice all equally depend on national sovereignty.
- ❧ Our government is not warlike nor does it seek adventure... Modern thought should find its inspiration in human rights and reaffirm that these rights are inalienable. Taking inspiration from these principles, we wish to establish constructive and friendly relations with our neighbors to the east and to the west.
- ❧ The new Turkish state is a people's government. It is the government of the people.

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