

# The “Republic of Turkey”

*The official name of modern Turkey is the “Republic of Turkey.” The Turkish name is “Turkiye.” The Republic of Turkey was established on October 29, 1923 with the carving up of the Ottoman Empire following World War I. Boundaries for the new Republic were drawn up by Mustafa Kemal, a general in the Turkish army, who was named the new head of government.*

*For roughly six centuries, the Ottoman Turkish Empire had stretched across vast swaths of land encompassing territories on three continents. In its heyday, the Empire included virtually the entire Eastern Mediterranean region, North Africa, and much of Eastern Europe. At the time, almost everyone in the Muslim world was referred to by the West as “Turks!”*

*Before the declaration of the “Republic,” Turkey was home to the “Caliph,” or spiritual leader of the world’s Sunni Muslim community. The last of the Sunni leaders, Caliph Abdul Medjid Effendi was deposed by Mustafa Kemal in 1924. A new constitution was drawn up that year which determined that Turkey would be a secular and democratic state that was closely aligned with nations of Europe and the West.*

*Today, the Republic of Turkey is a democratic, secular, and social state governed by rule of law, with a President as head of state and a Prime Minister as head of the government. The current President is Abdul Gul and the Prime Minister is Recep Tayyip Erdogan (pronounced “AIR-doe-ahn”). The elected government serves for a seven-year term. Turkey is made up of 79 provinces which are administered by appointed governors and elected councils.*

*Ankara is Turkey’s capital city. The largest and most famous city, however, is Istanbul, whose name was changed from Constantinople in 1453. It is an ancient city sprawled across two continents and often referred to as “The City on Seven Hills.” Istanbul boasts of beautiful architecture and landscapes with museum collections of arts, tapestries, carpets, relics, and great scholarly works gathered from across the vast regions of the former Ottoman Empire.*

*Ethnic “Turks” make up about 80% of Turkey’s 75,000,000+ populations. The Kurds are the second largest group with 17%, and 3% are mostly Greeks, Armenians, and Jews. Roughly 65% live in urban areas.*

*People living with the Republic of Turkey are generally referred to as “Turkish,” while Turks living elsewhere are referred to as “Turkic.”*

*The official language of Turkey is Turkish, which has an affinity with the Finn Hungarian languages. It was introduced in 1928 and has been spoken ever since. Turkish is written in the Latin alphabet but does not contain the letters “Q, W, or X.” Some form of the Turkish language is spoken by 150 - 200 million people worldwide.*

*The religion of Turkey is close to 98% Muslim, with two-thirds being Sunni and one-third Shi'a. There are large numbers of Sufis among both groups. While Turkey remains a secular state, freedom of religion is afforded to all religions.*

*Situated where two continents come together, the European part of the country is called Thrace, and the Asian part is Anatolia (or Asia Minor). Turkey's geographic location provides land connections to three continents and is surrounded on three sides by seas. The entire coastline spans more than 5,000 miles in length.*

*In order to create a new "secular state" from an "Islamic empire," Mustafa Kemal set about to make dramatic changes in culture and lifestyles. He declared full equality for women; banned Islamic dress at public gatherings; adopted the use of a Western calendar, clocks, and systems of measurement; opposed any recognition of ethnic differences; and forbade the speaking of any language other than Turkish. Rather than acknowledge the large Kurdish population as a legitimate ethnic group, he simply referred to them as "mountain Turks."*

*In building a sense of "nationhood," Mustafa Kemal required people to adopt at least two names, choosing for himself the last name "Ata'turk" ... or "Father of the Turks."*

*For many years, Mustafa Kemal Ata'turk (1881-1938) led his new country into relative peace and stability with tremendous economic growth and modernization. Most Turks continue to hold the founder of the Republic with high regards, living by his adopted motto of "Peace at Home, Peace in the World." Modern Turkey has traditionally been backed by a strong Turkish military and signed on with NATO in 1952.*

*Turkey enjoyed a measure of internal stability until the 1970's and 80's when political and economic problems emerged. The military seized control in 1980, restored a sense of stability, and called for elections in 1983. The military leader for these actions was Kenan Evren, who was elected President. The Prime Minister was Turgut Ozal, a liberal who was to become a dominant figure in Turkish politics. He served as Prime Minister (1983-1989) and went on to become Turkey's 8<sup>th</sup> President in 1989.*

*Turgut Ozal (1927-1993) transformed the economy of Turkey by paving the way for the privatization of many state enterprises, thus improving relations with the Western World. He also led the country to participate in a merging global economy. As President, he led Turkey to support the coalition against Iraq in the Gulf War of 1991.*

*President Ozal applied for Turkey's membership in the European Community (now the European Union, or EU). Progress has been slow, however, partly because of poor relations with Greece (mainly over Cyprus) and also because of unresolved issues with the large Kurdish populations in Southeastern Turkey.*

*Surviving an assassination attempt on June 18, 1988, President Ozal died of a "suspicious" heart attack on April 17, 1993 causing many to believe he had been poisoned.*

*The election of the Justice and Development Party, known as the “AKP,” in 2002 has brought about a shift in several long-held traditions of the Republic of Turkey. For one, there was almost immediately a lessening of the role and influence of Turkey’s strong military. Formerly known as the “guardians of the new republic,” the military had even tried to overthrow the AKP party in the early 2000’s. However, the AKP party had the strong backing of the more religious people in society as well as several important leaders among the Kurdish population, thereby becoming the clear winner in the 2002 elections.*

*Under the current AKP leadership of President Abdul Gul and Prime Minister Erdogan, there has been a movement to restore “Islam” as a defining characteristic of Turkish culture and society. Both the President and his wife (who wears a headscarf) are devout Muslims. Under this administration, previous bans on Muslim dress have been lifted for entering public places such as universities and public gatherings.*

*The Islamic revival in Turkey’s homeland has also led to a strengthening of cultural and political ties to countries of the Middle East. This is a departure from Turkey’s founding principals of secularism and the pro-Western foreign policies of earlier days. However, Turkey remains a strong ally of Europe and the United States, with significant potential as negotiator between several on-going conflicts within the Middle East, as well as between Middle Eastern and Western entanglements.*

*Today, one of Turkey’s most pressing internal problems still comes from the Kurdistan Workers’ Party, known as the “PKK” ... a Kurdish militant group seeking resolution for the 18 million Kurds in Turkey. Some PKK members call for adherence to the agreements set forth in the Treaty of Sevres in 1920, calling for autonomy and self-rule for the Kurdish people. Others simply want the Kurdish community to be able to speak their own language and practice their traditional Kurdish customs.*

*Turkey has also not settled the matter of the accused “Armenian Genocide” that occurred during the First World War. Armenians worldwide have pressured the United States and others to “... accurately characterize the systematic and deliberate annihilation of 1,500,000 Armenians as genocide.” Turkey officially denies this accusation and claims that the deaths resulted from “forced relocations” and “widespread fighting” when the 600-year old Ottoman Empire collapsed ... and not from a campaign of genocide.*

*Even more recently, the current AKP Turkish government is facing growing opposition and accusations of fraud and other violations by large communities of Turks throughout the country. Some secularists say that the AKP is going too far in bringing Islam back into a prominent role. Others say that the government has become corrupt with fraud and misrule. Prime Minister Erdogan accuses his former supporter Fatullah Gulan, a popular Sufi Muslim and recognized world leader, as forging these accusations. (Fatullah Gulan has made his home in the United States for many years). New elections for the offices of President and Prime Minister will occur later this year.*

## **Cultures and Traditions in Turkey**

- ❖ *The Turks are well known for their famous “Turkish hospitality” and enjoy a high level of tourism, which is one of the main industries. The culture might be described as a fusion between Eastern and Western traditions.*
- ❖ *Turkish families are very close and generally large with extended family members showing loyalty to the family unit. Fathers are the undisputed heads of their families, though both parents (as well as other older family members) are highly regarded and cared for by their children throughout their lives.*
- ❖ *Traditional wedding ceremonies are popular and usually very large events which may last for two or three days. The average age of marriage for women in Turkey is 24 ... and 26 for men.*
- ❖ *Turks highly value a good sense of humor and consider it a sign of intelligence. They also value group orientation over individual pursuits and take great pride in their collective heritage. Bravery and loyalty are also prized personal traits.*
- ❖ *Most Turks wear Western-style clothing (as dictated by Kemal Atta'turk) with European fashions being popular among young people. However, head coverings for women, which were formerly banned from public places, are now being seen in universities ... and throughout the country.*
- ❖ *People greet one another by shaking hands with friends or strangers; however, close friends and family are greeted with clasped hands and a kiss on both cheeks. The hands of older people may be kissed, then touched to the greeter's forehead to show respect.*
- ❖ *The Turks generally use their hands a lot during conversation. Social courtesies dictate that one does not expose the sole of one's foot or point the foot toward anyone. Also, one does not cross legs while in the presence of an older person.*
- ❖ *Turks generally remove their shoes when entering a home and replace them with a slipper. Slippers are also available for guests to the home.*
- ❖ *Despite the Muslim ban on alcohol, Turks generally enjoy locally made beer, wine, and spirits. (They have some of the best wines in the world!)*
- ❖ *Turkish cuisine is world famous with its traditional tray of small dishes including stuffed grape leaves, salads, and other tasty items, followed by mounds of rice, grilled lamb or other meats, vegetables ... and probably winding up with some exquisite syrupy baklava and servings of the famous Turkish coffee!*

## **Things to Know about Turkey ...**

*It is where Noah's Ark landed on Mount Ararat in Eastern Turkey. A Turkish pudding with nearly 20 ingredients, said to be the "last meal on the Ark", is still served today!*

*It is the site of the famous Hagia Sophia, largest cathedral in the world for nearly 1,000 years. It is said to be the epitome of Byzantine architecture ...and was a former patriarchal basilica, later a mosque, now is a museum in Istanbul.*

*It is the home of the Sufi "Whirling Dervishes" where performers spin around at 20-30 revolutions a minute for long periods of time in a symbolic union between people and their God (Al-lah). The tomb of "Rumi," the famous Sufi poet and founder of the order, draws thousands of pilgrims each year.*

*It's the birthplace of King Midas, who turned everything into gold.*

*It is the home of the famous "Van cat" which has a semi-longhaired auburn white coat and eyes of different colors ... one is blue and the other is green or yellow.*

*It also is the home of the famous Kangal dogs, bred for guarding flocks.*

*It produces the world famous hand-knotted Turkish carpets.*

*It is where Alexander the Great cut the intricate Gordian knot, a phrase now used to mean "solving difficult problems."*

*It has a city named Mardin, which is one of the few places in the world where you can still hear Aramaic, the native language of Jesus.*

*It is the birthplace and home of St. Nicholas, popularly known as Santa Claus.*

*It is the world's major producer (70%) of hazelnuts, apricots, and is also famous for figs and teas.*

*It first introduced coffee to Europe and gave the Dutch their tulips.*

*It is the location for two of the Seven Wonders of the World: the Temple of Artemis and the Mausoleum at Halicarmassus.*

*It incorporates history from three distinct heritages: The pre-Turkish Anatolian heritage; the Islamic heritage; and the Turkic-Mongol heritage.*

*And, finally, not all Turkish men wear mustaches, though most of the older ones do!*

# *The “Turks” in World History*

*The earliest records of the word “Turk” occurs in Chinese in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE and later in numerous Byzantine writings. Turks are thought to have originated from the high plateaus of Mongolia, entering the Middle East in large numbers from the early 13<sup>th</sup> century CE. They claimed dominance of the region, however, by capturing the Byzantine capital of Constantinople in 1453.*

*The Turks are not one “pure” race of people but rather consist of many tribes, including the Mongol, Uighur, Seljuk, Kazak, Kyrgyz, Uzbek, Hun, Ottoman, Indo-European, and other physically and culturally diverse people. Turks today may have black, brown, red, or blond hair and brown, blue, or green eyes!*

*The Turks have left a string of Turkish nation-states across the Middle East and Central Asia, as well as significant Turkic-speaking populations within countries integrated under foreign rule. The term “Turkish” now is used to refer to the people of the “Republic of Turkey.” “Turkic” refers to Turks everywhere else.*

*Turks converted to Islam between the 10<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries, thus helping to both unify and identify their rule under a universal moral code based on Qur’anic and Hadith teachings. This eventually became significant and, in time, the predominant element in the armies of the Caliphs and Sultans of Islam. During the Christian Crusades, Turks were seen as the “Saviors of Islamic faith.”*

*The Turkish language is spoken by about 63 million speakers worldwide, including the Republic of Turkey, Cyprus, and Western Europe. Turkic languages are spoken by Turks in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, and groups within China, Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, Greece, Bulgaria, and other parts of Eastern Europe and the Arab World.*

*Turks everywhere today are proud of their long histories, their cultures, and their many contributions to the world’s arts and traditions.. Among these are their magnificent architectural structures; their exquisite hand-knotted carpets; their fine Turkish cuisines; and their unique forms of arts, music, and dance.*

*It is important to note the role that Islam has played in Turkish governments since the 7<sup>th</sup> century in order to understand the current rise of Islamist political parties such as the AKP – “Justice and Development Party” in today’s Turkish politics.*

*The “Republic of Turkey” has one of the most thriving and democratic societies in the Middle East. Indeed, their model of governance and religious tolerance have been suggested as possible models for other Middle Eastern countries as the “Arab Spring” movements move across the region.*