

# Admiration for Atatürk, Turkey's Leader (1938)

## Abstract

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Mustafa Kamal Atatürk (1881-1938) was a Turkish revolutionary and founder of the Republic of Turkey after the fall of the Ottoman Empire in 1923. While Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party's friendship and admiration for Benito Mussolini is well documented, only recently have historians begun to understand and explore the fascination Hitler and his followers had for the Turkish president. These two excerpted documents, the first an essay written by Atatürk himself and re-published in the *Hamburger Tageblatt* after his death on 10 November 1938 and the other, a portion of the same newspaper's obituary for the leader, reveal this less-explored relationship between Turkey and Germany. Atatürk's essay speaks to his belief in the importance of a strong leader. He believed that a leader should be selfless and remain committed to maintaining the welfare of his people and the nation. The Germans seemed to admire Atatürk's revitalization of Turkey's national spirit and his efforts to reorganize Turkish society along ethnic lines. Regardless of Atatürk's race, this article seems to emphasize many of the things the Nazi Party and German public admired in their own Führer.

The short passage from his obituary perfectly captures how the Nazis felt about Atatürk. He was to be remembered for his stimulating mind and his creation of a "new national consciousness." It is clear to the Nazis that in Atatürk there was a leader worthy of Germany's admiration.

## Source

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### I. The Leader and His People

By Kamal Atatürk

[...]

Whoever thinks of himself more than of the happiness of his country and nation is only a second-rate man. People whose highest values are themselves, and who believe that the existence of their country and their nation rests on their own person, cannot ultimately contribute to the happiness of their nation. Only those who work for the future without regard to themselves and without regard to those around them will be able to build for their people the broad foundation of future happiness and future progress. For it is a great mistake to believe that life and progress cease after one has ceased to exist oneself.

All this is true without any qualification for all nations and for all people. But since nowadays all the nations of the world are somehow connected with all the others, or at least are on the way to it, it is not enough to think only of the existence and happiness of one's own people, as if it were alone in the world, but it is necessary to devote one's attention to the peace and good prosperity of all peoples and all nations. After all, the happiness of other peoples, too, only benefits one's own people again. It is quite wrong to believe that national self-consciousness entails the endangering or harming of any other people in the world. If there is no peace, harmony and good understanding between free peoples, even a single nation cannot secure peace, however much it may strive in that direction. So I advise the people I love to think like this.

Men who are leaders of their peoples naturally wish first and foremost to provide for the life and well-being, for the power and influence of their own country, but they should nevertheless have an eye also for the prosperity of the other peoples. Whatever happens in the world proves to us again and again the correctness of this view, for we can never know whether some event in the wide world, which we think

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does not affect us, may one day be of the greatest importance to us.

Turkey and her friends are powerful. So we have no reason to fear anything evil from any side and consequently we may look at the whole world with the eyes of calm observation. By no means, however, may we say, "What is the trouble in this or that part of the world to me?" On the contrary, when such difficulties exist, we must give them the same attention as if we were in the midst of them ourselves. No matter how remote any event may seem to us, we should always adhere to this principle. For in this way man preserves himself, and nation and government protect themselves, from narrow complacency and dangerous selfishness. Of course, anything that concerns our own people takes precedence, and our own national interests take precedence over all other interests in the world. After that, however, we must also take an interest in the world and its totality.

Source of German original text: Kamal Atatürk, "Führer und Volk," *Hamburger Tageblatt*, December 10, 1938, pp. 1-2.

## **II. From Rebel to "Father of the Turks"**

### **Kamal Atatürk died this morning – Parliament session Friday, 11 a.m.**

Ankara, November 10.

Turkish President Ghazi Mustapha Kamal Atatürk died this morning at 9:05 am in Istanbul. The Speaker of the Parliament of Turkey has temporarily assumed the office of President of the Republic in accordance with the Constitution. Parliament will meet at 11 a.m. Friday to elect Atatürk's successor.

Following initial reports this morning of the increasing deterioration of the Turkish president's health, Atatürk's passing was expected today on the Turkish side. Prime Minister Bayar rushed from Ankara to the bedside of the President of the Republic and convened a meeting of the leaders of the Republican State Party. The surroundings of the palace, where Atatürk wrestled with death, were hermetically sealed off by the police.

The death of Kamal Atatürk deprives Turkey of the pioneer and leader to whom alone it owes its significant rise after the World War. On March 31 of this year, the first official announcement was made that the Turkish president was in need of recuperation. On October 17, the first news of the seriousness of Atatürk's illness arrived. Since then, the president spent the last weeks of his life on the state yacht "Savarone" and in the palace in Istanbul.

The spirit in which Kamal Atatürk's life's work was built, in stark contrast to how earlier rulers of Turkey lived and worked, is illustrated by a saying of his: "Does the flower grower expect anything from his flowers? The one who forms people would have to have the same mental attitude as the flower grower. Only he who thinks and works in this way can benefit his country, his people and their future . . . A self-centered person who looks at the country and the people to which he belongs only from the point of view of his own existence is not one of those who serve their people."

The son of a poor customs officer in Salonika, Mustafa Kamal Hasleireri was born in 1881. It was already a concession to his talent that he was allowed to attend a cadet school at all and then the war academy in Istanbul, where his teachers – among them many Germans – already recognized his outstanding military talent. Unbending energy, deep national enthusiasm, paired with cool intellect and ingenious organizational power, already made him stand out next to Enver Pasha during the Young Turk movement. Around 1910 one already heard about this "Mustafa Kamal." His main aim was to free his fatherland from the bonds of European exploitation and paternalism, which Turkey had fallen into as a result of the limp and arbitrary regime of the previous rulers.

At the outbreak of the World War, Kamal – as he now called himself in purely Turkish style – was already a

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colonel and chief of general staff to Mahmut Shevket Pasha in what was then still Turkish Salonika. He then commanded troops in Palestine. With the year 1918 and the terrible conditions of the Treaty of Sèvres, – which was never ratified on the Turkish side – the plan of a dictatorial government to save the exhausted and defeated country grew within him. With the elite of the Turkish army, Kamal Pasha rearmed the organized resistance in the heart of Anatolia. He was pushed out of the army by Sultan Mohamed IV and stood on his own feet, strengthened by the enthusiasm of his followers. A counter-government was formed in Ankara. Kamal convened the National Assembly on October 23, 1920, and eventually simply deposed the Sultan. The sultanate and caliphate, the centuries-long spiritual suzerainty of the Turkish ruler, were destroyed. On October 29, 1923, the Turkish Republic was proclaimed in Ankara. The new spirit had triumphed.

In 1923 the presidency of the “Ghazi,” the hero, began, and with it the work of rebuilding the country, the extent of which one can only grasp if one has seen how disorganized and neglected everything had become. From the construction of roads to the development of industry, from the form of education to the reform of the army, from the declaration of Ankara as the capital to the brilliant new construction of the city according to the plans of the German architect Jansen – all this had to be created. The veil, the harem and polygamy were abolished; the Turkish woman, astonishingly lively and intelligent, entered the scene for her eagerly encouraged cooperation. The Turkish-Arabic alphabet was replaced by the Latin one.

A will of granite and inexhaustible energy were the foundation of this work. The spirit of Kamal Atatürk, productive or stimulating in countless fields, had created a new, nationally conscious and restlessly active state.

Source of German original text: “Vom Rebell zum ‘Vater der Türken’,“ *Hamburger Tageblatt*, November 10, 1938, p. 2.

Translation: Insa Kummer

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