

13 · The Rule of the Democratic Party, 1950–60

The new assembly and the new cabinet

There is widespread consensus among historians that the Democratic Party's landslide election victory in May 1950 is a watershed in modern Turkish political history. The character both of the new assembly, in which the DP held an overwhelming majority (408 seats against the RPP's 69), and of the new government was very different from the old.

When one looks at the social characteristics of the DP representatives, one is struck by a number of differences from those of the Kemalist period. The DP representatives were on average younger, more often had local roots in their constituencies, were less likely to have had a university education, and far more likely to have a background in commerce or in law. The most striking difference from the RPP was the virtual absence of representatives with a bureaucratic and/or military background. It was clear that a significantly different section of Turkey's elite had come to power.¹

One of the first things the new assembly did was to elect Celâl Bayar president of the republic. There was very little debate about his candidature: he was the founder of the new party, he had a record as a statesman going back to the days of Atatürk and he was widely regarded as a moderate. There was more competition for the post of prime minister, but the post went to Adnan Menderes, who was backed by Bayar because of his popular appeal. Menderes became not only prime minister but also party chairman, a position the president had always held under the RPP.

Under the RPP the state apparatus and the party machine had been merged (even officially) to the extent that one could say that the party was just one of the instruments through which the state controlled and steered society. When the DP came to power the link was broken. The Democrats mistrusted the bureaucracy and the military they inherited from the old regime, and devoted a great deal of effort to getting them under their control. Over the years, therefore, state and party tended to

coalesce again, especially at the higher levels, but the difference from the Kemalist era was that the party dominated the bureaucracy, not the other way around.

Relations between the parties

Relations between the two parties were strained almost from the start. Both had difficulty adjusting to their new roles after, respectively, 27 years in power and four years of fierce opposition.

The DP saw itself as the representative of the popular will (*millî irade*, a term used endlessly by the DP leaders), with a mission to transform the country and, like the RPP before it, it expected the opposition to be a junior partner in this process. But while the RPP, certainly after 1946, suspected that it did not have widespread support in the country, the DP felt that it represented the majority, and in its vision of democracy this majority gave it absolute power and legitimacy to do whatever it deemed necessary. Under the 1924 constitution there were no checks such as a second chamber or a constitutional court to counterbalance the power of the assembly and, especially after 1954, the government used this situation to make life hard for the opposition.

The RPP, on the other hand, was in disarray. In the first few years after its defeat, when the Turkish economy was booming and the Democrats seemed to make all their promises come true, the RPP had no political alternatives to offer. At its 1951 and 1953 congresses, the party decided to conquer its ideological confusion and to restore its prestige with its traditional supporters by emphasizing its Kemalist traditions. It redefined the 'Six Arrows' with more emphasis on social policies, but the RPP remained on the defensive because this programme held no attractions for the great majority of the voters.

Without being able to present credible alternatives, the RPP subjected the government to a constant barrage of criticism of anything and everything it did, often changing its own position in the process. The government grew increasingly irritated at what it saw as the RPP's refusal to accept the legitimacy of the DP regime. But there was more than irritation: there was a deep-seated fear that İnönü, whose position at the head of his party had not been in dispute despite the election defeat, had not really accepted the situation and was still supported by the bureaucracy and the army. This fixation on İsmet Pasha (the *paşa faktörü* or 'Pasha factor' to which many references are made in the press of the period) made the Democrat leaders feel insecure in spite of their electoral successes.²

The DP increased its share of the vote in the municipal and provincial elections, held later in 1950, and gained control of the administration at

all levels. Nevertheless, the increasingly irritated government saw a need to hit back at the opposition through intimidation and by excluding the RPP from the decision-making process in the assembly. A tour of the country by İnönü in September 1952 saw violent demonstrations by DP supporters and it was abruptly cancelled by İnönü when the governor of Balıkesir refused him permission to speak in that town.

The RPP might have lost its hold on the electorate, but through its long monopoly on power and the way it had been intertwined with the government it had over the years become a powerful – and rich – organization. Among its possessions was the material legacy of Atatürk himself, consisting of land, money and a large minority stake in the *Türkiye İş Bankası*. It was against this organizational base of the party that the government decided to strike next. In December 1953, the DP-dominated assembly requisitioned all the RPP's material assets and handed them over to the treasury. The *Halk Evleri* (People's Homes) and *Halk Odaları* (People's Rooms), which were closely linked to the RPP, had already been closed down in 1951, their assets also being turned over to the treasury.

The 1954 elections: increased DP majority

The DP's basic insecurity also showed in the adoption in 1953 of a number of amendments that increased government control of the press and the universities (banning political activity on the part of professors). Two months before the elections scheduled for May 1954, the press law was again tightened.

As it turned out, all the anxiety was completely unnecessary. The DP's economic success guaranteed it the support of the mass of the population, especially in the countryside and the central theme of the RPP campaign – the lack of freedom and the government's authoritarian tendencies – lacked credibility coming, as it did, from a party so closely identified with the authoritarian regime of the past. On 2 May 1954 the DP increased its share of the vote (from 53.6 to 58.4 per cent), while the RPP share dropped from 39.9 to 35.1 per cent. In the assembly this meant 503 seats for the DP, while the RPP was left with only 31. Again, the only areas where support for the opposition had held up were the underdeveloped areas in the east, where landowners and tribal chiefs were still able to deliver blocks of votes.

The third party of any importance, the reactionary *Millet Partisi* (Nation Party), which had won one seat in 1950, had been banned in July 1953 because of its political use of religion. It was soon reconstituted, however, as the *Cumhuriyetçi Millet Partisi* (Republican Nation Party). In 1954 it had only limited success: 4.8 per cent of the vote and

five deputies, all from the province of Kırşehir, whence its leader (and the only NP deputy from 1950 to 1954) Osman Bölükbaşı hailed.

With the benefit of hindsight one can say that the 1954 elections were the high-water mark of the DP's fortunes. That its fortunes began to deteriorate in the following years was due to two main factors: the growing economic crisis and the disaffection of parts of the ruling elite, notably the intellectuals and the army.

Economic developments

As far as the changeover from a statist, strictly controlled and autarkist economy to a liberal free-market economy is concerned, the crucial turning point was not the DP's coming to power in 1950, but the decisions taken by İnönü's government in 1947 (the first consignments of Marshall Plan tractors arrived in May 1949). It is, however, true that the Democrats had been the most vocal supporters of free-market economics since 1946 and that they implemented liberalization policies with vigour once they were in office. More than the RPP, they realized that in a country like Turkey any serious modernization drive would have to start from an agricultural base (a point emphasized in a number of American reports).³ Under the direction of Menderes, they, for the first time in Turkish history, put the interests of the farmer first, and they continued to do so until the very end. The basic instruments for this policy were to provide cheap credit to the farmers and to maintain – artificially – high prices for agricultural products through the government buying agency, the TMO.

Supported by large-scale American aid, the progress in these first years was impressive. The credits were used to buy imported machinery. The total number of tractors for example grew from 1750 to more than 30,000 in the years 1948–52. This allowed the acreage under cultivation to be drastically enlarged, from 14.5 million hectares in 1948 to 22.5 million in 1956 – far outstripping the population growth. Combined with excellent weather in the first three years of Democrat rule, this resulted in bumper harvests, which meant that farmers' incomes rose noticeably. Although it is true that the terms of trade for agricultural produce against industrial products declined during this period, the sheer volume of the agricultural production made up for it. Led by this expansion of the agricultural sector, the economy as a whole grew at a rapid rate of between 11 and 13 per cent. Incomes in the towns also rose, although profits rose much more rapidly than wages.

The Democrats' economic ideas were rather unsophisticated. They trusted implicitly in the workings of the market once it was allowed a free rein. Under strong American influence, in 1951 the government

introduced a law to encourage foreign investment in Turkey. It expected the Turkish bourgeoisie to start investing the profits it had accumulated in the 1940s and foreign capitalists to queue up to invest in the Turkish economy. The contribution from these sectors was disappointing, however. With few exceptions, the Turkish industrialists of this period were still people who ran relatively uncomplicated family businesses that they could fully control, and they hesitated to invest on the scale the Democrats desired. Despite all the encouragement, foreign investment also remained extremely limited. During the Democrat decade no more than 30 firms invested in Turkey and their share never exceeded 1 per cent of total private investment. As a result, between 40 and 50 per cent of investment had to come from the state, all the liberal rhetoric notwithstanding. Total investment rose by 256 per cent between 1950 and 1954. The most important areas in which this investment was concentrated were the road network, the building industry and agro-industries.⁴

New roads tied the country together for the first time and opened up access to the villages. In 1950, Turkey had only about 1600 kilometres of hard-surfaced roads. With American technical and financial assistance, another 5400 kilometres of hard-surfaced two-lane highways were built during the decade. Together with significant improvements in the loose-surfaced roads, the new roads and the fast-rising number of (imported) cars and trucks (from 53,000 to 137,000), allowed more effective marketing and distribution. By contrast, the building of railways, which had been such an important part of the Kemalist modernization scheme, came to an almost complete halt. The switch to road transport also meant a changeover from public to private transport, since most of the trucks and buses were in private hands while the railways had all either been built by, or taken over by, the state.

The reluctance on the part of private investors and the limited capital they had for investment also meant that the privatization of the large state enterprises, which the Democrats had demanded so vociferously during their years in opposition, was an almost completely dead letter. Much of the government investment was made within the framework of the state industrial sector.

The effectiveness of the massive investments of these years was lessened in three ways. First, because the Democrats aimed to jump-start the economy and wanted quick and tangible results (their professed aim being to reach the level of western Europe within 50 years), the use of their subsidies, cheap credit facilities and investments was often short-sighted, aimed at a high level of growth rather than at long-term improvements in the productive capacity of the country. It has

sometimes been said that they confused development with growth, but to a large extent their policies were dictated by the unsophisticated views of the villagers who supplied the DP vote. Second, the DP leadership, Prime Minister Menderes in particular, was allergic to anything resembling economic planning, which they associated with the evils of statism. Menderes even denounced planning as synonymous with communism. The investments, at least until 1958, were therefore uncoordinated. Third, investment decisions were often politically inspired, which resulted in factories being put up in economically unpromising locations and in the wrong sectors, leading, for instance, to a disastrous overproduction of sugar, which had to be dumped on the world market at a loss.

Income distribution and social policies

Most people were better off under the Democrats, though not all to the same degree. Exact numbers are hard to come by, but it is certain that agricultural incomes grew fastest, with the larger farmers profiting most. Profits grew faster than wages and salaries in the towns, so traders and industrialists were relatively better off. From 1955 onwards, worsening inflation began to hit the wage- and salary-earners. Still, it is probably correct to say that by the end of the decade even their real incomes had grown considerably when compared with the immediate postwar years.

In spite of the money invested directly and indirectly in the agricultural sector, which gave even relatively inefficient farms a chance to survive and kept many people on the land who were not essential to the upkeep of agricultural production, the 1950s saw the start of mass migration from the countryside to the towns and cities. Over a million people left the land and by the end of the decade the major cities were growing by 10 per cent a year. Labour migration was not a new phenomenon but the pattern changed in that, whereas earlier the migrants would have been essentially village-based while working part of the year in for instance the mines of Ereğli, now they increasingly moved permanently to the city and went back to the farms only for seasonal work if at all. They came in search of work in the new developing industries, but in the 1950s the capacity of these industries to accommodate this fast-growing but unskilled workforce was limited and as a result only a small proportion of the migrants found permanent jobs in industry, while most of them ended up as casual labourers or as street vendors. The cities were not equipped to receive large numbers of new inhabitants in a regular fashion and most of the new settlers had to fend for themselves, building their own houses on unused land on the outskirts of town. Whole satellite towns of these so-called *gecekondus* (built at night) sprang up, lacking an infrastructure: they had no water,

electricity, roads or sewers. Over the years the *gecekondus* were gradually incorporated into the cities. Because they became a much more prominent feature of Turkish life in the 1960s and 1970s with the explosive rate of urbanization of those decades, the phenomenon will be treated more extensively in the next chapter.

Organized labour

Most of Turkey's workers were still unorganized when the DP came to power, even in the industrial firms with more than ten employees, which fell under the Labour Law. Of about 375,000 workers some 78,000 were members of a trade union in 1950.⁵ In the years between the Trade Unions Law of 1947 and the elections of 1950, most unions were closely linked to the RPP through its 'Workers' Bureau' (*İşçi Bürosu*). Actually, the party forced quite a number of these unions on the workers. In competing with the RPP for the workers' allegiance the Democrats' most powerful weapon had been the promise to grant them the right to strike. After the elections this promise was forgotten, however, and the DP's attitude towards the trade unions became almost as repressive as that of the old regime.

In 1952, a trade union confederation called *Türk-İş* was founded with moral and material assistance from the ICFTU (International Conference of Free Trade Unions), but the position of the unions remained weak. The extremely low living standards of their members meant that contributions were insufficient for running the organizations. In fact, the main source of the unions' income was the fines employers paid to the Ministry of Labour for transgressions of the Labour Law. Part of these fines was handed over to the unions as the government saw fit. Especially from 1957 onwards, the government acted heavily-handedly in preventing the unions from establishing contacts between different industrial sectors or with international organizations.

A special case: the Çukurova

One area stands out because its development in the 1950s set it apart from the rest of the country: the Çukurova (hollow plain), the delta around the city of Adana in the south. This flat and fertile plain had been developed from the 1830s onwards. Armenian entrepreneurs and Egyptian labour had turned it into a major cotton-producing area. After the war of independence the Armenian properties came into the hands of Muslim landowners, who established large estates. As in the rest of Turkey, ownership was formalized when cadastral registration became more effective in the 1940s, and in the early 1950s circumstances conspired to create maximal opportunities for capital accumulation by

these large landowners. Cheap credit and the imports of machinery led to mechanization of agriculture, but contrary to what was usual in most of Turkey the landowners were in a position to use mechanization to eject the sharecroppers from their lands. Cotton needs only seasonal attention and could be tended very well by labour migrants from the surrounding mountains and from the north Syrian plain. Thus, the large cotton farmers could maximize their profits just when the Korean war led to a boom in cotton prices (cotton was in fact the only Turkish agricultural produce that profited from the Korean boom). In this way, cotton producers could become very rich very quickly. The more astute among them soon invested their money in cotton-based industries in and around Adana, which became a classic boom town. Several of the 30 or so large family-owned holding companies that dominate Turkish industry today started out in this way.

The economic problems accumulate

The Democrats' basic problem, pointed out by many foreign observers at the time, was that they tried to do too much too quickly and with insufficient means at their disposal. The modernization programme meant importing huge quantities of materials and machinery and Turkey suffered a trade deficit from 1947 onwards. This deficit rose, even during the boom years of 1950–53, when Turkey had a wheat surplus and for a short time became a major wheat exporter. By 1954, the boom was over. Agricultural growth had been achieved by a combination of extension of the sown area with exceptionally good weather, not by improved agricultural techniques, irrigation or the use of fertilizers. When the weather turned bad, the agricultural sector's vulnerability was exposed and Turkey had to import wheat once again. Economic growth fell from around 13 per cent to around 4 per cent and, as a result, the trade deficit in 1955 was eight times that of 1950. Nevertheless, the government kept up the rate of imports and investment. It used Turkey's strategic position in the cold war to the utmost to get financial aid and easy borrowing terms. It borrowed on the international markets and from its suppliers (by delaying payment). As a result, in 1960 the total external debt of the country stood at \$1.5 billion, or a quarter of the GNP.

The Democrats could have solved at least some of their financial problems by introducing a more effective system of taxation, specifically by taxing the new wealth in the countryside. The rich landowners and substantial farmers who together earned more than a fifth of the GDP, paid only 2 per cent of the total tax revenue. But political considerations always prevented DP governments from using this option. Instead, they borrowed from the Central Bank, which basically meant

printing extra money. As a result inflation gradually went up from 3 per cent in 1950 to 20 per cent in 1957, hitting wage and salary earners and consumers in the towns.⁶

The weakness of the Turkish economy was first reflected in the measures taken in September 1953, when import and foreign-exchange controls were established, ending the five-year period of gradual opening up and rapid integration into the world economy. From 1954 onwards, the international financial institutions began to caution the Turkish government, prescribing what would later become known as the classic ‘IMF package’: devaluation, an end to artificial prices and to subsidies, and an end to import and export restrictions – all measures aimed at complete incorporation into the capitalist world system. For some years, the DP resisted these pressures. It stuck to the official fixed exchange rate of the Turkish lira (2.80 to the dollar), while the deteriorating economy and growing inflation steadily widened the gap between the official rate and the real value of the lira. Instead of recognizing the economic realities, the government revived the National Defence Law of 1940 to enforce price controls. Needless to say, the result was a thriving black market, where everything that had disappeared from the shops could be bought – at a price. By 1958 the black-market rate of the lira was approximately ten to the dollar.

In August 1958 the government was so desperate for further foreign loans that it finally agreed to the demands of the IMF. The lira was devalued, the debts rescheduled and prices were raised. In exchange, the country received a new loan package, paid for partly by the USA, partly by European countries and partly by the IMF.

The debit side of the economic policies of the DP during its ten years in office is fairly clear: they were financially and fiscally unsound, creating huge deficits, debts, inflation and a black market. But the credit side should not be forgotten: the Democrats succeeded in modernizing Turkish agriculture to a certain extent and they vastly increased the industrial base of the country. The majority of the large industrial firms of present-day Turkey have their roots in the 1950s. The new road network opened up the country and the villages came into contact with the outside world for the first time. The result was a sense of mobility and a dynamism that were entirely new.

Increasing opposition and a return to authoritarian politics

The 1954 elections had been a tremendous success for Menderes. The economic boom had vindicated his policies and the peasants now massively supported him. Over the next few years, however, the economic downturn slowly began to erode support for the Democratic Party.

This was due partly to a real deterioration in standards of living (caused by the limits put on the imports of consumer goods, for instance), but it was also true that there had been an explosive rise in the average villager's expectations of material improvement, which the government could not meet. The 1957 elections showed a certain loss of support for the DP in the countryside, but nevertheless the party unquestionably kept the support of the majority of the village population.

A far more serious problem was the crumbling of support among intellectuals, members of the bureaucracy and the armed forces. This was brought about to some extent by the growing economic difficulties and especially the inflation (which of course hit salaried people like civil servants, teachers, university professors and officers more than other groups in society), but a more important factor was the growing authoritarianism of the government. It had been brought to power on a programme of economic and political liberalization but from 1954 onwards the latter was to a large extent sacrificed to save the former.

The election victory had very much been the personal triumph of Prime Minister Adnan Menderes. People selected by him had replaced many of the locally powerful representatives in the last assembly. After the election, he consolidated his position further – in the months after the elections many dissidents were expelled from the party. The changed circumstances were also reflected in Menderes's behaviour. He had always found it very hard to accept criticism; now he became positively allergic to it.

In 1954, a number of measures were taken against the bureaucracy, which the DP still suspected of loyalty to İnönü and his party. The government increased its hold over the bureaucracy by introducing a new rule that any civil servant with more than 25 years of service could be suspended and then sent into early retirement. This applied also to judges and university professors and completed the establishment of political control over the executive and even over the judiciary. Academic freedom, always weak in Turkey, was restricted even further.

In 1955 opposition to the DP's authoritarian line and also opposition to Menderes within the DP started to grow. While the DP, almost from its inception, had been a broad coalition, with supporters in every conceivable section of society, parts of the coalition gradually became estranged from the party over its authoritarian policies *vis-à-vis* the press, the universities and the judiciary.

The extent of the tension in Turkish society first showed in the riots of September 1955. In August and September negotiations between Great Britain, Greece and Turkey over the future of Cyprus led to rising nationalist fervour, fanned by the press. A Greek citizen of Turkish

origin placed a bomb in the Turkish consulate in Salonica, Greece, by way of provocation.⁷ On 6–7 September, large-scale riots took place in Istanbul. In all probability, Menderes and his foreign minister, Zorlu, had decided to have a limited ‘spontaneous’ demonstration by students in Istanbul to express public feeling on the Cyprus issue in Turkey, but the demonstrations got completely out of hand and developed first into a pogrom against Greek businesses and then into a general attack on visible wealth by the inhabitants of the *gecekondus*. Greek shops in Istanbul’s main shopping streets were ransacked and trucks came even from Anatolia to collect the loot. The police, who had apparently been instructed not to act in the original planned demonstration, watched without interfering. The government declared martial law in the three big cities (Istanbul, Ankara and İzmir) and the interior minister had to resign. In total, 5622 houses had been ransacked.⁸

The main bone of contention within the DP, which led to a split in the party, was the demand made in October by a number of liberal representatives that journalists who were taken to court under the restrictive press law should have the right to prove the truth of what they had written and that this should be admitted as evidence in the courts. Later that month, under great pressure from Menderes, the parliamentary group rejected the proposal after acrimonious debates. The mounting criticism forced Menderes himself to seek a vote of confidence from the party parliamentary group. This he got, but dissent within the party had now become so great that in December the liberal wing, under the leadership of Fevzi Lûtfi Karaosmanoğlu broke away from the DP to form the *Hürriyet Partisi* (Freedom Party), which at one stroke became the biggest opposition party in the national assembly. The Freedom Party seems to have had the support of big business, which by now wanted a more sophisticated economic policy with a degree of planning that Menderes would not provide.

During 1956 the trend towards authoritarianism continued. It was the year in which the ‘National Defence Law’ of 1940 was revived to control prices and supplies. In June the press law was again changed, not to liberalize it (as Menderes had promised during the December crisis) but to strengthen further government control of the media. Another law prohibited political meetings except during an election campaign.

Elections were not due until 1958 but when the government announced that base prices for agricultural products would be raised and that there would be a ten-month moratorium on farmers’ debts, it was clear to everyone that elections were imminent. They were duly announced for 27 October. The major opposition parties (RPP, Freedom Party and Republican Nation Party) had for some time been holding discussions on

cooperation. These had not been very productive, resulting only in a joint declaration of principles on 4 September, but all effective cooperation among the opposition parties was made impossible by a law enacted on 11 September that banned the use of combined lists in elections.

The elections produced a major setback for the Democrats, despite some vote rigging in their favour. They remained the largest party, but lost their absolute majority in the country. With 47.3 per cent of the vote they had 424 seats in the new assembly, while the RPP increased its percentage of the vote by nearly six points to 40.6, but dramatically increased its number of seats from 31 to 178. The result for the Freedom Party was extremely disappointing, showing that it was a head without a body, that is to say a party without grassroots organization. They got only 3.8 per cent of the vote and four seats. After the elections, in December 1958 the party decided to merge with the RPP. There, they provided a much-needed infusion of new ideas, which helped to reorient the RPP's policies in the direction of social justice and democratic safeguards. The ultra-conservative Republican Nation Party, which received 7 per cent of the vote but also only four seats, merged after the election with the small Peasants' Party (*Köylü Partisi*) to form the Republican Peasants' Nation Party (*Cumhuriyetçi Köylü Millet Partisi*).

The issue of secularism

In the 1957 elections the DP, confronted with an extremely hostile opposition, a worsening economic crisis and crumbling support among the city-dwellers and the more educated, sometimes resorted to an appeal to religious sentiments, describing the Republicans as communists and unbelievers and boasting about the number of mosques and religious schools opened under the Democrats.

This laid the DP open to the charge of using religion for political purposes and of reneging on the secularist principles of the state. The RPP had been harping on about this since the early 1950s and more and more intellectuals were now taking up the theme. In reality, the DP's attitude towards religion was ambivalent. Menderes used appeals to Islamic sentiments, especially during election campaigns. At the DP's party congress in 1958, he said: 'Without paying heed to the outcry of the zealots of the revolution, we Arabicized the call to prayer. We accepted religious teaching in schools. We had the Koran recited over the radio. Turkey is a Muslim state and it will remain so.'⁹ At the same time, the DP did not try to give Islam a greater role in the administration or legislation of the country.

To understand the argument we have to remember what the Kemalist concept of secularism had been. The Kemalists, like the Unionists

before them, were the executors of a modernization strategy based on a positivist world vision, in which religion was seen as a hindrance to progress in the modernization of state and society. Their secularism meant not so much the separation of church and state as the subjugation and integration of religion into the state bureaucracy.

In the 1930s and 1940s the regime's attitude towards religion had become extremely repressive, but after the introduction of multi-party politics both parties started to court the Muslim vote and the RPP itself became more tolerant of religion after the seventh party congress in 1947. It reintroduced elective religious education in schools and training establishments for preachers. Ankara University announced the establishment of a Faculty of Divinity and in 1949 the tombs and shrines (*türbeler*) were allowed to reopen. At the same time the RPP tried to guard against any religious reaction in politics by enacting article 163 of the penal code, which strictly prohibited propaganda attacking the secular character of the state.

In the years before 1950 the Democrat leaders took great care to emphasize that they would not allow any fundamental change in the secular basis of the state. This earned them the scorn of Islamic currents such as that represented by the journal *Sebilürreşat*, which started to attack the DP, and it led to the formation of a number of more radical opposition parties, the most important of which was the *Millet Partisi* (Nation Party).

After they had come to power, the Democrats continued the RPP's policy of relaxing restrictions on expressions of religious feeling and making concessions to the feelings of the Muslim population, while at the same time combating anti-secularist tendencies. The prayer call in Arabic was made legal again (and adopted overnight in every mosque in the country);¹⁰ religious education was expanded and parents now had to opt out instead of having to opt in (social pressure of course saw to it that hardly anyone opted out). The number of preacher schools was increased. There was a marked rise in the number of mosques being built (as much through increased wealth in the countryside as through any government policy) and the sale of religious literature was allowed again. But the DP's understanding of the secularist character of the state was not significantly different from that of the RPP in the 1950s. When activists of the *Ticani* dervish order started to smash busts of Atatürk after the DP's election victory, their leader Kemal Pilavoğlu was arrested, sent to prison and then placed under house arrest. A law against defaming Atatürk's memory was passed in 1951.

The Democrats did not end the integration of the religious establishment into the bureaucracy (through the directorate of religious

affairs) and every preacher remained a civil servant. They did, however, accept the existence of autonomous religious organizations, such as the brotherhoods, and even legitimized them when they accepted the support of the *Nurcu* movement in the 1954 and 1957 elections. What the Democrat leadership was tacitly admitting by its attitude towards Islam was that religion was not necessarily incompatible with development. To the majority of the educated elite (including civil servants, teachers and academics and officers) who had internalized the Kemalist dogmas and who themselves owed their position in the ruling elite to the fact that they represented the positivist, Western-orientated outlook, this admission threatened their cultural hegemony and their monopoly of the political scene and the state machinery. This explains why their reaction to expressions of even non-political Islamic feeling, was little less than hysterical. Within the army, which regarded itself as the keeper of Atatürk's heritage, the feeling that the DP was betraying the Kemalist traditions was especially strong. As we shall see, this would prove fatal for the government.

The relaxation of secularist policies under the DP made Islam much more prominent in everyday life in the cities, where the culture of the countryside was anyway becoming more visible through massive urbanization. Turkish intellectuals at the time – and later – saw this as a resurgence of Islam, but although there were fundamentalist groups at work, it was really only the existing traditional culture of the mass of the population, the former subject class, reasserting its right to express itself.

Foreign relations: Atlantic Turkey

The postwar era, and especially the Democrat decade, was a period of intensified incorporation of Turkey into the world capitalist system, not only in the economic field, but also in the realms of foreign policy and defence. Turkey in these years became a solid – albeit peripheral – part of the political and military structures the United States and its allies built up to safeguard the continued existence of democracy and free enterprise in their countries. This was a major break with the Kemalist policy of cautious neutralism.

Turkey's foreign relations in the postwar period were, of course, dominated by the cold war. We have already seen how the Truman doctrine was formulated in part with Turkey in mind. When the Democrats came to power in 1950, Turkey was already a member of the Organization for European Economic Cooperation and of the Council of Europe. After the creation of NATO in 1949, the RPP government had already started to sound out the major NATO countries on the possibilities of joining the organization. In August 1950 the new

government officially applied for membership. Menderes knew that several NATO countries, notably the Scandinavian ones, were opposed to Greek and Turkish membership, arguing that these countries were neither Atlantic nor democratic, but he thought he had a trump card: when the United Nations sent an international expeditionary force to Korea to counter the invasion from the north and asked for contributions from member countries to stop the invasion in June 1950, Turkey was one of the few countries that immediately offered to contribute troops. The first, a brigade of 4500 men, were sent in October and before the war was over some 25,000 Turkish soldiers had fought in Korea, suffering more than 6000 casualties.¹¹ This action gained Turkey a great deal of credit among NATO governments, but even so it was another year before Denmark and Norway, which blocked Turkish entry, were finally persuaded to drop their objections. On 18 February 1952 Turkey became a full member of NATO.

The entry into NATO was celebrated as a great success in Turkey by the Democrats and the opposition alike. The reasons for the enthusiasm for NATO were both rational and emotional. Rationally, it was seen as a guarantee against Soviet aggression and as guaranteeing the flow of Western aid and loans that would make the modernization of Turkey possible. Emotionally, it was taken as a sign that Turkey had finally been fully accepted by the Western nations on equal terms. This feeling seems to have been fairly widespread. Even in the 1970s one could still buy ‘NATO wine’ in Turkish restaurants.

Regional alliances

Turkey’s membership of the Western bloc in the cold war largely determined its position in the two regions of which it formed part: the Balkans and the Middle East. The country was a key element in Secretary of State Dulles’s attempts to encircle the Soviet bloc with regional alliances based on NATO.

In the Middle East, the first American attempt to construct a regional alliance was by bringing together Turkey and Egypt in 1951–52, but there was very little enthusiasm for this option in either country. Relations between Turkey and the Arab countries were strained by Turkey’s stance in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict.

Turkey had at first backed the Arab countries because the leadership in Ankara expected the Jewish state to be pro-Soviet. With the warming of American–Israeli relations from 1949 onwards, Turkey also shifted its position. It sat with France and the United States on the Palestine Conciliation Commission in 1949 and recognized Israel diplomatically.

After the failure of the Turkish–Egyptian alliance, the second attempt

to form a regional bloc was a treaty of cooperation with Pakistan, concluded in August 1954. In February 1955 this was followed by a treaty of cooperation and mutual assistance with Turkey's only friend in the Arab world, the Kingdom of Iraq under its strongman Nuri al-Said. Great Britain, Iran and Pakistan also joined this 'Baghdad Pact' while the USA received observer status.

The years after 1955 saw a rising tide of Arab nationalism sweep through the Middle East, led or at least inspired by the Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser. When the USA blocked his attempts to raise money for building the Aswan dam, in 1956 he nationalized the Suez Canal. This led to an attack by Israel, France and Britain. Even though they were militarily victorious, these nations were forced to retreat by the United States, which saw their action as irresponsible, old-fashioned colonialism that might endanger Western interests in the region. The results were that Nasser, although defeated militarily, came out of the conflict with great prestige in the eyes of the Arab world and that his brand of Arab socialist nationalism became popular throughout the Arab Middle East. Turkey's DP government intensely disliked Nasser and saw him as a communist agent. During the Suez crisis, it felt it had to support Egypt verbally, but it did so in rather equivocal terms and Turkey and the Baghdad Pact continued to be regarded as puppets of Western imperialism in much of the Arab world. Tension between Turkey and Syria rose so high in 1957 that for some time the Turkish army threatened to cross the border and Egyptian troops landed in Syria to help defend the country against possible Turkish aggression. The same year British troops had to intervene in Jordan to suppress a Nasserite uprising and to keep King Hussain on his throne. In 1958, Syria and Egypt, at the request of the Syrian leadership, joined forces to form the short-lived United Arab Republic. A civil war between conservative Christians and Nasserites broke out in Lebanon and, at the request of the Christian Lebanese President Chamoun, American marines landed in Lebanon, making use of bases in Turkey. From the point of view of the Turkish government, the worst news of 1958 was a nationalist coup in Baghdad, which left the king and Prime Minister Nuri al-Said dead. Menderes took the decision to intervene militarily in Iraq and Turkish troops were moved to the border. Only strong American pressure, and promises of more money, prevented a Turkish invasion.

In 1960, the Baghdad Pact, or what was left of it after the new regime in Iraq had withdrawn, was changed into the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO), of which the United States was a full member. Like its predecessor, however, CENTO accomplished very little. Unlike the NATO countries, the members of CENTO lacked the mutual trust

necessary to exchange military secrets and ciphers and to integrate their forces effectively in a supranational structure and without that its military effectiveness was bound to remain minimal.

In the Balkans, Turkey's main problem was with its neighbour, the Soviet puppet regime in Bulgaria. In revenge for the sending of Turkish troops to Korea, the Bulgarians suddenly expelled some 250,000 of their Turkish-speaking Muslim citizens. The Turks were totally unprepared for this immigration and closed the border. The conflict was finally resolved in 1953 when the border was reopened, but now the Muslim Bulgarians were forbidden to leave the country altogether. Curiously, nearly 40 years later the Bulgarians provoked a second crisis that was almost a carbon copy of this first one.

In the Balkans, too, the USA encouraged the formation of a regional alliance between Turkey, Greece and Yugoslavia. This Balkan Pact, concluded in February 1953, was as ineffective as the Baghdad Pact, but it did allow the Americans indirect access to the communist, but anti-Soviet, regime in Yugoslavia.

It is perhaps surprising, in view of the bloody history of the years between 1913 and 1923, that the one country with which relations were good and stable in the postwar years (and had been since the early 1930s) was the old enemy, Greece. The relationship stayed good, with both countries joining NATO, until the growing crisis in Cyprus, which started to erupt in 1954, shook it to its very foundations.

On the former Ottoman island of Cyprus a Greek-speaking Orthodox majority of some 80 per cent and a Turkish-speaking Muslim minority of some 20 per cent had lived together under British administration since 1878. Agitation by Greek nationalists of the EOKA movement escalated in 1954 into riots and terrorist attacks on the British. The Greek media and government supported these actions, the aim of which was the union of Cyprus with Greece. The idea of union ('enosis') also found growing support in circles of the British Labour Party.

For the Turkish government it was totally unacceptable, not only out of solidarity with the Cypriot Turks, but also for strategic reasons: it would effectively double the Turkish–Greek border. In August 1955, Greece, Great Britain and Turkey met for discussions on the future of the island, but these did not produce any conclusive results. Turkey supported maintaining the status quo. In the next few years the discussions centred on the idea of partitioning the island. Turkey supported this idea as the next best solution, but the idea was unacceptable to the Greek Cypriots, now led by Archbishop Makarios, a Greek nationalist and an astute politician, whom the British authorities had imprisoned and banned but set free in 1957.

Further discussions in 1958 and 1959, first in Zürich and then in London again, led to an agreement whereby Cyprus would become an independent republic and its independence, territorial integrity and constitutional order were guaranteed by Greece, Britain and Turkey. The agreement provided that the three countries would jointly uphold the guarantees and that, if they were unable to act together each of the guarantor countries could act unilaterally. Article 3, in which these provisions were made, formed the legal basis for Turkish intervention in later years. On 16 August 1960 Cyprus became an independent republic, with Archbishop Makarios as its first president.

The Cyprus problem has proved to be almost intractable, souring relations between Turkey and Greece up to the present day, and we shall return to the subject in the next chapters. At the same time, the Cyprus issue is an example of the way in which Turkish foreign policy, which on the whole had been governed by pragmatism, could still be influenced by the emotional issue of the 'outside Turks', the Turkish communities living outside Turkey. These communities, either remnants of the Ottoman Empire such as those in Bulgaria, Greece and Iraq (and in the prewar *sancak* of Alexandrette), or of the Turkic empires in Central Asia, have often had to live under – at least cultural and religious – repression and, even though the main body of Turkish politics, the Republicans and Democrats (or their successors) have always emphatically rejected irredentism, the fate of the 'outside Turks' is an emotive issue in public opinion, which can, and sometimes does, exert pressure on the politicians.

The DP and the military

The year 1958 also saw the first signs that all was not what it should be between the government and the armed forces. In December 1957, nine army officers were arrested for plotting against the government. The arrests were made public on 16 January 1958.

The Democrats had always distrusted the army, because of the close links of its leading officers with the old regime and İsmet Pasha in particular, but after a purge of the military leadership in 1950 they felt more at ease and, indeed, for the most part of the decade, the top echelon of the armed forces seems to have been loyal to the elected government. The trouble was that by the late 1950s this no longer guaranteed the government the loyalty of the whole officer corps. The reason lay in the fundamental changes wrought by NATO membership and US assistance in the armed forces.

At the end of the 1940s the Turkish army was a huge (700,000 strong) manpower-based force led and organized according to Prussian

doctrines of pre-First World War vintage. Unbridgeable chasms existed between the recruits, the NCOs and the officers. Because the level of technical equipment within the army was extremely low, there was no need for large numbers of people with special skills. In the 1950s, all this changed. More than \$2 billion of military aid was spent on modernizing and mechanizing the Turkish army, and American teams assisted in the training of personnel. Younger officers with expertise in engineering or communications took up the most vital positions in the army. They often received part of their training abroad through NATO exchange programmes and so had a chance to see how far behind the Western allies the Turkish army and Turkish society really were. We now know that from 1955 onwards plots against the government were hatched in these circles.¹²

The accusations against the nine officers involved, who were arrested in 1957, were investigated by a military tribunal, but it did not probe very deeply – the army was not prepared to wash its dirty linen in public. The officers were acquitted and only the informer was convicted. Nevertheless, the government had been alarmed and the military takeover in friendly Iraq in July 1958 was another warning of what could happen.

The final years of Menderes

Meanwhile, the opposition, buoyed up by the result of the 1957 elections, kept up its campaign of rejecting and criticizing absolutely everything and anything the government did. The DP now gave signs that it was no longer prepared to put up with this. It hinted at repressive measures and in October, with a lot of pomp and circumstance, Menderes launched the *Vatan Cephesi* (Fatherland Front), an effort to broaden the DP's base and to mobilize the mass of the population. The main element in the campaign was the daily reading on state-controlled radio of endless lists of people who had joined the Front. They included babies, deceased people and even entirely fictitious names and the campaign, which continued for a year and a half, so disgusted many people that 'Societies of Those who Refuse to Listen to the Radio' (*Radyoyu Dinlemeyenler Cemiyetleri*) were founded in many towns.¹³

In late 1958 and early 1959 two factors strengthened Menderes's hand in the countryside, if not in the cities. First the acceptance of the IMF stabilization programme led to the release of \$359 million in aid. Together with reasonably good harvests this improved the situation of the farmers, while the price rises connected with the programme hit the cities hard. Then, on 17 February 1959 Menderes survived a plane crash at London's Gatwick Airport in which most passengers were

killed. Fully exploited by Turkish radio and the party, his miraculous escape convinced many religious Turks that Menderes was a super-human figure, chosen by God to lead his people.

Tension between the parties remained high. İnönü was attacked during a tour of the DP heartland on the Aegean, and early in April 1960 troops were used to stop him holding a meeting in Kayseri. When he refused to turn back, the troops were withdrawn. On 18 April the Democrats in the assembly decided to establish a committee with wide powers to investigate the activities of the opposition. The committee, composed exclusively of hard-line DP members, would report on its findings within three months and during this period all political activity outside the assembly would be banned. Even newspaper reports of assembly debates were now forbidden.

The establishment of the investigatory commission was denounced as unconstitutional by law professors at Istanbul and Ankara universities. When disciplinary action was taken against the professors (for engaging in politics) there were student demonstrations and riots. The government now decided to use the army to suppress the student riots and the universities were closed down. One student was killed (although in the tense situation wildly exaggerated numbers were generally believed). The use of troops to suppress demonstrations in turn led to a large silent demonstration by cadets of the War Academy through Ankara on 21 May. The press, which under the censorship restrictions could not report on the riots, instead gave extensive coverage to the student demonstrations in Korea, which brought down President Syngman Rhee around this time.

Prime Minister Menderes, meanwhile, was trying to strengthen his support, or maybe only his nerve, by addressing large crowds of supporters in the Aegean provinces before returning to Ankara for the visit by Prime Minister Nehru of India between 20 and 24 May. On 25 May Menderes suddenly announced that the investigation committee of the assembly had finished its work in one month instead of the projected three, and that it would shortly report its findings. The commission is known to have looked into possible links between the RPP and the army and Menderes's announcement may well have moved the conspirators in the army to act. Whether or not that was the reason, in the early morning of 27 May 1960 army units took over all government buildings in Ankara and Istanbul and arrested all DP ministers and deputies, including Menderes and the president of the republic, Celâl Bayar.