Turkey

Kemal "Atatürk" ("Father of the Turks") - national hero of Turkey; (1881-1938). The modern Republic of Turkey begins on Oct. 29, 1923.

Geography

one of the most strategic locations in the world; Turkey controls access to the Black Sea which is the only warm water port of Russia. Bulgaria, Romania, Ukraine, & Georgia also depend on the Black Sea ports. Access out of the Black Sea to the Mediterranean lies within Turkish control. Turkey is the only NATO member in direct proximity to Iran, Iraq, & Russia (the traditional enemy of Turkey.)

Historical Background

1881 A.D. - birth of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk; the Ottoman Empire is a Middle Eastern Dominion. Mustafa "Kemal" ("Excellence") will attend the War College and will later become involved in a nationalist reform group known as the "Young Turks" which will achieve power but fail to liberalize the government. Disappointed, Kemal breaks from the group.

World War I - Turkey sides with the Central Powers in opposition to Russia; Kemal emerges as Turkey's greatest war hero by repulsing an overwhelming British attack at Gallipoli, saving the Ottoman capital of Istanbul.

Turkish War of Independence - the Ottoman Empire is dismembered following WWI. Kemal builds up the army to a point where it will threaten the Allied Occupation Forces; Kemal quits the army to become president of the Turkish nationalist parliament in Ankara.

October 29, 1923 - modern Republic of Turkey is born with Kemal as its president. Kemal manages to initiate a number of reforms. To Kemal, modernization meant Westernization.

Kemal finds it necessary to rule Turkey as a one-party state; Turkey will eventually become a democratic secular state - no easy feat.

November 10, 1938 - Kemal dies, but Kemal's government is strong enough to endure his death. (November 10th is a secular holiday.)

World War II - Turkey remains neutral, but sides with the West during the Cold War & will participate in the Korean War in 1950.

1952 - Turkey joins NATO

1990 - Iraqi invasion of Kuwait by Iraq (a major trading partner) puts enormous strains on Turkey; Turkish troops will not participate in the liberation, but Turkish air bases will be used which will be considered vital. As a result of the embargo, Turkey experiences economic problems & inflation which are partially offset by S$4 billion in grants & credits from the allies.

Government

The Republic of Turkey is a multiparty democracy. Prime Minister - head of government; President - traditionally a ceremonial office, but now is a forum for directing Turkey's international affairs. Grand National Assembly - the one legislative house with 450 seats. The Kurdish Workers' Party, a secessionist party evolves from the protection of the Kurds in Northern Iraq. A government program was established to meet some Kurdish demands in Turkey, but failed to prevent the rising violence.

Population / Demographics

roughly 56 million people; 85% ethnic Turks, 12% Kurdish (the largest minority group), as well as other Greek, Armenian, Jewish, & Arab minority groups.

Religion

About 90% of the population - Sunni Muslim. The remaining 10% - other Muslim sects, Christians, & Jews.

Language / Writing

Illiteracy in Turkey was reduced early on by replacing Arabic script with an easier-to-master Roman alphabet.

Protocol & Gestures

Tobacco is everywhere in Turkey; Turks usually smoke between courses at meals. A toothpick will probably be offered at the end of a meal; be sure to cover your mouth with your hand. Avoid taking sides in a Turkish political question or the Turkish-Greek dispute.

Business Practices & Culture

Traffic jams are frequent in both Ankara & Istanbul, so allow for plenty of travel time. Given enough notice, your Turkish colleagues should be able to conduct business in English; however, Turks will appreciate the effort to learn a few phrases in Turkish.

Small talk prior to business deals allows the Turkish businessmen to get to know you. Negotiations may take place over innumerable cups of tea or coffee. Although Friday is the Muslim holy day, business is still conducted. You can not expect to conduct business on a holiday. Be aware of the Muslim Holidays: Ramadan (Ramadan in other countries) - the holy month. Observers fast from dawn until dusk. Dusk is announced with a cannon shot; Sheker Bayram (the three day festival) at the end of the Ramadan fast. Children go door to door asking for sweets; the banks will be closed. Kurban Bayram - the feast of the sacrifice.