

A Few Notes on the Comparative History of Estonia

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Özet

Bu makalede, Eston ve Türk tarihinden örnekler vermek suretiyle, Türk-Eston etkileşimine dair bazı tarihsel ipuçlarına ve olasılıklara ulaşılmaya amaçlanmıştır. Estonca ile Türkçe arasındaki dil akrabalığı gibi bilinen hususlara değinmenin yanı sıra, 20.yüzyıl itibarıyla Türkiye'de ve Estonya'da yaşanan gelişmelerin birlikte yorumlanmasını temin edecek bir yaklaşım tercih edilmiştir. Bu suretle, henüz yeterince çalışılmamış olan bir sahada, Türkiye ve yurtdışındaki akademik merakın artırılması ve Türk kültürü dairesi ile etkileşimi tarihsel olarak eskilere uzanan Estonya'nın, özellikle Türkiye Cumhuriyeti dönemine denk gelen bir süreçte yaşadıklarının, bazı somut veriler üzerinden kıyaslanması ile, Türk-Eston araştırmalarının teşvik edilmesi öngörülmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Estonya, Türkiye, Atatürk, tarih, dil.

The tulip flower - permanently popular in world history - which gave its name to eras and its shape to motifs, is also referred to as a metaphor for the enviable "fortitude" of the Turks. The hardness of the tulip in the face of harsh weather and a difficult life is compared to the strong will, great culture and influence of the Turks extending from the steppes of Central Asia (Turkistan) into many parts of the world, including Europe; surviving for centuries among many other strong powers and civilizations. In terms of population and extent of influence, Estonians showed great resolution in continuing their own cultural existence within the relative and limited possibilities offered by the neighboring Slavic-Cermen-Baltic areas of Europe. Taking into account this "determination, fortitude and spirit of resistance", Estonia can be, in my opinion, referred to as one of the 'small tulips' of European history. This paper deals with a few issues concerning the comparative history of Estonia, instead of an excessive number of references or a selected range of assessments. It aims to pave the way for possible studies to be conducted in the future by encouraging further scholarly curiosity to be reflected upon the themes mentioned in this study.

Estonia in the Baltic region had to exist alongside population disputes and the policies of European states. For this reason, she confronted the dominant policies of great powers which, in one sense, had excluded her, but

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which at the same time, during certain stages in history, had carried the concern to rule.¹ However, despite the fact that Estonia consist of a fairly small territory and a population that is limited in size, she still have a deep and rich cultural inheritance and past. In addition, the peace-loving attitude and characteristics of the population is quite striking.

In order to continue her existence, Estonia preserved –with an enviable dignity– the fragile balance that distinguishes her, without, however, *separating* her from others surrounding the country. This was achieved through maintaining her cultural values and traditions, even if – at times- this meant being isolated from her surroundings; she also tried to avoid promoting a policy which encouraged her to come under a mandate or colony, or one that focused on the act of creating an identity under the full domination of a greater state.

Estonia witnessed a turning point in 1918; in this context, Estonia declared her first independence. Later, after the disintegration of the USSR in 1991, Estonia regained her independence (although the restoration of Estonia’s independence was actively an ongoing struggle since 1988). Today, whereas Estonia has been a member country of the EU and NATO since 2004.

As an example of Estonia and Turkey’s separate historical and political experiences in the first half of the 20th century, Estonia declared its independence on February 24, 1918, *i.e.* five years before the announcement of the Turkish Republic. The first Provisional Government of Estonia was headed by Konstantin Paets.² During the year at the 1924 recognition of Estonian independence by the then Turkish Government under M.İsmet (İnönü), the Estonian Elder of State in power was Paets between August 1923-March 1924

¹ Along with Latvia and Lithuania, Estonia shares a common history marked by invasions and rule from the neighboring countries of Russia, Germany, Sweden, and Denmark. The countries, however, are culturally and linguistically diverse. The Estonian language has two major dialects, northern and southern. In the past Estonians did not refer to themselves as *eestlased* (eastern people) nor did they refer to their language as *eesti keel* (Estonian tongue). The northern Estonians called themselves *maarahivas*, and their language, *maakeel*. Joyce Moss-George Wilson, *Eastern Europe and the Post-Soviet Republics*, Detroit 1993, pp.119,124.

² Konstantin Paets (Päts), who served as "State Elder (Riigivanem, a PM with some additional responsibilities of a President), or *de facto* Prime Minister" seven times between 1918 and 1934, was among the members of the Salvation Committee that issued the 1918 Estonian declaration of independence. In the 1930s, he played an important role in the political leadership of the state and state reform. He became the first President of Estonia in April 1938; Kaarel Eenpalu became his Prime Minister. With the Soviet occupation of Estonia in June 1940, Paets was deported to Ufa in the Urals in July. For Konstantin Paets, the national awakening (1869-1917), the early stages of Estonian independence (1917-1920), constituent assembly, elections, see Mel Huang, "Estonia" in *Eastern Europe: An Introduction to the People, Lands, and Culture*, edited by Richard Frucht, Vol.I , Santa Barbara 2005, pp.72-89; Georg von Rauch, *The Baltic States: the Years of Independence 1917-1940*, London 1974, pp.76-86,154-160; Pascal Lorot, *Baltık Ülkeleri* (Les pays baltes), translated by Hüsni Dilli, İstanbul 1991, pp.64,66-71.

and then Friedrich Akel in March-December 1924 (and starting from December 1924 Jüri Jaakson).

With the signing of the Peace Treaty between Estonia and Russia (also known as the Tartu Peace Treaty) in 1920, Russia recognised the Estonian autonomy. The opening session of the first Estonian Assembly was on April 23rd 1919 —on the same day the GNA of Turkey, the unicameral assembly of the Turkish Nationalists, opened a year later in 1920, in the midst of the Turkish National War. Estonian parliamentary elections to form the *Riigikogu* (state assembly)-I were held in 1920. The 1920 Constitution sought protection against a concentration of power, thus the severely weakened executive. Most of the power rested in the *Riigikogu*. The electoral system of the era was based on proportional system of representation. The lack of a minimum threshold meant that the Estonian Parliament was composed of many small parties who proved unable to make stable coalitions, thus paralyzing the government frequently, most notably during the 1929 economic turmoil.³ The *Riigikogu* was divided into two chambers (the lower and upper chambers) in 1938-1940 and was then replaced by the Estonian Supreme Soviet. Thus, the subsequent eras of Soviet and German occupation, and the late Soviet occupation of Estonia (1944-1991) froze the Baltic States, including Estonia.⁴ In 1991, Estonia once again free.

In other words, after the Great War, the assemblies of both countries (Estonia and Turkey) were operating under extraordinary conditions because of foreign interference and the initial years of state foundation and democracy building. In such a complex part of world history, which is generally known as the *Neo-Colonial* era (1914-1945) between the two World Wars, new "mandates and colonies" were introduced as part of the imperial designs of the colonial powers at that time. However, the Turkish Nationalists at Ankara under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk) followed the path of "full independence", succeeding in founding the Republic of Turkey out of the remnants of the partitioned Ottoman Empire in the aftermath of World War I

³ As an additional information, neither Estonia nor Turkey were very much harmed by the Great Economic Depression of 1929 although the looming global economic depression created the tremendous political disputes in Estonia. Like Turkey, at the outbreak of World War II Estonia declared neutrality. In 1940, however, Estonia was annexed by the Soviets. The Estonian Soviet Republic was proclaimed in July 1940, and the newly formed Estonian Socialist republic was formally accepted into the Soviet Union in August 1940. For the details in the paragraph, see Huang, *ibid.*, pp.77-89; Riina Kionka, "Estonians" in *The Nationalities Question in the Soviet Union*, edited by Graham Smith, London 1993, pp.40-51; Gordon B. Smith, *Soviet Politics: Continuity and Contradiction*, London 1988, pp.304-306; Stephen White (ed.), *Political and Economic Encyclopaedia of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe*, London 1990, pp.97-98.

⁴ During the Soviet annexation, Estonian history is interpreted -according to Ruutsoo- mainly in an ethno-nationalist political key and as a resistance to Russification. The conflict between the Soviet regime and the Estonians, however, was not only on the political and ethnic level; it was at the same time a cultural and civilizational conflict with a complicated ontology for the different levels of society. Rein Ruutsoo, *Civil Society and Nation Building in Estonia and the Baltic States*, Rovaniemi 2002, pp.96-97.

by resisting both the occupying Allied powers and the docile Ottoman Government at Istanbul.

While the Estonian War of Independence took place in the post-war era and in sight of the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution, which brought an opportunity for Estonia to gain political power; in Turkey's case, however, the victorious Allied Powers tried to impose the harsh peace terms of Sevres (1920) to end World War I with the Ottoman Empire; they were resisted and defeated by the Turkish Nationalists. In comparison to other peace treaties ending World War I with the Allies, only Turkey succeeded in sitting down as equal partners with the Allied powers to sign a new peace treaty to end World War I (in 1923), instead of the unacceptable peace treaty of Sevres.

During the Turkish National War (1919-1922), the opening of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey in April 1920 and the adoption of a new Constitution in January 1921 were benchmarks for the democratic moves to be followed after the foundation of the Republic. Nevertheless, a year after the proclamation of the Republic (1923), an improved Constitution came into existence. Although Turkey achieved a multi-party system in 1946, eight years after Atatürk's death, initial attempts to this end in 1924 and 1930 had both proved unsuccessful.

After the foundation of the Turkish State, came the furnishing of the institutional aspects of the state mechanism. In the constitutional system of the Turkish Republic there were four constitutions, in 1921, 1924, 1961 and 1982 consecutively (the last of these is the current constitution in Turkey). With the instigation of the multiparty system in Turkey in 1946, a system of election by the majority was put in place between 1946-1960, followed by a Turkish proportional representation system, accompanied time to time by the use of the d'hondt formula, without a threshold formula, or the today's 10% threshold etc. The Turkish parliament has always been unicameral except for the period between the last two constitutions, when the bicameral Turkish Parliament (1961-1980) –one named "republican senate", and the other "national assembly"— was operational.

As mentioned earlier the Estonian War of Independence occurred in 1918 and resulted in success for Estonia, the political life, however, could not develop for months due to the German occupation. It should be remembered, not only in terms of cultural interaction but also in terms of the bilateral relations between Turkey and Estonia, that Atatürk's Turkey had been one of the first countries to have recognized (in 1924) the independence of Estonia declared in 1918; many other countries in Europe seemed cautious about such a recognition.

This positive atmosphere was increased by a cordial relations in a variety of different fields. For instance, the newly founded Turkish Republic under Atatürk's presidency did not recognize the incorporation of Estonia into the USSR; in contrast, good relations with Estonia were strengthened.

Atatürk's Turkey recognized the Republic of Estonia in January 1924 and opened an embassy in Tallinn in 1935.⁵ On March 12, 1935, Kemal Atatürk wrote from Ankara to Konstantin Paets that to protect and strengthen the ties of friendship between the two republics, Ragıp Raif (who worked in Stockholm as a Minister plenipotentiary at that time) was also being given the duty of "extraordinary representative and Minister plenipotentiary" to Estonia. Importantly, Atatürk expressed his intention that this appointment would facilitate the channel of correspondence directly from Atatürk - or the Turkish State - for the greater peace and prosperity of Estonia.⁶

As another example, the Convention⁷ of Commerce and Navigation between Turkey and Estonia dated September 1929 aimed to strengthen relations between the two countries, to regulate the bilateral provisions on residential issues for citizens of the respective countries and to promote the treaty of commerce and navigation between both countries. As another example, the Trade Agreement dated June 6, 1937 and the Clearing (Kliring) Agreement of the same date, were signed in Ankara as an annex to the trade agreement and as proof of the intention to develop and ease trade relations between the governments of the Turkish Republic and the Republic of Estonia. According to the Trade Agreement that had come to effect on June 28, 1937, it was agreed that products, consisting mainly of salt and cotton, tobacco, dry fruits, acorns, fresh grapes, oranges and wool were to be exported to Estonia, whereas products such as cotton yarn, parquet, plywood, wrapping paper, wood pulp etc. were to be imported from Estonia. According to the 1937 Clearing Agreement (a renewed version of the Clearing Agreement dated March 1935), which was signed by Ş.Saraçoğlu and E.Virgo, regarding the payment of debts that arose from trade between the two countries concerned, it was agreed that reciprocal payments would be made by the Central Bank of the Turkish Republic and the Eesti Bank in Estonia. As in the previous agreement, the clearing account would no longer exist only in French francs and would now consist of an account in pounds as payments were to be made in the same currency. In March 1939, as a result of the correspondence between the Estonian Foreign Ministry under Mr.Karl Selter, and Mr.Nuri Batu, Turkish diplomatic envoy in Tallinn, to these agreements was reorganized a protocol (August 29, 1938) regarding quotas and customs tariffs to be

⁵ For the information about the presentation of Turkish Ambassador B.Nuri Batu's letter of credence to the President on September 20, 1935, see *Ayın Tarihi* (History of the Month), Vol.22, p.238, Ankara 1935.

⁶ Bilal Şimşir, *Atatürk ve Yabancı Devlet Başkanları II*, No.41: From Turkish President K.Atatürk to President Konstantin Paets (Ankara, 12 March 1935), Ankara 2001.

⁷ See "Convention de Commerce et de Navigation (*Ticaret ve Seyrisefain Muahedenamesi*)", by the Turkish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, (imp.Ebuzzia, Stanboul), Ankara 1928. Turkish signatories to the agreement included Mr. Zekai (deputy, ex-Minister and Ambassador) and Mr. Menemenli Numan (Turkish Under-Secretary to the Foreign Minister); Estonian representatives included ex-Minister Mr.Ernest C.Weberman.

imposed on raw leather, cotton yarn etc.⁸ Both debt payments and further trading traffic were thus set out in detail.

Estonia within the essentially Baltic framework –though differing linguistically from Baltic German-rooted/or Baltic Slavic-rooted people— draw attention by virtue of her socio-cultural depth, which is certainly disproportionate to her relatively small population. The popularity and usage of the Estonian *language* has held an important place in Eston people's cultural heritage within the continuation of its existence, sustaining its identity against the passage of time.

While trying to determine the historical background of the specific conditions of Estonia, one needs to bear in mind the factor of mysticism (shamanic, pagan) within the context of beliefs and practices. Moreover, regarding the historical framework and depth of Estonia, it would be useful to examine phenomena in a range, for instance, from Uralic shamanism to pre-historic Eurasian beliefs etc. Fanaticism, however, as a facet of religion is absent in Estonian society.

When considering the spoken *language* of the Estonian population, one can see that it belongs to the same linguistic family as the Turkish language. Whilst Turkish derives from the Altaic branch of the Uralo-Altaic family of languages, the Estonian language is rooted in the Finno-Ugric group of the Ural branch. As is already known, languages derived from vernacular languages are accepted as being of the same linguistic family, and the collaboration of this linguistic family may (or may not) reveal a socio-cultural influence which may increase as one goes back further into the reaches of the past. In the same way, whereas there are no doubt nations which share the same origins and have the same linguistic root, there are also nations who have a similar cultural bond and social custom without having any racial relations with one another. In this way, in an exploration of ancient history, the fact of belonging to the same linguistic group might provide a clue to indicate the possible existence of a social or cultural touch or contact between the Turkish and Eston populations in the distant past. For this reason, one must – at this point – express the need for further research on the subject matter. It seems to be likely that for this probability to be true, bearing in mind that Estonians in ancient times may have established contact with a variety of neighboring nations, including Turkish ones⁹, of the Volga-Uralic region or possibly even on the northern regions of the Black Sea.

⁸ Information about the Trade and Clearing Agreements between Turkey and Estonia, see *Düstur* (Code of Laws), Code No.231, (November 1938-October 1939), Vol.20, Ankara 1958, pp.966-974; also *Düstur*, Vol.21, Ankara 1961, pp.28-29.

⁹ As regards religion, the Turkish tribes in Volga-Uralic regions were Christian like Cuman, Gagauz, Chuvash etc. On the other hand, before the adoption of Islam by the Turks in the 9th-10th centuries, there was an old belief in Central Asia in the Sky-God (*Gök Tanrı*), which is a monotheist faith and still seen among the Turks of the Altaic regions.

In the case of Estonia, it can also be considered that Eston tribes populated the region located centuries ago in the wide Finno-Ugric speaking areas,¹⁰ *e.g.* around the Urals, where they –in a variety of ways- interacted, forming some degree of influence with many other entities, including various Turanian and Turkic-speaking Eurasian populations (such as, possibly, the Chuvash). Such an interaction is surely open to debate and research in order to define the existence/non-existence and extent of this possibility.¹¹

At this point, where such probabilities become dynamics for scientific and academic curiosity, it would be quite useful —aside from written literary documents— to resort to oral tradition when considering the relevant historical process, especially when comparing and examining the epics and old folk-expressions/idioms, in order to determine the similarities/differences between the two languages (Turkish and Estonian) and the capacity of “language” root, a relationship that goes a long way back in history.

Since the Estonian language is part of the Finno-Ugric family of languages, Özdoğan’s remarks should perhaps be considered at this point. In his article entitled “Pan-Turanism in the World and in Turkey”¹², the writer studied the notion of “Turan”. In terms of *territory*, Turan covered vast geographical areas found roughly between the Aral Sea and East Turkestan. In terms of *ethnic attribute*, it referred to all Turkic nations - neither Sami nor Arian - mainly in the successor Central Asian lands of the former Soviet Union as well as in the Caucasus and East Turkestan. Therefore, historically the “Turan” was a term for both an ethno-geographical region and a nation (*i.e.* not being Sami or Arian). However, as a result of 19th century Turcology studies, Turan was loaded with further cultural, historical and political meanings. In this regard, Turan was connected with the general “European and Asian languages”,

¹⁰ According to Moss and Wilson, the majority of the people of Estonia are descendants of Finno-Ugric peoples, related to Hungarians and Finns, who may have migrated from southern Siberia to the shores of the Baltic by the 3rd century B.C. and then settling in Scandinavia. They moved into an area that had been inhabited long before their arrival; archaeological records suggest that Estonia has been inhabited since 6000 B.C. During the Roman Iron Age, Estonia began an intensive sea trade with the Goths of eastern Germany and served as a link between the West and North-Eastern Europe. Moss-Wilson, *ibid*, pp.119-120.

¹¹ For example, an article about the Estonian author Sutrop considered the meaning and etymology of the name *Taarapita* (*the Great God of the Oeselians*) debating which language it belonged to and to which tribe it was connected. From this –even when reading an article on a different subject – one can conclude that to some extent the island of Taraconta (Taarakonda) mentioned in the middle of the 8th century in the *Cosmographia* of clergyman Aethicus likely points to Oesel (the island of Estonian Saaremaa). Heinz Löwe has come up with different interpretations for the name Taraconta: he even seems to have believed that the island of Taraconta was inhabited by the Turks. See Urmas Sutrop, “Taarapita—the Great God of the Oeselians”, *Trames* (3/2004, Estonia). Also see a number of words which are similar in Estonian and Turkish —*i.e.* *mina:ben* (I), *sina:sen* (you), *han:o* (he/she), *minun:benim* (my), *sinun:senin* (your), *hanen:onun* (his/her), and *seitse: siççi* in Chuvash (seven)— in Osman Karatay, *Hırvat Ulusunun Oluşumu* (Croatian Nation-Building), Ankara 2000, pp.15-16.

¹² Günay Göksu Özdoğan, “Dünyada ve Türkiye’de Turancılık” in *Milliyetçilik* (Nationalism), edited by Tanıl Bora, İstanbul 2002, pp.388-391.

which did not belong to the Indo-European or Sami language families; however, some European linguists, like M.Müller, claimed that the languages of both "Turan and Arian" also indicated race (eugene).

Özdoğan, while discussing pan-Turanism specifically in the Hungary and Russia, noted that during the initial years of World War I, the Turanists –with their understanding of the Finno-Ugric connection within Eurasia — generally hoped that the Turanian peoples whose origins were in Central Asia (Turan) including the Ural-Altaiic origins, and similar peoples from the lands of Finland, Estonia, Poland and Ukraine –as well as in Bahçesaray, Baku and Kazan in the Russian and Caucasian areas— would become independent and free from foreign pressure. They were also of the opinion that the Slavic world, with which –they believed –the ethnic, political and cultural geographies of the Turan nations sometimes overlapped, should not be disregarded. After the War, these pan-Turanist circles engaged with the concept of opening a door to Eurasian affairs; in keeping with this idea, they generally favoured the suggestion that the Turanic peoples should contact their members in Russia and the Ukraine with the aim of the salvation of the Turanian nations throughout Eurasia. Thus, for the pan-Turanists, "anti-German/Slavic/Western" leanings should be brought to the fore in the Press and in literature. In short, in the shadows of the World Wars, such pan-Turanist leanings were affected by the fragile European atmosphere and became more political.

On the other hand, it should also be added that a variety of political pan-Turanian ideas existed in the late-Ottoman era. An example of this was the aim to recover the Ottoman Empire via a new unified strategic front in order to open a space for pan-Turkism between the "the white" ethnic bloc of the West and "the yellow" ethnic bloc of the East (this idea was put forward by Yusuf Akçura) without any eugenic references.¹³ Non-political pan-Turkish idealists, such as Mahmut Esat Bozkurt -a Turkish revolutionist and deputy for Izmir in the first GNA, thought that nationalism should not depend on the political concept of the integration of the Turkic peoples all over the world, but instead on "history and language". In his opinion, pan-Turkism cannot be restricted to the limits of any geographical borders.¹⁴

As another kind of view, there was a course of political events that the victorious Allied powers after World War I, especially the British, desired to blockade the Baltic corridor to Russia; the formation of a confederation between Finland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania was therefore thought to be a

¹³ Özdoğan, *ibid.*, p.395.

¹⁴ See M.Esat Bozkurt's view in Nurettin Gülmez, *Kurtuluş Savaşı'nda Anadolu'da Yeni Gün* (The newspaper *Yeni Gün* in Anatolia during the Turkish National War), Ankara 1999, p.266.

potential base of resistance of about 10 million people against the Bolsheviks.¹⁵

In other words, to some Estonia was primarily assumed to be within the cultural extension of the Turanian geographies; to others it was mostly considered to be a strategic strand of resistance in the rivalry between the big powers.

However, the leaders of modern Turkey, primarily Atatürk, aimed at a unique policy by setting an incredible example for all suppressed nations, not differentiating between any countries in the national and religious sense. This was the role model for all suppressed nations under the greed of the big imperial powers. Atatürk knew how to resist against colonialism and imperialism, but he also knew how to maintain a modern and peaceful country in harmony with world countries of all origins. The Turkish Republic which emerged in 1923 from the ruins of the vast Ottoman (Turkish) Empire succeeded in waging an anti-imperial war against the foreign invasion of the great powers of the era.

In the 20th century, in other words, the grasping imperial greed of the great powers was dealt a fatal blow due to the rebirth of the modern Turkish nation under the guidance of Kemal Atatürk, the great Turkish and world leader. In this sense, his sensitivity towards the independence of the new states primarily served for this purpose.

When we consider the case of Estonia's small population, one may possibly receive the impression that as a result of Soviet policy, a great number of outsiders —mainly Russians— came to Estonia's territory following World War II. However, the Estonian identity remained intact. As discussed in Almond's words, the newly independent Estonian Republic still had a problem: though the position of ethnic Estonians was better in their Republic, it was still vague territorially speaking, with a non-Estonian minority population approaching a third of the total.¹⁶ Indeed, and more importantly than political events, the importance of such an experience in Estonia underlined the necessity of continuity in their language, perhaps with special emphasis in the areas of education, culture and administration.

Within this framework, it should be noted that in the case of Estonia, new opportunities will be open for Turkish, Estonian, Finnish, German, Slavic, Danish, Swedish, and Baltic researchers —as well as for those from other re-

¹⁵ *Finlandiya, Estonya, Letonya, Litvanya Orduları 1929-1930 (The Finnish, Estonian, Latvian, Lithuanian Armies)*, Ankara 1931, pp.2-4. Similarly, the Baltic states occupied an important place in the German policy against Russia and also to place the Baltic Sea and the Baltic states under the German control. Lorot, *ibid.*, pp.60-61. On the other hand, Russia had little direct access to Western Europe; therefore, Estonia was considered —in a sense— as Russia's window to the West. Huang, *ibid.*, pp.71-72.

¹⁶ For the case of Estonia's protection of its language and culture through political measures, see the above-mentioned remarks of the author in Mark Almond, *Europe's Backyard War: the War in the Balkans*, London 1994, pp.343-344.

lated countries— towards a better understanding of their own cultures, not just with regard to understanding the history of Estonia as a land, but also concerning the historical analysis of the connections of the Estonian people in an ethnic or tribal past, both in their well-known interaction with the Finno-Ugric tribes/language and also their contact with other relative or neighboring cultures prior to the Middle Ages. Indeed, it is not rare to encounter an emphasis on Estonian history pertaining mainly to the Middle Ages or the Teutonic era that witnessed the spreading of Christianity.¹⁷

In short, by a comprehensive examination of Estonia and, in the same context, by researching deeper into the old Estonian tribal element that subsisted both within the borders of present Estonia and also within the other possible Eston-populated areas of early times, one can determine the extent of the link –not racial or ethnic, but linguistic and cultural— between Estonian and Turkish history and that of other related Eurasian nations.

Abstract

Estonia within the essentially Baltic framework –though differing linguistically from Baltic German-rooted/ or Baltic Slavic-rooted people— draw attention by virtue of her socio-cultural depth, which is certainly disproportionate to her relatively small population. The popularity and usage of the Estonian language has held an important place in Eston people's cultural heritage within the continuation of its existence, sustaining its identity against the passage of time. A better understanding of the historical issues which overlap with the Turkish and Estonian cultural wealth and political life may be obtained through a comparative study of the history of both countries. Therefore, instead of introducing a great number of contradictory views or materials, this study aims to encourage further scholarly curiosity by assessing the destiny and the similarities or differences within the history of state foundation and that of cultural background of the two countries. Primarily, it should be remembered, not only in terms of cultural interaction but also in terms of the bilateral relations between Turkey and Estonia, that Atatürk's Turkey had been one of the first countries to have recognized (in 1924) the independence of Estonia declared in 1918.

Key Words: Estonia, Turkey, Atatürk, history, language.

¹⁷ Christianity was first brought to Estonia in the middle of the 12th century by Danes, who were followed by the crusading Teutonic Knights. Under Russian rule in the 1800s, the Russian Orthodox Church also gained prominence. However, while most Christian denominations are represented in Estonia, the majority of Estonians belong to the Evangelical Lutheran Church established during the Swedish rule of Estonia in the 16th century. Moss-Wilson, *ibid.*, p.124.

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