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# Politics and Public Libraries in the Republic of Turkey

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## ABSTRACT

This paper explores the phenomenon of the absence of public libraries from the politics and agendas of the Republic of Turkey, which was founded in 1923. Every institution is established and developed within the framework of the laws of its country. Both the successes and failures of institutions are directly proportional to the understanding of democracy in that country. In countries where democracy is not indigenized, the desires of the rulers in power may forge ahead regardless of what the legislation stipulates. The library as a social institution is an indispensable component of the dynamics of any democratic country. Therefore the question being asked is, to what extent can public libraries fulfill their objectives and functions in countries like Turkey, where democracy is not yet fully indigenized? With this question in mind, the paper first determines the place and function of politics in the general history of public libraries in Turkey; it then goes on to reveal how library institutions are affected when politics and democracy do not overlap. The methodology used for the study is an analysis of documents such as government programs, development plans, and laws and regulations. Data show that what has been promised directly or indirectly by some government programs has never been realized. It is concluded that unstable politics and the involvement of politicians in the operations of libraries hinder public libraries in performing their role.

## INTRODUCTION

As social beings, humans develop according to the setting in which they live, which includes geographical circumstances, language, education, and culture. This is where public libraries come into play, with their provision

of services that respond to the cultural, educational, and informational needs of individuals, whether within local or universal contexts. State policies recognize, regulate, and execute this response.

Public libraries are among the fundamental institutions created by the cultural, educational, and informational policies of countries. Commonly established and operated by the state, these institutions are defined as “local gateways to knowledge” (UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 1994, n.p.). Public libraries stand on four universal pillars: information, education, culture, and recreation. They achieve their unique and universal character by evaluating these elements within the local context. Hence they are established and operated by local administrations, although often with the support of central government. While libraries are often described as “information homes” of the people, their policies, however, may be more aligned with the approach taken by central or local government.

States are corporate entities organized as political associations by a nation, or by a synthesis of nations as a commonwealth, based on territorial integrity. In addition, states (if democratic) are administered by governments that are formed by the political parties that have gained power by winning an election. The administrative and executive prerogatives of a government and its power to make decisions are determined within a framework of laws. The constitution and laws represent the state, while the government undertakes the task of legislation and execution. By their nature, governments may be in a state of constant change, but despite this change and in opposition to it is the constancy embodied in the constitution. When the government of a country like Turkey attempts to operate outside the boundaries of its constitution, legislation prevents it from doing so.

Today, there are international decision-making bodies, such as the European Court of Human Rights, for occasions when national laws do not suffice. However, in countries where the culture of democracy has not been completely embraced and where the democratic principle of the separation of executive, judicial, and legislative powers has not been applied, governments may seize the powers of the state.

The word democracy is derived from the Greek *dimokratia*, a combination of δῆμος (*dēmos*: common people, the public) and κράτος (*krátos*: power) (Democracy, n.d.)—that is, people’s power, or rule by the people. The most important characteristic of democracy is the avoidance of dictatorship. In other words, a democracy ensures that its people are free and not subjected to a regime that is not based on the rule of law. In fact, even in ancient times, the Greeks knew that democracy was more about avoiding tyranny than governance by the people (Popper, 2006, p. 63).

Democracy is a fundamental and vital concept for almost all types of libraries. As stated in the UNESCO “Public Library Manifesto” (1994, n.p.), the fundamental human values of “freedom, prosperity and the develop-

ment of society and individuals” depend on the exercise of democratic rights and constructive participation by well-informed citizens. The public library makes possible the fulfillment of educational, informational, and cultural needs, and empowers the individual, the democrat, and the knowledgeable citizen to work for the freedom, welfare, and improvement of society. One of the assurances of democracy is that public libraries do not discriminate among the language, religion, gender, ancestry, social status, political views, or poverty or wealth of individuals; that they are free and accessible for everyone; and that they provide services and materials that address the needs of all sectors of society. In those countries where democracy and the rule of law are not upheld, it is questionable whether “true” public libraries can actually be said to exist, because there the criteria for democratic libraries cannot be met.<sup>1</sup> So how can the relationship between democracy and libraries be described in the Republic of Turkey, where democracy has not been internalized? What does the democracy–state–government interaction look like in Turkey? Which governments have overseen library development, and during which periods did libraries decline? Are Turkey’s public libraries truly *public*, or are they merely the embodiment of policies shaped by successive governments?

This paper is based on the hypothesis that in societies in which the culture of democracy is not developed, public libraries cannot truly fulfill their functions. Within the context of the relationship between politics and libraries, it addresses the question of why public libraries in Turkey, which has been a republic since 1923 and a democracy since 1950, are not what they should be. The scope of the study is limited to Turkey’s government programs—its five-year development plans and relevant acts, regulations, and statistics. Based on these sources it provides an analysis that aims at determining the place of public libraries in government policies between 1923 and 2013, and evaluates the relationship between government policies and libraries.

### LIBRARIES IN TURKEY

When Turkey is mentioned, the Anatolia region immediately springs to mind. It has been the home of various civilizations and served as a bridge between cultures. Founded on the remnants of the Ottoman Empire, the Republic of Turkey is the last link in the chain of civilizations and cultures in these lands. It is helpful to study the governance system of the former empire in order to have a better understanding of the government of the republic that followed it.

The governance system of the Ottoman’s covered Muslim, Christian, and Jewish religious communities, such as Greek (Rûm), Armenian, Bulgarian, and Hebrew, yet these diverse communities never blended together (Halman, 1998, p. 2494). They established their own libraries and educational institutions that were related to their religious and ethnic

origins. It is not possible to include all the libraries that were established and functioned during the 600 years of the Ottoman Empire under the single heading of "Ottoman libraries." There are no extant studies that specifically deal with the libraries of communities such as, for example, the Ottoman Rûm, Armenian, and Jewish communities, whereas there are numerous contributions about the libraries of the Ottoman Turks. For this reason, only the achievements of the Ottoman Turks in establishing libraries are taken into account in this paper.

The Ottoman Turks established libraries in line with the *vakıf* (foundation) traditions. These foundation libraries were part of *küllîye* (Islamic-Ottoman social complexes), which included religious, educational, and social-support organizations. These foundations were established by wealthy individuals to bestow, on behalf of God, favors upon the people. The beneficiary institutions often included libraries. The benefactor, who established the foundation, prepared a charter, or *vakfiye*, which functioned as a deed of trust, specifying how the institution would operate, for instance, who would work for what salary, which books would be included in the collection, who would be able to benefit from it, and when and how. What was written in this charter was deemed as valuable as the Qur'an, the holy book of Muslims, and could not be changed by anyone. The foundation libraries also attempted to fulfill the functions of the university, public, and school libraries of their time; in this sense they were similar to the monastery libraries of Europe (Jucchoff, 1972, p. 1).

With the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the Republic of Turkey, established by the Proclamation of the Republic on October 27, 1923, became its material and spiritual heir. The new state took up a position equidistant from all religions and adopted secular principles. After the Turkish War of Independence, libraries that used to exist in religious units such as the *madrassa* (Muslim theological schools), *tekke* (dervish lodges), *türbe* (tombs), and in *cami* (mosques) were grouped in the city centers of the new Turkish state. While the new republic was attempting to establish a state infrastructure, particular importance was attached to libraries in terms of knowledge and cultural policies. In the founding of the republic, the principle behind organizing the people was neither land (as was the case in France) nor labor (as was the case in Russia), but instead the concept of *culture*, as expressed in Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's pronouncement: "The foundation of the Republic of Turkey is culture" (Keseroğlu, 2013, p. 366). Atatürk was the founder of the republic, and during the War of Independence he convened the First Education Congress (1921) to discuss the country's educational problems, with particular emphasis on how to provide education for the peasants, as well as for other citizens.

On March 3, 1924, five months after the Proclamation of the Republic, Atatürk enacted laws to collect and centralize all the books constituting the Ottoman legacy. Ten years later he issued the Legal Deposit Act for

“printings, writings, and paintings.” According to the act, five copies of all printed books were to be collected for libraries.<sup>2</sup> These efforts indicate the value attributed to libraries during the very first years of the republic. The westernization movement, known as the *Tanzimât* of 1839, that had initiated the political reforms of the Ottoman state was accelerated in the republic. The laws, prepared in accordance with this shift toward westernization, represented fundamental changes. The effort to modernize in line with Western patterns expanded horizons in education, industry, and librarianship. Innovations in the field of librarianship were now also founded on Western culture rather than being drawn from traditional culture (Keseroğlu, 2013, p. 366).

A start was made with the cataloging and classification of books that had been gathered at specific centers in accordance with the laws promoting Unity in Teaching (1924), followed in 1925 by the laws on the closing down of the religious units *Tekke*, *Türbe*, and *Zawiya*.<sup>3</sup> With the Alphabet Revolution (the shift from Arabic to Latin script) in 1928, the literacy rate initially declined.<sup>4</sup> To spread the principles of the republic throughout the country and to teach literacy, national schools and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) called “Turkish hearths” (1924–1932) and community centers (1932–1950) were established. These NGOs also promoted the single-party government’s cultural policy; they worked in collaboration with the central government and had nine “branches,” one of which was the called the Branch of Library and Publishing.<sup>5</sup>

Difficult economic, sociocultural, and geographical circumstances in the villages, where 83 percent of the population lived, prevented teachers from reaching them. This problem resulted in the trial of a new model and the establishment of village institutes (1936–1950), which proved quite successful (Keseroğlu, 1995, p. 13). Teachers who were readers and library supporters were trained in these institutes.

In 1946 the National Library was established, and in 1950 its relevant law (the law of the National Library) was enacted. Individuals were sent abroad for education in librarianship, and when they returned home they started courses in librarianship. They also invited international experts in librarianship like John Dewey to visit Turkey, and had reports prepared, such as Dewey’s in 1939, on the state of education in the country.<sup>6</sup> Many scientists who had escaped from Nazi Germany started working in the first Turkish universities (Istanbul University, founded in 1933; and Ankara University, in 1946).

Between the years 1923 and 1950, there was a single-party system in Turkey. This period witnessed many improvements, such as

- the first children’s library (1925);
- the collection of all Ottoman legacy books at a single center (Legal De-

posit Act [1934]) and the establishment of the National Library (1946) and its related law (1950);

- the establishment of community centers as NGOs, affiliated to the central government and functioning as public libraries across Turkey;
- the establishment of public libraries that were also affiliated to the central government, and an increase in the overall number of libraries;
- the establishment of village institutes to support teachers;
- the introduction of librarianship courses; and
- an increase in the literacy rate.

All of these improvements demonstrated that libraries were welcomed, together with positive developments and attitudes. The republic gained a new identity as a social, secular state operating within the rule of law, based on a parliamentary and electoral system. Attempts at establishing a multiparty system in 1946, however, resulted in a new political party participating in the 1950 elections. Turkey's governance system changed from a single-party system to a "multiparty system" (so-called because of the overwhelming majority held by a single party in parliament). The new governing party had replaced the one founded by the leaders of the War of Independence, who had proclaimed the republic and later dealt with the aftermath of World War II. Due to the new government's opposition to previous policies, the community centers and village institutes were closed, thus reflecting the party's priorities and antidemocratic stance.<sup>7</sup> Although regulations rather than laws regarding public libraries (for example, Children's Libraries Regulation [1952] and Public Borrowing Service Regulation [1953]) were issued during this period, library experts were still brought in from abroad to issue and prepare reports. The librarianship courses offered at various sites were transformed into librarianship departments. The first Department of Librarianship was established in 1954 as part of the Faculty of Languages, History, and Geography at Ankara University, with the U.S.-based Ford Foundation contributing to its establishment and development.

The overthrow of the government by a coup d'état in 1960 undid the attempts by the post-1950 government to effect radical changes to the regulations and laws dating from the founding of the republic. Following the coup, a new Constitution (1961), which respected human rights and freedoms, was prepared and adopted. Turkey entered a period of planned development. Libraries, which had been affiliated with the Ministry of Education, were placed under one administrative umbrella, the General Directorate of Libraries, attached to the Ministry of Culture. This directorate was established as an entity responsible for the National Library, public libraries, and children's libraries. School libraries were now affiliated with the Ministry of National Education, while university libraries,

under the direction of university chancellors, become autonomous. With the *Library Commission Report* in 1961, the distinction was clearly defined between the previous Ottoman libraries (*umumi*, or people's libraries) and the newly established public libraries of the Turkish Republic. A second Department of Librarianship was established at Istanbul University during the 1964–1965 academic year.

The 1970s, however, were years of civil disorder and terror, as parliament was compromised by military interference. Five of the thirteen governments during this period were formed by individuals operating outside of parliamentary control at the request of the military. Libraries and their problems were neglected. However, during the 1972–1973 academic year, another Department of Librarianship was opened at Hacettepe University, offering degrees first at the postgraduate level, then a year later a bachelor's.

During this decade serious damage ensued in the country's agricultural and industrial production, and one consequence was the declining number of academic library acquisitions, which nearly resulted in the closure of some university libraries. Disruptions caused by successive governments led to the frequent amending and reissuing of regulations, while political debate often resulted in violence. Similar intolerance was seen in 1977 when the ruling political party issued a circular to remove the concept of *public* (*halk*), due to the claim that it "created confusion"; the word *public* occurred in public libraries (*halk kütüphaneleri*, which translates as people's libraries), as well as in the name of the opposition party, the Republican People's Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*) (Keseroğlu, 1989, p. 177).

With the military coup d'état in 1980, the NGOs and all political parties were closed and inflation caused critical social problems. Whereas one U.S. dollar had been equal to fifteen Turkish liras in 1971, during the late 1980s it was worth 2,316 liras. In 1987 a separate department, the Department of Record Keeping (1989), opened in both Marmara University and Istanbul University (which still had the Department of Librarianship). Regulations regarding libraries were revised to reflect the views of the civilian–military government that assumed power in 1981, and had its mandate renewed in the 1983 elections. The Ministry of Culture initiated the publication of materials for public libraries, but this was short-lived.

In 1963 the Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey (TÜBİTAK) was established to coordinate the country's research in science and technology. After 1980 the policies of this institution changed yet again. A report prepared in 1983 titled *Turkish Scientific Policies: 1983–2003* (Köklü, 2001, p. 114) introduced a new structure that excluded the Ministry of Culture, and thus the public libraries. During the 1990s ten different governments were formed, and regulations on public libraries changed again.

In 1994 a Department of Librarianship was established at Erzurum Atatürk University. In 2002 the Higher Education Council, which is a central administrative body for higher education in Turkey, changed the designation of Department of Librarianship to Department of Information and Records Management for all departments in this discipline. Between the years 2002–2012, ten new universities formed information-and records-management departments. Of these, only one was a private university; the others were public. However, by 2013 five of these public universities had not yet commenced their education programs (Çakın, 2013, p. 399). Universities were opened without any plan of action, inadequate programs, insufficient staff, and without functioning libraries. The Justice and Development Party (AKP) that had ruled Turkey since 2002 had neither prepared laws relating to libraries nor allowed those awaiting ratification to become law. By ignoring the Constitution and law, the party in power established authoritarian rule; consequently libraries, like all other institutions, were treated as political organizations. As described below, supporters of the ruling party rather than experts in the field were appointed as heads of libraries.

#### *Libraries in Government Programs*

From the Proclamation of the Republic up to the present day, the various political parties in Turkey have formed sixty-two different governments. *Governments* consist of groups of one or more political parties that make binding decisions concerning the execution of state functions. These governments, which are formed by various political parties (including the interim regimes, interrupted by military coups d'état), present the programs for action by the Turkish Grand National Assembly, the country's parliament. These programs are based on the objectives presented in the various political parties' election programs, and require a majority vote in parliament. Between the years 1923 and 2015, three of the sixty-two governments failed to receive votes of confidence for the programs they presented (Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Başbakanlık, 2015). Libraries were featured in only four of these government programs, as follows:

- *Thirtieth government of Turkey (October 1965 to November 1969—first Demirel administration)*: Library-related content was expressed in the form of “handling the matters of libraries and books” (Demirel, 1965, n.p.).
- *Thirty-ninth government of Turkey (March 1975 to June 1977—fourth Demirel administration)*: “We will be expediting the infrastructure services of our villages, such as mosques, roads, water, irrigation, electricity, telephone, schools, libraries, health and administration buildings and complete them across the country” (Demirel, 1975, n.p.).
- *Forty-fifth government of Turkey (December 1983 to December 1987—first Özal*

*administration*): “Enriching the libraries, equipping them with modern amenities, spreading them across the country and encouraging the pleasure and habit of reading is a must” (Özal, 1983, n.p.).

- *Forty-seventh government of Turkey (November 1989 to June 1991—Akbulut administration)*: “New measures will be improved to spread library services in a more productive and balanced manner across the country” (Akbulut, 1989, n.p.).

As previously mentioned, libraries were part of only four of these programs, and the above details represent the total of ideas, actions, and approaches concerning libraries that were part of the programs. These items are characterized by politics rather than careful planning. The problems of libraries were not resolved, only a few libraries were in fact built in the villages, and they were neither spread across the country nor enriched. No national agenda, plan, or understanding was developed in order for libraries to become more productive. In other words, the treatment of libraries in the politicians’ agendas was inadequate both qualitatively and quantitatively; moreover, the status of libraries expressed in governmental policies did not correspond to what existed in practice. A similar situation is also apparent in the government’s five-year development plans.

#### *Libraries in Development Plans*

According to the state planning organization Devlet Planlama Teşkilatı (DPT) (2006, p. 1), development plans “reveal the transformations to be put into effect, with a holistic approach in economic, social, and cultural fields” for a state to be structured and developed. A comparison of the strident political approaches with actual transformation in Turkey shows that the projects and procedures identified in development plans are not always completed in their entirety, and when it comes to libraries, experts are excluded from the planning process. Scrutiny of the development plans reveals that

- in the first Five-Year Development Plan (1963–1967), libraries were discussed under the headline of “Education, Research” (DPT, 1964, p. 461), and in the second plan (1968–1972), under “Culture” (DPT, 1972, p. 188);
- in 1971, after the military intervention, responsibility for the National Library was transferred to the Ministry of Culture, while the Undersecretary of Culture and General Directorate of Libraries remained within the Ministry of National Education (Sevgisunar, 2009, pp. 163–164). The name General Directorate of Libraries kept changing as the governments changed (Keseroğlu, 1989, pp. 136–137). It appears as though the state still has not decided which ministry was responsible for libraries: culture or education? The uncertainties regarding even the name of libraries—*kitaplık*, meaning the place where books are stored

(that is, bookshelf or bookcase?)—and their placement and organization within the government are indicative of the ambivalence toward the social importance, place, and function of libraries;

- the fourth (1979–1983), fifth (1985–1989), and sixth (1990–1994) Five-Year Development Plans focused on national culture and proclaimed that public libraries would increase in number and new facilities constructed. The fifth plan emphasized that the Library Services Act and the Legal Deposit Act (DPT, 1985, pp. 148–151) would be rewritten. Yet, these laws were never enacted; in fact, according to an assessment carried out in 1989 regarding the development plans and libraries, Keseroğlu (1989, p. 168) noted that “development plans change with the changing governments, do not follow their predecessors, [and] leave the impression that on numerous occasions, libraries are dealt with by people who are not experts on this subject”; and
- in the ninth Five-Year Development Plan, it was evident that “the name library is not even indirectly” mentioned (Yılmaz & Dalkıran, 2012, p. 67).

For more than twenty years, development plans regarding libraries were not successful, despite claims in both the government programs and the plans themselves to develop libraries throughout the country. Table 1 shows that the official statistics for the number of public libraries in Turkey during the period 2001 to 2013 declined from 1,350 to 1,118. The number of registered members also decreased from 20,964,172 in 2001 to 20,232,069 in 2013. The total number of both registered and nonregistered users, however, increased from 508,133 in 2001 to 1,025,846 in 2013. The number of books found in libraries also increased, from 12,398,913 in 2001 to 16,099,993 in 2013.

The number of library personnel increased from 2,829 (2001) to 3,386 (2013), but only 15.1 percent of the employees had graduated from university-based information- and document-management (librarianship) departments (table 2). Furthermore, almost 70 percent of individuals providing librarianship services held a high school diploma only or graduated from university departments other than librarianship. Since librarianship is a profession that requires a specific education, the percentage of employees holding university degrees in librarianship should be higher. This would be consistent with the requirements of the country’s relevant laws and regulations.

### *Laws and Regulations*

The state and governments exist within the framework of the legal system. The most significant components of the legal infrastructure are the Constitution and the laws. Regulations are prepared in accordance with the laws and legal statutes. Public libraries in Turkey operate under regula-

Table 1. Public library statistics, 2001–2013

Year	Number of clients	Number of users	Number of personnel	Number of libraries	Number of books	Number of non-book materials
2001	20,964,172	508,133	2,829	1,350	12,398,913	NA
2002	20,179,482	424,493	3,445	1,275	12,433,310	101,587
2003	17,827,177	422,760	3,134	1,350	12,684,084	114,455
2004	20,516,562	418,067	2,955	1,367	12,984,801	142,836
2005	20,706,526	426,351	2,924	1,144	12,948,460	178,999
2006	21,138,821	485,216	3,055	1,178	12,958,376	213,980
2007	20,228,517	493,596	3,045	1,162	13,198,814	260,439
2008	19,034,750	503,961	3,014	1,156	13,662,483	285,916
2009	19,929,836	591,661	3,084	1,149	14,093,896	299,928
2010	19,280,441	675,620	3,189	1,136	14,528,550	211,445
2011	18,826,715	753,378	3,391	1,118	15,621,478	216,351
2012	19,545,940	885,282	3,345	1,112	15,785,280	139,501
2013	20,232,069	1,025,846	3,386	1,118	16,099,993	137,352

Source: "Libraries" (2015).

tions only, for there is no relevant legislation that applies to them. In the first decade of the Republic, some laws that concerned libraries only indirectly were enacted: for example, the Unity in Teaching Act (1924); the closing down of *Tekke*, *Türbe*, and *Zawiya* (1925); the Alphabet Revolution (1928); and the Legal Deposit Act (1934).

The first law that directly concerned the libraries was the Law on the Establishment of National Libraries, enacted on March 29, 1950, twenty-seven years after the Proclamation of the Republic. In May 1955 the National Library Bibliography Institute was established by the Supplementary Law to the Existing Law Concerning the Establishment of the National Library. Finally, in 1976, with the Turkish Grand National Assembly Library Act, both the number of books gathered by the state through the Legal Deposit Act and the number of libraries to which these publications were sent increased to six, the Turkish Grand National Assembly Library being added to the other five legal deposit libraries (*Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi Kütüphane Kanunu*, 1976).

In 1952 the first children's libraries' regulation was issued, followed in 1953 by the public borrowing service regulation. Also, it was decided in 1966 to centrally purchase publications for public and children's libraries by a Committee on the Selection of Books and Periodicals. This decision would prove to be the regulation most frequently changed by subsequent governments; at the same time, it serves as a good example for understanding the relationship in Turkey between politics and public libraries.

The regulations controlling the Committee on the Selection of Books and Periodicals allow libraries no opportunity to select items for their collections according to their needs; all public library collections are chosen by a central authority. The first regulation resulted in the *Ministry of Cul-*

Table 2. Educational status of library personnel

Educational status	Number	Percentage (%)
University: library and information science graduates	511	15.1
University: Various majors	999	29.5
High school graduates	1,361	40.2
Junior high school graduates	370	10.9
Elementary school graduates	145	4.3
Totals	3,386	100

Source: Kütüphan-e Türkiye Planlama ve Pilot Uygulama Projesi (2015, p. 19).

*ture Guidelines Concerning the Committee on the Selection of Books and Periodicals for Public and Children's Libraries*, published in March 1975 in *Official Gazette*. Three months later, in June, revised guidelines were published. A comparison of the original guidelines with these reveals some significant, though ironic, changes. In the revision by the Minister of Culture, words of Arabic origin are preferred to the Turkish ones previously used. In the earlier guidelines the intention had been to select specialists from the law, sociology, economics, and literature departments of Ankara University as committee members, as well as one each from both the Turkish Language Society and Turkish Historical Society, so that overall the committee would be comprised of ten individuals. This was changed in the June guidelines, which specified that the committee membership was to be selected from the Ministry of Education. In other words, the latter guidelines replaced the specialists intended in the original guidelines with bureaucrats. Even though the *Ministry of Culture Guidelines Concerning the Committee on the Selection of Books and Periodicals for Public and Children's Libraries* was amended and reissued in July 1978, it had to be amended again nine days later because the government had changed. After the disruption caused by the military coup d'état in September 1980, the *Ministry of Culture Guidelines* was republished and renamed, with the word Publications replacing *Books and Periodicals*. This was again amended in March 1998, June 2005, and in the latest instance in January 2011.

The *Ministry of Culture Guidelines Concerning the Committee on the Selection of Books and Periodicals for Public and Children's Libraries* was changed nine times in total, during the period 1975–2011 when twenty-one successive governments assumed power. While the governments have often changed the guidelines for the selection of books and periodicals, the public and children's libraries' regulation has been amended only once since 1982, in 2012. This regulation is still in force and specifies many guidelines.<sup>8</sup> The principal reason for the many amendments over the years to the guidelines on the selection of books and periodicals is to direct the available budget toward the acquisition of publications sympathetic to the policies of the government currently in power.

While controlling libraries through regulations and guidelines, the

successive governments have failed to enact a comprehensive library law. Although numerous drafts of laws have been presented, none has succeeded in being passed.<sup>9</sup> By considering the *sui generis* reality of Turkey, the reasons behind this may be summed up as follows:

- Just as there is no law on libraries, there is no law outlining the legal position and professional qualifications of librarians. If these loopholes were corrected, governments would be unable to appoint political allies who lack professional qualifications into library positions. For example, the current president of the National Library is an individual with no background in either libraries or information science. The head of the General Directorate of Libraries and Publications, to whom the 1,118 public and children's libraries report, also comes from a background that is completely irrelevant to libraries and information science. Both individuals are prominent politicians.
- The National Library is an essential institution that provides national leadership and coordination between libraries and knowledge centers. It would be expected that the person appointed to head the National Library has educational credentials relevant to the role and who is open to collaboration. Of the five directors of the National Library, only one appears to have received a library and information science education. Given that in Turkey the university departments of library and information sciences have been training students since 1954, and that four of these nine departments offer courses at the doctoral level, it is difficult to understand why a person who lacks the requisite background is managing the National Library. The situations for both the National Library and the General Directorate of Libraries and Publications are similar in that neither employ professional librarians. These two significant institutions and their directors are conspicuous as political entities rather than preeminently fulfilling the objectives and functions of their respective institutions as professionals. Neither the National Library nor the public and children's libraries, the latter reporting to the General Directorate of Libraries and Publications, are supposed to be political establishments, but both have become so. The National Library bears the responsibility of being the national memory of its country and interlibrary coordination center, and public libraries should be places where information is collected, organized, and provided without any discrimination among individuals.
- Once government appointees are in the Ministry of Culture, they in turn appoint high-ranking ministers who also appear to make decisions based on personal attitudes, rather than those of their party. This demonstrates that political parties have neither documents nor specific platforms for culture or libraries. Even though reference is made to culture

and libraries in the party programs, relevant policies cannot be put into effect because the ministers follow their own agendas.

- On the other hand, the various changes in the regulations show differences that reflect the rotation of ministers.<sup>10</sup> In particular, the frequent amendments in the selection of books and periodicals guidelines are attempts by the ministry to allocate the budget for publications that bolster the political views of the government. Typical examples of this have been witnessed during almost all periods.<sup>11</sup>

It is unthinkable that the circumstances discussed above would exist in true democracies where the rule of law operates. In Turkey, governments use the library solely for their own political ends. Moreover, these interests are in conflict with the objectives and functions of libraries, and personnel are appointed and publications collected according to political whim. Whenever an attempt is made to establish an exemplary public library in the country, subsequent governments end support of such projects instead of developing them. Such disruptions have occurred under many governments, prime examples being the fates of two public libraries, one in Bakırköy-Istanbul (1978) and the other in Oran-Ankara (1991). These libraries, which were established as a part of a pilot Project, were not supported by subsequent governments.

Library officials who attempt to oppose politically motivated decisions risk being relieved of their duties. An example is the case of an official with a librarianship education who had been working as vice general director of libraries and publications for over twenty years, but lost his job after a change of government. Although a court order subsequently had her reinstated, she is currently in another position unrelated to her profession (Ocak 2016 Tarihli Atama Kararları, 2016). In addition, library users accept the decisions of the government without challenging them. Negative and unfair decisions by the government are not widely reported, featuring only in social media and newspapers of the opposition.

## CONCLUSION

The Republic of Turkey was formed from the remnants of the six-hundred-year-old Ottoman Empire, its monarchy being converted into a parliamentary system. Influenced by Western examples, the republic has chosen to depart from traditional ways and pursue modernization in areas such as government and education and its institutions.

The core of its public libraries consists of collections established within religious agencies as well as Ottoman foundation (*wakıf*) libraries.<sup>12</sup> Since 1925, when they were first established, through 1950, public libraries in Turkey were expanding and attempts were made to establish them throughout the country. The so-called community centers (1932–1950),

which were NGOs that contributed to the dissemination of the culture policy of the one-party regime and worked in collaboration with the centralized public libraries, were the most significant public libraries during the republic era and played an important role in keeping the function of public libraries alive.

Public libraries in the country have attempted to develop and attain international standards, especially after the establishment of the Department of Librarianship at Ankara University in 1954 and the subsequent expansion of formal education for librarianship at Istanbul University (1964), Hacettepe University (1972), and elsewhere. Those who pioneered these endeavors were supported by the political power of the time, while those who opposed such initiatives also had political motives. Today, there are more than fifteen universities in Turkey offering programs of librarianship (since 2002 called information- and records-management programs), producing students and future specialists for various types of libraries. To take positive steps in the development of public libraries, however, requires a convergence of the concerns of the libraries and their directors with the interests of whatever political party is in power.

Public libraries function according to each country's political tradition. For instance, in countries such as the Netherlands, France, and the United States, succeeding governments do not comprehensively influence public libraries; laws relating to libraries are enacted and the roles of library directors are defined. Policies are written and changes are made depending on the country's requirements and emphatically not on politics. In Turkey, however, library directors are political appointees. For example, the director of the National Library of Turkey will lose the position when the government changes. Public library directors are chosen and appointed from among the ruling party's supporters instead of from the pool of professionally qualified. Furthermore, these directors dismiss their institution's professionally trained employees and replace them with individuals who share their political leanings. Since there is no specific legislation for the maintenance of public libraries, governments and ministers can easily cancel the previously issued regulations and replace them with their own, which are often different. This scenario is illustrated by the multiple amendments to the guidelines for the selection of books and periodicals, as described above.

Societies do not become democracies quickly; it is a long process. When Western democracies are examined, we find that it took centuries for societies to indigenize the system. Turkey is a developing society, and politics is present in its everyday life. All individuals in all sectors—from teachers to librarians, civil servants to businessmen—as well as all institutions and organizations, are evaluated politically. However, there should be state priorities that are above politics, and implementing these policies should be the primary task of those holding political power. In a mature democracy

the exigencies of the state override the political aims and interests of the administration that happens to be in power. Such political maturity does not yet appear possible in Turkey due to the fact that the concepts of *state* and *government* are not separated—at least they haven't been for more than a decade.

In a country where the availability of economic resources is evident in the building of roads, soccer stadiums, hospitals, and courthouses, for example, the failure to establish a model library, one equipped with the necessary hardware and served by a professional staff, reflects the lack of priority given to educational and cultural policy. Overall, due to the inclinations and attitudes of the country's political powers, public libraries in Turkey appear to be devoid of plans and programs, evidence that the country has yet to indigenize democracy.

## NOTES

1. Some examples of the inability of libraries to operate democratically in countries where democracy and the rule of law are not recognized are the burning of books written by Jewish authors during Hitler's regime; the elimination of books other than those about socialism or communism in the Soviet Union; and the Iranian fatwa against Salman Rushdie because of his writings.
2. The initial beneficiary libraries of the 1934 Legal Deposit Act were the Ankara City Public Library, Izmir National Library (which is not *the* country's National Library), Istanbul University Library, Beyazıt State Library, and the National Library, which had not yet come to existence. In 1976 the Turkish Grand National Assembly Library became the sixth legal deposit library (Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi Kütüphanesi kanunu, 1976).
3. A *Zawiya* is an Islamic religious school or monastery.
4. Latin script was adopted because it was easier to read, but initially it resulted in a decline of the literacy rate to zero, after which it slowly rose. The literacy rate was between 3–4 percent during 1923–1924, and around 5.5 percent in 1927. This rate dropped again to zero as a result of the Alphabet Revolution in 1929, then increased to 15 percent by 1935. According to the 1955 census, the country's literacy rate was 40 percent. In line with the ten-year, long-term plans of the village institutes, by 1956 there should not have been any illiterate individuals in Turkey (Keseroğlu, 1995, pp. 7, 8).
5. The other eight were "branches" of Language, Literature, and History; Fine Arts; Performance Arts; Sports; Social Aid; Public Classroom Courses and Branch Offices; Museums and Exhibitions; and "Peasantism" (the ideology of improving the social life and health of peasants, and establishing an affinity between them and city dwellers).
6. John Dewey was an American philosopher, psychologist, and educational reformer whose ideas have been influential, especially on the Turkish library-education system. He visited Turkey in 1924, the year after the republic was founded, and prepared reports emphasizing the importance of adapting the Turkish library system to support progressive education. These reports were important, especially for their advice about Turkish libraries (Dewey, 1924/1939; Keseroğlu, 1989, pp. 140–141).
7. The prime minister of the ruling party requesting that the community centers be shut down had actually presided as chairperson of a community center during single party rule!
8. These include *Interlibraries Guidelines Concerning Borrowing Printed Books*, published in *Official Gazette* on September 21, 1981; *Guidelines Concerning Educational and Cultural Activities in Libraries* (*Official Gazette*, September 21, 1981); *Guidelines Concerning the Duty and Operation of Public Libraries* (*Official Gazette*, September 21, 1981); *Guidelines Concerning the Celebration of Library Week* (*Official Gazette*, March 6, 1982); and *Guidelines Concerning Public and Children's Libraries* (*Official Gazette*, August 19, 1982), all of which were repealed.

9. Although it had enacted the laws it wanted for the previous thirteen years, the Justice and Development Party administration did not allow the most recent draft of the Public Libraries Law, proposed in May 2012 by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, to be passed.
10. The *Ministry of Culture Guidelines Concerning the Committee on the Selection of Books and Periodicals for Public and Children's Libraries* has been changed by different ministers and the same general director (Keseroğlu, 1989, pp. 156–161).
11. One of the most typical examples, which caused much debate, was Minister of Culture Namık Kemal Zeybek's diverting two-thirds of the books and periodicals' budget to a single publishing house. He was minister from November 1989 to June 1991 in the forty-seventh government, formed by Yıldırım Akbulut.
12. The term *Ottoman foundation libraries* refers to the libraries founded by the *vakıf* organizations, which were established to finance or complete projects, usually for nonprofit organizations, in the Ottoman Empire. *Ottoman legacy libraries* refers to institutions holding items from the Ottoman Empire era.

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