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# INSTITUTIONAL APPROACHES TO SPORTS IN TURKEY BETWEEN THE YEARS 1922-1938

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## Introduction

From time immemorial, people have felt an unceasing need to engage in physical activities, be it for reasons of economic survival or for a healthier life. While these physical activities in question sometimes took place within a consciously defined program, at other times they had the shape of numerous games that emerged without any conscious planning in accordance with the cultural characteristics of society. The important thing to note here is that, in both cases, human beings benefited from the activities performed.

Since antiquity, being a good warrior has been the most important factor in a person's economic survival. In wars fought without the technological means available today, without doubt the physically strong people would be deemed good warriors. Having left their mark on world history in this respect, Turks are known as strong and brave warriors. The expression "strong as a Turk," used in western countries, is indisputable evidence. It can be argued that the most important factor for the fame that Turks achieved as good warriors, archers, and wrestlers, is the fact that they always trained in a modern sense.

The difficult conditions they had to face due to the geography they inhabited were reflected in the need for Turks to always stay physically fit during their lives. In an effort to feed themselves, they placed importance on hunting. Turks understood the importance of maintaining speed and strength for their encounters with game animals, and to attain a certain level of physical fitness they adopted distinctive methods of training. The idea that Turks need to be mentally and physically strong stems from their belief that their survival depends on their ability to cope with difficult natural conditions (Kurt et al. 2016)

These sportive movements can be observed at all stages through the history of the Turks. Sportive movements have been important in the Turks' success in conquering lands as they migrated from Central Asia to Anatolia as well as in their transition to a more sedentary way of life as they settled in these lands. They are recorded in history especially as a nation of skilled archers and horse riders. As a sub-branch of sports, archery was considered an important weapon during the 600-year reign of the Ottomans for its ease of use on horseback, and it did not fall out of use for a long time despite the transition

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to firearms. After all, archery was among the most important sportive movements, with sultans themselves participating in archery competitions, and had gained an institutional identity (Güven, 1999). Numerous Ottoman sultans were interested in traditional sports themselves, and they also encouraged participation in these activities by means of rewards (Kahraman, 1995).

However, faced with political, economic, military and social issues, the Ottomans could not advance in the fields of sports and physical education either, and consequently, the sportive activities in Turkish territories fell behind those in the modern world (Ünver, 2004).

Despite the loss of large territories and the numerous defeats experienced during the later periods of the Ottoman Empire, the nationalist movement struggle, sparked especially by the invasion of Anatolia as a result of the First World War, not only made it possible to retain the territories held by the Republic of Turkey today but also allowed for the foundation of the republic (Türkmen, 2013). Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, without doubt the greatest contributor to the success of the nationalist movement struggle and later the founder of the Republic of Turkey, in his opening speech delivered at the 1921 Education Congress emphasized the need for “education to have a completely national and local character without any foreign influence or the dark superstitions of the past”. Atatürk’s approach was interpreted by Hasan Âli Yücel as the need to “create a Turkish youth that would be strong and competent enough to compete with other nations” (Yücel, 1993).

The aim of creating physically and mentally healthy generations was the rationale behind Atatürk’s encouragement of the Turkish youth’s participation in sports. It can be observed that this approach paved the way for a number of developments in the field of sports even before the foundation of the Republic. Following the foundation of the Republic, sports came under state supervision. Sports and physical education had four steps during the foundation years: The Period of Turkey Training Associations Alliance between 1922-1936. The Period of Turkish Sports Institution between 1936-1938 during which Turkey participated in international competitions for the first time. This institution became an organizational sub-branch of the Republican People’s Party (CHP) during its first general assembly, and thus sports came under state supervision. The period of the Ministry of Youth and Sports which has endured since 1946. In this period, the management of sports took the shape that it still has to this day (Fişek, 1980). This study aims to shed light on the developments in sports in the period leading up to and following the foundation of the Republic of Turkey (1922-1938).

### **Turkey Training Associations Alliance (1922-1936)**

The first step toward the organization of sports in Turkey was taken when with Burhan Felek and Nasuhi Esat Baydar and Ali Sami Yen translated the Swiss Sports

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Organization Regulations which were brought back by Yusuf Ziya Öniş who had received his education in Switzerland. Led by Ali Sami Yen, Burhan Felek and Nasuhi Esat Baydar, the representatives of sports clubs assembled and started their efforts towards the establishment of the Turkey Training Associations Alliance, which would be the first sports organization in Turkey. This alliance consisted of the representatives of sports' clubs located in Istanbul. The Swiss Federation was set as the example for the organization of the alliance. Founded in 1922, the Turkey Training Associations Alliance became the sole authority in charge of sports following the First World War. The new Republic participated in an international competition for the first time during this period. The prestige of the Alliance increased when, during the 1924 Paris Olympic Games, it was understood that international competitions were important for the representation and recognition of the new republic (Canşen, 2015).

The first steps toward the establishment of the Turkey Training Associations Alliance (abbreviated to TICI) were taken at an assembly held on 26 June 1920 in Istanbul with the participation of the following sports clubs: Altınordu, Beylerbeyi, Darüşşafaka, Anadolu, Bakırköy, Fenerbahçe, Hilal İdman Yurdu, Nişantaşı, Süleymaniye, Türkgücü, Vefa, Üsküdar, Beşiktaş, Union and Galatasaray. The assembly was led by Yusuf Ziya Öniş. The efforts to formally establish the TICI continued until 15 April 1921 after this first assembly. The second assembly was held on 15 April 1921 at the Istanbul Sports Club. At this second assembly, a provisional board led by Mahmut Eşref, representative of the Altınordu sports club, was formed. Having officially applied for as a legal entity on 27 November 1921 in accordance with the associations law, dated 3.8.1909, it obtained the status of a legal person on 22 May 1922. The provisional board was led by Ali Sami Yen, Burhanettin Felek, Selim Sırrı TARCAN and Yusuf Ziya Öniş. The founders had their first official meeting at the Fenerbahçe Clubhouse in Kadıköy on 14 July 1922. The government of the time provided economic support for the establishment of the TICI (Sümer, 1990). The TICI was recognized as a public benefit organization with government decree number 170 dated 2 January 1924.

The founding principles of the TICI were as follows: “to improve health and promote better moral behavior by providing sports as a desirable field of activity for youth which would prevent them from immoral behavior - such as smoking and gambling; to promote nationwide participation in organizations and group activities; to improve the ability to exchange ideas as well as improving managerial skills; to help meet the needs of military organizations by promoting swordsmanship, horse riding and sailing to turn the youth into reliable and skillful individuals; to give youth the opportunity to see more of their country through sports competitions and excursions, so that they can get to understand its needs and cherish it; to promote and encourage national sentiments through participation in international competitions; to provide an external means of

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propaganda for Turkishness; to combat the idea that physical education and sports are a means towards personal gain and benefit; and thus to improve our nation by means of promoting sports as a means to further develop minds and science” (Özmaden, 2010).

Even though there have been numerous studies concerning the organizational efforts of the TICI around the country as well their efforts to promote sports, offering chronological, institutional and sportive information on the said processes, it was thought that the organization, which survived until 1936, would promote national sentiments in accordance with its founding principles, and that the republican idea of sports as a means to reinforce national consciousness as well as the opportunity to represent the nation would motivate athletes. Professionalization as well as organization in the form of separate clubs was rejected as possible causes of damage to an athlete’s national consciousness. Sports was promoted as a means of political and national propaganda overseas. Trainers were brought from abroad to train athletes for the 1924 Olympic Games, further economic resources were allocated on top of the existing ones; the main aim here was to create a modern Turkey that moved in the direction of the West. Participation in international competitions increased and athletes were encouraged to promote their country to their foreign counterparts. Promotion and representation of and familiarity with one’s country came to be some of the outcomes expected of sports (Yıldırım, 1996).

The contrast between the new Republic of Turkey as a nation state and the multinational Ottoman Empire, which had suppressed the Turkish identity, has been cited as the main reason for the inclusion of national consciousness and representation among the founding principles of the TICI. In order to achieve this aim, professionalization was rejected. Professionalism was thought to move athletes away from group consciousness to self-seeking sentiments centered around personal gain. For this reason, the fact that an athlete represented not himself or herself but the whole nation was emphasized (Özmaden, 2010).

### **Sports at Educational Institutions (1923-1938)**

Studies concerning physical education and sports began in Turkey in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Those who had contact with other countries reached an understanding that physical education was a discipline, that it could not be accidental and could be no more than simple movements based on sheer physical strength. First among these people were Selim Sırrı Bey, who was sent to Sweden in 1909 to receive his education in Physical Education, and Mustafa Necati Bey, the Minister of Education, who visited a number of countries in Europe to hold meetings. Having understood that physical education was a scientific matter, Mustafa Necati Bey, in particular, made use of his position of authority to promote this understanding in Turkey. However, the number of experts in this field was very limited. In order to make up for the shortage of experts, he invited foreign

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instructors to Turkey to organize physical education classes and provide education in the field, and sent young students from Turkey to study abroad. However, it was difficult to have this new discipline recognized and embraced in Turkey. At the root of this difficulty lay the perception that physical education was based solely on simple movements and was not to be taken seriously. It was necessary to establish a scientific institution to overcome this difficulty. Even though a school was established in Istanbul for this purpose, it was shut down shortly after. It was thought that if Ankara became the center of physical education, as it was the center of everything else, it would be easier to promote physical education (Günay, 2013).

After the nationalist movement struggle, efforts were made to further develop the country and the nation in every possible aspect. Education was placed at the top of the list. For it was believed that nationwide intellectual, mental, and physical development was necessary. In this period of development, the two subjects which Mustafa Kemal attached great importance to, physical education and sports, were inevitably added to the national education system and became part of the national curriculum. The 6<sup>th</sup> article of the National education program, presented to the Grand National Assembly before the declaration of the Republic (14 August 1923), made references to scouting, physical education and sports. The 6<sup>th</sup> article included the following: “The moral and social capabilities of an individual as well as their mental and intellectual capabilities will be developed. For this purpose, the Physical Education Teacher Training School will be established, and it will achieve gradual success with the activities of the scouting organization at a social level.” It can be observed that the efforts to promote physical education and sports had already begun before the declaration of the Republic as part of the education program, and Selim Sırrı Tarcan was delegated to implement the decision (Güven, 1996; Günay, 2013).

From the first years of the Republic onward, the need to include physical education in teacher education curricula was emphasized. The “Teacher’s Middle School,” established in Konya in 1925 for this purpose, was moved to Ankara for the school year 1927-1928, and, after the addition of a pedagogical branch, its name was changed to “Gazi Teacher’s School and Education Institute”. A physical education and sports area was built next to the building, so that a physical education branch could be established within the Institute. When these facilities were built in 1932, the Physical Education branch, which offered a three-year program, was established with the “Board of Education and Discipline” decree number 105 dated 5 July 1932 (Yücel, 1993).

Once the Physical Education Branch of the Gazi Education Institute began operating, people such as Nizamettin Kırşan, Vildan Aşır Savaşır and Zehra Alagöz, who had received their education abroad and were working at various institutions at the time, joined the staff of the school. In addition, the German physical education expert, Kurt

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Dainas, came to Turkey to join the team. In 1937 the school started training female physical education teachers and recruited Margarete Korge, who had been working at the Istanbul German High School as a Physical Education Teacher (Güven, 1996)

The “Directorate of Physical Education and Scouting” was established within the Board of Education with the passing of law number 2287 dated 22 June 1933 and the promotion of sports at schools was accelerated. Later, with the passing of law number 2273 dated 15 June 1935, the organization of physical education and scouting activities by this directorate, both at schools and outside, was regulated (Abalı, 1974).

A more pragmatic approach to physical education and sports, regarding national education policies in general, was embraced in the 1930s. According to the “Primary School Regulation” published in 1929, the aim of primary schools was to physically and mentally educate young generations in such a way that they would benefit the Republic of Turkey and its society in the best way possible (Cicioğlu, 1985).

The institutional efforts to promote camping, especially during the early years of the Republic, also had an important part to play in the physical education of children and youth. Youth and Health Camps, organized by the Turkish Red Crescent, are among the best examples of the Republican policies for body and education (Türkmen, 2015).

### **The Turkish Sports Institution (1936-1938)**

The TICI dealt with these issues over a 13-year period from 1923 to 1936. The development of sports to the desired level was impeded during this period by the shortage of government funds, the domination of sports management positions by those who were involved in other trades, and by the fact that one half of the sports facilities was located in Ankara while the other half was located in Istanbul. Starting from 1934, sports in Turkey came further under the influence of the Republican People’s Party. The congress assembled in Ankara in 1936 put an end to the TICI, and later the Turkish Sports Institution (TSK) was established (Kılıç, 2013).

The Turkish Sports Institution represents the period of transition from federal administration by clubs to the state administration of sports. It was the first of its kind in Turkey in terms of the relationship it established between sports and politics. The Turkish Sports Institution functioned as an offshoot of the Republican People’s Party, the only political party in Turkey at the time. In a way, the TSK was the continuation both of the process of democratization in sports and of the unsuccessful experiments with democratization in sports, which had both begun with the creation of the TICI. It was established as an institution that aimed to create a youth that would hold their homeland in the highest esteem and even sacrifice their lives for it if need be, to promote and develop sports based on national and technical principles, and to represent Turkish sports

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both in Turkey and overseas, with the passing of a law that described the Institution as “an institution that strives to promote and develop sports in Turkey on a basis of national and technical principles and to represent Turkish sports both in Turkey and overseas”(Gül, 2008).

During the period of its foundation, it was not subordinate to any ministry and it had elected bodies of its own. As an autonomous institution with the authority to use its resources at will, the TSK was based on the principle of local administration with respect to its administration and services (Türkay and Aydın, 2017).

Such a concept of organization was not so different from the model embraced by the TICI. However, the fact that the board of directors of the TSK had members from the military and the government, as well as the fact that the TSK needed the approval of the presidency and the general secretary of the Republican People’s Party (CHP) for its budget programs, contributed to its transformation into a semi-official body. In addition to that, the party dictated instructions regarding important matters. In short, sports organization in this period could not go beyond a “party-state” administration (Keten, 1974). The organization of the TSK caused the personal ambitions of party members to be mixed up with the management of sports, and certain negative developments in sports were in turn reflected within the party (Fişek 1985). This situation resulted in a polarization in social and political circles as well as in the violation of the principle of “equal opportunity” (Doğar, 1994). In the words of Atabeyoğlu (2001), all the athletes were enlisted as members of the party, and this practice reached a point where non-members could not become athletes. It is worth noting that the logo of the party was placed on the jerseys worn by the athletes (Kılıç, 2013). In the end, Atatürk himself had to interfere with the politicization of sports to a significant degree (Kılıç, 2012), and the transitional Turkish Sports Institution only survived for a period of two years and was replaced by a public institution, the Public Directorate of Physical Education, which was an entirely public institution established with the passing of law number 3530 (Ekenci and Serarşlan, 1997; Kırşan, 1938).

### **Conclusion**

The concept of sports appears in Turkish history to have been adopted as a way of life that comprised physical activities which were aimed at survival and domination. Since its foundation, the Ottoman Empire attached great importance to traditional sports both in educational and military institutions. Modern movements in the field of sports can be traced back to the 1830s. However, faced with political, economic, military and social issues, the Ottomans could not advance in the fields of sports and physical education either, and, consequently, the sportive activities in Turkish territories fell behind those in the modern world. After the Turkish war of independence, even before the declaration of

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the Republic, Mustafa Kemal implemented certain measures that would promote sports for the masses and help produce physically and mentally fit generations.

The first step was to lay the foundations for the institutionalization of sports; for this purpose, the autonomous Turkey Training Associations Alliance was founded in 1922. At the same time, following the declaration of the Republic, sports and physical education were also added to school curricula. The most noteworthy among such schools were those that were established to train physical education and sports teachers.

In 1936, the Turkish Sports Institution replaced the Turkey Training Associations Alliance, paving the way for state control over sports. However, the TSK was made subordinate to the CHP, the single party of the period, and it functioned as the party's youth association. The politicization of sports to such a degree made the TSK a short-lived organization. In 1938 the Turkish Sports Institution was replaced by the Public Directorate of Physical Education, which was an entirely public institution established with the passing of law number 3530.

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