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“Turkish nation has a noble character” (M. Kemal Atatürk)

The Role of Turkish National Holidays in Promoting Character and Citizenship Education

- This paper presents the history and developments of Turkish national holidays including an emerging new national day.
- It describes how national holidays celebrated in Turkey and some aspects that emphasize civic virtues within these celebrations.
- It discusses several aspects of these national days that may promote character and citizenship education in Turkey.

Purpose: This article introduces the history and development of Turkish national holidays. It also describes how these holidays being celebrated overtime in Turkey. Thus, the purpose of this article is providing fundamental information regarding Turkish national holidays and discussing possible role of these holidays in promoting character and citizenship education in Turkey.

Design/Methodology/Approach: The article is created based on literature review, document analysis and qualitative observations of the authors with the support of several audiovisual materials that show the celebrations of these national holidays. In order to provide the fundamental information (history, development, and etc.) regarding to the holidays, relevant literature presented and synthesized. Also relevant official documents (laws, regulations, and orders) analyzed. Finally, observations of the authors based on their experiences of these national holidays included in the article with the aid of several audiovisuals materials that provided as hyperlink in the text.

Findings: After analyzing all materials described above, we concluded that national holidays in Turkey has some aspects that promote character and citizenship education while these national days may have been lost their spirits and passions comparing their early years.

Keywords:

Turkish national holidays, school rituals, character education

1 Introduction

National holidays and rituals reveal many fundamental aspects regarding architecture of a society or nation (Etzioni, 2002). These occasions are the events for people to show their commitments to the values of their nation. According to Gillis (1994) national holidays and commemoration days could be considered “national memory practices” and have critical functions in the construction of public memory and national identities (Çınar, 2001). Thus commemorative activities are useful in terms of providing sites where national identities express themselves (McCrone & McPherson, 2009; Zencirci, 2004). These identities might include beliefs, traditions, and

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values which can be considered foundational aspects of a nation. These aspects can be tied up with the founding moment of nation which often celebrated as the day of independence or the national liberation day (Çınar, 2001). The founding moment of Turkish Republic is 29th of October 1923 and it has been celebrated since 1925. Ottomans who are the ancestor of Turkish Republic did not give much importance to celebration of national days until the beginning of the 20th century. The first accepted national holiday during the Ottoman time called *national day [İd-i Milli]* which is 10th of July 1909 when the second constitutional monarchy [Meşrutiyet] has been declared (Akbaşrak, 1987; Öztürk, 2015; Yamak, 2008). Almost all national holidays in Turkey are related to various events that took place during the Independence War of Turkey (1919-1923) and the early years of Modern Turkish Republic (Çınar, 2001). These national holidays, in Turkey, have been celebrated over the years with the assistance of a state-controlled education system (Öztürkmen, 2001; Zencirci, 2004). The celebration of commemoration days are including official ceremonies, ritualistic dramatizations of historical events, parades and festivals and other performances such as singing and reading poems in the public sphere (Çınar, 2001).

2 National days in Turkey

In Turkey, there are four major national holidays that has been celebrated to date. As stated above these days are the important events that took place at the transition



stage of Ottoman Empire becoming the modern Turkish Republic between 1918 and 1923. After WWI, Ottoman Empire was one of the losing parties of the war. Ottoman Empires surrendered by signing Armistice of Mudros on 30th October 1918. According to this agreement and Serves Treaty signed by the Ottoman government on 10th of August 1920, most of the Turkish territory would have been occupied by the victorious countries including British, French, and Greeks. While Ottoman Sultan and his government surrounding, one of their general, Mustafa Kemal [Atatürk] has started a national movement and organized meetings with the local people in order to form a national front against the occupation forces. General Mustafa Kemal thought there was not anything that could be done in Istanbul so he decided to start this movement in Anatolia [Asia Minor] which was the rural territory of the Ottoman Empire then. He started his journey of liberating this nation from the occupation forces on 19th May 1919 when he landed in Samsun [a city at the shore of Black Sea]. This day is accepted as the first day of the Independence War of Turkey and it is celebrated as *19th May Commemoration of Atatürk, Youth, and Sports Fest*. On 23rd April 1920, the Turkish Grand National Assembly [Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi - TBMM- the Turkish parliament then] re-opened itself in Ankara as they could not operate in Istanbul anymore; and this day is celebrated as the *National Sovereignty and Children's Day*. The Independence War ended on 30th August 1922, which is celebrated as the *Victory Day*. Finally, Republic has been declared by the TBMM on 29th October 1923 which is celebrated as *the Republic Day* (Öztürkmen, 2001).

Students, from kindergarten through end of high schools from all levels, have been taking major parts in celebrations of these national holidays except the Victory day (30th August) as it falls in the summer term and the schools are not open until mid of September. Thus, in this paper, we only will focus on the other three major national holidays in which students take parts; and we discuss and evaluate the celebration procedure and how it might help students to build civic virtues. We also discuss the new emerging national day after the 15th July coup attempt.

19th May Commemoration of Atatürk, Youth, and Sports Fest [19 Mayıs Atatürk'ü Anma Gençlik ve Spor Bayramı]: The main theme in this fest is the youth doing sport activities and physical exercises. In fact, this fest gets its roots from last few years of Ottoman times. This fest has started in 1916 under the name of [sport] exercise / work out fest [idman bayramı] and only celebrated two consecutive years. After 11 years break, in 1928, this fest resumed and celebrated under such different names as exercise / work out fest [idman bayramı] and *gymnastic carnival* [cimnastik şenlikleri] until 1938 (Güven, 1999). Then a legislation was passed by the TBMM declaring the current name of this fest and it has been celebrated every 19th May since then. The main focus of the celebration of this fest is high school students' sports and exercise shows done in public. All high schools in Turkey are required to organize shows consist of basic

sport exercises done with participation of all students in the schools.

National Sovereignty and Children's Day [Ulusal Egemenlik ve Çocuk Bayramı]: On 23rd April 1920 the TBMM, which governed the Independence War with leadership of Atatürk, was reopened in Ankara. This day was accepted as a national holiday on 1921 by the TBMM and celebrated more than a decade every year just as a national day. In 1935, a new legislation passed by the TBMM officially named this day as *National Sovereignty Holiday* [Milli Hakimiyet Bayramı] (Akin, 1997). While there had not been issued any official name for 23rd April until then, in 1927 *Youth / Children Protection Society* [Himaye-i Etfal Cemiyeti] declared 23rd April as "children's day" for the purpose of raising money for the orphan children of the young Turkish Republic (Akin, 1997). In 1933, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk himself invited group of children to his residential office as a part of the celebrations of 23rd April and children visiting high level officials such as governors and mayors become a tradition applied in all cities. This was also the day of *students' pledge* [Andımız / Öğrenci andı] was recited by the children for the first time (Akin, 1997). Thus, National Sovereignty Holiday was being celebrated until the 1980's as children's day although the word "children" was not included in the official name of this holiday. Just after a year of the military coup, the militaristic regime changed the name of this national day for the last time. Thus, in 1981, the current name for this day was adapted and called *National Sovereignty and Children's Day* since then (Meşeci-Giorgetti, 2016). Although the name of this holiday has been changed few times, except the early years of the celebration, the focus of these national holidays always have been the young children. Atatürk himself has given this day as a symbolic gift to the Turkish children for celebrations (TBMM, n.d.).

Republic Day [Cumhuriyet Bayramı]: After, the Independence War had ended and Turkish peoples' army had defeated the occupation forces, on 29th October 1923 the Republic has been declared. Two years later on 19th April 1925, the TBMM, passed a legislation that accept *Republic Day* as a national fest. This fest has been celebrated since then every year nationwide. All students from kindergarten to high school level take part in the celebration of this national day.

3 Celebrations of national days in Turkey

Although there were some slight changes in the celebrations and ceremonies of these national holidays overtime, the general structure of these ceremonies mostly remains the same and they become fundamental rituals in the Turkish schools. According to Filiz Meşeci-Giorgetti (2016), the celebrations of these national holidays and other rituals taking place at Turkish schools such as *student's pledge* and *flag raising ceremony* [bayrak töreni] can be considered as "uniting rituals" because these rituals unite the community of the school including students, teachers, and administrators with people who come to watch the rituals and promote solidarity among them. While student's pledge abolished in 2013, flag



Picture 1: Elementary school students in the parade and the city officials are saluting them (29th October, 2011, Şile-Istanbul)

raising ceremony along with singing national anthem is still applied in all Turkish schools every Monday for opening and Friday for closing the ceremonies.

There always have been two different venues in which these days are celebrated. The first is the celebration organized by the state officials and the latter is the ceremonies organized in each and every school in Turkey. Both ceremonies have something in common while there are some distinctions. Both ceremonies have not changed much and been repeated every year with very similar fashion. We will give the details about the celebration procedures below.



Picture 2: Soldiers in the parade and the city officials are saluting them (29th October, 2011, Şile-Istanbul).

State Officials' Ceremonies: All state offices are closed on the national days. But Republic day officially starts at 12:00 pm, just one day before. Thus, on 28th of October at 12:00 pm all schools and other public offices are closed until 31th October. While private businesses can stay open during a national day, they are required to hang a Turkish flag somewhere in their shops or offices. Activities related to the national holiday celebration are done for 24 hour periods by the state officials. Some activities done in daytime while there are some events that need to be done in the evening. The highest official person in a city, governor or mayor, is responsible to organize all programs and s/he is considered as the host of the organization. The day begins by putting wreath to Atatürk's monuments in the city center, and giving speeches that emphasize the historical importance of the day. The participants to this event are governor, mayor,

police chief, highest level military officer in the city, school principals, and other high level state officials. After leaving the wreath, a minute of silence is followed by singing the national anthem.

One the most important event in these celebrations is official parade ceremony. This parade usually is done in one of the main street or stadium of the city. The stadium or the streets where the parade take place are decorated with Turkish flags and Atatürk's posters. Soldiers and selected students from the schools in the city are the main actors in the parade. Both military and school bands march with other students and soldiers. They sing marches, and read heroic poems and Atatürk's important quotes [see examples below in the text] repeated frequently during these parades. People, mostly the parents, usually are sitting in the stadium or standing up at both sides of the main street and cheering the students and soldiers as they waive the Turkish flags. Picture 1 and 2 are good examples of celebration from a small suburban district near Istanbul.

After the parade is completed the governor gives an evening reception for the high level officials. Meanwhile, in the main street of the city night torchlight parade is held by the Turkish army (TSK). Like the day time parade citizens stay at the sides and cheer the soldiers. Nevertheless, in the recent years people also have begun to take role in the night torchlights parade. Picture 3 is taken from Antalya in one of the recent years Republic day celebration with 150,000 participants according to the local news (Antalyada tarihi cumhuriyet kutlaması [Remarkable Republic day celebration in Antalya], 30 Ekim [October], 2012).

Celebrations in Schools: Students have always played a major role in the ceremonies of these national holidays as long as they are within the academic calendar. Other than the ceremony held by the state officials, every single school in Turkey is required to organize a ceremony in their schools to celebrate that day. The Ministry of National Education has a [guideline](#) that explains how the organization will be held. Thus, all ceremony programs are very similar in every school.



Picture 3: Evening light torch parade organized by people on Republic day (29th October, 2012, Antalya).

Students are gathered in the school garden in a certain order and always stand up during the whole ceremony which may take up to two hours. Students and teachers

have to be dressed up very neatly (Öztürkmen, 2001). Depending on the national day, students may have to wear a unique type of clothing. For example, male students have to wear shorts and shirt and female students have to wear skirt and shirt for the 19th May Commemoration of Atatürk, Youth, and Sports Fest so that they could do the sport activities and exercises. Usually Turkish literature, social studies, physical education, and music teachers take major roles in organizing these events. The ceremony always starts with minute of silence for remembering Atatürk, his comrades and who-ever lost his life saving this country. Just after this minute ends, all crowds sing the [national anthem](#). Then, the host - usually the Turkish teacher - shout "at-ease" so that students can put their hand behind their back and move their right leg to the right side for 30-40 cm which is what the soldiers do in the training.



Picture 4: Girls high school band performing (19th May 1973 -Nevşehir)

After a minute of silence and national anthem, usually a social studies or history teacher makes a speech that emphasizes the importance of the day in the Turkish history. These are often followed by loudly recited heroic poems, enthusiastic folk dance performances, costume parades and shows (Öztürkmen, 2001). School bands and choir also take important part in the celebrations. Choirs sing national marches and bands play militaristic tones that help other students to walk properly during the parade within the school. Picture 4 is taken from Nevşehir located in the central Anatolia represents one of many bands performances in these celebrations.

While the activities mentioned above are performed in all national days celebrations in schools, some national days have their unique activities. For instance, on 23rd April National Sovereignty and Children's Day, elementary and middle school students decorate their classrooms with colorful ornaments and flags which stay at least a week in there. Students also may wear costumes based on theme or performance they will do. For instance, [in this video](#) Cumhuriyet [Republic] elementary school students did a dramatization of reopening of TBMM in Ankara. The most distinguished activity in the celebration of children's day is the participations of students from all over the world to the ceremonies with [their folkloric dances](#). This feature to the celebration was added by Turkish Radio and Television Foundation [Türkiye Radyo ve Televizyon Kurumu] [TRT], n.d.; Akın,

1997) in 1979 which have brought intercultural perspective to this day. TRT have been organizing this event since then every year with sponsorship of other state departments and private companies. While number of participant countries varied each year, 31 countries participated in the 38th TRT International April 23 Children's Festival in 2016. To date almost 30.000 children from 118 different countries visited Turkey via this event (TRT, n.d)

These students usually perform folkloric dances or sing folkloric songs. The address of this event always had been Ankara until 2000. After that, various big cities of Turkey such as İstanbul, Antalya, İzmir, Bursa, Konya and Gaziantep hosted the TRT International April 23 Children's Festival until today. The performance of these students is broadcast live by TRT both nationally and internationally. These guest children stay at the houses of volunteer families who have children at the similar ages with the invited guest.

Another noteworthy tradition of the children day is that selected students assume the role of president, prime minister and other ministers for one day. In fact, these selected students get to sit on the real chair of this high level official. While this is merely a symbolic gesture for a very few students, it is also a tradition for selected students from every school to visit the city governor, mayor and other high level state officials that day (see picture 5).



Picture 5: Elementary school students visiting the city governor (23th April, 2016- Antakya) [a city at the South of Turkey].



Picture 6: One of May 19th celebration in a stadium (place unknown, 2007).

This event always makes the evening news and broadcasted nationwide and even internationally. While

it is a symbolic gesture for these students, it can be considered as encouragement for all students all over Turkey to work hard and perhaps to get these chairs in the future for real. Another common tradition in this day which involves much more students than the former activity is that selected students from every school visit the city governor, mayor and other bureaucrats that day. As most of schools in a city participate in this activity, in total many students get to see and talk with the city governor, mayor and other state officials. This activity has been repeated for years and even to date. Thus, many students have had this experience so far. This experience also can be considered as an opportunity for the students to learn more about administrative structure of Turkey.

19th May Commemoration of Atatürk, Youth, and Sports Fest also has some uniqueness. Participating in the 19th of May celebrations means for most students that they grow up and it means they are up for more challenge. High school students for the celebration of this day do some acrobatic and sportive shows as a whole group. Sometimes they write their school name or a quote from Atatürk by just standing in a specific order in the field. [This recent video](#) is a characteristic example of how 19th May celebrated.

Another important aspect of these ceremonies is using quotes from Atatürk during the whole ceremony. Many times, in the area where the ceremony takes place, it is easy to see quotes from Atatürk written on several posters hanging out. Besides these posters, it is also very common to have students [listen to these quotes from Atatürk's original voice using a loud speaker](#). One of the most famous quotes is that "Turkish nation has a noble character, Turkish nation is hardworking, Turkish nation is smart!" [Türk milletinin karakteri yüksektir, Türk milleti çalışkandır, Türk milleti zekidir!] (see Kocatürk, 1999). It is known that Atatürk said these exact words on the tenth anniversary of Republic day on 29th October 1933 when he gave his famous speech to the Turkish nation. Tenth anniversary celebrations of the *Republic day* could be considered one of the most dominant image of the national holiday celebrations (Öztürkmen, 2001) as the government tried to make people understand the virtue of the republican regime by distributing booklets and organizing theatrical shows nationwide about the new republic and reforms (Demirhan, 1997; Öztürk, 2015).

We also would like to present two more other quotes from Atatürk we think are connected to essence of these national days and have emphasis on values and character education. "I like sportsman who are intelligent, agile, and with high morality." [Ben sporcunun zeki çevik ve ahlaklısını severim] (see Kocatürk, 1999). This quote is often used in 19th May Commemoration of Atatürk, Youth, and Sports Fest as it suits the essence of the event. Another famous quote is "Turk!, be proud, work hard, trust" [Türk, övün, çalış, güven] (see Kocatürk, 1999). This quote is not only used in all national holidays but also it is written on the walls of most of schools in Turkey. Especially, this quote has been recited loudly by the students during these ceremonies when students are

marching on the field. While there has been some criticism toward the way national days celebrated along with these quotes, we will discuss these issues at the end of the article.

4 An Emerging National Day: Democracy and National Unity Day [Demokrasi ve Milli Birlik Günü]

Finally, we also would like to provide information about an emerging national day as a result of the recent military coup attempt in Turkey. On 15th July 2016, a fundamental religious group nested in the Turkish Military took a drastic action in order to take over the Turkish Republic. Troops occupied streets and tried to control strategic locations such as the Bosphorus Bridge, Istanbul City Municipal, Ataturk Airport, and police headquarters including other locations in Ankara, the capital city. F-16 jets did low attitude flights over Istanbul and Ankara all night in order to scare and intimidate the people so that they stay at their homes. Some of the Jets even bombed the TBMM and Police Special Team headquarter in Gölbaşı near Ankara where nearly 50 officers killed immediately. Helicopters and some of the troops on the ground fired at the people who were protesting and trying to stop the coup attempt. There are many pictures and footages that show people climbing on the tanks. Also some people were run over by tanks as they were standing up in front of them. Meanwhile, there were shootings between the soldiers that were supporting the coup attempt and the soldiers trying to prevent it within several military bases in the country. Several military personal killed each other from both sides. Eventually, by the next day in the morning, people, police, and military forces altogether were able to defeat this coup attempt. But with very high cost! 248 people who were against this coup attempt got killed in action.

According to the Turkish laws and regulations martyrdom [şehitlik] is an official state given to the police and military personal who were killed in the line of duty. Nevertheless, the government made an exception and announced all 248 people as martyrs and named many locations after this day including Bosphorus bridge. The bridge is now called *15th July Martyr's Bridge* [15 Temmuz Şehitler Köprüsü].

On the other hand, the Ministry of National Education issued an order for all schools to do activities in the first week of academic calendar of 2016 for remembering the fallen that day. The order requires schools to do several types of activities under the general name of 15th July Democratic Victory and Commemorations of Martyrs events. [15 Temmuz Demokrasi Zaferi ve Şehitleri Anma Etkinlikleri] (Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı [Ministry of National Education], [MEB] 2016a). This is a detailed program covering information about the type of the activities, the specific application date, and who are responsible for planning and execution of the events. For example, every class requires to create a panel board within the first week of the school (19-23 September, 2016) including pictures, news, or stories regarding 15th of July on the classroom wall and the class teacher is responsible to organize this board with his/her students. We present

two examples of these boards created by elementary and high school students.

As can be seen from picture 7, in this board the central person is Ömer Halis Demir who was senior master sergeant on 15th July and he became a hero as he killed one of the top generals who were leading the coup attempt. Unfortunately, he also was killed by the other soldiers around the general. His action is considered as very important breaking point in preventing the coup as the general he killed was going to taking over the special army forces. His action is also very brave and heroic as he acted alone when he infiltrated into the coup forces and killed the general.



Picture 7: A Panel board created by Ataturk Elementary School students, Derik- Mardin [a Southeastern city] regarding 15th of July, 2016.



Picture 8: A Panel board created by Hacı Mehmet Cömert Anatolian High School students, Sarıyahşi- Aksaray [an inner city at South of Ankara] regarding 15th of July, 2016.

The panel board presented in picture 8, created by the high school students, was entitled as “15th July Democratic Victory” [15 Temmuz Demokrasi Zaferi] and included pictures of Atatürk and Erdoğan at the center. The students also added several pictures of people who died that day. There are also some handwritten materials, seem to be poems and/or other types of students’ work on the board.

There are many other activities mentioned in the order (MEB, 2016a) such as Turkish literature teachers in all classes must have their students write letters to the

heroes of 15th July and express their feelings about this event. According to the order, Turkish literature, social studies, history, and religious education and ethic teachers are supposed to focus on topics such as democracy, martyrdom, a nation’s will, and defense of [Turkish] country in their classes during the first week of the schools. MEB (2016a) also has included activities that need to be done during the whole academic year based on each schools choice or convenience. Organizing one or more contest in the school with the theme of “15th July from students’ perspectives [Öğrenci gözüyle 15 Temmuz]” is one of them. The contest can be in various forms such as painting, poem, essay, poster, photo, maquette, website design, theatre performance, and short videos created by the students. Taking students to field trips to the scenes where struggle took place between the coup forces and the people [if there is any in the city where the school located] are among the activities that need to be organized by the school districts. School districts also need to build a forest in memory of martyrs [Demokrasi Şehitleri Hatıra Ormanı] in their city within this academic year.

These are only some of the highlights of the commemoration of the 15th July for the first time in the Turkish schools. Thus, it is clear that there is a very detailed and comprehensive program to be applied in a whole year. MEB, (2016b) also issued another program for the commemoration ceremony itself. This program is very detailed and even included school headmaster’s speech and all poems and speeches to be read by the selected students in each school. Thus, every headmasters and the selected students from each school read the exact same speeches and poems in the first week of the school year during the commemoration ceremony of 15th July. These speeches included heroic stories of 15th July, quotes from Atatürk and famous Turkish poets.

We have given summary of the first year of the commemoration which took place in the Turkish schools in September 2016. Just after a month, on 25th October 2016, a new national day was issued by the TBMM for remembering 15th July and it is officially named *Democracy and National Unity Day* [Demokrasi ve Milli Birlik Günü] (Law number, 2429). Although, until that day 15th of July called “Martyrs day” [Şehitler Günü] the official name turn out to be different. We do not know much about the commemoration activities of 15th July 2017 at this point. Normally, it should be state official ceremonies on that day and we expect that the next year first week of the school is going to be the time of 15th July is commemorated in the schools.

5 Character and civic virtues emphasized in the Turkish national days

We have presented the general structure and some specific features of national ceremonies in Turkey. Generally in such national days, patriotism and nationalism are emphasized as it is the case here as well. While conceptualizing of Turkish nationalism is considered as a difficult task (Canefe, 2002), Tanil Bora (2003) divides Turkish nationalism into four main fractions. These are;

(a) official nationalism (Atatürk's nationalism): focusing on building a nation state; (b) Kemalist nationalism (ulusçuluk): left wing Kemalism; (c) Liberal neonationalism: focusing on economic growth, prosperity, and developing modern country; and (d) Turkish radical nationalism: racist-ethnicist nationalism developed against Kurdish movements. Although there always have been different fractions of nationalism, the Turkish state has adapted an official nationalism called Atatürk's nationalism from the beginning. Atatürk's nationalism is mainly based on citizenship and territoriality (Bora, 2003; Özdoğan, 2010; Ürer, 2009). In this sense as officially stated in the constitution "everyone bound to the Turkish state through the bond of citizenship is a Türk" (Constitution of Republic of Turkey, 1982, Article, 66). According to, Atatürk's nationalism, Türk merely is the name of the nation and does not refer to the ethnic identity, and rather it has uniting character (Ürer, 2009). This notion also is criticized as, "Türk" is also the name of ethnic and cultural identity itself (Özdoğan, 2010). Nevertheless, Atatürk's nationalism has been alive within the Turkish state although it starts to become fuzzier within the last decade. As we have laid out the fractions of the Turkish nationalism and the meaning of the mainstream nationalism, we will discuss the criticism toward Atatürk's nationalism through national holidays and school rituals at the end of this section.

But, before getting to this issue, first we would like to discuss the role of Turkish national days on promoting character and citizenship education. We believe that many aspects of the celebrations of these national days in Turkey support development of character and citizenship education. When it is analyzed thoroughly, several elements of moral and civic virtues can be found in all of these national ceremonies. Some of these virtues can be found by analyzing the general structure of these ceremonies, some may be found on a poster hanging out in the ceremonies where the national day is held. Thus, we would like to point out and discuss character and civic virtues that we believe are the main focus of these national days in Turkey.

When general celebration structure of these national days are analyzed, it is apparent that "respect" is one of the main themes of these celebrations. In Turkish philosophical terms dictionary respect is defined as special feeling which arises from giving high value toward a person, idea, action or success. [Bir kişiye, bir düşünüşe, bir eyleme, bir başarıya yüksek değer vermekten doğan özel bir duygu] (Akarsu, 1975). As stated above, all of these celebrations begin with a minute of silence for paying respect to Atatürk, his comrades, and anybody who lost his/her life defending this country. The last part of this sentence does not only refer to the people who died during the Independence War of Turkey, but also people who have died recently in fight with terrorism. In these ceremonies students have to walk in form of military troops in accordance with school band and they have to behave almost like a soldier during the ceremony. This discipline in the whole ceremonies also could be considered as a sign of respect. Respect is one of the

central values cited in the current social studies curriculum in order to be integrated in appropriate instructional units (Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı Talim Terbiye Kurulu Başkanlığı [Ministry of National Education – Curriculum Division][MEB], 2009a; 2009b). Although there is not any definition of respect in the current social studies curriculum, the term is associated with human rights and diversity in the curriculum. There are several citations in the curriculum such as "respect to diversity", "respect to human rights", and "respecting different perspectives and ideas". Respect was also one of the central values within the [student's pledge](#). The second sentence of the pledge starts as "my principle is to protect my youngsters and respect my elders" [ilkem küçükleri korumak, büyükleri saymaktır].

Other aspects of character education vividly presented in the quotes from Atatürk that always has been parts of these ceremonies. For instance, the famous quotes that were first said on Tenth anniversary of *Republic day* by Atatürk himself ("The Turkish nation has a noble character, the Turkish nation is hardworking, the Turkish nation is smart!") could be a great example for character education. It is interesting to see Atatürk used the word "character" [karakter: written and pronunciation form in Turkish]. In the Educational terms dictionary published by Turkish Language foundation, character education is defined as a concept that focuses on moral aspects of education and students' developing good behavior [Eğitimin ahlaksal yönüne önem veren ve öğrencilerin özellikle davranış bakımından iyi nitelikler geliştirmeleri üzerinde duran eğitim] (Oğuzkan, 1974). Thus, in the Turkish educational context, character education mostly refers to moral education.

Atatürk by saying "Turkish nation has a noble character" not only gave pride to the nation, but also emphasized importance of noble character for the nation. The second part of the quote also put emphasis on being hardworking as a quality of the Turkish nation. Similarly, the other quote we have mentioned above ("Turk!, be proud, work hard, trust") also clearly suggest to the Turkish nation to work hard. It is kind of one of his legacies to pass to this nation. Finally, the quote mostly used on 19th of May clearly focuses on the importance of morality ("I like sportsman who are intelligent, agile, and with high morality"). Atatürk here also used the word "morality" [ahlak] which may indicate that he had selected those exact words to promote character education in Turkey. Diligence [çalışkanlık] is also one of the values cited in the current social studies curriculum (MEB, 2009a; 2009b) and it can be associated with working hard as Atatürk emphasized in one of his quotes. Thus, it is clear that some of the civic virtues emphasized in these national days are still taking place in the Turkish educational system. Although it is difficult to measure how these quotes, national days or other school rituals such as [student's pledge](#) and [flag raising ceremony](#) influence students' civic values, they may have had affected people to some degree through all these years.

On the other hand, these quotes and [student's pledge](#) have been receiving criticism from time to time by the

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Pictures

Picture 1: Şile Belediyesi [Şile Municipality], 29 Ekim [October], 2011 www.sile.bel.tr/Mobile/Detail/5668
Photo credit: Burç Civan

Picture 2: Şile Belediyesi [Şile Municipality], 29 Ekim [October], 2011 www.sile.bel.tr/Mobile/Detail/5668
Photo credit: Burç Civan

Picture 3: Antalya Güncel Gazetesi [Antalya Timely Newspaper], 29 Ekim [October], 2012 www.antalyaguncel.com/haber-46472-Antalyada_tarihi_Cumhuriyet_kutlamasi

Picture 4: Fibhaber Nevşehir [Fibnews Nevşehir], 19 Mayıs [May], 1973 www.fibhaber.com/gundem/gecmisten-gunumuze-nevsehir-de-mill-i-bayramlar-h58901.html

Picture 5: Antakya İlkokulu [Antakya Elementary School], 23 Nisan [April], 2016 antakyaio.meb.k12.tr/icerikler/yasasin-23-nisan_2543698.html

Picture 6: Tarihte bugün [Today's history], 19 Mayıs [May], 2007

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Picture 7: Derik Atatürk İlkokulu Mardin [Derik Atatürk Elementary School]- Eylül [September], 2016

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Picture 8: Hacı Mehmet Cömert Anadolu Lisesi [Hacı Mehmet Cömert Anatolian high School] Sarıyahşi-Aksaray, Eylül [September], 2016

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