Geographical name changes in Turkey

Geographical name changes in Turkey have been undertaken , periodically , in bulk from 1913 to the present by successive Turkish governments . Thousands of names within the Turkish Republic or the Ottoman Empire have lost or departed from their popular or historic alternatives in favour of recognizably Turkish names , as part of the Turkification policy . The governments have argued that such names are foreign and / or divisive against Turkish unity . Names changed were usually of Armenian , Greek , Laz , Georgian , Bulgarian , Kurdish , Assyrian , or Arabic origin .

Turkey 's efforts to join the European Union in the early 21st century has led to a decrease in the incidence of such changes from local , and particularly the central government . In some cases legislation has restored the names of certain villages (primarily those housing Kurdish minorities) . Place names that have formally changed frequently persist in local dialects and languages throughout the ethnically diverse country .

The policy commenced during the final years of the Ottoman Empire and continued into the Turkish Republic . Under the Kemalist oriented government , specialized governmental commissions were created for the purpose of changing names . Approximately 28 @,@ 000 topographic names were changed , which included 12 @,@ 211 village and town names and 4 @,@ 000 mountain , river , and other topographic names . Most name changes occurred in the eastern regions of the country where minority ethnicities form a large part or a majority of the population . Policies at times included banning the use of foreign names that were considered divisive and inappropriate .

History

Ottoman Empire

The Committee of Union and Progress took the reins of the Ottoman government through a coup d 'état in 1913 . At the height of World War I and during the final years of the Ottoman Empire , when the ethnic cleansing policies of non @-@ Muslim Greek , Armenian , and Assyrian minorities were underway , Minister of War Enver Pasha issued an edict (ferman) on October 6 , 1916 , declaring :

It has been decided that provinces , districts , towns , villages , mountains , and rivers , which are named in languages belonging to non @-@ Muslim nations such as Armenian , Greek or Bulgarian , will be renamed into Turkish . In order to benefit from this suitable moment , this aim should be achieved in due course .

General Directorate of State Archives of the Republic of Turkey , ?stanbul Vilayet Mektupçulu?u , no . 000955 , 23 Kânunuevvel 1331 (October 6 , 1916) Ordinance of Enver Pa?a

Enver Pasha did not change the geographical names belonging to Muslim minorities (i.e. Arabs and Kurds) due to the Ottoman government 's role as a Caliphate . His decree inspired many Turkish intellectuals to write in support of such measures . One such intellectual , Hüseyin Avni Alparslan (1877 ? 1921) , a Turkish soldier and author of books about Turkish language and culture , was inspired by the efforts of Enver Pasha , writing in his book Trabzon ?li Lâz m? ? Türk mü ? (Is the Trabzon province Laz or Turkish ?) that :

If we want to be the owner of our country , then we should turn even the name of the smallest village into Turkish and not leave its Armenian , Greek or Arabic variants .

Only in this way can we paint our country with its colors .

It is not known how many geographical names were changed under the ordinance . The ultimate overarching objective behind it failed due to the collapse of the Ottoman government and trials of its leaders before Ottoman and European courts for massacres against ethnic minorities committed in 1915 .

A decreased level of cultural repression has taken place in the Turkish Republic , however non @-@ mainstream Turkic origin place names have invariably been officially renamed over the course of time .

= = = Republic of Turkey = = =

Turkish nationalism and secularism were two of the six founding principles of the Turkish Republic . Mustafa Kemal Ataturk , the leader of the early decades of the Republic , aimed to create a nation state (Turkish : Ulus) from the Turkish remnants of the Ottoman Empire . During the first three decades of the Republic , efforts to Turkify geographical names were a recurring theme . Imported maps containing references to historical regions such as Armenia , Kurdistan , or Lazistan (the official name of the province of Rize until 1921) were prohibited (as was the case with Der Grosse Weltatlas , a map published in Leipzig) .

Journalist and writer Ay?e Hür has noted that after the death of Ataturk and during the Democratic period of the Turkish Republic in the late 1940s and 50s , " ugly , humiliating , insulting or derisive names , even if they were Turkish , were subjected to changes . Village names with lexical components meaning red (kizil) , bell (çan) , church (kilise , e.g. Kirk Kilise) were all changed . To do away with " separatist notions " , the Arabic , Persian , Armenian , Kurdish , Georgian , Tatar , Circassian , and Laz village names were also changed . "

The Special Commission for Name Change (Ad Degistirme Ihtisas Komisyonu) was created under the supervision of the Ministry of the Interior . It brought together professors , politicians , generals , linguists , and academicians throughout Turkey to take up the task of official name changing . Among the commission 's participants were members of the Office of the General Staff , Ministry of Defense , Ministry of Education , and history and geography professors from Ankara University . The initiative proved successful , as approximately 28 @,@ 000 topographic names were changed , including 12 @,@ 211 village and town names and 4 @,@ 000 mountain , river , and other topographic names . This figure also included names of streets , monuments , quarters , neighborhoods , and other components that make up certain municipalities . By 1927 , all street and square names in Istanbul which were not of Turkish origin were changed . The campaign continued until 1978 , and was reintroduced after the military coup of 1980 in 1981 ? 83 . During the heightened tension between Kurdish rebels and the Turkish government , the focus of geographical name changing in the 1980s was on Kurdish villages , towns , rivers , etc .

In 1981 , the Turkish government stated in the preface of Köylerimiz , a publication dedicated to names of Turkish villages , that :

Approximately 12 @,@ 000 village names that are non @-@ Turkish , understood to originate from non @-@ Turkish roots , and identified as causing confusion have been examined and replaced with Turkish names , and put into effect by the Substitution Committee for Foreign Names functioning at the Directorate General for Provincial Governments in our Ministry .

At the culmination of the policy , no geographical or topographical names of non @-@ Turkish origin remained . Some of the newer names resembled their native names , but with revised Turkish connotations (i.e. Aghtamar was changed to Akdamar) .

= = = Current status = = =

Although geographical names have been formally changed in Turkey , their native names persist and continue in local dialects throughout the country . At times , Turkish politicians have also used the native names of cities during their speeches . In 2009 , when addressing a crowd in the town of Güroymak , president Abdullah Gul used the native name Nor?in . Also that year , when talking about his family origins , Prime Minister Recep Tayip Erdogan used the native Greek name of Potamya instead of Güneysu .

Efforts at restoring the former names of geographical terms have been recently introduced in Turkey . In September 2012 , legislation was introduced to restore the names of (primarily Kurdish) villages to their former native names . According to the bill , the province of Tunceli would be named Dersim , Güroymak would be named Nor?in , and Ayd?nlar would be named Tilo .

= = Comparative analysis = =

Most of the geographical name changes occurred in the eastern provinces of the country and on the coast of the eastern Black Sea , where minority populations tend to live . Through independent study , etymologist Sevan Nisanyan estimates that , of the geographical location name changes , 4 @,@ 200 were Greek , 4 @,@ 000 Kurdish , 3 @,@ 600 Armenian , 750 Arabic , 400 Assyrian , 300 Georgian , 200 Laz , and 50 others . The official statistics of The Special Commission for Name Change (Ad Degistirme Ihtisas Komisyonu) claim that the total number of villages , towns , cities , and settlements renamed is 12 @,@ 211 . The chart below lists the provinces and the number of villages or towns renamed .

= = Notable geographical name changes = =

= = = Armenian = = =

 Armenian geographic names were first changed under the reign of Sultan Abdulhamit II . In 1880 , the word Armenia was banned from use in the press , schoolbooks , and governmental establishments , to be replaced with words like Anatolia or Kurdistan . Armenian name changing continued under the early Republican era up until the 21st century . It included the Turkification of last names , change of animal names , change of the names of Armenian historical figures (i.e. the name of the prominent Balyan family was concealed under the identity of a superficial Italian family called Baliani) , and the change and distortion of Armenian historical events .
 Most Armenian geographical names were in the eastern provinces of the Ottoman empire . Villages , settlements , or towns that contain the suffix -kert , meaning built or built by (i.e. Manavazkert (today Malazgirt) , Norakert , Dikranagert , Noyakert) , -shen , meaning village (i.e. Aratashen , Pemzashen , Norashen) , and -van , meaning town (i.e. Charentsavan , Nakhichevan , Tatvan) , signify an Armenian name . Throughout Ottoman history , Turkish and Kurdish tribesmen have settled into Armenian villages and changed the native Armenian names (i.e. the Armenian Norashen was changed to Nor?in) . This was especially true after the Armenian genocide , when much of eastern Turkey was depopulated of its Armenian population .
 Sevan Ni?anyan estimates that 3 @,@ 600 Armenian geographical locations have been changed .
 Notable name changes of Armenian geographical locations :

= = = Assyrian = = =

 Most Assyrian name changes occurred in the southeast of Turkey near the Syrian border in the Tur Abdin region . The Tur Abdin (Syriac : ???? ?? ? ????) is a hilly region incorporating the eastern half of Mardin Province , and ??rnak Province west of the Tigris , on the border with Syria . The name ' Tur Abdin ' is from the Syriac language meaning ' mountain of the servants (of God) ' . Tur Abdin is of great importance to Syriac Orthodox Christians , for whom the region used to be a monastic and cultural heartland . The Assyrian / Syriac people of Tur Abdin call themselves Suroye and Suryoye , and traditionally speak an Eastern Aramaic dialect called Turoyo .
 After the Assyrian genocide , the Assyrians of the region were either depopulated or massacred . Currently , there are 5 , 000 Assyrians living in the region .
 Ni?anyan estimates that 400 Assyrian geographical locations have been changed .
 Notable name changes of Assyrian geographical locations :

= = = Greek = = =

 Many of the Greek names have maintained their origins from the Byzantine empire and Empire of Trebizond era .
 With the establishment of the Ottoman empire , many Turkish name changes have continued to retain their Greek origins . For example , the modern name " ?zmir " derives from the former Greek name ?????? " Smyrna " , through the first two syllables of the phrase " ??? ??????? " (

pronounced " is Smirnin ") , which means " to Smyrna " in Greek . A similar etymology also applies to other Turkish cities with former Greek names , such as ?znik (from the phrase " is Nikaean " , meaning " to Nicaea ") , Istanbul (from the phrase " is tan Polin " or " to the City ") , or even for the Greek island of Kos , called " ?stanköy " in Turkish .

Ni?anyan estimates that 4 @,@ 200 Greek geographical locations have been changed , the most of any ethnic minority .

Notable name changes of Greek geographical locations :

Kurdish

The Kurdish geographical name changes were exempt under the Ottoman Empire due to the Islamic religious orientation of Kurds . During the Republican era and especially after the Dersim massacre , Kurdish geographical name changes became more common . During the Turkish Republican era , the words Kurdistan and Kurds were banned . The Turkish government had disguised the presence of the Kurds statistically by categorizing them as Mountain Turks . This classification was changed to the new euphemism of Eastern Turk in 1980 .

Also included in the category of Kurdish geographical name changes are Zazaki , which is considered among Kurdish group , along with Kurmanci . Ni?anyan estimates that 4 @,@ 000 Kurdish geographical locations have been changed .

Notable name changes of Kurdish geographical locations :