Sitting at the juncture of Europe, Asia, and the Middle East, the Turks find themselves at the epicenter of world events. Following the European powers’ partition of Anatolia under the Treaty of Sevres in 1920, modern Turkey emerged from six centuries of Ottoman rule as an ethnically Turkish nation-state saddled with the legacy and memories of having once been a great power. In the eighty-two years since Mustafa Kemal Ataturk founded the republic on the values of democracy and secularism, Turkey has developed into a modern and important regional actor, as evidenced by its ongoing accession negotiations for membership in the European Union. In *The Turks Today*, Andrew Mango, the author of the definitive biography *Ataturk*, tackles Turkish history after the death of Ataturk on November 10, 1938, and seeks to reintroduce the world to the Turks.

Mango, who was born in Istanbul, is an astute observer of Turkish affairs whose scholarship is equally respected in Turkey and abroad. Through his balanced look at Ataturk, which included private aspects that are almost never discussed, such as bouts with depression and alcoholism, Mango was able to do what no other scholar had accomplished. In *Ataturk*, he brought out the human side as well as the character and firm resolve of Turkey’s revolutionary leader, offering a new and candid assessment of the country’s adored founder. Mango, as a native Turk, can be openly critical of modern Turkey while also being deeply sympathetic to the difficulties the Turks have faced throughout their history. Drawing on a wide range of sources, *The Turks Today* attempts to cover the entire experience of a nation through its most important events and unresolved problems.

Mango first presents a chronological history of Turkey and then analyzes modern Turkey from several perspectives. He supplements the

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relatively dry history of the country with his personal knowledge to emphasize the relevance of particular historical events to Turkey’s recent policies and foreign relations. One such example of bringing historical analysis to life is his recount of the fallout with the United States in 2003 over the war in Iraq. Unlike many scholars who point to recent events to explain the Turkish decision to reject U.S. requests to allow American forces to create a northern front in Iraq through Turkish territory, Mango attributes the refusal to problems inherited from the 1960s. “Apart from a honeymoon in the early 1950s,” he writes, “the U.S.-Turkish alliance has always been troubled.” Mango does not hesitate to offer his own informed opinions to spice up the well-researched but otherwise unremarkable historical section of the book.

The historical background is a necessary precursor to the latter two-thirds of the book, which delve into modern Turkey with refreshing enthusiasm and candor. At times reading more like a tour book than a scholarly work—a unique approach in the literature on Turkey—Mango introduces the three major geographic centers (Istanbul, Ankara, and Southeastern Anatolia), and discusses the culture, economy, education, and religion of Turkey. Drawing on disciplines as wide-ranging as linguistics and economics, Mango adopts a new multidisciplinary approach in contrast to earlier, highly specialized works of historical, political, anthropological, and sociological research on the Turks.

Mango’s explicit aim is to reintroduce the Turks to a wider audience not as the evil Muslim horde at the gates of Vienna, but as the hard-working hope of Europe and model for the Middle East. Unlike the prevailing literature on Turkey, which mainly deals with the country’s geostrategic assets and political deficiencies, Mango is as interested in understanding the hopes and aspirations of Turkey’s inhabitants. He accomplishes this by taking the reader on various journeys through the Turkish landscape and introducing the plight of specific individuals, from politicians to children. He is also critical of Europe’s obsessive focus on Turkey’s human rights record, a critical factor in Turkey’s potential accession to the EU, and points out that Turkey’s achievements in granting greater rights to its Kurdish population have been largely overlooked.

By tracking the immigration patterns of rural Turks and Kurds to the major urban centers, Mango traces the development of modern Tur-
key from a predominantly agrarian society to a largely industrial one. However, as critics will justifiably contend, Turkey is still poor and agrarian outside its major cities, with an annual per capita GDP of less than $2,000 in parts of Eastern Anatolia. Turkey must take seriously the challenges posed by continuing migration-driven urban growth. Beyond the economic impact of this migration, many of these poor urban migrants subscribe to a brand of Islam that views secular politicians as inherently corrupt. While these migrants do not necessarily favor Islamic law as the basis for Turkey's state structure, they place their trust in politicians who share their faith and live their lives based on the values espoused in the Koran. Turkey's strong secular foundation has been jealously preserved by the military, but the polarization between Islamist and secular forces within the country remains a significant challenge to its development.

Turkish politicians have followed Ataturk's vision of a Turkey that is part of Western civilization by seeking a future among the nations of Europe. In discussing the recent emergence of the conservative Islamist AK party led by Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan, Mango does not share the pessimistic tone of Turkey's secular elite. Erdogan's past imprisonment and ban from political life for his recitation of a religious poem while serving as Istanbul's mayor in 1997 may seem to lump him with the group of Islamist politicians in Turkey. However, Mango believes that Erdogan is far less inclined to Islamism than his critics claim. While Islamists in many Middle Eastern countries directly threaten the state, Erdogan's brand of moderate and pragmatic Islamist-leaning politics offers the best protection against extremist Islam in a democratic Turkey, Mango argues. Turkey's eighty-two-year-old democracy is still developing, but its recent experience with weak coalition governments has given way to a popular movement of trustworthy, religiously informed politics that does not pose a threat to the secular state.

Having succeeded in obtaining a firm date for EU accession negotiations, Erdogan has taken Turkey one step closer to realizing its dreams of being unequivocally recognized as part of Western civilization. Mango's arguments that a more European or Islamic Turkey means a weaker U.S.-Turkey relationship does not take into account the already changing nature of this alliance. Turkey, as a secular, democratic, and predominantly Muslim bastion of stability in the Middle East, could be a strong U.S. ally, while a more European Turkey could offer the U.S. another ally within the EU. Mango's belief that the av-
verage Turk is simultaneously pragmatic and idealistic also holds true for Turkish politicians, who continually look toward a better future while trying not to lose sight of the present. Mango’s book offers both observations and prescriptions for Turkey’s progress. His book echoes the optimism of the Turks who seek a better future as part of the EU. However, at times this optimism over-stretches. The analysis of Turkish politics and the motivations of current politicians may prove to be naïve in light of recent events like Erdogan’s comments on adultery, headscarves, and the denial of the existence of a Kurdish minority in Turkey. Mango argues that the external pressures of EU membership will play a more significant role than modest EU economic subsidies in bringing Turkey into compliance with the economic and political standards of developing democracies. In doing so, he envisions greater stability for Turkey under a European umbrella. Most important, Turkey’s future depends on the degree to which it can efficiently organize itself in a manner similar to the current EU membership. The days of blaming external forces for domestic challenges and crowding under the banner of nationalism in resisting further democratization are over for the Turks. The answer to Turkey’s problems must be sought at home. Mango has now given the Turks a greater depth, not as barbarians seeking to conquer Europe, but as idealistic, ingenious, young, and hard-working people who want to leave their impression on the future of Europe.