

STATE VISIT OF HER MAJESTY THE QUEEN ELIZABETH II TO TURKEY IN 1971

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Abstract

This article presents the observations of the British Ambassador to Turkey, Sir Roderick Sarell, on the state visit of Her Majesty the Queen to Turkey 18–25 October 1971, in return for President Cevdet Sunay's visit to the United Kingdom in 1967.

Key Words: Queen Elizabeth, Turkey

KRALİÇE İKİNCİ ELIZABETH'İN 1971 YILI TÜRKİYE RESMİ ZİYARETİ

Özet

Bu makalede İngiltere'nin Ankara Büyükelçisi Sir Roderick Sarell'in 18–25 Ekim 1971'de Türkiye'ye resmi bir ziyaret yapan Kraliçe İkinci Elizabeth'in ziyareti ve bu ziyaret sırasında meydana gelen olaylar ile ilgili gözlemlerine yer verilmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kraliçe Elizabeth, Türkiye

Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II was born in 1926, the elder daughter of King George VI and Queen Elizabeth. She ascended to the throne in 1952 at the age of 25 and has reigned through more than five decades of social change and development in Britain. She is married to His Royal Highness Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, and has four children and eight grandchildren.¹

Although Her Majesty the Queen and His Royal Highness the Duke of Edinburgh had a short conversation on 6 March 1961 with General Gürsel, the Turkish Head of State at that time, during the stop of Her Majesty's aircraft at Ankara airport on its way from Tehran to London;² it was ten years later when, accompanied by Her Royal Highness the Princess Anne, they paid the first State Visit to Turkey from 18-25 October 1971 in return for President Cevdet Sunay's visit to the United Kingdom in 1967.³

Sarell stated that the visit was **“an outstanding success”**, and well-received after the preceding months during which the embassy had had a difficult time dealing with Turkish bureaucracy. Indeed, they had been rather concerned about the state of internal security and the course which Turkish politics was likely to follow at that time.⁴

Sarell noted the importance to which the Turks attached to a state visit by the Queen of England. As he remarked, **“the President of Finland might be left without a car to take him home, his suite to find no sheets on their beds. For The Queen and The Duke of Edinburgh it was to be quite different”**. In preparation for the visit, two houses in the Presidential grounds were gutted and completely refitted, linen and furnishings brought from Paris and the national treasures, such as Atatürk's own desk, moved in for The Queen's use. The President and Madame Sunay showed particular concern, visiting the house destined for The Queen and The Duke of Edinburgh every week, often accompanied by the Prime Minister. However, not everyone admired the result as Madame Olcay, wife of the Foreign Minister, remarked: **“I was ashamed but what can you do when generals deal with it all.”** None the less, Sarell believed the final result was **“adequate once a supply of hot water had been achieved on the second day”**.⁵

1 <http://www.royal.gov.uk/output/page5543.asp>. (Her Majesty The Queen), (Retrieved 17.07.2008).

2 For more detailed information about the purpose of this visit, see Behçet Kemal Yeşilbursa, “The ‘Revolution’ of 27 May 1960 in Turkey: British Policy towards Turkey”, *Middle Eastern Studies*, Volume: 41, Number: 1, (January 2005), pp. 139-141.

3 FCO57/316, File No: TX VI/318/1, State visit of H. M. the Queen to Turkey, From Her Majesty's Ambassador at Ankara (Roderick SARELL) to the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, 1 November 1971. Also see FCO9/1606, File No: WST ½, Annual Review of Turkey, by Roderick SARELL, 1 January 1972.

4 FCO57/316, File No: TX VI/318/1, State visit of H. M. the Queen to Turkey, From Her Majesty's Ambassador at Ankara (Roderick SARELL) to the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, 1 November 1971.

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After the installation of the Erim Government following an ultimatum by the Generals on 12 March, Sarell commented that the problem of public security was never in doubt. However, the political future of the Government was made uncertain by attacks made by the majority Justice Party in the weeks immediately preceding the visit and the problem was openly **“put in the refrigerator”** by Prime Minister Erim until The Queen’s departure.⁶

The Information Departments, well backed by Mr. Heseltine, The Queen’s Press Secretary, and by the Central Office of Information, made skilful preparations for the visit, including showings of the film **“The Royal Family”** both to VIP audiences, including the President, and on Turkish television. Sarell attributed this success to widespread and historic interest in the British monarchy, in The Queen herself and The Duke of Edinburgh, and in Princess Anne. The crowds in Ankara, in Izmir and in Istanbul were the largest ever seen **“in this rather stolid country”**. Moreover, as Mr. Olcay, the Foreign Minister, pointed out to him, **“nowhere along the many miles of processional route covered during the week was there a word of protest against the Government or its actions or a jarring note of any sort in the general air of enthusiasm, orderliness and warm friendliness.”** Sarell believed that none of this had anything to do with martial law; in fact, the security arrangements along the route were of the slightest, **“a policeman facing outwards every 10 yards”**. The schoolchildren along the route were there on instructions, but they were still very enthusiastic. The Queen’s obvious confidence in the Turkish people, standing up unguarded in open cars through the centres of the towns visited was greeted with favourable comments after the heavy and obtrusive precautions taken by the Americans for Vice-President Agnew.⁷

Sarell himself was particularly pleased with the success of the dinner he gave for The Queen and President Sunay. He related an amusing incident occurring at the dinner as follows: **“The evening was notable for an agreeable gatecrash by the most distinguished living Turk, Ismet İnönü, who, misunderstanding a parting remark by The Queen at a private audience in the afternoon, arrived unannounced and uninvited, since political and protocol problems had precluded his inclusion while still an active party leader. My Counsellor reseated the tables with masterly deftness in a matter of minutes”**.⁸

Throughout the tour, The Queen, The Duke of Edinburgh and The Prin-

6 FCO57/316, File No: TX VI/318/1, State visit of H. M. the Queen to Turkey, From Her Majesty’s Ambassador at Ankara (Roderick SARELL) to the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, 1 November 1971.

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cess Anne were able to talk to a great number of Commonwealth citizens. In Ankara, Izmir and Istanbul, it was possible to give all these citizens an opportunity of attending some reception, and the Royal party must have spoken to nearly 70 per cent of those present, **“to their immense pride and gratification”**.⁹

For Sarell, two days stood out. First the visit to Kusadasi and Ephesus was **“a relaxed, interesting and agreeable occasion”**. Any tiredness that arose from the walk through the ruins of Ephesus was lessened by the refreshments given in the privacy of the museum in Selcuk. This was followed by a successful and pleasantly informal buffet luncheon on a hotel terrace overlooking Kusadasi bay. The proprietress, a granddaughter of the last Sultan, had prepared **“with imagination and taste an excellent variety of Turkish food including lamb grilled on a characteristic vertical charcoal grill, which aroused much interest”**.¹⁰

Second, the tour of the main Gallipoli war memorials on the following day was **“a moving occasion”**, of which the spirit was well captured by the message written by The Queen in the visitors’ book at the Turkish memorial dominating the entrance to the Dardanelles: **“A fitting memorial to those who died in the Gallipoli campaign, in which our two nations gained a lasting respect for one another”**. An **“admirable”** brief by the Imperial War Museum offset a **“distressingly bad address”** by the Director of the Turkish Army Historical Section.

The tour concluded with two and a half days in Istanbul enabling The Queen and Princess Anne to visit the English High School for Boys, established in 1905 and at that time giving a much-prized English and Turkish education to the rising generation of Turkish leaders. The headmistress and some children from the 120-year old English Girls’ High School were also present to bear witness to the success of Lady Stratford de Redcliffe’s efforts for Turkish female emancipation. The Duke of Edinburgh visited the Bosphorus Bridge built to British design by British and German contractors, and still under construction at that time. He then gave a stimulating address at a luncheon in his honour by the British Chamber of Commerce in Turkey and the Istanbul Chambers of Industry and Commerce. In this he touched upon the mistake of the blind pursuit of economic growth and the urgent need to protect the environment from further destruction by pollution. This was followed by a show-jumping competition in the afternoon, which they had actually tried to avoid.¹¹

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In the evening, after the Prime Minister's dinner, while The Queen and The Duke of Edinburgh met a large cross-section of Istanbul cultural and political life, The Princess Anne attended an informal dance given by the Naval Attaché for the officers of the Royal Yacht and escorting squadron in the ballroom of Pera House (the Consulate-General).¹²

After Divine Service on Sunday, the Royal party met Commonwealth citizens in the grounds of Pera House and was able to see Sir Charles Barry's historic Embassy mansion. Then they visited some of the famous sights: St. Sophia, the Blue Mosque of Sultan Ahmet, a glimpse of the now restored Harem and the main treasures of the Topkapı Museum. The Foreign Minister gave an informal small lunch in the restaurant within the Topkapı grounds and arranged displays of old Turkish music, including a Janissary band and some folk-dancing. Finally, on the way to the airport it was possible to visit the beautifully revealed 14th century mosaics and frescoes of St. Saviour in Chora, previously the Kariye Mosque until secularised by Atatürk and cleaned of plaster and whitewash by American archaeologists.¹³

Sarell commented that underlying the tour there had been a three-cornered struggle between Press departments, Press and security police. While the Press departments, Embassy and Turkish, did much, the security police and Press ***“too often combined to obscure the view and to mar the atmosphere”***. In spite of all, however, he remarked that the Royal party got a good view of the principal sights.¹⁴

Sarell saw Mr. Godber's presence as Minister-in-Attendance as an opportunity, much welcomed by the Turks, for bilateral talks on important political matters. Previous to the visit, that Mr. Godber had recently been in Brussels and New York discussing two subjects of great current interest to the British and the Turks—European security and Cyprus. Mr. Godber immediately struck up a warm personal relationship with Mr. Olcay at their talks and lunch together on 19 October, which was especially gratifying as Mr. Olcay and his wife accompanied the Royal party throughout their time in Turkey. It was obvious to everyone that Mr. Olcay was not just being polite when he said that there were no serious differences between the two countries and that the Royal Visit emphasised ***“the cordiality of [our] relations”***.¹⁵

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In a private conversation with Sarell, Mr. Olcay had been so impressed by his week in The Queen's company that he told him he could see **"no solution but for Turkey to join the Commonwealth"**. While Sarell recognised Mr. Olcay's cynicism and wit, the remark gave some measure of his genuine enthusiasm. Mr. Olcay was impressed, as all had been, by the charm and friendliness of The Princess Anne, and much impressed by her political awareness and quicken of thought. Very fortunately, the Turkish suite had been very well chosen. Mr. and Mrs. Olcay in particular were, in Sarell's opinion, agreeable travelling companions for The Queen and The Duke of Edinburgh throughout the tour.¹⁶

As mentioned earlier, Turkey was in the midst of a temporarily **"frozen"** political crisis at the time of the visit. The majority Justice Party had just called on its Ministers to withdraw from Mr. Erim's Government and it was obvious that a period of conflict lay immediately ahead. The brief references to Turkey's political, economic and social situation in The Queen's three speeches, and that given by The Duke of Edinburgh, were **"beautifully judged and gave rise to much favourable and thoughtful comment"**. On the Turkish side, for Sarell, the only point of obvious significance came in the President's speech when he deliberately created the opportunity to remind Her Majesty's Government of its responsibilities as a guarantor Power for Cyprus without actually naming the island. There was only one isolated attempt to involve The Queen in Turkish politics when the Justice Party newspaper complained that she had received the 87-year-old Mr. İsmet İnönü in his capacity as leader of the People's Republican Party. This **"absurdity"** was effectively silenced by swift Press releases issued by the Prime Minister's Office and the British Embassy. Sarell saw it worth remarking that the British Press were greatly impressed by the generally relaxed atmosphere in a country partly under martial law, of which the very light control of the streets already mentioned was striking evidence. Indeed, they found it quite impossible to determine from outward signs when the Royal party was in a martial law area and when not. As he remarked, **"this is one respect in which Turkey's image abroad should have benefited"**.¹⁷

Sarell described the coverage given the visit by the Turkish Press, radio and television in order to assess its full impact. Together with the capable assistance of the Information Departments in London, they had, as mentioned previously, been given much advance assistance. This achieved the publication of over 30 special articles about the Royal Family and three special supplements of remarkably high quality. However, all were gratified by the **"enormous and exceptionally favou-**

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nable” coverage given to the visit. Throughout the whole of their week in Turkey, the Royal party featured on the front pages of all the national newspapers and a great many local ones, including a small newspaper in a remote Black Sea area which headlined **“England’s Queen Elizabeth Taylor comes to Turkey”**.¹⁸

The over-all effect can perhaps best be judged from a few quotations from national newspapers on the day after The Queen’s departure. One commentator, referring to The Queen’s visit to Gallipoli, said that she had brought home to him the truth of the words that **“those who are good fighters are also good friends”**. Another described The Queen as **“Turkey’s most distinguished guest ever”**; yet another said that **“the Turkish people had shown more interest in The Queen than the most optimistic had hoped for and that her visit consequently provided more benefits for Britain than anyone had expected”**. Finally, an elderly and respected Left-wing columnist called that week **“The Queen’s Week”** and said that **“the charming Queen Elizabeth’s visit was a sweet memory to be cherished”**.¹⁹

Sarell commented that it was not usual for the Turkish Press to make **“handsome tributes”** of this kind and he thought it was important to recognise that they reflected the genuine feelings of the Turkish people as a whole. As he pointed out, it had been a wonderful week for them, **“a colourful and also meaningful interlude in their lives”**. Thus, he summed up the impact of the visit as an outstanding success both for Britain and for Turkey. Turkey felt the need of friends like Britain and sought inspiration from them in its struggles to preserve parliamentary democracy and achieve economic and social progress. It is also greatly in British interest that the country be put more firmly on the Western European map, and he thought it was very good that the British had been enabled to make such a striking contribution to that process.²⁰

As a final remark, Sarell mentioned his and his staff’s gratitude for **“the magic of this Royal Visit and for the warmth and kindness with which The Queen, The Duke of Edinburgh and The Princess Anne treated all of us with whom they came in contact, and we and all The Queen’s subjects in Turkey share to the full the tremendous pleasure and pride felt by the Turkish people at having such wonderful visitors present for a whole week in this country”**.²¹

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The Queen was not to visit Turkey again until some 37 years later, when she made a State Visit to the country 13-16 May 2008 at the invitation of the Turkish President, Abdullah Gül. During this visit, she visited the northwest town of Bursa, in addition to the larger metropolises of Ankara and Istanbul. In a speech at the banquet given in her honour at the Presidential Palace, she referred to her previous State Visit saying: ***“Here in 1971, I remarked on the tremendous achievement of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk in guiding this country of rich and ancient traditions along a course towards a modern, enlightened and democratic state. One could hardly have imagined then the further strides that Turkey would take to become today’s confident and dynamic democracy.”***²²

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²² *Royal Insight, State Visit to Turkey 13 to 16 May, 2008.* <http://www.royal.gov.uk/output/page6253.asp>. (Retrieved 17.07.2008).