

# Geography in Turkish higher education: Sea names for textbooks and maps

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This paper consists of two sections. The first section gives an overview of geography education in Turkish higher education institutions and the second sections summarizes the literature in reference to sea names. Geography was started to be taught in Turkish universities as an independent subject since 1915. The first geography department was opened in Istanbul University and Ankara, Erzurum and Izmir followed Istanbul in that respect. There were only 4 geography departments in Turkey until 1980. However, after 1980 with the establishment of Turkish Higher Education Board (YÖK) new geography departments were opened in different parts of Turkey and the number has reached to 55 today. The second section of this paper deals with how the water bodies named in Turkish higher education geography literature. There are a number of historical, political, cultural, and linguistic factors affecting the naming of the surrounding water bodies.

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## Introduction

Geography as a university teaching subject has been in universities formally since the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century. The subject was started to be taught in Istanbul University in 1915 and when the universities restructured in 1933, a geography department was established in that university. This was the first geography department established in a university in Turkey. The geography department in Ankara's faculty of Literature and History-Geography was established in 1935 as the second department in Turkey. After that date the number of universities has increased in Turkey, but a new geography department was not opened until 1974 when Erzurum Atatürk University started a geography department. The geography departments at Fırat and Ege Universities in Izmir followed the trend. But the establishment of Turkish Higher Education Board in 1981, the university system went through a number of reforms and geography departments have been opened in several universities including geography

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education departments. Six geography departments were opened in 1992 and another 6 were opened in 2009 only. Today there are 40 geography department and 15 geography education department which educate geography teachers for secondary schools. It is a dilemma if it is suitable to have both geography and geography education departments but it seems that major changes have been made in the structure and functioning of the departments and as of 2013 the YÖK has decided not to accept students in the faculty of Educations. Insisted, the number of students accepted to geography departments has increased considerably as almost 30 new geography departments were opened in the newly established universities in the last two decades.

Today there is 317 academic staff employed in geography departments. The number of students who enrolled in geography departments has increased tremendously despite many graduates cannot find jobs related to their education after graduation. Especially in last 3-4 years the enrolment numbers to some departments like chemistry, biology and physics decreased drastically there is no sign that geography enrolments will decline in the near future. As these accounts show geography departments spread throughout the country and student enrolments is still increasing.

However, when we examine the geographic work produced in these universities a number of shortcomings come to the attention. Yavan (2012) classified the development of Turkish geography in to three phases:

- a. Foundation, organization and rise (1915-1980)
- b. Disengagement from world and rapid growth (1981-2002)
- c. Spread throughout the country and new searches (2002-2013)

The first stage is covers the slow developments in the first five departments mentioned earlier. A number of European geographers had migrated Turkey for several reasons and some geographers received postgraduate geography education in Turkey. The first generation of geographers in Turkey worked hard to establish geography as a university subject and compared to the following period they were well connected outside world despite the disadvantages of technology at the first half of the 20th century. The most famous of these first generation of geographers İbrahim Hakkı Akyol (1888-1950), Besim Darkot (1903-1990), Ali Tanoğlu (1904-1974) ve Ahmet Ardel (1902-1978) from Istanbul and Cemal Arif Alagöz, Danyal Bediz, Cevat Rüştü Gürsoy and Mecdi Emiroğlu from Ankara. Many scholars believe that during this period Turkish geog-

raphy has developed in a manner similar to Western geography. However, I believe that after WW II Turkish geography still continued to follow traditional regional geography and produced Works that dealt with systematic documentation of different places in Turkey and could not follow the change in Western geographical approaches especially the quantitative revolution and the new developments afterwards.

The second period was deep the reformation of Turkish Higher education through the YÖK and a number of changes were introduced. It was this time that geography education departments were established under the faculties of education throughout Turkey. Parallel to the YÖK's policy to increase the number of universities, the number of geography and geography education departments boomed all over the country. So much energy must have been invested these internal developments that the connection between Turkish geography and outside world weakened during this period. Geography could not be able to find proper environment to question its ontological and epistemological issues. Basically the traditional approaches continued to be dominate the common literature and especially the post graduate theses were almost identical to those that was done 50 years ago. That was also time for Turkish Geographical Society (TCK-Türk Coğrafya Kurumu) to move from Ankara to Istanbul that was a major devolution in Turkish geography.

In the third period that started in 2002, a major criticism was raised by young geographers against traditional regional and deterministic approaches in geography. For the first time new approaches and methodologies called for and introduced in geographic literature. A new association (Turkish Association of Geographers) was established by these young geographers in 2012.

## **Naming of the seas surrounding Turkey**

It is generally accepted that the naming of water bodies around Turkey is something to do with linguistics. Old Turkish indicates names with an inclination of direction. The directions are coded in colours. The North, south, west and east has certain colours associated with them and all water bodies surrounding Turkey has one of the direction names associated with colours (Table 1). In a sense the naming is similar that of the South Korean usage in the sense that the water bodies are names depending on what direction is the water body is located in reference to the mainland.

**Table 1.** Colours and directions in old Turkish

Colour		Direction	
Turkish	English	Turkish	English
beyaz (ak)	white	batı	west
Kara (siyah)	dark-black	kuzey	north
Kızıl (al)	red	güney	south
Mavi-yeşil	blue-green	doğu	east

There are other factors affecting the naming of seas. Historical factors as in the case of the Aegean Sea, or natural characteristics as in the case of Marmara Sea are the examples of these.

**Figure 1.** Water bodies surrounding Turkey

Source : <http://www.delinetciler.net>

## The Aegean Sea (Ege Denizi,-Adalar Denizi) and political dimension

The most problematic naming around Turkish seas is the Aegean Sea. The name Aegean claimed to be coming from Greek mythology. Supposedly the name comes from the Greek King Aegeus. As a result of his sons' defeat by Crete King, he committed suicide by drawing himself in the sea. But historian Bilge Umar claims that the name Agea does not come from Greeks but it comes from Luwis which settled Anatolia even before the Greeks. But the name seems to have been used in Greek Sources and other languages as Agea. However, the Turkish sources tell a different story.

The first atlas ever published in Turkey in 1803 records Aegean sea as Anatolian Sea. Later in some French maps that published in Turkey the sea was called Mer Egee The historical Turkish Sources recorded the name as Adalar Denizi, the islands'sea. The first encounters of Turks with the Aegean Sea dates back 1081 when Turkish nomads migrated to Anatolia from the middle Asia. The names appear in Aydınoğulları and ot-toman sources and it is called 'the sea of islands' The sea has many islands depending on its tectonic and volcanic character. The Ottoman sources refer this sea as Adalar Denizi which is Sea of Islands or Archipelago. The most famous Turkish cartographer and sailor Piri Reis, used the term "Adalar Arası" or "Erso Peloga" in his 1519 book Kitab-ı Bahriye, the book of Seas. In Katip Çelebi's, 1656 book "Tuhfetü'l-Kibar Fi Esfari'l Bihar-Deniz Savaşları Hakkında Büyüklere Armağan- Gift to Adults on Sea Wars" the name is referred as 'Adalar arası yer', between the islands.

In *Turkish* literature Aegean Sea has not been considered as a separate water body but conceived as part of the Mediterranean Sea. The most famous proof of this is said by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. In a pitched battle against the Greek arm Atatürk commanded 'Armies the first target is the Mediterranean Sea, go foward!' It was obvious and Atatütık explained two years later that he pointed Izmir, and mentioned that the first encounter of the Army with the Mediterranean sea would be in Izmir.

In the Lozan treaty which was written in French originally, the name appears to be Mar Egee but the Turkish translation has the name as Adalar denizi.

One of the earliest geography textbooks published by famous geographer Faik Sabri Duran in 1938 mentioned the name Ege on page 27, but used Adalar Denizi on pages 70 and 328.

Finally, the first Geographical Congress in Turkey which convened in 1941, decided to use the name 'Ege' as a standard geographic name. However, recently some geogra-

phers argued that the name ‘Adalar Denizi’ should be used (Özey, 2001). However, currently almost no disagreement exists over the use of Ege Denizi and it is commonly used in maps and textbooks.

Although there is a consensus on the use of the name Ege, The Ege dispute is one of the major conflict area between Turkey and Greece and it has multiple dimensions.

## The Black Sea and Mediterranean Sea (Kara Deniz, Bahr-i Siyah ve Akdeniz Bahr-i Sefid)

As the Table 1 Shows in old Turkish the colour black (Turkish: kara) meant the direction of north. Since the black sea is located to the north of Turkey, it is called Kara Deniz. Although there are other reasons what it is called Kara Deniz, the most obvious reason was the linguistic indication.

The Mediterranean Sea is named in the same fashion. The colour white (Turkish: ak or beyaz) meant the direction of west and west of Anatolia is called Akdeniz as shown in Figure 2. Interestingly the south-western part of the country is surrounded by the Mediterranean Sea as well but the south meant the colour red and the Red Sea is

**Figure 2.** Akdeniz (The Mediterranean)



Source : <http://www.delinetciler.net>

## The Marmara Sea

The Sea of Marmara is an inland water body surrounded by the most populous part of Turkey. The name Marmara comes from the stone mined in the islands located in this sea. The Island of Marmara which is located to the west of the sea is famous for its marble that has been mined there for millennium. Therefore the name and the surrounding region is called Marmara. There has not seem to be any political dilemma in the usage of the name.

## Conclusions

Geography is now a well established subject in the universities and there is a large demand from students to get education in Geography departments and the number of enrolment increases each year as opposed to some of the subject which declined drastically lately. In terms of philosophical approaches Turkish geography is still following the traditional regional geographic approaches and recently a number of young and enthusiastic geographers have started pushing through a problem-base spatial science. Toponymy has not been an important study topic in Turkish geography and only few publications touch on the topic systematically.

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