

Experiencing Change*

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- Did you meet often with Turan Yavçan, the Deputy Governor?
- I would go whenever Turan Yavçan summoned me. He was a very busy man. His office was always overflowing with people. He resembled a civilian administrator more than a soldier. He enjoyed being among the public.

One day, he called me and asked me to go and inspect the institution of Darülaceze, which dated back to the Ottoman period, and the "The Society for Assistance to Darülaceze" that had been established to provide assistance to it. He also asked me to meet with his friend, retired officer Adnan Çelikoğlu, who had just been appointed as the director of the institution.

I went to Darülaceze. After conducting the necessary investigations and meetings, I submitted a report to Turan Yavçan in which I stated that the operation of both the institution and the support association needed to be reorganized.

Turan Yavçan asked me to form a founding committee to restructure the The Society for Assistance to Darülaceze and to make it functional again by organizing its congress. He also requested that I include İffet Halim Oruz, who was publishing Kadın magazine at the time and was known for her sensitivity toward social welfare issues.

I formed a founding committee with my fellow association members from Beylerbeyi, Zekeriya Salıcı and Ruhi Erman. Following my suggestion, we appointed İffet Halim Oruz as the president of the association and began our work.

As we examined the records, transactions, and accounts, we encountered a horrifying situation. Funds were being transferred from the municipal budget to the institution. However, since the municipal contribution was insufficient, the Democrats had founded this association under the name " The Society for Assistance to Darülaceze". The association collected money for Darülaceze—but the collected funds were embezzled. One of the big shots of the Democrat Party even had his dental work done there and didn't pay a penny. The former administrators were unable to account for anything.

- So Darülaceze had become a den of corruption?
- We uncovered such terrible things that I was deeply disturbed. For example, a wealthy man brought a crate of oranges to Darülaceze and threw them to the poor, lonely people who lived there in dormitory-like rooms. These people would catch the oranges mid-air. What a disgraceful understanding of charity!

The accounts and procedures were an utter mess. The care and condition of the residents presented a heartbreaking picture of misery. The corruption was rampant. We uncovered everything, one by one.

They had fabricated reports for the receipt book stubs used in collecting donations, claiming “they were burned.” We also determined the amount embezzled. We convened the general assembly and wanted to take the former administrators to court. Most of the offenses, however, had passed the statute of limitations.

Then, one of our members, Vehbi Koç, said, “Forget the court and all that.” I explained our financial needs and said, “In that case, you give us the money, and we’ll drop the legal action.” Without hesitation, Vehbi Koç provided the funds, and we covered the embezzlements. We restored both the institution and the support association, making them clean, healthy, and properly functioning.

Meanwhile, as the support association, we organized a first-of-its-kind ball in the garden of Beylerbeyi Palace. We named it “Dost Eller” (Friendly Hands), and it generated a high level of donations.

In the course of our work, we identified a significant deficiency. Darülaceze was founded to support only those with no one to care for them. Elderly individuals who had families but still needed care were not admitted. Yet there were so many elderly people who, despite having money, required care... And at that time, there wasn’t a single institution in Turkey to accommodate them.

To meet this need and take initiative in this area, we established a new association called the “Association for Establishing and Supporting Nursing Homes.” The administrative team from The Society for Assistance to Darülaceze, became the founders and administrators of this new association as well.

To raise funds, we commissioned gold-plated medallions dedicated to Turkish women, and we sent them both across the country and to embassies around the world to be sold.

With the money raised, we bought Akay Hospital in Bakırköy, renovated it, and established Turkey's first nursing home in Bahçelievler, Bakırköy. It is still operating there to this day. And I am still a member of the Association for Establishing and Supporting Nursing Homes.

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*(Excerpted and summarized from "Ali TOPUZ Anlatıyor – 1, Değişimi Yaşamak (1932–1972)," Interview by Hikmet BİLA, Doğan Egmont Publishing, İstanbul, November 2011)

ALİ TOPUZ



Ali Topuz Anlatıyor - 1

DEĞİŞİMİ YAŞAMAK

(1932-1972)

Söyleşi: Hikmet Bilâ



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