

Empowerment Through Tea & Sugar: A Story of Sovereignty by Self-Sustenance

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Following the Turkish War of Independence the young Turkish Republic, founded in 1923, was in ruins, its agriculture destroyed, the country with its shrunk borders deprived of all the previously available food sources of the former Ottoman territory. The first Izmir Economic Congress was held in 1923, even before the declaration of the Republic, as an urgent attempt to revive the economy shattered by the war. The lesson learned from the experience of the last decades of the Ottoman Empire was clear: Sovereignty and political liberty could only be achieved by economic independence and self-sustenance.

The goal of choosing to be a completely self-sustained country was declared openly at the Economy Congress: All basic needs had to be grown and produced within the country. Soon after that, the establishment of a sugar factory was a manifestation of this much-desired independence. A group of farmers had initiated a campaign to raise funds to establish a sugar factory in Uşak, and started growing sugar beets. As an early example of a community-driven initiative, it was supported by the state and subsequently several state-owned sugar factories were established throughout the country. Turkey also had to find a substitute for the traditional Turkish coffee, as it could not be grown in the country's climate. In 1924, Law No: 407 was passed calling for the cultivation of tea in the Black Sea province of Rize; a decision which eventually turned the nation to one of avid tea drinkers. In parallel to sugar & tea initiatives, the establishment of Rural Education Institutes across the country progress brought schools, agricultural training and social activities to the countryside.

This paper will present an early envision of locavorism in Turkey, now challenged dramatically by globalism and populist politics.