Şükrü Kaya, who worked as Minister of Interior and Deputy Minister of Exterior during Atatürk’s time, was not only a statesman, but also a writer and translator. He had translated works such as Daniel Defoe’s “Robinson Crusoe”, Henry Beraud’s "Le Martyre de l’obèse”, Charles Rist and Charles Gide’s "Histoire des Doctrines Economiques depuis les Physiocrates jusqu’a Nos Jours", Buckley’s "Old Tales of Greece" and Albert Mathiez’s "La Révolution française" into Turkish.¹

¹ Şükrü Kaya together with Atatürk (17.06.1932-Ankara)
Kaya’s translation of “Old Tales of Greece” published in 1949 is of importance to our subject because while in Atatürk’s time, the Turkish History Thesis (that civilization was born in Central Asia and spread to the West and Europe through migration) was taught in History course books, right after Atatürk’s death in 1938, this thesis was abandoned; instead the view We will join the Western Civilization; what created European civilization is “Ancient Greek Humanism” and the "Greek Miracle"; to join Western Civilization, “Humanist Virtue” should be instilled in the young generations in schools and in the whole society by community centers; to this purpose, we should teach Ancient Greek Literature, Homer, and make the society adopt these through theater, opera, etc. became dominant in the National Education and Culture policy of the state. One day after Atatürk’s death, on November 11, 1938, Şükrü Kaya, who had resigned from his position as Minister, stated in the preface he wrote to the 1949 print of his translation of “Old Tales of Greece” that he himself also shared this view, using the following words:

“The learning doctrine of the Renaissance period called Humanism starts with the re-study and imitation of Greek, Roman, and other classical legends (myths, tales). (...) In Europe, the Renaissance period started with the translation of Greek and Roman literature and philosophy into European languages. Homer, Hesiod, and Virgil are the most important classics translated. (...) When my children were in high school, we would sometimes translate parts (of Buckley’s book “Old Tales of Greece”) together. Some teachers and writer friends who saw the original and the translation of the book insistently repeated that its publication would be beneficial for the youth and worthwhile. (...) If it is of use, however limited, to the country, the honor of service belongs to those friends who gave the courage to have it printed.”

What Kaya defined as the “humanist doctrine” in the “Old Tales of Greece” was the (anthropomorphist and mystical humanist) belief system that viewed god as an entity in a human form, and that deified successful humans. While the society was imbued with “Ancient Greek Humanism” by the state after 1938, Atatürk who had gained success throughout his life with his many superior achievements, had started to be commemorated in ceremonies organized within this view. "Humanist" writers praised Atatürk with expressions resembling the "person-deity" exaltations in Ancient Greek Literature; the Mausoleum built for Atatürk was being designed in line with the movement that the state adopted as educational and cultural policy.

Atatürk’s mortal remains that were preserved in the Ethnographic Museum would be moved to the completed Mausoleum on his 15th death anniversary on November 10, 1953 with a great state ceremony.
Days in advance, newspapers had started to make special announcements related to this ceremony; the Dünya newspaper directed by Falih Rifki Atay had published a six pages long “Atatürk Supplement” on November 10, 1953. In his article covering the front page of this supplement, Ruşen Eşref Ünaydın compared Atatürk to “(the person-deity) Athena in Phidias’ (Ancient Greek Temple) Parthenon” and to “Hermes, which Praxiteles deified”; he likened Atatürk, whom he considered superior to them, to “Zeus (the ruler god of the Ancient Greeks) who descended from Mount Olympos with storm and lightning”. In his article titled “Death Year” published on the 3rd page, Falih Rifki Atay described Atatürk as “more legendary than Homer's heroes in the Iliad”, which is considered to be the masterpiece of Ancient Greek Humanism. The special interview with Şükrü Kaya, who had translated Buckley’s “Old Tales of Greece”, was published on the 5th page of the “Atatürk Supplement” with the following heading:

The speech that Atatürk wanted to be delivered addressing the whole world Atatürk’s dinner table was a talking place on country issues.

A memory of a dinner table
Narrator: Şükrü Kaya
Writer: Yekta Ragip Önen

The special interview with Şükrü Kaya on the 5th page of the Atatürk Supplement published by the Dünya newspaper of 10.11.1953.
(Personal Archive of C. Özakınç)

Y. R. Önen reported his interview with Kaya to his readers as follows:

I am in the house of Şükrü Kaya, a close friend of the great soldier, great revolutionary, and great human Atatürk. On the eve of November 10, I hear from him his memories of Atatürk. I had requested this from him, and he had said “Alright come and we’ll talk”. As a state administrator who served in the historical period of the War of Independence and
revolution, my valuable colleague Şükrü Kaya’s memories of Atatürk are so rich… He has been wholly absorbed by a flood of memories, and is telling them with deep excitement, in ecstasy. It is impossible to take notes and record them. He describes Atatürk's views, thoughts, sensations, humanity, and gentlemanly sides with events; as he gets more excited, new memories flood back, and I find myself falling short of grasping the greatness of the "Great Human". Dear Şükrü Kaya will of course write about the days he spent together with Atatürk, but I will report only one or two memories from his treasure.

Great human: Atatürk

Look at "Human Atatürk": Minister of Interior Şükrü Kaya is going to go on inspection in the Çanakkale territory. When he visits Atatürk to say goodbye, Atatürk says:

- When you visit Çanakkale, you will also visit our glorious martyrs. No doubt you will fulfill this duty! Yet, what kind of speech will you give? I’ll tell you; you will say glorious martyrs that lie here, we commemorate you with reverence and respect. By the side of the Mehtemtćik monument, you will speak with all the eloquence of your tongue. You will say Rest here in peace and quietude. If you had not been there, if you hadn’t used your chests as shields against steel fortresses, this strait would have been passed, Istanbul would have been occupied, our country’s lands would have been invaded.

- Yes, I will say that!

- No, no! ...You shall speak very differently, beyond this. You shall speak as if addressing the whole world. There in Çanakkale, you shall commemorate with reverence and respect not only our martyrs, but also the people who shed their blood on our soil and the brave warriors!

- Pasha, I cannot do that because these words are the sublime words that only you can utter.

- You shall say them! You will speak in this way from Çanakkale to the world. You should speak in that manner!

Şükrü Kaya leaves Atatürk, and at night they come together again. Atatürk, hands a long sheet of paper to Şükrü Kaya. It is the speech that Kaya will deliver in Çanakkale. Atatürk prepared it himself. And Şükrü Kaya takes this speech, goes to Çanakkale, and delivers the speech by the graves of the Mehtemtćik. The statements in the speech that Şükrü Kaya utters to address the foreign warriors are the following:

“Heroes that shed their blood on the soil of this land! Here you are in the soil of a friendly country. Rest in peace and quietude. You lie side-by-side, bosom-to-bosom with the Mehtemtćiks. Mothers who sent their sons to war from faraway lands. Wipe away your tears, your sons are in our bosom. They are in peace and they will rest peacefully here in tranquility. After they gave their lives on this land, they became our sons.”

In Çanakkale, Şükrü Kaya utters the sentences that reflect Atatürk’s high humane feelings towards the nations he defeated on his soil, and he returns to Ankara.

It turns out that, there are some journalists that record these words which is uttered by the side of the Mehtemtćik Monument. They report these words to their newspapers, and the speech spreads to the world. Not more than a week later, Şükrü Kaya is flooded with telegrams; days later, letters arrive all the way from Australia and New Zealand, from mothers eyes in tears, brothers, political figures, soldiers... Şükrü Kaya is congratulated for his speech and appreciated.

However, the discourse belongs to the great soldier. And this great soldier does not bear feelings of enmity to the nations he defeated yesterday, but with the most humane and civil feelings, he extends the hand of friendship. And he makes the Minister of Interior of the Republic of Turkey voice this. Peace at home, peace in the world!.. How obvious it is that Atatürk took this dictum from the fact that enmity was forgotten among world nations!

(...) The happiness I feel for recounting here some of Şükrü Kaya's memories, though incomplete, is deep. My honorable colleague will quite naturally write all his memories and present it as gift to the country. (...)
After retrieving Şükrü Kaya’s speech that he delivered by the Mehmetcik Monument from the Hakimiyeti Milliyê newspaper of 26.08.1931, we published it in full as a reprint for the first time in the March 2015 issue of our magazine, and it became evident that these words did not exist in the speech.

These words addressed to the Anzac (Australia and New Zealand) soldiers who died in the 1915 Battle of Gallipoli, were made up using poetic expressions resembling those of Ancient Greek heroes by the translator of “Old Tales of Greece”, Şükrü Kaya, who adopted “Ancient Greek Humanism” and who was deeply excited, in ecstasy, during an interview in 1953 with a journalist who listened to him without taking notes of his narration.3

Turkey had joined the United Nations, the USA, and England in the Korean War in 1950. In Korea, the Turkish Brigade had met the ANZACS coming from Australia. The Anzacs and Turks, who had been on the enemy fronts in Gallipoli in 1915, this time, had
become allies in Korea in 1950-1953. In fact, the Anzacs had performed the April 25, 1915 Gallipoli Campaign Anniversary ceremonies of the years 1951 and 1953 together with the Turkish Brigade in Korea, and the Korean War had ended in July 1953.

The first meeting of the Turkish Brigade and the Australia-New Zealand Anzac troop in Korea (Anzac soldiers in the right top corner)

The Turkish Brigade and Australia Anzac troop on April 25, 1953 at the 38th anniversary ceremony of the 1915 Gallipoli Campaign, standing in silence.

The Turkey-Australia friendship was built by the soldiers of the two countries on the fronts.

This friendship does not need the words of Şükrü Kaya that he produced in ecstasy on November 10, 1953.


2 In Uluğ İğdemir's translation: "foreign newsmen" (Atatürk And The Anzacs, p. 40). But, in the original newspaper, there is no "yabancı"=foreign. There are only the words: "bir kaç gazeteci". ("Bir kaç = few; some" - "gazeteci=Journalist")
Elsie Finimore Buckley, "Old Tales of Greece" 1908.,p. 347: "O father Zeus," he prayed, "who rulest upon Ida, before thee do I burn the body of my son, and before my friends and before my foes, that they both may see it. May the wine which I pour forth upon his body be a libation of peace, that by his death he may join together in friendship those hands which by his sin he made to draw the sword upon each other. O Zeus almighty, grant my prayer!" The people bowed their heads as they heard, and the old man poured forth the last libation. The salt tears ran from his eyes and fell upon the body of his son, and washed away from his mind all memory of his sin and cowardice, and only the image of him remained as he had been when he came in his youth and beauty for the winning of the bull. So can the hand of death wipe out all ugliness and wrong.