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FACTS ON TURKISH

POPPY





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DIRECTORATE GENERAL OF PRESS AND INFORMATION

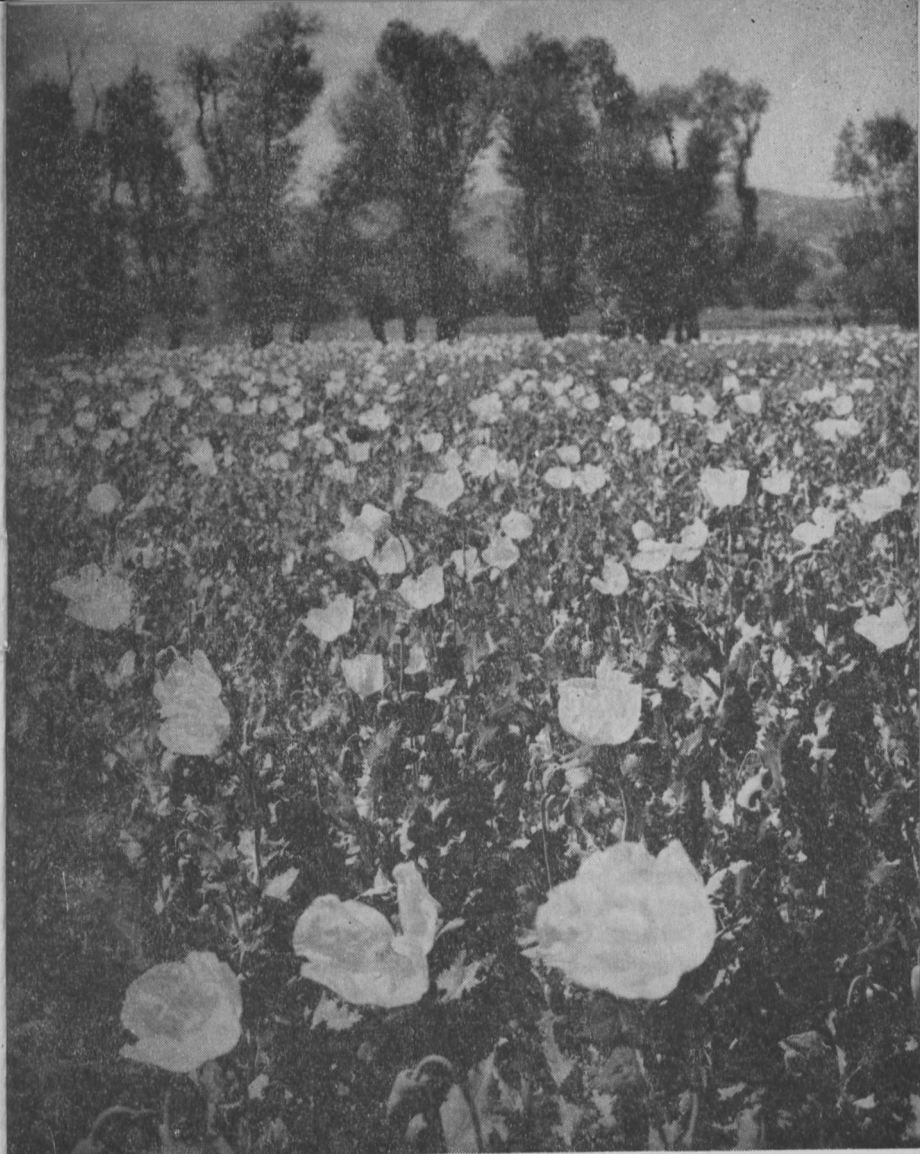


FACTS ON TURKISH
POPPY



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Blooming of the opium poppy.



Memorial of the German People



FACTS ON TURKISH POPPY

INTRODUCTION :

In recent years, Turkish poppy cultivation has become an important issue of Turkish domestic and foreign policy. As one of the traditional opium producing countries, Turkey has been unfairly made a target for much criticism and controversial debate, particularly by certain international interest groups, on the pretext that some of the Turkish opium was channelled into illicit trafficking increasing the addiction problem in certain countries.

It is most unfortunate that this issue and false allegations have been widely exploited and the matter has been sometimes linked with political questions such as Cyprus and the embargo on arms deliveries.

We are confident that in this brief pamphlet you will find an objective exposé of «the opium poppy affair» based on facts and documents established by the most reliable and competent international authorities.

A. BACKGROUND :

1. What is the poppy plant?

«Poppy is the common name for plants of several genera of the poppy family PAPAVERACEA, especially the type genus papaver. Papaver contains about a hundred species, mostly native to central and southern Europe and temperate Asia.»

Most of these species are growing wild in temperate climates and most of the cultivated ones are used in gardening their flowers varying in colour from white, purple, dark blue, brown to yellow and pink.

Among these species only one, namely *papaver somniferum* is at present available for pharmaceutical utilization. Morphine and its derivatives extracted from *papaver somniferum* are needed in the pharmaceutical industry and as it seems codeine cannot easily be replaced by synthetic substitutes.

2. A brief history :

No plant in human history has caused disputes like the poppy plant. It has been cultivated for thousands of years as its advantages as well as its disadvantages have been discovered by human beings a long time ago.

Homer's Iliad in the 4th century B. C. mentions a substance which makes «people forget sad memories» as a reference to opium. At least 3500 years of recorded history is full of references to opium. Greek bas-reliefs in the Pergamum Museum in Turkey and Roman coins in Afyon Museum with opium poppy designs indicate the poppy was cultivated in Turkey since antiquity and Roman times.

3. Importance of opium poppy cultivation to the Turkish peasant :

Although opium poppy cultivation provided a great many Anatolian peasants with the only source of income, the Turkish Governments have constantly made efforts to control cultivation and to decrease the cultivated area, solely for humanitarian considerations. In 1940, 42 provinces out of 67 were cultivating the opium poppy. In 1961 opium poppy cultivation was reduced to 35 provinces and in 1962 to 25 provinces. Two years later, in 1964, the number of provinces was reduced to 16. In 1968, the number of these provinces was further reduced to 11 and the following year, 1969, cultivation was permitted only in 9 provinces. In 1970, opium was produced in 7 provinces. This gradual and calculated decrease did not affect considerably the Turkish farmer, as in the regions the poppy cultivation was banned, the peasants were able to cultivate other crops. It was quite obvious that in 1971

Turkey had limited its poppy cultivation to the minimum and could not move any further without seriously undermining social and economic stability in the area because of the poor economic characteristics of the remaining 7 provinces.

In fact, the opium poppy plant meant to the Anatolian cultivator more than a simple crop. To him the uses of opium poppy range from bread, pastries and cookies to a unique cream, from ready-made sedatives for stomach ailments, tooth-ache to cures for dysentery and pulmonary diseases etc. Its waste is used as a high quality animal feed. Its stalks are used for heating purposes. In short, for certain regions, cultivation of the opium poppy is a way of life which could only be changed in the long run by a systematic economic development rather than imposing decisions of interdiction on cultivator.

4. Total ban of the poppy cultivation in 1971 :

In view of the exaggerated reports about the increasing trend of addiction in general and on the suggestion of the U. S. in particular, the Government of Turkey opted for the total ban of the poppy cultivation in Turkey. Thus, poppy cultivation was totally prohibited starting from the autumn of 1972 by a Government Decree dated 29 June 1971. Meanwhile, the U. S. Government promised Turkey to assist in solving the problems with which poppy cultivators would be confronted. This scheme included financial compensation to be paid to the cultivators, as well as the industrial and agricultural development of the region in question.

This approach, which was not based on thorough study of the ban in all its aspects, proved to be unrealistic even at its initial phase. The importance of poppy cultivation for the people in the region had been underestimated and the external assistance promised to develop the region could not be realized at an adequate level.

On the other hand, the decision to ban affected also the world legal supply of opium adversely as the need for



opium alkaloids to be used in the pharmaceutical industry increased constantly. The pharmaceutical industries in Europe and the U. S. began to look for other sources to provide opium or capsules to manufacture fine alkaloids to be used for pharmaceutical purposes.

Under these circumstances, it then became quite clear that the total ban imposed on the Turkish cultivators, without the open consent of the people directly concerned, could hardly be maintained for very long in a democratic country.

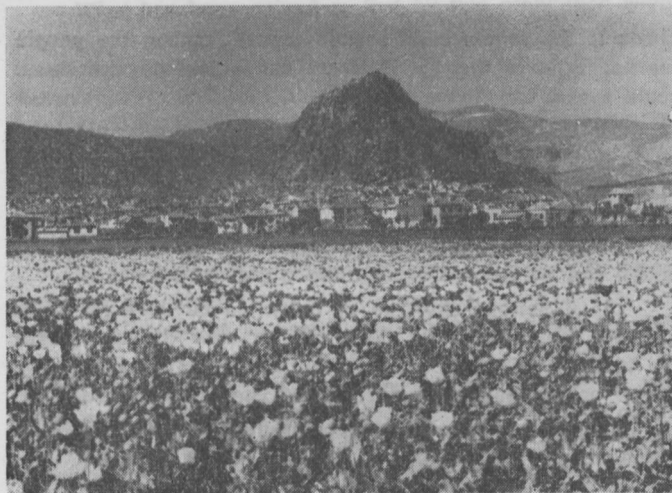
The decision to ban was constantly criticised in the Turkish press. Diplomatic observers in Turkey expected that people's discontent on the opium issue would find ready expression in the national elections in 1973. During the election campaign, all of the political parties made the poppy ban an issue, underlining particularly the plight of the impoverished cultivators who were practically deprived of their only source of income.

5. Resumption of poppy cultivation in 1974 :

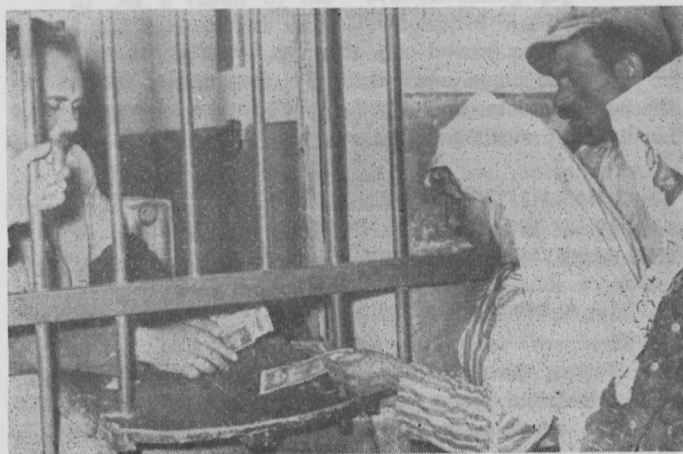
Although every possible effort was deployed in order to remedy the negative social and economic effects of the prohibition, the plight of a considerable number of people who depended on legal poppy farming as their only source of income continued to foster. Furthermore, a potentially dangerous social resentment gradually increased among the people affected by the ban.

The Turkish Government, by a Decree dated 1 July 1974, No. 7522 lifted the ban on poppy cultivation in 6 provinces and certain sub-provinces of the Province of Konya. With the same Decree strictest control measures were also adopted. The main reasons for the resumption of cultivation could be summarised as follows :

a) In time, the plight and poverty of 1,500,000 people directly affected by the ban gained a new dimension and the efforts made in order to solve the problems related to the prohibition did not succeed. Consequently, economic



Opium poppy and the fortress of Afyonkarahisar



After delivery of the crop to the State Monopoly (Turkish Soil Products Office) the farmers receive their cash from Pay - Office.

chaos in the region and social unrest among the people reached a level that no democratically elected government could ignore any longer.

b) While the ban gave the wrong impression to the world public opinion that all opium poppy growers in Turkey had been involved in illicit traffic and the Turkish Government had been unable to control it, other countries tended to increase their production to meet the growing need for opium and opium alkaloids in the world market.

c) A serious shortage of opium to be used for pharmaceutical purposes has been felt all over the world. Yet the kind of opium produced in Turkey is of highest quality as far as the medical and scientific use is concerned.

d) The suppression of poppy cultivation resulted in an annual loss of 500 million TL. for the Turkish economy.

e) The external assistance to compensate the cultivators and to ensure industrial and agricultural development of the region remained highly insufficient.

f) It was proved only after the ban that the cultivation of substitute crops was practically impossible because of the poor character of the soil as well as the adverse climatic conditions prevailing in the region.

WHAT HAS HAPPENED WHEN TURKEY STOPPED CULTIVATION AND WHAT WOULD HAVE HAPPENED IF TURKEY HAD MAINTAINED THE BAN

1. A ban of two years and its international repercussions :

Turkey, the producer of 5 to 10 % of world opium until 1971, prohibited poppy cultivation for humanitarian reasons and thus tried its best to contribute to positive efforts in the fight against drug abuse and illicit trafficking at the expense of its own legal interests and that of poppy cultivators.

What has been gained or lost by this prohibition which lasted two years? And who has gained what? In order to reach sound conclusions, the developments which took place between 1972 and 1974 should briefly be recalled :

a) The other opium-producing countries have concentrated their efforts to increase their production with the sole aim of replacing the Turkish supply for the pharmaceutical market. In their efforts they were supported and encouraged by the countries which advocated the Turkish ban.

b) The heroin continued to flow into the illicit American market, coming from other countries.

c) The world pharmaceutical industries began to face a serious shortage of raw material with an increasing trend. The absence of the Turkish opium and poppy capsules with their good quality and high morphine content was deeply felt by pharmaceutical industries, which were forced to cut down their production, even though the demand for medical use increased sharply.

d) As a result of the ever-increasing gap between supply and demand, the strategic stocks of opium had to be used up in order to meet the need for medicals.

e) Meanwhile, the demand for opium was diverted especially to India, encouraging this country to increase its production to supply the pharmaceutical market.

f) Efforts mobilised to find ways and means of substitute opiates by synthetic drugs have been in vain so far.

g) The decision of total ban proved to be wrong from the Turkish point of view as well, as the Turkish farmer of the poppy growing region was confronted with a serious economic and social crisis, in spite of the efforts deployed.

The United States of America, upon the unilateral decision of Turkey to prohibit the cultivation of poppy, could provide only 35 million US dollars for the financing of various projects in the region. And during the two-year period of the ban, only 15 million US dollars of this amount could be allocated.

THE LIMITED AND CONTROLLED OPIUM POPPY CULTIVATION

Attaching primordial importance to humanitarian considerations, the Turkish Government, while deciding to authorise only the unbalanced method of cultivation, has at the same time adopted the most comprehensive and effective measures of control in order to prevent the illicit traffic of opium. These wide-ranging measures have been praised also by the United Nations experts who examined them in detail upon the request of Turkey.

The Turkish Government, while taking this step concerning directly the welfare of a section of the Turkish rural population, was also mindful of its international responsibilities and obligations to the World Community; therefore, every effort has been made to ensure a closely guarded and fool-proof control mechanism, to avoid and prevent any possible illicit traffic. Turkey is cooperating with the competent UN bodies in order to prevent illicit trafficking. As a result, the UNFDAC has decided to assist Turkey in its efforts.

As it is practically impossible to describe all measures of control adopted by the Turkish Government, some of them are briefly mentioned here :

- Full application of individual licensing under strict and constant control.
- Continuous checks by law enforcement officers on the plots.
- Establishment of joint travelling committees in the provinces.
- Secure storage system.
- The use of helicopters and light aircraft to control the poppy cultivation.
- Detailed land survey.
- Use of undercover intelligence teams to detect illegal cultivation and marketing.



- The mobilisation of all intelligence organisations particularly during the harvest season to prevent trafficking.
- The monopoly of TMO (Turkish Soil Products Office) in buying and in exporting of poppies.
- Full cooperation with Interpol and other intelligence bodies.
- Severe punishment of breaches.
- Construction of an extraction and alkaloid factory in Turkey.

THE LICENSING SYSTEM

The «License Law» was enacted in 1971 as was required by the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs of 1961, but not implemented as the total ban followed it. After the lifting of the ban, this Law has been implemented very carefully. This new system has laid a sound and effective basis for a thorough control of poppy cultivation from the sowing of seeds in the fields to the harvest.

The license system contains mainly the following procedures and phases :

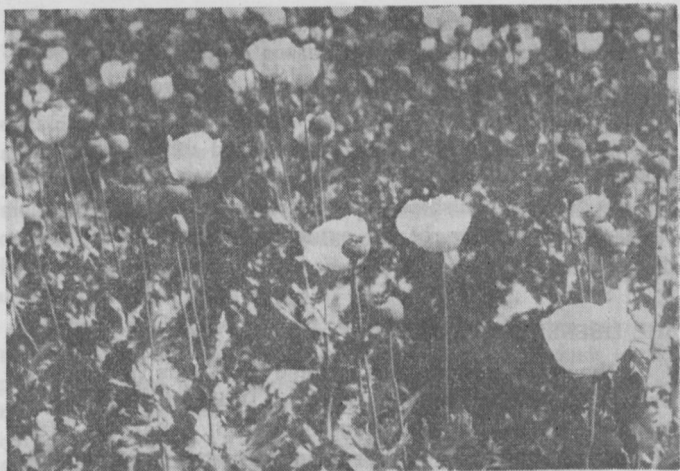
1. Every year cultivators in the 7 provinces apply to TMO for licenses.
2. Applications are examined by the TMO experts carefully, particularly from the point of view of whether or not applicants can grow other crops.

The economic and social standard of the cultivator and the location of fields for controlling is taken into account in the scrutiny of applications.

TMO is not obliged to issue licenses to every applicant and the experts use their discretion about the size of the field (varying from 1 to 5 decares for one family).

3. Once licenses are issued, the TMO experts visit the fields and mark the area that every cultivator is allowed to cultivate opium.





While some of the capsules on the main stem have ripened and let their petals fall, others are still blooming.



Poppy cultivation and production control and capsule and yield estimation on the field by Soil Products Office Expert

4. In the spring the fields are again checked by TMO experts and the first rough estimate of the harvest is established and the cultivation in excess is destroyed.

5. TMO experts continue to check the fields until the poppies are harvested.

6. Before the cultivator starts harvesting the unlanced pods, TMO experts control again to see whether the pod is lanced or not, and they establish the final estimate for harvest. The cultivator is required to have a written permission to harvest.

7. Any cultivator who breaches the rules of the licensing is deprived permanently from cultivation and tried by courts which have no discretion regarding punishment.

NO LANCING, NO OPIUM, NO HEROIN :

After thorough consultations with the UN Narcotic Division experts and upon their recommendation, the Government of Turkey in 1974 prohibited the incision of poppy capsules, a measure which no doubt has been one of the most effective measures against illicit traffic of opium. By the adoption of producing unincised or unlanced poppy capsules, in other words «poppy straw process», obtaining of raw opium has been completely eliminated and thus illicit traffickers have been deprived of their raw material for heroin.

Even though the method of straw process has been implemented for the first time, the result constituted a great success for Turkey. The following public assessment of the UN Mission is an irrefutable confirmation of this effective implementation :

«The Mission was greatly impressed by the success of the control system in this first year of the new policy and by the fact that farmers were not lancing their poppy capsules.»

«Farmers had obeyed the law and no single case of lancing of capsules has been detected. There have been no reported cases of illicit trafficking in opium and known illicit traffickers have made no efforts to obtain opium. (1)

«The United Nations Mission visited poppy fields of its own choice in three of the seven provinces in which the Turkish Government has licensed controlled poppy cultivation for the production of poppy straw. It was able to discuss and examine all aspects of the harvest and to see the results of the decisions taken by the Government and supported by the UN. It saw no evidence of the lancing of poppy capsules in contravention of the Government prohibition both of lancing and production of opium, and was informed by responsible Turkish officials that no single case of lancing had been detected.» (2)

As a result of the straw process methods, no opium is produced in Turkey and consequently the danger of supplying raw material for heroin manufacturers has been totally eliminated.

THE NUMBER OF PERSONNEL EMPLOYED IN CONTROLLING :

It has been argued that Turkey does not have enough personnel required for a constant and strict control. Some circles alleged even that altogether 200 men have been employed for this purpose.

Although the reports of UN Mission who examined the control mechanism in the field deny these allegations, it is worthwhile to mention the fact that in 7 provinces TMO employs 800 controllers in addition to other office personnel

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- (1) *Excerpt from the Report of the United Nations Narcotics Mission to Turkey, 1-8 July, 1975.*
- (2) *Press Release of the United Nations, dated July 25, 1975, issued in Geneva, No. 75-8-E.*

and the Gendarmerie has 3,600 men on constant duty solely for opium poppy control. A considerable number of other personnel, such as local police and the head man of every village, are also fully engaged in control operations.

In addition to this quantitative aspect, it also should be borne in mind that most of the control teams are equipped with vehicles and modern communications apparatus.

CREATION OF AN ALKALOID INDUSTRY :

It is a contradiction in terms that an opium producing country should import its morphine, its codeine and other related pharmaceutical needs from industrialized countries. There were years, in the 1950's when Turkey could not import morphine and codeine from abroad due to foreign exchange difficulties. Now, with limited and controlled cultivation, plans conceived a decade ago will be translated into an alkaloid factory, at most in two years' time in the poppy growing region to process opium poppy into pharmaceutical substances.

The preparations for the construction of an opium alkaloid factory have been completed. The project that was put on international bidding, in which firms from 6 countries participated, has been contracted. The factory which is expected to be operational in 1978, will produce fine opium alkaloids for which the universal need in medical and scientific fields is increasing.

The factory will, on the one hand, facilitate the implementation of the unbalanced poppy cultivation, and contribute to the international use of opium alkaloids for medical and scientific purposes on the other.

Turkey with its harvest of poppy capsules amounting to 20,000 tons annually and its alkaloid factory which will be operational in 1978, will contribute considerably to the efforts to meet the world requirement for opium alkaloids.



A TEST CASE : SUCCESS OF THE TURKISH CONTROL SYSTEM

Following a two-year period of interval, the Turkish Government has successfully implemented the new system of control, even though both the poppy straw process and the licensing mechanism have been introduced for the first time.

The UNFDAC Mission has voiced its assessment in this respect with the following statement :

«The Mission was well impressed by the attitude of the poppy farmers and the efficient working of the control system established by the Turkish authorities.» (1)

In this context, the role and the contribution of UNFDAC should be mentioned with much appreciation, as the UN experts advised Turkish authorities on the measures of control to be adopted on the one hand and UNFDAC and Division of Narcotic Drugs have assisted the Turkish Government on the other.

President Ford of the USA expressed his satisfaction on the effectiveness of the control mechanism with the following statement :

«When Turkey resumed poppy cultivation last year, many Americans were concerned about the possibility of an increase in the availability of heroin from Turkish sources. We were relieved by your Government's assurances that effective controls would be implemented and by your prohibition of opium gum production by pod incision and adoption of the poppy straw process. I am greatly encouraged by current reports highlighting the effectiveness of your controls over the recent harvest.»

(1) UNFDAC Press Release, Geneva 25 July 1975.



CLOSE COOPERATION WITH U. N. F. D. A. C. :

When Turkey announced on 1 July 1974 the resumption of poppy cultivation the Turkish Government regarded it as a humanitarian duty to establish an effective control system which would satisfy the world community. The Turkish Government also announced that it would welcome offers of cooperation and technical assistance, to which UNFDAC duly responded in the control system, law enforcement, services' training, the supply of equipment. Upon the invitation of the Turkish Government six UNFDAC missions paid official visits to Turkey between September 1974 and November 1975 to discuss various aspects of the control system and the cooperation in the narcotic field.

The multisectoral UNFDAC projects were intended to strengthen control, to develop an efficient and leak-proof system of control to improve the output of morphine and poppy seed, and to further improve the efficiency in farming.

UNFDAC provided Turkey with technical cooperation, training programmes and equipment for law enforcement personnel for more efficient communication against illicit traffickers.

There are definite plans to make use of aerial surveillance by the use of air-borne remote sensing equipment called «compasstrip» to assist in the identification of fields of opium poppies and eliminate unlicensed cultivation, through UNFDAC assistance, in 1976.

B. DRUG ADDICTION AND TURKEY :

In Turkey the opium poppy has only been used positively, namely for its seeds, oil, straw as animal feed, as heating oil, oil for painting etc.

The negative effects of this plant have never been felt by the Turkish people i. e. addiction has never been a problem for Turkey, unlike other poppy growing countries in the East.

However, Turkey, being sincerely concerned with the drug addiction problem of some other countries, has always participated actively in all efforts in this respect. Not only did she become a party to all international conventions, but also cooperated with other countries on a bilateral basis.

It is obvious that the most realistic approach to the problem of addiction should be based primarily on sociological and psychological motives, which have so far been ignored, coupled with the measures of control in cultivation and trade of both narcotic and synthetic drugs.

C. ILLICIT TRAFFIC OF OPIATES (OPIUM AND ITS DERIVATIVES) AND TURKEY :

No doubt raw opium has been an attractive target for the international illegal traders for centuries. Illicit traffic routes have been established throughout the world starting from the 19th century onwards. These trade routes grew increasingly, turning to an illicit network of underground activities, including the occupation of couriers, agents, small size and clandestine laboratories.

Because of its geographical position on the traditional routes of commerce between Europe and Asia on one hand and because of the fact that she has been an opium producing country, much suspicion and accusation are directed at Turkey. In fact, Turkey took very severe measures to fight against illicit trafficking and cooperated with the international organisations and all countries concerned.

In this respect Turkish Penal Code and other related laws have been so indiscriminately and vigorously implemented that some countries who have been bitterly criticising Turkey are disturbed when their own citizens were sentenced to heavy penalties for trafficking.

Reliable researchers in the US established the fact explaining how Turkey was made scapegoat as the following:



«In all, Turkey produced only 3 to 8 % of the illicit opium available throughout the world. Nevertheless, Turkey was chosen as the «most feasible target» for several reasons.» (1)

«There is no way known of chemically tracing heroin seized in the US back to the country, no less area, of its origin.» It is all done «by deductive reasoning». There is always latitude for identifying a convenient prime source. (2)



**Control of incision of technically ripe capsules by
Turkish Soil Products Office and Gendarmerie Teams.**

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- (1) *The Incredible War Against the Poppies*, by Edward Jay Epstein, *Esquire Magazine*, December 1974.
(2) George Belk, *Bureau of Narcotic Drugs*.

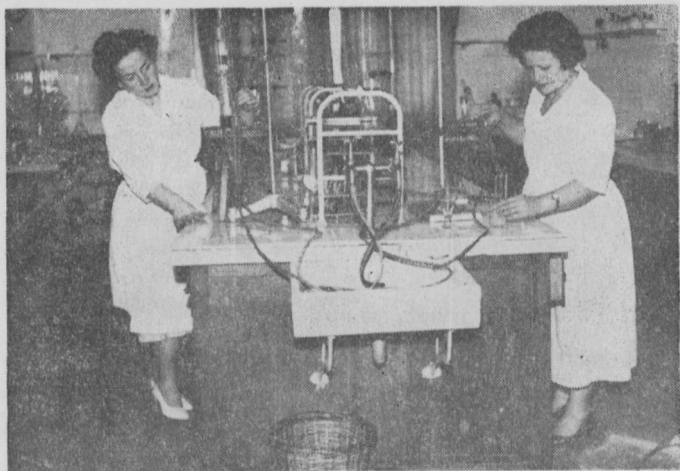
« . . . Turkey was not publicly singled out as the new «prime source» of American heroin until 1970 when an Ad Hoc Committee created in Washington decided to make an all-out effort to discourage Turkish production of opium. Through Congressional testimony and news releases, Turkey was accused of supplying «up to eighty percent of the heroin smuggled into the US. Even though the eighty percent estimate quickly became established as a journalistic fact, it was predicted on a set of very open-ended assumptions.» (1)

Irrespective of the false accusations and unfounded suspicions of the past, with the decision of the Turkish Government to interdict the incision of poppy pods and thus to ban the production of raw opium, this most unfair and exaggerated story of illicit trafficking has been closed forever.



**Expertise and purchasing of the unlanced-capsules by
Turkish Soil Products Office.**

(1) *The Incredible War Against the Poppies*, by Edward Jay Epstein, *Esquire Magazine*, December 1974.



Determining the morphine content in the unalanced poppy capsules at the Soil Products Office Laboratory.

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