

**A RESEARCH ON THE EFFECT OF EARTHQUAKES ON POLITICAL HISTORY:  
MARCH 18, 1953 YENİCE-GÖNEN EARTHQUAKE CASE<sup>1</sup>****Assoc. Prof. Cemile ŞAHİN (Ph.D.)<sup>\*</sup>** **ABSTRACT**

*The 1953 Yenice-Gönen earthquake in the Marmara Region of Türkiye was not only a major natural disaster, but also had a significant impact on the political history of the period. This study examines the political repercussions of the earthquake in terms of the state's crisis management, relief organization, public relations strategies and its long-term effects on political stability. In the immediate aftermath of the earthquake, the government's response to the disaster, its management of the process and its attitude towards aid distribution led to changes in the local population's trust in the government and their political preferences. In the following years, it created a social sensitivity about disaster management and a growing awareness of the state's responsibility. Moreover, since the earthquake process created the need for solidarity and organization among the local population, the people had to interact more with the local administration and public authorities and started to have more say in local politics. In conclusion, as can be seen in the case of the 1953 Yenice-Gönen Earthquake, natural disasters such as earthquakes the way for transformations in Türkiye's political structure and left lasting traces in social memory.*

**Keywords:** Earthquake, Yenice-Gönen Earthquake, Marmara Region, Natural Disaster, North Anatolian Fault Line.

**Jel Classification:** H12, H84, N94.

**1. INTRODUCTION**

Earthquakes are one of the most dangerous and destructive natural disasters for human beings, who have been exposed to natural disasters since their existence. The fact that the duration and intensity of the tremor experienced at the time of the earthquake cannot be known makes the earthquake even more frightening. According to the Turkish Language Association, earthquake is defined as "tremor, earth tremor, movement, zelzele caused by the breaking and displacement of the deep layers of the earth's crust or the eruption of volcanoes" (TDK, Date of Access: 06.10.2024). Since earthquakes cause great

<sup>1</sup> This study was produced by expanding the book chapter titled "March 18, 1953 Yenice-Gönen Earthquake" in the book work titled *Türk Tarihine Dair Yazılar-II* into an article in the light of new sources.

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losses and damages in terms of demographic, economic and social consequences, not only the people of the region where the earthquake occurs, but the whole country suffers from earthquakes.

In our country, which is located in the “Mediterranean Earthquake Belt”, one of the oldest and most active earthquake belts of the world, earthquakes that have caused significant loss of life and property have occurred in the historical process. It is possible to divide the earthquake zones in Türkiye into three as “North Anatolian Earthquake Belt” starting from the Biga Peninsula in the west and extending from Bolu-Kurşunlu-Amasya-Erzincan to Lake Van, “Western Anatolian Earthquake Belt” extending from the Gulf of Edremit to the Mediterranean Sea bounded by the Southern Anatolian folds in the south, and “Eastern Anatolian Earthquake Belt” starting from Antakya and extending to Maraş, Malatya, Elazığ, Bingöl, Bitlis and Van (Arık, 1992: 14-15).

In our country, there have been many destructive earthquakes on various dates and in various regions such as Istanbul, Izmir, Bursa, Erzincan (Haçın, 2014: 39), Sakarya and Antakya, especially the most recent February 6 earthquake, which occurred on February 6, 2023, with a magnitude of 7.7 and 7.6 centered in Kahramanmaraş and Elbistan, causing a great destruction in 10 provinces and causing thousands of casualties and injuries. In this study, it is tried to reveal that earthquake is a great disaster that affects every aspect of life, especially political, social, demographic and economic structure, based on the example of Yenice-Gönen Earthquake. In our study, the news in Milliyet newspaper and Ateş newspaper, one of the local newspapers of the period, were exemplified regarding the reflection of the 1953 Yenice-Gönen Earthquake, which is the main subject of our study, in the written national press, and archival documents, parliamentary minutes and related sources were utilized.

## **2. MARCH 18, 1953 YENİCE-GÖNEN EARTHQUAKE TIME, LOCATION, SEISMIC CHARACTERISTICS AND INTENSITY**

The region is located on the North Anatolian Fault Line (Elcuman, Kara ve Haktanır: 2007; Tekin, 1969: 1-27), and on March 18, 1953 at 21:08<sup>2</sup>, an earthquake of magnitude 7.2 occurred 12 km. east of Yenice with the rupture of the northern branch of the Yenice-Gönen fault between Yenice and Gönen, lasting 55 seconds (TBMM, 24.04.1953: Dönem IX, C.21, Toplantı 3, 72. Birleşim, 493; Bıkçe, 2015; Tanış, 2022).

When the news about the earthquake is analyzed; it is understood that the Yenice-Gönen Earthquake was one of the most important earthquakes seen in Türkiye for the last fifty years, it was felt in many European countries such as Greece, Italy and Germany, even two of the instruments that announced the earthquake at the Strasbourg Seismograph Station (Milliyet, 20.03.1953) were thrown out of their places and the earthquake caused great destruction (Milliyet, 19.03.1953). The 50-60 km long land collapse in Yenice revealed the severity of the earthquake. As a result of the earthquake, it

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<sup>2</sup> The time of the earthquake is shown as 19:06 or 20:10 in some newspapers and sources. See *Milliyet*, 20.03.1953; In *Ateş*, the time of the earthquake is shown as 21:10. See *Ateş*, 20.03.1953.

was determined that damage and destruction occurred over an area of 30,000 km<sup>2</sup>. The Çanakkale peninsula, the northwestern part of Anatolia and the surrounding areas between Marmara and the North Aegean were more or less affected by the earthquake. It is stated that a new fault was formed between Yenice and Gönen, and the length of the earthquake fault is more than 80 km. Yenice was built near the fault zone and on a gravel cone, so the damage was very severe. A road near Muratlar was displaced 1,5 m to the southwest, while the displacement in the Yenice valley was larger. After the first tremor, aftershocks continued for days. Deep cracks formed in the region. Within two months after the earthquake, Kandilli Observatory recorded 600 aftershocks (Tamış, 2022: 161-162).

According to official figures, the Yenice-Gönen Earthquake, in which 265 people lost their lives, many people were injured and thousands of buildings were destroyed or damaged, was claimed to be an artificial earthquake. On May 24, 1953, a letter written by a person named İbrahim Ateş from Marseille and sent to then Prime Minister Adnan Menderes is closely related to these claims. This person claims that Soviet Russia was responsible for the Yenice-Gönen Earthquake and that the earthquake occurred under strange conditions. According to this claim, Russian scientists are engaged in the study of cosmic rays, and he states that the earthquake in the region was deliberately triggered by the Russians through cosmic rays, and gives detailed information on the subject in order to prove this claim<sup>3</sup>.

### **3. EFFECTS OF EARTHQUAKE**

#### **3.1. Human Casualties, Injuries and Structural Damages after the Earthquake**

The main cause of human casualties and injuries in earthquakes is the collapse of buildings that are not built to withstand earthquakes and do not comply with construction standards. In addition, factors such as shifts and collapses on the earth due to earthquakes, environmental effects such as fire and tsunami, panic and chaos, and the difficulty of access to health services for the injured in such an environment significantly increase human losses and injuries in earthquakes.

The Yenice-Gönen earthquake, which was felt in a very large region including Çanakkale, Edirne, Istanbul, Adapazarı, Bursa, Balıkesir, Dikili, Foça and Karaburun, caused damage and destruction over an area of 30,000 square kilometers. According to official figures, 265 people lost their lives, more than 8000 buildings were damaged, 211 schools, 176 official buildings and 27 mosques were destroyed (Kürçer, Özalp, Özdemir, Güldoğan ve Duman, 2016: 5; Selim, Eyidoğan ve Tüysüz, 2005; <http://www.koeri.boun.edu.tr>).

It was feared that the casualties would be especially high in Gönen with a population of 12 thousand, but it was understood that Yenice with a population of 1800 had also suffered a great disaster and it was stated that eighty people were pulled out from under the rubble the day after the earthquake

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<sup>3</sup> For detailed information, see: *Presidency Directorate of State Archives, Republican Archives (BCA)*, 030-01 35-213-14 (24.05.1953).

and twenty people lost their lives (Milliyet, 21.03.1953). However, in the news of the following days, it was reported that the number of victims of the earthquake was increasing and contact with the villages was cut off (Milliyet, 21.03.1953), 80% of the houses in Gönen became uninhabitable (Milliyet, 20.03.1953), around 200 houses in Manyas were completely destroyed and there were dead and wounded (Milliyet, 21.03.1953), and in Bandırma, as of March 22, 18 people in the center and 35 people in the villages lost their lives and nearly 5 thousand houses were damaged (Milliyet, 22.03.1953). Apart from these, 5 people were injured in Biga, including the towns and villages, 4 houses were completely destroyed, 285 houses were partially destroyed and 988 houses were slightly damaged. The loss of livestock consisted of 15 sheep, 1 cattle and a buffalo (Milliyet, 22.03.1953). On March 27, it was announced that a total of 268 people lost their lives in the earthquake, 224 of them were from Çanakkale, 44 from Balıkesir and 332 were injured (Milliyet, 27.03.1953). However, these figures are the ones that could be determined. It is quite possible that the number of dead and injured may be higher.

In the Yenice region, one of the places most affected by the Yenice-Gönen Earthquake, 60 of the 63 people who were in the coffee house at the time of the earthquake lost their lives when the coffee house collapsed (Milliyet, 21.03.1953). Similarly, in Büyükpaşa Village of Çan district of Çanakkale, the minaret of the 225-year-old Mehmet Emin Efendi Mosque collapsed and fell on the congregation coming out of Isha prayer, killing the imam of the mosque and Sinan Öney, a villager. 61 years later, his grandson gave a charity dinner to the people of the village and those who lost their lives in the earthquake were commemorated with charity (Milliyet, 19.03.2014).

In the report submitted by the Çanakkale Governorate on 12.02.1954 regarding the devastation caused by the earthquake in Çanakkale, the balance sheet of the earthquake in this region was summarized as follows: A total of 220 citizens, 8 in the center and villages of the province, 3 in the center of Ayvacık, 4 in the center and villages of Çan, 208 in the center and villages of Yenice, lost their lives, while 260 people, mostly in Yenice and Çan, were injured. Again, 252 cattle and 134 sheep and goats were lost, mostly in Yenice and Çan. 103 schools, 22 of which were completely destroyed, 22 of which were heavily and 59 of which were moderately damaged, 80 public offices, 9 of which were destroyed, 29 of which were heavily and 42 of which were lightly damaged, and 36 mosques were destroyed. In addition, out of more than 6000 dwellings and outbuildings, 742 were destroyed and the rest were damaged to varying degrees. 5557 of these were included in the list of aid to be provided by the province (BCA., 030-01-121 772 2, 12.02.1954).

The balance sheet of the earthquake that could be determined up to that time was explained as follows in the publication of Ateş Newspaper, one of the local newspapers of the period, two days after the earthquake; 35 dead in Gönen and its villages and all the streets were under a pile of rubble; 60% of the buildings in Manyas were damaged and 3 people were dead and 4 people were injured so far; many buildings were damaged in Havran and 4 people were seriously injured; It was reported that some buildings in Balya were heavily damaged and even the prisoners in Balya prison were transferred to

Balıkesir prison due to its damage; some walls and chimneys collapsed in Bigadiç and Sındırgı; 30% of the buildings in Çanakkale were damaged and 4 people were killed; the situation in Yenice was very grave, it became a ruin, over 500 people were lost; and some buildings were damaged in Çan (Ateş, 20.03.1953). In the issue of Ateş Newspaper dated March 22, 1953, under the heading “*Not as they say, Very Fortunately Deaths are Less*”, it was written that according to the latest news from Yenice, the number of deaths was not 400-500 as exaggerated, but around 165 (Ateş, 22.03.1953).

In any case, the earthquake in question affected the lives of a large number of people, brought with it pain and hardships that are very difficult to forget, and led to radical changes in people’s lives. The Yenice-Gönen Earthquake, which caused many negative effects on the lives of the people of the region, especially the pain of those lost, led to political, social, economic and psychological problems. For example, when a merchant named Mümtaz Azbay saw that his family of six people had died, he entered a damaged building and tried to die himself by being trapped under the rubble, but was brought out with difficulty (Milliyet, 20.03.1953). In Yenice, the wife of the accident veterinarian, who took her two children and went in front of the iron railing of the window in fear at the time of the earthquake, was rescued alive with her children, while her mother-in-law in the other corner of the same room lost her life. Similarly, during the fire that started with the earthquake, the district National Education officer made a great effort to save his son who was up to his waist in debris. The fire that started with the earthquake and the severe cold temperatures increased the hardship even more. A young girl named Sülün Taşcıoğlu had a nervous breakdown and lost consciousness while reading the news about the earthquake (Milliyet, 21.03.1953). It is possible to cite many such examples. In short, the earthquake was a disaster not only for those who died, but also for those who fell ill, were injured and survived.

### **3.2. Direct and Indirect of the Earthquake on the Local Economy**

As a natural disaster, earthquakes cause great damage and losses to local economies as they deeply affect both physical and social, economic and psychological structures. First of all, the loss of life or injury of people due to earthquakes causes labor force losses and reduced capacity in production and service sectors. On the other hand, damage to critical infrastructure such as buildings, workplaces, roads, bridges, electricity and water lines disrupts production processes, businesses and services, disrupts supply chains, halts trade and causes economic losses. Likewise, a threat to the security of the region can prevent new investments and projects from coming in, and can also damage the tourism sector. In addition, search and rescue operations, reconstruction activities and social aid expenditures will also have a negative impact on the budget as they will burden the economy. Migration movements that may occur after the earthquake will cause demographic changes, which may have a negative impact on the economy as it may change labor dynamics and economic activities. Apart from all these negativities that may be experienced, traumas such as fear and anxiety caused by the earthquake in the society can

negatively affect people's labor productivity and consumption behaviors and cause damage to the economy (Marangoz ve İzci, 2023: 6-20; Demiralp, 2023: 3-5).

As mentioned above, the negative effects of earthquakes on the local economy are also observed in the Yenice-Gönen earthquake. First of all, the destruction and devastation caused by the earthquake negatively affected economic activities in the region, disrupting production and trade, and causing losses in basic sectors such as agriculture and animal husbandry. In addition, factors such as the decrease in investments in the region and the cost of the reconstruction process also had a negative impact on the economy. As can be seen from the newspapers of the period, such as *Ateş* and *Milliyet*, and archival documents on the subject, efforts were made to meet the needs of the people of the region with domestic and foreign aid, and efforts were made to initiate the reconstruction process and to improve the economy of the region<sup>4</sup>.

#### **4. STATE INTERVENTION IN CRISIS AND MANAGEMENT CAPACITY**

Natural disasters such as earthquakes, floods and fires are events that test the competence of governments in crisis management. If a government fails to respond quickly and effectively in the aftermath of a natural disaster, it undermines public confidence in the state. Factors such as inadequate aid, infrastructure deficiencies or delays in rescue efforts can lead to a weakening of power and social unrest, leading to the resignation of the government. In the aftermath of the Yenice-Gönen Earthquake, the first interventions were mostly provided by local administrations, military units, voluntary organizations and the people's own efforts. On the other hand, the government's intervention was also made by military units and voluntary organizations in the first place, and the state authorities also took action and started to work. Considering the conditions of the period, it is understood that organizing search, rescue and relief operations after the earthquake was a very challenging process since modern disaster response systems and infrastructure were not possible at that time. Therefore, there were problems in reaching the earthquake victims quickly in this process (Ateş, 26.03.1953).

##### **4.1. State Officials' Activities Related to the Earthquake**

State officials of the period, including President Celal Bayar, Bandırma Deputy Interior Minister, Deputy Minister of Enterprises and Public Works, and Balıkesir Members of Parliament, visited the region after the earthquake, received information about the measures taken against the risk of the earthquake continuing and relief activities, and expressed their sympathy for the people. Kemal Zeytinoğlu, the then Deputy Minister of Public Works, stated that the suffering was great, that the material damages would be compensated as soon as possible and the region would be made more prosperous than before, that an engineer assigned for this purpose would stay in the region and that

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<sup>4</sup> For detailed information, see: *Milliyet* (March 20-April 20, 1953), *BCA*, (documents on the subject dated 24.05.1953-1954), *Ateş* (22-24-27.03.1953).

damage assessment work would begin immediately (Milliyet, 20/21.03.1953; Ateş, 21/22.03.1953). Deputy Interior Minister Etem Menderes gave the necessary orders for all kinds of aid to be provided to the earthquake zone and stated that everything would be done to rebuild the region in line with the plan to be made by the geologists and engineers working there (Milliyet, 02.04.1953). Furthermore, on 14.04.1953, a meeting was held in Ankara under the chairmanship of President Celal Bayar, with the participation of Prime Minister Adnan Menderes, Public Works Deputy Kemal Zeytinoglu, members of the general administrative board of the Red Crescent and general managers of the banks, to discuss issues related to the compensation of the earthquake victims' losses and reconstruction works, for which it was decided to allocate an allocation of 20 million liras (Milliyet, 14.04.1953). On 23.03.1953, a two-minute silence was held for those who lost their lives in the earthquake and a telegram was sent to the Governorships of Balıkesir and Çanakkale expressing the condolences of the Turkish Grand National Assembly (TBMM, 23.03.1953; Dönem IX, C.21, Toplantı 3, 57. Birleşim, 6-7).

The Ministry of National Defense, on the other hand, issued an order to all military units in the country to grant 45 days of leave each to soldiers from Balıkesir and Çanakkale. It was also reported that it was being considered to grant such leave to civil servants from the same provinces (Milliyet, 22.03.1953).

## **4.2. Relief and Reconstruction**

### **4.2.1. Aid to Earthquake Victims**

According to the report prepared by the Çanakkale Governor's Office on damage assessments, on the day after the earthquake, that is, on March 19, 1953, teams formed under the chairmanship of the Provincial Director of Public Works in the Çanakkale region went from village to village in a survey method and tried to determine the earthquake damages. Among the people assigned for this purpose were Mahmut Nefesoğlu, Director of Public Works, Bedii Sargın, Master Architect (sent from Ankara), Süleyman Örnek, Master Architect (sent from Istanbul), İzzet Uraz, Master Architect (sent from Istanbul), Razi Ural, Engineer (sent from Balıkesir), Celâl Pınar, Engineer, Mesut Özen, Water Works Controller, Osman Gönünç, Chief Science Officer, Aziz Oral, Science Officer, Mahmut Barçın, Science Officer of the Central Municipality, Mahmut Barçın, Science Officer of the Ezine Municipality and two National Education Technical Staff. The first damage assessment in this region started in the Çan district and the teams were distributed to all districts in turn. As a result of the assessments, the tables sent to the Ministry formed the basis of the aid program. The aid programs were prepared in accordance with the number and nature of the damages written in these tables, and funds were allocated. However, due to the seasonal conditions, some villages could not be visited at all and it was seen that these damage assessment tables, which were made in a state of mind where the earthquake continued intermittently, were not fully sufficient and accurate. For example, the number of damaged houses, which was initially determined as 4077, was later determined as 5557, thus necessitating new inspections. The Ministry of

Public Works approved an allocation of 2139150.- TL for the Çanakkale region, including 1000 TL for the completely destroyed houses, 750 TL for the severely damaged ones and 300 TL for the moderately damaged ones (BCA., 030-01-121 772 2, 12.02.1954).

Likewise, according to the report submitted by the Çanakkale Governorate on the measures taken and aid provided in this region immediately after the earthquake, activities were started immediately within 10 minutes after the earthquake, and first of all, the degree of damage and loss of life were tried to be determined. Since contact with the Yenice region could not be established at the first moment, a first aid team consisting of three open trucks, three buses, 680 liras of medicines and one operator and two nurses was sent to the Çan region, assuming that the most damage was in the Çan region. However, in the following hours, upon learning that the Yenice region was devastated, Governor Sefaaddin Karanakçı, accompanied by Çanakkale MP Kenan Akmanlar, the Commanders of the Fortified Position and Gendarmerie Regiment, doctors, orderlies, 40 soldiers, 100 tents, 50 blankets, and a truckload of bread, immediately moved to the region. In addition, hospital staff from Biga were sent to Yenice with the necessary supplies. The district governor of Biga first arrived in Yenice with a large group of local youth, and seeing that Yenice was completely destroyed, that there were many casualties and that fires had started, he immediately started rescue and fire-fighting operations with the help of the prisoners in the prison. All official and private vehicles were confiscated and teams from Çanakkale and Biga were dispatched to the region, but since they were not sufficient in the face of the extensive destruction caused by the earthquake, emergency assistance was requested from the Ezine Brigade and the Fortified Position. The Ezine Brigade and the Fortified Position participated in the rescue efforts with 25 and 125 soldiers, respectively, which made it possible to rescue the wounded from under the rubble and prevent fires. In the meantime, efforts were immediately initiated for shelter and food aid. On March 20, while the delivery of tents, blankets and rations continued within the scope of the emergency aid started from the Gallipoli Corps headquarters, tents shipped by airplanes from Ankara were also allocated to the shelter of the citizens who were exposed in the damages of Yenice, Çan, Ayvacık, Ezine, İmroz, Bozcaada, Eceabat, Gelibolu and central accidents and villages (BCA., 030-01-121 772 2, 12.02.1954). The Red Crescent sent 488 tents and 2013 kilos of pasta to the earthquake zone by train on March 26 and 497 more tents by 7 planes on March 27 (Milliyet, 27.03.1953).

The military organizations in Balıkesir and its surroundings mobilized to provide aid to the people affected by the earthquake. Early in the morning, aid teams departed to the earthquake zone in a military airplane and brought as many tents and medicines as the plane could carry. This team, including the Director General of the Red Crescent, towards Balıkesir. In addition, the Red Crescent Headquarters sent 1000 thousand tents by 4 trucks and 2000 tents by train to the disaster area. As soon as the incident was heard, the Red Crescent Headquarters sent 1000 liras to Çanakkale and 5000 liras to Balıkesir and its region, and also telegraphed the necessary orders to Istanbul to provide all kinds of aid (Milliyet, 20.03.1953). A meeting was held by Fahrettin Kerim Gökay, the then Governor and Mayor of Istanbul,



regarding the aid to be provided to the earthquake victims from the Istanbul region and the manner of collecting this aid. After this meeting Gökay, the Ministry has tried to ensure that aid is provided from a single source and in an organized manner (Milliyet, 27.03.1953).

The fact that friendship and solidarity are universal values was once again realized during the Yenice-Gönen Earthquake, and various aids continued to be sent to the earthquake region from Türkiye and abroad to the extent possible. Donations started to be collected all over the country in order to meet all kinds of needs of the citizens exposed to the earthquake disaster and the total amount of aid collected in various provinces within 3-4 days reached 250 thousand liras. In addition, the cash donations made by the Red Crescent in various parts of the country amounted to 1000 liras, and in-kind donations were also sent to the earthquake zone (Milliyet, 22.03.1953). In addition to the Red Crescent, organizations such as the Benevolent Association also provided food aid in large quantities. For example: 7500 blankets from the Istanbul Red Crescent; 300 blankets from the province of Edirne; 900 blankets from Sümerbank; 150 blankets from the Ankara Red Crescent; 200 luxury lamps, 5 tons of nails, 100 tins of cheese from the Governorship of Istanbul; 1000 kilos of bulgur, 506 kilos of tahini halva, 515 kilos of soap, 540 kilos of D.D.T.; 1000 tins of kerosene from Sokoni and Şel Companies; one truck of clothing from Sarıyer D.P. Presidency; one truck of clothing from Istanbul Aid Society; two trucks of clothing from Çanakkale Aid Society (BCA., 030-01-121 772 2, 12.02.1954; BCA., 030-01 124 800 1, 07.12.1953).

Apart from these, many institutions and citizens continued to provide necessary aid. On his way to the earthquake zone, the then President Celal Bayar said the following in an interview with journalists in Eskişehir: *“On my way from Ankara, the villagers of Karayavsan in Polatlı gave me 81 lira 25 kuruş, the first aid for the earthquake. I am taking this money and their condolences directly to the site of the earthquake. I am very grateful for this kind and merciful act of our villagers”* (Milliyet, 20.03.1953). Likewise, in a telegram sent to the President of the Republic, the Eskişehir Iron Industrialists' Association stated, *“...Eskişehir Iron Industrialists' Association has decided to repair the animal-drawn agricultural tools and carts of Yenice, the center of the zone of the earthquake, and has sent a delegation of 25 people to determine the damage this evening”* (Milliyet, 22.03.1953). Apart from these, the people of Mahmudiye 325, Karasu 200, Gemlik 4000, İnegöl 100, Konya Ereğlisi 400, Değirmendere 200, Ordu's Mesudiye 400, Eskişehir Journalists Association 125, Bandırma 2500, Aşkale 650, Eskişehir sugar industry workers 1000, Karacabey and Tekirdağ 2000 liras. In addition, donations such as flour, sugar and bread were also made from various provinces. The artists of the Ankara State Theater decided to donate the proceeds of one performance each of the opera Kerem and the plays Ramak Kaldı and Vatan İsterse to the earthquake victims in Çanakkale and Balıkesir (Milliyet, 22.03.1953). In addition to these aids from various parts of the country, it was decided to give advances in the amount of two months each to civil servants, employees, retirees, widows and orphans who suffered from the earthquake (BCA., 030-18-01- 02 135 27 9, 15.03.1954). Yenice Agricultural Credit

Cooperative's debt of 84,053.50 liras to Ziraat Bank was postponed for one year (BCA., 030-18-01- 02 135 23 4, 10.03.1954).

Various countries such as Yugoslavia, the Netherlands, Pakistan, Lebanon, Iraq, Austria, Switzerland, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan, Abyssinia (BCA., 030-01-61 376 12, 24.04.1953)<sup>5</sup>, Iran... and Queen Elizabeth II of England expressed their condolences on the occasion of the earthquake and provided money and various aids (Milliyet, 22.03.1953). It was reported that the British Red Cross would send 60 tents, first aid kits and devices used for fractures, the Irish Red Cross would send 2112 bottles of penicillin, 240 bottles of penicillin procaine, 43 thousand tablets of sulfadiazine, 9 thousand tablets of sulfamidine and 3000 tablets of sulfaguadin, the Austrian Red Cross would send other relief supplies and the Belgian Red would send penicillin (Milliyet, 27.03.1953). As soon as it received the news of the earthquake in Türkiye, the American Red Cross Organization contacted the International Red Cross Organization in Geneva by telephone and asked it to find out what kind of aid Türkiye needed. One of the 4 American transport planes containing 50 thousand dollars worth of aid prepared by the Red Cross to be distributed to the earthquake victims arrived at Yeşilköy airport at 21.30 on 21.03.1953 and it was reported that three more planes would arrive the following day (Milliyet, 20/22.03.1953). The Government of Yugoslavia, on the other hand, decided to provide 10 ready-made houses to be allocated to the disaster victims and it was reported that these houses would be built by Yugoslav engineers and that the transportation and construction costs would be covered by Yugoslavia (BCA., 030-01-61 376 16, 30.04.1953)<sup>6</sup>. 500 blankets were sent by the Israeli Government and a truckload of clothing and food was sent by the Argentine Red Cross (BCA., 030-01-121 772 2, 12.02.1954).

The proposal put forward by the Ambassador of Uruguay for the United Nations Organization to assist the victims of the earthquake in Türkiye was immediately accepted and the necessary initiatives were taken with the Turkish Ambassador Selim Sarper. In addition to the assistance to be provided by these United Nations agencies, the American Red Cross has also purchased 60 thousand dollars worth of new wool blankets to be sent to Türkiye immediately. Furthermore, the Turkish-American Association, founded under the chairmanship of Edwin, the former US Ambassador to Ankara, launched a large-scale campaign to help the victims of the disaster and started to collect money. Upon the proposal of Vilhemina, the mother of the Queen of the Netherlands and former Queen of the Netherlands, the Dutch Red Cross invited the public to help the victims of the earthquake in Türkiye. An account was opened to collect aid for the victims of the disaster. Similarly, in Pakistan, societies were opened to collect aid for earthquake victims (Milliyet, 22.03.1953). The General Council of Europe also adopted a proposal to help the development of villages destroyed by the earthquake (Milliyet, 27.03.1953).

In response to some news reports that the aid provided to the earthquake regions was not sufficient and organized and that the authorities were not sufficiently concerned with the issue, the then Deputy

<sup>5</sup> About the representative the Emperor of Abyssinia wanted to send to our country on the occasion of the earthquake.

<sup>6</sup> On Yugoslavia's assistance to the victims of the earthquake.

Minister of Enterprises Sırrı Yırcalı made the necessary examinations in the earthquake region (Milliyet, 26.03.1953).

During this process, Ali Fahri İşeri, Member of Parliament for Balıkesir, submitted a parliamentary question to be answered by Etem Menderes, the Minister of Interior of the period, regarding both the government's attitude and the aids and certain practices<sup>7</sup>.

#### **4.2.2. Zoning and Construction Activities**

After the earthquake, first of all, the citizens whose houses were damaged were temporarily placed in tents, and as a result of various examinations made by experts sent to the region, it was decided to start reconstruction activities. Accordingly, a commission started to work on the construction of new buildings in Çanakkale, Balıkesir and its environs, which had been devastated by the earthquake. These dwellings, the plans of which are being prepared by the engineers of the Ministry of Public Works' Zoning Department, will be built in the number of houses destroyed in the region (Milliyet, 26.03.1953). As a result of these systematic and systematic efforts by the Director of Public Works, engineers and various officials, great efforts were made to ensure that the earthquake victims were rescued from their tents as soon as possible and placed in their repaired or newly constructed houses and that they were not further victimized. For example, in Yenice, which was almost completely destroyed in the earthquake, it was decided that 300 houses would be built by the Real Estate Bank and that those who had been living in tents would be housed in these houses before winter set in, but when it became doubtful that the construction would be completed on time, action was immediately taken to prevent citizens from spending the winter in tents. For this purpose, barracks were immediately built and these families were placed in the most suitable conditions. The fact that the houses built by the Real Estate Bank could not be completed on time proved that these measures were very appropriate, and further victimization of the earthquake victims in winter conditions was prevented in this way. Similarly, civil servants who were working in tents because their buildings were destroyed in Yenice and Çan provinces were placed in barracks to prevent them from being victimized in winter conditions (BCA., 030-01-121 772 2, 12.02.1954). On 14.04.1953, in a meeting held in Ankara under the chairmanship of President Celal Bayar and with the participation of Prime Minister Adnan Menderes, Public Works Deputy Kemal Zeytinoğlu, members of the Red Crescent's general administrative board and general managers of banks, issues related to reconstruction works were discussed and it was decided to allocate an allocation of 20 million liras for this purpose (Milliyet, 14.04.1953).

Following the Yenice-Gönen Earthquake, while zoning and construction works were initiated in line with the urgent needs in the region in order to prevent further victimization of the earthquake

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<sup>7</sup> For detailed information about the parliamentary discussions regarding the parliamentary question and the response given by the Minister of Internal Affairs Etem Menderes to this proposal, see: *TBMM*, 24.04.1953: Dönem IX, C.21, Toplantı 3, 72. Birleşim, 491-495.

victims, it was also observed that preventive measures were tried to be taken throughout the country both at the level of the Turkish Grand National Assembly and the government. In the aftermath of the earthquake, the establishment of an earthquake bureau within the Ministry of Public Works, Directorate of Building and Zoning Affairs, and the November 3, 1953 dated and 8547 numbered “Regulation on Structures to be Built in Earthquake Zones” (Alyamaç ve Erdoğan, 2005)<sup>8</sup> work can be evaluated in this context.

## **5. INTERNATIONAL AID AND DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS RELATED TO THE EARTHQUAKE**

Many foreign countries expressed their condolences on the occasion of the earthquake and these condolences were read by the Speaker of the Grand National Assembly during the parliamentary session on 27.03.1953.

Subsequently, the telegram of condolences sent by Edouart Herriot, the Speaker of the French Assembly of Deputies, to the Presidency of the Grand National Assembly on the occasion of the earthquake in Balıkesir and Çanakkale regions is as follows: “*His Excellency Mr. Refik Koraltan, President of the U.N.M.M. Ankara-Türkiye, I join you in your great sorrow with all my heart. Edouart Herriot*” (TBMM, 23.03.1953: Dönem IX, C.21, Toplantı 3, 59. Birleşim, 90-91). U.S. Ambassador George McGheo and Leon Dayton, the Special Mission of the Mutual Security Organization, visited Gönen on the occasion of the earthquake, while McGheo also visited Prime Minister Adnan Menderes and Deputy Foreign Minister Fuat Köprülü to express his grief over the earthquake disaster and his readiness as a state to provide immediate assistance to Türkiye, should Türkiye request it (Milliyet, 20.03.1953; Ateş, 22.03.1953). In addition, the Ambassadors of Yugoslavia and Pakistan, the Ambassadors of Lebanon, Iraq, Austria, Switzerland, the Charge d’Affaires of Egypt and Saudi Arabia visited the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and expressed their condolences on the earthquake disaster. Queen Elizabeth II of England sent a telegram of condolences to President Celâl Bayar on the earthquake. The Queen said the following: “*I express my deepest sympathy and condolences for the deaths of many people and the extensive damage caused by the earthquake in the provinces of Balıkesir and Çanakkale*” In West Pakistan, a mevlûd was recited in a mosque in the city of Multan for the souls of the victims of the earthquake in Türkiye (Milliyet, 22.03.1953). Due to the earthquake disaster, the Soviet Ambassador and the Argentine Ambassador came to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to express their condolences (Milliyet, 26.03.1953), while Italy expressed its readiness to help in every way (Ateş, 22.03.1953). Likewise, the Emperor of Abyssinia also expressed his sorrow over the disaster and stated that they would be willing to help. Apart from these, the General Secretariat of the Union of Red Cross

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<sup>8</sup> For the full text of the Regulation, see: 8547 Sayılı Resmi Gazete, 03.11.1953.  
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Societies also expressed their sorrow and the readiness of the union to provide all kinds of assistance to the Red Crescent (Tanış, 2022: 166-167).

## **6. THE IMPACT OF EARTHQUAKES ON POLITICAL AND SOCIAL STRUCTURE**

Earthquakes are destructive natural events that not only cause physical destruction but also deeply affect the political, social, demographic and economic structures of states and societies. The effects of earthquakes on state and societal structures are shaped by many factors, including the destruction they cause, the reactions of societies to the disaster, the success of governments in crisis management, and the visibility of social inequalities.

First of all, it is imperative that the government takes action as soon as possible after an earthquake and responds quickly and effectively. It is also crucial that search, rescue and relief efforts are properly organized and that all citizens affected by the disaster are provided with the necessary assistance. Failure to do so may lead to social discontent, disintegration and political instability. For example, the inadequacy of the current government's response and lack of coordination the earthquake that struck our country on August 17, 1999, shook the trust of the society and led to various criticisms. After the 1999 Marmara earthquake, due to the problems experienced in search, rescue, coordination and assistance, some regulations were made by establishing institutions and legislation related to disaster or crisis management. However, the May 2003 Bingöl earthquake showed that these regulations were not sufficient. Similar events occurred in subsequent earthquakes. In the surveys conducted after the recent February 6 earthquake, it is seen that the majority of the people stated that the government's natural disaster management preparation was inadequate and that the work done in the first 48 hours was not sufficient (Herdem, 2011: 164).<sup>9</sup> The adverse events caused the public's trust in the state to be shaken and the government to be criticized.

On the other hand, earthquakes can make social inequalities visible. For example, since the structures in areas where poorer groups live are generally less durable, these groups may suffer more damage from earthquakes. Class distinctions may also become evident in the relief and reconstruction processes following an earthquake. Improper or insufficient distribution of aid can lead to social unrest and polarization. Moreover, while some regions or social classes may recover faster after an earthquake, poorer groups may be left with negative impacts for longer. This can trigger social movements, protests and even political change. Since disasters such as earthquakes can leave a lasting mark in the collective memory of a society as well as carry a symbolic meaning, remembering the disaster can lead to a stronger sense of solidarity or the formation of a new social identity. In addition, political leaders and parties can use earthquakes for political purposes. Recovery efforts after the disaster can become a tool for political discourse and propaganda (Herdem, 2011: 158-163).

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<sup>9</sup> For detailed information, see: <https://spectrumhouse.com.tr/depremin-etkileri-ve-siyasal-egilimler/> (Access Date: 10.01.2025).

## 7. CONCLUSION

In our country, which is located in the "Mediterranean Earthquake Zone", severe earthquakes that have caused loss of life and property have occurred in the historical process. The March 18, 1953 Yenice-Gönen Earthquake is one of the most destructive earthquakes in the last seventy years.

Earthquakes affect social structures and political systems not only in a direct physical sense, but also through social dynamics, power relations, social movements and reform processes. Such disasters are important examples for understanding how societies respond to crises, the crisis management capacity of the state, and how inequalities between societies are shaped. The March 18, 1953 Yenice-Gönen Earthquake was not only a major natural disaster, but also had a significant impact on the political history of Türkiye at the time. One of the positive developments in this process was the mobilization of military and civil servants and citizens from various parts of the country to help the earthquake victims as soon as the news of the earthquake reached them. However, in addition to the slow and disorganized response process of the government and local administrations, there were also negative factors such as inadequate infrastructure, inadequate communication and transportation facilities, which exacerbated the effects of the earthquake. The devastation caused by the earthquake revealed the difficulties of the local and central government in crisis management and created an environment that questioned the state's relationship with the public in this process.

The March 18, 1953 Yenice-Gönen Earthquake was not only a major natural disaster, but also an event that left important traces in Türkiye's political history. Following the earthquake, inadequacies in crisis management, slow relief and reconstruction processes led to deepening social inequalities and led to serious criticism of the state's disaster response. This situation triggered political debates and social movements and led to questioning of the government's disaster management capacity. Since the developments in the aftermath of the earthquake made it almost imperative to take certain measures to prevent similar adversities in the following period, the establishment of an earthquake bureau within the Ministry of Public Works, Directorate of Building and Zoning Affairs, and the issuance of the "Regulation on Structures to be Built in Earthquake Zones" dated November 3, 1953 and numbered 8547 led to such efforts. In conclusion, the Yenice-Gönen Earthquake was not only a natural phenomenon, but also caused significant ruptures in Türkiye's political structure and offered important lessons on disaster management and social justice.

In general, the inadequacy of aid and the reconstruction process in the aftermath of devastating disasters causes social inequalities to become more pronounced and creates a process in which especially the lower classes suffer more and aid is not distributed fairly. This situation increases social unrest and paves the way for the emergence of social movements and protests. The Yenice-Gönen Earthquake also initiated a serious questioning of the state's disaster management capacity, and the post-disaster reforms laid the foundation for the reshaping of the political balance. In this process, domestic and international

aid once again demonstrated the universal value of friendship and cooperation and the importance of unity and solidarity as a nation. In addition, it is very important that everyone learns the necessary lessons from the bad experiences and tries not to make the same mistakes in the future. Natural disasters, especially earthquakes, offer lessons for the development of today's policies and disaster response systems as an important turning point that shapes the disaster management approach of states and the search for justice in the social structure.

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