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THE EFFECT OF THE GREAT DEPRESSION OVER AEGEAN GRAPES (REPERCUSSIONS)

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Abstract

The worldwide economic depression in 1929, as known as the “Great Depression”, is one of the results of World War I. What is meant by the word “Depression”, also referred to as “Slump”, is the destabilization of the worldwide economy. Destabilization of the economy caused many businesses to go bankrupt, many people to become unemployed and social order and life to be derailed. In the books of history and economy, “The Great Depression” is usually evaluated and interpreted by numbers but the fact that it inflicted deep wounds in people should not be overlooked. The effects of Great Depression in 1929 over Aegean Region will be analyzed. With this purpose it is researched, be it from local news or various other sources, how the Depression affected grape producers and traders of the region in terms of their well-being. Moreover, grape variations in the foreign countries and sales prices of that time are given in tables.

Keywords: Grape, depression, market

1929 Dünya Ekonomik Bunalımının Ege Bölgesi Üzümlerine Etkisi (Yansımaları)

Öz

Tarihte “Büyük Bunalım” olarak geçen 1929 Dünya Ekonomik Bunalımı, I. Dünya Savaşı’nın sonuçlarından biridir. Burada “Bunalım” yani o dönemdeki deyimiyile “Buhran” kelimesinde kastedilen dünya genelinde ekonomik istikrarın bozulmasıdır. Ekonomik istikrarın bozulması, pek çok ekonomik işletmenin iflas etmesine, insanların işsiz kalmasına, şirketlerin batmasına, toplumsal istikrarın bozulmasına ve dolayısıyla sosyal hayatın da darbe almasına neden olmuştur. Tarih ve ekonomi kitaplarında “Büyük Bunalım”, rakamlarla değerlendirilir, yorumlanır ancak, bunalımın insanlar

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üzerinde yarattığı derin yaralar tarihin sayfalarında kaybolup göz ardı edilmemelidir. Bu çalışmada 1929 Büyük Bunalım'ın Ege Bölgesi üzerindeki etkisi üzüm sektörü açısından incelenecektir. Bu amaçla öncelikle Bunalımın Ege bölgesi üreticilerine ve tüccarlarına, toplumun ruhsal durumuna nasıl yansıdığı gerek yerel basından gerek çeşitli kaynaklardan araştırılmıştır. Ayrıca yine yerel basından o dönemlerde yabancı ülkelerdeki üzüm çeşitleri ve satış fiyatları tablolar şeklinde sunulmuştur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: üzüm, bunalım, borsa

Effects of the Great Depression on Aegean Grapes

Turkey met with drops in sales, misbalance of import/export and increase in expenses as the world greeted the Depression of '29 in shock and panic. As a result of economic depression, prices dropped, hence the decrease in sales profit. There were still not enough buyers despite grapes, figs, cotton and olives being sold in low prices. This drop could easily be understood by comparing the numbers of the stock market of that time. For example; in Hamburg market, raisins were sold for 48 kuruş (currency subunit of Turkish Lira), while they were sold 32 kuruş in İzmir market¹. As several liberal intellectuals during the crisis claimed that the country cannot get over the crisis alone and that the country should correspond to the solutions; Turkey tried to survive regulating customs and taxation². It can be said that Turkey was affected more than the West from the Great Depression of '29 because Turkey was caught in the process without having settled its economic system. According to Gözcü, she states: "*From its establishment and until the economic depression started knocking on its door, Turkey ditched the economic policies of the late Ottoman State and started making radical changes in economy as well as other fields*"³. Western states were watching closely as Turkey struggled. Atatürk was aware how important farming and trade was, in order to overcome this crisis with minimal losses. He was working and researching for hours. Moreover, including Atatürk, high ranking state officials started using national products to encourage people to live a modest life style. Government gained public support in this matter. These developments were

¹ Alev Gözcü, "*Bir İntiharın Sosyo-Ekonomik Arka Planı: Dünya Ekonomik Bunalımının İzmir Örneğinde gündelik Yaşama Yansımaları*", ÇTTAD, VI/14, (2007/Spring), p.96.

² Melih Gürsoy, "*Dünyadaki Büyük Ekonomik Krizler ve Türkiye Ekonomisine Etkileri*", p.227.

³ Alev Gözcü, "*1929 Ekonomik Bunalımı Sonrasında Dünyada "Yeni Türkiye" Algısı Ve Türkiye'nin Ekonomik Araştırmalarına İlişkin Saptamalar*", ÇTTAD, VII/16-17, (2008/Spring-Autumn), p.277.

watched closely by countries in various regions such as Iraq and Germany and were making newspaper headlines.⁴

The effects of economic depression of that time can be seen more clearly if the sales numbers were examined:

Between the years 1929 and 1934, wheat price dropped from 12.6 kuruş to 3.6 kuruş, grape price dropped from 4.7 kuruş to 3 kuruş, fig price dropped from 5.1 kuruş to 2.6 kuruş, olive price dropped from 8.9 kuruş to 4.9 kuruş and tobacco price dropped from 62.3 kuruş to 33.1 kuruş. The fields that were affected most were international trade and farming. Particularly, heavily exported produce such as grapes and figs were affected⁵. Despite the fact that 44.400 tons of raisins were sold for 18 million TRY in 1929, 40.500 tons of raisins made only 11.6 million TRY in 1930. In 1932, 49.500 tons of raisins were sold for 10.216.090 million TRY and in 1934, 52.800 tons of raisins made only 6.9 million TRY⁶. This situation can be compared more easily in table form:

GRAPE EXPORT DATA BETWEEN THE YEARS 1929 - 1934

YEAR	AMOUNT OF GRAPES	TOTAL SALES
1929	44.400 tons	18 million TRY
1930	40.500 tons	11.6 million TRY
1932	49.500 tons	10.216.090 million TRY
1934	52.800 tons	6.9 million TRY

According to the import/export data provided by the local newspaper "Yeşil Tire", 38.375 kilograms of grapes were sold for 25.542 TRY⁷.

⁴ Gözcü, *ibid*, p.279.

⁵ Esra Polat, "Uluslar Arası İzmir Fuarının Kuruluşu Ve İlk Sergiler", (Y.L.T.), DEU, Atatürk İlk.ve İnk. T. Ens., İzmir,2008, p.89.

⁶ Melih Gürsoy, "Ekonomisi ve Bizim İnsanlarımız ile Güzel İzmir", I.b. İzmir, 1993, p. 174 - 175.

⁷ Yeşil Tire,1 Nisan 1933.

It is explained how badly Turkey was affected from the Great Depression, as it devastated the world. Columnist İsmail Hakkı, working at the newspaper "Yeni Asır" at that time, stated the reasons of the Great Depression and frequently suggested solutions.

Aegean region, enduring World War I, enemy invasion and the War of Independence, suffered in repercussion heavily. Right before the Depression, Turkey went through drought. As a result, this affected produce badly and led to famine. At the same time, heavy rain and floods in and around İzmir caused damage to frequently exported produce such as fig, tobacco and cotton⁸. Severe seasonal conditions like flood and drought also caused growing cost to go up.⁹ Prior to this, Jews, Armenians, British and Russians have fled the area after the War of Independence, which indirectly and deeply had an effect. In connection, several measures to render foreign capital ineffective led the trade in İzmir to become weaker. Another interesting example is that the shipment costs for good to İzmir were twice as bigger than the shipment costs of goods for İstanbul. This also led merchants in time to prefer İstanbul to İzmir for import/export. Hard days were ahead for Aegean region, as incorporation and capitalization was pretty much non-existent at the time. Foreign companies, which provided critical services for the city such as railway-tramway transport, telephone, water, gas and electricity, sold these services too expensive and installed them not on time, causing social and municipal services to not run properly. One of the most important problems of İzmir was the housing for immigrants that came to the city following the population exchange with Greece. Corruption and illegal housing during expropriation could not be prevented. Lots of profiteering took place over the houses left by the Greeks. At the same time, due to rumors of famine, merchants do not sell their wheat which caused prices to increase, bakers to sell bread at exorbitant prices and the people to become breadless.¹⁰

İzmir, having endured invasion, war, poverty and fire since May 15 1919 and economically devastated, had become a symbol of the War of Independence. Now, this symbol of a city was also going to be symbol of economic salvation,

⁸ Alev Gözcü, "Bir İntiharın Sosyo-Ekonomik Arka Planı: Dünya Ekonomik Bunalımının İzmir Örneğinde gündelik Yaşama Yansımaları", ÇTTAD,VI/14, (2007/Bahar), p.89.

⁹ Hakkı Uyar, "Tariş Üzüm Satış Kooperatifleri Birliği", Tariş Tarihi, İzmir 1993.

¹⁰ Nuri Poyrazoğlu, "1929 Dünya Ekonomik Bunalımının İzmir'de Görülen Etkileri", (Post Graduate Thesis) DEU, Institute of Principles of Atatürk and Turkish Revolution History, İzmir, 2008, p. 89.

transitioning from dependence on foreign capital to national economy¹¹. Production and usage of national product was encouraged during Economy Congress in İzmir, which took place between the dates February 17 and March 4 1923¹². So it was not coincidence that it took place there.

At this point, new ways of attracting foreign capital to İzmir were sought, in order to re-energize the the economically along with the new-born Republic. Products and goods that could prove İzmir's richness were supposed to be exhibited. The "*Sample Exhibition*", which took place during the Economy Congress, was the most suitable event for this. The Sample Exhibition is considered the first step towards the İzmir Expo, which would open later on¹³. Some of the product that are presented in the exhibition: Grape halva (of Ali Rıza from Kuşadası), figs and export boxes full of grapes¹⁴.

During the years of Depression, a new form of tax was introduced which was called "*Depression Tax*" (*Law of National Economy Protection*). However, since the profit was low for grape and fig producers, they were exempt from this tax. These producers have only paid income taxes¹⁵.

The value loss of Turkish Lira has affected İzmir the most¹⁶ because nearly half of the country's export was done from İzmir. One of the most important produce that contributed to city economy was grape.

Grape production was mostly done in two areas: Urla and Manisa – Alaşehir – Akhisar – Salihli. Grapes were usually grown in İzmir (in the towns of Çeşme, Foça, Karaburun, Kemalpaşa, Menemen, Urla and Seferihisar) and in Manisa: (in the towns of Akhisar, Alaşehir, Kasaba, Kırkağaç and Salihli). "*İzmir Sultanisi*" a type of grape which was grown particularly in the towns of Karaburun and Urla, was known internationally. After all, the most important type of grape was "*Sultani*" and it had no seeds¹⁷". This type of grape made its name as "*İzmir Sultanisi*"¹⁸. "*Aegean grapes have gained themselves a place in the foreign market while*

¹¹Pakize Çoban, "*İzmir'de Dünya Ekonomik Bunalımı Srasında Tüketim Kültüründe Değişmeler Ve Bunalımın Fiyatlar Üzerinde Etkileri*", (Post Graduate Thesis), DEU, Institute of Principles of Atatürk and Turkish Revolution History, İzmir, 2008, p.28.

¹² Çimen, *ibid*, p.24.

¹³ Fikret Yılmaz – Sabri Yetkin, "*İzmir Kent Tarihi*", İzmir, 2002.

¹⁴ Polat *ibid*, p.38

¹⁵ *Ibid*, p.39.

¹⁶ Çimen, *ibid*., p.26.

¹⁷ *Ibid*. p.95.

¹⁸ Hasan Hüseyin Genç, "*1929 İzmir'in Sosyo-Ekonomik Ve Kültürel Yapısı*", (Post Graduate Thesis), DEU., Institute of Principles of Atatürk and Turkish Revolution History, İzmir, 2010, p.45.

competing with Californian and Corinthian grapes. The most noticeable buyers of Aegean grapes were as follows: "Germany, England, Italy, Belgium, Netherlands, Russia and Egypt¹⁹".

80% percent of the yield of grape in the region was made from the towns of Manisa, Alaşehir, Akhisar and Turgutlu²⁰. In 1927, the biggest grape washing, sifting and drying plants belonged to Henrico Alyoti. The most famous grape dryer among Turks was Kazım Bey. According to the general report of İzmir Commercial Chamber, starting from the beginning of the season and until October 20 1929, 25.030.347 kilograms of grapes were sold in İzmir Market²¹. Grape prices of the year 1929 were stated as below:

Aliyyülâlâ (premium quality)²² starting from 55-62 kuruş, âlâ (high quality) 48-58 kuruş, primary grapes 41-54 kuruş, secondary 1-43 kuruş, tertiary 24-32 kuruş, karaböce 20-23,5 kuruş²³.

Annual export value of grapes, which have a large popularity in the world fruit market with their taste, color and sweetness, is around 17 - 20% of the general export in İzmir, which is between 14 and 20 million TRY²⁴. It was predicted that in 1929, the yield of grape in İzmir would be about an unusual 75 million kilograms. However, heavy rains caused the grape production to decrease about 32%. Grape production and export data in İzmir between the years 1928 - 1929 are as follows:

YEAR	YIELD OF GRAPE (KG)	EXPORT (KG) (TRY)
1928	45.000.000	37.780.341 14.678.457
1929	51.000.000	42.154.339 17.435.742

¹⁹ Erkan Serçe- Sabri Yetkin, , "120. Yılında İzmir Ticaret Borsası Tarihi", I.b., İzmir, 2012, p.245.

²⁰Melih Gürsoy, "Tarihi, Ekonomisi ve İnsanları ile Bizim İzmirimiz", 1.b.Yaylacık Matbaası, İzmir, Mayıs, 1993, p. 175.

²¹ Genç , *ibid*, p. 46.

²² Premium Quality

²³Anadolu, 22 Teşrinievvel 1930.

²⁴İzmir Ticaret ve Sanayi Odası Mecmuası, V/3 (Mart 1930), s.129-130.

“During the years 1929, 29.851.618 kilograms of grapes were exported from the ports of İzmir to various countries. Grapes were valued at 11 million TRY. Countries that import our grapes the most are England, Italy, Netherlands and Belgium.²⁵”

The newspaper “Ahenk” published the report provided by the İzmir Commercial Chamber in September 5, 1929. Here is the report, dated November 4, 1929:

GRAPE PRICES IN THE MARKET

ALA (HIGH QUALITY) ²⁶	55 kuruş.
1.	41- 50 kuruş.
2.	32-41 kuruş.
3.	24-32 kuruş.
KARABÖCE	20-27 kuruş.
YAĞMUR YEMİŞ	10-20 kuruş.

EXPORT TO VARIOUS COUNTRIES

GERMANY AND OTHER WESTERN PORT COUNTRIES	178.625.081 KG.
ENGLAND	69.900.075 KG.
FRANCE	500.657 KG.
ITALY	43.139.083 KG.
EGYPT	148.479 KG.
OTHER COUNTRIES	485.317 KG.

GRAPES (RECEIVED AND SOLD) IN THE MARKET

YEAR	GRAPES RECEIVED	GRAPES SOLD

²⁵ Anadolu, 14 Şubat 1929.

²⁶ High Quality

1928	30.800.000 KG.	27.274.288 KG.
1929	43.600.000 KG.	36.362.827 KG.

Again, during these days, there have been news which were spread over by various newspapers to producers and traders regarding damaged/decaying grapes being purchased by the monopoly: *“Zekayi Bey, general manager on distillery restriction, immediately visited the market and left satisfied with the grape purchase. Management on restriction imposed that we must produce from our own grapes and figs, while undergoing surveillance²⁷.”*

It is understood from the tables that, while the Depression is not yet officially existent, the sales of grapes were adequate, even though the amount of grapes received by the Market was low due to both climate and various reasons. When the Depression took place in 1929, the amount of leftover grapes was quite high, even though there was an increase in the sales. As usual, local press published news stating that heavy rains damaged crops in Kemalpaşa, Menemen, Manisa and Kasaba, as well as suggestions, including potash water to help prevent fast drying of grapes²⁸.

In 1930's, grapes made up around 7 – 10% of the export income and took second place as the “locomotive of the economy”. According to Durgun, he stated: *“Annual export value of grapes, which have a large popularity in the world fruit market with their taste, color and sweetness, is around 17 – 20% of the general export in İzmir, which is between 14 and 19 million TRY”²⁹*

In order to better understand the state of trade in İzmir between the years 1929 and 1930's, it is necessary to see how the press covered it at that time. As stated in the newspaper “Cumhuriyet”:

“According to the statistics published by the Commerce Chamber, in the first six months of this year, export to foreign countries was 68.350.055 kilograms valuing at 28.741.983 TRY. This year had a surplus of 7.649.287 TRY. Surplus for other produce in comparison with last year can be seen as follows: Olive oil – 3.937.000 TRY, Grapes

²⁷ Ahenk, 5Eylül 1929.

²⁸ Anadolu, 4 Eylül 1929

²⁹ Bülent Durgun, *“Atatürk Döneminde İzmir Ekonomisi”*, (Doctoral Thesis), DEU, Institute of Principles of Atatürk and Turkish Revolution History, İzmir, 2006, p.69.

- 1.177.400 TRY, *Opium* - 1.082.867 TRY, *Tobacco* - 986.000 TRY and *Fig* - 144.800 TRY.³⁰

It should be taken into consideration that in İzmir, where 70% of the country's export is handled, there was no exchange market. In a newspaper regarding this was mentioned the discomfort of the situation: "In our country, where exchange market is concerned, there is a law and order. Neither of which exists in İzmir.³¹" At last "Inspectors from the Department of Treasury were sent to establish the Exchange Chamber, in order to stimulate the city economy³²."

By the way, the situation for grape producers was not very pleasant. Efforts such as reducing taxes and granting bonuses of 3 kuruş were not helping. Imported wine was sold from 12 kuruş, while the national wines started from 22 - 23 kuruş. This made the export virtually impossible³³.

Even though the value of Turkish Lira was protected with the taken measures and precautions, the expected pickup of the economy did not happen. Turkey is an important country when it comes to grape export in the world. However, the consecutive wars prior to World War I have taken their toll and Turkey had to pull out from the export. At that time, grapes still had an important share in Turkey's export. So much so, that the profit from the grape export was as high as the amount spent on importing machines.³⁴ Import of İzmir's produce by Europe decreased, further pulling down the prices. Both dry and wet produce, which were the mythological fruits mentioned in holy books, were the source of income for the local populace.

Figs were also affected in a similar manner as the grapes. In 1929, 44.400 tons of raisins were sold for 18 million TRY, in 1930 40.500 tons were sold for 11.6 million TRY and in 1932 49.500 tons were sold for 10.2 million. In 1930, the first year when the first reflections of the Great Depression show up, export price dropped from 41 kuruş to 29 kuruş³⁵. In 1930's, yıllarda several measures were taken such the *Grape Institute*, which was build in Manisa - Horozköy³⁶. Around 1932 - 1933, the severe drop at the prices during the export season led the gov-

³⁰ Cumhuriyet, 5 Teşrinievvel 1929.

³¹ Poyrazoğlu, *ibid*, p. 44.

³² Çimen, *ibid*, p.26.

³³ Yarı, 10 Kanun-i Evvel 1930.

³⁴ Çimen, *ibid*, p.54.

³⁵ Genç *ibid*, p.. 46.

³⁶ *Ibid*, p.46.

ernment to take action. Government, assigned Ziraat Bank and İş Bank to prevent prices from falling by purchasing grapes from Manisa market. In the same year, grape producers in Manisa got into a cooperative association. Cooperatives were being established in Alaşehir (in 1931), number 1 and 2 of Bağcılar in Manisa (in 1932) and in Salihli and Turgutlu (in 1933)³⁷.

“From İstanbul Trade Market to İzmir Trade Market, important news were given out in 1931 in the middle of grape season. According to this; due to the damage of the fields in America, it is claimed that İzmir grape would make a lot of money.³⁸” Hopes went up as rumors spread among Turkish producers about how diseases spread in the American fields. The expectation of the rise for demand and the increase in the yield due to the friendly conditions of that season led producers to be hopeful³⁹. In 1932 however, something came up which put producers in a difficult position. Several ill-intent merchants which sought to make quick money, packed Iranian grape and sold it under the name “İzmir Grape”⁴⁰. This situation naturally stained the name of İzmir grape because the quality of the Iranian grape was lower. This may have created big problems for the Turkish economy during the Great Depression. İzmir grape was not popular only abroad but also in other parts of Turkey⁴¹.

On January 14 1932, an urgent letter No 204 was sent to the Internal Affairs, requesting urgent solutions for the problems of producers in Urla and Kemalpaşa. It is also written that in the previously mentioned areas, local producers did not have any grapes left, tobacco was not sold and this is why they have problems, not to forget that they have received support from Ziraat Bank but the timing was not right. It is suggested that the support should be provided during harvest time and the next year after that.

In the letter, it is reported that the Municipality of İzmir was notified⁴².

One of the most important rivals of Turkey in terms of grape export was Greece. *“Greek grapes, while incomparable with ours in terms of breed, look more flamboyant due to its size and hand-picked state. Merchants that fail to comprehend the breed of the produce can easily prefer Greek grapes to ours⁴³.”* The biggest rival of Sultani

³⁷Gürsoy, *ibid.*,p.176.

³⁸*Ibid*,p.55.

³⁹*Ibid*,p.56.

⁴⁰ Çimen, *ibid.*,p.57.

⁴¹Durgun, *ibid*, p. 68

⁴² T.C.Başbakanlık Devlet Arşivi,Dahiliye Vekaleti,p.204.

⁴³Durgun, *ibid*, p.72.

grapes are the Greek Corinthian grapes. Here is the difference: *“Corinthian Passolinas is prepared and packed like the ones in Turkey. What differs is, these grapes are placed on wooden bedsteads with high edges⁴⁴. “*

As time passed, with the increase of demand for wet grapes in Europe, merchants that wanted to make quick money made advances. Producers started to ship out grapes while unripe to meet the demand. Measures were taken to warn the producers because for export, grapes needed to be packed properly, cut into small bunches and placed correctly⁴⁵. A small possible mistake could have easily meant the loss of leadership in grape market.

CONCLUSION

Those who lived in an area where grapes grow from past to present consumed this fruit in various forms: raw grapes, vinegar, raisins, wine, grape molasse and biscuits. Grapes are one of the most important sources of income for Aegean region. Local farming populace makes a complete living from grape. Different types of grapes (in terms of color, size, taste, smell etc.) emerge from the soils of Mediterranean. Grapes have witnessed many historical events and even at some point, directly influenced the process with its economic value. Grapes have also become a symbol of hope during crises. Therefore, grapes were influential even in the first years of the Republic.

Between the years 1930 and 1934, when the Depression affected, most of the population lived in rural areas. Turks tried to make a living by selling grapes, figs, wheat and tobacco as those were the most produced in an economy based on farming. At the same time with the Lausanne conference, İzmir Economy Congress took place and according to the decision taken there, people and students were going to be encouraged to use national products by annually celebrating “national products week”. İzmir and İzmir port, regardless of the invasions during war, became the shining star of the Aegean region by producing and selling its grapes. İzmir International Expo and the Sample Exhibition became the showcase for grape and other products grown in the region with the aim of Turkey’s economic development.

It is evident that the Great Depression, which shook the world deeply, had a great effect on the weak economy of the newly-established republic. It was

⁴⁴*Ibid*, p. 71.

⁴⁵*Ibid*, p.58.

not easy taking measures to struggle with the Depression while trying to maintain both the modernization attempts and the provision of the resources for these attempts. So, in such conditions, Aegean Region became the locomotive of the Turkish economy, at the time when it was dependent on farming. İzmir, a sea port and the center of trade, had tried to make up for the damage caused by the Great Depression by organizing exhibitions and expos of farming produce. As a result of these attempts, grapes had become an important source of export income not only for the Aegean Region but also for the entire Turkey. At the end, grapes have become the lifesaver that rescued İzmir and eventually Turkey from the economic crisis.

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