

## A SHORT SUMMARY OF TURKISH FOREIGN POLICY: 1923-1939

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### INTRODUCTION: GOALS AND PRINCIPLES

The First World War brought the Ottoman Empire to an end. The Ottoman Empire had been divided when it was defeated by Allied Powers. However, Turkey's National Liberation War was won and the Republic of Turkey was established on October 29, 1923. The Grand National Assembly accepted a new constitution while Mustafa Kemal as its first president. The new republic cut of ties with the Ottoman past. The first fifteen years of Turkish state was dominated by Atatürk not only internal affairs but also affairs.

Turkish foreign policy between the two world wars was influenced by Atatürk's vision and his personality. Most writers call this era "The Turkey of Atatürk." According to Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, Turkey's foreign policy objectives were to seek recognition as a sovereign entity, and to seek to enjoy the full benefits of peace. During this period, Turkish foreign policy remained true to the non-revisionist norms of Kemalist ideology-except for the Montreux Convention and the Hatay Issue-. I want to discuss this subject in two parts: the first part is brief the period of 1923-1932 and the second covers the period until the Second World War. Before giving the details, I would like to give an introduction explaining the goals and principles of Atatürk's foreign policy.

If one is interested in Turkish foreign policy, an analysis of Atatürk's foreign policy is important from several points of view. General Turkish foreign policy originated from Atatürk's ideas. This is still true today. For example the sentence, "Peace at home, peace in the world" encapsulated Atatürk's approach, and it could still be said to be the main principle of today's foreign policy. Even in 1992, Prime Minister Suleyman Demirel said Turkey's foreign policy should be based on the protection and continuation of peace in the region and peace in the world.<sup>1</sup> The other important principle laid down by Atatürk was looking to the West for direction. None of these principles has priority over the other. They have equal importance in Turkish foreign policy.

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<sup>1</sup>International Herald Tribune, July 13, 1992.

During the establishment of the Republic of Turkey, the new Turkish state had some goals. The creation of a national Turkish state which was the main goal of the National Pact of 1920 and it stated the political and military goals of the War of National Liberation. Related with this main goal, the completion of independence was naturally the second goal of Atatürk's foreign policy. There was no way of a mandate or protectorate would be accepted. The third goal was modernization. Atatürk identified modernization with westernization and used both words synonymously. Turkey's western-inclined foreign policy began in Atatürk's time in conjunction with efforts at modernization in the cultural sphere.

Turkish statesmen had formulated some principles that were the major foundations of the attempts to achieve these goals.<sup>2</sup> The first principle was realism. Atatürk always kept this in mind when dealing with national and international issues. Because of this realistic policy, Turkey was able to win and preserve its independence. The second principle was allegiance to international law. Here there are several examples which will be given later in details:

- (i) The Briand-Kellog Pact of 1928
- (ii) Membership of the League of Nations
- (iii) The solution of the Mosul Question
- (iv) The Montreux Convention of 1936

"Peace at home, Peace in the World" was the third principle which was demonstrated by the Balkan Entente of 1934 and the Saadabad Pact of 1937. As I have stated above, the Westward direction is the fourth principle. This direction has not been changed since 1923. It is still very important for Turkey not only politically but also economically. For example Turkey is a member of the Council of Europe and NATO and also it is trying to be member of the EC.

The Turkish Grand National Assembly ratified the Treaty of Lausanne which was signed on July 24, 1923. Turkey was the only defeated nation of the First World War to be able to negotiate peace on its own terms and won almost all its demands from the Entente. Also, The Lausanne Treaty was the only post-war agreement which depended on mutual negotiations.<sup>3</sup> The most important point that the secular Turkish state was acknowledged by the international community.

At the same time, the Treaty of Lausanne left several problems between Turkey and the Entente Powers; the Mosul question, the problem of the Straits, the Hatay question. The strategic importance of Turkey began to increase because of its borders created by the Lausanne Treaty. It had borders with the important powers of Europe after 1923, i.e. the Soviet Union, Britain in Mosul, France in Syria, and Italy in the Aegean Islands.

<sup>2</sup>M. Gönlübol "Atatürk's Foreign Policy and Principles, in Turhan Feyzioglu(Ed.), Atatürk's Way, Istanbul. 1982, p.259.

<sup>3</sup>Ö.Kürkçüoğlu, "Turco-British Relations Since the 1920s," in W.Hale and A. Bağış(Eds.), Four Centuries of Turco-British Relations, Beverley,1984, p.88.

Before establishing normal relations with these nations to solve problems in foreign policy, almost all the institutions of the Ottoman Empire were abolished during the five years following Lausanne; the Sultanate and Caliphate, the Islamic Law and educational system, and the Arabic alphabet<sup>4</sup>. Afterwards they started to apply a very realistic foreign policy. There are some examples of evidence of "realism" in Turkish foreign policy.

## I. THE PERIOD NECESSARY TO SOLVE THE PROBLEMS THAT THE TREATY OF LAUSANNE LEFT UNRESOLVED:1923-1932

### 1) The Question of the Etablis and Turkish-Greek Relations

After the signing of the Treaty of Lausanne, the Allied forces left Istanbul. This caused the emigration of Christians from Istanbul to Greece. The problem started when the Greek minority wanted to stay in Istanbul.

The two countries decided to clarify the situation with an agreement. The Convention between Greece and Turkey concerning the exchange of Greek and Turkish minorities was signed on January 30, 1923. With this agreement the future of the Greek community in Istanbul, as well as the Muslim minority in Western Thrace, was officially guaranteed. On the other hand, the implementation of this treaty was more difficult than its preparation. It caused some problems between the two countries due to different interpretations. We can say the most important problem was "the question of the etablis". Article 2 of the exchange convention stipulated that: The following persons shall not be included in the exchange provided for in Article 1: The Greek inhabitants of Constantinople and the Moslem inhabitants of Western Thrace.<sup>5</sup>

There was a different interpretation concerning the status of the Greek residents settled in the city before 30 October 1918. From the Turkish point of view, the status of these Greek residents had to be determined by Turkish Law. According to the Greeks, the term etablis had to be interpreted by the treaty of 1923. A mixed-commission was established to find a solution. Wishing to reduce to a minimum the number of non-exchangeable Greeks, the Turkish government reopened the problem as soon as the mixed-commission was convened in October 1923. By September 1924 negotiations at the mixed commission had failed. The question of the etablis was referred to the judicial sub-committee but it could not break the deadlock either. The impasse was then presented to the League of Nations.<sup>6</sup> The Council of the League of Nations therefore suggested the possibility of an appeal to the Permanent Court of International Justice. On February 21, 1925, the Permanent Court of International Justice announced its opinion regarding this issue. According to the Court's opinion if the Greek minority of Istanbul wished to be non-exchangeable;

- (i) they have to have been in Istanbul before November 30, 1918,

<sup>4</sup>W. Hale, in Hale & Bağış (Eds.), op.cit., p.5.

<sup>5</sup>FO:371/10860/E56/56/44.

<sup>6</sup>A. Alexandris, *The Greek Minority of Istanbul and Greek-Turkish Relations*, Beverley, 1983, pp. 113-114.

- (ii) they have to have intended settling in Istanbul permanently. However, after this resolution there were some unresolved problems relating to personal property possessions in the two countries.

The other problem was the position of the ecumenical Patriarch at Istanbul in 1924. Patriarch Gregory expressed his anxiety about the status of the archbishops. He had come to the city after 1918 and was therefore exchangeable under the terms of the exchange convention. For this reason, the Turks refused to recognize the new patriarch. Turkish government stated:

- (1) that mixed-commission decided that Patriarch was subject to exchange,
- (2) that Turkish government had no objection to election as Patriarch of person properly qualified by Treaty of Lausanne,
- (3) that foreign intervention on could not be admitted in domestic affairs.<sup>7</sup> Resignation of patriarch assisted negotiations between Greece and Turkey. According to Sir Lindsay, Turkish Government became more moderate at outbreak of Kurdish revolt in the Dersim region (when an offer was made to allow exchangeable Metropolitans if non-exchangeable Patriarch was elected), but appeared to become less moderate when reassuring news regarding revolt was received.<sup>8</sup>

By early April 1925, negotiations had been resumed after these problems had been solved. The Ankara Accord was signed on June 21, 1925. The aim of this agreement was to solve the financial and legal questions arising from the exchange. It was about Greek property in Turkey and Turkish property in Greece. The second part was to deal with the interpretation of articles 2 and 16 of the exchange convention.<sup>9</sup>

They exchanged ambassador in the following month, and established normal relations for the first time since the Balkan Wars. But General Pangalos, who was a Greek dictator came to power on 25 June 1925. He refused to take any positive action regarding to situation and practically ignored Turkey. However, Pangalos soon fell and the Athens agreement was signed on December 1, 1926.<sup>10</sup>

Despite the agreement, meaningful relations did not start between the two governments until 1930. A strong wish for an improvement in Greek-Turkish relations was developed by Venizelos and Atatürk. These two leaders came to symbolize the idea of peaceful Greek-Turkish co-existence. The negotiations were resumed in 1928 and an agreement was first signed on 10 June 1930. It dealt with the questions arising from the application of the Lausanne treaty and with the agreement on the exchange of populations. Consequently, they decided that the Greek and Turkish claims as-balancing. Properties were to be restored to their rightful owners within two months. In summary, the minorities issue was solved and a treaty was signed which covered the following:

<sup>7</sup>FO:371/10859/E668/55/44.

<sup>8</sup>FO:371/10859/E1392/55/44.

<sup>9</sup>FO:371/10865/E4102/301/44.

<sup>10</sup>Alex, *op.cit.*, pp.127-128.

neutrality, conciliation and arbitration, a protocol of parity and naval armaments and a commercial convention.<sup>11</sup>

## 2) Turkish-British Relations and the Mosul Question

"The Turkish Question" for Britain centred around the Mosul Question. According to Turkey, Mosul was within the National Pact boundaries. On the other hand the Treaty of Lausanne left the undetermined frontier with Iraq to be settled directly with Britain as trustee for Iraq. In accordance with article three of the Treaty of Lausanne the problem was to be solved by mutual negotiations within nine months. Talks opened in Istanbul on May 19, 1924, but reached no definite conclusion. The Treaty of Lausanne envisaged that if the parties failed to find a solution within nine months, the issue would be referred to the League of Nations.

By 6 August 1924 Britain had decided to make a unilateral application to the League of Nations and had the item 'Iraqi Frontier' put on the agenda of the Council of the League. Turkey proposed a referendum in the region. During the discussions which began on 24 September, the British countered the Turkish request for a plebiscite by arguing that the matter was a boundary dispute. Finally on September 30, 1924, the Council of the League of Nations decided that a commission of neutral members be set up to investigate the matter. At the same time the British issued a 48 hour ultimatum to the Turks to move from the area by October 9, 1924. The Turks appealed to the League of Nations against the ultimatum. The League called a special session to meet in Brussels to discuss the matter. They decided upon a line to divide the two territories. This became known as the Brussels line. This provisional frontier approximated to the boundaries of the Ottoman provinces of Mosul and Hakkari. Two days later, the Enquiry Commission was appointed and the commission gave its report to the League on 16 July 1925. The Brussels Line was accepted as a geographical border. Turkey refused to recognize the decision and questioned the Commission's findings. The Secretary-General sent a letter to the Turkish Minister for Foreign Affairs on November 2, 1925. It was explaining that the Committee of the Council had special duty to investigate the question of the frontier between Turkey and Iraq.<sup>12</sup> The problem was then referred to the Permanent Court of International Justice in the Hague for an advisory opinion. The P.C.I.J. was only asked its opinion on procedural matters. The Turkish government declared that the matter was a political one which could not be decided by judicial means, and that for this reason Turkey would not participate in the activities of the Court. However, the Council decided that the Brussels Line become the permanent border, thereby awarding Mosul to Iraq On December 16, 1925. Despite official and popular reactions in Turkey, the government decided to abide this decision.<sup>13</sup>

There were two reasons for accepting this decision: Firstly, the Turkish government formulated the problem as a territorial rather than an economic issue. Former Ottoman province Mosul was an oil-rich region but its population was largely Kurdish. According to Ankara, the integration of the Kurds within Turkey would cause more problems.

<sup>11</sup> S. Bilge and et.al., *Olaylarla Türk Dış Politikası (1919-1965)*, Ankara, 1969, pp. 72-73.

<sup>12</sup> FO:10822/E6893/2/65.

<sup>13</sup> Gönlübol, *op.cit.*, pp. 289-290.

Curzon had insisted that Mosul belonged to Iraq, on historical, economic and racial grounds. Also, if Turkey owned Mosul, the Turkish frontier would have been within sixty miles of the Iraqi capital.<sup>14</sup> Another reason to seek a quick end for the Mosul Question was the Kurdish rebellion. A Kurdish revolt was led by Sheikh Said in the Dersim region in February 1925.<sup>15</sup> The most important symbol of Turkish-Kurdish brotherhood disappeared with the abolition of the caliphate. Shaikh Said and the other co-operating shaikhs blamed the Kemalist Turkey as a godless government. In the name of the restoration of the Holy Law, the shaikh forces marched through the country and seized government offices.<sup>16</sup>

Because of these reasons Turkey accepted the decision of the League of Nations and the Turks formulated three proposals to put the British:

- 1) Britain would sign a neutrality treaty with Turkey.
- 2) The sovereignty of Mosul would be transferred to Iraq as a 'fully self-governing state'.
- 3) A request for shares in Mosul oil.<sup>17</sup>

The British-Turkish Treaty was signed on June 6, 1926. An important clause was that the Treaty gave Turkey 10% of all the oil royalties for 25 years from the Mosul oil fields.<sup>18</sup> However, within a year Turkey had accepted a one-off payment of £500.000.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, the British promised to refrain from agitation on behalf of Kurds and Armenians.<sup>20</sup>

### 3) The Milestones in Turkish-Soviet Relation

The Mosul Question served as the motivation for Turkey to return to the foreign policy which it had followed during the War of National Liberation. Turkey felt the need for the support of a major power. At that time the only major power which wished to maintain friendly relations with Turkey was the Soviet Union. Also the USSR had itself not yet normalized its relations with the West.

Turkey and the Soviet Union signed a Pact of Non-Aggression and Security on December 17, 1925-one day after the League's decision on the Mosul Question.-<sup>21</sup> Article 1 of this Pact reads: Both sides agree to observe neutrality towards the other on

<sup>14</sup>Geoffrey Lewis, *Nations of the Modern World: Turkey*, Third Edition, Ernest Benn, London, 1965, p.115.

<sup>15</sup>V. D. Volkan and Norman Itzkowitz, *The Immortal Atatürk: A Psychobiography*, The University of Chicago, 1984, p.247.

<sup>16</sup>Kinross, p.399; look at Martin van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State; The Social and Political Structures of Kurdistan*, Zed Books, London, 1992, 281.

<sup>17</sup>S.F. Evans, *The Slow Rapprochement: Britain and Turkey in the Age of Kemal Atatürk, 1919-1939*, Beverley, 1982, pp.95-96.

<sup>18</sup>FO 371:11462/E3291/62/65.

<sup>19</sup>J. C. Hurewitz, *Diplomacy in the Near and Middle East*, Vol.2, p.146.

<sup>20</sup>Brunissen, *op.cit.*, p.275.

<sup>21</sup>FO:371/10869/E8181/1944/44.

case a military action should be carried out by one or more powers against one signatory party.<sup>22</sup> In some ways the treaty was an extension of the Soviet-Turkish Treaty of 1921, which enshrined the principle of non-intervention by adding non-aggression and neutrality".<sup>23</sup> Actually, Turkey was very anxious about Italy's attitude towards Asia Minor. In a word, should a conflict between Turkey and England arise over Mosul, Italy might be tempted to join in and reoccupied Adana, if not Izmir, while Greece recaptured Eastern Thrace.

An interesting interpretation that Ankara was suspicious of a secret understanding between Rome and Moscow or between London and Moscow against Turkey. The guarantee of Turkey's frontier should be with the Pact of 1925.<sup>24</sup> Thrace On March 11, 1927, a commercial treaty was also signed. However, although the volume of trade between the two countries increased between 1927 and 1930, relations were not always amicable. Some friction had arisen as a result of Soviet insistence on establishing "branches of the commercial delegation" in many Turkish cities. The Turks rejected the establishment of such offices in Kars and Artvin. On the other hand, they continued to have good relations in the international arena. For example, they clearly demonstrated their allegiance to the rule of law and to world peace, by signing the Kellogg-Briand Pact of August 27, 1928. This pact was perhaps the first agreement signed by Turkey after Lausanne. Also, it was another proof to the world of Turkey's desire for general peace and goodwill.<sup>25</sup>

Turkey and the Soviet Union had good and strong relations between 1933 and 1936. The Soviets offered Turkey credit for the purpose of buying Soviet made machinery. In addition, the Soviets made free gifts of military vehicles and loaned the services of experts to set up industrial plants during this period. Although the Soviet Union supported the Turkish proposals for the Montreux Revision, relations had begun to deteriorate since 1936. From the Soviet point of view, Turkey steered a course towards closer relations with the Western World. According to Turkey, the Soviets might be harbouring imperialistic claims towards the Straits and Istanbul. In 1936, the deterioration of Turkish-Soviet relations was caused by the initiation of Turkish-British relations. The real reversal in the Turkish-Soviet relationship was to come after Atatürk's death in 1938.

Although the Mosul incident brought Turkey and Russia closer together for a time, there was a rapprochement with the West.

#### 4) Turkish Rapprochement with the West: Italy and France

Though Atatürk had never admired Mussolini, Turkish-Italian relations had been extraordinarily good until 1938. They had reached an agreement in 1921 and Turkish - Italian trade relations from that time on had continued to flourish. Relations improved after the solution of the Mosul Question, and in May 1928 a bilateral Turkish-Italian agreement was signed. It was a treaty of friendship, conciliation and neutrality. It was the

<sup>22</sup>Hurewitz, *op.cit.*, p.143.

<sup>23</sup>Evans, *op.cit.*, p.93.

<sup>24</sup>FO:371/11029/N7077/6895/38.

<sup>25</sup>FO:371/12799/A6246/1/45.

first political pact which the Turks had signed with a Western European Great Power after the war.<sup>26</sup> According to this treaty in the event of one of the contracting parties being attacked by one or more other power, the other party would remain neutral.<sup>27</sup> Actually in 1928 Italy was striving for a tripartite pact in the eastern Mediterranean among Turkey, Italy and Greece. After Turkish-Italian pact, a Greco-Italian pact was signed on September 24, 1928. Also, Italian "conciliation" played an important part in the Greco-Turkish accord of 1930.<sup>28</sup>

France has always been a source of inspiration for the arts and general culture of Turkish intellectuals. The subsequent recognition of the National Pact by France seemed to usher in a new era of Turkish-French relations. On October 20, 1921, the Ankara Agreement was signed between Turkey and France. The Turkish-Syrian border was determined by this agreement as well as by a special administrative regime for Iskenderun. Also they agreed that a border-commission would decide the fixed frontier within one month. However, the commission was not founded until 1925 and it did not find any solutions. After that Turkey and France resumed negotiations on the border question in 1926. On February 18, 1926, the Treaty of Friendship and Good Neighbourliness was signed, which was the first agreement between Turkey and France since the Treaty of Lausanne. The Treaty established relations of good neighbourliness and friendship between Turkey and France. There had been no important modification of frontiers, but only adaptations to practical necessities. As a matter of fact the whole of this agreement was based on the Treaty of Ankara of 1921.<sup>29</sup> The Grand National Assembly ratified this treaty on the same day as the British-Turkish Agreement on the Mosul Question on June 8, 1926.<sup>30</sup>

There were two important questions between Turkey and France: the question of the capitulations and the question of Hatay after 1930's. The system of the capitulations was the privileges granted by Sultans to foreigners in the Ottoman Empire since 1535. Under the system of capitulations, foreigners were not subject to Ottoman law. The Capitulations were to be totally abolished by the Treaty of Lausanne. After the abolition of the capitulations, Turkey accepted to pay the debts of the Ottoman Empire to the Western States, especially to France since it had more privileges than the others. On June 13, 1928, the convention deal with this issue was signed by Turkey and France. Turkey continued to pay the instalments until the World Recession of 1930.

## II. THE PERIOD OF TURKISH ACHIEVEMENT IN INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS: 1932-1938

The progress of Turkish foreign policy was paralleled by success and peace in the international field in this period. The world economy was affected by the great recession between 1929 and 1930. Almost every state tried to find a solution and they all applied

<sup>26</sup>H. Howard, *The Partition of Turkey: A Diplomatic History*, New York, 1966, p.343.

<sup>27</sup>FO:371/12922/C4358/45/19.

<sup>28</sup>FO:371/12922/C4554/45/19.

<sup>29</sup>FO:371/11518/E3893/1199/89.

<sup>30</sup>FO:371/11518/E6575/1199/89.



different policies. Two big groupings emerged as a result of the situation: The Revisionists (Germany, Italy) and the Anti-revisionists (France, Britain). Turkey was in the Anti-revisionist Camp.

As a result in 1932 Turkey was admitted to membership of the League of Nations. Joining the League of Nations was a milestone in Turkey's rapprochement with the West. After becoming a member of the League, Turkey remained faithful to the articles of the Convention.

### 1) The Balkan Entente of 1934 against the Revisionist States

Ataturk wanted to start good relationships with Turkey's neighbours. He concluded two regional pacts to reinforce the defense policy: one in the Balkans and one with Turkey's eastern neighbours. "The difficult problems have concerned relations between Turkey and the Balkan countries, a legacy of the break-up of the Ottoman Empire. Specific problems have arisen from Turkish minorities, their cultural freedom and property compensation."<sup>31</sup> As I have stated above, the minority problem was solved by Turkish-Greek Agreement on June 10, 1930. On October 30 a treaty of Neutrality, Conciliation and Arbitration was signed. A Cordial Friendship Pact of 1923 was to lead to the foundation of the Balkan Entente.

In the 1930s, Bulgaria and Italy were two aggressive states in the Balkans. Moreover, their designs on southern Anatolia during the First World War had not been forgotten by Turkish statesmen. At that time Atatürk decided that a Balkan federation was the ultimate aim of Turkish foreign policy. Turkey had signed treaties with all the Balkan States separately: with Yugoslavia in 1925 and 1933; Bulgaria in 1929; Rumania in 1933; Hungary in 1927. However the Balkan situation outside the sphere of Turkish-Greek relations appeared less optimistic. The Balkan States organized many conferences for Balkan Unity between 1930 and 1933. Finally in February 1934, (the Balkan Entente was signed between Turkey, Greece, Yugoslavia and Romania), guaranteeing all frontiers and pledging collective security for the Balkans. In fact the Entente was against a possible attack by Bulgaria. Since Bulgaria and Albania refused to join, the Balkan Union would never become a genuine regional organization. Actually, without Bulgaria and Albania the agreement cannot be called a Balkan Agreement. This agreement was an important step towards international peace. Instead of solving any problem it caused further friction. For example, Bulgaria increased its diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union.<sup>32</sup> Apart from Bulgaria, Turkey feared of Italian aggression in the region. In spite of the Treaty of Neutrality and Conciliation, relations between Turkey and Italy did not proceed in a peaceful manner. There was not any problem between 1928 and 1932. However, Mussolini's speeches in 1934 brought Turkish suspicions to the surface. According to Mussolini, the historical aim of Italy has two names: Asia and Africa. Although Mussolini stated that he had never included Turkey in his plans, Italy's attack on Ethiopia further increased Turkey's suspicions. On the other hand, the Italians objected to the Montreux Convention. From 1937 until 1939, relations between the two countries remained cool.

<sup>31</sup>Duygu B. Sezer, "Turkey's Security Policies," in Jonathan Alford (Ed.), *Greece and Turkey: Adversity In Alliance*, Gower Publishing, Guildford, 1984, p.80.

<sup>32</sup>FO:371/R1158/22/67.

In addition, peace in the Balkans was seen by Atatürk as a defensive measure against the growing imperialism of Germany. In reviewing Turkish-German relations between the two world wars, a somewhat paradoxical attitude of Turkish statesmen and people towards Germany could be detected. Atatürk himself had bitter memories of German high-handedness during the First World War. It appeared that at any rate while Atatürk was alive he would never again allow Turkey to be dragged in the political wake of Germany.

By 1933, Turkey had started to implement its five-year economic improvement program. Turkey accepted a loan and technical advice from Russia to apply its five-year plan. "There is no doubt that Atatürk's goal in international economic relations were diversity and balance. Yet, during his era, Turkey became disproportionately entangled with Nazi Germany. By the mid-1930s, Hitler's regime had become Turkey's main trading partner in imports and exports."<sup>33</sup> The sympathy evinced by the Turks for their former German business partners continued because of their popularity. However, Turkey, and Atatürk in particular, did not desire an exclusive German monopoly over the Turkish economy. For example, Turkey contracted for the construction of Karabük steel and iron mills with a British company. Although Germany wanted to take Turkey to the 'revisionists' camp, it did not join. Germany's close collaboration with Italy and its negative attitude toward the Montreux Convention created further Turkish suspicions. In 1937, Turkey felt the necessity of countering German-Italian pressure.

## 2) Montreux Convention of 1936 and Turkish-British Relations by the Mediterranean Pact

After the resolution of the Mosul dispute, relations between Turkey and Britain entered a period of stagnation. Although the elimination of the fundamental problem formed the foundation for a close relationship, it was neither easy nor rapid. The Locarno Agreement, which is called a golden age of inter-war history, created a climate of relative peace. It was in this period that Turco-British relations became closer. The visit of the British Mediterranean Fleet in 1929 was received positively on both sides. A British-Turkish Treaty of Commerce and Navigation was signed in 1930.

When Italy attacked Ethiopia in 1935 Turkey felt the fear of Italian imperialism in the Mediterranean Region. Not only Turkey but also Greece felt the necessity of protecting the Eastern Mediterranean region against the danger of Italian aggression. Therefore Turkey and Greece proposed for a Mediterranean Pact was suggested by the French as a means of Franco-Italian detente. The British government never encouraged this proposal before the Abyssinian trouble, because:

- (a) Britain did not wish to undertake further commitments beyond the Locarno Agreement and the Covenant of the League of Nations,
- (b) It was difficult to see how the guarantee could be limited to defence against naval attack in the region.

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<sup>33</sup>George S. Harris, *Turkey: Coping with Crisis*, Westview Press, Colorado, 1985, p.183.

(c) It would be difficult to exclude Egypt, Russia and Romania from participation in the Pact, but their involvement would cause the most difficult problems.<sup>34</sup>

In 1936, the situation was completely different. Hence Great Britain accepted the proposal of Turkey. The Mediterranean Pact was signed in July 1936 by Turkey, Greece, Yugoslavia and Great Britain. The British government declared that if Turkey, Greece or Yugoslavia should be the victim of an act of unprovoked aggression committed in violation of the Covenant of the League of Nations, Britain would at once assist these countries.<sup>35</sup> In the final analysis, it was clear that it could not be any real Mediterranean security if France and Italy did not participate.<sup>36</sup> Still, this pact was regarded as evidence of Anglo-Turco-Greek alliance for peace in Eastern Mediterranean. The Turkish fleet visited Greece and Malta as a sign of this rapprochement in November 1936.<sup>37</sup>

If we look at the international arena in 1936, Germany began re-armament of the Rhine area; Japan, which was a signatory of the Treaty of Lausanne, invaded Manchuria and subsequently withdrew from the League of Nations. Additionally, there was another possibility. Turkey feared that should Italy succeed in conquering Ethiopia it might turn its attention to the Straits with a view to ensuring oil supplies from the Black Sea. This could be definitely ensured if Italy hold the Straits.<sup>38</sup> After these actions of the Revisionists states Turkey entered into diplomatic action for changing the demilitarized status of the Turkish Straits. The Turkish Government presented a formal note to the Lausanne signatories.<sup>39</sup> Bulgaria, France, Britain, Japan, Romania, Turkey and the Soviet Union met at Montreux and signed a convention on July 20, 1936. Italy refused to sign the convention until 1938.

According to the Straits Convention of the Lausanne Treaty, there was to be a demilitarized zone while at the same time recognizing Turkish sovereignty. This convention delegated their defense to a straits commission operating under the auspices of the Assembly of the League of Nations in conjunction with the great powers. As has been mentioned, the security system of the League was lacking in any real deterrent force against revisionists states.

The British Government took a sensible attitude toward Turkish claims and also the Balkan Entente supported Turkey in this matter. As a result of the conference, Turkish sovereignty and its right to remilitarize the zone was re-established. From the Turkish point of view, the most important result was that the International Commission ceased functioning after October 1, 1936. "Like the Lausanne Convention, the Montreux Convention recognized and affirmed 'the principle of freedom of transit and navigation by sea in the Straits.' which was to 'continue without limit of time'."<sup>40</sup> Briefly, the most important point of the convention was that the passage of warships must be left to the

<sup>34</sup>FO:371/20382-R 4002/294/67.

<sup>35</sup>FO:371/20382-R 4004/294/67.

<sup>36</sup>FO:371/20382-R 4005/294/67.

<sup>37</sup>FO:371/ 20382/R7088/294/67.

<sup>38</sup>FO:371/20073/E2258/26/44.

<sup>39</sup>FO:371/20073/E1973/26/44.

<sup>40</sup>H.N.Howard, *Turkey the Straits & US Policy*, Baltimore, 1974,p.152.

discretion and judgment of the Turkish Government if Turkey considered itself in danger of imminent war. However, this convention was Turkey's biggest diplomatic victory between the two World Wars. With respect to the acquisition of rights by legal means, Turkish policy had a unique place in international relations during this period.

The sojourn of King Edward VIII in Istanbul in 1936 and Inonu's visit to London in 1937 symbolized the climax of the rapprochement between Turkey and Britain. On May 27, 1938, the Credit Agreement was signed. For a time a silent struggle was waged between Britain, Germany and Russia to win Turkey's confidence and friendship. However, in 1936, Turkey was definitely on England's side. Furthermore, Turkish-English relations has been facilitated by the Montreux Convention.

### 3) The Saadabad Pact of 1937 with the Eastern Neighbours

The other notable achievements in international affairs followed. In 1937 Turkey participated to the Saadabad Pact with Iran, Iraq and Afghanistan. It was Turkey's attempt to be a bridge between Asia and Europe.<sup>41</sup> Establishing an Eastern Entente was similar to the Balkan understanding of 1934. Actually, The Middle Eastern States could not accept Turkey as a friend easily because of their history. On one hand they had bitter memories and territorial questions due to Ottoman rule of nearly four centuries, on the other hand the new Turkish Republic attacked on Islam.

The abolishing of the caliphate and the secularisation of the state caused bitterness in Arab countries. Ataturk's westernization policies separated Arabs and Turks. Arab nationalism, anti-westernism and socialism grown up since the First World War, when Turkey felt the Russian pressure. Surprisingly, the first sign of Turkey's good relations with the Eastern neighbours was initiated by the Soviet Union. The pact of brotherhood between Turkey and Afghanistan was signed during the War of Liberation. After seven years, Treaty of friendship and economic co-operation was signed at Ankara on 25th May, 1928 between Turkey and Afghanistan. Object of the treaty was to consolidate further relations established by treaty of 1921. There was no indication of its being intended to serve as an instrument towards the creation of a 'league of Eastern Nations,' which Russia has been suspected of desiring to establish. After this agreement Turkey started to lead an Eastern Pact. Turkey signed two agreements with Iran and Iraq.<sup>42</sup> In addition to the pact of friendship with Iran, the visit of shah Pehlavi served to open a new era in Turco-Iranian relations. Turkey and Iraq solved the border problem with the Mosul Agreement. The Saadabad Pact was not a military alliance, but a pact of friendship and solidarity."The pact called for non-aggression, consultation among the signatory state in case of a threat, and cooperation in stopping subversive activity. Turkey was now the stable link between East and West as the pivotal number of both the Balkan and Eastern agreements."<sup>43</sup> But this Pact never got beyond the 1937 stage.

Some writers said that Turkey's adherence to this Pact was a return to Pan-Islamism. These kinds of interpretations were wrong. It was clear that Ataturk determined to cut Turkey off from its oriental and Islamic past. Turkey did not participate the Islamic

<sup>41</sup>FO:371/E5166/188/44.

<sup>42</sup>FO:371/13095/E2802/600/44.

<sup>43</sup>Volkan and Itzkowitz, *op.clt.*,p.325.

Congresses between 1926 and 1931. "But this purely defensive Pact, which helped guard her eastern frontiers, did not constitute a threat to the principle of laicism."<sup>44</sup>

#### 4) The Question of Hatay and Turkish-Franco Relations

As has been mentioned, the important problems between the two countries were the Question of Capitulations and the Debts of the Ottoman Empire. The world depression made Turkey tighten currency controls. Turkey declared that it could not pay the instalments of Ottoman Debts. This declaration caused major problems between Turkey and France. After several negotiations the Paris Agreement of 1933 was signed. This agreement led to a rapid improvement in the Turkish-Franco relations.

Turkey's most troublesome frontier was to the south with Syria. The Sanjak of Hatay, where more than 90 000 Turks resided, was within the National Pact frontiers. On the other hand, Turkey accepted the trusteeship of France for the Sanjak with the Ankara Agreement in 1921. According to this agreement, a special administrative regime was to be established for Hatay.<sup>45</sup> It never occurred to Turkey that the Sanjak would be considered a part of Syria, because the region was very important to Turkey strategically and for security reasons. There was not any problem until 1925. The Turkish-Syrian border became a source of irritation because of Syrian agitation. When the Franco-Syria accord, (which was about Syrian interdependence), was signed in 1926, the Syrians interpreted its articles as incorporation of the Hatay in Syria. Turkey was concerned about the future of the Sanjak. Turkey objected to the Sanjak's incorporation in to Syria. From the Turkish point of view, the future of the Sanjak should be decided by bilateral treaties between Turkey and France.

After several deliberations, the separate political entity of the Sanjak was accepted in 1937 but there was a dispute over the new electoral system. On July 4, 1937, a Turkish-Franco Treaty of friendship was signed. The following year, a Turco-French condominium for Hatay was established. "In September 1938, elections were held and the Turks gained a majority in the assembly which promptly proclaimed autonomy under the name of Hatay."<sup>46</sup> The new government was independent for one year and then decided part of Turkey. France was forced to keep silent because German and Italian foreign policies increased the importance of Turkish-Franco co-operation. Hatay was annexed to Turkey in June 1939. The negotiations over the Hatay was essentially Atatürk's last public act. He had been ill since late in 1937. He did not see the annexation of Hatay to Turkey because he died on November 10, 1938.

This territorial acquisition was the only exception to a general Turkish policy of preserving the status quo and peace with its neighbours.

### CONCLUSION: ON THE THRESHOLD OF WORLD WAR II

In 1939, Turkey's international position was important. Hitler sent Franz von Papen as ambassador to cement Turkish-German relations. Britain and France, however,

<sup>44</sup>Lewis, *op.cit.*, p.117.

<sup>45</sup>Hurewitz, *op.cit.*, p.98.

<sup>46</sup>A. Kılıç, *Turkey and the World*, W.D.C., 1959, p.65.

secured a military alliance and non-aggression pact. After the Mosul agreement relations with England improved. Turkey signed a non-aggression pact with France. This pact was about the annexation of Hatay. On October 19, 1939, the Treaty of Mutual Assistance was signed between Britain, France and Turkey.<sup>47</sup> Thus, Turkish leaders found themselves in a neutral position between Germany and the West during the World War II.

In the final analysis, Turkey achieved its foreign policy goals during this era:

- (a) The Republic of Turkey was accepted as a part of the European state system,
- (b) Turkey had good relationships with its neighbours and preserved the peace both in the Balkans and the Middle East.
- (c) It was not in the revisionist camp; it chose to protect the status quo between the two world wars.
- (d) It was a faithful adherent of international law.

"By her peaceful methods of negotiations, as compared to Italy's belligerence, Turkey gained considerable international stature. Turkey's good foreign relations were a consequence of Ataturk's unyielding resistance to any revival of Ottomanist, pan-Turanian, or pan-Islamic expansionism. The national state in its national frontiers was not revisionist."<sup>48</sup>

As a consequence, I think it is fair to say that all of the international problems which remained unsolved at Lausanne, were solved by peaceful means during this period in Turkish foreign policy.

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<sup>47</sup>Hurewitz.,op.cit.,p.226.

<sup>48</sup>Roderic H. Davison, Turkey: A Short History, 2. Edition, The Eothen Press, Huntingdon, 1988, p.142.

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