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THE IMPORTANCE OF THE MERİÇ RIVER IN TURKEY'S GEOPOLITICS IN TERMS OF THE CONCEPT OF "NATIONAL SECURITY"

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Abstract

The aim of the study is to analyze the geopolitical importance of the Meriç (Evros) River for Turkey with respect to the concept of "national security". This study also aims to address Turkey's geopolitical problems, and its problems with Greece and Bulgaria, regarding the Meriç River. The study's contribution is its analysis of the geopolitical implications of the problems occurring on the Meriç River such as pollution, floods, refugees and asylum-seekers from the perspective of Turkey's national security. It is an important study also because it addresses Turkey's relations with Bulgaria and Greece with specific emphasis on the Meriç River. This study's research questions are as follows: "What are the effects of the asylum seeker and refugee problem occurring on the Meriç River on Turkey's national security?", "What are the effects of the pollution and floods occurring on the Meriç River on Turkey's national security?", "What are the problems Turkey has with Bulgaria and Greece regarding the Meriç River?" and "What is the importance of the Meriç River for Turkey's geopolitics?". The study is limited in scope as it addresses the importance of the Meriç River for Turkey's geopolitics only within the context of the concept of "national security". "What is the importance of the Meriç River in terms of Turkey's geopolitics?" This question is the main research question of the study. In addition, the sub-research questions are "What are the effects of the refugee and refugee problem in the Meriç River on Turkey's national security?", "What are the effects of the pollution and floods in the Meriç River on Turkey's national security?", "Meriç River" "What are the problems Turkey is experiencing with Bulgaria and Greece?" and "What is the importance of the Meriç River in terms of Turkey's geopolitics?" respectively. While touching on the importance of the Meriç River in terms of Turkey's geopolitics, the study is limited by considering it in the context of the

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concept of "national security". The research method of the study is qualitative research. In addition, the historical analysis approach included in the qualitative research method was used in the study. The study's assumption is to show that the water pollution, floods, and refugee problems around the Meric River negatively affect Turkey's geopolitics.

Keywords: Meric River, Turkey, Geopolitics, National Security.

“MİLLİ GÜVENLİK” KAVRAMI AÇISINDAN MERİÇ NEHİRİ’NİN TÜRKİYE’NİN JEOPOLİTİĞİNDE MERİÇ NEHİRİ’NİN ÖNEMİ

Özet

Çalışmanın amacı, Meriç Nehri'nin Türkiye açısından jeopolitik önemini “milli güvenlik” kavramı bağlamında analiz etmektir. Bununla birlikte Türkiye'nin jeopolitik açıdan Meriç Nehri'nde yaşanan problemleri ortaya koymak ve Türkiye'nin Meriç Nehri'nde Yunanistan ve Bulgaristan'la yaşadığı problemlere de değinmektedir. Çalışma, Meriç Nehri'nde yaşanan kirlilik, sel taşkınları, mülteci ve sığınmacı sorunlarının Türkiye'ye jeopolitik açıdan getirdiği etkileri Türkiye'nin milli güvenliği bağlamında ele alması açısından önem taşımaktadır. Ayrıca Türkiye'nin Meriç Nehri'ne yönelik Bulgaristan ve Yunanistan'la olan ilişkilerini ele alması açısından önem taşımaktadır. Bu çalışma “Meriç Nehri'nde yaşanan sığınmacı ve mülteci sorununun Türkiye'nin milli güvenliğine etkileri nelerdir?”, “Meriç Nehri'nde yaşanan kirlilik ve sel taşkınlarının Türkiye'nin milli güvenliğine etkileri nelerdir?”, “Meriç Nehri'ne yönelik Türkiye'nin Bulgaristan ve Yunanistan ile yaşadığı problemler nelerdir?” ve “Meriç Nehri'nin Türkiye'nin jeopolitiği açısından önemindedir?” sorularına yanıt bulunmaktadır. Çalışma, Türkiye'nin jeopolitiği açısından Meriç Nehri'nin önemine değinirken “milli güvenlik” kavramı bağlamında ele alınarak sınırlandırılmıştır. “Türkiye'nin jeopolitiği açısından Meriç Nehri'nin önemi nedir?” çalışmanın temel araştırma sorusudur. Bununla birlikte “Meriç Nehri'nde yaşanan sığınmacı ve mülteci sorununun Türkiye'nin milli güvenliğine etkileri nelerdir?”, “Meriç Nehri'nde yaşanan kirlilik ve sel taşkınlarının Türkiye'nin milli güvenliğine etkileri nelerdir?”, “Meriç Nehri'ne yönelik Türkiye'nin Bulgaristan ve Yunanistan ile yaşadığı problemler nelerdir?” ve “Meriç Nehri'nin Türkiye'nin jeopolitiği açısından önemi nedir?” çalışmanın alt araştırma sorularıdır. Çalışma, Türkiye'nin jeopolitiği açısından Meriç Nehri'nin önemine değinirken “milli güvenlik” kavramı bağlamında ele alınarak sınırlandırılmıştır. Çalışmanın araştırma yöntemi ise nitel araştırmadır. Bununla birlikte çalışmada nitel araştırma yönteminin içerisinde yer alan tarihsel analiz yaklaşımı kullanılmıştır. Çalışmanın varsayımı ise Meriç Nehri'nin çevresinde meydana gelen su kirliliği, sel, taşkın ve mülteci sorununun Türkiye'nin jeopolitiğini olumsuz etkilediğini göstermektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Meriç Nehri, Türkiye, Jeopolitik, Milli Güvenlik.

INTRODUCTION

Turkey's geopolitical landscape is constantly attracting attention for its geographical location and natural resources. One of these natural resources is the Meriç River. Constituting Turkey's borders with Greece and Bulgaria, the Meriç River is a factor that affects Turkey's relations with these two countries in many aspects such as water resources, migration movements and natural disasters. The current problems of refugees, pollution and floods occurring on and around the Meriç River keep Turkey's relations with Bulgaria and Greece warm. In this context, the Meriç River has an important role in the economic, regional and geopolitical relations of Turkey, Bulgaria and Greece. Especially after the civil war started in Syria in 2011, thousands of refugees started to flock to the Meriç River in the hope of entering through the EU borders. With the influx of refugees, the Meriç River has gained more significance both in the international arena and in the relations between Turkey and Greece. The Meriç River has utmost importance in terms of water supply in the Thrace Region of Turkey. In addition, the Meriç River, which feeds the Ergene River and provides an important resource for the agricultural sector in the Thrace Region, is vital for the continuation of farming in the region. For Turkey, the Meriç River has an important place both in terms of economic resources such as agriculture, industry and animal husbandry, and with regard to tourism. However, frequent pollution, flooding and overflow problems in the Meriç River have been negatively affecting Turkey economically for nearly fifty years. In this context, the refugee, flood and pollution problems at the Meriç River poses a risk for the economic structure of the Thrace Region of Turkey.

The article consists of three parts in total:

1. The Effects of the Current Status of the Meriç River's Water Resources on Turkey's Geopolitics
2. The Effects of the Refugee Problem at the Meriç River on Turkey's Geopolitics
3. The Effects of Floods and Overflow Problems at the Meriç River on Turkey's Geopolitics

The first part of the article discusses the effects of the current status of the Meriç River's water resources on Turkey's geopolitics. In the second part of the article discusses the effects of the refugee problem at the Meriç River on Turkey's geopolitics. The third part of the article addresses the effects of floods and overflow problems at the Meriç River on Turkey's geopolitics. The

literature was first reviewed to arrive at the arguments required in the study. The information contained in the sources obtained through the literature review was then analyzed and included in the study. The study also relied on official sources, scientific sources, reports and news. Addressing the importance of the Meriç River in terms of Turkish geopolitics, the study addresses river water pollution, floods, and refugee issues.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Mankind have always wanted to live in safety throughout their lives, starting in the womb, due to their instinct of "*ensuring their safety*". Therefore, they have always attributed importance to the establishment of a security mechanism in order to prevent the disturbance of their peace of mind. In order to establish these security mechanisms, they have laid down their own strategies, policies and rules. Examples to such security mechanisms include a person's engagement in martial arts such as karate, kickboxing, etc. as part of his own security mechanism against physical attacks from outside or remaining calm and mature towards other people in order to protect himself against emotional attacks (insult, heartbreak, ridicule, etc.) coming from them. Security is not a concept related to only humanity, it is applicable to every phenomenon or object in the universe. Examples in this regard include a lion attacking a creature that enters its territory, or seagulls constantly flying around crow chicks in case they attack their own chicks. For example, companies create passwords to protect their revenue and expense information from hackers. These are also examples of the concept of security. As can be seen from these four examples, security is applicable to each and every field. In this context, security is a defense mechanism that any phenomenon or object needs for its survival against threats and risks that may potentially be harmful.

An example to the concept of "*security*" is the Delian League founded by Athens against possible Persian attacks (Okan & Dayangaç, 2020: 13). In addition, the Great Wall of China, which was built to prevent attacks by Turkish and Mongol tribes, and the walls built by the Byzantine Empire in Istanbul against the possible threats of invasion are some other examples of the concept of security. The meaning of the concept of "*security*" has transformed and evolved throughout the history. Until the end of the Cold War period, the concept of "*security*" was generally addressed from a "*military*" point of view (Ağır, 2015: 99). It started to extend after the Cold War in a way to be associated with different concepts (Aslan, 2020: 127). After being addressed from a "*military*" perspective until the end of the Cold War, security started to be linked to climate, food and cyber domains. Various

subfields of security emerged in this respect, such as the ones addressing climate crisis, cyber security, and food security, while military security, political security, social security, economic security and environmental security remained as traditional security issues. After the end of the Cold War, security has become a global concept with many new issues under its scope. These new issues include:

- Transnational Crimes
- International Migration
- Infectious Diseases
- Food Safety
- Climate change
- Ethnic Conflicts
- Cyber security
- Energy Security
- Terrorism
- Weapons of mass destruction
- Maritime Banditry and Piracy
- Poverty (Demir, 2020, p. 193)

The concept of “*national security*” is a security system that functions at the level of state rather than that of international security systems. In general terms, “national security” deals with threats that can harm the state and the people living in the state (Aslan, 2020: 127). In this respect, “*national security*” is characterized as a security concept that incorporates both internal and external threats. In broad terms, the concept of “*national security*” is a concept that defines the state’s ability to be safe and secure in terms of both internal and external relations and in all areas such as political, social, economic, legal, technological, educational, etc.

The main purpose of the concept of “*national security*” is to establish internal and external defense mechanisms for the realization of the national interests, policies and objectives of the state. Such defense mechanisms may be of military, legal, economic or any other nature (Süleyman Demirel University, 2017, p. 1). The concept of “*state survival*” underlies the concept of national security. In addition to ensuring the survival of the state, the concept of “*national security*” can also be defined as the protection of common culture, identity and values by taking the necessary measures against the threats and risks that will prejudice the welfare of the state (Varlık, 2012:

614). The concept of geopolitics deals with the impact of geography on state policy. In this context, geopolitics examines the relationship between states' geographical characteristics and policies. The origin of the word geopolitics may be traced back to Greek language. It is a combination of the Greek words "geo" (place) and "politeia" (politics) (Koçak& Şahin, 2002, p. 1). The concept of "geopolitics" has gained importance in the field of political science and international relations, especially since the 19th century (Atay, 2016: 1).

The concept of geopolitics was coined by Rudolf Kjellen. Rudolf Kjellen mentioned the word "geopolitics" for the first time in his article on Sweden's borders published in the magazine "Ymer" in 1899 (Taban, 2013: 20). First mentioned in Rudolf Kjellen's article in 1899, the concept of "geopolitics" attracted attention in the 20th century with respect to the topics of world domination and control of strategic resources and guided the foreign policies of prominent states in the international system.

Although migration is a phenomenon that has existed since human history, there are different definitions of the phenomenon of migration. In short, migration is the change of place of people for certain reasons (Dagaşan, Aydin, 2017: 737). For example, the phenomenon of migration, according to TDK, refers to the movement of individuals or groups from one place to another for economic, political or social reasons (TDK, 2024). In a study conducted by the Family Research Institute of the Prime Ministry in 1997, migration was defined as the phenomenon of people leaving the geographical place in which they live for reasons of their own, to settle permanently or temporarily and with the idea of settling in a new place (Türkyılmaz, 1998: 2). In a study conducted by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development in 2018, migration is the movement of a person or group within a country to another place or across an international border (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, 2018: 21). In the dictionary of migration terms prepared by the International Organization for Migration in 2009, the phenomenon of migration is defined as a person who migrates of his own free will, without external coercion, for personal comfort. However, the phenomenon of migration is defined as the migration of an individual or a family member to another country or region to improve Material and social opportunities (International Organization for Migration, 2009: 22). There are several types of migration trends:

1. International Migration
2. Internal Migration

3. National Migration
4. Stable Migration
5. Circular Migration
6. Forced Migration
7. Economic Migration
8. Educational Migration
9. Return Migration
10. Family Reunification Migration (Sakarya University of Applied Sciences, 2024).

Migration movements affect both the country of immigration and the country of departure economically, socially and politically. This is why the direction of migration is important for countries. International migration movements also accelerated, especially with globalization that began with the end of the Cold War. Today, international migration movements have become intense, especially from countries such as Syria, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Ukraine, Pakistan and India. The Meriç River basin lies between Turkey, Bulgaria and Greece (United Nations, 2011: 288). In this context, the developments on the Meriç River have a significant impact on the diplomatic relations between Turkey, Bulgaria and Greece. In addition, 187 km² of the Meriç River basin forms the border between Turkey and Greece (Kibaroğlu, 2008: 1-11). The Meriç River's basin covers a total area of 490 km². The area of Meriç River is 39.000 km², of which 21.083 km² is in Bulgaria, 14,650 km² in Turkey and 3,340 km² in Greece. In this context, 66% of the Meriç River basin is located in Bulgaria, 28% in Turkey and 6% in Greece (International Network of Water-Environment Centres for the Balkans, 2004). Also, three tributaries join Meriç River. These tributaries are as follows:

- Tundzha - Turkey and Bulgaria
- Ergene - Turkey
- Arda - Bulgaria and Greece (Hallı, 2013: 12).

1. THE EFFECTS OF THE CURRENT STATUS OF THE MERIC RIVER'S WATER RESOURCES ON TURKEY'S GEOPOLITICS

Water resources are natural resources on earth that are vital for the continuity of life. However, factors such as increasing industrial activities and global warming have seriously threatened water resources in recent years.

Industrial activities cause intensive use of water in industrial production processes. The chemicals and wastes used in these processes expose water resources to pollution and lead to a reduction in potable water resources. In particular, the mixing of chemical wastes released from industrial plants into natural water resources causes water to become undrinkable and damages ecosystems (Türkeş, 2007: 38-53). In addition, also global warming is causing water resources to dry up and increasing the risk of drought. Rising temperatures are causing glaciers to melt and water resources to dwindle. This situation adversely affects rainfall regimes and the water cycle, increasing the risk of drought. The combination of global warming and industrial activities is leading to pollution of water resources and droughts. This threatens the sustainability of water resources and people's access to clean water. Therefore, actions should be taken urgently for the conservation and sustainable use of water resources. Such measures include controlling industrial waste, promoting the use of renewable energy resources and adopting strategies to combat climate change. However, for these steps to be effective, international cooperation and coordination is also required (Arık, 2024).

Meriç has an important place for agriculture and animal husbandry in the Thrace region of Turkey. However, the pollution rate of the Ergene River, which flows into the Meriç River from the Thrace Region, has reached quite high levels, and this situation negatively affects Meriç. The reason for the high pollution rate of the Ergene River is the polluted air caused by intensive industrial activities, especially in Çorlu and Çerkezköy, and the release of harmful wastes into the river. This situation negatively affects not only the continuity of the Ergene River, but also the health condition of local people, the agricultural sector, animal husbandry and water needs in the region. As such, polluted and harmful water flows from the Ergene River meet the Meriç River (Kocaman & Akın & Oğuzhan: 90-97).

In brief the pollution spreading in the Ergene River has a negative impact on the Meriç River as well. Due to the flow of these polluted waters into the Meriç River, the agricultural lands and settlements around its basin are adversely affected. The Meriç River has become an important problem for people living on the banks of the river, engaged in fishing, and making a living from the river. In addition, the spread of polluted and harmful wastes from the Ergene River into the Meriç River endangers the lives of living creatures in the river. Fish in the river accumulate harmful substances containing these toxins. As a result, harmful substances found in fish can spread to other living organisms through the food chain. In this case, people

unconsciously introduce these harmful substances into their bodies through the food chain. In particular, citizens who benefit from the river water have a weaker body against diseases as they take the pollutants in the river into their bodies. In this respect, the pollution problem around the Meriç River poses a problem for the continuity of Turkey's economic gains in the Thrace Region (Kocaman & Akın & Oğuzhan: 90-97). As a result of the pollution in the Meriç River, the agriculture and livestock sector in the Thrace Region is also negatively affected. In the study titled "Investigation of Bioaccumulation of Toxic Metals in Fish of the Meriç River Delta" conducted by Anadolu University and supported by Trakya University, Eskişehir Osmangazi University and Dumlupınar University, the chemical content of fish species in the Meriç River was investigated (Tokatli et al., 2016: 7). In this study, three fish species in the Meriç River were investigated:

- Cyprinus Carpio
- Silurus Glanis
- Sander Luciopera (Tokatli et al., 2016: 7)

In this study, it was determined that lead and cadmium values were high in the fish in the basin, and it was concluded that the important sources of high lead and cadmium values were agricultural wastes such as phosphatic fertilizers and pesticides used. In addition, high levels of nickel (Ni) and chromium (Cr) were detected in fish in the study. The most important source of nickel and chromium values detected was found to be industrial wastes (Tokatli et al., 2016: 7). Water pollution in the region has especially started with the intensification of industrialization. The textile industry, in particular, is a significant cause of water pollution. In the "*Meriç-Ergene Basin Strategic Environmental Assessment Final Report*" prepared by the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry dated 2022, it was determined that domestic pollution mostly originates from Edirne and Kırklareli provinces and industrial pollution mostly from Tekirdağ province. According to the report, the rate of industrial wastes is higher in Tekirdağ compared to Kırklareli and Edirne because there are more industrial facilities in Tekirdağ. The report indicates that the water quality in the Meriç River is severely affected by the discharge of untreated domestic wastewater into rivers and wastewater coming from industrial facilities. In addition, according to the report, irregular construction of septic tanks, unplanned dumping of septic waste transported by vacuum trucks, excessive use of fertilizers and pesticides, and uncontrolled solid waste storage are some other factors that increase water pollution in the Meriç River (R.T. Ministry of Environment, Urbanization and Climate Change, 2022: 25).

In terms of water resources, the Meriç River is threatened by not only pollution but also the risk of drought. On July 10, 2018, the General Directorate of Water Management under the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry decided to prepare a “*Meriç-Ergene Basin Drought Management Plan*” to combat drought in the Meriç River Basin (R.T. Ministry of Environment, Urbanisation and Climate Change, 2022: 6). The “*Meriç-Ergene Basin Drought Management Plan*” has been in progress since 2018 to solve the drought problem of the Meriç River. In January 2024, as a result of the investigations carried out by the State Hydraulic Works, it was determined that the water level of the Meriç River had decreased four times compared to the previous year. This drought negatively affects the Meriç River, which is critical for both animal husbandry and agriculture (Ceylan & Basmacı, 2024). According to the “*Project for the Preparation of Drought Management Plan for the Meriç, Ergene and Marmara Basins*” dated 2023 and prepared by the General Directorate of Water Management under the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, if effective solutions cannot be produced against the drought problem at the Meriç River, it is predicted that the agriculture and livestock sector, especially in the basins of Havsa, Lüleburgaz, Babaeski, Uzunköprü, Hayrabolu and Keşan, will face serious problems due to the increase in the drought problem in the future (R.T. Ministry of Environment, Urbanization and Climate Change, 2023: 42). In this context, it is seen that if effective methods are not developed against the drought problem, agriculture and animal husbandry activities that utilize the water resources in the river will be severely reduced.

2. THE EFFECTS OF THE REFUGEE PROBLEM AT THE MERIC RIVER ON TURKEY’S GEOPOLITICS

Migration has been an ongoing phenomenon among societies throughout history. As one of the most important issues in international relations today, migration matters also in the context of Turkey's geopolitics and national security. Factors such as internal wars, natural disasters, political instability and economic hardship force many people to leave their home states. This leads to people migrating to other states. With the onset of the Arab Spring movement in 2010, migration flows started to increase. With effects of the Arab Spring, migration flows to the European Union have increased considerably. In this context, Turkey and Greece, as geopolitical gateways to Europe, are transit points for migrants and refugees. However, in recent years, Greece’s harsh border policies have led to many migrants and refugees being trapped in Turkey. Refugees are trying to cross the border from Turkey to Greece to migrate to the EU. From time to time, Greece does

not let refugees through the border crossing, so refugees return to the Turkish border and wait for the border crossings around the Meriç River to be opened. However, Greece sometimes responds harshly to refugees trying to cross its border illegally. For example, Greek security forces have attempted to open fire on many refugee sea boats, including many children, the elderly and infants, and treats captured refugees in violation of human rights. In response, Turkey has attempted to save the lives of tens of thousands of migrants who have been subjected to Greece's human rights violations against refugees (Üstün&Üstün: 377-378).

In the *"Situation of Refugees in Edirne - Monitoring Report"* prepared by the Turkish Medical Association delegation on the situation of migrants in Edirne, it is stated that Greek security forces beat migrants trying to cross the border, sends them back after confiscating their belongings, and even confiscates their clothes and forces them to walk naked and barefoot (Turkish Medical Association, 2020: 3). A report published on April 3, 2020, by Amnesty International on the refugee problem at the Turkey-Greece border, states that Greek security forces treat migrants inhumanely and that its security measures violate Human Rights and endanger the lives of people fleeing war. The report continues that migrants are not a political trump card, and that Greece should stop using excessive force (Amnesty International, 2021:7-15). On February 23 and 24, 2021, asylum-seekers/migrants, including women and children, were beaten by Greek security forces. In addition, their phones, money, valuables and shoes were stolen, and they were brought by boat to an islet in the middle of the Meriç River and left to die. In response, 22 asylum-seekers/migrants were rescued from death on February 23, and 29 asylum-seekers/migrants on February 24, by Turkish border troops (Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2021).

On May 12, 2021, the Council of Europe issued a statement calling on Greece to abandon its harsh policies towards migrants. Dunja Mitajovic, EU Commissioner for Human Rights, stated that Greece has committed crimes against migrants around the Meriç River and intervened harshly against them (Mitajovic, 2021:1-3). In response, Greece repudiated Mitajovic's allegations, saying that it had never pursued a harsh policy and had never intervened in a way that endangered the lives of migrants (Council of Europe Commissioner of Human Rights, 2021: 1-4). However, there were many photographs and video recordings proving Greece's human rights violations against refugees. Despite all the evidence, Greece has continued to crack down on migrants and maintain its harsh policies towards migrants.

On June 23, 2021, Amnesty International informed Greece once again. Amnesty International announced that it has become a habit for Greece to repeatedly push migrants arriving at its border across the Meriç River towards Turkey. Amnesty International demanded that Greece renounce its policy of violence, acknowledge its crimes against human rights and stop permanently pushing refugees to Turkey. Moreover, Amnesty International also emphasized in this statement that the EU should take steps regarding Greece and initiate infringement procedures against this country (Amnesty International, 2021). Instead of solving this problem around the Meriç River diplomatically and in accordance with human rights, Greece still continues to maintain its harsh policies against migrants today. In particular, Greece is building steel fences or high walls around the Meriç River to prevent migrants from crossing the border. This process started in June 2021 with Greece's construction of 40 kilometers of steel fencing with a length of more than five meters around the Meriç River (*Euronews*, 2021). Then, in January 2023, the Ministry of Citizen Protection of Greece announced that 140 km of steel fencing would be installed along the border lying in parallel with the Meriç River (Mehmet, 2023).

In April 2023, Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis announced the start of construction of the first 35 km of the projected 140 km long fence (Kırbaki, 2023). The fact that migrants who are not allowed to cross the Greek border stay in Turkey around the Meriç River has a negative impact on the relations between Turkey and Greece and thus on the social order of the local population around the Meriç River. It seems that this problem will continue around the Meriç River as long as the Greek side continues to act unilaterally on the refugee issue.

3. THE EFFECTS OF FLOODS AND OVERFLOW PROBLEMS AT THE MERIC RIVER ON TURKEY'S GEOPOLITICS

Floods and overflows are among the natural disasters that affect people and the environment the most. They often occur as a result of natural events such as extreme rainfall, snowmelt, tropical storm or river overflow. These disasters, which can cause serious damage and loss of life in both rural and urban areas, pose a major risk worldwide. The Meriç River, especially in the province of Edirne in Turkey, is a region where floods and overflows are common. The Meriç River is known as an important river flowing between Greece and Bulgaria, where it forms the border of these countries with Turkey. However, during the rainy season and with snowmelt, the river's water level rises rapidly and can cause flooding. Especially the settlements in

the city of Edirne and its surroundings are severely affected by these floods. Both agricultural lands and residential areas may be flooded, and economic losses may occur(Yıldız, 2015: 1-3).

The Meriç River faces the danger of flooding and overflowing almost every year. This situation puts the Thrace Region, especially the city of Edirne, in a difficult situation. These floods and overflows, which occur almost every year at the Meriç River, negatively affect the economic, cultural and social activities in the Thrace Region by making life difficult for the locals. In addition, there have been many losses of life and property in the Meriç River Basin due to floods and overflows that have occurred almost every year from past to present. A major flood disaster occurred especially around Edirne on November 27-28, 2018. As a result of this flood disaster, 128.7 kilograms of precipitation fell per square meter in Edirne province within 24 hours. Moreover, a rainfall of this level had not been experienced since October 11, 1953, and it represented a record of rainfall for Edirne after 65 years. The fact that this flood disaster occurred more than 65 years ago shows that the flood problem in the Meriç Basin has reached a dangerous point (Baran, Demirci&Zobar, 2018). There are three reasons for the occurrence of floods and inundations in the Meriç River Basin: “climatic reasons”, “geographical reasons” and “flood management of dam operations around the river”:

1. Climatic Causes: Heavy rain and heavy snowfalls in the upper reaches of the Meriç River.
2. Geographical Causes: Most of the rivers that cause floods in the Meriç River are located within the borders of Bulgaria, which constitutes 66% of the basin, but the surroundings of the Meriç River Basin in Bulgaria are generally mountainous. The Meriç River Basin in Turkey is a plain. Therefore, Turkey is affected by floods and inundations more than Bulgaria(Yıldız, 2015: 3).
3. Dam Works around the Meriç River on the Bulgarian Side: With the opening of the dam gates in Bulgaria, the uncontrolled flow from the dams causes floods and overflows (Yıldız, 2015: 3).

The dams built in Bulgaria to collect water from rainfall against floods and overflows drain the water downstream of the Meriç River. Therefore, the water that flows from the dam into the Meriç River moves downstream and flows to Turkey and Greece. This increases the risk of floods and overflows. Various studies are being carried out in Turkey to solve the problem of floods and overflows in the Meriç River. For example, the State Hydraulic Works

(DSİ) started construction of the 7,800-meter “*Canal Edirne*” project in November 2015 (Baran &Demirci, 2019). With the “*Canal Edirne*” project, solutions will be sought to eliminate the flooding problem at the Meriç River. As a matter of fact, the project, which was completed smoothly and successfully in 2019, successfully passed its first test against heavy rains between January 10 and 14, 2021, and although the flow rate of the Meriç River increased during heavy rains, the potential flood risk was prevented thanks to this project (*Malkara Haber*, 2021). In the first week of 2022, Canal Edirne successfully prevented the potential flood threat of the Meriç River during heavy downpours in Thrace (Güler&Zeray, 2022). On March 7, 2022, the project “*Technical Assistance for the Preparation of a Flood Risk Management Plan for the Meriç-Ergene Basin*” was prepared jointly by Turkey and the EU (R.T. Ministry of Environment, Urbanisation and Climate Change, 2023: 2). Even though the Canal Edirne project has been developed in an attempt to prevent floods and overflows in the Meriç River, the threat of floods and overflows in the Meriç River still persists. In December 2023, works on the reinforcement of Canal Edirne started (Zobar, 2023). Since 2019, works have been initiated by the State Hydraulic Works teams in order to reinforce the damaged embankments of Canal Edirne, which has become the insurance of the Meriç River by protecting the area against floods (Zobar, 2023). In this respect, it is seen that efforts to prevent floods and overflows in the Meriç River continue.

CONCLUSION

In the light of the findings of the study, it is concluded that the Meriç River has an important place in Turkey’s geopolitics and national security. With its refugee problem, pollution, flooding and inundation problems, the MeriçRiver is of importance for Turkey in terms of economy, military, politics, environment and health. Greece’s violations in relation to and policies about the refugee problem also complicate Turkey’s attempts to resolve the problems along the Meriç River. However, it is concluded that it is imperative to take more comprehensive measures to address the pollution problem, which has reached dangerous levels due to contaminated and harmful wastes discharged from industrial facilities to the Meriç River. After analyzing the resources obtained in the study, it was observed that the refugee, pollution, flood and overflow problems at the Meriç River negatively affect Turkey's geopolitics and national security. One of the reasons for this conclusion is that the pollution in the Meriç River has a negative impact on agriculture, livestock and water supply in the Thrace Region of Turkey. The polluted and hazardous wastes in the Ergene River, which flows into the

Meriç River, have a negative impact on agriculture, livestock and water supply in the Thrace Region of Turkey. In this respect, it is concluded that if the pollution problem in the Ergene River is not solved, the Meriç River will continue to be polluted and thus continue to compromise Turkey's geopolitics, economy and environmental security. The second reason is that the refugee problem at the Meriç River has a negative impact on Turkey's border security. In this context, it is observed that Greece's violations in relation to and non-cooperative policies towards the refugee problem at the Meriç River adversely affect Turkey's national security. The third reason is the negative effects of floods and overflows on agriculture, livestock and residential areas in the Thrace Region of Turkey. In this respect, as a result of the findings of the study, it is concluded that the problems in the Meriç River have negative repercussions for Turkey's geopolitics from the perspective of national security.

In the first part of the study, it was concluded that the Meriç River is an important resource for agriculture and livestock, but the high level of pollution from the Ergene River negatively affects water resources. A study conducted in the Meriç River found high levels of chemicals in fish in the area and concluded that the source of these chemicals was agricultural waste and industrial activities.

In the second part of the study, it was concluded that the refugee problem is at the center of the Meriç River. It was concluded that the influx of refugees into the region increased the tensions between Türkiye and Greece on the Meriç River. It has been concluded that Greece's lack of cooperation with Turkey on the refugee issue, its strict refugee policies, and the European Union's lack of response are factors in the persistence of the refugee problem in the Meriç River.

In the third part of the study, it was concluded that floods and torrents in the Meriç River greatly affect the areas of settlement, agriculture, and livestock around the river. It has been concluded that studies have been carried out in recent years to prevent floods and floods in the Meriç River. It was also found that these studies succeeded in preventing the recent floods and floods in the Meriç River.

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