



## International Journal of Social Sciences

ISSN:2587-2591

DOI Number:<http://dx.doi.org/10.30830/tobider.sayi.20.37>

Volume 8/4

2024 p. 664-683

**ATATURK AND HIS LAST LEGACY: HATAY**

**ATATÜRK VE SON KALAN MİRASI: HATAY**

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### ABSTRACT

The Hatay issue arose when France decided to grant independence to Syria in 1936, which led to Hatay being annexed by Turkey a few months before the start of World War II in 1939. Following World War I, the Iskenderun (Hatay) Sanjak, along with Syria, entered France's sphere of influence. While the Iskenderun (Hatay) Sanjak was within the borders of the National Pact, it was excluded from these borders with the Ankara Treaty of October 20, 1921. With this treaty, the Sanjak was designated as part of the Syrian territory under French mandate, gaining a special status. After France declared Syria's independence in 1936, Turkey requested the support of the League of Nations for Hatay's independence. After Turkey's persistent efforts, Hatay was recognized as a "separate entity" by the constitution in 1937, and the "State of Hatay" was established in 1938. Hatay functioned as an independent state for about a year. As World War II approached, France realized Turkey's strategic importance against the expansionist ambitions of Germany and Italy, leading to the decision to transfer Hatay to Turkey. As a result, Hatay became part of Turkish territory with the "Treaty on the Final Settlement of the Territorial Issues between Turkey and Syria" signed between Turkey and France on June 23, 1939. Evaluating the conditions of the period well, Turkey successfully resolved the Hatay issue, which was a national cause as stated by the Great Leader Atatürk, using international law and diplomatic efforts.

**Key Words:** *Atatürk, Hatay Problem, Iskenderun Sanjak, France, Syria.*

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## ÖZ

Hatay sorunu, Fransa'nın 1936 yılında Suriye'ye bağımsızlık verme kararı almasıyla ortaya çıktı ve bu durum Hatay'ın 1939 yılında II. Dünya Savaşı'nın başlamasından birkaç ay önce Türkiye tarafından ilhak edilmesine yol açtı. I. Dünya Savaşı'nın ardından İskenderun (Hatay) Sancağı, Suriye ile birlikte Fransa'nın nüfuz alanına girdi. İskenderun (Hatay) Sancağı, Misak-ı Milli sınırları içinde yer alırken, 20 Ekim 1921 tarihli Ankara Antlaşması ile bu sınırların dışında bırakıldı. Bu antlaşma ile Sancağı, Fransız mandası altındaki Suriye topraklarının bir parçası olarak belirleyerek özel bir statü kazandı. Fransa'nın 1936 yılında Suriye'nin bağımsızlığını ilan etmesinin ardından Türkiye, Hatay'ın bağımsızlığı için Milletler Cemiyeti'nin desteğini istedi. Türkiye'nin ısrarlı çabaları sonucunda Hatay, 1937'de anayasa ile "ayrı bir varlık" olarak tanındı ve 1938'de "Hatay Devleti" kuruldu. Hatay, yaklaşık bir yıl boyunca bağımsız bir devlet olarak işlev gördü. II. Dünya Savaşı yaklaşırken Fransa, Almanya ve İtalya'nın yayılcı emellerine karşı Türkiye'nin stratejik önemini fark etti ve Hatay'ı Türkiye'ye devretme kararına yol açtı. Sonuç olarak Hatay, Türkiye ve Fransa arasında 23 Haziran 1939'da imzalanan "Türkiye ile Suriye Arasındaki Toprak Meselelerinin Kesin Çözümüne Dair Antlaşma" ile Türkiye topraklarının bir parçası haline geldi. Aynı tarihte, Türkiye ile Fransa arasında Hatay sorununun çözümüne ilişkin bir Ortak Deklarasyon da oluşturuldu ve Türkiye'nin savaş öncesi anti-revizyonist uluslarla uyum sağlama politikasını özetlemesine olanak tanıdı. Türkiye, dönemin koşullarını iyi değerlendirerek, Ulu Önder Atatürk'ün ifade ettiği gibi milli bir dava olan Hatay meselesini, uluslararası hukuk ve diplomatik çabaları kullanarak başarıyla çözmüştür.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Atatürk, Hatay Sorunu, İskenderun Sancağı, Fransa, Suriye.

### 1. Introduction

England and France shared the Middle East region with the Sykes-Picot Agreement, which they signed secretly during the First World War. According to this agreement, Syria, Lebanon and Çukurova, and the Sanjak (Iskenderun Sanjak) region, which was connected to the Syrian Province during the Imperial period, were included in the French population area. When the Armistice of Mudros was signed on October 30, 1918 following the First World War, the region of Iskenderun and Antakya, whose population was mostly Turkish, was under the control of Turkish forces. According to the "National Pact" announced in 1920, this region had to remain within the national borders of Turkey (Sarıay, 2010a). However, France occupied the Sanjak of Iskenderun on December 11, 1918, based on Article 7 of the Armistice of Mudros. Based on the "Mandate" system established on 28 June 1919, the Allied Powers left Syria and Lebanon, which was considered a part of it, to France under the name of Mandate administration at the San Remo Conference on 25 April 1920 (Sosyal, 1985).

Although İskenderun Sanjak (Hatay) was accepted within the National Pact borders, it had to be left outside the national borders with the Ankara Treaty signed on October 20, 1921 at the cost of stopping the war with France as soon as possible under the extraordinary conditions of the National Struggle period. İskenderun Sanjak was left

within the borders of Syria under French mandate, and the Turkey-Syria border was determined with the Ankara Treaty of 1921 (Prime Ministry Republic Archives (BCA), Fund No: 30 10-Box No: 224- File No: 510/12). The 7th article of the said treaty foresaw the establishment of a “special administrative regime” for this region, the development of the culture of the Turkish population of the region and the use of Turkish as the official language (Gönlübol ve Sar, 1987). This article constituted an important support point in the hands of Turkey in gaining the independence of İskenderun Sanjak in the future.

The French applied the same ethnic and religious discrimination in the Sanjak of Iskenderun that they did in other parts of Syria. In 1921, the Sanjak was attached to Aleppo, and when the Syrian State was established, it became autonomous. (Umar, 2004).

With the Treaty of Lausanne, Turkey took its place in the international community as an independent state. After the provisions of the Ankara Treaty were confirmed by Article 3 of the Treaty of Lausanne, the French mandate over Syria was approved by the League of Nations on September 23, 1923. In January 1926, representatives of İskenderun in the Syrian Parliament requested that İskenderun be separated from Syria and annexed to France. Although France initially found this request appropriate and accepted it, it rejected it upon the extreme objection of the Syrian Parliament (Demir, 2011). While the friendship and good neighborly relations agreement signed between Turkey and France in Ankara on May 30, 1926 between Turkey and France regulated Turkish-Syrian relations, it also stipulated that the special form of government envisaged by the Ankara Treaty of 1921 would be taken into consideration by the French Government (Topal, 2009). After this, France established an autonomous administration for the Sanjak region within Syria in accordance with the 1921 Treaty. After Turkey gained its independence, it waited for the internal and external problems to be resolved before bringing the Hatay issue to the forefront.

Turkey tried to resolve its problems with all its neighbors through peace since Lausanne, became a member of the League of Nations in 1932, signed the Balkan Pact in 1934 and the Sadabad Pact in 1937, and made great contributions to the peace and stability of the Balkans and the Middle East. During this period, Turkey, which had good relations with both Western States and the Soviet Union, found the opportunity to eliminate two deficiencies of the National Pact that could not be fully achieved in Lausanne. In this context, the Montreux Straits Convention in 1936 replaced the Lausanne Straits Convention, which limited Turkish sovereignty in the Straits. In 1939, Hatay (Iskenderun Sanjak), which was given a special status with the Ankara Treaty of 1921, was annexed to the motherland.

## **2. Hatay During the Ottoman Empire**

Syria and Antakya were annexed to the Ottoman lands after Yavuz Sultan Selim’s Egypt Campaign (1516). The region, which was called İskenderun Sanjak during the Ottoman

period, was transformed into a governorship after the Reform Edict of 1856, and is referred to as “İskenderun Sanjak” or simply “Sancak” in both Turkish and international documents (Oran, 2002). İskenderun remained under Ottoman rule for 401 years until it was occupied by the Allied Powers in 1918, and under French rule for 21 years until it was annexed to Turkey in 1939. With the Industrial Revolution that began in England in the second half of the 18th century, the industrialization process of European countries and the emergence of their need for raw materials led them to new searches. The rich oil fields of the region encompassing Mosul, Kirkuk and the Persian Gulf have further increased the geopolitical importance of İskenderun, which is located in the neighboring region. Until the new political balances brought about by the 20th century emerged, England supported a weak Ottoman State against the presence of a powerful Russia, especially in the Mediterranean and its surrounding areas, in the transportation lines that provided connections to its colonies. However, the Ottoman alliance with Germany in World War I caused England to change its Middle East strategy. England and France signed the secret Sykes-Picot Agreement regarding the division of the Ottoman Empire. Since England did not want to be a direct neighbor to Russia during the division of the Middle East, it gave settlements such as Mosul, Erbil and Dohuk to France, thus putting France between it and Russia, and itself took Kirkuk and Suleymaniye (Eskander, 2000). However, after a while, England took back Mosul and its surroundings, which it had previously ceded to France, in exchange for the lands of Syria and Lebanon. Hatay and its surroundings were also considered to be within Syrian territory and were left to France.

### **3. Hatay During the War of Independence**

When the Armistice of Mudros was signed, which ended World War I, the Sanjak region was under the control of Turkish forces. Using Article 7 of the armistice as an excuse, İskenderun would be occupied by the Allied Powers. Mustafa Kemal Pasha, who was the Commander of the Lightning Army Group in the region at that time, ordered that any British attack on İskenderun be resisted with arms. However, in accordance with Article 16 of the Armistice, the Ottoman government disbanded all of its armies in the region, and therefore the Lightning Army Group Command, and placed Mustafa Kemal Pasha at the disposal of the Ministry of War. The Allied Powers gradually began to occupy the region in accordance with the secret agreements they had previously made among themselves, and in November 1918, both the British and the French landed troops in İskenderun and occupied Dörtyol. The fact that the people took up arms against the French occupation in Dörtyol on December 19, 1918 occupies an important place in the history of the National Struggle. It is known that the “First Bullet” that started the National Struggle was fired here (Tekin, 1993). When the French troops consisting of Armenians entered Dörtyol, the people started to resist. On September 15, 1919, England and France signed a contract known as the “Syrian Entente”. Accordingly, England left Adana, Maraş, Antep, Urfa, İskenderun and Syria to France, and took Mosul for itself (Atatürk’s Circular, Telegraph and Declarations, 1991).

Although the İskenderun region, which was a part of the motherland Turkey, was within the borders of the National Pact, the occupation by France and the attacks on the local population attracted the attention of the TBMM, especially Mustafa Kemal Pasha, and efforts were made to ensure that this occupied Turkish land could be incorporated into the motherland. Indeed, a short while after the opening of the assembly, Mustafa Kemal Pasha said on the podium of the Assembly on May 1, 1920: "...When determining and determining the border issue, which is one of the principles we always accept, and perhaps the first, our national border passes through the south of İskenderun. It extends eastward and includes Süleymaniye, Mosul, and Kirkuk. This is our national border..." (Atatürk's Speeches and Statements I, 1997) and expressed that İskenderun was considered within the National Pact. He also told Henri Franklin Bouillon, who would sign the Ankara Agreement on behalf of France, during their meeting in Ankara that "the point of action was the content of the National Pact" (Nutuk, 2007). Again, Tayfur Sökmen Bey, who left İskenderun in the days following the opening of the Turkish Grand National Assembly and established a society for the liberation of İskenderun in Adana, sent a letter to Mustafa Kemal Pasha and asked: Is Sanjak (Hatay) included in the National Pact? The answer was as follows: "Every place where Turks live is included in the National Pact" (Banguoğlu, 1987).

After the Mondros coup, France, which was defeated by the National Forces in Maraş, Antep and Urfa, which it occupied, stated that it wanted to sign a ceasefire, and thus Turkey gained the chance to negotiate on the İskenderun issue. Another issue that led France to a ceasefire was the possibility of Mustafa Kemal Pasha cooperating with the Turkish and Arab resistance movements in Syria (Sonyel, 1987). France also obtained some important intelligence information regarding this (Gelvin, 1998). The victory in the Battle of Sakarya (August 23–September 13, 1921) against the Greeks strengthened the hand of the Turkish government, and negotiations with France continued. The first attempts to liberate the İskenderun region began with the Ankara Agreement-Franklin Bouillon Agreement signed between the TBMM government and France on October 20, 1921 (Soysal, 1983), but the desired result could not be fully achieved, and İskenderun remained outside Turkey. At that time, signing an agreement with France meant that the TBMM government would be legally (de jure) recognized by a Western state for the first time (Oran, 2002). In addition, the disagreements that were gradually emerging between the Allied Powers would deepen and England would be left alone. Mustafa Kemal Pasha, who knew the importance of the agreement to be signed for the National Struggle for these reasons, evaluated the issue as follows: "With this agreement, Turkish national demands were confirmed and expressed for the first time by one of the Western Powers." (Nutuk, 2007).

It is seen in the memoirs of the head of the Turkish delegation, Yusuf Kemal Bey (Tengirşenk), that the negotiations for the Ankara Agreement were quite difficult. He states that not all the demands of the Ankara government were realized with the agreement and that they had to accept the negative answers of the head of the French

delegation, Bouillon, because at that time the government needed to “open a window” in Europe by relying on France. Again, Yusuf Kemal Bey told Bouillon that although the agreement was signed, it was incomplete, that the Turkish lands and people south of the border would never be forgotten, and that the Turkish children would struggle to have these lands re-integrated into Turkey one day (Tengirşenk, 2001). There were also serious discussions in the Assembly due to İskenderun being outside the border, and therefore, the possibility of the agreement not being accepted arose. Seeing the importance of the situation, Mustafa Kemal Pasha took the floor in the secret session of the Assembly on October 16, 1921 and said: “...There is no specific and positive line in our National Pact. He said, “The line that we will determine with our power and strength will be the border line” (TBMM Secret Session Minutes II, 1999). Apparently, he meant to say here, ‘this is our current power, we will complete our unfinished work by acting according to our power in the future.’

With the Ankara Agreement, Turkey’s border with Syria was drawn and France accepted to withdraw from the region. Although the Sanjak of İskenderun remained outside the homeland, the Ankara government had included provisions in the agreement that would protect the interests of the Turkish element in the Sanjak and prepare the necessary ground for granting autonomy to this region. According to Article 7 of the agreement, “A special administrative procedure will be established for the Iskenderun region. The Turkish people of the said region will benefit from all kinds of organizations for the development of their culture. The Turkish language will have official status there” (Melek, 1986).

An interesting anecdote reflecting Mustafa Kemal Pasha’s future plans for İskenderun has also been related. While the Treaty was about to be signed, a delegation headed by Tayfur Sökmen, who would later be elected as the first president of the independent Hatay State, came to Ankara and met with him, requesting that İskenderun be included within the borders of the homeland. However, Mustafa Kemal Pasha, who wanted to secure the southern border with the French for now and saw this as a necessity, told the delegation, “I know the aim and goal of the struggle in Hatay. We have been following these struggles since the first day, and we support them as much as our means allow. Hatay is already within our National Pact borders,” and after this meeting, he had Tayfur Sökmen elected as an independent deputy from Antalya. In fact, the fact that Tayfur Sökmen was elected as the deputy of Antalya attracted the attention of many people, and in response to the question of why he was elected from Antalya and not Adana or Antep, Pasha said; “Then we will put “k” instead of “l”. Thus, Antalya will become Antakya” (Ünal, 1978).

### **3.1. The Situation in Hatay After the Occupation**

The best explanation of the developments in Hatay after the occupation and the one that is more academically adequate than the others is İsmail Soysal’s book “Political Agreements of Turkey”. As the name suggests, the work focuses on the agreements in general, but it also covers in depth the political developments before and after the



agreement. In this respect, Soysal also includes the developments before and after the Ankara Agreement in his book.

It is known that after the occupation of İskenderun and Antakya, many Turks migrated from there with their families and settled in Adana, Mersin and Antep. Soysal (2000) stated in his book that the number of migrants increased after İskenderun, Antakya and the surrounding areas were left to the French with the Ankara Agreement, and that most of these people were Unionists who thought that they would not be given peace in Sanjak and did not want to live under another flag, and those who fought a gang war against the occupation.

The general statement in the sources is that France, when it comes to Turkish demands, considers Sanjak as a part of Syria despite its administrative autonomy and continues to treat Turks as a minority there.

The improved relations after the signing of the Turkish-French Agreement in 1926 also ensured that the situation of the Turks living in Sanjak improved politically. According to Soysal (2000), an important factor in this was that Turkey and France did not intervene in the mandate administration in Sanjak and warned their diplomats serving in the region about this issue and prevented them from visiting Sanjak.

There are issues in Soysal's book that are not discussed in other sources regarding these developments. The most important issue that Soysal points out is the perspective of the people living in Hatay on the revolutions and reforms taking place in Turkey. Soysal stated that the Sancak Turks tried to follow Ankara closely and that they started to implement all the reforms in Turkey in Sancak. According to the author, the dress code reform implemented in 1925 was immediately adopted in İskenderun and Antakya and became the symbol of the Turks who were in favor of annexation to the homeland. Similarly, reforms such as the closure of dervish lodges and dervish lodges in Turkey and the transition to secular education were also followed carefully, and the policies of the French in Sancak that supported religious education in madrasahs and schools were criticized. According to Soysal, the French Mandate Administration tried to prevent the strengthening of loyalty to the Republic of Turkey among the Sancak Turks, especially by supporting the Turkish notables and clergy who opposed the reforms taking place in Turkey. For this purpose, one of the policies they implemented since 1921 was to grant asylum to most of the opponents of reform who fled Turkey and to fill the quotas reserved for Turks in important civil servant positions with these people. In addition, they turned a blind eye to the propaganda of these people. Many sources that narrate Turkish Political History also confirm Soysal. According to these sources, the place that opponents of reforms in Turkey most preferred to flee to was İskenderun Sanjak.

### **3.2. Independence Movements in Syria and the Attitude of the Sanjak Turks**

After the British recognition of Iraq's independence in 1932, the demands for independence by Arab nationalists in Syria began to show themselves more strongly and with daily actions. While strikes, marches and rallies were held in Damascus and Aleppo, it is known that there was an indifference towards these developments among the Sancak Turks. Because the Sancak Turks stated that their cause was different and did not support the actions of the Arab independenceists in Syria. It is seen that Feridun Cemal Erkin, who was a diplomat at the time, discussed these developments in his book "34 Years in Foreign Affairs", where he recounted his memoirs. According to Erkin (1987), the policy of France starting after 1926 to attract the Turks to its side had an impact on the emergence of this situation, as did the tension between Arabs and Turks in Sancak and the articles published against the Sancak Turks in Syrian newspapers.

Starting in 1935, the independence movement started by the people in Syria gained momentum and gradually spread throughout Syria. According to Melek (1991), while the French administrators in Sancak continued their support for the Turks, they also tried to keep Sancak away from the events in Syria. For this reason, a scout group coming from Syria was not allowed to hold a demonstration march in Antakya, and attempts were made to stop the oppression of the Turks by the Arab gendarmes in Sancak.

The work that reflects the developments in Syria and Syria's perspective on the events in detail is Ömer Osman Umar's book "Syria Under the Ottoman Administration and the French Mandate". According to Umar (2004), nationalists began to voice demands for independence against the French mandate in Syria, especially in 1934. The policies of oppression and violence implemented by France led to bloody incidents in 1936, and the demonstrations were forcibly suppressed by French forces. Although Turkey was not the direct addressee of these developments in İsmail Soysal's book "Political Agreements of Turkey", it is seen that he briefly explains their results because they were of great concern to Turkey. According to Soysal (2000), the Syrian delegation went to Paris in March 1936. The talks progressed more slowly than expected due to the elections held in France and the lack of political will. As a result of the elections in April-May 1936, the left-wing parties in France won the elections they entered as the "Popular Front" and the government formed under the leadership of Leon Blum, consisting of socialists and radicals, was able to continue the negotiations. The Popular Front Government also stated that the time for mandates was over and that an alliance system should be established instead, as the British had done with Iraq. In line with this, Foreign Minister Delbos and his Undersecretary for Political Affairs Vienot accelerated the negotiations with the Syrians to turn Syria and Lebanon into independent states allied with France and finally, a friendship and alliance agreement was signed with the Syrian leaders in Paris on September 9.



This agreement, which is considered the first step towards Syria's independence, will come into force three years after the Syrian and French parliaments complete the necessary ratification procedures and when Syria becomes a member of the League of Nations; thus, the French mandate will also end.

Ada (2005) stated in his book that Turkey did not initially show a great reaction to these developments in Syria. However, at the League of Nations meeting held on September 26, Foreign Minister Tevfik Rüştü Aras brought up the issue of the Sanjak and expressed his hope that France would give the majority of the Turks in the Sanjak of İskenderun the opportunity to govern themselves and thus Turkish-French relations could develop further.

The French Undersecretary of Foreign Affairs, Viénot, stated that Syria, which would take over all the rights of the Mandate, would also recognize all the rights of Turkey over the Sanjak. Thus, it can be seen that the issue was first brought up in the League of Nations meetings. Şükrü Kaya, one of the Turkish delegates who spoke at the League of Nations on October 2, stated that the independence that would be achieved in Syria was a welcome development and expressed his concerns about whether the vital interests of the Turks in the region were sufficiently taken into consideration.

The work that best reflects Turkey's perspective on the issue during this period belongs to Tayfur Sökmen, as he was someone who experienced these events. In his book "Efforts Spent for the Liberation of Hatay", Sökmen stated that on November 1, 1936, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk stated in his opening speech to the Turkish Grand National Assembly that the true owners of the Sanjak were the Turks, and that the Sanjak issue, which remained the sole subject of dispute between Turkey and France, needed to be resolved. Following this development, Atatürk summoned Tayfur Sökmen to the Çankaya Presidential Palace and announced that the case had been officially taken over, ordered that the name of Antakya-İskenderun and its surroundings would henceforth bear the name of Hatay, and similarly, ordered that the name of the Antakya-İskenderun and its surroundings be changed to the "Hatay Sovereignty Society".

### **3.3. Bringing the Sanjak Problem to the League of Nations**

According to the common statement of the sources that examined the Hatay issue, France chose to take the issue to the League of Nations when it was torn between the mandate of Syria and Lebanon, which it carried out on behalf of the League of Nations and for which it had pledged independence with the Mandate Act, and the clear commitments it had made to Turkey with the Ankara Agreement but tried to ignore, on the other hand. The argument that France relied on the most on this issue was the commitments it had made in the Mandate Act of July 22, 1922, to protect the integrity of the Syrian and Lebanese territories.

Another common statement of the sources is that the Sanjak issue was brought to the League of Nations at a time when Turkey was quite respected and powerful in the

international arena. It is seen that the books Turkish Foreign Policy and Turkish Political History covering that period also support this argument. By 1936, Turkey had become a country that was respected in the international arena and trusted in its region with the reforms it had implemented and the foreign policy it had successfully implemented. Indeed, with the approval of the invitation made by the League of Nations in 1932 in the Turkish Grand National Assembly, Turkey became a member of the League of Nations and two years after becoming a member, it was elected as a temporary member of the Assembly of the League of Nations. On the other hand, in 1934, Romania signed the Balkan Pact with Yugoslavia and Greece, thus ensuring the mutual security of the borders in the region against the revisionist tendencies that were increasingly becoming a major threat from Germany and Italy.

As the dimensions of the Sanjak problem grew as a result of the notes France and Turkey exchanged and the parties were unable to find a solution to this complexity, the Turkish Government, in agreement with the French Government, referred the issue to the League of Nations on 8 December 1936. The Council of the League of Nations discussed the issue between 14–16 December 1936. Soysal (2000) stated in his book that Turkey requested that the French army be withdrawn and a neutral gendarmerie attached to a League of Nations commissioner be sent to ensure peace in Sanjak before the issue was addressed. Sökmen (1978) stated that when France rejected this, on 16 December the Council appointed the Swedish representative Sandler as a rapporteur to prepare a report for the resolution of the dispute, and also suggested sending a group of three observers to Sanjak and that Turkey and France continue their talks in the meantime.

Gürson (1999) states that Turkey stated that Turkish and French representatives should be together in the observer group. When the observer group arrived in Sancak on 31 December 1936, Turkish-French talks also began. Gürson stated that the failure of Tevfik Rüştü Aras's travel from Geneva to Paris and his meetings with French Foreign Ministers Delbos and Vienot on 21–22 December created a general atmosphere of dissatisfaction at the meeting of the Republican People's Party held in Ankara on 5 January 1937. The most striking information provided by Gürson was that Atatürk suddenly cut short his trip to Eskişehir on 6 January, went to Konya and went to Ulukışla with his civilian and military advisors on 7 January, creating a visible panic in France. While there was a general panic in the French press, rumors spread rapidly that Turkey was preparing to stage a coup in the region. As a result of Ambassador Fethi Okyar's meeting with Vienot in Paris on January 8, the frightening atmosphere created in France by Atatürk's trip disappeared.

In this positive atmosphere, the meetings that started in Geneva on January 21st, ended on January 26th, 1937, after the Turkish and French representatives made speeches reiterating the views of their governments, and the Sandler Report was unanimously accepted in the Council on January 27th (Gürson, 1999).

The details of the report are explained in detail in Gönlübol and Sar's (2013) books. According to the report; a "Separate Entity" will be established in the İskenderun and Antakya regions, which will be completely independent in its internal affairs, but will be governed by a constitution and a status that will be in a customs union with Syria. The foreign affairs of the Sanjak will be governed by Syria under certain conditions. Turkish will be the official language, and the conditions for the use of other languages will be determined by the League Assembly. The territorial integrity of the Sanjak will be guaranteed by Turkey and France in accordance with an agreement to be made for this purpose.

While the Sandler Report and its applications were met with backlash and caused protests in Syria, it was a temporary formula applied for the interim period for Turkey. While the Turkish public opinion was directed in a controlled manner in this context, various demonstrations and rallies were organized throughout the country to make the incident known to the entire public.

#### **4. Hatay's Joining of Turkey**

The best chronological explanations of the international developments that took place before Hatay joined Turkey were given by Armaoğlu and Aydın. Armaoğlu (1993) states that Germany's annexation of Austria in March 1938 also affected France's policy on the Hatay issue. He also thinks that at a time when the Berlin-Rome axis was gradually increasing its weight, France's need for Turkey, which had strategic importance in the Eastern Mediterranean and was a strong protector of the straits, also increased. Aydın (2012) states that Atatürk, after the signing of the Montreux Straits Convention on July 20, 1936, turned to the issue of the Sanjak of İskenderun, which was the last remaining issue from Lausanne. This is because during this period, Turkey reached a more comfortable position in foreign policy compared to the past, and developments in Europe also created a favorable political environment for the solution of the Sanjak issue.

Gürson was the one who best summarized the national developments. In his book, Gürson (1999) stated that, in parallel with the escalating tension in Europe, Turkey declared martial law in the region on June 3 and amassed a force of thirty thousand people on the border. As a result of these developments, bilateral talks began between France and Turkey. On June 28, the election commission went to Geneva and on July 4, a new friendship treaty was signed between the two countries in Ankara. This new treaty, which would replace the 1930 Treaty that Turkey had terminated, determined the new status of the Sanjak and the future relations of France, Turkey and Syria. Gürson stated that these developments were met with a great reaction in the Arab press and that it was announced that the validity of the Syria-France-Turkey compromise would never be accepted.

The signing of the Turkey-France Friendship Treaty by the parties on July 4, 1938 and the confirmation of the 1937 Treaty guaranteeing the territorial integrity of Hatay caused

Turkish-French relations to take on a new shape. Although this treaty did not enter into force because it was not approved by the parliaments of the parties and therefore did not have any binding effect, it made great contributions in terms of showing the parties' perspectives on each other and their common interests in the course of other international events, as in the Sanjak issue. After the signing of the Turkish-French Treaty, work on the elections to be held in Sanjak was resumed. Sökmen (1978) showed in his book that the majority was Turkish by giving the proportional values in the elections held in August. According to Sökmen, in Hatay; it was revealed as a result of the election that there were 35,847 Turks, 11,319 Alevis, 5,504 Armenians, 1,845 Sunni Arabs, and 2,098 Greek-Orthodox voters. Accordingly; the Turkish community in Sanjak won 22 out of 40 seats in the Sanjak assembly. In addition, 9 Alevis, 5 Armenians, 2 Sunni Arabs, and 2 Greek-Orthodox deputies were elected. It is thought that Sökmen's inclusion of numerical data is important in terms of objectivity.

In the first assembly meeting on September 2, 1938, an oath was taken in Turkish, Abdülgazi Türkmen was appointed as the Speaker of the Assembly, Tayfur Sökmen was appointed as the Head of State, and Abdurrahman Melek was elected as the Prime Minister by Sökmen. In this first assembly, the assembly accepted Hatay as the name of the state instead of Sancak.

Meanwhile, in Europe, the first step towards a new alliance was taken within the framework of the new situation that emerged with the occupation of Czechoslovakia on March 15, 1939 after Germany invaded Austria, and the Joint Declaration of Turkey and England was published on May 12, 1939. Turkey put forward the condition that the same declaration be made with France or that Hatay join it for a triple alliance. According to the common statement of the sources, in order to prevent Turkey from being in the opposing bloc in the event of Hitler threatening international security and a war that was now inevitable, France had no other alternative but to accept Turkey's demands.

On June 23, 1939, when the Turkish-French Joint Statement, which was the second step of the Triple Alliance, was published, the "Agreement on the Definitive Solution of Territorial Issues between Turkey and Syria" was signed between Foreign Minister Şükrü Saraçoğlu and the French Ambassador to Ankara, Rene Massigli. According to the agreement, the Turkish-Syrian border was arranged in a way that would include Hatay within the borders of Turkey. It was also foreseen that these lands would be evacuated by French soldiers by July 23, 1939 at the latest. It is seen that the details of the agreement have not been examined in depth in many sources on the Hatay Problem. However, it is possible to find the details of the agreement in the works of Hamit Pehlivanlı, Yusuf Sarımay and Hüsamettin Yıldırım titled "Hatay in Turkish Foreign Policy" (1918-1939).

The Hatay State, founded in September 1938, remained independent for about a year. During this period, there was very close cooperation between this state and Turkey. The Hatay Assembly, which held its last meeting on June 29, 1939, unanimously decided to join Turkey. In accordance with the agreement signed with France on June 23, 1939, the

Hatay Assembly convened and decided to join Turkey. On June 29, 1939, the Hatay National Assembly held its last meeting and the decision to join was read in the assembly. Later, with the law numbered 3711 dated July 7, 1939 of the Turkish Grand National Assembly, the Hatay province was established and the governorship was opened. Following these developments, French soldiers withdrew from Hatay after July 24 (Sökmen, 1978). It is possible to find the details of these developments in the works of Abdurrahman Melek, who experienced various stages of the Hatay problem and held administrative positions, in “How Hatay Was Liberated” and Tayfur Sökmen’s “Efforts Spent for the Liberation of Hatay”.

### **5. Hatay Issue in Foreign Press**

As Turkey focused on the Hatay issue and established close diplomatic relations with France, this situation was closely followed and evaluated by the foreign press. News and comments in the foreign press were closely followed and reported by both the General Directorate of Press of the Ministry of the Interior and the Intelligence Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Greek newspaper *Katimerini* attributed Atatürk's interruption of his trip to Trabzon in June 1937 and his return to Istanbul to the Syrians' unrest regarding the Hatay issue and the alarming news coming from the region (BCA, 030.10/1.3.17). The French newspaper *La République* reported in its issue dated 4 December 1937: It reported that the agreement between France and Syria had strained Turkish-French relations, which had been friendly since 1535, and that this situation was pregnant with new problems (BCA, 030.10/222.501.22). The Hatay issue reaching a solution stage in line with the Turkish thesis and France's attitude on this issue were heavily criticized, especially by Syrian leaders and the press. In particular, the lowering of the Syrian flag in Hatay seriously disturbed the public opinion of the country in question. The *Fetâ el-Arab* newspaper claimed that Atatürk would come to Dörtyol and that this situation would pose a threat to Syria. In an article published in the *Le Journal* newspaper on December 8, 1937, while evaluating the Syrians' discontent and the situation of France, it was claimed that “France will either force the Syrians to comply with the terms of the agreement or fall out with Turkey” (BCA, 030.10/222.501.23). After Syria's stance rejecting the status of Sanjak disrupted the public order in Hatay, Turkey terminated the 1926 friendship agreement it had signed with Syria. Pierre Dominique from *La République* evaluated Turkey's reaction to Syria's actions and the conjunctural situation in his article dated December 8, 1937. While emphasizing the increasing British, German and Italian competition in the region, he asked what France would do about the Sanjak issue. He added, “Are we going to fight Mustafa Kemal because the Syrians want it?” and stated that “not a single drop of French blood can be shed for the region in question” (BCA, 030.10/222.501.24).

Meanwhile, an article on the subject will be written in the *Arev* newspaper, the publication organ of the Armenian Ramgavar party published in Cairo. The article will state the latest situation between Turkey, France and Syria and the importance Atatürk



gave to the subject; it will emphasize that the Armenians of Sanjak have never been committed to one side and have always aimed to be friendly with all elements in the region (BCA, 030.10/222.501.26).

Due to the visit of French Foreign Minister Delbos to Romania, an article was published in *Le Moment* newspaper on December 12, 1937, examining Turkish-French relations with a special focus on Hatay. While the stages of the Hatay issue and the final stage it had reached were evaluated in the article, it was stated that the issue was perceived as a national cause by Turkey and that Atatürk himself supported this cause (BCA, 030.10/222.501.25). In his article in the French newspaper *L'Ere Nouvelle* dated December 16, 1937, Louis Bresse evaluated relations between Turkey, France and Syria and stated that Foreign Minister Delbos would visit Ankara in February and that this visit could bring some surprises (BCA, 030.10/222.501.27). Again, in the French press, in the *Journal des Débats* dated 21 December 1937, Pierre Bernus wrote that the agreement between France and Syria did not mean that the Hatay issue was over, and that it would be wrong to think so, because Turkey had annulled the friendship agreement signed with Syria in 1926 (BCA, 030.10/223.502.4). The Swiss newspaper *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* (June 24, 1938) attributed the Sanjak issue's progress towards its planned conclusion and France's constant concessions to the following reasons: 1- Germany began to pursue expansionist policies again, 2- England and France did not want their interests in the Mediterranean to be jeopardized, 3- Both states wanted to act together with Turkey in the region and were planning an alliance, 4- France was protecting its interests in Lebanon and Syria, 5- France's concessions in favor of Turkey were a result of the French and British rapprochement and foreign policy (BCA, 030.10/224.509.28).

A similar article was published in the *New York Times* on June 26, 1938 by Joseph M. Lewy. The relevant part of the article, which generally analyzes the world balances of the period, is as follows: "While France tries to prevent the capture of Sanjak by the Turks by saying 'Syria, France's ally, opposes this', it also has to reassure Turkey as much as possible. Great Britain and France appreciate today that Turkey is now an important state on the world chessboard. Thanks to its equipped army of nearly two hundred thousand people and its absolute dominance over the Straits, Turkey has become one of the important states in the Mediterranean region in terms of strategy. At a time when war clouds are covering the horizons of Europe, France and England, whose interests in Europe are common, appreciate very well the vital importance of remaining at peace with Turkey and the value of making many sacrifices... Whether for the defense of peace or for winning a war against Germany and perhaps Italy, it is extremely important to establish an Anglo-French-Turkish bloc in the Mediterranean. Allowing the annexation of the Sanjak by Turkey is not too heavy a concession to gain Turkey's friendship and alliance. But since France and England are the guardians of the League of Nations and its pact and principles, France could not surrender the Sanjak to the Turks without at least appearing to defend Syria. This is why negotiations between France and Turkey have lasted so long." The French press generally viewed positively the joint action of Turkey



and France in resolving the Hatay issue and the latest agreement they signed in this context. The following news item was published in the *L'Ere Nouvelle* newspaper on July 2, 1938: "When the texts that were confirmed one after another are examined, it becomes clear that the centuries-old friendship between France and Turkey has been revived with all its strength and scope." In an article he wrote for the *Populaire* newspaper on the same date, M. A. Leroux wrote: "France was obliged to maintain and strengthen its friendship with Turkey, especially in the current situation. It was necessary to remove the obstacles that had arisen over the last few months. This was achieved. This is an important result." In the *Matin* newspaper dated July 3, 1938, it was reported that the agreement between Turkey and France was welcomed with joy in Antakya, that while the Turks were very enthusiastic, the Arab, Alevi and Armenian elements were calmly accepting the situation. The *Soir* newspaper dated the same date said the following about the latest agreement: "France and Turkey have renewed, or rather, strengthened, their bonds of friendship." The French newspaper that made opposing comments against the latest agreement between the two states was the communist-leaning *Humanité* newspaper. In its issue dated July 3, 1938, it was emphasized that the latest agreement would strengthen France's friendship with Turkey while causing it to gain the hostility of the Arab world (BCA, 030.10/224.511.4).

## **6. Conclusion**

The Iskenderun Sanjak (Hatay) issue constituted one of the most difficult foreign policy events that the Republic of Turkey faced during the Ataturk era. Although it was within the borders of the National Pact, Iskenderun was inevitably left to French administration due to the negative conditions of the National Struggle years. However, Turkey managed to include the conditions that would later lead to the Hatay issue being mentioned again in the signed agreements. A rebellion would break out in Eastern Anatolia during a period when Turkey was focusing on the Hatay cause. Just like the Sheikh Said Rebellion that took place during the Mosul-Kirkuk talks with England (1925), the Dersim Rebellion (1938–1939) broke out in Tunceli during the final stages of Hatay's accession to the homeland. France hoped to gain the advantage that England provided with the Sheikh Said Rebellion, but its expectations were not realized. Because Turkey was neither a newly established state as in 1925 nor a tired and unprepared state that had come out of wars. Indeed, Hatay was annexed to Turkey, the homeland, after a period of 21 years, which is not considered long in the life of a state. Turkey continued diplomatic negotiations at every stage of this process, acted in accordance with the decisions of the League of Nations, but changed these decisions again through diplomacy when necessary, and concluded them in its favor without using force directly, so to speak, "by the book" (Oran, 2002). The Hatay success is one of the most important examples showing that Turkey's "Use of Force" strategy was successful (Longrigg, 1968). Due to the increasing Italian and German threats, it is seen that France preferred Turkey's

friendship rather than Syria's regional integrity when it came to its national interests (Khoury, 1987). In short, Turkey won a victory against France, which was the number two state in the world balance of power at the time, without firing a single bullet.

While all this was happening, Atatürk displayed a tremendous example of struggle during the process of Hatay's annexation to the homeland. (Soyak, 2004; Bayar, 1955) During the most complicated times of the problem, during a period when doctors advised him to rest completely due to his illness, he watched the military parades in Mersin and Adana on foot in May 1938 and made various trips. Despite contracting a disease with a known outcome, he focused on the Hatay issue as much as he could and forced the government to take more effective measures. In this context, his role in Hatay's annexation to the homeland is truly great.

The saddest event of 1938 was the death of Atatürk, who left Hatay, which he had saved from captivity, without seeing it join the homeland. Atatürk's death filled the people of Hatay, as well as the entire world, with endless sorrow and grief. However, the continuation of these efforts and the continuation of Hatay's annexation to the homeland did not diminish the effort. Indeed, during İsmet İnönü's presidency, efforts regarding Hatay were carried out at great speed. However, those working against this cause did not lag behind in their propaganda activities and tried to demoralize people by spreading the rumors that the Hatay cause could no longer be carried out as quickly as before. The Syrian press began to write unpleasant articles, and those of Italian nationality in İskenderun increased their political propaganda activities and began to make efforts to weaken the cause. If we give an example; The statement made by Tahir Bey, the owner of the pro-Italian El Vakit newspaper published in Syria, regarding the Turkish-British Declaration signed on May 12, 1939 and the ongoing Turkish-French talks is as follows (BCA Fund No: 30 10, Box No: 224, File No: 495/1); "The Turkish-British agreement is not complete. It has not yet been completely finalized. The aim of the Turks is to obtain 30 million from England in order to purchase military equipment. The Turks agreeing with the French, which is impossible. There are 50 thousand Armenians and 100 thousand Kurds on the Turkish-Syrian border, who are the reserve forces that the French trust the most. What will happen to these 150 thousand people if those places are given to the Turks? It is for all these reasons that the Turkish-British Declaration is doomed to remain fruitless. Especially if the possibility of war decreases, the French and the British will never make these sacrifices to the Turks. The Turks abandoned neutrality and joined the British group in order to get money from the British and to gain land and benefits from Syria. How could France dare to give even a foot of land from Syria to Turkey? This land is not its property, it belongs to the Arabs."

With the insistence of England, France agreed to the solution of the Hatay issue as Turkey wanted. Thereupon, Turkish-French talks began on June 17, 1939 and lasted for six days (NA, FO.371/23295). The talks for Hatay were concluded in Ankara between Ambassador Massigli, Minister of Foreign Affairs Saraçoğlu and Secretary General

Menemenciöglü. Within this scope, with the signing of the “Treaty on the definitive solution of territorial issues between Turkey and Syria” in Ankara on June 23, 1939, France accepted the annexation of Hatay to Turkey, while Turkey in return undertook to respect the independence and territorial integrity of Syria. The Turkish-French Joint Declaration was signed in Paris between French Foreign Minister M. Bonnet and Turkish Ambassador Suat Davaz (NA, FO.371/21929/E-4552/1142/44; Aym Tarihi 1939: 89). The declaration signed between Turkey and France included the same provisions in the Turkey-UK declaration, adapted to France.<sup>1</sup> Thus, with the signing of the Turkish-French Declaration, France also joined the negotiations between Turkey and the UK for a definitive alliance agreement starting in July (Atabey, 2014). The Turkish-French Declaration constituted the beginning of the negotiations for the Triple Alliance Agreement to be signed in Ankara on October 19, 1939. On the other hand, the Hatay Assembly unanimously decided to join Turkey in its last meeting on June 29, 1939, and Turkey established the province of Hatay on July 7, 1939 with a law, finalizing the joining process. In the meantime, French forces left Hatay on July 23, 1939 (Hatipoöglü, 2002). The agreement entered into force on July 24, 1939, when the ratification documents were given in Paris.

The two agreements signed with France were welcomed with great satisfaction both in Turkey and in France. The news in the “Son Posta” newspaper dated June 25, 1939 regarding the subject is as follows (Son Posta, June 25, 1939): “Two important events took place in the Grand National Assembly the day before yesterday, which brought relations between France and Turkey into a brand new era. One of these was the signing of an agreement expressing the definitive surrender of Hatay to Turkey, and the other was the declaration regarding the establishment of a mutual assistance pact between the two countries. The first event consisted of the finalization of an issue that had been pending between the two countries for seventeen years and had been the subject of lengthy negotiations after going through various stages for more than two years. The National Assembly welcomed this news with great satisfaction. The completion of a task that the national Turkey had been waiting for a long time constitutes the basis of this satisfaction. In the near future, Hatay will be fully incorporated into the homeland, both de facto and de jure, and with this, the only issue that has been a source of disagreement between Turkey and France for a long time will be history. This event makes us happy in two ways. One is that Hatay will be reunited with the homeland, and the other is that there will no longer be any disagreement between Turkey and France. Both are events that will be welcomed by both sides.”

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