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**INTERNATIONAL REPERCUSSIONS OF
THE CAPITAL LEVY:
AN ANALYSIS THROUGH ALLIED PRESS AND
AMERICAN DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENCE***

Murat ÖZATA**

Abstract

The Second World War, which spread across Europe in the autumn of 1939, deeply affected not only Türkiye's foreign policy but also its economic structure. Although Türkiye did not participate in the war militarily, it faced both the direct and indirect economic consequences of the conflict. In this context, the Capital Levy Law, enacted in 1942, was introduced as an extraordinary financial measure to meet the state's increasing fiscal needs, control inflation by reducing the money supply, and address public discontent by taxing speculative wartime profits.

This study examines how the Capital Levy Law, in effect for sixteen months between November 12, 1942, and March 15, 1944, was perceived in American public opinion and diplomatic circles. It draws primarily on unpublished archival documents from the U.S. National Archives and contemporary reports from the American press.

The main objective of this research is to analyze how external pressures on Türkiye, during a period when the course of the Second World War was turning in favor of the Allies, influenced the implementation of the Capital Levy. Evaluations in American diplomatic documents and newspapers offer important insights into the political effects emerging at the intersection of Türkiye's international relations and domestic policies.

Keywords: *Capital Levy, Diplomatic Records, American Press, War Economy, Minorities.*

* Bu makalede Etik Kurul Onayı gerektiren bir çalışma bulunmamaktadır.

There is no study that would require the approval of the Ethical Committee in this article.

** Dr. Öğretim Üyesi, Giresun Üniversitesi, Fen-Edebiyat Fakültesi Tarih Bölümü,
(e.posta: muratozata@yahoo.com), (ORCID: 0000-0003-0099-0297).

VARLIK VERGİSİNİN ULUSLARARASI YANKILARI: MÜTTEFİK BASINI VE AMERİKAN DİPLOMATİK YAZIŞMALARI ÜZERİNDEN BİR ANALİZ

Öz

1939 Sonbaharında tüm Avrupa'ya yayılarak başlayan İkinci Dünya Savaşı, Türkiye'nin yalnızca dış politikasını değil, aynı zamanda ekonomik yapısını da derinden etkilemiştir. Türkiye savaşta fiilen taraf olmamakla birlikte, savaşın doğrudan ve dolaylı ekonomik sonuçlarıyla yüzleşmek zorunda kalmıştır. Bu bağlamda, 1942 yılında kabul edilen Varlık Vergisi Kanunu, devletin savaş koşullarında artan mali ihtiyaçlarını karşılamak, enflasyonu kontrol altına almak amacıyla piyasadaki para arzını azaltmak ve savaş döneminde oluşan toplumsal hoşnutsuzluğu gidermek üzere spekülasyon kazançları üzerinden alınan olağanüstü bir mali tedbir olarak yürürlüğe girmiştir.

Bu çalışma, 12 Kasım 1942 ile 15 Mart 1944 tarihleri arasında 16 ay boyunca yürürlükte kalan Varlık Vergisi Kanunu'nun, Amerikan kamuoyunda ve diplomatik çevrelerde nasıl yankı bulduğunu incelemektedir. Araştırmada, ABD Ulusal Arşivleri'nde bulunan yayımlanmamış arşiv belgelerinin ile dönemin Amerikan basınında yer alan haberler birincil kaynaklar olarak kullanılmaktadır.

Çalışmanın temel amacı, İkinci Dünya Savaşı'nın seyrinin Müttefikler lehine değiştiği dönemde Türkiye üzerindeki dış baskıların Varlık Vergisi uygulamasına nasıl yansıdığını analiz etmektir. Verginin uygulanma biçimine dair Amerikan diplomatik belgelerinde ve gazetelerinde yer alan değerlendirmeler, dönemin uluslararası ilişkileri ile iç politikalarının kesişim noktasında ortaya çıkan siyasi etkileri anlamak açısından önemli veriler sunmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Varlık Vergisi, Diplomatik Belgeler, Amerikan Basını, Savaş Ekonomisi, Azınlıklar.

Introduction

The outbreak of the Second World War in the autumn of 1939 presented significant economic and political challenges for Türkiye, despite its efforts to maintain neutrality throughout the conflict. Guided by a leadership that believed Türkiye would remain safe as long as it stayed out of the war, the country adopted a strict neutrality policy, successfully avoiding direct involvement until the very final stages of the war. However, the mobilization of over one million soldiers and the sharp contraction in foreign trade, particularly due to Türkiye's dependency on Germany, brought the national economy to a standstill.

In this economic context, the Capital Levy Law (Varlık Vergisi), enacted in November 1942, emerged as an extraordinary fiscal tool aimed at addressing the state's urgent wartime financial needs. According to Article 1 of Law No. 4305, the Capital Levy was defined as "*a one-time levy imposed on individuals of wealth and extraordinary profit.*"¹ In practice, the law aimed to curb inflation by withdrawing capital from circulation, fund military expenditures, and suppress public discontent, particularly resentment toward war profiteers.

However, despite its financial rationale, the Capital Levy also had significant political and social implications. Both the structure of the law and its implementation raised concerns about fairness, particularly due to the disproportionate burden placed on non-Muslim minorities and foreign nationals. During World War II, heavy taxes were imposed across many parts of the world as a result of wartime economies and policies. In the United States, for instance, 94% of corporate profits were taxed under the Excess Profits Tax, while a dramatic increase in the number of taxpayers and types of taxes introduced significant administrative challenges.² Similarly, in April 1940, the United Kingdom imposed a 100% tax on excess profits, taxing any income beyond a fixed limit.³ In Germany, where systematic war preparations had begun as early as 1933, tax rates nearly doubled, and a separate excess profits tax collected up to 150% of previous years' dues.⁴ The Soviet Union introduced new taxes targeting singles and childless couples, as announced by Radio Moscow in November 1941.⁵ In the Far East, Japan financed its military

1 *T.C. Resmi Gazete*, October 12, 1942, Number: 5255, 3965.

2 "Australia Increases Income Tax by %30", *The New York Times*, February 13, 1943, 4. "Tax Day Poses Larger Task Than Ever Before", *The New York Times*, March 15, 1942, 7.

3 "Britain Will Take All Excess Profit", *The New York Times*, May 30, 1940, 2.

4 "Germany's Taxes Multiplied By War", *The New York Times*, January 2, 1942, 5.

5 "Soviets Taxes Childless Persons", *The New York Times*, November 25, 1941, 8.

efforts by imposing numerous taxes, especially in occupied territories such as Pienkwan, where 77 types of taxes were collected—including 12 specifically on domestic animals.⁶ In Australia, income tax was raised by 30%.⁷ Other countries adopted similar fiscal measures—the global trend of using aggressive taxation to support war economies.

Against this international backdrop, Türkiye's Capital Levy reflects a broader global trend of wartime fiscal exceptionalism. Yet, its unique political and social dimensions—especially in terms of its implementation and public reception—make it a distinctive case. According to Edward C. Clark, the Wealth Tax reproduced the Muslim–non-Muslim discrimination inherited from the Ottoman Empire in a modern form. However, this time the privileges were granted not to non-Muslims but to Muslims, thereby reversing the direction of the capitulations. Clark emphasizes that the tax severely restricted the industrial entrepreneurship of non-Muslims and created significant hesitation in their investment decisions.⁸

Şevket Süreyya Aydemir argues that the Wealth Tax was an extraordinary levy; not a whim or arbitrary choice, but rather the inevitable result of the circumstances of the time. For this reason, the ruling elites of the period cannot be blamed.⁹ To describe the tax solely as a “racist” practice, he contends, would mean ignoring the severe economic bottleneck of the period.¹⁰

According to Stanford Shaw, in practice it is clear that the tax was directed mainly at non-Muslim urban merchants. However, the centuries-long negative effects of the capitulations on Muslims led local commissions to impose the tax predominantly on non-Muslims.¹¹ Still, in evaluating the tax, one should not overlook the fact that in those extraordinary circumstances, these merchants were practically the only group with liquid financial resources.¹² Shaw also points out that Türkiye made greater efforts than most European states to protect its Jewish community from the Nazis. In his view, many of the Jewish families who suffered from the tax remained in Türkiye after the war, rebuilt their businesses, and continue to live as affluent members of Turkish society today.¹³

6 “Chinese Are Crushed With Japanese Tax”, *The New York Times*, July 23, 1942, 7.

7 “Australia Increases Income Tax by %30”, *The New York Times*, February 13, 1943, 4.

8 Edward C. Clark, “The Turkish Varlık Vergisi Reconsidered.” *Middle Eastern Studies* 8, (1972): 205–216. doi:10.1080/00263207208700205.

9 Şevket Süreyya Aydemir, *İkinci Adam*, (İstanbul: Remzi Kitabevi, 1999), 229.

10 Aydemir, 236.

11 Stanford J. Shaw, *The Jews of The Otoman Empire and Turkish Republic*, (New York: New York University Press, 1991), 256.

12 Stanford J. Shaw, *Turkey and The Holocaust*, *Palgrave Macmillan*, (New York: New York University Press, 1993), 40.

13 Shaw, 45.

Ahmet Emin Yalman, in his memoirs, describes the Wealth Tax as a “blunder,” stressing that it was applied mercilessly to minorities. In his view, the law lacked any sound criteria; it was clearly enacted by imitating Nazi methods in order to oppress minorities, intimidate political opponents, and protect political allies.¹⁴

Taner Timur argues that the Wealth Tax was employed against minorities in line with the racist ideology that had gained strength during the war years.¹⁵ Likewise Rıdvan Akar maintains that the tax had devastating effects on minorities while simultaneously elevating Turkish merchants, thereby partially achieving the goal of “Turkification of the market.”¹⁶ The requirement to pay debts in cash within fifteen days forced taxpayers to sell their immovable properties, which resulted in the transfer of ownership to wealthy families who had recently arrived from Anatolia. Similarly, Ayhan Aktar, by examining land registry records, concludes that between December 28, 1942 and June 30, 1943, approximately 95% of the 11,077,949 immovable properties sold belonged to non-Muslims, while 67% of these were purchased by Muslim Turks.¹⁷

According to Yahya Tezel, one of the most significant interventions in foreign trade during the war years was the Wealth Tax introduced in 1942. The government consciously implemented this law to weaken Greek, Armenian, and Jewish businessmen and to strengthen the weight of Turkish-Muslim merchants in the country’s foreign trade. The application of the tax considerably reduced the power of local non-Muslims, but it did not entirely eliminate them. The decline was relative; indeed, in 1950 non-Muslims still maintained a substantial role in Istanbul’s trade and industry. In that year, non-Muslims accounted for 17% of the city’s total workforce, while their share in manufacturing employment stood at 22%, and their share in commerce and banking employment reached 27%.¹⁸

Building on these domestic interpretations, this study examines the reflections of the Capital Levy in American diplomatic documents and contemporary U.S. press coverage, focusing on the period during which the law was in effect (November 12, 1942 – March 15, 1944). By analyzing archival materials from the United States Department of State, including unpublished records from the National Archives, alongside articles from prominent Anglo-American newspapers this research highlights how Türkiye’s wartime

14 Ahmet Emin Yalman, *Yakın Tarihte Gördüklerim Geçirdiklerim*, Volume III, (İstanbul: Yenilik Basımevi, 1970), 375.

15 Taner Timur, *Türk Devrimi ve Sonrası*, (Ankara: Doğan Yayınları, 1971), 243.

16 Rıdvan Akar, *Varlık Vergisi Tek Parti Döneminde Azınlık Karştı Politika Örneği*, (İstanbul: Belge Yayınları, 1992), 96.

17 Ayhan Aktar, *Varlık Vergisi ve Türkleştirme Politikaları*, (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2000), 229-230.

18 S. Tezel, *Cumhuriyet Döneminin İktisadi Tarihi*, (İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 1994), 263.

fiscal policies were perceived internationally and how these perceptions were shaped by both diplomatic reporting and public discourse.

Building on these domestic interpretations, this study examines the reflections of the Capital Levy in American diplomatic documents and press coverage, focusing on the period during which the law was in effect (November 12, 1942 – March 15, 1944). By analyzing archival materials from the United States Department of State, including unpublished records from the National Archives, alongside articles from prominent Anglo-American newspapers, this research highlights how Türkiye's wartime fiscal policies were perceived internationally and how these perceptions were shaped by both diplomatic reporting and public discourse.

While numerous studies have examined the Capital Levy from various domestic perspectives, analyses focusing specifically on the U.S. government's response remain relatively limited. For instance, Yasin Coşkun's work, *An Example of International Reactions to the Wealth Tax: The U.S. Perspective*, primarily relies on the *Foreign Relations of the United States* (FRUS) series, whereas Ferudun Ata's article, *Reflections of the Wealth Tax on American Public Opinion: The Case of The New York Times*, draws mainly on U.S. press materials. Yet, despite these contributions, important gaps remain: several telegrams concerning the Capital Levy are missing from the FRUS volumes published by the U.S. Department of State, some responses to existing telegrams are not preserved in their original form, and only a limited number of documents dated after January 1943 have been included. This omission may be attributed to the FRUS editorial policy, which often avoids publishing documents related to politically sensitive issues.

Against this backdrop, the present study distinguishes itself through its use of unpublished archival documents housed in the U.S. National Archives. These materials provide a more nuanced and contextualized perspective on American views regarding the Capital Levy. These previously unused materials not only deepen our understanding of the media narratives but also uncover the diplomatic dynamics that shaped them.

1. The Capital Levy, Objectives, Implementation and Financial Dimensions

During the years of World War II, Türkiye, although not directly involved in the war, experienced significant economic and social upheavals. The mobilization of a large portion of the workforce, which was necessary for production, resulted in a sharp decline in agricultural output. Between 1938 and 1945, total grain production decreased by 52%, and the production of

wheat, the most essential crop, dropped by approximately 50%.¹⁹ This decline in agricultural production posed a major challenge, particularly for feeding the urban population and the military.²⁰

The rapid reduction of the producing population, coupled with the growing consumer population, led to a dramatic increase in public expenditures. To meet these extraordinary costs, the government resorted to issuing more currency, and the amount of circulating money tripled by 1942.²¹ As a result, inflation skyrocketed, and with difficulties in imports, the supply-demand balance was completely disrupted. The failure of supply to meet demand, combined with the scarcity of goods and the general anxiety caused by the war, led to rapid price increases. Many traders took advantage of this situation, withholding goods from the market and making extraordinary profits.²² For instance, wheat purchased at 30 kuruş per kilogram in Konya was sold as flour for 200 kuruş in Istanbul.²³

On November 1, 1942, President İsmet İnönü addressed the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye and expressed his strong disapproval of such profiteering:

There is certainly a way to cure the damage obviously caused to the nation by this relatively small group of schemer. We cannot allow anyone to insult the state and the nation, to poison the honor of the nation, or to undermine the public's confidence in the government.

We cannot recognize the right of any person or group to rob the nation under the excuse of freedom of commerce or economic activity. Ambitious schemers will be prevented absolutely from carrying out any domestic or foreign policy beyond those of the national administration.²⁴

This speech pointed directly to the Capital Levy Law, which was to be enacted two weeks later, highlighting both the rationale behind and the target group of the tax.

Press, being under tight government control during the war years, played an active role in preparing public opinion for the forthcoming Capital

19 Selim Deringil, *Denge Oyunu İkinci Dünya Savaşı'nda Türkiye'nin Dış Politikası*, (İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 1994), 20.

20 Korkut Boratav, *100 Soruda Türkiye'de Devletçilik*, (İstanbul: Gerçek Yayınevi, 1974), 292.

21 Faik Ökte, *Varlık Vergisi Faciası*, (İstanbul: Nebioğlu Yayınevi, 1951), 32.

22 Ökte, 35.

23 Boratav, *100 Soruda Türkiye'de Devletçilik*, 302.

24 *İnönü'nün Söylev ve Demeçleri I*, (İstanbul: Milli Eğitim Basımevi, 1946), 371.

Levy. Throughout the summer of 1942, several newspapers in Istanbul published articles that associated the non-Muslim population with activities such as black marketeering, hoarding, and profiteering. This media portrayal aimed to legitimize the targeted group of the tax within public opinion.²⁵

Key figures involved in the preparation of the law included Prime Minister Şükrü Saraçoğlu, Minister of Finance Fuat Ağralı, Finance Undersecretary Esat Tekeli, and the President of the Finance Inspection Board, Şevket Adalan.²⁶ Prime Minister Şükrü Saraçoğlu, in his speech at the General Assembly of the Turkish Grand National Assembly, stated that the increase in the circulating money had led to a rapid rise in inflation. He emphasized the need to withdraw part of the money through taxation in order to curb this inflation. The Prime Minister outlined the goal of the law as reducing the circulating money and meeting the country's needs. Additionally, he mentioned that by forcing the sale of goods to pay the taxes, he expected a general decrease in prices.²⁷

The Capital Levy Law was published in the Resmi Gazete (Official Newspaper) on November 12, 1942, and came into force. Following the enactment of the law, Prime Minister Saraçoğlu held a meeting with the editors of newspapers, where he explained the objectives of the law and requested that the journalists write articles to inform the public of the law's benefits to both the people and the country.²⁸ In this context, articles frequently appeared in the press analyzing the economic and social implications of the tax. For example, Asım Üs, a writer for the Vakit newspaper, argued that the Capital Levy "was a new initiative aimed at establishing a balance in Türkiye's economic, financial, and social life" and that it was based on the principle of sharing the sacrifices required by the global depression in proportion to one's ability to do so. Similarly, Cumhuriyet newspaper focused on the social justice aspect of the tax.²⁹

25 Ayhan Aktar, *Varlık Vergisi ve Türkleştirme Politikaları*, (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2000), 143.

26 Boratav, *100 Soruda Türkiye'de Devletçilik*, 340.

27 TBMM Zabıt Ceridesi, Session: 6, Volume 28, Meeting: 4, 3rd Transcript, November 11, 1942. This aspect of the tax is also mentioned in the memoirs of Faik Ökte, the Istanbul Treasury Official of the time. He writes that Prime Minister Şükrü Saraçoğlu told him, "There is also a price policy involved, young man. I will flood the market with goods." Ökte, *Varlık Vergisi Faciası*, 52.

28 According to this directive, in the Tan newspaper dated December 8, 1942, Zekeriya Sertel stated that the Wealth Tax would bring beneficial results to our social and economic life, while the Cumhuriyet newspaper of the same date explained that the purpose of the tax was to meet the state's critical needs and to distribute the burden of sacrifice as equally as possible among the citizens. O. Murat Güvenilir, *2. Dünya Savaşında Türk Basını*, (İstanbul: Gazeteciler Cemiyeti Yayınları, 1991), 101.

29 M. Çağatay Okutan, *Tek Parti Döneminde Azınlık Politikaları*, (İstanbul: İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2004), 284.

In an interview with *The Times*, Prime Minister Saraçoğlu emphasized that the Turkish peasantry had shouldered the burden alone for centuries, and that it was now time for the wealthy traders, who had thus far refused to make sacrifices, to contribute as well. He also appealed to the wealthy to perform their duties at this critical juncture for the country, taking advantage of the Turkish hospitality.³⁰ However, despite its official justification, the Capital Levy Law became highly controversial both due to its content and its implementation. The most debated provisions of the law included Article 7, which stipulated that the tax would be determined by a commission led by the highest-ranking civil servant of the district, Article 11, which eliminated the right of appeal against the commission's decisions, and Article 12, which required taxpayers to pay their debts within 15 days, and those who failed to comply within a month would be sent to labor camps. Payment of the tax assessed must be made within 15 days, with a penalty of 1% for payment within the first week thereafter, or 2% for the second week. Should those assessed not pay the tax within one month from the date of assessment, the taxpayers will be subjected to forced labor of a non-military nature until the tax is paid. Furthermore, all payments were required to be made in cash, and the amount of the tax in Istanbul was alone 344 Million Liras, which means almost 50 percent of the total currency in circulation.³¹

The taxes determined by the established commissions, while based on certain criteria, lacked objectivity. The Capital Levy was not based on a clear, fixed assessment but was entirely discretionary. Furthermore, the tax amounts, as well as the deadlines and conditions for payment, presented various challenges. The relationship between certain political factions and profiteers complicated the implementation of the Capital Levy even further.³²

Prime Minister Saraçoğlu justified these provisions during the November 11, 1942 parliamentary session, stating, "Taxpayers will primarily include merchants, property and real estate owners, and large landowners. Merchants earned the most money during the war, and therefore, they will naturally bear the largest burden of the Capital Levy. We have not hesitated to demand a portion of the money they earned, as determined by the commission." He continued, "We have not left much time for the determination and collection of the tax, as we wanted to prevent any misuse and fraud by moneyed interests. Therefore, we have kept the timeline short..."³³

30 "Building The New Turkey", *The Times*, January 16, 1943, 4.

31 National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), Record Group (RG) 59, *Records of the Department of State Relating to Internal Affairs of Turkey, 1930-1944*, "Department of State Division of Near Eastern Affairs OSS Report no:1903", May 31, 1944, Microfilm M 1224, Roll 3.

32 For various examples on this matter, see. Ökte, *Varlık Vergisi Faciası*, 95-99.

33 *TBMM Zabıt Ceridesi*, Session: 6, Volume 28, Meeting: 4, 3rd Transcript, November 11, 1942.

The implementation of the Capital Levy disproportionately impacted minority groups, with approximately 87% of the 63,000 taxpayers in Istanbul being non-Muslims.³⁴ This has reinforced the widespread belief that the burdens of the war were largely placed on the shoulders of Greek, Armenian, Jewish, and other foreign entrepreneurs.³⁵ In the assessments, clear differences are observed between the Muslim Turkish population and the non-Muslim minorities, while also highlighting significant disparities in the taxes levied and collected between foreign nationals and the non-Muslim populace. For instance, of the total 73.7 million Lira in taxes imposed on foreigners, only 58% was collected.³⁶ Whereas the collection rate across all taxpayers was 74%.³⁷ Additionally, foreign-owned companies were taxed at varying rates depending on their country of origin. Greek, Yugoslav, and Italian companies were subjected to heavy taxes, while French, German, and Bulgarian companies faced lighter taxation. American and British companies, in contrast, were required to pay minimal taxes.³⁸

The Capital Levy (Varlık Vergisi), implemented in Türkiye during World War II, assessed a total of 424,906,421 Turkish Liras, with Istanbul alone accounting for over 300 million TL—approximately 70.6% of the total. The tax targeted a broad spectrum of the population, with 114,368 individuals and firms subject to assessment. By March 1944, 314,920,940 TL—roughly 74% of the total—had been collected, while the remaining 26% was cancelled in phases. The cancellation process began with small wage earners in September 1943 and culminated in the complete termination of unpaid balances by March 15, 1944, through Law No. 4530. As a result, a total of 112,612,167 TL in tax liabilities was officially written off. Enforcement of the tax was harsh; up to 1,500 individuals were sent to labor camps for non-payment. However, these camps were ultimately discontinued by December 1943.

2. Diplomatic Influence on the Implementation of the Capital Levy

During the implementation of the Capital Levy, various reactions from foreign governments and diplomatic missions were observed. Almost all diplomatic representations in Ankara either objected to the law itself or specifically to the tax assessments levied on foreign nationals. The Turkish government anticipated potential diplomatic repercussions, yet foreign

34 Aktar, *Varlık Vergisi ve Türkleştirme Politikaları*, 225.

35 Johannes Glasneck, *Türkiye’de Faşist Alman Propagandası*, Translated by. Arif Gelen, (Ankara:Onur Yayınları, 1970), 270.

36 Ökte, *Varlık Vergisi Faciası*, 124-125.

37 NARA, RG 59, *Records of the Department of State Relating to Internal Affairs of Turkey, 1930-1944*, “Department of State Division of Near Eastern Affairs OSS Report no:1903”, May 31, 1944, Microfilm M 1224, Roll 31.

38 NARA, RG 59, *Records of the Department of State Relating to Internal Affairs of Turkey, 1930-1944*, “Memorandum on The Varlık Vergisi or Capital Wealth Tax by Walter L. Wright, Jr”, February 2, 1943, Microfilm M 1224, Roll 31.

governments, while acknowledging discriminatory assessments against their nationals, refrained from formal protests or widespread criticism. Efforts were made to prevent negative coverage of the tax in the foreign press. Despite the absence of official objections, resentment persisted in foreign circles.³⁹

While the Turkish Foreign Minister rejected claims of discrimination, he acknowledged that some errors had been made in the process and promised that these mistakes would be corrected. However, some foreign governments, finding the corrections insufficient, even refused to accept the newly amended lists. Despite this, the issue did not escalate into an international crisis, as the friendly relations with the Turkish government acted as a deterrent to foreign states intervening in this domestic matter. However, U.S. Ambassador to Türkiye, Laurence A. Steinhardt, maintained close surveillance over these developments and regularly conveyed detailed reports to Washington.

The implementation of the Capital Levy in Türkiye, while primarily aimed at addressing domestic economic challenges during wartime, extended its impact beyond minority communities to include foreign nationals and institutions, thereby attracting notable international attention and diplomatic responses. Among the foreign entities affected, American institutions appear to have received particularly favorable treatment, especially when compared to those affiliated with other nations such as Germany. Despite holding extensive property and operating on a large scale, American institutions were subjected to relatively nominal assessments. For example, the American Hospital—an advanced and well-equipped facility—was taxed only 2,500 liras, whereas the poorly equipped Armenian Hospital was assessed at 39,000 liras.⁴⁰ This stark disparity highlighted the preferential treatment extended to American establishments.

The tax's enforcement soon prompted formal protests from various diplomatic missions. A classified telegram dated June 1943 revealed that representatives from multiple embassies, including those of the United Kingdom, Switzerland, Germany, and Italy, lodged official complaints with the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs concerning the levies imposed on their citizens.⁴¹ In response, Turkish authorities issued revised tax lists, which they insisted were final and non-negotiable. While the German and Italian

39 NARA, RG 59, *Records of the Department of State Relating to Internal Affairs of Turkey, 1930-1944*, "The Capital Levy: A Key to the Understanding of Current Trends in Turkey", Office of Strategic Services Research and Analysis Branch, Report no:1903", May 3, 1944, Microfilm M 1224, Roll 31. Secret.

40 NARA, RG 59, *Records of the Department of State Relating to Internal Affairs of Turkey, 1930-1944*, "Memorandum on The Varlık Vergisi or Capital Wealth Tax by Walter L. Wright, Jr", February 2, 1943, Microfilm M 1224, Roll 31.

41 NARA, RG 59, *Records of the Department of State Relating to Internal Affairs of Turkey, 1930-1944*, "Telegram From American Embassy Ankara to Secretary of State, Washington, N:1103", June 22, 1943, Microfilm M 1224, Roll 31. Strictly Confidential.

embassies accepted these revisions with written reservations, the British and Swiss representatives rejected them outright, citing the lack of an appeals mechanism.⁴² The British Embassy's objections were later endorsed by the British government in London. Efforts by the British Ambassador to reach a diplomatic compromise proved unsuccessful, as both parties remained steadfast in their respective positions. At that time, the Turkish government had not formally addressed the U.S. Embassy regarding American nationals whose cases had previously been raised.⁴³

Although the Capital Levy was presented to the public as a domestic fiscal measure, its implementation was significantly shaped by international diplomatic dynamics. In particular, diplomatic pressure from British and American representatives played a decisive role in securing favorable outcomes for foreign nationals—outcomes that were not extended to Turkish citizens. For instance, British taxpayers, initially assessed at approximately 7,000,000 Turkish liras, ultimately paid only around 2,000,000 liras. In a prominent American case, the Socony-Vacuum Oil Company succeeded in having two of its three double assessments annulled. Similarly, a U.S. citizen, Mr. Mandell, saw his liability reduced from 90,000 to 30,000 liras.⁴⁴

Archival correspondence further reveals that the United States intervened directly in multiple cases. Negotiations between the U.S. Embassy and the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs led to the reduction of a 300,000-lira assessment imposed on American citizens Sadullah, Mandil, and Levy—first to 75,000, and eventually to 30,000 liras. Likewise, the assessment against Mr. Thomas Retz was annulled following embassy involvement, despite ambiguity regarding his citizenship status.⁴⁵ According to Faik Ökte, no American citizen ultimately paid the Capital Levy. Although foreigners were not legally exempt, enforcement measures were not pursued against them, creating a de facto exemption.⁴⁶

Further evidence of American diplomatic involvement is found in a dispatch from the U.S. Department of State, dated shortly after the final liquidation of the tax. The document confirms that the United States not only closely monitored the implementation of the Capital Levy but also intervened actively to protect the interests of its citizens and affiliated organizations. Specifically highlighting the efforts of U.S. Ambassador Laurence A.

42 NARA, RG 59, M 1224, Roll 31, Telegram: 1103.

43 NARA, RG 59, M 1224, Roll 31, Telegram: 1103.

44 NARA, RG 59, *Records of the Department of State Relating to Internal Affairs of Turkey, 1930-1944*, "Telegram From American Embassy Ankara to Secretary of State, Washington, N:1521", September 6, 1943, Microfilm M 1224, Roll 31. Strictly Confidential.

45 NARA, RG 59, *Records of the Department of State Relating to Internal Affairs of Turkey, 1930-1944*, "Telegram From American Embassy Ankara to Secretary of State, Washington, N:612", March 23, 1944, Microfilm M 1224, Roll 31.

46 Ökte, *Varlık Vergisi Faciası*, 126.

Steinhardt, the report expresses satisfaction that the matter had been resolved and that American individuals and entities who appealed for diplomatic support had been successfully assisted.⁴⁷ This acknowledgment indicates that the U.S. did not regard the Capital Levy merely as a domestic Turkish matter, but as a policy requiring diplomatic engagement to safeguard national interests. It also underscores the fact that, even during a period of global conflict, international pressure could decisively influence how sovereign states handled sensitive internal matters.

These examples illustrate how Türkiye's wartime fiscal policies, particularly the Capital Levy, became entangled in broader geopolitical considerations. The differential treatment of Turkish citizens and foreign nationals reflects the Turkish government's strategic efforts to preserve favorable diplomatic relations with the Allied powers. In a period marked by fragile global power balances, such concessions likely stemmed from a desire to avoid international scrutiny and to maintain wartime neutrality. Therefore, the Capital Levy must be understood not merely as a domestic economic tool, but also as a policy shaped by the imperatives of international diplomacy.

3. The Role of the Allied Press in the Repeal of the Capital Levy

The Capital Levy initially garnered only limited attention in the international press. The British media, which followed the issue up until January 1943, generally approached the Turkish government's position with understanding, while the American press remained largely silent for an extended period. This lack of coverage in the United States was likely a consequence of wartime press policies aimed at preserving diplomatic balance and avoiding tensions with strategically important neutral countries such as Türkiye. It was not until September 1943—nearly a year after the tax's enactment—that *The New York Times* published a series of five critical articles by journalist C.L. Sulzberger. By that time, however, the enforcement of the tax had already been firmly established.⁴⁸

The portrayal of the Capital Levy in the foreign media, especially with regard to the discrepancies in its implementation and the disproportionate burden placed on non-Muslim minorities, became a focal point of international concern. Although the Turkish government consistently defended the tax as a fiscal necessity, its discriminatory effects drew increased scrutiny from the Allied powers, who questioned the fairness and political implications of the policy.

47 NARA, RG 59, *Records of the Department of State Relating to Internal Affairs of Turkey, 1930-1944*, "Telegram From Department of State Washington to American Embassy Ankara", April 24, 1944, Microfilm M 1224, Roll 31.

48 NARA, RG 59, *Records of the Department of State Relating to Internal Affairs of Turkey, 1930-1944*, "The Capital Levy: A Key to the Understanding of Current Trends in Turkey, Office of Strategic Services Research and Analysis Branch, Report Number: 1903", May 3, 1944, Microfilm M 1224, Roll 31, 7. Secret.

Two of the most prominent newspapers in the Anglophone world—*The Times* of London and *The New York Times*—closely monitored the developments surrounding the Capital Levy through reports published at various intervals. While *The Times* acknowledged the severity of the tax’s implementation, it generally echoed the official discourse of the Turkish government and aligned with narratives found in the domestic press. In contrast, *The New York Times* adopted a far more critical stance, openly questioning the legitimacy of the policy and highlighting its discriminatory nature, particularly after the momentum of the war began to shift in favor of the Allies.

Despite occasional expressions of concern, Anglo-American diplomatic intervention remained limited during the early implementation phase. Both nations refrained from taking official action, largely due to the delicate diplomatic context. This cautious stance was explicitly conveyed in a telegram from U.S. Secretary of State Cordell Hull to Ambassador Laurence A. Steinhardt, in which he warned that exposing the discriminatory implementation of the tax—particularly its targeting of minority groups—could seriously harm Turkish-American relations.⁴⁹ The absence of critical coverage in the American and British press during January 1943 is closely tied to this diplomatic restraint.

The British press generally adopted a supportive stance toward the Wealth Tax, with *The Times* playing a leading role in shaping public opinion. Drawing on both Turkish newspapers and government sources, the paper presented the rationale behind the tax to the British public, framing it within the context of Türkiye’s economic structure and wartime conditions. It sought to legitimize the higher tax rates imposed on foreigners, Jews, and other non-Muslims in commercial hubs such as Istanbul and Izmir by linking them to these groups’ dominant position in trade and commerce.⁵⁰

However, *The Times* did not limit itself to defending the policy; it also drew attention to its shortcomings. For instance, in its issue of December 22, 1942, the paper reported that the announcement of the tax lists had caused significant turmoil in the country, criticizing the excessive taxation of wealth, errors resulting from negligence, and the absence of any mechanism for correction.⁵¹

Over time, the British press also reflected the international reactions Türkiye faced. In its December 4, 1943 issue, under the headline “*Turkey Releases Tax Debtors*”, the paper reported that around 1,500 individuals had been released, portraying this decision as a goodwill gesture by the Turkish government in response to growing criticism and discontent.⁵²

49 NARA, RG 59, *Records of the Department of State Relating to Internal Affairs of Turkey, 1930-1944*, Telegram From Department of State Washington to American Embassy Ankara, January, 11, 1943, Microfilm M 1224, Roll 31.

50 “War Profits the Main Goal”, *The Times*, December 5, 1942, 3.

51 “Rigid Application of New Law”, *The Times*, December 22, 1942, 3.

52 “Turkey To Release Tax Defaulters”, *The Times*, December 3, 1943, 3.

Thus, the British press's approach to the Wealth Tax combined a supportive narrative of the Turkish government's policies and justifications with a cautious and critical perspective that acknowledged the social unrest and practical difficulties arising from its implementation.

Notably, The *New York Times* did not publish any articles about the Capital Levy in the first year following its enforcement. Between November 1942 and September 1943, the paper remained silent on the issue, despite extensive documentation in U.S. consular correspondence regarding the discriminatory practices and Turkish government assurances to American merchants. This lack of media attention to a policy affecting a vast portion of the population is significant, reflecting both the geopolitical sensitivity of the time and wartime censorship practices.

During what has been described as the "equilibrium phase" of the war—when the Capital Levy was implemented with the greatest severity—Germany still retained strategic advantage, and the United States avoided criticizing Türkiye, which had signed a non-aggression pact with Germany, for fear of pushing it closer to the Axis powers. Like many wartime governments, the U.S. exercised considerable control over its media, which involved both withholding stories and censoring content.

However, a turning point occurred in September 1943. With the tide of the war shifting in favor of the Allies and Germany's defeat appearing increasingly likely, The *New York Times* began publishing a series of strongly critical articles. In one such article, titled "Turkish Tax Kills Foreign Business," the newspaper reported that Christian and Jewish businesses were subjected to significantly higher tax rates than their Muslim Turkish counterparts. The article also highlighted that the tax levied in Istanbul alone was estimated at 344 million Turkish liras—roughly half the amount of total currency in circulation in the country at the time.⁵³ Growing unrest among minority communities and widespread concern among foreign diplomats were also noted.⁵⁴

Cyrus Leo Sulzberger, a correspondent for The *New York Times*, authored several sharply critical articles between September 9 and 13, 1943. These pieces condemned the Capital Levy under provocative headlines, characterizing it as a discriminatory and unprecedented financial measure with the potential to provoke major diplomatic and political repercussions.⁵⁵ One article asserted that "The Turkish Government has chosen the most opportune

53 C.L. Sulzberger, "Turkish Tax Kills Foreign Business", *The New York Times*, September 11, 1943, 7.

54 C.L. Sulzberger, "Turkey Is Uneasy Over Capital Levy", *The New York Times*, September 9, 1943, 20.

55 C.L. Sulzberger, "Premier Defends New Turkish Tax", *The New York Times*, September 10, 1943, 8.

moment to implement its plan,” while underscoring the broader context in which democratic nations were “engaged in a life-and-death struggle with a merciless enemy of civilization.”⁵⁶ The Capital Levy was framed as a “windfall taxation,” implicitly accusing the Turkish government of targeting specific groups under the guise of wartime economic necessity.

The publication of these articles had a direct impact. Just four days later, on September 17, 1943, an amendment was passed granting the Minister of Finance the authority to cancel unpaid tax debts for certain categories of taxpayers. This rapid policy shift clearly demonstrates the influence of American public opinion—and by extension, the American press—on Turkish decision-makers. However, the timing chosen for the abolition of these measures—on the eve of the Roosevelt, Churchill, and İnönü conference in Cairo—may reflect a desire to eliminate criticism in the Anglo-American public eye.

A diplomatic telegram from Washington dated October 5, 1943, further confirms the international dimensions of the issue. During meetings with Arthur Sulzberger, the owner of *The New York Times*, Turkish officials reportedly secured an informal agreement to limit criticism of Türkiye in the American press. According to Ambassador Steinhardt, journalist Cyrus Sulzberger had met with the Turkish Prime Minister before publishing his articles, and their content had been initially approved by Turkish authorities. However, the final versions diverged significantly from the pre-approved texts, leading to considerable frustration on the Turkish side.⁵⁷

In parallel with managing foreign media narratives, the U.S. Embassy also played a key role in defusing tensions between the Turkish government and the American press. This dynamic illustrates the evolving role of journalism, which, beyond informing the public, increasingly functioned as a diplomatic tool during wartime.

Ultimately, Law No. 4530, enacted on March 15, 1944, officially repealed the Capital Levy. The law canceled the remaining unpaid balances of taxes imposed under Law No. 4305, totaling 112,612,167 Turkish liras. Significantly, the decision to abolish the labor camps associated with the tax—taken shortly before the Roosevelt-Churchill-İnönü conference in Cairo—suggests a deliberate effort to mitigate Anglo-American criticism and realign Turkish diplomatic priorities.⁵⁸

56 “Turkish Action Condemned”, *The New York Times*, September 28, 1943, 24.

57 NARA, RG 59, *Records of the Department of State Relating to Internal Affairs of Turkey, 1930-1944*, “Telegram From American Embassy Ankara to Department of State Washington”, October 18, 1943, Microfilm M 1224, Roll 31.

58 NARA, RG 59, *Records of the Department of State Relating to Internal Affairs of Turkey, 1930-1944*, “The Capital Levy: A Key to the Understanding of Current Trends in Turkey, Office of Strategic Services Research and Analysis Branch, Report Number: 1903”, May 3, 1944, Microfilm M 1224, Roll 31, 4. Secret.

Taken together, these developments illustrate that the Capital Levy, while ostensibly a domestic fiscal policy, also served as a key axis around which international diplomacy, media influence, and wartime politics converged. The role of the Allied press in shaping both international perception and domestic policy responses demonstrates how critical journalism could become in the context of broader geopolitical strategy.

4. Objectives and Outcomes of the Capital Levy in U.S. Diplomatic Records

The Capital Levy in Türkiye, introduced during the exigencies of World War II, was primarily intended as a measure for rapid revenue generation to meet the state's urgent financial needs without exacerbating inflation. American diplomatic reports emphasize that the Turkish government's primary objective was to secure immediate fiscal resources, particularly to finance the large standing army maintained during the wartime period.⁵⁹ Although the Turkish government justified the tax on economic grounds, the implementation disproportionately affected non-Muslim minorities—referred to in documents as “non-Moslems”—under the assertion that they had accumulated greater profits during the war.

In Istanbul, by the initial deadline, only 25% of the assessed amount had been collected, highlighting significant difficulties in enforcement. One of the main objectives behind the tax was not only to generate funds but also to weaken the economic dominance of minorities in the import-export sector.⁶⁰ However, the tax carried broader economic and political implications. From a fiscal standpoint, the measure achieved partial success: of the original 465 million Turkish lira assessment, around 314.9 million liras—approximately 67.7%—was effectively collected. An additional 8.7% was cancelled due to documented errors, while 23.6% was eventually written off.⁶¹

A confidential report highlights that the Turkish government's focus during implementation was the prompt and forceful collection of taxes. While the law permitted property seizures and deportation of defaulters to labor camps, in practice, confiscations progressed much faster than deportations. The threat of deportation was thus used largely as a psychological tool to enforce compliance rather than as a widespread administrative practice.⁶² This coercive strategy was amplified by vivid press portrayals of life in the Aşkale labor camp, emphasizing severe weather conditions, inadequate shelter, and grueling labor, thereby creating an atmosphere of fear to accelerate tax payments. Confiscations reportedly averaged twenty per day, underlining the

59 NARA, RG 59, M 1224, Roll 31, Report:1903, 5. Secret.

60 NARA, RG 59, M 1224, Roll 31, Report:1903, 4.

61 NARA, RG 59, M 1224, Roll 31, Report:1903, 6.

62 NARA, RG 59, M 1224, Roll 31, Report:1903, 11.

government's priority of rapid fiscal extraction.⁶³

Despite the harsh and discriminatory aspects of the tax's implementation, American diplomatic assessments suggest that the primary intent was not the liquidation of minority groups but rather the punishment of black market profiteers and the urgent acquisition of revenue.⁶⁴ Given the difficulty in accurately determining the distribution of wartime fortunes, the government adopted a fear-driven policy, with arbitrary assessments and threats of deportation serving psychological rather than punitive purposes.⁶⁵ Even unexpected taxes imposed on low-income individuals are believed to have been intended to create broader fear and compliance rather than to specifically target vulnerable groups.

The use of forced labor camps also reflects this approach. While deportations to Aşkale were portrayed as harsh in the press—with reports of extreme cold, deep snow, and grueling work—the actual number of those interned was relatively small, around 1,400 individuals, and the camps functioned more as a deterrent than a punitive measure.⁶⁶ Publicizing images of wealthy merchants struggling in harsh conditions served to intimidate the urban populations of Istanbul, Izmir, and Bursa into paying their taxes promptly.⁶⁷

Further evidence suggests that the central government did not pursue a systematic policy of minority liquidation. Although local assessment committees, influenced by personal biases and rivalries, sometimes acted discriminatorily, the central authorities did not impose formal restrictions on minority economic activity. After the tax was abolished, many non-Muslim entrepreneurs in Istanbul continued to expand their businesses, notably in the textile sector, often obtaining loans from institutions such as the Turkish Industrial Development Bank without indications of religious discrimination.⁶⁸ This demonstrates that despite localized excesses, the central state's overarching objective remained fiscal rather than ethnic in nature.

U.S. Secretary of State Cordell Hull's assessment offers a valuable perspective on how the Turkish Capital Levy was officially justified in international diplomatic discourse. According to Hull, the Turkish government maintained that the tax was levied on all Turkish citizens proportionally to their ability to pay, and that any perceived discrimination against minority

63 NARA, RG 59, M 1224, Roll 31, Report:1903, 5.

64 NARA, RG 59, M 1224, Roll 31, Report:1903, 12.

65 NARA, RG 59, M 1224, Roll 31, Report:1903, 11.

66 For Example of these descriptions see: Ulvi Ufuk Tosun, "Gazeteci Feridun Kandemir'in Aşkale Gözlemleri." *Anasay* 22, (2022), 366–370.

67 Edward C. Clark, "The Turkish Varlık Vergisi Reconsidered", *Middle Eastern Studies* 8, 2 (1972): 208.

68 Clark, "The Turkish Varlık Vergisi Reconsidered," 208.

groups stemmed not from the tax's intent but from socio-economic realities. Specifically, he noted that non-Muslim minorities were disproportionately affected because they were predominantly engaged in commercial activities and had, as a result of wartime economic conditions—such as reduced competition and rising prices—accumulated relatively greater wealth than the broader Turkish population.⁶⁹ This statement reflects the Turkish state's effort to frame the tax as an economically motivated policy rather than one driven by ethnic or religious bias, though its implementation and impact remained a subject of considerable scrutiny.

Diplomatically, the Capital Levy had significant but initially muted repercussions. Although foreign governments acknowledged the discriminatory application of the tax to their nationals, they refrained from issuing serious protests, recognizing Türkiye's strategic importance during the war. This calculation proved correct: no foreign government mounted a formal protest beyond isolated cases concerning unfair taxation of their citizens, and the tax received little adverse publicity abroad initially.

However, American diplomatic sources caution that the long-term consequences for Türkiye's international reputation were considerable. There was a growing disillusionment among Allied circles regarding Türkiye's professed democratic values.⁷⁰ Reports indicate that even some Turkish journalists recognized the potential damage; for example, one who visited the United States in late 1942 advised Prime Minister Saraçoğlu that the tax would negatively affect Turkish-American and Turkish-British relations. Although immediate diplomatic relations were preserved and no major fallout occurred during the war, the Capital Levy created a reservoir of negative sentiment that could later be exploited against Türkiye in the international arena. Thus, while the Capital Levy fulfilled its immediate fiscal objectives to a limited extent, it carried significant long-term political costs, particularly by damaging Türkiye's image among the Allied powers at a critical juncture in world affairs.

69 NARA, RG 59, *Records of the Department of State Relating to Internal Affairs of Turkey, 1930-1944*, "A letter From Secretary State Hull to President of Northern Epirotic Society", May 12, 1944, Microfilm M 1224, Roll 31.

70 NARA, RG 59, *Records of the Department of State Relating to Internal Affairs of Turkey, 1930-1944*, "The Capital Levy: A Key to the Understanding of Current Trends in Turkey", Office of Strategic Services Research and Analysis Branch, Report Number: 1903, May 3, 1944, Microfilm M 1224, Roll 31, 17. Secret.

Conclusion

Despite the legal and logical justifications presented by Prime Minister Saraçoğlu, the application of the Capital Levy—particularly the heavier taxation of non-Muslims and foreigners compared to Muslim citizens—has remained a subject of ongoing debate and criticism to this day. The Capital Levy thus stands as one of the most controversial and frequently discussed fiscal policies in the history of modern Türkiye.

Historical documents indicate that the primary objective of the Capital Levy was not to deliberately target minority groups, but rather to maximize tax revenue rapidly under extraordinary wartime conditions. In practice, however, the imposition of high taxes on minorities, and the aggressive manner in which they were collected within an atmosphere of fear, suggest that intimidation was employed as a strategy to accelerate payments. The aggressive enforcement measures, such as property confiscations and threats of deportation to labor camps, were designed more as psychological pressure mechanisms than systematic instruments of ethnic persecution.

Although the Capital Levy primarily impacted minority communities, it also had some effect on foreign institutions, albeit to a lesser extent. A common occurrence throughout the process was diplomatic intervention by embassies seeking tax reductions for their nationals. From the outset, the U.S. Department of State, monitoring the situation through the U.S. Embassy in Ankara, refrained from outright interference, recognizing the tax as a matter of Türkiye's internal affairs. Nevertheless, a diplomatic dispatch from the U.S. Department of State, dated shortly after the final liquidation of the tax, confirms that the United States had closely observed its implementation and had actively intervened in cases concerning American citizens and affiliated organizations.

The stance of the United States evolved over time. Initial assessments by American officials viewed the Capital Levy as an anti-minority measure. However, several developments—such as the relatively humane conditions in labor camps, the issuance of amnesties toward the end of the enforcement period, and the continued economic and social presence of minorities—led to a revision of this view. Official reports prepared by the State Department after the abolition of the tax emphasized that the Turkish government's primary aim was not the systematic elimination of minorities but the urgent collection of revenue. The reports underlined that the fiscal policy particularly targeted non-Muslim citizens who had profited through foreign connections before and during the war, aiming at a redistribution of economic resources.

On the international stage, the Capital Levy was closely monitored by the Allied powers, particularly through the press. Initially, *The Times* echoed

the Turkish government's official narrative and adopted a cautious tone, while *The New York Times* remained silent until September 1943, when it published a series of critical articles. Although the Allied forces were gaining the upper hand in the war by this point, a government-controlled softening of press coverage was observed, aiming to minimize diplomatic friction. Allied states did not exert formal pressure on Türkiye for the abolition of the Capital Levy but focused instead on demanding corrections for unfair practices against their own citizens. Available records show that many of these demands were met by Turkish authorities.

Ultimately, while the Capital Levy succeeded in generating substantial revenue under wartime pressures, it inflicted lasting damage on Türkiye's international reputation. Although no direct diplomatic crises ensued, the measure fueled perceptions of inconsistency between Türkiye's domestic policies and its professed democratic values, leaving behind a legacy of controversy that continues to inform historical assessments of the period.

From a broader perspective, this study demonstrates how a fiscal policy, conceived primarily as an emergency economic measure, intersected with questions of minority rights, international diplomacy, and Türkiye's wartime positioning. By drawing on unpublished U.S. archival materials alongside contemporary press coverage, it highlights the dual arena—diplomatic and public opinion—through which the Capital Levy was debated and interpreted abroad. In doing so, it not only reconsiders the place of the Capital Levy in Turkish history but also contributes to a wider understanding of how domestic economic decisions in semi-peripheral states reverberate within global wartime politics. This integrative perspective suggests that future research might profitably examine similar cases where fiscal expediency and international legitimacy were in tension, thereby situating Türkiye's experience within a comparative and transnational framework.

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Genişletilmiş Özet

Bu çalışma, II. Dünya Savaşı yıllarında Türkiye’de yürürlüğe giren Varlık Vergisi’nin yalnızca ekonomik bir uygulama olmadığını, aynı zamanda iç politik güç dengeleri, toplumsal yapı, uluslararası diplomasi ve basın ilişkileriyle iç içe geçmiş çok katmanlı bir süreç olduğunu ortaya koymaktadır. 1942’de kabul edilen bu vergi, savaşın ağır ekonomik koşulları altında devletin mali kaynak ihtiyacını karşılamak amacıyla tasarlanmış olsa da, uygulamadaki yöntemler, gayrimüslimlere yönelik orantısız yük ve yabancı uyruklulara yapılan farklı muameleler nedeniyle hem yurtiçinde hem de uluslararası kamuoyunda büyük tartışmalara konu olmuştur. Makale, verginin iç politik bağlamda ortaya çıkışını, yerli tarihçiler arasındaki yorum farklılıklarını, Amerikan diplomatik belgelerinde nasıl raporlandığını ve Müttefik basınında nasıl temsil edildiğini inceleyerek Varlık Vergisi’nin kaldırılmasında uluslararası baskıların belirleyici etkisini ortaya koymaktadır.

Türkiye savaşa fiilen girmemekle birlikte seferberlik nedeniyle büyük ekonomik zorluklar yaşamıştır. Tarımsal üretimde yaşanan keskin düşüş, ithalatın azalması, fiyat artışları ve para arzının üç katına çıkması gibi gelişmeler, hükümeti enflasyonu kontrol altına almak ve kamu harcamalarını karşılamak için olağanüstü önlemler almaya zorlamıştır. Cumhurbaşkanı İsmet İnönü ve Başbakan Şükrü Saraçoğlu’nun konuşmaları, savaş zenginlerinin kazançlarının vergilendirilmesini meşrulaştırmak amacıyla kamuoyunu hazırlamıştır. Basının devlet kontrolünde olması verginin topluma “ekonomik eşitlik” ve “adalet” söylemiyle sunulmasını sağlamıştır. Ancak vergi komisyonlarının keyfi kararlar alması, itiraz mekanizmasının bulunmaması ve borçlarını ödeyemeyenlerin çalışma kamplarına gönderilmesi uygulamanın sertliğini gözler önüne sermiştir.

Tarihçilerin vergiye ilişkin yorumları farklılık göstermektedir. Edward C. Clark, Varlık Vergisi’nin Osmanlı’dan miras kalan Müslim-gayrimüslim ayrımcılığını tersine çevirdiğini ve Müslümanlara ayrıcalık tanıyarak ekonomik dengeleri değiştirdiğini belirtir. Taner Timur ve Rıdvan Akar ise verginin dönemin güçlenen ırkçı ideolojileri doğrultusunda azınlıkları hedef aldığını ve piyasanın Türkleştirilmesi politikasının bir aracı olduğunu savunur. Ayhan Aktar’ın tapu kayıtlarına dayanan çalışmaları, azınlıklara

ait taşınmazların büyük kısmının Müslüman Türklerin eline geçtiğini göstermektedir. Buna karşılık Şevket Süreyya Aydemir ve Stanford Shaw gibi tarihçiler, verginin ekonomik zorunluluklardan doğduğunu, asıl hedefin gelir sağlamak olduğunu, azınlıkların ise ticaretteki hâkim konumları nedeniyle daha fazla etkilendiğini ileri sürer. Bu farklı görüşler, Varlık Vergisi'nin karmaşık doğasını yansıtmaktadır.

İkinci bölüm, verginin diplomatik boyutuna odaklanmaktadır. Neredeyse tüm yabancı diplomatik temsilcilikler ya verginin genel yapısına ya da vatandaşlarına yönelik tahakkuklara itiraz etmiş, ancak savaş koşulları nedeniyle resmî protestolardan kaçınmıştır. Türk hükümeti, dostane ilişkileri zedelememek için bazı ülkelerin taleplerine kısmen yanıt vermiş, özellikle Amerikan kurumlarına ve vatandaşlarına daha ılımlı yaklaşmıştır. Örneğin Amerikan Hastanesi düşük bir vergiye tabi tutulurken, donanımsız bir Ermeni hastanesine yüksek miktarda vergi kesilmiştir. Bazı Avrupa ülkeleri düzeltmeleri yetersiz bulmuş ve yeni listeleri reddetmiştir. Amerikan Büyükelçisi Laurence A. Steinhardt süreci yakından izlemiş ve Washington'a düzenli raporlar göndermiştir. Belgeler, Amerikan diplomatlarının açık müdahaleden kaçınmakla birlikte, arka planda vatandaşlarının yükümlülüklerini azaltmak için aktif şekilde pazarlık yaptığını göstermektedir. İngiliz, Alman, İtalyan ve İsviçre elçilikleri de benzer girişimlerde bulunmuştur. Bazı şirketlerin tahakkukları düşürülmüş, bazı cezalar kaldırılmıştır. Bu durum, verginin uygulanmasının uluslararası güç dengelerine göre şekillendiğini göstermektedir.

Üçüncü bölümde Müttefik basınının verginin kaldırılmasındaki rolü analiz edilmektedir. Başlangıçta İngiliz basını, Türkiye'nin stratejik önemini göz önünde bulundurarak hükümetin resmi söylemlerine yakın bir tutum izlemiş, The Times gazetesi hem verginin gerekçelerini hem de uygulamadaki sorunları aktarmıştır. Amerikan basını ise 1943'e kadar sessiz kalmış, bu sessizlik ABD'nin Türkiye'yi kaybetmeme stratejisiyle ilişkilendirilmiştir. Ancak savaş dengeleri Müttefikler lehine döndükçe eleştirel haberler artmış, özellikle The New York Times muhabiri C. L. Sulzberger'in Eylül 1943'te yayımladığı makaleler verginin ayrımcı yapısını, azınlıklara yönelik baskıları ve çalışma kamplarını gündeme taşımıştır. Bu yazılar uluslararası kamuoyunda Türkiye'ye yönelik tepkiyi artırmış, diplomatik baskıyı güçlendirmiştir. Haberlerin yayımlanmasından kısa süre sonra verginin hafifletilmesine ve borçların silinmesine dair yasal düzenlemeler yapılmıştır. Bu, basının yalnızca kamuoyu oluşturmakla kalmayıp diplomatik bir araç olarak da kullanıldığını göstermektedir.

Son bölüm, Amerikan diplomatik belgelerinde verginin amaçları ve sonuçlarına ilişkin değerlendirmeleri ele almaktadır. Belgeler, verginin temel amacının hızlı gelir sağlamak olduğunu, azınlıklara yönelik orantısız yükün ticaretteki hâkimiyetlerinden kaynaklandığı belirtmektedir. Uygulama,

başlangıçta yaklaşık 465 milyon lira tahakkuk ettirilmiş, bunun 314 milyon lirası tahsil edilmiş, geri kalan kısmı çeşitli yollarla silinmiştir. Belgeler, devletin asıl hedefinin azınlıkları tasfiye etmek olmadığını, ancak korku ve baskı yoluyla ödeme yapmaya zorladığını belirtir. Aşkale çalışma kampına gönderilenlerin sayısının düşük olması, kampların daha çok psikolojik baskı aracı olarak kullanıldığını göstermektedir. Savaş sonrası dönemde azınlıkların ekonomik faaliyetlerine devam edebilmesi ve kredi alabilmesi, sistematik bir tasfiye politikasının güdülmediğine dair başka bir göstergedir. Buna rağmen verginin Türkiye'nin uluslararası imajına zarar verdiği, Müttefik çevrelerde Türkiye'nin demokratik değerlere bağlılığı konusunda şüphe yarattığı belirtilmektedir.

Sonuç olarak, Varlık Vergisi kısa vadede devletin mali ihtiyaçlarını karşılasa da uzun vadede azınlıklarla devlet arasındaki güveni zedelemiş ve Türkiye'nin uluslararası itibarına zarar vermiştir. Verginin kaldırılması, yalnızca iç kamuoyu baskısının değil, aynı zamanda Müttefik basınında yükselen eleştiriler ve Amerikan diplomatik girişimleri aracılığıyla oluşan dış baskının ortak ürünüdür. Bu süreç Türkiye'nin savaş dönemindeki tarafsızlık politikasının mutlak bir bağımsızlık değil, uluslararası güç dengelerine uyum sağlama çabası olduğu ortaya koymaktadır. Bu bağlamda çalışma, Varlık Vergisi'ni iç politika ile dış politikanın kesiştiği bir örnek olarak ele almakta ve verginin tarihsel önemini çok boyutlu bir bakış açısıyla değerlendirmektedir.