

TURKEY’S RELATIONS WITH ITALY (1932-39):
REALITIES AND PERCEPTIONS

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Approval of the Graduate School of Social Sciences

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ABSTRACT

TURKEY’S RELATIONS WITH ITALY (1932-39): REALITIES AND PERCEPTIONS

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This thesis examines Turkey’s relations with Italy between 1932 and 1939 through key historical events and analyses the role of Italy in Turkish foreign policy making. In so doing, it underlines the complex and multifaceted nature of the relations between the two countries and challenges the widely-held axiom in the secondary literature that the relations evolved from friendship to enmity in a unilinear way. This thesis argues that what defined the relations between these two Mediterranean countries in the late interwar period was not a direct Italian threat to Turkey and Turkey’s fear of it; but was rather the divergence in the views of Turkey and Italy regarding the international system. In this period, while Turkey based its foreign policy on the idea of collective security, Italy adopted an aggressive foreign policy and opted for a great-power-led international system. In the context of the international environment, Turkey’s relations with Italy in 1932-1939 were a prime example of the active, multilateral and pragmatic nature of Turkish foreign policy in the inter-war period.

Keywords: Turkish-Italian Relations, Turkish Foreign Policy, the Early Turkish Republican Period

ÖZ

TÜRKİYE’NİN İTALYA İLE İLİŞKİLERİ (1932-39): GERÇEKLER VE ALGILAR

Doğar, Mehmet

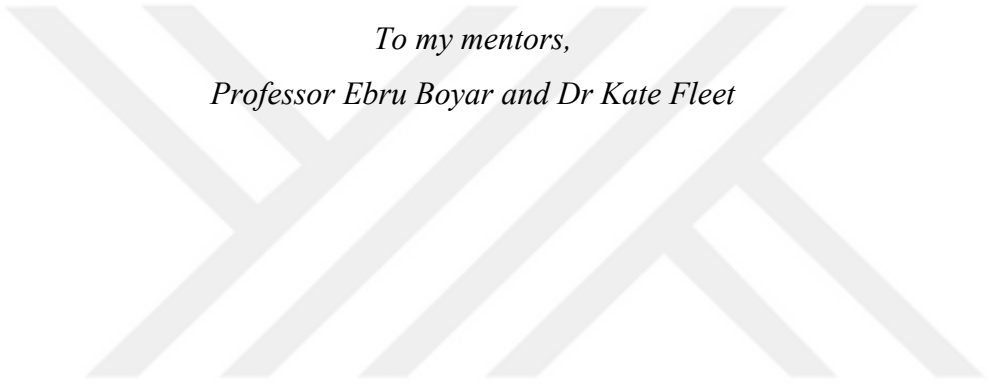
Yüksek Lisans, Uluslararası İlişkiler Bölümü

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Bu tez, Türkiye’nin 1932-1939 yılları arasında İtalya ile olan ilişkilerini bu dönemin ana tarihsel olayları üzerinden incelemekte ve İtalya’nın Türk dış politikası yapımındaki rolünü analiz etmektedir. İki ülke arasındaki ilişkilerin karmaşık ve çok yönlü doğasını vurgulayan tez, ikincil literatürde çokça kabul gören ilişkilerin dostluktan düşmanlığa lineer bir şekilde evrildiği önermesine karşı çıkmaktadır. İki dünya savaşı arası dönemin son bölümünde, iki Akdeniz ülkesi arasındaki ilişkileri, İtalya’nın Türkiye’ye doğrudan tehdidinin ve Türkiye’nin bundan korkusunun belirlemediği savunulan tezde, asıl belirleyici faktörün Türkiye’nin ve İtalya’nın uluslararası sistemi algılayışlarındaki farklılık olduğu savunulmaktadır. Bu dönemde, Türkiye müşterek emniyet fikri üzerine dış politikasını temellendirirken, İtalya saldırgan bir dış politika benimsemiş ve büyük güçlerin yönetiminde olan bir uluslararası sistemi tercih etmiştir. Dönemin uluslararası ilişkiler sistemi içinde Türkiye’nin 1932-1939 yılları arasında İtalya ile olan ilişkileri aslında bu dönemdeki Türk dış politikasının aktif, çok katmanlı ve pragmatik doğasına başlıca bir örnektir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Türk-İtalyan İlişkileri, Türk Dış Politikası, Erken Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Dönemi



*To my mentors,
Professor Ebru Boyar and Dr Kate Fleet*

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CHP	Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi (Republican People's Party)
MP	Member of Parliament
TBMM	Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi (Turkish Grand National Assembly)
USA	United States of America



CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This thesis examines Turkey's relations with Italy between 1932 and 1939 and analyses the place of Italy in Turkish foreign policy making and in the national security calculations of the Turkish Republic in the late interwar period, a period which was part of what Eric Hobsbawm referred as "the age of catastrophe" largely characterised by "uncertainty" and "crisis".¹ This constant "uncertainty" in the interwar period was further underlined by the fact that almost every issue in the 1930s had the tendency to embrace a "transnational" character.² Facing such a turbulent period, thus, both Turkey and Italy had to adopt their foreign policies according to these constantly changing circumstances in international politics.

That is why, this thesis argues that the relations between Turkey and Italy between 1932 and 1939 cannot be analysed merely by an analysis of the bilateral engagements such as diplomatic visits, agreements or aggressive verbal exchanges between these two countries and that Turkey's relations with Italy in this period should be analysed with a more nuanced understanding, an understanding which contextualises these relations within the framework of first, the international events during this period and second, Turkey's general foreign and security policies at this time. In doing so, this thesis highlights the multifaceted and complex nature of Turkey's relations with Italy in these 'long eight years'.

The year 1932 was a turning point in Turkey's relations with Italy. This turning point, however, was not due to the bilateral engagements or problems between Turkey and Italy, but due to the important issues and events regarding the

¹ Hobsbawm, Eric, *Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century 1914-1991* (London: Abacus, 1994), p. 6.

² Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes*, p. 156.

general foreign policies of the two countries. In May 1932 there was an official visit of the Turkish Prime Minister İsmet İnönü³ to Rome and an Italian fleet visited Istanbul in July 1932. In fact, what constituted a turning point in the relations was Turkey's joining the League of Nations on 18 July 1932 and the Italian foreign minister Dino Grandi's leaving office two days later, on 20 July, which signified a change to a more aggressive Italian foreign policy.⁴

In order to understand the historical development of Turkey's relations with Italy as well as why 1932 was a turning point, it is necessary to understand the historical background of these relations from their inception in 1919 to 1932. One of the main theatres of war during World War I was the Ottoman Empire, which the Allied Powers were to divide up among themselves after 1918. Italy, only joining the war in 1915, signed an agreement in London with Britain, France and Russia to get its share of Ottoman territories on 26 April 1915. According to this agreement, Italy would receive the Dodecanese islands. It was also stated that when the war ended, Italy would not get any less territories than other Allied Powers and it was given a guarantee that it could acquire Antalya as well.⁵ However, the division of the Ottoman territories among the Allied Powers was not a smooth process, especially for Italy. In 1919, there were apparent clashes among the Allied Powers over the fate of İzmir to the extent that, according to Fabio Grassi, İzmir became the "centre of jealousies" of the Allied Powers even more than Istanbul.⁶ In the Paris Conference of 1919-1920 where the Allied Powers discussed the details of their approach to the Central Powers as well as about how to divide the Ottoman territories, Italy was very dissatisfied particularly about the

³ Although Turkish surnames were not used before 1934, for consistency full names, including surnames, are given throughout the text. Thus the Turkish Prime Minister, İsmet Paşa before 1934 and İsmet İnönü afterwards, appears throughout as İsmet İnönü.

⁴ Burgwyn, H. James, *Italian Foreign Policy in the Interwar Period (1918-1940)* (Connecticut: Praeger, 1997), p. 71.

⁵ Bayur, Yusuf Hikmet, *Türkiye Devletinin Dış Siyaseti* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1995), p. 12.

⁶ Grassi, Fabio L., *Türk-İtalyan İlişkilerinde Az Bilinenler*, Sadriye Güneş (trans.) (İstanbul: Tarihçi Kitabevi, 2014), p. 109.

divisions in the Adriatic Sea. Not wanting an Italian hegemony in the Mediterranean, Lloyd George, then British prime minister, opposed the idea that İzmir should be given to Italy and thus to counter this backed the Greek invasion of İzmir on 15 May 1919 in order to prevent a possible Italian invasion of the city.⁷

Just after the occupation of İzmir by the Greeks, the Turkish National Liberation War against the foreign occupation was started on 19 May 1919 under the leadership of a high-ranked Ottoman officer, Mustafa Kemal, who found this occupation as well as the Armistice of Mudros of 30 October 1918 unacceptable from the perspective of territorial integrity and sovereignty of the country. The Armistice in effect meant a complete surrender of the Ottoman Empire to the Allied Powers, granting an allied occupation of Istanbul and the Straits (Article 1) and demilitarising this region (Articles 2 and 3); disbanding the Ottoman army and giving the right to the Allied Powers to occupy any region threatening their security (Article 7).⁸

Meanwhile, the Istanbul government and the Allied Powers, ignoring the resistance movement in Anatolia, signed the Treaty of Sèvres on 10 August 1920, empowering the Allied Powers legally to invade the former Ottoman territories. Italy was given the Dodecanese islands (Article 122) and granted a zone of influence in Southern Anatolia based on the Articles 27-36, which defined “the frontiers of Turkey”.⁹ In fact, the Italians had already occupied some places in this region such as Bodrum, Marmaris, Fethiye, Antalya, Burdur and Kuşadası.¹⁰ One of the most damaging consequences of the Treaty of Sèvres was the reestablishment of the capitulations (Article 261), thus paving the way for

⁷ Bayur, *Türkiye Devletinin Dış Siyaseti*, p. 36.

⁸ Bayur, *Türkiye Devletinin Dış Siyaseti*, p. 23.

⁹ “Sevr Andlaşması”, in Nihat Erim (ed.), *Devletlerarası Hukuku ve Siyasi Tarih Metinleri*, vol. I (Osmanlı İmparatorluğu Andlaşmaları) (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1953), pp. 539-44 and p. 567.

¹⁰ Barlas, Dilek, *Etatism and Diplomacy in Turkey: Economic and Foreign Policy Strategies in an Uncertain World, 1929-1939* (Leiden, New York and Köln: Brill, 1998), pp. 116-17.

economic control of Anatolia in addition to physical occupation.¹¹ It was within this context that Mustafa Kemal approached the activities of Banca di Roma in the Central Anatolia region in 1919 and 1920 with suspicion.¹²

The Italian position during the Turkish National Liberation War was, according to Fabio Grassi, different from the policies of other Allied Powers since Italy, starting from 1920, established regular contacts with the Ankara government.¹³ These contacts were such that Italy adopted a policy “favouring” the Turkish opposition, particularly in relation to Turkish opposition to the Greeks.¹⁴ Even though the relationship between the Ankara government and Italy during the Turkish National Liberation War needs further study, it is, however, clear that the Italian approach was much friendlier,¹⁵ in particular when compared to that of the British. This was how Carlo Sforza, who had been the Italian High Commissioner in the Ottoman Empire between November 1918 to June 1919 in Istanbul and later became the foreign minister of Italy in 1920, regarded the issue. Referring to his communication with Gabriele D’Annunzio, then the commander of the city of Fiume and one of the most important men behind the ideology of fascism, Carlo Sforza later argued in 1938 that:

... immediately after the war, I had been alone in my contention that Turkey had not been conquered; that it was childish to talk of its partition, a fond dream in which the Big Four at Paris had indulged; ... my short stay at Constantinople after the armistice had made me many friends among the Mussulmans, and D’Annunzio proposed to me, in mysterious phrases, that

¹¹ “Sevr Andlaşması”, in Erim, *Devletlerarası Hukuku ve Siyasi Tarih Metinleri*, p. 618.

¹² Grassi, *Türk-İtalyan İlişkilerinde Az Bilinenler*, pp. 207-8.

¹³ Grassi, *Türk-İtalyan İlişkilerinde Az Bilinenler*, p. 213.

¹⁴ Çelebi, Mevlüt, “Millî Mücadele Döneminde Türk-İtalyan İlişkileri”, *Belleten*, 62/233 (1998), p. 167.

¹⁵ Çelebi, Mevlüt, “Turco-Italian Relations between 1919-1922” in *Italia e Turchia tra passato e futuro: Un impegno comune, una sfida culturale*, Esra Danacıoğlu Tamur and Fabio L. Grassi (eds.) (Rome: Edizioni Nuova Cultura, 2009), p. 138.

I should arrange an understanding between Mustafa Kemal (whom he admired), and Italy ...¹⁶

Sforza's policy towards the Ankara government was clearly visible in June 1921 when Italy started to withdraw its army from Antalya. However, this policy was certainly not a result merely of the good-will of the Italian government. By then it had been clear to France and Italy that British hegemony in the region would not be favourable to their interests and it was thus more rewarding for them to recognise the Ankara government.¹⁷ Moreover, Italian policy towards the Istanbul and Ankara governments in this period was very much defined by its economic rather than political concerns in Anatolia, an approach which annoyed the British.¹⁸

Meanwhile, with the victory of the Turkish forces, on 11 October 1922, an armistice was signed in Mudanya. This armistice, which mainly focused on the details of how Greece would withdraw from Eastern Thrace, was a disaster for the occupying powers, especially for Britain where it led to the resignation of Prime Minister Lloyd George, who blamed the other powers for the Turkish victory.¹⁹ According to Grassi, the Italian position before and during the conference was that of an "intermediary" between the Allied Powers and the Ankara government.²⁰ However, the territorial issues were left to the Lausanne Peace Conference in November 1922 – July 1923. Although Italy's sovereignty over the Dodecanese islands was recognised under Articles 15 and 16 of the Lausanne Peace Treaty, this was not achieved without argument.²¹ Kastellorizo (Meis) island in particular

¹⁶ Sforza, Count Carlo, "D'Annunzio, Inventor of Fascism", *Books Abroad*, 12/3 (1938), p. 270.

¹⁷ Barlas, *Etatism and Diplomacy in Turkey*, pp. 119-20.

¹⁸ Fleet, Kate, "Money and Politics: The Fate of British Business in the New Turkish Republic", *Turkish Historical Review*, 2/1 (2011), p. 30.

¹⁹ Boyar, Ebru, "Türk-İngiliz İlişkilerinde Prestij Faktörü (1923-1938)", *Belleten*, 78/283 (2014), p. 1160.

²⁰ Grassi, *Türk-İtalyan İlişkilerinde Az Bilinenler*, p. 288.

²¹ "No: 7 – Lozan Sulh Muahednamesinin Kabulüne Dair Kanunlar", *Düstur*, Üçüncü Tertip, vol. 5 (Istanbul: Necmi İstikbal Matbaası, 1931), pp. 27-8.

became an issue of hot debate between Italy and Turkey during the conference²² and was only settled in January 1932 by an agreement between the two parties defining the territorial waters between the Anatolian coast and the island of Kastellorizo.²³ On 14 July 1923, the Lausanne Treaty was signed between Britain, France, Italy, Japan, Greece, Romania, the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes and Turkey.

After the Lausanne Treaty, the Turkish Republic was established in October and thus a new regime based on the rule of law and secularism was established in Turkey. Interestingly, in the same period, Italy was also in the process of a regime change. Mussolini established the National Fascist Party in 1921. Immediately after the March on Rome on 28 October 1922, a violent mass demonstration by fascists who seized various places in the city including police stations,²⁴ he came to power as the new prime minister of Italy, presenting himself to King Vittorio Emanuele III in a black shirt, a symbol of fascism.²⁵ However, according to Duggan, the strengthening of the fascist regime in Italy was a gradual process which developed in a rather “ad hoc manner” and the totalitarian character of the fascist regime became clearer after 1925, when Mussolini explicitly announced his “formula” of the “totalizing vision” of his regime.²⁶

²² Papuççular, Hazal, *Türkiye ve Oniki Ada 1912-1947* (Istanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası Yayınları, 2019), pp. 29-30.

²³ For the agreement, see: Soysal, İsmail (ed.), *Türkiye'nin Siyasal Andlaşmaları: Tarihçeleri ve Açıklamaları ile Birlikte*, vol. 1 (1920-1945) (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1983), pp. 340-3. However, the status of the island of Kastellorizo still constitutes a problem between Turkey and Greece since with the signing of the Treaty of Paris in 1947, this island as well as the other Dodecanese islands were transferred under the sovereignty of Greece. For a detailed discussion on the issue, see: Yayıcı, Cihat, *Yunanistan Talepleri (Ege Sorunları): Soru ve Cevaplarla* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınları, 2020), pp. 41-53.

²⁴ Duggan, Christopher, *A Concise History of Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 206.

²⁵ Salvatorelli, Luigi and Giovanni Mira, *Storia d'Italia nel periodo fascista* (Turin: Giulio Einaudi, 1964), p. 240.

²⁶ Duggan, *A Concise History of Italy*, p. 213; Arthurs, Joshua, Michael Ebner and Kate Ferris, “Introduction” in *The Politics of Everyday Life in Fascist Italy: Outside the State?*, Joshua Arthurs, Michael Ebner and Kate Ferris (eds.) (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), p. 2.

Immediately after the establishment of the Turkish Republic, regular relations between Turkey and Italy were officially initiated in 1924 when Italy sent its ambassador to Turkey in February of that year.²⁷ According to a report sent from the Turkish embassy in Rome, Mussolini had declared his desire to appoint an ambassador (*sefir-i kebir*) to Turkey in a meeting with Suat Davaz, who was the Turkish ambassador in Rome in September 1923.²⁸ However, according to Barlas, even though relations seemed normal on the surface, Italy considered Turkey as a “potential colony” until late 1927, an approach not in fact *sui generis* to the new fascist regime, but rather a continuation of the Italian imperial mindset towards Turkey since the beginning of the twentieth century.²⁹ This was a reflection of the mindset of great power politics in the post-Lausanne period. Moreover, in the summer of 1924, the Italian fortification on Rhodes alarmed the Turkish government and inevitably harmed the newly budding relations between the two countries.³⁰

Not yet regarding the Turkish Republic as an equal partner in international politics, the great powers often collaborated with each other against Turkish interests and claims. For example, in March 1926, the Turkish ambassador in Prague sent a report to the foreign ministry that an Anglo-Italian understanding had been reached, an understanding in which Britain recognised Italian interests in the Balkans and Italy supported British claims in Iraq and Mosul.³¹ This was a

²⁷ Çelebi, Mevlüt, “Atatürk Dönemi ve Sonrasında Türkiye-İtalya İlişkilerini Etkileyen Faktörler”, *Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi Dergisi*, 31/91 (2015), p. 105.

²⁸ 8 September 1923: Devlet Arşivleri, Cumhuriyet Arşivi, Ankara (hereafter CA), 030.10.0.0.236.594.7.

²⁹ Barlas, Dilek, “Friends or Foes? Diplomatic Relations between Italy and Turkey, 1923–36”, *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 36 (2004), p. 247.

³⁰ Çelebi, “Türkiye-İtalya İlişkilerini Etkileyen Faktörler”, p. 105.

³¹ 17 March 1926: CA, 030.10.0.0.12.71.38.

favourable position for Italy since, according to Barlas, Italy believed until the end of the Mosul issue in 1926 that the Turkish Republic could still be dismantled.³²

Another problem concerning relations between Turkey and Italy in this period was the position in Italy of *Yüzellilikler* (the 150 people who had acted against the Turkish nationalist movement and had thus either already left the country by 1924 or were deported under a decision taken in the Turkish parliament in 1924, a decision which was within the framework of the Lausanne Treaty), since Italy became almost a hub for oppositional figures to the new Kemalist regime in Turkey. One of these oppositional figures, for example, Said Molla published a book titled *Muhaliflere Hitabım* (My Address to the Opponents) in December 1923 in Italy, a book which was banned by the Turkish government.³³ The last Ottoman sultan, Vahdeddin, lived in San Remo until his death in 1926. Vahdeddin was able to engage in activities against the Turkish government and it seemed that the Italian government did not interfere with his activities. Just before the declaration of the Republic, Vahdeddin gave an interview about the position of the sultanate and caliphate in Turkey to a newspaper in San Remo in September 1923.³⁴ Two years later, in April 1925, he was busy holding meetings in his residence in San Remo, Villa Magnolie, with other oppositional figures with the aim of restoring the sultanate in Turkey.³⁵

Nevertheless, the increasing power and the prestige of the Turkish Republic in the international arena, especially after the end of the Mosul issue with Britain in 1926, led to a change in how Italy regarded Turkey.³⁶ This change was also due to the fact that Italy considered Turkey as a counterbalancing factor in the Balkans against French hegemony in the region. Therefore, Mussolini envisaged a

³² Barlas, "Friends or Foes?", p. 233.

³³ 18 December 1923: CA, 030.18.1.1.8.43.7.

³⁴ 15 September 1923: CA, 030.10.0.0.202.381.4.

³⁵ Çelik, Recep, "İngiliz Korumasında Sultan Vahideddin'in Sürgün Seyahatleri", *Çağdaş Türkiye Tarihi Araştırmaları Dergisi / Journal of Modern Turkish History Studies*, 16/33 (2016), pp. 204-5.

³⁶ Barlas, "Friends or Foes?", p. 238.

tripartite policy among Turkey, Greece and Italy.³⁷ On 30 May 1928 in Rome, Turkey signed a “Treaty of Neutrality and Reconciliation” with Italy, a treaty which was to be the epitome of relations between Italy and Turkey in the interwar period. The treaty was signed “in order to foster the friendly bonds between the two countries and to help the preservation of the peace around the world” and the two states agreed not to be involved in any act against each other (Article 1), to remain neutral during a conflict in which one of them was involved (Article 2) and to establish a committee of reconciliation for the issues that were not possible to handle through regular diplomatic channels (Article 3). The remaining parts of the agreement included a protocol about the mechanism for the settlement of disputes between the two countries through the established committee for reconciliation.³⁸ Following the treaty, the then Italian foreign minister, Dino Grandi, visited Ankara in December 1928.³⁹ As can be seen from the articles of this treaty with Italy, it was, in effect, merely a neutrality agreement. But, nevertheless, given the deliberate British policy that aimed to make Turkey isolated in the international arena, the treaty signed with Italy was a positive development.⁴⁰

In the period from 1929 to 1932, Turkish-Italian relations were characterised by an increasing naval trade, Italy being a provider of naval arm supplies to Turkey.⁴¹ In addition, the trade relations between the two countries were also on track, Italy being one of the leading countries in both Turkey’s export and import rates until the mid-1930s.⁴² In the political relations, however, there

³⁷ Grassi, Fabio L., “La Turchia nella politica francese e italiana tra le due guerre”, *Transylvanian Review*, 15/1 (2006), pp. 134-5.

³⁸ *T.C. Resmî Gazete*, 13 December 1928, p. 6214.

³⁹ Çelebi, “Türkiye-İtalya İlişkilerini Etkileyen Faktörler”, p. 108.

⁴⁰ Boyar, “Türk-İngiliz İlişkilerinde Prestij Faktörü”, p. 1171.

⁴¹ Barlas, “Friends or Foes?”, p. 241.

⁴² Töre, Nahit, “Atatürk Döneminin (1923–1938) Dış Ekonomik İlişkiler Politikası” in *Atatürk Dönemi Ekonomi Politikası ve Türkiye’nin Ekonomik Gelişmesi Semineri* (Ankara: Ankara Üniversitesi Siyasal Bilgiler Fakültesi Yayınları, 1982), p. 52.

appeared the first clashes between the two countries due to the differences in their approach to the stability of the Balkans. When on 30 October 1930, Turkey signed a “Friendship, Neutrality and Reconciliation” agreement with Greece, Italy expected that Turkey would also work for a reconciliation between Bulgaria and Greece and eventually include Italy in this “larger alliance” in the Balkans.⁴³ However, this was quite the opposite of what the Turkish government would desire since it did not want to take part in any arrangement under the auspices of any great power. This difference in Turkish and Italian understanding about how they regarded the Balkans and the Mediterranean, as well as international security, would shape the relations between the two countries in 1932-1939, the period which this thesis analyses.

1.1. The Secondary Literature Survey

The argument put forward in this thesis requires revising the general premises which dominate not only the secondary literature on Turkey’s relations with Italy in 1932-1939, but also that on Turkish foreign policy in the interwar period. The number of scholarly works on the subject is quite limited, but in the work that has been done these general premises have continued to be accepted almost as the ‘facts’ determining Turkish relations with Italy, in particular, and Turkish foreign policy making in the interwar period, in general.

The first of these main arguments in the literature concerns the attempt to divide the history of Turkish-Italian relations into different periods, thus, in Hobsbawm’s terms, “disturbing the historical cargo into a series of non-communicating containers”.⁴⁴ For example, Barlas, in her well-known article on the subject, adopts the periodization made in a letter sent by Percy Loraine, the then British ambassador in Ankara, to the Foreign Office in February 1935 and divides Turkey’s relations with Italy between 1928 to 1936 into three different periods of “warmth” (1928-1932), “cooling-off” (1932- approximately 1934) and

⁴³ Barlas, “Friends or Foes?”, p. 243.

⁴⁴ Hobsbawm, Eric, *On History* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1997), p. 66.

“frost” (1934-1936).⁴⁵ In doing so, Barlas’s periodization restricts our understanding of the relations in this period since it represents a unilinear picture of the relations transforming from friendship to enmity.

Another periodization was offered by Fabio Grassi, who also defined three main periods to characterise the relations between Turkey and Italy in the interwar period. Grassi, who tried to offer a panorama of the relations in the period between 1919 to 1939, made the periodization as follows: 1919-1923; 1924-1932 and 1933-1939.⁴⁶ Comparing these two different periodizations of Turkish-Italian relations in the interwar period, one might argue that whereas Barlas justified her periodization on the basis of bilateral political issues between the two countries such as the signing of the Turkish-Italian Treaty in 1928 and Mussolini’s speech in 1934, a speech which demonstrated the Italian expansionist aims in Asia and Africa in this period, Grassi made his periodization on the basis of the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923 and Grandi’s leaving office in 1932.

Secondly, it is often argued in the secondary literature that Turkey defined its foreign policy according to the Italian threat in the interwar period. The level of this threat was such that it was accepted as “the greatest threat” that Turkey faced in the interwar period⁴⁷ and it “dominated Turkish foreign and strategic policy from the 1930s”.⁴⁸ In such an environment, Yücel Güçlü argued, Turkey “followed a more active foreign policy” after 1934 due to the existing Italian threat.⁴⁹ The overemphasising of the Italian threat is also present in the secondary literature on Turkish foreign policy. In a well-known textbook on Turkish foreign policy, it is argued that “Turkish foreign policy was immediately and directly affected” by the Italian factor especially after 1934 to the extent that Turkey “met every action of

⁴⁵ Barlas, “Friends or Foes?”, p. 232 and p. 247.

⁴⁶ Grassi, “La Turchia nella politica francese e italiana”, pp. 129-40.

⁴⁷ Çelebi, “Türkiye-İtalya İlişkilerini Etkileyen Faktörler”, p. 125.

⁴⁸ Barlas, “Friends or Foes?”, p. 248.

⁴⁹ Güçlü, Yücel, “Fascist Italy’s ‘Mare Nostrum’ Policy and Turkey”, *Belleten*, 63/238 (1999), p. 814.

Italy with suspicion” in this period.⁵⁰ William Hale argues in his textbook that from 1933-1934 onwards Italy was regarded as “a potential threat” by Turkey.⁵¹ Similarly, in an article on Turkish foreign and strategic policy in this period, Brock Millman defined Italy as “the most immediate threat” to Turkey.⁵² Even though this thesis does not deny the existence of the Italian threat between 1932-1939, it argues that the Turkish perception of the Italian threat was less in the form of a direct Italian threat over Turkish territories than a threat that Italy directed towards the existing international status quo. It therefore calls for a more nuanced understanding in analysing the factor of the Italian threat.

Finally, in the existing secondary literature, there is another assumption related to the two problems mentioned above. Turkey’s developing relations with Britain in the mid-1930s onwards is usually regarded as a reason for the deterioration of the relations between Turkey and Italy. According to many scholars, especially during the Italo-Ethiopian War in 1935-1936, Turkey made a conscious effort to approach Britain, Barlas arguing, for example, that the Italian invasion of Ethiopia signified an important turning point in Turkish foreign policy, which was now based on “the need for some great power support to secure stability in the region”, this great power being Britain.⁵³ Similarly, Papuççular considered this war as the beginning of a British-Turkish rapprochement, therefore suggesting an understanding that Turkey’s foreign policy during this period was based on its ability to secure great power support.⁵⁴ According to Güçlü, this desire for a rapprochement was such that Turkey determined its foreign policy in order to

⁵⁰ Gönübol, Mehmet, et al., *Olaylarla Türk Dış Politikası (1919-1995)* (Ankara: Siyasal Kitabevi, 1996), p. 111.

⁵¹ Hale, William, *Turkish Foreign Policy since 1774* (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), pp. 45-6.

⁵² Millman, Brock, “Turkish Foreign and Security Policy 1934-42”, *Middle Eastern Studies*, 31/3 (1995), p. 485.

⁵³ Barlas, *Etatism and Diplomacy in Turkey*, p. 111.

⁵⁴ Papuççular, Hazal, “İki Savaş Arası Dönem Türk Dış ve Güvenlik Politikasında Oniki Ada, 1923-39”, *History Studies*, 9/5 (2017), p. 149.

appeal to the British: “[t]he policy of Turkey vis-à-vis Italy throughout the Ethiopian dispute was ... inspired by a desire to cooperate in the greatest possible measure with Britain ...”.⁵⁵ Overall, these arguments suggest an understanding that regards Turkey’s relations with the two great powers as a zero-sum game. However, this thesis suggests that Turkey tried to implement its own foreign policy path by manipulating the changing international system in the late interwar period. This pragmatic Turkish understanding of foreign policy was concisely explained by Falih Rıfkı Atay, who was the editor-in-chief of *Hakimiyet-i Milliye* (later *Ulus*), the organ of Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi (CHP) (the Republican People’s Party), in his travelogue *Moskova Roma* in 1932, arguing that Turkey did not “worship” any country or ideology but regarded the world as one based on “life” and “realities”.⁵⁶ Moreover, summarising western authors, he noted that politics could not be “fixed” since it required “a constant adaptation” to changing circumstances.⁵⁷

1.2. Explaining Turkey’s Relations with Italy (1932-1939)

Based on primary sources such as unpublished Turkish and British archival material, published Italian and British documents, travel accounts, memoirs as well as popular Turkish newspapers and magazines of the period such as *Akbaba*, *Akşam*, *Cumhuriyet*, *Milliyet* (later *Tan*), and *Ulus*, this thesis challenges these assumptions in the existing secondary literature and approaches the period from a more nuanced perspective. Unlike the periodisations referred above, which oversimplify and disregard the nuances that existed in the relations between Turkey and Italy, the period between 1932-1939 is examined in this thesis according to the chronological events and developments which defined the character of Turkey’s relations with Italy. Chapter 2 discusses the changing nature of Turkey’s relations with Italy between 1932 and 1934 by analysing the different

⁵⁵ Güçlü, “Fascist Italy’s ‘Mare Nostrum’ Policy”, p. 820.

⁵⁶ [Atay], Falih Rıfkı, *Moskova Roma* (Istanbul: Muallim Ahmet Halit Kitaphanesi, 1932), p. 19.

⁵⁷ [Atay], *Moskova Roma*, p. 13.

positions adopted by Turkey and Italy over the means they opted for for their security policies. In this framework, Turkey's entry into the League of Nations in July 1932 as well as the dismissal of Grandi from the Italian foreign ministry will be discussed together to highlight the divergences in how these two countries perceived the situation of international politics. It will then continue with an analysis of the Turkish reaction to the Italian initiated Four-Power Pact in 1933 and Italy's role and reaction to the Balkan Pact in February 1934.

Starting with Mussolini's speech on 18 March 1934, which was usually regarded as a turning point in the relations between Turkey and Italy, Chapter 3 will offer a detailed analysis of this speech as well as the Turkish reaction to and engagement with it. In doing so, this part will discuss the extent of the Italian threat in the period between 1934 and 1936 and a particular focus will be given to Turkish governmental policy and the position of the Turkish press during the Italo-Ethiopian War in 1935-1936, which will demonstrate the differences between how Turkey perceived the Italian threat and how it was portrayed.

Chapter 4 will discuss the Italian factor in the Straits issue in 1936 by analysing how Turkey used the Italian threat to justify its claim to refortify the Straits. After a close examination of the efforts of the Turkish government as well as the Turkish press to bring the issue of the Straits onto the international agenda, this chapter will also analyse the Italian reaction to the revision of the Straits regime with the Montreux Convention in July 1936. In doing so, it will also question the nature of Turkey's relations with the European powers, especially with Britain and Italy.

Tracing Turkey's efforts to secure Italy's signature on the Montreux Convention, Chapter 5 first discusses the Turkish reception of the Gentlemen's Agreement between Italy and Britain in January 1937 and analyses the Milan Meeting between the two foreign ministers, Aras and Ciano, in the following month. It also examines the place and role of Italy in the security arrangements in which Turkey took part in 1937, namely the Saadabad Pact and the Nyon Conference. Finally, this chapter elaborates on a rather neglected subject in the secondary literature, which is the role of Italy in the issue of the Sanjak of Alexandretta (Hatay), which was eventually annexed to Turkey in 1939.

CHAPTER 2

RE-DEFINING TURKEY'S RELATIONS WITH ITALY (1932-1934)

This chapter analyses Turkey's relations with Italy between 1932 and 1934 and argues that what changed the course of the relations between the two countries in this period was in fact not the bilateral engagements and problems that existed between the two countries, but was rather their responses to the changing international environment. Whereas Turkey's entrance into the League of Nations in July 1932 demonstrated its further commitment to the idea of collective security, Italian Foreign Minister Grandi's dismissal from office in the same month meant a revival of an aggressive foreign policy by fascist Italy. However, despite this beginning of the divergence in their understanding of international politics, reciprocal visits took place in 1932, between Turkey and Italy, one being the well-known visit of Turkish Prime Minister İsmet İnönü in May and the other, the Italian fleet's visit to Istanbul in July. Juxtaposing these direct bilateral engagements between Turkey and Italy with their general foreign policy actions, such as Turkey's entry into the League of Nations in 1932 and its initiation of the Balkan Pact in 1934 as well as Italy's leadership in the formation of the Four-Power Pact in 1933, this chapter examines how the two countries' understanding of international politics shaped the bilateral relations in this period.

2.1. Turkey's Entry to the League of Nations in 1932 and Italy's Response

Turkey's entry into the League of Nations on 18 July 1932 was a turning point in the Turkish foreign policy of the interwar period. Not having experienced positive encounters with the League of Nations since the establishment of the League in 1919, the Turkish government was very sceptical of its activities. Turkey's previous negative experiences, such as the Permanent Court of International

Justice's decision in 1925 to settle the "etabli" question about how to define the status of the Rum (Ottoman Greek) inhabitants of Istanbul during the exchange of population between Turkey and Greece, a decision which favoured Greece; and the League's policies over the Mosul question between Turkey and Britain, prepared the ground for the idea in the minds of the Turkish authorities that the League of Nations was "the tool of the great powers".⁵⁸ Tevfik Rüştü Aras, the foreign minister of the Turkish Republic between 1925 to 1938, argued, for example, that the League of Nations was "a kind of a club of victorious powers [of the First World War]" in the 1920s and acted as "a well-behaved tool of the British and the French" as the League's mechanism in that period was entirely depended on a mutual understanding between Britain and France no such understanding would mean deadlock for the League's mechanisms.⁵⁹

The British and French influence in the League of Nations, however, did not change very much in the 1930s and the Turkish government was well aware of this fact. Given the possibility of Turkey's entry into the League of Nations, in the early months of 1932, Aptülahat Akşin, then a Turkish diplomat responsible for affairs regarding the League of Nations, was ordered by Tevfik Rüştü Aras to visit the Permanent Secretariat of the League and to make inquiries while they were in Geneva for the World Disarmament Conference.⁶⁰ There Akşin was introduced to Under Secretary-General Italian Marcello Roddolo, who reiterated the Italian perception of British and French influence over the League:

The British and the French dominate the organisation. ... The position of Italy in the secretariat is not good. However, we have to put up with it. ... *I would suggest you to do the same. It is better to take part in this institution rather than to be out of it* [emphasis in original].⁶¹

⁵⁸ Güçlü, Yücel, "Turkey's Entrance into the League of Nations", *Middle Eastern Studies*, 39/1 (2003), p. 192; Bilgiç, Bestami S., "Atatürk Döneminde Türkiye-Yunanistan İlişkileri, 1923-1938", *Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi Dergisi*, 31/91 (2015), p. 8.

⁵⁹ Aras, Tevfik Rüştü, *Atatürk'ün Dış Politikası* (İstanbul: Kaynak Yayınları, 2003), p. 83.

⁶⁰ Akşin, Aptülahat, *Atatürk'ün Dış Politika İlkeleri ve Diplomasisi* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1991), pp. 170-1.

⁶¹ Akşin, *Atatürk'ün Dış Politika İlkeleri ve Diplomasisi*, p. 171.

Roddolo's idea was later shared by Yunus Nadi, who was a journalist and an MP for the ruling party, CHP, claiming that the League of Nations was at least a meeting place to discuss issues related to peace and security and it might thus be better to serve world peace within this institution.⁶² The Turkish government seemed to agree with this idea when the Turkish foreign minister gave the green light for his country's entry into the League of Nations during a speech he made on 13 April 1932 at the Disarmament Conference in Geneva.⁶³

Even though the Italian threat to Turkey is usually accepted as the reason for Turkey's entry to the League in 1932, Barlas arguing that "the main reason" for the change in Turkey's attitude towards the League of Nations was the Italian foreign policy at the time,⁶⁴ this represents a retrospective reading of the issue given that the two reasons she argues, i.e. the worsening of the bilateral relations after 1932 and Mussolini's desire to form a separate pact among the great powers of Britain, France, Germany and Italy, happened for the most part a year after Turkey had entered the League of Nations on 18 July 1932. Moreover, the idea of Turkey's membership to the League of Nations was already in place even a year earlier in 1931 when Aras argued that the only problem preventing Turkey's membership was the issue of the obligation to implement economic sanctions within the framework of the League of Nations' Covenant's Article 16.⁶⁵

Aware of the limitations of the League of Nations, the Turkish government nevertheless accepted the official invitation made by the League on 9 July 1932 for three main reasons. Firstly, Turkey regarded the League of Nations as "at least a meeting place for all nations", which could provide an opportunity for a dialogue

⁶² [Abaloğlu], Yunus Nadi, "Milletler Cemiyetine Davet Ediliyoruz", *Cumhuriyet*, 2 July 1932, p. 1.

⁶³ See the speech in Aras, Tefik Rüşti, "13 Nisan 1932 Tarihinde Tahdidi Teslihat Konferansında İrat Edilen Nutuk", *Lozanın İzlerinde 10 Yıl* (Istanbul: Akşam Matbaası, 1935), pp. 143-8.

⁶⁴ Barlas, Dilek, "Milletler Cemiyeti'nde Türkiye: İyimserlik ve Kuşku Arasında", *Uluslararası İlişkiler*, 14/55 (2017), p. 99.

⁶⁵ *TBMM Zabıt Ceridesi*, Devre: IV, Fevkalade İctima, 15 July 1931, Wednesday, p. 133.

among different states for the maintenance of world peace and security.⁶⁶ Secondly, Turkey's acceptance into the League of Nations meant that Turkey was beginning to be regarded as one of the status-quo powers, which proved Turkey's commitment to international law and to world peace and increased Turkey's international prestige.⁶⁷ Turkey's commitment to world peace was also emphasised when the Turkish representative in the League of Nations, Cemal Hüsnü Bey, made a speech in the League of Nations upon the League's invitation of membership to Turkey arguing that "Turkey considers international collaboration in and for peace to be the sublime ideal and desires to contribute to the achievement of that ideal to the utmost of her powers".⁶⁸

The final reason was much more practical. The League of Nations provided a venue for the Turkish Republic to directly communicate and establish relations with other countries without the burden of travelling to each of these countries.

Thanks to [Turkey's] entry into the organisation of the League of Nations, [Aras argued,] we had the opportunity to establish relations with many states without being forced to have recourse to methods such as travelling and visiting in order to open the way to political display and speculation. In this way we reserved reciprocal visits for necessary places and events.⁶⁹

Turkey's entry into the League of Nations is usually regarded as 'the end of Turkey's international isolation' since the formation of the republic in 1923.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ Aras, *Atatürk'ün Dış Politikası*, p. 107.

⁶⁷ Güçlü, "Turkey's Entrance into the League of Nations", p. 201.

⁶⁸ "Eighth Plenary Meeting, Monday, July 18th, 1932, at 10 a.m.", *League of Nations Official Journal*, Special Supplement 102 (1932), p. 23.

⁶⁹ Aras, *Atatürk'ün Dış Politikası*, p. 108: "Milletler Cemiyeti müessesesine girmiş olmak sayesinde birçok devletlerle, seyahatlar ve ziyaretler gibi nümayişlere ve tefsirlere kapı açan vasıtalarla müracaata mecbur kalmadan temas etmek imkânlarını kazandık. Bu suretle karşılıklı ziyaretleri, lüzumlu olan yerlere ve hadiselerle ayırabildik".

⁷⁰ Güçlü, "Turkey's Entrance into the League of Nations", p. 201; Barlas, "Milletler Cemiyeti'nde Türkiye", p. 100.

However, Turkey had by then already established relations with different countries through a series of neutrality and friendship agreements, for example, with the Soviet Union in 1925; with France in 1926 (for the border disputes with Syria) and in 1930 (a treaty of friendship, conciliation and arbitration); with Britain in 1926 (for the settlement of Mosul question); and with Italy in 1928. Turkey's membership to the League of Nations reinforced the already signed bilateral agreements especially with the great powers within a framework of an international institution. This did not mean, however, as Güçlü argues, that "the relations between Turkey and its former enemies took a turn for the better as almost all of Turkey's unsettled international questions had been solved".⁷¹ In fact, Turkey later made use of the League as a venue to bring these "unsettled issues" back onto the international agenda. The Turkish government's distrust of the great powers and the League did not fade away easily after its membership of the institution.

This distrust was very much evident in the Turkish press coverage, which very much welcomed the republic's entry into the League of Nations, but maintained a sceptical attitude towards the institution. Writing in one of the popular newspapers of the time, *Cumhuriyet*, Yunus Nadi questioned the League's power in world politics by stating on 2 July 1932 that "One cannot deny that the League of Nations is still some way from having complete and absolute power".⁷² Moreover, as with the Turkish government, the Turkish press, too, was aware of the fact that the League of Nations was not immune from great power politics. In Ahmet Şükrü Esmer's editorial in *Milliyet* on 20 July 1932, the reason why Turkey joined the League so late was attributed to the League's lack of universality and its being merely an institution of the victorious powers,⁷³ a situation which, according

⁷¹ Güçlü, "Turkey's Entrance into the League of Nations", p. 199.

⁷² [Abalıoğlu], "Milletler Cemiyetine Davet Ediliyoruz", p. 1: "Milletler Cemiyetinin hâlâ hatta manen tam ve kâmil bir kuvvete mazhar olmaktan uzak bulunduğunu inkâra mahal yoktur".

⁷³ [Esmer], Ahmet Şükrü, "Milletler Meclisinde Türkiye", *Milliyet*, 20 July 1932, p. 1.

to Yunus Nadi, was still continuing and was not something that would change overnight.⁷⁴

These still-held hesitations about the League of Nations' independence and inclusivity could perhaps be taken as the reason for a rather toned-down coverage of the event by the Turkish press. However, the main reason for such coverage was to convince other states that entry did not in any way signify a disruptive shift for Turkey's bilateral relations with any country, particularly, the Soviet Union, which was then not a member of the League and was a state that Turkey had a good relationship with. That is why, for example, a CHP MP from Siirt and the journalist Mahmut Soydan argued in *Milliyet* that membership of the League of Nations did not signify a new foreign policy direction for the Turkish Republic in international politics since it had already participated many times in the efforts of the institution to preserve peace and security. It was for this reason, according to Soydan, that this was nothing more than a legalisation of the already-existing situation.⁷⁵ Soydan was right in his claim that the membership to the institution did not mean a radical change in characteristics of the Turkish foreign policy, which was already based on the preservation of the status quo and world peace and on the principles of neutrality in international politics and non-intervention in the affairs of other countries.

However, the entry signified something else, which was celebrated by the Turkish government and the Turkish press perhaps more than the membership of the League of Nations itself. The recognition of the Turkish Republic as an equal state by the same great powers which had imposed the Armistice of Mudros and the Treaty of Sèvres on the Ottoman Empire and were the enemies during the National Liberation War of 1919-1922, was in fact more important than the entry to the institution. This recognition was very much evident in the speeches made in the Assembly of the League of Nations. In his speech to welcome Turkey to the institution on 18 July 1932, the president of the League's Assembly, Paul Hymans

⁷⁴ [Abalıoğlu], Yunus Nadi, "Türkiye'nin Milletler Cemiyetine Girmesi", *Cumhuriyet*, 9 July 1932, p. 1.

⁷⁵ [Soydan], Mahmut, "Beynelmilel Politikada: Türkiye ve Cemiyeti Akvama Girişimiz", *Milliyet*, 12 July 1932, p. 1.

of Belgium, referred, for example, to the past experiences of the Turkish Republic and to how the country had recovered so quickly from these “hard trials” so “[constituting] at one extremity of Europe a particular form, a particular conception and a particular expression of civilisation”. Thus, now, “Turkey [is ready to take] her place as an equal in a family of States”.⁷⁶

Cemal Hüsnü Bey, who represented Turkey in the Assembly together with Necmettin Sadık Sadak, who had been the Turkish delegate in the 1932 Disarmament Conference and was now the Turkish delegate at the League of Nations, in place of Tevfik Rüştü Aras and Şükrü Kaya, who was then the Turkish minister of interior, responded to the president’s speech, in which he thanked all countries for their kind speeches, speeches which “moved [Turkish people] profoundly”. The Turkish representative concluded his speech by quoting “one of the great sons of [Geneva]”, Jean-Jacques Rousseau: “There is no surer way of winning the affection of others than by offering them one’s own”.⁷⁷ This quote represented the importance of the League of Nations for Turkey as a venue in which to form and foster good relations with other states by offering “its affection” to them. This quote could also be interpreted to mean that, now that the European powers had presented their goodwill with speeches favouring Turkey, Turkey was also ready to accept this goodwill and offer its own.

The contentment with the changing attitudes of the European states was also evident in the Turkish press when Mahmut Soydan argued that what appealed to Turkey most during this process was not the invitation made by the League, which was, according to him, something natural considering that the League of Nations should embrace all nations, but rather it was witnessing the change in the attitude of the European nations and their acceptance of Turkey as an element of stability and peace in the international arena.⁷⁸ Further, some articles in the Turkish press not only appreciated this situation, but also considered it as “revenge” taken for the past. Two days after the ninth anniversary of the Lausanne Peace Treaty of

⁷⁶ “Eighth Plenary Meeting”, p. 23.

⁷⁷ “Eighth Plenary Meeting”, p. 23.

⁷⁸ [Soydan], “Beynelmilel Politikada”, p. 1.

24 July 1923, an unsigned article titled “Maziden İntikam!” (The Revenge from the Past!) appeared in *Cumhuriyet*:

... while reading the speeches made in favour of Turkey ... I remembered the grievous accusations and the invective words against us all around the world during the time between ... the Armistice of Mudros, and ... the Armistice of Mudanya. ... And now, in the League of Nations, 57 nations welcome Turkey with speeches, applause, admiration and the French Prime Minister says “I cannot make head or tail of why and how we fought against Turkey, against this peace-loving and virtuous nation”. With these words we have taken revenge for all those former malicious calumnies and on those who made them.⁷⁹

Such changing of attitudes towards Turkey, as well as Turkey’s pleasure over this situation, did not, according to Barlas, apply to Italy, which “opposed Turkey’s entry into the League of Nations [and whose] firm stand against Turkey’s membership in the League adversely affected Turkish–Italian relations”.⁸⁰ This claim for which Barlas does not provide any references, is, however, problematic. There appears to be no implication either in Turkish archival material or in the Turkish press suggesting that Italy did not favour Turkey’s entry into the League of Nations. Given other countries’ speeches favouring Turkey, any Italian discontent would have been reflected in Turkish press coverage. Barlas based her claim on two different reasons in her articles on the subject. Firstly, in her well-known article on the bilateral relations between Turkey and Italy, she argued that “Italy’s opposition” to Turkish membership of the League of Nations was based on the general foreign policy of Mussolini, who believed that world peace could only be sustained through an understanding between the four great powers: Britain,

⁷⁹ “Maziden İntikam!”, *Cumhuriyet*, 26 July 1932, p. 3: “...Türkiye lehinde irat edilen nutukları ... okurken Mondros mütarekesinin imzalan[ması ile] Mudanya mütarekenamesinin imza edil[mesine] kadar bütün dünyada, aleyhimize yapılan ağır ithamlar ve sarfedilen tahrirkâr sözler hatırıma geldi. ... Şimdi ise Cemiyeti Akvamda 57 millet Türkiye’yi hitabeler, alkışlar, takdirlerle karşılıyor ve Fransız Başvekili, “Türkiye ile bu sulhperver, faziletli milletle niçin ve nasıl olmuş ta harbetmişiz, bir türlü havsalam almıyor.” Diyor. Bu sözlerle aleyhimizdeki bütün eski gazezkârane iftiralarm, söyliylenlere raci olan hareketlerin intikamını almış oluyoruz”.

⁸⁰ Barlas, “Friends or Foes?”, p. 246 and repeated in Barlas, “Milletler Cemiyeti’nde Türkiye”, p. 100.

France, Germany and Italy.⁸¹ This, however, seems unconvincing since Italy, as well as the other great powers, was already in the League of Nations and, as demonstrated by Marcello Roddolo's statement, regarded participation in the League of Nations, despite its many problems, as more beneficial than being outside it. Further, Italy's efforts to form the Four-Power Pact were not visibly in place during the time of Turkey's accession to the League. The discussions became public later in March 1933 when both Mussolini and British Prime Minister James Ramsay MacDonald vaguely referred to the idea, an idea which originated with Mussolini in October 1932 when he made a speech in Turin.⁸² Secondly, in her recent article on Turkey's attitude towards the League of Nations, Barlas linked "Italy's opposition" to the fact that Turkey's being a member of the League meant that it could engage in diverse diplomatic relations with other countries, which could potentially be against Italy and Bulgaria.⁸³ This argument also remains unconvincing considering that Turkey, as shown above, had already started to develop its bilateral relations with many countries, including Balkan states such as Albania, Hungary, and even Bulgaria by that time.⁸⁴

Going one step further from Barlas's claim, Degli Esposti has argued that "when in 1932 the council of the League approved Turkey's membership, Italy voted against [it]", a situation which eventually "worsened the bilateral relations between the two countries".⁸⁵ However, this is inaccurate since the decision was taken unanimously in the Assembly and Italy was thus one of the supporters of the

⁸¹ Barlas, "Friends or Foes?", p. 246; Barlas, Dilek, "Akdeniz'de Hasmane Dostlar: İki Dünya Savaşı Arasında Türkiye ve İtalya", *Doğu Batı*, 14 (February-April 2001), pp. 217-18.

⁸² H. L., "The Four-Power Pact", *Bulletin of International News*, 9/21 (1933), p. 3.

⁸³ Barlas, "Milletler Cemiyeti'nde Türkiye", p. 100.

⁸⁴ Soysal, *Türkiye'nin Siyasal Andlaşmaları*, pp. 246-8.

⁸⁵ Degli Esposti, Nicola, "An Impossible Friendship: Differences and Similarities between Fascist Italy's and Kemalist Turkey's Foreign Policies", *Diacronie. Studi di Storia Contemporanea* [Online], 22/2 (2015), p. 8, doi: <https://doi.org/10.4000/diacronie.1998> [accessed on 22 May 2020].

resolution.⁸⁶ The only support offered for Degli Esposti's argument, for which he does not provide any references, is Mussolini's "firm" stance towards the League of Nations due to its domination by the British and French.⁸⁷ Any such understanding in the minds of the Italian authorities, however, cannot by itself explain why Italy was against Turkey's membership since, following this argument, Italy would have had to oppose every single new membership of the League of Nations. In fact, the Italian representative to the League of Nations Vittorio Scialoja stated explicitly that this was not the official Italian position in this period declaring that "We have acted thus for the specific purpose of facilitating the entry of those States into the League".⁸⁸

The only apparent contemporary source that might perhaps offer support for the claim that Italy was against Turkey's entry into the League of Nations was a letter sent by Italian Foreign Minister Grandi to the Italian ambassador in Ankara, Aloisi, on 23 June 1932. In this letter, Grandi resents Turkey's failure to inform him about the official arrangements made with the League's Secretariat for Turkey's entry to the League of Nations. Annoyed by learning of this in a casual conversation with the Soviet commissar for foreign affairs, Litvinov, Grandi stated that he did not intend to attend the meeting on Tuesday (28 June), where the speeches in favour of Turkey's entry would be communicated in the assembly, since "neither İsmet Paşa nor Tevfik Rüşdü Bey mentioned this in their recent meeting in Rome" or afterwards.⁸⁹

The meeting was indeed a very recent one since İsmet İnönü and Tevfik Rüşdü Aras had visited Rome just a month earlier in May 1932 after visiting

⁸⁶ "Eighth Plenary Meeting", p. 22.

⁸⁷ Degli Esposti, "An Impossible Friendship", p. 8.

⁸⁸ "Seventh Plenary Meeting, Wednesday, July 6th, 1932, at 10 a.m.", *League of Nations Official Journal*, Special Supplement 102 (1932), p. 18.

⁸⁹ "Il ministro degli esteri, Grandi, all'ambasciatore ad Angora, Aloisi" (23 June 1932, Geneva), doc. 112, in Ministero degli affari esteri commissione per la pubblicazione dei documenti diplomatici, *I documenti diplomatici italiani settima serie: 1922-1935*, vol. XII (1 aprile – 31 dicembre 1932) (Rome: Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato P.V., 1987), p. 153.

Moscow earlier in the same month.⁹⁰ The visit aimed to renew the 1928 Treaty for another five years. The main aim, however, was to develop the relationship with Italy as well as to secure credit of 300 million Italian liras. In the end, no credit materialised due both to Italy's inability to provide it because of ongoing financial problems as well as Turkey's willingness to take an interest-free 8-million dollar credit from the Soviet Union.⁹¹ According to a British report on the Turkish financial situation at that time, the main reason for the disagreement between Turkey and Italy about this loan was due to the "onerous issue terms" over the cash portion of the Italian credit.⁹² In addition, this visit, according to the Egyptian newspaper *al-Ahram*, was regarded as the beginning of a tripartite policy between Turkey, Italy and the Soviet Union since İsmet İnönü had just visited Moscow before his visit to Rome. The newspaper argued that both visits together reflected the active role that Turkey wanted to play in international politics as "an intermediary between West and East".⁹³ However, in spite of the issue of loans, İsmet İnönü's visit to Rome clearly demonstrates the development of a considerable closeness between the two countries. This was the time, as *Cumhuriyet* stated, when "Kemalist Turkey [sent its] greetings to Fascist Italy", thus presenting the visit as an attempt by Turkey to develop its relations with Italy.⁹⁴

The Turkish press celebrated İsmet İnönü's visit by publishing accounts of his meetings and activities in Rome on a daily basis. Articles, drawings and photographs praising Italy and/or referring to the Turkish-Italian "friendship" were published in popular newspapers like *Cumhuriyet*, which, for example, published a coloured cartoon on its front page (Figure 2.1) portraying two women wearing

⁹⁰ For a detailed discussion of the visit, see: Çelebi, Mevlüt, "Başvekil İsmet Paşa'nın İtalya Seyahati", *Tarih İncelemeleri Dergisi*, 22/2 (2007), pp. 21-52.

⁹¹ Barlas, "Friends or Foes?", p. 245.

⁹² 1 December 1932: The National Archives, London (hereafter TNA), FO 371/16089, p. 201.

⁹³ 26 June 1932: CA, 030.10.0.0.13.74.11.

⁹⁴ *Cumhuriyet*, 22 May 1932, p. 1.

Turkish and Italian flags and cheerfully shaking hands with each other. The background of the cartoon is also very interesting. Showing Ayasofya in Istanbul and St. Peter's Basilica in the Vatican, it was a subtle representation of the event as the reunion of the Western and Eastern Roman empires.⁹⁵



Figure 2.1: A cartoon published in *Cumhuriyet*, during İsmet İnönü's visit to Rome. *Cumhuriyet*, 23 May 1932, p. 1.

One of the most significant themes which the discussions in the Turkish press revolved around was how the Turkish delegation was welcomed in Rome.⁹⁶ İsmet İnönü's visit to Rome on 25-29 May in 1932 was indeed full of splendour and pageantry organized by the Italians. İnönü was welcomed in Rome with a huge reception where Mussolini as well as his foreign minister Grandi were

⁹⁵ *Cumhuriyet*, 23 Mayıs 1932, p. 1.

⁹⁶ For a short anecdote about this visit, see: Atay, Falih Rıfkı, *Çankaya V* (İstanbul: Yeni Gün Haber Ajansı Basın ve Yayıncılık, 1999), p. 99. Falih Rıfkı Atay also published a travel account about his visit to Moscow and Rome in 1932, which mainly discussed the ideological currents of the period, fascism and socialism: [Atay], *Moskova Roma*.

present. Apart from attending the official meetings and receptions (Figure 2.2.A), İnönü also watched military parades such as those of *i Lancieri*, i.e. the cavalry (Figure 2.2.B), *i Bersaglieri*, who paraded on their bicycles, *gli Alpini*, the Italian army's mountain infantry, as well as *i Carabinieri*, who performed a parade both on foot and on horse. On 29 May, İnönü visited the *Accademia della Farnesina*, a centre for physical education of the fascist regime, where he was accompanied by Renato Ricci, the president of the fascist youth organization *Opera Nazionale Balilla*, and watched gymnastic performances by Italian students, who welcomed İnönü with fascist saluting (Figures 2.2.C and 2.2.D). The Turkish group also visited some Italian factories together with Mussolini.⁹⁷

Yunus Nadi, who was also in the visiting committee, was astonished and flattered by the Italian reception and particularly by Mussolini personally meeting İsmet İnönü and his delegation at the train station on their arrival. In an editorial he authored in *Cumhuriyet* after coming back to Turkey, Yunus Nadi stressed this fact by printing the lines in a larger font: "For the first time, Signor Mussolini came to the station to welcome a foreigner. We saw that those Italians who had heard the incident were quite astonished".⁹⁸ It was clear therefore that the visit was not only to foster the Italian-Turkish relations, but also the image of Turkey in the international arena as an equal partner of the great powers, in this case, Italy.

Grandi's grievance over the Turkish government's failure to share the details about Turkey's membership of the League of Nations was therefore, particularly understandable after such an important visit and the portrayal of a "friendship" by the two sides. However, from the Italian point of view, it seemed that the problem was not Turkey's membership of the League, but how and where the Turkish government positioned Italy in its foreign affairs, that is, at least in Grandi's assessment, in a secondary position after the Soviets and possibly after

⁹⁷ June 1932: Archivio Storico Istituto Luce, "25-29 maggio 1932 La visita del ministro turco İsmet", Cinegiornale Luce A / A096603, <https://patrimonio.archivioluce.com/luce-web/detail/IL5000033311/2/25-29-maggio-1932-visita-del-ministro-turco-ismet.html> [accessed on 19 June 2020].

⁹⁸ [Abaloğlu], Yunus Nadi, "İsmet Paşa, ve M. Musolini", *Cumhuriyet*, 3 Haziran 1932, p. 1: "M. Musolini ilk defa olarak bir ecnebi şahsiyeti karşılamak üzere bu defa istasyona gelmiştir. Hâdiseyi işiten İtalyan'ların hayretler içinde kaldıklarını gördük".

the British and the French as would be manifested by other events in the mid-1930s.



Figure 2.2.A



Figure 2.2.B



Figure 2.2.C



Figure 2.2.D

Figure 2.2: Still frames showing the activities that İnönü attended during his visit to Rome, from the Archivio Storico Istituto Luce.

Yet still, despite this resentment, the Italian official position in the League of Nations regarding Turkish membership was a positive one. Italy was one of the 29 delegations in the League of Nations which proposed the draft resolution to invite Turkey in the first place.⁹⁹ Fourteen countries, including China, Portugal, Norway and Irish Free State, did not take part in the proposal of the draft resolution about Turkey's entry into the League of Nations for different reasons,

⁹⁹ "Sixth Plenary Meeting, Monday, July 1st, 1932, at 5 p.m.", *League of Nations Official Journal*, Special Supplement 102 (1932), p. 9.

the Portuguese representative M. Vasco de Quevedo stating that “the Portuguese delegation ... had no previous notice of the draft resolution”.¹⁰⁰ If it had “opposed” Turkey’s entry into the organisation, Italy could therefore have adopted a similar approach and not signed the draft proposal in the first place. Nevertheless, having emphasised that Italy had always advocated for the universality of the organisation, the Italian representative Vittorio Scialoja stated his country’s support for Turkey’s membership at the assembly meeting on 6 July: “The Italian government is especially glad that it should be Turkey to whom we are addressing our invitation to-day”.¹⁰¹ These words were met with satisfaction and applauded in the Turkish parliament where Tevfik Rüşti Aras read out the speeches of the delegations in translation to the MPs on 9 July.¹⁰² Scialoja continued his speech by pointing out the importance of Turkey as an “essential element” in European politics and argued that “... the intimate relations ... between Turkey and Italy constitute the clearest and most eloquent proof of the importance we attach to it”.¹⁰³ This importance was also demonstrated, according to the Italian diplomat, through “the feeling of confidence” with which Italy followed the establishment and development of this newly-founded “young Mediterranean State under the enlightened leadership of Ghazi”.¹⁰⁴

According to the telegram sent to Scialoja by the Turkish foreign minister following his speech in the Assembly, the Turkish government was also pleased by Italy’s reaction to Turkey’s accession to the League of Nations. “Deeply moved by the beautiful words of sympathy and friendship”, Aras noted, Turkey could not

¹⁰⁰ “Seventh Plenary Meeting”, p. 18.

¹⁰¹ “Seventh Plenary Meeting”, p. 18.

¹⁰² *TBMM Zabıt Ceridesi*, Devre: IV, İçtima Senesi: 1, 9 July 1932, Saturday, p. 539: “Bu gün Türkiye’ye hitap edilmesinden dolayı İtalya bilhassa bahtiyardır (*Alkışlar*)”.

¹⁰³ “Seventh Plenary Meeting”, p. 18.

¹⁰⁴ “Seventh Plenary Meeting”, p. 18.

be happier to collaborate with Italy also within the League of Nations, which would foster the “spirit of friendship” between the two states.¹⁰⁵

2.2. Fostering the “Spirit of Friendship”: The Italian Fleet’s Visit to Turkey, July 1932

Indeed, this “spirit of friendship” that Aras was referring to was evident when an Italian fleet which was led by one of the Italian admirals Italo Moreno, who had been involved in the Italo-Ottoman War of 1911-12 as a lieutenant,¹⁰⁶ visited Istanbul on 16 July 1932, just after a one-week visit to Varna.¹⁰⁷ Quarto, which was the Italian cruiser commanded by Moreno, entered the harbour at 8 o’clock in the morning and moored in front of the Dolmabahçe Palace.¹⁰⁸ This was the beginning of the one-week visit of the fleet, a visit full of official meetings and parties. Among such official encounters of Italo Moreno was the visit on 16 July to Carlo Margotti, the *amministratore apostolico*, the Pope’s representative, in Istanbul, an official visit on 17 July to the governor and mayor of Istanbul Muhittin Bey as well as to the corps commander Şükrü Naili Paşa,¹⁰⁹ and a welcome garden party held by the Italian ambassador to Turkey Baron Pompeo Aloisi in *Casa d’Italia*,

¹⁰⁵ TBMM Zabıt Ceridesi, 9 July 1932, p. 542: “Meclisin dünkü celsesinde Türkiye hakkında yapmak lûtfunde bulunduğunuz o güzel muhabbet ve dostluk ifadatından çok mütehassis olarak sizden en hararetli ve en heyecanlı teşekkürlerimi kabul buyurmanızı rica ederim. Türkiye, aralarındaki münasebatın vasfını teşkil eden samimî olduğu kadar ateşin dostluğun ruh ve manası dahilinde faşist İtalya ile Akvam Cemiyeti sinesinde mesaisini teşrik edebilmekten dolayı kendini tebrike şayan addeder. Hakkınızdaki samimî saygı ve yüksek ihtiramatımın temenniyatını tekrar için bu vesileden istifade ediyorum efendim”. See Aras’s telegram in Italian in A. G., “Riassunto della situazione. Turchia”, *Oriente Moderno*, 12/8 (August 1932), p. 365.

¹⁰⁶ Stephenson, Charles, *A Box of Sand: The Italo-Ottoman War, 1911-1912* (Ticehurst: Tattered Flag, 2014), p. 186.

¹⁰⁷ “İtalyan Filosu Bu Sabah Geliyor”, *Milliyet*, 16 July 1932, p. 1.

¹⁰⁸ “İtalyan Filosu Dün Geldi”, *Cumhuriyet*, 17 July 1932, p. 1.

¹⁰⁹ “İtalyan Filosu Dün Varnadan Geldi”, *Milliyet*, 17 July 1932, p. 6.

the old Italian embassy building in Beyoğlu on the same day.¹¹⁰ The ambassadors of the USA, Bulgaria, Greece and Egypt attended the party along with Turkish officials and journalists including the vice governor of the city, Ali Rıza Bey, *Cumhuriyet*'s editor-in-chief Yunus Nadi and the preeminent poet Abdülhak Hamit Tarhan, who had been a diplomat of the late Ottoman period and was then an MP of Istanbul.¹¹¹

On 18 July 1932, on the date when Turkey became an official member of the League of Nations, the Italian admiral together with the Italian ambassador went to Yalova to visit President Atatürk.¹¹² After the visit, Moreno seemed pleased with the one-and-a-half-hour meeting in which naval and general politics were discussed. Referring to his earlier memories of "Turkey", the admiral stated that he was able to "appreciate the differences between the Turkey of the sultans and of the Gazi", and Atatürk apparently sent his regards to the Italian king and to Mussolini.¹¹³ With satisfaction all round, therefore, the Italian fleet left the city on 22 July 1932. However, there was also an unexpected person who joined Moreno aboard the cruiser. This person was Italian Ambassador Baron Pompeo Aloisi who was summoned immediately to Rome by Mussolini to be his personal *chef de bureau* at the Italian foreign ministry after Grandi's departure from office on 20 July.¹¹⁴

2.3. The Change in Italian Foreign Policy: A Fork in the Road for the Bilateral Relations?

Grandi's leaving office was not voluntary, but was more of a demonstration of the difference of approach between *Il Duce* and his foreign minister over foreign

¹¹⁰ "İtalyan Filosu Bu Sabah Geliyor", *Milliyet*, 16 July 1932, p. 1.

¹¹¹ "İtalyan Misafirlerimiz Şerefine Gardenparti", *Cumhuriyet*, 18 July 1932, p. 8.

¹¹² "Gazi Hz. İtalyan Amiralini Kabul Ettiler", *Milliyet*, 19 July 1932, p. 1.

¹¹³ "İtalyan Amiralı İhtisaslarını Anlatıyor", *Milliyet*, 22 July 1932, p. 6.

¹¹⁴ "Sefir Baron Aloizi İtalya Hariciye U. Kâtibi Oldu", *Cumhuriyet*, 22 July 1932, p. 1.

policies. Accusing Grandi of having “gone to bed with England and France”,¹¹⁵ Mussolini dismissed his foreign minister, an “Anglophile” and an adopter of “a policy of moderation” after his diplomatic failure at the Lausanne Conference of June – July 1932, where the moderations in the war reparations payments of Germany were discussed and eventually accepted by a joint communiqué issued by France and Britain on 13 July.¹¹⁶ Having appointed Grandi to London as an ambassador, Mussolini wanted full control over the foreign ministry and he declared himself foreign minister. The two men whom he trusted with foreign affairs were Pompeo Aloisi and Fulvio Suvich, who were both experts on Eastern Europe and the Balkans, territories in which “Mussolini’s main interest still [lay]”.¹¹⁷ This change in the cabinet in the Italian government is usually regarded as the beginning of a more aggressive and expansionist turn in Italian foreign policy, which was characterised by “revitalizing a *tono fascista*”.¹¹⁸

This change in Italian foreign policy in the summer of 1932 had important effects on Turkish-Italian relations¹¹⁹ and was also regarded as the beginning point of a new period in the bilateral relations, characterised as a “cooling-off” era by Barlas.¹²⁰ How much of an immediate effect this change had on Turkey’s attitude towards Italy is open to discussion, for the news of the cabinet change arrived when the Italian admiral Moreno was still in Turkey and when newspaper articles on the Turkish-Italian friendship were positive. Mahmut Soydan in *Milliyet* wrote that

¹¹⁵ As quoted in Burgwyn, *Italian Foreign Policy*), p. 68.

¹¹⁶ Robertson, Esmonde M., *Mussolini as Empire-BUILDER: Europe and Africa 1932-36* (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1977), p. 20.

¹¹⁷ Robertson, *Mussolini as Empire-BUILDER*, p. 21.

¹¹⁸ Burgwyn, *Italian Foreign Policy*, p. 71.

¹¹⁹ Grassi, “La Turchia nella politica francese e italiana”, p. 137.

¹²⁰ Barlas, “Friends or Foes?”, p. 232; Barlas, “Hasmane Dostlar”, p. 217.

The best friendships are those that are established after much experience and hesitation. ... In order to establish a good and strong friendship with Italy, we had to overcome various difficulties. Now we maintain a most developed friendship with [this] country.¹²¹



Figure 2.3: “İtalyan Misafirlerimiz Şerefine Gardenparti”, *Cumhuriyet*, 18 July 1932, p. 1.

These sentiments were also reflected in the way the Turkish press regarded the cabinet reshuffle in July 1932. Muharrem Feyzi Togay, writing in *Cumhuriyet* about the issue, discussed the reasons for the change in the Italian cabinet, which had happened, according to the author, at an “unexpected time”, and referring to the “resignation” of certain members of the cabinet, he argued that Mussolini’s taking on the positions of foreign minister and minister of economy increased the significance of this reshuffle.¹²² Mussolini’s taking over of these ministries was justified, according to Togay, because of the dire economic conditions of Italy

¹²¹ [Soydan], Mahmut, “Dostluk Sesi”, *Milliyet*, 19 July 1932, p. 1: “En iyi dostluklar bir çok tecrübe ve tereddütlerden sonra teessüs eden dostluklardır. ... İtalya ile de iyi ve sağlam bir dost olmak için bazı zorlukları yenmeğe mecbur olduk. Şimdi bu ... memleketle en ileri bir dostluk münasebatı idame ediyoruz”.

¹²² [Togay], Muharrem Feyzi, “İtalya Kabinesindeki Tebeddül”, *Cumhuriyet*, 24 July 1932, p. 2.

after the Great Depression as well as the need for a more effective Italian foreign policy, which had recently failed over the issue of the moderation of war debts as well as of disarmament. Thus “[t]he state of Italy need[ed] to show its strength and influence in these issues [and] Mr Mussolini [was] the [only] person who could do it”.¹²³ The article was thus supportive of the change in the cabinet. However, this was not an indication of the naiveté of the author or the Turkish newspaper about what this change really meant. The author himself acknowledged the change in the tone of Italian foreign policy claiming that “Italy had been prepared to follow a definite and effective policy in the international arena”.¹²⁴ Similarly, in an article praising the cabinet change, Ahmet Şükrü Esmer argued a few days later in *Milliyet* that considering how “ambitious” a statesman Mussolini was, some changes in the Italian foreign policy could be expected. According to the author, the first possible example of this change was Italy’s recent withdrawal from the Interparliamentary Union on 25 July 1932,¹²⁵ which came after a French delegate’s criticism of fascism and his question about the murder of Giacomo Matteotti, a socialist opposition deputy killed by fascists in 1924.¹²⁶

2.4. The Turkish Reaction to the Four-Power Pact (1933)

This change in Italian foreign policy was to create problems from the Turkish perspective when it was put into practice following Mussolini’s desire to create a pact between the four great powers, namely Britain, France, Germany and Italy. This desire was first mentioned in a speech made in Turin on 23 October 1932,

¹²³ [Togay], “İtalya Kabinesindeki Tebeddül”, p. 2: “... İtalya devletinin bu mes’elelerde bütün kuvvet ve nüfuzunu göstermesi lâzım geliyor. Bunu da yapabilecek M. Musolini’dir”.

¹²⁴ [Togay], “İtalya Kabinesindeki Tebeddül”, p. 2: “İtalya beynelmilel sahada kat’i ve müessir bir siyaset takibine hazırlanmıştır”.

¹²⁵ [Esmer], Ahmet Şükrü, “İtalyan Kabinesindeki Tebeddüller”, *Milliyet*, 28 July 1932, p. 1; “İtalya Parlâmentolar Birliğinden Çekildi”, *Cumhuriyet*, 26 July 1932, p. 3.

¹²⁶ “Senate. Tuesday, May 30, 1933” in *Congressional Record: Proceedings and Debates of the First Session of the Seventy-Third Congress of the United States of America*, Volume 77 – Part 5 (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1933), p. 4582.

when Mussolini argued that even though Italy would not leave the League of Nations, despite its problems, it would be beneficial for order and stability in Europe to establish an understanding between the four western great powers.¹²⁷ This speech came to be regarded as a very momentous one by the Turkish press even though initially no editorials or commentary articles were published on the subject.¹²⁸

In March 1933, Mussolini took active initiative to turn this desire into reality, encouraged in particular by the recent change in international dynamics due to Hitler's coming to power in Germany in January 1933. The speedy rearmament of Germany, as well as Hitler's visible desire for Austria's incorporation into Germany by the Anschluss, a clash-point for Italian foreign policy, made this initiative necessary in the eyes of Mussolini.¹²⁹ On 15 July 1933 Mussolini realised his desire for the Four-Power Pact, which provided him with a position of leadership in European politics and which was supposed to result in a mutual understanding between the four countries regarding international issues. This was in a way the reaffirmation of the old Locarno pattern.¹³⁰

Even though, Aras argued years later that "the pact had been mutilated while it was coming into the world",¹³¹ the Turkish government was one of the main challengers of this agreement. From the Turkish point of view, the pact would alter the balance of power in Europe and it would be an act against the

¹²⁷ Robertson, *Mussolini as Empire-BUILDER*, p. 23.

¹²⁸ "M. Musolini Torinoda Çok Mühim Bir Nutuk Söyledi", *Cumhuriyet*, 24 October 1932, p. 3; "İtalya Avrupada Hekemonyaya Karşı Koyacak!", *Milliyet*, 24 October 1932, p. 1.

¹²⁹ Mallett, Robert, *Mussolini and the Origins of the Second World War, 1933-1940* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 21.

¹³⁰ Fink, Carole, "The Search for Peace in the Interwar Period" in *The Cambridge History of War Volume 4: War and the Modern World*, Roger Chickering, Dennis Showalter and Hans van de Ven (eds.) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 306.

¹³¹ Aras, *Atatürk'ün Dış Politikası*, p. 64.

political independence of smaller powers.¹³² Aware of the Turkish reservations regarding the pact, the Italian government tried to give assurances on several occasions. On 7 May 1933, for example, the previous Italian ambassador to Turkey Pompeo Aloisi, who was then the right-hand man of Mussolini in foreign policy matters, met Aras in Geneva and tried to assure the Turkish foreign minister that “the Italian policy of friendship towards Turkey had in no ways changed”.¹³³ The assurances were repeated this time to the Turkish ambassador in Rome, Vasıf Çınar, on 31 May 1933 when Aloisi claimed that Italy’s friendship with Turkey was one of the “cornerstones of Italian politics”.¹³⁴ However, these assurances did not mean much since Turkey’s position was not defined merely by its relations with Italy, but was much more related to its approach to matters of world politics. While for Italy and the other great powers, the international arena was a vertical hierarchical space thus making a distinction between great powers and others, for the Turkish government, it was a horizontal one, which should be based on collaboration and preservation of the status quo through the understanding of collective security.¹³⁵

This understanding was clear from an event which demonstrated how President Mustafa Kemal Atatürk himself regarded the issue. On 29 October 1932, a celebration dinner was held for the ninth anniversary of the establishment of the Turkish Republic at Ankara Palas, a dinner which was also attended by foreign ambassadors in Ankara. According to a report sent to British Foreign Minister John Simon by the then British ambassador in Ankara George R. Clerk, President Atatürk “was not pleased” about Mussolini’s Turin speech and the idea of a pact

¹³² Barlas, *Etatism and Diplomacy in Turkey*, p. 141.

¹³³ Akşin, *Atatürk’ün Dış Politika İlkeleri ve Diplomasisi*, p. 188.

¹³⁴ “Il capo del governo e ministro degli esteri, Mussolini, agli ambasciatori ad Ankara, Lojacono, e a Mosca, Attolico” (2 June 1933, Rome), doc. 758, in Ministero degli affari esteri commissione per la pubblicazione dei documenti diplomatici, *I documenti diplomatici italiani settima serie: 1922-1935*, vol. XIII (1 gennaio – 15 luglio 1933) (Rome: Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato P.V., 1989), p. 803.

¹³⁵ Barlas, Dilek and Serhat Güvenç, *Türkiye’nin Akdeniz Siyaseti (1923-1939): Orta Büyüklükte Devlet Diplomasisi ve Deniz Gücünün Sınırları* (İstanbul: Koç Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2014), p. 110.

between the great powers. He told the new Italian ambassador, Vincenzo Lojacono, that:

... no doubt the representatives of England, France, Germany and Italy had been pleased at the Duce's assertion that if these four Powers collaborated they could ensure the peace and prosperity of Europe and the world. ... I tell you he is wrong. The future of my country of 14 millions cannot be influenced or settled at the ruling or by the co-operation of any four Great Powers, nor will it be. Only the co-operation of *all* [emphasis in original] the Powers can restore peace to the world, and I, who want peace, and not war, wish this method to be followed. Let all combine to assure peace and fraternity.¹³⁶

Atatürk succinctly explained what the Turkish government's position would be in the event of the signing of the Four-Power Pact. This anecdote was proof of the fact that Turkey's resentment was not merely towards Italy, but to all the great powers, which tried to control world politics unilaterally. However, regardless of Turkey's discontent, the pact was signed between Britain, France, Germany and Italy in Rome on 15 July 1933. That it was signed in Rome also indicated how influential Mussolini was in the conclusion of the pact which aimed "to establish that reciprocal European confidence, the absence of which has hitherto blocked so many attempts at reconstruction".¹³⁷

For Yunus Nadi, however, this was not the way to establish such European confidence, as he discussed in his critical editorial on the Four-Power Pact in *Cumhuriyet* on 17 July. The Four-Power Pact was not based on any strong mutual motivation among the four great powers and was in fact, according to Yunus Nadi, rather vague:

To be honest, despite the explanations, details and even assurances given in the period from the time when this idea first emerged until the day before yesterday when [the pact was] signed, the true nature of this Four-Power

¹³⁶ 18 November 1932: TNA, FO 371/16089, p. 116; Akşin, *Atatürk'ün Dış Politika İlkeleri ve Diplomasisi*, p. 189. This was also the same dinner when the well-known Fez Incident took place between Atatürk and the Egyptian ambassador to Turkey. For an account of the Fez incident, see: Bein, Amit, *Kemalist Turkey and the Middle East: International Relations in the Interwar Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. 66-73.

¹³⁷ "The Four Power Pact", *World Affairs*, 96/3 (1933), p. 132.

Pact, we believe, was not even understood precisely among those who signed it.¹³⁸

Moreover, according to Yunus Nadi, the Four-Power Pact could not be “an instrument for peace” because “Germany of Hitler, which constituted the greatest threat to European peace, was in [the pact]”.¹³⁹ Despite such direct criticism of Germany, the article did not target Italy in any way. In fact, Yunus Nadi tried to justify Mussolini’s initiation of such a pact that lacked “sufficient, lucid and exact” purpose, claiming that the worsening situation in Europe should have led the fascist leader to prevent another great war by bringing these four powers together “because the tragedy called war is such a great disaster that it can even frighten Mr. Mussolini just like [it would do] any other clever man”.¹⁴⁰ On the other hand, Muharrem Feyzi Togay’s article in the same issue stressed the same point made by Atatürk in the above-mentioned dinner, Togay writing that

there remain[ed] no doubt from now on that, the European affairs would be handled not through the conferences which all the countries would join, but through the private and friendly negotiations between the four great powers.¹⁴¹

This understanding of establishing almost a private club between these four powers led the Turkish government to find alternative means and venues in the form of more regional agreements and pacts. One such example came when the discussions of the Four-Power Pact was in the air, in May 1933, when the Turkish

¹³⁸ [Abalıoğlu], Yunus Nadi, “Yeni Bir Vesika: Dörtler Misakı”, *Cumhuriyet*, 17 July 1932, p. 1: “Doğrusunu söylemek lâzım gelirse böyle bir fikrin ilk çıktığı günden itibaren evvelki günkü imzaya kadar geçen müddet zarfında verilen izahata, tafsilâta ve hatta teminata rağmen bu dörtler misakının hakikî mahiyeti – zannederiz, onu imza edenler arasında dahi henüz bütün sarahatle anlaşılmış değildir”.

¹³⁹ [Abalıoğlu], “Yeni Bir Vesika: Dörtler Misakı”, p. 1.

¹⁴⁰ [Abalıoğlu], “Yeni Bir Vesika: Dörtler Misakı”, p. 1: “Çünkü harp denilen haile, her akıllı adam gibi M. Musoliniyi dahi korkutacak kadar büyük bir felâkettir”.

¹⁴¹ [Togay], Muharrem Feyzi, “Dörtler Misakının Ehemmiyeti”, *Cumhuriyet*, 17 July 1932, p. 2: “Dörtler misakı Avrupa meselelerinin bundan sonra bütün devletlerin iştirak edecekleri konferanslardan ziyade, dört büyük devletin arasındaki hususî ve dostane müzakerelerle halledileceğine şüphe bırakmıyor”.

foreign minister Tefik Rüşti Aras met his Romanian counterpart Nicolae Titulescu in London, where the World Economic Conference was held at that time. In this meeting, Aras suggested that there was a need for an arrangement which could “protect [Turkey and Romania] in the face of this Four-Power Pact”, a pact which wanted to “control” the other countries. However, Aras continued, for any arrangement to be effective, they needed to include the Soviet Union as well.¹⁴² This was in fact a manifestation of Turkish foreign policy at that time, which regarded the Soviet Union “not only as a regional partner but also as an ally to counter-balance hostile combinations in Europe”.¹⁴³

Eventually, the foreign ministers of Romania, Turkey and the Soviet Union decided that they should come together around a convention for the definition of aggression (a convention that would specify and list examples of acts of aggression to prevent any subjective interpretation) with neighbouring and regional countries. In fact the idea of such a convention was not a novelty since the Soviet Commissar for Foreign Affairs Litvinov had already shared his views on the need for a definition of aggression convention in 1932.¹⁴⁴ The timing and active initiative of Aras in bringing about these conventions in the summer of 1933 does not thus seem to be a coincidence. Turkey signed two such conventions, one on 3 July 1933,¹⁴⁵ due to its position as a neighbouring country of the Soviet Union,¹⁴⁶ with Afghanistan, Estonia, Latvia, Iran, Poland, Romania and the Soviet Union,

¹⁴² Aras, *Atatürk'ün Dış Politikası*, p. 58: “Bunun üzerine memleketlerimizin sırtında tutunmak isteyen bu dörtlü misakın sebep olabileceği mahzurlardan masun kalmak hususunda başvurulacak bir tertibin faydalı olabilmesi için behemehal Sovyet Rusya’sıyla birlikte olmamız lâzım geldiğini ... kendisine anlattım”.

¹⁴³ İşçi, Onur, *Turkey and the Soviet Union during World War II: Diplomacy, Discord and International Relations* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2019), pp. 19-20.

¹⁴⁴ *TBMM Zabut Ceridesi*, Devre: IV, İçtima Senesi: 3, 23 December 1933, Saturday, p. 103.

¹⁴⁵ See “No. 3391. - Afghanistan, Estonia, Latvia, Persia, Poland, Roumania, Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and Turkey: Convention for the Definition of Aggression, Annex and Protocol of Signature. Signed at London, July 3rd, 1933”, *League of Nations Treaty Series*, vol. 147/1-2-3-4 (1934), pp. 67-77.

¹⁴⁶ *TBMM Zabut Ceridesi*, 23 December 1933, p. 105.

and another on 4 July¹⁴⁷ with Romania, the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia. The reason for the second convention, which remained open to other countries to join, seemed rather less well defined since Aras argued in the Turkish parliament that it was due to the fact that “Turkey was among the best friends of the Soviet Union” during the discussions to ratify these two conventions in December 1933.¹⁴⁸ The effectiveness and the scope of these conventions were perhaps limited; however, it was clear that they were concluded in response to the international system proposed by the Four-Power Pact since both conventions specifically noted that “... all States have an equal right to independence, security, the defence of their territories and the free development of their institutions”.¹⁴⁹

Despite the signing of these definition of aggression conventions and of the Four-Power Pact, the latter not being received well by Turkey, the summer of 1933 was an active period for Turkey’s relations with Italy, just as the previous year had been. Tevfik Rüşti Aras visited Rome just a few days before the signing of the Four-Power Pact and had a meeting with Mussolini during which issues related to world politics and economics as well as those directly concerned the Turkish-Italian relations were discussed. Mussolini also held a dinner in honour of Aras in *Castelfusano*, which presented a good image for the outside world of relations between the two countries. Moreover, the official statement made by two statesmen noted that the interests of Turkey and Italy were “identical”.¹⁵⁰

In reality, however, their interests did not seem to be “identical” to each other. Although Italy did not consider the conclusion of definition of aggression conventions as being aimed against itself, the failure of the Turkish foreign minister to inform Italy beforehand about these conventions created uneasiness in the relations, Aloisi questioning the motives behind such arrangements, especially

¹⁴⁷ See “No. 3414. - Roumania, Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, Czechoslovakia, Turkey and Yugoslavia: Convention for the Definition of Aggression, Annex. Signed at London, July 4th, 1933”, *League of Nations Treaty Series*, vol. 148/1-2-3-4 (1934), pp. 211-19.

¹⁴⁸ *TBMM Zabıt Ceridesi*, 23 December 1933, p. 105.

¹⁴⁹ “No. 3414. - Roumania, Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, Czechoslovakia, Turkey and Yugoslavia”, p. 213.

¹⁵⁰ “Tevfik Rüşti Bey Romadan Hareket Etti”, *Cumhuriyet*, 15 July 1933, p. 3.

that signed between Turkey, the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, Romania and Czechoslovakia. This arrangement was also regarded by Aloisi as a “depart[ure] from the [usual] lines of traditional Turkish politics”.¹⁵¹ However, the definition of aggression conventions were not desired solely by Turkey. Austen Chamberlain, who had been an influential figure during the formation of the Locarno Pact in 1925 and was the half-brother of the future Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain, argued in a House of Commons session that this was an idea which many of the continental European countries wanted to realise, including France.¹⁵²

Aras therefore went to Italy to meet Mussolini and inform him directly about the reasons behind the recently signed conventions of the definition of aggression. In his meeting with *Il Duce*, he argued that the main aim behind these conventions was to make a rapprochement between Romania and the Soviet Union since it would be beneficial for the security of the Black Sea. However, since Romanian Foreign Minister Titulescu did not want to sign a direct non-aggression pact with the Soviet Union, it was decided that it should include the neighbouring countries, which led to the first agreement signed on 3 July. For the second agreement on 4 July, Aras argued that it mainly concerned the Soviet Union’s relations with the Little Entente countries and Turkey’s presence was merely due to the fact that the Soviet Union did not want to sign a convention solely with the Little Entente countries.¹⁵³ Moreover, Aras stated that there was no reason for Italy to be concerned about the recent conventions signed in London since the Soviet Union also wanted to form good relations with Italy, as Litvinov “[gave] the

¹⁵¹ “Il capo gabinetto, Aloisi, al capo del governo e ministro degli esteri, Mussolini” (10 July 1933, Rome), doc. 964, in Ministero degli affari esteri commissione per la pubblicazione dei documenti diplomatici, *I documenti diplomatici italiani settima serie: 1922-1935*, vol. XIII (1 gennaio – 15 luglio 1933) (Rome: Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato P.V., 1989), pp. 1012-13.

¹⁵² *Hansard*, HC Deb 26 May 1933, vol. 278, cc 1439-522.

¹⁵³ “Colloquio fra il capo del governo e ministro degli esteri, Mussolini, e il ministro degli esteri, Turco, Tewfik Ruschdi Bey” (11 July 1933, Rome), doc. 975, in Ministero degli affari esteri commissione per la pubblicazione dei documenti diplomatici, *I documenti diplomatici italiani settima serie: 1922-1935*, vol. XIII (1 gennaio – 15 luglio 1933) (Rome: Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato P.V., 1989), p. 1026.

utmost importance to the Treaty which [was then] being negotiated with Italy”,¹⁵⁴ an argument repeated by the German ambassador in Rome to the under-secretary at the Italian foreign ministry, Fulvio Suvich on the same day.¹⁵⁵ The Italians did not seem much concerned with the conventions signed in London, as the summary report about the meeting between Mussolini and Aras indicated. According to the report, which was sent by the director general of political affairs, Gino Buti to Suvich, the latter being also present at the meeting, there was no need to “exaggerate” the scope of these conventions and he added that whatever the case was, “Turkey [still] represent[ed] an element of considerable interest and importance for Italy” and it was in “Italy’s interest to cultivate cordial and friendly relations with Ankara”.¹⁵⁶

2.5. The Effect of the Balkan Pact (1934)

Referring to the conventions on the definition of aggression, the Turkish foreign minister once argued that every initiative and treaty around the world should be considered as a step towards world peace and security.¹⁵⁷ But perhaps the epitome of Turkish diplomacy for the maintenance of peace and security both at the regional and at the international level was the conclusion of the Balkan Pact in February 1934. The idea of a Balkan pact dated back to the early years of the new Turkish Republic. The idea was first mooted by the Turkish government as early as 1926, aimed at preserving the existing borders between the states, an idea which

¹⁵⁴ “Colloquio fra il capo del governo e ministro degli esteri, Mussolini, e il ministro degli esteri, Turco, Tewfik Ruschdi Bey” (11 July 1933, Rome), doc. 975, p. 1027.

¹⁵⁵ “Colloquio tra il sottosegretario agli esteri, Suvich, e l’ambasciatore di Germania a Roma, Hassell” (11 July 1933, Rome), doc. 976, in Ministero degli affari esteri commissione per la pubblicazione dei documenti diplomatici, *I documenti diplomatici italiani settima serie: 1922-1935*, vol. XIII (1 gennaio – 15 luglio 1933) (Rome: Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato P.V., 1989), p. 1028.

¹⁵⁶ “Il direttore generale degli affari politici, Buti, al sottosegretario agli esteri, Suvich” (11 July 1933, Rome), doc. 977, in Ministero degli affari esteri commissione per la pubblicazione dei documenti diplomatici, *I documenti diplomatici italiani settima serie: 1922-1935*, vol. XIII (1 gennaio – 15 luglio 1933) (Rome: Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato P.V., 1989), p. 1030.

¹⁵⁷ “Türkiye ve Sulh: Tefvik Rüştü Beyin Mühim Beyanatı”, *Cumhuriyet*, 15 July 1933, p. 1.

did not find support at that time.¹⁵⁸ This was largely due to the existing problems between the Balkan countries related to border clashes or the exchange of populations. However, despite these problems, relations between the Balkan countries in the 1930s seemed less problematic, as was the case with Turkish-Greek relations which became much friendlier after Venizelos's coming to power in 1928.¹⁵⁹ In this environment, a series of four Balkan conferences was held between Albania, Bulgaria, Greece, Romania, Turkey and Yugoslavia between 1930 and 1933. These conferences had an "academic" character, meaning that they only provided a venue for discussion among the signatory countries while the road to the formation of the eventual pact was developed through political engagement.¹⁶⁰

These conferences certainly paved the way for the improvement in common understanding with the exception of Albania and Bulgaria. Albania was excluded from the pact due to the fact that it became very much a tool of Italy in the Balkans and was also militarily dependent on this great power. Both Atatürk and Venizelos thought in September 1933 that this might have created problems for the integrity of the Balkan Pact, since Albanian foreign policy during this period was usually based on an understanding that "play[ed] Italy and Yugoslavia off against each other".¹⁶¹ This Albanian policy was known by the Italians. An Italian-Yugoslav agreement would, according to Aloisi, undermine this policy and would further enable Italy to extend its influence over Albania.¹⁶² Therefore, Albania, "whose activity in the field of foreign policy [was] limited to its alliance

¹⁵⁸ Soysal, *Türkiye'nin Siyasal Andlaşmaları*, p. 448.

¹⁵⁹ Barlas, *Etatism and Diplomacy in Turkey*, pp. 136-7.

¹⁶⁰ Türkeş, Mustafa, "The Balkan Pact and Its Immediate Implications for the Balkan States, 1930-1934", *Middle Eastern Studies*, 30/1 (1994), p. 133.

¹⁶¹ Türkeş, "The Balkan Pact", p. 133.

¹⁶² "Il capo gabinetto, Aloisi, al capo del governo e ministro degli esteri, Mussolini" (2 February 1934, Rome), doc. 654, in Ministero degli affari esteri commissione per la pubblicazione dei documenti diplomatici, *I documenti diplomatici italiani settima serie: 1922-1935*, vol. XIV (16 luglio 1933 – 17 marzo 1934) (Rome: Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato P.V., 1989), p. 734.

with Italy”, was not included in the pact.¹⁶³ However, Albania would want to join the Balkan Pact later, in 1937. While Turkey was supportive, Greece proposed a delay of one year in this decision due to existing problems between Albania and Greece related to the issue of foreign schools.¹⁶⁴

Bulgaria, on the other hand, did not want to join the pact mainly due to its problems with Greece, Romania and Yugoslavia. In a meeting with Mussolini in January 1934, the Bulgarian minister plenipotentiary in Rome, Ivan Valkov, set out these problems as being financial issues and the problem of the Aegean outlet with Greece; and territorial and minority problems with both Romania and Yugoslavia, those with the latter being much greater. Valkov argued that Bulgaria’s joining the Balkan Pact without settling these issues would not be welcomed by the Bulgarian people. Mussolini responded that, for the time being, it would be better for Bulgaria not to join the Balkan Pact since this would not change anything in the current position of the country in the Balkans, isolated as it was from the other Balkan countries.¹⁶⁵ Bulgaria did not join the pact in 1934, but later, in July 1938, after the Italian invasion of Albania in April that year, it signed an agreement with the Balkan Pact countries (Greece, Romania, Turkey and Yugoslavia), in which both parties undertook not to use force against one another and underlined their desire to further develop cooperation between their countries.¹⁶⁶

In the end, without Albania and Bulgaria, the Balkan Pact was signed on 9 February 1934 in Athens between Greece, Romania, Turkey and Yugoslavia. The

¹⁶³ “Il ministro a Tirana, Koch, al capo del governo e ministro degli esteri, Mussolini” (10 February 1934, Tirana), doc. 681, in Ministero degli affari esteri commissione per la pubblicazione dei documenti diplomatici, *I documenti diplomatici italiani settima serie: 1922-1935*, vol. XIV (16 luglio 1933 – 17 marzo 1934) (Rome: Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato P.V., 1989), p. 768.

¹⁶⁴ Aras, *Atatürk’ün Dış Politikası*, p. 134.

¹⁶⁵ “Colloquio fra il capo del governo e ministro degli esteri, Mussolini, e il ministro di Bulgaria a Roma, Volkov” (15 January 1934, Rome), doc. 562, in Ministero degli affari esteri commissione per la pubblicazione dei documenti diplomatici, *I documenti diplomatici italiani settima serie: 1922-1935*, vol. XIV (16 luglio 1933 – 17 marzo 1934) (Rome: Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato P.V., 1989), p. 638.

¹⁶⁶ Soysal, *Türkiye’nin Siyasal Andlaşmaları*, p. 463.

main document of this pact consisted of three articles. The first article, which presented the main understanding behind the pact, guaranteed the existing status quo in the Balkans, i.e. the current borders.¹⁶⁷ The second article set up a mutual consultation mechanism among these signatory states over “the measures to be taken in the face of events which could affect their interests”.¹⁶⁸ However, the kind of measures that could be taken within the framework of this pact was not defined in the main text, but through a secret protocol of signature providing detailed interpretations of the main text where “military agreements” were regarded as being within the limitations of these measures.¹⁶⁹ According to the protocol annexed to the pact, such measures could be taken if a Balkan country attacked another Balkan country or a non-Balkan country attacked a Balkan country in collaboration with another country. Therefore, these measures were limited to the Balkan countries.¹⁷⁰ The third and the last article of the main document concerned the ratification of the pact and it opened the door for the joining of “all Balkan countries” upon the approval of the current signatory states.¹⁷¹

Despite its regional character, however, the Balkan Pact is usually regarded in the secondary literature as an agreement that directly targeted Italy.¹⁷² Since

¹⁶⁷ According to a secret protocol of signature, these borders were defined as the current borders between Romania and Bulgaria, Romania and Yugoslavia, Albania and Yugoslavia, Albania and Greece, Yugoslavia and Bulgaria, Greece and Yugoslavia, Greece and Bulgaria, Greece and Turkey and Turkey and Bulgaria. Soysal, *Türkiye'nin Siyasal Andlaşmaları*, p. 448.

¹⁶⁸ “Türkiye Cümhuriyeti ile Yunanistan Cümhuriyeti ve Romanya ve Yugoslavya Kırallıkları arasında akdedilen Balkan Anlaşma Misakının tasdikına dair 1/887 numaralı Kanun Lâyihası ve Hariciye Encümeni Mazbatası”, Appendix to *TBMM Zabıt Ceridesi*, Devre: IV, İttima Senesi: 3, 6 March 1934, Tuesday, no. 69, p. 3; “International Documents. The Balkan Pact”, *World Affairs*, 97/1 (March 1934), p. 54.

¹⁶⁹ Soysal, *Türkiye'nin Siyasal Andlaşmaları*, p. 458.

¹⁷⁰ Soysal, *Türkiye'nin Siyasal Andlaşmaları*, p. 456.

¹⁷¹ “1/887 numaralı Kanun Lâyihası ve Hariciye Encümeni Mazbatası”, Appendix to *TBMM Zabıt Ceridesi*, 6 March 1934, no. 69, p. 3.

¹⁷² For some accounts that regarded the Balkan Pact as an initiative directly against Italy, see: Barlas, *Etatism and Diplomacy in Turkey*, p. 145; Barlas, Dilek, “Turkish Diplomacy in the Balkans and the Mediterranean: Opportunities and Limits for Middle-Power Activism in the

Italy was unhappy about the Balkan Pact, it is argued, this pact must then have been designed against that country. In fact, this pact did not directly target Italy or any other countries as was explicitly stated in the annex protocol to the pact itself: “the Balkan Pact is not aimed at any state. Its aim is to protect the borders in the Balkans against an attack started by a Balkan country”.¹⁷³ Even before the signing of the pact, the Turkish foreign minister Aras claimed on 12 March 1932 in Belgrade that he was against the idea of any pact which directly targeted a particular country, and added that the past experiences of “Turkey” before the establishment of the Turkish Republic showed that Turkey should not get into any “adventures”, thus underlining the commitment to the traditional Turkish policy of not engaging in any alliances against any particular country.¹⁷⁴ Moreover, as early as July 1933, in the meeting between Turkish Foreign Minister Aras and the Italian leader Mussolini, details of which was referred above, Aras informed Mussolini beforehand about the plans regarding the formation of a Balkan pact, a pact which aimed at a “mutual guarantee of the respective borders”. This was initially regarded by the Italian official Gino Buti as a favourable action that “could be useful for [Italian] interests” since a resolution of the border issues especially between Bulgaria and Greece could provide support for Mussolini’s long-held idea

1930s”, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 40/3 (2005), p. 444; Cantemur, Trkan, “Trkiye-İtalya İlişkileri (1930-1950)” in 38. ICANAS (Uluslararası Asya ve Kuzey Afrika Çalışmaları Kongresi (10-15.09.2007 Ankara Trkiye) Bildiriler, vol. II (Ankara: Atatrk Kltr, Dil ve Tarih Yksek Kurumu, 2012), p. 785; Çelebi, Mevlt, “Trk-Romen İlişkilerinin Balkan Antantı’na Gidişİ Srecinde çnc Gz: İtalya” in *Trkiye-Romanya İlişkileri: Geçmiş ve Gnmz Uluslararası Sempozyumu (04-06 Ekim 2017, Kstence) Bildiriler*, vol. I, Duygu Trker Çelik (ed.) (Ankara: Atatrk Araştırma Merkezi Yayınları, 2019), p. 731; Gçl, “Fascist Italy’s ‘Mare Nostrum’ Policy”, p. 818; Kelkitli, Fatma Aslı, “İki Savaş Arası Dnemde İtalya’ya Karşı Balkanlar’da Bir Dengeleme Politikası Denemesi: Balkan Antantı”, *Ankara niversitesi SBF Dergisi*, 72/2 (2017), p. 437; Ksebalaban, Hasan, *Turkish Foreign Policy: Islam, Nationalism, and Globalization* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 56; Millman, “Turkish Foreign and Security Policy 1934-42”, p. 485; Oran, Baskın, “Dnemin Bilançosu” in *Trk Dış Politikası: Kurtuluş Savaşından Bugne Olgular, Belgeler, Yorumlar*, vol. I: 1919-1980, Baskın Oran (ed.) (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2009), p. 254; Trkeş, “The Balkan Pact”, p. 128.

¹⁷³ Soysal, *Trkiye’nin Siyasal Andlaşmaları*, p. 456.

¹⁷⁴ 9 April 1932: CA, 030.10.0.0.251.693.23.

of forming a pact between Bulgaria, Greece and Turkey under the Italian umbrella.¹⁷⁵

Moreover, just after the pact was signed, verbal assurances were given to the fascist government by Greece and Turkey that this pact was not against Italy. For example, just one day after the signing of the Balkan Pact, on 10 February, the Greek and Turkish foreign ministers Dimitrios Maximos and Tevfik Rüştü Aras received the Italian minister plenipotentiary in Athens, Pier Filippo De Rossi. De Rossi was, “in a completely confidential way”, informed about the secret protocol that had been signed by the signatories to determine the scope and duration of the agreement. The Italian representative informed Rome that the scope of the agreement was only defined as being for “defensive purposes” and that it did not apply to non-Balkan states. Further, according to De Rossi’s telegram, “both ministers kept on telling me that as far as Greece and Turkey are concerned, they gave total assurance that the Balkan Pact would never be against Italy, insisting that their countries, even if they had interests in the Balkan states, had predominant interests in the Mediterranean”.¹⁷⁶

Greece even took one step further and also gave a written assurance to Italy. In a letter which was sent to Venizelos, then the opposition leader, by İnönü on 6 March 1934 in response to the former’s concerns that Greece would have to enter a war in the case that Italy attacked Yugoslavia, the Turkish Prime Minister argued that the framework of the pact was limited only to the Balkan countries and that “Italy could not attack Yugoslavia without risking a European war”.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁵ “Il direttore generale degli affari politici, Buti, al sottosegretario agli esteri, Suvich” (11 July 1933, Rome), doc. 977, in Ministero degli affari esteri commissione per la pubblicazione dei documenti diplomatici, *I documenti diplomatici italiani settima serie: 1922-1935*, vol. XIII (1 gennaio – 15 luglio 1933) (Rome: Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato P.V., 1989), p. 1029.

¹⁷⁶ “Il ministro ad Atene, De Rossi, al capo del governo e ministro degli esteri, Mussolini” (10 February 1934, Athens), doc. 680, in Ministero degli affari esteri commissione per la pubblicazione dei documenti diplomatici, *I documenti diplomatici italiani settima serie: 1922-1935*, vol. XIV (16 luglio 1933 – 17 marzo 1934) (Rome: Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato P.V., 1989), p. 767: “Ambedue ministri hanno tenuto dichiararmi che per quanto riguardava Grecia e Turchia, essi davano più ampia completa assicurazione che patto balcanico non si sarebbe mai trovato contrasto con l'Italia, insistendo che loro paesi, per quanto abbiano interessi con stati balcanici hanno preminenza interessi Mediterraneo”.

¹⁷⁷ Türkeş, “The Balkan Pact”, p. 138.

However, the Greek parliament remained unconvinced and when Greece ratified the Balkan Pact in March 1934, a reservation clause was included in the ratification document which stated that Greece would not act against any great power in any situation that emerged due to its obligations within this pact.¹⁷⁸ This clause was added largely due to the insistence of the Greek opposition leaders Michalakopoulos and Venizelos that unless such a clause was added, they would not let this pact be ratified, an action which was very much appreciated by Mussolini, who gave instructions to De Rossi to express Italy's appreciation to these two opposition leaders.¹⁷⁹ This Greek reservation, not only in discourse, but also in practice, made it impossible that this pact would operate against Italy or any other country.

If this regional pact was designed to target anything, then it would have been great power politics in general, which reached its epitome with the signing of the Four-Power Pact in 1933, as discussed earlier in this chapter. In February 1934, an article was published in the *Bulletin of International News*, a publication of the Royal Institute of Foreign Affairs (Chatham House), in which it was argued that "[there] ha[d] been the increasing tendency of these countries [in the last few years] to emancipate themselves from the political and economic leading-strings of the Western Powers".¹⁸⁰ This idea of a region free from great power influence had in fact already been reflected in Turkey's motto of "the Balkans for the Balkan people" during 1926 and 1927 when the proposal for a pact among the Balkan countries was first voiced by Turkey.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁸ "Il ministro ad Atene, De Rossi, al capo del governo e ministro degli esteri, Mussolini" (5 March 1934, Athens), doc. 773, in Ministero degli affari esteri commissione per la pubblicazione dei documenti diplomatici, *I documenti diplomatici italiani settima serie: 1922-1935*, vol. XIV (16 luglio 1933 – 17 marzo 1934) (Rome: Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato P.V., 1989), pp. 858-9.

¹⁷⁹ "Il capo del governo e ministro degli esteri, Mussolini, al ministro ad Atene, De Rossi" (9 March 1934, Rome), doc. 785, in Ministero degli affari esteri commissione per la pubblicazione dei documenti diplomatici, *I documenti diplomatici italiani settima serie: 1922-1935*, vol. XIV (16 luglio 1933 – 17 marzo 1934) (Rome: Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato P.V., 1989), p. 875.

¹⁸⁰ H. L., "The Balkan Pact", *Bulletin of International News*, 10/16 (1934), p. 4.

¹⁸¹ Barlas, Dilek, "Turkish Diplomacy in the Balkans and the Mediterranean", pp. 448-9.

Great power influence over the region was already evident. According to a report about the attitudes of the Balkan countries regarding a Balkan pact, which was sent from the Turkish ambassador in Athens in 1932 to the Turkish foreign ministry, this influence was such that the policies of individual countries such as Albania and Bulgaria did not really matter. Instead, Turkey should closely follow the policies of the great powers, “particularly France and Italy”. According to the ambassador, Italy would not “favour” the formation of a Balkan Pact since it would strengthen Yugoslavia’s position vis-à-vis Italy and it would save Albania from Italian influence.¹⁸²

Italian influence was especially manifest in Albania and Bulgaria. Yakup Kadri Karaosmanoğlu, who was the Turkish ambassador in Tirana in 1934-1935, provided an anecdote of his conversation with an Albanian MP in his memoirs, in which the Albanian MP argued:

Some of us are the servants of the Serbians, some of us the slaves of the Italians. Whoever pays more, we would wait on. But, the era of auctioning services has now finished. Now, from king to commoner, we are all under the command of “pasta-makers”.¹⁸³

In addition to this Italian political and social influence in Albania, there was also economic penetration, as explained by the same Albanian MP, the Italians paying for everything, trading, and giving gifts to everyone, thus making Albanians completely dependent on them.¹⁸⁴ This economic dependency reached such a point that according to a report sent to the Turkish foreign ministry from the Turkish embassy in Tirana, there were discussions in 1933 about a possibility of the

¹⁸² 9 November 1932: CA, 030.10.0.0.226.523.30.

¹⁸³ Karaosmanoğlu, Yakup Kadri, *Zoraki Diplomat* (Ankara: Bilgi Yayınevi, 1967), p. 64: “Kimimiz Sırp uşağıyız, kimimiz İtalyan kölesi. Hangi taraf fazla verirse oraya kapılanırız. Ama, şimdi, müzayede devri bitti artık. Şimdi, Kralımızdan candarma çavuşuna kadar hepimiz “makarnacıların” emrindeyiz”.

¹⁸⁴ Karaosmanoğlu, *Zoraki Diplomat*, p. 64. For more information on the Italian influence over the Balkans and especially in Albania, see: Stavrianos, L. S., *The Balkans since 1453* (New York: Rinehart & Company, Inc, 1958), pp. 734-6. For the economic aspects of this influence, see: Roselli, Alessandro, *Italy and Albania: Financial Relations in the Fascist Period* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2006), pp.118-29.

formation of a customs union between Albania and Italy, which put Albania in a difficult position.¹⁸⁵

The Bulgarian case, though less direct than the Albanian, was not so different. As the Turkish ambassador in Athens stated in 1932, Italy in particular had an influence over Bulgaria which increased at the beginning of the 1930s, and which was gained especially by manipulating Bulgarian revisionist aims.¹⁸⁶ In 1930, the Bulgarians provided a free harbour in Varna for Italy which had a quasi-monopoly over all automobile trade in Bulgaria. This close relationship reached a high point in October 1930 when King Boris of Bulgaria married Princess Giovanna of Italy and Mussolini acted as the “Crown’s Notary” during the newlyweds’ signing of the civil marriage act at the Town Hall,¹⁸⁷ an event which was closely followed by the Turkish government which considered even the engagement of the two as the beginning of a “rapprochement” between Bulgaria and Italy.¹⁸⁸ According to the report of the Turkish ambassador in Athens, this marriage was only possible due to Mussolini’s discussion with the Vatican since King Boris was Orthodox.¹⁸⁹ This perception of a rapprochement in the minds of the Turkish authorities was strengthened with the Bulgarian king’s visit to Italy in 1932.¹⁹⁰

The main way of countering such influence was, from the Turkish point of view, to establish a mutual understanding among the regional powers in the Balkans, an understanding which would curb great power influence over the region. This plan was known by Italy, which, not surprisingly, was displeased with

¹⁸⁵ 21 February 1933: CA, 030.10.0.0.220.486.3. See also: 25 January 1933: CA, 030.10.0.0.220.485.18.

¹⁸⁶ 9 November 1932: CA, 030.10.0.0.226.523.30.

¹⁸⁷ Groueff, Stephane, *Crown of Thorns: The Reign of King Boris III of Bulgaria, 1918-1943* (Lanham and Plymouth: Madison Books, 1998), p. 176.

¹⁸⁸ 30 July 1929: CA, 030.10.0.0.239.617.9.

¹⁸⁹ 9 November 1932: CA, 030.10.0.0.226.523.30.

¹⁹⁰ 1 May 1932: CA, 030.10.0.0.220.482.12.

this Turkish policy since the Italian government regarded the Balkan Pact as a deviation by Turkey away from Italy's Milan policy in place since 1928, which aimed at a tripartite agreement between Bulgaria, Greece and Turkey under Italian influence.¹⁹¹ Aloisi wrote to Mussolini on 2 February 1934 that, "in contrast [Italy's] Four-Power Pact", the Turkish foreign minister was following [his] "own way" and had adopted an "autonomous" policy in the Balkans.¹⁹² What concerned the Italians, thus, was not the militarily defensive nature of the Balkan Pact, but rather the idea behind it.

In order to counteract this, the Italian government tried to manipulate the existing situation in order to reduce the impact and importance of the Balkan Pact. As discussed earlier, Mussolini tried to make sure that Bulgaria was out of the pact because with Bulgaria absent, Mussolini justified his "unfavourable" position towards the pact by arguing that it targeted and encircled Bulgaria and thus was far removed from maintaining peace and security in the region.¹⁹³ In fact, as the process of the Balkan Pact showed, it did not target Bulgaria. On the contrary, Aras, for example, explained his discontent about the situation by stating in the Turkish parliament "I assure you that just like the other parties, we, too, more than anyone else, very much wanted [Bulgaria's] joining [the Balkan Pact], but it did not happen. This matter was made up for by leaving the pact open for [Bulgaria's]

¹⁹¹ Barlas, "Friends or Foes?", pp. 239-43.

¹⁹² "Il capo gabinetto, Aloisi, al capo del governo e ministro degli esteri, Mussolini" (2 February 1934, Rome), doc. 654, p. 733: "Forte della posizione raggiunta sotto i nostri auspici nei riguardi greci e mediterranei, Ruschdi bey, in contrapposto al nostro Patto a Quattro ..."

¹⁹³ "Il capo del governo e ministro degli esteri, Mussolini, agli ambasciatori ad Ankara, Lojacono, a Berlino, Cerruti, a Mosca, Attolico, a Parigi, Pignatti, a Varsavia, Bastianni, a Washington, Rosso, e ai Ministri ad Atene, De Rossi, a Belgrado, Galli, a Bucarest, Sola, a Budapest, Colonna, a Praga, Rocco, a Sofia, Cora, a Tirana, Koch, e a Vienna Preziosi" (14 January 1934, Rome), doc. 556, in Ministero degli affari esteri commissione per la pubblicazione dei documenti diplomatici, *I documenti diplomatici italiani settima serie: 1922-1935*, vol. XIV (16 luglio 1933 – 17 marzo 1934) (Rome: Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato P.V., 1989), p. 634.

participation”.¹⁹⁴ The absence of Bulgaria was regarded as an obstacle to the effectiveness of this pact.¹⁹⁵

The second attempt to reduce the impact of the Balkan Pact came through Albania since it had to be excluded from the pact due to its dependency on Italian policy and economy. This issue was raised by an MP for Kocaeli, Sırrı Bellioğlu in the Turkish parliamentary meeting on 6 March 1934, when the ratification of the Balkan Pact was being discussed. After questioning why Bulgaria did not join the pact, Sırrı Bellioğlu referred to the situation of Albania and argued:

If Albania’s not signing this [pact], whose name and existence, as I gather, were not mentioned at all in the *esbabı mucibe mazbatası* [the document that outlined the leading reasons for a governmental proposal], was [due to] the influence of a foreign power to which [Albania] was subjected, I [can only] look at it from this dais with endless compassion and hope that [Albania] too will join our *kafile* (group).¹⁹⁶

Aras tried to assure Sırrı Bellioğlu that the Turkish government could not disregard Albania, a country with which Turkey had one of “the oldest and deepest” relations, to such an extent that “half of many families still live here and half there”.¹⁹⁷ However, Aras did not respond to that part of Sırrı Bellioğlu’s speech where he implied that Italy was the reason for Albania’s failure to join the Balkan Pact. Despite the fact that Italy’s attempts to undermine the success of the

¹⁹⁴ *TBMM Zabıt Ceridesi*, 6 March 1934, p. 15: “Size temin ederim ki bütün akitler gibi biz de herkesten daha fazla olarak bu iştiraki çok diledik, fakat olmadı. Bu cihet misakı kendilerinin iştirakine açık bırakarak telâfi edilmiştir”.

¹⁹⁵ H. L., “The Balkan Pact”, p. 10.

¹⁹⁶ *TBMM Zabıt Ceridesi*, 6 March 1934, p. 18: “Eğer esbabı mucibe mazbatasında büsbütün isminin ve cisminin zikredilmediğini gördüğüm Arnavutluğun buna imza etmemesi, eğer nüfuzuna tâbi olduğu haricî bir kuvvetin tesiri ise bu kürsüden ben ona nihayetsiz bir merhametle bakarım ve temenni ederim ki o da bizim kafilimize iltihak etsin”.

¹⁹⁷ *TBMM Zabıt Ceridesi*, 6 March 1934, p. 18: “Kaldı ki Arnavut milletile Türk milleti arasındaki münasebetler o kadar eski ve o kadar derindir ki hâlâ ailelerin bir çoklarının yarısı burada ise yarısı da oradadır”.

Balkan Pact were known to the Turkish government, Aras thanked Italy, along with many other countries, for “the trust it showed towards [Turkey]”.¹⁹⁸

This “trust” was, however, more formality than reality, as demonstrated so far in this chapter. In a meeting on 9 March 1934, Suvich explicitly told Numan Menemencioğlu, then the under-secretary general in the Turkish foreign ministry, that “[Menemencioğlu] could draw the attention [of İsmet İnönü and Tevfik Rüştü Aras] to the uselessness of the Balkan Pact” since it could not change the general policies of Bulgaria and Yugoslavia. Moreover, he underlined the fact that, for Greece, the basis of its foreign policy was not the Balkan Pact but its friendly relations with Italy which could in fact further damage the effectiveness of the Pact itself. Therefore, Turkey, too, should act on the same lines as Greece. Menemencioğlu, according to the report, confirmed Turkey’s desire to pursue a peaceful policy in the Mediterranean which was based on a mutual understanding between Turkey, Greece and Italy.¹⁹⁹ Therefore, in general, what made the Balkan Pact as an important event within the framework of Turkey’s relations with Italy was not that the Balkan Pact directly targeted Italy.

2.6. Conclusion

The Balkan Pact was important within the framework of Turkey’s relations with Italy not because the pact was related directly to Italy but because it highlighted the divergence of approach between the two countries over how they regarded the region and operated in international politics. Whereas Turkey, especially after its entry into the League of Nations, favoured the idea of collective security both at the regional and international level, Italy based its foreign policy on bilateral arrangements or alliances, exemplified by its policies during the formation of the

¹⁹⁸ *TBMM Zabut Ceridesi*, 6 March 1934, p. 15.

¹⁹⁹ “Colloquio fra il sottosegretario agli esteri, Suvich, e il segretario generale agli esteri turco, Numan Bey” (9 March 1934, Rome), doc. 787, in Ministero degli affari esteri commissione per la pubblicazione dei documenti diplomatici, *I documenti diplomatici italiani settima serie: 1922-1935*, vol. XIV (16 luglio 1933 – 17 marzo 1934) (Rome: Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato P.V., 1989), p. 876: “Gli ho detto che avrebbe potuto attirare la loro attenzione sulla inutilità del Patto balcanico ...”; Also see: “Il capo gabinetto, Aloisi, al capo del governo e ministro degli esteri, Mussolini” (2 February 1934, Rome), doc. 654, p. 734.

Four-Power Pact in 1933 and the Balkan Pact in 1934. Despite these divergences in the foreign policy choices of the two countries, however, the relations between Italy and Turkey from 1932 to the beginning of 1934 proceeded without major problems. One of the major crises in Turkish-Italian relations was to occur in March 1934 when Mussolini made his well-known speech outlining his foreign policy.



CHAPTER 3

TURKISH PERCEPTION AND PORTRAYAL OF THE ITALIAN THREAT (1934-1936)

1932-1934 was a period when the divergence between Turkey and Italy over how they positioned themselves within international politics started to become clearer. This divergence became much more visible from March 1934 when Mussolini gave a speech about the solution, in ex-minister Grandi's words, of Italy's "vital problem"²⁰⁰ of territorial expansion. It was now that the aggressive change in Italian foreign policy, the seeds of which had already been in place as examined in the previous chapter, became manifest in practice.

In the secondary literature on Turkish-Italian relations in the interwar period, Mussolini's speech on 18 March 1934 is usually considered as one of the turning points in the relations between Turkey and Italy.²⁰¹ According to Barlas, this speech "heralded the transition in Italian-Turkish relations from "cooling-off" [1932-1934] to "frost"" since it "renew[ed] [the] fear of Italy".²⁰² Moreover, in one of the most popular textbooks on Turkish foreign policy written by William Hale, it is argued that this speech was one of "Mussolini's most overt threats against Turkey".²⁰³

²⁰⁰ Grandi, Dino, "The Foreign Policy of the Duce", *Foreign Affairs*, 12/4 (1934), p. 566.

²⁰¹ Barlas, "Friends or Foes?", p. 247; Barlas and Güvenç, *Türkiye'nin Akdeniz Siyaseti*, p. 199; Çelebi, "Türkiye-İtalya İlişkilerini Etkileyen Faktörler", p. 111; Güçlü, "Fascist Italy's 'Mare Nostrum' Policy", p. 817; Papuççular, "İki Savaş Arası Dönem Türk Dış ve Güvenlik Politikasında Oniki Ada", p. 148.

²⁰² Barlas, "Friends or Foes?", p. 247.

²⁰³ Hale, *Turkish Foreign Policy*, p. 46.

By analysing Mussolini's speech and the Italian invasion of Ethiopia in 1935-1936, this chapter argues that the main concern of the Turkish government during this period was more the insecure international environment to which fascist Italy contributed in 1934-1936 rather than a direct Italian threat against Turkish territories. In addition, it contends that the Turkish perception of the Italian threat was skilfully played with by the Turkish government and the Turkish press in order to highlight the decline of the collective security mechanism around the world as well as to raise the issue of Turkey's need of further security in this period both at the domestic and international levels.

3.1. Mussolini's 1934 Speech and its Reception in Turkey

3.1.1. The Speech

Mussolini's speech in the second quinquennial assembly of the fascist regime on 18 March 1934 outlined the domestic and foreign policy of fascist Italy. The most sensational part of the speech was where he explicitly claimed Asia and Africa as the two "historical objectives of Italy", a claim which according to him could be justified by the geography of the country as well as its history. Geographically, he justified these imperialist objectives of Italy by arguing that "of the great western powers of Europe, the closest to Africa and Asia is Italy".²⁰⁴ This implied that Italy wanted to establish its hegemony over the "entire" Mediterranean and to extend into the Middle East, a desire which was an "exaggeration of Liberal Italy's colonial dreams".²⁰⁵ Moreover, Mussolini's imperialist discourse challenged not

²⁰⁴ Susmel, Edoardo and Duilio Susmel, *Opera omnia di Benito Mussolini: dal patto a quattro all'inaugurazione della provincia di Littoria*, vol. xxvi (Florence: La Fenice, 1958), pp. 191-2: "Gli obiettivi storici dell'Italia hanno due nomi: Asia ed Africa. ... Di tutte le grandi potenze occidentali d'Europa, la più vicina all'Africa e all'Asia è l'Italia".

²⁰⁵ Cassels, Alan, "Was There a Fascist Foreign Policy? Tradition and Novelty", *The International History Review*, 5/2 (1983), p. 261.

only the British and French hegemony over their mandates in the region, but also the international status quo.²⁰⁶

Mussolini also justified his claims by referring to the history of Italy, a history which was mainly defined by its “key” role and successful conduct in diplomatic and commercial relationships.²⁰⁷ According to Mussolini, all these historical ties “between the East and the West”, the West meaning Rome, should be renewed. In another speech he delivered in December 1933, *Il Duce* stated these ties dated back to the period of the Roman Empire and argued that “now Rome and the peoples of the Mediterranean are prepared to restore the factor of unity under Fascist renaissance”.²⁰⁸ Mussolini’s discourse on making Rome “a bridge between East and West” as well as the revival of the Italian interest in understanding “Islam and the Arab world”, for example, through the *Istituto per L’Oriente*, established in 1921, which published the journal *Oriente Moderno*, was, according to Arielli, in fact a cover-up for the Italian aim of penetration into the region.²⁰⁹

Mussolini then moved on to another discussion to justify the “historical objectives” of Italy, which was the issue of population, the importance of which was demonstrated by his quoting of Nicolò Machiavelli and Pietro Verri about the role of population in the power and security of a state.²¹⁰ The population issue had also been referred in Grandi’s article on Italian foreign policy in July 1934, an article which was considered by the then Turkish ambassador in Washington Mehmet Münir Ertegün as “a clear expression of Italy’s long-held expansionist

²⁰⁶ Williams, Manuela A., *Mussolini’s Propaganda Abroad: Subversion in the Mediterranean and the Middle East, 1935–1940* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 30.

²⁰⁷ Williams, *Mussolini’s Propaganda Abroad*, p. 30.

²⁰⁸ Williams, *Mussolini’s Propaganda Abroad*, p. 35.

²⁰⁹ Arielli, Nir, *Fascist Italy and the Middle East, 1933-40* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 32-3.

²¹⁰ Susmel and Susmel, *Opera omnia di Benito Mussolini*, p. 191.

desires”.²¹¹ In this document, which summarised Grandi’s article in Turkish, one paragraph, which was underlined, was considered the most important, and that was the one on the relation between the increasing population and the need for colonies in Italy. Grandi wrote:

Ours is a vital problem that involves our very existence and our future, a future of peace, tranquillity and work for a population of 42 million souls, which will number 50 million in another fifteen years. Can this population live and prosper in a territory half the size of that of Spain and Germany and lacking raw materials and natural resources to meet its vital needs, pent up in a closed sea beyond which its commerce lies, a sea the outlets of which are owned by other nations ...?²¹²

Apart from this expression of Italy’s expansionist aims, Mussolini’s speech also covered other issues related to how fascist Italy perceived international politics in general. The Italian leader underlined his country’s good relations with its neighbours and expressed his desire that relations should develop further with Yugoslavia.²¹³ Mussolini then turned his attention to Italy’s need for rearmament, arguing that this was necessary for Italy given that there was a need to reform the League of Nations due to the organisation’s failure over the materialisation of disarmament as well as its ineffectiveness when Germany left the institution in late 1933. He explicitly stated that “it is a necessity to become militarily strong. Not to attack, but to be able to confront any situation”.²¹⁴ This speech thus not only reflected the imperialist policies of Italy, but also demonstrated the Italian perspective on the most pressing issues of the time in international politics such as the position of Germany and the failure of disarmament conferences, which eventually ended up in deadlock. In such an environment, Italy should have the right to increase armaments in the country. Overall, one might argue that

²¹¹ 23 August 1934: CA, 030.10.0.0.237.604.22.

²¹² Grandi, “The Foreign Policy of the Duce”, p. 566; 23 August 1934: CA, 030.10.0.0.237.604.22.

²¹³ Susmel and Susmel, *Opera omnia di Benito Mussolini*, p. 188.

²¹⁴ Susmel and Susmel, *Opera omnia di Benito Mussolini*, p. 189: “E necessario essere militarmente forti. Non per attaccare, ma per essere in grado di fronteggiare qualsiasi situazione”.

Mussolini's speech was not merely about Italian expansionist aims, but was a reflection of the already existing divergences in the approaches of Italy and Turkey in the face of the international environment of the late interwar period.

3.1.2. The Rome Protocols

In addition to its content, Mussolini's speech was also important due to the time in which it was delivered. First of all, delivering such a significant speech in the second five-year assembly of the fascist regime was a message to the world that now fascism had entered a second, and more aggressive, phase. As Dino Grandi later announced, "the first constructive phase of [Italy's] foreign policy [was] closed [and] fascism [had] placed Italy's problem before Europe".²¹⁵

Another reason that made the timing of this speech meaningful was the signing of the Rome Protocols between Austria, Hungary and Italy on 17 March 1934, just a day before Mussolini's speech. On 17 March, three protocols were signed between these countries in Rome after discussions among the three leaders: Italian leader Mussolini, Hungarian Prime Minister Gyula Gömbös and Austrian Chancellor Engelbert Dollfuss. By signing the first protocol, these countries undertook the responsibility "to concert together on all the problems which particularly interest them", a mechanism which could be initiated whenever "at least one of them may consider this course opportune".²¹⁶ The second and third protocols concerned trade and economic relations between these three countries.²¹⁷ According to Robertson, the Rome Protocols were in fact designed to counter German influence in Southeastern Europe even though the protocols did not have any binding effect over the signatories. In Germany, the protocols initially

²¹⁵ Grandi, "The Foreign Policy of the Duce", p. 566.

²¹⁶ H. L., "The Rome Protocols and the Question of the Danube Basin", *Bulletin of International News*, 13/11 (1936), p. 3.

²¹⁷ H. L., "The Rome Protocols", pp. 3-4.

achieved their aim since they were regarded in Berlin as a “formidable setback” to the German policy in the region, which reportedly made Mussolini “elated”.²¹⁸

3.1.3. Turkey’s Reception of the Rome Protocols and the Speech

From the Turkish perspective, too, these protocols were regarded as a counteract by Italy to lessen the German influence in the region and to prevent Anschluss. However, according to the report from the Turkish embassy in Rome, Italy would not consider any military action not only because of its unwillingness to do so, but also because of its insufficient military power for such an action.²¹⁹ The Turkish embassy in Budapest, on the other hand, underlined the fact that Italy’s approaching Austria and Hungary was also an act against the French influence in the region as well as against the Little Entente. Moreover, Hungary and Italy’s position on the Balkan Pact was, according to the report, negative and thus there was a possibility that Mussolini might also want to include Bulgaria in this “bloc”.²²⁰ Therefore, in the Turkish official view, the protocols were a reflection of Mussolini’s attempt to establish his own hegemony in Southeast Europe and the Balkans.

Discussions regarding the Rome Protocols were also to be found in Turkish newspapers, focusing on the significance of the Rome Protocols for the Little Entente and the Balkan Pact as well as for Germany. In an article in *Cumhuriyet*, the Rome Protocols between Austria, Hungary and Italy were regarded as an action against the Little Entente and the Balkan Pact.²²¹ Similarly, reporting the claims of the Italian ambassador in Sofia about the Balkan Pact, *Akşam* argued that “Mussolini did not favour the pact, whose nature he did not know and which was

²¹⁸ Robertson, *Mussolini as Empire-Builder*, p. 68.

²¹⁹ 12 March 1934: CA, 030.10.0.0.237.602.7.

²²⁰ 12 March 1934: CA, 030.10.0.0.237.602.7.

²²¹ “Roma Müzakereleri Bitti”, *Cumhuriyet*, 18 March 1934, p. 1 and p. 6.

against the main principles of Italian foreign policy”.²²² The publications in *Cumhuriyet* and *Akşam* therefore also reflected the significance of the Rome Protocols within the framework of the Balkan Pact, which had been signed just a month before. Moreover, the protocols were also considered as being against Germany when it was argued in *Akşam* that “Italy was playing the role of a big brother for Austria and Hungary”, which was, according to the newspaper, a role that “was enough to create anxiety and agitation”.²²³ This view was also shared by Ahmet Şükrü Esmer, who claimed that the Rome Protocols were designed to ensure the political independence of Austria and thus to prevent a possible German annexation of the country.²²⁴ Sharing “news that aroused anxiety in Europe”, *Cumhuriyet* had another concern regarding the Rome Protocols, which was Italy’s supplying arms to Hungary.²²⁵ Even though this news was based on incorrect information and was denied by the Italian authorities,²²⁶ it appeared in the discussions in Turkish newspapers, thus magnifying the significance attributed to these protocols.

The reaction of the Turkish press to Mussolini’s speech was more negative than that to the Rome Protocols. The part of the speech where Mussolini directly pointed to Asia and Africa as Italy’s destination for Italian expansion, in particular, gave rise, as *Oriente Moderno* was aware, “to very severe comments”.²²⁷ Yunus Nadi wrote an editorial in *Cumhuriyet* on 21 March 1934, where he criticised

²²² “Mussolini Balkan Misakına Rız Olmamış”, *Akşam*, 29 March 1934, p. 1: “Mussolini, mahiyetini bilmediği ve İtalyanın haricî siyasetinin esaslı prensiplerine zıt olan bu misakı tasvip etmedi”.

²²³ “Roma Konuşması Endişe Uyandırdı”, *Akşam*, 22 March 1934, p. 5: “İtalya, Avusturya ve Macaristana karşı ağabey rolü yapıyor. Bu rol endişe ve heyecan doğurmağa kâfidir”.

²²⁴ Ahmet Şükrü, “Haftalık Siyasi İcmal”, *Milliyet*, 23 March 1934, p. 4.

²²⁵ “İtalya, Macaristanı Silahlandırıyor mu?”, *Cumhuriyet*, 19 March 1934, p. 1; “Roma Müzakereleri Bitti”, *Cumhuriyet*, 18 March 1934, p. 1 and p. 6.

²²⁶ 12 March 1934: CA, 030.10.0.0.237.602.7.

²²⁷ R[ossi], E[ttore], “Inopportuni commenti della stampa turca a un discorso di S. E. Mussolini”, *Oriente Moderno*, 14/4 (April 1934), p. 154.

Mussolini's "warlike and aggressive" rhetoric, a rhetoric which the world had tried to and had finally begun to forget. It was exactly this rhetoric which, according to Yunus Nadi, would be of great concern for "this imperialist policy, bringing to mind the relapse of a disease, would certainly greatly shock the other nations of the world, which are working heart and soul for the establishment of a stable peace".²²⁸ For many other Turkish journalists as well, the speech did not bring anything positive for world peace. An article in *Akşam* on 23 March reflected this, succinctly noting that "apparently, the spring of 1934 did not bring the flowers of peace to Europe".²²⁹ Ahmet Şükrü Esmer expressed the same sentiment when he stated that Mussolini, by giving the speech, certainly did not serve peace and order.²³⁰ Mehmet Asım Us, a CHP MP for Artvin as well as the editor-in-chief of the newspaper *Vakit*, argued in an editorial titled "Mussolini Harp İstemiyor mu?" (Doesn't Mussolini Want War?) that it was not possible to see any connection between Mussolini's last speech and peace-loving deeds since one could not be sure quite what Mussolini would bring to Asia and Africa in his airplanes, "books and goods" or "bombs and grenades".²³¹

From the perspective of the Turkish press, therefore, Mussolini's speech was definitely not in tune with the efforts to preserve world peace. Further, the Turkish press regarded it as an extension of an imperialist mindset. In another article which appeared in *Akşam* on 21 March, Mussolini's declared intention to civilise countries in Asia and Africa was considered as "a lie of the old colon[ialism] and imperialism". Titled "*Aut Caesar, aut nihil...*", meaning either emperor or nothing, the article considered the shift in Italian foreign policy, which

²²⁸ [Abalıoğlu], Yunus Nadi, "M. Mussolininin Son Nutku", *Cumhuriyet*, 21 March 1934, p. 1: "Bir hastalığın nüksetmesini andıran bu emperyalist politika, canla başla sulhun istikrarını temine çalışan diğer dünya memleketlerini muhakkak büyük bir hayrete düşürecektir".

²²⁹ Politikacı, "Sulh Ümitleri Azalıyor!", *Akşam*, 23 March 1934, p. 1.

²³⁰ [Esmer], Ahmet Şükrü, "Haftalık Siyasi İcmal", *Milliyet*, 23 March 1934, p. 4.

²³¹ [Us], Mehmet Asım, "Mussolini Harp İstemiyor mu?", *Vakit*, 25 March 1934, p. 1 and p. 4.

had begun to reflect an imperialist mindset.²³² This article was regarded by Ettore Rossi as “the first” example among the articles in the Turkish press which “severely” criticised Mussolini’s speech.²³³ One other example of severe criticism in the Turkish press was Esmer’s claim that the speech, which had the smell of “the imperialism of the pre-war [period]”,²³⁴ was the most provocative speech from Rome to date.²³⁵ However, perhaps the most interesting publication was Yunus Nadi’s editorial on 21 March since it directly criticised not only the expansionist Italian policy, but also the quality of the Italian administration in its colonies, a criticism which was in fact quite out of order considering that it was a common knowledge that *Cumhuriyet* had very close links with the Turkish government at that time.

Will our ambitions in Africa lead us, for example, to establish rule over Ethiopia? Will we not be in difficulty in giving an answer if this country [Ethiopia] rises up and says, first show the civilisation you wish to spread over the world to the oppressed people who still complain in the most desperate manner of your administration in Tripoli and Benghazi?²³⁶

The press also criticised the fact that Mussolini’s speech was one of ambiguity since it referred only to cultural and economic expansion into Asia and Africa, what he meant by this expansion remaining uncertain. In a column called “Halkın Sesi” (Voice of People) in *Son Posta*, a Turkish newspaper which would later be known for its opposition during the presidency of İsmet İnönü, a certain Hasip from Turan Coffeehouse in Çemberlitaş expressed frustration about

²³² Politikacı, “Aut Caesar, Aut Nihil...”, *Akşam*, 21 March 1934, pp. 1-2.

²³³ R[ossi], “Inopportuni commenti della stampa turca”, p. 154.

²³⁴ [Esmer], Ahmet Şükrü, “Haftalık Siyasi İcmal”, *Milliyet*, 23 March 1934, p. 4.

²³⁵ [Esmer], Ahmet Şükrü, “Haftalık Siyasi İcmal”, *Milliyet*, 23 March 1934, p. 4.

²³⁶ [Abaloğlu], Yunus Nadi, “M. Mussolininin Son Nutku”, p. 1: “Afrikada arzumuzu meselâ Habeşistana mı hâkim kılacağız? Ya bu memleket kalkar da; siz dünyaya yaymak istediğiniz medeniyeti varın evvelâ Trablusgarp ve Bingazide hâlâ idarenizden en feci suretlerde şikâyet eden mazlum bir halk üzerinde gösterin, derse cevap vermek hususunda müşkülâta maruz kalmaz mıyız?”

Mussolini's lack of straight talking. Mussolini could not "say openly that we are a peace-loving [country], that we certainly do not want war [and] that we do not have its eye on the territories of other [countries]", Hasip concluding that "we have had it up to here with these mealy-mouthed words of diplomats".²³⁷

The Turkish press also discussed Mussolini's speech within the framework of Turkey's bilateral relations with Italy. The nature of the publications in the Turkish press did not reflect a 'fear of Italy', but were rather aimed at demonstrating the strength of Turkey and at intimidating Italy. In the article on 21 March, Yunus Nadi argued that Mussolini was clearly not thinking of Turkey in his speech since there existed a "friendship" between the two countries. However, in addition to this friendship, the editor-in-chief claimed that "Turkey's ability to defend its borders and rights with might and main" was another reason for the speech not being directed at Turkey, Yunus Nadi's remark being an implicit reference to Italy's inability to attack Turkish territories given Turkey's strength and determination.²³⁸

However, perhaps the most interesting example of this implied threat against Italy was to be found in a series of three articles, "Danoncio'ya Açık Mektup" (Open Letter to D'Annunzio) which appeared in *Milliyet* and were written by Aka Gündüz, or, to give his full name, Enis Avni Akagündüz, who was then a CHP MP for Ankara. Directly addressing Gabriele D'Annunzio, who was the famous Italian poet and, as the ex-Italian foreign minister Carlo Sforza later put it, "the inventor of fascism",²³⁹ Aka Gündüz directly targeted the claims made by Mussolini in his speech and he tried to demonstrate that Turkey could not be one of those countries in Asia and Africa that Italy wanted to expand against. In his first article, Aka Gündüz claimed that the Italians in essence were good people but that they might "be easily scared", "easily believe" and "easily rely on someone" especially when they saw a person, who "talks a lot", "makes

²³⁷ "Halkın Sesi. Barut Fıçısına Ateş Vermek Meselesi", *Son Posta*, 2 April 1934, p. 2: "Açıktan açığa biz sulhçüyüz, kat'iyen harp etmek istemeyiz, kimsenin toprağında gözlerimiz yoktur, diyemiyor. Bu lâstikli diplomat lâflarından artık bıktık usandık".

²³⁸ Yunus Nadi, "M. Mussolininin Son Nutku", p. 1.

²³⁹ Sforza, "D'Annunzio, Inventor of Fascism", pp. 269-71.

extravagant promises” and “frowns”, apparently referring to Mussolini’s recent speech.²⁴⁰ Further, Aka Gündüz argued that Italy had not had any heroes other than Cavour (Camillo Paolo Filippo Giulio Benso) and Guiseppe Garibaldi, the two important names of the Italian Unification, thus indirectly suggesting that Mussolini was not one of them.²⁴¹

In the second part of the open letter to D’Annunzio, Aka Gündüz this time referred to the past, to the period when Italy was one of the occupying powers in Turkey during the National Liberation War of 1919-1922. This article was more aggressive against Italy since it was based on the memory of Italy’s expansionist aims in Turkey, namely in Antalya. Titled “İtalya ve Antalya” (Italy and Antalya), the article emphasised the inability of Italy to acquire Antalya in the period of the Liberation War and compared the assets of this city with the current Italian colonies of Benghazi, Tripoli and Tobruk.

... Our motherland called Turkey is very beautiful as well. Especially the coasts of the Mediterranean, especially İzmir, and even more so Antalya... It is also a celestial heaven in terms of economy, industry and trade. ... How much are Benghazi, Tripoli and Tobruk worth? Is it even worth mentioning Tunis, Fez, Alexandria and Beirut?²⁴²

D’Annunzio was a deliberate choice for Aka Gündüz to target, not only because he was one of the foremost people among the fascists, but also due to his works, such as *Merope*, a collection of poems which the Italian poet originally published in the well-known Italian newspaper *Il Corriere della Sera* between 1911 and 1912, during the Italo-Turkish War in Tripoli and was “a work of propaganda” to boost

²⁴⁰ Aka Gündüz, “Bir İtalyan İyi Bir İnsandır”, *Milliyet*, 30 March 1934, p. 3.

²⁴¹ Aka Gündüz, “Bir İtalyan İyi Bir İnsandır”, p. 3.

²⁴² Aka Gündüz, “İtalya ve Antalya”, *Milliyet*, 31 March 1934, p. 3: “Türkiye denilen bizim vatan da çok güzeldir. Hele Akdeniz kıyıları, hele İzmir, bilhassa ve hele Antalya... .. Antalya yok mu Antalya? ... İktisadî, sınaî ve ticarî bakımlardan da cennet mi cennettir. ... Bingazi, Trabulus, Tobruk kaç para eder? Tunusun, Fasın, İskenderiyenin, Berutun lâfı mı olur?”

the image of the Italian navy.²⁴³ One of the poems in this collection was called “La canzone dei Dardanelli” (The songs of the Dardanelles), demonstrating D’Annunzio’s connection with discussions over Italian claims to Turkey. In the third and last letter, Aka Gündüz again referred to these Italian claims by addressing D’Annunzio:

What do you want? Say [it] clearly! ... Our Ankara? Here’s an easy way: Go to a bookstore that sells schoolbooks. Buy a map of these places [that you have your eye on]. Put [them] in your pocket. [Then], go around bragging that all this is mine.²⁴⁴

Aka Gündüz’s explicit references to the Italian claims over Anatolia were therefore one of the rare pieces in the Turkish press that directly examined Mussolini’s speech in relation to Italian claims over Turkey. Even though Aka Gündüz directly addressed his letters to D’Annunzio, the content and timing of these letters suggested that they were about Mussolini’s recent speech.

The Turkish press, however, did not simply discuss Mussolini’s speech on the basis of a possible threat to Turkey, but it also engaged with it in a much wider way, for example, using the speech of Mussolini to justify Turkey’s need for an increase in defence and armament. In an article which appeared in *Cumhuriyet* on 21 March titled “Kurban Olmamak İstersek...” (“If we don’t want to be sacrificed...”), a reference to *Kurban Bayramı* which was then to be celebrated in a few days, it was argued that even though it was a time of peace, it was still necessary to be prepared to protect one’s own country from any possible threat, an argument which the article associated with Mussolini, who “has just announced his intention to expand into Asia and Africa”. If the imperialist powers armed themselves on the pretext of protecting themselves, the article reasoned, then peace-loving nations should reserve their right to increase their armaments “a thousand times more” than those imperialist powers, indicating that it was these

²⁴³ Re, Lucia, “Gabriele D’Annunzio’s Theater of Memory: Il Vittoriale degli Italiani / Il teatro della memoria di Gabriele D’Annunzio: Il Vittoriale degli Italiani”, *The Journal of Decorative and Propaganda Arts*, 3 (1987), p. 20.

²⁴⁴ Aka Gündüz, “Manto ve Kanto”, *Milliyet*, 1 April 1934, p. 3: “Ne istiyorsun? Açık söyle! ... Bizim Ankarayı mı? Kolayı var: mektep kitapları satan bir kitapçıya git. Bu yerlerin birer haritasını al. Cebine koy. Hepsi benimdir, diye övüne, övüne dolaş”.

expansionist powers which in fact forced other countries to protect themselves better. As a solution, the article proposed that, in order not to be sacrificed as a country, Turkish people should donate the money to Türk Tayyare Cemiyeti (the Turkish Aviation Association) instead of sacrificing an animal.²⁴⁵

Moreover, Mussolini's speech was regarded by the Turkish press not only as an indication of the problems related to the efforts for disarmament, but also of the weakening role of the League of Nations in world politics, Muharrem Feyzi Togay arguing, for example, that in his speech Mussolini "buried" the League of Nations due to its ineffectiveness regarding the disarmament issue, thus clearly demonstrating, according to the author, just how "delicate" the political climate in Europe was.²⁴⁶ The sections of the speech related to the issue of rearmament were thus taken as an opportunity to justify the Turkish need for security in the press.

Overall, the Turkish press's coverage of the Rome Protocols and Mussolini's speech was a negative one and perceived as such by the Italians. Ettore Rossi, basing himself on an article published in the Italian weekly newspaper *Il Messaggero degli Italiani*, which was published in Istanbul under the ownership of Gilberto Primi,²⁴⁷ argued in *Oriente Moderno* that these publications in the Turkish press were a reoccurrence of the Turkish "mentality" of foreign occupation period, suggesting that this was unfortunate for the relations:

Unfortunately, in this [Mehmed Asım Bey's article "Mussolini Harp İstemiyor mu?" in *Vakit* on 25 March] and similar articles we find again the mentality, which can never be deplored enough, of the press in the immediate post-war period, those suspicions, those apprehensions that for so many years up to 1927 clouded relations between the two great Mediterranean countries which have so many political and economic interests in common. It was to be hoped that, after the new relations

²⁴⁵ "Kurban Olmamak İstersek...", *Cumhuriyet*, 21 March 1934, p. 1.

²⁴⁶ [Togay], Muharrem Feyzi, "Silah Meselesi ve Cemiyeti Akvam", *Cumhuriyet*, 22 March 1934, p. 2.

²⁴⁷ Gilberto Primi, who had published a book on the occupation of İzmir, was also the owner of the daily newspaper called *Beyoğlu*, which was published in French. This newspaper, according to Pantaleone Sergi was a supporter of the Axis Powers during the Second World War. Sergi, Pantaleone, "Mediterraneo d'esuli, migranti, stampa e affari: Il progetto di un quotidiano italiano in Turchia", *Daedalus*, 5 (2014), pp. 99-100.

initiated by the Milan meeting between Mussolini and Tevfik Rüşdi Bey and sanctioned by solemn pacts, such a mentality, such distrust, and insults for a country such as ours which is a sincere friend of Turkey would have completely vanished.²⁴⁸

Ettore Rossi's rhetoric of 'groundless suspicions' of Turkey was in fact one that would continuously be adopted by Italian newspapers as well as the Italian authorities whenever Turkey raised a criticism of Italian actions in this period, other examples of which will be discussed further in the following chapters.

Ettore Rossi was not alone in his displeasure over the publications in the Turkish press. On 23 March 1934, the undersecretary in the Italian foreign ministry, Suvich, received the Turkish ambassador to Rome, Vasıf Çınar and claimed that the publications in the Turkish press were not in conformity with the existing "friendship" between the two countries. Moreover, Suvich further argued that Mussolini's speech did not target Turkey and explained his position, providing three main reasons. Firstly, Mussolini did not refer to any territorial expansion in his speech but only to the improvement of economic and cultural relations with countries in Asia and Africa, there thus being "no reason for alarm". Secondly, Mussolini had talked about countries that Italy had not established frequent relations with and thus Turkey, having "multiple and intense" relationships with Italy, could not be numbered among them. Lastly, Suvich argued that when Mussolini referred to the geographical proximity of Italy to Asia and Africa, he did not mean the places closest to Italy, but that Italy was the closest country to these regions among all European great powers.²⁴⁹

²⁴⁸ R[ossi], "Inopportuni commenti della stampa turca", p. 154. "Purtroppo, in questo e in altri simili articoli ritroviamo la non mai abbastanza deplorata mentalità dei commenti di stampa dell'immediato dopo-guerra: quei sospetti, quelle apprensioni che per tanti anni, fino al 1927, intorbidarono le relazioni dei due grandi Paesi mediterranei che hanno tanti comuni interessi politici ed economici. Si era sperato che, dopo i nuovi rapporti iniziati col colloquio di Milano tra Mussolini e Tefvik Rüşdi Bey e sanzionati da patti solenni, tale mentalità, tali diffidenze, insultanti per un paese sinceramente amico della Turchia come il nostro, sarebbero definitivamente sparite".

²⁴⁹ "Colloquio fra il sottosegretario agli esteri, Suvich, e l'ambasciatore di Turchia a Roma, Vassıf Bey" (23 March 1934, Rome), doc. 25, in Ministero degli affari esteri commissione per la pubblicazione dei documenti diplomatici, *I documenti diplomatici italiani settima serie: 1922-1935*, vol. XV (18 marzo – 27 settembre 1934) (Rome: Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato P.V., 1990), p. 27.

Apparently, Suvich's arguments were not sufficient to reassure Turkey, for Mussolini himself received the Turkish ambassador on 30 March, "tactfully and sincerely" according to Vasıf Çınar, to assure the Turkish government that he had not referred to Turkey in his speech, saying, according to the report,

I assure you sincerely and definitively that I never referred to Turkey in my speech and I did not think of it even for a moment. ... When I mentioned Asia, I wanted to point to a collaboration between various countries in Great Asia. Be assured that I consider you as Europeans and if I had decided not to talk specifically about countries with which we [i.e. Italy] share a border, then I would have spoken of Turkey and Greece in a very friendly [manner]. ... My friendship towards Turkey is sincere, loyal and certain. Be totally assured of this.²⁵⁰

While these assurances were provided by the Italian authorities, even by *Il Duce* himself, the discussions in the Turkish press regarding the Rome Protocols and Mussolini's recent speech were also brought onto the agenda at the Turkish parliament at a "special meeting" on 5 April 1934, which was held to reassure the very anxious Turkish MPs.²⁵¹ In his written question to the Turkish foreign minister, Mahmut Esat Bozkurt, a CHP MP from İzmir and the former minister of justice, stated that Mussolini's speech should be discussed in parliament, especially because of its wide ranging coverage in the European and Turkish press. Moreover, given the proximity of the Italian-administrated Dodecanese islands to Turkey, this speech was also significant for Turkey's security.²⁵² Tefik Rüşti Aras argued that it was not only the recent speech of the Italian leader that should

²⁵⁰ *TBMM Zabıt Ceridesi*, Devre: IV, İçtima Senesi: 1, 5 April 1934, Thursday, p. 15: "Sizi samimiyetle ve katiyetle temin ederim ki nutkumda Türkiyeyi hiç kastetmedim ve bunu bir an bile düşünmedim. Bütün nutuk dikkatle okunduğu zaman maksadımın ne olduğu anlaşılabilir. Asyadan bahsederken Büyük Asyadaki bazı memleketlerle bir collaboration'a işaret etmek istedim. ... Emin olunuz ben sizleri Avrupalı bilirim ve eğer nutkumda münhasıran müşterek hududumuz olan Devletlerden bahsetmek kararını almasaydım Türkiyeden ve Yunanistandan çok dostane bahsederdim. ... Türkiyeye olan dostluğum sincere, loyal ve net'tir. Buna katiyen emin olunuz".

²⁵¹ Papuççular, *Türkiye ve Oniki Ada*, p. 99.

²⁵² *TBMM Zabıt Ceridesi*, 5 April 1934, p. 14.

be considered important, but also the signing of the Rome Protocols, which could have implications for the Balkans, a region in which Turkey was also situated.²⁵³

Before deliberating on the content of Mussolini's speech, Aras first tried to reassure the Turkish MPs in parliament, like Mahmut Esat Bozkurt, about Italy's assurance that Mussolini's speech was not against Turkey. To do so, the Turkish foreign minister chose a rather unorthodox method and read out aloud the diplomatic correspondence from the the Turkish ambassador in Rome, Vasıf Çınar, to the Turkish foreign ministry, correspondence which reported on his meetings with Suvich and Mussolini, details of which were discussed above. Moreover, the Turkish foreign minister read Mussolini's assurance to Vasıf Çınar word for word at the parliamentary meeting.²⁵⁴ Reading these diplomatic reports in parliament was certainly not well-received by the Italian government and the displeasure was made known to Vasıf Çınar, who, according to an Italian document, himself admitted that this did not comply with the "customary rules".²⁵⁵ In his meeting with the Soviet ambassador in Italy, Potemkin, Suvich also raised the issue of Aras's behaviour in parliament and Potemkin argued that it was a "gaffe" for Aras to have done this.²⁵⁶

Nevertheless, Aras, content with Mussolini's reassurance to the Turkish ambassador, also emphasised the fact that Turkey and Italy had just signed a trade agreement in Ankara the day before, on 4 April 1934.²⁵⁷ The main text of the

²⁵³ *TBMM Zabıt Ceridesi*, 5 April 1934, p. 14.

²⁵⁴ *TBMM Zabıt Ceridesi*, 5 April 1934, p. 15.

²⁵⁵ "Colloquio fra il sottosegretario agli esteri, Suvich, e l'ambasciatore di Turchia a Roma, Vassıf Bey" (7 April 1934, Rome), doc. 78, in Ministero degli affari esteri commissione per la pubblicazione dei documenti diplomatici, *I documenti diplomatici italiani settima serie: 1922-1935*, vol. XV (18 marzo – 27 settembre 1934) (Rome: Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato P.V., 1990), p. 103.

²⁵⁶ "Colloquio fra il sottosegretario agli esteri, Suvich, e l'ambasciatore dell'U.R.S.S. a Roma, Potemkin" (19 April 1934, Rome), doc. 121, in Ministero Degli Affari Esteri Commissione per la Pubblicazione dei Documenti Diplomatici, *I documenti diplomatici italiani settima serie: 1922-1935*, vol. XV (18 marzo – 27 settembre 1934) (Rome: Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato P.V., 1990), p. 139.

²⁵⁷ *TBMM Zabıt Ceridesi*, 5 April 1934, p. 15.

“Trade Agreement between Turkey and Italy”, which was signed by Numan Menemencioğlu and the Italian ambassador Lojacono, included 12 articles, which covered issues such as customs; how the export of goods to third-party countries through either Turkey or Italy should be conducted; the circumstances that would enable the signatories to stop trading particular goods to each other and how the trade ships of each signatory should operate within the territorial waters of the other state. In addition to the main text, another additional agreement detailed the procedures for how payments for imported commodities would be made between Italy and Turkey.²⁵⁸ Even though this trade agreement was a positive development for the relations between the two countries, it was rather overshadowed by Mussolini’s speech.

It was for this reason that Aras referred to it in only one sentence and focused his parliamentary speech instead on the part of Mussolini’s speech in which he referred to Asia and Africa as Italy’s “two historical objectives”, and pointed to the reasons for the Turkish government’s interest in the fascist leader’s speech. Defining Turkey as a European country from the point of its geography and its future development, thus implicitly denying any possibility of Turkey being an Italian target, Aras nevertheless declared that Turkey’s indispensable friends as well as its great interests lay in Asia, thus making Mussolini’s speech of concern for the Turkish government. Officially, too, Turkey did not consider itself an Asian country. In December 1933, according to an Italian report, the government summoned Turkish students, who were on their way to Rome for the Asian Student Congress, back to Turkey, declaring that Turkey was a non-Asian country and thus Turkish students had no place in such a congress.²⁵⁹ Aras also argued that Mussolini’s speech was also significant because both Turkey and Italy were the Mediterranean countries and it was thus important for Turkey to understand Italian foreign policy. In addition, according to Aras, Mussolini’s speech was also one of

²⁵⁸ “Türkiye ve İtalya Arasında Akit ve İmza Edilen Ticarî İtilâfın Kabul ve Tasdikına Mütedair Kanun”, *T. C. Resmî Gazete*, 12 June 1934, Tuesday, pp. 3969-75.

²⁵⁹ “L’ambasciatore ad Ankara, Lojacono, al capo del governo e ministro degli esteri, Mussolini” (26 March 1934, Ankara), doc. 36, in Ministero degli affari esteri commissione per la pubblicazione dei documenti diplomatici, *I documenti diplomatici italiani settima serie: 1922-1935*, vol. XV (18 marzo – 27 settembre 1934) (Rome: Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato P.V., 1990), p. 43.

interest for Turkey due to Mussolini's explicit criticism of the dead-end situation of the disarmament conferences and his declaration of Italy's need for rearmament.²⁶⁰

In this instance, the Turkish foreign minister appreciated Mussolini's point of view regarding the need for increasing armament. After emphasising Turkey's commitment since its establishment to world peace, Aras stated that Turkey should always be strong enough not to attack others, but to counter any threat and to protect itself, just as was stated, according to the Turkish foreign minister, "succinctly and correctly" by Mussolini.²⁶¹ This view was shared by Mahmut Esat Bozkurt who claimed that while keeping peaceful relationships with other states was important for national security, "always be[ing] ready with arms" was of the utmost importance.²⁶² Both Aras and Bozkurt's statements thus reflected the Turkish authorities' attempt to justify Turkey's need for an increase in armament by supporting Mussolini's argument regarding rearmament being needed not to attack, but to defend Italy.

Mussolini's speech was thus used to justify the increase in Turkish armament both for the purpose of international propaganda and for domestic propaganda. At the international level, the Italian threat factor was used as a way to justify Turkey's need for further armament without damaging its international prestige as a peace-loving nation. This was evident in the discourse of Bozkurt, who argued that "the possibility of getting along well together is surely something that should be facilitated and encouraged. We like, want and desire to get on well with everyone. This is a sincere ideal principle for us. But no one should doubt that there is no place for fear in this desire of ours".²⁶³ This "fear" could only be eliminated by an increase in national security.

²⁶⁰ *TBMM Zabıt Ceridesi*, 5 April 1934, p. 14.

²⁶¹ *TBMM Zabıt Ceridesi*, 5 April 1934, p. 16.

²⁶² *TBMM Zabıt Ceridesi*, 5 April 1934, p. 17.

²⁶³ *TBMM Zabıt Ceridesi*, 5 April 1934, p. 17: "İyi geçinmek imkânı; elbette kolaylaştırılacak ve teşvik edilecek bir şeydir. Herkesle hoş geçinmeyi severiz, isteriz ve istiyoruz. Bu, bizim için

On a domestic level, Aras, on the other hand, targeted the Turkish population in an attempt to ensure national support, both moral and financial, for an increase in Turkish armaments, support he was sure would be forthcoming as the Turkish population would never “begrudge any sacrifice or support” for the state.²⁶⁴ After explaining Turkey’s current efforts to increase its military capacity, including the allocation of an additional 20 million Turkish lira to the defence budget, bringing it to a total of 70 million, Aras, according to the Italian report, explicitly told the Austrian minister plenipotentiary in Ankara that “as a consequence [of this increase in the military spending] we will have to ask for a sacrifice from the people and we must do this by creating the conviction in public opinion of the danger in which the country finds itself”.²⁶⁵ This effort to persuade public opinion was exemplified, for example, in the abovementioned article in *Cumhuriyet*, where the Turkish people were encouraged to donate their money to Türk Tayyare Cemiyeti during *Kurban Bayramı* instead of sacrificing an animal.²⁶⁶

As the discussions regarding the disarmament issue thus demonstrated, Mussolini’s speech was received not only as a source of threat in Turkey, but was engaged with and used to justify Turkey’s further security needs both at domestic and international levels. In so doing, neither the discussions in the Turkish parliament nor those in the Turkish press reflected an immediate fear of Italy after Mussolini’s speech. But the speech was regarded as a sign of a more aggressive Italian policy and the beginnings of a new era in interwar Europe, where the promises of peace and security were rapidly beginning to lose their meaning. In

samimî bir ideal prensibidir. Ancak böyle bir arzumuzda, korkunun yeri olmadığına kimsenin şüphesi olmamalıdır”.

²⁶⁴ *TBMM Zabıt Ceridesi*, 5 April 1934, p. 16.

²⁶⁵ “L’ambasciatore ad Ankara, Lojacono, al capo del governo e ministro degli esteri, Mussolini” (26 March 1934, Ankara), doc. 36, in Ministero degli affari esteri commissione per la pubblicazione dei documenti diplomatici, *I documenti diplomatici italiani settima serie: 1922-1935*, vol. XV (18 marzo – 27 settembre 1934) (Rome: Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato P.V., 1990), p. 46: “Per conseguenza – dire il Ministro degli Esteri – dovremo chiedere un sacrificio al popolo e dovremo farlo creando nella opinione pubblica la convinzione del pericolo a cui si trova esposto il Paese”.

²⁶⁶ “Kurban Olmamak İstersek...”, p. 1.

such an environment, the Turkish government had to take its own measures to increase its security.

3.2. The Use of Italian Factor in Turkey's Search for Security

One of such measures undertaken by the Turkish government was to strengthen its security through alternative regional security arrangements, the most important of which were the separate and secret agreements that the Turkish government signed with Romania and Yugoslavia on 5 June 1934 in Geneva. Both agreements were identical to each other and they were signed within the framework of the Balkan Pact, which allowed for the formation of new agreements between the signatory powers through its additional protocol.

However, unlike the Balkan Pact, which did not create any military obligations for the signatory countries but merely provided a platform of consultation and “political solidarity”,²⁶⁷ these agreements were in nature designed to impose a military obligation on the signatories as explained in Article 1 of each agreement, which stated that in the face of an attack on one of the parties by “a Balkan country or a Balkan country acting together with a non-Balkan country”, the other party must automatically declare war on the aggressor(s).²⁶⁸ Article 2 covered a situation in which one of the signatories was attacked by a non-Balkan country while performing its obligations under Article 1. In that case, the other signatory country had to declare war on this non-Balkan country.²⁶⁹ In practice, these two articles were a direct indication of the fact that these agreements were designed with Bulgaria in mind since they were explicitly aimed only at attacks from “an immediate neighbouring country”.²⁷⁰ This situation was openly acknowledged by Turkish foreign minister Aras in a secret session in parliament

²⁶⁷ Barlas, *Etatism and Diplomacy in Turkey*, p. 144.

²⁶⁸ Soysal, *Türkiye'nin Siyasal Andlaşmaları*, p. 459.

²⁶⁹ Soysal, *Türkiye'nin Siyasal Andlaşmaları*, p. 459.

²⁷⁰ Soysal, *Türkiye'nin Siyasal Andlaşmaları*, p. 459.

on 25 October 1934 to discuss and ratify these two agreements. While explaining what these articles meant in practice, Aras argued:

For example, if Albania attacks Yugoslavia, we cannot attack Albania since it is not an immediate neighbour [of Turkey]. The immediate neighbouring Balkan countries are known [i.e. Bulgaria and Greece]. ... However, I would like to present [a particular point] for the information of the Grand National Assembly. In the process of drafting [these agreements], we wrote them together with our neighbour and ally Greece. It [i.e. Greece] knows and has a good grasp of [the content of these agreements] and was there as these agreements were being negotiated. Yet, by wording and signing [these agreements] in this way, it seemed as if the intention was that the agreements were not made against any particular [Balkan] country, but were directed towards any neighbouring Balkan country which contravened one of these agreements.²⁷¹

Given the suspicions of the Turkish government towards Bulgaria in the interwar period, partly due to the Bulgarian government's attitude towards the Turkish minority in Bulgaria but mostly to its support for anti-Kemalist activities, it was not unexpected that these two agreements directly targeted Bulgaria.²⁷² 1934 was perhaps the peak point at which to take such an action from the Turkish government's perspective, since it was in this year that anti-Kemalist actions in Bulgaria became more institutionalised under the leadership of *başmüftü* in Sofia, Hüseyin Hüsni who established a society to carry out the Bulgarian government's policy of creating a split among the Turkish minority.²⁷³ Greece's non-engagement with these agreements, on the other hand, was evidently due to the written

²⁷¹ *TBMM Gizli Celse Zabıtları*, Devre: IV, İçtima Senesi: III, 25 October 1934, Thursday, p. 585: "Meselâ Arnavutluk Yugoslavya'ya taarruz ederse bize bitişik olmadığı için biz Arnavutluk'a taarruz edemeyiz. Bize bitişik olan Balkan Devletleri malûmdur. Ama Bulgaristan veya Yunanistan bize veya Yugoslavya'ya taarruz ederse, diğer taraf derhal harekâte askeriyege geçecektir. Yalnız şurasını derhal Büyük Millet Meclisinin ıttılama arz etmek isterim. Biz bunu yazarken, Yunanistan komşu ve müttefikimiz de beraber yazdık. Bunu yazarken o da biliyor ve vakıftır ve birlikte müzakere edildiği zaman hazır. Fakat böyle yazmakla bu suretle imza edilmekle, gaye olarak, hiçbir Balkan devleti aleyhine mukavele yapılmış değil, herhangi bir komşunun bu âkitlerden birine ihanet edecek Balkan devletine müteveccihdir".

²⁷² Boyar, Ebru, "Turkish-Bulgarian Relations in the Early Turkish Republic: the View from Ankara" in *Turkish-Bulgarian Relations Past and Present*, Mustafa Türkes (ed.) (Istanbul: TASAM, 2010), p. 66.

²⁷³ Boyar, Ebru and Kate Fleet, "A Dangerous Axis: the "Bulgarian Müftü", the Turkish Opposition and the Ankara Government, 1928-1936", *Middle Eastern Studies*, 44/5 (2008), p. 777.

assurance it gave to the great powers while ratifying the Balkan Pact in the parliament. In order not to antagonise Italy, Greece, therefore, remained out of these two agreements.²⁷⁴

Having defined Bulgaria as the target of Turkey's agreements with Yugoslavia and Romania, there remained the question of finding out which the non-Balkan country was against which these military agreements were directed. Though it was not specified directly by Aras himself, the non-Balkan country that could act together with Bulgaria was Italy. There were three main reasons for this. Firstly, the increasing Italian influence over the Balkans and especially over Bulgaria was already clear to the Turkish government. According to Barlas, the Italian influence was such that the Turkish foreign policy in the Balkans "cannot be analysed" without taking it into account.²⁷⁵ As discussed in the previous chapter, this influence, particularly after Italy's discouraging of Albania and Bulgaria's entry into the Balkan Pact, became much clearer, affecting the relations between Italy and Turkey.²⁷⁶ Moreover, the creation of the Rome Protocols between Austria, Hungary and Italy further strengthened Italy's position in Central and Eastern Europe.²⁷⁷

Secondly, according to the report of Lojacono, the Italian ambassador in Ankara, on 26 March, the Rome Protocols prompted Turkey to initiate discussions with the Balkan Pact countries to establish a mutual assistance system against Italy. The report claimed that Aras had already contacted Belgrade to discuss this issue. However, according to Lojacono, Aras's diplomatic manoeuvres with the other Balkan Pact countries were neither due to the Rome Protocols nor to a fear of Italy, but were conducted on the basis of a pragmatic understanding of the protocols. Therefore, the report claimed, just as it had made use of the Rome

²⁷⁴ T. C. Dışişleri Bakanlığı Araştırma ve Siyaset Planlama Genel Müdürlüğü, *Türkiye Dış Politikasında 50 Yıl: Cumhuriyetin İlk On Yılı ve Balkan Paktı (1923-1934)* (Ankara, 1974), pp. 351-2.

²⁷⁵ Barlas, *Etatism and Diplomacy in Turkey*, p. 133.

²⁷⁶ Çelebi, "Türk-İtalyan İlişkilerini Etkileyen Faktörler", p. 112.

²⁷⁷ 12 March 1934: CA, 030.10.0.0.237.602.7.

Protocols for domestic propaganda to raise funds for further military spending, the Turkish government also used the Protocols as a tool to strengthen the security mechanism of the Balkan Pact. Furthermore, this pragmatic understanding by the Turkish government was also evident, as Lojacono argued, in how Turkey played with “geography” by “denying” or “affirming” its position in Asia as best suited its own political needs, a policy which made the search for a “logical” component in Turkish-Italian relations an arduous task.²⁷⁸ Aras’s efforts to bring about a mutual assistance system in the Balkans must have been more widely known since Mussolini himself instructed Lojacono on 17 April that whereas the Italian ambassador should “take appropriate measures to clarify misunderstanding and suspicions”, he should also carefully observe any “possible developments” regarding the Balkan Pact.²⁷⁹

Finally, the fact that some Turkish MPs referred to Italy as the potential aggressor and discussed these two agreements within the context of situations where Italy could be the potential aggressor in a secret parliamentary meeting on 25 October 1934 also demonstrated that the agreements also targeted Italy. The members of parliament discussed the articles of the agreements based on two possibilities: a joint attack by Bulgaria and Italy, or an attack by Italy alone. While explaining the second article of the agreements which concerned an attack by a non-Balkan state, the Turkish foreign minister argued that in order to sustain peace in the Balkans, this agreement would be put into effect against any country, “even if it were to be Britain”.²⁸⁰ Aras’s reference to Britain in fact showed the importance the Turkish government attached to any regional cooperation vis-à-vis great power politics. However, Britain was perhaps given here as an example by the Turkish foreign minister in order to avoid a direct reference to the country in question, i.e. Italy. This can be understood from how Aras continued his speech,

²⁷⁸ “L’ambasciatore ad Ankara, Lojacono, al capo del governo e ministro degli esteri, Mussolini” (26 March 1934, Ankara), doc. 36, p. 43.

²⁷⁹ “Il capo del governo e ministro degli esteri, Mussolini, all’ambasciatore ad Ankara, Lojacono” (17 April 1934, Rome), doc. 107, in Ministero degli affari esteri commissione per la pubblicazione dei documenti diplomatici, *I documenti diplomatici italiani settima serie: 1922-1935*, vol. XV (18 marzo – 27 settembre 1934) (Rome: Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato P.V., 1990), p. 127.

²⁸⁰ *TBMM Gizli Celse Zabıtları*, 25 October 1934, p. 586.

referring to “a foreign state whose name we do not know but which is a state that intends us harm and does not like the Balkan system and wishes to destroy it”.²⁸¹ Since Aras later in the same parliamentary session claimed that the Soviet, French, and in particular British positions were in favour of the Balkan Pact, but not those of Bulgaria, Italy and Hungary,²⁸² it can be argued that the great power that could harm the peaceful situation in the Balkans was Italy.

The Turkish MPs in the parliamentary session, unlike Aras, discussed the agreements, adopting a direct stance against Italy for they explicitly and continuously named Italy without hesitation during the session. Mazhar Müfit Kansu, a CHP MP for Denizli and one of the people who had been in Atatürk’s inner circle for many years, directed a question to the Turkish foreign minister, probably thinking that Italy could be counted as a neighbour of Turkey due to its possession of the Dodecanese islands: “Is Italy considered our immediate neighbour? If a neighbour attacks us, what will the Yugoslavians do?”, to which Aras replied that the agreements only concerned the Balkan borders of the signatory countries.²⁸³ The MP for Kırşehir, Yahya Galip Kargı was bolder in his question when he stated that “Let us talk clearly, it is a secret meeting. Italy declares war on us and we begin fighting. Will Yugoslavia declare war on Italy?”²⁸⁴ In response to such questions from the MPs, Aras argued that the aim of these agreements were to maintain the status quo in the Balkans by preventing non-Balkan states from finding an ally in the Balkans because these military agreements, he continued, would make it difficult for such states to attack a Balkan country by themselves.²⁸⁵

²⁸¹ *TBMM Gizli Celse Zabıtları*, 25 October 1934, p. 586: “O adını bilmediğimiz haricî devlet ancak bize kasteden ve Balkan manzumesini beğenmeyen ve mahvetmek isteyen bir devlettir...”

²⁸² *TBMM Gizli Celse Zabıtları*, 25 October 1934, p. 589.

²⁸³ *TBMM Gizli Celse Zabıtları*, 25 October 1934, p. 586: “İtalya bize bitişik mi addediliyor? Bitişik bir devlet bize taarruz ederse Yugoslavlar ne yapacaktır?”

²⁸⁴ *TBMM Gizli Celse Zabıtları*, 25 October 1934, p. 587: “Şimdi açık söyleyelim celse hafidir. İtalya bize ilânı harp etti, başladık çarpışmaya Yugoslavya İtalya’ya ilânı harp edecek mi?”

²⁸⁵ *TBMM Gizli Celse Zabıtları*, 25 October 1934, p. 587.

For some MPs, however, such as Sırrı İçöz for Bozok Yozgat, the maintenance of security in the Balkans was not enough by itself to prevent Italy from attacking Turkey since it could still attack from the Mediterranean without confronting any other power to counter it. Therefore, Sırrı İçöz argued for the need for a similar security understanding in the Mediterranean, an idea which was also supported by Tevfik Rüştü Aras who claimed that the ministry was working on the possibility of a Mediterranean pact and had already exchanged views on the issue with France, Yugoslavia, Romania, Greece and the Soviet Union. However, Aras added that Italy would not favour such a pact unless it consolidated its security in Central Europe and the Balkans. It was for this reason, Aras argued, that the Turkish government was working hard to convince Italy to support such a pact.²⁸⁶

Although Mediterranean security had always been a source of concern for Turkey in the interwar period, this concern increased from 1933-1934. This was partly due to the increasing Italian fortifications on the Dodecanese islands, for example, in Leros, where these fortifications were happening at an “abnormal” speed.²⁸⁷ By May 1934, the Italian fortifications in Leros were such that they were, according to Belgrade’s *Vreme*, a cause of considerable concern to the Turkish government,²⁸⁸ and Minister of Interior Şükrü Kaya argued that they were like “a gun pointed at Turkey”.²⁸⁹ These concerns were directly communicated by Prime Minister İsmet İnönü to the Italian ambassador in Ankara, İnönü stating that

I am informed on a daily basis about these endless preparations. We will understand the true extent of this situation once the fortifications are completed. Well, will they be completed soon? We do not know. Until then, we will live in suspicion.²⁹⁰

²⁸⁶ TBMM Gizli Celse Zabıtları, 25 October 1934, p. 589.

²⁸⁷ Papuççular, *Türkiye ve Oniki Ada*, p. 100.

²⁸⁸ 15 May 1934: CA, 030.10.0.0.227.527.14.

²⁸⁹ Barlas, “Turkish Diplomacy in the Balkans and the Mediterranean”, p. 451.

²⁹⁰ As quoted in Papuççular, *Türkiye ve Oniki Ada*, p. 100.

To allay these suspicions, the Italian officials claimed that the fortifications in the Dodecanese islands were merely to protect the commercial communications of Italy in the Eastern Mediterranean and as an act against British and French influence in the Mediterranean.²⁹¹

In addition to the Italian fortifications in the Dodecanese islands, there was another, more social, concern for the Turkish government, one which also had political implications. There were increasing reports in 1934 indicating that the Italian administration on Rhodes was not treating the Turkish minority in the island well, allowing, for example, the Turkish students' hats to be ripped off their heads by Greeks and Jews,²⁹² or by preventing them from attending schools in Turkey.²⁹³ The Italian administration's behaviour was such that Turks, selling their property and belongings at low prices,²⁹⁴ were constantly trying to escape from Rhodes and enter Turkey, a situation which necessitated the Turkish government's taking necessary measures and persuading such people to return to Rhodes.²⁹⁵ It was in the same period, in April 1934, that a speech praising the power and strength of Italy was delivered in Rhodes to a group of 40 *avanguardisti*, that is Italians aged 14-18 who were members of the fascist youth organisation *Opera Nazionale Balilla*, from Alexandria.²⁹⁶ The environment in the Mediterranean overall thus provided considerably support to back Sırrı İçöz's concerns in his speech in parliament regarding Turkish security in this region, as well as his desire of the formation of a pact among the Mediterranean countries.

²⁹¹ "L'ambasciatore ad Ankara, Lojacono, al capo del governo e ministro degli esteri, Mussolini" (21 April 1934, Ankara), doc. 132, in Ministero degli affari esteri commissione per la pubblicazione dei documenti diplomatici, *I documenti diplomatici italiani settima serie: 1922-1935*, vol. XV (18 marzo – 27 settembre 1934) (Rome: Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato P.V., 1990), p. 147.

²⁹² 6 August 1934: CA, 030.10.0.0.101.656.10.

²⁹³ 27 August 1934: CA, 030.10.0.0.237.604.23.

²⁹⁴ 13 August 1934: CA, 030.10.0.0.237.604.20.

²⁹⁵ 28 November 1934: CA, 030.10.0.0.238.605.12; 8 January 1934: CA, 030.10.0.0.237.602.2.

²⁹⁶ 16 April 1934: CA, 030.10.0.0.237.602.12.

In fact, the idea of a Mediterranean Pact was out there even in 1930 when the Turkish officials started to declare that Turkey might be interested in the formation of a “Mediterranean Locarno”.²⁹⁷ In May 1934, a few months before the secret parliamentary meeting in October, the then French foreign minister Louis Barthou had asked Aras’s opinion about a possible Mediterranean Pact, which would strengthen the position of the Balkan Pact. Even though Turkey’s position was a positive one, the Turkish press publishing articles about the formation of a Mediterranean Pact in June 1934, Britain and Italy declared towards the end of the month that they would not be interested in taking part in such a pact.²⁹⁸ From the Italian point of view, any pact in the Mediterranean without Britain would be ineffective and since Italy had already signed bilateral agreements with Greece and Turkey there was thus no need for such a pact.²⁹⁹ Due to the reluctance of the great powers, the Mediterranean Pact desired by Turkey never happened. Therefore, Turkey needed to strengthen its security in the Mediterranean by other means, i.e. by fortifying the Straits. To do so, however, the Turkish government needed first to present a very good justification for its point of view in order not to lose its international prestige. The opportunity for Turkey to justify its claims over the Straits appeared when Italy invaded Ethiopia in October 1935.

3.3. The Case of the Italian Invasion of Ethiopia and the Turkish Portrayal of the Italian Threat

Just two months after the secret parliamentary meeting in Turkey, a meeting which made clear that Italy’s aggressive policy would harm the status quo in the Balkans as well as in the Mediterranean, there appeared in December 1934 a border clash between Ethiopia and Italy in Wal Wal, an oasis in Ethiopia. Known as the Wal Wal Incident, this border clash was taken as the trigger or pretext for the Italian invasion of Ethiopia, an issue which would not only have a significant place on the

²⁹⁷ Barlas and Güvenç, *Türkiye’nin Akdeniz Siyaseti (1923-1939)*, p. 201.

²⁹⁸ Barlas and Güvenç, *Türkiye’nin Akdeniz Siyaseti (1923-1939)*, pp. 201-2.

²⁹⁹ Barlas and Güvenç, *Türkiye’nin Akdeniz Siyaseti (1923-1939)*, pp. 202-3.

agenda of the Turkish government, but would also dominate international politics as the most important political crisis in 1935 and 1936. The Italian invasion of Ethiopia on 3 October 1935 demonstrated the extent to which Italian foreign policy had taken an aggressive turn since the summer of 1932. It can also be regarded as the first reflection on the ground of Mussolini's speech in March 1934, which targeted countries in Asia and Africa.

Although the Italo-Ethiopian War was one of the most important issues of the late interwar period due to its repercussions on international politics, the secondary literature on Turkish foreign policy does not pay much attention to the effects of the war on Turkish foreign policy making. The topic has been discussed only within the context of either bilateral relations between Italy and Turkey or of Turkey's position and/or activities in the League of Nations since this was the first time that the international organisation had evoked Article 16 of the Covenant to impose economic sanctions on an aggressor member country.³⁰⁰ One of the very few publications that directly discusses the effects of the Ethiopian issue on Turkish-Italian relations is an article written by Di Casola, who, relying mostly on British and Italian archival sources, argued that the Italian threat perceived by Turkey during the Italo-Ethiopian conflict was "essentially psychological"³⁰¹ and that Turkey "believed itself to be of particular interest to imperial Italy, and next in line [after Ethiopia]".³⁰² Therefore, according to Di Casola, "strong-felt fear" of Italy dominated the Turkish government's mindset during the conflict.³⁰³

However, Di Casola's argument does not display a sound understanding of the Turkish perception of the Italian threat during the conflict. Even though there can be no denying of the fact that Turkey was threatened especially by Italy's actions in the Balkans and in the Mediterranean, the Turkish government did not

³⁰⁰ Reinalda, Bob, *Routledge History of International Organizations: From 1815 to the Present Day* (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), p. 217.

³⁰¹ Di Casola, M.A., "Italo-Turkish Relations between the Two Wars: the Impact of Ethiopian Crisis", *Il Politico*, 62 / 2 (181) (1997), p. 339.

³⁰² Di Casola, "Italo-Turkish Relations between the Two Wars", p. 334.

³⁰³ Di Casola, "Italo-Turkish Relations between the Two Wars", p. 339.

consider itself as “next in line”. According to an anecdote in Falih Rıfkı Atay’s *Çankaya*, the Turkish ambassador in Rome Vasıf Çınar once argued that “Mussolini would never think of attacking Turkey”.³⁰⁴ Atatürk himself was also aware of the limitations of the Italian leader and his army when he argued that in the case of a possible war, Mussolini, who “would never put aside his desire to play the role of Caesar”, would probably get involved in the war and in doing so would demonstrate that “Italy was still far from establishing itself as a military power”, meaning that Italian military power was not as strong as it was often thought to be.³⁰⁵ Furthermore, Italy’s colonialist expansion and its expansionist aims over Ethiopia had been known since the last quarter of the 19th century, Italy having experienced an earlier defeat in Adwa by Ethiopian troops in 1896, and therefore there was no particular reason for Turkey to associate the attack on Ethiopia with a possible attack on Turkey. As early as 1925, there had appeared an exchange of notes between the British and Italians over the issue of Italian penetration of Ethiopia, an issue which the British used as a way to guarantee Italian support on the Mosul Question, which was resolved on 16 December 1925, two days after an Anglo-Italian understanding had been reached.³⁰⁶ Given the apparent attitude of Vasıf Çınar and Atatürk as well as the fact that Italian expansionist aims over Ethiopia were already common knowledge, it would be an exaggeration to argue that the Turkish government was fearful of an Italian invasion in the wake of the Italo-Ethiopian War.

This does not, however, mean that Turkey did not perceive any threat from Italy, for, as the discussion above has shown, Turkey did regard Italy as a direct threat in the Mediterranean. However, what is important here is not perhaps the threat itself, but how Turkey perceived and portrayed this threat. According to an article published in *The Near East* on 14 June 1934, “[Turkey] definitely exaggerated the Italian threat” since “if the threat was as accurate as Turkey

³⁰⁴ Atay, *Çankaya V*, p. 72.

³⁰⁵ Akşin, *Atatürk’ün Dış Politika İlkeleri ve Diplomasisi*, p. 164.

³⁰⁶ Iadarola, Antoinette, “The Anglo-Italian Agreement of 1925: Mussolini’s “Carte Blanche” for War against Ethiopia”, *Northeast African Studies*, 1/1 (1979), p. 49.

wanted to portray” it, Turkey would not have a chance against Italy if Italy were to invade Turkey.³⁰⁷ Mainly focusing on Turkey’s search for security and its increasing of armaments during this period, the article argued that this portrayed threat of Italy was not in reality equal to the level of threat perceived by Turkey, an argument which was apparently regarded as significant by the Turkish government since the minister of interior, Şükrü Kaya sent the Turkish translation of this article to Prime Minister İnönü and asked whether an answer to the article was needed.³⁰⁸

This article is in fact proof of the need to make a distinction between how Turkey perceived the Italian threat and how it portrayed it domestically and internationally. Though this distinction does not make much of appearance in the secondary literature on Turkish-Italian relations, Amit Bein, in his recent monograph, acknowledges this difference stating that

[t]he Italian and German challenges to the post–World War I international order were at one and the same time threatening and inviting from Ankara’s perspective. Turkey viewed Italy’s aggressive moves in the Mediterranean region ... as matters of grave concern. But Ankara also realized that it could exploit the international crisis to [its own advantage].³⁰⁹

One such crisis to be “exploited” by the Turkish government thus arrived during the Italo-Ethiopian conflict, a period when the Turkish press, most of which had organic links with the government, was very influential in increasing the level of portrayed Italian threat both at the domestic and international level by emphasising how the Italian invasion of Ethiopia made the world a less secure place.³¹⁰ The coverage in the Turkish press did not focus solely on a direct Italian threat to Turkey during the conflict, in fact it gave very little space to this at all. Rather it

³⁰⁷ 26 June 1934: CA, 030.10.0.0.228.532.31.

³⁰⁸ 26 June 1934: CA, 030.10.0.0.228.532.31.

³⁰⁹ Bein, *Kemalist Turkey and the Middle East*, pp. 54-5.

³¹⁰ Doğar, Mehmet, “‘Complete Neutrality’ or ‘Controlled Enmity’? The Role of the Turkish Press during the Italo-Ethiopian War of 1935-36”, *Turkish Historical Review*, 10/2-3 (2019), pp. 223-38.

discussed different issues that highlighted the problems at the international level, such as the declining effectiveness of the League of Nations, great power politics and imperialism, and the possibility of a new world war.³¹¹ It can be argued, therefore, that the “exaggeration” referred to by the article in the *The Near East* was a deliberate ploy and that what Turkey perceived and portrayed as an Italian threat did not refer only to a direct Italian threat to Turkey, but rather to the existing international system.

This divergence between perceived and portrayed threat during the Italo-Ethiopian conflict becomes much clearer when the Turkish government’s approach to the issue and the coverage of it in the Turkish press are examined together. As an official position, the Turkish government adopted a policy of “complete neutrality”, which meant acting within the framework of the League of Nations and not stating any other opinions against Italian invasion at the governmental level.³¹² In other words, the Turkish authorities did not make any comments on the invasion itself, but rather its effects on world peace. On 15 November 1935, more than a month after the Italian invasion of Ethiopia on 3 October, Turkey ratified the League of Nations’ economic sanctions against Italy, which banned the trade of many commodities excluding oil and steel.³¹³

According to Ülman, Turkey applied these sanctions due to “the fear of Italy and Atatürk’s distrust for Mussolini”.³¹⁴ However Ülman’s argument is somewhat flawed as it automatically raises the question that if the main motivation for the application of the sanctions was indeed the “fear of Italy”, then it would surely have been easier for Turkey simply not to apply sanctions and so avoid giving offence to Italy. Just as Albania, Austria and Hungary abstained from

³¹¹ Doğar, “‘Complete Neutrality’ or ‘Controlled Enmity’?”, p. 223.

³¹² TBMM Zabıt Ceridesi, Devre: V, İçtima Senesi: 1, 13 November 1935, Wednesday, p. 52.

³¹³ 15 November 1935: CA, 030.18.1.2.59.85.19; For the official documents, see: Soysal, *Türkiye’nin Siyasal Andlaşmaları*, pp. 480-8.

³¹⁴ Ülman, Haluk, “Türk Dış Politikasına Yön Veren Etkenler (1923-1968)”, *Siyasal Bilgiler Fakültesi Dergisi*, 23/3 (1968), p. 252.

voting for the sanctions,³¹⁵ so, too, Turkey could have followed the same path as these countries instead of voting in favour of the sanctions. As was discussed in the previous chapter, the relationship between the League of Nations and Turkey at this point should be contextualised with a specific focus on Turkey's expectations from the organisation and obligations to it. Article 16 of the Covenant of the League of Nations explicitly made it necessary for members to apply sanctions, especially if a member did not want to be seen as a supporter of an aggressor in the international arena:

Should any Member of the League resort to war in disregard of its covenants under Articles 12, 13 or 15, it shall *ipso facto* be deemed to have committed an act of war against all other Members of the League, which hereby undertake immediately to subject it to the severance of all trade or financial relations, the prohibition of all intercourse between their nationals and the nationals of the covenant-breaking State, and the prevention of all financial, commercial or personal intercourse between the nationals of the covenant-breaking State and the nationals of any other State, whether a Member of the League or not.³¹⁶

Moreover, the Turkish government's application of the sanctions was also due to the much more pragmatic consideration of securing the League's support if a similar situation potentially threatening Turkey's security should arise. This approach was encapsulated nicely by Aptülahat Akşin, a Turkish diplomat responsible for Turkey's affairs with the League of Nations, who stated that "Having joined the League three years earlier because it found the pact favourable for its own security, Turkey could not behave in any other way".³¹⁷ This was perhaps why the Turkish government chose to endure the negative impact of the application of the sanctions on its own economy. The difficult choice in front of the Turkish government was also recognised abroad, *The Times*, for example,

³¹⁵ Soysal, *Türkiye'nin Siyasal Andlaşmaları*, p. 477.

³¹⁶ "The Covenant of the League of Nations (Art. 1 to 26)", <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1919Parisv13/ch10subch1> [accessed on 6 March 2020]

³¹⁷ Akşin, *Atatürk'ün Dış Politika İlkeleri ve Diplomasisi*, p. 226: "Kendi güvenliğini Misakın uygulanmasında bulduğu için üç yıl önce Cemiyete katılmış olan Türkiye'nin başka türlü davranmasına imkân yoktu".

arguing on 8 October that few states found themselves in a situation which was as “embarrassing” as Turkey’s.

Turkey [was] faced with the problem of reconciling a theoretical and rhetorical loyalty to the League of Nations with the practical and stern reality of enforcing the Covenant’s provisions against Italy. ... Italy [was] one of her best customers and has recently purchased large quantities of coal and cereals to the great relief of Turkish producers and exporters.³¹⁸

Despite the hardships this created, however, Turkey did not hesitate to implement the economic sanctions against Italy, and indeed took an active role in the League of Nations, Foreign Minister Tevfik Rüştü Aras frequently visiting Geneva and working closely with Anthony Eden, the then British minister for League of Nations affairs in June 1935 and then, from December 1935 onwards, the foreign minister, and French foreign minister Pierre Laval, who was also the prime minister between June 1935 and January 1936. This action was in line with the statements made on several occasions by President Atatürk and Prime Minister İsmet İnönü, who both underlined the importance of international cooperation during the crisis and of the League of Nations as a venue for sustaining this cooperation.³¹⁹ The Turkish government, thus, both in rhetoric and in action, adopted a position of supporting the work of the League of Nations over this issue even though at times this risked a negative reaction from Italy.

Unlike the Turkish government’s official position, however, the Turkish press represented a rather pessimistic picture of the League of Nations and of how it handled the Italo-Ethiopian conflict. In fact, the publications in the Turkish press suggested that the League of Nations was quite ineffective and irrelevant in regard to the conflict,³²⁰ which, according to Yunus Nadi, was so important that it represented an arduous test for the League of Nations, the fate of which would be

³¹⁸ “Turkey and the Covenant”, *The Times*, 8 October 1935.

³¹⁹ “Ulu Önderin Dünkü Söylevi”, *Cumhuriyet*, 2 November 1935; “Enternasyonal Hayat Huzur İçinde Değil”, *Cumhuriyet*, 28 October 1935.

³²⁰ Doğan, “‘Complete Neutrality’ or ‘Controlled Enmity’?”, p. 223.

determined according to the measures it took in the face of the Italian invasion of Ethiopia.³²¹

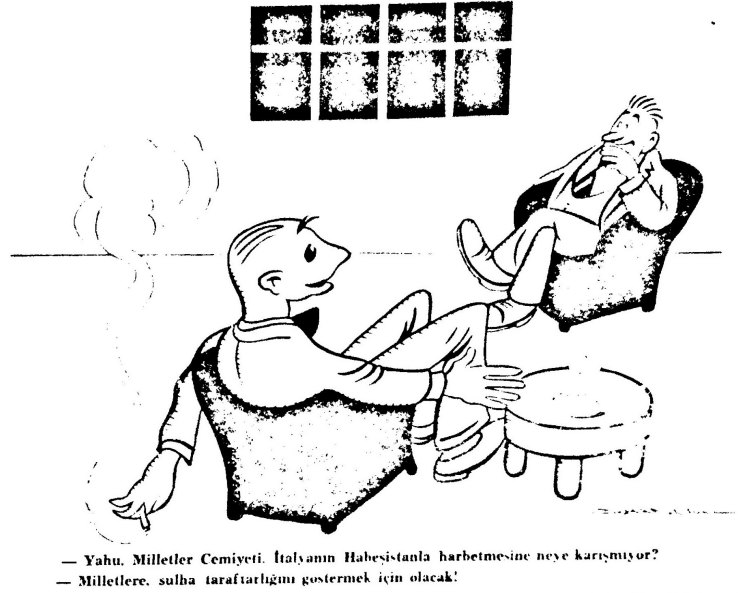


Figure 3.1: *Akbaba*, 3 August 1935

The criticism against the League of Nations in the Turkish press was especially apparent in the form of political cartoons, which were published in the most popular humorous magazines of the time such as *Akbaba* and *Köroğlu*. One of the reasons why the League was criticised by the Turkish newspapers and magazines was its reluctance to take immediate action after Italy's attack on another League member, i.e. Ethiopia, thus demonstrating the risk of relying entirely on the security mechanisms of the League of Nations. A cartoon published in *Akbaba* in August 1935 depicted two men chatting with each other, one of whom asked: "Look! Why doesn't the League of Nations get involved in the Italian attack on Ethiopia?" to which the other replied: "it must be in order to demonstrate to other nations its support of peace" (Figure 3.1).³²² By criticising the

³²¹ [Abalıoğlu], Yunus Nadi, "Habeş Meselesi Değil, Hakka Dayanacak Barışın Prensip Meselesi", *Cumhuriyet*, 22 December 1935, p. 1.

³²² *Akbaba*, 3 August 1935.

League of Nations here for not taking appropriate measures, the magazine demonstrated Turkish demand for more active and decisive action from the League of Nations.

Further, the failure of the League of Nations in the face of the Italian invasion of Ethiopia was also discussed together with the earlier failure of the organisation during the Japanese invasion of Manchuria in 1931. As early as June 1935, at a time when Italy had not yet declared war on Ethiopia but when its intentions towards the country were quite clear, a cartoon appeared on the front page of *Köroğlu*, which pictured the most important international issues of the time and criticised the ineffectiveness of the League of Nations (Figure 3.2). In this cartoon, the Japanese invasion of Manchuria and the Italian actions over Ethiopia were criticised. A man, in traditional Chinese costume and hairstyle, was depicted going to a house named “Uluslar Derneği” (the League of Nations) for help. He was opposed, however, by a man in a military uniform, representing Japan with a sword in his hand. Similarly, a barefoot and half-naked black Ethiopian man, escaping from an Italian soldier armed with a rifle and a sword, was running for help towards a man representing Britain. Meanwhile, the main character of the magazine, representing Turkey, called *Köroğlu* suggested that one should not rely only on the League of Nations for one’s security but should search for alternative security measures, such as accepting the protection of a great power, acquiring national armaments or adopting the policy of maintaining a careful balance of power.³²³ These alternatives suggested by *Köroğlu* reflected the distrust for the League of Nations even before Italy invaded Ethiopia.

The limitations of the League of Nations became much more evident in December 1935 when it became clear that the League of Nations was in essence directed mainly by British and French interests, interests which were again publicised when a plan between Sir Samuel Hoare of Britain and Pierre Laval of France partitioning the Ethiopian lands between Italy and Ethiopia without consulting the League of Nations was leaked. The disclosure of this plan demonstrated the Janus-faced British policy since whereas, on the one hand, the

³²³ *Köroğlu*, 22 June 1935, p. 1: “Çin – İmdat, imdat, Can kurtaran yok mu, Milletler Cemiyeti aç kapını!... KÖROĞLU – Aklın varsa Habeş gibi İngilizin eteğine yapış. Ya silâhına güven, ya kodamanlar arasına fit sok, başka çare yok!”

British were “mobiliz[ing] the League [against Italy] in the name of collective security”, on the other, they were “bargain[ing] with the Duce”.³²⁴ Although İsmet İnönü called this policy a “blunder” on the part of Britain,³²⁵ it was fiercely criticised in the Turkish press, *Cumhuriyet* referring to “Britain’s fickleness” since Britain, in the case of Ethiopia, did not act as “a champion of rights” as it represented itself, but rather as “a greedy merchant [in pursuit] of [its own] interests”.³²⁶

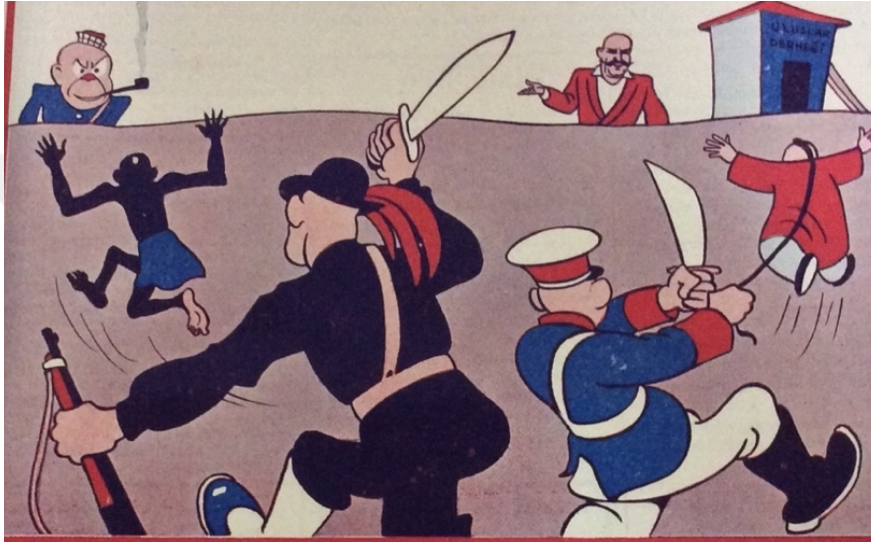


Figure 3.2: “Asya ve Afrikada İnsan Avcıları”, *Koroğlu*, 22 June 1935.

As in the case of Hoare-Laval Plan, the position of the great powers when faced with the Italian invasion of Ethiopia brought up another issue for discussion in the Turkish press: the rise of great power politics and the issue of imperialism around the world. In its discussion of the Four-Power Pact, the previous chapter described the mindset of the Turkish governmental elite regarding great power politics and imperialism, a subject which was difficult to broach at an official level since it

³²⁴ Braddick, Henderson B., “The Hoare-Laval Plan: A Study in International Politics”, *The Review of Politics*, 24/3 (1962), p. 352.

³²⁵ “İsmet İnönü’nün Mühim Bir Diyevi”, *Cumhuriyet*, 18 December 1935, p. 1.

³²⁶ “İngiltere’nin Dönekliği!”, *Cumhuriyet*, 16 December 1935, p. 3.

could undermine Turkey's relations with European countries, in particular, with Britain, France and Italy.

In the case of Ethiopia, too, great power politics were present since it was evident that the issue was much more than merely a war between Italy and Ethiopia. Since the 1920s, Britain, one way or another, had a role in Italy's expansionist policy towards Ethiopia. This British involvement was such that Mussolini argued in an interview on 29 September 1935 that "after all, England only recently regarded Abyssinian independence as an absurdity. In 1925, Sir Ronald Graham and I signed an agreement that practically cut Abyssinia in pieces".³²⁷ The Hoare-Laval Plan strengthened this understanding of the Italo-Ethiopian War as a reflection of great power politics in Europe. A Turkish governmental report regarding Turkish foreign policy in 1935 noted that "the Italo-Ethiopian conflict does not seem local, [but] European. ... The Turkish policy must be very vigilant in this struggle for survival between the great powers".³²⁸ As clearly seen in this report, from the perspective of the Turkish government, Turkey needed to be careful not only towards Italy, but towards all great powers in Europe.

The publications in the Turkish press also reflected the view that the war was one influenced by great power politics and imperialism. M. Nermi argued in *Cumhuriyet* on 4 November 1935 that the Italo-Ethiopian War brought once more to the fore a "great wrestling" between Italy and Britain in the Mediterranean:

The Italo-Ethiopian War, is the major event of our period. ... The political might of two great powers, that is Britain and Italy, have entered into the biggest and most serious wrestling match. The character which the whole political system will assume depends on the outcome of this wrestling match ... After Britain, France and Italy, we too exist in the Mediterranean. It is very natural that such a wrestling match is of interest to us.³²⁹

³²⁷ As quoted in Iadarola, "The Anglo-Italian Agreement of 1925", p. 52.

³²⁸ 18 November 1935: CA, 030.10.0.0.219.476.5, p.1: "İtalyan-Habeş ihtilafı mevzîî değil avrupaî görünüyor. ... Türkiye siyaseti, büyük devletler arasındaki bu hayat mücadelesinde müteyakkız bulunmak zaruretindedir".

³²⁹ M. Nermi, "Akdeniz Stratejisi. İtalya ile İngilterenin Giriştikleri Büyük Güreş", *Cumhuriyet*, 4 November 1935, p. 5: "... Habeş-İtalyan savaşı, devrimizin en başta gelen bir siyasa hadisesidir. ...

M. Nermi further argued that, in the face of this war in the Mediterranean, Turkey had to be extremely “alert” since it was the country positioned on “the most strategic coasts” of the Mediterranean, thus underlining the importance of Turkey’s security in the Mediterranean.³³⁰ Similarly, the vibrant cartoons in *Köroğlu* also reflected the idea that the struggle was between Britain and Italy rather than between Italy and Ethiopia. The cartoons usually presented a depiction where the Italians were faced with a rather unexpected opponent, while they were hoping to fight only with Ethiopia. In one issue of the magazine, Britain was represented as the “lawyer” of Ethiopia;³³¹ in another, Britain was a “troublesome bedrock” on the shores of Ethiopia, blocking Mussolini’s advance.³³²

One of the most important reasons for this struggle between the great powers, if not *the* most important reason, was the ambition to follow their imperialist goals in Africa. These policies, according to *Cumhuriyet*, were due to a considerable degree to the increase in the population of these countries, of, for example, Italy and Japan which both searched for places to invade and settle their people. Population increase was thus used as a pretext for imperialist goals.³³³ According Falih Rıfkı Atay, however, the population increase was only one of the pretexts of the imperialist powers, the other justification being the civilising mission of these countries.³³⁴ M. Nermi also criticised the imperialist policy of the great powers, in this case of Italy, by referring to these powers as “strange” since they first invaded the countries of “Bedouins” in order to bring them civilisation,

İki büyük politika kudreti, yani İngiltere – İtalya en büyük ve en ciddi bir güreşe girişmiş bulunuyorlar. Bütün politika sisteminin alacağı renk bu güreşin sonucuna bağlıdır. ... İngiltere, Fransa ve İtalya’dan sonra Akdenizde biz varız. Böyle bir güreşin bizi ilgilendirmesi çok tabiidir”.

³³⁰ M. Nermi, “Akdeniz Stratejisi”, *Cumhuriyet*, 4 November 1935, p. 5.

³³¹ “Habeş Derken İtalyanın Karşısına İngiliz Çıktı”, *Köroğlu*, 11 September 1935, p. 1.

³³² “Evdeki Pazar Çarşıya Uymadı”, *Köroğlu*, 18 September 1935, p. 1. For a similar cartoon, see: *Köroğlu*, 2 October 1935, p. 1.

³³³ “Nüfusları Arttığı İçin!..”, *Cumhuriyet*, 28 November 1935, p. 3.

³³⁴ Atay, Falih Rıfkı, “Milli Uyanışlar”, *Ulus*, 7 January 1936, p. 1.

but once they civilised them, these great powers “ceased to care” for them.³³⁵ Another criticism in the Turkish press concerned the relationship between the use of force and civilisation. *Cumhuriyet* published a small cartoon on 5 November, which criticised the understanding that equated arms to civilisation (Figure 3.3). An Italian soldier, wearing a gas mask and pointing his finger at an Ethiopian man holding a spear in his hand with a hat on his head and a tie on his half-naked body, scoffs “You say, Ethiopians are civilised, [but] you still don’t even know how to use poisonous gas”.³³⁶ For the Turkish press, Ethiopia was a “victim of civilisation”.³³⁷



Figure 3.3: *Cumhuriyet*, 5 November 1935

From the Turkish perspective, all these discussions revolving around the Italo-Ethiopian War on the ineffectiveness of the League of Nations, the rise of great power politics and the issue of imperialism, led to a rather pessimistic understanding of the fate of the international system. Yusuf Ziya Ortaç announced at the beginning of 1936 that even if the war was in Africa, it should still concern

³³⁵ M. Nermi, “Akdeniz Stratejisi”, *Cumhuriyet*, 4 November 1935, p. 5.

³³⁶ *Cumhuriyet*, 5 November 1935, p. 1. For similar cartoons, see: *Cumhuriyet*, 12 November 1935; *Akbaba*, 7 March 1935; *Akbaba*, 13 July 1935; *Akbaba*, 19 October 1935.

³³⁷ [Ortaç], Yusuf Ziya, “Kurbanlar...”, *Akbaba*, 7 March 1936.

everyone since it could led to another war, perhaps a full-scale one.³³⁸ In *Köroğlu*, too, this issue was discussed, the magazine arguing that the great powers sought excuses to fight each other and that another world war was soon to come. In the face of such threats, *Köroğlu* proposed that Turkey should be “vigilant” and purchase many airplanes.³³⁹ The need to strengthen the position of Turkish aviation was also one of the themes that *Ulus* discussed in detail, mainly in order to raise funds from the public in support of the government’s attempts to increase the budget for aviation.³⁴⁰ Just as was the case immediately after Mussolini’s speech in 1934, the issue of increasing armaments also appeared in the discussions in the Turkish press to the extent that it was claimed that “a true friend is an arm in hand”.³⁴¹

By magnifying the danger that the Italo-Ethiopian War created at different levels, the Turkish press, however, aimed not only at justifying its security needs, such as strengthening its aviation or increasing armaments, for the main purpose of this focus on the Italian invasion of Ethiopia in the press was to justify Turkey’s reclaiming full sovereignty over the Straits regime, which was then the greatest concern for the Turkish government, especially given the dangerous situation in the Mediterranean and around the world.³⁴² A prime example of this justification was evident in an article written by Yunus Nadi who argued:

If we look at how much the world has changed since [the First World War], we will lose consciousness. ... In the face of the dire position of peace which could be destroyed at any moment, in this most serious period, aren’t the League of Nations and the whole of Europe swimming around in confusion and agitation without any knowledge of what to do? Is the Mediterranean not bubbling with the dangers of war? The situation is so altered that it is [now] impossible not to see all this with complete clarity in

³³⁸ [Ortaç], Yusuf Ziya, “1936”, *Akbaba*, 4 January 1936, p. 3.

³³⁹ “Muharebe Havası Esiyor”, *Köroğlu*, 19 June 1935, p. 1.

³⁴⁰ Gökmen, Şakir Hazim, “Havacılık Yolunda Yapacaklarımız”, *Ulus*, 17 August 1935, p. 2.

³⁴¹ *Köroğlu*, 11 April 1936.

³⁴² Doğar, “‘Complete Neutrality’ or ‘Controlled Enmity’?”, pp. 240-2.

relation to the Straits, that is to a vital point in our security, and to admit the [need for a revision in the Straits].³⁴³

3.4. Conclusion

The position of the Turkish government and the Turkish press about Mussolini's speech in 1934 as well as during the Italian invasion of Ethiopia in 1935-1936 demonstrated the fact that in the period between 1934 and 1936, Turkey did not define its foreign policy merely on the basis of a direct Italian threat to Turkey. In fact, a close examination of the Turkish position in these two events suggests that by emphasising the dangers that Italy posed for the Mediterranean and the Balkans and the international status quo in the Turkish press, Turkey used these incidents to justify its own security needs both for domestic and international audiences and that the most important of these needs was for the refortification of the Straits, a project which the Turkish government had wanted to realise for a long time.

³⁴³ [Abahoğlu], Yunus Nadi, "Boğazlar Meselesinin Biz Türklere Nisbetle Ehemmiyeti Tekrar Belirdi", *Cumhuriyet*, 25 December 1935, p. 1 as translated in Doğar, "'Complete Neutrality' or 'Controlled Enmity'?", p. 240.

CHAPTER 4

THE ITALIAN FACTOR IN THE STRAITS ISSUE

The Italo-Ethiopian War of 1935-1936, as the previous chapter demonstrated, was not perceived by Turkey as an event that would eventually lead to direct Italian aggression against Turkey but, as the coverage in the Turkish press suggests, was set within the wider context of the Turkish perception of threat that was based not simply on Italy but on the insecure international environment of the late interwar period, and was therefore seen against the backdrop of the implications of the Italian invasion for the position of the League of Nations in world affairs, for the power struggle in Europe and for the possibility of a new world war. Turkish foreign policy, as well as the coverage in the Turkish press in this period, not only reflected a desire for increasing the Turkish military budget or strengthening aviation, but also a desire to solve the most important security problem of the country, which was the lack of Turkey's sovereignty over the Turkish Straits.³⁴⁴ This chapter argues that the Italian invasion of Ethiopia prepared the ground for the Turkish government to realise “one of the major successes”³⁴⁵ of Turkish foreign policy in the interwar period, i.e. the revision of the Straits regime. The Montreux Convention of July 1936 became possible largely due to the Turkish government's further securitisation and manipulation of the Italo-Ethiopian conflict both in the domestic and the international arena.

³⁴⁴ Doğar, ““Complete Neutrality’ or ‘Controlled Enmity’?”, pp. 220-1.

³⁴⁵ Biagni, Antonello, “Introduzione - La repubblica turca: un quadro politico” in *Italia e Turchia tra passato e futuro: Un impegno comune, una sfida culturale*, Esra Danacıoğlu Tamur and Fabio L. Grassi (eds.) (Rome: Edizioni Nuova Cultura, 2009), p. 16.

4.1. Revising Historiography on the Italian Threat and the Straits

The existing scholarship on the issue acknowledges the fact that the Italo-Ethiopian War prepared the ground for the Turkish government to make its claim on the Straits heard. According to Soysal, the Italian invasion of Ethiopia was one of the decisive factors that led the Turkish government to raise officially the question in April 1936, along with other issues, such as Italy's increasing fortifications in the Dodecanese islands during the invasion of Ethiopia and Germany's remilitarisation of the Rhineland in March 1936, which effectively ended the Locarno understanding.³⁴⁶ Ülman even argued that the Italian aggression was "the chance" Turkey needed to change the existing Straits regime.³⁴⁷ In an anonymous volume published by the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1973, it is argued that this "chance", which appeared with the Italian invasion of Ethiopia, was also due to the fact that now Britain could more easily be persuaded to support the Turkish point of view regarding the Straits regime since the Turkish government regarded the Italian invasion of Ethiopia as a struggle for hegemony in the Mediterranean between Italy and Britain, a struggle in which Britain could not accept any Italian hegemony in the Mediterranean.³⁴⁸

The secondary literature on the topic, however, fails to offer an analysis of how exactly Turkey used the situation for its own security aims. Just as in the issues covered in the previous chapter, the secondary literature often directly connects the Turkish government's foreign policy in this period to the idea that Italy would attack Turkey after Ethiopia. Barlas argued that the League's limits over implementing the collective security mechanism were particularly important for Turkey since the organisation was not able to prevent the "Italian aggression",

³⁴⁶ Soysal, *Türkiye'nin Siyasal Andlaşmaları*, p. 493. For a similar argument see: Bolech Cecchi, Donatella, "L'Italia e la Conferanza di Montreux nei documenti britannici", *Il Politico*, 58/4 (167) (1993), p. 666.

³⁴⁷ Ülman, "Türk Dış Politikasına Yön Veren Etkenler (1923-1968)", p. 263. See also Kösebalaban, *Turkish Foreign Policy*, p. 68.

³⁴⁸ T. C. Dışişleri Bakanlığı Araştırma ve Siyaset Planlama Genel Müdürlüğü, *Türkiye Dış Politikasında 50 Yıl: Montreux ve Savaş Öncesi Yılları (1935-1939)* (Ankara, 1973), p. 11.

which was, according to her, “eventually turn[ed] on Turkey”.³⁴⁹ More explicitly, Di Casola argued that in this period Turkey considered itself as the “next in line” after Ethiopia.³⁵⁰ Gülmez explained that the reason for Turkey to revise the Straits regime was “the rising German and Italian revisionism”.³⁵¹

These arguments, which overplay the importance of a direct Italian threat in the Straits issue, depend on an analysis of British documents, including a report written by the then British ambassador in Turkey, Percy Loraine, who gave details of his two different meetings with Aras and Atatürk on the Straits issue on 8 April and 10 April 1936 respectively.³⁵² Contrary to the arguments made based on it, this report from Loraine to Eden, demonstrated that Turkey’s demand for a revision of the Straits regime was not directly due to the Italian threat, but to the ongoing international situation, in which the Italo-Ethiopian War proved to be only a part. Tevfik Rüştü Aras, who visited Loraine just after “a lengthy sitting” of the cabinet of Ministers on 8 April, gave the reasons for Turkey’s desire to revise the Straits regime as follows:

(1) the feeling of general insecurity ... raised by the Italo-Abyssinian conflict, by Germany’s repudiation of the Treaty of Locarno and her unilateral action in reoccupying the Rhineland, by Austria’s ...

³⁴⁹ Barlas, “Friends or Foes?”, p. 247.

³⁵⁰ Di Casola, “Italo-Turkish Relations between the Two Wars”, p. 334.

³⁵¹ Gülmez, Seçkin Barış, “Turkish Foreign Policy as an Anomaly: Revisionism and Irredentism through Diplomacy in the 1930s”, *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 44/1 (2017), p. 36.

³⁵² The scholarly works that use this specific document to argue the same point are Bolech Cecchi, “L’Italia e la Conferenza di Montreux nei documenti britannici”, p. 667; Gülmez, “Turkish Foreign Policy as an Anomaly”, p. 42; Macfie, A. L., “The Straits Question: The Conference of Montreux”, *Balkan Studies*, 13/2 (1972), p. 204; Kurat, Yuluğ Tekin, “Anglo-Turkish Relations during Kemal Atatürk’s Presidency of the Turkish Republic”, *Osmanlı Araştırmaları / Journal of Ottoman Studies*, vol. IV (1984), p. 129. For works that rely extensively on other British documents on the subject and reach the same conclusion regarding the Italian threat factor in the revision of the Straits regime, see Di Casola, “Italo-Turkish Relations between the Two Wars”, p. 334; Güçlü, Yücel, “Turco-British Relations on the Eve of the Second World War”, *Middle Eastern Studies*, 39/4 (2003), p. 167; Sarıkoyuncu Değerli, Esra, “Bir İngiliz Diplomatın Gözüyle Atatürk ve Türkiye (1933-1939)”, *Turkish Studies. International Periodical for the Languages, Literature and History of Turkish or Turkic*, 3/4 (2008), p. 648; Barlas, Dilek and Seçkin Barış Gülmez, “Turkish-British Relations in the 1930s: from Ambivalence to Partnership”, *Middle Eastern Studies*, 54/5 (2018), p. 834; Gülmez, Seçkin Barış, “Do Diplomats Matter in Foreign Policy? Sir Percy Loraine and the Turkish-British Rapprochement in the 1930s”, *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 15/1 (2019), p. 73.

denunciation of the military clauses of Saint-Germain, by the general process of rearmament, by the development of the events in the Far East... (2) ... a perceptible danger of European war. (3) That the Italians had altered the position in the Mediterranean by fortifying the islands of the Dodecanese. (4) That the guarantee afforded to Turkey by article 18 of the Straits Convention was seriously vitiated by the facts that (a) Japan had left the League of Nations, and (b) that Italy refused to regard herself as bound by certain international guarantees that she had accepted, so long as sanctions were enforced against her. (5) That the habit of unilateral repudiation of international obligations was spreading.³⁵³

In this list, perhaps, only the third clause regarding Italy's fortification in the Dodecanese islands might be taken as a reference to a direct Italian threat to Turkey, but even this was framed within the context of Mediterranean security, pointing out that the Italian fortifications might alter the status quo in the Mediterranean, but were not an immediate threat to Turkey. Moreover, the Italian fortification in the Dodecanese islands was not new, as discussed in the previous chapter.³⁵⁴

After several discussions with the Turkish foreign minister, according to the report, Percy Loraine was received by Atatürk on 10 April. Even though the main aim of this meeting was not the Straits issue itself, but the British ambassador's delivering of a letter to Atatürk announcing the accession of King Edward VIII, the Straits issue eventually came up in the conversation. Atatürk here referred to Italian aggression and to the fact that Italy's response to Turkey's communication regarding the revision in the status of the Straits "if not actually provocative, would be manoeuvre, intrigue and probably chicanery".³⁵⁵ Then, reportedly, Atatürk continued with the following:

it was, moreover, impossible not to take note of Signor Mussolini's avowed intention of recreating the Roman Empire; perhaps even the conquest of

³⁵³ "No. 491 Sir P. Loraine (Angora) to Mr. Eden, 10 April 1936" (E 2024/26/44) in *Documents on British Foreign Policy 1919–1939*, ser. 2, vol. 16 (London: H.M. Stationery Office, 1977), pp. 662–9.

³⁵⁴ See: "Chapter 3. Turkish Perception and Portrayal of the Italian Threat (1934–1936)", pp. 78–80, in this thesis.

³⁵⁵ "No. 491 Sir P. Loraine (Angora) to Mr. Eden, 10 April 1936" (E 2024/26/44), pp. 662–9.

Ethiopia, if realised, would not satisfy him, and if it did not, one wondered what would be the next step in his expansionist programme. Maybe the risk was a remote one, but in any case the Turkish Government were accepting it for the sake of international correctness and legality.³⁵⁶

These words were in fact no proof of the argument that Turkey expected a direct Italian aggression towards itself after the completion of the invasion of Ethiopia, but Loraine's letter to Eden demonstrated how the Turkish government used the Italian aggression as a pretext to justify its claim over the Straits to the British, who had been reluctant to support the Turkish claim until then. Here, reportedly, what Atatürk referred to as "the next step in [Mussolini's] expansionist programme" did not necessarily mean that this step was expected to be against Turkey. Firstly, the discussion was about whether Turkey should fortify the Straits until the time when a conference was to be held or whether it should wait without taking any military measures in the Straits. Therefore, what was referred to here as "the risk" was not the straightforward risk of Italy attacking Turkey, but of Italy creating unrest in the Mediterranean, which would eventually affect Turkey in one way or another. Secondly, according to Hasan Rıza Soyak, who was then the secretary general of the presidency of Turkish Republic and thus was always near the president, Atatürk did not really expect direct Italian action against Turkey during this time as Soyak argued that "Mussolini could attack the Balkans or Turkey only from the Albanian front", meaning that unless Italy took control of Albania, an Italian attack against the Balkan countries was not possible.³⁵⁷ For Tevfik Rüştü Aras, even the Italian invasion of Albania could have been prevented by the Balkan Pact, if Albania had been included in it. In that case, Italy could not have taken the risk of invading Albania, or any other Balkan country.³⁵⁸ An anecdote reported by Soyak regarding a speech made at *Casa d'Italia* by the Italian consul general in Istanbul Mario Badoglio, who was the eldest son of Pietro Badoglio, also demonstrated that such an intention was not in the air, Badoglio

³⁵⁶ "No. 491 Sir P. Loraine (Angora) to Mr. Eden, 10 April 1936" (E 2024/26/44), pp. 662–9.

³⁵⁷ Soyak, Hasan Rıza, *Atatürk'ten Hatıralar*, vol. II (Istanbul: Yapı ve Kredi Bankası A.Ş., 1973), p. 529.

³⁵⁸ Aras, *Atatürk'ün Dış Politikası*, pp. 134, 155 and 195–6.

stating that “as long as Atatürk is alive, the Balkans and Turkey cannot be attacked, the reason for this is quite clear; because Atatürk is older than Mussolini”.³⁵⁹

Badoglio’s rather playful remarks alone, of course, cannot be taken as a reason to ignore any existing Italian threat to Turkey and to underestimate the Italian factor in Turkey’s security calculations about the Straits. The Italian threat, however, was not a *sui generis* factor in any initiation of the effort to revise the Straits regime. Aras’s comments on the issue in fact reflected that the need for a revision in the Straits was due more to the international dynamics in Europe and in the world than to a mere Italian threat. Writing in his memoirs that “... Italy attacked Ethiopia. Sometime later, the German army entered the Rhineland. All these were events that could change the situation of the Mediterranean and Europe fundamentally”, Aras continued that thanks also to Japan’s withdrawal from the League of Nations as well as Germany’s introduction of military conscription and its remilitarisation of Rhineland, “now the issue of collective security had come to naught”.³⁶⁰

4.2. Turkish Foreign Policy, the Straits Issue and the Italian Factor

The most important reason that demonstrated why the Turkish demand in the revision of the Straits regime was not directly tied to a direct Italian threat to Turkey was in fact Turkey’s earlier efforts to change the Straits regime. As Hale argues, the Turkish government “had begun to raise the question of remilitarization in 1932, before the threat from Italy became clear”,³⁶¹ demonstrating that the revision of the Straits regime had been desired for a long time. In fact, it can be argued that from the time that the Lausanne Treaty was concluded, the Turkish government was not content with the existing situation in

³⁵⁹ Soyak, *Atatürk’ten Hatıralar*, p. 529.

³⁶⁰ Aras, *Atatürk’ün Dış Politikası*, p. 101: “... İtalya Habeşistan’a taarruz etti. Bir müddet daha sonra da Almanya ordusu “Ren” mıntıkasına girdi. Bütün bunlar, Akdeniz ve Avrupa durumunu temelinden değiştirecek hadiselerdi.”, “artık müşterek yardım hususu suya düşmüş...”.

³⁶¹ Hale, *Turkish Foreign Policy*, p. 47.

the status of the Straits, which denied Turkey the ability to take its own security measures in the region and made it dependent on a ‘protection’ mechanism to be provided by Britain, France, Italy and Japan. Turkey’s opposition to the existing Straits regime existed even before the Lausanne Conference was convened. Just a few days before the opening of the Lausanne Conference, in a meeting with Mussolini, who had just come to power in Italy, İnönü, the then foreign minister of the Ankara government, argued that “Istanbul will be evacuated. The Straits will be evacuated. No [power] will remain in Gallipoli, we do not recognise any [international] commission [to govern the Straits]”.³⁶² The status of the Straits had become a bone of contention in the Lausanne Conference, which compelled the Turkish government to accept the Lausanne Straits Convention. However, as İnönü argued, this did not mean that Turkey gave up its rights on the Straits. Defining the existing situation as one of the “deficiencies” of the Lausanne Treaty, he claimed that what would determine the future of the Straits afterwards was “the strength and efforts of the [Turkish] state”.³⁶³

It was for this reason that the Turkish government continuously made an effort to bring the issue back onto the international agenda whenever it was possible. According to Harry N. Howard, a contemporary American expert on Turkey and the Near East, these efforts “did not become especially audible until the breakdown of the League system in the years following 1931”, a situation which had been most clear when the League of Nations could not prevent the Japanese invasion of Manchuria.³⁶⁴ In March 1933, at the Disarmament

³⁶² İnönü, İsmet, *İsmet İnönü’nün Hatıraları: Büyük Zaferden Sonra Mudanya Mütarekesi ve Lozan Antlaşması*, vol. I (İstanbul: Yenigün Haber Ajansı Basın ve Yayıncılık, 1998), p. 76: “İstanbul tahliye edilecektir, Boğazlar tahliye edilecektir, Gelibolu’da kimse kalmayacaktır, hiçbir komisyon tanımayız.” For more information on the Italian position during the Lausanne Conference see: Cassels, Alan, *Mussolini’s Early Diplomacy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), pp. 21-45.

³⁶³ İnönü, İsmet, *İsmet İnönü’nün Hatıraları: Büyük Zaferden Sonra Mudanya Mütarekesi ve Lozan Antlaşması*, vol. II (İstanbul: Yenigün Haber Ajansı Basın ve Yayıncılık, 1998), pp. 80-1.

³⁶⁴ Howard, Harry N., “The Straits after the Montreux Conference”, *Foreign Affairs*, 15/1 (1936), p. 200.

Conference convened in Geneva,³⁶⁵ Aras brought the issue of the remilitarisation of the Turkish Straits into the discussion, arguing that the Straits Convention of the Lausanne Treaty was “incompatible with the right of legitimate defense” and that “if the military clauses in the various peace treaties [were to be eliminated], the military clauses in the Lausanne Treaty [should be] treated in the same way”,³⁶⁶ thus referring to Germany and Japan’s obstruction of the success of the disarmament conferences in Geneva.³⁶⁷ However, this attempt did not bear any immediate fruit since, unlike the Soviet support for the Turkish view,³⁶⁸ neither Sir John Simon nor Paul Boncour, then the British and French foreign ministers respectively, wanted such a discussion to be held in Geneva at that point claiming that the disarmament conference was not the place for it.³⁶⁹ The Turkish government tried again to raise the issue in another League session on 17 April, one month after the Mussolini’s speech on 18 March 1934, which was discussed in the previous chapter. In this session, Aras pointed to the unsatisfactory situation in the Straits regime, an attempt which once more failed to bring the desired outcome.³⁷⁰

The attempts of the Turkish government to raise the issue continued in 1935. The Turkish foreign minister referred to the issue of the Straits on several occasions such as at the meeting of the Council of the League of Nations in April, which took place just one month after Germany had introduced military conscription by violating the clauses of the Versailles Treaty of 1919. In this

³⁶⁵ For more information about the disarmament conference in March 1933, see: Trommer, Aage, “MacDonald in Geneva in March 1933”, *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 1/1-4 (1976), pp. 293-312.

³⁶⁶ As quoted in Howard, “The Straits after the Montreux Conference”, p. 200.

³⁶⁷ Neilson, Keith, *Britain, Soviet Russia and the Collapse of the Versailles Order, 1919-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 80.

³⁶⁸ Ülman, “Türk Dış Politikasına Yön Veren Etkenler (1923-1968)”, p. 263.

³⁶⁹ Millman, Brock, *The Ill-Made Alliance: Anglo-Turkish Relations, 1934-1940* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1998), p. 70.

³⁷⁰ Papuççular, *Türkiye ve Oniki Ada*, p. 105; Millman, *The Ill-Made Alliance*, p. 71.

session, Aras explicitly stated that Turkey wanted to alter the existing regime in the Straits, a statement which was received with reservation on the part of Britain, France and Italy.³⁷¹ On 14 September 1935, too, Aras brought the Straits issue again back onto the agenda in the League Assembly and argued that, given the failure of the disarmament efforts, the Lausanne Straits Convention was “unique, detrimental, and unfair”.³⁷²

Even though these Turkish attempts failed to turn the international environment in Turkey’s favour, this situation would start to change after the Italian invasion of Ethiopia on 3 October 1935. The connection between the Italian invasion of Ethiopia and the revision of the Straits regime was perhaps most evident in November 1935 when Aras repeated Turkey’s desire for the revision of the Straits regime in the League of Nations during the discussions about the sanctions that would be imposed on Italy. This time, according to Özersay, Turkey’s efforts were received in the international arena with much more approval than before.³⁷³ In a session of the League Council on 17 December 1935, at a time when the League of Nations was in a rather delicate situation due to the recently leaked Hoare-Laval Plan, which undermined the League’s position in world affairs, Aras again brought the Straits issue onto the agenda and argued that the current situation in the Straits left Turkey’s security weakened and that there was thus a need for a change.³⁷⁴ Aras’s and the Turkish government’s claims about the revision of the Straits regime also reached an international audience. The British newspaper, *The Times*, published an article on 27 December 1935, in which the Turkish claims over the Straits and Turkey’s justification for such a claim were discussed. The newspaper, without making any explicit comment on the British

³⁷¹ Walters, F. P., *A History of the League of Nations* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 611.

³⁷² Millman, *The Ill-Made Alliance*, p. 78.

³⁷³ Özersay, Kudret, “Montreux Boğazlar Sözleşmesi” in *Türk Dış Politikası: Kurtuluş Savaşından Bugüne Olgular, Belgeler, Yorumlar*, vol. I: 1919-1980, Baskın Oran (ed.) (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2009), p. 371.

³⁷⁴ Bıyıklı, Mustafa, *Batı İşgalleri Karşısında Türkiye’nin Ortadoğu Politikaları: İki Dünya Savaşı Arasında* (Istanbul: Hiperlink Yayınları, 2019), p. 352.

position, added that “there is a growing impression in Turkish political circles at the moment that the attitude taken by Great Britain on this question is less intransigent than formerly and may lead to a régime more in keeping with Turkish wishes”. *The Times* also argued that these “Turkish wishes” were due to the “world conditions [that] have so changed” recently.³⁷⁵

However, among these world conditions, the Italian invasion of Ethiopia proved to be the most important in justifying the Turkish claim over the Straits for two main reasons. The first one was that, as discussed in the previous chapter, it was one of the major challenges that the League of Nations faced in its history, which eventually contributed to the further visibility of its ineffectiveness in world politics.³⁷⁶ Thus, for Turkey, it meant the weakening of the collective security system that the League of Nations provided. Secondly, Italy was one of the signatories of the Lausanne Treaty and it was also a guarantor of the security of the Turkish Straits according to Article 18 of the Lausanne Straits Convention, which stated:

Should the freedom of navigation of the Straits or the security of the demilitarised zones be imperilled by a violation of the provisions relating to freedom of passage, or by a surprise attack or some act of war or threat of war, the High Contracting Parties, and in any case France, Great Britain, Italy and Japan, acting in conjunction, will meet such violation, attack, or other act of war or threat of war, by all the means that the Council of the League of Nations may decide for this purpose.³⁷⁷

Italy, being an aggressor in the case of Ethiopia, therefore demonstrated to Turkey that the understanding between Britain, France, Japan and Italy could easily become void since Italy was acting on its own apparatus in the case of Ethiopia. Moreover, by the time of the Italo-Ethiopian War, Japan had already proved its

³⁷⁵ “Turkish Policy in the Mediterranean. The Straits Régime”, *The Times*, 27 December 1935, p. 10.

³⁷⁶ See: “Chapter 3. Turkish Perception and Portrayal of the Italian Threat (1934-1936)”, pp. 88-91, in this thesis.

³⁷⁷ Republic of Turkey, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “II. Convention Relating to the Régime of the Straits”, <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/ii-convention-relating-to-the-regime-of-the-straits.en.mfa> [accessed on 26 March 2020].

unreliable position due to its aggressive attitudes in the international arena and by invading Manchuria. As for Britain and France, their appeasement policy towards Italy through the Hoare-Laval Plan in December 1935 was in fact a manifestation of the fact that they were not in a position to ensure the security of the Straits.³⁷⁸

This view was also worded later in a book on the foreign policy of the early Turkish Republic written by Yusuf Hikmet Bayur, the ex- minister of education and then the CHP MP for Manisa, stating that

in fact, in time, several events had clearly demonstrated that it was not right to trust the moral force of the League of Nations. That Japan had withdrawn from the League of Nations and Italy dived into an Ethiopian war had made it obvious that Article 18 of the Lausanne [Straits] Convention could not be enforced.³⁷⁹

Therefore, the *de facto* end of the protection mechanism provided by the Lausanne Treaty was the reason that enabled the Turkish government to justify its claim for the status of the Straits, not a possible direct attack from Italy.

With the beginning of the Italo-Ethiopian War, the discussions regarding the revision of the Straits regime were also intensified at the domestic level, the issue being discussed in several meetings at the Turkish Parliament. At a parliamentary session on 11 October 1935, Berç Türker, an independent MP from Afyon Karahisar, pointed out the dangerous position of international politics and highlighted the need for fortifying the Straits. Türker was in fact the person who brought the question onto the meeting's agenda with a written proposal to discuss the subject at parliament, a statement which suggested:

The international political situation is today in a very dangerous position. In this situation, it is necessary to keep the gates of our homeland closed against all possibilities. From the perspective of security, it is absolutely not right to leave the Dardanelles, the most delicate place of our homeland,

³⁷⁸ T. C. Dışişleri Bakanlığı Araştırma ve Siyaset Planlama Genel Müdürlüğü, *Montreux ve Savaş Öncesi Yılları (1935-1939)*, p. 5. See also Barlas and Güvenç, *Türkiye'nin Akdeniz Siyaseti*, p. 229.

³⁷⁹ Bayur, *Türkiye Devletinin Dış Siyaseti*, p. 178: "Halbuki zamanla bir çok vak'alar Cemiyeti Akvamın manevî kuvvetine güvenmenin doğru olmadığını pek açık olarak göstermişti. Japonyanın Cemiyeti Akvamdaki çıkışı ve İtalyanın Habeşistan harbine dalmış olması da Lozan mukavelesinin işbu 18 inci maddesinin tatbik edilemeyecek hale geldiğini aşikâr kılmıştı".

open. We sincerely desire peace and to respect the treaties. However, if any of the articles in the treaties place our homeland in danger or threaten to undermine our security, we want to keep [the security of] our homeland above everything. That is why, since it is necessary to handle this very important and delicate issue without a moment's delay, I request that our honourable government inform the parliament regarding what kind of precautions it has taken over this issue.³⁸⁰

Türker's question to the government was in fact a good reflection of how the Italo-Ethiopian conflict and the worsening situation of world politics became a reason to justify Turkey's security objectives regarding the Straits. This question was answered by Şükrü Kaya, the then minister of internal affairs, who after stating that the government was well aware of the existing problems in international politics as well as the delicacy of the Straits issue, argued that "we are not failing and will not fail to try to explain the country's need for strengthening its defence in international meetings [and] in the case that we are exposed to a risk that we were not expecting, we will not hesitate to take the necessary actions".³⁸¹ Even though Kaya's response was received with much applause and shouts of "bravo" in parliament, the shortness of the response and his rather noncommittal attitude perhaps indicates that the Turkish government did not yet think that this was the right time to raise the issue officially in the League of Nations.

Apparently unsatisfied with Kaya's answer, Berç Türker continued to raise the issue:

The international political situation is very dangerous. When each country in the world is feverishly following a policy of [re]armament, why are we leaving open [Turkey's] most important gate from the point of view of the

³⁸⁰ *TBMM Zabıt Ceridesi*, Devre: V, Fevkâlade İçtima, 11 October 1935, Friday, p. 69: "Arsiulusal siyasal durum bugünlerde çok tehlikeli bir haldedir. Bu durum karşısında yurdumuzun kapılarını her ihtimale karşı kapalı tutmak gereklidir. Yurdumuzun en nazik noktası olan Çanakkale boğazının açık kalması güvenlik bakımından asla doğru değildir. Biz, candan barış isteriz ve andlaşmaları gözetmek isteriz. Fakat andlaşmalardaki her hangi bir madde, yurdumuzu tehlikeye koyuyor ve selâmetini bozmak tarafına gidiyorsa, biz, sevgili yurdumuzu her şeyin üstünde tutmak isteriz. Bundan dolayı bu çok önemli ve nazik meselenin, hiç vakit kaybedilmeksizin kotarılması gerekli olduğundan, saygıdeğer Hükümetimizin buna dair ne gibi tedbirler ittihaz etmiş olduğunu Kamutaya bildirilmesini rica ederim".

³⁸¹ *TBMM Zabıt Ceridesi*, 11 October 1935, p. 69: "Memleketin müdafaasını tamamlamak ihtiyacını arsiulusal içtimalarda anlatmağa çalışmaktan geri kalmıyoruz ve geri kalmıyacağız. Beklemediğimiz ihtimallere maruz kalırsak icab eden tedbirleri almakta tereddüd etmeyeceğiz".

national defence of our country. In my opinion, the article[s] about [the status of] the Straits in the Lausanne Treaty should be regarded as no longer applicable and void from the point of view of rightness and fairness, of the security of our country and because the international political situation has changed radically.³⁸²

Türker's speech in parliament was in fact a summary of the arguments of the Turkish government when a revision was officially demanded through a diplomatic note sent to the signatories of the Lausanne Treaty as well as to the League of Nations in April 1936, thus making it clear that the discussion in parliament was just the beginning of more efforts to come to bring about a revision in the Straits regime.

President Atatürk's speech opening parliament on 1 November 1935 also contributed to these efforts since the speech very much highlighted the existing insecure environment in the international arena and emphasised Turkey's need for security in such an environment. Even though the speech did not directly refer to the Straits issue, it was important in the sense that Turkey's security concerns were once again officially announced to the world from the mouth of the most authoritative figure in Turkey. At the very beginning of his speech, Atatürk acknowledged the extraordinary situation of the international environment by stating that "the Parliament starts working at a time when the international situation is very important". The president then continued by pointing out two important principles: "to be in a strong position to defend [Turkey] and [its] rights" and "to pay attention to international cooperation to preserve the peace".³⁸³ In the last part of his speech, Atatürk also underlined the importance of aviation in terms of the country's security, an importance which, according to the Turkish

³⁸² *TBMM Zabıt Ceridesi*, 11 October 1935, pp. 69-70: "Arsiulusal siyasal vaziyet çok vahimdir. Dünyada ne kadar milletler varsa hummalı bir silâhlanma siyasetini kabul etmişken niçin bizim yurdumuzun müdafaai milliye noktai nazarından en önemli kapısını açık bırakıyoruz. ... Bence Lozan muahedesindeki boğazlara dair madde, hak ve adalet noktai nazarından, yurdumuzun emniyeti noktai nazarından ve arsiulusal siyasal vaziyetin kökünden değişmiş olması noktai nazarından ortadan kalkmış ve hükmü kalmamış bir madde gibi telâkki edilmelidir".

³⁸³ *TBMM Zabıt Ceridesi*, Devre: V, İçtima Senesi: 1, 1 November 1935, Friday, p. 2.

president, had once again been proved by the recent developments in international politics.³⁸⁴

As the Turkish foreign minister claimed, this desired strong position of Turkey was, however, hampered due to the current situation of the Straits. At a parliamentary meeting on 13 November to discuss the issue of the application of the League's economic sanctions against Italy, Aras claimed that at such a delicate time, the government was working on the issue more than ever, trying to persuade the other countries about the necessity of the fortification of the Straits in terms of Turkish security.³⁸⁵ This approach by the foreign minister again clearly demonstrated the fact that the government was trying to make use of the existing political turmoil which had emerged from the Italian threat by portraying the threat as not only one against Ethiopia, but one that be directed against any other country at any moment. The Turkish government's efforts were also evident in Aras's memoirs, where he argued that

while fascist aircraft poured gas over the defenseless people from the skies of Ethiopia, it was imperative, in the autumn of 1935, to strengthen its [Turkey's] security position within the League of Nations and, on the other hand, to take defence measures for the country in time.³⁸⁶

4.3. Making the Turkish Case Heard: The Role of the Turkish Press

The Turkish government's efforts to publicise the Turkish claim over the Straits were also supported by the Turkish press. On 4 September, a cartoon was published in *Köroğlu* (Figure 4.1), depicting the main character Köroğlu as a strong man, who was protecting the Dardanelles with a big sword in his hand. Behind Köroğlu, there appeared a Turkish flag, which signified that the Straits belonged to the Turkish people. The caption of the cartoon was in fact a riddle and

³⁸⁴ *TBMM Zabut Ceridesi*, 1 November 1935, p. 3.

³⁸⁵ *TBMM Zabut Ceridesi*, 13 November 1935, p. 52.

³⁸⁶ Aras, *Atatürk'ün Dış Politikası*, p. 165: "Faşist uçakları, Habeş semasından müdafaasız halka gazlar yağdırırken, 1935 yılı sonbaharında Milletler Cemiyeti içinde emniyet cephesini sağlamlaştırmaya ve diğer taraftan memleketinin savunma tedbirlerini vaktinde almaya saik olmalıydı".

read “The gate of the Mediterranean, Holding its Deed..!”, to which the answer was “the Dardanelles”. *Köroğlu* also connected the need for a fortification in the Dardanelles to the ongoing situation in Europe, a situation, according to the magazine, which was not promising due to the ongoing insecurity around the world.³⁸⁷ This representation was important particularly for domestic rather than international propaganda, since the magazine’s target audience was the common citizen and it was not closely followed by the international audience as *Akbaba*, the most popular humour magazine of the time, was.³⁸⁸ *Köroğlu*’s raising awareness among the public about the issue of the Straits became particularly significant considering the fact that the magazine had a close relationship with CHP, it even being referred to as one of the party publications in an official document.³⁸⁹



Figure 4.1: *Köroğlu*, 4 September 1935, p. 1.

³⁸⁷ “Bilmece: Akdeniz’in Kapısı, Elimdedir Tapısı..! (Çanakkale)”, *Köroğlu*, 4 September 1935, p. 1.

³⁸⁸ Öztürk, Serdar, *Cumhuriyet Türkiye’sinde Kahvehane ve İktidar (1930–1945)* (Istanbul: Kırmızı Yayınları, 2006), p. 436; Cantek, Levent and Levent Gönenç, *Muhalefet Defteri: Türkiye’de Mizah Dergileri ve Karikatür* (Istanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2017), p. 28.

³⁸⁹ 5 November 1935: CA, 490.1.0.0.1294.296.1.

The intensity of the coverage in the Turkish press changed in parallel to the changing circumstances in Turkish policy in the Straits issue, as well as in the international arena. Just after the parliamentary meeting on 11 October 1935, *Ulus* published a news item regarding the parliamentary discussion on its front page, just under an article about the Italo-Ethiopian War. The item, which gave little commentary on the meeting, was in effect a publication of the minutes of the parliamentary session. The fact that, whereas the other issues raised in the meeting, like the opium trade, tax and custom duties exemptions for imported devices related to radio and cinema for *Halkevleri*, and a law on agricultural credits for farmers, were only briefly mentioned, the minutes of the discussions related to the Straits were published in full, demonstrates the importance attached to this issue in order to raise domestic awareness.³⁹⁰

Approaches of other popular newspapers were similar. *Cumhuriyet*, using Kaya's words as the title of its article "We will not hesitate to take the necessary actions in the Dardanelles!", published the parliamentary discussion in detail,³⁹¹ along with other popular newspapers such as *Akşam*, *Tan* and *Kurun*, which also shared a detailed account of these discussions.³⁹² Even local newspapers like *Hakkın Sesi* in Bursa and *Ulusal Birlik* in İzmir, the latter also providing a map of the Straits, published the discussion on their front pages.³⁹³ Similarly, *Beyoğlu*, a newspaper published in French which targeted the Turkish Levantine population in Istanbul and was owned by the owner and editor of the weekly Italian newspaper *Il Messaggero degli Italiani di Constantinopoli*, Gilberto Primi, published the news

³⁹⁰ "Dün Kamutayda Boğazların Durumu Görüşüldü", *Ulus*, 12 October 1935, p. 1 and p. 5.

³⁹¹ "“Çanakkalede İcab Eden Tedbirleri Almakta Tereddüd Etmeyeceğiz!”", *Cumhuriyet*, 12 October 1935, p. 1 and p. 2.

³⁹² "Boğazların Tahkimi Meselesi", *Akşam*, 12 October 1935, p. 2; "Boğazların Müdafaası", *Kurun*, 12 October 1935, pp. 1-2; "Boğazların Tahkimi", *Tan*, 12 October 1935, p. 1 and p. 9.

³⁹³ "Çanakkale Boğazımız", *Hakkın Sesi*, 12 October 1935, p. 1; "Beklemediğimiz İhtimallere Maruz Kalırsak Boğazlar İçin İcabeden Tedbirleri Alacağız", *Ulusal Birlik*, 12 October 1935, p. 1 and p. 4.

about the parliamentary session on its front page.³⁹⁴ Such publications, therefore, showed the importance and necessity of raising the issue of the Straits in Turkey. This was not, however, the only aim of such press coverage, as Turkish popular newspapers were also closely followed abroad. The Italian journal, *Oriente Moderno*, quoting from the article in *Akşam*, published Şükrü Kaya's response to Türker's question, without giving the details of the question.³⁹⁵

According to *Köroğlu*, the Straits issue received widespread coverage in European newspapers. These newspapers, discussing what each country would do in such a complicated international environment, argued, reportedly, that the Turks would close the Straits in six hours. This argument, as *Köroğlu* reported, was confirmed by the Turkish foreign minister claiming that "if we consider it necessary, we will do it". *Köroğlu*, supporting the foreign minister's claim, titled this news item "Elbette Yaparız" (Of course, We will Do it!) and further claimed that the Turkish army was powerful and governmental officials were vigilant, and that it would therefore not be a problem for Turkey to close the Straits.³⁹⁶

Two days after the parliamentary debate on 13 November, which was referred above, *Cumhuriyet*'s Yunus Nadi wrote an editorial about the content of the parliamentary session. Having pointed out the fact that Turkey's decision to apply the sanctions against Italy was not due to Turkish enmity towards Italy, but due to its obligations to the League of Nations, Yunus Nadi argued that the constantly changing conditions that had arisen in international relations since the signing of the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923 frequently compelled Turkey to bring the issue of the Straits onto the agenda. However, the author also underlined that Turkey was still highly concerned about the international agreements, thus providing a subtle contrast with Italy's ongoing action in Ethiopia and thus argued

³⁹⁴ "Un débat important au Kamutay", *Beyoğlu*, 12 October 1935, p. 1.

³⁹⁵ R[ossi], E[ttore], "Dichiarazioni del governo sulla questione degli Stretti", *Oriente Moderno*, 15/10 (October 1935), p. 509.

³⁹⁶ "Elbette Yaparız. Çanakkale Boğazını 6 Saatte Kapatırız", *Köroğlu*, 26 October 1935, p. 1.

that it was Turkey's right to expect the others to respect its need for security.³⁹⁷ In addition to the editorials published, *Cumhuriyet* also published articles from foreign newspapers in translation about the Straits issue. An article from the German newspaper *Völkischer Beobachter* appeared on 20 November which argued that after the end of the Italo-Ethiopian conflict, Turkey would raise the issue of a revision in the Straits regime, a revision that would end in favour of Turkey. The article also argued that Britain would be supportive of the Turkish government's desire.³⁹⁸ This article in fact demonstrated that the discussion about the Straits regime as well as Turkey's policy of making use of the Italo-Ethiopian conflict were not something secret.

4.4. The Italian Factor on the Way to Montreux

The publications in the Turkish press therefore contributed to the formation of a fertile domestic and international environment for the Turkish claim on the Straits issue, an environment which enabled the Turkish government to send its diplomatic note regarding the revision of the Straits regime to the League of Nations and to the signatory countries of the Straits Convention of the Lausanne Treaty on 11 April 1936. According to Millman, the main reason for Turkey's patient waiting to send the official note to the signatories until then was that Turkey did not want to "give a very wrong impression ... that [it] was seeking to profit from Italy's challenge to the League"³⁹⁹ and April 1936 proved to be the right time to raise the issue since the almost certain Italian success in Ethiopia and the failure of the sanctions by that point had proved that the League had failed to provide the collective security for which it had been established.⁴⁰⁰

³⁹⁷ "Zecri Tedbirler Kamutaydan Geçerken", *Cumhuriyet*, 15 November 1935, pp. 1-2.

³⁹⁸ "İngiltere Boğazların Tahkimine Razı Olacakmış", *Cumhuriyet*, 20 November 1935, p. 7.

³⁹⁹ Millman, *The Ill-Made Alliance*, p. 74.

⁴⁰⁰ Millman, *The Ill-Made Alliance*, p. 79.

The official note once again showed that Turkey's concerns were much more related to the general changing political situation in Europe and the world than to the Italian threat itself. The note claimed that Turkey's desire to change the Straits regime was due to the "uncertain" position in the Mediterranean, to a tendency for rearmament around the world and to the international environment in which even the signatory countries were expecting a new world war.⁴⁰¹ Furthermore, the note highlighted the slowness and ineffectiveness of the collective security mechanism, which had been demonstrated by "the political crises", one of which clearly being the Italo-Ethiopian War even though the note did not explicitly state this. In these circumstances, the note concluded, Article 18 of the existing Straits Convention, which created a 'security' mechanism over the Straits by Britain, France, Italy and Japan, was no longer applicable.⁴⁰²

Turkey therefore did not officially name Italy as an aggressor in the note, but, the newspaper of the ruling party, *Ulus*, did not have any scruples about naming Japan and Italy as the main actors who directly led to Article 18 becoming obsolete. Three days after the Turkish government's sending of the diplomatic note to the signatory countries and the League of Nations, in an article in *Ulus*, Necip Ali Küçüka, a lawyer and a CHP MP from Denizli, pointed out the inapplicability of Article 18 by specifically referring to the Italian policies vis-à-vis the League of Nations. Having argued that Turkey's action for the revision of the Straits regime was different from those of Germany and Austria since it was conducted on the basis of a legal principle of *rebus sic stantibus*, meaning that Turkey took action because of a substantial change in the international conditions since the Lausanne Treaty was signed in 1923, Küçüka discussed Italy as an example to prove his argument and stated that

... Japan, which was one of the countries that gave assurances [regarding the security of the Straits] in the name of the League of Nations, ...

⁴⁰¹ T. C. Dışişleri Bakanlığı Araştırma ve Siyaset Planlama Genel Müdürlüğü, *Montreux ve Savaş Öncesi Yılları (1935-1939)*, p. 22: "... Akdeniz'de yavaş yavaş bir kararsızlık teessüs etmeye başlamıştır".

⁴⁰² T. C. Dışişleri Bakanlığı Araştırma ve Siyaset Planlama Genel Müdürlüğü, *Montreux ve Savaş Öncesi Yılları (1935-1939)*, p. 22.

withdrew from the League of Nations. And Italy's position towards the League of Nations is [also] obvious.

Since withdrawal of a guarantor country from the League consequently meant that this country could no longer be bound by the international agreements signed within the framework of the League of Nations, Küçüka concluded, this would not only create problems from the point of Turkey's security, but also of Europe's.⁴⁰³ Hence, Küçüka's article, as well as the note itself, positioned Italy within the framework of the collective security discussion.

The editorial in *Tan* on 13 April deliberated on the same angles of the issue. Here Ali Naci Karacan's expression was more explicit when compared to Küçüka's. This editorial was also a prime example of how the Ethiopian issue was used to justify Turkey's reclaim of the Straits. The Ethiopian issue, as in the previous examples, was discussed within the framework of the League of Nations in the article which, arguing that the League of Nations, which had become "a strange institution yet still regarded as a base for international security and order", raised questions about its ability to enforce its Covenant as well as about the international agreements, especially during the recent Ethiopian crisis.⁴⁰⁴ Karacan, like Küçüka, examined the effects of the Japanese and Italian policies on Turkish security in the Straits and argued:

Japan had withdrawn from the League of Nations. If we face any attack, will it send its fleet in the Far East to our aid? Who knows whether Italy will not again lay down the conditions, which it inserted in order to guarantee the Locarno agreement, over any dispute concerning the Straits question? In this way, the Straits Agreement, well before Turkey [s objections], has, in essence, automatically lost its legality, with the withdrawal of two of those states which had signed it.⁴⁰⁵

⁴⁰³ Küçüka, N. A., "Boğazlar Rejimi", *Ulus*, 14 April 1936, p. 2: "Şu vaziyet karşısında uluslar cemiyeti namına teminat veren devletlerden birisi olan Japonya bugün uluslar cemiyetinden çıkmıştır. Ve İtalyanın da uluslar cemiyetine karşı olan vaziyeti malûmdur".

⁴⁰⁴ Karacan, Ali Naci, "Boğazlar Meselesi", *Tan*, 13 April 1936, p. 1.

⁴⁰⁵ Karacan, "Boğazlar Meselesi", p. 5: "Japonya, Milletler Cemiyetinden çekilmiştir. Herhangi bir taarruz karşısında kalırsak Uzakşarktaki donanmasını imdadımıza gönderecek midir? İtalyanın Lokarno Muahedesindeki kefaletini yerine getirmek için koyduğu kayıtları, Boğazlar meselesine ait herhangi bir ihtilâfta tekrar etmeyeceğini kim bilebilir? Bu suretle Boğazlar Mukavelesi,

The note sent by the Turkish government was generally received with a positive attitude in Europe. *The Times* published an article on 13 April, which demonstrated an understanding of “the Turkish fear for security” due to the inapplicability of Article 18 of the Straits Convention.⁴⁰⁶ In the same issue, there appeared another article praising the way in which the Turkish government brought the matter onto the international agenda. The article argued that Turkey’s sending the note to the League of Nations as well to inform all the members of the institution was important due to the fact that Turkey had consulted Article 19 of the League of Nations Covenant, which allowed for a revision in international treaties in the face of a substantial change in international conditions. The British newspaper was highly satisfied with the Turkish government’s way of handling this process, stating that

it is noted with satisfaction here that Turkey has refrained from following the example of unilateral denunciation set by Germany and Austria and has declared her readiness to enter into negotiations for a new regime of the Straits.⁴⁰⁷

Ulus seemed content with *The Times*’s approach to the Turkish position and referred in particular to the part of the article quoted above, emphasising that *The Times* paid attention to the legal conduct of the Turkish demand for a revision in the Straits regime. The satisfaction of *Ulus* was also evident in the article, whose first line was written in a large font, “British and French newspapers emphasise the great difference between our request and the actions and decisions of other countries”.⁴⁰⁸ *Köroğlu* also acknowledged the positive attitude adopted by most of the European countries, publishing a cartoon on its front page, which depicted an armed Turkish soldier standing on one edge of the Dardanelles. The

Türkiyeden evvel, onu imza eden devletlerden ikisinin aradan çekilmesile kendiliğinden hukukî kıymetini esasen kaybetmiş vaziyettedir”.

⁴⁰⁶ “Turkish Fear for Security”, *The Times*, 13 April 1936, p. 9.

⁴⁰⁷ “Turkish Note to Powers”, *The Times*, 13 April 1936, p. 10.

⁴⁰⁸ “Boğazlar Hakkındaki Notamız ve Avrupa Gazeteleri”, *Ulus*, 14 April 1936, p. 1.

caption of the cartoon claimed that Turkey not only aimed to protect its security by this proposal, but also aimed to protect the security of European countries, who were “ready to cut each other’s throats”. That was why, according to the magazine, European countries did not oppose the Turkish desire to remilitarise the Straits.⁴⁰⁹ On the same day, another popular humour magazine *Akbaba*, published a cartoon in which the Turkish foreign minister, depicted as a pianist, was playing a piece entitled “the Turkish note”. The cartoon represented the League of Nations in the form of a man, who was listening the minister’s performance and was pleased by the ‘Turkish song’. He showed his appreciation declaring that it was “the best note” which he had heard so far.⁴¹⁰

There was an exception, however, regarding the attitudes of European countries towards the Montreux Convention, and that was Italy. Italy’s response to the Turkish note was awaited anxiously and impatiently by Turkey. *Akşam* published an article on its front page taken from the most important contemporary French newspaper, *Le Temps*, which referred to the positive attitude of France, Britain and the Balkan countries towards the Straits issue, but only mentioned Italy’s still ambiguous position in one sentence, at least according to the translation provided by *Akşam*. The Turkish newspaper chose this one sentence, “except for the still unknown Italian point of view, all countries approved [the Turkish note]”, and published it on the front page in a larger font.⁴¹¹

4.5. The Italian Reaction to the Turkish Note and Turkey’s Response

At the same time this article was published, the Italian government sent its response to the Turkish government’s note on 28 April 1936, but the response was far from providing a positive attitude: “...The Italian government reserves the right to make known its comments and opinion of the contents of the

⁴⁰⁹ *Köroğlu*, 18 April 1936, p. 1.

⁴¹⁰ “Boğazlar Tahkimi İçin Bir Nota Verdik!”, *Akbaba*, 18 April 1936, p. 16.

⁴¹¹ “Boğazlar Meselesi”, *Akşam*, 29 April 1936, p. 1 and p. 7.

abovementioned *note verbale* and the nature of the [Straits] issue”.⁴¹² The main reason for Italy’s non-approval of the Turkish note was the still-ongoing sanctions against Italy imposed by the League of Nations. Italy therefore made its support of Turkey’s attempt to revise the status of the Straits conditional on the lifting of the sanctions.⁴¹³

According to the Italian point of view, the Turkish demand for the revision of the Straits regime was not something unexpected and it was the “logical result” of the League’s failing sanction policy against Italy.⁴¹⁴ The Turkish government’s policy of benefiting from the existing international situation was known to the Italians, *Oriente Moderno* arguing in its May 1936 issue that the Turkish government “profited from the situation in Europe” to ask for a revision in the Straits.⁴¹⁵ On the other hand, the Turkish government was also aware of the Italian policy on the Straits issue. In his conversation with the British ambassador in Ankara, Percy Loraine, Atatürk had already foreseen that the Italian reaction to the Straits issue would not immediately be a positive one.⁴¹⁶

This negative stance of the Italian government was also manifested in the official documents. On 12 May 1936, Pompeo Aloisi, the former Italian ambassador to Ankara and now the head of the Italian Cabinet, sent two telegrams to Mussolini outlining the details of his communication with Aras regarding the Straits issue. According to the first letter, Aras explained the current situation about the Straits issue pointing out the necessity of changing the demilitarisation articles in the Straits Convention, the current article in force regulating commercial traffic and a possible conference to be convened in Montreux in June. Reportedly,

⁴¹² T. C. Dışişleri Bakanlığı Araştırma ve Siyaset Planlama Genel Müdürlüğü, *Montreux ve Savaş Öncesi Yılları (1935-1939)*, p. 52: “... İtalya Hükümeti yukarıda mezkur notverbalin muhtevassile meselenin mahiyeti hakkında mütalaaların ve noktai nazarını bildirmek hakkını muhafaza eder”.

⁴¹³ T. C. Dışişleri Bakanlığı Araştırma ve Siyaset Planlama Genel Müdürlüğü, *Montreux ve Savaş Öncesi Yılları (1935-1939)*, p. 51.

⁴¹⁴ “Boğazlar Hakkındaki Notamız ve Avrupa Gazeteleri”, *Ulus*, 14 April 1936, p. 3.

⁴¹⁵ A. G., “Riassunto della situazione. Turchia”, *Oriente Moderno*, 16/5 (May 1936), p. 253.

⁴¹⁶ “No. 491 Sir P. Loraine (Angora) to Mr. Eden, 10 April 1936” (E 2024/26/44), pp. 662–9.

Aras expressed his hopes that the signatory states would provide Turkey with “a proof of good faith” to which Aloisi replied with a rather hesitant answer, arguing that first a consultation was needed among the signatory countries to call for a conference. This consultation was in the making, Aras argued, with Britain and the Soviet Union having already approved a call for the conference.⁴¹⁷ In fact, Aloisi found it “very bold” that Aras was the one who was asking for “a proof of good faith”.⁴¹⁸ This was particularly due to Aras’s objections to the inclusion of the issue of lifting the sanctions against Italy in the agenda of the recent Balkan Pact meeting in Belgrade on 4-6 May, despite another member country having reportedly attempted to include the issue, according to a report sent from the undersecretary of the foreign affairs Suvich to Aloisi. The country that brought the issue was most probably Greece which was particularly insistent that any obligations within the Balkan Pact “would not involve them in a war with a Great Power”, a position which was evident from the establishment of the Balkan Pact in 1934.⁴¹⁹ In response to Aras’s position at the conference, in his report written on 10 May, Suvich wanted Aloisi to let Aras know that the Italian government would not also forget “this new unnecessary manifestation of [Aras’s] unchanging nature of hypocrisy”.⁴²⁰

Thus, just as Suvich wanted, Aloisi brought the issue to Aras’s attention and the Turkish foreign minister promptly denied any such an occurrence. Unconvinced, Aloisi wrote to Mussolini that “needless to say, I have the feeling

⁴¹⁷ “Il capo di gabinetto, Aloisi, al capo del governo e ministro degli esteri, Mussolini” (12 May 1936, Geneva), doc. 18, in Ministero degli affari esteri commissione per la pubblicazione dei documenti diplomatici, *I documenti diplomatici italiani ottava serie: 1935-1939*, vol. IV (10 maggio – 31 agosto 1936) (Rome: Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato P.V., 1993), p. 16.

⁴¹⁸ “Il capo di gabinetto, Aloisi, al capo del governo e ministro degli esteri, Mussolini” (12 May 1936, Geneva), doc. 18, p. 16.

⁴¹⁹ Stavrianos, L. S., *Balkan Federation: A History of the Movement toward Balkan Unity in Modern Times* (Wisconsin: George Banta Publishing Company, 1944), p. 244.

⁴²⁰ “Il sottosegretario agli esteri, Suvich, al capo di gabinetto, Aloisi, a Ginevra” (10 May 1936, Rome), doc. 5, in Ministero degli affari esteri commissione per la pubblicazione dei documenti diplomatici, *I documenti diplomatici italiani ottava serie: 1935-1939*, vol. IV (10 maggio – 31 agosto 1936) (Rome: Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato P.V., 1993), pp. 5-6. “Veda di far sapere ad Aras che abbiamo passato in contro anche questo nuova non necessaria manifestazione della sua immutabile natura di versipelle”.

that, as always, he lied”, clearly demonstrating the existing distrust of the fascist government towards Turkey.⁴²¹ This report clearly showed that the Italians did not regard the Straits issue separately from Turkey’s policy during the Italo-Ethiopian War since Aloisi continued, “... the conduct of Turkey [during the Ethiopian crisis in the Mediterranean] damaged our treaty of friendship”.⁴²² The fate of the Straits issue, therefore, was tied directly to Turkey’s policy during the Ethiopian crisis. In response to Aloisi, Aras argued that France, as an “ally” of Italy, had in fact followed the same policy as Turkey regarding the Italo-Ethiopian War and pointed out that Turkey’s policy was not unique and did not target Italy, a statement, however, that failed to convince Aloisi.⁴²³

Having received the Turkish ambassador to Rome, Hüseyin Ragıp Baydur, on the same day, Mussolini made it clear to Turkey that Italian support in the Straits issue was directly connected to the lifting of the sanctions. According to the report, the Turkish ambassador asked for “Italy’s friendly attitude” towards the Straits issue to which Mussolini, arguing that the application of the sanctions against Italy was in fact not a collective decision, but one made by other powers, i.e. Britain and France, replied “If Turkey were to make a definite gesture of friendship by lifting the sanctions, he would adopt a friendly attitude towards Turkey over the rearmament of the area of the Straits”.⁴²⁴

⁴²¹ “Il capo di gabinetto, Aloisi, al capo del governo e ministro degli esteri, Mussolini” (12 May 1936, Geneva), doc. 19, in Ministero degli affari esteri commissione per la pubblicazione dei documenti diplomatici, *I documenti diplomatici italiani ottava serie: 1935-1939*, vol. IV (10 maggio – 31 agosto 1936) (Rome: Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato P.V., 1993), p. 16: “Inutile dire che ho sensazione che, come sempre, egli [Aras] abbia mentito”.

⁴²² “Il capo di gabinetto, Aloisi, al capo del governo e ministro degli esteri, Mussolini” (12 May 1936, Geneva), doc. 19, p. 16.

⁴²³ “Il capo di gabinetto, Aloisi, al capo del governo e ministro degli esteri, Mussolini” (12 May 1936, Geneva), doc. 19, p. 16.

⁴²⁴ “Colloquio del capo del governo e ministro degli esteri Mussolini, con l’ambasciatore di Turchia a Roma, Baydur, e con l’ambasciatore ad Ankara, Galli” (14 May 1936, Rome), doc. 36, in Ministero degli affari esteri commissione per la pubblicazione dei documenti diplomatici, *I documenti diplomatici italiani ottava serie: 1935-1939*, vol. IV (10 maggio – 31 agosto 1936) (Rome: Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato P.V., 1993), p. 37: “Facesse la Turchia un preciso gesto di amicizia col togliere le sanzioni, ed egli terrebbe attitudine amichevole per la Turchia per il riarmo della zona degli Stretti”.

The Italian price for its support over the Straits issue was not a secret abroad. According to an article published in the Greek newspaper *Proia* on 20 May, an article which was translated into Turkish and sent by Interior Minister Şükrü Kaya to Prime Minister İnönü on 29 May, the Italian government had negotiated its support of the Montreux Conference in return for the removal of the sanctions against Italy and it had tried to “divide the countries that applied the sanctions from each other”. However, the newspaper was convinced that “Turkey would not accept this bargain”.⁴²⁵

This “bargain”, however, remained in place, thus creating a problem for Turkish-Italian relations. The fascist government’s displeasure over the Turkish government’s insistence on the continuation of the sanctions was evident in a telegram sent from the Italian ambassador in Ankara, Carlo Galli, to Mussolini on 9 June, a telegram reporting the details of his recent meetings with İsmet İnönü, Şükrü Kaya, Şükrü Saraçoğlu and Tevfik Rüştü Aras. The sanctions were the main topic of all these meetings. In his meeting with Şükrü Kaya, Galli once more conveyed his and his government’s discontent with Aras’s attitude at the recent Balkan Conference in Belgrade. Şükrü Kaya, according to the report, was “surprised” and denied Galli’s claims by arguing that “Because at a session of the cabinet the [Turkish] government had shown itself to be extremely favourable towards supporting any proposal for the lifting of sanctions”.⁴²⁶ However, considering the delicacy of the issue not only for relations with Italy but also for the question of the Straits, as well as for the formation of a common Balkan policy on the subject, it was unlikely that Aras would oppose the lifting of the sanctions without consulting the Turkish government. Galli, however, was not convinced claiming that “But we know without doubt that it was Aras himself who opposed

⁴²⁵ 29 May 1936: CA, 030.10.0.0.238.607.33.

⁴²⁶ “L’ambasciatore ad Ankara, Galli, al capo del governo e ministro degli esteri, Mussolini” (29 May 1936, Ankara), doc. 136, in Ministero degli affari esteri commissione per la pubblicazione dei documenti diplomatici, *I documenti diplomatici italiani ottava serie: 1935-1939*, vol. IV (10 maggio – 31 agosto 1936) (Rome: Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato P.V., 1993), p. 175: “Mi sorprende, ha esclamato Sukru Kaja, perché il governo in una seduta di Gabinetto si era mostrato favorevolissimo ad appoggiare ogni proposta di soppressione delle sanzioni”.

[the proposal to lift the sanctions in the conference]”.⁴²⁷ Moreover, Galli also raised the issue again in his meeting with Prime Minister İsmet İnönü, who asked the Italian ambassador about the thoughts of Mussolini on a possible Mediterranean Pact and the rearmament of the Straits. Galli’s reply was definite and again the manifestation of the fact that the Italo-Ethiopian War and the Straits issue were directly interrelated events: “Lift the sanctions and then we’ll talk about it”.⁴²⁸

As discussed in the previous chapter, the sanctions affected Turkey both economically and politically and thus their continuation did not benefit Turkey, particularly at a time when the fate of Italian support for the revision of the Straits regime was so tied to this issue. As Galli observed later in his meeting with Aras, a meeting which was according to the Italian ambassador “substantially hostile and negative”,⁴²⁹ the Turkish government’s position was not against the lifting of the sanctions, but rather it did not want to be the initiator of such an action. If the issue was brought to Geneva, Turkey would support the lifting of the sanctions (when on 30 June 1936 the British representative proposed that the sanctions should be lifted at the League’s Assembly, Turkey supported this proposal),⁴³⁰ but it would not bring the issue to Geneva by itself.⁴³¹ This was the very same approach that Turkey adopted in the beginning of and during the conflict, i.e. acting within the context of League of Nations.

On the same day that Galli sent his report to Mussolini on 9 June, Galeazzo Ciano was appointed as the new minister of foreign affairs, an appointment which

⁴²⁷ “L’ambasciatore ad Ankara, Galli, al capo del governo e ministro degli esteri, Mussolini” (29 May 1936, Ankara), doc. 136, p. 175: “... ma noi sappiamo in modo pertinente che è stato proprio Aras ad opporvisi”.

⁴²⁸ “L’ambasciatore ad Ankara, Galli, al capo del governo e ministro degli esteri, Mussolini” (29 May 1936, Ankara), doc. 136, p. 176: “Togliere le sanzioni, e poi ne parleremo”.

⁴²⁹ “L’ambasciatore ad Ankara, Galli, al capo del governo e ministro degli esteri, Mussolini” (29 May 1936, Ankara), doc. 136, p. 179.

⁴³⁰ Walters, *A History of the League of Nations*, p. 684.

⁴³¹ “L’ambasciatore ad Ankara, Galli, al capo del governo e ministro degli esteri, Mussolini” (29 May 1936, Ankara), doc. 136, p. 177.

would result in a more definite Italian stance regarding the Straits issue.⁴³² Later, in a meeting with the new Italian foreign minister, Ambassador Baydur asked whether the Italian government intended to join the international conference regarding the revision of the Straits regime on 22 June. After expressing his wish for better bilateral relations, Ciano stated that until the removal of the sanctions, Italy would not take part in any issue regarding Europe.⁴³³ Therefore, even though, an agreement would come into place in Montreux, Turkey would still have to seek Italian support since the lack of this support could hinder the implementation of the treaty in practice.

4.6. Changing the Straits Regime without Italy

The conference to discuss the fate of the Straits was nevertheless convened in Montreux on 22 June 1936 without Italy.⁴³⁴ At this time, the Italian government announced that it would not attend the conference for the reasons that the conference was untimely, that a conference about such a significant issue of Mediterranean security could not be discussed without one of the biggest Mediterranean powers, i.e. Italy, and that Turkey's concerns related to the possibility of a war in the Mediterranean were baseless considering that Mussolini regarded the Ethiopian issue as an issue of colonialism, not one of European politics.⁴³⁵ These claims by the Italian government were announced in *Il Giornale d'Italia*, a mouthpiece of the fascist government, in an article published on 23 June 1936. Having stated the above-mentioned reasons for Italy's position, the article also argued that Italy's non-attendance should be regarded as an indication that

⁴³² T. C. Dışışleri Bakanlığı Araştırma ve Siyaset Planlama Genel Müdürlüğü, *Montreux ve Savaş Öncesi Yılları (1935-1939)*, p. 53.

⁴³³ T. C. Dışışleri Bakanlığı Araştırma ve Siyaset Planlama Genel Müdürlüğü, *Montreux ve Savaş Öncesi Yılları (1935-1939)*, p. 53.

⁴³⁴ For the members of the Turkish delegation under Tefik Rüşti Aras at the Montreux Conference, see: 10 June 1936: CA, 030.18.1.2.65.48.14.

⁴³⁵ Soyak, *Atatürk'ten Hatıralar*, p. 539.

Italy might not agree with the decisions taken at the conference later.⁴³⁶ Moreover, Italian newspapers also argued that Turkey had already fortified some parts of the Straits and the conference in Montreux was only a way to legalise the already-existing situation.⁴³⁷ Aras responded to the Italian decision not to attend the Montreux Conference by maintaining that even though he would be pleased to see Italy's attendance at the conference, "it is very unfortunate that it is not possible to find a time that Italy would consider suitable [for the discussion] of the vital issues of other countries".⁴³⁸

The reaction to the news from Rome received considerable coverage in the Turkish press. While *Ulus* quoted Aras's above-mentioned statement on its third page on 25 June,⁴³⁹ *Tan* was less reserved in its attitude, sharing the news on its front page and quoting Aras's answer more visibly.⁴⁴⁰ The Turkish reaction was even referred to by *The Times*, which argued that "the Turkish public opinion has been somewhat shocked" by the news from Italy.⁴⁴¹ This "shock" was in fact quite clear in an editorial written by Falih Rıfkı Atay in *Ulus* specifically discussing the Italian stance regarding the Straits regime. The tone adopted by the official party newspaper showed that the Turkish authorities were totally furious in the face of the news. After summarising the content of the Italian note and the publications of the Italian newspapers on the issue, Atay discussed several points in order to prove the "weakness" of the reasons given by the Italian newspapers.⁴⁴² Atay argued that

⁴³⁶ Akşin, *Atatürk'ün Dış Politika İlkeleri ve Diplomasisi*, p. 294.

⁴³⁷ "İtalyanlara Göre Boğazları Kısmen Tahkim Etmişiz!", *Tan*, 4 July 1936, p. 1 and p. 5.

⁴³⁸ "İtalya Konferansa Muarız", *Tan*, 25 June 1936, p. 1: "Çok teessüf olunur ki diğer milletlerin hayatî işlerini İtalyanın muvafık göreceği zamanlara isabet ettirmek mümkün değildir".

⁴³⁹ "Son Dakika. Boğazlar Konferansı Hakkında İtalyan Görüşü ve Ajansın Bir Notu", *Ulus*, 25 June 1936, p. 3. See also "Habeş Meselesi Halledilmedikçe..", in the same issue, p. 1.

⁴⁴⁰ "İtalya Konferansa Muarız", *Tan*, 25 June 1936, p. 1.

⁴⁴¹ "Turkey and 'Italy's Convenience'", *The Times*, 26 June 1936, p. 16.

⁴⁴² Atay, Falih Rıfkı, "Konferans ve İtalya", *Ulus*, 26 June 1936, p. 1.

“Turkey did not attempt to militarise the Straits because it felt under direct threat of being attacked in the Mediterranean”, but rather because of the fact that the recent events had shown that “treaty guarantees are not capable of defending national security”.⁴⁴³

Atay’s point was also to be seen in the issue of *Tan* on the same day. *Tan* argued that the news of the Italian ‘assurance’ shared by *L’Agenzia Stefani*, then Italy’s leading press agency, that Italy had no intention of expansion in the Balkans or in the Mediterranean was irrelevant because Turkey demanded the fortification of the Straits not because of a possible attack by a single country, but in order to have a security mechanism which could be put into place “automatically”.⁴⁴⁴ The Italians were closely following these publications in the Turkish press since both editorials in *Ulus* and *Tan* on 26 June were quoted in *Oriente Moderno*’s July issue, which stated that “The Turkish papers of 26 June, as if obeying an order, engaged with the attitude of Italy towards the Montreaux Conference...and entered into a polemic with the Italian newspapers which had judged the meeting of the conference as untimely”, thus implicitly pointing out that behind the publications in the Turkish press, there was the Turkish government.⁴⁴⁵

From the Italian perspective, both the Turkish government’s attitude and the publications in the Turkish press were ‘illogical’ and primarily against Italy. This ‘illogical’ understanding of the Turkish threat perception of Italy was such that, according to Galli, who exchanged views with the new French ambassador to Ankara, Henri Ponsot, on the Straits issue and Mediterranean security, it was “an

⁴⁴³ Atay, “Konferans ve İtalya”, *Ulus*, 26 June 1936, p. 1: “Türkiye boğazları silahlamak teşebbüsüne, Akdenizde yakın bir hücumu uğramak tehdidi altında bulunduğunu hissederek girişmiş değildir. Türkiye, muahede garantilerinin millî emniyetleri müdafaa etmeğe ve filî taarruzları menetmeğe muktedir olmadığı inkâr edilmez hâdiselerle sabit olduktan sonra, alâkadar devletlere notasını vermiştir”.

⁴⁴⁴ “Boğazlar Konferansı ve İtalya”, *Tan*, 26 June 1936, p. 5.

⁴⁴⁵ “Pareri di giornali turchi sull’atteggiamento dell’Italia nella questione degli Stretti”, *Oriente Moderno*, 16/7 (July 1936), p. 392: “I giornali turchi del 26 giugno, come ubbidendo a una parola d’ordine, si occuparono dell’atteggiamento dell’Italia di fronte alla Conferenza di Montreux ... e polemizzarono con I giornali italiani i quali avevano giudicata intempestiva la riunione della Conferenza”.

incurable psychopathic case” and the Italian government did not really know “how to calm [Turkey’s] apprehensions about Italy”. Turkish fear of a possible attack from Italy’s bases in the Dodecanese was also ‘illogical’ according to the Italian ambassador since an examination of the positions of the bases could show that it posed no possible strategic danger for Turkey.⁴⁴⁶

The Italian press, too, shared similar claims about Turkish understanding of the Italian threat. The Italian newspaper *L’Azione Coloniale* published an article on 27 June 1936. After evaluating Turkey’s position in the Mediterranean, the Italian newspaper accused the Turkish government of being deluded and argued that

The Turks had invaded Anatolia, a place which was full of contradictions in terms of ethnicity and politics and they wanted to destroy people’s religions and their sacred beliefs; then they turned [their attention] to the Dodecanese islands. The Turks consider Italy as a natural enemy. This is a psychological mistake and deceptively bringing up the issue of the Italian expansion into Anatolia is a result of a pessimistic policy. Ankara is addicted to the disease of disillusionment and harbours the view that the Italian policy wishes to damage its authority and prestige. Conclusion? Turkey must give this up ...⁴⁴⁷

This Italian view was partly fuelled by the British press’s coverage of the Turkish “suspicion” of Italy, which was consistently referred by *The Times*. In one such article the British newspaper stated that “the Italian possession of the Dodecanese and the conversion of the island of Leros into a powerful military base near the Turkish coast have no doubt excited suspicions of Italy among the Turks, suspicions for which the new Roman Empire-builders have only themselves to

⁴⁴⁶ “L’ambasciatore ad Ankara, Galli, al capo del governo e ministro degli esteri, Mussolini” (26 May 1936, Ankara), doc. 111, in Ministero degli affari esteri commissione per la pubblicazione dei documenti diplomatici, *I documenti diplomatici italiani ottava serie: 1935-1939*, vol. IV (10 maggio – 31 agosto 1936) (Rome: Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato P.V., 1993), pp. 129-31.

⁴⁴⁷ 22 July 1936: CA, 030.10.0.0.238.608.5., p. 3: “Türkler etnik ve siyasal noktai nazarlardan ziddiyetler ile dolu olan Anadoluyu işgal etmişler ve oradan halkın dinini, mukaddesatını yok etmek istemişlerdir; sonra Oniki adaya cephelerini çevirmişlerdir. Türkler, İtalyayı tabii bir düşman olarak addediyorlar. Bu psikolojik bir hatadır ve Anadoluda İtalyan inkişafı meselesini hilekârane bir şekilde ortaya atması bedbin bir politikanın neticesidir. Ankara evham hastalığına müptelâdır, ve İtalyan politikasının kendi hakimiyeti ve prestijini kırmak istediği kanaatini beslemektedir. Netice? Türkiye bundan vazgeçmeli...” For an earlier example of a similar view on Turkey, see: 20 September 1935: CA, 030.10.0.0.238.606.12.

blame”.⁴⁴⁸ Even earlier, on 24 January 1936, another leading British newspaper, *The Manchester Guardian*, published an article discussing Turkey’s policy towards the League of Nations and its demands over the Straits regime. The article emphasised Turkey’s “active distrust of Italy” and argued that “the Turkish population certainly have never been quite at ease in regard to the possible designs of Mussolini on Turkish Anatolia, but the leaders have not shared this fear”.⁴⁴⁹

An interesting article in *The Scotsman*, which was published on the same day as the Turkish official note was delivered to the League of Nations, directly connected the Turkish claim over the Straits to a direct Italian threat to Turkey. This threat was to such, the article argued, that “the shifting play of the Mediterranean forces and the menacing rise of Italy [in the Mediterranean] have *forced* [emphasis added] the Turks to look to their defences, and especially to the Straits”.⁴⁵⁰ The article even referred to recent past events that provided Turkey with “extra reason[s] for suspicion”, which were, according to the newspaper, Mussolini’s speech on 18 March 1934 and the Italian fortifications in the Dodecanese islands, fortifications which were an “ever-present reminder of past claims and future possibilities” of Italy over Anatolia.⁴⁵¹ The British ambassador in Ankara, Percy Loraine’s adding this article to his personal newspaper cuttings collection, was also an indication that this coverage in *The Scotsman* or in similar publications in the British press were considered important by British official circles. This was, for example, the situation in a House of Commons debate on 21 April 1936 when the Labour MP William Thorne posed a question to Eden: “Does

⁴⁴⁸ “Montreux Conference”, *The Times*, 22 June 1936, p. 15.

⁴⁴⁹ “Turkey and the League. The Dardanelles”, *The Manchester Guardian*, 24 January 1936, a newspaper cutting from the Middle East Centre Archive, St Antony’s College, Oxford (hereafter MECA), Sir Percy Loraine Collection, GB165-0186, vol. 9, pp. 159-60.

⁴⁵⁰ “Turkey and the Straits”, *The Scotsman*, 11 April 1936, a newspaper cutting from MECA, Sir Percy Loraine Collection, GB165-0186, vol. 9, p. 168.

⁴⁵¹ “Turkey and the Straits”, *The Scotsman*, 11 April 1936.

the right hon. Gentleman not think that Turkey is very much concerned about the ambitions of Italy at the present time?"⁴⁵²

From the perspective of the Turkish press, however, a direct Italian threat to Turkey and the Italian fortification of the Dodecanese islands were not the main concerns for the Straits issue, Yunus Nadi claimed that "the position of Italy in the Dodecanese islands in no way had an effect on [Turkey's] demand for the refortification of the Straits", and thus this demand was not due to "an assessment of individual events", but due to "a necessity which had emerged from the change in world politics".⁴⁵³ Therefore, even though Turkey did not directly connect its demand to a change in the Straits regime to a direct Italian threat against Turkey, both the Italian perspective and the British coverage of the issue presented it as such. However, despite this misrepresentation, the Turkish government and the press did not respond to these claims, thus implicitly using this insistent accusation on the part of Italy for its own benefit. Moreover, the British articles, by referring to a direct Italian threat to Turkey, further justified the Turkish position about the Straits, which proved to be useful for the Turkish government.

However, despite this somewhat confused environment for Turkish-Italian relations during the Montreux Convention, there was a moment when the Italian participation in the Montreux Convention seemed highly likely since Italy's pretext for its non-attendance, i.e. the ongoing sanctions against Italy, was eliminated in the last meeting of the League's sixteenth session on 4 July. In this meeting, the Assembly of the League of Nations left the issue of sanctions to the Coordination Committee,⁴⁵⁴ thus totally disregarding the speech made by Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie on 30 June, who condemned the Italian invasion and called for the League to act in the Assembly's meeting, a meeting which was "in

⁴⁵² *Hansard*, HC Deb 21 April 1936, vol. 311, cc28-9.

⁴⁵³ Yunus Nadi, "Boğazların Tahkimi Talebinde 12 Adanın Rolü Yoktur", *Cumhuriyet*, 13 July 1936, p. 1.

⁴⁵⁴ Pemberton, Jo-Anne, *The Story of International Relations, Part Two: Cold-Blooded Idealists* (London and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), pp. 562-3.

such a mood of ill humour, discouragement and anxiety”.⁴⁵⁵ The meeting of the Coordination Committee on 6 July led to the expected result: the lifting of the sanctions against Italy as of 15 July. The Turkish government immediately issued a governmental decree to terminate the sanctions on 8 July.⁴⁵⁶ Naturally, the end of the economic sanctions against Italy created an expectation both in Turkey and in Montreux that the Italian government would attend the conference. However, this was not the case.

Italy decided not to attend the conference, which created “dissatisfaction” in Montreux since a final solution to the Straits issue was considered impossible without Italy’s active involvement in the process.⁴⁵⁷ The absence of Italy created “a difficulty in reaching an agreement between the Powers”.⁴⁵⁸ This time, Italy’s pretext for not attending the conference was the British-brokered arrangement in December 1935 for mutual aid in the Mediterranean, an arrangement which included Britain, France, Yugoslavia, Greece and Turkey. These arrangements were specifically designed with regard to the implementation of the sanctions against Italy and aimed to ensure that any of these countries would not be a target of an Italian aggression in the Mediterranean due to their implementation of the League of Nations’ sanctions.

This “Mediterranean understanding”,⁴⁵⁹ as Cohen called it, was in fact neither a pact nor a permanent security arrangement, but rather an understanding which was set up within the limits of the Covenant of the League of Nations in the case of any Italian attack on these Mediterranean countries. This mechanism was based on the second clause of Article 16 of the League of Nations:

⁴⁵⁵ Walters, *A History of the League of Nations*, p. 684.

⁴⁵⁶ 8 July 1936: CA, 030.18.1.2.66.57.18.

⁴⁵⁷ Akşin, *Atatürk’ün Dış Politika İlkeleri ve Diplomasisi*, p. 298.

⁴⁵⁸ *Hansard*, HC Deb 15 July 1936, vol. 314, cc2022-5.

⁴⁵⁹ Cohen, Michael J., “British Strategy in the Middle East in the Wake of the Abyssinian Crisis, 1936-39” in *Britain and the Middle East in the 1930s: Security Problems, 1935-39*, Michael J. Cohen and Martin Kolinsky (eds.) (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1992), p. 24.

The Members of the League agree, further, that they will mutually support one another in the financial and economic measures which are taken under this Article, in order to minimise the loss and inconvenience resulting from the above measures, and that they will mutually support one another in resisting any special measures aimed at one of their number by the covenant-breaking State, and that they will take the necessary steps to afford passage through their territory to the forces of any of the Members of the League which are co-operating to protect the covenants of the League.⁴⁶⁰

Before reaching the above-mentioned arrangement, British Foreign Minister Eden, in a memorandum, asked France, Greece, Yugoslavia, Spain and Turkey what the position of these countries would be if Britain were to take any action against Italy in order to implement the League's decisions and he wanted to know whether they would help Britain in such a situation.⁴⁶¹ This question was responded to positively by all countries that were addressed, apart from Spain.⁴⁶² Tevfik Rüştü Aras, on behalf of the Turkish government, responded to the British memorandum with a letter to the League of Nations on 22 January 1936 in which he stated that Turkey "approved" the British proposal and was ready to "undertake any responsibility" which would emerge from the League's Covenant. Moreover, Turkey asked Britain to confirm that this arrangement was a reciprocal one, thus in the case of an Italian attack on Turkey, Britain would also help Turkey in the Mediterranean, which was confirmed by the British.⁴⁶³

However, even though this arrangement was in fact within the framework of the League of Nations, the secondary literature, of which there is very little, argues that this arrangement was "an alliance" between Turkey and Britain. Soysal

⁴⁶⁰ Foreign Relations of the United States Online (hereafter FRUS), "The Covenant of the League of Nations (Art. 1 to 26)" <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1919Parisv13/ch10subch1> [accessed on 7 April 2020].

⁴⁶¹ Soysal, *Türkiye'nin Siyasal Andlaşmaları*, p. 490.

⁴⁶² "Mediterranean Powers' Reply", *The Scotsman*, 28 December 1935, a newspaper cutting from MECA, Sir Percy Loraine Collection, GB165-0186, vol. 9, p. 142.

⁴⁶³ 7 December 1935: CA, 30.10.0.0.234.580.13.

called the understanding “the 1936 Turkish-British Mediterranean Alliance”.⁴⁶⁴ Papuççular argued that this was a “Mediterranean pact” and it signified the beginning of a better relationship between Turkey and Britain.⁴⁶⁵

Papuççular’s argument was only one of similar arguments made in the literature about how the Italo-Ethiopian War and the Straits issue provided a background for a Turkish-British rapprochement in this period. In one of the most well-known textbooks on Turkish foreign policy, it was argued that Turkey’s policy during the Italo-Ethiopian War and its joining the “Mediterranean Pact” with Britain paved the way for Turkey’s approaching the “status quo” group, particularly Britain.⁴⁶⁶ Similarly, the Montreux Convention was, according to some scholars, the result of this British-Turkish rapprochement. Millman argued that “without Britain, ... there could be no alteration of a Straits regime”.⁴⁶⁷ In a similar fashion, Di Casola, in her article on Turkish-Italian relations during the Ethiopian War, asked: “Had a concrete exchange not already occurred when, as a consequence of the new Anglo-Turkish friendship, Great Britain permitted the re-armament of the Straits?”⁴⁶⁸ The British support was such that, Gülmez argued, Percy Loraine was the “unsung hero behind the peaceful resolution of the international Straits issue”.⁴⁶⁹ Therefore, the bilateral relations between Turkey and Britain had further improved after the Montreux Straits Convention.⁴⁷⁰

In fact, what supports these arguments in the secondary literature is the British newspaper coverage of Turkish-British cooperation. A rhetoric suggesting

⁴⁶⁴ Soysal, *Türkiye’nin Siyasal Andlaşmaları*, p. 477.

⁴⁶⁵ Papuççular, *Türkiye ve Oniki Ada*, p. 110.

⁴⁶⁶ Gönlübol, et al, *Olaylarla Türk Dış Politikası (1919-1995)*, p. 113.

⁴⁶⁷ Millman, “Turkish Foreign and Security Policy 1934-42”, p. 490.

⁴⁶⁸ Di Casola, “Italo-Turkish Relations between the Two Wars”, p. 339.

⁴⁶⁹ Gülmez, “Turkish Foreign Policy as an Anomaly”, p. 42.

⁴⁷⁰ Barlas and Gülmez, “Turkish-British Relations in the 1930s”, p. 834.

that the relations between Britain and Turkey had improved recently was adopted by *The Times*, in an article titled “A Friendship Revived” on 23 April 1936. According to this, the relations were so good between the two countries that “a distinguished member of the Diplomatic Corps in Angora has described the recent improvement in [the] relations as “a second Anglo-Turkish honeymoon””. This improvement was due to the Italo-Ethiopian dispute, *The Times* argued, though the Turkish government had had suspicions about the real intention behind the British position at the beginning of the conflict.

[However,] it was slowly brought home to Turkish minds that, if selfish interests were behind the British attitude at all, they played a very secondary part, and that the storm of indignation which the Italian aggressive measures against Abyssinia had aroused in Great Britain was genuine.⁴⁷¹

The newspaper further argued that with the recent support of the British government for the Turkish claim about the Straits, the two countries would “place the seal on a new Anglo-Turkish friendship”.⁴⁷²

However, even though the Italo-Ethiopian War and the Straits issue might have provided grounds for the development of a better bilateral relationship between Britain and Turkey, the ‘cooperation’ of the two countries on these issues did not mean an immediate rapprochement. Therefore, Britain did not directly appear as an “obvious candidate”⁴⁷³ for Turkey to form an alliance with in the mid-1930s. The existing secondary literature’s heavy reliance on British primary sources leads to such a portrayal of the bilateral relations. British-Turkish relations are beyond the scope of this thesis. However, a demonstration of why such a rapprochement was not in place during the time of the revision of the Straits regime is necessary to understand why the Italian government placed the removal

⁴⁷¹ “A Friendship Revived. Relations with Turkey”, *The Times*, 23 April 1936, p. 13. For a similar article, see: “Turkey Pleased with Britain. Dardanelles Rearming”, *Daily Telegraph*, 15 April 1936, a newspaper cutting from MECA, Sir Percy Loraine Collection, GB165-0186, vol. 9, p. 171.

⁴⁷² “A Friendship Revived”, p. 13.

⁴⁷³ Gülmez, “Turkish Foreign Policy as an Anomaly”, p. 42.

of the Mediterranean understanding of December 1935 as a condition for its attendance at the Montreux Convention.

The Mediterranean understanding of December 1935 and the revision of the Straits regime in 1936 cannot be regarded as the beginning of the rapprochement between Britain and Turkey since, first of all, as demonstrated above, this was not an alliance but rather an ad-hoc arrangement. Moreover, Turkey regarded this arrangement only within the context of the League of Nations and considered it as a “mutual” assistance mechanism in the Mediterranean,⁴⁷⁴ an idea which was strengthened by the fact that Turkey was not the only country in this Mediterranean understanding. Turkey’s stance was also evident in an editorial published in *Ulus*, where Falih Rıfki Atay argued that it was “natural” for Britain to be the broker of such an arrangement in order for it to see clearly to what extent the countries in the Mediterranean were “persistent” in their decision to apply the sanctions against Italy.⁴⁷⁵ Further, from the Turkish perspective, a Mediterranean pact, which had been desired for a long time by the Turkish government, was ideally one that would include many countries including Italy. The idea of multilateralism was in fact one of the backbones of Turkey’s ‘*pactisation*’ policy in the interwar period. According to Tevfik Rüşti Aras, any attempt to form a permanent security arrangement in the Mediterranean was depended upon how the Italo-Ethiopian conflict and Italian-British relations would develop, thus meaning that a Mediterranean pact should be formed not by using one great power against another, but rather including both.⁴⁷⁶

Secondly, the British position during the Montreux Conference and before was not defined by an act of friendship towards Turkey, but rather by the pragmatic calculations of London. The British attitude over the Straits issue had only changed due to the remilitarization of the Rhineland, which according to

⁴⁷⁴ 7 December 1935: CA, 30.10.0.0.234.580.13.

⁴⁷⁵ Atay, Falih Rıfki, “İngiltere’nin Sualı”, *Ulus*, 25 December 1935, p. 5.

⁴⁷⁶ 3 December 1935: CA, 030.10.0.0.45.290.45.

Millman was “the most analogous case” to the Turkish demand.⁴⁷⁷ In fact, the general attitude of Britain on the subject was quite the opposite of favourable up until 1936. At a conference he gave about the issue of the Straits on 5 October 1932, Philip Perceval Graves, who had been a correspondent in Istanbul for *The Times* in 1908-1914 and continued to work there until 1946 with a short interruption between 1915 and 1919 when he served in the army in the Middle East,⁴⁷⁸ reflected on how much the British were in fact reluctant to support the Turkish reclaiming of the Straits. After discussing the history of the power struggles over the Straits among the Mediterranean powers as well as Russia, Graves argued that the Russian factor was still valid since “at present, if there is danger, it comes from Russia” and the Soviet Union’s foreign policy “remain[ed] unchanged” over this issue.⁴⁷⁹ The British aim should thus be, according to Graves, to prevent any situation in which “a hostile power or combination of powers [held] the Straits” since it would threaten Britain’s imperial communications and goals in the East and beyond.⁴⁸⁰ Therefore, since the existing convention prevented the domination of one power over the Straits, Britain’s position should be, Graves argued, the preservation of the existing Lausanne Straits Convention, even though it was “an imperfect instrument” and changing it “would not be easy”.⁴⁸¹ One of the audiences at the conference, Captain Harold Courtenay Armstrong, who had served as an assistant military attaché during the Turkish National Liberation War and who published his sensational book *Grey Wolf: Mustafa Kemal - An Intimate*

⁴⁷⁷ Millman, *The Ill-Made Alliance*, p. 70.

⁴⁷⁸ Cooke, Jim, “The Graves Family in Ireland”, *Dublin Historical Record*, 50/1 (1997), p. 35.

⁴⁷⁹ Graves, Philip, “The Question of the Straits”, *Journal of the Royal Central Asian Society*, 20/1 (1933), p. 18.

⁴⁸⁰ Graves, “The Question of the Straits”, pp. 21-2.

⁴⁸¹ Graves, “The Question of the Straits”, p. 22.

Study of a Dictator in the same month as Grave's talk,⁴⁸² agreed with Graves and underlined the importance of the Straits as "one of the great roads of distribution of the wealth of the world".⁴⁸³ However, according to Armstrong, the Turks, were not aware of the commercial importance of the Straits since they considered it merely "as a fortress to be defended, a military possession".⁴⁸⁴ In effect, Armstrong argued, the Turks were controlling the Straits, the Straits Commission being nothing more than "a farce".⁴⁸⁵ Therefore, a simple decision lay in front of the British:

The little Turkish peasant state will be the porter on the door [i.e. the Straits]. You or your children will have to decide whether you will help the porter to close the gate. Whether with one hand you will give up India and with the other you spend millions and perhaps fight a war to keep the road to India open.⁴⁸⁶

A Turkish translation of this conference proceeding was sent by Numan Menemencioğlu in the Turkish foreign ministry to İsmet İnönü, thus demonstrating the importance attached to these discussions and that the Turkish government was well aware of the unsupportive British position regarding the Straits until 1936.⁴⁸⁷

Therefore, British support for the Turkish reclaim on the Straits was a result of a rather realist British foreign policy. This was also evident, for example, in Loraine's meeting with Lojacono in June 1934, a meeting in which Loraine

⁴⁸² Yılmaz, Mustafa, "Harold C. Armstrong'un "Grey Wolf Mustafa Kemal an Intimate Study of a Dictator" (Bozkurt – Mustafa Kemal) Kitabı Üzerine", *Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi Dergisi*, 11/33 (1995), p. 721.

⁴⁸³ Graves, "The Question of the Straits", p. 24.

⁴⁸⁴ Graves, "The Question of the Straits", p. 25.

⁴⁸⁵ Graves, "The Question of the Straits", p. 24.

⁴⁸⁶ Graves, "The Question of the Straits", p. 25.

⁴⁸⁷ 12 February 1933: CA, 030.10.0.0.228.534.13.

reassured Lojacono that if Turkey brought the Straits issue onto agenda again, “Britain would act in concert with the other [signatories] of the treaty”. As Millman rightly argued, the rapprochement between Britain and Italy hindered solution for the Straits issue in 1934.⁴⁸⁸ This in fact showed that both the support of the British ambassador and of London arrived much later and it was due to the existing international situation in 1936 rather than a “friendship revived” just after the Mediterranean arrangement in December 1935. The British pragmatic position on the issue of the Straits was crystal-clear in an article in the British daily, *Morning Post* on 13 April 1936, just after the Turkish note to the League of Nations. According to this article, the British position on the Straits issue would “no doubt be decided by the guarantees for the safety of [the British] trade as well as by the attitude of the other Mediterranean powers”. Moreover, the newspaper made reference to the experiences of Britain during World War I in the Turkish Straits and argued that “What we may have learnt from experience [was] to go no further in our policy than the circumstances promise[d] and the means command[ed]”, thus underlining that the British position was rather circumstantial.⁴⁸⁹

Thirdly, even though Turkish communication with Britain on the issue of the Straits was highlighted in the secondary literature, in fact Britain was not the only country which was consulted during this process. Tevfik Rüştü Aras stated later that in the League of Nations’s meeting about the German remilitarisation of the Rhineland, he brought the subject to the attention of both Soviet commissar for foreign affairs Litvinov and Romanian Foreign Minister Titulescu separately and asked for their support for the Turkish claim, to which both responded positively.⁴⁹⁰ This suggests that the Turkish foreign policy to bring a revision in the Straits regime was not an attempt solely dependent on Britain’s stance on the subject, but again one that tried to gain the favour of as many actors as possible.

⁴⁸⁸ Millman, *The Ill-Made Alliance*, p. 72.

⁴⁸⁹ “The Straits”, *Morning Post*, 13 April 1936, a newspaper cutting from MECA, Sir Percy Loraine Collection, GB165-0186, vol. 9, p. 169.

⁴⁹⁰ Aras, *Atatürk’ün Dış Politikası*, p. 102.

A different reflection of this idea was also evident in a letter sent from İsmet İnönü to Aras on 12 July 1936, a letter which suggested that Turkey should remain neutral in any possible war in the future whether Italy joined the war or not.⁴⁹¹ Even though this document is usually interpreted by scholars as a manifestation of how the Turkish government directed its policy in relation to Italy,⁴⁹² it was rather a reflection of the general principle of the Turkish foreign policy in the interwar period, i.e. remaining neutral in events which were not directly related to Turkish interests. Interestingly, the letter also revealed Turkish suspicions of other great powers' policies, İnönü arguing that "...In order not to offend Italy, Russia and France abstained from the most basic agreements. Britain wishes to preserve this opportunity specifically for itself for a time that suits it and carefully refrains from any undertaking connected to Turkey".⁴⁹³ Therefore, at a time when Italy had just announced that it would not join the conference due to the Mediterranean arrangement, İnönü's warning letter should be considered a reminder for Aras that Britain, France and Russia should also not be trusted, especially considering their rather flexible approach to the alliances.

Moreover, as Howard's article demonstrates, the discussions at the Montreux Conference were consisted rather hot debates between the Turkish, British and Soviet delegates, thus undermining the so-called cooperation between Britain and Turkey in this process.⁴⁹⁴ *Ulus* announced its disagreement with the British proposal about the new Straits regime, a proposal which the Turkish newspaper published on its front page, and argued that "this proposal did not make a good impression on Ankara where there was concern about the fate of the

⁴⁹¹ T. C. Dışişleri Bakanlığı Araştırma ve Siyaset Planlama Genel Müdürlüğü, *Montreux ve Savaş Öncesi Yılları (1935-1939)*, p. 54.

⁴⁹² For an example, see: Mengeş, Yeter, "İkinci Dünya Savaşı Dönemi Türk-İtalyan İlişkileri", Unpublished Master's Thesis, Dokuz Eylül Üniversitesi, İzmir, 2016, p. 90.

⁴⁹³ T. C. Dışişleri Bakanlığı Araştırma ve Siyaset Planlama Genel Müdürlüğü, *Montreux ve Savaş Öncesi Yılları (1935-1939)*, p. 54: "... Rusya ve Fransa İtalya'yı gücendirmemek için, en basit muahedelerden içtinap ettiler. İngiltere kendi istediği zaman için bu imkânı kendine mahsus olarak muhafaza etmek istiyor. Türk noktai nazarından bir taahhüde girmekten dikkatle içtinap ediyor".

⁴⁹⁴ Howard, "The Straits after the Montreux Conference", p. 201.

conference”.⁴⁹⁵ On the other side of the coin, there was also discontent in Britain regarding the Turkish thesis on the Straits, which was criticised by the Conservative MP Reginald Purbrick, who asked Foreign Minister Eden

whether, in view of the Turkish Government's statement that recent happenings have made the Straits Convention signed at Lausanne in 1923 no longer an effective guarantee of Turkish security, he [would] state whether any grounds exist for the fear that any foreign country contemplated invading Turkish territory?

Eden did not give any answer to the question and left some MPs unconvinced about the insecure environment that Turkey based its claims on for the revision of the status of the Straits since Frederick Cocks, another British MP, this time from the Labour Party, asked directly: “Is it not a fact that Turkey has been threatened with attack by Italy?”⁴⁹⁶ It seemed that in fact Reginald Purbrick was not even convinced about the necessity of a change in the Straits regime when the Montreux Conference was convened since he argued in his open letter to *The Times* on 22 June that “... it must be remembered that the demilitarization of the Straits was not imposed on Turkey by any dictated treaty but was freely accepted by the present Turkish Government at Lausanne in 1923 in return for huge territorial and other compensations”.⁴⁹⁷

Even though the relations between Britain and Turkey were not entirely amicable, from the Italian perspective, however, the Mediterranean arrangement between Britain, France, Greece, Yugoslavia and Turkey was an extension of the sanctions against Italy and aimed to encircle Italy in the Mediterranean.⁴⁹⁸ The Italians considered this Mediterranean understanding as the beginning of a British-Turkish rapprochement. This Italian perception was due to the nature of Anglo-

⁴⁹⁵ “Boğazlar Hakkındaki İngiliz Mukavele Projesinin Metnini Neşrediyoruz”, *Ulus*, 8 July 1936, p. 1. For a similar article, see: Atay, Falih Rıfki, “Son Vaziyet”, *Ulus*, 10 July 1936, p. 1.

⁴⁹⁶ *Hansard*, HC Deb 20 May 1936, vol. 312, c1176.

⁴⁹⁷ “Refortification of the Straits. To the Editor of The Times”, *The Times*, 22 June 1936, p. 15.

⁴⁹⁸ “İtalyada İngiliz Politikasına Karşı İtimatsızlık”, *Akşam*, 18 July 1936, p. 1.

Italian relations in the interwar period, which were characterised by clashing “dreams of imperial greatness” since both countries wanted hegemony over the Mediterranean.⁴⁹⁹ The negative Italian attitude about Turkey’s relations with Britain was also reflected in *Al-Muqattam*, one of the Egyptian newspapers that Italy financially sponsored⁵⁰⁰ to “justify Italian policy in Abyssinia and elsewhere”.⁵⁰¹ According to an article in this newspaper, Turkey, “having remembered and been afraid of the previous Italian attempt to invade the Western Anatolia”, adopted a policy against Italy during the Ethiopian crisis. As a result, therefore, the newspaper argued that British-Turkish relations appeared to be improving as could be seen in the Straits issue and in the publications of the British press, which “agreed with the necessity...of fortifying the Straits”. In fact, according to *Al-Muqattam*, the relations were so good that “Turkey would defend Britain in the case of an attack against Britain and it would even [open] all its ports in the Mediterranean to the British”.⁵⁰²

Italy insisted on its condition of the ending of the Mediterranean understanding and it pursued an active policy to realise this aim, Ciano sending an assuring note to Ankara, Athens and Belgrade on 14 July stating that “To think that Italy could move to reprisals against Turkey, Greece and Yugoslavia, now that the sanctions have been totally removed, is a hypothesis even more arbitrary than that which had, up until now, been established” and was “totally unjustified”. Ciano explicitly expressed the desire to “construct the future in the spirit of trust and mutual collaboration with every people”.⁵⁰³ This was an attempt by the Italian

⁴⁹⁹ Fiore, Massimiliano, *Anglo-Italian Relations in the Middle East, 1922-1940* (Surrey and Burlington: Ashgate, 2010), p. 185.

⁵⁰⁰ Arielli, *Fascist Italy and the Middle East*, p. 46 and p. 57.

⁵⁰¹ Arielli, *Fascist Italy and the Middle East*, p. 45.

⁵⁰² 3 July 1936: 030.10.0.0.266.798.15, p. 3.

⁵⁰³ “Il ministro degli esteri, Ciano, agli ambasciatori ad Ankara, Galli, a Londra, Grandi, a Parigi, Cerruti e a Washington, Rosso, e ai ministri ad Atene, Boscarelli, e a Belgrado, Viola” (14 July 1936, Rome), doc. 520, in Ministero degli affari esteri commissione per la pubblicazione dei documenti diplomatici, *I documenti diplomatici italiani ottava serie: 1935-1939*, vol. IV (10

foreign minister to demonstrate to London and Paris, to which a copy of the telegram was sent, that there was no need for the unilateral assurances granted for these three Mediterranean countries.

As was to be expected, the Turkish press opposed this new condition set by Italy. *Tan* published an article titled “Italians feign reluctance!” (İtalyanlar Naza Çekiyorlar!) on 8 July, reporting that the French argued “Why did we lift the sanctions if Italy would still be unsatisfied?”⁵⁰⁴ *Ulus* was rather reserved in its language, yet it still shared the news on its front page and also referred to the same French article published by *Tan*.⁵⁰⁵ Unpersuaded, however, the Italians announced that they would not attend the conference. According to *Tan*, as a response to Italy’s stance, the Turkish foreign minister stated that the agreement to be concluded in Montreux would be universal and could not be left open for the signature of the non-attending countries, in other words, Italy.⁵⁰⁶

Despite such fierce criticisms in the Turkish press, Tevfik Rüşdü Aras, reportedly, met with the Italian representative at the League of Nations who came to Montreux from Geneva. In this meeting, Aras gave a copy of the new Straits convention proposal on 16 July.⁵⁰⁷ The representative was also told that the convention would be left open for Italy’s signature.⁵⁰⁸ This representative was Renato Bova Scoppa, the former Regent of the Italian Consulate General in

maggio – 31 agosto 1936) (Rome: Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato P.V., 1993), p. 580: “Pensare che l’Italia possa passare a rappresaglie contro Turchia Grecia Jugoslavia, ora che sanzioni sono state tolte, è ipotesi ancor più arbitraria di quella che era stata sinora posta a base delle intese di assistenza; ed è del tutto ingiustificata. ... di costruire l’avvenire con spirito di fiducia e mutua collaborazione da tutti i popoli”.

⁵⁰⁴ “İtalyanlar Naza Çekiyorlar!”, *Tan*, 8 July 1936, p. 1.

⁵⁰⁵ “Zecrî Tedbirler Kalktıktan Sonra: İtalya Şimdi de Akdeniz Anlaşmalarının Feshini İstiyor”, *Ulus*, 8 July 1936, p. 1 and p. 5.

⁵⁰⁶ “İtalya Konferansa Gelmiyeceğini Bildirdi”, *Tan*, 14 July 1936, p. 1.

⁵⁰⁷ “Tahrir Komitesi Boğazlar Mukavelesinin Kati Metnini Hazırladı”, *Ulus*, 18 July 1936, p. 1.

⁵⁰⁸ “Son Dakika. İtalyan Murahhası, Dün Montreux’e Gitti”, *Akşam*, 17 July 1936, p. 2.

İzmir⁵⁰⁹ and now the Secretary General of the Italian delegation at the League of Nations. He wrote a report to Ciano in which he outlined the details of his meeting with Aras on 16 July. In this meeting, Aras stressed the importance of Italy's signature of the new convention and said that he would search for ways to sign "a bilateral treaty" with Italy which could be different in form, but still within the framework of the Montreux Straits Convention. According to the document, Aras, after stating that he would work for a rapprochement between Italy and Britain in the Mediterranean, claimed that the Mediterranean understanding, which would no longer be reciprocal but only in the form of unilateral assistance offered by Britain, could not be rejected by Turkey since it was "a protection generously offered" by Britain.⁵¹⁰ However, he also argued that this agreement would soon be lifted.⁵¹¹

The Turkish government was faced with a difficult task over keeping its relations with Britain and France balanced since, on the one hand, it did not want to turn down the unilateral assistance provided by Britain and it needed to respond positively to the telegram sent by the Italian foreign minister regarding the assurances given by Ciano on 14 July on the other. As claimed by Ambassador Galli, this difficult position for the Turkish government was clearly visible in his meeting with İnönü on 17 July, where İnönü apologised for the delay in the response of the Turkish government to the telegram and stated that he was "very satisfied" by Ciano's assurance of Italian non-aggression towards Turkey and other Mediterranean countries.⁵¹² İnönü claimed that Turkey was in agreement with

⁵⁰⁹ "Bova Scoppa Renato", <https://baldi.diplomacy.edu/diplo/biogra/bovascoppa.htm> [accessed on 7 April 2020].

⁵¹⁰ "Il segretario generale aggiunto della delegazione alla S.D.N., Bova Scoppa, al ministro degli esteri, Ciano" (16 July 1936, Geneva), doc. 544, in Ministero degli affari esteri commissione per la pubblicazione dei documenti diplomatici, *I documenti diplomatici italiani ottava serie: 1935-1939*, vol. IV (10 maggio – 31 agosto 1936) (Rome: Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato P.V., 1993), p. 609.

⁵¹¹ "Il segretario generale aggiunto della delegazione alla S.D.N., Bova Scoppa, al ministro degli esteri, Ciano" (16 July 1936, Geneva), doc. 544, p. 610.

⁵¹² "L'ambasciatore ad Ankara, Galli, al ministro degli esteri, Ciano" (18 July 1936, Ankara), doc. 560, in Ministero Degli Affari Esteri Commissione per la Pubblicazione dei Documenti Diplomatici, *I Documenti Diplomatici Italiani Ottava Serie: 1935-1939*, vol. IV (10 maggio – 31 agosto 1936) (Rome: Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato P.V., 1993), p. 630.

what Ciano argued about the continuing of Mediterranean assistance, which “Turkey did not ask for or felt the need of ...”.⁵¹³

Two days later, however, there appeared news in the Turkish press that even though the reciprocal assistance had ended due to the lifting of the sanctions, the unilateral assistance provided by Britain would still continue.⁵¹⁴ According to Galli, behind this shift from what İnönü suggested earlier lay Aras, who was also responsible for Eden’s insistence on the unilateral assurances.⁵¹⁵ Galli’s discussions with the Turkish governmental officials about this unilateral assurance continued until its end by Britain.⁵¹⁶

Within this ambiguous environment about the fate of the Mediterranean assurance and without the Italian signature, the Montreux Straits Convention was signed on 20 July 1936. As stated by Aras to Bova Scoppa earlier, Article 27 of the Convention left the Convention open for the signature of the countries who had been a party to the Lausanne Treaty, i.e. Italy.⁵¹⁷ At the time the Montreux Convention was signed, the Turkish army simultaneously fortified the Straits, prompting a reaction of joy and celebration around the country where Turks rushed onto streets and squares to celebrate the event. The venue for celebrations

⁵¹³ “L’ambasciatore ad Ankara, Galli, al ministro degli esteri, Ciano” (18 July 1936, Ankara), doc. 560, p. 630.

⁵¹⁴ “Sanksiyonlardan Sonra Türkiye-İngiltere Karşılıklı Teminatı”, *Ulus*, 19 July 1936, p. 1.

⁵¹⁵ “L’ambasciatore ad Ankara, Galli, al ministro degli esteri, Ciano” (19 July 1936, Ankara), doc. 568, in Ministero degli affari esteri commissione per la pubblicazione dei documenti diplomatici, *I documenti diplomatici italiani ottava serie: 1935-1939*, vol. IV (10 maggio – 31 agosto 1936) (Rome: Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato P.V., 1993), p. 639.

⁵¹⁶ For example, see the documents: “L’ambasciatore ad Ankara, Galli, al ministro degli esteri, Ciano” (22 July 1936, Istanbul), doc. 588, pp. 655-6. and “L’ambasciatore ad Ankara, Galli, al ministro degli esteri, Ciano” (22 July 1936, Istanbul), doc. 590, pp. 657-8 in Ministero degli affari esteri commissione per la pubblicazione dei documenti diplomatici, *I documenti diplomatici italiani ottava serie: 1935-1939*, vol. IV (10 maggio – 31 agosto 1936) (Rome: Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato P.V., 1993), which gives the details of a meeting between Galli and Saraçoğlu on the subject.

⁵¹⁷ *T. C. Resmî Gazete*, 5 August 1936, p. 7029.

in Ankara was Ulus Square,⁵¹⁸ the quintessential public space in the early Republican capital. In Istanbul, *Akşam* stated, the celebrations would take place throughout the night, during which time shops and public spaces would remain open.⁵¹⁹

How important the new convention was for the Turkish government, as well as for the Turkish people, was evident in *Tan*'s editorial, which claimed that “the last trace, the last difficulty that recalls those days when we were unable to determine our own fate will be eradicated after today”.⁵²⁰ The Montreux Convention was thus regarded as a re-manifestation of Turkish independence by the newspaper, an idea which was also expressed by Mazhar Müfit Kansu, a CHP MP from Denizli, who stated that the Straits question, which had been “a shadow” over Turkey’s independence and “a nightmare” for the Turkish people, had been resolved thanks to Atatürk’s “diplomatic tactics”.⁵²¹

4.7. Conclusion

Italy’s signature on the Montreux Convention was indeed very important. Refik İnce, a CHP MP from Manisa and the future minister of national defence in Menderes’s cabinet in 1950-1951, put the Turkish desire into the words: “It is to be hoped that Italy, whose signature is necessary for the Straits agreement and whose word is important in European affairs, will one day ... remove the concern we have in our hearts by coming and, like the other states and nations, signing this agreement”.⁵²² These words were reported by Galli to Rome who underlined the

⁵¹⁸ “Ankarahılar”, *Ulus*, 20 July 1936, p. 1.

⁵¹⁹ “Bu Akşam Bütün İstanbul Halkı Meydanlarda Toplanacak”, *Akşam*, 20 July 1936, p. 1.

⁵²⁰ “Türklüğün Bugünü”, *Tan*, 21 July 1936, p. 10.

⁵²¹ *TBMM Zabıt Ceridesi*, Devre: V, İçtima Senesi: 1, 31 July 1936, Friday, p. 310.

⁵²² *TBMM Zabıt Ceridesi*, 31 July 1936, p. 314: “... Boğazlar mukavelenamesinde imzası bulunması lâzım gelen ve Avrupa işlerinde sözü geçen İtalyanın bir gün gelip de diğer devletler ve milletler gibi bu muahedeyi imza ederek kalplerimizde husule gelen endişeyi izale etmek siyasetini ve diplomasisini göstereceğini ümit etmektir”.

fact that Refik İnce was the only MP who referred to Italy's position regarding the new convention.⁵²³



Figure 4.2: Celebrations in Ankara due to the Montreux Convention, in *Ulus*, 20 July 1936, p. 1.

By 31 July when the Turkish Parliament met mainly to discuss and celebrate the Straits Convention, the Mediterranean assurances had already been lifted by Britain, thus leaving no reason whatsoever for Italy to maintain its stance. The assurances lifted on 27 July on the day Eden announced in the House of Commons that there was no need for the unilateral assistance anymore given the assurances provided by Italy to Turkey, Greece and Yugoslavia on 14 July.⁵²⁴

⁵²³ “L’ambasciatore ad Ankara, Galli, al ministro degli esteri, Ciano” (1 August 1936, Beyoğlu), doc. 667, in Ministero degli affari esteri commissione per la pubblicazione dei documenti diplomatici, *I documenti diplomatici italiani ottava serie: 1935-1939*, vol. IV (10 maggio – 31 agosto 1936) (Rome: Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato P.V., 1993), p. 733.

⁵²⁴ 10 August 1936: CA, 030.10.0.0.234.580.17.

According to Yunus Nadi, writing an editorial about the issue in *Cumhuriyet* on 29 July, Britain's changing position was due to the fact that Eden wanted to appease Italy so that it would take its place again in European politics, more specifically, in the existing Locarno Pact. Even though the sustaining of British assistance in the Mediterranean was not necessary anymore, the author continued, it was important to evaluate the issue of Mediterranean security separately from the Locarno issues.⁵²⁵ Indirectly referring to Yunus Nadi's article, Galli reported to Ciano on the same day that the Turkish press showed "vivid disappointment" about Eden's declarations.⁵²⁶ However, in a speech he gave at the parliament on 31 July, Aras declared that "This [Eden's] declaration, made with the desire to return to the normal state of affairs, cannot in any way affect the cordial and friendly relations of trust between Britain and us".⁵²⁷

Despite the end of the unilateral Mediterranean assurance by Britain, however, Italy's signing of the Montreux Convention took almost another two years. Only after Turkey's official acceptance of Italy as an empire on 4 April 1938, did the Italian government sign the Montreux Convention on 2 May. This also demonstrates how the Italian government used the Straits issue as a way to realise its foreign policy demands not only with Turkey but internationally, as demonstrated by its insistence on the conditions it set for attending the Montreux Conference: first, the lifting of the economic sanctions and second, the termination of the Mediterranean agreement. Trading its signature for a recognition of the Italian Empire by Turkey represented the continuation of this trend, which will be examined in the next chapter.

In conclusion, despite the fact that bilateral relations between Italy and Turkey were damaged further during this process, the Turkish government was able to realise perhaps its most important foreign policy goal after the signature of

⁵²⁵ Yunus Nadi, "Akdeniz Emniyeti Meselesi", *Cumhuriyet*, 29 July 1936, p. 1.

⁵²⁶ "L'ambasciatore ad Ankara, Galli, al ministro degli esteri, Ciano" (29 July 1936, Beyoğlu), doc. 645, in Ministero degli affari esteri commissione per la pubblicazione dei documenti diplomatici, *I documenti diplomatici italiani ottava serie: 1935-1939*, vol. IV (10 maggio – 31 agosto 1936) (Rome: Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato P.V., 1993), p. 714.

⁵²⁷ *TBMM Zabıt Ceridesi*, 31 July 1936, p. 331: "Normal bir vaziyetin avdeti arzusu ile yapılan bu beyanatın İngiltere ile aramızdaki samimî itimat-kâr dostluk münasebetlerine asla dokunmaz".

the Lausanne Treaty in 1923. As seen in the previous chapter and in this chapter, the realisation of this aim became possible thanks to the well-executed Turkish foreign policy during the Italo-Ethiopian War, a policy which benefited from this unstable international environment to bring the issue of the Straits onto the agenda. In this, the Turkish press also had an important role by portraying the threat the war created around the world and by discussing the reasons why a refortification of the Straits was necessary for Turkey. However, as shown in this chapter, Turkey's demand for a revision in the Straits or the justification of this demand was not due to a direct Italian threat to Turkey, but rather the international situation that was created by Italian actions. Even though Italy's delayed signature casted a shadow over the Montreux Convention until 1938, as Akşin states, it was this foreign policy result that changed the balance of power in the Mediterranean, making Turkey a country more influential in the region than before.⁵²⁸ This success continued to be celebrated for many years by the Turks with folk dances, speeches, plays held in *halkevleri* and other activities at the exact time, 10 pm, at which the Convention was signed.⁵²⁹ The Straits issue was not the last one for which the early Republican Turkish government had long-term plans. When Aras returned to Istanbul from Montreux, Atatürk immediately asked for the beginning of preparations concerning what was to be another most prominent success of early Republican Turkish foreign policy.⁵³⁰ This was the issue of Hatay, an issue which had been deliberately delayed by the Turkish government until then in order to prevent any side-effects that it might have over the Straits issue.⁵³¹

⁵²⁸ Akşin, *Atatürk'ün Dış Politika İlkeleri ve Diplomasisi*, p. 227.

⁵²⁹ 29 July 1944: CA, 490.1.0.0.237.942.1.

⁵³⁰ Aras, Tevfik Rüştü, *Görüşlerim İkinci Kitap* (Istanbul: Yörük Matbaası, 1968), p. 46.

⁵³¹ Papuççular, Hazal, "The Sanjak of Alexandretta (Hatay) in Turkish Foreign Policy: A Case of "Accidental Diaspora" and Kin-State Politics" in *A Transnational Account of Turkish Foreign Policy*, Hazal Papuççular and Deniz Kuru (eds.) (London and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), p. 132.

CHAPTER 5

THE PLACE OF ITALY IN TURKISH FOREIGN POLICY MAKING IN THE POST-MONTREUX CONVENTION PERIOD (1936-1939)

On 5 January 1937, the popular newspaper *Tan* published an article, which reflected the spirit of the late interwar period very well, stating that “All world affairs are interconnected. The world of politics has become so intricate and such a tangled affair that an event in one corner of the globe cannot but be echoed in all four corners of the world”.⁵³² This statement was also valid for the course of Turkish-Italian bilateral relations in the run up to the Second World War since the relationship between the two cannot be well understood without taking into account contemporary world politics as well as the general foreign and security policies of the two countries in question. This chapter reevaluates the place of Italy in Turkish foreign and security policy making in the period of 1936-1939 by examining important issues concerning Turkish foreign policy in the post-Montreux Convention period such as the Saadabad Pact and the Nyon Conference in 1937 as well as the issue of the Sanjak of Alexandretta (Hatay), an issue which dominated Turkish foreign policy for most of this period. It also argues that the relations between the two countries did not immediately worsen after 1936⁵³³ and that Italy, though it had an important place in these important issues, was not the main and only target of Turkey’s policies in this period. Turkish-Italian relations in this period, thus, should be understood in a more nuanced way by taking into

⁵³² “Günün Meseleleri”, *Tan*, 5 January 1937, p. 5: “Bütün dünya meseleleri birbirine bağlıdır. Dünya siyaseti o kadar birbirine girift olmuş, o kadar arap saçı halini almıştır ki, cihanın bir köşesindeki bir hâdise, dünyanın dört köşesinde aksiseda yapmaktan hâli kalmamaktadır”.

⁵³³ For example, Grassi argued that Mussolini “lost” Turkey after 1936. See, Grassi, *Türk-İtalyan İlişkilerinde Az Bilinenler*, p. 320. See also Çelebi, “Türkiye-İtalya İlişkilerini Etkileyen Faktörler”, p. 115.

consideration international politics as well as Turkey's general foreign policy in this period.

5.1. Turkey's Efforts to Secure the Italian Signature on the Montreux Convention

As discussed in the previous chapter, from the Turkish government's perspective, Italy's failure to sign the Montreux Convention created a flaw for the effectiveness of the treaty since it was important for Turkey to be assured officially that Italy, as one of the great powers in the Mediterranean, would abide by this agreement.⁵³⁴ Without Italy, as the British newspaper *The Observer* once stated, the Montreux Convention would be "little more than a Russo-Rumanian-Turkish-French bloc, buttressing the Franco-Russian Pact".⁵³⁵ The Turkish government therefore tried to seize every possible opportunity to secure the Italian signature on the Montreux Convention after it was signed in July 1936. In January 1937, the Turkish government completely shut down the Turkish embassy in Addis Ababa, the ambassador having already been summoned back permanently to Ankara in August 1936.⁵³⁶ Moreover, the authority of the Turkish consulate in Bari was extended to cover East Africa in January 1937, meaning that the Turkish government *de facto* recognised Italian authority in Ethiopia and thus the Italian Empire.⁵³⁷ According to the Italian ambassador in Ankara, Galli, Aras even stated that "the Empire" would be recognised formally once a decision had been reached in the League of Nations.⁵³⁸

⁵³⁴ See: "Chapter 4. The Italian Factor in the Straits Issue", pp. 128-9 and pp. 143-4, in this thesis.

⁵³⁵ "Better Relations with Italy. Conversations in London", *The Observer*, 24 January 1937, p. 18.

⁵³⁶ "Tebliğ. Adisababa Elçiliğimizi Kaldırdık", *Ulus*, 20 January 1937, p. 1.

⁵³⁷ "L'ambasciatore ad Ankara, Galli, al Ministro degli esteri, Ciano" (17 January 1937, Istanbul), doc. 65, in Ministero degli affari esteri commissione per la pubblicazione dei documenti diplomatici, *I documenti diplomatici italiani ottava serie: 1935-1939*, vol. VI (1 gennaio – 30 giugno 1937) (Rome: Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato P.V., 1997), p. 80.

⁵³⁸ "L'ambasciatore a Ankara, Galli, al Ministro degli esteri, Ciano" (11 January 1937, Ankara), doc. 43, in Ministero degli affari esteri commissione per la pubblicazione dei documenti

Further, Turkey and Italy signed a Trade and Navigation Agreement on 29 December 1936 in Rome for a period of 18 months, thus to some extent normalising the economic relations between the two countries. The agreement detailed the yearly quotas for Turkish and Italian export goods and detailed the related procedures.⁵³⁹ This agreement, which was signed by Ciano and the Turkish ambassador to Rome, Hüseyin Ragıp Baydur, was in essence a reinstallation of the clearing principles between the two countries, which would facilitate bilateral trade.⁵⁴⁰ Aras was reportedly very pleased about this trade agreement, according to Galli, the Turkish foreign minister highlighting Italy's acceptance of shipyard payments either in Turkish lira or in Turkish goods in exchange.⁵⁴¹ Even though, this economic agreement prepared the ground for Turkey to raise the issue of the Montreux Convention with Italy, the best opportunity came in January 1937 when a rapprochement between Britain and Italy in the Mediterranean took place.

5.1.1. The Gentlemen's Agreement and Turkey

On 2 January 1937, Britain and Italy signed a 'Gentlemen's Agreement' to ease the tension between the two countries that had emerged during the Italo-Ethiopian War. In fact, even though this was called an agreement, it was only a signed declaration to protect the status quo in the Mediterranean.⁵⁴² The first signs of the 'Gentlemen's Agreement' came on 1 November 1936, when Mussolini

diplomatici, *I documenti diplomatici italiani ottava serie: 1935-1939*, vol. VI (1 gennaio – 30 giugno 1937) (Rome: Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato P.V., 1997), p. 50.

⁵³⁹ "Türkiye Cumhuriyeti ile İtalya Kırallığı Arasında 29 İlkkânun 1936'da Roma'da İmzalanan Ticaret ve Seyrisefain Muahedenamesile Ticaret Anlaşmasının ve Merbutlarının Tasdikına Dair Kanun", *T.C. Resmî Gazete*, 27 July 1937, pp. 8369-75.

⁵⁴⁰ 12 January 1937: CA, 030.18.1.2.71.3.1.

⁵⁴¹ "L'ambasciatore a Ankara, Galli, al Ministro degli esteri, Ciano" (11 January 1937, Ankara), doc. 43, p. 49.

⁵⁴² Salerno, Reynolds M., *Mediterranean Origins of the Second World War, 1935-1940* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2002), p. 20.

“characteristically combining confrontational and appeasing statements”⁵⁴³ made a famous speech in Milan, a speech which recognised British interests in the Mediterranean and paved the way for the starting of communications between the two great powers, the relations between them having been strained since the Italo-Ethiopian War. After resembling the Mediterranean to “a road, one of the many roads, or rather a short-cut” for Britain, since it enabled access to its overseas colonies, the Italian leader described the Mediterranean as “life” itself for Italians. The most important part of the speech was that inviting Britain to recognise reciprocal interests, which according to Mussolini, should be done in a “direct, rapid and complete” manner.⁵⁴⁴ Not long after this speech, the British government started negotiations with Italy, but these negotiations did not lead to a friendship pact between Italy and Britain, but to a “gentlemen’s agreement”.⁵⁴⁵ From the British point of view the Gentlemen’s Agreement was a necessity for the Mediterranean. Chamberlain later explained the British reasons for signing such a declaration in a session of the House of Commons in 1938:

By the Autumn of 1936 the relations between [Britain] and Italy had become so unsatisfactory and even so dangerous that it was felt to be necessary to make some effort to improve them. Since it was in the region of the Mediterranean Sea that the interests of the two countries came most closely into contact with one another, it was there that any lack of confidence between us became most apparent, and was most calculated to give rise to harmful results. For these reasons, it was to that region that the two Governments directed their attention, and on 2nd January, 1937, they signed a joint declaration which came to be known as a “Gentlemen’s agreement”.⁵⁴⁶

⁵⁴³ Arielli, *Fascist Italy and the Middle East*, p. 78.

⁵⁴⁴ Susmel, Edoardo and Duilio Susmel, *Opera omnia di Benito Mussolini: dalla proclamazione dell’impero al viaggio in Germania (10 maggio 1936 – 30 settembre 1937)*, vol. xxviii (Florence: La Fenice, 1959), p. 70.

⁵⁴⁵ “Haftalık Siyasi İcmal. İngiltere-İtalya”, *Ulus*, 14 December 1936, p. 4.

⁵⁴⁶ *Hansard*, HC Deb 02 May 1938, vol. 335, cc533-669.

This agreement was therefore designed in such a way that it was no more than a mere acknowledgement of what Mussolini stated in his Milan speech: the acknowledgement of reciprocal interests in the Mediterranean and the preservation of the status quo there. The issue of Ethiopia was purposefully left off the agenda since it would hinder the process.⁵⁴⁷

From the perspective of Turkey, however, the most important result of this agreement was expected to be Italy's signature of the Montreux Convention. Since the Montreux Convention was now one of the cornerstones of the security of the Mediterranean, the Anglo-Italian understanding would lead to the Italian approval of the new Straits regime. For a time, it seemed that Turkish hopes were soon to be realised since the Italians made several gestures implying this. Carlo Galli's donation of 100 lira to Kızılay for the victims of a disastrous flood in Adana⁵⁴⁸ could be seen as a demonstration of 'willingness' by Italy to mend its relations with Turkey since the donation was not provided immediately after the disaster in the beginning of December 1936, but a month later, only after the conclusion of the Turkish-Italian Trade and Navigation Agreement and the signing of the Gentlemen's Agreement.⁵⁴⁹

Moreover, just a few days after Galli's donation, an article was published in the mouthpiece of the fascist government, *Il Giornale d'Italia*, an article which, as reported in *Tan*, stated that "the issue of Montreux will be handled between Italy and Turkey directly".⁵⁵⁰ At the same time, the British press, too, published articles claiming that the Gentlemen's Agreement would lead to an Italian signature of the Montreux Convention. In an article, *The Scotsman* argued that the agreement would, if Mussolini followed it, have a "stabilising influence" in the Mediterranean and "Turkey may perhaps hope that Italy will agree to the abolition

⁵⁴⁷ "Akdenizde İngiltere ve İtalya", *Ulus*, 21 December 1936, p. 3. For a similar article see: "İngiliz-İtalyan Anlaşması" in the same issue, p. 5.

⁵⁴⁸ "Adanada Felakete Uğrayanlara İtalyan Büyük Elçisinin Teberrüü", *Kurun*, 6 January 1937, p. 2.

⁵⁴⁹ "Adana Korkunç Bir Feyezan Felâketi Geçirdi", *Cumhuriyet*, 8 December 1936, p. 1.

⁵⁵⁰ "Bir İtalyan Gazetesinde Salahiyettar Bir Baş Makale", *Tan*, 9 January 1937, p. 1: "Montrö meselesi İtalya ile Türkiye arasında halledilecektir".

of the Straits régime”.⁵⁵¹ Similarly, *The Observer* claimed that it was “a matter of common interest, particularly to Great Britain” that the Montreux Convention should be “made effective” by Italy’s signature.⁵⁵² The importance of the new Straits regime in the security of the Mediterranean led the British to include the Italian signature under the Montreux Convention in the discussions during the process of the Gentlemen’s Agreement and it was naturally expected in Turkey that this agreement would pave the way for Italy’s signing of the convention.⁵⁵³

The issue of a possible Italian participation in the Montreux Convention was not the only reason why the Turkish government was pleased with the agreement. Aras expressed this pleasure on several occasions. In his meeting with Galli after the agreement, he stated “with delight” that Turkey was very satisfied with this Anglo-Italo declaration, and noted that what was most significant was the fact that this agreement had been directly initiated by *Il Duce*, who had thus contributed to the security in the Mediterranean and the world.⁵⁵⁴ The importance of the issue was also apparent in a report written by the Turkish ambassador in London, Ali Fethi Okyar to Aras about British Prime Minister Baldwin’s recent speech in parliament about the agreement, Okyar wrote: “...from our point of view, what ... was particularly important were the soothing words he used for Italy”.⁵⁵⁵

Similarly, the Turkish press considered this agreement an important step for world peace, as well as for Turkey. Writing in *Tan*, Ahmet Emin Yalman argued that the Gentlemen’s Agreement was “an important turning point for world

⁵⁵¹ “Agreement with Italy”, *The Scotsman*, 4 January 1937, p. 8.

⁵⁵² “Better Relations with Italy. Conversations in London”, *The Observer*, 24 January 1937, p. 18.

⁵⁵³ Atay, “Akdeniz’de”, *Ulus*, 5 January 1937, p. 1; “İtalya Hükûmeti, Montrö Muahedesi ni Tastik Edecek”, *Ulusal Birlik*, 4 January 1937, p. 1; “Akdeniz Anlaşması İtalyayı Montröye Yaklaştırıyor”, *Tan*, 5 January 1937, p. 1.

⁵⁵⁴ “L’ambasciatore a Ankara, Galli, al Ministro degli esteri, Ciano” (11 January 1937, Ankara), doc. 43, p. 49.

⁵⁵⁵ 12 January 1937: CA, 030.10.0.0.234.581.5., p. 3: “Mamafih bizim noktai nazarımızdan bilhassa mühim ad ettiğim cihet İtalya için kullandığı nüvazikâr sözlerdir”.

politics” and it was a “success” for both Italy and Britain.⁵⁵⁶ *Akşam*, along the same lines, stated that “this agreement eliminated one of the very serious difficulties that threatened the peace of Europe” and thus should be regarded as a “major gain”.⁵⁵⁷ Therefore, for Turkey, which wanted to develop its relations with both of these countries and which desired peace in the Mediterranean, this agreement was a positive development.⁵⁵⁸ According to Selim Ragıp, writing in *Son Posta*, this agreement resulted in one of the “bones of contention” in Western Europe, i.e. the Anglo-Italian dispute, being “partially” solved.⁵⁵⁹

One of the reasons that led to Turkish support for the agreement was the anxiety that emerged as a result of the newly formed Rome-Berlin Axis in October 1936. The Gentlemen’s Agreement was initially regarded by the Turkish press, and most probably hoped by the Turkish government to be, a move away by Italy from its Axis policy. *Ulus* evaluated Italy’s attempt to come up with an agreement with Britain as a return to its old policy of friendship with Britain, indicating that Italy no longer wanted to walk alongside Germany in Europe. According to the newspaper, this was the “most beneficial policy” for Italy, which had begun “to slide away” from the Rome-Berlin Axis.⁵⁶⁰ A week later, in the same column, it was stated that since Italy had turned its back on Germany, a return to the Stresa front (the coalition formed between Britain, France and Italy) of 1935 should soon be expected.⁵⁶¹ Similarly, Yalman also claimed that the Gentlemen’s Agreement

⁵⁵⁶ Yalman, Ahmet Emin, “Dünya Siyasetinde Dönüm Noktası”, *Tan*, 5 January 1937, p. 1.

⁵⁵⁷ “İngiliz-İtalyan Anlaşması”, *Akşam*, 5 January 1937, p. 5.

⁵⁵⁸ “İngiliz-İtalyan Anlaşması”, *Akşam*, 8 January 1937, p. 1.

⁵⁵⁹ Selim Ragıp, “Siyaset Âleminde: Yeni Sene Başında İngiliz Siyaseti. Garbî Avrupada Bir Çıban Başı İyileşti”, *Son Posta*, 3 January 1937, p. 8: “Bu suretle garbî Avrupanın çıban başlarından bir tanesi dahadeşilerek vaziyet kısmî surette ıslâh edilmiş bulunuyor”.

⁵⁶⁰ “Haftalık Siyasi İcmal. İngiltere-İtalya”, *Ulus*, 21 December 1936, p. 2.

⁵⁶¹ “Haftalık Siyasi İcmal. İtalya-İngiltere”, *Ulus*, 28 December 1936, p. 2.

was “a manifestation of the clash of interests” between Italy and Germany.⁵⁶² He further argued that the essence of this agreement was that “the fascist bloc ... which threatened world peace was dissolved”.⁵⁶³

Turkey’s support for the Gentlemen’s Agreement was also due to the fact that Turkey believed that this might be the first step towards a Mediterranean pact. In fact, the Gentlemen’s Agreement was nothing more than a mere Anglo-Italian declaration and was thus far from realising the Turkish desire for a pact in the Mediterranean. However, it was still a successful beginning from the Turkish perspective since it enabled an understanding regarding the Mediterranean between Italy and Britain, an understanding which was in fact the primary condition for such a pact to be reached. This Turkish understanding of collective Mediterranean security was also known, for example, to Britain, *The Times* arguing on 31 December 1936 that “Although Turkey would have preferred a general Mediterranean pact, it is realized that the first step in that direction must be the removal of the tension to which the Abyssinian dispute gave rise between Great Britain and Italy...”.⁵⁶⁴ The main reason for the Turkish government’s contentment was therefore not, as Güçlü argues, that British rearmament in the Mediterranean (since the agreement did not specify anything regarding the armament) would “contribute further to the security of Turkey as the friend of Britain”,⁵⁶⁵ but rather the mutual understanding between Italy and Britain that it would pave the way for a further security arrangement in the Mediterranean in the form of a Mediterranean pact, which would include other Mediterranean countries as well.

All the reasons that led Turkey to regard the Gentlemen’s Agreement as a positive development, i.e. its paving the way for the Italian signature of the Montreux Convention, Italy’s departure from the Axis policy and the formation of

⁵⁶² Yalman, “Dünya Siyasetinde Dönüm Noktası”, *Tan*, 5 January 1937, p. 1.

⁵⁶³ Yalman, “Dünya Siyasetinde Dönüm Noktası”, p. 10.

⁵⁶⁴ “Turkish Policy. Watch on Anglo-Italian Negotiations”, *The Times*, 31 December 1936, p. 9.

⁵⁶⁵ Güçlü, “Fascist Italy’s ‘Mare Nostrum’ Policy”, p. 828.

a Mediterranean pact, were, however, undermined by publications and declarations from the Italian side. Even though the possibility of the Italian signature on the Montreux Convention was not denied by the Italian side, an article in *Il Giornale d'Italia* demonstrated the resentment felt over Turkish distrust of Italy. The article argued that it was not Italy which had provoked the Greeks into invading İzmir or which had settled in Anatolia, thus implying that if distrust existed, it should have been of Britain, not Italy.⁵⁶⁶ Similarly, *Ulus* shared another Italian editorial dated 5 January 1937 from *La Gazzetta del Popolo*, in which it was argued that "... before Italy puts its signature under the Montreux Convention, everything must be well established and ... clarified".⁵⁶⁷ Therefore, from the Italian perspective, there was a need for an improvement in relations with Turkey but at the same time it was underlined that it was Turkey which was responsible for the earlier tense relations between the two countries. Moreover, the Italian newspapers rejected the claims that the Gentlemen's Agreement meant Italy's deviation from the Rome-Berlin Axis.⁵⁶⁸

In the light of this environment, the Turkish newspapers including *Ulus* and *Cumhuriyet*, the newspapers closest to the government circles, also published critical articles about the Gentlemen's Agreement. Falih Rıfkı Atay, writing an editorial in *Ulus*, underlined the conditions that led to the agreement and questioned its viability. After outlining Mussolini's "adventure" in Ethiopia to revive the Roman Empire within the framework of its policy of *mare nostrum* and the tension this created between Britain and Italy, Atay quoted Mussolini's Milan speech where he made the above-mentioned metaphor in which he resembled the Mediterranean to a "road" for Britain and "life" for Italy, and argued that Mussolini regarded this agreement as a way to force Britain to accept its interests

⁵⁶⁶ "Bir İtalyan Gazetesinde Salahiyettar Bir Baş Makale", *Tan*, 9 January 1937, p. 1.

⁵⁶⁷ "İtalya ile Türkiye Arasında Dostluk", *Ulus*, 14 January 1937, p. 4.

⁵⁶⁸ "Popolo d'Italia'ya Göre İtalyayı Almanyadan Ayırmak İçin Manevralar Yapılıyormuş", *Ulus*, 29 December 1936, p. 3; "İngiliz-İtalyan Anlaşması", *Ulus*, 30 December 1936, p. 3.

in the region while Britain perceived it as a way to stop Italian expansion.⁵⁶⁹ Thus, having indicated the differences in the British and Italian perceptions of the signed declaration, Atay underlined the fact that the Italian newspapers attributed the greatest importance to the continuity of Italy's good relations with Germany in their publications that discussed the Gentlemen's Agreement. Atay concluded his article with scepticism about the success of the Gentlemen's Agreement:

When the history of the Mediterranean conflicts in the first part of our article and these explanations [i.e. the coverage in Italian newspapers] are put side by side, it is possible to get a clear idea about the nature and extent of the British-Italian agreement.⁵⁷⁰

Muharrem Feyzi Togay, in his article in *Cumhuriyet*, also pointed out that the relations between Italy and Germany would continue and that this could undermine the effectiveness of the Gentlemen's Agreement.⁵⁷¹

In his article in *Tan*, Ömer Rıza Doğrul also questioned the extent of this agreement stating that at the time that the Gentlemen's Agreement was signed, Italy sent around 4000-6000 volunteers to the port of Cadiz in Spain to support Franco. Doğrul argued that the sending of Italian volunteers to Spain was not a decision that concerned the status quo in the Mediterranean, but it was very important "to show that Italy decided to turn the status quo to its own favour" so that a fascist regime could be established in Spain. Thus, Doğrul concluded, the establishment of a fascist regime in Spain would certainly alter the status quo in the Mediterranean.⁵⁷² In the same issue of the newspaper, it was also argued that,

⁵⁶⁹ Atay, Falih Rıfıkı, "Akdeniz'de", *Ulus*, 5 January 1937, p. 1 and p. 4. For a similar argument, see: "Günün Meseleleri. İtalyanın Anladığı Mana", *Tan*, 7 January 1937, p. 5.

⁵⁷⁰ Atay, Falih Rıfıkı, "Akdeniz'de", *Ulus*, 5 January 1937, p. 4: "Yazımızın ilk kısmındaki Akdeniz ihtilâfları tarihçesi ile bu izahlar yanyana konulduğu vakit, İngiliz-İtalyan anlaşmasının mahiyet ve şümulü hakkında sarîh bir fikir edinilebilir".

⁵⁷¹ Togay, Muharrem Feyzi, "İngiliz-İtalyan Anlaşması", *Cumhuriyet*, 6 January 1937, p. 2.

⁵⁷² Doğrul, Ömer Rıza, "Akdeniz Anlaşması ve İspanya Harbi", *Tan*, 5 January 1937, p. 3.

considering the existing problems in the Mediterranean, one could not assume that the Mediterranean issue had been completely solved by this agreement.⁵⁷³

Another problem which was emphasised by Turkey about the Gentlemen's Agreement concerned the idea of collective security and the bilateral understanding of this agreement. Perhaps the fiercest criticism came from the then Turkish ambassador in Prague, Yakup Kadri Karaosmanoğlu, who argued in his memoirs that Britain, which made other countries apply the League's sanctions against Italy, had now lifted the sanctions for its own sake and made peace with Italians, and he asked, "was Chamberlain really a warrior for peace?"⁵⁷⁴ Similarly, an article written by Togay in *Cumhuriyet* looked at the issue from another perspective and argued that Britain's policy towards Italy meant that Britain did not consider the idea of collective security as the basis of its security policy, but rather opted for bilateral security arrangements and excluded France and other Mediterranean countries from this arrangement. This was, according to the author, an acceptance by the British of Hitler's idea of security which was based on bilateral non-aggression and security arrangements.⁵⁷⁵ Likewise, an unsigned article in *Akşam* argued that since this agreement excluded other countries, it could only mean the mere "extinguishing of the tension which occurred between the two states".⁵⁷⁶ According to the newspaper, the presence of France, Yugoslavia, Greece and Turkey was necessary for "a complete Mediterranean agreement", thus referring to the long-desired Mediterranean pact, the lack of which was due to the unwillingness of Britain and France.⁵⁷⁷

Despite all the questions regarding the Gentlemen's Agreement, the Turkish government supported such an initiative for it would also help to ease the

⁵⁷³ "Günün Meseleleri", *Tan*, 5 January 1937, p. 5.

⁵⁷⁴ Karaosmanoğlu, *Zoraki Diplomat*, p. 124: "Lâkin, Chamberlain, gerçekten bir sulh fedaisi miydi?"

⁵⁷⁵ Togay, Muharrem Feyzi, "Müşterek Emniyet Sistemi", *Cumhuriyet*, 7 January 1937, p. 2.

⁵⁷⁶ "İngiliz-İtalyan Anlaşması", *Akşam*, 8 January 1937, p. 1.

⁵⁷⁷ "İngiliz-İtalyan Anlaşması", *Akşam*, 8 January 1937, p. 1.

tension between Italy and Turkey since the Ethiopian crisis. According to Aras, the Gentlemen's Agreement was therefore "completely compatible with the ideas and principals that constituted the basis of our foreign policy".⁵⁷⁸ Therefore, Turkey did not consider its relations with Britain as targeting Italy, but rather preferred a rapprochement between these countries for the sake of its Mediterranean policy. It was for this reason that, even after the signing of the Gentlemen's Agreement, Aras tried to assure the Italians about the British desire for the maintenance of the agreement at every possible opportunity, including his meeting with the Italian ambassador in Tehran, Luigi Petrucci, on 29 June 1937, when the Turkish foreign minister was there for the conclusion of the Saadabad Pact.⁵⁷⁹ These attempts by Aras were not, perhaps, due to any belief he may have had in the goodwill of the British regarding its relations with Italy, but because good relations between these two great powers would benefit Turkish-Italian relations and might open the door to secure the Italian signature on the Montreux Convention, which could strengthen the Turkish position in the Mediterranean. With this aim in mind, Aras's destination after Geneva, and after having partially solved the issue of Alexandretta with the League of Nations granting independence to Hatay in late January 1937, was Milan where he was to visit his Italian counterpart.

5.1.2. The Milan Meeting

On 2 February 1937, Tevfik Rüştü Aras arrived in Milan with Numan Menemencioğlu and Hasan Rıza Soyak. They were received by Italian Foreign

⁵⁷⁸ Soyak, *Atatürk'ten Hatıralar*, p. 627: "Bu anlaşmanın ruhu bizim dış siyasetimizin temelini teşkil eden fikirler ve prensiplere tamamen uymaktadır".

⁵⁷⁹ "Il ministro a Teheran, Petrucci, al ministro degli esteri, Ciano" (29 June 1937, Tehran), doc. 816, in Ministero degli affari esteri commissione per la pubblicazione dei documenti diplomatici, *I documenti diplomatici italiani ottava serie: 1935-1939*, vol. VI (1 gennaio – 30 giugno 1937) (Rome: Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato P.V., 1997), pp. 1061-2. For other instances when the Turkish foreign minister raised the issue to the Italian authorities, see: "L'ambasciatore ad Ankara, Galli, al ministro degli esteri, Ciano" (15 May 1937, Istanbul), doc. 599; and, "L'ambasciatore ad Ankara, Galli, al ministro degli esteri, Ciano" (10 June 1937, Ankara), doc. 719, in the same volume.

Minister Ciano “with a large military ceremony”.⁵⁸⁰ It was a time in which Aras was under the international spotlight and was apparently ambitious, a Bulgarian newspaper reportedly calling him “one of the most active” diplomats in the world.⁵⁸¹

The Milan meeting took place between Aras and Ciano on 3 February and lasted for five and a half hours.⁵⁸² Even though both parties were equally eager to organize this meeting, their expectations from it were not the same, and both parties attributed different meanings to it. From the Turkish government’s perspective, the aim of the meeting was to persuade Italy to sign the Montreux Convention, an aim which was also publicised by the Turkish press,⁵⁸³ and to better the relations between the two countries.⁵⁸⁴ According to the Italian government’s understanding, this meeting was no more than “an act of contrition” on the part of Turkey.⁵⁸⁵ Moreover, according to Ciano, this meeting was not to have any specific objective, but would merely serve in essence as an opportunity to review relations between the two countries since the Italo-Ethiopian conflict, just as had been done with Britain.⁵⁸⁶ Thus, the Montreux Convention was not really on the agenda of the

⁵⁸⁰ Soyak, *Atatürk’ten Hatıralar*, p. 628.

⁵⁸¹ “Faal Bir Diplomat”, *Ulus*, 15 February 1937, p. 5.

⁵⁸² Soyak, *Atatürk’ten Hatıralar*, p. 629.

⁵⁸³ For example, see: “Son Dakika. Türk-İtalyan Mukareneti Akdenizde Sulh Âmilidir”, *Akşam*, 1 February 1937, p. 2; “Milâno Mülâkatı”, *Cumhuriyet*, 2 February 1937, p. 6; “Milâno Mülâkatı Öbür Gün Yapılıyor”, *Haber*, 1 February 1937, p. 2.

⁵⁸⁴ Akşin, *Atatürk’ün Dış Politika İlkeleri ve Diplomasisi*, p. 228.

⁵⁸⁵ “Il ministro degli esteri, Ciano, al capo del governo, Ciano” (4 February 1937, Milan), doc. 124, in Ministero degli affari esteri commissione per la pubblicazione dei documenti diplomatici, *I documenti diplomatici italiani ottava serie: 1935-1939*, vol. VI (1 gennaio – 30 giugno 1937) (Rome: Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato P.V., 1997), p. 160: “Rüstü sapeva di esseri in Italia per fare soprattutto l’atto di contrizione”.

⁵⁸⁶ “Il ministro degli esteri, Ciano, all’ambasciatore ad Ankara, Galli” (15 January 1937, Rome), doc. 58, in Ministero degli affari esteri commissione per la pubblicazione dei documenti diplomatici, *I documenti diplomatici italiani ottava serie: 1935-1939*, vol. VI (1 gennaio – 30 giugno 1937) (Rome: Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato P.V., 1997), p. 70.

Italian government. Thus when Aras presented a request earlier to Galli in Ankara that the Italian newspapers should publish a note about stating that Italy and Turkey would directly discuss the issue of the Montreux Convention, Ciano opposed this idea arguing that “public opinion is not interested in this issue”.⁵⁸⁷

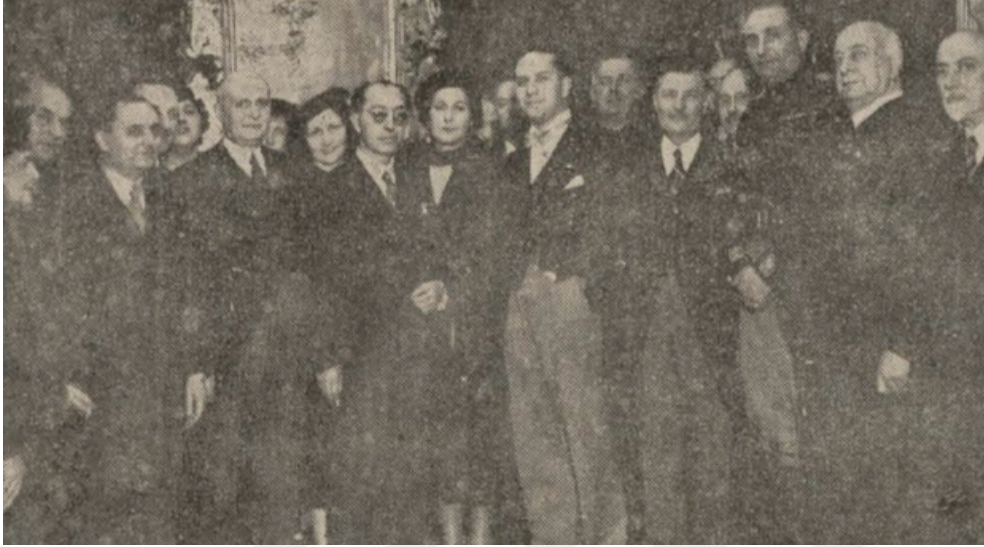


Figure 5.1: “Dış Bakanımız Doktor Tevfik Rüştü Aras’ın Milâno’da İtalyan Dış Bakanı ile Beraber Alınmış Bir Resimleri”, *Ulus*, 11 February 1937, p. 1

According to the report of Ciano, which summarised the details of the meeting, the meeting started with good wishes for the betterment of relations by the both sides. While Ciano found Aras’s words praising Italy and *Il Duce* rather “excessive and clumsy”, it was clear that both sides wanted, as Ciano put it, “to open a new page” in Turkish-Italian relations.⁵⁸⁸ The two ministers talked about several issues including the Montreux Convention, the status quo in the

⁵⁸⁷ “Il ministro degli esteri, Ciano, all’ambasciatore ad Ankara, Galli” (15 January 1937, Rome), doc. 58, p. 70: “Non vedo perché ciò dovrebbe venir pubblicato dalla stampa italiana: questa opinione pubblica si disinteressa di tale questione”.

⁵⁸⁸ “Il ministro degli esteri, Ciano, al capo del governo, Ciano” (4 February 1937, Milan), doc. 124, p. 158: “Rüstü Aras ha cominciato col fare delle dichiarazioni smisurate e goffe di amicizia per l’Italia e di ammirazione per il Duce. ... Gli ho risposto che, mentre stavamo per aprire una nuova pagina nel libro delle relazioni italo-turche...”

Mediterranean, Italy's relations with the Balkan countries,⁵⁸⁹ and, according to Soyak's account, Turkey's position over the Rome-Berlin Axis, a topic which was not mentioned in Ciano's account.⁵⁹⁰

The first elephant in the room was not surprisingly the issue of Italy's adhesion to the Montreux Convention. After explaining that Italy's non-attendance at the Montreux Conference was due to the international situation and thus not due to any hostility towards Turkey, Ciano set out three new conditions for Italy's signature of the convention, just as Italy had in the earlier instances that were examined in the previous chapter.⁵⁹¹ Firstly, Italy should be considered of equal status with the original signatory countries. Secondly, Italy would "formulate the same reservations as Japan in relation to the link between the Covenant [of the League of Nations] and the Montreux Convention",⁵⁹² referring to Japan's conditional signature of the convention stating that "Japan reserves full liberty of interpretation as regards the provisions of Articles 19 and 25 so far as they concern that Covenant and those treaties".⁵⁹³ This in fact demonstrated very well that even though Italy was to leave the League of Nations officially in December 1937, it was already disregarding the organisation and had *de facto* abandoned its

⁵⁸⁹ "Il ministro degli esteri, Ciano, al capo del governo, Ciano" (4 February 1937, Milan), doc. 124, pp. 158-60.

⁵⁹⁰ Soyak, *Atatürk'ten Hatıralar*, p. 628.

⁵⁹¹ See: "Chapter 4. The Italian Factor in the Straits Issue", pp. 117-18 and pp. 128-9, in this thesis.

⁵⁹² "Il ministro degli esteri, Ciano, al capo del governo, Ciano" (4 February 1937, Milan), doc. 124, p. 159: "Naturalmente avremmo dato la nostra adesione con due condizioni: 1) di venire ad assumere una figura identica a quella degli Stati firmatari originariamente; 2) di formulare le stesse riserve del Giappone per quanto concerne i legami tra il Convenant e la Convenzione di Montreux".

⁵⁹³ "1936 Convention Regarding the Regime of the Straits", <https://cil.nus.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/formidable/18/1936-Convention-Regarding-the-Regime-of-the-Straits.pdf> [accessed on 30 April 2020]. Article 19 of the Convention made an exception for the passage of warships in the Turkish Straits if it was a mutual assistance issue arising from the Covenant of the League of Nations or another mutual assistance pact, meaning the Balkan Pact, which was within the framework of the Covenant of the League of Nations. Article 25 specified that the Montreux Convention would in no way be an obstacle to the implementation of rights and obligations which existed under the Covenant of the League of Nations.

commitments towards it since the Italo-Ethiopian War. According to Ciano's report, Aras did not have problems about these conditions.⁵⁹⁴

However, the third condition, though Ciano did not explicitly state it as a condition, was Turkey's *de jure* recognition of the Italian Empire, Ciano arguing that some other states of the League had already done this. According to the report, Aras stated that Turkey had already *de facto* recognized 'the empire' and therefore *de jure* recognition could be handled once Aras returned to Turkey.⁵⁹⁵ In *Ulus*'s editorial, even though not referred to directly, this implicit condition imposed by Italy about Italy's signing of the Montreux Convention was received with disappointment: "... we are expressing a fact by saying that the joining of Rome to Montreux, which was considered as the biggest achievement for peace last year, is the most natural necessity of the sentiments of friendship [between Turkey and Italy], [a friendship] which we see clearly".⁵⁹⁶ On the other hand, however, some Turkish newspapers did not show any such disappointment, some even publishing headlines declaring that the Italians had agreed to sign the Montreux Convention.⁵⁹⁷

Another issue that was discussed in the meeting, interestingly not brought up in the discussion by Aras but by Ciano, concerned the Italian fortifications in the island of Leros, which Ciano claimed were for the purpose of the "imperial communications" of Italy and thus should not be considered by Turkey as a direct threat.⁵⁹⁸ According to *The Times*, Ciano's points in the meeting were repeated, in

⁵⁹⁴ "Il ministro degli esteri, Ciano, al capo del governo, Ciano" (4 February 1937, Milan), doc. 124, p. 159.

⁵⁹⁵ "Il ministro degli esteri, Ciano, al capo del governo, Ciano" (4 February 1937, Milan), doc. 124, p. 159.

⁵⁹⁶ Ünal, Kemal, "Milano'dan Sonra", *Ulus*, 5 February 1937, p. 1: "Geçen yılın en büyük sulh eseri sayılan Montröye Romanın iltihakı, vazih olarak gördüğümüz dostluk hislerinin en tabii icabıdır, demekle de bir hakikati ifade etmiş oluyoruz, sanırız".

⁵⁹⁷ "İtalya Boğazlar Meselesini Kabul Etti", *Son Posta*, 4 February 1937, p. 1.

⁵⁹⁸ "Il ministro degli esteri, Ciano, al capo del governo, Ciano" (4 February 1937, Milan), doc. 124, p. 159: "Le Isole del Dodecaneso rappresentano una tappa nella via delle comunicazioni imperiali..."

an editorial in the Italian newspaper *Popolo d'Italia*, arguing reportedly that “while a policy of armaments, is being pursued by all countries, Italy too has had to see to the safety of her communications”, thus the fortifications did not aim at attacking Turkey.⁵⁹⁹ The same Italian article was also referred in *Tan*, which reported that, according to the Italian newspaper, in the Milan meeting Italy put an end to Turkey’s concerns about the fortifications in the Dodecanese islands.⁶⁰⁰ These concerns, which were not as serious as the British and Italian newspapers portrayed, were not, though, immediately erased.⁶⁰¹

Having discussed the centuries-long “peaceful, friendly and trade” relations between the Turks and the Venetians and the Genoese, Ahmet Emin Yalman argued, in an editorial in *Tan*, that Turkish-Italian relations could not be understood solely by reference to the Tripoli War, for “to draw meaning and conclusions about Turkish-Italian relations from the Tripoli War would mean not knowing the last half century of the political history of Europe”.⁶⁰² Such “anxieties”, for Yalman, were not omnipresent historical facts but rather an occurrence that resulted from the context after the First World War, a context in which Italy began rapid militarisation announcing that it had to “handle various problems abroad”, i.e. imperial claims, and Turkey, “quite naturally”, had to act cautiously towards this neighbour, who had military bases visible from the Anatolian coast. This, Yalman argued, was the reason for Turkish distrust. Now, however, the context had changed as Italy had already demonstrated its imperial aims clearly, i.e. by attacking Ethiopia, and Turkey’s defence system was so

⁵⁹⁹ “Italian Assurances to Turkey”, *The Times*, 4 February 1937, p. 16.

⁶⁰⁰ “Fransız Gazetelerinde Garip Yazılar”, *Tan*, 5 February 1937, p. 1.

⁶⁰¹ For an example of the British portrayal of such “suspicions” of Turkey regarding the Italian fortifications in the Dodecanese islands, see: “Italian Aims Abroad”, *The Times*, 17 October 1936, p. 11.

⁶⁰² Yalman, Ahmet Emin, “Tabii Hale Dönüş”, *Tan*, 5 February 1937, p. 10: “Trablusgarp harbinden Türk-İtalyan münasebetleri hakkında mâna ve neticeler çıkarmak, Avrupanın son yarım asırlık siyasî tarihini bilmemek demektir”.

developed that it “can stand on its own”, a situation which paved the way for the current development of relations between the two countries.⁶⁰³

Thirdly, the discussions related to the Mediterranean status quo as well as Italy’s improving relations with the Balkan countries were also an important part of the Milan meeting since they raised the hopes of the Turkish government that a Mediterranean pact might soon be formed. Italian rapprochement with Yugoslavia in particular supported this Turkish ‘dream’ of the formation of a pact in the Mediterranean. This idea was also evident in Turkish press coverage as Turkish newspapers immediately after the meeting published articles announcing the possibility of a Mediterranean pact. Togay argued that Aras’s subsequent visit to Belgrade on his way back from Milan as well as Yugoslav Prime Minister Milan Stojadinović’s recent parliamentary speech on Yugoslav-Italian relations were proof of the coming of such a pact, which would provide security and stability in the Mediterranean.⁶⁰⁴ Both the Turkish government and the Turkish press underlined the fact that Turkey’s search for Mediterranean security did not exclude Italy and, in fact, was against such an exclusion,⁶⁰⁵ for the Turkish government wanted Italy present in such an arrangement.

Publications in the Italian newspapers, however, regarded Turkish claims about a Mediterranean pact as defunct and denied that Italy would be in favour of such a pact, arguing that Italy would always prefer bilateral arrangements to multilateral ones.⁶⁰⁶ This once again demonstrated the divergence in the

⁶⁰³ Yalman, Ahmet Emin, “Tabii Hale Dönüş”, p. 10: “İtalya, hariçte görülecek hesapları olduğunu ilân eden bir taarruz kuvveti halinde inkişaf edince bizim, Anadolu kıyılarından gözle görülecek mesafede askerî üsleri bulunan böyle bir komşuya karşı ihtiyatlı davranmamızdan daha tabii bir şey olamazdı”.

⁶⁰⁴ Togay, Muharrem Feyzi, “Siyasi İcmal. Akdeniz Anlaşması Genişliyor”, *Cumhuriyet*, 7 February 1937, p. 2. For similar articles, see: “Akdeniz Paktı, Türkiye, Yunanistan ve Yugoslavya”, *Tan*, 10 February 1937, p. 1; Yunus Nadi, “Milano Mülakatı Vesilesile Türk-İtalyan Münasebetleri”, *Cumhuriyet*, 4 February 1937, p. 1 and p. 7.

⁶⁰⁵ For an example of the argument that Turkey searched for a Mediterranean alliance against Italy in this period, see: Türkeş, Mustafa, “Atatürk Döneminde Türkiye’nin Bölgesel Dış Politikaları (1923-1938)” in *Uluslararası Konferans Atatürkçülük ve Modern Türkiye* (Ankara: Ankara Üniversitesi Siyasal Bilgiler Fakültesi Yayını, 1999), p. 137.

⁶⁰⁶ “Akdeniz ve Romadan bir Tekzip”, *Tan*, 12 February 1937, p. 1.

approaches of Italy and Turkey over how they perceived security: while for Turkey, international security should be based on a collective arrangement such as the League of Nations or regional pacts, for Italy, it was one dependent on bilateral agreements and alliances.

The official press release published after the meeting was rather bland and far from Turkish expectations for there was no reference to the Montreux Convention. It merely stated that there was

no question [that] divides the two countries and that only feelings of mutual confidence must inspire [the] relations. Both Governments have expressed the will, and recognize the utility, of cooperating in the interests of Italo-Turkish relations and of a general policy of peace and stabilization.⁶⁰⁷

Despite the rather narrow scope of the meeting, the stance of the Turkish press was a distinctly positive one since the meeting was regarded as the beginning of the amelioration of relations between Italy and Turkey.⁶⁰⁸ Similar rhetoric was apparently also adopted by Italy. In his interview for *Tan*, the new Italian consul general in Istanbul, Mario Badoglio, the son of the famous Pietro Badoglio, claimed that the Milan meeting would pave the way for the re-flourishing of Turkish-Italian relations, which had earlier experienced “some complications”.⁶⁰⁹

It can easily be argued that the enthusiasm of the Turkish press was decidedly more muted than it had been during the time when İnönü and Aras had visited Rome in 1932. This lack of enthusiasm was most evident in the publication of a French article on the front page of *Ulus*. This article, which was published without any commentary, argued that “despite the exaggeration in the happiness of the Italian newspapers, the extent of the Milan meeting was very limited. In fact,

⁶⁰⁷ “Italian Assurances to Turkey”, *The Times*, 4 February 1937, p. 16.

⁶⁰⁸ Us, Asım, “Roma Mülakatı”, *Kurun*, 6 February 1937, p. 4; Yalman, Ahmet Emin, “Bir Haftalık Tarih”, *Tan*, 7 February 1937, p. 14.

⁶⁰⁹ “Türk-İtalyan Dostluk Münasebetleri Genişleyecek”, *Tan*, 15 February 1937, p. 2.

looking at the *communiqué*, nothing positive had come out of it”.⁶¹⁰ Considering that *Ulus* was the official media organ of the ruling party CHP, the publication of the article on the front page without any commentary countering such claims might be taken as an implicit approval of what the French newspaper argued.

Even though the Milan meeting was not comprehensive in its scope, it was still an effective tool for Turkey due to three main reasons. Firstly, as discussed above, it, to some extent, normalised the relations between Italy and Turkey and it enabled both countries to discuss problematic issues in their bilateral relations without any intermediaries. Secondly, it was very significant for Turkish-Italian economic relations since the continuation of these relations was crucial for both countries.⁶¹¹ Finally, as Millman argued, the Milan meeting also showed Britain that Turkey was not dependent entirely on Britain in its foreign policy calculations and that Turkey could easily search for alternatives.⁶¹² This was an important point since it underlined that Turkey’s security policy was not based on the good will of one country, but was the result of engaging in good relations with as many countries as possible.

After the meeting, there had been further diplomatic attempts to develop bilateral relations. The first of these was a plan for the Turkish fleet’s visit to Italy in the summer of 1937, but this visit was later postponed to the autumn and then eventually failed to materialise.⁶¹³ The second was Ciano’s possible visit to Turkey, which was first scheduled for the last week of October 1937 so that the Italian foreign minister could attend the celebrations for the anniversary of the

⁶¹⁰ “Milano Mülâkatının Akisleri”, *Ulus*, 8 February 1937, p. 1: “İtalyan gazetelerinin sevincindeki mübaleğaya ragmen Milano konuşmasının şümülü çok mahduttur. Hattâ tebliğe bakılırsa müsbet bir şey de çıkmamıştır”.

⁶¹¹ Yalman, Ahmet Emin, “Tabii Hale Dönüş”, *Tan*, 5 February 1937, p. 10.

⁶¹² Millman, *The Ill-Made Alliance*, p. 90.

⁶¹³ “L’ambasciatore ad Ankara, Galli, al ministro degli esteri, Ciano” (24 July 1937, Ankara), doc. 119, in Ministero degli affari esteri commissione per la pubblicazione dei documenti diplomatici, *I documenti diplomatici italiani ottava serie: 1935-1939*, vol. VII (1 luglio – 31 dicembre 1937) (Rome: Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato P.V., 1998), p. 145.

establishment of the Turkish Republic, but was then rescheduled for November.⁶¹⁴ However, again this visit never took place for the reason which will be examined later in this chapter.

In such an environment, Italy's signing of the Montreux Convention only came about in April 1938 one month after Turkey's *de jure* recognition of the Italian Empire. This delay in the realisation of the Turkish aim of getting Italy to sign the Montreux Convention was not due to hostilities between the two countries, but was rather due to the contemporary international environment in this period. From the Turkish perspective, the *de jure* recognition of the Italian Empire was not possible without an international environment which enabled such an action, such as an official recognition by the League of Nations. Such an environment only emerged in the early months of 1938 after Britain and France recognised the Italian Empire officially and when the British-Italian rapprochement was paving the way for a new Anglo-Italian Agreement in April 1938.⁶¹⁵ This delay and Turkish disappointment over Italy's policy regarding the Montreux Convention did not, however, automatically lead to the deterioration of bilateral relations.

5.2. Turkey's Search for Collective and Regional Security Arrangements and Italy

The Italian factor in Turkish foreign policy making after 1936 was not limited to the aim of securing the Italian signature on the Montreux Convention. Italy, either

⁶¹⁴ "L'ambasciatore ad Ankara, Galli, al ministro degli esteri, Ciano" (20 March 1937, Ankara), doc. 308, in Ministero degli affari esteri commissione per la pubblicazione dei documenti diplomatici, *I documenti diplomatici italiani ottava serie: 1935-1939*, vol. VI (1 gennaio – 30 giugno 1937) (Rome: Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato P.V., 1997), p. 368; "Il ministro degli esteri, Ciano, all'ambasciatore ad Ankara, Galli" (30 March 1937, Rome), doc. 358, p. 433; and, "L'ambasciatore ad Ankara, Galli, al ministro degli esteri, Ciano" (31 March 1937, Ankara), doc. 366, pp. 439-40, both in the same volume; "L'ambasciatore a Mosca, Rosso, al ministro degli esteri, Ciano" (16 July 1937, Moscow), doc. 80, in Ministero degli affari esteri commissione per la pubblicazione dei documenti diplomatici, *I documenti diplomatici italiani ottava serie: 1935-1939*, vol. VII (1 luglio – 31 dicembre 1937) (Rome: Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato P.V., 1998), p. 94.

⁶¹⁵ Fiore, *Anglo-Italian Relations in the Middle East, 1922-1940*, p. 53. For the importance of this environment for Turkey to recognise the Italian Empire, see: "No. 594 Sir P. Loraine (Angora) to Viscount Halifax, 26 February 1938" (R 1859/117/67) in *Documents on British Foreign Policy 1919-1939*, ser. 2, vol. 19 (London: H.M. Stationery Office, 1982), p. 972.

directly or indirectly, continued to play an important role in Turkey's search for collective and regional security arrangements on the eve of the Second World War. The first of these security arrangements was the Saadabad Pact in July 1937.

5.2.1. The Saadabad Pact

The Saadabad Pact was a non-aggression pact initiated by Turkey and signed by Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Afghanistan on 8 July 1937 in the Saadabad Palace in Tehran. The aim of this pact was to overcome the grievances among the signatory countries, for example, those between Iraq and Iran over the *Shatt al-Arab*, which was solved partially thanks to the active initiative of Turkey over this issue,⁶¹⁶ as well as to contribute to the stability and peaceful relations both in the region and around the world. The articles of the Saadabad Pact reflected these aims. Article 1 acknowledged the principle of non-intervention in the internal affairs of another member of the pact; Article 7 explicitly provided an example for such an action, i.e. supporting a non-state group against any other member of the pact.⁶¹⁷ This was a particular reference to Kurdish activities in the region, which began increasingly to be a threat for the national security of Iran, Iraq and Turkey.⁶¹⁸ Article 2 envisaged an end to the border conflicts between the signatory countries and thus recognised the status quo in the region and Article 4 prevented any act of aggression by a signatory country against another.⁶¹⁹ The scope of this pact was therefore limited to that of a non-aggression treaty and the aim was clearly to prevent any possible conflicts among these states. Thus Article 7 proposed a

⁶¹⁶ Yunus Nadi, "Tahran Görüşmeleri ve Şark Misakı", *Cumhuriyet*, 4 July 1937, p. 1; D[doğan] N[adi], "Tam Bir Dostluk Havası İçinde İmzalanan Anlaşma: Şark Misakı", *Cumhuriyet*, 10 July 1937, p. 1.

⁶¹⁷ Soysal, *Türkiye'nin Siyasal Andlaşmaları*, pp. 585-6.

⁶¹⁸ Gunter, Michael M., "The Kurdish Factor in Turkish Foreign Policy", *Journal of Third World Studies*, 11/2 (1994), pp. 441-2.

⁶¹⁹ Soysal, *Türkiye'nin Siyasal Andlaşmaları*, pp. 585-6.

consultancy mechanism among the signatory states over issues related to the region or international issues which might affect the region.⁶²⁰

Despite the rather limited scope of the Saadabad Pact, however, some scholars argue that the Saadabad Pact directly targeted Italy, an argument which was based on the fact that the pact was initiated firstly in October 1935 when Italy invaded Ethiopia.⁶²¹ In fact, the idea of forming the Saadabad Pact had existed even before 1935. On 3 October 1932, Iraq, granted its independence by the British and thus “graduat[ing] ... from the status of mandated community”, joined the League of Nations as a new member.⁶²² In his memoirs, Aras argued that the Turkish government benefitted from Iraq’s membership of the League and he met the foreign ministers of Iran and Iraq to discuss a pact, which would create a venue for constant interaction among these countries and possibly many other Middle Eastern states in the future.⁶²³ In December 1933, too, this idea was pondered over by the Turkish and Soviet governments, which envisaged a Near Eastern Non-Aggression Pact among Turkey, the Soviet Union, Iran, Iraq and Afghanistan. However, this initiative was undermined by Iraq’s insistence on the inclusion of Britain in this pact.⁶²⁴

From another point of view, Akdevelioğlu and Kürkçüoğlu claim that the argument that the Saadabad Pact was against Italy does not reflect reality, but was a perception crafted by Britain and the Soviet Union, for whom such an

⁶²⁰ Soysal, *Türkiye’nin Siyasal Andlaşmaları*, p. 586.

⁶²¹ For such arguments, for example, see: Akhtar, Shameem, “The Iraqi-Iranian Dispute over the Shatt-el-Arab”, *Pakistan Horizon*, 22/3 (1969), pp. 216-7; Armaoğlu, Fahir, *20. Yüzyıl Siyasi Tarihi*, vol. I (1914-1980) (Ankara: Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 1993), p. 346; Barlas, *Etatism and Diplomacy in Turkey*, p. 182; Gönübol, Mehmet, et al., *Olaylarla Türk Dış Politikası (1919-1995)*, p. 106; Soysal, *Türkiye’nin Siyasal Andlaşmaları*, pp. 582-3; Tuncer, Hüner, *Atatürkçü Dış Politika* (İstanbul: Kaynak Yayınları, 2008), p. 154.

⁶²² Hudson, Manley O., “The Admission of Iraq to Membership in the League of Nations”, *The American Journal of International Law*, 27/1 (1933), p. 133.

⁶²³ Aras, *Atatürk’ün Dış Politikası*, p. 109.

⁶²⁴ İşçi, *Turkey and the Soviet Union during World War II*, p. 46.

interpretation would have been more palatable.⁶²⁵ The general attitude in the diplomatic correspondence between British Ambassador Percy Loraine and the Foreign Office suggested that Britain certainly did not want any rapprochement between Italy and Turkey and would thus certainly have preferred this kind of an explanation for the Saadabad Pact, as Akdevelioğlu and Kürkçüoğlu have argued. In a communication to Loraine from the Foreign Office on 3 April 1937, the Foreign Office explicitly stated that “it seems to [the British government] highly desirable in present circumstances that negotiations between Italy and Turkey should not be started”.⁶²⁶ Further, Loraine was clearly instructed by the Foreign Office to “use [his] influence with M. Aras accordingly”,⁶²⁷ meaning that he should prevent such a negotiation between Turkey and Italy, although this instruction was cancelled a few hours later by a following communication, which advised Loraine to make no comment against Italy in his discussion with Aras since it “might gravely prejudice” Britain’s relations with Italy.⁶²⁸

Given both the nature of the treaty and the exaggeration of the Italian threat against Turkey by the British press and the government, it can clearly be argued that the Saadabad Pact was not directed against Italy. As can be seen in its articles, the Saadabad Pact did not specify any collective defence mechanism among the signatory countries and thus this pact in nature could not be aimed directly against any country including Italy. In practice, too, there was “no possibility of military cooperation” given that the signatory countries were mostly dependent on foreign

⁶²⁵ Akdevelioğlu, Atay and Ömer Kürkçüoğlu, “Orta Doğu’yla İlişkiler” in *Türk Dış Politikası: Kurtuluş Savaşından Bugüne Olgular, Belgeler, Yorumlar*, vol. I: 1919-1980, Baskın Oran (ed.) (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2009), p. 366; Similarly, Papuççular argued that the Saadabad Pact was not against Italy. See: Papuççular, Hazal, “Turkish-Italian Relations in the Interwar Period”, Unpublished Master’s Thesis, Boğaziçi University, Istanbul, 2009, pp. 146-7. Hale further argued that the Saadabad Pact was not against any country. See: Hale, *Turkish Foreign Policy*, pp. 46-7.

⁶²⁶ “No. 369 Foreign Office to Sir P. Loraine (Angora), 3 April 1937” (R 2258/1/22) in *Documents on British Foreign Policy 1919–1939*, ser. 2, vol. 18 (London: H.M. Stationery Office, 1980), pp. 563-4.

⁶²⁷ “No. 369 Foreign Office to Sir P. Loraine (Angora), 3 April 1937” (R 2258/1/22), pp. 563-4.

⁶²⁸ “No. 369 Foreign Office to Sir P. Loraine (Angora), 3 April 1937” (R 2258/1/22), pp. 564-5.

supply of arms.⁶²⁹ Further, as İşçi argued, the military power of the signatory countries was insufficient to fight against any great power, “even with their forces combined”.⁶³⁰ This point was also underlined by Şevket Süreyya Aydemir, a contemporary member of the Turkish republican elite and a founder of the well-known *Kadro* magazine, who argued that “... it was not possible to expect any serious results from this treaty” since the armies of these “Eastern countries” were weak.⁶³¹

Moreover, Aras’s declarations after the conclusion of the pact demonstrated that the pact certainly did not mean an alliance, but was “only an undertaking of consultation” since “in the pact, neither mutual assistance nor a military undertaking was mentioned”.⁶³² Aras even defined the content of the pact as being “the most basic” type of regional agreements that were allowed within the framework of the League’s Covenant.⁶³³ Similarly, in his speech in parliament on 14 June 1937 before Aras’s visit to Baghdad and Tehran, İsmet İnönü declared that the Saadabad Pact was in nature “a non-aggression and consultation” treaty.⁶³⁴

The coverage of the Turkish press also supported this line of justification for the existence of the pact. Yunus Nadi explicitly stated in an editorial on 14 July 1937 that “... [this] document which was signed in Saadabad is not a treaty of

⁶²⁹ Mango, Andrew, “Turkey in the Middle East”, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 3/3 (1968), p. 230.

⁶³⁰ İşçi, *Turkey and the Soviet Union during World War II*, p. 47.

⁶³¹ Aydemir, Şevket Süreyya, *Tek Adam: Mustafa Kemal*, vol. III (1922-1938) (Istanbul: Remzi Kitabevi, 1999), p. 392.

⁶³² Akşin, *Atatürk’ün Dış Politika İlkeleri ve Diplomasisi*, pp. 198-9.

⁶³³ Akşin, *Atatürk’ün Dış Politika İlkeleri ve Diplomasisi*, p. 199.

⁶³⁴ “Hükümetin İç ve Dış Politikası Hakkındaki Konuşması, 14 Haziran 1937 – TBMM” in *İsmet İnönü’nün TBMM’deki Konuşmaları, 1920-1973*, vol. I (1920-1938), Ali Rıza Cihan (ed.) (Ankara: TBMM Kültür, Sanat ve Yayın Kurulu Yayınları, 1992), p. 424.

alliance and it does not target any [country]”.⁶³⁵ Yalman in his editorial in *Tan* also gave the same assurance and added that this pact was completely “in the spirit of the League of Nations”.⁶³⁶ In general, for the Turkish press, the main benefit of this pact was its elimination of long-held grievances between these countries in the region and its paving the way for the establishment of good-neighbourly relations.⁶³⁷

Establishing good relations with these countries, as Aras argued, was mostly of “psychological importance” for Turkey, the treaty being thus not much more than a mutual understanding between the four countries.⁶³⁸ According to the Italian ambassador in Tehran, Petrucci’s report, Aras also repeated this point to him, the Turkish foreign minister arguing that what Turkey gained from this agreement was “only an increase in moral strength” and that Turkey would no longer have to act as an arbitrator between these countries since the pact would end these contentions.⁶³⁹ Aras must have felt the need for a clearer assurance to Italy that the pact was not against Italy since he received Petrucci again on 3 July 1937 for another meeting, a meeting in which Aras emphasised the good relations between Turkey and Italy by stressing the importance of two upcoming events: the Turkish fleet’s visit to Venice and Ciano’s visit to Turkey, and he assured Petrucci that the Saadabad Pact was “within the framework of the Turkish-Italian Agreement” of 1928 and that the pact would “insure and facilitate peace” in the

⁶³⁵ [Abaloğlu], Yunus Nadi, “Günün En Mes’ud Hâdisesi: Saadabad Paktı”, *Cumhuriyet*, 14 July 1937, p. 6.

⁶³⁶ Yalman, Ahmet Emin, “Tahran Misakı”, *Tan*, 10 July 1937, p. 1.

⁶³⁷ For example, see: [Abaloğlu], Yunus Nadi, “Tahran Görüşmeleri ve Şark Misakı”, *Cumhuriyet*, 4 July 1937, p. 1; Atay, Falih Rıfki, “Türkiye ve Şark”, *Ulus*, 13 July 1937, p. 1; Yunus Nadi, “Günün En Mes’ud Hâdisesi: Saadabad Paktı”, p. 1.

⁶³⁸ Akşin, *Atatürk’ün Dış Politika İlkeleri ve Diplomasisi*, p. 199.

⁶³⁹ “Il ministro a Teheran, Petrucci, al ministro degli esteri, Ciano” (29 June 1937, Tehran), doc. 816, in Ministero degli affari esteri commissione per la pubblicazione dei documenti diplomatici, *I documenti diplomatici italiani ottava serie: 1935-1939*, vol. VI (1 gennaio – 30 giugno 1937) (Rome: Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato P.V., 1997), p. 1061: “Ha detto che Turchia ritrae dal patto solo un aumento di forza morale...”

Middle East against “all speculations and frictions” in the region.⁶⁴⁰ This was not the first time that the Turkish government had highlighted the “good” relations between Italy and Turkey since only two weeks before the meeting between Petrucci and Aras, Prime Minister İsmet İnönü had argued that “our political relations with Italy are in a very good position [and] economic relations are improving”. Moreover, İnönü underlined the fact that Turkey’s foreign policy sought peace and security in the Mediterranean and would welcome any initiative there that would end the conflicts between the Mediterranean countries, thus being an understanding that did not reflect any hostility towards Italy.⁶⁴¹ Considering that the Saadabad Pact was concluded after the Milan meeting and at a time when further steps to develop the relations, such as the visit of the Turkish fleet to Italy and Ciano’s visit to Turkey were planned, there was no particular reason for such hostility or for the Turkish government to engage in a pact directly targeting Italy. If this pact were to target anything, it would not target any particular country, but, according to Muharrem Feyzi Togay, great power politics in general, since “... [these] foreign great powers had used the Eastern nations and countries as a tool against each other”, a direct reference to British and French interwar policy in the region. Therefore, according to the author, the Saadabad Pact “ended this era definitively” since it brought a mutual understanding among the signatory powers.⁶⁴² However, the official rhetoric of the Turkish government did not explicitly reflect this view at all. İnönü stated that both Britain and the Soviet Union were informed beforehand about this pact because Britain was in effect a neighbour of Afghanistan due to British India and the Soviet Union was a

⁶⁴⁰ “Il ministro a Teheran, Petrucci, al ministro degli esteri, Ciano” (3 July 1937, Tehran), doc. 15, in Ministero degli affari esteri commissione per la pubblicazione dei documenti diplomatici, *I documenti diplomatici italiani ottava serie: 1935-1939*, vol. VII (1 luglio – 31 dicembre 1937) (Rome: Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato P.V., 1998), p. 18: “... d idare pure a V.E. [Ciano] formale assicurazione che la firma del Patto a Quattro asiatico si inquadra nell’Intesa italo-turca e che è destinato assicurare e facilitare pace in questo settore contro ogni speculazione (*sic*) e frizione. Ha pure aggiunto intesa italo-turca ha ormai basi granitiche come dimostreranno due avvenimenti futuri, visita flotta turca a Venezia ed il viaggio di V.E. [Ciano] ad Ankara”.

⁶⁴¹ “Hükümetin İç ve Dış Politikası Hakkındaki Konuşması, 14 Haziran 1937 – TBMM”, p. 425.

⁶⁴² Togay, Muharrem Feyzi, “Şark Misakı”, *Cumhuriyet*, 13 July 1937, p. 2: “Bundan sonra haricdeki büyük devletlerin şarklı milletleri ve devletleri yekdiğerine karşı âlet olarak kullanmaları devri kat’î olarak kapanmıştır”.

neighbour of both Afghanistan and Iran. According to the prime minister, both Britain and the Soviet Union would receive this pact well.⁶⁴³ The support of these two countries for the Saadabad Pact was repeated in a speech made by Aras in June 1938, when the pact was finally ratified by all signatory states and was therefore put into force.⁶⁴⁴

From the Italian perspective, too, at least according to those Italian primary sources that I have been able to consult, the Saadabad Pact was not regarded as an agreement which emerged out of Turkey's fear of any Italian threat. Togay's aforementioned argument about great power politics appeared in one of the important Italian journals on the Middle East, *Oriente Moderno*, which reported that the pact would contribute to preventing "Anglo-Russo rivalry" in the Middle East, a rivalry which existed due to these two countries' attempts to establish their influence over the Middle Eastern countries that were "too weak to resist foreign penetration". The Italian journal also argued that this pact might provide a reconciliation not only between these four signatory countries, but also between Britain and the Soviet Union.⁶⁴⁵ According to Petrucci, the British influence in particular in the pact was obvious, even in the resolving of the *Shatt al-Arab* dispute between Iran and Iraq, the end of which led to the emergence of the Saadabad Pact.⁶⁴⁶ Moreover, Petrucci was well aware of the fact that the expectations of the signatory countries from the pact were not high. For the Iranians, for example, the pact reportedly did not have a "special meaning", but

⁶⁴³ "Hükümetin İç ve Dış Politikası Hakkındaki Konuşması, 14 Haziran 1937 – TBMM", p. 424.

⁶⁴⁴ İşçi, *Turkey and the Soviet Union during World War II*, p. 47.

⁶⁴⁵ U. F., "Oriente in Generale. Sul Patto Asiatico", *Oriente Moderno*, 17/7 (July 1937), p. 320.

⁶⁴⁶ "Il ministro a Teheran, Petrucci, al ministro degli esteri, Ciano" (29 June 1937, Tehran), doc. 815, in Ministero degli affari esteri commissione per la pubblicazione dei documenti diplomatici, *I documenti diplomatici italiani ottava serie: 1935-1939*, vol. VI (1 gennaio – 30 giugno 1937) (Rome: Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato P.V., 1997), p. 1059.

was well received only because of the settlement of the border disputes with Iraq and because it was signed in Tehran.⁶⁴⁷

On the other hand, the active role that Aras played in bringing about the Saadabad Pact was regarded by Italy as an initiative increasing Turkey's international prestige as a country working for peace in Europe and now also in Asia. The primary reason for this, according to *Oriente Moderno*, was Turkey's desire to secure a semi-permanent seat in the League's Council,⁶⁴⁸ a goal to which Turkey attached considerable importance since it had become a member of the League of Nations in 1932.⁶⁴⁹ It was even argued that before its admission into the League as a member, the Turkish government had argued that if a semi-permanent position were to be reserved for Turkey in the League's Council, Turkey would then initiate the membership process by sending an official request for membership to the League of Nations, a proposition which was not accepted and which thus led instead to an official invitation for Turkey to become a member by the League of Nations.⁶⁵⁰ A semi-permanent position was an intermediate position in the Council, which in practice meant nothing more than the continual renewal of the non-permanent position every three years.⁶⁵¹ Since Turkey's non-permanent position was to end soon, Aras worked hard to obtain a semi-permanent position in the Council.

Petrucci "did not fail to warn" the Iranian governmental officials over the interests of Aras in this pact and argued that Aras's efforts for the Saadabad Pact were not a "personal sacrifice", meaning that the Turkish foreign minister's aim

⁶⁴⁷ "Il ministro a Teheran, Petrucci, al ministro degli esteri, Ciano" (29 June 1937, Tehran), doc. 815, p. 1060.

⁶⁴⁸ R[ossi], E[ttore], "La prima riunione del Consiglio dell'Intesa Orientale dopo la firma del Patto Orientale. Firma di un Protocollo.", *Oriente Moderno*, 17/8 (August 1937), p. 371.

⁶⁴⁹ Howard-Ellis, Charles, *The Origin Structure & Working of the League of Nations* (New Jersey: The Lawbook Exchange, Ltd., 2003), p. 156 (Originally published, Boston: Houghton Muffin Co., 1929).

⁶⁵⁰ Walters, *A History of the League of Nations*, p. 356.

⁶⁵¹ Walters, *A History of the League of Nations*, p. 324.

was to increase Turkey's as well as his own personal prestige in the League of Nations. Reportedly, these Iranian authorities whom Petrucci referred to in his report to Ciano agreed with him, claiming that Aras was "well known" in Iran for his "immoderate ambitions" and his "love for intrigue". However, apparently the Iranians did not care much about Turkish interests in the pact and rather regarded the pact as a manifestation of *realpolitik*, where each country had its own interests.⁶⁵² According to Petrucci, Aras was playing "a double game" since he, on the one hand, assured the Iranians that the Saadabad Pact would protect their independence and security against the Soviet Union and would bring peace to the region, and, on the other, he would try to persuade the Soviets, during his visit to Moscow which would take place just after his departure from Tehran, that this pact would increase the prestige of the League of Nations and therefore would contribute to the peace efforts "against any possible Italian-German move".⁶⁵³

However, the description of this Turkish policy as a "double game" by Petrucci also indicated that Aras's policy was related to rhetoric rather than reality. Framing the pact as being against a possible "Italian-German move" might be especially appealing to the Soviets due to the tense relations that existed between the Soviet Union and the Rome-Berlin Axis due to the ongoing Spanish Civil War, which would, a few months later, create further problems during the Nyon Conference. Apart from this reference by Petrucci, the Italian stance neither seemed negative towards the pact nor did the Italians regard it as a result of Turkish policy against Italy. The Italian ambassador in Ankara, Carlo Galli, who was often suspicious of Aras's policies, regarded the Saadabad Pact as a mere agreement guaranteeing Turkey's border in the East. Turkey, according to Galli, wanted to pursue "its own independent" policy in the Mediterranean. He argued that the fact that relations with the Soviet Union, which were "under British guardianship", would have to "decline relatively to make room for other friendships (for certain that with the British and, following or at the same time,

⁶⁵² "Il ministro a Teheran, Petrucci, al ministro degli esteri, Ciano" (29 June 1937, Tehran), doc. 815, p. 1060.

⁶⁵³ Il ministro a Teheran, Petrucci, al ministro degli esteri, Ciano" (29 June 1937, Tehran), doc. 815, p. 1060.

that with Italy)” completely excluded the possibility of the pact being a reinforcement of Turkish-Russian friendship.⁶⁵⁴

Therefore, Galli’s report of 4 August 1937 clearly demonstrated the fact that Italy did not regard its relations with Turkey with reservation before or after the signing of the Saadabad Pact. Relations were even regarded as improving and capable of offering an alternative to the famous Turkish-Soviet relationship, a fact which annoyed the Soviets.⁶⁵⁵ Another conclusion that can be made from this document was that Turkey’s improving relations with Britain in this period did not necessarily mean a deterioration of the relations between Italy and Turkey. This was also the case with Turkish foreign policy during the Nyon Conference, which took place almost two months after the signing of the Saadabad Pact.

5.2.2. The Nyon Conference

The Spanish Civil War that emerged in the summer of 1936 created another source of disturbance for Mediterranean security and was soon internationalised thanks to the direct support of Germany and Italy for General Franco and their direct involvement in the war by providing military assistance. On the other hand, the remaining European powers, including Britain and France, tried to adopt (at least officially) a policy of neutrality despite that fact that they continued to recognise the Republicans as the legitimate government.⁶⁵⁶ Turkey’s policy was also in line

⁶⁵⁴ “L’ambasciatore ad Ankara, Galli, al ministro degli esteri, Ciano” (4 August 1937, Istanbul), doc. 173, in Ministero degli affari esteri commissione per la pubblicazione dei documenti diplomatici, *I documenti diplomatici italiani ottava serie: 1935-1939*, vol. VII (1 luglio – 31 dicembre 1937) (Rome: Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato P.V., 1998), p. 216: “Ma il solo fatto che l’amicizia sovietica debba relativamente diminuire per far posto ad altre amicizie (sicuramente a quella inglese, e successivamente o contemporaneamente anche a quella italiana) esclude appunto che possa offi essere in atto un rafforzamento dell’amicizia turco-russa”.

⁶⁵⁵ “L’ambasciatore ad Ankara, Galli, al ministro degli esteri, Ciano” (4 August 1937, Istanbul), doc. 173, p. 216.

⁶⁵⁶ Cortada, James W., “Ships, Diplomacy and the Spanish Civil War: Nyon Conference, September, 1937”, *Il Politico*, 37/4 (1972), p. 673.

with this policy of non-intervention and neutrality during the Spanish Civil War.⁶⁵⁷ According to the Italian *chargé d'affaires* in Ankara De Astis, the Turkish position was succinctly worded by Aras as following: “We are absolutely hostile to the establishment of Bolshevism in Spain. There must be no Soviet Republic in the Mediterranean and we make our hostility clear by not allowing any propaganda in Turkey. However, we would be very concerned if...a regime clearly dominated by German and especially by Italian influence were to be established in Spain”.⁶⁵⁸ Therefore, from the Turkish perspective any change in the Mediterranean status quo, be it either by the Soviets or the Rome-Berlin Axis, was undesirable.

Sustaining this position of neutrality became much more difficult at the beginning of 1937, when Italian naval vessels started to sink other European commercial ships carrying goods to Republican Spain in an attempt to damage its trade relations. The frequency of the attacks continued to increase and in August 1937 more than ten ships from different countries were attacked.⁶⁵⁹ It was common knowledge that these ships in the Mediterranean were attacked by Italy even though it was never named as an aggressor. Ciano himself did not feel the need to hide this fact in his diary on 2 September writing that “great naval activity: three torpedoing and one seizure”.⁶⁶⁰ The unsuccessful Italian torpedo attack on a British destroyer on 1 September led Britain to accept the French proposal to hold a

⁶⁵⁷ Belenli, Tuğba, “Akdeniz’de Meçhul Denizaltı Saldırıları ve Nyon Konferansı (1937)”, *Gazi Akademik Bakış Dergisi*, 12/24 (2019), p. 166; Güçlü, Yücel, “Nyon Conference of 1937 on the Prevention of Piratical Acts in the Mediterranean and Turkey”, *Belleten*, 66/246 (2002), p. 532.

⁶⁵⁸ “L’incaricato d’affari ad Ankara, De Astis, al ministro degli esteri, Ciano” (16 September 1937, Istanbul), doc. 346, in Ministero degli affari esteri commissione per la pubblicazione dei documenti diplomatici, *I documenti diplomatici italiani ottava serie: 1935-1939*, vol. VII (1 luglio – 31 dicembre 1937) (Rome: Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato P.V., 1998), p. 416: “Siamo ostili nettamente allo stabilirsi del boscevismo in Spagna. Nel Mediterraneo non vi deve essere una Repubblica sovietica e dimostriamo la nostra avversione non permettendo in Turchia alcuna propaganda. Però saremmo molto preoccupati se in Ispagna, debellate le forze rivoluzionare, si instaurasse un regime nettamente dominato dalla influenza tedesca e più dalla italiana”.

⁶⁵⁹ Cortada, “Ships, Diplomacy and the Spanish Civil War”, pp. 673-4.

⁶⁶⁰ Ciano, Galeazzo, *Diario: 1937-1938* (Bologna: Cappelli Editore, 1948), p. 11. Also referred in Cortada, “Ships, Diplomacy and the Spanish Civil War”, p. 674.

conference to protect shipping in the Mediterranean⁶⁶¹ and in a British Cabinet meeting on 8 September a draft detailing how this conference should be convened was ready after consultation with France.⁶⁶² However, this conference, which was to be held in Nyon, Switzerland, was not convened against the aggressor, i.e. Italy, both Britain and France deciding to include all those parties involved in the Spanish Civil War, i.e. Italy, Germany and the Soviet Union.⁶⁶³ According to Mills,

the British response, leading to the Nyon Conference of 10-14 September 1937, should not be interpreted as a strong stand against aggression, however, but rather as an attempt to avoid confrontation and ... [an example of] Chamberlain's search for appeasement.⁶⁶⁴

The conference, which was attended by Bulgaria, Egypt, Greece, Romania, Turkey, the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, was convened in order "to end the present state of insecurity in the Mediterranean and to ensure that the rules of international law regarding shipping at sea shall be strictly enforced".⁶⁶⁵

Turkey's attendance at the Nyon Conference and the signing of the agreement is usually regarded in the secondary literature as an action directly taken against Italy. Çelebi, in his article where he discusses the general course of Turkish-Italian relations in the interwar period considers this conference as one of the factors that worsened relations between Turkey and Italy since he equates the Turkish attendance at the conference with joining "the peace bloc", meaning the

⁶⁶¹ Mills, William C., "The Nyon Conference: Neville Chamberlain, Anthony Eden, and the Appeasement of Italy in 1937", *The International History Review*, 15/1 (1993), p. 14.

⁶⁶² 8 September 1937: TNA, CAB 23/89.

⁶⁶³ 8 September 1937: TNA, CAB 23/89.

⁶⁶⁴ Mills, "The Nyon Conference", pp. 2-3.

⁶⁶⁵ Güçlü, "Nyon Conference of 1937", p. 539.

so-called status quo powers Britain and France.⁶⁶⁶ Similarly, for Güçlü, Turkey's policy during the conference signified "in effect, an informal alliance against Italy".⁶⁶⁷

Turkey's position in the conference was not hostile to Italy and the Italian authorities did not perceive Turkey's attendance as an action directly targeted at their country. Originally, as discussed above, this conference itself did not aim to exclude Italy and Germany as they were also invited to conference. Moreover, the venue of the conference was carefully selected, Nyon, not Geneva, the headquarters of the League of Nations, being chosen in order to avoid any possible excuse from the Italians that they had been prevented from attending the conference by the choice of its location.⁶⁶⁸ However, despite this gesture, Italy declared that it would not attend the conference since the recognition of the Italian Empire was not *de jure* recognised yet by either Britain or the League of Nations.⁶⁶⁹ Another reason for Italy's protest over the conference was due to the fact that the Soviet Union directly named Italy as an aggressor in a diplomatic note sent to all representatives at the conference.⁶⁷⁰ The Nyon Agreement was thus signed on 14 September 1937 without Italy's participation. The main outcome was that each country's commercial ships would follow specific routes and these routes would be guarded by naval and air forces. Apart from the territorial waters of the coastal states in the Eastern Mediterranean, the patrols were assigned to Britain

⁶⁶⁶ Çelebi, "Türk-İtalyan İlişkilerini Etkileyen Faktörler", p. 115. For similar views on the subject, see: Soysal, *Türkiye'nin Siyasal Andlaşmaları*, p. 520; Barlas, *Etatism and Diplomacy in Turkey*, p. 184; Papuçular, "Turkish-Italian Relations in the Interwar Period", p. 145; Güçlü, "Nyon Conference of 1937", p. 542.

⁶⁶⁷ Güçlü, "Nyon Conference of 1937", p. 547.

⁶⁶⁸ Cortada, "Ships, Diplomacy and the Spanish Civil War", p. 676.

⁶⁶⁹ "L'ambasciata di Gran Bretagna a Roma al ministero degli esteri" (9 September 1937, Rome), doc. 313, in Ministero degli affari esteri commissione per la pubblicazione dei documenti diplomatici, *I documenti diplomatici italiani ottava serie: 1935-1939*, vol. VII (1 luglio – 31 dicembre 1937) (Rome: Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato P.V., 1998), pp. 375-6.

⁶⁷⁰ Belenli, "Akdeniz'de Meçhul Denizaltı Saldırıları", p. 173.

and France in the Mediterranean.⁶⁷¹ The Tyrrhenian Sea was an exception to this rule since it was reserved for Italy, in the case of its future attendance. This was indeed “unacceptable” for Italy according to the Italian note given after the conference, since, considering Italy’s role in Mediterranean trade, this area was insufficient.⁶⁷² However, by the end of September, Italy had decided to join the agreement and was given the responsibility of protecting the zone from Port Said to Tripoli. Moreover, in order to please Italy, the Soviets were not given a share in this patrolling system.⁶⁷³ In other words, as Ciano stated in his diary on 21 September, for Italians, “it is a beautiful victory” since they were promoted “from accused torpedoers to policemen of the Mediterranean”.⁶⁷⁴ Italy was thus eventually included in this arrangement, a result which Turkey took active steps to bring about.

From the Turkish government’s point of view, the Nyon Conference was one of the pillars of the collective security mechanism, on which it based its foreign policy. Turkey’s preference was, therefore, for Italy’s inclusion in this system rather than its exclusion since this would strengthen the power of the conference and the subsequent agreement itself. The rhetoric of the governmental authorities in Turkey also emphasised this point. In his parliamentary speech on 18 September when the Nyon Agreement was ratified, Prime Minister İnönü argued that the content of the agreement was quite modest, the reason for its clamorous reception in world politics being the delicate conditions that were created by the

⁶⁷¹ “Akdenizde Korsanlık Efaline Karşı İttihaz Edilecek Müsterek Tedbirler Hakkındaki Nyon Anlaşmasının Tasdikına Dair (I/886) ve Akdenizde Korsanlık Efaline Karşı İttihaz Edilecek Müsterek Tedbirler Hakkındaki Nyon Anlaşmasına Müzeyyel İtilâfnamenin Tasdikına Dair I/888 Sayılı Kanun Lâyihaı ve Hariciye ve Millî Müdafaa Encümenlerinden Murekkeb Muhtelit Encümen Mazbatası”, Appendix to *TBMM Zabıt Ceridesi*, Devre: V, İçtima Senesi: 2, 18 September 1937, Saturday, p. 2.

⁶⁷² “The Nyon Conference and Its Result”, *Bulletin of International News*, 14/6 (September 18, 1937), p. 14.

⁶⁷³ Belenli, “Akdeniz’de Meçhul Denizaltı Saldırıları”, p. 176.

⁶⁷⁴ Ciano, *Diario: 1937-1938*, p. 21: “È una bella vittoria. Da imputati siluratori a poliziotti mediterranei, con esclusione degli affondati russi”.

ongoing crisis in the Mediterranean.⁶⁷⁵ The conference, he continued, should be regarded as a step towards preventing war, an aim for which Turkey should work. He concluded his speech by underlining the fact that this agreement was not against any country, but was only “a manifestation of a normal and legitimate self-defence”.⁶⁷⁶ Similarly, in a speech he made at the opening of the new session of parliament, President Atatürk argued:

From wherever a call for peace came, Turkey responded with zeal and did not withhold its help. ...The protection of stability and peace in ...the Mediterranean is a matter which we follow closely and with interest. In order to explain briefly the distinctive nature of our foreign policy, I can say that we do not depart from the policy direction or goal that we have. Despite constant changes in international relations in the last years, we, in the middle of this turmoil, respect our friendships in the sentiment of peace.⁶⁷⁷

This international turmoil that Atatürk referred to in his speech was so worrying that in his letter to İnönü about the Nyon Conference and the situation in the Mediterranean, he wrote “Now I am safely and pleurably drinking *rakı* with my friends. But I do not think that this safety will last forever”.⁶⁷⁸ Yunus Nadi also emphasised this grave situation in the Mediterranean in his editorial in *Cumhuriyet* arguing that due to the recent events, everybody, not just in the Mediterranean but all over Europe and around the world, had started to feel that they were living in

⁶⁷⁵ *TBMM Zabıt Ceridesi*, 18 September 1937, p. 342.

⁶⁷⁶ *TBMM Zabıt Ceridesi*, 18 September 1937, p. 343. Aras, in his memoirs, also argued the same point: Aras, *Atatürk'ün Dış Politikası*, p. 34 and p. 87.

⁶⁷⁷ *TBMM Zabıt Ceridesi*, Devre: V, İçtima Senesi: 3, 1 November 1937, Monday, p. 8: “Sulh yolunda nereden bir hitap geldiyse, Türkiye onu, tehalükle karşıladı ve yardımlarını esirgemedi. ... Dünyanın her tarafında olduğu gibi, bizi alâkalandıran sahalarda ve bu arada, Akdenizde, sükûn ve istikrarın korunması, bizim yakından ve alâka ile takib ettiğimiz bir mevzudur. ... Dış siyasetimizin ayırıcı vasfını kısaca anlatmış olmak için, diyebilirim ki, tuttuğumuz siyasiğ yol ve hedeften ayrılmıyoruz. Son senelerde, arsiulusal münasebetlerde daimiğ değişiklikler olmasına ragmen, biz bu karışıklığın ortasında, sulhseverlikle duygulu olarak, karşılıklı dostluklarımıza riayet ediyoruz”.

⁶⁷⁸ 11 September 1937: CA, 030.10.0.0.45.290.52, p. 1: “Şimdi arkadaşlarla beraber, memnuniyet ve emniyetle rakı içiyorum. Fakat, bu emniyetin daimi olacağına kani değilim”.

an environment that was so concerning and “suffocating” that the international environment in 1914 was not as troubling as that of today.⁶⁷⁹

In such a precarious environment, Turkey needed to adopt a very careful foreign policy during the conference process and this policy had definitely to be one that would not antagonise Italy. This concern of the Turkish government was evident in Turkish archival documents indicating that the Turkish position during the conference was not against Italy. On the contrary, Turkey’s policy during the conference attempted to draw attention to possible Italian concerns and policies in the Mediterranean. In the first place, Aras himself was very instrumental in the process of inviting Italy to the conference by establishing contact with the Italian representative in Geneva.⁶⁸⁰ Moreover, Turkey, under pressure from the Soviets who wanted Turkey’s support for a direct targeting of Italy, tried to strike a careful balance between Italy and the Soviet Union during the conference. The Turkish government was well aware of the fact that the Soviets wanted Turkey to side with themselves against Italy, İnönü commenting that “it is clear that the Soviets are trying to push us with them into a polemic against Italy”. Even the Soviet *charge d’affaires* directly contacted Menemencioğlu in an attempt to bring this about.⁶⁸¹

This Soviet attempt to prevent any rapprochement between Turkey and Italy had already been in place when the official newspaper of the Soviet Union, *Pravda*, published an article in August claiming that in the face of the fascist expansionist policy in the Near East, Turkey feared a possible intrusion by Italy and Germany, at least economically and culturally.⁶⁸² This demonstrated very well how much the Soviet Union, just as Britain often did, tried to manipulate Turkish-Italian relations during this period by referring to the so-called Turkish ‘fears’ of Italy. Responding to the claims of *Pravda*, Yunus Nadi argued that the Soviet

⁶⁷⁹ [Abalıoğlu], Yunus Nadi, “Akdeniz Emniyetinin İspanyol Vaziyeti ile Çok Sıkı Alâkası”, *Cumhuriyet*, 6 September 1937, p. 1.

⁶⁸⁰ Aras, *Atatürk’ün Dış Politikası*, p. 11.

⁶⁸¹ 11 September 1937: CA, 030.10.0.0.45.290.52, p. 8: “Anlaşıyor ki Ruslar bizi kendileri ile beraber İtalya aleyhine polemîğe sokmaya çalışıyorlar”.

⁶⁸² R[ossi], E[ttore], “Insinuazioni russe per mettere la Turchia in guardia contro Tedeschi e Italiani”, *Oriente Moderno*, 17/9 (1937), p. 440.

newspaper was sounding off about Turkish foreign policy and thus everyone should be reminded again about what that policy was. Turkey was not in favour of exporting any ideologies, either communism or fascism, and he argued that “[Turkey] does not believe that foreign policy should be conducted within a framework of an ideology”. Moreover, Yunus Nadi argued that the claims made by the Soviet newspaper about German and Italian activities in the Near East were “very exaggerated” and “Turkey’s friendly relations with Germany and Italy” should not be regarded as an “obstacle” for the “very intimate relationship” that existed between Turkey and the Soviet Union.⁶⁸³ *Pravda* must have responded to Yunus Nadi’s article since Atatürk wrote to İnönü on 9 September that

...The unreasonable assaults and attacks on two well-known members of the Turkish press [one most probably being Yunus Nadi] by the *Pravda* newspaper are indirect attacks on the honour of the republican government, its independence and its lofty interests.⁶⁸⁴

The Turkish government tried to understand the motives of both Italy and the Soviet Union and their actions in the Mediterranean and it did not side-line the Italian perspective on the issue by merely declaring it as an aggressor. This was especially evident in the letter sent from Atatürk to İnönü about the Nyon Conference, in which he asked “...what was the Italian point of view that led it to attack on the one hand Russian and on the other British ships? ... what kind of complications could the Italians hope to gain from this apparently contradictory action?”⁶⁸⁵ Moreover, the Turkish government carefully abstained from any action that might be regarded as being against Italy and it was for this reason, for example, that Turkey did not want the Soviet Union to have patrolling zones in the

⁶⁸³ [Abaloğlu], Yunus Nadi, “Akdenizin Emniyetinde Alâkamız Çok Sıkıdır”, *Cumhuriyet*, 12 August 1937, p. 1 and p. 7. See also ““Pravda”nın Bir Makalesi ve Türkiye’nin Haricî Siyaseti” in the same issue, p. 1 and p. 7.

⁶⁸⁴ 11 September 1937: CA, 030.10.0.0.45.290.52, p. 9: “... Pravda gazetelerinin Türk matbuat erkânından malûm olan iki zata mantıksız taarruz ve tecavüzleri indirectement cumhuriyet hükûmetinin şerefine, istiklâline ve âlî menfaatlerine açıkça taarruzdur”.

⁶⁸⁵ 11 September 1937: CA, 030.10.0.0.45.290.52, p. 9: “... İtalya’yı, bir taraftan Rus, diğer taraftan İngiliz gemilerine taarruza sevk eden İtalyan noktai nazarı nedir? ... İtalyanlar, ... zıt gibi görünen bu icraattan ne gibi komplikasyonlar alabileceklerini ümit edebilirler?”

Mediterranean.⁶⁸⁶ The Soviet Union was in the end excluded from the Mediterranean, which was, as the Italian *charge d'affairs* in Ankara De Astis argued, a relief for the Turkish government, which actively worked for this outcome with the support of the Balkan Pact countries and Bulgaria.⁶⁸⁷ Aras, in his meeting with Italian Ambassador Galli, stated he was the one who persuaded Eden not to allow Soviet patrolling in the Mediterranean since it would create “an enormous danger” for Britain. Given that France supported the Soviets and that Eden’s position was uncertain, Aras’s “tactical manoeuvre” became much more significant.⁶⁸⁸ According to Hasan Rıza Soyak’s account, the note that the Balkan Pact countries gave at the conference indicated that these countries were in favour of the attendance of Italy at the conference and the note avoided assigning patrolling zones in the Aegean Sea to any country so that Italy would not be alienated further.⁶⁸⁹

This careful policy adopted by Turkey caused problems between President Atatürk and Prime Minister İnönü to the extent that the end of İnönü’s premiership on 25 October is usually attributed to this rift over the Nyon Conference. It should be noted that this rift was due not only to the Nyon policy, but was also related to various domestic issues which will not be discussed further here due to the scope of this thesis.⁶⁹⁰ It is often argued that whereas Atatürk, “who had become a warm supporter of Turco-British friendship, ... supported Britain’s resolute policy” at

⁶⁸⁶ 11 September 1937: CA, 030.10.0.0.45.290.52, p. 7.

⁶⁸⁷ “L’incaricato d’affari ad Ankara, De Astis, al ministro degli esteri, Ciano” (16 September 1937, Istanbul), doc. 346, pp. 416-7.

⁶⁸⁸ “L’ambasciatore ad Ankara, Galli, al ministro degli esteri, Ciano” (6 November 1937, Ankara), doc. 524, in Ministero degli affari esteri commissione per la pubblicazione dei documenti diplomatici, *I documenti diplomatici italiani ottava serie: 1935-1939*, vol. VII (1 luglio – 31 dicembre 1937) (Rome: Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato P.V., 1998), pp. 627-8. For another effort of Turkey to include Italy in the Mediterranean security system, see: “L’ambasciatore ad Ankara, Galli, al ministro degli esteri, Ciano” (11 October 1937, Rome), doc. 420, pp. 513-4, in the same volume.

⁶⁸⁹ Soyak, *Atatürk’ten Hatıralar*, p. 669.

⁶⁹⁰ For a detailed account of the event, see: Soyak, *Atatürk’ten Hatıralar*, pp. 662-709. See also Aydemir, Şevket Süreyya, *İkinci Adam*, vol. I (1884-1938) (Istanbul: Remzi Kitabevi, 1999), pp. 491-8.

the conference, İnönü, on the other hand, opted for a more “cautious” approach, an approach which was based on not antagonising Italy.⁶⁹¹ Soyak gives a very detailed account of the Nyon issue, including telegraphs exchanged between Atatürk and İnönü. In the light of this account, as well as the discussion made in this chapter so far, it can safely be argued that the reason for the rift was not Atatürk’s desire for a Turkish-British friendship but rather the way in which the issue was handled by İnönü and the government.

Atatürk, after reading the draft agreement which was to be signed in Nyon, pointed out to İnönü that Article IV, 2 (b) of the treaty should be carefully considered by the government before giving approval to Aras. However, Atatürk’s warning did not arise from a position hostile to the signing of the treaty, but only from a desire to ensure that “the government knew what it would put his signature under”.⁶⁹² This article covered assistance to British and French patrolling activities on the high seas:

On the high seas, ... other participating Governments possessing a sea border on the Mediterranean undertake, within the limit of their resources, to furnish [the British and French] fleets any assistance that may be asked for; in particular, they will permit them to take action in their territorial waters and to use such of their ports as they shall indicate.⁶⁹³

In response to Atatürk’s caution, İnönü was concerned about the word “assistance” since it would mean “a *de facto* enmity against Italy” according to the prime minister,⁶⁹⁴ and he sent a telegraph to Aras on the last day of the conference instructing him that he should include a clause in the treaty that would exclude Turkey from this commitment. If this was not possible, as an alternative, Aras

⁶⁹¹ Güçlü, “Nyon Conference of 1937”, p. 544. See also Papuççular, “Turkish-Italian Relations in the Interwar Period”, p. 145.

⁶⁹² Soyak, *Atatürk’ten Hatıralar*, p. 671 and p. 674.

⁶⁹³ International Committee of the Red Cross, “The Nyon Agreement, 14 September 1937. Art 4.”, <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/applic/ihl/ihl.nsf/ART/335-500005?OpenDocument> [accessed on 16 May 2020].

⁶⁹⁴ İnönü, İsmet, *Cumhuriyetin İlk Yılları*, vol. II (Istanbul: Yenigün Haber Ajansı Basın ve Yayıncılık, 1998), pp. 61-3.

could write a letter making the same statement to Eden and Delbos, the British and French foreign ministers respectively, and they could answer by an *accusé de reception*, i.e. a confirmation that such a letter had been received.⁶⁹⁵ According to Atatürk, this was unnecessary since he believed that the agreement would end piratical activities and once Italy had also joined the patrolling system, there would be no further problem. The government's action put the Turkish foreign minister into a rather difficult position and one which would not leave a good impression in regard to Turkey's commitment to the agreement.⁶⁹⁶ From İnönü's perspective, the main reason for the rift stemmed from the fact that Aras was given different instructions from Florya, where Atatürk then was, and from Ankara.⁶⁹⁷ According to Yakup Kadri Karaosmanoğlu, the Nyon Conference led to the "disgruntlement" between İnönü and Aras.⁶⁹⁸

Neither this "disgruntlement" nor the change of prime minister, now Celal Bayar, however, led to a departure from the foreign policy adopted towards Italy. Aras utilised these *accusé de receptions* obtained from Eden and Delbos to prove to Galli at their meeting on 17 November that Turkey was not engaging in any action against Italy at the Nyon Conference.⁶⁹⁹ The Turkish position at Nyon was such, Galli argued that from time to time, that Aras was "branded as Italophile and pro-fascist" both by Britain and France as well as the Soviet Union.⁷⁰⁰ The French believed that the Turkish policy of demanding *accusé de receptions* and Aras's immediate return to Ankara after the signing of the treaty were due to the "Italian

⁶⁹⁵ Soyak, *Atatürk'ten Hatıralar*, p. 678.

⁶⁹⁶ Soyak, *Atatürk'ten Hatıralar*, p. 679.

⁶⁹⁷ İnönü, *Cumhuriyetin İlk Yılları*, pp. 61-3.

⁶⁹⁸ Karaosmanoğlu, *Zoraki Diplomat*, p. 110.

⁶⁹⁹ "L'ambasciatore ad Ankara, Galli, al ministro degli esteri, Ciano" (17 November 1937, Ankara), doc. 588, in Ministero degli affari esteri commissione per la pubblicazione dei documenti diplomatici, *I documenti diplomatici italiani ottava serie: 1935-1939*, vol. VII (1 luglio – 31 dicembre 1937) (Rome: Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato P.V., 1998), pp. 690-1.

⁷⁰⁰ "L'ambasciatore ad Ankara, Galli, al ministro degli esteri, Ciano" (17 November 1937, Ankara), doc. 588, p. 691: "... è stato tacciato di filo-italiano e pro-fascista".

manoeuvres in Ankara”, which were orchestrated by Italian ambassador Galli himself.⁷⁰¹

Even though Galli acknowledged that the diplomacy adopted by Aras at the Nyon Conference was “not all bad”, an exceptional acknowledgement given that Galli had “no affection for Turkey and even less for Aras”, neither he nor his government showed the satisfaction expected about the policy of Turkey.⁷⁰² Furthermore, Ciano, “unsatisfied”⁷⁰³ by Turkish policy at the conference, postponed his visit to Ankara, which was to take place in November 1937.⁷⁰⁴ Three main reasons were provided by Italy for the postponement of the visit, Turkey’s policy at the Nyon Conference, Turkey’s failure to recognise the Italian Empire and the current situation of international affairs, which necessitated Ciano staying in Rome. Even though Aras could understand the last two reasons, he could not see why Italy was not satisfied with Turkish policy at the conference and this brought him “infinite disappointment”.⁷⁰⁵

The answer lay not in what Turkey did, but rather where Italy would like to be positioned in Turkish foreign policy. Galli argued that “the policy of Turkey...has a strongly ambiguous and contradictory character because it is forced to serve so many different and opposing needs in order to maintain its balance”⁷⁰⁶

⁷⁰¹ 21 September 1937: CA, 030.10.0.0.245.655.8., p. 3.

⁷⁰² “L’ambasciatore ad Ankara, Galli, al ministro degli esteri, Ciano” (6 November 1937, Ankara), doc. 524, p. 628: “Non ho alcun tenero per la Turchia, ed ancora meno per Aras...”

⁷⁰³ “L’ambasciatore ad Ankara, Galli, al ministro degli esteri, Ciano” (6 November 1937, Ankara), doc. 524, p. 627: “Non ho mancato di fargli sentire come l’E.V. [Ciano] fosse scarsamente soddisfatta dell’atteggiamento da lui tenuto a Nyon”.

⁷⁰⁴ “Il ministro degli esteri, Ciano, all’incaricato d’affari ad Ankara, De Astis” (15 October 1937, Ankara), doc. 432, in Ministero degli affari esteri commissione per la pubblicazione dei documenti diplomatici, *I documenti diplomatici italiani ottava serie: 1935-1939*, vol. VII (1 luglio – 31 dicembre 1937) (Rome: Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato P.V., 1998), p. 530.

⁷⁰⁵ “L’ambasciatore ad Ankara, Galli, al ministro degli esteri, Ciano” (6 November 1937, Ankara), doc. 524, pp. 630-1: “In realtà, ciò ha recato infinito disappunto”.

⁷⁰⁶ “L’ambasciatore ad Ankara, Galli, al ministro degli esteri, Ciano” (6 November 1937, Ankara), doc. 524, p. 628: “Ma è politica della Turchia, che egli interpreta ed esegue, che ha da essere

and that “Turkey wants a development of its relations with us, but subject to Italo-British relations”.⁷⁰⁷ This was indeed the case for Turkish foreign policy was based not on forming alliances against a particular country, but on a collective understanding that would ease the tensions especially between the great powers so that another war could be prevented. However, in an environment where Mussolini had just visited Germany and joined the Anti-Comintern Pact on 6 November 1937, thus forming an alliance against the Soviet Union, together with Germany and Japan, Turkey’s expectation of such an Anglo-Italian understanding was yet to be realised, especially given the ongoing issues between these two countries, such as Britain’s recognition of the Italian Empire, which would only happen a few months later. Moreover, Italy left the League of Nations in December 1937, an event which was expected yet still gravely undermined the relevance of the League of Nations from the perspective of the Turkish government and the Turkish press. Even though Turkey was to remain committed to Geneva, it was now obvious that the malfunctioning of the League would lead Turkey to carry out a more delicate diplomacy on the eve of the Second World War, especially over the issue which proved to be of great concern for the Turkish government for a long period, namely the annexation of the Sanjak of Alexandretta to Turkey.

5.3. The Italian Factor in the Issue of Hatay

Italy’s role in the issue of Hatay is usually neglected in the secondary literature, Grassi arguing, for example, that Italy stayed “out of the game in the whole issue”.⁷⁰⁸ Similarly, also Çelebi argues in his recent article on the Italian stance during the Hatay issue, that Italy had no role in this issue, there merely being much noise made about it in the Italian press which Turkey did not really take

forzatamente ambigua e contraddittoria perchè costretta a servire tante diverse ed opposte necessità per mantenersi in equilibrio...”

⁷⁰⁷ “L’ambasciatore ad Ankara, Galli, al ministro degli esteri, Ciano” (6 November 1937, Ankara), doc. 524, p. 629: “La Turchia vuole sì uno sviluppo dei suoi rapporti con noi, ma subordinatamente a quello dei rapporti italo-britannici”.

⁷⁰⁸ Grassi, “La Turchia nella politica francese e italiana”, p. 138.

seriously.⁷⁰⁹ This tendency is largely due to the fact that the issue is considered within the framework of Turkey's relations with France and/or Syria or within the framework of the revisionist vs. anti-revisionist Turkish foreign policy discussions.⁷¹⁰ This part of this chapter tries to evaluate the Italian factor in the issue of Hatay and is concerned with the question to what extent Italy was an important actor in the Hatay issue.

The issue of the Sanjak of Alexandretta (in 1936, the region was named as Hatay by Atatürk), just as had been the case with the Straits issue, dated back to 20 October 1921, when France and Turkey signed an agreement to end the French occupation in Anatolia. In this agreement, in order to have peace with France, the Ankara government did not push its claim over the region.⁷¹¹ The Turkish government waited until 1936 to bring this issue onto the agenda for three reasons. First, it was a time when international relations seemed the most precarious due to the failure of disarmament and the aggressive policies of Germany and Italy, as discussed in the previous chapter. Second, this was a time when Turkey was strengthened due to its success in revising the Straits regime in July 1936. Finally, it was a period when the French administration over Syria was weakening day by day and finally, in September 1936, France had to sign an agreement to withdraw its mandatory power over the region.⁷¹² Within this environment, therefore, the issue of the Sanjak of Alexandretta was brought to table again, an issue which would take almost three years to resolve.

⁷⁰⁹ Çelebi, Mevlüt, "Hatay'ın Türkiye'ye İlhakı Sürecinde İtalya'nın Tepkisi", *Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi Dergisi*, 36/101 (2020), p. 159: "... İtalya, ... Hatay'ın Türkiye'ye devredilişi sürecinde de "dışarıdan gazel okumuştur".

⁷¹⁰ For example, in Baskın Oran's edited volume on Turkish foreign policy, the Hatay issue was put under the discussion of "Relations with France". See: Fırat, Melek and Ömer Kürkçüoğlu, "(II) Fransa'yla İlişkiler" in *Türk Dış Politikası: Kurtuluş Savaşından Bugüne Olgular, Belgeler, Yorumlar*, vol. I: 1919-1980, Baskın Oran (ed.) (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2009), pp. 279-92. Similarly, Yücel Güçlü also analysed the issue within the framework of Turkish-French and Turkish-Syrian relations, "The Controversy over the Delimitation of the Turco-Syrian Frontier in the Period between the Two World Wars", *Middle Eastern Studies*, 42/4 (2006), pp. 641-57. See also: Sanjian, Avedis K., "The Sanjak of Alexandretta (Hatay): Its Impact on Turkish-Syrian Relations (1939-1956)", *Middle East Journal*, 10/4 (1956), pp. 379-94.

⁷¹¹ Fırat and Kürkçüoğlu, "(II) Fransa'yla İlişkiler", p. 280.

⁷¹² Fırat and Kürkçüoğlu, "(II) Fransa'yla İlişkiler", p. 281.

Over these three years, Italy, from different angles, also became a part of this issue. Firstly, Italy was active in the region with its propaganda activities directed toward the aim of obtaining the granting of the Sanjak of Alexandretta to Italy. According to Papuççular, the intelligence reports in the *Askeri Tarih ve Stratejik Etüt Başkanlığı Arşivi (ATASE)* demonstrate the frequency and the importance of such activities for the Turkish government.⁷¹³ Officials from the Italian consulate in Aleppo were sent to the Sanjak where they collected petitions from the local people favouring the cession of the Sanjak to Italy.⁷¹⁴ This was part of the more aggressive Italian propaganda-making in the Middle East in the 1930s, which was limited not only to Alexandretta, but was also directed towards Syria, Lebanon and Palestine.⁷¹⁵ Even though, the extent of these activities requires further research by examining both Italian and Turkish intelligence reports, it is clear that Italian propaganda activities were not new in the region. One such example is particularly striking. In November 1935, in Aleppo and Alexandretta, “a series of Kurdo-Armenian conferences” were organised with the support of the Italian embassy. At these conferences, issues such as the future of the resistance in Syria against the Turks as well as ways to form a support initiative for Dersim were discussed. These “Kurdo-Armenian” groups were reportedly in a mutually beneficial relationship whereby Italy was to supply arms and money and the groups were to advocate for the transferring of the mandate of Syria from France to Italy.⁷¹⁶ On 15 May 1937, according to the report of the Italian vice-consul in Alexandretta, a newsreel from Tunisia portraying Mussolini with the Sword of Islam, was reportedly “received with enthusiasm by Arab and Armenian

⁷¹³ Papuççular, *Türkiye ve On İki Ada*, p. 117. Also see, Papuççular, “İki Savaş Arası Dönem Türk Dış ve Güvenlik Politikasında Oniki Ada”, p. 149.

⁷¹⁴ Papuççular, *Türkiye ve On İki Ada*, p. 117.

⁷¹⁵ Williams, *Mussolini's Propaganda Abroad*, p. 35.

⁷¹⁶ 16 November 1935: CA, 030.10.0.0.115.799.15; See also İşçi, *Turkey and the Soviet Union during World War II*, p. 42.

crowds”.⁷¹⁷ However, this reported enthusiasm might have been an exaggeration of the situation for the Turkish ambassador in Cairo reported that Egyptians were certainly not happy about Mussolini’s speech in Tripoli, where it was claimed that he had stated that he was the “protector of Islam”.⁷¹⁸ The Italian government was also in communication with local leaders, one of whom was Fakhri al-Barudi, a Syrian nationalist leader and journalist, who opposed the cession of Alexandretta to Turkey.⁷¹⁹ These activities did not, however, always target Turkey, but were usually the product of anti-French rhetoric in Rome.⁷²⁰

Secondly, for Turkey, these Italian activities provided a venue for manoeuvre for its relations with the French on the issue of Alexandretta, relations which was very tense, which was particularly the case in the months of December 1936 and January 1937 just before the League of Nations decided that the Sanjak of Alexandretta should be recognised as an independent entity. During this time, even though the Turkish government was aware of these Italian activities, activities that according to Güçlü, “could further endanger Turkish naval security” since Turkey “feared” that Mussolini could be given the port city of Alexandretta by Britain and France as part of their appeasement policy,⁷²¹ the Turkish press denied French newspapers claims about these Italian activities in the region and accused them of spreading misinformation. In an editorial in *Cumhuriyet*, Yunus Nadi argued that French newspapers were making propaganda in order to turn other countries against Turkey over the issue. Italy, however, denied such accusations and did not fall for such French propaganda. Yunus Nadi was

⁷¹⁷ Arielli, *Fascist Italy and the Middle East*, p. 103.

⁷¹⁸ 20 April 1937: CA, 030.10.0.0.267.799.5.

⁷¹⁹ Arielli, *Fascist Italy and the Middle East*, p. 157.

⁷²⁰ Arielli, *Fascist Italy and the Middle East*, p. 158.

⁷²¹ Güçlü, “Fascist Italy’s ‘Mare Nostrum’ Policy”, p. 827. Güçlü provides no reference for this argument.

particularly pleased about this Italian position,⁷²² a position which further enabled Turkey at this particular point to justify its claims over the Sanjak, as eventually the Sanjak was granted independent status at the end of January 1937.

In the beginning of 1939 when the Hatay issue became a hot debate again, there was a change in the rhetoric of the Turkish government. Based on French diplomatic documents, Millman argued that the Turkish ambassador to Moscow argued in February 1939 that Turkey “feared that France might be forced to cede all or part of Syria to Italy”, failing to resist “the German and Italian pressure”.⁷²³ Apparently, this “change” in Turkey’s policy was known abroad, for the Syrian newspapers in Aleppo and Damascus spread the news that Turkey was unhappy about Italian activities in the Eastern Mediterranean and further argued that some Turkish newspapers had even threatened Italy over not attacking ports in Syria.⁷²⁴ As in the case of the Turkish government’s utilisation of the Italo-Ethiopian War, therefore, the government tried to make use of the “Italian threat” once again in the issue of Alexandretta.

This threat did not need to directly target Turkey. The Italian invasion of Albania in April 1939, for example, indirectly accelerated the process of Hatay’s annexation to Turkey, which became possible in June 1939, only a few months after Germany’s invasion of Czechoslovakia in March and the Italian invasion of Albania in April.⁷²⁵ Just as in the case of the Italo-Ethiopian War, the unrest that the Italian invasion of Albania created in the international scene resulted in a need for Britain and France to improve their relations with Turkey especially in an environment where the approach of another world war was becoming obvious day by day. In a British Cabinet meeting on 10 April 1939, it was decided “to take

⁷²² Yunus Nadi, “Hatay Davası Önünde Dostlarımız”, *Cumhuriyet*, 13 January 1937, p. 1.

⁷²³ Millman, *The Ill-Made Alliance*, p. 150.

⁷²⁴ 4 March 1939: CA, 030.10.0.0.85.558.14.

⁷²⁵ Yerasimos, Stéphane, “Le sandjak d’Alexandrette: formation et intégration d’un territoire”, *Revue de l’Occident musulman et de la Méditerranée*, 48-49 (1988), p. 209.

steps ... to reach agreement with Greece and Turkey”, which would eventually lead to the Anglo-Turkish Agreement of May 1939.⁷²⁶

The effect of the invasion of Albania on the issue of the Sanjak was evident in the reports of the American ambassador in Turkey, MacMurray. In a report he wrote on 11 April, just a couple of days after the invasion, MacMurray argued that the annexation of Hatay to Turkey was “agreed in principle by France”, but both sides were observing a careful policy “to avoid the appearance of unseemly haste” in realising the annexation.⁷²⁷ However, two weeks afterwards, it seemed, according to the American ambassador, that Turkey’s “discussions with the French concerning the annexation of the Hatay have reached a point at which only the “modalities” have still to be arranged and that the matter is expected to be concluded in the very near future, perhaps within the week”.⁷²⁸ In the meanwhile, the Italians were also aware of these more frequent Turkish-French contacts on the issue of Hatay and, according to the Italian *chargé d'affairs* in Ankara, Berio, Turkey’s annexation of Hatay was soon to happen.⁷²⁹ The British worked hard to accelerate this process, but were unable to achieve their aim of including France in the agreement which would be signed between Britain and Turkey in May 1939. Turkish-French negotiations were apparently problematic. According to a letter from Knatchbull-Hugessen to Halifax, Saraçoğlu, now the Turkish minister of foreign affairs, reportedly claimed “angrily” on 7 May that the “French government [was] bargaining about a few villages when Turkey was offering the

⁷²⁶ Millman, *The Ill-Made Alliance*, p. 176.

⁷²⁷ “The Ambassador in Turkey (MacMurray) to the Secretary of State” (11 April 1939, Istanbul), doc. 14, in *Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers, 1939*, vol. IV. The Far East, the Near East and Africa (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1955), p. 836 and “The Ambassador in Turkey (MacMurray) to the Secretary of State” (19 April 1939, Ankara), doc. 48, p. 836, in the same volume.

⁷²⁸ “The Ambassador in Turkey (MacMurray) to the Secretary of State” (26 April 1939, Ankara), doc. 63, in *Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers, 1939*, vol. IV, p. 837.

⁷²⁹ “L’incaricato d’affari ad Ankara, Berio, al ministro degli esteri, Ciano” (3 May 1939, Ankara), doc. 631, in Ministero degli affari esteri commissione per la pubblicazione dei documenti diplomatici, *I documenti diplomatici italiani ottava serie: 1935-1939*, vol. XI (1 gennaio – 22 maggio 1939) (Rome: Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato, 2007), p. 729.

whole of her manhood to cooperate with the Western powers”.⁷³⁰ Considering Turkey was now in a stronger position in the issue of Alexandretta, as well as in the Mediterranean, the French, who were “in need of Turkey’s friendship and consequently [whose] bargaining position was weaker”,⁷³¹ eventually “handed” the Sanjak of Alexandretta to Turkey to “ensure Turkish goodwill in any European conflict”.⁷³² As Gülmez encapsulated well, thus, Turkey, in bringing an end to the question of Alexandretta, “enjoyed the status of *Tertius Gaudens*, gaining from the delicate European balance in which both aggressors and appeasers feared losing Turkey to the other side”.⁷³³

Finally, another role played by Italy in the issue of Hatay was related to its manipulation of the tensions that existed between France and Turkey during the negotiations over the resolution of the issue, a process which had been in place since December 1936. By emphasising these tensions and the inability of the League of Nations to take effective measures, the Italians from time to time encouraged the Turkish officials to take unilateral action about the issue of Hatay with the aim to moving Turkey away from its usual stance regarding international politics, which included following the rules of international law. Before the decision of the League of Nations that granted independence to Hatay in January 1937, Italian officials argued that Turkey had the right to unilaterally take action in the Sanjak and, in that case, the Italian government would support this action.⁷³⁴ Given that this was a time when the Turkish government was highly sensitive

⁷³⁰ Millman, *The Ill-Made Alliance*, p. 182.

⁷³¹ Khadduri, Majid, “The Alexandretta Dispute”, *The American Journal of International Law*, 39/3 (1945), p. 406.

⁷³² Arielli, *Fascist Italy and the Middle East*, p. 158. See also Gülmez, “Turkish Foreign Policy as an Anomaly”, p. 40 and Uzgel, İlhan and Ömer Kürkçüoğlu, “I İngiltere’yle İlişkiler” in *Türk Dış Politikası: Kurtuluş Savaşından Bugüne Olgular, Belgeler, Yorumlar*, vol. I: 1919-1980, Baskın Oran (ed.) (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2009), p. 274.

⁷³³ Gülmez, “Turkish Foreign Policy as an Anomaly”, p. 44.

⁷³⁴ “Il ministro degli esteri, Ciano, all’incaricato d’affari ad Ankara, De Astis” (7 January 1937, Rome), doc. 19, in Ministero degli affari esteri commissione per la pubblicazione dei documenti diplomatici, *I documenti diplomatici italiani ottava serie: 1935-1939*, vol. VI (1 gennaio – 30 giugno 1937) (Rome: Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato P.V., 1997), p. 23.

about the League's policies on this issue, this strategy by Italy was particularly important. Encouraging Turkey to take unilateral action on the issue of Hatay was a persistent policy, Ciano encouraging Turkey again in June 1938 to annex the Sanjak of Alexandretta without waiting for any decision by the League or negotiating with France since the French were not in a position to do anything about such action by Turkey.⁷³⁵ This possibility of Turkey's unilateral annexation of Hatay in fact concerned the French by the beginning of 1939.⁷³⁶

Hatay joined Turkey in June 1939 under a new Turkish-French agreement and Turkey once again, after the Straits issue, concluded unfinished business left from the Lausanne Treaty which had made the region a French mandate. Both the Turkish government and the population celebrated this foreign policy victory. Şükrü Saraçoğlu, the then Turkish foreign minister, argued in his speech in parliament that this success was the result of a long period of "difficult negotiations", adding that the government was determined to help the people of Hatay "forget their [20-year] sufferings" by building schools and roads and developing trade and agriculture.⁷³⁷ *Cumhuriyet*, pointing to the good reception of this diplomacy of Turkey, argued that it was a "white victory", a victory which not only annexed Hatay to Turkey but also "conquered the hearts of the French nation".⁷³⁸

The Italians were not happy with the annexation of Hatay to Turkey and the Italian newspapers published articles that protested against this decision. Italy sent a diplomatic note to the French foreign ministry stating that the handing of the Sanjak to Turkey was a clear breach of the 1920 San Remo Conference since the issue was handled without the knowledge of Italy, a member of this conference.⁷³⁹

⁷³⁵ Arielli, *Fascist Italy and the Middle East*, p. 139.

⁷³⁶ Millman, *The Ill-Made Alliance*, p. 150.

⁷³⁷ *TBMM Zabıt Ceridesi*, Devre: VI, Fevkalade İçtima, 30 June 1939, Friday, p. 432.

⁷³⁸ "Beyaz Zafer", *Cumhuriyet*, 4 July 1939, p. 3.

⁷³⁹ "The Italian Ambassador (Colonna) to the Secretary of State" (11 July 1939, Washington), in *Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers, 1939*, vol. IV., pp. 846-7.

Similarly, according to this note, the British, by encouraging this agreement, did not act in the spirit of the 1938 Anglo-Italian Agreement, which promised the preservation of the status quo in the Mediterranean.⁷⁴⁰ The Turkish press was definitely not happy about the Italian stance towards cession of Hatay to Turkey and claimed that this change in Italian policy made no sense. Nadir Nadi published an editorial in *Cumhuriyet* on 3 July, which directly targeted Italian newspapers coverage of the Turkish annexation of Hatay. This very critical article accused the Italian government as well as the Italian newspapers of being “illogical” and also criticised the fascist regime by arguing that it did not have freedom of press.⁷⁴¹ The lack of freedom in Italy was also discussed in an anonymous article in *Cumhuriyet*. According to this article, which could be also a fiction, a Turkish journalist was not allowed to enter Italy because of that he was writing articles against Mussolini’s policies. This journalist, now in the border between Italy and France, talked to a ticket seller from Marseilles and they both appreciated the importance of freedom to the extent that the French ticket seller said, “freedom is even more important than wealth”, to which the Turkish journalist replied, “and even more important than dictatorship!”, thus referring to the fascist Italy.⁷⁴² The Turkish press response, comparing France and Italy, created a quarrel between the presses of the two countries to the extent that the Italian ambassador in Ankara was forced to request an end to this polemic.⁷⁴³ Italy’s stance on the Hatay issue demonstrated that the Italian protest was not due to the Hatay issue itself, but rather to the rapprochement that was emerging between Britain, France and Turkey since in the earlier phases of the Hatay issue, as demonstrated above, Italy’s stance became more negative after the rapprochement between these three countries.

⁷⁴⁰ “The Chargé in Germany (Kirk) to the Secretary of State” (24 June 1939, Berlin), doc. 554, in *Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers, 1939*, vol. IV., pp. 845-6.

⁷⁴¹ [Abalıoğlu], Nadir Nadi, “İtalyan Matbuatının Neşriyatı Karşısında”, *Cumhuriyet*, 3 July 1939, p. 1 and p. 7.

⁷⁴² “Hürriyet”, *Cumhuriyet*, 15 July 1939, p. 3.

⁷⁴³ 1 August 1939: CA, 030.10.0.0.85.558.22.

5.4. Conclusion

In conclusion, between the years 1937-1939, Turkey's foreign policy was very much affected by the Italian factor, but this effect was not merely in the form of a Turkish position that perceived Italy as a direct threat to its security. What affected the bilateral relations badly, as this chapter has argued, was not Turkey's policies which are often considered to be against Italy in the secondary literature, but rather the international environment of the late interwar period, an environment in which the collective security system almost totally collapsed and Turkey was thus forced to search for alternative mechanisms to increase its security, through arrangements like the Saadabad Pact and the Nyon Conference in 1937, and to realise its foreign policy goals, such as securing the Italian signature on the Montreux Convention and annexing Hatay to Turkey in 1939. These cases showed that until the Italian invasion of Albania, there had been no automatic and immediate deterioration in relations between Turkey and Italy. In order to understand the nuances, Turkish-Italian relations in the late interwar period should be analysed within the context of the international relations of the period as well as the general foreign and security policies of the two countries.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

Having challenged the three main assumptions in the secondary literature on Turkey's relations with Italy in the interwar period, that the bilateral relations evolved from friendship to enmity in the period 1932 to 1939, that the Italian threat dictated the foreign and security policies of the Turkish Republic in this period, and that Turkey's improving relations with Britain led to a deterioration of Turkey's relations with Italy, this thesis has demonstrated the importance of examining the relations between these two countries in a wider context not only Turkish and Italian foreign policies in this period, but also of the changing dynamics of world politics. In doing so, this thesis has argued that what shaped the relations between Turkey and Italy between 1932 and 1939 was not simply 'Turkey's fear of the Italian threat', but the fundamental differences between these two countries' views of the nature of the international system, in particular in relation to the idea of collective security, and how they defined their positions in this precarious international environment.

These differences started to become more visible after the summer of 1932, which was a turning point in Turkey's relations with Italy. As Chapter 2 has demonstrated, however, this turning point was not because of any bilateral problems between Turkey and Italy. In fact, given İnönü's visit to Rome in May 1932 and the visit of the Italian fleet to Istanbul in July 1932, relations seemed, on the surface, friendly. Nonetheless, Turkey's entry into the League of Nations and the dismissal of Italian Foreign Minister Grandi, who was considered a moderate voice of Italian foreign policy, in July 1932 were the two main reasons that highlighted the differences between the two countries regarding their perception of international politics in 1932. After 1932, therefore, Turkey's further grasp on the collective security system through its entry into the League of Nations as opposed

to the re-emergence of the *tono fascista* in Italian foreign policy after Grandi's leaving office started to create problems, as exemplified in the cases of the Turkish reaction to Mussolini's project of the Four-Power Pact (1933) and Italy's position against the Balkan Pact (1934). These two events clearly showed the levels of the differences between the two countries. Whereas Turkey desired a collective security system based on participation of all states, which would also be supported by regional non-aggression pacts, Italy's security understanding was mainly based on a system determined by great power politics and bilateral dealings.

In March 1934, when Mussolini delivered his famous speech on Italian expansionist aims in Asia and Africa as well as on Italy's need for increasing armament, this created further discussions in Turkey about the idea and fate of collective security in international politics. In contrast to what is widely accepted in the secondary literature on the topic, the speech itself did not create an immediate fear of an Italian invasion of Anatolia in Turkey and Mussolini's speech was engaged with at different levels by the Turkish government and by the press, as Chapter 3 has explained. Similarly, from the Turkish perspective, the Italian invasion of Ethiopia in 1935-1936 did not foreshadow a direct Italian threat to Turkey but was rather considered as the manifestation of the dangerous situation in world politics. As Chapter 3 has argued, the Turkish portrayal of the Italian threat in the case of Mussolini's 1934 speech as well as during the invasion of Ethiopia demonstrated how the Turkish government, by juxtaposing the threat that Italy created around the world and Turkey's need for further security, justified its security needs and goals in this period, such as increasing its armament and its military budget.

Perhaps, one of the most important security aims of Turkey in this period was the need to change the existing Straits regime, which Turkey realised in July 1936 thanks to the Montreux Convention. By examining Italy's role in the Straits issue, Chapter 4 has demonstrated that Italy constituted a pivotal part of the issue, first, due to the international environment to which it contributed with the invasion of Ethiopia and second, due to the policy it pursued throughout the Montreux Conference and afterwards. Italy's resistance to signing the Montreux Convention until 1938, by setting conditions unrelated to the Straits issue itself, such as the

lifting of the League of Nations's sanctions against Italy, the termination of the Mediterranean arrangement, and lastly, Turkey's *de jure* recognition of 'the Italian Empire', necessitated the re-examination of the Italian factor in the Straits issue from different angles and in a wider perspective. In doing so, Chapter 4 also discussed Turkey's relations with Britain during this period and argued that, in contrast to what is widely accepted, during the Italo-Ethiopian War and in the process that led to the Montreux Convention, Turkey did not engage in an alliance policy towards Britain. The Mediterranean arrangement of December 1935, which is usually claimed to have been the basis of this 'Turkish-British rapprochement', was concluded within the framework of the Covenant of the League of Nations and was thus, by no means, an alliance.

As underlined in Chapter 5, the Turkish foreign policy in the interwar period was not based on any assurances made by any great powers, but instead Turkey tried to pursue its own policy, independent of great powers and within the framework of the League of Nations. Turkey's negative reaction to the Four-Power Pact (1933) (Chapter 2) and to the Hoare-Laval Plan during the Italo-Ethiopian War in December 1935 (Chapter 3) were prime examples of Turkey's views regarding great power influence in international politics. Turkey's utilisation of the Gentlemen's Agreement of January 1937 between Britain and Italy to mend its damaged relations with Italy as well as the Turkish government's expressing its desire on several occasions for the development of Anglo-Italian relations showed that Turkey's understanding of Mediterranean security did not depend exclusively on its cooperation with Britain, but included both Italy and Britain, which would work together for the preservation of the status quo in the Mediterranean.

By the mid-1930s, however, Turkey's desired collective security understanding started to crumble due to the increasing ineffectiveness of the League of Nations and the rise of great power politics, a rise which manifested itself either in the form of invasions and breaching of treaties, as was the case with Italy, Germany and Japan, or in the form of appeasement policies towards these countries by Britain and France. As discussed in Chapter 5, the Nyon Conference of 1937 was one of the examples of this appeasement policy towards Italy by Britain and France. It was for this reason that, aware of the fly-by-night nature of

great power politics, Turkish policy during the conference, contrary to what has been argued in the secondary literature, was not directed against Italy, the Turkish government in fact trying to keep a neutral stance towards Italy and the Soviet Union in this process.

Facing this rather turbulent international environment, Turkey, in addition to increasing its armament and fortifying the Straits, took alternative security measures. The Balkan Pact in 1934 as well as the Saadabad Pact in 1937 were regional security arrangements that Turkey initiated to secure its western and southern borders. The aim of these two pacts was to provide regional security for Turkey and to settle the border disputes among the members of these two pacts. As discussed in Chapters 2 and 5, neither of these security arrangements directly targeted Italy and these pacts were against great power domination of international relations, meaning that Italy did not have a *sui generis* position in the making of any of these security arrangements. Yet, Italy was without doubt an important factor in Turkey's policy in this period, as was demonstrated, for example, in the discussion of Turkey's annexation of the Sanjak of Alexandretta in 1939 in Chapter 5, which argued that Italy, just like Britain and France, had a role to play in the Hatay issue. Italian propaganda activities in the region confirmed Italy's desire to have an influence in this part of the world. The invasion of Albania, further, indirectly accelerated the process of the annexation of Hatay to Turkey, since it increased French and British apprehension about the next moves of the Rome-Berlin Axis.

In conclusion, by adopting a comprehensive approach in examining Turkey's relations with Italy in 1932-1939 through key historical events in this period, this thesis has argued that the course of the relations between the two countries was in fact an example of the active and multilateral nature of Turkish foreign policy in the interwar period. This realist Turkish policy was not designed and orchestrated with a constant suspicion of the Italian threat, but the relations between Turkey and Italy in this period were very much defined by the existing divergences between their understanding of and their positioning themselves in the unstable international environment of the late interwar period.

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APPENDICES

A. TURKISH SUMMARY / TRKE ZET

Bu tez Trkiye'nin 1932-1939 yılları arasında İtalya ile olan ilişkilerini incelemekte olup özellikle İtalya'nın bu dönemdeki Trk dış ve güvenlik politikaları yapım sürecindeki yerini analiz etmektedir. 1930'lu yıllardaki değışken ve belirsiz uluslararası sistem Trkiye ve İtalya'nın dış politikalarında sürekli bir adaptasyon ihtiyacını doğurmuştur. Bu nedenle, bu tezde, Trkiye'nin bu dönemde İtalya ile olan ilişkilerinin sadece ikili ilişkiler bazında incelenmesinin yetersiz olduğu vurgulanmakta ve ilişkilerin uluslararası konjonktr ierisindeki olaylar ve Trkiye'nin bu dönemdeki genel dış ve güvenlik politikaları erevesinde incelenmesi gerektiđi savunulmaktadır. Bu dönemdeki ikili ilişkileri etkileyen olaylar ele alınırken Trkiye'nin İtalya ile olan ilişkilerinin ok ynl ve komplike doğası da ne ıkarılmıştır.

1932 yılı, Trkiye'nin İtalya ile olan ilişkilerinde bir dnm noktası teşkil etmiş ve bu nedenle de bu tezin başlangı noktası olarak tayin edilmiştir. Ancak, bu dnm noktası Trkiye'nin İtalya ile olan ikili ilişkilerinden dolayı ortaya ıkmamış, daha ok iki lkenin uluslararası sistem karşısında kendilerini nasıl konumlandıklarınnın bir sonucu olarak oluşmuştur. Temmuz 1932'de Trkiye Milletler Cemiyeti'ne girmiştir. Diđer taraftan ise, daha ılımlı bir İtalyan dış politikasının mimarı olarak bilinen İtalyan dışışleri bakanı Dino Grandi'nin görevini bırakması – daha doğrusu bıraktırılması – sonucu, İtalya daha saldırgan bir faşist dış politika benimsemeye başlamıştır. Bu iki olay Trk-İtalyan ilişkilerindeki dnm noktasını beraberinde getirmiştir.

Bu dnm noktası ncesindeki dönemde ilişkilere bir gz attığımızda da iki lke arasındaki ilişkilerin ok ynl boyutu karşımıza ıkmaktadır. İtalya hem

Birinci Dünya Savaşı döneminde hem de hemen sonrasında yer alan Kurtuluş Savaşı sürecinde Osmanlı Devleti topraklarında yer alan işgalci güçlerden biri olmuş ve özellikle Türkiye'nin Akdeniz bölgesinde faaliyetlerde bulunmuştur. İzmir de İtalya'nın işgal etmek istediği bölgelerden olmasına rağmen burası İtilaf kuvvetleri arasında hararetli tartışmaların merkezi olmuş ve bölgede bir İtalyan hegemonyası istemeyen İngilizler tarafından Yunanlılara bırakılmıştır. Birinci Dünya Savaşı bitiminde İstanbul Hükümeti tarafından imzalanan Mondros Ateşkes Antlaşması ve Sevr Antlaşmaları başta Mustafa Kemal olmak üzere Milli Mücadele Hareketi'nin mensupları tarafından kabul edilmemiş ve Anadolu'da işgalci güçlere karşı bir Ulusal Kurtuluş Savaşı başlamıştır. İtalya da bu dönemde Bodrum, Fethiye, Antalya, Burdur ve Kuşadası gibi bölgelerde işgalci güç konumunda yer almaktaydı. Ancak, İtalya, İngiltere ve Yunanistan'ın aksine, 1921'de Anadolu'dan askerlerini çekmeye başlamış ve bu durumda özellikle İtalya'nın Anadolu'daki ekonomik çıkarları etkili olmuştur. Savaşın sonunda yapılan Lozan müzakereleri sırasında özellikle Türkiye ve İtalya arasındaki tartışma noktalarından en önemlisi İtalya'nın Oniki Ada üzerindeki egemenliği üzerinedir. 14 Temmuz 1923 tarihinde imzalanan Lozan Antlaşması ile birlikte İtalya'nın Oniki Ada üzerindeki egemenlik hakları tanınmıştır.

Türkiye'nin cumhuriyet rejimine geçtiği yıldan tam bir yıl önce İtalya'da Mussolini başbakanlığında faşist hükümet kurulmuştu. Türkiye Cumhuriyeti ve İtalya arasındaki ikili ilişkiler resmi olarak 1924'te İtalya'nın Türkiye'ye büyükelçisini göndermesi ile başlamış olmasına rağmen aslında 1927 yılının sonlarına kadar İtalya Türkiye'yi potansiyel bir koloni olarak görmüştür. Ancak, Musul meselesinin Türkiye ve İngiltere hükümetleri tarafından 1926 yılında çözüme kavuşturulması sonrasında İtalya'nın Türkiye'ye olan yaklaşımı da yavaş yavaş değişmeye başlamış ve İtalya Türkiye'yi bölgede etkin bir faktör olarak algılamıştır. Bu doğrultuda, 1928 yılında Türkiye ve İtalya arasında bir tarafsızlık antlaşması imzalanmıştır. Bunun akabindeki süreçte ise Türkiye'nin İtalya ile olan ilişkileri özellikle ekonomik açıdan oldukça gelişmiştir.

Aslında 1919-1932 arasındaki ikili ilişkilerin gidişatı 1932-1939 yılları arasındaki Türkiye'nin İtalya ile olan diplomatik ilişkilerini de etkilemiştir. Ancak bu dönemle ilgili olan ikincil literatür maalesef kısır olup Dilek Barlas, Mevlüt

Çelebi ve Fabio Grassi tarafından yazılan birkaç kitap ve makale dışında Türkiye'nin bu dönemde İtalya ile ilişkilerini değerlendiren eserler neredeyse yok denecek kadar azdır. Bu eserlerin azlığı sadece Türk-İtalyan ilişkileri üzerine olan anlayışımızı etkilememiş, bunun dışında belki de daha da önemli olarak, iki dünya savaşı arası dönemdeki Türk dış politikası üzerine olan ikincil literatürü de etkilemiştir.

Bu tezin gösterdiği üzere, halihazırda yapılmış çalışmalarda üç temel argüman göze çarpmaktadır ki bu argümanlar ikincil literatürde büyük ölçüde ağır basmaktadır. Bunlardan ilki, Türkiye'nin İtalya ile olan ilişkilerini dönemlere ayırma çabasıdır. Örneğin Barlas, 1932-1936 yıllarındaki ikili ilişkileri, 1928-1932 (ılımlı ilişkiler evresi), 1932-1934 (soğuma evresi) ve 1934-1936 (donma evresi) olmak üzere üç temel evreye ayırmıştır. Benzer şekilde Grassi de ilişkileri 1919-1923, 1923-1932 ve 1932-1939 olmak üzere üç dönemde incelemiştir. Bu ayrımlar 1932-1939 arası dönemdeki ilişkilerin lineer bir şekilde kötüleştiği izlenimini çizmekte olup ilişkilerdeki nüansları göz ardı etmektedir.

İkincil literatürdeki çok tekrar edilen argümanlardan diğer birisi ise Türkiye'nin bu dönemdeki dış politikasını şekillendirmesinde asıl faktörün İtalya'nın Türkiye tarafından doğrudan kendi toprak bütünlüğüne saldıracak bir tehdit olarak algılanması üzerinedir. Bu argüman, sadece Türkiye'nin İtalya ile olan ilişkilerini inceleyen eserlerde yer almamış, aynı zamanda Türk dış politikası üzerine yazılan genel kitaplar ve hatta üniversitelerde çoğunlukla okutulan ders kitaplarında da yer almıştır. Her ne kadar bu tez bu dönemde İtalyan tehdidinin varlığını reddetmese de Türkiye'nin İtalyan tehdidi algısının Türkiye topraklarına olan doğrudan bir tehditten çok İtalya'nın uluslararası sisteme oluşturduğu tehdit üzerinden şekillendiğini iddia etmektedir.

Son olarak, Türkiye'nin bu dönemde İngiltere ile gelişmeye başlayan ilişkilerinin Türk-İtalyan ilişkilerini kötü bir şekilde etkilediği savı ikincil literatürde büyük ölçüde yer bulmuştur. Hatta, Türkiye'nin adeta İngiltere'yi İtalya'ya karşı bir dayanak noktası olarak seçmiş olduğu iddia edilmiştir.

Türk, İtalyan ve İngiliz belgelerini, bu dönemde yayınlanmış bazı popüler gazete ve dergileri de baz alarak hazırlanmış bu tez, yukarıda tartışılan bu üç argümana karşı çıkmakta olup Türkiye'nin bu dönemde İtalya ile olan ilişkilerini

daha kapsayıcı bir açıdan ele almaktadır. Yukarıda yer verilen dönemleştirmelerin aksine Türk-İtalyan ilişkileri bir devamlılık içerisinde incelenmiştir. Bunu yaparken de ikili ilişkileri doğrudan veya dolaylı olarak etkileyen temel olaylar analiz edilmiştir.

Tezin giriş bölümünü takip eden İkinci Bölüm’de Türkiye’nin 1932 ve 1934 yılları arasında İtalya ile olan ilişkilerindeki değişim incelenmiştir. Bu dönemde ikili ilişkiler iki ülke arasında meydana gelen olaylar veya problemlerden çok iki ülkenin uluslararası sistem içerisinde veya ona karşı olarak aldıkları pozisyonlara göre belirlenmiştir. Mayıs 1932’de Başbakan İsmet İnönü’nün Roma ziyareti ve Temmuz 1932’de İtalyan donanmasının İstanbul ziyareti gibi bu dönemde iki ülke arasında meydana gelen önemli ve pozitif olarak addedilebilecek gelişmelerin neden direkt olarak ikili ilişkileri yeterince şekillendiremediği tartışılmıştır. Bu bağlamda da ilk olarak Türkiye’nin 1932’de Milletler Cemiyeti’ne giriş süreci incelenmiştir. Türkiye’nin Cemiyet’e girişinin Türk dış politikasında da bir dönüm noktası olduğu öne sürülmüş ve Türkiye’nin üyeliğinin müşterek emniyet sistemine bağlılığının bir yansıması olduğu vurgulanmıştır. Bu doğrultuda ikincil literatürde vurgulanan İtalyan tehdidinin de Türkiye’nin Cemiyet’e girişinde kayda değer bir rol oynamadığı iddia edilmiştir. Türkiye tarafından üyeliğin en önemli getirisi dönemin gazetelerinin de vurguladığı gibi aslında Türkiye’nin uluslararası anlamda İngiltere, Fransa ve İtalya gibi Avrupalı büyük güçler tarafından eşit bir paydaş olarak kabul görmüş olmasıdır. İtalya da aslında diğer Avrupalı güçler gibi Türkiye’nin Cemiyet’e üyeliğini desteklemiştir. İkincil literatürde yer alan İtalya’nın Türkiye’nin üyeliğine karşı çıktığına yönelik argümanın da görünen bir dayanağı yoktur çünkü bu dönemde yayınlanmış İtalyan diplomatik belgeleri de dahil olmak üzere incelenen birincil kaynaklar böyle bir argümanı destekler nitelikte değildir. Yine bu bölümde incelenen İsmet İnönü’nün Mayıs 1932’de Roma’ya olan ziyareti ve ziyarete İtalya tarafından verilen önem de göz önünde bulundurulduğunda İtalya’nın Türkiye’nin Cemiyet’e girmesine karşı çıkması çok da muhtemel görünmemektedir, kaldı ki zaten Milletler Cemiyeti’ndeki İtalyan temsilcisi Vittorio Scialoja’nın Türkiye hakkındaki olumlu sözleri de bunu kanıtlar niteliktedir. Dahası, Türkiye’nin Cemiyet’e üye olduğu 18

Temmuz 1932 tarihinde Italo Moreno önderliğindeki İtalyan donanması İstanbul'u ziyaret etmekteydi.

İkili ilişkilerdeki dönüm noktası, Dino Grandi'nin aynı ay içerisinde İtalyan dışişleri bakanlığı görevinden alınmasıyla başlamıştır. Mussolini dışişleri bakanlığını bizzat kendisi yönetmeye başlamış ve İtalyan dış politikasını büyük güçlerin uluslararası sistemde hakim olması üzerine kurulu bir anlayış çerçevesinde revize etmeye başlamıştır. Bu politikadaki değişimler sahada ilk olarak Mussolini'nin öncülük ettiği ve İngiltere, Fransa, İtalya ve Almanya arasında 15 Temmuz 1933'te imzalanan Dörtler Paktı ile belirginleşmiştir. Dörtler Paktı, Türk hükümeti ve Türk basını tarafından büyük güçlerin diğer ülkelerin geleceklerine yön verme isteğinin bir tecellisi olarak algılanmış ve bizzat Cumhurbaşkanı Atatürk bu konudaki hoşnutsuzluğunu dile getirmiştir.

9 Şubat 1934 tarihinde Türkiye'nin öncülüğünde ve diplomatik faaliyetleri neticesinde meydana gelen Balkan Paktı imzalanmıştır. Her ne kadar Balkan Paktı fikri 1926 yılına kadar götürülebilse de ancak 1930'lu yıllarda yani Balkan ülkelerinin çoğu arasındaki problemlerin göreceli olarak azalmasından sonra bu fikir gerçeğe dönüşebilmiştir. İtalya, Balkan Paktı'nın oluşturulması sürecinde özellikle Arnavutluk ve Bulgaristan üzerindeki faaliyetleri dolayısıyla etkin bir role sahip olmuştur. Arnavutluk üzerinde hem siyasi hem de ekonomik olarak var olan İtalyan nüfuzu Balkan Paktı'na Arnavutluk'un dahil edilmesi önünde bir engel teşkil etmiştir. Bulgaristan özelinde ise bizzat Mussolini Bulgar yetkililerini Balkan Paktı'na katılmamaları konusunda ikna etmeye çalışmıştır. Bu iki Balkan ülkesi dışında kalan Yunanistan, Romanya, Türkiye ve Yugoslavya tarafından imzalanan Balkan Paktı temelde bölgesel bir savunma mekanizması geliştirmiştir. Her ne kadar paktın bölgesel niteliği paktın içeriğinden bile belli olsa da ikincil literatürde Balkan Paktı'nın İtalya'yı hedef alarak yapıldığına dair argümanlar yer almaktadır. Ancak bu tez, bu argümanların aksine Balkan Paktı'nın asıl hedefinin bölgesel güvenlik ve imzacı ülkeler arasındaki sınırların teminini sağlamak olduğunu savunmaktadır. Aslında Balkan Paktı'nın oluşturuluş süreci ve hemen sonrasında Türkiye ve Yunanistan'ın İtalya'yı bu konuda teskin etmeye yönelik çeşitli diplomatik faaliyetleri incelendiğinde de paktın İtalya'ya karşı oluşturulmamış olduğu göze çarpmaktadır. Balkan Paktı aslında Avrupalı büyük

güçlerin bölgede bir hegemonya kurma çabalarına karşı oluşturulmuştur. Mussolini'nin sonradan Balkan Paktı'na karşı çıkması da zaten bu bölgesel oluşumun kendi Balkan politikasını sekteye uğratmasından kaynaklanmaktadır. Balkan Paktı da aslında tıpkı Dörtler Paktı'nda olduğu gibi iki ülkenin uluslararası sisteme ve bölgesel politikalara karşı olan tutumlarındaki farklılığı ortaya koymuştur. Ancak bu farklılıklara rağmen bu olaylar ilişkilerde büyük sorunlara yol açmamış görünmektedir.

Üçüncü Bölüm'de ise Türkiye'nin İtalya ile olan ilişkileri 1934-1936 yılları arasındaki olaylar üzerinden incelenmiş olup tezin bu kısmında spesifik olarak Türkiye'nin İtalyan tehdidi algısı ve bu tehdit algısını hem yurt içinde hem de yurtdışında nasıl yansıttığı tartışılmıştır. Mussolini'nin 1934'teki ünlü konuşmasının ve İtalya'nın Etiyopya'yı (Habeşistan) işgalinin Türkiye'deki yansımalarını vaka çalışması olarak ele alan bu kısım, Türkiye'nin İtalyan tehdit algısının ikincil literatürde iddia edildiği şekilde İtalya'nın Türkiye'ye saldırması gibi bir senaryo üzerinden şekillenmesinden çok İtalya'nın saldırgan ve genişlemeci dış politikası ile uluslararası sistem üzerinde yarattığı tehdit üzerinden şekillendiğini göstermiştir. Daha da önemlisi, Türk hükümeti ve Türk basını bu dönemde müşterek emniyet sisteminin problemlerini öne çıkarmış ve bunun karşısında Türkiye'nin kendi ulusal güvenliğini arttırmasının gerekliliğini hem iç kamuoyuna hem de dış kamuoyuna anlatmıştır.

18 Mart 1934'te, yani İtalya'nın Avusturya ve Macaristan ile Roma Protokolleri'ni imzalamasından bir gün sonra, Mussolini İtalya'nın emperyalist hedeflerine yönelik bir konuşma yapmış ve Asya ve Afrika'yı İtalya'nın "iki tarihsel hedefi" olarak tanımlamıştır. İkincil literatürde Mussolini'nin bu konuşmasının Türkiye'deki 'İtalyan korkusunu' yenilediği argümanı hakimdir. Ancak Türkiye'nin hem Roma Protokolleri'ni hem de Mussolini'nin konuşmasını nasıl algıladığı üzerine detaylı bir inceleme yapılan tezin bu kısmında aslında durumun tam olarak literatürde iddia edildiği gibi olmadığı gösterilmiştir. Her ne kadar konuşmadan hemen sonra Türk gazetelerindeki makaleler ve köşe yazıları negatif bir tutum sergilemiş olsalar da bu yazılar bir 'İtalyan korkusu'nun habercisi olmaktan çok Mussolini'nin söylemlerinin dünya barışını tehlikeye atması üzerine odaklanmıştır. Kaldı ki bizzat Mussolini Roma'daki Türkiye

Büyükelçisi Hüseyin Ragıp Baydur ile yaptığı görüşmede 18 Mart tarihli konuşmasında Türkiye'yi katiyen kastetmediğini söylemiştir. Dahası, dönemin dışişleri bakanı Tefik Rüşti Aras Türkiye'nin bir Avrupa ülkesi olduğunu dile getirmiş ve bu nedenle de endişeye gerek olmadığını söylemiştir. Bunun yanı sıra, Türk hükümeti ve Türk gazeteleri Mussolini'nin konuşmasını sadece emperyalist politikaların bir yansıması olarak ele almamış, konuşmanın içeriği ile de yakından ilgilenmişlerdir. Örneğin, Mussolini'nin konuşmasında yer alan silahlanmanın gerekliliği ve silahsızlanma çalışmalarının başarısızlığı ile ilgili kısımlar Aras tarafından haklı bulunmuş ve Türk gazeteleri de Türkiye'nin silahlandırma çalışmalarını arttırması gerektiğine yönelik yazılar yayımlamışlardır. Yani bir yandan İtalya'nın müşterek emniyet sistemini nasıl tehlikeye attığı vurgulanmış diğer taraftan da Mussolini'nin konuşması üzerinden Türkiye'nin silahlanma ihtiyacı duyurulmuştur.

Bu dönemde ulusal güvenliği arttırabilmek adına 5 Temmuz 1934 tarihinde Türkiye, Romanya ve Yugoslavya ile Cenevre'de iki tane gizli anlaşma imzalamıştır. Bu anlaşmalar Balkan Paktı çerçevesinde imzalanmış olup komşu bir Balkan ülkesinin herhangi imzacılardan birine saldırması durumunda diğer imzacılara askeri yardım sorumluluğu getirmiştir. Anlaşma ayrıca bu saldırgan Balkan ülkesinin başka bir ülke ile birlikte hareket etmesi durumunu da kapsamaktadır. Bu da aslında Bulgaristan ve İtalya'nın birlikte hareket edebileceği düşüncesine yönelik olarak düzenlenmiştir. İtalya'nın o dönemki Ankara büyükelçisi Lojacono'nun da ifade ettiği gibi Türkiye Roma Protokelleri'ni ve Mussolini'nin konuşmasını aslında Balkan Paktı'nın güvenlik mekanizmasını güçlendirmek için kullanmıştır. Akdeniz güvenliği meselesi de yine Mussolini'nin konuşması sonrasında Türkiye'de konuşulan konulardandır ve bu mesele tüm Akdeniz ülkelerinin oluşturacağı bir Akdeniz Paktı tartışmalarını da bir kez daha alevlendirmiştir.

Akdeniz meselesi özellikle İtalya'nın Etiyopya'yı Ekim 1935'te işgal etmesinden sonra daha da alevlenmiş ve bu dönemde özellikle Türk basını, İtalyan işgalinin Akdeniz ve dünya barışı üzerindeki etkilerini tartışmıştır. Bu tartışmalar aslında Türkiye'nin İtalyan tehdidini gerçekte nasıl algıladığı ve bunu nasıl yansıttığı arasındaki farkı da ortaya koymuştur. Nitekim, Türk basını bir yandan

Milletler Cemiyeti'nin başarısızlığı üzerine sayısız makaleler yayımlarken aynı zamanda büyük güçlerin ve onların emperyalist politikalarını da eleştirmiş ve İtalyan işgalinin bir dünya savaşının habercisi olabileceğini savunmuştur. Öte taraftan, Türk hükümeti İtalya'nın Etiyopya'yı işgali ile ilgili olarak alenen İtalya'ya karşı bir söylemde bulunmamış ve politikasını tamamen Milletler Cemiyeti çerçevesinde “tam bir tarafsızlık” politikası güderek yürütmeye çalışmıştır. Halbuki, basındaki tartışmalar bu “tarafsızlığın” sadece görünürde olan ve resmî bir “tarafsızlık” olduğunu ortaya koymaktadır. Türk basınındaki bu tartışmaların aslında asıl nedeni Türkiye'nin güvenlik kaygılarını ve güvenliğini arttırma isteğini meşrulaştırmaktır. Nitekim yayınlar Türkiye'de havacılığın geliştirilmesinin gerekliliğinden silahlanmanın önemine kadar birçok konuyu tartışmıştır. Ancak bu tartışmalardan en önemlisi ise Türkiye'nin o güne dek uluslararası bir komisyon tarafından idare edilen Boğazlar'ın hakimiyetini ele alması üzerineydi.

Tezin Dördüncü Bölümü Boğazlar Meselesi'nin Türk hükümeti ve Türk basını tarafından nasıl tekrar gündeme getirildiğini incelemekle başlayıp genel olarak İtalya'nın Türkiye'nin Boğazlar'da tekrar tam egemenlik kurma arayışındaki pozisyonunu incelemektedir. Bu kısım İtalya'nın Etiyopya'yı işgalinin Boğazlar Meselesi'nin çözümüne uygun bir ortam hazırladığını ve Türk hükümetinin bu işgali uluslararası anlamda güvenlileştirerek Montreux Boğazlar Sözleşmesi'ne giden yolu oluşturduğunu savunmaktadır. İkincil literatürde savunulduğunun aksine, Boğazlar Meselesi'nin Türkiye tarafından yeniden gündeme getirilmesine Türkiye'ye doğrudan bir İtalyan tehdidi sebep olmamıştır. Aslında Boğazlar Meselesi Lozan Anlaşması'nın imzalandığı 1923 yılından beri Türkiye tarafından yarım kalmış bir mesele olarak addedilmiştir. Türkiye'nin Boğazlar Meselesi'ni bu dönemde dile getirmesindeki asıl sebep uluslararası çevrede Türkiye'nin bu isteği için uygun bir ortamın oluşmuş olmasıdır.

Bu ortamın oluşturulmasında bu tezin Üçüncü Bölümü'nde tartışıldığı gibi Türk basınının rolü de büyüktür. Özellikle Türk hükümetinin İtalya'yı hiçbir şekilde saldırgan ülke olarak tanımlamadığı böyle bir dönemde, *Ulus* ve *Cumhuriyet* gibi hükümetle organik bağları bulunan gazetelerin İtalyan işgalini eleştirdikleri yazıları önemlidir. Boğazlar Meselesi özelinde de basın meselenin

acilen çözüme kavuşturulması gerektiğini vurgulamış ve bu savını İtalyan işgaliyle daha da belirgin bir şekilde ortaya çıkan ve artık güven vermeyen uluslararası sistem üzerinden desteklemiştir. Buna ek olarak, Lozan Boğazlar Sözleşmesi'nin 18. maddesi gereğince Fransa, İngiltere, İtalya ve Japonya tarafından Türkiye'ye verilen boğazların güvenliğine dair teminatın artık geçerli olamayacağı da hem Berç Türker gibi bazı milletvekilleri hem de Türk basını tarafından vurgulanmıştır. Buna sebep olarak hem İtalya'nın Etiyopya'yı işgali ile birlikte özellikle İngiltere ile arasının bozulmuş olması hem de İtalya'nın müşterek emniyet sistemini hiçe sayması gösterilmiştir. Yine Japonya'nın Milletler Cemiyeti'ni daha önce terk etmiş olması da bu maddenin geçersizliğine dair savları güçlendirmiştir.

Bu tartışmaların oluşturduğu ortam ile birlikte Türkiye, 11 Nisan 1936'da imzacı ülkelere ve Milletler Cemiyeti'ne halihazırdaki boğazlar rejiminin değiştirilmesinin gerekliliğine dair bir nota göndermiştir. Bu nota, İtalya tarafından zamansız bulunmuş ve İtalya bu durumda konferansa katılmayacağını dile getirmiştir. Konferansa katılmama gerekçesi olarak da kendisine Milletler Cemiyeti tarafından uygulanmakta olan ekonomik yaptırımları göstermiştir. Ancak bu dönemle ilgili yayımlanmış olan İtalyan birincil kaynaklar incelendiğinde İtalya'nın konferansa katılmamasının asıl sebebinin Türkiye'nin İtalyan işgali sırasındaki politikasından duyulan hoşnutsuzluk olduğu söylenebilir. Nitekim bu durum Milletler Cemiyeti'nin Montrö Konferansı devam ederken İtalya'ya uygulanan ekonomik yaptırımları kaldırmasına rağmen İtalya'nın konferansa katılmama konusunda ısrarcı olmasından da anlaşılabilir.

İtalya'nın konferansa katılmamak için gösterdiği diğer bir neden ise Akdeniz Mutabakatı'dır. Aralık 1935'te İngiltere, Fransa, Yugoslavya, Yunanistan ve Türkiye arasında oluşturulan ve ikincil literatürde "Akdeniz Paktı" olarak da bahsedilen Akdeniz Mutabakatı aslında bir pakt veya ittifak değildir. İtalya'ya karşı ekonomik yaptırımların uygulanması sırasında Akdeniz'de İtalya ile karşı karşıya kalması durumunda diğer Akdeniz ülkelerinin İngiltere'ye destek verip vermeyeceğini merak eden İngiliz hükümeti yukarıda bahsedilen ülkelerin hükümetlerine birer mektup yollamış ve cevaben Türkiye bu durumda İngiltere'ye destek vereceğini belirtmiştir. Ancak bu mutabakat tamamen Milletler Cemiyeti Misaki'nin 16. maddesinin 2. paragrafında belirtilen çerçeve içerisinde yapılmış

olup İngiltere ile bir ittifak niteliğinde değildir. Bu dönemle ilgili çalışmalarda sürekli olarak dile getirilen Türk-İngiliz yakınlaşması ve bunun bir sonucu olarak Türk-İtalyan ilişkilerinde bir kopuş döneminin başlaması argümanları da aslında bu mutabakat etrafında şekillenmiştir. Bu dönem ve öncesinde İngiltere'nin Türkiye'ye yönelik politikaları incelendiğinde İngiltere'nin Boğazlar'ın Türk egemenliğine geçmesi konusundaki desteğinin pragmatik olduğu görülmektedir. Dahası, Türkiye'nin iki dünya savaşı arası dönemdeki dış politikası herhangi bir büyük güce dayanmak üzerine kurulmamış olup bilakis bu anlayışa karşı bir mücadeleyi temel almıştır.

20 Temmuz 1936'da imzalanan Montrö Boğazlar Sözleşmesi İtalya'nın katılımı olmadan imzalanmıştır. Her ne kadar İtalya'nın sözleşmeyi imzalamamış olması Türkiye'yi tatmin etmemiş olsa da genel olarak Montrö Boğazlar Sözleşmesi Türkiye tarafından büyük bir başarı olarak görülmüştür. Özellikle Boğazlar'ın yeniden silahlandırılmasına imkan veren bu sözleşmenin Türkiye'nin uluslararası prestiji zarara uğramadan barışçıl bir yolla yapılmış olması da bu başarıyı taçlandırmıştır.

Sözleşmenin imzalanması sonrasındaki süreçte Türkiye'nin öncelikli hedeflerinden biri İtalya'nın Montrö Sözleşmesi'ni imzalaması olmuştur. Türkiye'nin bu doğrultudaki çabalarını ele alarak başlayan Beşinci Bölüm, Türk dış politikası yapım sürecinde İtalya'nın yerini ve rolünü bu dönemdeki önemli tarihsel olaylar çerçevesinde incelemiştir. Montrö sonrası döneme (1936-1939) odaklanan bu kısımda Türkiye'nin İtalya ile olan ilişkilerinin Montrö ile birlikte birdenbire kötüleşmediği ve ilişkilerin daha dikkatli ve çok yönlü bir biçimde ele alınması gerektiği savunulmuştur.

İtalya'nın sözleşmeyi imzalamamak için öne sürdüğü neden olan Akdeniz Mutabakatı daha sonra İngiltere tarafından tek yönlü olarak sonlandırılmış ve İngiltere-İtalya arasındaki ilişkiler en azından görünürde yumuşamaya başlamıştır. Bu bağlamda, Türkiye'nin İtalya ile olan ilişkileri de karşılıklı jestler ile iyileşmeye başlamıştır. Örneğin Ağustos 1936'da Türk hükümeti Addis Ababa'daki maslahatgüzarını Türkiye'ye geri çağırması ve Ocak 1937'de elçiliği tamamen kapatmıştır. Bu durum aslında *de facto* olarak Türk hükümetinin İtalya'nın Etiyopya üzerindeki egemenliğini tanıdığını göstermektedir. Diğer

tarafından 29 Aralık 1936 tarihinde iki ülke arasında Ticaret ve Seyrisefain Muahedenamesi imzalanmıştır. Ancak İtalya'nın Montrö Sözleşmesi'ni imzalamasının tekrar gündeme gelmesi 2 Ocak 1937 tarihinde İngiltere ve İtalya arasında Akdeniz'de statükonun devamlılığı üzerine imzalanan Centilmenlik Anlaşması (Gentlemen's Agreement) sonrasında mümkün olmuştur. Bu anlaşma Akdeniz'de bütün devletlerin katılımıyla bölgesel bir güvenlik anlayışının oluşturulmasını amaçlayan Türkiye tarafından iyi bir şekilde karşılanmıştır. Nitekim bu anlaşmanın imzalanmasından tam bir ay sonra 3 Şubat 1937 tarihinde Tevfik Rüştü Aras Milano'ya Ciano ile görüşmek üzere gitmiştir. Bu görüşmede Ciano, İtalya'nın Montrö Sözleşmesi'ni imzalaması için Türkiye'nin İtalyan İmparatorluğu'nu (diğer bir deyişle Etiyopya üzerindeki hakimiyetini) *de jure* olarak da tanımmasını şart koşturmuştur ki bu şarttan dolayı İtalya'nın sözleşmeyi imzalaması ancak Mayıs 1938'de mümkün olabilmekmiştir.

1936-1939 arası dönemde İtalya Türkiye'nin dış politikasında sadece Montrö üzerinden bir rol oynamamıştır. Bunun dışında aslında Türkiye'nin Akdeniz ve güney sınırlarında bölgesel güvenliğini sağlamak için içinde yer aldığı Saadabad Paktı ve Nyon Konferansı gibi oluşumlarda da İtalya'nın rolü görülmektedir. 8 Temmuz 1937'de Türkiye, İran, Irak ve Afganistan arasında imzalanan Saadabad Paktı bir saldırmamazlık anlaşmasından öte olmamakla beraber üye ülkeler arasında çıkabilecek herhangi bir problemi engellemeye yöneliktir. Ancak Balkan Paktı ile ilgili ikincil literatürde olduğu gibi, Saadabad Paktı'nın İtalya'ya karşı oluşturulduğu argümanı bazı yazarlar tarafından kabul edilmiştir. Bu tezde yapılan tartışmada bu argümanın gerçekçi olmadığı ve özellikle İngiliz kaynakları üzerinden yapılan bir okumanın sonucu olduğu vurgulanmıştır. Nitekim, Aras'ın paktın sadece "psikolojik" bir etkisi olduğunu ve hiçbir ülkeyi hedef almadığını iddia etmesi de bu tezde savunulan görüşü doğrulamaktadır. Dönemin İtalyan büyükelçisi Carlo Galli tarafından da dile getirildiği üzere, İtalya bu dönemde Türkiye ile olan ilişkilerinin gelişmekte olduğunu düşünerek bu ikili ilişkinin Türk-Sovyet ilişkilerine bir alternatif oluşturulabileceğini öngörmüştür.

Saadabad Paktı'nın imzalanmasından sadece birkaç ay sonra toplanan Nyon Konferansı da benzer bir biçimde ikincil literatürde Türkiye'nin İtalya'ya

karşı içinde yer aldığı oluşumlar olarak değerlendirilmiştir. Ancak Akdeniz’de İspanyol İç Savaşı’ndan dolayı ortaya çıkan korsan faaliyetlerini önlemek için toplanan bu konferans ve akabinde yapılan anlaşma doğrudan İtalya’yı hedef almamış, hatta tam aksine İngiltere ve Fransa tarafından İtalya’ya yönelik bir yatıştırma politikasının neticesi olarak ortaya çıkmıştır. Bu bağlamda, zaten Türkiye’nin konferansa katılması teknik olarak İtalya’ya karşı olamazdı. Konferans sırasında Türkiye, özellikle İngiltere ve Fransa ile olan temaslarında Akdeniz’de İtalyan çıkarlarının da göz önünde bulundurulmasının önemini altını çizmiştir. Zaten anlaşma imzalanırken Türkiye anlaşmanın 4. maddesinin 2. paragrafına yönelik çekincesini belirtmiş ve İngiltere ve Fransa’ya Türkiye karasularında ve limanlarında faaliyetlerde bulunma yetkisini vermeyeceğini açıklamıştır. Bu durum da Türkiye’nin Nyon sürecinde İngiltere ve Fransa politikaları ekseninde bir politika izlemediğini tam tersine üç büyük güç karşısında tarafsız bir politika gütmeye çalıştığını göstermiştir.

İkinci Dünya Savaşı’nın hemen öncesinde Türk dış politikasının önemli başarılarından bir diğeri olan Hatay’ın Türkiye’ye ilhakı sürecinde de İtalya faktörünün değerlendirilmesi önemlidir çünkü İngiltere ve Fransa gibi İtalya da bu meselede önemli bir rol oynamıştır. Öncelikle, bu bölgede İtalya, Sancak (Hatay) bölgesinin İtalya’ya verilmesine yönelik propaganda faaliyetlerinde bulunmuştur. Bölgedeki genel bir İtalyan politikasının yansıması olan bu faaliyetler İtalya’nın bölgedeki Kürt ve Ermeni gruplara verdiği destekle daha da belirginleşmiştir. İkinci olarak, İtalya, Hatay meselesinde Türkiye için Fransa ile olan görüşmelerinde bir manevra alanı sağlamıştır. Örneğin, Aralık 1936 ve Ocak 1937’de yani Hatay meselesinin Milletler Cemiyeti’nde tartışılmaya başlandığı dönemde, Türkiye İtalya’nın bölgedeki faaliyetlerini görmezden geldiğine dair bir tutum sergilemiş ve Fransız gazetelerinin İtalyan’ın bölgedeki faaliyetlerine yönelik yayınlarını yalanlanmıştır. Bu aslında Hatay meselesinde, Türkiye’nin İtalya’nın ve bununla beraber diğer ülkelerin desteğinin alınmasına yönelik uyguladığı politikasının bir parçasıydı. Ancak 1939 yılının başında bu sefer İtalya’nın bölgedeki faaliyetleri Türk yetkililer tarafından Fransızlara dillendirilmiş ve Fransa’nın Hatay’ı İtalya’ya devretmek zorunda kalması konusunda bir kaygının Türkiye’de var olduğu söylenmiştir. Türkiye’nin dile

getirdiği bu kaygılar İtalya'nın Nisan ayında Arnavutluk'u işgal etmesiyle birlikte daha da ikna edici bir hal almıştır. Arnavutluk'un işgali Hatay meselesinde dolaylı yoldan bir etkide bulunmuştur ki bu işgal Hatay'ın Türkiye'ye ilhak sürecini hızlandırmıştır. İngiltere ve Fransa'nın İtalyan ve Alman yayılmacı politikaları karşısında Türkiye'yi karşılarına almama istekleri Arnavutluk'un işgalinin hemen akabinde Fransa'nın Hatay meselesinde daha fazla direnmemesine neden olmuştur. Hatay'ın Haziran ayında Türkiye'ye katılması İtalya tarafından hoş karşılanmamış ve İtalyan gazeteleri Fransa ve Türkiye aleyhinde yayınlar yapmışlardır. Bu durum Türk ve İtalyan gazetecileri arasında bir polemige bile neden olmuştur. İtalya'nın Montrö Sözleşmesi'ni imzalaması sürecindeki tutuma benzer olarak, Hatay meselesi karşısında gösterilen İtalyan tutumunun aslında Hatay meselesinin kendisi ile ilgili olmadığına daha ziyade İkinci Dünya Savaşı'na giden yolda Türkiye'nin İngiltere ve Fransa ile olan yakınlaşmasının bir sonucu olduğu bu kısımda gösterilmiştir.

Sonuç olarak, bu tez 1932-1939 yılları arasında Türkiye'nin İtalya ile olan ilişkilerine yönelik ikincil literatürde yer alan üç temel yaygın kanıya karşı çıkmaktadır. Bunlardan ilki, Türkiye'nin İtalya ile olan ilişkilerinin bu dönemde bir dostluktan düşmanlığa tekdüze şekilde evrildiğidir. İkincisi ise, İtalyan tehdidinin bu dönemde Türk dış ve güvenlik politikalarında ana belirleyici etmen olduğu argümanıdır. Son argüman ise Türkiye'nin bu dönemde İngiltere ile gelişmeye başlayan ilişkilerinin İtalya ile olan ilişkilerini zedelediğine yöneliktir. Halbuki bu tez, ilişkileri daha geniş bir bağlamda ve bütüncül olarak inceleyerek ikincil literatürde yer alan bu argümanların dönemin dış politikasını kavramamızda sorun teşkil ettiğini göstermektedir. Bu dönemde ilişkilerin gidişatını belirleyen temel faktör Türkiye'nin İtalya'yı direkt bir tehdit olarak algılamasından daha çok iki ülke arasında uluslararası sisteme yönelik tutumlarındaki farklılıktır. Nitekim, bu dönemde Türkiye dış politikasını Milletler Cemiyeti çerçevesinde bir müşterek emniyet sistemi üzerine kurgularken, İtalya bunun tam tersi bir doğrultuda politikasını oluşturmuştur. Bu tez göstermiştir ki Türkiye'nin iki dünya savaşı arası dönemde İtalya ile olan ilişkileri Türkiye'nin aktif, çok yönlü ve realist dış politikasına önemli bir örnek teşkil etmektedir.

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