FOREIGN POLICY OF ATATÜRK

Prof. Dr. YILMAZ ALTUĞ

Turkish foreign policy during 1920-1938 was initiated, formulated and directed by Atatürk. The period between 1920-1938 is the first three years of the Turkish Grand National Assembly and the first fifteen years of the Turkish Republic. So Turkish foreign policy of this period may be named Foreign Policy of Atatürk.

The great achievement of Atatürk was his ability to organize the intense nationalism of the twenties so that it became productive patriotism.

His luck was the misjudgement, by the Allies of him andof forces he put into action.

The Times of London printed the following comment of September 27, 1920. "Nationalism is waning as a military force but even so the Central Government must be enabled after detaching the majority of the Angora Government's supporters by offers of amnesty to deal with the minority of adventures, criminals and fanatics whose crimes and follies exclude them from the hope of pardon."[1] Mustafa Kemal began his famous speech to the Grand National Assembly, in the following words: "The group to which the Ottoman state had belonged, was defeated in the World War. The Ottoman army had been mutilated on every front and an armistice of harsh terms had been signed. Due to the long years of the war, the nation was tired and poor. Those who were responsible for bringing the nation and country into war had fled in fear of their lives. The person who occupied the throne as Sultan and Caliph was a degenerate who was in quest of ways and means to preserve his throne. The Cabinet was weak, dishonest without any pride and was completely subservient to the will of the Sultan-willing to comply with any condition under which it might preserve its position. The weapons and ammunition of the Army had been or were being confiscated.

The Entente Powers did not even feel the necessity of complying with the provisions of the Armistice Agrement. Under some pretext or another, the Entente fleets and soldiers were in Istanbul. The Adana Province had

[1] Geoffrey Lewis, *Turkey*, 1965, p. 66

been occupied by the French, and Urfa, Marash, Aintap by the British. In Antalya and Konya there were Italian troops, in Merzifon and Samsun, British soldiers. Everywhere foreign Officiers, Officials and private persons were active. Last, but not least, on 15 May 1919, a greek Army was landed in İzmir, by agreement and support with the Entente Powers. On top of all this, in every corner of the country, Christian elements were doing their utmost, both openly and clandestinely to hasten the Ottoman State.[2]

The principles of the independence movement were embodied in a National pact (Misakı Milli), the text of this pact was prepared and dictated by Atatürk to Anatolian deputies who were elected to the last Ottoman House of Deputies. This pact is a highly important document since it is the foundation of modern Turkey's foreign policy, in other words Atatürk's foreign policy.

The first article stipulated that "areas inhabited by an Ottoman Moslem (Turkish) majority, united in religion, race, and aim form an undersible whole which can not be divided really or by assumption for any reason." The last article stated: it is a fundamental of our life that we, like every other country should enjoy complete independence in assuring the means for our development for this reason we are apposed to all restrictions inimical to our development in political, juridical, financial and other matters.[3]

The same National Pact was accepted on june 18, 1920 by the First Turkish Grand National Assembly which convened first time on April 23, 1920. Allied Powers occupied Istanbul on March 16, 1920. So Atatürk convened Grand National Assembly in Ankara on April 23, 1920.

This was the culmination of nationalist efforts in Anatolia. Atatürk had succeded to rally various patriotic forces under one banner. Two Congresses one at Erzurum, a regional one the other in Sivas the national were convened.

Erzurum Congress was held on july 23, 1919 and the following points took place in the declaration issued at the end:

1) The nation is an indivisible unit

[2] Altemur Kılıç, *Turkey and the World. op. cit.* p. 33.
[3] Kılıç, *op. cit.* p. 36.

2) In case of the fall of Sultan's Government as a result of foreign invasion or foreign political pressure Turkish nation will resist

3) No foreign mandate will be accepted

4) National elections must be held immediately

Sivas Congress accepted the same resolutions, broadinnig some of them.

Atatürk was realist, he knew that England and other allied Powers could not take arms again against Turkey. In a private meeting later reported by one of the participants, at Erzurum in 1919 he said "A national resistance movement in Anatolia will succeed in a short time. I draw my conclusions from two points: First is the determination of Turkish nation to live a free life, second the idea that Allied Powers which fought four years and are victorious will never start a new world war. In these case will have only Greek troops to combat. If we can unit Turkish nation in on front of resistance and we can organize Turkish Army in a short time, we can throw the Greek Army into the sea". [4]

England before the convening of Paris Peace Conference asked to put under American Mandate the stricts and Armenia which was going to be created and the American Senate rejected this project. Armenian representatives who were participating to the Paris Peace Conference tried to persuade the great Powers to take under their protection for 20 years the whole eastern and Southeastern Anatolia. U.S.A. did not accept this offer either.

U.S.A. did not want the partition of Turkey, this was according "peace without victory" principle of President Wilson U.S.A. wanted to maintain only commercial and cultural relations with Turkey. Atatürk knew this, and his foreign policy at the beginning of the Grand National Assembly can be summarized as follows:

1) To profit from disharmony reigning between Allied Powers

2) To support Soviets in foreign policy

3) To attract the friendships of the U.S.A. [5]

[4] Cevat Dursunoğlu "Erzurum Kongresi Sırasında Atatürk'ün Düşünceleri" *Erzurum Kongresi ve M.K. Atatürk,* 1965, s. 36-38.

[5] Genel Kurmay Harp Dairesi Başkanlığı, *Türk İnkılâp Tarihi,* s. 68.

Atatürk did cooperate with Soviets during war of Independence in order to reach the independence and establish the Turkish national state. "Friendship with Russia" said Atatürk is not to adopt their ideology communism for Turkey. He said openly: "Communism is a social problem. Social conditions religion and national traditions of our country confirm the opinion that Russian Communism is not applicable in Turkey."[6]

The Moscow Treaty of March 16, 1921 concluded between Turkey and Soviet Russia is a Treaty of States which were fighting against a common Enemy: England and the West.

M. Kemal never swerved from his aim: Turkey was to become a Western State, a European State: France and Britain were his models, not Russia. But there was no change in Turkey external policy of which Mustafa Kemal spoke into following terms on 1 November 1924 in a speech to the G.N. Assembly! "Our amicable relations with our old friend the Soviet Russian Republic are developing and progressing every day. As in past our Republican Government regards genuine and extensive good relations with Soviet Russia as the Keynote of our foreign policy."

The two countries Turkey and Russia were brought even closer together by the question of Mosul. At Lausanne Conference İsmet Pasha had fought hard and long for Mosul. Curzon had insisted that Mosul belonged to Iraq. Giving Mosul to Turkey would have meant bringing the Turkish frontier to within sixty miles of the Iraqui capital Bağdat.

The treaty of Lausanne left the destiny of Mosul to be settled by the Turco-British negociations, within nine months of the Treaty's coming into effect. As no agreement had been reached within the time stipulated, the conflict was referred to the Council of the League of Nations which decided on 16 December 1925 to give the disputed territory to Iraq.

The Turks refused in the beginning to accept this ruling and on the same day signed in Paris a Pact of Non-Aggression and Security with Soviet Russia. However Atatürk being a cool realist decided to conclude a treaty with Great Britain and Iraq on 5 June 1926 accepting the League decision.

With Lausanne Treaty the most of the National Pact was realized, Mustafa Kemal who succeded to establish National State, accepted the

[6] Yılmaz Altuğ, *Türk Devrim Tarihi Dersleri, 1919-1938,* 1980 s. p. 136.

Motto "Peace at home and peace abroad", one of his first step was to approach Greece. The convention concluded on June 10, 1930 which cleared away dificulties arising from the exchange of populations between Turkey and Greece helped the rapproachement of two countries.

Between 1930 and 1933 the six Balkan Countries convened Conferences under the name Balkan Union. Turkey, Greece, Bulgaria, Rumania, Yugoslavia and Albania were all participating, this union was not formal and did not develop into a regional organization; this was caused by the aggressive policies of Bulgaria, she wanted to increase her territory. Turkey tried to persuade Bulgaria to quit such aggressiveness but she did not succeed.

Albania was under influence of Italy and was not willing to join the other Balkan countries, On February 9, 1934 Turkey signed the Balkan Entente with Greece, Yugoslavia and Rumania. The signatories undertook to preserve the Balkan frontiers and to consult together in the event of any threat to peace in the Balkans.

Atatürk never believed the idea that there are permanent friendship and permanent enmities. He sollicited the friendship of Greece which had very badly burned and destroyed Western Anatolia. Also he sought the friendships of Great Britain and France which were our enemies during First World War. Turkey true to her motto "Peace at home and peace abroad" was not imperialistic, she did not want revision of her frontiers. Germany, Italy, Bulgaria all followed revisionist policies. Britain, and France were for the statusque.

Atatürk knew very well world leaders. He said about Mussolini: "Italy under Mussolini reached a great recovery and development in a future war if Mussolini can exploit the outward appearances of grandeur and majesty of Italy, with the condition of staying out of the war, can play one of the major roles at the Peace table. But I fear that the actual Chief of Italy will not be able to save himself from the playing the role of Ceaser and will show immediately that Italy is far away to be a military power."

Italy's war time designs on Southern Anatolia were not forgotten by the Turks, Mussolini from time to time repated in a vague way his interests in the Eastern Mediterranean.

So Turkey sent a note to Great Britain in 1936 asking for the revision of the Straits convention of 1923 noting that "The situation in the Black

Sea is reassuring in every respect. But uncertainty has gradually arisen in the Mediterranean". The Straits were demilitarized, fortifications forbidden. Laussanne Powers with exception of Italy held a Conference at Montreux and concluded a Convention on July 20, 1936 restoring full Turkish sovereignty over the Straits, the principles of passage are: Peace time free passage for merchant shipping of all nations and warships of Black Sea Powers total tonnage of warships which other nations may send throuh the Straits is resticted to 30.000 tons, and they may stay only 15 days in the Black Sea. If Turkey is at war, she may forbid the passage not only of enemy ships but also of neutral merchantmen carrying troops or material in support of enemy.

In time of war, Turkey being neutral, no belligerent warships may pass the Straits except under orders from the League of Nations or in fulfilment of a treaty of mutual assistance to which Turkey is a signatory. Neutral ships may pass provided that they respect the laws of neutrality. If Turkey considers that there is a threat of war, she may close the Straits for foreign warships and compel foreign merchantmen to pass during the the hous of daylight.

Hatay, the former sanjak of Alexandretta was the next problem to besolved. Ankara Agreement of 1921 with France reorganized special status for Hatay, namely the maintenance of Turkish Language and culture. Hatay was annexed to Syria after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and Syria was put under France's mandate. France recognized the independence of Lebanon in November 1936. Turkey asked restitution of Hatay to Turkey by a note of October 9, 1936. France by her note of November 10, 1936 rejected Turkish note and proposed to bring the conflict to the League of Nations. Turkey accepted this. The League of Nations started to discussions on December 14, 1936 and with the intervention of Great Britain Council of the League of Nations accepted a status for Hatay, which was accepted as distinct entity (entité distincte) independent in her internal affairs with a special Constitution of her own, externally tied to Syria. The League of Nations established a committee, took the views of Turkey and France and prepared a Constitution which was accepted by the Council of the League of Nations on May 29, 1937. The same day Turkey and France signed a convention guaranting territorial integrity of Hatay.

On July 8, 1937 Saadabad Pact was signed at Teheran by delegation of Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Afghanistan. The signatories undertook to pre-

serve their common frontiers, to consult together in all matters of common interest and to commit no aggression against one another's territory. In 1935 an agreement was paraphed in Geneva but the signing of it was delayed until 1937 because of border dispute between Iran and Iraq which is the same actual dispute causing the was between two counties.

Turkish government always considered the Sanjak (Hatay) predominantly Turkish since the Turkish population was the largest single ethnic group.

Atatürk with his speech on November 1, 1935 into the Turkish Grand National Assembly, started the campaign for Hatay. He said: "The important topic of the day which is absorbing the whole attention of the Turkish people is the fate of the distict of Alexandratta, Antioch and its dependenires which in fact belong to the purest Turkish element. We are obliged to take to take up this matter seriously and firmly."

He said another speech: "I am not interested in territorial aggrandizement. I am not a habitual peace breaker. I only demand our rights based on treaties. If I do not obtain these I cannot rest in peace, I promise my nation: I will get Hatay." This time his fatal sickness had begun.

But the Constitution and the Convention were not easily applied Hatay was put under surveillance of the League of Nations and this surveillance was going to be administred by a French representative. The situation grew tense because French representative prevented the application of the Constitution and of the Convention. French colony officials tried to our popular manifestations in favour of independence, there were clashes between people and the police. French tried to foment the minorities against Turks in Hatay. Turkish public opinion became strongly anti-french. French-Turkish relations deteriorated. Constitution would be put into force on November 29, 1937 for this general elections were necessary but under these conditions the general elections were not held, Turkey and France had separate and opposite views on the election system. League of Nations taking into considerations Turkish objections commissioned a committee to prepare an election regulation. Elections would be held until July 15. From the beginning of May, 1938 the lists of voters were prepared, but the French Officials attitude caused new clashes. Turkey sent 30.000 troops to Hatay border. France realizing that a war was imminent and the European situation worst changed her attitude and appointed a Turkish Governor instead of French governor. Germany's annexation of Austria in March 1938 surely influenced French attitude.

On June 13, Turkish and French military delegations met at Antakya and on July 3, 1938 a Convention was concluded to respect territorial intignity and political status of Hatay by two Powers. A force of 6000 men would be put on foot to for the security of Hatay, 1000 men from Hatay and 2500 men each from Turkey and France.

On July 4, 1938 A treaty of friendship was signed an Ankara between Turkey and France. High Contracting Parties were not going to help agressor to other High Contracting Party, were not goving to join any political and economic agreement against one of them.

Election were held in August and Turks won 22 of 40 Seats. But 40 deputies took eath of Office in Turkish while the 18 minorities deputy edult take it in arabic. Sancak Assembly met just time on September 2, 1938 and called the new State Republic of Hatay.

Atatürk saw this and was happy. Later after his death the Parliament of Hatay adopted Turkish civil and penalcodes. Hatay people wanted to join Turkey but there was Quaranty Conventions of May 29, 1937 under which Turkey and France were conquarartors and France was not willing to give in. Situation in Europe grew worts and first steps of Turkish-British alliance were taken France accepted by an agrement of June 23, 1939 annexation of Hatay by Turkey.

Hatay Parliament of June 29, 1939 in his last session unanimously decided to join Turkey.