

**PORTRAIT OF A SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE  
TURKISH MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS:  
NUMAN MENEMENCIOĞLU**

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**Introduction**

Very little has been done, as yet, to bring to light the distinguished professional service career of Numan Menemencioğlu. There has not been hitherto a single scholarly monograph, or even an article in the periodical literature on the personality and life of this eminent Turkish diplomat. Neither Turk nor foreigner has devoted more than a few paragraphs on the subject under review here. The following pages are intended as a modest contribution to filling this gap in our knowledge of Menemencioğlu at one important stage in Turkish history. They do not pretend to present a full picture of the conditions of the period and the workings of the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. But they will, I hope, shed some light on the character and qualities of at least one actor who played a crucial role in the actual daily conduct of the Turkish diplomacy in the 1930s and most of the Second World War years.

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There is no separate biography of Menemencioğlu, but there are very short sketches of his life in various encyclopedias and biographical dictionaries. The story of his diplomatic career as found in Turkish and foreign sources is extremely fragmentary. There are memoirs, in restricted quantities, by Turkish and foreign diplomats and journalists which contain some scattered material on Menemencioğlu's attitudes and accomplishments.

The political and intellectual portrait of Menemencioğlu is not only drawn from official documentation, but the information is also cross-referenced with several different sources - Turkish or otherwise. The present paper is mainly focused on this outstanding figure's activities as the Secretary-General of the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and his distinctive characteristics.

### **Family and Educational Background**

Menemencioğlu was born in Baghdad, then part of the Ottoman Empire, in 1893 during the tenure of office of his father, Menemenlizade Mehmet Rifat Bey, as the chief financial officer of that province. Rifat Pasha - as Menemencioğlu's father was later called - ,after a successful and unbroken government service of many years, was appointed Minister of Finance and President of the Assembly of Notables during the period of Second Constitutionalism (1908-1918). As is the case with most of his contemporaries, Menemencioğlu's exact date of birth is not known. His father and his mother - Feride Hanım who was a liberally-raised Turkish lady - had named him Hüseyin Kemal Numan. He was the second son of a family of four children. At Menemencioğlu's death notices published in the Turkish newspapers of 16 February 1958, the names of his elder brother and two younger sisters were mentioned as follows: Muvaffak Menemencioğlu, Beraet Savut and Nahide Büktaş. Both of his parents were descendants of renown families who could trace their genealogy way back in history. <sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Archives of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey, Curriculum Vitae of Numan Menemencioğlu: Member of Parliament for İstanbul, Personal File no.998. (Henceforth referred to as "C.V.N.M.") See also *Cumhuriyet*, 16 February 1958.

On the paternal side he came from the famous family of Menemencioğulları of southern Anatolia. The patriarch in 1865, Hacı Ahmet Bey, has left a story of his family which traces its hegemony over the tribe of the same name back as far as 1660. At some point, probably in the eighteenth century, the tribe migrated from İç-il to Çukurova and the family established itself in Karaisalı.<sup>2</sup> The lands assigned to the Menemencioğulları by the Ottoman monarch provided considerable income to the members of the family. Menemencioğulları were regarded as part of the ruling class - of the Ottoman establishment - who acquired education, governmental experience, and social and political connections in İstanbul and other leading cities which would have been unavailable to them in the provinces.<sup>3</sup>

On the maternal side Menemencioğlu was the grandson of a well-known figure in the nineteenth century Ottoman Empire, the poet, playwright, and journalist Namık Kemal, one of the foremost Turkish intellectuals of the time and one of the leaders of the Young Ottoman Movement.<sup>4</sup> Consciously or unconsciously, he combined many of the various traditional traits he had inherited from his forefathers: love for liberty and fatherland, an interest in law and public administration and a veneration for science and rational knowledge. He also developed an intense historical consciousness that may or may not have been obvious result of his own family's long historical background. His maternal lineage, in particular, evidently had a strong influence on him because he was later to be intensely proud of having advanced from such a family background.<sup>5</sup>

Menemencioğlu got his elementary and intermediate education in the Terakki and Burhanı Terakki schools in Salonica and İstanbul where the

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2 Faruk Sümer, Oğuzlar (Oghuzs), Ankara, 1967, p.194. For details on the origins of the Menemencioğulları family see Andrew Gould, "Lords or Bandits The Derebeys of Cilicia", *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 7, 1976, p.496.

3 Gould (1976), p.500.

4 1967 Yearbook of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey, Ankara, 1968 (Henceforth referred to as "1967 Yearbook"), p. 153.

5 See Nimet Arzik, Bitmeyen Kavga: İsmet İnönü (Unending Quarrel: İsmet İnönü), Ankara, 1966, p.69. Also Abidin Daver, "Yeni Hariciye Vekilimiz" (Our New Minister of Foreign Affairs), *İkdam*, 15 August 1942.

instruction was mostly in French, thus receiving an early exposure to the French language. By reason of his ambitious, competitive and assertive nature, he was remarkable and brilliant among his classmates.<sup>6</sup> He was later trained in the prestigious Saint Joseph French high school run by Jesuits in İstanbul and at the Faculty of Law in the University of Lausanne in Switzerland.<sup>7</sup>

### Early Career

Menemencioğlu entered the foreign service in 1914 as the Third Secretary at the Embassy of Vienna, then served as the Second Secretary at the Embassy of Berne in 1916-1923 (with an interval between 1920 and 1922) and as the First Secretary at the Bucharest Legation in 1923-1926<sup>8</sup>. From the start he impressed people with his wide and precise wisdom which extended over the fields of diplomacy and law with his shrewd and sound judgement of men and events - judgement which was uniformly and exceptionally free of fanciful illusions. He advanced quickly in the career as a result of his intelligence and ability. He was extremely industrious, learned and honest and soon gained the trust of his superiors.<sup>9</sup>

He became Chargé d'Affaires at the Budapest Legation in 1926-1927 and Consul-General at Beirut in 1927-1928. In 1928 he returned to Ankara and assumed the post of Directorate-General of the Political Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.<sup>10</sup> Menemencioğlu not long after rose to prominence and his unusual brilliance quickly won the attention and appreciation of Prime Minister İsmet İnönü and President Kemal Atatürk. He was a very eloquent and fluent speaker and of energetic and resolute temper. He was the brightest star in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs firmament. It was clear that he was bound to play a major role in the future.<sup>11</sup>

6 Ibid. 1967 Yearbook, p.154. It is to be noted that learning French in childhood had become a fashionable practice among the upper and upper-middle class Ottomans by the late nineteenth century.

7 C.V.N.M.

8 Ibid.

9 See Falih Rıfık Atay, "Yeni Hariciye Vekilimiz" (Our New Minister of Foreign Affairs), Ulus, 14 August 1942.

10 C.V.N.M.

11 Hakkı Ocakoglu, "Numan Menemencioğlu", Yeni Asır, 15 August 1942.

### Office of the Secretary-General

In 1929 Menemencioğlu was appointed the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs with the rank of Minister Plenipotentiary and Extraordinary, following Enis Aygen and later in 1933 the Secretary-General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with the rank of Ambassador. Known as Menemenlizade Numan till 1934 when the law relating to surnames was passed, whereupon he officially adopted the surname Menemencioğlu. However, he was continued to be called affectionately by his friends and colleagues as Numan Bey. He was elected a member to the Grand National Assembly of Turkey from Gaziantep on 5 April 1937 and acted as the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs until 1 December 1937. Following the abolition of the Parliamentary Under-Secretaryships he was appointed for the second time the Secretary-General on 2 December 1937 and functioned under this title until 9 August 1942.<sup>12</sup>

As the deputy to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Menemencioğlu filled his office ably between the years of 1929 and 1942. He enjoyed the complete confidence of his minister. He was an invaluable assistant to his minister through his clear-sightedness and his deep grasp of international affairs. He was a man of discretion and of unwavering determination. He also had supple enough mind and above all knew that of Atatürk. His conversation was interesting, his ideas stimulating and his influence with İnönü, who was Prime Minister for fourteen years under Atatürk, very important. He had an excellent sense of timing. For over thirteen consecutive years he had been in charge of the permanent staff of the ministry, a faithful servant to his country and a devoted supporter of the cause of peace. Being a professional diplomat of exceptional competence, he had strong views and broad perspective.<sup>13</sup> Therefore it was no wonder that the German ambassador at Ankara in 1939-1944, Franz von Papen, in his memoirs

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12 C.V.N.M.

13 Oğuz Gökmen, *Bir Zamanlar Hariciye: Eski Bir Diplomatın Hatıraları I* (Once Upon a Time Ministry of Foreign Affairs: Recollections of a Former Diplomat I), İstanbul, 1999, in particular pp.57,127, 130 and 150. Also Semih Günver, *Bir Kiraz Ağacı Olsaydım* (If I were a Cherry Tree), Ankara, 1986, p.94. Moreover, see Philip Graves, "The Question of Alexandretta", *The Nineteenth Century*, vol. CXXIV (August 1938), p.166.

commented on Menemencioğlu's Secretary-Generalship in the following words: "I soon learnt to appreciate also the worth of the Permanent Secretary at the Foreign Office, Numan Menemencioğlu, an immensely capable official, who rendered great service to his country. He had a truly remarkable feeling for the nuances of diplomatic activity and had firm opinions on European political questions. He liked plain speaking and his word was his bond."<sup>14</sup>

Menemencioğlu was indeed a true statesman with a most illustrious record of service for Turkey. He had been involved in all of the most important Turkish diplomatic episodes of the 1930s, including the Montreux Straits Conference on 22 June - 20 July 1936 and the negotiations with the French over the question of the district of Hatay at Ankara, Paris and Geneva between 1936 and 1939.<sup>15</sup>

In international circles Menemencioğlu was popular on account of his bright intellect and conciliatory skill. He was an able figure in the halls of the League of Nations in Geneva and thanks to his energetic efforts Turkey had a fine performance as a member of the world organisation. In Geneva his charm, his drive, his attention to detail, and his intelligence had commended him to all who met him. He worked closely with the diplomats of both East and West in addressing a familiar range of challenges to international peace and security. Menemencioğlu could inspire League attenders and League watchers with passionate speeches for peace and the principle of collective security against all aggression. He was persuasive and convincing and displayed ability that earned him a reputation far outside Turkey.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Franz von Papen, *Memoirs*, London, 1952, p.449.

<sup>15</sup> For an evaluation of Menemencioğlu's role in the Montreux Conference see, for example, Abtilahat Akşin, *Atatürk'ün Dış Politika İlkeleri ve Diplomasisi* (Foreign Policy Principles and Diplomacy of Atatürk), Ankara, 1991, p. 294 and Aşım Us, *Aşım Us'un Hatıra Notları:1930-1950* (Recollection Notes of Aşım Us: 1930-1950), İstanbul, 1966, pp.124-125. Detailed accounts of Menemencioğlu's endeavours in defence of the Turkish cause during the dispute of Hatay can be found in Tayfur Sökmen, *Hatay'ın Kurtuluşu için Harcanan Çabalar* (Efforts Exerted for the Liberation of Hatay), Ankara, 1992, pp. 94,96, 98-99 and 102-103 and Abdurrahman Melek, *Hatay Nasıl Kurtuldu* (How Hatay was Liberated), Ankara, 1966, pp.36,38-39 and 50.

<sup>16</sup> Hüseyin Cahit Yalçın, "Yeni Hariciye Vekilimiz" (Our New Minister of Foreign Affairs), *Yeni Sabah*, 15 August 1942. See also René Massigli, *La Turquie devant la Guerre: Mission à Ankara 1939-1940*, Paris, 1964, p. 77.

Menemencioğlu was essentially a realist in international politics. Sentiment or sympathy was not a valid criterion where his judgements were concerned. He based his decisions on frank calculations of enlightened self-interest and he generally assumed that others would follow the same principle. The Secretary-General did not conduct foreign policy from any predetermined ideological and geopolitical theories, but according to the dictates of geography and the needs of the time.<sup>17</sup>

Menemencioğlu had lived through the Young Turk Revolution, the First World War, the Turkish War of Liberation and the founding of the Turkish Republic. The circumstances and events of these years obviously conditioned the thinking of him. Three lessons he had learnt in this long and testing period: the strength that a determined and decided man has over one who is not; the folly of an uncalculated, hotheaded challenge to a European power; and the overriding importance of controlled and disciplined judgement. He had experienced the hardship and humiliations of the years between 1914 and 1918. Therefore, when the Second World War broke out, his foremost consideration was: how could Turkey find a way to stay out?

Turkish foreign policy in the 1930s was mainly formulated and implemented by three persons - Atatürk, Minister of Foreign Affairs Tevfik Rüştü Aras and Menemencioğlu. Subordinate to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, but nearly equal to him in the daily conduct of diplomacy was Menemencioğlu, the importance of whose influence in the making of Turkish policy has been largely ignored by Turkish and non-Turkish scholars. Although he had a decisive impact on the decision-making process and was an author of Turkish policy, little has been devoted to his position of power. The hallmark of Turkish leadership's policy at the period was realism and restraint; in this it was guided by Menemencioğlu, the spirit and driving force behind the Turkish diplomacy. The hard sequence of events had shown that Menemencioğlu's vision was clear, his judgement discerning,

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

and that he seldom made mistakes. Little wonder then that his counsel was eagerly sought and gladly followed.

Menemencioğlu maintained his ascendancy during Şükrü Saracoğlu's term as the Minister of Foreign Affairs in 1938-1942. What he was given to do, he did well, intelligently, and with success. For Menemencioğlu the language and pomp of diplomacy were parts of a role to be played when that was required. His private means, adroitness and eminence enabled him to be a particularly independent diplomat. Even while Saracoğlu was the minister, Menemencioğlu was really the brain providing the ideas at the ministry.<sup>18</sup> Not surprisingly, Britain's ambassador to Turkey between the years of 1939 and 1944, Sir Hugh Knatchbull-Hugessen, confided to his diary that Menemencioğlu was more versed in foreign affairs than his minister Saracoğlu who was a new comer to the field. Knatchbull-Hugessen observed that Menemencioğlu was closer to the traditional idea of a diplomat.<sup>19</sup> The Germans also had the impression that the Secretary-General was the moving force behind the scenes. Von Papen reported to his minister in Berlin, Joachim von Ribbentrop, on 28 March 1941 that Menemencioğlu took a much more realistic attitude than Saracoğlu.<sup>20</sup> In a later telegramme he stated that Menemencioğlu always saw the political realities much more clearly than Saracoğlu.<sup>21</sup>

Deeply imbued with French culture Menemencioğlu was equally on good terms with British and German diplomats. He was the ablest brain in the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and despite perpetual ill-health, its most tireless worker and most impressive craftsman.<sup>22</sup> He also possessed a reputation by common consent as a forceful negotiator. The Secretary-General was in charge of and conducted most high-level economic and commercial negotiations. To the Turk and the foreigner alike he was an as-

18 Ibid. Also Gökmen (1999), pp. 131-132 and Günver (1986), pp. 91-92.

19 Sir Hugh Knatchbull-Hugessen, *Diary:1939-1940*, Entry of 9 May 1939. In the keeping of Churchill College, Cambridge.

20 Documents on German Foreign Policy, ser. D, vol.12, no.231, Papen (Ankara) to Foreign Ministry, 28 March 1941.

21 Ibid., no.295, Papen (Ankara) to Foreign Ministry, 29 April 1941.

22 Massigli(1964), p.77.



tute bargainer. As William Norton Medlicott, one of Britain's most distinguished and highly-respected modern international historians, suggests, tough bargaining was to Menemencioğlu the sign of highest patriotism.<sup>23</sup> To illustrate his point the British scholar states that during the talks between Menemencioğlu and Lord Halifax, the British Foreign Secretary, in November 1939 at London the former was to prove "a resourceful and at times an exasperating negotiator."<sup>24</sup>

According to the French ambassador at Ankara between the years of 1939 and 1940, René Massigli, Menemencioğlu had the reputation of being a Germanophile, especially in Berlin.<sup>25</sup> The noted German historian Gerhard Weinberg also points out that Menemencioğlu was believed in Berlin to be a leader of the pro-German party in the Turkish government.<sup>26</sup> But those who gave him this reputation grossly mistook him. He was, above all, a Turk and as such entirely ready to be completely realistic and pragmatic in taking care of what he considered to be his country's vital interests.<sup>27</sup>

The omnipotent Secretary-General kept a tight control on the workings of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Menemencioğlu ruled officials with an iron hand. He was able to maintain a closer surveillance over the permanent staff than his immediate predecessors. He was aided in this by the excellent relations he enjoyed with his ministers Aras and Saracoğlu, as well as by a reform of the ministerial set-up in 1930.<sup>28</sup>

During the 1930s the Ministry of Foreign Affairs evolved from an administrative body into an institution whose members could substantially voice their opinions and contribute to political decisions, but the Secretary-General consistently retained ultimate authority. The men who staffed the

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23 William Norton Medlicott, *Economic Blockade*, vol.1, London,1952, p.269.

24 Ibid., p.274

25 Massigli (1964), p.77.

26 Gerhard Weinberg, *The Foreign Policy of Hitler's Germany: 1937-1939*, Chicago,1980,p.241.

27 Donald Cameron Watt, *How War Came*, London, 1989,p.274.

28 Gökmen (1999)p.163. See also Kemal Girgin, *Osmanlı ve Cumhuriyet Dönemleri Hariciye Tarihimiz: Teşkilat ve Protokol* (Our History of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs at the Ottoman and Republican Periods: Organisation and Protocol), Ankara, 1994, pp.130-131.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs had a highly developed sense of their own importance, which was derived not only from their consciousness of duty but from an awareness of the Turkish nation's long history as a great power. Individuals such as Cevat Açıkalın and Feridun Cemal Erkin graced the foreign service during this period. They were all men of rare talent, whose astuteness and energy enabled them to acquire exceptional stature and at times, to behave in a remarkably particular way.<sup>29</sup>

Being a first-rate career diplomat Menemencioğlu moulded the organisation of the ministry and improved the calibre of its officials. Under his management two new Ministerial Organisation Laws were adopted, one in 1933 and the other in 1939.<sup>30</sup> Intent upon training the young officers for their work in the ministry, the Secretary-General would regularly hold seminars at his home or office during which he would examine them on their reactions to various problems or situations. He was the moving force in raising the standards of the foreign service. Menemencioğlu had become an institution within an institution. In the opinion of the prominent American political scientist Edward Weisband, a specialist on Turkish foreign affairs, Menemencioğlu played a more significant role and deserves greater credit than Aras for the growth of a well-trained diplomatic personnel in Turkey during the 1930s.<sup>31</sup>

### **Post of the Minister of Foreign Affairs**

On 10 August 1942 Menemencioğlu was elected deputy from Istanbul and after two days replaced Saracoğlu as Minister of Foreign Affairs in which capacity he served until 15 June 1944.<sup>32</sup> He was the first career diplomat in the Turkish Republic to be appointed as the Minister of Foreign

29 See Cevat Açıkalın'ın Anıları (Recollections of Cevat Açıkalın), *Bellekten*, vol.LVI, no.217, December 1992, pp. 985-1078. Also Feridun Cemal Erkin, *Dışişlerinde 34 Yıl. Anılar -Yorumlar* (34 Years in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Recollections -Comments), vol. I, Ankara, 1980, passim.

30 Girgin (1994), p.132.

31 Edward Weisband, *Turkish Foreign Policy: 1943-1945. Small State Diplomacy and Great Power Politics*, Princeton, 1973, p.49 and fn.41. See also Semih Günver, *Fatın Rüşti Zorlu'nun Öyküsü* (Story of Fatın Rüşti Zorlu), Ankara, 1985, p.25.

32 C.V.N.M.

Affairs. Even when he was the Secretary-General his words and his name were mentioned more often than the best ministers and it is remarked that still then he addressed members of the Cabinet in peremptory fashion.<sup>33</sup> As Secretary-General he was, so to speak, chief of staff to Saracoğlu, and the fact that the two men had worked hand in hand for so many years was an indication that there would be no change in the country's foreign policy. He writes of his appointment as Minister of Foreign Affairs, "I did not have to do an apprenticeship for this position; for thirteen years I had found myself at the head of the services of the ministry and on account of this in the midst of directing the foreign policy of Turkey. My responsibility had now simply taken a different form."<sup>34</sup>

Menemencioğlu maintained throughout his professional career a strong interest in international law and its practices. He believed that peace was the normal state of relations between nations, and that that peace depended upon the observance by those nations of a number of rules and conventions of international behaviour, of which keeping one's word, and respect for the rights and interests of other nations were the most important. Jurist by training, diplomat by instinct and profession, he was respectful of law. For the support of his claims, he frequently referred to international law and to its main source, i.e. international agreements and treaties.

Menemencioğlu scrupulously adhered to Turkey's international obligations. In a truly statesmanlike manner, he stood by Turkey's agreements and treaties with other governments. The master of Turkish diplomacy sincerely believed that international law must be observed. Therefore an emphasis on legality and legitimacy is often seen in his dealings with the foreign powers. To give an example, when during the Adana Conference of

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33 Arzyk (1966) p.66.

34 Numan Menemencioğlu's Memoirs, *Les Détroits vus de la Méditerranée: aperçus, études, souvenirs*, p. 267. This unpublished manuscript is in the private keeping of the inheritors of Nermin Streater, the niece of Menemencioğlu. The manuscript, written in French while Menemencioğlu was serving as Turkish ambassador in Paris, covers his experiences and outlines his thoughts during the time he was Minister of Foreign Affairs as well as the period immediately before and after this. Menemencioğlu's memoirs is packed with observations, insights and hypotheses drafted with precision and logic but presented in clear and memorable prose.

30 January 1943 the British Prime Minister Winston Churchill insisted on the granting of bases to Britain in the Turkish Straits region, Menemencioğlu vigorously opposed this, basing his argument on the fact that such a grant would contravene the regulations for the Straits set down at the Montreux Convention of 20 July 1936. The convention stipulated that in times of war, Turkey being neutral, no foreign power would be granted military facilities in the zone of the Straits. Menemencioğlu also rigorously resisted the infiltration of British military personnel into Turkey in the guise of tourists and civilian technical advisers.<sup>35</sup>

Menemencioğlu was President İnönü's key man in foreign affairs and till the end of his ministership, they usually met each other four or five times a week. İnönü respected Menemencioğlu's judgement and his ability to negotiate adroitly. The latter knew his art, was quick and could react shrewdly to situations as they developed. He had the fame of being what in the political life of the Turkish Republic passed for a "strong man". He was solid. He was massively calm and possessed the virtues of honesty, honour and steadfastness under pressure.<sup>36</sup> Upon Menemencioğlu's removal from the post of Minister of Foreign Affairs the Counsellor at the British Embassy in Ankara, G.L. Mc Dermott, wrote: "Menemencioğlu has for years been a sort of central authority or unofficial adviser not only for foreign but also for various home affairs, finance, etc. He was, however, never in with the Party, and I don't think his style would ever be likely to please them much. Still, he will be hard at work behind the scenes."<sup>37</sup>

### Personality Traits

The effect of his educational experience, especially that portion which took place in Switzerland, was to produce a new set of values and accepted

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., pp. 272 and 284.

<sup>36</sup> Nadir Nadi, "Başvekilin Tekrartadığı Hakikat" (The Truth Repeated by the Prime Minister), *Cumhuriyet*, 17 June 1944. Ömer Sami Coşar, "Türk Hariciyesinin Kaybı: Dışişleri Bakanlığında Numan Menemencioğlu" (The Loss of the Turkish Foreign Service: Numan Menemencioğlu in the Post of the Minister of Foreign Affairs), *Cumhuriyet*, 17 February 1958.

<sup>37</sup> Foreign Office Papers, Public Record Office, London. 371/R 10541/789/44. Memorandum by McDermott, on Knatchbull-Hugessen (Ankara) to Eden, 20 June 1944.

patterns of action for Menemencioğlu. He saw value in organisation for particular ends, in efficiency of operation and economy of effort, and he believed in the efficient use of time instead of the traditional disinterest in its ordered use prevalent in some countries. He was at home in Europe; he had a sound knowledge of French and spoke German also. He enjoyed fine dining and entertainment.<sup>38</sup>

Menemencioğlu had an intense craving for knowledge and read constantly as well as widely. His sharp and acute intelligence could be readily engaged in the correction of evasive and illogical thinking of any kind.<sup>39</sup> Weisband, quoting Zeki Kuneralp - one of the most competent Secretary-Generals of the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs - writes that Menemencioğlu was more an intellectual than a politician, more adept at manipulating ideas than people, he deeply enjoyed the study and practice of foreign policy.<sup>40</sup> Remarkably Massigli mentions that Menemencioğlu was endowed with one of the most subtle and penetrating political intelligence that he had ever met; appreciating things and men with pitiless lucidity, he was the kingpin of the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs with undisputed authority, the wisdom that the chief of state and the ministers consulted under any circumstances and from whom they received opinion formed in complete independence. The French diplomat indicates that he knew only very few cases where Menemencioğlu's counsels were not paid attention. Massigli recognised him as a negotiator with wide experience of all the skills of the profession and as an able carver of diplomatic formulas. There was always an intellectual pleasure of rare quality during a compact conversation with Menemencioğlu; pliancy of language, delicacy of analysis, ingenuity of hypothesis and subtlety of juridical argumentation, contributed equally to enrich his statements. Towering above all these qualities, he possessed a vast political culture and a perfect urbanity. Massigli believed, reasonably enough, that in another century Menemencioğlu could

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38 Arzyk (1966), p.67. See also Franz Weber, *The Evasive Neutral: Germany, Britain and the Quest for a Turkish Alliance in the Second World War*, Missouri: St. Louis, 1979, p.24.

39 Erkin(1980), p.179.

40 Weisband (1973) , p. 47 and fn.39.

have ranked among grand viziers who had illustrated the history of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>41</sup>

A usually witty and suave man, outgoing and enthusiastic, Menemencioğlu was an engaging sort of person to whom people took an immediate liking. His finesse, his sense of humour, his ironical approach to the problems of his job, his underlying sensibility, went down excellently with his colleagues both Turkish and foreigner. Accordingly Knatchbull-Hugessen notes that the fact that they had not always seen eye to eye on all matters did nothing to lessen his respect for Menemencioğlu's outstanding gifts and his admiration for the latter's devoted services to Turkey. Knatchbull-Hugessen had always found in him a warm personal friend and he considered him to be one of the cleverest men he had ever met. In the opinion of the British ambassador, the combination of an unusually active mind, keen intellect and abnormally retentive memory with an upbringing in the tense diplomatic atmosphere of Turkey in the days of the Sublime Porte, the revolution and the wars of the early years of the century could not fail to produce something exceptional. The British diplomat further held that he had never encountered anyone with a mind better mobilised for instant action in any circumstances. Admiration for him was increased by the knowledge of his physical infirmities. Knatchbull-Hugessen recalls that he had on more than one occasion had to have long and difficult discussion with him when he was clearly in continual pain which could have been little short of agony. But it never affected his power of dealing with the subject in hand. Business with him was short and direct. His grasp of a subject was quick as lightning. No time was wasted and there was seldom danger of misunderstanding.<sup>42</sup>

Menemencioğlu's personality and character had a substantial impact on many people. Of all his many marvelous characteristics his most outstanding were his generosity and kindness. He gave freely his time and

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41 Massigli (1964), pp.77-78.

42 Erkin (1980), p. 133. And Hugh Knatchbull-Hugessen, *Diplomat in Peace and War*, London, 1949, p.201.

energy, especially in helping younger diplomats at the beginning of their careers. His careful politeness helped to deter or decrease many diplomatic arguments and quarrels. Menemencioğlu was an inspiration and model for young Turkish diplomats.<sup>43</sup>

### **Conclusion**

Menemencioğlu was at his time the central and dominant figure in the Turkish foreign service. Indeed, it can be said that as years went by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs became the centre of his life. He had the ministry under his absolute control and he directly influenced policy by his clear position and unwavering attitude. His skill as a negotiator was unique. Menemencioğlu's career as a diplomat spans forty-two years from the beginning of the First World War to 1956. During the last twelve years of his professional life he represented Turkey as Ambassador to France. He retired from the government service at his own request on 30 November 1956 and was elected deputy from İstanbul in 1957.

On 15 February 1958, Menemencioğlu died of heart failure and respiratory ailment at his home in Ankara, finally succumbing to an illness which had plagued him for many years. Menemencioğlu was 65 and had been suffering from bone tuberculosis against which he fought a long and tenacious battle. The passing away of this diplomat of rare quality was reported on the front pages of all the Turkish newspapers on 16 February 1958 together with obituaries and photographs of the deceased. His death news also appeared widely in the world press. His professional activities had brought him international fame and he had become the best-known Turkish diplomat outside Turkey at the period. Various world statesmen and diplomats, as well as foreign and Turkish observers of modern Turkey acclaimed Menemencioğlu. Upon his death, the plaudits were no less impressive than those that had been offered when he became Minister of Foreign Affairs.

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43 Gökmen(1999), p.163. Günver (1985),p.25.

The solemnity and pomp of his funeral procession were in tune with the public attention generated by the news of his death. His coffin, covered with Turkish flag, was borne on gun carriage escorted by a squadron of troops and a military band, and followed by mourners, prominent politicians - including the former President İnönü-, high-level civilian and military officials, members of the foreign diplomatic corps and a large crowd. He was laid to rest in the Cebeci graveyard in Ankara. Messages of condolence poured in from the highest state dignitaries, from the President to the Parliamentary Speaker, and from outstanding political and public figures. Turkish press devoted considerable space to describing the internationally renowned diplomat whom they, almost to a man, declared one of the greatest Turkish ambassadors of the twentieth century.

He was awarded with the Grand Cross of the Legion of Honour of France and received the great orders of the German, Swedish, Romanian, Yugoslav, Bulgarian, Greek and Egyptian governments.

His friends were many and they cherished his loyalty, dependability, good humour and that cheerful determination which stood him in good stead during his long-lasting illness. In his personal life he bore stoically a number of unhappinesses and the tragic loss by very early death in sad circumstances of his Swiss-born wife. He was a man fascinated by diplomacy and law and one who loved reading, reflection and negotiation. He was greatly missed by all those many people who were drawn to these enthusiasms by their contact with him.



PORTRAIT OF A SECRETARY - GENERAL OF THE  
TURKISH MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS:

853

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TERGÜMEİHAL (Kısaca)

1914'de Viyana Beferehi için  
Kâtipliği ile Hariciye'ye intisap etmiş  
ve sırasıyla Bern, Paris, Bükreş,  
Atina; Eleilikleri Kâtipliklerinde ve  
~~Budapeşte Maslahatçılığı~~ için de  
bulunmuş, Beirut Başkonsolosluğundan  
Diyariye Birinci Daire Müdürü Umumi-  
misi olarak merkeze naklolunmuş,  
1 sene sonra Hariciye Müsteğarlığına  
tayin edilmiş ve bu müteakkip  
Büyük Elçi derecesiyle Hariciye  
Kâtiibi Umumiliğini yaptıktan  
sonra Bazi'Antep'ölen mebus ekması  
ve Hariciye Nispeti Müsteğarlığına  
getirilmiştir ve bu makemin için  
üzerine tekrar Hariciye Kâtiibi  
Umumisi olmuş, 1942'de  
İstanbul mebusluğuna seçilerek

Sarıoğlu Kabinesine Hariciye  
Vekili olarak girmiş, 1944'de  
bu vazifeden istifa etmiş aynı  
sene'de Paris Büyük Elçiliği  
ne tayin olunarak 1956 sene  
sinde emekliliğini talep etmiş  
ve 1957 Ekimin'de İstanbul  
mebusu seçilmiştir.

Muhammed Güçlü

## ÖZET

Numan Menemencioğlu (1893-1958) T.C. Dışişleri Bakanlığının iç ve dış teşkilatında 1914 ila 1956 yılları arasında çeşitli kademelerde başarıyla görev yapmış bir diplomattır. 1929-1942 arasında onüç yıl Dışişleri Bakanlığı Genel Sekreterliği yapmış olup Boğazlar ve Hatay gibi ülkenin millî meselerinin yabancılarla müzakeresinde hayatî roller üstlenmiştir. Menemencioğlu keskin zekası ve uzlaşma maharetinden ötürü uluslararası camiada sevilen bir diplomattı. Bütün meslekî hayatı boyunca usta bir müzakereci olarak tanınmıştır. Ayrıca, Dışişleri Bakanlığı bünyesinde reformlar yapmıştır. Menemencioğlu 1942-1944 yıllarında Dışişleri Bakanlığı yapmış ve bu sırada Genel Sekreterliği dönemindeki mahirane tutum ve davranışlarını sürdürmüştür. Adıgeçen; 1944-1956 yıllarında Paris'te büyükelçi olarak bulunmuş, 1956'da kendi isteğiyle emekli olmuş ve 1957'de milletvekili seçilmiştir:

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Diplomat, Genel Sekreter, Dışişleri Bakanı.

**ABSTRACT**

Numan Menemenciođlu (1893-1958) is a diplomat who had pursued a brilliant career in the Turkish foreign service between 1914 and 1956. Menemenciođlu acted as the Secretary-General of the Turkish Foreign Ministry for thirteen years in 1929-1942 and he assumed vital roles in the negotiation of such national questions as the Straits and Hatay with the foreigners. In international circles he was popular on account of his bright intellect and conciliatory skill and possessed a reputation as an astute bargainer. Menemenciođlu has also acted as Foreign Minister in 1942-1944, represented Turkey as ambassador to France in 1944-1956 and was elected deputy from İstanbul in 1957.

**Key Words:** Diplomat, Secretary-General, Foreign Minister.