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Rebuilding Regional Security in the Balkans on the Brink of World War II: The Example of the Salonika Agreement

İkinci Dünya Savaşı Eşiğinde Balkanlar'da Bölgesel Güvenliğin Yeniden İnşası: Selanik Antlaşması Örneği

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Abstract

1930'lu yılların başından itibaren uluslararası sistemdeki hızlı silahlanma ve Milletler Cemiyeti sistemine duyulan güvensizlik Avrupa'da revizyonizmin hızlı yükselişi Balkanlarda bağımsızlığını yeni kazanmış ülkeler bakımından ciddi güvenlik endişelerini tetiklemiştir. Antlaşmalarla kararlaştırılmış ülkesel sınırlarını korumak için küçük ülkeler arasında dayanışma ve işbirliği çabaları sürerken silahlanma faaliyetleri kısıtlanmış ve ülkelerinin bir kısmı askersizleştirilmiş ülkeler güvenlik risklerini daha belirgin hissetmeye başlamışlardır. Bu bağlamda Balkanlar ve Doğu Akdeniz'de ülkelerin statüko yanlısı ve revizyonist ayrışması içerisinde kendilerine yer bulmaya çalıştığı gözlemlenir. Bu çalışmada Balkanlar ve Doğu Akdeniz'deki revizyonist kamplaşmadan endişe duyan Türkiye ve Yunanistan'ın ülkesel bütünlüklerini koruma ve güvenliklerini sağlamaya yönelik arayışları ele alınacaktır. Bu bağlamda dikkate değer unsur ise her iki ülkenin de statükocu kampta yer almış olmalarıdır. Her ne kadar farklı gerekçelere dayanmış olsa da hem Türkiye hem de Yunanistan rasyonel bir tercih yaparak ülkesel güvenliklerinin korunmasında işbirliği ve dayanışma içerisinde olmaya karar vermişlerdir. İkili ilişkilerde belirgin bir 'yakınlaşma dönemi' olarak işaretlenen bu dönem, Türkiye ve Yunanistan arasında tarihlerindeki düşmanlıkları aşan, benzeri görülmemiş diplomatik ve askeri iş birliğine sahne olmuştur. Bu çalışma Türkiye ve Yunanistan'ın ülkesel güvenliklerini sağlamak için kurguladıkları siyasi stratejilerin ne olduğunu ele alarak 1938 Selanik Anlaşması'nın bu ülkeler ve Balkanlar'ın güvenliği bakımından nasıl bir etki yapmış olduğunu tartışacaktır.

Öz

In the early 1930s, rapid armament within the international system, rising mistrust towards the League of Nations, and the swift spread of revisionism in Europe triggered major security concerns for newly independent Balkan states. While smaller countries sought cooperation to protect treaty-defined borders, those with limited armament or demilitarised zones began to feel increasingly vulnerable. In this context, Balkan and Eastern Mediterranean states aimed to align themselves within the emerging divide between revisionist powers and defenders of the *status quo*. This study examines the efforts of Türkiye and Greece, both alarmed by growing revisionist polarisation in the region, to maintain territorial integrity and ensure national security. Importantly, both nations positioned themselves within the status quo bloc. Although their motivations differed, Türkiye and Greece made a rational decision to pursue cooperation and solidarity in safeguarding their national interests. This period, marked as a unique "rapprochement phase" in bilateral relations, witnessed an exceptional level of diplomatic and military collaboration that transcended historical hostilities. The study will examine the political strategies employed by Türkiye and Greece to achieve national security and assess the impact of the 1938 Salonika Agreement on the stability of both countries and the broader Balkan region.

Keywords Balkans · Regional Security · Interwar Period · Salonika Agreement · Türkiye · Greece

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Anahtar Kelimeler Balkanlar · Bölgesel Güvenlik · İki Savaş Arası Dönem · Selanik Antlaşması · Türkiye · Yunanistan

Introduction

The interwar period exhibits distinct characteristics when viewed from the perspective of Turkish-Greek relations. Although there was a search for a stable order based on collective security organisations and liberal peace principles after World War I, divisions in the international system and the balance of power quickly rendered this interim period unstable. Countries dissatisfied with the heavy sanctions of peace treaties in Europe and the Balkans sought to escape the conditions imposed by these treaties at the earliest opportunity. Specifically, the newly formed nation-states in the Balkans sought new alliances outside the League of Nations regarding territorial integrity and security. This situation was understandable, as many young states at the time lacked the material capacity to protect their sovereignty and territorial integrity. Moreover, the treaty arrangements imposed during the delimitation of their national borders made it difficult for these states to establish stable relations with neighbouring countries. Indeed, from the early 1930s onward, the treaties signed after World War I in Europe and the Balkans began to be violated. This led to escalating competition and conflicts between states satisfied with the status quo and those seeking to change it.

During this period, when the divide between status quo and revisionist powers became prominent in Europe and the Balkans, a notable aspect was that Türkiye and Greece aligned themselves with the status quo. Although there were many disagreements between the two countries following the 1923 Lausanne Peace Treaty, both parties successfully resolved these conflicts peacefully through diplomacy. Issues that were deferred in the Lausanne Treaty, such as the problem of settlements, population exchanges, and the delimitation of the Thrace border, were resolved through diplomatic and political initiatives (sometimes with the assistance of the Permanent Court of International Justice or the League of Nations). This was facilitated not only by the political philosophies of the leaders in both countries but also by the realities of the time. The pragmatic and transparent foreign policy approaches adopted by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and Eleftherios Venizelos combined with their deliberate rejection of revisionist and irredentist policies, created the necessary conditions for establishing peaceful and cooperative bilateral relations between their respective states. Additionally, Bulgaria in the Balkans and Italy in the Mediterranean were perceived as potential "threats" to both countries' territorial integrity and security, prompting Türkiye and Greece to act together against "a common threat/enemy."

After World War I, the invalidation of the treaties that had established the status quo led Türkiye and Greece to strengthen their territorial integrity and security through effective arrangements. While participating in international and regional disarmament treaties, both countries also sought to establish bilateral and multilateral pacts. Türkiye's involvement in Disarmament Conferences, its membership in the League of Nations in 1932, and its support for Balkan Conferences are notable in this context. However, one of the more intriguing aspects of this period is the efforts of regional countries to rearm demilitarised areas within their territories. Specifically, the military, naval, and aerial restrictions established in Part IV of the Treaty of Neuilly (1919), along with the provisions concerning the Thracian border delineated in the subsequent Treaty of Lausanne (1923), were formally abrogated, marking a significance revision of the post-WWI security regime in the Balkans. While border demilitarisation measures were implemented to minimize potential hostilities between neighboring states; they were at times interpreted as reflecting underlying tensions. Demilitarised zones routinely became perceived security gaps in the absence of reciprocal trust mechanisms between neighbors.

In the first half of the 1930s, this situation became a concern for Türkiye. The demilitarisation of both the Thrace border and the Straits region, along with the failure of the League of Nations collective security system, emerged as a critical issue for Türkiye. By overcoming these restrictions on its national sovereignty, Türkiye sought to ensure its security through its own initiatives. Indeed, Türkiye aimed to achieve this goal not by unilaterally violating agreements but through negotiations and diplomatic efforts. By applying the "*rebus sic stantibus*" principle[1], Türkiye concretely demonstrated that states could negotiate changes to their status through bilateral and multilateral treaties.

This study will discuss how the 1938 Salonika Agreement contributed to joint security and cooperation between Türkiye, Greece, and Bulgaria, focusing on the demilitarisation agreements along their shared borders in the Balkans. In other words, what thoughts and justifications did the regional countries offer when seeking to free themselves from the obligation of demilitarisation? Did the re-militarisation of borders ensure peace, security, and stability? This study will seek answers to these questions. The remilitarisation of Thrace under the 1938 Salonika Agreement not only failed to build trust but revealed the inherent tension between the Balkan stability project of Türkiye and Greece and the era's revisionist geopolitics. Despite concerted diplomatic efforts to integrate Bulgaria into the Balkan Pact, Sofia ultimately remained outside the agreement. Paradoxically, Türkiye and Greece's policies in this period -while aimed at regional stability- may have inadvertently facilitated Bulgaria's rearmament by providing it with a perceived security margin.

1. International Structure of the Interwar Era

The interwar period saw fundamental transformations in Europe's political regimes, which precipitated the rapid dissolution of the post-1918 'united Europe' ideal and entrenched a rigid division between victorious and vanquished states. As Michael Cox demonstrates, this crisis of international relations manifested through three interconnected developments: first, the systematic exclusion of revisionist great powers from the diplomatic order; second, the catastrophic collapse of economic multilateralism; and third, the absence of effective hegemonic leadership – a triad of systemic failures that collectively eroded the foundations of global governance.[2] Throughout this turbulent era, power remained the indispensable currency of international politics, with the explicit 'return of power politics' in the 1930s marking the definitive unravelling of the Versailles system's restraining mechanisms.[3] Depending on alliances, this created two main groups: "revisionists" and "status quo" powers.[4] This era primarily fostered politics around the balance of power, yet it relied on partnerships. That is why this period was predominantly viewed as a time of transition.[5]

After World War I, Britain and France emerged as the primary defenders of the status quo as the victorious side of the war. However, France was the more prominent of the two. It sought to establish a robust alliance that would support the post-war settlement.[6] France, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Romania, and Yugoslavia formed an alliance in Eastern Europe. All these pacts laid the foundation for the Little Entente.[7] The primary

[1] *Rebus sic stantibus* is a legal principle stating that a treaty may change or withdraw due to evolving circumstances.

[2] Michael Cox, "Giriş", *Yirmi Yıl Krizi 1919-1939* (İstanbul: İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2010): 46-47.

[3] Edward Hallet Carr, *Yirmi Yıl Krizi 1919-1939* (İstanbul: İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2010): 148.

[4] Oral Sander, *Siyasi Tarih 1918-1994* (Ankara: İmge Kitabevi, 2013): 53.

[5] Faruk Sönmezoğlu, *İki Savaş Sırası ve Arasında Türk Dış Politikası* (İstanbul: Der Yayınları, 2011): 225-226.

[6] Britain did not support this because its primary interests shifted following World War I. France was concerned about Germany and its recovery, while Britain hesitated due to the threat posed by the Soviet Union. Sönmezoğlu, *İki Savaş Sırası ve Arasında Türk Dış Politikası,* 230.

[7] On 14 August 1920, Czechoslovakia formed an alliance against Hungary. Czechoslovakia and Romania signed a treaty on 23 April 1921, followed by an agreement between Yugoslavia and Romania on 7 June. The defensive pacts between France and Poland, made on 19 February 1921, targeted Hungary and Bulgaria. Piotr Wandycz, "The Little Entente: Sixty Years Later", *The Slavonic and East European Review*, 59/4 (1981): 548-564.

reason behind the Little Entente was to limit revisionist powers in Southern Europe.[8] However, it was not just the great powers that were interested in preserving the status quo; minor powers within the regional sub-system also emerged as its defenders.

Türkiye and Greece can be considered small powers during the interwar years. As Payne claims, smallness is related to being open to vulnerabilities.[9] This generally leads small powers to gain strategic significance. However, there is power asymmetry between small and great powers in international relations.[10] Contrary to popular belief,[11] Türkiye could be seen as a small power in the power hierarchy in the 1930s.[12] However, Türkiye has never been a colony and exhibits superior diplomatic skills compared to other minor powers; nevertheless, it did not qualify as an economic power. Türkiye effectively played a geopolitical role independently of major powers while pursuing its diplomatic efforts. On the contrary, Türkiye was assessed as a middle power due to its expansive territory, well-established diplomatic tradition and services, and Ottoman heritage, which provided a significance diplomatic role.[13] Türkiye and Greece upheld a status quo policy in the Balkans during the interwar period.

1.1. Turkish-Greek Joint Efforts for Peace and Stability of Balkans

The interwar years, which brought Türkiye and Greece closer together, shaped international relations through economic nationalism that emerged from the global financial crisis of 1929. Greece faced political turmoil, social and financial issues, demographic challenges, and trauma following its defeat in Asia Minor.[14] Türkiye sought to consolidate the domestic authority of the new nation-state. Turkish-Greek relations had their tensions during the 1920s. For instance, Ankara deported Konstantin Araboğlu, appointed Patriarch of Fener in 1924, because he was included in the population exchange. Türkiye and Greece made two separate agreements after the Lausanne Peace Treaty to solve bilateral problems. The first agreement was signed in Ankara on 21st June 1925, and the second on 1st December 1926.[15] However, it was not possible to overcome them. When Eleftherios Venizelos came to power and declared that Greece "has no interest in Turkish territory", he initiated a new chapter for the foremost political advocate of the Megali Idea. Thus, Greece aimed to develop good bilateral relations with Türkiye. Nevertheless, Turkish foreign policy remained

[8] France strengthened alliances with Poland and Czechoslovakia to counter Germany and Russia. P. Kissoudi, "Balkan Politics: Relations between Greece and the Balkan States in the Inter-war Years and the Role of the Great Powers in the Region", *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 25/13 (2008): 1920-1921.

[9] Anthony Payne, "Small States in the Global Politics of Development", *The Round Table: The Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs*, 376 (2004): 623.

[10] Small powers prefer acting through international organisations due to the restraint of great power efficiency. Additionally, smaller powers have limited involvement in world affairs. Small powers have two kinds of strategies in international relations: "A pacifist renunciation" or "defensive strategy that aims at protecting the status quo". See Gürol Baba and Murat Ünsoy, "Between Capability and Foreign Policy: Comparing Turkey's Small Power and Middle Power Status", *Uluslararası İlişkiler*, 13/51 (2016): 7.

[11] According to Papuççular, middle power status is related to sufficient strategic authority in international relations; therefore, Türkiye can be viewed as a middle power in its first century. Hazal Papuççular, *Cumhuriyetin Dış Politikası: Olaylar, Aktörler, Kurumlar 1923-2003* (İstanbul: İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 2003): 2-3. William Hale posits that Türkiye is a middle power, noting that the late Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic exhibit this status. This indicates they can resist more powerful states' pressures and influence weaker ones. William Hale, *Turkish Foreign Policy Since 1774* (London: Routledge, 2003): 1-2. Baskın Oran defines Türkiye as a middle power state, characterising it as a regional power. He explains that these countries marginalise the international system, yet they can sway regional politics, particularly concerning their smaller neighbours. Such states can withstand pressure from larger nations to some extent, occasionally engaging in bargaining with them. They may even influence some of their behaviours by thoroughly assessing the current conditions. Baskın Oran, *Türk Dış Politikası Cilt 1: 1919-1980* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2004): 30.

[12] Baba and Ünsoy, Between Capability and Foreign Policy, 10.

[13] Dilek Barlas, "Turkish Diplomacy in the Balkans and the Mediterranean. Opportunities and Limits for Middle-Power Activism in the 1930s", *Journal of Contemporary History*, 40/5 (2005): 443.

[14] Rıdvan Akın, *Türkiye'nin Siyasal Gelişmeleri 1923-2018* (İstanbul: Nora Kitap, 2022): 92.

[15] Antonis Klapsis, "Greek Foreign Policy and Rapprochement with Turkey in the 1930s", *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, 34/2 (2023): 209.

fundamentally anchored in the Kemalist principle of "peace at home, peace in the world."[16] The tension between the two countries persisted into the 1930s.

Türkiye's Balkan policy in the 1920s aimed to cultivate friendly relations with regional states, a pragmatic approach necessitated by contemporary geopolitical realities. Türkiye tried to establish diplomatic ties with as many countries as possible, but, unlike its Ottoman past, these relationships were based on equality. The economic depression affected Türkiye and other Balkan countries more than others in 1929.[17] Also, after being denied the protection of the great powers, Greece sought to resolve issues with neighbouring countries without ceding territory to them.[18] Furthermore, Germany, Italy, and other nations that had endured losses from the war sought to alter the status quo established by the Paris Peace Treaties of 1919[19] and pursued a revisionist foreign policy. In contrast, the states that benefited from the war endeavoured to maintain the status quo.

The interwar policies of Türkiye and Greece relied on sustaining peace. This process began earlier for Türkiye. However, following the outbreak of European crises in the 1930s, Türkiye maintained its relations with the Soviet Union -the cornerstone of its foreign policy since the War of Independence- while simultaneously developing cooperation with Balkan states, carefully avoiding any deterioration in either relationship. Nonetheless, Türkiye's turn to various alliances was influenced by Atatürk's policy of relying on its power and then prioritising international and regional partnerships when necessary.[20] That is the main reason why Türkiye aimed to establish cooperation with the Balkan nations. Türkiye and Albania signed treaties in 1923 and established friendly relations between Bulgaria and Yugoslavia in 1925.[21]

Regarding Greece, a dispute arose with Italy over the Dodecanese Islands, particularly after the Italian invasion of Corfu in 1923. Furthermore, relations between Greece and Bulgaria were strained. Following the killing of two Greek military officers, General Pangalos ordered the occupation of Bulgaria, which led to a reprimand by the League of Nations.[22] Nonetheless, Greek negotiations with Yugoslavia yielded more favourable outcomes.[23] Greece signed various pacts with its neighbours after 1928; these included a Treaty of Friendship with Italy in 1928 to keep Yugoslavia at bay and an agreement with Romania. Moreover, the Greco-Italian Treaty of Amity, Reconciliation, and Juridical Settlement was concluded in Rome on 23 September 1928.[24] In 1929, Yugoslavia sought to neutralise the threat of revisionist powers in Bulgaria.[25]

[16] Turkish foreign policy during this period is controversial. Some criticise Türkiye for turning inward, while others view it as a golden age. Kösebalaban argues it was based on isolation and pacifism from 1923 to 1938. Balcı contends Türkiye aimed to transform changing conditions into opportunities. Baskın Oran describes it as a time of relative autonomy. Hasan Kösebalaban, *Türk Dış Politikası,* (İstanbul: BigBang Yayınları, 2014): 120; Ali Balcı, *Türkiye Dış Politikası İlkeler, Aktörler, Uygulamalar* (İstanbul: Etkileşim Yayınları, 2013): 30; Baskın Oran, *Türk Dış Politikası Cilt 1: 1919-1980* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2004): 239.

[17] Dilek Barlas, "Atatürk Döneminde Türkiye'nin Balkan Politikası", *Atatürk Dönemi Türk Dış Politikası*, Yay. Haz. Berna Türkdoğan (Ankara: Atatürk Kültür, Dil, Tarih Yüksek Kurumu Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi, 2000): 277.

[18] John S. Koliopoulos, "Greece and the Balkans: A Historical Perspective", *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, 2/3, (2002): 29.

[19] The Paris Peace Conference occurred on 18 January 1919 with 32 countries. This led to several treaties: the Treaty of Versailles with Germany (28 June 1919), the Treaty of Saint-Germain with Austria (19 September 1919), the Treaty of Neuilly with Bulgaria (27 November 1919), the Treaty of Trianon with Hungary (4 June 1920), and the Treaty of Sèvres with the Ottoman Empire (10 August 1920). Türkiye rejected the Treaty of Sèvres and signed Lausanne Peace Treaty due to its national struggle.

[20] Yusuf Sarınay, "İki Savaş Arası Dönemde Türkiye'nin Balkan Ülkeleri ile Münasebetleri (1919-1939)", *Ondokuz Mayıs Üniversitesi Eğitim Fakültesi Dergisi*, 2/1 (1987): 237.

[21] Barlas, Atatürk Döneminde Türkiye'nin, 275.

[22] Gareth M. Winrow, "The Balkans in International Politics: An Examination of Inter-war Period", *İki Dünya Savaşı Arasında Avrupa ve Balkanlar Sempozyumu* (İstanbul: Aybay Yayınları, 1993): 84.

[23] The agreements ultimately required Yugoslavia to allow the use of a free port in Salonika.

[24] John Kaliopulos and Thanos M. Veramis, *Modern Greece: A History Since 1821* (West Sussex: Wiley and Blackwell, 2010): 102.

[25] Koliopoulos, Greece and the Balkans, 30.

After the Lausanne Peace Treaty and seven years of disagreement, Türkiye and Greece came together for several reasons. According to Haluk Ülman, Turkish policymakers were compelled to reassess their strategic position in response to Bulgarian threats and its nationalist revisionist policies towards neighbouring Greece.[26] According to Soysal, the possibility of an offensive attack by Italy and the suspicion regarding Bulgaria facilitated the closer collaboration between Türkiye and Greece.[27] According to Klapsis, Venizelos distanced himself from the *Megali Idea*, as a territorial threat to Greece was coming from Bulgaria, which could not accept losing Western Thrace.[28] For Klapsis, Balkan and Eastern Mediterranean countries' revisionist tendencies encouraged a new process between Türkiye and Greece. To Coufoudakis, the détente depended on several factors that emerged in 1930. With strong governments and charismatic leaders, both countries benefited from the détente for domestic reconstruction, and the costs of the arms race declined. Détente was essential for common defense needs in the spirit of Locarno and Geneva.[29] According to Alim, the uncertainty of the international system had prompted the Turkish-Greek rapprochement. The Greeks highlighted a Bulgarian threat, while Türkiye took into account Italian revisionism.[30] It seemed as if both countries had mutual interests and enemies.[31] This was because Italy did not hide its interest in Turkish territory.[32] After 1923, Italy militarised the Aegean islands based on Mussolini's "*mare nostrum*" policy. Throughout this period, Italy sought to revive the "glorious days" of the Roman Empire. Thus, the Mediterranean was the most crucial area of this policy. Italy was an "active, aggressive, and revisionist" power. Türkiye viewed Italy as the most significant threat.[33] Ülgül discusses the issue from the perspective of personal diplomacy.[34] According to him, without the personal diplomacy of Atatürk and Venizelos, they would not have been able to reach such peaceful relations between Türkiye and Greece. Both countries had a mutual road map for the Balkans.[35] That's why we can say that domestic factors were the supplementary condition for rapprochement.[36]

The Turkish-Greek rapprochement[37] was closely tied to Italy.[38] The crisis and erosion of peace facilitated the rapprochement between the countries. Türkiye and Greece were part of the status quo, so they united to defend peace and stability in the Balkans. Rapprochement was closely related to uncertainty in the regional subsystem. Both nations prioritized reducing uncertainty in their immediate surroundings rather

[26] A. Haluk Ülman, "Türk Dış Politikasına Yön Veren Etmenler 1923-1968", *Ankara Üniversitesi SBF Dergisi*, 23/3 (1968): 250.

[27] İsmail Soysal, *Türkiye'nin Siyasal Anlaşmaları 1920-1945* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1989): 589.

[28] Antonis Klapsis, "1930'larda Yunan Dış Politikası ve Türkiye ile İlişkiler", *Tarih ve Uluslararası İlişkiler Pespektifinden Türk-Yunan İlişkileri 1821-2021*, ed. Esra Özsüer (İstanbul: Boyut Yayınları, 2022): 70 and also Antonis Klapsis, "Greek Foreign Policy and the Rapprochement with Türkiyein the 1930s", *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 34/2 (2024), 208-220.

[29] Van Coufoudakis, "Greek-Turkish Relations, 1973-1983: The View from Athens", *International Security,* 9, 4 (Spring, 1985): 187.

[30] Eray Alim, "Tarihsel Bir Perspektiften Türk Yunan İlişkileri Üzerine Üçüncü Aktörlerin Etkisi", *İnsan ve Toplum Bilimleri Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 9/3 (2020): 2809.

[31] Dilek Barlas and Andelko Vlasic, "The Balkan Entente in Turkish-Yugoslav Relations (1931-41): The Yugoslav Perspective", *Middle Eastern Studies*, 52/6 (2016): 1016.

[32] Ülman, "Türk Dış Politikasına...", 250.

[33] Italy's control of the Dodecanese islands raised security concerns about a potential attack base for Türkiye in the 1920s. Hazal Papuççular, *Türkiye ve On İki Ada 1912-1947* (İstanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 2020): 43-57.

[34] Murat Ülgül, "Personal Diplomacy and Greek Foreign Policy", *Balkan Araştırma Enstitüsü Dergisi* 13/2 (2023): 572.

[35] Andreas Kotelis, "Preconditions for Successful Rapprochement: A Comparative Analysis of the Greek-Turkish Rapprochement Process", *Unpublished PhD Thesis* (Ankara: İhsan Doğramacı Bilkent University, 2013): 82.

[36] Kotelis, "Preconditions for Successful Rapprochement", 78.

[37] Spyros Katsoulas, *The United States and Greek-Turkish Relations: Guardian's Dilemma* (London: Routledge, 2022), 42 and Şükrü Sina Gürel, *Tarihsel Boyutları İçinde Türk-Yunan İlişkileri 1821-1993* (Ankara; İmge Yayınevi, 2018): 64.

[38] Italian-Turkish relations were characterised by 'warmth' from 1928 to 1932 rather than the 'cooling off' and 'frost' between 1932 and 1936. Dilek Barlas, "Friends or Foes? Diplomatic Relations between Italy and Türkiye1923-36", *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 36/2 (2004): 232. Italy aimed to leverage its influence in Southeastern Europe, which was dependent on the Turkish-Greek rapprochement. P. Kissoudi, "Balkan Politics: Relations between Greece and the Balkan States in the Inter-war Years and the Role of the Great Powers in the Region", *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 25/13 (2008): 1714.

than addressing the ambiguity of the global landscape. This supports the argument that Türkiye and Greece could unite if they shared a common interest. While the structure of the international system was significant during the interwar years, what brought Türkiye and Greece together was the effort to prevent small states in the Balkans from being manipulated by the great powers. Venizelos composed a letter to Turkish Prime Minister İsmet İnönü in August 1928 and declared:

> At the moment that Greek people trusted me, by giving me a strong majority for the next four years, I would like to inform you that my only desire is to contribute to the settlement of the relations between our two countries, through ensuring a strong relationship and through the adaptation of a friendship, non-aggression and arbitration agreement, that would be as broad as possible.
>
> I am fully aware of the fact that Türkiye has no aspiration for our territories, and, in order that, it has been repeatedly stated in public during the election campaign that it does not aspire Turkish territory and accepts the peace treaties, honestly and without reservations.[39]

İsmet İnönü remarked that there were "no essential or political problems" between Türkiye and Greece, emphasising that "the challenges were mostly legal" in his speech in 1928. According to Venizelos' various remarks, he "genuinely aimed to resolve these issues." He added that the letter received in Ankara further bolstered his confidence.[40]

When Venizelos visited Türkiye in 1930, three different treaties were signed: "The Friendship, Neutrality Agreement, and Arbitration Treaty", " "the Protocol Related to Naval Forces", and lastly, the "the Protocol Related to Naval Forces".[41] Under the Friendship, Neutrality, and Arbitration Treaty, both states pledged to avoid political or economic agreements harming the other's interests and to settle disputes through the Permanent Court of Justice. More importantly, they would be obliged to remain impartial in an attack by another country.[42] According to the Residence, Trade and Sailing Agreement, citizens of both countries might enter, travel, or reside freely in the other party's territory without limitations. Venizelos's government gave Türkiye the most favoured nation status in 1931.[43]

1.2. Disarmament in the Interwar Years

Disarmament conferences emerged during the interwar years primarily due to the widespread belief regarding the arms race and the accumulation of arsenals in the pre-war period, as these factors precipitated and contributed to the war. Under the League of Nations covenant, Article 8 established that disarmament was necessary for maintaining peace. This is why the 1924 Geneva Protocol stated that security depended on disarmament.[44] As Ayman Güler mentions, there is a significant difference between the disarmament efforts of the victorious parties and independent disarmament initiatives. Firstly, given the prevailing negative psychological climate, whether these efforts would contribute to peace is debatable.[45] In fact,

[39] Kotelis, "Preconditions for Successful Rapprochement", 71.

[40] Mehmet Gönlübol and Cem Sar, *Atatürk ve Türkiye'nin Dış Politikası* (Ankara: Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi, 1997): 62.

[41] Emine Tutku Vardağlı, "Turkish-Greek Raproahment in 1930s: The British factor as a Third Party", *Akademik İncelemeler Dergisi*, 16/1 (2021): 77.

[42] Melek Fırat, "Yunanistan'la İlişkiler", *Türk Dış Politikası Cilt 1: 1919-1980*, ed. Baskın Oran (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2004): 347-348; Kotelis, Preconditions for Successful, 85.

[43] Alexis Alexandris, "Turkish Policy Towards Greece During The Second World War And Its Impact On Greek-Turkish Détente", *Balkan Studies,* 23/1 (1982): 159.

[44] Baskın Oran, *Turkish Foreign Policy 1919-2006: Facts and Analysis with Documents* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2006): 183.

[45] Gülden Ayman Güler, İki Dünya Savaşı Arasındaki Silahsızlanma Girişimleri, *İki Dünya Savaşı Arasında Avrupa ve Balkanlar Sempozyumu* (İstanbul: Aybay Yayınları, 1993): 114.

Türkiye supported a gradual reduction of armaments.[46] General disarmament improved overall security due to limited resources and military forces. That's why the Conference on the Reduction of Armaments began in Geneva in 1932.[47]

Indeed, the demilitarisation efforts during the interwar period were unsuccessful. In any case, major powers were reluctant to undermine their domestic arms industries or impair the effectiveness of their armed services. Similarly, imposing limits on national military budgets had proven unsuccessful.[48] With the League of Nations no longer functioning, small states turned to rearmament by forming agreements. However, in Turkish-Greek relations, the Protocol Related to Naval Forces in 1930 was an exception. The Protocol Related to Naval Forces was formally appended to the conclusion of the Treaty of Friendship, highlighting, with the utmost sensitivity to security, the genuine commitment to the evolving Turkish-Greek friendship. The primary factor enabling the two nations to ratify the treaties of 1930, including the naval protocol, was their shared identity as conservative states dedicated to preserving the status quo in the Balkans. Having moved beyond territorial disputes, both countries shared a common interest in avoiding the potentially devastating consequences of a naval arms race. Throughout the interwar period, it was widely recognised that an arms race led to financial difficulties and served as a significant catalyst for warfare. Furthermore, we propose that Greece's naval policy, a crucial component of its military strategy, was closely linked to the nation's financial imperatives.[49]

2. Regional Security Building Initiative: The Balkan Entente

The Balkan Entente was realised as epitomising the ongoing divide between European revisionist and anti-revisionist factions. Following 1929, the necessary conditions for cooperation among the Balkan nations were established due to events that transpired between 1912 and 1913, during which residual issues from the Balkan Wars were addressed.[50] Gönlübol and Sar contend that instances such as the Locarno Treaties and the formation of the Little Entente, which categorically classified European states into two opposing camps—revisionist and status quo—fostered an environment in which Balkan states were encouraged to cooperate.[51] For Aksu, the friendship and cooperation developed within the atmosphere of easing relations between Türkiye and Greece was "also reflected in the relations of these countries with other Balkan states, and laid the foundations for the 'Balkan Pact' to be established."[52] At the Universal Peace Conference convened by the International Peace Bureau in Athens in 1929, the Greek statesman Papanescu advocated for establishing a Balkan union. Subsequently, the Balkan states resolved to conduct these unofficial conferences. The visit of Turkish Prime Minister İsmet İnönü to Greece evolved into a meeting where essential views were exchanged to establish the foundations of friendship and cooperation between the two countries in the Balkans. This laid the groundwork for the preliminary step of the Balkan Pact.[53]

[46] In 1929, Türkiye joined the Briand-Kellogg Pact, which bans war, and the Litvinov Protocol (Moscow Protocol). İsmail Soysal, Atatürks Policy of Peace and Its Impact in the World", *Between East and West: Studies of Turkish Foreign Relations* (İstanbul: The ISIS Press, 2001): 135.

[47] Türkiye suggested upper limits for men and armaments to gradually diminish their forces. Oran, Turkish Foreign Policy, 184.

[48] Andrew Webster, "From Versailles to Geneva: The Many Forms of Interwar Disarmament", *The Journal of Strategic Studies*, 29/2 (2006): 232-233.

[49] Evanthis Hatzivassiliou, "The 1930 Greek-Turkish Naval Protocol", *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, 9/1 (1998): 89.

[50] Hazal Papuççular, *Cumhuriyet'in Dış Politikası,* 34.

[51] Mehmet Gönlübol and Cem Sar, *Atatürk ve Türkiye'nin Dış Politikası* (Ankara: Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi, 1997): 100.

[52] Fuat Aksu, *Türk-Yunan İlişkileri: İlişkilerin Yönelimini Etkileyen Faktörler Üzerine Bir İnceleme* (Ankara: SAEMK Araştırma Projeleri Dizisi, 2001): 13.

[53] According to Venizelos, Turkey remained wary of Serbian expansionist ambitions while simultaneously pursuing Greco-Bulgarian reconciliation. For this reason he noted: Turks did not want Greece to lose power. Once the Turks and Greeks reached an agreement with Bulgaria, they would then turn to the Serbs and say, "We have established this union's foundation- now you must join". For this to happen, the Bulgarians needed to accept their current borders, and the Serbs had to recognize the Bulgarian minority. The Turks were aware that Greece did not want war

The First Balkan Conference opened in Athens on October 5, 1930. During this assembly, decisions were made to convene annual meetings at the foreign ministerial level among the Balkan states, prepare a formal Balkan Pact, address unresolved issues through peaceful means, and promote economic, social, political, and cultural unity among the Balkan nations through the establishment of a permanent structure.[54] Türkiye's agreements with Greece, Romania, and Yugoslavia formed the cornerstone of the Balkan Entente. Notably, the Turkish-Greek rapprochement catalyzed the unification of the Balkans.[55] The divide between revisionist and anti-revisionist Balkan states materialized concretely, permitting just minimal technical and cultural collaboration at the 1931 Istanbul Balkan Conference. During this period, Bulgaria followed a non-revisionist policy, and Yugoslavia, a member of the Little Entente, distanced itself from the Balkan Entente. Bulgaria left the third Balkan conference held in Bucharest in October 1932 due to its different approach to minority issues. Social and economic problems, as well as the establishment of a customs union, were on the agenda.[56] However, on September 20, 1933, Prime Minister İsmet İnönü and Dr. Tevfik Rüştü Aras visited Sofia, where they met with Bulgarian Prime Minister Nikola Mushanov and Tsar Boris. Although the visit aimed to enhance regional security through Bulgaria's accession to the Balkan Pact, Bulgarian leaders held a negative view of Türkiye's offer.[57] The most critical aspect of the meeting in Bucharest was the beginning of developing a consensus on a Balkan Alliance. The 4th Balkan Conference was held in Thessaloniki in November 1933, and it became clear that unofficial conferences could not solve the Balkan problems.[58]

Thus, Türkiye and Greece signed "the Entente Cordiale" in 1933.[59] Türkiye and Greece mutually guaranteed their borders in Thrace, agreed to consult each other on all international questions of common interest in the region, and committed to relying on representatives from each nation's meetings for ten years.[60] The Entente Cordiale was prominently featured in a significant portion of the Bulgarian press, leaving a negative impression on Bulgarian public opinion. It was stated that the agreement would ensure the security of Türkiye and Greece's common borders against attacks, which would be detrimental to Bulgaria.[61] In this way, the opinion was formed that the agreement prevented the Bulgarians from reaching the Mediterranean. Despite Bulgaria's opposition, the Balkan Entente harmonised its shared concerns and interests regarding Türkiye, Greece, Yugoslavia, and Romania. It originated in the Balkans and evolved into a collaborative pact.[62]

At this point, it is crucial to mention that Türkiye defended itself from the outset in the Balkan Entente; it relied on strengthening the ties between Türkiye and Greece to establish a balance against the

and would remain neutral if a conflict broke out in Europe tomorrow. Enis Tulça, *Atatürk, Venizelos ve Bir Diplomat Enis Bey* (İstanbul: Simurg Yayınları, 2003), 46.

[54] Gönlübol and Sar, Atatürk ve Türkiye'nin, 100.

[55] Selma Yel, "Montrö Boğazlar Sözleşmesi", *Değişen Dünya Şartlarında Karadeniz ve Boğazlar Meselesi 1923-2008* (Ankara: Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi, 2009): 70.

[56] When international disarmament efforts failed during that same period, Mussolini asserted that only Italy, Germany, France, and England could establish order. Atatürk remarked that "*the fate of his country, which had a population of 14 million, could not be determined by four great powers*." Dilek Barlas, "Atatürk Döneminde Türkiye'nin Balkan Politikası", *Atatürk Dönemi Türk Dış Politikası,* Yay. Haz. Berna Türkdoğan (Ankara: Atatürk Kültür, Dil, Tarih Yüksek Kurumu Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi, 2000): 278.

[57] Ali Sarıkoyuncu, "Mustafa Kemal Atatürk Döneminde Türk-Bulgar Siyasî İlişkileri (1920-1938)", *XX. Yüzyılın İlk Yarısında Türk-Bulgar Askerî-Siyasî İlişkileri* (Ankara: Genelkurmay ATASE ve Genelkurmay Denetleme Başkanlığı Yayınları, 2005): 157.

[58] Gönlübol and Sar, *Atatürk ve Türkiye'nin*, 101-102.

[59] İsmail Soysal, *Türkiye'nin Siyasal Anlaşmaları 1920-1945* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1989): 435-436.

[60] The Entente Cordiale emphatically secured Eastern Thrace for the Greek government, standing firmly against Bulgaria. This guarantee was not just a strategic position; it was deeply rooted in the Turkish government's significance of Eastern Thrace and the Straits Balkans, reinforcing the necessity of these territories in the region's stability. Mustafa Türkeş, "The Balkan Pact and Its Immediate Implications for the Balkan States, 1930-34", *Middle Eastern Studies*, 30/1 (1994): 130.

[61] Sarıkoyuncu, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, 157.

[62] Fuat Aksu, *Türk-Yunan İlişkileri: İlişkilerin Yönelimini Etkileyen Faktörler Üzerine Bir İnceleme* (Ankara: SAEMK Araştırma Projeleri Dizisi 2001): 13.

mutual Yugoslav-Romanian threat.[63] According to this agreement, Türkiye, Greece, Romania, and Yugoslavia guaranteed the security of all their Balkan borders. They pledged not to take any political action against any Balkan country that had not signed the agreement without prior notice nor to become subject to any political obligations. Finally, they determined that the agreement would be open to any Balkan country that the parties deemed appropriate.[64] The goal was to create a permanent mechanism under the Balkan Entente and transform it into a regional organization. While this broader institutionalization failed, Türkiye nevertheless secured its border security and reduced regional threats through the Entente.[65]

On October 25, 1934, a private meeting of the Turkish Grand National Assembly involved detailed discussions about the Balkan Entente. In his speech, Turkish Foreign Minister Tevfik Rüştü Aras emphasised that the agreement was crafted in collaboration with "a neighbour and ally," Greece. He clarified that it was not meant to be a contract against any Balkan state, asserting that violating these commitments would effectively declare hostility toward all Balkan signatories. Aras underlined that both sides "understood the agreement in this context."[66] The assembly emphasised a significant point: the pact states that if any Balkan state is attacked -whether by another Balkan state or by a non-Balkan state allied with a Balkan state- the attacked state will perceive itself as under threat. Consequently, it will respond swiftly with military action against the aggressor states, particularly those whose territories border its own. This commitment demonstrates the Balkan nations' collective defense strategy, highlighting the urgency of mutual protection.[67]

2.1. Re-militarization of Straits

The joint action of the Balkan Entente countries facilitated the change in status and the arming of the straits. The Lausanne Peace Treaty established the principle of complete freedom of navigation and overflight for all vessels and aircraft through the Istanbul and Çanakkale Straits.[68] The Second Convention relating to the Régime of the Straits is based on the restrictive conditions of Türkiye's sovereignty and security. It obliges, in peacetime, that merchant ships and aircraft have freedom of passage. There are limitation provisions for warships and aircraft.[69] Also, a 25-kilometre area on both sides of the Straits was demilitarised. Türkiye first proposed changing the Straits regime at the London Disarmament Conference in 1933. The League of Nations' inability to display the expected effectiveness was effective at this moment.[70] When Mussolini declared Italy's ambition had been directed to Asia and Africa on 19 March 1934, Türkiye reacted strongly. The news from Italy stated that they had begun constructing submarine bases and airports in the Dodecanese. The other issue was an Italian fleet that came to Albania without an invitation. These events showed that Türkiye was right to suspect Mussolini's aspirations. Italy's attack on Abyssinia in 1935 and the arming of the Dodecanese Islands made the fortification of the Dardanelles a security problem.[71] The Montreux negotiations commenced on 22 June 1936, culminating in the signing of the 'Convention

[63] *Türkiye Dış Politikasında 50 Yıl: Cumhuriyetin İlk On Yılı ve Balkan Paktı 1923-1934* (Ankara: Dışişleri Bakanlığı Siyaset ve Planlama Genel Müdürlüğü, 1974): 317.

[64] Rıfat Uçarol, *Siyasi Tarih* (Ankara, Filiz Kitabevi, 2000): 580.

[65] Yel, "Montrö Boğazlar Sözleşmesi", 71.

[66] TBMM Gizli Celse Zabıtları, 25 Teşrinevvel 1934, Sekseninci İntikat, 2. Celse, 585.

[67] TBMM Gizli Celse Zabıtları, 591.

[68] See Article 23, "Lausanne Peace Treaty", https://www.mfa.gov.tr/lausanne-peace-treaty-part-i_-political-clauses.en.mfa, [12.02.2025].

[69] For warships and aircraft to pass through the straits, they must not be larger than the states' navies with coasts on the Black Sea. "Convention Relating to the Regime of Straits", https://www.mfa.gov.tr/ii_-convention-relating-to-the-regime-of-the-straits.en.mfa, [15.02.2025].

[70] Ayşe Nur Tütüncü, "Montrö (Montreux) Sözleşmesinin Güncel Sorunlar Işığında Değenlendirilmesi", *Tarafların Bakışlarıyla Lozan Sempozyumu*, 9-10 Mayıs, 2014 İstanbul, ed. Cezmi Eraslan and others, 173.

[71] Yel, "Montrö Boğazlar Sözleşmesi", 63-64.

Regarding the Regime of the Straits' on 20 July 1936.[72] The Convention, which gives Türkiye full control over the Straits, consists of five Sections, twenty-nine Articles, four Annexes, and one Protocol. According to Atatürk, "the Straits must be militarised as soon as possible." Even "more efforts should be made to create an effective security environment by the League of Nations;" "relations should be established with France and Britain," the most powerful states in the Mediterranean, while the "solidarity with the Soviet Union and its Balkan allies should continue."[73] Türkiye used the principle of *rebus sic stantibus*.[74] Due to this anxiety, Türkiye, Yugoslavia, and the Little Entente developed a close relationship. They sought to restrain Italian influence in the Balkans, representing the group as an initial step toward the reconstruction of post-war Europe.[75]

The Montreux Convention granted Türkiye the right to close the Straits to all warships when it was "threatened by an imminent danger of war" without being "considered a belligerent."[76] Alarmed by the threats, Türkiye sought support from the Balkan Entente states. During the Montreux talks, Foreign Minister Tevfik Rüştü Aras stated that Türkiye "accepted the disarmament of the Straits under entirely different conditions" and that "demilitarisation can no longer be sustained" because it "contradicts the most fundamental right of the state, the right to defend itself." According to Aras, the Straits represented Türkiye's "most vulnerable point."[77] During the convention talks, Romanian Foreign Minister B. N. Titelescu stated, "Everything that affects Türkiye's security also affects Romania's security."[78] "Türkiye, Romania, Yugoslavia and Greece have connected their security with the Balkan Alliance," and Greek Ambassador Nicolas Politis expressed that "the Greek government will genuinely participate in reaching an agreement for Türkiye's security as soon as possible."[79] The king of Yugoslavia, Ivan Soubbotic, stated that "the Yugoslav government is ready to respond to Türkiye's call and join the efforts of other states to prepare a new status for the Straits."[80] Meanwhile, Greece was also worried about Italian ambitions in the Balkans. Türkiye and Greece initiated diplomatic efforts to collaborate in the region's security.[81]

2.2. 1938 Salonika Agreement

The Lausanne Peace Treaty defined Türkiye's territorial borders in the Balkans and its relationships with neighbouring states. During the interwar era, the Lausanne Peace Treaty's concrete security measures were crucial when assessing Türkiye's relations with Greece and Bulgaria and its territorial borders. Accordingly, the Lausanne Treaty determined that the border separating Türkiye from Greece and Bulgaria, extending from the Aegean Sea to the Black Sea, would be demilitarized with a zone of 30 km on both sides.[82] This was so significant that on July 24, 1923, an additional agreement was added to the Treaty of Lausanne

[72] The signatories of the Convention are the United Kingdom, Bulgaria, France, Greece, Japan, Romania, Türkiye, the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia.14 Australia has also signed the Convention as the Commonwealth of Australia. Japan, with Article 8 of the Treaty of Peace with Japan of 8 September 1951.

[73] İsmail Soysal, "Atatürks Policy of Peace and Its Impact in the World", *Between East and West: Studies of Turkish Foreign Relations* (İstanbul: The ISIS Press, 2001): 137.

[74] Soysal, "Atatürks Policy of Peace", 138.

[75] Yel, "Montrö Boğazlar Sözleşmesi", 63-64.

[76] Kıvanç Ulusoy, "The Montreux Convention: A Key For Understanding the Geopolitics of the Eastern Mediterranean and Black Sea", *Southeast European And Black Sea Studies*, 1/18 (2024): 10.

[77] *Montreux Boğazlar Konferansı Tutanaklar Belgeler*, (Ankara: Ankara Üniversitesi Siyasal Bilgiler Fakültesi Yayınları No: 390, 1976): 25.

[78] *Montreux Boğazlar Konferansı*, 26.

[79] *Montreux Boğazlar Konferansı*, 32.

[80] *Montreux Boğazlar Konferansı*, 32.

[81] S. J. Raphalides, "Separate Spheres: An Overview of United States Policy in the Interwar Years Toward Greece and Turkey." *The Journal of Modern Hellenism*, 8 (1991): 122-123.

[82] Soysal, *Türkiye'nin Siyasal Anlaşmaları*, 153.

concerning the Convention Respecting the Thracian Frontier. In fact, establishing these demilitarised zones was recognized as a principle to eliminate the possibility of surprise attacks by neighbouring states against one another. After World War I, Part IV of the Treaty of Neuilly mandated compulsory disarmament of Bulgaria. This included abolishing compulsory military service, limiting the army (excluding gendarmes and frontier guards) to 20,000 personnel, restricting the calibre of guns, and prohibiting naval or military air forces, as well as virtually all naval forces, except for a few torpedo boats and motor boats designated for coastal police and fisheries duties.[83]

The Salonika Agreement, also known as the "Treaty Signed Between Bulgaria and the Balkan Entente States" is particularly important in this context. Initially regarded and implemented as a security measure among Türkiye, Bulgaria, and Greece, this agreement, along with the growing Italian expansionism and revisionist pressures in the international context, evolved into a factor that created insecurity and weakened border security, particularly for Türkiye. Especially after 1935, there was an increase in the fortification of the Thracian lands outside the demilitarised zone in response to a perceived threat from this area. The signing of the Salonika Agreement represented a very important development, as Bulgaria complained to the League of Nations on 7 March 1935, citing the increased military presence of Türkiye in Thrace.[84] In this regard, it can be asserted that the resolution of the perceived distrust between Türkiye and Bulgaria was achieved by signing the agreement.[85] Consequently, the foreign policy crisis stemming from the perceived distrust between Bulgaria and Türkiye was concluded.

Another important aspect of the Salonika Agreement can be observed during the visit of Greek Prime Minister General Metaxas to Türkiye during the meeting with Atatürk in Çankaya on 9 October 1937. Atatürk, Metaxas, Aras, the plenipotentiaries Ünaydın and Rafael were present at that meeting. During that meeting, Atatürk mentioned this while responding to General Metaxas, giving special importance to the Turkish-Greek Entente Cordiale of Understanding while evaluating the possibilities of cooperation to resolve the concerns of the two countries regarding their territorial integrity. According to Atatürk's opinion:

> ... Since the Balkan Pact undertook to ensure the mutual security of the Balkan borders and to preserve the existing status quo, and this would be sufficient to solve the Bulgarian issue, there may be an objection to the idea that there would be no need or issue for the continuation of the entente cordial between us. However [...] it would be a weak thing to consider the Bulgarian Question as the sole 'base' for the Balkan Pact, just as it would a weak thing to consider only one issue as the sole 'base' for the Turkish-Greek Entente Cordial of September 14, 1933. Consequently, in this respect, the Entente Cordial also has a special nature. It must have another scope other than the Balkan Pact. We have a sea border between us, your Anatolian and the islands... The defensive circle of the Balkan Pact does not include this, and this border is not included in this. Its defence constitutes a separate issue that directly concerns both of us. Accordingly, the nature of the Turkish-Greek agreement should be to walk together in the broadest area. And I agree that it should be as follows. In that case, the existing cordial agreement between us should be reinforced by expressing it in a way that will extend to the sea borders, that is, to a general unification, as it was originally planned.[86]

General Metaxas responded that he would examine the agreement. Following their visits to Greece and Yugoslavia, Turkish Prime Minister Celal Bayar and Minister of Foreign Affairs Tevfik Rüştü Aras travelled to

[83] S.A.H. "Bulgaria and Balkan Entente", *Bulletin of International News* 15/16 (1938): 677.

[84] Bulgaria initiated rearmament in defiance of the Treaty of Neuilly. While the country had no military aircraft in 1934, its inventory grew to 258 by 1939, with most equipment sourced from Germany. R. J. Crampton, *Bulgaria* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007): 252.

[85] Fuat Aksu ve Yunus Çolak, "Dış Politika Krizlerinde Algısal Güven[siz]lik: 1935 Bulgaristan Krizi", *Yıldız Teknik Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi,* 1/2 (2017): 167.

[86] *Atatürk'ün Dış Politikası Cilt II* (Ankara: Kültür Bakanlığı Yayınları, 1994): 369.

Sofia in May 1938 to meet with Tsar Boris and Prime Minister Kiosseivanof. The primary aim of this meeting was to discuss the revocation of the restrictions imposed by the Neuilly Agreement, which hampered Bulgaria's ability to arm itself and foster better relations with the Balkan Entente.[87] This situation indicates that there was diplomatic communication by the Balkan Entente countries and Bulgaria. On 28 July 1938, Türkiye authorised the Greek Prime Minister, Metaxas, to sign the joint declaration on behalf of the Turkish Government, which was to be signed between the Balkan Entente States and Bulgaria.[88]

The Salonika Agreement was signed in Thessaloniki on July 31, 1938, by the Bulgarian Foreign Minister and Minister of Public Worship, Georges Kiosseivanof, and Ioannis Metaxas.[89] It represented a profound revision of deterrent militarisation in favor of peace. It has also been interpreted as a peace agreement between Bulgaria and Greece in a historically disputed city, appearing as a non-aggression pact.[90] According to Soysal, "the possibility of an offensive attack by Italy and the suspicion regarding Bulgaria" facilitated the closer collaboration between Türkiye and Greece.[91] According to the Salonika Agreement, except for a limited number of domestic security personnel, the prohibition status was abolished for Türkiye, Greece, and Bulgaria. Also, the closed status of air traffic in the areas was abolished.[92] Thus, the Salonika Agreement has abolished the demilitarisation obligations at the borders of Türkiye, Bulgaria, and Greece, as specified in Article III of the Lausanne Peace Treaty and Part IV of the Treaty of Neuilly.[93]

With the signing of the treaty, the head of the Greek Foreign Affairs stated that new unified states had been formed in the Balkans.[94] According to news from the Ulus newspaper on August 9, citing a high-level Greek official, the Salonika Agreement is important at three different levels: international, inter-Balkan, and national. In an international context, the agreement demonstrated that this region, once the powder keg of Europe, is now evaluated as a place of peace and a model. Regarding the Balkan Entente, the Balkan states were not engaging in conflict but instead developing their potential. For Greece, it would have strengthened the sense of security and enhanced the prospects for fruitful cooperation with neighbouring countries based on mutual agreement. The connections with Koseivanov established a security framework that will serve as a foundation for new successes between Greece and Bulgaria.[95] More importantly, the 1938 Salonika Agreement between Türkiye and Greece included an extraordinary provision: Greek Prime Minister Ioannis Metaxas signed on Türkiye's behalf under a legally unprecedented power of attorney. This exceptional authorization -approved by the Turkish Council of Ministers and endorsed by Atatürk- enabled Metaxas to execute binding commitments for Türkiye while simultaneously representing Greece. The diplomatic initiatives undertaken by smaller powers during periods of uncertainty and instability demonstrated how marginal actors carved out spheres of influence within the international system in the early 20th century.

According to Doğu Newspaper on 3 August 1938, "the fifth seat, which had been left vacant in the Balkan Council, was now filled." From this point onwards, the Balkans and the Balkan people would no longer fall out with one another due to the external world's influences. The Salonika Agreement was evaluated as

[87] Hikmet Öksüz, "Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Devleti'nin Atatürk Dönemindeki Balkan Politikası (1923-1938), *Unpublished PhD Thesis* (İstanbul: İstanbul Üniversitesi Atatürk İlkeleri ve İnkılap Tarihi Enstitüsü, 1996): 98.

[88] Republic of Türkiye Directorate of State Archives Republician Archives (BCA), Institution Code: 30-18-1-2, Reference Info: 84-76-13.

[89] "League of Nations Treaty Series", 196 (1939): 372.

[90] "Bulgaristan ve Balkan Antantı Arasında İmzalanan Anlaşma", *Ulus,* 7 August 1938, 5.

[91] Soysal, *Türkiye'nin Siyasal Anlaşmaları,* 589.

[92] Soysal, *Türkiye'nin Siyasal Anlaşmaları,* 152-156.

[93] T.C. Resmî Gazete, 4109, (12 Kânunusani 1939), 11103.

[94] "Selanik Antlaşması ve Bulgaristan", *Cumhuriyet,* 16 August 1938.

[95] *Ulus,* 9 August 1938.

Bulgaria's entrance into the pact.[96] After the demilitarized zones in Thrace were eliminated, the Turkish military entered Edirne in August 1938.[97]

The Salonika Agreement was approved by the Turkish Grand National Assembly on 5th January 1939. The Minister of Foreign Affairs, Şükrü Saraçoğlu, stated that "Turkish diplomacy has worked hard to implement the agreement." Saraçoğlu underlined that "the seeds of this agreement were planted in Ankara when the Balkan states gathered." He also emphasised that "an international record was removed after Montreux" in Turkish territory.[98] On 19 February 1939, Turkish journalist Yunus Nadi conducted an interview with Georges Kiosseivanof. He emphasised that "they have no thoughts other than friendship towards the other Balkan states," that "peace is the greatest blessing," and that "it is not suitable for them to consider themselves outside the Entente." However, he questioned how "a poor country like Bulgaria could arm itself." He also noted that "the previous arms restriction was a burden for an independent nation" and expressed his gratitude to Türkiye. Therefore, it is clear that Bulgaria is pleased with the Salonika Agreement.[99] Actually, Bulgaria de facto joined the Axis Powers in December 1941. Prior to this, Bulgaria endeavoured to maintain neutrality during the Second World War.[100]

Conclusions

The most significant step toward cooperation in the Balkans during the interwar period stemmed from the security concerns of Türkiye and Greece. Both countries made concerted efforts to maintain regional stability and ensure collective security. In this context, Türkiye and Greece strongly resisted the notion that only great powers should dictate political influence, instead rejecting external interference in regional affairs. As status-quo powers within the revisionist-status-quo divide, they adhered to policies that affirmed a fundamental principle: Balkan security must be safeguarded by Balkan nations themselves. This perspective not only championed regional autonomy but also empowered local actors to take charge of their own security dynamics.

The Balkan Entente initiative was a key example of the efforts made by Türkiye and Greece to ensure regional security. These efforts triggered the collective actions of both countries during the interwar period. Although Türkiye and Greece participated in international and regional disarmament agreements, when faced with serious security threats, such as the rise of revisionism in the Balkans; they decided to maintain their security policies within the framework of bilateral and multilateral pacts. The Balkan conferences addressed how peace and stability could be maintained regionally and how security could be built. Thanks to the Balkan Entente as a regional initiative and the Entente Cordiale as a bilateral initiative, both countries pursued an effective foreign policy during the interwar period. Through this regional security approach, Türkiye, Greece, Yugoslavia, and Romania played a significant role in changing the status of the Straits and in the signing of the Montreux Convention. Additionally, with the Salonika Agreement, they were able to change Thrace's demilitarised status. Under the *rebus sic stantibus* principle, the Salonika Agreement transformed the demilitarisation provisions of the post-World War I peace agreements (Lausanne and Neuilly) into militarisation through an agreement. The Salonika Agreement crystallized the Turkish-Greek partnership, with Metaxas signing as both Greek Prime Minister and Türkiye's plenipotentiary -an extraordinary act of

[96] Cihad Daban, "Selanikte İmza edilen Muadene", *Doğu,* 3 August 1938, 1-3.

[97] "Türk Askeri Edirne'ye Girecek", *Ulus,* 20 August 1938.

[98] "Selanik Antlaşması Kanunu Mecliste Kabul Edildi", *Vakit*, 5 January 1939, 8

[99] Yunus Nadi, "Bulgar Başvekili ile Mülakat", *Cumhuriyet*, 24 February 1939, 1.

[100] Crampton, Bulgaria..., 255-256.

solidarity between former rivals. This shared authorization created a template for Balkan security managed by regional actors alone. This pivotal action is a clear testament to the significant bond between Türkiye and Greece during the interwar period, highlighting a unique alliance that shaped their historical relations.

However, despite all their efforts, they were unable to prevent Bulgaria from joining the revisionist camp. Nevertheless, Türkiye and Greece's initiatives allowed smaller Balkan powers to adopt a more active foreign policy. As a result of these efforts, bilateral relations deepened, and with the 1938 Salonika Agreement, the demilitarization obligations of the Neuilly and Lausanne Peace Treaties were abolished.

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