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**Extended Essay  
History**

**Turkey's Foreign Policy During the Second World War and It's Repercussions on the  
Turkish Press**

Candidate Name: İlhan Kıvanç

Candidate Number: D1129060

Supervisor: Pınar Türkecan

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## **Abstract**

Despite its Ottoman security culture the Republic of Turkey followed a neutrality policy throughout the Second World War. This paper argues that Turkey's policy of neutrality is closely linked to Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's foreign policy objectives and his principles. İsmet İnönü's "wait and see policy" was created as a result of Turkey's modernization project. Turkey's Western orientation and shift of foreign policy is greatly related to its will to become an economically developed sovereign state. Turkey's neutrality policy was based on this objective. This policy created tensions between the Allies and the Turkish Republic, which from time to time impinged upon Turkey's foreign policy during the Second World War. The debate on Turkish foreign policy has been an extension of the debate on the "neutrality" policy in the past. There is extensive literature that enriches our understanding of this period. After outlining the broad survey of literature this paper will analyze what was written in Turkish press reports on this issue in order to better understand the main determinants of Turkey's foreign policy behaviors and preferences during the inter war period.<sup>1</sup> It will seek to find out the repercussions of this policy on press. Parallels between the government's balance policy and its repercussions on the press will be studied with the purpose of disclosing the past and understanding the prospects of the future impacts of government policy's and its ramifications on the press in Turkey.

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<sup>1</sup> *Akşam* 1941, 1943, 1944 - *Cumhuriyet* 1941, 1943, 1944 - *Tan* 1941, 1943, 1944

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## Introduction

Turkish foreign policy during the Second World War was very much influenced by the bitter memories of the past. The Ottoman Empire was brought to an end and was divided when it was defeated by Allied Powers. Turkey's National Liberation War was fought with the leadership of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and military officials such as İsmet İnönü and the Republic of Turkey was founded from the ruins of the Ottoman Empire with hardship on October 29, 1923. Turkish foreign policy was influenced by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's perspective. His foreign policy objectives were not similar with the former Ottoman Empire's he did not aspire to conquer other lands and strengthen the Empire by military means. He only was seeking for recognition as a sovereign secular state. He wanted to strength his country through economic cooperation and he intended to seek to ripe the benefits of peace. "Peace at home, peace in the world" encapsulated main goals and principles of Atatürk's foreign policy.

President İsmet İnönü's policy of "neutrality" during the Second World War was founded on Atatürk's foreign policy approach. Scholars questioned Turkey's "neutrality" policy during the Second World War and inquired whether Turkey was indisputably neutral during the war. Many scholars had different perspectives on Turkey's neutrality. Numan Menemencioğlu, Turkish Foreign Minister during the Second World War, called Turkey's policy "active neutrality." He maintained that Turkey pursued such a policy consciously in order to decrease the risk of being invaded. Turkey was invaded after the First World War and fought to be independent during the Turkish Independence War, therefore, Turkish officials tried to avoid such a risk by not playing an active role in the war. Turkey wanted to ripe the benefits of the War. With this purpose, both İsmet İnönü the Turkish President and his administration pursued a policy of neutrality so as to increase Turkey's commercial relations with both sides and decrease the risk of being invaded again. In the war period, İnönü devoted large part of his energy to protect Turkey's territorial integrity.

Turkey followed a "wait and see" policy all through the inter war period. Turkey's foreign policy did not satisfy any of the parties but it was seen explicable from time to time. For example, Lord Halifax, the British Foreign Affairs Minister expressed that he could comprehend Turkey not going into the war in his speech of July 11, in 1941. In addition, the British General Staff was stated that the force needed to rescue Turkey would be immense, in

case it was to go to war with the allies and was attacked by Germans, and this would compel Britain to use its scarce resources to save the Turkish front. İnönü repeatedly stressed this theme; the possibility of invasion and the repercussions this invasion. He argued that the Turkish military was not ready to fight the German forces in its territory and therefore the allies would be needed for a rescue operation. In this context, the Turkish government policy of neutrality was difficult but not impossible. This policy had its repercussions on the press too. Parallels between the government's balance policy and its repercussions on the press will be studied with the purpose of disclosing the past and understanding the prospects of the future impacts of government policy's and its ramifications on the press in Turkey.

## 1. The “Neutral” Foreign Policy of Turkey during World War II

It is stated that Turkey followed the "neutrality" policy during the Second World War, but according to the different view, Turkey was not neutral but stayed out during the Second World War.<sup>2</sup> This staying out of the war was also a situation in favour of the allies. The essential targets of this policy named as "active neutrality" by Numan Menemencioğlu, the Foreign Minister of the period, were not being invaded and not going to the war. With this purpose, the highest level of efforts is shown intended to execute the commercial relations with both sides fighting and to remain neutral as possible in the foreign relations during the war. In the war period, İsmet İnönü, the President, as the person at the top of the government has drawn the path to follow of Turkey in the war, in the subject of determining and executing the foreign policy of Turkey; devoted his large part of the energy to the external problems supervising strictly the abstains of the government in especially external problems. İnönü's policy adopting and pre giving the decision to staying out of the war no matter how during the Second World War was intended to protect Turkey's territorial integrity. The angle of vision summed up as "Neither do we have designs on other's territory nor we would give away a part of a land" had a double meaning: İnönü accepted the price of it calculating that there would not be attack on Turkey's borders. He was determined on not giving a part of Turkey's land away, but he was strongly against the idea of soaring any country's lands.<sup>3</sup>

Turkey used the projects that the parties formulated to push Turkey into the war to gain time. The most important ones are the interviews lasting almost a year done about the organizing the Turks of USSR with Germany. This dilatory tactic is applied until Ribbentrop, the German Foreign Affairs Minister is fed up and at the end the annoyed Foreign Affairs Minister has given the instructions to stop the ongoing negotiations with Turkish Government.<sup>4</sup>

Turkey committed the themes intensely if being invaded Turkey's rescue operation would have to divide the Allies and Turkey not going into the war causing more damages to Germany. Turkey has also oriented its internal policy in this period entirely intended to the

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<sup>2</sup> Weisband, Edward, *2.Dünya Savaşında Türkiye'nin DışPolitikası*, Cumhuriyet Yayınları, İstanbul, 2000, 16

<sup>3</sup> Weisband, Edward, *2.Dünya Savaşında Türkiye'nin DışPolitikası*, Cumhuriyet Yayınları, İstanbul, 2000, 17

<sup>4</sup> Oran, Baskın, *Türk Dış Politikası, Cilt 1*, İstanbul, İletişim Yayınları, 2002, 396

ruffles of the war. This orientation was inherently the government's tactic, had the aim of ease to remain Turkey out of the war showing the tendency to the current strong state. In this framework, which party was the strongest one; all regulation and even the decisions of the court were set of accordingly. The Turkish Government has continued its relations with both parties with these different tactics, and came to the end of the war with no invasion and not living the war.<sup>5</sup>

Three phases showing changes can be mentioned according to the course of the war in the Turkish foreign policy. The first stage is the period from the beginning of the war to the year 1941. In this period, Turkey has followed a path near to the Allies far from the Axis.<sup>6</sup>

Turkey signing the Triple Alliance with the Great Britain and France at the beginning of the war stated that they would staying out of the war putting forward the number 2nd protocol besides appearing next to the Allies in this period. Despite Turkey being in a distant attitude against the Germany, Turkey tried to maintain a balanced relationship with both sides making commercial agreements. In 1941, when Germany decided to go into action against the Russia, has offered to sign a nonaggression pact to ensure its right wing and this pact is signed on June 18, in 1941.<sup>7</sup>

Since the year 1943, the Allies had began to press for Turkey's entry into the war; however Turkey announced that they will not enter the war unless the needed material for the defence force are not given besides accepting to enter into the war as a principle. These negotiations lasted until the year 1944 with having no result. And Russia has started to criticise Turkey's foreign policy and the Turkish - Russian relations are tensed up. In early 1944, the Allied pressure on Turkey has increased and the material shipment ongoing is suspended. On April 14, in 1944, the American and British governments announced that they would blockade Turkey if it continues to give chrome to Germany, and Turkey has stopped the shipment of the chrome on it and trade with the country has decreased 50 %. This date is the beginning of the third phase when the relation and the foreign policy of Turkey with Germany. Turkey's

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<sup>5</sup> Armaoğlu, Fahir H. Doç.Dr., "İkinci Dünya Harbinde Türkiye", *Siyasal Bilgiler Fakültesi Dergisi*, C.XIII, 1958, 448

<sup>6</sup> Armaoğlu, Fahir H. Doç.Dr., "İkinci Dünya Harbinde Türkiye", *Siyasal Bilgiler Fakültesi Dergisi*, C.XIII, 1958, 449

<sup>7</sup> Armaoğlu, Fahir H. Doç.Dr., "İkinci Dünya Harbinde Türkiye", *Siyasal Bilgiler Fakültesi Dergisi*, C.XIII, 1958, 451

relations with the Allies and the Russians being destroyed entering the middle of the year 1944 alone, Turks' both internal and foreign policies started to change when the grants are failed. To keep up with the new developments coming up as a result of the weakening of Germany in this phase, to organize the foreign policy accordingly, Turkey has closed the Straits to the Axis ships obeying the British and American calls, has dismissed Numan Menemencioglu the Foreign Affairs Minister as known as German bias and stopped its diplomatic relations with Germany. Thus, Turkey has brought its foreign policy to the line as the Allies wanted to, went doing changes in its internal policy.<sup>8</sup>

As a result, Turkey followed always a near policy for the Allies by the Triple Alliance agreement signed at the beginning of the war at the Second World War; however they succeeded to stay out of the war resisting the pressure devoted to their entry into the war until the end. And the attitude against the Germany has changed depending on the situation in the war of Germany; it was distant at the beginning of the war, a near policy is being followed when Germany was in a strong period and the relations were stopped entirely when Germany is weakened and its defeat were becoming absolute. This policy can be interpreted in different ways, being an inconsistent and unethical policy can be argued; however it provided Turkey to stay out of the war and has fulfilled its task.

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<sup>8</sup> Armaoğlu, Fahir H. Doç.Dr., "İkinci Dünya Harbinde Türkiye", *Siyasal Bilgiler Fakültesi Dergisi*, C.XIII, 1958, 455



## 2. The Government's Press Policy during the Second World War

During the Second World War the foreignpolicy that the country has followed was one of the most important factors in shaping the press policy of the ruling power. Server Iskit, talking about the Turkey's press policy in the Administration and Policies of Press in Turkey published in the year 1943; is saying that the press liberalism is splitting up in Turkey, differently from other countries and the reason for that has come forward the feature of Kemalism being the political regime in Turkey. Iskit expressing the liberal press not the free formation of the idea, the news and the idea being seen as a commercial article based on the free trade system, says that after a short increase circuit the news and the idea in this system becoming a part of the large political interests and capital groups is nothing but a trade meta. Iskit indicating the party press has come out could be characterized as statist in Soviet Russia, Italy and Germany in the Second World War period says that the Republican press is the organ of propaganda and suggestion of Kemalism more tolerant than the other regimes. According to Iskit, the most important principle of the press is accepting the cooperation between the state and the nation; Turkey left the place of destructive critics to the awareness of the national aims and will fight for them and took positive and constructive critics.<sup>9</sup>

The Turkish press at that time had a single purpose, and that is serving the country's regime, but it operates with the voluntary basis not in a system strict as the press of totalitarian regimes. Of course Iskit, as a bureaucrat of the state is telling the press that he wants to be in the country when defining the Turkish press; however this period's specific political features and conditions marked the communication system. The subject that is more highlighted in the followed press policies is Turkey's national interests.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Topuz, Hıfzı, *100 Soruda Türk Basın Tarihi*, İstanbul, Gerçek Yayınevi, 1973, 160

<sup>10</sup> Topuz, Hıfzı, *100 Soruda Türk Basın Tarihi*, İstanbul, Gerçek Yayınevi, 1973, 162

### 3. Comparison of the News in “Cumhuriyet” “Tan” and “Akşam”

Propaganda efforts in The Second World War had a unique nature both in terms of organization and the emergence of new communication tools such as radio and film. Both parties concluded that propaganda works became successful and contributed greatly to military efforts. Britain and Germany were the most active countries in the war of propaganda.<sup>11</sup>

During the war period, newspapers were naturally supporting different sides of the war. One of the biggest newspapers of the era, Cumhuriyet was implicitly favouring Germany while Tan was supporting the Soviet side and Akşam remained neutral just like Turkey and insisted that Turkey should not join the war in any case.<sup>12</sup> These three newspapers, which were the biggest of that time were selected and compared in terms of their tendencies differing than each other.

Cumhuriyet characterized as "the biggest newspaper of the Republican era" in the book named the History of the Turkish Journalism of Enver Benhan Sapolyo started to be published in May 7, in 1924 by the request of Atatürk 7 months after the declaration of the Republic. The newspaper was having a special purpose like defending the Republican regime and promoting it to the public. However this newspaper made history of the press as Germanise bias in the Second World War. Cemil Koçak indicated that he explained he did an interview with Nadir Nadi the leading author of Cumhuriyet and after that interview Nadi wrote an optimistic article on Cumhuriyet in the article named "Foreign Influences on the Turkish Press", in a Papen report. In addition, in a report prepared in the middle of the year 1941 by the Ministry of the German Foreign Affairs, the Turkish press is separated in parties and in the meantime Cumhuriyet is described as La République and Tasvir-i Efkâr German friend. Orhan Kologlu has also described Cumhuriyet as a German friend in the Turkish Press History. And Hifzi Topuz described some authors but not every of them as a German friend saying "Some newspapers believed that the Germans will win strictly the war. They defend a

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<sup>11</sup> Deringil, Selim, Denge Oyunu “2.Dünya Savaşı’nda Türk Dış Politikası”, Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, İstanbul, 1994, 3

<sup>12</sup> Akşam 1941, 1943, 1944 - Cumhuriyet 1941, 1943, 1944 - Tan 1941, 1943, 1944

very strict friendship policy with Germans. Some authors of *Tasvir-i Efkar* and *Cumhuriyet* are also in this tendency".<sup>13</sup>

*Cumhuriyet* having good relations with the state since its foundation, has been punished the longest closure punishment of its publishing life by brimming over this line with the Second World War. It has stayed closed with the reason of making publications against the state's general policy in 1940 from 11th August to 8th November 90 days. *Cumhuriyet*, besides having a more careful policy after this punishment, could not get rid of another closure in July 12th and December 7th in 1941. So, it had 3 closure punishments in one and a half year. *In 1936, Zekeriya Sertel and Ahmet Emin Yalman buying Is Bankasi and Tan started to manage with Ahmet Emin Yalman and Halil Lütfü Dorduncu. However Sertel, to shape the newspaper as he wants, pushed Ahmet Emin Yalman away first and then together with Sabiha Sertel gathered together the country's progressive and revolutionary authors up together.* During the Second World War Tan, followed a path in favour of the Allies and the democracy and in addition he is known as a sympathetic to Russia. Tuncay, in his article named "the Press in the Single Party Period" described Tan as a fundamentalist opposite newspaper. For this reason Sertel's newspaper has been closed 7 times and two months and thirteen days totally between the years 1939 and 45 during the Second World War. And it has been seen that it was closed forever since the date August 12th in 1944. In the book *Turkish Press History* of Fuat Süreyya Oral, it is expressed that Tan took its place in the communist publications of this period. Oral says that Sertels are not clearly making the propaganda of communism but suggest always the Turkish people the Russian friendship. Sertel tells in his memories the shutdown of the newspaper by the Council of Ministers that means disaster for the newspapers was happening the most to Tan in that period. Sertel telling the German Nazism coming to power also motivated the fascist young people, the biggest target of these young people making the fascism propaganda was Tan, because in their propagandas they were seeing Tan as the biggest obstacle; says the policy that the newspaper drove was gathering up at the points of the Soviet friendship and fascism antagonism.

In the war years when the majority of the newspapers were shut down at least twice, *Aksam* was never been shut down but received warning.

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<sup>13</sup> Oran, Baskın, *Türk Dış Politikası, Cilt 1*, İstanbul, İletişim Yayınları, 2002, 162

One of these warnings was because of it offered its readers a puzzle in the forth page of the newspaper on the day Kanunu evvel 7 in 1941 (June 7, 1941). The appearance of the filled squares of this puzzle that its solution seemed easy was not compatible at all with the government's neutrality policy. The filled squares of the puzzle had the shape of two crooked crosses standing over and over angular in the puzzle. This situation has drawn the attention of Martial Law Commandment like it did everyone else's. The Aksam newspaper was not been closed because of this reason but has been warned. The Commandment informed all the newspapers that they should avoid the shapes and articles like that could cause misunderstandings and different misevaluating of many readers "even if it is possible to happen coincidently" after this incident. *Aksam defends that Turkey should not going into the war in the early years of the war. According to the newspaper, there could be one reason to go into the war: "To defend the Homeland". And the leading author Necmettin Sadak adopted both being neutral and not going into the war as the most exact policy for Turkey unless the security of the country is in danger.* Of course the newspaper's publication line shows off in parallel with the balance policy of Inonu try to remain the country away of the war "whatever it takes" unless there is an attack.<sup>14</sup>

On the other hand, even if the Allied news weighted, it has been seen that Anadolu Ajansı tracks the foreign policy and the war agenda strictly, transferring the news to the public and the press with a comprehension which gives place to both sides in accordance with this agenda. The publication of every kind of news from the countries that are invaded or neutral and from both sides of the war without distinction in the agency caused being a news resource of the neighbouring countries and accepting as a reliable news agency that does no distinction, reporting neutrally by the public world and neighbouring countries.<sup>15</sup>

Cumhuriyet analysed in the second section of the research is seen reflecting the Government's balance policy by publishing the foreign resourced news with no changing given by the Anadolu Ajansı, Aksam and Tan. When publishing the incidents selected in the bulletin the Anadolu Ajansı gave place the news of the both sides and the newspapers kept the principle of the same neutrality when giving news on the newspapers. In fact all the newspapers

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<sup>14</sup> Oran, Baskın, *Türk Dış Politikası, Cilt 1*, İstanbul, İletişim Yayınları, 2002, 165

<sup>15</sup> Topuz, Hıfzı, *100 Soruda Türk Basın Tarihi*, İstanbul, Gerçek Yayınevi, 1973, 189

published the news by splitting pages in the middle, one side with the title "According to the Allies" and the other side with the title "According to the Axis".

The official war notifications are published on the three newspapers, the equality principle is applied for the photos used, and the photos of the authorities of both sides are given the place. This situation continued in the news of Germany attacking the Russia in 1941 and the Normandy Invasion news in 1944 too.<sup>16</sup>

## Conclusion

To conclude; even in the periods when the foreign policy varies, the news about both sides was balanced in the news of the press. However, in the result of the research, no matter how the Anadolu Ajansı transferred the bulletins and the newspapers published the foreign news about the war without changing; it has been seen that every newspaper reflects the title of the news, the photo in use, and its footprint vs. in an editorial form with the details Yes, the front page of each newspaper was split in two, one side for the Allies and the other side for the Axis, but; a person reading the editorial sees which party the newspaper is sympathized, believes and praises the power of. In addition, a photo put next to the news gives the message of the newspaper to the reader clearer. To reflect their Russian sympathy, Tan, highlighted the Russian and the Axis victory was close by the mouth of the citizen organizing a survey of reader (June 23 1941, December 8 1941, August 25 1943, June 7 194 ). All of these show that the press even if it is under control, reflected its policy clearly; a reader who reads Cumhuriyet could see the German sympathy, a reader who reads Tan could see the Russian sympathy and a reader who reads Aksam could see the Russian antipathy in the newspaper (June 23 1941, August 26 1943).

In summary, the Turkish Press in the Second World War followed a foreign news policy parallel to the Government's balance policy with the purpose of the realization of the essential target of the foreign policy that is stay out of the war.

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<sup>16</sup> Alemdar, Korkmaz; "Anadolu Ajansı (1920-1980) Devlet Propaganda Örgütü'nün Gelişimi", *İletişim Ve Tarih*, Ankara, Ümit Yayınevi, 2001, 53

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*Tan*, June 23<sup>rd</sup> 1941, December 8<sup>th</sup> 1941 August 25<sup>th</sup> – 26<sup>th</sup> 1943, June 7<sup>th</sup> 1944