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REFLECTIONS OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR ON TURKEY'S FOREIGN POLICY

Summary

The representatives of Turkey's foreign policy and decision makers witnessing deadly results of the First World War, keenly evaded to follow adventurous policies applying an active neutral foreign policy practice in the course of the Second World War. Ankara preferred to apply a realist, non-adventurist outlook as well as it applied all possible diplomatic methods in order to protect itself from the destructive effects of the War. However, principally toward the end of the War, because of pressures by Alliance powers and not to have a disadvantageous position at the post-War era it cut its relations with Germany and Japan declaring war against Berlin and Tokyo.

Key words: Turkey, Second World War, active neutrality, diplomacy, Ankara.

JEL codes: F5, N4

Introduction

The Second World War (also called the World War II) is thought to have been the most disastrous and widespread war in the history. It is estimated that over 100,000,000 soldiers, originating from approximately thirty countries, served in different fronts. It is believed that between 50 and 75 million people died during the WWII, which makes it the most devastating war in the history of humanity¹.

Turkey's foreign policy decision makers witnessing deadly results of the First World War, keenly evaded to follow adventurous policies applying an active neutral foreign policy practice in the course of the Second World War. Ankara preferred to follow a realist, non-adventurist outlook as well as it applied all possible diplomatic methods in order to protect itself from the destructive effects of the War. However, principally toward the end of the War, because of pressures by Alliance powers and not to have a disadvantageous position in

¹ D. Sommerville, *The Complete Illustrated History of World War Two: An Authoritative Account of the Deadliest Conflict in Human History with Analysis of Decisive Encounters and Landmark Engagements*, Lorenz Books, 2008 p. 5.

the post-War era it cut its relations with Germany and Japan and declared war against Berlin and Tokyo. In addition to that, the emergence of Soviet threat also played an essential role in the decision-making process of the Republic of Turkey.

The aim of the paper is to present the specificity of Turkey's foreign policy during the World War II. Political, sociological and economic factors will be taken into consideration and will be thoroughly analysed in course of the subsequent sub-chapters. Within the framework of the paper a brief overview of the situation of Turkey before WWII along with the factors and conditions that influenced its foreign policy at the time of war will be presented. Aftermaths, the paper will present the most important events and achievements in the international affairs policy of Turkey during the WWII as their influence on the foreign relations and strategies will be analysed.

Finally, the paper will focus on goals of Ankara's foreign policy during the WWII as the rule of 'active neutrality', often cited in the literature on the subject, will also be presented and discussed. Finally, the paper will dwell on far-fetched influences on Turkish foreign policy with regard to the WWII.

1. Turkey before the World War II

1.1. The economic situation of Turkey before the WWII

In the period between the WWI and WWII, Turkey managed to integrate itself quickly into the global economy after it became a Republic (with a democratic governmental system) in the year 1923. In the beginning, around the year 1920, about 75% of the population (mounting up to 13 million at the time) inhabited villages. 82% of the employees worked in the agricultural sector and only approximately 5% in the industrial one. 5% of people worked in trade and the rest in services². Moreover, most of human resources and internal capital were scarce. Therefore, financial and economic means for introducing changes and promoting development were insufficient. It is important to mention that one of the main elements of the heritage after the Ottoman Empire (that was defeated during the WWI) was a significant debt³.

Turkey was predominantly an agricultural economy with almost 70% of its total income coming from this source. Nevertheless, the level of technology and advancement in the agricultural sector was very low; almost no innovations were introduced in comparison with the pre-war period, so it was very primitive and required massive workforce. It can be depicted with the fact that only

² E. Pakdemirli, *Ekonomimizin 1923'den 1990'a Sayısal Görünümü* (Numeric Outlook of Our Economy between 1923 and 1990). Milliyet Yayınları, İstanbul, 1991 pp. 32-38.

³ R. H. Davison, *Turkey: A Short History*, 2nd Edition, The Eothen Press, Huntingdon, 1988, p. 192.

approximately 200 tractors were used in the whole agricultural production then. The industrial production was able to meet only basic needs of citizens and therefore hunger was not uncommon⁴.

In addition to internal difficulties, the general global economic and political situation was also hindering Turkey's development. Even though Turkey managed to integrate itself with the global economy and start financial and economic development, the fact of integration had also its drawbacks. In the time of the Great Depression it suffered great losses due to its business relationships as it was highly reliant on them. After the global economy was re-built, political unrest started which eventually led to the outburst of the Second World War. Therefore, it was a difficult period for economy in general⁵.

In order to prevent further decreases in production and commerce, Turkish government decided to nationalise a great deal of previously private businesses as well as economy and industry. It was a practice already successfully carried out by the Soviet Union, from which Turkey adapted some of the practices. Thanks to those changes, the Turkish recovery from the Global Depression was relatively quick⁶.

It can be observed, on the basis of economic data, that the changes in GNP growth were significant between the year 1924 and 1939. In a short period of time, the economy went from the phase of quick and effective development to the decline phase. Until the year 1936, the rate of economic growth underwent sharp fluctuations, sometimes decreasing by more than 10% a year and sometimes increasing by more than 15% a year⁷. Because of that no far-fetched and long-term changes could have been effectively introduced by the government. The economy was tightly connected to the world economy, so all alterations, decreases and troubles were fast seen on the domestic market.

The instability and ups-and-downs of the Turkish economy at that time are depicted in the following graph.

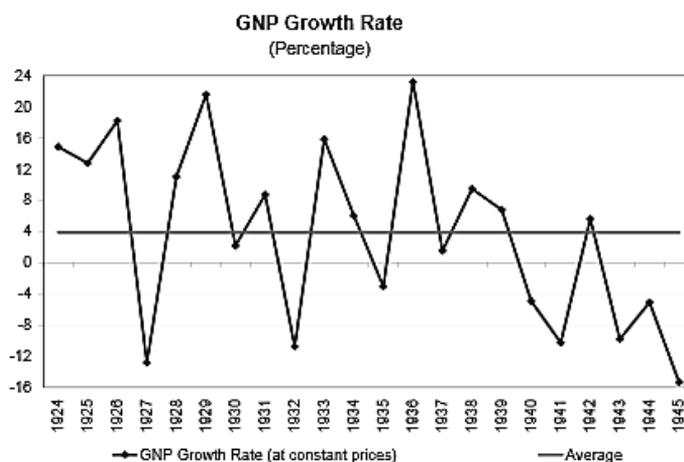
Therefore, it can be summed up that after the preliminary period of high instability, the Turkish economy managed to achieve a certain level of advancement before the WWII broke out. Nevertheless, it was still far from a well-developed and totally stable internal and international market and system.

⁴ Ibidem, pp. 47-49.

⁵ F. Mishkin, "Global Financial Instability: Framework, Events, Issues", *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, Vol. 13, Issue 3, 1999, pp. 1-10.

⁶ O. Silier, *1920'lerde Türkiye'de Milli Bankacılığın Genel Görünümü* (General Outlook of National Banking in Turkey at 1920's), *Türkiye İktisat Tarihi Semineri*, Volume 13, Hacettepe, Ankara, 1973, pp. 84-95.

⁷ Ibidem.

Fig. 1. GNP Growth Rate 1924–1945⁸

1.2. The political situation of Turkey before the WWII

In the early periods of young Republic, Ankara was focused on ensuring stability of the country. After many years of instability and both domestic and international conflicts, the country and its internal political and social system were in decline. The new system was vital for keeping society in order, to enforce required laws and rebuild the country. The basis for government at the time was created through implementation of the single-party rule. The Republican's People Party (CHP) was the only one to constitute the government in the period from 1925 to 1945⁹.

With the establishment of the single-party government and the new ruling system, the efforts to modernise Turkey began. First, there was an attempt to apply and adapt Western-European laws, regulations and constitutions to the domestic situation and policy. New laws were based in majority on the contemporary systems from France, Italy, Switzerland and Sweden. Sometime afterwards the Liberal Republican Party was founded. It was the time when religious and liberal parties united. Some social riots and conflicts aroused especially in the eastern part of the country. The instability continued until the year 1930 when the opposing party was dissolved and then there were no attempts to establish a multi-party system till after the Second World War¹⁰.

⁸ Turkish Statistical Institute, <http://www.turkstat.gov.tr>

⁹ Z. Eric Jan, *Political Opposition in the Early Turkish Republic: The Progressive Republican Party, 1924–1925*, Brill, New York, 1991, pp. 297–298.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 431.

2. Turkey's foreign policy during the interwar period

Kemalism was the shaping factor of the foreign policy of Turkey that promoted westernisation of the country and modernisation of its society. The general rule of the Mustafa Kemal and the single-party government with regard to country's foreign policy is clearly visible in the following motto: "Peace at home and peace in the world"¹¹. Therefore, Turkey followed the policy of neutrality that strictly adhered to antirevisionist approaches¹².

The conflict with Greece, left-over from the Ottoman Empire times, was resolved relatively peacefully after the independence war. The transfer of both Christian and Muslim inhabitants was carried out without problem so that they could return to their homelands. The same happened with the dispute of Mosul and Kirkuk, which provoked tensions between Turkey and Great Britain – it was resolved by the League of Nations in the year 1926.

Two major fractions were instated at the time:

- the Revisionists (with major members: Germany and Italy);
- and the Anti-revisionists (instated by France, Britain), to which Turkey accessed¹³.

In consequence, in the year 1932, Turkey became a member of the League of Nations, which was an important step in its rapprochement with the Western countries. At this point it is vital to underline the fact that the foundations of all international contacts and co-operation were laid on "the full independence and territorial integrity of the Republic"¹⁴ as due to economic capitulations that seriously treated Ottoman sovereignty toward its collapse.

In addition to the desire of establishing close relations with the West, Turkey was also in search for gaining support of a country which was powerful in global terms. Therefore, the government decided to go back to the foreign policy it exerted in the time of the War of National Liberation. Therefore, it was obvious that peaceful and friendly relationship should be maintained with the Soviet Union. Those two countries agreed to sign a Pact of Non-Aggression and Security as early as in 1925. The first article of this document states:

Both sides agree to observe neutrality towards the other on case a military action should be carried out by one or more powers against one signatory party¹⁵.

¹¹ Ibidem, p. 526.

¹² Ibidem, p. 527.

¹³ J. C. Hurewitz, *Diplomacy in the Near and Middle East*, Vol. 2, D. Van Nostrand Company, London 1958, p. 143.

¹⁴ F. S. Larrabee, I. O. Lesser, *Turkish Foreign Policy in an Age of Uncertainty*, Rand Corporation, Santa Monica, 1993, p. 15.

¹⁵ H. Howard, *The Partition of Turkey: A Diplomatic History: 1913-1923*, New York, 1993, p. 343.

2.1. The Balkan Entente

“The difficult problems have concerned relations between Turkey and the Balkan countries, a legacy of the break-up of the Ottoman Empire. Specific problems have arisen from Turkish minorities, their cultural freedom and property compensation”¹⁶. The issue of domestic minority groups was solved through the agreement between Turkey and Greece in June in the year 1930. Then, in October of the same year, an agreement of Neutrality, Conciliation and Arbitration was instated¹⁷.

The Balkan Entente, being one of the most significant documents which served to maintain peace in the region, is based on the Cordial Friendship Pact which was first introduced in the year 1923. Balkan Entente was in its core an agreement concluded in Athens in the year 1934, between Greece, Yugoslavia, Romania and Turkey. In the preliminary phase also Albania and Bulgaria were to be included but this never came to pass. The Balkan Entente was a political system which was modelled on the organisation of the Little Entente pact, but was supplemented by a secret military annex, which provided for co-operation of four participants in the defence of the existing borders in the Balkans. In its text there are the following articles:

Article 1.

Greece, Romania, Turkey and Yugoslavia mutually guarantee the security of each and all of their Balkan frontiers.

Article 2.

The High Contracting Parties undertake to concert together in regard to the measures to be taken in contingencies liable to affect their interests as defined by the present Agreement. They undertake not to embark upon any political action in relation to any other Balkan country not a signatory of the present Agreement without previous mutual consultation, nor to incur any political obligation to any other Balkan country without the consent of the other Contracting Parties¹⁸.

It is worth to note that in this group there were Yugoslavia and Romania – the original members of the Little Entente, which actually meant the weakening and the political isolation of Czechoslovakia was also a member of the Little Entente. Yugoslavia and Romania felt that this new agreement sufficiently protected them from Hungary and thus the co-operation with Czechoslovakia was not required anymore¹⁹.

¹⁶ B. S. Duygu (1984), *Turkey's Security Policies* in Jonathan Alford (Ed.). *Greece and Turkey: Adversity In Alliance*, Gower Publishing, Guildford, 1988, p. 80.

¹⁷ Ibidem.

¹⁸ Pact of Balkan Entente Between Greece, Romania, Turkey and Yugoslavia signed at Athens, February 9th, 1934, <http://ungarisches-institut.de>.

¹⁹ B. S. Duygu, op. cit., p. 83.

As far as Turkey is concerned, the Balkan Entente was very vital for its policies, both internal and external meaning. Peace in the Balkan region meant not only stabilisation of Turkey's position on the local ground, but also was perceived as a defensive means against increasing German imperialism. Because of the aforementioned agreement of friendship with the USSR Ankara received foreign loans which enabled its growth²⁰. It can therefore be stated that even though the Balkan Entente was appreciated as a political treaty, it was skilfully used by Turkey to enhance its economic development possibilities.

2.2. Montreux Convention

After the Mosul dispute was resolved with London, relations between Turkey and Britain were highly tense. Although the harshest conflict was resolved between the parts the development of mutual co-operation did not take place that quickly. Relations between Turkey and Britain improved soon afterwards the British-Turkish Treaty of Commerce and Navigation was introduced in the year 1930. The co-operation of both countries, both political and economic, was then instated²¹.

In 1936, when Germany began to re-arm the Rhine region, Japan attacked Manchuria (even though it signed the Lausanne Treaty) and then ceased to be a member of the League of Nations. Turkey was afraid that Italy, that successfully defeated Ethiopia, might attack other countries, including Turkey. Because of this instability and worsening of international situation, Turkey decided to take political action aimed at re-militarisation of its territories and allowing free passage of ships, both merchant and army ones. A formal request was sent to those countries which signed the Treaty of Lausanne. In consequence, Turkey, Bulgaria, Japan, Romania, France and USSR signed the Convention in Montreux in July 1936 (Italy restrained from signing it up until the year 1936)²².

Article 1 of the Convention states that "The High Contracting Parties recognise and affirm the principle of freedom of passage and navigation by sea in the Straits". Article 2 states that "In time of peace, merchant vessels shall enjoy complete freedom of passage and navigation in the Straits, by day and by night, under any flag with any kind of cargo"²³. It should be underlined that, in the light of international situation at the time, the Convention served rather the interests of Turkey and the USSR than those of other signatory countries.

2.3. Saadabad Pact

The signing of the Saadabad Pact between Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Afghanistan was one of the most noteworthy events in the foreign policy of Turkey just

²⁰ Ibidem.

²¹ League of Nations Treaty Series, vol. 173, pp. 214-241.

²² Ibidem.

²³ Montreux Convention 1936/1951. <http://www.anistor.gr>

before the Second World War. The Pact was in fact a result of Turkey's want for establishing relationship between Asian and European countries²⁴.

In its essence, the Saadabad Pact was almost identical in its meaning and importance to the Balkan Entente, already aforementioned. It spread Turkey's influences and friendships over a vaster region on the continent, assuring its safety and welfare. Therefore, it can be stated that signing of the Pact was an important rapprochement of the East and Turkey. On the other hand, Bernard Lewis states that: "[...] this purely defensive Pact, which helped guard her eastern frontiers, did not constitute a threat to the principle of laicism"²⁵. Yet it may be concluded that thanks to the Saadabad Pact Ankara secured its eastern border in the course of upcoming war.

2.4. Hatay Question

One of the most heated conflicts between Turkey and France at that time was post-Ottoman Empire debts. Due to global recession, Turkey was not able to pay its debts thus disagreement increased. Negotiations were then held in Paris and they resulted in an agreement in the year 1933 which quickly led to a significant improvement of mutual relationship²⁶.

Almost 100 thousand Turkish inhabitants lived in the Sanjak (or governorate) of Hatay the borders of which were within the National Pact. Turkey came to accept the French trusteeship for this region in the year 1921 (in the so-called Ankara Agreement). Therefore, a special administration was instated there. In the year 1925 problems arose due to Syrian want of taking back Hatay. Soon a treaty between Syria and France was signed which was seen by the Syrian government as an agreement for its Hatay related territorial ambitions²⁷.

After long-term negotiations, it was decided that Hatay should be politically separate from both countries for the time of elections. "In September 1938, elections were held and the Turks gained a majority in the assembly which promptly proclaimed autonomy under the name of Hatay"²⁸. The new political entity was independent yet as a consequence of a plebiscite Hatay annexed to Turkey. France agreed to that due to a new political situation in Europe (mostly German and Italian policies with regard to international affairs) and getting a warrant from Ankara that the Christian minority rights would be observed in accordance with international law frames²⁹.

²⁴ Foreign Office Files, The Public Record Office, London, No. 371/E5 i66/188/44, www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/records

²⁵ G. Lewis, *Nations of the Modern World: Turkey*, Third Edition, Ernest Benn, 1965, p. 117.

²⁶ J. C. Hurewitz, *Diplomacy in the Near and Middle East*, Vol.2, D. Van Nostrand Company, London, 1958, p. 98.

²⁷ Ibidem.

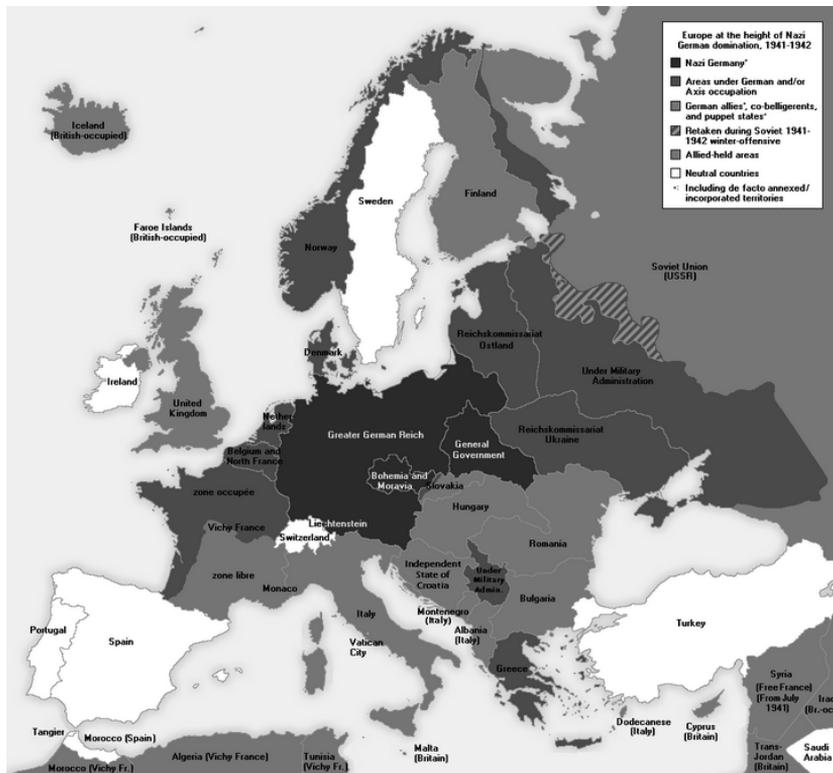
²⁸ A. Gol, "A Short Summary of Turkish Foreign Policy", http://www.politics.ankara.edu.tr/dergi/pdf/48/1/5_ayla_gol.pdf

²⁹ J. C. Hurewitz, op. cit., p. 99.

3. Determinants of the Turkish foreign policy during the WWII

It may be argued that the foreign policy of Turkey under the Second World War was highly distinctive. One may claim that it was a diplomatic and political achievement to maintain a fairly stable and independent position without taking any side prior to the War as well as in the course of the War. Turkey succeeded at a certain point in having both a Treaty of Mutual Assistance with the United Kingdom and, at the same time, a Friendship and Non-aggression Pact with Germany³⁰. Due to this fact, when manifold other countries were under Nazi occupation during the War, Turkey prevailed. The neutrality and thus relative security of Turkey during the War can be observed through analysis of Nazi-occupied regions, as in the figure here beneath:

Fig. 2. Nazi-occupied Europe



Source: http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/1/16/Europe_under_Nazi_domination.png

³⁰ S. Derengil, *Turkish Foreign Policy during the Second World War: an 'Active' Neutrality*, Cambridge University Press, London, 2002, p. 1.

The position of Turkey during the War resulted from its well-designed foreign policies of friendship and balance beforehand. It was due to consistent strategy, realistic approach to foreign relations, understanding of the country's own limitations, strengths and weaknesses, and attentive guidance by the government. As Turkey was no longer a super-power as in the times of the Ottoman Empire, its foreign and domestic policies must have mirrored its situation and international position. Besides, the fact that both civic and military cadres of young Republic (not excluding President Ismet Inonu) consisted of people who experienced dreadful consequences of the First World War that brought a nation almost to demolishment also played a crucial role in Turkish foreign policy decision makers toward the War.

Eventually, it is worth to note that in the year 1938 Mustafa Kemal, nearing his death, advised the remaining government: "A World War is near. In the course of this war, international equilibrium will be entirely destroyed. If during this period we act unwisely and make the smallest mistake, we will be faced with an even graver catastrophe than in the Armistice years"³¹.

4. Active neutrality of Turkey during the WWII

It should be underlined that one of the most important and remarkable achievements of the Turkey's foreign policy during the Second World War was that it was able to maintain friendly or at least neutral relations with both sides which took part in the global conflict. In terms of diplomacy one may assert that Turkey's foreign policy decision makers in the course of WWII gave a good sample of successful, well managed, versatile diplomacy³².

As far as German threat is concerned, it was not only non-aggressive towards Turkey but even it was convinced by the Turkish government that it was in its best interest to support Turkey. In consequence Germany helped in arming of the Turks during the War. As alliances wanted Turkey to take part in the War on its side, it was at times difficult for Turkish government to manoeuvre themselves out of such an action. One of the main arguments to remain neutral was that Turkey claimed to believe that an imminent German attack on the country is near. This 'German threat' was in fact only an argument to remain neutral with regard to Great Britain's' requests³³. Alliances so as to convince Ankara to participate to the War pushed an immense pressure toward Turkey. Nevertheless, Ankara under the pretext of arsenal shortage or similar reasons managed to reject insistence of alliances.

³¹ Ibidem, p. 3.

³² Annette B Fox, *The Power of Small States: Diplomacy in World War II*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1959, p. 50

³³ Ibidem, p. 134–135.

5. Turkey's foreign policy objectives during the WWII

The most persistent and important aim of the Turkish government's foreign policy at the time of the War was the survival and the continuation of Turkey's independence and sovereignty. Therefore, a very cautious and mindful approach was the reigning policy. Here beneath is the list of the most vital benchmarks and bases of Turkish warfare foreign policy:

Turkey at this period tried not to take part in creation of various power alliances. Ankara attempted to maintain the dilution of power and influence between as many countries as possible to assure its stability. "Formulas such as 'Traditional friendship', 'hereditary enemy' or 'long-lasting history of cooperation' are devoid of any real meaning. Practical policies will inevitably triumph over idealism, promises and sentiment"³⁴. Therefore, it was vital for Turkey to make the most of its own resources and accumulate as much strength, power and influence as possible as agreements and treaties might be broken due to the change in the international situation.

Another vital concept was that Turkey always ready to stand and defend itself (politically as well as territorially and economically). However, as the neutrality rule was of greatest importance, the constitution of armed forces should be accompanied by straightforward and clear statements towards other countries that they should be used only on the event of attack – in self-defence.

Bargaining at this period constituted an important part of foreign policy as it was inevitable with regard to small and middle size countries. It was a key issue for country's survival in the face of threats from powerful neighbour.

In a nutshell, it can be stated that the main goal of Turkish foreign policy at the time was to survive and, possibly, strengthen its international position. All of the government's actions and attempts were done with the aim of fulfilling this very goal.

6. Post-War Period

Regardless of the fact the neutrality principle was so useful and proved so effective during the War period, it had its drawback immediately afterwards. When in the post-war period Stalin made an ultimatum in which he demanded territory along the Straits altogether with returning of some eastern regions, Turkey's allies, Great Britain and the United States of America, did not react or offer any kind of support for a long time. In the year 1947, when the post-war situation was more or less stabilised, the position of Turkey declined relatively. Moreover, it did not receive any financial help from the United Kingdom (which

³⁴ Ibidem, p. 3.

was promised in order to re-build and develop the country after the war) as it itself was struggling with a major economic crisis³⁵.

Afterwards the United States offered financial and military support to Turkey. However, it was not on the basis of their mutual co-operation but with the aim of averting it from falling under the control of the USSR³⁶. In consequence, Turkey became a member state of NATO in 1952. This was the end of the neutrality period which it strived so much to conserve by all means during the war and after it.

Thus it was obvious that the use of one powerful country against another to maintain status was no longer possible. The period of standing aside the international situation was definitely over. Thus, Turkey due to historical and geo-politic reasons stays with the West as the basis for its international co-operation and on this fact all further foreign policies were built.

Conclusion

Even though Turkey did not take part in the WWII, the costs of defence were considerable and grew fast, which negatively influenced the country's economy and its development. In the time of war, from the year 1940 to 1945, the GNP growth was negative (with the exception of the year 1942). Therefore, the overall effect of war was highly negative one. It provoked some changes in both internal and foreign policies which aimed at maintaining at least lack of economic decrease.

The rule of active neutrality, which was most important foreign policy principle for Ankara at the time, proved a successful foreign policy which enabled the country to survive and saved against destruction effects of the War. Due to skilful diplomatic tactics of Turkey's foreign policy decision makers at the time of the Second World War, Ankara managed to exploit to the most the changing balance of power.

To sum up, even though there is a foreign policy literature disapproving Turkey's foreign policy during the Second World War, Turkey managed to avoid suffering, citizens' deaths and economic breakdown which deeply destroyed many other countries. Turkey's neutral policy, which was applied very successfully in the course of the Second World War, lost its medium in the upcoming conjecture due to the bipolar construction of the international political scene where Turkey soon participated to the West.

³⁵ Ibidem, p. 63.

³⁶ S. Deringil, *op. cit.*, pp. 130–131.

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Piętno Drugiej Wojny Światowej na polityce zagranicznej Turcji

Streszczenie

Przedstawiciele tureckiej polityki zagranicznej i decydenci, będący świadkami tragicznych wyników Pierwszej Wojny Światowej, byli żywo zainteresowani tym, by uniknąć prowadzenia awanturniczej polityki, stosując w trakcie Drugiej Wojny Światowej praktykę aktywnej polityki zagranicznej prowadzonej z pozycji neutralności. Ankara wolała się trzymać realistycznej, nieryzykownej perspektywy, jak również stosowała wszelkie możliwe metody dyplomatyczne w celu zabezpieczenia się przed niszczącymi skutkami wojny. Z drugiej strony,

w zasadzie pod koniec wojny, z powodu nacisku Państw Sprzymierzonych i nie chcąc zajmować niekorzystnej pozycji w epoce powojennej, zerwała swe stosunki z Niemcami i Japonią, wypowiadając wojnę Berlinowi i Tokio.

Słowa kluczowe: Turcja, druga wojna światowa, aktywna neutralność, dyplomacja, Ankara.

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