

# YUGOSLAV DIPLOMACY AND PUBLIC ON “THE HATAY QUESTION” (THE SANJAK OF ALEXANDRETTA) IN THE PERIOD OF 20S AND 30S OF THE 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY



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## Abstract

The development of bilateral relations between the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (known as the Kingdom of Yugoslavia since 1929) and the Republic of Türkiye during the second half of the 20s and 30s of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was characterized by intensive rapprochement within all spheres – politics, economy, defense, education, culture etc. Owing to that very rapprochement diplomatic societies and the wider Yugoslav public carefully followed the events in Türkiye, considering internal as well as internal aspects. Atatürk's extensive reform activities as well as those performed by Turkish authorities concerning the establishment of neighbor relations with the surrounding, regarding pacific external politics that was promoted by the "Father of Turks", made Yugoslav daily papers and periodical publications full of written columns on this matter. "The Hatay Question" (the Sanjak of Iskenderun) together with "The Mosul Question" was one of the most important challenges of the young Turkish Republic's external politics in the constructive consideration of which the creators of the Yugoslav external politics were interested since it was the obstacle between France, the main Yugoslav external political support and Türkiye, its close ally with which it has been bound by contractual relation within Balkan Agreement since 1934. Therefore the reports of the Yugoslav Embassy in Ankara and the general consulate in Constantinople written to the superiors in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Belgrade very often consisted of information on "the Hatay Question". Yugoslav press also wrote on this matter, particularly those papers that had reporters in Türkiye.

According to the unpublished archives of Yugoslav origin and articles in journals, the most important moments and processes regarding "the Hatay Question" will be analyzed chronologically as it is mentioned in the title, till 1940, namely its final solution, the realized demarcation of Türkiye and

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Syria in the region of the Sanjak of Iskenderun, while they regard the circumstances and the situation in Hatay, the relationship of Turks and Arabs, French-Turkish diplomatic complicated situations and tensions, the role of the League of Nations and other important international political factors (Great Britain, USSR, Italy, Germany) etc.

**Keywords:** "The Hatay Question", Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes/ Yugoslavia, League of Nations, French-Turkish relations, Turkish Republic.

## 20. YÜZYILIN 20'LI VE 30'LU YILLARINDA “HATAY MESELESİ” (İSKENDERİYE SANCAĞI) KONUSUNDA YUGOSLAV DIPLOMASISI VE KAMUOYU

### Özet

20. yüzyılın 20'li ve 30'lu yıllarının ikinci yarısında Sırp, Hırvatlar ve Slovenler Krallığı (1929'dan beri Yugoslavya Krallığı olarak bilinir) ile Türkiye Cumhuriyeti arasındaki ikili ilişkilerin gelişimi, her alanda yoğun bir yakınlaşma ile karakterize edildi. – siyaset, ekonomi, savunma, eğitim, kültür vb. Bu yakınlaşma nedeniyle, diplomatik toplumlar ve daha geniş Yugoslav kamuoyu, Türkiye'deki olayları hem iç hem de iç yönleri dikkate alarak dikkatle takip etti. Atatürk'ün kapsamlı reform faaliyetleri ve Türk makamlarının “Türklerin Babası” tarafından teşvik edilen barışçıl dış politika konusunda çevre ile komşuluk ilişkilerinin kurulması konusunda gerçekleştirdiği girişimler, Yugoslav günlük gazetelerini ve süreli yayınlarını yazılı olarak dolu hale getirdi. Bu konudaki sütunlar. “Musul Sorunu” ile birlikte “Hatay Sorunu” (İskenderun Sancağı), genç Türkiye Cumhuriyeti'nin dış politikasının yapıcı değerlendirmesindeki en önemli sorunlarından biriydi ve Yugoslav dış politikasının yaratıcılarının ilgilendiği bir sorundu. Yugoslavya'nın ana dış siyasi desteği olan Fransa ile 1934'ten beri Balkan Anlaşması çerçevesinde akdi ilişkiyle bağlı olduğu Türkiye ile arasındaki engeldi. Belgrad'daki Dışişleri Bakanlığı'ndaki amirleri çok sık olarak “Hatay Sorunu” ile ilgili bilgilerden oluşuyordu.

Yugoslav basını da, özellikle Türkiye'de muhabiri olan gazeteler bu konuyu yazdı. Yugoslav kökenli yayınlanmamış arşivler ve dergilerdeki makalelerden hareketle “Hatay Sorunu”nun başlıkta da geçtiği şekliyle 1940 yılına, yani nihai çözüme, gerçekleştirdiği döneme kadarki en önemli anları ve süreçleri kronolojik olarak incelenecektir. Hatay'daki şartlar ve durum, Türkler ve Araplar arasındaki ilişkiler, Fransız-Türk diplomatik karmaşık durumları ve gerilimleri, Milletler Cemiyeti'nin rolü ve diğer önemli uluslararası siyasi faktörler (İngiltere, SSCB, İtalya, Almanya) vb. bu çalışmanın konusunu oluşturmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Hatay Sorunu, Sırp, Hırvat ve Sloven Krallığı/Yugoslavya, Milletler Cemiyeti, Fransız-Türk ilişkileri, Türkiye Cumhuriyeti.

The beginning of the fourth decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, marked by a major global economic crisis that left deep consequences in the spheres of international economy and politics, was characterized by a tightening of the European political scene. The ambitious expansionist aspirations of the Italian fascists, the coming to power of the National Socialist Party in Germany and the general strengthening of tendencies directed towards the revision of the Versailles system established after the First World War caused the concern of those countries that were threatened by such efforts. Among them were the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and the Republic of Türkiye, which were connected by the "Treaty of Peace and Friendship" on October 28, 1925<sup>1</sup>, and from February 9, 1934, the alliance within the Balkan Pact.<sup>2</sup> On the geopolitical level, both countries faced the revisionist efforts of Bulgaria and Italy, which led them to intensive cooperation in the domain of diplomacy and the military-security sector, and thus created the conditions for rapprochement in other segments - economy, education, culture, sports, etc. Friendship and alliance influenced the fact that both official Belgrade and official Ankara intensively observed the foreign policy challenges faced by their ally, striving to help him and provide all kinds of support. One such issue that captured the attention of the Turkish government was regarding the status of two areas - Iskenderun Sanjak (Alexandretta) and Hatay (Antioch), territories that were controlled by the French after the First World War and the territorial reduction of the Ottoman Empire.

Through its diplomatic missions in the Republic of Türkiye - in Istanbul and since 1939 in Ankara, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia tried to collect as much information as possible from various sources on this issue - during official meetings with representatives of the Turkish government and the regime's "Republican People's Party", to members of the diplomatic corps of other countries in Ankara and Istanbul, by analyzing the writings of the Turkish press, from various "confidential sources", etc. That information, analyzed and systematized in the office of the Minister of Foreign Affairs in Belgrade, served the Yugoslav government to create its position, taking care primarily of its interests, but also trying to maintain political closeness, both with

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<sup>1</sup> Владан Виријевић, *Југословенско-турски економски односи 1918-1941*, Филозофски факултет Косовска Митровица, Косовска Митровица, 2018, р. 66.

<sup>2</sup> Милица Бодрожић, "Спољна политика Краљевине Југославије у време владавине Југословенске националне странке 1932-1934", *Зборник Матице српске за историју*, 63-64, Нови Сад, 2001, р. 286; Nada Zimova, "The Balkan Entente and Turkey", *IX Türk Tarih Kongresi Bildirileri*, III. Cilt, Ankara 1981, 2002.

official Ankara and with official Paris, otherwise one of the main foreign policy pillars of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. Along with the interests of Yugoslav diplomacy, the "Hatay question", as this diplomatic process was most often called, also received significant attention from the Yugoslav public. The daily press and specialized magazines, which collected information about it from their correspondents in Türkiye, but also transmitted the writings of the Turkish, French, English, Italian, German, Bulgarian, Romanian and Greek press, informed the readers about the most significant details and diplomatic entanglements related to "Hatay question", cross-referencing different information, publishing official announcements and statements of high officials of the Turkish and French governments, etc.

The "Question of Hatay", i.e. the status of the area of Iskenderun Sanjak and Hatay, became the focus of attention of Yugoslav diplomacy and the public at the beginning of 1935, although it was relevant as part of the reconfiguration of geopolitical relations in the Middle East and the Eastern Mediterranean between the leading powers of the Entente, the victorious group in the First World War, during the duration of the war conflicts and in the period immediately after their end, i.e. defining the peace treaty with the Ottoman Empire in Sèvres in 1920. Namely, the dismemberment and occupation of the territories of the Ottoman Empire by the Entente were carried out under the secret agreements signed during the war between France, England, Russia, Greece and Italy, whereby each of them sought to satisfy their own geopolitical and economic interests as much as possible. The complexity of the situation was further enhanced by the fact that the area of Asia Minor and the Middle East was very diverse in the ethnic-confessional sense, which created the possibility for numerous manipulations and conditions for conflicts between the peoples who lived there. All this resulted in the drawing of new state borders and the shaping of state territories, which was discussed at several international diplomatic conferences. Thus, at the conference in San Remo (April 19-26, 1920), during which the agenda for the future peace agreement with the Ottoman Empire was prepared and the borders of Syria were decided, the Iskenderun Sanjak was also discussed, so that it, along with Lebanon and Syria, was supposed to become part of the French administrative area in the Middle East. The French government sought to gain control over the port of Iskenderun, an important maritime point in the Eastern Mediterranean, both militarily-strategically and economically, as it was connected by rail to the "Baghdad Railway". The area itself was demographically diverse - it was inhabited, apart from the majority Turkish population, by Arabs and

Armenians, who were mutually confrontational and as such represented exponents of individual interested Entente powers.<sup>3</sup> The solution reached the conference in San Remo was implemented in the clauses of the Sèvres Peace Treaty of August 10, 1920, which gave France the right to control the territory of Syria as a mandated power.<sup>4</sup>

The question of the status of the Iskenderun sanjak occupied an important place in the relations between France and the government of Kemal Pasha. During the London Conference on March 11, 1921, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the government in Ankara, Bekir Sami, and the French Prime Minister Aristide Briand signed an agreement concerning political, military and economic issues and the Syrian-Turkish border was established in principle. It was foreseen the withdrawal of French military units from the territories of Asia Minor that they had previously occupied, with the control of the Baghdad railway being retained by the French, and the territory through which it passes being controlled by Kemalist troops.<sup>5</sup>

The Iskenderun Sanjak was also discussed during the stay of the French delegation in Ankara in mid-October 1921, led by Franklin Bouillon. The epilogue of these talks was the signing of the agreement on October 20, which ended the state of war between the two countries and opened a new chapter in their relations. The agreement defined the Syrian-Turkish border and determined the special regime of administrative administration in Sanjak, whereby the Turkish language is recognized as official in the administration and schools, and the rights of the Turkish minority are guaranteed.<sup>6</sup> By the decision of the Council of the League of Nations on July 24, 1922, France was officially recognized as having a mandate over Syria and Lebanon.<sup>7</sup> In this way, the French presence and influence in the Middle East were strengthened, but the issue of drawing the borderline between Syria and Türkiye remained on the agenda and made it difficult to improve Franco-Turkish relations.

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<sup>3</sup> Armenians during the war years 1914-1918. tried to obtain support from the leading powers of the Entente for the formation of their republic in the area of Hatay, while also gaining control over the port of Iskenderun, but this did not happen after the war. – Јован М. Јовановић, **Дипломатска историја Нове Европе 1918-1938**, књ. 1, Издавачка књижара Косте Ј. Михаиловића, Београд, 1938, p. 87.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*, 196.

<sup>5</sup> Doç. Dr. Mustafa Budak, "Ankara İtilafnamesi Sürecinde Suriye Sınırı Üzerindeki Tartışmalar", **Atatürk Dönemi Türk Dış Politikası – Makaleler**, Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi, Ankara 2000, p. 245.

<sup>6</sup> "Французи у Турској", **Политика**, 20. III 1921, 1.

<sup>7</sup> "Мандат Енглеској и Француској", **Правда**, 25. VII 1922, 2.

The status of the Iskenderun Sanjak area was also the subject of a new Franco-Turkish agreement, signed on February 18, 1926. With it, the two governments undertook to respect the inviolability of borders in Asia and that all disputed issues must be resolved exclusively through judicial arbitration.<sup>8</sup>

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Actualization of the "Hatay issue" in the Yugoslav diplomatic sphere and public opinion, i.e. the press began to notice it more significantly after the signing of the peace treaty between France and Syria in Paris on September 9, 1936, which recognized the independence of Syria. In the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, they estimated that this event was first of all supported by the Turkish government and public opinion, i.e. characterized as an act of "liberation of a brotherly people", but this attitude was soon changed. Namely, the dissatisfaction of Turkish official circles and the public was caused by the fact that on that occasion the issue of the status of the Turkish minority in the area of Iskenderun Sanjak, which, according to estimates, numbered around 240,000 of the 280,000 population there, was not addressed.<sup>9</sup> Although the treaty stated that Syria would be obliged to respect all agreements that France concluded with other countries, the Turkish government considered that it was more general in nature and did not represent a firm guarantee for the rights of Turks in Syria.<sup>10</sup> At the beginning of October 1936, the Yugoslav Consul General in Istanbul wrote to his authorities that this dissatisfaction was further strengthened by the vague statements that the members of the Syrian delegation made to Turkish journalists in Istanbul upon their return from Paris: "The statements of the Syrian delegation were in the spirit of

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<sup>8</sup> Ovaj sporazum izazvao je negativne reakcije engleske vlade koja je smatrala da se time ugrožavaju njene pozicije u Iraku. – "Француско-турски споразум", *Политика*, 20. II 1926, 2.; "Француско-турска конвенција је потписана", *Време*, 21. II 1926, 1.; "Уговор Француске и Турске", *Правда*, 21. II 1926, 2.; "Француско-турски споразум", *Застава*, 24. II 1926, 1.

<sup>9</sup> The Yugoslav General Consulate in Constantinople stated in relation to the question of assessing the population structure and number of Sanjak: "It is difficult to determine who has the majority in this area." The Turkish element is the better and wealthier part of the population. (...) In addition to the Turkish and Arab elements in this area, there are also a large number of Armenians, Circassians and Turkish emigrants who would be reluctant to opt for Turkish administration". - AY-411-7-284, Report of the Consulate General of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in Constantinople to the Political Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, December 15, 1936; *Izveštaji Ministarstva inostranih poslova Kraljevine Jugoslavije za 1937. godinu*, Arhiv Jugoslavije, Beograd 2013, p. 485.

<sup>10</sup> Archives of Yugoslavia (AY)-411-7-275, Letter from the Consulate General of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in Constantinople to the Political Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, 10. X 1937.

understanding the nationalist the party that has the majority in Syria and is not in the mood to make major concessions to Türkiye or other minorities in their country.<sup>11</sup> According to this report, the movement advocating for the autonomy of the Turks in the area of the Iskenderun sanjak was gaining mass. Its representatives refused to participate in the ceremonial welcome of the Syrian delegation that returned from Paris and then sent a petition to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Türkiye expressing their protest regarding the French-Syrian treaty, which, as they believed, did not protect their rights. This caused a reaction from Syrian nationalists and numerous anti-Turkish articles in the Syrian press. The Syrian authorities even expelled the correspondent of the Turkish daily "Cumhuriyet" because "in his correspondence, he energetically advocated the rights of the Turkish minority".<sup>12</sup> Miodrag Mihajlović Svetovski, the Turkish correspondent of the Belgrade daily newspaper "Vreme", wrote that he learned from conversations with "eminent interlocutors from Ankara" that the Turkish government is not asking for a plebiscite for the Iskenderun Sanjak, that is, it has no intention of making it an integral part of the Turkish state, but to insist on autonomy for the Turkish population there.<sup>13</sup>

The Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs, Tevfik Rushdi Aras, sent a diplomatic note of protest to the French government at the beginning of October 1936, in which he demanded that mutual negotiations be held on the "Hatay question". She answered that she accepted the initiative, but that the representatives of Syria should be included in the negotiations, which the Turkish side vigorously refused, pointing out that at the time of the signing of the Turkish-French treaty in 1921, there was "no Syrian state".<sup>14</sup> The Turkish government linked the new situation with the provisions of the Lausanne Peace Treaty, emphasizing that Article 13 of this treaty stipulated that Türkiye renounce sovereignty over the Iskenderun Sanjak in favour of France and that now the local Turkish population had the right to inherit sovereignty over that territory. Official Paris responded by declaring that it is ready to negotiate only within the framework of the provisions of the Turkish-French agreement from 1921 and that the Turkish government, if it does not agree, can raise this issue before the bodies of the League of

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>13</sup> "Проблем независности Александрете и Антиохије", *Време*, 24. XI 1936, 3.

<sup>14</sup> *Izveštaji Ministarstva inostranih poslova Kraljevine Jugoslavije za 1937. godinu*, Arhiv Jugoslavije, Beograd 2013, p. 596.



Nations in Geneva. Analyzing this situation, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia concluded that the Turkish government "is avoiding solving the legal side of this issue and therefore does not want it to be brought before the Hague Court".<sup>15</sup> At the same time, the situation "on the ground" began to worsen. According to Turkish claims, the Syrian authorities began to apply numerous repressive measures against the Turkish community in Iskenderun Sanjak, especially in the urban areas, as a result of which  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the shops in Antakya were closed.<sup>16</sup> The Yugoslav Consul General from Istanbul reported to the authorities in Belgrade that the situation on the Syrian-Turkish border "is so tense that a more serious conflict can occur at any moment", that serious military preparations are being made on both sides and that the Turkish and Syrian press are conducting such intense polemic "as if the two countries are on the verge of a fight".<sup>17</sup>

At the beginning of December 1936, Rushdi Aras held talks in Geneva with the head of the French delegation that appeared before the League of Nations, Pierre Vigneault, during which he proposed that French and Syrian troops be withdrawn from the area of Sanjak and that the maintenance of order and peace should be entrusted to an international gendarmerie unit and a commissioner appointed by the League of Nations. Also, an inquiry commission be sent to the field with the task of investigating numerous incidents.<sup>18</sup> However, the French government agreed to withdraw only those of its troops that, as reinforcements, were subsequently sent to this area and refused to accept the arrival of the commission of inquiry, agreeing only to send neutral observers to the area.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> **Ibidem.**

<sup>16</sup> **Ibidem**, 650.

<sup>17</sup> According to his knowledge, rallies were organized all over Syria where they spoke against the "supreme enemy" - Türkiye, which is accused of wanting to stifle Syrian independence in the very beginning. At the same time, all Arab countries observed and supported such Syrian attitudes with sympathy. – AY-411-7-284, Report of the Consulate General of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in Constantinople to the Political Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, 15. XII 1936.

<sup>18</sup> It is interesting to note that an important mediating role in the talks led by Aras and Vijeno was played by the Yugoslav delegate to the League of Nations, Dr. Ivan Subotic, whom the Swiss press said was "the most suitable person to be a mediator between countries that are so closely tied to the country which he represents". – "Повољни изгледи за решење сукоба између Француске и Турске: Успешно посредовање Југословенског делегата", **Правда**, 16. XII 1936, 2.; "Конференција г. др. Араса и г.др. Суботића у Женеви", **Правда**, 16. XII 1936, 2.

<sup>19</sup> The Turkish press wrote negatively about the French positions, rejecting the efforts of the government in Paris to include representatives of Syria in the negotiations. - **Ibidem**, 651.

At the session of the Council of the League of Nations on December 16, 1936, a resolution was adopted which determined that a three-member delegation would be sent to Sanjak to take a direct look at the situation and mediate in direct negotiations between the French and the Turks.<sup>20</sup> The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia analyzed this, in which it was stated: "In Ankara diplomatic circles, it is believed that the Russians helped the Turks in this matter to exert pressure on France due to its position in Spain. England, in the beginning, also helped Türkiye to win her over even more, and because Alexandretta in the hands of Türkiye could eventually serve England as a base. England sided with France because it was afraid of the bad impression that supporting Türkiye at the expense of Syria would create in the Arab states. Those same circles believe that this is the first major failure of Rushdi Aras".<sup>21</sup>

At the beginning of January 1937, Branko Lazarevic, the representative of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in Ankara, wrote to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Belgrade about the talks that the Turkish Prime Minister, Ismet İnönü, had with the newly appointed Romanian ambassador to Türkiye. On that occasion, İnönü pointed out that, despite the difficult situation, he hopes for a favourable solution: "Türkiye cares about friendship with France." She is in friendship and alliance with all her allies. It means that Türkiye has opted for the Franco-English diplomatic system in Europe and for these reasons France should take this into account and help the Turkish thesis."<sup>22</sup> İnönü also expressed the expectation that the members of the Balkan Pact - Romania, Yugoslavia and Greece - will support the position of his government, and that "Türkiye will act calmly so that, if there is a break in the negotiations, all the responsibility will fall on France".<sup>23</sup> In a conversation with the French ambassador in Ankara, Lazarevic learned that the French position was that it would not proceed with the ratification of the treaty with Syria before an agreement with Türkiye was reached and that,

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<sup>20</sup> The Belgrade press wrote that it was agreed in Geneva that the French should withdraw their troops that they had deployed in Sanjak after the riots that took place in Antakya. – "Александрета ће добити широку аутономију под окриљем Француске и Турске", *Време*, 16. XII 1936, 3.; "До споразума по питању Александрете нема изгледа да ће лако доћи", *Политика*, 16. XII 1936, 1.; "Савет Друштва народа шаље анкетну комисију у Александрету", *Време*, 17. XII 1936, 1.; "Питање Александрете и Антиохије задало је Друштву народа много више тешкоћа него шпанско питање", *Правда*, 17. XII 1936, 2.; "У питању Александрете победила је у Женеви Француска теза", *Политика*, 17. XII 1936, 2.

<sup>21</sup> *Izveštaji Ministarstva inostranih poslova Kraljevine Jugoslavije za 1936. godinu*, Arhiv Jugoslavije, Beograd 2012, p. 652.

<sup>22</sup> Бранко Лазаревић, *Дипломатски списи*, Историјски архив у Неготину, Неготин 2001, p. 173.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibidem*.

therefore, France "does not understand the nervousness and haste of official Ankara" which, according to his words, remained lonely in Geneva, i.e. the expected support from the Soviet Union, Romania and England was also absent.<sup>24</sup>

The deadlock in the negotiations between Paris and Ankara had a negative impact on the situation in Sanjak<sup>25</sup> and attracted the attention of the governments of numerous European countries.<sup>26</sup> Already in the first days of January 1937, numerous incident situations were recorded in which there were also fatalities. The Turkish population confronted Arab nationalists, who were supported by local Armenians.<sup>27</sup> The news about this caused great anxiety among the Turkish public, so that the "Cumhuriyet" newspaper openly threatened the French with war, "if Türkiye was forced to do so by not respecting its rights in Sanjak". One article stated that Türkiye is capable of occupying the Alexandretta area in 24-48 hours with troops stationed on the Syrian border, without using the rest of its military forces, and that it would not take much time to occupy the whole of Syria".<sup>28</sup>

On the first day of February, Lazarevic sent a telegram to Yugoslav Prime Minister Milan Stojadinovic, in which he informed him that the

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<sup>24</sup> *Ibidem*, 174.

<sup>25</sup> "Затегнутост односа између Француске и Турске због питања Искендеруна, **Време**, 10. I 1937, 1.; "Г. Ружди Арас каже да се питање Искендеруна може лакше решити непосредним споразумом са Француском него у Друштву народа", **Време**, 10. I 1937, 1.; "Хоће ли Санџак у Сирји постати федеративна држава?", **Време**, 14. I 1937, 4.

<sup>26</sup> Thus, the position of official Rome, as one of the main disruptive factors when it came to the post-war status quo in Europe, was that the Turkish demands for the autonomy of Sanjak have the ultimate goal of including this area, if not immediately, at least in the foreseeable future. Turkish states. The Italian press wrote that, if the Turkish position prevails, that precedent will serve to resolve other disputed territories that were under the mandated control of the League of Nations, such as Germany's demand to return the colonial territories that were taken from it after the First World War. – "Турска тражи пуну независност Александрете и Антиохије док Француска нуди само извесну аутономију те области, **Политика**, 10. I 1937, 2.; "У питању Александрете г. Исмет Инени тражи директне преговоре са Француском, а не преко Женева, **Политика**, 11. I 1937, 1.; "Г. Ружди Арас каже да се питање Искендеруна може лакше решити непосредним споразумом са Француском него у Друштву народа, **Време**, 11. I 1937, 1.;

<sup>27</sup> Conveying the news of some European news agencies, the Belgrade daily press reported on riots in a place about 50 km from Antakya on January 10, during which one Arab was killed and 19 people were injured, one of them seriously. A day later, a conflict took place in Antakya, where two Arabs were killed and eight were wounded. The French gendarmerie then, in order to suppress the riots, started mass arrests. – "Крвави нереди у Риханији", **Политика**, 11. I 1937, 1.; "Крвави сукоби у Александрети", **Време**, 11. I 1937, 1.; "Крвави нереди у Риханији поводом присуства посматрача Друштва народа у Антиохији", **Правда**, 11. I 1937, 2.; "Сукоби у Антиохији настављају се и поред настојања власти да се отклоне", **Политика**, 12. I 1937, 5.; "У току арапских демонстрација у Антиохији погинула су два Арапина и осам рањено", **Време**, 13. I 1937, 1.

<sup>28</sup> AY-411-7-288, Report of the Consulate General of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in Constantinople to the Political Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, 6. I 1937.

Turkish Prime Minister especially thanked the government of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia because its delegation to the League of Nations in Geneva actively supported Turkish positions, stating that official Belgrade "can always count on Türkiye at every opportunity and in every matter".<sup>29</sup> Ten days later, Lazarevic learned that Rushdi Aras proposed to the French ambassador in Ankara regarding the "Sanjak issue" the conclusion of a bilateral defensive alliance, and regarding the drawing of the border line between Türkiye and Syria, a tripartite military alliance, emphasizing Türkiye's need to ask France for a larger financial loan. In a conversation with Numan Menemencioglu, a high-ranking official of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, he learned that French agents were carrying out secret anti-Turkish propaganda in Sanjak and were organizing numerous riots and writing petitions to the League of Nations.<sup>30</sup>

How to solve this complex problem by diplomatic means, i.e. direct negotiations between Paris and Ankara could not be achieved, the League of Nations took the initiative again, so on January 20, 1937, new negotiations were organized in Geneva with the presence of the Swedish Minister of Foreign Affairs Sandler, as authorized by the League of Nations. After difficult and exhaustive negotiations, the principles according to which the future status of Sanjak was to be determined were adopted and embodied in a special resolution.<sup>31</sup> During these negotiations, the Yugoslav ambassador

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<sup>29</sup> Лазаревић, *Дипломатски...*, p. 180.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibidem*, 184.

<sup>31</sup> Those principles were:

1. Sanjak represents a separate administrative unit and enjoys full independence in internal affairs;
2. Foreign affairs will be conducted by Syrian diplomacy, with the proviso that no treaty concluded by Syria, which would affect its independence or sovereignty, will be applied to the Sandjak without the prior consent of the Council of the League of Nations.;
3. Syria and Sanjak will have a common monetary and customs system;
4. The official language is Turkish, and the Council of the League of Nations will decide on another official language;
5. Both governments, Sanjak and Syria, will have special liaison delegates with each other;
6. The League of Nations will have one permanent delegate of French nationality who will take care of the implementation of the Constitution and Statute of the Sanjak;
7. Sanjak will not have an army or compulsory military service. There will only be police.;
8. France and Türkiye will conclude an agreement guaranteeing the territorial integrity of Sanjak and an agreement on the inviolability of the Turkish-Syrian border;

The Statute of Sanjak will state that Türkiye will have the right to use the port of Iskenderun for the transit of its goods.

(AY-411-7-275, Letter from the Consulate General of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in Constantinople to the Political Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, 10. X 1937)

to France, following the instructions of his government, stayed in Geneva, trying to mediate the relations between the French and Turkish delegations, and to that end, he organized a lunch where the diplomatic representatives of the member states of the Little Entente and the Balkan Pact gathered. The Parisian press spoke highly of this, emphasizing that it was "new proof of the solidity of alliances and friendships that are a tradition for France."<sup>32</sup>

Based on the aforementioned principles, the Council of the League of Nations formed the "Committee of Experts", composed of five members - diplomats from Türkiye, Belgium, France, the Netherlands, England and Sweden, which had the task of drafting the Statute and Constitution of Sanjak. This body sat in the period from February 25 to March 17 and from April 22 to May 15, 1937. During the first session, the opposing views of Ankara and Paris were confronted. While the Turkish delegate, interpreting the resolution of the Council of the League of Nations, emphasized that the Sanjak should be a separate territorial unit with complete internal independence, the position of the French government was that the autonomy of the Sanjak should be limited to a special administrative regime in the form of an autonomous province of Syria.

The intelligence findings of the Yugoslav Ministry of Foreign Affairs indicated that Syrian nationalists tried to exploit this Franco-Turkish opposition by conducting a harsh anti-Turkish propaganda campaign, demanding "the unification of the Arab areas against Turkish imperialism." On the other hand, the Turkish press pointed out that the French authorities in Syria are secretly inciting the resident Arab population, which resulted in the persecution of the local Turkish population.<sup>33</sup> The analysis of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia indicated that "Türkiye certainly tries to underline that it is in good relations with the Arab states and that the dispute over Sanjak does not mean antagonism between the Turkish and Arab world."<sup>34</sup> It also emphasized that until the beginning of the 30s of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, France saw Türkiye as the main stronghold of its foreign policy in the Middle East, spreading its political and cultural

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<sup>32</sup> "Александрета ће у саставу Сирије потпуно независно решавати своја питања", **Правда**, 25. I 1937, 6.; "Париски листови истичу значајну посредничку улогу г. др. Пурића", **Правда**, 25. I 1937, 6.

<sup>33</sup> Newspaper articles highlighted French gendarmerie command issuing orders to torture Turks, while the Turkish government protested to the French ambassador in Ankara about "bandit incursions" from Syria across the border. - **Izveštaji Ministarstva inostranih poslova Kraljevine Jugoslavije za 1937. godinu**, Arhiv Jugoslavije, Beograd 2013, p. 163, 223.

<sup>34</sup> **Ibidem**, 224.

influence through numerous banks, schools, various religious and cultural-educational societies, but that in the meantime the situation had changed, so that only Syria was left for her, which is why she "tenaciously defended that position".<sup>35</sup> At the same time, the General Consulate of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in Constantinople reported that at the beginning of April, in the context of the tightening of French-Turkish relations, there was an intensification of raids by robbery gangs from Syria, which is why the Turkish government reinforced gendarmerie units and mobilized reserve military units with the strength of one division along 800 km long border line. In the Turkish parliament, some MPs demanded that the Turkish army be deployed across the border, in the territory of Syria, to protect state sovereignty, while Interior Minister Shukri Kaya emphasized that "the Turkish people are ready to secure their right and their prestige against anyone".<sup>36</sup> The Consul General learned from "certain political circles" in Constantinople that Türkiye will take "extreme measures" regarding the "Hatay issue" if it receives "friendly guarantees" from Italy for the security of the coast of Asia Minor.<sup>37</sup>

The second meeting of the "Committee of Experts", which was supposed to start on April 9, was postponed to April 22 due to the illness of the Turkish expert. In the adopted final document, sent to the Council of the League of Nations, it was stated that the Statute of the Sanjak is an international document that will have to be respected by all those bodies that will intervene in the future in connection with any issues related to the Sanjak, and that the Constitution refers to the regulation of internal issues of the Sanjak. The Constitution is based on the Statute and in case of any contradiction in their application, the provisions of the Statute are considered valid. The "Expert Committee" reached an agreement on all details, except for the official language and the status of the three regions - Basit, Bahir and El Akrad, inhabited by a predominantly Turkish population.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> AY-411-7-297, Report of the Consulate General of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in Constantinople to the Political Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, 22. III 1937.

<sup>36</sup> AY-411-7-300, Report of the Consulate General of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in Constantinople to the Political Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, 8. IV 1937.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>38</sup> The Turkish expert opposed the proposal that, in addition to Turkish, the official language should be Arabic. His position was that Arabic could be in official use only in those parts of the Sandjak where Arabs were the majority population. The status of these three regions was to be decided by the Council of the League of Nations. - AY-411-7-275, Letter from the Consulate General of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in Constantinople to the Political Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, 10. X 1937.

**The Statute** and the Constitution of the Sanjak were adopted at the session of the Council of the League of Nations in Geneva on May 29, 1937.<sup>39</sup> In this way, according to Yugoslav diplomacy, "a critical phase" in the relations between Türkiye, on the one hand, and France and Syria, on the other, was completed. The Turkish government had the reason to be satisfied, because, apart from the issue of the official language and the status of the three mentioned regions, it achieved success in its demands.<sup>40</sup> However, despite this achieved political solution, foreign policy analysts in Belgrade expressed considerable reservations about its successful implementation "on the ground". Namely, the intelligence they had at their disposal testified that, despite the determined French position, which on July 15, 1937, during the ceremonial announcement of the new status of the Iskenderun Sandjak, the French High Commissioner for Syria De Martel pointed out, the situation "on the ground" was tense and uncertain. Arab nationalists believed that in this way they wanted to achieve the complete expulsion of the Arab presence ("eradicated and the last trace of Arab culture").<sup>41</sup> Also, among a part of the Turkish population in rural areas, a certain amount of mistrust was observed, which was expressed as resistance to the introduction of the new spelling of the Turkish language, which hinted at resistance to other reforms of a secular nature that the Kemalist authorities in Türkiye were resolutely implementing.<sup>42</sup>

Evaluating the newly created situation in the General Consulate of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in Constantinople, they concluded that Türkiye, after signing the Sadabad Pact with Iran, Iraq and Afghanistan on June 8, 1937, confirmed its prestige among Islamic countries, which opened up more room for maneuver in the matter Sanjak, that is strengthened political positions towards France: "Lately, Türkiye has been developing a lively

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<sup>39</sup> "У Женеви је потписан низ споразума између Француске и Турске о Сирији и Александretti", **Време**, 30. V 1937, 1.; "Пред Друштвом народа окончано је питање Санџака Александrette", **Политика**, 30. V 1937, 6.

<sup>40</sup> The Turkish proposal to hold a plebiscite in these regions was rejected and they were annexed to Syria by the decision of the Council of the League of Nations. - **Izveštaji Ministarstva inostranih poslova Kraljevine Jugoslavije za 1937. godinu**, Arhiv Jugoslavije, Beograd 2013, p. 277.

<sup>41</sup> Numerous European news agencies reported that a part of the Turkish population in Sanjak, wanting to celebrate this event, erected triumphal arches in many places, but the French mandate authorities demolished them, preventing the display of the Turkish flag. As a result, in one incident, i.e. 12 Turks were wounded in the conflict. – "Дванаест рањених у Александretti услед сукоба између Турака и власти", **Време**, 1. XII 1937, 3.

<sup>42</sup> **Izveštaji Ministarstva inostranih poslova Kraljevine Jugoslavije za 1937. godinu**, Arhiv Jugoslavije, Beograd 2013, p. 374.

action to use its influence to thwart the great powers, to achieve their goals, to use one Islamic state against another."<sup>43</sup>

Despite the successful epilogue of the negotiations in Geneva and the declaration of the new status of the Iskenderun sanjak, the political conditions and the daily life of its population in the fall of 1937 did not confirm the decline of tensions and the relaxation of tensions. The preparation of the election process, in accordance with the agreements reached, took place in an atmosphere of frequent incidents and fierce nationalist propaganda, both from the Turkish and Arab sides.<sup>44</sup> The Syrian nationalists tried to homogenize the anti-Turkish bloc by attracting Armenians, Assyrians, Kurds and Circassians, in order to win a majority in the future parliament.<sup>45</sup> On the other hand, public opinion in Türkiye was also characterized by expressed support for compatriots in Sanjak, both in euphoric press articles and at numerous rallies and gatherings of a political nature.<sup>46</sup> Leading Turkish newspapers accused the French authorities in Sanjak of illegally interfering with Turkish election campaign activities, not hesitating to issue open threats to official Paris and hint at "fatal events" in the Middle East.<sup>47</sup> The newspaper "Ulus" published an interview with Atatürk, who, regarding the current problems, stated that it is necessary to achieve "friendly cooperation" between Türkiye and the Iskenderun Sanjak.<sup>48</sup> The situation became particularly complicated after the Syrian Parliament refused to accept the Statute of the Iskenderun Sanjak on December 2, 1937.,<sup>49</sup> to which the Turkish government responded three days later, canceling the 1926 treaty with France, but declaring that it was ready to conclude a new treaty that would "better suit the changed

<sup>43</sup> AY-411-7-307, Report of the Consulate General of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in Constantinople to the Political Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, 23. VII 1937.

<sup>44</sup> The elections were planned for February 1938. – "Турска против одлука Савета Друштва народа о Александрети", **Време**, 28. XII 1937, 1.

<sup>45</sup> AY-411-7-310, Letter from the Consulate General of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in Constantinople to the Political Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, 10. XI 1937.

<sup>46</sup> Thus, at the end of November and the beginning of December 1937, students and high school students in Istanbul organized large gatherings in support of the Turks in Sanjak, demanding from the League of Nations to allow them to express their determination in a plebiscite. - **Izveštaji Ministarstva inostranih poslova Kraljevine Jugoslavije za 1937. godinu**, "Arhiv Jugoslavije", Beograd 2013, 604.

<sup>47</sup> It has been written about the reckless actions of the French gendarmerie, about the fact that French officials carry out strict control of the mail, that schools are still closed, etc. – "Мале вести из иностранства", **Време**, 3. XII 1937, 3.; "Догађаји у Искендерунском Санџаку", **Правда**, 3. XII 1937, 3.

<sup>48</sup> "Г. Кемал Ататурк за пријатељску сарадњу између Турске и Александрете", **Правда**, 4. XII 1937, 5.

<sup>49</sup> "Догађаји у Сирији", **Правда**, 4. XII 1937, 3.



circumstances."<sup>50</sup> The visit of the French military delegation to Türkiye in order to define the future military cooperation between France and Türkiye regarding the demilitarization of Sanjak did not significantly ease the tension.<sup>51</sup>

Realizing that France wanted to preserve its position in the Middle East, Turkish Foreign Minister Tevfik Rushdi Aras tried to negotiate Sanjak's position directly with the Syrian government. Thus, a conversation was held in Ankara with Syrian Prime Minister Cemil Mardam on his return from Geneva, about which the Yugoslav government learned from "well-informed circles" that Türkiye had offered to help Syria in its efforts to free itself from French influence, provided that it give up his persistent claims to Sanjak. However, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Belgrade estimated that "Syria does not want to pay for its independence by losing Sanjak and that it is very reserved in offers of this kind."<sup>52</sup> The Consul General of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in Istanbul sublimated the current situation in his report as follows: "The issue of Sanjak has been preoccupying the Turkish government and Turkish political circles for a year now. Until Sanjak is annexed to Türkiye, it will be the subject of unrest on the Syrian-Turkish border and the cause of Franco-Turkish conflicts. In this issue, Turkish nationalism clashes with Syrian nationalism and with the resistance of national minorities: Armenians, Circassians, Greeks and Alawites. France, as the former mandatory power, and the future ally, that is, the protector of Syria, will lose a lot in its and otherwise reduced prestige in the Levant if it allows Sanjak to fall completely into Turkish hands. The French are trying to satisfy both the Turks and the Syrians, but it is difficult. The French administration in Syria thinks that the elections to be held in Sanjak next year will be arranged so that the Turks, Syrians and national minorities will receive an equal number of mandates so that the French control authorities can manage it more easily. According to the current mood of the Turkish authorities, it cannot be said that they will allow themselves to be played and the Turkish element in Sanjak to be a minority. Turkish efforts aim to make

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<sup>50</sup> Yugoslav diplomacy believed that Türkiye wanted to "point out the seriousness of the situation and its determination not to give in to its demands" in this way. - **Izveštaji Ministarstva inostranih poslova Kraljevine Jugoslavije za 1937. godinu**, Arhiv Jugoslavije, Beograd 2013, p. 654.

<sup>51</sup> Despite the press statement of French General Hunziker, the commander of French units in Syria, that this visit strengthens the friendly ties between France and Türkiye, the Yugoslav Ministry of Foreign Affairs emphasized that this delegation was welcomed "with all the necessary attention, but without any cordiality". - **Ibidem**, 604.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibidem*.

Sanjak, a fully autonomous territory, dominated by the Turkish element. Otherwise, the Turks are ready for extreme measures."<sup>53</sup>

The activities of the delegation of the League of Nations, which was tasked with preparing the elections in Sanjak, met with fierce criticism from both the Turkish government and public opinion. Its members were accused of expressing partiality, not taking into account the interests of the Turkish population and of acting contrary to the decisions of the League of Nations, that is, of helping France to "further strengthen its influence on a purely Turkish province".<sup>54</sup> On the other hand, a significant change was observed in the writing of the Turkish press in relation to Syria. The tone of the address became much more cordial, so it was emphasized that "the provocateurs can do what they want, but Türkiye considers the Arab people in Syria as its brothers, with whom it has been separated since yesterday, but for which it always wishes well, without any reservation or conditions."<sup>55</sup>

To relax the tension, Minister Rushdi Aras traveled to Geneva for talks with French Prime Minister Chotan and Minister of Foreign Affairs Delbos. On that occasion, a diplomatic agreement was reached that did not only refer to the Iskenderun sanjak, but also included other issues related to the Middle East and Asia Minor. France recognized Turkish influence in Sanjak, and Türkiye renounced its objections to the status of Lebanon and Syria. In a statement published after the talks, Rushdi Aras pointed out that the great credit for the positive outcome of the talks belongs to England, declaring: "We yielded to France in the formal matter, and she yielded to us in essence."<sup>56</sup> After reaching an agreement, the Council of the League of Nations adopted a resolution on the issue of the rules for the elections in Sanjak, which, according to the original point of view, should have been held before April 15. A "Special Committee" was formed with the task of amending the rulebook for elections if changes were deemed necessary, and it had the authority to postpone the elections.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> AY-411-7-312, Letter from the Consulate General of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in Constantinople to the Political Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, 3. XII 1937.

<sup>54</sup> AY-411-7-315, Letter from the Consulate General of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in Constantinople to the Political Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, 20. XII 1937.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>56</sup> *Izveštaji Ministarstva inostranih poslova Kraljevine Jugoslavije za 1938. godinu*, "Arhiv Jugoslavije", Beograd 2014, p. 50.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibidem*, 51.

The "Special Committee" ended its activities on March 19, 1938, making the definitive version of the "Regulations for the Sanjak Elections".<sup>58</sup> In the report submitted to the Council of the League of Nations, it was stated that all objections previously raised by the Turkish government were adopted and the appointment of personnel to manage the work of the election commissions was carried out.<sup>59</sup> For Yugoslav diplomacy, the fact that two representatives of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia were included in that staff was an important satisfaction and diplomatic success.<sup>60</sup> Satisfaction with this was also expressed during Numan Menemencioglu's two-day stay in Belgrade, upon his return from Geneva, where he was warmly received by Yugoslav officials.<sup>61</sup>

Despite this important diplomatic benefit for the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and the appearance of a solution that was supposed to resolve the issue of the status of Sanjak peacefully, the General Consulate in Istanbul, assessing the possibility of the success of the initiative of the Turkish government, they considered that it had made a mistake by requesting engagement and mediation of the League of Nations. "In direct negotiations with France, considering the difficult French situation in the Orient, the Turks could have achieved an easier solution and more success."<sup>62</sup> Predictions that the Turkish electoral list will succeed in Sanjak were negative, because "Armenians, natives and refugees from Turkish territory decide the elections, and they are opponents of Türkiye for understandable reasons."<sup>63</sup>

This opinion stemmed from the general political atmosphere that prevailed in Türkiye at the end of April and the beginning of May 1938. On the 17th of May, Prime Minister Celal Bayar held a meeting with the

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<sup>58</sup> "Правилник за изборе у Александretti завршен у Женеви", *Политика*, 20. III 1938, 4.

<sup>59</sup> The "Special Committee" had, among other things, the task of preparing voter lists, which, according to some opinions, represented a kind of "trial vote". In addition to names and surnames, data on the native language and nationality of the voters were entered in the lists. - AY-411-7-324, Letter from the Consulate General of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in Constantinople to the Political Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, 19. V 1938.

<sup>60</sup> The work of the "Special Committee" was managed by the Swiss expert Roger Sekreta, and it consisted of 20 members. - AY-411-7-322, Letter from the Consulate General of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in Constantinople to the Political Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, 21. IV 1938.

<sup>61</sup> *Izveštaji Ministarstva inostranih poslova Kraljevine Jugoslavije za 1938. godinu*, "Arhiv Jugoslavije", Beograd 2014, 173.

<sup>62</sup> AY-411-7-324, Letter from the Consulate General of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in Constantinople to the Political Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, 19. V 1938.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibidem*.

representatives of the ruling political party and on that occasion informed them that a kind of violence was being carried out against the Turks in the Hatay area and held the French authorities responsible for it. On that occasion, several MPs demanded "taking harsh measures and making quick decisions", to which he replied that the government "will coolly wait for the development of events".<sup>64</sup> The Turkish press also started sending the "heaviest insults and threats" against France, and many nationalist groups were "waiting with impatience for Atatürk's decisive gesture and many believed that Türkiye would intervene in Hatay, to protect its interests."<sup>65</sup> The public excitement was further increased by the statement of the French Prime Minister Daladier about the inviolability of the borders of the French imperial possessions, which was interpreted to also apply to Syria and introduced Turkish-French relations into a "very unpleasant atmosphere".<sup>66</sup> Atatürk's visit to Mersin and Adana, i.e. his stay near Sanjak, despite his impaired health, was understood by the Turkish public as his desire to indicate the seriousness of the situation, but also his determination "to take everything so that Turkish interests in Hatay are protected".<sup>67</sup> The Turkish government sent a sharp diplomatic note to France and demanded the dismissal of the High Commissioner for Syria, de Martel, and the Turkish General Staff at the same time ordered the reinforcement of numerous personnel in the border garrisons towards Syria, in response to the news of the increase in the French military contingent.<sup>68</sup>

In the General Consulate in Istanbul, they had information that the ambassador of the Soviet Union suggested the Turkish government to show restraint and that the French ambassador protested the way the Turkish press was writing. "It seems that the whole thing is more about calculated maneuvers to intimidate the non-Turkish population in Sanjak before the elections, than about serious action." The Turks want at any cost to get a majority in the elections and for that majority to vote for unification with Türkiye," stated the report sent to the Yugoslav Ministry of Foreign Affairs.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>65</sup> *Izveštaji Ministarstva inostranih poslova Kraljevine Jugoslavije za 1938. godinu*, "Arhiv Jugoslavije", Beograd 2014, p. 293.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibidem*, 294.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>68</sup> AY-411-7-325, Letter from the Consulate General of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in Constantinople to the Political Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, 25. V 1938.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibidem*.

The tension in Sanjak reached its peak in early June 1938. Under the influence of numerous riots, the "Special Committee" was forced to suspend its work, and an energetic campaign was waged against it in the Turkish press.<sup>70</sup> Under such circumstances, under strong diplomatic pressure from Ankara, the French government changed its previous position, starting to support pro-Turkish elements in Sanjak. Negotiations between the French and Turkish governments on a joint military action aimed at maintaining order and peace in this area have been held.<sup>71</sup> This led to a change in the tone of the leading Turkish newspapers, which again began to emphasize "traditional friendship with France."<sup>72</sup>

The situation calmed down at the beginning of July 1938, when, as a result of intensive negotiations between official Paris and Ankara, a protocol on the implementation of the military agreement was signed in Antakya on July 3, which stipulated that a contingent of 1,500 Turkish soldiers.<sup>73</sup> The political framework of this agreement was reached in direct negotiations between the French ambassador to Türkiye, Henri Ponceau and Rushdi Aras, and its finalization was represented by the signing of the "Friendship Treaty" between Türkiye and France, which was reached on July 4, 1938, in Ankara, and whose the ceremonial proclamation was scheduled for September, when French Foreign Minister Georges Bonnet will pay an official visit to the Turkish capital.<sup>74</sup> On the same day, in the morning hours, Turkish soldiers entered Sanjak territory near Gaziantep.<sup>75</sup> Colonel Shukri Kanadli was at the head of the formation made up of three infantry battalions, one mountain

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<sup>70</sup> It was written that the "Special Committee" is completely redundant, and the newspaper "Ulus" even hinted at the possibility that Türkiye, if it continues its activities, will leave the membership of the League of Nations. - AY-411-7-329, Letter from the Consulate General of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in Constantinople to the Political Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, 18. VI 1938.

<sup>71</sup> **Izveštaji Ministarstva inostranih poslova Kraljevine Jugoslavije za 1938. godinu**, "Arhiv Jugoslavije", Beograd 2013, p. 354.

<sup>72</sup> AY-411-7-326, Letter from the Consulate General of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in Constantinople to the Political Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, 14. VI 1938.

<sup>73</sup> "У Санџаку Александрети биће 1500 турских војника", **Време**, 4. VII 1938, 1.; "Споразум између француског и турског генералштаба о војној сарадњи у Санџаку", **Политика**, 4. VII 1938, 1.

<sup>74</sup> "Уз срдачне декларације прјатељства синоћ је парафиран француско-турски уговор", **Политика**, 6. VII 1938, 1.; "Француско-турска сарадња полазна тачка за читаву нову политику" вели „Тан“, **Политика**, 6. VII 1938, 1.; "У Анкари је потписан текст француско-турског споразума", **Време**, 6. VII 1938, 3.

<sup>75</sup> AY-411-7-336, Letter from the Consulate General of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in Constantinople to the Political Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, 6. VII 1938.; "Јуче су турске трупе, према споразуму, умарширале у Александретски санџак", **Политика**, 6. VII 1938, 1.;

artillery battery, an engineering company and a platoon of telegraph operators.

The turnaround in French-Turkish relations in the context of the "Hatay issue" met with great interest in the Yugoslav press, which saw it as an important step for the consolidation of peace and security in the Eastern Mediterranean. Thus, it was emphasized that the aforementioned agreement represents the formation of a French-British-Turkish bloc in the Middle East, as a counterweight to the potential expansion of the influence of Italy and Germany, an important link in strengthening anti-revisionist positions, an expression of the strengthening of peaceful policies in international relations, etc.<sup>76</sup>

The Yugoslav Consul General in Istanbul wrote about the possible future implications of this event: "Certainly, this is the first stage of success that will allow the Turkish element to take over Sanjak." The second stage - the definitive annexation of Sanjak to Türkiye is yet to come."<sup>77</sup>

In an extensive article about this new "political construction" in the Middle East, the Belgrade daily "Pravda" wrote on its front page: "Türkiye will therefore no longer have an interest in annexing Sanjak, since it will be under its real administration and only formally." be separated from Ankara. In addition, Türkiye abandoned its territorial claims to Syria, especially in the province of Aleppo. The agreement between France, Türkiye and Syria, in which France undertakes to defend Syria against any attack, constitutes a guarantee of its territorial status and independence. (...) By sacrificing Alexandretta, France received considerable benefits. Its position was strengthened in Tripolis, the terminus of the Mosul oil pipeline, and Beirut, France's best port, which France had built as a major naval base. The tripartite agreement between France, Türkiye and Syria constitutes a firm guarantee and precaution against any attack on French possessions in the Middle East. Then, with the Franco-Turkish agreement, Türkiye is moving closer to the group of Middle Eastern and Balkan states, and this means that this entire system is moving closer to the Franco-British system."<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> "Споразум о Александрети значи практично образовање француско-британско-турског блока", *Политика*, 5. VII 1938, 1.

<sup>77</sup> AY-411-7-336, Letter from the Consulate General of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in Constantinople to the Political Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, 6. VII 1938.

<sup>78</sup> "Значај француско-турског споразума за одржавање равнотеже у Средоземном Мору – нови прилог учвршћењу мира", *Правда*, 8. VII 1938, 1.

Election activities continued on July 22 under the control of a newly formed commission, which consisted of delegates from the Turkish government, one representative from each ethnic group in Sanjak, and a French delegate, Colonel Collet.<sup>79</sup> They ended on August 1, 1938, and according to the published results, out of 57,000 registered voters, 37,000 were registered in the lists of the Turkish community (63% of voters). By that, the distribution of mandates in the future Sanjak parliament was carried out. Out of 40 parliamentary seats, 22 went to the Turkish community, and 18 to the others.<sup>80</sup>

The Parliament was constituted on September 2, 1938, at a session in Antakya. As the president of the "Republic of Hatay", it was decided to name the territory of the Iskenderun Sanjak, Tayfur Sekmen, "a former Turkish parliamentarian who participated in the struggle for the independence of Türkiye and worked tirelessly for the Turkish cause in Hatay", was elected.<sup>81</sup> Dr. Abdurahman Melek was appointed Prime Minister, and on September 6, the Parliament adopted the Constitution and a series of laws on the organization and competence of the executive branch. According to the constitutional provisions, Hatay is an independent state with a republican system, whose independence in internal affairs is based on the Turkish majority. Legislative power is exercised by the people through the parliament, which was elected for four years, and the mandate of the president of the republic lasted five years. Public order and peace and constitutional order were to be protected by the 1,500-man gendarmerie. The parliament then adopted several proposals of deputies that were mainly based on the secularist principles of the Republic - that the Turkish national anthem should also be the national anthem of Hatay, to abolish the wearing of the fez, to abolish the land tax, to open new gymnasiums, to produce postage stamps, etc. Qualifying these fundamental changes in the politics and administrative physiognomy of the Iskenderun Sanjak area, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia concluded: "All this will inevitably be met with resistance by a part of the retrograde Turkish population." But that resistance will neither be great nor long-lived and soon

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<sup>79</sup> *Izveštaji Ministarstva inostranih poslova Kraljevine Jugoslavije za 1938. godinu*, "Arhiv Jugoslavije", Beograd 2014, p. 406.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibidem*, 446.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibidem*, 496.

Hatay will completely resemble Kemal's Türkiye in terms of its arrangement."<sup>82</sup>

That these reflections were correct will be shown by what happened on June 23, 1939, when a new French-Turkish political agreement was signed in Paris, in which the two countries committed themselves to friendship and mutual assistance in case of war.<sup>83</sup> At the same time, an agreement was signed in Ankara by which France agreed that Hatay would once again become an integral part of the Turkish state.<sup>84</sup> The Yugoslav ambassador in Paris, Božidar Purić, assessed this outcome, i.e. the French government's views, as the aspirations of the French-British diplomacy to win over Türkiye to its interests as firmly as possible in the conditions of numerous complications in the Eastern Mediterranean and the whole of Europe. Purić emphasized that the English Ministry of Foreign Affairs played a crucial role in resolving the "Hatay issue", fearing that Germany and Italy would not take advantage of the delay in the negotiations between Paris and Ankara, and therefore put pressure on the French government to give in to Turkish demands.<sup>85</sup> In the text on the front page, the Belgrade-based "Politika", analyzing this agreement, wrote: "In the current murky circumstances in Europe and the world, the signing of this agreement, which complements the similar Anglo-Turkish agreement in Paris, is considered a great step forward towards the realization of a peace front and the creation of a more tolerable atmosphere in Europe. This agreement is expected not only to strengthen friendship with Türkiye and the cooperation of this country, which can be valuable due to its geographical position but also to have significant consequences on a wider scale. In Paris, they believe that Türkiye's approach

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<sup>82</sup> AY-411-7-346, Letter from the Consulate General of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in Constantinople to the Political Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, 9. IX 1938.

<sup>83</sup> AY-370-4-413, Report of the Embassy of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in Ankara to the Political Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia for the month of July 1938, 5. VII 1939.

<sup>84</sup> "Манифестације у Анкари, а народна радост у Александрети", *Политика*, 24. VI 1939, 1.; "Одушевљење у Турској после споразума са Француском и повратка Александрете", *Политика*, 25. VI 1939, 3.; "Hataj konačno turski", *Muslimanska svijest*, 29. VI 1939, 3.

<sup>85</sup> The Turkish government tried to remove every trace of the French presence from Hatay, so it demanded that the missionaries of the Roman Catholic Church leave Hatay, the removal of French flags from the graves of French soldiers in Iskenderun, and opposed the initiative to open a French consulate on the territory of Hatay. – Živko Avramovski, "Sukob interesa Velike Britanije i Nemačke na Balkanu uoči Drugog svetskog rata", *Istorija XX veka*, II, Beograd, 1961, p. 91.



to the Western countries' agreement will affect the behavior of other countries, especially the attitude of the Islamic world."<sup>86</sup>

Based on the Franco-Turkish agreements reached on June 29, 1939, the parliament of Hatay made a unanimous decision on its abolition and annexation of the area to the Republic of Türkiye.<sup>87</sup> In this way, the long-term political efforts of the Turkish government were finalized to finally include the area of Iskenderun Sanjak (Hatay) in its state-legal structure and thus, on the eve of the outbreak of the Second World War, to establish sovereignty over this strategically important area. The Yugoslav government welcomed this epilogue with obvious satisfaction, considering it an important moment for the strengthening of the Balkan Pact, i.e. confirmation of the determination of Türkiye, as its member, to remain committed to this defense alliance, essential for the security of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in the upcoming uncertain trials that have loomed over European and world peace.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> "Француска и Турска потписале су јуче пакт о пријатељству и о узајамној војној помоћи у рату", **Политика**, 24. VI 1939, 1.

<sup>87</sup> Immediately after the end of the parliamentary session, the Turkish national flag was displayed on the building where the session was held, and the French troops began to evacuate. – "Затварање Александретског парламента", *Политика*, 1. VII 1939, 6.; "Евакуација француских трупа", **Политика**, 1. VII 1939, 6.

<sup>88</sup> **Izveštaji Ministarstva inostranih poslova Kraljevine Jugoslavije za 1939. godinu**, "Arhiv Jugoslavije", Beograd 2015, 1939, p. 335.

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