

CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES IN THE NORTH-EAST BALKANS: TURKISH-ROMANIAN WAY OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION ON THE EVE OF WWII (1930-1939)

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Abstract: Turkey and Romania, two coastal countries bordering the Black Sea, share a rich history of challenges, conflicts, cooperation, and mutual understanding. After WWI, Romania, the largest country in the Balkans and situated near the Soviet sphere of influence, focused on preserving its post-war borders, strengthening its domestic structure, and building a strong economy. After the foundation of the new Turkish Republic in October 1923, relations between the two countries significantly improved shortly after the Peace Treaty of Lausanne, to which Romania was also a signatory. The period between 1923 and 1942 may be called the Ataturk Era in Turkish-Romanian relations. This period, which concluded shortly before WWII with the passing of the founder of the Modern Turkish Republic Ataturk in November 1938, faced challenges such as rising revisionism, Soviet ambitions concerning the territories of both nations and the Turkish Straits, the migration of Turkish people, in particular Muslims and Orthodox Christians residing in the northeast Romania to Turkey, and the emigration of Romanian Jews in response to increasing human rights violations against them in Romania. When WWII broke out in September 1939, Turkey allied with the UK and France while Romania enjoyed similar guarantees. After the Nazi advance towards Soviet lands in 1941, Romania joined the Axis. Regardless, Turkey and Romania stood with opposing sides throughout WWII; nonetheless, friendly relations persisted between the two countries after the war. Several researchers from Romania and Turkey have studied the relations between both countries during the abovementioned period. This paper analyses newly opened Turkish archival documents to shed light on uncovered parts of both countries' relations on the eve of WWII.

Keywords: Alliance, Archival Documents, Balkan Pact, Conflict Resolution, Constructivism, Geopolitics, Immigration, Minority Rights, Trade Relations, World War II

Rezumat: Provocări și oportunități în nord-estul Balcanilor: maniera turco-română de soluționare a conflictelor în ajunul celui de-al doilea război mondial. Turcia și România, două țări de pe coasta Mării Negre, au avut o istorie lungă plină de provocări, conflicte, cooperare și înțelegere reciprocă. După Primul Război Mondial, România, cea mai mare țară din Balcani, aproape de zona sferei sovietice, s-a concentrat pe păstrarea granițelor sale postbelice, consolidarea structurii sale interne și construirea unei economii puternice. După întemeierea noii Republici Turce în octombrie 1923, relațiile dintre cele două țări, la scurt timp după Tratatul de pace de la Lausanne, al cărui semnatar era și România, au cunoscut o creștere notabilă. Perioada dintre 1923 și 1942 ar putea fi numită epoca Atatürk a relațiilor turco-române (cu aproape un an înainte de al Doilea Război Mondial, fondatorul Republicii Turce Moderne, Atatürk, a murit în noiembrie 1938). În această perioadă, relațiile turco-române s-au confruntat cu provocări precum revizionismul în ascensiune și tendințele sovietice de control asupra teritoriului ambelor țări și asupra strâmtorilor turcești, tendințele de migrație a supușilor turci, în special a celor care trăiau în nord-estul României, atât musulmani cât și ortodocși către Turcia, migrația evreilor români din cauza abuzurilor tot mai mari la adresa drepturilor omului în România. Când a izbucnit cel de-al Doilea Război Mondial în septembrie 1939, deși Turcia a avut un tratat de alianță cu Marea Britanie și Franța iar Români avea garanții similare, după înaintarea nazistă către fosta URSS din 1941, România s-a alăturat Axei. În ciuda faptului că Turcia și România s-au aflat în tabere opuse în timpul celui de-al Doilea Război Mondial, după război, relațiile de prietenie dintre cele două țări au continuat. Relațiile dintre ambele țări în perioada analizată au fost studiate de mai mulți cercetători din România și Turcia. Această lucrare pune la dispoziția cititorului documente turcești de arhivă recent descoperite, care fac lumină asupra unor zone puțin cercetate ale relațiilor dintre cele două țări, în ajunul celui de-al Doilea Război Mondial.

INTRODUCTION

The longstanding relationship between Turkey and Romania has a historical foundation that spans centuries and was marked by numerous political decisions and social interactions over the years. This historical link can be traced back to the conquest of Bessarabia and Bogdan by the Ottoman Sultan Bayezid II (r. 1481-1512) in 1484. The nearly three-century-long Turkish rule ended in 1859 when the Romanian principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia were unified. The newly formed country was named Romania in 1866 and soon after the Ottoman-Russian War of 1877-1878, Romania gained independence. Since that day, Turkish-Romanian relations have evolved on a solidarity basis, because both countries, bordering the Black Sea, have shared significant historical ties, and faced similar challenges, threats, and security concerns.

Following Romania's independence from the Ottoman Empire in 1878, amicable relations were established between the two nations. Consequently, when the Republic of Turkey was founded in 1923 as the successor state to the former Ottoman Empire, close cooperation between Romania and Turkey continued uninterrupted. Gazi Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the Founder of the Turkish Republic, advocated for solid friendly relations with Romania, which Romanian officials reciprocated by seeking strong ties with Turkey. In that respect, a pact known as the Balkan Entente (February 1834) was established between Turkey, Romania, Greece, and Yugoslavia in response to rising Soviet imperialism, which was regarded as worse than rising Nazi and Fascist threats in the Balkans. That pact aimed to form a joint front in the event of a potential invasion attempt of the four-member countries. After WWII, to prevent Soviet imperialism in the Balkans another pact was established with the name of the Balkan Pact (February 1953); however, Romania, as part of the Soviet Block, commonly known as the Iron Curtain, was left out of the new alliance. During the Cold War, despite Romania's status as a Communist Bloc nation and Turkey's alignment with the Western Bloc, the two countries' historic solidarity rooted in friendship persisted.

As highlighted above, due to the extensive historical context of Turkish-Romanian relations, which spans nearly half a millennium since Romania's independence, numerous articles and books have been published on the interactions between the two nations. Therefore, at first glance, there appears to be nothing unaddressed about the relationship between Romania and Turkey throughout the last two centuries. Nonetheless, archival documents available to academics and researchers prove that significant, uncovered events occurred in the relations between both countries during the turbulent period preceding WWII. Nowadays, newly accessible, previously undisclosed documents reveal issues such as migration challenges, trade relations, clearing agreements, Turkish minorities in Romania, Christian Gagauz Turks, the Jewish people living in Romania, and the patterns of Jewish migration to Turkey in response to increasing discrimination, among other topics.

Considering the aforementioned new development, the current research investigates Turkish-Romanian relations through newly accessible archive documents of Turkey from the turbulent years between WWI and WWII, commonly known as the twenty-year crisis in world policy.¹ Using newly accessible archive documents through the perspective of constructivist theory on international relations will clarify the events of a turbulent era and, most importantly, the

¹ See H. Edward Carr, *The Twenty Years Crisis*, New York, Palgrave, 2001. pp. 9-16.

productive conflict resolution endeavours of both countries.

The research has two objectives. First, it analyses the longstanding connection between Turkey and Romania. Secondly, it aims to demonstrate how the Constructivist viewpoint enriches our understanding of these interactions by emphasizing the importance of norms and identities in addressing shared challenges. This paper highlights the importance of theoretical research in shaping viewpoints on international collaboration and conflict resolution by achieving these objectives. In this regard, the importance of this study lies in its ability to elucidate certain aspects of interactions that occurred during the period between the two World Wars and the turbulent years leading up to World War II. It seeks to contribute to existing research by utilizing uncovered archival materials from Turkey to explore facets of Romanian relations, such as migration policies, trade agreements, and minority issues. Although the history of Turkish-Romanian relations has been thoroughly examined from a military perspective, the archival documents examined in this study shed light on overlooked elements, such as the effects of migration and trade regulations. Incorporating the experiences of the Gagauzian Turks and Romanian Jews into this analysis provides insight into how these countries handled issues related to minority groups and human rights while facing influences. This research distinctly emphasises records that provide insights into how both nations navigated the complexities of interwar and wartime eras. In-depth analysis is carried out to reveal a complex web of relationships that extends beyond conventional diplomatic and military narratives.

In addition to its empirical contributions, as mentioned above, this study also uses the Constructivist approach in International Relations (IR) theory to examine how the relationship between Turkey and Romania has evolved. Unlike realism and Liberalism, Constructivism provides a perspective on how shared identities and historical experiences influence the policies of these countries. This research emphasizes the importance of using this lens to analyse events and mutual values that promote collaboration. The relationship between Turkey and Romania is defined by both tension and cooperation. This provides a model for exploring how history and geopolitics coincide with theories in international relations. This research integrates data with viewpoints to address deficiencies in current studies and establish an approach for assessing connections grounded upon shared historical contexts.

AN ANALYSIS OF THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN TURKEY-ROMANIA RELATIONS: CONSTRUCTIVISM

Turkey and Romania's multifaceted relationship provides a worthy paradigm for investigating how historical familiarities, shared values and norms, and

similar identities shape global interactions and the complex enduring ties between nations. The relations between the two countries date back to the 15th century. Romania, as previously emphasized, fell under Ottoman influence during Sultan Bayezid II's administration and gained full independence in 1978. Despite the difficulties caused by Ottoman rule, the two nations maintained a respectable relationship. As detailed below, during the process of Soviet and Nazi and fascist expansion, Turkey-Romania relations showed considerable solidarity and cooperation. In addition, although Romania sided with the Soviet bloc and Turkey sided with the Western alliance during the Cold War, relations between the two countries progressed in a spirit of solidarity and cooperation. The primary concern to be analysed is how the two countries have maintained a relationship based on reconciliation and cooperation, despite their many contrasts and challenges.

Constructivism stands out as a perspective for studying interactions in the field of International Relations philosophy. It highlights the significance of common historical backgrounds and values in shaping national conduct, rather than solely concentrating on tangible benefits or power structures as typically emphasised by Realist or Liberal perspectives. Constructivism, which emerged as an approach in the late 1980s, has become increasingly used in elucidating contemporary events in international relations over the last two decades. It provides an alternative viewpoint that challenges the prevailing paradigms of Realism and Liberalism. While Realism highlights the state's quest for power and security within a system and Liberalism emphasises cooperation and interdependence through institutions, Constructivism puts forward a different approach that emphasizes the influence of ideas, norms, identities, and historical context on state actions. According to A. Wendt², one of the leading names in the theory of constructivism, the nature of the international system is not fixed and is determined solely by material factors. On the contrary, it is constructed and shaped by the relations and interactions among states throughout history, as well as by shared values, identities, and norms that exist or are created throughout the interaction process. In this regard, aspects such as military or economic variables may not be the only factors that dictate the foreign policies and external actions of states. They are largely influenced by social constructs such as historical connections, cultural similarities, and common norms. In addition, the social constructivism approach proposes that the interests and identities of states are not predetermined or permanent but are shaped through social interactions. As detailed below, in the context of Turkish-Romanian relations,

² Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999. pp. 2-9.

shared experiences such as addressing external threats and navigating the intricate geopolitics of the Black Sea region have shaped a mutual identity and normative structure that still impacts their relationship today. On the other hand, a Realist approach may only focus on the power struggles between the two nations, but a Liberal view would highlight the importance of organizations such as the Balkan Pact or other local accords.

A significant amount of research in International Relations (IR) examines how shared historical experiences, stories, and collective identities play a role in shaping the policies and actions of states. For instance, M. Finnemore's³ study on how international norms and rules are formed and how they affect the policies and behaviour of states in IR suggests that states generally operate according to the logic of appropriateness rather than solely through an instrumental logic of consequences. As detailed below, the collaborative relations between Turkey and Romania during the Cold War, despite being in different camps, exemplify how shared history and similar challenges impact the policies and actions of states. Additionally, T. Hopf⁴ pointed out the importance of national identity in shaping foreign policy and stated that countries frequently align their interests with their unique identity and that of other nations. The findings of this study also display that the long historical interaction and shared experiences between Turkey and Romania continue to affect and shape their national identities and foreign policy preferences. For instance, during the period when Turkey and Romania were dealing with threats from the Soviet Union and fascist regimes in Europe, Turkey's connection to the Ottoman Empire as a successor state and Romania's journey to independence from Ottoman rule affected the dynamics of the relationship. Constructivism, therefore, provides useful analytical tools for this type of study.

Scientific research on the Turkey-Romania relationship often explores the strategic dimensions of their interaction across the 20th century. İ. Ortaylı and V. Georgescu⁵ have explored the connections between the Ottoman Empire and Romania, underscoring the mix of conflict and collaboration that defined their ties. The

³ Martha Finnemore, *National Interests in International Society*, Ithaca, New York, Cornell University Press, 1996. pp. 34-69.

⁴ Ted Hopf, *Social Construction of International Politics: Identities & Foreign Policies, Moscow, 1955 and 1999*, Cornell University Press, 2002. pp. 16-42.

⁵ İlber Ortaylı, *BALCANICA - Guide to the Polish Archives Relative to the History of the Balkan Countries*, in "Osmanlı Araştırmaları", Vol. 1, 2002, No. 1, pp. 282-283; Idem, *Ottoman modernization and Sabetaism*, in "Alevi Identity", 1998, p. 115; Vlad Georgescu, *The Romanians: A History*, Ohio, Ohio State University, 1991.

studies conducted by K. H. Karpat⁶ and M. Bucur⁷ have examined the effects of World War I and World War II on the relationship between Turkey and Romania. They found that both countries are deeply influenced by the turbulent geopolitics of the Balkans and the Black Sea and that their shared geopolitics and historical experiences create a strong bond between them. Many studies of interwar relations have examined the role of alliances, such as the 1934 Balkan Pact, which brought together Turkey, Romania, Greece, and Yugoslavia to create a collective security arrangement against external threats. Scholars such as T. Bitkova⁸, A. Pop⁹, I. Scurtu¹⁰ and P. Şerban¹¹ have argued that Romania's decision to join the Balkan Pact with Türkiye and other Balkan countries was partly motivated by the need to counterbalance the growing influence of Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy in this region. Turkish researchers, such as T. Akyol¹² and S. Güvenç,¹³ have delved into Turkey's involvement in the Balkan Pact, emphasizing the significance of collaboration in Turkish foreign policy at that time.

Although much of the known literature on Türkiye-Romanian relations

⁶ Kemal H. Karpat, *Turkey's Foreign Policy in Transition: 1950-1974*, Vol. 17, England, Brill Archive, 1975; Kemal H. Karpat, *Ottoman Population Records and the Census of 1881/82-1893*, in "International Journal of Middle East Studies", Vol. 9, 1978, No. 2, pp. 237-274; Kemal H. Karpat, *Millets and Nationality: The Roots of the Incongruity of Nation and State in the post-Ottoman Era*, in "Studies on Ottoman Social and Political History", 2002, pp. 611-646.

⁷ Maria Bucur, *Heroes and victims: Remembering War in Twentieth-Century Romania*, Indiana, Indiana University Press, 2009. pp. 24, 29, 46, 51; Eadem, *The Nation's Gratitude: World War I and Citizenship Rights in Interwar Romania*, England, Routledge, 2021. pp. 97, 194.

⁸ Tatiana Bitkova, *The Place of Romania and Russia in the Context of East-West Relations: Political and Cultural Aspects*, in "Romanian Review of Political Sciences and International Relations", Vol. 11, 2014, No. 2, pp. 44-52.

⁹ Adrian Pop, *Frameworks of Sub-Regional Cooperation in South-Eastern Europe*, in "Euro-Atlantic Studies", Vol. 1, 1998, pp. 99-108.

¹⁰ Ioan Scurtu, *The Romanian Revolution of December 1989*, in "Annals of The Academy of Romanian Scientists Series on History and Archaeology", Vol. 2, 2010, No. 2, pp. 60-109.

¹¹ Şerban Papacostea, *Captive Clio. Romanian Historiography under Communist Rule*, in "European History Quarterly", Vol. 26, 1996, No. 2, pp. 181-208.

¹² Taha Akyol, *Sovyet Rus Stratejisi ve Türkiye* [Soviet Russian Strategy and Turkey], Vol. 11, Ötüken Yayınevi, 1976. p. 351.

¹³ Serhat Güvenç, Soli Özel, *NATO and Turkey in the Post-Cold War World. Between Abandonment and Entrapment*, in "Southeast European and Black Sea Studies", Vol. 12, 2012, No. 4, pp. 533-553; Serhat Güvenç, *NATO'nun Evrimi ve Türkiye'nin Transatlantik Güvenliğe Katkıları* [NATO's Evaluation and Türkiye's Contributions to Transatlantic Security], in "Uluslararası İlişkiler Dergisi", Vol. 12, 2015, No. 45, pp. 101-119.

mainly examines military and diplomatic developments, newly accessible archival documents enable the disclosure of previously unexplored aspects of the relations between the two countries. For instance, Ö. Bedir¹⁴ and R. Ioanid¹⁵ argue that migration, trade, and minority relations have frequently been ignored in favour of conventional accounts of diplomacy and warfare. Newly acquired regional records provide under-examined insights into their connections, such as migration movements and trade dynamics, which are often overlooked in traditional analyses of diplomacy and warfare.

The disclosed records provide details about events such as the Christian Gagauz Turks and Jewish immigrants in Romania, which brings new perspectives to the Turkish-Romanian social and economic ties. Additionally, the importance of trade agreements that facilitated commercial relations between Turkey and Romania in the interwar period has been largely ignored in research. As detailed below, the trade agreements between Turkey and Romania, established to mitigate the challenges and repercussions of increasing protectionist measures that caused disruptions in trade flows and bilateral relations due to the Great Economic Depression in Europe, played an important role in maintaining the economic relations between the two countries during geopolitical turmoil. By analysing these agreements within the Constructivist framework, this study seeks to underscore the significance of solidarity, friendship and shared historical experiences between Turkey and Romania in strengthening economic cooperation between the two countries.

Employing Constructivism to examine the relations between Turkey and Romania during the interwar period provides an insight into how their mutual historical backgrounds and shared values influenced their foreign policy decisions during that period. The formation of the Balkan Pact in 1934 stands out as an instance where these two nations collaborated with Greece and Yugoslavia to establish a security framework in reaction to external challenges. Realist scholars tend to look at the alliance in terms of material interests such as countering the impact of Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy; however, a Constructivist perspective

¹⁴ Ömer Bedir, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'yla İlişkileri Bağlamında Voyvodalıklardan Modern Romanya'ya: Osmanlı-Romanya Diplomatik İlişkileri (1878-1908)* [At the Context of Relations with Ottoman Empire. From Voivodeship to Modern Romania. Ottoman Romanian Diplomatic Relations (1878-1908)], in "Artuklu İnsan ve Toplum Bilim Dergisi", Vol, 5, 2020, No. 2, pp. 56-72.

¹⁵ Laurențiu Radu, *Political, Economic and Social Options in Interwar Romania*, in "Anuarul Institutului de Cercetări Socio-Umane «C. S. Nicolăescu-Plopșor»", Vol. XXIV, 2023, pp. 211-228.

highlights the significance of shared norms of cooperation and solidarity developed over time from interactions among states. The uncovered archival records also show how these norms were strengthened through endeavours aiming to address issues, such as migration patterns. For instance, managing the movement of minority groups in Romania and the situation of Christian Gagauz Turks posed challenges that demanded tactful diplomatic discussions.

Addressing these concerns without open conflict demonstrates Turkey and Romania's commitment to sustain centuries-old norms of amity and collaboration. Similarly, the trade agreements between Turkey and Romania during the interwar period, between the two World Wars, illustrate how economic collaboration served as a mechanism to strengthen these established norms. The trade agreements between the two nations helped to alleviate the obstacles posed by the global recession and the implementation of protective measures throughout Europe. They also contributed to the stability of Turkish-Romanian relations during a period of geopolitical instability.

There are, however, certain drawbacks to using constructivist theory to analyse Turkish-Romanian relations. Though constructivism provides perspectives on how shared identities and historical interactions influence international relations dynamics, its practical implementation faces challenges and has received criticism. Recognising these constraints can improve the analysis by addressing omissions and providing a broader framework for understanding the interactions, between Turkey and Romania. First, Constructivism overemphasizes ideational factors. When exploring how states behave and nations interact, constructivism stresses ideas, norms, and historical ties over military power, financial reasons, or organisational regulations. This perspective becomes readily apparent when considering the interactions between Turkey and Romania in the context of trade agreements and military alliances such as the Balkan Pact. These arrangements were motivated not only by beliefs but also by economic necessities and the imperative for united defence against aggressive powers such as Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy. Second, critics contend that constructivism's predictive capabilities are constrained because it focuses on the evolving nature of identities and norms, rather than on fixed outcomes. Researchers argue that although constructivism provides insight into the cooperation between Turkey and Romania, it may face challenges in explaining changes, such as Romania's alliance with the Axis powers in World War II. This issue challenges the theory's effectiveness, in forecasting state behaviour during geopolitical shifts.

Constructivism, on the other hand, tends to focus on constructs. Consequently, occasionally neglects the impact of power dynamics in shaping

international relations. For instance, the collaboration between Turkey and Romania in the era was shaped not only by common norms but also by the larger power struggles in the Balkans and Europe. External powers such as the Soviet Union, Nazi Germany and the United Kingdom significantly influenced the relationship between Turkey and Romania. The constructivist approach alone is ineffective in addressing these issues. Abstract concepts such as identity and norms in constructivism can be hard to measure using methodologies. This complicates the accurate application of the theory to real-life situations, such as the impact of identity in Turkish Romanian collaborations on migration issues. Furthermore, constructivism often prioritizes the systemic aspects of analysis, potentially overlooking the impact of domestic politics. This nuance is evident in instances such as the migration of minorities and Romanian Jews, when local factors such as economic challenges nationalist agendas and societal interactions significantly influenced results beyond the scope of constructivist theory alone. In this regard, it may not fully encompass the context in which the interactions between Turkey and Romania occurred. For instance, the theory's focus on comprehension fails to adequately explain Romania's alliance with the Axis powers despite established norms and historical connections, whereas Turkey maintained a position of neutrality. This contrast also underscores the deficiencies of constructivism in addressing influences and opposing interests.

PROGRESS OF COMMERCIAL AND MILITARY RELATIONS AFTER WWI

While examining Turkish Archive documents, an interesting uncovered event surfaced. Between 1916 and 1918, the Ottoman Government purchased unspecified goods from Romania, transferring 1,265,000 gold lei to the Romanian Bank General al Țării Românești. The balance was not returned to the Ottoman Government, nor were the goods purchased. The Bank issued a concordat and after lengthy negotiations in 1930, the Turkish Government agreed to receive 822,000 lei from the Bank. Mr. Bug Graciun, the advocate from Ankara responsible for the lawsuit, would receive 30% of the sum from the related bank.¹⁶ The information is interesting as, following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the conclusion of the Peace Treaty of Lausanne, the majority of the signatory countries

¹⁶ *Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Genelkurmay Başkanlığı ATASE Başkanlığı Arşivi* [Republic of Türkiye Chief of General Staff ATASE Presidency Archives], (herein after *RTCGS ATASE PA*), 30.11.1.0.95.13.4, 15.05.1930, pp. 1-3.

sought reimbursement of the loans given to the Ottoman Empire. Romania was one of the few countries with debts to the Ottoman Empire.

During the 1930s, the balance of power within the banking sector was of major importance for Turkey and the Balkan countries. Archive documents from that period indicate that any potential tight connections between Romania and revisionist Bulgaria were monitored by Turkish legations in both countries.¹⁷ In this context, in 1929, the Turkish Embassy in Bucharest also reported the secret military negotiations between Romania and Poland to Ankara.¹⁸ The military relations between the two easternmost Balkan countries were important for Turkey because, under that year's ultrarealistic global policy, any alliance attempt in Turkey's vicinity could affect border security. Another reason for thorough monitoring was probably the alliance treaty signed by both countries one year earlier on October 1, 1928.¹⁹ Turkey monitored similar developments between Romania and Poland, Italy's policies in the Balkans and Italian-Romanian relations, with all developments reported to Ankara during that time.²⁰

In addition to rising revisionism during that period, other serious problems adversely affected the relations between both countries, including mass replacement in the Balkans and irregular migration flow targeting Turkey. Irregular migration constitutes a major problem; Turkey and the global community face paradoxical dilemmas and difficulties that remain unsolved, as neither has implemented an effective solution yet. The irregular migration flow under revisionism and rising discrimination against Jews of the Balkans and the Turkish minority in the Balkans was a real economic, demographic, social, employment, and housing challenge for Turkey. In anticipation of potential issues related to the escalating trend of irregular migration flow, one year before WWII, the Ministry of Interior Affairs sent a circular to provincial governorates regarding Romanian citizens living in Turkey and Jews migrating from Romania, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia targeting Turkey or wishing to use it as an entry point to reach the US. According to the circular, Romanian citizens could not stay in Turkey for more than two months. Although the exact number of Romanians who illegally extended their stay in Turkey was unknown, the Ministry wanted them to return to Romania, according to archive records from that time. Massive Jewish migration, particularly from Romania to Turkey, became a major concern in 1939, one year after that circular.²¹

¹⁷ *RTCGS ATASE PA*, 30.10.0.0.220.483.17, 24.09.1932.

¹⁸ *RTCGS ATASE PA*, 566.238.1994.25, 30.10.1939. p. 1.

¹⁹ *RTCGS ATASE PA*, 566.238.1994.23, 08.03.1929.

²⁰ *RTCGS ATASE PA*, 30.10.0.0.226.525.20, 00.01.1934. pp. 1-8.

²¹ *RTCGS ATASE PA*, 568.38938.158709.12, 11.04.1941. pp. 2-4.

Because the first circular proved inadequate, a new comprehensive one was issued to Provinces to address irregular migration. This document outlines rules and procedures specifically for Jewish asylum seekers primarily migrating from Romania to Turkey. According to the new document, the monthly influx of Jewish immigrants to Turkey ought not to exceed 200 per month. Entry of regular or mostly irregular Jewish migrants above the limit could be allowed contingent upon the departure of the same number of Jews from Turkey. Romanian Jews coming to Turkey were required to possess a visa for the destination country and their stay in Turkey was limited to one month. Each Jewish migrant needed to demonstrate financial means of 300£ (approximately 405\$) per person or equivalent currency to pass through Turkish consular offices and border police inspections upon entry. Any extension of the stay could only be authorized by the Ministers of Cabinet.²²

Although the restriction was relaxed during the war, the Turkish Government, despite its good relations with Romania, was reluctant to home Romanians and Jews. Romania exhibited discontent towards its Jewish citizens, with discrimination and inter-social conflict becoming frequent during that period. On the eve of WWII, Romania passed some discriminative legislation that deprived Romanian Jews of certain civil and legal rights and classified Jews according to three different categories.²³

The Romanian Government, having facilitated the Soviet advance into Bessarabia and collaborated with the invaders in their assault on neighbour Romanians in the first months of WWII, forced its Jewish citizens to leave the country, most likely to Turkey, in 1940-1941. The Jews who refused or were unable to go were sent to the Ghettos in Bug. The translation of Marshall Antonescu's answer letter to Jewish Society leader Filderman, protesting the forced migration and relocation of Jews to Bug, which included complaints against Jews living in Romania who, according to Marshall Antonescu, collaborated with invader Soviet Army in Bessarabia, killed and tortured their former neighbours, the Romanians. The lengthy letter was translated and dispatched to Ankara by the Turkish Embassy and has been available since June 2024 at the Republic Archives of Turkey.²⁴

Nearly a decade before the Jewish immigration flow, Orthodox Gagauz Turks living in Romania exhibited an increasing tendency to relocate to their country, Turkey, due to various issues. During 1932-1933, many Gagauz Turks with Turkish identity, residing in three provinces of Romania, sold their assets and

²² *RTCGS ATASE PA*, 30.10.0.0.110.736.5, 06.04.1939. pp. 5-8.

²³ *RTCGS ATASE PA*, 568.38938.158709.8, 27.08.1940. pp. 1.

²⁴ *RTCGS ATASE PA*, 568.38938.158709.12, 11.04.1941. pp. 2-4.

migrated to Turkey. It turned out that the remaining Gagauz population also wanted to immigrate to Turkey shortly. The Turkish Government asked the Turkish Envoy to Bucharest Hamdullah Suphi [Tanrıöver] to conduct an extensive investigation into the causes of the mass movement and to collaborate with Romanian Prime Minister Iuliu Maniu and Minister of Internal Affairs Mr. Michalache to devise a solution. Research minutes available in Archives indicate that Turkish villagers who contacted Turkish consulates or the Turkish Embassy for migration complained about the Romanian Government's deployment of foreign settlers to Turkish houses and lands. The Turks chose to leave Romania due to the illegal and unjust settlement of new settlers on their lands, as well as the inequities in the land distribution procedure by the Romanian government.²⁵

Significant discord was unlikely when Turkish-Romanian solidarity and friendly relations assumed straightforward solutions to such problems. The Romanian Prime Minister and Minister of Internal Affairs pledged to address grievances and resolve all issues to retain Turkish families in their residential areas and stop mass migration directed towards Turkey. A report submitted to Ankara indicated that over 400,000 Orthodox Turks resided in Bessarabia and the Minister of Education consented to facilitate education in the Turkish language for the Turkish minority.²⁶ During that period, the Romanian Government implemented nearly all necessary measures to maintain amicable relations with Turkey and to prevent Turk migration, so aiming to resolve the issue before the onset of WWII.

The use of native language in schools was a significant concern. In 1933, amidst rising migration, Musselman Turks complained about Romanian education policies to Turkish Ambassador Hamdullah Suphi, noting that Bulgarian, Hungarian, and German minorities in Romania were allowed to use their native language in schools. Musselman and Gagauz Turks were not permitted to use their native language, Turkish, in their schools. Turkish Ambassador Hamdullah Suphi conferred with Romanian Minister of Education Dr M. Anjelosko and requested an urgent solution to the problem. A further topic addressed by the Turkish Ambassador and Dr M. Anjelosko was a madrassah in Romania run by Muslim Turks, which imparted obscurantist ideas counter to Turkey's modernising efforts. Hamdullah Suphi firmly urged for changes in that Madrassah too.²⁷

Similar challenges were encountered in Bulgaria and Greece, where a few modernity-opposing individuals tried to persuade Turkish minorities that the

²⁵ *RTCGS ATASE PA*, 30.10.0.0.247.668.14, 22.01.1935. pp. 2-13.

²⁶ *RTCGS ATASE PA*, 30.10.0.0.247.668.14, 22.01.1935. pp. 2-13.

²⁷ *RTCGS ATASE PA*, 30.10.0.0.125.888.3, 24.01.1933. pp. 2-13.

modernization process of Turkey contradicted Islamic laws. The madrassahs in Romania, and those in Greece and Bulgaria, were places for the propagation of fanatic, unmodern ideas. To prevent the spread of such obscurantist ideas, the Turkish Ambassador requested the Romanian Minister to address the issue. Romania adopted a constructivist and cooperative approach whereas Greece deliberately supported such a movement to cause friction between Turkey and Turks in Western Thrace.

Despite the Romanian Government's goodwill and friendly relations between the two countries, field survey visits of Turkish Ambassador Hamdullah Suphi one year later indicate that the problems of Gagauz Turks remain inadequately addressed. Hamdullah Suphi, with the permission of the Romanian Government, visited Gagauz Turk villages. In his detailed report, he underlines that during his time in Kishinev, Gagauz Pastor Çakır Mihail, an old man, focused during his life on proving to Gagauz people that, despite claims that Gagauz Turks were Ulah, Roman, or Russian, they are indeed Turks. Mihail wrote documented various articles and poems, supporting the Turkish identity of the Gagauz.²⁸ The Ambassador was familiar with that information due to the extensive report issued by the Turkish Embassy to Bucharest in 1932 and the Turkish Consulate to Constanza in 1930, concerning the Gagauz Turks living in Bessarabia and Dobruja and Bulgaria's Varna Province. The report, using scientific articles and data, indicates that the Gagauz originated from pure Turkish lineage.²⁹

During the visit of the Turkish Ambassador, the Gagauz Turks complained about discrimination and the inability to use their native language in schools. The same complaint was raised by Musselman Turks one year before, so the Romanian Education Minister promised an urgent solution. According to Hamdullah Suphi's report, Orthodox Gagauz Turks in Bessarabia were far more conscious, wealthier, educated and trained than Muslim Turks in Teleorman and Dobruja. Gender equality and women's status among Orthodox Turks were held to higher standards.³⁰

In the same year as Hamdullah Suphi's field survey visit, the rising migration flow to Turkey prompted intense discussions³¹ in the Turkish Grand National Assembly (TGNA) on a new settlement bill. The TGNA minutes indicate that 3,337 immigrants came to Turkey from Romania between June 1, 1933, and June 1,

²⁸ *RTCGS ATASE PA*, 30.10.0.0.247.668.14, 22.01.1935. p. 6.

²⁹ *RTCGS ATASE PA*, 38990.158500.67, 11.04.1932. pp. 2-6.

³⁰ *RTCGS ATASE PA*, 30.10.0.0.247.668.14, 22.01.1935. p. 11.

³¹ *Turkish Grand National Assembly - Minutes Book* (herein after TGNA-MB), Term IV, Volume 23, Meeting Number 65. 07.06.1934, pp. 5-8.

1934. The total number of immigrants who entered Turkey through other neighbouring countries such as Iran, Afghanistan, Syria, and Greece was 15,319 individuals. The total number of immigrants from Romania in the year 1934, originating from Teleorman through Dobruja, was 12,000 people. In 1934, approximately 100 Turkish immigrants in Costanza awaited departure to Turkey. According to TGNA records, the approximate population of Turks living in Bulgaria was about 1 million, while in Romania it was about 400 thousand during that period.³² On September 4, 1936, an agreement was signed between Romania and Turkey concerning the relocation of Turkish immigrants to Turkey. The agreement consisted of 20 articles about Musselman Turks living in Durostor, Caliacra, Costanza, Tulcea, and Dobruja provinces. However, the Gagauz Turks were not included in the agreement.³³

Nonetheless, as WWII started, the Turkish Government had to adjust its approach towards Gagauz Turks. Therefore, in the year 1943, according to the Ministry of Internal Affairs' documents, especially after Romania participated in WWII on the side of Axis powers, Gagauz Turks started to emigrate to Turkey. Apart from its general immigration policy towards other Romanian citizens, emigrated Gagauz Turks were granted Turkish citizenship. However, because they were Orthodox Christian Turks, the Ministry of Internal Affairs added an identifier to their identity documents, marking them as "Orthodox Turks", to differentiate them from other Christian Turkish citizens. According to practice in use, minorities were identified as "Rum Orthodox" and "Armenian Catholic" etc. Thus, such a comment and the labelling of Christian Gagauz Turks in that way did not constitute a discriminatory attitude and was consistent with established practices.³⁴

A CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE ON ROMANIAN-TURKISH RELATIONS

The historical account of relations portrayed as predominantly collaborative and supportive hides a more intricate reality, characterized by discord and uncertainty mixed with practical agreements and concessions. Recognizing these intricacies provides a comprehensive perspective on how they interacted without succumbing to excessively optimistic interpretations. During that time, Turkey and Romania often collaborated for pragmatic reasons rather than profound

³² *TGNA-MB*, Term IV, Volume 25, Meeting Number 12.11.1934, p. 16.

³³ "Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Resmi Gazete" [Republic of Türkiye Official Gazette], 02.11.1937, No. 3523.

³⁴ *RTCGS ATASE PA*, 30.10.0.0.125.888.3, 25.09.1943, pp. 2-3.

unity. The Balkan Pact of 1934 illustrates that approach, mostly serving as a reaction to security threats posed by Nazi and Fascist interests in the region, rather than stemming from lasting trust or shared ideologies. Necessity drove both nations to form this alliance. Their responsibilities varied according to their evolving strategies. Romania's decision to align with the Axis powers during World War II demonstrates the limits of collaboration. Their different positions during World War II highlight the nature of the bilateral connection between countries involved in the conflict at that time. Romania's choice to align with the Axis powers was driven by certain objectives and the impact of Nazi Germany, in contrast to Turkey's position of neutrality. This divergence put a strain on the relationships and highlighted the difficulties of maintaining cooperation based on values and historical connections amid significant geopolitical changes.

This analysis accurately highlights the challenges faced by both countries, such as migration and minority concerns while minimizing the hidden conflicts between them. In Romania, the Gagauz Turks, a segment of the Turkish community, faced social and cultural obstacles, including restrictions on the use of their native language in schools. These issues suggest that governmental decisions were frequently influenced more by agendas rather than by a sense of mutual understanding. Turkey's hesitance to help refugees from Romania at first and its strict immigration policies highlight the extent of its commitment to demonstrating support during those times. Despite instances of conflict resolution, such as addressing minority movements, difficulties persisted. Discussions frequently required considerable time. Agreements were occasionally reached through external pressures rather than genuine intentions. An illustration of this is Romania conceding to demands for minority rights because peace was more important than equal treatment.

Overall, the two nations' economic ties highlighted imbalances and mutual distrust. The trade agreements were influenced not by trust but by the constraints of clearing procedures, protective measures and external economic factors caused by the Great Depression and the subsequent World War II. Romania's need for Turkish raw materials and Turkey's dependence on Romanian manufactured goods were not consistently perceived as fair collaborations; disputes periodically arose around trade terms and payment methods. Both Turkey and Romania have emphasised the positive aspects of their relationship, while alternately minimizing instances of previous disagreement or exploitation. The Ottoman era is frequently depicted favourably or interpreted selectively in contemporary history books, despite its recognized significance. Similarly, Turkey's emphasis on their shared history may outweigh times when their decisions prioritised interests over

fostering relations with Romania.

RISING REVISIONISM AND TURKISH-ROMANIAN ALLIANCE EFFORTS WITH ANTI-REVISIONIST BLOCK

Poland to the north and Yugoslavia to the east of Romania were two notable powers of the Balkans. During the Turkish-British alliance negotiations on the eve of WWII, both countries saw Yugoslavia and its military capability as a significant topic of discussion. In addition to Ankara's vigilant oversight of the cooperation between Romania and Poland, underlined in previous pages, Yugoslavia was also closely monitored by Turkish Army intelligence. According to intelligence reports, the Yugoslavian Armed Forces, on the eve of WWII had two cavalries, 17 infantry divisions, and one mountain division. Turkish Army's intelligence reports indicate that during the mid-1939 period, the Romanian Armed Forces comprised four mine-laying torpedo boat destroyers, with bases established in the Black Sea and the Danube. Turkish intelligence reports indicated that in the event of a fight against Germany, the Romanian Navy would be unable to contribute because of a deficit of personnel. In case of a general mobilization, the Romanian Army could deploy 22 Infantry divisions and 3 mountain brigades. In addition, during the first months of a general war, Romania could provide two or three reserve divisions. Romania had two armaments factories, which were also insufficient for the requirements of its military forces. The Romanian air forces comprised 48 bombers, 90 fighters, and 24 surveillance aircraft, totalling 300 units. Turkish intelligence reports indicate that the forces were inadequately armed, and the logistical capabilities of the Romanian Army were severely deficient.³⁵

Following Hitler's rise to power in 1932, Turkey, Romania, and Greece realised the threats posed by rising revisionism and allied to cooperate against emerging challenges. Yugoslavia joined the alliance, whereas Bulgaria preferred not to take part due to its revisionist policies. In 1934, after negotiations between four countries, the Balkan Treaty was signed by Romania, Greece, Yugoslavia, and Turkey to build a defence alliance in the Balkans against potential Nazi or Fascist invasion. Turkish Archive documents indicate that after the Balkan Treaty, a few months before WWII, two Romanian officers went to Turkey for training in the Turkish Army. In exchange, a Turkish captain and a major from the land forces were dispatched to Romania for one year of training in the Romanian army.³⁶

³⁵ *RTCGS ATASE PA*, 110.9.1.14.1.0.1, 31.12.1931. p. 3.

³⁶ *RTCGS ATASE PA*, 30.18.1.2.86.31.3, 09.04.1939. p. 1.

Notably, three months after the beginning of WWII, on November 9, 1939, a trade and payment treaty was signed between Romania and Turkey, which came into force on 21 November 1939, after confirmation by the Turkish Cabinet.³⁷ Given the long-standing good relations between the two countries, commercial and military relations continued to evolve during the first two years of WWII. Commercial relations, as stipulated in the signed treaty, were conducted through a clearing system. As a result, in the mid-1940s, Romania exported oil and benzene to Turkey, while importing 3,150 tonnes of fleece wool and 1,600 tonnes of angora wool from Turkey in exchange.³⁸ The same year an additional trade protocol was signed for bandages produced in Romanian factories. That transaction was also completed by clearance: in exchange for bandages, Turkey delivered to Romania 2,5 tonnes of pig iron. In the same year, 50 tank cars were purchased from Romania for the urgent need of the Turkish Army, and that was done by clearing also.³⁹

It is known that Romania joined the Axis Powers in October 1940 and declared war against the USSR in June 1941 in an effort to annex its former lands under Soviet invasion. Until that date, despite declaring war against the Soviet Union, Turkey and Romania were allies. The Nazi advance in the Balkans and the German Army's fast move towards the south of Soviet lands at the Black Sea coast forced Romania to split from its former alliance. As stated above, Romania and Turkey had friendly relations before they collaborated with Nazi forces. After Romania participated in the Axis, the quantity of iron pigs exported to Romania interestingly rose to 5,698 tonnes, while Turkey purchased 1,036 tonnes of train carriage bandages. According to Turkish archive archives, despite Romania's alliance with the Axis, previously agreed-upon buy and sale transactions between the two countries were completed through clearance.⁴⁰

The commercial treaty was negotiated and extended at the end of 1941, 1942, 1943, and 1944, with oil and other needed equipment imported from Romania by Turkey in 1942.⁴¹ The clearing system remained the procedure stipulated by the trade treaty and nearly all goods imported by Turkey in the middle of 1942 were paid in equivalent goods exported to Romania in return.⁴² Amidst

³⁷ *RTCGS ATASE PA*, 30.18.1.2.89.112.12, 24.11.1939. p. 1.

³⁸ *RTCGS ATASE PA*, 30.18.1.2.91.68.8, 17.07.1940. p. 1.

³⁹ *RTCGS ATASE PA*, 30.18.1.2.92.84.7, 25.08.1940. p. 1.

⁴⁰ *RTCGS ATASE PA*, 30.18.1.2.93.127.8, 24.01.1941. p. 1; *RTCGS ATASE PA*, 30.18.1.2.96.74.11, 25.08.1941. p. 1.

⁴¹ *RTCGS ATASE PA*, 30.18.1.2.96.97.15., 27.11.1941. p. 1; *RTCGS ATASE PA*, 30.18.1.2.97.127.19, 11.03.1942. p. 1; *RTCGS ATASE PA*, 30.18.1.2.98.39.11, 09.05.1942. p. 1.

⁴² *RTCGS ATASE PA*, 30.18.1.2.99.59.2, 08.07.1942. p. 1.

wartime circumstances and the Nazi-dominated hot days of the 1940s, such friendly relations proved that Turkey and Romania struggled to preserve the Balkan Treaty alliance to the greatest extent possible.

In 1943, on the eve of Stalingrad's defeat of Nazi Germany, a wool yarn factory was purchased from Romania and to facilitate settling the factory at the Istanbul Deferdar factory, two Jewish Romanian engineers and their wives were granted visas to enter Turkey and stay in Istanbul one year.⁴³ The same year, a Romanian language and literature department (*kürsü*) was founded in one of the with Prof. Felicien Branzu appointed to teach Romanian courses.⁴⁴ All of these are significant as they occurred during WWII years, showing that the solidarity between Romania and Turkey was institutionalized soon after the proclamation of the Turkish Republic, on a friendly basis, during the dark days of WWII and thereafter.

CONCLUSIONS

Throughout the long relationship between Romania and Turkey, nearly all issues have been examined; nevertheless, many matters, due to their secondary importance and insufficient evidence, have not been thoroughly analysed. Documents in Turkish Archives only made public four months ago illuminate certain obscure aspects of the long-lasting relations between the two nations. This study employs constructivism as the theory of international relations because of its precise formula for state formation, fundamental principles of foreign relations, and national priorities. Following independence, Romania saw numerous challenges in maintaining its territorial integrity and national unity. Building a Romanian nation posed an additional challenge to the Romanian state-building process. On the other hand, the Ottoman Empire had reached a state of collapse when Romania gained its independence, progressively losing its strategic territories in Europe. WWI was a turning point for the Ottomans, while Romania, and in contrast to its strong neighbours such as Russia, Austria-Hungary, and Bulgaria did not face major structural difficulties.

After WWI, a turbulent era in world history, Turkey struggled to secure its independence, while Romania sought to overcome the domestic and international post-war challenges. The recently unveiled archival papers from Turkey show that during those years, Romania and Turkey, especially under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, developed joint initiatives to produce common solutions to similar

⁴³ *RTCGS ATASE PA*, 30.18.1.2.100.110.10, 06.01.1943. p. 1.

⁴⁴ *RTCGS ATASE PA*, 30.18.1.2.102.51.2, 24.06.1943. p. 1.

threats and challenges. For instance, the increasing trade relations between the two countries, especially after the 1929 Economic Crisis, were influenced by the scarcity of necessary foreign exchange currency, such as the US dollar, which necessitated the employment of a clearing method for payments. The clearing is a mechanism of mutual trust that plays a crucial role, and Romania and Turkey implemented clearing methods given their confidence, traditional friendship, and historical ties. Furthermore, countries developed strong military relations, culminating in the Balkan Treaty. Archival documents indicate that Romanian military power was crucial in countering Soviet and Bulgarian revisionism.

This research employed constructivism due to its robust analytical capabilities regarding state-to-state relations. Although liberalism and realism are the basic mainstream practices of a twenty-year crisis, neither perspective effectively analyses Turkish-Romanian relations. Contrary to the common practices of world politics during those years, both countries developed peaceful relations, consistently implementing confidence-building measures. Peaceful conflict resolution methods were employed to solve grave disagreements that arose, whether anticipated or unforeseen. The study emphasizes that relationships can be built and influenced by various variables. Constructivism emphasizes the significance of historical processes and common values, identities, and norms that exist or are created throughout the interaction of countries, which can play crucial roles in facilitating negotiation and fostering peaceful resolutions. In this regard, the foreign policies and external actions of states are not exclusively dictated by military or economic might, but rather by mutual understanding and negotiations. Overall, tangible factors in state relations are consistently influential; yet, they were not the primary determinants of Turkish-Romanian relations during the examined period.

During the Montreux negotiations concerning the Turkish Straits from June to July 1936, the transit of submarines from riparian and non-riparian countries was not allowed because Romania did not have any other seaway to transfer its submarines to the Black Sea. However, the regulation was amended to permit the passage of newly built, repaired or mounted submarines from riparian countries through the Turkish Straits contingent upon their demonstration of having undergone maintenance or construction before transit. Actually, due to the increasing power of the Soviet navy in the Black Sea Turkey was reluctant to allow the passage of submarines through the Straits; however, to provide Romania access to the high seas, the Turkish delegation at Montreux, under the guidance of President Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, consented to amend the provision. This policy proves mutual understanding and peaceful solutions to issues, highlighting the practical

effect and importance of the constructivist approaches and their effectiveness in state relations with strong historical ties.

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