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**Burak Şakir Şeker**

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8536-1790>

Associate Professor, Ankara Hacı Bayram Veli University, International Relations, Türkiye,  
[buraksakirseker@gmail.com](mailto:buraksakirseker@gmail.com)

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## **Turkey-Syria Relations before World War II**

### **Abstract**

*Syria-Turkey relations have a long history. The fact that both states are located in the Middle East and have borders with each other has made diplomatic relations inevitable. In this article, Turkey-Syria relations are analysed objectively, based on history, and the events that deeply affected the relations of the two states are included. After Syria had been under Ottoman rule for a long time, it came under the French mandate. After being governed under the French mandate for a long time, it gained its independence as a result of great efforts and got rid of the French mandate. In this process, there were many developments in the diplomatic field between the two states, and from time to time tensions and good developments were achieved. In Turkey-Syria relations, the decisions and attitudes of states and structures such as Britain, France and the League of Nations have been decisive. The Hatay issue has been a major turning point in Turkey-Syria relations. In the article, the process starting from the interaction of the two nations a long time ago until the World War II is mentioned. In this context, Lausanne, Mudros, Mudanya, World War I, Sanjak Status and the Hatay problem were included and Turkey-Syria relations were tried to be explained.*

**Keywords:** Turkey, Syria, France, League of Nations, Hatay



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## II. Dünya Savaşı Öncesi Türkiye-Suriye İlişkileri

### Öz

*Suriye-Türkiye ilişkileri uzun bir tarihe dayanmaktadır. İki devletin de Ortadoğu'da konumlanması ve birbirlerine sınırlarının bulunması, diplomatik ilişkilerin yaşanmasını kaçınılmaz kılmıştır. Bu makalede, Türkiye-Suriye ilişkileri objektif bir şekilde, tarihe dayalı olarak incelenmiş, iki devletin ilişkilerini derinden etkileyen olaylara yer verilmiştir. Suriye uzun süre Osmanlı egemenliğinde varlığını sürdürdüktan sonra, Fransız mandası altına girmiştir. Fransız mandasında uzun bir süre idare edildikten sonra, büyük uğraşlar sonucunda bağımsızlığını kazanmış ve Fransız mandasından kurtulmuştur. Bu süreçte iki devlet arasında diplomatik alanda birçok gelişme yaşanmış, zaman zaman gerilimler zaman zaman da iyi yönde gelişmeler sağlanmıştır. Türkiye-Suriye ilişkilerinde, İngiltere, Fransa, Milletler Cemiyeti gibi devlet ve yapıların karar ve tutumları belirleyici olmuştur. Hatay sorunu, Türkiye-Suriye ilişkilerinde büyük bir dönüm noktası olmuştur. Makalede, iki milletin uzun zaman önce etkileşime geçmesinden başlayan süreçten, II. Dünya Savaşı'na kadar olan sürece kadar söz edilmiştir. Bu kapsamda, Lozan, Mondros, Mudanya, I. Dünya Savaşı, Sancak Statüsü ve Hatay sorunu konularına yer verilerek, Türkiye-Suriye ilişkileri anlatılmaya çalışılmıştır.*

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Türkiye, Suriye, Fransa, Milletler Cemiyeti, Hatay

### Introduction

Syria is located in a geography on the Mediterranean coast, which has hosted many civilizations. It is surrounded by important states such as Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, and Israel. Many empires have ruled over these lands throughout history. The Arabs took control of the region in the 7th century. At that time, the area was called Bilal al-Sham or Al-Sham. As a result of the spread of Islam among the Arabs, it was conquered by Omar and joined the Islamic lands. Today's Syria was ruled by states such as the Umayyads, Abbasids, Fatimids, Seljuks, Franks, and Mamluks, respectively in history. Turkmen began to settle in the region during the Seljuk period. Many Turkmen tribes settled in Syria. As a result of these migrations, interactions began between Syrians and Turks. At that time, the lands of Syria were ruled by the Fatimids. The Seljuks managed to dominate the region by defeating the Fatimids and connecting the region to the Seljuk Empire (Brauer, 1995). The Ottoman Emperor Yavuz Sultan Selim organized an expedition to Syria and brought a large part of the holy lands, such as Syria and Egypt, to the Ottoman dynasty. The location of Syria was of great importance according to the conditions of the time. Its connection with Asia and its proximity to the holy lands attracted the attention of the Ottomans. The Ottoman Empire

divided the region into four provinces, created a central authority, and continued its administration with the help of governors. It also granted limited autonomy to some local powers (Reilly, 1999). Syria has been a problematic region for the Ottomans from time to time. The reason for this was the organization of the local forces in the region and their grand plans for independence and autonomy. The Ottoman Empire did not care about this in the first place. The Egyptian Governor, Kavalali Mehmet (Muhammad) Ali Pasha, turned against the Ottoman Empire and created an independent state in Egypt, as well as achieved victory against the Ottomans. Afterward, Syria was captured by Kavalali Mehmet Ali Pasha, and he succeeded in establishing his state in the region. However, due to his oppression of the people and his harsh policies, Arab Nationalism gained strength in the region. With the support of the British, the Ottoman Empire defeated the forces of Kavalali Mehmet Ali Pasha in Syria and captured Syria back (Abir, 1977). In Syria, which was under the rule of the Ottoman Empire for many years, the people were affected by the provocations of the British and the French and were encouraged to rise against the Ottomans by using Arab nationalism. These studies caused the Arabs to stand against the Ottomans when they had the opportunity. When Syria is taken from the Ottoman administration and passed to the French mandate, Türkiye-Syria relations will be strained with the Hatay Dispute (Alon, 2016). After remaining under the rule of the Ottoman Empire, MENA (Middle East and North Africa) continued to exist as a colony of European states, and many new states were formed as a result of these colonies. One of the most important post-colonial states was Syria, which attracted the attention of many European states due to its geopolitical position and wealth of resources. With the loss of Ottoman power and dominance in the MENA, the idea of dominating Syria attracted great powers. Many states, especially European states and Russia wanted to have something to say in Syria. With the withdrawal of the Russians from the First World War, secret agreements were revealed. In these secret agreements, it was understood that the Arabs were used as bait against the Ottomans, and the promise of independence was a lie. The Arabs, who had revolted against the Ottoman Empire, could not gain their independence and continued to be ruled under the mandate (Samee-ul-Hasan, 2010). As a result of the Ottomans losing the First World War, the Armistice of Mudros came to the fore and was enforced. After this treaty, the Allied Powers tied the Ottomans' hands and occupied most of their lands. After the war ended, the Allies met in Paris to make treaties with the defeated states. The most important aim of the conference was the occupation and sharing of the MENA lands (Gelvin, 1994). According to Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the Armistice of Mudros is a very

heavy and unacceptable agreement. Mustafa Kemal, who also showed his reaction to Hatay, was taken to the Ministry of War upon the pressure of the Allied Powers on the Ottoman Empire. Against the states that jeopardized the territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire, it was stated by the Grand National Assembly that the borders and lands were an indivisible whole with the National Pact (Qureshi, 1946). However, the reaction of the Turkish people emerged. Meanwhile, Arab leaders who promised independence came together with Britain and held a congress, and according to the decision taken at the congress, Faisal was elected as the "King of United Syria" (Munson, 1988).

Under the Sykes-Picot agreement, France, which had a mandate understanding and wanted to maintain dominance in the MENA, was planning to realize its dream of domination in Syria and Lebanon according to the "mandate system" clause in the League of Nations. This request was approved at the San Remo Conference, and the mentioned regions were left to the French mandate (Fitzgerald, 1994). After this decision, France occupied Syria, and the mandate of Syria by France was accepted by Türkiye with the Ankara Agreement. The mandate that France maintained in this period affected the borders, as well as today, and also affected the future policy and structure of Syria. The treaty that would affect the sovereignty and borders of the Ottoman lands was signed after the Armistice of Mudros. After the Mudros Armistice Treaty, which was a devastating treaty, the Treaty of Sèvres was signed as a so-called peaceful treaty. After this treaty, the Ottoman Empire began to disappear completely from history (Tanenbaum, 1978).

After these heavy agreements, the resistance of the Turkish people increased in Anatolia. The resistance of the Turkish people gradually increased over time and became a great power. Especially the French suffered great losses against the national struggle forces. This situation disturbed the French government. In Syria, which is under the French mandate, the attitude of the French government towards the Arabs led them to revolt. In these uprisings, the Turks provided great support to the Arabs against the French, who were the common enemy of the Turks and the Arabs. France, which suffered a serious loss of power in the region, took a soft stance when it realized that it would lose its sovereignty, and then Turkish-French relations improved. As a result of these developments, the Ankara Agreement was signed to ensure peace with the French (Farrar, 1982). As a result of the Ankara Agreement, it was decided to leave Iskenderun for Syria under the French mandate. The borders were determined by the Ankara Agreement, and it was decided in the

same way in the Lausanne Treaty. Despite the great resistance of the national struggle, Hatay remained outside the borders of the National Pact (M. B., & H. G. L., 1940). After the national struggle and wars, the Republic of Türkiye was established, and relations with France continued to be developed. And then, the Türkiye-Syria border was clearly determined by a protocol. After the British gave independence to Iraq, which was under its mandate, the Syrian people struggled for independence. France could not stand these pressures and, as a result, recognized Syria's independence. After France recognized the independence of Syria, Türkiye also demanded the independence of Iskenderun. As a result of this demand, Türkiye-Syria relations stagnated for a while and deteriorated (Sluglett, 2014). At the end of the 1930s, powerful states such as Italy and Germany, which had a gravity in world politics and wanted to continue their presence in the MENA, began to pose a threat to Western states (Trask, 1964). States that would prevent the Western state from acting comfortably in the MENA had changed the attitude of France, especially towards Türkiye. Needing an ally in the region, France started to follow policies for Türkiye and Hatay in a way that would be beneficial for Türkiye. As a result of these events and Türkiye's harmonious policies, Hatay's independence was obtained without any war, and Türkiye took place in world politics by making agreements with Western states. These positive developments determined Türkiye's policy in the Middle East (Jäschke, 1940).

### **1. Türkiye-Syria Relations After the Peace Treaty of Lausanne**

After the Ankara Agreement was signed, Mustafa Kemal assigned the Foreign Minister Yusuf Kemal to London and Paris for negotiations. As a result of the negotiations, it was learned that France wanted to maintain the current peace. After the success of the 1922 Great Offensive and the determination of the Turkish nation in its resistance, Türkiye has shown that it has adopted the peace policy by signing the Armistice of Mudanya (Davison, 1953). At the Lausanne Peace Conference, negotiations were held without making any concessions from the National Pact. Britain, which did not tolerate this demand of Türkiye, wanted to take a front against Türkiye together with France. Not wanting to make concessions from the National Pact, Türkiye faced the Western states once again, and the negotiations were interrupted. Negotiations were held again after the allied states demanded and insisted that Türkiye join again. As a result of these negotiations, the Lausanne Peace Treaty was signed, and the Syrian border was drawn as agreed in the Ankara Agreement (McCarthy, 2022).

As a result of Türkiye's increasing power on the southern front, relations with France were strained. Britain supported France, and there was a border crisis. Upon the strained relations with France, the Turks living in Syria and their Turkish supporters were put under pressure by France. During this period, Syrians were influenced by the Turkish War of Independence against European states. The fact that the Syrians are also under the mandate caused them to think of their independence by taking the example of Türkiye's struggle (Guclu, 2001). Since the caliphate was abolished in Türkiye after the Ottoman Empire, Serif Hussein was declared caliph. The French government stated that they rejected the new caliph, and pressure was exerted against the religion of Islam in the region, which caused the Syrians to want to get rid of the French mandate completely and sympathize with Türkiye. The Syrians, who could not stand the great pressure, started the Great Revolt in 1925 (Miller, 1977). In this process, Türkiye, which did not want the dominance of the French in the region, supported the Syrians. The revolt spread throughout the country and created a serious problem for the French. In the League of Nations and international conferences, Türkiye stated that it supports Syria's independence, and some of the Syrians, whose lives were not safe in the rebellion, took refuge in Türkiye. Although France tried to disrupt Türkiye-Syria relations, the relations between the two states strengthened during this period, and the nationwide rebellion initiated by the Syrians yielded results in 1927 (Daam, 2023).

The French met with the Syrians and evaluated their requests, but Syria demanded independence and elections, and these demands were accepted by the League of Nations. Although accepted by the League of Nations, the French mandate was included in the Syrian Constitution, and the restrictions continued. While the divide-and-rule policy was adopted at the beginning of the French mandate in Syria, a process in which Syria's demands were also included started. Although Syria's demands were included, democracy and independence in the region did not last long. As Syria's demands increased after the new government was elected, France again mandated the region and closed the parliament. Syria-Türkiye relations also started to tense again due to the Hatay issue (Antonius, 1934).

## **2.Sanjak of Iskenderun (Alexandretta) Dispute or Hatay Issue**

Hatay, which has an important place in history, has been under the roof of many civilizations and has an important geopolitical position in the Middle East. At the end of the 19th century, many great states entered the race for dominance in the region. In the last years of the Ottoman Empire,

many states wanted to have something to say in the region, considering that Hatay was a key point to maintain dominance in the Mediterranean. In this context, France tried to assimilate the people by making serious investments in the region. It even planned to strengthen its authority by provoking the local people against the Ottoman Empire (Shorrocks, 1972).

After the weakening of the Ottoman Empire and losing its dominance in the region, Iskenderun was connected to Syria with the Sykes-Picot Agreement, which was a secret treaty, and entered the French mandate. The port was completely under British control, but as a result of the end of World War I, the British and French occupied the region based on the articles of the Armistice of Mudros. A commission was appointed to report to the region, and because of this report, it was determined that the local people were against the French mandate in Iskenderun (Balistreri, 2022). After this report, the French put pressure on the local people in the region. As a result of the pressures, Turks and Syrians came together and resisted against the French. Since France was fighting with many forces at the same time, its power began to run out, and it started negotiations with Türkiye for peace. As a result, the Ankara Agreement was signed as a sign of peace (Gratien, 2016).

As a result of this agreement, the war ended, and a border was drawn between Syria and Türkiye, and İskenderun was given as a concession. With the treaty, an autonomous structure called “İskenderun Sanjak” was established in Iskenderun and its surroundings and remained in Syrian territory. Although İskenderun Sanjak remained on Syrian territory, it had special conditions due to its structure. Benefits such as Turkish education were provided by granting privileges to the Turks. This situation helped the Turks in the region to preserve their national values and identities and was of great importance in the process when Hatay was included in the borders of Türkiye (H. L., 1937). Sanjak had been brought under the domination of different structures and states many times, and it had been tried to be kept under constant control by France. France established different governments in the region, and then it was decided to join Damascus in the region. Since Türkiye was in a difficult and long process through the war of independence, it had not been able to fully focus on the Hatay issue. First of all, by solving internal and external problems, it waited to implement the reforms and to provide the necessary conditions. When Türkiye did not intervene, the Sanjak Turks wanted to immigrate to Türkiye, but Türkiye warned the Sanjak Turks not to immigrate in order not to completely lose its dominance in the region (Thomas, 2002).

After the Iskenderun Sanjak decided to join Damascus, the Damascus Assembly made decisions regarding Syria and Iskenderun Sanjak, and these decisions were approved by the League of Nations. The Governor to be appointed by the Head of State would represent the President in the region and act together by establishing a parliament. After these new developments, Türkiye focused on the Hatay issue. Iskenderun Sanjak was of great importance for both Turks and Syrians, and both sides claimed that the territory belonged to them (Satloff, 1986).

In this process, Türkiye gained an important place in world politics and gained many allies with its peaceful policy. It reinforced this by becoming a member of the League of Nations. In this process, the Sanjak Turks were waiting for news from Türkiye and were impatient for Hatay to join the homeland. Syria, on the other hand, saw the Turks in Sanjak as enemies. Syria was disturbed by the presence of the Turks in the region and asked France to do something about it. However, relations between the French administrators and Turkish representatives in the region were good during this period (Provence, 2005).

The end of the French mandate in Syria and Lebanon in 1935 triggered Arab nationalism in Syria (Wien, 2011). An anti-Turkish organization called “Syrian Unity” was established in Sanjak. Among the members of this organization were authorized persons such as party members. They thought that when the French Mandate was over, there would be Syrian control in the region (Olmert, 1996). On the contrary, the Turks were trying to connect their region to the homeland. During this turmoil, the Syrian delegation had a meeting with the French and learned that the French intended to leave the region for Syria. Afterward, some behaviors were not in accordance with the Ankara Agreement regarding autonomy and against the Turks in the region. Thereupon, Türkiye took action and activated its societies. The name of the society operating in this region is “Hatay Sovereignty Society” (Sökmen, 1978).

In 1935 and 1936, studies on Syria's independence were increased. An uprising started in Damascus, and the French mandate was rejected. Despite the measures taken by the French government, the uprising could not be completely suppressed. France, which could not cope with the uprisings and lost power in the region, changed its harsh stance in the region after Britain gave independence to Iraq (Mattar, 1984). After the change in the French parliament and the establishment of a new government, France changed its policy on Syria and Lebanon and tried to improve its relations with these countries. This new government in France called the "Popular



Front," thought that the mandate applied in the region was not suitable for the new world conjuncture and that a new policy should be followed (Wall, 1986).

Upon this, necessary studies were carried out, and negotiations were made with Syria and Lebanon. And at the end of the negotiations, a friendship agreement was made in Paris in 1936. The treaty was made to be valid for 25 years. This treaty was of great importance for independence, as it represented Syria's independence in the international arena (Traboulsi, 2012). However, there was no decision regarding the Iskenderun Sanjak in the treaty. Three years after the signing of the treaty, France gave Syria its independence, and the Sanjak region was left to Syria's administration. Leaving the Sanjak administration to Syria is an indication that the provisions of the Ankara Agreement were ignored. The reason why France made such a decision was that although it made serious investments in the region, it could not get its return as much as it expected, and the strengthening of states such as Italy and Germany played a major role (Khadduri, 1945).

After the signing of the agreement, Turkish statesmen reacted. Although they were happy with Syria's independence, they emphasized that Iskenderun's right to independence should be recognized. The decision about Iskenderun was by no means accepted by the Turkish government, and there was a great reaction. After this date, the Hatay issue had taken a big place in Türkiye's politics, and it had been the biggest aim of Hatay to gain its independence and add it to the homeland. After the agreement signed by the French and Syrian governments, the Hatay issue had been on Türkiye's agenda and had become an issue for which a solution was sought. Mustafa Kemal determined Hatay as a national cause and started the necessary studies (Sprayregen, 2001).

Türkiye continued to implement its peaceful policy and sought diplomatic solutions to the Hatay issue. Türkiye stated that they do not have any problems regarding the independence of Syria but that a solution should be found to the Iskenderun issue. European states started negotiations with France to put pressure on France to solve the Iskenderun dispute due to its connection with France. At the League of Nations meeting, Türkiye requested a meeting with France to find a solution to the Iskenderun dispute. The French government, on the other hand, stated that bilateral talks were not possible since the region was under Syria's sovereignty and that in case of a possible meeting, Syria also had the right to speak on the issue. Thereupon, Türkiye-France relations became stagnant again and progressed in a negative direction (Mango, 1968). Later on, the Turkish government gave a note demanding that the independence given by France to Syria applying the same policy should also be given to Iskenderun. It supported this right by showing the treaties

between the two states. Mustafa Kemal tried to create public opinion for the solution to the Iskenderun dispute and made the necessary explanations about the issue in the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye (Atatürk, 1938). According to these statements, he emphasized that the Iskenderun region belongs to the Turks, and this issue is a main problem between France and Türkiye. Upon these explanations, the Sanjak issue became official, and Atatürk's speech greatly impacted the Sanjak region, bringing the Turks together and increasing their desire to join the motherland. Atatürk had a meeting with the French Ambassador and clearly expressed his views on the Sanjak issue. He stated that Türkiye followed a peaceful policy but would never compromise on the Hatay issue, which it had a right to. Turkish determination on this national issue had drawn great attention (Gönlübol & Sar, 1963).

France gave negative feedback on the note given by Türkiye. The French administration stated that if they gave independence to Sanjak, they would disrupt the territorial integrity of Syria and that they did not have such an intention and authority as a mandate power in the region. After these statements, although mutual notes were given between the two states, these notes did not yield any results. With the effect of the turmoil in Europe, France did not want to spoil its relations with both Türkiye and Syria and sought an international solution by opening the Hatay issue to discussion in the League of Nations (Sanjian, 1956).

As the elections approached in the region, clashes broke out between the Turks, who resisted the French police, and the French administration. The pressure was applied to the Turks who preferred not to participate in the elections by protesting the elections, by the French soldiers and police, there were some Turks who died in the conflicts that broke out. This event affected Türkiye-France relations and after the event, martial law was imposed in the region. According to the statements of the French officials in the region, it was stated that clashes broke out as a result of provocations, and the French military intervened to ensure security in the region (Shields, 2011).

After the incident, Türkiye sent an ambassador to the region. Atatürk emphasized the seriousness of the Hatay issue by stating that they have demanded autonomy in Sanjak until now and that they will go to integration from now on. Against this reaction of Türkiye, France tried to soften the atmosphere and did not want to break its relations with Türkiye. France suggested that the Hatay issue be discussed and resolved in the League of Nations, and Türkiye accepted this offer (Jenks, 1938).

### **3.The Process of Resolving the Hatay Issue under the Leadership of the League of Nations**

With the changing politics and state structure of Europe, the importance of imperialism in the world had increased and Syria became one of the lands gaining importance. The threat of independence that previously was given to Syria may have inflamed the desire for independence in other colonial countries and that caused France to follow a conciliatory policy with Türkiye (Philliou, 2021). While Türkiye's condemnation of France and Syria continued, a general election decision was made in Syria. Since this election would formalize Syria's independence, Türkiye refused to hold elections. This attitude of Türkiye resulted in the majority of the people in Iskenderun not participating in the elections. Although the Turks did not participate in the elections, with the support of France, Arab leaders were elected in Iskenderun and this situation received a great reaction from the people. The Turkish people suffered great losses in the conflicts that broke out after the election (Khoury, 1982).

Following the failure to reach an agreement with France on the Hatay issue, Turkish Foreign Minister Tevfik Rüştü Aras expressed to the League of Nations that a meeting would be held on 14 December 1936 to decide on the safety and future of the people living in the region. During the pre-meetings, Türkiye expressed its demands regarding Hatay and one of these demands was the withdrawal of French soldiers from Sanjak and the armed forces of the League of Nations to ensure order in the region. Another demand was the request for independence with the treaty, based on the example of Syria but France refused this request (Sarnay, 1996a). When the dispute between the two states could not be resolved again, the League of Nations assigned the Swedish representative and his team to prepare a report in the region. During this period, negotiations between Türkiye and France continued. The report team, who started their duties in Sanjak, faced a great reaction from the people in the region. A large rally and protest march was held to create public opinion (H. L., 1938). According to the report of the Swedish representative appointed by the League of Nations to prepare a report on the region at the second session of Geneva, it was determined that the Sanjak region had an autonomous structure (Matthews, 1937). This report was evaluated by Turkish and French representatives and an agreement was made accordingly. Many privileges were granted to Sanjak with the agreement and some of these privileges are that the official language in the region is Turkish and that it can act independently in internal affairs. Although it will act independently in its interior, it will remain loyal to Syria in Foreign Affairs, which is an indication that it is not

completely independent. It would not have armed forces, and it would depend on the League of Nations in its executive system. Although concessions were made on a few issues, borders would be drawn in the region and the sovereignty of the region would be strengthened by making a treaty with France. Reaching such a conclusion as a result of long years of disagreements was a great step in solving the Hatay issue and the Turkish people welcomed this situation with joy (Jackson, 2013).

The Sanjak Statute, which was prepared for this situation, was accepted in May 1937 as a result of the negotiations. With this status, Sanjak was accepted as a separate entity and became official. The French mandate did not officially announce the new regime and status of Hatay based on the decision taken by the League of Nations. Atatürk drew attention to the importance of this issue and made the necessary explanations in the opening speech of the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye. Atatürk said that there is little time left for the implementation of the new regime and the status of Hatay and that Hatay is of great importance in the development of future Turkish-French relations (Atatürk, 1937).

Shortly before the Sanjak Statute came into effect, the Arabs in Syria started to cause problems by revolting. France, on the other hand, did not intervene in this matter, on the contrary, it secretly supported the behavior of the Syrians on this issue (Ulus, 1937). Because France also did not want the implementation of the new regime and after this attitude, Türkiye-France relations were strained. The decision aimed at solving the Hatay issue, given by the League of Nations, could not solve the problem. Although Türkiye tried to implement the regime, it prolonged the process after the uprisings of the Syrian people and the French mandate's provoking policies in the region. As a result of long efforts, on 29 November 1937, the Sanjak Statute came into force. After these developments, the negotiations of the French-Turkish governments increased and this situation was reinforced with a treaty. By the sign of the Turkish-French Friendship Agreement, was aimed at the parties to support each other in every field (Millman, 1995).

After this agreement, France-Türkiye relations continued to develop positively. After the Sanjak Statute and its new constitution came into force, France accepted that the Turks were the majority in the region. However, although it accepted the Turkish army to enter the region, it tried to prevent the integration of the region (Watenpauh, 1996). When the Turkish forces entered Hatay, they were met with great enthusiasm and the people found great morale. The entry of Turkish forces into the region had been a major factor in resolving the Hatay issue, leading the

people to believe that the elections would be held impartially this time. After the agreements were made, the Turkish-French forces decided to conduct the elections in Hatay jointly. The election was carried out with great care, the frauds in the previous election were detected and efforts were made to prevent it from happening in this election. Tayfur Sökmen, who had been working hard since the beginning of the problem in the region, was considered for the Hatay Presidency. When the elections were concluded, a 40-person assembly was formed and the Turks obtained the majority in this assembly with 22 people. The desired result was obtained from the selections (Melek, 1986).

After the elections were concluded, the Assembly was opened, and the name of the state was determined as the Republic of Hatay. With the votes of 40 deputies, Tayfur Sökmen was elected as the President. After the Hatay Assembly was established, the government was given a vote of confidence the constitution prepared by the League of Nations was approved and the Republic of Hatay changed its name to the "Hatay State". The national anthem of the Hatay State and its flag were similar to the Turkish flag (Sökmen, 1978). Following the officialization of the Hatay State, its cooperation with Türkiye and Türkiye's active role in the region was seen as a threat by the French and Syrians. The Syrians had a feeling of hatred towards the Turks. The people of Armenian and Greek origin living in the region also made great efforts to prevent Hatay from joining Türkiye. As a result of the decisions taken by the Council, French representatives and French soldiers continued to exist in the Hatay State. But they continued their existence in the region only symbolically, they had no function. Although the Hatay State was independent, it was also affected by the French mandate since it was located in Syria (Sarıay, 1996b). The decisions taken in the Hatay State Assembly were generally the laws already existing in Türkiye. The Turkish legal system was also applied in Hatay. Arrangements were made to get rid of the influence of France and Syria. These arrangements were seen as a threat to the French and Syrians. Afterwards, Syria closed its customs gates to Hatay and France also decided to close Syria's Hatay border (Khoury, 1987). By closing its customs, Syria aimed to imprison Hatay and prevent its development. As a result of the increase in the events and the mutual closure of the borders, the Hatay Assembly put many systems of Türkiye as an example, together with the decisions it had taken. There are many examples from Türkiye in Hatay's economic policy, especially in the education system and legal system. Türkiye and Hatay increased their imports and exports in this process and continued their close relations. Türkiye never withheld its support from the Hatay State and blocked Syria's plan by opening the border Melek, 1986).

The cooperation between Türkiye and Hatay made France nervous, and France demanded a meeting with President Tayfur Sökmen. In this meeting, the French representative stated that they would open the borders by apologizing to the President. The President, on the other hand, showed his harsh stance on this issue and said that even if the border was opened by France, Hatay would not open the border again. On December 1, 1938, the customs application was abolished for the products coming from the Hatay State. Right after that, the passport requirement for travel between states was eliminated and the passage with identity cards was made free. After the decisions and regulations taken in the parliament, Hatay turned into a structure that is closely related to Türkiye. In this way, it is as if it became a province of Türkiye, and its connection with Syria would be completely cut off (Tekin, 2009).

Realizing these developments, Syria offered to share Hatay between Türkiye and Syria. The Foreign Minister of the period stated that if they handed over the Bayır, and Bucak regions to Türkiye, which are not within the borders of Hatay, arrangements would be made regarding Hatay. This offer was rejected by Syria and no progress was made (Soysal, 1985). Germany's occupation of Slovakia and military activity in Albania shook the balance in Europe and new structures emerged. As a result of these restructurings, France displayed a more harmonious attitude as it needed Türkiye's alliance. As a result of the negotiations with Britain, it was decided to form a Turkish-British-French alliance (M. B., 1939).

Thanks to this alliance, France accepted Türkiye's demands on Hatay. Foreign Minister Şükrü Saraçoğlu and the French Ambassador decided to agree to resolve the Hatay issue between Türkiye and Syria in March 1939. Following this decision, Hatay's accession to Türkiye was accepted by France. In this agreement, whose articles are clearly stated, it was decided to reorganize the Türkiye-Syria border and to include Hatay in Türkiye. It was also stated that the region under the mandate of France would be definitively transferred to Türkiye by the decision of the League of Nations. Within a month, the decision to withdraw the French soldiers from Hatay was taken with it and the Türkiye-Syria border was determined. In return for the integration of Hatay into Türkiye, Türkiye promised that it would not attempt to invade Syria's sovereignty and territory (Ministry of Foreign Affairs-Türkiye, 1973).

As a result of the voting held in the Hatay Assembly, the decision of Hatay to join the motherland was approved. With this decision, the Assembly ended the existence of the Hatay State

and accepted to become a city of Türkiye. After the decision was approved by the Turkish Grand National Assembly, Hatay officially joined the motherland. According to the provisions of the treaty, the French soldiers started to leave Hatay. The people of Hatay were given the chance to choose between Turkish and Syrian citizenship and those who chose Syrian citizenship were allowed to migrate. A joint commission was formed on the Syria- Türkiye border and the border was determined for two states. After the French soldiers left Hatay completely, the law regarding Hatay's becoming a province was accepted by the Parliament and the accession process of Hatay was completed (TBMM (TGNA) Zabıt Ceridesi, 1939).

Hatay's accession to Türkiye was criticized by the Syrian government and this situation was rejected. The Syrian government did not recognize the inclusion of Hatay as a province in Türkiye and protested the situation in Hatay by issuing declarations and using the media. Decisions and sanctions taken in the Syrian Assembly were in line with this. The Speaker of the Syrian Parliament sent declarations to the League of Nations and the French Government, stating that Iskenderun was Syrian territory, they were against its integration by Türkiye, and that Iskenderun should be returned to Syria, citing the reason that France and the League of Nations could not maintain the necessary order in the region. He stated that the transfer of Hatay to Türkiye in this way did not comply with international law and stated that they did not support or recognize this situation (Ada, 2005). In addition, after Hatay acceded to Türkiye, hostility towards Turks started among the people. In particular, the Syrian army harbored great hostility towards the Turks by creating fake news and propaganda, that spreading Türkiye was the enemy of Syria and that they could move to Syria at any moment. Diplomatically, Syrians were prevented from communicating with Turkish officials and Turkish Consulates were under surveillance (Mestyan, 2023). However, after a while, Syria gave up its initial reaction and stated that it was bound by and respected the agreement between France and Türkiye regarding Hatay. This situation did not last long and after the end of the French mandate in Syria, it returned to its old policies. As a result of the United States taking an active role in the Middle East, it has caused states in the Middle East to change their policies. Syria needed an ally in the region and tried to improve its relations with Türkiye by making these policies more compatible.

### **Conclusion**

Syrian lands were ruled for more than 400 years by the Ottoman Empire. However, Arab nationalism unbalanced this order in time. There were several reasons for this: The French

Revolution was one of the reasons and also, the Ottoman Empire was in its disintegration period. Additionally, some European countries like France and Great Britain tried to make provocations in the region by considering their interests. After some time, these reasons contributed to the revival of Arab independence among them. France and the British signed a secret agreement which is called Sykes-Picot concerning the sharing of the MENA territory of the Ottoman Empire between themselves. This treaty was tried to be implemented during the First World War. According to this agreement, Syria was given under the control of France, thus, the mandator of France over Syria was accepted by the League of Nations in 1922. Thereby, those two states established their mandates in the region in line with their interests. However, both the undermining practices of the French administration and the gain of independence by other states affected the Arab views towards the French administration in the region. The discomfort of the Arab peoples showed itself in ever-rising rebellions in the face of France in the region, which especially escalated during 1925-1927. In time, the opposing attitudes and rebellions of Arab peoples turned into a struggle for their independence. As a response to the behaviors of Arab groups, France did not hesitate to use force against them and tried to suppress the rebellions at any attempt. However, Arabs had a chance to take part in the government by winning the election held in 1928 thanks to their huge efforts. In addition, the constitution which was prepared by Arab groups was entered into force as a result of their struggles.

In 1936, since France faced a lot of struggles in the region in addition to the changed dynamics of the international arena, it had to give Syria its independence. Thus, France transformed its all rights in the region to Syria, however, this paved the way for another issue which is called as İskenderun Sanjak issue. There was no provision regarding İskenderun Sanjak in the agreement which was signed between Syria and France. This brought up to this issue Türkiye's agenda at that time. When we look at the relations during this time, we can consider that the İskenderun Sanjak issue played a significant role in shaping the relations between these two countries. Additionally, it affected the relations in adverse ways.

Hatay was given a separate status with the Ankara Agreement. On the other hand, the borderline between Syria and Türkiye was determined and also the status of Sanjak was accepted with the Lausanne Peace Treaty. These two countries decided to bring the case in front of the League of Nations. This means that Hatay's separate position from Türkiye was accepted.



However, the conditions at the international arena were changed and France had to change its attitude regarding this issue positively. Thereby, the independence of the Hatay State was accepted in 1938. However, it did not last for a long time in this status and one year later, Hatay was included in Türkiye homeland at the end of this process.

Moreover, the rights and obligations of Syria were abolished in this region in terms of international law. When we have a look at the relations, especially in terms of the Hatay issue, we can say that there were up and down relations between these two countries. But Syria always has shown its discomfort regarding this issue from past to present. Thus, Syria did not hesitate to mention the Hatay issue almost in every problem with Türkiye. However, Türkiye managed to include Hatay in its lands without using any force or violence. Türkiye always gave importance to pursuing diplomatic ways of solving this problem.

Although this problem has remained the determining factor in bilateral relations for a long time, both states must act within the framework of good neighbor policy in terms of historical ties and regional balances. Considering the solution to the Hatay issue as a personal matter, Atatürk made Hatay independent after a great political struggle by evaluating the international balances and conjuncture very well. Last but not least, there was an important issue that adversely affected the relations between Syria and Türkiye. In other words, the Turks living in Syria had a vital role in defining relations.

Türkiye-Syria relations have affected both themselves, Middle Eastern states, and European states in many ways. These two states, which struggled for territorial dominance, sometimes resisted the mandate of European states and sometimes experienced territorial problems. The most important issue determining the relations of the two states was undoubtedly the Hatay issue. As a result, the solution to this issue was provided by the national struggle of the Turkish nation and the determination of Atatürk, and consequently, Hatay joined the homeland. Although Türkiye-Syria relations have progressed badly for a while, the relations between these two countries have never really come to an end.

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