

Men of Mission: Turkey's Ambassadors to Iran in the Early Republican Period (1922–1938)

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ABSTRACTS

Focusing on the 1920s and 1930s, this article analyzes Turkey-Iran relations through the lenses of Turkey's ambassadors in Tehran. In the first place, it discusses the changing reasons and the motives behind the selection of certain individuals as Turkey's ambassadors in Tehran. It then concentrates on how these high-ranking diplomats dealt with major issues in bilateral relations. These ambassadors played roles of varying significance in the relations but overall, their experiences give important insight into how Turkey and Iran perceived each other and formulated their foreign policies accordingly. These were men with a certain mindset and a sense of mission and their actions and reactions in Tehran show us a dimension of the bilateral relations which an Ankara-centred analysis does not.

Dieser Artikel konzentriert sich auf die 1920er und 1930er Jahre und analysiert die türkisch-iranischen Beziehungen am Beispiel der türkischen Botschafter in Teheran. Zunächst werden die wechselnden Gründe und Motive für die Auswahl bestimmter Personen zu türkischen Botschaftern in Teheran erörtert. Anschließend wird untersucht, wie diese hochrangigen Diplomaten mit wichtigen Fragen der bilateralen Beziehungen umgingen. Die Botschafter spielten hier zwar unterschiedlich bedeutsame Rollen, doch insgesamt erlauben ihre Erfahrungen einen wichtigen Einblick in die wechselseitige Wahrnehmung der Türkei und Irans und der entsprechend formulierten jeweiligen Außenpolitik. Es waren Männer mit einer bestimmten Mentalität und einem gewissen Sendungsbewusstsein, und ihre Aktionen und Reaktionen in Teheran zeigen eine Dimension der bilateralen Beziehungen auf, die eine auf Ankara konzentrierte Analyse nicht erfassen kann.

1. Introduction

The 1920s–30s were a formative period in the reorganization of Turkish diplomacy in its modern form as well as the creation and maintenance of diplomatic ties with an increasing number of countries, including Iran. Although there is a rich body of scholarship on Turkey's diplomatic history during this period, the emphasis is often put, for obvious reasons, on the role of Ankara and the agency of the central government, most notably, of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. After all, Ankara was the capital of the newly founded Turkish Republic and Mustafa Kemal Pasha played a key role as its president. Nevertheless, to better understand the complexity of Turkey's foreign relations during these years, we need to consider other actors involved in diplomatic processes, too. Accordingly, this article attempts to analyze Turkey-Iran relations by focusing on the role of Turkish ambassadors in Tehran. To do so, I will try to look at the relations through the lenses of these diplomats and discuss their part in the decision-making processes of foreign affairs. My main argument is not only that their functions mattered, most certainly during the period under study, far more than usually assumed, but also that they were more than merely foreign policy practitioners. On the contrary, considering the limited communication facilities between Tehran and Ankara at that time, there were numerous instances where they had to take direct initiative, sometimes to the objections of Ankara. In doing so, I will only address the issues directly relevant to the experiences of these ambassadors in order to avoid digression from the main focus. Therefore, this article does not intend to provide a comprehensive account of Turkey-Iran relations during the period under scrutiny.

Even though Turkey-Iran relations have a long historical background, they have, in the interwar period, been shaped within the context of three major factors. First and foremost, each of the states experienced a radical structural transformation, albeit in different forms, in the early 1920s. Secondly, the republican elites were extremely sensitive to the security issues and the threats posed by the rebellious Kurdish tribes in the eastern region of the country. Lastly, the tension caused by revisionist powers started to grow in Europe, particularly during the 1930s, which further shook up the already fragile postwar status quo. Thus, security concerns have, from the very beginning of this period, haunted Turkey-Iran relations.

Before entering this discussion, however, I find it useful to refer to two significant issues. It goes without saying that the Turkish Republic built and advanced its foreign policy by relying upon the strong Ottoman legacy. More specifically, *Tercüme Odası* (Translation Office), which was launched in the early phases of Ottoman modernization in 1821, did not only coordinate Ottoman foreign policy but also served as a training school for new generations of diplomats.¹ In 1836, *Reis'ül-Küttab* (the Chief Scribe), the title given to the de facto Ottoman Foreign Minister, was changed to *Hariciye Nazırı* (The Minister

1 S. Kunalalp, The Ministry of Foreign Affairs under the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic, in: Z. Steine (ed.), *The Times Survey of Foreign Ministries of the World*, London 1982, p. 500.

of Foreign Affairs). As a matter of fact, the continuity between the Ottoman tradition and the modern Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs was deliberate, and it is universally recognized by diplomatic historians. After all, the Ottoman Empire had initiated and maintained permanent missions in major foreign capitals, including Tehran, from the late eighteenth century onwards. Nevertheless, significant changes took place in the functioning of the ministry when Ankara became the new capital. On 2 May 1920, only about a week after the inception of the Grand Turkish Assembly in Ankara on 23 April 1920, *Hariciye Vekaleti* (The Ministry of Foreign Affairs), was founded with Bekir Sami Bey, the Deputy of Amasya, as its first minister. The ministry gradually expanded its physical and personnel capabilities by simultaneously incorporating some of the diplomats of the Hamidian era and recruiting new ones.

The second issue concerns the source material used in this study. The idea of writing on this subject first occurred to me during my archival research at the National Archives in London in 2012 where I encountered short but interesting excerpts of information about Turkey's ambassadors to Tehran in the early republican period through the lenses of the British heads of mission in the Iranian capital. Following this research, I have read the available diaries and memoirs of the Turkish ambassadors who served in Tehran during the period to understand their accounts of the events which took place in Turkey-Iran relations. However, only Memduh Şevket Esendal (1883–1952) and Rıdvanbeyoğlu Hüseyin Gerede (1884–1962) left such personal accounts behind.² For my research, the most promising source in this respect would be the Turkish Foreign Ministry Archive in Ankara. Unfortunately, the documents from this period are still not accessible to researchers. Bilal Şimşir, a former diplomat and author of several books on Turkish diplomats and diplomatic history, makes abundant use of this archive in his *Bizim Diplomatlar* (Our Diplomats), but this book provides very limited information about the ambassadors' reports on the events taking place in Iran and the developments in bilateral relations. Therefore, this study would have been more comprehensive with the material from that archive.

2. Turkey-Iran Relations in the Early Republican Period

Only months after the opening of the Grand National Assembly in Ankara on 23 April 1920, in Tehran, Reza Khan launched a coup d'état on 21 February 1921 and obtained significant political power, first as *Sardar-e Sepah* (Commander-in-Chief), and then as minister of war two months later. Furthermore, only one day before the proclamation of a republic in Turkey on 29 October 1923, Ahmad Shah Qajar named Reza Khan prime minister and left for Europe due to health issues not knowing that he was destined never

2 The Surname Law was passed in Turkey on 21 June 1934. Therefore, all persons mentioned in this article, including Mustafa Kemal Pasha, adopted their surnames according to this law. However, for the sake of simplicity, their full names are used throughout this article.

to return to Iran. For Ankara's political elites, the republic was more than a political regime. To them, it contained the best moral values, and symbolized freedom from the tradition and the yoke of foreign powers. Mustafa Kemal thought that the establishment of other republics in the region would consolidate Turkey's national security and regional stability. He was particularly interested in seeing the establishment of a republican regime in Iran. There already was a significant pro-republican circle in Iran during the Constitutional period. The Social Democrats were the most notable group among them.³ Debates in favour of the proclamation of a republic in Iran intensified during the spring of 1924. By then, Reza Khan was a respected figure who had secured Iran's territorial integrity against external and internal threats.

That said, it remains controversial if Reza Khan had any genuine interest in a republican form of government. In either case, he had already made it clear that his primary concern was to take complete control of the country in his own hands. A few days after becoming prime minister, he issued a proclamation about the unfortunate state of affairs in Iran and his vision to remedy the extant problems, where he declared the following:

*There are two sorts of misfortunes, either one of which, if not remedied, is able to destroy the national identity of any deteriorating race or people. These are domestic disorder and insecurity and chaos of thought, ideas, and morals.*⁴

Within the Iranian republicans' debates, there were constant references to the neighboring Turkish Republic, but while some regarded it as an admirable model, the Shiite ulama took a negative stand against it. This was mainly caused by three laws that the Turkish Grand National Assembly passed on 3 March 1924 which abolished the caliphate, shut down the ministry of religious affairs and *awqāf* (religious endowments) and placed all religious schools and seminaries under the control of the national ministry of education. Ultimately, in late March 1924, Reza Khan had an audience with the leading ulama in Qom, and, upon his return to Tehran, he abandoned the idea of republicanism altogether.⁵

3. Muhiddin Akyüz Pasha (1870–1940)

Maintaining good bilateral relations was a priority for both Turkey and Iran. In October 1921, Iran sent Esmail Momtaz od-Dowleh as ambassador extraordinary to Turkey, mainly to negotiate Turkey's position towards Ismail Agha of Shikak, a Kurdish chieftain of the Shikak tribe, widely known as Simko.⁶ On 1 March 1922, Mustafa Kemal expressed his pleasure about this appointment and stated that, upon the ambassador's

3 A. Gheissari and V. Nasr, *Democracy in Iran: History and the Quest for Liberty*, Oxford 2006, p. 38.

4 D. Wilber, *Riza Shah Pahlavi: The Resurrection and Reconstruction of Iran*, New York 1975, p. 73.

5 E. Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions*, Princeton 1982, p. 134.

6 G. Çetinsaya, *Millî Mücadele'den Cumhuriyet'e Türk-İran İlişkileri: 1918–1925* [Turkey-Iran Relations from the National Struggle to the Republic: 1918–1925], in: *Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi Dergisi* XLVIII (2000) 48, p. 777.

arrival, they would take “all necessary measures to improve bilateral relations”.⁷ Mustafa Kemal also made favourable statements about Turkey-Iran relations. For instance, at a banquet which Semyon Ivanovich Aralov, the Soviet ambassador in Ankara, gave in honour of Momtaz od-Dowleh on 7 July 1922, Mustafa Kemal referred to the necessity of improving relations with Iran.⁸ After criticizing the foreign policies of earlier governments in Turkey and Iran regarding each other, which, he claimed, did not correspond to the serious expectations of their people, he added: “However, our Iranian brothers can rest assured that the men in charge in today’s Turkey are not the same men.”⁹

It was in this context that Muhiddin Pasha, an associate of Mustafa Kemal and one of many former soldiers, was appointed as ambassador to Tehran on 7 November 1922.¹⁰ Previously, the Pasha had a brilliant military career, fought in the First World War, and acted as the Adana and southern front commander in the War of Independence, which he had joined in September 1920. At the time of his appointment, Iran was still under the destabilizing effects of the First World War with secessionist movements on the one hand and the imperial rivalry between Britain and Russia on the other. In 1920, Sheikh Mohammad Khiyabani had taken control of Tabriz and parts of Iranian Azerbaijan, which he renamed as *Azadestan* (The Land of the Free) while Mirza Kuchek Khan had initiated in Iran’s northern province of Gilan a rebellion known as the *Jangali* (Forester) Movement, which, in 1920, seized control of the region and proclaimed the Soviet Republic of Gilan. Although Reza Khan had crushed these rebellions by late 1922 and had virtual control of internal affairs in his hands, his de facto power was still not institutionalized. This was the case even after he appointed two of his most trusted generals as minister of interior and minister of post and telegraph while he himself retained the post of minister of war in the cabinet once the shah named him prime minister.

On the other hand, Muhiddin Pasha was appointed as ambassador to Iran only six days after the Grand National Assembly deposed the Ottoman sultan, preserving only his religious functions as caliph, and abrogating the sultanate in Turkey. These developments were closely watched by different political circles in Iran. Similarly, Turkey paid the utmost attention to the political stand-off between Ahmad Shah Qajar and Reza Khan.

7 Ibid., p. 778. All translations throughout the text from the Ottoman and modern Turkish into English are mine unless otherwise noted.

8 Atatürk’ün Söylev ve Demeçleri [Atatürk’s Speeches and Declarations], vol. II, 4th edn, Ankara 1989, pp. 43–45.

9 Ibid., p. 45.

10 There is confusion in the literature about his appointment to the post. There are different indications, either 17 October or 17 November. Many sources give 7 October 1922, probably citing the following important source published by the General Staff of the Turkish Republic: Türk İstiklal Harbine Katılan Tümen ve Daha Üst Kademelerdeki Komutanların Biyografileri [Biographies of Division and Higher-Ranking Commanders Who Participated in the Turkish War of Independence], Ankara 1989, pp. 16–17. This information apparently comes from Pasha’s handwritten short biography submitted to Parliament, where he was a member from Kars from June 1931 until his death in November 1940. (See Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi (Hereafter TBMM) Âzayı Kırâmına Mahsus Muhtasar Tercüme-i Hal Varakası, www.tbmm.gov.tr/eyayin/GAZETELER/WEB/MAZBATALAR/TBMM/d04/HT_815_1_4.pdf [accessed 7 December 2022]). However, as can also be read in some other sources, his exact official appointment date was 7 November 1922. See Adana ve Çevresi Kumandanı Tuğg. Muhiddin Paşa’nın Tahran Büyükelçiliği’ne Tayini [The Appointment of Brigadier Muhiddin Pasha Who is the Commander of Adana and its Vicinity], Report, Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye Directorate of State Archives, 30-18-1-1/6/34/19.

Already on 28 October 1922, the Turkish consulate in Tabriz sent a short telegraph to Ankara regarding the recent developments in Iran.¹¹ Earlier that year, on 6 October, Reza Khan had been harshly criticized in the Majles, the Iranian parliament, about his actions as minister of war, which caused him to announce his resignation from this post. However, the military ranks showed their firm support for Sardar-e Sepah and a similar reaction came from Iranian society. As a result, his resignation was not accepted. This report aptly assesses the implications of Reza Khan's victorious emergence from this political battle, but overstates his anti-British attitude: "Today, the minister of war emerged as an anti-British figure par excellence and is prepared to take part in any kind of anti-British movement."¹² Hence, this was more wishful thinking than a factual analysis. The report also proposed to send a representative to Tehran to get in touch with the minister of war, the ulama and the pan-Islamist journalists in order to guide them in accordance with the designs and directions of Turkey. If, the report continued, the appointment and the arrival of an ambassador to Tehran was to be delayed, Kadri Bey, Turkey's consul general in Tabriz, should reside in Tehran temporarily in order to follow these developments. It is not clear if this report influenced Muhiddin Pasha's appointment as ambassador to Tehran a few days later. This and Momtaz od-Dowleh's arrival in Ankara surely must have played a role in his appointment. In any case, the pasha arrived in Iran during a most turbulent period on 7 February 1923.

When the Pasha arrived in Tehran, Nüzhet bey, the Ottoman chargé d'affaires, was still there and the finalization of the Treaty of Lausanne, which was ultimately signed on 24 July 1923, was still around six months away. Shortly after his arrival, Muhiddin Pasha reported on the widespread gratification caused by his presence in Tehran and the deep love that the Iranian people showed towards Mustafa Kemal Pasha.¹³ It took some time for him to present his letter of credence to Ahmad Shah, and he was the last Turkish ambassador to do so before the shah was deposed. Ahmad Shah accepted the Pasha in mid-February after receiving his letter of credence. Muhiddin Pasha reported on the ceremony, his address to the shah and the latter's response.¹⁴ As the Pasha asked for the blessing of the shah to work for the improvement of good relations between these "two great Muslim states," the shah replied by expressing his full support for the ambassador. Beyond these diplomatic courtesies, however, the shah must have felt threatened by the

11 Tahrân'daki Hükümet Buhranı ve İngiliz Aleyhtarlığı Hakkında Rapor [Report on Government Crisis and anti-British Atmosphere in Tehran], Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye Directorate of State Archives, 30-10-0-0/260/752/2.

12 Ibid.

13 Gerek İran Halkının Gerekse İran Hükümetinin Mustafa Kemal Paşa ve Türk Hükümeti Lehinde Yaptıkları Nümayişler Hakkında Tahrân Sefiri Muhittin Paşa'nın Raporu [Report of Muhiddin Pasha, Turkey's Ambassador in Tehran, on the Activities in Favour of Mustafa Kemal Pasha and the Turkish Government Conducted by Both the Iranian People and its Government], Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye Directorate of State Archives, 30-10-0-0/260/752/5.

14 Tahrân Sefiri Muhittin Paşa'nın İmtatnamesini Şah'a Verirken Yapılan Merasim ve Karşılıklı Yapılan Konuşmalar Hakkında Rapor [Report on the Ceremony and Mutual Speeches which Took Place During the Presentation of Letter of Credence by Muhiddin Pasha, Turkey's Ambassador in Tehran, to the Shah], Report, Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye Directorate of State Archives, 30-10-0-0/260/752/5.

presence of an ambassador sent by a government that had recently abrogated the sultanate. Percy Loraine, the British ambassador in Tehran, who later served as Ambassador to Turkey between 1933 and 1939, was apparently not pleased by Muhiddin Pasha's arrival, and wrote that he waited for the signing of the Treaty of Lausanne to meet personally with the Turkish ambassador.¹⁵ In the same report, Loraine gave information about the reception of Muhiddin Pasha in Tehran as well as his personal characteristics:

*I find Muhiddin Pasha a most agreeable man with a thorough command of the French tongue and ready to discuss any question with a frankness, indeed I might almost say a naivete, quite unusual in an Oriental. His sentiments seem to be getting more and more anti-Russian; he tells me that, although he admires many things in the German people, he bears Germany a lasting grudge for having drawn Turkey into the vortex of the war and for the disasters which have since overtaken his country. With Persian and the Persians, he is thoroughly disgusted; he dislikes the place, the race in general and the mullahs in particular, and says openly that he longs for the days when he will be able to turn his back on this country for good and all. So far as I can see, Muhiddin Pasha has pursued a very steady policy and is determined not to get himself mixed up in any Persian intrigues. So far as the British interests are concerned, his attitude has been quite correct. The ambassador is married, but deeply resents the fact that the women folk of the Turkish Embassy are obliged by Persian public opinion to remain veiled.*¹⁶

The real challenge for Muhiddin Pasha started about a year later when a pro-republican campaign arose in Iran in early 1924. Previously, he reported on 7 September 1923 about the recent developments in Iran in a confidential telegraph, where he referred to the power struggle between Ahmad Shah and Reza Khan in which, he believed, the khan was gaining the upper hand.¹⁷ He added: "This man [Reza Khan] is friendly to us. After the fundamental reforms that he will apply in Iran, he will support us." On 13 March 1924, the Iranian Majles held an extraordinary session and appointed a special committee to consider the question of proclaiming a republic. Nevertheless, the campaign ended in failure. As mentioned above, the three laws passed by Turkey on 3 March made a deep impression on the Iranian ulama, who feared that the proclamation of a republic in Iran would have similar consequences for the role of Islam and the religious establishment in their country. On the one hand, although a small intellectual and political circle did insist on the establishment of a republic in Iran, for the majority the real priority was obtaining stability and development in any possible way. In particular, the ulama were not interested in having a republic and ultimately convinced the shah in late March 1924 not to proclaim one. In early October 1924, Ahmad Shah wired Reza Khan about his intention to travel back to Iran but failed to do so. Finally, on 31 October 1925, the Majlis deposed the shah and entrusted the provisional government to Reza Khan. Con-

15 Foreign Office (Hereafter FO) 371/10151, E1541/1541/34.

16 Ibid.

17 B. Şimşir, *Bizim Diplomatlar* [Our Diplomats], Ankara 1996, p. 86.

sequently, on 12 December 1925, Reza Khan was declared the shah of Iran as Reza Shah Pahlavi, although his coronation took place on 25 April 1926.

The backdrop of this pro-republican campaign and what gave rise to it have been discussed in the existing literature. So have the reasons why it faded away so quickly. The discussion often revolves in the context of the developments which took place in Turkey at that time. Nonetheless, Reza Khan's interest in a republican form of government was rather instrumental and he "was not convinced that the establishment of a republic was vital to the future of Iran".¹⁸ The ulama, on the other hand, did not want to relinquish their privileges, power, and autonomy, and thus preferred to maintain monarchical rule, which was the most familiar form of government up to that point. However, Ankara was rather enthusiastic to see Iran become a republic. Apparently, having seen Muhiddin Pasha's lack of assertiveness in this respect, Ankara subsequently appointed him as ambassador to Cairo and sent a more vigorous successor in his stead to Tehran.

4. Memduh Şevket Esendal (1883–1952)

On 29 July 1925, Memduh Şevket Esendal, who had previously served as Turkey's representative in Baku in 1920–1924, was appointed as middle-ambassador to Tehran.¹⁹ He was to be promoted to the rank of ambassador in December 1927.²⁰ As a prolific writer, he provided a detailed account of his years in Tehran in his diaries.²¹ In his account, he mentions the confusion in Ankara regarding Reza Khan's provisional government. The Iranian authorities requested Turkey's recognition of the new government, but Esendal received no such instruction for a few days.²² He then received a telegraph from Ankara, which requested further information regarding the "revolution" in Iran and urged Esendal to encourage Reza Khan to proclaim a republic. Nevertheless, it appears that Ankara did not have a good grasp of the political developments in Tehran and thus hoped for the proclamation of a republic up to late 1925. In any case, encouraged by the telegraph, Esendal formally informed Iran's foreign ministry about Turkey's recognition of the new government. Following this, Reza Khan received Esendal on 14 November for the first time.²³ He reports that Reza Khan spoke in Turkish during this meeting. At some point,

18 Wilber, Riza Shah Pahlavi, p. 76.

19 Tahrân Büyükelçiliği'ne, Ortaelçi Kadrosu ile Memduh Şevket Bey'in Tayini [Appointment of Memduh Şevket Bey as Middle Ambassador to Tehran], Report, Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye Directorate of State Archives, 30-18-1-1/14/47/1.

20 Tahrân Elçiliği'ne Memduh Şevket Bey'in Tayini ve Tahrân Elçilik Kadrosunun Budapeşte'ye Tahsis Edilerek Peşte Elçimiz Vasıf Bey'in de 1. Sınıf Elçiliğe Terfii [The Appointment of Memduh Şevket Bey as Ambassador to Tehran and Promotion of Vasıf Bey, Our Ambassador in Budapest, to First Class Ambassador by Transferring the Ambassadorial Position to Budabest], Report, Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye Directorate of State Archives, 30-18-1-1/26/68/9.

21 M. Ş. Esendal, Tahrân Anıları ve Düşsel Yazılar [Tehran Memoires and Fairy Writings], Ankara 1999.

22 Ibid., p. 10.

23 Ibid., p. 19.

Esendal wanted to bring up the issue of the republic, but Reza Khan interrupted him and told him that they should talk about these issues in private.

On 14–15 November 1925, Esendal assessed the existing standoff between Reza Khan and his opponents. These assessments are based on his conversations with various political figures in Tehran. His view of Reza Khan was rather positive:

*I believe that if Reza Khan comes to power this time as a shah or president, [he] will terminate the powers of the old landlords, old-fashioned state officials and of the ulama. He will build a permeant and consistent policy with a trustworthy army. This is what foreign countries need in Iran.*²⁴

On 7 November 1925, the following instruction was sent to Esendal in an encrypted telegraph:

*[...] if the occasion occurs, His Excellency Reza Khan should be advised in private that his preference of a presidency over a kingship will better serve the interests of Iran and its revolution, as he should also be ensured that any kind of effort made for Iran's progress and future along with his government will always receive Turkey's favourable reaction and support.*²⁵

As a matter of fact, by November 1925, Reza Khan had already removed the republican issue from his agenda. It is likely that due to Muhiddin Pasha's insufficient reporting, Ankara had not recognized that the republican issue was a closed case in Iran at that time. Interestingly, in his diary dated 16 November 1925, Esendal mentions a conversation with Konstantin Yurenev, the ambassador of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) in Tehran, where he expresses his belief that Reza Khan would either proclaim a republic, if possible, and, if not, would declare himself shah only for his lifetime or for a few years.²⁶ On the same day, Esendal sent the following report to Ankara:

*Elections for the Constituent Assembly will be over in a few days. It appears for the moment that if a republic cannot be approved by the Constituent Assembly, Reza Khan will be elected the shah temporarily or for his lifetime. In any case, it is in our best interest to recognize Reza Khan's soon-to-be-formed government. In order not to fall behind others in the recognition issue, I wait for your orders as of now.*²⁷

The question of Reza Khan's political future haunted Esendal for some time, much like other heads of foreign missions in Tehran, and he wrote that this was a popular topic among diplomatic circles in the Iranian capital. On 19 November 1925, Esendal reported on a most interesting conversation that he had held with Percy Loraine.²⁸ The two diplomats shared the same view regarding the necessity of a regime change in Iran and

24 Ibid., p. 17.

25 Şimşir, *Bizim Diplomatlar*, p. 87.

26 Esendal, *Tahran Anıları*, p. 17.

27 Şimşir, *Bizim Diplomatlar*, p. 88.

28 Esendal, *Tahran Anıları*, pp. 28–30.

they preferred Reza Khan to the “corrupted” old system: “He [Loraine] told me that the new regime will be very convenient for foreigners working in Iran. He also said that the ongoing system in Iran is corrupted and that no one is trustworthy. I think the British ambassador was sincere in his words. Iranians have for years been sold and bought so many times that even those who have bought them are sick of them. Many statesmen have presented themselves as commodities and have lived for the interests of foreigners.” The conversation, he reports, then diverged into bilateral relations between Turkey and Britain, especially the Mosul question, which was to be solved by a treaty on 5 June 1926. Esendal told Loraine, however, that “The issue is not only the Mosul question. Above all other issues, England thinks that we are against its interests”. Loraine also reported this conversation, which he writes was conducted via a translator since, unlike Muhiddin Pasha, Esendal spoke only Russian as a foreign language:

He is tall and rather good-looking with a somewhat stiff manner which, however, unbends rapidly under the sun of a little personal attention. He professes a firm conviction in the desirability, even necessity, of good and close relations between Turkey and Great Britain. He seems, however, to think that there is some unrelenting grudge and an insuperable lack of sympathy on the British side which he attributes to lack of understanding on our part of the true state and objects of the Turkish republic and he sees therein a serious obstacle to the development of better relations, even though the Mosul question were settled to mutual satisfaction. I think myself he has the narrowness of outlook which is so common among his compatriots, and an inability to see more than one end of the wood.²⁹

On 29 November, Esendal was received by Reza Khan in private and held a meeting that he had been “impatient” for.³⁰ During this meeting, Reza Khan complained about British foreign policy in Iran and said that he was unable to proclaim a republic, but that his kingship would not be like that of the Qajars. In what followed, Reza Khan expressed his views about Turkey-Iran relations and the necessity of acting together. It appears from his records that Esendal was not particularly impressed by this meeting. Eventually, on 15 December 1925, Reza Khan took his imperial oath to become the shah. On 21 December, Turkey expressed its official recognition of the new government and five days later, on 26 December, the shah received Esendal once again.³¹ In this meeting, Esendal congratulated the shah and conveyed the good wishes of Mustafa Kemal. In response, the shah said the following:

Although I could not declare a republic, it is not because I do not care about reforms but because declaring a republic is difficult. We can save Iran with this system too and consolidate our relations with Turkey. Beyond the governmental level, we must have a personal contact with Mustafa Kemal Pasha.³²

29 FO 371/11484, E 759/93/34.

30 Esendal, *Tahran Anıları*, p. 54.

31 *Ibid.*, p. 74.

32 *Ibid.*

Crucially, the meeting took place a few days after the signature of the Turkish-Soviet Non-Aggression and Friendship Agreement on 17 December 1925. Esendal reports that after meeting with the shah, he met Yurenev and congratulated him on the signing of this treaty.³³ However, one month later, on 24 January 1926, the shah received Esendal again, and he took the opportunity to criticize the treaty:

“We thought you would have a new way of conduct” the shah said. “I would first sign a treaty with Turkey and then would do the same with Russia”, he added. I said that we had to sign a treaty with Russia and that the Mosul question puts us in a difficult situation. He agreed. “Now we will sign separate treaties”, he said. “When I heard of a Russo-Turkish treaty, I doubted it and did not believe [this]” he said. “I thought your government might have a consideration,” he added. Then, surmising that his failure of proclaiming a republic in Iran has left a bad impression on us, he said that Muhiddin Pasha had told him that they fired a gun in Turkey and proclaimed a republic, and he added, “Here is not Turkey. Here the bloody people (köpek oğlu halk) have learnt the ways of foreign embassies;³⁴ here, it is impossible to proclaim a republic by firing guns”.³⁵

Soon after this meeting, on 22 April 1926, the Security and Friendship Treaty, which consisted of eleven articles, was signed in Tehran between Turkey and Iran with the participation of Esendal and Mohammad Ali Foroughi, Iran's prime minister, and Mirza Davoud Khan Meftah, Iran's deputy foreign minister. It should be noted that similar treaties were also signed with Albania (15 December 1923), Hungary (18 December 1923), the Republic of Austria (28 January 1924), the Kingdom of Spain (27 September 1924), the Swiss Federation (19 September 1925), the Kingdom of Bulgaria (18 October 1925), the Republic of Chile (30 January 1926), and several other countries. In the parliamentary deliberation, Tevfik Rüşti Aras, Turkey's foreign minister, emphasized his country's initiatives for establishing friendly relations in the East while, at the same time, keeping peaceful relations with Western countries.³⁶ The treaty with Iran was significant in many respects. Its first article was particularly crucial: “An unbreachable peace, sincerity and perpetual friendship will endure between the Turkish Republic and the state of Iran and also between their citizens.” The rest of the treaty, which also included a non-aggression clause, elaborated on the two states' good faith by referring to border-related issues. The positive atmosphere created by the treaty boosted bilateral relations. As a sign of good will, Iran designated a valuable building for the use of the Turkish embassy, which was reciprocated by Turkey.³⁷ Nevertheless, the positive atmosphere faded away shortly after-

33 Ibid., p. 75.

34 This is a reference to the practice of bast or taking refuge in shrines or foreign embassies by Iranian nationals when they want to escape state persecution or pursue their goals. This was a traditional practice, but became particularly popular during the Constitutional Revolution.

35 Esendal, *Tahran Anıları*, p. 86.

36 TBMM Zabıt Ceridesi, 105th Session, vol. 25, 22 May 1926, <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/tutanaklar/TUTANAK/TBMM/d02/c025/tbmm02025105.pdf> (accessed 7 December 2022).

37 C. Teke and E. Aydoğan, Memduh Şevket Bey'in Tahran Büyükelçiliği Dönemi Türkiye-Iran İlişkileri (1925–1930)

wards, for neither of the parties was assured, when it came to realpolitik, of the other's good faith. The tension laid in the sixth article of the treaty:

To secure the peace and the safety of people who live in border areas, the two parties shall undertake all measures to terminate the actions and arrangements of the tribes extant over the regions, which have been threatening the security of the two countries. These measures will be adopted separately by each state, or they will act jointly when they deem it necessary.

Although, in Mustafa Kemal's words, the men in charge in Turkey were not the same men, the lack of trust between Turkey and Iran throughout the 1920s, as later, was more or less the same as the previous decades and centuries. After all, a decade earlier, during the First World War, the Ottoman army had invaded parts of northwestern Iran as a part of its war effort against the Russians. Since this region was predominantly populated by ethnic Turks, Iran was suspicious of Turkey's intentions even after the Kemalists came to power. Reza Shah once complained to Major Hüsametdin Tugaç, Turkey's military attaché in Iran, about Turkey's position towards Iranian Azerbaijan:

Mr. Major Hüsametdin, it occurs to me that Turkey wants to have Iranian Azerbaijan. It wants to take that region. Does it not? What do you say? Yes, the people of Azerbaijan are Turks, Turkey cannot ignore this. In fact, today's Turkey does not pursue such a policy. Mustafa Kemal Pasha is a very reasonable man. However, after him, Turkey can go back to the policy of the Union and Progress Government. I see that your railway construction heads towards Azerbaijan from every direction. It necessitates Turkey's takeover of Azerbaijan.³⁸

The Iranian press also directed such accusations against Turkey.³⁹ In another meeting with the shah in February 1926, the last one reported in Esendal's memoirs, the Turkish ambassador apparently shared Turkey's concerns over Iran's approach to the Kurdish tribes. In response, Reza Shah this time shared this suspicion about Turkey's Kurdish policy:

[Turkey-Iran Relations During Memduh Şevket Bey's Tehran Embassy Period (1925-1930)], in: Atatürk Üniversitesi Türkiyat Araştırmaları Enstitüsü Dergisi (2021), pp. 72, 359.

38 İ. Arar, Atatürk'ün Günümüz Olaylarına da Işık Tutan Bazı Konuşmaları [Some Speeches of Atatürk that Cast Light on the Present-Day Events], in: Belleten 52 (1998) 204, p. 964. Tugaç's activities in the Iranian Azerbaijan deeply concerned the Iranian authorities – so much so that in October 1931 a circular was sent to Iran's diplomatic missions in Turkey, Russia and Iraq to instruct them not to issue him a visa in case he applied for one and send his photo to the ministry once they had it. National Archive and the Library of the Islamic Republic of Iran (NALIRI), Ministry of Domestic Affairs, (290) 8/335/4, 4 October 1931. Quoted in Khadjeh Solh-Mirzaii, Asnad az Ravabit-e Iran va Torkieh (1304–1320) [Some Records on Iran and Turkey Relations (1925–1941)], Tehran 2004, p. 35. The reason for this was the visit which Tugaç paid to Tabriz in mid-September 1931 and which "Essentially aimed at obtaining pieces of information about the situation of Kurds in Iran and the way the Sublime State [Iran] is dealing with them". Ibid., p. 36. However, only a few days after the circular, Tugaç managed to enter Iran and to travel to Tabriz again apparently because the officials at the border control failed to recognize him in the absence of his photo. Ibid., p. 37.

39 Teke and Aydoğan, Memduh Şevket Bey, p. 362.

*He [Reza Shah] told me: "Three years ago, a British ambassador told me about this issue. But he put it exactly the other way around." He said, "The Turks want to establish a separate Kurdistan under its own auspices, and they will add to that [territory] Iranian Kurdistan, too. This way they will be annexing Kurdistan." What do you think about this? I said I do not know [anything about] Turkey's Kurdistan, but do not give away Iran's Kurdistan, either. They must behead me to convince me to give it away for any reason. This is all I spoke with the British about the Kurdistan issue.*⁴⁰

Esendal does not provide any information about the rest of the conversation. Only two days after the signing of the treaty, Reza Shah was officially coronated as Iran's king. The Turkish government paid special attention to the ceremony and honoured the shah with gifts. In exchange, Abdolhossein Teymourtash, Reza Shah's minister of court and an intimate friend of Esendal, according to Loraine,⁴¹ paid a return visit to Ankara, where bilateral relations were also discussed. Nevertheless, the Kurdish insurgencies on the Turkey-Iran border continued to haunt the bilateral relations. The tension resumed when the First Ağrı Rebellion started in May 1926 against the Turkish government, which was already alarmed by the Sheikh Said rebellion's eruption. In his statement in the opening session of the Grand National Assembly on 1 November 1925, shortly after crushing the rebellion, Mustafa Kemal referred to Turkey-Iran relations rather briefly in the following words: "In our relations with Iran, good neighborly feelings are felt and observed."⁴² The Ağrı İsyanı, however, caused the tension to resurface between the two countries. On 17 June 1926, the rebellion was suppressed but also left a deliberate suspicion in Ankara regarding Iran's Kurdish policy. These tensions were further exacerbated by the Ağrı Rebellions in 1927, and finally, in 1930. These developments led to the resignation of Esendal and the subsequent appointment of Hüsrev Gerde as Turkey's ambassador in Iran. Esendal's resignation, which was dated 29 July 1930, read as follows:

*Since undesirable developments are taking place in Iran for lack of appreciation of my way of conduct during the last five years in applying my government's Iran policy, I find it accurate and necessary to step down as our country's ambassador to Tehran. I am grateful for the trust that has been shown to me so far and ask for the sublime acceptance of my resignation.*⁴³

40 Esendal, *Tahran Anıları*, p. 88.

41 TBMM Zabıt Ceridesi, vol. 19, 1 November 1925, FO 371/13063, E 585/585/34, https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/tarihce/ataturk_konusma/01_11_1341.pdf (accessed 7 December 2022).

42 Ibid.

43 Şimşir, *Dizim Diplomatlar*, p. 95.

5. Rıdvanbeyoğlu Hüsrev Gerede (1884–1962)

Shortly after Esendal's resignation, on 17 August 1930, Hüsrev Gerede, Turkey's ambassador in Sofia, was appointed to Tehran.⁴⁴ In his report dated 27 January 1931, R. C. Parr, the British chargé d'affaires in Tehran, commented on Esendal's disagreement with Ankara as follows:

*Memduh Şevket returned to Turkey in August. Ostensibly, he was permitted to retire owing to a disease of the heart from which he undoubtedly suffered, but he has shown clearly his disapproval of his Government's Kurdish policy of "pacification by extermination" and there is little doubt that his call was due to differences of opinion arising out of the incidents which marked the height of the Ararat campaign when, on at least one occasion, Turkish troops, unable to count on adequate Persian co-operation, had crossed the frontier in pursuit of Kurdish refugees.*⁴⁵

His tenure in Tehran witnessed major ups and downs in bilateral relations. In this, Gerede's personality was at least as influential as the context of the early 1930s. Gerede was unlike any of Turkey's other ambassadors in Tehran before and after him during the period under study, and he was certainly very different from Esendal in his dominant disposition, which, paradoxically, served as the main reason behind his appointment in the beginning and his forced resignation in the end. His was a deliberate case of the unwritten rule, unwritten at least until the adoption of the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations in 1961, of "mutual consent" between sending and receiving states regarding the appointment of ambassadors. In 1930, Turkish-Iran relations were rather strained. On 24 January, shortly before his official appointment to Tehran, Gerede was received by Mustafa Kemal in Yalova, then a district of Istanbul on the eastern coast of the Sea of Marmara.⁴⁶ During his conversation with Gerede, although Mustafa Kemal spoke of Reza Shah Pahlavi favourable and declared his determination to maintain good relations with Iran, there was a hidden tension in some of his sentences:

*Today's statesmen of the Turkish Republic know well the blind fights of the past and they do not want to reproduce them at all. To the contrary, the decision-makers of today's Turkish Republic desire an organized, well-established, and powerful state for Iranians who, as the new evidence shows, are of the same race as us.*⁴⁷

44 Tahrir Büyük Elçiliğine Hüsrev Beyin Tayin Edilmesi [The Appointment of Hüsrev Bey as Ambassador to Tehran], 17 August 1930, Report, Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye Directorate of State Archives, 30-18-1-2/13/58/12.

45 FO 371/15342, E430/223/34.

46 H. Gerede, *Siyasi Hâtıralarım I: İran Ağustos 1930–Haziran 1934* [My Political Memoires I: Iran (August 1930–June 1934)], İstanbul 1952, p. 15.

47 Ibid., p. 16. Here Mustafa Kemal refers to the Turkish History Thesis formulated in late 1920s and officially advocated in early 1930s. Accordingly, Turks belonged to the Aryan race and they moved, in prehistoric times, from their ancestral homeland in Central Asia to gradually spread to different parts of the world, including the Middle East, where they brought civilization.

If Mustafa Kemal's remarks to Gereade, which were published in *Vakit* newspaper the following day, were of a diplomatic nature, those of İsmet İnönü, the premier of the time, were definitely rather more sharp:

*Hüsrev, your situation resembles that of the ambassadors of those states which used to push their fleets to the Dardanelles Strait and send the embassy translators to the Sublime Port [the Ottoman prime ministry] to impose their demands on the Ottoman prime minister. The only difference is that our state is sending you based on the legitimate right and determination of preventing the violation of our domestic security and creation of a Macedonia along our borders. Therefore, you will be negotiating with the Iranian state knowing that you have our army behind you as mobilized and ready to deploy. It is essential to act according to necessities of the situation.*⁴⁸

Gereade did act so. Bilateral relations had already started to deteriorate in 1927, when, on the one hand, Turkey reacted against Iran's perceived indifference to and even protection of the Kurdish groups who posed a deliberate threat to the former's security. On the other hand, Tehran was suspicious of Turkey's Kurdish policy, as reflected in Reza Shah's above-mentioned remarks to Esendal in February 1926, and waged a fierce media campaign against Turkey which went as far as belittling Turkey's independence war, which, in turn, was responded to equally harshly by the Turkish media.⁴⁹ In order to ease the tension, a supplementary two-article protocol to the 1926 treaty was signed on 15 June 1928.⁵⁰ Its first article read as follows: "If one of the signing parties is subject to the hostile operations of a third state or states, the other party will work with full capacity to rectify the situation." The second article concerned economic matters and improving trade relations between the parties. However, the protocol failed to address the core problem of security threats posed by the border-crossing Kurdish tribes. Apparently, both Turkey and Iran had the USSR in mind as the potential aggressor. Nevertheless, Article 2 of the protocol showed Ankara's conviction to use economic interdependence as diplomatic leverage, which was clearly in İnönü's remarks in September 1928, only a few months after the signing of the protocol:

*The protocols that we have signed with neighboring Iran attest to the friendship which commands our bilateral relations and to the sincerity of the desires to further economic relations and cooperation. The improvement of contacts and transportation facilities between the two countries will better help to reap the benefits of friendly relations and mutual trust.*⁵¹

48 Şimşir, *Bizim Diplomatlar*, p. 345.

49 G. Çetinsaya, *Atatürk Dönemi Türkiye-İran İlişkileri: 1926–1938* [Turkey-Iran Relations under Atatürk (1926–1938)], in: *Uluslararası İlişkiler ve Stratejik Araştırmalar Dergisi* 5 (1999) 3, p. 155.

50 Nisan 1926 Tarihli Türkiye-İran Muahadenet ve Emniyet Muahedesine Merbut Protokol [The Protocol Pertaining to Friendship and Security Between Turkey and Iran Which Dates April 1926], in: *Resmî Gazete*, 13 December 1928, <https://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/arsiv/1065.pdf> (accessed 7 December 2022).

51 A. Akşin, *Atatürk'ün Dış Politika İlkeleri ve Diplomasisi* [Atatürk's Foreign Policy Principles and Diplomacy], Ankara 1991, pp. 192–193.

Indeed, in the late 1920s, Tehran was predominantly preoccupied with economic policies, and a multidimensional ambitious effort was put forth to ensure economic development. As part of the legislative attempts and infrastructural projects which aimed to achieve economic development, in May 1928, Iran abolished all capitulations and obtained full tariff autonomy.⁵² For Reza Shah, maintaining friendly relations with Turkey was a part of “the political and economic emancipation of Iran”. Hussein ‘Ala, then Iran’s ambassador in London, made this point in an interview he gave to the *Morning Post*:

*The Shah’s decision to establish friendly relations with Iran’s neighbors was essentially related to that fundamental objective. The traditional Irano-Ottoman conflict had significantly contributed to the isolation of Iran from the Western world. The economic dependence of northern Iran upon Russia was to no small degree due to Iran’s lack of access to Western markets through Turkey. The comparative ease with which Iran established friendly relations with modern Turkey was not due only to the Shah’s ideological predisposition toward Kemalism in Turkey. It resulted partly from the fact that the Shah was determined to emancipate the economy of northern Iran from dependence on Soviet Russia by finding access to new markets through Turkish ports.*⁵³

Esendal also clearly saw economic relations as a good leverage for establishing cordial relations. In the letters he wrote to his son in August 1929, he emphasized his determination to finalize a commercial treaty between Turkey and Iran which he identified as his “fundamental work”.⁵⁴ However, because of the chronic problem of tribal raids into Turkey, security was Ankara’s top priority, which, in turn, aggravated relations with Iran due to the inconclusive frontier dispute. Upon his arrival to Tehran, Gerede maintained a rather firm position in stressing Turkey’s security concerns. The following notes in his memoirs, which he had written after his retirement in the early 1950s, gives a clue about Gerede’s approach to the issue: “The Ağrı Dağı incident was nothing but the result of provocations and encouragements which aimed at the trespassing of Turkey’s territory and the violating of its security and safety as well as triggering a war between us and Iran.”⁵⁵ The same suspicion regarding the Soviet Union’s ill intention to instigate a war between the two countries was also shared by Foroughi, who was then Iran’s ambassador in Ankara.⁵⁶ Nevertheless, this mutual suspicion did not improve the deficit in trust between Ankara and Tehran. Parr referred in the aforementioned report to an interview which Gerede had given to one of Tehran’s newspapers:

It is not clear at the time of writing whether, in the intervening period, he had been successful in securing a rectification of the frontier, giving Lesser Ararat to Turkey. That was

52 R. K. Ramazani, *The Foreign Policy of Iran, 1500–1941: A Developing Nation in World Affairs*, Virginia 1966, p. 245.

53 Quoted in Ramazani, *The Foreign Policy of Iran*, p. 270.

54 Teke and Aydoğan, *Memduh Şevket Bey*, p. 361.

55 Gerede, *Siyasi Hâtıralarım I*, p. 152.

56 A. Özgiray, *İngiliz Belgeleri Işığında Türk-İran Siyasi İlişkileri (1920–1938)* [Turkey-Iran Relations According to the British Documents], in: *Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi Dergisi XI* (1995) 33, p. 692.

*certainly his object, and, in an interview, he gave to a Tehran newspaper shortly before his departure, he stated very firmly that such a rectification was essential if the relations between the two countries were to be improved. In the same interview he gave, incidentally, an indication of his limitations as a diplomatist by an ill-advised reference to the alleged discoveries of certain Turkish scientists proving the Turanian origin of Iranian people.*⁵⁷

Gerede clearly made the last point under the impression of Mustafa Kemal's remarks about Turks and Iranians being of the same race. The shah received Gerede on 15 September 1930 to accept his letter of credence. The Turkish ambassador recalls his first impressions about the shah as follows: "My first impression about the hefty shah who did not know any foreign languages, did not receive any notable education and looked like a self-made tribal chieftain was that he had an inborn intelligence and was a visionary and very daring man."⁵⁸

It was in this first conversation with the shah that Gerede raised the issue of Kurdish rebels. He briefed the shah about Turkey's recent military operations against them and emphasized "the political significance and military advantages of conducting a joint operation against these rebels who disturb the security of both of the two states and violate our friendly relations by engaging in cross-border banditry and smuggling".⁵⁹ It appears from Gerede's wording of the conversation that the shah did not share his enthusiasm, "scratched his chin, [and] could not and did not want to give a definitive answer".⁶⁰ The shah then brushed aside the subject and switched to another one. However, Turkey was continuing its operations along the Iranian border. Gerede reported in his memoirs about Iran's reaction against the violation of its airspace by Turkish jets, which were chasing the rebels:

*A few days after I started my work as ambassador, after presenting my letter of credence, I received the first ever letter from Iran's minister of foreign affairs, which complained in a Persianate manner [Acemkari] that one of our planes violated their airspace around the [Ararat] region and I was asked to swiftly inform my government about the situation. I immediately reported this letter and my response to Ankara. The following were the main lines of my reply to him which I sent on 21 September 1930: I do not wish to accept that the great Iranian state, which, by conceding a joint operation against Kurdish rebels, showed its friendship, goodwill, and benevolence, would, in these fragile times, be offended by the flight of a Turkish plane in a naïve and friendly atmosphere without any specific intention.*⁶¹

57 FO 371/15342, E430/223/34. Parr refers to Gerede's travel to Turkey shortly after arriving in Tehran because of news of his wife's illness. Gerede returned to Tehran shortly afterwards.

58 Gerede, *Siyasi Hâtıralarım I*, p. 68.

59 *Ibid.*, p. 69.

60 *Ibid.*, p. 69.

61 *Ibid.*, p. 194.

Later, in his memoirs, Gerede criticized Iran's abstention from a joint operation which, he wrote, "was an example of its imprudence".⁶²

In the following months, Turkey continued to pressure Iran to resolve the border security question. Ultimately, "The Agreement for the Demarcation of the Border Between Turkey and Iran" was signed in Tehran on 23 January 1932.⁶³ Accordingly, Iran gave Turkey the Lesser Ararat in exchange for the Kotur district near Van.⁶⁴ This way, the longstanding border problems were finally resolved to the relief of the two parties. This agreement marked the apex of the bilateral relations between Turkey and Iran. Finally, the time had arrived to crown the relations with Reza Shah's visit to Turkey, which started in June 1934.

The idea of a personal visit to Ankara was first raised by Reza Shah, then khan, in his first reception of Esendal on 14 November 1925.⁶⁵ However, considering Iran's domestic situation and the level of bilateral relations, the time was not ripe for such a visit. But, once the border problems were resolved in 1932, this time, Mustafa Kemal expressed his desire, via Gerede, for a face-to-face meeting with the shah somewhere near the Turkey-Iran border.⁶⁶ Reza Shah responded to this invitation by saying that he wished to visit him in Ankara, but this too had to wait for another two years. The shah and his relatively large entourage entered Turkey on 10 June 1934 to arrive in Ankara six days later. Gerede also accompanied the shah during the visit. The Shah's visit lasted for 27 days although originally a shorter one had been planned by Iran. After receiving and hosting him in Ankara, Mustafa Kemal took the shah on a tour of Western Anatolia, and then to Istanbul to show him factories, military schools, military parades, museums, mosques, and palaces. The visit ended on 2 July 1934, when the shah returned to Iran. Having resigned from his post, Gerede did not accompany him back to Tehran. Instead, in an official telegraph sent on 21 June, Aras called Enis Akaygen (1880–1956), Turkey's minister in Athens since 1929, to Istanbul to attend the welcoming ceremony of Mustafa Kemal and Reza Shah in Istanbul on 27 June: "I request you to immediately head to Istanbul after making your personal preparations for a potentially long journey."⁶⁷ This way, he was promoted to an ambassadorship at the age of 54 and went to Tehran in the shah's entourage. Like Esendal, Gerede was also asked to resign on 28 June, this time by Mustafa Kemal, for the shah no longer wanted him in Tehran. Gerede describes his resignation process as a *tragicomedia*.⁶⁸

62 Ibid., p. 152.

63 TBMM, Türkiye ile İran Arasında Hudut Hattının Tayinine Dair İtilafnâme, <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/tutanaklar/TUTANAK/TBMM/d04/c009/b065/tbmm040090650182.pdf> (accessed 7 December 2022).

64 Çetinsaya, Atatürk Dönemi Türkiye-İran İlişkileri, p. 167.

65 Esendal, Tahrir Anıları, p. 19.

66 Gerede, Siyasi Hâtıralarım I, p. 264.

67 E. Tulça, Atatürk-Venizelos ve Bir Türk Diplomat: Enis Bey [Atatürk, Venizelos and a Turkish Diplomat: Enis Bey], İstanbul 2015, p. 64.

68 Gerede, Siyasi Hâtıralarım I, p. 290.

6. Enis Akaygen (1880–1956)

From the beginning, Mustafa Kemal was more cautious, compared to İsmet İnönü, in dealing with Iran and tried not to antagonize Reza Shah. For him, Gerede had crossed the line. Although there is no direct evidence to prove it, it is reasonable to suggest that Gerede was, in the first place, picked as Esendal's successor, jointly by İnönü and Aras, and to be approved by Mustafa Kemal. In his memoirs, Gerede provides a detailed account of his resignation process.⁶⁹ On the way back from the Dardanelles to Istanbul, the shah proposed a toast in honour of Gerede, apparently to give a message to Mustafa Kemal, with the following words: "When he arrived in Tehran, Mr. Gerede had drawn his sword. Yet, he has worked hard for the friendship of the two states. I owe him my meeting with the Great Ghazi [Mustafa Kemal]."⁷⁰ Mustafa Kemal immediately became upset to hear that the shah was dissatisfied with Gerede. A few days later, during a conversation, Mustafa Kemal openly asked the shah if he was pleased with Gerede, who, in turn, answered unfavourably: "I am very pleased with him, he has done a lot in Tehran. But as doyen [of the corps diplomatique at Tehran] he has sided with foreigners."⁷¹ Consequently, Mustafa Kemal immediately called for Enis Akaygen as the new ambassador. Days after the shah's departure, Mustafa Kemal made this point directly to Gerede's face: "Hüsrev, you have not been successful. The shah did not like you. We like and favour you."⁷² Also, the international political and economic climate required a different type of diplomat in Tehran. The effects of the Great Depression were washing over the world, especially the United States and Europe, which, was further exacerbated by the rising of the far-right in continental Europe. In other words, a new war was knocking on Europe's door, albeit softly, at least for the time being. This led Turkey to pursue a more active foreign policy from 1934 onwards, predominantly owing to the Italian threat. With his moderate and cautious personality, Akaygen, who, Hughe Knatchbull-Hugessen, the British ambassador in Tehran, notes in January 1936, was "considered as one of the foremost Turkish diplomats"⁷³ was an ideal candidate for the job. Having entered the Ottoman foreign ministry in 1904, he was Turkey's first ambassador in Tehran with a professional diplomatic background. Available information about Akaygen's Tehran years is rather scarce. *Atatürk-Venizelos ve bir Türk Diplomat* (Atatürk Venizelos and a Turkish Diplomat) by Enis Tulça, his grandson, chiefly traces Akaygen's activities in Athens.⁷⁴ Indeed, he had played an active role in the signing of the Balkan Pact on 9 February 1934, only a few months before moving to Tehran. Ankara wanted to reproduce a similar pact with its eastern neighbours, which eventually led to the signing of the Sadabad Pact on 8 July 1937 between Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Afghanistan. It was

69 Ibid., pp. 290–304.

70 Ibid., p. 299.

71 Ibid., p. 300.

72 Ibid., p. 198.

73 FO 371/20049, E470/470/34.

74 Tulça, *Atatürk-Venizelos*.

reported that Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and Reza Shah might even have discussed the need for a Middle Eastern Pact during the Shah's visit to Turkey.⁷⁵ This was a multilateral non-aggression treaty. There were several reasons for the inception of such a pact, but the shared Soviet threat must have been one of the key motives behind its signature. Besides its regional implications, it strongly symbolized the cordial relations between Turkey and Iran. The parties undertook by this treaty:

*(1) to abstain from interference in each other's internal affairs, (2) to respect the inviolability of their common frontiers, (3) to consult in international disputes affecting their common interests, (4) to refrain from aggression against one another either singly or jointly with one or more other powers, (5) to bring any violation or threat of violation of Article 4 of the pact before the Council of the League of Nations, without prejudice to their own exercise of the right of self-defence, and (6) to have the right to denounce the pact in respect to a signatory who commits an act of aggression against a third power.*⁷⁶

Ramazani's remarks about Iran's attitude towards the pact explains Turkey's perspective, too:

*To Iran, the Sadabad Pact was no more than a multilateral instrument embodying the principles which had evolved over the years substantially as a result of its persistent efforts to establish friendly relations with the new neighboring states of the Middle East.*⁷⁷

It is interesting to note here that amidst these significant bilateral and regional developments which took place in mid-1930s, the Turkish Embassy started to provide consular services to Greek citizens living in or travelling to Iran from July 1934, since Greece did not have diplomatic representation in Tehran at that time.⁷⁸ This continued for some years. As for Akaygen's image in the Iranian capital, the shah had a personal sympathy towards him so much so that his four kids became friends with the shah's children, including Muhammad Reza, and they frequently spent time together in the palace.⁷⁹ By all accounts, an unprecedented friendly atmosphere was created in bilateral relations between Turkey and Iran. However, in the late 1930s, the political priorities of both Turkey and Iran shifted significantly owing to domestic and international developments. Slightly more than a year later, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk died, to be replaced by İsmet İnönü as president. Shortly afterwards, the Second World War erupted in Europe and caused deep anxiety in Turkey and Iran. Consequently, in 1941, the invading Allies forced Reza Shah to abdicate from the throne in favour of his twenty-two-year-old son, Muhammad Reza Shah.

75 Ramazani, *The Foreign Policy of Iran*, p. 272.

76 Ibid., pp. 272–273.

77 Ibid., pp. 274–275.

78 Tulça, *Atatürk-Venizelos*, p. 66.

79 Ibid., p. 71.

7. Conclusion

This study ended in 1938 but it could have ended in 1937 with the signing of the Sadabad Pact which marked the zenith of Turkey-Iran relations, at least symbolically, and provided the first example of their concerted attempts to secure regional stability in the Middle East. In later decades, no radical change took place in bilateral relations with the significant exception of increasing trade relations especially in the energy sector. Nevertheless, during the period under study, obtaining and maintaining the border security was the major concern of the republican elites in Ankara. In that, they had a deep distrust towards Iran's policies despite the border agreement of 1932 and Reza Khan's visit to Turkey two years later. The post-WWII atmosphere added to the existing trust deficit when both Turkey and Iran compromised from regionalism to increasingly align with the USA particularly following the Truman Doctrine of 1947. Following that, the two countries mostly acted as regional rivals. Subsequently, they came together once again in the Baghdad Pact of 1955 which was eventually reorganized in the Central Treaty Organization following Iraq's withdrawal, but their conflicting interests and security paradigms dominated Turkey-Iran relations during much of the twentieth century as well as their regional visions. Ankara's perception was vividly illustrated by Yakup Kadri Karaosmanoğlu, Turkish writer and ambassador to Tehran between 1949–1951:

One day, I was invited to the Afghan Embassy for lunch. When I sat on the table, I realized that I was in a meeting which I can call the gathering of the Muslim community since all the attending diplomats were Sunnite and Shiite Muslims. The Orient and the Oriental mindset had never appeared to me so perplexed and blurry. These Muslim diplomats, each of whom spoke in a different language, arrived at this point after lengthy speech: One or twice a month, Muslim diplomats would sit around a dinner table for a brotherly chat and exchange of ideas. But what brotherhood? What idea? In about those times, the disagreements between Afghanistan and Pakistan were at their highest level. The relations between Iraq and Syria were rather sour. The principal concern of the Egyptians, the Jordanians and the Lebanese was Israel. I and the Indian ambassador had nothing to do with these issues. The Representative of Iran's Ministry of Foreign Affairs looked as if he was an observer coming from Europe. As it turned out, after this meeting at the Afghan Embassy and despite the certain decision made for a next meeting, the Muslim diplomats have never managed to come together again.⁸⁰

Although one can imagine numerous ways of revisiting Turkey-Iran relations during the 1920s and 1930s, as before and later, this article focused on the role of Turkey's ambassadors in Tehran who served there throughout this period. As their underlying common feature, each of the four diplomats discussed in this article, namely Muhiddin Akyüz, Memduh Şevket Esenal, Hüsrev Gerede, and Enis Akaygen, were high-profile figures with significant careers both before and after their diplomatic services. They played a

critical role in laying the foundations of Turkey-Iran relations in modern times with both successes and failures. At any rate, emphasizing their experiences provides further insight into Turkey-Iran relations in the Early Republican period. This was the main objective of this article. However, one should not be misled to overemphasize their role either. After all, diplomatic service has its own limitations which an ambassador is supposed to abide. Using his satirical language, Karaosmanoğlu describes an ambassador's challenge and his "splendid isolations" in the following words:

*I think there is a bit of exaggeration in calling this 'splendid isolation'. In the past, this concept was exclusively used for Great Britain and many people have come to see it as a mark of an utterly realist policy. However, here I use it to describe a certain type of a human being who has cut all his ties with reality and is uprooted from the earth. He moves around throughout his life and goes to dissimilar places but fails to see the world as anything other than a one-layered and one "dimensional" ground since he has undertaken all his travels in his "Ivory Tower" like a turtle retreating in his shell. When he lands somewhere, he only stuck his head out. The reason for this is his fright from contacting the people of those places.*⁸¹

This article mostly dealt with what the above-mentioned ambassadors have observed from their "Ivory Tower" which they only left to interact with their foreign counterparts and Tehran's bureaucratic circles. Their reports which are preserved in the Turkish Foreign Ministry Archive in Ankara can shed further light on what they observed. However, even the amount of information contained in their diaries, memoirs and accessible reports make significant contributions to our understanding of Turkey-Iran relations in the Early Republican period.