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An impossible friendship: differences and similarities between fascist Italy's and Kemalist Turkey's foreign policies

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Despite a period of “warmth” and some similarities between the two regimes, fascist Italy and Kemalist Turkey proved to be very different in their approach to international relations. Italy showed a very aggressive and revisionist foreign policy, whereas Turkey, won the Independence war, tried to build solid and peaceful relations with its neighbors. The analysis of Turkish-Italian bilateral relation in the 1920s and late 1930s explains the reason of the different behavior which the two countries adopted on the eve of and during the Second World War.

1. Introduction

This paper aims to make a comparison between the foreign policy of Kemalist Turkey and Fascist Italy by analyzing their bilateral relations between the 1920s and the early 1930s. Kemalist Turkey certainly shared some of the features characterizing the authoritarian regimes which spread throughout post-WWI Europe. Italian Fascism had a particularly strong influence on most of those nationalist regimes, and among them, also on the Kemalist regime. Fascism and Kemalism were both driven by an extreme nationalism. They both shared elements of totalitarianism, which is clear in their attempt to shape the entire society and in their use of the regime's party in order to create a monopoly over the activities of the civil society. Moreover, they both built a personality cult of the two leaders (Mussolini and Atatürk), to an extent not common in other contemporary authoritarian experiences.

Nevertheless, differences are more significant than similarities. The two regimes structurally differed in their relation with religion and with social classes, in the role of the leader and in their ideological attitude toward democracy.¹

Foreign policy is another element of deep difference between these two authoritarian experiences. Since the establishment of the two regimes, at the beginning of the 1920s, the diplomatic relations between the two countries can be divided into three phases:

- A first period of bitterness dominated by Italian colonial ambitions over south-western Anatolia (1923-1926);
- The rapprochement, which followed the consolidation of the Kemalist regime. This period is characterized by the attempt made by Italy to build an alliance with Greece and Turkey, as a counterweight to French influence in the Balkans (1926-1931);
- The failure of that project and the return to unfriendly relations between Italy and Turkey (1931-1939).

This paper argues that the main reason of the failure of the rapprochement between fascist Italy and Kemalist Turkey lies in a deeply different understanding of the role of those two countries in the international chessboard. Very often conflicts among nationalist regimes are based on contested territories or national interests and not on ideological contrasts. This paper aims to show why Italian-Turkish relation in the inter-war period does not fit with this assumption. Since Italy renounced its ambition over Anatolia, there were the conditions for a stable alliance between those two countries. What impeded the development of this alliance was the incompatibility of their wider projects. The Kemalist élite was in search of stability, whereas Mussolini's Italy was an element of destabilization for the entire region. Differently from the other authoritarian regimes of the time, Turkey's regime chose to find stability in a peaceful way and within the framework of the *League of Nations*. Differently from fascism, the Kemalist state proved to fit within a democratic international system.

1. A hostile beginning

Several elements shaped Italian-Turkish relations in the 1920s and 1930s. As independent variables of this relation we can consider three facts which came from the history of the two countries as well as from the international contexts. First of all, Italy's traditional expansionist ambitions toward the Balkans and the eastern shore of

¹ ZÜRCHER, Erik J., *Turkey a Modern History*, London, I.B. Tauris, 2004, p. 186.

the Mediterranean basin. Secondly, Turkey's seek for security. As third element, we must consider the new order which came out of World War I. Italy won the Great War, and was one of the great powers – even though the least of them – which were supposed to guarantee the post-war order. Turkey was instead a defeated country, it lost its empire and large part of its territories and had to fight for its own survival. Given these variables, two elements could be added to these picture: the approach on international politics of the authoritarian regimes which hold the power in these two countries during the inter-war period.

One of the most important element which shaped Italian politics, after the bloody suppression of the worker movement in 1920-21 and the establishment of the fascist regime, was the myth of a '*vittoria mutilata*' (maimed victory). According to the nationalist elite, the post-war treaty system did not properly awarded Italy for its war effort. So, once Benito Mussolini seized the power in October 1922, Italy started an ambiguous policy. On the one hand Rome tried to keep its position as a winning powers. On the other hand, Mussolini did not hide his revisionist ambitions, by flirting with defeated countries, like Bulgaria, and by establishing positive relations with the Soviet Union.

At the same time, Turkey was fighting a war for its own independence, under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal. The national movement led by Mustafa Kemal, won the country's independence and renounced to the empire. The new Turkey established itself on national borders and did not claim the lost territories, with the exception of some bordering contested lands.

With the treaty of Lausanne, signed on July 1923, the Allied Powers renounced to their war-time partition agreements on Turkey and recognized Turkey's independence, leaving the only issue of Mosul to an international arbitrate. By signing the treaty, Italy did not really put aside its ambition over south-western Anatolia. The region was particularly interesting in Italy's eyes due to its proximity to the Dodecanese islands, the slice of the Aegean archipelago occupied by Italy during the Italian-Turkish war of 1911-1912. The islands were largely inhabited by Greeks and claimed by Greeks nationalists. The main concern of Turkey was their geographical location, which made the Dodecaneso an ideal starting point for Italy's military operations in Anatolia. Aware that his country was not in the position to wage a private war against Turkey, Mussolini waited for an international crisis which could allow Italy to re-claim the region. Diplomatic documents show the level of tension between the two countries in the mid-1920s. Turkey perceived Italy as a clear threat to its integrity and denounced Italy's

troop gathering near its border.² The threat never really materialized and Turkey's accusation were probably made in order to alarm the international community. Nevertheless, in the summer of 1924, Mussolini asked his Minister of War Antonino Di Giorgio to prepare plans for military actions against Turkey.³

According to Dilek Barlas, who has written the most important works about this topic, the key of Italian-Turkish relations in these years lay in the Mosul issue. She argues that Italy's strategy toward Turkey consisted in keeping the tension high and waiting for the explosion of a Turkish-British conflict over Mosul, which would have brought about the fall of the Kemalist regime.⁴ Italian diplomatic documents confirm this idea, but it seems like the Italian position was more complicated. Rome supported London's stance over Mosul because it hoped to have colonial territorial gain in return (on the Libyan-Egyptian border and in Somalia) or to gain south-western Anatolia after a hypothetical conflict between Turkey and the British Empire.⁵ The crisis of Corfu in 1923 made clear to Mussolini that any military action could only be undertaken in accordance with other great powers, or at least with London.⁶ At the same time, Italy's stance over Mosul can be read with the lenses of a medium-term diplomatic strategy toward Turkey. In February 1926, in the midst of the Mosul crisis, Mussolini let Ankara know that Italy «does not pursue aggressive designs against Turkey» and that «Turkey should shows its confidence in Italy's policy and Italy will be willing to consider the opportunity of agreements».⁷ In a telegram to his ambassador, Mussolini explicitly mentioned the advantages of an Italian ambiguous position:

The friendly policy that the [Italian] National Government has undertaken towards Britain, which has assured to Italy full England's support in international issues [...], discourages us in taking a position of overt hostility towards Great Britain, in the abovementioned issue. [...] Notwithstanding, that does not mean that we could overlook [...] the importance which Italy places in the consolidation and

² *Documenti diplomatici italiani*, Serie 7, Vol. III, 227, p. 138.

³ *Ibidem*, 604, p. 364.

⁴ BARLAS, Dilek, «Friends Or Foes? Diplomatic Relations Between Italy And Turkey», in *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 36, 2004, pp. 235-236.

⁵ ARIELLI, Nir, *Fascist Italy and the Middle East, 1933-40*, Houndmills, Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, p. 24; CASSELS, Alan, *Mussolini's Early Diplomacy*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1970, p. 303.

⁶ In August 1923, After the murdering of Italian diplomats on Greek soil, Mussolini ordered the occupation of the island of Corfu as retaliation. The Italians were then forced to evacuate after a League of Nations' resolution, strongly supported by Great Britain. See: CASSELS, Alan, *Mussolini's Early Diplomacy*, cit. pp. 95-126.

⁷ *Documenti diplomatici italiani*, Vol. IV, 236, p. 166.

development [...] of our many interests in Turkey, therefore it is not convenient to declare ourselves overtly against Turkey's position⁸

In this document it seems that for Italy a war against Turkey was not the only positive possible outcome of the crisis. To Italy's eyes also a diplomatic solution which would keep Mosul in British hands and Turkey humiliated and isolated appeared convenient. Mussolini was starting to consider Ankara as a possible strategic partner in the Mediterranean. The objections on a Turkish-Italian reconciliation came more from the Turkish side, than from the Italian one. The Turkish government was seriously concerned about the change in Italy's foreign policy. During the war of independence, pre-fascist Italian government had been the first, among the winning powers, which gave up to its claim on a slice of Ottoman empire. But Mussolini bellicose and revisionist rhetoric, combined with the Italian presence in the Aegean sea, was perceived as a threat by Ankara.

The second option was the one which actually took place. In 1926, Turkey accepted the resolution approved by the League of Nations commission and signed the Frontier treaty which assigned Mosul to the British mandate of Iraq.⁹ This unsatisfying solution left Turkey diplomatically isolated and the need to find a way out of this isolation can be considered the most important condition for the rapprochement with Italy. But the fact which brought the two countries closer was the signature of a Treaty of Friendship between France and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes,¹⁰ in November 1927. This pact was perceived as a mortal threat by Italy, which feared a two-front war. Belgrade was having with Rome significant contested issues, dating back to the post-war territorial arrangement of the Adriatic shores. Turkey was as well very uncomfortable with the growing role of France in the Balkans, which had already signed an alliance with Romania the previous year (June 1926). Moreover, Ankara was worried about Yugoslavia's ambition over Bulgaria, under the banners of pan-Slavism, and after that of a possible claim on Constantinople.¹¹ The external pressure posed by the French-Yugoslavian treaty, removed the concerns that Turkey used to have on Italy's reliability and drove the new republic to accept Italy as an essential counterweigh to the French block.

⁸ *Ibidem*, 184, p. 134-135.

⁹ According to Andrew Mango, Ankara accepted the final solution on Mosul in order to 'close' and make for the country easier «to resist the economic demands of the French and the Italians». See: MANGO, Andrew, *Atatürk*, Woodstock, Overlook Press, 2000, p. 378.

¹⁰ Later renamed Kingdom of Yugoslavia.

¹¹ In a meeting with the Italian ambassador, Turkish Prime Minister İsmet İnönü explicitly shows his fear for a possible French support on Yugoslavian ambition over Constantinople. See: *Documenti diplomatici italiani*, Vol. IV, 553, p. 523.

2. Rapprochement and treaties

According to fascist Italy's plan, the idea of a Mediterranean alliance, as alternative to the French-sponsored *Little Entente*, should have included also Greece. The Hellenic state had started a policy of reconciliation with both Italy and Turkey, a policy which fostered Italy's hope for a trilateral alliance. Already in 1924, Mussolini talked about Italy's ownership of the Dodecanese islands as «fundamental element of equilibrium in the new order of eastern Mediterranean», which could guarantee Turkish-Greek peaceful relations.¹² Talks for a treaty of friendship between Italy and Turkey started in the Spring of 1926, when Turkish foreign minister Tevfik Rüştü Aras confirmed his goodwill in this direction.¹³ Negotiations moved slowly due to the prudence kept by Turkey, which was at the same time working on a similar treaty with Greece. The 3rd of April 1928 the first high-level meeting took place in Milan. Aras met Dino Grandi, the Italian vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs and they discussed about the treaty. The Italians insisted to sign a treaty which could include also Greece,¹⁴ but negotiations between Turkey and Greece were proceeding slowly due to unsolved issues dating back to the post-war period and the exchange of populations.¹⁵ However, in the same days the Greek foreign minister was also in Milan, and had separate meetings with both Aras and Grandi. During the meeting of Milan, the idea of a reconciliation among the three countries – even though through separate agreements – was officially recognized by all the components. The 30th of May 1928 Italy and Turkey signed the *Treaty of neutrality and reconciliation*, which assured reciprocal neutrality in case of war against a third power. It also forbade the two countries to join alliances directed against one of them.¹⁶ In a speech in the Senate a few days later, Mussolini acknowledged the historical value of the Kemalist revolution, by defining Turkey “a nation which is bravely building its soul”.¹⁷ In September Rome signed a similar treaty with Athens, and two month later Grandi was in Ankara, fostering the Turco-Greek conciliation process. In the meanwhile, Grandi was appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs by Mussolini. This has been seen by historians as a sign of a moderate turn in fascist foreign policy. When, in October 1930, Turkey and Greece signed their treaty of friendship, Aras gave a speech

¹² *Ibidem*, Vol. II, 165, p. 103.

¹³ *Ibidem*, Vol. IV, 307, p. 225.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, Vol. VI, 216, p. 185-187.

¹⁵ After the Greco-Turkish war (1919-1922), approximately 2 million people moved from one country to the other.

¹⁶ «Il testo del trattato italo-turco», in *La Stampa*, 1 June 1928, p. 1.

¹⁷ MUSSOLINI, Benito, «L'Italia potenza mondiale», in *La Stampa*, 6 June 1928, p. 1.

in front of the Grand National Assembly in which he thanked Mussolini and Grandi for Italy's role in the reconciliation between two old enemies.¹⁸ From 1928 to 1932, Italy, along with the Soviet Union, was the very pillar of Turkish foreign policy.

An important part of this friendship was made by naval and arms supply agreements which were signed in those years. With the Turkish-Italian naval agreement of May 1929, Ankara ordered from Italy two destroyers, three submarines and two submarine chasers. For Rome, naval supplies to Turkey was a way to develop its still-infant naval industry. At the same time, Mussolini was starting to look at Turkey as part of the Italian zone of influence and he thought that providing Ankara with an essential navy was a mean "to facilitate Turkish transformation into a pro-Italian actor in the Eastern Mediterranean naval balance".¹⁹ From Ankara's point of view the building of a navy was an essential – even though very expensive – matter of national security, despite the pro-land battle attitude of the entire generation on power. In the second half of the 1920s, Turkey had secured its land borders with the Soviet Russia, Iran, Iraq and Syria, therefore a naval force was the natural completion of its defense system. Italy was considered a good supplier because of its relative low financial capacity. The Turkish leadership considered this element as particularly important because it wanted to avoid the Ottoman experience of dependency on a foreign great power.

This time of "warmth" in Italian-Turkish relations left room for a new interest in Turkey for some features of Italian fascism. Many Turkish military and civil servants visited Italy for training periods²⁰ and some sectors of the Kemalist elite looked with interest to the way fascist "autarchy" helped Italy to react to the economic crisis, in a better way than liberal democratic countries.

3. Two different destinies

After 1932, the relations between Italy and Turkey started worsening very quickly. In these years, Italy showed its financial inability to be the main supporter of Turkey's economic and military recovery. The visit made by Turkish Prime Minister İsmet İnönü in Rome in 1932, was a great political and diplomatic success, but did not reach its aim to provide Turkey with Italian financial aids in a stable way. Turkey had to address

¹⁸ BARLAS, Dilek, «Friends Or Foes?», cit. p. 243.

¹⁹ BARLAS, Dilek; GÜVENÇ, Serhat, «To Build a Navy with the Help of Adversary: Italian-Turkish Naval Arms Trade, 1929-32», in *Middle Eastern Studies* 38, 4/2004, p. 143.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 154.

France in order to obtain the loan it needed and this move deeply upset Italian diplomacy.²¹ Moreover, Italy delayed in delivering some of the ships ordered by Turkey.²² Despite the rhetoric on *autarchy* and *corporativism*, the global economic crisis impacted on Italy, and especially on its structural difficulty in providing capitals. According to Barlas and Güvenç, “Italians lacked the naval technologies and economic resources to foster a patron-client relationship through the arms trade”.²³

These failures significantly affected Italian-Turkish relations, but the main divergence started to emerge on the level of international politics. When in September 1930, French Prime Minister Aristide Briand presented a plan for the establishment of a European economic Union within the framework of the League of Nations, the reactions of Rome and Ankara were very different. The project addressed only the European countries which were members of the League, but the Kemalist regime supported the idea along with the application of Turkey for League's membership. Italy perceived Turkey's membership of the League of Nations as a step toward France and its sphere of influence, and so Rome consulted with the Soviet Union, which shared the same fear, in order to prevent this possibility.²⁴ In this phase, Rome appeared to be very interested in using its relations with Turkey to improve the one it already had with Soviet Russia.

At this time Mussolini was firmly against the League of Nations, and considered it as an instrument of Britain and France to foster the status quo, which corresponded with their national interests. When in 1932 the council of the League approved Turkey's membership, Italy voted against, and this fact significantly worsened the bilateral relations between the two countries.

The dismissal of Dino Grandi from its post of Italian Foreign Minister in 1932, sought a turning point in Italian foreign policy. Grandi's approach was now seen as too soft and anglophile by Mussolini, who was preparing the “spectacular achievement” of the Ethiopian adventure.²⁵ The *Duce* became again the foreign minister of himself²⁶ and oriented toward a new policy of expansionism. In December 1932 he mentioned for the first time the idea of a cabinet of the superpowers (Italy, Britain, France and Germany)

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 160.

²² BARLAS, Dilek, «Friends Or Foes?», cit. p. 244.

²³ BARLAS, Dilek, GÜVENÇ, Serhat, «To Build a Navy», cit. p. 158.

²⁴ *Documenti diplomatici italiani*, Vol. IX, 190, pp. 269-270.

²⁵ BURGWYN, H. James, *Italian Foreign Policy in the Interwar Period, 1918-1940*, Westport, Praeger, 1997, p. 68; POLLARD, John F., *The Fascist Experience in Italy*, London, Routledge, 1998, p. 95.

²⁶ Mussolini kept for himself the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for most of the regime (1922-1929, 1932-1936, 1943).

which should have replaced the League of Nations in dealing with international crises.²⁷ This speech created apprehension in Turkey, which had just become a member of the League.²⁸ Moreover, In March 1934 the *Duce* made a speech on the future directions of Italian expansion, stating that “the historical objectives of Italy have two names: Asia and Africa”.²⁹ It seems obvious that this new turn in Italian foreign policy could not please the Turkish friend, which was in search of stability and security. It must be added that the advent to power of Adolf Hitler in Germany, increased Italian self-confidence in international affairs.

It must be also noticed that one of the main concerns of Ankara was the peace and the status quo in the Balkan peninsula. In this area it was almost impossible to find a common stance with Italy. Rome was interested above all in the destabilization of the region, and in particular of its main pillar, Yugoslavia, where Mussolini supported Croatian and Macedonian separatist movements. The agreement reached by Italy and Greece did not develop in an alliance, and the only country with which Rome shared an overall vision of Balkan dynamics, was Bulgaria, that is to say the only revisionist country of the peninsula. Therefore, Turkey’s interest in Balkan security was completely in contradiction with Italian ambitions of territorial acquisitions and regional influence. Between the friendship with fascist Italy and Balkan cooperation, Ankara chose the latter. In 1934, Turkey signed the Balkan Pact, with Yugoslavia, Greece and Romania. The pact had a clear anti-revisionist stance and was directed against Bulgarian *revanchism* and Italian expansionism. The establishment of the so-called “Balkan Entente” can be considered the very end of the friendship between the new Turkish republic and Mussolini’s Italy.³⁰

4. Conclusion: the impossible friendship

As mentioned in the introduction, this paper has tried to delve into the relationship between Italy and Turkey in a span of time straddling the 1920s to the 1930s. In this period both the consolidation of the regime built by Mustafa Kemal in Turkey and the heyday of Italian fascism took place. The comparison between these two regimes helps our understanding of the Kemalist experience because it put Kemalism into its

²⁷ MUSSOLINI, Benito, «A Torino, all’Italia, al Mondo», in *La Stampa*, 24 October 1932, p. 1. See also: BARLAS, Dilek, «Friends Or Foes?», cit. p. 246.

²⁸ “Documenti,” Vol. XII, No. 509, p. 620 and Vol. XIII, 279, p. 304.

²⁹ MUSSOLINI, Benito, «Mussolini nel suo possente discorso all’Assemblea quinquennale del Regime», in *La Stampa*, 19 March 1934, p. 1.

³⁰ See: TURAN, Esin Tüylü, «The Rise of the Concept of a Balkan Pact and the First Balkan Conference», in *History Studies* 4, 4/2012, pp. 433-446.

historical context. The many similarities between them – nationalism, one-party rule, cult of the personality – do not outnumber the differences. Among the latter, foreign policy deserves particular importance. Whereas, the ambiguous relationship between Kemalism and democracy casts doubts on the harmony between Atatürk's rhetoric and practice, Kemalists' attitude toward the wider world is much more consistent. After the analysis of their relations, Turkish foreign policy appears in stark contrast with Mussolini's projects on south-eastern Europe and the Mediterranean sea.

Alan Cassels defines fascist Italy's foreign policy as "consistent only in its inconsistency".³¹ Expansionism and revisionism were tamed by Mussolini's realism, and by the awareness of Italy's lack of means to directly challenge the two main powers of post-war Europe, Britain and France. Unable to set up a long-term plan to fulfil its great ambitions, Rome tried to seize the opportunities of expansion offered by the troubled situation of the inter-war Europe. The years of 'warmth' in the relationship between Italy and Turkey coincide approximately with the phase of moderation of Italian foreign policy represented by the period of Dino Grandi as foreign minister. According to Martin Bilkhorn the moderation of the Duce's international policy was also driven by the economic crisis, which "suggested Mussolini three years of diplomatic calm".³²

Kemalist Turkey presents a completely different approach to international relations. Mustafa Aydın defined it as a continuation of Kemalist internal policy, and as based on security concerns:

Kemalist foreign policy was based upon a peaceful orientation in world politics expressed by the famous Kemalist dictum "Peace at Home, Peace in the World". Turkey's survival as a small developing nation at the strategic and exposed location astride the straits demanded such a policy.³³

In tune with Aydın are Robert Olson and Nuhan Ince, who identify in the building up of a "security ring with the neighbouring countries" the main goal of Turkish foreign policy.³⁴ Considering this strategic goal, the Kemalist elite took a consistent attitude since the National Pact of February 1920. This concern went alongside the

³¹ CASSELS, Alan, «Was There a Fascist Foreign Policy? Tradition and Novelty», in *The International History Review*, 2/1983, p. 262.

³² BILKHORN, Martin, *Mussolini and Fascist Italy*, New York, Routledge, 1984, p. 44.

³³ AYDIN, Mustafa, «The Determinants of Turkish Foreign Policy, and Turkey's European Vocation», in *The Review of International Affairs*, 3, 2/2003, p. 13.

³⁴ OLSON, Robert W., INCE, Nuhan, «Turkish Foreign Policy from 1923-1960: Kemalism and Its Legacy, a Review and a Critique», in *Oriente Moderno* 5, 1977, p. 231.

apprehension about national independence. The memory of the late Ottoman Empire, when foreign powers were able to determine imperial policies, was very clear in the mind of the early republican elite. This concern justified Turkey's reluctance in deepening its relations with Italy and explains the prudence used by Turkish foreign minister Aras. Turkey did not want to embark in an exclusive relation with a great power and to risk a patron-client relation. This is true also in matter of financial aids, where the memory of the Ottoman past played a role again. Economic independence was viewed by the ruling elite "as indispensable for political and diplomatic independence".³⁵ Turkey served of the Italian friendship for its own scopes. On the one hand, the end of its diplomatic isolation which followed the war of independence. By approaching Rome, the Turkish government managed to revive other power's – and especially Paris' – interest in courting Ankara, in order at least to contrast Italy's influence. On the other hand, with the mediation of Rome, Turkey was able to mend its relation with Athens, and to turn Greece to an anti-revisionist power with no further ambition over Turkish territories.

Therefore, the reasons which drove to the temporary Italian-Turkish friendship had a contingent and not structural nature:

- The isolation of Turkey after the resolution of the Mosul issue. The lack of friendly relations with any western great power was perceived as an element of weakness by the ruling elite;
- Italy's renounce to colonial ambitions over Anatolia, and the inauguration of a 'moderate phase' of Italian foreign policy;
- The French-Yugoslavian treaty of November 1927, regarded as a danger for both Italy and Turkey, even though for different reason.

Another reason can be added to this list. The United Kingdom might have played a role in Turkish-Italian relations. As Turkish Foreign Minister Aras mentioned in diplomatic documents,³⁶ Britain seemed interesting in every move which could balance French influence in southeast Europe and the Mediterranean. In many case has been underlined Britain's tolerant attitude toward Mussolini's foreign policy as a way to counterweight an excessive power of Paris. This attitude was particularly common among British conservative politicians, and in the case of this paper, in Austern Chamberlain, head of the Foreign Office between 1924-1929.³⁷ London's positive approach helped in the involvement of Greece, which had with Britain a long-standing

³⁵ OLSON, Robert W., INCE, Nuhan, «Turkish Foreign Policy», cit., p. 229.

³⁶ *Documenti diplomatici italiani*, Vol. IV, 307, p. 225.

³⁷ BILKHORN, Martin, *Mussolini*, cit., p. 43.

‘special relation’. Nevertheless, even if London was interested in the improvement of trilateral relations, the British government never agreed with the establishment of a real alliance, and showed it by discouraging Greece to take further steps in that direction.³⁸

As a conclusion, it can be said that the failure of Turkish-Italian relations in the inter-war period was not due to contested territorial issues or diverging interests. When Mussolini gave the above mentioned speech on Italian expansion directions, he made clear – via diplomatic channels – that he did not refer to Turkey. Italian-Turkish relations were still high at that time and İnönü had been received in Italy only two years before and with the highest honours. Notwithstanding, Turkish press and public opinion reacted to Mussolini’s speech with a wave of indignation. This episode helps to understand how the difference between the foreign policy of the two countries was deep. The failure of this alliance happened because of a structural incompatibility of the ways Italy and Turkey perceived their roles in the international context.

After the war of independence, Kemalist Turkey shaped its foreign policy on the line of regional security and multilateralism. By assuming this peaceful attitude, Turkey starkly differentiated itself from fascist countries, and made itself compatible with the global order shaped by the institution of the United Nations after the Second World War.

³⁸ *Documenti diplomatici italiani*, Vol. X, 471, pp. 695-697.

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