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## Marshaling Development: Turkish Thrace in the Interwar Years\*

### Abstract

Based on ethnographic fieldwork and archival research, this study examines the interwar transformation of Eastern Thrace through the prism of sovereignty. It argues that Turkish political and military elites came into a particular geopolitical consciousness about Thrace in the 1930s, viewing the region as a vulnerable yet indispensable frontier due to its geographical, symbolic, and military significance. In their quest to re-border Thrace to extend state sovereignty, the elites combined the tools of international diplomacy with a regional policy that sought to repopulate, redevelop, and refortify Thrace. The study coins the concept of marshaling development to describe these efforts to interrelated civilian and military ends. It demonstrates how officials marshaling development foresaw the reordering of peoples, materials, infrastructures, resources, and affective dispositions across the borderland space with a view to the joint goals of defense and development and with durable socioeconomic and demographic consequences extending well beyond the interwar years.

**Keywords:** civil-military relations, interwar geopolitics, critical security studies, migration, borderlands, Thrace

### 1. Introduction

After the Second Balkan War in 1913, a young İsmet İnönü was appointed as military adviser for the Turkish delegation negotiating the Treaty of Constantinople with Bulgaria. Working with a Bulgarian officer to draft a protocol to determine postwar state borders, Major İsmet was adamant about resisting the incursions of his Bulgarian counterpart. Any borderline running south of the Rezovo (Mutludere) River in the direction of Adrianople (Edirne) and Kırkkilise (Kırklareli), İnönü insisted, would lend Bulgaria so great a strategic advantage that it would amount to the surrender of Thrace.<sup>1</sup> The resulting border was more accommodating to his wishes, but the question of Thrace's borders was to preoccupy İnönü time and again. The border was subject to another modification in 1915 in an effort to recruit Bulgaria to the side of the Central Powers. Serving as the First Branch Manager at General Headquarters, İnönü's heart swelled with 'fury, indignation, and defiance' with the news of a *fait accompli* that ceded to Bulgaria the west bank of the Maritza River he had labored to

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1 İnönü 2018 [1985], 80–1, 146–7.

retain two years ago.<sup>2</sup> The border rectification of 1915 continued to haunt İnönü at Lausanne, where he acted as the chief negotiator for Turkey. All his diplomatic probes to reconstitute the 1913 borders he had helped to create met with the Allied riposte that the Ottomans had agreed to transfer the territories beyond the Maritza (Meriç) line on voluntary terms.<sup>3</sup>

As such, İnönü could wrest only minor concessions from the Allies regarding the joint questions of Thrace and the Straits.<sup>4</sup> Ironically, the Thracian frontiers that İnönü-the-soldier had fought hard to preserve in Constantinople in 1913 reappeared as a battle İnönü-the-diplomat had to forfeit to win the peace in Lausanne in 1923. The signing of the peace treaty on 24 July 1923 finally settled the political and military dust of a ten-year war. However, the question of Thrace remained a thorn in postwar Turkey's side. During a visit to Edirne a few months after the treaty's signing, İnönü's earlier military confidant and later political rival, Kazım Karabekir, observed the city's idiosyncratic railway network and fortifications with a group of parliamentarians, noting in his memoirs that the condition of the border was 'inappropriate.'<sup>5</sup>

Drawing on multi-sited archival research, this article interrogates how the early Republican elite sought to fix the 'inappropriate' borderland of Thrace in the interwar years. It begins with a description of historical developments, socioeconomic conditions, and structural constraints that undermined borderland security in Thrace in the aftermath of years of war. The article then zooms into the momentous 1930s as a period in which Turkish elites markedly came into a particular geopolitical consciousness about Thrace that recast the region as a frontier in geographical, symbolic, and military terms. Mired in a crisis of sovereignty in a geopolitically and symbolically indispensable yet militarily vulnerable borderland, the Turkish military and political elite combined diplomatic maneuvers to reborder Thrace in a more sovereign light with a new policy to refortify, repopulate, and redevelop the region. This regional strategy foresaw no less than the complete reordering of peoples, materials, infrastructures, resources, and affective dispositions across the borderland space with a view to the joint goals of defense and development. The article thus mobilizes the concept of *marshaling development* to capture the borderland's transformation under the state's geopolitical gaze, briefly addresses the legacies of this interwar past, and discusses the scholarly significance of studying interwar Thrace in the conclusion.

2 İnönü 2018 [1985], 103.

3 Lausanne Conference 1923, 25, 44–6, 87–90.

4 Most notable of those was the acquisition of a small territory on the western bank of the Maritza River, namely Karaağaç, which was an essential node on the lines of communication that bridged Edirne with the rest of Turkey. Other major Turkish demands for a plebiscite in Western Thrace, a seamless Turkish sovereignty over the Straits and in Eastern Thrace, and a control of a defensive hinterland beyond the Maritza line were shelved in the course of negotiations.

5 'Hıdırlık Tabyası'na bazı mebuslarla çıktık. Hududun münasebetsiz vaziyetini gösterdik' (Karabekir 2009, 890–1).

## 2. From an Imperial Heartland to a Forlorn Borderland

Modern Turkish Thrace, also known as Eastern Thrace, roughly comprises what remains of the Ottoman *vilayet* of Edirne. Once a prosperous province lying between the empire's capital and its possessions farther in Europe, Edirne enjoyed a relatively secure existence from the sixteenth century until the nineteenth-century Ottoman-Russian rivalry. The first external threat destabilizing the region came with the Russo-Turkish War of 1828–1829, during which the Russian army crossed the Balkans to defeat the Ottomans and marched, somewhat to the latter's surprise, unimpeded across the Maritza River to capture the city of Edirne. Although the Treaty of Adrianople (1829) reset the western Ottoman-Russian border along the Danube River, a second and deeper Russian thrust in 1877–1878 could only be stopped short at the gates of Constantinople, throwing the region into further disarray until the Treaty of Berlin (1878) restored Edirne to Ottoman rule. If the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877–1878 fractured the region's shield of security, the Balkan Wars of 1912–1913 shattered it completely by transforming what was once the inland province of Edirne into a volatile frontier that swapped hands between the Turks, Bulgarians, and Greeks over the next decade. The frontier conditions of the period spanning the Balkan Wars, World War I, and the Turkish War of Independence have found expression in a local refrain that is still popular among older people in contemporary Thrace: 'The Bulgarians reaped what I sowed, I reaped what the Bulgarians sowed; the Greeks reaped what I sowed, I reaped what the Greeks sowed.'<sup>6</sup>

As the Lausanne Treaty instituted Eastern Thrace as Turkey's borderland with Europe, the turn to reap the harvest passed decisively to the Turks. The ten-year war had dismantled the multiethnic and multireligious composition of the region,<sup>7</sup> with the Greeks being uprooted after the Balkan Wars and the Turkish War of Independence,<sup>8</sup> the Bulgarians dissipating after the Second Balkan War,<sup>9</sup> and the Armenians being deported to face their almost certain death in 1915.<sup>10</sup> The local non-Muslim population, which had exceeded half of the regional population in 1870,<sup>11</sup> was reduced to some ten to twenty thousand Jews scattered across a number of cities in Thrace, particularly in Edirne, Kırkkilise, Tekirdağ, Gelibolu, Çorlu, Lüleburgaz, and Uzunköprü.<sup>12</sup>

6 'Ben ekim Bulgar biçti, Bulgar eki ben biçtim; ben ekim Yunan biçti, Yunan eki ben biçtim.'

7 For a general account of the removal of Christian populations from Eastern Thrace, see: Gingeras 2016.

8 Akçam 2012, 63–96; Efiloğlu 2016.

9 Dündar 2015a, 182–91; Ginio 2013.

10 Kevorkian 2011, 545–50.

11 *Edirne Vilayet Salnamesi* 1287 [1870].

12 According to the 1927 census, the Jewish population of Thrace, including Çanakkale Jews, was 10,402. At the time of the 1934 Thrace Incidents, the official figures had the regional Jewish population at 13,000. Some commentators find the 1927 census unreliable for its undercounting of non-sedentary populations and minorities. For the 1927 census, see: Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Başvekalet İstatistik Umum Müdürlüğü 1929. On the suspect accuracy of the 1927 census data, see: Dündar 1999.

The local Turkish population was also drained to an extreme, as they faced dislocation, poverty, hunger, epidemic diseases, and endless rounds of conscription under foreign occupations and protracted wartime conditions. Even after the injection of over 80,000 Turkish migrants into the region through the 1923 population exchange between Turkey and Greece,<sup>13</sup> which designated Thrace a priority zone for settlement, Thrace's population constituted a mere 3.4 percent of Turkey's population in 1927.<sup>14</sup>

Although Thrace's population density was not significantly lower than that of other regions, it was grossly inadequate to exploit the fertile fields of its softly undulating landscape. Agricultural mechanization was too limited to offset the labor shortage.<sup>15</sup> Even in vaster and more organized plots where the machinery to shore up the forces of production was present,<sup>16</sup> the dearth of fuel and spare parts often made their use economically unviable.<sup>17</sup> Global market conditions were also unfavorable to the predominant type of agricultural production in Thrace.<sup>18</sup> Because mid and large-scale farming activities in Thrace were oriented towards larger domestic and international markets, the massive drop in crop prices after the Great Depression left many more farmlands deserted.<sup>19</sup> A report reveals that as late as 1939, there were 163 agricultural estates of over 182,509 hectares in Thrace – or 'lazy çiftlik' (*tenbel çiftlik*) as the report referred to them – that lay in a state of waste and abandonment.<sup>20</sup> Local agricultural institutions were also under duress, and a network of grain exchanges, welded together to reinvigorate the foundations of regional agriculture, began to collapse under the

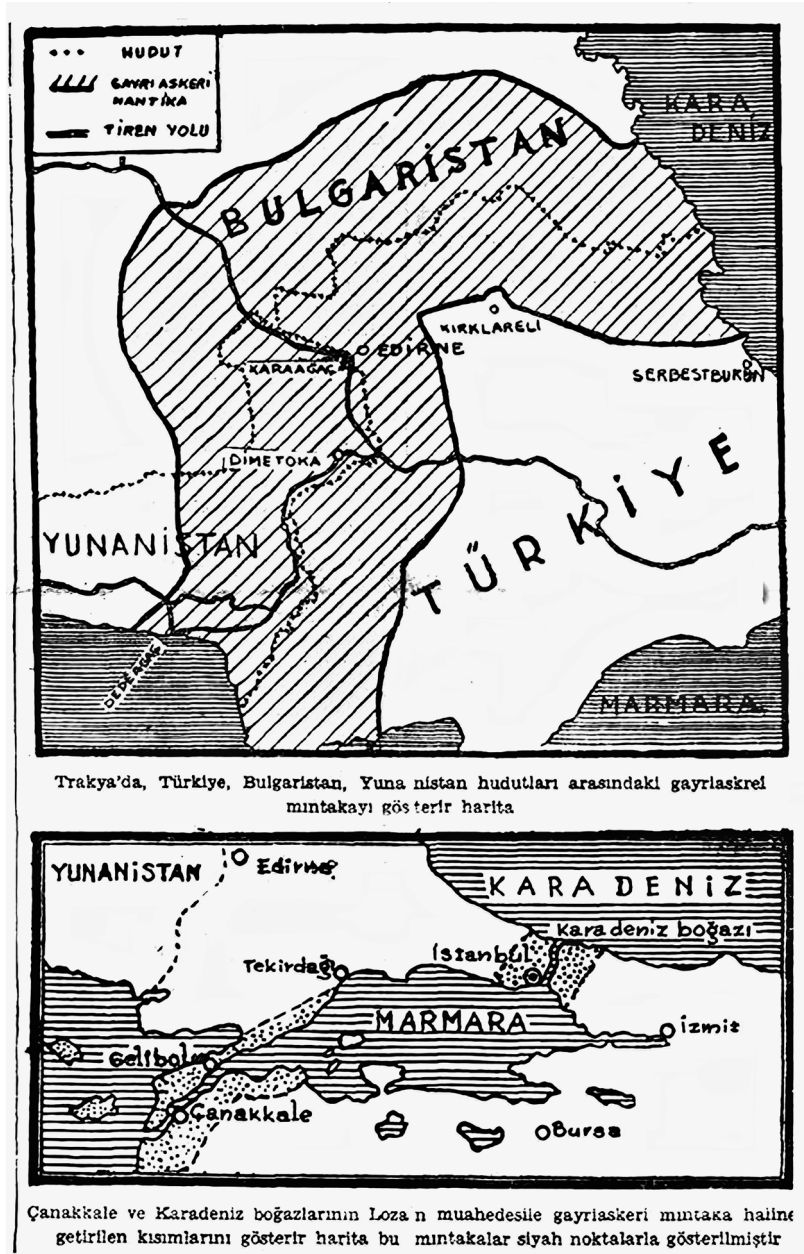
- 13 40,041 of those exchanges settled in Edirne, 22,237 in Tekirdağ, and 19,920 in Kırklareli. See: Arı 2014, 113. For a different study which sets the number of settlers at 49,441 for Edirne, 33,728 for Tekirdağ, and 33,119 for Kırklareli, see: Ladas 1932, 711–2. For alternative figures provided by Recep Peker, minister of the interior, see: Öztürk 1994, 370–1. Peker announced that the number of migrants who arrived in Thrace through the exchange was 73,502 as of November 1924.
- 14 Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Başvekalet İstatistik Umum Müdürlüğü 1929.
- 15 On agricultural mechanization and its gradual rollback, see: *Trakya İstatistik Yıllığı* 1938, 94.
- 16 Because Thrace was integrated into global agricultural markets since the late Ottoman period, the presence of machinery and foreigners was not alien to the region. See: '33 Yıl Önce Çorlu'da Tarım Teknisyenini Olarak Çalışan Bir Alman Dün Yurdumuza Geldi,' *Cumhuriyet*, 21 September 1962, 5. For an earlier personal account on the subject, see: Esendal 1999, 89–90.
- 17 On the problems in fuel provision and distribution for agricultural purposes, see: Tekeli and İlkin 2009, 189–90. For a more local account of the problem, see: Yunus Nadi, 'Ziraat ve Petrol,' *Cumhuriyet*, 1 May 1930, 1.
- 18 On regional agricultural production, see: *Trakya İstatistik Yıllığı* 1938, 95–102.
- 19 On the Great Depression's deleterious effects on regional agriculture, see: Tekeli and İlkin 2009, 217–8; Başaranlar 2020, 81–8. For a more local report, see: Pelvanoğlu Ekrem, 'Çorlu'nun İhtiyaçları,' *Vakit*, 6 September 1933, 6.
- 20 Devlet Arşivleri Başkanlığı Cumhuriyet Arşivi (Directorate of State Archives, Republican Archives, İstanbul, hereafter DABCA). 30.10 / 81-531-20, 25 September 1939.

weight of unfolding social and economic crises.<sup>21</sup> Nor could the local industry offer a substantial crutch to Thrace's inhabitants at a time the region's agricultural fabric was fraying. Besides flour mills, dairy farms, and a few vegetable oil extraction facilities, Thrace's industry mainly consisted of a sugar beet processing factory in Alpullu, which opened in 1926 and remained the region's only nationally significant plant until the mid-1950s.

Equally alarming for the locals, and perhaps even more so for the country's elites, was the question of borderland security. Trampled by consecutive wars, the native population was weary, apprehensive, and light-footed in anticipation of another wave of violence that could wash them ashore on the Anatolian hinterland. Their fears had a basis as much in history, memory, and lived experience as in structural constraints sapping the strength of borderland defense. The Lausanne Treaty had introduced one demilitarized zone (DMZ) along Turkey's border with Greece and Bulgaria and another around the Turkish Straits. The DMZ in Thrace traced along both sides of the frontier to a depth of about 30 kilometers, except for an area around Kırkkilise. It stipulated the removal of all existing fortifications and field works, prohibited the construction of new military installations, and stripped Turkey of the right to station troops within the DMZ,<sup>22</sup> save for a maximum of 5,000 special elements that included border guards, customs officers, police, and gendarmerie forces to safeguard internal order.<sup>23</sup> The latter DMZ extended along the Turkish Straits, enforcing similar conditions in an area that covered the Gallipoli peninsula, some chunks of the Anatolian and European coasts of the Marmara Sea, and both shores of the Bosphorus up to a line of 15 kilometers. The convention also compromised borderland defenses by capping the military forces earmarked for the security of İstanbul at a maximum of 12,000 men and forbidding permanent defensive works within the DMZ, including naval bases, aerial organizations, coastal artillery, and submarine engines of war. Moreover, the treaty internationalized aspects of the area's administration by enacting an international commission to oversee a new regime of the Straits, which allowed the liberal passage of commercial vessels and warships in both peace and wartime with minimal restrictions.<sup>24</sup>

- 21 On the collapse of grain exchange in Uzunköprü, Çorlu, and Lüleburgaz, see: DABCA 30.18.1.2 / 27-29-7, 24 April 1932; DABCA 30.18.1.2 / 37-41-17, 1 June 1933; DABCA 30.18.1.2 / 85-92-18, 19 October 1938.
- 22 Officially, the highest ranked officer within the DMZ in Thrace could be a lieutenant colonel who commanded the border guards from his office in Edirne. On military participation in Edirne's public life and national rituals, see: Çetin 2020, 67–8.
- 23 The draft convention had also included a clause slashing the defense of all European possessions of Turkey to 20,000 men, including a maximum of 12,000 troops that could be based in İstanbul. The article was later dropped in the final terms of the treaty. For the draft, see: Lausanne Conference 1923, 785–90. For the final convention, see: Soysal 2000, 161–3.
- 24 For the Convention Relating to the Regime of the Straits, see: Soysal 2000, 154–8. For the progression of territorial negotiations regarding the Straits and Thrace at Lausanne, see: Lausanne Conference 1923, 19–288.

Figure 1. Two maps published in *Cumhuriyet* on 26 March 1933 showing the situation in Thrace following the Treaty of Lausanne. They show the demilitarized zone and the rail lines around the international border (above) and the demilitarized zones around the Bosphorus and Dardanelles (below).





The establishment of two DMZs and an international Straits regime in the borderland under these conventions fanned into flames a crisis of sovereignty in Turkey. Within the regime of checkered sovereignty that the peace treaty foresaw in Thrace, there was little room for political and military maneuvering to ensure borderland safety. Military maneuvering was limited also in the most literal sense. Aside from the infrastructure that the peace treaty barred from construction, the existing transportation infrastructure of Thrace was not conducive in the least to the movement of troops and materiel. The most developed regional road that linked Edirne and İstanbul was a menace to anything on wheels with its numerous potholes and mud fields, resembling more ‘a goat trail’ than a public road.<sup>25</sup> The railroad was run by an international company notorious for its high tariffs,<sup>26</sup> and its meandering tracks crossed Greek territory to reach the last Turkish stop at Edirne before exiting again for foreign lands – this time Bulgarian – just a few kilometers away.<sup>27</sup> Military logistics primarily hinged on this curving legacy of the 1915 border rectification and subsequent wars, and the track’s wayward itinerary was another factor compounding the sense that the Turkish sovereignty over Thrace was dangerously derailed. In one stark example of how the railroad exacerbated the crisis of sovereignty, the Turkish MPs who took the train to celebrate Edirne’s liberation day were stopped in Greek territory and returned to Turkey because their wagon was draped with Turkish flags which they refused to take down.<sup>28</sup>

Consequently, from 1923 to 1934, Thrace, which would later require nearly half of the Turkish army for its defense in 1940–1941, was entrusted to two infantry divisions and a cavalry division headquartered in İstanbul, Çorlu, and Kırklareli, all operating under III Army Corps, to protect a narrow strip of land that was in flux, devoid of natural defenses, deprived of infrastructure, and short on human resources.<sup>29</sup> It was on these shifting sands that the Republican elite sought to build a castle, and the task they set themselves required not only diplomatic finesse but also an overarching regional policy.

### 3. Diplomatic Borderwork

If Thrace’s defense was a leaky ceiling that Turkey sought to handle with the few buckets in its allowance, the positive news for the Turkish elite was that there were no

25 On the ‘unimaginably poor’ condition of the road, see: Abidin Daver, ‘Seyyah Getirmek İçin,’ *Cumhuriyet*, 12 July 1932, 3. Also see: ‘İstanbul-Edirne Yolu,’ *Vakit*, 24 June 1933, 1.

26 On the economic impact of railroad tariffs on agricultural prices, see: DABCA 30.10 / 72-475-2, 28 August 1935; DABCA 490.1 / 643-130-1, 25 July 1935.

27 For an early suggestion to build new tracks to bypass the foreign strip of the railroad, see: DABCA 30.10 / 151-59-5, 11 March 1939 [1923]. The project was not realized until 1971, almost fifty years after its original proposal. For a more general account of the history of the railroad, see: Engin 1993.

28 Erkin 2010, 288.

29 On the postwar force disposition of the Turkish army, see: Genelkurmay Harp Tarihi Başkanlığı 1973, 35. On force levels in Thrace during World War II, see: Tekeli and İlkin 2013, 183, 431.

clouds of war gathering in sight. After Lausanne, the most serious threat to Turkey's western frontiers came from Italy.<sup>30</sup> Arriving at the colonial sweepstakes belatedly with the fervor of a latecomer, Italy was able to wrest away the Dodecanese Islands from the Ottomans, becoming the newly-minted republic's naval neighbor in the Aegean. The postwar militarization of the Italian islands just off the Turkish coast was received with great concern by Turkey.<sup>31</sup> While Turkish rulers feared that these islands could become a bridgehead for Italian expansionism in the Mediterranean, Italians insisted that their Aegean possessions were in fact a liability that needed protection due to their distance from the mainland. Not entirely convinced of Italian intentions, Turkey closely monitored port visits and the progress of military traffic and construction in the Aegean, focusing particularly on the developments in Rhodes and Leros.<sup>32</sup> Despite the rocky start, however, Turkish-Italian relations also showed signs of improvement at times, climaxing in the signing of a neutrality treaty in 1928 and going through cooling and warming cycles punctuated by the occasional explosive Mussolini speech.<sup>33</sup>

A more immediate threat to Thrace could come through the Balkans from the direction of Greece and Bulgaria. While Turkish-Greek relations were on the mend after the war and subsequent population exchange, Bulgaria proved to be a more intractable neighbor for Turkey. Disarmed to the bare minimum by the Treaty of Neuilly in 1919, Bulgarian military capabilities were no match for Turkey.<sup>34</sup> However, Turkey was concerned not so much with the present military might of Bulgaria as with the possibility of a future Bulgarian-Italian alignment around an expansionist vision. Bulgaria in the interwar period was a hotbed of political strife and resentment, with numerous revolutionary movements, secret societies, and paramilitaries operating alongside the formal political system to reverse the 'national castration' and postwar status quo brought by Neuilly. Deprived of its former possessions in Thrace, Macedonia, and Dobrudja, irredentist sentiments ran high. Several organizations, like

30 For a detailed overview of Turkish-Italian relations during the era, see: Pabuççular 2020. On Turkish threat perceptions of Italy, see: Güvenç and Barlas 2014, 109–29; Deringil 1989, 7.

31 DABCA 30.10 / 236-594-11, 31 May 1924.

32 For port visits of concern, see: DABCA 30.10 / 236-595-10, 16 December 1925; DABCA 30.10 / 236-596-24, 28 April 1928; DABCA 30.10 / 236-597-4, 26 May 1929. On troop and material deployment and military construction on the islands, see: DABCA 30.10 / 253-708-22, 4 January 1925; DABCA 30.10 / 253-708-35, 16 April 1925; DABCA 30.10 / 236-594-38, 17 May 1925. For intelligence on Rhodes, see: DABCA 30.10 / 236-594-12, 1 June 1924; DABCA 30.10 / 236-595-22, 23 March 1926, DABCA 30.10 / 238-605-14, 20 December 1934.

33 On a Mussolini address which led to a cabinet call and a subsequent war exercise in 1926, see: Erkin 2010, 271. On Mussolini's infamous speech on 18 March 1934 which led to a protest by the Turkish ambassador in Rome, see: T.C. Dışişleri Bakanlığı Araştırma ve Siyaset Planlama Genel Müdürlüğü 1973, 348–9. For Turkish preparations on the ground, see: Kocatürk 1999, 145–8.

34 On Bulgarian military capabilities and threat perceptions, see: Yavaşcev 2005, 169–90.



the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (IMRO), Internal Thracian Revolutionary Organization (ITRO), Internal Dobrujan Revolutionary Organization (IDRO), Internal Western Outland Revolutionary Organization (IWORO), and right-wing groups like *Rodna Zashitita* garnered substantial support, and worked, sometimes at cross purposes, to restore a greater Bulgaria. As a result, Bulgaria had territorial conflicts with all its neighbors, which included the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes (later Yugoslavia), Greece, Romania, and Turkey at the time.<sup>35</sup>

The relative autonomy of these centrifugal political actors from the government thus laid the basis of an uneasy, if not paranoid, relationship between Turkey and Bulgaria from the outset. On the one hand, both governments sought to maintain good neighborly ties, which brought into existence a treaty of friendship in 1925 and a neutrality agreement in 1929. On the other hand, the Turkish government watched with caution the fomenting of grassroots discontent, which occasionally lent itself to acts of violence against the Turkish minority in Bulgaria, whose number exceeded 500,000 at the time.<sup>36</sup> Of particular concern for the security of Turkey were the activities of ITRO, later the Committee of Free Thrace (CFT), which drew its lifeblood from those uprooted from Western and Eastern Thrace during the previous decades. The committee's activities picked up steam in 1933, manifesting in the form of propaganda publications, louder territorial claims over Greek and Turkish Thrace, extortion of funds from minorities, and ostentatious demonstrations in the borderland areas, including one in the border town of Svilengrad.<sup>37</sup> Agitated by the committee's increasing clout and audacity, Turkish authorities followed the situation closely, often prodding the Bulgarian government to act upon these unruly elements to perform its friendship with Turkey.<sup>38</sup> The Turkish press paid close attention to the committee's intrigues as well,<sup>39</sup> with columnists amplifying the chorus that Bulgaria would have to crack down on the committee if it was to prove its potency as a government and an ally.<sup>40</sup> Yet, Bulgarian sincerity would remain in question for years to come, with or without the committee.<sup>41</sup>

35 For a general account of interwar Bulgaria, see: Crampton 2006, 145–60.

36 DABCA 30.10 / 241-627-26, 7 May 1933.

37 DABCA 30.10 / 241-631-22, 14 November 1933; 'Svilengrad'daki Nümayiş,' *Cumhuriyet*, 20 January 1934, 1, 6.

38 DABCA 30.10 / 241-627-20, 25 April 1933; DABCA 30.10 / 241-631-34, 13 December 1933; DABCA 490.1 / 607-105-14, 15 September 1934.

39 Ali Naci, 'Trakya Komitasının İç Yüzü,' *Cumhuriyet*, 8–16 August 1933, 4; 'Bulgarların Trakya Cemiyeti İşi Azıtıyor,' *Cumhuriyet*, 13 October 1933, 3; 'Trakya Cemiyeti Ötüp Duruyor,' *Cumhuriyet*, 10 December 1933, 1, 5.

40 Yunus Nadi, 'Bulgaristan'la Türkiye Arasındaki Hakiki Vaziyet,' *Cumhuriyet*, 10 September 1934, 1, 3.

41 Yunus Nadi, 'Razgrat Hadisesi ve Bulgaristan II,' *Cumhuriyet*, 29 April 1933, 1; 'İki Cepheli Beyanat mı?' *Cumhuriyet*, 9 December 1933; 3; 'Trakya Komitası Hududumuz Üstünde Kongre Aktediyor,' *Cumhuriyet*, 6 January 1934, 5; 'Bulgar Dostluğu! Altı Bin Bulgar Hudutta Nümayiş Yapacaklardı,' *Cumhuriyet*, 17 January 1934, 1.

In view of these perceived threats to its Western frontiers, the Turkish foreign policy in the 1920s and early 1930s relied mainly on bilateral diplomacy. Turkey concluded a series of bilateral agreements with Balkan countries on various terms ranging from friendship and neutrality treaties to conciliation, arbitration, and cordiality agreements.<sup>42</sup> It also participated in annual Balkan conferences with Albania, Bulgaria, Greece, Romania, and Yugoslavia to foster stability and political rapprochement in the region from 1930 onward.<sup>43</sup> Nonetheless, the early 1930s saw transformations in the global order that upset the fragile vase of postwar peace placed on the wobbly table of Versailles, Trianon, Saint-Germain, Neuilly, and Lausanne. Japan officially withdrew from the League of Nations, and Germany followed suit by leaving both the League and the world disarmament conference under a rising Hitler, all in 1933.<sup>44</sup> With the League's authority eroding, disarmament talks stalling, and polarized factions crystallizing, Turkey's diplomatic strategy that had hinged on bilateral agreements began to give way to a more comprehensive vision of regional defense by way of multilateral negotiations.

Accordingly, the same year, the Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs made its first pleas at the disarmament conference and the League of Nations for the revision of the Straits regime with a view to national security and deterrence for world peace.<sup>45</sup> It was also at this point that the Balkan negotiations took an accelerated course and resulted in the Balkan Pact between Greece, Romania, Turkey, and Yugoslavia on 9 February 1934. The pact aimed to guarantee the mutual security of the region and included an annex that foresaw collective military preparedness in the event of aggression against the signatories' common Balkan frontiers. The pact was also left open to future recruitment, forcing Bulgaria's hand to choose between joining the anti-revisionist bloc or wallowing in isolation.

The pact, however, was defanged from its inception due to varying interpretations of what kinds of circumstances, beyond isolated Bulgarian aggression, would provoke it into effect with what measures of collective defense. While seeking to prevent a Bulgarian-Italian alignment, Turkey wanted to introduce a reserve clause to the pact to placate the worries of its principal interwar ally, the Soviets, which laid territorial claims to the Bessarabia region of Romania. Meanwhile, Greece weighed whether pacifying Bulgaria was worth alienating Italy. Despite İnönü's pledges that the pact existed to pin down Bulgaria, whose intentions regarding both Greek and Turkish Thrace were far from reassuring, Venizelos, once an ardent supporter of the pact, managed to introduce a reserve clause to appease Italy during the pact's ratification in

42 Aside from those already mentioned, these included conventions with Yugoslavia in 1925 and 1933, with Albania in 1923, with Greece in 1930 and 1933, and with Romania in 1933. The 1925 nonaggression pact with Russia and the 1929 neutrality treaty with Hungary were also vital to the Balkan security.

43 On the annual Balkan conferences, see: Kerner and Howard 1936.

44 On the disarmament conference and its eventual failure, see: Noel-Baker 1979.

45 For the Turkish attempts to bring the Straits regime to the agenda of the League of Nations and the world disarmament conference, see: Aras 1945, 122–5.

Greece in March 1934.<sup>46</sup> The Greek reservation was untimely for Turkey, as Mussolini delivered another fiery speech the same month, defining the historical objective of Italy as its spiritual and material expansion in Asia and Africa. Notwithstanding their diplomatic efforts, the Turkish elite thus continued to subscribe to a conception of sovereignty that stretched thin around the European edges of the country. For this reason, they decided to hitch to their wagon of diplomacy a more concrete regional policy concerning Thrace.

#### 4. Marshaling Development

From 1934 onward, the Turkish elite began to articulate in clearer terms a vision of Thrace as a frontier of utmost significance. Viewed through an emergent geopolitical lens colored by a logic of nesting orientalism,<sup>47</sup> they conceived Thrace as a frontier in three major respects. First, Thrace was Turkey's geographical frontier because it was cut off from the country's Anatolian heartland by the Straits. Second, as Turkey's vestigial land in Europe, Thrace was Turkey's symbolic frontier because it set the country apart from the Orient. In other words, Thrace functioned as a territorial index of Turkish claims to Western cultural identity. 'Without Thrace, İstanbul, and the Straits,' Turkey's minister of the interior stated in a 1935 press conference, 'Turkey would become like Afghanistan.'<sup>48</sup> Other commentators extended the analogy to Iran and Turkestan.<sup>49</sup> Third, Thrace was a military frontier because it was a bridgehead for possible enemy campaigns, a frontier whose vulnerability was amplified by its terrain, demography, infrastructure, and demilitarized condition. The latter was crucial in this respect. Without the sovereign right to militarize its territories, a columnist remarked, Turkey's defense posture would resemble that of a man stretching his legs across a river and leaning back with a banana peel under his foot.<sup>50</sup> It would take an exceptional level of stupidity and blindness, the same commentator argued, to fail to appreciate the significance of Thrace.

In light of a renewed appreciation of Thrace's significance, the government inaugurated the Inspectorate General of Thrace (hereafter IGT) on 19 February 1934, ten days after the Balkan Pact's formation, and appointed İbrahim Tali Öngören as its first inspector-general on 18 March 1934, the same day of Mussolini's Italian expansionism speech.<sup>51</sup> The inspectorate general, the second of its kind in Turkey, was the institutional manifestation of the elites' emergent geopolitical vision regarding Thrace. The official task of IGT was the proper organization and administration of migrant

46 T.C. Dışişleri Bakanlığı Araştırma ve Siyaset Planlama Genel Müdürlüğü 1973, 457–8.

47 On nesting orientalism, see: Bakic-Hayden 1995.

48 Us 2012, 81–2.

49 Abidin Daver, 'Trakya'nın Ehemmiyeti,' *Cumhuriyet*, 28 June 1934, 3; Ebuzziya Zade, 'Biraz da Trakyalıları Düşünsek,' *Zaman*, 13 June 1934, 13.

50 Abidin Daver 1934, 3.

51 On general inspectorates in Turkey, see: Koçak 2016.

settlement and infrastructural development in Thrace.<sup>52</sup> Although IGT was a civilian administration, its first chief, Öngören, came from a military background, as did his successors Kazım Dirik and Abidin Özmen.<sup>53</sup> Vested with state authority on a supra-provincial scale, inspectors-general of IGT served as the state's eyes and ears on the peripheries they served, resembling marcher lords aiming at the control and internal colonization of unstable frontiers. IGT continued to function until 1948, but the bulk of its activities took place between Öngören's appointment in 1934 and Kazım Dirik's death in 1941.

On the whole, IGT constituted the civilian fulcrum of a regional policy that pivoted around three integrated goals: Thrace's repopulation, redevelopment, and refortification. If the chief instruments of the latter goal were foreign diplomacy and military reorganization, the means of achieving the others were migrant settlement and infrastructural development. IGT was formally in charge of the latter, yet neither of these could be achieved without the other. Repopulation was a prerequisite for development and security, for without a fixed population tending the land and providing fighting power, borderland prosperity and defense would be doomed to failure. In the absence of the means to sustain security and development, however, people could not be fixed on the land. The totality of coordinated civilian and military efforts to these integrated ends is what I call a policy of marshaling development.<sup>54</sup>

In this regard, Öngören's report upon his first regional inspection trip in May and June 1934 provides not only a panoramic view of Thrace from his gaze, which was colored by securitism and antisemitism, but also a window into the constitutive logics of marshaling development. 'The view today is a nomadic one unsure of its moorings,' wrote Öngören to describe the state of the region at the time.<sup>55</sup> For him, Thrace's desired progress, strength, security, and above all, economic activity depended on population growth.<sup>56</sup> However, population growth would be unattainable with the prevailing mindset that setting down roots in Thrace was tantamount to exposing oneself to a future gust of catastrophe.<sup>57</sup> Therefore, the local population's spirit had to be uplifted by molding Thrace into a fortified zone equipped with defenses along every inch of the territory.<sup>58</sup> Yet, coming back full circle, Thrace's defense would demand at least a million settled people to repel a threat from the Balkans.<sup>59</sup> In the

52 DABCA 30.10.1.2 / 42-8-10, 19 February 1934.

53 On İbrahim Tali Öngören's career as the inspector-general of eastern provinces and Thrace, see: Pekesen 2008. On a hagiographic account of Kazım Dirik's military and political life, see: Dirik 2016. On Abidin Özmen, see: Dündar 2012.

54 I use the term 'marshaling' due to its military and spatial connotations. In its noun form, the word describes a high-ranking military officer. As a verb, it refers to an arrangement of elements in order, as for battle.

55 DABCA 490.1 / 643-130-1, 25 July 1935, 55.

56 *idem*, 26.

57 *idem*, 20.

58 *idem*, 31.

59 *idem*, 71.

words of Öngören's successor Kazım Dirik, the key to the policy's success was the conduct of settlement in proportion to the military situation at hand.<sup>60</sup> Only in this way could a demographic force that would be sufficient to maintain and feed the military in wartime, the core of the policy for Dirik, be raised in Thrace.<sup>61</sup>

## 5. Civilian Efforts

The demographic target of raising the population of Thrace to at least a million people and doing so within five years was an ambitious goal,<sup>62</sup> considering the number of people inhabiting the land from Çatalca and Silivri to the Gallipoli peninsula stood at 461,428, according to the most recent census.<sup>63</sup> Even with a sound plan for migrant settlement, where could the republic summon an additional 500,000 people to double the regional population? The obvious candidate was the Turkish minority in Bulgaria, whose size correlated with the demand. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs had already relayed reports to the government that strongly recommended the transfer of nearly half a million Muslim Pomaks and Turks to Thrace or Anatolia at all costs, so they would not be forced to relinquish their ethnic and cultural identity under persecution.<sup>64</sup>

However, large-scale migration from Bulgaria proved less practicable than hoped because of the political and economic obstacles in the way of their relocation. Those who wanted to leave the country faced difficulties liquidating their properties for a fair price and customs restrictions in transferring their assets across the border. Moreover, Bulgaria prohibited the movement of all Turkish minorities to Turkey in April before drifting further into a crisis with a coup that ousted the government in May.<sup>65</sup> Another option for settlement were the minorities in other Balkan countries. Romania in particular emerged as Turkey's partner in settlement by facilitating the flow of migrants and the conversion of their assets.<sup>66</sup> Romania also struck a later deal with Turkey to streamline migration from its contested Dobrudja frontier while untapping funds for Turkey's use in exchange for the properties minorities left behind.<sup>67</sup>

60 Varlık 2010, 174–5.

61 *idem*, 196.

62 The goal of accommodating at least one million people in Thrace was reiterated by the minister of the interior Şükrü Kaya and inspector-general Kazım Dirik. See: 'Kamutayda Hareketli Bir Celse,' *Cumhuriyet*, 19 November 1935, 1, 8; DABCA 30.10 / 72-475-3, 3 October 1935.

63 Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Başvekalet İstatistik Umum Müdürlüğü 1929.

64 DABCA 30.10 / 241-627-26, 7 May 1933; DABCA 30.10 / 241-629-15, 17 June 1933.

65 DABCA 30.10 / 242-633-9, 30 April 1934.

66 This is not to say that Bulgaria's role in settlement was negligible. The number of Muslim settlers from Bulgaria was comparable to their Romanian counterparts from 1934 to 1939. Here, the comparison is not in absolute but in relative terms.

67 These funds were crucial to offset the construction expenses for migrant housing, especially for wood procurement. See: DABCA 30.10 / 81-531-5, 5 March 1935; DABCA 30.18.1.2 / 56-52-17, 19 June 1935; DABCA 30.18.1.2 / 64-37-2, 9 May 1936; DABCA

Meanwhile, the Turkish government passed a new settlement law on 14 June 1934. The law laid out the principles with which the relocation of citizens and settlement of immigrants would proceed on a national scale with a view to assimilating the diverse elements of the country into a unified Turkish nation. Even before the law's coming into force, migrants from Romania and some from Bulgaria had begun to fan out across Thrace under IGT's supervision.<sup>68</sup> Because settlement encompassed more than the physical transfer of people across international space and also denoted a process through which immigrants would become productive forces tending and defending the land, IGT sought to furnish the newcomers with various means of production from land, shelter, and draft animals to seed grains, farm equipment, and credit.

Of these, land and shelter were the most crucial to fix the immigrants in their place, but also the most challenging to provide. Although uncultivated lands lay in abundance, public land available for cheap distribution was scarce because the abandoned properties of the former non-Muslim inhabitants of Thrace had already been distributed to earlier migrants and exchangees or were still occupied by squatters.<sup>69</sup> A cabinet decree was passed on 25 April 1935 to solve the land question. The decree authorized the expropriation of 178 private farmlands (*çiftlik*) across Thrace in proportion to the need and in line with the regional settlement plan that sought to accommodate 350,000 immigrants in Thrace over the following five years.<sup>70</sup> Housing was another complex matter closely tied to the land question. Construction was seasonal and depended on a vast manual labor force, a plenitude of land, and a wealth of construction materials that required the deployment of enormous human and financial resources.

Despite ritual celebrations of immigrants-turned-sheltered producers in the press, the speed and efficacy with which settlement progressed were subpar due to problems of land, construction, and funding. Complaining about the inadequacy of preparations to cope with immigration, Öngören conveyed the news in late 1934 that most migrants who came to Thrace since the spring, numbering over 15,000, had to take temporary shelter in preexisting local homes. With another 20,000 standing ready to depart from Romania, Öngören asked for fundraising support to free the weak shoulders of the local population from this burden, for they had not yet bounced back from a long history of occupation.<sup>71</sup>

The following year, IGT reported that the number of immigrants in Thrace reached 39,124 while predicting 4,000 families would be left without homes with the current pace of construction.<sup>72</sup> A year later, Refik Saydam, Minister of Health and Social Relief, suggested diverting the incoming 25,000 people from Thrace to Anatolia on

30.10 / 123-880-2 30 September 1938; DABCA 30.18.1.2 / 94-34-8, 21 April 1941.

68 'Çorlu'da Muhacirler İçin Yeni Bir Köy Kuruluyor,' *Cumhuriyet*, 6 June 1934, 2.

69 On land scarcity, see: DABCA 30.10 / 72-472-8, 28 November 1934; DABCA 30.18.1.2 / 65-50-14, 12 June 1936.

70 DABCA 30.18.1.2 / 54-31-1, 25 April 1935.

71 DABCA 30.10 / 72-472-7, 10 November 1934.

72 DABCA 30.10 / 72-475-2, 28 August 1935.



the grounds that there was a backlog of 10,000 homeless families in Thrace.<sup>73</sup> As the number of homeless piled up, the slow absorption of homeless immigrants took precedence over the transfer of new ones. Therefore, 1936 and 1937 were lost years for the cause of rapid settlement in Thrace. Immigration slowed down to such a trickle that the minister of the interior protested another proposal to settle a portion of migrants in Anatolia instead of Thrace in 1938, flagging this as a deviation from the settlement plan, which was designed in congruence with the General Staff to reinforce cultural unity and defensive strength.<sup>74</sup>

In a nutshell, the civilian leg of marshaling development fell short of expectations. Notwithstanding incremental progress in population growth and agricultural production, Thrace would have to wait until the 1960s to hit the population target of one million.<sup>75</sup> The 1940 census indicated the regional population at 870,569, a far cry from the original settlement goals, considering that an estimated 192,831 of those were soldiers camped in Thrace during World War II.<sup>76</sup> Irrespective of its shortcomings, however, the migrant settlement had a profound impact on regional development patterns.

Implicit in the geopolitical lens of the elites marshaling development in Thrace was a geographical as well as a geometrical bias that informed their locational preferences for the allocation of people and resources. The 1934 Settlement Law had designated three settlement zones: 1) zones in which an increased density of culturally Turkish populations was desired, 2) zones slated for the transfer of those whose assimilation into the Turkish culture was desired, and 3) zones in which evacuation for health, economic, cultural, political, military, or security reasons was desired, and where settlement was prohibited. In their administration of settlement in Thrace, IGT elites layered another tripartite division upon the 1934 settlement law's zoning plan, which, to a curious extent, reflected Thrace's spatial partition into demilitarized and sovereign zones at Lausanne. In his report to the party, Öngören advised against settling Muslim immigrants from the Balkans along the Bulgarian and Greek frontier or on the Black Sea coast, suggesting the concentration of immigrants near the Straits and inland areas to bolster their resilience on the land.<sup>77</sup> A later report from Kazım Dirik demonstrates that Öngören's spatial vision of settlement that divided Thrace into an 'outer rim' of instability and a relatively secure 'zone of the interior' was at play. Almost one-third of all the 5,365 migrant homes completed or under construction in late 1935 were corralled in Çorlu, an inland town and the emergent military hub

73 DABCA 30.18.1.2 / 65-50-14, 12 June 1936.

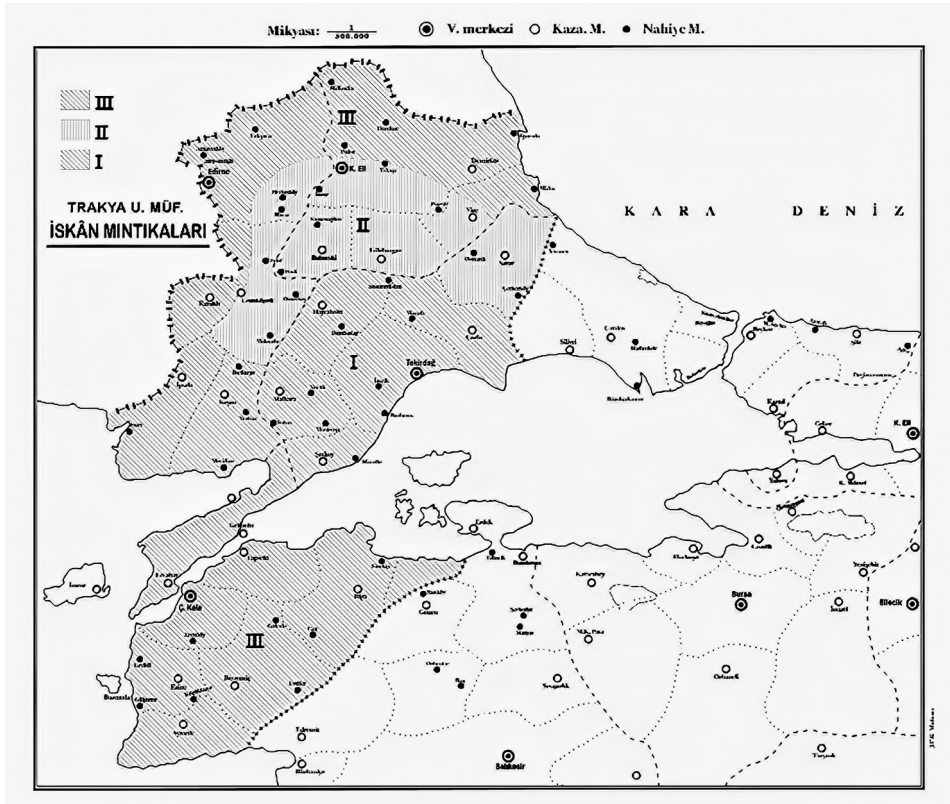
74 DABCA 30.10 / 81-531-16, 21 July 1938.

75 Başbakanlık İstatistik Genel Direktörlüğü 1941.

76 The estimated figure is calculated by subtracting the regional male population from female population. Because the 1940 census counted military personnel at the garrisons where they served, soldiers were represented in local population figures. The regional male surplus of 192,831 people corresponded to 22.15 percent of Thrace's total population in 1940, the highest mark of all time as far as census data available on the region is concerned.

77 DABCA 490.1 / 643-130-1, 25 July 1935, 71.

Figure 2. Inspector-General İbrahim Tali Öngören's zoning plan for the settlement of Thrace, dated 25 July 1935. The map is a faithful digitalization of the original, held in the Turkish state archives at DABCA 490.1 / 643-130-1.



of Thrace. Other inland towns, like Hayrabolu, Lüleburgaz, and Malkara, followed Çorlu's uncontested lead, whereas the aggregate figure for Edirne and Kırklareli, Thrace's largest cities at the time, which were near the border, stood at a total of mere ten homes.<sup>78</sup> Based on tender notices for housing contracts advertised in the local and national press, it is plausible to assume that later years brought little, if any, change to this geometric settlement pattern.<sup>79</sup>

78 DABCA 30.10 / 72-475-4, 14 October 1935.

79 'Tekirdağ İskan Müdürlüğünden,' *Tekirdağ Vilayet Gazetesi*, 18 June 1936, 3; 'Tekirdağ İskan Müdürlüğünden,' *Cumhuriyet*, 17 July 1937, 10; 'Tekirdağ İskan Müdürlüğünden,' *Tekirdağ Vilayet Gazetesi*, 12 May 1938, 3; 'Tekirdağ İskan Müdürlüğünden,' *Tekirdağ Vilayet Gazetesi*, 15 June 1939, 4; 'Tekirdağ İskan Müdürlüğünden,' *Tekirdağ Vilayet Gazetesi*, 24 August 1939, 2.

Marshaling development within a calculus of graduated sovereignty,<sup>80</sup> where a place's position vis-a-vis the frontier informed the size and form of allocations due to it, contoured the concave development of Thrace. Locals were acutely aware of the inward shifting of Thrace's gravity. In Kırklareli, people were agitated by the repeating rumor that the provincial center would move from their city to the inland town of Lüleburgaz.<sup>81</sup> After a bus trip to the town, the chief editor of a Kırklareli newspaper wrote:

Somehow in this early morning, Lüleburgaz appeared to me like a proud enemy. With its buildings, I heard it shouting in my face, 'I will become the provincial center!' and moved on without looking around, in a combination of anger and envy toward the proud fellow.<sup>82</sup>

The money disbursed to a single Çorlu-based contractor for his migrant housing construction from 1936 to 1939 alone was almost on par with the provincial budget of Tekirdağ and nearly ten times more than the municipal budget of Çorlu.<sup>83</sup>

## 6. Sovereign Steps

The year 1934 was an inflection point and a milestone not only for civilian administration but also for military reorganization in Thrace. A week into Öngören's region-wide inspection trip, a law dated 12 May 1934 authorized the release of extraordinary funds in the amount of 49.5 million liras to be spent over several years by the Ministry of National Defense, a figure which accounted for over 20 percent of the 1934 national budget.<sup>84</sup> The law authorizing this amount, numbered 2425, was part of the Second Military Supply Plan for armed forces modernization. Two days later, and on the ratification day of the 1934 Settlement Law, the Ministry of National Defense further asked for the authorization of negotiated tendering for urgent military construction at the estimated cost of 400 thousand liras in the III Army Corps area.<sup>85</sup> With the end of the construction season looming and soldiers still awaiting shelter, a later cabinet decree allowed additional funding and force account to expedite military construction, which practically meant the exploitation of soldier labor to get the job done by

80 On graduated sovereignty, see: Ong 2000. For an application of the concept to borderland studies, see: Plummer 2022.

81 İnönü's diaries indicate that the rumor had some credibility, but the plan for relocating the provincial center was not realized. See: İnönü 2017, 153. On local fears, see: 'Vilayetimiz Kalkıyor mu?' *Trakya'da Yeşilyurt*, 28 January 1935, 1; 'Lüleburgaz Vilayet Merkezi mi Oluyor?' *Trakya'da Yeşilyurt*, 12 January 1939, 1; 'Vilayet Kalkması İşİ Mevzu Bahis Değildir,' *Trakya'da Yeşilyurt*, 8 June 1939, 1.

82 Ali Rıza Dursunkaya, 'Seyahat Notları,' *Trakya'da Yeşilyurt*, 13 July 1939, 1.

83 DABCA 270.0.0.80 / 4-13-3, 31 December 1939.

84 Tekeli and İlkin 2013, 95–6.

85 DABCA 30.18.1.2 / 46-43-11, 19 May 1934.

the winter.<sup>86</sup> All this frantic activity foreshadowed a large-scale military reorganization that coincided with the settlement of migrants in Thrace. As the establishment of a separate İstanbul Command was underway, III Army Corps was freed up to relocate farther west into Thrace.<sup>87</sup>

The new corps headquarters was to be located in Çorlu, the town at the center of settlement efforts. Concurrent with the influx of migrants and soldiers to Çorlu was the exodus of Jewish inhabitants from the town and Thrace at large. On the day the 1934 Settlement Law came into effect, the Jews of Thrace, particularly those in Çanakkale, Edirne, and Kırklareli, started to face boycotts and physical violence across the region, receiving unsigned letters threatening them to leave or risk harm. As a result of violence, an estimated 3,000 people, roughly one-fifth of the Jewish population in Thrace at the time, liquidated their assets and left the region. Whether in the form of migrant settlement or non-Muslim expulsion, Thrace's repopulation was bound closely to its militarization. In one stark example from Çorlu, a local witness narrated that the day townsfolk celebrated the decision that III Corps headquarters would resettle in the town was also the day the episode of violence came to an end in Çorlu.<sup>88</sup>

The new defense posturing and increasing troop concentration also informed urban development in Thrace. A journalist reported in 1935 that an unprecedented buzz of excitement pervaded Çorlu, where a military engineer drew up a new town plan while the Officers' Club screened movies and served cheap meals to civilians.<sup>89</sup> New military construction, including an imposing corps headquarters, a large-scale military hospital, barracks, and an Officers' Club, proceeded with such great intensity that another journalist remarked that 'the constructive power of the Turkish army has breathed a new life into Çorlu.'<sup>90</sup> The funds for building dual-use or civilian infrastructures, such as waterpipes, schools, livestock rearing facilities, a public library, and a weather station, were also justified on the basis of Çorlu's military significance.<sup>91</sup> Even today, Çorlu's main artery for car traffic is named after the city's first corps commander, Salih Omurtak, in homage to these interwar legacies of militarized development.

Thrace's militarization continued apace throughout 1934 and 1935, radiating outwards from Çorlu to areas edging the DMZs. As part of an effort to create more mobile and mechanized forces in forward areas, the first tank battalion of the Turkish military was launched in Lüleburgaz in 1934, laying the foundations of armored units

86 DABCA 30.18.1.2 / 49-72-5, 22 October 1934.

87 Terzioğlu 1965, 73–4.

88 Quoted in Bali 2012, 293–4.

89 Ragıp Kemal Cantürk, 'Çorlu Güzelleşiyor!' *Kurun*, 13 February 1935, 6; Ragıp Kemal Cantürk, 'Çorlu'da Göçmenler,' *Kurun*, 17 February 1935, 6.

90 Abidin Daver, 'Çorlu'da,' *Cumhuriyet*, 16 August 1937, 3.

91 DABCA 30.10 / 72-473-3, 20 January 1935; DABCA 30.10 / 142-20-4, 27 January 1935; DABCA 30.10 / 72-474-5, 4 February 1935; DABCA 30.10 / 73-480-4, 22 January 1938; DABCA 30.10 / 188-288-8, 1 August 1939.

in Turkey.<sup>92</sup> Another significant military development was the fortification of Kırklareli, the border city barely exempted from the DMZ that stretched along Turkey's border with Bulgaria and Greece. The funds for the city's fortification derived from revenues raised from extraordinary sources, as authorized by Law No. 2605 on 10 December 1934.<sup>93</sup> The 1 million liras appropriated for Thrace's fortification through this law were spent through negotiated tendering and in secrecy, prompting widespread military construction in Kırklareli and beyond.<sup>94</sup> However much the civilian and military elites wanted to keep Thrace's fortification away from the gaze of domestic and international publics, increasing force levels and troop movements within earshot of the border attracted the anxious attention of neighboring Bulgaria, which appealed to the League of Nations on 7 March 1935 with a memorandum to protest Turkey's fortification of Thrace.<sup>95</sup> With Turkish assurances that the military precautions concerned the existing conditions in Greece, which was in a political spiral after a failed coup attempt on 1 March, Bulgaria retracted its appeal. Yet, Turkey continued to militarize the region by announcing the creation of a fortified zone in Kırklareli on 10 July 1935 and allotting 1,083,000 liras for military construction in the fortified area and III Corps zone.<sup>96</sup>

Another sovereign step on the way was the remilitarization of the Straits. In that respect, the Italian occupation of Ethiopia, German rearmament, and Hitler's remilitarization of the Rhineland in violation of the Versailles Treaty provided Turkey with the leverage it needed to attain its perennial aspirations. The foul winds from Italy and Germany swelled the sails of the Turkish diplomats who, after many fizzling attempts, embarked on a new mission and circulated a diplomatic note to the signatories of the Lausanne Treaty to renegotiate the regime of the Straits in April 1936. With war drums thumping nearer and louder, the peaceful Turkish appeal found a more sympathetic ear this time. After a month-long conference, the Montreux Convention was accepted on 20 July 1936, restoring Turkish sovereignty over the Straits and granting Turkey the right to remilitarize the DMZ area.<sup>97</sup> Over the following days, celebrations honoring the Turkish military's *occupation* of the Straits echoed across the press.<sup>98</sup> Soon after the treaty's provisional enactment in mid-August, a cabinet decree

92 On the Lüleburgaz tank battalion and the beginnings of armored warfare in Turkey, see: Çifçi 2015.

93 *Resmî Gazete*, No. 2881, 16 December 1934.

94 DABCA 30.18.1.2 / 53-29-4, 21 April 1935.

95 League of Nations Archives, R3656/1/16923, March 1935.

96 DABCA 30.18.1.2 / 56-57-3, 10 July 1935; DABCA 10.18.1.2 / 57-62-5, 26 July 1935; DABCA 30.10 / 13-75-28, 4 August 1935.

97 On the Montreux Conference and the regime of the Straits it enacted, see: Meray and Olcay 2020; Vali 1972; Erkin 1968.

98 '13 Yıllık Bir Ayrılıktan Sonra Ebediyete Kadar Sürecek Bir Kavuşma...' *Cumhuriyet*, 21 July 1936, 1; 'Ordumuz Dün Gece Karadeniz Boğazını İşgal Etti,' *Cumhuriyet*, 21 July 1936, 9; 'İşgal Dün Ögle Vakti Tamamlandı,' *Akşam*, 22 July 1936, 1; 'Çanakkale, Gelibolu ve Adalar Çılgın Bir Sevinç İçinde 48 Saattir Uykusuz,' *Son Posta*, 22 July 1936, 1; 'Çanakkale İşgalinden İntibalar,' *Cumhuriyet*, 23 July 1936, 6, 7.



established forbidden zones in the Dardanelles and the Bosphorus on 26 August.<sup>99</sup> Two other decrees followed on 3 September, authorizing the additional conscription of 1,500 soldiers for the Straits' remilitarization and an earlier call-up schedule for III Army Corps units.<sup>100</sup> A later decree also established a no-fly zone in Çanakkale linking up to the Çatalca fortified zone, thereby adding another crucial pillar to the Thracian fortress in the making.<sup>101</sup>

As Turkey amassed more military power and control in the region, the ongoing reorganization and fortification also stimulated war exercises to test and showcase the military's resolve in Thrace. Although military maneuvers were supposed to rotate between the three army zones yearly, Turkey held three large-scale military maneuvers in Thrace in 1936, 1937, and 1939. The Great Maneuvers of 1937 were particularly ostentatious in their display of the Turkish military's growing strength and mechanized capabilities in Thrace. Attended by the president, prime minister, and a large crowd of foreign and domestic observers, the maneuvers ended on 22 August with a military parade of about 80,000 soldiers and a convoy of military vehicles. Infrastructural developments accompanied military progress as well. As a first-hand witness of how the military bogged down in the mud fields of Thrace during the Balkan Wars, Kazım Dirik paid particular attention to rebuilding the İstanbul-Edirne road, the main land route of Thrace.<sup>102</sup> The asphalt road construction reached Çorlu, the maneuver's headquarters, around the time the exercises began. The Oriental Railways, another curb on military mobility in Thrace, was also nationalized on 25 December 1936 because, the minister of public works asserted, the railway's slipshod administration contrasted with Thrace's vital political and military significance.<sup>103</sup>

As 1939 approached, the war seemed less like a dreadful possibility one could avoid and more like an ugly reality one had to accept. The Anti-Comintern Pact grew stronger with the addition of Italy in late 1937. The long-awaited Anschluss materialized in March 1938. In turn, Turkey ratified Law No. 3395 in May 1938 to authorize the colossal appropriation of 125.5 million liras to the Ministry of National Defense as part of the Fourth Supply Plan.<sup>104</sup> A few days later, Law No. 3420 came into effect to speed up infrastructural capacity-building and armament by releasing from extraordinary funds 25,689,000 liras to the Ministry of Public Works and 19,370,000 liras to the Ministry of National Defense.<sup>105</sup> The gloom in Europe also rendered some earlier postwar conflicts and arrangements expendable to allow for new alignments and defense postures for the looming war. Included in these were the Hatay dispute with France, which was resolved in Turkey's favor, and the demilitarized status of the Thra-

99 DABCA 30.18.1.2 / 68-71-13, 26 August 1936.

100 DABCA 30.18.1.2 / 68-74-10, 3 September 1936; DABCA 30.18.1.2 / 68-73-15, 3 September 1936.

101 DABCA 30.18.1.2 / 72-18-14, 16 March 1937.

102 Kocatürk 1999, 161–2; Varlık 2010, 194–7.

103 *Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi Zabıt Ceridesi*, 19 April 1937, 73.

104 *Resmî Gazete*, No. 3919, 28 May 1938.

105 *Resmî Gazete*, No. 3923, 2 June 1938.



gian frontier. In agreement with other Balkan Pact members, Turkey put out feelers to Bulgaria in mid-May to revoke the disarmament provisions of the Neuilly Treaty so as to preempt a possible Bulgarian *fait accompli* in the manner of Germany and to remilitarize the DMZ along the border. After the positive Bulgarian reply, a cabinet decree authorized the Greek Prime Minister Metaxas to negotiate with Bulgaria on behalf of the Balkan Pact.<sup>106</sup> The negotiations culminated in the Salonika Agreement on 31 July 1938, whereby the disarmament clauses were mutually renounced, and the DMZs on both sides of the frontier were remilitarized.<sup>107</sup> While public attention fixated on the health of President Atatürk, Turkish troops entered the border city of Edirne to *occupy* the last standing DMZ in Thrace on 20 August.<sup>108</sup> Soon after, a cabinet decree established a no-fly zone in the Kırklareli fortified zone, whose northern tip was enlarged to the border.<sup>109</sup>

Throughout 1939, the mist of war grew thicker and more ominous with the German occupation of Czechoslovakia in March, the Italian occupation of Albania in April, and the crystallization of the Pact of Steel in May. With the smell of gunpowder in the air, the Turkish government authorized the discretionary delay of the discharge of 11,300 conscripts nearing the end of their active duty and organized a war maneuver with 70,000 soldiers to maintain larger forces in the region in August.<sup>110</sup> The conclusion of the Soviet-German nonaggression pact on 23 August sent shockwaves across Turkey, precipitating further plans for military road construction, the suspension of discharges, and the urgent recruitment of reserves to bring the military forces in Thrace to war strength.<sup>111</sup> A day after the latter emergency measure, the war broke out. Regardless of the war's outcome, the results of the coordinated civilian and military activity within the five years up to the war were remarkable. The vulnerable frontier of Eastern Thrace, where state sovereignty had seemed provisional at worst and checked at best, was transformed into the sovereign realm of Turkish Thrace, where a constellation of fortresses mushroomed, soldiers marched untrammelled, and *culturally Turkish* citizens settled to work the land, all awaiting the war – an ever-present fact of life that made and unmade Thrace even in its formal absence.

## 7. Conclusion

Much ink has been spilled on late-Ottoman Thrace. The works on the social, diplomatic, and military history of the empire's last toehold in Europe in its twilight years

106 DABCA 30.18.1.2 / 84-76-13, 28 July 1938.

107 For the background of the agreement, see: Aras 1945, 134–6.

108 'Orduya Kavuşan Edirne Bayram Yapıyor,' *Akşam*, 21 July 1938, 1; 'Kahraman Ordumuzun Bağrına Basan Edirne Heyecan İçinde Çalkalandı,' *Son Posta*, 21 July 1938, 1, 'Kahraman Türk Ordusu Edirne'de,' *Kurun*, 21 July 1938, 6.

109 DABCA 30.18.1.2 / 85-114-20, 13 January 1939.

110 DABCA 30.18.1.2 / 88-76-6, 1 August 1939.

111 DABCA 30.18.1.2 / 88-82-2, 25 August 1939; DABCA 30-18-1-2 / 88-85-8, 31 August 1939.

form a vast corpus. In contrast to the prolific literature on late-Ottoman Thrace and the surge of interest in post-Ottoman and early Republican borderlands, interwar Thrace remains understudied, with the exception of the so-called Thrace Incidents of 1934.<sup>112</sup> To an extent, the relegation of interwar Thrace to the footnotes of history is understandable and symptomatic of the broader shift of the gravity center from the Balkans to Anatolia, with the capital's relocation from İstanbul to Ankara and Thrace's transformation from an imperial core region to a national periphery.<sup>113</sup> Another cause contributing to the omission of interwar Thrace may be the assumption that the making of Eastern Thrace into Turkish Thrace was completed in 1923, and the region, now 'permanently tied to the future of Anatolia and the Turkish Republic at large,' pursued a stable existence save for a few episodes blemishing its peaceful interwar record.<sup>114</sup>

This article has shown that the making and securing of Turkish Thrace for the republic was far from complete – and would remain incomplete well into the Cold War. In that sense, Thrace was not unlike Turkey's southern and northeastern borders, where border negotiations spurred protests against compromises on alternative imaginations of the emergent body politic.<sup>115</sup> As such, the 'inappropriate' borderland of Thrace was where 'the awkwardness of state borders,' that is, the tension between the nationalist sanctification of state borders and discontent about the concessionary nature of border-making, was starkly visible.<sup>116</sup> With DMZs and treaty stipulations compromising military maneuverability and full sovereignty over the territory, critical infrastructures zigzagging across state borders, and local populations bouncing across international space with a fleeting sense of permanence, interwar Thrace resembled more an ambiguous frontier than a secure borderland.<sup>117</sup> So, what vantage point

112 On post-Ottoman borderlands, see: Boyar and Fleet 2023; Tejel and Öztan 2022. See also: Bartov and Weitz 2013. On Turkey's interwar borderlands, see: Altuğ 2020; İşçi 2023; Korucu 2021; Öztan 2020a.

113 In two recent volumes on the interwar state of post-Ottoman borderlands, Thrace appears a total of thirteen times in passing references and footnotes. See: Boyar and Fleet 2023; Tejel and Öztan 2022.

114 Gingeras 2016, 395.

115 Here, interesting parallels exists between the protest of deputies during the ratification of the Treaty of Moscow due to the cession of Batum, the parliamentary criticism of the Ankara Agreement due to the status of İskenderun, and the opposition of deputies from Thrace to the Lausanne Treaty due to their unfulfilled expectations about self-determination in Western Thrace and sovereign control over Eastern Thrace. Of the fourteen MPs who voted against the ratification of the Lausanne Treaty, two of them, Faik Kaltakkıran and Faik Öztrak, represented the provinces of Thrace. See: Demirel 2012, 289–90. On parliamentary opposition to the Treaty of Moscow and the Ankara Agreement, see: Balistreri 2022, 31.

116 *idem*, 48–9.

117 One party who sought to exploit this frontier quality of Thrace was Nazi Germany during World War II. In May 1941, German Ambassador to Turkey, Franz von Papen, offered to Turkey a border rectification in Thrace around the hinterland of Edirne, a transfer of

does approaching the interwar borderland of Thrace as an object of analysis rather than a fixed backdrop for specific events of scholarly significance afford us?

I believe centering on interwar Thrace can move discussions in three registers: Thrace's history and present, early Republican historiography, and borderland studies. Starting at the regional level, this article provides empirical substance to debates on the 1934 Thrace Incidents to situate them within a transnational context. Early discussions on the subject revolved around the responsibility for violence against Jewish citizens. While some authors downplayed the possibility of direct government involvement in the attacks and drew attention to the official statements of the seemingly confused political elite and antisemitic publications,<sup>118</sup> others implicated the government for its willful ignorance,<sup>119</sup> if not for its backstage orchestration of violence.<sup>120</sup> In later years, the debate took a turn more responsive to the fact that the targets of violence were not just Jewish citizens but the Jews of Thrace. In later iterations, the debate thus focused on local actors and circumstances over exogenous triggers, with scholars probing the worldviews of IGT officials,<sup>121</sup> deteriorating conditions in local agriculture,<sup>122</sup> communal class resentments, regional history of ethnic cleansing, and military sensibilities in the borderland.<sup>123</sup> This work does not unearth any new material to cast light on the question of responsibility. Yet, it fleshes out a crucial context that remains muted in much of the literature: the concurrent advance of Thrace's refortification and repopulation with an eye on Europe's crumbling post-World War I order.<sup>124</sup> While doing so, it posits that methodological nationalism is ill-suited to study borderlands, let alone one like interwar Thrace, which has been quite sensitive to European developments and where demographic engineering and military strategy have a history of interconnectedness.

Interwar Thrace is also essential to understanding the region's development patterns and place hierarchies today. There is a tendency in the scant literature on the matter to consider Thrace's transformation as a function of İstanbul's outgrowth, metropolitan planning, and industrial deconcentration.<sup>125</sup> Certainly, juxtaposing Thrace and İstanbul offers a productive line of inquiry in urban studies. Yet, an İstanbul-centric approach to Thrace risks presentism unless it is furnished with a sense of how Thrace's history, fraught with insecurity and demographic upheaval, has informed

some Aegean islands off the Turkish shore, and more favorable conditions in the Straits regime to sever Turkey from France and Britain, and to acquire transit rights to support an attempted coup in Iraq. See: Koçak 2015, 574; Tekeli and İlkin 2013, 195–7.

118 On imported antisemitism in the media, see: Levi 1996. On official statements, see: Toprak 1996.

119 Aktar 1996.

120 Karabatak 1996.

121 Bayraktar 2006; Pekesen 2008.

122 Başaranlar 2020.

123 Bali 2012; Daniels 2017.

124 Exceptions to this are Bali (2012) and Daniels (2022) who examine the international context in interwar Europe and elite concerns about borderland security in greater depth.

125 Genel 2016; Kaya 2013; Zeybek 2014.

its industrial present. For example, since the 1980s, a range of cities in inland Thrace has been shortlisted as candidates for administrative promotion from being district centers (*ilçe*) to being provincial centers (*il*), like Çorlu, Lüleburgaz, and Keşan. Not coincidentally, Çorlu and Lüleburgaz are the largest beneficiaries of interwar policies concerning Thrace. Despite assumptions to the contrary, I have claimed that interwar settlement and resource allocations in Thrace did not follow an even distribution pattern for security reasons.<sup>126</sup> Some inland cities, like Çorlu and Lüleburgaz, saw the biggest proportional uptick in their population size in the interwar period, not after İstanbul's industrial dispersal. Considering the importance of these interwar settlers and subsequent streams of 'voluntary' migrants from the Balkans for labor availability, earlier in agriculture and later in industry, our vision of contemporary Thrace would be dimmed without understanding the sub-regional legacies of interwar settlement and the broader project of marshaling development that veered people and resources away from the region's outer rim and into a zone of the interior.

Studying interwar Thrace can also promote more nuanced historical discussions with respect to the issue of settlement. The use of settlement in the Young Turk repertoire of social engineering and the role of settlement policies as part of a broader ethnoterritorial quest for nation-building and state-building in Turkey are covered in the literature.<sup>127</sup> A major strand of this literature tackles interwar settlement within a domestic framework of Turkification, internal colonization, and securitization, especially in the country's Kurdish-populated eastern regions. Within this tradition, authors reveal the inextricable ties between the movement of Muslim settlers from former Ottoman territories and Kurdish deportees on a west-east axis,<sup>128</sup> situate the Settlement Law of 1934 as a legislative node in a long thread of policies aiming at diluting Kurdishness,<sup>129</sup> and detail the zoning designations of the 1934 law and the statements of higher-ups as evidence of the main objective of interwar settlement: the colonization of Kurdistan.

What often falls by the wayside in this portrayal is the geographical primacy of Thrace in settlement policies. If settlement were solely 'a strategy of 'Turkifying' the country's eastern provinces,' one would expect most interwar immigrants to settle in

126 Missing the gap between the stated objectives and implementation of migrant settlement in interwar Thrace may lead to the assumption that the immigration of Balkan Muslims brought about a more or less even spread of settlers across the borderland's expanse. For example, Bali (2012, 451), Daniels (2017, 381), and Ülker (2008, 45) reiterate that just in the year 1935 30,000 immigrants settled in Kırklareli, 15,000 in Tekirdağ, 15,000 in Edirne, and 30,000 in Çanakkale. Yet, such neat figures thrown around in publications and internal communications often do not reflect the realities of settlement on the ground. For example, the figure provided above for Çanakkale migrants exceeds the number of immigrants settled in the city for the entire period from 1927 to 1960. On settlement by urban location, see: Geray 1970, 33–4.

127 Çağaptay 2002; Dündar 2015a, 2015b; Jongerden 2007; Üngör 2011.

128 Üngör 2011, 107–69.

129 Beşikçi 1977.

eastern Anatolia.<sup>130</sup> But they did not. The number of immigrants directed to eastern Anatolia was a fraction of those destined for Thrace,<sup>131</sup> making interwar Thrace a counterpoint to the narrative that settlement was simply an alibi for Kurdish assimilation. To be sure, this is not to say that settlement policies were unkeyed to the goal of undermining Kurdishness, or that the pacification of Kurds was a much lesser concern than Thrace's security during the interwar period and beyond. Rather, Muslim settlers were seen as strategic assets for internal colonization and security-making, and settlement decisions responded to a multitude of domestic and transnational security projects whose urgency varied over time and of which the 'Kurdish Question' formed only one, albeit extremely significant, axis. And from 1934 to World War II, the most salient threat perception underlying these projects was the unraveling Versailles order rather than domestic affairs.<sup>132</sup>

What can Thrace teach us about Turkey's interwar borderlands? Was Thrace subjected to a larger and unified policy of borderland governance, or was it an exceptional borderland? On the one hand, interwar Thrace had its particularities. Because of the DMZs and the Straits regime, the government had much less room for maneuver in terms of defense posturing in Thrace. Unlike other geographical and cultural frontiers of Turkish nation- and state-building, such as the Kurdish regions or Dersim, Thrace was viewed not so much as a savage frontier in need of taming against domestic threats as a vulnerable one in need of development and fortification against international threats—hence marshaling development. Also, the demographic problem in Thrace from the elites' perspective was less the majority of 'unruly' cultural others than the general shortage of 'reliable' populations required for the borderland's economic and military upkeep. Because Thrace was the postimperial remnant of Turkey in Europe, its retention was also loaded with symbolic significance for the 'modernizing' republic. On the other hand, the institution deployed to lay the groundwork for Thrace's remaking was a general-inspectorate, as in Turkey's other interwar frontiers. Also, the cadres in charge of frontier governance in Thrace and elsewhere showed a great deal of continuity. Two of the three heads of IGT, İbrahim Tali Öngören and Abidin Özmen, had served as inspector-generals in Turkey's eastern provinces before their appointments to Thrace. The diplomatic rebordering efforts in Thrace, too, ran parallel to those in Turkey's southern border with French Mandate Syria. These parallelisms indicate that Thrace's interwar governance was not an isolated case despite regional peculiarities.

130 Üngör 2011, xv.

131 The three provinces of Thrace, which constitute 3 percent of Turkish territories, absorbed about 27 percent of immigrants who settled in Turkey from 1923 to 1960. The rate for Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia, which together form over a quarter of Turkey's area, is about 6 percent by comparison. See: Geray 1970, 18–21.

132 For a robust critique of the shortcoming of methodological nationalism in studies of settlement and the importance of the transnational context for the 1934 Settlement Law's implementation, see: Öztan 2020b.

What might the case of interwar Thrace contribute to the broader literature in borderland studies? Since the early writings of Frederick Turner and Lord Curzon, the very same British statesman who negotiated the borders of Thrace with İnönü at Lausanne, much of the scholarship has focused on these regions as the margins of state power and sovereignty.<sup>133</sup> In particular, frontiers have been theorized as fluid areas of contact between the putatively civilized core and unruly, if not savage, peripheries in which porosity, heterogeneity, local autonomy, informality, and the specter of instability form the rule rather than the exception.<sup>134</sup> As Pelkmans reminds us, it is precisely for these reasons that borderlands and frontiers are subject to intensified efforts by the state to tame and regulate its margins.<sup>135</sup> Interwar Thrace exhibits many of these features. What distinguishes the case of interwar Thrace is that it offers a glimpse into an instance of postwar borderland construction in anticipation of another war. The postwar regional planning within ‘a logic of war yet to come’ gave interwar Thrace its particular hue and undergirded the policy of marshaling development.<sup>136</sup> Marshaling development worked as a Mobius strip: redevelopment, repopulation, and refortification in Thrace unfolded not as separate projects but as a continuous loop with only one side.

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133 For early imperialist accounts on frontiers, see: Curzon 1907; Turner 1920. For classical conceptual studies, see Hartshorne 1936; Kristof 1959. For a literature review on borderlands, see: Alvarez 1995.

134 On frontier informality, porosity, and heterogeneity, see: Donoghue 2014; Jusionyte, 2015. On the distinct governmentality of savage frontiers, see: Hopkins 2020.

135 Pelkmans 2006, 12–3.

136 On planning within the logic of war yet to come; see Akar 2018.



*Trakya İstatistik Yıllığı*  
*Trakya'da Yeşilyurt*  
*Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi Zabıt Ceridesi*  
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