

FRENCH MANDATORY EDUCATION: THE CASE OF SANJAK (HATAY) (1920-1939)

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Abstract: Although Hatay existed in National Pact borders, it was kept out of Turkish borders with the Ankara Treaty signed on October 20, 1921 in order to stop the armed conflict with France under extraordinary conditions of Independence War. Yet, Ankara Government inserted provisions into this treaty in order that the Turks in the district could pursue their national existence. These provisions were preserved in the same way in Lausanne Peace Treaty and other treaties signed between France and Turkey. The case of Syria, mandated by France in The San Remo Conference, was also approved by The Nations League on July 24, 1922. So, Hatay was mandated by France along with Syria.

In the period of French Mandate Government, every community was educated in its own language. Formal schools were opened for non-Turkish groups in Hatay and the opening of private schools was supported. While the children belonging to these groups were formerly educated in the Turkish language, in the newly opened schools the Turkish language was not included at all. Moreover, as in Syria, France implemented educational policies in Hatay which would raise mandate government-dependent people.

Keywords: French Mandatory, Hatay

Introduction

Hatay Province, located on the east coast of the Mediterranean sea, is surrounded by Syria on the south and east, the Mediterranean sea on the west, Adana province on the northwest, Osmaniye province on the north, and Gaziantep province on the northeast. Hatay Province, the history of which dates back to antiquity, and is a transition point geographically, has been home to many different culture until today. Alexandretta, a district of Hatay, is an important natural harbour in the Eastern Mediterranean. These features of Hatay made it a focal point for great powers in every period of the history. French tried to train individuals to practice their policies in the field of education, during the period when they mandated Hatay with Syria.

French Occupation of Hatay and the Foundation of Mandate Government

After World War I, Sanjak (Hatay) was under the control of Turkish forces, when the armistice of Mudros was signed between Ottoman Empire and Allied Powerp. However, right after the armistice of Mudros, Allied Powers started to occupy the region based on this treaty (Akşin 1991, p.302, Sökmen 1992; p.34-35, Kuçcu 1997; p.23, Durgun 2011, p.180;Fırat-Kürkçüoğlu 2012, p.280). In parallel with the occupation, the region was handed to France in accordance with Sykes-Picot Agreement, which was one of the secret agreements made during World War I. Even it was within Misak-ı Milli (National Oath) borders, Hatay had be left out of Turkish Republic borders with Ankara Treaty signed on 20 October, 1921, due to the extraordinary conditions of the Turkish War of Independence, in order to stop the armed conflict with France. Nonetheless, Ankara government included terms in this treaty, which would protect the rights of Turks in Hatay, and pave the way for the autonomy of the region (Atay 1936 p.1; Benice 1936, p.1; Küçüka 1936, p.3; Nadi 1936; p.1; Erkal 1988 p.15; Sarıay 2001, p.23; Gönübol-Sar 2013, p.147). These terms were also include in the Treaty of Lausanne (Başbakanlık Cumhuriyet Arşivi; 030.10/224.510-12; Akşin 1991 p.303; Ada 2005 p.104; Çatalçam 2008 p.25; Esmer 1938, p.334-335; Soysal 1985, p.80; Khadduri1945,p.406-425; Dağlıoğlu 1936, p.3). The decisions of San Remo Conference put Syria within the French Mandate on 25 April 1920, and this decision was approved by League of Nations on 23 September 1923. After that, France founded an autonomous government for Hatay region in accordance with the Treaty of Ankara (Tekin 1986; Gönübol-Sar, 2013). With further treaties signed between Turkey and France, Turkish language was given the official language status, and the terms included in these treaties paved the way for the development of Turkish culture, and established an environment for Turkish cultural activity. Still, France didn't completely comply with these terms in Hatay during their mandate.

French Education Policies Practiced in Hatay (1920-1939)

French didn't interfere with the cultural life in their vassal Hatay at the beginning, and allowed cultural development of the residents. This attitude of France started to change after a couple of years, and they started to intervene in the cultural life. Wanting to consolidate their place in the region, France started systematic and programmed activities in order to withstand the reforms conducted by Turkey. Until 1925, Turkish educational program was practiced in Hatay, and the course books were also brought from Turkey. However, this disturbed mandatory managements, and they started work harder to break the connections of the region with Turkey (Bilgili 1939, p.15; Payaslı 2009, p.24-25).

"Divide and rule" policy was practiced in French mandated Syria in the process of establishing the domination in the area (Sander 1994, P.72; Ayrancı 2006, p.21). Social structure of the country was also affective in this policy of France, as Syria was a country with the most different ethnic population in Middle East (Ayrancı 2006, p.21). France tried to attain its goals by using this social structure of Syria. To this end, they started to increase the number of missionary priests. These priests worked not only to proselytize but also for the interests of France (Hourani 1997, p.298; Umar, 2002, p.291). Taking advantage of the poorness of Ottoman management and education system in the area, missionaries founded many schools. At French schools in Hatay, they tried to inculcate Arabian students with hostility against Turks, and tried to create animosity between Turks and Arabs. They tried to keep the region under control taking advantage of the upheavals to be created this way. As they did in the administration, French tried to commove any kind of racial and religious tendencies. They cut down the budget of public schools that offered Turkish education, and they also tried to reduce the number of these. On the other hand, they tried to increase the number and the budget of the schools that served for French interests. This way, they tried to train individuals loyal to mandatory government (Umar 2002, p. 303-304).

Due to their policies, French didn't only deal with non-Turkish groups. They also tried to promote the reformist and conservative attitudes among Turks, in order to create conflict within them. For this purpose, they made former primary schools semi-public schools under the name of "EcolCoranique". Teachers educated in madrasahs were assigned to these schools and financial aid was provided (Bilgili 1939, p.15; Payash2009, p. 25). Conservative families mostly sent their children to these schools. These schools offered rote learning with traditional methods. They tried to prevent the development of thinking skills of the children who attended these schools. There were many schools founded in constitutional period in Hatay, when French occupied the area. These were 1 high school with five classes, 1 girls' junior high school, 1 boys' junior high school in Antakya, and one junior high in Alexandretta and Belen. Additionally, there were a total of 41 primary schools in various places in Hatay. Even these schools were closed during World War I, France allowed the re-opening of them right after the war. In order to maintain their cultural inheritance, Hatay residents followed the developments in Turkey closely. French mandatory government was totally disturbed by this attitude of Hatay people. In this context, they introduced the educational developments in Turkey as alienation from Islam, and tried to keep religious-traditional institutions active. (Payaslı 2009, p.23-25).

Primary schools opened in Hatay during constitutional period were 3 grade schools, and mostly offered religious education. These schools continued their education this way until 1928, and they were re-organized as 5 grade schools in that year. These schools taught in French and Arabic as of first grade, and their objective was to train students for colleges. At schools in Turkey, a standard programmed curriculum was followed in classes, though Hatay schools offered un-programmed education for groups. After 5th grade of primary schools, students were given certificates according to their proficiency in French, regardless of their achievement in other courses.

French mandatory government started to increase the number of these schools as of 1928, and in 1938 there were 26 of these schools. The same education of the same of the purpose was also given in schools in villages (Kıymat 2007,p.12).

In his book titled Mandatory Government: Cultural Life in Hatay, Mesut FaniBilgili provided this information about the education of Turkish children during mandatory government: *"Of the 21000 Turkish children at school age between 6-14, only 2600 could learn to read. Compared to children of other ethnic groups, cultural condition of Turkish children was a disaster. While Turkish children were in such a bad situation, of the 3800 Armenian children at school age 2873, of the 1909 eastern orthodox children 1181, of 1272 catholic children 826, of 244 protestant children 216, and of 79 Jewish children 57 followed schools regularly. Additionally, Christian children in Hatay were educated under the aegis of missionaries. Today, while 75-80% of Christian children are literate, while only 10% of Turkish children are"*.

Conclusion

Hatay, is an area where different ethnic groups have lived in peace and tolerance for centuries. France tried to maintain its dominance in Hatay making use of this cultural diversity. Educational policies were also set accordingly. In spite of all these policies, France couldn't settle in Syria easily. Divide and rule policy and the pressure policies of France resulted in a reaction to France by local residents. France faced many rebellions in its vassal Syria. Yielding to independence requests from the nationalist groups, France signed an independence agreement on 9 September 1936. After Syria-France Independence Agreement, Turkey carried Hatay dispute to international grounds bringing up the terms of Ankara Treaty. As a result of successful policies, Hatay first separated from Syria, and gained independence. Then, on 23 June 1939, Hatay Assembly decided to become part of Turkey.

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