

## WHY IS THE CANAL ISTANBUL PROJECT SO IMPORTANT?

### News:

The Minister of Transport Turhan said; *“Canal Istanbul project is of great importance for our country and our citizens in Istanbul. With many projects implemented for Istanbul, we aim to protect Istanbul from possible dangers as well as to reach a cleaner Istanbul. Every project we have done so far has provided less exhaust gas emissions in Istanbul. With each project we have provided new green spaces in Istanbul. We attach great importance to Istanbul, especially our President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.”* (Anadolu Agency; 12 December 2019)

### Comment:

This project, called Canal Istanbul, which is also named as the crazy project, was announced by the then Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, at the Halic Congress Center in Istanbul, Sutluce on 27 April 2011 and in the same year, it was reflected in the press as ‘Tayyip Erdogan’s Crazy Project’. Although this project has been on the agenda from time to time since 2011, it has never been substantially on the public agenda as it is these days.

Different views are being raised between the Erdogan-led government and the opposition led by the CHP regarding the project. While the government continuously emphasizes the importance of the project with reasons like that it will be an alternative for the Bosphorus, will protect Istanbul from possible threats and has economic returns, the opposition on the other hand urges upon the issue that this is an entirely just-for-profit project and faulty from strategic point of view. However, in spite of all these things, it seems like the opposition made its final decision on this matter and will start this project in the near future.

As a matter of course, it is important to put forth loud and clear whether such a project should be done or not together with their reasons. However, rather than talking about whether it is needed to put the project into practice or not, we will try to reveal the real reason behind the approach of the government, as well as the opposition regarding the project.

**Firstly:** This project has directly to do with the “Montreux Convention”. Thus, while the issue is being discussed, it has to be evaluated in terms of the articles in this convention at first step. According to the claims of the government, the “Montreux Convention” terms will become kind of invalid when the “Canal Istanbul” project is put into practice, and the merchant ships which pass the straits without paying any money will be forced to pass through “Canal Istanbul” because of security reasons and this will raise income to a considerable extent. Even if this assumption put forward by the ruling party is true, together with the fact that it is debatable, it is not true when considered strategically. Because with such a project, the Bosphorus will lose its feature of being in a very strategic position at the moment, as it has been throughout the history.

**Secondly:** The strategical aspect of this topic results from the conditions in the straits convention. Because according to the 14th article of the “Montreux Convention”, the maximum total tonnage of all foreign naval forces that could pass the straits may not exceed 15.000 tons. According to a report of Sputnik News, Retired Vice Admiral Atilla Kiyat stated that the US Special Representative for Syria Engagement James Jeffrey offered him to break the Montreux Convention 10 years ago (2009), when he was Ambassador to Turkey. Kiyat *“you were the northern sea area commander, you were responsible for the Black Sea and Straits, the Turkish and US fleets can do many good things in the Black Sea, he said. ‘Of course, but within the principles of the Montreux Convention’ I said. Nobody can do anything if Turkey and the US want it’ he said.* (Sputnik News, 16 December 2019) In his article published in the Social Sciences Magazine of Dumlupinar University in 2016, Hakan ARIDEMIR states: *“When US’ and Russia’s approach to the Montreux Balance Regime is being evaluated, one could say that the Russian Federation follows a policy within the continuation of the balance, while the US accepts the Montreux Balance Regime and makes policies to change the balance via its alliances. In this context, one can expect that the US will turn towards new expansions and policies and that Turkey will be given new roles in the long view, so that the US can change the balances in the area in its favour.”*

According to the Montreux Convention, war ships having a tonnage of more than 15 thousand tons from countries that have no coast on the Black Sea may not pass the strait. Other ships may stay maximum 21 days at the Black Sea, under the condition of informing Turkey and within five days, passing the Gallipoli strait. America, on the other hand, wants to have the Montreux Convention drilled, reconsidered and redrawn or amendments that enables the US war ships to stay at the Black Sea for a longer time. Thus, the “Canal Istanbul” project which is momentarily on the agenda is a project having other goals than the security or economic dimensions of straits.

As a matter of fact, while the government follows the footsteps of the American devil by the policy it has put into practice, those who oppose the government follow the footsteps of the English devil regarding the same issue. Unfortunately, both of them do politics in line with the interests of the imperialists. Neither the justifications of the government, like the security of straits and financial return, nor the justifications put forth by the opposition about losing rights gained by Montreux are true. Because after all, both results are primarily serving the interests of one of the imperialists.

When we consider the matter from the Islamic angle, the “Montreux Convention” being in the first place, all the conventions made with the Westerners during the dissolution of the Ottoman State as well as in the Republican period are conventions that prioritize the interests of imperial states. Thus, as long as Turkey in the first place and all Muslim countries do not get rid of these ties, it is not possible for them to take sound steps in line with their own interests. By the will of Allah, the Muslims will get rid of these shackles through the Khilafah State (Caliphate) to be established soon.

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