Münir Ertegün (he would drop the first name of Mehmet when he took a last name in the 1930s), was the second ambassador from Turkey to serve in Washington after the First World War. He faced a slightly different task from that of his predecessor. By the time he arrived in Washington, Turkey was generally viewed in a favorable light by the decision-makers in Washington. But it was not yet thought of as having strategic importance. And it would be his task to deepen ties and establish a smoothly functioning military supply arrangement with Washington as Turkey’s principal arms supplier. Active criticism by Armenian-Americans had waned considerably, though dealing with possible negative repercussions of the Armenian issue on public opinion would dog his path for much of his tenure in the American capital. Yet all in all, under his stewardship most impediments to establishing rather intimate relations between the United States and Turkey were overcome. And he would leave a strongly based relationship on which a remarkable post-war intimacy could be built.

Münir came from a background in many ways different from that of his predecessor. He was the son of a religiously oriented family. His father had risen to become Undersecretary of the Religious Endowments Ministry, while his mother was the daughter of Sufi Sheykh Ethem efendi of the Üsküdar Özbekler Tekksi (Uzbek Lodge in Üsküdar). Münir himself remained religious and, according to his son, prayed five

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1 His basic data and career assignments were drawn from his Foreign Ministry personnel file, sicil numerası 63.
times a day all his life. Yet his political approach was secular and he never had any trouble in fitting in appropriately with the West-leaning Kemalist regime. He was also unusual in having acquired a fair command of English from study with the head of an American missionary school in his youth. And he would have the opportunity to increase his proficiency through an assignment in London as ambassador before being posted to the United States.

With a degree from the İstanbul Faculty of Law, Münir entered Ottoman service in 1908 and later that year, after the Young Turk Revolution, became a translator for the Senate, indicating that his proficiency in foreign languages was already impressive. The following year he joined the Advisory Chamber in the Ottoman Foreign Ministry, before becoming a Legal Adviser to the Prime Ministry in 1913. He apparently remained in that position during all the First World War. He did take time out to marry Hayrinissa Rüstem in 1917 before going as Legal Adviser to take part in drafting the March 1918 Brest-Litovsk treaty with Czarist Russia. Next he participated in the May 1918 Bucharest peace negotiations to regulate the status of the Balkans as the First World War was coming to an end. In his position as Legal Adviser he finally shared in the disastrous Sèvres Treaty in 1920.

Against this background, in December of that year he took part in the Ahmet İzzet Pasha’s (Furgaç) delegation to Ankara. When this mission seeking to reconcile Atatürk’s nationalists with the Ottoman government failed, Münir, while still in Ankara, abandoned the Sultan and offered his services to the national cause. He was immediately recruited by Acting Foreign Minister Muhtar to join the Ankara Foreign Ministry on December 9, 1920.

Service as Ankara Legal Adviser

Two months later he was sent to serve Atatürk’s regime as Legal Adviser to the Turkish mission at the London Conference of February–March 1921. His command of English proved useful in this context. And then in May he was dispatched to Adana to present to the French Ankara’s counterproposals for a cease-fire in Cilicia. He also bore a letter

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