

Soviet-Turkish Relations in 1921-1923: A Few Nuances from the Bulgarian Archives*

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Abstract:

The article aims at presenting information from unpublished and unexplored until now Bulgarian archival documents about the Soviet-Turkish relations. It follows their development in the period 1921-1923, based on the reports of the Bulgarian diplomats residing in Istanbul - Todor K. Pavlov, Todor Markov and Ivan Altanov. Among the topics concerned were the status of the Soviet-Turkish relations; the Soviet military and financial support for the Ankara Government; the Soviet-Turkish rivalry for the influence over Muslim peoples in the Middle East and Asia; international conferences; internal politics and developments within the Grand National Assembly; important Turkish personages that influenced directly or indirectly the Soviet-Turkish relations, etc. The presented documents reveal not only some important nuances of already known facts and events, but open new unexplored topics in the historiography, related to the Soviet-Turkish relations during the period under consideration.

Key words: *Bulgarian archives, Bulgarian diplomats' reports, Soviet-Turkish relations, Soviet support, Ankara government, Turkish politicians and leaders*

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The eventful post-war period of the First World War intensified the relations between the Soviet Government and the newly-established Turkish government in Ankara*, transforming a century-long confrontation into a politically profitable cooperation, paving the way for overcoming the international isolation and revision of the Entente's plans for the new European order. The communists in Moscow and the nationalists in Ankara, being threatened by the same enemy, managed to find common grounds for establishing relations and providing mutual support. Still, "under the surface" the rivalry continued, especially regarding the Caucasus and Central Asia. These processes as well as many others, related in general with the developments in the period of the Turkish War for Independence, were followed closely by the Bulgarian diplomats in Istanbul as one of the main focuses of the Bulgarian foreign policy was the protection of Bulgarian interests in Thrace. Another issue was the relations with Soviet Russia and the representatives of the White army in Istanbul.

At the end of 1918 the diplomatic relations between the two former allies of the Central Powers – Bulgaria and the Ottoman Empire, were officially suspended due to the requirements of the Armistice of Salonica, signed by Bulgaria¹ and the Allied Powers and the Mudros Armistice, signed by the latter and the Ottoman Empire². As a result, since December 1918, the protection of the Bulgarian interests in the Ottoman Empire was transferred to the competences of the Swedish legation in Istanbul, and those of the Ottoman government – to the Spanish legation in Sofia³. Still, in August 1921, the government of Aleksandar Stamboliyski managed to send an unofficial representative to the Swedish legation in Istanbul – Todor K. Pavlov, who was providing consular services. On 1 March 1923, he was replaced by Gen. of the Reserve Todor Markov⁴. Their reports, as

* In the Bulgarian documents, presented in this article, the term "Turkey" referred either to the Ottoman Empire or the Government of the Grand National Assembly in Ankara. Still, there is clear differentiation in the reports as Bulgarian diplomats referred either to Angora (Ankara) government or the Sultan's one in Istanbul. It should be also considered that "Russian" was often used as synonymous to "Bolshevik" or "Soviet". For the purposes to keep the correct citation of the documents the term "Russian" was used in this respective way. Differentiation was made when there was reference to the "White Russians" and the former Russian Empire.

¹ "Bulgaria Armistice Convention, September 29, 1918.", *The American Journal of International Law*, Vol. 13, No. 4 (1919): 402–404, www.jstor.org/stable/2212836 (accessed October 29, 2019)

² "Mudros Agreement: Armistice with Turkey (October 30, 1918)", *German History in Documents and Images*, Vol. 6. Weimar Germany, 1918/19–1933, http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/pdf/eng/armistice_turk_eng.pdf (accessed October 29, 2019)

³ Mariya Mateeva, Hristo Tepavicharov, *Diplomaticheskite otnosheniya na Balgariya (1878–1988)* (Sofia: BAN, 1989), 283.

⁴ Lyudmil Spasov, Balgaroro-turski diplomaticheski otnosheniya 1925–1934 g., *Voemoistoricheski sbornik*, Issue 2 (2014), https://logos.uni-plovdiv.net/documents/35514/508268/Bulgaro-turski_otnosheniya.pdf/62024a35-6364-48d9-bb99-0b26cb4fd0f6 (accessed October 15, 2019)

well as those of the secretary of the Bulgarian legation Ivan Altanov⁵, contribute with additional nuances to the Soviet-Turkish relations in the period 1921-1923. The information Bulgarian diplomats managed to provide the Bulgarian government with was based on their active engagement on the spot by establishing contacts with journalists, politicians, public figures, people close to both governments in Istanbul and Ankara, foreign representatives of the Allied powers, etc.



1. Gen. Todor Markov - head of the Bulgarian Legation in Istanbul from 1923 to 1925.

The documents to be presented are nowadays stored in the Bulgarian Central State Archive. They, tracking the developments mainly in political aspect, outlined two periods in the Soviet-Turkish relations:

- **First period (1921-end of 1922)**, when the Soviet-Turkish relations were stable and the mutual cooperation prevailed conflict situations. The cohesion was strengthened due to the international isolation of both governments and the military conflicts they were engaged in. The focus was on

establishing strong partnership and finding ways to oppose the common enemy - the Entente. During this period there were also moments of conflict but they didn't bring a change in the policy towards the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR).

- **Second period (end of 1922-1923)**, when the Soviet and Ankara governments finalised the military conflicts and started to receive international recognition. There was comprehension that it was time to negotiate with the Entente for finalisation of the peace process and stabilization of the internal socio-political and economic life. The major threat for close cooperation was exhausted and more orientation to self-interests could be observed. This led to conflicts and "cooling-off" of the relations.

The topics concerned in these two periods included not only the general status of the relations but also the Soviet military and financial support for the Ankara Government; the Soviet-Turkish rivalry for influence over the Muslim peoples in the Middle East and Asia; conferences, such as those in Moscow (1921) and Lausanne (1922-1923);

⁵ Lalyu Metev, *Vidni balgarski pravniitsi 1879 - 1944* (Sofia: Atlas-L, 2013), 7, <https://en.calameo.com/read/0004463717c0432b3e042> (accessed October 15, 2019)

internal politics, developments in the Grand National Assembly (GNA) in Ankara; Mustafa Kemal's prestige and role; important Turkish personages that influenced directly or indirectly the Soviet-Turkish relations.

1. First period (1921-end of 1922)

On 1 April 1921, Todor Pavlov prepared a report on the political situation in Turkey in which a separate chapter was devoted to the relations with Soviet Russia⁶. Writing that the Turkish nationalists didn't cease to sustain close friendship with Moscow and to receive different support from it, Pavlov confirmed that there was not the slightest tendency among the Kemalists to introduce communism in Anatolia. He cited the official newspaper "Hâkimiyet-i Milliye", according to which the communist movement could have caused serious damage had it been spread in Anatolia, namely disintegrating the country and making it vulnerable to the enemies. In such situation, the latter would even reach Caucasus. Thus, the Turkish nationalist army was protecting the most important front of the Russian revolution⁷.

The report continues with an overview of the establishment of a communist party in November 1920 and a collectivist party* later. As both were short-lived, it was supposed that the only aim was to prevent Moscow from intervening in the internal affairs and creating a real communist party.

The Russian-Turkish relations were disturbed by the rivalry for influence over the Muslim peoples according to the Bulgarian diplomat. Nevertheless, the Ankara government did everything possible to preserve the close relations with Soviet Russia, which, on its part, was making efforts to prevent a rift with the Turkish nationalists. According to Todor K. Pavlov: "The latter understand very well that without Russia's friendship and support, they can neither preserve their acquisitions in Caucasus, nor fight successfully against the Greek army, for the combat with which they need all their forces"⁸.

⁶ TsDA, f. 321K, op. 1, a.e. 2772, 41-44.

⁷ TsDA, f. 321K, op. 1, a.e. 2772, 41.

* The information has to be referred to the Turkish Communist Party (Türk Komünist Fırkası) founded in October 1920 by decision of Mustafa Kemal as "official" and disbanded soon after; and the People's Communist Party of Turkey (Türkiye Halk İştirakiyyun Fırkası), founded in November 1920 and in relations with the Bolsheviks. On 7 December 1920, the Ministry of Interior granted to the latter an official permission to operate, but later in October 1922 it was suppressed. See: Feridun Kandemir, *Atatürk'ün Kurduğu Türkiye Komünist Partisi ve Sonrası*. (İstanbul: Yakın Tarihimiz Yayınları, 1966); Erden Akbulut, Mete Tunçay, *Türkiye Halk İştirakiyyun Fırkası (1920-1923)* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayımevi, 2016); George S. Harris, *The Origins of Communism in Turkey* (Stanford, California: Hoover Institution Publications, 1967).

⁸ TsDA, f. 321K, op. 1, a.e. 2772, 43.

Information about a conference in Moscow starting on 1 March 1921 was given as it was said to have been aimed at arranging all disputable issues between Russia and Turkey, and which had as a consequence the Treaty of Moscow (16 March 1921)⁹. But as a strong motive for the conference, T. K. Pavlov pointed out Moscow's concern about London's negotiations with Ankara, regardless of the fact that the Soviets at that time were also negotiating with the British government. The Bolshevik propaganda was trying desperately to convince the Turks that the Entente remained their "intransigent enemy" as it was in Russia's interest the war in Anatolia to continue. Without citing a name, Pavlov gave a short excerpt from an interview with a Kemalist leader. Answering the question on how an eventual peace treaty (with the Entente - a.n.) would be met in Moscow, he stated that if it left Turkey economically and politically dependent, most probably this would not trouble the Soviets. On the other hand, if it confirmed the national demands, Turkey would have the freedom to deal with the Caucasian issues in Azerbaijan, Dagestan, Batumi. Officially, the Ankara government had no interest in these issues in order not to be blamed in pan-Turanism*, but the Muslim public opinion called for Turkey to help the Muslims who were disturbed by the Reds and the Ankara government could not resist this appeal. This was what Moscow was afraid of¹⁰.

Another important point was the pan-Islamist movement, which, according to Todor K. Pavlov, represented another support for the Kemalists. He said that even though Mustafa Kemal was not sharing the pan-Islamism dreams of Enver Pasha and Cemal Pasha, he continued to use it and to keep close relations with other Muslim countries. Pavlov mentions the relations with Azerbaijan and revolutionaries in India but with regard to the Soviet-Turkish relations. It is interesting that in Moscow, in March 1921, an agreement was signed between the Afghanistan representative and the Angora government¹¹. Additionally, it was even foreseen a pan-Islamic council (congress) to be opened in Ankara, being in future a common Islamic parliament and dealing with the issues of interest of all these countries. T. K. Pavlov mentioned Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, from which there was confirmation; Khiva, Bukhara, to which representatives of the Angora government were sent. At the same time, Turkish nationalists were trying to support the

⁹ Todor K. Pavlov managed to acquire the full text of the Treaty in French "privately and confidentially from a source close to the Kemalist government", TsDA, f. 321K, op. 1, a.e. 2797, 145-151.

* As the respective document retold an interview, the term was used without any additional clarification about what it implied.

¹⁰ TsDA, f. 321K, op. 1, a.e. 2772, 44.

¹¹ TsDA, f. 321K, op. 1, a.e. 2772, 45.

movements in Egypt, Tunisia, Syria and other Muslim countries¹². It was mentioned also in a later report from the same year that many Turkish officers had infiltrated in Azerbaijan, Turkestan, Dagestan and other countries in order to organise the Muslim population¹³. In this respect, Pavlov reported about the speech of the Afghan representative Sultan Ahmed Han during the opening of the legation in Ankara on 10 June 1921, saying that the “Turkish-Afghan-Russian union will break the hands that tried to conquer the East”, emphasizing the Western imperialists who violated the rights of the Muslims. The Afghan representative additionally said that the united Muslims would again acquire their rights¹⁴. Mustafa Kemal was said to confirm that they want independence for the Muslims and for the oppressed at the East as the union between Turkey, Soviet Russia and Afghanistan was “a happy event”¹⁵.

It could be seen as a confirmation of Moscow’s wish to use Turkish nationalists to spread its influence in the Muslim countries. In addition, uniting the Muslims in Asia and Africa would contribute to the fight with the Allied powers and especially Great Britain. This definitely would be harmful for a county, which ruled over a huge Muslim population.

When speaking about Muslim communities, we should not underestimate the one in the Caucasian region, the cooperation with whom, through the prism of Soviet-Turkish relations, was an important factor. A curious fact that appeared from the Bulgarian archives concerns the grandson of Imam Şamil – the Dagestani leader who led a war against the Russian empire for almost 30 years in the 19th century. Prince Şamil or Mehmet Kamil¹⁶, was said to be ready to send his 10 000 army to help Mustafa Kemal in the war against the Greeks. As T. K. Pavlov wrote, this was



2. Mehmed Said Şamil (1901-1981) - grandson of Imam Şamil.

possible after negotiations with the Bolsheviks. He also emphasized that Prince Şamil was very popular in Dagestan; he had graduated from the Harbiye Military School in Istanbul and was an officer from the Turkish

¹² TsDA, f. 321K, op. 1, a.e. 2772, 24.

¹³ TsDA, f. 176, op. 4, a.e. 1951, 17.

¹⁴ TsDA, f. 321K, op. 1, a.e. 2797, 108-109.

¹⁵ TsDA, f. 321K, op. 1, a.e. 2797, 109.

¹⁶ TsDA, f. 321K, op. 1, 2772, l. 16r-v.

As the name of Imam Şamil’s youngest son was Mehmet Kamil, most probably here it was meant his grandson – Mehmed Said Şamil, who was a famous figure of the Mountain Republic.

army. This confidential information was sent to the Bulgarian acting Minister of Foreign Affairs Rayko Daskalov dated 26 May 1921.

Referring to the close relations Dagestani people had established with the Ottoman Empire in the past and during the short existence of the Mountainous Republic of the Northern Caucasus, their engagement could be considered a normal continuation of the mutual cooperation. In addition, at that time Dagestan was already a Soviet republic, which in the framework of the Soviet support for the Turkish government in Ankara, could contribute to the efforts of the Bolsheviks. The fact that Said Şamil was engaged in this process is not as simple as could be suggested. He was one of the founders of the short-lived Mountainous Republic and struggled against the Bolsheviks, after they established their power in Dagestan in the beginning of 1920, and after the defeat of which he escaped in the Ottoman Empire¹⁷. This fact should be considered when speaking about the help he wanted to provide to the Ankara government, maybe expecting to receive reciprocity to liberate his fatherland. At the same time, having 10 000 trained Caucasian people in Turkey would be a serious threat for Soviet Russia in the future. Maybe due to this fact we could assume his negotiations with the Bolsheviks were not successful as there is no historical information for realisation of his plan for military participation in the Turkish War of Independence.

For the Bulgarian diplomats the above information presented in the report was important with regard to the forces the New Turkish Army included and the support it received from the Soviets, which would affect the course of the war with the Greeks. Namely, the last was a regular topic of the documents sent to the Bulgarian government. In his report from 29 June 1921 to the Bulgarian Prime Minister, Todor K. Pavlov stated that the Ankara government received money, munitions and weapons from the Soviets. In addition, there was a secret Russian-Turkish convention that obliged Moscow to provide military support in case a third power intervened in the war with Greece on the side of the latter. Not long ago, he wrote, when there was a possible English intervention, 10 Bolshevik divisions were situated at the Turkish border on Caucasus with the aim to be sent to the Izmir front in case England left neutrality. As it didn't happen, these divisions were protecting the back of the Turks from "Kurdistan" where Britain tried to incite the population against the Ankara government. Thanks to this, part of the Turkish army on Caucasus would be sent to the Western front¹⁸. A later report by Pavlov, based on

¹⁷ Some additional information about Said Şamil, see: Oleg Smyslov, *Proklyatye legiony. Izmenniki Rodiny na sluzhbe Gitlera*, (Moskva: Veche, 2017), <https://www.litmir.me/br/?b=569635&p=8> (accessed March 2, 2020)

¹⁸ TsDA, f. 321K, op. 1, a.e. 2772, 12-13.

evidence from the former Bulgarian officer Georgi Babadzhanov¹⁹, informed that the main financial support of the Russians was in gold, with which the Kemalists were buying equipment and ammunition for the army from wherever they could find, even from the English²⁰. Russian gold was a special topic of the report dated 27 April 1921, in which he informed Al. Stamboliyski about the import of a significant sum in gold by the Bolsheviks in the Ottoman Empire²¹, used not only to buy goods for Soviet Russia but also to spread the communist idea in the capital, mainly among the refugee camps and Wrangel's army. The import was done through Batumi, Trabzon, sometimes through Kyustendzha and the amount was usually between 10 and 15 000 rubles. Recently a sum of 250 000 was imported by Bolsheviks in Istanbul, exchanging it at separate smaller parts in order not to be confiscated by the foreign administration. The import was also done by Turks through Anatolia for the needs of the Ankara government. Some Turkish tradesmen were said to possess significant amount of golden rubles due to the loan Soviet Russia gave to Ankara. Most of the operations done by the Kemalists at the Istanbul market were done in gold through the facilitation of Italians.

The Soviet support was also presented in the "Report on the organisation of the Turkish Nationalistic Army"²² from 26 April 1921. Based on an "authentic Kemalist source", it provided very detailed information about the mobilisation system, the release from military service and operational zones, senior commanding staff, military equipment, etc. Quite interesting is the statement that the Anatolian Army had a small Russo-German headquarters, part of the General headquarters, where the foreign officers were helping in developing the general plans of the military actions²³. Here we definitely cannot assume that the mentioned Russians from the headquarters were "White Russians" as in addition, their generals or other military staff had never supported the Turkish nationalists even though there were such attempts²⁴.

¹⁹ The last was a captive for one year in Eastern Anatolia as after the Balkan Wars he started a service in the Armenian Army and was captured during the Turkish-Armenian military conflict, during which he commanded the artillery in Kars. After he was liberated, he met with T. Pavlov and gave him information about the East-Anatolian Army commanded by Kâzım Karabekir and in general about the Turkish Army. TsDA, f. 321K, op. 1, a.e. 2759, 1, 8, 12-13.

²⁰ TsDA, f. 321K, op. 1, a.e. 2759, 2.

²¹ TsDA, f. 321K, op. 1, a.e. 2797, 144.

²² TsDA, f. 176, op. 4, a.e. 1951, 1-20.

²³ TsDA, f. 176, op. 4, a.e. 1951, 8.

²⁴ Oya Dağlar Macar, Elçin Macar, *Beyaz Rus Ordusu Türkiye'de* (Istanbul: Libra Kitapçılık ve Yayıncılık, 2010), 219-230.

As the Bolshevik support for the Kemalists is a proven fact (Mikhail Frunze and Semen Aralov's missions, financial and military support²⁵), the mentioning of Germans sheds a new light on the period of the Turkish War of Independence as it is an unexplored topic in the historiography²⁶. Even though the information is limited, there are at least three prerequisites for it to be proven historically in the future.

First, RSFSR, Germany and the Ottoman Empire were in total isolation and the last two were "punished" as defeated countries with severe treaties. The approach and politics of the Allied powers was a motivation for establishing a ground for cooperation between the Soviet, Weimar and Ankara governments. Thus, Germans and Soviets, supporting the new Turkish army, found a way to fight against common enemies – Great Britain and France.

Second, attempts for establishment of a Soviet-German military cooperation started in 1920, as some German leaders didn't want to reconcile with the losses from the war and the threats coming from France. At the same time, the war between Soviet Russia and Poland provided them with an opportunity to solve their own territorial problems with the Polish government through cooperation with the Soviets²⁷. This cooperation was most probably transferred on "Turkish ground" as well and the connection with the GNA was implemented through the Bolsheviks. The provision of German military means for the Turkish army should also be taken into account. In the already mentioned report, Pavlov wrote that the Turkish army had been mostly armed with "Mauser" rifles, part of which provided by the Soviets, and planes manufactured by Germany – some left from the war, but some bought through the Bolsheviks²⁸.

Third, the factor "Enver Pasha" could give some clue. Enver Pasha was one of the first trying to establish relations between the Germans and the Soviets, planning after that to use them in order to provide support for his own country against the Allied powers. As he was also in contact with the GNA and Mustafa Kemal, it was possible he could contribute to the

²⁵ Semen Aralov, *Vospominaniya sovetskogo diplomata. 1922-1923* (Moskva: Izdatel'stvo IMO, 1960); Mikhail Frunze, *Sobranie sochineniy* (Moskva: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo 1929), Vol. 1 (1905-1923 gody); Ali Fuat Cebesoy, *Moskova Hatırları. Milli Mücadele ve Bolşevik Rusya* (Istanbul: Temel Yayınları., 2017).

²⁶ Until now there is only limited information for Captain Hans Tröbst, based on his own memoirs. He was a German officer, who took part in the Turkish War of Independence, serving behind the front and having the right only to give advice to a respective commanding Turkish officer in the Turkish Army. See: Gerhard Grüsshaber, *The "German Spirit" in the Ottoman and Turkish Army, 1908-1938: A history of military knowledge transfer* (Berlin; Boston: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2018), 190-193.

²⁷ Sergei Gorlov, *Sovershenno sekretno: Al'ians Moskva – Berlin, 1920–1933 gg* (*Voenna-politicheskie otnosheniya SSSR — Germania*) (Moskva: Olma-Press, 2001), 31-60.

²⁸ TsDA, f. 176, op. 4, a.e. 1951, 11.

establishment of contacts between the nationalists and the Germans. Judging by the available documents, he achieved some success at least with the Soviet support. As Pavlov stated in a confidential transcript from 4 August 1921 to the managing the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Aleksandar Radolov, Enver Pasha managed to form a small army of 15-20 000 under the command of his uncle Nuri Pasha, situated in Trabzon. Despite the insistence of the Soviets, there still were no results in the negotiations with Mustafa Kemal this army to be sent to the front²⁹. The Soviet “patronage” of Enver Pasha was a reason for the increase of the mutual distrust between the Soviet and Ankara governments with time, as stated by Pavlov in a report to the Bulgarian Prime Minister, dated 29 November 1921 and based on information by Georgi Babadzhanov³⁰.



3. The original wagon, gifted by the Bolsheviks to Kâzım Karabekir, which can be seen in the Caucasus Front Museum of War History in Kars, Turkey.

Reports, containing data about many political and military leaders are of peculiar interest. They reveal nuances in the Soviet-Turkish relations through the prism of people who were directly engaged in their realisation. An example in this regard is Gen. Kâzım Karabekir.

Information concerning his attitude to the Bolsheviks and to Bolshevism as a whole, can be derived from a report dated 31 August 1921. He was considered to maintain good relations with the Russian Bolsheviks and the latter doing the same gifted him a first-class wagon. At the same time, he took severe measures against the spread of Bolshevism among the Turkish population and army. According to Pavlov’s information, Karabekir was arresting and executing all Turkish communists. Example was given with two young Turkish officers, who due to their contacts with the Soviet Army in Caucasus started to sympathise with communism. Karabekir ordered the officers to be sent to Erzurum where they were shot dead. In addition, he was said to have ordered the execution of Yusuf Kemal – a former secretary of the Aleksandropol revolutionary committee

²⁹ TsDA, f. 176, op. 4, a.e. 1951, 15.

³⁰ TsDA, f. 321K, op. 1, a.e. 2759, 1, 8, 12-13.

and Süleyman Nuri, who was a People's Commissar for Justice in the first Armenian Bolshevik government³¹.

Conflicts and suspicions were part of the relations. In January of the same year two Turkish divisions were asked by the Soviets to leave Nakhichevan and the situation would have escalated to a military clash if Kâzım Karabekir hadn't order the commanding Şevket Bey to retreat³². According to the information, Gen. Karabekir was considering as possible a future conflict with the Russian and Armenian Bolsheviks and due to this fact he kept a close watch on their military forces. He had representatives in Yerevan, Baku and Tiflis who were providing him with information about the status and location of the Bolshevik armies. In Sarıkamış, within his headquarters, there was also a Russian Military Mission consisting of 12 people³³. According to the report, Kâzım Karabekir and the Turks didn't trust the Russians, who continued to be accepted as the most dangerous enemies. Due to this, Gen. Karabekir wanted to establish a barrier of independent Caucasian states. He supported the two Armenian revolts as the aim was a non-Bolshevik government to come to power and to fulfil the obligations under the Treaty of Aleksandropol.



4. Mustafa Kemal and Yusuf Kemal
(Foreign Affairs Commissar 1921-1922)

Not last in importance is the information that Kâzım Karabekir often acted separately and even to some extent against the politics of the government in Ankara. Many people were said to believe that if Mustafa Kemal did not achieve success against the Greeks, Gen. Karabekir and colonel Kadri Bey

³¹ TsDA, f. 176, op. 4, a.e. 1951, 16.

Nowadays this information provided to the Bulgarian diplomat proved to be unreliable. Based on the sources available so far, we can state with a high degree of confidence that the name "Yusuf Kemal" and the administrative position, occupied by this person, were wrong and couldn't identify the person, mentioned in the document. Süleyman Nuri was member of Mustafa Suphi's Communist Party of Turkey (Türkiye Komünist Partisi), but not occupying the mentioned position. He died in 1966 in Moscow. More about him and his activities: Süleyman Nuri, *Çanakkale Siperlerinden TKP Yönetimine. Uyanan Esirler* (Istanbul: TÜSAV, 2002); Emel Akal, *Moskova-Ankara-Londra Üçgeninde: İştirakiyuncular, Komünistler ve Paşa Hazretleri* (Istanbul: İletişim Yayıncılık, 2013).

³² TsDA, f. 176, op. 4, a.e. 1951, 16.

³³ TsDA, f. 176, op. 4, a.e. 1951, 17.

would start negotiations with the English “in order to save what is possible to be saved”³⁴.

The opposition to some governmental decisions and politics was something existing in the Turkish parliament too. Reporting in May and June 1921, about the governmental crisis in Ankara and the election of a new cabinet³⁵, T. K. Pavlov presented shortly two opposing currents that were in a permanent clash, which due to their views for the direction of the external politics influenced the internal ones: one “moderate” that assumed together with the military means diplomatic ones had to be used in order soon to finish the war and not to provoke the Allied powers; the other was presented by supporters of the extreme decisions and close cooperation with the Bolsheviks and the Muslim countries. Bekir Sami’s resignation was considered a result of the confrontation between the two currents³⁶. Another result was the election of Yusuf Kemal for Foreign Affairs Commissar, which was said to be a sign for even closer relations with Soviet Russia³⁷. Pavlov stated that the moderate elements in the Kemalist government were removed by “the extreme chauvinist-nationalists” under the influence of Soviet emissaries³⁸. The extreme wing started a war against the Entente in the printed media as well as provoking the Muslims in Mesopotamia, Arabia, Egypt and Afghanistan, and continuing the project about creation of an “Islamic Federative Union” in Ankara. All these enabled the English diplomacy to try to convince France and Italy in the need of more decisive measures against the Ankara government, which according to Britain was “a hearth of pan-Islamist and Bolshevik propaganda”³⁹, posing a danger over the territorial possessions of the three countries in Asia and Africa, populated by Muslims.

As confirmation of the new direction of the foreign policy and most precisely the one towards Soviet Russia, T. K. Pavlov prepared a summary of Yusuf Kemal’s presentation in front of the GNA, taken from Anatolian Agency publication. According to the Commissar of Foreign Affairs, the relations with Russia were based on “the brotherhood”, which was expressed in the Treaty from 16 March (Treaty of Moscow – a.n.). The government was working in close cooperation with the new representative of the RSFSR (Sergey P. Natsarenus – a.n.), who had arrived in Ankara in order to strengthen the mutual friendship. Both

³⁴ TsDA, f. 176, op. 4, a.e. 1951, 17.

³⁵ TsDA, f. 321K, op. 1, a.e. 2764, 55-60.

³⁶ TsDA, f. 321K, op. 1, a.e. 2764, 60.

³⁷ TsDA, f. 321K, op. 1, a.e. 2764, 58.

³⁸ TsDA, f. 321K, op. 1, a.e. 2797, 126.

³⁹ TsDA, f. 321K, op. 1, a.e. 2797, 127.

governments would conclude other agreements to facilitate the relations between the two nations⁴⁰.

“The brotherhood” was proven also in another dimension. The violence against the civil Muslim population in the Asia Minor territories occupied by the Greek Army, provoked reactions both from the Istanbul and the Ankara governments. On 12 April 1921, Mustafa Kemal protested against the Greek atrocities to the whole civilized world⁴¹. The Soviets did not remain indifferent and Moscow donated 30 000 golden rubles to the Ankara government to help the victims, as T. K. Pavlov reported on 3 May 1921⁴². The Soviet representative at that time Polikarp Mdivani was also asked by Mustafa Kemal to spread broadly the word about the Greek inhumanity.

The Kütahya–Eskişehir battle, ending with Greek victory, reinforced the discussions in the Turkish political circles about the relations with Soviet Russia. The common opinion, shared by the Bulgarian diplomat in a report to Al. Radolov – acting Minister of Foreign Affairs, was that the Kemalists would rely on more efficient help from the Bolsheviks⁴³. The ratification of the Treaty of Moscow by the GNA was accepted as a sign of this intent. Another one was the unconfirmed presence of Gen. Brusilov* in Ankara. Still, the mentioned efficiency was not anticipated as calling Bolshevik Army in Anatolia and Pavlov stated with high level of affirmation that it would happen only if the Ankara government lost confidence in its own power. At the same time, it was presumed that Soviet Russia would not want to actively engage in military actions in Anatolia as this could be perceived as hostility towards the Allied powers, which the Russians were relying on for support to fight the famine in the country⁴⁴.

2. Second period (end of 1922-1923)

The Turkish victory at Sakarya (13 September 1921) led to further developments, which strengthened Ankara government’s internal and international positions. The conclusion of the Treaty of Kars finalized the process of solving the border question between the Soviet Transcaucasia Republic and Turkey, thus also closing a “sensitive chapter” in the Soviet-Turkish relations. Then, another important issue came to the agenda – the

⁴⁰ TsDA, f. 321K, op. 1, a.e. 2797, 102.

⁴¹ Yunan zulümlerine dair insanlık âlemine beyanname (12. IV. 1921). *Atatürk'ün Tamim, Telgraf ve Beyannameleleri*, Vol IV (Istanbul: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basimevi, 1991), 393-394, <http://kitaplar.ankara.edu.tr/dosyalar/pdf/355.pdf> (accessed November 17, 2019)

⁴² TsDA, f. 321K, op. 1, a.e. 2740, 9.

⁴³ TsDA, f. 321K, op. 1, a.e. 2789, 183.

* Gen. A. A. Brusilov had never been in Ankara. More about him and his life: Sergey Bazanov, *Brusilov Aleksei Alekseevich* (Moskva: Tseihgaus, 2006).

⁴⁴ TsDA, f. 321K, op. 1, a.e. 2789, 184.

status of the Straits, which became one of the reasons for destabilisation of the Soviet-Turkish relations at the end of 1922.

According to the National Pact (Misak-ı Millî) the right to define the status of the Straits was reserved to the Ottoman Empire and the countries concerned⁴⁵. In the Treaty of Moscow, Article 5, Ankara government agreed the future of the Straits and the status of the Black Sea to be decided on a conference with “delegates from the littoral states”⁴⁶. Thus, the Soviet diplomacy managed not only to exclude the Entente powers from the decision-making process but also to guarantee Moscow a predominant voice due to the fact that all littoral states on the Black Sea Eastern coast were sovietised and under its control. In this respect, it is not surprising that the Turkish project for the status of the Straits was discussed together with representatives of Soviet Russia and Ukraine. Such information was provided to T. K. Pavlov by a “Kemalist source” and was included in a report dated 26 January 1922 to the Prime Minister Aleksandar Stamboliyski⁴⁷. Additionally, a Bulgarian translation of the full text of the mentioned project was enclosed. The most important conclusions made by the Bulgarian diplomat were that the aim of the project was to guarantee the sovereignty of Turkey and at the same time to establish solidarity between the Black Sea countries – Russia, Bulgaria, Caucasus, etc. through a common body – a commission, where they would be engaged in the defence and management of the Straits thus decreasing the future advantage for the Entente and namely England. More interesting is that, if really agreed with Soviet representatives, the project showed a completely different view of Moscow about the Straits’ status from the one declared later at the Lausanne Conference. Article 12 of the project stated: “In normal time (here having the meaning of “peaceful” – a. n.) the military ships will be able to freely cross the Straits under the condition that they will not stay more than 24 hours.”⁴⁸ At the Lausanne conference the Soviets insisted that “the Dardanelles and the Bosphorous must be permanently closed both in peace and in war to warships, armed vessels and military aircraft of all countries except Turkey”⁴⁹. This change could be related to Moscow’s increased confidence that it could exercise a political influence on Turkey in future issues related to the Black Sea

⁴⁵ A. Suat Bilge, Ahmet Şükrü Esmer, Mehmet Gönülöbol, Oral Sander, Cem Sar, Duygu Sezer, Haluk Ülman, *Olaylarla Türk Dış Politikası (1919-1965)* (Ankara: Ankara Üniversitesi SBF Yayını, 1969), 13-14.

⁴⁶ Moskovskiy dogovor mezhdru Rossiiyey i Turtsiyey 16 marta 1921 goda, <http://www.amsi.ge/istoria/sab/moskovi.html> (accessed November 17, 2019)

⁴⁷ TsDA, f. 321K, op. 1, a.e. 2788, 1-2.

⁴⁸ TsDA, f. 321K, op. 1, a.e. 2788, 1.

⁴⁹ Conference on Near Eastern Affairs. 1923. *Lausanne Conference on Near Eastern Affairs, 1922-1923: records of proceedings and draft terms of peace*. London: H.M.S.O., 129.

region and to the possibility to deal with only one country in case of necessity. Nevertheless, if we can trust the source, it was a quite fast transformation of the Soviet position within less than a year.

A document, regarding the international politics of the Allied powers, prepared by the Bulgarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs for the Bulgarian Foreign Legations, had a separate paragraph dedicated to the situation in Turkey. According to it, a topic that troubled the Ankara government in the beginning of 1922 was the dissolution of the Cannes Conference and the resignation of the French Prime Minister Aristide Briand. It was reported that the Turks considered the situation as possibly having an unfavourable impact on the resolution of the Greek-Turkish conflict. They were worried also about eventual revision of the French-Turkish agreement. Additional negative factors – source of pressure for the Ankara government, were the people's tiredness of the war; the English inciting of Kurdish tribes in Eastern Anatolia against the power of Mustafa Kemal; the internal conflicts in the government – ministers' resignation, and the supposed decrease of Mustafa Kemal's prestige – a litmus for this was a proposed draft-bill to limit his powers; the intrigues of Enver Pasha; the financial difficulties⁵⁰.

As it would be further presented in the following reports of the Bulgarian legation in Istanbul, 1922 was a crucial year for the Ankara government for the finalization of the war and the international recognition of the state borders. The relations with Soviet Russia were important in regard to these developments, even though they underwent some changes at the end of the year. The visits of Mikhail Frunze at the end of 1921-beginning of 1922 and the work of the Soviet envoy to Turkey Semen Aralov in 1922, had to strengthen the trust in Russia's moral and material support in the final period of the Turkish War of Independence. In May 1922 a final balance of the given credit of 10 million rubles was done in a period when the Entente made an attempt to end the war between Greece and Turkey⁵¹. The Turkish victory at the Izmir battle in September, followed by the Armistice of Mudanya, intensified the international relations and negotiations to finally solve the Eastern question.

⁵⁰ TsDA, f. 321K, op. 1, a.e. 2789, 115a.

⁵¹ Harish Kapur, *Soviet Russia and Asia, 1917–1927: A Study of Soviet Policy towards Turkey, Iran, and Afghanistan* (Geneva: V. Chevalier, 1966), 114; Aralov, *Vospominaniya*, 104.

All processes were closely followed by Bulgaria, due to its interests in Thrace and the expectation some of them to be achieved. In this regard, the internal affairs in Turkey were of importance as they directly influenced the external ones. As the secretary of the Bulgarian Legation Ivan Altanov informed in his report dated 18 July 1922, the new law accepted by the GNA for limiting the powers of Mustafa Kemal would not change his foreign policy⁵². However, an agreement between the Angora government on the one side, and Azerbaijan and Afghanistan on the other for mutual support was signed, joined also by Persia, but without keeping RSFSR updated about it⁵³. Being in political and economic relations with Afghanistan and Persia, and having a communist government in Azerbaijan, it is quite strange that the Soviets were not informed about the new agreements by their partners, so this information needs further investigation in the future.



5. Ivan Altanov - a secretary of the Bulgarian legation in Istanbul (1922)

Meanwhile, the Soviets were to end with Cemal Pasha and Enver Pasha. The first one, as declared by Altanov⁵⁴, was killed in Tiflis on 21 July 1922. It was said that he was travelling to Moscow in order to assure the Bolsheviks he had nothing to do with the movement, organised by Enver Pasha in Turkestan. According to the Armenian newspaper in Istanbul "Dzhagadamard" the assassination was done by the Bolsheviks, who were afraid of Cemal playing the same role in Afghanistan as Enver in Turkestan. Nowadays it is accepted that his assassination was done as part of operation "Nemesis"^{*}, but the information presented has its logic, too, bearing in mind that after Enver was no longer useful to the Soviets⁵⁵, they stopped supporting him and tried to dispose of him.

⁵² Mustafa Kemal would still be commander-in-chief of the army and representative of the country, but there would be a ministry cabinet and a prime minister directly elected by the Parliament. TsDA, f. 321K, op. 1, a.e. 2799, 31-35.

⁵³ TsDA, f. 321K, op. 1, a.e. 2799, 35.

⁵⁴ TsDA, f. 321K, op. 1, a.e. 2799, 24-25.

* A covert operation carried out between 1920-1922 by the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (Dashnaksutyun) for the assassination of Ottoman political and military figures as well as leaders of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic.

⁵⁵ As Y. Masayuki wrote: "For certain, Soviet Russia kept Enver Pasha as a "trump card" in bargaining with Ankara government diplomatically. He could be used to check Kemal's rapprochement with the Entente", Yamauchi Masayuki, *The Green Crescent under the Red Star. Enver Pasha in Soviet Russia 1919-1922* (Tokyo: Institute for Study of Languages and Cultures, 1991), 43; See also: Salahi Sonyel, "Mustafa Kemal and Enver in Conflict, 1919-1922", *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 25, № 4 (1989).

The preparations for the conference in Lausanne and solving the issue of the status of the Straits were topic of two reports by Ivan Altanov in September and October 1922⁵⁶. In Ankara government's response to the Allied powers, the GNA agreed on the principle of free Straits provided that the security of Istanbul and the minorities was to be ensured in a way compatible with the national sovereignty. They insisted also Russia, Ukraine and the countries from the Caucasian Federation to participate in the conference. As Altanov assumed "behind the back of Angora government stays Soviet Russia with its natural striving to the Straits, maybe now more actively interested in the question as it is connected with possible complications in the East, which are strongly wished in Moscow⁵⁷". This was something the Bulgarian diplomat noticed in his conversation with Hamid Bey – a representative of the Ankara government in Istanbul^{**}. In fact, the Turkish delegation at the Lausanne Conference would rely on the support of the Soviet representatives, but at the same time during it, the Turkish representatives tried to counterbalance the Russian strength in the Black Sea region and to decrease the dependency on it in case of future issues.

The different positions about the Straits' status at the Lausanne Conference deteriorated the Soviet-Turkish relations according to the Bulgarian diplomat Todor Markov⁵⁸. On 12 March 1923, the 5th Bolshevik Congress in Baku strongly condemned the behaviour of the Turkish delegation during the negotiations. The last hope of the Soviets was Semen Aralov who had to exercise influence on the GNA not to accept the Lausanne draft-agreement. As these attempts were unsuccessful, Moscow undertook a threatening measure towards Ankara by strengthening its army in Transcaucasia. The official motive was that the Turkish army was doing the same at its Caucasian border, which as T. Markov stated was not true. In addition, some local freedoms preserved for the Transcaucasian Republics in order to "manage the Turkish patriotic feelings"⁵⁹ were limited. At the same time, after the Soviets put a lot of efforts, a new pro-Russian government in Tehran came to power, outlining a military front against Turkey from the Black Sea to Mosul.

⁵⁶ TsDA, f. 321K, op. 1, a.e. 2799, 175, 188-191.

⁵⁷ TsDA, f. 321K, op. 1, a.e. 2799, 175, 191.

^{**} Gordon A. Craig, Felix Gilbert (ed.), *The Diplomats, 1919-1939* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994), 182.

⁵⁸ TsDA, f. 321K, op. 1, a.e. 2797, 160.

⁵⁹ TsDA, f. 321K, op. 1, a.e. 2797, 161.



6. Semen Aralov (first row, second on the right). He was Plenipotentiary Representative of the RSFSR in Turkey in 1922–1923. Here he was photographed with his wife (sitting next to him), Soviet embassy staff, and Turkish officials (Turkey, 1922).

The dissolution of the GNA and the decision for election of a new one was seen by Markov as the final capitulation for Aralov's aspirations and his recall to Moscow was one of the signs for the new relations between RSFSR and Turkey. T. Markov declared that one journalist from Lausanne informed him that during the conference Grigory Chicherin had stated in front of some journalist that they had never given up on Istanbul but at the moment were compelled to support the Turks. Even though the Bulgarian diplomat could not check whether this statement was true, he wrote

that it described very well the behaviour of the Moscow government. Last but not least, he had a conversation with the Turkish publicist-philosopher Mehmet Ali Bey, who stated that the friendship with Bulgaria was of big importance for Turkey as it provided security at the western border, which would give the Turks the possibility to concentrate eventually all their forces at the Eastern front⁶⁰.

A telegram from T. Markov dated 17 April 1923 gave important information from first hand – he met twice with Semen Aralov, who was in Istanbul on his way back to Moscow. Reportedly the Russian diplomat was not pleased with the Turks. He presumed that they would enter in an understanding with England in order to use it, too. Concerning the appointment of Bekir Sami Bey as Minister-Plenipotentiary in Bucharest, it was important for Aralov since Bekir Sami Bey was a big "Russo-hater"⁶¹.

After Semen Aralov, the position of Soviet representative was occupied by Yakov Surits. On his way to Ankara, he stopped in Istanbul where he made a press release in front of the Turkish newspapers. He stated that the relations between Russia and Turkey were still close and correct. According to him the two countries had entered into a commercial fight with the Western countries and if they remained united they would achieve success. Surits spoke about the development of the Soviet

⁶⁰ TsDA, f. 321K, op. 1, a.e. 2797, 162-164.

⁶¹ TsDA, f. 321K, op. 1, a.e. 2797, 157.

industry and that it would strengthen the economic and trade relations with Turkey, as one of his tasks was to stabilize them through consular and trade agreements. He stated that the friendship between Russia and Turkey was best seen at the Lausanne Conference where both countries had sincerely supported each other. For the aggravation of the relations he first heard in Turkey, saying that there were some attacks in the newspapers – one Russian and a response in some Turkish ones, but those were insignificant issues that could not spoil at all the correct relations between the two countries⁶².

Still, provocations on local level increased the tension between Moscow and Ankara. Some of them as presented by T. Markov in April 1923:

1. The arrival of the first Bolshevik trade ship in Istanbul. The captain and the chief mechanic of the ship visited the Greek patriarchy, which was accepted by the Turks as a provocation, ordered by Moscow.
2. According to the information of some press in Istanbul, the Turkish consuls in Soviet Russia were not treated accordingly.
3. The Turkish steamship “Gül Cemal” was not allowed to enter Batumi port by the Bolshevik port management under the pretext it hadn’t obtained the necessary visa from the Soviet representative in Istanbul. In response to this, the Turks announced that they did not recognize the Bolshevik delegation in Istanbul as an official representation because it did not have a valid exequatur from the Ankara government⁶³.

As could be seen, the diplomatic statements differed from the real situation, where signs of confrontation appeared. The cases presented by the Bulgarian diplomat could be seen as a warning to the Ankara government, marking the end of a period of consent and “business partnership”⁶⁴.

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The presented documents reveal the importance of the Bulgarian archives as a source that should be considered when researching the Soviet-Turkish relations in the period 1921-1923. The detailed reports of the Bulgarian diplomats can contribute to a more sophisticated analysis, to better comprehending the nuances of facts and events, and last but not least, can open new unexplored topics in the historiography. These topics need a further research as they can shed a light on some important moments, offering an alternative historical perspective of the processes of

⁶² TsDA, f. 321K, op. 1, a.e. 2797, 155-156.

⁶³ TsDA, f. 321K, op. 1, a.e. 2797, 162-163.

⁶⁴ Bülent Gökay, Turkish settlement and the Caucasus, 1918–20, *Middle Eastern Studies*, (1996), 32:2, 68.

establishment and development of the Soviet-Turkish relations. At the same time, the professional work requires careful cross-check of some facts for which there was not reliable information at the moment of their reporting by the Bulgarian diplomats.

Last but not least, the documents outline Bulgaria's focus on the international politics that could impact the decision making process with regard to the national interests after the end of the First World War.

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