

The Impact of Batumi on Turkish-Georgian Relations During The Period of National Struggle

Buket Elmas*

Abstract

The future of Batumi, which was occupied by the British by the Mondros Armistice Agreement (October 30, 1918), has occupied the agenda of the Ankara Government for a long time during the National Struggle Period. The Turkish side tried to maintain its existence in Batumi against the British, Georgian and Russian threat and aimed to keep the "Elviye-i Selase" in Turkish territory. In terms of both strategically and, the Turkish and Muslim population living in the region, Batumi has been a priority issue for the Turkish side and played an important role in shaping Turkish-Georgian relations during the National Struggle, from the Mondros Armistice Agreement to the Treaty of Kars.

Keywords: Mondros Armistice Agreement, Batumi, Elviye-i Selase, National Struggle, Ankara Government.

Milli Mücadele Döneminde Batum'un Türk-Gürcü İlişkilerine Etkisi

Özet

Mondros Ateşkes Antlaşması ile İngilizler tarafından işgal edilen Batum'un geleceği konusu, Milli Mücadele döneminde Ankara hükümetinin gündemini uzun süre meşgul etmiştir. İngiliz, Gürcü ve Rus tehdidine karşı Türk tarafı Batum'daki varlığını sürdürmek üzere gayret göstermiş ve "Elviye-i Selase"nin Türk topraklarında kalmasını amaçlamıştır. Hem stratejik olarak hem de bölgede yaşayan Türk ve Müslüman nüfus açısından Batum, Türk tarafı için öncelikli bir mesele olmuş, Milli Mücadele süresince, Mondros Ateşkes Antlaşması'ndan Kars Antlaşması'na kadar geçen sürede Türk-Gürcü ilişkilerini şekillendirmede önemli rol oynamıştır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Mondros Ateşkes Antlaşması, Batum, Elviye-i Selase, Milli Mücadele, Ankara Hükümeti.

* Buket Elmas, PhD Candidate, Bahcesehir University, Political Science and International Relations. E-mail: buket.elmas@rc.bau.edu.tr

(Received: 27.10.2019; Yayın kabul / Acceted: 29.11.2019)

Introduction

As a result of the Mondros Armistice Agreement (October 30, 1918), the future of Batumi, which was occupied by the British on 24 December 1918, was one of the main tasks of the Ankara Government during the National Struggle Period. The Ankara Government, acting in line with its national targets, gave great importance to the participation of "Elviye-i Selase" to the Turkish lands. In this context, the Turkish side tried to maintain its existence in Batumi, which was witnessed Georgian, Russian and British sovereignty. In the process from the Mondros Armistice Agreement to the Treaty of Kars, Turkish-Georgian relations were shaped on Batumi axis and bilateral relations were shaped according to Batumi's future.

As a result of the Bolshevik Revolution that took place in the Russian Empire 1917, there were major changes in Russian territory and many regions were separated from the center. The Georgians, one of the communities of the divided region, were also influenced by the British and tried to resist the Bolshevik and Turkish threat. In this process, they concentrated on the Batumi, and demanded their rights there. On the other hand, the National Struggle Movement started in Anatolia and the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia brought the Turkish government and Soviet Russia closer together. During the National Struggle Period, the Turkish government, which attaches great importance to Soviet support, paid particular attention to the smooth progress of bilateral relations. However, the issue of Batumi occupied the agenda of both sides for a long time. Moreover, Turkey tried to balance their relations with Germany, which has some political, economical and social goals in the region.

On the other hand, the most influential issue shaping Turkish-Georgian relations during the National Struggle Period was Batumi. Both sides' claiming rights in Batumi caused long-lasting conflicts in the region. The future of Batumi, which was witnessed of the British, Russian, German, Turkish and Georgian domination race, has been an important agenda item for the forces of that period. This important agenda item emerged as the main factor determining the relations between Turks and Georgians. In this sense, what is the impact of Batumi on Turkish-Georgian relations during the National Struggle Period? How did it shape the bilateral relations? Was Batumi the key

factor that shaped the relations between Turkey and Georgia? This study will focus on these questions. The point that, how Batumi, one of the most important factor in determining bilateral relations, shaped the relations in the National Struggle Period will be emphasised, and a context will be established by questioning the reasons for the loss of Batumi.

Referring to previous studies on this subject; Batumi is seen in a very important position in terms of its geopolitical location (Manvelidze 37). Its geopolitical position is seen as the most important factor shaping the future of the region controversial. At this point, the issue of granting special status to the region after the Russian Revolution in 1917, began to be discussed in Tbilisi and the representatives of Adjara came to the First Nation Assembly in Tbilisi and made important recommendations. In this context, Memed Abashidze, one of the supporters of Muslims in Batumi, offered to give special status to Adjara at the national committee meeting on 13 December 1917. However, the offer of Abhasidze to leave the cantons of the region was not accepted by Tbilisi. Members of the committee found the idea of "broad self - government" suitable for both Adjara and other Georgian regions. Although disagreements between Abasidze and Tbilisi have occurred, the idea of autonomy for Batumi was used for the first time. Furthermore, it is mentioned that the status of Batumi is important not only for Georgians, but also for the British, Russians and Turks. In this context, the two regional formations in Batumi have acted with the aim of autonomy: Islamic Society and Liberation of Muslim Georgia. While the Liberation Committee was seeking help from Georgia and Great Britain, Islamic Society was supported by the Turks and the Bolsheviks. The Ankara Government, which was founded in Anatolia, worked on the status of Batumi through the Islamic Society and took care to keep the region under its influence. In this process, the Turkish-Georgian relations were shaped under the influence of Batumi (Manvelidze 40).

In addition, the British surrendered Batumi to the Georgians in June 1920 and because of the Georgian invasion of the region, the Turkish-Georgian relations were tense. However the Kazim Bey's appointment to the Tbilisi Embassy had a positive impact on bilateral relations. Moreover, Turkish government which gave great

importance to the issue of Batumi, was more concerned about Batumi in order to keep relations with Georgians close due to the Armenian threat. It was very important to ensure the neutrality of Georgians in the process leading to the Treaty of Gyumri, and the issue of Batumi played a key role in this issue (Şimşek 323).

If we consider this work from a realist perspective, it would be appropriate to refer to the concepts in the context of the order in which states have to take care of themselves. We can begin with the concept of “relative gain” according to the realist theory. “Relative gain” is a concept that expresses the balance of interstate earnings. In this context, states construct their policies on the fact that their earnings from a situation are more than the other states. When we consider the loss of Batumi in this sense, the Turkish side provided a strong support for Batumi with the policy of Soviet Russia, and with the end of the struggle in the region, the Turkish side had the chance to reinforce the troops in the southern and western fronts, and prepared the ground for the recognition of the newly formed Turkish government.

If we look at the situation of Georgians, the advantages of Batumi being a port city come to the fore. However, although the loss of Batumi seems to be negative, it draws a more lucrative framework for the Turks. The Turkish government, with the disposal of Batumi, maintained its own gains and pursued a way of balancing power rather than increasing power. In addition, the Turkish government, acting in order to “preserve the balance of power” or to turn it in its favor, normalized relations with the Georgians against the Armenian threat. In response to the steps taken to increase the power of the Armenians in the region, the Turks developed diplomatic relations with the Georgians and ensured them to remain neutral. In fact, the Ankara Government choosed an “external balancing” with this move. On the other hand, as a result of the rise of the Bolshevik threat in the region, Georgian demands for assistance from the Turks and expectations of military support in the area of Batumi indicate that Georgia is acting with a realist policy. Alliances are important step in balancing politics, and it is clear that Georgians and Turks often use this advantage during this period. In addition, Georgians tried to establish a “threat balance” by activating the Turks against the threat of Soviet Russia. In addition,

the status of Batumi and the border of the region have been in constant change in the process from the Mondros Armistice to the Treaty of Kars, and the dominant power changed. Thus, in order to protect the security of its borders and its influence in Batumi, Turkish forces kept the military power in the region under constant control and provided military reinforcements to the region according to the changing conditions. The security efforts of the Turkish forces in the region led the Georgian government to take steps to protect itself. In this process, Georgians declared mobilization and kept their military power active in the region. These steps can be evaluated within the framework of the "security dilemma", one of the important concepts of the realist theory. The steps taken by the Turkish government were perceived as threats by the Georgians and this caused the Georgians to respond equally in order to prevent the risks. As a result, during the National Struggle, the Turkish government acted on the basis of the balance of interests and positioned itself according to the changing conditions.

The situation of "Elviye-i Selase" and British Domination in Batumi

With the Treaty of Berlin (1878) signed at the end of the Ottoman-Russian war in 1877-1878, "Elviye-i Selase" (three livas: Kars, Ardahan and Batumi, these lost regions were known as "Elviye-i Selase") were left to the Russians (Peyrat 166). With this agreement, the Ottoman Empire suffered a great loss of land both in the Balkans and in the Caucasus. The loss of "Elviye-i Selase" which has an important Turkish and Muslim population, was a major problem for the Ottoman Empire. After this loss, migrations from these regions to Anatolia started and this caused demographic changes in the region, too. As a result of the Russian policies in the region, non-Muslim population was placed in the region and Turkish constructions began to be destroyed. In this political atmosphere, it was one of the most important aims for the Ottoman Empire to ensure that these three provinces, which had an important Turkish and Muslim population, were re-joined to the homeland.

On the other hand, Russia, which has undergone significant transformations in the political sense with the Bolshevik Revolution,

gave these three regions back to the Ottoman Empire as a result of the Brest-Litovsk agreement signed with the Ottomans on March 3, 1918 (Armaoğlu 140). In addition, according to the result of the referendum that made in the region, the majority of the population wanted the Ottoman Empire (Kılıç 54, 55). As a result of the referendum, it was notified to the Ottoman Government with an official letter dated September 8, 1918 that these three districts joined the Ottoman State with the will of the people (BOA, DH.UMVM. 124/176). However, on April 5, 1918, the Transcaucasian Peace Delegation was offering some regions in Kars and Ardahan to the Turks and rephrasing their wishes about the situation of Armenians living in Anatolia. The delegation also rejected the validity of this agreement. However, as a result of the political conditions and the negotiations between Ottomans and the delegation, validity of Brest Litovsk was accepted. On the other hand, contrary to the delegation's decision, Tbilisi did not accept Brest Litovsk Agreement. Georgian administration declared some statements that they would rather die in a war than accept this agreement. According to Tbilisi, Batumi was well fortified and could resist against the Turks. Georgian politician Irakli Tsereteli stated that, Turkish authorities issued an ultimatum for the acceptance of the Brest Litovsk agreement in Transcaucasia but they did not accept such an agreement. He also stressed that, with the Brest Litovsk the "death sentence" passed to the Revolutionary Russia and they would not accept this death sentence in their motherland (Kazemzadeh 99, 100). In short, they were against the Brest Litovsk and they regarded the Turks as "imperialists".

However, the Turkish forces kept moving forward. The Third Army, which received orders from the government to protect the people without discrimination, continued to advance in Batumi, Kars and Ardahan to ensure lasting peace and security (BOA, HR.SYS. 2453/34). As a result of the advancement of the Ottoman forces, the Transcaucasia declared war on Turks, in Seim which assembled on April 14th. It was clear that, the population of Adjara was helping and supporting the Turkish troops. Furthermore, Menshevik members of the Seim and the Menshevik Party could not take any support from Russia as they expected. Consequently, this situation made advantageous Turkish troops in terms of military movement.

On the other hand, the "Treaty of Peace and Friendship" was signed in Batumi between Georgian and Turkish representatives on 4 June 1918. However, this agreement was not seen as an agreement with equal terms for the Georgian side (Janelidze 179). Also, this agreement was protested by the Georgian National Council, calling it "discriminatory". The Council of Georgia requested the revision of the agreement with the participation of central states. The idea of revising the Batumi Treaty was accepted by Germany, and the Germans persuaded Turkey to hold a conference about this issue. However, the conference, planned to be organized in Istanbul, could not be held following the defeat of the central powers in the first World War. Although the Batumi Treaty could not be revised, the newly-created Georgian Democratic Republic was officially recognized by Turkey thanks to this treaty (Saqartvelos 350).

Despite all of these, with the Mondros Armistice Agreement which was signed between Ottoman Empire and the Allies on October 30, 1918, the situation for Georgia changed respectably. According to this agreement, the Samtskhe-Javakheti region, was to be demilitarized from Turkish detachments (Rayfield 274). Afterward, Batumi was occupied by the British on 24 December 1918. At the same time, Kars was occupied by the British, and Ardahan was captured by the Georgians. However, before these invasions, the people of the region agreed to connect to the Ottoman lands. As stated in the second article of Misak-i Milli, it was emphasized that there could be a referendum in this region again (Budak 174-176). For the Ankara Government, acting in accordance with the principle of Wilson's Fourteen Points, this was clearly an expression that the region was Anatolian soil. However, the annexation of the region directly to the motherland was not appropriate for that period, after the main peace, the region was thought to join the territory.

Batumi, a corridor leading to Baku oil, was an important issue for the British. However, the rise of the Bolshevik threat and the change of the fractions in the region led the British to think about the Caucasus. During this period, the British decided to evacuate the Caucasus in early January 1919 and began to seek a state to replace themselves. For the Caucasus region, French, Italian and American mandates were considered. However, none of these mandate ideas realized (Sürmeli 449,450).

German Policies in the Region

It is necessary to consider the German policy on Georgia during the First World War as "Eastern Policy" (Ostpolitik). This policy covers a wide geography, starting from Poland and reaching India, including Central Asia, the Caucasus, the Ottoman Empire, Iran, Russia, and Africa. With this policy, Germany aimed to capture the colonies of England and Russia and become a world power with vast colonies. Another important factor that encouraged Germany to deal with the Caucasus was the German population in the region. Most of the Germans living in the Caucasus consisted of cultured people who migrated to Russia from Würterberg in 1818, because of the economic reasons with the encouragement of the Russian Empire. In 1914, there were about 2.4 million German population in Russia (Memmedova 90, 91).

Moreover, the Caucasus, which was rich in raw materials was an attractive region for Germany. The Caucasus was a significant region that would meet the needs of Germany in terms of underground and surface resources, especially oil reserves (Çolak 39, 40).

The Germans, often accused of being imperialist by the Socialists, were welcomed in Transcaucasia. Germany, were seen as an important representative of European civilization and technology. Germany's military and war power was also seen very important in the region (Avalov 38). For this reason, Georgians in Batumi wanted to use German authority and power to encompass the Turks. The Georgians, who were approaching allies because of the Russians' internal policies, began to negotiate with the Germans. As a result of the negotiations with the Georgians and the support of the Ottoman Empire, Germany decided to implement the plan of establishing a legion from the Georgians (Bay 80).

As a result of the agreement signed between the Ottomans and Germans on October 16, 1915, provisos related to the establishment and functioning of Georgian legion were determined. According to this agreement, it was decided that the Ottoman Empire would help transport the weapons to be sent to the region, and provide the training of the legion (Sürmeli 148-162). The army consisted of prisoners of war camps in Germany, Austria-Hungary and the Ottoman Empire, refugees who fled from the Russian occupation and settled in

the Ottoman territories and volunteers from Georgia. The legion was militarily attached to the 3rd Army Command.

Then the troop started operating on the Black Sea coast with the Rıza Bey's battalion. The troops that were going forward along the Black Sea coast, captured Borçka and reached the Batumi border. Rıza Bey offered to capture Batumi, but the Ottoman rulers did not support this idea that wasn't seen strategical. However, 3rd Army Command's loss of territory against Russia and its departure from the borders of Georgia made the legion's activities constraint. The use of the troops in the Ottoman internal operations also caused dissatisfaction among the Georgians. At the end of all this, Caucasasia Liaison Officer Graf von Schulenburg announced on 7 May 1917 that the legion was completely disbanded (Çolak 178).

The Situation of Muslims in Batumi and Their Relations with the Ankara Government

As a result of the final decision of the evacuation of British forces, the forces claiming rights on Batumi have also taken action. Among the Muslim groups in Batumi, "Batumi Livası Cemiyeti" was Turkish supporter, and Batumi was a supporter of connecting to Turkey within the framework of broad autonomy. The greatest support for the Turkish supporter Muslims in Batumi, came from the nationalist movement around Mustafa Kemal Pasha. In 1919, a congress was decided to be held in Erzurum, and the Muslims of Elviye-i Selase knew that this congress is an opportunity for their demands. They applied to Kemal Pasha and stated that they wanted to participate in the congress. Consequently, with the participation of representatives of Elviye-i Selase gathered in Erzurum Congress on 23 July 1919, it was decided that the militia in the region represented Kuvayi Milliye to them.

On the other hand, the Georgians were also claiming rights in Batumi. In this context, a force of 5,000 people had accumulated on the Batumi border. However, due to the threat of Denikin from Russia, Georgians also stepped back and preferred to get closer to the British. "İslam Tahlis Cemiyeti" of Georgia was defending to connect with the Georgians. In this respect, they decided to connect to Georgia in August 1919. As a result, Georgia declared the "Autonomous

Government of the Georgian State of Islam". In September 1919, the Muslim League of Batumi, a Turkish supporter, came together and decided to extradite Elviye-i Selase to Turkey if Britain left Batumi. However, as a result of all these negotiations, it was decided that the British staying in Batumi. Because, according to the British, when Batumi was abandoned, Anton Denikin would attack Batumi and the region would be pushed into the arms of the Bolsheviks, and this was an undesirable situation. However, the British were not able to make a definitive decision. In addition, although the British evacuated their troops from the Caucasus, Batumi did not cause unrest among the people of the region. As a result, the unresolved issues at the Paris Peace Conference were discussed at the London conference, which was held between 12 February and 10 April 1920. Representatives of the Caucasus were invited to the conference and worked hard on the Batumi issue. In particular, the Georgian Representative Avalov, who was at the meeting, gave his views on the future of Georgia and even admitted that the Turks in the region had the right to connect this region to Georgians without Turks. As a result of the negotiations, it was decided that Batumi port would be a free port under the control of the League of Nations. In addition, there will be a mixed garrison of British, Italian and French battalions in the region (Sürmeli 454-460).

While Batumi's future was determined in this way, the Georgian government and the Georgian press objected to this decision. In the article "Les Destine De Batoum" published in the 18 March 1920 edition of the *Republique Georgienne*, it was stated that Batumi belongs to Georgia in geographical, ethnic and historical terms. In addition, the newspaper said that the Turkish and Bolshevik plots would increase in the region, and a Bolshevik-Turkish alliance against Georgia was mentioned. The way the Turks are coming to the region with a cavalry of 300 people, was seen as the Turks and the Bolsheviks will invade the region. However, Georgians acted for the conquest of the region and the region resisted Georgian forces with the support of Turkish and Bolshevik Muslims. In order to continue its activities, the Muslim community of Batumi in the region needed help from the Turks. In a copy of the newspaper *Hakimiyet-i Milliye* on January 10, 1920, it was written that Batum's occupation was temporary and Elviye-i Selase was three precious livas of Turkey (Sarı 438).

Georgian Activities in Batumi

Against the Bolshevik progress, the British recognized the Caucasus Republics in the region. The Georgians who wanted to get away from this opportunity have accelerated their activities in the name of taking over Batumi. Islamic Society, which had close relations with the Ankara Government, sent a telegram to the Heyet-i Temsiliye delegation on January 19, 1920 and asked for the military and munitions support. Although Kazım Karabekir Pasha stated that a new adventure in Batumi should not be dragged while a National Struggle was taking place in Anatolia, the Islamic Society continued to be supported. 1.500.000 rubles were provided to the community and Kazım Karabekir Pasha was informed about an intelligence station facility in the region. In addition, Islamic Society opened a school for the education of Muslim people in Batumi. As a result of the activities of the Islamic Society in the region, Muslims in Batumi were not affected by the propoganda of the Pro-Georgian "Islam Tahlis Cemiyeti" (Sarı 446-450).

The Grand National Assembly of Turkey was inaugurated in Ankara on 23 April 1920 while these developments were taking place in Batumi. There were also participation in the assembly from Elviye-i Selase. Batumi also participated in May 1920 and was represented with 5 deputies at Grand National Assembly of Turkey.

With the arrival of the Bolshevik threat to Batumi, the British decided to officially transfer Batumi to Georgians and delivered it to the Georgians on July 7, 1920. The Turkish Grand National Assembly reacted to this occupation and sent a harsh protest to the Georgian government on 25 July 1920. In the protest, Brest-Litovsk Agreement and Batumi Agreement states that Batumi belongs to Turkey legally and stressed that the responsibility of this situation does not belong to Turkey. This situation led discussions in the parliament. Also, a telegram came from the people of the region and from local representatives and they were asking help from Turks. Ahmet Fevzi Efendi, one of the representatives of Batumi, stated that the people in Batumi should be supported. While the Armenian and Georgian activities were increasing in the Eastern Front, the national assembly was busy with the issue of why they did not responded this demand. M. Kemal Pasha explained this issue in detail. Essentially, the main

point here was the relationship with the Bolsheviks. It was important to keep the relationship with the Bolsheviks in balance, while organizing activities in the region. Whereas these discussions were ongoing at the Grand National Assembly of Turkey, Anadolu Agency was publishing news and articles about Batumi and was trying to keep the people's national feelings alive (Sarı 555-557).

The Reflection of the Armenian-Turkish Conflict on the Relations Between Turkey and Georgia

As these developments took place, the Sevres Agreement was signed on August 10, 1920, aiming at the establishment of the "Great Armenia". With this agreement; Rize, Trabzon, Gümüşhane, Artvin, Kars, Van, Bitlis, Ağrı, Muş, Erzincan, Erzurum and Bingöl were given to Armenia. After this agreement, the first Turkish-Soviet official meeting on August 13, 1920 was a disappointment for the Turkish delegation. As a result of the ongoing negotiations between the parties in the following weeks, the issue of the Soviet aid (arms and ammunition support) to Turkey was discussed. As of September 1920, aid began to reach. On the other hand, the Armenians began to attack the regions where deemed appropriate to be given to them with the Sevres Agreement (Beyoğlu 128-130). In addition, the British formed an Armenian regiment in Gyumri, and the Armenians and Greeks in Batumi formed gangs to be sent to Trabzon (BOA, DH.KMS. 55-3/15).

On September 20, 1920, the Ankara Government sent a telegraph to Kazım Karabekir Pasha and sent the order to begin the operation. The remarkable fact is that there would have been no action against Georgians. There was no attempt to save Batumi. The Turkish government, who was particularly sensitive about this issue, was sent to Tbilisi, Captain Talat Bey (Sürmeli 574). In addition, the Ankara Government sent a telegram to the Georgian government and stated that the military operation was only for Armenia. Moreover, it was stated that they want to establish friendly relations with Georgia. However, the Georgian government responded to this attempt by adding Batumi and Ardahan to its borders. Also, declared mobilization in Georgia. On October 14, they applied to the Soviet government and asked to stop the progress of the Turks and reinforced his troops on the border.

On October 20, Georgian Foreign Minister Ramushvili sent a telegram to Ankara while the Ankara Government was trying to ensure Georgia's neutrality. In this Telegram Ramushvili asked that the Turkish army would not enter Batumi and Ardahan, which they accepted within the borders of Georgia. The Turkish government, which gave great importance to the neutrality of Georgia, accepted the Georgians' request and committed that the border would not be crossed. They also offered Georgian officials a meeting to sign an agreement. On October 23, Miralay Kazım Bey was appointed to the Tbilisi Embassy for the development of bilateral relations (Sürmeli 584).

As a result of the efforts of the Ankara Government and Kazım Karabekir Pasha, Georgia remained neutral in the Turkish-Armenian war. Although the Georgians remained neutral, they continued to hesitate about Batumi. The Georgians, who were worried about the issue, invited the assembly to the meeting and decided to increase the measures against the Turks. In this context, the Georgian army mobilization was expanded and its numbers increased to 60.000. The Georgians, who took similar precautions in Batumi, dismissed the governor of Batumi at the Assembly meeting and assigned the former minister of war to that position. While the Georgian government was taking these precautions, Miralay Kazım Bey, who was appointed to Tbilisi, met with Georgian authorities on November 13. Kazım Bey, stressed that the issue of Batumi should be resolved not by the British and Bolsheviks but by the interests of the two governments. Georgian Foreign Minister Ramushvili stated that Batumi port should be in Georgians. They stated that if this is achieved, the Turks could benefit from this port. In addition, the Georgian Minister stated that the Turks should not be concerned about the mobilization of Georgians and this decision was a measure against the Bolsheviks. Ramushvili also added that they want to contact "friendly" with "strong Turkey" (Sürmeli 587-589).

Besides these, Kazım Bey met with Sheynman, Russian Ambassador to Tbilisi on November 14. In this meeting, Sheynman said that Turkey should not violate the agreement between Georgians and Russians on May 7, 1920. In other words, the Turkish government had to agree to Batumi stay in Georgia.

The Idea of Caucasus Confederation and British Policies in the Region

As the Turkish-Georgian relations progressed in this period, the Turkish forces succeeded against the Armenians and as a result the Treaty of Gyumri (December 3, 1920) was signed with the Armenians (Yılmaz 102). As a result of this success of Turkey, the British tried to establish the basis of bilateral agreements by means of the Turkish and Georgian government.

In fact, Great Britain did not want to leave Batumi, one of the most important ports on the Black Sea. Meanwhile, the Entente States also had interests in this region and they were unable to reconcile with British sovereignty there. Consequently, the acceptance of Batumi's status as an international "porto-franco" was discussed (Avalov 317). As a result, within the Lloyd George's policy, in July 1920 the British military unit withdrew from Batumi and the region returned to Georgia. And this situation was considered as a great success in Georgia, although it also means the rejection of Europe in the region (Asatiani and Janelidze 325).

On the other hand, the British wanted the Georgians to make an alliance with the Turks, and they even started to think of replacing the Treaty of Sevres with another agreement. As a result of the meetings between the Foreign Ministry of Georgia and the Ankara Government, the Caucasian Confederation against the Bolsheviks was planned to be established. The British-Turkish rapprochement worried Moscow. For this reason, Deputy Foreign Minister Ahmet Muhtar Bey sent a telegram to Cicerin and stated that they wanted to sign a friendship agreement with the Soviets (Somel 147, 148). The Russians had a positive response for the interview. Thus, with the instructions of Mustafa Kemal Pasha, it was decided to appoint a delegation to go to Moscow. The delegation headed by Yusuf Kemal Bey first arrived in Tbilisi on January 17, where he met with both Georgian Foreign Minister Ramushan and Prime Minister Jordanian. The main issue was the establishment of the Caucasus Confederation. However, the Ankara Government has not taken any steps regarding the confederation.

As a result of these conditions, the Entente States decided to meet in London on February 21, 1921 to discuss the Caucasus Confederation issue and soften the articles of the Sevres Agreement. The Entente States, which invited the Istanbul government to the congress, also

requested that a representative be present in the Istanbul government delegation from Ankara. Mustafa Kemal Pasha stated that they should be invited directly to the London conference. As a result, the Ankara delegation was officially invited at the London conference. The issue that kept the agenda busy was a matter of the Caucasus Confederation. The agenda had become a matter of Batumi rather than a matter of Caucasus. Instead of the Mensheviks who were losing blood against the Bolsheviks, the Entente States found Ankara's dominance in Batumi proper. In this way, the Entente States were once became the defenders of Misak-i Milli (Yerasimos 203, 204). The Ankara Government informed Moscow about these negotiations.

During these developments in London, Georgia sent a delegation to Ankara in order to find support for the Caucasus Confederation. In addition, the independence of Georgia was recognized by the Turkish Grand National Assembly on January 14, 1921. After the declaration of independence of the Georgians, on February 16, 1921, Georgians stated that the Bolsheviks attacked Georgia and they expected assistance from the Turkish government. However, in line with the request of Kazım Karabekir Pasha, it was found appropriate to take advantage of the Georgian's situation and Ardahan and Artvin were taken back. It was not appropriate to come up against the Bolsheviks in those political atmosphere (Karabekir 866). In fact, when the Bolsheviks occupying Tbilisi, the risk of occupation of Batumi by them increased too. Under these circumstances, it was thought that the Georgians would not go off about the invasion of Batumi by the Turkish army and would even invite the Turkish forces to Batumi. However, Karabekir Pasha thought that Batum was not very important for Turkey in terms of military and economic terms. In fact, Soviet Russia needed the region more militarily and economically. In all this context, to invade Batumi was meaning to be faced with Russians. This would be an unnecessary move for the circumstances of the period. However, as the Bolsheviks accelerated their progress towards Batumi through Sohum, the Georgians had to ask for support from the Turkish forces. The Turkish government did not be indifferent to this request and sent a force to Batumi. As a result, the Turkish administration was established in Batumi for the last time. While the Turkish Dominion was established in Batumi, peace talks started in Moscow.

Treaty of Moscow (March 16, 1921)

The meetings in Moscow started on February 18, 1921 under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal Bey. The Turkish delegation acted for the adoption of Misak-i Milli in the negotiations. Following, the Turkish military detachments entered Batumi on March 11, 1921, then the Akhaltsikhe-Akhalkalaki region. The Batumi region that came under Turkish rule, was declared as a part of Turkey and Kazim Bey was appointed as the governor of the region (National-Archives-of-Georgia 1872/1:6). As a result, the situation became more complicating for the Georgians, and they even considered to make a deal with the Bolsheviks to save Batumi (Janelidze 181). On the other hand, during the meetings in Moscow the Turkish delegation's focus was on Batumi, they demanded Batumi district but Soviet Russia did not agree with this idea. As a result of the negotiations, the Treaty of Moscow or the Treaty of Brotherhood was signed on March 16, 1921. With this treaty, Batumi was left to Georgia. In fact, the Turkish delegation had been instructed beforehand that Batumi could be abandoned. In the negotiations, Batumi would be used as a trump card and Batumi would be abandoned when the appropriate conditions were met. As a result, with the Treaty of Moscow, the Ankara Government had accepted its power to a great state for the first time. Turks also won a serious ally against the Entente States. While most of the Turkish troops fought on the western and southern fronts, it was risky to make war with the Russians for Batumi. In addition, the money, munitions and arms aid from Soviet Russia was very important for the national struggle. Also, due to this treaty, the remaining military units on the eastern front could be shifted to other fronts. In addition, Turks could use Batumi port without sanctions. The rights of Muslims in the region were also guaranteed. As a result, Batumi was lost, but great gains were also obtained (Sarı 649-656).

Treaty of Kars (October 13, 1921)

This agreement was signed on October 13, 1921 between the Turkish Grand National Assembly and Russia, Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia. It was assembled to solve the problems between Turkey and Soviet Russia and to ratify the provisions of the Treaty of Moscow by the republics of the Caucasus. The sixth article of the Treaty of Kars

was related to the port of Batumi and the reputation of Adjara. It has been decided that trade goods should be exempt from all taxes and that there is no obstacle in transit. With regard to Batumi, it was decided to establish the Soviet Socialist Republic of Adjara and make Batumi the center. Terms of use of Batumi port and the head office of Adjara region have been secured by Turkey under the Treaty of Kars (Sarı 659-662).

Conclusion and Evaluation

As a result, Turkish-Georgian relations were shaped over Batumi within the national borders of Misak-ı Milli during the National Struggle Period. After the Mondros Armistice, the question of who will dominate the region after the invasion of the British has kept the agenda very busy and the danger of Bolshevik and the fear that the Turks will invade the region, always disturbed the Georgians about Batumi. However, Georgians had to seek help from the Turks on the rise of the Bolshevik threat. The Ankara Government, which attaches great importance to the implementation of Misak-ı Milli, has exerted great effort to maintain its existence in the Caucasus, even though it has given a great struggle for independence in Anatolia. Following the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917 and the movements in the region closely, the Ankara Government attaches importance to bilateral relations with Georgians. Bilateral relations are especially shaped about Batumi. For the British and Germans, it was important to keep Batumi, a corridor for transportation to Baku oil. The idea that the region was under Georgian rule rather than being dominated by Turkish or Bolshevik, shaped the Turkish-Georgian relations in the early days. The Georgian government, acting with the support of the British, has stated at every opportunity that they have their own rights in Batumi and has been on guard against the Turks. However, the necessity of a new authority to replace the British presence in the region and the imminent Bolshevik danger led the Georgians to establish a more healthy and diplomatic relations with the Ankara Government. The idea of establishing a Caucasus Confederation with the guidance of the British was the main goal of the Georgians. However, the Turkish government did not consider such a British-backed formation suitable when Soviet support was obtained. With the rise of the Bolshevik

attacks and the threat of Batumi, the Georgians themselves demanded the protection of the Turks. As we can see, the relations of the Georgians with the Turks have been shaped over the future of Batumi and changed over time. In fact, the Georgians who acted with the fears of the past and the concern of the continuation of Ottoman domination in the region have experienced the fact that how a strategic partnership with their border neighbours would be possible by putting aside their fears and anxieties. When the Turkish government entered Batumi against the Russian threat at the request of Georgians, it stated at every opportunity that its mission in the region was temporary and that it did not intend any occupation. Indeed, even this example is an important turning point for the idea that bilateral relations can become a strategic partnership. In addition, it is also important to establish close relations with the Georgians and ensure their neutrality while the Turkish forces are fighting with the Armenians. With the Georgians excluded from these events, the Turkish forces were only interested in the Armenian obstacle and as a result the Gyumri Agreement was signed. Also, this success was followed by the fact that the Turkish government acted more prudently and read the terms of the period rather than making instant, impulsive decisions about Batumi and did not take the Georgians against them.

In fact, the Turkish forces, Artvin, Ardahan and Kars took a great success in the region. During the process from the disposal of the Mondros Armistice to the Treaty of Kars, the Turkish government had made considerable efforts on the subject of the Batumi. The disposal of Batumi is actually seen as success rather than a lost. In fact, the Turkish government ensured the signing of the Treaty of Moscow with Russians, which it used Batumi as a trump card against them. Soviet Russia. With this agreement, for the first time a powerful and grand state officially accepted the existence of the Ankara Government. This was seen as a very important diplomatic victory. In addition, it was difficult to fight on the Eastern Front for the Turkish military while the struggle was continuing in the south and the west. The end of the struggle in the region led to the strengthening of the western troops. Looking at the overall result, it was not thought that Batumi would make too much economic and political gain for the Turks. Soviet

ambitions in the region were known. It was not be logical to damage the good relations with Russian because of Batumi while obtaining both economic and military assistance from the Soviets. To consider all of these Batumi played a key role in Turkish-Georgian relations during the National Struggle Period.

Bibliography

- Armaoğlu, Fahir. *20. Yüzyıl Siyasi Tarihi (1914-1995)*. Alkım, 2004.
- Asatiani, Nodar and Otar Janelidze. *History of Georgia*. House Petite, 2009.
- Avalov, Zurab D. *Nezaviimost Gruzii v mejdunarodnoy politike (1918-1921)*. Paris, 1924.
- Bay, Abdullah. "Birinci Dünya Savaşı'nda Gürcü Lejyonu ve Faaliyetleri." *Karadeniz İncelemeleri Dergisi* 2015: 75-92.
- Beyoğlu, Süleyman. "Sevr ve Lozan'da Ermeni Sorunu." *Gazi Akademik Bakış* 2015: 125-128.
- BOA (Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi), DH.KMS. 1 Ağustos 1917.
- BOA (Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi), HR.SYS. 4 Mayıs 1918.
- BOA (Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi), DH.UMVM. 2 Eylül 1918.
- Budak, Mustafa. *Misak-ı Milli'den Lozan'a: İdealden Gerçeğe Türk Dış Politikası*. Küre Yayınları, 2014.
- Çolak, Mustafa. *Alman İmparatorluğu'nun Doğu Siyaseti Çerçevesinde Kafkasya Politikası (1914-1918)*. TTK Yayınları, 2006.
- Janelidze, Otari. "The Democratic Republic of Georgia (1918-1921)." *Remembrance and Justice. Contemporary History Studies* 2018: 168-190.
- Karabekir, Kazım. *İstiklal Harbimiz*. Türkiye Yayınevi , 1969.
- Kazemzadeh, Firuz. *The Struggle For Transcaucasia (1917-1921)*. New York: Philosophical Library, 1951.
- Kılıç, Selami. *Türk-Sovyet İlişkilerinin Doğuşu : Brest-Litovsk Barışı ve Müzakereleri*. Dergah Yayınları, 1998.
- Manvelidze, Irakli. "The Status of the Region of Adjara in Caucasus in the Context of Geopolitical Transformation in 1917-1921 Years." *RS Global* 2018: 37-40.

- Memmedova, İrade. "19. Yüzyılın 80-90'lı Yıllarında Güney Kafkasya'nın Etnografik Haritası (Kars ve Diğer Bölgeler)." *İnsan ve Toplum Bilimleri Araştırmaları Dergisi* 2012: 87-99.
- National-Archives-of-Georgia. *National Archives of Georgia. Historical Central Archive*. 1872/1:6.
- Peyrat, Etienne. "The Ottoman occupation of Batumi, 1918: a view from below." *Caucasus Survey* (2016): 165-182.
- Rayfield, Donald. *Gruziya. Perekrestok imperii. İstoriya dlinnoy v tri tıyaçı let*. Kolibri, 2017.
- "Sağartvelos Damfuznebeli Kreba (The Constituent Assembly of Georgia)." 1919.
- Sarı, Mustafa. *Türkiye-Kafkasya İlişkilerinde Batum (1917-1921)*. Türk Tarih Kurumu, 2014.
- Somel, Gözde. *Soviet Policy Towards Turkey 1920-1923*. (Thesis): METU, 2016.
- Sürmeli, Serpil. *Türk-Gürcü İlişkileri (1918-1921)*. Atatürk Araştırmaları Merkezi, 2001.
- Şimşek, Derya. "Milli Mücadele Dönemi Türk-Gürcü İlişkileri." *Social Science Studies* 2018: 318-331.
- Yerasimos, Stefanos. *Kurtuluş Savaşı'nda Türk-Sovyet İlişkileri (1917-1923)*. Boyut Yayın Grubu, 2000.
- Yılmaz, İskender. *Gümrü Antlaşması*. Atatürk Araştırmaları Merkezi, 2001.