

The Role of Sports in the Development of Turkish-Soviet Relations from Türkiye's Perspective (1924-1936)

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Research Article

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ABSTRACT

With its appeal beyond borders, sports have become an important tool used by the governments of various countries to be more effective in international politics. The aim of this study is to reveal how sports is applied in international relations within the framework of Turkish-Soviet relations. The Soviet Union (USSR) was one of the countries with which Türkiye had the most contact in sports during the interwar period. As a result of the regime change, both countries aimed to prove their existence and power to the world. They used sports as a tool, which is one of the important ways to show this. The governments of both countries played an active role in ensuring these sports encounters which contributed to the development of friendly relations between the people of the two countries.

Keywords: Sports, Politics, Türkiye, Soviet Union.

Türkiye'nin Gözünden Türk-Sovyet İlişkilerinin Gelişiminde Sporun Rolü (1924-1936)

Araştırma Makalesi

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ÖZ

Spor, sınırları aşan cazibesıyla, çeşitli ülkelerin hükümetlerinin uluslararası siyasette daha etkili olma amacıyla başvurduğu önemli bir araç haline gelmiştir. Bu çalışmanın amacı spor diplomasisinin uluslararası ilişkilerde nasıl uygulandığını Türk-Sovyet ilişkileri çerçevesinde ortaya koymaktır. İki savaş arası dönemde Türkiye'nin en fazla spor temasında bulunduğu ülkelerin başında Sovyetler Birliği (SSCB) gelmektedir. Her iki ülke de yaşanan rejim değişikliği sonucunda varlığını ve gücünü dünyaya ispat etme gayesinde olmuştur. Bunu göstermenin önemli yollarından biri olan sporu bir araç olarak kullanmışlardır. Her iki ülkenin hükümetleri de bu spor temaslarının sağlanmasında etkin rol oynamış ve bu spor temasları iki ülke halkı arasındaki dostane ilişkilerin gelişimine de katkı sağlamıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Spor, Politika, Türkiye, Sovyetler Birliği.

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Introduction

The period between the two world wars witnessed dynamic changes in both Türkiye and the Soviet Union. While Türkiye was going through a process of modernization and reform under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the USSR was consolidating its power under the Communist regime after the Bolshevik Revolution. During this period, both countries were seeking to prove their existence and power in the international arena after the radical regime changes they had undergone. One of the important tools to achieve this goal was sports. Considering sports not only as a physical activity but also as a means of building national identity and strengthening diplomatic relations in the international arena, Türkiye and the USSR tried to establish an atmosphere of mutual trust and friendship through their cooperation in the field of sports.

The Turkish-Soviet friendship, which left its mark on foreign policy in the first years of the Republic, was also present in sports in the 1920s and 1930s. The USSR was one of the countries with which the Republic of Türkiye became closest and had sporting encounters in its early years. Turkish teams of the new republic (founded in 1923) were most played with Soviet teams. Therefore, we can assume that the Soviets had a significant impact on the formation of Turkish sports policies.¹

When the USSR was established, the society was largely made of peasant population, similar to the social structure in Türkiye. As a result of the similarity of these initial conditions and the rapprochement policy pursued with the USSR during this period, both Turkish political elites and intellectuals in search of a model closely followed the actions of the USSR. In this context, the social, cultural and economic policies of the USSR were carefully examined by the intellectual and political circles in Türkiye and were greatly influenced by various aspects.²

Türkiye attached great importance to sportive encounters to solidify its relations with the USSR. Sports came to the fore as an important element of cultural exchange and diplomatic maneuvers between the two nations in this period. Turkish-Soviet diplomats came together frequently on the occasion of sports competitions, ensuring the transfer of information and paving the way for cultural and political rapprochement. While these events contributed to the deepening of ties between the two countries, they also established a ground for the strengthening of friendship and cooperation. In this context, sports played a strategic role in strengthening friendly relations and increasing cultural interactions between the two countries.³

This study examines the role of sports in the development of Turkish-Soviet relations. In this context, it is emphasized that the sports activities between the two countries in the period between 1924-1936 progress in parallel with the political developments and strengthen the friendship ties between the two societies. The research is enriched with information obtained from Turkish state archives and supported by press sources of the period. The study also tried

¹ James Riordan, "The sports policy of the Soviet Union, 1917-1941", *Sport and International Politics* in, Editors Pierre Arnaud, James Riordan, (London: Routledge, 1998) 74-75; Mutlu Türkmen, *Beden Terbiyesi: Erken Dönem Türk Spor Politikalarının Sosyo-Politik Temelleri*, (Ankara: Spor Yayınevi ve Kitabevi, 2018) 168.

² Yiğit Akın, "Gürbüz ve Yavuz Evlatlar", *Erken Cumhuriyet'te Beden Terbiyesi ve Spor*, (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2014), 99.

³ Fehim Kuruloğlu, "Sports Diplomacy and Propaganda in Turkish Foreign Policy in the Early Republican Period," *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 40, no. 2-3 (2023): 120. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09523367.2022.2159386>

to analyze the sports-based relations between the two countries in more depth by using Russian sources on the subject.

1. The Influence of Sport on International Relations

The late 19th century was a period that witnessed the birth of modern sports. During this period, England played a pioneering role in the development of modern sports which spread from Europe to the world and gained a global character. In particular, the British made significant contributions to the promotion of sports in the international arena through their colonies such as India, New Zealand, Australia and South Africa.⁴ The fact that sports gained an international identity in this period laid the foundations of diplomatic relations between states. Thus, sports went beyond being just a physical activity and turned out to be a diplomatic tool. While the sports organizations contributed to the establishment or consolidation of diplomatic contacts between states, they sometimes played a functional role in easing inter-state tensions.⁵

In the 20th century, the importance of sports in international relations gradually increased. Sporting events offered important opportunities to enhance diplomatic relations between states, increase cultural interactions and strengthen national prestige.⁶ In this context, the modern Olympic Games stood out as the most concrete example of the use of sports in peaceful international relations. Initiated by Baron Pierre de Coubertin, the modern Olympic Games aimed to foster friendship and understanding between nations. Coubertin believed that sport could create "peaceful nationalism" and be used as a tool of détente in international diplomacy.⁷

After the First World War, sports took on a more effective role in strengthening diplomatic relations between states. For example, the athletics competitions between Bulgaria and Greece in 1927 were recorded as one of the first peaceful contacts between the two countries.⁸ Such events increased dialogue and cooperation between states and enabled sports to function as a "goodwill ambassador".

Sports played an important role in Turkish-Greek relations, especially in the process of easing diplomatic tensions and developing mutual dialogue. During the period of resolution of historical disputes and conflicts between the two countries, sports competitions between the two countries contributed to the development of relations. In this context, the Balkan Games in the 1930s and the football and wrestling competitions between the sports clubs of the two countries provided a rare example of sports being used to bring two hostile states together in an atmosphere of unity and understanding.⁹

A notable example for the role of sport in international relations in the 1970s was the "Ping Pong Diplomacy" between the US and China. At the World Table Tennis Championships in

⁴ Pierre Arnaud, "Sport and International Relations Before 1918", *Sport and International Politics – The Impact of Fascism and Communism on Sport* in, Ed. Pierre Arnaud and James Riordan, (London: Routledge, 1998), 14-20.

⁵ Berkant Atasoy and Fusun Öztürk Kuter, "Küreselleşme ve Spor." *Eğitim Fakültesi Dergisi* XVIII, no. 1, (2005), 14.

⁶ Barrie Houlihan, *The Government and Politics of Sport*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), 8.

⁷ Paavo Seppänen, "The Idealistic and Factual Role of Sport in International Understanding," *Proceedings of the Congress 'Sport and International Understanding'* in, Editor M. Ilmirinen. (Berlin: Springer-Verlag, 1984), 57.

⁸ "Sport, Politics and International Relations in the Twentieth Century", *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 25, no. 13, (2008): 1696. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09523360802367281>.

⁹ Mustafa Mutlu, "Uluslararası İlişkilerin Gelişiminde Sporun Rolü: Türk-Yunan İlişkileri Örneği (1930-1931)," *Atatürk Yolu Dergisi*, no. 70 (May 2022): 343. <https://doi.org/10.46955/ankuayd.1066919>.

Nagoya in 1971, the competitions between the two countries were recognized as a turning point in the re-establishment of diplomatic relations.¹⁰ This event demonstrated how effective sports can be in easing tensions between states.

Today, sport continues to be an effective tool in international relations as an element of globalization. Large-scale sporting events such as the Olympics and the World Cup provide opportunities for heads of state to engage in diplomatic contacts and encourage prestige competition between countries. This multifaceted function of sport in international relations has an important role in consolidating global diplomatic relations.¹¹

The Turkish-Soviet relations examined in this context concretize the role of sports in international relations and provide an important example on a global scale of how sports can be used as a “soft power” element in inter-state relations.

2. Turkish-Soviet Sporting Encounters

The Turkish-Soviet friendship, which shaped foreign policy since the early years of the Republic of Türkiye, also manifested itself on the sports fields in the interwar period. The two revolutionary states collaborated in sports as rivals to counter the isolationist policies of the West. After the October Revolution of 1917, the Russian Football Federation was no longer represented in the FIFA, of which it had been a member since 1912. Following these restrictions, the USSR established its own sports union, the Red Sports International. However, the FIFA did not allow its member countries to play matches against the USSR.¹²

The first step in the organization of sports in Türkiye was taken with the establishment of the Turkish Sports Associations Alliance on 22 May 1922. Following the establishment of this organization, an attempt was made to establish a structure to regulate Turkish football. Under the leadership of Yusuf Ziya (Öniş) of the Galatasaray Football Club, a delegation convened on July 31, 1922 and laid the foundations of the Turkish Football Federation. Following this development, Türkiye applied for a membership to FIFA in order to take part in international football organizations. As a result of this application, Türkiye was accepted as the 26th member of FIFA on May 21, 1923.¹³

In this period of developments in the field of sports, the first Turkish-Soviet sports contact was attempted to be established in 1922. Although a Turkish football team was invited to Russia, this attempt did not yield any results.¹⁴ However, two years later in 1924, the first Turkish-Soviet contacts took place. In a letter addressed to Türkiye's Minister of Education, Vasıf Bey, on October 22, 1924, USSR Ambassador to Ankara Yakov Zaharovic Suriç stated that a team of Turkish football players was invited to football games which would be organized by The Superior Council of Physical Culture of the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics in Moscow

¹⁰ Fahir Armaoğlu, *20. Yüzyıl Siyasi Tarihi*, (İstanbul: Alkım Yayınevi, 2012) 706; Richard Espy, *The Politics of the Olympic Games*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1981) 3.

¹¹ Andrei S. Markovits and Lars Rensmann, *Gaming the World: How Sports are Reshaping Global Politics and Culture*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010) 2.

¹² Mehmet Perinçek, *Türk-Rus Diplomasinden Gizli Sayfalar, Siyaset-Askeriye-Ekonomi-Kültür-Bilim-Spor*, (İstanbul: Kaynak Yayınları, 2011) 200.

¹³ Cem Atabeyoğlu, *1453-1991 Türk Spor Tarihi Ansiklopedisi*, (Fotospor, 1991) 84-85.

¹⁴ Günver Güneş, “Türk-Rus İlişkilerinde Bir Diplomasi Aracı Olarak Spor Müsabakaları ve Halkevleri’nin Rolü”, *III. Uluslararası Türkiye-Rusya İlişkileri Sempozyumu* in, Editor Vefa Kurban et. al. (Ankara: Gece Kitaplığı, 2023), 115.

in November on the occasion of the anniversary of the Soviet Revolution. This invitation was interpreted as the USSR wanting to deepen its relations with Türkiye through sports.¹⁵

On the other hand, this invitation from the Soviet Superior Council was also a great diplomatic opportunity for the Ankara Government. The Soviet Union, which was one of the first states to officially recognize the Republic of Türkiye and known to have provided financial and arms aid during the national struggle, wanted to improve its relations with Türkiye even after the death of its founder Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov.¹⁶ Turkish officials, not wanting to miss this opportunity, accepted the invitation and formed a Turkish national team within a week and this team set out on 31 October 1924 to play a football match in Moscow on the anniversary of the Soviet Revolution. This was a concrete example of the role of sport in political dialogue and trust building between the two countries.¹⁷

Since the USSR was not a member of the FIFA at that time, the TFF obtained a special permission from the FIFA for this match. The FIFA agreed on the condition that the match would be officiated by a Turkish referee.¹⁸ Following this permission, the Turkish team played three matches in Moscow and could only win one of them.¹⁹ These first sports encounters were used as a tool for the development of Turkish-Soviet relations rather than for the teams to have an edge over each other, and the first steps of sports diplomacy that would last for 12 years were taken.

Türkiye invited the Soviet national team in December 1924 to continue these sports encounters. In May 1925, as a return visit, the Soviet delegation played football matches with Turkish teams in Ankara and Istanbul. On the day of the competitions, citizens, almost all members of the Council of Ministers, members of the Parliament, members of embassy were present in the stadium. These competitions contributed greatly to the strengthening of ties between the USSR and Türkiye and demonstrated that sports can contribute to political relations at the social level.²⁰

On the last day before the Soviet team's departure from Istanbul, an evening banquet was organized in their honor, at which both Potemkin, the head of the Soviet national team delegation, and Tâib Servet Bey, the second president of the Turkish Sports Associations Alliance, made mutual statements. The friendship and mutual appreciation of Turkish-Soviet relations built on the basis of sports was considered as an important indicator of the rapprochement between the two countries. The foundations of these relations were laid especially through football and the emphasis was placed on raising the young population of both countries to be strong, disciplined and resilient in order to protect their independence. This approach revealed that sport is not only physical, but also ideological and political. Official representatives of the USSR regularly reported to their governments on the hospitality shown to football players in Türkiye and emphasized that these contacts improved diplomatic

¹⁵ Devlet Arşivleri Başkanlığı Cumhuriyet Arşivi (BCA.), 180-9-0-0/3-19-2.

¹⁶ Mehmet Yüce, *İdmançı Ruhlar, Futbol Tarihinin Klasik Devreleri: 1923-1952*, (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2015) 113.

¹⁷ *İkdam*, (29 October 1924), 3.

¹⁸ Atabeyoğlu, *1453-1991 Türk Spor Tarihi Ansiklopedisi*, 95.

¹⁹ *Sovyet-Türkiye Spor Karşılaşmaları*, (İstanbul: Alaeddin Kırıl Basımevi, 1935) 2-3; *Cumhuriyet*, (18 November 1924), 5; *Cumhuriyet*, (28 November 1924), 5; *Spor Alemi*, no.12-149, (27 November 1924): 2-3; Refik Osman, "Moskova Seyahati", *Spor Alemi*, no. 13-150, (4 December 1924): 2-11.

²⁰ *Cumhuriyet*, (11 May 1925), 1, *Hakimiyet-i Milliye*, (13 May 1925), 1; *Spor Alemi*, no.38-175, (28 May 1925): 15, 17; Konstantin Sergeevich Yessenin, *Futbol, Sbornaya SSSR*, (Moskva: Fizkultura i Sport, 1983) 9.

relations and reinforced the social cohesion between the two countries beyond political borders.²¹

In the opinion of the members of the Soviet sports delegation, this visit of Soviet athletes to Türkiye turned into a real demonstration of Turkish-Soviet friendship. One of the members of the Soviet sports delegation said the following:

*"At the stations where our train stopped, we were greeted with flags and the international anthem. Our arrival in Ankara attracted the attention of all the people of the capital. I can say that we were the 'event of the day'. On the day of the most important competition, citizens, almost all members of the Council of Ministers, members of the Parliament, members of our embassy were at the stadium. This trip made a great contribution to strengthening ties between the USSR and Türkiye."*²²

Upon the hospitality and interest the Soviet team received in Türkiye, Soviet physical education officials, taking into account the desire of Türkiye and the USSR football teams to meet every year, proposed that the Turkish national team be sent to Russia. On this occasion, it was stated that sportive encounters would contribute to the strengthening of friendly relations between the two countries. Thereupon, Turkish Football Federation President Yusuf Ziya Bey reported the issue to Prime Minister İsmet İnönü on 16 December 1925 and received the necessary permissions.²³

In addition to these sporting interactions, important developments were also taking place in the diplomatic arena. At the exact time when these sports encounters were held, a Turkish-Soviet Treaty of Friendship and Neutrality was signed between Türkiye and the USSR in Paris on December 17, 1925. Under this treaty, both parties agreed to remain neutral in the event of an armed attack by one or more states against one of the parties. The signatory parties would not engage in any acts of aggression against each other and would not participate in any political alliance against the other signatory.²⁴

Despite the close political and sporting relations between the two countries, there were no football matches between Türkiye and Soviet Russia for a long period of time. This was because the FIFA had banned Türkiye from playing soccer matches with the USSR and threatened serious sanctions. Despite all efforts, the FIFA refused to compromise and continued its isolation policy towards the USSR national team.²⁵

During this period, Türkiye and the USSR continued to deepen their diplomatic relations through official channels. The protocol regarding the extension of the validity period of the treaty signed in December 1925 was signed during the visit of USSR Deputy People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs Lev M. Karakhan to Ankara on 17 December 1929, and friendly relations were further strengthened.²⁶ After Ankara, Karakhan went to Istanbul and watched

²¹ *Cumhuriyet*, (28 May 1925), 3; *Gol Spor*, no. 1, (8 June 1925): 12-13.

²² Dimitir Vandov, *Atatürk Döneminde Türk-Sovyet İlişkileri*, (İstanbul: Kaynak Yayınları, 2014) 305.

²³ BCA, 30-10-0-0/144-35-3.

²⁴ Devlet Arşivleri Başkanlığı Türk Diplomatik Arşivi (TDA.), 571/35603-140276-24; İsmail Soysal, *Türkiye'nin Siyasal Andlaşmaları*, Volume 1, (Ankara: A.Ü.SBF Yayınları, 1989) 271; Erel Tellal, "1923-1939 SSCB'yle İlişkiler." *Türk Dış Politikası* in, Editor Baskın Oran, (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2009) 315; Hüner Tuncer, *Türk Dış Politikası*, Volume 2, (Ankara: Kaynak Yayınları, 2017) 99; Çağatay Benhür, "1920'li Yıllarda Türk-Sovyet İlişkileri: Kronolojik Bir Çalışma." *Selçuk Üniversitesi Türkiyat Araştırmaları Dergisi*, no. 24 (2008): 298.

²⁵ Perinçek, *Türk-Rus Diplomasinde Gizli Sayfalar*, 214.

²⁶ TDA, 571/ 34735-136614-16.

the Vefa-Beykoz match played at Taksim Stadium to see Turkish athletes. Speaking to the press on this occasion, Karakhan said the following:

*"The previous contacts between Turkish and Russian athletes left us with a very deep and sincere memory. We invited Turkish footballers to Russia in order to develop and consolidate the friendship that has been established. However, many of our applications did not yield positive results. We hope that this time our request will be accepted and we will have the honor to greet Turkish athletes in Russia."*²⁷

Karakhan's wish turned into a concrete step a year later. Although not in the football branch, boxing competitions were organized in December 1930 within the framework of Turkish-Soviet relations. Six boxing matches were held at the Meyerhold Theater in Moscow on December 15, 1930, and Turkish boxers lost all of these matches. These results are important in terms of revealing the impact of sports on both national pride and international reputation. In fact, the Turkish Embassy in Moscow, which closely followed the competitions, sent a report to the then Minister of National Education Esat Bey. In this report, he stated that the defeats of the Turkish boxers and the careless and unconscious behavior of the sports delegation damaged the reputation of the country and as a result, negative propaganda was made in various parts of Europe with state money on behalf of and on account of Turkishness:

*"Considering that our sports delegations traveling abroad are a national representation; it is important not to embark on travels to countries such as Russia, where sports are highly developed, without being well prepared. Even though it is not always possible to achieve victory, our athletes should always be in a position to achieve success at any rate. For this reason, they must be busy by working and completing their preparations domestically before their international travels."*²⁸

From the current report, it is understood that sporting activities were seen as a symbol of national identity during this period. It was emphasized that the defeats damaged national identity and pride, and it was stated that this situation should be prevented. The fact that the Turkish Embassy in Moscow followed the competition and prepared a report is also noteworthy in terms of the importance that the political power attaches to international competitions.

On the other hand, it seems that the Soviet side refrained from commenting negatively about the performance of Turkish athletes and their defeats in order not to affect Turkish-Soviet relations. According to the statement given by the Soviets, the boxing matches took place in a friendly atmosphere. Both Turkish boxers and USSR boxers displayed extremely disciplined sports behavior, and the modesty of both teams and the courage of the Turkish athletes were certainly praised.²⁹

This diplomatic function of sport was reflected in the sporting contacts that continued in 1931. After a long break, in August 1931, the two countries decided to organize football competitions in Soviet Russia. However, in this process, as mentioned above, FIFA had banned Türkiye from playing matches against the Soviet Union and announced that it would impose serious sanctions for possible violations. In order to overcome this ban, Türkiye decided to use the name "Turkish Universities Mixed Team" instead of the national team. In this way, the FIFA's ban was overcome. With the 1931 Russia meeting, the "Turkish Cycle" that played an

²⁷ *Türk Spor*, no.13, (26 December 1929): 7.

²⁸ BCA, 30-10-0/145-36-1

²⁹ BCA, 30-10-0/145-36-1.

important role in the development of Soviet football, as Andrei Starostin, one of the Russian national footballers of the period, put it, had started again.³⁰

In 1931, there was great interest in the football matches held in the cities of Moscow and Leningrad, and more than 50,000 spectators followed the matches. An important encounter took place on August 23, revealing their significance for the two countries. Karakhan, who was the Deputy Commissioner of Foreign Affairs of Russia in those years, hosted Taip Bey, who headed the Turkish delegation, and Zeki Rıza Bey, the captain of the Turkish football team, in his office. The presence of autographed photographs of Turkish President Mustafa Kemal on Karakhan's desk was an important detail that demonstrated the political symbolism of sports and the support of these contacts at the national leadership level. In the August 23 meeting, Karakhan stated that the visit of Turkish football players to the Soviet Union was of great political and sporting value and that the Soviet people had the opportunity to get to know the Turks better. He also emphasized that regular competitions of this kind would contribute significantly to the strengthening of bilateral relations.³¹

This diplomatic momentum provided by sports was reflected two months later when the USSR Foreign Minister Maxim Litvinov arrived in Ankara. The protocol to extend the 1925 Treaty was approved on 30 October 1931 within the framework of the negotiations.³² In the following period, Prime Minister İsmet İnönü's visits to Moscow in May 1932 were an indication that Turkish-Soviet friendship was getting stronger.³³

The development of Turkish-Soviet relations continued to flourish in sports. A Soviet sports delegation visited Türkiye on 18-30 October 1932.³⁴ This visit of the USSR national football team was a new indicator of friendship ties between the two nations. Russian footballers first laid a wreath at the Republic Monument in Taksim on October 20, and stood in silence in front of the monument symbolizing the Turkish nation's struggle for independence and victory.³⁵

Following this visit, the Soviet national team and the Turkish national team would play two matches each in Istanbul and Ankara. The year before, the Turkish national team had used the name "Turkish Universities Mixed Team" to overcome the FIFA ban. However, since there were no higher education students in the team, in order to avoid attracting the attention of FIFA, the team used the name "Türkiye People's Houses Mixed Team" for the matches to be held from 1932 until 1936.³⁶ In this respect, the People's Houses became an important institution that supported Türkiye's participation in international sports competitions. In this

³⁰ Andrei Starostin, *Povest O Futbole*, (Moskva: Sovyetskaya Rossiya, 1973) 98; Perinçek, *Türk-Rus Diplomasinde Gizli Sayfalar*, 214.

³¹ *Cumhuriyet*, (24 August 1931), 1; T. S., "Futbolcularımız Rusya'da", *Cumhuriyet* (25 August 1931), 1; *Milliyet*, (24 August 1931), 2; *Vakit*, (24 August 1931), 1-2; *Hakimiyet-i Milliye*, (24 August 1931), 1, 3; *Olimpiyat*, no.12 (18 July 1931): 13; *Olimpiyat*, no.13 (25 July 1931): 13; Kemal Rifat, *Olimpiyat*, "Rusya Seyahati: 2", no.17 (22 August 1931): 13; *Türk Futbol Tarihi (1904-1991)*, Volume 2, Editor Erdoğan Arıpınar, (Ankara: Türkiye Futbol Federasyonu Yayınları, 1992) 187.

³² TDA, 571/34457-135725-109.

³³ TDA, 571/35231-138611-217; Aleksandr Kolesnikov, *Atatürk Dönemi Türk-Rus İlişkileri*, Translator İlyas Kamalov (Ankara: AKDİTYK Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi, 2010) 33; İsmet İnönü, *Hatıralar*, Editor Sebahattin Selek, (Ankara: Bilgi Yayınevi, 2014) 506.

³⁴ Andrei Starostin, *Flagman Futbola*, (Moskva: Sovyetskaya Rossiya, 1988) 44.

³⁵ *Cumhuriyet*, (21 October 1932), 6; *Cumhuriyet*, (22 October 1932), 1, 5; *Vakit*, (22 October 1932), 9; *Son Posta*, (22 October 1932), 9; *Akşam*, (22 October 1932), 1; *Milliyet*, (22 October 1932), 6.

³⁶ Vladimir Malov, *Tayın Sovetskogo Futbola*, (Moskva: Veçe, 2008) 92; Perinçek, *Türk-Rus Diplomasinde Gizli Sayfalar*, 218.

way, it contributed to the development of Türkiye's political and cultural relations, especially with Russia.³⁷

In two matches played in Istanbul, the Turkish national team drew one and lost one against the Soviet national team. While these first matches took place in a cordial and friendly atmosphere, the fact that high-level state representatives - such as Prime Minister İsmet Pasha, Speaker of the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye Kazım Pasha and the Soviet Consul General - closely followed the matches is important in terms of showing the extent to which sports played a role in high-level political relations.³⁸

Matches were set to be played on 28 and 30 October so that the Soviet team could attend the ceremonies held on Republic Day in Ankara. Special importance was given to these matches to be played in Türkiye's capital city and renovations took place at the Ankara Stadium. Matches were followed by high-ranked state officials including the Speaker of the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye Kazım Pasha, Prime Minister İsmet Pasha and Russian Ambassador Suriç. Before the matches, speeches were delivered on the field emphasizing the importance of Turkish-Soviet friendship.³⁹

The function of sports in strengthening diplomatic relations between the two countries was also evident with the Soviet national team being hosted with great hospitality in Türkiye. Receptions, excursions, visits to museums and theaters, and cultural tours in Istanbul ensured that the sporting theme did not remain confined to the field, but paved the way for wider social and cultural interaction.⁴⁰

After returning to his country, the head of the Soviet delegation, I. A. Demina, emphasized in an article he wrote for a sports magazine that sports events between Türkiye and the Soviet Union were an important element that strengthened friendly relations between the two countries. Demina, who quoted Turkish officials as saying, *"There is no border between us, only the Black Sea separates us. Please feel at home,"* stated that the Soviet team was welcomed with warm hospitality in Türkiye and evaluated this meeting as a concrete reflection of the strong friendship between the two peoples. The following statement in Demina's article summarizes the essence of the subject:⁴¹

"Although every team takes the field to win, representatives of the Soviet and Turkish communities are united under a motto: "Regardless of who wins, Soviet-Turkish friendship will win, and ultimately Soviet-Turkish sports ties will be strengthened"

In the summer of 1933, it was the USSR's turn to host again. A large Turkish sports delegation visited the USSR between 12 July and 20 August 1933, that is, for 38 days. 40 Turkish athletes were included in the delegation. Renowned Turkish sports administrator Cevdet Kerim Bey chaired the delegation. Compared to previous ones, this trip to the USSR in 1933 was the most comprehensive and long-lasting one up to that time.

In the first days of this extensive visit, the Soviet public welcomed the Turkish sports delegation with enthusiasm. Students of the Central Institute of Physical Education, managers

³⁷ Güneş, "Türk-Rus İlişkilerinde Bir Diplomasi Aracı Olarak Spor Müsabakaları ve Halkevleri'nin Rolü", 118.

³⁸ Ahmet İhsan, "Dün Ruslara 4-0 yenildik", *Cumhuriyet* (24 October 1932), 1, 4.

³⁹ *Cumhuriyet*, (29 October 1932), 1, 5.

⁴⁰ N. Vasilic, "Sovetskiye futbolisty v Turtsii", *Fizkultura i sotsialisticheskoye stroitelstvo*, no.12 (1932): 45-47; H. Kay, "USSR- Türkiye", *Fizkultura i Sport*, no.28-30 (1932): 24-25.

⁴¹ I. A. Demina, "Vyigryvayet druzhba", *Fizkultura i Sport*, no.33-34 (1932): 3.

and members of physical education organizations, Turkish Embassy staff, Ambassador Mehmet Ali Bey, officials of the Foreign Affairs Commissariat, press representatives, and Moscow athletes were present at the station. On behalf of the Physical Education Council, Mr. Kouriz greeted the Turkish nation and the sports movement in Türkiye before the delegation. Kouriz stated that Turkish guests' visit to Moscow was an indication of the strong bonds of friendship connecting the two countries.⁴²

This mutual interest provided important clues as to how the political dialogue and cultural exchange between the two countries were reinforced through sports. Highlighting the friendly ties between the Soviets and Turks in his press statement on the day of the arrival of the Turkish delegation to Moscow, Deputy Commissioner of Foreign Affairs Karakhan said, *"Soviet-Turkish friendship is not only the result of diplomatic activities but also a reflection of the mass activities of the two nations."* He continued his speech by stating that the visit of a Turkish government delegation headed by İsmet Pasha to Russia in 1932 provided new ways of cooperation in the field of industrial development between the two countries and said: *"Scientific and cultural cooperation plays a pivotal role in the relations between Turks and Russians. Physical education is attached top-level importance, rather than being a mere tool."*⁴³

The delegation to Moscow included athletes in three branches: football, wrestling and athletics. In the USSR, Turkish athletes competed in Moscow, Leningrad, Ivanovo, Gorky, Kharkov and Odessa. Our sports delegation consisting of football, wrestling and athletics played 18 competitions in Moscow, Leningrad, Ivanovo, Gorky and Kharkov.⁴⁴ Twelve of the 18 competitions were won, with one draw and five defeats.⁴⁵

Soviet Russia hosted the Turkish delegation meticulously in every respect. City tours in Moscow on 16 July, a special performance for athletes at the Stanislavski Theater, and cultural programs in Leningrad; monumental sites, suburban tours and banquets were among the events that highlighted the cultural dimension of the visit. In particular, the garden party organized by Deputy Foreign Affairs Commissioner Karakhan in the garden of the Commissariat of Foreign Affairs on August 1, with the participation of representatives from the fields of literature, sports and arts, paved the way for the fusion of Turkish and Soviet cultures.⁴⁶

The farewell dinner held towards the end of the visit and the presentation of the "Ready for Work and Defense medal" to Cevdet Kerim Bey by Antipof, the head of the Supreme Council of Physical Education, demonstrated the importance of sports as a symbol of friendly relations between the two countries. Cevdet Kerim Bey described this medal as an expression of the

⁴² *Hakimiyet-i Milliye*, (15 July 1933), 1, 5; *Vakit*, (16 July 1933), 1.

⁴³ *Cumhuriyet*, (16 July 1933), 5.

⁴⁴ *Cumhuriyet*, (18 July 1933), 1; *Cumhuriyet*, (19 July 1933), 1; *Hakimiyet-i Milliye*, (20 July 1933), 1; *Hakimiyet-i Milliye*, (21 July 1933), 1; *Hakimiyet-i Milliye*, (23 July 1933), 3; *Cumhuriyet*, (26 July 1933), 1, 6; *Hakimiyet-i Milliye*, (27 July 1933), 1; *Cumhuriyet*, (31 July 1933), 1, 4; *Hakimiyet-i Milliye*, (1 August 1933), 1; *Cumhuriyet*, (1 August 1933), 1; *Cumhuriyet*, (12 August 1933), 3; *Hakimiyet-i Milliye*, (9 August 1933), 1; *Hakimiyet-i Milliye*, (14 August 1933), 2.

⁴⁵ *Cumhuriyet*, (16 August 1933), 5; *Hakimiyet-i Milliye*, (16 August 1933), 1, 4.

⁴⁶ *Cumhuriyet*, (17 July 1933), 1; *Hakimiyet-i Milliye*, (17 July 1933), 2; *Milliyet*, (17 July 1933), 1; *Vakit*, (17 July 1933), 2; *Cumhuriyet*, (2 August 1933), 3; *Hakimiyet-i Milliye*, (2 August 1933), 1; *Milliyet*, (2 August 1933), 2; *Vakit*, (2 August 1933), 7; *Cumhuriyet*, (4 August 1933), 5; *Hakimiyet-i Milliye*, (4 August 1933), 1; Pyotr Dementyev, *Peka O Sebye, İli Futbol Naçinaetsya V Detstve*, (Moskva: İzvestiya, 1995) 26.

deep friendship and affection of all Soviet athletes for the Turkish nation and pointed out that sports is one of the means of strengthening political and cultural solidarity between nations.⁴⁷

According to the report of Türkiye's Moscow Embassy dated August 10, 1933, the trip of Turkish athletes to Russia marked the beginning of a new era in Turkish-Soviet relations. The Soviet Government and relevant institutions showed great hospitality to the Turkish delegation. The great interest and brotherly approach shown by the public were an indication of the gradual penetration of the Turkish-Soviet friendship into Russian society. The report stated that the cooperation between the two countries yielded positive results in the fields of sports and politics, and the strong desire to expand this cooperation in other fields was expressed. It further emphasized the importance given to Türkiye's friendship and stated that Turkish athletes increased the country's reputation with this visit. The successes achieved in sports competitions were deemed as an indicator of the importance Türkiye attached to youth and the strength of the Turkish race. Overall, this visit consolidated Turkish-Soviet friendship and improved Türkiye's international prestige.⁴⁸

I. A. Demina, who was in charge of the Soviet sports delegation, wrote in a sports magazine that the visit of the Turkish sports delegation was an incentive for the further development of the physical education ties between the Soviet Union and the Republic of Türkiye, which were strengthened and developed year by year on the solid foundation of Soviet-Turkish friendship. Demina emphasized that the visit marked the beginning of a new era in the sports-based friendly relations between the USSR and Türkiye, and drew attention to the Turkish delegation's extensive study of the Soviet physical education system.⁴⁹

The studies on the Soviet physical education system mentioned by Demina can be found in the report titled "Physical Education and Sports in Russia" prepared by Cevdet Kerim Bey, the head of the Turkish sports delegation. The report includes photographs taken during the trip, magazines, albums, statistics and regulations on Soviet industrial development, and detailed information on the Soviet sports organization, museum and exhibition activities, and professional associations. In addition, the physical education institutes in Leningrad, Moscow and Kharkov, curricula, gymnastics schools, stadiums, the functioning of cultural and recreational parks and children's camps in Moscow, and the role of the Soviet physical education organization in reaching the masses were examined in detail.⁵⁰

After this comprehensive visit to the Soviet Union⁵¹, another important development that showed the strengthening of relations between the two countries took place in October 1933. In October 1933, in commemoration of the 10th anniversary of the founding of the Republic of Türkiye and as a reciprocal gesture following İsmet İnönü's visit to Moscow the previous year,

⁴⁷ *Cumhuriyet*, (12 August 1933), 3; *Hakimiyet-i Milliye*, (12 August 1933), 1; *Vakit*, (12 August 1933), 2; *Milliyet*, (12 August 1933), 1; *Cumhuriyet*, (28 July 1933), 1; *Hakimiyet-i Milliye*, (28 July 1933), 1, 4; *Vakit*, (28 July 1933), 2; *Milliyet*, (28 July 1933), 1-2.

⁴⁸ BCA, 30-10-0-0/248-678-24.

⁴⁹ I. A. Demina, "Türkiye-USSR, The Result of The Physical Education Meeting", *Fizkultura i Sport*, no. 20 (1933): 4

⁵⁰ BCA, 490-1-0-0/1105-36-1; Cengiz Aslan, "Türk Uzmanların Rus Eğitim Sistemi Hakkındaki Raporları," *OPUS Uluslararası Toplum Araştırmaları Dergisi* 15 no. 26 (2020): 4608, <https://doi.org/10.26466/opus.661295>.

⁵¹ An important detail of the 1933 trip was the album prepared by Suat Yurtkoru, which included photographs of the athletes who participated in the USSR trip from Izmir and sports competitions. In the introduction of the album, it was stated that the idea of establishing a cultural park in Izmir was formed during a visit to the Moscow cultural park. Güneş, "Türk-Rus İlişkilerinde Bir Diplomasi Aracı Olarak Spor Müsabakaları ve Halkevleri'nin Rolü", 123.

a delegation led by Marshal Voroshilov from the Soviet Union visited Türkiye. This visit played a significant role in strengthening the relations between the two countries.⁵²

While these mutual visits in 1933 reinforced the increasing role of sports in Turkish-Soviet relations, a new sports delegation visit organized in 1934 contributed to the positive progress of relations. Within this framework, a new sports delegation headed by Cevdet Kerim visited the USSR between July 29 and August 30, 1934 by order of the Turkish government. In addition to football players, this delegation also included track and field players, swimmers and wrestlers.⁵³ Through the competitions organized in Moscow, Leningrad, Kharkov and Kiev, the unifying power of sports was once again demonstrated.⁵⁴

Turkish athletes who set foot in Odesa on July 29 were welcomed with a ceremony by representatives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, local state and party executives, representatives of the Physical Culture and Sports Council, members of tourist organizations and Odesa residents, and a ceremony was held for Turkish athletes in Moscow the next day.⁵⁵

During this period, the Soviet press emphasized the importance of the Turkish athletes' visit. The Soviet press noted the participation of the Turkish women swimmers Leyla and Cavidan, and wrote that it was the first time that Turkish women had crossed the borders of Türkiye to participate in the Moscow swimming competitions.⁵⁶

On August 1, President of the Supreme Council of Physical Culture and Sports, Natipov, received the head of the Turkish delegation, Cevdet Kerim, and Feyzi Bey. Representatives of the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs and members of the Turkish Embassy were present at the meeting. On the same days, Lev M. Karakhan hosted Cevdet Kerim at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the USSR. During the meetings, issues of expanding sports ties and consolidating Turkish-Soviet friendship were discussed.⁵⁷

In the first sports contacts, the Turkish team was defeated in football, but showed their superiority in wrestling.⁵⁸ Especially the swimming competitions held on August 5 at Dinamo stadium were watched with interest by the Soviet people. The stadium was decorated with flags and inscriptions proclaiming Turkish-Soviet friendship and unity. Especially around the swimming pool and the diving boards, there was a vivid and beautiful view of the closeness of the people of the two countries. Karakhan, the new ambassador of Soviet Russia to Ankara, complimented the Turkish athletes as they arrived in a group at the stadium, shaking their hands individually. Government and sports organization officials, the Turkish ambassador and members of the embassy were present at the competition.⁵⁹

⁵² Çağatay Benhür, "Stalin Dönemi Türk-Sovyet İlişkileri." *Selçuk Üniversitesi Türkiyat Araştırmaları Dergisi*, no. 15, (2004): 328.

⁵³ *Son Posta*, (26 July 1934), 10; *Cumhuriyet*, (26 July 1934), 6; *Yeni Asır*, (26 July 1934), 1, 4; *Türk Spor*, no. 42-249, (14 July 1934): 14.

⁵⁴ BCA, 490-1-0-0/1103-28-1.

⁵⁵ *Hakimiyet-i Milliye*, (30 July 1934), 1; *Hakimiyet-i Milliye*, (31 July 1934), 1; *Cumhuriyet*, (29 July 1934), 3; *Vakit*, (30 July 1934), 2.

⁵⁶ *Cumhuriyet*, (31 July 1934), 5; *Akşam*, (31 July 1934), 2; *Haber*, (31 July 1934), 2; *Milliyet*, (31 July 1934), 1-2; *Son Posta*, (31 July 1934), 6.

⁵⁷ Vandov, *Atatürk Döneminde Türk-Sovyet İlişkileri*, 313.

⁵⁸ *Cumhuriyet*, (4 August 1934), 1, 4; *Vakit*, (4 August 1934), 1, 10; *Akşam*, "Futbol maçı", (4 August 1934), 2; Yesenin, *Futbol, Sbornaya SSSR*, 16.

⁵⁹ *Cumhuriyet*, (6 August 1934), 5; *Hakimiyet-i Milliye*, (6 August 1934), 1, 5; *Vakit*, (6 August 1934), 10; *Haber*, (6 August 1934), 2.

A day later, the Turkish embassy hosted a banquet for Turkish-Soviet athletes and dignitaries. This banquet provided an important platform for cultural interaction between the dignitaries of the state and sports organizations. During the talks, Karakhan stated that Turkish-Soviet friendship goes beyond official policies and is based on historical events, and that the meeting of the athletes of the two countries is a new indicator of this friendship.⁶⁰

On August 7, in the football match held in Moscow, the Turkish team lost the match 2-1 despite playing well, and failed to show superiority in other branches.⁶¹ Before proceeding to Leningrad, Antipof, the head of the Soviet Supreme Council of Physical Education, hosted a banquet in honor of the Turkish athletes. Present at the banquet were the Turkish embassy officials, Turkish athletes, high officials of the Commissariat of Foreign Affairs, members of the Supreme Council of Physical Education, Soviet athletes and representatives of the press. Antipof greeted the Turkish athletes and emphasized that the sports relations between Soviet Russia and Türkiye were becoming more organized every day and were a proof of the mutual friendship between the two nations. Cevdet Kerim Bey delivered a long speech in which he declared that *"Turkish-Soviet friendship has gone beyond the framework of friendship of governments and has become the friendship of nations."*⁶²

After Moscow, the Turkish team competed in Leningrad, Kiev and Kharkov, but failed to show any success except in wrestling. The Turkish delegation, which was welcomed warmly in every city it visited, returned to Türkiye on September 1, 1934. Mrs. Cavidan, one of the female swimmers who represented Türkiye for the first time on the sports front abroad, told the press that when Russian people, especially Russian women, saw Turkish women athletes, they appreciated their interest in sports and their ability to communicate in foreign languages. She said that the people in the stadium paid attention to them before anyone else, and interpreted this sincere interest shown to Turkish athletes in the Soviet Union as a clear indication of the friendly attitude of Russians towards Turks.⁶³

Mr. Cevdet Kerim and Mr. Vildan Aşır, who traveled with the Turkish delegation, submitted a report to the state under the title "Sports in Soviet Russia". In the report, the history of physical education in Russia, physical education schools, Moscow and Leningrad Physical Education Institutes, sports festivals, medals, football, wrestling, and sea sports were discussed in detail, which revealed the importance attached to sports organizations and cultural interaction between the two countries.⁶⁴

Turkish-Soviet meetings took place in 1935, this time in Türkiye. Shortly before the Soviet sports delegation departed for Türkiye, an article titled "Tomorrow to Türkiye" was published in the Krasny Sport newspaper on October 7, emphasizing that bilateral contacts were not limited to sports:

*"The sporting events go far beyond sports interests. They will undoubtedly contribute to further cultural rapprochement between the peoples of the USSR and Türkiye, and will be instrumental in strengthening friendly relations and cooperation."*⁶⁵

⁶⁰ Cumhuriyet, (7 August 1934), 1, 4

⁶¹ Cumhuriyet, (8 August 1934), 1, 6; Türk Spor, no. 46-253, (11 August 1934): 11, 13.

⁶² Hakimiyet-i Milliye, (10 August 1934), 1, 3; Son Posta, (10 August 1934), 8; Akşam, (10 August 1934), 2.

⁶³ Cumhuriyet, (2 Eylül 1934), 3; Akşam, (2 Eylül 1934), 1-2.

⁶⁴ BCA, 490-1-0-0/1105-36-1.

⁶⁵ Mikhail Yakushin, *Veçnaya Tayna Futbola*, (Moskva: Fizkultura i Sport, 1988) 18.

Departing from Odessa, the ship Chicherin was welcomed with great enthusiasm in Istanbul on October 12.⁶⁶ Vasiliy Mantsev, Chairman of the Supreme Council of Physical Education of the USSR, who also headed the Soviet delegation, was very pleased with the interest in the welcoming ceremony and made the following statement to the press:

*"We are very happy to meet Turkish athletes again. Because Turkish athletes are our most valuable and biggest competitors. In sports you are young and we are young. The youth of the two friendly countries, the Turkish-Soviet athletes, working hand in hand and working together, will rise together and in the not distant future will be strong and dangerous rivals for Europe in every field of sports."*⁶⁷

Between October 12-30, 1935, Turkish athletes competed with Soviet athletes in football, tennis, fencing and wrestling in four-day intervals on October 13-15 in Istanbul, October 19-21 in Ankara and October 25-27 in Izmir.⁶⁸

A program was also made for the Soviet delegation to visit historical and touristic places in their free time. After the competitions in Istanbul, the football players of the two countries boarded the train together and left for Ankara. As throughout the whole trip, enthusiastic and crowded ceremonies were organized at every station. Some schools were even canceled and students were present at the train stations to greet the Soviet players.⁶⁹

As a matter of fact, on their way back after completing the competitions, Mantsev, the head of the Soviet Russian delegation, stated that they felt the sincere friendship of the Turkish people from the moment they arrived in Türkiye and that they realized how deep the love of the Turkish people was during their two-week stay.⁷⁰

The year 1935 was an important year for the consolidation of friendship, especially in Turkish-Soviet relations. So much so that on November 7, 1935, the Turkish-Soviet Friendship Treaty was extended for another 10 years. It was emphasized that this treaty is the most fundamental document of the sincere relations that have been gradually strengthening over the past decade, serving the interests of the two nations and contributing to the establishment of world peace.⁷¹

Sportive encounters continued in 1936 and a Turkish sports delegation visited the USSR between 14 September and 7 October 1936. A total of 57 athletes, including football players, wrestlers, fencers, and cyclists, participated in the delegation and Sinop Deputy Cevdet Kerim Bey chaired the delegation.⁷²

The Turkish delegation's visit to Russia, like other visits, aroused great interest and articles were written in the press about Turkish-Soviet friendship. These articles emphasized that Turkish-Soviet sports friendship was of great importance in terms of rapprochement and strengthening of cultural ties between the two countries. Even though there were winners and losers in these sports matches, it was considered a common victory in terms of strengthening the sports friendship between the youth of the two countries. It was indicated that the

⁶⁶ *Gol Spor*, 12 no. 4, (October 1935): 9.

⁶⁷ *Cumhuriyet*, (13 October 1935), 1, 8; *Tan*, (13 October 1935), 12; *Kurun*, (13 October 1935), 1, 6; *Ulus*, (13 October 1935), 1, 5.

⁶⁸ *Top*, no. 45, (30 Eylül 1935): 4-5.

⁶⁹ Perinçek, *Türk-Rus Diplomasinde Gizli Sayfalar*, 236.

⁷⁰ BCA, 490-1-0-0/1103-29-1, *Ulus*, (4 November 1935), 3

⁷¹ Kamuran Gürün, *Türk-Sovyet İlişkileri*, (Ankara: TTK Yayınları, 1991) 126-127; *Cumhuriyet*, (8 November 1935), 1, 3.

⁷² BCA, 490-1-0-0/1103-28-1.

foundations of this friendship were laid during the heroic struggle of both countries against imperialist interventions.⁷³

Turkish-Soviet relations, which had been increasing since 1930, weakened especially after the signing of the Montreux Straits Convention in 1936, bringing an end to 12 years of Turkish-Soviet sports diplomacy.⁷⁴

Conclusion

The cooperation between Türkiye and the Soviet Union (USSR) in the field of sports during the period under study contributed significantly to the strengthening of not only diplomatic relations between the two countries, but also people-to-people relations. Beginning in 1924, Soviet-Turkish relations began to deepen, especially in the field of sports, and this cooperation went beyond ideological boundaries, leaving lasting effects on the cultural and social structures of the two societies. Sports served as a bridge between the young populations of the two countries, creating a space for both physical and intellectual exchange. In this context, sports were used as a tool for international cooperation and friendship-building, beyond mere national achievements.

As both governments recognized the importance of sport in bilateral relations, contacts in this field were encouraged at the official level through ministries and embassies. Sporting events were conceived not only as a means to celebrate sporting achievements, but also as a means for societies to get to know each other better. Friendship matches, international tournaments and mutual visits of athletes between the USSR and Türkiye were organized within this framework. These events were widely disseminated through the media, raising awareness of the use of sport as a diplomatic tool.

The fact that the press not only limited the sports events to sporting achievements but also presented them as a reflection of Turkish-Soviet friendship made the social and political function of sports more visible. In particular, the news in the press during this period is remarkable in terms of showing how sports were used as a propaganda tool in diplomatic relations. In this context, sports functioned not only as an arena where athletic skills were displayed, but also as a platform that shaped the perceptions of the two countries towards each other and built a common consciousness at the social level.

The diplomatic function of sport in this period was reinforced not only by the support of political leaders, but also by the individual bonds forged between athletes and the public's interest in these events. Mutual visits and competitions allowed for direct contact between athletes, and the personal relationships that developed in the process contributed significantly to building trust between societies. The visits of athletes and administrators to each other's countries allowed them to get to know different cultural and social structures closely, while the direct participation of the public in these processes demonstrated the unifying power of sport. These interactions are of great importance in terms of demonstrating that sports have created a common ground, especially between countries with politically and ideologically different systems such as Türkiye and the USSR.

In conclusion, the cooperation in the field of sports that developed from the mid-1920s onwards contributed significantly to the deepening of relations between Türkiye and the USSR

⁷³ BCA, 490-1-0-0/1103-29-1; *Tan*, (19 September 1936), 6; *Yeni Asır*, (19 September 1936), 4.

⁷⁴ Perinçek, *Türk-Rus Diplomasinde Gizli Sayfalar*, 251.

and increased mutual understanding and trust between the peoples. Within the political conjuncture of the period, sports were considered as a tool that served to build national identity and gain international prestige for both countries. The contacts realized in this direction increased the visibility and effectiveness of the two countries in the international arena. Official and unofficial diplomatic contacts, especially through sporting events, reinforced the political and cultural rapprochement between Türkiye and the USSR and demonstrated that sports could assume a multifaceted function in international relations.

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