

**THE UNEASY RELATIONSHIP
TURKEY'S FOREIGN POLICY TOWARDS THE
SOVIET UNION AT THE OUTBREAK OF
THE SECOND WORLD WAR**

YÜCEL GÜÇLÜ

After the Lausanne Peace Treaty of 24 July 1923, Turkey followed a policy aiming consciously at peace and co-operation with all nations. The whole purpose of the country presupposed a long period of tranquillity, without which its far-reaching plans for development and reform would have been meaningless. It was natural that at this period Republican Turkey and Soviet Russia should be attracted towards each other. Each was striving for freedom from foreign shackles, and each was faced with formidable programmes of internal transformation. It was one of the major tenets of Soviet foreign policy at the time to cultivate Turkey's good will and understanding, in order to show the exploited nations of Asia that Moscow was their only and true friend. Furthermore, Turkish friendship carried with it promise of an advantageous accommodation in the Straits, in case of war with the West a consideration which no Russian government could disregard.¹

¹See *Cumhuriyetin İlk On Yılı ve Balkan Paktı: 1923-1934* (The First Ten Years of the Republic and the Balkan Pact: 1923-1934), Publication of the Directorate General of Research and Policy Planning, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkey, Ankara, 1973, pp. 10-34.

A close friendship united new Turkey with the Soviet Union. After achieving its complete independence, and while fully preserving it, Turkey observed neutrality between the Soviet Union and the Western powers. Without damaging its friendship towards Moscow, it also kept open all ways leading to the West. It was in this sense that it joined the League of Nations on 18 July 1932. Sir Percy Loraine, the British ambassador in Ankara, did not believe that any rapprochement with Turkey would be possible if it were at the expense of Turkey's relationship with Russia. For the Turk, he wrote, 'to feel insecure on his land frontier in the Caucasus, on his long Black Sea littoral, and at the northern end of the Straits would be a nightmare.'²

That there had been periods of difficulty was true; but the friendship remained. Consistently the Turkish Republic had been able to preserve cordial relations with the Soviet Union, for there had been an identity, though not of ideology, yet certainly of interest between the two. This cordiality was no sentimental affair both Turks and Russians were realist, and knew that common interest alone made friendship a practical mode of relationship. Good relations with the Soviet Union therefore continued to be a cardinal point in Turkish foreign policy. There was no question of Turkey being subordinate to the Soviet Union. Ankara had always shown its national independence and doubtless would do so on every occasion. As Tevfik Rüştü Aras, the Foreign Minister, was reported to have remarked in the course of an interview with a representative of the newspaper *Tan* on 1 February 1936, 'the misunderstandings which continued for centuries between Turkey and Russia have disappeared since the fall of the Tsarist regime in Russia and of the Sultanate in Turkey. In the Near East the unhappy rivalry between Turk and Russian no longer exists.'

So far from harbouring any idea of maintaining its ancient rivalry with Russia, Turkey, indeed, continued to be concerned by, or at least conscious of, the danger presented to its long stretch of sea and land frontier by Russia in the Black Sea and in the Caucasus. To cover that frontier good relations with Moscow were necessary and desirable, but on the condition that Turkey was entirely free to combat Soviet ideology on its own territory.

²*Foreign Office Papers*, Public Record Office, London henceforth referred to as 'F.O.' 371/1011/89. Loraine (Ankara) to Wigram, 30 March 1936.

Turkey, had no room for communism within its own borders, and it had given short shrift to any who tried to practise or preach the doctrines of Karl Marx among its population.³

The Soviets' competition with Britain at the Turkish Straits was renewed at Montreux in June-July 1936 with Turkey aloof (having been conciliated beforehand by a promise that the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles would be demilitarised) but with France on the side of Russia trying to obtain egress to secure communications with its ally. The compromise reached was in many respects favourable to the Soviet Union. The Montreux Convention permitted the Russians unlimited exit for surface vessels and tankers in peacetime, subject to the provisions that warships of more than fifteen thousand tons must proceed singly through the Straits. Soviet submarines were likewise permitted to pass singly through the Straits by day when returning to their Black Sea bases or en route to dockyards located elsewhere. The control of transit for the vessels of the non-Black Sea powers was achieved by restricting the aggregate tonnage, admitting only 'light warships', and limiting the length of their stay. But the new convention did not provide for complete security on Russia's southern borders because effective control of the Straits was placed in the hands of Turkey which, having obtained the right not only to rearm the zone but also to close the Straits in time of war or of an imminent threat of war, was in a position to allow or impede passage according to its interests. For the Soviet Union, therefore, the problem of security in the Black Sea remained tied to its political relations with Turkey and with Turkey's relations with Russia's long-time rivals.⁴

The more insistent and more recent of these rivals was Germany intent upon not only economic penetration of the Balkans and the Near East, but also on a bilateral agreement with Turkey to by-pass the provisions of Montreux to which Berlin had not been a signatory. Germany succeeded to the extent of obtaining confidential verbal assurances in 1938 that Turkey would not enter into a treaty of mutual assistance which would oblige it to allow passage of warships to assist a victim of

³Ibid.

⁴Full text of the Montreux Straits Convention in *League of Nations Treaty Series*, No. 4015, Vol. 173 (1936-1937), pp. 213-241.

aggression, as well as a promise that at the next conference to revise the Montreux Convention Germany would obtain a seat.⁵

On 1 October 1936 Aras informed Anthony Eden, the British Foreign Secretary, at Geneva that the Soviet government had lately been showing some dissatisfaction towards their Turkish friends. The Soviets seemed to wish to thrust upon the Turks an excessive friendliness, and Aras had been considering whether there was any action he could take which would give the Soviets some measure of satisfaction. For this purpose he had in mind to enter into an engagement not to allow warships of an aggressor power to pass through the Straits against the Soviet Union, in return for which Moscow was willing to place its Black Sea fleet at Turkey's disposal in the event of an attack being made against Turkey in the Mediterranean. The view of the British government (which Aras invited) was communicated to Fethi Okyar, the Turkish ambassador in London, on 14 October and was to the effect that Aras' proposal either was covered by the provisions of the Montreux Convention, in which case it amounted to nothing new, or was intended to add something to that convention, which could only lead to complications with the other signatory powers and would clearly be open to the gravest objection; and as regards the proposed Russian guarantee to Turkey, that such an understanding would be extremely dangerous and open to grave political objection, since it would amount in fact to something like a Turco-Soviet alliance, to which, as Okyar agreed, there were manifold objections from the Turkish no less than from the European point of view.⁶

In the light of Okyar's report, the Turkish government decided to reject the Soviet proposal; it proposed, however, as Ambassador Numan Menemencioğlu, the Secretary-General of the

⁵*Documents on German Foreign Policy* henceforth referred to as 'D.G.F.P.', ser. D, Vol. 5, No. 548 and fn. 2, Memorandum by Ribbentrop, 7 July 1938. Ibid., No. 550, Circular to all the principal diplomatic missions, 16 August 1938.

⁶*F.O.* 371/424/280. E6231/5280/44. Eden (Geneva) to Vansittart, 1 October 1936. Ibid., 954/28. Eden (Geneva) to F.O., 10 October 1936. See also *Montreux ve Savaş Öncesi Yılları: 1935-1939* (Montreux and Pre-War Years: 1935-1939), Publication of the Directorate General of Research and Policy Planning, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkey, Ankara, 1973 henceforth referred to as 'Montreux and Pre-War Years', pp. 137-141.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs informed James Morgan, the British Chargé d'Affaires in Ankara on 24 October, to return a soft answer, to the effect that, in order to dissipate a certain vagueness in Article 19 of the Montreux Convention, Turkey would let it be known that it would not allow any aggressor to cross its territory from any quarter by land, sea or air, without, however, asking Russia for an undertaking in return. The proposed reply was found by the British government to be open to serious objection on various grounds, since it appeared that Ankara was still contemplating a declaration putting a gloss on the Montreux Convention, as well as some kind of understanding with the Soviet Union. On 30 October Morgan accordingly made renewed representations to the Turkish government, with the result that in the course of the speech to the Grand National Assembly by the President Kemal Atatürk on foreign affairs (the occasion chosen for making known the proposed declaration to the Soviet Union), only an anodyne and entirely satisfactory reference to the Straits Convention was included.⁷

Turkey's policy towards the Soviet Union was necessarily conciliatory. It could not afford to antagonise its big neighbour, and friendship with Russia would remain a corner-stone in the structure of Turkey's foreign policy; yet Turkey was ready to admit variations of degree in the firmness of the setting of that vital portion of its architecture. In pursuance of the admitted necessity of conciliating the Soviet government from time to time, Aras, accompanied by Şükrü Kaya, Minister of the Interior, visited Moscow on 12-19 July 1937. At the end of a week of meetings, it was announced that the common 'interest of both countries demands the preservation of their relation of friendship in full as a stable element in their foreign policies.'⁸ Although nothing concrete had been achieved, the visit was regarded in Turkey as having been successful in dispelling rumours of a Turco-Soviet rift and in smoothing over some misunderstandings. In the same order of ideas, the Prime Minister İsmet İnönü, whose stamp on foreign affairs were often seen, made a cordial reference, in his statement on foreign policy to the Grand National Assembly on 14 June

⁷Ibid., 21935/10426. *Annual Report on Turkey*, 1937. Para.s 93 and 94.

⁸*Bulletin of International Affairs* henceforth referred to as 'B.I.A.', Vol. 14, No. 8, 4 September 1937, p. 40. And *Documents on International Affairs* henceforth referred to as 'D.I.A.' (1937), London, 1938, p. 423.

1937, to the excellent relations prevailing between the two countries.⁹

At the Nyon conference of 14 September 1937, on the policing of the Mediterranean during the Spanish civil war, it quickly became obvious that none of the participant lesser powers wanted Soviet contribution to the provision of antisubmarine piracy patrolling vessels. 'The extent of this feeling which was shared by all even by the Turks in spite of their friendly relations with the Soviet Union', Admiral Sir Dudley Pound, Commander-in-Chief of the British Mediterranean fleet informed London, 'was surprising.'¹⁰ No one should have been surprised. The Turks were not anxious to establish a precedent for opening the Straits to the Soviets. Also, they knew that if the Soviets were allowed out, the Italians would be certain to hold the Turks accountable after the crisis ended. The Russians, very largely, were left out in the cold. It was Eden's belief, shared by his naval adviser Pound, that the Soviets were prevented from protesting by their anxiety that the world not learn the extent of their unpopularity and isolation.¹¹ 'The Soviet government', Maxim Litvinov, the Soviet Foreign Minister said, 'had no axe to grind, and sought only to ensure the elimination of piracy.' However, he warned, all must understand that the Soviets had as much right in the Mediterranean as anyone else and would protect their rights.¹²

In the long years of friendship between Turkey and the Soviet Union there had been cracks, which, however, had never been allowed seriously to jeopardise relations between Ankara and Moscow. A good understanding with the Soviets had always been a main principle in the diplomacy of Turkey; yet within that large, unchanging framework there had been abundant opportunity for mutual criticism.

⁹*İsmet İnönü'nün TBMM ve CHP Kurultaylarında Söylev ve Demeçleri: 1919-1946* (İsmet İnönü's Speeches and Statements in the Grand National Assembly of Turkey and in the Conventions of the Republican People's Party: 1919-1946), Istanbul, 1946, p. 321. Speech of 14 June 1937.

¹⁰*Public Record Office*, London henceforth referred to as 'PRO'. Pound's Private Papers. CC DUPO 4/6. Pound (Geneva) to F.O., 15 September 1937.

¹¹*Ibid.*

¹²*B.I.A.*, Vol. 14, No. 6, 18 September 1937, pp. 42-43.

On the Russian side there were signs of growing restiveness, mostly accounted for by discontent at the fact that Moscow, since the establishment of very friendly relations between Turkey and Britain following the signature of the Montreux Straits Convention, was no longer 'the only pebble on the Turkish beach', and partly, after Aras' trip to Milan on 3 February 1937 for talks with the Italian Foreign Minister Count Galeazzo Ciano, by suspicions that Turkey might succumb to blandishments of Italy. For example, the government newspaper *Izvestiya* on at least one occasion violently attacked Aras and his policy, and what appeared to be disproportionate indignation was shown in the Soviet press at an article in the influential *Cumhuriyet*, in which the editor-in-chief, Yunus Nadi Abalyoğlu, had, it was alleged, misrepresented Soviet integrity in regard to piratical incidents in the Mediterranean. Moreover, it appeared from a conversation between Aras and Loraine towards the autumn of 1937 that relations were by then becoming less warm. The former said that this was partly due to the fact that the Soviet leader Joseph Stalin had failed to receive himself and Kaya on the occasion of their visit to Moscow in the summer, and partly to the unwillingness of the Turkish government to accept any extension, even by implication, of their public obligations to Russia. It later became apparent that the President of the Republic himself was becoming resentful of Soviet methods; Atatürk was, in particular, indignant at the brutal execution of Lev Karakhan, the former Soviet ambassador in Ankara, who had been recommended as a person in whom he could repose complete confidence, and had, indeed, been admitted to terms of personal intimacy with the President unusual for a foreign ambassador.¹³

It is also to be noted that the omission by Atatürk in his opening speech on 1 November 1937 to the Grand National Assembly of reference to Turkey's friendship with the Soviet Union had roused the curiosity of some observers. Those with a suspicious turn of mind saw in it a turning away from the big neighbour to the north. But that was an exaggerated interpretation. Turkey would not solemnly quarrel with the Soviet Union. Nor was there any fundamental reason for its doing so.¹⁴

¹³F.O. 371/21935/10426, *Annual Report on Turkey*, 1937. Para.s 95 and 96.

¹⁴See text of Atatürk's speech, in *Speech Delivered by Kemal Atatürk, The President of the Turkish Republic at the Opening of the Grand National Assembly on 1 November 1937*, Turkish Government Press, Broadcasting and Tourism Office Publication, Ankara, 1937, pp. 117-129.

Rumours of a Turco-Soviet mutual assistance pact, strenuously denied by Turkish diplomats during the first part of 1938¹⁵, had been insistently revived at the end of that year after the accession of İnönü to the presidency of the Turkish Republic following the death of Atatürk on 10 November 1938. The new President was particularly appreciated in the Soviet Union, where it was believed that he had been dropped from the premiership a year ago because of his Soviet orientation. Russians commonly maintained that İnönü differed from Atatürk on the question of Turkey's relations with Moscow, the new President being alleged to hold more favourable views towards the Soviets than had the late President. They thought that İnönü tended to look with kindlier eyes on the Soviet Union than did his predecessor. Observers were quick to note that Vladimir Potemkin, the Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister, had been the last foreign representative to leave Ankara after Atatürk's funeral, *The Times* in its edition of 26 November reporting that İnönü had expressly asked him to stay behind to discuss mutual problems. The Turkish President, who obviously wished to dispel certain misconceptions, remembered vividly the good understanding that existed for many years after the Great War between Ankara and Moscow, and was concerned to restore it. There was nothing in such a policy that need disturb other countries which cherished Turkey's friendship. Ankara's policy was determined solely by a desire to be both strong and independent. İnönü and his Foreign Minister, Şükrü Saraçoğlu, were at the same time considered in Berlin to be the leading advocates of the Soviet connection.¹⁶ But those who gave them these reputations grossly mistook them. Both statesmen were, above all, Turks and no followers of any predetermined ideological and geopolitical theories.

It was after the visit of Potemkin that rumours of a Turco-Soviet Black Sea pact gained widespread currency. By February

¹⁵On 5 April 1938, Hamdi Arpağ, the Turkish ambassador in Berlin told Joachim Von Ribbentrop, the German Foreign Minister, that his country had recently rejected a Russian proposal for a Black Sea pact on the grounds that Turkey's policy was one of conciliation and neutrality towards all sides. Menemencioğlu confirmed this during the course of the Turco-German economic negotiations. See *D.G.F.P.*, ser. D, Vol. 5, No. 548 and fn. 2, Memorandum by Ribbentrop, 7 July 1938.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, No. 559, Kroll (Ankara) to the Foreign Ministry, 1 February 1939.

1939, the Turks were giving the Germans distinct signs that they were moving towards the Russians. On 1 February, Hans Kroll, the German Chargé d'Affaires in Ankara, reporting that the Russians thought the time had come for reactivating their relations with Turkey, noted that the Soviet ambassador Alexei Terentiev, who had been on leave, was believed to be returning to Ankara with a comprehensive programme for closer co-operation. Germany, he advised, needed a big personality for its ambassador in Ankara to counteract Western influence, and Menemencioğlu, then in Berlin, should be made to realise the seriousness with which Berlin viewed the Turkish actions. Kroll added, however, that both Saraçoğlu and Menemencioğlu had denied as complete illusory the suggestion that Turkey was negotiating with Russia.¹⁷

Apparently to dispel whatever was left of the illusion, on 10 February, Menemencioğlu called on his German counterpart, Ernst Von Weizsacker, the German Under-Secretary of Foreign Affairs, and of his own accord brought up the subject of the alleged Black Sea pact. Menemencioğlu told Weizsacker that the initiative had come from Moscow but that Turkey was not interested in concluding a treaty charging it with the defence of the Straits or the Black Sea while the other treaty members reaped the benefits. In any case, he assured Weizsacker, Turkey would never make an arrangement contrary to German interests. The interview ended with a cool German warning about the growing Turco-Soviet intimacy.¹⁸

Weizsacker may have thought that Menemencioğlu did protest too much, for the following day Kroll again reported signs of a thaw in Turco-Soviet relations and ascribed them to İnönü's influence.¹⁹ The main point at issue in the Turco-Soviet negotiations was the position with regard to the Black Sea, the importance of which was increased at this juncture by the fact that the Danube, on which the Germans were now relying as a trade route, flows into it. Nor were the rumours the exclusive property of the embassy row. *Havas*, the French news agency, filed a story at about the same time alongside a denial by Saraçoğlu. The denial was echoed in Moscow on 20 February. Despite denials, the

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Ibid., No. 560, Memorandum by Weizsacker, 10 February 1939.

¹⁹Ibid., fn. 1.

substance of the rumour was real enough, and they consisted of more than diplomatic feelers for it appears that Turkey thought a Black Sea pact substantial and important enough to bring before the meeting of the Balkan Entente in February. In fact what had happened was that in February 1939 Litvinov tried to secure the Balkan part of Russia's European frontiers by means of an agreement with Turkey and Romania. Meeting the Turkish ambassador, Haydar Aktay, at a luncheon, Litvinov broached the idea of a Black Sea security pact to comprise all the powers bordering on the Black Sea. His Romanian colleague, who was also at the luncheon, was said to have treated the idea very coolly. But Aktay was less certain.²⁰

The Turks appear to have sounded out their allies in the Balkan Entente, especially the Greeks, and the matter was discussed at the annual conference of the Balkan Entente powers at Bucharest.²¹ The proposal struck all these Balkan powers as an extremely unwelcome invitation to choose sides in the war they were now all coming to accept as inevitable. It was therefore rejected. Instead Ivan Maisky, the Soviet ambassador in London, made it clear to his Romanian colleague, Virgil Tilea, that the Soviet Union would come to Romania's aid if Germany attacked it. The news was not treated with any enthusiasm in Romania, and on 8 March the Soviet news agency *Tass* was forced to deny that any request for assistance, military or otherwise, had been made by the Romanians. Rather similar approaches had been made to the Turks, in the belief that İnönü was definitely pro-Russian. Tentative conversations with Turks had likewise failed to produce any result as yet.²²

Despite these difficulties, it is clear that by the beginning of 1939 an alliance with the Soviet Union came high on the list of Turkish priorities. Turkish security could be threatened from two sides: through the Balkans and through the Mediterranean. On the first score the Turkish government considered that no country from the Baltic to the Black Sea was in a position to resist German

²⁰*Ibid.*, No. 560, Memorandum by Weizsacker, 10 February 1939.

²¹*Documents Diplomatiques Français* henceforth referred to as 'D.D.F.', Ser. 2, Vol. 14, No. 144, Thierry (Bucharest) to Bonnet, 20 February 1939.

²²*D.G.F.P.*, Ser. D, Vol. 5, No. 559, Kroll (Ankara) to the Foreign Ministry, 1 February 1939. Also *Survey of International Affairs* henceforth referred to as 'S.I.A.' (1938, iii), London, 1938, p. 447.

aggression unless assured, at the very least, of the Soviets' benevolent neutrality. Co-operation with the Soviets was not for the Turks, as with the West, a matter of convenience but a matter of the most essential necessity firmly rooted in the geography of the area. The corollary to this conclusion was that without Soviet co-operation there was no question of organised defence in eastern Europe. The other area, the eastern Mediterranean, was no less vital. So long as Italy spoke or thought in terms of its destiny in the Mediterranean, the Turks remembered that the Dodecanese Islands in the Aegean Sea belonged to Italy and that the heavy fortifications in the aero-naval base at Leros were aimed either to attack western Anatolia or to disrupt sea traffic in the eastern Mediterranean. It was natural to suppose that Benito Mussolini's government would not remain indifferent if a favourable opportunity occurred for attempting to realise Italian aspirations on Turkish territory. Just as no defence of the Balkans could be arranged without Soviet co-operation, equally no defence in the Mediterranean against Italy was conceivable without British help.²³

The West's response to the German occupation of Czechoslovakia on 15 March 1939 provided Turkey with the opening it had been looking for to arrive at a security arrangement in the Mediterranean to complement the discussions already underway with the Soviet Union. It seems that sometime between February and March that is, before the *Axis coups* in Czechoslovakia and Albania Turkey had weighed the advantages of an already tentatively formulated agreement with the Soviets in the Black Sea against an, as yet, unformulated agreement with Britain in the Mediterranean, and had decided that the second alternative took precedence. This was a seminal decision from which Turkey would not deviate despite blandishments to do so from both Germany and the Soviet Union.²⁴

On 12 April 1939, five days after the occupation of Albania by Italy, Britain offered a treaty of mutual assistance to Turkey. It was clear to Turks that by itself a Black Sea pact with the Soviet Union was insufficient. It would expose them to German blackmail,

²³Frank Marzari, 'Western-Soviet Rivalry in Turkey: 1939-I', *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 7 (1), 1971, pp. 65-66.

²⁴In this connection it is worth underlining that the British ambassador in Ankara dated the new policy from February 1939. See Hugh Knatchbull-Hugessen, *Diplomat in Peace and War*, London, 1949, p. 145.

and their economy was sensitive enough to pressures of that kind. Moreover, the immediate danger now appeared to be coming from other quarters. The Turks appreciated the addition to their security a Black Sea pact would entail, but the risk would only be offset by first obtaining an agreement with Britain providing for security in the Mediterranean where Italy had given ominous proof of bellicosity by invading Albania. The Black Sea pact could then be incorporated as part of a reinsurance policy extending from London to Moscow. These considerations ensured that within limits the British offer would be viewed favourably.²⁵

The Turkish reply was returned on 15 April. It reflected with painstaking clarity the Turks' reluctance to abandon their neutrality without crystal-clear safeguards, but it also reflected the sober decision already arrived at that security could no longer be found in non-alignment. Before taking a position against the Axis, Saraçoğlu stated, Turkey had to know exactly what help it could expect from Britain and France and, eventually, the Soviet Union. Only then could the matter of help to Romania beyond the provisions of the Balkan Entente be studied. Turkey would co-operate fully with Britain in the Balkans or the Mediterranean providing the latter first helped in the defence of the Straits, co-ordinated its overall military strategy with Turkey and helped mediate Bulgaro-Romanian differences.²⁶

It was in these circumstances that Vyacheslav Molotov, Soviet Chairman of the Council of Ministers, first became active in foreign affairs. On the same day that the Turks replied the British offer of treaty, he telegraphed directly to the Soviet ambassador in Ankara, proposing a Turco-Soviet meeting as soon as possible, in Tbilisi or Batumi.²⁷ At the same time Litvinov enquired directly of the Turkish ambassador in Moscow, Zekai Apaydyn, about the Turco-British negotiations.²⁸ Why had not the Turks told him what was going on? On 21 April, Apaydyn reassured him. The Turks, he

²⁵*British Documents on Foreign Policy* henceforth referred to as 'B.D.F.P.', Ser. 3, Vol. 5, No. 138, Knatchbull-Hugessen (Ankara) to Halifax, 12 April 1939.

²⁶*Ibid.*, No. 190, Knatchbull-Hugessen (Ankara) to Halifax, 16 April 1939. *Ibid.*, No 199, Knatchbull-Hugessen (Ankara) to Halifax, 17 April 1939.

²⁷V. Filin *et al.* (Eds.), *Soviet Peace Moves on the Eve of the Second World War*, Vol. 1, Moscow, 1973, p. 234.

²⁸*Ibid.*, p. 246.

said, had told the British that, in the event of a Balkan or Mediterranean war, they anticipated an attack on the Dardanelles, and asked what assistance they could count on Britain and France. For that matter, Apaydyn asked, what assistance could they count on from the Soviets? Litvinov could not answer. Instead he mentioned that his deputy Potemkin would visit Ankara at the end of April. His real mission was to investigate the positions in the Balkans. Advantage was taken of his visit for him to pass through Sofia on the way down to Istanbul, and to visit Bucharest and Warsaw on his return.²⁹

On his arrival at Istanbul on 28 April, Potemkin was treated with high honours. He was well-known in Turkey. He had been the counsellor of the Soviet Embassy at Ankara between 1926 and 1929 and inspired a considerable degree of confidence in Turkish government quarters. On arriving in Istanbul he informed the French ambassador, René Massigli, that his object was to harmonise Turkish and Soviet policy and to synchronise the negotiations between Turkey, Britain and France on the one hand and Turkey and Soviet Union on the other. He wanted very much to see the Balkan Entente strengthened and backed up by a Turco-Anglo-Franco-Soviet agreement.³⁰ In Ankara the Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister displayed the attitude of the career diplomat, acting nationalistically, and plying the trade of diplomacy. Potemkin told the Turks that Russia was happy with the movement towards a Turco-British convention and Mediterranean agreement, and was satisfied with Turkish policy in general, though Moscow thought it unduly weak over Romania. He wondered, however, if the proposed Turco-British convention might be expanded into a tripartite Turco-Anglo-Russian pact. But if this were not possible, he assured the Turks, they could continue to count on Russian assistance if required.³¹ The Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister asked if Russia could reckon on Turkish assistance if involved in a war over Romania. Saraçoğlu told him that this would depend on the Bulgarian attitude. Potemkin promised that the Soviets would use

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰*D.D.F.*, Ser. 2, Vol. 15, No. 527, Massigli (Ankara) to Bonnet, 30 April 1939. See also Filin, *Soviet Peace Moves*, Vol. 2, p. 264.

³¹*D.G.F.P.*, Ser. D, Vol. 5, No. 559, Kroll (Ankara) to the Foreign Ministry, 1 February 1939. Also *S.I.A.* (1938, iii), p. 447.

their influence to produce a more co-operative attitude in Sofia.³² Before he left, Potemkin had an audience with the President. İnönü urged him to advise Moscow to take whatever it was offered by the West.³³

The Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister was more than a little peeved to find that the British negotiations with Turkey had gone as far as they had. He was also worried by the very marked reserve the Turks showed towards Germany, as compared with their open hostility to Italy. The Turks, by Potemkin's own account, treated him openly, giving him a somewhat edited version of their talks with the Romanians and their exchanges with the British. Their version emphasised the Turkish reluctance to be involved in any guarantee system against Germany which was not backed by Soviet arms and Soviet aid. They proposed a direct Turco-Soviet agreement to make the Anglo-Soviet and Turco-British agreements, whose conclusion they anticipated, into a triangular relationship. They asked for the terms of the Soviet proposal of 17 April to the British for a triple Anglo-Franco-Soviet alliance against aggression; and they asked, as Potemkin reported, for Soviet blessing for their negotiations with Britain. They asked too for Soviet aid in pressing Romania to cede the Dobrudja to Bulgaria so as to include the latter in the Balkan Entente. They discussed a separate Black Sea security pact. Potemkin duly approved their stand in the Turco-British negotiations.³⁴ The joint communique issued at the conclusion of Potemkin's mission, that Turkey and Russia would 'pursue their respective and parallel efforts for the safeguarding of peace and security', in the light of subsequent events, becomes charged with more than a little irony.³⁵

With regard to the Turco-Soviet negotiations it is relevant to ask why, given the favourable disposition all around, nothing was concluded. Here one enters into the realm of speculation, but one hypothesis seems more consonant with the available evidence: that

³²*B.D.F.P.*, Ser. 3, Vol. 5, No. 357, Knatchbull-Hugessen (Ankara) to Halifax, 4 May 1939.

³³*Ibid.*, No. 378, Knatchbull-Hugessen (Ankara) to Halifax, 6 May 1939.

³⁴Filin, *Soviet Peace Moves*, Vol. 2, pp. 264-265, 269, 271 and 273. Moreover see *Montreux and Pre-War Years*, pp. 217-218.

³⁵*B.I.A.*, Vol. 16, No. 10, 20 May 1939, p. 45.

the Soviet Union regarded its negotiations with Turkey as exclusive (whereas Ankara saw them as complementary with security arrangements with the West); that the Soviet Union traditionally considered Britain as a competitor rather than an ally; that despite this Moscow still might have concluded a pact of mutual assistance with Turkey if three conditions had been fulfilled. These were, firstly, that the Balkan countries show signs of becoming united to resist German aggression and welcome Soviet help, and, secondly, that the Turkish negotiations with Britain be not so far advanced that the Soviet Union could not make its peculiar requirements prevail, and lastly that, *in toto*, both Balkan and Western powers display enough evidence of strength to induce the Soviet Union to join their side. As these conditions did not appear likely to be fulfilled it is fair to suppose that the traditional Russian hostility towards Britain as well as the exclusiveness of Turco-Soviet negotiations gained the upper hand and, for the while, the Soviet Union chose to bide its time. This hypothesis seems confirmed by the fact that Potemkin was visibly shaken by the advanced state of Turco-British negotiations.³⁶

As indicated earlier, Potemkin confided to Massigli that his intention had been to synchronise the Turco-Anglo-French and the Turco-Soviet negotiations. Given the advanced state of the former his comment could only have one meaning: to slow them down. He had as little success on this score as he had had with Bulgaria. He had arrived in Ankara on 28 April and by 2 May there was no indication that he had placed any serious proposals before his hosts. He appeared to be temporising while awaiting instructions. After the first few days, the British ambassador in Ankara Sir Hugh Knatchbull-Hugessen was quick to observe a growing note of distrust in Saraçoğlu's allusions to his guest.³⁷ The third Soviet requirement the overall prospects of successful defiance of Germany was equally no closer. Potemkin registered considerable dismay at the fact that the British reply to the Soviet proposals for a containment front showed little consideration of Soviet needs, and

³⁶*B.D.F.P.*, Ser. 3, Vol. 5, No. 322, Knatchbull-Hugessen (Ankara) to Halifax, 30 April 1939. Also René Massigli, *La Turquie devant la Guerre: Mission à Ankara 1939-1940*, Paris, 1964, p. 192.

³⁷*Ibid.*, No. 343, Knatchbull-Hugessen (Ankara) to Halifax, 3 May 1939.

appeared doubly discomfited because Turkish policy towards Germany was not as clearly antagonistic as it was towards Italy.³⁸

Clearly, although no suggestion of an open break was allowed, the visit had not borne out its expectations: Potemkin professed himself satisfied in a conversation with Knatchbull-Hugessen but added significantly that everything now depended on the British reply to the Soviet proposals on the containment front and on the composition of inter-Balkan differences.³⁹ The British ambassador was surprised by the deficiency of concrete results during the visit. He asked Saraçoğlu about the proposed Black Sea pact. It was a matter for later realisation, the Foreign Minister replied; the agreements with Britain and France were to be concluded first. When the moment came, 'the Soviet Union could then be incorporated'.⁴⁰ Potemkin, on his part, made no effort then or later either to dissuade the Turks from signing the joint declaration for mutual assistance with Britain or to accelerate the negotiations for an agreement between Turkey and the Soviet Union. On his return to Moscow he gave the general impression that the Soviet Union was prepared to leave the Turco-British negotiations alone until the fate of the Soviet Union's own negotiations with the West was settled.

Meanwhile, Turkey continued to search for the illusive Soviet connection to parallel its accommodation with Britain. Turkey fully appreciated the potential weight of Russia in world affairs, and particularly in Near Eastern questions. That is not to say, however, that it readily subscribed to the Russian view upon the indivisibility of peace. Instead of been doctrinaire Turkey was wholly empirical in its policy, and might be considered to lean towards the British thesis rather of immediately buttressing the forces of peace where peace was threatened than of pledging aid where aid was not at present called for. Through the spring and summer of 1939, there were definite signs that an agreement with the Turks would not be uncongenial to the Russians. Potemkin told M. Payard, the French ambassador in Moscow, that the Turco-

³⁸Ibid., No. 322, Knatchbull-Hugessen (Ankara) to Halifax, 30 April 1939. Massigli (1964), p. 192.

³⁹Ibid., No. 357, Knatchbull-Hugessen (Ankara) to Halifax, 4 May 1939. Massigli (1964), p. 192.

⁴⁰Ibid., No. 379, Knatchbull-Hugessen (Ankara) to Halifax, 5 May 1939.

British Joint Guarantee of 12 May 1939 had made such a development essential for Soviet security because of the twist it had given the Straits regime established at Montreux.⁴¹ When in Ankara, in April, Potemkin had assured Saraçoğlu that the Soviet Union aspired only to an identical arrangement to that negotiated with the Western powers. The new Foreign Minister Molotov, he said, was anxious that Saraçoğlu come to Moscow to sign a mutual assistance pact.⁴² On 29 May, *Tass*, reported quite explicitly that Russia desired a military accord with Turkey.

The Turks continued to believe a Germano-Soviet rapprochement unlikely, and thought that such rumours were only a Russian attempt to light a fire under the British.⁴³ By the middle of July, however, they were becoming anxious at the obvious lack of progress towards an understanding between its Western allies and the Soviet Union.⁴⁴ Despite this, Ankara considered that whatever the final outcome of Russia's talks with the West, this need not preclude a satisfactory Turco-Soviet arrangement. Turkey and the Soviet Union were friends of long standing, and that a mutual interest which united them was the determination to prevent the Germans from approaching closer to the Black Sea.⁴⁵

In the middle of July, Stalin began to push hard for an understanding with the Turks. On 18 July, he warned the Turkish government much to its annoyance that signature of a Turco-Soviet pact was a precondition for an understanding with Britain and France.⁴⁶ By 22 July, however, Moscow's attitude apparently had softened. Molotov instructed, Olga Nikitnikova, the Soviet

⁴¹*D.D.F.*, Ser. 2, Vol. 16, No. 305, Payard (Moscow) to Bonnet, 29 May 1939.

⁴²Feridun Cemal Erkin, *Les Relations Turco-Soviétiques et la Question des Détroits*, Ankara, 1968, p. 154.

⁴³*D.D.F.*, Ser. 2, Vol. 17, No. 66, Massigli (Ankara) to Bonnet, 1 July 1939.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, No. 211, Massigli (Istanbul) to Bonnet, 15 July 1939.

⁴⁵Erkin, *Les Relations Turco-Soviétiques*, p. 156.

⁴⁶*D.D.F.*, Ser. 2, Vol. 17, No. 230, Massigli (Ankara) to Bonnet, 18 July 1939. This demand does not seem to have been entirely a ruse on Stalin's part and if it was, then it accorded well with contemporary Western thinking. In Paris, Georges Bonnet, the French Foreign Minister also considered that Turco-Western and Turco-Soviet treaties would be preconditions of a Soviet-Western accommodation. Georges Bonnet, *De Munich à la Guerre*, Paris, 1967, p. 273.

Chargé d'Affaires in Ankara to see if the Turks would like to sign a bilateral agreement such as Saraçoğlu had discussed with Potemkin in May. The Soviet ambassador in Ankara assured the worried Turks that there was no truth to the rumours that Moscow was negotiating with Germany.⁴⁷ Both Menemencioğlu and Saraçoğlu were considerably warmed by this development and considered it, understandably, a certain sign that the Soviets desired good relations with Ankara.⁴⁸ To Massigli, the Turks stressed the importance of the Soviet initiatives in regards to the formation of a possible Eastern Front against Germany.⁴⁹

The Turks do not appear, at this juncture, to have had any insurmountable doubts regarding Soviet policy and seem to have continued to expect that good relations which had existed between the two nations since the Great War would continue. In any case, vigorous Soviet efforts to obtain some accommodation with Turkey were consistent with Molotov's statements to the Anglo-French delegation then in Moscow. Agreements with Poland and Turkey, Molotov had insisted, must be concluded simultaneously with any agreement with Britain and France and were essential if this last agreement were to operate with any hope of success. In Ankara, vigorous Russian attempts to bring a Turk to Moscow competent to assist in talks of the highest order, appeared to underline the consistency of Soviet policy rather than to indicate any change.⁵⁰

At the beginning of August 1939, when the negotiations with the West were entering their most delicate phase, the Soviet government had once again offered Turkey a bilateral pact and underlined the importance of the offer by asking Saraçoğlu to come to Moscow to conduct the negotiations.⁵¹ In typical Soviet

⁴⁷James MacSherry, *Stalin, Hitler and Europe: 1933-1939*, New York, 1968, p. 162.

⁴⁸*D.D.F.*, Ser. 2, Vol. 17, No. 276, Massigli (Ankara) to Bonnet, 22 July 1939.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, No. 350, Massigli (Ankara) to Bonnet, 28 July 1939.

⁵⁰MacSherry, *Stalin, Hitler and Europe*, p. 186.

⁵¹*B.D.F.P.*, Ser. 3, Vol. 6, No. 620, Knatchbull-Hugessen (Ankara) to Halifax, 11 August 1939. Massigli (1964), p. 245. Turkey at its own request had been informed of the West's negotiations with the Soviet Union. See *ibid.*, no. 352, Knatchbull-Hugessen (Ankara) to Halifax, 19 July 1939. Turkey had also been asked by Britain to help in persuading the Soviet government

fashion, before putting forth a draft of their own, the Russians submitted a questionnaire to the Turkish government. They wanted to know whether Turkey preferred the projected pact to apply only to aggression or go further, possibly as Saraçoğlu surmised, into the area of indirect aggression. They asked whether the pact should be limited to land only to the defence of the contracting or also to cases when the contracting parties were involved in hostilities owing to the obligations; in that case Turkey was asked to state to which other countries it had obligations.⁵²

The timing of the Soviet representation was significant. It came three months after the last official approach to Turkey; it came when negotiations with the West were about to reach an impasse; it came when a turnabout in Russian policy threatened to leave the Soviet Union's southern flank exposed. In the next week the turnabout was confirmed by Ribbentrop's night flight to Moscow and by the ensuing pact. Soviet policy was striking out in a new direction, though on paths well traversed by previous generation of Russian diplomats.⁵³

The most remarkable aspect of the new Soviet policy was the desire to cash as quickly as possible the promissory notes exacted as a price for the Germano-Russian Non-aggression Pact of 23 August 1939 and to take whatever advantage from the dislocation caused by the coming war. Both objectives were pressing, on the one hand because the complexion of the war might change and on the other because of the necessity to strengthen the country's strategic position *vis-à-vis* Germany. Both, however, were compellingly circumscribed by a third and over-riding consideration: in no case could the Soviet Union become embroiled in hostilities with a great power. The first two considerations dictated the fundamental direction of Soviet policy; the third prescribed its limitations.⁵⁴

of the West's sincerity in their negotiations. See *ibid.*, No. 366, Knatchbull-Hugessen (Ankara) to Halifax, 20 July 1939. Also *Montreux and Pre-War Years*, p. 220.

⁵²*Ibid.*, Vol. 7, No. 9, Knatchbull-Hugessen (Ankara) to Halifax, 15 August 1939. *Montreux and Pre-War Years*, pp. 220-224.

⁵³*Ibid.*

⁵⁴Frank Marzari, 'Western-Soviet Rivalry in Turkey: 1939-II', *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 7 (2), 1971, p. 207.

If this analysis is accepted it serves to explain why the Soviet Union, at a time it was about to make its first major territorial acquisition in Poland, should be interested in allaying complications on its southern frontiers. On the basis of what can be inferred from the later actions of the Soviet government, an immediate alteration of the status quo at the Straits must have been a tantalising temptation. But the certainty that a *coup* in that area would automatically involve the country in war, and the fear that Turkish policy might independently lead to an extension of the conflict in the Middle East caused the Soviet government to act energetically to support the peace in an area where its interests were so extensive and so vital that, if threatened, the country might be forced to abandon its neutrality.⁵⁵

Some time during the last week in August Turkey replied to the Soviet questionnaire: the proposed pact would have 'effect within a limited compass and therefore have a limited liability' but it could be concluded on a 'wide conception of aggression' and cover 'naval and land wars'; Turkey's engagements were those envisaged by the Balkan Entente and the Turco-Allied declarations.⁵⁶ At the beginning of September Terentiev submitted a formula whereby the two countries might sign an agreement in principle pending the conclusion of the formal treaty. This procedure was acceptable to the Turkish government provided the Soviet Union accepted first that mutual assistance would be operative against aggression by a European power in the Balkans, the Black Sea and the Straits, and secondly that Turkey could not be obliged to take any action leading to a conflict with Britain and France.⁵⁷

The first condition reflected Turkey's concern with its own security and echoed the similar provision incorporated in the draft tripartite pact with the West; the second sought to harmonise those engagements with a security arrangement with the Soviet Union. The problem was to reconcile these undertakings in a situation in which, should Germany attack in the Balkans, Turkey would be called upon by the allies to oppose the attack at the same time that it was asked by the Soviet Union to abet it. There are two versions

⁵⁵Ibid.

⁵⁶The full text of the reply is in *Montreux and Pre-War Years*, pp. 220-224.

⁵⁷Massigli, *La Turquie devant la Guerre*, p. 268.

of Terentiev's answer to these Turkish conditions. According to Massigli, who got it from Saraçoğlu, Terentiev had replied he had no instructions in the matter.⁵⁸ According to Necmettin Sadak, at that time a deputy and a journalist and after the Second World War Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Soviet ambassador had answered that the Turkish conditions would have been acceptable while the Soviet Union and the West were still engaged in conversations. But after their breakdown the situation had changed, although it was still possible to envisage an agreement on the Straits and the Balkans. Again according to Sadak, it was finally decided that negotiations should be primarily concerned with the Black Sea and the Straits but with a provision for consultation regarding the Balkans and a reservation, which Turkey insisted had to be inserted in the projected pact, that 'any obligations thereby assumed by Turkey would not involve it in an armed conflict with either of the two Western powers.'⁵⁹

The above compromise was evidently accepted by the Soviet Union because on 8 September Saraçoğlu showed a sceptical Massigli a draft project and on the 16th Saraçoğlu's trip to Moscow was publicly announced. The departure date was left open in the hope that in the meantime agreement might be reached on the outstanding financial clauses of the tripartite pact. But the time was too short. Saraçoğlu before leaving on 25 September assured Massigli that Turkish policy would not change as a result of the trip and that the tripartite treaty would be signed on his return.⁶⁰

Despite Saraçoğlu's assurances, there could be little doubt that the Soviet turnabout had made nonsense of the Turkish policy to reconcile engagements with the West with friendship in Moscow. Turkey would now had to revise its position. Evidently Germany was counting heavily on the Soviet Union's collaboration and nowhere more so than in Turkey and the Straits where the geographical position and the old friendship with Ankara made the Soviet Union uniquely efficient in applying pressure. Germany's hopes seemed to be matched by Russia's disposition. During the night of 23 August both Stalin and Molotov had remarked to

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 269.

⁵⁹Necmettin Sadak, 'Turkey Faces the Soviets', *Foreign Affairs*, April 1949, p. 453.

⁶⁰Massigli, *La Turquie devant la Guerre*, p. 269.

Ribbentrop that they too had suffered from 'the vacillating policy of the Turks.'⁶¹

Berlin had seen an opening for a representation when it came to know at the end of August of the Turco-Soviet discussion for a Black Sea pact. Immediately the German ambassador in Moscow, Count Friedrich Von Schulenburg, was charged with drawing Molotov's attention to the desirability of complete Turkish neutrality and the German representative was grateful to receive an assurance on 2 September that the Soviet Union was ready to work to that end: in Stalin's and Molotov's view Moscow's security requirements in the Black Sea could be reconciled with Berlin's desires by inserting a provision in the projected pact that Russia should not be required to take action against Germany, in which case Turkey would surely have to remain neutral in a Balkan war.⁶²

On the other hand, Saraçoğlu had three very specific objectives. The first was to ascertain to what extent the non-aggression pact with Germany had altered Soviet policy in general and in the Balkans in particular. The second was to arrive at a security pact with the Soviet Union which would not be incompatible with his engagements towards the West. And thirdly he undertook to ascertain the Soviet reaction to a projected neutral bloc of Balkan states. His bargaining position was strong. The treaty with the West was almost ready for signature and France had extended a formal promise of help and solidarity should he be subject to Soviet pressure. In accepting this assurance, İnönü had pledged that if the Soviet Union asked Turkey to limit the treaty with the allies to the eastern Mediterranean and come to a separate agreement on the Straits and the Balkans, the reply was going to be negative.⁶³

The Turkish government had very definite ideas about what it wanted from the Soviet Union. Basically, it sought a non-

⁶¹*D.G.F.P.*, Ser. D, Vol. 7, No. 213, Record of the conversation between Ribbentrop, Stalin and Molotov, 23 August 1939.

⁶²*Ibid.*, No. 465, Foreign Ministry to Schulenburg (Moscow), 30 August 1939. *Ibid.*, No. 516, Foreign Ministry to Schulenburg (Moscow), 1 September 1939. *Ibid.*, No. 551, Schulenburg (Moscow) to Foreign Ministry, 2 September 1939.

⁶³Massigli, *La Turquie devant la Guerre*, pp. 277-278.

aggression pact which would free it from the necessity of deploying large numbers of troops in its eastern provinces. Prior to leaving, Saraçoğlu had given Knatchbull-Hugessen the following text of a proposed non-aggression pact between Turkey and the Soviet Union:

i) In the case of an aggression by a European power directed in the area of the Black Sea, including the Straits, against Turkey or the Soviet Union, high contracting parties will effectively co-operate and send each other all aid and assistance in their power.

ii) In the case of an aggression by a European power against Turkey or against the Soviet Union in the Balkan area, high contracting parties will effectively co-operate and lend each other all assistance in their power.

iii) The engagements by Turkey in virtue of Articles 1 and 2 of the above cannot force that country into an action having for effect or leading to the consequence of putting it in armed conflict with Britain and France.

iv) Suggested treaty to be for a duration of fifteen years with tacit renewal every five years.⁶⁴

Saraçoğlu presented this draft treaty to Molotov on the first day of discussions, 30 September 1939. Molotov gave to Saraçoğlu a document of his own. It was a list of proposed amendments to the Montreux Convention. When he realised what it was, Saraçoğlu refused to take it, touch it, or discuss it. This exchange set the tone for the remainder of the conversations. The truth was, as mentioned previously, that the Russians had already promised the Germans to use their influence to draw the Turks away from the West and regarded the talks more in this light than as an attempt to come to some mutually beneficial bilateral accommodation with the Turks. Von Schulenburg, one of the main architects of the Germano-Russian pact, was in constant contact with Kremlin during Saraçoğlu's visit to Moscow and pressed Molotov to heed German desiderata. Soviet leaders were willing to follow his advice. Having chosen neutrality in the Germano-Western war, Russia was ready to

⁶⁴*F.O.* 371/424/283. C13247/3356/18. Knatchbull-Hugessen (Ankara) to Halifax, 8 September 1939.

aid Germany in neutralising the Black Sea region, and thus to bar the opening of a second front in the Balkans. Such a front would bring hostilities close to the Soviet border, a situation Russia wanted to avoid. Moreover, the presence of an Anglo-French fleet in the Black Sea a possible result of an alliance with Turkey might create serious security problems for "collaborationist" Russia. Thus, both to appease Germany and to keep the conflict away from its borders, Russia desired Turkish neutrality.⁶⁵

On the second day of discussions, 1 October, Stalin himself appeared.⁶⁶ He made very plain that he objected to the Turco-Anglo-French tripartite treaty as negotiated to date. He thought that the treaty should commit the Turks only to consultation, and not to action, in regard to the guarantees to Greece and Romania. Further, he thought that in the event that the Soviet Union went to war with Britain and France, the treaty should be suspended for the duration.⁶⁷ Stalin returned to the question of the proposed Montreux modifications. The substance of Soviet demands was that whether in peace or war, the Turks belligerent or non-belligerent, Turks and Soviets should decide in common, in each case, if passage through the Straits of a non-riverine power would be permitted. Non-riverine powers would be limited to a fifth of the presently authorised tonnage.⁶⁸ Ships would not be allowed in for humanitarian work or in execution of a League decision unless the Soviets participated in the decision. Finally, there would be no further revision except by bilateral agreement between Turkey and the Soviet Union.⁶⁹

Saraçoğlu agreed to pass on to Britain and France the Russian demands for modification of the tripartite treaty, but was not hopeful of their response. Straits revision, he refused to discuss. Turkey, he vowed, would never repeat the mistake of *Hünkâr İskelesi*. If this were Russia's last word, he said, then he would go

⁶⁵Erkin, *Les Relations Turco-Soviétiques*, p. 162.

⁶⁶B.I.A., vol. 16, no. 21, 21 October 1939, p. 59.

⁶⁷*Cabinet Office Papers*, Public Record Office, London henceforth referred to as "CAB" 29/1. WC, 36 (39), 4 October 1939.

⁶⁸5.000 rather than 30.000 tons.

⁶⁹Erkin, *Les Relations Turco-Soviétiques*, p. 163.

home.⁷⁰ "Saraçoğlu is perfectly correct", answered Stalin disarmingly: "This project is just too grotesque".⁷¹ Stalin turned, lastly, to the nature of the alignment between Turkey and the Soviet Union. The Russians, he said, would guarantee the Turks except in the case of German attack. In this event, the Turco-Soviet agreement would be suspended.⁷²

In Ankara Stalin's modifications were considered a stiff, but nonetheless acceptable price to pay for Soviet amity. Instructions were sent to Saraçoğlu to prepare a draft Turco-Soviet treaty on the understanding that the suggested modifications to the tripartite treaty would be made as soon as London and Paris gave their approval. Such approval proved to be much more difficult to obtain than the Turkish government anticipated. In the West, where earlier in the year the proposed Turco-Soviet pact had been seen as essential to the containment front, opinion was sharply divided.⁷³

In Paris the official announcement of Russia's neutrality, which arrived the same day that Russian troops marched into Poland, seemed like a monstrous joke. Immediately an earlier promise of aid to all Balkan countries menaced by German expansion was amplified to include Russian imperialism as well.⁷⁴ In the Quai d'Orsay, there was no doubt that Stalin's modifications were intended to divest the tripartite treaty of all substance and to render the guarantee to Romania inoperative. Consequently on 3 October the French Prime Minister, Edouard Daladier, informed the Turkish ambassador in Paris in no uncertain terms that France had no intention of altering the text as it then stood. It was against France's interests, the Quai telegraphed Massigli, to agree to what amounted to a neutralisation of the Balkans. London, on the other hand, took a more flexible line, partly because it never shared Paris' optimism about a Balkan front. Britain would be pleased to see continued friendly relations between Turkey and the Soviet Union,

⁷⁰Ibid. The Treaty of Hünkâr İskelesi of 1833 provided the opening of the Straits to Russian warships while keeping them closed to warships of other powers. The treaty also gave Russia the right to participate in the defence of the Straits.

⁷¹Ibid., p. 164.

⁷²Ibid., p. 166.

⁷³Ibid.

⁷⁴Massigli, *La Turquie devant la Guerre*, p. 270.

the British Foreign Secretary, Lord Halifax told the House of Lords. "In our view, these relations are not contrary to closer relations between ourselves and Turkey or between Turkey and France."⁷⁵

Against this background Menemencioğlu embarked on an attempt during the first week of October to persuade the French and, to a lesser extent, the British ambassadors in Ankara that Stalin's amendments had more form than substance. Soviet amity, Menemencioğlu explained to Massigli and Knatchbull-Hugessen, had long been a corner-stone of Kemalist Turkey's foreign policy. The Soviet proposals were really meaningless except in the unlikely possibility of Russia joining Italy. Substituting a pledge of unconditional aid to Greece for a pledge of consultation changed nothing since Greece was a vital Turkish interest and consultation would only be a matter of days. Queried about Romania, Menemencioğlu repeated his conviction that there was no private Germano-Russian understanding aimed at Bucharest. As to the suspense clause, it mattered little in a Turco-Soviet agreement since, in a case of war between Russia and the allies, Turkey would not take sides in any event. Menemencioğlu optimistically chose to view these modifications as a wedge between Germany and Russia.⁷⁶

The majority opinion in the British war cabinet was to refuse revision and to insist that the triple alliance stand as already initialled by Britain and France. The only other course would be to abandon it altogether and negotiate a new treaty limited to the Mediterranean. The British Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain, however, was not anxious to abandon what had been achieved only with difficulty. He convinced the cabinet that the Soviet objections should be admitted, but that the British government must receive full information in regards to the proposed Turco-Soviet agreement and the assurance that Turkey would be able to enter the war if it chose to do so.⁷⁷ As remarked before, Paris, in contrast, had come to the conclusion that the Soviet demands should be refused and the treaty signed as it stood. The French

⁷⁵Ibid., p. 282.

⁷⁶Ibid., pp. 283-284.

⁷⁷CAB 65/2 . WC 39 (39), 6 October 1939.

agreed, however, to follow the British lead in this matter.⁷⁸ Puzzled, and with considerable misgivings, the British government advised the Turks that it would accept the Russian reservations if the Turks wished it. Had this approval not been forthcoming, in Erkin's opinion, a rupture with the Soviet Union would have been certain, rapid and rancorous.⁷⁹

On 14 October, the Turks fortified by Britain's reluctant acquiescence, agreed to Stalin's demand that the tripartite treaty would bind them only to consultation in the event of a threat to Greece and Romania. Turkey would not, however, Saraçoğlu informed Molotov, agree to the German reservation to be placed on the proposed Turco-Soviet treaty. To do so would be to embrace a daydream because Turkey's most probable and most dangerous enemies were currently Germany and Italy. If Germany attacked, the reservation would suspend the treaty; if Italy attacked, Germany would be behind its Italian ally and the reservation would again come into play. Such a treaty would therefore be entirely without value. Unfortunately, said Molotov, he had promised this reservation to Ribbentrop, then in Moscow, and if the Turks would not agree to it, then he doubted that a treaty would be possible.⁸⁰

What of Straits revision? Molotov asked, reminding Saraçoğlu that he had promised the Soviet Defence Minister, Marshal Klimenti Voroshilov, earlier that Turkey was prepared to proceed bilaterally with the Russians in this matter. Saraçoğlu denied that this was so and blamed Voroshilov's misunderstanding on a translation error. Even so, Molotov asked, how, if Montreux were allowed to stand, could Turkey use its rights under the present regime to benefit the Soviet Union? Saraçoğlu refused to consider this last. Such a course, he said, would be illegal and illegitimate. Would the Turkish Foreign Minister agree to a regulatory draft in the future? Saraçoğlu again refused. Would he at least give a verbal promise to the same effect? Saraçoğlu was adamant. Would Turkey pledge neutrality towards Bulgaria in all instances? The reply was the same. The day's session broke off at the point without

⁷⁸Ibid., 43 (39), 10 October 1939.

⁷⁹Erkin, *Les Relations Turco-Soviétiques*, p. 179.

⁸⁰Ibid., p. 168.

discussion ever having begun on the Turco-Soviet draft project submitted at the beginning by Saraçoğlu.⁸¹

On 16 October, Molotov simply restated all the Soviet demands. The German reservation, he assured Saraçoğlu, was essential. Straits revision was a prerequisite. At this point, Molotov introduced another document prepared under Stalin's own direction. Stalin's revised Straits regime eliminated all obligations under the League of Nations and placed the discretion to open and close the Straits entirely in the hands of Turkey. In practice, since unilateral Straits revision would lose for Turkey its Western friends, this would place Turkey entirely in the hands of the Soviet Union. Molotov insisted also on further changes to the tripartite treaty; most particularly that its operation not include the case of war with Bulgaria. None of this was admissible for the Turks.⁸²

In Ankara the Ministry of Foreign Affairs now lost its patience. Instructions were sent to Saraçoğlu not to budge on any of the above points and to return home if the Russians insisted on them. Privately Menemencioğlu wondered whether the Soviet Union was now employing the same techniques with his Foreign Minister as it had with the allied mission in August. At this diplomatic tug of war, Turkey drew the line.⁸³

Meanwhile the Turkish press was following, not without anxiety, the movements which were taking place in Moscow. The newspapers expressed surprise at Ribbentrop's presence in Moscow simultaneously with that of Saraçoğlu, particularly as Turkey had received no previous information of his visit. There was no doubt that the government and the public were puzzled, if not piqued, at the cool reception accorded to their Foreign Minister. Relying on the cordiality of their relations with the Soviet Union the Turkish government had accepted with alacrity the invitation to send its Foreign Minister to Moscow, and the press had foreshadowed the prompt conclusion of a pact of mutual security with the Soviet Union. Saraçoğlu was also kept waiting in the background during the visits of successive delegations from the Baltic countries. In these circumstances the Turkish press comment was in general

⁸¹Ibid.

⁸²Ibid.

⁸³Ibid.

restrained, but a feeling of irritation was voiced by Hüseyin Cahit Yalçın, one of the best known and respected members of the former Union and Progress Party and a journalist of great talent, in the Istanbul daily *Yeni Sabah*: "Our Soviet friends appear to have invited our Foreign Minister to Moscow for a pleasant autumn holiday. In this period of crisis, when the states of the world are agitated by a thousand possibilities, our Foreign Minister has been working very hard and is naturally tired. We appreciate the consideration of our friends and neighbours in freeing him from his preoccupations and extending to him their courteous hospitality. No doubt, when time can be spared from the affairs of the Estonian gatekeeper and the Chinese dragoman, the friendly negotiations with us will continue."⁸⁴

On 17 October, Stalin put in his second and final appearance. He insisted that the suspensive clause on the tripartite treaty must cover both Russia and Germany. If the Turks would permit no revision of Montreux, then, he said, they must at least promise to invoke Article 22 of the Convention to deny passage to the vessels of non-littoral powers.⁸⁵ Saraçoğlu could admit none of this. That evening, Menemencioğlu telephoned Knatchbull-Hugessen with the news that it looked as if the negotiations would fail and that Turkey was anxious to sign as quickly thereafter as possible. Would 19 October be possible he wondered? Until then, Turkey attached great importance to the maintenance of secrecy as regards signature until the Minister of Foreign Affairs was out of Russia.⁸⁶ That same day, the Prime Minister, Refik Saydam informed a parliamentary meeting of the Republican People's Party that negotiations with the Soviets had broken off because Russian proposals could not be reconciled with Turkey's other obligations.⁸⁷

The last session, on 18 October, was anticlimatic, the stage having already been set for a breakdown. Molotov, who alone was present for the Soviet side, presented all the demands that had been made to this point as if there had been no negotiation at all. The

⁸⁴Hüseyin Cahit Yalçın, *Yeni Sabah*, 5 October 1939.

⁸⁵Erkin, *Les Relations Turco-Soviétiques*, p. 168.

⁸⁶*F.O.* 371/195/2461/65. Knatchbull-Hugessen (Ankara) to Halifax, 17 October 1939.

⁸⁷*Anatolian News Agency*, 18 October 1939.

Soviet Foreign Minister stated he could not give up the German clause; Saraçoğlu replied he could not accept it without amending the tripartite treaty out of existence. Molotov renewed his request for a protocol changing Articles 20 and 21 of the Montreux Convention to prevent allied warships and troop carriers entering the Black Sea while allowing Russian ships into the Mediterranean. The Turkish Foreign Minister refused to entertain giving up an international agreement to come to a bilateral arrangement with the Soviets on the Straits. The few pallid assurances which Moscow was offering were simply insufficient to offset the cost of the concessions they required. Saraçoğlu then announced his intention to return home: if the Soviet government was still disposed to conclude a pact of mutual assistance according to the original proposals, further negotiations could take place through the normal diplomatic channels in Ankara. Massigli and Knatchbull-Hugessen were informed by telephone later in the day by Menemencioğlu that negotiations had broken down in Moscow and that the tripartite treaty should be signed immediately in its original form. The political treaty, the secret protocols and the special arrangements were signed on the afternoon of 19 October, as soon as Saraçoğlu had left Soviet soil.⁸⁸

Considering the basic divergence in objectives, it is no wonder that Saraçoğlu's mission to Moscow failed. It was an extraordinary visit in the annals of diplomacy, because the Foreign Minister remained away from home for almost a month at a time of great international crisis. His trip coincided with the visit that Ribbentrop paid to the Soviet Union. The German minister, who had come to discuss the division of eastern Europe into the German and Soviet spheres, was given priority in Moscow, and Saraçoğlu was kept waiting for weeks between the meetings. By

⁸⁸The principal sources for these negotiations remain Erkin and Massigli. Erkin is essential for discussion of the Stalin - Saraçoğlu talks in October 1939, of which he was the sole witness on the Turkish side to publish an account an account which, due to the silence of Turkish archives, stands alone. Erkin was then the Director General of the Political Department of the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and he soon rose to prominence. The negotiations were summed in Molotov's speech to the Supreme Soviet on 31 October 1939 in Jane Degras, *Soviet Documents on Foreign Policy*, London, 1948, Vol. iii, pp. 388 ff. Moreover an exhaustive documentary treatment of the Turco-Soviet negotiations can be found in Harry Howard, *Germany, the Soviet Union and Turkey during the Second World War*, Washington, 1948, pp. 63 ff.

that time Turco-Anglo-French conversations for a definitive alliance were far advanced, and most of the major points of agreement settled. In order to reconcile its Western friendship with Soviet objections, Turkey was willing to formulate its proposed alliance with Britain and France in such a way that it would explicitly exclude any common anti-Soviet action. This concession was made with the approval of the British and French, who fully understood Turkey's difficult position. Such an arrangement might prove satisfactory to Russia, and at one time during the Moscow negotiations the Soviet leaders seemed to be ready to conclude a pact on that basis. But German pressure prevailed, and Moscow insisted that, in its treaty of alliance with the West, Turkey must promise to refrain from engaging in war with Germany. This, of course, was unacceptable to Saraçoğlu, as it would render the Turco-Anglo-French alliance meaningless. Germany preferred to see no Turco-Soviet pact at all than a pact which would result in safeguards to Russia only, and not to itself. Anxious to oblige the Germans, the Soviet leaders finally informed Saraçoğlu that they were not interested in the pact.⁸⁹

The net result of Saraçoğlu's visit to Moscow was that he learned, much to his uneasiness, of a rather pronounced degree of Germano-Russian co-operation and of consequent Soviet opposition to Turkish links with the West. The trip impressed upon Turkish leadership the need for great caution in their international relations but did not deflect them from the basic course of co-operation with the West.

The nervous glances cast in the northern neighbour were evident in the Turkish press. A journalist much in İnönü's confidence, Falih Rifkî Atay, in the semi-official *Ulus* wrote that negotiations failed with the Soviets because of the clash between obligations to Britain, the Soviet position, and the Montreux Convention. But he stressed that this did not mean the end of the Turco-Soviet friendship. He underlined that any undertaking Turkey went into would be to preserve peace and security in its own area: "This unchanging principle of Turkish foreign policy is sure to be appreciated by our friends the Soviets."⁹⁰ Yalçın in the

⁸⁹Ibid. See also George Lenczowski, *The Middle East in World Affairs*, New York, 1956, p. 137.

⁹⁰Falih Rifkî Atay, *Ulus*, 18 October 1939.

Yeni Sabah said that Turkey had tried hard to reconcile Anglo-French views with those of the Soviets, unfortunately this had proved impossible.⁹¹

What had the Russians been after? Firstly, it seems obvious that they wished to remove all substance from the tripartite treaty, and if this were not possible, to negate its possible operation against the Soviet Union. Secondly, the proposed amendments, taken together, could not but have reduced Turkey to something like political vassalage. Thirdly, certain of the amendments, in particular the Bulgarian reservation, would have nullified the Balkan Entente. What had the Russians wanted? They wished to supply a Finnish solution to the problem of Turkey and to return Turkey to the state of relative reliance in which it had existed prior to 1932. The views of the Turkish press to that effect are enlightening. On the subject of the Russo-Finnish dispute, which the Turks closely followed, Ragıp Emeç wrote in popular *Son Posta* that the Soviets had made claims on Finland and negotiations were in progress. Of the Finns he said: "Because they are a long way from nourishing illusions, while negotiating with the Russians on one hand they have been taking the precautions necessitated by circumstance Ö Finland wants to live in peace with the world. But nor does it seem at all likely to make sacrifices of its national integrity and freedom." Emeç hoped negotiations would lead to a satisfactory solution.⁹²

The Turks obviously saw a potential similarity between Finns and themselves. The parallels between the Turkish and the Finnish cases are suggestive. Finland too received an urgent invitation to send a plenipotentiary to Moscow to "discuss concrete political matters" in October 1939. Like the Turks, the Finnish delegation was confronted with impossible demands border modifications and the acceptance of a Soviet base in the south of the country; unlike the Turkish case, Finnish refusal led to virtually immediate hostilities with the Soviet Union.⁹³

⁹¹Hüseyin Cahit Yalçın, *Yeni Sabah*, 19 October 1939.

⁹²Ragıp Emeç, *Son Posta*, 21 October 1939.

⁹³See Max Jakobson, *The Diplomacy of the Winter War*, Harvard, 1961, passim.

Saraçoğlu's failure in Moscow to reconcile Turkey's two big friends — the British and the Russians — marks the end of the period during which Ankara attempted to juggle the two relationships. This heralds a new phase in the development of Turkish foreign policy with the Soviet Union now becoming a major worry. A Turco-Soviet pact of mutual assistance had proved incompatible with the other undertakings already entered into by the two parties, and, furthermore, it appeared certain that the Soviet Union was embarking on a policy of expansion reminiscent of its Tsarist antecedents. The Western allies, for their part, saw their last hopes for a link with the Soviet Union dashed, but they were grateful that the tripartite treaty was signed in its original, unamended form.

Following the signature of the Turco-Anglo-French Treaty of Mutual Assistance the Turks found themselves solidly placed, on paper, in one of the belligerent camps. They had nourished strong hopes of including the Soviet Union in this arrangement, but now they found it not only outside but also in a position of co-operation with Germany. Kremlin was highly critical of the tripartite treaty when it was officially announced, and Molotov in his speech of 31 October 1939 made vocal his disapproval of Turkey's action. The Soviet Foreign Minister stated that the Turkish government, by its alliance with the Western democracies had openly abandoned its policy of neutrality and had entered the orbit of war, adding that Turkey might one day repent of its deed. Relations between Turkey and the Soviet Union thus entered into a new period of mutual distrust and tension.