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## Anti-Western policy of the Soviet-Turkish relations during the Greek-Turkish War

### Abstract

A number of recent comparative works have drawn attention to parallels and similarities between the Soviet Union and the early Turkish Republic. In this article, I take a firmly transnational approach to Soviet-Turkish interactions in the 1920s to demonstrate that the similarities were not merely circumstantial. The manifest ideological conflict between nationalist Turks and internationalist Bolsheviks has led many historians to dismiss Soviet-Turkish cooperation as a necessary response to geopolitics, a pragmatic alliance against the west. This article makes that opposition to the western-dictated international order was a coherent element in Soviet-Turkish exchanges that stretched beyond diplomacy into the economic and cultural spheres. The anti-western elements of Soviet-Turkish relations suggest that convergence was more than a case of homologous responses to similar conditions; it was part of a broader narrative that, in the Soviet case at least, continued to shape international relations beyond World War II.

**Key words:** Mustafa Kamal, Lenin, antiwestern, socialism, bolsheviks, convergence

### 1. Introduction

This article addresses the following major questions first, how was it possible that the Western allies occupied of major cities of the Ottoman Empire after the end of WWI? Second, what was the reason for the establishment of Russian-Turkish convergence?

In 1914, the World War I started between the two military blocs-the Entente, which included Britain, France and Russia and the Triple Alli-

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ance, which members were Germany, Italy and Austria-Hungary. The Ottoman Empire entered the war with Russia in October 1914 and in 1915 became a principal member of the Quadruple Alliance, led by Germany (Hirst 2013: 10). In 1915 Russia, England, France and Italy signed the first plan of partition in London, dividing Turkey this treaty (the Sykes-Picot agreement), and the ones which followed, were entered upon for various purposes: first, in order to keep Russia in the War; second, in order to bring Italy, Greece, or other countries into the War; third, in order to carve out the largest shares for France and England; fourth, because, apart from these agreements, the Allies had committed themselves by promises to non-Turkish subjects, mostly Arabs and Armenians, who were commissioned to stab Turkey in the back during the War (Jensen 1979: 45). These promises, both to the Arabs and Armenians, were in contradiction to the Powers' other arrangements, but then it was never intended that they should be fulfilled. The War, Colonial and India offices inclined towards the former while David Lloyd George and elements within the Foreign Office opted for the Greek solution (Hirst 2013: 12). The secret agreements had accorded to Russia Constantinople, the Gallipoli Peninsula, the European shore of the Sea of Marmora, and a part of eastern Anatolia, including Trebizond, which she had occupied in 1916. France was given Syria, Cilicia as far as Sivas, Mosul, and western Kurdistan (Solomonidis 1984: 65–67). Italy was given the southern half of Asia Minor England was given Mesopotamia, the Mandate of Palestine, Haifa, and Acre, and she was to support the independence of the Hedjaz and of the remainder of Arabia. The land claimed by and granted to Russia in eastern Turkey was identical with that which was later pledged to become an independent Armenia (Reynolds 2011: 26). By this time a new factor had appeared in the situation.

## 2. The change of political line

Revolution stripped the Russian empire of its axle. The empire's geographic expansion, the growth in its bureaucracy, the development of its economy, and the stratification of society had all subjected the imperial apparatus to increasing strain. The tsar, as the symbol of the empire and its central institution, had held it all together. The fall of the tsar meant that the whole imperial project was open to question, from the future form of government through property rights to the empire's borders" (Mozjuxin 2016). Everything was up for grabs. The announcement of the tsar's abdication shook the army hard. In a surreal twist, tsarist

officers found themselves with little choice but to cooperate with the revolutionary movements churning in the ranks. The Ottomans took note of the dissension spreading through the Russian ranks (Mozjuxin 2016). They grasped the broader political meaning of the February Revolution and attempted to turn it to their own ends. They dispatched small delegations of soldiers to meet face to face with their Russian counterparts. The Russians explained that they held no animosity toward the Ottomans who, unlike the Germans, did not occupy their lands. Denunciations of the “imperialists’ war” in Anatolia and declarations such as “We don’t want the Dardanelles” circulated in the Russian ranks, suggesting the unpopular nature of the war against the Ottomans. Then the promise of the Bolsheviks, ceasefires, and peace talks on 7 November 1917 (McMeekin 2007: 57). Mustafa Kamal was wary of the Soviet Government, which came to power after the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 in Russia. Ankara Government and Soviet Government, which united to struggle together against the imperialists contacted with each other in a short time to support each other. On the other hand the Bolsheviks were trying to declare and expand their regimes and movements, to the World. After the Sivas Congress on September 4-11, 1919, in order to dissolve the negative atmosphere against Turks in the United States, the officials of the national movement decided to invite an American Committee to Anatolia to research and see the truth (Giritli 1970). Mustafa Kamal met with General Harford on September 22, he stated that national movement would accept help from a neutral great power and his aim was to protect the empire with a neutral great power’s, preferably American mandate (Gokay 2006: 24). This move must be seen as a tactic to gain time during the wars. Right at that point, Moscow and Ankara became allies against the Imperialist European States. However, their friendship was not without a cost. While Bolsheviks were aiming to expand their regimes to Anatolia and if possible aimed to make Anatolia a Socialist Republic of the Soviet Union, Kamalists aimed to get material and spiritual support of the Bolsheviks without adopting their regimes in Anatolia (Tarasov 2009). The Bolshevik Party led by Vladimir Lenin overthrew the Provisional Government in Petrograd in a violent coup and plunged Russia into a full-fledged civil war or, rather, a concatenation of civil wars. Russia’s deepening disorder comforted the Ottomans. As the newspaper “Vakit” observed in an editorial entitled “The Russia of Tomorrow”, Russia represented an eternal danger, but the Russian revolution has saved us from an immediate threat and we can now take a deep breath” (Hirst 2013: 32). Yet the rise of the Bolsheviks held out the possibility of more than just greater turmoil inside Russia. Soviet Government was thinking about that the National

Struggle movement was struggling against the Western imperialism, at the same time was considering that it was an awakening of the Islamic society in 1919, the Turkish war of independence started.

Hard pressed by the British invasion of Anatolia, Mustafa Kamal in a letter addressed to Moscow declared his readiness to participate in the struggle against foreign imperialism which threatened both countries and urged to conclude a treaty of military and political alliance (Giritli 1970). On March 16, 1921 the two countries signed a treaty in Moscow settling the border dispute; the provinces of Kars and Ardahan were left to Turkey and Batumi to Russia (Gokay 2006: 24). The letter consisted of three articles: In the first article, Ataturk offered to operate together against imperialist powers. In the second, he said that if Bolshevik forces organized military operation on Georgia and put them under the Bolshevik rule, the Turks would undertake military operation on Armenia and Bolshevik regime in Azerbaijan. In the last article, the Turks insisted on aid for their struggle against imperialist powers. In short, the Turks were offering an alliance and cooperation (Ulgul 2010: 6). Kamalists were convinced that only co-operation with the Soviet government would provide the Turks with vital material and diplomatic support and military aid to "fight imperialist governments" together (Kuznechova 1961: 31). The contents of Kamal's telegram show that the Turks unequivocally approved the attack on the Caucasus by the Bolsheviks (Tarasov 2009). Bolsheviks thought that Ataturk shared the same ideas as them (which he partially did) like a disdain for imperial powers, full independent and a republic. In addition, they thought that Turkey would provide a buffer. So they decided to help. While in opposition the Bolsheviks had consistently denounced the war as an imperialist project, and the day after they came to power they published a "Decree on Peace" in which they called for an immediate end to the war and a peace "without annexations and indemnities." Lenin's explicit condemnation of the Entente's secret agreements to partition the Ottoman Empire (Korkmaz 2017: 22). The Bolsheviks, it seemed, really were sincere about peace. And if peace could be made with Russia, the rest of the Entente would almost certainly have to follow.

The meaning of Soviet and Turkish solidarity

If we allow a more ambiguous definition of anti-westernism, one that includes in the drive to challenge western power an admiration for its tools and its successes, we can better understand Soviet-Turkish interactions. Soviet- Turkish anti-westernism took on various hues during the

interwar period, but at its core it involved a commitment to importing the content of European progress while shedding the forms of European domination. In February 1921, the Red Army attacked, again taking advantage of Turkish military pressure to overwhelm the Caucasians (Tarasov 2015). The triumphant Reds installed pro-Bolshevik puppet governments in the three republics and converted them into nominally independent Soviet republics. On 16.03.1921 the solemn treaty of "Soviet-Turkish Friendship and Brotherhood" was signed (Akşhin 1991: 36). Kamal got Kars, Ardagan and Arvin and 10 000 000 gold rubles were transferred to Kamal in installments. He used the Soviet money to buy French and Italian military supplies and favor (Toynbe 1922: 65). In this critical days of August 1921 General M.V. Frunze was appointed the Soviet ambassador in Turkey. He became Kamal's close military advisor. His successor S.I. Aralov and Soviet military advisor K.K. Zvonarev used to visit the front and distribute gifts with dedications "To the Turkish soldier from the Red Army" (Mozjuxin 2016). Officials of the republics met with representatives of Ankara on 13 October 1921 in Kars where they signed a treaty confirming an agreement the Turkish nationalists and Bolsheviks had concluded in March in Moscow. Batumi went to the Soviets, while Kars and Ardahan now belonged to the Turks (Akşhin 1991: 38). The treaty squared its endorsement of self-determination with its rapid rearrangement of borders by granting the affected populations the temporary right to emigrate from one state to the other. With his rear in the Caucasus secured, Mustafa Kamal turned toward the west. He compelled the French to withdraw from Anatolia southward into Syria and the British and Italians to relinquish their pretensions to influence in Anatolia. Unlike the Armenians, the Greeks did receive meaningful aid from the Allies. Mustafa Kamal in 1922 managed to drive the Greek army out of Anatolia back to Greece, sending hundreds of thousands of Orthodox Christian Anatolians in train. The following January Turkey and Greece finalized an "exchange" of populations that formalized the transfer of approximately 1.2 million Christians to Greece and nearly 400,000 Muslims to Turkey (Toynbe 1922: 65). These measures, combined with the earlier massacres and ethnic cleansing of Armenians and Assyrians, transformed Anatolia's population into an overwhelmingly Muslim, if not yet wholly Turkish, one. On 3.05.1922 soviet governments generosity was shown 3 500 000 gold rubles given in Ankara. It was the last installment of 10 000 000 promised a year before by Mustafa Kamal. Lenin was not only a true friend in need but also a useful scarecrow (Tarasov 2009). It is what stands behind the pious self-glorifying Turkish myth of Kamal's genius. Mustafa

Kamal's achievement of military dominance over Anatolia nullified the Treaty of Sevres, compelling the great powers to sit with his representatives in Lausanne, Switzerland, in 1923 and conclude a new treaty that acknowledged the territorial integrity and full sovereignty of the new Anatolian hegemony, the Republic of Turkey. With the Treaty of Lausanne British policy returned to the traditional policy of supporting Turkey as the British proxy in the region (Kireev 2007: 142). British policymakers by 1923 had achieved a relative stability in the area of the near and Middle East which remained unchallenged up until the outbreak of the Second World War. The fact that Mustafa Kamal and Lenin worked together did not mean that their relationship lacked a competitive dimension. The Bolsheviks nurtured ambitions of cultivating influence throughout the Muslim world, including Anatolia. Toward that end, they hosted the First Congress of the Peoples of the East in Baku in September 1920 (Toynbe 1922: 81). Among the participants was Enver Pasha, who through Karl Radek had come to Moscow with the hope that the Bolsheviks would prelaunch his career inside Anatolia, and Mustafa Suphi, who founded the Turkish Communist Party right after the congress. Mustafa Kamal, however parried the Bolsheviks by blocking Enver's return and establishing a rival communist party under his control (Kireev 2007: 143). The Kamalist regime's unyielding pursuit of centralization, purification, and secularization stirred some Kurds to revolt, and, in the middle of the 1920s, the Soviet Union attempted to revive its influence in Anatolia by lending support to Kurdish exiles plotting rebellion (McMeekin 2007: 67). The Kamalist regime's determination and coercive capabilities, however, were greater than those of its Unionist predecessor, and it handily suppressed this and other challenges to its rule in Eastern Anatolia. The Soviets found more opportunities next door inside chaotic postwar Iran. In 1920 Muhammad Khyabani, established inside Iran a socialist state of sorts called Azadistan, or "Freedom Land." On Iran's Caspian shore, Red Army units' fresh from the recapture of Baku helped the Iranian revolutionary Mirza Kuchuk Khan found a "Soviet Republic of Gilan." When, however, Moscow concluded a treaty of friendship with Tehran in 1921, it withdrew support, and both the Gilan Republic and Azadistan fell to Tehran's army (Korkmaz 2017: 31). Parallels in post imperial paths just as the dynamic of interstate competition pushed Ankara and Moscow to adopt complementary foreign policies, it also elicited parallels in domestic policies. Whereas the origins of the Turkish Republic lay in a project to adapt to the interstate order, the Soviet state was born in defiance of that order, but in a matter of years it too would conform. As heirs to defeated empires, the Kamalist and So-

viet elites came to share the conviction that the survival of their respective states demanded comprehensive and radical reform not just of the institutions of state but also of society, economy, and culture as a whole. The centrality of the motif of revolution to the Bolsheviks needs no elaboration. The Kamalist and Soviet elites saw themselves as strong-willed, elite vanguards of progressive change, uniquely capable of imposing the necessary if often resented modernizing reforms upon their as yet unenlightened populations.

#### The National Struggle movement

After Brest-litovsk treaty Russia had withdrawn from the War and Greece was becoming an important factor in the European situation. In order to keep her interested, some delicate morsel had to be squeezed for her out of the already worked-out plan of partition, which left no area free. The Greco-Turkish War was one of the major aftershocks in the World War I. In attacking war-ravaged Turkey, Greece sought to realize goal of a new Hellenic presence in Asia Minor. This action, together British, French, and Italian designs upon Anatolian territory, threatened Turkey's existence as a nation (Toynbe 1922: 101). After the Mudros Armistice of 1918, the Great Powers moved Anatolia to ensure acquisition of territory promised in the secret treaties during World War I. In the plan of alliances was especially Anatolia occupied an important place. In Kurdistan, British 'advisors' present as the nationalistic tendencies of that people began to rise. The French, meanwhile, had marched north from Syria into Adana Cilician hinterland. The Italians had landed in Antalya and had occupied outlying areas (Kuznechova 1961: 49). In this time Greece government naturally amenable to the idea of a 'Big Greece' and swiftly entered into the war. The Turkish war of independence is a military history which focuses on the Greek-Turkish war between 1919 and 1922. The Greek occupation of Izmir on 15 May 1919 met with protests and bloodshed in the city (Kuznechova 1961: 69). The occupation was extended to Aydın, Manisa, Turgutlu, Ayvalık, and Tekirdağ (Rodosto) in Thrace (Davison 1953: 155). Greek military landings in Thrace were facilitated by British naval vessels, but as soon as the Greco-Turkish war began, London declared neutrality. In 1919, local armed bands displayed resistance to occupation using hit and run tactics. The war between Turkey and Greece was a defensive war for safeguarding of the Turkish homelands in Anatolia. It was provoked by the unwarranted invasion of a Greek army of occupation. In Cilicia especially,

Armenian legions were recruited under French authority and used in the search for arms in Turkish houses; this proved to be the beginning of a most bloody feud between the two races, who might yet, had they only been left alone, have found some modus Vivendi in postwar life (Jensen 1979: 231). As it was, the Armenians lost any chance of ever again cooperating with the Turks in Cilicia, and the Turkish population was goaded into organizing an armed resistance which later obliged the French to evacuate and come to terms. The Armenians were transported and settled in Syria by the French (Andersen, Egge, online). The occupation in Constantinople did not involve so much bloodshed. The Italians in Adela behaved best, although their presence was as deeply resented. The condition of the Turkish Government in this internal muddle and disaster was pitiful. The Government had passed into the hands of the Sultan and passed completely into the hands of the Allies. On 10 August 1920, the Istanbul government signed the Treaty of Sevres, which effectively eliminated Turkey's sovereignty (Reynolds 2011: 46). According to the Wilson in declarations, exclusively Turkish territory was to remain independent and the non-Turkish parts of the Ottoman Empire were assured "an absolutely unmolested opportunity of autonomous development" (Jensen 1979: 245). The Treaty of Sevres provided for important concessions for Greece, which were to have far reaching consequences not only for the Ottoman Greek minority, but for the Balkan Peninsula. Ankara's reaction was swift: the Grand National Assembly issued a declaration calling the signatories of the treaty traitors. Furthermore, during the following months, Ankara decided to design its own international link. In early May 1919, the three gave their consent to a Greek occupation of Smyrna (Jensen 1979: 251). Their entrance was chaotic. There was a Turks massacre. On 26 April 1920, Mustafa Kamal (Ataturk) first convened the Turkish Grand National Assembly (henceforth Mueslis) in Ankara. The main target of the National Struggle movement was to protect the state rather than becoming a spokesman of any political thought. The Bolsheviks responded with the gold and guns that proved crucial in the Turkish War of Independence (Piter 2004). At that time over Novorossiyski, Tuapse and Batumi Kamal got 39 000 rifles, 327 heavy machine guns, 54 big cannons, 63 mln bullets, 147 000 artillery shells and more. By May 1920, however, this situation changed dramatically. In the mid-1920s, tension arose with Britain over control of the city of Mosul (Piter 2004). Under Mustafa Kamal, the irregular forces, together with the crack Turkish Ninth Army (undefeated in the Caucasus), had driven the French back to Aleppo. On 21 July the Greeks entered the Sea of Marmara port of Tekirdag with a division and an infan-

try regiment. Smaller forces entered another Marmara port, Ereğli (Toynbe 1922: 121). Another Greek column prepared to attack Adrianople. Concentrating their attack in the northern sector, they met the Turks in a valley near the village of Inonu (Hirst 2013: 33). This was the first Nationalist victory, and the Turks played up its importance for both local morale and Soviet opinion. General Michael Vasilyeviç Frunze, founder of the Red Army, and Marshall Kliment Yefremoviç Voroişilov, chief of staff of Russian Armed forces, who was a brilliant strategist and was sent by Lenin to assist Atatürk during the war of independence (Xeyfech 1968: 83). On January 5, 1921, the appointment of Semen Aralov to the post of Plenipotentiary of the RSFSR in Turkey, Lenin, accompanied by these words: "The Turks are fighting for their national liberation. Therefore, the Central Committee sends you there as knowing a military matter" (Xeyfech 1968: 85). The Soviet government helped Ankara to build two powder factories by supplying equipment and raw materials for them. General Michael Vasilyeviç Frunze allocated 100 thousand rubles to the authorities of Trabzon for the organization of an orphanage, and Aralov betrayed the Turkish army 20 thousand lire to purchase hiking printing houses and cinema installations (История 1986: 93). In May 1922, the last installment was paid – 3.5 million gold rubles (Davison 1953: 173). The West clearly did not want to strengthen the new Turkey. In particular, attempts were made to form the Armenian and Kurdish states on the Soviet-Turkish border. But the active military assistance of Turkey from the RSFSR disrupted these plans (Gusterin 2016). After Inonu battle, a conference was called in London. The basis for discussion was leader of the Great Powers Lloyd George's proposal that the Treaty of Sevres be modified. By autumn that year France recognized the Ankara government (История 1986: 94). By then the Ankara government had established its legitimacy throughout the entire country, and when in September 1922 the nationalist troops raised the Turkish flag at Kadifekale in Izmir (Jensen 1979: 253). Greek historians were to call this venture the "disaster in Asia Minor", which depleted the idea of a greater Greece as well as British policy (Зачем Ленин 2016). Preparation for the peace conference made Mustafa Kamal tighten his grip on Istanbul. In Lausanne Soviet Russia was the power that made Kamal's diplomatic success a reality. The 'sick man of Europe' had survived the fever and was well on his way to recovery. Geopolitics had brought the two countries together, but Bolsheviks and Turks embraced the alliance and openly proclaimed their joint opposition to western dominance in both the economic and cultural fields. In a Europe where allegiance to economic and national ideologies was so vaunted, Soviets and Turks boasted of

links that trumped allegiance to nation, to capitalism, or to communism – they spoke instead of an alliance determined by the inequity of the international order. Such cooperation is vital evidence of a transnational response to western power.

### 3. Conclusion

Soviet-Turkish relations in the first half of the century reveal the presence and results of a similar discontent much closer to Europe's core. The conditions of the First World War caused the revolutions and the developments in two neighboring Eurasian states. Turkey Government and Soviet Government founded as a result of revolutions did not exhibit enemy relations as in the time of the empire. However, they completely were, in the essence, different from each other. Geostrategic natures of the region and historical periods made them strategic ally. The leaders of the new governments also had different ideas and characteristics in terms of purpose, understanding and belief. It was seen from results of the study that both leaders knew each other well and properly developed politics. Observing from Europe and the United States, Western commentators emphasized the superficiality of the relationship, discrediting the alliance of such an "odd couple." (Gokay 2006). For the Soviets, there was only one undesirable move: Turkey's close relations with an enemy state; these potential enemies were Britain, France and Germany. Bolshevik government was as knowledgeable of the British pressure as the Turks. In the event of the fall of the Turkish movement, the Soviets would have felt this pressure more than before because they would be surrounded. Another common element was both sides' opposition to a strong, independent Armenia in East Anatolia. Undoubtedly, Soviet opposition to an Armenian state was not based on their reverence towards Turkish territory. Instead, the Bolsheviks were alarmed that the British supported the Armenian state that abutted their border. Russia's panic about a satellite state supported by an enemy in the southern borders led Turkish authorities to alleviate this fear through some gestures and explanations to the Kremlin (Giritli 1970). Throughout the interwar period, both sides respected the other one's "red lines" (Ulgu 2010: 7). Mustafa Kamal, who was close to the Bolsheviks whereas did not allow their politics to enter the state said advised that our politics was not to confront these two nations anymore. These relations with the Bolsheviks were established well above the base of necessity and not on mutual trust or good faith. The foundation for their interactions was not built upon

strong grounds. The Turks and Soviets were outraged at the strict moves that prevented a break in relations during the interwar period. Today, despite the complex relations among the states, friendly relationships between Turkey and Russia are welcomed by the peoples of two states, whose roots going to Mustafa Kamal Atatürk and Lenin. The formation of the Nationalist-Bolshevik relations during the Turkish War of Independence was the fruit of the desperate situation of the Allied invasion of Ottoman lands for the Turkish side, while for the Bolshevik side it was the same powers that tried to suppress Russia and fought against Bolshevism. Therefore the Allied pressure was the biggest instrument in the formation of and strengthening the relations between Ankara and Moscow.

### Antyzachodnie aspekty relacji radziecko-tureckich podczas wojny grecko-tureckiej

#### Streszczenie

Kilka ostatnio opublikowanych prac porównawczych zwróciło uwagę na podobieństwa między Związkiem Radzieckim a wczesną Republiką Turecką. W artykule autor postulował konieczność szerszego podejścia do interakcji sowiecko-tureckich w latach dwudziestych w celu wskazania podobieństw zachowań politycznych w obu krajach. Wyraźny konflikt ideologiczny między nacjonalistycznymi Turkami a internacjonalistycznymi bolszewikami skłaniał wielu historyków do odrzucenia założenia o sowiecko-tureckiej współpracy jako odpowiedzi na sytuację geopolityczną. Autor założył również, że był to element pragmatycznego sojuszu w opozycji do Zachodu. Wyraża także pogląd, że sprzeciw wobec dyktowanego przez Zachód porządku międzynarodowego był elementem spajającym współpracę sowiecko-turecką, która wykraczała poza dyplomację, wchodząc w sferę gospodarczą i kulturalną. Antyzachodnie elementy relacji radziecko-tureckich sugerują, że współpraca obu państw była czymś więcej niż przypadkiem homologicznych reakcji na podobne warunki; była częścią szerszej narracji, która przynajmniej w przypadku sowieckim nadal kształtowała stosunki międzynarodowe po II wojnie światowej.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Mustafa Kamal, Włodzimierz Lenin, antywesternizm, socjalizm, bolszewicy, konwergencja

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