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The significance of the Black Sea in Turko-Soviet relations in 1939–1946*

Turkish historiography dealing with the relations between the Soviet Union and Turkey during World War II and directly post-war intentionally omits attempts the question of the Turkish government's attempts to reach agreement with Moscow, instead focusing on Turkey's closer cooperation with the Western countries. However, an analysis of archive material and diplomatic notes exchanged between the sides clearly shows that the Turkish government was not eager to firmly stand on the same side of the divide as the US. Rather, it tried to strike an agreement with Joseph Stalin and negotiate concessions. The rapprochement between Ankara and the West was only a means of finding a strong ally which would secure Turkey's interests in the region in case of failed negotiations with the Soviet Union. The aim of this article is to present the significance of the Black Sea as well as the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles in shaping Turko-Soviet relations in the years 1939–1946 and to determine the extent to which the Republic of Turkey was inclined to arrange a deal with Moscow and remain neutral versus the extent to which it could be placed in the Western Bloc.

It is widely accepted that the region of the Black Sea includes Bulgaria, Moldova, Romania and Greece to the west, the Soviet Union to the north and Turkey to the south. Please note, however, that at that time

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Moldova and Greece did not have their shorelines at the edge of the Black Sea, and for this reason they were categorised as Wider Black Sea states due to historical, cultural and civilisational connections as well as geographical proximity.¹ The Bosphorus, the Dardanelles and the Sea of Marmara formed a sea route (ca. 330 km) of enormous international importance.² They were especially important to Russia, all the more that in the 19th century the Western superpowers' contribution to the Black Sea trade was negligible. For the United Kingdom and France, the significance of the two straits should be perceived rather in terms of economic and political interests in the Mediterranean Basin. How crucial this route was for Moscow's interest is best confirmed by a memorandum issued by "White" Russians at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919, according to which 88 per cent of Russian oil, 93 per cent of manganese and 61 per cent of iron passed through the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles. In total, as much as 54 per cent of the entire Russian sea export was shipped through the Turkish Straits. In the years 1936 – 2007, the number of commercial ships increased 11-fold, and their tonnage 12-fold.³ During World War II and directly afterwards, the Black Sea found itself under Soviet influence. It was for economic and security reasons that Moscow wished to take total control of the region.

Historical significance of the Turkish Straits

The closure of the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles after the invasion of Constantinople by the Ottomans in 1453 put an end to unrestrained maritime transport, as each vessel sailing through the Straits was checked by the sultan's officials. From that point onwards, all foreign ships navigating the passage had to obtain permission from the Ottoman Empire. The Ottoman-Russian conflicts began in the 16th century, when Russia captured Kazan and Astrakhan, and started threatening the Ottoman Empire's dominant position in the Black Sea Basin. Even in the 17th century the Ottoman supremacy was still unquestionable. The Ottoman hegemony in the Black Sea broke down after the lost *Polish War*⁴ (Mustafa III's forces were defeated both on land

1. T. Kapuśniak, *Polityka czarnomorska Turcji*, Lublin 2010, p. 10.
2. K. Smoleń, *Geostrategiczne położenie Turcji w XXI wieku*, Lublin 2020, p. 26.
3. J. Wódka, *Polityka zagraniczna Turcji. Uwarunkowania wewnętrzne oraz podmioty decyzyjne*, Warszawa 2012, p. 27.
4. The Russo-Turkish War of 1768 – 1774, called "the Polish War" in Turkish historiography, broke out when the Russian army crossed the Ottoman border, chasing Bar confederates. For more details see: M. Tanty, *Bosfor i Dardanele w polityce mocarstw*, Warszawa 1982, p. 26.

and at sea). Under the Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca the Ottoman Empire had to surrender its protectorate of the Crimean Khanate, and the Russian Empire gained access to the Black Sea. During peacetime, Russian ships were able to sail down the Don and the Dnieper River and enter the Black Sea.⁵ Commercial vessels were permitted to freely navigate the Black Sea or sail through the Bosphorus to the Mediterranean and back without the possibility of using the Dardanelles in Mediterranean trade.⁶

In the early 18th century France demanded that its vessels be allowed to sail through the Straits. Its claim was scuttled by the Russians; in the words of Chancellor Alexander Vorontsov, "The Black Sea must be treated as a lake or a closed sea, the only way to which is through the Bosphorus. Only Black Sea coastal countries should be allowed to access the sea."⁷ This was a period of alliance between Russia and the Ottoman Empire, as the Tsar did not intend to gain total control over the Straits. Vorontsov even insisted that the Russian fleet had to obtain permission whenever it sailed through the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles to Korfu. His intention was to force the Ottoman Empire to apply this procedure in all cases. Ultimately, the Sublime Porte ensured that the Bosphorus would be closed to all European warships except for Russian ones.⁸

The status of the Black Sea straits was finally regulated in the London Straits Convention signed on 13th July 1841 by Russia, the Ottoman Empire, Prussia, Austria, the United Kingdom and France. Free navigation for commercial ships was maintained under the convention but warships were denied access through the Straits, which threatened Russia's position in the territory.⁹ It is worth noting that although the Ottoman Empire formally retained sovereign jurisdiction over internal waters, superpowers actually had an influence on the status of the Straits. It was then that countries outside of the Black Sea Basin became jointly responsible for the regime of the Straits. At that time, the Soviet Union was faced with a predicament it would also fear in the future, namely a situation in which the Russian fleet would be locked out at the Black Sea without the possibility of sailing to the Mediterranean. In the event of the

5. C. King, *Dzieje Morza Czarnego*, Warszawa 2006, p. 162.

6. For more information on growing Russian influence in the Black Sea Basin see: K. Olszowska, *The Intricacies of (Un)lasting Turkish-Russian Alliances*, "The Warsaw Institute Review" 2020 No. 3 (14), pp. 78 – 85.

7. M. Tanty, *Bosfor i Dardanele*, p. 61.

8. M. Tanty, *Bosfor i Dardanele*, p. 61.

9. J. Kinross, *The Ottoman Centuries. The Rise and Fall of the Turkish Empire*, New York 2002, pp. 491 – 492.

neutrality of the Ottoman Empire (later Turkey), this ensured the Russian fleet's safety from any attack on part of Western countries. However, if the Ottoman Empire joined the war, this would threaten the southern Russian border, as enemy warships would be given access to the Straits.

The question of the status of the Black Sea was again brought up in another London conference, which started on 17th January 1871. All participants accepted Russian claims for the abrogation of the Black Sea's neutrality. In addition, the Ottoman Empire kept its right to close the Straits during war and open them in peacetime, since the interests and the security of the Porte would require permission for the entry of vessels from friendly and allied countries.¹⁰ The convention was signed on 15th March 1871 (dated 13th March).

During the Great War, the Ottoman Empire and Russia found itself on opposing sides. Moscow sought to gain control over the passages, since the Black Sea harbours guaranteed the economic development of the entire southern part of the Russian Empire. The regions in question were characterised by the growth of agriculture, newly established factories and oil (in Baku), coal (in Donbas) or iron ore (Kryvyi Rih) production facilities. It was through the Straits that more than 65 per cent of Russian cereal crop was transported in the early 20th century.¹¹ Following the coup in Russia and the Bolshevik seizure of power, Vladimir Ilich Lenin in the Decree on Peace promulgated at the Second All-Russian Congress of Soviets (8th November 1917) abrogated all deals and agreements entered into by the Tsar government.¹²

A treaty between the Grand National Assembly of Turkey and the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic was concluded in Moscow on 16th March 1921. The treaty was signed by Georgy Vasilyevich Chicherin and Djelal ed-Din Korkmasov on behalf of Russia, and Ali Fuat (Cebesoy), Doctor Rıza Nur and Yusuf Kemal (Tengirşenk) on behalf of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey. In Article 5, both parties agreed that they hand over the determination of the status of the Straits and the Black Sea to delegates from Black Sea coastal countries as long as the decision made by said committee will not impinge on the security of Turkey or its capital city Constantinople.¹³ The Russian-Turkish rapprochement was not looked on favourably by the Western

10. T. Wituch, *Tureckie przemieiany. Dzieje Turcji 1878–1923*, Warszawa 1980, pp. 28–31.

11. M. Tanty, *Bosfor i Dardanele*, pp. 266–267.

12. W.I. Lenin, *Dziela*, t. 26, Warszawa 1956, pp. 239–244.

13. *Московский договор между Россией и Турцией, 16 марта 1921 года*, Поиск по документам XX века, <http://www.doc20vek.ru/node/4149> (28.02.2021).

countries. They blocked the Straits during the war of national liberation on the pretext of remaining neutral. Then, they tried to leave Soviet Russia out of any decisions on matters pertaining to the Black Sea.

The regime of the Straits, challenged by the Soviet Union after World War II, was determined at the Montreux Convention on 20th July 1936. Turkey gained complete control over the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles as well as the Sea of Marmara. The demilitarization of the Straits was annulled: in peacetime all vessels were allowed to pass, including light surface vessels and auxiliary vessels, provided that their transit was requested 8 to 15 days in advance. A limit of 15,000 tons in total was imposed on larger commercial vessels of non-coastal countries. The aggregate tonnage of warships belonging to all non-coastal states present in the Black Sea at any time could not exceed 45,000 tons. Those rules were applicable in peacetime. During the war, if Turkey remained neutral, free transit and navigation of civil vessels was permitted. If it joined the war, enemy vessels were banned, and Turkey had the power to decide whether a navy was allowed transit through the Straits.¹⁴

The Straits during World War II

In the early 1939, the government of Turkey made its decision to oppose the Third Reich and Italy conditional upon the stance of the United Kingdom, the Soviet Union and France. The defence of the Black Sea Straits was considered the most important task.¹⁵ An invasion of Turkey by the Axis Powers could lead to denial of access to oil deposits in the Near East, the Middle East and, further on, the route to India. Note that because until 22nd June 1941 the Soviet Union was allied to the Axis Powers, a potential threat to the Turkish Straits would come both from the Balkans and the Black Sea. During the visit of the Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs Şükrü Saracoğlu in Moscow on 13th October 1939, among new Soviet demands Vyacheslav Molotov named the ones that concerned the Straits; in line with those claims, Turkey was supposed to consult any passage of all non-Black Sea countries through the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles with the Soviet Union. In addition, their tonnage was to be limited to 6 tons, the Straits were to be closed to ships with humanitarian

14. *Postanowienia traktatu z Montreux*, http://sam.baskent.edu.tr/belge/Montro_TR.pdf (06.03.2021).

15. The National Archives, Kew, London, Foreign Office 371/23741/R2887/115/G, Sheets 169 – 171, No. 133, Sir H. Knatchbull-Hugessen's Report for the UK's Foreign Office, Angora, 15.04.1939.

aid, and vessels intervening on behalf of the League of Nations were allowed to pass only if Moscow agreed.¹⁶ Turkey found those terms unacceptable, and the Turkish minister returned on the 17th of October. Consequently, Saracoğlu's visit to Moscow did not yield any political gains.

In mid-July 1940, Haydar Aktay, the Turkish ambassador in Moscow, notified his government that Moscow would soon make its claim to revise the Turko-Soviet border, on the pretext of protecting its Caspian oil fields.¹⁷ The consul in Batumi informed the cabinet in Ankara that the Soviets were planning to seize the province of Kars, situated in north-eastern Turkey near its border with the Soviet Union.¹⁸ The rumours were alarming in the context of the disclosure of French documents (after the German invasion of France) containing the Allied Forces' plans to launch an attack on Baku, with Turkey playing a key role in the operation. In autumn 1940, during confidential talks with the Third Reich's ambassador, Molotov voiced demands with regard to the establishment of Soviet bases in the Turkish straits and sought quiet acceptance for future expansion towards the Mediterranean and the Persian Gulf from Transcaucasia. Fearing that the Soviet Union would seize the Bosphorus before it formally declared war on Turkey, the British wanted the Turkish government to allow their fleet in the region of the Straits as soon as possible.¹⁹

Turkey's strategic position was of such critical importance that both parties to the conflict sought to win its support. The Soviet Union interest in the Straits did not relent even when it changed sides. On the one hand, their salience was due to the security of the southern border, which could be attacked only from the direction of the Black Sea, and the latter could only be entered through the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles. On the other hand, ships carrying supplies for the Allied forces also had to obtain permission to use the passage. For this reason negotiations with Turkey continued. On 2nd November 1943, Minister of Foreign Affairs Hüseyin Numan Menemencioğlu, Secretary of State in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Cevat Açıkalın and

16. A. Macfie, *The Turko-Soviet talks of September-October 1939: A Secret German Report*, "Balkan Studies" 1985 No. 2, p. 434.

17. N. Tamkin, *Britain, Turkey and the Soviet Union, 1940–45. Strategy, Diplomacy and Intelligence in the Eastern Mediterranean*, London 2009, p. 22.

18. The National Archives, Kew, Government Code and Cypher School, Diplomatic Section [HW 12/256], No. 082009, Turkish Ambassador, Moscow, to Minister of Foreign Affairs, Angora, 11.07.1940.

19. K. Zdulski, *Bariera bliskowschodnia. Turcja w polityce Wielkiej Brytanii w latach 1939–1942*, Kraków – Łódź 2019, p. 142.

British ambassador in Turkey Sir Hugh Montgomery Knatchbull-Hugessen left for Cairo. On 9th November Cairo again buzzed with rumours. Upon its return, Minister Numan Menemencioğlu was informed that the Soviet Union had made its claims towards the European part of Turkey and both coasts of the Bosphorus at the aforementioned Moscow conference. The UK decided to take advantage of the situation and guaranteed the integrity of the Turkish territory on condition that Ankara joins the war. Otherwise, the British did not feel obliged to oppose the Soviet claims.²⁰ This attitude was all the more justified that the Turkish government consented to the transit of German warships camouflaged as commercial vessels, which allowed them to bypass tonnage restrictions. The government in Ankara walked a fine line between the two sides of the conflict, and letting Allied ships with materiel for the Soviet Union pass through the Straits was one of its benign gestures.²¹

The Turkish government was afraid that the United Kingdom and the United States would "compensate" the Soviet Union for "the bloodshed and wartime effort" by making further concessions and surrendering more countries to the Soviet protectorate. American circles in Ankara spoke more and more openly that Turkey should relinquish the Straits to the USSR. This step was expected to be a compensation for the effort and lack of free passage through the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles during heavy hostilities. Turkey was troubled again in the early 1945. The Allies had clearly managed to secure some victories. The end of the war was only a matter of time. There was more and more talk of surrendering not only the Straits but also the capital city of Turkey, Istanbul, to the USSR. According to those plans, areas surrounding Constantinople were to be "internationalized." On 23rd February 1945, at a special session, the National Assembly of the Republic of Turkey announced Turkey's entry into war against Germany and Japan.²² Turkey intended to participate in the United Nations Conference on International Organization in San Francisco. However, the new British ambassador in Turkey Sir Maurice Peterson²³ informed Hasana Saka that the only the

20. M. Sokolnicki, *Dziennik ankarski 1943–1946*, London 1974, p. 46.

21. E. Weisband, *Turkish Foreign Policy 1943–1945. Small State Diplomacy and Great Power Politics*, Princeton 1973, p. 297.

22. A. Hür, *Çok Partili Dönem'in Öteki Tarihi. İnönü ve Bayar'lı Yıllar 1938–1960*, İstanbul 2015, p. 110.

23. Sir Maurice Drummond Peterson, British ambassador in Turkey in the years 1944 to 1946. Cf. *Foreign Office, 29th January 1945*, "The London Gazette" No. 36916, 30.01.1945, p. 641.

countries which declared war on the Axis Powers by 1st March 1945 would be invited to the conference. On the same day, the US ambassador signed the "Lend Lease Act" with İsmet İnönü's government.²⁴ It was a purely symbolic act, since throughout the Second World War no Turkish soldier fired a shot, perhaps except for firing a salute.²⁵

Turkey in the eventful year of "exchanged notes"

Turkey declared war on the Third Reich and Japan on 23rd February 1945. Moscow was displeased since it went against its interest. Already in January 1945, there were plans to open transit through the Straits from the Aegean Sea to the Black Sea. The Turkish government tried to improve relations with Moscow, referring to the USSR as "our friend and neighbor."²⁶ Still, such approach proved fairly useless, since the Soviet Union no longer cared about better relations; rather, it craved territorial gains. This proved obvious during the conference in Crimea (3rd February 1945), where the Soviet Union made its claims with regard to the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles. Later, in late March, Turkish ambassador in Moscow Selim Sarper was summoned by the USSR Minister of Foreign Affairs to a meeting with Vyacheslav Molotov. At the meeting, he learned that the Russian side terminated the treaty of friendship and neutrality signed with Turkey on 17th December 1925.

The USSR also insisted that Turkey cede Kars and Ardahan to Soviet republics, and part of Thrace to communist Bulgaria. Pressure was put on Ankara also with regard to a revision of the Montreux Convention. Moscow insisted on being given unlimited access to the Bosphorus and the Dardanelle, even in the event of war, as well as the possibility to maintain its contingent in the area. The subject of the Straits was raised at the peace conference in Yalta, and later on discussed in the Potsdam Conference. It was then that President Truman concluded that European inland waterways such as the Danube, the Rhein, the Kiel Canal or the Black Sea Straits should be handed over for international control. It was decided that the Montreux Convention

24. Lend Lease Act — the act on loans and leases enacted by the Congress in March 1941. It allowed the president to supply materiel to any country vital to the defence of the United States. Cf. *Wielka historia świata. Wielkie wojny w XX wieku 1914–1945*, red. M. Zgórnjak, J. Łaptos, J. Solarz, t. 11, Kraków 2006, p. 571.
25. E.J. Zürcher, *Turcja. Od sułtanatu do współczesności*, Kraków 2013, p. 205.
26. The Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum, The Embassy of the Republic of Poland in London, 1919–1945 A.12. 53/40, Report of 24.01.1945.

requires revision but its wording should be negotiated by the governments of the Soviet Union, Turkey, the United States and the United Kingdom. In April 1945, a "Daily Express" correspondent informed that the USSR demanded that the Dardanelles be demilitarised and freed from Turkey's exclusive control, and that Ankara should relinquish Kars and Ardahan and make its constitution "more specific," in order to give greater power to the parliament.²⁷ Polish Consul General Witold Ryszard Korsak believes that the Turkish government in May 1945 was ready for concessions to the Soviet Union if they ensured improved relations with Russia. However, the stance of Joseph Stalin, who did not wish to make any concessions towards Ankara, proved problematic.²⁸

The government of Turkey relied on support from the Western countries, realising that they were unable to oppose Moscow on their own. The United States held firmly to its position, and on 2nd November 1945 suggested that the Turkish government revise the convention. It was proposed that the Straits should be constantly open to all countries' commercial vessels and naval ships of Black Sea coastal states. In peacetime, a specific tonnage quota was to be applied for non-Black Sea vessels, and vessels with tonnages in excess of the limit required the consent of major Black Sea countries or they could be granted consent if on a UN mission. Even though the Turkish government was prone to accept such a solution, Moscow strongly objected to the idea.

On 8th August 1946, the USSR ambassador in Ankara explained the Russian viewpoint on the revision of the regime of the Straits at the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It was based on 5 points:

1. The Straits should always be open to commercial vessels from all countries.
2. The Straits should always be open to naval warships of Black Sea superpowers.
3. The passage of warships of countries other than Black Sea coastal states should be prohibited except for unusual cases.

27. The Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum, The Ministry of Foreign Affairs A.11.E/605, Turkey's internal affairs – "Daily Express" correspondent, 12.04.1945.

28. The Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum, The Ministry of Foreign Affairs A.11.E/605, Turkey's internal affairs – W.R. Korsak's telegram of 29.05.1945.

4. Turkey and other Black Sea coastal states should be competent to determine the status of the Straits as a natural marine route to and from the Black Sea.

5. Turkey and the Soviet Union, being the superpowers most interested and capable of ensuring the freedom of commercial navigation and security in the Straits, will jointly defend the Straits to prevent other countries from using the Straits for purposes hostile to Black Sea coastal states.²⁹

On the one hand, the Soviet Union strove to ensure free trade for all countries, which promoted its economic interests. However, it also tried to reverse the trend that took hold at the London Conference in 1841, according to which countries other than Black Sea coastal states were allowed to decide on the regime of the Black Sea. This was especially important in the context of the security of the USSR's southern border, should Turkey fail to close the Straits during a conflict. It was all the more critical that Ankara, by controlling those strategic passages, was also able to control the transit of Soviet units to the Mediterranean. The Turkish government was perfectly aware that by agreeing to such change it would lose its actual impact on the Straits, since it would contend with Moscow as well as Sophia and Bucharest, both of which were in the Soviet area of influence. In fact, the events of 1946 determined the future of the Black Sea Straits and the security of Istanbul in the Cold War period.

On 22nd August 1946 Minister of Foreign Affairs Hassan Saka presented the *chargé d'affaires* of the USSR Embassy with a note in which:

1. Turkey explained that Ankara's behaviour towards German ships in World War II was due to the absence of a clear definition of the words "warships" in the Montreux Convention.

2. Turkey agreed to conduct talks on the revision of the Montreux Convention, yet emphasized that the Soviet claims would constitute an entirely new treaty on the regime of the Straits rather than an amendment to existing provisions.

3. Ankara stressed that in all wars in which it had taken part it proved that it invariably defended the integrity of its own territory.

29. Archive of the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Turkey 1946 – political reports 6/1587, No. 14, Information on the presentation of the new cabinet before the National Assembly, Ankara, 14.08.1946, p. 2.

4. The USSR should not base its own security on a violation of the integrity of another country. Mutual friendship and trust between Turkey and the Soviet Union would be the best guarantee of security. Turkey extends friendly gestures towards the USSR but still expects similar moves on part of Moscow.

5. Turkey may rely on the UN Security Council in case of any threat from the USSR.³⁰

For the USSR, the key argument in support of the claim that Turkey was incapable of effectively controlling the Straits in the event of a military conflict was that Ankara allowed the transit of German warships during the war. Turkey countered this claim, arguing that those were only isolated incidents resulting from the lack of precise provisions in the Montreux Convention, which would specify how to differentiate between naval warships and auxiliary ships from commercial vessels. Note, however, that during World War II Turkey tried to remain formally neutral, skilfully balancing between the two sides of the conflict. Throughout the war, it supplied Berlin with chromite, a mineral used in the production of steel for tanks. At the same time, considering Wehrmacht's planned passage through the Turkish territory en route to Palestine,³¹ the government in Ankara had to make some concessions to guarantee Turkey's security. One of those was "turning a blind eye" on the transit of German ships through the Straits. Undeniably, however, the number of those incidents did not significantly affect the security of the southern borderland of the USSR, and therefore it did not impact the result of hostilities.

Obviously, the Soviet Union did not back down on its agenda, issuing two further notes, i.e. on 7th August and 24 September 1946. In the September note, it demanded that Turkey follow new rules with regard to the Straits, all of which were in line with Moscow's previous claims. In support of its demands, the USSR cited the Russo-Ottoman treaties of 1798, 1805 and 1833 — which assumed joint defence of the Straits and the dominant role of the Black Sea coastal states — at the same time completely ignoring the Treaty of Moscow (16th March 1921), Kars (13th October 1921) and the Turko-Ukrainian Agreement (2nd January 1922), under which Turkey was responsible for the security of the Straits. It was also suggested that since Turkey had allowed

30. Archive of the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Turkey 1946 — political reports 6/1587, No. 18, Ignacy Złotowski's secret telegram to Minister Berman, Ankara, 26.08.1946.

31. More information: Bundes-Militärarchiv, Freiburg im Breisgau, Studie über Operationen im Vorderen Orient, RH 2/632 (OKW/OKH files).

German warships to pass through the Straits, the Soviet Union had been forced to withdraw considerable forces from the war zone to deploy them near the Black Sea.³²

In Turko-Soviet relations the year 1946 was marked with the exchange of diplomatic notes. Ankara responded to Moscow's further demands by sending another note, in which "the government of Turkey thanked the government of the Soviet Union for the kindness shown with regard to the Straits;" however, it did not consent to hand over the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles for the joint jurisdiction of the Black Sea coastal states. Turkey insisted that the matter of the Straits was of crucial not only to the Black Sea coastal states.³³ In reply to the second Soviet note, the Turkish government its previous response in its entirety.³⁴ The public opinion in Turkey strongly opposed any negotiations on points 4 and 5 of the Soviet note, claiming that they threaten the sovereignty and integrity of the state.³⁵

Turkey was aware that the Soviet border at the Black Sea was 2100-kilometre long yet it hoped that its decision to close the Straits if the Soviet Union was under threat would be sufficient, and that the UN was its only partner ensuring security in the Straits.³⁶ In this respect it relied on the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations which set forth that any threats or the use of force in international relations must be avoided, particularly in the context of territorial integrity and political independence of another country.³⁷

32. Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Başbakanlık Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü [hereafter: T.C. Başbakanlık], Başkanlık özel kalem Müdürlüğü 30-1-0-0 [hereafter: 30-1-0-0]/60-368-1. Turkey's response to the Soviet note of 24.09.1946 on the Montreux Convention, Ankara 1946, p. 1.
33. T.C. Başbakanlık, 30-1-0-0/60-368-8, TC Hükümeti, Montreux Sözleşmesi'nin muhtemel tadili meselesi hakkında 22 Ağustos tarihli Türk notasına cevap teşkil eden, Sovyet Hükümeti'nin 24 Eylül notasına dair görüş ve mülahazalar, Ankara, September 1946, p. 12.
34. Archive of the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Turkey 1946 – political reports 6/1587, No. 48, S. Sośnicki's secret note to the Director of Political Department on the political situation in Turkey, Angora, 7.10.1946, p. 1.
35. Archive of the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 6/1588, No. 42, T. Fillip's expert report on the Black Sea straits to the Minister, [no place of issue], 24.05.1947, p. 5.
36. T.C. Başbakanlık, 30-1-0-0/60-368-8, TC Hükümeti, Montreux Sözleşmesi'nin muhtemel tadili meselesi hakkında 22 Ağustos tarihli Türk notasına cevap teşkil eden, Sovyet Hükümeti'nin 24 Eylül notasına dair görüş ve mülahazalar, Ankara, September 1946, pp. 21 – 22.
37. T.C. Başbakanlık, 30-1-0-0/60-368-8, TC Hükümeti, Montreux Sözleşmesi'nin muhtemel tadili meselesi hakkında 22 Ağustos tarihli Türk notasına cevap teşkil eden, Sovyet

At the same time, Ankara hoped that "Moscow would approach the matter of the Straits with openness and kindness."³⁸

It should be noted that before giving the reply to the USSR, the ambassadors of the United Kingdom and the United States met with Turkey's foreign minister.³⁹ On this basis we may conjecture that Turkey's response addressed to Moscow had been consulted with other countries. Despite his assurances of his intention to build amicable relations with the Soviet Union, Prime Minister Peker decided to keep the Turkish army mobilized. In addition, Turkey manifested the power of its naval fleet during the trade show in Izmir as well as the power of its entire army during the Victory Day (Zafer Bayramı) parade. Peker was an adamant opponent of the Soviet claims with regard to the Black Sea Straits. Moreover, he was convinced that in the event of Moscow's pressure Turkey would have to resort to the use of armed forces.⁴⁰

On 9th November 1946, the governments of Turkey, the United Kingdom and the United States expressed their willingness to participate in a conference aimed at the conclusion of an agreement concerning the Straits. The Soviet Union did not intend to take part in the meeting and ended all public discussion on the subject in autumn 1946. Initially, the British were inclined to agree to leaving the issue of the Straits to bilateral Turko-Soviet talks. However, under pressure from the United States they ultimately abandoned the idea.

The Turkish government continued to pursue consensus with the Soviet Union. In December 1946, Faik Zihni Akdur became the new Turkish ambassador in Moscow (he remained in office until 1949).⁴¹ One of his tasks in Moscow was to learn about the possibility of Soviet concessions with reference to sections 4 and 5. Meanwhile, the Embassy of Poland in Turkey held

Hükümeti'nin 24 Eylül notasına dair görüş ve mülahazalar, Ankara, September 1946, p. 24.

38. T.C. Başbakanlık, 30-1-0-0/60-368-8, TC Hükümeti, Montreux Sözleşmesi'nin muhtemel tadili meselesi hakkında 22 Ağustos tarihli Türk notasına cevap teşkil eden, Sovyet Hükümeti'nin 24 Eylül notasına dair görüş ve mülahazalar, Ankara, September 1946, p. 25.
39. Archive of the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Turkey 1946 — political reports 6/1587, No. 23, Sośnicki's secret note to Minister J. Olszewski, Ankara, 01.09.1946, p. 2.
40. Archive of the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Turkey 1946 — political reports 6/1587, No. 31, Sośnicki's secret note to the Director of Political Department, Ankara, 09.12.1946, p. 2.
41. Büyükelçilik Tarihi ve Önceki Büyükelçilerimiz, <http://moskova.be.mfa.gov.tr/Mission/MissionChiefHistory> (08.03.2021).

that the rumours concerning the USSR's territorial claims with regard to Kars and Ardahan were untrue.⁴² This was to reassure the ruling elites in Turkey as well as appease their Western allies, since the Soviet Union did not want to spark a new military conflict. Note that at that time, unlike the US, the Soviet Union did not yet have any nuclear weapon.

Conclusions

The Black Sea Straits: the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles were a strategically and economically valuable passage connecting the Black Sea with the Mediterranean. In the analysed period, they were particularly significant for Turkey, as losing control over them would threaten the security of a vital centre such as Istanbul. Also, thanks to the Straits the Republic of Turkey was a precious ally of the Western countries. Admittedly, the Allies were disappointed with the Turkish attitude during the war and walking a fine line between the sides of the conflict, as exemplified by the treaties which Turkey concluded with all players and its failure to actually deliver on any such agreements. Nonetheless, were it not for its strategic importance to the Allies, it could not have relied on their protection and would have probably ended up in the Soviet area of influence.

At that time, the Straits were equally salient for the Soviet Union. As previously mentioned, they provided protection for the country's southern border as well as being of foremost importance to local trade routes. Towards the end of World War II Moscow sought to discredit Ankara by making it "Hitler's ally," a move that enabled the Soviets to demand a revision of the Montreux Convention and the annexation of the provinces of Kars and Adahan to the USSR and part of Thrace to Bulgaria. If it had not been for the growing discord between Moscow and Washington, it is very likely that Turkey would be another country "traded" to the USSR for the Soviet involvement in the war. In the face of mounting tension and fear of the outbreak of World War III, Turkey seemed too precious in strategic terms to allow its crossing over to the other side. It was the regime of the Straits which enabled the United States to control the passage of Soviet submarines.

42. Archive of the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 6/1587, No. 106, S. Sońnicki's secret note to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on the political situation in Turkey, Angora, 11.12.1946, p. 4.

However, the claim that Turkey had already sided with the US at the end of the war, expressed by Turkish historiographers, is unfounded. As reported by Witold Korsak, Turkey was willing to make concessions as late as in 1945. Had it not received support from the US and the UK, i.e. countries which were ready to defend Turkey right after the war, it is quite likely that it would have to reach agreement with the United States even for the price of far-reaching concessions. Notes were exchanged throughout 1946; if we consider the fact that all responses were consulted with Washington and London, we may conclude that Ankara was ready to negotiate with Moscow, and that it was only Western support which prevented it from making radical concessions. Nevertheless, if the USSR had restricted its claims to the ones which would not significantly affect Turkey's security, it is very probable that İsmet İnönü's government would have consented to negotiate, trying to remain relatively neutral, as it had already done during World War II. Turkish control of the Black Sea Straits was somewhat saved by the clash between Moscow and Washington as well as the outbreak of the Cold War later on. It was the geopolitical salience of the country on the Bosphorus that ensured the support of the Western players in matters contentious with the Soviet Union.

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Abstract

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The significance of the Black Sea in Turko-Soviet relations in 1939–1946

Keywords:

Republic of Turkey,
Soviet Union,
Black Sea, straits,
Bosporus and
Dardanelles, Cold
War

The Black Sea and the Black Sea Straits during World War II and immediately after its end had a huge impact on the formation of Turkish-Soviet relations. Already at the beginning of the war, Moscow tried to force Ankara to revise the Montreux Treaty. Soviet pressure depended on the war situation and resurfaced as the Allies began winning the war. In 1945, Turkey, fearing a lack of support in the event of a conflict with the Soviet Union, was ready to make concessions, and in the following year Moscow began to boldly demand a revision of the Montreux Treaty in its notes in such a way that the straits would be decided by the Black Sea states, and the security guards Turkey and the Soviet Union were to become the Bosporus and the Dardanelles. Ankara could only have been saved by Western support during this period – and in the longer context by the outbreak of the Cold War.

Abstrakt

Karolina Wanda Olszowska

Znaczenie Morza Czarnego

dla relacji turecko-sowieckich w latach 1939–1946

Morze Czarne oraz cieśniny czarnomorskie podczas II wojny światowej i zaraz po jej zakończeniu miały istotny wpływ na kształtowanie się relacji turecko-sowieckich. Już na początku wojny Moskwa starała się wymusić na Ankarze rewizję traktatu z Montreux. Naciski sowieckie uzależnione były od sytuacji wojennej, powróciły, gdy alianci zaczęli zyskiwać przewagę w konflikcie. W 1945 roku Turcja, obawiając się braku poparcia w przypadku konfliktu ze Związkiem Radzieckim, gotowa była na ustępstwa, w następnym roku Moskwa coraz śmielej zaczęła w swoich notach domagać się rewizji traktatu z Montreux w taki sposób, aby o cieśninach decydowały państwa czarnomorskie, a na straży bezpieczeństwa Bosforu i Dardaneli stały Turcja i Związek Radziecki. Ankarę mogło w tym okresie uratować tylko wsparcie zachodnie – a w dłuższym kontekście wybuch zimnej wojny.

Słowa kluczowe:
Republika Turcji,
Związek Radziecki,
Morze Czarne,
cieśniny, Bosfor
i Dardanele, zimna
wojna