

ISMET KONAK. THE TURKISH POLICY DURING THE RUSSIAN CIVIL WAR (1918-1922) // *English version of the article was submitted by the author for the bulletin "Russia and the Moslem World."*

*Keywords: October Revolution; Russian Civil War; Bolsheviks; Ottoman Empire; Republic of Turkey; V.I. Lenin; Ataturk.*

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*Abstract. The history of the Russo-Turkish relations is coming into prominence in recent years. Especially, the role that Soviet Russia played in the formation of the Republic of Turkey is drawing high attention of Turks and Russians. As known, in 1917, Bolsheviks came to power and began to rebuild Russia within the framework of the communist doctrine. The dominant classes, who held the production means in their hands, were opposed to the Bolshevik power and waged a war, which spread to the territories related to Turkey. Thus, two politically various administrations, the Istanbul government and the Ankara government, pursued a specific policy in Crimea, Caucasus and Turkestan during the Russian Civil War. The aim of our study is to focus on the policy, which was implemented by Turks toward the Bolsheviks from 1918 to 1922.*

## **Introduction**

Turks and Russians positively or negatively interacted with each other for centuries. Both sides were involved in many wars in the regions, related to Caucasus, Crimea and Balkans. No doubt, the Ottoman Empire and the Russian Empire, composed

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of the multicultural ethnic formations, were obliged to be disintegrated after the French Revolution in 1789. Every nation suffered from uppermentioned monarchistic regimes and started to struggle for their self-determination. Thus, in the XIXth century, various independent states were established particularly in the lands of the Ottoman Empire.

With the French Revolution, a new class, the bourgeoisie emerged and took over the power. Under bourgeois oppression, another class, the proletariat quantitatively became strong, and it was organized by the communist movement led by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels.

Undoubtedly, the communist movement passed to the Russian Empire. Especially, the Bolshevik faction, headed by Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, tried to spread the communist ideology between Russian proletarians. After a period of decisive struggle, the Bolsheviks reached a great victory in October, 1917. With the formation of the socialist power, the counterrevolutionary classes revolted against the Bolsheviks, and the Russian Civil War broke out in 1918. The civil war lasted approximately 4 years and resulted in the Bolshevik success.

Needless to say, the Russian Civil War influenced the territories, inhabited by Turkic and Muslim population. Thus, the Turkish governments in Istanbul and Ankara followed a different foreign policy in line with their demands. In this regard, the aim of our study is to touch upon the impact of the Russian Civil War on the establishment of the Turkish state. In this paper, we also try to compare the foreign policies of two different Turkish governments.

## **I. Emergence of the Russian Civil War**

Tsarist Russia had entered the First World War with great hopes in order to hold an absolute dominance over Istanbul, the Straits and the Eastern Anatolia. However, the lack of military material on the front and the shortage of food in the rear

complicated the situation in Russia. Especially the poor peasantry, proletariat and simple soldiers highly suffered from the war policy of the Kremlin, and they deemed a resistance necessary. In a way, all war conditions paved the way for a massive revolution.

Thus, the revolutions broke out behind the front in 1917, disrupted the aforesaid plans of the Kremlin, and also put an end to the Romanov dynasty. The Bolsheviks, took over the "state apparatus" in the end of the October Revolution in 1917, had taken the number of radical steps in order to build socialism in Russia. Immediately after the revolution, the socialist principles such as the decree on land, the domination of labourers over production, the right of nations to self-determination and the continuous peace were put into practice by Bolsheviks. These socialist steps, on one side, satisfied a group (e.g., poor peasants, proletarians, simple soldiers) on the other side, dragged the opposition group (bourgeois class, landlords, aristocracy, Mensheviks, Socialist Revolutionaries, Cadets, White Army etc.) into an indignation. Following the decrees, the relations, between two combatant opposition groups steadily deteriorated. Especially, the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly and the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, signed on March 3, 1918, were the last straw that broke camel's back. It was clear that the Russian bourgeoisie wanted to make use of the Constituent Assembly for seizure of the state power. In this regard, the Bolshevik faction, regarded the Constituent Assembly as an instrument of representative democracy, decided to establish the Soviet system, which is theoretically consonant with the participatory democracy.

Also, the Russian bourgeois class, considered by Bolsheviks as a "comprador class," was allied with French and Britain investors. For this reason, it had to continue the world war against Central Powers. However, the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk prevented the bourgeoisie from continuing the war.

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Thus, the class interests forced Soviet Russia into the civil war that lasted from 1918 to 1922. The Russian Civil War, undoubtedly, ended with the absolute victory of Bolsheviki, and changed the fate of region on a large scale. In terms of its neighborhood with Soviet Russia, Turkey directly or indirectly took part in the civil war as well. In this context, highly different foreign policy was carried out by Istanbul and Ankara governments, especially over Eastern Anatolia, Caucasus and Turkestan.

## **II. The Russian Policy of the Istanbul Government**

Needless to say, the Istanbul government viewed the Bolshevik Revolution and the fighting between factions as an opportunity to expand the territory of the Ottoman Empire toward Caucasus and Turkestan. The government in question based on the ideology of Pan-Turkism and Pan-Islamism. Thus, it planned to unite all of the Muslim and Turkic nations under one state. Particularly, the losses that the Ottoman Empire suffered during the First World War forced the Ottoman troops to move eastward. To be sure, the disintegrated Soviet Russia would be the first victim of this expansionist and aggressive policy.

While the Ottoman administration was doing negotiations for the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, the Turkish forces were advancing and retaking the cities such as Erzurum, Kars, Trabzon, Ardahan and Batumi. Especially, Elviye-i Selase, a given name for the area which consists of Kars, Ardahan and Batumi, historically was a worthy region for the Ottoman Empire.

In next months of 1918, the progress of Turkish army continuously went on. The Ottoman forces occupied the major cities in the Caucasus, namely Gyumri, Ahilkelek, Meskheta, Ganja, Baku, Nagorno Karabakh, Derbent, Temirhan-Şura and Petrovsk. Please note that Enver Pasha, the predominant figure of the Istanbul government, particularly attached great importance to the invasion of Baku, and he appointed his inexperienced

brother, Nuri Pasha, as a commander of the invasion. Nuri Pasha was commanding the Islamic Army of the Caucasus (Turkish: Kafkas İslam Ordusu), which especially had an alliance with the anti-Bolshevik Caucasian Mountaineers, also known as “Dağlılar” in Turkish. The Turkish administration even provided the weapon and ammunition to the Mountaineers against the Bolshevik power. Thus, the Mountaineers, with Turkish assistance, gained victory in northern Caucasus in the autumn of 1918.

With the annexation of previously mentioned cities, the Istanbul government explicitly became a rival of Bolsheviks in the Russian Civil War. The Moscow administration had nearly lost its control over Caucasus. This aggressive policy, which seriously affected the course of civil war, lasted to the Armistice of Mudros in October 1918. By concluding the armistice, the Turkish army had to retreat and surrender its arms to the Allies. In the meantime, the prominent members of the Istanbul government, Talaat Pasha, Enver Pasha and Djemal Pasha ran away abroad not to face the Armenian Genocide.

In 1921, the interior minister Talaat Pasha, who was considered to be the main organizer of the Armenian massacres, was gunned down by an Armenian in Berlin. Another Ottoman statesman, Djemal Pasha, served as a marine minister in the Istanbul government, also was accused of exterminating the Armenians, and assassinated by two Armenians in Tbilisi in 1922. As to Enver Pasha, who was the real leader of İttihadists (Turkish: İttihatçılar), went to Turkestan, and carried on the struggle against Bolsheviks. In collaboration with the anti-Bolshevik Basmachi movement, predominantly composed of the Turkic landlords, Enver Pasha fought the Reds, and in 1922, he was killed by the Bolshevik troops.

### **III. The Soviet Policy of the Ankara Government**

In comparison with the Istanbul government, the Ankara government, led by Atatürk, adopted an agreeable policy toward

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Soviet Russia. Definitely, both sides needed a compromise. Firstly, with the assistance of the Anatolian movement, Soviet Russia had the intention of preventing Allies' intervention in the Caucasus. Secondly, the Bolsheviks wanted to spread communism on the Turkish soil. On the other hand, the Ankara government, supported by the Anatolian and Rumelian landlords, merchants and nobles, aimed to save the Turkish territory from Allies. For this reason, the Turkish side strongly needed the Soviet military and financial aid.

Soviet Russia, which was ready to support the Anatolian movement, stipulated that Turkish government should accept socialism. It is believed that Atatürk tactically promised to pass to the state socialism during the negotiations with Soviet representative in Havza, Samsun. In exchange for this, the Soviet representative, S.M. Budenny, said that the Moscow administration would provide the military and financial aid. He also added that Soviet Russia definitely would not allow the Armenians, Kurds and Greeks to establish their own states in Anatolia. As a matter of fact, the Turkish War of Independence (Turkish: Kurtuluş Savaşı, also known as "Millî Mücadele") was based on preventing the indigenous people of Anatolia from founding a state. Thus, the Ankara government declared the ethnic rebellions took place in Anatolia especially by Kurds to be a separatist action of Allies, and it also persuaded Soviet Russia to believe this. When the Treaty of Sévres was signed on August 10, 1920, Bolsheviks together with the Ankara government were strongly opposed to it. Because, the pact that abolished the Ottoman Empire, provided for an independent Armenia, for an autonomous Kurdistan and for a Greek presence in eastern Thrace.

To get the terms of Treaty of Sévres accepted by the Ankara government, the Greeks, at the direction of Britain, moved toward Ankara. It sparked the Greco-Turkish war, which lasted from 1919 to 1922. In this war, Soviet Russia supported the Turkish side with weapons and finance. However, while the

Ankara administration was battling with Greeks on one side, it was occupying the Soviet territory in the eastern front. The Turkish troops annexed the Caucasian areas such as Gyumri, Ahilkelek, Meskheti, Batumi and Surmali. Thus, the Ankara government, like its predecessor, followed an extension policy in the east, and also passed the borders that determined by the National Oath (Turkish: Misak-ı Milli). Actually, the Turkish rule thought that Soviet Russia would give permission to occupy the previously mentioned areas because the Ankara government believed that it supported Bolsheviks for sovietizing Azerbaijan on April 28, 1920. However, the Soviet side didn't allow occupation and forced the Turkish army to retreat. Finally, the definite boundaries between both sides were decided by the Treaty of Moscow on March 16, 1921. The Ankara government, in fact, gained advantage from this treaty. Particularly, the provinces such as Van, Bitlis, Kars and Ardahan, which were considered to be Armenian regions by Bolsheviks, had been passed to the Turkish side. In Van and Bitlis, the Soviet administration had an intention of resettling the 300.000 Armenian survivors of the genocide.

It is obvious that the Ankara government inherited the genocide policy from its predecessor, and had also an intention of removing the rest of Armenian people. In 1920, the Turkish forces occupied the prominent cities of Armenia, and especially left the main Armenian city, Gyumri in ruin. According to the archival documents, approximately 5.000 people were killed in Gyumri. Besides that, many statesmen, who participated in the Armenian Genocide, were rehabilitated by the Ankara government. The qaimakam of Bogazlıyan, Kemal Bey and the governor of Diarbekir, Mehmet Reşit Bey were given the title of "national martyr (Ottoman Turkish: şehid-i milli)" by the Turkish Grand National Assembly in 1922. Also, the statues of Topal Osman and Gabash Ali were erected by Kemalist regime. Whereas Topal Osman was accused of murdering the Greeks and Armenians in the Black Sea, Gabash Ali was charged with the extermination of

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Armenians during the genocide in Amasia. Furthermore, the abandoned properties (Ottoman Turkish: emval-i metruke) of Armenians were seized by Turkish government, and they were distributed among the some public and private foundations such as the Turkish Hearts, Trabzon Idman Yurdu, Ministry of Education etc. In a way, Armenian people had been dispossessed, and the new Turkish-Muslim bourgeois class was created. Even though the last Ottoman administration juristically accepted to return the confiscated property and possessions to the deported Armenian families, the new Turkish government, in 1928, passed a law, which was called "the Disposition Law (Turkish: Temlik Kanunu)," and according to the article 7 of this law, the return of the confiscated properties was officially ended.

When it comes to state socialism, the Ankara government simultaneously changed its manner of policy, and implicitly tried to remove the communist movement from Anatolia. In this context, it is necessary to touch upon the emergence and the termination of the Turkish Communist Party (hereafter "TCP"), also known as "TKP" in Turkish. The Soviet Russia-centered TCP was founded in September 1920 under the leadership of Mustafa Suphi, who lived in Russia, and struggled for the revolution on the side of Bolsheviks during the civil war. According to the programme of the Soviet-based communist party, Bolsheviks aimed to transform Turkey into a socialist republic. The party also planned to provide autonomous commissariats to the Kurds, Armenians and Laz people. Thus, the Soviet-based TCP, in general, considered a class revolution necessary. This purpose posed a major threat to the dominant class in Anatolia, which was composed of the bourgeoisie and landlords. As a political representative to the Turkish dominant class, Ataturk, also didn't want to lose his power. He, explicitly, prevented the political organization of the Soviet-based TCP within Anatolia. Even, on Ataturk's initiative, the Turkish-based TCP was founded in October 1920. With the foundation of this party, the Ankara government wished to dominate the communist organization



overall. As a matter of fact, it is believed that in the beginning of 1921, Mustafa Suphi and his fellows were murdered by a criminal network.

### **Conclusion**

The Russian Civil War (1918-1922) began as a result of the class struggle, and in a short time, spread to the all parts of Russia. Needless to say, the Turkish administration didn't remain indifferent to the disorder, particularly, in the Caucasus and Turkestan, where the Turkic and Muslim population lived. In this context, the Istanbul government followed an aggressive extension policy against the Soviet regime. The Ankara government, by contrast, seemingly adopted a peaceful policy.

The victory that Bolsheviks won in the end of the civil war, was important for the future of the Turkish state. If the tsarist Russia or bourgeois class had become successful, the Turkish state wouldn't have been established. For the continuation of partnership, the Soviet administration especially abandoned its demands over Armenia. Even during the murder of Mustafa Suphi and his comrades, Bolsheviks never accused the Turkish government. It was obvious that Soviet power, at any rate, tried to strengthen its alliance with Turkish side against ambitions of the imperial countries.

Clearly, the Soviet-Turkish partnership posed an obstacle to the self-determination process of the indigenous people of Anatolia such as Kurds, Armenians and Greeks. Even though the Soviet-based Turkish Communist Party provided for an autonomy for upper mentioned ethnicities, it didn't quite meet their expectations. Thus, with the support of the Soviet power, the Turkish nation-state was built, and native ethnic people were removed from their homeland. Particularly, the Turkish government persuaded the Soviet administration to recognize the Kurdish revolts as "divisive" movements, which were organized by so-called "colonial countries."

## Notes

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11. State Archive of Russian Federation (GARF). Fond. P–130. Opis. 2. Ed. Xr. 581. L. 17.
12. In fact, all of the Mountaineers weren't opposed to the Soviet system. While the prominent religious figures such as Necmeddin Gotsinsky, Abd al-Majid Chermoyev, Haydar Bammатов were fighting against the Red Army, the pro-Bolshevik revolutionaries, Celal Korkmazov, Mahaç Dakhadayev, Ullubiy Buynaksky, etc., supported the Soviet power, by becoming the members of the Bolshevik organizations. See also: GARF. Fond. P–440. Opis. 1. Delo. 23. L. 8; Ivanov V.V. *Severnnyy Kavkaz i Zakavkaz'ye v*

- 1900-1991 gg (The Northern Caucasus and Transcaucasia in 1900-1991). Komsomolsk na Amure, 2010. P. 48.
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  14. Konak. *ibidem*. 232.
  15. Regarding the Armenian question, Djemal Pasha, in his memories, advocates the Armenian Genocide and writes as follows: "I advise the Ottoman Armenians, in the interest both of their own peace and happiness, and especially in the interests of the Turks, to give up their hare-brained dreams that Erzerum, Bitlis, Van, Diarbekir, Mamuret-ul-Asis shall ever become part of Armenia." See also: Pasha, Ahmad Djemal. *Memories of a Turkish Statesman*. London, 1922. P. 300.
  16. The Basmachi movement, which officially lasted from 1916 to 1934, was principally a resistance of the dominant Turkic class in the region of Turkestan against the Russian power. The term of Basmachi (Russian: Басмачество), according to the definition of Zeki Velidi Togan, is derived from the word "Baskıncı", a Turkic word that refers to bandit or marauder. The Basmachi movement was ruled by the feudals such as Korbashi Irgash, Mustafa Chokai, Muhiddin Beg and Hal Hodja. See also: Hayit Baymirza. *Basmacılar: Türkistan Milli Mücadele Tarihi (1917-1934) (The Basmachis: The History of Turkestan National Movement [1917-1934])*. Ankara, 1997. P. 429; Russian State Military Archive (RGVA). Fond. 25859. Opis. 1. Delo. 10. L. 141; Togan Zeki Velidi. *Bugünkü Türkili (Türkistan) ve Yakın Tarihi (Today's Turkili [Turkestan] and Its Recent History)*. İstanbul, Cilt. 1. 1981. P. 429.
  17. Meram Ali Kemal. *Türk-Rus İlişkileri Tarihi (The History of Russo-Turkish Relations)*. İstanbul, 1969. P. 296.
  18. Pope Nicole and Pope Hugh. *Turkey Unveiled: Atatürk and After*. London, 1997. P. 55.
  19. From 1920 to 1922, the Soviet administration, step by step dispatched the weaponry such as thousands of rifles, millions of cartridges, many cannons and cannonballs. During this time, it also delivered approximately 12 million gold rubles to the Turkish government. See also: Karabekir Kâzım. *İstiklâl Harbimiz (Our War of Independence)*. İstanbul, Cilt. 2. 2000. P. 81-82; Shirokorad A.B. *Vzlet i Padeniye Osmanskoy Imperii (The Rise and Fall of the Ottoman Empire)*. Moskva, 2012. P. 373.
  20. RGVA. Fond. 25896. Opis. 8. Delo. 1. L. 123.
  21. The National Oath, which is also known as "Misak-ı Milli" in Ottoman Turkish, was acknowledged by last term of the Ottoman Parliament on January 28, 1920. It triggered the occupation of Constantinople by the

British, French and Italian troops on March 16, 1920, and the establishment of the Grand National Assembly led by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. Misak-ı Millî, which was consisted of six decisions, had been adopted by Mustafa Kemal Government, as well. However, the Ankara government moved eastward and occupied the cities like Kars, Ardahan and Batumi, the status of which should be determined by a referendum according to the second decision of the National Oath.

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26. Temizgüney. ibidem. P. 301–334.
27. Gigineishvili O.I. Danilov V.I. Oreshkova S.F. and Shamsutdinov A.M. Velikiy Oktyabr' i Turtsiya (Great October and Turkey). Tbilisi, 1982. P. 11–12; The Crimean Peninsula was the basic region that Mustafa Suphi conducted his political activities. For Bolshevik propaganda, he went on publishing the newspaper “Yeni Dünya” in the city of Simferopol in 1919. Mustafa Suphi also founded the Eastern Volunteers International Regiment (Turkish: Doğu Gönüllüleri Enternasyonel Alayı), and this regiment, within the 12th Soviet army, decisively fought against Denikin's forces. See also: Sağlam Önder. Ölümsüz Savaşçı Mustafa Suphi (The Immortal Warrior Mustafa Suphi). İstanbul, 1978. P. 41–42.
28. RGVA. Fond. 25896. Opis. 8. Delo. 11. L. 116; Topçuoğlu İbrahim. Neden İki Sosyalist Partisi 1946: TKP Kuruluşu ve Mücadelenin Tarihi 1914–1960 (Why Two Socialist Parties 1946: The Foundation of TKP and the History of Struggle 1914–1960). İstanbul, III. Kitap. 1977. P. 250–254.
29. Mustafa Suphi and his comrades were bloodthirstily murdered by a “mysterious” criminal network on 28 January, 1921, in Trabzon. The death of Mustafa Suphi and his fellows is not a common event. Undoubtedly, it was an assassination, which was organized by people were closed to the Ankara government. The member of the Committee of Union and Progress, Hacı Selim Sami, the boatman's housekeeper Yahya and Faik Reis together committed the assassination. In this context, the former president of

Bukharan People's Soviet Republic, Osman Kocaoglu, in an interview of 1963, proudly said that Hacı Selim Sami organized the assassination. Please note that the Soviet administration charged Mustafa Suphi with the formation of the soviet system in Turkey. Thus, Mustafa Kemal considered him as an enemy. Nonetheless, this assassination didn't damage the relations between USSR and Turkey. See also: National Archives of the Prime Ministry of the Republic of Turkey (BCA). Fon No. 93 02 00. Kutu No. 3. Dosya No: 24, Sıra No: 3, (28-1-1923); Şehidoğlu Süreyya H. Eylül 1920 Bakü Kurultayı ve Millî Mücadeleye Sağdan Soldan El Koyma Çabaları (September 1920, Baku Congress and the Efforts to Confiscate the National Struggle from Right to Left). İstanbul, 1975. P. 96.

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The article examines the role and importance of sport and the Olympic movement in the Islamic world. Olympism is the philosophy of life that dominates and unites into the integral whole the virtues of body, will and mind. Olympism, which connects sport with culture and education, seeks to