

KARS

CONFERENCE: KNOWN AND UNKNOWN FACTS

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THE RUSSIAN-TURKISH TREATY SIGNED IN MOSCOW ON 16 MARCH 1921 WAS AN IMPORTANT VICTORY FOR TURKISH DIPLOMACY. UNDER THIS TREATY, NOT ONLY DID TURKEY NOT LOSE TERRITORY AS A MEMBER OF THE BLOC DEFEATED IN THE FIRST WORLD WAR, IT ALSO MANAGED TO RECOVER SOME OF THE TERRITORY IT HAD LOST.

The Treaty of Moscow signified the failure of the Treaty of Sèvres, which Western states had imposed on Turkey. As far as Azerbaijan's fate is concerned, the Treaty of Moscow was a political-legal solution to the issue of Nakhichevan.

Having lost hope after the Treaty of Moscow and the discussions in Baku and Tiflis in April 1921 that Azerbaijan will be conducting an independent policy, Turkey was not very interested in holding a new conference with the Caucasus republics. They saw this conference as a direct extension of the Moscow conference and believed

that in the best case scenario, the Soviet republics of the South Caucasus would endorse the Treaty of Moscow as a legal document during the Kars conference.¹ Moscow was using all means to ensure that the South Caucasus republics act as a single team at the conference. To this end, the foreign ministers of all three republics were summoned to Tiflis on 7 May 1921. At these discussions, Azerbaijan was represented by M. D. Huseynov and Behbud Shahtakhtinski. The meeting chaired by G. Orjonikidze and B. Legran adopted a decision that all three South Caucasus republics

should take a single position at the forthcoming conference. The decision said that the Treaty of Moscow should form the basis of the talks to be held with Turkey and the treaty to be signed.² This idea was later confirmed by the RFSFR Commissar of Foreign Affairs Chicherin in an official note to the Turkish ambassador in Moscow. In his opinion, the treaty had to be signed not just between Turkey, Azerbaijan and Georgia, but between Turkey and all three Caucasus republics, including Armenia, and "supplement the treaty signed in Moscow".³

Although Turkey secured Azer-

1 See: USSR Foreign Policy Documents. T. IV, M.: Gospolitizdat, 1960, p. 227-228

2 The meeting of representatives of the South Caucasus republics on talks with Turkey. 07.05.1921 // The State Archive of the Azerbaijan Republic (SA AR), f.28, s.2, i.27, v.30



baijan and Georgia's consent to hold the conference in Kars during negotiations in Baku and Tiflis, Yusif Kamal, who led the Turkish delegation during the Moscow talks and was appointed foreign minister after his return to Ankara, now suggested holding the conference in Ankara. To this end, he sent a telegram to M. D. Huseynov on 3 July. Yusif Kamal, who invited Azerbaijan to the Ankara conference, asked Commissar of Foreign Affairs M. D. Huseynov to appoint representatives of Azerbaijan in order to regulate relations between the Grand National Assembly of Turkey and the fraternal Azerbaijan Republic and sign an agreement between the two countries on legalizing the part of the Treaty of Moscow concerning Azerbaijan.⁴ As soon as M. D. Huseynov

received the telegram, he informed Chicherin about it on 5 July.⁵ On the same day, Yusif Kamal sent invitations to the leaderships of Georgia and Armenia on the holding of the conference in Ankara.⁶ He sent the same kind of note to Chicherin on 9 July. The note reached Moscow on 12 July. He wrote that in order to resolve all issues between Turkey and the South Caucasus states and sign an agreement with each of them under the provisions of the Treaty of Moscow concerning these republics, Ankara requested that the governments of those states appoint their representatives to the conference. Yusif Kamal asked Chicherin that under the Treaty of Moscow, Soviet Russia should also send its representative to the conference to be held between Turkey and

the South Caucasus republics. Regarding the venue for the conference, Yusif Kamal returned to the preparatory period of the Moscow conference and wrote: "Considering the immediate response of my government to your 19 December 1920 statement on changing the venue for the conference from Baku to Moscow, I would be personally grateful to you if you could use your influence among the South Caucasus republics and persuade them to hold the conference in Ankara rather than in an Eastern Anatolian city as was verbally agreed between me and the government circles of Azerbaijan and Georgia. The reasons that make this request necessary are the same as the reasons shown in your telegram of 19 December 1920."⁷ Yusif Kamal explained that he could not

3 USSR Foreign Policy Documents. T. IV, M.: Gospolizdat, 1960, p. 287

4 Yusif Kamal's telegram to M.D. Huseynov. 03.07.1921 // SAAR, f.28, s.1, i.49, v.8

5 M.D. Huseynov's telegram to G. Chicherin. 05.07.1921 // SAAR, f.28, s.1, i.49, v.8

point resolution on the issue was adopted at the meeting. The resolution on the forthcoming Kars conference said: "1. The negotiations shall be held within the framework of the Treaty of Moscow; 2. The Caucasus republics shall demonstrate solidarity with Ankara in the fight against the Entente; 3. Strong assistance (financial and other) shall be given to this fight; 4. In the current situation, the signing of military treaties between the Caucasus Republics and Ankara is impossible, however, if this issue is proposed by Ankara representatives, the South Caucasus republics shall not avoid closer political contacts with Turkey, Iran and Afghanistan; 5. During the negotiations, it is necessary to raise the issue of using pastures and salt mines in Kagizman district and copper concessions in Chorokh district; 6. No South Caucasus republic shall be allowed to act individually and solidarity shall be demonstrated on all issues; 7. The delegation itself is authorized to define the date for the negotiations and prepare the agenda of the conference."¹⁸

Immediately after the meeting of the Caucasus Bureau on the Kars conference, the Georgian and Armenian delegations were identified as well. Georgia was to be represented at the Kars conference by Commissar of Foreign Affairs and Finances A. Svanidze and Navy Commissar Sh. Eliava and Armenia by Askanaz Mravyan, who was appointed commissar of foreign affairs in the Council of People's Commissars established in late May 1921, and Commissar of Internal Affairs Pogos Makinsyan.

The government of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey was to be represented at the Kars conference by a delegation led by a member of parliament from Edirne and commander of the Eastern Front, Kazim Karabekir



Pasha. A few days prior to the opening of the Kars conference, on 17 September, the foreign minister of the Ankara government, Yusif Kamal, gave a clear instruction to the Turkish delegation. The instruction contained individual important provisions on each of the South Caucasus republics separately. First of all, Yusif Kamal described the Moscow conference and the talks of the Turkish delegation in Baku and Tiflis after the conference and commented on the parties' positions in these meetings and talks. He reminded Kazim Pasha that if each of the South Caucasus republics protests at the parts of the Treaty of Moscow which concern them, a policy aimed at forcing the Russian delegation to honor its obligations should be conducted and no provision of the Treaty of Moscow signed on 16 March 1921 should be allowed to turn into a subject of discussion between Russia and us. The document recommended that the following issues should be taken into account in the agreement to be signed with the Azerbaijan Republic. Yusif Kamal wrote: The text of the treaty to be signed with Azerbaijan shall be clearly written in Turkish and the preamble shall contain enough phrases on true brotherhood be-

tween the two nations; The governments of Azerbaijan and Turkey shall reject any agreement or international act being thrust upon one of them; The Azerbaijani side shall guarantee that it will never grant anyone the right to patronize Nakhichevan which was handed over to it under the Treaty of Moscow; The agreement shall contain a separate provision on Turkish immigrants in Azerbaijan and Azerbaijani immigrants in Turkey; The Turkish government shall be free to grant citizenship to Azerbaijani immigrants on its territory according to their wishes; The agreement shall contain a provision that some of Baku oil will be handed over to Turkey; Education shall be free in Azerbaijan; The provision on Batumi in the agreement to be signed with Georgia shall not be mentioned in the agreement to be signed with Azerbaijan and the provision on Nakhichevan shall not be mentioned in the agreement to be signed with Georgia. Other parts of the instruction pertained to the talks with Georgian, Armenian and Russian representatives.¹⁹ The most important point of Yusif Kamal's instruction was that it specifically stressed that Turkey will sign an agreement with each of the three South Caucasus

18 Protocol 17 of the session of the Caucasus Bureau of the CC of CPR(b). 03.09.1921.// RSSPHA, f.64, s.1, i.1, v.144

republics separately.²⁰ However, the principles on which the delegations of the South Caucasus republics were formed and the instructions that Soviet Russia gave to these republics clearly showed that Turkey's desire to sign individual agreements with these republics would meet with serious resistance. The 3 September resolution of the Caucasus Bureau shows that these republics followed Russia's will.²¹

Setting off from Tiflis, the Russian, Azerbaijani, Georgian and Armenian delegations reached Kars at 1130 on 26 September. They were met with a festive ceremony in the city. The conference opened at 1930 on the same day with a congratulatory speech by Kazim Karabekir Pasha at a ceremony in a special building prepared for the conference on Ordu Street.²² After Kazim Pasha, the Russian representative Ganetskiy and Mravyan, on behalf of the South Caucasus republics, made congratulatory speeches. Ganetskiy figuratively said that "they will prove to the whole world that they have given up the hostility between the great Turkish and Armenian peoples not in words, but in deeds. They are moving towards each other not with swords, but with warm feelings of brotherhood."²³ Mravyan said that the South Caucasus peoples "wish the fraternal Turkish people victory in the fight against imperialism and violence" and called for this to be noted and consolidated even further during the confer-

ence.²⁴ In order to gain the trust of the Soviet representatives during the Kars conference, the Grand National Assembly of Turkey adopted an act to amnesty imprisoned communists at the proposal of Mustafa Kamal Pasha in late September.²⁵

The first session of the conference determined its agenda and set up a commission to study economic and border issues at the proposal of South Caucasus representatives. During the first session of the conference, the form of the treaty between Turkey and the South Caucasus republics turned into a serious subject of discussion. Kazim Pasha suggested signing a separate agreement with each of the South Caucasus republics. Stressing that this was the intention of the Turkish government, he said that our government has given us an instruction to sign a separate treaty with each republic. However, the Russian representative Ganetskiy was against signing a separate agreement with each republic. He said that the situation in the South Caucasus had undergone substantial changes since the signing of the Treaty of Moscow and all three fraternal peoples were moving towards integration from a political and economic point of view. Ganetskiy was trying to substantiate the fact that the signing of a joint agreement between all three republics and Turkey would lead to the establishment of a close alliance with

Ankara and give impetus to the fight against the common enemy.²⁶ Kazim Pasha regarded the arguments of the Russian representative as groundless, stressing the importance of signing a separate treaty with each republic. After contacting Ankara, he informed the conference that a separate agreement should be signed with each of the three South Caucasus republics. At the session of the conference held on 28 September, Kazim Pasha stressed once again that he insisted on his position. Discussions on this issue gradually became tense and the debates continued until 30 September. At the fourth session of the conference on 30 September, Kazim Pasha suggested that the treaty should consist of two parts. In his opinion, the first part of the agreement was to reflect general issues concerning all three South Caucasus republics and the second part – separate trade and border issues with each republic. However, this proposal by the Turkish side was met with resistance.²⁷ Kazim Pasha's assumption that he could win over Azerbaijan in these discussions proved wrong. Speaking on 30 September, the head of the Azerbaijani delegation, B. Shahtakhtinski, supported Ganetskiy's position. He said: "On behalf of the Azerbaijan Republic, I suggest that this treaty should be unified and not contain special chapters concerning each republic separately."²⁸ After this speech by Shahtakhtinski, Kazim Pa-

19 See: Karabekir. *Our Independence War*. Volume 2, Istanbul, 2006, p.1112- 1116; V. Gafarov. *The issue of Azerbaijan in Turkish-Russian relations. (1917-1922)*. Baku, 2011, p.409-410

20 See: Candar Azer. *South Caucasus from Father to Son*. Turkish-South Caucasus relations, p. 303-304

21 See: Betul Aslan. *Turkish-Azerbaijani relations and Ibrahim Ebilov (1920-1923)*. Istanbul, 2004, p.140

22 *Ibid*, p. 141-143

23 *USSR Foreign Policy Documents*. V. 4, M.: Gospolitizdat, 1960, p. 372

24 See: *USSR Foreign Policy Documents*. V. 4, M.: Gospolitizdat, 1960, p. 373

25 S. Nararenuş' telegram to G. Chicherin. 29.09.1921. // RSSPHA, f.17, s.84, i.104, v.111

26 Minutes of the 1st session of the Kars conference. 26.09.1921.// SAAR, f.28, s.1, i.81, v.3

27 Minutes of the 4th session of the Kars conference. 30.09.1921.// APD OPAR, f.609, s.1, i.81, v.21; Nurcan Toksoy, *The Last Days in Revan. From Turkish Rule to Armenian Rule*. Orion publishing house, Ankara, 2007, p. 322

28 Minutes of the 4th session of the Kars conference. 30.09.1921.// APD OPAR, f.609, s.1, i.81, v.21; SAAR, f.28, s.1, i.81, v.30; For additional information, see: Karabekir. *Our Independence War*. Istanbul, 1988, p. 963; M. Gasimov. *Azerbaijani-Turkish diplomatic-political relations (April 1920 – December 1922)*. Baku, 1998, p. 106; Betul Aslan. *Turkish-Azerbaijani relations and Ibrahim Ebilov (1920-1923)*. Istanbul, 2004, p.144; M. Gasimov. *Azerbaijani-Turkish diplomatic-political relations (April 1920 – December 1922)*. Baku, 2011, p. 411

sha was forced to back off and agreed to sign a joint agreement. Thus, the tense moments of the Kars conference became a thing of the past.

During further discussions in Kars, the parties came up with a number of political, economic and cultural proposals. One of the most important issues concerning Azerbaijan during the Kars conference was related to Nakhichevan. Turkish diplomats who specially focused on this issue submitted for discussion a draft on the Nakhichevan issue, which complied with the Treaty of Moscow. Kazim Pasha, first of all, asked the Georgian and Azerbaijani representatives to report on the autonomy of Ajaria and Nakhichevan. Sh. Eliava made a short report on behalf of the Georgian representatives and B. Shahtakhtinski on behalf of the Azerbaijani delegation. He said: "Azerbaijan is a Soviet government. The autonomy to be granted to Nakhichevan should be in line with the system that exists in Russia. Since Nakhichevan is situated too far (from Azerbaijan – J. H.), the system of government that will be granted to it is more than just autonomy. There is a council of people's commissars. Since there are few people with scientific knowledge and education, the language used in official circles is Russian. A law has been adopted on the nationalization of enterprises and steps have been taken in this regard. Azerbaijan runs the financial affairs of Nakhichevan. No decision has yet been taken on its army. Three-year primary schools are all in Turkic. Issues of marriage, divorce and religious issues are free as before."²⁹ Like all issues were discussed in Tiflis ahead of the Kars conference, the issue of Nakhichevan was discussed between representatives of Azerbaijan and Ar-

menia. As a result of these discussions, they came up with a special memorandum that reflected a common position and presented it to the Turkish representatives. Along with several other issues, the memorandum envisaged "the establishment of an autonomous Nakhichevan Soviet republic within the Azerbaijan SSR" with some border corrections in favor of Armenia. The main purpose of the memorandum, which was prepared as a result of the diplomatic steps ahead of the conference and the diplomatic discussions between Azerbaijan and Armenia with the "support" of Russia, was to sideline Turkey from the issue of Nakhichevan. The discussions at the conference clearly showed that in



contrast to the Treaty of Moscow, the Soviet representatives, including the Azerbaijanis, were trying to eliminate the possibility of a mixed commission, which would also include Turkish representatives, being sent to the region and to turn the issue of Nakhichevan into an internal affair that could be resolved without Ankara's participation.³⁰ However, Turkish diplomacy, which had a very sensitive approach to the issue of Nakhichevan, did not allow this to happen. In compliance with the Treaty of Moscow, Kazim Pasha called for the issue of Nakhichevan to be included in the agreement to be signed between Turkey and the South

Caucasus republics. After lengthy debates, agreement was reached that the issue of Nakhichevan should be described in the following way in an appendix to the Treaty of Kars, which would reflect its borders: "The Turkish government and the Azerbaijan and Armenian Soviet Republics agree to establish a Nakhichevan province as an autonomous region under the protection of Azerbaijan within the borders indicated in Appendix 3 to the agreement."³¹ The advantage of this formulation of the issue by Turkish diplomacy was that Armenia recognized the Nakhichevan province as an Azerbaijani territory and undertook a political-legal commitment to sign the treaty.

Despite differences and disputes on some issues, the Treaty of Kars, which reflected the foundations of mutual relations between Turkey and South Caucasus republics, was signed at 1400 on 13 October 1921. The Treaty of Kars, which contained 20 articles and three appendices, was signed between Turkey, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Armenia with the participation of Russia. Under Article 1 of this agreement, the parties "stated that, except for the 16 March 1921 Treaty of Moscow, all agreements on territories signed between the governments that previously had sovereignty over the territories of the signatories, including all agreements concerning the South Caucasus republics signed in third states, were abolished and considered invalid". Article 2 of the Treaty of Kars noted that the name of "Turkey" implied territories identified according to the Turkish National Oath (Misak-i Milli). Under this article, the parties reached agreement not to recognize any peace agreement or any international document thrust

29 Karabekir. *Our Independence War*. Istanbul, 1988, p.963-964

30 Ismayil Mustafayev. *The political situation in the Azerbaijani regions of Nakhichevan and Zangazur and the policy of foreign powers (1917-1921)*. Baku, 1998, p.350

31 Betul Aslan. *Turkish-Azerbaijani relations and Ibrahim Ebilov (1920-1923)*. Istanbul, 2004, p.145

upon any of the countries that joined the agreement. This article implied that all three Caucasus republics rejected the Treaty of Sevres signed on 10 August 1920 and first of all, that the Armenian Soviet Republic recognized the Turkish borders determined by the Turkish "National Oath" and rejected "Greater Armenia" claims based on the Treaty of Sevres.³² Under Article 3, all three Caucasus republics which signed the treaty "stated that the occupying regime did not fit into the national progress and full sovereign rights of each country and proclaimed that any activity and rights related to this regime were invalid and abolished". Article 4 established the border between the South Caucasus republics and Turkey from the Sarp region along the line stretching to the mouth of the Ashagi Garasu River. A clear description of the borders was given in Appendices 1 and 2 to the treaty. Under Article 5, "the Turkish government and the Azerbaijani and Armenian Soviet Republics reached agreement that the Nakhichevan province should be an autonomous territory under the protection of Azerbaijan within the borders indicated in Appendix 3 to the treaty".³³ With this article, Armenia confirmed that Nakhichevan was placed under the protection of Azerbaijan and that Azerbaijan accepted this protection. Appendix 3 to the treaty entitled "The Territory of Nakhichevan" determined its borders in the following way: "The village of Urmiyya and a straight line to the Arazdayan station from there (incorporating it into the Armenian SSR), then a straight line to western Mount Dash-Burun (3,142), then eastern

Mount Dash-Burun (4,108) along the water divide, and crossing the Jahanam-Darasi River from the south of the signboard "Rod" (Spring), and from Mount Bagirsag (6,607 or 6,587) along the water divide and along the administrative border of the Iravan and Sharur-Daralayaz districts crossing height 6625 to Mount Komurludag (6,839 or 6,930), and then height 3,080, Sayatdag (7,868), the village of Gurdgulag, Mount Hamsur (8,160), height 8,022, Kukudag (10,282) and the eastern administrative borders of the former Nakhichevan district."³⁴ Under Article 6, Turkey gave up in favor of Georgia its sovereignty over the



port of Batumi, the city of Batumi, as well as the territories which are located north of the borders envisaged by Article 4 of the treaty and are part of the Batumi province. Georgia was supposed to secure the cultural and religious rights of the population of these territories, grant them extensive administrative autonomy and adopt a law on land to meet the wishes of this population. Apart from that, Turkey was to be granted rights of free transit without hindrance and without customs duties on goods imported into and exported from Turkey through

the port of Batumi. Under Article 7, Turkey and Georgia undertook to simplify border crossing for the population of the border region. The remaining articles of the agreement focused on travel by the population of border regions, banned the activities of political émigrés who claimed power and covered issues such as railways, telegraph, trade, economic, financial and other issues.³⁵ According to the last article, the Treaty of Kars signed between the governments of Turkey, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia was to be ratified and the ratifications were to be exchanged in Iravan as soon as possible.³⁶ The treaty was signed by Askanaz Mravyan and Pogos Makinsyan on behalf of the Armenian government, the commissar of the people's workers and peasants inspectorate, Behbud Shahtakhtinski, on behalf of Azerbaijan, Shalva Eliava and Aleksandr Svanidze on behalf of the Georgian government, Yakov Ganetskiy on behalf of the RFSFR government and Kazim Karabekir Pasha, Veli bey, Memduh Shevket and Muhtar bey on behalf of the Turkish government. In a number of cases, the Treaty of Kars repeated some articles of the Treaty of Moscow. However, despite that, the treaties of Moscow and Kars ushered in a new stage in Turkish-Russian relations. This period, with little exceptions, lasted until the end of the Second World War.

Although it was signed on 13 October 1921, the Soviet republics of the Caucasus delayed the ratification of the Treaty of Kars. They tried to explain it mainly by the establishment of the South Caucasus Federation. For Turkey, the swift ratification of the treaty,

32 Candar Azer. *South Caucasus from Father to Son. Turkish-South Caucasus relations*. Istanbul, Truva publications, 2011, p. 304-305

33 *South Caucasus-Turkey Treaty*. 13.10.1921.// PDA OPAR, f.609, s.1, i.94, v.112; Betul Aslan. *Turkish-Azerbaijani relations and Ibrahim Ebilov (1920-1923)*. Istanbul, 2004, p.146-149

34 *South Caucasus-Turkey Treaty*. 13.10.1921.// PDA OPAR, f.609, s.1, i.94, v.116 (end)

35 *South Caucasus-Turkey Treaty*. 13.10.1921.// PDA OPAR, f.609, s.1, i.94, v.112 (end)-114; Betul Aslan. *Turkish-Azerbaijani relations and Ibrahim Ebilov (1920-1923)*. Istanbul, 2004, p. 149-151

36 *South Caucasus-Turkey Treaty*. 13.10.1921.// PDA OPAR, f.609, s.1, i.94, v.114-114 (end); Betul Aslan. *Turkish-Azerbaijani relations and Ibrahim Ebilov (1920-1923)*. Istanbul, 2004, p. 151-153

especially by Armenia, was of political importance. The meeting held between I. Abilov and Yusif Kamal on 26 January 1922 focused mainly on the ratification of the Treaty of Kars. During the meeting, Yusif Kamal decided to speak frankly and said: "The ratification of the treaty by Azerbaijan is not urgent or important for us. We are not so interested in it, and it is the same with Georgia. However, the separate ratification of the treaty by Armenia is extremely important for us and we are very interested in it... Therefore, I am asking you not to refuse to con-

tact Comrade Narimanov for taking measures in order to ensure that the Treaty of Kars is ratified by each republic separately and to expedite this issue."³⁷ After such a frank explanation by Yusif Kamal, I. Abilov said: "If you are really so interested in this issue, I will personally contact Comrade Narimanov and ask him to try to resolve the issue of ratification in a way that suits you."³⁸

As a result of all this, after serious efforts by Turkey, a meeting of the Political and Organizational Bureau of the Central Committee of the Com-

munist Party of Azerbaijan on 14 February 1922 included the issue of ratifying the Treaty of Kars in the agenda of the session of the Azerbaijani Central Executive Committee to be convened in early March. For this reason, Azerbaijan ratified the treaty first on 3 March 1922, the Turkish Grand National Assembly – on 17 March, Armenia - on 20 March and the Georgian government - on 14 June. Copies of ratifications were exchanged on 11 September 1922 in the city of Iravan and thus, the Treaty of Kars acquired political and legal importance. ■

37 I. Abilov's conversation with Yusif Kamal. 26.01.1922.// SAAR, f.28, s.1, i.68, v.17-20

38 Ibid, v.20

