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RUSSIA/USSR – TÜRKIYE/TURKEY: LEGACY OF “FRIENDLY NEUTRALITY” GOALS OF SOVIET POLICY

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Abstract. The article analyzes how the Soviet leadership pursued foreign policy objectives in relation to Turkey and the resulting legacy from these pursuits in today's terms. USSR-Turkey relations in the 1920s were based on the common political interests of the two states, both of which existed in a similar geopolitical environment. The common goal shared by both nations was to overcome international isolation and ensure national security. The view of the Soviet government on Turkey's role in border safety matters was outlined by People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs Georgy Chicherin, who considered USSR–Turkey cooperation a tool for ensuring security of the southern and southwestern borders of the Soviet Union. The Black Sea Straits were a key issue in bilateral relations. As the Straits were considered a “gateway” for an attack on the USSR's southern borders, the Soviet government tried to revise the Straits regime in a more favorable way. It was assumed that strong economic ties with the Soviet Union and mutually advantageous cooperation in the security sector would become a robust deterrent instrument for Turkey's leaders. During the Great Patriotic War, the USSR's policies towards Turkey were aimed at preventing it from participating in the war on the side of a hostile bloc, as well as revamping the 1936 Montreux Convention more favorably for Soviet leadership. The 1939–1946 attempts

to apply pressure on Turkey regarding the Straits issue caused the latter to withdraw from the orbit of Soviet influence and led to almost two decades of hostility and strained relations between the two nations. After the death of Joseph Stalin, particularly in the Khrushchev era, the Soviet government sought to improve bilateral relations, mainly by identifying common ground in military and political spheres, expanding trade and economic cooperation, and building the foundation for the current high level of bilateral Russia-Turkey relations.

Keywords: G.V. Chicherin, USSR, Atatürk, Turkey, Black Sea Straits, Russia-Turkey relations, NATO

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The history of relations between Russia and Turkey can be characterized as complex. Attempts by the Ottomans to capture Zaporozhye and Left Bank Ukraine, along with raids launched by the Crimean Tatars, were replaced by the Russian state's struggle with the Ottoman Empire for access to the Black Sea after the unification of the Muscovite Kingdom and the Zaporozhye Army, which then led to a series of Russian-Turkey wars. As is commonly known, throughout the period from 1676 until 1918, there were eleven such wars. The events from those centuries have been thoroughly researched [Zhukov, 2009; 2012; Russia and the Black Sea Straits...1999; Kurat, 2011; Finkel, 2005] in the annals of Russia-Turkey relations. Much to our regret, however, developments from the not-so-distant 20th century, when relations between the Turkish Republic and the Soviet Union followed another logical trajectory, have been studied to a much lesser degree [Stefanos, 2000; Gasratian, Moiseev, 1981; İşçi, 2019]. Currently, when Ankara is engaged in the consistent pursuit of its "strategic autonomy" in international affairs, and Moscow continues to defend national and state interests of paramount importance by military means, among others, the collective expertise acquired from the policies pursued by Soviet Russia/USSR in relation to the Turkish Republic is of great interest to us. How Kremlin tried to realise in its relations with Turkey a fundamental principle of its foreign policy: there should be no states hostile to Russia/USSR on its borders?

"Avoid coming into conflict with turkey over petty current matters"

At the end of the second decade of the 20th century, Russia and Turkey embarked on a radical transformation of their state systems, the former models of which had suffered setbacks: in the first instance – as a result of the Bolshevik Revolution; in the second – the Ottoman Empire's defeat in the First World War. Both nations were suffering an acute crisis of national identity and became the target of an aggressive expansion by the West headed by the Entente. Therefore, despite a huge difference between the two aforementioned cases, both sides were facing a truly existential crisis. The leaders of the revolution in Soviet Russia, in addition to being forced to counteract foreign intervention, find a solution for achieving civil discord in the years 1918–1922, and wage

war against Poland in 1919–1921, they were also preoccupied with handling the tasks of nation-building, which included the former marginal lands of the Russian Empire. Of primary importance was the goal of ensuring border security for the future federal state, particularly in the southern direction. In this context, the national liberation struggle underway in Turkey in 1919 led by Mustafa Kemal Pasha¹ evoked a broad range of sympathy across Soviet Russia due to its anti-imperialistic fervor.

On April 26, 1920, Mustafa Kemal approached Vladimir Lenin with a proposal for establishing diplomatic relations between Turkey and Soviet Russia and requested that Ankara be provided with assistance. This, however, did not imply that Kemal Pasha was sympathetic to the Communists in his own country. As he emphasized later in his letter to Lenin dated January 4, 1922, the transformation in Turkey had not taken the form of a social revolution as it had in Russia, but instead “had emerged as an uprising against overseas countries”². According to him, one thing the two countries shared in common was the fact that they both “had been fighting against capitalism and imperialism”³.

The People’s Commissar of Foreign Affairs of the RSFSR (then the USSR) from 1918 to 1930, Georgy Chicherin⁴ became one the chief engineers of the “**pivot to Turkey**”. As is well known, the Soviet leadership took the decision to lend a helping hand to Atatürk (the name of Turkey’s leader since 1934) by providing supplies of gold and weapons [Vasiliev, 2018]. It should be noted that this assistance was very substantial: the overall amount of financial support made available to Turkey’s government was over 12 billion Rubles worth of gold, funds which were used to pay the wages of government officials and military personnel. This assistance also enabled Turkey to purchase weapons and equipment from abroad [Müderrişoğlu, 2013: 518]. Over the period 1920–1922, Turkey received 39,000 rifles, 327 machine guns, 63,000,000 cartridges, 54 pieces of ordnance, 147,000 shells, as well as a large number of hand grenades and other munitions, 12 airplanes, and several warships [Documents of Foreign Policy of the USSR...1959: 675]. For reference, the funds the Soviet Union supplied to Atatürk were equal to the annual budget of Turkey [Hirst, İşçi, 2020: 838].

Chicherin constantly insisted on fast-tracking the fulfillment of USSR’s obligations with respect to Ankara. On September 27, 1920, Chicherin reported to Vladimir Lenin on “the catastrophic condition of the Kemalists due to the non-availability of military equipment”⁵. While offering his critical assessment of the situation in this direction, the People’s Commissar for Foreign Affairs again stressed the urgent nature of rendering assistance to Turkey, as was promised, and that any procrastination of the fulfillment of

¹ Mustafa Kemal Pasha, on April 24, 1920, was elected Chairman of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey.

² Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History, Moscow, Russia (RGASPI), f. 5, ser. 1, d. 1520, sh. 1.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Georgy Vasilievich Chicherin (1872–1936) – People’s Commissar of Foreign Affairs of the RSFSR, then the USSR in 1918–1930, member of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party of the Bolsheviks throughout 1925–1930.

⁵ RGASPI, f. 159, ser. 2, d. 57, sh. 3.

promises made “would make Mustafa Kemal look at us as if we were chatterers and deceivers”. However, even more significant, in his opinion, was the fact that Turkey might be crushed while this assistance, which was not so burdensome for Russia even under conditions when its own resources were limited, “would make, both practically and morally, a huge difference”. Non-compliance with its obligations, as Chicherin believed, would discredit Russia’s policies and undermine “its immense authority and influence in the East”¹.

On March 16, 1921, a Treaty of Friendship and Brotherhood between the Great National Assembly of Turkey, headed by Yusuf Kemal Bey (1878–1969)² and the RSFSR government (Council of People’s Commissars), led by Georgy Chicherin was signed in Moscow. The Treaty set forth the territorial delimitation between the two powers, affirmed the solidarity of Moscow and Ankara in the struggle against imperialism, and, what is particularly important, defined what would ultimately be the status of the Straits for the future Conference of the Black Sea coastal states [Collection of current treaties... 1924: 155–160].

In late 1921, an Extraordinary Military and Political Mission headed by Commander of the Ukraine and the Crimean Armed Forces Mikhail Frunze was commissioned to Turkey. The mission was stationed in Turkey from November 25, 1921 until January 16, 1922. An order was issued for Frunze and approved by Joseph Stalin on October 6, 1921, which underscored the necessity to take into account in all contacts with the Turkish side the fact that his trip, the idea of which had been floated at a time when Ankara was facing a very difficult military situation, would be regarded by Turkey “as a vivid manifestation of our (the USSR’s) unwaveringly friendly policies towards it”³. At the same time, this order testified to the fact that the Soviet leadership had been weighing thoroughly all the risks associated with its rapprochement with Turkey: “Judging by the fact how Turkish troops are being deployed, one might conclude and inform us about the real danger – that the Kemalists might use these tactics in an active

¹ RGASPI, f. 159, ser. 2, d. 57, sh. 2.

In a letter to the Central Committee (CC) Politburo of the Russian Communist Party of the Bolsheviks, dated June 28, 1920. See: RGASPI, f. 159, ser. 2, d. 57, sh. 2-2rev. The People’s Commissar for Foreign Affairs assails with criticism the Military Department, drawing attention of the Party leaders to the request filed by the People’s Commissariat for Foreign Affairs, addressed, inter alia, to the military, and the CC of the Russian Communist Party of the Bolsheviks, to allocate 23 persons for employment in Turkey, Persia, Afghanistan, India and the Far East, taking into account that the Eastern Division of the General Staff Academy had been engaged in the training of “personnel for the East”. However, after almost three weeks of efforts, all of them were sent to the western front. And this was done regardless of the fact that most of them were proficient in Oriental languages, over half of them were Muslims, and the trained personnel to be sent to the West was available in sufficient amounts, even without them. The People’s Commissar regarded this as a “specific means to neutralize our Eastern policies”, which could lead, in particular, to the “failure of the revolutionary struggle in Turkey”.

² He held the post of the Minister of Foreign Affairs from 1921 to 1922.

³ RGASPI, f. 558, ser. 2, d. 18, sh. 1.

fight against us in the event of their accord with the Entente¹. The leaders of Russia’s Communist Party of the Bolsheviks, with the help of the Frunze mission, were planning not only to find out whether Turkey’s Army was a battle-worthy militarily, but also to make sure that they “did not intend to use their force against us” (!)².

Contemporary Turkish historian Onur İşçi describes that period: “Since 1920, USSR-Turkey relations have developed under the influence of resentment resulting from the post-war world order. The Turkish nationalists and Bolshevik internationalists, whose Imperial predecessors had been engaged in competition among themselves for four centuries, began to draw closer to each other on the anti-imperialist platform, which was considered by both parties” [İşçi, 2020a: 733]. The assertion made by our Turkish colleague, that the groundwork for this cooperation was the “**building up of a geopolitical shield**”, which would protect the Black Sea region from Western claims/attacks, and that they shared a common endeavor to create a more modern form of statehood, can hardly be disputed. As it was aptly phrased by another contemporary historian Samuel Hirst, the common course pursued by Ankara and Moscow throughout the entire Inter-War period could be felicitously called as **anti-Westernism**, and “it was a meaningful interaction”. The strategy for pursuing improved relations along the Turkish track was formulated by Georgy Chicherin in a memorandum he sent to the Politburo on June 14, 1924, entitled “the Political Highlights of Relations between the USSR and Turkey”. According to the People’s Commissar on Foreign Affairs, the following were the two principal tenets of his strategy:

- Avoid, to the extent possible, “any conflict with Turkey over petty current affairs”;
- Consider the best way of establishing friendly contacts with Turkey through the promotion of economic collaboration with this nation³.

Does this not sound fairly relevant even today?

Chicherin noted that “Turkey’s exhaustion and its full economic dislocation excludes any possibility, under current circumstances, of its participating in military actions against the USSR. Only in the event that the USSR suffers a total political catastrophe and Turkey’s incursion into the Caucasus goes completely unpunished, such a possibility can be reckoned with”. Further, the People’s Commissar for Foreign Affairs drew attention to Turkey’s strained relations with other powerful nations and completed his extensive review with the premise of Turkey’s historic distrust of Russia, which had negatively impacted the interaction of the two neighboring states⁴.

On June 19, 1924, the proposals advanced by Chicherin were endorsed by the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party of the Bolsheviks (CC RCP(b))⁵.

Turkey’s leaders, in turn, were also engaged in thoroughly weighing all the strengths and weaknesses of these new relations with Moscow. One of the reports made

¹ RGASPI, f. 558, ser. 2, d. 18, sh. 1 rev.

² Ibid.

³ RGASPI, f. 82, ser. 2, d. 1328, sh. 43.

⁴ RGASPI, f. 82, ser. 2, d. 1328, sh. 45.

⁵ Since December, 1925 – the Central Committee (CC) Politburo of the All-Union Communist Party of the Bolsheviks. RGASPI, f. 17, ser. 3, d. 444, sh. 2.

by USSR Ambassador Plenipotentiary to Turkey Yakov Suritz stated that Ankara was keenly aware of the convergence of interests of Turkey and Soviet Russia, but was doubtful about whether Russia was strong enough to make Turkey feel committed to being openly tied to the chariot of Russia. Even though the Soviets had increased their international prestige, Turkey was still hesitant about re-directing the emphasis of its foreign policy to the East and had high hopes for the League of Nations. Furthermore, it “feverishly dreaded any military complications” in light of the crisis situation it was already *facing*¹.

Political interaction between the USSR and Turkey received an additional boost in 1925 when a new treaty between the two nations was concluded. On January 12, 1925, Chicherin wrote to the Russian Communist Party of the Bolsheviks Politburo: “The current Minister of Foreign Affairs S. Kaya² requested that we propose a formula for observing **a friendly neutrality status** (authors’ emphasis) in the event that war was waged by either party with a third nation”³. This idea was set forth in a statement by the Politburo dated January 15, 1925, which called for an additional agreement between the USSR and Turkey⁴. However, owing to unknown circumstances (apparently, because of the apprehension harbored by the Turkish side), this wording was later altered⁵. The agreement simply mentioned neutrality. In his letter to Chicherin with reference to the Turks, Suritz comments on the benevolent neutrality phrase, as the “maximum that could be agreed upon”⁶.

A new version of the “extended” Treaty of Non-Aggression and Neutrality in the Event of Conflict with a Third Nation (Nations), which was executed on December 17, 1925 in Paris, helped ensure the security of the USSR frontiers in the Caucasus and in the Black Sea basin, although the Turks were too apprehensive to be bound by concrete obligations regarding the Straits issue [Collection of current treaties... 1927: 9–10]⁷.

The treaty’s framework served as the basis for multifaceted strategic interaction between the two countries. Its important component was military-technical cooperation, which should be considered in the context of the general attitudes of the Russian lead-

¹ RGASPI, f. 82, ser. 2, d. 1328, sh. 84.

² Şücrü Kaya.

³ RGASPI, f. 82, ser. 2, d. 1128, sh. 76.

⁴ While Article 1 should have read as follows: “In the event of military action against one of the contracting parties committed by a third party or third parties, the other contracting party should maintain a friendly neutrality in relation to the first contracting party”. See: RGASPI, f. 17, ser. 162, d. 2, sh. 58.

⁵ On November 26, 1925, the Politburo (Minutes No. 92, Special No. 71) resolved in section 1b: “To amend the Politburo Resolution dated January 15, 1925, (Minutes No. 45, Special No. 32), the word “friendly” should be excluded before the word “neutrality” in Article 1 of the Treaty. However, Section 1b read: “A provision on mutual non-aggression” should be included in the Treaty. See: RGASPI, f. 17, ser. 162, sh. 199. Nevertheless, the mere formula of the “friendly neutrality” is quite adequate to describe the Russian-Turkish relations at various stages.

⁶ RGASPI, f. 82, ser. 2, d. 1128, sh. 83.

⁷ This issue runs like a golden thread through the entire system of relations between Moscow and Ankara.

ership of that time regarding the states of the East. For example, on February 3, 1927, the Politburo of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks decided “to consider it expedient and timely to move from the random release of weapons to the eastern states to a more planned and systematic introduction of Soviet weapons to the armies of the eastern states”¹. As part of the framework of this new agenda, the flow of ordnance deliveries to Ankara continued throughout the 1920-s and 1930-s. To illustrate, on August 14, 1934, the Central Committee (CC) Politburo of the All-Union Communist Party of the Bolsheviks approved a list and the tentative quantity of “armament supplies” to be made available to Turkey in the form of a loan in the amount of RUB 8 million². And, on October 20, 1934, new deliveries of weapons were already contemplated³.

Arms sales to Turkey continued up until the late 1930-s. However, this was not the only avenue of cooperation between the two countries. Soviet authorities, proceeding from their overall strategic vision of development prospects for Turkey’s economy, decided to support the latter’s industry with loans. A resolution of the Politburo dated June 19, 1924⁴ was emphatic: “It should be considered a matter of absolute priority to execute, within the shortest timeline possible, in the appropriate Soviet manner, a series of economic measures intended to facilitate our rapprochement with Turkey, with no detriment to us”. In this respect, mention should be made of another policy document endorsed by the CC Politburo of the All-Union Communist Party of the Bolsheviks dated August 12, 1926, entitled the Draft Resolution on the Trade Policy with the Eastern States, which stated that “the development of economic ties between the USSR and Turkey, Persia, Afghanistan, Western China, and Mongolia has both economic and political significance for the USSR”, and that the USSR “is a natural and large market for the sales of goods from those nations”⁵.

On May 7, 1932, the Politburo endorsed a proposal made by Stalin, Molotov, and Voroshilov on extending a long-term loan in the amount of RUB 16 million (!) to Tur-

¹ RGASPI, f. 17, ser. 162, d. 4, sh. 58.

² RGASPI, f. 17, ser. 162, d. 17, sh. 7.

The list included, in particular, 12 T-26 tanks, T-37A light tanks (amphibious tanks), 60-70 ZIS-6 tandem trucks, 435 ZIS-5 biaxial trucks, 42 BAI three-axil armored vehicles, 5,000 TT handguns, 350 mines of the 1926 production type, 120 anti-paravane mines (paravane is a towed device to protect the ship from mines), 300 depth bombs etc. See: RGASPI, f. 17, ser. 162, d. 17, sh. 7.

³ Among other things, the Politburo resolved to increase the number of T-26 tanks to be supplied from 42 to 63 units and obliged the People’s Defense Ministry to make available to the People’s Commissariat for Foreign Trade, destined for Turkey, by April 1, 1935, 1,300 projectiles for 203-mm gun howitzers and 14,000 projectiles for 122-mm gun howitzers, by December 1, 1934, 105 pieces of 45-mm tank cannons with a set of gun shells, by January 1, 1935, 250 contact mines of the 1926 production type, 120 anti-paravane mines etc. See: RGASPI, f. 17, sh. 78.

⁴ RGASPI, f. 17, ser. 3, d. 444, sh. 11–12.

⁵ RGASPI, f. 17, ser. 3, d. 580, sh. 9. At the same time, the USSR foreign policies in relation to those nations, as it was stated, would facilitate the growth of their economic sector and its evolution towards more progressive forms of business, “which would eventually lead to their liberation from being exploited by capitalist nations”.

key's government for 20 years, which would be directed toward the country's textile and military industry equipment, to be repaid in kind by annual instalments¹. The funds received from the USSR constituted about a third of all investment into Turkey's industry under the so-called five-year industrial development plan of the Republic of Turkey adopted in 1932 [Russia and the Black Sea Straits... 1999: 399; İşçi, 2014: 399].

In the period between the two World Wars, the USSR and the Republic of Turkey were intensely involved in the search for an acceptable form for military and political interaction, including discussions of options for a military and political alliance. Probing talks concerning the prospects for entering into an agreement on the joint defense of the Straits, including the possibility for deploying the Soviet Navy in Izmir, were held in 1934, 1936, and 1939 at the initiative of the Turkish side² [Documents of Foreign Policy of the USSR..., 1992: 326]. The mere fact that these talks took place was indicative of the trusting relations between Ankara and Moscow.

***Passage through the Black Sea Straits should be closed for military vessels
of any class owned by non-black sea states***

As concerns the key issue, the resolution of which had been traditionally regarded as extremely important for ensuring security of the USSR's frontiers in the southwest – the Black Sea Straits – it is worth noting that the regime for their demilitarization, enshrined in the 1923 Lausanne Convention, could have only existed under conditions of a very weak Turkey. Therefore, it is not surprising that by 1933 the Turks had started to raise the question about remilitarization of the Black Sea Straits, while simultaneously holding probing talks with Moscow on the conclusion of a mutual assistance pact [Russia and the Black Sea Straits... 1999: 400–401]. Turkey's government chose a favorable moment for revising the Straits regime after Germany's troops occupied the Rhineland (March, 1936), and very quickly achieved its goals. On April 11, 1936, Ankara forwarded to the state participants of the Lausanne Conference (the UK, Bulgaria, Greece, France, Italy, Japan, Romania, the USSR, Yugoslavia) a note proposing that a new agreement governing the regime for the Straits functionality be entered into within the shortest timeframe [Russia and the Black Sea Straits... 1999: 400–401]. Initially, Turkey's government did manage to succeed in garnering the support of the UK in this matter.

The Soviet stance at the Conference underway in Montreux, Switzerland, on June 22, 1936, was determined by the guidelines issued by the Politburo to Maxim Litvinov³ on May 5, 1936:

– Passage through the Straits into the Black Sea should be closed to all military vessels of non-Black Sea states;

¹ RGASPI, f. 17, ser. 162, d. 12, sh. 129.

² RGASPI, f. 17, ser. 166, d. 79.

³ People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs (Foreign Affairs since 1936) of the USSR (21.7.1930–3.5.1939).

– In wartime, insist on the prohibition of passage of military vessels, except Turkish ones¹.

According to Litvinov, (in a telegram to the “quintet” of the Politburo, dated June 23), “we need to have complete liberty to make disposition of our Navy’s capabilities deployed in various seas”². This opinion of the People’s Commissar for Foreign Affairs was detailed in a guideline issued by the Politburo on July 7, 1936: “It is essential that we seek the absolute [crossed out by Stalin and instead written in pencil “unconditional”] right to withdraw our present and future vessels from the Black Sea, with no restriction of tonnage”³. As a matter of fact, it is the same position that Russia has adhered to with respect to the regime of Black Sea Straits functionality since the 18th century.

The Conference in Montreux did not last very long (from June 22 until July 21, 1936), but the atmosphere proved very tense: the Turks were maneuvering between the USSR and the United Kingdom (UK), while Litvinov was nervous that he could not meet the objectives set before him. As he reported back to Moscow, the USSR was trying to make sure that “the rights of the UK, Italy, Japan, and other nations [concerning free access to the Black Sea for their ships], were scaled back, but without having any leverage to use against them”, at a time when Turkey was prepared to be satisfied with remilitarization of the Straits [Russia and the Black Sea Straits... 1999: 422]. The fate of the Conference was decided by a compromise Litvinov reached with the British⁴. Ultimately, the USSR secured an opportunity to bring its Black Sea Naval Fleet to the Mediterranean in times of peace and impose severe restrictions on the possibility for non-Black Sea nations to deploy their vessels in the Black Sea.

Meanwhile, Stalin was not perfectly content with the Montreux Convention, accusing in his usual manner the diplomats of “excessive flexibility”⁵. In a mere three years, Stalin’s discontent over the matter would seriously affect USSR-Turkey relations. In October, Tevfik Rüştü Aras,⁶ at the instruction of Prime Minister İsmet İnönü, made a proposal to Litvinov that the sides conclude a bilateral Pact according to which the USSR would be obligated to provide assistance to Turkey in the defense of its Anatolia coastline and the Straits, while Turkey would be committed to closing the Straits in the event that the USSR was attacked⁷. However, the promising proposal proved to be unrealizable due to staunch opposition from the UK [İşçi, 2020a: 749–750].

The diplomatic blitz in Montreux exposed the very essence of the controversy between Moscow and Ankara. While it was a matter of paramount importance for Moscow to close the Black Sea to non-regional powers, whereby an “exclusive partnership” with Turkey was regarded by Moscow as the primary vehicle to that purpose, for the

¹ RGASPI, f. 17, ser. 166, d. 559, sh. 86.

² Foreign Policy Archive of the RF, f. 59, ser. 1, b. 217, d. 1565, sh. 1–5.

³ RGASPI, f. 558, ser. 11, d. 214, sh. 23.

⁴ RGASPI, f. 558, ser. 11, d. 214, sh. 11–12.

⁵ RGASPI, f. 558, ser. 11, d. 214, sh. 18.

⁶ Since 1920 – Ambassador of the Turkish Republic in Moscow, in 1925–1938 – Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs.

⁷ RGASPI, f. 17, ser. 166, d. 566, sh. 79.

Turkey's leadership, which was seeking to rely on the UK to leverage its vulnerability in the Mediterranean, it was necessary to strike a balance between Moscow and London [İşçi, 2020a: 749–750].

In the wake of the Munich settlement (September, 1938), when the pressure exerted by Nazi Germany on the closest geopolitical circle of the USSR was very keenly felt, work to step up Moscow's efforts to fortify its security zone got underway, which in the spring of 1939 acquired a systematic nature.

The Soviet leadership was concerned about the methods used by Hitler with respect to Austria, Czechoslovakia, Danzig, and Memel (renamed to Klaipeda in 1945), and on March 28, 1939 Litvinov handed over to the representatives of Estonia and Latvia in Moscow a non-public declaration – a kind of a unilateral guarantee for the defense of the Baltic states on behalf of the USSR [Dullin, 2019: 334]. It stated that the USSR could not stand on the sidelines in view of the growing economic and political influence being exerted by Germany, let alone the territorial concessions being made in its favor [Statement made by Litvinov to August Rei on March 28, 1939, Documents of Foreign Policy, Vol. XXI, b. 1, p. 233; record of the conversation between Litvinov and Latvian Ambassador Frīdis Kociņš. Ibid: 232]. A similar warning was issued to Romania: “We cannot stand idly as powerless spectators allowing =aggressive state(s) to dominate in Romania and watch while control points in close proximity to our frontiers, or at Black Sea ports are being created” [Litvinov to Stalin, March 27, 1939, Ibid.: 230].

On April 14, 1939, talks with the UK and France got underway concerning potentially providing assistance to the Eastern European states located between the Baltic and Black Seas in the event of any aggression by Germany. At the same time, the Politburo was convinced of the expediency of having a separate agreement with the participation of Turkey (an appropriate request was forwarded by Molotov to İnönü on April 15, 1939) [Documents of Foreign Policy, Vol. XXI, b. 1: 278–279]. On April 21, 1939, the Kremlin hosted a meeting attended by Joseph Stalin, Vyacheslav Molotov, Anastas Mikoyan, Lazar Kaganovich, Kliment Voroshilov, Maxim Litvinov, Deputy People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs Vladimir Potemkin, Ambassador Plenipotentiary in the UK Ivan Maysky, Ambassador Plenipotentiary in Germany Alexey Merekalov, and Counsellor of the Russian Embassy in France Krapiventsev, during which the “desirability of an alliance” with the Western democracies was addressed. The topic of the Straits was also discussed at the meeting, as was Vladimir Potemkin's visit to Ankara with a view of feeling out Turkey's position regarding the Pact [Maysky, 2006: 382]. Litvinov treated the prospects for the Soviet diplomatic onslaught with excessive optimism: “It is impossible to stop the aggression in Europe without us” and “the later they appeal for our assistance, the more dear the price they will have to pay us”, he wrote to Alexey Merekalov on April 4, 1939 [Documents of Foreign Policy... 1992: 252–253].

The results of Potemkin's visit to Ankara seemingly corroborated the optimistic outlook of the Soviet People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs. However, while Moscow was unsuccessful in trying to negotiate an agreement with the UK and France, but (to their surprise) successful in striking a deal with Germany, Turkey advanced far ahead in its talks with the “Western democracies”, which had a direct impact on the progress of the USSR-Turkey negotiations in Moscow (September 22 – October 18,

1939). Turkey's Minister of Foreign Affairs Şükrü Saracoğlu's (in 1942–1946 he was also Prime Minister of Turkey) visit to Moscow took place amid a diplomatic blitz linked to the second visit to Moscow by Joachim Ribbentrop on September 27–29, 1939, the talks with the Latvians (September 28, 1939), and somewhat later, in October, 1939 with the Finns. Efforts to complete the building of a Soviet security zone along the perimeter of its western and southern frontiers, while not always successful, were forging ahead.

The People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs had taken his preparation for his talks with Saracoğlu very seriously. He believed that “Turkey's government considered it feasible to enter into a USSR-Turkey Mutual Assistance Pact in the Black Sea and the Straits area, as well as in the Balkans”. In the wake of the “betrayal committed by the UK and France with respect to Poland, or their powerlessness to provide any realistic assistance, perhaps it might not be difficult to convince the Turks of the fact that instead of indefinite and non-formalized mutual assistance obligations declared by Turkey, the UK and France, Turkey would be much better off yielding preference to the more solid mutual assistance guarantees that bound Turkey and the USSR”¹.

According to the Middle East and Legal Department of the People's Commissariat of Foreign Affairs, “it was appropriate to use the talks for the purpose of neutralizing certain tough and restrictive provisions of the Convention on the Straits regime dated July 20, 1936, i.e. to offer to the Turks, if articles 20 and 21 of the Convention were amended, settling the questions related to the passage through the Straits of vessels owned by non-regional states “by way of consultation with the USSR”². After a preliminary conversation between Saracoğlu, Stalin, and Molotov (October 1, 1939), three rounds of USSR-Turkey talks took place (on October 9, 13 and 16, 1939), as well as a conversation between Saracoğlu and Voroshilov.

Over the course of the first round, Molotov explained to Turkey's Minister of Foreign Affairs “the substantial changes” in the USSR's policies related to the conclusion of a treaty with Germany (“the talks we had held for a protracted period showed that the UK and France did not intend to make a pact, it was all a game for them”, they “had been trying to drive a wedge between us and Germany”, “this would have meant a tremendous war – a world war”) In the end, Molotov raises the question of a so-called “pro-USSR clause in connection with the tripartite agreement Turkey – the UK – France” (“Turkey will never be at war with the USSR, such a pro-USSR clause has already been formulated”, was Saracoğlu's response to this)³.

During the second round, on October 13, 1939, Molotov and Saracoğlu discussed in a fairly constructive way the contents of a prospective USSR-Turkey agreement. Saracoğlu explained the essence of Turkey's stance: “Turkey neither wants to lose the UK, nor the USSR”, “the goal of the USSR-Turkey and UK-Turkey pacts is to create a

¹ Archive of Foreign Policy of the RF, f. 6, ser. 1, f. 17, d. 177, sh. 85–86.

² Archive of Foreign Policy of the RF, f. 6, ser. 1, f. 17, d. 177, sh. 80, 83.

³ Archive of Foreign Policy of the RF, f. 6, ser. 1, f. 17, d. 177, sh. 4 and further.

bridge of sorts. At the end of their conversation, Molotov “on a tentative basis” raised the question on the Straits regime, which made Saracoğlu feel nervous¹.

The third round (preceded by a meeting between Saracoğlu and Voroshilov) was dedicated entirely to the Straits. According to Molotov, Moscow was first and foremost interested in the issue concerning the Straits and “formulated a concrete proposal, the endorsement of which was to be a precondition for the conclusion of a Mutual Assistance Pact” (it was a question of coordinated actions of the two powers with respect to the use of Articles 20 and 21 of the Montreux Convention and, with this in mind, it was proposed to hold additional special talks on the matter)². This proposal was met with a harsh reaction on behalf of Saracoğlu: “I am in Moscow not to discuss the issue regarding the Straits”, “the whole world knows that the problem of the Straits was the problem of Tsarist imperialism”. Molotov gives a repartee: “Not only for me, but also for Comrade Stalin and the Soviet government, it was totally unexpected to see such opposition from Saracoğlu”. “I also did not expect, when I was on my way here, to see this question raised again”, replied the Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs. This was the final note of negotiations³.

On October 18, 1939, the Anglo-French-Turkish Mutual Assistance Treaty was signed. As Onur İşçi writes, having received from the British both military equipment and weaponry, as well as a substantial gold loan, Turkey also secured an agreement that was fully in line with its security interests and foreign policy objectives. “Turkey would only engage in a conflict if it was subjected to an attack; whereas if Turkey’s allies were attacked, it was only obligated to maintain a favorable neutrality” [İşçi, 2019: 68]. The reaction of Soviet diplomats to that event was rather pessimistic. As was reported to Molotov by the Soviet Ambassador in Ankara, if the British and French tried to bring their military and auxiliary vessels loaded with troops and defense material through the Straits into the Black Sea, “there is no doubt whatsoever that the Turks would make any concessions necessary to suit the British and the French in that matter” [Documents of Foreign Policy... 1992: 268].

The situation around USSR-Turkey relations reached its boiling point after the commencement of the “Winter War” with Finland, during which the UK and France were actively engaged in devising plans to attack the USSR, including aerial bombing of the major oil industry centers in the Caucasus, while Turkey’s government behaved in a very ambiguous way, made evident in French diplomatic documents that were willingly published by the Germans after they defeated France⁴.

¹ Archive of Foreign Policy of the RF, f. 6, ser. 1, f. 17, d. 177, sh. 39–40.

² See for details: Archive of Foreign Policy of the RF, f. 6, ser. 1, f. 17, d. 177, sh. 40. Protocol on the forthcoming negotiations between the USSR and Turkey over the application of the Convention on the Straits regime. See: Archive of Foreign Policy of the RF, f. 6, ser. 1, f. 17, d. 177, sh. 60. The People’s Commissariat for Foreign Affairs also compiled a draft Protocol on the Straits regime, which envisaged consultations between the two powers on the issue of third nations’ military vessels passage through the Straits and the Black Sea during peacetime and wartime. See: Archive of Foreign Policy of the RF, f. 6, ser. 1, f. 17, d. 178, sh. 43.

³ Archive of Foreign Policy of the RF, f. 6, ser. 1, f. 17, d. 177, sh. 48–49, 57.

⁴ For more on the so-called Massigli case see: [İşçi, 2020b].

Following Hitler's forces invasion of the USSR, on June 25, 1941, Turkey announced its neutrality, which it tried to observe despite strong pressure exerted on it by Germany. Turkey's neutrality was favorable to the Soviet side. During a meeting between Joseph Stalin and Anthony Eden in December, 1941, Stalin suggested that Turkey be rewarded by being provided, as compensation for the neutrality of Dodecanese, with an area populated by Turks in Bulgaria, south of a Burgas. In addition, “it would be useful to transfer to Turkey some of the Aegean Sea islands that block exit from its primary ports” [Documents of Foreign Policy... 2000: 502].

At the Tehran Conference, the issue regarding the Straits was discussed at the initiative of the British side. According to Winston Churchill, the UK had no objection to Russia being provided with an access to warm seas. In response, Joseph Stalin noted that for this purpose a review of the regime governing the Straits needed to be conducted: “Such a vast nation has found itself locked within the Black Sea... If now the British are not willing to stifle Russia, then it is necessary that they help us to ease the Straits regime” [The Soviet Union at International Conferences... 1978: 141]. During Churchill and Eden's visit to Moscow in October, 1944, in a conversation with them, Stalin again returned to this question and received reassurances from Churchill that the British favorably assessed the idea of revising the Straits regime [The Soviet Union at International Conferences... 1979: 201]. At the Yalta Conference, Stalin continued to press energetically for a revision of the Montreux Convention provisions: “This agreement is obsolete, it has outlived its usefulness. Turkey has the right to close the Straits when it so desires. It is necessary to change <...> the existing order at no detriment to Turkey's sovereignty” [The Soviet Union at International Conferences... 1979: 201–202].

In early February, 1945, Deputy People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs Sergey Kavtaradze and Russian Ambassador Plenipotentiary in Ankara Sergey Vinogradov generated a position paper, which then became the basis for talks on the draft of a new regime governing the functionality of the Straits. The draft submitted by them placed heavy emphasis on the historic experience of interaction between Russia and Turkey. In particular, the period spanned from the late 18th century until the first third of the 19th century (the 1799 and 1805 Constantinople Treaties of Alliance and, certainly, the 1833 Treaty of Hünkâr Iskelesi, which stipulated a closure of the Straits for military vessels of non-Black Sea states, while providing absolute freedom of such passage to Black Sea states).

This plan proposed to cancel the Montreux Convention and to consider the Black Sea, while continuing free navigation for merchant ships closed for the military vessels of non-Black Sea states whereas the military vessels of the Black Sea states should be granted full freedom in navigating from the Black Sea into the Mediterranean and backwards. The draft envisaged that the USSR and Turkey (or the Conference of the Black Sea States) would be entitled to establish through a bilateral accord a mandatory procedure for governing the Straits regime to be followed by all nations. It was also contemplated that the USSR (or, as an alternative position, all of the Black Sea states) would be granted the right to control how new regime would be applied, alongside Turkey. With the view of implementing the above proposals, the US and the UK were ex-

pected to accept the specific status of the Black Sea as a closed water zone and recommend that Turkey's government agree to the provision of naval and air bases in the Straits to the Soviet Union.

As it was stressed by Kavtaradze and Vinogradov, "the most preferred settlement of the issue for the USSR would be a combination of a bilateral USSR-Turkey Treaty on the Straits backed by real guarantees of its implementation and a treaty among three great Allied Powers that would stipulate non-interference of the UK and the US into the above bilateral USSR-Turkey Treaty"¹.

In March of 1945, Vyacheslav Molotov declared to Turkey's Ambassador in Moscow Selim Rauf Sarper (in 1944–1946)² that the Soviet government wanted to denounce the Soviet-Turkish Treaty of Friendship and Neutrality of 1925, as it was no longer in conformity with the new environment and was in need of revisions. The Ambassador was not taken aback by such statement and instead, within two months, he and the Prime Minister Mehmet Şükrü Saracoğlu explored an optimal strategy for Turkey in this matter, all the while being in consultation with Vinogradov³ [İşçi, 2023: 627, 632]. On June 7 and 19 of 1945, Turkey's Ambassador paid two visits to Vyacheslav Molotov to discuss the draft of the new Treaty, but was met with a cool welcome. Molotov stated that in order to win the USSR's friendship, Turkey must return the eastern vilayets to the USSR, "which had been taken away from us by you, when we withdrew from the war in 1918 in a weakened state". He also requested that the USSR be provided with an opportunity to keep its military bases at the Straits. Sarper was not prepared for such a turn of events. The Turks vigorously opposed the Soviet bases at the Straits during peacetime and were averse to raising the territorial question. The talks were put "on hold" again⁴.

At the July 22, 1945 Potsdam Conference, the Soviet Union requested that the Straits regime be changed and issued its territorial claims to Turkey, demanding that the latter return Kars, Artvin, and Ardahan to the Georgian and Armenian Soviet Socialist Republics. Truman and Churchill essentially expressed their formal agreement to the amendment of the Montreux Convention, however, their position called for free navigation through the Straits, which ran counter to the interests of Moscow. During negotiations in Potsdam the following day, Churchill expressed confidence that Turkey would never agree to Russian bases on the Straits. In response, Stalin said:

"The stance of such a big state as Russia with respect to the Straits has tremendous importance. The Montreux Convention has been entirely directed against Russia, and it is a Convention that is hostile to Russia. Turkey is being granted the right to close the Straits for our navigation not only in the event of war but also in the event that Turkey thinks that there is a threat of war. At the same time, Turkey has the liberty to decide when such a threat occurs. It is a totally impossible clause! Turkey may simply think

¹ Archive of Foreign Policy of the RF, Vyacheslav Molotov's Fund, ser. 7, f. 47, d. 761, sh. 1–19.

² Subsequently, in 1960–1962, Sarper, an ethnic Turk of Albanian descent, served as the Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs.

³ Archive of Foreign Policy of the RF, f. 06, ser. 7, f. 47, d. 756, sh. 80–81.

⁴ Archive of Foreign Policy of the RF, f. 06, ser. 7, f. 47, d. 758, sh. 1–14.

that some kind of threat exists and then can close the Straits at any time. We, the Russians, have just as many rights or even fewer rights than the Japanese Emperor with regard to those Straits. It is ridiculous, but it is a fact. It follows that a small state backed by the UK holds a large state by the throat and refuses to give any passage to it. It might be imagined what a fuss would be raised in the UK if a similar agreement was in place in relation to the Gibraltar, or in America, if such an agreement existed in relation to the Panama Canal. Hence, the question about the possibility of free passage back and forth for our ships needs to be ensured. But, as Turkey is weak, and it cannot defend the possibility of free passage itself, in the event of any complications we need to have some sort of guarantee that this freedom of passage will be secured <...> You believe that naval bases at the Straits are unacceptable. All right, then give us another base, where the Russian Fleet can be repaired, equipped, and where it can protect the rights of Russia, along with those of our allies. That's how things stand. But, to leave things as they are now, is ridiculous. That's it for me"¹.

On August 7, the Soviet government sent a note to the government of the UK, the US, and Turkey containing its views with respect to the planned Straits regime. It was proposed that the Straits be open for the passage of all merchant vessels of all states; that they be open for the passage of military vessels of the Black Sea states; that the passage through the Straits of military vessels of non-Black Sea states be banned, with the exception of special occurrences; that the establishment of the Straits regime be in the competency of Turkey and other Black Sea states; and, that Turkey and the USSR jointly manage the common defense of the Straits for the purpose of preventing their use by other nations in pursuit of hostile objectives [Foreign Policy of the USSR, Vol. VI, 1947: 458–460]. Having solicited US support, Turkey rejected the USSR's proposals [İşçi, 2023: 642]. On September 24, 1946, a second note by the Soviet government was issued, in which Turkey's government was accused of breaking the Montreux Convention during wartime and again the ideas of joint defense of the Straits and the establishment of a new regime at the Conference of the Black Sea States were put forward [Russia and the Black Sea Straits, 1999: 480]. The territorial issue and the question about the bases were not raised in the note, which testified to a serious bluff element in Moscow's position request. In the reciprocal notes, the US and the UK reaffirmed their agreement to the convocation of a new Conference on the Straits regime, meanwhile Turkey continued to decline the Soviet claims.

Thus, by late 1946 all attempts made by the USSR to alter the Straits regime ended in failure, and the Montreux Convention provisions remain in their frozen state even today [Sotnichenko, 2010: 227]. Turkey, frightened by the USSR's claims, embarked on a course to join a Western military alliance, which eventually led to its admission into the NATO. The pressure exerted by the USSR was perceived by Turkey through the prism of its historic antagonism with Russia (“The fear of a possible capture of the Straits by Russia was ingrained in the consciousness of all classes in Turkey”, the US Ambassador observed². Turkey's track for pursuing diplomacy with the Soviet Union

¹ RGASPI, f. 558, ser. 11, d. 268, sh. 20.

² FRUS, 1943, Vol. IV, doc. 1120.

thus began its long journey of alienation and mutual circumspection. As it was stated in the instructions to the USSR Ambassador in Turkey on March 29, 1948, “taking into account that the policy pursued by Turkey’s current government leads to the transformation of the country into a UK-US military foothold against the USSR, the USSR Embassy in Turkey should not display any initiative at trying to improve relations with Turkey”¹.

Post factum, the Soviet leaders – Molotov and Khrushchev – assessed the draft of a USSR-Turkey condominium over the Straits as a serious political error by Stalin (“it was an untimely, unrealizable plan” [Chyev, 2000: 52]. Khrushchev, in his reminiscences about the Soviet demarche regarding the Straits in February, 1945, said with irony to the participants in the June Plenary Meeting of the CPSU Central Committee, in 1957: “Why don’t we draft a note, and just like that they’ll give us the Dardanelles. Who would be that stupid? The Dardanelles are not Turkey, there is an entire assembly of states located there..., we have lost a friendly Turkey...”².

A formal NATO member

The situation began to change only after Stalin’s death. New approaches toward positioning the USSR in the international arena were formed very rapidly in those days. Already in March, 1953, a search for solutions of the key security issues in Asia, primarily regarding the Korean peninsula, was in progress. In April-May, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in close collaboration with the CPSU Presidium, issued a list of new proposals on the German issue, while almost simultaneously Soviet diplomats carried out large-scale initiatives with regard to Iran and Turkey in order to boost relations with their Eastern neighbors.

On May 30th, 1953, Vyacheslav Molotov made an oral declaration to Turkey’s Ambassador, which stated: “For the sake of maintaining good-neighborly relations and consolidating peace and security, the governments of Armenia and Georgia deemed it conceivable to abandon their territorial claims against Turkey. As far as the issue about the Straits is concerned, the Soviet Government has revised its previous stance regarding this question, and believes it is possible to ensure the USSR security on the side of the Straits, under such conditions that are equally acceptable for the USSR and Turkey. Thus, the Soviet government declares that the Soviet Union has no territorial claims against Turkey” [History Essays of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2002: 377].

It seemed that after such reconciliatory gestures, a full normalization of relations between Moscow and Ankara would ensure automatically. However, the clashes of interests of the two powers in the Middle East – during the 1957 Syrian crisis, and especially the 1958 Middle East – twice led to a brinkmanship situation in USSR-Turkey relations [Naumkin, 2008; Skorospelov, 2022a; Skorospelov, 2022b]. And so, having

¹ RGASPI, f. 17, ser. 162, d. 39, sh. 41.

² Russian State Archive of Contemporary History, Moscow, Russia (RGANI), f. 2, ser. 1, d. 161, sh. 223–224.

received data at the height of the Middle East crisis to the effect that the landing of the US and British troops in Lebanon and Jordan was a preparatory phase for a subsequent military attack against the United Arab Republic (UAR) and Iraq, and that Turkey, assisted by other Baghdad Pact nations¹, would take the initiative by unleashing military aggression, the USSR decided to hold large-scale military exercises. Their aim was to deter Turkey from inflicting damage upon Iraq and the Syrian area of the UAR. Alongside measures intended to produce a strategic deterrent effect, the KGB and GRU were engaged in the launching of a series of “special-designation actions” to destabilize US allies, including with the intense involvement of the “Kurdish factor”, an extremely painful element for Turkey [Serov, 2017: 545]. The Soviet Ambassador in Ankara, in his talks with the Turkish leaders, spoke about an inevitable major war in the event of Turkey’s intervention in Iraq².

In the wake of the 1958 crisis, the barrier, which consisted of a system of military alliances formed to stave off the Soviet Union in the south, was severely undermined. The Turks and Iranians, as Khrushchev put it poignantly in a conversation with Mao Zedong, “feared us as the devil feared holy water”³. The time had come for diplomacy. The first one who showed signs of giving in to the pressure was the Shah of Iran, who had been seriously frightened by the 1958 Middle East crisis. As a result of a three-year-long diplomatic marathon (talks were procrastinated because of stiff British-American pressure on the Shah), in February, 1962, Iran decided not to allow the deployment of any foreign missile bases on its territory. A similar scenario was followed in the development of the situation around Turkey, although the talks with Ankara moved along with greater difficulty. In June, 1960, in the aftermath of a military coup in Turkey, when the pro-American government headed by Adnan Menderes was overthrown, Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev sent to Chairman of the National Union Committee Cemal Gürsel a personal message in which it was suggested that Turkey adopt a neutral stance. The offer was rejected⁴.

The situation changed only upon the commencement of the Cyprus crisis in 1963. Turkey was determined to thwart the unification of Cyprus and Greece, even if it meant deploying military force. In June, 1964, Turkish troops landed in Cyprus. The magnitude of the conflict was vividly illustrated by the airborne military operation. On August 8, the positions of Greek forces were subjected to aerial bombardment by 34 jet-propelled aircraft of the Turkish Air Force, and on August 9 an aerial attack was conducted with 64 aircraft⁵. Interestingly, there was now an ongoing military and political conflict between two North Atlantic Treaty Organization member-states, which subjected Turkey to veiled, but intense pressure from the US.

¹ As for Iraq, after the overthrow of monarchy on July 14, it ceased to participate in the Baghdad Pact operations, and on March 24, 1959, Iraq formally withdrew from it (all the Pact bodies were moved to Ankara back in 1958) [Annual of the Great Soviet Encyclopedia... 1959: 461].

² Foreign Relations of the United States Series (FRUS), 1958–60, vol. XII, p. 583, No. 1.

³ RGANI, f. 52, ser. 1, d. 498, sh. 131.

⁴ Archive of Foreign Policy of the RF, f. Ref. on Turkey, ser. 76, folder 11, d. 359, sh. 5.

⁵ Archive of Foreign Policy of the RF, f. Ref. on Turkey, ser. 76, folder 11, d. 358, sh. 48.

Under such circumstances, the USSR Embassy began witnessing a growing desire on behalf of Turkey to garner support from Moscow on the Cyprus issue. Soviet Ambassador Nikolay Ryzhkov reported to the Center on October 24: "Favorable objective prerequisites are being shaped for invigorating our work in Turkey, while the prospects for USSR-Turkey relations will depend on our stance on the Cyprus matter"¹. In November, 1964, during the Turkish Foreign Minister Feridun Cemal Erkin's visit to Moscow, he made an attempt to solicit such support. On November 5, Gromyko stated to Erkin that the USSR was prepared to make a public declaration in favor of the federative framework in Cyprus [and against the unification], "bearing in mind that the Turkish side would make a step forward to meet our wishes". This implied that Turkey was to refuse to participate in the NATO multilateral nuclear forces (as it had been previously done by Norway) and refuse to allow foreign states to deploy their missile bases on the Turkish territory (as had been done by Iran)². Erkin replied to this by saying that Turkey had already made the decision not to participate in the NATO multilateral nuclear forces, and on December 24, he declared to the Soviet Ambassador that Turkey's government intended to resolve the second issue in a positive way³. Effectively, Turkey adopted the Norwegian model of the NATO membership.

In May, 1965, the CPSU Presidium embarked on a "radical improvement of relations with Turkey". Reference was made to the three agreements reached between Andrey Gromyko and Feridun Cemal Erkin in November, 1964. At this time, the task ahead was to secure a reduction of Turkey's military activities within the NATO with a view to remove Turkey's divisions from the NATO command (as had been done by France, the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs noted). "If the question cannot be resolved formally now, it would be possible to agree on the factual implementation of this measure", Gromyko's instructions said before his talks with the Turkey's leaders in May of 1965. With the aim of restoring "relations based on mutual understanding and trust" with Turkey, it was proposed to accelerate contacts with Turkish political and economic representatives, to bolster cooperation in the economic sphere (by developing large-scale hydro-energy and metallurgy projects and also by supplying oil and petroleum products to Turkey) etc. Turkey was regarded as a "gateway" to the Middle East. "When the US was bogged down in its aggressive policies in South-East Asia, the improvement of USSR-Turkey relations could be viewed, in addition to the further reinforcement of the Soviet Union's positions in the South Africa, Algeria, and Syria, as one of the most crucial foreign policy objectives of strategic importance"⁴.

The change in the nature of the USSR-Turkey relations made it possible to place on the agenda the question regarding the consolidation of the USSR's presence in the Mediterranean. That same month, it was decided to set up a Non-Standard Operational Mixed Squadron of the Black Sea Navy (the would-be 5th OPESK) to operate in the

¹ Archive of Foreign Policy of the RF, f. ref. on Turkey, ser. 76, folder 11, d. 358, sh. 57.

² Archive of Foreign Policy of the RF, f. ref. Turkey, ser. 76, folder 354, d. 12, sh. 46.

³ Ibid.

⁴ RGANI, f. 3, ser. 16, d. 694, sh. 100–112.

region. By 1965 the squadron consisted of 28 submarines, 24 surface vessels, and 37 auxiliary ships [Spirin, 2006: 102–103].

In December, 1975, Kosygin, who visited Ankara to participate in events marking the commissioning of the Iskenderun Iron and Steel Factory, which was built with the technical and economic support of the Soviet Union, assessed the interim results yielded by this policy in the following way: “Yes, Turkey is a member of the NATO, and its territory accommodates foreign bases. But, as I was reassured by Demirel¹, while being part of the alliance, they have not sacrificed their national interests in favor of the interests of that organization. Foreign bases are fully controlled by the Turkey’s authorities... During the present talks ... [the Turks] have confirmed their readiness to take any and all appropriate measures to provide for non-stop travel for Soviet commercial and combat ships passing through the Bosphorus and Dardanelles Straits” [Hirst, İşçi, 2020]. The first passage of the Black Sea Straits by the Soviet aircraft-carrying cruiser “Kiev” in July of 1976 [Spirin, 2006: 84] was evidence of this readiness.

The tendencies laid down in 1960–1970 in USSR-Turkey relations defined not only Soviet diplomatic tactics along the Turkish track for the short- and mid-term, but also the substance of the bilateral relations for the long haul. The Soviet stance envisaged a strategy to provide assistance to Turkey toward the development of its modern industrial potential, which bore its first fruit in the 1980-s. Even while retaining NATO membership, Turkey managed to maintain close cooperation with the USSR. Turkey’s government, while realizing the benefits of being engaged in cooperation with the USSR and the risks of any confrontation with it, pursued a policy of maintaining balance among the super powers.

* * *

Looking back at the history of Russia-Turkey relations, and throughout the Soviet period, we cannot help but be amazed by Georgy Chicherin’s foresight, which was on full display in his assessment of bilateral relations as set forth in his Memorandum of June 14, 1924. The Russia-Turkey model for interaction that was created with his active involvement proved to be surprisingly viable and sustainable; it has served as an example of how to build relations with other neighboring states in the 20th century, particularly, as we believe, with China (in the PRC it is called “back to back”)². Nevertheless, it should be noted that this model has proved it can function successfully under conditions when a stable balance of power exists. However, the “impunity” that was mentioned by People’s Commissar of Foreign Affairs Georgy Chicherin a century ago can still emerge and give rise to any number of geo-political temptations, which might again test the endurance of present-day Russia-Turkey relations.

¹ Süleyman Demirel was Prime Minister of Turkey at that time. Throughout 1993–2000, he was President of Turkey.

² For greater details, see: [Skorospelov, Naumkin, 2022].

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