

Ottoman policy in the South Caucasus - Trabzon and Batumi Conferences (1917-1918)

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to present Turkish policy in the South Caucasus in 1917-1918, after the Bolshevik Coup, when the distribution of power changed and the government of the Young Turks hoped that they would take over not only the Caucasus, but also the Crimea and Central Asia. After the peace decree was published by the Soviet Russia, Turkey's initiative to start peace negotiations in the Caucasus can be considered as a kind of trick. In fact, Young Turkish government, which was obsessed with the Pan-Turanian ideas, was planning to restore "Great Turan" which should have stretched from the Caucasus to Central Asia. The Turkish government used the principle of the right of the self-determination - announced by the Soviet Russian government and urged to withdraw its troops from the territories lost during the Russian-Turkish war of 1877-1878 and therefore, determined its status by holding a referendum in this region. Recognizing the principle of self-determination of nations, Russia gave to Ottomans a „weapon“ against their own. Also after the collapse of the Russian Empire the Transcaucasian Seim, for which the years 1917-1918 were particularly critical, had to resist the Ottoman Empire,. Transcaucasian republics had to repel the aggressive imperialist actions of both Ottoman and Soviet Russia.

Based on the historical facts and collecting data, we found that after the October revolution, a favorable situation was created for Turkey. Within the frames of the article, on the bases of primary sources, periodicals and fact-based data analysis, we concluded that the Turkish government took advantage of the change in the balance of power after the Bolshevik Coup, as well as the situation in the Caucasus, to implement various activities in disguise resulted in achieving their plans.

Keywords: Caucasus front, Georgia, Negotiations, Soviet Russia, Young Turks

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1. Introduction

The Caucasus was highly valued by the Young Turk government. The high ranked officials believed that the Ottoman army would take control of Iran, Afghanistan, the entire Volga area, and the entire Caucasus. Ottoman army's supremacy would bring victory and would control the Caucasus. In 1914 Ottoman army launched an onslaught against Arzurum, Yerevan, and Oltis, and did have some success. The Ottomans were more emboldened by this, they moved to a large-scale operation in the direction of Sarikamish and Kars. However, the army could not withstand the harsh winter conditions and the Ottoman army was defeated by Tsarist Russian army. After the victory of Sarikamish, in Tsarist Russia the issue of the Straits became even more urgent. Tsarist Russia begins to strengthen the fleet and builds three battleships, which would allow them to gain an advantage over the Black Sea and to act against the opponent. In the highest circles of Tsarist Russia, they are already discussing taking over Constantinople, with or without the help of allies. The Bolshevik Coup of 1917 prevented the realization of Russia's goals. The Bolshevik government that came to the head of the state refused Turkey partition and demanded the start of peace negotiations for the purpose of concluding a truce. On October 27, 1917, the Soviet government published an armistice to request a truce. After the Bolshevik revolution, when Ottomans seemed to be given hope, Pan-Turan sentiments became especially powerful, the desire to restore "Great Turan" stretching from the Caucasus to Central Asia became prominent once again.

2. Methods

This article is based on qualitative research methods. In particular, the Discreptionary placement method is used in the article. Description plays crucial role in the explanation process, on the basis of which we have made a systematic conclusions. By summarizing the facts that took place after the Soviet Coup, we could get a descriptive history of the process in the South Caucasus. Method of interpretation of historical events helped us to determine the causes of changing the Ottoman policy in the Caucasus. Considering the observed facts, we tried to confirm our theory that sounds that: the Ottoman officials took advantage of the Soviet Coup and if it had not happed, they would not have been able to fulfill their imperialistic desires.

We also sorted out the described events in an understandable context by documents collection mehtod, which is also used in this paper, by coding sheets / newspapers, telegrams, we are able to precisely display events of that period.

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3. Results and Discussion

1. The South Caucasus after the October Revolution.

The reverberation of the October revolution we can find at the newspaper Tasvir-i Efkâr of April 18, 1917, which states that the proletariat took over the reins of state management and from now they would no longer have the need to take over new lands of Russia which created positive anticipation for Turkey. (Kurat.,2011.,p.274). However, they were soon disappointed. In September 1917, Tercüman-ı Hakikat newspaper wrote that the Caucasus for a long time has been a bone of contention between Turkey and Russia and that Turkey had to take necessary measures to stop the threat. The Newspaper of the same year Vakit in September 1918 wrote that the for Turkey existence of independent states together with Georgia, Azerbaijan and North Caucasus between Turkey and Russia was important from the point of view of security.

After the publication of The Peace Pact of the Soviet government, need to establish peace in the Caucasus was set in order. General of the Turkish army Vahib pasha was the head of Peace negotiation initiative and on November 20, 1917 he suggested the start of peace negotiations the Caucasus Front to Commander-in-Chief - Przewalski (Kurat.,2011., p.264). However, the answer was late. Due to the delay, Vahib Pasha assumed that the Russian command did not yet have willingness to come to peace negotiations. According to the Brest-Litovsk Agreement, negotiations were supposed to take place between Turkey and Russia, but the situation was completely changed, the only state structure in the region was the southern Caucasus Commissariat, which did not recognize the Bolshevik government. Therefore, the addressee of Vahib Pasha's letter was the South Caucasus Commissariat. Having fallen in difficult situation, The new established government of the Caucasus, could not continue the war and on behalf of the South Caucasus Commissariat, the General of the Commander of the Caucasus Front Przewalski in response to Vahib Pasha's offer in a telegram of December 5, 1917 agreed to a truce. In case of a positive answer, he offered creating a special commission with Turkish and Russian representatives where they would come in and work out the terms of the peace agreement. On same day Przewalski sent a letter to the commander-in-chief of the English Mesopotamian army, where he announced Turkey's readiness to begin negotiations and its consent regarding the ceasefire. Telegram was signed by General Przewalski and General Lebedinski. [Dokumenty i materialy po vneshnej politiki Zakavkaz"ja i Gruzii, 1919] [Documents on Internal Policy of Georgia and South caucasus] # 9,10., p. 19). With this step, we can think that the commissariat emphasized that it did not recognize the Bolshevik government and declared readiness to cooperate with its strategic rival. Nevertheless, the Entente countries were dissatisfied, as it happened without agreement with the consent of Turkish side to the proposal. According to the explanation of General Przewalski, his step was caused by the fear that control would pass into the hands of the Bolsheviks, especially when the new provisional government had already issued a peace decree and readiness to start negotiations with the Turkish side. (Şahin., 2002., p.162). On

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December 5, 1917, the South Caucasus worked out the terms of the armistice, with which the commission was to be guided. The conditions consisted of 13 points and the most important of them was an unconditional ceasefire for military units granting the right to stop within the borders established by the countries, the parties were forbidden the right to move to neutral territory, while civilians were not restricted from crossing the demarcation line. Holding a truce was in effect until the final establishment of peace. The instruction was signed by: Major General Lebedinsky, General-Quartermeister Shamilov. On December 15-18, 1917 peace negotiations were held. It should be noted that negotiations were held on behalf of the Russian army, not the Bolshevik government, but South Caucasus Commissariat and Command of the Russian Army of the Caucasus. The Turkish side was confused as the South Caucasus commissariat was newly created, the head of Turkish delegation, Omer Lutfi Bey, in the telegrams written to Bey Vahib Pasha reported that the Russian side was involved in Brest-Litovsk negotiations, as the representative of Caucasus government, which took place in parallel with these negotiations. It is possible that the agreements were not compatible with the decisions adopted in Erzincan (Şahin., 2002., p. 65) The fact that Turkey conducted negotiations with the South Caucasus Commissariat, was the actual recognition that Turkey recognized the authority of the Commissariat. However, it was suspicious of the progress of the negotiations, which can also be seen in the letter sent from Vahib Pasha, General of the Caucasus Army to Lieutenant Odishelidze. He wrote that in Erzincan he received a telegram from the head of the Turkish delegation - Omer Lutfi Bey, where he wrote that the Russian side was represented by the South Caucasus Commissariat. Based on this, Vahib Pasha believed that the implementation of decisions received in Brest-Litovsk was questioned. In order to continue the peaceful negotiations, Vahib Pasha claimed that sending a delegation to Tbilisi would be useless. [Dokumenty i materialy po vneshnej politiki Zakavkaz"ja i Gruzii, 1919] [Documents on Internal Policy of Georgia and South caucasus], # 15., p. 30). The government of Tbilisi refused to accept receiving of the Turkish delegation on the grounds that they were waiting for the decision of the meeting of founders in Petrograd. (Kurat., 2011., p. 465). "As we are willing to conclude a peace agreement with the Russian Democratic Forces considering the requirements, it is our pleasure to inform you that we, as a part of the Russian republic, we will be able to continue negotiations after the assurances received by the congregation with the founders". - it is said on January 5 (18), 1918 In the report of the meeting of the Caucasus Commission. [Dokumenty i materialy po vneshnej politiki Zakavkaz"ja i Gruzii, 1919] [Documents on Internal Policy of Georgia and South caucasus], # 18., p. 26). On January 3 (16), 1918, Vahib Pasha sends a telegram to the South Caucasian Commissariat, Gen. Odishelidze, where he asks him to send trustees at the Brest-Litovsk negotiations. [Dokumenty i materialy po vneshnej politiki Zakavkaz"ja i Gruzii, 1919] [Documents on Internal Policy of Georgia and South caucasus]# 34., p. 52). This telegram only reaches Tbilisi on 1(14) February.

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On January 6, 1918, the constituent assembly was held, however, the return of provisional government was not possible, the Bolsheviks surrounded the democratic forces and the government of Georgia slowly began to wake up from the illusion that democratic government would ever return to Russia. (Tchumburidze., 2018., p.28)_After closing the meeting of the founders, the Tbilisi government asked for three weeks to negotiate. [Dokumenty i materialy po vneshnej politiki Zakavkaz"ja i Gruzii, 1919] [Documents on Internal Policy of Georgia and South caucasus], # 20 p.35). Meanwhile, the Soviet Russian government in the region tried to incite a civil war so that the Soviet government would spread in the Caucasus. The People's Commissariat passed a decree in Turkey regarding the self-determination of the Armenian diaspora, according to which, Soviet Russia expressed full support to the Armenian diaspora inn matters of self-determination, the Armenian diaspora had the right to protect its own rights even through holding a referendum. based on this, the People's Commissariat was ordered to immediately create a militia, which would be staffed by ethnic Armenians, the unconditional return of Armenian refugees (including Armenians who emigrated to different countries) should have been ensured from Turkish side, a temporary people's government should have been established. In order to fulfill the mentioned requirements, the support was ordered to temporary commissioner Stefan Shaumian. As a note in the said declaration it is written that the new geographical area of the Armenian diaspora in Turkey is approved by democratically elected Armenian representatives in agreement with mixed commissions (staffed with representatives of Muslims and other ethnic groups) and with the temporary commissioner for Caucasian affairs. The declaration is signed by: V. Ulyanov (Lenin) I. Jughashil (Stalin) v. Bonch-Brunevich (administrator of state affairs) N. Gorbunov (Secretary of the Council). According to Soviet Russia's calculations, as Armenian diaspora strengthened a referendum would be announced and then these lands would completely come under the control of Soviet Russia. Thus, with the help of the Armenian diaspora Soviet Russia would also seize Turkish lands and finally eliminate Armenian separatism in the region. (Kurat., 2011., p.261). As a result, with the instigation of the reactionary Bolsheviks, attacks of Armenian armed forces became more frequent in the region. As if these events were in the interests of the Ottoman Empire, in parallel with the negotiations, the Ottomans tried inciting the Muslim community and confusing political situation. Rauf Bey was arranging secret negotiations with representatives of the Muslim community of Azerbaijan and Dagestan, who allegedly demanded the entry of the Turkish army into the Caucasus. (Kurat., 2011., p.469). In the telegram sent to General Odisheridze Vahib Pasham's demanded to scare off the attackers. [Dokumenty i materialy po vneshnej politiki Zakavkaz"ja i Gruzii, 1919] [Documents on Internal Policy of Georgia and South caucasus]., # 29 p.44). In the telegram sent to Vahib Pasha In January 30, 1918 (February 12) Gen. Odishelidze states that he doesn't doubt the accuracy of reports and, the data is assessed excessively, however, they will do everything to protect the region occupied by Russian army and inhabited by Muslims from the attacks of Armenians. [Dokumenty i materialy po vneshnej politiki Zakavkaz"ja i Gruzii, 1919] [Documents on Internal Policy of

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Georgia and South caucasus], #30 p. 46). Despite Gen. Odishelidze's efforts, the attacks could not be stopped. (Kurat., 2011., p. 465). On January 30 (February 18) 1918, Vafib Pasha warns by telegram, that due to the existing situation, the Turkish troops are planning on attacking, with the reply Gen. Odishelidze ordered for the infantry units to occupy the infantry positions and protect the territories in case of the attack of Turkish army. [Dokumenty i materialy po vneshnej politiki Zakavkaz"ja i Gruzii, 1919] [Documents on Internal Policy of Georgia and South caucasus]# 31, 32., p. 48). A telegram sent by Enver Pasha to Vahib Pasha on February 16, 1918 states: "Our goal is to complete get rid of the standing Russian army and the Armenian diaspora, going even further with the help for Caucasus Muslims and Georgians". In the letter sent on April 12, he states that the first priority task is to fully connect Muslim community in the South-West Caucasus to Turkey (Şahin., 2002., p.191). On March 25, 1918, in Tercüman ı Hakikat newspaper, an article on the necessity of protection of the Muslim community in the Caucasus is being printed. The author states: "If the situation in the Caucasus and Russia escalates and clashes take place, we must protect our brothers and compatriots, otherwise the contradictions in Caucasus will keep going and the Russians will try again to capture our border state" (Tercüman ı Hakikat Mart 1334/1918 . No 13323). Obviously, Ottomans had their own interests in the Caucasus. At the same time events created in the Caucasus, the negotiations in Brest-Litovsk came to an end, and in 1918 on February March 3, the Brest Listovsky Peace Treaty was signed. Within the framework of which, an additional agreement was made between the Soviet Russia and Turkey. The parties agreed to the agreement that within three months after the ratification, the first order task of the Russian-Turkish commission would be to restore the border strip between Russia and Turkey as this line passed through 3 Sanjak: Kars, Ardahan and Batumi. [Dokumenty Vneshnej Politiki SSSR [Documents on Internal Policy of The USSR] 1917 - 31 December, 1918).

1.1.Trabzon Conference.

February 17, 1918 (March 2nd) the Transcaucasian government protested regarding the decision made in Brest-Litovsk by the Bolsheviks. "Transcaucasian government, according to the decision of the Seim, believes that any decision regarding the South Caucasus and its borders and which is accepted without the will and involvement of this state itself, does not have international legitimacy. The Transcaucasian Seim selected a delegation which will go to Trabzon to negotiate with Turkey." [Dokumenty i materialy po vneshnej politiki Zakavkaz"ja i Gruzii, 1919] [Documents on Internal Policy of Georgia and South caucasus] # 41). The note is signed by the head of Transcaucasian Government Gegechkor and Seim Chairman Chkheidze. On February 25 / March 10, the Turks demanded the return of the territories of handed by Brest Truce. (Chumburidze (2018). On the same day, March 10 (25 February) Vahib Pasha ordered occupation of Kars, Ardahan and Batumi. Erzincan, which has been in Russian hands since 1915, on March 11 (February 13) became occupied by the Turkish army and by March 14 almost all territories occupied by the Russian army in First

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World War were returned by the Turks. The Brest-Litovsk peace treaty was signed in such a way that Transcaucasia's representation was not involved, which is why Transcaucasian delegation expressed a strongly negative attitude. Seim refused to meet Ottoman demands. On 10 (23) February Vahib Pasha addressed the Transcaucasian Commissariat by radio telegram, where he offered the Seim to hold peace negotiations and he was ready to travel to Tbilisi for this. [Dokumenty i materialy po vneshnej politiki Zakavkaz"ja i Gruzii, 1919] [Documents on Internal Policy of Georgia and South caucasus], # 40., p.68). On the same day, the session of Seim was conducted, which was led by E. Gegechkor. According to the record of the meeting, N. Jordania believed that the start of peace talks is timely, based on the fact that Germany renewed attacks on Russia, however, Semyonov was suspicious of initiation of renewing the peace talks with Turkey he wondered if diplomatic trick was hidden in it. Gen. Lewandowsky offered a neutral territory for negotiations, as holding a meeting in Tbilisi indicated declaring defeat. His opinion was shared by A. Chkhenkel. Natadze suggested to the council members to offer the Turkish side to hold negotiations in Trabzon. (Документы и Материалы По Внешней Политики Закавказья и Грузии [Dokumenty i materialy po vneshnej politiki Zakavkaz"ja i Gruzii, 1919] [Documents on Internal Policy of Georgia and South caucasus], # 41). The Georgian side discussed Trabzon as a neutral city where holding peace negotiations would be appropriate. However, Turkish researchers believe that when Trabzon was still conquered by Russia and They saw a diplomatic trick in the decision of the Georgians moreover, considering the fact that the Greek Metropolitan was sitting there who did not recognize Bolshevik government after the October Revolution and submitted to the Transcaucasia Commissariat. (Şahin., 2002., p.241). On March 13, 1918 the Trabzon Peace Conference began. Delegation of Georgia, according to the resolution of the Transcaucasian Commissariat of January 14, 1918, was led by A. Chkhenkeli. The delegation included: Haidar Abashidze, Mehmed Khasan Khachinsky, Ibrahim Haydarov, Giorgi Beyakhobi Gvazawa, Ruben Kachascnuni, Giorgi Lashishvili, Yakob Mahdiev, Halil Khas Memedov, Aleksandre Khatisian and Ekber Aga Sheikhulislamov. Along with the main composition of the delegation conference was also attended by: Gen. Chief of Staff Vladimir Levandovsky, Colonel Ejadze, Captain Primatov, Junior Lieutenant Gartman, Captain Golitsyn, officers: Diakokhov, Apiskin and Lovengo. 43 delegates in total. (Şahin., 2002., p.274). There were 9 delegates in the delegation from Turkey. The delegation was managed by Rauf Bey and the members were: Adviser on Legal Affairs Nusret Bey, Unity and Progress Party Trabzon representative Riza Bey, military doctor, Colonel Tevfik Salim, Director of the operational department, Major Husrev Bey. [Dokumenty i materialy po vneshnej politiki Zakavkaz"ja i Gruzii, 1919] [Documents on Internal Policy of Georgia and South Caucasus, 1919]# 46., p.83). Transcaucasian delegation arrived in Trabzon on March 8-9, but did not move to the land due to security measures. The Turkish delegation arrived on March 12, while the Transcaucasian delegation, after a long wait was in the final preparations to leave for their homeland. According to Commissariat's instructions, the delegation should have first demanded a complete ceasefire, border demarcation as of 1914, and another point -

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supporting the self-determination aspirations of the Armenian diaspora in Turkey. The instructions given to the Turkish delegation were as follows: 1. In order to establish peace and order the Ottoman army had to enter sanjaks of Batumi, Ardahan and Kars, which at the request of Russia, was surrendered to by the Ottomans military in 1877-1878 as a capitulation. 2. The Turkish delegation had to determine the real goals of the Caucasian delegation based on the information obtained, establish ethnic origin of the representatives of the countries included in the Caucasus Seim and their representatives and discuss the possibility of conducting negotiations. After reaching an agreement the establishment of political and economic relations, exchanging captives etc. was discussed. (Şahin., 2002., p.304).

As mentioned above, the first task of the Turkish delegation was clarifying the goals of the Caucasus delegation before moving on to peace negotiations. The doubts of legitimacy of Caucasus delegation did not give rest to Turkish delegation, that's why they delayed negotiations as much as possible until the main purpose of the delegation's arrival was determined and only after that, according to the decree received from Istanbul, negotiations would begin. Before the start of negotiations, on March 13, Rauf Bey held secret negotiations with representatives of delegations from Dagestan and Azerbaijan, they were: Benderli Ibrahim Bey Haydarov, Yakub Mehdiyev, Mustafa Bey. At a secret meeting, the representatives of the Caucasian Seim declared to Rauf Bey that the Muslim population was waiting for the Turkish army to enter, regardless of the end of the peace talks. Rauf Bey was convinced that the Muslims living in Caucasus were hoping for the support of Turkish army due to the support of the Armenians by British and due to the threat of Bolshevik influences spreading. During the meeting Hussain Rauf Bey directly stated that the Caucasus Republic, in which Muslim, Georgian and the Armenian nations were united, would not exist for a long time. (Kurat., 2011., p.469). On the same day, March 13, the Russian-language newspaper "Republic" published in Tbilisi printed the information regarding the delegation's visit to Trabzon. This article was urgently translated for the Turkish delegation, in addition, Turkey was informed about the meeting on February 16 / March 1, at which the identity of the delegates was decided and the instructions were laid down. Before the beginning of conversations, the Turkish delegation was fully informed about the objectives of Caucasus commissariat. (Şahin., 2002., p.317). Negotiations began on March 14. According to the information received from the Muslim representatives of the delegation, the Caucasus Commissariat was not yet an independent structure and still was pinning its hopes on Russia, that is why, in order to avoid irritating the Russians, they did not rush to declare independence. Depending on these conditions, the Turkish army was advised to go into action immediately. The Turkish side had doubts about information received from Muslim representatives of the delegation on the possibility to continue negotiations with the state that neither had borders nor had sovereignty. Rauf Bay in the letter sent for Transcaucasian delegation on March 1(14). requested the delegation to clearly explain if the form of statehood of Transcaucasian commissariat was consistent or not with international norms of

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statehood. In response, on 3 (March 16) Transcaucasian delegation announced that after the Bolshevik coup the full-fledged representative body in Caucasus was the Transcaucasian Seim, whose political and administrative arrangement was fully in line with the international norms and had rights to hold peace talks with the Ottomans. After completion of Brest-Litovsk negotiations the Transcaucasian Seim - representative body of peoples of the Caucasus, sent a note of protest to the states involved in negotiations regarding the fact that the Transcaucasian Seim did not agree with this decision and Transcaucasian delegation was not involved in any decision making. [Dokumenty i materialy po vneshnej politiki Zakavkaz"ja i Gruzii, 1919] [Documents on Internal Policy of Georgia and South Caucasus, 1919] # 57 p. 117). To which the Ottoman delegation replied, that during the ongoing negotiations in Brest-Litovsk, Transcaucasian state had not yet been formed, that's why it could not participate in negotiations. For proof they brought G. Gegechkor's telegram from January 23, 1918, in which he reported that Transcaucasian state must coordinate its steps with the Russia Federation which Transcaucasian state was considered to be a part of. Therefore, as Transcaucasia, considered itself as a part of the Russian Federation it could not participate in negotiations. Accordingly, the Ottoman delegation stated in the letter that protest by Transcaucasian delegation of the union in Bres-Litovsk regarding the decision was unacceptable. [Dokumenty i materialy po vneshnej politiki Zakavkaz"ja i Gruzii, 1919] [Documents on Internal Policy of Georgia and South Caucasus,1919]# 58). In the process of negotiation, the Turkish delegation constantly was receiving secret information about Transcaucasian Muslim delegates, which put them in a profitable position. Besides, negotiations could be blocked due to the fact that both sides were not going to give up. The Transcaucasian delegation explained that Russia, being in a state of civil war was forced to accept the conditions proposed Brest-Litovsk and, as for the Caucasus, after Bolsheviks arranged coup in Russia, Russian rule no longer extended. On January 15 (28), Ottomans offered a delegation of the Transcaucasian Commissariat to be sent in Brest-Litovsk. The fact that Transcaucasia and Ottoman delegations were in Trabzon indicates that continuation of peaceful negotiations was important to both sides and delegates did not perceive Ottoman's decision as important. [Dokumenty i materialy po vneshnej politiki Zakavkaz"ja i Gruzii, 1919] [Documents on Internal Policy of Georgia and South Caucasus,1919], # 65 p.132). The Ottoman delegation responded that even though they agreed to the peace negotiations it did not mean that they admitted the recognition of the Transcaucasian state. Moreover it was baseless, due to the fact that his proposal was not even officially legitimate as the newly established state is not recognized and all its demands lack the legal basis [Dokumenty i materialy po vneshnej politiki Zakavkaz"ja i Gruzii, 1919] [Documents on Internal Policy of Georgia and South Caucasus,1919],. # 66 p. 134). The negotiations came to an impasse. The Caucasian delegation demanded canceling the clauses related to the Caucasus in Brest-Litovsk treaty, however, minor changes were considered, for example leaving Ardahan to Turkey, Batumi leaving as part of Georgia and Kars would be given to Armenians. The Muslim members of the delegation assured Rauf Bey, that leaving Batumi in the hands of the

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Georgians was favorable for the Ottomans, so that Armenians and Georgians would not revolt against the Muslims. (Kurat., 2011., p.472). But the Turkish delegation demanded fulfilling points of Brest-Litovsk and did not agree to give up Batumi. While the debates were ongoing, Vahib Pasha went into battle on April 5 and took Sariqamish. On March 24/April 6, 1918, Rauf Bey gave an ultimatum to the Transcaucasian delegation and demanded to give a final answer regarding the Brest-Litovsk clauses within 48 hours. [Dokumenty i materialy po vneshnej politiki Zakavkaz"ja i Gruzii, 1919] [Documents on Internal Policy of Georgia and South Caucasus,1919]# 72 p.155). Thus, this was the last reply of the Ottoman delegation, either the Transcaucasian government would agree to the conditions set forth in the ultimatum or the military offense that started in April 5 would continue. Being in Trabzon the delegates immediately left for the Transcaucasian Seim Congress. A. Chkhenkeli, commandant of Batumi, writes in a letter to the general secretary that the delegates had a heated debate, but they could not reach a consensus. A. Chkhenkeli believed that protesting the Brest-Litovsk agreement was losing its meaning, the main thing at that moment was the maximum limit, after which the Seim had to proceed to the battle, whether the Ottomans were ready to fight with arms for Kars, Artan and Batumi districts and take the next steps accordingly. A. Chkhenkeli was sure that the Turks would not give up Batumi. However, the Turks were still willing to negotiate on this issue, unlike the case of Kars, which the Turks refused to even discuss. A. Chkhenkel, was afraid that this condition was endangering the unity of the Seim. [Dokumenty i materialy po vneshnej politiki Zakavkaz"ja i Gruzii, 1919] [Documents on Internal Policy of Georgia and South Caucasus,1919], # 73 p. 156). Meanwhile Ottoman army was moving forward. On March 26 / April 8 Gegechkori In the telegram written to A.Chkhenkeli states that it made no sense to continue peace negotiations in such conditions. If the Ottoman army did not stop the offense, peace negotiations would derange. [Dokumenty i materialy po vneshnej politiki Zakavkaz"ja i Gruzii, 1919] [Documents on Internal Policy of Georgia and South Caucasus,1919], # 74 p. 165).

1.1.1 Batumi Conference.

Third city that was to be assigned to the Transcaucasian Seim in Brest Litovsk negotiations was Batumi. In case Batumi there was a difference of opinion in the Ottoman government. Vahib Pasha was in favor of conceding to the Georgians, according to his calculations, it was a favorable move for the Armenians to be left alone in the area. Enver Pasha had the opposite opinion, in the letter he wrote to Vahib Pasha he states: "We agree with you that obtaining benevolence of Georgians is our task, however, it should not happen on the expenses of interests of Turkey. The main achievement of the Brest-Litovsk negotiations – Batumi should come under our rule, and Batumi will then become a guarantee of union of not only Caucasus but also of the entire Muslim population of Iran and Asia... In order to maintain political friendship, we can allow Georgians to go to the Black Sea, however, there is no interest to demand for more even for Georgians, because if now they are receiving the help from British and French, tomorrow they may find themselves all alone in

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Russia and if Russia decides attack, they won't have any means of resistance anymore. Thus, they are also forced to have a good relationship with us therefore, it would be a good idea to introduce our goals and head to Batumi in order to have solid guarantees before the start of negotiations" (Şahin., 2002., p.414). On April 13th, the Ottomans presented an ultimatum to the commandant of Batumi on leaving the city. On April 15th, Batumi surrendered to the Turkish army without a fight. Newspaper Tarih i Efkâr describes the entry of the Ottoman Empire into Turkey as follows: "Our army achieved an excellent victory in Batumi. Christian and Muslim citizens showed up in the streets of the city. Long live Fadishah! - Howls are heard from all sides. The streets are covered with Ottoman flags." (Tarih i Efkâr 22 Nisan 1334 / 1918 NO 2432). In response to the force of the Ottomans, the Seim was had to agree to the demands of the Turkish side. On April 22/May 11, 1918 Transcaucasian state declared independence and peaceful negotiations with Ottomans were resumed. The head of Government and at the same time Minister of Foreign Affairs A. Chkhenkeli went to Batumi in order to negotiate with Turkey. The members of Transcaucasian Seim delegation were: Niko Nikoladze, Gen. Odishelidze, Noe Ramishvili, Zurab Avalishvili, Giorgi Gvazawa, G. Ritkiladze, Vakhtang Gambashidze, Mehmed Khasan Khajinski, Emin Resulzade, Fethali Khan Khoiski, Aslan Safikurdski, Ahmed Tsedet Pepinov, Alexander Khatisian, Khovanes Kachaznuni, Mentor Banatiani, Simon, Vaziani, Mikhail Papajanian. (Şahin., 2002., p. 521). The Ottoman delegation included: Halil Bey, Wahib Pasha, Muhtar Bey, Ferik Wahib Asha, Muhtae Bey, translator Orhan Bey (also participated in the Brest-Litovsk negotiations), Secretary NizametinBeu, legal advisor Nusret Bey (who also attendant the Trabzon conference), Sadiq and Jellal Bey - translators, military doctor Tevfiq Salim Bey, Major Yusuf Zia Bay. (Şahin., 2002., p. 517). Soviet Russia also requested to attend the conference in Batumi as a supervisor and before that protested the promotion of Ottoman Kars, Ardahan and Batumi. It was clear that Soviet Russia displayed special interest in ongoing negotiations between the delegation of Turkey and Transcaucasia. It is interesting that Chicherin wrote a note to the German ambassador in Moscow, von Mirbach, in which Soviet Russia declared that they did not recognize the decision made in Batumi conference based on the fact that as Chicherin emphasized, the Soviet Russia did not recognize the Transcaucasian Confederation. (Kurat., 2011., p. 475). Attendance at the conference was also requested by the German side, which had previously showed complete indifference to current events. German side neither protested against the arrest of Batumi by the Turks, however, after the fact that Ottomans actively began to exert influence in Transcaucasia, Germany had negative attitude towards the ally. During the negotiations Otto von Losov offered the role of a mediator to Transcaucasian delegation. [Dokumenty i materialy po vneshnej politiki Zakavkaz"ja i Gruzii, 1919] [Documents on Internal Policy of Georgia and South Caucasus,1919], # 147 p. 293). He addressed the Turkish delegation with the same proposal, but it was rejected. After receiving the refusal, Otto von Lasov announced to the Transcaucasian delegation that Germany could no longer participate in the negotiations. However, instead of returning to Berlin, the German delegation stopped in Poti. There

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together with Georgian delegates - Chkhenkeli, Nikoladze, Avalishvili and Ramishvili they had to conduct secret negotiations. Before the beginning of the conference, the head of the delegation, Halil Pasha Sadrazam received the necessary directives from Talat Pasha. In the long list of directives, the main new requirement was turning Akhaltsikhe and Akhalkalaki under Turkish rule. Imbued with Pan-Turanian ideas the main goal of the Ottoman Empire was weakening of the neighbors. The main task of the Ottomans was not only weakening the hostile Armenia in the Caucasus, but also of Georgia. The new demand to have Akhaltsikhe-Akhalkalaki under Turkish rule was serving exactly that purpose. Most importantly, this new demand was based on the peace pact made after the Russian revolution by Ottoman rival - the Soviet Union. The pact announced that all nations had the right to self-determination and sovereignty. If Russia supported the self-determination of the Armenian diaspora in Ottoman empire, then Ottomans were "protecting" the interests of the Muslim community in Akhaltsikhe and Akhalkalaki. Exactly under the pretext of this right to self-determination, on April 13, 1918, the Muslim community of Akhaltsikhe and Akhalkalaki adopted the resolution on union with Turkey. [Dokumenty i materialy po vneshnej politiki Zakavkaz"ja i Gruzii, 1919] [Documents on Internal Policy of Georgia and South Caucasus, 1919], # 160 p. 316). Due to the emerging international political situation, Transcaucasian delegation, especially the Georgian delegates, agreed to negotiate with the Turks. Perhaps hoping that this concession was temporary Georgia hoped that Germany, even during the negotiations would be able to persuade Turkey to cede Batumi district. Z. Avalizhvili recalls: "The occupation of Batumi by the enemies was only temporary and this defeat was not final and everything depended on the post-war development. That's why it was important to negotiate with Turks at the moment" (Avalov., 1924., p.36). Conciliatory negotiations began on May 11, 1918 in especially difficult circumstances. At the very first session, the Ottoman delegation proposed the Georgian delegation with 12 point document and stated that the Brest-Litovsk Treaty was no longer the basis, of peace negotiations as after the failed negotiations in Trabzon, the situation changed and they demanded Akhaltsikhe, Akhalkalaki, Adrianople and Etchmiadzin districts. The new demands made by Ottomans were completely unexpected for Georgian side. The head of the Georgian delegation A. Chkhenkeli protested the new demands and declared that the negotiations in Trabzon were temporarily stopped, that the Ottoman should have had claims not with Transcaucasia, but with Russia. But the Caucasus delegation was here to establish peace and the Brest-Litovsk Treaty was to be taken as the basis of the negotiations. This completely unexpected request of the Ottomans puzzled the Transcaucasian delegation. While the discussion was ongoing, in the meantime, the Turkish army continued to advance, Armenia and Georgia faced danger. (Kazemzadeh., 1951., p.110). Georgian delegation proposed a four-point proposal to Ottomans, namely, a peace agreement to be signed not only by Turkey and the Transcaucasian state, but the Union of Four and the agreement should be based on Brest-Litovsk agreement. Within the framework of ongoing military activities, agreements were made separately, as the addition to the Convention between the Union of Four and the Transcaucasian Republic. The

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establishment of Economic and Trade relations should happen within the framework of a bilateral agreement. Though, Austria and Bulgaria would not be represented during the negotiations, it does not constitute a basis for obstructing negotiations. [Dokumenty i materialy po vneshnej politiki Zakavkaz"ja i Gruzii, 1919] [Documents on Internal Policy of Georgia and South Caucasus,1919], # 132 p. 268). This offer of the delegation of the Caucasus was somewhat a diplomatic trick to involve Germany as guarantor of peace. Ottomans did not delay the response, Halil Bey stated that the Brest-Litovsk treaty could not be the only basis of negotiations and agrees to add to draw a special convention as the addition to the agreement, which would remain active until the end of the war. [Dokumenty i materialy po vneshnej politiki Zakavkaz"ja i Gruzii, 1919] [Documents on Internal Policy of Georgia and South Caucasus,1919], # 136., p.272). In parallel with the negotiations, the Ottoman army was advancing towards Lore and Tbilisi, that's why A. Chkhenkeli sent a note of protest to the Ottoman delegation once again. Azerbaijan met this demonstration of Ottoman power silently, while Armenia did weaken and would not be able to resist, Georgia was trying to maintain the strategic position between Armenia and Azerbaijan, however couldn't do it without foreign help. (Kazemzadeh., 1951., p.115). As mentioned above, Germany came to sense after Ottomans activated in Transcaucasia and tried to stop an ally which was also in favor of Georgians. Georgian delegates secretly met up with Von Losov and Schulenburg (German consuls in Tbilisi) and offered mediation, however as it is known they received denial from Halil Bey. The Ottomans met s activation of Germany with concern, they did not want to create hostility with Europe's strongest ally, however, after Von Losov left the negotiations, the situation became even more critical. On May 26th, Halil Bey presented a new ultimatum to Chkhenkeli and demanded transfer of Nakhchevan to Turkey. The Transcaucasian Republic became on the verge of collapse, Armenia was defeated by Turkey in the battle of Karakilis, Azerbaijan maintained a neutral position, during the negotiations, and for Georgia, the issue of presence or absence was being resolved together with statehood being under question. Therefore, in order to save the Georgian nation Georgian delegates took the only right step- Independence of Georgia was announced. After the dissolution of the Transcaucasian Republic and the declaration of Georgia's independence, negotiations in Batumi continued. After the developed events in Georgia, Noe Ramishvili was appointed as the head of the delegation. The head of the Turkish delegation - Halil Bey stated that despite the changes in Tbilisi, the ultimatum still remained in force. The representative of the Georgian delegation immediately replied to Halil Bey and told him, that the Republic of Georgia agreed to give the Ottoman Empire an opportunity to use railways as the mean of transportation of troops and war equipment and the southern border of Georgia should pass through the border established by the agreement of Brest-Litovsk. [Dokumenty i materialy po vneshnej politiki Zakavkaz"ja i Gruzii, 1919] [Documents on Internal Policy of Georgia and South Caucasus,1919], # 170., p.340). The delegation emphasized that the ultimatum of the Ottomans to surrender Akhalkalaki and Akhaltsikhe was satisfied to some extent, only within the framework of using the railway they demanded the demarcation of

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border based on the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. Halil Pasha called this note of the Georgian delegation "the answer given to get rid of them". It seems that Ottomans did not intend to make concessions, Ottomans were appealing for the right to self-determination in the markets of Akhalkalaki and Akhaltsikhe and were ready to interrupt negotiations in Batumi and move on to battle actions against Georgia. (Şahin., 2002., p.615). The delegation of Georgia was in a desperate situation and agreed to the terms of the Ottoman Empire. Batumi negotiations ended June 8, 1918 and the Ottomans received Akhalkalaki and Akhaltsiokh except Abastumani and Atzkur. (Alen & Muratoff., 1953.,p. 158).

4. Conclusion

All Ottoman demands were met, with the accession of Kars, Ardahan and Batumi, the influence and power of Ottomans increased even more. The conference in Batumi was somewhat a continuation of negotiations that began in Brest-Listovsk. After the October Revolution the Ottoman Empire wanted to increase their influence on Caucasus and weaken Soviet Russia, which was trying to enhance civil resistance with declaring support for Armenian diaspora. In response, Turkey demanded the return of 1877-1878 status quo: Russia had to withdraw its army from Ardahan, Kars and Batumi districts. Soviet Russia, in a difficult situation, could not afford to oppose the Turkish-German alliance and was forced to accept the demands and sign the peace agreement. The agreement made in Brest-Litovsk was the first step. In parallel with ongoing negotiations in Trabzon and Batumi, the Ottomans launched military actions in order to intimidate the government of Caucasus. Ottomans justified their actions by protecting themselves from the attacks of the Muslim population. In the result the Ottomans brought the southern border completely under their influence. The Batumi Agreement did not settle as it was not signed by both parties. The Ottomans continued their hostilities until the Mudros Agreement was signed. The issue of Caucasus, though in different political situation, became clear once again after three years. After the Sovietization of the Caucasus, the negotiations were held by Turkey and Soviet Russia.

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