

TED ANKARA COLLEGE FOUNDATION HIGH SCHOOL

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HISTORY

1919-1939 TURKEY-USSR RELATIONS

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Research Question: What are the political, military and cultural aspects of the relationship between Republic of Turkey and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics in the time interval between World War I and World War II?

Abstract

World War I had different effects on different states. Turkey and Russia can be given as an example. These countries were affected in different ways but they started to get closer and develop their relations. In this extended essay; the political, military and cultural aspects of the relationship between Turkey and Russia in the period of 1919-1939 was examined. This is an important interval since it includes the fall of former empires of both countries: The Ottoman Empire and the Russian Empire. After the collapse of these empires, the newly formed governments for both sides were united. The Bolshevik ideology and Turkish National Struggle allied against their common enemy Imperialism, despite the discrepancy of the regimes. The fight of Soviet Union against Imperialism was a political one whereas Turkey was trying to gain its independence. In this period, Soviet Russia's aim was to convert the regime in Turkey to socialism but Turkish government has used that hope as a trump card to gain Russia's support. The reason behind narrowing the aspects and period of time was to investigate topics more detailed and deeply. While studying this period when the relations between Turkey and Russia have reached its climax, books, periodicals of the period and websites were used as sources. The periodicals are especially important since they are considered as first hand sources which convey the most accurate information.

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Introduction

Having fought on opposite sides in World War I, Turkey and Russia started to get closer due to the events that happened towards the end of the war. The Bolshevik Revolution in Russia and the loss of war in Ottoman Empire caused a regime change in both countries. The Socialist Government in Russia and the Republican Government in Turkey became allies in early 1920's.

In this essay the relation between Turkey and Soviet Russia in the period of 1919-1939 will be examined. This interval is chosen because it is when the regimes in both countries started to be shaped. Turkey was turned into republican regime whereas Russia into socialism. And the aim of this essay will be to give a reasonable answer for the research question "What are the political, military and cultural aspects of the relationship between Republic of Turkey and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics in the time interval between World War I and World War II?"

I. Socio-political condition of Turkey after World War I

The Ottoman Empire had lost the World War among with its allies Germany and Austro-Hungarian Empire. According to the Armistice of Mudros¹ –which was signed between The Ottoman Empire and the Allies² on 30th October 1918- the Turkish Army was disbanded and several regions were invaded by Entente Powers on the basis of 7th and 24th terms of the agreement.³

The Istanbul based monarchial government was hopeless about the invasions that regional resistance troops called “Kuva-yı Milliye” arose after the occupations. After the arrival of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk⁴ to Samsun on 19th May 1919, The Turkish Move of Independence had officially started. There were several congresses in unoccupied territories resulted in the opening of the Grand Turkish National Assembly on 23rd April 1920. After that the Kuva-yı Milliye troops were merged under central administration, The Grand Turkish National Assembly became the headquarters of the Turkish Move of Independence but the Istanbul government was also maintaining its existence, thus constituting a threat for the Ankara government.

The Grand National Assembly government was in the middle of a war against Britain, France and Greece with limited resources and manpower. ⁵ The conditions were harsh and the government needed an ally strongly.

¹ Sir Frederick B. Maurice, *The Armistices of 1918*, London 1943

² Originally consists of The British Empire with its colonies, France and Russia. Italy, US, Greece and Japan joined after the war has started. Also called as the Entente Powers.

³ Both of these terms granted the Allies the force of invading any location which may be a threat for their security Turkish Association of History, “*Original Script of The Armistice of Mudros*”,
<<http://www.ttk.org.tr/templates/resimler/File/ktpbelge/antlasmalar/mondros.pdf>>

⁴ The leader of the Turkish Independence Movement, statesman, commander, founder of the republic.

⁵ Kreiser K., Neumann C., *Brief Summary of Turkish History*, Reclam Press, 2003, p. 403

II. Socio-political condition of Russia after World War I

Originally a part of the Ally Forces in the World War, The Russian Empire had to resign from the war because of serious domestic incidents. The Bolsheviks had come to the power after the revolution on 7th November 1917 and a civil war⁶ between the Red⁷ and White⁸ armies had started. The civil war lasted until 1922 when Soviet Union was formed.

After the revolution and the collapse of the monarchical regime, the mainland Russia started to get smaller because of minor territories declaring their independence. Until the coalition of the Soviet Union in 1922, the primary objective of the Bolshevik government was to reunite with these territories.⁹

The Bolshevik government was standing alone in Europe against Imperialism. According to the foreign policy of the government, Russia should be the center and socialism should branch out to the world from there.¹⁰ Therefore, Russia strongly needed allies. The significant countries of Europe were not interested in a socialist regime, moreover there was a phobia of spreading socialism over Europe. For that reason, it was not easy for the Bolshevik government to find an ally.

⁶ Lincoln W.B., *Red Victory*, 1990

⁷ Supporters of the socialist regime

⁸ Supporters of the monarchical regime

⁹ Sakwa R., *The Rise and Fall of the Soviet Union*, 1999

¹⁰ *Документы внешней политики (Foreign Policy Documents) USSR*. Moscow, 1959

III. Relations in 1920's

a) Before the Treaty of Moscow (1919-1921)

Regarding the uneasy situations for both countries, Turkey and Russia got closer after the World War I. The first contacts were made during the congresses at Havza, Erzurum and Sivas.¹¹ There were Soviet spectators¹² at these congresses and after the one in Sivas¹³, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk sent an official (Halil Pasha) to Moscow with the aim of better relationships and resource aid. The conclusion of improving relations with Russia was also confirmed by the Turkish Grand National Assembly. At the first council meeting in the parliament in 5th May 1920, the parliamentarians agreed that it was vital to improve relationships with Russia since both sides had exactly the same enemies. Soviets were in the middle of a battle for power against Imperialism whereas Turkey was fighting Greek troops which were supported by Imperialist forces. As a result, a committee was formed and sent to Moscow to keep up the negotiations.¹⁴ The committee leaded by Sami Bekir¹⁵ had arrived to Moscow on 19th July 1920 and contacted important Soviet officials including Vlademir Lenin himself. The first draft of an agreement was formed during this visit and on the way back, the committee had brought a letter from Georgy Chicherin¹⁶. At his letter, Chicherin was appreciating and making prudential wishes about Turkish-Soviet relations.¹⁷

¹¹ National congresses organized to regulate Turkish National Struggle

¹² Kaymak, E. *"Sultan Galiyev and Colonial International"*, p.78

¹³ 2nd September 1919

¹⁴ Coskun, A. *"Establishment of Kuva-yı Milliye"*, p.322

¹⁵ Minister of Foreign Relations of Turkish Government

¹⁶ Minister of Foreign Relations of Soviet Union

¹⁷ *Документы внешней политики(Foreign Policy Documents) USSR*. Moscow, 1959, V.3, p. 15

Shortly after the negotiations in Moscow, a committee was sent from Moscow to Ankara. The Russian committee had arrived to Ankara on 4th October 1920 and founded a Soviet Embassy in Ankara on 9th November 1920.¹⁸ This is important since it shows the support of Soviet Russia to Ankara government despite the existence of the monarchical government in Istanbul.



The Soviet Committee

¹⁸ Samsutdinov, A.M., *The History of Turkish War of Independence from Mudrow to Lausanne*, p.201.

During the negotiations, Mustafa Kemal had written letters to Lenin and also Joseph Stalin¹⁹ who was executing the duty of Eastern Nations Political Commissar. Stalin was playing a role of mediator between Turkey and Armenia and he was a strong advocate of the good relations between Turkey and Russia.

The disagreement between Turkey and Armenia was the only significant problem that hindered the sign of a comprehensive alliance treaty between Turkey and Soviet Russia. After that problem was solved in 3rd December 1920 with Treaty of Alexandropol²⁰, the negotiations started to proceed faster and more positively.

As a result, a Turkish committee was sent to Moscow to discuss a wide ranged alliance pact between two sides. The committee was welcomed with a military ceremony on 19th February 1921. After long negotiations, “Turkey-Soviet Russia Friendship and Brotherhood Agreement”, in other words “The Treaty of Moscow” was signed on 16th March 1921.²¹ It is important since this is when Soviet Russia had recognized Turkish Government officially and also Turkey’s eastern border was secured. Soviet government also agreed to provide military aid to the Turkish army.

After the signature of Treaty of Moscow, both leaders, Atatürk and Lenin made speeches about the significance of the agreement.²²

¹⁹ Iosif Vissarionovich Dzhugashvili was born on December 18, 1879 in Gori, Georgia. After Vladimir Lenin’s death in 1924, Stalin won the battle for authority over Leon Trotsky and had come to the power. Directed the World War II, Korean War and the early Cold War era for his country, Joseph Stalin died on March 5, 1953 in Moscow.

²⁰ Specified the border and relationships between Turkey and Armenia.

²¹ Soysal, I. , *Political Agreements of Turkey* ,V.1, pp.26-38.

²² Perincek, D. , *The writings of Lenin, Stalin and Mao about Turkey*, p.136.

With respect to Treaty of Moscow,²³

- Turkey will not recognize any agreement that Russia did not and the vice versa. With respect, Russia did not recognize Treaty of Sevres.²⁴
- All agreements that were signed between Tsarist Russia and Ottoman Empire would be invalid.
- Soviet Russia would recognize Misak-I Milli²⁵ orders.
- All capitulations would be abolished.
- Batum would be given to Russia and the border between two sides would be accepted.

With Treaty of Moscow, the Grand National Assembly government was officially recognized and also secured its eastern borders as well as had the warranty of Soviet Russia's support.



Soviet and Turkish Committees signing the Treaty of Moscow

²³ Tenginsenk, Y.K. , *At Service for Mainland*, pp.345-359.

²⁴ An agreement that was signed with the purpose of occupation of the Ottoman Empire.

²⁵ Orders that was accepted in the last meeting of Ottoman Parliament about national independence on 28th January 1920.

b) Before the Non-aggression pact (1921-1925)

On 10th April 1922, prominent European countries organized a conference at Genoa, Italy to discuss the general situation of Europe. The Soviet Union was invited whereas Turkey was not. Although Turkey was not a part of the negotiations going on, The Soviet Union strained to include Turkish government into the conference.²⁶ Even though they failed to do so, this event was an important sign of the improving relations between Turkey and Russia. The Genoa Conference had ended with no significant conclusions but important for Ankara government since it was represented in an international conference.

The Izmir Offensive²⁷ started on 26th August 1922. During the battles, Greek Communists and Bolshevik agents were leading a broad propaganda campaign in order to demoralize the Greek army. The Balkans Communist Federation had invited all communists to oppose and protest the Greek raid in Anatolia.²⁸



Atatürk with Soviet officials before the Izmir Offensive. 23rd March 1922

²⁶ *Документы внешней политики (Foreign Policy Documents) USSR*. Moscow, 1959, V.5, p. 63

²⁷ The largest and the final battle of Turkish War of Independence. Resulted in the withdrawal of Greek Forces from Anatolia.

²⁸ Gokay, B., *Turkey Between Communism and Imperialism*, p.169

After the Turkish National Struggle, Armistice of Mudanya²⁹ was signed on 11th October 1922 and the Turkish military victory was verified.³⁰ The Turkish victory was a significant incident and celebrated with various events in Soviet Russia. There were several telegraphs from Soviet Russia to Turkish officials congratulating the victory.³¹

The battles were virtually over. However, it officially ended with the Treaty of Lausanne which was signed on 23rd July 1923. During the negotiations at Lausanne, Soviet Russia was supporting Turkey for its independence but more importantly trying to decide the faith of Turkish straits.³² Shortly before the conference at Lausanne, Lenin had made a speech indicating that straits should be enclosed to all battleships both at war and peace.³³

After gaining its full independence except the matter of straits at Lausanne, the Turkish government declared that the new regime of the state would be republic on 29th October 1923. That news excited the Soviet Union since they were aiming to convert Turkey into a communist state.³⁴

Vladimir Lenin passed away on 21st January 1924. After Lenin's death, the relations were held under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and Joseph Stalin.

²⁹ States that all Greek troops must evacuate Western Anatolia.

³⁰ Tansel, S., *From Mudros to Mudanya*, 1991

³¹ Perinçek, M.B., *Ataturk's Negotiations with Soviets*, 2005

³² Sonyel, S., *Turkish War of Independence and Foreign Politics*, 1995

³³ Perinçek, M.B., *Ataturk's Negotiations with Soviets*, 2005

³⁴ Burcak, R.S., *The Negotiations of Moscow and Impacts on Our Foreign Policy*, Ankara, 1983, p.9.

After World War I, The Soviet Russia was suspecting that the rest of Europe was beginning to involve in an alliance against Russia. First there were binary agreements signed between France, England, Belgium, Poland, Czechoslovakia and United States.³⁵ Moreover, The Soviet Union was not invited to the Locarno Conference on 15th October 1925 where the topic was Germany. Germany was trying to lighten the orders signed in the Treaty of Versailles and that was causing dissatisfaction in Europe. At the conference, negotiations were held and Germany's western border was secured with the Treaty of Locarno. However, the faith of Germany's eastern border³⁶ was remaining uncertain.

Meanwhile in Turkey, the newly formed republican government was struggling against economic and social problems, the conflict of Mosul³⁷, the population change between Turkey and Greece and rebellions in the Southeastern Anatolia.

The uneasy conditions for both sides made these two countries to get closer. As an important event, "Turkish-Soviet Non-Aggression and Friendship Agreement" was signed on 17th December 1925.³⁸ This agreement should be considered an answer to the Treaty of Locarno.³⁹ With respect to this agreement; two sides would not attack each other, if one side would be attacked by a third country, the other would remain neutral, both sides would not make political arrangements against each other and they would consult and inform each other before they sign an agreement with a third country.⁴⁰

³⁵ Ucanol, R., *Political History*, p.522

³⁶ The eastern borders of Germany are the borders which it share with Soviet Union

³⁷ The conflict between Turkey and England about the area of Mosul which is rich in petrol resources.

³⁸ Gasratyan, M.A., *SSSR iTurtsiya 1917-1979* , p.64

³⁹ Inonu, I.(Turkish Prime Minister 1924-1950), *Memories*, V.2 , p.242

⁴⁰ Gurun, K., *Turkish-Soviet Relations*, p.117

c) 1926-1930 Era

Relations in 1926-1930 period is mostly based on international alliances and negotiations with other European countries.

Turkish government was trying to resolve the undefined issues that could not be determined at Lausanne. First, the issue of unclear border of Syria was solved by the signature of Treaty of Ankara between Turkey and France on 26th May 1926. Then, between Turkey and England, "The Borders Agreement"⁴¹ was signed on 5th June 1926. That agreement was regulating the border between Turkey and English Mosul and the rights of both sides over the natural resources of the region.

On 9th September 1926, Turkish Minister of Agriculture, Sabri Toprak and his committee had signed a border agreement with Soviet Russia at Moscow. With that agreement, Turkish-Soviet border had gained its final and absolute status.⁴²

On 12th May 1927, English Police raided the office of ARCOS, an English-Russian corporation, in London and captured top secret documents. After the investigations, that company was found out to be a Soviet spy network. Subsequently, England renounced all political relations with Russia on 24th May 1927. After these events, Turkish Minister of Foreign Relations, Tevfik Rüştü Aras told to Russian media that the raid on ARCOS was a conspiracy.⁴³

The League of Nations had organized a disarmament conference in Geneva. The Soviet Union was invited whereas Turkey was not at first place. With the request of Soviet Union,

⁴¹ Soysal, I., *The Political Agreements of Turkey*, V.1 , p.313

⁴² Belen, F., *Military, Political and Social Aspects of Turkish War of Independence*, p.306

⁴³ Gurun, K., *Turkish-Soviet Relations*, p.122

Turkey was also invited to the conference on 28th March 1928. Throughout the negotiations, Turkish officials had supported the Soviet thesis for full disarmament.⁴⁴

On 27th August 1928, The Kellogg Pact was signed in Paris between United States, France, England, Germany, Italy, Japan, Poland, Czechoslovakia and Belgium.⁴⁵ This pact which was named after the US minister of foreign relations, Frank Kellogg⁴⁶, was a broad non-aggression pact. Turkey joined the pact on 8th September 1928. Soviet Union had also joined the pact because of the phobia of western countries forming an alliance against Russia.

Soviet Russia had formed a new pact in order to fasten the execution of the Kellogg Pact in eastern European countries. As a result, Protocol of Litvinof was signed on 9th February 1929 between Soviet Russia, Poland, Romania, Latvia and Estonia. Turkey agreed to join the Litvinof Pact on 1st April 1929 with the request of Soviet Union.⁴⁷

On 17th October 1929, Turkey and Russia had an agreement about the disarmament of Black Sea and on 17th December 1929, the non-aggression pact between Turkey and Soviet Union was updated and extended for two years. These two show that the good relations between two countries were still in existence and will tend to maintain its state. In this period, both the Turkish and Russian Media were complimenting the good relations between Turkey and Russia.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ *Документы внешней политики (Foreign Policy Documents) USSR*. Moscow, 1959, V.11, p.136

⁴⁵ Ucanol, R., *Political History*, p.528

⁴⁶ Frank Kellogg won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1929 for founding the Kellogg Pact.

⁴⁷ *The History of Turkish Republic*, V.2, p.324

⁴⁸ *Hakimiyet-i Milliye*, 15.12.1929 ; *Pravda*, 19.12.1929

IV. Military Relations

Turkish and Russian armies fought on opposite sides in World War I. However, Russia had to resign due to the October Revolution in 1917. After the regime change in Russia, the hostile attitude towards Turkey gave its place to a more amicable one.

The very first committee which was sent to Moscow by Mustafa Kemal to pursue the negotiations, had demanded military aid from Bolshevik government to support the ongoing Turkish Move of Independence. The committees determined to provide the military forwarding via marine routes due to the danger in land roads. That forwarding started on 22nd September 1920.⁴⁹ Soviet Russia also helped with the maintenance of Turkish gunboats and donated two gunboats of their own.⁵⁰ On 26th November 1921, Soviet Russia started to support Turkish Army with raw materials for military equipment.⁵¹

The Soviet ambassador of Turkey sent a report to Moscow on 1st March 1922. In his report, Ambassador Aralov had stated to Soviet officials that Soviet Union should not expect a hostile military assault from Turkey and also the independence movement in Anatolia must be succeed since Turkey and Russia have common benefits on that matter.

On 24th March 1922, Ambassador Aralov and some Soviet military officials visited the battlefield and executed several investigations. The committee had distributed some small gifts to the Turkish soldiers in order to increase their morale.

⁴⁹ Isin, M. , *The Marine Front of War of Independence*, Ankara, 1946, pg. 36

⁵⁰ Isin, M. , *The Marine Front of War of Independence*, Ankara, 1946, pg. 120

⁵¹ Perincek, M. , *Ataturk's Negotiations with Soviets*, pg. 118

The military equipment that Soviet Union had donated to Turkey:⁵²

- 39.000 rifles
- 327 machine guns
- 54 cannons
- 63.000.000 cartridges
- 147.000 cannonballs
- 10.000.000 gold rubles for military expenses

With the military aid from Soviet Russia, the Turkish army had gained a significant power up. It is very important since the Greek troops were always being reinforced by England and other imperialist countries in Europe. Thus, the aid of Russia had provided Turkish army equal standards with its enemy.



Front of Izmir Offensive where the sitting soldier in the photo is a Soviet official with Red Army uniform

⁵² The Russian Embassy of Turkey, < http://www.turkey.mid.ru/20-30gg_t.html > , 21.12.2012

V. Cultural Relations

On 21st November 1921, Turkish offices demanded to send some Turkish students to Moscow for educational purposes. The Soviet government had accepted the offer and reserved a quota of hundred people for Turkish students at Russian institutions.⁵³

On 1st February 1924, the first left-winged magazine in Turkey named “Painted Moon” started its publication. Shortly after, the magazine started to be the headquarters of Turkish socialists. Forced to shut down in 1930, Painted Moon occupies an important role in Turk-Soviet cultural relations by supporting Soviet Russia even against Turkey at some points.



A copy of Painted Moon. Headline: “We are destroying the idols.”

The Turkish and Soviet national football teams played a friendly match on 15th May 1925 in Ankara. Soviet Union had won the match with the score of 2-1. Some members of the Turkish cabinet and Russian embassy officials had watched the game.⁵⁴

⁵³ Moiseyev, Rozaliyev, *Turkish-Soviet History*, p.50

⁵⁴ *USSR and TURKEY*, p.88

In November 1925, a Turkish scientific committee, headed by Fuat Koprulu, had attended the 200th anniversary celebrations of University of Moscow. The committee had also executed some scientific activities.⁵⁵

In 1928, a sculpture of the former ambassador Aralov was put in the Republic Memorial in Taksim Square. Aralov was a well liked person in Turkey because of his good relations with Atatürk and also his efforts in the arrival of Soviet aid to Turkey during the Turkish War of Independence.⁵⁶

All these cultural relations can be seen as the natural consequence of the political relations. For these two countries, Turkey and Soviet Union, which were concerned in such an intense political relation; it was inevitable for the cultural relations to occur. These cultural relations are important since they contributed to the duration and permanence of the Turk-Soviet relations.

⁵⁵ Perincek, M. , *Ataturk's Negotiations with Soviets*, pg. 210

⁵⁶ Bugay, B., *The Monumental Turk-Soviet Friendship at Taksim*, Istanbul, 2000, p.8

Conclusion

The 1920-1930 period relations can be considered beneficial and mutual for both sides. The newly formed governments on both countries were alone at international arena and strongly needed allies. Turkey and Russia provided each other the need of an ally, both political and military against their common enemy Imperialism and imperial forces.

Russia helped Turkey with military resources and economic base for military expanses. That was a vital aid for Turkey since the country was just out of a lost world war and fighting another one against strong countries. It is still a doubt: Without the military aid of Russia, would the result of Turkish War of Independence still be the same?

The main reason behind Russia's willingness to attain Turkey as an ally was to convert the republican regime of Turkey to a communist one while Turkish government had used this as a trump card to gain Soviet Union's political and military support.

While the good relations were improving gradually, a cultural contact was inevitable. So the ongoing interaction between two countries has leaped to the intellectual field. This intellectual field concerned education, science and art.

To conclude with, 1920's era can be considered as the climax of Turkish-Soviet relations at all aspects. Leaders from both sides strived a lot to improve the relations. However, the good relations could not be permanent. After living its golden age in 1920's, Turkish-Soviet relations started to get worse and after World War II, these two countries swapped from friends to enemies, mostly due to Stalin's aggressive policy.

Adds

Le 11 Septembre 1920
Am
30

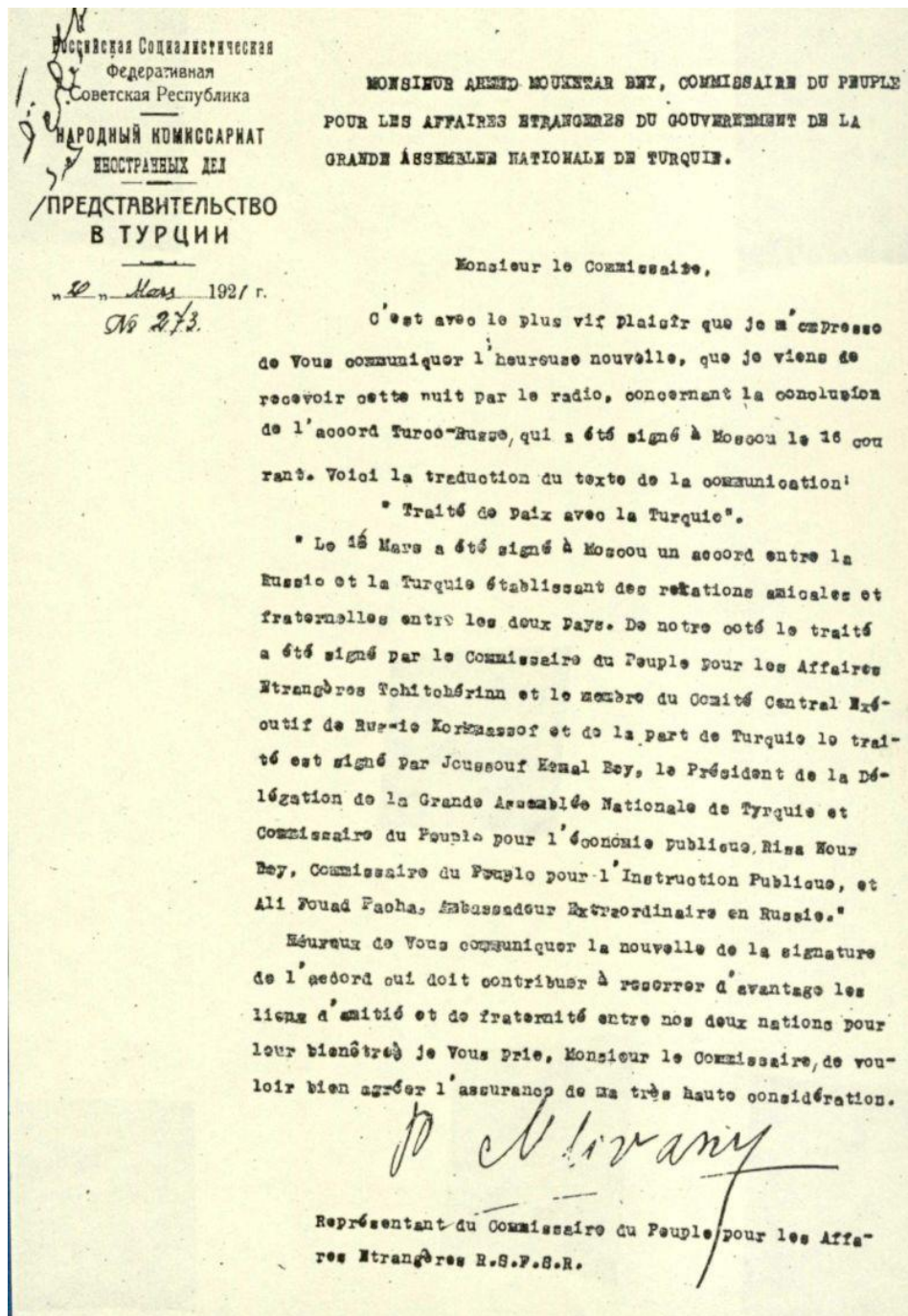
Camarade Kara Khan,

Par la présente je vous présente le
camarade Midhat, porteur d'une lettre
au camarade Lénine de la part des émigrés
en Turquie de la Ciscaucasie, qui attend
depuis quinze jours ici. Je vous serais bien
obligé si comme je vous avais prié ainsi que
le camarade Tchichérine si vous pourriez
lui procurer une audience de la part du
camarade Lénine soit pour la remise de
la lettre susmentionnée soit pour lui sou-
mettre verbalement les doléances de ces vic-
times du tsarisme ainsi que l'espoir qu'ils
fondent sur l'équité et la justice de la
grande République Soviétique russe.

Veuillez agréer, camarade Kara Khan,
l'assurance de ma haute considération.

S. Bekir

A letter from Sami Bekir to Soviet Ministry of Foreign Relations, requesting the land road
between Turkey and Russia to be opened. 11th September 1920.



The document that confirms the signature of the Treaty of Moscow, sent from Soviet
official in Ankara B. Mdivani to Turkish Ministry of Foreign Relations. 20th May 1921.

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