

## **The Importance of Turkish-Soviet Relations during the Early Republican Period in Turkey**

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Preprint

## **Abstract**

During the World War I, the Tsarist regime was overthrown by the socialist revolution in 1917. In recent times, a national struggle process has also been experienced by Türkiye. In this period, Turkish-Soviet relations started in the axis of anti-imperialist struggle. During the days of the Turkish War of Independence, the close political relations established between the Ankara Government and Soviet Russia against the Western states, from the proclamation of the Republic in 1923 to the World War II. It continued until the end of World War II in 1945. Turkish-Soviet relations in the early Republican period witnessed many important events. The development of political, economic and military ties between the two countries is an important issue in terms of international relations. In this context, the Early Republican period is particularly important in terms of Turkish-Soviet relations. In this direction this study aimed to examine Turkish-Soviet relations in the early Republican period. The study concluded that Turkish-Soviet relations started amicably in the early Republican period and later became tense. The problems such as trust, ideological differences and borders between the two countries have been effective in the development of relations. However, Turkish-Soviet relations have always had the potential for cooperation and dialogue.

**Keywords:** Early republican period; turkish soviet relations; turkish war of independence.

## **INTRODUCTION**

During World War I, the fall of the Tsarist regime in 1917 due to the socialist revolution had a significant impact on the political history of the world, as well as on Turkey. The consequences of this event for the Turkish War of Independence have a historical significance. The Turkish-Soviet relations established in the early stages of the National Struggle laid the foundation for close political and economic relations that lasted for approximately 20 years (Özder, 2017).

In 1917, the Soviet Government, which came to power in Russia with the Bolshevik Revolution, called on the Muslim peoples to support the Bolshevik regime and rise up against imperialism in a manifesto published on December 3, 1917, addressed to Russian and the Eastern Muslims (Oran, 2009). With this manifesto, the Bolsheviks also declared that they did not recognize the treaties of the Tsarist Russia that divided the Ottoman Empire and that they were in favor of Istanbul remaining in the hands of the Turks. Three days after the opening of the Grand National Assembly in Ankara, on April 26, 1920, Mustafa Kemal proposed the establishment of a military and political alliance between Ankara and Moscow to fight against imperialism together in a letter he sent to Lenin. With the Soviet Union's response to this letter on June 3, 1920, diplomatic relations were established between the two governments (Balçioğlu, 2005).

With the Moscow Treaty signed between Turkey and the Soviet Union on March 16, 1921, the Soviets declared the Sevres Treaty invalid, recognized the Ankara Government, and left Kars, Ardahan, and Artvin to Turkey. The Soviets declared that they would not recognize any treaty that the Grand National Assembly did not recognize. With this treaty, the Turkish-Russian border was drawn, and the abolition of capitulations was accepted by the Soviets. The Soviets would provide Turkey with enough weapons and ammunition for two divisions of troops, as well as ten million gold rubles in aid. In addition to this, the Soviets also accepted that the straits would remain under Turkish control and that the status of the straits would be determined by the coastal states of the Black Sea. On October 13, 1921, the Kars Treaty was signed between Turkey, and the Soviet Socialist Republics of Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Armenia. With this treaty, the aforementioned states approved the borders established in the Moscow Treaty (Balçioğlu, 2005).

On December 17, 1925, Turkey and the Soviet Union signed a "Treaty of Friendship and Non-Aggression." According to the treaty, which would be valid for three years, if one of the parties were subjected to a military action by one or several states, the other would remain neutral and refrain from attacking each other, and they would not participate in alliances or political agreements against each other. As a result of the developing relations between Turkey and the Soviet Union, this agreement was extended until November 7, 1945 (Acun, 2015).

The relations, which had developed positively until 1936, started to weaken after the Montreux Conference convened this year and Turkey's cooperation with England in the following years. The basis for this improvement was Turkey's support of the current political status quo, along with France and England, and its opposition to "revisionist" states such as Germany and Italy, which sought to redraw the map of Europe. The Soviet Union's joining the anti-revisionist group also facilitated Turkey's rapprochement with Western countries (Zürcher, 2006).

The close relations between Turkey and the Soviet Union during the 1920s and 1930s began to deteriorate with the signing of the "German-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact" in 1939 and Turkey's subsequent neutrality in the war. At the end of World War II, the Soviet Union announced that it would not renew the Turkish-Soviet Friendship Treaty, which had expired in 1945, and shortly thereafter Soviet Foreign Minister Molotov spoke of certain conditions that needed to be met before a new friendship treaty could be signed. These conditions included the return of Kars and Ardahan, which had been under Russian occupation between 1878 and 1918, to the Soviet Union, and the establishment of a joint Turkish-Russian defense force to protect the Black Sea in the Istanbul and Çanakkale Straits region. When the Soviet Union officially notified Turkey of these demands on August 8, 1946, Turkey rejected them with the support of the United States (Zürcher, 2006). Stalin's aggressive policies towards Turkey led to Turkey's general rapprochement with the West and specifically with the United States (Ahmad, 2007).

As can be seen, Turkish-Soviet relations have witnessed many important events during the Early Republican period. The development of political, economic, and military ties between the two countries is an important issue in terms of international relations. In this context, the Early Republican period is particularly important in terms of Turkish-Soviet

relations. The period of Turkey's declaration of independence and the establishment of the Soviet Union coincides with recent dates. The relations between these dates have played an important role in determining the future direction of the relationship between the two countries. In this study, it is aimed to examine how Turkish-Soviet relations developed during the Early Republican period, which factors influenced these relations, and the consequences of these relations.

## **RESULTS**

Russia has always been an important country in political and geopolitical terms, and its relations with Turkey have always been at the forefront for Turkey. During the Ottoman period, it seems that the first relations were established in the 15th century. Russians living distributed under different principalities, in the 15th century with the establishment of the Principality of Moscow, they united around a central government. Prince of Moscow III. Ivan sent ambassadors to Istanbul around this time, and Russian-Ottoman commercial relations began. While Russia securely cultivated stronger in the following centuries, the Ottoman Empire entered a period of decline. The Ottoman Empire, which was caught between the West and expanding Russia in the 18th and 19th centuries, faced Russia during World War I at the beginning of the 20th century and suffered significant losses. However, towards the end of the war, in 1917, the socialist revolution took place in Russia and a new order was established.

The Bolsheviks, who came to power, declared that the agreements made during the Tsarist period were invalid. As a result of the subsequent negotiations, it was decided to conclude all mutual hostile actions between the two states and to determine the border line. During this period, the Ottoman Empire signed the Armistice of Mudros on October 30, 1918 and withdrew from World War I. With this treaty, the Ottoman Empire largely lost its control over its lands, and these lands It started to come under the domination of the occupying countries. The resistance against the occupying forces in Anatolia would soon result in the establishment of the Republic of Turkey under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal. It turned into a struggle for liberation. Although the fight in Anatolia was against the Greek military forces, the main enemy was the imperialist countries led by England.

British western capitalist as the strongest representative of the imperialist countries, it was also the most important enemy of the Soviet Union, which was established instead of the

Tsarist regime in Russia. In one country in the first years of the revolution the foundations of positive relations have not yet been established in the Republic of Turkey with the correspondence that started between Lenin, who struggled to keep socialism alive, and Mustafa Kemal, who led the war of independence in Anatolia. It was thrown away before it was installed.

According to Lenin, although Mustafa Kemal did not aim for a socialist order, he should be supported for his struggle for independence against the imperialist countries. Both during the establishment of the Republic and aftermath, the Soviet Union and the Ankara Government developed stable and warm relations and provided the necessary support in both political and economic matters. Relations, which followed a positive development until the end of the 1930s, came to a halt for a short period of time, but were revived from the early 1960s.

## **DISCUSSION**

During the interwar period, Turkey continued to protect the Soviet Union as the main element of its foreign policy. Since 1933, Turkish-Soviet relations began to decline from their peak. This decline became especially evident after the signing of the Montreux Straits Convention and As World War II approached, it became impossible to hide. Nevertheless, the Turkish Government, acting from its own national interests, felt the need to continue its policy of friendship and cooperation with the Soviet Union. After signing the Non-Aggression Pact with Germany on August 23, 1939, the Soviet Union made unacceptable offers about the Straits to Saraçoğlu, who went to Moscow to sign a cooperation pact. These negotiations were the beginning of disputes between Turkey and the Soviet Union. In the requests made by the Soviet Russian Government to Turkey in October 1939, the common defense of the Straits was stated as the defense of the states that do not have a coastline on the Black Sea.

Turkey allowed combat ships to pass through the Straits to the Black Sea Binding demands and obligations were found, such as giving assurances to Soviet Russia that it would not give up. These Soviet proposals, which were incompatible with Turkey's territorial integrity and self-governing rights, were rejected with full clarity. These demands and attitude of the Soviets had a deep impact on Turkish foreign policy and were one of the most important factors in Turkey's preference for the West over Moscow.

Thus, the Turkish-Soviet friendship period, which started with the Turkish War of Independence ended because of the changes in the Soviet Foreign Policy. Hereafter, while the concern to stay out of war played a decisive role in Turkish foreign policy under the extraordinary conditions of the Second World War, the balanced policy followed by Turkey between the two wars has also ended.

## **CONCLUSION**

In this study, it is aimed to examine how Turkish-Soviet relations developed during the Early Republican period, which factors influenced these relations, and the consequences of these relations. The prominent issues in terms of Turkish-Soviet relations in this period are summarized below.

In 1917, following the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, the Soviet Government issued a manifesto on December 3 calling on Muslim peoples to support their regime and rise against imperialism. The manifesto also declared the Bolsheviks' opposition to the treaties of Tsarist Russia that had divided the Ottoman Empire and supported the idea of Istanbul remaining under Turkish control. On April 26, 1920, Mustafa Kemal proposed a military and political alliance between Ankara and Moscow to fight against imperialism together in a letter addressed to Lenin. This letter led to the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two governments when the Soviet Union responded on June 3, 1920.

The Moscow Treaty, signed on March 16, 1921, between Turkey and the Soviet Union, declared the Sevres Treaty null and void, recognized the Ankara Government, and ceded Kars, Ardahan, and Artvin to Turkey. The treaty also established the Turkish-Russian border, abolished capitulations, and provided Turkey with weapons, ammunition, and financial aid. The straits were to remain under Turkish control, and the coastal states of the Black Sea would determine their status. On October 13, 1921, the Kars Treaty was signed by Turkey and the Soviet Socialist Republics of Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Armenia, which confirmed the borders established by the Moscow Treaty.

In 1925, Turkey and the Soviet Union signed a treaty called the "Treaty of Friendship and Non-Aggression," which stated that the two countries would remain neutral in the event of a military attack by one or more states against either of them. They also agreed not to participate in any alliances or political agreements against each other. The treaty was

initially valid for three years but was later extended until November 7, 1945, due to the improving relationship between the two nations.

After experiencing positive developments until 1936, the relationship between Turkey and the Soviet Union began to deteriorate due to Turkey's cooperation with England following the Montreux Conference of that year. The improvement in relations was based on Turkey's support of the existing political status quo, along with France and England, and its opposition to "revisionist" countries like Germany and Italy, which aimed to redraw Europe's map. The Soviet Union's joining the anti-revisionist group also helped Turkey to get closer to Western countries.

During the 1920s and 1930s, Turkey and the Soviet Union had a close relationship, but this began to deteriorate after the German-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact in 1939 and Turkey's neutrality in World War II. After the war, the Soviet Union declined to renew the Turkish-Soviet Friendship Treaty and set conditions for a new treaty, including the return of Kars and Ardahan to the Soviet Union and the establishment of a joint Turkish-Russian defense force to protect the Black Sea in the Istanbul and Çanakkale Straits region. Turkey rejected these demands, leading to a general rapprochement with the West and the United States due to Stalin's aggressive policies towards Turkey.

In conclusion, it can be stated that the Turkish-Soviet relations in the Early Republican Turkey period were characterized by important developments that had important consequences for both countries. Despite their ideological disparities, Turkey and the Soviet Union were cognizant of the mutual advantages of collaboration, and their interactions were shaped by a multifaceted intermingling of strategic, economic, and geopolitical dynamics. It can be asserted that the inception of diplomatic ties between the two nations in 1920 acted as a catalyst towards strengthened cooperation, although this liaison was put to test by a series of events such as the Soviet incursion of Azerbaijan and the Turkish War of Independence. Nevertheless, both states realized the importance of collaboration, and the Treaty of Moscow signed in 1925 marked a watershed moment in their relationship, as it paved the way for the growth of economic cooperation and political discussion.

The 1930s were characterized by a period of vigorous economic and political cooperation between Turkey and the Soviet Union. Both countries endeavored to foster industrial



growth and enhance their military capacity. The Soviet Union provided significant technical and financial aid to Turkey to establish its own industrial base, whereas Turkey, in turn, provided the Soviet Union with access to its strategic position in the Middle East and the Balkans.

However, the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact in 1939 marked a watershed moment in Turkish-Soviet relations, placing Turkey in a delicate situation between the two major global powers. Throughout World War II, Turkey adopted a policy of neutrality to avoid being drawn into the conflict. The Soviet Union's persistent pressure to join the war effort tested Turkey's resolve, but it managed to maintain its independence and territorial integrity and emerged from the war as a key player in the emerging global order.

The post-war period saw a new phase in Turkish-Soviet relations, as both countries recognized the need for cooperation in building a new world order based on the principles of peace and cooperation.

Preprint

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NOTE: This preprint reports new research that has not been certified by peer review and should not be used as established information without consulting multiple experts in the field.

Preprint

## Tables and Figures

<b>Member</b>	<b>Date of Entry</b>	<b>Notice of Withdrawal (Effective After Two Years)</b>
Afghanistan	September 1934	
Albania	December 1920	annexed by Italy, April 1939
Argentina	*	
Australia	*	
Austria	December 1920	annexed by Germany, March 1938
Belgium	*	
Bolivia	*	
Brazil	*	June 1926
Bulgaria	December 1920	
Canada	*	
Chile	*	
China	*	
Colombia	*	
Costa Rica	December 1920	
Cuba	*	
Czechoslovakia	*	
Denmark	*	
Dominican Republic	September 1924	
Ecuador	September 1934	
Egypt	May 1937	
El Salvador	*	August 1937
Estonia	September 1921	

Ethiopia	September 1923	
Finland	December 1920	
France	*	
Germany	September 1926	October 1933
Greece	*	
Guatemala	*	May 1936
Haiti	*	April 1942
Honduras	*	July 1936
Hungary	September 1922	April 1939
India	*	
Iraq	October 1932	
Ireland	September 1923	
Italy	*	December 1937
Japan	*	March 1933
Latvia	September 1921	
Liberia	*	
Lithuania	September 1921	
Luxembourg	December 1920	
Mexico	September 1931	
Netherlands	*	
New Zealand	*	
Nicaragua	*	June 1936
Norway	*	
Panama	*	
Paraguay	*	February 1935
Persia	*	
Peru	*	April 1939

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Poland	*	
Portugal	*	
Romania	*	July 1940
Siam	*	
Spain	*	May 1939
Sweden	*	
Switzerland	*	
Turkey		July 1932
Union of South Africa	*	
U.S.S.R.	*	**
United Kingdom	*	
Uruguay	*	
Venezuela		September 1934
Yugoslavia	*	

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*Source.* Encyclopædia Britannica, inc. (n.d.). Members of the League of Nations. Encyclopædia Britannica. Retrieved April 6, 2023, from <https://www.britannica.com/topic/League-of-Nations/Members-of-the-League-of-Nations>

*Note.* \*Original member (January 10, 1920).

\*\*Declared to be no longer a member of the League by council resolution December 14, 1939.