

## THE QUESTION OF RE- DEMARCATION OF THE SOVIET-TURKISH BORDER IN USSR-TURKEY RELATIONS (1960s-1970s)

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### **Abstract**

After the Second World War, the possibility of changing the situation of the Soviet-Turkish borders set by the Treaty of Kars at any moment created an atmosphere of fear in Turkey. Although later, in 1953, the USSR officially renounced the territorial claims presented to Turkey in 1945, the issue of reaffirmation of the Kars Treaty has become one of the most sensitive topics for the Turkish side in Soviet-Turkish relations. After the restoration of independence of Armenia in 1991, it was moved to the agenda of Armenian-Turkish relations, so the study of the topic has relevance in our days.

**Keywords:** *USSR, Soviet Armenia, Turkey, Treaty of Kars, Soviet-Turkish relations, Soviet-Turkish border, territorial integrity*

The tension observed in the Turkish-American relations related to the Cyprus Question in the 1960s creates favorable conditions for the warming of ties between the USSR and Turkey. The high-level mutual visits that took place during the 1960s and 1970s, during which the main goal of official Ankara was to receive assurances from Moscow regarding the preservation of Turkey's territorial integrity, create a neighborly atmosphere. In other words, Turkey wanted to reaffirm the Soviet-Turkish border set by the 1921 Kars Treaty. This was due to the fact that after the Second World War, the Soviet Union, taking into consideration Turkey's open support to Nazi Germany, as well as referring to the need to restore historical justice, presented Turkey with territorial claims related to the regime of the Black Sea Straits and the return of two provinces captured from Soviet Armenia - Kars and Ardahan. In other words, in 1945 the USSR officially questioned the legitimacy of the Kars Treaty. And although the Western powers later defended Turkey's territorial integrity, and the USSR officially renounced its territorial claims after J. Stalin's death, the issue of the legitimacy of the Kars Treaty is still a topic of the official Ankara agenda. The Turkish authorities needed assurances from the USSR that the issue would not be raised again. Anxiety increased even more when events dedicated to the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Armenian Genocide were being held in Diaspora and Soviet Armenia. They found a wide response in the Turkish press, which forced the President of Turkey, Cemal Gürsel, to issue a statement on April 23, 1965 saying: "The press should not deepen and present the Armenian problems as they are. They should know that there were no Armenian massacres...".<sup>1</sup> Despite such

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<sup>1</sup> Koldaş 2003: 81.

statements, the Turkish leadership did not hide their concern and at every meeting demanded the Soviet authorities to reaffirm the Soviet-Turkish border set by the Kars Treaty.

Especially during the visit of A. Kosygin, Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the USSR, to Turkey on December 26, 1966, Turkish Prime Minister S. Demirel did not miss a single moment and demanded from the USSR that the relations between the two countries develop “on the basis of mutual respect for territorial integrity”.<sup>2</sup>

However, in September 1967, Turkish Prime Minister S. Demirel makes an official visit to Moscow and Baku, receiving a warm welcome<sup>3</sup>. In the subsequent years, 1968-1969, high-level Soviet-Turkish meetings, the issue of re-demarcating the border was mainly discussed. The Turkish press also published different news on those occasions, which strained the situation in the country. For example, on June 29, 1969, the “Sabah” newspaper wrote, “The Russians have started demanding territories from the Turks. At the beginning of 1969, the first attempt was made. Declaring that the Turkish-Russian border is not justly adjusted, therefore a new border should be re-demarcated.”<sup>4</sup>

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkey officially denies these rumors, stating that they do not correspond to reality. The statement says: “Russia has not applied to Turkey with the demand of correcting the borders. The Turkish and Russian border was adjusted by the 1921 Moscow and Kars treaties.<sup>5</sup> Meanwhile, on September 23, 1965, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the USSR sent a letter to the Turkish Embassy in Moscow in order to conduct redemarcation, to which the official Ankara gave a positive response.

Turkey proposed to start the negotiations in Ankara and discuss the following issues:

1. drawing up maps of border regions,
2. determination of the period for starting technical works,
3. determination of the composition of the group performing technical works,
4. determination of the border sections that should be reflected on the border maps,
5. aerial photography, determination of technical parts,
6. after the preparation of border maps, the formation of a special commission, which was supposed to deal with the settlement of border disputes.<sup>6</sup>

As a result, on February 28, 1967 and July 5, 1968, new agreements were signed between the two countries regarding the correction of the borders, according to which the parties will adjust the Soviet-Turkish border, pointing out that the geographical maps

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<sup>2</sup> Altan 1986: 129.

<sup>3</sup> Milliyet 30. 09. 1967: 1.

<sup>4</sup> Sabah 29. VII.1969.

<sup>5</sup> Oran 2012: 779.

<sup>6</sup> NAA, fund 326, inv. 5, list 3, sheets 67-68.

prepared in 1926 do not correspond to the technical conditions of those days.<sup>7</sup> For this purpose, a Turkish-Soviet mixed commission was formed, which started its activities in Moscow on January 20, 1969, and continued in Ankara from February 24 to March 28, 1970. The composition of the delegations was the same. During the negotiations, the parties agree and sign a number of documents on re-demarcation.<sup>8</sup>

It should be noted that during the period of 1969-1970, rumors were spread in Yerevan that together with the Armenian demands, the issue of Ani is again on the agenda. Soviet Armenia offered to replace the Turkish-populated region of Amasia of the Armenian SSR with Ani, which was rejected by the Turkish authorities.<sup>9</sup> I would like to mention that this information has not been confirmed, but the reality is that the issue of demand has always been on the agenda of the Armenian society.

The ongoing processes had a historical-political context. As we mentioned above, the Turkish side needed the USSR to once again recognize the Kars Treaty and declare the inviolability of the Soviet-Turkish border. Both the Turkish authorities and the press have repeatedly spoken about it, stating that the wording about the inviolability of the borders in official documents is “the expectation of the Turkish society”.<sup>10</sup> One of the vivid evidences of this is the joint statement published at the end of the visit of Turkish President Cevdet Suna to Moscow in 1969, that both sides accept the border set by the Kars Treaty.<sup>11</sup> And on August 17, 1972, official Moscow and Ankara issued another statement, where they characterized the Soviet-Turkish state border as a “line of peace and cooperation”.<sup>12</sup>

In addition, analyzing the article published by Ilter Türkmen, the Turkish ambassador to the USSR, on the occasion of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the Republic of Turkey and Soviet-Turkish relations, we arrive to the conclusion that the latter puts forward a number of principles, thus trying to flatter the Soviet authorities and achieve to sign a new political document in favor of Turkey. Those principles are:

1. Soviet-Turkish relations are accelerating on the basis of the traditions of peace, friendship and good fellowship established by Lenin and Atatürk.
2. Mutual respect for each other's dominance and equality.
3. Respect for territorial integrity and integrity of borders.
4. The two states do not interfere in each other's internal affairs.
5. Respect for the signed pacts.<sup>13</sup>

As a result, Turkey achieves its goal and on December 29, 1973, the solemn ceremony of signing the documents on the re-demarcating of the Soviet-Turkish border and the adoption of the joint Communiqué took place in the building of the Ministry of

<sup>7</sup> NAA, fund 326, inv. 5, list 3, sheets 69-70.

<sup>8</sup> Hasratyan, Moiseev 1981: 213.

<sup>9</sup> Msrlean 2012: 178.

<sup>10</sup> Altan 1986: 131.

<sup>11</sup> Harris 1972: 31.

<sup>12</sup> Özbay 2013: 17.

<sup>13</sup> Türkmen 1973: 2.

Foreign Affairs of Turkey in Ankara. In the Soviet-Turkish joint document, at the request of the Turkish side and owing to persistent efforts, the following phrases were included: “By re-demarcating the Soviet-Turkish border determined by the Moscow and Kars Treaties of 1921”, “the Parties are convinced that the Protocols of historical significance signed as a result of this joint work, documenting the purpose of maintaining peace and security between the Republic of Turkey and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics fix the invariable limits ...”.<sup>14</sup>

The signed documents entered into force on April 29, 1975 after the exchange of documents in Moscow.<sup>15</sup>

At the same time, we should note that in the 1960s and 1970s, Soviet-Turkish relations entered an active phase of economic cooperation. In 1972, the Turkish press was discussing the five big Soviet-Turkish economic programs, the 363 million dollars loan and the fact that in recent years the turnover between the two countries has reached 90 million dollars.<sup>16</sup> In 1974 the USSR, unlike the USA, refrained from condemning Turkey’s military action in Cyprus, which contributed to further deepening of Soviet-Turkish economic relations. In addition to economic ties, attempts were made to accelerate political relations. In 1978, two documents were signed between the two countries.<sup>17</sup> The first was related to the development of Soviet-Turkish economic relations, the second was a political agreement on the principles of joint cooperation and neighborliness.

Despite all this, the relations between the two countries in the 1970s, as a rule, did not get warmer, but more resembled a temporary truce, which sooner or later had to turn into a phase of tough confrontation. Turkey not only remained loyal to its Western allies, but also performed quite well the role of defender of NATO’s southeastern front. Moreover, by resorting to propaganda and diplomatic games, it assured the world community that its eastern borders were threatened and received material and military support from the West in defense of those borders. Although starting in 1963, the USSR maintained and affirmed through agreements, communiques and other official documents that the Soviet Union respected the territorial integrity of Turkey and had no territorial ambitions.

The Turkish side achieved its goal: the issue became a topic of discussion in the Western press, showing the world community that its country’s borders were threatened. On October 13, 1977, the British periodical “The Times” published an article entitled “Forgotten land that could become NATO’s battlefield.” The latter addressed the concerns related to the eastern border of Turkey. The columnist writes that the NATO command in Izmir is of the opinion that after the Second World War, the USSR failed to implement the plans related to its southern borders. After the 1973 Arab-Israeli war,

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<sup>14</sup> Harutyunyan 2008: 179.

<sup>15</sup> Koritsky 2005: 66.

<sup>16</sup> Hale 2003: 236.

<sup>17</sup> Hale 2003: 247.

such a situation was created in the Middle East that it was not excluded that the Soviet army will make an unexpected attack on the eastern borders of Turkey.<sup>18</sup>

Thus, border concerns did not become an obstacle for the development of relations with the USSR for Turkey. Turkey's foreign policy of this period can be described as purely realistic, because Turkey was able to solve a number of problems in this way: Cyprus, border, economic, etc., while remaining loyal to its Western allies. As for the issue of the Kars Treaty, after the collapse of the USSR in 1991 and the independence of the Republic of Armenia, a part of the USSR-Turkey border established by that document also became de jure the Armenian-Turkish border. Both the legal-political and technical issues related to that border continued in a new way, which collided with Armenia-Turkey interstate issues and acquired a different character.

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<sup>18</sup> Hale 2003: 247.