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THE 1921 TREATY OF KARS: DETERMINATION OF NAKHCHIVAN'S STATUS AND TURKEY'S POSITION

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The Nakhchivan issue held strategic significance in Turkey's South Caucasus policy during the conference held in the city of Kars in September - October 1921. Through the Treaty of Kars, Nakhchivan was granted autonomous status under the Azerbaijan SSR, with its borders clearly defined and legally recognized at the international level. The Turkish delegation also succeeded in protecting the rights of the Turkic-Muslim population in the region and in curbing Armenia's expansionist ambitions. The separate ratification of the treaty by each republic was essential for ensuring the stability of Nakhchivan's status and for strengthening Turkey's strategic position in the South Caucasus.

Keywords: Kars Treaty, Nakhchivan, Turkey, South Caucasus policy, Azerbaijan SSR, Armenian SSR, status, borders, diplomacy.

Introduction. In early 1921, the agreements reached in Moscow between the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR) and the Government of the Turkish Grand National Assembly (TGNA) helped shape the new political landscape of the South Caucasus. In this new phase, the TGNA government considered it essential to regulate diplomatic and legal relations with the republics of Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia, which had been Sovietized by Bolshevik emissaries sent by Russia. This was because Turkey's position in the Caucasus, particularly in Azerbaijan, depended on how these relations were managed. The issue of Nakhchivan, in particular, held strategic importance for Turkey. Nakhchivan was of vital strategic significance in terms of protecting the Turkic-Muslim population, maintaining a territorial link between Turkey and Azerbaijan, and limiting Armenia's expansionist ambitions. What were Turkey's interests regarding Nakhchivan during the Kars Conference, and how were these interests reflected in the treaty signed as a result of the negotiations? To understand this, it is necessary to conduct a comparative analysis of the points discussed during the conference and those reflected in the signed document.

Main section. Following the agreement reached and the treaty signed in March 1921 in Moscow between representatives of the RSFSR and the Government of the Turkish Grand National Assembly (TGNA), it became essential to regulate relations with the South Caucasus republics, which had been occupied and Sovietized by the Bolsheviks. In addition, the fate of several strategically important regions in the area needed to be clarified. Diplomatic and legal confirmation was required regarding Batumi between Turkey and the Georgian SSR, Ardahan between Turkey and the Armenian SSR, and Nakhchivan between Turkey and the Azerbaijan SSR [2, p.433].

After the signing of the Moscow Treaty, there was a need to revise and clarify the borders of Nakhchivan. On April 19, 1921, discussions were held in Moscow between the Turkish delegation and Mirza Davud Huseynov, the People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs of the Azerbaijan SSR, along with Behbud Agha Shahtahtinsky, the Commissar for Justice. The representatives of the Azerbaijan SSR agreed to continue negotiations on the issues requiring clarification, with the intention of continuing these talks in Kars.

Nevertheless, the Turkish delegation considered it necessary to travel from Moscow to Baku to further clarify the matter with the Azerbaijani authorities. In Baku, they met with Nariman Narimanov, Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars of the Azerbaijan SSR. During this meeting, the necessity of signing a treaty between the Azerbaijan SSR and Mustafa Kemal's Turkey was once

again emphasized, along with the importance of addressing the Nakhchivan issue and other matters directly affecting the fate of both nations [2, p. 433].

As a result of the negotiations, it was decided -with the consent of Soviet Russia- to hold a conference in the city of Kars involving Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia, and Turkey**.** Turkey had already appointed its delegation by August. However, the cautious policy pursued by the Soviet government toward Turkey for a period led to the postponement of the conference. This stance shifted following Turkey's victory in the Battle of Sakarya, after which preparations for the Kars Conference commenced.

From September 26 to October 13, 1921, negotiations were held in Kars between the delegation of the Government of the Turkish Grand National Assembly (TGNA) and the three South Caucasus republics. The RSFSR also participated in the conference as an observer. Aware that the main contours of the new South Caucasus policy would be defined at the Kars Conference, the TGNA government sent a delegation composed of individuals well-versed in the region and in Russia's Caucasus policy.

The Turkish delegation included Kazım Karabekir Pasha, a deputy of the Grand National Assembly from Edirne; Veli (Saltıkgil), a deputy from Burdur; Ahmed Muhtar (Çilli), who had previously served as a deputy from Trabzon in the Fourth Ottoman Parliament and later became the chief engineer for reconnaissance and construction of the Eastern Anatolian Railways; and Memduh Şevket Esendal, Turkey's plenipotentiary representative in Azerbaijan [10, p. 421].

The selection of this delegation was by no means coincidental. Kazım Karabekir Pasha had rendered significant service in the Caucasus both as a commander in the Ottoman army and in the newly established Turkish army. He was remembered by the people of the region -especially in Nakhchivan and Azerbaijan- as a liberating figure. Moreover, Karabekir had established solid relations with the Bolsheviks.

Veli Saltıkgil, a graduate of the Paris Law School, possessed substantial experience in international law and was well-versed in the language of diplomatic and legal documents. It is no coincidence that he later served as an advisor to the Turkish delegation at the Lausanne Peace Conference. Ahmed Muhtar Çilli had deep knowledge of Anatolia's transportation and railway systems and was also familiar with the strategic importance of the border regions between the South Caucasus and the new Turkish state in terms of transportation and rail infrastructure.

In addition to the main delegates, several advisors were also included in the delegation. These included Edib Bey (Mehmet Edip Dinç), a deputy from Batumi in the First TGNA; Müveffeq Bey, introduced as the general inspector of the Reji administration; Kadri Bey, chief of staff of the Eastern Front; and Majors Veysel Bey and Talat Bey from the General Staff. According to Kazım Karabekir Pasha's writings, Kadri Bey was later unable to participate in the conference due to his involvement in other military matters [6, p. 1112]. The delegation's secretaries were Zühtü Bey and Osman Bey from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and their assistants were individuals named Nazmi and Selahaddin Bey.

During the negotiations, the Turkish delegation tried to resolve a wide range of issues in order to regulate relations with the South Caucasian Republics. It was clear from the course of the conference that the Turkish delegation was trying to reduce the influence of Bolshevik Russia on the South Caucasian Republics as much as possible. However, of course, while doing so, it was also trying to maintain relations with the RSFSR in the geopolitical situation that had arisen.

At the opening of the conference, speeches were delivered by Kazım Karabekir Pasha on behalf of the Turkish delegation, Yakov Ganetsky on behalf of Bolshevik Russia, and Askanaz Mravyan on behalf of the Sovietized republics of the South Caucasus. The Kars negotiations took place in an extremely tense and principled atmosphere, with the parties presenting various arguments, proposals, and alternative approaches. The Turkish delegation considered it appropriate to sign separate agreements with each of the South Caucasus republics. In contrast, the RSFSR representative, Yakov Ganetsky, insisted on the signing of a single, unified treaty involving all parties, justifying his position with various arguments. However, the underlying goal of his insistence was to enable Soviet Russia to gain full control over the foreign policy of the South Caucasus republics, draw them into its political orbit, and eventually transform the region into a unified Soviet space [5, p. 217].

During the Kars negotiations, the issue of Nakhchivan emerged as one of the strategically significant topics in Turkey's South Caucasus policy. Alongside Batumi, disagreements over Nakhchivan also persisted. After the Turkish delegation requested information about Nakhchivan's current status and the situation in the region, Behbud Agha Shahtahtinsky, the representative of the Azerbaijan SSR, provided clarification. He stated that an autonomous people's soviet republic had been declared in the Nakhchivan district under the protection of Azerbaijan. Its status was similar to that of autonomous regions within Russia. The newly declared republic had its own Council of People's Commissars. Shahtahtinsky also emphasized that, given Nakhchivan's distance from Baku, the status granted to the region was, in practice, more extensive than typical autonomy. Nakhchivan's financial support was provided by Azerbaijan, and although decisions adopted in the Azerbaijan SSR were implemented in Nakhchivan, this process was gradual in nature [6, p. 1121].

The Turkish delegates demanded a more precise definition of the principles of autonomy for Nakhchivan and insisted that these principles be coordinated with the South Caucasus republics [8, p.141].

For Turkey, Nakhchivan held strategic significance not only as a recognized part of Azerbaijani territory, but also in terms of protecting the rights of the Turkic-Muslim population and limiting Armenia's expansionist ambitions in the region**.** This approach aimed to support Azerbaijan's future political stability while also preserving Turkey's influence in the South Caucasus.

On October 13, 1921, the Treaty of Kars was signed between Azerbaijan, Georgia, Armenia, and Turkey, with the RSFSR participating as an observer. The treaty consisted of 20 articles and 3 annexes. According to Article V, the governments of Turkey, Soviet Azerbaijan, and Soviet Armenia agreed that the Nakhchivan region would be granted autonomous status under the protectorate of Azerbaijan. This status was defined by the borders outlined in Annex III. Annex III precisely delineated Nakhchivan's borders: the boundary line began at the village of Urmiya and extended to the Arazdayan station (retained by the Armenian SSR), then continued toward Mount Dashburun, passing through the eastern part of Dashburun and the southern point of "Rodn." (Spring), crossing the Hell Valley River to the Bagirsak Mountains. From there, it followed the administrative borders of the former Iravan district and the Sharur-Daralayaz counties, passing through elevation point 6629 to Mount Gomurlu, then to Mount Sayat at elevation 3080, through the village of Gurdqulaq and Mount Qamasur, and finally through elevations 8022 and Kukudag (1028), ending at the eastern administrative border of the former Nakhchivan county [10, p. 423].

Following the signing of the treaty, one of the most debated issues in Turkey was its ratification. In particular, the delay in ratification by the Sovietized South Caucasus republics caused concern for Turkish diplomacy. This concern was not merely procedural - it was tied to regional power dynamics and territorial claims. Turkey's primary worry centered on Armenia's stance. Some Armenian figures, dissatisfied with the treaty's outcomes, continued to make unfounded territorial claims against Azerbaijan and other neighbors [8, p. 154]. At the same time, Bolshevik Russia declared that it had created a new political order in the South Caucasus, which posed additional risks for Turkey regarding the positions of its regional allies. Moreover, members of the Turkish Grand National Assembly (TGNA) and its Foreign Relations Committee questioned the reasons behind the delay in ratification, linking it to the formation of the Transcaucasian Federation and the Union Council.

For Turkey, the Nakhchivan issue held particular strategic importance. The separate ratification of the Treaty of Kars by the Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Armenia SSRs was considered essential to Turkey's interests. Ratification solely by the Union Council could have strengthened the propaganda efforts of Armenian figures - especially the Dashnaks - and influenced the resolution of the "Armenian question" in Western countries. Therefore, individual ratification by each republic was seen by Turkey as a key condition for preserving the legal and political status of Nakhchivan.

There were no issues with ratification by Azerbaijan and Georgia, but Turkey was especially concerned about Armenia's position. As a result, diplomatic coordination between Turkey and Azerbaijan was strengthened through the efforts of I. Abilov, the representative of the Azerbaijan SSR in Ankara, and steps were taken to expedite the ratification process [9, pp. 118–119]. This diplomatic

activity contributed to the international legal recognition of Nakhchivan's status and reinforced Turkey's strategic position in the South Caucasus.

Although the delay in the ratification of the Treaty of Kars caused serious concern for Turkey, the issue was resolved through regional political and diplomatic mechanisms - particularly with the active involvement of the diplomatic representatives of the Azerbaijan SSR. The separate ratification of the treaty by each republic not only ensured the recognition of Nakhchivan's status under international law but also safeguarded Turkey's strategic interests in its South Caucasus policy. The Treaty of Kars was ratified by the legislative bodies of the signatory countries between March and June 1922, and officially entered into force on September 11, 1922 [1, p. 43].

The Turkish historian İbrahim Ethem Atnur, in evaluating the significance of the treaty in the context of Turkey's Caucasus policy and its approach to Nakhchivan, writes: "One of the important aspects of the treaty is that Armenia recognized Nakhchivan as Azerbaijani territory. … According to the Moscow and Kars treaties, Turkey's designation as a party to Nakhchivan's status demonstrated that there was nothing left for Armenians to pursue" [2, p. 435].

According to Musa Gasimli, the approach to the Nakhchivan issue in the Treaty of Kars reflected the core principles of Turkey's South Caucasus policy. He believes that Turkey established a legal and political foundation for fostering good neighborly relations and constructive cooperation in the region, while also securing the safety of its borders. The Nakhchivan issue was resolved in accordance with historical and ethno-cultural realities, effectively thwarting Armenia's attempts to seize this historic Azerbaijani territory. Musa Gasimli views this approach as a key element of Turkey's strategy to both safeguard Azerbaijan's territorial integrity and ensure balance and stability in the South Caucasus [8, p. 146].

The historian Arzu Abdullayev emphasizes that the Treaty of Kars is significant for fully resolving the issues of Nakhchivan's status and subordination through international agreements. He notes that, since the Treaty of Kars was signed for an indefinite period, none of the signatory states can unilaterally annul it. This further enhances its value as an international legal document [1, p. 43].

The analysis leads to the conclusion that the Treaty signed on October 13, 1921, enabled Turkey to further consolidate the agreement reached during the Moscow negotiations regarding the status of Nakhchivan. While the Moscow Treaty was a bilateral agreement, the participation of the Azerbaijan SSR, Georgian SSR, and Armenian SSR in the Treaty of Kars elevated the matter to an internationally recognized level. Although the Soviet republics of the South Caucasus were under the influence of the RSFSR, they were formally considered independent entities. This factor enhanced the significance of the Treaty of Kars in comparison to the Moscow Treaty. Turkish diplomacy also succeeded in ensuring that the borders of Nakhchivan were definitively established in the Kars Treaty, and Turkey became one of the guarantors of those borders. Until now, historiography has primarily focused on the confirmation of Nakhchivan's autonomous status and its borders in the Treaty of Kars. However, our analysis shows that the treaty also recognized Turkey as one of the guarantor states of the borders defined at that time. This is explicitly stated in the treaty**:** "The Government of Turkey and the Soviet Governments of Armenia and Azerbaijan agree that the Nakhchivan region, within the borders defined in Annex III of this treaty, shall constitute an autonomous territory under the protection of Azerbaijan" [7, p. 413; 4, p. 178].

Thus, Turkey later held the right to protest the transfer of territories that were gradually separated from Nakhchivan and given to the Armenian SSR, particularly during the years 1929–1930, and to demand the restoration of those borders. It was precisely with this in mind that the national leader Heydar Aliyev once referred to the Treaty of Kars as an irreplaceable document for ensuring "the territorial integrity of Nakhchivan" [3, p. 249].

Conclusion. The Treaty of Kars represented a strategic achievement of Turkish diplomacy regarding the Nakhchivan issue. Through the treaty, Nakhchivan was granted autonomous status under the protection of the Azerbaijan SSR, its borders were precisely defined, and its legal status was recognized at the international level. Furthermore, the treaty later gave Turkey the right to raise its voice against Armenia's aggressive interventions threatening the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan in the direction of Nakhchivan, and to object to border-related issues. In terms of its historical and legal

significance, the Treaty of Kars laid the foundations not only for securing Nakhchivan's status, but also for preserving Turkey's strategic position in South Caucasus policy for the future.

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1921-Cİ İL QARS DANIŞIQLARI: NAXÇIVANIN STATUSUNUN MÜƏYYƏNLƏŞMƏSİ VƏ TÜRKİYƏNİN MÖVQEYİ

1921-ci ilin sentyabr-oktyabr aylarında Qars şəhərində keçirilən konfrans zamanı Naxçıvan məsələsi Türkiyənin Cənubi Qafqaz siyasətində strateji önəm kəsb etmişdir. Qars müqaviləsi ilə Naxçıvanın Azərbaycan SSR-in himayəsi altında muxtar ərazi statusu əldə etməsi, sərhədlərinin dəqiq müəyyənləşdirilməsi və hüquqi baxımdan beynəlxalq səviyyədə təsdiqlənməsi təmin olunmuşdur. Türkiyə nümayəndə heyəti həmçinin regiondakı türk-müsəlman əhalinin hüquqlarının qorunmasına və Ermənistanın genişlənmə cəhdlərinin məhdudlaşdırılmasına nail olmuşdur. Müqavilənin hər bir respublika tərəfindən ayrıca ratifikasiyası Naxçıvanın statusunun sabitliyi və Türkiyənin Cənubi Qafqazdakı strateji mövqeyinin güclənməsi baxımından vacib olmuşdur.

Açar sözlər: Qars müqaviləsi, Naxçıvan, Türkiyə, Cənubi Qafqaz siyasəti, Azərbaycan SSR, Ermənistan SSR, status, sərhədlər, diplomatiya.

МУНЕВВАР СУЛЕЙМАНОВА
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КАРССКИЕ ПЕРЕГОВОРЫ 1921 ГОДА: ОПРЕДЕЛЕНИЕ СТАТУСА НАХЧЫВАНА И ПОЗИЦИЯ ТУРЦИИ

Во время конференции, проходившей в городе Карс в сентябре - октябре 1921 года, вопрос о Нахчыване приобрёл стратегическое значение в политике Турции на Южном Кавказе. Карсский договор обеспечил получение Нахчываном статуса автономной территории под

покровительством Азербайджанской ССР, точное определение его границ и международное юридическое признание. Турецкая делегация также добилась защиты прав тюрко-мусульманского населения региона и ограничения экспансионистских стремлений Армении. Отдельная ратификация договора каждой республикой имела важное значение для стабильности статуса Нахчывана и укрепления стратегических позиций Турции на Южном Кавказе.

Ключевые слова: Карсский договор, Нахчыван, Турция, политика на Южном Кавказе, Азербайджанская ССР, Армянская ССР, статус, границы, дипломатия.

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