



SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES

The Question of the Straits and the Soviet Foreign Policy

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Introduction

The Bosphorus Straits, that thin line of water that connects the Black Sea with the Mediterranean, has always been of the uttermost importance for the riparian states of the Black Sea, especially for Russia and Turkey. Their economical significance was known since the Greek colonization in the antiquity and, throughout the centuries, the two states fought about control over them. For Russia, the Straits mean an exit to the Mediterranean Sea and at the same time they are the point from where a hostile fleet might attack its Southern shores. For Turkey control over the Straits means control of who gets in and out the Black Sea and therefore they mean important power in diplomatic relations.

In the beginning of the Ottoman occupation of the Straits nobody had the right to pass through them. That was “the ancient rule of the Ottoman Empire”. Since the Russian Empire came in the picture, however, and especially since it managed to obtain the northern shores of the Black Sea, treaties started to be signed, regarding the Straits. From the Treaty of *Kucuk Kaynarca* in the 18th century to the *Montreux Convention Regarding the Regime of the Straits* of 1936, which still applies to our days and according to which Turkey is in sole charge of who passes through the Straits, several treaties have been signed and significant changes have been made to the Straits regime. The *Treaty of Sevres* and the *Treaty of Lausanne* are some of the most important parts of the picture.

These treaties were not signed easily and without conflicts of interests. Great disputes emerged not only between Russia and Turkey but between the Great Powers too, since it was not only the riparian states that had interest in the regime of the Straits. Great Britain, for example, would like to assure that the Russian fleet would not be able to enter the Mediterranean, which was a British area of influence and interest, and in the same time, they would be able to send their ships inside the Black Sea since it was a route for her interests in Asia. The USA, although they were not that active in the matters of the Straits until after the Second World War, they would still be examining closely the developments. Their interests laid on the fact that the Straits should be peaceful and open to everyone, in order for them to conduct business with the European states.

Since the Montreux Convention was signed, 77 years before, the USSR tried to gain control of the Straits by putting pressure on Turkey. The most notable event was the Potsdam Conference of 1945, during which the leaders of the three Great Powers were deciding the future of the Dardanelles. No agreement was reached though, and the constant pressure of the Soviet Union to Turkey in order to take what she wanted, resulted in Turkey eventually turning her head towards the West and accepting aid from the US, alongside with Greece. The two countries would both join the NATO a few years later, in 1952.

The story of the Dardanelles Straits is a very important one, since it played a major role in the external policies of Russia, and consequently the Soviet Union, and the Ottoman Empire, and subsequently Turkey, on one hand and the Great Powers on the other. However, many more countries played a role or were affected by these policies. Greece is one such example, since she was forced to demilitarize the islands of Lemnos and Samothrace under the Treaty of Lausanne which called for a demilitarized zone around the Straits, only to remilitarize them after the Montreux Convention. Moreover, Greece was an object of Soviet pressure after the Second World War, alongside Turkey, which led to the Truman doctrine and the Marshall plan. The constant Soviet efforts to take control of the Straits by establishing military bases near the Dardanelles are what made the USA to take action and proceed with offering financial aid to European countries in order to minimize the Soviet influence. Therefore, the matters of the Straits affected a large part of Europe and not only the riparian states. It is a topic with many aspects and layers that need to be examined.

In this paper I will try to examine the impact that the Straits policies had to the world, primarily for the Black Sea countries and secondly for the rest of Europe. I will try to create the full picture of how these disputes and agreements influenced the course of events of modern Black Sea and European history and show that the Soviet desires for control over the Straits are just a continuation of the goals of the Russian Empire. This would point out that the Straits regime is not only an important matter of modern history but has been a significant part of history for centuries.

The Geography and Importance of the Straits

In the 5th century BC, Herodotus described the Straits and the Black Sea in the following way:

*“No sea can equal the Euxine Sea; it is 1380 miles long, and 410 wide in its widest part. Its mouth is half a mile wide, and the length of the Bosphorus, the narrow strait which leads to it... is nearly fifteen miles. The Bosphorus joins the Propontis, which is about sixty miles wide and a hundred and seventy long, and runs into the Hellespont, a narrow strait nearly fifty miles long but less than one mile wide. The Hellespont leads into the broad sea we call the Aegean”*¹.

This description remains accurate until our days. The Straits are characterized by their length and narrowness. There are strong currents in the area, which make it very difficult to sail across the Straits and sailing ships often had to wait for months before the desired Southeastern wind that would carry them into the Black Sea would appear².

The southwestern entrance of the Dardanelles is between Cape Helles, at the edge of Gallipoli Peninsula, is about 60 miles long and has a tongue-like shape. The southeastern coast extends along the mainland of Asia Minor. The Dardanelles are, more or less, 36 miles long. 15 miles away from the entrance are the Narrows, whose width is between one and two miles long and the passage continues with an average width of two miles until the Sea of Marmara. They took their name from the ancient city Dardania who, in turn, took its name from Dardanos, the founder of Troy³.

The Sea of Marmara connects the Dardanelles with the Bosphorus. Its length is 150 miles and at its widest part is 40 miles long. Its average depth is 493 meters and its maximum depth is 1225 meters, so it is proper for a large ship to sail into. The Bosphorus connects the Sea of Marmara with the Black Sea. The length of the Bosphorus is 17 miles and has an average width of one to four-and-a-half miles. Its morphology makes it look more like a river than a sea and that's why it does not lack of strategic importance⁴. Its depth does not exceed 27 meters. There are no islands in the Black Sea, close to Bosphorus, while in the Aegean side there are the two islands called Imvros and

¹ Herodotus, Histories, Book 5, p. 270

² Vali 1972 p. 5

³ Nikolaou 1995 p. 25

⁴ Ibid p. 26

Tenedos. The geographic position of the Straits makes them significant not only because they separate and connect the European and Asian side of Turkey, but also because they are the bridge that connects Europe and Asia and a great route of traffic and exchange between the two continents⁵.

The Dardanelles and the Bosphorus are both privileged to be suited for defense in case of a surface attack. Their narrow entrance allows them to defend with an advantage against warships. The natural heights on both sides allowed the building of military fortifications. Amphibious attacks against the Straits were considered very risky and almost impossible, in case of meeting an organized defense of course. Actually, no naval force accomplished to force into the Dardanelles or the Bosphorus when found resistance. The Straits can also be used as traps, into which hostile ships can be lurked and then not be allowed to exit. It is well established that in order for one force to capture the Straits, it must have naval superiority. The Straits however are exposed from the ground, especially from the side of European Istanbul and Eastern Thrace where the low lands are no obstacle to a possible hostile attack. This little corner of the Balkans forms just a mere 3 per cent of Turkey's surface but also contains 8 per cent of the country's total population, due to the highly populated metropolis of Istanbul⁶. Of course, the Straits area is exposed in a case of an attack from above and efficient defense could be accomplished only by having an adequate and even stronger air force.

The geographical position and morphology of the Straits makes them significant for political and economic reasons. The Straits are the only passage and link from the Black Sea to the Mediterranean. The Trojan War can be regarded as the first known hostile episode for the rule of the Straits, and the desire to open the Black Sea market to the ancient Greeks while the argonautic myth displays that there have been European interests in the Eastern shores of the Black Sea since antiquity⁷. The transfer of the Byzantine capital to Constantinople and the constant attacks by the Ottomans, Franks and Venetians shows the exact same thing, the trying of the Empire and its enemies to rule the Straits⁸. In the 20th century the Straits were in the boundaries of a sole country and this made them easier to defend. There have been strong armies and naval forces that completely failed to seize and occupy the Straits. What made the Straits so

⁵ Vali 1972 p. 8

⁶ Ibid p. 9

⁷ Nikolaou 1995 p. 35

⁸ Ibid p. 35

important to the diplomacy of the first decades of the 20th century was the position of the Soviet Union, which occupied the largest part of the shores of the Black Sea.

The territory of the Soviet Union used to stretch as far as the deep ends of Asia and the limits of its south side were the Caspian Sea and the Black Sea. Although Russia has ports in all the shore-sides of its territory, the most important ports were those in the Black Sea, like Nikolayev, Rostov, Batumi, Sevastopol and Kerson, since her northern ports were frozen during the winter⁹. At the Lausanne Conference it was stated by the Russian delegation that 70 per cent of the Russian grain was exported through the Straits. By 1919, 88 per cent of Russian oil, 93 per cent of manganese, 61 per cent of iron and 54 per cent of all Russian exports by sea had to enter the Mediterranean by the Straits¹⁰. It is not only the economic factor, however, that is important to the Soviets. The protection of the Straits is also a matter of security for them. The fact that they are the only exit for their fleet to the Mediterranean Sea and, at the same time, they only way through which their southern coasts could be exposed to attack, made them of paramount importance to Soviet security. Since Tsarist Russia existed, she always looked for free passage of merchant or war ships and even tried to take control of the Straits, while when being on the defensive side, she always objected to the entrance of warships into the Black Sea which she considered it to be a closed Sea¹¹.

The Straits are very important, if not even more, to the security of Turkey too. In fact they are the greatest factor of national interest and security for Turkey. For five centuries the Ottoman Empire and, consequently, Turkey based their existence on the Straits, having the “ancient rule” which meant that the Straits were closed to all warships at all times. The Straits are on the exact spot of Turkey’s link with the West, in the Straits region lies the most important city and harbor, the end of the Orient Express and its industrial core¹². The magnitude of the fight between Turkey and Russia for the control of the Straits can be easily understood by the large number of Russo-Turk wars over the centuries¹³.

Not only Turkey and the Soviet Union had interests there, though. By 1923, only 20 per cent of ships passing through the Straits belonged to Black Sea countries and the

⁹ Picak 2011 p. 173

¹⁰ Bilsel 1947 p. 731

¹¹ Vali 1972 p. 12

¹² Ibid p. 12

¹³ Nikolaou 1995 p. 39

other 80 per cent belonged to other countries. The states with shores along the Black Sea are four, while those with coasts on the Mediterranean are eleven and all of them have interests in the Straits. Of course, one cannot forget the most important factor in world politics of the times, the Great Powers. Great Britain and, secondary, the USA both had significant interests in the area and never hesitated to intervene¹⁴.

¹⁴ Bilsel 1947 p. 733



*The Turkish Straits*¹⁵

¹⁵ Map taken from Nikolaou 1995 p. 24

The Straits during the Ottoman Empire (From 1453 to 1914)

We shall examine the history of the Straits from the point that they came under Ottoman occupation, however the importance of the city of Constantinople and the Straits during the era of the Byzantine Empire is well known.

The Ottomans came to rule both the sides of the Dardanelles already by 1356 and almost a hundred years later, in 1453 and the occupation of Constantinople they came to rule both banks of the Bosphorus too. By the year 1475, the whole coastline of the Black Sea was under Ottoman occupation, making it an “Ottoman Lake”. In 1479 they obtained the islands Thasos, Samothrace, Imbros and Tenedos. The whole Black Sea system, with the Black Sea, the Sea of Azov and the Straits was therefore an internal sea and the Ottomans kept it close to foreign ships at all times¹⁶. Since the Ottomans had in their position the whole coastline, it was impossible for any other country to persuade them to open the Straits if they did not approve of such a move. Nobody was allowed to pass through the Straits and merchant vessels of friendly states which had treaties with the Sublime Porte were allowed to sail only until the port of Constantinople¹⁷.

About three centuries passed with the Straits being completely closed to everyone and Russia succeeded in obtaining the Northern shores of the Black Sea. The moment that Russia made her presence strong in the Black Sea region, was the moment that the Straits question started being raised¹⁸. Peter the Great was the first to, unsuccessfully, try and take under Russian domination the northern shore of the Black Sea. He did manage, however to annex the Sea of Azov into the Russian Empire and create a fleet. Eventually it was Catherine the Great with the war of 1768 – 74 and the treaty of Kucuk Kaynarca in 1774, which questioned the Ottoman monopoly of the Straits. The Ottomans had to let the Crimea peninsula to be independent (although it later came into Russian hands) and allow the Russian ships to, not only be able to enter the Black Sea, but also exit from it. Russia, moreover, stood up as the “protector” of Christians in Moldavia, got the right to build a church in Constantinople, place ambassadors in the places she wanted and was allowed to trade throughout the Empire¹⁹. Russia pressed the

¹⁶ Dontas 1987 p. 17

¹⁷ Vali 1972 p. 18

¹⁸ Kucherov 1949 p. 205

¹⁹ Nikolaou 1995 p. 46

Ottomans to open the Straits for her merchant ships²⁰ and once this was achieved, it was a matter of time for the Straits to be open to merchant vessels of all states. This happened in the following years but the Straits were still closed to warships of all kind. These developments would mark the beginning of decline of the Ottoman Empire.

Throughout the years, the Tsarist Russia would constantly make efforts to obtain the control of the Straits via an imperialistic policy and would even try to destroy the Ottoman Empire. This was because they sought to bring the city of Constantinople back to Christianity, have an exit for warships and merchant ships to the Mediterranean and to secure her defense against any attacks to her industrial and agricultural region to the South²¹. Although, however, the Russian objective was the control of the Straits and the partition of the Ottoman Empire, there were times that it seemed more favorable to let the Ottomans exist weakly instead of letting them fall into the hands of another Great Power.

During the late 18th and early 19th century, the Ottomans signed three treaties with the Russians and one with Britain, treaties that had to do with the Straits and the passage of warships. In 1809 was signed the treaty with the British, according to which, the Straits would be closed to all foreign warships in time of peace and the British would support the Ottomans in case of a power trying to act the opposite. This was the “ancient rule of the Ottoman Empire”. In 1798, 1805 and 1833 Treaties of Alliance were signed with the Russians.

Napoleon’s expedition in Egypt during 1798, whose goal was the disturbance of the British trade in the Orient²², led to the creation of an alliance between Great Britain, Russia and the Ottomans. It was during that year, that for the first time Russian ships sailed through the Dardanelles and entered the Aegean Sea. They ended the French rule of the Dodecanese islands and were welcomed as saviors by the locals. According to the first two articles of this treaty, the Russian ships had the right to sail into and out of the Black Sea, until the war with France was over²³. Being present in the Mediterranean, the Russians managed in 1805 to sign another treaty with the Ottomans which opted for freedom of passage for Russian ships, bilateral protection of the Straits and closing of

²⁰ Grosek 2004 p. 74

²¹ Vali 1972 pp. 19 - 20

²² Watson 2003 p. 13

²³ Grosek 2004 p. 88

the Straits to the ships of non-riparian states²⁴. The Russian Empire was taking advantage of the military conflicts of the time and was taking control of the Straits and an exit to the Mediterranean.

However, after 1806 and the dissolution of the German Empire, Sultan Selim 3rd, infringed the treaty of 1805, an event which was causing problems to the Russian replenishment in the Dodecanese. By June of 1807 and the Russian defeat in Friedland, the Russians were forced out of the Mediterranean. In 1829, the Treaty of Adrianople was signed according to which, except for the creation of new states, the Straits were open to merchant ships and the Russian trade was secured²⁵. A new crisis in the Ottoman grounds in 1833 gave the Russians the opportunity to intervene one more time. The Egyptian Muhammad Ali, invaded Asia Minor and was about to attack Constantinople when the Russians saw their chance for obtaining further privileges at the Straits²⁶. The Russian fleet sailed to Constantinople and the other powers realized the danger of the presence of Russian ships there. They forced the Ottomans and the Egyptians to reach a settlement but, before the Russians retreated, they signed the Treaty of Hunkar Iskelesi in 1833. According to this treaty, the Ottomans had to close the Straits to all foreign warships, except for Russian, in exchange for Russian protection²⁷.

After the treaty of Hunkar Iskelesi in 1833, the Ottomans, without a doubt, placed themselves under the protective wing of Russia which, of course, was very pleased with the outcome. The Empire had started to fall and it was now on the hands of the Great Powers to decide whether it would continue to exist or if it had to fall apart. This treaty gave the right to Russia to place and maintain a number of military troops within Ottoman ground and, therefore, be able to arrive quickly on spot if there were any new developments and solve the “Eastern Question” (which is the problem of who should have the control of the Straits) in her own advantage. The Russians managed to take and maintain a very privileged position in the matters of the Straits during the wars of the past three decades.

²⁴ Sfetas 2009 pp. 100 - 101

²⁵ Ibid pp. 103 - 105

²⁶ Esmer 1947 p. 292

²⁷ Dontas 1987 p. 20

This did not last for too long though. On the 13th of July 1841 was signed the London Agreement which canceled the Treaty of Hunkar Iskelesi²⁸. A new crisis in Egypt in 1839 made it necessary for the matter of the Straits to be debated in an international conference. The Ottomans were crushed by the army of Muhammad Ali and Sultan Mahmud 2nd died. The British saw a chance to step in as protectors of the Ottoman Empire and managed to call for a conference in London between the Great Powers. Russia was at first hesitant to participate, since it thought that such a move did not have the purpose of strengthening the Ottomans but weakening the Russian position on the Straits. When they were informed however that the Conference would take place anyway, whether they would participate or not, they decided to participate and support their thesis that the Straits should be closed to all warships at all times²⁹. According to the London Agreement, which had four points, the Ottomans would keep the Straits closed to all foreign warships and all states had to support this decision. The signatories were Great Britain, France, Austria, Prussia, Russia and the Ottoman Empire. The Russians had managed three times to open the Straits for their ships, all in cases of emergency for the Ottoman Empire, and all those times, after the emergency stopped existing, the “ancient rule” was restored³⁰. The Russians consented to the London agreement in hopes of reaching an agreement with Great Britain about the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire and they were once again losing their privileges at the Straits³¹.

In 1856 the Paris Agreement was signed, which opted for the neutralization of the Black Sea, as it was decided in the Vienna Conference that took place one year earlier. The Crimean War and the defeat of the Russians by the British and the French brought the Russians in a difficult position. They had to choose one out of three choices: to limit their naval power inside the Black Sea, retrieve the military fortifications and shipbuilding yards or accept the fact that foreign forces would be able to pass through the Straits³². They decided to propose the second option, having in mind that the Sultan would be allowed to close the Straits in case of war or in case the Empire felt threatened by the war of other powers. However, the Russian proposal was rejected, the Black Sea was neutralized and the Russians had to demilitarize the northern coast (except for six

²⁸ Hurewitz 1972 Vol. I p. 123

²⁹ Bilsel 1947 p. 735

³⁰ Vali 1972 p. 22

³¹ Sfetas 2009 p. 113

³² Bilsel 1947 p. 735

small steam vessels and two guardships³³). Russia now had lost everything that she managed to obtain in the previous decades and was, once again, cut from the access to the Straits.

Russia, since it had sunk the Ottoman fleet during the naval combat of Sinope in 1853, and turned the Black Sea into a Russian Lake, was not very pleased with this neutralization since it was imposing a restriction to her sovereignty³⁴. During the Franco-Prussian war of 1870, Russia found the chance to denounce the Agreement unilaterally. While Germany supported Russia and France could not take action, Great Britain and Austria-Hungary opposed to the Russian move³⁵. These developments led to the London Conference of 1871 which took place after an initiative of Bismarck who wanted to reward Russia for maintaining a neutral position during the Franco-Prussian war³⁶. Although the Conference stressed that a unilateral denouncement of a treaty is not acceptable, they abolished the neutralization of the Black Sea due to changed conditions since it was signed. The Ottomans were allowed to open the Straits to the warships of friendly powers during peace time. One more war between Russia and the Turks took place in 1877 – 1878 and the victorious Russians managed to open the Straits for their warships with the Treaty of San Stefano, however this was quickly revised by the Treaty of Berlin (1878). The situation before the First World War was that the Straits were open to all merchant vessels at all times and closed to all warships during peace time. During a war, in which the Ottomans participated, there was no provision governing the Straits³⁷.

In the first years of the 20th century, however, the scenery changed drastically. This started in the end of the previous century. The British began to wonder whether it was profitable to continue and support the Ottoman Empire. France, on the other hand, after she lost the war of 1870 - 71 to Germany, was open to an alliance with Russia. The British also saw a threat in the rise of Germany and the German fleet, while at the same time the Ottoman Empire was getting military and financial help from Germany.

The Russian desire for control over the Straits grew stronger after their defeat in their war with Japan in 1905. Their lack of capability to send their Black Sea ships in the Far

³³ Dennis 1922 p. 727

³⁴ Maity 1954 p. 138

³⁵ Howard 1962 p. 14

³⁶ Sfetas 2009 p. 117

³⁷ Bilsel 1947 p. 736

East made the necessity for obtaining the Straits greater³⁸. The Russians tried to obtain control of the Straits in 1908, by taking advantage of the opportunities created by the matter of Bosnia-Herzegovina. During a meeting in the Moravian castle Buchlov, Isvolsky, the Russian Foreign Minister, asked his Austrian counterpart, Aehrenthal for a modification in the status of the Straits, in exchange for approval of the annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina by Austria-Hungary³⁹.

Sir F. Bertie informed Sir Edward Grey: *He (Isvolsky) stated that in the course of an interview which he had with Baron d'Aehrenthal on the 15th of September that Minister had said that certain circumstances might cause Austria to annex Bosnia and Herzegovina... As far as Russia was concerned she had no territorial ambitions on Turkey and she only desired the maintenance of the status quo and the integrity of the Ottoman Empire; but in the event of a revision she would require a modification, in a sense favorable to herself and the other riverain states of the Black Sea, of the stipulations concerning the Straits*⁴⁰.

What the Russians asked for was “*that in time of war, when Turkey was neutral, she should observe her neutrality by giving equal facilities for passage through the Straits to all the belligerents*”⁴¹.

Of course, the Russians had the support of Great Britain and France and they were sure that if Austria agreed, Germany would follow. If the Austrians agreed, then the Russians would guarantee to the Ottomans that they would support them in any conference that might consider the revision of the Treaty of Berlin. Not much in favor of Russia happened though. Sir Edward Grey wrote to Sir G. Lowther:

*We have secured that the question of the Straits should not be mentioned in the programme of the Conference; we have urged upon Russia that it is not opportune to ask Turkey to negotiate about it now, and that the consideration of it should therefore be postponed*⁴².

Unfortunately for the Russians, there was no agreement during these talks, so when the annexation of Bosnia was announced, the Russians offered the Turks protection

³⁸ Akgun 1994 p. 58

³⁹ Roberts 1967 p. 212

⁴⁰ British Documents on the Origins of War Vol. V pp. 384 - 385

⁴¹ Ibid pp. 433 - 434

⁴² Ibid p. 452

against the Austrians in exchange for free passage through the Straits. The suspicious Turks did not agree though⁴³. A Second effort was attempted in 1911, similar to the first. Taking advantage of the Italian occupation of Tripolitania, the Russians asked the Ottomans for a revision of the Straits regime in exchange of the Russian support in a conference regarding the Treaty of Berlin. Moreover, they offered the renegotiation of the Anatolian Railway agreement, promised to do their best to try and stabilize the situation in the Balkans (the Balkan Wars were about to begin) and they hinted that they would put pressure on Britain and France in order to accept the Empire as a member of the Triple Entente. The Russians dropped their plans, however, thinking that making such agreements in a period of international tension might prove to have unwanted consequences⁴⁴. During the Balkan Wars, the Russians were orientated towards maintaining the status quo in the Straits and after the Wars ended, the Ottoman Empire had suffered sufficient losses.

The failure of Russia to make use of the right of freedom of passage for her warships through the Straits, through a revision of the Straits regime which the Ottomans believed would bring the eventual end to the Empire, had the result of eliminating their chances of imposing their will on Turkey in a case of a possible war. In addition to that, the continuing pressure of Russia to maintain such a right and, at the same time, the refusal or incapability of Britain and France to oppose to the Russian plans, brought the Ottomans to the realization that they cannot expect support from the Entente Powers and therefore they turned for help in Germany. It can be stated, therefore, that the Russian pressure to obtain free passage through the Straits, was one of the reasons that the Turks chose the side of the Central Powers⁴⁵.

By the beginning of the 20th century the Ottoman Empire had shrunk and not much was left to resemble that at some time a huge empire existed. The First World War would find it in a very weak point and the Straits would play an important role in this Great War⁴⁶.

⁴³ Langer 1928 p. 324

⁴⁴ Macfie 1993 pp. 36 - 37

⁴⁵ Ibid p. 43

⁴⁶ Vali 1972 pp. 25 - 26

The Straits during the First World War (1914 – 1918)

During the First World War the opposing camps were Germany with Austria-Hungary on one hand and Britain, France and Russia on the other.

On the beginning of the War, the Straits were not a priority for the Entente powers, since they believed that the War, which was not supposed to last long, was going to be judged on the fronts of France and Russia. The Straits were viewed under the light of a general Balkan policy, according to which, the Balkan states would be used either to bring the Ottomans on the Entente side, or in order to put pressure on them in case they joined the Central Powers, which was considered the most likely to happen⁴⁷.

The Germans, on the other hand, were very skeptical about having the Ottomans on their side. They valued the tactical advantages of the closed Straits but the fact that the Ottoman army was very weakened by the constant wars (it was only a year after the Balkan Wars) made them doubtful of Turkey's worth as an ally. The results of the War however were very disappointing and the Germans could use a new ally. Negotiations started on 22 July 1914 when the Turks proposed themselves as an ally and by August 2 1914, the Ottomans had signed a secret agreement according to which they would enter the war on the side of the Central Powers⁴⁸, provided that "*Turkey either can or will undertake some action against Russia worthy of the name*"⁴⁹.

On August 10, two German battle ships entered the Dardanelles, named Breslau and Goeben, and sailed to Constantinople⁵⁰. During that period, the Ottomans had two warships in British shipyards for repair which were taken into British rule⁵¹, something that was not seen very positively in the Turks' eyes. After that, the Germans gave the two German ships as a present to the Ottomans, although the people operating them would still be German. This German gift made the Ottomans superior to the Russians, when it comes to navy of course⁵². The Entente powers demanded that the ships should be driven away from Constantinople, since their presence consisted a violation of the Treaty of Paris, but the Turks replied that they had bought the ships. The Entente

⁴⁷ Macfie 1993 p. 45

⁴⁸ Grosek 2004 p. 153

⁴⁹ Macfie 1993 p. 46

⁵⁰ Massie 2004 p. 21

⁵¹ Fromkin 2001 p. 56

⁵² Vali 1972 p. 26

powers then, asked for the German crews to leave and the Turkish reply was once more negative. Although the Entente could declare war on Turkey, they decided that it was better to not enlarge their list of enemies⁵³.

The Ottomans, however, were hesitating to enter the War since they knew that their army was weak. Most Turks were negative about the prospect of joining the War and those who were not, doubted if the Central Powers were the best choice. The failure of Germany to invade Paris, and therefore diminishing their hopes for a quick war, made the Turks even more hesitant. Since the Turks made it clear to the Germans that they would not take any form of action until they were ready, the Germans decided to help them. They sent over supplies and hundreds of German soldiers and officers were sent to Turkey. The British were aware of the building of the German army on the Turkish grounds and warned the Vizier of the consequences. The British would, until the very end, respect Turkey's "neutrality" and would not initiate any attacks.

After two months of being reluctant to enter the War and receiving pressure from Britain and France to stay neutral, the Ottomans finally gave permission to the two newly acquired ships to enter the Black Sea and bombard Russian ports in the 29th of October, 1914. Immediately, Russia, Britain and France declared war on the Ottomans. The Ottomans joining the war gave the chance to the Russians to once more try to achieve their wishes about the Straits. The British, afraid that the Russians might change their orientation and move its forces from the main front to the West, warned them that nothing should distract their attention from defeating the Germans. The Russians accepted the British warnings but soon started negotiation about the fate of the Straits in case of winning the War⁵⁴.

The British were decisive that, in the case of victory, the fate of the Straits would not be decided without taking Russia into consideration. Even the King informed Beckendorff, the Russian Ambassador in London, that "*in regard to Constantinople, it is clear that it must be yours*"⁵⁵. For the time being, the Russians did not propose any specific desires regarding the Straits, leading the British and French to believe that they would be satisfied with freedom of passage through the Straits. Incorporation of the city of Constantinople in the Russian Empire did not seem to be in their immediate plans,

⁵³ Macfie 1993 p. 50

⁵⁴ *ibid* p. 54

⁵⁵ *ibid* p. 55

although in later communications this idea was discussed too. More specifically, Nemitz, the Russian Chief of Black Sea operations, stated in a memorandum in December 1914:

*“Russia must dominate the Straits and the Constantinople region in a manner... which, while it secures Russian interests, enables her at the same time not only to avoid weakening, but actually to consolidate, her international position... From this viewpoint it appears essential but also sufficient... to affirm that the Straits are absolutely indispensable to us... but that we do not at all require Constantinople as a city”*⁵⁶.

Although the Turkish decision to join the Central Powers proved to be disastrous for the Empire, it gave the Central Powers a significant advantage, which is nothing but the control of the Straits, whose importance was displayed greatly during the War.

With the closing of the Straits, the British and French could not supply the Russians with weaponry. The Baltic route was also blocked by German ships, the port of Arkhangelsk in the Arctic was frozen for a large part of the year and the port of Murmansk and the railroad leading to it were still under construction. Moreover, Russia could not be provided with wheat and cereal, which caused a great hunger throughout its territory. While Russia could provide a great manpower, only a portion of them could eventually be armored with weapons and it is one of the reasons that the Russian people revolted and Russia withdrew from the War.

Britain and France tried unsuccessfully to open the Straits, as the Russians suggested⁵⁷, but their failures made them step back by January 1916. An attack against the Dardanelles was in the minds of the British army since 1914 but it was not until the early days of 1915 that such a thing started to get discussed seriously. It was decided that on the 19th of February 1915, the British navy would bombard the Gallipoli peninsula with a target of taking Constantinople.

During the months that preceded Turkey’s entry into the war, the Turks managed to strengthen the defensive facilities of the Straits. Mines were set up, alongside with twenty – one batteries, dummy positions and searchlights. The day of the attack there were eleven lines of mines ready to destroy the British fleet. The British made two efforts to take the Straits: one on the 19th of February and the other one month later, on

⁵⁶ Gottlieb 1957 p. 71

⁵⁷ Shotwell 1940 p. 99

the 18th of March 1915. Although they managed to make some damage to the defensive systems of the Turks, their efforts were not successful.

The British attempt to take the Straits in February made the Russians suspicious about the true desires of the British. Moreover, the British were discussing the possibility of bringing Greece into the War, a country which also had aspirations in the city of Constantinople and the Russians would definitely not want to let the Greeks take part into the discussions about the Straits. In addition to that, the British declared that they would support a favorable settlement of the Straits for Russia but the details would be discussed after the War ended, which was something that the Russians also did not want. Seeing all these, Sazonov, the Russian Foreign Minister sent the following note to the British and the French:

Course of the latest events leads his Majesty the Emperor Nicholas to think that the question of Constantinople and the Straits must be definitely solved in accordance with traditional aspirations of Russia.

Any solution would be unsatisfactory and precarious if it did not incorporate henceforward in Russian Empire the city of Constantinople, western shore of the Bosphorus, of the Sea of Marmora and of the Dardanelles, as well as Southern Thrace up to Enos – Midia line.

Ipsa-facto and by strategic necessity, part of Asiatic shore included between the Bosphorus, River Sakharia and a point to be fixed on the Gulf of Ismid, island of the Sea of Marmora, Islands of Imbros and Tenedos, ought to be incorporated in the Empire. Special interests of France and of Great Britain in the region above described will be scrupulously respected.

Imperial Government likes to hope that above considerations will meet with sympathy of the two Allied Governments. Said Governments are assured of meeting with, at the hands of Imperial Government, the same sympathy for realization of desiderata which they may form in other regions of Ottoman Empire and elsewhere⁵⁸.

The Allies realized that what Russia was claiming was far more than they had previously discussed and they were uncomfortable because freedom of passage through the Straits was one thing and complete rule over them, with fortifications, by Russia was another. They believed that more than one or two countries had interests in the

⁵⁸ Macfie 1993 p. 63

Straits. However, in fear that the Russians might sign a separate peace with Germany, the decided to accept the Russian claims.

In the meanwhile, after the two failed attempts to take the Dardanelles, the British attacks continued. This time they decided it was better to make an attack, not only with the navy, but from the ground too. By the 25th of April the first landings of troops took place and, eventually, about 20,000 soldiers were gathered. Although they fought hard, they reached a point where their position was not threatened but they could not advance too. The British officers however decided to let them there, as a means of pressure to Turkey. It was not until December that they decided to withdraw the soldiers from the Straits. This operation was the greatest military operation to ever try and capture the Straits in modern history⁵⁹.

It was not only the Allies that were negotiating with the Russians about the Straits though. The Central Powers also made communication about this issue with Russia on a number of times. The matter was discussed during the Molotov – Hitler talks of November 1914⁶⁰, while in March 1915 there were rumors that the Russians were negotiating a separate peace with the Germans in exchange for the Straits. The Turks too negotiated with Russia, especially during the period of the British Bombardments in 1915.

So, the situation was that the Russians managed to agree with the other two powers in order to seize Constantinople. Although the Russians were in favor of the British and French tries to open the Straits, they did not want the city of Constantinople to fall into their hands, or even the Greeks' who had been offered such gifts in case they entered the War.

The British and the French, after the exchange of notes, agreed to alter their century old policy and allow Russia to take control of the Straits, in case the War had the desired result. The city of Constantinople, the Western side of the Bosphorus, the Marmara and the Dardanelles and the Eastern side of the Bosphorus, alongside with the islands Imbros and Tenedos, were all promised to the Russians⁶¹. All that Britain and France asked for was free passing through the Straits for their merchant ships and a free

⁵⁹ Nikolaou 1995 p. 51

⁶⁰ Nekrich 1997 p. 201

⁶¹ Vali 1972 p. 28

port in Constantinople. Russia would be allowed to forbid entrance to any foreign warship.

What would happen though, neither the Russians nor the British could foresee. The Bolshevik Revolution of March 1917 changed all their plans. Even though the Foreign Minister of the provisional Government, Mr. Miliukov, kept on claiming the Straits for Russia, he found strong opposition within his own colleagues. When he resigned in May 1917, it marked the ending of the Russian aspirations to take control of the Straits, during the First World War. The Bolsheviks, in the *Decree of Peace of 8 November 1917* and the *Proclamation to the Mussulmans of December 1917* stated: “*We give notice that the secret treaties... concerning the seizure of Constantinople... have now been torn up and destroyed. The Russian Republic and her Government, the Council of People’s Commissaries, are against the seizure of foreign lands. Constantinople must remain in the hands of the Mussulmans*⁶²”.

By the summer 1918 it was established that Turkey would be defeated. By early 1916 the United States had received information about the secret agreements according to which the Ottoman Empire would be carved up⁶³. The British and French created a draft of conditions which Turkey had to accept in order for a peaceful stop of the hostilities. These conditions asked for free passage for all Allied ships through the Dardanelles, Marmara and Bosphorus and access to the Black Sea, denial of passage to the enemy, British occupation of Constantinople and fortifications on both sides of the Dardanelles. There were also other conditions regarding the mines that were in the Black Sea.

The Turks accepted most of the conditions but they would oppose in the setting of fortifications and the occupation of Constantinople. However, they could not do much in order to resist so, in the end, they gave in. They would dismantle their guns and create a joint commission that would control the forts of the Straits. By November 1918 British and Indian soldiers occupied the forts and the British fleet sailed through the Dardanelles and into the Sea of Marmara.

⁶² Dontas 1987 p. 32

⁶³ Howard 1963 p. 227

From the End of the First World War to the Treaty of Lausanne

In the armistice signed at Mudros in 1918, following the ending of the First World War, the Entente powers managed to obtain the right to occupy the Straits' defenses, have their warships sailing inside the Black Sea and the Sea of Marmora and occupy parts of Turkey necessary for their security. They were not only victorious over the Central Powers but they also saw the Russian Empire fall in the hands of the Bolsheviks and denounce any imperialistic claims in the Straits and in general.

They were not in a hurry, however, to decide on a firm position about the fate of the Straits and the Constantinople area. In the meanwhile, they secured the Straits zone to their best interest. In November and December 1918, the British had dismantled the guns in the Asiatic shores of the Straits and Allied troops were positioned in Constantinople. The Turks were forced to disarm their forces and in January 1919 Constantinople was divided into three zones, for the British, the French and the Italians who had control of the local police⁶⁴.

While in the meantime the Entente powers were trying to decide what they would do with Turkey, the US President Wilson refused to acknowledge any secret agreements made during the War. Moreover, he created the League of Nations, which was an authority that would appoint mandatories over states that were not able to advance and maintain stability without the help of the Great Powers.

The Americans had interests in the Straits, in the sense that they wanted their commercial ships to be able to get in and out the Black Sea at will. They believed that the Straits should be internationalized or put under the control of a single power which would guarantee their freedom. President Wilson, in his fourteen points, which were the peace terms from the side of the USA pointed that:

“The Turkish positions of the present Ottoman Empire should be assured a secure sovereignty, but other nationalities which are now under Turkish rule should be assured an undoubted security of life and an absolutely unmolested opportunity of autonomous development, and the Dardanelles should be permanently opened as a free passage to the ships and commerce of all nations under international guarantees”⁶⁵.

⁶⁴ Macfie 1993 p. 82

⁶⁵ Howard 1963 p. 238

The British did not oppose to the point raised by President Wilson since it did not conflict with their interests in Asia. They knew that the Russians would not stay weak for too long and the possibility of Germany standing up on her feet again was not to be eliminated. According to that policy, internationalized Straits that would allow her fleet to move into the Black Sea was important for Great Britain. However, a new guardian of the Straits should be found since Turkey proved that she was unreliable. Neither of the Great Powers desired the Straits to be in the hands of another Great Power and if they were in the hands of a minor power, like Greece, they would be open to influence. The proposal of the US to be in charge was denied. The French were also in favor of an international commission being in charge of the Straits.

No decision was reached until October 1919 and the Turks had started to rise again. The Greek occupation of Smyrna, with British support, was the one event that made the Turks to take arms again. Mustafa Kemal within months, managed to create a strong nationalistic movement which was strong enough to oppose to any plans the Great Powers had. On the matter of the Straits, however, they recognized that internationalization was to their best interest. On the National Pact, they declared: *The security of Istanbul (which is the Kalifate of Islam, the capital of the Sultanate, and the headquarters of the Ottoman Government) and likewise the security of the Sea of Marmara must be protected from every danger. Provided this principle is maintained, whatever decision may be arrived at jointly by us and all other Governments concerned, regarding the opening of the Bosphorus to the commerce and traffic of the world, shall be valid*⁶⁶.

What the British and the French could not decide was whether the Sultan and the Turkish government should be expelled from Constantinople. There were lots of matters to be taken into consideration, for example the reaction of the Muslim population in the Asian parts of the world that the British had interests to. On 12 of February 1920, the Allies met for a conference in London in order to draft a peace treaty for Turkey.

After agreeing that the Sultan should remain in Constantinople, they also agreed on the internationalization of the Straits. There would be a demilitarized zone that would be controlled by an international commission. Greece and Turkey would be divided by the Chatalja line. In the Straits zone all fortifications, roads and railways would be

⁶⁶ Vali 1972 p. 30

destroyed and only a restricted number of troops would be allowed. Turkey would delegate to a Commission of the Straits that would be in charge of the area between the two edges of the Dardanelles and the waters in a three mile radius from each edge. The Commission would be composed by representatives of the United States, Britain, France, Italy, Russia, Greece, Romania and Bulgaria. The Peace Treaty was discussed further and modified in San Remo, between 18 and 26 of April and was presented to the Turks in Paris in 11th of May, 1920. It was signed in *Sevres* on 10th of August 1920 after pressure of the Greek army with the support of the British.

When Kemal came in power, he sought diplomatic relations with the new Bolshevik state. The Russians were seeing the Turks as the westernmost frontier of a series of states against capitalistic imperialism but Kemal thought of his war as a national one, not a class one. The Russians, in 2 June 1920, asked for the Straits question to be discussed among the Black Sea states but the Turks managed to avoid discussions⁶⁷. The two states signed a Treaty of Friendship on March 16, 1921⁶⁸. According to that treaty, the regions of Kars and Ardahan were given to Turkey whose eastern borders were those of present day Turkey⁶⁹.

During the next couple of years, the rise of the Young Turk movement and a series of military episodes like the destruction of Smyrna and the *Chanak episode*, which in turn led to the *Armistice of Mudanya*, and the rise of Kemal in power, would lead to the Conference of Lausanne. The *Treaty of Sevres* proved to be of no use any more but it was used as the basis for further discussions in the Conference of Lausanne⁷⁰.

⁶⁷ Davison 1994 p. 184

⁶⁸ Ibid p. 191

⁶⁹ Theodoropoulos 1988 p. 106

⁷⁰ Shotwell 1940 p. 106

The Conference of Lausanne (1922 – 1923)

The Conference of Lausanne started on 20 November 1922. The British recognized that the Turks were no longer a nation that was defeated and which they would easily dictate. What they would seek would be freedom of the Straits. The Russians on the other hand, who were invited only to take part in the discussions about the Straits regime⁷¹, would try to close the Straits since they were still trying to gain power and were feeling that the need for defense was greater than the need to expand. The French would also agree with the Russians, since they were intimidated by the British fleet. The Romanians would probably follow the French and the Italians were expected to agree with Britain at a price. Greece was steadily next to Britain, the Serbs were unpredictable and Turkey was believed to agree to freedom of passage for commercial ships only. Moreover, the Turks managed to persuade the Allies to accept the participation of representatives from Ukraine and Georgia⁷². The United States, although they were asked to participate in the conference, decided to be present at all discussions and expected to be treated with equality even though they would not sign any papers⁷³. There were many countries that wanted to participate in the Conference and they all had the right to be heard but not all countries should talk for every issue. So, it was decided that the Conference would be held among the countries that were in war with Turkey, but every interested party would be heard⁷⁴.

The first meeting of the Straits Commission was held on the 4th of December 1922. The Russian proposal that Mr. Chicherin put on the table was: *The principle of freedom for peaceful navigation in the Straits and the principle of closing the Straits to all vessels of war mutually complete each other, as only the fact that they are closed to all warships, armed vessels and military aircraft of other nations can effectively guarantee the freedom of peaceful navigation in those waters... The Turkish government will only be in position to defend the Straits... if it receives express recognition of its right to fortify and arm its coasts...*⁷⁵

⁷¹ Vali 1971 p. 169

⁷² Soysal 2001 p. 312

⁷³ Hurewitz 1972 Vol. II p. 114

⁷⁴ Busch 1976 p. 359

⁷⁵ Lausanne Conference on Near Eastern affairs. Records of proceedings and draft terms of peace p. 129

The Turks were pleased to hear the Russian proposals, not recognizing probably that such a thing would turn the Black Sea into a closed Russian sea. One of the basic Turkish aspirations was the rejection of any regime that would allow Greece to have a saying on the matters of the Straits. The Turks wanted to take control or demilitarize the islands of Lemnos, Samothrace, Imbros and Tenedos⁷⁶. However, after pressure from the British, the Turks agreed on discussing any other proposals. Curzon, the British Foreign Minister, took advantage of it, pointing some flaws of the Russian proposals: *In the first place, apart from the fact that it ignores the principle of international law that the passage between the two seas should be regarded as an international highway, it would, if adopted by this conference, give to Russia a position of exceptional and indefensible advantage within the Black Sea. In other words, although Russian and Turkish warships have the right under international law to free passage through the Suez, Panama and Kiel canals and through all the other straits of the world, M. Chicherin proposes to deny these rights to other nations in regard to the passage between the Mediterranean and the Black Sea. In the second place, he contended that the opening of the Straits to warships would be to the advantage of the strongest naval Power. But he omitted to mention that the closing of the Black Sea would place the other littoral countries at the mercy of the littoral Power possessing the strongest land forces, in other words, Russia itself*⁷⁷.

The American Ambassador Child stressed the American position on the matters of the Straits:

*“Our position is based upon that policy of our Government which stands for complete and constant freedom, without special privilege, for our commerce and for the commerce of other nations... We cannot accept the position that the future of commerce in the Black Sea is the exclusive affair of the States border upon it...”*⁷⁸

Before the Conference of Lausanne took place, the British and the French had meetings, discussing the matters of the Straits. What they both agreed on was the creation of a demilitarized zone, the creation of a commission of control that would be on the authority of the League of Nations, freedom of passage through the Straits and limitation of Turkish army in Eastern Thrace.

⁷⁶ Nikolaou 1995 p. 57

⁷⁷ Lausanne Conference on Near Eastern affairs. Records of proceedings and draft terms of peace p. 141

⁷⁸ Howard 1963 pp. 235 - 236

The British and French gave their common proposals to the Turkish Pasha who responded with a regime based on the following principles: a guarantee securing the Straits, Constantinople and the Sea of Marmora against any surprise attack by land or sea, limitation of the naval forces which may enter the Black Sea, so that they shall not constitute danger for the districts between the two Straits and in the Black Sea. These forces could consist of light craft employed for the protection of international commerce and freedom of passage both in war and peace for merchant-men; in case Turkey is belligerent, she will be satisfied with such technical control as is indispensable.

On the other hand, there were parts of the British proposals that the Turks found harmful to their interests: from the term “Straits” the Sea of Marmara should be excluded since defensive preparations on the coasts of the sea were required for the defense of Anatolia and Thrace, instead of a demilitarized zone around the Bosphorus there should be no land or sea fortifications on either shores, movement of troops should be allowed in the demilitarized zone since this zone connects two parts of the country, Turkey should maintain arsenals and naval establishments at Constantinople and in the Straits, the area of the demilitarized zone should be reduced, Turkish sovereignty should be affirmed on the islands of Samothrace, Imbros and Tenedos and Lemnos should be declared autonomous and, finally, they should be allowed to have a minimum defense on Gallipoli peninsula in order to be prepared for a surprised attack.

The Allies were pleasantly surprised by the turn of events and were willing to make a few compromises, if their interests were not harmed. Since their goal of demilitarized Straits and freedom of passage was achieved, they would not ruin it by not giving the Turks a little of what they wanted. The Russians however were not willing to accept such things. M. Chicherin stated: *“We therefore see, on looking into the last draft of the inviting Powers, that it threatens the vital interests of Russia, violates the most elementary requirements of Turkey as regards her safety and independence, necessitates fresh naval armaments and places obstacles in the way of general peace”*⁷⁹ and even threatened the Turks that this behavior would be considered hostile. The Russians insisted on the proposals made by Chicherin on the first day of the

⁷⁹ Lausanne Conference on Near Eastern affairs. Records of proceedings and draft terms of peace p. 237

Commission. Curzon kept a very firm stance, unwilling to accept the Russian demands and the Turks eventually followed him and accepted the British proposals.

Eventually, in 31 January 1923 the British presented the final draft to the Turks. According to that, they would not allow the military force in the Gallipoli peninsula but they agreed on the restoration of Imbros and Tenedos to Turkish sovereignty, the withdrawal of articles about inspection of the demilitarized zone and the article about immediate response by the Allied powers in case that the demilitarized zone was imperiled. Lemnos and Samothrace would stay under Greek rule but they would be demilitarized.⁸⁰ The Dodecanese islands and Rhodes were given to Italy⁸¹. The actual treaty was signed on the 24th of July, 1923 although the Russians refused to sign⁸² and would not reconcile with the Treaty for the next few years⁸³. M Chicherin stated during the last meeting of the commission:

“Taking account of the fact that the draft convention concerning the regime of the Straits presented by the inviting Powers threatens the security and vital interests of Russia, the Ukraine and Georgia;

That it makes it impossible to establish a stable and peaceful situation in the Near East and on the Black Sea;

That it will result in imposing on Russia and the other countries and additional burden of naval armaments and places an obstacle in the way of establishing general peace; ...

... The Russo-Ukrainian-Georgian delegation do not agree to the draft of the inviting Powers, make it clear that they are irreconcilably opposed to the whole policy of domination and violence expressed in this draft, and wish to emphasize the inability of the present conference to accomplish a work of real peace.

At the present time, there is no agreement with Russia, the Ukraine and Georgia...

Under these conditions there cannot be any decision in the Straits question. There is none and there will not be any without Russia, the Ukraine and Georgia. If the convention is signed without Russia, the Ukraine and Georgia, the latter will retain an entirely free hand and complete liberty of action. If certain Powers sign this convention

⁸⁰ Nikolaou 1995 p. 58

⁸¹ Vali 1972 p. 31

⁸² Soysal 2001 p. 312

⁸³ Akgun 1994 p. 63

*without Russia, the Ukraine and Georgia, the Straits question remains and will remain open*⁸⁴.

The Straits convention was signed on a separate draft than the rest of the *Treaty of Lausanne* in order to maintain its stability, in case peace was interrupted and the rest of the Treaty was out of use.

The Allies were obliged by the Treaty of Lausanne to allow Turkey to close the Straits at will when at war, the right to stop and search neutral vessels that might be assisted enemies, the right to send troops through the demilitarized zone and the right to place soldiers in Eastern Thrace. In addition to these, they reduced the tonnage of warships that was allowed in the Black Sea, they put an imposition of a limitation on the duration of passage and a reduction in the extent of the demilitarized zone. They achieved their purpose of open and demilitarized Straits, however, which allowed them to send a fleet in the shores of Constantinople if needed. This marked the first time that the Bosphorus Straits were under a complete international control⁸⁵. Even though the British made a great victory in the Lausanne Conference, the Turks also managed to avoid dependence to Russia, which was equally important⁸⁶.

⁸⁴ Lausanne Conference on Near Eastern affairs. Records of proceedings and draft terms of peace pp. 454 - 456

⁸⁵ Vali 1972 p. 33

⁸⁶ Davison 1994 p. 113

The Montreux Convention of 1936

Since the Treaty of Lausanne was signed, the Turks never really looked up to it. It was the first time that Turkey had actually no power over the Straits, leaving the decisions to the Great Powers⁸⁷. They believed that it threatened their independence, left Istanbul open to attack from the sea and decreased their value in the world of international diplomacy. It was only logical that they would eventually try and reverse all these negative effects with a new treaty as soon as possible, while in the meantime they would try to make the best out of it in order to cope with the current situation. They improved the roads in the Straits zone and, outside of it, they installed heavy machine guns, they installed ack-ack batteries on mobile carriers and made plans of how to coordinate the military actions of their ground, sea and air forces in the area. When it comes to diplomacy, they were often pointing out the dangers that came with the demilitarization of the Straits and the little guarantees of safety that they had. In 1932 the Turks referred to their wish of revision during the League of Nations Conference on Reduction and Limitation of Armaments⁸⁸. It was 1933 when they decided that the situation was right in order for them to propose a formal revision of the Lausanne treaty⁸⁹.

The Soviets definitely wanted a remilitarization of the Straits so they were in favor of such a revision while the British believed that the demilitarization of the Straits was to their advantage. The Admiralty, the authority responsible for the British Royal Navy, commended in May 1933:

If relations became strained between Russia and a Western Power, Russian pressure might possibly be brought on Turkey to refuse passage to warships. If the Straits were fortified, Turkey could not deny her power to do so; so long, however, as the Straits remain unfortified, Turkey could plead her inability to aid Russia in this way. Au contraire a fortified Straits would mean a Russo-Turkish Alliance would be of greater military value.

Further, if it were necessary for a Naval Power to operate in the Black Sea, it would be a greater risk to do so with an impregnable Dardanelles and Bosphorus on the lines of communication than if the Straits were in a demilitarized position.

⁸⁷ Dontas 1987 p. 81

⁸⁸ Howard 1963 p. 237

⁸⁹ Macfie 1972 p. 204

It is exceedingly difficult to judge, in view of modern military weapons and powers of transport, to what extent and with what rapidity a demilitarized Straits could be made so dangerous as to necessitate the withdrawal of naval forces sent into the Black Sea. The risk involved would also depend on the observation that could be kept on the demilitarized area so that any dangerous move by Turkey could be parried. Nevertheless, the fact remains that a fortified Straits could be closed instantly, a demilitarized Straits could not.

From the above mainly military arguments, it is considered that fortification of the Straits still possesses, to a great extent, the disadvantages pointed out by the Chiefs of Staff in 1922⁹⁰. Moreover, the question confronting us now is not one of forcing a treaty on an unwilling Turkey but of holding Turkey to her treaty obligations⁹¹.

In the meanwhile, the British were observing if the demilitarization clauses were being applied and reporting any unusual movements from the Turkish side, mostly about weaponry being carried to the Straits zone⁹².

In 1933, the Turks felt like the chances are in favor of them so they officially raised the question of remilitarization of the Straits. They based their hopes on the fact that they had signed agreements with many European countries and established good relations with most of them. In 1925 they signed a treaty of friendship and neutrality with the Soviet Union⁹³, in 1926 they signed a treaty of friendship with Britain, in 1928 a similar agreement was signed with Italy while France and Greece followed in 1930 and, in the same year, the treaty of friendship with Russia was renewed. In 1932, Turkey was admitted as a member of the League of Nations.

So, at the Geneva Disarmament Conference of 1933, the Turks raised the question of revision which the British rejected immediately⁹⁴ on the grounds that, Turkey had no obligation to keep the Straits open and the Turks could not state that the treaty did not

⁹⁰ At the 166th meeting of the Committee of Imperial Defense, on 4th of December 1922, the Chiefs of Staff stated that, during the beginning of a war, fortification would prevent a fleet forcing the Straits and bringing pressure on the Turkish Government at Constantinople

⁹¹ Macfie 1972 pp. 204 - 5

⁹² Berridge 2009 p. 164

⁹³ Shotwell 1940 p. 119

⁹⁴ Akgun 1994 p. 64

guarantee their security since it clearly stated that “*the demilitarization of the Straits would not constitute and unjustified danger to the military security of Turkey*”⁹⁵.

In 1934, informal approaches were made by the Turkish Government towards the United Kingdom, France, the Soviet Union and the USA, about the need for revision of the Straits Convention⁹⁶. However, it took the Turks three years to raise the question again and, by that time, the British could not raise any arguments. Germany, under the instructions of Adolf Hitler, started rearming and building up an army during March of 1935 which was a violation of the Versailles Treaty. In April an agreement was reached in Stresa of Italy, between Italy, Britain and France according to which, the Locarno Treaties between Italy, Britain, Germany, France and Belgium would be reaffirmed. According to these treaties, the signing parties would not attack each other. This was a means of stopping Germany from rearming and also a way for Mussolini, the Italian Prime Minister, to secure that the other parties would remain neutral in the forthcoming occupation of Ethiopia by Italy. However, the Germans managed not only to raise an army but also to reoccupy Rhineland. In the meanwhile, Italy invaded and occupied Ethiopia which was a violation of the League of Nations Covenant and showed the inability of the League to take immediate action in order to avoid military violations by its members. Moreover, some international episodes decreased the Turk’s belief and trust in international agreements: Bulgaria and Austria had rearmed, which were violations of the Treaty of Neuilly and the Treaty of Saint Germain respectively, and Italy remilitarized the Dodekanese. So, the Turks were sure that this time no objections were going to be raised and this is what actually happened. This time the British, who were getting anxious by Italy getting stronger and jeopardizing their position in the Mediterranean, were open to making some new friends. Accepting the Turkish proposals would lead to better relations between the two countries⁹⁷. The Soviets, who knew that they had to protect their southern shores, were very positive to a revision⁹⁸.

What Turkey had in mind, however, was not a formal question for revision to the League of Nations or to the signatories of the Lausanne Treaty, but the notification of the signatories of its intentions to militarize the Straits immediately. The Turkish intentions were to get equipped with 800 aircrafts in order to be able to defend the

⁹⁵ Macfie 1972 p. 206

⁹⁶ Howard 1963 pp. 237 - 238

⁹⁷ Macfie 1972 pp. 206 - 7

⁹⁸ Vali 1971 p. 170

Straits in case of an attack from above⁹⁹. The Turks also had communication with Greece in order to reach a mutual agreement of remilitarization. On a note that was given from the Turkish Ambassador in Athens to Ioannis Metaxas in the 6th of May 1936, it was stated that “*The militarization of the Greek islands is currently considered about Samothrace and Lemnos islands. We fully agree regarding the militarization of these two islands at the same time as the Straits. As for the other Greek islands in the Aegean Sea, they are the object of the provisions of article 13 of the Treaty of Lausanne, referring to the territorial clauses*”¹⁰⁰.

This, however, the British would not approve. They quickly informed the Turkish ministers that such an action would be a “breach to the Straits Convention” and the Turks soon dropped their plans of quickly remilitarizing the Straits. A formal notification that Turkey was ready to negotiate a revision of the Straits Convention, especially the part about demilitarization, was sent to the members of the League of Nations, Russia and Yugoslavia. The Turkish Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign affairs, during a visit to London stated that the articles about the passage of warships and aircrafts should also be revised and the Straits Commission should be abolished too. He declared that:

*The Turkish Government hoped to combine the principle of liberty of passage with the principle of security by finding a solution which would regulate the passage of warships from the Mediterranean into the Black Sea, and from the Black Sea into the Mediterranean, in such a way that, while free passage would be assured in all ordinary circumstances, the security of Turkey and particularly of such Turkish warships as might be in the Sea of Marmora at the time would be assured and any sudden and undue accretion of the naval forces of any Power in either the Black Sea or the Mediterranean be prevented*¹⁰¹.

He also stated that any new revisions should not only be applied in times of peace or war, but also in times of “menace de guerre” (threat of war), in which case the passage of any military ships would be under a de facto Turkish authorization.

⁹⁹ Nikolaou 1995 p. 75

¹⁰⁰ Ibid p. 76

¹⁰¹ Macfie 1972 pp. 208 - 9

The British were not very enthusiastic about the Turkish proposals but they believed that a solution could be reached somewhere in the middle so that the British desiderata would be satisfied to some point. Although they were not in favor of such revisions, they also wanted to befriend the Turks and this made them eager to make a few necessary compromises. It was very difficult however, for the British to accept the Turkish suggestions about authorization.

The Soviets were eager to accept the Turkish proposals for a revision of the Straits Convention in hopes of a revision that would be of their best interest. The Soviet Union wanted to secure its Black Sea coastline and the industrial zone of Ukraine in case of an attack by the fascist Italy or Nazi Germany. Moreover, they believed it was easier to control the Straits if they were objected to the authority of Turkey and only, instead of the International Straits Commission¹⁰².

The Turks, being assured that the British would support them on a heavy revision of the Straits Convention, arranged for a conference that would be held in Montreux on 22 June 1936¹⁰³. The meeting took place in Montreux because Japan objected to Geneva, Italy to London and Paris and the Soviets to Lausanne¹⁰⁴. A few days earlier, they sent their proposals to London, according to which, the demilitarization clauses of the Straits Convention should be aborted, civil and military aircrafts would be forbidden to pass over the area of the Straits, regulations should be made about the amount of warships passing the Straits during times of war, peace and a threat of war. In addition to these, the maximum force to be permitted to pass the Straits at once should be limited to 14,000 tons. If the Turkish fleet was absent at that time then the force would pass the Straits in two parts. The total tonnage of all non-riparian fleets assembling in the Black Sea at any one time should not exceed 28,000 tons. Warships should pass only with the purpose of paying courtesy calls. Turkey should be informed one month in advance of their intended passage. None was to remain in the Black Sea for more than fifteen days. The regulations governing the passage of the warships of riparian powers from the Black Sea to the Mediterranean were to be analogous to those governing the passage of the warships of non-riparian powers from the Mediterranean to the Black Sea¹⁰⁵.

¹⁰² Vali 1972 p. 35

¹⁰³ Dostas 1987 p. 110

¹⁰⁴ DeLuca 1981 p. 51

¹⁰⁵ Macfie 1972 pp. 210 - 211

In the Montreux Convention all the states which had signed the Lausanne Treaty were present except for Italy, who thought of the convention to have no reason of existence and could be of no actual benefit for them¹⁰⁶. The USA saw no reason for formal representation, not even for the participation of observers in the Convention¹⁰⁷. They would accept however the revisions since it would not harm freedom of commerce. They considered the problem of the Straits as a “European issue”, and if the passage of all merchant ships of all nations was guaranteed then they would be satisfied with the result. It would not be until after the end of the Second World War that the USA would get actively involved in the matters of the Turkish Straits¹⁰⁸.

The purpose of the new Convention regarding the Straits was stated to be the desire to regulate the transit and navigation in the Straits in a way which would safeguard “*within the framework of Turkish security and of the security, in the Black Sea, of the riparian States*”¹⁰⁹.

On the first day of the convention, the Turks presented a draft convention which was similar to the one sent to the British, with some additions: In a case of war, in which Turkey is neutral, warships would have free passage. If Turkey is belligerent, no warships were allowed to pass without permission from the Turkish Government and in case of a threat of war a similar permission should be obtained, provided that Turkey had informed the League of Nations about her intentions to do so. There was also one difference: while it was stated in the first draft that the regulations governing the passage of warships of riparian powers should be analogous to those governing the passage of warships of non-riparian powers, the second draft granted the riparian with privileged rights of egress¹¹⁰.

While the British were ready to accept the Turkish proposals of the first draft, they would not support the official proposals of the second draft because they believed that abandoning the principle of reciprocity in favor of Russia, would turn the Black Sea into a Russian closed sea. The British stated that if restrictions of passage of warships would be imposed, they should be imposed on a reciprocal basis. The British rejection of the

¹⁰⁶ DeLuca 1981 pp. 53 - 54

¹⁰⁷ Howard 1963 p. 238

¹⁰⁸ Vali 1972 p. 57

¹⁰⁹ Fenwick 1936 p. 704

¹¹⁰ Macfie 1972 p. 211

Turkish draft was the beginning of a series of debates between them and the Soviets about the Straits¹¹¹.

It was no surprise that the Russians viewed the whole subject under a different light. M. Litvinov, head of the Soviet delegation, stated enthusiastically that the Soviet Union had special interests in the Black Sea. They also had coasts in other parts of the world and an immediate necessity might ask for the Soviet fleet to be quickly transferred to the Baltic Sea or the Pacific. In addition to that, Litvinov stated that the Black Sea was a “closed sea” and not a “high sea” that is open to warships of all nations. There is no acceptable purpose of warships entering the Straits, he stated, because “the Black Sea leads nowhere”¹¹². Moreover, the French and the Romanians supported this amendment because they believed that it would ensure the effective working of the Franco-Rumanian treaty. The Greeks, even though they primarily cared about commercial shipping, alongside with Yugoslavia, they supported France and Russia. The same applies for Bulgaria who thought of the conference as a good opportunity to start having better relations with the rest of the Balkan countries, and only Japan thought of the amendment to be too favorable to the Soviets¹¹³.

The British delegation had two possibilities in mind: either complete freedom of passage for all countries equally, or a limited right of entry and egress, controlled by a sliding scale. As the conference progressed, the second solution seemed to be the more practical. Turkey soon understood the meaning of the Soviet proposals and they did not want to end up with a revision that gave the right to the Soviet Union to transfer through the Straits unlimited fleet while there would be major limitation to the non-riparian powers that wanted to get in the Black Sea. If this happened, Turkey would end up becoming the guardian of a Soviet lake in which the Soviets would organize and arrange a powerful fleet. Adopting the scale proposal, the Turks thought it would prevent the Soviets from building a large fleet inside the Black Sea. Litvinov was acquiescent with this proposal and this allowed the British to start dealing with the other proposals of the Turkish draft. They presented their own draft which contained a few new proposals:

¹¹¹ DeLuca 1981 p. 56

¹¹² Vali 1972 p. 38

¹¹³ Macfie 1972 p. 213

“A declaration affirming the principle of the freedom of the Straits, which had been included in the Lausanne Convention, but omitted from the Turkish draft, should be inserted in the preamble; that the maximum naval unit that might pass the Straits at any one time should be limited to one half of the tonnage of the Turkish fleet, or to 15,000 tons, whichever should be the greater; that such limits as were to be enforced should not prevent the visit of a fleet of any size to a Turkish port on the invitation of the Turkish government, provided that fleet left the Straits the same route by which it entered; that the length of notification to the Turkish Government for the passage of warships through the Straits should not exceed fifteen days; that the tonnage which any one non-riverain power might have in the Black Sea should be limited to three quarters of the total tonnage allowed to all non-riverain powers; that if any power, having at the time no force in the Black Sea or a force of less than 10,000 tons in all, should wish to send a force into that sea “for humanitarian purposes”, that power should have the right, subject to special authorization from the Turkish Government, to send ships or to increase its existing force in the Black Sea up to a maximum of 10,000 tons, notwithstanding all the provisions in the preceding articles; that such a force might remain in the Black Sea without limit of time; that forces sent into the Black Sea for any other purpose should not remain for longer than one month; that in time of war, should Turkey remain neutral, the same conditions should apply to the passage of warships as in time of peace, subject to the provision that these conditions should not be applicable to a belligerent power to the detriment of its belligerent rights; that Turkey should undertake, on the occasion of “menace de guerre”, not only to notify the League of Nations and the signatories of the Convention of measures taken, but also, should the League decide by a two thirds majority that the measures taken were unjustified, to cancel them forthwith; that the Straits Commission should continue to exercise its functions; and that the new convention should remain in force for fifty years (as against fifteen years in the Turkish draft)”¹¹⁴.

A clause that would exclude from the auxiliaries the ships that were designed to carry liquids was also incorporated and it was a French proposal that would ensure that France’s oil supplies from Romania and Russia would be maintained in case of war.

¹¹⁴ Macfie 1972 pp. 214 - 215

The sliding scale proposed by the British would work as follows: the total tonnage of non-riparian ships sent into the Black Sea should not exceed 30,000 tons, unless and until the tonnage of the largest riparian fleet in the Black Sea should come to exceed that of the largest fleet in the Black Sea at the time of signature of the Convention by more than ten percent. After that point, the total tonnage allowed to non-riparian powers should rise *pari passu* with the excess up to a maximum of 45,000 tons. The Turkish proposal for the passage of warships of riparian powers not exceeding a tonnage of 25,000 tons was abandoned¹¹⁵.

The British also, favored the continuation of existence of the International Straits Commission. There was a try from the British side to maintain the existence of the Commission, at least as an authority with certain technical tasks, like collecting statistics, but Turkey managed to persuade the parties of its opposing position. The Turkish Government was in charge to continue the duties that were then held by the International Straits Commission¹¹⁶.

The British draft was soon adopted as the primary basis for the continuation of discussions and the Russians soon started showing their discomfort to the British proposals. They did not like the fact that Turkey would allow entrance to warships if she was neutral to a war and found the numbers of the scale to be unequally favorable to the non-riparian powers. They would also never agree on the clause about riparian powers sending capital ships through the Straits.

The one about the neutrality of Turkey was eventually the one that was most difficult to settle. On July 8, the British proposed that if Turkey felt threatened they would have the right to close the Straits to all belligerent powers in which the Russians replied with another amendment that would ensure the closure of the Straits in case Turkey remained neutral in a war. The dispute was so intense that, at some point, it looked like the conference would end because of the disagreement. The British, however, proposed a compromising position that the Soviets and the French accepted:

“Vessels of war belonging to belligerent Powers shall... not pass through the Straits except in cases arising out of the application of article 23 of the present Convention, and in cases of assistance rendered to a State victim of aggression in virtue of a treaty

¹¹⁵ Macfie 1972 pp. 215 - 216

¹¹⁶ Vali 1972 p. 53

*of mutual assistance binding Turkey, concluded within the framework of the Covenant of the League of Nations*¹¹⁷”.

Once this obstacle was passed, the delegations were able to quickly move on and agree to the other amendments too. They agreed that in the preamble of article 1 of the final text, the principle of freedom of navigation should be maintained. In time of peace, freedom of passage was guaranteed for light surface vessels, minor war vessels and auxiliary vessels. The capital ships of riparian powers were exempted from this regulation only if they would pass singly during daytime. Submarines that were constructed or bought outside the Black Sea, in transit to a base in that sea, would also be exempted if they passed singly, during daytime and on the surface. The period of notice required to be sent to the Turkish Government for the passage of warships was eight days but in case of non Black Sea power it was preferable to be fifteen days. The maximum aggregate tonnage of all foreign naval forces in the course of transit through the Straits (except in the case of the capital ships of riparian powers) should not exceed 15,000 tons. The upper limit of the aggregate tonnage of non-riparian fleets allowed in the Black Sea in peace time was to be 30,000 tons, unless and until the tonnage of the strongest Black Sea fleet had exceeded by 10,000 tons that of the strongest Black Sea fleet at the time of the signature of the Convention. This limit was to rise *pari passu* with any further excess up to a maximum of 45,000 tons. The proportion of that tonnage which any one power might have in the Black Sea was limited to two thirds. The clauses about ships entering the Straits for humanitarian purposes were maintained but their tonnage should not exceed 8,000 tons. If the additional force should bring the aggregate tonnage in the Black Sea up to a figure in excess of the limit imposed in the “escalator” clause, it should only be sent into that sea on condition that the riparian powers raised no objection to its dispatch. Vessels of war belonging to non-riparian powers were not to remain in the Black Sea for more than twenty one days, no matter what the purpose of their presence there. Naval auxiliary vessels specifically designed for the carriage of fuel, liquid or non-liquid, were not to be required to notify the Turkish government in advance for their passage, nor to be counted in the calculation of total tonnage. They were, however, to be subject to all the other regulations laid down for the passage of warships through the Straits. The Straits Commission would be

¹¹⁷ Macfie 1972 p. 217

abandoned and the Convention was to remain in force for twenty years, which is until the year 1956¹¹⁸.

The Turks had the right to remilitarize the demilitarized zone immediately¹¹⁹, even before the actual signing of the Convention. The Greeks too remilitarized the islands of Lemnos and Samothrace, to the discomfort of Turkey which supports that the Montreux Convention states remilitarization of only the Turkish grounds however the Convention states clearly that the Montreux Conventions replaces the Lausanne Conference¹²⁰.

All participating parties thought of the results of the Montreux convention as very satisfying. Mr. Litvinoff stated on the matter:

“It seems to me that all who have participated in this Conference will depart satisfied, and that there would be no malcontents. The Conference has given absent states no reason for dissatisfaction, and their peaceful interests have been fully respected”¹²¹ .

The Montreux Convention was signed on the 20th of July¹²² and comprises 29 articles, 4 annexes and one Protocol. The signatory parties were Turkey, Great Britain, Bulgaria, France, Greece, Japan, Romania, the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia. Italy adhered later (in 1938) since the Convention was open to adhesion for all the states that had signed the Lausanne Treaty¹²³.

Many of the provisions of the Montreux Convention display the concerns of the Powers at the time of its signing. Turkey and the Soviet Union were concerned about an attack from the aggressive states of Italy and Germany. Especially the Soviets were afraid of a union between Italy, Germany and Great Britain against the socialist state¹²⁴.

The Montreux Convention displays the new status of the Turkish state in the world of diplomacy. Turkey takes back the leading control of the Straits and is once again allowed to remilitarize the area, therefore increased her security¹²⁵. Although Turkey is the sole guardian of the Straits, however it must exercise its control according to the obligations of the League of Nations. The Soviets were also satisfied with the

¹¹⁸ Macfie 1972 pp. 317 - 318

¹¹⁹ Akgun 1994 p. 73

¹²⁰ Theodoropoulos 1988 pp. 294 - 295

¹²¹ Bilsel 1947 p. 728

¹²² Maity 1954 p. 143

¹²³ Fenwick 1936 p. 705

¹²⁴ Vali 1972 pp. 55 - 56

¹²⁵ DeLuca 1981 p. 116

Convention. Now the Soviet Union is allowed to send warships into the Aegean and the Mediterranean almost without restriction, while powers who desire to pass into the Black Sea are objects of heavy restrictions. This Convention marks a new beginning in the relationship between the Soviets and Turkey and is of great political, and not only legal, significance¹²⁶

¹²⁶ Fenwick 1936 pp. 705 - 706

The 1945 Crisis over the Straits

Not that much time passed until the Soviets sought a new revision of the Montreux Convention. The Soviet Union was getting stronger by the day, in the 1st of September 1939 Germany invaded Poland and the Second World War was about to begin. By 1939 the Montreux Convention looked like it did not correspond to the new reality. When the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact was signed in August of 1939, the Soviet Foreign Minister Molotov informed the Germans of the Soviet intentions to revise the regime of the Straits and establish military bases in Turkey¹²⁷.

In 22 of September 1939, the Turkish Prime Minister Sukru Saracoglu went to Moscow to discuss the signing of a treaty with the Soviets. Molotov and Stalin made it very clear that what they wanted, among other things, was a revision of the Montreux Convention. Specifically, they asked for was that the Soviets and the Turks should decide together if a ship of a non-riparian country would be allowed to enter the Black Sea. When Saracoglu rejected even discussing the proposal, a second proposal was made. This was that the Turks would be the only state that would decide whether a ship would pass or not through the Straits, eliminating the League of Nations. Such thing would cause Turkey to lose its western allies, putting her in the hands of the Soviets. Saracoglu was once more negative and nothing was decided¹²⁸.

When the Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union were discussing about spheres of influence, during the last months of 1940, the USSR repeated many times that it considered Bulgaria and the Turkish straits as of being of great importance to its security zone. Both Germany and the Soviet Union came to an agreement that the Montreux Convention of 1936 was outdated and didn't respond to the current political map. The Soviets wanted to establish a military base in the Dardanelles, in order to control the exit and entrance of the Black Sea. If Turkey was reluctant to such a decision, the USSR would not hesitate to proceed to the necessary military and diplomatic actions to take what it wanted¹²⁹. The Turkish side was aware of the Soviet claims, from the talks they had at the fall of 1939 and because Hitler had informed the

¹²⁷ Rozakis & Stagos 1987 p. 44

¹²⁸ Millman 1998 pp. 215 - 219

¹²⁹ Xydis 1960, p. 65

Turks¹³⁰. The Soviet pressure on Turkey was getting stronger and stronger as time passed by.

During the greatest part of the Second World War Turkey maintained a neutral position. However, although the Montreux Convention forbid the Turks from allowing any warships to pass through the Straits, the merchant vessels were heavily armed during the War. This would be used by the Axis powers in order to pass merchant ships with weaponry and ammunition through the Straits, while the Turks would look the other way¹³¹. On June 1944 the German ship *Kassel* would be searched by the British, only for them to find out that it was carrying weaponry¹³² and caused the forced resignation of the Turkish Foreign Minister Numan Menemencioglu. All these were noticed by the Soviets.

Eventually, with the end of the Second World War and the inclusion of Romania and, mainly, Bulgaria, to the Soviet sphere of influence, the Turks could not help but get more worried. First, they sought help from Greece, who was also feeling the Soviet pressure and, in that sense, they had some common interests in their foreign policy. On July 24 of 1944, the Turkish Ambassador to the Greek government, which at that time was in Cairo of Egypt, informed a Greek diplomat that Turkey was eager to conduct friendship with Greece in terms of foreign policy. He said that the USSR is clearly following a tsarist imperialistic policy and that the two countries should stand up, with the help of Yugoslavia, Britain and the USA¹³³.

On October 9 of the same year, Churchill and Stalin were deciding the fate of the Balkan countries in the Kremlin. It was during these talks that Stalin informed Churchill of his intentions to revise the Montreux Convention in order for Soviet ships to be able to go in and out the Black Sea at any time¹³⁴. They agreed that the US government should be informed too and specific proposals from the Soviets should be sent to them. The Soviets, however, did not send anything regarding the Turkish straits for the next few months. In the meanwhile, Turkey got informed about the Soviet aspirations and started negotiating with the British and the Americans.

¹³⁰ Xydis 1969 p. 65

¹³¹ Deringil 2004 pp. 169 - 171

¹³² kreiser 2012 p. 70

¹³³ Xydis 1960 p. 66

¹³⁴ Tamkin 2009 p. 168

At February 10, at Yalta during a conference between the three Great Powers, Stalin once again stated that the Montreux Convention was outdated and modification was required in order to be in pace with the foreign affairs of that time. It was not the first time Stalin referred to the problem of the Straits, since he discussed about it with Roosevelt at Tehran during November of 1943¹³⁵. At the time when it was signed, the Soviet Union was weak and faced many threats but at that current time it did not represent the present relations, and also the participation of hostile Japan in the Convention was bigger than that of the Soviet Union¹³⁶. For Stalin and the Soviets, it was not a matter of question to accept a regime where Turkey “*had a hand on the throat of the USSR*”¹³⁷ since Turkey had the right to close the Straits in case of war or if it felt threatened. A solution should be reached, which would not threaten Turkey’s security and interests. Although Roosevelt preferred to sidetrack since he did not have any specific opinion on the matter, Churchill agreed that changes ought to be made. It was decided that the three Great Powers (the Soviets, the British and the USA) would discuss the matter with their respective foreign ministers and inform Turkey of their conclusions when time was right¹³⁸.

On the 21st of March, 1945, the Soviets renounced the Treaty of Friendship and Neutrality which had signed with Turkey in 1925. According to that treaty, each one of the countries involved would maintain a neutral position in case the other party is under military attack by one or more powers. In addition to that, none of the parties would sign any political agreements with third parties that were against the second party (if this treaty was still active, Turkey’s accession to NATO in 1952 would have been a lot harder, from a legal point of view)¹³⁹. The Soviets stated:

“It is declared that the Soviet Government acknowledging the value of the Soviet – Turkish Treaty of December 17, 1925, in the cause of maintaining the friendly relations between the Soviet Union and Turkey, nevertheless considers it necessary to assert that owing to deep changes which have taken place particularly in the course of the Second

¹³⁵ Hurewitz 1962 p. 605

¹³⁶ Howard 1974 p. 213

¹³⁷ Tamkin 2009 p. 171

¹³⁸ Alvarez 1980 p. 45

¹³⁹ Xydis 1967 p. 243

World War, this treaty no longer corresponds to the new situation and requires serious improvement”¹⁴⁰.

The Turkish side accepted this as a Soviet move that purposes to solve the matter of the Straits as a concern of solely the Black Sea countries. They believed that the Soviets would ask for bilateral discussions between them and Turkey, in order to eliminate the British and American influence in the area. The Turks were prepared to discuss alternations in the Montreux Convention, as long as their interests and security were not threatened but would never give in to the Soviet pressure about military bases and territory aspirations.

The renunciation of the treaty of Friendship showed that the Soviets would not only pursue their objectives with diplomacy, but they would also use any measure possible in order to put pressure on the Turks. The Soviet propaganda was constantly referring to the Montreux Convention as threatening for its security, while they would often refer to the fact that the Turks co-operated with the Germans¹⁴¹ (they let German ships pass through the Straits during the Second World War). At the same time, there were rumors of Soviet troops in Bulgaria moving towards the Turkish borders¹⁴².

On June 7, as a result of the Turkish anxiety for the signing of a new Treaty of Friendship, Molotov received the Turkish ambassador for discussion. However, according to Molotov, there were a few matters that had to be discussed before signing any new treaty¹⁴³.

First of all, there was the Soviet-Turkish treaty of 1921. The Soviets demanded the return of the territories of Kars and Ardahan to them. The Turkish ambassador denied discussing with Molotov any territorial issues which would affect the integrity of his country. Molotov agreed to put this issue aside as “unresolved” and proceeded to discussing the Straits question. He stated that the Soviets recognized the fact that Turkey had acted well and with good intentions during the Second World War, but a country like the Soviet Union could not base its security on the intentions of a country like Turkey, neither did they believe that the Turks could guarantee the security of the Straits. The Turkish Ambassador, very forwardly, asked if Molotov is asking about

¹⁴⁰ Alvarez 1980 p. 129

¹⁴¹ Picak 2011 p. 180

¹⁴² Alvarez 1980 p. 48

¹⁴³ Howard 1974 p. 218

establishing military bases inside Turkey and, when he received a positive answer, he refused to make any further discussions. Molotov stated that it was better for the two sides to solve this issue alone, instead of having to resort to an international conference but the Turks clearly preferred the international way, since they didn't believe that they could deal with the Soviet pressure without the support of other Great Powers¹⁴⁴.

The British and the Americans were surprised when they got informed about all these by the Turks, since they were still waiting for the Soviet views on the issue of the Straits as they agreed during the conference in Yalta. The Turks contacted the US Ambassador and asked for his country's views on the above mentioned dialogue. The Turks were afraid that their firm stance would cause another wave of Soviet pressure and propaganda against them.

Another discussion was made between Molotov and Ambassador Sarper, on June 18, where the Turks maintained their firm stance and said that the points made by Molotov were out of discussion. The Turks feared that the purpose of the Soviet pressure was the eventual satellization of Turkey, especially since Molotov was frequently referring to the new treaty as being similar to those being made with Poland and other Eastern countries¹⁴⁵. They believed that the USSR, occupying a huge percentage of the planet's total territory, didn't really need the two regions from Turkey, even though official Soviet response was that they were needed for the Armenian Soviet Republic which had very little space. The Americans believed however, that the USSR had in mind of expanding its sphere of influence to Iran and Iraq and, eventually, to the Persian Gulf, therefore the territorial claims. The Turks soon contacted with the US, requesting for help but the US were reluctant to take any position prior to the Potsdam Conference, which was a meeting that would be held between the three Great Powers after British request¹⁴⁶.

The Soviets kept on moving forces towards the Turkish and Greek frontiers and the Turks were asking for American help even more demandingly. In meetings with American diplomats, the Turks were establishing the fact that they would discuss about the revision of the Montreux Conference and would allow minimal territorial changes but nothing of a great magnitude. The US, however were unmoved prior to the

¹⁴⁴ Xydis 1960 pp. 71-2

¹⁴⁵ Gokay 2006 p. 61

¹⁴⁶ Alvarez 1980 p. 60

conference, even though premier Saracoglou characteristically talked about how Turkey was endangered to be even annexed to the Soviet Union.

The USA had no specific objectives in that part of the world. It recognized the role of the “watcher” in a battle between Soviet and British interests, ready to intervene if and when things got out of hand. America’s purpose has always been the existence of stable peace in Europe, in order to conduct business with the European countries. In the Potsdam conference, the US would not tolerate any decision threatening Turkey’s independence.

This did not mean, however, that they were not prepared. On the contrary, since 1943, the American State Department acknowledged the Dardanelles as a point of future interest and started examining what alternatives were there to secure American interests and solve the matter. They reached four possible conclusions and solutions: keep going on with the current arrangements of the Montreux Convention, internationalize the Straits, increase Russian control over the Straits and apportion control among all Black Sea countries. Russian control of the Straits was the least desirable since it would make the Black Sea a Soviet lake and control among all Black Sea countries would have the same effect, since the Soviet Union, as the strongest player in that game, would easily gain control. Internationalization, on the other hand, seemed as a more desirable solution for the States but harder to achieve. Turkey would not accept a solution that takes away its rights on the Straits and the Soviets would not agree with a decision that did not guarantee that they would have the primary role in the region. Moreover, a decision like that would put pressure on internationalizing other waterways, like the Suez Canal and Panama. It seemed that the retention of the Montreux Convention was the only possible solution that would actually work out¹⁴⁷. The Americans had already studied and reached these conclusions since 1943, while Roosevelt was still president.

The British, on the other hand, by July 1945 started pointing out to the Soviets that they are “*very much surprised by the... territorial claims and demands for bases in the straits, since these activities could not be regarded as exclusively Turko-Soviet matters*”¹⁴⁸. Territorial claims should be examined by the United Nations and the

¹⁴⁷ Alvarez 1980 pp. 38-9

¹⁴⁸ Xydis 1960 p. 82

Straits question affected aspects of the Montreux Convention which was not bilateral but was signed by many parties. In addition to that, it was agreed at Yalta that the Soviets would contact the US and British governments before making any demands to Turkey and that the whole issue should be discussed in Potsdam. The British in general thought that the Soviet demand for passage at all times was logical but would strongly oppose to any Soviet bases being set up in Turkey. Apart from the fact that Russian ships sailing freely into the Mediterranean would threaten the British power and dominance in the area, the setting of military bases would threaten the lines of communication between Britain and her Asian empire, mainly India¹⁴⁹. The US would be reluctant, however, to have such a firm stance in the matter of the military bases, since it was negotiating the setting of military camps in Brazil, Portugal and Ecuador.

Potsdam, a suburb for German officials just a little further away from Berlin, was selected as a reminder of the Allied power and victory. The American delegates would stroll around ruined Berlin discussing about the fate of Adolf Hitler¹⁵⁰.

The Potsdam Conference started at the 12th of July, one day after the first successful detonation of an atomic bomb in New Mexico. Although in the 17th of July Truman stated that “Stalin wanted the Black Sea Straits for Russia, as had all the czars before him” and “Churchill was determined that Britain should keep and even strengthen the control over the Mediterranean”¹⁵¹, the question of the Straits was not discussed until the 22nd of the same month. It was Churchill who first raised the question during the plenary meeting of that day. He said that his side was ready to accept modifications in the Montreux Convention which would allow the movement of Russian ships through the Straits and the whole discussion would be on a friendly basis. He, however, stressed to Stalin that importance of not alarming Turkey who was suspicious of the movements of Soviet and Bulgarian troops near the Bulgarian borders and the constant attacks in the Soviet press and radio, as well as his discomfort about the prior discussions between Turkish and Soviet diplomats¹⁵². Mr. Molotov responded by claiming that the Turks approached the Soviets for an alliance but the Soviets demanded two conditions: the annexation of the Turkish territory that once belonged to the Armenian and Georgian SSR and the revision of the Montreux Convention. He stated that the Convention did

¹⁴⁹ Gokay 2006 p. 59

¹⁵⁰ Truman 1986 pp. 339 - 44

¹⁵¹ Howard 1974 p. 225

¹⁵² Potsdam Conference Proceedings Vol. 2 p. 256

not correspond to the present situation and that the rights of the Soviet Union were equal to those of Japan¹⁵³. He had also informed the Turks that if they did not agree, the Union was ready to reach an agreement alone with the other Black Sea powers. When Churchill asked Molotov if what he wants is Soviet military bases in the Straits, Molotov responded by referring to the treaties of 1805 and 1833, which were the closest that the Russians ever got to closing the Straits issue for good, to their advantage without external influences, proposed that the matter of the Straits should be the business of Turkey and the USSR and the Montreux Convention should be revised “in the proper regular procedure”. President Truman stated he has not an opinion on the matter and asked for delaying this conversation for a day which was agreed.

On the plenary meeting of the next day, the Straits were brought up again. Churchill made it very clear that Britain would not tolerate Soviet bases on Turkish grounds and the Turks would not agree anyway. Stalin stated that the Turks had nothing to be afraid of and that the information about Soviet troops on Bulgaria were wrong since there were less Soviet troops in Bulgaria than British soldiers in Greece¹⁵⁴. He continued by stating that the Soviets only claimed a little piece of land, which would not have been brought up if the Turks did not ask for an alliance. An alliance means protecting each other’s frontiers but the frontiers to the parts of Kars and Ardahan were incorrect¹⁵⁵. Stalin repeated the well-known argument that a little country like Turkey, with the British help and support, was holding the Soviet Union by the throat, since it could close the Straits not only in cases of war but also when and if it felt threatened, and that was something that had to change and called it “a ridiculous situation”¹⁵⁶. Stalin also said that it would be very uncomfortable for Britain and the USA, if similar agreements were made for Gibraltar or the Suez and Panama canals. Turkey, he stated, was too weak of a country to guarantee safe passage of Soviet ships at all times and to deny the entrance to possible hostile ships¹⁵⁷. If they could not have a base in Turkey, there should be another base near the Straits through which the Soviets would defend them.

Then it was turn for the US president H. Truman to take the speech. He proposed of a free waterway guaranteed by all the Great Powers. Since all the European wars, in the

¹⁵³ Potsdam Conference Proceedings Vol. 2 p. 257

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid* p. 302

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid* p. 302

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid* p. 303

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid* p. 303

last two hundred years, happened in the area between the Black and Baltic Seas and from France to Russia, it was in the hands of the great powers to not let that happen again¹⁵⁸. Free passage would correspond not only to the Black Sea but also to the Danube and Rhine waterways, guaranteed by international authorities that would represent all powers. These authorities would restore and develop navigation facilities and guarantee equal protection for all participant nations. He said that he didn't want to participate in another discussion about the Straits or Danube in 25 years¹⁵⁹. The idea for this came to Truman because of similar problems to the Danube River and the proposal of the State Department for an authority composed by the United States, Britain, France, the Soviet Union and the riparian states. The problem in Danube was, however, a commercial one, while in the Dardanelles it was a matter of security¹⁶⁰. Truman's proposal was out of spirit with the Soviet needs. Churchill once more stated that he also wanted a revision of the Montreux Convention and Truman's proposal was on the right track, however Stalin needed a day to analyze the American proposals.

During the next plenary meeting, Stalin stated that it was impossible to reach an agreement since their points of view were so different and should perhaps move on to discussing the next item of the conference's agenda¹⁶¹. A solution like the American proposal was undesirable by the Soviets since they did not only want free exit to the Mediterranean, they also wanted to control who goes in the Black Sea and be able to close the Straits at will. Free access to the Black Sea would mean that Russia's Southern shores were vulnerable to the aggressive appetites of other powers, while exit through the Black Sea was very significant for the Union's economy since it was the outlet for the natural reserves of Caucasus and the grain of Ukraine. Having a state in which everyone can get in or out at all times would only satisfy one of those needs.

Churchill once more supported that the guarantee of the Great Powers would be a substitute for military bases and the Soviets asked him if he would like the Suez Canal to be under the same principle. Churchill responded that the Suez Canal has worked for 70 years without complaints, only to find Molotov's respond to "ask Egypt about complaints"¹⁶². A solution was not reached and it was decided that each of the three

¹⁵⁸ Knight 1977 p. 241

¹⁵⁹ Xydis 1960 p. 86

¹⁶⁰ Alvarez 1980 p. 63

¹⁶¹ Potsdam Conference Proceedings Vol. 2 p. 365

¹⁶² *Ibid* p. 365

governments would make separate talks with Turkey. Stalin did, however, propose to Churchill, on the sidelines of the meeting, the setting of Soviet military bases in Alexandroupoli, if he would not be allowed to do so near the Sea of Marmara¹⁶³.

What was agreed at the Potsdam Conference is that the Montreux Convention should be revised and each of the three participating countries would make their own talks with Turkey. As the protocol of the Conference stated:

The three Governments recognized the need for revision of the Convention of the Straits concluded at Montreux as failing to meet present day conditions.

It was agreed that as the next step the matter should be the subject of direct conversations between each of the three Governments and the Turkish Government¹⁶⁴.

¹⁶³ Nikolaou 1995 p. 83

¹⁶⁴ Alvarez 1980 p. 66

The Straits after the Potsdam Conference

Although the Potsdam Conference did not actually turn out to bring any major changes or results, it is considered as a turning point to the foreign relations of that time. President Truman showed that the US was ready to take a leading role in the final solution of the problem and act more actively on the issues of Eastern Europe. The Soviets were seeing the US as an obstacle to their ambitions, while Britain as an ally to maintain their dominance in the Mediterranean for the same exact reasons. The Turks of course, were more than pleased with America's interaction to the matters of the Straits, since they always considered it as a trustful ally and that is why they tried to involve the US in the case from the very beginning¹⁶⁵.

After the Conference, it was expected by Turkey and Britain that the US would take the initiative to start negotiations and lead the problem to an end. The US however, was not active, and as the Soviet pressure was continuing on Turkey, the latter were getting anxious that the Americans would step back to their previous policy of non involvement. What was actually happening was that the American State Department and president Truman could not reach an agreement, since their opinions differed and the State Department did not take internationalization into consideration at all.

On November 2, 1945 Ambassador Wilson passed the American note on the Dardanelles to the Turkish foreign minister. The note included a review of the Potsdam discussions and stated that they proposed a solution which “ *will promote international security, will show due consideration for the interest of Turkey and all Black Sea riparian powers, and will assure the free use of this important waterway to the commerce of all nations* ”¹⁶⁶. It stressed American will to participate in another international conference to resolve the issue and concluded that

“The Government of the United States is of the opinion that a revision of the Montreux Convention undertaken to meet changed world conditions should be based on the following principles:

The Straits to be open to the merchant vessels of all nations at all times.

The Straits to be open to the transit of warships of Black Sea powers at all times.

Save for an agreed limited tonnage in time of peace, passage through the Straits to be

¹⁶⁵ Alvarez 1980 p. 66

¹⁶⁶ Ibid p. 72

denied to the warships of non - Black Sea powers at all times, except with the specific consent of the Black Sea powers or except when acting under authority of the United Nations.

Certain changes to modernize the Montreux Convention, such as the substitution of the United Nations system for that of the League of Nations and the elimination of Japan as a signatory”¹⁶⁷

The responses to the American suggestions varied. The British agreed that the Montreux Convention needed to be revised but believed it was better if that would happen during an international conference. Turkey was also reluctant, since it considered the proposal to be very beneficial for the Soviets and it would make them lose their strategic advantage over them. They did acknowledge, however, the fact that the American proposals were much milder than those of the Soviets. They agreed with the general spirit of the note but reserved commenting on the proposals since they were afraid of a Soviet gathering of the fleet at the Straits. This, they noted, should be a concern for all the powers that have interests in the Mediterranean Sea. The Soviet Union was even more cautious. They were thoughtful that Turkey alone was too weak to guarantee that, in a case of war, they could deny the entry of hostile war ships. Without such a guarantee, Russian security was not assured. The only guarantee for such concerns was the establishment of Soviet military bases at the Dardanelles. Although these responses were not official, the Americans understood that the Soviets were not pleased with their proposals.

Not much happened regarding the Straits from the Soviet side either. For about a year, to the surprise of Britain and the USA, no official contact between the Soviet Union and Turkey took place. Although the Soviet pressure on Turkey (and Greece) was not reduced¹⁶⁸, no formal theses were delivered to the Turkish side. With five more years remaining until no more amendments to the Montreux Convention could be made, the Soviets did not push too hard towards that direction, although they insisted on their demands about the Straits and the annexation of the Kars and Adrahan areas. On 7th of August 1946, the Soviets sent to the Turkish foreign ministry their views and proposals on the Straits regime¹⁶⁹. Again, no changes were made to the Soviet policy and

¹⁶⁷ Alvarez 1980 p. 72

¹⁶⁸ Howard 1970 p. 44

¹⁶⁹ Hurewitz 1972 Vol. II p. 268

demands: they asked for exclusion of all non-Black Sea military powers, exclusion of any role of the US as well as the revision of the convention and military bases on Turkish grounds. More specifically, they asked for opening of the Straits to all merchant ships at all times, opening of the Straits to the warships of Black Sea countries at all times, restricted passage of the non – Black Sea warships, establishment of a new regime under the control of Turkey and the Black Sea powers and a joint defense system.

Ankara sent an anxious message to Washington asking for advice¹⁷⁰ and the USA was the first to react to the Soviet proposals. They believed that the Soviet note to Turkey showed a desire for the eventual control and domination of Turkey, with instant consequences to the Middle East. On August 19, they sent a note to the Soviets, stating once again their opinion that the revision of the Montreux Convention was not an issue to be solved solely by the Black Sea countries. They decided that they had to “*resist with all means at our disposal any Soviet aggression and in particular, because the case of Turkey would be so clear, any Soviet aggression against Turkey... The United States would not hesitate to join other nations in meeting armed aggression by the force of American arms*”¹⁷¹. On the note sent to the Soviets, it was stated that “*Turkey should continue to be primarily responsible for the defense of the Straits... Should the Straits become the object of attack or threat of attack by an aggressor, the resulting situation would constitute a threat to national security and would clearly be a matter for action on the part of the Security Council of the United Nations*”¹⁷². This was followed by the notes sent to the Soviets by Britain and Turkey at 21 and 22 of August respectively. The order of the notes sent to the Soviets was not random. It represented the new role of the US as the leading country in the effort to prevent the Soviet expansion. It represented the changes that happened in the Great Power’s relations since about a year before and was the harbinger of the Truman doctrine that would follow and the beginning of the Cold War¹⁷³.

The problem of the Turkish Straits was once again brought up during the Paris Peace Conference, at October 10, when Molotov made once more the parallelism between the Straits and the Suez and Panama Canals, accusing the British policy of being

¹⁷⁰ Xydis 1967 p. 248

¹⁷¹ Howard 1970 p. 45

¹⁷² Ibid p. 46

¹⁷³ Xydis 1960 pp. 89-90

imperialistic. On 18th of October, Turkey once again rejected the Soviet proposals, reaffirming the fact that they would be eager to revise the Montreux Convention but would not accept military bases on the Dardanelles or even a regime of joint defense system. In the meanwhile, the US Government was weighing the Soviet's moves and came to the conclusions that their main objective was the eventual control of Turkey. The Soviets would use Turkey as an obstacle for those wishing to attack their grounds, and as a means of expansion towards the Mediterranean, the Near East and Middle East.

The US recognized that, from a strategic point of view, Turkey was the most important state in the Mediterranean and the Middle East. Turkey's geographical position makes it the most efficient point in which Soviet expansion to the Middle East could take place or be stopped. A satellization of Turkey would eventually mean that the next steps of Russian expansion would be Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Palestine, Transjordan, Egypt and the Arabian Peninsula, all of which were out of Soviet influence at that time. It would also have the same consequences in Greece and Iran, which were struggling against the Soviet influence. None of these countries had a state as stable as Turkey did, which made Turkey the most efficient candidate to put an ending in those plans of expansion¹⁷⁴.

The Turkish Government proposed the creation of a security arrangement between Turkey, the USA, the Soviet Union and Britain for defense in the Straits in case of war, and hoped that the Soviets would prove to be reasonable. The Soviet pressure on Turkey was creating a large financial burden in that country and, if a settlement could not be reached quickly, they would soon have to look for financial aid since they could not keep carrying the burden for ever.

However, the Soviet pressure on Turkey and Greece kept going on and was even magnified during late 1946 and 1947. On the 9th of January 1947, the American ambassador in Moscow informed President Truman that the Soviets were about to begin with a new wave of diplomatic activities, regarding the Turkish Straits¹⁷⁵. The American response to the situation in Greece and Turkey was the Truman Doctrine on March 12, 1947. The Truman Doctrine was an American foreign policy, according to which financial assistance would be given to Turkey and Greece in order to prevent

¹⁷⁴ Howard 1970 p. 48

¹⁷⁵ Xydis 1967 p. 252

them from falling to Soviet hands. President Truman gave a speech on live television that was broadcast in several countries of the world, in which he asked for the Congress to provide Greece and Turkey with 400 million dollars for financial aid and military supplies and equipment. On May 22, President Truman signed Public Law 75, according to which “*the national integrity and survival of Greece and Turkey were of importance to the security of the United States and of all freedom-loving peoples*”¹⁷⁶.

On April 19, 1950, the Soviet naval organ Krasnii Flot declared that the Montreux Convention should be revised since it had ceased to accord with the interests of the Black Sea powers. The Soviet Union, however, did not raise the question of revision in 1951 although they could have done so, according to article 29 of the Convention. On February 15, 1952, Greece and Turkey both joined NATO and took another big step away from Soviet pressure and towards Western influence. General of the Army, Omar Bradley, discussed the significance of Turkey stating that “*Turkey, astride the Bosphorus and Dardanelles, guards the approach by water from the Black Sea to the Mediterranean and to Suez Canal and Egypt farther south. Turkey, too, flanks the land routes from the North to the strategically important oil fields of the Middle East*” and continued stating “.....” that the evidence of these countries’ importance were “*in the intensive efforts of international communism to bring Greece under Soviet domination, and in efforts of Russia, extending almost 200 years, to gain control of the Turkish Straits*”¹⁷⁷.

On May 30, 1953, Molotov informed the Turkish Government that the Soviet Union was reconsidering its relations with its neighboring countries, and especially with Turkey. He informed them that the States of Georgia and Armenia, and consequently the Soviet Union, could now renounce their territorial claims over Turkey. The Turks replied on the 18th of July stating that they were satisfied with the note, they would also like to seek good relations and that “*the question of the Black Sea Straits, was regulated by provisions of the Montreux Convention*”¹⁷⁸. On July 20, the Soviets sent one more note to Turkey, in which they complained about the nature of the Turko-American relations and the visit of 10 American and 22 British warships in Istanbul during July of that year. This was considered “a kind of military demonstration”. The Turks replied

¹⁷⁶ Xydis 1967 p. 255

¹⁷⁷ Howard 1970 p. 51

¹⁷⁸ Ibid pp. 51 - 52

that they were just courtesy visits and the Soviets pointed out that in 1950, 1951 and 1952, 33, 49 and 61 warships had visited Turkey respectively, while on the first seven months of 1953 the number had already reached 60. It was evident that Turkey was now under full western influence and the Soviet aspiration of getting control of the Straits was further than ever.

The Soviets, once again, did not ask for a revision of the Convention on 9 November 1954, although they could do so according to article 28. It was very doubtful that they could achieve their goals now and, furthermore, the advances in weapon technology made the Straits easier to control from a distance with the new weaponry and missiles that were invented¹⁷⁹. Not much happened ever since. In 1957, from August to October, during the Syrian crisis, Turkey was once more under pressure from the Soviets, similarly to 1945-46. There was no change of policy considering the Straits between Turkey and the US, not even after the 1960 *coup d'état*. The Soviets did not stop being displeased by the constant American presence in the Straits, but the US would also refer to their right to act that way, according to article 18 of the Montreux Convention, and would send two destroyers or frigates in the spring and fall of each year. This, of course, worked as a reminder of the signed treaties and worked as maintenance of their functionality.

The constant challenges coming from the ever growing Soviet fleet, led to the creation of MARAIRMED (Maritime Air Forces in the Mediterranean) with the participation of the US, Britain, France and Italy by NATO. During the Korean War, Turkey could refuse passage of warships since it was a country at war, but refused to do so in order to not raise an issue of revision again. Neither did they forbid entry to the Black Sea to the American fleet during the Vietnam War, with the excuse that the US were not in a war but were supporting a side. The US, at first declared that the Montreux Convention does not apply to them since they had not signed it, but later they adopted the Turkish excuses¹⁸⁰. As years passed by, the interpretation of the Convention has been becoming more and more elastic, since new weapons, especially nuclear, were being created that the Convention did not mention.

¹⁷⁹ Howard 1970 p. 52

¹⁸⁰ Nikolaou 1995 pp. 87 -8

Even though decades have passed, the Montreux Convention is still in full use until our days, although some changes need to be made in order for it to be on the same page with today's world. These changes have nothing to do with security though. The increase in traffic through the Straits since 1936 is huge. This has led to an increase of accidents, especially with oil tankers, and nobody would like an ecological catastrophe right on the shores of Constantinople. The sea pollution has already reached a new peak in the area.

Article 2 of the Montreux Convention states that any merchant vessel enjoys freedom of passage any part of the day and that Turkish pilotage is optional. That might have worked in 1936 but now there cannot be such unlimited freedom of passage. In 1994 the Turkish Government introduced a new "Maritime Traffic Regulation for the Turkish Straits and the Marmara Region" in order to cope with these dangers¹⁸¹. During November 1998 new regulations replaced those of 1994 due to Russian concerns. The new regulations are simpler and deal more thoroughly with freedom of passage¹⁸².

¹⁸¹ Soysal 2001 pp. 325 - 326

¹⁸² Karaosmanoglu 2001 p. 156

Conclusions

It is clear that, ever since the creation of Russia and its annexation of the northern shores of the Black Sea, the Bosphorus Straits have been of great importance to her. We have seen that the policy of Russia and the Soviet Union regarding the Straits has been changing, based on the conditions that she was facing each time. When she was feeling weak, like during the Conference of Lausanne, Russia would prefer the Straits to be closed for warships in order for her to establish her security. When she felt, however, that she needs to expand and be on the offensive side, the opening of the Straits was what she would be trying to achieve. Of course, since Russia could not call for a new international treaty every time her interests changed, she would have preferred to acquire the Straits, like the Tsarist Russia did, or place them in her zone of influence, like Stalin tried to do after the Second World War. Despite their passionate tries, the last years of Stalin marked the last efforts the Russians made in order to acquire control over the Straits. Ever since 1952, Turkey has proven to be an ally to the Westerners and the Montreux Convention of 1936 is the longest living international regime that the Dardanelles ever had.

Turkey on the other hand, seems to be an object in the hands of the Great Powers ever since the Ottoman Empire began its decay. She used to be the one and only undisputed controller of the Straits and the Black Sea in general, until Catherine the Great managed to obtain the Crimean peninsula. Since the Treaty of Kucuk Kaynarca, the Ottoman Empire was facing way too many problems inside the lands of the Empire, and it was very difficult to handle them all at once. The rise of nationalism and the revolts this brought inside her territory and the constant wars made the, once great, Empire a weak state. This resulted in other powers taking control of the matters of the Straits, like the Potsdam Conference in which Turkey was not even invited. What Turkey sought, when it came to the Straits, was to be in control of who passes through them and for most of the time this was accomplished. Losing that privilege meant that she would lose her most significant advantage in the world of diplomacy and would soon be forced to be annexed or join the sphere of influence of Russia and, later, the Soviet Union.

From the other powers that played a role in the matters of the Bosphorus Straits, Great Britain played the most important role since here presence of her fleet in the

Mediterranean was constant. What she opted for was open Straits that would allow her commercial ships to enter the Black Sea and, on the same time, some regulations regarding the exit of warships from the Straits, since she would not like to see the Russian fleet entering the Mediterranean at will. On the other hand, she would like to have the ability to approach Constantinople easily and take action if she saw a chance of obtaining the control of the Straits would appear. From that point of view, befriending the Ottoman Empire was the best choice and that's how Britain acted most of the time, although after the First World War she started questioning that choice.

The USA on the other hand, for a large part of the 20th century, had a policy of non involvement. As long as her commercial interests in the Black Sea were not harmed, they would not take any formal position regarding the Straits. This changed after the Second World War when they saw in the Soviet Union a great enemy. This led to the matters of the Straits being of importance to the USA too, since they would not like any revisions that would strengthen their great opponent. Moreover, the Soviet Union's actions regarding the Straits made the US President Truman take a more firm stance and get involved seriously in the matters of Europe.

For more than two centuries, the "Eastern Question", the problem of who is going to be in control of the Bosphorus Straits, has been much discussed among the leaders of the Great Powers. Although the interests and prospects were changing by the years, the stable thing was the interested parties and the persistence with which they tried to achieve their goals. Although the Dardanelles are nothing but a small strip of sea, they played an important role in European and world history throughout the centuries.

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