

Yardstick of Friendship

Soviet-Turkish Relations and the Montreux Convention of 1936

ONUR İŞÇİ

Beginning in 1920, bitterness against the postwar international order drove Soviet-Turkish relations. Nationalist Turks and internationalist Bolsheviks laid to rest four centuries of rivalry between their imperial predecessors as they found themselves in a convergence that each side defined as anti-imperialist. At the heart of their cooperation was a geopolitical alignment that sought to shield the greater Black Sea region from Western intrusions. Equally, both sides shared a commitment to the creation of modern states. This interwar exchange between Ankara and Moscow has aptly been called anti-Westernism on the European periphery; it was a meaningful partnership.¹ All the way up to the final hours of peace in 1939, the first principle that guided Turkish diplomacy was good neighborly relations with Moscow in the context of friendship rather than subordination. Turkey's leaders repeatedly stressed that they perceived all other alliances as complementary to "Turkey's anti-imperialist coalition with Russia."²

Soviet-Turkish tension during the Cold War, however, contributed to a widely held view that the default nature of the two states' relationship was chronically hostile and inherently destabilizing.³ In the context of the previous centuries of struggle, there is a certain logic to the portrayal of the interwar friendship between Ankara and Moscow as a short-lived pragmatic alignment in an otherwise conflict-prone affair that resumed after World War II. Thus before the Soviet and—much more recently—Turkish archives

¹ Samuel J. Hirst, "Anti-Westernism on the European Periphery: The Meaning of Soviet-Turkish Convergence in the 1930s," *Slavic Review* 72, 1 (2013): 32–53.

² İsmet İnönü, *Söylev ve Demeçleri, TBMM'nde ve CHP Kurultaylarında* (Istanbul: Milli Eğitim Basımevi, 1946), 280–321.

³ See, e.g., Dzhamil Gasanly, *SSSR–Turtsiia: Ot neutraliteta k kholodnoi voine* (Moscow: TP, 2008).

became accessible, the scholars who approached Soviet-Turkish relations during the interwar period treated their political meaning in terms defined narrowly by geopolitics—a pragmatic alignment at odds with the broader visions of each government.⁴ As a corollary to this belief, many accounts maintain that cordial Soviet-Turkish relations ended, rather predictably, at the Montreux Convention of 1936, when an age-old geopolitical dispute over the ownership and control of the Straits reemerged and drove a wedge between two natural enemies.

Yet such notions of historic enmity exist more in the works of scholars than in the words of historical actors. Scores of Turkish diplomatic records, which are currently being declassified, show that the Soviet-Turkish partnership remained intact after Montreux but not after the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. The question then remains: if Soviet-Turkish convergence during the interwar period was only a temporary geopolitical alignment, then how could Moscow and Ankara disagree over the principal strategic challenge—the Straits—and continue to talk about joint anti-imperialist endeavors? Juxtaposing key holdings from Russia's and Turkey's foreign ministry archives, the second of which is not yet officially open to researchers, this article probes diplomatic exchanges between Ankara and Moscow during 1936–39 to examine how Turkish and Soviet leaders imagined they could reconcile their strategic problems. It shows that after Montreux there was even a thin ray of hope for a bilateral military pact on the Black Sea that would “ward off imperialist penetration.”⁵ Ultimately, more significant cooperation was achieved in the economic sphere. These activities demonstrate that a Black Sea logic was central to Turkish thinking, that Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's and İsmet İnönü's insistence on friendship with the Soviet Union as the primary goal of their foreign policy needs to be taken seriously. The Soviet Union, in turn, courted Turkey as an ally, including after Montreux. Continued cooperation after 1936 shows that, much more than a pragmatic alignment, Moscow and Ankara saw partnership on the Black Sea as a key response to imperialist threats from without.

After Montreux, Soviet and Turkish leaders did indeed lament that “the whole world” seemed to have become “aware of their dwindling attachment.”⁶ Yet both the Soviet and Turkish governments also sought to address that

⁴ See, e.g., Zara Steiner, *The Triumph of the Dark: European International History, 1933–1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 112, 122, 533, 534, 623.

⁵ Türk Diplomatiği Arşivi (TDA) TSİD 5028381 (15th Anniversary of the Soviet-Turkish Friendship Treaty, 24 March 1936).

⁶ *Dokumeny vneshnei politiki SSSR* (hereafter *DVP*) (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1959–), 20:267 (Conversation with Zekai Apaydın, 14 May 1937).

tension and took dramatic steps in the late 1930s to prolong cooperation, particularly in the economic sphere. These attempts to maintain the partnership after the challenge of Montreux reveal much about the nature of the Soviet-Turkish relationship. Indeed, even as undeniable tensions grew, until 1939, when the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact demonstrated that one party had aligned with an expansionist power outside the region, Moscow and Ankara shared a sense that their interests overlapped in defense of the Black Sea.⁷ New works, a number of which were published in the pages of this journal, suggest that by the beginning of the 20th century the major powers on either side of the Black Sea had increasingly begun to see convergence as the basis of their relationship.⁸

This article, then, is in keeping with recent scholarship on Soviet-Turkish relations and shows that anachronistic notions of Russo-Ottoman geopolitical rivalry are radically at odds with the *Weltanschauung* of modern Turkey's policy makers. The next brief section puts Turkey's relations with the Soviet Union in context by illustrating how Italy and Nazi Germany had become new sources of apprehension in the mid-1930s. I then examine Soviet-Turkish negotiations at Montreux to demonstrate why relations soured before turning to the aftermath of the Straits Convention to show that both Ankara and Moscow desperately sought to reconcile their differences and improve relations, particularly through trade. In its conclusion, the article takes the narrative into the final days of peace in Europe and demonstrates how the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact firmly ended the possibilities for friendly relations between the two states.

Turkish Diplomacy and Revisionism in Europe

When Turkey's new leaders looked at their truncated country and the world around it, they did so with hope but also with restraint. In 1939, Ambassador Percy Loraine captured this tension when he said of Ankara: "the Sick Man ... has left behind a number of lusty children, who were [sic] acutely aware of their limitations."⁹ The new capital in Anatolia was more isolated from its Western neighbors, metaphorically as much as physically. Until the 1930s, many European states maintained their embassies in İstanbul, feeding Turkey's conviction that Ankara was being boycotted by the West and

⁷ TDA TSID 16992881 (Molotov-Sarper Meeting Minutes, 7 June 1945).

⁸ *Kritika's* special issue "Models on the Margins: Russia and the Ottoman Empire" included one article that treated the interwar period at significant length: Adeb Khalid, "Central Asia between the Ottoman and the Soviet Worlds," *Kritika* 12, 2 (2011): 451–76. Another good example, again published in *Kritika*, is Samuel J. Hirst, "Soviet Orientalism across Borders: Documentary Film for the Turkish Republic," *Kritika* 18, 1 (2017): 35–61.

⁹ Public Record Office (FO) 424/282, E2170/135/44 (Loraine to Halifax, 14 April 1939).

needed the Soviet Union as an alternate source of support. This underlying motive is crucial for understanding Turkey's priorities in the immediate post-war environment.

A critical question for early republican Turkish diplomacy concerned the fate of the Straits, which served as the key trading route for Black Sea littoral states and as a passage for their navies. The Straits Question had long been an intrinsic part of the larger problem known as the Eastern Question, encompassing a strategic fault line that stretched out from the Mediterranean to the Black Sea. On the eve of the republic's establishment, Ankara was vexed about the existing regime of naval passage through the Dardanelles and the Bosphorus—as that passage took foreign navies through the heart of İstanbul—but there were other priorities and problems to resolve, such as the annulment of the Ottoman capitulations granted to Western powers and the recognition of Turkey's sovereignty rights in Eastern Thrace and Asia Minor. Hence at the Lausanne Conference in 1922–23, which replaced the Sevres Treaty of 1920, Turkey agreed to demilitarize the Straits and transfer their control to an international convention. Once again, behind Turkey's conciliatory attitude regarding the Lausanne Convention on the Straits, friendship with the Soviet Union loomed large. Until the mid-1930s, when revisionism in Europe compelled Turkish leaders to mend fences with Western powers, strong relations with the Soviet Union safeguarded Turkey's security on its long eastern border and in the Black Sea.

Turkey's admission to the League of Nations in 1932 occurred at a critical interwar conjuncture, when relations with Moscow had reached their climax but a different source had produced apprehension in Ankara.¹⁰ With Italian revisionism appearing increasingly threatening, Turkey shifted its attention to the Mediterranean from the Black Sea. Bitter memories of Italian claims to territory in southwestern Anatolia during World War I, which had subsequently been disclosed at Brest-Litovsk, convinced Turkey's leaders that Rome would eventually seek to expand its sphere of influence toward the Aegean Sea, where no substantial Turkish naval defense structure was allowed under the existing Lausanne regime.¹¹ Turkey's interwar relations with Italy had shown symptoms of bipolar disorder until 1935, with constant shifts between antagonism and amity. Recent scholarship suggests that aversion and friendship often coexisted in a peculiar way, leading French observers to

¹⁰ Dilek Barlas and Serhat Güvenç, *Turkey in the Mediterranean during the Interwar Era: The Paradox of Middle Power Diplomacy and Minor Power Naval Policy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 151.

¹¹ See "The Lausanne Convention Relating to the Regime of the Straits, July 24, 1923," *League of Nations Treaty Series*, 28:117–37.

label Ankara-Rome diplomacy “*amiadversion* (amity-adversity).”¹² By 1936, Turkey’s growing concerns over the status of the Straits demonstrated the need to revise the relevant clauses of the Lausanne regime, which had become more detrimental to Turkish national security. Between 1936 and the break-out of war in Europe in 1939, Turkish policy makers concentrated their efforts on resolving this problem. Consequently, Turkey had to change its own view of Great Britain, establishing closer relations with London to remilitarize the Straits in 1936. The one obvious caveat of this strategy was that what now seemed like Turkey’s own revisionism could easily have been misinterpreted by the Soviet Union. It was no coincidence that during the course of 1936–39, Turkish leaders often made one last stop in Moscow before ending their diplomatic tours in Europe, because they knew only too well that their Soviet friends would be somewhat irked by this shift in their foreign policy.

While Italian activities in the late 1930s were Ankara’s primary concern in the military sphere, Nazi Germany was a source of a different kind of anxiety. The Third Reich had come to dominate Turkey’s foreign trade, and was doing so in an increasingly dramatic way. “Dependence on Germany” was a common refrain among the Turkish political elite, and given the memory of the Ottoman Empire’s economic fate, these were words spoken with a particular anxiety. Here the Soviet Union offered an attractive alternative, because it was a source of some of the goods that Ankara sought. Indeed, after Montreux the Turkish government continued to seek Soviet support in its attempts to industrialize. Turkey looked to the Soviet Union, Moscow sought to oblige, and both hoped to develop bilateral trade to lessen Turkish dependence on Germany and make a Black Sea partnership work.

Nazi Germany’s “export empire,” which stretched out from Hungary to Turkey and Iran, was difficult to compete with.¹³ The rapid advance of German-Turkish commercial exchange had been due to growing Turkish demand for goods such as iron and steel, locomotives and trucks, and machinery, mainly owing to Turkey’s railway construction program.¹⁴ Since Turkey’s main railway system had been built according to German standards before World War I, most of its rolling stock was of German origin and most of its technical employees had received their training in Berlin. Additionally, however, both countries faced similar economic policy challenges after the Great Depression, and cooperation was facilitated by an effective policy that limited the outflow

¹² Dilek Barlas, “Friends or Foes? Diplomatic Relations between Italy and Turkey, 1923–36,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 36, 2 (2004): 231–52, here 231.

¹³ See Stephen G. Gross, *Export Empire: German Soft Power in Southeastern Europe, 1890–1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 222–23.

¹⁴ TDA TSID 9139755 (Celal Bayar’s Report, 23 November 1936).

of coveted hard currency for either.¹⁵ Agreements between the Reichsbank and the Central Bank of Turkey in 1934 and 1935 established a clearing system, and a stipulated margin guaranteed that any Turkish debts to Germany would be paid. According to Turkish statistics, Turkey's exports to Nazi Germany in 1935 grew to 46.7 million Turkish lira from 33.8 million in 1934. To put these numbers in perspective, Germany absorbed 48.7 percent of Turkey's total exports in 1935, up from 36.6 percent in 1934.¹⁶ The exponential advance was, in part, a result of the net-balance system.¹⁷

If Nazi Germany provided Turkey with necessary industrial goods in a fashion that prevented Turkish accumulation of a trade deficit, then why did İnönü relentlessly beg the Soviets "to free Ankara from this economic dependency on the Nazis"?¹⁸ The message İnönü conveyed during his meetings with the Soviets was that, despite the impressive trade volume between Turkey and Germany, the reality was different from what the numbers suggested. Turkey had become caught, he argued, "in the web of a trade system that placed it in the hands of Germany."¹⁹ Despite the clearing agreements, Turkey was rapidly accumulating a foreign trade deficit.²⁰ Turkey's purchase of war materials was growing and becoming ever harder to pay off with the sale of Turkey's chief exports—tobacco, mohair, raisins, figs, sultanas, and hazelnuts. Part of the difficulty, according to İnönü, was that, as Turkey had become more and more dependent on Germany, "Turkey's outside markets had been lost while the Soviets were looking elsewhere." It was presumably understood that he lamented the loss of other export markets as well, but it was a clear plea to the

¹⁵ A key aspect of the Nazi-Turkish trade was that exchange occurred without depleting the two countries' foreign currency reserves. As with other countries, the Nazi New Plan aimed to conduct trade agreements with Turkey, which accepted German goods in return. See Dilek Barlas, "Germany's Economic Policy Towards the Balkan Countries in the 1930s: A Case of Great Power Pursuit of Domination in the Peninsula," *Turkish Review of Balkan Studies*, no. 2 (1994/1995): 135–45, here 138.

¹⁶ TDA TSID 5032572 (Report on Soviet-Turkish Trade, 2 November 1936).

¹⁷ In line with Reich Economics Minister Hjalmar Schacht's New Plan, Nazi Germany pursued a similar economic policy in Iran as a containment strategy toward the Soviet Union. By comparison, Jennifer Jenkins suggests that German imports into Iran in 1941 made up close to 48 percent of the national total, while Iranian exports stood at 42 percent ("Iran in the Nazi New Order, 1933–1941," *Iranian Studies* 49, 5 [2016]: 728).

¹⁸ Arhiv vneshnei politiki Rossiiskoi Federatsii (AVP RF) f. 5, op. 16, pap. 122, d. 114, l. 26 (Apaydin to Stomoniakov, 16 November 1936).

¹⁹ AVP RF f. 5, op. 16, pap. 122, d. 114, l. 24 (Stomoniakov's Diary, 7 November 1936).

²⁰ Adam Tooze refers to the New Plan as a system of National Socialist economic management, which was essential if the Third Reich was to survive a truly global war. Since clearing agreements were vital for the extension of this system to countries such as Turkey, Tooze claims that maintaining a balanced trade account was the primary Nazi objective. If we read İnönü's pleas to the Soviets in this context, it reveals even more about Turkey's changing political preferences (Tooze, *Wages of Destruction* [London: Penguin Books, 2006], 308–9).

Soviet Union to step in. İnönü made it clear that Turkey's conundrum was fundamentally a political one that reflected its political preferences. Looking at the minutes of İnönü's conversations with Karakhan and his repeated appeals to secure a trade agreement that would counterbalance Germany's share, it becomes clear that Republican Turkey had changed a great deal since the Great War—the Ottoman government had been satisfied with strong economic ties with Germany, but Ankara much preferred a Soviet to a German partnership.

The ambivalence of the 1936–39 period was on display during Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's visit to the Soviet embassy's celebrations of the 13th anniversary of the establishment of the Turkish Republic.²¹ On 29 October 1936, just three months after the Montreux Convention had been signed, Atatürk arrived at the Soviet embassy on his state's most important holiday. In some sense, his visit was not particularly unusual. During the peak of Soviet-Turkish collaboration, the Soviet embassy was a mecca for Ankara's new leaders, and one of the regular participants recalled that "rather unlimited amounts of vodka and caviar were served over politics."²² For the 1936 celebrations, Ambassador Lev Karakhan had as usual secured the attendance of Turkey's political elite, including Prime Minister İsmet İnönü and Foreign Minister Tevfik Rüştü Aras. Atatürk was not an expected guest; he turned up at half past two in the morning, already in high spirits. With relations as they were, the nocturnal conversations proved awkward.²³

Atatürk's behavior suggested that he was frustrated with his Soviet hosts, but also that he wanted to put these frustrations behind him. He took Karakhan aside and demanded to know why Stalin had not met with him personally after so many years: "Is Stalin indifferent to such a meeting or deliberately ignoring me?" He claimed to be offended that "Comrade Kalinin," instead of the leader of the Soviet Union, had sent him a laconic congratulatory telegraph on the anniversary of Turkey's independence. Karakhan reported that Atatürk was visibly irritated as he insisted that he was a friend of the Soviet Union, that this friendship would exist as long as he lived, but that he could maintain this friendship only on reciprocal grounds.²⁴ Karakhan

²¹ Karakhan's primary purpose was actually to introduce a delegation from the Union of Societies of Assistance to the Defense and Aviation-Chemical Construction of the USSR (OSOAVIAKHIM). See Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv sotsial'no-politicheskoi istorii (RGASPI) f. 558, op. 11, d. 388, ll. 10–13 (Record of a conversation with Kemal Atatürk, 29 October 1936).

²² Falih Rıfki Atay, *Çankaya* (Istanbul: Pozitif Yayınları, 2009), 479.

²³ TDA TSID 8512358 (Report on Litvinov's Discussion with Ambassador Zekai Apaydın about Atatürk's Conversation with Karakhan, 8 November 1936).

²⁴ RGASPI f. 558, op. 11, d. 388, ll. 10–13.

promised to arrange a meeting with Stalin, but, far from mollified, Atatürk reiterated resentment for recent insolence, albeit with a further proclamation of loyalty. Amid these vacillations of mood, Atatürk let slip that he respected Russia with its strong, disciplined, and mechanized army, but that he was not afraid of anyone, as there were 18 million Turks behind him.²⁵ His tirade continued with further exhortations about the need for continued alliance between Ankara and Moscow until, finally, he alluded to the elephant in the room—the recent quarrel at Montreux. Atatürk knew that the Soviets were unhappy with some of the clauses in a new Straits regime that introduced Turkey's full sovereignty over the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles, as well as precise limitations on naval tonnage in the Black Sea for littoral and nonlittoral powers. He referred to the latter limitations as a yardstick and ran with the metaphor. Figuratively, he told Karakhan, collaboration across the Black Sea was a much more meaningful yardstick for appraising Soviet-Turkish friendship than any of the Montreux clauses.²⁶

Atatürk's visit thus demonstrated the tension that emerged after Montreux but also Montreux's place within a broader context. Karakhan immediately transmitted his record of the conversation, shortly after Atatürk retired with his entourage at 7 AM and the orchestra stopped playing. A few months later, Stalin took an interest in the report and had it circulated to the Soviet political elite, with the suggestion that they would find interesting the words of their “‘friend’” Atatürk.²⁷ The cynicism of Stalin's quotation marks around the word “friend” matched that visible in Atatürk's reference to the strength of his army. Yet Stalin's description of Atatürk as a friend also alluded to a momentum that Montreux alone was not enough to break. It would be wrong to misconstrue this meeting at the Soviet embassy as evidence that Ankara and Moscow's honeymoon had ended. In 1937, Atatürk quietly observed that “even the happiest families have minor spats, but that does not lead them to fall apart.”²⁸ In the face of a widening gap over the Straits, Turkish and Soviet diplomats desperately tried to maintain the anti-imperialist understanding of the Black Sea that had once united them.

***Mare Clausum?* Soviet-Turkish Negotiations at Montreux**

The Montreux Convention represented the first peacefully negotiated revision of the post-World War I peace treaties. At the Lausanne Conference in

²⁵ Ibid., 13.

²⁶ TDA TSID 8512277 (Apaydın's Report on Atatürk's Statement to the Soviets regarding the New Straits Regime, 2 November 1936).

²⁷ RGASPI f. 558, op. 11, d. 388, l. 9 (Stalin to Rosengol'ts, 7 January 1937).

²⁸ *DVP*, 20:317 (Conversation between Mustafa Kemal and M. A. Karskii, 1 June 1937).

1923, Turkey had taken a conciliatory position on the Straits in return for Allied concessions on other issues. Ankara agreed to demilitarization in the Straits and a right of passage determined by international agreement rather than by the Turkish government. At Montreux, with a position strengthened by postwar recovery, Turkey asserted its sovereignty over the Straits, claiming the right to develop fortifications in the area and take control of passage into its own hands. Ironically, Moscow had pushed harder for Turkish sovereignty at Lausanne than Turkey itself but was nonetheless disappointed by the negotiations at Montreux. The crux of the Soviet-Turkish disagreement lay in the relationship of each side with Great Britain, the power pushing most forcefully for an open Straits regime at Lausanne and at Montreux. The Soviet Union sought to have the Straits permanently closed to warships, thus offering protection to the Soviet coastline in Ukraine, southern Russia, and Georgia. Turkey, however, was anxious about a growing Italian threat and sought to alienate neither the Soviet Union nor Great Britain.

The Straits Question, which had been dormant since Lausanne, reemerged in the context of a Europe whose map was changing. Hitler's remilitarization of the Rhineland in March 1936 demonstrated that Western Europe remained hesitant to confront the German desire to revise that map. From the Turkish perspective, however, Italian revisionism was an even greater threat.²⁹ Alarm bells had already begun to toll in July 1935, when the Turkish ambassador in Rome grew suspicious of Mussolini's bombast and startled Ankara with a report on the role of the Dodecanese in Italy's naval policy. The report showed an alarming increase in Italian fortifications in Leros and Kastelorizo—Rome's two main naval bases in the Aegean Sea.³⁰ Just three months after Mussolini ordered Bersaglieri battalions to invade Ethiopia, local radio stations in western Anatolia were broadcasting Il Duce's propaganda, exacerbating Turkey's concerns.³¹ Ankara watched with trepidation as Italy mobilized in what Rome liked to call *mare nostrum*. Chief of Staff Fevzi Çakmak was convinced that Mussolini schemed to contain British dominance in the Mediterranean through the Dodecanese.³² What is more, he argued, were a naval battle to break out in the Mediterranean, Turkey would be left to its own fate. In light of Turkey's weak naval defenses on the Aegean Coast, he decided to reinforce

²⁹ Dilek Barlas wrote extensively on Italy and Turkey during the interwar period. See Barlas, "Friends or Foes?"; and Barlas and Güvenç, *Turkey and the Mediterranean*.

³⁰ Başbakanlık Cumhuriyet Arşivleri (BCA) 030.10.0.0/238.608 (The Role of the Dodecanese in Italy's Naval Policy, 7 July 1935).

³¹ BCA 030.10.0.0/219.476.4 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the Turkish Embassy in Rome, 2 January 1936).

³² BCA 030.10.0.0/256.720.20 (Ministry of the Interior to the Prime Ministry, 23 January 1936).

the Fourth Army with new conscripts and purchased modern anti-aircraft guns from the Soviet Union.³³ But these precautions could not address Turkey's main concern—the Straits—which remained demilitarized according to the Lausanne agreement. Hence a few days after the German reoccupation of the Rhineland, Turkish Foreign Minister Tevfik Rüştü Aras decided to take concrete steps to address the security of the Straits.³⁴

Aras's primary challenge was to harmonize diametrically opposed British and Soviet positions. While Turkey easily attracted Britain's attention, it was unclear if the Soviets would endorse Turkey's decision to formally raise the issue of revising the Lausanne agreement. During his preliminary negotiations with his British and Soviet counterparts, Anthony Eden and Maksim Litvinov, Aras made the Turkish government's logic clear. He pointed to Italian fortification of the Dodecanese and, by calling the islands "the Helgoland of the Eastern Mediterranean," compared them to Germany's main naval base and pointed to the revisionist context.³⁵ Aras stressed that such a base could serve only two purposes: to control the Suez Canal and to dominate the Dardanelles. The former peril, Aras hoped, would induce Britain to assist Turkey, while the latter would persuade the Soviets. In any case, he argued that if Italy had highly fortified islands within a few hours' sail of the Dardanelles, Turkey could not be forbidden the right to keep garrisons in self-defense.³⁶ Aras pleaded that the step he proposed was the only way of forestalling a possible Italian coup de main on the Straits.³⁷

Although Eden and Litvinov both sympathized with Aras's logic, they disagreed on the best course of action. Given recent breaches of the convention in Europe, Eden was unsure about the timing, but he was favorably disposed to the idea of renegotiating the Straits problem for two reasons: to relieve the Royal Navy from the burden of assisting Turkey's defense of the Dardanelles; and to separate Turkey from its interwar connection to the Soviets.³⁸ By contrast, Litvinov was strongly opposed to any renegotiation that included nonlittoral powers. The Soviet Union had long held that the Black Sea constituted a *mare clausum* that differed from internationalized waterways like the Suez and Panama canals. Litvinov told Aras that the Soviet

³³ BCA 030.10.0.0/221.491.27 (Chief of General Staff to the Prime Ministry, 8 March 1936).

³⁴ BCA 030.10.0.0/231.557.7 (Ministry of the Interior to the Prime Ministry, 16 March 1936).

³⁵ BCA 030.10.0.0/219.476.7 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the Turkish Embassy in London, 16 March 1936).

³⁶ FO 424/280 E 1634/26/44 (Eden to Loraine, 24 March 1936).

³⁷ BCA 030.11.1.0/106.28.11 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the Prime Ministry, 19 April 1936).

³⁸ FO 424/280, E 2024/26/44 (Loraine to Eden, 10 April 1936).

position had undergone no change since the Lausanne Convention of 1922–23, and that they had always supported Turkey's sovereignty and its desire to remilitarize the Straits.³⁹ Indeed, Georgii Chicherin, the head of the Soviet delegation at Lausanne, had argued against the demilitarization of the Straits much more strongly than the Turks themselves.⁴⁰ Hence the Soviet government understood "Turkey's legitimate concerns regarding the insecurity of peace and the grave danger of the outbreak of war," but continued to be categorically against the inclusion of nonlittoral powers in any negotiation.⁴¹

Aras seems to have been overly confident in his ability to serve as a bridge between London and Moscow. Given his assurance to Litvinov that Ankara would confer with the Soviets before taking action, the Soviets responded with understandable outrage when, on 11 April 1936, the Turkish government raised the issue before the League of Nations without having informed Moscow. When Karakhan informed the Soviet Foreign Ministry about this *fait accompli*, he was told that Turkey's timing was "terrible": only days after the Wehrmacht's march into the Rhineland, it suggested silent approval of German revisionism. Despite private misgivings, in public the Soviet Union tried to maintain the appearance of Soviet-Turkish solidarity. In their newspaper coverage, Soviet columnists took pains "to paint the Turkish move in a light that it did not have." In explaining the rationale for this position, the Soviet Foreign Ministry, like Atatürk, adopted a marital metaphor for the relationship: "we, of course, have decided not to take the argument out of the Soviet-Turkish hearth."⁴² The Soviets lobbied in vain to dissuade the Turks from going forward with procedures in the League, not because they disagreed with the goal but "to give Turkey a free hand."⁴³ Much to Moscow's dismay, the international conference convened in Montreux on 22 June to discuss the fate of the Straits. It is hard to overstate the Soviets' scorn for Aras, whom they found to be duplicitous and personally responsible for some of the challenges to the Soviet-Turkish relationship.

To make matters worse, during the preparations Aras had repeatedly insisted to the British delegation that the Soviet government was in complete agreement with the Turkish position, and that Turkey's proposals would meet with no difficulty from that quarter.⁴⁴ When, however, the Turkish draft was

³⁹ *DVP*, 19:231–32 (Soviet Note on the Turkish Proposal for a Revision of the Lausanne Straits Convention, 16 April 1936).

⁴⁰ RGASPI f. 159, op. 2, d. 19, l. 100 (19 December 1922).

⁴¹ *DVP*, 19:231–32 (Soviet Note on the Turkish Proposal for a Revision of the Lausanne Straits Convention, 16 April 1936).

⁴² AVP RF f. 5, op. 16, pap. 112, d. 113, l. 23 (Krestinskii to Karakhan, 13 May 1936).

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ FO 424/280 E 4633/26/44 (Lord Stanley to Eden, 21 July 1936).

eventually presented at Montreux on 22 June, it emerged that Aras's claims about Soviet endorsement were unfounded. There were a number of issues that the Soviets sanctioned: for instance, it was more or less established that unhindered commercial traffic, both in peace and war, would be guaranteed, and that Turkey would have the right to remilitarize the Straits.⁴⁵ What disturbed the Soviet Union in the draft treaty was the inclusion of the Turkish sovereignty clause, which meant that Turkey would have the right to open or close the Straits to warships. In addition, Litvinov was aware of Britain's desire to drive a wedge between Ankara and Moscow and viewed Aras's repeated attempts to satisfy England with revulsion. So incensed was Litvinov that the Soviet delegation was prepared to leave the conference. They stayed not despite but because of Aras's "pointless Anglophilism," which some in Moscow thought might not be fully representative of the official Turkish position.⁴⁶ Deputy Commissar of Foreign Affairs Boris Stomoniakov, for example, told Karakhan that when he broached the subject of the Soviets' discontent with Aras at Montreux, the Turkish ambassador in Moscow, Zekai Apaydin, "blamed everything on Aras, with whom everyone knew he had terrible relations."⁴⁷ Stomoniakov thought that Aras undoubtedly had a worse attitude toward the Soviets than did İnönü and Atatürk, and apparently, "being impelled by his feelings and desire to curry favor with the British," went much further than İnönü and Atatürk had in mind.⁴⁸ In his response Karakhan concurred, saying that the position taken by Aras, who was junketing between British and Soviet receptions, did not correspond to the content and tone of traditional Soviet-Turkish relations. Nonetheless, he admitted Aras was not entirely alone, and that a role in the general worsening of relations was played by Soviet intransigence. They were "guilty of much" in the Turks' growing coldness toward Moscow.⁴⁹

In the context of worsening relations, Litvinov and Aras met in Geneva on 29 June to reconcile their differences and repair some of the damage of Montreux. Aras sought to ease Moscow's apprehension by offering a separate, albeit less binding, bilateral treaty—one that would supplement the soon-to-be concluded general accord at Montreux. Litvinov received the offer with amused surprise and reminded Aras that as early as 1934, there had been discussions of a Soviet-Turkish pact for defense of the Straits in case of naval

⁴⁵ *DVP*, 19: 231–32 (Soviet Note on the Turkish Proposal for a Revision of the Lausanne Straits Convention, 22 June 1936).

⁴⁶ AVP RF f. 5, op. 16, pap. 112, d. 113, l. 28 (Stomoniakov to Karakhan, 13 July 1936).

⁴⁷ *DVP*, 19:365 (Stomoniakov to Karakhan, 14 July 1936).

⁴⁸ AVP RF f. 5, op. 16, pap. 112, d. 113, l. 28 (Stomoniakov to Karakhan, 13 July 1936).

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

assault. In other words, Litvinov pointed to a solution to Turkey's security problems that did not involve non-Black Sea powers. Of course, the Soviet Union stood to gain, for "in return for Soviet assistance, Turkey had offered to close the Straits in case the Soviet Union was attacked."⁵⁰ The Turkish foreign minister, however, seemed to have a different recollection of their talks in 1934. His offer to negotiate a supplementary treaty with the Soviet Union was, in reality, something of an empty gesture. Aras saw it primarily as a concession to the Soviets and of little real meaning. From his perspective, the momentum of Soviet-Turkish cooperation was sufficient. "Why was the 1925 Soviet-Turkish Treaty of Friendship not enough?" he repeatedly asked Litvinov, and he appealed to Chicherin's pledges of mutual assistance in case of attack. Back in 1925, Aras had pushed for a clause guaranteeing "friendly neutrality" in case either the Soviet Union or Turkey was at war with a third party, but the Politburo had ordered Chicherin to exclude this term "because it had no clear meaning." Chicherin's compromise was a secret letter attached to each copy of the pact, in which each side promised that the "genuine friendship" that existed between them would be preserved in the event of an attack by a third party on the other.⁵¹ From the Soviet perspective in 1936, this was hardly a formal commitment. Karakhan challenged Aras, pointing out that in the 1934 negotiations Turkey had also seemed to think that more formal mutual commitments were necessary, and that there had even been discussion of stationing a Soviet fleet on the Aegean near the port of İzmir.⁵² Caught off guard, Aras backtracked and said that he had yet to receive authorization to put in writing anything that would produce binding obligations.⁵³ In view of the rising tensions, Soviet newspaper editorials could no longer remain aloof. On 2 July, *Izvestiia* published a succinct but accusatory account of the whole affair in Geneva, which prompted the Turkish government to respond with a diplomatic note.⁵⁴ Despite Turkey's insistence on continued loyalty, the Soviet Union was frustrated by its lack of exclusivity.

Litvinov's increasing resentment toward Aras and the very idea of Montreux notwithstanding, he tried to ensure that the new Straits regime would be as beneficial toward the Soviet Union as possible. Litvinov announced that his government would support the Turkish thesis provided that nonlittoral use of the Straits would be "for specific purposes and within

⁵⁰ *DVP*, 19:326 (Karakhan to Litvinov, 29 June 1936).

⁵¹ AVP RF f. 5, op. 16, pap. 122, d. 112, ll. 28–29 (Krestinskii to Litvinov, 31 October 1936).

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ TDA TSID 8513398 (Apaydın's Record of His Conversation with Litvinov, 20 October 1936).

⁵⁴ *DVP*, 19:365 (Stomoniakov to Karakhan, 14 July 1936).

specific limitations.”⁵⁵ In its final amendments, article 10 of the Montreux Convention introduced the kind of specific limitations Litvinov sought and expressed exactly when and how nonlittoral powers could pass through the gates of the Black Sea. Additionally, article 12 gave Black Sea littoral countries privileged access to the Straits and the right to dispatch their fleet for purposes of rejoining their base outside the Black Sea with adequate notice.⁵⁶ Finally, article 18 curbed the aggregate tonnage of nonlittoral states in the Black Sea in times of peace and stipulated that “their vessels of war may not remain in the Black Sea more than 21 days, whatever be the object of their presence there.”⁵⁷ Soviet conditions were almost entirely met in the new accord. The only clause of concern to Moscow related to times of war, when the passage of warships was left entirely to the discretion of the Turkish government, provided that it remained neutral.⁵⁸

Given the impending war in Europe, the Soviets were understandably irritated that Black Sea security now relied exclusively on good-neighborly relations with the Turkish government. Although this was a significant issue, serious concessions had been made to Soviet concerns. The so-called “Black Sea yardstick” clause, which Aras had introduced in the final draft of the treaty, limited nonlittoral powers to a fixed tonnage of 30,000 tons with a limited period of stay in the Black Sea. There was a clause allowing a one-off increase in tonnage to 45,000, if the Soviet fleet was further expanded. Nonetheless, this was a much more stringent limitation than anything in the Lausanne Convention and, given that the Soviet Black Sea fleet had a known tonnage of 60,000 tons, beneficial to the Soviet Union. The Soviets accepted the yardstick clause and agreed to sign the convention, which replaced the Lausanne regime on 20 July 1936 and reinstated “Turkey’s full sovereignty over the Straits in times of war and when it senses an imminent possibility of war.”⁵⁹ All the Lausanne signatories were present except Italy, which refused to send a delegation because of Anglo-French orchestrated sanctions through the League.

The Montreux Convention was a clear victory for Turkey and for its allies in the region. Turkey had peacefully negotiated a revision to the Straits regime agreed to in the aftermath of World War I, achieving sovereignty over the Straits and the right to militarize them. Germany and, even more so, Italy were the main losers, since the anti-Italian group in the Mediterranean was

⁵⁵ *DVP*, 19:315–16 (Litvinov’s Statement at Montreux, 23 June 1936).

⁵⁶ *League of Nations Treaty Series*, 173:215–41.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ See articles 19 and 20 in *League of Nations Treaty Series*, 173:215–41.

⁵⁹ “Montrö Boğazlar Sözleşmesi ve Ekleri,” *Resmî Gazete* (5 August 1936), 37.

reinforced. Regarding Moscow's gains, however, there were competing assessments. Some thought that Soviet Russia, closely associated with Turkey and recently allied to both France and Czechoslovakia, received an equally valuable prize. The Soviets could now dispatch their fleet into the Mediterranean in times of peace without restrictions, while all nonlittoral powers were limited to 45,000 tons in the opposite direction.⁶⁰ Despite Eden's attempts to put a good face on the new convention, Britain feared that "should Turkey adhere to the Franco-Russian pact, the French and Russian fleets might utilize the Black Sea as a base for naval operations in the Mediterranean."⁶¹ Despite Soviet accusations that Turkey had sided with Britain, Britain's sponsorship of the Oriental Entente less than two years later demonstrated London's recognition that its position in the Eastern Mediterranean had weakened.

While most signatories at Montreux thought that the Soviet Union would now enjoy a more favorable position than it had since 1923, for months Moscow's attitude toward Turkey remained puzzlingly sour. İnönü tried probing his Soviet counterparts about Moscow's lingering pessimism. "Was it really in Stalin's best interest," he asked, "to risk the collapse of a friendship so cautiously protected for decades from the most intransigent powers of imperialism?"⁶² Three months after Litvinov and Aras parted ways acerbically at Montreux, İnönü took the initiative and apologized to Litvinov for the confusion in Switzerland. "If something was necessary to prove Turkey's continued friendship," İnönü told him, the Turkish government was ready to sign an agreement with the Soviets about the defense of the Straits in case of Italian aggression "despite a legitimate fear of economic retaliation from the Germans."⁶³ At first, the meeting between Litvinov and Ambassador Apaydın, who was communicating İnönü's message, revealed a marked sense of bitterness, which the Soviets continued to hold against Aras. Litvinov disdainfully asked whether İnönü was offering this belated apology "out of pity for the Soviet Union."⁶⁴ Apaydın's minutes of the meeting demonstrate an even harsher language than Litvinov recorded in Soviet accounts, and the Turkish ambassador seems to have been cajoling his government into action. Apaydın told Ankara that Litvinov's impression of Turkey had been reduced

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Harry Howard, "The Straits after the Montreux Conference," *Foreign Affairs* 15, 1 (1936): 199–202.

⁶² TDA TSID 5071728 (Aras to Apaydın, 26 October 1936).

⁶³ *DVP*, 19:500–2 (Conversation between Apaydın and Litvinov, 19 October 1936).

⁶⁴ RGASPI f. 17, op. 166, d. 566, ll. 78–79 (Litvinov's Record of His Conversation with Apaydın, 25 October 1936).

to naught by Aras's frivolity and that "Turkey was no longer the master of its own foreign policy."⁶⁵

Hope emerged as Litvinov began probing the possibility of a formal agreement. Although the Turks still maintained the existing treaty and its annexes were "one of the constituent documents of the republic, obviating all requisites for additional accords," Litvinov cherished hopes of forging a military alliance more binding than the 1925 treaty.⁶⁶ Confronted by Litvinov's persistence, Apaydın suggested that Turkey had considered Soviet-Turkish relations since the early 1920s within the framework defined by Chicherin in his famous letters. But if the Soviets now hoped for a less ambiguous statement of that framework, Apaydın said his government would be willing to reformulate it in writing. Litvinov seemed intrigued; he rummaged through the pile of documents on his desk and found Chicherin's letters, which the two then proceeded to interpret. Later that evening, Apaydın reported to İnönü that the most viable option to rejuvenate their relations with Moscow was to rearticulate Aras's proposal for a separate treaty in Soviet language.

Litvinov had no doubt of the appeal of reinforcing Moscow's relations with Ankara and informed the Politburo on 25 October: "It is not so much the assistance that Turkey would be able to provide us in the event of war, but the political effect of such a pact, which will do something to prevent Turkey's drift away from us."⁶⁷ For the Soviets, the exigencies of the impending war in Europe necessitated a much more binding treaty, particularly after what happened in Montreux, "if only for purposes of more clearly defined allegiances." He was equally aware that Aras would "no doubt seek Britain's consent first" and would "try not to disobey their orders," but he still believed that if Turkey fully disclosed its cards and formulated the promised treaty, it would be of great interest to the Kremlin, "however little it gives us from a geostrategic point of view."⁶⁸ Evidently, Litvinov thought of Soviet-Turkish relations in more political terms than strategic, for he recommended the Politburo accept the Turkish proposal and ask Arkadii Rosengol'ts, the commissar for foreign trade, to present his views on expanding trade relations with Turkey.

Much to Apaydın's dismay, Ankara did not concur with its ambassador's appraisal of the situation and showed little eagerness to enact a treaty with

⁶⁵ TDA TSID 8513398 (Apaydın's Record of His Conversation with Litvinov, 20 October 1936).

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ RGASPI f. 17, op. 166, d. 566, ll. 80–81.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

the Soviet Union. Aras told him to “stop negotiating until further notice.”⁶⁹ Instead, Apaydın should simply communicate Atatürk’s friendly but ceremonial note of gratitude to Stalin.⁷⁰ Turkey’s volte-face came on 28 October, just hours before the Republic Day reception at the Soviet embassy in Ankara, where Atatürk made his surprising appearance and added more confusion to Soviet-Turkish relations. Apaydın himself was perplexed and bluntly told Aras that “he could not grasp exactly what it is that Aras wanted him to do.”⁷¹ Bearing the burden of delivering his government’s message, Apaydın certainly did not expect Litvinov to respond favorably. Yet Litvinov’s response was even more shocking than he could have imagined, for Litvinov told him that “Turkey has definitely adopted a new orientation” and that the Soviet Union saw “nothing positive” in it.⁷²

Whatever Apaydın hoped to gain by negotiating a treaty with the Soviets, it was not Litvinov’s esteem. But, unhappy with the failure of his initiative, he revealed his personal problems with Aras and fed Litvinov’s suspicions that Aras was personally responsible for the more anti-Soviet turns in Turkey’s recent policy. Litvinov considered Apaydın’s offer to be the one that Aras had already made to him earlier in Geneva and now had taken back. Litvinov claimed that “he knew for sure that Aras reneged because of British pressure,” and that “he had information that Aras even thanked the British for their advice.”⁷³ For the Soviets, the failure of Apaydın’s latest approach in Moscow, three months after Montreux, was the nail in the coffin. In a snappy telegram, Litvinov instructed Karakhan “not to talk with the Turks anymore about pacts.”⁷⁴ When Aras paid a visit to the Soviet embassy in Ankara the next day, he tried to smooth things over, but Karakhan told him: “nothing changes the fact that the Turks preferred the English to the Soviets and were now more loyal to that camp.”⁷⁵

British diplomatic records illustrate that the Soviets were right about Anthony Eden’s role in obstructing the Soviet-Turkish pact and that Litvinov’s fears of an emerging Anglo-Turkish Spring had some basis. But they also attest to Soviet exaggeration of the British threat and a sense of insecurity that haunted Litvinov’s decisions for months after Montreux. Several meetings between Anthony Eden and Turkey’s ambassador in London, Fethi Okyar, demonstrate that Aras was in fact pleading incessantly for

⁶⁹ *DVP*, 19: 525–26 (Litvinov’s Conversation with Apaydın, 28 October 1936).

⁷⁰ TDA TSID 17841279 (Apaydın to Aras, 4 November 1936).

⁷¹ TDA TSID 8512277 (Aras to Apaydın, 2 November 1936).

⁷² *DVP*, 19:525–26 (Litvinov’s Conversation with Apaydın, 28 October 1936).

⁷³ *DVP*, 19:538–39 (Litvinov’s Instructions to Karakhan, 4 November 1936).

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ *DVP*, 19: 539–40 (Karakhan’s Telegram to Litvinov, 5 November 1936).

British acceptance of a Russian guarantee to Turkey. Eden told Okyar that a Soviet-Turkish pact “would be extremely dangerous and open to grave political objections,” given the situation in Europe. But Aras kept pushing to bring the Soviet Union to the table as a guarantor of Turkey’s Black Sea coasts.⁷⁶ Ankara was only willing to move so far in London’s direction. Aras’s attempts to harmonize Soviet and British positions irritated Okyar so much that the latter seemed to the British “distinctly embarrassed by Aras, of whom he had a poor opinion.”⁷⁷ It was, in fact, Okyar and not Aras who “thanked” Eden for his advice. This was to be expected, for Okyar was an ardent supporter of liberal economics and known for his Anglophile tendencies. Because Aras sought to balance Moscow and London, the pro-British Okyar was now leveling the same accusations against Aras for exactly the opposite reasons that Ambassador Apaydin had in Moscow. Although he caught flak from both sides, Aras did have a firm position. He described the state of affairs between Ankara and Moscow as “an insidious rift” that needed to be dispelled.⁷⁸ In October 1936, Aras informed Okyar that, even though a Soviet-Turkish Pact did not seem to be in the offing, his rejection would not be brusque, as it was important to give Russia a soft answer “because Turkey wished to do nothing that might jeopardize friendship with Russia, which was the corner-stone of Turkish policy—both at home and abroad.”⁷⁹ Turkey’s goal was to remain free and unaligned but favorably disposed to the Soviet Union.

Events at Montreux and in its aftermath did introduce new tensions into the Soviet-Turkish relationship, despite the fact that the actual terms of Montreux were more beneficial to the Soviet Union than the Lausanne agreement that it replaced. The crux of the disagreement was Moscow’s desire to close the Black Sea to nonlittoral powers and the consequent need for Turkey to enter into an exclusive relationship with the Soviet Union. Turkey refused and sought to maintain Britain’s support in case of problems with Italy in the Mediterranean. Nonetheless, Turkey strove to satisfy as many of the Soviet Union’s Black Sea concerns as possible. At no point did Montreux represent a clean break in Soviet-Turkish relations. Indeed, the strength of the Soviet-Turkish understanding of their partnership as crucial to the politics of the Black Sea is visible in both sides’ efforts to rekindle relations in other spheres after Montreux.

⁷⁶ FO 424/280 E 6499/5280/44 (Eden to Morgan, 15 October 1936).

⁷⁷ FO 424/280 E 6712/5280/44 (Morgan to Eden, 25 October 1936).

⁷⁸ FO 424/280 E 6812/5280/44 (Eden to Morgan, 30 October 1936).

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

Beyond Pragmatism: Economic Preferences across the Black Sea

In Moscow, at the 19th anniversary celebrations of the Bolshevik Revolution Apaydın was surprised by Litvinov's friendly welcome. This was just a week after Atatürk's performance at the Soviet embassy in Ankara, and he was greeted before even the British ambassador, with whom he had arrived at the same time. Taking Apaydın aside, Litvinov immediately began showering him with questions about Atatürk's visit. He told Apaydın that Stalin knew and appreciated Atatürk's genuine feelings toward the Soviet Union.⁸⁰ After alluding to Turkey's economic problems and its over-reliance on Nazi Germany, Apaydın said that "the nature of Soviet-Turkish collaboration has always been based in politics and economics," and that the two states would be better served by the expansion of trade relations than by rehashing trivial disputes. Apaydın's response, unvarnished as it was, did come with a concealed criticism of the Soviets' disregard for Turkey's more fundamental economic difficulties. He did not avoid a delicate subject and expressed regret that the total volume of trade between Ankara and Moscow had fallen from 20 million Turkish liras in 1930 to just 8.5 million lira in less than six years (Table 1). In the discussion that ensued, Litvinov proclaimed that the Soviet Union was, "of course, willing" to relieve Turkey of its troubles by purchasing agricultural products or "whatever the Germans were buying from Turkey."⁸¹ There was an element of bombast here, for the Soviet Union could not truly compete with Germany, but there was also a sincere declaration of an attempt to try.

Apaydın's comments were not the first Moscow had heard of Turkey's foreign trade problems. Litvinov was well aware of Turkey's soaring trade volume with Nazi Germany, for Soviet reports showed that Turkey's leading trading partner in 1935 was Germany (35.5 million Turkish liras for German imports versus 39.2 million for Turkish exports), dwarfing England (8.7 mil./5.2 mil) and the Soviet Union (4.32 mil./4.15 mil.) combined.⁸² The Soviet Union had further cause for worry, because in 1936 the total volume of trade between Turkey and the USSR (9 million liras) was again significantly lower than the Turkish-German exchange (102 million liras) (Table 2). In its trade with the Soviet Union, Turkey ran a deficit of just over 1 million liras. Thus with discernible haste the People's Commissariat of Foreign Affairs called Apaydın the morning after he broached the subject and informed him that Stalin approved the commencement of a new round of negotiations in

⁸⁰ TDA TSID 5032572 (Report on Soviet-Turkish Trade, 2 November 1936).

⁸¹ TDA TSID 8512358 (Report on Litvinov's discussion with Ambassador Zekai Apaydın of Atatürk's conversation with Karakhan, 8 November 1936).

⁸² AVP RF f. 5, op. 16, pap. 122, d. 114, l. 6.

Table 1. Turkish Imports from and Exports to Soviet Russia, 1930–36**IMPORTS FROM SOVIET RUSSIA, 1930–36**

Year	Amount (in 1,000 liras)	Ratio (% of total Turkish imports)
1930	10,606	7.19
1931	7,943	5.78
1932	5,942	6.91
1933	3,907	5.23
1934	3,911	4.51
1935	4,325	4.87
1936 (as of Sept.)	3,278	—

EXPORTS TO SOVIET RUSSIA, 1930–36

Year	Amount (in 1,000 liras)	Ratio (% of total Turkish exports)
1930	7,661	5.06
1931	4,688	3.69
1932	5,437	5.36
1933	4,499	4.62
1934	3,643	3.95
1935	4,150	4.33
1936 (as of Sept.)	1,791	—

Source: Tables are from Celal Bayar's "Report on Soviet-Turkish Trade." See TDA TSID 9139755, (Celal Bayar's Report, 23 November 1936). Soviet reports confirm the Turkish figures but indicate that the total volume for 1935 does not include the exchange of goods though Kayseri mills or of military equipment and goods. See AVP RF f. 5, op. 16, pap. 122, d. 114, l. 6 (Ministerial Report on Foreign Trade with Turkey for 1935, 30 May 1936).

Ankara for the expansion of Soviet-Turkish trade and to replace the commercial treaty of 1931.⁸³

The scope of the trade negotiations that began in December 1936 reveals how closely Turkey was prepared to align itself with the Soviet Union in economic terms. During preliminary talks in Moscow, Apaydın asked for \$100 million US from the USSR in a five-year installment plan for the purchase of military equipment, the establishment of two new industrial plants, agricultural development, and the improvement of Black Sea ports for coastal trade. This loan, Apaydın proposed, would ideally be repaid in ten years in the

⁸³ TDA TSID 5032535 (Apaydın to Aras, 9 November 1936).

Table 2. Turkish Imports and Exports in 1936**TURKISH IMPORTS IN 1936**

Country	Value (in 1,000 liras)	Amount (in tons)	% in 1936	% in 1935
Germany	41,742	163,800	45.0	40.0
United States	8,993	58,700	9.6	6.9
United Kingdom	6,103	19,800	6.6	9.8
USSR	5,030	67,800	5.4	4.9
Czechoslovakia	3,627	13,600	3.9	4.3
Austria	2,595	8,600	2.8	3.3
France	2,300	9,900	2.5	4.7

TURKISH EXPORTS IN 1936

Country	Value (in 1,000 liras)	Amount (in tons)	% in 1936	% in 1935
Germany	60,042	328,000	51.0	41.0
United States	13,419	49,800	11.4	10.0
United Kingdom	6,356	59,900	5.4	6.4
Italy	4,345	36,100	3.7	9.9
Czechoslovakia	4,012	8,400	3.4	3.2
USSR	3,954	6,600	3.3	4.3
France	3,800	51,700	3.2	3.2

Source: Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Başvekalet İstatistik Umum Müdürlüğü, *Harici Ticaret Yıllık İstatistik, Memleketler ve Maddeler İtibarile 1936 İthalat-İhracat, Kısım-2* (Ankara, 1937).

form of agricultural produce totaling \$112.5 million US, including interest. As in previous Soviet-Turkish commercial agreements, Apaydın imagined a state-sponsored Turkish enterprise to partner with the Soviet trust Turkstroï to facilitate future ventures.⁸⁴ Stomoniakov, like other Soviet officials, balked at Apaydın's figure and thought that even half of this amount would require Moscow to purchase too many consumer goods.⁸⁵ Nevertheless, he thought that the Soviet Union could achieve a significant increase in their trade with Turkey.

⁸⁴ TDA TSID 5032066 (Report on Soviet-Turkish Trade Negotiations, 20 December 1936).

⁸⁵ AVP RF f. 5, op. 15, pap. 122, d. 114, l. 53 (Stomoniakov to Karakhan, 13 December 1936).

Given the Soviet Union's wariness about importing consumer goods, it is all the more striking that Stomoniakov hoped that the Soviet Union should challenge Germany for the import of Turkish "raisins and figs." In his response to a draft letter by the People's Commissariat of Foreign Trade (NKVT), which recommended 7.5 million liras for imports from Turkey in 1937, Stomoniakov firmly pushed for 15 million.⁸⁶ Karakhan agreed with Stomoniakov's course of action and acknowledged that the expansion of trade with Turkey was hardly in the Soviet Union's economic interests, that the decision would be made "for exclusively political considerations."⁸⁷ In a private letter to Kliment Voroshilov, Karakhan fleshed out some of those political considerations. He argued that Nazi-Turkish trade had been accompanied by an exponential growth of the German propaganda network in Turkey. This is "ultimately a question of preparing for war," he wrote, "and the Germans are doing this well."⁸⁸ Karakhan was pushing for economic and cultural exchange to keep Turkey as a potential ally despite the fallout at Montreux.

In the end, the Soviet Union did not offer Turkey a large loan, but 1937 saw a marked upswing in economic relations. A new trade agreement was signed in 1937, with a subsequent increase in the volume of exchange. Most importantly from Ankara's perspective, Soviet purchases of Turkish exports increased from 3,900,000 liras to 6,500,000 liras (Table 3). The two sides almost attained a net balance in their bilateral trade. Additionally, Turkey's industrial plans for 1937 were devised under the aegis of the Soviet Union. In the previous collaboration, Turkey had worked with Turkstroï, a subsidiary organization of the Soviet People's Commissariat of Heavy Industry (NKTP) dedicated to the export and installation of industrial equipment in Turkey.⁸⁹ Ankara was disappointed to see Turkstroï folded into a larger organization that dealt with the export of industrial equipment to "the East," but it put aside any reservations.⁹⁰ Beginning in February 1937, the Turkish Ministry of Public Works relied almost exclusively on Exportstroï for ongoing construction projects in eastern Anatolia—such as, for example, the building of

⁸⁶ TDA TSID 9139755 (Celal Bayar's Report, 23 November 1936).

⁸⁷ AVP RF f. 5, op. 16, pap. 122, d. 114, l. 21 (Karakhan to Stomoniakov, 29 November 1936).

⁸⁸ Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv ekonomiki (RGAE) f. 7292, op. 38, d. 309, l. 61 (Karakhan to Voroshilov, 31 December 1936).

⁸⁹ TDA TSID 5029808 (Report on New Soviet-Turkish Trade Treaty, 25 December 1936); also see RGAE f. 7292, op. 38, d. 309, l. 20 (Ordzhonikidze to Molotov, 25 December 1936).

⁹⁰ RGAE f. 7292, op. 38, d. 309, l. 20 (Ordzhonikidze to NKTP, 14 February 1937); also see TDA TSID 9106721 (Report on Turkstroï Activities, 2 November 1936).

Table 3. Turkish Imports and Exports in 1937**TURKISH IMPORTS IN 1937**

Country	Value (in 1,000 liras)	%	1936 total (in 1,000 liras)
Germany	48,132	42.02	41,742
United States	17,295	15.13	8,993
United Kingdom	7,129	6.23	6,103
USSR	7,092	6.21	5,030
Italy	6,085	5.33	2,260
Czechoslovakia	3,006	2.53	3,627
Egypt	2,451	2.15	1,334

TURKISH EXPORTS IN 1937

Country	Value (in 1,000 liras)	%	1936 total (in 1,000 liras)
Germany	50,412	36.53	60,042
United States	19,203	13.92	13,419
United Kingdom	9,769	7.08	6,356
Italy	7,266	5.27	4,345
Belgium	6,633	4.81	1,657
USSR	6,508	4.72	3,954
Czechoslovakia	6,093	4.41	4,012

Source: Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Başvekalet İstatistik Umum Müdürlüğü, *Harici Ticaret Yıllık İstatistik, Memleketer ve Maddeler İtibarile 1937 İthalat-İbracat, Kısım-2* (Ankara, 1938).

a tunnel on the Aras River and a dam in Serdar'abad.⁹¹ Soviet and Turkish engineers were exchanged to complete these projects as well as several irrigation facilities near the Iğdir Valley.⁹²

By March 1937, Ekspoststroï intensified its efforts to promote Soviet experts to be employed as technicians and engineers in Turkey's eastern provinces. Located in the immediate vicinity of Soviet Transcaucasia, the snow-capped villages near Kars and Iğdir witnessed a surge of Soviet mechanics (300–400 people a day at the construction stage), who worked on water-pipeline projects.⁹³ Meanwhile, Ambassador Apaydın was haggling over the

⁹¹ RGAE f. 7292, op. 38, d. 309, l. 38 (Ambassador Zekai Apaydın to Zolotarev, 9 January 1937).

⁹² Ibid., ll. 39–40 (Zolotarev to Apaydın, 21 January 1937).

⁹³ Ibid., ll. 57–58 (Stomoniakov to Zolotarev, 13 March 1937).

price of new projects, over whether the cost of the labor was to be provided by the Turkish government in advance or included in the estimated total budget.⁹⁴ In early June, when the chief engineer of Eksportstroi returned to Moscow, about 70 percent of the installation work was completed and Celal Bayar, the Turkish minister of the economy, anticipated that most Soviet-sponsored facilities would be up and running by the year's end.⁹⁵

Soviet support for Turkish industrialization ultimately had mixed results. The upswing in 1937 was part of a larger Soviet commitment that had helped Ankara launch its first Five-Year Plan (1932–37). Turkey had already been receiving substantial support for years, but 1937 seemed like a showcase year for collaboration. In that year alone, Turkey completed three factories, all equipped to varying degrees with Soviet-sponsored machinery: a cotton-mill factory in Nazilli; a merino factory in Bursa; and an artificial silk factory in Gemlik. The Nazilli plant was Turkey's fourth and largest textile mill, with a production capacity of 20 million meters (1,800,000 kilograms) of coarse cotton fabrics for peasants as well as fine fabrics for urban consumers. Much of the construction work for Turkey's textile industry was financed by Eksportstroi's Turkish counterpart, Sümer Bank, and this development brought new life into remote towns, triggering an influx of people looking for much-needed jobs, housing, schools for their children, and a cultural environment. But there were also setbacks, many stemming from Eksportstroi and Sümer Bank's failure to fully harmonize their efforts, with consequent interruptions in work.⁹⁶ After its opening, it took another eight months for the Nazilli plant to reach full capacity, delaying the 8 million rubles' worth of textile products that were to be exported to the Soviet Union. Equally, however, collaboration suffered from the two sides' ambition. Moscow and Ankara were frequently overzealous, commencing ventures with no specific deadline, cost, or technical specifications. The planned construction of a short-wave national radio station in Ankara, for example, was ultimately aborted, along with several other local stations in the Aegean. For Karakhan and others concerned about German propoganda, this was a particularly frustrating failure, since this was a project in which the Soviet economic and cultural challenge to German influence in Turkey had been particularly entwined.⁹⁷

Despite hindrances, Soviet-Turkish interactions in 1937 permeated the Black Sea, where the two states looked beyond their geopolitical differences and focused on state-sponsored ventures. These developments fell in stark

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, I. 47 (Zolotarev to Apaydin, 23 January 1937).

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, I. 52 (Turkstroi Chief Engineer to NKTP, 2 June 1937).

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, I. 54 (Zolotarev to NKTP, 3 June 1937).

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, I. 90 (Stomoniakov to NKTP, 22 March 1937).

contrast to what British and German observers had hoped for only a year ago at Montreux. This was so much the case that the British government watched with trepidation when Tevfik Rüştü entered into negotiations with Ion Antonesco of Romania for a Black Sea pact that would have included the Soviet Union.⁹⁸ Even though the proposed Black Sea pact was not much more than a gesture, the British ambassador in Ankara voiced his concerns about the support his country had given Turkey at Montreux and questioned whether it would backfire.

Indeed, the Soviet Union had significantly more interest in the Black Sea coastline than it did in the ice-bound Baltic or the Barents Sea, which were easily threatened by the German navy. The Black Sea had well-equipped commercial ports; proximity to valuable manganese, oil, wheat, coal, and steel hubs; and developed canal systems. Another auxiliary aspect of the question of a Black Sea pact was also evident in the matter of interstate trade among its littorals. Turkey, Romania, and Bulgaria were all customers of the Soviet Union, where water-borne merchandise passed through the Black Sea to the Danube and was then reshipped to İstanbul and to other Black Sea ports. Given the centrality of this area for Soviet trade outlets and routes, the British government was concerned about a more privileged partnership between Ankara and Moscow, which they had so carefully sought to circumvent at Montreux.⁹⁹

In July 1937, when Tevfik Rüştü Aras paid an official visit to the Soviet Union, nothing seemed to herald a setback in the calm that had characterized Moscow-Ankara relations since Montreux. As previously, İnönü carefully selected a Turkish delegation whose stature would match the previous delegations that had visited Moscow. Minister of the Interior Şükrü Kaya accompanied Aras and made frequent references to the two states' "heroic struggle against foreign enslavement" and "the oppression of European aggressors."¹⁰⁰ The Soviet press dutifully translated Kaya's proclamations in a way that emphasized the two states' shared values. *Izvestiia*, for instance, suggested that Kaya's remarks were a warning against European imperialists, who incessantly tried to separate Turkey from its connection to the Bolsheviks.¹⁰¹ In his exchanges with the Soviets during his stay, Aras stressed that Turkey's

⁹⁸ In fact, as early as 1933, there had been rumors of Turkish-Romanian negotiations about a Black Sea pact (*Karadeniz Misaki*) between Aras and Nicolae Titulescu. See TDA TSID 6940596 (Turkish Embassy in Moscow to Ankara, 15 September 1933); and TDA TSID 6940463 (Turkish Embassy in Moscow to Ankara, 18 September 1933).

⁹⁹ FO 424/280 E 4434/386/44 (Loraine to Eden, 26 July 1937).

¹⁰⁰ TDA TSID 5194348 (Report on Tevfik Rüştü Aras and Şükrü Kaya's Moscow Visit, 12 July 1937).

¹⁰¹ *Izvestiia* reference is from the 12 July 1937 report cited above.

amicable feelings for Russia were genuine and that, whether the proposed Black Sea pact materialized or not, Turkey would scrupulously fulfill its obligations to the Soviet Union. His carefully worded speech in Moscow on 13 July, when he proclaimed that “the friends and enemies of Russia were ipso facto the friends and enemies of Turkey,” was meant to convey that even without a pact Turkey was prepared to think of itself as in alignment with the Soviet Union.¹⁰²

In Moscow, Aras shed his earlier image of a mediator and embraced a different role. He referred to himself as one of the architects of Soviet-Turkish friendship and celebrated his tenure in Moscow in 1920–21 as the representative of the Turkish Communist Party (or the “Left party,” as he now labeled it) and a “figure of the Comintern.”¹⁰³ Aras’s mission in Moscow was to dispel all negative rumors that had arisen since Montreux and to convince Stalin that the “two states could not remain indifferent to each other’s fate, with or without contractual agreements and military obligations.”¹⁰⁴ In a letter addressed to the Soviet people, İnönü wrote that “of all the desiderata shaping Turkish diplomacy, friendship with the Soviet Union was a permanent and vital element, particularly in the Black Sea Basin, and that no aggressor can expect any help or support from the Turkish side.”¹⁰⁵ Returning to the yardstick metaphor Atatürk had used at the Soviet reception a year earlier, Aras and Kaya proclaimed that Turkey’s historic amity toward the Soviet Union permeated the Black Sea beyond naval measures, that it represented the truth, “nothing more nor less,” and that “there was no empty phraseology in it.”¹⁰⁶ More than a year after Montreux, Turkey still clearly staked its position in the Black Sea—and, indeed, its diplomacy more broadly—to a strong relationship with the Soviet Union.

Sailing toward War

As World War II approached, it became increasingly hard to maintain the relationship of the interwar period. Aras’s 1937 visit did not cement interstate cooperation in the ways that each side hoped, and in some ways it was plagued by the same tensions that had been present since Montreux. Moscow continued to insist that a contractual and more committed relationship was needed. Ankara, in its new position as sole custodian of the Straits, refused

¹⁰² AVP RF f. 5, op. 17, pap. 100, d. 135, ll. 3–25 (Anatolii Filippovich Miller’s Report on Conversations with Turkish Representatives, 1 August 1937).

¹⁰³ AVP RF f. 5, op. 17, pap. 100, d. 135, l. 18.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ TDA TSID 8570146 (Report on Soviet-Turkish Friendship, 17 July 1937).

¹⁰⁶ TDA TSID 5194348.

to pledge itself to an open-ended military defense of the Black Sea, whereby Turkey would be charged with the heaviest burden and other littoral states would reap the benefits.¹⁰⁷ But Turkey's reluctance to sign a pact did not negate hopes that the Moscow visit would improve relations. Soviet internal correspondence reveals that Aras was active: he spoke "incessantly for a period of three days" and "consumed cognac in immoderate amounts." The Soviets, however, saw this talk as empty rhetoric, doing little more than confirming the basic principles of Soviet-Turkish friendship.¹⁰⁸ Moscow's impatience did not breed implicit or explicit anti-Soviet feelings in Turkey, but it did create frustration. Soviet pressure for a written Turkish guarantee seems particularly counterproductive because the Turks could not understand why the Soviets needed it after nearly two decades of friendship and recent Soviet-sponsored Turkish industrialization.

The optimism with which Turkey had prepared for Aras's Moscow trip was matched by the pessimism with which he and Kaya returned. On their journey home, the Turkish representatives did not hide their gloomy mood, sat locked up in a cabin, and barely spoke to the Soviet representative who accompanied them.¹⁰⁹ Upon arrival in Ankara, the Turkish ministers asserted that the whole purpose of their visit had been "to speak frankly with the leaders of the Soviet state," and that "their inability to see Stalin, notwithstanding an undertaking by the Soviet ambassador in Ankara that was publicized in Turkish papers" was the crux of their resentment.¹¹⁰ For several weeks after his trip, Aras barely saw Soviet officials, and on those rare occasions, he reminded them that Turkey now represented the interests of 100 million people, from the Dniester to the Himalayas, and that in that capacity it needed to be treated like a great power.¹¹¹ The extremes of this conversation were remarkably similar to the discussion surrounding Atatürk's visit to the Soviet embassy a year earlier—the sense that if only Turkey was treated by Stalin with the respect due all would be fine and the hint of a military threat when that respect was not accorded.

Yet in 1937, this was not merely a repetition of the earlier scenario. Soviet-Turkish interaction during the fall of 1937 was hampered by the appalling transformation in Moscow's political and diplomatic leadership. The Great Terror saw almost all of Moscow's notable Turkey experts purged,

¹⁰⁷ TDA TSID 5071728 (Aras-Potemkin Talks, 26 October 1938).

¹⁰⁸ AVP RF f. 5, op. 17, pap. 100, d. 135, ll. 1–2 (Stomoniakov to Zalkind, 27 July 1937).

¹⁰⁹ AVP RF f. 5, op. 17, pap. 100, d. 135, l. 19.

¹¹⁰ AVP RF f. 5, op. 17, pap. 100, d. 135, l. 26 (Zalkind to Litvinov, 28 July 1937).

¹¹¹ TDA TSID 5000995 (Turkish Embassy in Moscow to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 16 November 1937).

imprisoned, or executed. In less than four months, the host of men with whom Ankara had been intimately acquainted but were now disgraced included Lev Karakhan, recalled from his position as ambassador in Ankara, and Andrei Bubnov, who had accompanied Voroshilov in the famous Soviet grand delegation to Ankara in 1933. Atatürk was deeply resentful of the treatment of people to whom he had shown personal favor in Ankara's *corps diplomatique* for nearly two decades. When he received the new Soviet ambassador M. A. Karskii's request for *agrément*, only weeks after Lev Karakhan's execution in September 1937, Atatürk told Litvinov that one after another, the Soviet officials who were recommended to him as persons deserving of Turkey's confidence and esteem had been either disgraced or executed as persons inimical to the very government that entrusted them with their missions. "Who, therefore, can I trust?" he asked Litvinov tersely.¹¹² But Litvinov was able to allude to a concurrent transformation taking place in Turkey's own leadership. A quarrel between Atatürk and İnönü had brought about the latter's resignation, and there were rumors that the dispute arose over Atatürk's alleged discontent with İnönü's overly sympathetic attitude toward the Soviet Union.¹¹³ Responding to Soviet inquiries, Tefik Rüştü Aras dismissed these rumors as baseless, but the Soviets naturally took İnönü's resignation as a bad omen for Ankara-Moscow diplomacy.

Even as the sources of tension grew, Moscow and Ankara managed to maintain something of the balance that had been achieved after Montreux. The Soviet Union responded with delight when İnönü ascended to the presidency in November 1938, immediately after Atatürk's death.¹¹⁴ İnönü's pictures and biography appeared on the front pages of *Izvestiia* and *Pravda*, which published a series of laudatory blurbs on İnönü's statesmanship and heroic career as a general.¹¹⁵ A fortnight after his election to the office, İnönü reshuffled the cabinet and replaced Aras with Şükrü Saraçoğlu as foreign minister, which was taken as another sign of İnönü's eagerness to rekindle Soviet friendship. Foreign observers did not fail to notice the continued improvement in Soviet-Turkish trade in 1938–39, when Turkish diplomacy progressively became more cordial towards the Bolsheviks.¹¹⁶ Although the total volume of trade dropped from 13 million Turkish liras in 1937 to 11 million

¹¹² TDA TSID 4999348 (Turkish Request for Extension of Karakhan's Diplomatic Mission in Ankara, 27 April 1937).

¹¹³ TDA TSID 5022132 (Conversation with Litvinov, 2 October 1937).

¹¹⁴ TDA TSID 5001356 (Report on Soviet Reaction regarding İnönü's Presidency, 15 November 1938).

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ *Documents on German Foreign Policy*, series D, vol. 12, no. 545, 722–23 (Memorandum by the Deputy Director of the Economic Policy Department, 29 June 1938).

liras in 1938, Ankara and Moscow maintained the targeted net balance, while Turkey's exports to Germany fell 8 million lira short of imports.¹¹⁷ In late 1938, Litvinov invited the Turkish Admiralty to visit Sevastopol and nearby Soviet ports as a sign of collaboration across the Black Sea.¹¹⁸ Meanwhile, Ambassador Apaydin in Moscow was renegotiating the purchase of a squadron of bombers and fuel tanks for the army.¹¹⁹ This deal was striking, as Turkey had asked for a similar transaction the year before, only for Stomoniakov to tell Apaydin that the Red Army was busy improving its own stockpile. Faced with Soviet refusal, the Turkish government had turned to Germany, but it returned to the Soviet Union as soon as the latter was prepared to supply. İnönü yet again demonstrated his preference for Soviet connections over German dependency.

Remarkably, these struggles to make Soviet-Turkish cooperation work were undertaken by two governments that were a world apart in ideological terms. In private conversations with Turkish counterparts, Soviet leaders contended that, while Moscow would welcome any revolutionary state or reformist government in the Middle East, they would refrain from communist propaganda or agitation in those countries. The Soviet ambassador in Paris told Saraçoğlu that if, for example, the Bolsheviks wanted to, "they could have easily converted the small Mongolian government in two days, but they did no such thing."¹²⁰ Neither did the Turkish state hide its politics: it was harsh on communism, imprisoning prominent sympathizers and fellow travelers among the Turkish intelligentsia.¹²¹ Yet even after Montreux, Turkish leaders continued to proclaim that they did not consider the Soviet Union a menacing neighbor, nor did they suspect Kremlin-sponsored communist subversion. Even as the postwar environment became more perilous between 1936 and 1939, both states continued to display a shared determination to isolate Black Sea cooperation from the pressures of an international order that was dictated by what they often referred to as imperialism.¹²²

The ability to imagine Soviet-Turkish partnership within a common Black Sea framework was finally brought to an end by the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of 1939. It was the Soviet Union's alignment with Nazi Germany, and not Turkey's compromises with Great Britain at Montreux in 1936, that

¹¹⁷ TDA TSID 5000995 (Apaydin to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 16 November 1938).

¹¹⁸ TDA TSID 5039693 (Stomoniakov to Apaydin, 2 August 1938).

¹¹⁹ TDA TSID 5001470 (Apaydin to Aras, 3 November 1938).

¹²⁰ BCA 490.01.0.0/609.111.9 (Report of a Conversation with the Soviet Ambassador in Paris, 11 July 1939).

¹²¹ BCA 030.10.0.0/209.425.19 (Report on Communist Propaganda among Turkish Teachers, 7 December 1939).

¹²² TDA TSID 5001202 (Apaydin to Aras, 22 November 1938).

challenged the very logic of the Soviet-Turkish relationship. Turkish parliamentary minutes during this period contain a plethora of such Kemalist aphorisms as “anti-imperialism,” and “independence.” The struggle to carve out sovereignty in a world demarcated by European imperialism defined the formation of the Turkish Republic in the 1920s and retained a prominent place in Turkey’s political discourse throughout the 1930s and 1940s.¹²³ Turkey had always looked to the Soviet Union—whatever its other faults—as a foil to European great-power politics. Soviet rapprochement with Germany, and hence with the aggressive revisionism that Turkey feared, brought an end to that vision. Indeed, the Soviet Union seemed to embrace a new role. At talks in Moscow, Viacheslav Molotov referred menacingly to occupied Poland as an example of the kind of fate that could befall Turkey.¹²⁴ While the discourse of national sovereignty was associated exclusively with Western imperialism during the early Kemalist years, it took on a new meaning with the outbreak of World War II and began to reflect Turkey’s apprehension vis-à-vis Russian imperialism.

Dept. of International Relations and Center for Russian Studies
Bilkent University
Ankara 06800, Turkey
onur.isci@bilkent.edu.tr

¹²³ İnönü, *Söylev ve Demeçleri*, 280–321.

¹²⁴ TDA TSİD 16992896 (Molotov-Sarper Meeting—First Report, 9 June 1945).