

# SOVIET-ARMENIAN COLLABORATION AGAINST TURKEY IN THE POST-SECOND WORLD WAR PERIOD, (1945-1947)

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## **Abstract:**

*The article focuses on the Soviet-Armenian collaboration against Turkey during the critical days, at the beginning of the Cold War. It analyses the reasons for the Soviet efforts to provoke Armenian population both in Soviet Armenia and abroad against the government in Ankara. The study shows that the traditional approach taken by the Tsarist Russia towards the Armenian population against Turkey was to continue with the successor regime in Moscow. This was especially the case when the Soviet regime, in collaboration with the Armenian groups, began to embark a violent campaign against Turkey demanding from her the return of certain territories for the Soviet Armenia. In relation with this, the study also analyses the reasons for the coming of the Armenian Repatriation Project into existence, in which it was organized by Moscow. The last part of the article deals with the failure of the repatriation project and the responses of Turkey against Soviet-Armenian joint attempts*

## **Keywords:**

*Turco-Russian-Armenian Relations, Armenian Refugees, Lenin, Greece, the Cold War, Soviet-Armenian Collaboration, the Hatay Question, the Armenian Repatriation Project.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

**T**he end of the Second World War marked the beginning of a new era in the world balance of power. This signaled the beginning of a bi-polar system in international political system when the Soviet Union became an imminent threat to Western interests in Europe, in the Middle East and the Far East. The new polarization was shaped by the United States and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). Turkey was one of the few key countries affected most from the new emerged East-West conflict because of her crucial geographical position between the

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two blocs. This was the start of the so-called 'Cold War' period, which dominated post-war politics.

In this period, with apparent expansionist aims, Moscow, after dominating much of the Balkans and Eastern Europe directed its threat to Turkey by demanding certain territories in the east and bases in the Straits. Moscow, at this time, thought that it had a better chance to obtain its traditional objective of reaching the warm waters of the Mediterranean since Turkey was internationally in a weak position because of her neutral attitude during the war. Turkey felt an imminent Soviet menace from two directions: one was a direct threat which concentrated on her territorial integrity; the other one was an indirect threat which aimed at encirclement of Turkey by provoking its neighbors against her. Besides, the USSR used many other methods such as waging a propaganda war and provoking minor groups against Turkey in order to force her to give way to Moscow's demands.<sup>1</sup>

The article deals with the Soviet attempts to incite Armenians against Turkey at the critical juncture of the start of the Cold War era. It started in 1945 because this was the time when the Soviet Union began to put all of its pressures on Turkey. It ends in 1947 as the United States (US) with the enunciation of Truman Doctrine took the responsibility for defending the Near East against the possible USSR's expansion. It also examines how Turkey reacted to these Soviet actions. The article is a documentary study based on published and unpublished materials and as well as the secondary sources available both in Turkish and English.

### **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND: RELATIONS BETWEEN THE TURKS, ARMENIANS AND RUSSIANS UP TO 1945**

Throughout earlier history Turco-Armenian relations had been well developed up until the outbreak of the Russia-Ottoman War in 1877. Since the 11<sup>th</sup> century as the Seljuk Turks came to dominate the areas, where Armenians and others had inhabited, the Turks had always well treated the Armenians by giving them their cultural and religious rights and liberties. In the later period,

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<sup>1</sup> For detailed information see Mustafa Sıtkı Bilgin, 'Anglo-Turkish Relations in the Middle East: British Perceptions, 1945-1953' (Unpublished PhD Thesis, The Univ. of Birmingham, July 2001), Ch.2; *Idem*, 'British Attitude Towards Turkey's Policies in the Middle East, (1945-47)' *The Turkish Yearbook of International Relations* No. 33, 2002, p.267.

this peaceful coexistence between the Turks and Armenians continued under the rule of the Ottoman Empire. However, as mentioned above, during the second half of the 19th century things began to change.<sup>2</sup>

In this period, especially after the Ottoman-Russian War of 1877-78, the Great Powers of Europe changed fundamentally their attitudes towards the Porte and began to look for an opportunity to destroy the Ottoman Empire with all possible means under the guise of the so called the 'Eastern Question'. The European Powers, instead of looking for a solution to the Eastern Question, fell in a rivalry about who was to take a major share from the remnants of the Ottoman Empire. One of the easiest means that these powers had most preferred was the use of minorities against Istanbul in order to annihilate the Empire from within. This was a watershed in Turco-Armenian relations. The foreign powers therefore were successful in destroying all the good and friendly relations that had been developed between the Turks and Armenians since the 11<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>3</sup>

Starting from the late 19th century onwards, however, these relations were never recovered again. Conversely, they were worsened especially after the outbreak of the Great War. Afterwards, the new Turkish Republic finally solved this episode with the internationally recognized the Lausanne Peace Treaty in 1923. But for the Armenians, the chapter was not closed and they were eager to pursue this matter in the following decades when they were provoked by the foreign powers.

As for the Russian-Armenian relations, these date back to the 11th century and their relations were commenced in the commercial field. Their relations initially were of economic and commercial character later, from 18<sup>th</sup> century onwards, these turned into a political and military nature. At this time, Peter the Great, saw the Armenians as valuable allies against the Ottomans when he commenced his military campaign towards Caucasus, Persia and Central Asia from 1722 onwards. However, this Russian campaign against Turks was unsuccessful and hence Peter the Great who promised help left the Armenians on their own fate. In

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<sup>2</sup> Mustafa Sıtkı Bilgin, 'Türk ve İngiliz Belgelerine Göre Osmanlı Devleti'nin I. Dünya Savaşı Sırasında Ermenilere Karşı Takip Ettiği Siyaset, (1914-1918)', *Ermeni Araştırmaları*, Vol.3, No.10, Summer 2003, pp.58-65.

<sup>3</sup> Bilgin, 'Türk ve İngiliz Belgelerine Göre...', pp.58-65.

1768 when the Russians attacked the Ottoman Empire their Empress Catherine II gave long expectations to the Armenians for setting up an Armenian Kingdom under Russian protection but she too broke her promise.<sup>4</sup>

The Treaty of Adrianople on 14 September 1829 was an important juncture for the Russian-Armenian relations. With this treaty Istanbul acknowledged that Erivan, Gouriel, Mingrelia, Imiritia, Naktchivan and Georgia had been ceded to Russia by Persia. Also the Ottoman Empire herself handed over some small territory near the Black Sea to the Russians.<sup>5</sup> Therefore much of the Armenian inhabited territories came under the rule of the Tsar. This established a good ground for further Armenian-Russian military and political cooperation to the detriment of the Ottomans in the following decades.

From this time onwards, Russia even gained the role of the protectorate of the Christian minorities, including the Armenians within the Ottoman Empire in return its help to the latter when Mohammed Ali, the governor of Egypt, threatened the Ottoman authority from mid-1830 onwards. However, this Russian influence did not last long. It was ruined during the Crimean War when the coalition forces heavily defeated Russia in 1856. Afterwards, though Moscow was degraded from her role of guardianship over the Armenian population in Turkey Tsar Alexander II was to continue on his plan of setting up of an independent Armenia under Russian protection. However, this plan was abandoned by Russia when Alexander II was assassinated in 1881. From this time onwards, Russia, in general, kept itself away from its involvement in the affairs of the Ottoman Armenians until the year, 1907.<sup>6</sup>

From 1907 onwards, however, Russia renewed its interest in the affairs of the Ottoman-Armenians once again. This change occurred on Russian foreign policy towards the Armenians had a close link with the events taking place on international relations. As the world was divided into two blocs at this time, Russia and Britain, leaving their rivalries aside, decided to come together against Germany and its allies. This led Russia turn on the

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<sup>4</sup> Mustafa Sıtkı Bilgin, 'Attitudes of the Great Powers towards the Ottoman Armenians Up to the Outbreak of the First World War', *Review of Armenian Studies*, Vol.1, No.4, 2003, p.40.

<sup>5</sup> Confidential Memorandum by the Foreign Office, 11 June 1874, FO 881/2464.

<sup>6</sup> Bilgin, 'Attitudes of the Great Powers towards the...', pp.41-49.

**The foreign reports indicated that even before the start of the Great War, the Muslim population in those places constituted an overwhelming majority and added that 'with the large preponderance of Mohammedans in these vilayets it is difficult to imagine how the Armenians will maintain themselves against this large population without outside assistance'.**

Ottoman Empire and it began to look for an opportunity towards the realization of its ultimate aim of reaching the warm waters of the Mediterranean. One of the means to accomplish this aim was to incite an Armenian rebellion to weaken the internal strength of the Ottoman Empire. Afterwards, the Ottoman-Armenians began to increasingly cooperate with Russians and this cooperation was even turned into an alliance during the Great War.<sup>7</sup>

At the end of the war, the Turkish National struggle began and successfully completed its

mission in 1922. A year later, the new state of Republic of Turkey was internationally recognized with the Lausanne Peace Treaty. During this period, though Armenian delegations from the Armenian Republic of Erivan and elsewhere worked hard to annex eastern parts of Anatolia their attempts were doomed to fail. In a letter from Armenian Labor Party to the Ramsay MacDonald, the British Premier, in 1924, it was stated that 'The Armenian People awaited with the feverish impatience the opening of the Lausanne Conference in which they had placed their last hope'. Afterwards, however, the Allied Powers did not include the Armenian Question on the agenda of the Conference and hence the Armenian delegations regarded this as 'the burial of the Armenian cause'.<sup>8</sup> This was because, as indicated in a British Foreign Office report in 1922, Britain and its allies came to a conclusion that it was impossible to set up an independent Armenian state in the eastern parts of Turkey or to add these territories into the borders of the Armenian Republic. The foreign reports indicated that even before the start of the Great War, the Muslim population in those places constituted an overwhelming majority and added that 'with the large preponderance of Mohammedans in these vilayets it is

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<sup>7</sup> Bilgin, 'Attitudes of the Great Powers towards the...', pp.49-53.

<sup>8</sup> Secretary of the Armenian Labour Party to Ramsay MacDonald, 3 April 1924, FO 371/10213.

difficult to imagine how the Armenians will maintain themselves against this large population without outside assistance'.<sup>9</sup> The Treaty hence solved the Armenian Question for Turkey once and for all. For the Armenians, however, as explained before, this chapter had not been closed as yet.

After the Treaty of Lausanne the Armenian Question lost its significance for the international politics. This situation was to continue during the inter-war period until the end of the Second World War in 1945. In this period the Great Powers saw no need to resurrect the Armenian Question. They rather spent their energies with the problems involved around the European Continent. There was however some international efforts to resettle the Armenian immigrants in Greece and the Middle East in the Soviet Republic of Armenia through the League of the Nations. One of the League's projects of this kind was to place the Armenian immigrants in Greece and Bulgaria in the plain of Sardarabad near Erivan. The project was initially planned for the settlement of 50 thousand Armenian immigrants in Greece in 1923. This plan, however, was not realized due to the financial difficulties, and by 1932, only 6 thousand immigrants were placed in the projected Sardarabad Plain.<sup>10</sup>

#### **THE RESURRECTION OF THE ARMENIAN QUESTION BY THE SOVIET UNION IN THE 1945-47 PERIOD**

In order to understand Soviet policy towards Turkey in relation with the Armenian Question in the post-Second World War era it is necessary to briefly examine Turco-Soviet relations in the interwar period. Unlike the pre-Great War period, the traditional conflict between Russia and Turkey had given its place to a temporary Turco-Soviet compromise after the end of the First World War.

In this era, as the Bolshevik regime replaced the Tsarist rule in Russia and both the new Soviet Government and the new Turkish Republic had a common cause to oppose the Western powers, this brought the two countries into close collaboration from 1920

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<sup>9</sup> Foreign Office Report on Armenia and the Caucasus, September 1920, FO 371/4957; Report by Horace Rumbold on Armenian National Home, 16 June 1923, FO 371/9110.

<sup>10</sup> Report by Foreign Office on proposed settlement of Armenian refugees in the Plain of Sardarabad, 5 June 1924, FO 371/10214; Report by League of Nations, 6 October 1932, FO 371/17384; Report by Sir Walter Napier on the Armenian Question, 12 December 1932, FO 371/17384.

onwards. However, this 'opportunist friendship' was not free from constant friction. The Soviet Government was not happy with the Straits Convention, which was signed at Lausanne on 24 June 1923. According to this convention, an international commission would be established to control the Straits navigation and the Straits Zone would be demilitarised.<sup>11</sup> Later, the two governments signed a treaty of friendship and neutrality in December 1925. This treaty was extended in 1935 for another ten years until November 1945, with an automatic extension thereafter for periods of two years, subject to six months' prior notice of intent either to renew or to abrogate. It committed each country to abstain from participating in any alliances or coalitions, which were directed against the other.

In 1934, as Anglo-Turkish relations improved, the Soviets unofficially raised their demands to obtain bases in the Straits for the first time under the pretext of the Italian threat in the Mediterranean. Turkey began to realize the possible Soviet threat at this time and attached more importance to aligning herself with the West. With British assistance, she regained control of the Straits at Montreux in July 1936. From this time onwards, the Soviets changed their tactics and tried to achieve their traditional aspirations in the Straits by means of a military alliance. However, Turkey rebuffed the Russian attempts to make one, and her relations with the Soviets began to deteriorate.<sup>12</sup>

In short, Soviet policy towards the Straits can be said to have three facets: first, it aimed at obligating Turkey to consult the Soviet Union before admitting foreign warships in the cases allowed by the Montreux convention; second, it aimed at persuading Turkey to cede bases in the Straits, in virtue of a military alliance; third, it pursued to conduct a propaganda which aimed at the replacement of the present regime on the Straits by one amenable to Moscow.<sup>13</sup>

As Turco-Soviet relations had further worsened during the Second World War because of Turkey's neutral position Moscow began to look for any opportunity to establish its control over

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<sup>11</sup> Report on the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles by Foreign Office Research Dept., 6 January 1947, FO 371/96550; Mehmet Gönübol, Halük Ulman and others, *Olaylarla Türk Dış Politikası 1919-1990* (Ankara: Siyasal Kitabevi, 1993), pp.123-124.

<sup>12</sup> Report on Turkey by Foreign Office, 24 July 1946, FO 371/59316; Report by W.S. Edmonds on the Straits and Aegean, 14 October 1946, FO 371/59230.

<sup>13</sup> Report on the Straits of Istanbul by the Foreign Office, 28 November 1944, FO 371/44188.

Turkey. Moreover, Turkey's critical geographical position at the crossroads of the three continents was very important for Moscow in its struggle with the West as the Cold War was about to begin. For the USSR, one of the methods to bring Turkey in line with itself was to use Armenian cards against Turkey. Furthermore, Turkey's relatively isolated position in the Western eyes encouraged Moscow to move against Ankara.<sup>14</sup>

Under these circumstances, as the Soviet Union planned use the Armenian card against Turkey, it first turned its eyes to Syria, which had a considerable number of Armenian population in its territory. Also, Syria, for some time, had tense relations with Turkey over the question of Hatay (Alexandretta). As it is known, the province of Hatay, after its long struggle against the French rule decided to join Turkey in 1939 but Syria refused to accept this situation and made a protest in the League of Nations in June 1936.<sup>15</sup> Moscow saw this raw between the two countries as an opportunity to provoke Damascus further against Ankara thorough inciting the feelings of the Armenian population in Syria.

The reports in the British documents showed that the Hatay issue came to the forefront of the regional politics on 30 October 1944 when two Syrian Deputies argued the right to claim Hatay in the Syrian Chamber. The reports indicated that the Hatay campaign was mainly originated from two sources: first, agitations conducted by the immigrants from Hatay; second, activities of some the deputies who had various interests in the region. As for the first source, the reports stated that a large proportion of the immigrants from Hatay were Armenians who were receptive to the Soviet propaganda. Under the Soviet instigations organized by the Soviet Minister in Damascus, the Armenian groups together with the Orthodox Greeks kept the Hatay campaign active in Syria. The reports further stated that the vast majority of the Syrian people had no problems with the Turks at all except some minor groups. Moreover, some of the Syrian politicians tended to use the Hatay question for internal political purposes.<sup>16</sup> Later, the remarks appeared on the Turkish Papers mostly matched with the views which had been reported by the British officials.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> For more detail, see Bilgin, 'Anglo-Turkish Relations...', Ch. Two.

<sup>15</sup> Bilgin, 'British Attitude Towards Turkey's Policies...' pp.260-261.

<sup>16</sup> British Legation, Beirut to Eden, 19 May 1945, FO 226/292.

<sup>17</sup> See article by Hüseyin Cahit Yalçın, *Tanin*, 10 April 1945; Selim Çelenk, *Atayolu*, 15 May 1945.



**Moscow also planned to provoke the Armenian population in the Republic of Soviet Armenia and elsewhere against Ankara. The USSR wanted to use all possible means to put pressure on Turkey with the intent of either changing the regime in Ankara or obtaining bases in the Straits.**

Moscow saw the Armenians in Syria and Lebanon as valuable allies to extend its influence down to the eastern Mediterranean. Its other objective was to increase the trouble between Turkey and Syria through inciting the Armenian immigrants whom they migrated from Hatay to Syria in 1939 and these Soviet activities continued up until the mid-1946. However, these Soviet fifth column activities against Turkey were not enough. Moscow also planned

to provoke the Armenian population in the Republic of Soviet Armenia and elsewhere against Ankara. The USSR wanted to use all possible means to put pressure on Turkey with the intent of either changing the regime in Ankara or obtaining bases in the Straits.

The Soviet plans well matched with the aspirations of the Armenian leaders in Erivan who had long wished for the cession of Turkey's eastern territories to the Republic of Armenia since it was set up in 1918. These activities, even, were to continue after Bolshevik takeover in 1920. The Armenian leaders asked for foreign help to realize their aims. But as the documents asserted the Christian subjects of the Ottoman Empire especially the Armenians had never comprised the majority against the Muslim population in the claimed eastern provinces. It was for this reason that the Allied Powers had failed to realize such plans as creating a home for the Armenians in the east of Turkey during the years between 1919 and 1923. The documents well showed that the Armenian population did not exceed 30 per cent at most out of the total population in these Turkish provinces even the years preceding the outbreak of the Great War. This was because, as the reports indicated, they were scattered around all parts of Turkey and around the Caucasus. The British report concluded that it was for these reasons therefore 'the attempt to obtain a national home for the Armenians failed as in the circumstances prevailing it was bound to fail'.<sup>18</sup>

Though the government in Erivan initially was zealous to expand its territory at the expense of Turkey it, later, renounced all of its territorial claims with the treaty of Alexandropol signed between Erivan and Ankara on 2 December 1920. This agreement was confirmed with treaties of Moscow on 16 March and of Kars on 13 October 1921. The latter treaty was signed with the new Republic of Soviet Armenia after it was incorporated into the Soviet Union in late 1920. Though these treaties definitely fixed Turco-Armenian borders the Armenian delegations in different parts of the world continued in their attempts to claim for Turkey's eastern territories for the Soviet Armenia until the late 1923.

Despite the fact that the Armenian delegations from different parts of the world made their final attempt to put their case on the agenda of the Lausanne Conference these attempts brought no success. The Treaty of Lausanne signed in 1923 did not even mention anything related to Armenia. As the Armenians, about this time, realized that there was no possibility of the creation of a home for themselves in the eastern parts of Turkey they began to flee in large numbers into three main areas: a) the Soviet Armenia; b) the French mandated territory of Syria; c) Greece and Bulgaria. Afterwards, the Armenian delegations asked for British and French assistance to resettle the Armenian refugees in those places.<sup>19</sup>

With the initiatives taken by these two powers the League of Nations in its session in September 1923 approved a scheme for the settlement of refugees from Greece in Echmiadzin and Sardaraabad regions in the borders of the Republic of Soviet Armenia. It was estimated that a million pounds were needed to fund the scheme. Though the Soviet Government was also in favor with the project it indicated that it was not in a position to assist the plan of repatriation.<sup>20</sup> As mentioned before the League of Nations was not fully able to realize this project due to the financial difficulties, and until 1932, only 6 thousand immigrants were re-settled in the Sardarabad Plain. Afterwards it was planned further 20 thousand Armenians in Greece to be repatriated in

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<sup>18</sup> Foreign Office Minute on Armenian National Home by Mr. Edwards and Mr. Forbes, 16 June 1923, FO 371/9110; Foreign Office Report on Armenian and Georgian Claims to Turkish Territory, 4 April 1946, FO 371/59247.

<sup>19</sup> The Armenian Question by Sir Walter Napier, 12 December 1932, FO 371/17384; National Armenian Delegation, Paris to the Foreign Ministers of Britain, France and Italy, 2 August 1923, FO 371/9110.

<sup>20</sup> League of Nations, Twenty Six Session of the Council, Geneva, 25 September 1923; British Mission, Moscow, to Ramsay MacDonald, 16 May 1924, FO 371/10214.

Sardarabad Plain. The League of Nations, however, was unable to carry out this plan as the League began to direct its attention to the political events in Europe and elsewhere.

As the repatriation plan for the Armenians was not fully accomplished in the interwar period the Soviet Union took the opportunity to raise the question once again in early 1945 for different purposes. Its main aim was to force the leaders in Ankara to put Turkey under the Soviet influence. The leaders in Erivan welcomed this decision coming from Moscow since it suited well with their objectives. They found this an opportunity to look for resurrection of the abortive Treaty of Sevres with which it had created a home for the Armenians in the eastern parts of Turkey. As regards the question of which side first planned to raise this issue at the expense of Turkey, it can be said that both the Armenians and the Soviet leaders jointly made these attempts.

The process started in July 1944 when Tashnag party, which had strongly been anti-Soviet, changed its stance towards Moscow and began to look for a possible compromise with the USSR. About this time, other parties especially among the Armenian diaspora in the US, in which they had so far opposed Moscow, came to reconcile their views with the Soviet Union as becoming to believe that this was the only practical framework for the realization of the 'Greater Armenia' project. One of these parties, the Armenian National Council, founded in 1944 and strongly pro-Soviet, presented a memorandum to the San Francisco Conference. In the memorandum it asked for the cession of Kars and Ardahan to the Soviet Armenia and facilities for the repatriation of the one and half million Armenians who might wish to return to the Soviet Armenia. Later, similar memorials were presented to President Truman, Mr. Byrnes and the British Embassy in the US.<sup>21</sup>

Simultaneously, Moscow took a radical step towards further encouraging Armenian National sentiment against Turkey. This was the permission granted by the Soviet Government in October 1945 to elect a Supreme Catholicos, an office which had been vacant since 1938. Shortly after this, the government in Moscow denounced the Russian-Turkish Treaty in late March. Then, a few days after the election of the new Catholicos in Echmiadzin the Armenian National Delegation presented its memorandum to the

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<sup>21</sup> Brief by A.H. Pandey, British Embassy, Washington, 24 September 1945, FO 195/2488.

San Francisco Conference with which it included the charges against the Turks for the ill treatment of the Armenians. Thereafter, the Soviet Radio and Press took up the theme and began to carry out a bitter campaign against Turkey accusing of her for conducting the alleged crimes against the Armenians and that of collaborating with Germany.<sup>22</sup> They went on further to say that the Armenians greatly contributed to the Allied cause against Turkey's 'hypocritical neutrality'.<sup>23</sup>

As the British documents indicated, these were further Soviet attempts to extend their influence through the religious means not only in the Middle East but also in the US. As the election of the new Catholicos aroused great sympathy from the Armenians all over the world the Armenian Church in the US greeted this occasion as 'an event of utmost significance'. The new elected Catholicos in Echmiadzin hence categorically announced that 'the main purpose of the new Armenian Church constitution now approaching completion is to unite more closely the congregations and believers of the Armenian Church throughout the world'.<sup>24</sup>

A more concrete development on the issue came out on 7 June when Molotov, the Soviet Foreign Minister, told Selim Sarper, the Turkish Ambassador to Moscow, that his government demanded the following from Turkey before a new treaty could be negotiated: first, the reversion of certain eastern territories (Kars, Ardahan and Artvin), which had been ceded to Turkey under the Turkish-Russian Treaty of 1921 by the Soviet Union; second, the cession of bases in the Straits; third, a revision of the Montreux Convention between Russia and Turkey; last, Molotov hinted gloomily that there was a fourth outstanding question, the settlement of which would make the other three points easier.<sup>25</sup> The Turkish Ambassador replied tentatively to these demands that his government was not in a position to reopen the question of the 1921 Treaty, which had been freely negotiated at the time. It could not even consider granting Russia bases in the Straits. As regards the Montreux Convention, Sarper said that it was not a matter to discuss between the two governments alone.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Peterson to Foreign Office, 22 March 1945, FO 195/2487/401; Brief by A.H. Pandy, British Embassy, Washington, 24 September 1945, FO 195/2488.

<sup>23</sup> Moscow to Foreign Office 9 October 1945, FO 195/2488.

<sup>24</sup> Brief by A.H. Pandy, British Embassy, Washington, 24 September 1945, FO 195/2488.

<sup>25</sup> Foreign Office to various HMG's representatives, 14 June 1945, FO 371/48773.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

In fact, these Soviet demands in no way matched with the historical facts. This was because Lenin, at a time after the Treaty of Alexandropol was signed on 2 December 1920 with which Armenia ceded the city of Kars to Turkish Nationalists, made it clear to the Armenian leaders that this city was a Turkish town and for this reason he could do nothing to restore it to Armenia.<sup>27</sup> The Commissariat of Nationalities, under Stalin, later confirmed this view, during the signature of the Treaty of Kars in 1921 on the line that Kars and Ardahan must not be a bone of contention with Turkey as their population contained 67 per cent Muslim population.<sup>28</sup> Bearing these facts in mind, it can therefore be said that these Soviet demands had two main objectives: One was to incite Armenian nationalistic sentiments against Turkey and, the other was to put pressure, with all means, on Turkey and to force her for making concessions such as granting military bases in the Straits in favor of the Soviet Union.

The first Soviet objective, which aimed at gaining sympathies of the Armenians in different parts of the world and to incite their feelings against Turkey, was to soon show its effect among the Armenian communities. The Armenian groups in Lebanon and Syria in a meeting on 23 September under the leadership of Manuelyan assented that 'time was ripe to incorporate Armenian lands occupied by force by Turkey in Soviet Armenia'. Some days later Armenian organizations in the US arranged meetings and sent messages to London Conference asking for the return of the territories in the east of Turkey.<sup>29</sup> The Soviet tactics also made a good impact on the population in the Armenian SSR. There had been a keen interest in getting parts of Turkey's eastern territories. Some influential people in that country came to believe that this would come about before very long. As to the question of how this would happen since there were no more than few Armenians living on the eastern side of Turkey the inhabitants of Armenia thought that these territories could be populated by both providing the return of Armenians from overseas and by supplying the surplus population from Soviet Armenia.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Record of telephone conversation between Alexander Bekzadian, Armenian Minister for Foreign Affairs and Attabekoff, Armenian representative in Azerbaijan, 26 December 1920, FO 371/6626.

<sup>28</sup> Foreign Office Minute by Mr McDermott, 31 January 1946, FO 371/59239.

<sup>29</sup> Moscow to Foreign Office, 29 September 1945; Frank K. Roberts, Moscow to D. F. Howard, Foreign Office, 4 October 1945, FO 195/2488.

<sup>30</sup> Frank K. Roberts, Moscow to D. F. Howard, Foreign Office, 4 October 1945, FO 195/2488.

**The documents consulted implied that Moscow, at this time, came to believe that if it could secure the return of several hundred thousands Armenians from abroad into Armenia it would be much easier to pursue the claim for the return of the eastern parts of Anatolia.**

in case several thousands of Armenians were attracted to return, these people, for their survival, would have been in needed for being settled in different places since the Soviet Armenia did not have adequate land to absorb such a huge mass. In their view, this situation hence would have created a better ground for both Moscow and Erivan to ask more strongly for the cession of Turkey's eastern territories.<sup>31</sup>

Under these circumstances therefore Moscow put the Armenian repatriation scheme into effect in March 1946. The government in Moscow to begin with set up a Committee to organize the repatriation scheme. The members of the Committee took a trip to Greece, and other Balkan countries, and the Middle East to encourage the Armenian migration. However, the result was opposite to the expectations of Moscow and Erivan since the repatriation scheme failed to attract the return of Armenians in large numbers from those regions. This project even was less successful than the one, which had been carried out under the supervision of the League of Nations in the interwar period. The number of Armenian immigrants who returned to Armenia under the repatriation project was: three thousand from per countries of Greece and Syria, about a thousand immigrants from Turkey and some small numbers from other countries.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Frank K. Roberts, Moscow to D. F. Howard, Foreign Office, 4 October 1945, FO 195/2488; Foreign Office Report, 5 October 1945, FO 371/48795.

<sup>32</sup> Süleyman Seydi, 'The Armenian Question in the Early Cold War: Repatriation Scheme' *Review of Armenian Studies*, Vol.1, No.3, 2003, pp.47-49.

Some of the reasons for the failure of the repatriation project can be counted in the following sense. First, the Armenian people were suspicious of the project as it was organized by Moscow. Second, having sympathy to communism was the basic condition for being included in the repatriation project. This condition made people hesitated to apply to the project. Third, there was some criticism raised by the leaders of the Tashnak Party in the Middle East especially in the Levant. They criticized the local Repatriation Committee that the scheme was not organized in a proper way and they claimed that it was done without proper preparation and without adequate funds and facilities.<sup>33</sup>

The Turkish reaction to these joint Soviet-Armenian demands was vigorous. The Turkish Prime Minister clearly stated that Turkey would fight rather than give up Kars, Ardahan, and Artvin. Besides this, Turkey immediately asked for British and American support against the USSR. It was Britain first responded to the Turkish pleas. Britain was well recognized that this was 'the Soviet Government's shrewd appreciation of the value of this minor religious development to its designs upon the warm waters not only of the Mediterranean but also- for there are Armenians in Iraq and Iran- of the Persian Gulf'.<sup>34</sup> Britain, therefore, was well aware that Turkey was the last barrier in front of the Soviet expansion southwards and if Turkey was to be lost in one way or another the entire British interests in the Middle East and elsewhere would be in great danger.<sup>35</sup>

However, at this time, Britain also realized that it was unable to face the Russian threat alone and thus it asked for US support to stop the Soviet danger on Turkey's borders. Not long before the two countries came to an agreement in supporting Turkey against the renewed Soviet demands in August 1946 and this joint action forced Moscow to drop its claim at that time. This was subsequently followed by a more concrete support given by the US with the enunciation of the Truman Doctrine in March 1947, which declared a keen American interest in the defense of the Near East.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Seydi, 'The Armenian Question....' pp.50-51.

<sup>34</sup> Brief by A.H. Pandey, British Embassy, Washington, 24 September 1945, FO 195/2488.

<sup>35</sup> Bilgin, 'Anglo-Turkish Relations', Ch. Two.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

## CONCLUSION

The Armenian population had always been a strategic asset for Moscow to be used against the Turks since the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. The successor of the Tsarist rule, the Soviet regime, did not abandon this policy. Seeing that Turkey was internationally in a weak position in the post-1945 period Moscow sized the opportunity to force Turkey either for coming under the Soviet control or becoming a Soviet satellite. To realize this objective Moscow adopted different tactics. One of these was to rally the Armenian population in the world against Turkey. The Soviet objective was well matched with the aspirations of many Armenian organizations, which had long looked for the cession of Turkey's eastern territories into the Soviet Armenia.

The Soviet aim of asking for the return of Kars, Ardahan and Batum was strategic. The Kars Plateau had a strategic location in the borders between Turkey and the Soviet Union. It hence would weaken the Soviets' security if a third party would have attacked to the USSR by using the Turkish lands though Turkey was in no position to envision such a thing. For Moscow, it could also be used as a springboard for a Soviet drive to the Mediterranean or the Persian Gulf and, as the Turks thought the, the Plateau would be a last ditch where the Soviet forces might be hold up.<sup>37</sup> By provoking the Armenian population across the world and demanding the return of Turkey's eastern territories, the ultimate Soviet target was to weaken the Turkish internal regime and hence to force Ankara for becoming of a Soviet satellite.

As the Armenian leaders in Erivan and abroad saw these Soviet attempts as an opportunity for the realization of their historical objectives they did not miss the opportunity and embarked an active campaign across the world claiming for the return of parts of Turkey's eastern territories. For them, the return of these three provinces would be a first step towards the realization of the Greater Armenia scheme. Armenian groups in the Caucasus, the Levant, the Middle East and elsewhere were encouraged by Moscow and hence they began to make excessive demands from Turkey.

Though the Soviet tactics to rally Armenian organizations against Turkey were successful in placing Turkey in a difficult

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<sup>37</sup> Foreign Office Report, 4 April 1946, FO 371/59247.



position they were not good enough. At the beginning of 1946, in the face of increasing Anglo-American support for Turkey, the Soviet government realized that it could not fully obtain its objectives through political and diplomatic pressures. Moscow, therefore, changed its tactic. The new tactic was to gain sympathies of the world including sympathies of the American and European public opinion by embarking an Armenian repatriation project. In the view of the Soviet leaders, if Moscow could manage to attract the return of many hundred thousands Armenians in abroad to the Soviet Armenia then there would be a possibility of making a stronger case for extending Armenian territories to the eastern parts of Turkey. This case would be that the territories of the Soviet Armenia did not absorb such a huge number of Armenian immigrants and hence Erivan would have needed further lands to settle them. In that case Turkey's eastern territories would be the first target. In Soviet opinion, the Western Powers could not easily reject this case. If this method would be successful not only would it have satisfied the Armenian aspirations but also would have a shocking effect on Turkish State and the public opinion. This thus would have created a better ground for Moscow to easily dominate on Turkey.

The Armenian Repatriation Project was not successful in attracting the return of large number of Armenian immigrants since the Soviet government mishandled the project. Later, the developments, which led to bring an increasing Anglo-American interest in the defense of Turkey weakened Soviet-Armenian attempts. Furthermore, the promulgation of Truman Doctrine, which declared a firm American commitment in the defense of the Near East, destroyed any chances of the Soviet scheme.