

GEORGIA'S PLACE IN THE BLACK SEA STRAITS CONVENTION AND GEORGIAN POLITICAL EMIGRATION (1920S-1930S)¹

LELA SARALIDZE

PhD in History, Chief Scientist-Researcher,

Regionalism Research Institute

E-Mail: lelasaralidze@yahoo.com

ORCID: 0009-0008-5173-7906

Abstract: This work sheds light on the activity of Georgian politicians in exile, based on a scientific analysis of archival documents and materials from the émigré press. They actively defended the interests of forcibly Sovietized Georgia at the international conferences in Lausanne and Montreux. The Black Sea, as well as the Bosphorus and Dardanelles straits, have had special commercial, economic and military significance for both bordering and non-bordering countries since ancient times. Behind the Iron Curtain, Georgian politicians in Europe, fully understanding the strategic importance of the Black Sea, actively fought at the international level for Georgia's place in the International Convention on the Straits. With the exception of a few scholarly articles, this issue has not been properly studied in Georgian historiography, while Soviet historiography assesses the struggle of Georgian politicians in exile as the actions of the Mensheviks and significantly downplays their contribution.

Of the international agreements concluded regarding the Bosphorus and Dardanelles Straits, the leading role belonged to the Turks. After the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in World War I, the Treaty of Mudros, signed on October 30, 1918, provided for the capitulation of the Ottoman Empire to the Entente countries. The Ottoman government was forced to allow the victorious powers of World War I to enter the Black Sea and occupy Constantinople and the Straits. By 1920, the Entente troops occupied Constantinople and the Black Sea straits. From 1918 to July 1920, the British army was stationed in Batumi. On July 7, 1920, the British government returned Batumi to its rightful owner, the government of the Democratic Republic of Georgia. On August 10, 1920, a treaty was signed in Sèvres, near Paris, according to which the Ottoman Empire lost 3/4 of its territory, and control over the straits was entrusted to a special commission. In February-March 1921, after the occupation and annexation of the Democratic Republic of Georgia by the Russian Red Army, the legitimate government of Georgia was forced into exile and continued the struggle to restore its lost freedom from abroad. By the decree of the Georgian government in exile of November 13, 1922, Akaki Chkhenkeli and Khariton Shavishvili were sent as delegates to the Lausanne Conference. Thanks to the efforts of an unofficial delegation sent by the Georgian national government, Georgia as a Black Sea state was included in the protocols of the Lausanne Conference. The conference also reserved the place for Georgia in Article XII of the Straits Convention. The article mentions an international commission tasked with overseeing the implementation of new rules in the straits. Point III of the same article, nicknamed the „Georgian point,“ stated that the states bordering the Black Sea – Georgia and Ukraine, which did not officially participate in the Lausanne Conference – had the right to send a representative to the commission to study the issue of international straits. Despite great efforts, Georgian politicians working in exile were subsequently unable to maintain this position. On July 20, 1936, a new Montreux Convention was signed in the Swiss city of Montreux, by virtue of which the decision of the Lausanne Conference was annulled and Turkey's full sovereignty over the Black Sea Straits was restored. By this time, Georgian emigration had weakened. In July 1933, the Georgian embassy in Paris was officially closed, which was preceded by the Russian-French non-aggression pact (November 29, 1932).

¹ The research project [HE-22-239] is funded by the Shota Rustaveli National Science Foundation of Georgia (SRNSFG)

The Montreux Convention was put to serious use during the Russo-Georgian War in August 2008, when the US government intended to send warships to the Black Sea and the Turkish government refused to allow US ships to pass through the Bosphorus and Dardanelles Straits and activated the Montreux Convention. Despite the efforts of Georgian politicians in exile, Georgia proved powerless to defend the country's rights under the Straits Convention, something the Soviet Russian government at the time actively opposed.

Keywords: Georgia, Russia, Turkey, Lausanne Convention, Montreux Convention.

* * *

Introduction. The factor of the Black Sea is of vital importance for the Georgian state from a military-economic point of view. This fact was especially important for Georgian politicians who were forced to leave the country due to the Russian occupation. They took an active part in international forums. The Georgian political elite mainly operated in France, where the Georgian mission officially existed until July 1933. At the Lausanne Conference, obtaining a place in the Convention on the Straits was the result of the efforts of Georgian politicians. Bypassing the Soviet delegation, they actively fought to protect the interests of Georgia. Although later, in 1936, with the adoption of the Montreux Convention, Georgia lost the results achieved at the Lausanne Conference, its voice was actively heard behind the Soviet Iron Curtain and showed the world the true face of the Soviet government. The work consistently presents the selfless struggle of Georgian politicians in exile at the conferences in Lausanne and Montreux, where the issue of the Straits Convention was discussed at the international level.

Methods. The study is based on historical-comparative and empirical methods, which involve critical analysis and comprehension of the research material. A comprehensive method of processing archival and press materials, reports of political figures at international conferences, political monitoring, and analysis of data from international treaties was used.

Discussion. The role of the Black Sea straits in the economic development of European states, international trade and competition increased significantly. The Ottoman Empire, a formidable military power, dictated the rules for the use of the straits until the 19th century.

In order to ensure free passage of their ships through the Bosphorus and Dardanelles, the rulers of European states actively negotiated with the Ottoman authorities. To achieve the desired result, they resorted to diplomacy and sometimes even military force. The international conditions that arose led to the idea of creating an international convention on the use of the Black Sea straits. Representatives of Russia, Great Britain, France, Austria, Prussia and the Ottoman Empire signed the First London Convention on the Straits on July 13, 1841. By virtue of the convention, the former dominance of the Ottoman Empire over the Black Sea straits connecting the Black Sea with the Mediterranean was restored. The passage of foreign warships through the straits was prohibited, and their passage was permitted only by the Ottoman Sultan himself (Rozakis, Stagos, 1987:25).

In turn, the government of Soviet Russia, headed by Lenin, annulled all illegal treaties with Tsarist Russia, including those regarding the straits, and established friendly relations with the Turkish government headed by Mustafa Kemal (Ataturk). The Soviet government agreed with the proposal of the Turkish government, according to which the question of the straits remained under the jurisdiction of the Black Sea states, but due to the changed balance of power in the world arena and disagreements between the Black Sea states themselves, this could not be realized.

On March 16, 1921, an agreement was signed between the government of the Russian Socialist Federative Republic and the Grand National Assembly of the Ottoman Empire, Article V of which concerned the straits. The issue of the Black Sea straits was supposed to be submitted for discussion to a conference of the Black Sea states. In resolving this issue, it was necessary to protect the sovereignty

of the Ottoman Empire. Similar conditions were later discussed in the Russian-Turkish Kars Treaty of October 13, 1921, as well as in the Ukrainian-Turkish Treaty of 1922.

From November 20, 1922 to July 24, 1923 (with a break from February 4 to April 22, 1923) in the Swiss city of Lausanne, on the initiative of Great Britain, France and Italy, an international conference was held to prepare a peace treaty with Turkey and develop a Convention on the Straits in the Black Sea.

The common position of the Entente countries provided for free passage of warships of all countries through the Black Sea straits both in peacetime and in wartime, provided that Turkey maintained its neutrality. The British delegation demanded the demilitarization of the Black Sea straits and the establishment of international control over them.

By the decree of the Georgian government in exile on November 13, 1922, the first delegate at the Lausanne conference was appointed Akaki Chhenkeli, the minister extraordinary and plenipotentiary of Georgia to Europe and the representative of the Georgian national government in the League of Nations, Khariton Shavishvili, was appointed as the second delegate (Archive, F. 1864, Case 636:38).

According to the resolution of the Entente, the participation of the Soviet delegation was initially limited to the discussion of the issue of straits. The Soviet government protested against such discrimination, but considered it possible to participate in the conference and sent an official delegation to Lausanne headed by George Chicherin. Soviet Georgia was represented by Budu (Polycarp) Mdivani – the chairman of the Union Council of the Transcaucasian SSR, member of the Presidium of the Central Committee of Georgia (b), secretary. His brother Simon Mdivani was a representative of the Government of the Democratic Republic of Georgia in Angora (Ankara). The Soviet delegation that arrived in Lausanne felt completely isolated. G. Chicherin wrote to Maxim Litvinov, Deputy People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs of the USSR: «I got the impression of our complete isolation not only in Lausanne, but also in general... Curzon is the full host of the conference. The French obediently follow him. Mussolini completely lost all independence. The Turks lead a pitiful policy, as if they want to deceive someone and, in the end, they surrender and obey...» (Хормач, 2019:80). All other states, including Yugoslavia and Bulgaria, as well as the delegation of the Democratic Republic of Georgia unofficially present at the conference, opposed RSFSR.

Prime Minister of France Raymond Poincaré proposed to the rulers of England and Italy to invite the delegation of the Democratic Republic of Georgia to the Lausanne conference, but he did not receive the consent of the allies. Minister of Foreign Affairs of Great Britain, Lord Curzon, was not against the invitation of the representatives of the Georgian national government, but he also demanded the admission to the conference of the actual representative of the Soviet government. The Minister of Foreign Affairs of Great Britain, Lord Curzon, justified his proposal as follows: «England recognized the independence of Georgia, but it legally did not recognize any government, neither national nor Bolshevik. Therefore, I cannot agree with you in the invitation of the government, which does not manage its territories» (Saralidze, 2017:360). R. Poincaré proved to the British representative that on January 27, 1921, England, along with other allies, recognized Georgia and its national government. After this, Curzon was forced to admit his mistake, although he remained steadfast in his desire to invite Georgia to the Lausanne Conference. Since it was not possible to reach an agreement, it was decided not to invite either the Georgian government or Soviet Russia. Later, on February 2, 1924, Great Britain officially recognized the USSR as a state.

In the second stage of the conference, after the resumption of negotiations on April 23, 1923, the Entente powers took the path of direct discrimination against the Soviet delegation. The Soviet diplomatic representative in Italy, Vaclav Vorovsky, was not even officially notified of the resumption of the conference, and when he arrived in Lausanne, he was not allowed to participate in the negotiations. On the same day, the Soviet government ordered Vorovsky to leave Switzerland, but it was too late – on May 10, Vorovsky was killed by a former White Guard officer, a Swiss citizen named Maurice Konrad (Белков, 1971:86).

On May 16, the Soviet government issued notes of protest to the invited states and Switzerland in connection with the murder of Vorovsky, and on June 20, it broke off relations with Switzerland. As a result of negotiations, without the participation of Soviet representatives, the allies managed to reach an agreement with Turkey on the adoption of their project regarding the regime of the straits, as well as on the creation of a local commission.

At the Lausanne Peace Conference, the Russian government actively supported the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the Turkish Republic (Svanidze, 2002:314-316). On December 6, 1922, at the second meeting of the commission, Curzon expressed his dissatisfaction with the Soviet delegation, since the Russian program aimed to turn the Black Sea into a Russian lake, at the gates of which Türkiye would become a faithful guard. In turn, the head of the Ottoman delegation at the Lausanne Conference, Ismet Pasha (Mustafa Ismet Inonu, 1884-1973), refused to support the positions of Soviet Russia, as a result of which the Russian Bolshevik government not only failed to gain new positions in Lausanne, but also lost old ones. During the deliberations of the commission, Ismet Pasha stated that he did not demand the return of Western Thrace to Turkey. The people living in the region had the right to decide their own fate. The borders of Eastern Thrace were to remain within the limits defined by the Istanbul Treaty of 1913 (Lozan Barış Konferansı, 2018:58).

On July 24, 1923, Great Britain, France, Italy, Japan, Greece, Romania and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, on the one hand, and Turkey, on the other, signed the Lausanne Peace Treaty. On the issue of the straits, British diplomacy achieved significant concessions from Turkey: the agreement provided for freedom of movement of merchant and military (naval and air) vessels through the straits in peacetime and wartime; demilitarization of the Bosphorus and Dardanelles straits, i.e. the destruction of coastal fortifications. By decision of the Lausanne Conference, the Black Sea became an international sea, where the passage of both merchant and military vessels of coastal states was ensured.

On August 23, 1923, Turkey ratified the treaty, and it entered into force on August 6, 1924, when it was ratified by all the signatory states.

At the Lausanne Conference, Georgia was included in the conference protocols through the efforts of an unofficial delegation sent by the exiled government of the Democratic Republic of Georgia. In addition, the conference reserved a place for Georgia in Article XII of the Straits Convention. The article mentions an international commission tasked with monitoring the implementation of new rules in the straits. Point III of the same article, nicknamed the „Georgian point“, stated that the Black Sea states of Georgia and Ukraine, which did not officially participate in the Lausanne Conference, had the right to send their representative to the commission to study the issue of international straits. At the Lausanne Conference of 1922-1923, the Soviet delegation repeatedly put forward demands for the admission of representatives of the Georgian National Government to the conference, although the head of the Soviet delegation, Georgy Chicherin, received a negative response. Moreover, Georgia was included in the conference protocols as an independent state bordering the Black Sea, and in accordance with subparagraph 3 of Article 12 of the Convention on the Straits, it was assigned a place in the Control Commission (Archive, F. 1864, Case 820:6).

The French diplomat René Massigli provided great assistance to the Georgian delegation at the conference. From 1920 to 1931, he was the French ambassador to Turkey and also the secretary general of the Conference of Ambassadors.

Despite great efforts, the Georgian emigration was unable to maintain this position. From June 22 to July 20, 1936, an international conference was held in the Swiss city of Montreux. On July 20, 1936, the Montreux Convention on the Regime of the Straits, written in French, was signed and entered into force on November 9 of the same year. The new convention was signed by Great Britain, Bulgaria, France, Greece, Japan, Romania, Turkey, the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia (Tulun, 2020:7). Based on the Montreux Convention, which is still in force today, the International Straits Commission was abolished and Turkey's full sovereignty over the area was restored. According to the Montreux Convention, the International Straits Commission was abolished and the full sovereignty of Turkey over the specified zone was restored. Levers of control over the Black Sea Straits – Bosphorus and Dardanelles – passed

to the Republic of Turkey. Merchant ships of all countries were granted free passage through the straits in both peacetime and wartime. In peacetime, all Black Sea states could freely conduct their ships through the straits. The conference discussed the rights of non-Black Sea states to warships. In peacetime, they could only allow light surface ships into the Black Sea for up to three weeks. In addition, the total tonnage of ships of all non-Black Sea states was clearly defined. During war, in the event of Turkey's neutrality, the straits were to be closed to warships of the belligerent states, and in the event of Turkey's participation in military operations, the states were allowed to act in the strait area at their own discretion. The passage of non-Black Sea military vessels is limited depending on their class, tonnage and duration of stay in the Black Sea. 89 years have passed since the adoption of the convention, and it is valid to this day, confirming the sovereignty of Turkey over the Bosphorus and Dardanelles straits and regulating the movement of ships in the Black Sea.

Georgian politicians in exile, who had no opportunity to defend Georgia's interests through their representatives at the Montreux Conference, did not lose hope that the discussion of the straits would protect Georgia's rights as a state bordering the Black Sea, since this right was enshrined in the Lausanne Convention. The representative of Russia, Georgy Chicherin, tried to close the straits for military ships of all states, with the exception of Turkish ones, but that time he did not succeed. Russia wanted to declare the Black Sea a closed sea for coastal states, which would lead to Russian domination over other states. For its part, the Georgian government-in-exile questioned the legality of the Montreux Convention. According to them, under international law, only a treaty that has been signed by all participating countries is considered legal. The legality of the new convention was questioned because, unlike the Lausanne Conference, the Italian government had not signed the Montreux Convention and, moreover, its delegation was not even present at the conference. A. Chkhenkeli was referring to the fact that on October 3, 1935, the Italian army invaded Ethiopia, which plunged long-time friends Italy and England into conflict. However, Italy was still given a place in the Montreux Convention, which was a violation of international norms.

Georgian politicians considered frequent violations of international treaties as the weakness of the League of Nations in observing international law. Akaki Chkhenkeli sent an official letter to the chairman of the Montreux Conference, Stanley Bros, in which he explained that Georgia, as a state bordering the Black Sea, had the right to participate in the conference, which was granted to it at the time by the Lausanne Conference of 1923.

Conclusions. Thus, Georgian politicians working in exile did not lose hope that Georgia would definitely restore its lost state independence. They actively defended Georgia's legitimate rights at the international level behind the Iron Curtain. As a result of their efforts, the Lausanne Conference determined Georgia's place as an independent state in the Straits Convention. They did everything possible to prevent the Soviet government from being recognized as a representative of the Georgian side, as evidenced by the memoranda, statements and personal letters that they drafted at a high level and sent to representatives of various countries of the world.

გამოყენებული ლიტერატურა:

დოკუმენტები გენუისა და ლოზანის კონფერენციებში საქართველოს მთავრობის წარმომადგენელთა მონაწილეობის შესახებ (მიმართვები, მემორანდუმები, მიმოწერა და სხვ.). ლოზანის კონფერენციის დელეგატები ა. ჩხენკელი და ხ. შავიშვილი, საქართველოს ეროვნული არქივი, ფონდი 1864, ანაწერი: 2, ს. 636.

მიმოხილვა ერთა ლიგის ასამბლეის სხდომებსა და საერთაშორისო კონფერენციებზე 1920-1924 წლებში საქართველოს საკითხის განხილვის შესახებ (ფრანგულ ენაზე), ფონდი 1864, ანაწერი: 2, ს. 820.

სარალიძე ლ. (2010), მონტრეს კონფერენცია და ქართული ემიგრაცია (1936 წ.), ქართული ემიგრაცია, კრებული I (59-69). თბილისი: ილიას სახელმწიფო უნივერსიტეტის პოლიტოლოგიის ინსტიტუტი, გიორგი მაჩაბლის ფონდი.

- სარალიძე ლ. (2010/2011), რუსეთ-საქართველოს 1932 წლის თავდაუსხმელობის პაქტი და ქართული ემიგრაცია. ისტორიის და ეთნოლოგიის ინსტიტუტის შრომები X-XI (380-385). თბილისი: უნივერსალი.სარალიძე ლ. (2017), არისტიდ ბრიანი და კავკასიის ერთიანობის იდეა (352-367). ივანე ჯავახიშვილის სახელობის თბილისის სახელმწიფო უნივერსიტეტის საქართველოს ისტორიის ინსტიტუტის შრომები XII, თბილისი.
- სვანიძე მ. (2002), ოსმალეთის ისტორია: 1600-1923, ტომი II (314-316). თბილისი: ქრონოგრაფი.
- სრუტეების თავისუფლება და საქართველო, გაზ. „დამოუკიდებელი საქართველო“, №126 (1936), პარიზი.
- ჩხენკელი ა. მიმოხილვა საქართველოს უახლესი წარსული (1921-1933 წ.წ.) (ფრანგულ ენაზე), საქართველოს ეროვნული არქივი, ფონდი 1864, ანაწერი 2, საქმე 915.
- ჩხენკელი ა. წერილი საქართველოს დემოკრატიული რესპუბლიკის მთავრობას ლოზანიდან, 1923 წ., აკაკი ჩხენკელი საქმიანი წერილები, საუბრის ჩანაწერები და სხვა ოქმები (2024), მთავარი რედაქტორი ზურაბ გაიპარაშვილი, თბილისი: თსუ.
- Lozan Barış Konferansı Tutanaklar Belgeler, Takım 1, C 1, Kitap 1 (2018), (s.58). Ankara: Ankara Üniversitesi.
- Rozakis Ch. L., Stagos P. N. (1987), The Turkish Straits (p. 25). Boston: M. Nijhoff.
- Tulun Teoman Ertuğrul (2020), The Montreux Convention: A Regional And Global Safety Valve (p. 7). Ankara: Center for Eurasian Studies.
- Белков А. К. (1971), Вацлав Вацлавович Воровский (стр. 86). Москва:Мысль.
- Хормач И. (2019), Советская Россия на Лозаннской конференции по урегулированию положения на Ближнем Востоке (1922-1923 годы) (стр. 74-92). Новая и новейшая история, №2, Москва:Russian Academy of Sciences.