

THE GEORGIAN QUESTION IN THE MINUTES OF THE CLOSED SESSION OF THE GRAND NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF TURKEY (1920–1921)¹

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Abstract. It is known that the Ottoman Empire suffered defeat in the First World War and signed the Armistice of Mudros on October 30, 1918. The victorious Entente powers took control of the Arab states that were part of the Ottoman Empire and began to divide the Ottoman territory itself.

On April 23, 1920, a new parliament was convened in Ankara, which was called the Grand National Assembly of Turkey. Mustafa Kemal Pasha was elected chairman. The Grand National Assembly declared itself the sole legitimate government of Turkey. On May 3 of the same year, a government was formed under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal. Thus, a dual system of government was established in Turkey. The Sultan in Istanbul, and Mustafa Kemal in Ankara.

The government of the Democratic Republic of Georgia still had its own diplomatic representation with the Sultan's government in accordance with the Batumi Treaty of June 4, 1918. As for the establishment of diplomatic relations with the Ankara government and the recognition of the Democratic Government of Georgia by the Ankara government, it took place on February 8, 1920, when the Georgian diplomatic representative Simon Mdivani presented his credentials to Mustafa Kemal Pasha in Ankara. Earlier, Colonel Kyazim (Dirik), an official representative of the Ankara government, arrived in Tbilisi and presented his credentials to the Georgian government. Relations between Ankara and Tbilisi were more or less cooperative, although the border issue remained unresolved.

During the Bolshevik expansion in Georgia, the Ankara government's approaches to Georgia changed somewhat. Ankara demanded that Tbilisi withdraw its troops from the Artvin and Artaani regions, and expressed different approaches regarding the Batumi issue. This was expressed, on the one hand, in the condition of the annexation of the Batumi region to Turkey, and on the other hand, in the condition of holding a plebiscite in the same region.

The aim of the article is to study the relationship between the democratic governments of Ankara and Georgia according to the closed sessions of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey. Based on their analysis and comparison, to present the political events taking place in the South-West Caucasus and the results obtained. This will allow readers interested in the history of the region to critically assess what happened.

Keywords: Georgia, Turkey, Tbilisi, Ankara, National Assembly.

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Introduction. The good-neighborly and strategic relations between Georgia and Turkey at the modern stage, the historical literature published in Georgia and Turkey, and the search and processing of materials preserved in the archives of both countries allow for an in-depth study of Georgian-Turkish relations.

It is known that the Grand National Assembly of Turkey laid the foundation for a new state built on the political legacy of the Ottoman Empire – the Republic of Turkey. Which was led by a parliamentary government. The officially declared foreign policy pact of Turkey was based on the desire for independent and peaceful coexistence within national borders. As for Turkey's Caucasian policy, the priority in this regard was to establish cooperation, friendship, and good-neighborly relations with the Caucasian states, Russia, and the Turkish-Islamic elements living in the Caucasus.

In the context of relations with the Soviet Russian authorities, the Turkish government decided to resolve the issue of Armenia and the Kars, Batumi, and Artaani regions on its own. It turned the process in its favor in such matters as the Armenian operation and at the same time a compromise with Georgia. The beginning of the occupation of Georgia by Soviet Russia changed Ankara's attitude towards Georgia. It had a new opportunity to incorporate the Artaani and Batumi regions within its borders, as envisaged by the „National Pact“. However, the subsequent development of events prevented the Ankara government from fully realizing its goals. The issue of relations between Ankara, Moscow and the Soviet republics of Transcaucasia was determined by the Moscow and Kars treaties.

Methods. The article is based on the analysis of primary sources and special literature. Historical processes and the activities of politicians of the period under study were discussed. The research methodology uses the principles of historicism and objectivity. The historical background of the research topic was studied using the method of comparative analysis.

Discussion and conclusions. One part of the protocols used by us reflects the events of the beginning of June 1920 and the first half of March 1921. According to the protocols, it can be seen that during this period Turkey tried to get closer to Russia on the one hand and to establish political relations with Georgia through special representatives on the other (TBMM Gizli Celse Zabıtları, I, 3 Temmuz 1920 Tarihli Oturum, 1985: 74).

The Ankara government launched a military operation against the Democratic Republic of Armenia at dawn on 28 September 1920 (Karabekir, 2008: 986). On the second day of the war, on 29 September, the Turks took Sarıkamış. They resumed their offensive only a month later. Kars fell on 30 October, and on 7 November the Turks occupied Gyumri (Kazemmazde: 356). Negotiations between the parties in Gyumri ended with the Gyumri Peace Treaty on 3 December 1920 (Tansel, 1978: 244). The Georgian government announced mobilization due to the aforementioned military operation (Svanidze, 2000: 137).

The issue of mobilization announced by the Georgian government during the Armenian operation became a subject of discussion in the Turkish Grand National Assembly. In this regard, Mersin MP Yusuf Zia even made a statement, where he focused on the location and capabilities of the Georgian army's deployment (TBMM ..., I, 2 Aralık 1920 Tarihli Oturum, 1985: 248-249).

After the Armenian operation, the Turkish Grand National Assembly assessed Georgia's position and noted that despite the mobilization announced by the Georgian government, there had been no attack on the Turkish army from Georgia. However, the Georgian government declined to accept the Turkish Foreign Ministry's offer to negotiate.¹

¹ In connection with this issue, letter No. 26, sent by the Georgian representative in Ankara, Simon Mdivani, to the Georgian Minister of Foreign Affairs on February 25, 1921, is interesting. Simon Mdivani explains the reasons that led to the failure of establishing relations with Turkey from the very beginning. One of the reasons he cites is Georgia's refusal to start negotiations on Ankara's proposal in October. According to the secretary, it was easier to reach an agreement with the Turks in October, because then many things were hypothetical for the Turks than in the subsequent period. (See SSCSA, Fund 2118, Act 30).

It is also stated here that after the defeat of Armenia, the attitude of the Georgian government towards Turkey softened. Meanwhile, the goal of the Georgians was to establish friendship with Turkey and maintain Georgia's political independence from Russia (TBMM ..., I, 21 Şubat 1921 Tarihli Oturum, 1985:447). According to the information contained in the protocols, the Georgian government proposed to the Ankara government to agree on the state borders of Georgia as defined by the Russia-Georgia treaty.¹ This meant that the Sanjaks of Artaani and Batumi would remain part of Georgia. This agreement was unacceptable to Ankara, as it intended to pursue its own goals based on the actual situation in the region (TBMM ..., I, 24 Ocak 1921 Tarihli Oturum, 1985: 349-350).

MP Hussein Avni has focused on the importance of Georgia for Britain's Caucasian policy after the Sovietization of Armenia.² According to him, this increased Russian aggression towards the region. Meanwhile, Russia itself wanted to gain complete control of the South Caucasus by invading Georgia (TBMM..., I, 21 Şubat 1921 Tarihli Oturum, 1985:452).

The minutes of the February session show that the Ankara government was monitoring Soviet Russia's policy towards Georgia. It is stated that Russia accelerated preparations for an invasion of Georgia in February 1921. It is also noted that although the Georgian government took defensive measures, signs of power were visible in the country. The protocols state that England was supposed to provide military assistance to Georgia, but in reality this was nothing more than simple propaganda that did not reflect reality. After the invasion of Soviet Russia into Georgia, the main task of the Turkish government was to capture the Artaani and Batumi sanjaks. Because it believed that if the Red Army completely subjugated Georgia, the capture of these territories by Turkey would become impossible (TBMM ..., I, 18 Şubat 1921 Tarihli Oturum, 1985: 439-442).

The above-mentioned situation is confirmed by Secretary Simon in a letter to Akaki Chkhenkeli dated February 25, 1921. According to the Secretary, the Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmed Mukhtar Bey brought to the forefront the principle of Turkey's „national pledge,“ which meant bringing Batumi within the borders of Turkey. Here, the Secretary analyzes the Ankara government's approach to Georgia and notes that at the very moment when negotiations on borders were supposed to begin, Georgia had to face military confrontation first with Bolshevik Armenia, then with Azerbaijan, and finally with Soviet Russia. In such a situation, Secretary Simon calls the behavior of the Ankara government unclear. In his opinion, Ankara wanted to create a situation in the Caucasus that would weaken the influence of the Bolsheviks by „stirring up“ the situation in this region. On the other hand, it would find itself in a better position at the London Conference. As for the Georgian issue, in the Secretary's opinion, the Ankara government changed its course towards Georgia and demanded the Ardagan and Artvin regions as a solution. He explained this by saying that after the possible defeat of Georgia by the Bolsheviks, these regions would not fall into the hands of Soviet Russia (STSSA, Fund 2118, Act. 30).

It seems that the Georgian resistance to the Bolsheviks, the defeat of the Bolsheviks in Armenia and the entry of the Dashnak forces into Yerevan, gave the Turkish government the opportunity to implement new political initiatives towards Georgia. According to the Ankara government, in such a situation there would be no negative reaction from the Western world towards Turkey and it would no longer be forced to launch military operations and, moreover, it would no longer be left to rely on the Bolsheviks to capture Ardahan and Batumi³ (TBMM ..., I, 21 Şubat 1921 Tarihli Oturum, 1985:447).

¹ The date of the protocol is indicated as January 24, 1921. (It is likely that the discussion regarding the borders between members of the Georgian government and the representative of the Ankara government in Tbilisi, Colonel Kyazim Dirik, took place at the possible initiative of Dirik himself).

² It is likely that in this case the MP was referring to the legal recognition of the Republic of Georgia by the Supreme Council of the Allies in Paris on January 27, 1921. However, it should be noted that already in January-February 1921, the government of L. George officially confirmed the expansion of Russian influence over Georgia. (See Ramaz Tsukhishvili, *Anglo-Georgian Relations 1918-1921*, Meridian Publishing House, Tbilisi, 1995, p. 115).

³ In this regard, the opinion expressed by Noe Zhordania in his memoirs „My Past“ is interesting. He notes that he gave the Ankara government representative Kyazim Bey the right to use the government telephone. With it, he

The Georgian side agreed to leave Artaani, but refused to cede Batumi. This closed the negotiations on the issue of Batumi's inclusion within the Turkish borders. The Turkish side put forward a four-point proposal, in which it proposed to the Georgian side to withdraw Georgian troops from Artaani, transfer it to Turkey along with Artaani, and hold a referendum in Batumi.¹ If the Georgian side agreed, Turkey would receive the two cities without military conflict. If it refused, military intervention would be necessary, which would mean a Turkish-Georgian war (TBMM ..., I, 21 Şubat 1921 Tarihli Oturum, 1985:448-451).

It seems that the deputies of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey had sufficient information about the events taking place in the South Caucasus. An example of this is the statement made by the deputy of Arzrum, Huseyin Avni, about Turkey's relations with Georgia and Russia. According to him, „Armenia began to act together with Russia against Georgia. Meanwhile, in the Russo-Georgian war, the Entente countries left the Georgians alone. Russia, by force of treaties, brought Armenia and Georgia into its clutches. And after the Bolshevik government was established in Georgia, the Soviet government of Georgia would oppose Turkey and would not hand over Artaani and Batumi. For this reason, Turkey had to act quickly and reached an agreement with the Georgian government without a fight. Otherwise, the Turkish-Georgian war would have made Russia's task easier“ (TBMM ..., I, 21 Şubat 1921 Tarihli Oturum, 1985: 452).

According to a statement made by Mustafa Kemal Pasha at one of the closed sessions, the leaders of Soviet Russia did not inform him about the start of the operation against Georgia, nor did they propose to start a joint operation, because the Soviets did not want Turkey to seize the Artaan-Batumi regions. However, according to the decision of the Grand National Assembly, the desire of the Ankara government was to fulfill the tasks set by the National Pact peacefully. It was believed in the ruling circles of Ankara that at that moment the Georgian government was close to accepting other conditions than Batumi. Thus, the National Assembly had to urgently agree to the occupation of Artaan and Artvin, and to hold a plebiscite in Batumi. However, the Mejlis was unacceptable for the „unconditional surrender of Batumi.“ The minutes of the session confirm that Ankara did not reject the principle of holding a plebiscite in Batumi (TBMM ..., I, 21 Şubat 1921 Tarihli Oturum, 1985:456-457).

It is known that in the conditions of the war with Bolshevik Russia, the Georgian government decided to take a rather risky step in order to protect its state interests. In particular, it offered the Ankara government the deployment of military units and asked to occupy the areas of Batumi, Akhaltsikhe and Akhalkalaki. According to these agreements, the local government was to remain Georgian, while the military administration was to be temporarily transferred to the Turkish side. This agreement was intended to maintain stability in the region and preserve Georgia's statehood.

The letter sent by Secretary Simon to Noe Jordania (March 8, 1921, No. 43) clearly reflects the diplomatic content of this decision. According to the document, the Ankara government accepted Jordania's first proposal, but added conditions to it. In particular, the Turkish side stated that it did

could contact Ankara and Moscow. According to Zhordania himself, „Kyazim often spoke from the headquarters to Ankara and Moscow, which the Georgian government never once understood how or what he was talking about. There is no doubt that at that time the Muscovites bought the Ottoman neutrality by ceding Artaani and Artvin, which was confirmed by attacking us from behind“ (Noe Zhordania, *My Past*, Publishing House „Sarangi“, Tbilisi 1990, p. 123).

¹ The Turkish side, on behalf of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ahmed Mukhtar Bey, submitted the first note to Secretary Simon on February 21, 1921, regarding the withdrawal of the Artvin and Artaani regions, and gave him a deadline of four o'clock in the evening for a response (see Selahattin Tansel, *Mondros'tan Mudanya'ya Kadar*, IV. Cilt, Milli Eğitim Basımevi, Ankara, 1978, pp. 56-57). At first, Secretary Simon rejected the Ankara government's notes and even justified their inappropriateness to some extent (Victor Nozadze, *The Struggle for the Restoration of Georgia over Meskheti*, Tbilisi, 1989. p. 95). The first note was followed by a second one, dated February 23, 1921. Ahmed Mukhtar Pasha informed the secretary that the Turkish Northeast Army Command had been given the appropriate order to deploy troops to Artvin and Artaan (see M. Adil Özder, *Artvin ve Çevresi, 1828-1921*), Ay Matbaası, 1971, p. 212).

not consider it necessary to involve Georgian military units in the occupation of the aforementioned districts; a Turkish military representative should be permanently present with the local civil authorities, and a plebiscite should be held in the future, on the basis of the results of which the status of the aforementioned districts would be finally decided. According to the secretary, the idea of a plebiscite on the part of the Turks was only formal in nature and aimed at gaining political favor with Moscow and London.

Of particular interest is the fact that three ministers of the Ankara government appeared in person at the meeting with Secretary Simon and gave a verbal promise to the Georgian diplomat on behalf of the government that Turkish troops would withdraw from the aforementioned districts as soon as the situation in Georgia improved. At the same time, the Ankara government refused to sign a written agreement, citing the uncertainty of Turkey's international status between Moscow and London as the reason. According to the Secretary, additional delays were caused by the position of some deputies of the Georgian Constituent Assembly, who supported the Bolshevik model and thus gave Ankara information that Georgia's political course was not stable. The Secretary assumed that this information was provided to Ankara by Kyazim Dirik.

The letter from the Georgian Ambassador Simon Mdiviani shows that the Georgian Cabinet of Ministers was unable to maintain its positions until the end of the London Conference, which significantly limited the diplomatic resources available to Tbilisi. Nevertheless, the Turkish government decided to fulfill the provisions of the verbal agreement and gave the appropriate order to the commander of the Eastern Front.

On the same day, March 8, 1921, the Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Muhtar Pasha officially informed the commander of the Eastern Front, Kızım Karabekir Pasha, that the Georgian Cabinet of Ministers requested the entry of Turkish troops into the Akhalkalaki, Akhaltsikhe, and Batumi regions on the condition that the local civil authorities remain unchanged. According to the Minister's letter, the details of the operation were to be determined by a separate agreement and that the Turkish military units were to remain in these territories until the political situation in Georgia and the Caucasus was finally clarified (Askeri tarih Belgeleri Dergisi, 1999:16-18).

These documents reveal that Ankara's goal was to legitimize a temporary military presence at the request of the Georgian government. In this way, the Turkish government was protecting its own security interests while maintaining diplomatic flexibility towards Moscow and London. For the Georgians, this agreement was a forced but hopeful attempt to save the country's civilian administration in the face of a full-fledged Bolshevik occupation.

The above-mentioned episode clearly reflects the historical reality when the Cabinet of Ministers of the Georgian government tried to save the interests of the state through diplomatic compromises. The tactics of the Ankara government were based on verbal agreements and temporary documentary formulations, which was a characteristic style of Kemalist diplomacy. At the same time, the Turkish side used a policy of balancing relations with Moscow and the West, which allowed it to simultaneously be an active player in the region and maintain international legitimacy.

The Secretary's letter and related documents demonstrate that the relations between Ankara and Tbilisi in March 1921 were no longer a classic political dialogue, but rather a complex diplomatic maneuver, where both sides tried to gain time and maximally protect their own state interests. It can be said that the March 1921 agreement between the Georgian government and the Ankara government was not a strategic alliance, but a temporary diplomatic maneuver, which became a transitional means for both sides to achieve various political goals. For Georgia, this was a forced step, that is, an attempt to protect the country's territorial integrity under the conditions of Bolshevik occupation and to preserve the formal attributes of state sovereignty, even at the cost of temporary compromises. For Turkey, this agreement was an opportunity to expand its influence in the South Caucasus, strengthen its position in negotiations with Moscow, and at the same time present its actions to the international community as „assistance“ rather than expansion.

However, the nature of this verbal agreement was fragile from the very beginning. It was based on temporary conditions and political uncertainty, which excluded its military consolidation. The Kemalist side, which at that time itself was struggling with the problem of international recognition, deliberately did not transfer the agreement to a written format. This allowed it to change its position as needed, maintain flexibility and adapt to the reactions of Moscow or London. For its part, Tbilisi hoped that after the Moscow Treaty, the agreement would become a means of protecting national interests, although events showed that Turkey's temporary presence in southern Georgia did not guarantee political stability.

Thus, the March 8 agreement represents one of the most tightly balanced diplomatic episodes in Georgia's recent history, an example of how a state on the verge of occupation attempted to maintain formal sovereignty in a geopolitical chaos at a time when international law and political reality no longer coincided. It was this episode that highlighted that the strategic rationale of Georgian diplomacy at that time was based not only on ideological choices, but also on the principle of state prudence and self-preservation.

On the other side of the coin, the model of the March 8 agreement was a temporary rope. It was easily changed even with minor deviations in the political conjuncture. This situation led the parties to famous crisis episodes and confirmed that a military presence reinforced by a verbal formula cannot replace the need for a clear political agreement that specifies responsibilities, deadlines and limitations in both the operational and civilian dimensions. A broader lesson comes from the same conclusion. The security architecture of the South Caucasus in those years depended not only on force, but also on texts, the writing or non-writing of which often determined the legitimacy of force. This episode is a vivid illustration of this paradigm.

March 9, 1921, marked a new phase in the dramatic events in the South Caucasus. On that day, by an official order from the General Staff of the Turkish Grand National Assembly, the commander of the Eastern Front, Kızım Karabekir Pasha, was ordered to seize the Akhalkalaki, Akhaltsikhe, and Batumi regions (Karabekir, 2008, pp. 1027–1028). This order was a deliberate move by the Kemalist leadership to establish de facto control over territories that, from Ankara's perspective, historically fell within the geographical boundaries of the „National Covenant“ (Misak-ı Milli)¹. Karabekir's army, which was also deployed in the direction of Kars, Olt and Artaani, quickly went on the offensive and between March 9 and 11 successively captured Akhaltsikhe, Akhalkalaki and finally Batumi. The operation was considered by the Turkish side as a „peaceful entry“, although in reality it was carried out with a demonstration of military force and the use of fear of the local population.

¹ The National Covenant (Misak-ı Milli) is one of the fundamental documents of Turkish statehood, adopted on January 28, 1920, at the last session of the Ottoman Parliament and later became the ideological basis of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey. The document defined the borders and geopolitical claims of the Turkish state, which were based on the principles of ethnic, religious and historical unity. According to the text of the National Covenant, the fate of the territories where the Muslim population was in the majority – including the districts of Artaan, Artvin, Batumi, Kars, Mosul, Alexandretta (Hatay) and Western Thrace – was to be decided by a plebiscite held on the basis of the free will of the local population. This principle acquired a strategic function in Kemalist diplomacy. It has become a legal-ideological argument to justify territorial claims both in international negotiations and for initiating military actions. Accordingly, Misak-ı Milli was not only a political declaration, but also a testament to the national ideology that determined the framework for the territorial construction of the Republic of Turkey. In the official statements of Kızım Karabekir, İsmet İnönü and Mustafa Kemal in 1920–1923, it was perceived as an „inviolable border“, the revision of which was equivalent to state treason. From the point of view of Georgian historiography, the „National Pledge“ acquires special importance in that it was on its basis that Ankara's position towards the South Caucasus was formed. Paragraphs 2 and 3 of the document directly concerned the Artvin, Artaani and Batumi regions, which was later reflected as a geopolitical justification for Turkish military operations in the March 1921 campaign. Thus, the „National Pledge“ is not only a set of diplomatic principles, but also a documentary expression of the territorial self-awareness of the Kemalist state. Its analysis is necessary to correctly understand the motivations of Turkey's foreign policy towards Georgia and the entire Transcaucasia in the first half of the 20th century.

It is noteworthy that a verbal agreement had been reached in advance between the representatives of the Democratic Republic of Georgia and the Turkish National Government, according to which the local civil authorities were to remain unchanged after the entry of the Turkish army. This condition was part of Turkey's diplomatic argumentation, the purpose of which was to show during the negotiations that Ankara was not attacking Georgia, but was only temporarily controlling the territory to deter the expected Bolshevik invasion. Nevertheless, already on March 13, the situation had changed radically. On that day, Kızım Karabekir received new instructions from the Turkish Eastern Command, signed by General Ahmet Muhtar Pasha.

According to Articles 3 and 4 of the aforementioned instruction, Karabekir was instructed to abolish the local Georgian authorities in the Akhalkalaki, Akhaltsikhe, and Batumi regions and to establish Turkish administrations in their place. The order emphasized the need for full administrative and military control of the territory, including the disarmament of the local Georgian armed forces and their withdrawal beyond the newly created Turkish zone (Askeri Tarih Belgeleri Dergisi, 1999, pp. 19–24).

The new instruction placed special emphasis on the neutralization of the Batumi administration. It stated that the local Georgian authorities should be offered to continue their activities on the territory of Ozurgeti, outside the zone occupied by Turkey. This note directly confirms Ankara's goal to create a de facto occupation regime in the Batumi region, which would be fully subordinate to the control of Turkish military and civil structures. Such an action contradicted the preliminary oral agreement reached between Turkey and Georgia, which was a sign of temporary political agreement between the two states.

The execution of the instruction caused a sharp reaction in Georgian political circles. In Tbilisi, Turkey's steps were perceived as a political deception aimed at legitimizing the de facto occupation in the eyes of international public opinion. Fears arose among Georgian diplomats and military leaders that Ankara, in parallel with Soviet Russia, would try to resolve the Batumi issue in its own favor during the upcoming negotiations in Moscow.

The minutes of the sessions of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey present the events of this period in a special light. According to the documents, there were reservations in the negotiations between Ankara and Tbilisi, which provided for the entry of Turkish troops into the regions of Artvin, Artaani, Akhaltsikhe, and Batumi only for temporary military needs. This decision was formally made with the consent of the Georgian government and was aimed at maintaining local government and public order against the backdrop of the Bolshevik threat.

However, Turkey's violation of the terms of the agreement soon became known in international diplomatic circles. Nevertheless, on March 17, 1921, after the Moscow Treaty came into force, a resolution was officially adopted at the session of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey, according to which the Turkish armed forces were to leave the Batumi region, the Akhaltsikhe and Akhalkalaki regions and guard the new state border with Soviet Georgia (TBMM Gizli Celse Zabıtları II, 1985, 17 Mart 1921 Tarihli Oturum, pp. 9–10).

The decision was a rare compromise of Kemalist diplomacy, conditioned by an agreement with Moscow. In this way, Ankara gained the opportunity to maintain a political and military alliance with Russia and at the same time gained international recognition as a new republican state. The withdrawal of Turkish troops from southern Georgia brought temporary stability, although the local population was left with a painful feeling that this step was dictated by the external balance of power, and not by bilateral good-neighborly relations.

Although the border determined by the Moscow Treaty somewhat reduced the space of Georgian territorial claims, its signing was still perceived as a guarantee of the end of the war and conflict. The withdrawal of Turkish army units from Akhaltsikhe, Akhalkalaki and Batumi finally closed the phase of military confrontation, although Georgia's political independence no longer existed in fact. These events once again confirmed that the military operations of March 1921 were not only the fate of territories, but also the last test of the political sovereignty of the states of the South Caucasus.

The Batumi military operation of March 1921 is one of the most important episodes in the military history of the Democratic Republic of Georgia, where national forces were able to expel a unit of the Royal Turkish Army from the strategic center of southwestern Georgia. As is known, at the initiative of Georgian generals and officers, the Georgian Revolutionary Committee (Revkom) entrusted the leadership of the Batumi liberation operation to General Giorgi Mazniashvili. This decision was due to his military experience, patriotic authority, and the fact that Mazniashvili was considered one of the last remaining outstanding military figures who could mobilize various political groups, together with the local population, around a common goal – the protection of territorial integrity (Daushvili et al., 2011, p. 138).

General Mazniashvili paid special attention to the unification of the local Muslim population during the Batumi military operation. His diplomatic flexibility and respect for local authorities led to the fact that influential representatives of the Batumi Muslim community joined the Georgian officers and voluntarily formed small but effective pro-Georgian units. It was their participation that became decisive in expelling the Turkish army from the inner districts of the city and capturing strategic points. Georgian military units, united with local fighters, simultaneously attacked the Turkish positions and in just a few hours were able to capture the main fortress and barracks of the city.

By the morning of March 20, 1921, at exactly 12 o'clock, Batumi and its district were completely liberated from the Turkish army units. By this time, there were no Turkish military forces left in the city, and the remaining small units were forced to leave the city and cross the Chorokhi Bridge, from where they retreated to the south. This success was followed by a mass expression of national solidarity and support from the population. The liberation of Batumi gave rise to hope in Georgian military circles that it would be possible to develop relations with Turkey in a new format in the future – based on equality and territorial respect.

The minutes of the Turkish Grand National Assembly do not place any special emphasis on this Georgian military operation, which shows that Ankara tried to respond to this event with minimal political resonance. However, the episode is still recorded in the memoirs of the Turkish general, Kızım Karabekir. In his multi-volume work *İstiklal Harbimiz* ("The Struggle for Independence"), he notes that on March 22 he received information from Colonel Kızım Dirik about the March 20 Batumi clashes, during which Georgian military units attacked Turkish army units at the Bartskhana barracks (Karabekir, 2008, p. 1033).

Karabekir's account shows that the fighting intensified on the northern outskirts of the city, where the Georgian fighters were supported by the Red Army cavalry. It involved several hundred Georgian soldiers and volunteers, who knew the local topography and the military positions around the city well. The fighting intensified especially when the Georgian units reached the territory of the Bartskhana barracks, where an intense clash with the enemy took place. One Turkish company was forced to surrender its weapons and be taken prisoner in the Red Army camp.

According to Qazim Karabekir, other units of the Turkish battalion stationed in Batumi were at the Mahmudiye outpost, from where they were unable to organize the defense of the city. At night, Georgian units blocked the road to the city at the bridge over the Chorokh, where, as a result of a surprise attack, the Turkish detachment was forced to abandon its positions with heavy losses. According to Karabekir, four officers and twenty-six soldiers were killed as a result of this clash, twenty-six were wounded, and forty-six were declared missing.

After the signing of the Moscow Treaty, Karabekir provided detailed information about the losses in Batumi to Ankara, where the incident was assessed as a local conflict that should not be followed by a large-scale military reaction. By his own order, only one platoon was left to protect the Turkish consulate in Batumi, while the rest of the battalion was moved south of Chorokhi. Ankara clearly instructed the Batumi garrison to maintain discipline and avoid confrontation with the Soviet side, so as not to deepen military-diplomatic tensions. As for the Akhaltsikhe and Akhalkalaki regions, according to Karabekir's notes, the Turkish forces stationed there were ordered to leave the territory after the formation of local government bodies (Karabekir, 2008: 1033).

This order was part of the implementation of the agreement, which, under the terms of the Moscow Treaty, provided for the gradual withdrawal of Turkish military units from the territories of Georgia and Armenia. Thus, the Batumi operation was not only a military action, but also a political turning point that ended Turkey's direct military presence on Georgian soil and created the basis for a new stability in the region.

The historical significance of the operation lies in the fact that it became one of the last demonstrations of Georgia's military will, ability to self-organize and national unity. The operation led by Mazniashvili is considered an example of the adaptation of Georgian military strategy in a situation where the country found itself surrounded by diplomatic isolation and military threat. Such a military success, despite its temporary nature, remained a symbol of national dignity, emphasizing the indefatigability of the Georgian people in the defense of state independence.

The operation to liberate Batumi caused significant political and international resonance in both regional and European diplomatic circles. The Western press described this event as Georgia's attempt to preserve its state identity under the double pressure of Bolshevik and Turkish pressure. The operation clearly demonstrated that Georgia's military power, despite its scarcity of resources, still possessed organizational and strategic skills, which strengthened the perception of Georgia by the West as a combat-ready and independent political entity. Thus, Georgia in fact continued the political line of the democratic republic, which aimed at integration with Western democracies and the protection of state sovereignty through realistic military-diplomatic steps.

The official reaction of Turkey to the events in Batumi was restrained. In the reports of Kızım Karabekir and the Ankara military headquarters, the Georgian operation was assessed as a local incident, the aggravation of which was not advisable in the light of the entry into force of the Moscow Treaty. Such a position clearly reflected the strategy of Kemalist diplomacy, the essence of which was to find a temporary compromise in order to strengthen relations with Soviet Russia. However, the Turkish political elite perceived this event as a warning – Georgia's military strength showed that the issue of the balance of power in the South Caucasus had not been fully resolved. Accordingly, the liberation of Batumi became a symbolic event that, despite the loss of Georgia's political independence, strengthened its national dignity and military-diplomatic heritage.

Results of the study:

1. After the First World War, a new political reality emerged between Turkey and Georgia, determined by the political distribution of power resulting from the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. Based on the Treaty of Mudros in 1918 and the Grand National Assembly of Turkey established in Ankara in 1920, Turkey moved to a republican model of government, while the Democratic Republic of Georgia sought to strengthen its independence and deepen relations with the West. The new Turkish government, led by Mustafa Kemal Pasha, aimed to revise the balance of power in the region and strengthen its influence in the Caucasus. Relations with Georgia were of strategic importance for it, since control of the Batumi, Artani and Artvin regions in the context of the National Pact was considered a necessary component of Turkish state interests.

2. Official diplomatic relations between the governments of Georgia and Ankara were established on February 8, 1920, when Secretary Simon presented his credentials to Mustafa Kemal Pasha. This fact confirmed the recognition of the Democratic Republic of Georgia as an international entity, which is considered a significant achievement for the foreign policy of the young state. Nevertheless, bilateral relations could not develop into a stable partnership. The strengthening and expansion of Soviet Russia changed Ankara's attitude, which began military pressure in the direction of Artvin and Artan and raised the idea of holding a plebiscite on the Batumi issue, which in fact meant an attempt to reconsider the territorial integrity of Georgia.

3. In 1920–1921, the aggressive policy of Soviet Russia in the South Caucasus significantly changed Turkey's strategic positions. Against the backdrop of the approaching occupation, Ankara considered

the issue of Georgia in the context of its own security and considered that the capture of Batumi and Artaani was necessary to contain Russian influence. The minutes of the Turkish Grand National Assembly make it clear that the Kemalist government was simultaneously oriented towards temporary cooperation with Moscow and maintaining relations with the Caucasian states that would allow it to strengthen military-political control over the region if necessary.

4. The 1920 Turkish-Armenian War and the resulting Gyumri Treaty significantly changed the balance of power in the South Caucasus. Turkey's victory over Armenia forced Georgia to declare mobilization, although Tbilisi refrained from active military intervention and maintained a neutral position. Ankara positively assessed this step and believed that Georgia was trying to maintain friendly relations with Turkey and at the same time defend its independence under Russian pressure. This fact clearly demonstrates the pragmatic and realistic nature of Georgian diplomacy of that time.

5. The Georgian Cabinet of Ministers proposed to the Turkish side to establish the border along the line defined by the Russian-Georgian treaty, which meant leaving Artaani and Batumi within Georgia. This proposal was unacceptable to Ankara, since the mentioned regions were considered an integral part of the Turkish National Pact. In February 1921, Turkey put forward a four-point proposal, according to which Artaani and Artvin were to be transferred to Turkey, and a plebiscite would be held in Batumi. Georgia ceded Artaani, but refused to change the status of Batumi, which ultimately led to an aggravation of relations and the creation of the threat of military confrontation.

6. The diplomatic mission of Simon Mdivani to Ankara, in the context of the geopolitical crisis, faced difficult conditions to protect the interests of Georgia. According to the secretary's correspondence, the Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Muhtar Pasha strictly adhered to the principles of the National Pledge and considered the inclusion of Batumi within the borders of Turkey to be justified. In the secretary's opinion, Ankara was trying to create a situation in the region that would, on the one hand, weaken the Bolshevik influence, and on the other hand, help it strengthen its positions before the West, especially London. Finally, Turkey, on the basis of a verbal agreement, formally at the request of Georgia, decided to deploy troops in Akhaltsikhe and Akhalkalaki, which in reality was a calculated strategic move in Kemalist diplomacy.

7. Despite the verbal agreement, in March 1921 the Turkish army violated the terms reached. In Akhaltsikhe and Akhalkalaki, the local Georgian civil authorities were abolished and Turkish administrative bodies were established. However, after the Moscow Treaty, Ankara began to withdraw troops from both Samtskhe-Javakheti and Batumi. On the basis of the treaty, Georgia and Turkey agreed to establish the state border along the line that still applies today, while Batumi ultimately remained part of Georgia, which was a significant diplomatic success for the Georgian side.

8. The minutes of the closed sessions of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey are an extremely important source for the study of relations between the Democratic Republic of Georgia and Kemalist Turkey. These documents reflect the internal dynamics of Ankara's diplomacy, the decision-making process, and the diversity of political motives. The Georgian issue was perceived in Ankara as a strategic and ideological issue that determined Turkey's state self-awareness and regional strategy. At the same time, the study shows that Georgian-Turkish relations of 1920–1921 cannot be viewed only in the context of conflict. It was a dynamic process built on the convergence of interests, which played a decisive role in shaping the political balance in the South Caucasus.

Conclusion. The research problem is connected with the historical transitional period, when the Democratic Republic of Georgia was fighting to preserve its independence, and the Grand National Assembly of Turkey was creating a new model of state identity. The intersection of these two processes determined the complex political situation in the South Caucasus, which is impossible to understand without the minutes of the closed sessions of the Turkish Grand National Assembly. These documents reflect the Turkish state thinking of that time, strategic calculations and attitude towards Georgia as a neighboring sovereign country.

The study of the problem acquires special importance in the context of the fact that two different political cultures – European-type republican Georgia and Kemalist Turkey – were trying to find their place in the new international system. The discussions in Ankara show that Turkey's foreign policy was based on the idea of implementing a national pact, tactical cooperation with Soviet Russia, and maintaining diplomatic maneuvering towards the West. These factors determined its attitude towards Georgia.

For Mustafa Kemal's government, Georgia represented a strategic space, control of which would ensure the security of the Black Sea coast and the expansion of its influence. At the same time, Ankara was well aware that the existence of Georgia as a state would temporarily hinder Soviet expansion in the region. Therefore, Turkey's policy combined a convergence of interests and geopolitical caution.

The minutes of the Turkish Grand National Assembly are not just official records. They reveal the internal mechanisms of political decision-making, where military calculations, diplomatic positions and ideological goals converge. Two main trends emerged in these discussions – a Kemalist core, which advocated the realization of the borders of the National Pact, and a pragmatic wing, which envisaged a compromise with neighboring countries. It was this balance that determined Turkey's attitude towards Georgia.

Simon Mdivani's mission to Ankara is one of the most important expressions of this difficult diplomatic background. He tried to reach an agreement that would allow the country to formally maintain its sovereignty. Despite the efforts, the Bolshevik occupation effectively nullified all the results of the agreements that existed between the two sides.

Turkey's policy towards Georgia was pragmatic, although it also had elements of imperial heritage. Ankara sought to avoid direct confrontation with Soviet Russia, while not relinquishing influence in the Artvin and Batumi regions. This policy gave rise to a temporary tactical alliance that soon ended in real geopolitical changes.

The study of the minutes of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey not only reveals historical facts, but also teaches us how state thinking and political logic were formed in the new republican state. The discussion of the Georgian issue in these sessions reveals that the Kemalist elite perceived it as a transitional space, which was necessary to maintain the balance of power between Russia and the West. As a result, the study confirms that the Georgian issue was not an accidental episode on the agenda of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey, but a central part of the regional strategy. The analysis of these documents allows us to better understand the political reality of the South Caucasus and its place in the international system of the 20th century.

From a modern perspective, this study acquires special significance, as it illustrates the continuity of regional policy and the mechanisms of formation of state interests on the example of historical experience. The analysis of the documents of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey not only serves to explain the events of the last century, but also contributes to understanding the essence of modern Georgian-Turkish relations. In today's geopolitical reality, when the South Caucasus is still at the crossroads of interests, the experience of 1920-1921 offers us a valuable example of state flexibility and diplomatic balance. These historical parallels clearly indicate that the cooperation between Georgia and Turkey is based on the interests of common stability and regional security. The study, with its depth of source knowledge, strengthens the practical importance of history for modern political science and creates an intellectual basis for a realistic analysis of international processes in the South Caucasus.

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