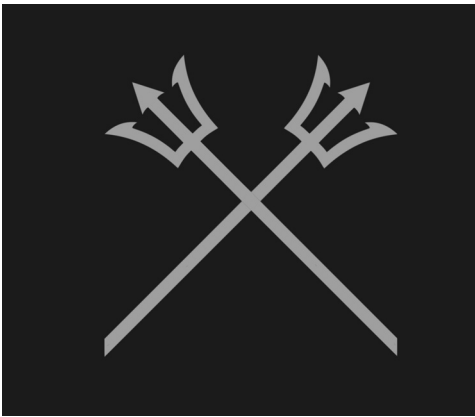


The Straits The Geostrategic Dispute

IONUȚ COJOCARU

in the Balance of the Great Powers



Flag of the International Straits Commission.

SOURCE: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_Straits_Commission.

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THE AREA between Gibraltar and the Dardanelles was controlled from Constantinople for a long time. The Ottoman Empire dominated both the Arab world and the Balkans for more than half a millennium. The broad autonomy they granted to the states in their area of influence led to their acceptance of suzerainty, which accounts for this long period. According to some analysts, the decline of the empire was caused by the poor administration during the last period, namely the fact that it did not adopt the new methods in military strategy and technique. Moreover, instead of focusing on promoting ways to increase the welfare of its citizens, it sought to expand to the West. The campaigns that they conducted, with considerable efforts both economically and militarily, can be explained by the gradual decline of this empire that once spanned three continents. From a geostrategic point of view, its area of influence was also of interest for both the Tsarist Empire and Western powers such as Great Britain and France.

The dissolution of the Ottoman Empire was enshrined in the Treaty of Sèvres¹ on 10 August 1920. At the same time, the territories that were part of the empire were redistributed. Thus, Greece received the Aegean Sea area and eastern Thrace, while the British and the French shared Iraq, Arabia and Syria. The Italians and the French took possession of southern and southeastern Anatolia. The most important point desired by the European powers, the Straits, came under their control.

In the Balkans, the states located south of the Danube agreed and concluded a war alliance against the Ottomans. The goal was to drive Turkey out of Europe. Eleftherios Venizelos urged the Balkan League to support the declaration of the prince of Montenegro who declared war on both the sultan and the caliph, followed by the kings of Serbia, Bulgaria, and Greece.² The Great Powers were carefully analyzing this conflict but they were both stating that they would not allow a change in the status quo regardless of the consequences. The chance of the Turks was that in the opposing camp there was no military genius, but only a coalition of leaders who suspected each other and envied each other's successes. Moreover, when the Greeks and the Serbs achieved their goals, they left the Bulgarians bleed themselves in front of the Çatalca lines. The Great Powers, after seeing the direction in which things were going, intervened according to their own interests. Russia recalled that it was its moral duty to ensure peace in the region on the grounds that, rather than a Balkan state, it would be better for Turkey to hold the Straits. The European cabinets mediated an armistice, and negotiations began under the protection of London. In London, the participating states demanded that Turkey cede all Balkan territories except for a stretch of land north of the capital, as well as the islands facing the Dardanelles. In Europe, Turkey held only Constantinople and the Straits. As in Constantinople the loss of Adrianople was unimaginable, and the Divan decided to accept the demands of London, on 23 January the government was overthrown in a coup. Turkish historians claim that the government should have been overthrown after the final answer was sent to London and thus peace would have been formally concluded. In this way, it was possible to blame the political opponents for the defeat. It was up to the new government to overturn the decision to sign the peace and continue the fight.

The Turks thus continued the war, gaining several significant victories. Communication was not the strong point of the Balkan allies. The Serbs were disappointed that they had not received access to the sea to the detriment of the independence of Muslim Albania. Greece was unhappy with what had been given to Bulgaria. In July 1913, just a few months after the London Peace, fighting broke out again in the Balkans. Serbia and Greece attacked Bulgaria; Romania sent its troops against Sofia. In this conflict between Christians, the Turks, dis-

dain the Great Powers, crushed the weak resistance of the Bulgarians, and on 23 July 1913, on the anniversary of the Young Turk Revolution, they regained Adrianople. Through the peace of Bucharest, the Turks kept Adrianople, the Greeks received most of Macedonia to the detriment of the Bulgarians, and again, the Serbs remained without access to the sea.³ The borders established in Bucharest in 1913 did not last long.

The Turks, as well as some of the powers interested in the area, did not welcome the transformation of the state into a “new Egypt.” The nationalist factions managed to draw attention to the significance of the English protectorate, and because the United States had stood in support of the nations that sought self-determination, the idea was convenient for the Turks. If the protectorate could not be avoided, then the United States one was preferable, because the United States were not as interested in the area as the European powers. The idea of an American protectorate had also been considered in Paris. According to the principle stated by W. Wilson, the Armenians wanted the same thing as the Turks: an independent state. The United States seemed to agree with the establishment of the Armenian state and the government of Damad Ferid Pasha was ready to resign in exchange for keeping Constantinople and the Straits. As an agreement between the two nations was impossible, a new Turkish movement was born in the East.

Shortly before, Britain and France had reached a new agreement on the division of the mandates in the East. Under this agreement, France appropriated Arab Syria and Turkish Cilicia. Great Britain received the rest of Arabia, along with the petroliferous regions in the Mosul area. In accordance with the agreement, the British withdrew from Cilicia, making way for the French. London had given up its claims on Turkey, except for the Straits and Constantinople. Britain also withdrew its troops from Anatolia, except for the railway surveillance officers. The French used the expelled Armenians due to the lack of troops. It was a mistake of the French that rekindled the Turkish ire, which had simmered down during the English period. Mustafa Kemal harshly criticized the Allied powers and then he took action. He entered Cilicia and attacked the French troops with the help of the locals.⁴ From a gang fight it had turned into a war. The news stunned Paris. When the Allies finally agreed, a general thwarted their plans. The case of this general had to be resolved.

While the games for the Chamber were taking place, from Paris the Allies officially informed the Turkish government that the Straits and Constantinople were to remain under the control of the sultan. It was more of a stalemate on the part of the Europeans than a benevolent act because none of the powers agreed that another power should have the dominant position.

How did the Turks perceive this official note? The Parliament considered this a success of the national policy. They hurried to depose the war minister, Djemal Pasha, at the request of the High Commissioners, but they also postponed deposing the Grand Vizier Ali Rıza Pasha. Skillfully, Mustafa Kemal used his people in the Chamber to reveal an open conflict in order to move the national representation towards the interior of the country. Armaments and war preparations continued at a brisk pace, these efforts being also supported by the military authorities in Constantinople. An entire weapons depot was transferred from the Gallipoli Peninsula to Asia Minor to equip the Wrangel army, which was sent to fight the Bolsheviks. This transport was not stopped, although it took place under the eyes of the High Commissioners.⁵

Considering themselves victorious, the Allies did not take into account the uprisings in the far southeast of Turkey. The gangs around Smyrna continued their guerrilla warfare, the French were losing village after village, then the city of Maraş was taken, and finally the French were forced to give up Şanlıurfa as well. Cilicia was once again free. Investigations show that the Turks promised them a free withdrawal, but on the way they were attacked, massacred or taken prisoner. At first hopeless in terms of the national resistance, the Parliament in Constantinople took courage. They forced the abdication of Grand Vizier Ali Rıza and replaced him with Salih Pasha, the former minister of the navy. The nationalists' hopes were bolstered.

The Dissolution of the Sultanate. The Lausanne Moment, a Starting Point for the Turkish State

AFTER THE armistice, peace negotiations followed. The Allies sent invitations to the Lausanne Conference.⁶ As for Turkey, the Allies invited representatives of both Ankara and representatives of the sultan's government. It is unclear what the United Kingdom pursued with this double invitation, but Mustafa Kemal took full advantage of this opportunity. After all, the situation between Ankara and Constantinople had to be clarified. This decision, intentionally left in abeyance by Mustafa Kemal, had come at a time when he had to make a decision. All the representatives of the National Assembly agreed that the relations between the two cities should be clarified but they did not see a solution. The thought of abolishing the Sultanate was unimaginable. According to known models, they formulated the hypothesis of the withdrawal of the

government from Constantinople, and the incorporation of the Sultanate into the new Constitution in the form of a constitutional monarchy: the sultan as an element of stability and representative leader, Mustafa Kemal as prime minister for life (a form adopted in Italy by Mussolini). The head of the Turkish state did not agree with this constitutional solution on the grounds that it would have permanently closed the path to the republic. As before, General Kemal allowed the deputies to discuss, to rally against the sultan and his ministers, categorized as the “docile tools of foreigners and traitors of the people,” and then had some partisans introduce a motion called “Sovereignty, in its entire extent, has now passed over to the Nation; Consequently, the Sultanate is disbanded, but the Caliphate is maintained.”⁷ The aim of this decision was to divide the powers, which were only theoretical. The Muslims did not know the difference between the spiritual and the temporal leader.⁸ To them, the sultan and the caliph were two forms of the same power, a kind of inseparable duality. The caliph had no religious office; he was a regular ruler like the sultan. Mustafa Kemal’s plan was to leave to the Ottoman imperial house the dignity of the Caliphate, which created the appearance of a monarchical leader, but with all the possibilities open in the future. Faced with the proposal, the National Assembly did not know how to proceed. After heated debates, Mustafa Kemal spoke:

Sovereignty is not passed on, it is conquered. Previously it was conquered by the Osman House; today the Nation has conquered it. It is only a matter of acknowledging an existing fact. If the commission and the National Assembly would recognize it, it would be, in my opinion, an opportune decision indeed. Otherwise, the reality will still impose itself in the desired form. But then it is very possible, gentlemen, for a few heads to be cut off.

The language used was similar to that of the French Revolution. The bill created a lot of discontent, but it was quickly put on the agenda. In the midst of a turmoil when no one was sitting on the benches, everyone was protesting and looking outraged, the president decreed: “adopted unanimously.” After a reign of seven hundred years, through this “ceremony,” the Osman dynasty came to an end. Following this decision, Tefvik Pasha, the last Grand Vizier, Marshal Izzet Pasha, and the other ministers withdrew. Sultan Vahideddin, clinging to his throne, did not intend to abdicate as advised, but after the decision of the National Assembly to take him to court on charges of high treason, he sought protection from the British. On the morning of 17 November, the last sultan and his son boarded the British ship *Malaya* and fled. After a brief stay in Malta and after King Huseyin of Mecca refused to receive him, he lived in San Remo where he died in his villa a few years later. The office of caliph was given by the

National Assembly to his cousin, Abdul-Medjid. The general had taken another step. Another equally important one followed: Lausanne.

The commission that was sent to Lausanne included İsmet Pasha, Dr. Rıza Nur (health minister), Hasan Saka (former finance minister), 21 advisers, 2 press officers, a general secretary, a translator, and 8 secretaries.⁹

Before leaving for Lausanne, in a quick meeting, the government listed 14 points that had to be set during the negotiations:

1. The Eastern frontier—no mention of the homeland of the Armenians; if the subject is debated, the talks are to be interrupted.

2. The border with Iraq—the provinces of Suleymaniya, Kirkuk and Mosul will be requested. In other cases, clarifications will be required from the government.

3. The border with Syria—seek to straighten the border and the landmarks are the following: Re'si İbni Hani, Harim, Muslimie, Meskene, along the Euphrates, Deir ez-Zor, the desert and the southern Mosul province.

4. The islands—depending on the situation, the nearby islands will be claimed; otherwise they will consult Ankara.

5. Thrace (the area with Greeks)—they will try to obtain the border from 1914.

6. A plebiscite will be requested for Western Thrace.

7. Gallipoli Peninsula and the Straits—no foreign military forces will be accepted, if the talks are interrupted because of this matter, Ankara will be informed.

8. The capitulations—they will not be accepted, if need be the talks can be suspended.

9. Minorities—the principle of exchange.

10. The Ottoman debts—will be divided between the countries of the former empire. The foreign administration of Ottoman finances will be abolished.

11. It is out of the question to limit the armed and naval forces.

12. The foreign institutions will comply with Turkish law.

13. For the countries established after the break-up of the empire, the principle of the plebiscite applies.

14. The Muslim community and the rights of religious foundations: the old agreements will be valid.¹⁰

For two of the above points, the Armenian issue and the capitulations, they were mandated to interrupt the talks. The Turks also needed to stay in contact with Ankara during the negotiations. Mustafa Pasha wanted to establish borders that could be defended in case of attack. Although encrypted, the English received most of the information, but due to the London bureaucratic system, the information reached Lord Curzon late.¹¹

A Different Kind of Negotiation

THE TURKISH foreign minister left for Lausanne by train. He traveled from Bulgaria together with Aleksandar Stamboliyski, about whom he confessed: “I saw a frightened prime minister; when he was talking to me, he looked left and right so that no one would see or hear us.” Arriving in Lausanne, İsmet İnönü confessed to the Bulgarian official: “All the propaganda against Turkey was made in Switzerland.” Irritated by the not very friendly atmosphere, because he had not found anyone there, he said: “They made fun of us because they told us to come a week early.”¹² During this week, the Turkish foreign minister details in his memoirs, he accepted the invitation of the French and together with the Turkish ambassador in Paris they went to the French capital where they met Prime Minister Raymond Poincaré. From İsmet İnönü’s point of view, there were no significant differences between them and the French:

The war with the French ended, we set the border with Syria and discussed trade issues; we had bought cars from them during the war. I asked him if there would be peace and he categorically said yes. Poincaré answered me: the conditions of the peace are favorable, everyone wants it and is determined to make peace.

Wishing to know as much as possible about the French plans, İsmet Pasha said frankly: “You have to leave Istanbul and the Straits; it is a serious problem for us.” The French official responded simply to this request: yes. With nothing to lose, the Turks were determined to remain adamant about their territory and not to accept any foreign power in the country:

After the peace treaty is signed, we agreed that the Allied forces and the Istanbul administration would liberate the city. I explained that we would not accept anyone, no commission, no force in the smallest corner of the country; we do not accept any military threat.

We also learn from his memoirs that Poincaré confessed to him that the French were no longer considering occupation plans for Turkey.¹³

Twelve states met in Lausanne to discuss the problems of the Orient. It is true that very few were directly interested in the problems of Turkey; for them, important was the particular interest in the Straits. Some of the powers were interested in the existence of an independent Turkey because in this way the maritime powers of Great Britain were diminished. A success of the Turks was that in Lausanne the world witnessed a peace that was not dictated but negoti-

ated. The victorious powers, as they were called in Europe, could no longer be called so in the East; they absolutely rejected the negotiations in Lausanne.

The conference opened on 20 November 1922 in the presence of Poincaré and Mussolini. The next day, after the departure of the leaders, Lord Curzon was the one who chaired the conference. The starting idea for the British foreign minister was that the Treaty of Sèvres should be the basis of the negotiations. On hearing these principles enunciated by the British minister, İsmet İnönü, a general but also the Turkish foreign minister, the head of the Turkish delegation, did not give any importance to the English intentions; moreover, he set a condition, namely equal negotiations or none at all.¹⁴ It is self-evident how much amazement and stupor the statement made by the Turks provoked, but the Europeans could not slam the door on Ankara's representatives in the early days. The Turks knew exactly what they wanted, the Allied powers less so. It can be said that this was the only advantage that İsmet Pasha had. According to his memoirs, his Russian friends, Georgy Chicherin and Vatslav Vorovsky (the latter, the victim of an attack during the conference), with their noisy attitude, confused him more than helped him. The special relations between Ankara and Moscow also came to light in Lausanne when the first Soviet delegate, Georgy Chicherin, proposed on 4 December 1922:

*banning or rather closing the Straits for warships both in peacetime and in wartime, except for Turkish warships; the full sovereignty and independence of Turkey in the Straits with the right to fortify and arm the coasts, to possess a fleet of war, mines, military aviation and any other means of modern warfare technology.*¹⁵

If the Soviet point of view had been accepted, the security of the other sovereign states, especially Romania, would have been endangered because the closure of the Straits for warships in peacetime and at war tended to transform the Black Sea into a Russian lake.

Great Britain had secured a good position. Noticing this, France began to regret the friendship shown to the Turks and was trying to return under the wing of the British ally. In this sense, Poincaré proclaimed the united front of the Allies, which for the Turks meant the renunciation of the Ankara agreement. But this time the union invoked by the French was true. France had given way to Britain, especially since the Ruhr action was imminent. In Turkey, Mustafa Kemal had stopped marching on Constantinople, declaring himself ready to negotiate a peace, trusting in France's support. Unfortunately for the Turks, this support was canceled thanks to the skillful diplomacy of Great Britain. Between these coordinates, the conference turned into a duel between Lord Curzon and

İsmet Pasha, which took place over several months. Given the attitude of the English counterpart, İsmet Pasha¹⁶ pretended to hear only what he wanted to hear (he had declared that he had a disability and could not hear with one ear), was procrastinating and refused to give an inch. Visibly annoyed, the English foreign minister stated: “This Turk is haggling like he is in a carpet fair.”¹⁷ After all, London also did not give up on the positions that seemed important to it. France had to pay dearly for Lausanne.

One problem the Turks wanted to get rid of was the liquidation of the remaining legacy of the Ottoman Empire. Accounts covering several centuries had to be settled, piles of paper that no one recognized. Among these were the capitulations, the privileged status which the former sultans had granted to their non-Turkish subjects. The foreigners, together with their institutions and commercial enterprises, were not subject to the jurisdiction of Turkey, they did not pay taxes and they were enjoying, in addition, great economic privileges, so the native traders could not compete with them. In this chapter there was also the issue of the “*dette publique*” (the international administration of the public debt contracted by the old sultans), the Ottoman Bank, the Tobacco Authority and other concessions and mortgages in which most of the French capital was interested. Ankara retaliated on the grounds that these capitulations meant a significant restriction of its sovereign rights that was incompatible with its independence, demanding their immediate removal. Lord Curzon, as chairman of the conference, was not moved and argued that Turkey had no modern jurisdiction, no trade law, and no other codes. The Turkish delegate asked for time and he promised to have them soon. Moreover, he gave the example of Japan, which escaped capitulation after a 20-year transition period. In the conclusion on this subject, the Turkish general stated that Turkey would rather fight than admit the restriction of the fundamental rights of the nation.¹⁸ After three months without any result, Lord Curzon tried one last move and acted like the buyer at the bazaar. He said he could not give more and left the conference room in anger. At the train station, angry, he waited for his Turkish counterpart to come after him and accept. As this did not happen, the English diplomat had to leave without any result. The conference broke down in early February 1923. Left alone, the Turkish delegation also left Lausanne.

EVENTS WERE proceeding apace in the country. The successful attack on the monarchy, the removal of the Sultanate and leaving the Caliphate without any effective power alarmed many in the country. In addition to the opposition formed around Rauf Bey, who believed in a constitutional monarchy, there were all the citizens who were linked to Islam and the tradition

of this religion. Behind them were the imams (priests). The rumor among them was that Mustafa Kemal, who had gotten married in the meantime, intended to become sultan-caliph and thus establish a Kemal dynasty. Persia was an example of such an idea. Constantinople, freed from the pressure of the occupation, sought through its representatives, the aristocracy, the nobility, to regain its place as capital. Behind their choice were the achievements of a great past, there was the mantle of the Prophet, as it was the residence of the caliph. On the other hand, the National Assembly had declared Ankara the seat of government, which meant the first step towards making it the capital of the Turkish state. Fights between the two camps took place. The Ankara opposition secretly supported those in the historical capital. Even Rauf Bey, the prime minister, supported the opposition, but his position forced him to do it in secret. Among the arguments of the opposition were the reproaches addressed to İsmet Pasha, and indirectly to Mustafa Kemal. These were in connection with the suspension of the peace negotiations, the threatening prospect of the continuation of the war, the deception at Lausanne (according to the opposition), and they created a vehement and violent discontent in the spring of 1923 in the National Assembly. The opposition could not hope for anything better. The ranks of Mustafa Kemal's supporters had thinned after the removal of the sultan, and his policy at Lausanne was categorized as a resounding failure. Moreover, he was blamed for ending the march on Constantinople, even if he had promised: "With French help we will gain peace. I have their word."¹⁹

As the situation of the Lausanne Conference was deadlocked, Mustafa Kemal secretly sought to reach an agreement with London. For the Turks, Britain was no longer to be feared (but rather Soviet Russia), and the British felt that they could finally reconcile with a nationalist Turkey in Asia Minor, detached from Islam. However, the price of the secret negotiations was found out later. Turkey had to give up Mosul. As the attacks against the leader and his collaborators had intensified in the National Assembly, Mustafa Kemal considered dissolving it. It was a legal measure available to the head of the National Assembly. In the evening of 1 April 1923, Mustafa Kemal summoned the ministers and party leaders with whom he made the necessary preparations. The next day the motion was introduced: dissolution and new elections. The motion was voted on 2 April. Thus ended the first National Assembly of the new Turkey, which had been permanently convened since 1920.

If the opponents had hoped that the elections would strengthen them, they were disappointed. Mustafa Kemal had taken the necessary steps, and he knew that parliamentarism in Turkey was largely a foreign novelty. He also knew that, in general, it is difficult for the Turk to say yes or no even though he has a head

full of ideas. Under the circumstances, General Kemal decided to found a party, the Republican People's Party. He relied on the direct contact with the people, so he started a campaign and he traveled the country, carrying out a kind of modern propaganda, talking to the people about the program of the new party that contained everything he had done but nothing he would do. This modern propaganda was completely new to the Anatolians, accustomed to leaders who only cared about collecting taxes. M. Kemal spoke in general formulas about the exclusive sovereignty of the people and about evolution in the national sense. His motivation:

I thought it would not be appropriate to provide the ignorant and reactionary elements with the means to poison the whole nation by introducing these issues (reforms) too early in the program. Because I was absolutely sure that at the right time these problems would be solved and that in the end the people would be satisfied with what had been done.²⁰

The silence on the real goals also had its disadvantages, allowing the opponents to take over the program of the People's Party and thus enter Parliament. Only the candidates of the new People's Party won seats in the elections. It was a situation similar to that of the Young Turks, with the essential difference that at the head of the current parliamentary organization was not a committee, but a single leader, Mustafa Kemal.

Meanwhile, the conference had resumed in Lausanne on 9 April 1923. For Britain, Lord Curzon was replaced by Sir Horace Rumbold, a former British High Commissioner to Constantinople, a sign that something had changed in British politics. However, it took more than 3 months for the treaty to be signed. This time the major resistance was put up by France. It was obvious to France that the Ruhr action had been unsuccessful, its hopes on the Rhine frontier had also been shattered, and economically the devaluation of the German mark had produced well-founded fears for Paris that war reparations might also be lost. In this sense, the French hoped to recover at least the money placed in Turkey, and rescue what they could from those significant capitals.

A less addressed issue concerned the island of Ada Kaleh, belonging to Romania. In the opinion of the Turkish foreign minister, it had been overlooked during the Berlin Congress of 1878, and was put on the table by a Turkish delegate who remembered it. Although it was difficult to control, the Turks wanted to have it.

I have been reprimanded by my own delegation that we must not become deadlocked over Ada Kaleh at the Peace Conference on the grounds that in the first phase of the Conference we did not mention this island and it is not fair to make further claims now. I mentioned the Ada Kaleh problem in the second part of the Conference, but my team member, Mustafa Reşid Pasha, advised me that it was not logical to talk about this issue, especially since I had not raised it in the first part.²¹

As this point of view is only found in Turkish documents, it can be believed that the “Ada Kaleh issue” was raised only to irritate the Turkish opposition at the conference. Located far from the borders claimed by the Turks, it was impossible for this island to belong to Turkey.

Another issue that created astonishment among the representatives of the countries present at Lausanne was the statement of İsmet İnönü:

We want to get the Patriarchate out of Istanbul. The Patriarchate was the center of all actions against the Turks. The Patriarchate was an obstacle to the friendship between the Turks and the Greeks. The subject brought up the issue between Turks and Christianity.²²

The customs and the tradition of hundreds of years represented by the Patriarchate in the former capital of the empire were not an object of negotiation, in the opinion of the Christians. Moreover, if the Turks had removed the Patriarchate from Constantinople, the representatives of the Great Powers would have been seen as the destroyers of Christian unity.

Minister İsmet Pasha relates the matter in his memoirs:

One morning Dr. Rıza Nur came to me and told me that he had met with Nicholson, Lord Curzon’s secretary, and they had a long discussion. Nicholson: Discussions on the subject of the Patriarchate leave us without any comment before Christendom, they hurt us. English public opinion is like a wounded lion. These pressures will continuously cause pain. This animal (the public opinion), beaten, hit, injured and punched, will wake up in the end. When it wakes up it won’t see anything and we don’t know what it will do: Why are you doing this?

Rıza Nur (İsmet Pasha’s trusted man, a member of the Turkish delegation in Lausanne), after listening, transferred the issue to İsmet İnönü: “This is İsmet Pasha’s problem. We do not interfere.” In turn, after the discussion was reported, İsmet İnönü stated that he felt as if the roof had fallen on his head. In the

talks during the conference, when the situation of the Armenians was discussed as well as the creation of a commission in this regard, Rıza Nur took it badly and wanted to withdraw. Obviously, for the Europeans, the issue of the Patriarchate was much more important than the situation of the Armenians. Irritated by the statements of his delegate, he tried to remedy the situation:

What did you do? The whole effort I made for the Patriarchate came to naught. You are my representative here! It means that you are not representing the problem of the Patriarchate. It is not the policy of the government; it is a personal wish of İsmet Paşa. That's why he's tormented. Your words are like a complaint, you can't influence me at all. How important is the fight of the chief negotiator if he does not have the support of the government, of his friends, and of the public opinion. You did very badly. We sent him after Curzon, who agreed to talk immediately. When he saw me, he welcomed me with joy. Before we spoke, he said, "You brought me a present." I wondered what gift he was talking about. "I came to talk to you!" "Today is my birthday," Curzon replied. "We talked about the issue of the Istanbul Patriarchate."

In Lord Curzon's opinion, the Patriarchate has nothing to do with worldly affairs. It will not interfere in any problem. Why do you want to send away the Istanbul Patriarchate? We have come to the end point, there is no order from the government, nor do your friends know, it is only your wish. How did you come up with this issue? My secretary made some inquiries in the morning and brought me this answer.

—İnönü: I told him it was a misunderstanding.

—Curzon: Don't bother, it can't be repaired.

—İnönü: After a few days we closed the subject and the Patriarchate remains with us.²³

Our analysis shows that Mustafa Kemal did not want to threaten the independence of the Patriarchate but used its importance in the Lausanne negotiations. The proud Venizelos would have been happy to see the Turks drive the Patriarchate out of Istanbul, offering to host it on Mount Athos.²⁴

He had to make do with a small allowance, but at the same time he lost what was most important for the future, namely all the cultural and economic authority he had enjoyed in the Middle East.²⁵ On the afternoon of 24 July 1923, the bells of Lausanne Cathedral announced to the world that peace negotiations were over. This marked the end of a five-year truce, an unprecedented period in history. Eighteen special conventions and six documents were attached to the final protocol, showing how difficult it had been to settle the complex legacy of

the Ottoman Empire. As for Turkey, it generally maintained the borders it had conquered with its military might, as claimed in the national pact. The fate of Mosul, with its rich oilfields, remained unclear. The United Kingdom preferred a direct agreement with Turkey on this issue.

The Straits, the most delicate matter for most of the participants, were also resolved according to British wishes. Turkey considered opting for the United Kingdom without taking into account the Russian ally. The Moscow–Ankara agreement had expressly stipulated that the Straits issue was to be resolved only through a special conference with the neighboring states. After all, the Soviet proposal came on the grounds that only the countries bordering the Black Sea had the right to decide on the Straits. In Lausanne, Turkey was granted, with some restrictions, sovereignty over Constantinople and the coastal region, as a demilitarized area, but in exchange the Turks had to allow the free passage of trade and war vessels (with certain specifications). Naturally, this westward orientation of Turkey on the issue of the Straits resulted in a cooling of relations with Moscow. However, the Russians had not given up their goal in terms of the Straits. Thus, Chicherin, once he had the opportunity, intervened to restore the relations with Ankara. The opportunity was offered by the Mosul problem. On 17 September 1925, a pact of Russian-Turkish friendship and neutrality was signed.

Turkey also won in matter of the capitulations.²⁶ Together with the concessions made by the Ottoman Empire, these were abolished by the Treaty of Lausanne, without a transition period. Any limitation on the Turkish armed forces, as mentioned in the Treaty of Sèvres, was out of the question. Another problem that had emerged before Lausanne, that of the Christian minorities, no longer played any role. Concerning the Greco-Turkish issue, there was a population exchange and 2 million people left their homes. In conclusion, Lausanne became the liberating act of the new Turkey, bearing the seals of twelve powers. Historians have observed that for the first time modern Europe had suffered a defeat in Asia. The expansion of the West to the East was stopped on the threshold of the Asian continent.

The Straits Convention, discussed and adopted in parallel with the Lausanne²⁷ Peace Treaty with Turkey, aimed at complete freedom of navigation for all merchant ships through the Bosphorus and Dardanelles Straits; the application of limits on tonnage on non-riparian military vessels was considered. The demilitarization of the shores was completed with the establishment of an International Straits Commission.²⁸

Turkey did not agree with these proposals, considering the Commission to be an infringement on its sovereignty. At the same time, it considered that the

sovereign rights of the Turkish state had been violated by the demand to demilitarize the shores of the Straits, which were guaranteed by France, Great Britain, Italy and Japan.

At the Lausanne Conference, Turkey was represented by İsmet Pasha. The Turkish official proposed: guarantees against an unprovoked naval or ground attack, the security of the Saints, Constantinople and the Sea of Marmara, limitations on the naval forces entering the Black Sea so as not to pose a danger to the area between the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles on the one hand and the Black Sea on the other, unrestricted freedom of navigation for merchant ships in time of peace and war, with the necessary controls. As for the military side of the regulations, the Turkish delegate considered that the decision not to fortify the Straits deprived Turkey of its defenses in the event of an unexpected attack. In the opinion of the Turkish government, the demilitarized zone was much too large, so it asserted the need to maintain arsenals in Constantinople and the Straits, to ensure the movement of troops from the European coast to the Asian coast and vice versa, to provide a minimum of defenses for the Gallipoli Peninsula, and claimed recognition for Turkey's sovereignty over the islands of Imbros, Tenedos, and Samothrace, as well as autonomy for the island of Lemnos.²⁹

The victorious states of the First World War tried to limit the Russian influence over the Straits and the Black Sea, but they did not fully achieve their goal. On the other hand, Turkey and Russia supported each other in the "Lausanne issue."³⁰

As for the Romanian delegation, when it left for Lausanne, it had three goals, namely to establish a lasting peace in the East, to obtain a demilitarized zone between Turkey and Bulgaria and to establish a regime for the Straits, which would ensure their freedom as much as possible. The aim was to further Romania's political and economic interests in the area.

In the work that gave the final form of the Lausanne Treaty, the principle of nationalities was taken into account. Turkey kept all its European lands up to the Maritsa River, including Adrianople, while Greece remained in possession of Western Thrace, giving up Smyrna and any possession in Asia Minor.

Another decision that was taken was the creation of a demilitarized zone between Turkey and Bulgaria. This area also stretched across the border between Greece and Turkey, so from the Black Sea to the Aegean Sea, Turkey was separated from its neighbors by a demilitarized region.³¹

REGARDING THE Straits, it was decided that they should be free both in time of peace and in time of war. From the exposition of I. G. Duca, it emerges that two positions clashed in Lausanne: on the one hand, the position of Soviet Russia, which coincided with that of Tsarist Russia, favoring

the closure of the Straits and the transformation of the Black Sea into a closed sea, and the position of general interests, namely the concept of the freedom of the Straits, which guaranteed not only the commercial interests of all countries in time of peace, but offered opportunities to the riparian states even in time of war.

As expected, the latter option prevailed, because the former reflected the interests of a single state, while the other position represented the common interest of the countries in the region. Finally, after some hesitation, Soviet Russia signed the convention.

The Lausanne Convention, in the form it had at that time, was welcomed in Turkey. Practically, an attempt was made to remove the Straits from the influence of one power and put them under the control of all interested powers. In Lausanne, the victors of 1918 tried to impose their will on a Turkey that in 1923 was no longer a defeated country, because it had also scored victories of its own.

For Romania, the Convention, in its final form, was quite beneficial, because its point of view had been accepted, and its interest in having the Straits open had been endorsed.

After protracted discussions the Straits Convention was signed on 24 July 1923. It stipulated:

1. Full freedom of navigation for all merchant ships and warships, under any flag, with any cargo, in peacetime; the conditions remained the same during wartime if Turkey remained neutral.

2. In time of war, if Turkey was one of the belligerents, it had no right to stop the passage of neutral ships through the Straits.

3. Warships could pass freely through the Straits, during both day and night, regardless of the flag, but no Power was allowed to send warships to the Black Sea that exceeded, in terms of capacity, the fleet of the strongest riparian countries.

4. Submarines were to cross the Straits sailing on the surface.

5. No warships were to be stationed in the Straits.

6. The demilitarization of the Straits and the establishment of the International Straits Commission—consisting of representatives of France, Great Britain, Italy, Japan, Bulgaria, Romania, Greece, Yugoslavia, and Soviet Russia—which monitored the compliance with the provisions of the Convention. This commission was under the control of the League of Nations.³²

The failure of disarmament plans initiated after the First World War, the inability of the League of Nations to stop the revisionist states from seizing territories and to organize a system of collective security are the factors that led to a re-discussion of the conclusions of the Lausanne Conference, as established in July 1923, because they no longer corresponded to the interests of either Turkey or the riparian countries. In the debates on the issue of the Straits, two points of

view emerged, that of Turkey, which coincided with that of the Soviet Union, and the one supported by Great Britain. Turkey wanted the militarization of the Straits in order to guarantee its own security; instead, the Soviet Union sought to make the Black Sea a Russian lake by restricting or banning the entry of non-riparian warships. On the other hand, the United Kingdom, interested in protecting its maritime communication lines, wanted to maintain some type of international control over the Straits.

Finally, the point of view of Turkey was adopted, which was granted the right to rearm the areas that had been demilitarized at Lausanne. After all, this was a necessity as well as a natural fact. □

Notes

1. Suggestive in this respect are the works of Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacy* (New York–London–Toronto–Sydney: Simon and Schuster Paperbacks, 1994); Jean Baptiste Duroselle and André Kaspi, *Histoire des relations internationales*, vol. 1, *De 1919 à 1945*, 13th edition (Paris: Armand Colin, 2017); Viorica Moisuc, *Istoria relațiilor internaționale până la mijlocul secolului al XX-lea* (Bucharest: Ed. Fundației România de Măine, 2003). Among the Turkish authors who dealt with this topic, we find Mustafa Budak, “I. Dünya Savaşı sonrası yeni uluslararası düzen kurma sürecinde Osmanlı Devleti’nin tavrı Paris Barış Konferansı’na sunulan 23 Haziran 1919 tarihli muhtıra” (The position of the Ottoman state after the First World War in the current new order: Communication presented on 23 July 1919 in Paris), *Divan: Disiplinlerarası Çalışmalar Dergisi* 7 (1999): 191–215; Taner Baytok, *İngiliz Belgeleriyle Sevres’den Lozan’a: Dünden Bugüne Değişen Ne Vardı?* (What has changed since yesterday, from Sèvres to Lausanne: British documents) (Istanbul: Doğan Kitap, 2007); Fahri Belen, *20. Yüzyılda Osmanlı Devleti* (The Ottoman State in the 20th century) (Istanbul: Remzi Kitabevi, 1973); Osman Olcay, *Sèvres Antlaşmasına doğru: Şişitli Konferans ve Toplantuların Tutanakları ve Bunlara İlişkin Belgeler* (Towards a Sèvres understanding: Different papers from conferences and meetings) (Ankara: Ankara Üniversitesi Siyasal Bilgiler Fakültesi, 1980); Cahit Kayra, *Sevr Dosyası* (Sèvres file) (Istanbul: Buke, 2004); Esin Yürdusev, “İstanbul’dan Lozan’a İngiltere’nin Boğazlar Politikası 1915–1923” (England’s policy towards the Straits: From Istanbul to Lausanne 1915–1923), *Bellefen* 71, 260 (2007): 161–222; Baskın Oran, ed., *Türk Dış Politikası: Kurtuluş Savaşı’ndan Bugüne Olgular, Belgeler, Yorumlar* (Turkey’s foreign policy), vol. 1, *1919–1980* (Istanbul: İletişim, 2003).
2. D. v. Mikusch, *Gazi Mustafa Kemal 1880–1938: İntre Asia și Europa* (Craiova: Scrisul Românesc, n.d.), 146, 100.
3. *Ibid.*, 107.
4. *Tarihte Türk-Rumen İlişkileri* (Turkish-Romanian relations in history) (Ankara: Genelkurmay Basımevi, 2006), 141.

5. Mikusch, 203.
6. *Tarihte Türk-Rumen*, 148.
7. Mikusch, 278.
8. *Ibid.*, 279.
9. Oran, 217.
10. *Ibid.*, 217–218.
11. *Ibid.*, 218.
12. İsmet İnönü, *Hatıralar* (Memoirs), 2nd edition (Ankara: Bilgi, 2006), 320.
13. *Ibid.*, 321.
14. Mikusch, 285.
15. Mihai Retegan, *În balanța forțelor: Alianțe militare românești interbelice* (Bucharest: Semne, 1997), 39.
16. İsmet İnönü details the moments spent in Lausanne and the mood of that time. Visibly irritated by the wishes of the Allies, the foreign minister tried to explain that Turkey was participating in the Lausanne Conference as a victor, and the Allies had to take this into account. Although the Russians wanted the Turks to get what they wanted, İnönü (313–338) states that the way the Russians behaved did not help him. The point of view of the Turkish foreign minister is completely opposed to that of the Romanian counterpart, I. G. Duca; see *Memorii*, vol. 4, edited by Stelian Neagoe (Bucharest: Machiavelli, 1994), 264. He sometimes found İsmet İnönü even hypocritical. According to the historical facts, the Turkish envoy did his duty, obtaining more than he had hoped.
17. Mikusch, 286.
18. *Ibid.*, 286–287.
19. *Ibid.*, 289.
20. *Ibid.*, 291.
21. İnönü, 386.
22. *Ibid.*, 397.
23. *Ibid.*, 397–399.
24. *Ibid.*, 400.
25. Mikusch, 292.
26. *Ibid.*, 293.
27. The states participating in the Lausanne Conference were: Great Britain, France, Italy, Greece, Romania, Yugoslavia, Turkey, Japan, and the USA as an observer. To discuss certain issues were the following guests: Bulgaria, Albania, the Netherlands, Spain, Portugal, Norway, and Sweden. Soviet Russia, Ukraine, and Georgia participated in the debates on territorial, military, and Straits regime issues.
28. Moisuc, 249.
29. *Ibid.*, 250.
30. Ibrahim Kara, *Yakın Tarihimiz* (Recent History) (Istanbul: Gonca Yayinlari, 2014), 179–188.
31. *Ibid.*; also Duca, *Memorii*, 4: 286–289.
32. Moisuc, 250.

Abstract

The Straits: The Geostrategic Dispute in the Balance of the Great Powers

Situated in a zone of great strategic interest, the Straits have represented in the course of time an important asset for those who possessed them and a permanent object of the Great Powers' desire to control them. The Turkish Republic sought, as was only natural, to consolidate her control of the Straits at the Lausanne Conference. As to the Straits, the treaty stipulates that: "its purpose is to ensure the opening and to grant the passage liberty through the Straits of all peoples' commercial transactions." Turkey and implicitly the USSR, as main powers at the Black Sea, alongside with the neighboring states, agreed to assign the preparation of the final statute of the Black Sea and of the Straits to a subsequent conference of delegates of the neighboring states, "excluding the possibility that the ensuing decisions jeopardize Turkey's absolute sovereignty and security."

Keywords

Straits, Turkey, Lausanne Conference, Black Sea, Romania