

PRO GEORGIA
JOURNAL OF
KARTVELOLOGICAL
STUDIES

N° 30 — 2020

(Published since 1991)



CENTRE FOR EAST EUROPEAN STUDIES
FACULTY OF ORIENTAL STUDIES UNIVERSITY OF WARSAW
WARSAW 2020

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PRINTING: Duo Studio

ISSN 1230-1604

Edition of 500 Copies
The printed version is the basic version of the journal

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TRANSCAUCASIAN SEJM'S DELEGATION
ON CONFERENCES
IN TRABZON AND BATUMI (MARCH-MAY, 1918)

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The Bolshevik coup in Russia in October 1917 had an influence upon the South Caucasus region – a part of borders of former Russian Empire. In particular, dominant political parties acting at that time in the Caucasus did not recognize the governing of the Russian Social-Democratic Bolshevik Party that had come to power; they separated from it and created a new governmental body in the South Caucasus – the Transcaucasian Commissariat. The majority of members in the Commissariat were from Georgian Social-Democratic, Armenian Dashnaktsutyun (“Armenian Revolutionary Federation”) and Azerbaijani Musavat (“Equality”) parties. The Transcaucasian Commissariat did not declare the independence of Transcaucasia from the very beginning, due to the fact that the Georgian Social-Democrats, as well as the members of Dashnaktsutyun and Musavat parties did not seem to be in a hurry to secede from the former Russian Empire’s borders; they considered Transcaucasia as a constituent part of Federal Russia, and the only unacceptable thing for them was the Soviet government.

The main challenge of the Transcaucasian Commissariat that determined the future of the Transcaucasian state was to establish relationship with Turkey. During the First World War, the front line of the Eastern Caucasus was traversing the territory of the south-western Caucasus. Ottomans, on the one hand, offered Transcaucasia to establish good neighbourly relations and to make peace, while on the other hand, it continued military actions against Transcaucasia.

Transcaucasian Commissariat was alone on the diplomatic or military arena with Ottomans. After the Bolsheviks came to power, Russia

dropped out of the First World War. Transcaucasia, which was not even a subject of international jurisdiction, did not have an ally.

For the first time, the Ottoman government put forward the initiative to cease hostilities and launch peace talks. In the beginning of December 1917, the Commander of the Third Army of Turkey, Mehmed Vehib-Pasha, offered the Transcaucasian Commissariat to conclude a ceasefire agreement¹. On December 18 of the same year, the Ottoman Empire and Transcaucasia signed a temporary peace treaty in Erzincan, which envisaged termination of hostilities. After signing a temporary peace treaty, Ottomans offered the Transcaucasian government to start peace negotiations and send a delegation to Trabzon. The Commissariat delayed with the respond. Members of the Transcaucasian government restrained from pursuing independent politics, since they still cherished a hope that the Bolshevik government would fall in Russia. However, the event on January 6, 1918, in particular, the disbandment of the Russian Constituent Assembly by Bolsheviks, forced the Transcaucasian political parties who were in favour of Russian Federation to eventually secede from Russia and think about strengthening the Transcaucasian rule. The Transcaucasian Commissariat convened the legislative body of Transcaucasian Sejm on February 10 (23) in 1918. Similar to the Commissariat, the majority of Sejm consisted of members of the Social-Democratic, Dashnaksutyun and Musavat parties². Following the calling of Sejm, the relationship with the Ottomans was maintained by the Sejm on behalf of Transcaucasia.

While the Transcaucasian Commissariat's government was hesitating to begin negotiations with Ottomans and delayed their response, the situation became worse. The Armenians killed dozens of Muslims in Erzincan on 15 and 16 February 1918 to take revenge. Such facts became frequent. Turkey used the raids on Muslim population by Armenians to its advantage. On February 12, 1918, the Ottoman Commander Vehib-Pasha told the Commander of the Transcaucasian Army, General Lieutenant Ilya Odishelidze, that he was "no longer able to suspend his soldiers in the role of silent spectators who understand and realize that their parents

¹ Firuz K a z e m z a d e h, *The struggle for Transcaucasia, 1917-1921*, Tbilisi 2016, p. 110.

² The Transcaucasian Sejm was composed of the following parties: 1. Georgian Social-Democratic party (38, Georgians in the majority, 2 Russians and 3 Armenians); 2. Dashnaksutyun (27, all Armenians); 3. Musavat (30, all Azerbaijanis); 4. Cadets (1 Russian); 5. Social-Revolutionaries, the same SRs (1 Russian, 2 Armenians, 3 Georgians); 6. Georgian Socialist-Federalists (1 Georgian); 7. National Democrats (1 Georgian); 8. Muslims in Russia (4); 9. Muslim Socialist Block (7); 10. Hummet, the same Muslim Social Democratic party (3). (J u. S e m e n o v, *Transcaucasian Republic*, journal „Revival”, 1, Paris, 1949, p. 122).

and children, their wives and relatives are doomed to destroy," therefore, he had to order his troops to attack³. As a result, the Turkish army invaded Erzurum almost without fight.

Despite the resumption of combat operations, Ottoman Commander Vehib-Pasha explained that it was a forced act and that it should not be considered as a violation of the Erzincan treaty; moreover, the Ottoman proposal to start negotiations between the Transcaucasia and the Ottoman Empire remained in force.

The Transcaucasian Sejm established a Peace Committee to review and discuss issues related to negotiations with the Ottoman Empire⁴. Noe Ramishvili, one of the leaders of the Georgian Social-Democratic Party was appointed as a chairman. The issue of Sejm's powers concerning the right to negotiate with Turkey was put on the agenda during the first session of the Peace Committee. They also discussed the terms of the peace treaty. A resolution that had to become the basis for the peace treaty was adopted at the final session of the Peace Committee. In particular: 1. The Sejm was authorized to establish peace with the Ottomans; 2. The Transcaucasian Sejm aimed at establishing the ultimate peace; 3. The main basis of the Agreement had to be the 1914 Russian-Ottoman borders; 4. The delegation should gain the right of self-government for the people of Eastern Anatolia, in particular, for Armenians to create autonomy within the Turkish state⁵. The Transcaucasian delegation had to act taking into consideration third and fourth clauses of this resolution while negotiation with Ottomans.

The Peace Committee of the Transcaucasian Sejm discussed the issue of electing members of the delegation at the session on February 15, 1918. The Polish Council asked the Committee to include a Polish representative, but their request was not taken into consideration due to the fact that the number of Polish residents in the Caucasus was small⁶. When discussing the formation of the delegation, the subject of consideration was the principle based on which the candidates should have been selected: according to party or nationality. Finally, it was decided that the delegation of the Transcaucasian Sejm would consist of members of the parties: in case of parties with large numbers – 2 members, and smaller parties

3 *Documents and Materials on the Foreign Policy of Transcaucasia in Georgia*, Tbilisi 1919, p. 48.

4 Historical Archive of National Archives of Georgia, 1819/1/225/1.

5 *Ibid.*, 1875/1/4/46.

6 *Ibid.*, 1819/1/225/4.

had the right to have one member⁷. Based on the principle of the party, the following delegation members were named: The Social Democratic party – Akaki Chkhenkeli (Chairman) and Haidar-Beg Abashidze, Dashnakt-sutyun party – Alexander Khatisov (Khatisian) and Ruben Kachaznun; Musavat party – Mammad Hasan Hajinski and Khalil-beg Khasmam-madov; Georgian National Democratic party – George Gvazava, Georgian Socialist-Federalists party – George Laskhishvili, Muslim Socialist Bloc – Ibrahim Hajinski, Muslims in Russia (Ittihad party) – Mir-Yagub Mehtyev, “Hummet” (Muslim Social-Democratic) party – Akper Sheikh-UI-Islamov⁸, Social Revolutionaries – Chikalin⁹. The delegates of the Transcaucasian delegation were approved at the session of Sejm on 17 February 1918.

In terms of nationality, the majority of the delegation was presented by Georgians and Azerbaijanis; the Armenians were in minority. The national ratio became significant later while making decisions during the sessions of the delegation in Trabzon.

In addition to main members of the delegation – the delegates, the delegation was composed of financial advisers (M. A. Bubiati), trade-industrial advisers (L. Kikodze), Military advisers (Colonel S.S. Eradze, Captain Pritoman and others, in total 10 militaries¹⁰, including the General Major of the Russian Empire Vladimir Levandovsky¹¹). The Armenian historian Arakel (Leo) Babakhanyan¹² and Georgian historian Pavle Ingorokva were invited as experts on historical issues.

Besides delegates and advisers, the delegation included clerks (three people), translators (one expert in French and two in Turkish languages), as well as the secretaries from political parties: Grigol Veshapeli, Akhmed Bek Pepinov, Samson Pirtskhalava, R. Ter-Minasyan; Secretaries of the Chairman of the Delegation: A. Kutateladze and I. Gogolashvili, two employees of the agricultural part, the aides of the chairman: Lieutenant A. Chkheidze and Cornet A. Kiziria, assistants – Giorgi Naneishvili, Rusudan Mikadze and the armed guard¹³.

⁷ Historical Archive of National Archives of Georgia, 1819/1/225/8.

⁸ Ibid., 1819/1/224/1.

⁹ Ibid., 1819/1/225/8; *Transcaucasian Sejm*, Newspaper “Ertoba”, 1918, N41, p. 3.

¹⁰ Ibid., 1819/1/224/1.

¹¹ Ibid., 1819/1/226/6.

¹² Ibid., 1819/1/225/10.

¹³ Ibid., 1819/1/224/1.

The delegation of Transcaucasian Sejm was the most numerous delegation in the history of Caucasus during the Trabzon Peace Conference¹⁴. The multiplicity and composition of the delegation clearly shows the diversity of Transcaucasian political parties and political pluralism.

Following the election of the delegation members, the Transcaucasian Sejm approved the regulations of the delegates at the session on February 17, 1918. They should have acted monolithically, without separatist demonstrations or unapproved actions by the Sejm. The delegation was accountable to the Sejm¹⁵. Bilateral negotiations with the Ottomans had to be held in Trabzon.

The departure of the Transcaucasian delegation to Trabzon to negotiate with the Ottoman Empire was hindered by the notification of the secretary of the Russian Peacekeeping delegation, Lev Karakhan. During the period of February-March 1918, negotiations between the Soviet Russia and the Allies (Germany, Ottoman Empire, Austria-Hungary, Bulgaria) were being held, which resulted in the conclusion of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk on March 3, 1918. A day before the signing of the Treaty, on March 2, Lev Karakhan informed the Transcaucasian Commissariat that the agreement was about to be signed which implied transferring the territories of Batumi, Kars and Ardahan to the Ottoman Empire. On March 2, 1918, the Transcaucasian government and Sejm spread a protest note. The government and the Sejm did not admit the terms of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, since it was signed without the approval of Transcaucasia¹⁶. In such a situation, the Transcaucasian government and the Sejm doubted that the Ottoman Empire still wanted peace negotiations with the Transcaucasia¹⁷.

Despite the fact that according to the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, Turkey received the territories of the Transcaucasia from the Soviet Russia, the interests of the Ottoman Empire were not confined to the Caucasus. Consequently, it was important for the Ottoman Empire to establish relations with de-facto government of Transcaucasian Commissariat.

¹⁴ When the delegation of the Transcaucasian Sejm arrived to Trabzon, one of the Turks said: "if this is the entire population of the Transcaucasia, then it is little, but if it is the delegation only, then it is quite large". (Z. Avalishvili, *independence of Georgia 1918-1921 in international politics*, Tbilisi 1990, p. 49).

¹⁵ Historical Archive of National Archives of Georgia, 1819/1/225/7.

¹⁶ *Documents and Materials on the Foreign Policy of Transcaucasia in Georgia*, Tbilisi 1919, p. 85.

¹⁷ Historical Archive of National Archives of Georgia, 1819/1/224/1.

While heading to Trabzon, the delegation of the Transcaucasian Sejm hoped to start negotiations with the Ottomans from scratch and not to discuss the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk at the conference. Taking into consideration the existing reality, this expectation was maximalist and at the same time unrealistic and utopian.

The Transcaucasian delegation, which arrived in Trabzon by the ship from the port of Batumi, turned out to be in unequal conditions. Trabzon was selected as a place of negotiations between the Ottoman Empire and Transcaucasia as a neutral territory that was not controlled by either party. However, before the Transcaucasian delegation arrived in Trabzon (March 8, 1918, according to a new style), the city had already been occupied by the Ottoman military units and was ruled by the Turkish Wali¹⁸, who did not allow the Transcaucasian delegation to enter the city with the protection of the armed forces. The delegation managed to enter Trabzon only after arrival of the Ottoman delegation; moreover, the delegation had to concede and enter the city without the armed guards. During the meeting on the organizational issues of the future conference the Chairman of the Ottoman Delegation Rauf Bey did not agree with Akaki Chkhenkeli's proposal to chair the conference sessions in turns by the heads of the Transcaucasian and Ottoman delegations. All the plenary sessions of the Trabzon Conference (total of six meetings were held) were chaired by Rauf Bey¹⁹.

Unlike the large in number delegation of the Transcaucasian Sejm, the Ottoman Empire's representation consisted of 5 delegates. The Chairman of the Delegation was the first-rank captain, Hussein Rauf Bey; Members: Mehmed Husred Bey, Governor of the Legal Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Ottoman Empire; Colonel Salim Bey, Chief Doctor of the Transcaucasian Front of the Ottoman Army; Major of General Staff Husref Bey, the Head of the Operative Department of the Ottoman Transcaucasian Front; and Major Yusuf Rukha Bey. The Ottoman delegation was accompanied by two secretaries (Professor of Constantinople University Ismail Gami Bey and First-rank Captain of the Ottoman Imperial Fleet Hummid Bey) and one Adjutant of the Chairperson – Lieutenant Abdurrahmann²⁰.

¹⁸ Historical Archive of National Archives of Georgia, 1819/1/225/21v.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 1819/1/224/2.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 1875/1/4/4.

The Chairman Akaki Chkhenkeli spoke on behalf of the delegation at the plenary sessions of the Trabzon conference. Along with the negotiations between the Transcaucasia and the Ottoman Empire, the sessions of the Transcaucasian delegation were held, where delegates from Transcaucasia and the members of the delegation discussed requirements of Ottomans.

The expectation of the Transcaucasian delegation in Trabzon was not justified. In order to conclude the Treaty of Peace, the delegation of the Ottoman Empire demanded unconditional recognition of the transfer of the territories (Batumi, Ardahan and Kars) to Turkey stipulated by the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. The Turkish delegation explained in the declaration as of March 16, 1918, which dealt with the liability to acknowledge the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk for Transcaucasia, that in the course of negotiations of the Brest Treaty of Peace, the Transcaucasian authorities considered themselves to be part of the Russian Federation. The Transcaucasia did not represent an independent political entity, it was not recognized by any state and did not correspond to the principle provided by the international norms. Consequently, the Transcaucasian government and Sejm could not declare the part of the Brest Treaty, which deals with Transcaucasia, invalid²¹.

The position of the Transcaucasian delegation regarding the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk was as follows: they believed that this treaty should not be spread on Transcaucasia, because the agreement signed by two other states could not oblige the third state²². Despite the request of the Ottoman delegation, the Transcaucasian delegation refused to recognize the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk and sought to offer their project of territorial concessions to Turkey. Discussion over the issue of territorial concession started during the session on March 17, 1918 (according to the old style), the main issue of the discussion was to determine the principle: What was important an economic, ethnic or strategic factor?

The discussion regarding the criteria to be considered for the territorial concessions was initiated by the Georgian historian Pavle Ingorokva. In his opinion, the most important thing was consideration of the economic interests of Transcaucasia. In this regard, the Batumi district was of great importance; thus, the district of Batumi should not be transferred to Tur-

²¹ *Documents and Materials on the Foreign Policy of Transcaucasia in Georgia*, Tbilisi 1919, pp. 118-119.

²² Historical Archive of National Archives of Georgia, 1819/1/224/4.

key. Pavle Ingorokva's opinion was shared by members of the National-Democratic, Socialist-Federalists and Muslim Parties. The only thing was that the Musavat focused on the port of Batumi and not the entire Batumi district²³. They explained it by the fact that Baku oil transportation was carried out by means of Batumi port.

The Armenian delegates did not agree with the consideration of the economic factor while selecting territories for Turkey. The members of the Dashnaktsutyun party of the Transcaucasian delegation considered that they should be guided by ethnicity in terms of concession of the territories. Most of the population of the disputed territories were Armenians. Azerbaijanis opposed the demand of the Armenian delegates with a religious factor. In order to reinforce their opinions, the Armenian and Azeri delegates presented statistical data on the number of Armenians and Muslims, residing in these territories. Similar statistical data was presented by the Azeri delegate from the "Hummet" (Muslim Social-Democratic) party, Akper Sheikh-Ul-Islamov²⁴.

According to Ruben Kachaznun, a member of the delegation, a representative of Dashnaktsutyun party, they should have given in the territories the population of which would easily adapt to the Ottoman governance; such regions included Artvin, Artaan and Oltisi, because the majority of inhabitants of those areas were Muslims, and they could easily get used to the Ottoman rule, unlike the Kars population, where Armenians constituted the majority²⁵. He accused the Georgian delegates that they would want to maintain Artvin and Ardagan to strengthen Batumi and Akhaltsikhe-Akhalkalaki. He reckoned that this was a violation of democratic principles, and Christians were put in a difficult situation. Kachaznun finally agreed to give in Kars except the part where the Armenians were settled²⁶.

The Transcaucasian delegation did not reach an agreement when discussing the issue of concession of territories. They were discussing a lot but in vain. The members of the delegation were led by national interests. Their national interests were so incompatible with each other that they could not elaborate a common position. Taking all this into consideration and according to the decision on March 13, 1918 of the Transcaucasian Sejm, the chairman of the delegation, Akaki Chkhenkeli's powers were

²³ Historical Archive of National Archives of Georgia, 1875/1/3/1-5.

²⁴ Ibid., 1875/1/3/4.

²⁵ Ibid., 1875/1/3/11-12.

²⁶ Ibid., 1875/1/3/9.

extended and he was able to act independently; the delegation members had only the right to vote during the sessions. This decision was made after listening to reports of 3 delegates arrived in Tbilisi during the Trabzon Conference²⁷.

According to Mammad Hasan Hajinski, a member of delegation from the Musavat party, the delegation was acting slowly while the Ottomans were occupying the requested territories and would soon present new claims: "We're talking about the concessions now, but tomorrow Turkey can take the territories over and there will be nothing to argue about. On the contrary, Turkey may set new demands", thus, he offered the delegation to give in all the requested areas except the Batumi port²⁸.

On the basis of the opinions expressed by the delegation of the Transcaucasia regarding the concession of the territories to the Ottoman Empire, the Chairman Akaki Chkhenkeli introduced the Declaration elaborated by him regarding the concession of the territories to the members of the Delegation during the session on March 21, 1918. It included the entire Oltisi Okrug, the largest part of Ardahan Okrug, the southern part of Kars district, Kaghizman Okrug except Kaghizman city and its northern part. The Armenian delegates did not agree with the concessions of the chairman of the delegation²⁹. Despite this, Akaki Chkhenkeli presented this project to the Ottoman delegation during the session at the Trabzon Conference on March 23 (April 5). Rauf Bey did not consider the Declaration of the Transcaucasia delegation regarding the concession of the territories and categorically demanded the recognition of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. He explained what they demanded: "Not only they should recognize the right of Ottoman governance of these three provinces, but also the Caucasus should renounce these provinces."

At the sessions of the Transcaucasian delegation, the issue of maintaining disputed territories by struggle was also discussed. This issue was raised by the Armenian delegate. The delegation members were aware that the Transcaucasian Armed Forces, which like the Transcaucasian state were also in the process of formation, had no sufficient resources to stop the Ottoman army. This was confirmed by the successful advance of the Ottoman army and rapid detention of territories during the conference. At the time of the Trabzon conference, the chairman of the delegation

²⁷ Historical Archive of National Archives of Georgia, 1819/1/224/6.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 1875/1/3/8.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 1819/1/225/80r-v.

Akaki Chkhenkeli was sending dispatches and was interested, whether they would be able to maintain Batumi by means of weapons; he always received the same response that it would be impossible to maintain Batumi for more than two weeks³⁰. Azerbaijani delegates were against the protection of the territories by means of a struggle. They said they would not be able to force the Muslim population to fight against the Ottoman Empire to defend the Transcaucasian state. In this respect, a member of the Musavat party, Khalil-beg Khas-Mamedov's speech is worth mentioning. He said: "Muslims have not seen any real benefits from the Transcaucasian government yet; there are examples that when dealing with Muslims the point is always their duties and not their rights. Under these conditions, we cannot speak about the obligation of the Transcaucasian peoples to defend the borders of the state which actually does not exist"³¹.

While considering the issue of defence of the disputed areas by means of weapons, it was obvious that one of the main obstacles to the unity of the Transcaucasian state was the consciousness of the population, they were alien to the common interests of the Transcaucasia, as to why they should fight to defend the territories of the state they did not perceive themselves as its part.

If we consider the real situation and the power balance in the Caucasus of that period, it is clear that the delegation's debates on concessions/demands were in vain. Turkey could do that, and it was later proved that whether willingly or not it would receive what it had demanded.

During the sessions of the Transcaucasian delegation in Trabzon, the issue of seeking autonomy for the so-called "Turkish Armenians" residing on Turkish territory was being considered concurrently with the issues of concession of the territories to the Ottoman Empire and defence of the disputed territories with weapons. According to the aforementioned, the Transcaucasian Sejm adopted a four-clause resolution regarding the peace negotiations with Turkey and according to the fourth clause, the Transcaucasian delegation should gain the right of self-government from the Ottoman Empire for the autonomy of the eastern Anatolian peoples, in particular establishing the Armenian state within the Turkey³². This was one of the most acute topics. Armenian delegates were again in the minority.

³⁰ Historical Archive of National Archives of Georgia, 1875/1/4/22.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 1875/1//3/17.

³² *Ibid.*, 1875/1/4/46.

In the course of the discussion, the Armenian delegate Aleksandre Khatsov used a book "Collection of Diplomatic Documents" published by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Empire in 1914, as well as the statistics by a German scholar Lepius published in 1913, according to which 1034000 ethnic Armenians of the 2600,000 population were residing in six vilayets of Turkey³³. According to him, the existence of the autonomous unit of the population (which was benevolent to the Transcaucasia) in the adjoining territory of the Ottoman Empire would have strategic importance for the defence of Transcaucasia. In this respect, the Armenian delegate tried to present the demand for the so-called autonomy for the Turkish Armenians in the context of the common interests of Transcaucasia and thus, receive support of the delegates. Yet, Khatsov's arguments were not convincing enough. Georgian and Azerbaijani delegates were against to present the demand to gain the right of the so-called Turkish Armenians' autonomy to the Ottoman delegation. The Georgian delegate, a member of the National Democratic Party Giorgi Gvazava, called this demand by the Armenian delegates a "reckless adventure". He and a member of the delegation, Giorgi Laskhishvili from the Georgian Socialist-Federalists Party believed that England, France and Russia failed to solve the problem of Armenians before, and accordingly the weak South Transcaucasia could not deal with such a difficult issue. Khalil-beg Khas-Mamedov, a member of the Musavat party considered that the issue of autonomy for Armenians would interfere in Ottomans' domestic affairs³⁴.

The attitude of Georgian and Azeri delegates towards the gaining of the so-called autonomy of the Turkish Armenians stipulated the categorical position of the Ottomans. The Ottoman Empire would regard the issue of gaining the autonomy for Armenians as an interference in the internal affairs and would react acutely. The Ottoman delegation categorically pointed out to the Transcaucasian delegation: "If you want to reach peace do not talk about Armenia's autonomy".³⁵

Georgian and Azeri delegates were against requesting the so-called autonomy for the Turkish Armenians from the Ottoman delegation at the Trabzon Conference. Yet, they did not support the entire deletion of the issue from the agenda. During the First World War, the large number of Ar-

³³ Historical Archive of National Archives of Georgia, 1819/1/225/63.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 1819/1/225/65r-v.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 1819/1/225/65.

menians oppressed by the Ottoman Empire entered Transcaucasia. Azerbaijani and Georgian delegates saw the danger in them. They thought that if Armenian refugees did not return, they would stir up “the life of Transcaucasia, which already had difficult intercultural relationships”³⁶. Taking that into consideration, they believed that they should request from the Ottoman Empire to return the Armenian refugees.

The Transcaucasian delegation failed to reach agreement regarding the so-called autonomy for the Turkish Armenians. In this case, the final decision was made by the chairman Akaki Chkhenkeli. In his memorandum to the Ottoman delegation regarding the issue of the so-called autonomy for the Turkish Armenians, Akaki Chkhenkeli stated that by putting forward this issue, they did not mean to interfere in the internal affairs of the Ottoman Empire, though if the Ottomans perceived this issue in such a way, they were ready to have a joint meeting and find the means that would allow this issue to be discussed³⁷. Akaki Chkhenkeli’s offer was unacceptable for the Ottoman delegation, and they agreed to discuss the issue of Armenians only in the context of the return of the refugees which could happen only after signing the Peace Treaty³⁸.

The sessions of the delegation of the Transcaucasian Sejm at the Trabzon Conference included discussions regarding the proposal of Transcaucasia government and Sejm to proclaim independence of Transcaucasia. The issue of declaring independence of Transcaucasia was first raised by Giorgi Laskhishvili, a member of the Socialist-Federalists Party on February 14, 1918 during the session of the Peace Committee, which was established to negotiate with the Ottoman Empire and when the issue of Sejm’s authority to negotiate was being discussed. At that time, the head of the Peace Committee, a Georgian Social-Democrat Noe Ramishvili stated that the Committee would raise the issue of independence of the Transcaucasia in case Turkey would force it³⁹. And this happened indeed, at the first meeting of the Trabzon Conference, the chairman of the Ottoman delegation Rauf Bey asked how a peace agreement could be signed between the parties and how the state would be protected if it was not an independent international law subject. The Ottoman delegation also raised the issue of political arrangement of South Caucasus. They were wondering why the negotiations were con-

36 Historical Archive of National Archives of Georgia, 1819/1/225/66.

37 Ibid., 1819/1/225/80v.

38 Ibid., 1819/1/225/90v.

39 Ibid., 1819/1/225/2.

ducted by the legislative body – Sejm and not the government, as in the case of a republican rule⁴⁰.

During the personal meetings of the delegates, the Ottoman delegation suspected that the Transcaucasia was not going to declare independence. The Chairman of the delegation Akaki Chkhenkeli had to explain consistently that the state of Transcaucasia was in the process of establishing and it would have constitution and would ensure the fulfilment of the peace treaty with the Ottoman Empire. The Ottoman delegation directly pointed out that they were interested in declaring the independence of Transcaucasia. Chairman of the Delegation Akaki Chkhenkeli spoke about the necessity of declaring Transcaucasian independence at the meeting of the Transcaucasian delegation on March 20, 1918. According to him, the suspension of Ottoman military operations would be possible only in terms of independence. The part of delegates (Kachaznun, M. A. Buniatian, Mehmed Hassan Hajinski) did not agree with the Chairman⁴¹. As a result, the discussion on this issue did not continue.

As we have already noted, despite the Ottomans' request, the Transcaucasian delegation did not recognize the terms of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. However, the firm position of Turkey and the advance of the Ottoman Army led the Transcaucasian delegation to discuss the recognition of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. This took place during the last sixth session of the Trabzon Conference (March 24, 1918), when the Ottoman Empire presented a 48-hour ultimatum with the demand to recognize the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk⁴². This was the only issue discussed by the Transcaucasian delegates which ended with the unanimous agreement after hot debates. Despite the contradictory opinions, the delegates eventually came to the conclusion that they had to acknowledge the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. Georgia and Armenia suffered most because of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. Aleksandre Khatisov and Ruben Kachaznun, members of the delegation of the Dashnaktsutyun party sent a dispatch to the Minister of Finance Karchikyan and the Chairman of the Government, Evgeni Gegechkori (April 10, 1918) where they wrote that in the given situation the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk was considered "less evil"⁴³.

40 Historical Archive of National Archives of Georgia, 1819/1/226/4.

41 Ibid., 1819/1/225/86r-v.

42 Ibid., 1819/1/224/7.

43 Ibid., 1819/1/225/83.

Under the “given situation,” the delegates implied Ottoman military actions. The members of the delegation were aware that the Ottoman army were occupying the territories that they had demanded from Transcaucasia during the Trabzon Conference. Obviously, there was an expected danger, the Ottoman Empire would not be satisfied with the detention of the territories provided by the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk and would demand more territories. Transcaucasia did not have any military or political opportunities to stop Ottoman advancement. Taking this into consideration, the delegation of the Transcaucasian Sejm agreed to recognize the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk.

Chairman of the Transcaucasian Delegation Akaki Chkhenkeli informed the Transcaucasian Sejm of the ultimatum set forth by the Ottoman Empire. On March 31 1918, the Transcaucasian Sejm discussed the Ottoman demand – to recognize the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. Georgian and Armenian members of the Sejm were against and deemed the recognition of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk as the betrayal of motherland. Finally, Sejm refused to recognize the Treaty and adopted a resolution drafted by the leader of the Social Democratic Party Noe Zhordania, which envisaged the challenge of the Transcaucasian delegation⁴⁴. The last session of the delegation of the Transcaucasian Sejm was held on April 1, 1918 (according to the old style). The session began in the morning with the resolution passed by the Sejm: “Taking into consideration that Turkey and Transcaucasia failed to reach the bilateral agreement, the Transcaucasian delegation was proposed to return to Tbilisi immediately”⁴⁵. Thus, Sejm and the Government did not agree with the delegation’s proposal and the delegation was recalled. Akaki Chkhenkeli informed the Ottoman delegation that it was not a cessation of negotiations but a temporary break⁴⁶. Delegation of Transcaucasian Sejm left Trabzon on April 1, 1918. They thought that Batumi had already been occupied by Ottomans, therefore they arrived in Poti⁴⁷.

Diplomatic mission of the Transcaucasian delegation sent to the Trabzon Peace Conference ended without any results. They were not able to defend the common national and Transcaucasian interests. The delegates represented a state that did not exist legally, which created additional obstacles to them. As a secretary of the Transcaucasian delegation at the

⁴⁴ *In Transcaucasian Sejm*, Newspaper “Ertoba” (“Unity”), 1918, N72, p. 2.

⁴⁵ Historical Archive of National Archives of Georgia, 1819/1/225/104v.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 1819/1/224/8.

⁴⁷ *Pease Delegation*, Newspaper “Sakartvelo” (“Georgia”), 1918, N73, p. 3.

Peace Conference, a member of the Socialist-Federalists Party of Georgia Samson Phirtskhalava wrote the following in the published letter "from Trabzon": "Our proposal is so fair, sound and valuable as our reasoning was supported by our military training. Here is only one language, one document: war preparation and ability to carry out military actions. Those who are not equipped with this weapon and come out to the international arena to negotiate peacefully must be sure from the very beginning that they will lose and will be defeated shamefully.

After unsuccessful negotiations with the Ottoman Empire, the Transcaucasian Sejm declared war on Turkey. Military actions were accomplished by the victory of the Ottoman Army. In April 15-21 1918, Ottoman Armies occupied Batumi, Ozurgeti, Meskheta and Georgians were able to stop them only at Choloki. On April 9 (22) 1918, the Commander of the Ottoman Caucasus Front, Vahib-Pasha sent a telegram to Akaki Chkhenkeli, where the combat operations were justified by the termination of the ongoing Peace Conference in Trabzon and pointing to the need to continue the negotiations⁴⁸.

In the context of war with the Ottoman Empire, on April 22, 1918, the Transcaucasian Sejm announced the independence of the Transcaucasian Democratic Federative Republic. On the next day, the Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Akaki Chkhenkeli informed Vehib-Pasha that the Transcaucasian government would recognize the terms of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk and offered peace negotiations to be held in Batumi⁴⁹. The Turks agreed to Chkhenkeli's proposal.

Sejm again elected Akaki Chkhenkeli as the Chairman of the Transcaucasian delegation at Batumi Conference and elected the following members: Niko Nikoladze from Georgian Social Democrats, Mehmet Hassan Hajinski and Mamed-Emin Rasul-Zade from Musavat Party; Aleksandre Khatsov and Ruben Kachaznun from Dashnaktsutyun Party; Besides delegates, the delegation included advisors, representatives of the agencies, secretaries of Georgian, Armenian and Muslim national councils, members of the military mission (two generals and three colonels), and adjutants. Similar to the Trabzon Conference, the Transcaucasian delegation was numerous in Batumi negotiations, including 45 members.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ *Documents and Materials on the Foreign Policy of Transcaucasia in Georgia*, Tbilisi 1919, p. 199.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 224.

⁵⁰ *Peace Conference of Batumi*, Newspaper "Sakartvelo" ("Georgia"), N90. 1918, p. 2.

The Transcaucasian delegation arrived in Batumi on May 6, 1918. Unlike Trabzon Conference, the positions of the delegation in the Batumi Conference were stronger because Transcaucasian Democratic Federative Republic had already existed. This negotiation was not only between Transcaucasia and the Ottoman Empire, but Germany also participated in unofficially, therefore, they hoped that the Ottoman Empire would not be able to play a decisive role⁵¹. However, the Transcaucasian delegation in Batumi appeared in a grave situation. Apart from the territories envisioned in the Brest Treaty, the Ottoman Empire requested districts of Akhaltsikhe-Akhalkalaki and two-quarters of the Erevan province. Now the Transcaucasian delegation were demanding to stick to the terms of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk.

An advisor lawyer and diplomat of Transcaucasian Delegation Zurab Avalishvili commented on the Batumi conference: "It has not been a month since the words in the Sejm were spoken: Batumi or Death! Our life is not worth without Batumi! And now, the delegates of independent Transcaucasia are in Batumi but not as if at home, but as visitors of Turks (May 6, 1918). It was obvious that the Armenians arrived in Batumi more frustrated than the Georgians⁵². The Azerbaijanis were in different situation. They were looking at Turks as if they were friends and were able to help them in many ways ... The general policy of the Transcaucasia had to be elaborated based on different motives, assessments, fears and aspirations!"⁵³.

Negotiations were resumed in Batumi on May 11, 1918. The chairman of the Ottoman delegation was the Minister of Justice and the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Halil Sami-Bey, and members were: The Commander-in-Chief of the Ottoman Front Feriye-Vehib Mehmed-Pasha, Legal Advisor Nusrad-Bey, former First Secretary first in Petersburg then in Berlin Orkhan-Bey⁵⁴, and Marine and Justice Minister Khalil-Bey⁵⁵. Only one joint session of the Batumi Conference was held, the rest of the time was dedicated to discussions of the notes and private meetings.

It became clear on the example of the Transcaucasian delegation at the Batumi Conference that the existence of the Transcaucasian state

⁵¹ *Pease Delegation*, „Newspaper Ertoba” (“Unity”),“ N95, 1918, p.1.

⁵² Kars had already been occupied by the Turks.

⁵³ Z. Avalishvili, *The Independence of Georgia in International Politics of 1918-1921*, Tbilisi 1990, p. 52.

⁵⁴ *Pease Conference of Batumi*, Newspaper “Sakartvelo” (“Georgia”), N90. 1918, p. 3.

⁵⁵ *Pease Delegation*, Newspaper “Sakartvelo” (“Georgia”), 1918, N85, p. 3.

was unpromising. Georgians were oriented towards German, Azeri – towards Turks and Armenians – towards English. It became obvious that the Transcaucasian nations were unable to develop a common position. The Azerbaijanis were in favour of Ottomans' interests more than the Transcaucasian ones. They were meeting the Ottomans individually and informed them about details of the internal negotiations within the Transcaucasian delegation. The Azerbaijani delegates always supported Ottomans during the sessions and not the state they represented. Azerbaijani delegate Hajinski believed that the concession of the territories required by the Ottoman Empire would not harm the vital interests of the Transcaucasia. In this case, he was led by the national interests, since the Azerbaijanis considered having good relationship with the Ottoman Empire was better than with the territories of Georgia and Armenia, which were claimed by the Ottomans.

The leader of the party Noe Jordania wrote about the Transcaucasian delegation sent to Batumi Conference: "There is not one official delegation in Batumi who speaks on behalf of the Transcaucasia and there are several delegations of the Tatars, who act in a different manner, as if an official delegation. They directly invite the Ottomans in the Transcaucasia. The impression is as if our delegation is a reflection of the spirit not of the entire Transcaucasus but only of Armenia-Georgia".⁵⁶

The end of the Transcaucasian Democratic Federative Republic started at Batumi Conference. The disagreement of the Transcaucasian delegation and the constant contradictions made the disintegration of the Transcaucasia inevitable. On May 22, 1918, Georgian members of the delegation gathered separately and discussed future actions. It became clear for the Georgian delegates and the Georgian chairman of the delegation that they could stop the Ottoman aggression with the help of Germany and without the Armenia and Azerbaijan. The Georgian delegates initiated secret negotiations with the German representative Von-Lossow in Batumi. The chairman of the delegation Akaki Chkhenkeli wrote in the secret letters sent to Noe Ramishvili and Noe Zhordania in Tbilisi on the necessity of declaring independence. As a result, on May 26, 1918, the Transcaucasian Democratic Federative Republic was dissolved. The powers and authorities of the delegation in Batumi were suspended as well.

Delegation of the Transcaucasian Sejm at Trabzon and Batumi Peace Conferences was rather a conglomerate of nationalities and parties than

⁵⁶ Noe Zhordania, *Peace Negotiations*, Newspaper "Sakartvelo" ("Georgia"), N103, p. 2.

a single state delegation. They were unable to reach agreement on a number of issues. Their national interests were so incompatible that they failed to develop a consensus-based action platform and confront with the Ottoman diplomats at the same time. The military force did not support the delegation that forced the Ottomans to make some concessions. They were not able to accomplish the goals due to the inability of unanimity and disagreements, as well as the political situation at that time.

Transcaucasian Sejm's delegation on Conferences in Trabzon and Batumi (March-May, 1918)

The paper examines the activities of the delegation of the Transcaucasian Sejm sent to Trabzon and Batumi during the last stage of the First World War, in the spring of 1918, for negotiations with the Ottomans. The aim of the research is to identify, based on the study of the history of the Transcaucasian Sejm Delegation, the resistance and disagreements between the Transcaucasian nations, which made it impossible for the Transcaucasia to exist as a separate political entity – the state.

Georgians and Azeris predominated in the delegation on national grounds, while Armenians were in minority. The national ratio proved to be significant in making decisions during the meetings of the current delegation in Trabzon. The Delegation of the Transcaucasian Sejm sent to Trabzon and Batumi Peace Conferences represented conglomeration of nationalities and parties and not a unified state delegation. They failed to reach an agreement on a number of issues. Their national interests proved to be so incompatible that they were unable to develop a consensus-based action platform and confront the Ottoman diplomats with a united force. The delegation was not backed by military forces that could compel the Ottomans to make some concessions. During the activities of the Transcaucasian Delegation, it became even clearer that the existence of the Transcaucasian state had no prospects.

Key words: Transcaucasian Sejm; Trabzon and Batumi Conferences; Transcaucasian History; Transcaucasian's Delegation; Ottoman empire.