

Russian-Turkish Relations Between Sovietization of Azerbaijan and Sovietization of Armenia (IV)

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Part II (B). How Chicherin Tried to Give Nakhchivan to Armenia

On September 24, 1920, G. Chicherin sent Sh. Eliava a priority diplomatic dispatch, which said that, "the treaty of August 10 is the maximum of what can be achieved. It was necessary for us to conclude it. Providing Armenia with the ability to use the railroads was, according to Legran, a necessary condition, without which it would have been impossible to conclude the treaty and achieve the recognition of the occupation by us of Nakhchivan." [1]

In fact, this treaty dealt not so much with the railroad as with the transfer to Armenia of the greater part of the territory of Nakhchivan. On the day of the signing of the Armenian-Russian treaty, M. Bektashi, the president of the Nakhchivan Revolutionary Committee, wrote to N. Narimanov that by a decision of the absolute majority of the population of Nakhchivan, this district recognized itself as "an inalienable part of the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic." [2]

On August 13, B. Shakhtakhtinsky telegraphed V. Lenin that the population of Nakhchivan had restored the Soviet system and did not think that Soviet Russia, in opposition to the will of the entire population, would give Nakhchivan to the dashnaks, because if that were to happen, not only would the Soviet system die there, but given what was happening on the territory of Dashnak Armenia, the physical existence of the Muslim population would be put at risk. [3]

After the conclusion of the Armenian-Russian treaty, the Politburo of the Central Committee of the AKP(b) discussed the situation in Nakhchivan and assigned to the Azerbaijani Revolutionary Committee to work out the Nakhchivan question, as well as to define the Azerbaijani-Armenian border. In addition, the Azerbaijani Revolutionary Committee was directed to consult with the Military-Revolutionary Committee of the XI Army and occupy itself with the organization of power structures in Nakhchivan and to settle the issue of the candidacy of the commissar for the district. At the Politburo session, the candidacy of Mir Jafar Bagirov was promoted, and Viktor Naneyshvili was given the task of clarifying whether he could be freed from his current position. Having discussed the situation in Nakhchivan, the Politburo did not consider it useful to disarm the population of this district, and the Organization Bureau and Secretariat were directed to ensure the sending to Nakhchivan of party workers and literature. [4]

However, when analyzing the course of events, Kazim Karabekir-pasha well understood that Soviet Russia would be dissatisfied by the military actions of the Turkish forces against dashnak Armenia. On July 31, he sent a letter to Halil-pasha in which he wrote: "Chicherin in his letter to the Grand National Assembly informed that questions about the border between us and Armenia will be resolved through the mediation of Soviet Russia. From this response of Comrade Chicherin, I conclude that he would not consider it desirable for us to enter into battle with the dashnaks." [5] The Turkish command was decisively inclined to take Shakhtakhty from the Armenians, and G. Chicherin in a code cable through Vladikavkaz so advised B. Legran. [6] Even if the Russians would not be able to take part in this operation, then the Turks would demand that they be permitted independently and without the Red Army to free Shakhtakhty and

Sarykamysh from the Armenians.

On July 27, 1920, G. Chicherin via a priority diplomatic dispatch demanded from B. Legran, the Russian representative in Armenia, to immediately leave Azerbaijani Agstafa where "he apparently was sitting far too long" and go to the place of his assignment, Erivan. Chicherin wrote that, "under existing conditions and the launch of an attack by the Turks, we cannot unilaterally—certainly not by radio—demand from Armenia the stopping of military actions. This can only be the result of negotiations with all interested sides. Therefore it is necessary that you reach the place of your assignment. The Armenian catholicos now is putting about that Finland will take a mandate over Armenia and if the latter refuses, then Belgium. Apparently, they are seeking protectors since they foresee that we will soon be in a stronger position. The Turks, having occupied Nakhchivan, have introduced Soviet power there and propose that our forces go there as well. The order about the occupation of Nakhchivan by our units has already been given, and I have reported about this to you, but in general, it is not the place of the Turks or another people to define where and in what quantity we must go." [7]

Despite such sharp declarations, of course, the Bolsheviks nonetheless needed the Kemalists. It was not only the general platform of world internationalism and dreams about "the liberation" of the oppressed masses of the East by which the attempts of the Russians to cooperate with them were conditioned. In a number of cases, they saw in the Kemalists guarantees of security on the Muslim territories occupied by them and on the whole a guarantee of the success of their eastern policy.

In September 1920, G. Chicherin with agitation wrote to V. Lenin that, "Both the communications of comrades Eliava and Kirov and the reports of Western radios lead to the conclusion about the catastrophic situation of the Kemalists as a result of the lack of military supplies. The collapse of the Kemalists would lead to the triumph of reaction that would be supported by the Entente and of Muslim fanaticism, which would make possible the appearance of a sultan in Lesser Asia and the launch of a holy war against us. This could lead to a broad counterrevolutionary Muslim movement, to the loss for us of Baku and perhaps Turkestan and even to serious dangers for us in our east. The question about the further existence of the Kemalists for us is therefore vital. [To make this possible] requires the supply of arms to them. When their representatives have spoken with our military people, they declared that they need 250,000 rifles with a corresponding amount of bullets. Our military in conversation with Halil have agreed to 60,000 rifles. But then we didn't give this amount, but only sent 6,000. Transit is only an issue if we agree there is something to send them." [8]

As far as armed transfers to Turkey were concerned, the Soviet government considered it possible to dispatch them through the territory of Armenia, and its members attended to the proposal of B. Legran, the representative of Russia in Erivan, who had written to the chairman of the Sovnarkom and the commissar of international affairs that it would be necessary to compensate Armenia for this transit with some lands and that there was no need to be afraid of conceding to Armenia for this purpose Nakhchivan and Zangazur. [9]

In the summer of 1920, B. Shakhtakhtinsky was appointed plenipotentiary representative of Azerbaijan, and on September 20, he presented V. Lenin with an extensive letter. From the Turkish section of this letter, it is clear that the leadership of Soviet Azerbaijan was aware of the plans of Russia to hand over Nakhchivan to Armenia. B. Shakhtakhtinsky in the first instance noted the opinion of the SNK of Azerbaijan headed by N. Narimanov that the handing over of Nakhchivan to Armenia would mean the intentional and final break of all relations with Turkey. He also added that prohibiting the Turks to attack the dashnaks was equivalent to Russian conceding in the near future a number of vilayats in Turkey to the Armenians. B. Shakhtakhtinsky suggested that an alliance with Turkey would allow the soviets to use its authority in the struggle against imperialism in the East. But too cautious a policy on the Armenian question would lead to a loss of faith in the seriousness of the policy of the Bolsheviks in the East and to the victory of the Entente. [10]

Following the conclusion of the treaty between Soviet Russia and Armenia, the first official meeting with the Turkish delegation took place on August 13, 1920, at which the Turks for the first time received information about this treaty. At this meeting, G. Chicherin appeared in the role of the defender of the Armenians. He attempted to reanimate the privileges given to them by the Sevres Treaty and raised for discussion the question of the transfer to the Armenians of the Turkish vilayats of Van, Mush and Bitlis. To this he added that the assistance of Turkey on the basis of these concessions had already been spoken about with Halil-pasha and Jemal-pasha. However, the Turkish delegation decisively protested declaring that such a policy was in no way different from that of the Entente to dismember Turkey.

Moreover, Halil-pasha and Jemal-pasha did not have the right to conduct talks in the name of Kemalist Turkey. These claims by G. Chicherin left the talks without resolution. When the Turkish delegation met with V. Lenin on August 14, the leader of the Bolsheviks recognized the mistaken nature of the treaty that had been concluded with Armenia and said that, "we understood that having signed this treaty we had committed a mistake and we will try to correct our negligence. If we do not correct it, you will." [11] As Ali Fuat Jebesoy recalls in his *Moscow Reminiscences*, it was at this meeting that V. Lenin told the Turkish delegates about the soon-to-come Sovietization of Armenia and Georgia (Cebesoy 1955, pp. 72-73).

On August 17, Ye. Adamov and A. Sabanin, the Russian representatives of the Peoples Commissariat of International Affairs, on the basis of the week-long talks with the Turkish delegates, prepared as a first step a draft of a Russian-Turkish treaty consisting of eight points. However, the negotiations were broken off on August 24 following the demand of G. Chicherin concerning the transfer of lands into Eastern Anatolia to the Armenians. The open protection shown by Chicherin to the Armenians put relations between Soviet Russia and Turkey at the edge of breach. The Soviet commissar of international affairs was affected by Armeniophilia to an even greater degree than the representatives of the Entente who had signed the Sevres Treaty. G. Chicherin thus became the chief advocate of the idea of "Greater Armenia," which had been prepared by the leaders of the dashnaks and the Armenians in the Kremlin.

At the very same time, such actions of the peoples commissar especially angered several authoritative leaders of the Bolsheviks, who in contrast to G. Chicherin well knew the Caucasus. Thus, I. Stalin, when he found out somewhat later about the dead end in talks with the Turks as a result of the territorial demands of G. Chicherin in favor of the Armenians, wrote in anger to V. Lenin: "Comrade Lenin, just yesterday I found out that Chicherin really sent to the Turks a foolish (and provocative) demand about the cleansing of Van-Mush and Bitlis (Turkish provinces with an enormous predominance of Turks) in favor of Armenia. This Armenian-imperialist demand cannot be our demand. Chicherin must be prevented from sending to the Turks a note that reflects the diktat of nationalistically inclined Armenians." [12] Stalin had received this information from G. Ordzhonikidze who the day before this telegraphed V. Lenin, G. Chicherin, L. Trotsky and I. Stalin: "Chicherin's demand regarding Mush-Van-Bitlis has immediately strengthened the supporters of the Entente, and Mustafa Kemal has started seeking ways for a rapprochement with Constantinople and the Entente … At the present time, there is a struggle of two groups going on in Anatolia, one supports an agreement with us (the populists) and the other is for the Entente. The latter, not able to speak out openly on behalf of the Entente, does everything to provoke people against us, it consciously makes use of all possible excesses in Armenia, and disseminates all possible provocateur rumors against us. The Armenian question occupies the largest place in Turkish politics. Many years of hatred to Armenians, despite certain attempts from the side of the high command are not in a position to prevent those excesses, which are very strongly exaggerated and talked about by the Armenian comrades. In units of the army, agitation is being conducted as if we, because of the Armenians, had already broken off relations with Ankara. In response, the command of Karabekir put out an order for the armies that all this is a lie and a provocation. I cannot be silent that many Armenian comrades are supporters of a war with the Turks … Beyond any doubt, the demand for Mush-Van and Bitlis will be used as an indication of our relations with the Turks. All such demands must be withdrawn and a treaty which would have a purely agitation character must be concluded in order that our opponents will immediately be deprived of the opportunity of provoking the population. Then, if Ankara turns to the Entente, Eastern Anatolia will remain with us, and for us this is extremely important. The Armenian question is the question of Eastern Anatolia, because the Entente has demanded the handing over of Mush, Van, Bitlis, and others to Armenia." [13] This message of G. Ordzhonikidze to the policy makers of Soviet Russia reveals many hidden aspects of this policy in relation to Turkey.

* The article originally appeared, in Russian, in Russia's Regnum News Agency at <http://www.regnum.ru/news/1438182.html#ixzz1Xevxl1D3>.

Reference

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Notes

[1] Priority diplomatic dispatch of G. Chicherin to Sh. Eliava, 24 September 1920, Foreign Policy Archive of Russian Federation (hereafter FPA RF), f.04, op.39, p.232, d.52987, l.37.

[2] Letter of M. Bektashi to N. Narimanov, 10 August 1920, Political Documents Archive under the President of Azerbaijan Republic (hereafter PDA PAR), f.609, D¼p.1, d.6, l.3.

[3] Letter of B. Shakhtakhtinsky to V. Lenin, 13 August 1920, Russian State Archive of Social-Political History (hereafter RSASPH), f.5, op.1, d.2796, l.2.

[4] Protocol of the session of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the AKP(b), 28 August 1920, PDA PAR, f.1, op.1, d.22, l.6.

[5] Letter of K. Karabekir-pasha to Halil-pasha, 31 July 1920, RSASPH, f.17, op.84, d.104, l.22.

[6] Correspondence between B. Legran and L. Ruzer concerning the occupation by the Turks of Shakhtakhty and Sarykamysh, 17 August 1920, RSASPH, f.85, op.10, d.14, l.1.

[7] Priority diplomatic dispatch of G. Chicherin to B. Legran, 27 July 1920, RSASPH, f.5, op.1, d.2099, l.1.

[8] Note of G. Chicherin to V. Lenin, 27 September 1920, RSASPH, f.159, op.2, d.57, l.3.

[9] Report of B. Legran to V. Lenin and G. Chicherin, 23 September 1920, RSASPH, f.64, op.1, d.21, l.144.

[10] Letter of B. Shakhtakhtinsky to V. Lenin, 20 September 1920, PDA PAR, f.1, op.1, d.2D°, l.26-27.

[11] *Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi Gizli Celese ZabÄ±tlarÄ±*, devre: I, c.: II, Ankara, 1985, p. 166.

[12] Note of I. Stalin to V. Lenin, 12 November 1920, RSASPH, f.558, op.11, d.388, l.4 ob.

[13] Code cable from G. Ordzhonikidze to G. Chicherin, V. Lenin, L. Trotsky, and I. Stalin, 11 November 1921, RSASPH, f.558, op.11, d.388, l.4-4 ob.