

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

BAKU. May 28, 2012: Jamil Hasanli, professor of history at Baku State University, started the publication of series of articles on the turbulent period of history of the South Caucasus in 1920-1921. Click here to read Part I and Part II and Part III and Part IV and Part V Professor Hasanli's work represents the results of the latest research in the archives regarding the history of the South Caucasus in 1920-1921. The English version of the article was first published by the "Azerbaijan in the World" - electronic publication of Azerbaijan Diplomatic Academy, Vol. V, No. 7 (April 1, 2012). Below is the full text of the third part of Dr. Hasanli's article:

BAKU. May 28, 2012: Jamil Hasanli, professor of history at Baku State University, started the publication of series of articles on the turbulent period of history of the South Caucasus in 1920-1921. Click here to read Part I and Part II and Part III and Part IV and Part V Professor Hasanli's work represents the results of the latest research in the archives regarding the history of the South Caucasus in 1920-1921. The English version of the article was first published by the "Azerbaijan in the World" - electronic publication of Azerbaijan Diplomatic Academy, Vol. V, No. 7 (April 1, 2012). Below is the full text of the third part of Dr. Hasanli's article:

Part III (B).

"Don't Get into a Conflict with the Turks on Behalf of the Dashnaks"

Beyond doubt, the Armenian-Turkish war that had begun and the serious military defeats of Armenia corresponded to the interests of Azerbaijan. However, even in this crisis situation, Armenia continued to advance demands for Nakhchivan, which had now been transformed—thanks to Russia—into a matter of dispute. As far as Soviet Russia is concerned, then it considered the Turkish advance as a historic chance for the communist seizure of power in Armenia. On October 13, 1920, G. Chicherin wrote to B. Legran: "Ordzhonikidze reports about a possible withdrawal by the Dashnaks. Report immediately on the internal prospects in Armenia and on the possibility of the transfer of power without pressure from outside, for we at the present time must refrain from any pressure and present ourselves as peacemakers … Point to our sincere friendship to the Armenian masses and our desire to help them." [1] On October 11, B. Legran arrived in Erivan and three days later informed G. Chicherin that if the Turks give up their demands based on the Brest Treaty and the Batumi Accord, then the Armenians are ready to accept the mediation of Soviet Russia on the Turkish question. In the same telegram, B. Legran added that "the Armenians complain about the replacement in the disputed regions of Red forces by local partisan detachments and Azerbaijani units and about the presence in Nakhchivan of Turkish regular forces with which they are at the present time in a state of war." [2] The Armenian government tried hard to relate its conflicts with Turkey to Azerbaijan. In negotiations with the representatives of Soviet Russia, the Armenians made the immediate recognition of Zangazur and Nakhchivan as part of Armenia a categorical condition for their allowing transit to Turkey through Armenia. [3] During this period, foreign radio stations broadcast reports suggesting that Soviet representative B. Legran had presented the government of Armenia with an ultimatum. Therefore, G. Chicherin advised him that, "We must not speak with threats … The current situation of our forces in the Transcaucasus also does not allow us to speak in a threatening manner. Stress that we are peacemakers, declare to the government and in the press that we do not represent a threat. Stress that we have no alliance with the Turks, but that we desire to use our influence for making peace. At the same time, we demand from Armenia an end of the alliance with the Entente, but not in the form of an ultimatum or threat." [4]

Despite the serious resistance by the Armenians, the Turks on October 30, 1920, occupied Kars. As a result nothing remained to the Armenians except to withdraw to Gyumri. The liberation of Kars by the Turks further intensified pressure on Armenia to agree to the mediation of Russia. However, the conditions they put for the mediation included the return by diplomatic means of territories they had lost on the field of battle. Under the terms of the first condition, Armenia was to gain Zangazur and Nakhchivan and Russian forces there were to yield their positions to Armenian units. In this case, Armenia would voluntarily give up its claims on Karabakh. The second condition of the Dashnaks was that 25 percent of all arms transferred through Armenia to Turkey would remain in Armenia. The third condition involved the giving to Armenia a credit of 2.5 million in gold. In addition, Turkey must have stopped military actions, withdraw its units to the borders of 1914 and give an undertaking that its units would be directed to points not closer than the Trabzon-Erzurum-Mush-Bitlis line. [5]

B. Legran considered the conclusion of a treaty with Armenia on the basis of these conditions possible if an agreement with Azerbaijan on the disputed territories could be reached. In his opinion, such an arrangement would not please the Kemalists, but would be profitable for Armenia by freeing it from the role of a tool in the hands of the Entente and even lead to the formation of a Georgian-Armenian union, which would secure the strengthening of the position of Russia in the South Caucasus. "As concerns Azerbaijan," B. Legran wrote, "I am certain that if You adopt a firm position, we will be able to push Azerbaijan toward the desired decision." In connection with the arrival of I.

Stalin in Baku at the beginning of November 1920, B. Legran also intended to go to Baku in order to discuss this question with "the Baku comrades." And finally, he warned that "the Dashnaks in Armenia are still in a strong position and the communists now do not represent a force. To liquidate the Dashnaks would only be possible by the occupation of the territory by Turks or ourselves." [6]

On November 4, 1920, at a joint session of the Central Committee of the AKP(b) and the Caucasus Bureau of the Central Committee of the RKP(b) in the presence of I. Stalin, the situation in Armenia and Georgia was discussed in detail. The day before, G. Chicherin had sent a telegram to the Foreign Ministry of Turkey, in which he had expressed the desire of Soviet Russia to serve as a mediator between the Turks and Armenians. A. Sheynman, the Russian representative in Tiflis, spoke about the situation in Georgia. He suggested that for clarifying relations with M. Kemal-pasha L. Stark should be sent to him as an ambassador. But I. Stalin did not agree with this proposal. He said that, "Moscow does not know anything about Kemal. For him, the question is put that before Sarykamysh, he will be forced to attack for fuel. Kemal was sent a telegram from Moscow calling on him to end the attack, but whether he received it is unknown. Here, there is no Turkish Communist Party and no representative of Kemal knows anything about the situation there. A communist who recently came from Kemal and who had spent time among the Kemalists and among the Soviets (which exist both in the army and in the population) says that Kemal is not against conducting talks with the sultan (he is for the Entente). The Kemalists present demands for a fraction and something else, but they have no money and reserves. Negotiations with the sultan can change the entire situation in a way, which is not going to be best for us. I agree with the proposal of Sheynman to send to Kemal a man to acquaint himself with the situation, but we think that Mdivani, together with Shakhtakhtinsky and Korkmasov should be sent instead (the candidacy of Stark did not meet any opposition, but he is more needed in Georgia). Besides, Mdivani is more suitable to Baku than Stark. But one can say to the Georgians about the attack that we have sent a note to Kemal, it hasn't been answered, when we receive one, then we will tell them." [7]

After the report of B. Legran about the situation in Armenia, his proposal to include in an agreement with Armenia a point about the transfer to Armenia of Nakhchivan and Zangazur was rejected. The final decision of the Central Committee of the RKP(b) about the treaty was assigned to I. Stalin. In the protocol of the session, it is written that the transfer to Armenia of Nakhchivan and Zangazur are not profitable politically or strategically.

After the Baku party decisions, B. Legran sent to the Soviet mission in Armenia an immediate communication that in the presence of I. Stalin at the session was shown a negative relation to "our treaty," and in the first instance it was noted that the withdrawal of Turkish forces to the borders of 1914 would significantly complicate relations with Turkey. Second, the importance of the possibility of influence on the course of events in Iran through the disputed territories was underscored. B. Legran wrote that, "At the same time, they consider that we cannot in fact undertake anything regarding the Turkish attacks, although our attitude as before remains sharply negative. Formally, Turkey is not connected by treaty with us, and we cannot make any demands on it. As concerns transit, given the current situation and the lack of information from Turkey, this issue loses its urgency. In addition, they suppose that the Turks, in the case of the achievement of peace with Armenia, would be easily able to achieve transit, the transfer of the disputed territories to Armenia however is [too] high a price for that." [8]

After the surrender of Kars, the policy of Soviet Russia toward Turkey, the Caucasus Muslims and all its Eastern policy as a whole became more shaky. This is clearly shown in the long letter G. Chicherin sent to I. Stalin on November 5, 1920, from Baku. He wrote there are numerous reports about a sharp and fundamental change in the policy of the Entente regarding Turkey and in the policy of the Kemalists regarding Armenia. But all the same, this is not final and not entirely clear. Chicherin particularly pointed out the situation regarding relations between the Kemalists and the Istanbul government and stressed the justice of this conception of the Kemalists: Historically, whoever controlled Anatolia then mastered Constantinople and that he who massed Constantinople without Anatolia inevitably lost it. G. Chicherin was concerned that Great Britain historically accustomed to controlling the main world water routes would make concessions to the Kemalists in order that the Kemalists would concede Constantinople to London.

G. Chicherin wrote that, "It is completely unclear whether on the part of the Kemalists this is simply a compromise for self-preservation or whether this involves a 180 degree turn against us, a shift into the anti-Bolshevik camp of world reaction and an effort to obtain compensation at our expense along the lines of Turkish policy in 1918 … In our relations to Armenia and Georgia, we must not forget for a single minute that in the new turn of the wheel of history, these countries could become a necessary barrier for us against the policy of conquest of the shifting fronts of the Turkish nationalists. In our bet on the Muslims, we must all the time take into consideration that on one fine day, the anti-Bolshevik tendency as occurred in Afghanistan could turn out to be stronger than the anti-English. I have all the time warned and I warn now against that one-sided bet on the Muslims, of which Narimanov is the representative among us. At the present moment, we stand for not changing our relations to the Kemalists in order not to push the vacillating into the opposing camp." [9]

On November 2, 1920, the command of the Turkish army proposed to Armenia to conclude a peace. The Armenians, having understood that it was impossible to stop the attack of the Turkish army at Gyumri on November 6 agreed to a ceasefire. On the same day, the Turks already reached Gyumri. On the basis of a proposal of A. Ogandzhanyan, the Armenian foreign minister, the conditions for an armistice were agreed on November 8. [10] In correspondence with the agreement achieved, in the course of no more than three days, the Armenian army was to leave Gyumri and withdraw to a position 15 kilometers south of Arpachay, while the Turkish army was to occupy the fortress of Gyumri, the railroad, and a ten kilometer zone around the city. [11]

This armistice, which consisted of seven points and was set to last seven days, required the Turks to observe the security of the civilian population and to maintain order in the city. All military actions were to cease. [12] On November 10, A. Ogandzhanyan handed the Turkish side a note in which he agreed to the terms. However, at the last minute, the

Armenians refused to sign the accord explaining their actions by saying that such an agreement would give the Bolsheviks an opportunity to conduct propaganda against the Armenians. Therefore, on November 14, 1920, the armed forces of Turkey renewed military actions, which lasted until the moment when the Armenians could not bear further losses and sat down at the negotiating table. Seeing such a dangerous turn of events, G. Chicherin on November 7 telegraphed I. Stalin about the possibility of the introduction of Soviet forces into Armenia. He wrote that, "Trotsky has responded that in military terms, we are strengthening in the Caucasus and he does not oppose the dispatch of forces into Armenia for Sovietization. It is necessary to resolve the issue politically, we consider that You need to resolve the issue in place. There are two possibilities: the maximum one—to save Armenia at the price of its Sovietization." The choice between the beginning of an uprising of communists and the dispatch of forces into Armenia, Chicherin left to Stalin, being confident that if "there will be even one Red Army man [in Armenia], the Turks won't touch him." Then G. Chicherin reported that he had already sent mandates to B. Shakhhtakhtinsky and Dzh. Korkmasov for going to meet Mustafa Kemal and about the replacement of B. Mdivani "in view of the Persian events." [13]

Not satisfied by telegraphic communications with I. Stalin, G. Chicherin on November 7 by direct line instructed B. Legran that the earlier draft of a treaty between Moscow and Erivan was out of date and now all means must be employed to stop the advance of the Turks. He added that, "The question about the status of Zangazur and Nakhchivan must still remain open." [14] G. Chicherin insisted that, "if the Armenians accept the mediation conditions of Soviet Russia, we will demand that the Turks stop their advance." He noted that, "we will continue to give the Turks arms only if they, first, stop the attack, but this is in the case if Armenia from its side accepts our conditions of mediation, and second, they will be required to expel the Entente from Batumi if they occupy it." [15]

Here too, G. Chicherin again reported that the Peoples Commissariat of International Affairs had given mandates to B. Mdivani, B. Shakhhtakhtinsky and Dzh. Korkmasov to conduct talks with the Turks. As concerns the issue about the introduction of units of the Red Army into Armenia, G. Chicherin considered this only possible "if a decision is taken about the Sovietization of Armenia." He did not exclude the possibility of the occupation of Georgia either, but said that, "this should be done in such a way that the Georgian government upset with the Bolsheviks would not be able to throw itself into the embrace of the Entente. However in recent times, what matters is the dislocation of certain forces on the border of Armenia which could be put in motion in the case of necessity." [16]

On November 11, 1920, for the realization of the mediation mission, the Revolutionary Committee of the Caucasus Front gave a mandate to Polikarp (Budu) Mdivani. On the same day, G. Chichen informed Mustafa Kemal-pasha and the government of Armenia that P. Mdivani was being sent as a mediator for the Armenian-Turkish negotiations. With this mandate, Mdivani was sent along the Dilizhan road and on November 19th arrived in Erivan. The day before that, that is, November 18, the Armenians already accepted the conditions of the Turks. Before his departure to Erivan, Budu Mdivani received from I. Stalin a somewhat different instruction than G. Chicherin had given, namely, "don't get into a conflict with the Turks on behalf of the Dashnaks." [17]

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

Notes

[1] Telegram of G. Chicherin to B. Legran, 13 October 1920, Russian State Archive of Social-Political History (hereafter RSASPH), f.64, op.1, d.21, l.183.

[2] Telegram of B. Legran to G. Chicherin, 14 October 1920, RSASPH, f.64, op.1, d.21, l.181.

[3] Telegram of B. Legran to G. Chicherin, 24 October 1920, RSASPH, f.64, op.1, d.21, l.188.

[4] See telegram of G. Chicherin to B. Legran, 26 October 1920, RSASPH, f.64, op.1, d.21, l.191.

[5] Telegram of B. Legran to G. Chicherin, 1 November 1920, RSASPH, f.64, op.1, d.21, l.196.

[6] Telegram of B. Legran to G. Chicheri, 1 November 1920, RSASPH, f.64, op.1, d.21, l.197.

[7] Excerpt from protocol number 4 of the joint session of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the KP(b) of Azerbaijan and the Caucasus Bureau of the Central Committee of the RKP(b), 4 November 1920, Political Documents Archive under the President of Azerbaijan Republic (hereafter PDA PAR), f.1, op.1, d.22. l.18-19.

[8] See the telegram of B. Legran to the Soviet mission in Erivan, 6 November 1920, RSASPH, f.64, op.1, d.21, l.203.

[9] Letter of G. Chicherin to I. Stalin, 5 November 1920, FPA RF, f.04, op.39, p.232, d.52987, l.42-43.

[10] B. Legran to G. Chicherin, 19 November 1920, RSASPH, f.85, op.14, d.17, l.4.

[11] Armistice conditions of the Ankara government, November 1920, RSASPH, f.85, op.14, d.24, l.2.

[12] Telegram of A. Sheynman to G. Chicherin, 9 November 1920, RSASPH, f.85, op. 14, d.19, l.1.

[13] Telegram of G. Chicerin to I. Stalin, 7 November 1920, RSASPH, f.64, op.1, d.21, l.205.

[14] Conversation of G. Chicherin with Legran on direct line, 7 November 1920, RSASPH, f.64, op.1, d.21, l.207.

[15] Conversation of G. Chicherin with Legran on direct line, 7 November 1920, RSASPH, f.64, op.1, d.21, l.212-213.

[16] Telegram of G. Chicherin to I. Stalin, 9 November 1920, RSASPH, f.5, op.1, d.2097, l.9.

[17] See the Telegram of V. Lenin to I. Stalin, 16 November 1920, PDA PAR, f.1, op.44, d.118, l.38.