

A FAILED PROJECT: THE PONTO-ARMENIAN FEDERATION, 1919-1920

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During the First World War, Armenians and Rums¹ had collaborated against the Ottoman government. They later carried this collaboration to the postwar period and joined forces in their struggles versus the Istanbul and Ankara governments.² Nevertheless, Rums and Armenians did not always cherish the best of emotions about one another. Despite their common animosity towards the Turks, they also had a rather long history of ill feeling against each another. Mark L. Bristol, the American High Commissioner in Istanbul and an acute observer of Ottoman affairs, noted succinctly this general rule of rather intricate relationship of alliance and animosity between Armenians and Rums:

“The fact developed herein that the Greeks hate the Armenians is, of course, no news in this part of the world. They are natural enemies in trade and business and the Greeks hate the Armenians because the Armenians generally beat the Greeks in trade. There has always been the keenest animosity between the Greek and Armenian Patriarchs, and this feeling has been instilled into their people by the priesthood. At the same time the Greek methods of making an alliance with the Armenians in spite of this racial feeling, is typical of the methods of this part of the world.”³

N. Petsalis-Diomidis, a Greek historian, agrees that until 1918 Armenians and Rums were indeed in fierce rivalry. Only on 2 November 1918, the Trabzon Rums, who convened in Marseilles, decided that hostility towards Armeni-

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¹ Throughout this study, “Rum” refers to the Ottoman subjects who were under the ecclesiastical authority of the Orthodox Patriarchate in the Phanar district of Istanbul, regardless of the language they spoke. “Greek” denotes the citizens of Greece. Ottoman subjects of Rum Orthodox faith who migrated abroad and did not have Greek citizenship are indicated as “Rums”.

² J.K. Hassiotis, “Shared Illusions: Greek Armenian Co-Operation in Asia Minor and the Caucasus (1917-1922),” in *Greece and Great Britain During World War I* (Thessaloniki: Institute for Balkan Studies, 1985), pp. 142-144.

³ From Bristol to the Secretary of State, 3 November 1920, NARA 767.68/66.

ans should be set aside for the time being and a way for some kind of an understanding with them should be sought.⁴

Heretofore the most comprehensive study in the English language on the Rum-Armenian collaboration/conflict in the Trabzon vilayet and the Caucasus, one of the least known episodes in the post-WWI era, is a conference paper by J. Hassiotis published in 1985. The paper's title is "Shared Illusions: Greek Armenian Co-Operation in Asia Minor and the Caucasus (1917-1922)". Although Hassiotis makes good use of Greek and Armenian primary and secondary sources, he ignores many published works in the Turkish language. Discarding the Turkish dimension is not limited to his use of sources. Additionally, while Hassiotis discusses how Trabzon became a conflict matter between Armenians and Rums he fails to mention the involvement in the whole issue of the Ankara government which naturally claimed the vilayet, and the existence of a very large Muslim population who enjoyed an absolute majority in the region. Furthermore, Hassiotis argues that Armenians and Rums could not establish a sound cooperation due to the lack of experience of the main actors and of a real will to that end. These factors may have played a role. Yet, there seems to be another element which was that while Armenians and Rums were ostensibly joining forces against the Turks, they were essentially intriguing against each other as well as the Turks. Moreover, it will be argued in this study that what really and practically ended the Armenian-Rum collaboration/conflict over Trabzon was the defeat of Armenian forces by the Turkish armies towards the end of the year of 1920.

The present study will also question the Turkish historiography on this matter. In Turkish history-writing, there is a prevalent assumption that Rums and Armenians acted in unison in carrying out conspiracies against Turks.⁵ This

⁴ N. Petsalis-Diomidis, "Hellenism in Southern Russia and the Ukrainian Campaign," *Balkan Studies* 13, no. 2 (1972): p. 229.

⁵ See Selahattin Tansel, *Mondros'tan Mudanya'ya Kadar I* (Ankara: Başbakanlık Basımevi, 1973); Osman Köksal, "Mütareke Döneminde Ermeni ve Rum Patrikanelerinin İşbirliği," *Askeri Tarih Bülteni*, no. 24 (Şubat 1988): pp. 61-70; Rahmi Çiçek, "Milli Mücadelede Ermeni-Rum-Yunan İttifakı'nın Anadolu Basınındaki Yankıları," *Atatürk Yolu* 2, no. 6 (Kasım 1990): pp. 295-306; Abdullah Saydam, "Kurtuluş Savaşı'nda Trabzon'a Yönelik Ermeni-Rum Tehdidi," *Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi Dergisi* VI, no. 17 (Mart 1990): pp. 421-434; Cemal Kutay, *Mütarekede Pontos Suikastı* (İstanbul: 1956), pp. 14-15; Hamit Pehlivanlı, "Askeri Polis Teşkilatı İstihbarat Raporlarında Milli Mücadele Sırasında Ermeni-Rum Azınlığın Faaliyetleri ve Alınan Tedbirler," *Ankara Üniversitesi Türk İnkılap Tarihi Enstitüsü Atatürk Yolu Dergisi* 2, no. 8 (1991): pp. 675-682; Zafer Çakmak, "Mondros Mütarekesi Sonrası Ermeni-Rum-Yunan İşbirliği," *Fırat Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi* 16, no.

study will attempt to show that this was not always the case, at least in Trabzon. Both sides wanted Trabzon badly, even if it would be to the detriment of the other party.

In this study, the Armenian-Rum conflict over Trabzon and attempts for collaboration against the Ottoman and Ankara governments between the commencement of the Paris Peace Conference in January 1919 and the fall of Armenia to Bolshevism in December 1920 will be examined. In this analysis, hitherto main arguments in the literature will be questioned and new insights will be provided, through the use of various American, British and French documents as well as numerous published sources in Turkish, English and Greek.

Armenians were quite active in Western capitals just before and during the Paris Peace Conference. They had two delegations at the conference. The first one was the Armenian National Delegation. This was headed by Boghos Nubar who was appointed as special envoy to the European governments in 1912 by the Supreme Patriarch Catholicos Gevorg V. The second one was the Delegation of the Republic of Armenia.⁶ The existence of two delegations created a little confusion for Armenians in Armenia, the diaspora as well as in Paris. On this issue Hourii Berberian writes:

“The arrival of the Delegation of the Republic of Armenia ... in Paris complicated matters as Boghos Nubar’s National Delegation already existed. Matters were made more complex by two factors. First, the goals of the two delegations differed. The demands of Boghos Nubar’s delegation included an Armenia from the Caucasus to Cilicia, while those of [Avetis]

2 (2006): pp. 403-412. For an exception, see Sabahattin Özel, *Milli Mücadelede Trabzon* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1991), p. 50.

⁶ Towards the end of May 1918, an independent Armenian republic was proclaimed in the Caucasus. See Richard G. Hovannisian, *Armenia on the Road to Independence 1918* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967), pp. 186-191; Richard G. Hovannisian, "Simon Vratzian and Armenian Nationalism," *Middle Eastern Studies* 5, no. 3 (Oct., 1969): p. 208; Akaby Nassibian, *Britain and the Armenian Question, 1915-1923* (London & Sydney: Croom Helm, 1984), p. 104; Bülent Gökay, "Turkish Settlement and the Caucasus, 1919-1920," *Middle Eastern Studies* 32, no. 2 (Apr., 1996): p. 54. Yet, this Armenia was not recognized by Western powers. The final boundaries of an Armenian state would later be determined by the Western allies during the Paris Peace Conference. The status of this state was negotiated as part of what was then called the "Turkish settlement" at the conference. As a matter of fact, for instance, while the Bolsheviks were advancing into the Caucasus in 1919-1920, the Allies became apprehensive of this move and recognized on 10 January Georgia and Azerbaijan, which had proclaimed independence before Armenia. However, the Allies remained silent about recognition of Armenia. See Gökay, "Turkish Settlement and the Caucasus, 1919-1920," p. 62.

Aharonian's delegation included only the six Turkish-Armenian vilayets of Van, Bitlis, Harput, Erzurum, Sivas and Diyarbakir, together with a port on the Black Sea. Second, Boghos Nubar's delegation lacked confidence in the new republic formed in Russian Armenia. It was Turkish Armenia that had been the center of Armenian reform movements and emancipatory struggles, and not the Armenia the destiny of which, in their view, was firmly bound to and determined by Russia. In addition, Boghos Nubar and most of his delegation were ideologically opposed to the ruling party – The Dashnaksutiun- and its revolutionary and socialist ideas... The two delegations realized that a division would damage the Armenian case and reached an agreement. Aharonian, who saw that the Allies seemed willing to sanction a greater Armenia and cognizant of the support of Turkish-Armenians – including Turkish-Armenian members of his own party – for the greater Armenia claim, accepted the National Delegation's territorial claims. Both delegations united to form the Delegation of Integral Armenia. This delegation chose to speak with one voice on important issues while each constituent delegation kept its distinct identity: Boghos Nubar represented the Turkish Armenians and Aharonian represented the Russian Armenians.⁷

Firuz Kazemzadeh also notes that Armenians were not unified in presenting their claims to the world. He quotes Loris-Melikov, whom he calls “a self-styled roving ambassador for Armenia”, who reported

“that in a conversation the Catholicos told him that Armenia must obtain Cilicia. “Cilicia”, said the Pontiff, “is ours.” Yet Khatisian assured everyone that the Armenian delegation would not even mention Cilicia at the Peace Conference. In Tiflis Loris-Melikov heard rumours that it was Sazonov who prodded the Armenians to claim Cilicia. Presumably Sazonov hoped that Russia would soon be restored and would obtain Cilicia with the rest of Armenia.”⁸

Just before the Paris Conference convened, Boghos Nubar Pasha had sent a telegram to the British in which he listed Armenian demands. He included in his demands the incorporation of part of the Trabzon vilayet to the Greater Armenia that he thought was promised to them.⁹ Meanwhile, Rum and Arme-

⁷ Hourı Berberian, "The Delegation of Integral Armenia: From Greater Armenia to Lesser Armenia," *Armenian Review* 44, no. 3 (Autumn 1991): pp. 40-41. For the configuration of and conflict among the Armenian delegations in Paris, see also Firuz Kazemzadeh, *The Struggle for Transcaucasia (1917-1921)* (New York and Oxford: Philosophical Library and George Ronald, 1951), pp. 253-254.

⁸ Kazemzadeh, *The Struggle for Transcaucasia (1917-1921)*, p. 255.

⁹ Stanford Shaw, *From Empire to Republic, Vol.II* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 2000), p. 369.

nian patriarchates were negotiating in Istanbul in December 1918 and early January 1919 for promotion of mutual interests. Armenian side initially did not propose the inclusion of Trabzon vilayet to Greater Armenia. But later, when they formed a commission with the members of the Rum Patriarchate they demanded that Rums acquiesce. In return for this favor, the Armenian Patriarchate would not oppose to annexation by Greece of Thrace, Istanbul, İzmit, Bursa and Aydın, where Rums were more than Armenians. Armenians were also encouraged by Venizelos who unequivocally told the Paris Peace Conference that Trabzon could be a part of future Armenia.¹⁰ Receiving the go-ahead by Venizelos, Boghos Nubar and Avetis Aharonian included Trabzon to their demands which they submitted to the peace conference on 12 February.¹¹ Armenian diaspora, too, increased their lobby activities in Western capitals for the same purpose.¹²

Like Venizelos, Christos Vasillakakis, a Greek parliamentarian, said during a visit to the United States in January that he supported Armenian efforts to

¹⁰ Petsalis-Diomidis, "Hellenism in Southern Russia and the Ukrainian Campaign," pp. 252-253; Hassiotis, "Shared Illusions: Greek Armenian Co-Operation in Asia Minor and the Caucasus (1917-1922)," p. 146; Sp. V. Markezini, *Politiki Istoria Tis Neoterias Ellados, Sigxronos Ellas, Tomos Protos* (Athina: Papiros, 1973), p. 155; William James Battle, "Greece at the Peace Table," *The Classical Journal* 16, no. 1 (Oct., 1920): p. 12; Paul C. Helmreich, *Sarı Entrikaları, Büyük Güçler, Maşalar, Gizli Anlaşmalar ve Türkiye'nin Taksimi* (İstanbul: Sabah Kitapları, 1996), pp. 28-29; Yusuf Sarıncay, "Pontus Meselesi ve Yunanistan'ın Politikası," in *Pontus Meselesi ve Yunanistan'ın Politikası*, ed. Berna Türkoğlan (Ankara: Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi, 1999), p. 15; Richard G. Hovannisian, "Pontus and Armenia, 1914-1922," in *Armenian Pontus, the Trebizond-Black Sea Communities*, ed. Richard G. Hovannisian (Costa Mesa, California: Mazda Publishers, Inc., 2009), p. 359; "Greece Before the Peace Congress", FO.608/37, p.15 For a rather comprehensive study on Greece's policy during the conference see N. Petsalis-Diomidis, *Greece at the Paris Peace Conference 1919* (Thessaloniki: Institute for Balkan Studies, 1978), p. 104. Admiral Bristol argued that Venizelos could not have been unaware of the ongoing negotiations in Trabzon, Armenia and Tiflis about the future of Trabzon and simply tried to gain time. See from Bristol to the Secretary of State, 3 November 1920, NARA 767.68/66. Sabahattin Özel wrote that Venizelos told the Rum Patriarchate delegation who came to Paris to visit him that they should not have clashed with Armenians over Trabzon because Turks could have taken advantage of this. See Özel, *Milli Mücadelede Trabzon*, p. 49.

¹¹ Richard Hovannisian, *The Republic of Armenia, Volume I, the First Year, 1918-1919* (University of California Press, 1971), pp. 278-279; Albert Howe Lybyer, "Turkey under the Armistice," *The Journal of International Relations* 12, no. 4 (Apr., 1922): p. 458; Hassiotis, "Shared Illusions: Greek Armenian Co-Operation in Asia Minor and the Caucasus (1917-1922)," p. 147; Özel, *Milli Mücadelede Trabzon*, p. 48; Shaw, *From Empire to Republic, Vol.II*, pp. 381-382; Kazemzadeh, *The Struggle for Transcaucasia (1917-1921)*, pp. 255-256.

¹² "Armenians Desirous of a United Country, Religious Leader Would Welcome Either an Italian or American Protectorate", *New York Times*, 6 March 1919. Also see Hassiotis, "Shared Illusions: Greek Armenian Co-Operation in Asia Minor and the Caucasus (1917-1922)," p. 150.

incorporate Trabzon and other towns along the Black Sea coast. For, these places may have been inhabited by Rums before, but now they enjoyed an Armenian majority, he explained.¹³

The Trabzon Rum diaspora reacted furiously to the official Greek position.¹⁴ The Rums in Boston asked from the American representatives in Paris that a "Pontus Republic" should be established in the vilayet of Trabzon. They stated that there was no Armenian in Trabzon as of 1919 and Trabzon was never Armenian throughout the history.¹⁵ Constantine Constantinides and Socrate Oeconomos, two prominent spokesmen for the Pontus Rum diaspora, sent a letter to the State Department in March in which they explicitly wrote that Trabzon could not be left to the Armenians and reiterated their wishes for a "Pontus Republic."¹⁶

Towards the end of March, Lepissier, the French representative in Trabzon, sent a telegram to the French Foreign Ministry on the Rum emotions in the region. In that, he wrote:

"The separatist movement of the Greeks of Pontus is real and many committees became agitated with different tendencies all along the coast for the defense of that idea. The militants have established a vast program, but the majority yearns only for tranquility and has only one desire, which is to escape from the Turkish domination. In order to protect themselves against what is called the Armenian danger, and to ward off the threat of autonomy in Turkish rule, many people started to hope for a foreign protectorate or an occupation that some people, especially in Kerasund, think to provoke by violence. The political alliance concluded in Constantinople between Greeks and Armenians seems to be quite fragile here and the old antagonism of these two races which are the most dis-

¹³ "Greek-Armenian Alliance Planned for Near East Peace", *New York Times*, 27 January 1919.

¹⁴ Petsalis-Diomidis, "Hellenism in Southern Russia and the Ukrainian Campaign," pp. 250-251; Dimitri Kitsikis, *Yunan Propagandası* (İstanbul: Meydan Neşriyat, 1963), p. 336; Stefanos Yerasimos, "Pontus Meselesi (1912-1923)," *Tophum ve Bilim*, no. 43/44 (1988/89): p. 49; Sarınnay, "Pontus Meselesi Ve Yunanistan'ın Politikası," pp. 16-17; Özel, *Milli Mücadelede Trabzon*, pp. 38-39.

¹⁵ NARA867.00/100, 7 March 1919.

¹⁶ NARA 868.00/106, March 1919. For the Trabzon Rums' political demands announced by Oeconomos towards the end of February 1919 see also Gotthard Jaeschke, *Kurtuluş Savaşı İle İlgili İngiliz Belgeleri* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1971), p. 57.

credited ones in the Orient, one must admit, and which have, to an equal degree, the genius of affairs, seems to make this union very unstable.”¹⁷

Here, Lepissier uses rather harsh words for Rums and Armenians. However, to a student of the history of the Near East, this does not come as a surprise because it was then not uncommon for European diplomatic and consular workers to use such euphemisms for the peoples of the Near East, including the Christians.

While Rums and Armenians were paying lip service to desire for a common arrangement, Trabzon Rum representatives, Hrisanthos Philippides, the Rum Metropolitan of Trabzon, being among them, went to Paris in April to see Venizelos.¹⁸ About this meeting, Venizelos sent a telegram to the Foreign Ministry in Athens on 25th of April. In this telegram, Venizelos wrote that Trabzon Rum representatives asked for help from him in forming a small military unit in Trabzon. This small unit would constitute the nucleus of a future army which would be instrumental for Trabzon Rums in reaching their national aims, namely secession from the Ottoman Empire. The Rum representatives told Venizelos that the necessary funds for the military unit would be provided by them. The main thing they asked from Venizelos was that he should send military personnel to train this unit. Venizelos acquiesced and told the Greek Foreign Ministry that Colonel Dimitris Katheniotis, the Military Attaché in Bucharest, was the man for the task. He should be immediately contacted and informed of this new mission. Twenty or so other officers, selected from Trabzon Rums, should accompany him. Katheniotis should leave at once for Istanbul and contact Canellopoulos, the Greek High Commissioner, and other prominent Trabzon Rums in that city. Afterwards, he should set out for Trabzon with accompanying officers and other military personnel. Venizelos advised strict

¹⁷ “Le mouvement séparatiste des Grecs du Pont est réel et de nombreux comités s’agitent, avec des tendances diverses, surtout le littoral pour la défense de cette idée. Les militants ont établi un vaste programme, mais la majorité n’aspire qu’à la tranquillité n’a qu’un désir, celui d’échapper à la domination turque. Pour se garantir contre ce qu’en appelle déjà le danger arménien et parer à la menace d’une autonomie turque, beaucoup commencent à souhaiter un protectorat étranger ou une occupation que cette(?), en particulier à Kérasonde, songeraient à provoquer par des violences. L’alliance politique conclue à Constantinople entre grecs et Arméniens semble ici assez fragile et le vieil antagonisme de ces deux races, les plus déconsidérées d’Orient, il faut le reconnaître, et qui ont à un égal degré le génie des affaires paraît devoir rendre cette union très instable.” Ministère Des Affaires Étrangères Direction Des Affaires Politiques et Commerciales Série E-Levant 1918-1940; Turquie; Carton 320; Dossier 7; Juillet 1918-20 Mai 1919 Vol. 208 Grèce-Turquie p.118-119.

¹⁸ *Arşiv Belgeleriyle Rum Faaliyetleri 1918-1922*, (Ankara: ATASE, 2009), pp. 566-572; Yerassimos, “Pontus Meselesi (1912-1923),” p. 50; Markezini, *Politiki Istoria Tis Neoterias Ellados, Sigxronos Ellas, Tomos Protos*, p. 155.

secrecy and in no way the Paris Peace Conference should find out about this scheme until it gives its final verdict on the future of the Ottoman Empire.¹⁹ About this letter, Admiral Bristol made the following comment: "The ultimate object of presenting the Peace Conference with a *fait accompli* on the Black Sea Coast, in the form of Greek military control of the Pontus, should no more be missed than that its avatar, counselling secrecy and intrigue, is the present Greek Prime Minister."²⁰

On 15 May 1919, Constantine Constantinides and Socrate Oeconomos sent another memorandum to the Paris Peace Conference, in which they made it clear that Venizelos by no means had the right to speak on their behalf. They repeated their objection to the incorporation of Trabzon to Greater Armenia.²¹

During the conference, Trabzon Rums and Armenians carried out negotiations to find a solution among themselves, apparently at the former's request. Rums argued that they held the majority in Trabzon, not only over the Armenians but also even the Muslims. They gave their number around 1.200.000 and Armenians' around 70.000. Notwithstanding, they resorted to negotiation with the Armenians.²² In fact, Trabzon Rums did not see their position in Paris as favorable as that of Armenians. Armenians had the backing of almost all the Allied Powers, and especially of the United States, whereas Trabzon Rums were not supported initially even by Greece, which they thought would be their natural patron.

Trabzon Rums came to Paris with the demand that an independent Pontus republic in Trabzon should be granted to them. Yet, since Armenians had coveted the same area, they gradually gave in and had to abandon that idea. Now they were ready for establishing a union with Armenians in which each side would enjoy a considerable independence. According to what the Trabzon Rums suggested, this union would defend both sides' interests in a much stronger way, especially against Turks. As regards the specifics of the proposed union; foreign policy would be determined together. However, should a specific diplomatic issue concern only one of the constituent republics, that republic should be able to

¹⁹ The Intelligence Report dated 1 November 1920, Section I, p.3, NARA 767.68/66. For Katheriotis being assigned by Venizelos to organize Rum bands see also Tasos Kostopoulos, *Polemos Kai Ethnokatharsi: I Kschasmeni Pleura Mias Dekaktous Ethnikis Eksormisis, 1912-1922* (Athina: Vivliorama, 2007), p. 228 and 233; Sarnay, "Pontus Meselesi ve Yunanistan'ın Politikası," p. 23; Markezini, *Politiki Istoría Tis Neoterás Ellados, Sigxronos Ellas, Tomos Protos*, p. 156.

²⁰ The Intelligence Report dated 1 November 1920, Section I, p.3, NARA 767.68/66.

²¹ NARA867.00/184.

²² NARA867.00/184.

appoint its own diplomatic representative. Here, the Swiss model could be adopted. Matters regarding commerce, industry, customs, postal affairs and railways would be handled together. Both republics would have autonomy in dealing with religious matters, education and gendarmerie. Trabzon Rums concluded that naturally this proposal was not final and could be subject to modification, if necessary. But even this act of proposing should suggest that they were acting with good will and ready for some kind of arrangement with the Armenians.²³

At first, Armenian representatives liked this offer but then Boghos Nubar said that they could not accept it unless it was imposed on them by the Peace Conference. So, Armenians would not come to terms with the Trabzon Rums. They wanted Trabzon for themselves and were merely ready to grant some sort of autonomy to the Rums.²⁴

Trabzon Rums were quite disappointed with the Armenians' response. In fact, they thought that while they were ready to make sacrifices in order to find a solution to the problem, Armenians would not move an inch. In their counter-response to the Armenian rebuttal, they made it clear that they would not forgo independence that easily but would happily form a union of two equal partners with the Armenians. If, they somewhat threatened, Trabzon would be incorporated with Armenia, the latter would have to deal continually with a would-be disgruntled community of Rums.²⁵ Likewise, a member of the American Rum diaspora, Nicholas Zarokilli, was quoted by *New York Times* in its 13th of April edition, saying that Rums would definitely refuse to live under Armenians and a friction between these two would be certain to happen.²⁶ Later in July Hrisanthos would take this contingency further and tell American representatives in Paris that if they did not support the idea of an independent Pontus republic and Armenians would be granted Trabzon, Rums and *Muslims* [italics are mine. BSB] would resist to this. He even suggested, perhaps for the first time in this whole saga, the formation at least of a Rum-Muslim government with two pres-

²³ NARA867.00/184

²⁴ NARA867.00/184. For a brief discussion on the negotiations between Trabzon Rums and Armenians in March-May period see also Hassiotis, "Shared Illusions: Greek Armenian Co-Operation in Asia Minor and the Caucasus (1917-1922)," pp. 153-154.

²⁵ NARA867.00/184.

²⁶ "Greeks Lay Claim to Storied Trebizond, Pontian Republic on the Black Sea Part of Territory Sought at Peace Conference – Conflicts with Italy in the Epirus, Smyrna, and Dodecanese Islands", *New York Times*, 13 April 1919.

idents, one Muslim and the other Rum, who could later be joined by an American third if necessary, under American mandate.²⁷

In the meantime, the Armenian diaspora in the United States continued to agitate for incorporation of Trabzon to Greater Armenia. One of the prominent activists of the diaspora, D. E. Siramaro, argued that Trabzon was never Greek. He was quoted in a New York Times article saying:

“It is claimed that Trebizond is Greek... because there are a good many Greeks in the district. But no one has claimed, or can claim, that it is part of true Greece. The Greeks of Trebizond are simply a colony, just as they are in Jerusalem, Egypt, New York, Boston. Now the Greeks cannot put forward the proposition that New York is part of Greece, just because there are a great many Greeks in New York City. Similarly, they cannot brand Trebizond as part of Greece. The question is: To what country does Trebizond belong properly? I say that it belongs to the country of which it forms an integral part, by reasons of climatic, ethnic, political and economic characteristics. It is very much like those eastern sections of Canada where a French element is preponderant both racially and lingually, yet no wild dreamer can ask that they be ceded to France.”

Siramaro, therefore, continued that Trabzon had been part of the Pontian Empire of Mithridates, who did not have any links with Greeks but was a near relation to the then Armenian king. Later, it was incorporated in Armenia. Siramaro then recounted the history of Trebizond as follows:

“In the Middle Ages the Byzantine Emperors used those seashore towns as landing bases for their troops against the Persians, and after the decline of the Persian hegemony they used them for a similar purpose in their war against the Armenian kingdom of Ani. Very few of those Byzantines were actual Greeks, except in language and in religious profession. So, shortly after, the emigrant Byzantines severed their connection with the Emperor of Constantinople and instituted their own instead, the Empire of Trebizond. This soon fell under the Mongolian invasions, and until the present year nothing was said or done by those immigrants to show that they were at all desirous of intercourse with the Greeks of Greece. Any people living under the rule of a different nation for a long term of years soon uses the standards of thought of the ruling race. Now, in all the Mohammedan countries religion is the nationality. A man cannot become a Mohammedan and still keep his individual nationality of Armenian or

²⁷ Özel, *Milli Mücadelede Trabzon*, p. 123.

Greek. If he happens to be living under Turkish rule, upon espousing Moham-
medanism he also espouses Turkism. The same line of thought has gradually
dominated the races subject of the Turks. If an Armenian espouses the tenets of
the Greek Church he thereby espouses Hellenism. The same is true of Greeks,
Jews, &c., in Turkey.”

Siramaro simply said that nationality was something quite fluid and con-
version from one nationality to another was mostly determined by who ruled
the country. Therefore, he bluntly stated that “[w]hen an independent Armenia
is instituted, in time, the Greek element of Colchis [the vilayet of Trabzon] will
be assimilated by the native Armenians.” Furthermore, Siramaro expressed his
frustration at the Trabzon Rums’ desires over Trabzon in most explicit terms:

“...Greece has far too many jealous neighbors to allow her peace of
mind. She needs friends, and she can do no better than by building
friendship with Armenia, ever before Armenia is made into an independ-
ent State. In this Greece and her statesmen have shown a very sound wis-
dom, and it is unfortunate that any one should disturb the foundations of
that friendship. Further, Greece has officially relinquished any claims she
might have made to Trebizond. But aside from what Greece has said
about this matter, we must not forget that Armenia also has some things
to say, when it comes to taking away from her one of her most valuable
districts. It would be a most unfortunate experience for Armenia if, im-
mediately upon being given her long-expected independence, her very
nearest neighbor should step up to her and rudely demand of her best
seaport and her gold and silver yielding province. It would mean that her
independence would have a string tied to it; that she would be at the mer-
cy of some other State. It would mean that all that blood she shed, all the
infamy she bore, and the martyrdom she endured would benefit another
State. And Greece would benefit at the price of Armenia’s blood. But it is
a happy truth that things have not come to such a pass; for Armenia and
Greece have joined hands in friendship and alliance, and therefore both
are ready and willing to make sacrifices for one another.”²⁸

Response from American Rum diaspora to Siramaro’s remarks came im-
mediately. N. J. Cassavetes sent a letter to the editor of the *New York Times*
which was published on the 11 May. He reiterated the common Rum view that
Trabzon’s inclusion to Armenia was unacceptable. According to Cassavetes, a

²⁸ “Armenia and Trebizond, Claims to Old Pontian Empire Set Forth as Against Those Ad-
vanced by the Greeks”, *New York Times*, 4 May 1919.

Pontus Republic should be created in the vilayet of Trabzon, and that republic could grant port facilities to the Armenians if the latter was so insistent on that.²⁹

Naturally, the Armenian diaspora members continued to defend their own case and in June Arshag Mahdesian, in a letter to the editor of the *New York Times*, contended that Armenia needed an outlet to the sea in order to survive. Therefore, Trabzon would be the obvious choice and should be united with Armenia.³⁰

While the exchanges between the members of the Rum and Armenian diaspora communities continued in the pages of American dailies, the parliament in Erevan proclaimed towards the end of May the annexation by Armenia of seven Turkish vilayets including Trabzon.³¹

Meanwhile, Greece continued its efforts for secretly organizing a Rum revolt in Trabzon and at the same time it was also talking to the Armenians and trying to persuade them to a settlement to its own benefit, only giving minor concessions to the latter in the shape of an outlet to the sea. This newly started activities in August for a Greek-Armenian collaboration in Eastern Anatolia and the Caucasus were carried out by Ioannis Stavridakis on behalf of the Greek government. Stavridakis first tried to bring together Rums in Armenia and Armenian authorities in order to dispel mistrust among them. He also preached Katheriotis, Greek High Commission in Istanbul and the Greek Foreign Ministry that their prejudices against the Armenians were baseless.³² Apparently, he was trying to mollify the Greek and Rum attitude first, and then hoping to make Armenians more amenable towards Greek proposals. The new and more friendly discourse by Greeks towards Armenians was also reflected in Greek publications. In *Tachydromos*, a Greek daily in Egypt, an article was published

²⁹ "The Future of Trebizond", *New York Times*, 11 May 1919.

³⁰ "Recent Suggestion for Armenia, Against a Joint Mandate for the Lands of the Former Turkish Empire", *New York Times*, 8 June 1919.

³¹ Selahattin Tansel, *Mondros'tan Mudanya'ya Kadar II* (Ankara: Başbakanlık Basımevi, 1973), p. 229; Ovanes Kaçaznuni, *Taşnak Partisi'nin Yapacağı Bir Şey Yok*, trans. Arif Acaloğlu (İstanbul: Kaynak Yayınları, 2005), p. 56.

³² Hassiotis, "Shared Illusions: Greek Armenian Co-Operation in Asia Minor and the Caucasus (1917-1922)," pp. 157-158.

in August in which great joy was expressed at renunciation of Trabzon by "our Armenian friends" before Venizelos and Rum representatives.³³

Some Greeks and Rums apparently thought by this time around that Armenians had forfeited their claims over Trabzon. However, this would not be the case. For, later developments would show that Armenians were playing the same game. They were ostensibly sending out friendly messages to Greeks and Rums. However, they were pursuing their own interests behind the scenes.

Towards the end of 1919, Stavridakis and Hrisanthos went to Erivan and proposed to Armenian authorities a Ponto-Armenian federation on 1 January. This was not a new proposal as it recalled previous offers for a federal structure with two separate autonomous entities. Alexander Khatisian, the Armenian premier, well aware of the fact that Trabzon Rum representatives were not taken by Allied Powers as seriously as Armenians in Paris, made a counter proposal. According to Khatisian's scheme, Trabzon would have a separate parliament within Armenia. With Trabzon attached to Armenia, the latter would continue to be a unitary state. Negotiations between the two parties lasted for two days with no concrete result. Richard Hovannisian writes that Armenian leaders then believed that sooner or later Rums would assent to the incorporation of Trabzon in Armenia.³⁴ Apparently, the Armenian leaders were quite confident that Rums were the weaker side and Khatisian even told Oliver Wardrop, the British representative in the Caucasus, on 14 January that Rums would agree to the incorporation of Trabzon in Armenia in return for certain guarantees.³⁵ However, events would not develop the way that the Armenian leaders had expected.

Despite initial failures, Rums and Armenians seemingly reached an arrangement towards the end of January. Curiously enough, several sources recount the story of this agreement rather differently. Markezini wrote that after coming back from his long sojourn in Europe, Hrisanthos proceeded to Tiflis and later Erivan, where after long negotiations they concluded with Khatisian

³³ Ministère Des Affaires Étrangères Direction Des Affaires Politiques et Commerciales Série E-Levant 1918-1940; Turquie; Carton 320; Dossier 7; Du 1 Juillet 1919 au 31 Août 1919 Vol. 210 Grèce-Turquie, page number is not legible.

³⁴ Richard G. Hovannisian, *The Republic of Armenia, Volume II, from Versailles to London, 1919-1920* (University of California Press, 1982), pp. 528-529. For another mention on the Rum-Armenian negotiations towards the end of 1919 see Saydam, "Kurtuluş Savaşı'nda Trabzon'a Yönelik Ermeni-Rum Tehdidi," p. 429.

³⁵ Hassiotis, "Shared Illusions: Greek Armenian Co-Operation in Asia Minor and the Caucasus (1917-1922)," p. 157 fn. 164.

an agreement for a Ponto-Armenian federation. Then a military agreement followed. According to this, Greek forces would disembark in Trabzon and secure the area stretching towards Erzurum, and wipe out Turkish regular and irregular forces on the way. Meanwhile, the Armenian army would advance into Erzurum.³⁶ Markezini does not give exact dates for the agreements mentioned. Demetrius Kiminas, in his book on the Rum Orthodox Patriarchate, writes on this agreement that it was for the establishment of a Rum-Armenian state with its capital Trabzon. Without giving an exact date for the agreement, Kiminas says, "[t]he treaty provided for the military cooperation of Greece and Armenia to protect the new state [meaning the Rum-Armenian state. BSB].³⁷ Stefanos Yerasimos, in an article which is often-quoted by Turkish historians, noted that a military agreement was signed by Greeks and Armenians in Tiflis on 25 January, without giving further details.³⁸ Sabahattin Özel, a Turkish historian who wrote a rather comprehensive study on Trabzon during what is called *National Struggle* in the Turkish historiography, gives 16 January for the date of that military agreement which was signed by Katheriotis and Ananias, a Rum who formerly served in the Tsar's army, for the Greek side, and Termenasian, a high ranking Armenian military official for the Armenian side. Özel notes that the agreement was primarily for preventing Bolshevik penetration.³⁹ Another Turkish historian, Bige Sükan Yavuz, who wrote an article in Turkish on the proposed Ponto-Armenian federation relying almost exclusively on a lengthy Admiral Bristol report which is frequently cited in the present study as well, argues that even though the foundations for that federation were laid out, its future was rather unclear.⁴⁰

That Admiral Bristol report is worthy of more mention here. Bristol prepared that report basically from what the French intelligence had relayed to him. In fact, the French intelligence had reported that on 23 January Rums and Armenians in Tiflis with encouragement from Greece had reached an agree-

³⁶ Markezini, *Politiki İstoria Tis Neoteris Ellados, Sigxronos Ellas, Tomos Protos*, p. 157.

³⁷ Demetrius Kiminas, *The Ecumenical Patriarchate, a History of Its Metropolitanates with Annotated Hierarchy Catalogs* (Wildside Press, 2009), p. 109.

³⁸ Yerasimos, "Pontus Meselesi (1912-1923)," p. 57. Also see Sarıncay, "Pontus Meselesi ve Yunanistan'ın Politikası," pp. 28-29; Nuri Yazıcı, *Milli Mücadelede (Canik Sancağı'nda) Pontosçu Faaliyetler (1918-1922)* (Ankara: Ankara Üniversitesi Basımevi, 1989), p. 23.

³⁹ Özel, *Milli Mücadelede Trabzon*, p. 137.

⁴⁰ Bige Sükan Yavuz, "Kurtuluş Savaşı Sırasında Kurulması Düşünülen Rum-Ermeni Konfederasyonu," *Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi Dergisi* XIX, no. 55 (Mart 2003): p. 38.

ment.⁴¹ Before going into the details of this agreement mentioned in the intelligence report, it should be noted, with the advantage of looking back to the past from today, even though Greek/Rum side and the Armenians may have pledged military assistance to one another they did not reach a final solution on the future of Trabzon. Both sides were apparently trying constantly to reposition themselves over the question of Trabzon according to the course of, first, diplomatic negotiations in European capitals, which were mostly, if not totally, shaped by the decisions of the Allied Powers, and second, the Turco-Greek war in Western Anatolia. Both Greeks and Rums, and Armenians did not want to resent the other side, but were still biding for the right time to make a final move. But this time, Armenians, who looked like the more adamant party in the past, did not reject Rum proposals outright. One of the reasons for the change of Armenian attitude could be the British withdrawal from the Caucasus towards the end of 1919. In fact, the Armenians had been disillusioned by the presence of British forces in the region which they thought would help them establish a Greater Armenia. With the British out of the way, the Caucasus had become wide open for Turkish and Bolshevik penetration.⁴² Therefore, according to Bristol, Khatisian had to assent to the formation of a Ponto-Armenian federation.⁴³ But this federation would never be.

Curiously enough, Richard Hovannisian, who wrote a rather comprehensive history of Armenia, does not mention such an agreement between Trabzon Rums and Armenians. On the contrary, Hovannisian refers to a letter dated 6 February from Khatisian to Aharonian, in which the former stated that Armenia could give up on Cilicia, and therefore diplomatic efforts should have been concentrated on the creation of a Greater Armenia that would include Russian Armenia and the six vilayets plus Trabzon in Turkey.⁴⁴ This letter shows that while trying not to resent Greek-Rum side whose assistance against the Ankara government he deemed very useful, Khatisian strove to incorporate Trabzon through diplomatic efforts in European capitals because he anticipated that the final decision would be given by the Allied powers, not by Armenia or Greece or Trabzon Rums.

⁴¹ The Intelligence Report dated 1 November 1920, Section I, p.3 and Section II, p.8-9, NARA 767.68/66.

⁴² Gökay, "Turkish Settlement and the Caucasus, 1919-1920," pp. 58-63. For an Armenian critique of British decision for withdrawal from the Caucasus, see Nassibian, *Britain and the Armenian Question, 1915-1923*, pp. 159-179.

⁴³ The Intelligence Report dated 1 November 1920, Section II, p.9, NARA 767.68/66.

⁴⁴ Hovannisian, *The Republic of Armenia, Volume II, from Versailles to London, 1919-1920*, pp. 529-530.

As a matter of fact, Armenian representatives continued to press for Trabzon during talks over the fate of Turkey in London in February. They demanded that the northwestern boundaries of Armenia should have begun from Tirebolu, to the west of the city of Trabzon. But when confronted with opposition, especially from the French, they settled for an outlet to the sea either from Trabzon or Rize. Eventually, the conference decided that however it was desirable to leave Trabzon to the Armenians, it was not feasible for ethnographic and political reasons.⁴⁵

In the meantime, Boghos Nubar asked Romanos, the Greek ambassador in Paris, whether Trabzon Rums assented to join Armenia. Having seen that Armenians in Armenia and Europe were speaking differently, the frustrated Katheriotis decided to attend negotiations in Paris and London himself.⁴⁶

Katheriotis met with British War Office officials in early March 1920 in London. He asked for their support for a Pontus republic in Trabzon that would be under a Greek mandate. However, British officials told Katheriotis that it was beyond their authority to discuss such a scheme and he should have talked to the Foreign Office.⁴⁷

Around this time, Thoidis, the spokesperson of Trabzon Rums in Istanbul, sent a letter to the Peace Conference in which he reiterated their demands for an independent Pontus republic.⁴⁸ Katheriotis' activities and Thoidis' letter demonstrate that Pontusists were quite disappointed with the Armenian attitude. They must also have been frustrated by the Greek official position vis-à-vis the whole episode. As a matter of fact, the Greek parliament discussed in its session on 5 March the Cilicia events during which they thought Armenians were persecuted by the Turks. In Cilicia, Muslims took up arms in January-February against the French occupation that was bolstered by Armenian military involvement⁴⁹ and some Greek parliamentarians viewed these as another

⁴⁵ Richard G. Hovannisian, *The Republic of Armenia, Volume III, from London to Sevres, February – August, 1920* (Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1996), pp. 27-34; Hovannisian, "Pontus and Armenia, 1914-1922," p. 363.

⁴⁶ Yerasimos, "Pontus Meselesi (1912-1923)," pp. 57-58.

⁴⁷ Yerasimos, "Pontus Meselesi (1912-1923)," p. 58.

⁴⁸ From Secretariat-General of the Peace Conference to Bargeton, 4 March 1920, Ministère Des Affaires Étrangères Direction Des Affaires Politiques et Commerciales Série E-Levant 1918-1940; Turquie; Carton 320; Dossier 7; Du 1 Décembre 1919 au 15 Mars 1920 Vol. 212 Grèce-Turquie, s. 245-246.

⁴⁹ Robert F. Zeidner, *The Tricolor over the Taurus 1918-1922* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 2005), pp. 183-240.

set of massacres against Armenians. N. Politis, the Greek foreign minister, shared these sentiments and asked the speaker of the parliament to convey to the "noble Armenian nation" the best wishes of the Greek people and the regret that the Greek government could not do much to stop the miseries of the Armenians. Consequently, T. Sofulis, the speaker of the parliament, sent a telegram on 23 March to Erivan and condemned the "Armenian massacres" in Cilicia. The reply from Khatisian to this telegram came on 6 May. Khatisian hoped furthering of the cordial relations between two nations.⁵⁰

Ignoring or being unaware of friendly gestures between Greek and Armenian officials, Rums continued to agitate for an independent Pontus state. In this regard, Rums in Ekaterinodar sent a letter dated 27 March to the Peace Conference, in which they stated that they had temporarily settled in Russia and were awaiting the "liberation of their homeland", Trabzon. They also added that they had sent this letter because they were upset due to the Armenians' "illegitimate and excessive claims over the vilayet of Trabzon". Furthermore, they continued that Trabzon had been a "Greek" country throughout the history and Armenians constituted merely a small minority before 1914. Therefore, Armenian claims were void of "any historical, ethnic and numerical basis" and jeopardized Rums' "legitimate rights and aspirations". In the last paragraph of the letter, Ekaterinodar Rums protested vehemently "Armenians' greediness and imperialist plans". This letter was interestingly relayed to the Peace Conference by the Pontus League in Marseilles on 17 July. One wonders why the Pontus League waited for almost three months to pass the letter on, if there were no communication difficulties between Ekaterinodar and Marseilles.

Another letter from Trabzon Rums in Istanbul was sent to Alexandre Millerand, the French Foreign Minister, on 1 April. The same old Rum claims over Trabzon were reiterated. At the end of the letter, Rums made it clear that they would oppose to any solution that would frustrate their aspirations.⁵¹ What they meant by that must be the incorporation of Trabzon in Armenia.

While the Rums were enraged by the Armenian attitude, the Allies discussed the issue of Armenian boundaries at the League of Nations Council in Paris on 9-11 April. During the talks no solution could be proposed as to the

⁵⁰ Salahi R. Sonyel, "Yunan Milleti Meclisi Gizli Tutanaklarında Mustafa Kemal ve Türk Kurtuluş Savaşı," *Belgelerle Türk Tarihi Dergisi*, no. 49 (Ekim 1971): p. 12.

⁵¹ Ministère Des Affaires Étrangères Direction Des Affaires Politiques et Commerciales Série E-Levant 1918-1940; Turquie; Carton 320; Dossier 7; Du 16 Mars 1920 au 30 Juin 1920 Vol. 213 Grèce-Turquie, s.66-68.

protection of those boundaries. European powers wanted the United States to arrogate upon itself the responsibility. Venizelos interjected and expressed his country's willingness to contribute to the protection of Armenia militarily.⁵² Apparently no concrete results were obtained in these talks. However, Venizelos' interference can be interpreted as a gesture to the Armenians which would show them that while other powers were hesitating to help them, Greece was volunteering. By sending out a friendly message to the Armenians, Venizelos may have hoped to talk them into a mutually-beneficial solution over Rum-Armenian difficulties.

Later in April the Allied met in San Remo. Like in London in February, they decided that Trabzon should not go to Armenia. For, an Armenia that could not protect its borders by itself should not be created. An outlet to the sea would be granted to Armenia, either at Batum or Rize. If not, some port facilities could be provided for them in Trabzon.⁵³ In San Remo, Venizelos restated his readiness to dispatch Greek troops for the protection of Armenia and pledged additional forces.⁵⁴

In the meantime, Hrisanthos went to San Remo in order to have a close look at the developments. Together with Constantinides, they later wrote a memorandum dated 30 April, in which they demanded that an autonomous Pontus entity be created within the Turkish state with a governor appointed by the League of Nations.⁵⁵ This memorandum suggests that Trabzon Rums began to lose hope and they came to the point where they preferred remaining within Turkey instead of going under Armenian rule. Likewise, Venizelos acknowledged in a speech at the Greek parliament in May that the "Pontus dream" could not be realized and put the blame on Trabzon Rums' intransi-

⁵² Hovannisian, *The Republic of Armenia, Volume III, from London to Sevres, February - August, 1920*, p. 76.

⁵³ Hovannisian, *The Republic of Armenia, Volume III, from London to Sevres, February - August, 1920*, pp. 74-75; Hovannisian, "Pontus and Armenia, 1914-1922," p. 364. Sabahattin Özel wrote that Constantinides had interpreted the San Remo decisions as "salvaging Trabzon from the Armenians." Özel, *Millî Mücadelede Trabzon*, p. 130.

⁵⁴ Hovannisian, *The Republic of Armenia, Volume III, from London to Sevres, February - August, 1920*, p. 79; Sarhan, *Kürtuluş Savaşı Günlüğü II*, p. 494. Venizelos reiterated the same pledges in Geneva during a meeting of the Council of the League of Nations. See Hassiotis, "Shared Illusions: Greek Armenian Co-Operation in Asia Minor and the Caucasus (1917-1922)," p. 152.

⁵⁵ Yerasimos, "Pontus Meselesi (1912-1923)," p. 60. Also see the letter from Hrisanthos, Oeconomos and Constantinides to Millerand, 30 April 1920, FO608/272. That letter can also be seen at Ministère Des Affaires Étrangères Direction Des Affaires Politiques et Commerciales Série E-Levant 1918-1940; Turquie; Carton 320; Dossier 7; Du 16 Mars 1920 au 30 Juin 1920 Vol. 213 Grèce-Turquie, p.135.

gence over an agreement with Armenians.⁵⁶ Venizelos said that he would not oppose incorporation of Trabzon in Armenia anymore because creation of a Pontus state had become an impossibility.⁵⁷ Later conforming to Venizelos' weariness, Hrisanthos suggested that all committees and other formations that were established for the creation of a Pontus republic be shut down. Despite Venizelos' outburst and Hrisanthos' throw in of the towel, both the Greek press in Athens and the Rum press in Turkey did not give up on Trabzon and they even asserted that the Armenians had quitted.⁵⁸ Apparently, the Greek and Rum press tried to keep the morale high. For, Armenians did not intend to quit at all.

The leading Armenian lobby institution in the United States, American Committee for Armenian Independence, called on President Wilson in May and demanded that "all Armenian land be united". Of course, they mentioned Trabzon, too.⁵⁹ A week later, the *Economist* published a news piece in which it was predicted that Trabzon would be made part of Armenia in a final agreement with the Ottoman Empire.⁶⁰ We do not have any evidence whether this publication was made at Armenians' prompt. But it shows that the probability of Trabzon going to Armenia was in the air.

In June, almost totally extinguished Greek and Rum ambitions over Trabzon were enlivened not by Greeks or Rums themselves, but by Lloyd George, the foremost champion of the Greek interests in the Near East. The British premier invited Venizelos to London and offered him the duty to dictate on the Ankara government the peace terms that the Allies had drafted in San Remo.⁶¹ This new development gave Venizelos an opportunity to resume the Greek thrust deeper into Anatolia and perhaps to occupy Trabzon.⁶²

The pretext that Venizelos was seeking arose when the Ankara government forces defeated troops loyal to the Istanbul government near İzmit. Willing to counter Ankara's move, Greek army immediately attacked Bursa and

⁵⁶ Yerasimos, "Pontus Meselesi (1912-1923)," pp. 60-61.

⁵⁷ Özel, *Millî Mücadelede Trabzon*, p. 224; Sonyel, "Yunan Milleti Meclisi Gizli Tutanaklarında Mustafa Kemal ve Türk Kurtuluş Savaşı," p. 12.

⁵⁸ Özel, *Millî Mücadelede Trabzon*, pp. 224-225.

⁵⁹ "President Urged to Use Influence to Unite Armenia", *New York Tribune*, 9 May 1920.

⁶⁰ *Economist*, 15 May 1920, p.998-999

⁶¹ Yerasimos, "Pontus Meselesi (1912-1923)," pp. 61-62; Helmreich, *Sevr Entrikaları, Büyük Güçler, Maşalar, Gizli Anlaşmalar ve Türkiye'nin Taksimi*, pp. 238-239.

⁶² Zeki Sarıhan, *Kurtuluş Savaşı Günlüğü III* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1995), p. 84.

captured the town in early July.⁶³ Greek advance encouraged Trabzon Rums, too. They resumed their propaganda activities in Europe. In this respect, Constantinides and Oeconomos wrote a letter to Philippe Berthelot of the French Foreign Ministry on 10 July. They repeated their same old demand for creation of a Pontus republic. But this time, they added that this entity would be in good-neighborly relations with Armenia and in fact help the latter survive in a very treacherous environment like the one it was already in.⁶⁴

While Venizelos was sending Greek troops deep into Anatolia he was also trying to dissuade Armenians from their claims over Trabzon. He eventually seems to have succeeded and struck a deal with Aharonian on 11 August. According to this, Armenians gave up on Trabzon. In return, Greeks would not cease their military operations in Western Anatolia until the conflict between the Ankara government and Armenia came to an end.⁶⁵ The date of this agreement is quite striking when one considers that the Sevres Treaty, which was signed just one day before the Venizelos-Aharonian arrangement, had given Trabzon along with Erzurum, Van and Bitlis to Armenia, even though the final borders of Armenia would later be fixed by President Wilson.⁶⁶

Akaby Nassibian casts some doubts over the Sevres settlement about Trabzon. Relying on British documents, Nassibian argues that despite the Sevres Treaty, Katheriotis continued his activities for the creation of a Pontus republic. In this regard, the Greek colonel suggested to Armenian leaders formation of Rum military units to facilitate the Armenian occupation of Trabzon. However, the British authorities had warned Armenians that what Katheriotis really intended was the creation of a Pontus state.⁶⁷ Hassiotis, though, tells a different story on this episode. Hassiotis argues that Katheriotis did not have any secret plans and he in fact informed the Armenians of his activities.⁶⁸ And even if Katheriotis aroused the ire of the Armenians, Armenians would not dare getting into any sort of clash with the Greek-Rum duo in a time when they thought

⁶³ Sarhan, *Kurtuluş Savaşı Günlüğü III*, pp. 93-116.

⁶⁴ Ministère Des Affaires Étrangères Direction Des Affaires Politiques et Commerciales Série E-Levant 1918-1940; Turquie; Carton 320; Dossier 7; Du 1 Juillet 1920 au 31 Juillet 1920 Vol. 214 Grèce-Turquie, s.47-51.

⁶⁵ Yerasimos, "Pontus Meselesi (1912-1923)," p. 62.

⁶⁶ Martin Sicker, *The Middle East in the Twentieth Century* (London: Praeger, 2001), p. 122; Vahan M. Kurkjian, *A History of Armenia* (Los Angeles, CA: IndoEuropean Publishing, 2008), p. 394.

⁶⁷ Nassibian, *Britain and the Armenian Question, 1915-1923*, pp. 207-208.

⁶⁸ Hassiotis, "Shared Illusions: Greek Armenian Co-Operation in Asia Minor and the Caucasus (1917-1922)," p. 165 fn.197.

that the Turkish attack was imminent.⁶⁹ Actually, at this time around, Armenia was trying desperately to preserve its present borders rather than expanding. Therefore, it would not be wise for them to be at loggerheads with Greeks and Rums, perhaps the only allies they had who kept the Turkish army busy both in Western Anatolia and in Trabzon.⁷⁰

On 17 August, Avetis Aharonian wrote a letter to Athos Romanos in which he expressed his government's wish to appoint an ambassador to Athens. This person would be Tigran Chaiyan. The Greek government received this letter with great pleasure and wanted to reciprocate by sending Ioannis Pappas to Erivan as the Greek plenipotentiary.⁷¹ But, before Pappas would reach Erivan, the Tashnak government would be ousted from power.⁷²

While the relations between Greece and Armenia were somewhat improving, the Armenian and Rum diaspora communities continued their activities in America and competed fiercely over Trabzon. American Armenians expressed their hopes that President Wilson would include Trabzon in his final map of Armenia. Likewise, the Rum lobbyists also sent a telegram to Wilson and reiterated their claims over Trabzon. But this time, they asked not for an independent Pontus republic but union with Greece.⁷³ So, either the Armenian and Rum diaspora were oblivious of the recent rapprochement between Armenia and Greece, or diaspora communities were acting on their own. We know that not all policies of Greece vis-à-vis Trabzon had made the Rums in Turkey and abroad very happy. About the relationship between the Armenian diaspora, especially in the United States, and Armenia proper, we do not possess much evidence at hand. Yet, we know that Armenia was in a very difficult situation in August-September, pressurized by Bolsheviks from the north and Turks from the west. Therefore, one may speculate that Armenian diaspora activities and

⁶⁹ Hassiotis, "Shared Illusions: Greek Armenian Co-Operation in Asia Minor and the Caucasus (1917-1922)," p. 165.

⁷⁰ Faik Ahmet, "Yılan Hikayesi", *Istikbal*, 8 September 1920 cited in Çapa, "Trabzon'da Yayınlanan "İstikbal Gazetesi"nde Pontus Meselesi," pp. 68-69.

⁷¹ Hovannisian, *The Republic of Armenia, Volume III, from London to Sevres, February - August, 1920*, pp. 404-405. Hovannisian, *The Republic of Armenia, Volume II, from Versailles to London, 1919-1920*, pp. 526-527; Hassiotis, "Shared Illusions: Greek Armenian Co-Operation in Asia Minor and the Caucasus (1917-1922)," p. 146; Leonidas Themistocles Chrysanthopoulos, *Caucasus Chronicles: Nation-Building and Diplomacy in Armenia, 1993-1994* (Princeton and London: Gomidas Institute, 2002), p. 3.

⁷² Hassiotis, "Shared Illusions: Greek Armenian Co-Operation in Asia Minor and the Caucasus (1917-1922)," pp. 145-146.

⁷³ "Turkish Princes Threaten to Join Sultan's Enemies", *New York Tribune*, 21 September 1920.

Armenian government's policies were not well-coordinated, at least around this time.

Meanwhile, a new development in the Near East changed the parameters of the Greco-Armenian dispute/collaboration over Trabzon. On 28 September, the Ankara government forces carried out a counter-attack precipitated by imprudent Armenian encroachment upon Oltu.⁷⁴ On the face of the swift Turkish advance in Eastern Anatolia, Armenians asked from the Allies that Trabzon be occupied by Greeks.⁷⁵ Andrew Ryan from the British High Commission in Istanbul, approved that scenario but also thought that Greece should be promised Istanbul and Trabzon in return for its attack on Ankara. Likewise, British Admiral John de Robeck, who was in Istanbul early October, supported Greek occupation of Trabzon.⁷⁶ On 5 October, Venizelos wrote a letter to Lloyd George in which he stated that all Turkish forces in Ankara and the vilayet of Trabzon should be annihilated in order to wipe out Mustafa Kemal's movement once and for all.⁷⁷ Venizelos believed that this job could be done with British material assistance. As a result, Turks could be removed from Istanbul and a Pontus state could be founded in Trabzon. The population of this new state would be bolstered by bringing in Rums from South Russia. The Pontus state, along with Georgia and Armenia would be a bulwark against "Islamism

⁷⁴ Tansel, *Mondros'tan Mudanya'ya Kadar II*, p. 223; Sarhan, *Kurtuluş Savaşı Günlüğü III*, p. 226; Richard G. Hovannisian, *The Republic of Armenia Volume IV between Crescent and Sickle: Partition and Sovietization* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996), p. 180; Hovannisian, "Simon Vratzian and Armenian Nationalism," pp. 212-213; Kazemzadeh, *The Struggle for Transcaucasia (1917-1921)*, p. 287; Kaçaznuni, *Taşnak Partisi'nin Yapacağı Bir Şey Yok*, p. 60.

⁷⁵ Hassiotis, "Shared Illusions: Greek Armenian Co-Operation in Asia Minor and the Caucasus (1917-1922)," pp. 169-170; Nassibian, *Britain and the Armenian Question, 1915-1923*, p. 210; Sarhan, *Kurtuluş Savaşı Günlüğü III*, p. 232. Semyon Ivanovic Aralov, who was appointed in 1922 as the Soviet Russian plenipotentiary to Ankara, wrote that the Tashnak government indeed asked for Allied assistance. The United States refused to help because they thought they were under no responsibility. England and France, who had encouraged Armenians for a war against Turkey, did not do anything, either. See Semyon İvanoviç Aralov, *Bir Sovyet Diplomatının Türkiye Anıları, 1922-1923*, trans. Hasan Ali Ediz (İstanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 2007), p. 18.

⁷⁶ Yerasimos, "Pontus Meselesi (1912-1923)," p. 62; Nassibian, *Britain and the Armenian Question, 1915-1923*, p. 210.

⁷⁷ *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, First Series, Vol. XIII*, (London: 1963), pp. 157-158; Bilal Şimşir, *İngiliz Belgelerinde Atatürk, Cilt II* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1975), pp. 339-340; Salahi R. Sonyel, *Türk Kurtuluş Savaşı ve Dış Politika II* (Ankara: TTK, 2003), p. 93; Sarhan, *Kurtuluş Savaşı Günlüğü III*, p. 234.

and Russian imperialism.”⁷⁸ About Venizelos’ proposal for a foundation of a Pontus state, Alexander Pallis wrote:

“It is a matter for surprise that so acute a mind as that of Venizelos should have taken this phantom state [the author refers to the Armenian state that was envisaged by the Sevres Treaty. BSB] seriously and that he should further have entertained plans for creating yet another equally moribund state out of the remnants of the Pontine Greeks, who formed an isolated enclave of 200,000 to 300,000 Christians in the Black Sea region, submerged amid a flood of fanatical and warlike Turks and Lazes.”⁷⁹

Venizelos did not say anything in that letter about whether that Pontus state would unite with Greece. However, he had told Henry Wilson, the British Chief of Imperial General Staff, back in July that he had intended to drive Turks out of Istanbul and occupy Trabzon.⁸⁰ So, it was most likely that the Greek premier would attach would-be created Pontus state to the new Greece whose borders would be stretched as far as Ankara.

Venizelos’s offer was discussed at the British cabinet meeting on 12 October. After disclosing the contents of Venizelos’ letter, Lloyd George asked the cabinet members to keep this piece of information confidential.⁸¹ The British premier supported Venizelos’ offer, but some cabinet members raised suspicions that the French and Italians might object. Thus, the cabinet decided that the Greek prime minister’s suggestion should be further elaborated and studied.⁸²

Towards the end of October, Greeks launched an offensive against the Ankara government. However, after long battles around Gediz the Greek offensive stopped.⁸³ This stalemate between Turkish and Greek forces cost Venizelos dearly. He was already in a difficult situation back at home due to severe economic and social hardships. He had hoped to recuperate his political losses in Greece with great victories in Anatolia, which were not forthcoming. As a re-

⁷⁸ *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, First Series, Vol. XIII*, pp. 157-158; Şimşir, *İngiliz Belgelerinde Atatürk, Cilt II*, pp. 339-340.

⁷⁹ A.A. Pallis, *Greece’s Anatolian Venture – and After* (London: Methuen, 1937), p. 146.

⁸⁰ C.E. Calwell, *Field-Marshal Sir Henry Wilson, His Life and Diaries* (London: Cassell & Co., 1927), p. 252.

⁸¹ Şimşir, *İngiliz Belgelerinde Atatürk, Cilt II*, pp. 349-350. Salahi Ramadan Sonyel writes that the British cabinet convened on 10 October. See Sonyel, *Türk Kurtuluş Savaşı ve Dış Politika II*, p. 93.

⁸² Sonyel, *Türk Kurtuluş Savaşı ve Dış Politika II*, p. 94.

⁸³ Stanford Shaw, *From Empire to Republic, Vol III Part I* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 2000), pp. 1187-1188; Tansel, *Mondros’tan Mudanya’ya Kadar II*, pp. 164-166.

sult, he lost the elections in November and was ousted from power.⁸⁴ Though, change of government would not alter Greece's general policy vis-à-vis Anatolia. As a matter of fact, the new government would pursue Venizelos' goals. This would include the annexation of Trabzon.

Meanwhile, the negotiations in European capitals on the future of Trabzon were going on. Especially, Woodrow Wilson, who was assigned by the Sevres arrangement to the task of drawing the final borders of Armenia, was trying hard to persuade his European allies to the incorporation of Trabzon in Armenia. Though, in a memorandum he presented to the Allies on 22 November, Wilson stated that "[t]he majority of the population of Trebizond Vilayet is incontestably Moslem and the Armenian element, according to all pre-war estimates, was undeniably inferior numerically to the Greek portion of the Christian minority."⁸⁵ Despite his own acknowledgement that the Muslims surpassed in numbers Christian elements in the vilayet, the American president still insisted on including Trabzon in Armenia, and hence violated his own principle of "self-determination". Regardless, Trabzon would be part of Armenia in Wilson's final map.⁸⁶

Dorotheos, the Locum-Tenens of the Rum Patriarchate in Istanbul, reacted furiously to the Wilson's map. For, the Rums were much more than the Armenians in Trabzon, the Rum cleric remonstrated. Yet, he failed to mention that Muslims were the biggest group of all in the vilayet.⁸⁷ Thoidis, a leading member of the Trabzon Rum community in Istanbul, joined Dorotheos' protestations of Trabzon's inclusion in Armenia.⁸⁸

While the dispute between Rums and Wilson backed Armenians over Trabzon continued, the final Turkish military offensive against Armenian forces

⁸⁴ Richard Clogg, *Parties and Elections in Greece, the Search for Legitimacy* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1987), p. 88; Richard Clogg, *A Concise History of Greece* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 95; Shaw, *From Empire to Republic, Vol III Part I*, p. 1188.

⁸⁵ *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1920, Volume III*, (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1936), p. 793.

⁸⁶ Razmik Panossian, *The Armenians, from Kings and Priests to Merchants and Commissars* (London: Hurst & Co., 2006), p. 247; Martin Sicker, *Islamic World in Decline: From the Treaty of Karlowitz to the Disintegration of the Ottoman Empire* (London: Praeger, 2001), p. 225; Özel, *Millî Mücadelede Trabzon*, p. 227; Shaw, *From Empire to Republic, Vol III Part I*, p. 1148; Kazemzadeh, *The Struggle for Transcaucasia (1917-1921)*, p. 265.

⁸⁷ Özel, *Millî Mücadelede Trabzon*, p. 227.

⁸⁸ Ministère Des Affaires Étrangères Direction Des Affaires Politiques Et Commerciales Série E-Levant 1918-1940; Turquie; Carton 320; Dossier 7; Du 1 Novembre 1920 au 28 Şubat 1921 Vol. 216 Grèce-Turquie, s.244.

towards the end of November put an end to this entire squabble. Defeated badly, Armenia had to ask for an armistice. Early December, the Ankara government and the Tashnak representatives signed the Gümrü Treaty, according to which Armenians withdrew all their claims over Trabzon along with other Turkish territory. Moreover, a short while later the Tashnaks themselves were ousted from power and the country swiftly fell under Bolshevik control. Thus, the question of Armenian borders became a subject matter for the Ankara government and Soviet Russia. As a matter of fact, in March they signed the Moscow Treaty and in October the Kars Treaty.⁸⁹ With the conclusion of these agreements, all Armenian pretensions over Trabzon came to end. Since one of the would-be parties of a Ponto-Armenian federation was out of the picture, this project, which was perhaps never meant to be, failed completely.

In this whole saga of the Ponto-Armenian federation, there were six parties involved: Trabzon Rums, Greeks, Armenian diaspora, Armenia, Turks and the Allied Powers. Trabzon Rums never shied away from making public their desires for an independent Pontus state. But if this could not be, they would assent to forming a federation with the Armenians in which large autonomy would be granted to each constituent party. Greeks, mainly supporting Trabzon Rums' position, were well aware of the fact that it would be up to the Allies to decide over the future of Trabzon or Armenia, or the whole Near East all together. Therefore, they advised prudence, if not secrecy, in their dealings with the Allies as well as the Armenians. Armenian diaspora and Armenian government in Erivan seemed to have coordinated their common efforts better than the Rums and the Greeks, who sometimes came at loggerheads with each other. Be that as it may, compared to leaders of Armenia proper the diaspora representatives made bolder moves, and asked persistently from the Allies proper compensation

⁸⁹ *Türk İstiklal Harbi IIIncü Cilt, Doğu Cephesi (1919-1921)*, (Ankara: Gnkur. Basımevi, 1965); Salahi Ramsdan Sonyel, *Turkish Diplomacy 1918-1923, Mustafa Kemal and the Turkish National Movement* (London: Sage Publications, 1975), pp. 48-54; Simon Payaslian, *United States Policy toward the Armenian Question and the Armenian Genocide* (New York: Palgrave, 2005), pp. 181-182; Gökay, "Turkish Settlement and the Caucasus, 1919-1920," p. 68; İhsan Ilgar, "Doğu Cephesi (IV)," *Belgelerle Türk Tarihi Dergisi*, no. 11 (Ağustos 1968): pp. 20-32; Rubina Peroomian, "Dashnaksutiun-Bolshevik Relations, 1918-20: Dashnaksutiun's Quest for Peaceful Coexistence," *Armenian Review* 46, no. 1-4 (Spring-Winter 1993): pp. 173-180; Kazemzadeh, *The Struggle for Transcaucasia (1917-1921)*, pp. 287-293; Hovannisian, *The Republic of Armenia Volume IV between Crescent and Sickle: Partition and Sovietization*, pp. 180-192; Stefanos Yerasimos, *Milliyetler ve Sınırlar, Balkanlar, Kafkasya ve Orta-Doğu* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1995), pp. 339-349; W.E.D. Allen, and Paul Muratoff, *Caucasian Battlefields: A History of the Wars on the Turco-Caucasian Border 1828-1921* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 497-500.

for their contribution to the Allied war effort during the WWI. Therefore, for them the question of a Ponto-Armenian federation was merely a Greek-Rum phantasy. Why sharing Trabzon with Rums while there was the chance of having it all, they must have thought. Therefore, until the last moment, Armenians saw their chances better than the Rums' and hoped that the Allies would grant Trabzon to them. But the Allies' prevarication cost them dearly. Even though at the last minute the Allies decided to award Trabzon to Armenia, it was too late because by then Armenia had almost ceased to be. Turks, not taken too seriously by almost all parties except for the Allies, played a significant role in the failure of the project of a Ponto-Armenian federation. Despite Allied negotiations in European capitals over the future of their country, Turks took matters into their own hands and preserved as much as they could the territories that they claimed in their National Pact. Trabzon was one of those territories. Furthermore, they cleared Eastern Anatolia of Armenian troops and forced the Tashnak government to relinquish all claims over Turkish territory. Later on, they would successfully suppress the Rum uprising in Trabzon. And finally the Allies, from day one in Paris until their eventual withdrawal from Turkey, did not act in harmony with one another and got bogged down in their own petty interests that they forgot the pledges they had given Christian communities during the First World War. Among these communities were Rums and Armenians who were promised liberation from Turkish rule, which translated as being granted certain territories of their own. However, once the war was over the Allies became rather reluctant in creating a large Armenia and protecting it. Besides, they did not bother meeting the demands of a small Rum community in Trabzon. This proved decisive for the failure of a Ponto-Armenian federation, which had come about as an expedient solution for Rum-Armenian differences. For, it was the Allies' promises which inspired Rums and Armenians for having territories of their own. But in the end, it would be the Allies' hesitancy and reluctance, combined with Turkish resolve to keep Trabzon, that would call off the possibility of a federation between Rums and Armenians in Trabzon and the Caucasus.