

MUSTAFA KEMAL'S INSTRUCTIONS
(AN INTERCEPTED AND DECRYPTED TELEGRAM)
TO BEKİR SAMİ IN LONDON-A REASSESSMENT OF
THE LONDON CONFERENCE
(21 FEBRUARY - 12 MARCH 1921)
AND ITS IMMEDIATE CONSEQUENCES

YULUĞ TEKİN KURAT Ph. D.

THE ANTECEDENTS

When the Greek army failed to capture Eskishehir and had to beat a retreat before the defences of İnönü in early January 1921, armed conflict gave its way to diplomacy for a while. The initiative came from the Allies, who having met in Paris on 25 January, adopted the suggestion of Count Sforza, the Italian Foreign Minister. Accordingly a conference was called in London between the Allies and the representatives of Greek and Turkish (Istanbul and Ankara) governments¹. The invitation underlined that the basis of talks should be the Treaty of Sevres, but subject to modifications as might have been necessitated by the passage of events.

Indeed certain developments had made the review of the said treaty inevitable. To begin with, after the battle of İnönü (10-11 January 1921) the Allies felt concerned about the Greek prospects in Anatolia. Albeit the fact that Athens was entrusted with the subjugation of the Turkish Nationalist Movement, which was a must for the application of the Treaty of Sevres, the hurdles were not decisively surmounted. Mustafa Kemal proved much stronger than at the time of the signature of the Treaty (10 August 1920). With the appearance of making minor concessions in Sevres, the Allies expected to induce him or a considerable segment of his supporters, to make peace. This was the main reason for the summoning of the Nationalist representatives to London by means of their inclusion in the Istanbul

¹ *Documents on British Foreign Policy, First Series, 1919 - 1939*, London HMSO, 1967, vol XV, p. 37.

delegation. The Allies knew very well that the Istanbul government was feeble. As the recognition of Ankara was out of question, it was under the screen of Istanbul that they wanted to negotiate with the Nationalists. In this respect they were prepared to discuss various subjects – such as the removal of all restrictions in Istanbul, integration of Aintab, Urfa, Mardin and the Smyrna zone to the sovereign Ottoman state, return of the Ottoman Thrace including Adrianople, setting up of an international regime in the Straits compatible with an independent country, payment of the Public Debt also by means of founding special departments and the reorganisation of the Ottoman finances².

Evidently, these items were omitted from the letters of invitation for fear of offending Athens. On the other hand the proposed conference also gained importance, since the return of the exiled King Constantine to power, at the expense of Venizelos, required a new dialogue between the Greeks and the Allies.

Invitations to the conference first had the effect of causing internal disputes both in Greece and Turkey. The Greek premier Rallys decided not to participate, as he could not bear to hear anything on the review of the Treaty. However, his minister of war, Gounaris, being the best man of the King at the same time, was in favour of going to London, which he thought would help in improving Constantine's relations with the Allies. This difference of opinion led to a governmental crisis and ended up in the formation of a new cabinet under Kalegeropoulos, who also assumed the portfolio of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. So Gounaris keeping his position in the new government had won his case³.

Similarly in Turkey, it intensified the war of nerves between Ankara and Istanbul. In response to Grand Vizier Tevfik Pasha's call to assign representatives to join the Istanbul delegation to go to London, Mustafa Kemal sent three telegrams. In his official communication (30 January 1921), he stated that only the delegates of the Ankara government, representing the rights of the nation, could carry out this mission. It was unthinkable that Istanbul having signed the ominous Treaty of Sevres could reverse its position. Accordingly the

² Ibid, p. 38

³ *The Orient News*, 6 February 1921, p. 1 counn 3.

Allies should send their invitation directly to the government of the Grand National Assembly⁴. In his private telegram, however, he pointed out that the Sultan should officially proclaim that he recognised the Grand National Assembly as the only body representing the national will⁵. Also in another telegram Mustafa Kemal appealed to the Sultan himself to recognise publicly the Grand National Assembly and its government. In return for this compliance, the Sultan would continue to reside in Istanbul, but the Assembly would provisionally sit in Ankara with all its powers and faculties and there would no longer be any government in the Ottoman capital⁶.

Needless to say, the leader of the Turkish Nationalist Movement intended to seize this diplomatic opportunity for official recognition both at home and abroad. Thus he would not only oust the Istanbul government but would also repudiate the Treaty of Sevres on the ground that Ankara was not involved in the signing of this document. In order to consolidate this policy, Mustafa Kemal had also asked Ahmet İzzet Pasha, the then minister of the interior of the Istanbul government and a reluctant guest in Ankara, to send a supporting message to the Grand Vizier. Ahmet İzzet had fulfilled this request,⁷ but these overtures had upset both the Sultan and the Grand Vizier to such an extent that these telegrams were left without a reply⁸. Nevertheless the Istanbul daily *Vakit*, summarising the two telegrams of Mustafa Kemal to Tevfik Pasha, broke the news that the Sublime Porte deemed Ankara's proposals not only partial but also against the Constitution⁹.

If it had not been for the intermediation of Italy, the Nationalists could have never made their appearance in London. For the Italian statesmen had become aware of the National Pact and thought that it would be futile to convene a conference without the participation of Ankara in some way or another. Thanks to their efforts, the Ankara

⁴ *NUTUK, Kemal Atatürk Tarafından, 1920 - 1927*, Istanbul Devlet Matbaası 1934, vol II, p. 97-98.

⁵ Rumboldt to Curzon, 7 Feb. 1921, No: 146 E 2021/1/44, F.O 371/6465.

⁶ Rumboldt to Curzon, 8 May 1922, Annual Report 1921, E 4988/4988/44, F.O. 371/7947

⁷ See *NUTUK*, p. 98

⁸ Annual Report 1921.

⁹ *Vakit*, 10 Şubat 1921, p. 1 column 3.

delegation headed by the Foreign Minister Bekir Sami Bey proceeded to Adalia and embarked a cruiser (13 February) bound for Brindisi. When the delegation arrived in Rome (18 February), it still did not have an official invitation. During its short stay in this ancient capital, however, the Italians managed to get the support of the French government. Consequently, upon the official invitation of Lord Curzon, the British Foreign Secretary, the Nationalists left Rome on 20 February and arrived London the following evening.

Even before getting to London, Bekir Sami was tuning the voice of Ankara in his declaration to the French press at the Gare du Nord railway station in Paris: "Nous allons représenter la Nation Turque à Londres, nous sommes seuls mandataires pour cela"¹⁰. When he arrived at the Victoria Station, the Turkish Foreign Minister disappointed the British press at least in appearance, which was unworthy of him as a member of a 'bandit government'. The Times wrote the following: "... well groomed, dressed in a morning coat and smart striped trousers, he does not even wear a fez"¹¹. The Istanbul delegation led by Tevfik Pasha was already in London since 17 February. The British had made the reservations for the two delegations in the same posh hotel, namely Savoy. In so doing they did not want to give the impression that they had recognised two separate delegations officially. In fact, the Allies wanted them to exchange their views amongst each other and present a uniform case to the conference¹². However Bekir Sami was playing tough. He avoided seeing Tevfik Pasha and in the talks which took place in the hotel between the liaison officers of the two delegations on the night of the 21st, the Nationalists insisted on having the sole representation and threatened not to attend the conference otherwise. However this view changed later but Bekir Sami kept on saying "We shall go in separate cars and pass from different roads". He never wanted to associate and even to give the slightest impression of collaborating with the Grand Vizier¹³.

¹⁰ *Le Temps*, 21 Février 1921, Enclosure E 2342/1/44, F.O. 371/6465.

¹¹ *The Times*, 23 February 1921, p. 10 column 4.

¹² Londra Mektupları' Muhabir Ali Rıza, *Vakit*, 23 Şubat 1921, p. 1 clmn 2

¹³ *Vakit*, 8 Mart 1921, p. 1 clmn 3-4.

THE CONFERENCE

For the conference to start its deliberations, the Allies did not have to wait upon the final arrival of the Nationalists. On the contrary, they thought of making good use of Turkish absence in meeting the successors of Venizelos on the first day (21 February). Oddly enough, the discussions in this sitting sounded as if it was a war council rather than a meeting of a peace conference. The Greeks were asked the fundamental question that if they had the necessary economic and military means to maintain their position in the Smyrna vilayet and pacify Anatolia. Both Kalegeropoulos and Colonel Sariyannis, the chief of staff of the Greek army in Anatolia, speaking in turns, said that the Turks had always kept retreating. They had a force of 60 000 men in the front against the Turkish army estimated to be about 20 000 strong. Though the number of the Turkish irregulars could not be determined, Mustafa Kemal's forces were much inferior as compared to theirs. They had absolute confidence in their troop and their objective was to occupy Ankara, which they contemplated doing in three months. With the fall of Ankara, the Nationalist troops would scatter and they would be followed to Sivas if necessary. Count Sforza questioned this optimism and remarked that if the Greek army having reached Ankara without coming into contact with the Turks owing to their retreat, a situation might arise similar to the one "which had led to the downfall of a great army led by one of the world's greatest generals"¹⁴. The Greeks argued that their forces would not suffer the fate of Napoleon.

However the experienced and one armed French general Gouraud called their attention to the fact that they should not underestimate the Turks who were fierce fighters in defence and the French despite their superior forces in the Cilician front and at Aintab had great difficulties¹⁵. Obviously Colonel Sariyannis could not understand the strong Turkish resistance in the southern front, perhaps he thought the units there were of much tougher and ferocious types. He was also mistaken in his views on the battle of İnönü, which he represented as an operation of reconnaissance¹⁶.

¹⁴ *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, vol XV, p. 151

¹⁵ *Ibid*, p. 155

¹⁶ *Ibid*, p. 157

So the Greeks expressed their satisfaction with military matters and affirmed that they could finance this war. But they also asked not to be prevented from taking credits for the rapid conclusion of this campaign¹⁷. Colonel Georges, from the French corner, raised his hand and strongly criticised Sariyannis. Referring to the evaluations of the Allied Military Council held in Paris on 29 March 1920, he said the Greeks needed greater amount of troops. At least four divisions would be necessary for the defence of the Smyrna vilayet. He could not say that a successful operation against Ankara was impossible but he did say that 'such an operation undertaken with the existing Greek resources was one of a hazardous character'¹⁸.

The British premier Llyod George, also acting as the chairman of conference, refused Sariyannis to reply and asked him to submit his views in writing.

The conference could not meet the Turkish delegates the following day owing to the illness of Tevfik Pasha, who suffered from rheumatism. Nevertheless the Allies were satisfied to learn that the delegations were not going to state their differences against one another in the sessions. So the big day came on 23 February when Ankara was *de facto* represented in an international platform.

Llyod George opened the session in saying that the Treaty of Sevres had been signed in order to establish peace in Turkey, but since the signing of it, the real peace had not been achieved. Therefore the great powers had decided to invite the representatives of the 'Turkish Empire' to London to assist them in the termination of conflicts and the restoration of tranquillity.

Tevfik Pasha had a text prepared in French, which was read out to the conference as the views of the Istanbul government. This statement consisting of four articles lacked any specification and was too general in its contents: 1 - The integrity and independence of the countries inhabited by the Turks. 2 - The clear and entire sovereignty of Turkey. 3 - The protection of the right of minorities. 4 - The reaching of an international agreement on the subject of the Straits¹⁹. Nevertheless the short concluding paragraph of the text registered the

¹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 153

¹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 159

¹⁹ *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, vol XV (hence DBFR), p. 172

right of the Ankara delegation to express their views on behalf of the Grand National Assembly. Apparently, in supporting the Nationalists to submit their views, Tefvik Pasha intended to leave the onus of negotiations to Bekir Sami and relieve himself of any responsibility should the talks end in failure.

Bekir Sami claimed to be speaking on behalf of the whole Turkish nation and elaborated some of the principles of the National Pact, which he also read from a text in French. He stated that those were the minimum requirements which should be considered by the Allies as a basis for discussion²⁰.

Llyod George did not think it essential to challenge Bekir Sami as to whether he was entitled to speak on behalf of Istanbul also, but he saw that neither of the delegations had made any reference to Sevres. He therefore felt bound to press the Turkish delegates to say precisely in what respects they thought the Treaty was unjust and contradictory to their principles. Osman Nizami Pasha from the Istanbul delegation remarked that certain clauses in the Treaty might be discussed. Bekir Sami was more outspoken. He indicated that the future of Thrace and Smyrna, the question of the Sea of Marmora, the Straits and economic and financial restrictions imposed by the Treaty might be put into the agenda²¹. He was acting in faith with the National Pact, though without naming it. When Briand, the French premier, asked him to give some more details on these points, Bekir Sami said he needed time to prepare them and proposed that the conference should meet the day after (25 February).

Obviously, the Turkish Foreign Minister wanted to have time to inform Mustafa Kemal and get any necessary instructions in due course. Telegraphic communication with Ankara took more than two days (See Appendix). But Llyod George was not going to let Bekir Sami play for time. He said, all the delegations must have made their preparations before they came to London and the meeting was adjourned for the 24th.

In the evening of 23 February Savoy must have seen a lot of action. For both the Ankara and the Istanbul delegations had agreed in a common text to be presented to the Allies. Tefvik Pasha could

²⁰ *Ibid*, p. 173.

²¹ *Ibid*, p. 171

not come to St. James's Palace for the second meeting, as he felt unwell again. So Mustafa Reshid Pasha, the Ottoman representative in London, assuming the leadership of the Sultan's delegation asked Llyod George to let Bekir Sami read the statement, given the understanding that the Istanbul government reserved the right to speak in any discussion which might arise later²².

The text made an interesting reading as it conformed to the letter and spirit of the National Pact. Its striking political clauses demanded the evacuation of Eastern Thrace, Smyrna and all the territories occupied by the Greek forces in Anatolia. Regarding the financial and economic clauses, Turkey recognised the Ottoman Public Debt, but asked for the distribution of the debt to the countries detached from the empire as a result of various wars²³.

After the heads of the Allies conferred briefly amongst themselves, discussions mainly focussed on the question of Smyrna and Thrace. Bekir Sami was asked to produce his figures regarding the population of these regions. The Allies were informed that in the Smyrna vilayet 79 % of the population were Turkish. The corresponding figures were taken from the Yellow Book, an official French publication in 1897. Its author Cuinet had collected these statistics in 1896 for purposes of the Ottoman Public Debt. Also taking into consideration the Ottoman statistics, the Turks were dominant in Eastern Thrace by being the largest of the four groups (360 417 Turks, 224 680 Greeks, 28 000 Bulgarians, 19 000 Armenians). Bekir Sami stressed that they felt so sure of the accuracy of their statistics that they were even prepared to welcome the appointment of a commission to investigate the same on the spot²⁴.

The chairman concluded the meeting saying that they would see the Greek delegation in the afternoon and the Turkish delegation would then again be invited.

When the Greeks were asked to submit their own statistics, Kaleropoulos did so for the sake of information only. The Greek premier implored the conference not to reopen this question. The Treaty of Sevres, he maintained, had been based on statistics supplied by

²² *DBFP*, vol XV, p. 175

²³ *Ibid*, p. 179-181

²⁴ *Ibid*, p. 179

Venizelos and it was by the acceptance of these statistics that Thrace and the Smyrna vilayet had been given to Greece. If the Turks had proposed another commission of enquiry, it was simply their method of procrastination²⁵.

Thus, after having heard the Greeks and the Turks, the Allies had a private discussion amongst themselves at 6 p.m. Briand argued that the only practical remedy to end the controversy on the accounts of the populations of Smyrna and Thrace was the approval of the Turkish proposal. The Greeks had no reason to be upset, on the contrary a settlement of this kind would also serve their interests, if Kalegeropoulos was so confident of his figures. Therefore the conference should aim to get the approval of the Turkish delegation to accept in advance 'the results of an international enquiry, whatever those results might be'²⁶. Lloyd George said it would be too optimistic to assume that Mustafa Kemal would recognise the Treaty of Sevres with a decision in his favour on Smyrna only. Bekir Sami in his presentation had emphasized his reservations on the other aspects of the Treaty as strongly as he did in the case of Smyrna. Unless the Nationalists had accepted Sevres subject to modifications in the Smyrna vilayet, their resolution would prove valueless. Briand maintained that the decision on Thrace would come out in favour of Greeks, but Smyrna was less certain. Since the Nationalists were specially interested in this area, its retrocession would disarm Ankara and lead to a difference of opinion amongst the supporters of Mustafa Kemal. Otherwise he would not propose to try it²⁷.

In the light of these discussions, a draft prepared by Curzon was adopted for submission to the Greeks and Turks. The draft resolution was mainly based on two principles:

1 – That the delegates would accept the results of the arbitration of the Commission of Enquiry in Eastern Thrace and Smyrna.

2 – That the remaining clauses of the Treaty of Sevres should remain unaltered and should be accepted both by Greece and Turkey²⁸.

²⁵ *Ibid*, p. 182

²⁶ *Ibid*, p. 189

²⁷ *Ibid*, p. 191

²⁸ *DBFP*, p. 193

Curzon, however, warned the Allies that the special sections of the Treaty concerning "Armenia" and "Kurdistan" also needed modification owing to the march of events in Anatolia. It was decided that these points would be communicated verbally.

When the conference resumed its sitting on the following day (25 February), the Turks were called on to express their views on the document which was circulated to them. Tevfik Pasha said 'since a new situation had arisen. . . he was willing to give up his right to speak in favour of the head of the Ankara delegation'²⁹. The Grand Vizier keeping up with his usual tactics, so as to avoid any personal confrontation with the leaders of the Allies, pretended to be doing a favour for Bekir Sami, who then read out a statement.

Accordingly the Turkish Grand National Assembly had welcomed the proposal for the setting up of an international commission of enquiry. However the acceptance of this proposal was dependent on the following conditions: a) An international administration should replace that of the Greeks in order to assure the free work of the commission. b) In exchange for the satisfaction given with regard to this enquiry, the National Delegation would not withdraw its reservations concerning the economic, financial and other clauses of the Treaty. They should be similarly examined in a friendly spirit. c) Upon the acceptance of Turkish proposals as a basis for discussion as underlined at the sitting of 23 February (the principles of the National Pact), the Turkish delegation would consent to the cessation of hostilities with Greece as well as to the exchange of prisoners between all the interested parties³⁰.

Lloyd George refused to comment on this statement. He reiterated that in addition to the pending decision on Thrace and Smyrna, "Kurdistan" and "Armenia" would be open for discussion. Afterwards he put his question bluntly 'Did the Turkish delegations accept the rest of the Treaty of Sevres'³¹. Bekir Sami said that this was a vital question and he would like to have time for consideration. So the meeting with the Turks was postponed to 5 p.m.

²⁹ *Ibid*, p. 196

³⁰ *Ibid*, p. 202-3

³¹ *DBFP*, p. 198

The Turks then withdrew and the Greeks entered the conference-hall. Lloyd George put the same question again, as to whether they would accept the rest of the Treaty of Sevres in advance, pending the conclusion of the enquiry in Smyrna and Thrace and the termination of talks on clauses relating to "Armenia" and "Kurdistan". The British premier emphasized that the Turks had accepted to abide by the decision of the arbitration. He concealed it from the Greeks, however, that the Turkish acceptance was only conditional and the claims against the rest of the Treaty had not been withdrawn, not to mention the proposals for the conduct of enquiry in the said regions. The Greek premier seemed to be more concerned with the stipulation in the resolution that there should be an immediate cessation of hostilities³² He enquired if this meant that the Greek army was to withdraw from its present front lines and lay down its arms whilst awaiting the decision of the arbitration. The Allies assured him that the Greek army would remain in its present position and if necessary officers of the great powers would be attached to the Hellenic and Kemalist armies, in order to control their movements for the sake of preventing unexpected clashes.

Kalegeropoulos was not satisfied. He said they were now ready to take the offensive and to delay that advance for a period of at least two months, awaiting the result of the enquiry, would be a severe blow to the advantages gained by the Treaty of Sevres. He could not predict the reaction of army circles to this decision. As he had no doubt on the justice of the Allies, he felt compelled, however, to consult the Hellenic Constituent Assembly. In fact, the Assembly had already discussed the subject of the London conference and they were given the mandate to plead for the complete maintenance of the Treaty³³.

Lloyd George said that in these circumstances, there was no point of further discussion and they would await the reply of Athens.

At 5 p.m., it was the turn of the Turks to declare as to whether they accepted the rest of the clauses in the Treaty. The Grand Vizier was meaningfully absent again, since he could also be diplomatically ill. Bekir Sami gave the crucial answer by reading out his statement.

³² *Ibid*, p. 193

³³ *Ibid*. 202-3.

The Turks were prepared to make sacrifices for an honourable peace but a comparison between Sevres and the treaties of Versailles (Germany), Saint-Germain (Austria), Neuilly (Bulgaria), Trianon (Hungary) sufficiently indicated that the acceptance of this Treaty was totally incompatible with the rights of a sovereign state. Nevertheless to give a final definite reply, the delegation was going to refer the matter to the Grand National Assembly³⁴.

Lloyd George could not press Bekir Sami to get the answer of 'yes' or 'no'. Since the Greeks were also waiting for instructions, all he suggested was that the Armenian and Kurdish questions should be examined in the meanwhile. Upon this announcement Bekir Sami made a point of delaying his telegram to Ankara in order to see the outcome of talks with the Armenians.

Bogos Nubar and Aharonian came to meet the Allies in the morning session on 26 February. The former claimed to be representing the Armenians in Anatolia and the latter the Erivan republic. These claims were absolutely groundless. Bogos Nubar was a self-appointed spokesman. Aharonian's mandate to represent Erivan was also questionable. Although the Dashnaks had carried out a successful counter-coup against the Bolshevik Armenian government on 19 February, their chances of remaining in power were slim³⁵. Nubar argued that if the Bolshevik regime had threatened the Caucasian Armenia, it should not prevent the great powers from liberating the four vilayets (Erzurum, Van, Bitlis, Diarbekr) from the Kemalist troops. It was with a conquered Turkey and not with Russia that the Treaty of Sevres had been signed³⁶. Aharonian admitted that the Dashnak Erivan government had signed a treaty with the Kemalists. But he had received a letter after the fall of Kars and before the signature of the Treaty of Alexandropol, stating that the Armenians were surrounded both by the Turks and the Russians and would be forced to accept the conditions of their enemies. He was instructed, however, not to recognise this impending treaty and to deny its validity. Aharonian argued that the Turkish Nationalists by invading

³⁴ *DBFP*, p. 205

³⁵ *Ibid*, p. 209

³⁶ *Ibid*, p. 208

“Armenia” sought to render impossible the execution of the Treaty of Sevres which had registered the creation of an Armenian state³⁷.

So the Armenian spokesmen pleaded for the whole maintenance of the Treaty but could not help admitting that they were confronted with serious difficulties. Curzon grouped them under three headings, namely Bolshevism in Russian Armenia, the occupation by Mustafa Kemal of the greater portion of their claimed territory, the inability of great powers to send large forces to help “Armenia”. The British Foreign Secretary also made it clear that the establishment of the frontier as drawn by President Wilson was no longer possible. Therefore he put two questions: What frontiers did the Armenians actually suggest? What were the resources in men and money which “Armenia” could herself provide for the achievement of her independence?

Nubar said he did not know what Wilson’s frontiers did include, but he was prepared to be accommodating. Then Curzon asked Aharonian the clauses of the Treaty of Alexandropol. Aharonian blamed ignorance and stated, however, that he only knew of the return of Kars and Kagızman to Turkey. Nubar also said that the Armenians constituted the majority of the Cilician population. In order to support his contention, he quoted the figures from a book of Pierre Redan entitled ‘La Cilicie et Le Probleme Ottoman’ which showed the population of the Adana vilayet to be 185 000 Moslems as against the 215 000 Christians. Kamerrer from the French delegation disagreed with Nubar and indicated that according to the official figures this vilayet comprised in 1914, 314 000 Moslems and 55 000 Armenians. Nevertheless the French announced that they were prepared to protect the Armenian minorities in Cilicia either by a mixed gendarmerie or by some other arrangement. So France was committed to the Armenians whatever might be her relations with Turkey³⁸.

Curzon concluded the meeting; the proceedings had indicated that the Armenian case was getting much weaker than it was originally thought. Needless to say the so-called Armenian delegates had failed to come up with any practical suggestions.

³⁷ *Ibid*, p. 203

³⁸ *Ibid*, p. 212

When the Turkish delegation came after the Armenians had withdrawn from the conference-hall, The British Foreign Secretary referred to the Kurdish autonomy which was stipulated in the Treaty. Bekir Sami protested in saying that the Kurds did not want such a concession, all they desired was to live together with the Turks like brothers as they had lived for centuries. There was no greater difference between Kurds and Turks than between an Englishman and a Scotchman³⁹. It was true, however, that a society was founded in Istanbul after the armistice for the independence of "Kurdistan", but its leaders in no way represented the population for whom they spoke. On the contrary the Kurds were completely represented in the Grand National Assembly with their deputies elected from various constituencies. Bekir Sami affirmed that for the satisfaction of the Allies, Ankara would consent to accept the despatch of a commission of enquiry or the holding of a plebiscite in the regions concerned⁴⁰.

THE INTERLUDE

There was an interlude in official negotiations whilst definite replies to the Allied resolution were to come from Ankara and Athens. As already mentioned, Bekir Sami sent his message after the conclusion of the sitting on 26 February. Upon its reception on 28 February, Mustafa Kemal lost no time in tabling his instructions to his Foreign Minister which were forwarded on 1 March.

In the first place, Mustafa Kemal never thought that the conference would break up upon the answer of 'No' to the Treaty of Sevres. He was right in his conjecture that the Allies would endeavour to make some new soundings. The contents of his telegram which was intercepted by the British military headquarters in Istanbul and sent to the ministry of defence in London seemed obscure in certain paragraphs. It must have been due to some difficulties in the process of decyphering. On the whole it seemed that Mustafa Kemal was not at all pleased with Bekir Sami's conduct in the conference. He would have preferred his Minister of Foreign Affairs to be obdurate and more

³⁹ *Ibid*, p. 214,

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, p. 213

inflexible in the discussions, with no individual interpretations on the National Pact. He had been given these instructions before leaving Ankara.

Most of all, Mustafa Kemal disapproved the way by which Bekir Sami handled the question of Smyrna and Thrace. For the leader of the Turkish Nationalist Movement, to consent to the appointment of a commission of enquiry under a temporary international military control meant alienation from the Turkish objective. Such an enquiry could be considered only after the Greeks had evacuated all the territories under their occupation and with the resumption of Turkish administration in the said regions⁴¹. He would have also liked Bekir Sami to reject the Treaty of Sevres outright without even considering to examine its clauses⁴². Moreover the conference should not have discussed the Armenian affairs as they were already settled between Ankara and Erivan⁴³. Least of all, Mustafa Kemal would never consent to any kind of foreign administration in Cilicia. If the French were to insist on retaining their units disguised as gendarmes, it would close the door of friendly understanding and result in their forcible expulsion from the southern boundaries⁴⁴.

In conclusion, Bekir Sami was instructed to be quite careful when dealing with financial matters which were deemed more important than the territorial questions. Ankara had recognised the Ottoman Public Debt, but disagreed with the establishment of foreign departments which would set up finance control commissions⁴⁵. He was also cautioned against making friendly approaches to Britain. Apparently Bekir Sami intended to win the support of the British against the Greeks. But Ankara thought that it was a dangerous game to play. Bekir Sami was finally reminded that he should keep absolute faith with the principles of the National Pact and should not go beyond its limits during the discussions at the conference Also he

⁴¹ Mustafa Kemal to Bekir Sami, 1 March 1921, E 2911/1/44. F.O. 371/6466 (See the Appendix).

⁴² *Ibid*, paragraph 5.

⁴³ *Ibid*, paragraph 8

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, paragraph 8

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, paragraph 11.

should not make any commitments prior to the consent and approval of the Cabinet ⁴⁶.

Incidentally the day Bekir Sami's telegram had reached Ankara (28 February) the Greek Assembly debated the resolution of the Allies. Gounaris, as the acting prime minister, referred to the necessity of refusing these proposals. Mentioning the historical role of Greece, he said that the historical forces made it inevitable that Smyrna and Thrace should belong to Greece ⁴⁷. So the Assembly voted unanimously against the conference resolution, declaring that it was impossible to accept the revision of the Treaty of Sevres and that the delegation would be instructed to turn it down ⁴⁸.

Accordingly on 4 March, Kalegeropoulos personally brought the negative Greek reply to Llyod George at 10 Downing Street. Besides the British diplomats were confronted with the urgent task of devising their policy towards Greece. First of all, they suspected Britain's partners, namely France and Italy, of sympathising with the Turks as the discussions in the sittings had indicated. Therefore to put pressure on Greece to submit to the said resolution would have led to the isolation of Athens. Britain had nothing to gain by abandoning Greece to her fate. This would simply mean encouraging Mustafa Kemal who was considered to be an enemy and leaving the ground to France and Italy to support Turkey in yet another battle which the Greeks were unlikely to win. Consequently these two powers would reap all the benefits arising from such a situation which would be detrimental to the British interests ⁴⁹.

In the light of this policy Llyod George urged Kalegeropoulos to moderate his reply and make a fair compromise. The Greek premier had to remember that it was not a question of dealing with Britain alone. The government in London was a strong advocate of Greek claims, but the Greeks had also to deal with France and Italy and make peace with the Turks. The Italians were pro-Turk in their attitude. The French were anxious to come to an agreement with the Turks in Cilicia and their policy was, therefore, more pro-Turk than

⁴⁶ *Ibid* paragraph 12, Paragraphs 1,2 and 11 seem obscure, most probably there must have been some difficulties in the process of decyphering.

⁴⁷ *Vakit*, 3 Mart 1337 1, p. 1, column 2 Ĩ 3.

⁴⁸ Granville to Curzon, 28 Feb. 1921, Telegram E 2709/1/44, F.O 371/6466.

⁴⁹ See the minutes, 2 March 1921, E 2764/1/44, F.O 371/6466.

it had been. In these circumstances the Greeks had no choice but to help Britain by making some suggestion for a compromise which London could press upon France and Italy to accept. Only after that stage could the Allies put pressure on the Turks towards the making of peace. So Kalegeropoulos felt bound to ask Llyod George's advice. The British premier suggested, therefore, as a possible compromise that the Turks should be given the formal sovereignty over Smyrna, but that the Greeks should administer the region, in return they should hand over to Turkey a proportion of the revenues of Smyrna.

The Greek premier said that he personally accepted these proposals but as the details in their application presented certain difficulties he had to consult Athens⁵⁰.

Bekir Sami followed Kalegeropoulos to 10 Downing Street at 12.15 p.m. the same day (4 March). Oddly enough, this appointment was given upon the special request of the Turkish Foreign Minister. He did not call on the Prime Minister to communicate the official reply of the Grand National Assembly. This procedure was to come in the afternoon when the conference resumed its work. Since the British were already aware of Mustafa Kemal's instructions to Bekir Sami owing to the intercepted telegram, Llyod George did not need to be curious. However, Bekir Sami was too anxious to know the British opinion on the Greek rejection of the Allied resolution. Nevertheless he went beyond his instructions in giving credit to the British interests in the Middle East. Bekir Sami gave a detailed account on the Caucasian situation and dwelt on the leadership of Turkey in the foundation of a 'Caucasian Confederation' which should have no ambitions in the direction of Pan - Turanism or Pan - Islamism. This foundation would be a barrier against any danger from the North, whether it was from the Bolsheviks, Mensheviks or a Tsarist government. A Caucasian Confederation as such would deprive the Bolshevik regime of the oil resources in Baku or Grozny apart from the large grain supplies of the region. Once Russia lost her petrol, her economic life would be difficult and she would be entirely at the mercy of Britain. Moreover Turkey would do her best to aid Britain in checking Bolshevism in Central Asia, Bokhara, Khiva and Afghanistan. The

⁵⁰ *DBFP*, Vol XV, 267-269.

role he had proposed for Turkey could never be fulfilled by Greece⁵¹.

Llyod George thanked Bekir Sami for his valuable statement, but for the moment, he said, the question at issue was the settlement on the Treaty of Sevres by a new approach, as a result of the Greek rejection of the Allied resolution. Bekir Sami replied that if the Greeks had refused the arbitration, this seemed to show that they feared that there was no Greek majority in Smyrna and Thrace. Llyod George argued that the Greeks were in possession of Smyrna and no Greek King could order the troops out without sacrificing his dynasty. So if the Turks insisted on the Greeks going out of Smyrna there would be war. The only way to avoid further bloodshed was the solution which would give the sovereignty of the Smyrna vilayet to the Turks while the region remained under the control of Greece. Bekir Sami reminded the British premier that this meant something like rewriting the history of Crete. For the Turkish experience had shown that such practices resulted in a loss of territory within two years⁵². Llyod George, however, emphasized that the Greeks had gone to Smyrna at the request of the Supreme Council including the United States. In these circumstances it was very difficult for the powers to ask Greece to retire. Bekir Sami said if the Greek withdrawal from Smyrna was a cause for humiliation for Athens, it was the question of very existence for Turkey.⁵³

The outcome of this private conversation indicated that it was unlikely that the conference would find a peaceful solution and war was inevitable, which was actually what the Greeks had wanted. It was also a wasted effort on the part of the Turkish Foreign Minister to insist on saying to Llyod George that the Turks were at least of equal, if not better, value than the Greeks as friends.

THE RESUMPTION OF THE CONFERENCE

When the conference resumed its work in the afternoon on 4 March it happened to be a sheer formality. First Kalegeropoulos entered the conference-hall to read the declaration of Athens refusing

⁵¹ *Ibid*, p. 270-272.

⁵² *Ibid*, p. 275.

⁵³ *Ibid*, p. 278

the Allied resolution Half an hour later it was the turn of Bekir Sami to announce the decision of Ankara. In fact, he had written his own version in the light of his instructions. So the Grand National Assembly was accepting the enquiry on the populations of Smyrna and Eastern Thrace under the direct supervision and effective control of the Allied authorities. In this respect, Bekir Sami did not refer to the necessity of the cessation of the Greek occupation in all the Turkish territories as instructed by Mustafa Kemal. He even went to the extent of softening the Turkish rejection of Sevres:

'The Grand National Assembly declares itself ready to accept the other provisions of the Treaty of Sevres, provided they be adopted to conditions indispensable to the existence of a free and independent Turkey'⁵⁴. Needless to say, Bekir Sami pursued a policy in which he wanted to demonstrate to the conference that Ankara desired to be a peacemaker and not a warmonger like the Greeks.

In this role Bekir Sami also accepted to discuss the question of the exchange of prisoners with the British. In Mustafa Kemal's opinion, however, this question should not be dealt with before the conclusion of peace based on the National Pact⁵⁵.

Disregarding the private conversation between Llyod George and Kalegeropoulos the conference seemed to have been faced with a deadlock. However the suggestion of the French premier, that the Greeks should again consult Athens before taking a final decision to refuse the advice of the Allied powers⁵⁶, suited Llyod George's designs. This was indeed what Kalegerepoulos was going to do. Count Sforza said it would be easy to deal with Bekir Sami who seemed to be ready to accept the decisions of the great powers, since he was making his requests with a humble frame of mind⁵⁷.

Athens, however, did not find it necessary to review its decision but sent Gounaris to London for further talks instead. Apparently Greece did not want to assume the responsibility for the break up of the conference at that stage. But Llyod George did not think that this strong man of Athens was coming with an olive branch in his hand.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, p. 281

⁵⁵ Mustafa Kemal to Bekir Sami, 1 March 1921 (See Appendix para. 4)

⁵⁶ *DBFP*, vol XV, p. 283

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, p. 280

He would try to convince the Allies on the necessity of the Greek advance⁵⁸.

When the Allies met on 9 March, that is to say after Gounaris's arrival in London, to decide on their course of action in the conference, Llyod George revealed the change in his policy altering the standpoint on Smyrna and Thrace. To dissuade the Turks from insisting on the evacuation of Smyrna by the Greeks, they should make some concessions in some other regions. For instance the Allies should have a stronghold at Chanak. He did not think that any of the great powers would be willing to keep large garrisons at Istanbul. It would be better and cheaper to control it from the Dardanelles and let the Turks have the city to themselves. Llyod George also suggested that the whole of the Ismid peninsula except for Scutari (where the Greeks should be stationed) would be given up for Turkey.

He said that by making these concessions, the Allies would rid themselves off the main Turkish argument. For the Turks had always objected to the fact that their freedom in Anatolia was curtailed. Therefore the Allied control in the mainland should be reduced to the minimum. If they made these concessions and gave a portion of the hinterland of Smyrna to Turkey, then Bekir Sami would have something to offer to Ankara⁵⁹. The Allies then decided to see the Greeks and the Turks on the 10th and lay down their proposals which were mainly as follows:

- 1 - The withdrawal of the Allies from Istanbul and the Ismid Peninsula.
- 2 - Some arrangement which provided for the Turkish sovereignty and Greek administration in Smyrna.
- 3 - Relaxation of the financial and military controls in Anatolia⁶⁰.

Accordingly Llyod George was going to confer with Gounaris whilst Briand met Bekir Sami together with Vansittart, the permanent undersecretary of the British Foreign Office.

The following day Kalegerepoulos came to 10 Downing Street accompanied by Gounaris. The Greek minister of war outlined the

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, p. 364.

⁵⁹ DBFP, vol XV, p. 365

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, p. 364-65.

policy of his country. He had gathered that the Turks would not compromise on anything other than the withdrawal by Greece from Anatolia. This made any settlement impossible. In these circumstances it was up to Greece, he said, to complete the mission, namely the enforcement of the Treaty by means of her military forces. Gounaris was endeavouring to obtain the consent of the Allies for the resumption of military action against the Nationalists. In this respect he raised the question of the Straits on which he knew that the British were quite sensitive. So he said that the main objection of the Turks to the Treaty was not so much the existence of Greece in Anatolia as the regime established on the zone of the Straits. This regime would be threatened by the withdrawal from Asia of its principal guardian, namely Greece⁶¹.

However, he failed to impress Llyod George, who asked him to consider the proposals drawn by Britain. They were not yet shown to the French and the Italians⁶². Accordingly the Turks would have the sovereignty and the Greeks the possession of the town of Smyrna. The rest of the Smyrna vilayet would be placed under a Christian governor, with a gendarmeria drawn from the population in proportion to its nationality in the different districts. This regime would exist for five years, afterwards the great powers or the League of Nations would reconsider the whole question⁶³.

Gounaris asked what was the difference between this scheme and the one previously shown to Kalegeropoulos. The British premier said, there was all the difference in the world. The decision of the Commission of Enquiry as proposed by the Conference might have led to the evacuation of Smyrna by the Greeks, whereas this new scheme secured the town of Smyrna to Greece and provided a neutral government for the whole vilayet. So Llyod George suggested that the Greek statesmen should study this scheme carefully and inform Curzon of their views in the afternoon. In the meanwhile this scheme would be presented to the French and the Italians as well as the Turks⁶⁴.

After the Greeks had withdrawn, the French premier joined Llyod George at 10 Downing Street. He said both Bekir Sami and

⁶¹ *Ibid*, 367-68.

⁶² *Ibid*, p. 370.

⁶³ *Ibid*, p. 368

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, p. 370

his best man Nihat Reshid were impressed with the Allied proposals but their powers were strictly limited. Therefore it would be necessary for them to contact Ankara and get some fresh instructions. Nevertheless they would review the proposals and give their answer at 4 p.m.

Then the Allies did have a lengthy exchange of view regarding the military and financial concessions in Turkey. In the course of this discussion, the British handed their partners a copy of their new scheme which they had already delivered to the Greeks. Llyod George suggested that they should wave off all their claims on reparations in Turkey in return for Turkish concessions in Smyrna.

Briand was of the opinion that if Bekir Sami could inform his people of the Allied proposals, there would be a new revolution in Ankara, but he must have time to tell them. It was natural for the extremist Turks to resist the Treaty of Sevres but not all the Turks had the same view. On the other hand, he said, the Greeks were anxious to fight and the Allies should not stop them if they really wanted it. If the Greeks failed to defeat the Turks, then there would be a change of feeling in Greece and a tendency towards peace. That would be the moment for the Allies to bring the two conflicting parties together⁶⁵.

Briand was convinced that Bekir Sami was the peace-maker, but he was curtailed by some of his own delegation. To support his opinion, the French premier informed his colleague that the Turkish Foreign Minister had stated that the Turks would give all the necessary guarantees regarding the protection of the Christian population in Cilicia. This indicated that Bekir Sami was to reach an agreement with Briand in the southern front. The Allies then decided that both the French premier and Count Sforza should see the Turkish Foreign Minister at 4 p.m. when he would bring his reply. They were to inform Bekir Sami of the new British proposals, however no document would be given to him before the Greeks had had their say on the submitted scheme⁶⁶.

The Greeks brought in their written reply at 5.15 p.m. and Gounaris defended it verbally. In short, he insisted that the proposed

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, p. 371

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, p. 378-79..

Christian governor of Smyrna would have to be a Greek. Regarding the gendarmerie itself, he came with the counter-proposal that during the interim period of its organisation the Greek officers would command all the respective units. Gounaris also made it clear that the signature of a such a protocol would be conditional on the immediate and full application of the rest of the clauses of the Treaty of Sevres⁶⁷. In other words, the Greeks were aware that it would be impossible for the Turks to adhere to their views. What they wanted was war not peace.

At 7.15 p.m. Briand and the Italian Foreign Minister gave an account of their talk with the Turkish head of the Nationalist Delegation. Bekir Sami had decided to go to Ankara and put the whole question to the Grand National Assembly. In the absence of fresh powers and with the time involved in getting them, he did not think he could do much in London. Therefore he had asked for the official communication of the two documents, namely the proposals for the modification of the Treaty of Sevres and the Smyrna scheme. Llyod George remarked that it would be practical to give the Turks a summary of these proposals. If the Grand National Assembly agreed in principle with the proposals in the summary, the actual details could be worked out later. Briand also suggested that another copy of the summary should be given to the Istanbul delegation, although they had been discreet during the proceedings of the conference, it might be useful in having their influence with the moderate Turks⁶⁸.

However these developments were far from avoiding the forthcoming battle in western - Anatolia. Albeit the fact that Bekir Sami appeared to be compromising, this did not empower the Allies to forbid the Greeks to renew their advance. Particularly, Llyod George made it clear to his colleagues that he did not want the personal responsibility for restraining the Greeks. His position was a peculiar one, because he was the only person present in this conference who had invited the Greeks to land at Smyrna in 1919. Neither Clemenceau nor President Wilson were there. Therefore, he said, the French and the Italians might take a more independent view of this situation. The Greeks had also told him (10 March) that they were not going to

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, p. 382-386.

⁶⁸ *DBFP*, vol XV, 387

attack for another two weeks. Therefore much depended on the Turks during this period⁶⁹.

Briand felt quite unhappy about the Greek attitude. He said if the Greeks persisted on the strict maintenance of the Treaty of Sevres, it would not be possible for him to make any proposals to the French Parliament in this respect. It was because, France did not want to remain in Cilicia and the Parliament was very sensitive to this question, not to mention the fact that the Budget Committee had refused to make any appropriations for military funds in this region. Nevertheless he agreed that the Greeks should not think that the Allies forbade them to take the offensive⁷⁰. He also suggested that something written should be given to the Turks who must be informed of the Greek views on the Smyrna proposals. Accordingly it was agreed that the Turks would be given texts which would be more than a summary.

The conference had a final summing up meeting with the belligerents on 12 March. The Allies told them that they should take these proposals to their governments for serious considerations and give their replies in the earliest possible time.

IMMEDIATE CONSEQUENCES

At the final meeting of the Conference, Bekir Sami had announced that he declined to accept the responsibility for the delay in the restoration of peace, resulting from the refusal of Greece to agree to arbitration. He had failed in his endeavours to obtain the British support against Greece. Nevertheless he took advantage of the French antagonism to King Constantine and the Italian delusion to the *fait-accomplie* at Smyrna in 1919 and was able to conclude two agreements. The one with the French was signed even before the official termination of the Conference, that is to say on 11 March. The agreement provided for a cessation of hostilities, the exchange of prisoners, the evacuation by the French forces of all the territories attributed to Syria in Anatolia by the Treaty of Sevres and their integration to the Turkish state. In these territories, however, the French officers

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, p. 393

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, p. 389-390

would assist a newly organised police force and all the administrative personnel of Cilicia was to remain in office. The ethnic minorities were to be protected and there was to be a Franco - Turkish economic collaboration. A French group was to be given the concessions for the mines of Ergene. The section of the Baghdad line between the gates of Cilicia and Nusaibin was to be transferred to the French group and the frontier between Syria and Turkey would be finally defined ⁷¹.

The Italian agreement signed on 12 March contained more important features. It provided Italian - Turkish economic collaboration for the development of various vilayets (Adalia, Afyon, Konia etc) with the grant of several concessions. Also the concession for the coalmines of Hereclea was to be given to an Italian - Turkish group. In return for these concessions, the Italian government undertook to give effective support to the Turkish delegation for the return to Turkey of Thrace and Smyrna. These stipulations would come into force by means of a convention to be made between the two parties, immediately after the conclusion of peace ensuring the independence of Turkey ⁷².

Thus Bekir Sami's dealings not only surpassed his instructions but even violated the principles of the National Pact, particularly with regard to the economic concessions granted to the French and the Italians. Needless to say, he had taken these steps on his own initiative and responsibility. In doing so he attempted to drive a wedge in the Allied unity against Turkey. Besides these agreements constituted an indirect recognition of the Nationalist regime in Ankara and annoyed the British to a great extent. Curzon blamed the French for having violated the London agreement of November 1915 by which the Allies (Great Britain, France, Italy and Japan) were engaged not to make separate peace with their enemies without consulting each other. The French argued that they had not kept this deal secret from London, if not the actual details ⁷³.

The British, however, wanted to maintain this unity by a show of cooperation in Istanbul. So it was up to Rumbold, the British high

⁷¹ Rumbold to Curzon, 8 May 1922, Annual report 1921, E 4988/4988/44 F.O 371/7947.

⁷² *Idem*,

⁷³ *Idem*

commissioner in the city, to take his French and Italian colleagues to an audience of the Sultan on 31 March, without knowing perhaps that the Greeks were about to suffer a second defeat in the front at İnönü the same day. Rumbold in speaking on behalf of all the high commissioners said that the Allied proposals of the London Conference provided a favourable opportunity for Turkey. Entrusting the goodwill of the Sultan, he asked the sovereign to use his influence to promote a settlement of the question. The Sultan seemed to be, however, more preoccupied with the internal situation. He referred to the telegrams sent by Mustafa Kemal to Tevfik Pasha. This showed, in the Sultan's opinion, the mentality of the Ankara leaders. He called Mustafa Kemal and his associates a handful of brigands who had established control in Anatolia. The Sultan said that there was no hope that Ankara would accept the London settlement and added that he was in an isolated and helpless position⁷⁴.

This was yet another example indicating that the question of peace could no longer be settled in Istanbul and the power, as far as Turkey was concerned, rested in Ankara.

The French were the first to leave London on the 12th, after Briand had made his deal with Bekir Sami. The Nationalist Delegation, however, stayed until the 17th, during which time the Turkish Foreign Minister also made a preliminary agreement with Curzon on the exchange of Turkish and British prisoners. It was interesting that there had been no contact between Bekir Sami and Ankara since the beginning of March. The acting Minister of Foreign Affairs Muh-tar Bey, in a statement at the Grand National Assembly on 13 March, said that they had not heard anything from the delegation for the last ten days but they were not worried. Actually Bekir Sami called in Paris on his way back (18 March) and in a press interview declared that Ankara would be content with the agreement which he had made with France⁷⁵. So the consequences of the London conference reflected in the press for the common knowledge of public opinion. Count Sforza addressing the Chamber of Deputies on 21 March in Rome outlined the Italian policy. He said that his government had realised the significance of the Nationalist Movement in Anatolia and had adopted

⁷⁴ *Idem.*

⁷⁵ *Vakit*, 26 Mart 1337, p. 1, clmn 1

a policy of conciliation as the best course to be followed in the conference. Regarding Sevres, he emphasized that there was no basis for the application of this Treaty unless some of its fundamental clauses had been modified. Count Sforza also announced the signature of the Italian - Turkish agreement and expressed his hopes for large Italian investments in Turkey after the conclusion of peace⁷⁶. Amongst the participants of the great powers, the French premier was the first representative to give an account of the London conference to his Parliament on 16 March. He stated that a settlement of the Treaty of Sevres on the old basis was no longer possible. France was fighting in Anatolia for humanitarian purposes in order to protect the minorities, but this policy cost much in lives and money. Therefore a compromise leading to peace was absolutely necessary. He concluded in saying that having met the Turks of Ankara who spoke French like a native, they had reached grounds of agreement as far as France and Turkey were concerned^{76a}.

Ankara obtained the full account of the London conference in a cyphered telegram which was sent by Bekir Sami from the British capital on 12 March and had reached its destination in the evening of the 13th. Its contents were submitted on 17 March in a secret session of the Grand National Assembly. This presentation caused the protest and irritation of the great number of the deputies. The members of the delegation were blamed for being incompetent and having acted with ill faith. The government was also criticised for its choice of this team; the deputies claimed that it was done haphazardly. The Assembly was more sensitive on the agreement made with France than the one with Italy, since the latter did not bring any immediate imposition and was conditional on the conclusion of peace. Tunalı Hilmi Bey, deputy from Bolu, stated that it was even premature to confront the European powers around a conference table and ask them to consider the principles of the National Pact. It was because the military situation in the country was not yet suitable for doing so⁷⁷. Mustafa Kemal eased the tension in asking the acting Foreign Minister to read the statement of the Cabinet which rejected the Bekir Sami -

⁷⁶ *Vakit*, 24 Mart 1337, p.1. clmn 3

^{76a} *Vakit*, 29 Mart 1337, p.1. clmn 2

⁷⁷ *TBMM Gizli Celse Zabıtları*, TBMM Basımevi, Ankara 1980, vol II, p.7

Briand agreement. It was, however, decided that the Assembly should await the arrival of the delegation when its leader would be asked to account for his deeds. Prior to this no official decision was to be taken⁷⁸.

The Greeks, on the other hand, had only kept faith with their undertaking in the conference that they would delay their attack on Eskişehir for two weeks and on 27 March they resumed their action. The following day Mustafa Kemal addressing the Assembly said that it was going to be a long war. He did not forget to add that returning from the conference table to the battlefield, the Greeks had proved themselves that their claims on Smyrna and Thrace were without any foundation. Also their refusal to abide by the proposals of the London Conference had justified the legality of the Turkish demands⁷⁹.

The Turkish Nationalist Delegation had got stuck in Europe because of connection difficulties in its itinerary. Travelling via Bucharest - Constanza and by sea to Inebolu, it could reach Ankara not before the first week in May. Immediately after his arrival, Bekir Sami was interviewed by the Cabinet and had to resign (8 May). However, the matter could not rest in the Cabinet. It had to be brought to the consideration of the Grand National Assembly as the highest authority, not only in accordance with the resolution made in the secret session on 17 March but also for the approval of this resignation and the election of a new minister. Mustafa Kemal had created such an atmosphere in the secret sitting on 12 May that the Assembly exonerated Bekir Sami instead of sending him for trial. The President of the Assembly, speaking on behalf of the government said that they had fallen into disagreement with the Minister of Foreign Affairs because of his policy and he had tendered his resignation (which was read out for the knowledge of the deputies)⁸⁰. Mustafa Kemal stated, however, that they were not going to close the door of negotiations with the west. In other words, their objections focussed on the concessions granted by Bekir Sami to the French and not to his approach to find a common ground for agreement. Therefore the Cabinet had adopted the policy of continuing talks with the French

⁷⁸ *Ibid*, p. 2-3

⁷⁹ *Vakit*, 30 Mart 1337, p.1 clmn 3.

⁸⁰ *TBMM Gizli Celse Zabıtları*, vol II, p. 73

based on the modifications of Bekir Sami - Briand agreement. This did not mean that they were making concessions on the National Pact, on the contrary they would endeavour to bring the French to consent to their counter proposals. In so doing, however, they did not want to give them the impression that the previous deal had been rejected by the Assembly, although it was a fact. So they had forwarded their counter-proposals in advance to General Gouraud at Adana for the immediate knowledge of Briand. The counter proposals were mainly as follows:

1 - Definite French zones of economic influence was unacceptable as it might easily become political, but Ankara proposed to concede throughout Turkey vast fields for French enterprise.

2 - When Turkey recovered the sovereignty over Cilicia, she alone should have the initiative for the organisation of the gendarmerie there.

3 - The rectification of the Turkish - Syrian frontier should satisfy Turkish claims and guarantee economic rights to both parties. Once agreement was reached in these principles all other questions would be overcome⁸¹.

Thus Mustafa Kemal had given the understanding to the Assembly that in view of these counter-proposals, it was quite natural for Bekir Sami to resign, because he could not defend these new modalities as the author of the previous agreement, which would have contradicted him. Bekir Sami followed this pattern in declaring to the Assembly that he was the only person responsible for the making of these agreements both with France and Italy. None of the members of his delegation were involved and he was ready to account for his deeds in the Court of Independence if the House had so desired⁸².

For his exoneration, however, Mustafa Kemal had already stated that Bekir Sami had opened the venue of negotiations with the west and he was known to the European statesmen. Therefore he would be useful to Ankara as its agent in the western capitals in making diplomatic contacts. Accordingly the Assembly approved the foreign policy of the Cabinet, which entailed the election of a new minister, the resignation of Bekir Sami and his mission abroad.

⁸¹ Sir Cheetham to Curzon, Paris, 6 July 1921, E 7771/1/44, F.O 371/6471.

⁸² *TBMM Gizli Zabıtları*, p. 74-75.

CONCLUSIONS

The conference of London with its antecedents, proceedings and immediate consequences was a new experiment in the practice of the Nationalist diplomacy with regard to the relations with the western powers, officially the World War I enemies of the defunct Ottoman Empire. It was the determined resistance of Ankara in quest of an independent and undivided Turkey that had forced the European Cabinets to consider to make some minor concessions in the Treaty of Sevres. Although Mustafa Kemal refused to meet them on the grounds of this treaty, he could not turn a deaf ear to such a diplomatic opportunity which provided the best means of propaganda for the explanation of the Turkish case. However the participation of the Ankara delegation in the conference happened to be a last minute arrangement. The impending uncertainties on the status of the Nationalist representation caused a strong opposition to the dispatch of such a mission. In the debates which took place in the Grand National Assembly, the Cabinet succeeded in coming out of this stalemate declaring that the delegation would go to London as a propaganda mission, bound to explain the principles of the National Pact, though without naming it. Reference to the National Pact by name would be avoided, since it was the making of the Istanbul Parliament originally and could be used against the Nationalists with the connivance of the Sultan's representatives under the pressure of the Allies⁸³.

But as things turned out in the proceedings of the conference, Bekir Sami found himself in the position of Tevfik Pasha, the head of the Istanbul delegation, defending the sovereign rights of his country. So there was a surprising change in the functions of the spokesman of the Ankara delegation. Instead of putting the inflexible Nationalist standpoint to the Allies, he assumed the role of an officially recognised Foreign Minister. Strangely enough, the Allies purposely gave him that impression for the attainment of their goals, which were in essence the maintenance of the Treaty of Sevres with the granting of minor concessions so as to disarm Ankara. But the Allies were divided amongst themselves in the conduct of this policy. For instance, while France and Italy were inclined to accept the complete evacuation

⁸³ *Ibid*, p. 74.

of Anatolia by the Greek force, Britain felt obliged to keep Greece at least on a bridgehead in the Smyrna vilayet.

On the whole the Allies were convinced that the Treaty of Sevres could no longer be executed on the old basis. It was only the Greeks who had pinned their hopes to the full maintenance of the Treaty by means of further military action, with the objective of advancing to Ankara. Underestimating their setback in the First Battle of İnönü, their policy in the conference was to obtain the consent of the great powers to their military objectives. Indeed neither of the Allies wanted to assume the responsibility for stopping the Greeks to advance. A Greek victory over the Turks would have regenerated the basis for the full application of the Treaty. Therefore neither France nor Italy had anything to lose. But these powers did not feel optimistic about the Greek success. Accordingly they saw no harm in making separate deals with Bekir Sami for the propagation of their own interests. The Nationalist Foreign Minister was clever enough to take advantage of this frame of mind. Thus he had divided the Allied unity in the understanding of Sevres as well as putting the blame on Greece for her uncompromising attitude.

Nevertheless it is quite difficult to determine the thoughts of Bekir Sami in the transaction of such deals which most of all violated the economic principles of the National Pact. He could have defended himself on the grounds that in return for economic concessions, the French evacuation of Cilicia with the adjoining regions and the Italian support against the Greek presence in Anatolia and Eastern Thrace were secured. But he had failed to understand the fact that the Allies looked upon these agreements as subsidiary conveniences within the part and parcel of the Treaty of Sevres. In other words, in the opinion of both Italy and France, the spirit of this Treaty was as alive as ever.

Mustafa Kemal was able to detect their strategy, but he wanted to play the game at his own terms. These agreements could be manipulated in conformity with the Turkish interests, particularly with the object of isolating Britain from France and Italy. It was mainly for this reason that Bekir Sami was able to save his skin from the angry deputies in Ankara. Even as early as May 1921, Atatürk had realised the importance of a flexible diplomacy so long as it did not prejudice the Turkish interests. In the international platform he had the

Bolshevik Russia behind his back, but this did not mean that he ought to shut the doors on the west. On the contrary, he was resolved to meet the western powers provided they became accommodating.

On the whole, the conference in London culminated in the *de facto* recognition of the Ankara government. It also made it clear that with an incapacitated and isolated Sultan there could be no settlement of the Turkish question without an agreement with the Grand National Assembly. Nevertheless the time was still premature for the Allies to forsake the Treaty of Sevres.

A P P E N D I X

Moustapha Kemal to Bekir Sami, 1 March 1921 - BLACK JUMBO - Decyphered, GHQ Cpl. to DMI, E 2919/1/44 F.O. 371/6466 P.R.O (Public Record Office)

Your tel. 26 was received on the 28th. I believe points which you desire delegation enlightened on were explained clearly in addition to the provisions of our national oath, which forms the basis of our programme during discussions and exchange of opinion which took place while you were here. Nevertheless I beg to state here, under my view one by one on the important points raised in your tel.

1. Particulars of principles regarding economic and financial questions are untenable.

2. There is no such thing as the Kurdish unity.

3. Matters affecting Armenian and Georgian affairs have been settled with the respective governments. There is no need of referring to these questions at the London Conference.

4. Exchange of prisoners of war can be affected after the concluding of peace with our national oath.

5. To offer to us to accept the Sevres treaty should in the first instance be categorically rejected without examination.

6. Your approval in principle of the proposal to examine question of majority of population of Thrace and Smyrna is irreconcilable with our conviction and insistence that such action is unnecessary.

However as I have stated in my previous cypher message, it should be laid down as a *sine qua non* condition that this investigation can only

be carried out after Greek troops and their civil administration and everything Greek is set aside (withdrawal) from these regions which should be handed over to Turkey.

7. During discussion with Greeks(?) - Conference should not only be told that they have no right whatever over Thrace and Smyrna but you should also persuade it (the Conference) that in the event of their insisting on stopping in our country, we could expel them with an army sooner or later.

8. Our southern frontier should be demarcated in accordance with outlined principles. We cannot agree to retention of a single French gendarme in our territory whatever north of this boundary or in Cilicia. I cannot see any difference between the statement made to you by (?) Cabinet and the one made by Picot at Sivas and by De Caix at Angora. Desire of the French to save the ground for agreement by such cunning proposal would only serve to our closing the doors to a military victory which we could in the meanwhile win over the French in Cilicia.

9. We recognize our Public Debt only as discussed when you were here but while there is no necessity for recognising the Foreign Debt establishments we cannot agree to accord privileges and power to these establishments which would set up commission of finance control.

10. You are not at all right in your views concerning installation of a provisional international administration on the exercise of international military control in Smyrna and Thrace till termination of enquiry. Point of view explained in my para.6 should be taken as a principle by you. The condition providing for the participation of our officials(?) too in the committee of investigation which either exists or its appointment is contemplated is in no way sufficient for securing our objective.

11. Unless the conditions of peace which should be concluded afresh between the Entente Powers and Turkey and defined, it still cannot form subject of discussion.

12. Of the peace conditions financial and economic clauses are of paramount importance compared with the dealing with territories. You should consider matter of benefiting from opportunities presented to us by events at London Conference. But you should at the same

time take care absolutely not to be deceived by giving extensive credits to England's amour propre, for we do not approve your desire to grant some nominal privileges to English for receiving peace. You may also find to take into consideration privilege, be it nominal, given English would be sufficient to destroy our independence which is the spirit of our national cause. Powers granted to Y. Exc's delegation area confined within the limits of national oath. Maximum applies to the defined and limited points, which as it was pointed out when you were here, and subject previously consulting us about them.