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*Отримано: 29.06.2017.*

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## **TURKEY AND UKRAINE DURING THE FIRST WORLD WAR**

### **Introduction**

Until the World War I, history of Ukraine went through great milestones. Ukraine was both a zone of influence and conflict between Russia, Poland, Lithuania and Ottoman Empire, and sometimes divided between Russia, Ottoman Empire, and Poland. Ukraine had to tackle with these three strong neighbors. Ukraine was under the dominance of Russian Tsardom between 1775-1918. National consciousness started to arise with the modern nationalism in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Revolutions of 1848-1849 had a strong nationalist reflection in Western Ukraine. The opinion that Ukrainian people constitute a separate nation from the Russians is the result of these nationalist activities. World War I also brought significant changes to this situation. The collapse of Russian Tsardom with the October Revolution in 1917 and the emergence of a civil war provided the long-awaited opportunity to Ukrainians to announce their independence. Ukrainian Central Rada, which gathered on March 17<sup>th</sup>, 1917 begun to work. Finally, on December 26<sup>th</sup>, 1918, Ukrainian People's Republic was announced<sup>1</sup>. Although it is claimed that Turkish-Ukrainian relations were based on hostility during this process, on the contrary, Turkish-Ukrainian relations were mostly amicable<sup>2</sup>.

World War I is a war which affected the world history very significantly in every aspect. It had economic, political, social, and cultural consequences which we could not go into the details here. Borders of most of the countries were redrawn, a new world order was tried to be established. Of course, it should never be considered that this new world order adhered to equitable principles. This is also clearly revealed by the new order and drawn borders. This unnatural sharing of land brought new issues, and the world gradually drifted into a second war. One should look into the new world order established after the World War I to find the basis of the World War II and the extant issues.

### **1. Turkey-Ukraine Relations During the First World War**

Turkey-Ukraine relations, the subject of our paper, coincide with this problematic period. Until then, Ukraine was under the invasion of Poland, Russia, and a region in the Western part of the country was under the invasion of Austria although for a short period.

Cossacks are an important factor in Ukrainian history. Ukraine was under the dominance of Russian Tsardom during the World War I, and gained independence only towards the end of the war with October Revolution in 1917 and country borders were demarcated. However, as a nation, Ukrainians always remained Ukrainian. Throughout their history, they mainly clashed with the Russians.

During the World War I, the first political and economic relations between Turkey and Ukraine were reflected in Turkish archives. We are going to evaluate Turkey-Ukraine relations based on these archived documents.

### *1.1. Political Relations*

Political relations between Turkey and Ukraine during this period is focused on the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk on 3 March 1918, mutual confirmation and presentation of the agreements, and the establishment of Ukrainian Embassy and Consulate in Turkey.

According to the treaty signed on 9 February 1918 in Brest-Litovsk between Ottoman Empire, Germany, Austro-Hungarian Empire, Bulgaria and Ukrainian People's Republic, it was declared that the state of war between these countries ended<sup>3</sup>. According to the end article of this treaty, between Austro-Hungarian government on one side and Ukrainian People's Republic on the other side, if the two countries share borders, the border between Russia and Austro-Hungarian Empire before the war will be valid.

Other borders of Ukraine were defined as follows: More towards the North, the border of Ukrainian People's Republic starts from Tarnograd and generally follows the line through Bilgoraj – Tzcebrzsyn – Krasnostav – Pogaszow – Radin – Meshiretschie – Sarnaki – Melnik – Wysolio-Litovsk – Karmanietz Litovsk – Pruchany – Wygonowskojesce. The details of this border will be determined by a mixed Commission based on the ethnographic state and the wishes of the natives<sup>4</sup>. According to the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk on 3 March 1918, Ukraine's borders were more accurately defined. Liyoland and Istiland will not be adjourned and be evicted by the Russian armies and Red Guard Soldiers (Russian Red Army). Eastern border of Istiland is generally along the river Narva. Liyoland's Eastern border generally goes all the way until Tuna river, from Paypos Lake until Piskof Lake on the Southwest end, and along the line of Luban Lake and Liyonherf. The safety of this land will be maintained by Private Land Service and will be invaded by a German Security Force until the estimation of government regulation. Russia will release those from Liyoland and Istiland who are arrested and were forced to migrate and will ensure the safe return of those who were forced to migrate (See Appendix 1).

The treaty by which Russia withdrew from our provinces in Eastern Anatolia was signed on 3 March 1918 in Brest-Litovsk between Ottoman Empire and Russia, Austro-Hungarian Empire, Bulgaria. Since Ukraine was under the dominance of Russia, it was not considered as a separate state, but the provinces it comprises were defined in the 6th article. According to that; Russia undertook to make peace immediately with Ukrainian People's Republic and recognizing the peace contract between the aforesaid Republic and

four allied countries. Ukrainian land would be immediately evicted by the Russian armies and Russian Red Guard Soldiers. Russia would end all sorts of provocations and incentives against Ukrainian People's Republic and general organization<sup>5</sup>.

It could be understood from Talat Pasha's report dated 19 January 1918, which states that Ottoman Empire recognizes Ukraine as a distinct state. In the telegram he sent to the Prime Minister's Office, Talat Pasha states that; «Previous day we signed a special agreement with the Ukrainian commissioners and declared that we regard our joint ancient history not a war history but a history of old friends, and stated that our politic relations with Russia and Ukraine are equivalent, but Ukraine is considered an independent state by us for now, and if the peace treaty takes its final shape and our allies agree with us, a treaty can be signed with Ukraine as an independent state. Secondly, understanding the political borders of Ukraine is important for us, and this is important as we need to clearly identify the party to discuss the problems regarding the Black Sea...<sup>6</sup>.

Treaty of Brest-Litovsk and its appendices were accepted in the convention held with allies on 4 April 1918 and with Ukraine on the same date Ottoman Parliament and Upper House, and was accepted as a law with the decree of Sultan Reshad<sup>7</sup> (See Appendix 2). Ukrainian People's Republic was also recognized by Argentina via the treaty between Ukraine and Argentina on 5 March 1921<sup>8</sup>.

#### *a. Establishment of Ukrainian Embassy and Consulate*

As an important step to improve the relations between the two countries, diplomatic activities were started. In this regard, Ukraine requested the appointment of the appointed Ambassador to İstanbul and attempted to establish two consulates in Jerusalem and Batum. In a telegram from Batum Governor Cemil Bey to the Foreign Secretary Fethi Bey, it was stated that Ojen Rasbavko, the appointed consulate of Batum, was recognized by the government but have not taken office yet<sup>9</sup>. Monsieur Jan Nukami, appointed by Ukraine in 1918, was recognized as the Ambassador of Ukraine<sup>10</sup>. Finally, in 1921, Ukraine established a consulate in İstanbul<sup>11</sup>. In the letter by Muhtar Bey, who was appointed to carry out the foreign relations of Turkey in Ukraine, dated 6 November 1918, it was reported that upon the resignation of Monsieur Kistiyafoski, the appointed Ambassador of Ukraine in İstanbul, Monsieur Michel Sokovik was appointed as the emergency envoy. The letter from the Foreign Ministry confirm that this appointment is suitable was presented and the action of the Sultan was expected<sup>12</sup>. In addition, considering that there are no mail and telegram correspondences between the two countries, Ukraine was asked to establish this correspondence. After the confirmation of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk signed between the allies, the treaty was discussed in Vienna on 22 August 1918. Based on the fourth article of the treaty, as the establishment of an international telegram line between the two countries would be useful, a conference meeting to discuss the execution of the postal services was proposed<sup>13</sup>. However, the establishment of a mail and telegram line between the two countries was only possible after a few months.

## **2. Establishment of Economic Relations**

In the appendix of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, an economic cooperation treaty was signed. Based on this; the parties would begin to improve mutual trade relations, and until July 1918, essential agricultural products would be mutually exchanged according to the requirement. A mixed commission would be established to decide on the type and quantity of these products and would be in effect after the signature of the peace treaty. There had been negotiations for the joint action of Germany, Austro-Hungarian Empire and Turkey to begin economic relations with various regions of the fallen Russia in Berlin on 27 April 1918, and as a result of these negotiations, decisions on economic relations were made<sup>14</sup>. These decisions determined the nature of the exchange between the parties, the price of livestock and grains, how the trade will be performed, and how much percentage will be obtained.

In this agreement, the exchange rates between the domestic currencies of the states were clearly stated. Based on this; 100 German Gold Marks = 462 Ukrainian People's Republic Gold Karbovanets = Gold Rouble of the fallen Russian Empire (1 Rouble 1/15 Royal Imperial) or 1000 Austro-Hungarian Gold Kronen = 393 Ukrainian People's Republic Gold Karbovanets and 78 cents = 393 Roubles and 78 kopeks of the fallen Russian Empire (1 Rouble = 1/15 Imperial)<sup>15</sup> (See Appendix 3).

Moreover, in an arranged protocol, every agricultural and industrial trade between the parties would be encouraged, required conveniences for transit trade would be provided, navigation of the ships would be regulated, and mutual customs tariffs would be determined<sup>16</sup>.

## **3. Ukrainian Captives and Ukrainian Liberation Association**

At the end of each war, the state and exchange of captives have always been an important issue. The same issue was faced after the World War I. There were Ukrainian captives of unstated number in the camps near Manyas and Konya in Turkey. However, since Ukrainian captives were kept at the same place with the Russian captives, after the appeal by the Ukrainians, they were separated from the Russians. There is a significant issue here.

Ukrainian Liberation Association founded by the Ukrainians was working for the independence of Ukraine. In a letter from the Intelligence Department Submanager Staff District Governor to the Sultan on 9 December 1914; the purpose of Ukrainian Liberation Association was summarized as follows: Ukrainians, who inhabit the lands extending from the Carpathian Mountain to Don River and even to the Black Sea, taking advantage of the state of war and the invasion of these regions by the Austrian army, established an Association to found an Independent Ukrainian Government to rescue their thirty million citizens suffering under Russian oppression. The essence of their strategy is to enlighten the Ukrainians under Russian jurisdiction and provoke them against the Russians. Their first goal in this strategy is towards the isolation of the Ukrainians among the Russian captives in Austrian and Ottoman armies and their enlightenment. The committee's application for this purpose was taken into military consideration and Ukrainian captives in İzmit were separated from the

Russians and the document that includes their declaration and dates was presented to the Prime Minister's Office<sup>17</sup> (See Appendix 4).

However, in the letter from the Interior Minister on behalf of the Deputy Commander-in-Chief to Sultan on 29 October 1914, it was stated that there were no buildings suitable for the inhabitation of the Ukrainian captives in İzmit, and that the only building suitable was the French School, and it was requested that orders should be given to authorities so that the School is left to the Captives Commission Directorate<sup>18</sup>.

In the letter by the Police General Manager to the Ministry of the Interior on 7 February 1915; it was stated that Russian citizen and Jewish Leiba Evelev Babok transferred his printing house in Kurshunlu Han in Galata to the head of Ukrainian Association Monsieur Melenski, and that he would leave together with his wife Şine who is 40 years old, his son Moize who is 16 years old, his son David who is 14 years old, his child Bezalestel who is 7 years old, and his daughters Anna and Zina who are 12 and 10 years old respectively, and the required documents were discussed and the bills could be found in his file, and necessary permissions should be given<sup>19</sup>. So, it can be understood that by this way, the printing house Babok transferred to Ukrainian Association significantly contributed to the printing-publishing activities of the Ukrainians in Turkey.

In the answer provided by the Police Governor to the Ministry of Interior on 9 January 1915, it was stated that Ukrainian captives were indeed separated from the Russian captives by a special commission and placed in a separate section in the shipyard, there weren't any students in the French School, and that the evacuation and allotment of Galatasaray High School was not possible since the second year boarders were staying there at night and they were in a building in the interior of the Palace but were evacuated from there and the students of Numune School were transferred to the French School<sup>20</sup>.

Ukrainian Independence Association requested that the leading men of the association go to Manyas Lake and Konya in order to encourage the Ukrainians placed there to acquire Ottoman citizenship<sup>21</sup>. After this request, Ukrainian and Russian captives were separated from each other and the activities of the Association were allowed<sup>22</sup> (See Appendix 5). In the letter by staff head Brausard on behalf of Deputy Commander-in-Chief to the Ministry of the Interior on 17 May 1915, Andreas Çuk and Marko Motifiski, who will encourage the Ukrainians located at Manyas and Konya, were allowed to go there for this matter<sup>23</sup>.

There are explanatory documents on how to treat the captives. In the letter of the Ministry of the Interior on 21 April 1918, in summary; regarding the confirmation of the peace agreement with the Russian and Ukrainian governments, letter from the Ministry of the Interior on immediate determination of the treatment of civilian captives under these governments was discussed and based on this discussion, it was stated that Ukrainian civilian captives should be released and those who wish to return their home countries should be evicted via an empty ship travelling to Odessa from here, and for those who need help, the travel expenses from the neighborhood they currently reside to their previous settlement should be covered such that this would be consistent with the articles of the peace agreement with Ukraine, and that maximum

care should be taken to confirm the nationality of those who wish to go back to their countries so that they are actually Ukrainian citizens but not Russian citizens. The treatment of aforementioned civilian captives was determined and also the treatment of Ukrainian civilian captives and Ukrainian war captives was requested from the Ministry of War.

About the Russian civilian captives, according to the peace treaty between Ottomans and Russians signed on 3 March 1918 in Brest-Litovsk, the article on the aforementioned civilian captives was the same as the article in the treaty with Ukraine: «Civilian captives will be immediately released. The party that captivated and took them prisoner is obliged to pay their travel expenses from the locations they were placed in their actual places of residence, that is, the place they used to live in before they were taken prisoner<sup>24</sup>». According to this, Ukrainian and Russian captives would be released and necessary means will be provided for those who wish to go back to their countries and their travel expenses would be covered by us.

As it is with all treaties, the aforementioned treaty was signed according to the reciprocity principle. The obligations of Turkey were also valid for Ukraine and Russia. However, regarding this subject, not enough information was provided by the Russian government about the number, place, and state of the Turkish captives in Russia. Continuing from the same letter, the statement; «Since there are no information on the state of civilian Ottoman captives in Russia and whether Russia released them and covered their travel expenses from the locations they were placed in their actual places of residence, that is, the place they used to live in before they were taken prisoner, and the acquired information on the means of the Russian Government to cover the transfer of the Ottoman captives in Siberia and other provinces to their original residences is not confirmed, in summary, the request that without obtaining information based on evidence on the state of the Ottoman civilian captives in Russia, the state of the Russian civilian captives in Ottoman Empire should not be provided and the treatment of Ukrainians is not suitable for Russia as there are many Ottoman citizens in Russia, is presented to the relevant ministry in advance» asks the number and locations of the Turkish captives in Russia, and states that how many Turkish captives were exiled to Siberia or other places are not known and Russia does not provide any answers on this matter, and thus the decision on the Ukrainian captives is not requested for the Russian captives so they should not be treated as the Ukrainians.

### **Conclusion**

Since the dominance of the Ottoman Empire on the North, mostly amicable relations were established with the people of Ukraine. Ukrainian lands had always been a land of crossing during the Russo-Turkish war, which started from the beginning of 18<sup>th</sup> century and always changed hands between the two sides. Due to its geographical location, Ukraine has been under the influence of great powers and thus could not find the opportunity to develop as a separate state for a long time.

However, one of the first countries to recognize Ukraine, which gained independence from Russia after the World War I, was Turkey. As could be seen in the documents, amicable relations with Ukraine

was established even during the period of war. Diplomatic, economic and social relations were established between Ukraine and Turkey even during the period of war. During the war, Ukrainian captives in Turkey were treated differently from the Russian captives. It should especially be remembered that Ukrainian Liberation Association perhaps performed its first activity freely in Turkey.

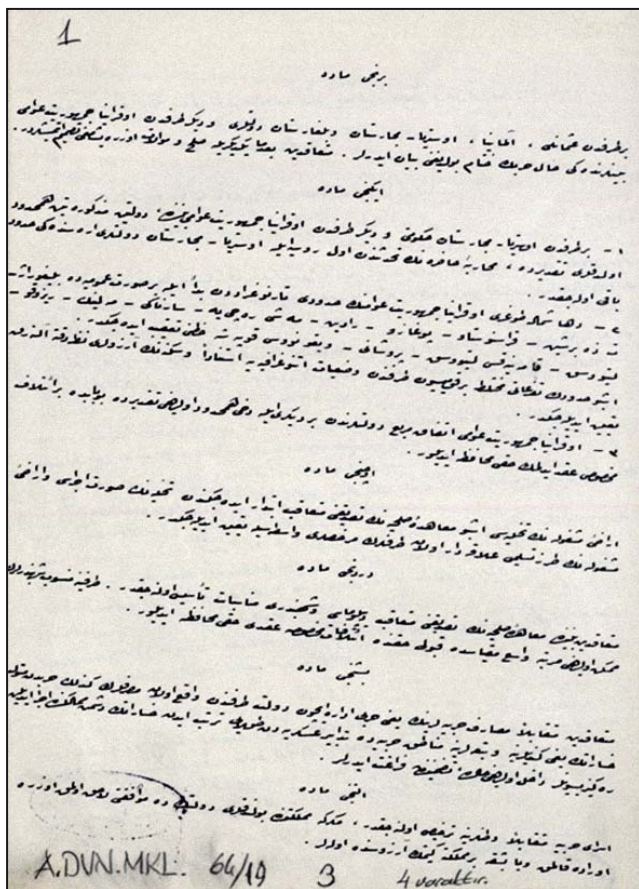
During the Soviet Union era, which was established after the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, these bilateral relations continued, and Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation was signed between Ukraine and Turkey in 1922. These relations established throughout the history form the historical basis which brings the two countries together. This historical basis should be fundamental for the development of top quality relations in every area, today and in the future.

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4. The spelling of these place names in Latin letters is given in the document dated 28 June 1922 and numbered HR.HMŞ.İŞO 00123.00034.001, which is the rough draft of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk.
5. *BOA (The Ottoman Archives of the Prime Minister's Office). – A)DVN. MKL.00064.00019.001 (Treaty of Brest-Litovsk dated 3 March 1918) (BOA will not be used from here on).*
6. *HR.SYS.02295-0002-20. For the spelling of these place names in Latin letters see: HR.SYS.02295-0002-34.*
7. *HR.SYS.002295-0003-15 (Copy of the Act 567 of Bâb-ı Âli Daire-i Saderet-Divân-ı Hümayun: Repeated item: Ottoman Government is responsible for the signing and exchanging of the Treaty and appendix between the Ottoman Government, its allied governments and Ukrainian People's Republic signed by the representatives of the two parties on the reconstitution of the state of peace in Brest-Litovsk on 9 February 1918, and also the signing and exchanging of the treaty signed in the same place on the same date. I ordered the legality and the addition of the hereby proposal accepted by the Upper House and Parliament to the laws of State governance. Date 4 April 1334. Mehmed Reshad – Grand Vizier and Minister of Domestic Affairs Talat- Sheikh ul-Islam and Imperial Evkaf Ministry Musa Kazım-formerly Minister of War Enver-Naval Minister Ahmed Cemal- Minister of Foreign Affairs Ahmed Nesimi-Minister of Justice ve Chief of Justice Halil-Finance Minister Cavid-The Minister of Public Works ve Deputy Minister of Education Ali Münif- Minister of Trade and Agriculture Mustafa Sheref-Minister of Mail ad Telegraph and Telephone Hüseyin Hashim).*
8. *HR. – HMŞ.İŞO.00123.00017.001(French).002 (from Berlin Embassy, 27 June 1337-27 June 1921).*
9. *DH.İ.UM. – 20/20 13-34 (telegram dating 22 October 1918).*
10. *HR.HMŞ.İŞO – 123 19 (11 February 1921).*
11. *HR.HMŞ.İŞO – 123 18 (22 April 1921).*
12. *MV – 00295.00145.001.*

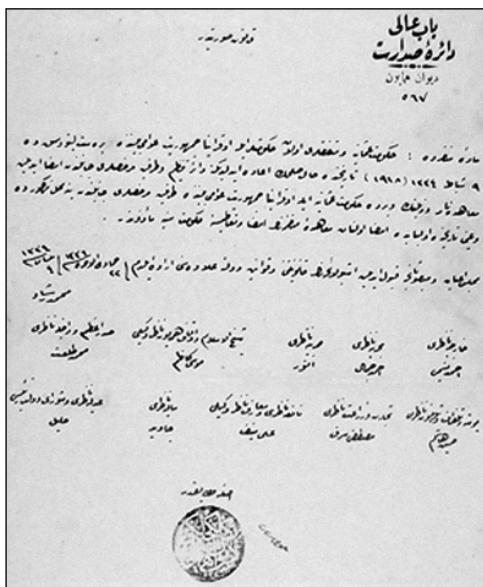
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Appendix

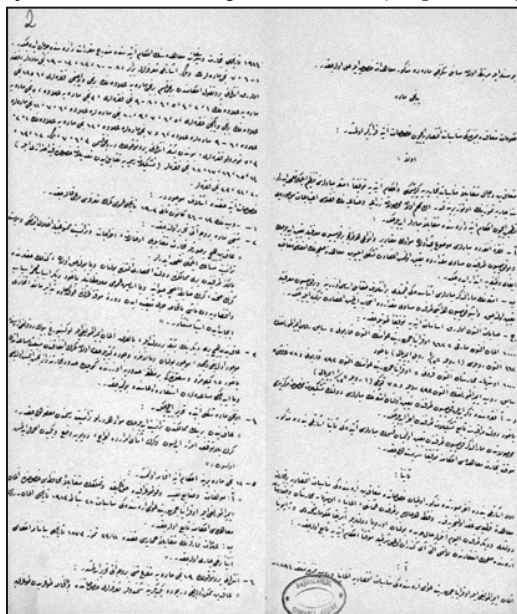


Appendix 1. Articles of Brest-Litovsk Treaty Which Demarcate Ukraine's Borders





Appendix 2. Act on the Confirmation of Brest-Litovsk Treaty with Ukraine (4 April 1918)



Appendix 3. Resolutions on Economic Relations Between The Parties

