

Review Essays

Basil Kondis

The Allied Powers and the Eastern Question

Ελληνικά Διπλωματικά Έγγραφα 1919-1940, First Series, Volume III: *Greece and Turkey, The Conference of Lausanne, November 20, 1922 - July 24, 1923*, Edited by Domna Visvizi-Dontas, Athens, The National Printing House, 1994, pp. 825.

Volume III was published on the occasion of the seventieth anniversary of the Treaty of Lausanne of 1923, which, as the editor points out in her preface, is undoubtedly considered as the most important turning point of the history of contemporary hellenism. This volume deals with the negotiations during the Conference of Lausanne between the Allies, the Greeks and the Turks to establish peace, after the collapse of the Greek army in Asia Minor, in September 1922, and lasted from November 20, 1922, to the signature of peace on July 24, 1923. It consists of 696 documents, found in the Archives of the Greek Foreign Ministry. Also, they are supplemented, as Professor Dontas states, with documents from the Venizelos Archive in the Benakis Museum and from other collections.

The documentation in Volume III is divided into three chapters:

Chapter I covers the first phase of the Conference of Lausanne from November 20, 1922, to February 5, 1923. Its first business session was devoted to the setting up of three commissions to deal with: (1) territorial and military questions; (2) the régime for foreigners and minorities in Turkey; (3) financial and economic questions (Nos 1, 12, 13). The first Commission began its sittings on November 22, under the presidency of Lord Curzon, and it started with the discussion of the frontiers of Thrace. From the very start the attitude of the Turkish delegation, under the presidency of Ismet Pasha, foreshadowed trouble. The Turks

had demanded the pre-war frontier but the Three Allies and Venizelos were united in rejecting this demand. The Turks had to accept Curzon's suggestion that the questions of demilitarized zones on the northern and western frontier of Eastern Thrace, railway control and the creation of a port at Dedeagatch should be referred to a sub-committee of military and economic experts (Nos 24, 39, 40, 46, 47). On November 26, Curzon announced to the Turks a concession which the Allies were prepared to make to the Turkish Government: they would restore to them a small enclave between the right bank of the Maritza at Adrianople and the boundary line drawn by the Turkish Government, when it ceded Karagatch and the surrounding district to Bulgaria in 1915, which concession would enable the construction of a separate station directly connected with Adrianople (Nos 55, 56). Without openly rejecting that concession, the Turks, embarked on interminable negotiations in order to gain time to organize their army and occupy Eastern Thrace. This brought the Greek Government to the decision to hasten the reorganization and reinforcement of the Greek army in Western Thrace in case of the renewal of operations (Nos 145, 210, 211, 276, 293). Thus, the question of the Thracian frontiers remained pending until the end of the first phase of negotiations (February 5).

Before the question of the Thracian frontiers was definitely settled, on November 26, the Conference took up the question of the eastern Aegean islands. Here the Turks demanded: (1) recognition of Turkish sovereignty over the islands of Imvros, Tenedos and Samothrace and their complete demilitarization; (2) demilitarization of the main group of islands in the eastern Aegean (i.e. Mitylene, Chios, Samos and Ikaria) already in the hands of the Greeks; and (3) the abrogation of Greek sovereignty over those islands and the institution of a form of autonomy which the Turks made no attempt to define. Neither Curzon nor Venizelos could accept the Turkish demands. The Allies recommended a form of demilitarization for Mitylene, Chios, Samos and Ikaria, in order not to be used as a base for attack, while enabling Greece, in whose possession they would remain, to maintain order and ensure defence. But the demilitarization of the islands guarding the Dardanelles (i.e. Lemnos, Imvros, Tenedos and Samothrace) was reserved for the final decision of the sittings that would deal with the freedom of the Straits (Nos 57, 61, 67, 68, 93).

The question of the Straits came up for discussion in the Territorial and Military Commission, on December 4, and was to continue until February 1. With Curzon on the chair, Venizelos was sure that Greece would gain considerable success in the Straits and the Black Sea. The Turkish delegation submitted no plan, but the Russian representative put forward an extreme case on their behalf: that commercial navigation and non-military maritime communication through the Straits should be absolutely free. He further demanded: (1) the Straits should be permanently closed to all men-of-war and aircraft of all countries except those of Turkey; and (2) Turkey should enjoy full sovereignty on land and sea and should have the right to fortify the Straits with modern equipment. The allied counter-proposals, to the great satisfaction of Venizelos, were in substance the same as in the Treaty of Sèvres: complete freedom of commercial navigation and restrictions concerning the passage of war-ships; complete demilitarization of the both sides: of Dardanelles and Bosphorus, and of the islands Samothrace, Lemnos, Imvros and Tenedos. On December 8, the Turkish delegation in a carefully prepared reply to the allied proposals tacitly accepted the main principles, but demanded guarantees for the protection of the Straits and Constantinople against sudden attack. However, on December 20, the Turks reiterated their view on points of special importance to them, the chief ones being the threat of a Greek population in the islands near the Dardanelles and the need for a garrison on the Gallipoli peninsula. The Conference reached a stalemate. The Greeks announced their military preparations in Thrace. The French, most anxious to achieve peace at almost any price, suggested further concessions to the Turks.

On February 2, 1923, a Straits Convention (to be attached to the Treaty) was presented to the Turks, whose agreement to accept it was made conditional upon further allied concessions. Curzon was prepared to make only one concession —the deletion from the main Treaty of the clause which placed restrictions on the members of the Turkish army in Thrace. On February 4, the Turks accepted the Straits Convention, which, in the main, satisfied both the Greeks and the British (Nos 115, 132, 134, 139, 171, 174, 178).

The problem of the exchange of populations had been created by the massive exodus of Greeks from Asia Minor and Eastern Thrace. To the problem of refugees was related that of the prisoners of war. At the

meeting of December 2, at which were present the representatives of the Allies, Greece and Turkey, it was decided that a sub-committee should draw up a convention for the exchange of Greek and Turkish populations.

The question then arose whether exchange should be voluntary or compulsory and whether it should apply to all areas concerned. Ismet, in a long speech on December 13, contended that there was no minority question that could not be dealt with by ordinary Turkish law. Curzon replied that this situation would produce a lamentable impression throughout the world. As he was supported by the French, Italian, American, Greek and Serbian delegates, the Turks found themselves isolated and hopelessly in wrong (Nos 96, 133, 136, 138, 151, 160, 195). The Turks intended to expel the Greek Patriarchate and its dependant institutions from Constantinople. In the discussions which ensued the Turks refused to bridge and inch and on all points of importance. Thus a deadlock was reached on December 23 (Nos 155, 159, 163, 166, 175, 189, 192). The Turkish attitude towards the Patriarchate created a strong reaction in Greece. The Greeks made it clear that under no circumstances would they stand by and see an institution of such significance to them and to the Christian world be removed from its ancient site. They threatened an attack on Constantinople. In making this threat, which they showed signs of carrying out, they counted upon considerable military forces. Their Thracian army had been joined by more troops and reorganized into a respectable fighting force amounted to two army corps of three divisions each, under General Pangalos (Nos 157, 192, 196, 211, 215). Furthermore, the Greeks let it be known that if the Greek demands were not satisfied, public opinion might force the Greek Government to take action. Much perturbed, the Allies sounded a warning to the Greek Government, but it was not until the end of January 1923, following repeated warnings, that the Greeks although they feared that the Conference might end without making a decision, promised not to attack the Turks without allied sanction (Nos 201, 227, 237, 244, 259, 263, 284, 285, 286, 296, 298, 344, 346).

The end of the crisis over Constantinople coincided with an agreement signed on January 30, 1923, along with an agreement for the exchange of hostages and prisoners of war, on the exchange of Greek and

Turkish populations. This exchange, which was adopted by both parties in the hope that it would remove deep rooted causes of conflict and provide greater ethnic homogeneity, was to be carried out on a compulsory basis (Nos 322, 339, 359).

The Third Commission of the Conference dealt with economic and financial questions, of which the Ottoman debt and indemnities were the most important. The Commission came to an agreement in principle as regarded the sharing of the Ottoman public debt annuities. Venizelos declared, however, that it was impossible for Greece to pay any share of the Ottoman public debt, and demanded that the question should be submitted to arbitration at the Permanent Court of the Hague. This the Sub-Committee accepted. But as regards the allied demand for indemnities, the Turks made final agreement contingent on the satisfaction of Turkish claims for war reparations from Greece —claims which they advocated with obstinacy and rudeness. The Turkish attitude was due to the reluctance of the French and Italian delegates to press matters. On January 13, Lord Curzon, exasperated by this dilatory and humiliating procedure, asked for a final report of the Commission. On January 27, the Third Commission submitted to the Conference the text of articles to be inserted in the draft Treaty on the financial, economic, commercial and sanitary questions. Discussions which were carried on outside to conference room, continued to be fruitless. On February 2, after a prolonged and heated interallied discussion it was agreed to divide the capital of the Ottoman public debt without requiring the consent of the bondholders and to reduce the allied claims for reparations from £ 15,000,000 to £ 12,000,000. Further it was decided to find a formula which would exclude from the Treaty the specific mention of the Turkish claims for Greek reparations estimated at the absurd figure of £ 16,000,000. Thus the question of the Greek reparations was left unsettled (Nos 41, 91, 148, 181, 197, 288, 305, 307, 318, 329, 376, 380, 384, 385).

Although there was no sign that the Conference would reach an agreement on most of the important questions, because the Turks continued to pursue their usual tactics, Curzon, out of patience with them, decided to bring the discussions to an abrupt end. He asked the allied delegates to put what they thought best in a draft text of the Treaty, which would be presented to the Turks for acceptance or refusal

on January 31, 1923. The Turks having not accepted this draft-Treaty, the negotiations broke down, on February 4, 1923.

Chapter II covers the negotiations from the break-down of the Conference on February 4, 1923, until their resumption on April 23, 1923, during which the allied draft-Treaty of January 31, 1923, and the Turkish counter-proposals were the subject of continuous haggling against a background of recurrent crises. During this interval, the Turks proceeded to extensive and recurrent expulsions of Greeks from Turkey, especially from Pontos; and they confiscated their properties, creating thus serious problems to the Greek Government. The allied intervention remained a dead letter (N^{os} 401, 402, 440, 446, 457, 463, 466). On the other hand, the Turks dwelt emphatically on Greek reparations. The Greek Government made clear that by no means they would pay and they stated that their armed forces were reorganized and ready for war (N^{os} 434, 448, 453, 482, 488, 493). On March 8, the Turks submitted their counter-proposals to the allied draft-Treaty which were against the Greek interests, especially in the demarcation of the Thracian frontiers and the Greek reparations (N^o 466). Lord Curzon then invited the French and Italian experts, as well as Venizelos for consultation. The outcome of these discussions which lasted from March 21 to 27, were proposals for fresh concessions, which were embodied in a new allied draft of the Treaty, and an invitation to the Turks to renew peace negotiations, who readily accepted the invitation (N^{os} 484, 488, 490, 492).

Chapter III consists of correspondence referring to the second phase of the Conference of Lausanne, April 23 to July 24, 1923. During these negotiations the French and the Italians were inclined to yield on almost every issue, and, in so doing, they seriously jeopardized the armistice, fondly hoping that if hostilities broke out the British and the Greeks would fight their battles for them. Not until Curzon let it be known that the British Government would not stand for this, did the French and the Italians make the final concessions which enabled the peace settlement to be signed. Until the final stages, the Conference worked as three Committees: the first dealt with outstanding territorial issues, the second with financial problems and the third with economic questions.

From April 23 to 28, the Conference reviewed the whole of the territorial clauses and agreed on all points except two, namely the Maritza frontier in Eastern Thrace and Castellorizo in the Dodecanese. The Turks, who wanted to have something to show on their credit side on their return to Angora, demanded Castellorizo and the thalweg of the Maritza. The Italians proposed to bargain the thalweg of Maritza and the herkeb Islands at the entrance of the Dardanelles for Castellorizo. To this proposal the British were not prepared to agree as it would have meant a loss for Greece (N^{os} 508, 526). The discussions dragged on and Greece became impatient, especially her military authorities, who considered that, with the demand for an indemnity hanging over their heads, the time had come to have it out with Turkey. On May 14, Venizelos proposed to give the Turks Karagatch with a few kilometres to the south plus a small triangle of territory to the north between the rivers Maritza and Arda, on the condition that the Turks dropped once and for all their demand for an indemnity from Greece (N^{os} 536, 543). Ismet then tried to commit the Allies to restrain the Greeks and allow the Turks a free hand in Eastern Thrace. The Allies were willing to restrain the Greeks and warned them against the resumption of hostilities (N^{os} 550, 551, 559, 561, 565). But, although the Greek Government gave a formal assurance that they would not resume hostilities without giving notice to the Allies, they stipulated that the question of Greek-Turkish reparations must be settled "within a reasonable time". When Ismet then asked for a "practicable proposal" on behalf of Greece, they threatened to withdraw their delegation from Lausanne if the Allies yielded to the Turkish demand for indemnity. They went further and expressed the hope that, if Turkey provoked war, the Powers would not stand in the way. The only concession Greece could make was a slight rectification of the Thracian frontier (N^{os} 553, 554, 568, 571).

On May 24, the Greek representatives stated that they would leave if the indemnity question was not settled immediately, and the Greek Government would denounce the armistice of Moudania. They complained also that 5,000 Turkish troops had crossed to Eastern Thrace. The Allies advised the Greeks not to withdraw from the Conference and they hastened to induce the Turks to agree to the Greek request. Finally, on May 26, at a meeting between the heads of the allied delegations,

Ismet Pasha and Elefterios Venizelos, it was agreed that in return for the renunciation of an indemnity from Greece, the Turks should gain Karagatch and the Arda-Maritza triangle (N^{os} 577, 582, 584, 585, 589, 591, 603, 658). There is no doubt that the presence of the Greek army in Thrace made possible the Greek stand at the long drawn out Conference of Lausanne. On July 24, 1923, the Peace Treaty and seventeen other instruments were signed.

The Appendices attached to the documentation are of great importance as they complete and explain the documents:

Appendix I consists of a long memorandum of A. A. Pallis, Director of the Refugee Committee, in which he suggests solutions to the refugee problem in Greece by their settlement in Macedonia and Thrace, Athens, November 21 / December 4, 1922.

Appendix II consists of the observation of the Turkish delegation to the allied draft Treaty, Lausanne, February 4, 1923, and it clarifies the Turkish standpoints against its clauses.

Appendix III is a very important despatch of February 5, 1923, from Lord Curzon to the Foreign Office, in which he reports on his private conversations with Ismet Pasha, during the concluding phases of the Lausanne proceedings, at which the Turks finally refused to sign the Treaty and thus rupture has occurred. At these private conversations Venizelos was not present and, as they were not recorded in the official minutes of the Conference, this Appendix supplements the documents in the Archives of the Greek Foreign Ministry.

Appendix IV is the report of the High Commissioner for refugees of the League of Nations on the tragic situation of Greek refugees from Asia Minor, Geneva, February 19, 1923.

Appendix V includes an explanatory letter to the Turkish counter-proposals to the allied draft-Treaty of January 31, 1923, by Ismet Pasha to the Allies, Angora, March 8, 1923. It also includes the text of the allied draft-Treaty of January 31, 1923, the Turkish counter-proposals of March 8, 1923, and the final concessions of the two sides.

(Italic print without underlining denotes articles, paragraphs, phrases, and word rejected in the Turkish counter-proposals. Additions and amendations proposed by the Turkish Government are shown by underlined type in square brackets).

Thus the reader is able to follow the evolution of the complicated deliberations of the second phase of the Conference (Chapter III).

The documentation printed in this volume provides a wealth of material for the study of the political and diplomatic history of Greece during the significant years 1922 and 1923. It may however be some time before historians can see the deliberations of this Conference in their true perspective. The most important element which determined the evolution of its deliberations was the intransigence of the Turkish delegation, which, under the presidency of Ismet Pasha, entrenched behind three formidable convictions from which it seemed impossible that they could ever be dislodged. Their first conviction was that Turkey was the conqueror of the world and could claim a conqueror's peace. Their second conviction was that not only Russia (with whom they had signed a treaty on March 16, 1921), but also France and Italy, were Turkey's allies. Their third conviction was that the British people, in repudiating Lloyd George and Churchill, had demonstrated that they also would in no circumstances oppose Turkish desires. In reality, the Turks were passing through a period of intoxicated nationalism. Their admitted policy was to achieve and consolidate a position of self-sufficiency and complete independence, political and economic. They had begun by freeing themselves from the Greeks and the Armenians, who constituted a considerable economic factor. They were determined as far as possible to substitute Turks for all other foreigners, British, French, Italians, engaged in trade or industry in Turkey. In order to achieve the fulfilment of this policy, the Turks were always in the last resort cheerfully prepared to face a rupture of the Conference and to have recourse to hostilities.

For the Allies, on the other side, the Ottoman Empire was a loser of the war and the Greek failure in Asia Minor constituted just an episode of the general war. They were determined to sign a peace treaty favourable to European interests, but they were not prepared to exalt their conditions by force of arms. Moreover, the Allies were not united. At the very culmination of the Conference (on January 4, 1923) France and Great Britain were publicly divided, and on January 30, Poincaré tried once again to stab the Alliance in the back. The attitude of Italy was equally uncertain. The fascist revolution was then but three weeks

old, and it was not to be supported that at a such a moment Italy would join with Britain in putting pressure on the Turks. Britain would have to fight her battle in spite of her Allies —a battle which she would fight along side with Greece. At this point, Venizelos was called upon by the Revolutionary Government of Greece to save the wreckage at Lausanne, but the great statesman was diminished in authority by the position of impotence in which he was placed.

With a heavy heart, and conscious of entire isolation, Venizelos made the journey to Lausanne. For eight months he and Caclamanos, his deputy, opposed by practically everyone, fought against Turkish intransigence, having on their side only Curzon's half-heartedly support. One of the most outstanding decisions of the Treaty of Lausanne was that of the exchange of populations. When the Conference tackled this problem there were already over a million refugees roaming homeless and hungry in the towns and villages of Greece. The act of repatriation having been forcibly accomplished, the Conference was only called upon to condone it by legislation. Thus, on January 30, 1923, the famous Greek-Turkish Convention for the exchange of populations was signed. The negotiations towards the conclusion of this Convention were by no means uneventful. The Turks raised the question of the expulsion or even extermination of all Greeks from Turkish territory, including the Patriarchate of Constantinople. The vital issues of war or peace were then still to be decided at the Conference. The Greeks decided to use their armies in Thrace to defend all their legitimate rights in Turkey. General Pangalos, having resigned as Minister of War, in December 1922, proceeded to Thrace where he hastened military operations. The Allies advised then Venizelos that Greece should not resort to military activities. Pangalos, however, was not likely to comply with the allied advice. He was determined to cross the Maritza, and he wanted to prove to the Turks that the Greeks would recover Eastern Thrace. So sure were the Greeks that the military situation was in their favour, that they made clear to all concerned that they would not sign the peace Treaty, until the questions of the Patriarchate and the minorities were settled according to their interests. This aggressive attitude of the Greeks alarmed the French, who demanded that the British should join them in making a protest in Athens. This demand Curzon promptly rejected. He welcomed the Greek threat, as it made the Turks to come speedily to an

agreement —what they did.

The crucial point arrived during the second session of the Conference. The Turks were pressing with greater insistence upon payment of compensation by Greece for damages. They claimed a sum no less than £ 100,000,000. But Greece was now in a better position. Her army was reorganized and concentrated on the Maritza, and Curzon was as well aware of this as Venizelos. Venizelos was also informed from Athens that the Government had become impatient, especially the military. General Pangalos wanted war against Turkey. It was then that Venizelos learnt confidentially that Ismet was inspired by more conciliatory ideas than those of his Government. Without losing any time, Venizelos asked to see Ismet, an initiative which came like a bombshell to the Conference, which had arrived at an impasse and ceased to meet. Everyone felt that a new lead had been given, and that the decision of peace or war was in the hands of these two men —particularly in the hands of Ismet. Venizelos told Ismet plainly that any insistence upon the payment of compensation meant war. Almost immediately, the Serbian Minister visited Ismet to tell him that if hostilities were resumed the Turkish army would not only have to face Greek but also Serbian bayonets. On the following day Ismet returned the visit to Venizelos. The outcome was the convocation of the Conference again, but restricting it only to the leaders of the delegations, for the final verdict. Peace in the meantime was in mortal danger. Poincaré telegraphed to inform the Conference that he had proposed to Britain and Italy that no resumption of hostilities was to be permitted and that if the Greek fleet should attempt to enter the Dardanelles, it would be confronted by the three European fleets. The French representative at Lausanne, General Pellé, buried the telegram rather than cause the failure of the forthcoming Conference —as did Stratford Canning, in November 1828, during the Conference of Poros, who buried Wellington's instructions to limit Greece to the Peloponnesos, and recommended the Zeitormi-Arta boundary. Great Britain in the meantime was holding up her answer to the French request. Had this telegram been known before the Conference ended, the unfortunate and conciliatory Ismet would have yielded to the pressure of the irreconcilables round him. It was then that it was initiated a friendship and mutual esteem between Ismet and Venizelos to the benefit not only of peace but of a lasting friendly relations between

Greece and Turkey.

On May 26, 1923, after three hours of debate, the Conference adjourned and Venizelos emerging out of the room announced to the waiting journalists: "Messieurs, c'est la Paix!".

The documents printed in this volume constitute for the historians the essential source to the last chapter of the policy of the *Megali Idea*. Furthermore, the significance of this publication must be attributed to the fact that many important decisions taken at Lausanne constitute the legal bases of the relations between Greece and Turkey from 1923 to the present day.