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CYPRUS PROBLEM AND ITS PLACE IN SOVIET-TURKISH
RELATIONS IN 1960–1970S

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Abstract

In 1960, the island of Cyprus, which has an important geostrategic position, gained independence from Great Britain. The Republic of Cyprus was formed on the island with 80 % of the Greeks and 18 % of the Turks. The Greeks supported the idea of enosis, i.e. unification with Greece actively encouraged from Athens that inspired the activities of irredentist extremist groups on the island. The Turkish population of the island sought to federalize the island and found support in Ankara. In the 1960–1970s the USSR developed close and warm relations with the leadership of Cyprus. The seizure of power in Greece by the anti-communist and nationalist junta of the “black colonels” further brought the positions of the Soviet Union and Turkey closer to the Cyprus issue. However, while Moscow opposed any policy that could increase Washington’s influence in the Mediterranean region, Ankara was interested in maintaining a regional balance between Turkey and Greece. At the turn of the 1960s–1970s the USSR and Turkey took a unified position, which included the principles of supporting the independence of Cyprus and the equality of the two communities. The military coup in Turkey in 1971 and the occupation of northern Cyprus in July-August 1974 by the Turkish army led to a short-time cooling of relations between the countries, which was easily overcome after the US Senate imposed an embargo on Turkey in 1975. Thus, the Cyprus problem contributed to the rapprochement of Soviet-Turkish positions in Mediterranean affairs.

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1. Introduction

Today, Turkey is one of the valuable and simultaneously complex partners of the Russian Federation in the international arena. Trade between the two states shows continuous growth. Similar positions are taken by the state regarding US foreign policy ambitions in Eastern Europe and the Middle East. At the same time, there are still contradictions between Russia and Turkey on the issue of solving the future political structure of the Syrian Arab Republic. Ankara's ambitions are growing in the post-Soviet space. In this regard, it is important to analyze similar problems in the history of Soviet-Turkish relations. One of the most striking issues of this kind is the Cyprus crisis. Moreover, the Cyprus problem is one of the key in the foreign policy agenda of modern Turkey. In particular, it was and is still fundamental for the possibility of accession.

Cyprus, located on the Europe – Middle East – Suez Canal – India line and the Pacific basin countries, i.e. on the path along which many oil tankers, passenger and cargo ships continuously run, is of key economic and military-strategic importance. Its possession made it possible to directly influence the events in the Middle East. Therefore, it is not surprising that in addition to the Greeks and Turks themselves living on the island, Turkey, Great Britain and the United States are actively involved in the process of solving the problem. In recent years France and Israel have shown increased interest in the region.

2. Problem Statement

One of the international problems still unresolved is the status of the northern part of the island of Cyprus, on which since 1975 the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, recognized exclusively by Ankara, has been functioning.

In 1955, the Greek nationalist organization EOKA was established in Cyprus fighting for the independence of the island from Great Britain and reunification with Greece. The idea of uniting with the latter was called enosis (from Greek: “union”, “unification”, “unity”). EOKA was led by a Greek colonel – a native of Cyprus Georgios Grivas. The categorical opponents of enosis were Turkish Cypriots living on the island, which turned them into the target of terrorist acts provoked by the EOKA organization. In turn, the Turkish nationalists created their own combat organization – TMT and opposed the ideas of the Greek enosis to the idea of taqsim, i.e. the federalization of the Republic of Cyprus and the formation of two Greek and Turkish autonomies on the island (Suleymanov, 2019).

3. Research Questions

Cyprus gained independence in 1960. During the first three years of the newly formed Republic of Cyprus, a delicate balance was maintained between the two communities of the island. Great in this was the merit of the first president of the country, Archbishop Makarios and Vice President Fazil Kuchyuk. The leadership of Turkey and Greece also tended to preserve the status quo. However, the provocations of G. Grivas and the EOKA led to a split in the ruling elite along ethnic lines. The first large-scale outbreak of violence on the island occurred on December 21, 1963. Mass Greek attacks on the Turks in

Nicosia, Larnaca and in 104 villages were later called “The Bloody Christmas” (Suleymanov, 2019). F. Kyuchyuk, who had entered into a conflict with Makarios in November 1963, who denied the Turks the right to his own autonomy, resigned as the vice president of the country and headed the opposition “General Committee of Turkish Cypriots”. The Turkish leadership announced its readiness to introduce its own troops to the island and end the rampant terror on its own (Canar, 2018). The Turkish initiative was actively objected by Greece. The relations between the two NATO member states were extremely tense. The US leadership has launched a number of initiatives that could solve the Cyprus problem. This in particular concerns the so-called “Acheson Plan”, which meant the transfer of Turkey to the military base of the Karpasia Peninsula in the north of the island instead of its consent to the enosis of the rest of the island with Greece. However, this plan, which Ankara and Athens were satisfied with at that stage, was rejected by Archbishop Makarios as violating the sovereignty of the country. As a compromise solution, international peacekeeping forces were deployed in Cyprus (Badulina, 2019).

On August 9, 1964, trying to get out of the diplomatic pressure of the United States and other NATO countries the Cypriot government addressed the USSR for help. Moscow again supported Cyprus, however, conditioning its assistance on the refusal of Archbishop Makarios from the idea of enosis and likely accession to NATO. Declaring his commitment to the non-accession policy the President of Cyprus established warm relations with the countries of the Department of Internal Affairs and primarily with the USSR, which conditioned Washington’s loyal attitude to the activities of the EOKA and other right-wing radicals in Cyprus (Canar, 2018; Menshikov, 1984).

The noticeable growing flirtation of the US Foreign Ministry and American intelligence agencies with Greek extremists did not elude the attention of the Turks and also interested them in Soviet mediation. President L. Johnson’s press adviser D. Pearson publicly suggested financial pressure on Turkey to withdraw its objections to enosis without preconditions. The Soviet Foreign Ministry successfully took advantage of this message, offering free assistance to Turkey in the amount of 3 billion US dollars (Gasymly, 2009). Turkish Foreign Minister F. Erkin visited Moscow from October 30 to November 6, 1964. During this visit, the Cyprus issue was also discussed. At the same time, both parties made a joint statement that “when solving the problem, it is necessary to recognize the presence of both national communities” (Canar, 2018, p. 235). In January 1965, the Secretary of the CPSU Central Committee N.V. Podgorny paid a return visit to Turkey, confirming the common position of Moscow and Ankara in the Cyprus issue (Sakkas & Zhukova, 2013).

Moscow was not satisfied with either the enosis option or the Turkish control over the island, since in both cases Cyprus would fall under the control of the NATO member country. Hence was the balanced and consistent policy of supporting the USSR government of Makarios (Uslu, 2003). However, at the same time, the Soviet leadership was increasing diplomatic activity in the Turkish direction. The change of government in Turkey in 1965 and the coming to power of the Justice Party, led by S. Demirel, greatly softened the Turkish position on the Cyprus issue. Speaking at the UN rostrum, Turkish representative J. Eralp said that both communities should live in a single state and “Neither one nor the other community should be given the right to forcibly place the other community under the authority of a foreign state” (Mamedov, 2017, p. 26). The peace-loving position of the Turkish Prime Minister on the Cyprus issue primarily caused by his awareness of the priority of solving internal economic problems contributed to the

growth of bilateral contacts. On March 25, 1967, an agreement on economic cooperation was signed between Turkey and the USSR. During the visit of the Prime Minister Demirel to Moscow on September 19–28, 1967, Moscow and Ankara once again emphasized the similarity of positions in the Cyprus issue (Canar, 2018).

Despite the seizure of power in Greece in April by the military junta of “black colonels” in the summer of 1967 the Greek deputies of the Cypriot parliament with the exception of the communists voted to begin enosis. In the summer of 1967, the attacks by EOKA militants on Turkish Cypriots intensified (Mamedov, 2017). In response, Turkish Cypriots unilaterally proclaimed their “provisional administration” on the island to manage the daily affairs of their community (Canar, 2018). In Turkey, pressure increased on S. Demirel demanding military intervention in island problems. Nevertheless, the Prime Minister supported the negotiation process. Moscow appreciated the peace-loving position of S. Demirel and looked at the Justice Party government with more sympathy than the “black colonels” military regime established in Athens in 1967. In turn, fearing a direct clash between Turkey and Greece the United States managed to get from Athens another recall of G. Grivas and the Greek troops from Cyprus (Mamedov, 2017).

Refusing an invitation to the White House, Cypriot President Makarios paid an official visit to the USSR on June 2–9, 1971, which was extremely painful for the United States. Makarios’s course towards non-accession to NATO and its ties with the USSR gave Washington the reason to fear the transformation of Cyprus into a “red island” and call the archbishop the “Mediterranean Castro” (Glushenkov, 2018). The American administration is beginning to actively support the Greek junta of the “black colonels”. In August 1972 and January 1973, US-Greek agreements were signed to base the ships of the 6th US Army Fleet in Greece (Artamonova, 2011). As part of the policy of pressure on official Nicosia, the Special Representative of the US President in Cyprus S., Vancy publicly stated in 1973: “In the event of a new aggravation of the situation in the Eastern Mediterranean, the United States will not prevent Turkey from invading Cyprus and landing its troops” (Shmarov, 1982, p. 72).

In January 1974, a coalition of the left wing of the Republican People’s (Kemalist) Party (RPP) and the Islamist National Salvation Party (NSP) came to power in Turkey. The leader of the first party, B. Ecevit, becomes the new prime minister of the country. RPP leader N. Erbakan accordingly holds the post of the deputy prime minister. The new leadership of Turkey, which came to power due to the votes of anti-American voters, was quite loyal to the USSR (Canar, 2018).

By the early 1970s due to success in the economy (over ten years the island’s GDP grew tenfold, from \$460 million in 1960 to 4750 million in 1971) the ideology of enosis has lost its relevance for many Greek Cypriots. Makarios also publicly announced his departure from it during a visit to Moscow. However, in response to the president’s refusal of the course on enosis, in 1971 G. Grivas founded the EOKA-B organization. Among the EOKA-B attacks are the murder of Minister P. Giorgades and the attempted murder of Makarios (Menshikov, 1984). Outraged by the intensification of EOKA-B activities the Cypriot president accused the Athenian “black colonels” regime of supporting it and demanded that this agency be recalled from the island and the Greek units stationed here be withdrawn. However, at the direction of the leader of the Athenian junta, Brigadier General D. Ioannidis, Greek military intelligence began preparations for the coup carried out on July 15, 1974 by G. Grivas’s successor N. Sampson and

his supporters with the support of the Greek army. During the riots that began in Nicosia, allegedly EOKA-B militants killed the American ambassador R. Davis. Official Washington chose to temporarily ignore his death and allowed N. Sampson to announce the unification of Cyprus with Greece (Menshikov, 1984). The Soviet Foreign Ministry sent a note of protest to Athens and stated that it did not recognize any leadership of Cyprus except the government of Makarios (Birand, 1990).

In Turkey, G. Sampson's statement was perceived as a violation of the 1959 Zurich-London Agreements. Turkish Prime Minister B. Ecevit, with the approval of all the country's leading parties, ordered the naval forces to launch the Attila Operation to land on the island of Cyprus (Gökçe, 2018). Despite the losses during the hostilities, the Turkish army managed to provide itself with a more or less satisfactory bridgehead for three days from July 20 to 23, after which, on July 23, 1974, the Turkish forces agreed to a ceasefire. The defeats of enosis supporters in Cyprus led to the fall of the military junta in Athens. In turn, in Cyprus, N. Sampson was replaced by G. Clerides (Menshikov, 1984).

During the peace talks that began in Geneva, the Turkish side insisted on the federalization of Cyprus and the granting of territorial autonomy to Turkish Cypriots. The new president of Cyprus, G. Clerides, asked for time to coordinate with the parliamentary parties of his country. Meanwhile, EOKA-B militants organized mass pogroms in the Turkish quarters of the cities of Paphos and Famagusta (Gadzhiev). In response, the Turkish military forces carried out the second stage of Attila Operation from August 14 to 16 "leading to the occupation of the island north of the Lefke-Nicosia-Famagusta-Kormacit line. As a result, the Turks occupied up to 37 % of the island. Soon there was a population exchange. 160 thousand Greeks moved from north to south of the island. In turn, 50 thousand Turks left the south of the island (Glushenkov, 2018).

It should be noted that 82 % of Cyprus's tourist infrastructure was concentrated in the Turkish-occupied part of the island, fertile land yielding 60 % of agricultural products and enterprises producing 70 % of industrial output. The port of Famagusta, which handled 83 % of all cargo arriving on the island, also ended up in the "Turkish zone". Given that after the beginning of the oil crisis of 1973, Turkey began exploration of oil deposits on its offshore shelf, some researchers believe that the Turkish leadership was driven not only by the sympathy for fellow tribesmen, but also by geoeconomic interests, in particular, the prospects for exploration and possible oil and gas production offshore along the northern coast of Cyprus. Here we can draw a direct analogy with modern disputes beyond the borders of the sea shelf between Turkey on the one hand and Greece, Cyprus and Israel on the other.

The United States sharply condemned the Turkish invasion. After the Cyprus events Washington and Ankara faced long cooling relations, which was completely overcome only after the military coup on September 12, 1980 (Kaigusuz, 2017). The USSR Ambassador to Turkey V.F. Grubyakov at meetings with Turkish Foreign Minister T. Gunesh also voiced the need "to protect and preserve the territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence of Cyprus" (Birand, 1990, p. 28). Nevertheless, intending to split NATO by strengthening its relations with Turkey, condemning the Turkish invasion the Soviet leadership refused to take a clear position on the future territorial structure of Cyprus and supported only the decision to withdraw foreign troops and maintain the independence of Cyprus (Kaigusuz, 2017). This decision was also caused by the right-centrist and pro-American government of G. Clerides coming to power in Nicosia.

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to determine the place and role of the Cyprus problem in the development of Soviet-Turkish relations in the 1960–1970s.

5. Research Methods

The methodological basis of the study included the principles of historicism and objectivity. With the help of the principle of historicism, it was possible to chronologically trace the sequence of foreign policy relations between the governments of Turkey and the USSR against the background of the emergence and development of the Cyprus crisis.

6. Findings

Paradoxically, the Cyprus operation did not only push the USSR away from Turkey, but actually contributed to the rapprochement of their positions. The imposition of an embargo on the supply of weapons to Turkey from February 1975 to September 1978 by the US Senate again contributed to the rapprochement of this country with the USSR. The states continued to develop bilateral relations, especially in the economic sphere.

7. Conclusion

The Cyprus problem played a significant role in the development of Soviet-Turkish relations in the 1960s–1970s. Despite Turkey's presence in the hostile USSR North Atlantic bloc, the two countries showed great interest and flexibility in relations. Until 1974, both countries took a similar position on the international status of the island of Cyprus, jointly opposing its annexation by the Greek military regime. The USSR's condemnation of the Turkish invasion of the island did not ruin the relations between the states. The Cyprus operation showed significant independence of the Turkish foreign policy course from the dictates of the United States and other NATO partners, which was appreciated by Moscow. Some modern researchers also explain Russia's individual diplomatic concessions on the Syrian and Karabakh issue by the desire to split NATO and break Turkey from the alliance with the United States, Great Britain, and France. Turkey's withdrawal from NATO is difficult to imagine, however, its open rejection of many foreign policy initiatives of Washington and Paris by its leadership has long become a reality. Just as in 1975–1978 the relations with the USSR contributed to Turkey's circumvention of Western sanctions, today the Turkish side is sabotaging Western sanctions against modern Russia and strengthening economic partnership with our country.

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