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THE MEETING BETWEEN PRESIDENT CELAL BAYAR AND SOVIET AMBASSADOR NIKITA S. RYZHOV IN THE CONTEXT OF TURKISH FOREIGN POLICY

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Abstract

During the Cold War, the international system was shaped by the rivalry between the U.S. and the USSR. Since the USSR constituted the primary threat to the security of Türkiye and the Western alliance it became a part of during this period, it is generally accepted that Türkiye as a member of NATO pursued a foreign policy entirely in line with Western interests. This study, however, argues otherwise by analyzing the official records that reveal the content of the high-level meetings held between Turkish President Celal Bayar and Nikita S. Ryzhov, who served as the Soviet ambassador to Ankara between 1957 and 1966. Based on these records, it is understood that a multilateral approach prevailed in Turkish foreign policy and Ankara sought to implement this approach during the most difficult years of the Cold War. In fact, during the Cold War period, Turkish-Soviet relations continued to improve in certain areas. To support this argument, the study extensively analyzes the documents obtained from the archives of the Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye, which have never been published before and which were obtained with special permission for the purpose of this study.

Keywords

Celal Bayar, Nikita S. Ryzhov, Turkish foreign policy, Soviet Union (USSR), Cold War

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Introduction

Due to its strategic geographical location, Türkiye has historically been a country on which the great powers devise their plans for achieving geopolitical supremacy against one another. The most concrete example of this situation was the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire at the hands of the European great powers following World War I. For this reason, Türkiye took careful steps in order to stay out of World War II. As a newly established republic and as a country which had just come out of a major world war, Ankara chose to pursue a foreign policy that was based on neutrality in World War II. Thus, Türkiye declared war against the Axis Powers only towards the very end of the war due to its desire not to become excluded from the new international system which was being shaped by the Allied Powers at the time.

Yet, right after World War II, the U.S. and the USSR entered into a new conflict with each other which would be later known as the “Cold War.” Although there were several crises around the world in this new period, there were no direct armed hostilities between the two superpowers. At the same time, however, other states in the international system started to gather under the leadership of either Washington or Moscow. This meant that the USSR and the U.S., which represented rivalling political ideologies, tried to attract as many states as possible to their own side. The U.S. succeeded in bringing together the Western European countries under its leadership and declared communism and the USSR as the key threats to Western security. Washington also started the policy of containment against the USSR and a Western military alliance led by the U.S. was established under the name of “North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).” The USSR, on the other hand, consolidated its influence over the Eastern European communist regimes and established its own military alliance that was called the “Warsaw Pact.” In such a bipolar international system, Türkiye chose to position itself on the side of the West due to the threat perceptions caused by Soviet territorial demands from Ankara and sought to join the pro-Western international organizations like NATO. In addition to security concerns, which was undoubtedly Türkiye’s main problem at the time, economic interests also played a role in Ankara’s decision to align with the Western bloc after 1945.

The position of a state in the international system is quite crucial in determining that state’s foreign policy choices, even though it is true that historical factors also play an important role in the foreign policymaking process. In the period

1950-1960, which is the focus of this study, Türkiye largely pursued a pro-Western foreign policy approach due to its alliance and collaboration with the Western bloc. Most of the studies that focus on this period in Turkish foreign policy emphasize that Türkiye gradually became a part of the Western alliance which culminated in its accession to NATO in 1952, and since then, has been determining its foreign policy priorities in line with the requirements of its alliance ties with the West.¹ However, there are also studies arguing that it is not sufficient to study Türkiye's foreign policy approach during this period exclusively in light of its relations with the West and that other actors, including the Soviet Union, should also be taken into consideration.²

Studies that deal with Turkish foreign policy in this period also focus on the diplomatic initiatives and activities led by prominent statesmen such as Adnan Menderes and Celal Bayar.³ In this study, the documents obtained from the archives of the Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye are used to reveal the basics of Turkish foreign policy and the development of Türkiye's relations with the USSR in the period 1950-1960. Especially by analyzing the records of the meetings held between President Celal Bayar and Soviet ambassador to Ankara Nikita S. Ryzhov, the study aims to reveal the dynamics of Turkish-Soviet bilateral relations. It should be emphasized that these documents have never been used in any study before and were obtained with special permission.

The article seeks to understand whether Türkiye pursued a fully integrated foreign policy with the West as many other studies on Turkish foreign policy claim. To this end, the article will first focus on the role of Celal Bayar in Turkish diplomacy and particularly the state duties he undertook during the establishment of the Republic of Türkiye as well as his diplomatic contacts during the period when he served as prime minister and president. Then, the foreign policy of Türkiye in this period will be generally evaluated in light of the Cold War dynamics. Finally, the relations between Türkiye and the USSR will be analyzed in line with the documents obtained from the presidential archives.

The article argues that the claims that Türkiye pursued a purely pro-Western foreign policy during the Cold War period provide an incomplete assessment as Türkiye actually acted in line with its national interests and in accordance with its traditional multilateral foreign policy approach. In fact, during this period, Türkiye prioritized its negotiations with the Soviet Union despite its alliance ties with the U.S., especially after it became clear that its economic expectations

from the West would not be met. These negotiations also show that Türkiye's threat perceptions about the USSR were visibly alleviated in time and Ankara later sought to cooperate with this country in specific areas.

Celal Bayar and His Role in Turkish Diplomacy

Celal Bayar, who assumed very important roles during the foundation period of the Republic of Türkiye, served as prime minister in the 9th and 10th governments (1937-1939) and later as president (1950-1960). He also assumed critical duties especially in the field of economy during the establishment period of the Turkish state. For instance, he was one of the founders of Türkiye's first national bank, Türkiye İş Bankası, and for a while served as the bank's general manager.⁴ In 1932, he was appointed as the minister of economy, and even prepared the "Report on the East (Anatolia)" which focused on the prospects for economic development of this region. It could be argued that his successful work in this period paved the way for his appointment as prime minister later.

Bayar's period as prime minister (1937-1939) witnessed his struggle with pressing domestic political problems and, as a result, he could not devote greater attention to foreign policy issues. However, he started to take more active roles in political life, especially after Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's death in 1938. For instance, he played a crucial role in the establishment of the Democrat Party (DP) in 1946, which became a turning point in Turkish political history as it signaled the beginning of the multiparty era in Türkiye.⁵

It should also be noted that as World War II was approaching, the Soviet Union did not want Türkiye to be completely on the side of the West, so Moscow made attempts from time to time to improve its relations with Türkiye. Therefore, when Bayar was still serving as prime minister, a trade treaty was concluded with the Soviet Union.⁶ This development indicated that Bayar was in favor of a multilateral diplomacy approach and tried to carry out a policy of balance between the Soviet Union and the West to protect Türkiye's interests.

The 1950s, the period when Bayar served as president, however, witnessed the deepening of the relations between Türkiye and the U.S. In fact, in 1954,

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Bayar became the first Turkish president to pay a visit to the U.S.⁷ This visit along with Türkiye's accession to NATO as a full member in 1952 and the permissions given to the U.S. by the Turkish government to establish military bases in certain regions of the country led to a hardening of the Soviet Union's attitude towards Türkiye. This was also why Bayar, who generally defended a multilateral approach in foreign policy, started to view the Soviet Union as a significant threat like many other Western countries at that time.⁸

Meanwhile, in the period leading up to the May 1960 military coup, the Turkish government was looking for support from its Western allies in order to alleviate the economic difficulties at home. The failure to attract greater Western economic support in this period compelled the Turkish leaders to turn to the Soviet Union and try to establish diplomatic contacts with Moscow. As a result, after so many years, Soviet Ambassador Ryzhov and the accompanying Soviet diplomatic delegation met with Turkish Foreign Minister Fatin Rüştü Zorlu at a dinner which was followed with curiosity and skepticism by the diplomats of Western countries.⁹ During this meeting, Ambassador Ryzhov stated that the Soviets were aware of the dire economic situation in Türkiye and ready to provide economic support to Ankara. The new momentum in Turkish-Soviet relations in this period was also noted by the German ambassador who reported that Türkiye's aim was to strengthen its commercial links with the countries in the Eastern Bloc.¹⁰

Turkish Foreign Policy and the Cold War in the 1950s

As stated earlier, taking lessons from the Ottoman Empire, which was a member of the losing alliance in World War I, the young Republic of Türkiye acted much more cautiously during World War II and tried to stay out of the war for as long as possible. The fact that Ankara had not yet recovered from the losses of World War I greatly impacted this decision, urging the Turkish leaders to follow the principle of neutrality in foreign policy in World War II. However, in the following period, Ankara chose to be involved in the Western alliance.¹¹ This was mainly because after World War II, a radical geopolitical change took place in Eastern Europe, since the Soviet Union refused to withdraw from the regions it had occupied during World War II and established communist governments in these countries.¹² Against these moves, the U.S. established NATO in order to contain the spread of Soviet influence in Europe. Therefore, when Türkiye became a member of NATO in 1952, this also meant that Turkish foreign policy

would now be guided by the objective of containing the Soviet Union in line with NATO strategies.¹³

Ankara's choice to approach the West was closely related with the Stalin leadership's unexpected requests from the Turkish government in March 1946 concerning the joint control of the Turkish Straits and returning Türkiye's eastern provinces of Kars and Ardahan to the Soviet Union.¹⁴ Facing the threat of such demands and surrounded by countries with communist regimes in its north and west, Türkiye's security concerns became much more Soviet-centered and the foreign policy of the DP government was built on these concerns. This was also why during the DP period, serious deviations were observed in traditional Turkish foreign policy instead of pursuing a more balanced and status quo-oriented approach. Even though Westernism had been a traditional element of Turkish foreign policy, in this new period, Ankara became much more dependent on the U.S.¹⁵ Yet, it should also be emphasized that the DP government in addition to strategic concerns had economic expectations from the West.¹⁶

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Türkiye's rapprochement with the West after World War II caused the toughening of the Soviet approach towards Ankara as exemplified by the "battle of diplomatic notes" that took place between the two governments about the status of the Turkish Straits in 1945-1946.¹⁷ This tense relationship did not change significantly until Stalin's death in 1953. The new Soviet leadership's diplomatic note to Ankara dated 30 May 1953 for normalization of bilateral relations could be regarded as a turning point in this regard. In this note, Moscow officially informed Ankara that it had given up its previous territorial demands.¹⁸ This, in turn, led to a change in Türkiye's approach towards the Soviet Union over time. The more accommodationist policies of Khrushchev, who succeeded Stalin, played an important role in the softening of the Turkish government's attitudes towards Moscow. Nevertheless, the decision of the DP government, which failed to receive greater economic support from the U.S., to approach the Soviet Union in 1959-1960 was largely a tactical rather than a

strategic move as the Cold War was still going on.¹⁹

It should be noted that despite the positive repercussions of the death of Stalin on Turkish-Soviet relations, new tensions emerged between the two countries due to Moscow's policies in the Middle East such as supporting the anti-Western government of Syria and the coup in Iraq in 1957-1958. Türkiye's membership in NATO and especially the permission given by Ankara for the deployment of medium-range Jupiter missiles in the Turkish territories caused great unrest in Moscow.²⁰ The shooting down of an American U-2 spy plane over Soviet territories shortly after it took off from the military base in Türkiye in May 1960 was another crisis that strained the Turkish-Soviet relations.

Despite such tensions, the efforts of Ambassador Ryzhov, who took office in Ankara in 1957, were crucial in the normalization of the ties between Türkiye and the Soviet Union.²¹ In 1959, after many years, Dr. Lütfi Kırdar became the first high-level Turkish official to visit the Soviet Union as the minister of health and social welfare. This visit could be regarded as a message to the West which failed to meet the demands of the DP government in the economic sphere. It was also one of the early examples of the "multilateral approach" which would become even more visible in Turkish foreign policy in the 1960s. It should be noted that Prime Minister Menderes was also expected to pay an official visit to Moscow which could not take place due to the May 1960 coup that brought the end of the DP period in Türkiye.²² While Menderes's planned visit was closely related with economic factors, as argued earlier, the new policy to approach the Soviet Union was supported by Foreign Minister Zorlu and President Bayar.²³

Meetings of President Bayar with Ambassador Ryzhov
[8 April and 23 May 1958]

During the Cold War, diplomatic talks continued between Türkiye and the Soviet Union. Given the circumstances of the Cold War period and the timing of these meetings, they are considered to be of great importance in terms of the development of bilateral relations. For example, President Bayar received Ambassador Ryzhov at the Çankaya Presidential Palace in Ankara on 8 April 1958. The request for the meeting came from the Soviet ambassador. The ambassador first stated that he would be going to Moscow the next day, and asked Bayar whether he had any message to convey to Marshal Voroshilov who was the chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Soviet Union. Bayar asked Ryzhov to convey his personal greetings and correspondence to Marshal Voroshilov.²⁴

During the meeting, relations between Türkiye and Soviet Union, particularly in the economic and political sphere, were discussed and mutual views on these topics were shared. The Soviet ambassador stated that the commercial relations between the two countries had recently gained positive momentum and that the agreement made with Türkiye İş Bankası for supplying the bank with Soviet credits was very important in this context. He stated that a similar agreement had just been made with another Turkish bank, Sümerbank, and that the Soviets were closely following the steps taken by the Turkish government for the development of Türkiye's national economy and industry.

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President Bayar, on the other hand, expressed his desire for the development of economic and commercial ties between the two countries within the framework of normal friendly relations. He asserted that the opportunities for greater Turkish-Soviet economic cooperation were favorable and that it would be beneficial for both sides to proceed by analyzing these economic opportunities and conditions. He mentioned that the Turkish government was ready to support the solution of problems in this matter. As he had previously served as the minister of economy, Bayar was well aware of the advancement of Soviet economy, and the importance for the Turkish economy of the textile factories founded in Nazilli and Kayseri with Soviet investment before the Cold War.²⁵ Bayar emphasized that the financing conditions offered by the Soviets to Türkiye were favorable and he would provide personal support to develop bilateral economic relations, since they would also be beneficial for Türkiye. Such statements by Bayar, as evidenced by the archival documents, provide precious insight into the Turkish foreign policy of the period as they indicate an aim to pursue a multilateral approach. Considering the fact that Türkiye was a member of NATO during this period, the talks with the Soviet Union emphasized the versatility of Turkish foreign policy.²⁶

While Ryzhov expressed his satisfaction with Bayar's remarks, he mentioned a difficulty encountered in the commercial relations between the two countries and pointed to the fact that the price offers made by Türkiye were quite high and, in some spheres, Turkish prices were almost 30 percent higher than the

international market prices. For Ryzhov, this was an obstacle that hampered the attractiveness of the Turkish goods for businessmen from the Soviet Union. Reiterating that such obstacles hindered the development of commercial relations and that their solution was very crucial to obtaining fruitful results in economic cooperation, the Soviet ambassador stated, once again, that he would be bringing up this topic to his superiors in his upcoming visit to Moscow. He added that if progress could be made in trade relations, this would be reflected in political issues. This was important for Ryzhov; he also mentioned that Moscow's positive attitude towards Ankara did not change even when the Turkish government was hesitant to develop political relations with the Soviets in the Cold War.²⁷

This shows that the USSR wanted to develop its relations with Türkiye in all spheres; initially, the USSR was aiming for an economic rapprochement which would subsequently lead to the development of political relations. Therefore, while Bayar reiterated his personal commitment to the development of economic relations between the two countries and requested the Soviet ambassador to convey this message to Moscow, he asked Ryzhov to share his views about the political issues.²⁸ The Soviet ambassador responded by saying that he admired Bayar's extensive experience in politics, but it would not be appropriate for him to express his personal opinion before the Turkish head of state due to the restrictions of the diplomatic protocol rules. Nevertheless, he politely expressed his desire to hear President Bayar's opinion on the issue. Bayar, in turn, expressed his willingness to share his opinion openly on political matters and requested that his remarks be conveyed to Moscow as stated.²⁹

Bayar began by noting the substantial differences between the two countries following World War II and stated that it was unnecessary to repeat the reasons for these differences once again. He emphasized Türkiye's alliance ties (referring to NATO), and the commitments and loyalty that came along with these ties. However, he clarified that Turkish membership in this alliance did not imply a desire to view other countries as adversaries or to support aggression against these countries. He made clear that Türkiye's main purpose in joining this alliance was related with the principle of self-defense. He expressed his pleasure to hear that the Soviet Union desired the continuation and progress of relations between the two countries despite Türkiye's alliance ties with the West and stated that he personally shared the same desire. Under these circumstances, he noted that the progress of political and economic relations between the two countries would be beneficial for both.

Bayar expressed his intention to speak a little more on the topic and asked the Soviet ambassador to excuse him if those remarks would not be to the ambassador's liking.³⁰ He stated one more time that after World War II there was a "malentendu," or misunderstanding, between Ankara and Moscow and that it would be pointless to dwell on this. Yet, he stated that a new era could be initiated in Turkish-Soviet relations, since it had been a long time since the end of World War II. At the same time, however, Bayar emphasized that while Türkiye had confronted new problems in the international sphere during this period, the Soviet Union was not very supportive and Moscow criticized Ankara on almost all international issues. Bayar argued that this Soviet policy was incorrect and emphasized that countries were entitled to pursue their own interests and policies. Thus, he believed that Türkiye's NATO membership was in accordance with Turkish national interests, just as the Soviet Union was following its own national interests. Bayar stated that during some meetings with Soviet officials in international forums, some of them displayed a hostile behavior toward Türkiye which was not in line with diplomatic courtesy. He was particularly critical of the fact that Türkiye was openly threatened by Soviet diplomats who used phrases such as "we are strong like this" or "we are strong like that" or "if we want, we can do this or that."

It should be mentioned that the Soviet ambassador had been acquainted with the Turks during the War of Independence that started in Anatolia shortly after the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia. This is why Bayar told Ryzhov that he should remember that Turks would respond negatively and react strongly when threatened. Bayar emphasized that diplomatic relations should be developed with a welcoming rather than a stern approach in the political realm, since both countries desired friendly relations. He added that he expressed these points openly and in good faith and requested that the Soviet ambassador convey them to Moscow. Bayar's statements hold historical significance in the context of Turkish diplomacy, since he openly pointed out the political problems between Türkiye and the Soviet Union, which had led to the deterioration of the relations between the two countries. It is also remarkable that he explicitly warned the Soviets

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about their previous threats to Ankara.³¹

Ambassador Ryzhov responded briefly to Bayar's remarks by saying that Türkiye's inclusion in NATO should not hinder good relations between Ankara and Moscow. He mentioned that the stern approach that dominated the diplomatic relations between the two countries could be easily softened and that one of the reasons for the "maletendu" which was mentioned earlier was the lack of a mutual and comprehensive dialogue. He addressed the mutual suspicion and mistrust which was visible between Ankara and Moscow and emphasized the need to work together to alleviate such feelings and rebuild trust in bilateral relations. In response, Bayar clarified to the ambassador that his goal in bringing up this issue was not to complain, but rather to underscore the importance of avoiding such a stern approach for the development of relations.³² Ambassador Ryzhov stated that he understood President Bayar well and assured him that the issues discussed in the meeting would not remain unresolved.

At the end of the meeting, applying a diplomatic tactic to soften the tense conversation, Bayar mentioned that during a previous trip to the Soviet Union, the "Soviet friends" had referred to him as "tamada" (master / leader), offered him "Narzan", one of Russia's oldest and most popular natural mineral water brands, and asked if they could refer to him as "tamada" once again after so many years. Ambassador Ryzhov responded by saying that this would always be possible. Ryzhov asked whether the existing conditions were sufficiently ripe for Turkish-Soviet relations to proceed in a sincere atmosphere. Bayar stated that it would not possible to resolve all the issues in only one meeting and stressed the necessity for conducting diplomatic talks in stages. He highlighted that genuine friendly relations between the two countries could only be attained by acknowledging and navigating the existing problems, i.e., developing relations within the framework of *realpolitik*. Before the meeting ended, Ryzhov stated once again that he would convey Bayar's greetings to Marshal Voroshilov and expressed his wish to meet Bayar once again when he returned to Ankara. Bayar concluded the meeting by saying that he would be waiting for the next meeting.³³

Upon the request of the Soviet side, Bayar and Ryzhov met once more on 23 May 1958. In this second meeting, which took place after Ryzhov's return from Moscow, the ambassador began by stating that he met Marshal Voroshilov several times and he extended his greetings to Bayar. Ryzhov said that he

conveyed Bayar's messages from the last meeting to Marshal Voroshilov and other officials of the Soviet government adding that Bayar's messages were appreciated on the Soviet side. He further emphasized the recollection of their past friendship and the time they lived as good friends and neighbors.

The Soviet ambassador told Bayar that according to the prevailing opinion in Moscow, Türkiye's involvement in certain military pacts with other countries did not prevent the maintenance of good neighborly relations between the two countries. Additionally, he emphasized that despite the Soviet Union's opposition to the military bloc to which Türkiye belonged, Moscow still aimed to foster neighborly relations with Ankara. He highlighted that there would be numerous opportunities for re-establishing the amicable atmosphere between Türkiye and the Soviet Union, and for rejuvenating political and economic cooperation.³⁴

Ryzhov drew attention to the USSR's economic capacity and to the fact that both sides would benefit from the development of economic ties. He mentioned that Marshal Voroshilov attentively listened to Bayar's messages and indicated his desire to meet Bayar personally after saying "a good *tamada* is always a good *tamada*, whether in Ankara, Moscow, or elsewhere."³⁵ Yet, Ryzhov added that the Soviet side was ready to conduct negotiations with Türkiye in a discreet manner, i.e., without publicizing the subjects on the radio or in newspapers. He mentioned the Soviet government's ongoing efforts to resume dialogue with the West emphasizing the importance of enabling mutual dialogue even if there were disagreements with these countries. The Soviet ambassador noted that a number of diplomatic messages had already been exchanged between U.S. President Eisenhower and Soviet leader Khrushchev, and negotiations were underway in Moscow between the Soviet Foreign Ministry and the U.S., British, and French ambassadors. He indicated that Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko was actively involved in organizing a high-level meeting with these ambassadors and assured that he would inform President Bayar if there would be progress on this issues.³⁶

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Another issue that was mentioned by Ryzhov in the meeting was that of atomic and hydrogen bombs. He told Bayar that the Soviet government did not believe it was feasible to ban the use of these bombs immediately, but expressed their readiness to prevent the use of these weapons by armies. In other words, the Soviet government would be ready to take the first step on this issue and would offer, at least, to stop the production of new bombs.

The Soviet ambassador emphasized Moscow's achievements in chemical industry, metallurgy and machinery, and reiterated their desire to develop cooperation with Türkiye in these spheres. He talked about the Soviets' interest in cooperating with Ankara to build new hydroelectric and hydrothermal power plants in Türkiye as well as chemical, textile, antibiotic, and flour factories. The Soviet side informed President Bayar of their interest in supplying Türkiye with tractors, agricultural tools, bulldozers, lorries, and a novel tool for mining and petroleum exploration known as "Turbodur," which even the Americans did not possess at the time.³⁷

Ryzhov's messages imply that the USSR was ready to foster relations with Türkiye especially in the economic sphere. Coupled with Türkiye's positive response, these messages, particularly in a period marked by the heightened tensions of the Cold War, hold great significance in Turkish diplomatic history. It should be noted that such efforts to achieve rapprochement between the two countries were also expected to have geopolitical repercussions. However, it seems that the anticipated progression in bilateral relations did not materialize very quickly. Indeed, it could be argued that one of the factors that led to the 1960 military coup in Türkiye might be related with the military leaders' desire to prevent a possible Turkish-Soviet rapprochement.

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In response to Ryzhov, President Bayar thanked the ambassador for the information he shared with the Turkish side and emphasized that he had nothing to add to what he had stated in the previous meeting regarding political issues. Yet, he reiterated once again Türkiye's adherence to its

international commitments and emphasized the importance of maintaining this fidelity. However, he also expressed the possibility of fostering friendly ties with the USSR.

Bayar talked about his views regarding economic matters.³⁸ Stating that the USSR was capable of achieving significant advancement in the economic field and citing the Soviets' positive role in the Turkish economy in the past, he emphasized that the Turkish government sought to achieve greater industrialization in the country with its limited means in order to increase the welfare of the Turkish people and there was much to learn from the experiences of the Soviet Union in this regard. However, he emphasized the importance of agreeing on the financial conditions and suggested that Turkish officials should decide whether these conditions comply with the international standards. The Soviet ambassador in response reiterated that Türkiye's membership in certain military blocs would not pose a problem for the Soviet government to deepen cooperation. He re-emphasized that Moscow did not have any preconditions regarding this point and clarified that the goal of the Soviet side was to develop bilateral relations. Bayar, on the other hand, affirmed that Türkiye did not want to enter into new military commitments against the Soviets in order not to complicate the situation.

Ryzhov mentioned the possibility of discussing economic matters with the Turkish president in detail,³⁹ but Bayar told him this was unnecessary as he only desired to be informed about the main subjects (like terms of payment). He emphasized the importance of organizing meetings with Prime Minister Menderes and other Turkish officials on this issue. The Soviet ambassador mentioned that he had not met with any other Turkish government representatives yet and expressed his intention to meet with the prime minister. He underscored the absence of preconditions for cooperating with other countries, but noted that discussions on economic relations inevitably encompassed political relations. Nevertheless, he expressed once again the Soviet side's desire to develop amicable relations with Türkiye without any prerequisites.⁴⁰

Lastly, Ryzhov stated that he had been subjected to questions from journalists after the last meeting, and that the press would again be asking questions. Therefore, he told Bayar that he intended to tell the press that he had come to convey his congratulations for the anniversary of Bayar's election as president. Bayar in response said that the Turkish side would define the meeting as a normal diplomatic correspondence and an official communique would be released by the Turkish government on the president's reception of the Soviet ambassador. This conversation shows that both sides preferred to keep the content of the meeting confidential since they understood that in order to develop bilateral relations they should act more cautiously due to the difficult conditions of the Cold War period.⁴¹

It should be noted that the first meeting between Bayar and Ryzhov lasted 90 minutes, while the second one lasted 70 minutes. As stated earlier, these meetings are of great importance in terms of understanding the history of Turkish-Soviet relations especially considering the political circumstances of the period. It should be remembered that the two states belonged to opposite blocs at the time. Under normal conditions, such diplomatic exchanges between a head of state and an ambassador are expected to have repercussions on the development of cooperation between the respective countries. However, if these two countries belong to opposing military blocs, both the content and the course of such exchanges become quite significant.

It should be emphasized that in the following years, the rapprochement efforts between Türkiye and the Soviet Union were particularly effective in the economic field. However, despite the development of cooperation in economic matters, political relations could not improve significantly due to the ongoing mutual distrust between the two governments as well as the domestic political turmoil in Türkiye which became more visible after the 1960 military coup. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that economic links with the Soviet Union deepened in an uninterrupted manner in the subsequent periods.

Conclusion

During the Cold War, which was an era characterized by unique dynamics, the meetings between high-level officials from Türkiye, a NATO member-state, and the USSR, representing the opposing pole, hold a significant place in Turkish diplomatic history. The records of these meetings clearly reveal the efforts of both sides to achieve reconciliation particularly in the economic sphere. It should be noted that the secrecy surrounding the talks between Turkish and Soviet officials indicates that the bilateral relations had regional and global repercussions.

It is commonly ascertained in the literature that the Cold War began to soften in 1953-1960 and that this period opened the way for the development of relations between Türkiye and the USSR. However, contrary to these interpretations, Turkish-Soviet relations, in fact, faced a number of problems in these years. For example, during the crisis regarding Syria in 1957, Ankara and Moscow came to the brink of a military confrontation for the first time after many years. Similarly, the coup in Iraq in July 1958 caused tensions in Turkish-Soviet relations once again. In addition, the Jupiter missiles issue and the U-2 spy plane incident also negatively affected the relations between the two neighbors.

Against this backdrop, the meetings between President Bayar and Ambassador Ryzhov are very important for the history of Turkish foreign policy. Even though the mutual desire of the two countries, which were on opposing sides of the Cold War blocs, to improve their political and economic relations was related with *realpolitik* in international relations, it was nevertheless a remarkable development considering the conditions of the time.

The prevailing assumption during this period was that Türkiye was aligned with the Western alliance and shaped its foreign policy with a Western-oriented approach. However, both literature findings and analysis of the meeting records reveal this understanding to be an incomplete assessment. The records of the meetings between Turkish President Celal Bayar and Russian Ambassador Nikita S. Ryzhov on 8 April and 23 May 1958, and especially Bayar's approach to events and his evaluations and analyses, are important for understanding traditional Turkish foreign policy and Ankara's versatility. These records also provide important clues for understanding and analyzing the present-day Türkiye-Russia relations. It could be argued that it is essential for Türkiye to pursue a multidimensional foreign policy due to geopolitical and geoeconomic dynamics. This multidimensional foreign policy tradition is a legacy that has been transferred from the Ottoman Empire to the Republic of Türkiye.

Even though the mutual desire of the two countries, which were on opposing sides of the Cold War blocs, to improve their political and economic relations was related with *realpolitik* in international relations, it was nevertheless a remarkable development considering the conditions of the time.

Endnotes

- 1 Hasan Ünal, “Dönemin Dış Politika Sorunları,” Haydar Çakmak (ed.), *Türk Dış Politikası 1919-2008*, Ankara: Barış Platin Kitap, 2008; Erel Tellal, “SSCB’yle İlişkiler,” Baskın Oran (ed.), *Türk Dış Politikası: Kurtuluş Savaşından Bugüne Olgular, Belgeler, Yorumlar*, İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2019.
- 2 Melih Aktaş, “Celal Bayar ve Adnan Menderes’in Dış Politika Felsefesi,” Haydar Çakmak (ed.), *Türk Dış Politikası 1919-2008*, Ankara: Barış Platin Kitap, 2008; Tellal, “SSCB’yle İlişkiler.”
- 3 İsmet Bozdağ, *Demokrat Parti ve Ötekiler*, İstanbul: Kervan Yayınları, 1975; İsmet Bozdağ, “Bayar’dan Dinlediklerim,” *Tercüman*, August 22-28, 1987; Mehmet Saray, *Sovyet Tehdidi Karşısında Türkiye’nin NATO’ya Girişi: 3. Cumhurbaşkanı Celal Bayar’ın Hatıraları ve Belgeleri*, Ankara: Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi, 2019
- 4 Nurgül Akın, “Celal Bayar’ın Başbakanlığı Döneminde Türk Dış Politikası,” *Journal of History and Future*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (April 2016), p. 130.
- 5 İbrahim Halil Tanık, “Asırlık Bir Yaşam Öyküsü: Celal Bayar,” Abdullah Ekinci & Levent Bilgi, *İslam Tarihinin İlk Asrıdan Günümüze Darbeler Tarihi*, İstanbul: Urfa Okulu Yayınları, 2017, p. 202.
- 6 Akın, “Celal Bayar’ın Başbakanlığı Döneminde Türk Dış Politikası,” p. 139.
- 7 Ibid., p. 203.
- 8 Ibid., p. 206.
- 9 Behlül Özkan, “Alman ve ABD Belgelerinde 27 Mayıs Darbesine Giden Yol,” *Yetkin Report*, May 27, 2021, <https://yetkinreport.com/2021/05/27/alman-ve-abd-belgelerinde-27-mayis-darbesine-giden-yol/> (Accessed 15 December 2023)
- 10 Ibid.
- 11 Hüseyin Bağcı, “Demokrat Parti Dönemi Türk Dış Politikası (1950-1960),” Hüseyin Bağcı & Kemal Yakut, *Türk Dış Politikası I*, Eskişehir: Anadolu Üniversitesi, 2018, p. 132.
- 12 İlater Turan, “Uluslararası Durum,” Haydar Çakmak (ed.), *Türk Dış Politikası 1919-2008*, Ankara: Barış Platin Kitap, 2008, p. 421.
- 13 Ünal, “Dönemin Dış Politika Sorunları,” p. 427.
- 14 Bağcı, “Demokrat Parti Dönemi Türk Dış Politikası (1950-1960),” p. 133.
- 15 Ünal, “Dönemin Dış Politika Sorunları,” p. 428.
- 16 Baskın Oran, “Dönemin Bilançosu,” Baskın Oran (ed.), *Türk Dış Politikası Kurtuluş Savaşından Bugüne Olgular, Belgeler, Yorumlar*, İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2019, p. 498.
- 17 Aktaş, “Celal Bayar ve Adnan Menderes’in Dış Politika Felsefesi,” p. 434.
- 18 Fahir Armaoğlu, *20. Yüzyıl Siyasi Tarihi*, İstanbul: Alkım, 2004, p. 522.
- 19 Tellal, “SSCB’yle İlişkiler,” p. 511.
- 20 Aktaş, “Celal Bayar ve Adnan Menderes’in Dış Politika Felsefesi,” pp. 434–435.
- 21 Mitat Çelikpala, “SSCB ile İlişkiler,” Haydar Çakmak (ed.), *Türk Dış Politikası 1919-2008*, Ankara: Barış Platin Kitap, 2008, pp. 451–453.
- 22 Tellal, “SSCB’yle İlişkiler,” p. 518.
- 23 Aktaş, “Celal Bayar ve Adnan Menderes’in Dış Politika Felsefesi,” p. 435.
- 24 Oran, “Dönemin Bilançosu,” pp.497–498; Tellal, “SSCB’yle İlişkiler,” p. 519.

- 25 Kliment Efremovich Voroshilov was a Soviet soldier and politician who became a marshal of the Soviet Union and a Communist Party leader. During the Turkish War of Independence, he was sent to Ankara to contribute to the tactics and strategy of the war with his military knowledge. He served as people's commissar of defense in 1925-1940. During World War II, he led the defense of Leningrad and prevented the Nazi Wehrmacht from capturing the city. At the end of the war, he was promoted to the rank of field marshal and became a member of the Politburo in 1947. Between 1953 and 1960, he served as president of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet. He died in 1969. In memory of his visit to Izmir, a major street in Izmir was named "Voroshilov Street" in November 1933 and Voroshilov was given the title of honorary citizen of Izmir. A statue of Voroshilov is located behind Atatürk at the Taksim Republic Monument.
- 26 Nazilli and Kayseri textile factories were built with the loan provided by communist Russia after İsmet İnönü's visit to Moscow in 1932. Russian specialists came to Türkiye, surveyed the location of the factories, built the plants, operated them, and trained the workers. One of these experts was Ambassador Ryzhov, who came to Türkiye as a technician at that time.
- 27 Presidential Archives (CA), 03005876, 1, April 8, 1958.
- 28 Ibid.
- 29 Ibid.
- 30 Ibid.
- 31 Ibid.
- 32 Ibid.
- 33 Ibid.
- 34 Ibid.
- 35 Presidential Archives (CA), 030307005877, 1, May 23, 1958.
- 36 Ibid.
- 37 Ibid.
- 38 Ibid.
- 39 Ibid.
- 40 Ibid.
- 41 Ibid.
- 42 Ibid.