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## **GEORGIAN, RUSSIAN, AND TURKISH RELATIONS AT THE DAWN OF GEORGIA'S STATEHOOD - THE BREST-LITOVSK PEACE NEGOTIATIONS**

**Abstract:** *The February Revolution of 1917 became the harbinger of a new period in the history of the peoples within the Russian Empire. The Brest Peace of 1918 became one of the most significant events in Russian history. In August 1914, when the military campaign began, the German leadership believed that it would be short-lived. However, instead of a quick victory, Germany found itself in a protracted war on two fronts. In November 1914, a meeting was held at the headquarters of Kaiser Wilhelm II, where the participants concluded that victory was only possible on the condition of concluding a separate peace with Russia.*

*Throughout 1915 and 1916, Germany made significant efforts in both military and diplomatic spheres to achieve its goal. However, the government of the Russian Empire rejected peace proposals, remaining committed to its agreement with the leaders of Great Britain and France (together with Russia, they formed a military-political alliance known in history as the "Entente") not to conclude a separate peace (the corresponding agreement was signed on September 5, 1914). The situation for the countries of the Quadruple Alliance (Germany, Austria-Hungary, Bulgaria, and the Ottoman Empire) worsened. In response, it was decided to intensify the activities of the German secret services, which were tasked with removing Russia from the war by destabilizing its rear.*

*Particular attention was given to working with parties and movements that opposed the tsarist government. One of these parties was the RSDLP(b), whose leadership, from the very beginning of the war, consistently advocated the slogan "defeat of one's own government" [Felshtinsky Yu. : 28].*

*The February Revolution, which overthrew the tsarist autocracy, fundamentally shook the foundations of imperialist Russia—this enormous state—and prepared the ground for its destruction.*

*It coincided with the final stage of the First World War, which caused a terrible economic crisis, devastation, chaos, and lawlessness in Russia. The Russian-German front practically collapsed, and the army was overtaken by an anti-war mood. It became clear that, under the current circumstances, the best decision for Russia would be to conclude a separate peace with the enemy. However, due to pressure from the Entente countries and certain circles in Russia that had long dreamed of gaining control of the Bosphorus and Dardanelles, the Kerensky government was unable to withdraw from the war. The fall of the Russian autocracy undermined the foundations on which the Russian Empire had stood for centuries [ TSGIAG, Case 8 :110-111].*

**Key words:** Georgia; Turkey; Brest Peace Treaty, Russia.

**JEL classification:** N30, N40

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## საქართველოს, რუსეთისა და თურქეთის ურთიერთობები საქართველოს სახელმწიფოებრიობის გარიჟრაჟზე - ბრესტ-ლიტოვსკის სამშვიდობო მოლაპარაკებები

**აბსტრაქტი:** 1917 წლის თებერვლის დემოკრატიული რევოლუცია გახდა ახალი პერიოდის საწინდარი რუსეთის იმპერიის ხალხების ისტორიაში. 1918 წელს ბრესტ-ლიტოვსკის ხელშეკრულება გახდა ერთ-ერთი ყველაზე მნიშვნელოვანი მოვლენა რუსეთის ისტორიაში. 1914 წლის აგვისტოში, როდესაც დაიწყო სამხედრო კამპანია, გერმანიის ხელმძღვანელობამ სჯეროდა, რომ ეს ხანმოკლე იქნებოდა. თუმცა, სწრაფი გამარჯვების ნაცვლად, გერმანია ორ ფრონტზე გაჭიანურებული ომით დასრულდა. 1914 წლის ნოემბერში კაიზერ ვილჰელმ II-ის შტაბ-ბინაში გაიმართა შეხვედრა, რომლის მონაწილეები მივიდნენ დასკვნამდე, რომ გამარჯვება შესაძლებელი იყო მხოლოდ იმ შემთხვევაში, თუ რუსეთთან ცალკე მშვიდობა დაიდო. მთელი 1915 და 1916 წლებში. გერმანიამ თავისი მიზნის მისაღწევად მნიშვნელოვანი ძალისხმევა გაიღო სამხედრო და დიპლომატიურ სფეროებში. თუმცა, რუსეთის იმპერიის მთავრობამ უარყო სამშვიდობო წინადადებები და დარჩა დიდი ბრიტანეთისა და საფრანგეთის ლიდერებთან შეთანხმების ერთგული (რუსეთთან ერთად მათ შექმნეს სამხედრო-პოლიტიკური ალიანსი, რომელიც ისტორიაში შევიდა, როგორც ანტანტა) ცალკე ზავის დადება (შესაბამისი ხელშეკრულება დაიდო 1914 წლის 5 სექტემბერს). გაუარესდა ოთხმაგი ალიანსის ქვეყნების (გერმანია, ავსტრია-უნგრეთი, ბულგარეთი, ოსმალეთის იმპერია) მდგომარეობა. ამასთან დაკავშირებით გადაწყდა გერმანიის სადაზვერვო სამსახურების მოქმედების გააქტიურება, რომლებსაც ზურგის დაშლის გზით რუსეთი ომიდან უნდა გამოეყვანათ. განსაკუთრებული ყურადღება ეთმობა პარტიებთან და მოძრაობებთან მუშაობას, რომლებიც ცარისტულ ხელისუფლებას ეწინააღმდეგებოდნენ. ერთ-ერთი ასეთი პარტია იყო RSDLP(b), რომლის ხელმძღვანელობაც ომის დაწყებიდანვე მუდმივად ემხრობოდა „საკუთარი ხელისუფლების დამარცხების“ ლოზუნგს.

თებერვლის რევოლუციამ, რომელმაც დაამარცხა ცარისტული ავტოკრატია, რადიკალურად შეარყია იმპერიალისტური რუსეთის, ამ უზარმაზარი სახელმწიფოს საფუძველი და მოამზადა ნიადაგი მისი განადგურებისთვის.

ეს დაემთხვა პირველი მსოფლიო ომის ბოლო ეტაპს, რამაც გამოიწვია საშინელი ეკონომიკური კრიზისი, განადგურება, ქაოსი და უკანონობა რუსეთში. რუსეთ-გერმანიის ფრონტი ფაქტობრივად დაინგრა და ჯარს ომის საწინააღმდეგო განწყობა დაეუფლა. ცხადი გახდა, რომ დღევანდელ პირობებში რუსეთისთვის ყველაზე სწორი გადაწყვეტილება იქნებოდა მტერთან ცალკე მშვიდობის დადება. თუმცა, ანტანტის ქვეყნებისა და რუსეთის იმ წრეების ზეწოლის გამო, რომლებიც დიდი ხანია ოცნებობდნენ

ბოსფორისა და დარდანელის დაუფლებაზე, კერენსკის მთავრობამ ვერ შეძლო ომიდან გამოსვლა. რუსული ავტოკრატიის დაცემამ შეარყია საფუძვლები, რომლებზეც რუსეთის იმპერია რამდენიმე საუკუნის მანძილზე ეყრდნობოდა.

*საკვანძო სიტყვები:* საქართველო; თურქეთი; ბრესტის სამშვიდობო ხელშეკრულება, რუსეთი.

*JEL კლასიფიკაცია:* N30, N40

## INTRODUCTION

The practical implementation of Russia's withdrawal from the war began after the Bolsheviks came to power. The Second All-Russian Congress of Soviets adopted the Decree on Peace, drafted by V. I. Lenin. Having condemned the imperialist war as the gravest crime against humanity, the Soviet government proposed that all warring nations and their governments conclude an armistice and begin negotiations for a just, democratic peace without annexations or reparations. On November 20, 1917, the Council of People's Commissars of Russia ordered the end of hostilities and the beginning of peace negotiations.

On November 21, the Russian People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs, L. Trotsky, sent diplomatic notes to the ambassadors of the Entente countries, proposing "an immediate cessation of hostilities on all fronts and the immediate start of peace negotiations." The Entente states decided not to respond to the Soviet peace proposals. On November 27, 1917, the German government agreed to begin peace negotiations. The conclusion of peace was primarily in the interests of both Russia and Germany. The former hoped to preserve Soviet power, while the latter sought to transfer its freed forces from the Eastern Front to the Western Front, aiming to gain an advantage there and, ultimately, secure an honorable peace with the Entente countries. The conclusion of a separate peace between Russia and Germany also suited both the exhausted Ottoman Empire and Germany's other allies. The Entente countries did not want peace, but despite this, peace negotiations between Bolshevik Russia and Germany began in Brest-Litovsk in early December. In Transcaucasia, the situation was as follows: after the overthrow of the Provisional Government, the Extraordinary Commissariat of Transcaucasia lost its functions and found itself practically out of work.

Having assessed the changed situation, the Entente missions began preparations to create a government in Transcaucasia independent of Bolshevik Russia, as confirmed by a telegram from U.S. Consul Smith to Secretary of State Lansing [TSGIAG, Case 116:12]. The Bolshevik coup in Russia was unacceptable to the Georgian Mensheviks. This stance was fully reflected in the resolution adopted by the regional council, which stated: "The Bolshevik uprising in Petrograd... will lead to the obvious destruction of the progress achieved. The interests of the revolution demand the peaceful liquidation of the uprising, in agreement with all the forces of revolutionary democracy" [TSGIAG, Case 8 :110-111].

As can be seen, the political figures and leading parties of Transcaucasia at that time were not particularly enthusiastic about Lenin and his Bolshevik government. Through their actions, they demonstrated a desire to cooperate with the Entente countries. It is also important to note that the political forces in Transcaucasia not aligned with the Bolsheviks would not have sat down at the negotiating table with them. This complicated the situation for the Transcaucasian peoples. Soon, this manifested in the development of Transcaucasian

phenomena, when the local authorities largely lost both control over the scenario and leadership in governing the country.

Georgian Social Democracy, which had been a significant political force for a quarter of a century, viewed the struggle based on social and class interests as the main strategic focus of its policy, while national ideals were relegated to the background. Naturally, this erroneous stance of the leading party prevented the resolution of pressing issues and only brought harm to Georgia.

On November 15 (November 28, new style), 1917, the Transcaucasian Commissariat was created as the governing body of Transcaucasia. By this time, a very complex and tense political situation had developed in the region. If the Transcaucasian Commissariat wanted to justify its creation, it needed to carefully consider and foresee many developments when shaping its foreign policy. The key task was to determine which political force would emerge as the leader in the future. The correct resolution of this issue and a clear direction remained an essential priority [**Trabzon Conference, collection of documents :11**]. The Transcaucasian authorities faced a difficult dilemma as the conference between Russia and the states of the German bloc gradually gained strength in Brest-Litovsk.

#### **MAIN TEXT**

On December 22, 1917, armistice negotiations began in Brest-Litovsk, where the Headquarters of the Supreme Command of the German troops on the Eastern Front was located (the location of the negotiations was proposed by Germany), and ended on December 15 with the signing of a 28-day armistice treaty. On the same day, peace negotiations began in the officers' meeting hall of the Brest Fortress, where the Soviet side, after an unsuccessful attempt to involve the Entente states in the peace talks, was forced to participate independently. The Soviet delegation included A. Ioffe (chairman), L. B. Kamenev, and G. Ya. Sokolnikov, representing the RSDLP(b), as well as A. Bitsenko and S. Maslovsky-Mstislavsky, representing the Left Socialist Revolutionary Party. The German side was represented by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs R. von Kühlmann and General M. Hoffmann, the Austrian side by the Minister of Foreign Affairs O. Czernin, the Turkish side by Grand Vizier M. Talaat Pasha, and the Bulgarian side by the Minister of Justice D. Popov.

The peace negotiations took place against the backdrop of an increasing desire among the peoples of the former Russian Empire for independent existence. By the end of 1917, calls for separation from Russia or for autonomy within it had been expressed by the Finns, Ukrainians, Tatars, Lithuanians, Latvians, Estonians, Bashkirs, and the peoples of the Caucasus, Siberia, and Central Asia. While agreeing to participate in the negotiations, the Soviet side did not have a clear strategy and viewed the talks primarily as a means of propaganda to accelerate the world revolution. This approach was already evident at the first meeting of the peace conference. The Soviet demands were vague and resembled a declaration of general principles. The Quadruple Alliance powers were urged to refrain from forcibly annexing territories captured during the war, withdraw troops from occupied territories as soon as possible, restore the independence of all peoples who had lost it during the war, and grant national groups that lacked political independence before the war the right to decide their state affiliation through a referendum. Additionally, the Soviets demanded the protection of cultural and national independence for minorities in territories inhabited by multiple nationalities, and if possible, administrative autonomy. They also recognized as unacceptable any pressure from stronger nations against weaker ones. On March 3, 1918, in

Brest-Litovsk, the Soviet delegation signed a peace treaty with Germany and its allies, a treaty that was clearly dictated by force.

What was the reason for such a sharp turn in Bolshevik foreign policy? Soviet historiography, for 70 years, repeatedly adhered to the same narrative, according to which the Brest Peace Treaty allegedly represented a brilliant victory of Lenin's strategy and tactics. The argument was that, under conditions where the Entente and the USA failed to achieve peace, Lenin managed to reach a compromise with the German imperialists. The central idea of this concept was the assertion that, from the very first days of the October Revolution, Lenin, in line with the principle of peaceful coexistence among countries with different political systems, sought to secure a peace treaty. In this context, the abrupt shift in Bolshevik policy was portrayed as a logical progression of Lenin's strategy and proof of his correctness in the fight against the "left communists" and "Trotskyists." The main elements of this narrative began to emerge in the late 1920s, during the internal party struggles of the Stalinists—first against Trotsky and his supporters, and later against Bukharin. Ultimately, this concept was formalized in 1938 in the short course History of the RCP(b) [**Zosidze N. : 25**].

But not everything is correct in this concept, and to reveal the truth it is necessary to reconstruct the course of events related to the Brest-Litovsk Peace Treaty based on new documents published in recent years. However, at the moment this is not our task. Although it should still be noted that in order to clarify the role of the Brest-Litovsk Treaty in the history of our homeland it is necessary to restore those moral and ideological coordinates in which the Bolsheviks and other revolutionary parties of that time lived. It is also necessary to understand that the establishment of Soviet power in Russia initially represented only one part of the great phenomenon of the world socialist revolution, which, in their view, was a matter of the near future. The Bolsheviks saw the main goal of their further activities in the ideas of permanent revolution.

As is well known, negotiations for a temporary peace began in Brest-Litovsk on December 3, 1917. After lengthy debates, it was decided to sign a temporary agreement for 28 days. On December 9, the first session of the official peace conference began [**History of diplomacy, edited by academician V. Potemkin : 321**]. The Soviet Russia delegation proposed to base the agreement on the idea of universal democratic peace. However, German military circles were determined to maintain their territorial claims, which only grew during the course of the negotiations. On December 22, the Soviet delegation presented its own version of the agreement, a six-article program that aligned with the decree "On Peace." The third and fourth articles are of particular interest.

In the third article, the Russian delegation declared that national groups which had no political identity before the war should now have the full right to decide whether to belong to one state or another or to form their own state through a referendum. The article further stipulated that the referendum should be conducted in such a way as to allow the population of the given territory to vote freely. Refugees and emigrants were to be granted the same right.

According to the fourth article, in territories inhabited by multiple nationalities, their rights should be protected by laws that ensure cultural and national identity, even in the form of administrative autonomy.

In the interest of maintaining decency, representatives of the Quadruple Alliance agreed to accept the Soviet peace proposals on the condition that the Entente powers also join them. On December 30, 1917, Trotsky sent a corresponding appeal to the states and peoples

of the Entente. However, since the Entente powers did not respond to the Soviet government's appeal, R. von Kühlmann rejected the Soviet proposals on January 9, 1918.

The "vague" nature of the negotiations infuriated the German generals. On December 26, 1917, General P. von Hindenburg sent a telegram to Wilhelm II, demanding that Russia be treated as a defeated state, and based on this, that the negotiations be accelerated. Ludendorff shared Hindenburg's views. Following this military protest, German diplomacy began to treat the Soviet side's demands more harshly. On December 27, Kühlmann, referencing Soviet declarations on national policy, demanded that the representatives of Soviet Russia recognize the independence of Poland, Lithuania, Courland, parts of Estonia, and Livonia. At the same meeting, the Soviet delegation learned of the arrival in Brest of a delegation from the Ukrainian Central Rada. The Soviet delegation was unprepared for this and requested a break to consult with the government [**History of diplomacy, edited by academician V. Potemkin : 320**].

The Brest-Litovsk Conference was truly extraordinary in its nature and outcomes. Having found itself in complete isolation from its former Entente allies, the Russian Bolshevik government, figuratively speaking, fell into the jaws of Germany and its allies. Despite this, the Russian delegation at the conference made every effort to achieve a peace treaty. Russia wanted to exit the war in order to free itself from martial law and address its domestic political and economic issues. Based on this, the Russian delegation at the conference was prepared to accept even the most intolerable and humiliating conditions presented by Germany. It must also be taken into account that Germany's ally, the Ottoman Empire (often referred to as the "Brilliant Porte"), also had its own specific goals regarding the Transcaucasus and sought to address them at this conference. It was clear that Georgia faced the threat of losing a significant portion of its territories.

On January 1 (14), 1918, Lieutenant General I. Odishelidze received a letter from the Commander-in-Chief of the Turkish Army, Ferik Vehib-Mehmed, stating that the acting Commander-in-Chief of the Turkish Army, Enver Pasha, wanted to know "by what means it would be possible to restore relations with the independent Caucasian government, and what proposals the independent Caucasian government had for restoring peaceful relations between the two sides." To this end, Enver Pasha was prepared to send a delegation to the capital of the independent Caucasian Government, Tbilisi, in order to achieve "the swift restoration of a mutually desired and just peace" [**Documents and materials on the foreign policy of Transcaucasia and Georgia : №15**].

Although this telegram explicitly mentioned (four times - N.Z.) the status of the independent Caucasian government (represented by the Transcaucasian Commissariat), this was not a sincere statement on the part of the Ottoman side. The fact that the Ottoman side did not consider the actual government of Transcaucasia to be legitimate and did not recognize it "de jure" was clearly evident at the very first meeting of the Trabzon Peace Conference.

In response, the Transcaucasian Commissariat notified the Ottoman side that the Transcaucasian government was very interested in ending the war and establishing peace as soon as possible. However, it also considered it "necessary to inform you that, being an integral part of the Russian Republic, we can begin peace negotiations only upon receiving the appropriate authority from the Constituent Assembly, which had just convened" [**Documents and materials on the foreign policy of Transcaucasia and Georgia : №16**]. The Commissariat also stated that the deputies of Transcaucasia were heading to Moscow to

participate in the work of the Constituent Assembly, where they would put forward this proposal, and the response would be immediately communicated to the Ottoman side.

On January 12 (January 25), 1918, it became known that the Constituent Assembly of Russia had been dissolved by the Bolsheviks. The Transcaucasian government now faced the following reality: either recognize the Bolshevik government or begin negotiations with the Ottomans. The latter path was chosen.

We share the opinion of Doctor of Historical Sciences, Professor Mikhail Svanidze, that if the Transcaucasian government did not recognize the Bolshevik government, it should have more actively asserted its position and officially declared the independence of Transcaucasia. However, Noe Zhordania and his associates still hoped that the Bolsheviks would not retain power in Russia for long, so they believed that the conditions for declaring the independence of Transcaucasia were not yet ripe. As a result, they did not pay sufficient attention to the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk [**Svanidze M. : 288-289**].

On January 18, Hoffmann invited the Soviet delegation to familiarize themselves with a map outlining the territorial demands of Germany and its allies. The Hoffmann Line carved out an area of over 150,000 square kilometers from the former Russian Empire. The territories lost to Russia included Poland, Lithuania, parts of Belarus, and Ukraine. Germany was granted control over the ports of the Baltic Sea. Thus, the Soviet representatives were made to understand that it was time to move from declaring general principles to negotiating specific peace terms. Hoffmann's proposals, which Trotsky characterized as a covert form of annexation, were transmitted to Petrograd. The Central Committee of the RSDLP(b) ordered Trotsky to urgently return to the Russian capital to discuss how to respond to the proposals of Germany and its allies [**Felshtinsky Yu. 49**].

The hardening of the position of the Quadruple Alliance powers concerned the leaders of Soviet Russia. It was no longer possible to drag out the negotiations. Attempts to move them to Stockholm or Pskov were unsuccessful as well. Hopes for support from the workers of Europe also proved to be unfounded. Although the situation of Germany and its allies was difficult—evidenced by the mass anti-war demonstrations that took place in many cities of Germany and Austria-Hungary at the end of January 1918—the situation in these countries remained under the control of their governments.

The Soviet government faced a difficult choice: either to conclude a "shameful" peace or to continue the "revolutionary war." The head of the Soviet government, V. I. Lenin, advocated for accepting the German peace terms. He believed that the Russian army would be unable to effectively resist enemy troops and, above all, was focused on the need to retain power at any cost—even if it meant ceding part of the former empire's territory. However, admitting defeat was not easy. The supporters of immediate peace were a minority, even within revolutionary organizations, let alone among other sectors of Russian society.

In these circumstances, Trotsky proposed an alternative. He argued that Soviet Russia should not conclude peace with Germany and its allies, as doing so would amount to agreement with Germany's imperialist ambitions. At the same time, he suggested demobilizing the old army and starting to form a new, revolutionary army. According to Trotsky, this approach would allow Russia to honorably extricate itself from the situation created by its previous policies. He also believed that the proletariat of Germany and other European countries would prevent the German government from launching military action against revolutionary Russia, and that the German offensive on the Eastern Front would mark the end of bourgeois dominance in Europe. Trotsky's position was supported by the delegates

at the 3rd All-Russian Congress of Soviets, held from January 10 to 13, 1918, in Petrograd. Lenin was ultimately forced to yield.

The second round of peace negotiations, which began on December 27 (January 9, 1918), 1917, took place in a highly tense atmosphere. At this new stage of the negotiations, Trotsky adopted a more aggressive approach and even provoked the representatives of the Quadruple Alliance to present demands that would provide the Soviet side with a pretext to break off the negotiations. He emphasized that, if the war continued, the Soviet government would appeal to the peoples of Europe to stop their aggression against Russia.

A few days after the start of the conference, on January 18, the Transcaucasian question was first raised in a conversation between the German Secretary of State, Von Kulow, and the head of the Bolshevik Russian delegation, Leon Trotsky. In particular, Trotsky confirmed that the Russian army operating on the Caucasian front was under the control of the Council of People's Commissars. This statement implied that the new Russian government, Bolshevik Russia, laid claim to all territories previously under the control of the Russian Empire. Consequently, Turkey's territorial claims were directed solely at Bolshevik Russia, and not at any other successor states. Trotsky reaffirmed his position on this issue at a meeting on February 9. He stated that Russia would definitely withdraw its troops from both Anatolia and those territories in Armenia that Turkey claimed[**Nozadze V. : 18**].

Trotsky also confirmed to German Foreign Minister Von Kuhlmann the existence of Transcaucasia as part of Soviet Russia[**Klyuchnikov Yu., Sabanin A. :125**]. This was likely the reason why Soviet Russia did not invite the Transcaucasian delegation to the Brest Peace Conference. During the peace negotiations, Germany and its allies were preparing to seize vast territories from Russia. Naturally, it was advantageous for Turkey to receive part of the Caucasian territories from Russia. At the same time, the Ottomans, encouraged by Germany, launched an offensive on the Caucasian front in order to force Russia to cede Batum, Kars, and Ardahan to them.

On February 10, 1918, Trotsky was informed of the demands of the Quadruple Alliance powers. After listening to the opposing side's arguments, he announced the termination of negotiations under the terms of "neither war nor peace." Trotsky's position surprised the diplomats of Germany and Austria-Hungary, but they took note of it. On the same day, Trotsky left Brest and traveled to Petrograd. That evening, a telegram signed by Commander-in-Chief Krylenko was sent to all front headquarters, ordering the cessation of military operations and the demobilization of the army. The question of the survival of Bolshevik power was now at hand. It was essential to develop a policy that could save Bolshevik Russia from a looming disaster. Following Lenin's direct instructions, the Russian side expressed its readiness to accept any draft peace treaty[**Janelidze G. :99-106**].

On February 10, 1918, a telegram was sent to Leon Trotsky in which Lenin insistently demanded that he immediately accept any terms of the peace treaty proposed by the Germans. After leaving the negotiations, Trotsky was confident that the Germans would not launch an offensive (he stated this at a meeting of the Petrograd Soviet). However, the German command thought otherwise. On February 13, the Crown Council, in a meeting in Hamburg, assessed the behavior of the Soviet side as a de facto breach of the armistice and decided to resume military operations against Russia on February 18. As planned, the German army began an offensive along the entire Eastern Front, from the Baltic to the Black Sea. The threat of the German occupation of Petrograd became imminent[**Sioridze M. 182.**].

On February 23, at 10:30 am, Germany finally presented its peace conditions, demanding a response within 48 hours. The Russian side accepted the German ultimatum, which consisted of ten points. Among these conditions, the Russian side was obliged to return the provinces of Anatolia to Turkey. After the final reading of the text of the ultimatum, it became clear that the Germans had made certain changes to it in favor of the Turks. As mentioned earlier, the Germans initially demanded that Russia return the provinces of Anatolia to Turkey. However, following the apparent display of weakness on the Russian side, Turkey's demands grew. Taking advantage of the situation, Turkey made claims to additional territories. Consequently, the question of transferring the Kars, Ardahan, and Batumi regions to Turkey was added to the previously mentioned provinces of Anatolia **[History of diplomacy, edited by academician V. Potemkin : 242].**

The claims of Germany and its allies were so brazen and predatory that, in order to navigate this delicate situation, Von Rosenberg proposed excluding certain issues from the treaty entirely. Despite this, the Russians were still required to withdraw their troops from these territories. Germany, in the form of an ultimatum, laid out strict conditions for their fulfillment. At the same time, Austro-German forces launched an offensive along the entire front, threatening to capture Petrograd. The Soviet government was forced to accept the ultimatum, as the old army was demoralized and unwilling to fight, while the new Workers' and Peasants' Red Army was still in the process of formation.

On the second day, February 24, the Central Executive Committee of Russia accepted the ultimatum, and the Soviet delegation was formed that same day, despite some difficulties in selecting candidates. No one wanted their name to be associated with the "shameful" peace. After the German offensive, Trotsky resigned, and Ioffe and Zinoviev resolutely refused to go to Brest. In the end, G. Ya. Sokolnikov agreed to head the delegation, emphasizing upon his appointment that he was doing so solely as a matter of party discipline. Along with Sokolnikov, the delegation included Petrovsky, Chicherin, Karakhan, and Ioffe (as a consultant). On February 25, the delegation left for Brest. On February 28, after arriving at its destination, it began its work. On March 1, the sessions of the peace conference resumed. Finally, on March 3, 1918, the peace negotiations concluded in Brest-Litovsk. Bolshevik Russia, Germany, Austria-Hungary, Turkey, and Bulgaria signed a peace treaty. The treaty consisted of 13 articles, the content of which largely reflected the German demands outlined in the ultimatum of February 23, 1918. The state of war between Russia and the powers of the Quadruple Alliance was officially declared terminated **[Zosidze N.: 34].**

In accordance with paragraph 4 of this treaty, Bolshevik Russia was required to fulfill all obligations outlined by the treaty. As noted earlier, the treaty demanded a great deal from Russia. It had to ensure the rapid cleansing of the eastern provinces of Anatolia and their equally swift return to their former owner. "The districts of Ardahan, Kars, and Batum will also be immediately cleared of Russian troops. Russia will not interfere in the new organization of state and international legal relations in these districts, but will allow their population to establish a new system in agreement with neighboring states, especially with Turkey"**[ Documents of Foreign Policy of the USSR : p.,121].**

This meant that Russia could no longer interfere in the state or international legal relations of these regions. It was required to grant the local population the full right to establish a new government on their territories, one that would be acceptable to neighboring states, especially the Ottoman Empire. On the same day, a Russian-Turkish supplementary agreement was drawn up, according to which Bolshevik Russia was obligated to immediately

withdraw its troops from the territories it had occupied, specifically from the Turkish provinces. Russia was allowed to maintain only one division in the entire territory of Transcaucasia—no more. This agreement also stipulated that the Russian-Turkish borders would be restored to their pre-1877-1878 Russo-Turkish war status [**Documents of Foreign Policy of the USSR : 199-200**].

According to the second point of the agreement: “The Contracting Parties shall form two mixed Russian-Turkish commissions within three months after the ratification of this agreement. The task of the first commission is to restore the border line dividing Russia and Turkey, starting from the point where all three borders—Russian, Turkish, and Persian—converge, and continuing to the point where the border line reaches the boundaries of the three sanjaks: Kars, Ardahan, and Batum. During this period, the commission will be guided by the border line that existed before the war... The second commission will establish the Russian border and the borders of the three sanjaks, subject to evacuation by the Russian Republic in accordance with the second paragraph of Article 4 of the collective peace treaty. The border there will be restored to its pre-Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878 status” [**Documents of Foreign Policy of the USSR : 200-201**].

This was the primary point of the agreement. Other provisions dealt with secondary issues, such as telegraphs, consulates, prisoner exchanges, and so on. The peace conference only partially reflected the aspirations of the Ottomans, whose far-reaching geopolitical plans began to be realized after the occupation of the Batumi region. Thus, the Brest-Litovsk peace treaty was formed, the ratification of which by both parties was to be completed within two weeks.

On March 14, the question of ratifying the Brest-Litovsk Treaty was considered at the IV All-Russian Congress of Soviets. Despite significant opposition from the left and right Socialist Revolutionaries (who accused the Bolsheviks of betraying the world revolution and national interests), anarchist communists, and Mensheviks (who also opposed ratification), the Bolshevik faction agreed to ratify the treaty only after Lenin promised that the treaty would be formal in nature and that the war with Germany would resume after a short respite. On March 15, 1918, by a majority vote in a roll-call vote (784 votes in favor, 261 against, and 115 abstained), the congress delegates approved the Brest-Litovsk Treaty. On March 17, 1918, the treaty was ratified by the German Reichstag (only a few deputies, members of the Social Democratic faction, abstained from voting; no one voted against). On March 22, 1918, the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk was approved by Wilhelm II. Thus, the treaty acquired legal force on the part of both Russia and Germany, formally ending Russia's participation in the world war. As we can see, isolated from all sides, Bolshevik Russia found itself in a very difficult situation. Taking advantage of this, Germany imposed truly enslaving conditions on it [**Zosidze N. : 29**].

This is how G. V. Chicherin, the Deputy People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, assessed the Brest-Litovsk Treaty's decision regarding Transcaucasia: “The territories to which the peace terms apply are divided into five categories... The other category includes Kars, Ardahan, and Batum. Regarding these areas, the treaty does not explicitly state that these territories are seceding from Russia; instead, they will be cleared of Russian troops, and Russia will not interfere in their new organization. The new system will be established in agreement with neighboring states, especially Turkey. In this case, the annexation is somewhat more covert than in the first case, but its essence, of course, remains the same” [**Documents of Foreign Policy of the USSR : 667**]. (The first category in the

report refers to those territories that finally seceded from Russian supremacy – N.Z.). To correctly evaluate this agreement, one must pay attention to Chicherin's words: "This is the content of the agreement we were forced to sign, with a gun to our foreheads." The gravity of this agreement directly affected our homeland, Georgia, as it was losing its historical territories: the Ardahan and Batumi regions [**Zosidze N. :65**].

Georgian émigrés placed all responsibility for the grave consequences at the end of 1917 and the beginning of 1918 on the Bolshevik government of Russia. We, in particular, share the opinion of Noe Zhordania, the leader of the Georgian Mensheviks, who held the Bolshevik government fully responsible for these unfortunate events. In connection with this issue, he noted: "After the dissolution of the assembly (referring to the Constituent Assembly – N.Z.), it became clear that we were left alone. This meant separating from Russia and arranging our life at our own discretion. This conclusion followed from the following well-known factors: the Bolshevik coup in Russia, whose authority we do not recognize; the withdrawal of Russian troops from the Ottoman front; and the Brest-Litovsk Treaty, according to which we lost our provinces. Since Russia refused to protect us, and instead gave away our territories, it is clear that it abandoned our country, left itself, and left us alone."

When assessing the Brest-Litovsk Peace Conference, it is important to consider the entire complex of factors. Russia, completely isolated, found itself in a hopeless situation. Seizing the opportunity, Germany imposed enslaving conditions on Russia. The Transcaucasian government, which clearly rejected Bolshevism, was in complete opposition to it. At the same time, it could not envision the region outside of a united Russia. The difficulty also arose from the fact that an objective assessment of the future of Bolshevism was complicated. When the Bolsheviks dispersed the Constituent Assembly and continued the Brest Peace Conference, it became evident that there was a need to develop a political status for the federation, which, unfortunately, the government was unable to establish.

The question arises: Did Bolshevik Russia recognize the independence of Transcaucasia? Whether it did or not, at that moment, it essentially changed nothing. However, Transcaucasia would have had both the moral and political right to reject the Brest-Litovsk Agreement and its clauses, which clearly threatened the territorial integrity of Georgia. In conclusion, it can be said that the conference was a true reflection of the chaos that prevailed in the Russian Empire at that time. The Brest Treaty serves as an example of what can be imposed on a defeated, isolated state.

## **RESULTS**

1. The February Revolution of 1917 created a political and social crisis in Russia, which ultimately laid the foundation for the collapse of the Tsarist government. At the start of World War I, Germany's strategy aimed for a swift victory over Russia, but the reality of fighting on two fronts turned the conflict into a prolonged struggle. In 1914, the German government considered a unilateral armistice as one of the strategic options against Russia. However, from 1915 to 1916, Germany intensified its military and diplomatic efforts, but the Russian Empire refused to breach the terms it had agreed upon with the Entente and was unable to reach an agreement on an armistice.

Germany, engaged in war on two fronts—against France and Britain in the West and Russia in the East—was keenly interested in concluding a peace treaty with Russia. Such a treaty would allow Germany to focus its resources on the Western Front. The Brest-Litovsk negotiations presented an opportunity for Germany to strengthen its influence in Eastern Europe and secure strategic reserves of food and material resources.

2. The February Revolution of 1917 overthrew the Tsarist government and paved the way for the establishment of a new democratic government. After the October Revolution, the Soviet government, led by Lenin and the Council of People's Commissars, began taking steps to withdraw Russia from the world war in order to focus on the country's internal political and economic issues. Lenin and the Soviet leadership viewed ending Russia's involvement in the war as a top priority. This objective led to the commencement of negotiations at Brest-Litovsk, where the Soviet delegation, led by Leon Trotsky, sought to reach a favorable armistice with Germany and its allies. However, their position was primarily based on propaganda declarations, which often did not reflect the harsh political realities. The Entente countries, particularly Britain and France, vehemently opposed Russia's withdrawal from the war. For them, Russia's continued participation was crucial to sustaining the fight against the Central Powers (Germany, Austria-Hungary, the Ottoman Empire, and Bulgaria). Consequently, the Soviet government found itself isolated on the international stage.
3. The events of 1917, particularly the collapse of the Provisional Government and the establishment of Soviet power in Russia, transformed the Caucasus region into a zone of political uncertainty. The Transcaucasian Commissariat, the Transcaucasian Sejm, and the Transcaucasian Democratic Federative Republic (hereinafter referred to as the TDFR) were unable to establish an independent stance. This failure resulted in increased pressure from both Germany and the Ottoman Empire on the region.
4. For Germany, the armistice with Russia provided an opportunity to redeploy forces from the Eastern Front to the Western Front. Germany sought to weaken Russia and partially annex its territories. During the negotiations, both Germany and the Ottoman Empire presented exaggerated territorial demands, which included regions in the Transcaucasus, such as Batumi, Kars, and Ardahan. The Ottoman objectives became particularly evident when they launched attacks on the Caucasus Front with the aim of capturing strategically important territories.
5. The Ottoman Empire took advantage of Russia's political and military weakness in 1917-1918, particularly during the negotiations of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, to pursue its territorial ambitions. The empire's goals centered on regaining lands lost during the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878. These territories, including Kars, Ardahan, and Batumi, held significant strategic and economic value. Positioned on the border between Transcaucasia and Asia Minor, these regions were crucial for regional control. Additionally, Batumi's port, a key commercial and transport hub on the Black Sea, was economically attractive to Turkey.
6. The Ottomans' ultimate goal was to create a "Greater Province of Gurjistan" (i.e., Georgia), which would include not only the Kars, Ardagan, and Batumi regions, but also other South Caucasian territories that would extend their influence. This strategy also ensured Ottoman dominance over the Black Sea coast and the mountainous regions of the Caucasus, offering them a wider geopolitical advantage. The Ottoman Empire deliberately exploited Russia's weakness during the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk and the chaos of World War I to regain territorial influence in the Caucasus. This process was not just part of the empire's strategic plans, but also contributed to the formation of a new political reality in the Caucasus. However, these annexationist policies ultimately created

additional difficulties for the empire, as it constantly faced resistance at both local and international levels.

7. The terms of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk were devastating for Georgia. The cession of territory by Russia and the satisfaction of Ottoman interests in Georgia's historical territories revealed Russia's isolation. Specifically, the treaty confirmed that Soviet Russia officially ceded the aforementioned regions. As a result, Georgia lost its historical territories, which were transferred to the Ottoman Empire, complicating Georgia's political and territorial situation. The terms of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, especially the transfer of the Kars, Ardagan, and Batumi regions to the Ottoman Empire, significantly impacted Georgia's territory and political landscape. The treaty became a symbol of not only territorial loss for Georgia but also of the additional challenges faced in the struggle for independence.
8. The terms accepted by Soviet Russia were perceived as "dictatorial" and a manifestation of Russia's utter weakness. These negotiations exemplified how a defeated and isolated state could be severely limited in its choices. The terms of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk represented one of the most painful and humiliating compromises for Soviet Russia. The clauses directly involving the Ottoman Empire fully reflected the Ottoman annexationist policy and their strengthened influence in the Caucasus region.
9. One of the main conditions of the armistice was the restoration of the border line that existed before the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878. This meant that the Ottoman Empire was to reclaim the territories it had lost as a result of that war, which had been part of the Russian Empire for more than 40 years. The armistice also included a Russian-Ottoman supplementary agreement, which detailed the process for restoring the border. Russia and the Ottoman Empire were to form two mixed commissions to establish the borders and oversee the territorial transfers. All territories were to be returned in accordance with the borders that existed before the 1877 war.
10. The Transcaucasian Commissariat failed to establish an independent course and remained dependent on Russia, despite its anti-Bolshevik stance. This region fell under the influence of both Germany and the Ottoman Empire. These territories were not only of strategic importance but also held cultural and historical significance for Georgia. The terms of the Brest-Litovsk Treaty directly reflected the military and political weakness of Russia at that time. Soviet Russia was forced to cede significant Caucasian territories to the Ottoman Empire. This treaty marked a pivotal political and strategic turning point, not only for Russia but also for the entire Caucasus region, shaping the geopolitical dynamics in the years that followed.
11. Although Germany and the Ottoman Empire were allies during the war, their goals in the Caucasus sometimes diverged. Germany prioritized stability and economic access, while the Ottomans were more focused on territorial expansion. This difference created tensions, which were reflected in the negotiations and territorial adjustments made in the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. The collapse of Russian imperial power and the opportunistic goals of Germany and the Ottoman Empire significantly altered the geopolitical landscape of the Caucasus. It highlighted how external powers exploited internal instability to further their strategic ambitions— a recurring theme in the region's history.
12. In conclusion, the Brest-Litovsk Treaty became a prerequisite for the collapse of the Russian Empire and the creation of a new political reality for the states of the Caucasus. The terms of the treaty revealed the global political crisis of the time and the tendency for

a regional redistribution of power. The geopolitical consequences of the Brest-Litovsk Treaty were intricately tied to the fall of the Russian Empire and the consolidation of Bolshevik power. Russia's difficult economic and political situation essentially "forced" the conclusion of a truce on terms that severely harmed the country's interests, particularly those of the South Caucasus. This event exemplifies how a combination of global war and revolution can fundamentally alter the political trajectory of a nation.

### CONCLUSION

"The analysis of the historical significance of the 1918 Treaty of Brest-Litovsk for Georgia should be expanded to better understand its impact on the country's political, geopolitical, and social processes. This treaty was an agreement between the Russian Soviet government and the Central Powers (Germany, Austria-Hungary, the Ottoman Empire, and their allies), which marked the end of hostilities on the Eastern Front of World War I. The treaty was significant not only in the European context but also for Transcaucasia and, in particular, for Georgia."

"The growth of Ottoman influence in Transcaucasia and its claims on Georgian territories became evident. The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk made it clear to Georgian leaders that the support of external powers (Germany and, later, the Entente) was essential for maintaining the country's sovereignty, as confrontation with the Ottomans appeared inevitable."

"Germany's support, later formalized in a military-political agreement with the Democratic Republic of Georgia, should also be considered in the context of the consequences of the armistice. Germany was interested in gaining influence in the Transcaucasus region, which Georgia leveraged to ensure its own security.

As a result of the terms of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, Georgia temporarily lost the important port of Batumi, which came under Ottoman control. This created significant economic difficulties for the country, as Batumi was not only a trade center but also a transportation hub for oil and other strategic resources. Additionally, Georgia's geopolitical situation became even more precarious, as the Ottomans' growing strategic interests in the region posed a major threat to Georgian sovereignty.

The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk was a turning point that presented both threats and opportunities for Georgia. The threats included territorial losses and increased Ottoman aggression. Among the opportunities, the most significant was the chance to declare independence and establish an alliance with the West (Germany). The treaty's significance can be assessed as one of the decisive factors that propelled the birth of the Democratic Republic of Georgia, while simultaneously creating a difficult regional and international environment that posed challenges for the country for years to come.

Furthermore, the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk opened a new diplomatic landscape for Georgia, where it had to adopt multifaceted strategies. The military-political alliance with Germany was Georgia's strategic choice to resist Ottoman aggression. At the same time, the treaty's aftermath forced Georgia to become part of the international balance of power in order to protect its sovereignty. These circumstances laid the foundation for the formation of Georgia's international identity, although they also significantly increased the country's dependence on external forces.

The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk radically altered the geopolitical balance of the region. Russia, once the traditional hegemon of the Caucasus, virtually disappeared from the political scene, while the Ottoman Empire actively sought to strengthen its position in the region. Germany, having established control over the Democratic Republic of Georgia, was interested in the resources of the Caucasus and in bringing the region under its influence. In this context,

Georgia's geopolitical choices were not just a matter of survival but also of strategic development.

"The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk was both a challenge and an opportunity for Georgia. It was a challenge because it represented an agreement between Russia and the Ottoman Empire that conflicted with Georgia's national interests, posing a serious threat to the country's territorial integrity and economic stability. However, it also presented an opportunity, as the agreement created a political space for Georgia to declare its independence and establish its place in the international arena.

At the same time, the outcomes of the armistice demonstrate how international agreements can create entirely new historical trajectories for smaller states. For Georgia, it served as a lesson in the crucial importance of international alliances, military strength, and national unity in defending sovereignty and safeguarding national interests."

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