

**The necessity of Supplying an Unimpeded Sea Terminal in Trebizond Sandjak.**

In the report of the Interallied Commission appointed by the Conference at London the attempt was made to secure to Armenia an outlet upon the Black Sea in three ways, by creating a free port at Batum, by granting to Armenia control over Lazistan Sandjak, and by assuring to Armenia the right to the free use of the road from Erzerum via Baiburt to Trebizond and the free use of that port. To your Committee, as to the London Interallied Commission, provision for a sea terminal for the highland state of Armenia, appeared as a sine qua non; but the provisions of the London Commission appeared to be quite inadequate for the attainment of that end.

The creation of the free port of Batum in Georgia, provided for in Articles 335-345 of the Turkish Treaty, affords for Russian Armenia the only provision for an economic outlet toward the west which the political situation in Transcaucasia and the ethnic distribution of the Armenians seem to warrant. For it is extremely doubtful that the Georgians, in their boundary negotiations with Armenia, will consent to the claim of the Armenians to the left bank of the Chorokh river and the territory south thereof. Any outlet in this northern district, whether at Batum or below it through the

Chorokh valley offers direct commercial drainage, so far as the Armenians are concerned, only to those Armenian districts which were formerly parts of the Russian Empire. In view of the remoteness of the territory concerned, its relative inaccessibility to the guidance of the great Allied Powers or of the League of Nations, and the kaleidoscopic uncertainty of the politics of Transcaucasia, the continued maintenance of freedom of access for Armenia to the port of Batum, as arranged for in the treaty, is highly problematic. The statement of Colonel Wm. N. Haskell, Allied High Commissioner in Armenia, dated June 24, 1920, was made specifically in regard to his own relief work; but it describes vividly the political uncertainty which exists, and will continue to exist, in Transcaucasia: "The whole business here for the last two or three months has been a hand-to-mouth proposition, which has changed each day and with no one able to foretell what the next day will bring forth."

We have therefore regarded the Batum provision of the treaty, in itself praiseworthy and a just and necessary arrangement for northern Armenia and the adjacent countries, as entirely inadequate to meet the requirement of a complete commercial outlet for Armenia.

The harbors of the Lazistan coast, at Riza and Off, afford only poor anchorage and are so exposed to rough weather that in certain months of the year vessels cannot

land cargoes. Back of Lazistan lie the great heights of the Pontic Range. The mountains are from 8,000 to 12,000 feet high, the passes from 6,500 to 11,000 feet. The gradients are tremendous. At present there are no roads leading southward into Erzerum Vilayet which are suitable even for vehicle traffic; and the cost of construction of railway connections into the Armenian valleys to the south is entirely prohibitive.

In agreement with the attitude of President Wilson, as expressed in the note of the Secretary of State to the Allied Supreme Council of March 24th, that access to the sea is indispensable to the existence of Armenia, we have come to the conclusion that this access is only to be obtained by including some portion of the coastal area of the Sandjak of Trebizond under the complete sovereignty of the Armenian State. In view of the history of Turkish-Armenian relations since 1876, we have regarded it as impossible to establish such an outlet by attempting to impose upon the Turkish government, if Trebizond should be left under Turkish suzerainty, arrangements for freedom of transit through Turkish territory to Trebizond and for freedom of use of the port of Trebizond.

In the settlement of the problem of Trebizond Vilayet it was obvious that the assignment of any portion of the territory to Armenia could not be justified upon ethnographic lines. Our estimate of its pre-war population

gives to the Armenians about 3% of the total, to the Greeks about 18%. The remaining 79% were Moslems of the two races of Turks and Lazs. The last-named people comprised about 20% of the total population of the vilayet. They are related to the Georgians, are exceedingly independent, and have little feeling of loyalty to or affection for the Turks, and none for Armenians. Deducting this 20% of Laz population we still have a distinct Turkish majority for the entire vilayet.

Accepting these estimates as approximately correct, the question of the incorporation of any part of, or all of, the Vilayet of Trebizond became purely a matter of an economic outlet for Armenia. In our study of the Black Sea ports all of our testimony, including personal observations and estimates of competent observers upon the Harbord Mission, led to the conclusion that railway connection along the old highway from Persia through Erzerum and Baiburt ending at Trebizond could not be developed successfully because of the prohibitive cost of the long tunnel through the Pontic range back of Trebizond and the steep gradients upon both sides of this range. The obvious course of the future railway which will drain the Armenian Vilayets of Erzerum, Bitlis and Van is along the Karshut Su with its terminal at Tireboli. This conclusion is supported by Turkish, Armenian, French and American expert testimony.

The settlement of the question of the outlet for Armenia at Trebizond and Tireboli has recently been beclouded by pressure from the Pontic Greeks, who are demanding immediate autonomy, with the probable intention of gaining entire independence or some form of political connection with Greece in the future. At the Peace Conference at Paris on February 4, 1919, Premier Venizelos stated before a meeting of the Council of Ten, that the Pontic Greeks desired that they be formed into a small independent Republic. "He did not favor this proposal as he thought it would be very undesirable to create a large number of small states, especially as the country surrounding the town (of Trebizond) comprised a very large number of Turks. In his opinion the vilayet of Trebizond should form part of the State of Armenia."

During the Conference at London in January, 1920, the tendency to restrict the Armenians to the Lazistan coast gave the Pontic Greeks a renewed opportunity to enforce their desire for independence. This change, moreover, seems to have affected materially the attitude of Premier Venizelos. For, in speaking upon the treaty with Turkey in the Greek Chamber on May 13, 1920, he stated that he no longer considered it possible to split the Pontic Greeks by giving a part of Trebizond Vilayet to Armenia and another part to Turkey, and that he did not believe that President Wilson would thus separate the Pontic Greeks in

order to provide Armenia with an access to the sea. Since this public statement, representations have been made to the United States government that Premier Venizelos preferred to see Trebizond Vilayet, except Lazistan, assigned to Turkey rather than to have it divided, as must be the case if President Wilson decides that Armenia have an unimpeded outlet to Trebizond and Tireboli. The Pontic Greeks also have petitioned the Supreme Council and President Wilson that they be granted autonomy over an area extending from Sinob (Sinope) to Riza.

By the terms of the Treaty of Sèvres (Article 89) it is impossible for President Wilson to deal with the Greeks inhabiting the coastal area of the independent Sandjak of Djanik and the Vilayet of Kastamuni (Uniya to Sinob inclusive). This area is definitely assigned by the Treaty terms to Turkey. Consequently the boundary decision of the President can only satisfy the desire of the Pontic Greeks for unity under Turkish sovereignty, and this can only be done by transferring all of Trebizond Vilayet except Lazistan to Turkey. The Armenian delegation in Paris has acceded to the wishes of the Pontic Greeks, now strengthened by the expressed desire of Premier Venizelos, and have renounced their claim to all of the coastal area of Trebizond westward of the town of Surmena. They feel, however, that they must have a large part of

the Sandjak of Gumush-khana, in the Vilayet of Trebizond, which contains some 50,000 Greeks. Their renouncement of claim to the Karshut valley outlet, debouching at Tireboli, forces them to appeal for an outlet through the Chorokh valley below Batum. In other words the Armenians have felt compelled to ask the Supreme Council, and now President Wilson, to assign them a portion of territory which is ethnologically Georgian and, from the American point of view, still politically a part of Russia. The terms of the Turkish Treaty do not contemplate that President Wilson is to assign any territory outside of the four vilayets, Van, Bitlis, Erzerum and Trebizond. Even were this not decisive against the Armenian request for the Chorokh valley, the consistent attitude of our government in regard to Russian territory, and particularly that of Georgia and Azerbaijan, as expressed in the note of the Secretary of State of August 10, 1920, would preclude the assignment of this valley to Armenia.

The question of the Pontic Greeks and the Armenian sea terminal has seemed to us quite analogous to that of Fiume. The desire for unity and independence or autonomy on the part of a relatively small population, racially and religiously distinct from the Armenians, runs athwart the economic necessity of a great hinterland for an outlet. The conditions which originally led Premier Venizelos

to declare that Trebizond should go to Armenia have not changed. Unalterable and imperative economic considerations, involving the entire hinterland, have forced us to recommend the assignment of the coastal area, including Tireboli, to Armenia despite the small number of Armenians living there. The sound Turkish claim thereto, based upon a decisive Moslem majority, as well as the Pontic Greek desire, must be regarded as secondary to the economic welfare of the Kurdish, Turkish and Armenian population of the three Vilayets of Van, Bitlis and Erzerum.

The elimination of the coastal region of Kerasun and Ordu from Armenia was dictated by three considerations; first, to include in Armenia as little as possible of territory which was predominantly Turkish in population and feeling; second, to make Armenian territory as compact and strongly defensible as possible by diminishing its westward extent; third, because the highways from the south debouching at Kerasun and Ordu form the commercial outlet for the eastern portion of the Vilayet of Sivas which is strongly Turkish. According to the terms of the Treaty of Sèvres all of Sivas remains a part of Turkey. It would therefore, be as unwise and unjust politically to include these ports under Armenian control as to leave Trebisond and Tireboli under Turkish control.