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The Black Sea Region during World War I and the Interwar Periods: The Forging of a Modern Identity

1 Introduction

Arguably, while World War I can be largely narrated as a continuation of pre-War geopolitical antagonism and rivalry between the two largest states in the Black Sea region, the ensuing history of the interwar period can be weaved as a *triadic narrative* account. Indeed, for the pre-World War I and World War I periods, the dominating narrative is a geopolitical one: Ongoing antagonism was manifested in wars fought for control over military and commercial navigation and access in the region. With respect to pre-World War I competition, the Russian Empire held the upper hand, although it was often thwarted or redirected by other Great Powers—especially when it came to the very existence of the Ottoman Empire, "the Eastern Question"[1]—while the smaller new state of Romania could not and would not be part of this antagonism. Subsequently, during World War I each of these three states, and another smaller and new state in the form of Bulgaria, fought in two power blocs: the Russian Empire (until 1917) and Romania (from 1916) with the Allied Powers, and Turkey and Bulgaria (from 1915) with the Central Powers.

In this interwar *triadic narrative* account, firstly, there is the ongoing geopolitical narrative which, instead of earlier antagonism, features historically unusual, friendly relations between the main imperial successor states: the Soviet Russia/Union and the Ankara Government/Republic of Turkey—sealed in the Treaty of Moscow (1921), the Treaty of Neutrality and Non-Aggression (1925), and the Treaty of Trade and Maritime Transportation (1927)—and a stable, multilateral regime forged via international law and agreements in the Treaty of Lausanne (1923) and the Montreux Convention on the Regime of the Straits (1936).[2] Secondly, there is a "collaborative" political-economic narrative of state-led economic developments: industrialization in the Soviet Union

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1 See Stephan Troebst, "The Black Sea as a Historical Meso-Region: Concepts in Cultural Studies and the Social Sciences," *Journal of Balkan and Black Sea Studies* 2, no.2 (June 2019): 14–15.

2 See Adrian Brisku, "Ottoman-Russian Relations," *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Asian History* (April 2019): 1–20.

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and Turkey, "agrarianism" in Bulgaria and Romania,[3] and a social-democratic, mixed economy in the short-lived Republic of Georgia.[4] And thirdly, there is the narrative of forced mass displacement of peoples—including ethnic cleansing and genocide—perpetrated by states on the basis of war and geopolitics, as well as on ideological and policy grounds of nation-building and national economy-building.[5]

This chapter offers a historical overview of both these periods using this triadic narrative account and drawing on the historical scholarship on the region to argue that especially the interwar period largely sets the stage for the modern relations between these states, sketching the contours of a regional Black Sea identity.

2 From the "Eastern Question" to a Regional Black Sea Identity

While historical scholarship on the region on this period is vast—considering Russian, Ukrainian, Turkish, Georgian, Romanian, and Bulgarian historiographical accounts and the wider Western historical literature—remarkably, few references engage with the region as such and employ the term "the Black Sea" directly. This is the case for contemporaries as well as for historians and social scientists studying the period.

One of the reasons for this—at least from this wider Western scholarly perspective—is that regional geopolitical events and developments in the "long nineteenth century" were read from an "Eastern Question" perspective. However, the term "the Black Sea" entered Western usage much earlier. A literal translation of the word *karadeniz* (the Black Sea) from Turkish, referring to the sea situated in the northern part of the Ottoman Empire—a direction that in Turkish culture is represented by the colour black—was first recorded in Diderot's Encyclopaedia of 1765 as "the people who inhabit the shores of this area are subjects or tributaries of the Ottoman Empire."[6] It was with the dissipation of the "Eastern Question"—the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in 1923—that sporadic articulations of and references to the Black Sea were made by contemporaries.

One of those early articulations was made by a representative of the Georgian government at the Paris Peace Conferences in 1919. In justifying his government's military

3 Nicoleta Ciachir, "A Promising Start of Interwar Bulgarian-Romanian Relations during the Government of Aleksandar Stamboliyski," *Valahian Journal of Historical Studies* 18 (2012): 40–52.

4 Stephen Jones, "Between Ideology and Pragmatism: Social Democracy and the Economic Transition in Georgia 1918–1921," *Caucasus Survey* 1, no. 2 (2014): 63–81.

5 Understood as political-economic perspectives and programs for a viable national economy. See Adrian Brisku, "Renegotiating the Empire, Forging the Nation-State: The Albanian Case through the Political Economic Thought of Ismail Qemali, Fan Noli and Luigj Gurakuqi, c. 1890–1920s," *Nationalities* Papers 48, no. 1 (2020): 158.

6 Stella Ghervas, "The Black Sea," in *Oceanic Histories*, ed. David Armitage, Alison Bashford, and Sujit Sivasundaram (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 249.

control of the region of Abkhazia in June 1918, he stated that this "Black Sea coast had been 'Georgian lands' in the 11th–13th centuries," adding that the tsarist Black Sea town of Sochi was a "'pure Georgian town.'"[7] In interwar Turkey—where the term had long been in usage—noteworthy is a booklet on a Turkish military perspective on the region whose title translates as "The North Part of the Black Sea Area" (1936), referring to the southern part of the Soviet Union.[8] In the Russian (Soviet) context, the historian of antiquity Mikhail Rostovtzeff—a full professor of Latin for two decades until 1918 at the University of St. Petersburg—did not use the term in his book *Iranians and Greeks in South Russia* (1922), published in exile. But by the mid 1930s, Soviet Foreign Minister Maksim Litvinov—in light of good bilateral relations with Turkey but in response to the latter's project to change the Bosporus Strait's status at the Montreux Convention in 1936—spoke of a Black Sea identity when declaring that "[t]his remarkable document [was] prepared with an impartial and liberal spirit. This spirit prompted the designer of the project to consider the safety of the Black Sea Countries as well as that of Turkey."[9] Interestingly, in interwar Romania, the economic historian Gheorghe Ion Brătianu, in his two-volume work titled *La Mer Noir et la Question d'Orient*, in studying the region's pre-sixteenth century history—with the Byzantine Empire as its fulcrum—in the first volume and its history during Ottoman rule in the second (which has been lost), used the terms "Black Sea" and "the Eastern Question."[10] Finally, in interwar Soviet Georgia, the historian Simon Janashia seemingly entrenched it in Soviet Georgian historiography with his book *The Historical Geography of the Black Sea*, published in the 1930s.[11]

As for the wider Western scholarship on or touching upon the two periods, one of the most well-known works is Ascherson's *Black Sea: The Birthplace of Civilisation and Barbarism* (1995). Providing a longue durée account of the region, in chapter seven Ascherson dwells more on the forced displacement of Pontic Greeks from the Black Sea's southern and northern shores: the Trabzon area in the context the Greek-Turkish Population Exchange in 1923 and South Russia and Ukraine following Stalinist collectivization and expropriation in the late 1920s. He estimates that 170,000 of the latter were expelled to Siberia and Central Asia. He briefly shines the spotlight on the Soviet Georgian littoral when mentioning Stalin's henchman, Lavrenti Beria, "the most prominent Megrelian," as the man responsible for the destruction of Georgia's interwar generation of intellectuals, and on the Turkish littoral by mentioning the fate of the Lazi peo-

7 George B. Hewitt, *Discordant Neighbours: A Reassessment of the Georgian-Abkhazian and Georgian-South Ossetian Conflicts* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 35.

8 Genelkurmay başkanlığı coğrafya encümeni, *Karadeniz Havzası Şimal Kısmi* (Ankara: Genelkurmay Matbaası, 1936).

9 Quoted in Vefa Kurban, *Russian-Turkish Relations from the First World War to the Present* (London: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2017), 66.

10 Troebst, "The Black Sea as a Historical Meso-Region," 17.

11 Simon Janashia, *Shavizghvispiretis saistorio geografia*, in *Works* (Tbilisi: Metsniereba, 1988), 6:250–322.

ple and their language.[12] Meanwhile, Charles King's book *The Black Sea: A History* (2004), in also offering a longue durée account "on the sea and its role in the histories, cultures, and politics of the peoples and the states around it," supplies a short narrative of World War I and interwar geopolitics, viewing the region "at the intersection of the turbulent Balkans, the Bolsheviks and European protectorates in the Levant."[13] This geopolitical narrative features in Zürrer's *Kaukasien 1918–1921* (1978) and in Ghervas's "The Black Sea" (2018), the latter bringing the interwar, World War II, and Cold War periods together under this narrative.[14]

3 A "Cordial" North-South Axis and a European-imposed Multi-laterism on "State(s) with a Black Sea Coast"

One of the most remarkable aspects—in this geopolitical narrative—is that while in World War I the region was plagued by war, violence, and destruction affecting the peoples of the four states, the interwar period became a relatively peaceful time—compounded by a stable and multi-lateral regime—for the four states with a Black Sea coast: the Soviet Union, Turkey, Romania, and Bulgaria. The most significant aspect was that "[t]he idea that the Black Sea could unite rather than divide the centres of power on its northern and southern sides [i.e., Soviet Russia and Turkey] would have been unthinkable" and became possible because, being excluded from the European order, "Soviets and Turks came to appreciate the ramifications of a shared geography."[15]

But their rapprochement and focus on a shared geography were not only because of exclusion from Europe, in the Russian case on ideological grounds following Vladimir Lenin's Communist Revolution/coup in Russia, and in the Ottoman case its mere dismemberment. It was also more immediate because Bolshevik Russians as well as Ottoman Turks led by Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk) fought wars within their former imperial territories—wars supported by other European powers—and needed each other's backing, this being the case more for the Ottoman Turkish side. While the Soviets withdrew from the Great War before it had ended, their Red Army began a five-year civil war against the remnants of the tsarist White Army. This was a civil war whose main theaters of war were the northern Black Sea areas, including the North Caucasus, with

12 Neal Ascherson, *Black Sea: The Birthplace of Civilisation and Barbarism* (London: Vintage Books, 2007), 177–202.

13 Charles King, *The Black Sea: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 3–5.

14 Ghervas, "The Black Sea," 234–66.

15 Samuel J. Hirst, "Anti-Westernism on the European Periphery: The Meaning of Soviet-Turkish Convergence in the 1930s," *Slavic Review* 72, no. 1 (2013): 36–37.

the White Army making its last stand in Crimea in 1920.[16] And thus the conflict swept over not only the short-lived independent Ukrainian states (the West Ukrainian People's Republic, the Ukrainian People's Republic and the Ukrainian State) and Crimea (Crimean People's Republic), but also the eastern flank of the Black Sea in 1921, which had also briefly become independent between April 1918 and February 1921, first as a federation, the Transcaucasian Democratic Federative Republic, and then as the separate republics of Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan.[17] This area had in fact fallen under British military control, which in turn sought to establish a "Caucasus barrier" against the Ottoman and Russian re-emergence there.

On the Ottoman side, with the Ottoman army having entered World War I on October 29, 1914—with a surprise attack, together with the German navy, on the Russian Black Sea coast—and having ultimately been defeated by the Allies in 1918, Mustafa Kemal Pasha garnered military resistance and established an alternative government to reject the Treaty of Sèvres (1920). The latter, signed by Allies and the defeated imperial government, imposed dismemberment on the Ottoman Empire. Mustafa Kemal Pasha's military resistance—the National Struggle, as it is known in Turkish historiography—to Greek, Italian, and Armenian armies within territories that would become the Republic of Turkey in 1923[18] would have suffered without what came to be Soviet military and financial aid. In fact, this assistance came about when the two governments signed the Treaty of Friendship and Brotherhood (the Treaty of Moscow) in March 1921, in which the Soviets recognized the legitimacy of Kemal's government and the territorial integrity of what would become the Republic of Turkey. Among other matters, the two governments decided the contentious issue of which side would control the Black Sea port town of Batumi and its environs; it went to Soviet Georgia but Turkey was allowed to use its port for commercial purposes. More concretely, Turkey's territorial disputes with Soviet Georgia and Soviet Armenia were settled in the Treaty of Kars in October 1921. The two governments also agreed to postpone resolving the question as to who would govern the Straits.[19]

Unlike the northern flank, where the Russian Civil War continued well into the first years of the interwar period, and on the southern flank, where the Turkish National Struggle against the Greek and Italian armies continued, on the western flank, i. e., Romania and Bulgaria, World War I war ended after 1919. Bulgaria accepted the Allies' decision, in the Neuilly Treaty (1919), to return the region of Dobruja to Roma-

16 Orlando Figes, "The Red Army and Mass Mobilisation during the Russian Civil War, 1918 – 1920," *Past & Present* 129 (1990): 207.

17 Adrian Brisku, "Afterword," in *The Transcaucasian Democratic Federative Republic of 1918: Federal Aspirations, Geopolitics and National Projects*, ed. Adrian Brisku and Timothy K. Blauvelt (Oxon: Routledge), 125.

18 Carter Vaughn Findley, *Turkey, Islam, Nationalism, and Modernity: A History, 1789 – 2007* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 218 – 19.

19 Kurban, *Russian-Turkish Relations*, 8 – 23.

nia, the latter having already expanded even more around the Black Sea coast when the formerly tsarist Bessarabia joined it in a union in March 1918.[20]

Thus, with wars ending in the early 1920s, the early antagonism and competition for imperial hegemony of the *mare clausum* (closed sea) policy of the north-south axis came to be replaced by "cordial"[21] relations between Soviet Russia and the Republic of Turkey as well as a multi-lateral regime for the Black Sea.[22] Their cordiality—despite ideological differences between "nationalist Turks" and "internationalist Bolsheviks" and because of European exclusion and "imperialism"—was reflected in the Soviet military and financial support and in their intense diplomatic, economic, and cultural interactions. For Turkey's interwar president Mustafa Kemal and prime minister İsmet İnönü, the Soviet Union became a shield against "European imperialism," and as such it made sense for their governments to align in opposing a "Western-dictated international order."[23] This was especially so for Turkey, which from its very existence experienced the weight of this order whereby a multi-lateral, open regime of navigation and commerce was imposed on the Ottoman government by the Allies in the Armistice of Mudros (October 1918)—reinforced by the Treaty of Sèvres (August 1920)—and remained unchallenged by the Turkish government in the Treaty of Lausanne (July 1923).[24] In this Treaty—signed by Britain, France, Italy, Japan, Greece, and Romania, but not by the Soviet Union and Bulgaria—Turkey's sovereignty and its new borders were recognized in exchange for its relinquishing claims to the remaining parts of the former Empire. This Treaty, however, did not strain Soviet-Turkish cordiality and their anti-Western cooperation[25] in the Black Sea region, as illustrated by the Treaty of Non-Aggression and Neutrality signed in December 1925. This Treaty of Non-Aggression confirmed that if the signatories fought a third party—Britain was trying to put a wedge between the two states—the other signatory would declare its neutrality.[26]

On the basin's western flank, after the Dobruja's handover, Bulgaria and Romania —especially upon the Bulgarian prime minister Aleksandar Stamboliyski's initiative— put their relations on a good footing. Stamboliyski, as a key figure of agrarianism, which had spread in the Balkans and Central Eastern Europe, sought closers relations with the Romanian state and proponents of agrarianism there. He visited Bucharest several times with the aims of forging a dynastic inter-marriage between the two royal houses and enlisting Romanian peasant parties in the Green International, an in-

20 Leften S. Stavrianos, *The Balkans Since 1453* (London: Hurst & Company, 2000), 579.

21 Onur Isci, "The Massigli Affair and Its Context: Turkish Foreign Policy after the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact," *Journal of Contemporary History* 55, no. 2 (2019): 272–74.

22 Troebst, "The Black Sea as a Historical Meso-Region," 17–18.

23 Isci, "The Massigli Affair and Its Context," 276. See also, Stefan Plaggenborg: "Kemalismus und Bolschewismus: Ungleiche Brüder und ihr historisches Erbe," *Osteuropa* 68, no. 10–12 (2018): 51–80.

24 Republic of Turkey, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Lausanne Peace Treaty," accessed June 21, 2020, http://www.mfa.gov.tr/lausanne-peace-treaty-part-i_-political-clauses.en.mfa.

25 Hirst, "Anti-Westernism on the European Periphery," 37.

26 Kurban, *Russian-Turkish Relations*, 42–44.

ternational platform of agrarian parties in the Balkans and Central Eastern Europe that opposed the Soviet Communist Red International. The latter in turn had its subdivision, the *Krestianskii Internatsional* (*Krestintern*; Peasant International).[27]

But while interwar Bulgarian-Romanian relations would not move beyond these initial interactions—except for the Balkan Pact in 1934 (more on this below)—Turkish-Soviet relations intensified. Against a background of Western financial exclusion and pressure, the Soviet Union and the Republic of Turkey signed the Treaty of Trade and Maritime Transportation in Ankara in March 1927—the first of its kind. The negotiation of this Treaty—which took place at the Soviet Black Sea port of Odesa in November 1926—had been contentious regarding aspects affecting the eastern and southeastern Black Sea littoral in particular. The Turkish side sought to export its consumer goods to the Soviet market and third countries by using the port town of Batumi as an outlet, whereas the Soviet side wanted to establish commercial agencies with diplomatic status in Turkey. Though the Turkish side considered such agencies propaganda outlets, it ultimately accepted them on its territory, except for the Artvin and Kars regions. Meanwhile, the Soviet side allowed Turkish commercial use of the port of Batumi. Turkey also received financial aid to the tune of USD 6 million to invigorate its struggling economy.[28] Additionally, both countries signed the Ankara Protocol in December 1929, extending by two more years the Treaty of Non-Aggression and Neutrality and adding that neither could enter into a political agreement with third parties without the consent of the other party.[29] But the pinnacle of their cordiality was reached between 1932 and 1933. With Soviet Odesa becoming one of the venues for high-level meetings between Prime Minister İnönü and his Soviet counterpart in April 1932, among many issues agreed upon, the Soviets reluctantly approved Turkey's intent to join the League of Nations—the Soviets wanted to do it jointly. In the event, Turkey joined that year, followed by the Soviet Union in 1934, both fearing the rise of Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany). They also provided Turkey with a credit of USD 8 million to purchase industrial goods from Soviet stock.[30] Meanwhile, a Soviet delegation—led by the head of the Soviet army and navy—attended the celebration of the tenth anniversary of the Republic of Turkey that took place in Ankara on October 29, 1933.[31]

Their cordiality began to wear off, however, due to increasing geopolitical divergence concerning the Black Sea region and beyond. The Balkan Pact of 1934 was one the instances that pointed to this divergence. A Turkish initiative aimed at preserving the post-Lausanne Treaty status quo in the Balkans and the western flank of the Black Sea, this pact was signed between Turkey, Yugoslavia, Greece, and Romania in the February. The Soviet Union declined the invitation to sign on the grounds of a border dis-

27 Ciachir, "A Promising Start of Interwar Bulgarian-Romanian Relations."

28 Kurban, *Russian-Turkish Relations*, 44–47.

29 İsmail Soysal, *Turkey's Political Treaties with Background and Explanations* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 2000), 1:279–80.

30 Kurban, *Russian-Turkish Relations*, 58–59.

31 Hirst, "Anti-Westernism on the European Periphery," 43–45.

pute with Romania concerning Bessarabia.[32] The other instance was the Montreux Conference of 1936. Again a Turkish initiative—supported by Britain and France—to finally change the Straits' status by giving Turkey control over the number of military battleships passing through it, it was opposed by the Soviets, who did not wish Turkey to be the only "state with a Black Sea coast" to have such control. As Minister Litvinov put it "[i]n [the] case [that] a state with a Black Sea coast goes to war, we will not take kindly to the fact that only one country has control of the Straits even if it is Turkey, our best friend."[33] Ultimately, a multilateral agreement—the Montreux Convention Regarding the Regime of the Straits—was signed in July 1936 by the four Black Sea coastal states as well as Greece, Yugoslavia, France, Britain, and Japan, giving Turkey control over the transit of military vessels of non-Black Sea states.

At the onset of the World War II, with Turkey getting closer to Britain and France, while the Soviet Union was beginning to "affiliate itself with Germany,"[34] in April 1939 the two states discussed the possibility of a mutual alliance. But a major geopolitical drift emerged when the Soviets signed the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact with Hitler's Germany in August 1939, sanctioning the partition of Poland that triggered World War II with the Nazi occupation of the country on September 1.[35]

4 Internationalized Trade, and "Collaborative" National Economy-Building

If this geopolitical narrative points to the novelty of an unusual cordiality in the north-south axis and multi-laterism, the political-economic narrative points to continuity and novelty in economic interactions and relations in the region. Continuity in relation to the region's internationalized trade, novelty in terms of a "collaborative," state-led development of economies[36] in the sectors of industry and agriculture, between the Soviet Union and Turkey, with brief attempts in the agricultural sector in Bulgaria and Romania.

Thus, the region's internationalized trade predated the interwar period and was certainly disrupted in the last two years of World War I. Indeed, it was the onset of "the long-nineteenth century," ending a long Ottoman (Istanbul) absolute monopoly of trade relations in the Black Sea basin and opening it to Russian and other European trading interests. Russia was the first to break this monopoly via wars, one of the principal causes of antagonism between the two empires. This was the case with the 1806–12 war concluded with the Treaty of Bucharest (1812), which gave Russia control

32 Kurban, *Russian-Turkish Relations,* 64–65.
33 Kurban, 66.
34 Kurban, 67–68.
35 Isci, "The Massigli Affair and Its Context," 272–74.
36 Hirst, "Anti-Westernism on the European Periphery," 45.

of Bessarabia, of shipping rights on the Danube, and of a large part of the Ottoman-Georgian Black Sea coast. Meanwhile, the 1828–18 war settled with the Treaty of Adrianople (1829) accorded Russia control of the Danube Delta on the western flank and of Mingrelia and Guria on the eastern flank, as well as the right to free navigation for all its commercial vessels on the Bosporus.[37] A significant corollary to this Ottoman loss of monopoly was the emergence of new port cities: Trabzon in the Black Sea coast of East Anatolia—close to the Persian trading metropolis of Tabriz—the new Russian city of Odesa, channelled through Ukrainian grain surpluses, and Romanian port towns of Brăila and Galaţi on the lower Danube.[38]

But while Russia broke this monopoly, Britain and France further internationalized the economic activity in the Black Sea basin, especially after Russia's defeat in the Crimean War (1853–56) by the Ottoman, British, and French armies. With this defeat settled at the Treaty of Paris (1856), this Treaty established the European Commission on the Danube (ECD), which took away Russia's control of commerce and navigation on the Danube Delta. Additionally, the Public Act of 1865—signed by all the Great Powers, including the Ottoman Empire and Russia—confirmed this Commission as an international body protected under international law, including from territorial (i. e., Russian and Ottoman) authorities.[39]

Trade remained internationalized during the first two years of World War I, as representatives from both the Allied and the Central Powers—including all the coastal states—in the ECD met and continued to operate it. But by the early interwar period, both Soviet Russia and Turkey were excluded from this Commission, never to return. However, throughout the period the ECD's international status was challenged by Romania, which sought *de jure* control over it, in competition with British *de facto* control, a contention resolved in Romania's favor in the Sinaia Agreement, signed with Britain and France in August 1938.[40] However, Britain and France, with the Armistice of Mudros (1918), the Treaty of Lausanne (1924), and the Montreux Conference (1936), in addition to the ECD, preserved a multi-lateral regime for the interwar period.

To be sure, however, these treaties and agreements did not exclude the Soviet Union and Turkey from this internationalized trade. What they were excluded from was access to international capital, which in turn led to this increased Soviet-Turkish economic collaboration. As mentioned above, the Treaty of Trade and Maritime Transportation in 1927 sealed this economic and financial collaboration, with the Soviet Union becoming Turkey's financial creditor, offering USD 6 million USD in 1927 and

37 Brisku, "Ottoman-Russian Relations," 9.

38 Troebst, "The Black Sea as a Historical Meso-Region," 20. See also Y. Eyüp Özveren, "A Framework for the Study of the Black Sea World, 1789–1915," *Review (Fernand Braudel Center)* 20, no. 1 (1997): 85–91.

39 Constantin Ardeleanu, *The European Commission of the Danube, 1856–1948: An Experiment in International Administration* (Leiden: Brill, 2020).

40 Stephen Gorove, *Law and Politics of the Danube: An Interdisciplinary Study, with a Foreword by Hans Kohn* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1964), 32.

USD 8 million in 1932.[41] But their collaboration went beyond giving and receiving capital credit to subscribing to and sharing a modern, state-led national economy-building approach.[42] Since the mid-nineteenth century, various imperial governments had engaged with policies of economic development,[43] which by the turn of the century, influenced by Friedrich List's political-economic ideas of the "national system" and "infant industries,"[44] had crystalized as statist doctrines. And while World War I forced governments to be more involved in their own economies—in commanding their war economies—the interwar period witnessed a more "collaborative" side in the form of this approach.

Certainly, Lenin and Stalin's Soviet Union was ideologically Marxist-communist, propagating itself as a better socialist, multi-ethnic, political, and political-economic system to than Western imperialist capitalism that was based on profit, exploitation, and colonialism. Atatürk and İnönü's Turkey, meanwhile, was conceptualized as a republican, nationalist, and secular state not opposed to capitalism *per se.* But Stalin's point to İnönü—in their Moscow meeting in 1932—that "if you don't create your industry, you will be wiped from the face of the earth"[45] rang true to the latter and to most of the Turkish political establishment. This was when the Soviet Union, with Stalin's "great break"[46] of 1928, had already moved away from Lenin's early interwar New Economic Policy of combining "state capitalism" (nationalization of industry, trade, and finance) with market relations in agriculture—between 1918 and 1921, independent Georgia also "created a mixed economy, framed by social democratic goals but driven by pragmatism [i. e. market principles]."[47] It was now pursuing Stalin's complete nationalization (including the collectivization of agriculture), with the aim of generating a surplus to finance rapid Soviet industrialization (heavy industry) and catching up with or even outdoing Western capitalism.[48] Within this state-led approach, the Soviets introduced a central agency for economic planning (*Gosplan*) with a five-year plan that planned, commanded, and spearheaded Soviet economic development, including in its northern and eastern territories on the Black Sea.

Atatürk, İnönü, and their one-party establishment did not espouse Soviet communism but embraced the idea of a greater role for the state in the economy and opposed Western imperialism as affecting Turkey. In fact, they recognized the state's greater

41 Hirst, "Anti-Westernism on the European Periphery," 45.

42 See also Adrian Brisku, *Open But not Dependent: National Economy-Building in Albania Georgia and Czechoslovakia* after the Great War (London: Routledge, forthcoming).

43 Adrian Brisku, *Political Reform in the Ottoman and Russian Empires: A Comparative Approach* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), 104.

44 Eric Helleiner, *The Neomercantilists: A Global Intellectual History* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2021), 90 – 96.

45 Quoted in Hirst, "Anti-Westernism on the European Periphery," 45.

46 Hirst, 39.

47 Jones, "Between Ideology and Pragmatism," 63.

48 Ronald G. Suny, *Looking Toward Ararat: Armenia in Modern* History (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 143.

role in the economy in their Republican People's Party platform of 1931 as *statism* and as one of their party's six principles.[49] Like the Soviet government, İnönü's government began to use a five-year plan for the development of industry, especially when the Soviets sent engineers and machinery to Turkey.[50] In his trip to the Soviet Union in May 1932, İnönü and his large delegation—comprised of prominent figures of the Turkish industry—gathered first-hand expertise on the Soviet economy and learnt how to develop the Turkish textile industry.[51]

And while Soviet-Turkish economic collaboration on the northern, eastern, and southern shores was predicated largely on their exclusion from Western capital and premised upon *statism*, on the western flank, i. e., Bulgaria and Romania—which had no collaboration during World War I, nor the kind described above with Turkey or the Soviet Union—exhibited brief attempts at collaboration on agrarianism in the interwar period. Emerging as an ideological and political program of peasant parties in the Balkans and Central Eastern Europe, proponents of agrarianism opposed heavy industrialization and foreign capital and supported the development of agriculture and light industry and the redistribution of land. As the leader of the Bulgarian Agrarian National Union and prime minister between 1919 and 1923, Stamboliyski sought to establish a "model agricultural state"[52]—in fact implementing agrarian reform (land redistribution) in Bulgaria—and closer links with his Romanian counterparts, visiting the country several times. However, Stamboliyski's Green International, which opposed the Soviet Red International—the dictatorial government that overthrew Stamboliyski in 1923 and established diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union in 1934—did not manage to bring the Romanian National Peasants Party into its fold until 1927.[53] A year later, led by Iuliu Maniu, the National Peasants Party—a coalition of the Peasants' Party and the Romanian National Party—came to power after a decade of the Liberal Party government, which in fact had carried out land reform (land redistribution) in 1921.[54] Seeking to implement a similar political-economic approach to Stamboliyski's, Maniu's government encouraged the establishment of cooperatives and higher prices for agricultural products. However, undermined by the Great Depression in 1929 and his decision to open up Romania to foreign capital, Maniu's government collapsed in 1930, with Romania falling under its king's direct rule in 1938 and his dictatorship in 1940.[55]

49 Hirst, "Anti-Westernism on the European Periphery," 41.

50 Hirst, 33.

51 Hirst, 43–45.

52 Stephen J. Lee, *European Dictatorships, 1918–1945* (London: Routledge, 2016).

53 Stavrianos, *The Balkans Since 1453*, 610–53.

54 Ioan Scurtu, "Relationships of Peasants' Party of Romania with Agrarian Parties of Central and South-East Europe," *Revue des Études Sud-est Européennes* 19, no. 1 (1981): 31–39.

55 Stavrianos, *The Balkans Since 1453*, 695–99.

5 Violence and Forced Mass Displacement of Peoples

Aside from these new geopolitical and politico-economic narratives, in World War I and during the interwar period, patterns of catastrophic violence and forced mass displacement of peoples (ethnic and religious communities) were experienced and witnessed in the Black Sea basin. Such patterns of violence, however, had already occurred during the Russo-Ottoman wars of "the long nineteenth century," whereby an estimated five million people (Crimean Tatars, Circassians, and Abkhazians) had been displaced from the tsarist state to the Ottoman Empire.[56] These patterns reoccurred in the midst of World War I, when in 1915 the Ottoman state perpetrated the Armenian Genocide—a term disputed by some Turkish historians—by engaging in mass killings, forced labor, and displacement of between 0.8 and 1.8 million of the Ottoman Armenian population,[57] as well as from late 1914 on and again in 1916, when it perpetrated the ethnic cleansing[58] or genocide[59]—there is even a stronger dispute on the use of these terms here—of the Ottoman, including Pontic, Greeks. It is estimated that between 300,000 and 700,000 Ottoman Greeks lost their lives to this campaign between 1914 and 1918.[60] And it continued in the interwar period, whereby violence and forced mass displacement of peoples were perpetrated not only due to continued inter-state and civil wars but also because of state-led nation(s)-building and national economy-building policies.

Indeed, as the Turkish state began to define its citizens in ethno-religiously homogenizing terms, a "hierarchy of citizens" emerged whereby "non-Muslims"—especially Armenian and Greek Orthodox peoples in the contexts of the Turkish-Armenian War/Eastern Operation (1920) and the Greco-Turkish War (1919–22)—were seen as a threat to the new republic and hence their forced mass displacement was seen as a solution. The most striking example of this was the Compulsory Population Exchange in 1923, a policy that Turkey implemented with Greece, with the "blessing" of the Great Powers and the League of Nations in the Treaty of Lausanne. The Turkish request to

56 Stefano Taglia, "Pragmatism and Expediency: Ottoman Calculations and the Establishment of Transcaucasian Democratic Federative Republic," in Brisku and Blauvelt, *The Transcaucasian Democratic Federative Republic*, 53–54. See also Brian Glyn Williams, *The Crimean Tatars: From Soviet Genocide to Putin's Conquest* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

57 See Ronald Grigor Suny, "AHR Forum: Truth in Telling: Reconciling Realities in the Genocide of the Ottoman Armenians," *American Historical Review* 114, no. 4 (2009): 930–46; Brisku, "Ottoman-Russian Relations," 12.

58 Taner Akçam, *The Young Turks' Crime Against Humanity: The Armenian Genocide and Ethnic Cleansing in the Ottoman Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).

59 Vasileious Th. Meichanetsidis, "The Genocide of the Greeks of the Ottoman Empire 1913–1923: A Comprehensive Overview," *Genocide Studies International* 9, no.1 (Spring 2015): 104–73.

60 Erik Sjöberg, *The Making of the Greek Genocide: Contested Memories of the Ottoman Greek Catastrophe* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2016), 234–35.

the League of Nation for "unmixing of the peoples"—i. e., ethno-homogenizing peoples from multi-ethnic and multi-religious imperial settings—was premised upon ensuring lasting peace in the region, and the League of Nations' representatives saw it as the most viable policy for protecting minorities and nation-building.[61] Although it was the first compulsory policy of mass displacement of peoples, this Exchange built on the Convention for Voluntary and Reciprocal Emigration of Minorities that Bulgaria —in conjunction with the Treaty of Neuilly—had signed with Greece in 1919. Implemented between 1924 and 1925—under the supervision of a Mixed Commission of the League of Nations—this Convention led to the forceful displacement of 350,000 people due to ethnic difference.[62] The Greco-Turkish Exchange, meanwhile, forcibly displaced 1.6 million people, some 1.2 million of whom were sent to Greece, being Greeks from Central Anatolia and Pontic Greeks of the Black Sea littoral—while those living in the surrounding mountains, nearly 80,000, had already moved to Georgia and Russia during the Turkish-Armenian war.[63] Bulgaria, meanwhile, in an agreement with Turkey, "repatriated" nearly 100,000 of its Turkish population to Turkey between 1934 and 1939. Additionally, more Muslims (mostly ethnic Albanians) were "returned" from the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes to Turkey, and Bulgaria and Turkey saw the arrival of the "White Russians" who settled in their respective territories after the Russian Civil War.[64]

A similar story of forced mass displacement of peoples as well as famines traumatized and terrorized the Soviet northern and eastern shores of the Black Sea and beyond. While the Russian Civil War, which had begun during World War I, on November 7, 1917, and continuing until June 16, 1923, created "extensive refugee flows" and the first group of stateless people in modern history,[65] in the interwar period national economy-building and nation-building processes displaced and hurt millions. The unprecedented mass industrialization and the collectivization of agriculture, which in turn demanded mass labor mobilization and expropriation, led to resistance and forced displacement. Between 1930 and 1931, nearly two million Soviet people—including hundreds of thousands of Pontic Greeks and Circassians on the northern and eastern shores of the Black Sea—were removed from their villages and sent to the Far North, the Urals, and Siberia. Stalin's Great Terror of 1937—killing more than 600,000 people—also took place in

61 Theodora Dragostinova, "Navigating Nationality in the Emigration of Minorities between Bulgaria and Greece, 1919–1941," *East European Politics and Society* 23, no. 2, (2009): 146.

62 Dragostinova, 185–86.

63 Anastasia Filippidou, "The Impact of Forced Top-Down Nation Building on Conflict Resolution: Lessons from the 1923 Compulsory Population Exchange between Greece and Turkey," *Nationalities Papers* 48, no. 1 (2020): 148. See also Renée Hirshon, ed., *Crossing the Agean: An Appraisal of the 1923 Compulsory Population Exchange between Greece and Turkey* (New York: Berghan Books, 2003).

64 Rogers Brubaker, "Aftermaths of Empire and the Unmixing of Peoples: Historical and Comparative Perspectives," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 18, no. 2 (1995): 194.

65 Filippidou, "The Impact of Forced Top-Down Nation Building," 145.

the context of ongoing forced displacement of collective groups.[66] Stalin's Soviet nation(s)-building process, too, while entailing the recognition of national and minority rights—ethno-territorial federalism for "historic nations" and national cultural autonomy for everyone else—perpetrated between 1932 and 1933 the *Holodomor* (death by hunger), the famine of around four million of Ukrainians,[67] recognized as genocide by Ukraine and eighteen other countries, as well as the European Union.[68]

6 Conclusion

Violence against the peoples and tensions among the four states with a Black Sea coast never really left, certainly during World War I, but also during the interwar period despite emerging cordial relations in the north-south axis, and irrespective of a multi-lateral regime and "collaborative" political-economic platforms, as outlined above. Violence, in fact, was horrifically exacerbated during World War II in and between the Soviet Union, Romania, and Bulgaria. Turkey and its population were spared this war, for the country remained neutral, at least until February 1945, when it joined the Allies against the Axis.

66 Alain Bloom and Emilia Koustova, "A Soviet Story: Mass Deportation, Isolation, Return," in *Narratives of Exile and Identity*, ed. Violeta Davoliute and Tomas Balkelis (Budapest: CEU Press, 2018), 21; James Forsyth, *The Caucasus: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 445–47.

67 Anne Applebaum, *Red Famine: Stalin's War on Ukraine* (New York: Doubleday, 2017).

68 Julia Damn, "EU Parliament Votes to Recognize 'Holodomor' Famine as Genocid," *EURACTIV*, December 15, 2022, https://www.euractiv.com/section/agriculture-food/news/eu-parliament-votes-to-recognise-holodomor-famine-as-genocide/.