CHAPTER TWELVE

TERRITORIAL CLAIMS AFTER THE SECOND WORLD WAR

Georgia

On 20 December 1945 two Georgian scholars, S. Dzhanashia and N. Berdzenishili published an article in the Tbilisi newspaper K’omunist’i in which they claimed for Georgia territories within Turkey.¹ The regions of Ardahan, Artvin, Olti, Thortum, Isgir, Baiburt, Gumushkume and Eastern Lazistan, including the region of Trebizond and Karasoon (Kerasund), were to be given to Georgia. This claim got wide attention in the Soviet press, and subsequently also in the Turkish press. The Soviet Government never officially adopted the claim, and no changes of the frontier occurred. Nevertheless the article gave rise to several diplomatic moves.

The claims were based on history. The area claimed was of strategic importance, since Turkey could not attack Batumi from the South when these territories would form part of the Georgian SSR.

Since there had been no suggestion before the end of 1945 that the Georgians needed or desired any Turkish territory, the claims came somewhat as a surprise. Lazistan (which was the name of the area covered by the claimed regions) was never an irredenta for the Georgians. Nor had the Western Powers broken any pledges to the Georgians on which they could base their claim.²

The territory claimed was of strategic importance to the Soviet Union, according to a document of the British Embassy in Ankara:

Batum is a position of great natural strength, and the state of communications in Lazistan and the Coruh valley is such that it would be impossible to concentrate heavy metal against the fortress from the Turkish side. The possession of Artvin, on the west bank of the Coruh,

¹ “Our Lawful Demands on Turkey”, an English translation in Burdett, Caucasian Boundaries, 893–897.
² Foreign Office Research paper of 4 April 1946, “Armenian and Georgian Claims to Turkish Territory” (combining paper above of 5 October with an additional paper from 22 December 1945), expanding and correcting detail, especially on historical points, FO 371/59247, in Burdett, Caucasian Boundaries, 1030].
would not improve the defences of Batum. On the other hand Artvin is a strong position which is important to the Turks since it blocks an enemy advance up the valley of the Coruh or up the Tortumcay towards Erzurum (The Russians availed themselves of the Tortum route to turn the defenses of Erzurum in January 1916).

Lazistan might well become an important defensive area for the Turks since, in contrast to the Kars plain, it remains impassable to armour, the forests in the seaward slopes of the Pontic Alps provide good air-cover, and the country is open to supply from the sea. Were the Soviet frontier to be advanced to Atina or Rize, it would become difficult, if not impracticable, for the Turks to hold Trabzon and the Trabzon-Erzurum trunk road.3

The claims never materialized, and it was only some 27 years later that a border correction between Turkey and the USSR took place. On 24 March 1972 a Protocol was signed in Ankara between the USSR and Turkey “Concerning the Demarcation of the Line of the State Frontier on Border Rivers and Territorial Compensation”.4

**Armenia**

In 1945, just after the end of the World War II, it was the Armenian Diaspora in the United States who pleaded for a return of certain territories in Turkey to the Armenian SSR.

As was the case with the claims of Georgia, the press in Moscow paid considerable attention to this. The claims however were not well founded. Again, as at the Peace Conference some twenty-five years earlier, it concerned territory that did not have an Armenian majority. The Soviet government did not adopt the claim and although the Turkish government feared military reprisals from the Soviets as a result of their attitude towards the Armenian claims, nothing ever happened.

A British Foreign Office document concerning the Armenian claim to Turkish territory gives the following argument against the claim with regard to Kurds living in the area: “One of the strongest arguments against the Armenian demand for the Turkish territory in ques-

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3 British Embassy, Ankara to Foreign Secretary, 28 January 1946, forwarding criticism of FORD paper on Georgia claims, FO 371/59426 in: A.L.P. Burdett, 1996: 904. It concerns a minute which W.E.D. Allen, press attaché at the British Embassy in Ankara has written on the Research Department’s memorandum of 22 December 1945 regarding Georgian claims to Turkish territory.

4 Ginsburg, Slusser, 647.