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San Remo conference and the foundation of Turkey

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Abstract

The partition of the Ottoman State and the formation of new countries in the Near East are the main issues during the peace treaties after the First World War. When the Treaty of Versailles effectuated in 10 January 1920, these issues became unsolved and important questions for the European Powers. For this reason many conferences and meetings had hold in between the countries which won the War. After the First London Conference the allies came together and hold a meeting in San Remo City in Italy (18-26 April 1920) and they gave decision most of the issues about the Middle East. This paper will consist with, how the result of the San Remo Meting affected the partition of Ottoman Empire and the foundation of modern Turkey. Generally San Remo Conference is not known as much as Lausanne Conference. However it had a crucial role during the other peace treaties from the perspectives of discussions and topics. Especially the Petroleum Treaty in between Britain and France during the San Remo Conference had affected not only the other treaties in Europe but also the formation of new states in Near East and appearing of modern Turkey besides portion of Ottoman State. This article will focus on these important issues using by the Archive of Ottoman State, Turkish Republican Archive, American National Archive, British National Archive, Turkish and English Newspapers, Memoirs of people who attended the meeting and the other works, books, and articles.

Keywords: San Remo; Turkish, Conferences

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1. Introduction

The First World War was a cause of disintegration of the Ottoman Empire. However it had started many years before. Some reforms and restructurings delayed this disintegration for almost half a century. Abdulhamid II, who was one of the last sultans of Ottomans, followed some political ways with European powers to restrict their influence on the Ottoman state. He proclaimed Ottoman basic law (Kanun-i Esasi) and Constitutionalism (Meşrutiyet) to solve domestic problems. This solution would be successful for a while. But this period was not too much long. After the 1900's national and international old and new problems appeared one after another. All these set Abdulhamid back sultanate and he had dethroned in 1908. After this year some new and surprise developments are waiting for the Ottomans. Tripoli war in 1911 and Balkan wars in 1912-13 were only the beginning.

While these recent developments being in Ottoman state, the Europe is preparing for the world war consciously. Turkish government will decide to participate to the war between European states and then the partition of Ottoman state will become one of the main topics during and especially after the war. Allies, together with end of the war started to make meetings to prepare draft texts of agreements which would be signed with states lost the war. These meetings and conferences started with Paris Peace Conference and then Versailles (28 June 1919), Saint-Germain (10 September 1919), Neuilly (27 November 1919) and Trianon (4 June 1920) signed between allies powers and the states lost the war. However some problems in between the allied countries delayed the preparing and truly signing agreement that will finish the war with Ottoman state. In fact the peace offering will be present to Turkish side had not been completed even in London Conference in February 1920. For this reason the allied decided to meet to find solutions relating with the Turks (Dilek & Kucuk, 2012). This paper will consist on San Remo Conference which directly concentrated on the Eastern Question, in other words how to effect to foundation of Turkish state.

2. San Remo Conference (18-26 April 1920)

The meeting in San Remo had decided during the First London Conference 12-24 February 1920 and it was a continuation of Paris Peace Conference and London Conference (*Southern Cross*, "The San Remo Conference", 7 May 1920). Mr. Lloyd George and Mr. Balfour came to Rome as guests of Italian Government in 12 April 1920 (*Daily Telegraph*, "The San Remo Conference", 13 April 1920). Then the Allied Supreme Council combined together for conference and it held Villa Devachan in San Remo city in north Italy. United States was not directly invited to San Remo, she send a representative as observer (*Newcastle Morning Herald and Miner's Advocate*, "San Remo Conference", 3 April 1920). The conference opened on 18 April 1920 (It was announced by newspapers as well. For an example look; *Daily Telegraph*, "San Remo Conference", 19 April 1920). There were many unsolved questions and problems still waiting about Eastern issues. Also the allies need to prepare a draft text of peace agreement to present the Ottoman side. The conference was all about the issues in the Near East but any representatives from the East were not invited and participate to the meeting. One of the Turkish diplomats Galip Soylemezoğlu sent a letter to Italian Prime Minister Nitti and he said "You need to listen a Turk before getting very crucial decision about east and we are waiting justly and humanly decision from the victorious states". But his request did not take in consideration (Tolon, 2004). In fact such international problems, according to International Laws should be solved in between participants of both sides.

The first topic discussed in conference was about preparing an answer to the memorandum that proclaimed by United State's President Wilson in 26 March 1920 about peace agreement with Turkey (Olçay, 1981). During the meeting the text written by Lord Curzon as an answer to that memorandum was discussed. According to this text: the Ottoman sultan should be stay in Istanbul, south border of Turkey not only drawn by geographical and ethnical factors, but also economical situations need to be took account, independent Armenia could be found just like US prefer, Arab countries will be saved from Turkish rule and Thrace would given to Greece (Tolon, 2004).

Armenian question is another main topic at San Remo Conference. But before, at London, the allied powers had considered to place Armenia under the protection of League of Nations. Additionally the powers had asked the League to assist Armenia military and financially. However just before the opening of conference at San Remo, the League explained that the mandate was necessary and no military means of assisting the Armenians (Helmrich, 1986). Besides, British Minister of Foreign Affairs Lord Curzon advised that Erzurum, one of the Eastern cities in Anatolia should be given to Armenia. After a short time of Lloyd George's offers Armenian Boghos Nubar Pasha attended to conference. Nubar Pasha claimed that the Armenia had 15.000 soldiers ready to get back Erzurum from Turks and if allies supported Armenia with military equipment they could easily mobilized more than 40.000 soldiers as well. British Prime Minister was not sharing the same ideas: for him, if the city of Erzurum leaved to Armenia, bloody crashes in between Turks and Armenians are indispensable. According to Britain three steps are necessary for the solution of Armenian situation; President Wilson would be called to take Armenia under the US mandate, in this case, President Wilson would be arbitrator to specify the borders of Armenia and lastly Turkey, Armenia and the other sides would accept the arbitration of US President by specifying the borders of Armenia. (For more information: Dilek, & Kucuk, 2012; Helmrich, 1986; Tolon, 2004; Olcay, 1981; *Southern Cross*, "The San Remo Conference", 7 May 1920; *Geological Adviser*, "San Remo Conference, Turkish and Armenian Questions under Discussion", 22 April 1920.).

One of the important peace treaty matters in San Remo Conference was sharing of the oil rights in between allied powers. It was called "San Remo Oil Agreement" that signed between Britain and France. According to this agreement, France should retained 25 percent of the crude oil in any private company in Mesopotamia. Also French Government would be constructed pipe lines for Anglo-Persian Oil Company from Iran to Mediterranean that across territories under French mandated. This settlement decided o April 24, 1920 between prime ministers of France and England. Royal Dutch Shell had got 25% from Mesopotamian oil and Shell Company granting the rights to the Turkish Petroleum Company. However it is surprisingly that the oil and oil resource were played a minor role in the negotiation with the Turkish Peace Treaty in Lausanne, (Helmrich, 1986) because it had almost solved between Britain and France.

Besides these discussions, there were many more issues which came on the agenda during the conference; French role in Syria and Palestine, the fate of Constantinople, the situation of Anatolia, Armenia and Kurdistan, the fate of Batum, the questions and borders of Palestine, Mosul, Egypt, Syria, independence of Hedjaz and economical issues also discussed and the draft of text to Turkish Government prepared.

3. The Turkish Reflections to San Remo Terms

On the other hand, Turkish National War with powers which occupied Anatolia started almost one year before the conference. All Turkish nation and sources mobilized for this national war. Even thought the Turkish newspapers followed the steps of San Remo Conference closely and day bay day. Also, some ministers in Turkish National Assembly gave speeches about the conference and its terms relating to Turkey. This paper is not allowed me to evaluate all these news and speeches. However I would like to emphasis some of them for understanding the Turkish psychology and reactions in this period. The Turkish daily newspaper *Vakit* published an article about the results of San Remo Conference and denied all terms strictly. According to this article; some important topics such Istanbul and Straits, Armenia, Kurdistan, Mosul, Batum and the rights of Greece discussed during the conference and proclaimed some decisions about all these. Nothing asked to Turkey, even all these issues relating with Turkish international relations. San Remo terms left all Turkey to the Greece unconditionally, and this is unacceptable (For newspaper articles and more information; *Vakit*, 19-20-21-22-23-24-25-26-27-28-29 and 30 April 1920). The similar reactions appeared in Turkish National Assembly as well. (For Speeches, *TBMM Gizli Celse Zabıtları*, 1980)

Naturally waiting favorable results from San Remo Conference for Turkey was useless. It was in between allied powers who won the Great War. Despite the fact that Ottoman Committee protested the decisions of conference but it was not worked. Then some protests organized in Istanbul streets. As a result of that, Turks wanted a peace agreement which Turkish ideas would be taken account justly and humanity.

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NEWSPAPERS

Daily Telegraph

Geological Adviser

Newcastle Morning Herald and Miner's Advocate

Southern Cross

The Orient News

Vakit

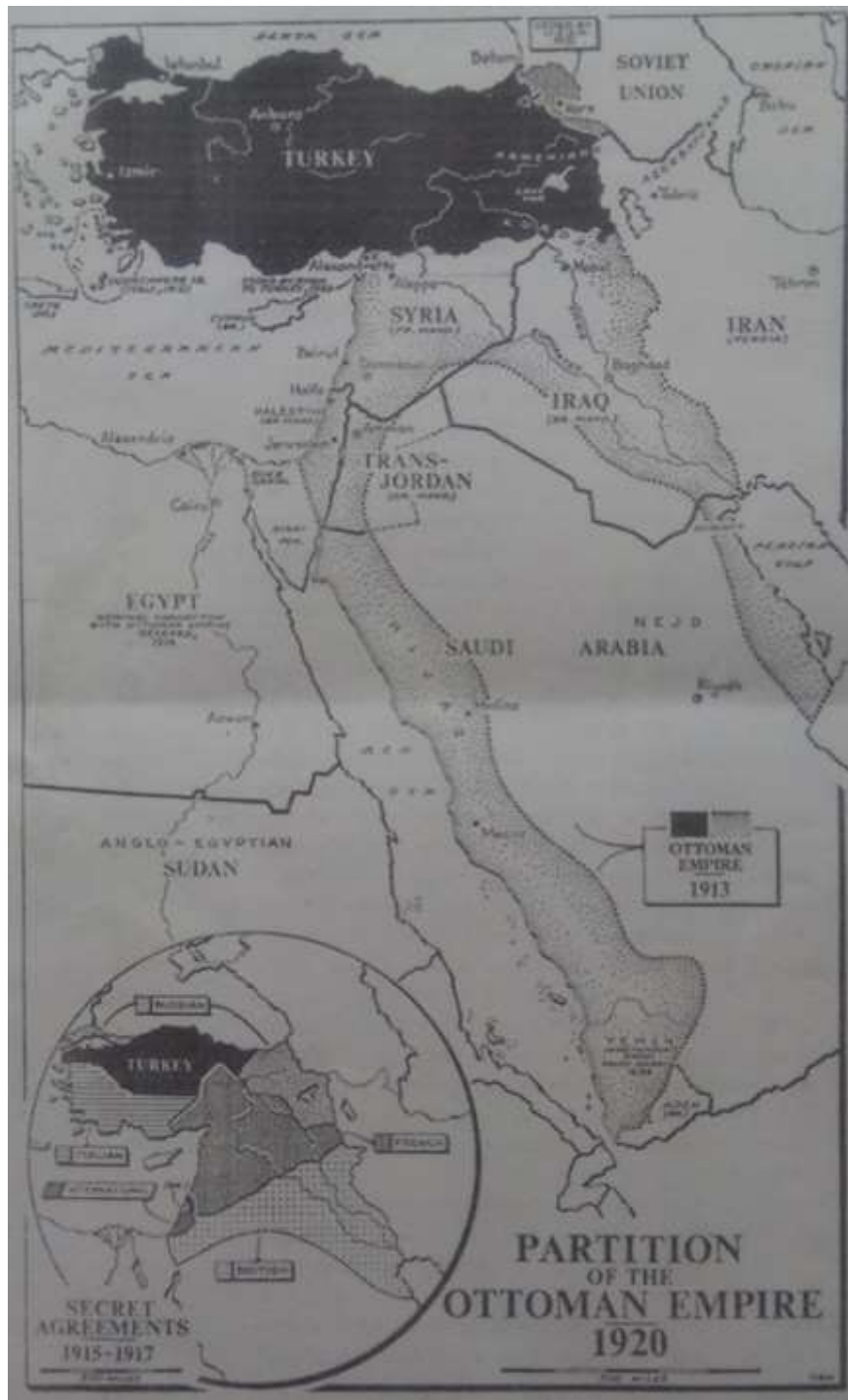
APPENDIX



The Orient News, "End of the San Remo Conference: Turkey Settled", April 25, 1920.



The Turkish daily newspaper *Vakit* announced the meeting of San Remo on 14 April 1920. Almost all news about San Remo Conference was given the first pages of Turkish newspapers at that time. Even after the conference some serials of articles about Conference published on *Vakit* newspaper.



This map had published after San Remo Conference. The borders of Turkey are almost same. (<http://mideastcartoonhistory.com/1920.html> Accessed; March 2014)