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The Pontus Question

Memorandum

**Submitted to the Peace Conference
on March 10, 1920**

BY

The Pontus Delegation.

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Right Honourable Sir,

We are informed that the Armenian question has been settled without any reference to the question of Pontus. We feel it, therefore, to be our imperative duty yet once more to lay before you the claims of Pontus and of the Greek populations which it comprises from Sinope to Rizeh.

The territory in question embracing the vilayet of Trebizonde (exclusive of the Sandjak of Lazistam with an almost purely Moslem population) and the Sandjak of Samsun, Shabbin-Karahissar, Amasia and Sinope, has an area of almost 50,000 square kilometres.

Colonized by the Greeks as far back as 7th century, B.C., it has formed a part of the Greek world throughout the twenty-six ensuing cen-

turies. On the Latin conquest of Constantinople in 1204, it formed the Comnenian Empire of Trebizonde which only capitulated to the Turks eight years after the Fall of Constantinople (1461).

The population of Pontus is approximately 1,700,000. Of these 850,000 are Greeks, including a quarter of a million emigrants in Southern Russia and Caucasia, who await the liberation of Pontus to return to their homes. The remainder are grouped in statistics as "Turks," but are in reality Moslems of different races. Special mention may be made of some 250,000 among them in the districts of Off and Tonia who are of pure Greek extraction, descendants of Christians forcibly Islamized 180 years back. These populations have retained their Greek speech and many of their traditions.

The Greek element is the pivot of such intellectual and economic life as the country possesses. Recognizing this fact, the Young Turkish Government attempted to alter the ethnological complexion of Pontus by a systematic persecution of the Greeks, intensified during the War. As a result of these persecutions 150,000 Greeks have been deported from their homes or compelled to take refuge in Russia during the past five years.

In the course of the War certain events of considerable political significance occurred in Pontus. The Russian Army occupied Trebizonde on April 18, 1916. On the eve of the Turkish evacuation of the city the Vali handed over the administration to a Provisional Greek Government headed by the Metropolitan with the words "From you we took this country and to you we restore it." This local Greek body retained the civil government in its hands for nearly two years. It set up mixed tribunals, organised a gendarmerie recruited from both races, and collected taxes. It was recognised by the Russian authorities and the Turkish population, as also by the local representatives of the Allied Powers and the United States. Proof of this is furnished by the documents reproduced in the enclosed memorandum.

The Provisional Greek Government was successful in maintaining law and order throughout this troubled period. The pamphlet enclosed reproduces letters of the Mufti of Trebizonde and of Vehib Pasha commanding the Third Turkish Army, which, addressing the Metropolitan, recognize that "From the entrance of the enemy into Trebizonde to the present day you have succeeded in administering the country with

tact and wisdom, and we have much pleasure in recognizing this and expressing to you our sincere admiration and warm gratitude.”

The aspiration of Pontus to-day is to secure its full independence. The compact masses of its Greek population are the basis of this aspiration. If, however, more general considerations make this solution impossible we venture to submit that it is not too much to ask for an autonomous régime analogous to that which formerly worked so successfully in the Lebanon, with an European governor, local self-government and local gendarmerie under European organizers. Such a régime could alone secure to the Greeks of Pontus the elementary conditions of a decent human existence. Further, such a régime could alone make possible the repatriation of the Pontus Greeks scattered over Southern Russia and Caucasia and totalling well over 200,000, including some 60,000 who fled from the country under stress of persecution during the War.

A bitter experience of five centuries has convinced us of the worthlessness in Turkey of paper reforms and paper guarantees. European pressure on the Sublime Porte is of little avail to protect the far away Greek populations of Pontus who have compromised

themselves in Turkish eyes by the assistance given by them to the Allies in their attempt to reconstitute the Caucasian front on the collapse of Russia (in 1918) and by their subsequent demand for autonomy. We will mention only one fact which gives an idea of the confidence to be placed in Turkish good faith. Towards the beginning of 1918, the Turkish army advanced to re-occupy the Trebizonde district. Irregular bands accompanying the Army and organized under official auspices were given a free hand in burning and pillaging Christian villages at the very moment that General Vehib Pasha with tragic irony was writing to the Provisional Greek Government and thanking it for the "noble and paternal protection extended by it to the Moslem element." When the General entered Trebizonde he looked at the desolation which reigned in the country around and he acquiesced in the accomplished facts.

Similar crimes are still being committed in Pontus in spite of the armistice, and they will continue to be committed unless the Peace Conference takes steps to remove this distracted country from Turkish administration. The concession of self-government on the other hand will bring with it the happy results exemplified by the case of

the Lebanon, securing the Christian populations in their rights and allowing the two races to live peacefully side by side.

We beg to remain, Sir,

With the highest consideration.

Signed : CHRYSANTHOS,

The Archbishop of Trebizonde.

Signed :

CONSTANTINE-JASON G. CONSTANTINIDES,

The President of the Pan-Pontic Congress.

Signed : SOCRATES ŒCONOMOS,

*The President of the National League of the
Euxine Pontus at Paris.*

Claridge's Hotel, Brook Street, W. 1.

London, March 10, 1920.

To the Right Honourable,

// DAVID LLOYD GEORGE, M.P.,

*Prime Minister of Great Britain and Ireland.
President of the Peace Conference.*

10, Downing Street,

London.