

Carolin Liebisch\*

# Defending Turkey on Global Stages: The Young Turk Reşit Saffet's Internationalist Strategy in 1919

DOI 10.1515/ngs-2016-0022

**Abstract:** The article investigates the internationalist activities of a Turkish nationalist during his Swiss exile at the outset of the postwar settlements in early 1919. Reşit Saffet, a devoted Young Turk and Ottoman diplomat on leave, moved in the internationalist milieus in Berne while his agenda remained utterly nationalist. Drawing on pan-Turkic, pan-Islamic, anti-imperialist, socialist, and Wilsonian ideas, he adapted his rhetoric to the internationalist conferences he attended; he thus sought to disguise and to defend his otherwise discredited nationalist cause on these global stages. The article traces Reşit Saffet's internationalist activities as a strategy to engage with the 'Paris moment' and the Ottoman question beyond official politics and governmental discourse. In a time when Ottoman diplomacy was in deadlock as a result of the Empire's exclusion from the peace conference and Reşit Saffet's career faced an unknown future in the face of the Ottoman collapse, internationalism seemed a promising option. The case illustrates the increasingly blurred border between state diplomacy and non-governmental influence, and thus questions exclusively state-centered approaches. It reveals the appeal and potential held by civil society internationalism, not only for Western pacifists and socialists, but also for anti-imperialist nationalists confronted with the disappointment of the 'Wilsonian moment'.

**Keywords:** Paris Peace Conference, internationalism, League of Nations, Second International, Ottoman Empire, pan-Turkism

## Introduction

In February 1919, the Young Turk and Ottoman diplomat Reşit Saffet Bey appeared on the international socialist scene when he visited the *International Labour and Socialist Conference* of the Second International in

---

\*Corresponding author: Carolin Liebisch, Cluster Asia and Europe, Heidelberg University, Voßstr. 2, Bd 4400, 69115 Heidelberg, Germany; History Department, Kiel University, Olshausenstr. 40, 24098 Kiel, Germany, E-mail: liebisch@histosem.uni-kiel.de

Berne and spoke in the name of the Turkish proletariat. Just one month later, Reşit Saffet could be seen at another internationalist venue in Berne, the *International Conference for the League of Nations* – a pacifist gathering in support of the foundation of the League of Nations where he presented himself as the anti-colonial voice of oppressed Muslim and Turkic peoples worldwide. Starting from the question: what drove a member of the nationalist Young Turk *Committee of Union and Progress* (hereafter CUP or *Unionists*) to get involved in socialist and pacifist internationalism after the fall of the CUP regime, this article traces the opportunistic strategies of Reşit Saffet and investigates how a former Young Turk diplomat made himself out to be an engaged internationalist in order to pursue a nationalist agenda via political back doors in the immediate postwar context.<sup>1</sup>

While, at the same time, the Allied governments met to decide a new world order in Paris, concurrent, non-governmental internationalism flourished and offered a back door by which various individuals and groups lacking an official voice at the Peace Conference could gain influence.<sup>2</sup> “In exasperation over the cause, helpless to make our voice heard at the Conference in Paris, we appeal to the humane conscience,”<sup>3</sup> Reşit Saffet addressed the audience at one of the two Berne conferences. By the end of the war, he found himself in Switzerland, his former government exiled, its leaders internationally ostracized, and the new government in Istanbul possessing hardly any diplomatic means in the face of the imminent loss of the Ottoman Empire’s political and territorial integrity under the decisions of the Paris Peace Conference.<sup>4</sup> Confronting this political power vacuum as well as his own uncertain future in view of the Ottoman collapse in 1918/19, Reşit Saffet, who was a devoted Turkish nationalist and an ambitious statesman, saw the opportunity to make his mark as the defender of future Turkey. The international peace negotiations in 1919 were a decisive moment both for the fate of the Ottoman Empire and for the future of Reşit Saffet himself. As direct participation in the negotiations

---

1 Madeleine Herren introduced the metaphor of internationalism as “back doors to power:” Madeleine Herren, *Hintertüren zur Macht. Internationalismus und Modernisierungsorientierte Außenpolitik in Belgien, der Schweiz und den USA 1865–1914* (München: Oldenbourg, 2000).

2 Daniel Gorman, *The Emergence of International Society in the 1920s* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 6; Madeleine Herren, Martin Rüesch, Christiane Sibille, *Transcultural History. Theories, Methods, Sources* (Heidelberg: Springer, 2012), 1f, 4.

3 Kara Şemsi, *L’Islam, les Turcs et la Société des Nations* (Geneva: Imprimerie Nationale, 1919), 9.

4 On the immediate postwar situation see Erik Jan Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History* (London: I.B. Tauris, 3 ed. 2004), 134–139.

was not possible, he sought to represent himself and the land on the alternative global stages offered by the internationalist venues in Berne.

Following a short biographical introduction as well as a brief contextualization of postwar internationalism in Berne, this article presents two chapters on Reşit Saffet's attendance of the International Labour and Socialist Conference (hereafter Socialist Conference) and the International Conference for the League of Nations (hereafter League Conference). As the chapters reveal, Reşit Saffet tailored his nationalist objectives to the language of the internationalist audiences by stressing the significance of universal principles, humanitarian values, and the ideal of an inclusive international community in his contributions. Blending together these universalistic and Wilsonian internationalist ideas, he created an ideological mixture into which he also integrated socialist thought, as well as pan-Turkish and pan-Islamic rhetoric in order to align his agenda with a greater cause. This 'global illusionism',<sup>5</sup> together with his claim to speak on behalf of the oppressed peoples of the world allowed him to represent the otherwise discredited position of Turkish nationalism in the international arena. An epilogue concludes the article and provides the reader with an outlook on the development of Reşit Saffet's career after 1919.

The topic is situated within a broader context of structural change stimulated by the postwar reordering of international relations and territorialities in two respects: Firstly, it addresses the decentralization of diplomatic agency in the transitional phase between the end of Young Turk rule and the establishment of the Ankara government, an underemphasized aspect of Ottoman diplomatic history.<sup>6</sup> Secondly, it casts a light on the increasing significance of

---

5 Herren describes the self-presentation of individuals as global subjects, as cosmopolitans, and as internationalists, together with the possibilities such globally oriented modes of self-presentation offered in the interwar period, as a phenomenon of a transnational civil society and a still understudied aspect of 'globalization'. She also shows how such global means of self-representation could include mimetic adaptations, and a multiple changing of ideological sides on the part of the individual and suggests the identification of "global illusionists" as an analytical category: Madeleine Herren, "Between Territoriality, Performance, and Transcultural Entanglement (1920–1939): A Typology of Transboundary Lives," *Comparativ* 23, no. 6 (2013): 121–123; Madeleine Herren, "Inszenierung des Globalen Subjekts. Vorschläge zur Typologie einer Transgressiven Biographie," *Historische Anthropologie* 13, no. 3 (2005): 2, 7, 15.

6 The time between the armistice in late 1918 and the installment of the Republic in 1923 saw a decentralization of diplomacy inasmuch as not only the Sultan's government in Istanbul, but also the national movement around Mustafa Kemal and its emerging Ankara government, the exiled CUP leaders, especially Enver Pasha, as well as civic initiatives like the *Turkish Wilsonian League*, and individuals like Reşit Saffet Bey and the Paris-based Ottoman ex-diplomat Mehmet Şerif Pasha all undertook attempts to represent Turkey internationally. So far, none of the major

internationalism after the 1914–1918 War and its role in blurring the line between international politics and public influence, and with that inducing a shift from ‘conventional diplomacy’ to the emergence of a global community.<sup>7</sup> The article suggests that Reşit Saffet’s appropriation of internationalism in 1919 is more than a brief episode in the history of a diplomat’s career. While most literature addressing the Peace Conference and the Ottoman Empire focuses on the Allied decision makers in Paris and the relatively powerless government in Istanbul,<sup>8</sup> this article approaches the topic from a peripheral point of view.<sup>9</sup> The article reveals Reşit Saffet’s internationalist activities as a strategy to engage with the ‘Paris order’, and the Ottoman question beyond official politics and governmental discourses.<sup>10</sup> From a global and international history perspective,

---

works on the history of Turkish foreign affairs, which follow a rather classic understanding of diplomatic history, offers a conceptualization of the broad spectrum of diplomacy after 1918 that also takes internationalist, semi-official and civic actions into account.

**7** See especially Akira Iriye, *Global Community. The Role of International Organization in the Making of the Contemporary World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 8. Iriye uses the term ‘global community’ to describe the important role internationalism, especially international organizations played in shaping our globalized world. On the shift of diplomacy from exclusive statesmen’s affairs to a ‘new diplomacy’ increasingly including civil society, also see: Ralph Blessing, “A Changing Diplomatic World,” in *A Companion to International History*, ed. Gordon Martel, (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 67f; Madeleine Herren, *Internationale Organisationen seit 1865. Eine Globalgeschichte der Internationalen Ordnung* (Darmstadt: WBG, 2009), 54 f.

**8** See among others the classics Harry N. Howard, *The Partition of Turkey. A Diplomatic History 1913–1923* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1966); Paul C. Hemsley, *From Paris to Sèvres. The Partition of the Ottoman Empire at the Peace Conference of 1919–1920* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1974).

**9** By doing so, this article corresponds with similar approaches like Erez Manela’s *Wilsonian Moment* on anticolonial activism in 1919 which “aims to tell [the story of the Paris Peace Conference] from the outside in, from the perspectives of peoples who were on the margins of the peace conference and of international society more generally.” Erez Manela, *Wilsonian Moment. Self-determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (London: Oxford University Press, 2007), 6.

**10** The article thus refers to recent calls for exploring the transgressive dimension of the ‘Paris Moment’; as Herren, Rüesch and Sibille put it: “Within the community of historians, the significance of what happened in Paris in 1919 is virtually uncontested. However, it is told either from a national perspective or follows the structures of international relations. Usually, the historical narrative elaborately avoids the disturbing interferences of national, social, and cultural arguments during the Peace Conference, because it may be easier to concentrate on the power shifts that affected clearly specified territories than to explain the irritating coincidence of multilayered and porous borders on a global scale.” See Herren, Rüesch, Sibille, *Transcultural History*, 3.

Reşit Saffet's story serves as an empirical case study that explores how internationalism gained momentum the moment the *Wilsonian Moment*<sup>11</sup> failed by providing a stage where marginalized actors could share their visions of international order, challenge 'Western' imperialism, claim national self-determination, and propagate their own agendas.<sup>12</sup> Aside from its respective agenda (be it socialism and/or pacifism), internationalism offered them the chance to amplify their voice in the eminently global moment of 1919.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, the case study reflects the ideological and practical proximity of nationalism, internationalism, and transboundary ideologies like pan-Islamism and pan-Turkism in this global moment as well as the tensions between the 'Western'-dominated global order and non-European agencies. In this sense, the article not only underlines the value of studying actors other than famous statesmen and well-known diplomats in order to grasp the meaning and repercussions of the Paris Peace Conference,<sup>14</sup> but also corresponds to recent efforts to look beyond the "much-studied elite of Western liberal internationalists,"<sup>15</sup>

---

**11** Manela's prominent study with the same title investigates the effect Wilson's language of national self-determination had on anticolonial nationalists in China, Egypt, India, and Korea as well as the radicalizing repercussions following the disappointment of the *Wilsonian Moment* at the wake of the 'Paris order' in spring 1919. Manela's term is used here as a catchphrase in order to describe the hopes for national self-determination and a new world order ending imperialism which were cherished by many people around the globe at the end of the war. However, the author of this article does agree with critical voices pointing to the book's monocausality and analytical Americentrism deriving from a latent disregard towards the complex discourse evolving around the design of the postwar international order as well as towards the manifold origins of anticolonial nationalism in different regions. See esp. Rebecca E. Karl: Review on: Erez Manela, *Wilsonian Moment. Self-determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (London: Oxford University Press, 2007), *American Historical Review* 113, no. 5 (2008): 1474–1476.

**12** Although Manela characterizes the *Wilsonian Moment* and the anticolonial agitation in Paris as "inherently international" and "transnational" (Manela, *Wilsonian Moment*, ix, 222), his study does not look at the role played by international organizations and non-governmental internationalism for anticolonial actors. While filling this gap by focusing on internationalism as an opportunity for 'post-Wilsonian' activism against the allies, this article at the same time refrains from identifying Reşit Saffet (or indeed postwar Turkish nationalism in general) as anticolonial. Rather, he was part of an anti-imperialist nationalist movement, which itself had a strong suppressive and hegemonic dimension directed against ethno-religious minorities.

**13** On the Paris Conference as a global moment see *ibid.*, 1–3; Manela, *Wilsonian Moment*, 4 f.

**14** Herren, Rüesch, Sibille, *Transcultural History*, 1–3; Manela, *Wilsonian Moment*, ix-x.

**15** Jessica Reinisch, "Introduction: Agents of Internationalism," *Contemporary European History* 25, special issue 2 (2016): 202.

as Jessica Reinisch put it, and to uncover non-European actors in the history of internationalism.<sup>16</sup> As a modernist, nationalist Muslim Turk who argued against what he perceived as the unjust European-Christian domination of the global order, Reşit Saffet was an outsider to the internationalist scene, but at the same time he used this marginal position to claim the victim role and to legitimize his political aims.

As regards primary sources, the article mainly focuses on Reşit Saffet's own publications, especially his printed conference speeches and memoranda. In addition to existing biographical sketches, his diplomatic career and relation to the Ottoman government could be tracked through archival documents in the Ottoman Archives in Istanbul.<sup>17</sup> As for the conferences themselves, the proceedings and resolutions of the Socialist Conference are available, whereas the League Conference is hardly documented. This might be one reason for its almost complete neglect by historical research.<sup>18</sup> Narrative insight into both conferences was further gained through newspaper articles and personal reports, with one source proving to be especially fruitful: the travelogue of Ethel Snowden, a British Labour politician, socialist, pacifist and feminist, who went on an 'internationalist grand tour' of Europe after the war. She took part in several international conferences, among them the two conferences in Berne. Her vivid travel account titled *A Political Pilgrim in Europe* reads like a Who's Who of socialist and liberal internationalism<sup>19</sup> at the time, and thus

---

**16** Ibid., 202. In their article from 2013, Dykmann and Naumann assessed that, while historians are delving ever deeper in their study of international organizations, they still hesitate to look beyond Europe and the US and at the roles of non-European actors and initiatives: Klaas Dykmann, Katja Naumann, "Changes from the 'Margins'. Non-European Actors, Ideas, and Strategies in International Organizations. Introduction," *Comparativ* 23, no. 4/5 (2013): 10 f.

**17** While there is no private collection of Reşit Saffet to be found in the state archives, some private notes and records may be found in the archives of the *Turkish Tourist Association (Türkiye Turing ve Otomobil Kurumu)*, since he acted as the association's president later in his life. Cf. Mahmut H Şakiroğlu, *Reşit Saffet Atabinen Bibliyografyası* (İstanbul: Türkiye Turing ve Otomobil Kurumu, 1985), 8.

**18** The more obvious reason why historians have shown greater interest in the International Labour and Socialist Conference than in the Conference for the League of Nations is the affiliation of the former with the Socialist International and thus with the history of socialism in general, so that especially during the Cold War historians took the conference into account. The League of Nations, by contrast, only recently regained the attention of historians, cf. Susan Pedersen, "Back to the League of Nations." *The American Historical Review* 112, no. 4 (2007): 1091–1117.

**19** The term 'liberal internationalism' ('Wilsonian internationalism') is used in this article to refer to the Wilsonian ideal of internationalism which built on national self-determination and the idea of a world consisting of independent nation-states jointly cooperating through free trade and an association of nations, thus promoting peace, economic prosperity and stability.

provides valuable insights into the socio-political milieus Reşit Saffet encountered in Berne.<sup>20</sup> It is used as a narrative element in this article to illustrate the social and political significance of the two Berne venues.

## Reşit Saffet Bey: A Diplomat in Transformative Times

In several respects, Reşit Saffet Bey's biography can be considered characteristic of the lives of many reform-oriented, nationalist Turkish elites at the transition of the late Ottoman Empire to the Republic of Turkey. Born in the 1870s or 1880s in an urban setting, of Muslim origin, having passed through a secular, Western-style, francophone education, and often studied in Europe, many of these men continued pursuing their political activities and professional careers by moving from the Young Turk Movement to Kemalist circles.<sup>21</sup> While there was no direct personal continuity between the top leadership of the CUP and the republican government installed in 1923 (the former fled into exile after the armistice in 1918), research has stressed that it was those broader modernist and nationalist elites who saw to the transitions that the state personnel and ideology underwent, and who later filled positions in the Kemalist state apparatus.<sup>22</sup>

Reşit Saffet Bey (1884–1965, he later assumed the surname *Atabinen*) was born into a well-esteemed family residing in one of the upper-class houses on the Bosphorus shore outside Istanbul. His father served as conductor of the Sultan's orchestra and is known for his efforts to establish European classical music in the empire. Having already enjoyed a francophone, secular education during his childhood in Istanbul, Reşit Saffet later moved to Paris to study at

---

Alongside British imperialist visions of world governance, liberal internationalism became one of the leading, and conflicting, ideological underpinnings of the League of Nations. Liberal internationalism thus describes a specific ideological current of internationalism and is to be distinguished from concurrent models like communist internationalism. Cf. Mark Mazower, *Governing the World: The History of an Idea* (London: Allen Lane, 2012), 154 f.

**20** Ethel Snowden, *A Political Pilgrim in Europe* (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1921). Besides the two Berne conferences, Snowden attended *The Conference of Women* in Zurich in June as well as another conference by the Second International in Lucerne in July 1919.

**21** Cf. the prosopographical analysis on Kemalist elites and continuities with the Young Turk socialization in Erik Jan Zürcher, "How Europeans adopted Anatolia and created Turkey," *European Review* 13, no. 3 (2005): 383–386.

**22** See esp. the works of Erik Jan Zürcher: *ibid.*, 385 f; Zürcher, *Modern History*.



*Sciences Po*. While still a student in France he engaged in journalistic pursuits and published various articles on literature and history in the *Mercure de France*, the *Journal des Débats*, and other reviews.<sup>23</sup> After his graduation in 1904, he went back to Istanbul, where he started working as a translator for the *Regie Company*<sup>24</sup> and as chief editor for the English and French language newspaper *Levant Herald*. In his capacity as translator for the *Tobacco Régie*, he attended the 1905 *Congrès international des Orientalistes* in Algiers where he was announced as speaker on the topic “the evolution of the Turkish race in Russia,” displaying his early dedication to Turkish nationalism and Turanism, and their ‘scientific’ claims.<sup>25</sup>

Back in Istanbul, Reşit Saffet also became the private French editor of the Ottoman Grand Vizier as well as an officer in the correspondence section of the Sublime Porte’s foreign office. Two years later, in 1907, he entered a diplomatic career, serving at the Ottoman embassies in Bucharest, Washington, Madrid, and Teheran.<sup>26</sup> At the moment of its foundation in 1911/12, he joined the Young Turk cultural organization *Türk Ocağı* which disseminated nationalist and Turanist ideas.<sup>27</sup> Being a member of the Young Turks, he continued on his diplomatic career after the CUP assumed power in 1912/13 and, following the First Balkan War, was sent to London, Paris, and Rome for postwar negotiations.<sup>28</sup> While remaining in the diplomatic service, he became more closely affiliated with the governmental center in Istanbul when in 1912, he was promoted to the position of director of the cabinet of the minister of finance (*Maliye Nezareti Kalem-i Mahsus Müdürü*).<sup>29</sup> Under the CUP regime, Reşit Saffet

**23** See the complete bibliography of Reşit Saffet: Şakiroğlu, *Atabinen Bibliyografyası*, 11.

**24** The state-affiliated *Regie Company* was initiated by the *Ottoman Debt Administration*. Having been granted a tobacco monopoly, the revenues were transferred in order to satisfy the Ottoman government’s European creditors. See Murat Birdal, *The Political Economy of Ottoman Public Debt* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010), 129 ff.

**25** *Actes du XIVe Congrès international des orientalistes*, Alger 1905, première partie, Paris 1906, 8, 36.

**26** Biographical information based on Ali Çankaya, “Reşit Saffet Atabinen,” in *Yeni Mülkiye ve Mülkiyeliler (Mülkiye Şeref Kitabı)* vol. 2 (Ankara: Mars Matbaası, 1969), 1064–1065; Çelik Gülersoy, “Reşid Safvet Atabinen,” *Tarih ve Toplum. Aylık Ansiklopedik Dergi* 122, no. 22 (February 1994): 68–73.

**27** Gülersoy, “Reşid Safvet Atabinen,” 71.

**28** T.C. Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi (hereafter BOA) BEO.4252-318828; HR.SYS.2081-2; MV.171-97; MV.172-19; MV.184-54. See also “Le règlement balkanique, les négociations turco-bulgare,” *La Lanterne: journal politique quotidien*, trente-sixième année, no. 13288 (September 8, 1913), 2; “L’Appel de la Turquie aux Puissances est confirmé,” *Le Gaulois*, 48<sup>e</sup> année, 3<sup>e</sup> série no. 12926 (March 5, 1913), 2.

**29** BOA İ.ML.92-1330; Çankaya, “Reşit Saffet Atabinen,” 1064.



also returned to journalism.<sup>30</sup> Between 1913 and 1917 he published numerous articles on the front page of *Sabah*, an Istanbul newspaper which openly supported the Young Turk Revolution in 1908.<sup>31</sup> During the First World War, Reşit Saffet, who shared a good relationship with CUP leader Talât Pasha, went to diplomatic meetings in Berlin and Vienna for financial arrangements with the federate governments.<sup>32</sup> In autumn 1918, when the CUP government resigned in the run-up to the armistice with the Entente, Reşit Saffet instantly left for Switzerland and did not return before late summer 1919.<sup>33</sup> In July 1919 the Ottoman foreign ministry requested the Allied High Commissioners to authorize the return of Reşit Saffet and his family to Istanbul, arguing that his presence in the ministry of finance was indispensable. The request also indicated that he was stuck in Geneva after having been surprised by the conclusion of the armistice while he was on “administrative leave”<sup>34</sup> in Switzerland. This claim seems not very plausible. The moment the Unionist regime collapsed was certainly not a suitable time for one of its operatives to go on vacation. More likely, it sought to conceal the ‘exile character’ of Reşit Saffet’s stay in Geneva. Presumably Reşit Saffet intended to escape the immediate political turmoil in Istanbul and avoid eventual charges by the new government or the Allies, and planned to return once the situation had settled.

During his short spell in Switzerland, Reşit Saffet’s political ambitions by no means lay idle. On the contrary, he continued to move on the international

---

**30** What might have been unlikely for a European diplomatic career of that time was quite common among the Young Turk political cadres, namely numerous personal ties between journalism and politics. The overlap between Ottoman press and the Young Ottoman/Young Turk movements surely stems from the fact that the press had served as a political tool for these movements since their time in opposition. As Zürcher explains with regard to mid-nineteenth century reformists: “Because they were excluded from the centre of power, they had to look for other ways to make their mark and some of them found this in a trade that was new to the empire: journalism.” See Zürcher, *Modern History*, 67. A detailed study on this aspect is still waiting to be written.

**31** See the list of all the newspaper articles written by Reşit Saffet in Şakiroğlu, *Atabinen Bibliyografyası*, 11ff; Ebru Boyar, “The Press and the Palace: The Two-Way Relationship between Abdülhamid II and the Press, 1876–1908,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 69, no. 3 (2006): 427.

**32** Gülersoy, “Reşid Safvet Atabinen,” 70; Kieser, *Vorkämpfer*, 93.

**33** Kieser quotes a note by the German Secret Service according to which Reşit Saffet arrived in Geneva on October 16, two days after Talât Pasha and his government resigned. Kieser, *Vorkämpfer*, 92f, 171, footnote 362; Çankaya, “Reşit Saffet Atabinen,” 1064; Gülersoy, “Reşid Safvet Atabinen,” 70.

**34** “Congé,” “mezunen,” BOA HR.SYS.2653-9.

stage, agitating as a self-declared representative of Turkey. In a time of political transition, at home in the Ottoman Empire as well as on the international level, he attended the international conferences in Berne and closely affiliated himself with the local Turkish nationalist diaspora, in which he became the most active publicist.<sup>35</sup> Under the editorship of the Turkish nationalist clubs in Geneva and Lausanne, the so called *Foyers Turcs* or *Türk Yurdu*,<sup>36</sup> Reşit Saffet published a total of nine propagandistic pamphlets in French concerning post-armistice developments.<sup>37</sup> The pamphlets fiercely attack the Peace Conference, the Allied occupation of the Ottoman Empire, their partition plans, and their support for Greek expansionism as well as for the Armenian case. They reflect strong nationalist sentiments and evince an animosity not only towards the Allies, but also towards Christian minorities, especially Armenians, culminating in a polemic that the Turks were collectively and generally speaking the victims.<sup>38</sup> Promoting as they do Turkism and pan-Turkic ideas, they also reflect an ideological stance characteristic of the nationalist circles that Reşit Saffet joined in the *Türk Yurdu*.<sup>39</sup> Besides these

---

**35** Hans-Lukas Kieser, “La Grande Guerre vue par la Diaspora Turque en Suisse (1918–1923),” in *The First World War as Remembered in the Countries of the Eastern Mediterranean*, eds. Olaf Farschid, Manfred Kropp, Stephan Dähne (Würzburg: Ergon Verlag, 2006), 234.

**36** Shortly after the Young Turk Revolution, five *Türk Yurdu* clubs were established outside the Ottoman Empire promoting Young Turk ideas and Turkish nationalism among the diaspora communities and the European public: Lausanne (1909), Genf (1911), Neuchâtel (1912), Paris (1913), Berlin (1913). See Tanık Zafer Tunaya, *Türkiye’de Siyasal Partiler*, vol. 1 (Istanbul: Hürriyet Vakfı Yayınları, 1984), 494.

**37** See the bibliography by Şakiroğlu, *Atabinen Bibliyografyası*, 38f for a list of pamphlets published during his stay in Switzerland. They were all published under the pen name ‘Kara Schemsi,’ a reference to Reşit Saffet’s ancestor, a famous Sufi sheikh of the same name, and most probably in an attempt to conceal his former political identity under the CUP government. See: Gülersoy, “Reşid Safvet Atabinen,” 68.

**38** Kieser, *Vorkämpfer*, 93. See especially: Kara Schemsi, *Les Turcs et la Question d’Arménie* (Geneva: P. Richter, 1918); Kara Schemsi, *Les Turcs et le Panhellénisme* (Geneva: P. Richter, 1918); Kara Schemsi, *Turcs et Arménien devant l’histoire. Nouveaux témoignages russes et turcs sur les atrocités arméniennes de 1914 à 1918* (Geneva: Imprimerie Nationale, 1919); Kara Schemsi, *L’Extermination des Turcs* (Geneva: Imprimerie Nationale, 1919); *Smyrne au Point de Vue Géographique, Économique de l’Instruction Publique, Ethnographique, Historiques, Politique: Pour la Défense des Droits Légitimes de la Nationalité Turque, publié par le Turc-Yourdou de Lausanne* (Lausanne: A. Bovard-Giddey, 1919).

**39** The term ‘Turkism’ describes a political ideology and collective identity which favors Turkish nationalism over Ottomanism or Islamism, and emphasizes ethnicity-based belonging as well as pan-Turkic ideas. On the influence of Turkism within the pre-revolutionary Young Turk movement see: Şükrü Hanioğlu, *Preparation for a Revolution. The Young Turks 1902–1908* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 295–302. On its increasing influence during the Second Constitutional Period see: Zürcher, *Modern History*, 128–130.

pamphlets, his exile publications also include the address he prepared for the Socialist Conference and a compilation of the speeches and memoranda for the League Conference. They, too, reflect strong nationalist convictions and have a propagandistic tone.<sup>40</sup> In April 1919 Reşit Saffet, together with two likewise nationalist-minded exiled Turkists, Ahmed Cevdet, director of the newspaper *İkdam*, and Ahmed Ihsan, owner of the newspapers *Servet-i Fünun* and *Le Soir*, joined the Geneva-based *Ligue Ottomane*. Reşit Saffet became the new general secretary of that hitherto relatively liberal, anti-CUP diaspora association which subsequently took a more resolutely nationalist stance and protested against the Allies and the Paris Peace Conference.<sup>41</sup>

In the Swiss interim period, Reşit Saffet was much more of a nationalist activist than a restrained statesman. First and foremost, he acted as representative of Turkey and the Turks, and not as a representative of the Ottoman government or the Empire's diverse society. While his position before and during the war was that of an official envoy of the Ottoman state, it was rendered unofficial with the change of government. However, the fact that he was on administrative leave and operated during a phase of political transition did not mean that Reşit Saffet was completely independent of Istanbul. Although he seemed to have acted on his own initiative, he kept contact with state authorities, namely the Ottoman embassy in Switzerland.<sup>42</sup> A letter from the Ottoman ambassador in Berne to the foreign minister in Istanbul, Fuat Selim Bey, indicates not only that Reşit Saffet forwarded his pamphlets to the embassy, but also that the ambassador himself supported his propaganda by printing and publishing his texts, distributing them to the Swiss press, political circles, and important political figures, as well as to the parties participating at the Socialist Conference in Berne.<sup>43</sup> At a time in which the Ottoman state's diplomatic agency towards the Allies was drastically limited, the diplomatic authorities seem to have not only tolerated, but even endorsed Reşit Saffet's individual claim to

---

40 Kara Schemsi, *Le Proletariat Turc au Congrès Socialiste International de Berne* (Berne, 1919); Kara Schemsi, *L'Islam, les Turcs et la Société des Nations* (Geneva: Imprimerie Nationale, 1919).

41 Kieser, *Vorkämpfer*, 86. See also the protest dispatch against the Allies published by the Ligue Ottomane in "La Protestation Ottomane," *L'Europe Nouvelle, Revue Hebdomadaire des Questions Extérieures, Economiques et Littéraires*, No. 22, May 31, 1919, 1120 f.

42 Reşit Saffet's signature under the published protest letter by the Ligue Ottomane suggests that he was not only the Ligue's general secretary but also a "Conseiller d'Ambassade honoraire," see: "La Protestation Ottomane," 1121.

43 BOA HR.SYS.2705-10. Kieser supposes that Reşit Saffet might have worked for the Ottoman secret service while he was in Switzerland; see: Kieser, "Guerre," 234.

representation. The critical political situation of the Ottoman Empire thus enabled Reşit Saffet to act in a twilight zone between state diplomacy, nationalist activism, and internationalism.

## The Internationalist Milieus in Berne in 1919

Already in the decades preceding the First World War, Switzerland, together with Belgium, developed into one of the hot spots for the increasing number of international organizations and conferences. Long before Geneva was made the seat of the League of Nations in 1920, the country's largest cities had become centers for internationalist activities and transnational networks. Located in a small state in the middle of Europe, which was however neutral and politically stable, Swiss cities offered a convenient environment for internationalism.<sup>44</sup> Besides their appeal to internationalists, they were also safe havens for political activists, including several exile and diaspora communities. Among those politicized groups were also communities with an Ottoman background, such as Armenian Dashnakist revolutionaries, nationalist clubs representing Bulgarians, Greeks, Serbs, Albanians, and Egyptians, as well as Zionists promoting Jewish settlement in Ottoman Palestine. Furthermore, since the 1860s, Geneva and Lausanne had evolved into centers for revolutionary Ottoman circles and later Young Turks, whose members established their nationalist clubs, the *Türk Yurdu*, as from 1911.<sup>45</sup>

Switzerland's non-alignment principle allowed the relatively unimpeded continuity of internationalism and diaspora activism during and after the World War. The actors involved took the opportunity to discuss on neutral ground not only the war but also the post-bellum future, for instance at the *International Socialist Women's Conference against the War* and the *Zimmerwald Conference*, both held in Berne in 1915.<sup>46</sup> Berne remained an

---

<sup>44</sup> Madeleine Herren, "Governmental Internationalism and the Beginning of a New World Order in the Late Nineteenth Century," in *The Mechanics of Internationalism. Culture, Society, and Politics from the 1840s to the First World War*, ed. Martin H. Geyer and Johannes Paulmann (London: Oxford University Press, 2001), 129, 133 f.

<sup>45</sup> Hans-Lukas Kieser, *Thinking 'New Turkey': Revolutionary Ottoman Groups in Geneva before 1914*. Stiftung Forschungsstelle Schweiz-Türkei/Research Foundation Switzerland-Turkey, Occasional Paper of March 2008, accessed October 15, 2016, [http://www.sfst.ch/typo3/index.php?id=16, 2f, 6](http://www.sfst.ch/typo3/index.php?id=16,2f,6). See also Kieser's all-encompassing book on the topic: Hans-Lukas Kieser, *Vorkämpfer der 'Neuen Türkei'. Revolutionäre Bildungseliten am Genfersee, 1870–1939* (Zurich: Chronos, 2005).

<sup>46</sup> Herren, *Internationale Organisationen*, 52.

important place for internationalist conferences concerned with the postwar situation, not least when the war was finally over. Soon after, in mid-January 1919, the official Peace Conference opened in Paris to negotiate a new global order and the foundation of the League of Nations, the Socialist Conference and the League Conference, which took place in Berne in February and March 1919 respectively, opened alternative negotiations. In reference to the Paris Conference, they, too, debated the future world order and the foundations of the League, albeit from their own socialist or pacifist vantage points.

Berne's internationalist climate and those two conferences in particular offered an alternative gathering place for all those who were not officially accredited with one of the delegations in Paris.<sup>47</sup> Such persons that sought a stake in the peace negotiations, yet who lacked formal representation during most of the conference, included opposition members and activists critical of Allied policies; individuals from one of the Central Power states, including the Ottoman Empire; representatives of states carved out over the war, like Armenia and Georgia; and people speaking for regions or groups not possessing an own independent government, like Alsace-Lorraine or Zionist Palestine. Thus, neither the Socialist Conference, nor the League Conference, were attended by state envoys on official missions (however, lobbyists from governmentally-affiliated parties did take part), but mainly by civic activists from various ideological and political backgrounds. These included socialists, trade unionists, anti-imperialists, feminists, liberals, nationalists, diaspora representatives, and various combinations of these.<sup>48</sup> The fact that these after-war internationalist forums were also attended by members of diaspora communities like the Geneva Türk Yurdu highlights the above mentioned overlap between internationalist milieus and politically active expatriate groups.

Although the delegates at the Berne conferences had differing agendas, they all found themselves in the same situation of being excluded from the official peace negotiations. What united them was the firm resolve to influence

---

<sup>47</sup> For the purpose of immediate concurrence, the Socialist Conference was originally planned to be held in Paris at the same time and place as the Peace Conference. The allied premiers, though, decided to tolerate internationalist conferences only in neutral countries, and in turn promised the authorization of according travel permits. See: Arno J. Mayer, *Politics and Diplomacy of Peacemaking* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1967), 376–380.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. *International Socialism and World Peace, Resolutions of the Berne Conference, February 1919* (London, The Independent Labour Party, I.L.P. Pamphlets New Series no. 1, 1919); Snowden, *Pilgrim*.

postwar decision-making by presenting conference memoranda and final resolutions to the Paris Peace Conference.<sup>49</sup> The participants regarded the conferences as chances to make their respective agendas heard in high-level diplomacy – provided that their individual concerns made it to the final resolutions. Apart from that, the conference venues themselves offered a chance to address official decision-makers more or less directly: In particular, the listeners in the audience at the Socialist Conference included important officials, “several ambassadors; a whole medley of chief secretaries; a gang of spies of both sexes,”<sup>50</sup> as well as a member of the American delegation to the Paris Peace Conference, as Ethel Snowden noted.<sup>51</sup> The conferences’ visibility in the peace negotiations meant that they attracted not only ardent socialists and staunch internationalists, but also people driven by their own sectional concerns about political and territorial issues left unsettled after the war. To enforce their positions, some delegates, including this article’s protagonist, visited several conferences.<sup>52</sup> Given that one of the conferences was openly socialist while the other supported liberalism, this might raise questions. Surely, political opportunism is one explanation as some people, such as Reşit Saffet himself, simply took every chance to acquire international representation regardless of its specific ideological underpinnings. What is more, though, is that as a consequence of the war-time split of the Second International into two factions – an anti-war, pro-revolutionary wing, and a social-democratic, reformist, anti-Bolshevist wing – the majority of socialists in Berne were moderates adhering to social patriotism and embracing,

---

**49** During the first session of the permanent commission resulting from the Socialist Conference, a nine-person delegation was appointed to present the conference resolutions to the Paris Peace Conference. A second group was charged with the task “to watch over the work of the Peace Conference at Paris.” See: *Resolutions of the Berne Conference*, 15. The League of Nations Conference likewise had the aim to impress the Paris Peace Conference directly and to “suggest such points for the Charter issued from Paris as would make of the League of Nations a real and vital thing.” See: Snowden, *Pilgrim*, 63.

**50** Snowden, *Pilgrim*, 38.

**51** The American peace delegation member was an official observer sent by the American government to win labor internationalism for Wilson, and to promote his Fourteen Points and thereby steer the conference in the direction of the U.S. government and contain the influence of Bolshevism. See: Mayer, *Peacemaking*, 384–187.

**52** Ethel Snowden, for example, and other socialists participated actively in both conferences. Ethel also mentions that a “group of well-known pacifists” who held the League of Nations Conference one month later was part of the audience during the Socialist Conference. See: Snowden, *Pilgrim*, 38, 59.

essentially, Wilson's principles and the League of Nations.<sup>53</sup> Berne's internationalist milieu in 1919, which crystallized out into the Socialist Conference and the League Conference, was thus shaped by a national, a socialist-democratic to liberal understanding of internationalism. In essence, the postwar future as envisioned by most of those internationalists conformed to the Wilsonian ideal tabled in Paris, where they saw it compromised by the Allies' political self-interests. However, assembling in the name of socialism and liberal internationalism did not prevent many of the delegates from also having their own, mostly national sub-agendas. Above all, the participants were pragmatists who, closely following the Paris Conference, realized that the future world order would be created through an international conference. Thus, if they wanted to leave their own imprint on this after-war design, this would best be achieved by either being part of the Peace Conference or, if not possible, by using the same format to discuss simultaneously what were essentially the same topics, and on basis of this to address the Allies in Paris.<sup>54</sup>

The close relations between the Berne conferences and the official Peace Conference, their quasi-diplomatic potential, and their efforts to influence the new global order seem to have motivated Reşit Saffet's internationalist involvement in early 1919. Arriving in Switzerland shortly after the defeat of the Ottoman Empire, he not only joined the local Türk Yurdu activists campaigning against the Entente's policies after the armistice, he also attended both conferences in Berne as well as another meeting of the Second International in Lucerne.<sup>55</sup> He thus carried the propaganda

---

53 As Mayer puts it, "Internationalists were not champions of civil disobedience or subversion. In their judgment, a Wilsonian peace was the essential precondition for the advance of democratic Socialism throughout Europe." See Mayer, *Peacemaking*, 378. See also George D. H. Cole, *A History of Socialist Thought*, vol. IV, pt. I (London: Macmillan, 1961), 296.

54 Already during the war, Allied socialists proposed that firstly, each of the official delegations sent to the Peace Conference should consist of at least one labor politician in a leading representative role, and that secondly, an international labor conference should be organized concurrently to the peace negotiations. As the first part of the plan could not be achieved, the international conference remained the only option for asserting influence. See: Mayer, *Peacemaking*, 375.

55 Ali Çankaya, "Reşit Saffet Atabinen," 1064. Unlike the Berne conferences, Reşit Saffet left no published account of his participation in the Lucerne Second International in July 1919. The conference proceedings mention neither him specifically nor indeed any Turkish attendee whatsoever: *The International at Lucerne: the Resolutions, the Provisional Constitution* (London: The Labour Party, 1919). Most probably he attended the Lucerne conference in much the same unofficial way as he did the Berne International, where he was also not accredited and does not appear in the proceedings. Due to this lack of narrative source coverage, Reşit Saffet's participation in Lucerne could not be examined in the present article.



cultivated in Turkish nationalist circles to the global stage presented by the internationalist milieu in Berne.

## At the International Labour and Socialist Conference

Two weeks after the opening of the Paris Peace Conference, the partly revived Second International held its own conference at the *Volkshaus* in Berne in February 1919. Set out to negotiate the postwar settlements from a socialist viewpoint, it attracted well-known European leftists (among them the grandson of Karl Marx, Jean Longuet) as well as various activists who seemed to have been more concerned about the pending territorial questions than actual working class issues.<sup>56</sup> The *Tribune de Genève* reported on Danish and German delegates agreeing on a plebiscite as the best means to set the contested boundary line between the two countries; on a Hungarian participant protesting against Czech troops on what he considered to be Hungary's rightful territory; and on a Zionist representative urging the conference to consider the critical situation of Jews. The newspaper also mentions Bulgarian spokesman Janko Sakasoff who pointed to problems arising from reallocating territory on the basis of population statistics, as he argued that national ratios had changed in the recent past due, for example, to "Turkey's politics of extermination."<sup>57</sup> Most prominently though, the article mentions the Armenian Dashnakist party member who took the conference floor to give an account of the Young Turks' crimes against Armenians: Hamazasp Ohandjanian demanded the acknowledgement of Armenia as an independent state on former Ottoman territory, the acceptance of an official Armenian representative to the Peace Conference, and that the future League of Nations assume its "sacred duty" to support Armenia.<sup>58</sup> Perceiving the conference as an

---

<sup>56</sup> A list of all the official delegates is attached to the conference proceedings: *Resolutions of the Berne Conference*, 14. Invitations to the conference were sent to labor or socialist parties and trade union centers in various countries. Almost no communist parties were represented. See Cole, *Socialist Thought*, 291 f.

<sup>57</sup> "Les Conférences de Berne," *Tribune de Genève*, year 41, no. 34, February 9–10, 1919, 4.

<sup>58</sup> On the Armenian delegation in Berne see Richard G Hovannisian, *The Republic of Armenia: The First Year, 1918–1919* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1971), 349–352.

oppositional side stage to the ongoing negotiations in Paris, delegates gathering in Berne under the umbrella of socialist internationalism represented their own national interests and backgrounds.<sup>59</sup> Indeed, in terms of its aims and the topics of discussion, the conference resembled more a smaller, socialist-tinged version of the Paris Conference than an assembly evoking socialist world revolution; as mentioned already, the majority of delegates rejected revolutionary socialism and instead sided with social-democracy, liberal internationalism, and the League of Nations idea. However, they did criticize the way the Allies were about to implement this ideas and argued in favor of a more democratic League than the one drafted in Paris.<sup>60</sup>

In addition to the accredited delegates and their sectional agendas, the conference audience – according to Ethel Snowden “a very large and interested one” – deserves some attention. As Snowden continued to describe very vividly, “Amongst the listeners of every nationality” there were not only the aforementioned diplomats, chief secretaries, and spies, but also “a group of well-known pacifists,”<sup>61</sup> and high society members including two gentlemen “famous for mystical millions,” one of them, John de Kay, was the main sponsor of the Berne conference (despite his impatience with “the ‘blue-sky-politics’ of some socialists.”<sup>62</sup>) As Snowden’s descriptions reveal, the conference was not only an international meeting of socialists and national activists, but, with an eye to its diverse and influential audience, depicted a truly global stage. Among the listeners were also, as Snowden noted with a slight exoticist excitement, “Indians with turbans and Turks wearing the fez.”<sup>63</sup> Although not officially accredited, Reşit Saffet numbered among the multifarious delegates

---

**59** Mayer, *Peacemaking*, 375 f, 394. According to Mayer, the conference served as “an instrument of party politics, factional struggles, and national rivalries,” “multipurpose for Allied and Central Socialists alike” (p. 375).

**60** *Resolutions of the Berne Conference*, 1–6. See also: Julius Braunthal, *Geschichte der Internationale*, vol. 2 (Berlin: J. H. W. Dietz Nachf., 1978), 172; Cole, *Socialist Thought*, 290 f; Mayer, *Peacemaking*, 383. Unlike the creators of the League of Nations in Paris, the socialists in Berne envisioned the League of Nations as an international parliament rather than a council of government delegates – an idea which was closer to a form of global governance than the Allies’ final scheme. See Cole, *Socialist Thought*, 296.

**61** Snowden, *Pilgrim*, 38.

**62** *Ibid.*, 41. De Kay later wrote his own book on the Berne conference: John de Kay, *The Spirit of the International at Berne*, Lucerne 1919.

**63** Snowden, *Pilgrim*, 38. Besides Reşit Saffet, there was also a member of the newly founded *Turkish Socialist Party (Türkiye Sosyalist Fırkası)* present in the audience. Tanık Zafer Tunaya, *Türkiye’de Siyasal Partiler*, vol. 2 (Istanbul: Hürriyet Vakfı Yayınları, 1986), 404.

and listeners.<sup>64</sup> He presented himself as the representative of Turkey, which, he complained, “had no knowledge of the reunion of this conference” because of the “excessive blockade by the Entente.”<sup>65</sup> More specifically, he claimed he was attending the congress as representative of “one of the largest national groups of the global proletariat.”<sup>66</sup> Turkey, he argued, was actually the most essentially proletarian country in existence, because 95 percent of its population consisted of peasants.<sup>67</sup> Omitting the fact that Turkey at that time had hardly any industrialized labor segment, let alone a high number of class-conscious, organized workers, he thus legitimized his position as advocate of the oppressed Turkish people by declaring practically all Turks as proletarians in a socialist sense. They might not be organized and they might lack official representation, he explained, but they nevertheless deserve “the attention of humanity and the international socialist party.”<sup>68</sup> Like many of the delegates, Reşit Saffet’s conference participation was driven far less by socialist convictions than by his nationalist objectives. He took the opportunity to represent Turkey on an international stage. The fact that it was simultaneously a socialist stage was less important to him than its concurrency with the Peace Conference, but its socialist stamp had a bearing on the way he represented Turkey and on the rhetoric he chose for doing so.<sup>69</sup>

“The Turkish peasant mass is not exploited by one distinct national class,”<sup>70</sup> Reşit Saffet clarified at the outset of his address. Instead, he made out three parties which were to blame for the alleged capitalist exploitation of the Turkish people: firstly, former Ottoman governments, especially the CUP; secondly, minorities in the Ottoman Empire, Armenians and Greeks; and thirdly, the European powers. Starting with the Ottoman governments of the past, Reşit Saffet held that “Labor, [and] the meagre yield of the Turkish peasant” served nothing but to maintain “a considerable number of inept functionaries,” their nepotistic practices and their adhesion to power.<sup>71</sup> For this reason “the Turk of

---

**64** Reşit Saffet does not figure on the list of officially accredited delegates attached to the proceedings. In his own address he mentions himself as acting as spokesman for the Turkish proletariat because “it has no official representation in this congress fold.” See: Schemsi, *Prolétariat Turc*, 3.

**65** *Ibid.*, 3. By “reunion” he probably meant the renewed gathering of the Second International.

**66** Schemsi, *Prolétariat Turc*, 15.

**67** *Ibid.*, 3.

**68** *Ibid.*, 3.

**69** Kieser, *Vorkämpfer*, 93.

**70** Schemsi, *Prolétariat Turc*, 3.

**71** *Ibid.*, 5.

Anatolia never had confidence in the government,” which always was “like a foreign government there to exploit him.”<sup>72</sup> Reşit Saffet saw the CUP government particularly at fault in regard to the recent war. He charged that in the same manner as the Tsar in Russia, the CUP leaders had not bothered to ask their citizens before they entered the war. No Turk joined the army voluntarily, Reşit Saffet stated, nor did the Turks in general support any territorial expansion in the Caucasus, the Crimean Peninsula, or Turkestan. Instead he claimed that all Turks were victims of “the imperialist politics of the Romanoffs and Hohenzollern” which “were served in the Orient by the radical fraction of the Committee of Union and Progress.”<sup>73</sup> Assigning all responsibility for Turkey’s actions during the war to the CUP leadership, he portrayed the Turkish people as a victim of their own government, and himself as their spokesperson and the victims’ voice. This is a subtle twist aimed at obscuring his own position under the CUP government and at claiming political credibility. It also suggests a one-sided nationalist narrative, not only because it makes victims of all Turks, but also because it excludes non-Muslims and non-Turkish Muslims who also fought on the Ottoman side in the war. By linking the CUP with the toppled monarchs, the Russian Tsar and the German Kaiser, who were anathema to the socialists, he furthermore curried favor and sought to clearly distinguish the former government from a new Turkey ready for socialist solidarity. At this point, he probably hoped to gain a status like that of Germany, which, in the eyes of the Berne conference, was not to be blamed for the deeds of “the old system” because the German proletariat had shown its will for democracy, reconstruction, socialism and an internationalist spirit.<sup>74</sup>

Reşit Saffet’s strategy was to free Turks of all responsibility, particularly with regard to the deportations and mass killings of Armenians during the war. At the Second International, which generally supported the Armenian cause,<sup>75</sup> he persisted in arguing that “It was exclusively the mercenary agents of the Committee and Kurdish gangs who massacred the Armenians.”<sup>76</sup> He confronted Hamazasp Ohandjanian and his Armenian delegation directly, claiming they themselves would “acknowledge that the responsibility for the massacres rests exclusively with the Unionists and not with the Turkish race.”<sup>77</sup> Not only did

---

72 Ibid., 5.

73 Ibid., 3.

74 See the resolutions on German war guilt in *Resolutions of the Berne Conference*, 2 f.

75 Hovannisian, *Armenia*, 349 f.

76 Schemsi, *Prolétariat Turc*, 6.

77 Ibid., 6. Ohandjanian spelled “le Dr Chandjanian [sic].”

Reşit Saffet's address aim at absolving Turkey of all charges in regard to the crimes committed against Armenians, but it also portrayed the Turks as the actual victims. He insisted that Armenians fighting on the side of the Tsar had attacked peaceful Turks in the first place, and that the number of Turkish casualties was higher than the subsequent death toll among the Armenians.<sup>78</sup> This distortion of the perpetrator-victim roles took root as a common trope of denial and relativization among Turkish elites after the war.<sup>79</sup> In the particular context of the Berne conference, however, depicting the Armenians as close allies of the Tsarist regime was specifically tailored to delegitimizing the Armenian position from a socialist viewpoint as well. In a similar vein, Reşit Saffet tried to discredit current attempts by Armenian activists to gain a foothold in the negotiations over the future of the Ottoman Empire. When mentioning the Paris-based Ottoman Armenian Boghos Nubar, who visited the Peace Conference to press for official Armenian representation, Reşit Saffet did not fail to stress Boghos Nubar's anti-socialist stance by attributing the epithet 'capitalist' immediately after mentioning his name.<sup>80</sup> Reşit Saffet was skilled at fitting his anti-Armenian and Turkish nationalist propaganda into socialist rhetoric. In his address, blaming the Armenians and casting the Turks as the victims was not limited to the context of the genocide, but also defined what he depicted as a century-long process of exploitation. He accused the "class of Armenian, Greek and Levantine small shop keepers, moneylenders, merchants, and intermediaries spread all over the country" as having "lived on the exploitation of Turkish labor, enriching themselves at their expense and expatriating once they made their fortune, as if to escape eventual sanctions against untoward social behavior."<sup>81</sup> Characterizing "certain races"<sup>82</sup> in the empire (that is Christian minorities) as being generally exploitative, capitalist, asocial, and – here again a conscious turn of phrase – *a class* on their own, Reşit Saffet claimed that the role this "class" played towards the "Turkish peasant mass" was equivalent to "the role of the capitalist bourgeoisie in Europe."<sup>83</sup>

---

78 Schemsi, *Prolétariat Turc*, 6–8.

79 Kieser, "Guerre," 239–243.

80 Schemsi, *Prolétariat Turc*, 6.

81 *Ibid.*, 5.

82 *Ibid.*, 4.

83 *Ibid.*, 3 f. This argumentation was by no means new, as Kemal Karpat stresses that throughout the Young Turk era "ethnic Turks were increasingly regarded as having been exploited economically by their own upper classes in association with the Greek and Armenian minorities and European interests and having faced total disappearance". Kemal H. Karpat, *The Politicization of Islam: Reconstructing Identity, State, Faith, and Community in the Late Ottoman State* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 369.

The European powers, or “European capitalism,”<sup>84</sup> figure as the third protagonist in Reşit Saffet’s accusation of the capitalist exploitation of the Turkish people. First and foremost, and not least because of the socialist-economic focus of the conference, he held them accountable for having caused the financial and economic crisis of the Ottoman Empire as they, he declared, “have never considered the Eastern Question other than from the viewpoint of their own interests.”<sup>85</sup> Citing railway constructions launched in the empire at the turn of the century as a prime example (the Berlin-Baghdad Express or the Hejaz Railway), he complained that the concessions granted to European investors by the Ottoman government did not serve Turkish public needs but only the Great Powers’ strategic interests and economic advantage. He argued that these railway projects, realized with British, French, and German capital, were solely designed to facilitate those governments’ financial benefit and to expedite their geopolitical aims in the region.<sup>86</sup> In close connection with concessions and foreign ventures, Reşit Saffet identified another dimension of European capitalist exploitation: the European debt policy towards the Ottoman Empire. Controlled by the *Ottoman Public Debt Administration*, an international bureaucratic apparatus run by European creditors to recover the Ottoman State’s debts via tax seizure, and “backed up, if necessary, by the cannon of foreign fleets,” as Reşit Saffet stressed, a system of “bonds and sometimes usurious interest rates” was operating against the “most vital interest”<sup>87</sup> of the common people in Turkey. As tax payers, he argued, the latter had eventually to pay off their government’s debt to European creditors, even though the debt itself stemmed from money borrowed in order to realize projects which in the end only profited the self-same creditors.<sup>88</sup>

While his criticism against the penetration of European capitalism in the Ottoman Empire may seem oversimplified but justified,<sup>89</sup> the following passages again make it clear that Reşit Saffet’s intention was to discredit non-Turkish

---

**84** Schemsi, *Prolétariat Turc*, 4.

**85** *Ibid.*, 4.

**86** *Ibid.*, 4 f. In his criticism of the exploitative nature of foreign investments, Reşit Saffet does not differentiate between former allies and enemies as for him, all Great Powers share basically the same imperialist intentions: “In Berlin, the prevailing considerations for the construction and course of the Baghdad Railway did not much differ from those obtaining in the capitalist milieus of Paris and London with regard to the Arab and Syrian railways.”

**87** Schemsi, *Prolétariat Turc*, 5.

**88** *Ibid.*, 4 f.

**89** On the background of European capitalist penetration in the Ottoman Empire see Şevket Pamuk, *The Ottoman Empire and European Capitalism, 1820–1913: Trade, Investment and Production* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 132.

parts of the society: “For one whole century, three-quarters of the taxes paid by Turks in Asia Minor lined the pockets of Greeks, Armenians, and the European capitalists without the poor Turkish taxpayers experiencing the slightest improvement in their livelihoods.”<sup>90</sup> The complicity between Europeans and Christian minorities, Reşit Saffet stated, was founded on a “latent religious animosity”<sup>91</sup> rooted in Christian prejudices against Muslims and Turks that had prevailed in Europe since the Crusades.<sup>92</sup> In present international affairs, he claimed, these biases materialize in a certain “fanaticism”<sup>93</sup> on the part of Christian diplomats who still adhered to a medieval mentality of thinking in the binary opposites of Cross and Crescent – a mentality which spurred them on to reclaim Eastern regions for the Cross in the name of civilization. Eventually, Reşit Saffet embedded this cultural argument in his broader narrative of a capitalist plot in which Turkey deserves the support of all true socialists: “The Turks [...] were the victims of prejudices on the one hand and of European imperialism and capitalism on the other. Karl Marx, too, took sides with the Turks against the Tsars in 1854.”<sup>94</sup>

Reşit Saffet’s speech was based on the outright neglect shown towards the complex reasons that led to the escalation of violence and the Ottoman Empire’s desolate situation after the war. Instead, he suggests an simplified explanation

---

**90** Schemsi, *Prolétariat Turc*, 4 f.

**91** *Ibid.*, 8.

**92** *Ibid.*, 7. Reşit Saffet was not the only Turkish activist to use the Socialist Conference as a forum for adverse criticism of the Allies and European imperialism. Halil Halid, a Turkish intellectual self-exiled in London until 1908 and who served as an Ottoman diplomat in Bombay before the war, published two pamphlets in Berne which were related to the socialist conference, one of which was a memorandum to the British socialist delegation in Berne in which he addresses the injustices of British imperialism committed against Turks and other Ottoman Muslims in the name of humanitarianism, Christianity, and civilization. Unlike Reşit Saffet, he draws less on anti-capitalist arguments (although he does make reference to Karl Marx as an anti-imperialist ally) than on pan-Islamic and anti-colonial ideas – thereby resembling more Reşit Saffet’s contributions to the *League of Nations Conference*. Memorandum in French translation: Halil Halid, *La Turcophobie des Impérialistes Anglais*, Berne 1919 (English title: *The Turcophobia of the English Imperialists*.) The second pamphlet the author published in Berne stressed the natural alliance between socialism and anti-imperialism: Halil Halid, *British Labour and the Orient*, Berne 1919. For literature on Halil Halid see: Cemil Aydın, *The Politics of Anti-Westernism in Asia. Visions of World Order in Pan-Islamic and Pan-Asian Thought* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 63–69; See Tanvir Wasti, “Halil Halid: Anti-Imperialist Muslim Intellectual,” in *Middle Eastern Studies* 29, no. 3 (July 1993): 559–579.

**93** Schemsi, *Prolétariat Turc*, 8.

**94** *Ibid.*, 11. “Tsars” used in plural form due to Alexander II’s accession to the throne during the Crimean War and after his father’s death in 1855.



warped through a nationalist lens. Urging a plainly coherent national argument, he denied the heterogeneity of ethnic, religious, and political belonging in the mixed context of Ottoman society, as well as the multi-causal interplay of internal and external factors leading to the empire's disintegration. By creating simple images of closed, diametrically opposed groups (Christian minorities, Europeans versus the Muslim Turkish people), and by labeling the former as perpetrators and the latter as victims, he externalized all responsibility. Portraying minorities as foreigners and the Turks in contrast as the only autochthonous people of Anatolia, he nationalized the notion of Turkey in a manner contrary to Ottoman or Muslim conceptions of society (not only Christian minorities are excluded, but also for instance Arabs and Kurds).<sup>95</sup> Finally, to win his audience's support, he attuned his argumentation to socialist terminology and identified the dichotomous groups as (foreign) capitalists vying against the (Turkish) proletariat. Projecting the image of Turks as collective victims, he expounded a Turkist viewpoint which towards the end of the address reveals pan-Turkic implications. Speaking "in the name of forty million Turkish proletarians"<sup>96</sup> he concluded that not just the Turkish proletariat in Turkey suffered under "these imperialist and capitalist classes," but all of the "40–50 million Turks in the world."<sup>97</sup> He demanded that the Paris Conference and the League of Nations should take into account "the rights of the Turkish majorities in the Ottoman Empire and of the Turkish minorities in the Caucasus, Persia, Russia, the Balkans, and elsewhere."<sup>98</sup> By doing so, he appealed to the principle of national self-determination in a reference not only to Wilson's promises regarding the postwar settlements, but also to one of the cherished principles of socialism.<sup>99</sup>

Throughout the address, it became manifestly clear that Reşit Saffet's key concern was the ongoing peace negotiations and the eventual partition of the Ottoman Empire to the benefit of minority national movements and European imperialist interests. A "peace of violence and annihilation" is

---

<sup>95</sup> The notion of the Turks as "truly autochthonous element of Anatolia," as "the most ancient and the real masters of the country [Asia Minor]" is used by Reşit Saffet in a speech on the League Conference: Şemsi, *Société des Nations*, 10.

<sup>96</sup> Schemsi, *Prolétariat Turc*, 14.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>99</sup> See Arno Mayer's classic work on the antagonism and shared development of Lenin's and Wilson's ideological portfolio: Arno J. Mayer, *Political Origins of the New Diplomacy 1917–1918* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), 8, 371.

being prepared in Paris, he warned, while Turkey is muzzled and her adversaries, especially the Armenian party, would enjoy every freedom “to lend credence to such versions as seem favorable to their own cause.”<sup>100</sup> Fearing Allied annexationism and Armenian irredentism in Anatolia, he stressed that he fully agreed with the present British, French, German, Austrian, and Dutch delegates who demanded that territorial questions should only be solved by plebiscites and majority votes under the control of the League of Nations; the latter, Reşit Saffet emphasized in line with the Berne delegates, must be a *democratic* League, open to all nations. He called all present delegates to exert pressure on their respective governments to make them adhere to these principles essential for “a lasting peace in the Orient and elsewhere.”<sup>101</sup> At the end of his address, he stressed that all that the Turks want is “to live in peace, on our integral territory, in peace among us, in peace with the Greeks and Armenians.”<sup>102</sup> He also did not fail to underscore once more that the Turkish cause, or rather that of the Turkish proletariat he represented was in the spirit of the Socialist Conference and its aim “for the reconciliation of the world’s proletariats.”<sup>103</sup>

Reşit Saffet’s appeal remained without any tangible impact on the conference proceedings and resolutions.<sup>104</sup> Neither Ethel Snowden, nor John de Kay, nor the French socialist Pierre Renaudel made any mention of Reşit Saffet in their publications.<sup>105</sup> Solely in de Kay’s account we read that the Bulgarian delegate Sakasoff pleaded “for a recognition of the unfortunate state of the proletarian Turks who were drawn into the struggle by their government.”<sup>106</sup> Despite the limited effect, Reşit Saffet seized the next opportunity to once again represent Turkey at an internationalist event. Instead of socialism, which had offered him a basis for his criticism against the Allies, he now accommodated himself and his agenda to pacifism and liberal internationalism and drew on the latter’s key principle, the nationality principle, to formulate his plea for Turkish sovereignty.

---

**100** Schemsi, *Prolétariat Turc*, 9.

**101** *Ibid.*, 14.

**102** *Ibid.*, 14.

**103** *Ibid.*, 15.

**104** Neither Reşit Saffet’s address in particular, nor the situation of the Ottoman Empire in general is mentioned. See: *Resolutions of the Berne Conference*. The Proceedings are printed in the *Official Bulletin of the International Labour and Socialist Conference* published by the press committee of the conference in Berne 1919, available in English, French, and German.

**105** See: Kay, *Spirit*; Renaudel, *L’Internationale à Berne. Faits et Documents* (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1919); Snowden, *Pilgrim*.

**106** Kay, *The Spirit of the International*, 60.

## At the International Conference for the League of Nations

Among the audience of the Socialist Conference was a group of pacifists around Jonkheer B. De Jong van Beek en Donk, Swiss-based secretary of the Dutch peace society, who organized their own, albeit smaller peace conference in Berne one month later in early March 1919.<sup>107</sup> Despite the fact that several socialists from the Second International also attended this event, as Snowden remarked, “the Congress was different in its personnel and in the character of those present.”<sup>108</sup> It was, as Snowden put bluntly, “more bourgeois in appearance.”<sup>109</sup> As Snowden further noted, the League Conference predominantly gathered “professional people, lawyers, professors, doctors, teachers, journalists” who “all believed in President Wilson.”<sup>110</sup> The pacifist conference, which was in session during the first half of March, met in support of Wilson’s Fourteen Points and his call for an association of all nations. Delegates from all over Europe and beyond (an Egyptian delegate, for example, was also present) discussed the foundation of the international organization which should as they stressed be democratic, be open to all independent nations, and should jointly promote peace and expedite disarmament. The conference resolutions were presented to the peacemakers in Paris, who carried the responsibility of drafting the League of Nations charter.<sup>111</sup> Although Snowden gives a detailed description of the people she met during the conference, especially those from the Central Powers Austria, Hungary, and Germany, in whom she seems to have been particularly interested, she does not make any mention of the present Turkish delegate Reşit Saffet, nor does the official conference publication. Just one sole news item about the conference in the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* deemed it worthy to mention, at least in the very last sentence, that “furthermore ... a Turk protested against the violation of Turkey.”<sup>112</sup> While the impact of Reşit Saffet’s efforts at the League Conference thus seems to have been as small as at the Second International, the very fact that he regarded the conference a suitable place to present himself and his propaganda deserves attention.

---

**107** Snowden, *Pilgrim*, 38, 54, 58.

**108** *Ibid.*, 59.

**109** *Ibid.*, 59.

**110** *Ibid.*, 59, 63.

**111** *Ibid.*, 63.

**112** “Internationaler Völkerbundkongreß in Bern,” *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* March 13, 1919, a2. In the same sentence an Egyptian delegate is mentioned who attended the conference to protest against the continuous British occupation of his country.

In the light of the intense negotiations carried out at the Paris Conference from January onward, decisions regarding the peace terms and the League of Nations gradually became public. In the short time between the Second International in February and the League Conference in March, the future of the Ottoman Empire as discussed by the Allies in Paris had become more apparent. On January 30, the Allied Supreme Council resolved to establish mandates which would turn former Ottoman territories into de-facto colonies under League oversight, claiming it was an international duty to guide those territories and their inhabitants to ‘civilization’. On February 14, a draft covenant of the League of Nations was finalized which laid out the terms of the mandates system in one of its articles.<sup>113</sup> At the same time, the Sublime Porte cooperated with the occupying Allied powers.<sup>114</sup> Hence by the time Reşit Saffet spoke at the League conference, it was already becoming apparent that the Ottoman Empire would at least partly be placed under long-term foreign control, and that the League would back British and French territorial interests in the Middle East. Due to the altered political situation and the different focus of the second Berne conference, Reşit Saffet’s main concern thus shifted from delegitimizing Armenian claims and European penetration in the Ottoman Empire to a critique of the League of Nations, its colonial underpinnings, and the forthcoming seizure of Ottoman territory.

Reşit Saffet held two speeches during the conference, one on what he saw as unjustified European prejudices against Islam and the Orient, and another on the rightful place of Muslim and Turkish states within the prospective League of Nations. Furthermore, he presented three motions to different commissions of the conference: firstly, a memorandum handed in to the conference bureau on the necessity of an international press office working next to the League of Nations, which should correct tendentious press articles (a reaction to the negative reporting on Turkey in the Entente press – “inciting demagogical or imperialist sentiments”<sup>115</sup>). Secondly, a motion formulated for the commission on nationality questions, in which he demanded that territorial allocation should solely be decided by plebiscites; that all nations should be free to join the League regardless of race or religious allegiance; that minority rights should be reciprocal and respected by states and their neighboring states alike

---

**113** MacMillan, *Peacemakers*, 100; Susan Pedersen, *The Guardians: The League of Nations and the Crisis of Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 29.

**114** Nur Bilge Criss, *Istanbul Under Allied Occupation 1918–1923* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 44; Zürcher, *Modern History*, 136, 138.

**115** Şemsi, *Société des Nations*, 24.

(an allusion to the Great Powers' exclusive attention to Christian minorities in the Ottoman Empire); and, last but not least, that the right of self-determination and plebiscites should apply not only to citizens but to all inhabitants of a territory. The last claim contains an anti-colonial stance, for here Reşit Saffet criticized the fact that the concept of citizenship would exclude "true autochthones possessing a proper civilization and nationality."<sup>116</sup> But while arguing against colonialism, he did not make an entirely universal argument because he referred only to colonized Muslim societies ("civilized," in his view), saying that his "reservation is inspired by the sad fact that in the majority of possessions of European states out of Europe, the Mussulmans are deprived of citizen's rights."<sup>117</sup> The matter is also addressed in a third motion which he presented to the commission on colonial affairs. In it he contended that "all the 250 million non-independent Mussulmans who populate European possessions and colonies [...] demand that the regime of exploitation called 'colonial' must be put to an end."<sup>118</sup> In regard to the League of Nations, he argued that if the League really was to become the meaningful and global institution Wilson had held out in prospect, it had to show the same "humanitarian concern" to all people, not only to Christian minorities, but also the "Mussulman and Turkish countries of the Caucasus, Turkestan, Russia, Arabia, India and Africa."<sup>119</sup>

All of Reşit Saffet's contributions to the conference employ a strong pan-Islamic rhetoric alongside pan-Turkic ideas. Claiming to speak in the name of all Muslims and Turks, he demanded that they be acknowledged as being on equal footing with Europe in terms of civilization, and thus also in terms of political rights. Not a shadow was left of the socialist and anti-capitalist sentiments that he had so ardently endorsed in his previous contribution at the Socialist Conference one month earlier. While socialist vocabulary served his position in the context of the Second International, he adapted his argumentation to the slightly different context of the liberal League of Nations Conference and to the new political setting determined by the Allies' decision for a mandate system and its civilizing claims.

The first speech he gave in the opening session of the conference was again a polemic in which he criticized that people throughout the Muslim world, and especially in Turkey, would have gained the impression that the League of Nations is designed solely for the Allied Christian nations.<sup>120</sup> The main point

---

**116** Ibid., 26.

**117** Ibid., 27.

**118** Ibid., 30.

**119** Ibid., 30.

**120** Ibid., 3.

of criticism he raised in regard to the League was the mandates system and its assumption that certain parts of the Ottoman Empire were civilizationally inferior. He opposed this imperialist claim, arguing that it would be humiliating for all Muslims if they were “equated with slaves, belonging to lower stages of civilization,”<sup>121</sup> and placed under tutelary rule. Especially the Turks, who Reşit Saffet considered to be “the most advanced element” among the Muslims, ought not to be declared as “demi-civilized” by Europeans just because their civilization was different; this, he warned, would be ignorant, short-sighted, unjust, and a “fanatical conception.”<sup>122</sup> The Entente’s plan to partition the Ottoman Empire, he stated, was rooted in such biased assumptions, no less in “anti-Turkish and islamophobic instincts,” which had prevailed in Europe since the Crusades, than in their “appetite for conquest.”<sup>123</sup> Europe would always conceive of the Muslim world according to an assumed opposition between the Cross and the Crescent.<sup>124</sup> Such thinking, Reşit Saffet argued, is “naturally against the spirit of the League of Nations”; by the same token, the League “is well in the spirit of Islam [...] but Islam is unfortunately not among the concepts of the founders of the League of Nation.”<sup>125</sup> At the end of his speech, his rather cynical conclusion in regard to the Allies’ postwar politics was that the ‘Occident’ would do everything right now to make Rudyard Kipling’s sinister prediction come true that “East is East and West is West, and never the twain shall meet.”<sup>126</sup>

In the second speech presented to the legislative section of the conference five days later, Reşit Saffet went a step further. After leveling criticism against the imperialist and anti-Muslim implications of the League and the mandates system in the first speech, in the following speech he addressed the topic of League membership and called for a truly open League of Nations which would make no distinction between Christians and Muslims. Speaking in the name of “the whole Muslim world and especially the sixty million Turks populating Europe and Asia, from the Balkans to the borders of China,”<sup>127</sup> he demanded

---

121 Ibid., 4.

122 Ibid., 4 (“fanatisme de conception”).

123 Ibid., 3. Quotes on page 6. Pan-Islamism also supported Reşit Saffet’s refusal to acknowledge an eventual Arabic independence in the course of the peace negotiations as he stresses “The predominantly loyal Arabia may aspire to local autonomy, but not to the separation of the Ottoman Caliphate” (p. 10).

124 Ibid., 3 (“Imbue des idées de croisade, l’Europe nous semble toujours figée dans les conceptions de la Croix et du Croissant opposées l’une à l’autre”).

125 Ibid., 3, 11.

126 Ibid., 11.

127 Ibid., 12.

their proper representation in the future League of Nations. Compared with the first speech, the emphasis shifted from a pan-Islamic, anti-colonial critique against ‘the West’, to a more distinct pan-Turkism and nationalism. He argued that “the sixty million Turks” from Europe to Asia had no less the right than the Christian minorities of the Ottoman Empire, “the Red Cross and the Jewish nation,” to be properly represented in the League.<sup>128</sup> Despite living under “most oppressive regimes,”<sup>129</sup> the Turks in the Caucasus, Turkestan, and Russia nevertheless possessed a national consciousness and therefore deserved a voice in the international arena. Turkey, being the only independent Turkic state, would potentially be “the sole state which could to a certain extent support their aspirations.”<sup>130</sup> However, as Reşit Saffet made clear, occupied as it was with its own struggle for survival, Turkey could not fulfill this task. Moreover, one Turkish delegate for sixty million Turks would in any case be disproportionate, all the more so as “Greeks, Armenians, and other agglomerations, whose total number does not even touch the number of Turks, have five or six delegates.”<sup>131</sup> He insisted that the “League of Nations must open its doors to all Turkish and Tartar nations.”<sup>132</sup> “Just like Turkey,” he went on, “the secular Turko-Tartar states of Central Asia, as well as the ancient Turkic or Mussulman states of Azerbaijan, the Caucasus, Crimea, and Kazan” are entitled in the same way as the newly recognized states of Ukraine, Finland, Georgia, Czechoslovakia, and Yugoslavia to “take their proper place in the League of Nations.”<sup>133</sup>

In both speeches Reşit Saffet tried to defend the League of Nations idea against imperialist, that is, British and French, utilization. He recalled the Wilsonian ideal of internationalism and demanded a League which would include all peoples equally and guarantee their equality. Seeing Ottoman sovereignty at stake in Paris and the League becoming a tool for the legitimization of the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, he warned the Allies that every irreversible, radical change of the Orient would constitute a violation of the “Wilsonian charter” and of the principles the League of Nations was originally to be based on.<sup>134</sup> In view of the fact that the Allies were obviously quite successful

---

**128** *Ibid.*, 12. The number of Turks worldwide indicated in his previous contribution at the Socialist Conference was 10–20 million lower.

**129** *Ibid.*, 12.

**130** *Ibid.*, 12.

**131** *Ibid.*, 13.

**132** *Ibid.*, 13.

**133** *Ibid.*, 13.

**134** *Ibid.*, 10.



in reconciling Wilsonianism with imperialism when they agreed on the mandates system, the insistence on Wilsonian principles alone could not possibly suffice any more as a strong argument. So Reşit Saffet embarked on a different strategy and again demonstrated his ability to align his national agenda with a global cause in order to elevate its importance before an internationalist audience. Based on Wilsonian internationalism as the common ideological ground of all conference attendees, he weaved pan-Islamic and pan-Turkic notions into his argumentation. Reşit Saffet's pan-Islamism, however, must be understood much less as an expression of personal religiosity or *Ummah* solidarity than as an attempt to counter the European claim for civilizatory superiority and its Christian implications.<sup>135</sup> Speaking in the name of millions of Muslims around the world served as a valid counterbalance in his line of argumentation and enabled him to dismiss the civilizational justification of mandates as rooted in a religious fanaticism that dated back to the Crusades. By the same token, the strong emphasis on anti-colonialism when referring to the Muslim world was less idealistic than pragmatic, and a clear reaction to the imminent scenario of the Ottoman Empire falling under some sort of foreign rule. The pan-Turkism Reşit Saffet promoted served a similar purpose to his anti-colonial pan-Islamic rhetoric. While he instrumentalized pan-Islamism to attack the civilizational hierarchy underlying the mandates system, speaking in the name of the millions of suppressed Turks in the world supported his insistence that Turkey should become a sovereign member of the League. As the League expressly consisted of nation-states and stood for the transformation of the global order from empires to a community of nations, it made sense to represent the Turks as a people that was both many in number and had a conscious national identity directed towards self-determination.

Neither pan-Islamism nor pan-Turkism was a very original political and rhetorical strategy. Far from being mere religious or romantic ideas, these modernist collective concepts had frequently been used since the second half of the nineteenth century for social and political mobilization by various actors in the Ottoman Empire and beyond.<sup>136</sup> Among the CUP government, to which

---

**135** This assertion seems all the more plausible since Reşit Saffet, as part of the Turkist elite, was a proponent of the secular, positivist ideology that the Young Turks and later Kemalists represented. Islam was more a political strategy than a spiritual part of this ideology. See: Hanioglu, *Preparation*, 305–308; Kieser, *Vorkämpfer*, 93.

**136** On pan-Islamism in politics see Adeeb Khalid, “Pan-Islamism in Practice: the Rhetoric of Muslim Unity and its Uses,” in *Late Ottoman Society: The Intellectual Legacy*, ed. Elisabeth Özdalga, SOAS/Routledge Curzon Studies on the Middle East 3 (London: Routledge

Reşit Saffet himself belonged, both ideologies (together with Ottomanism) were propagated, differently accented to meet the needs of the situation, sometimes emerging as a blend.<sup>137</sup> Likewise to Reşit Saffet's mind, the two transboundary ideologies neither conflicted with one another (also because Turkic peoples were predominantly Muslims), nor clashed with the concept of liberal internationalism he also insisted on. On the contrary, in the two speeches he presented, the three ideological strands – anti-colonial pan-Islamism, pan-Turkism, liberal internationalism – correlated strongly because they all were tied to the same underlying paradigm of Turkish nationalism. Pan-Islamism, pan-Turkism, and his insistence on universalistic, democratic, and humanitarian principles sought to attribute a global dimension to the struggle for Turkey's sovereignty. He pointed not only to the universal character of Wilson's principles for the League of Nations, but also to French Enlightenment and human rights, as well as to the recent move of the Japanese to put the abolition of racial and religious discrimination on the agenda of the Peace Conference.<sup>138</sup> He expressed his hope that "this conference will help establish a universal uniformity of principles which otherwise would have no ethical and moral value."<sup>139</sup> On the basis of this matter of global concern that he presented, he confronted the League of Nations' universal claim with its actual lack of universality by underlying how numerous and globally relevant the Muslims as a civilization and the Turks as nation(s) actually were, only to find themselves excluded from an ostensibly global association.

## Epilogue

Since the postwar transition in Istanbul rendered Reşit Saffet exiled and saw him suspended, internationalism, its platforms and its discourses, provided him with an opportunity to continue pursuing his political ambitions and to promote national self-determination and Turkist propaganda on global stages. At the League Conference, as well as at the Second International, he understood how to argue according to the conferences' internationalist

---

Curzon, 2005), 220 f. On pan-Turkism in the Ottoman Empire see the respective chapter in Jacob M. Landau, *Pan-Turkism: From Irredentism to Cooperation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 29–73.

<sup>137</sup> Kieser, *Vorkämpfer*, 72–74; Landau, *Pan-Turkism*, 53.

<sup>138</sup> Şemsi, *Société des Nations*, 17.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

outlook. Recognizing the conferences as back doors to political visibility and influence at the Paris Peace Conference, he did not merely represent a nation or state, but pleaded a global cause. Speaking as a representative of the defeated Ottoman Empire, especially in the light of public indignation regarding the Armenian genocide and prevailing negative attitudes towards Turkey<sup>140</sup> would not have put him in a favorable argumentative position. But speaking in the name of the globally oppressed – the exploited Turkish proletariat, the Muslim world humiliated by European colonialism, the Turks from Europe to Asia hindered in their rightful national self-determination –, he sought to lend credence to his nationalist purpose. It not only helped fabricate a general sense of Turkish victimization, but also presented Reşit Saffet as the advocate of a universalistic and humanitarian cause. Stressing the global nature of his cause served as a strategy to disguise and to defend a discredited nationalist endeavor in an internationalist context. The tactical aims behind his internationalist self-representation are also revealed by the ideological adaptability of his rhetoric oscillating between socialism, pan-Islamism and pan-Turkism. The fact that nationalism, besides careerism, was the prime mover behind Reşit Saffet's internationalist activities is all the more evident from his commitment to Turkish nationalism throughout his life (from Young Turk circles to his participation in the Lausanne Conference and later on to his membership in the *Turkish Historical Society*). This is not to mean though that Reşit Saffet might not have believed in any of the ideological currents he presented in Berne; their potential compatibility with national self-determination and their rhetoric against imperialism made pan-Islamism, pan-Turkism, socialism, and Wilsonian internationalism persuasive ideas from a Turkist point of view.

Reşit Saffet's propaganda seems to have had little impact on the internationalist milieus he encountered at the Berne conferences, let alone on the Paris Peace Conference. However, his publications, the accusations they made in regard to the supposedly anti-Turkish or islamophobic agendas of Armenians, Greeks, and 'the West', their rejection of responsibility for war crimes, and the legitimization they gave to Turkish nationalism contributed to a broader set of arguments nourished by various pro-national Turkish actors in the postwar time. It was those shared arguments being formed in the context of the Peace Conference which, in the years to follow, not only influenced prominent leaders

---

140 Vahakn N. Dadrian, "Military Defeat and the Victors' Drive for Punitive Justice," in *Judgement at Istanbul. The Armenian Genocide Trials*, eds. Vahakn N. Dadrian and Taner Akçam, (New York: Berghahn Books, 2011), 33 ff, 45 ff, 69.

of the Turkish National Movement fighting against Greek occupation and the Allied partition plans, but also inspired historiographical and ideological key tenets of the later Kemalist state in which Reşit Saffet himself became part of the elite.<sup>141</sup>

As a figure of lower rank among the Unionists, Reşit Saffet was spared the Istanbul Trials and political ostracism.<sup>142</sup> He managed to distance himself from CUP rule, to bridge the political breaks of 1918 and 1923, and to occupy posts under the Ankara government.<sup>143</sup> Soon after his return from Geneva, Reşit Saffet was withdrawn from his post at the ministry of finance after he decided to stand as candidate for a deputy post in the newly opened *Grand National Assembly* in Ankara.<sup>144</sup> Despite this (failed)<sup>145</sup> attempt to join Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's counter-government, he was appointed member of the council of state (*Şura-yı Devlet*) in 1921 under the last Grand Vizier Ahmet Tevfik Pasha who pursued a policy of rapprochement towards the Ankara government.<sup>146</sup> In 1922, after the Istanbul government finally resigned, Reşit Saffet reentered diplomacy when he was nominated by Mustafa Kemal Pasha as general secretary for the Lausanne Conference. However, the head of the delegation, İsmet Pasha, did not appreciate his unilateral nomination and vetoed his participation in the second round of negotiations. Ironically, as the information in Gülersoy's biographical essay suggests, one main reason for his dismissal might have been that he was too experienced in the diplomatic field: young and ambitious, flawless in French, sociable and with an easy way of establishing ties with all of the foreign delegations (he maintained friendly relations with French diplomats, one of whom was a member of the French delegation to Lausanne), he probably was considered too glib and Francophile for what were expected to be hard-headed negotiations with the Allies, which İsmet Pasha intended to dominate. Furthermore, Reşit Saffet was on friendly terms with his

---

**141** Hans-Lukas Kieser, "Die Herausbildung des Nationalistischen Geschichtsdiskurses in der Türkei (spätes 19.–Mitte 20. Jahrhundert)," in *A Quest for Belonging. Anatolia Beyond Empire and Nation (19th-21st Centuries)*, ed. Hans-Lukas Kieser (Istanbul: Isis Press, 2007), 372–376; Kieser explicitly mentions Reşid Saffet's role on pages 388–391.

**142** Kieser, *Vorkämpfer*, 93. Reşid Saffet's name does not appear in the Allies' list of important war criminals convicted of the massacres of Armenians and Greeks, see the list in: Bilâl N. Şimşir, *Malta Sürgünleri* (Ankara: Bilgi Yayınevi, 2 ed. 1985), 415 ff.

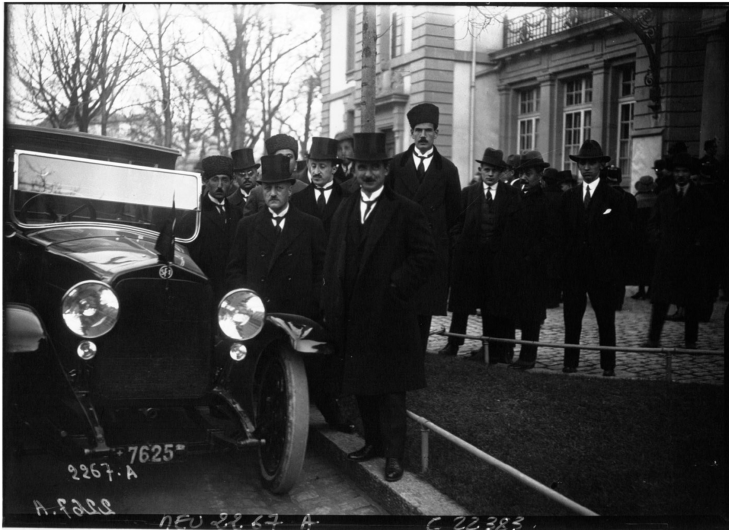
**143** Gülersoy, "Reşid Safvet Atabinen," 70 f.

**144** BOA DH.İ.UM.EK.85-15; HSD.AFT.6-100.

**145** In the official album of the Grand National Assembly Reşit Saffet is not listed as deputy until 1927, when he became deputy of Kocaeli (in 1920 he was a candidate for Çatalca): *TBMM Albümü 1920–2010* (Ankara: TBMM Basın ve Halkla İlişkiler Müdürlüğü Bakanlıklar, 2010), 159.

**146** BOA İ..DUİT.39 41.

former chief in the CUP's ministry of finance, Cavid Bey, who attended the Lausanne delegation as financial advisor but finally fell out with İsmet Pasha. As a result of his dismissal, Reşit Saffet retired from politics to the private sector for some years.<sup>147</sup>



Reşit Saffet at the Lausanne Conference 1922 (second row, middle), Bibliothèque nationale de France

Although he never gained a high-ranking post in the Kemalist government, he did achieve a political comeback in 1927 when he was elected member of the Grand National Assembly. Moreover, despite his dismissal from the Lausanne delegation, he seemed to continue having diplomatic ambitions and engaged in internationalism. He attended the League of Nations' *World Economic Conference* as a Turkish delegate in 1927, as well as the conference of the *Inter-Parliamentary Union* in Bucharest in 1931.<sup>148</sup> Furthermore, he was involved in transnational intellectual and nationalist networks. Still an ardent proponent of Turkism and

<sup>147</sup> The information on Reşit Saffet's later career in this paragraph is based on the biographical essay by Gülersoy, "Reşid Safvet Atabinen," 70 f. The lawyer and historical preservationist Çelik Gülersoy himself made a career in the *Türkiye Turing ve Otomobil Kurumu* during Reşid Saffet's presidency and followed him as head of the organization.

<sup>148</sup> Elemér Hantos, *L'économie mondiale et la Société des Nations*, Paris 1930, 109, 112; *Union interparlementaire, compte-rendu de la XXVIIe conférence, tenue à Bucarest, du 1er au 7 octobre 1931*, publié par le Bureau Interparlementaire, Lausanne 1932, 561–563, 609–612.

pan-Turkism – he became a member of the nationalist Turkish Historical Society (*Türk Tarih Kurumu*).<sup>149</sup> He traveled to various capitals in Europe and Russia to represent ‘New Turkey’ and pan-Turkic theses at academic gatherings, even becoming a member of the *Turanian Society* in Budapest. According to his later colleague and biographer, Çelik Gülersoy, Reşit Saffet’s networking activities were observed with suspicion by the Turkish ministry of foreign affairs and construed as far-reaching diplomatic ambitions.<sup>150</sup> The fact that Reşit Saffet was appointed representative to the *International Olympic Committee* by Mustafa Kemal in 1936 was hardly more than a gesture and arguably designed to tame his ambitions. Confined to his position as president of the state-associated tourism and automobile association (today’s *Türkiye Turling ve Otomobil Kurumu*), which Reşit Saffet founded in 1923 at Mustafa Kemal’s instigation and which he presided over until his death in 1965, he became by the end of the 1930s what Gülersoy termed a frustrated and resigned diplomat (“küskün bir diplomat”<sup>151</sup>).

What the final disappointment of Reşit Saffet’s diplomatic career illustrates is the modern nation-state’s exclusive claim on its own representation: a state government, more particularly a centralized and authoritarian one like the Kemalist government, guarding its monopoly on establishing foreign relations by means of highly selective recruitment and the suppression of undue individual initiative. Yet, what the actor-centered perspective of this article highlights is that while the state tried to maintain control, international politics themselves had become more inclusive: international conferences and transnational networks opened up new possibilities of representation outside the diplomatic service. Back in 1919, the disappointment of the *Wilsonian Moment*<sup>152</sup> and the contested moment of international reordering at the Paris Conference had allowed Reşit Saffet to make use of such internationalist back doors, namely the Berne conferences, even with the Ottoman ambassador’s endorsement. In a time of political transition, when the Sultan’s government was externally powerless, its diplomacy in deadlock, and the empire at the brink of partition, blurring the border between diplomacy and public internationalism had seemed convenient both for Reşit Saffet and for Ottoman authorities. After 1923, however, the new republican cadre aimed at full control over who speaks for the nation on global stages.

---

149 Gülersoy, “Reşid Safvet Atabinen,” 70.

150 Ibid., 71. Gülersoy writes “As the minister of foreign affairs felt uneasy because of his [Reşit Saffet’s] rise to eminence, many people who were preparing themselves for the same post in the future [foreign minister?] [...] kept reporting negatively to Ankara and Çankaya.”

151 Ibid., 71.

152 Cf., fn 11.