

# The Impact of the Confiscation of the Turkish Dreadnoughts and of the Transfer of Goeben and Breslau to Constantinople upon the Turkish Entry into WWI

Heinz RICHTER\*

## Abstract

*When Winston Churchill then First Sealord of the Royal Navy had the two Drednoughts, ordered and paid for by the Ottoman Empire before World War I, confiscated he created the preconditions for the Goeben-and Breslau-affair and the entry of Turkey into the war. This "act of piracy" (B. Tuchman) shifted the weight from the so far stronger neutralists to the bellicists with in the Turkish Government towards war minister Enver. Without this mistake Goeben and Breslau would never have sought shelter in Turkey. And these two men of war were the reason for Turkey's entry into the war when they bombarded Russian harbours in the Black Sea.*

**Keywords:** World War I, Goeben, Breslau, Ottoman Empire, Çanakkale

## Türk Drednotlarına El Konulması ve Goben ile Breslav Gemilerinin İstanbul'a Transfer Edilmesinin Osmanlı Devleti'nin I. Dünya Savaşı'na Girişi Üzerindeki Etkisi

## Özet

*İngiliz Kraliyet Donanması'nda dönemin Birinci Deniz Lordu (müsteşarı) olan Winston Churchill, Birinci Dünya Savaşı'ndan önce Osmanlı İmparatorluğu tarafından sipariş edilen ve ödemesi yapılan iki drednota el koydurmadan önce Goben (Yavuz) ve Breslav (Midilli) meselesinin gelişmesi ve Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun savaşa girmesi için gerekli zemini çoktan hazırlamıştı. Bu "korsanlık" (B. Tuchman), Türk Hükümeti içerisinde taşların yerinden oynamasına ve dengeyin o ana kadar daha güçlü olan tarafsızlardan uzaklaşarak savaşa*

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\* Professor emeritus of the University of Mannheim Germany, hrichter@rumms.uni-mannheim.de

yanlılarına, Harbiye Nazırı Enver Paşa'ya yönelmesine neden olmuştur. Eğer bu hata gerçekleşmeseydi, Yavuz ve Midilli asla Osmanlı'ya sığınmazdı. Bu iki savaş gemisi, Karadeniz kıyılarında bulunan Rus limanlarını bombaladıkları zaman Osmanlı'nın savaşa girmesinin temel nedeni olmuşlardır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Birinci Dünya Savaşı, Goben, Breslav, Osmanlı İmparatorluğu, Çanakkale

### The Confiscation of Sultan Osman and Reshadieh

In 1909 the Ottoman Government ordered two Dreadnoughts (worth 4 million Pounds) in England.<sup>1</sup> They were to bear the names *Reshadie* (gift) and *Rashad I. Hamiss*. The keel of *Reshadie* was laid on 6 December 1911 at the Vickers Dockyard and the ship was launched on 3 September 1913. The building of the second Dreadnought was given up out of financial reasons. Instead the half-finished Brazilian battleship Rio de Janeiro was bought which was under construction at the Armstrong Dockyard at New Castle-upon-Tyne. Brazil had ordered this ship during the arms race with Chile and Argentina. But when the price of the world trade of rubber collapsed it became clear that Brazil could not pay for the ship and thus in October 1913 it was offered for sale. Turkey bought it for 2.75 million pounds and called it Sultan Osman I.<sup>2</sup> Together both ships cost 3.680.650 pounds.<sup>3</sup>

Since the Ottoman Government did not have enough cash a fund raising campaign was started. Donation boxes were put up in taverns, coffee houses, schools and markets and a huge propagandistic effort was made to appeal to the patriotism of the Turks to donate. They reacted positively: even poor people gave their mite. Wealthy people who donated great sums were decorated with navy-donation-medal (Donanma Cemiyeti).<sup>4</sup>

By the end of July 1914 both ships were ready for delivery. At the same time it became known that Vickers and Armstrong-Whitworth had received the order to build the docks at Constantinople. It was to be financed by a loan guaranteed by the Ottoman Government. The bonds were primarily to be sold in Britain. Ottoman-British relations seemed to improve constantly.<sup>5</sup>

On 27 July 1914 Admiral Limpus, chief of the British naval mission, ordered a part of the Turkish fleet to set sail. The ships were to sail through the Dardanelles

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1 [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reshadieh-class\\_battleship](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reshadieh-class_battleship).

2 <http://smnmcshannon.hubpages.com/hub/World-One-War-Turkeys-failed-Dreadnoughts>.

3 Martin Gilbert, *Winston Churchill*, II., 1914-1916, London 1971, p. 191.

4 [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reshadieh-class\\_battleship](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reshadieh-class_battleship).

5 Gilbert, *Winston Churchill*, p. 191.

and wait at the entrance of the Straits for the arrival of *Sultan Osman* and *Reshadije* in order to escort them to Constantinople. This gesture would increase English prestige and lessen the German. The Turkish public was full of pleasant anticipation because great parts of the population had participated in the donation campaign. In the meantime 500 Turkish sailors had arrived in England. On 29 July they were waiting onboard their steamer in the river Tyne ready to be brought to the brand new *Man of War*, which was to steam off towards Turkey on 16 August. But Limpus and those 500 sailors were waiting in vain.

On 29 July 1914 the Assistant Undersecretary of State for Foreign Affairs Eyre Crowe informed the Admiralty that the *Sultan Osman* was coaling and would soon set sail to Constantinople. Winston Churchill who was then First Lord of the Admiralty reports that since 1912 in the framework of war preparations the construction of warships in British dockyards were constantly supervised. The production of ships which might be finished within six months were to be pushed up. By this British naval superiority should be assured at the beginning of a war. But these rules did not only apply to British ships but went much further as Churchill reports:

*“The plan of course covered all ships being built in Great Britain for foreign Powers. Of these there were two battleships building for Turkey [...] The Turkish battleships were vital to us. With a margin of only seven Dreadnoughts we could not afford to do without these two fine ships. Still less could we afford to see them fall into bad hands and possibly be used against us. Had we delivered them to Turkey, they would, as the event turned out, have formed with the Goeben a hostile force which would have required a force of not less than four Dreadnoughts battleships or battle-cruiser to watch them. Thus the British numbers would have been reduced by two instead of being increased by two.”<sup>6</sup>*

Churchill's arguments contain facts which did not exist before the outbreak of WWI. He uses these later facts to justify his actions before the war broke out. Not even Churchill could have known that the German battle cruiser *Goeben* would become a Turkish warship. In reality it was his action which triggered this development. Lastly Churchill tries to justify the illegal acquisition, the illegal confiscation of alien property, with these arguments.

When Churchill was informed that *Sultan Osman* was getting ready to set sails he informed the Navy's chief of staff Prince Louis Battenberg and the Third Sea Lord who was responsible for the acquisition of ships: *“The builders should by every means prevent & delay the departure of these ships while the situation is strained: & in no case shd they be allowed without express permission. If necessary authority will be*

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6 Winston Churchill, *The World Crisis 1911-1918*, v. I, London 1938, p. 168.

given to restrain them.” Churchill asked the Foreign Office whether there were any objections to keep the ships in British waters.<sup>7</sup>

On 30 July Eyre Crow wrote to Foreign Secretary Grey that the Admiralty should be allowed to do what they thought best. Afterwards one would diplomatically defend any action in Turkey. Grey agreed. On the same day the Third Sea Lord informed Churchill that the dockyard had been informed to do everything possible to hinder the hoisting of the Turkish flag on *Sultan Osman*.<sup>8</sup> But Churchill doubted that the workers of Armstrong would be capable of stopping a forceful action by the Turkish sailors to hoist the flag. Additionally this would lead to a difficult diplomatic situation therefore on 31 July he ordered the navy to occupy the ship with suitable forces. On 1 August sailors of the Royal Navy occupied the ship.

When the Turkish ambassador raised protest at the Foreign Office the official there justified the confiscation of both ships with Churchill's arguments. They added that ships had been confiscated only temporarily. Had the ships been on a visit in a British harbour they would have been allowed to set sail. Had they flown the Turkish flag there might have been complications. When the ambassador indicated that his country had paid three million pounds his interlocutor promised that Turkey would get the money back. On 31 July the Cabinet agreed with Churchill's proposal that the two ships should be integrated in the Royal Navy and be used against Germany. The confiscation of ships of a foreign nation was considered a necessary measure in the present crisis in order to secure British naval superiority. *Sultan Osman* became *HMS Agincourt* and *Reshadieh* was re-baptized *HMS Erin*. Both ships participated in the battle of Jutland 1916 and served in the Royal Navy until the end of the war. When Turkey surrendered on 30 October 1918 they became British property.<sup>9</sup>

The ships had been confiscated before the war broke out. Allegedly Churchill had asked the Foreign Office for judicial advice. The answer was that there was no precedent for a confiscation in peacetime. In wartime confiscation was legal but even in this case it was ambiguous whether one should do it or not. When Churchill ordered the confiscation the two ships Great Britain was not in a state of war with any state. The occupation of the two ships by sailors of the royal Navy was a clear breach of international law.<sup>10</sup> Rightly Barbara Tuchman called this action “a piece of piracy”<sup>11</sup>

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7 Gilbert, *Winston Churchill*, p. 192.

8 Gilbert, *Winston Churchill*, p. 192.

9 Gilbert, *Winston Churchill*, p. 192.

10 Peter Hart, *Gallipoli*, London 2011, p. 8.

11 Barbara Tuchman, *The Guns of August*, New York 1994, p. 165.

The reaction in Turkey was a popular outrage; after all both ships had been paid for with the donation of broad strata of the population. With his action Churchill pushed the Turkish side into the arms of the Germans. If the Turks entered the war they would close the Straits for all ships of the belligerent states and thus cut the supply route to Russia. They would attack the Russians in the Caucasus thus forcing a two front war upon them and then would undertake an attack on the Suez Canal. Did these disadvantages really outweigh the advantage of getting two more Dreadnoughts? Was Churchill not able to foresee these consequences? Most probably not because as First Sea Lord he did not have the necessary broad vision. He was confined to naval matters. In his eyes the addition of two Dreadnoughts to the seven which the Royal Navy owned was considerable. Additionally his action was a typical example of his disposition to aimless activism and adventurism.<sup>12</sup> Van der Vat is right if he speaks of “foolishness” and comes to the conclusion that the only person who could have stopped Churchill was Admiral John Fisher but he unfortunately had retired in 1910.<sup>13</sup>

In his memoirs Churchill justifies his action by quoting German documents which were published after the war. But the facts referred to in them did not play any role in the last peaceful days before the outbreak of the war. Then German ships *Goeben* and *Breslau* were operating in the Western Mediterranean and it is more than doubtful whether they would ever have been given to Turkey without Churchill's action. Had these two Dreadnoughts been given to Turkey the position of the neutralists would have been strengthened; among them was the Turkish minister for the navy. It is improbable the war minister Enver could have influenced the Turkish commanders in the same way as he was able to do this with the German commanders of *Goeben* and *Breslau*. After all Germany wanted Turkey to enter the war. The confiscation of the two Ottoman Dreadnoughts may be regarded as one of the main reasons for the entry of Turkey into the war on Germany's side. There is no doubt that the signing of the military alliance between Germany and the Ottoman Empire on 2 August 1914 was influenced by these events.

On 3 August Foreign Secretary Grey tried to make the confiscation acceptable to Turkey. He informed the British embassy in Constantinople that Britain intended to enter into the contract between Turkey and Armstrong. The embassy should inform the Turkish Government accordingly. The Grand Vizier and the Minister of the Interior considered the confiscation as an unfriendly act especially as Turkey was not

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12 Tuchman, *The Guns of August*, p. 165.

13 Dan Van der Vat, *The Ship that Changed the World. The Escape of the Goeben to the Dardanelles in 1914*, Edinburgh 2000, p. 27.

in the war. Turkey would remain neutral. The mobilisation of the army was a measure of precaution against Bulgaria.

The continuous presence of the military mission was politically irrelevant.<sup>14</sup>

In the middle of August Churchill and Foreign Secretary Grey wrote a warning letter to Enver: Should Turkey give up her neutrality, she could lose everything she had gained in the second Balkan War. To side with Germany would lead to a catastrophe.<sup>15</sup> At the same time Enver received a letter from Churchill in which the latter apologised himself for the confiscation: "*I deeply regretted necessity for detaining Turkish ships because I knew the patriotism with which the money had been raised all over Turkey. As a soldier you know what military necessity compels in war.*" At the end of the war the two ships would be returned fully repaired. In the meantime the British Government was ready to pay a daily rent of 1,000 pounds for the ships which would be transferred on a weekly basis provided that Turkey remained neutral and the German crews of *Goeben* and *Breslau* were sent home to Germany.<sup>16</sup> Enver even refused to accept this message as it reminded him of haggling at a bazaar.<sup>17</sup>

### **The German Mediterranean Naval Division**

Ever since the peace treaty of 1856 which ended the Crimean War the European powers had the right to station a war ship in the Bosphorus. Prussia stationed the steam yacht *Loreley* there whose task was representation.<sup>18</sup> When during the First Balkan War Bulgaria threatened to occupy Constantinople the Grand Vizier asked the great powers to send an international fleet to Constantinople. The Powers agreed and send quite a number of ships there. The German part was called *Mittelmeer Division* (Mediterranean Division) and consisted out of the heavy cruiser *Goeben* and the small cruiser *Breslau* as well as the *Loreley* which remained at Therapia, however. When Thessaloniki was conquered by Greek troops *Loreley* fetched the exiled former Sultan Abdul Hamid and brought him back to Constantinople. During WWI *Loreley* served as a depot ship.<sup>19</sup>

*Goeben* launched 1911 by Blom & Voss in Hamburg was an armoured cruiser with a tonnage displacement of 23,00 tons. Her artillery consisted of ten 28 cm,

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14 Great Britain Foreign Office, *Events Leading up to Rupture of Relations with Turkey*, London 1914, p. 1.

15 Gilbert, *Winston Churchill*, p. 194.

16 Gilbert, *Winston Churchill*, p. 196.

17 Alan Palmer, *Verfall und Untergang des Osmanischen Reiches*, München 1994, p. 323.

18 [Http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/SMS\\_Loreley\\_1885](http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/SMS_Loreley_1885).

19 Hermann Lorey, *Der Krieg in den Türkischen Gewässern*, Vol. 1 Die Mittelmeer-Division, Berlin 1928, p. 1.

twelve 15 cm and twelve 8.8 cm guns plus 4 torpedo tubes. Its maximum speed was 29 sm. Its crew counted 1,013 officers and men. *Goeben* was the quickest and strongest ship of the German navy. *Breslau* launched 1911 by the *Vulkan* dockyard had a tonnage displacement of 4.500 tons. She was armed with twelve 10.5 cm and two torpedo tubes. Her maximum speed was 27.6 sm. She had a crew of 373. In Mid-November 1912 both ships arrived in the Mediterranean.<sup>20</sup>

During the next 20 months both ships paid courtesy visits to the Mediterranean harbours. But in spring 1913 it was discovered that *Goeben* had boiler problems and her normal speed was substantially reduced to 12-14 knots. Her maximum speed was 20 knots. It was decided to replace *Goeben* with her sistership *Moltke* in October 1914.<sup>21</sup>

In October 1913 Rear Admiral Wilhelm Souchon became commander of the *Mittelmeer Division*. Born in Leipzig in 1864 he made a steep career climb and gained extensive experience especially during his overseas commands.<sup>22</sup> He was self-confident and decisive. He executed orders but he was no subordinate. He reserved the final decision for himself. As he was politically interested and having greater insights in this field, also, more than of the other naval officers he often came to other assessments of the situation than his superiors in the Admiralty. Additionally Souchon also had his share of good luck and - incapable adversaries.

When on 28 June the Austrian heir to the throne was killed Souchon understood immediately that war was imminent. Thus a return to Germany was impossible in view of the boiler problems of *Goeben*.<sup>23</sup> Besides that a return of *Goeben* would have deprived the Mittelmeer Division of its strongest ship. Thus improvisation was necessary. Souchon asked the Ministry to send material and experts to repair his ship to the Austrian port of Pola. (Pula).<sup>24</sup> This was done and when the war began *Goeben* was able to make 18 knots permanently and for a short period 24 knots. This was still not the original speed of 29 knots but *Goeben* was quicker than most of the British

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20 Wilhelm Souchon, "Der Durchbruch SM Schiffe 'Goeben' und 'Breslau' von Messina nach den Dardanellen", (ed. Eberhard von Mantey), *Auf See unbesiegt. Erlebnisse im Seekrieg erzählt von Mitkämpfern*, München 1922, p. 17; Wilhelm Souchon, "La percée de SMS 'Goeben' et 'Breslau' de Messine aux Dardanelles", in: *Les Marins Allemands au Combat*, (French Edition), Paris 1930, pp. 32-51.

21 Lorey, *Der Krieg in den Türkischen Gewässern*, p. 2. ; Souchon, "Der Durchbruch SM Schiffe 'Goeben' und 'Breslau' von Messina nach den Dardanellen", p. 17.

22 [Http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wilhelm\\_Souchon](http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wilhelm_Souchon).

23 Souchon, "Der Durchbruch SM Schiffe 'Goeben' und 'Breslau' von Messina nach den Dardanellen", p. 20.

24 Souchon, "Der Durchbruch SM Schiffe 'Goeben' und 'Breslau' von Messina nach den Dardanellen", p. 19.

ships in the Mediterranean. *Breslau* had no technical problems and at the outbreak of the war she was in Albanian harbor of Durazzo (Durrës).<sup>25</sup>

As early as 1913 Souchon and his colleagues of the allied Italian and Austrian navies had agreed that in case of a war the united navies of the *Dreibund* (Germany, Italy, Austro-Hungary) would attack the French supply lines between Algeria and France. But when the war broke out Italy remained neutral and the Austrian Admiral preferred to keep his ships in harbour. Although Souchon faced a numerically superior French force he had a chance to attack the French forces successfully because *Goeben* was technically superior. First Sea Lord Churchill understood this and on 30 July - still in peace - he gave the following order to the British ships in the Mediterranean: “*Your first task should be to aid the French in the transportation of their African army by covering and if possible bringing to action individual German ships, particularly Goeben, which may interfere with the transportation.*” But the British ships should avoid clashes with “superior forces.”<sup>26</sup>

The moment, however, when Britain entered the war the two ships of the *Mittelmeer Division* were doomed because the modern British ships could cope with *Goeben*. Thus Souchon had only this alternative: Fight and be sunk or withdraw to an Austrian harbour and stay there for the rest of the war and the Adriatic Sea would be sealed by the united fleets of the Entente. Nobody could imagine that the two ships might flee to Turkey.

On 4 August *Goeben* and *Breslau* bombarded Philippeville and Bône in Algeria without any interference by the French fleet which operated further West. The British had not yet entered the war and thus when the German ships encountered British ships nothing happened. Churchill had ordered his commanders to refrain from any action before the end of the ultimatum: “*The moral integrity of the British Empire must not be compromised at this solemn moment for the sake of sinking a single ship.*”<sup>27</sup>

On her way to the Algerian coast on 4 August at 3.35 a. m. the following wireless telegram was received by *Goeben*: “*On 3 August alliance with Turkey was signed. Goeben and Breslau go to Constantinople immediately. Naval Staff.*”<sup>28</sup> But Souchon first finished the attack against the Algerian harbours and obeyed this order afterwards.

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25 Lorey, *Der Krieg in den Türkischen Gewässern*, p. 2; Souchon, “Der Durchbruch SM Schiffe ‘Goeben’ und ‘Breslau’ von Messina nach den Dardanellen”, p. 18.

26 Churchill, *The World Crisis 1911-1918*, p. 180; Tuchman, *The Guns of August*, p. 169.

27 Churchill, *The World Crisis 1911-1918*, p. 181.

28 Lorey, *Der Krieg in den Türkischen Gewässern*, p. 5, The German original read: “*3. August Bündnis geschlossen mit Türkei. ‘Goeben’ und ‘Breslau’ sofort gehen nach Konstantinopel. Admiralstab.*”

### **Turkey and the two German Ships**

Already on 1 August the German Ambassador Wangenheim had mentioned the two ships during a conversation with the Grand Vizier. He told him that the Austro-Hungarian ambassador had informed him that the Russian fleet planned an attack on the Bosphorus. The Turkish fleet would certainly not be able to repulse such an attack alone but if it were strengthened by German ships the Russian would refrain from attacking the Straits. The Grand Vizier accepted the offer but asked to postpone concrete steps until the position of Bulgaria was clear. Nevertheless Wangenheim asked the German Foreign Ministry to obtain permission from the competent authorities. Kaiser Wilhelm II rejected the proposal because he had not yet been informed of the content of military alliance between Germany and Turkey. The Navy leadership was against it because they still believed in the functioning of the *Dreibund* and considered operations of *Goeben* and *Breslau* in the Black Sea as senseless. But Wangenheim did not give up and tried to get Enver's permission for an entry into the Dardanelles of the two ships. Enver replied that such an order had been already given, but this was not right. But when Souchon recognized on 2 August that he alone would have to fight against an Entente superiority he informed the Admiralty accordingly. There one finally understood that there existed only three options: 1) Glorious perishing; 2) Immobilisation in the Austro-Hungarian harbour of Pola; and 3) Sailing to a neutral country where the crew would be interned. If the *Mittelmeer Division* was to continue playing a military role this could only be done from Constantinople. It was Grand Admiral Tirpitz who persuaded Wilhelm II to intervene with the Admiralty and induce them to agree to the transfer of the two ships to Constantinople. The result was the telegram of the night of 4 August mentioned above.<sup>29</sup>

A detailed description of the flight of the two German war ships and their being chased by British men of war from Sicily across the Adriatic, around the Peloponnese and through the Aegean Sea to the entry of the Dardanelles is in my book on the Battle of Gallipoli.<sup>30</sup> Thus we can confine ourselves on the political developments happening during the days of the flight.

When on 6 August Souchon got ready to leave the Strait of Messina and set sail for the Dardanelles he received a telegram from the Berlin Naval Staff: "*Entering Constantinople is not possible for the time being because of political reasons.*"<sup>31</sup> This

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29 Bernd Langensiepen, Dirk Nottelmann, Jochen Krüsmann (Eds. *Halbmond und Kaiseradler*), *Goeben und Breslau am Bosphorus 1914-1918*, Hamburg 1999, p. 11; Lorey, *Der Krieg in den Türkischen Gewässern*, p. 15; Carl Mühlmann, *Deutschland und die Türkei*, Berlin 1929, p. 62.

30 Heinz A. Richter, *Der Krieg im Südosten, Band 1 Gallipoli 1915*, chapter 2, Mainz & Ruppolding: Rutzen 2014, pp. 58-68.

31 Lorey, *Der Krieg in den Türkischen Gewässern*, p. 14; The German text read: "*Einlaufen Konstantinopel zur Zeit nicht möglich aus politischen Gründen.*"

message left only one option open: Take course towards the Adriatic and try to break through the allied blockade. The consequence would have been the immobilisation of two German war ships. But from earlier visits to Constantinople Souchon knew the political circumstances there so well and was convinced “*that he considered it promising to pull Turkey on our side into the war if we succeeded in bringing the two German cruisers into the Dardanelles thus putting Turkey into an exigency which would violate her neutrality and cause her to enter the war against Russia and England. [...] He was convinced that the cleverest heads of the Turkish cabinet, Talaat and Enver had already understood this.*”<sup>32</sup> Obviously Souchon was already planning then what was realised in October, i.e. the entry of Turkey into war. There he defied this order: “*I had the hope that I could make the Turks join in the attack against their archenemy the Moskv*”<sup>33</sup> And thus Souchon set sail for the Dardanelles.

On 9 August the two ships reached the Greek island Donousa and coaled from a German collier. Since Souchon did not want to betray his position by using his ship’s wireless and because he did not yet have any official permission to enter the Dardanelles he send the German depot ship *General* to Smyrna to send a cable message to the *Loreley*. In this message Souchon urged the Embassy to obtain a formal or informal permission to enter the Dardanelles.<sup>34</sup> On 10 August at 1 a.m. a rather garbled message from the Naval Staff arrived via *General*. It read: “*Enter. Demand surrender fortress. Take Dardanelles pilot for the barriers. Turkey call back fleet under the order of British officers.*” The coal stockyard of the Turkish Government at Çanakkale is ready for coaling.<sup>35</sup>

This text needs diligent interpretation. At the beginning of the message the Naval Staff and the Turkish authorities authorised the entry into the Dardanelles. But since Turkey was neutral she was per agreement obliged to prevent the passage of war ships through the Dardanelles at war times. The fortresses were to threaten foreign war ships and stop them. The demand for surrender would be a kind of alibi for the Turks if they undertook nothing. That Turkey was ready to let the German ships pass is proved by the directive to take a pilot on board. If Turkey had really intended to block the Dardanelles there would never have a pilot ready to steer the German

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32 Lorey, *Der Krieg in den Türkischen Gewässern*, p. 14.

33 Souchon, “Der Durchbruch SM Schiffe ‘Goeben’ und ‘Breslau’ von Messina nach den Dardanellen”, p. 28.

34 Lorey, *Der Krieg in den Türkischen Gewässern*, p. 20.

35 Langensiepen, *Goeben und Breslau am Bosphorus 1914-1918*, p. 13. Original text: “*Einlaufen. Festung zur Kapitulation auffordern. Dardanellen Sperrlotsen nehmen. Türkei Flotte unter dem Befehl von englischen Offizieren zurückrufen.*”; Tuchman, *The Guns of August*, p. 185, totally misunderstood the text when she translated it thus “*Enter. Demand surrender of forts. Capture pilot.*” Similar: Redmond McLaughlin, *The Escape of the Goeben. Prelude to Gallipol*, London 1974, p. 84.

ships through the mine fields. The readiness to supply the German ships with coal inside the Dardanelles reinforces this interpretation. The interpretation of the last sentence is more complicated because it is syntactically senseless. Should the ships with English officers on board or the English officers themselves be withdrawn? The first interpretation is more plausible, since the British officers were withdrawn as late as September. Van der Vat translated the German sentence in the following way: “*Turkish fleet under command of English officers called away.*”<sup>36</sup> And there is no doubt that his translation is correct.

At 5.45 a.m. the two ships left Donousa and steamed towards the Dardanelles. Around noon a message of the Naval Staff sent the previous day arrived via *General*. It said that *Goeben* was expected to enter the Dardanelles as early as possible. Souchon was asked to acknowledge the receipt of this message.<sup>37</sup> In Constantinople things moved too. Enver was informed that the two ships wanted to enter the Dardanelles. Without asking the Grand Vizier Enver agreed that they were allowed to enter the Straits. British war ships would be rejected. In case they tried to force their way in they would be shot at.<sup>38</sup> At 5 p.m. of 10 August the two ships arrived at the entry of the Dardanelles and hoisted the flag demanding a pilot. A Turkish torpedo boat appeared showing the flag “Follow me”. At 19.35 hours the two ships anchored at Çanakkale. At 21 hours a British war ship was seen at the entrance of the Dardanelles but the two German ships were safe inside.<sup>39</sup>

With this singlehanded decision Enver had taken a risk if he did not succeed in bringing the majority of the Cabinet behind him. In the evening the Cabinet met for the usual evening session at the office of the Grand Vizier. This time Enver appeared last and smilingly he said: “*Bir oğlumuz dünyaya geldi,*” (A son has been born to us) meaning *Goeben* of course. The Cabinet was taken aback, they feared a declaration of war by the British. They began thinking about ways out. The simplest solution would have been to apply international law. According to this a foreign warship had to leave the territorial waters of a neutral state after 24 hours, in this case the Dardanelles or it had to be disarmed and the crew interned. Because Turkey was in an alliance with Germany this way out was excluded. Moreover had the two ships left the Dardanelles they would certainly have been sunk by the Royal Navy. And ambassador Wangenheim would never have agreed with an internment of the crews. Thus another way out had to be found. Wangenheim developed the saving idea when he sug-

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36 Van der Vat, *The Ship that Changed the World. The Escape of the Goeben to the Dardanelles in 1914*, p. 110.

37 Lorey, *Der Krieg in den Türkischen Gewässern*, p. 21.

38 Hans Kannengießer, *Gallipoli Bedeutung und Verlauf der Kämpfe 1915*, Berlin 1927, p. 22.

39 Lorey, *Der Krieg in den Türkischen Gewässern*, p. 21.

gested that Turkey fictitiously purchase the two ships. Enver immediately agreed and Navy Minister Cemal approved the idea. Since only the Minister of Finances raised objection the Grand Vizier agreed to the nominal purchase.<sup>40</sup>

Wangenheim openly admitted the fake purchase to his American colleague Henry Morgenthau. During a conversation with him Wangenheim received the message that *Goeben* and *Breslau* were inside the Dardanelles. "He was waving the wireless message with all the enthusiasm of a college boy whose football team has won a victory. Then momentarily checking his enthusiasm, he came up to me solemnly, humorously shook his forefinger, lifted his eyebrows, and said, 'Of course, you understand that we have sold those ships to Turkey! And Admiral Souchon,' he added with another wink, 'will enter the Sultan's service.'" Wangenheim openly admitted that both ships remained German and Talaat agreed.<sup>41</sup> On 16 August 1914 both ships were solemnly transferred to the Turkish navy. *Goeben* became *Yavuz Sultan Selim* and *Breslau's* new name was *Midili*. From now on the German sailors wore fez.<sup>42</sup>

The British ships which had been hunting the two German war ships had lost them by the evening on 7. August. Only on 11 August did the British Admiralty learn that *Goeben* and *Breslau* were inside the Dardanelles. The light cruiser *Weymouth* was ordered to control the entrance of the Dardanelles. When she came to close to the shore the Turkish fortress there fired a warning shot. A day later the Turks informed the captain of the *Weymouth* that the two German ships had become Turkish. An entry into the Dardanelles for British ships was not possible.<sup>43</sup> The British reacted by increasing the number of war ships guarding the entrance of the Dardanelles. The presence of the two German ships obliged the British to keep numerous ships in the Northern Aegean. Their presence excluded any operation of *Goeben* and *Breslau* there.<sup>44</sup>

On 2 September the British Cabinet decided that each Turkish ship leaving the Dardanelles should be sunk. The Admiralty's order was clear: "your sole duty is to sink the *Goeben* and *Breslau*, under whatever flag, if they come out of the Dardanelles."<sup>45</sup>

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40 Kannengießer, *Bedeutung und Verlauf der Kämpfe 1915*, p. 24; Langensiepen, *Goeben und Breslau am Bosphorus 1914-1918*, p. 11; Ahmed Djemal Pascha, *Erinnerungen eines Türkischen Staatsmannes*, München 1922, p. 126.

41 Henry Morgenthau, *Ambassador Morgenthau's Story*, New York 1919, pp. 71- 78.

42 Kannengießer, *Gallipoli* (wie Anm. 73), S. 24.

43 Van der Vat, *The Ship that Changed the World. The Escape of the Goeben to the Dardanelles in 1914*, p. 92.

44 Paul G. Halpern, *The Naval War in the Mediterranean 1914-1918*, Oxford 1987, p. 50.

45 McLaughlin, *The Escape of the Goeben. Prelude to Gallipol*, p. 87.

### **Further Developments until the entry of Turkey into the War**

The acquisition of two modern war ships changed the military weight of Turkey. Although operations in the Aegean were excluded due to British naval superiority the balance of naval power in the Black Sea changed in favour of Turkey. So far the Russian fleet had been superior to the Turkish with its outdated ships but with the acquisition of *Goeben* and *Breslau* Russian domination of the Black Sea ended. The German ships were much quicker.

In the following weeks the Russians and the British tried to keep Turkey neutral. The Russians were ready to guarantee solemnly Turkey's territorial integrity and give financial help if Turkey remained neutral. The French agreed to this proposal but the British hesitated. Churchill wanted to destroy the two German ships and for this he wanted to send a torpedo boat flotilla through the Dardanelles. But War Minister Kitchener stopped him and thus Britain, too, was ready to guarantee the territorial integrity.<sup>46</sup> The British went even further offering membership in the Entente. The diplomatic haggling reminded one of an oriental bazar.<sup>47</sup>

While the British, Russian, French and American ambassadors did their best to keep Turkey neutral, the Germans pressed Turkey to provoke the Russians. Towards the end of August the British ambassador wrote: *"There are grounds for thinking that Germans are urging Turks to send 'Goeben' into Black Sea, where they would argue that she has a right to go as a Turkish ship. Germans would count upon Russian warship attacking her, and war would ensue, seemingly provoked by Russia. Object of Germans is to create a diversion here, draw off some Russian troops and enemies from Austria, and embroil us at the same time."*<sup>48</sup>

Turkey on the other hand tried to prove her neutrality by giving such declarations to Petersburg, London and Paris on 13 and 14 August. In order to avoid a naval clash with the Russians the two German war ships were ordered to stay inside the Straits. At the same time Berlin was informed that Turkey would enter the war as soon as Bulgaria declared herself openly for the German side. Berlin accepted this since the difficult external and internal situation of Turkey was known.<sup>49</sup> Though Turkey had concluded a military alliance with Germany the majority of the cabinet minister was against an entry into the war. The question was now who would prevail, the neutralists or the bellicists?

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46 Tuchman, *The Guns of August*, p. 160 ; Mühlmann, *Deutschland und die Türkei*, p. 69.

47 Djemal, *Erinnerungen eines Türkischen Staatsmannes*, p. 131.

48 Cd. 7628, p. 12.

49 Mühlmann, *Deutschland und die Türkei*, p. 65.

In early September the British ambassador had to admit that the German sailors had not been withdrawn but their number had increased and augmented by soldiers.<sup>50</sup> On 15 September he reported that the Turkish navy was totally under German control. The minister of the navy had been deprived of all his powers. The fortresses of the Dardanelles had been rearmed by the Germans and the Straits barred by mines. *“Both I and my Russian colleague have received independent information that German and Austrian Ambassadors are making a determined effort to force the Minister of War to send the ‘Goeben’ and the rest of the fleet into the Black Sea.”*<sup>51</sup> On 21 September the ambassador informed the Foreign Office that in the meantime 4-5,000 German sailors and soldiers had arrived in Turkey. War Minister Enver did not worry about Cabinet decisions but acted as he liked. Foreign Secretary Grey instructed the ambassador to protest against the violations of neutrality. At the beginning of October the German induced the Turks to close the Strait for all traffic.<sup>52</sup> Souchon was afraid of a British naval attack on Constantinople. Therefore he wanted to strengthen the defence of the Dardanelles and the Bosphorus. Already on 15 August he asked Berlin to send specialists for the modernization of the fortresses. Already in early September 400 specialists arrived and under the supervision of Admiral Usedom and Admiral Merten the Dardanelles were made ready for defence.<sup>53</sup>

Until September the Turkish government had been dithering as to the entry into the war. But when the German troops lost the battle of the Marne and Austro-Hungarian troops had to withdraw behind the Carpathian Mountains the Turks hesitated to take the final step. Supply problems in the fields of food and military equipment increased this tendency. Ven Enver hesitated to do the decisive step. Souchon on the other hand tried to provoke a clash with Russian ships by sending every now and then a ship into the Black Sea but unfortunately for him no Russian ship showed up.<sup>54</sup>

Souchon was convinced that the only way to bring Turkey into the war was to cause an incident in the Black Sea. The German Government had repeatedly declared that it was desirable that Turkey began to attack. On 7 September the commander of the German Military Mission Liman von Sanders received a telegram from the German Chief of Staff that Turkey should enter the war after the reorganisation of the Defences of the Dardanelles. Next day Wangenheim was told the same. On 15 September Chancellor v. Bethmann-Hollweg demanded action in the Black Sea.<sup>55</sup>

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50 *Cd.* 7628, p. 22.

51 *Cd.* 7628, p. 24.

52 *Cd.* 7628, p. 26, 29, 34.

53 Halpern, *The Naval War in the Mediterranean 1914-1918*, p. 50.

54 Lorey, *Der Krieg in den Türkischen Gewässern*, p. 42.

55 Lorey, *Der Krieg in den Türkischen Gewässern*, p. 44; Mühlmann, *Deutschland und die Türkei*, p.70.

By the end of September the reconstruction of the defences of the Dardanelles had progressed so much that a direct successful attack against Constantinople seemed improbable. The mobilization of the Turkish army was almost finished. Enver gained the impression that Turkey was ready for war.<sup>56</sup> But the Cabinet procrastinated and even Wangenheim was not ready to act decisively. Thus Souchon took the initiative: “He decided to act on his own. He made a confidential oral agreement with Enver in which the latter promised to let the [German ships] return into the Bosphorus even if something happened in the Black Sea.” On 24 October the naval officers received a secret order to obey Souchon’s orders.<sup>57</sup> Souchon intended to attack the Russian Black Sea harbours so thoroughly that this led to war. Enver had the same plan. On 23 October he ordered the Turkish fleet to gain full naval control of the Black Sea. “Search the Russian fleet and attack it without a declaration of war.”<sup>58</sup>

On 27 October all operational Turkish ships entered the Black Sea for an “exercise”. On 28 October the German Embassy informed Souchon that the general situation of the war demanded the entry of Turkey into it. This was the green light for the attack. On the same day several Russian Black Sea harbours were bombarded and a few ships sunk. On 31 October the Russian, British and French Ambassadors asked for their passports and Russia declared war on Turkey.

## **Conclusions**

Churchill’s capital mistake to confiscate the two Turkish Dreadnoughts created the pre-condition for the transfer of *Goeben* and *Breslau* to Turkey. Without this “act of piracy” (Tuchman) nobody on the German side would have conceived the idea to send these two ships to Constantinople. Without this mistake *Goeben* and *Breslau* would never have sought shelter in Turkey. The German-Turkish military alliance did not oblige Turkey to enter the war. In the Turkish Cabinet the neutralists had a clear majority and they wanted a neutrality in arms. The two Dreadnoughts would be the main weapons for this purpose. The bellicists around Enver would never have been able to make Turkey enter the war as long as the armed neutrality was secured. But the confiscation shocked the public and led to a change of mood. It was the confiscation which enabled the transfer of the two German ships to Turkey. This strengthened the bellicists and enabled Enver and Souchon to force Turkey into the war.

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56 Mühlmann, *Deutschland und die Türkei*, p. 70.

57 Lorey, *Der Krieg in den Türkischen Gewässern*, p. 45.

58 Lorey, *Der Krieg in den Türkischen Gewässern*, p. 45.

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