

MEMOIRS

UKRAINIAN-RUSSIAN NEGOTIATIONS IN 1920: A RECOLLECTION*

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In the years 1917-1920 the struggle against the Bolsheviks was waged simultaneously by the governments and armies of the national republics, formed as a result of the disintegration of the Russian Empire; and by White Army forces under Kolchak, Yudenich, Denikin, Wrangel, and others. The lack of understanding between political and military centers of the national republics, on the one hand, and the Russian anti-Bolshevik centers, on the other, strongly contributed to the defeat of the anti-Communist forces.

However, some attempts were made in 1917-1920 to set up negotiations between the two types of centers. The Ukrainians tried to negotiate first with Denikin's government and later with Wrangel's government. Arnold Margolin, who is commemorated by this volume, exerted tremendous efforts to achieve better understanding among these groups.

As a participant in the negotiations between the representatives of the government of the Ukrainian People's Republic and the representatives of Wrangel's government, I would like to present here some notes which may be of interest.

In the late summer of 1920 Colonel Noga, an official representative of the High Command of the Armed Forces of South Russia, came with full credentials from Crimea to the headquarters of the Army of the Ukrainian People's Republic in Khryplyn, near Stanyslaviv. In August the government of the Ukrainian People's Republic decided to send a delegation to Crimea in response to the invitation delivered by Colonel Noga. There were two reasons for this decision. First, the government

* Although it is not a policy of the *Annals* to publish personal reminiscences, the editors invited Dr. Chikalenko to recall his experience in Crimea because of the light it sheds on the world of Arnold Margolin.

and the military circles wanted to come to an understanding with Wrangel with respect to the common enemy, the Bolsheviks. Second, private letters coming from Crimea mentioned a somewhat more favorable attitude toward the Ukrainians in Wrangel's group.

The Ukrainian military and civil authorities came to an agreement on the composition of the delegation, which was headed by Colonel Ivan Lytvynenko and included Colonel Mykhaylo Krat, Ensigns Romensky and Bludymko, and myself. I was appointed by the government because I had some experience in the negotiations with Denikin's forces in 1919.

Before leaving for Crimea I had talks with the Prime Minister, Vyacheslav Prokopovych, and the Commander-in-Chief, Symon Petlyura; they both gave me instructions with respect to the negotiations. After receiving credentials from army headquarters and obtaining a captain's uniform, money, and all necessary passes and documents, I went via Chernivtsi to Bucharest, thence to Galatz where I joined the delegates and Colonel Noga. We waited for the large steamship "Saratov" which was to take us to Sevastopol. To board the "Saratov" we had to travel to the seaport of Reni. We embarked on a small tug which towed a number of barges carrying troops for Wrangel's army. The troops were borne along the mighty river to the sea to board large steamships. We learned that these men formerly had belonged to White Army units which in 1919 had been defeated by the Reds and had retreated to Polish and Rumanian territory. Now under orders from the Entente, they were being transported to Galatz and then to Reni whence they were to be transported to Crimea to fight under General Wrangel's command. In Reni we boarded the "Saratov" directly from our tug. Other passengers were soldiers. The "Saratov" anchored at Yalta where we stayed for a day waiting for transportation to Sevastopol. In Yalta, on the advice of Prokopovych, I visited Horyansky, a local teacher known for his adherence to the Ukrainian cause. Horyansky informed us about Ukrainians in Crimea and about the attitudes of the top people of Wrangel's army.

The next day we came to Sevastopol aboard a small cutter. I saw that Colonel Noga was rather astonished that nobody came to meet us at the port. He left us a few times, probably to telephone, then asked us not to worry and left for some time to find accommodations for us. Then he returned with three cabs and brought us to a hotel, explaining that political attitudes in Wrangel's group had greatly changed during Noga's absence from Sevastopol. He said that his journey to the Ukrainian Army staff had been inspired by General Slashchev, who at that time influenced Wrangel's strategy and policy. Noga himself had been a man of some importance in Slashchev's circle. Now it turned out that Slashev was not only set aside, but was in disgrace. We saw that Noga was greatly embarrassed by this new situation and told him that we would wait a few days to see how things developed.

Next day we went to Headquarters to be introduced to the Quartermaster General, Kyriy (Kirei), evidently an important person in Sevastopol. Some members of our delegation had known the General, who had been in the Ukrainian Army for some time as Chief of Staff of the Slobidsky Corps (*Kish*) which, under Petlyura's command, in 1918 defended the approaches to Kiev from the direction of Kharkov. Later General Kyriy had disappeared and the rumor spread that he had left the Ukrainian Army, angered at the *Tsentral'na Rada* which had deprived him of his grandfather's land. He was born of a cossack family in Chernihiv Province and could not resign himself to the loss of some 150 acres of his inherited land. None of our delegation knew when and in what way General Kyriy had joined the White Army.

General Kyriy received us in a friendly manner, but explained that he was very busy. He asked us if we liked our quarters and advised us not to worry and to spend the next few days in sight-seeing. He said that Colonel Noga would continue as liaison officer and would inform us of new developments. He recommended that we board at a small restaurant owned by the Kotlyarevskys, a well-known family from Kharkiv, and

asked Colonel Noga to take us there and introduce us to the owners.

At the restaurant we were received as star boarders. Madame Kotlyarevsky acted as cashier, and her two young daughters were waitresses. The elder girl talked uninterruptedly and asked us many questions as she served us. Later it turned out that the girls' brother was at that time a secretary to Krivoshein, Prime Minister to Wrangel's government.

While walking around the city we became aware of constant attention from passers-by. Evidently this was because the Ukrainian uniform, with its unusual colored stripes and its trident insignia, had never been seen in Sevastopol before.

A local newspaper reported on the arrival of our delegation and soon we were approached by some Ukrainian residents of Sevastopol. Chernysh, one of the most active figures in local Ukrainian circles and an adherent of the Ukrainian People's Republic, told us about the prevailing sentiments toward Ukrainians in Wrangel's circles, about the partisans there, of improvement of Ukrainian-Russian relations, and of their attempts to better conditions which had greatly deteriorated in Denikin's time.

Days went by and no progress was seen in the matter for which we had come to Sevastopol, although we were informed by Chernysh that the situation was being discussed by high authorities. In the meantime I had a chance to meet quite a few people from the Ukraine and Russia brought to Sevastopol by the turbulent events of the time. For example, once I had a talk with the popular Russian writer, Arkadii Averchenko, who showed a keen interest in Ukrainian affairs.

We were also contacted by officials of the French and American Missions in Sevastopol. Evidently they had learned about us from the Polish Mission which we had visited immediately after our arrival. The French Mission representative who came to our quarters spoke fluent Ukrainian; he brought an invitation from the Chief. Colonel Krat, Colonel Lytvyenko and I went to visit the French officer and found him to be very amiable and well-acquainted with recent events in the Ukraine.

The invitation from the American Military Mission was delivered by an American sailor. I alone was commissioned by our delegation to visit Rear Admiral Newton A. McCully, chief of the Mission, aboard his ship. The Admiral and a Russian lady interpreter awaited me in his cabin. When I introduced myself in Russian the lady began to translate my words into French. I told them that I spoke French, and accordingly the Admiral dispensed with the interpreter, asking her instead to serve us coffee. In this very cordial atmosphere the Admiral showed a keen interest in Ukrainian affairs. Concluding our conversation he confidentially told me that Wrangel's prospects were not very bright, and advised us not to stay too long in Sevastopol. He offered to provide us with transport to Constantza on one of his ships, and promised to send us a message when he considered it time for us to leave.

I think that a few general comments will help to elucidate the attitude towards the Ukrainian question inside Wrangel's group. As already mentioned, the negotiations between Wrangel's government and the Ukrainian People's Republic had been initiated by General Slashchev, who at the time of our arrival at Sevastopol was isolated and was on the brink of arrest. It seemed that Slashchev was associated with groups of Ukrainian origin who happened to be in the White Army.

It should be remembered that earlier the theatre of operations of Denikin's army was mostly in the Ukraine. This army consisted of older men who had formerly belonged to the Russian tsarist army, most of whom originated from Russia proper, and of younger men, mostly from the Ukraine, recently enlisted as officers and soldiers. Among the younger group, many were the offspring of landowners, priests, and tsarist officials. They were set against the revolutionary masses, and in particular against the Ukrainian peasants who had turned them out of their estates; the children of priests and officials were deprived of their privileges. These people saw the Revolution mainly as the revolt of local peasants and of rural teachers, telegraphists and other so-called "half-intellectuals," all the latter elements

mostly associated with the ideals of the Ukrainian People's Republic.

That social incentives, at that time, prevailed over national ideas was manifested by the fact that many elements, formerly with the White Russian forces, changed sides and joined the Hetman because they shared his social program. Fluctuations in the political mood were typical at that time, and the shifting of men from the White Russian to the Ukrainian army and back was common. Thus, while many people of Ukrainian origin who had joined the White movement did not reveal their Ukrainian sympathies in the Denikin period, after the failure of Denikin's policy, when Wrangel took command, they began to turn toward rapprochement with the Ukrainian People's Republic. Evidently Slashchev, Kyriy, Noga and Chernysh belonged to those in Wrangel's group who tried to reach an understanding with the Ukrainian Republic. It may be of interest that the Leontovych brothers, Ivan, Volodymyr and Konstantyn, were of this company.

In the meantime our waiting was broken by an invitation for a conference with Prime Minister Krivoshein. Colonel Noga accompanied us there but did not attend our meeting. Krivoshein received our delegation in his study, sitting at his writing-desk. Our talk was of an informative character. Krivoshein revealed an interest in the Ukrainian army, its organization, arms, etc. Colonel Lytvynenko, chief of our delegation, sat opposite Krivoshein and answered most of his questions. It turned out that Lytvynenko, who before the war had been a bookkeeper at some provincial sugar refinery, spoke very poor Russian. Many of his mistakes sounded rather comical and I saw that Krivoshein could not help smiling. Anyway, Krivoshein got an opportunity to see that there was a difference between the Russian and Ukrainian languages, and that not all Ukrainians spoke Russian properly.

Krivoshein told us that he was sorry to keep our delegation waiting so long for conferences with representatives of their government and command. There were many reasons for this—one, the preoccupation with current affairs, and another, the

fact that our visit was to a certain degree a surprise for his government. The latter statement was a hint that someone else had initiated our coming, not the influential people of the day. I remarked that under such complicated circumstances all kinds of mistakes were possible, and that our negotiations might be postponed. Krivoshein was taken aback by my words and promptly began to excuse himself, saying that matters had been cleared up and that in a few days we would be received by Wrangel and his ministers.

Later the same day Chernysh informed us that a group of Ukrainians had invited us to a party next day at which we would meet some ministers of Wrangel's government, who had an understanding of Ukrainian affairs and favored the measures taken to bring us to Sevastopol.

The reception next day was in a large hall and was rather crowded, mostly with elderly men. I heard the titles "prince" and "count" in the introductions quite a number of times. Supper was served at a long table, with all the members of our delegation sitting side by side at the center and several ministers sitting vis-a-vis, among them Glinka-Yanchevsky, Minister of Agriculture. Prince Volkonsky was also nearby. Speeches during supper expressed pleasure that hostilities had ceased between the White Russians and Ukrainians and that now friendly visits were taking place. Denikin was blamed by some speakers as the man responsible for sharpening conflict between the two sides. Glinka-Yanchevsky in his long and rather involved speech outlined his land-reform plan which, he believed, would satisfy the peasants and influence them in support of Wrangel's liberation action.

In two days or so we were informed that Wrangel would receive us. Chernysh and I helped Colonel Lytvynenko to prepare his address, which was rather restrained. In general terms it welcomed the initiative of the Command of the Armed Forces of South Russia to come to an understanding with the Ukrainian People's Republic. It stated that such an understanding would be of great importance in the history of the Ukrainian and Russian peoples when the Bolsheviks' yoke was shaken off.

General Wrangel received us in his office. We entered this large crowded conference room and saw Wrangel at his writing-desk.

The General rose to greet us. After General Kyriy had introduced the members of our delegation, Wrangel made an official statement. He was glad to see us at his headquarters, he said, and hoped that our visit marked the beginning of a new period in our common struggle. His primary aim was the liberation of the country from the Bolsheviks, but he understood that this liberation could not be achieved by the methods used by his predecessors. He stated that he had drastically changed many things, and now appealed to us to find new forms for the cooperating in our common struggle which were acceptable to all of us. He would not just then discuss the problem of the future of Russia, but would try to achieve an understanding between all the peoples fighting the Bolsheviks. He said that he had come to an agreement with Ivanys, Ottaman of the Kuban Cossacks, and with the mountaineers of the North Caucasus, and now wanted to enter into an agreement with the Ukrainian armed forces for united military action. He added that he was sure that the representatives of the Ukrainian army would negotiate successfully with his representatives in Roumania headed by General Gerua.

After Lytvynenko had replied to this statement, we were introduced to some of the others at the reception. I met Savytsky, a young man whom I had encountered a few years before and who was now a secretary to Peter Struve, Minister of Foreign Affairs in Krivoshein's government. I asked Savytsky to arrange a meeting for me with Struve, formerly the well known professor of economics whose two former students, Valentyn Sadovsky and Oleksander Kovalevsky, were members of the Ukrainian government.

Next day I visited Struve and was impressed by his intelligence and refinement. Regarding the planned Russian-Ukrainian understanding Struve was rather skeptical. The complicated international situation made it hard, he said, to foresee further developments.

A few days later a messenger from Rear Admiral Newton A. McCully came to urge us to leave immediately because of the situation on the front. We left for Constantza on an American destroyer (which also carried General Wrangel's wife as passenger) and returned via Bucharest to our Army headquarters only a short time before Wrangel was defeated.

I hope that my brief notes may be of some interest to the historian studying events of the Revolution, and may be of help in further speculations on the problem of Russian-Ukrainian relations.