



## Summary :

The famous Russian-Turkish treaty of Küçük Kaynarca (1774) radically changed the geopolitical status of the era, whereas its terms had a drastic influence to the fortunes of the Greek world too. The Greeks under the legal protection of the treaty improved their living conditions and created the necessary requirements for the emancipation from Ottoman rule.

## Date

1774

## Geographical Location

Küçük Kaynarca, Silistra (modern Kaynardja, Danubian Bulgaria)

## 1. Short historical background

With the peace treaty of Küçük Kaynarca between Russia and the Ottoman Empire the end of the costly first Russian-Turkish war (1768-1774) under Catherine II was sealed. The treaty was a product of the victorious military operations at the Danube and Bulgaria under the commander-in-chief P.A. Roumiantsev, and of the defeat of the Ottomans, who were forced to ask for a peace treaty. The signing of the treaty took place on 10th/21st July 1774 at the camp of the Russian troops, which was located near Küçük Kaynarca, a small village of Silistra (modern Kaynardja, Danubian Bulgaria), from which it receive its name. It is the most famous treaty concerning the later interpretation of its peace terms –also due to the deliberately vagueness of many of its terms- and is amongst Russia’s most ingenious diplomatic actions. The treaty of Küçük Kaynarca, along with the subsequent complementary explanatory contract of Aynalıkavak (1779), depleted the power of the Porte and strengthened in every way the influence and the interference possibilities of Russia in domestic issues of the Ottoman Empire.

## 2. The contributors

The general directions for the terms the peace treaty included were drawn under the supervision of the diplomat N.I. Panin, who was in charge of the College of the External Affairs and the right hand of Catherine. They imprinted the character of Russian Balkan policy, in which the critical factors of the war situation with the Turks, of the dismemberment of Poland, of the positions of Austria and of the internal consequences of the revolt of Yemelyan Pugachev were realistically calculated. As a consequence, the Russian diplomatic dogma, which was based on the triptych “less annexations, more autonomies and more possible inner interferences”, became the foundation of the terms Russia enforced to the Ottoman Empire. In the final formulation of the increasingly more “vague” terms the contribution of A.M. Obreskov, ambassador of Russia in [Constantinople](#) (Istanbul) was central. The apprehension of the idea for the religious protection of the Christian subjects of the Sultan, as well as its final formulation [article 7], belonged to Obreskov.<sup>1</sup> This short article is, in combination to the article 14, the pinnacle of his political genius and of the treaty’s diplomatic importance. The treaty was validated on 15th July 1774, signed and sealed by the proxies of the empress Catherine and of the sultan Abdulhamid I, i.e. the commander-in-chief of the Russian forces count Roumiantsev and the **grand vizier** Muhsin Zade Mehmet Paşa. It became irreversibly valid and was enforced immediately with the approval of Catherine on 11th August 1774.

## 3. The geopolitical importance

In the treaty’s text, comprised of 28 articles set in a serial number and 2 separate articlesö an introduction is prefixed, in which the end of the hostilities is declared. With the invocation of the mighty God the “eternal oblivion and the establishment of an eternal peace between the two Powers” is announced. The composite territorial and judicial network of issues, which had been solved via warfare between the two countries, is regulated in many articles. On the contrary, with a skilfully deliberate irregularity and an intentional obscurity of meaning all Russian demands and Ottoman obligations are determined, the results of which had huge geopolitical



importance, since they radically changed the interrelation of the Powers in the Black Sea Basin. The fast rise of Russia and the weakening of the Ottoman Empire brought in the scene the issue of the Russian exit to the Mediterranean and of the retreat of the Turkish dominance in Europe. Given the loss of the independence of the Ottoman foreign policy, the solving of these issues took an international character, since Russia would often clash with any European powers raising claims on the Empire's "Ottoman heritage" and interfering in the Russian-Ottoman issues, as well as in the relations between the Sultan and his Christian subjects.

#### 4. The Russian profits

Russia with the treaty of Küçük Kaynarca secured military glory, state prestige, equation of the imperial title with the sultanic title, territorial expansion and exit to the Black Sea, establishment of consulate authorities in the lands of the Ottoman Empire, totally free navigation within the Ottoman seas, merchant privileges equal to the European ones, war compensation, and the right to religiously protect the Christian subjects of the sultan. In the use of this right the so-called Eastern Question in European politics was founded.

#### 5. The terms

According to the terms of the treaty, Russia assumed the sultan's political authority over the [Tatars](#) and the Chanate of [Crimea](#) [article 3], which was declared an independent state. Russia also occupied strategically important fortresses, forts, arid or colonized steppes of the Black Sea: Kinburn [article 18], [Kerch](#), Yeni Kale [article 19], [Azov](#) [article 20], Small and Great Kavardia [article 21]. The whole of Bessarabia with the cities of [Akkerman](#), Kilia and [Izmail](#) [article 16] along with the fort of Bender [article 24] returned to the hands of the Porte. Russia abandoned Moldavia and Wallachia, which under a special regime of autonomy were returned to the sultan [article 16] maintaining however a strong network of religious rights. These rights were based on 8 of the passages of the article 16, as well as on the interpretation of the articles 1, 7, 9, 14, which, under the pretext of religion served the Russian interests, but also practically profited the Christian populations of the Balkans and the [Phanariots](#), whereas they also firmly confirmed the possibility of influence and future intervention in the Danubian Principalities.

With the article 17, "the Russian Empire returns to the Sublime Porte all the islands of the Archipelago which it had occupied, whereas the High Porte is bound: 1) To follow with sanctity, and in favour of the inhabitants of these islands, the terms which were agreed in the first article and concern the general amnesty and eternal oblivion of crimes of every kind, perpetrated or suspected to be perpetrated by anyone against the interests of the Sublime Porte. 2) Not to suppress in any way Christian law, not to hinder the construction and repair of the Christian churches, not to oppress or insult anyone officiating in them. 3) Not to demand from the islands a payment of any yearly tax which corresponded to the time period these islands were occupied by the Russian Empire, because of the terrible damages they had suffered during the previous war, and also for two further years, which would be calculated from the time of the islands' return to the Sublime Porte. 4) Any family wishing to leave their homeland and settle to other places should be allowed to leave with their belongings freely; to these families, in order to be able to settle their cases more easily, the Porte would offer a time period of one year to freely leave their homeland. 5) In case the Russian fleet during its departure, which was to be made within three months after the exchange of the present agreement, faces any need, the Sublime Porte is obliged to supply it with any means available". The terms formulated in article 17 are strengthened and clarified in combination to the additions included in articles 17, 24, as well as in the first separate article. With the article 23 Russia offered parts of Georgia and Mingrelia to the Ottoman Empire, maintaining the right to remonstrate, a right secured by the validity of the general articles concerning the amnesty or religious protection along with the articles concerning clearly diplomatic jurisdictions.

On its side the Ottoman Empire was bound (second separate article) to pay to Russia, as a counterbalance of the war expenses, a war compensation of 7,500,000 piaster (4,500,000 rubles), which was to be paid every first of January of the years 1775, 1776 and 1777 to the temporary and proxy ambassador of Russia in Constantinople.

The Ottoman Empire accepted [article 5] a higher diplomatic Russian representation, in the level of a minister of the second order, i.e. an ambassador or a proxy minister, of equal rights, of life and possessions guarantee, of authority and respect, with the rights offered to the ministers of the most powerful Powers, of special and distinguished etiquette in public ceremonies. The presence of the higher diplomatic authority in Constantinople with its geographically extended jurisdiction in issues of religious protection [articles 7, 14, 16, 17, 23, 24, 25] acquired a huge importance for the possibilities of open and secret political intervention to the domestic issues of the



Ottoman Empire, as well as in the realm of the inter-European competitions.

The Ottoman Empire was obliged to allow ecclesiastical and lay subjects of the Russian Empire totally free passage to the Holy Lands and to the whole Ottoman dominion. The pilgrims and travellers were fully exempted from the *haraç* head tax and of every direct and indirect tax, duties and any other kind of obligation. During their trip or sojourn in the Ottoman dominion they enjoyed protection of the law, hospitality and accommodation in full equality with the privileges offered to the subjects of other friendly Powers [article 8].

The Ottoman Empire was also obliged to recognize the institutional position of the interpreters (dragomans) of any nationality who served the ministers of the Russian Empire. During their stay in Constantinople, as long as they were occupied with state cases, they enjoyed respect and accommodations for the success of their duties [article 9].

With the articles 11 and 12 “for the mutual interest and profit of both empires” the free and unhindered sailing of merchant ships belonging to both contracting powers in every sea and land around them was regulated. The Ottoman Empire was obliged to cede privileges and rights to everyone who possessed Russian citizenship, a license or a flag equal to the ones of the other European nations and was bound that the French and English merchant conventions would also become an inviolable rule for the Russian trade and the Russian subjects who were involved in trade in every part of the Ottoman Empire, including Constantinople. For the maintenance of the order and good practice in trade, the Sublime Porte was obliged to allow to the whole of its dominion, with no exceptions, the establishment of Russian consuls and vice consuls, who would enjoy every honour and respect their European colleagues enjoyed and would have the right to hire *beratli* (protégés) interpreters according to the regime valid for the European nations.

## 6. The importance for the Greeks

From the extremely favourable for Russia and unfavourable for the Ottoman Empire treaty almost every Balkan subject of the sultan was favoured, amongst them the Greeks too, who, being placed under the shield of the Russian protection, made an extensive use of the privileges and rights offered. Under the protection of amnesty, religious freedom, free travel, political protection by the Russian consuls or vice consuls, and merchant conventions, the conditions and the level of their social and economic life were improved. Large populations left the Ottoman territory [heading](#) for Russia, Europe and the economic centres of Asia Minor. They enlarged the great emigrational waves of the Diaspora creating in foreign lands under a regime of privileged acceptance ethnically distinct centres and prosperous communities. The Greeks placed under the legal protection and the privileges of the treaty of Küçük Kaynarca actively participated in the cultural and economic development of the arid regions of southern Russia and decisively contributed to the development of the transport trade and of seamanship in the Mediterranean, the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov. The gains of the Greeks from the Russian-Turkish treaty of Küçük Kaynarca eased the negative consequences of the Orlov incidents, created with the perspective of time favourable conditions for the national formation and the preparation of the Greek War of Independence, which led to the creation of the Greek state.

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1. For the articles of the treaty see Дружинина, Е.И., *Кючук-Кайнарджийский мир 1774 г.* (Москва 1955).

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## Bibliography :

	Дружинина Е.И., <i>Кючук-Кайнарджийский мир 1774 г.</i> , Москва 1955
	Anderson M.S., <i>The Eastern Question. 1774-1923</i> , New York 1966



## Glossary :



## grand vizier

Highest government official in the Ottoman Empire, second only to the Sultan. Before the 19th century he led the Ottoman army to war, when the Sultan could not go. He had vast administrative, legislative and judiciary responsibilities. During the reforms of the 19th century the office became even more important, as the grand vizier became in fact the head of the Ottoman government, very similar to the prime minister.



## haraç

(Ottoman Turkish: *haraç* or *cizye*): an entity of taxes payed directly to the central authorities by the non-Muslim Ottoman subjects (in addition to the other taxes that were payable by Muslims and non-Muslims alike). The non-Muslims, according to Islamic holy law, recompensed thus for the tolerance and protection offered by the Islamic State. Since 1474, the Orthodox Church, i.e. the patriarchates and the autocephalus archdioceses, had to pay annually the *haraç* or *vasilikon haratsion*. The patriarch or the autocephalus archbishop was responsible for the payment of the *haraç*; he collected the money through the taxes that the communities had to pay to the dioceses. The amount of these lump-sum (*maktu*) taxes was fixed by the sultanic authorities, although some aspirants of the patriarchal throne undertook to raise it in order to ascend to the throne.