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TURKEY.

[November 11.]

CONFIDENTIAL.

SECTION 1.

[E 12514/27/44]

No. 1.

*The Marquess Curzon of Kedleston to Lord Hardinge (Paris).*

(No. 3391.)

My Lord.

*Foreign Office, November 11, 1922.*

THE French Ambassador asked to see me this afternoon with regard to the Eastern question and the approaching conference. He had in his hands a letter from M. Poincaré which had been rendered somewhat out of date by the proceedings of the past few days, and I therefore asked him to allow me to deal with the situation as it now stood.

There was, I said, no longer any question that the conference should meet on the 13th November. For some time past, a meeting on that date had evidently been impossible. Few, if any, of the delegations, including the French, were prepared to be in Lausanne in two days' time. The Turks had gone there knowing perfectly well that there would not be anyone to meet them, and having, as I knew, intimated privately that they were quite prepared to spend the ensuing week before the 20th in Paris or elsewhere. The date of the 20th had now been definitely fixed and notified to all the States concerned, who were taking measures accordingly. The really important thing was, not the date of the conference, but what was to be done by France and ourselves before it met. I could not, I told the Ambassador, exaggerate the importance, and even the indispensability, of reaching a prior understanding between France and Great Britain, and if possible Italy also, in that interval. Without such an understanding, I was not prepared to enter the conference at all. I could not submit my Government and my country to the humiliation of open disagreement with our principal Allies at the conference table, in the eyes of the Turks and before the face of Europe. I was not prepared, once again, as I had had to do on at least three previous occasions, to fight a battle against the French and Italians in combination, and to make concessions, in order to arrive at an Allied agreement which was forgotten or broken as soon as it had been concluded. When we reached Lausanne, either we should have to yield to Turkey all along the field, or there must be a definite understanding under which France, Italy, and ourselves undertook to side together and even to break up the conference sooner than yield. Such an understanding could not be secured, as M. Poincaré had suggested, by my calling at the Quai d'Orsay for a conversation of an hour or two with him on my way to Lausanne. Supposing that, in such a case, we failed to come to an agreement: was I to be vested with the sole responsibility of breaking up the conference by returning to England, or was I to proceed to Lausanne with the certainty that on all important points I was going to be deserted by my Allies? No, the conversation and the understanding must both take place under conditions that were free from any such danger. I had myself proposed three alternatives to M. Poincaré. The first was that Signor Mussolini should go to Paris, see M. Poincaré, and then come to London. This might be difficult, owing to the possible inability of the Italian Prime Minister to leave Italy at present. The second alternative was that M. Poincaré should empower M. Barrère, after conversations with the Italian Government, to come to London and make an agreement with me. But as to this there was uncertainty whether M. Poincaré would be willing to invest M. Barrère with the requisite powers. The third, and much the best, solution would be that M. Poincaré should do me the honour of coming to London in the middle of next week and having a conversation here. During the last year and a half, I had gone, as British Foreign Minister, four times to Paris for similar discussions; and I thought that the time had arrived when the compliment might be returned. I could not myself leave London in the course of next week, and I thought that public opinion here would resent these repeated rushes of the British Foreign Minister to the Quai d'Orsay. It was for the French Prime Minister to say what he considered the best manner of dealing with the case; but, unless an opportunity were created and unless a definite understanding were arrived at, I did not myself see any advantage in proceeding with the Lausanne Conference at all. There would be less humiliation in retiring before the conference met than in beating a retreat after its sittings had begun. In any case the course would be difficult enough, and my plan was the only means of removing the main obstacles from the path.

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