

# THESIS

## **The Kurdish Issue in Turkey**

Duality in the League of Nations: Security or Sovereignty?

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# The Kurdish Issue in Turkey

## ABSTRACT

Despite the vast research on the League of Nations and its impact - or, as many researches conclude, its non-impact - little is known about the perspective of its subjects. Although the League aimed to provide security and self-determination to all ethnic groups, Kurds were, as this research will illustrate, left behind in these promises. In understanding the subordinated position of Kurds in former Ottoman territory, and in this case, Turkish territory, the process of state-building is core. In this thesis, Turkish Kurds are the central actor in researching how the altered attitude of the Allied Powers regarding the minority rights regime and Kurdish issue between 1920 and 1923 can be explained. By analysing the Treaty of Sèvres (1920) and Treaty of Lausanne (1923), an explanation is sought for the diminishing Kurdish representation in policy making. All in all, it is concluded that the currently still dominant ideas of the League's legacy are perhaps insufficient, if not incorrect.

Kurds are largest ethnic group in the world without an autonomous state. They have a subordinated position in four different nations: Iraq, Syria, Iran and Turkey. Although Kurds never truly succeeded in the creation of an internationally acknowledged state, they nearly did several times. The closest reach Kurds ever had in establishing a sovereign state was in the aftermath of the First World War after the fall of the Ottoman Empire. In this period the region was carved up by the victors of the First World War: Great Britain, France and Russia. These boundaries exist to the present day.

The signing of the Sykes-Picot Agreement by British and French diplomats in 1916 can be seen as the start of multiple negotiations between the Allied Powers and the already declining, but yet to fall Ottoman government at the other. In 1920, the Treaty of Sèvres was signed by the Allied Powers and the Constantinople government. In this treaty, minority and self-determination rights for ethnic groups such as Armenians and Kurds were envisaged.<sup>1</sup> In Turkish national consciousness this treaty is, until present day, interpreted as a betrayal of the British administration and symbolises a Turkish humiliation.<sup>2</sup> Where this treaty is said to be a peace treaty in which both parties have equal voices, the indirect rule of the Allied Powers was strongly presented (e.a. the Financial Commission, established by the Allies to maintain control over the region). According to history scholar William Cleveland, '... the aftermath of the war produced feelings of bitterness toward the Western powers and a deep-seated conviction that they [the Arabs] had been betrayed.' He continues writing that, 'from the Arab perspective, the British pledges ... had been sacrificed to the requirements of Allied harmony and imperial self-interest.'<sup>3</sup> Put differently, the Wilson principles were believed to be 'a mere camouflage', used by European powers to 'cheat' the Turks.<sup>4</sup> In 1923, in the Treaty of Lausanne, the borders of modern Turkey were created: 'Turkish sovereignty was restored over the Kurdish-dominated area accorded independence under the Treaty of Sèvres.'<sup>5</sup>

The origins of the agreements made in this treaty can be found in the League of Nations. Founded on 10th of January 1919, this intergovernmental organisation was initiated by the American president, Woodrow

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<sup>1</sup> K. Yildiz, *The Kurds in Turkey: EU Accession and Human Rights* (London 2005) 7.

<sup>2</sup> S. R. Sonyel, *Turkish Diplomacy 1918-1923: Mustafa Kemal and the Turkish National Movement* (London 1975) 79.

<sup>3</sup> W. L. Cleveland, *A History of the Modern Middle East* (Boulder 2013) 156.

<sup>4</sup> Sonyel, *Turkish Diplomacy 1918-1923*, 81.

<sup>5</sup> Yildiz, *The Kurds in Turkey*, 11.

Wilson. One of the main incentives for the founders of the League (mainly Britain and the US) to establish an international organisation, was to protect rights of minority groups and to provide humanitarian security by establishing an internationally recognised law-system. The League of Nations was to become the 'better version' of the former 'failed' Concert of Europe.<sup>6</sup> However, the ultimate aim of providing self-determination 'did not mean the end to colonialism, but for the League of Nations it meant paternalistic imperialism'.<sup>7</sup> All in all, the endeavour may have sounded promising at the time, but in the end, it did not fulfil its purpose to protect one of the largest minority groups in the world: the Kurds. As Mark Mazower writes, a 'civilisational self-assurance of nineteenth-century liberalism and the hierarchical world it took for granted', was emanated in the League.<sup>8</sup> Thus, although collective security was seen as foundation for the internationally organised League of Nations, this was not emanated to the question how to deal with Kurds in the, later to become, Turkish region: the so-called Kurdish Issue. This duality is, as Mazower writes, embodied in the principle of internationalism which has its origins in nineteenth-century international law: '[At] the same time that lawyers justified the extension of colonial rule overseas, they defended its value for the emergent society of sovereign national states in Europe (and when they remembered, the Americas).<sup>9</sup> This tension between nationalism and internationalism was especially evident in the Kurdish Issue. In 1923, by signing the Treaty of Lausanne, the borders of modern Turkey were created: 'Turkish sovereignty was restored over the Kurdish-dominated area accorded independence under the Treaty of Sèvres.'<sup>10</sup>

In short, by signing the Treaty of Sèvres, the Allied Powers envisaged an independent nation-state for various minority groups of the former Ottoman Empire, of which one were the Kurds. Three years later, in the Treaty of Lausanne, the Kurdish issue was not even mentioned. Hence, the question that will be researched is how the altered attitude of the Allied Powers regarding the minority rights regime and Kurdish issue between 1920 and 1923 can be explained.

First of all, the contrast in how Kurds are represented by the Allied Powers in the Treaty of Sèvres (1920) and subsequent Treaty of Lausanne (1923) is illustrated. Next, the political, economic and socio-cultural origins of this change in Allied Powers' policy are discussed. In third chapter, the more deep-rooted and ideological factors (socio-cultural) are combined with the political and economic factors. This thesis does not aim to analyse all of the reasons why the League is less 'failed' than it is often described by scholars. It is however crucial to understand that the League was founded as result of an immense destructive period (First World War) which not simply ended by neither the Treaty of Versailles or Sèvres. Sentiments as injustice and frustrations that had been simmering long time slowly showed their importance after it was expressed in growing Turkish nationalism (since the Ottomans felt like regions were unjustly split up by Western hegemony).

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<sup>6</sup> A. Van Ginneken, 'Staatsraison en Volkenbond', in: Duco Hellema and Hilde Reiding (red.), *Humanitaire Interventie en Soevereiniteit* (Amsterdam 2004) 87.

<sup>7</sup> V. Prashad, *The Darker Nations: A People's History of the Third World* (New York 2007) 21.

<sup>8</sup> M. Mazower, *Governing the World: The History of an Idea, 1815 to the Present* (New York 2012) 160.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 74.

<sup>10</sup> Yildiz, *The Kurds in Turkey*, 11.

According to Roger Owen, during the decade after the First World War, a ‘radical change throughout the whole Middle-East’ was evidenced in the “spirit of the age”,<sup>11</sup> or the so-called “Locarno spirit” (which originates from the city of Locarno in which promising treaties were made).<sup>12</sup> Owen elaborates this by alleging this phrase suggested ‘the need to come to terms with the emphasis that the Americans and some of the founders of the new League of Nations were now giving to such powerful notions as freedom and self-determination. The result was the invention of a new instrument of political control, the mandate, which was used to legitimise British and French government of their Middle Eastern possessions.’<sup>13</sup> Here, the conflicting nature of the League’s responsibilities becomes evident. As Susan Pedersen writes, ‘on the one hand, the League was to promote emerging norms related to trusteeship and human rights; on the other hand, it was to do so without undermining the principle of state sovereignty.’<sup>14</sup> This duality in the foundation of the League of Nations embodies the already discussed Janus-face that is characteristic for internationalism.

This contradiction has been the main motivation for many historians to follow a realist narrative of ‘decline and fall’, in which the League ‘failed’ to achieve its goals: to maintain peace and create a world of equal sovereign states.<sup>15</sup> However, in the mid-1990s new historical research was gathered, which ‘enabled us to come to a better understanding of this much-misunderstood international organization’.<sup>16</sup> Perhaps its diplomatic results were underwhelming, but ‘as a source of expertise and international action, it became the agent of the kind of organic growth in cooperative behaviour that [the founders] had believed in.’<sup>17</sup>

This debate regarding the role of the League is core, since the subordinated position of Kurds in Turkey (as in Iraq, Iran and Syria) is often attributed to the lack of decisiveness of the League. Was the League’s restraint truly one of the main incentives to dismiss the creation of a Kurdish nation? Or did the idea of a united community of Kurds in a nation lack agency from within?

In order to define a nation, the concept of nationalism has to be clarified: ‘It is nationalism that engenders nations, and not the other way around’.<sup>18</sup> There are two leading perspectives concerning nationalism.

First, there is a realist, instrumentalist conception of nationalism that derives, by and large, from the nineteenth century rebellion against the rule of autocratic monarchs. Alternatively, a collective myth had to be created: ‘nationalist movements reinvent[ed] particular versions of history and memory to construct new cultural forms that [could] be used for political mobilisation’.<sup>19</sup> The second, and in this thesis leading understanding of

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<sup>11</sup> R. Owen, *State, Power and Politics in the Making of the Middle East* (London & New York 2004) 6.

<sup>12</sup> S. Pedersen, ‘Back to the League of Nations’, *American Historical Review*, Vol. 112, No. 4 (October 2007) 1094.

<sup>13</sup> Owen, *State Power and Politics in the Making of the Middle East*, 6.

<sup>14</sup> Pedersen, ‘Back to the League of Nations’, 1107.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 1099.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 1092.

<sup>17</sup> Mazower, *Governing the World*, 143.

<sup>18</sup> E. Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford 1983) 55.

<sup>19</sup> M. Kaldor, *New and Old Wars: Organized Violence in a Global Era* (Cambridge, 2006) page 37, quoting Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (1983).

nationalism is led by scholars as Eric Hobsbawm and Benedict Anderson. In *Imagined Communities*, Anderson (inspired by Hobsbawm's notion that there 'is nothing to suggest that this trend [of states becoming nationalist] will not continue'<sup>20</sup>), defined an alternative understanding of nationalism of which nationalism is portrait as a 'social construction': 'it [the nation] is an imagined political community - and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign.'<sup>21</sup> In other words, nationalism is about the creation of mutual feelings of belonging which ultimately results in a nation, rather than creating a nation first, in order to fuel these feelings of belonging as a consequence. 'Nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness: it *invents* nations where they do not exist'<sup>22</sup>

Where this artificial creation of nation-states in European regions was relatively successful (as late eighteenth and nineteenth century developments in present-day Germany and Italy showed), this was significantly more complicated in the Middle East. In the aftermath of the First World War, multiple (some yet to be officially created) nations claimed authority over the same territory: the Eastern Question<sup>23</sup>, that had already started in the late eighteenth century, intensified. This intensification had many consequences, of which one now is called 'the Kurdish Issue'.

Since the position of Turkish Kurds is extremely subordinated, statistics and information in general is often incomplete or even nonexistent, particularly when compared with other Middle Eastern cultures. This is confirmed by Morton Abramowitz, former American ambassador in Turkey, writing that 'Turks do not like to be branded as unpatriotic, nor do they want to be threatened with a trial by the state prosecutor'.<sup>24</sup> The Turkish perspective regarding the Kurdish issue should thus be considered as highly subjective. The initiated seizure of the editorial office of Zaman, a - relatively - critical Turkish newspaper (after they criticised president Erdoğan's administration), by Turkish authorities confirms that 'free press' in Turkey is only a façade to endure the idea of democracy, but is, in practice, not existing.<sup>25</sup> All in all, it is correct that recent sources concerning Kurds in Turkey are often biased (which is actually equally as interesting to research) and therefore potentially to be accounted as not legitimate. However, the researched question concerns more than ninety years old treaties, of which primary and secondary sources are extensive and, most important, subsequent criticism is widespread. Therefore, this research is, as far is possible, legitimate.

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<sup>20</sup> E. Hobsbawm, 'Some Reflections on "The Break-up of Britain"' *New Left Review*, Vol. 105 (September-October 1977), 13.

<sup>21</sup> B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London & New York 2006) 6.

<sup>22</sup> E. Gellner, *Thought and Change* (London, 1964) 169.

<sup>23</sup> This term refers to the strategic competition and political considerations of the European Great Powers in light of the political and economic instability in the Ottoman Empire from the late eighteenth to early twentieth centuries.

<sup>24</sup> H. Barkey and G. Fuller, 'Foreword by M. Abramowitz', *Turkey's Kurdish Question* (Carnegie Corporation of New York 1998) xiii.

<sup>25</sup> Al Jazeera, 'Turkish authorities seize country's largest newspaper' (05/03/2016), <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/03/turkish-authorities-seize-country-largest-newspaper-160304184742814.html> (retrieved on 13/03/2016).

# Chapter I

## Kurds in the Treaty of Sèvres (1920), and Lausanne (1923)

The fall of the Ottoman Empire and its consequences for the Middle-East (and in this case, for the Kurdish Issue) is a broadly discussed subject with numerous eminent works. This chapter starts out by providing an overview of the most important events during the decline of the Ottoman Empire in relation to the Kurds in this region. Specifically, the significance of the altering Ottoman (later Turkish) and Allied Powers' attitudes regarding the Kurdish Issue is emphasised. Next, the two treaties (of Sèvres and Lausanne) are analysed respectively. The central question is how Turkish and Allied Powers attitudes relate (or contrast) to both each other and the two treaties?

Before providing a context with regard to the Kurdish position in (present-day) Turkey, it is crucial to understand the implications of their long-term subordinated position as a minority group. A recently published psychological study concerning Turkish and Kurdish relations, argues that 'the Kurdish Issue has for decades been known as a conflict between the irredentist PKK (Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan – Kurdistan Workers' Party) and the Turkish state, and has resulted in polarization along ethnic lines in Turkey.'<sup>26</sup> The subsequent sentence clarifies the necessity of researching the origins of this inequality: 'Heightened conflict triggers negative emotional reactions (i.e., fear, anger) to the out-group, increases in-group identification, nationalistic attachment and support for nationalistic leaders, as well as produces prejudice and out-group derogation.'<sup>27</sup> Why are Turkish Kurds systematically identified as an *out-group*?

The origins of the Kurdish exclusion is found in the characteristic social structure of the Ottoman Empire that was organised by a *millet*-system: a religion-based classification (rather than ethnicity), in which Muslims, Christians, and Jews were all separated into their own community. However, 'no matter how prosperous or prominent non-Muslims might become, they were not regarded as equal to Muslims'.<sup>28</sup> This Muslim-superiority is particularly interesting considering that Muslims, especially in the Balkans, were not a vast majority. An example for this was Serbia, which 'had virtually no Muslim landowners ... Its Muslim population [that of Serbia] was largely confined to the towns, and it had only light taxing powers over the Christian peasants.'<sup>29</sup> Nevertheless, Kurds (the majority of which was Muslim), among many other minorities, held no acknowledged position in this social construction and were systematically unrepresented and subsequently disadvantaged. The foundation for this unrepresentativeness of minorities can be found in the concern of, first Ottoman and later Turkish, concern to 'protect the integrity and indivisibility of the state and "nation".'<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> R. Bilali e.a., 'Psychological asymmetry in minority-majority relations at different stages of ethnic conflict', *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* 43 (September 2014) 255.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 255.

<sup>28</sup> Cleveland, *A History of the Middle East*, 45.

<sup>29</sup> D. Chirot and K. Barkey, 'States in Search of Legitimacy', *International Journal of Comparative Sociology*, Vol. 24, No. 1-2 (1983) 33.

<sup>30</sup> K. Kirisci, and G.M. Winrow, *The Kurdish Question and Turkey: An Example of a Trans-state Ethnic Conflict* (London 1997) 45.

In finding the source for the growing urge of Turkish nationalist to create a unified nation, the matter of the 'Eastern Question' is crucial. This dilemma embodied the competition between the Great Powers (mainly Russia and Britain) over influence of the Ottoman Empire. The already declining instability in the Ottoman Empire increased during the First World War, when the Empire allied with the Germans. Eventually, after Germany, and thereby the Ottoman Empire as well, were defeated by the British and French, all of the Ottoman territory was to be 'divided' by multiple actors. Among the Allied powers and prominent Arab leaders (e.a., field commander of the Arab Revolt, Amir Faysal) several pledges had been made during, and were made after the war. 'Since some of the pledges contradicted one another, they could be implemented only by compromise or the exercise of armed force.'<sup>31</sup> This contradiction is especially vivid in the comparison of the Treaty of Sèvres (1920) and Treaty of Lausanne (1923) and perfectly expresses the foundations of the Kurdish Issue.

## The Treaty of Sèvres

On August 10, 1920, in a commune of the suburbs of Paris, a peace treaty was signed between the Allied Powers and Turkey: the Treaty of Sèvres. The Allied Powers, dominated by the British Empire, France, Italy, and Japan<sup>32</sup>, had the mutual aim to 'terminate the state of war' and to have only 'official relations between the Allied Powers and Turkey'.<sup>33</sup> This desire for reconciliation is to be found in the increasing moral consciousness the United States', British, and French public opinion. After the First World War, the *millet*-system was no longer suitable for the nationalist demands of the Allied Powers. To ensure security for minorities (such as the Kurds), pledges of 'autonomous development' and sovereignty were made. Mazower supports this by suggesting that Wilson's ideal of politics was created by 'his commitment to democracy and public opinion as the bedrock as any political order'.<sup>34</sup>

This initiative of self-determination rights for minorities in former Ottoman territory is particularly vivid in Article 64, named 'Kurdistan'. The section 'Political Clauses', article 64 declares that:

If within one year from the coming into force of the present Treaty the Kurdish peoples within the areas defined in Article 62<sup>35</sup> shall address themselves to the Council of the League of Nations in such a manner as to show that a majority of the population of these areas desires independence from Turkey, and if the Council [of the League of Nations] then considers that these peoples are capable of such independence and then recommends that it should be granted to them, Turkey hereby agrees to execute such a recommendation, and to renounce all rights and title over these areas.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Cleveland, *A History of the Middle East*, 151.

<sup>32</sup> The Allied Powers were split into two groups: the 'Principal Allied Powers' (The British Empire, France, Italy and Japan) and the 'Allied Powers' (Armenia, Belgium, Greece, The Hedjaz people, Poland, Portugal, Roumania, The Serb-Croat-Slovene State and Czecho-Slovakia). Most likely, this division was made in order to emphasise differences in power-relations and thus to express the superiority of, in this case, the 'Principal Allied Powers'.

<sup>33</sup> L. Martin, 'Treaty of Sèvres' (1920) in: *The Treaties of Peace, 1919-1923*, Vol. II (New York 1924) 789.

<sup>34</sup> Mazower, *Governing the World*, 126.

<sup>35</sup> Martin, 'Treaty of Sèvres', 807. Article 62: 'Kurdish areas lying east of the Euphrates, south of the southern boundary of Armenia ... and north of the frontier of Turkey with Syria and Mesopotamia'.

<sup>36</sup> Martin, 'Treaty of Sèvres', 807.



Hence, two conditions were imposed on any future autonomous Kurdish nation-state: it had to be supported by a majority of the population of the areas concerned, and it needed the approval of the Council. Both conditions turned out to be ambiguous. On top of that, a condition of ‘capability’ was created. This subjective term illustrates the ongoing relation of dependence between former Ottoman territory and the Great Powers. In relation to this research (of ‘how the altered attitude of the Allied Powers regarding the Kurdish issue can be explained?’), the condition of approval of the Council is core and thus further elaborated.

This proposed condition of the ‘approval of the Council’ consisted of an (implicit) continuity of dependence of Turks (and Kurds) to the Allied Powers. On top of that, ‘[n]ot only did the Ottoman Empire lose all its Arab lands, but it was obliged to give territory to a new Armenian state and cede large territories to Greece.’<sup>37</sup> Additionally, the Allied Powers established various ‘Commissions’ that supervised and controlled the Empire: ‘The Financial Commission shall supervise the execution of the Budget and the financial laws and regulations of Turkey ... whose members will only be appointed with the approval of the Commission’.<sup>38</sup> Consequently, the sustained relations of dependence that were made in the Treaty of Sèvres (and monitored by the League of Nations), the decline in Ottoman territory, and Allied Powers its endeavours for minority-rights (and hereby undermining Turkish policy), drastically increased Turkish frustrations, where after narratives of (as discussed in the introduction) ‘betrayal’ and ‘humiliation’ intensified.

Approached from a realist perspective, the principles of self-determination and security were only applied in the Allied Power’s own interests. Cleveland even goes as far as to state that ‘the mandate system was little more than nineteenth-century imperialism repackaged to give the appearance of self-determination’.<sup>39</sup> Although this statement places Cleveland in a more, to use Susan Pedersen’s words, “decline and fall” narrative (that she believes is insufficient),<sup>40</sup> the *feeling* (whether or not accounted as justified by Pedersen) of ‘betrayal’ by Western superiority that was created, was equally important. These feelings of injustice resulted in growing resistance against Western interference and consequently in rising nationalism, on both Turkish as Kurdish fronts. In relation to researching the changing attitudes of the Great Powers, this forces of resistance against the neocolonial relations is highly relevant, since often is argued that this was the result of the League and its Covenant as merely, to use Vijay Prashad words, ‘a tool of imperialism and for the maintenance of peace within Europe’<sup>41</sup>. However, if looked at the organization of this resistance, another understanding becomes clear.

In 1920, there was no such thing as rivalry over territory between Turks and Kurds. On the contrary, some Kurdish tribes even sent a number of telegrams to Turkish representatives during the Peace Conference in Paris in 1919, arguing ‘that the Kurds did not want to separate from the Turks’.<sup>42</sup> What is core in this analysis is the notion of various Kurdish tribes with different motives. As Kirisci and Winrow conclude their chapter, and as

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<sup>37</sup> C. Catherwood, *A Brief History of The Middle East* (London, 2011) 181.

<sup>38</sup> Martin, ‘Treaty of Sèvres’, 865.

<sup>39</sup> Cleveland, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, 153.

<sup>40</sup> Pedersen, ‘Back to the League of Nations’, 1091.

<sup>41</sup> Prashad, *The Darker Nations*, 28.

<sup>42</sup> Kirisci and Winrow, *The Kurdish Question and Turkey*, 79.

will briefly be touched in the very beginning of this research, 'the Kurds found themselves separated from each other by default rather than by design.'<sup>43</sup>

## The Treaty of Lausanne

The creation of the Treaty of Sèvres was, by the the Allied Powers, seen as the settlement of the Eastern Question. The desire to create an enduring peace and stability arguably led to a treaty that was, either intentionally or unintentionally, favouring Western interests. In the following years, Western superiority diminished due to many factors, of which the Greek crisis was probably most inflectional. Next to that, Syria and Egypt proclaimed independence. In second chapter, these factors will be further elaborated. For now, proving the difference in attitude of the Allied Powers in linguistic representation is what matters most.

On 24th of July 1923, another treaty was signed between the Allied Powers and Turkey. The Treaty of Lausanne is chosen in comparison with the Treaty of Sèvres because it settled Turkish nation-state borders, which, by and large, correspond with present-day borders. When the Treaty of Lausanne was finally signed, Turkish sovereignty was recognised over all areas claimed by the National Pact with the exception of Mosul in northern Iraq.<sup>44</sup> The creation of a sovereign Turkish nation-state was, as will be further elaborated in next chapter, crucial in understanding the rise of both Turkish as Kurdish nationalism and the subsequent continuity in subordination of Kurds.

To start with, the most tangible difference with the former treaty is its location. while the Treaty of Sèvres was signed in the suburbs of Paris, capital of a country characterised by its imperial past, the negotiations in 1923 were held in a Swiss city, Lausanne: a country characterised by its neutrality. This altered location already hints to the more reserved attitude of the Allied Powers.

Second, a difference in the Allied Powers' use of language is notable. The tone in the Treaty of Sèvres was quite imperative and controlling. This was brought down significantly in the Treaty of Lausanne. This immediately becomes evident in first paragraph of the Treaty, where the purpose is formulated. Instead of using the authoritative terminology of 'terminating' the war (as was written in the Treaty of Sèvres), a more accessible phrasing was used. This time, the 'desire to bring to a final close the estate of war which has existed in the East since 1914', was seen as main aim of the treaty.<sup>45</sup> This notion of 'desire' justifies the suggestive tone, in contrast with the imperative tone of 'terminating'. Next sentence illustrates the change in attitude: the purpose is 'to re-establish the relations of friendship and commerce which are essential to the mutual well-being of their respective peoples, and considering that these relations must be based on respect for the independence and sovereignty of States.'<sup>46</sup> The words that indicate an almost submissive attitude of the Allied Powers towards the Turkish government are abundant, with 'friendship', 'well-being', 'respect' as foremost examples. Moreover, the so-called Financial Commission of the League of Nations, whose influence was profusely represented in the Treaty of Sèvres, significantly diminished if not completely disappeared in the Treaty of Lausanne. It is briefly mentioned

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<sup>43</sup> Kirisci and Winrow, *The Kurdish Question and Turkey*, 85.

<sup>44</sup> Cleveland, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, 165.

<sup>45</sup> L. Martin, 'Treaty of Lausanne' (1923) in: *The Treaties of Peace, 1919-1923*, Vol. II (New York, 1924) 959.

<sup>46</sup> Martin, 'Treaty of Lausanne', 959.

that 'debts must be settled and paid'<sup>47</sup>, but no more is mentioned referring finances. Finally, but probably most crucial to understand of the shift in Allied Powers attitudes, is the clause regarding minority rights. The minority rights agreed to at Lausanne were not applied to Kurds: only 'non-Moslim minorities will enjoy full freedom of movement and of emigration'.<sup>48</sup>

In short, it can be argued that the superior tone of the Allied Powers was diminished. Politically, this was evident in the altered, more accessible, use of language. Economically, the control by a Financial Commission practically disappeared. Geopolitically, the Turkish nationalist movement succeeded in creating their sovereign state. Culturally, minority groups were granted rights, although was only applied to non-Muslim minority groups. However, the impact, which is often alleged to be a result of this exclusion of minority rights for Kurds, can be countered: 'With regard to the general development of Kurdish consciousness in Turkey, almost all Kurds at one some considered themselves to be part of the Moslem population of the Ottoman Empire. Most of these Kurds were not aware of a separate ethnic let alone a separate national identity.'<sup>49</sup> In the third chapter, this question of whether or not the Kurdish Issue should be interpreted as a "tragedy" is further elaborated. Before plunging into this criticism, it is necessary to research the political, economic and socio-cultural factors that initiated the shift in the Allied Powers' position (concerning the protection of Kurds).

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 997.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 970.

<sup>49</sup> Kirisci, and Winrow, *The Kurdish Question and Turkey*, 210.

## Chapter 2

### Political, economic, and socio-cultural factors that influenced the attitude of the Allied Powers

At the start of the negotiations in 1920, as Cleveland claims, ‘the Allies were determined to punish the Ottomans as a defeated power, to grant the demands for self-determination put forward by Christian subjects of the empire, and to secure their own strategic objectives in Anatolia.’<sup>50</sup> Although this can be seen as a rather realistic view on the intentions of the Allied Powers (in particular of Britain and France), this superiority is indeed evident in the obtained objectives of the Treaty of Sèvres (as discussed in previous chapter). When the Lausanne Conference convened in late 1922, ‘the atmosphere was heavy with uncertainty, suspicion and intrigue’.<sup>51</sup> Having a recognised Turkish sovereignty was a most significant result, with the Treaty of Lausanne being a ‘remarkable turnabout for the Anatolian portion of the Ottoman Empire; from being partitioned and occupied in 1920, it emerged three years later as the internationally recognized independent nation-state of Turkey, free of restrictions on its domestic policies, on its finances . . . , and on its jurisdiction over foreign nationals.’<sup>52</sup>

The analysis of both treaties in chapter one aimed at demonstrating the altered attitude of the Allied Powers between 1920 and 1923, with regard to the former Ottoman territory and in particular Kurdish areas. Western superiority was toned down in many aspects, which is particularly evident in the Kurdish Issue. As mentioned earlier, a complete section devoted to the issue whether or not to create an autonomous ‘Kurdistan’ was included in the Treaty of Sèvres. Three years later, in the Treaty of Lausanne, the Kurds seemed to have ‘disappeared’ off radar. Of course, as in all transitions, this can be explained by the influence of numerous factors. This chapter focuses on the principal economic, political and socio-cultural factors that help to explain the altered attitude of the Allied Powers regarding Kurdish autonomy in Turkish regions.

### Political factors

Even before the Treaty of Sèvres was signed in 1920, the popularity of the Turkish nationalist movement was already high. This increased throughout the two following years, which eventually resulted in a legitimate nationalist government in Ankara that was recognised by both Turkish national and international authorities, such as the British Empire.

One factor that contributed to the increased authority of the Turkish nationalist movement (that held a strong position in the Lausanne Conference) is to be found in the rise of a former Ottoman field commander: Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. Over the years, this resistance increased under the firm hand of Mustafa Kemal, who, from 1935 onwards, was also known as Atatürk (‘father of the Turks’). Atatürk truly became a nationalist after he was dismissed from service in June 1920 by the Sultan’s government: ‘he became a rebel army officer acting

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<sup>50</sup> Cleveland, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, 163.

<sup>51</sup> Sonyel, *Turkish Diplomacy 1918-1923*, 191.

<sup>52</sup> Cleveland, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, 165.

against the policies of the legally constructed government in Istanbul'.<sup>53</sup> A factor that fueled this nationalist tendency was an Allied squadron that landed an entire Greek division in Izmir on May 14, 1919.<sup>54</sup> Since the Allied initially supported Greek expansionism at the expense of Turkish territory, Turkish anti-Western feelings grew. In short, the by Atatürk led Turkish resistance groups revolted against the 'occupation and division of Turkish soil'.<sup>55</sup>

The influence of the Turkish nationalist movement strengthened even more after the alliance with the Soviet Union. The Treaty of Sèvres secured Armenians an independent nation-state. However, in autumn 1920, 'Turkey and the Soviet Union invaded Armenia and divided its territory between them, an act that marked the first stage in the dismantling of the Treaty of Sèvres'.<sup>56</sup> From 1921 onwards, Turkish nationalists in Ankara were recognised as the legitimate government of Turkey by both the Soviet Union and France (next to the still ruling one in Istanbul). Furthermore, the Greek army withdrew and fled back towards Izmir. The Greek withdrawal was determined on October 11, 1922, in the Armistice of Mudanya, where they were also was requested to renegotiate the terms of the Treaty of Sèvres.

It is crucial to understand that at this point two Turkish governments existed: one of the Sultan and one of the nationalists. However, after various measures (that are too lengthy to discuss here<sup>57</sup>), Atatürk succeeded in persuading the assembly to pass a resolution which 'separated the caliphate from the sultanate and eliminated the sultanate. ... [This] abolition of the sultanate represented the end of the Ottoman political era, and the selection of the caliph of Islam by a democratically body of national delegates marked the beginning of the Turkish one'.<sup>58</sup>

Politically speaking, the change in policy in which the Sultan was removed of power was crucial to the altering in the Allied Powers' attitude that was expressed in the Treaty of Lausanne. Additionally, the brief junction of Soviet Union's and Turkey's interests in the case of Armenia is another bottom line in the political perspective regarding changed attitudes among the Allied Powers. Although the Western orientation of Atatürk strongly contrasted with Lenin's communist ideology by shaping a democratic government-structure, sabotaging any Western endeavour was a mutual aim, which made a (temporarily) neglect of the fundamentally opposing ideologies possible. This pragmatism is characteristic for the *realpolitik* of the late nineteenth and twentieth century. Bolsheviks knew that 'as long as the military emergency in Anatolia continued Ankara had to rely on the Soviet military and diplomatic assistance ... They [the Bolsheviks] were determined to help the Kemalist movement [i.e. Atatürk's] to counter-balance the influence of the West in the Near East'.<sup>59</sup> This Soviet support for Turkish nationalists altered the power of balance that revived the Eastern Question and eventually resulted in a changing, more reserved attitude of the Allied Powers in the creation Treaty of Lausanne.

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 163.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 176.

<sup>55</sup> Cleveland, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, 163.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 177.

<sup>57</sup> For more details regarding this development, I refer to Andrew Mango's detailed biography of Atatürk : A. Mango, *Atatürk* (London, 2004). Especially Chapter 18, 'The End of the Monarchy', relates to the shift from the monarchy to a republic in Turkey.

<sup>58</sup> Cleveland, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, 165.

<sup>59</sup> B. Gökay, *A Clash of Empires: Turkey Between Russian Bolshevism and British Imperialism 1918-1923* (London & New York, 1997) 150.

## Geopolitical factors

Atatürk's main objective - the creation of a unified Turkey - was embodied in a process of 'Turkification', which aimed at '[eradicating] non-Turkish allegiances and [suppressing] non-Turkish culture and expression. The Kurds were to become its primary target, as the organs of the state sought to break up the Kurdish community in the Southeast through restrictive legislation and state-sponsored violence.'<sup>60</sup> After Atatürk and his forces 'overran the northern part of Kurdistan' to *Turkify* the Anatolian areas of the former Ottoman empire, Britain concluded that 'the southern Kurdish areas that they protected should be unified with the rest of the new Iraq, rather than become an independent state.'<sup>61</sup> In this case, the absence of minority rights (in the Treaty of Lausanne) for excluded Muslim groups (i.e., Kurds) is particularly evident. Pedersen vividly points out the tension between providing security for minority-groups and thereby initiating sovereignty (which was supposed to be one of the main objectives of the League of Nations and thus the British administration) and at the same time stimulating the process of state-building: 'The minorities treaties were applied to fragile and often new states that were nevertheless recognized as sovereign; the mandates system, by contrast, was applied to territories conquered by strong states with preexisting and often extensive colonial empires.'<sup>62</sup>

Evident becomes the how the rise of a shared Turkish identity resulted in diminishing British (as well as French and Italian) dominance. Only after Atatürk's successes in Anatolian areas, British officials decided to unify the remaining areas in a new nation: Iraq. The initiative regarding territorial and political decisions slowly but surely shifted to the Turkish nationalist movement, if not to Soviet Union's indirect but all the more present interests.

## Economic factors

Besides the covered (geo)political factors, a 'follow-the-money' approach is helpful to find an explanation for the altered attitude of the Allied Powers regarding Kurdish autonomy in Turkish regions.

After the fall of the Ottoman Empire, it is seen that '[t]he remaining Kurdish-dominated lands were divided between Iran, Syria and Iraq, with the Allied powers drawing up new national boundaries giving more heed to the allocation of oil resources and rewarding Arab leaders than to the ethnic distribution of the Kurds and their right to self-rule.'<sup>63</sup> As Cleveland states, 'the mandate system was little more than nineteenth century imperialism repackaged to give the appearance of self-determination.'<sup>64</sup> Although this is a slight realist approach of the intentions of the League of Nations and, moreover, exactly the point we want to counter-balance in this thesis, there is a certain truth to be found in this statement. As illustrated in the introduction, there is more than economical and political perspectives to clarify, in our case, the change in attitudes of the Allied Powers. Again, this is elaborated further in the following section and chapter. This realist assumption of Western self-interest as main motive to intervene (in contrast with notions such as the provision of self-determination and humanitarian

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<sup>60</sup> Yildiz, *The Kurds in Turkey*, 14.

<sup>61</sup> Catherwood, *A Brief History of the Middle East*, 189.

<sup>62</sup> Pedersen, 'Back to the League of Nations', 1103.

<sup>63</sup> Yildiz, *The Kurds in Turkey*, 7.

<sup>64</sup> Cleveland, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, 153.

rights, which were the League's legitimation) is especially related to the creation of Iraq, as discussed in the point above. After receiving a mandate for Iraq and Palestine, Britain 'enhanced its position in the Persian Gulf, secured the approaches to India, and gained access to petroleum resources.'<sup>65</sup> Thus, oil interests certainly made British officials more willing to compromise to ensure their position in the area, even if that meant they would lose some authority in other (Kurdish) regions.

## Socio-cultural factors

All factors illustrated above help to explain the change in attitude of the Allied Powers between 1920 and 1923 regarding the Kurdish Issue. Approached from a realist approach, political and economic factors are quintessential in the explanation of changed attitudes of the Allied Powers. Although these factors definitely had their effect, socio-cultural influences are equally as significant. How did the Allied Powers lose their superior attitude in the negotiations regarding the position of Kurds in Turkey? In the end, imperial history had given nation-states as France and Britain an extensive guidebook how to deal with any kind of resistance. So why did the Allied Powers genuinely fail in retaining their superiority?

In researching the League of Nations, the fact that the founders (i.e., the US and Britain) failed to agree on a model for an international organisation is crucial. The disagreement especially concerned the either juridical or political purpose of the organisation. Whereas US president Woodrow Wilson never even mentioned a new world *organisation* in his Fourteen Points programme, Great Britain openly supported the idea of a League of Nations.<sup>66</sup> As Mazower claims, the US strongly held a 'missionary zeal' in their foreign policy.<sup>67</sup> Put differently, the transmission of *morals* transcended any territorial or economic motivations for intervention in less stable nations (at least, in Wilson's ideology it did). Britain's foreign policy, in contrast, was characterised by imperialism through indirect rule. This is illustrated in a speech of the British prime-minister, Lloyd George, in which he declared that, '[t]he British Empire is a league of nations'.<sup>68</sup> Interestingly enough, this notion of imperialism is exactly the opposite of what the League of Nations was supposed to embody, namely the support for self-determination and providing human rights. Susan Pedersen underlines this discrepancy in political (Britain) and legalist (the US) motives by stating that, 'if one considers its [the League's] work in stabilizing new states and running the minorities protection and mandates systems, the League appears as a key agent in the transition from a world of formal empires to a world of formally sovereign states [political]. By contrast, if one notes its efforts to regulate cross-border traffics or problems of all kinds, it emerges rather as a harbinger of global governance [legal].'<sup>69</sup>

All in all, every one of the factors illustrated in this chapter are relevant to the question how the changing position of the Allies regarding the minority rights regime and the Kurdish question between 1920 and 1923 can

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 153.

<sup>66</sup> Mazower, *Governing the World*, 127.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 119.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 128, Mazower quoting J. B. Scott, 'Official Statements of War Aims and Peace Proposals: December 1916 to November 1918', *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace* (Washington D.C., 1921) 381.

<sup>69</sup> Pedersen, 'Back to the League of Nations', 1092.

be explained. However, besides the broadly discussed economic and political factors, the discrepancy in ideology concerning internationalism is, as discussed, crucial. In summary, all factors that attempt to clarify the conversion of Allied Powers' policy towards the Kurdish Issue have a deeper-rooted origin that can be found in the ideological concept of internationalism.<sup>70</sup> Ideology - and more specific, the idea of self-determination and importance of public opinion - can therefore be seen as the foundations for the shift in policy regarding the Kurdish issue.

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<sup>70</sup> Mazower, *Governing the World*, 137.



## Chapter 3

### Connecting political and economic perspectives with changing ideas

So far, first chapter concluded in mentioning that the narrative of a structural Kurdish disadvantage caused by Western superiority (the so-called Kurdish “tragedy”), is perhaps insufficient - if not wrong. This can be found in the groundworks of the League of Nations, which were based on the desire to provide security (humanitarian rights) and self-determination. A contradiction is visible, as discussed earlier, in the simultaneous projects of state-building that were supported or even initiated by members of the League (e.g., the creation of Iraq by Britain). In chapter two, the altered attitude of the Allied Powers regarding the Kurdish Issue in Turkey is attempted to be explained by discussing (geo)political, economic, and socio-cultural factors. The challenge in providing these various frames is to combine them, in order to fully understand the complexity of (in this case) the Kurdish Issue in Turkey. Thus, in order to find an explanation for the altered attitude of the Allied Powers regarding the minority rights regime and Kurdish issue between 1920 and 1923, the (geo)political and economic factors have to be combined with the ideological duality in internationalism (the already elaborated socio-cultural factor). In providing this connection between (to a certain extent) superficial factors and more deep-rooted factors, a critical framework is used, mainly to emphasise the complexity of the Kurdish Issue.

This chapter aims to provide two perspectives regarding a unified Kurdistan. From the Kurdish perspective, the victimisation of Kurds will be countered: were Kurds truly disadvantaged by Allied Powers’ decision to relinquish from the incentive of an autonomous Kurdish nation-state? From the Allied Powers perspective, the assumption that Allied Powers’ authority declined (because of their own flaws (i.e., blaming the League of Nations) is criticised.

### The Kurdish Perspective

In Atatürk’s process of ‘Turkification’, Kurds were an important target to incorporate in a unified nation-state: ‘Kemal and his rebellious forces, facing shortages of man and matériel, could not afford to alienate the Kurds, as they needed Kurdish cooperation to carry out the war against to foreign invaders’<sup>71</sup> In this pragmatic motivation to include Kurds are two main incentives: a lack of resources to fight without Kurds, and more interesting, a lack of resources and motivation to even fight against any Kurdish resistance. It seems Kurds were indeed persuaded with this unity of a common Muslim cause and, above all, in some cases even seemed to support a sovereign Turkish nation over a Kurdish one.

This duality of incorporating diversity in order to establish unity is further researched by the originally Indian, but currently Harvard professor Homi K. Bhabha, the emergence of the nation was ‘... a powerful historical idea in the West. [It was] an idea whose cultural compulsion lies in the impossible unity of the nation as a symbolic force.’<sup>72</sup> While describing the ‘locality’ of national culture, Bhabha elaborates further on this dualism: ‘The boundary is Janus-faced and the problem of outside/inside must always itself be a process of hybridity, incorporating new ‘people’ in relation to the body politic, generating other sites of meaning and,

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<sup>71</sup> Barkey and Fuller, *Turkey’s Kurdish Question*, 9.

<sup>72</sup> H. Bhabha, ‘Introduction: narrating the nation’, *Nation and Narration* (London, 1990) 1.

inevitably, in the political process, producing unmanned sites of political antagonism and unpredictable forces for political representation.<sup>73</sup> He concludes by stating that nations change, because the people within these nations change. It thus could be alleged that the inconsistency of a nation is inevitable. This ideological ambivalence in relation to the Kurdish Issue is perfectly illustrated by Hamit Bozarslan: ‘The emergent Kurdish nationalism, like Turkish and Arab nationalisms before it, is thus Janus-faced, in line with the contradictory aspects of the nation-building program. On the one hand it aims to be universal, so as to give a meaning to Kurdishness, and to preserve it; on the other hand to remain Kurdish, in order to access the “universal”: ... universalism constructs the nation.’<sup>74</sup>

This duality is echoed in the notion of identity. Identities can alter and are influenced by many factors, in which short-term personal interests are often leading. Nations change, because the people living in nations change. Nowadays, as Van Bruinissen claims, there definitely exists a Kurdish identity: ‘What unites them [Kurds] is not any set of objective, economic, political or cultural characteristics, but only the awareness among many of them that they constitute one people. This awareness is a result of a series of historical developments.’<sup>75</sup> These historical developments are thus the origins for a feeling of unity: ‘To the extent that Kurds feel one and have an awareness of common destiny, they are a nation.’<sup>76</sup> However, as he continues, ‘there are also Kurds who have quite willingly chosen to identify themselves primarily as citizens of their state [e.a., Iraq, Syria, Iran, or as in our case, Turkey] or as followers of a particular religion or sect.’<sup>77</sup> In short, it is questionable whether or not this shared notion of a Kurdish identity was strong enough to create a distinctive nation in the researched period between 1920 and 1923.

It can thus be stated that a Kurdish identity, perhaps, did not exist in the form it does as of today (with, in Turkey, the PKK as a leading voice). Or, as Kirisci and Winrow write, ‘the population of the Ottoman Empire rather identified themselves on religious grounds.’<sup>78</sup> It is thus considerable that ethnic differences that are core to the Kurdish Issue as of today, did not even exist during the creation of both treaties. This lack of ethnic self-awareness, as Kirisci and Winrow put it, is a perspective that is often unrepresented if not neglected and therefore crucial in researching the question of how the altered attitude of the Allied Powers regarding the minority rights regime and Kurdish issue between 1920 and 1923 can be explained. Perhaps it was not the attitude of the Allied Powers that altered, neither the influence of Turkish nationalists that, in the end, resulted in the de-creation of a unified Kurdish region. What if Kurds, as the group of people in the discussed region is described throughout this thesis, never considered themselves as a ‘Kurdish’ ethnic group and did not even have a mutual aim to create a nation?

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<sup>73</sup> Bhabha, *Nation and Narration*, 4.

<sup>74</sup> H. Bozarslan, ‘Some Remarks on Kurdish Historiographical Discourse in Turkey (1919-1980)’, *Essays on the Origins of Kurdish Nationalism*, edited by Abbas Vali (Costa Mesa, 2003) 22.

<sup>75</sup> M. Van Bruinissen, ‘Kurdish Society and the Modern State: Ethnic Nationalism versus Nation-Building’, in: *Kurdish Ethno-Nationalism versus Nation-Building States: Collected Articles* (Istanbul, 2000) 45.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>78</sup> Kirisci, and Winrow, *The Kurdish Question and Turkey*,

## The Allied Powers' perspective

The question that remains is how previous discussed factors relate to the more deep-rooted change, that is, the shift in the balance of power and, perhaps even more important, a change of ideas.

As previously discussed, the Treaty of Sèvres was characterised by imperialistic dominance and the endured rulership the Allied Powers' (mainly France and Britain) were used to. In the Treaty of Lausanne, this changed into a more submissive and equal attitude in which the Turkey, under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, set the dominant tone. This diminished position of the Allied Powers was demonstrated the always changing balance of power. In describing the impact of the London Conference (1922), Salahi Sonyel writes that, 'the Nationalist felt stronger both in military and political sense. ... They had secured the support of two Eastern Powers, Soviet Russia and Afghanistan, and they had won the friendship of France and Italy'.<sup>79</sup> In short, the shifting balance of power significantly strengthened Turkish nationalist movement's position in the diplomacy regarding the creation of their independent nation state.

Public opinion is crucial in creating foreign policy. However, 'for what he [Wilson] delivered in Paris bore almost no resemblance to what the American public expected. International law appeared to have been buried.'<sup>80</sup> As Van Ginneken emphasises, public opinion and military deprivation, protection of economic interests and maintaining a status quo, all resulted in the avoidance of war: non-intervention was superior to collective security.<sup>81</sup> In short, both British and French foreign policies were based on fear for any disturbance in the balance of power. This non-intervention is especially vivid in the already discussed 'Locarno-spirit'. This may seem improbable, since the Locarno spirit is defined as a wave of optimism, and thus contrary to a 'fear' for disturbance which resulted in non-intervention. Hence, the crux that was emphasised in the introduction can be seen: was the League of Nations a failure in which its members reluctantly made some policies without the conviction of any future success, or did the League accomplish some serious successes?

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<sup>79</sup> Sonyel, *Turkish Diplomacy 1918-1923*, 113.

<sup>80</sup> Mazower, *Governing the World*, 137.

<sup>81</sup> Van Ginneken, 'Staatsraison en Volkenbond', 85.

## Conclusion

### The Universalism of the Nation<sup>82</sup>

The aim of this thesis was to explain the altered attitude of the Allied Powers regarding the minority rights regime and Kurdish issue between 1920 and 1923. First, the Treaties of Sèvres and Lausanne were compared in order to determine whether or not there genuinely occurred a change the position of the Allied Powers. Next, various factors were elaborated. As now is accounted for, favouring either a realist or culture-based approach is insufficient. The crux is to combine *all* dimensions in order to fully understand the complexity all different actors. This combination is executed in last chapter, where a critical perspective is used to accentuate the duality of the Kurdish Issue.

In the end, it can be concluded that the decision of the Allied Powers to stop supporting a Kurdish autonomous state was not per se a matter of changing ideas, but the change in application of the already existing idea of sovereignty. The League was an innovative organisational body that turned ‘into a bridge between the world of the nineteenth-century empire and the twentieth-century rise of the nation-state.’<sup>83</sup> Mazower states that, ‘[as] a diplomatic vehicle the League was a failure; as a source of expertise and international action, it became the agent of the kind of organic growth in cooperative behaviour that Wilson, Smuts and Zimmern [the founders of the League] had believed in.’<sup>84</sup> Although the executing of legal laws was highly controversial, the League practically created the foundations for international legislation, that is currently evident in, for instance, the United Nations, or, as Pedersen puts it, ‘it was the world’s first sustained and con-sequential experiment in internationalism.’<sup>85</sup>

However, how progressive and well-intended this all may seem, these concepts of democracy and self-determination were only implemented *to a certain extent*. Indeed, some borders were drawn and some authority was given, but at the same time mandates were created which, ultimately, resulted in a continuity of dependence of postcolonial territories and in unequal power-relations in which both Britain and France maintained superior.

This is exactly where both perspectives of the elaborated criticism unite. From Kurdish perspective, Kurds were not organised in any major nationalist organisation which strived for independence. ‘In spite of the lobbying ... of educated activists who had become conscious of a separate Kurdish identity, the first rebellions against the newly formed Turkish Republic were mostly tribal and regional in nature.’<sup>86</sup> From Allied Powers perspective, the Allied Powers, which were, for a moment (1920-1923), united in the League of Nations, did indeed encourage self-determination. The possibility of a sovereign Kurdish nation-state was complicated by increased Turkish nationalism (after Atatürk and his forces ‘overran the northern part of Kurdistan), after which Britain decided to choose for the most obvious approach: to unify the southern Kurdish areas that they protected

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<sup>82</sup> Based on writings of J. Leca, ‘Nationalisme et Universalisme’, *Pouvoirs*, No. 57 (1991) 32-42.

<sup>83</sup> Mazower, *Governing the World*, 119.

<sup>84</sup> Mazower, *Governing the World*, 143.

<sup>85</sup> Pedersen, ‘Back to the League of Nations’, 1116.

<sup>86</sup> Kirisci and Winrow, *The Kurdish Question and Turkey*, 221.

with the rest of the new Iraq, rather than co-create an independent state.<sup>87</sup> All in all, it is thus evident that the League perhaps have had an extra, unintended, impact (besides the political and legal ones) of initiating a change in ideas in 'the West'. International cooperation was now embodied in an organisation which was bound to a Covenant in which rules were established, all on unprecedented scale. However, one of the most important aims - which was to secure minority groups - evidently did not endure in case of Kurds position.

Next to both (geo)political and economical factors that embody a realist perspective, and even a socio-cultural perspective in which a change in ideas was visible, it is perhaps even more important to realise that it was not necessarily a change in attitudes of the Allied Powers that resulted in a subordinated position of Kurds in the Middle East. Perhaps it was the artificial creation of a nation in a territory that still felt 'Ottoman', especially in case of Kurdish tribes. How can a ethnic group create a nation for their own, if they are not even self-conscious of a shared identity? Concluded can thus that not only the Allied Powers played their part in changing minority rights, but also the reservedness of Kurds themselves was crucial.

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<sup>87</sup> Catherwood, *A Brief History of the Middle East*, 189.

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