
**Franco-Turkish Visions
of a Republic**
An Interview with Baskin Oran

Dorothee Schmid

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Dorothee Schmid, head of Ifri’s Turkish Studies Program

Foreword

For a long time, the Turkish Republic created by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk was regarded by France's elites and political class as a sister republic: secular and Jacobin, the concrete embodiment of the universalism of the shared values of the French Revolution. However, the political change that has occurred since the AKP has come to office has questioned these classical republican convictions. It has revealed the fragility of an ideological construction which had previously been locked into univocal political and institutional practice. The place of religion in the public arena, the recognition of minorities, the balance of powers and political pluralism are all issues that are henceforth openly debated and sometimes settled rapidly in Turkey, albeit at the risk of a certain degree of social disorientation. This begs the question of whether the republican dogma, or maybe a certain vision of the Republic, is weakening. There is no simple answer to this, neither in France nor in Turkey, as in both countries, the socio-political pact is breaking up and reforming in response to globalisation.

Dorothee Schmid, head of Ifri's Turkish Studies Program

Dorothee Schmid: How far does France's influence in Turkey go back?

Baskin Oran¹: Turkey – not the Turkish Republic but the Ottoman Empire – was historically much influenced by France. The terminology is very revealing in this respect. For example, *Frenk*, which is a derivation of “French” was traditionally the word for “European” and by extension “foreign”.

In the 19th century, and even before, the Ottomans realised that their armies were inferior to Europe's. To overcome this, they imitated European military organisation, by inviting European officers, importing arms, etc. It all started then. Later, the Empire began sending students to Paris and other European capitals, but mainly Paris. They learnt French, along with nationalism.

D.S: How did France's influence manifest itself?

B.O: It made itself felt in several waves. The first occurred with what are known as the “New Ottomans”, who arrived in Europe in the years immediately after 1839 (when the famous *Tanzimat* was adopted),² after a trade treaty was signed with Great Britain in 1838.³ They imported the notion of “homeland” (*patrie*). This concept didn't exist previously, as only the idea of the Sultan's property existed. The movement also introduced the concept of constitution. The first Ottoman Constitution of 1876 followed on from the constitutional laws of 1875, and so also resulted from their contribution. The second wave was that of the “Young Turks”. They were the source of the second constitutional period, which led to the re-establishment of the

¹ Baskin Oran is a Turkish academic and human rights activist. He has written several books about minority issues and nationalism in Turkey. He writes regularly for the press, especially in *Agos* (a weekly, published bilingually in Turkish and Armenian) and *Radikal iki*. He stood as an independent candidate in the legislative elections in Istanbul in 2007. In 2008, he was one of a group of Turkish intellectuals who launched a petition asking for “pardon” from Armenians for the 1915 massacres.

² The Tanzimat era, or Turkish “reorganisation”, refers to a period of reform of the Ottoman Empire, which ran from 1839 to 1876. It ended with the organisation of elections for the first Ottoman Parliament and the adoption of the 1876 constitution. The Parliament was suspended two years later by Sultan Adülhamid II, who brought back an absolutist regime. The Constitution was re-established in 1908 following the revolution of the “Young Turks”.

³ This treaty rewarded help given by the British to the Ottoman Empire against Egypt's Khedive. It unilaterally removed all taxes, quotas and monopolies on imports by Ottoman citizens, in Britain's favor. It was a capitulation of unlimited duration and resulted in the destruction of Ottoman industry. Together with spending on the Crimean War, the Anglo-Turkish trade treaty opened the way to the disastrous process of external borrowing and the build-up of the infamous “Ottoman debt”.

Constitution in 1908, hitherto not applied. The third wave was in direct continuation with the Young Turks, the founders of the Turkish Republic, including Mustafa Kemal and the first Kemalists.

D.S.: Was the Turkish Republic designed along the French Republican model?

B.O.: The Turkish Republic was very much influenced by the French Republic in three essential areas: the choice of an assimilationist policy to create the nation, secularism, and the concept of a unitary state. But beyond these similarities, numerous differences may be identified.

Take the assimilationist policy. The French Republic is certainly assimilationist. But the word “French” comes from “Frank” and the Franks were a Germanic tribe which invaded present day France. The name “France” thus has a purely territorial meaning with no ethnic nor religious references. In contrast, in Turkey, the word “Turk” specifically designates a citizen of the Republic, according to Article 66 of the present Constitution. This “Turkish” supra-identity is different from the concept of “French” identity, because there is in fact an ethnic group in Turkey which has an ethnic-religious identity and that is native to Central Asia, carrying the name “Turk”. It is easy to say, “I am French”, because this does not refer to an ethnic group. But saying, “I am Turkish”, has a different resonance. Some people use the term willingly, and others not at all: Kurds do not use it willingly, and nor do non-Muslims. A Turk is not just Turkish: strictly speaking the word refers to Hanafi Sunni Muslim Turks. The Turkish Republic has thus sought to assimilate all its citizens around the concept of being Turkish and has made this into a supra-identity. In France, such supra-identity is purely territorial, while in Turkey it is ethno-religious in nature. You are only really Turkish if you are Muslim and if you call yourself Turkish. And even then, if your ancestors adopted Islam in the 17th century, as was the case of the “Sabataists”,⁴ there is a good chance that you will not be accepted as a “White Turk”, a notion we will return to later.

Furthermore, even if the French Republic is assimilationist and continues to reject the concept of minorities, France has not hesitated, with time, to grant “positive rights” to cultural and linguistic minorities. For example, in 1951, instruction of regional languages was authorised in France.⁵ In Turkey, Kemalists ask why minorities protest against Article 3 of the present Constitution, according to

⁴ In the 17th century, Sabbata Zevi, a Sephardic rabbi from Smyrne (Izmir today) proclaimed himself as the Messiah of the Jewish people and founded the Sabbatean sect. Sultan Mehmed IV forced him to convert to Islam in 1666, leading to the conversion of nearly 300 disciples.

⁵ Law 51-46 of the 11th January 1951 relating to the instruction of local languages and dialects, called the Deixonne Law, was the first law in France which permitted regional languages to be taught.

which “Turkish is the language of the Turkish State”. They recall that the French Constitution similarly declares that “French is the language of the French Republic”. Yet Article 75-1 of the French Constitutions also specifies that “regional languages belong to France’s inheritance”.

Thus, both countries are assimilationist, but in different ways. France seeks to assimilate on a territorial basis, whereas Turkey follows an ethno-religious model, that is unacceptable to many Turkish citizens themselves, and which leads to divisions in the country.

D.S.: What about the notion of secularism in France and Turkey?

B.O.: It is said that Turkey imported secularism from France. But that is not completely accurate, unless reference is made to secularism as it was practiced prior to the 1905 law (separating Church and State), under the regime of the Concordat. The word of course comes from France, but secularism *à la française* is not secularism *alaturka*, which is in fact a secularism made up for controlling religion, organising the guardianship of religion by the State, and not a secularism separating the Mosque and the State. Yet today, all countries more or less follow the example of Western capitalism, and Turkey will also one day reach the point of French secularism as it was conceived of in 1905.⁶ Turkey will then shift from a secularism based on combat or conflict, towards a secularism of reconciliation and compromise. We are truly in the middle of such a transition today. I would note, by the way, that Kemalism made things difficult for itself by not recognising the Alevi specificity and by seeking to “cleanse” the country of non-Muslims. This led to the creation of an enormous, religious, monolithic edifice standing up to the Republic, making the practical implementation of secularism difficult. On the other hand, as Olivier Abel has explained very clearly, France has historically benefited from the division between Catholics and Protestants, which made it easier to move to a secular culture.⁷

⁶ The Law of 1905 relating to the separation of Churches and the State ended the regime of the 1801 Concordat which governed relations between the French government and the Catholic Church and which established the principle of secularism. The Law declares freedom of conscience and freedom of belief. But the Law also ended State compensation of bishops, priests, vicars and rabbis, etc. State intervention in the nomination of bishops ended too. While the State retains ownership of religious property, religious buildings may be handed over gratuitously to non-profit cultural associations, which then have responsibility for their upkeep.

⁷ “For the foundation of secularism lies first of all in the concrete existence of several communities or faiths that are substantially equal in power and prestige, within a country. By reducing this diversity to a mere ritual of national unity, secularism as an ideology has sawn off the branch on which it was seated! It is difficult for secularism to take hold in mono-religious countries, first because by taking on the social function of an opposing

D.S: Do the two countries share the same notion of having a unitary State?

B.O: France and Turkey are of course both unitary States. But what about the application of certain German laws in France, in what was historically Alsace-Moselle? This is typically the Ottoman model: the so-called “Cok Hukukluluk” model with “multiple legal systems”. Several legal systems lived side-by-side in the Ottoman Empire, with different courts. For example, cases concerning commercial law and affecting French persons were tried by the French Consul. Apart from issues of criminal law, Armenians were judged by the Armenian Patriarchate, and the same was true for Jews, for Greeks, etc. – as long as Muslims were not involved of course. Several, parallel legal systems existed. France today has at least two legal systems, that of France and Alsace, to say nothing of European law.

And in terms of a unitary State, what exactly is the status of Corsica, or that of France’s Overseas Territories? The Kemalists were finally wrong in seeing France as a republican, assimilationist, unitary State, with unambiguous secularism. I was criticized for my views on this subject, following the publication of my “Report on Minorities”. Along with my colleague, Professor Ibrahim Kaboğlu, President of the Consultative Council on Human Rights, I was taken to court in 2005. On this occasion, the Public Prosecutor referred to the French system in an abusive manner, turning it into a model for Kemalism. I replied with a long “counter indictment” which surely taught him a few things.⁸

D.S.: Why do the heirs of Kemalism feel the need of extol the French model nowadays?

B.O.: The Kemalist elites actually refer to an outdated France, which existed before World War I and between the Wars. In many areas, they are stuck in the 1930s, the era of real Kemalism, believing that the world is still in this stage. Their model is the French Third Republic, and they are sticking to this abstraction. It is indeed useful for analysing the facts, from their point of view and in their interests. It is convenient for them, and helps them avoid looking at the facts.

D.S.: Are these elites aware of the fact that France is changing?

B.O.: They do not know this. I myself am from the *steel core* of Kemalism, and am only just conscious of these changes. Few people in Turkey understand Kemalism as well as I do. My father was a

religion, secularism itself becomes a quasi-religion...”; O. Abel, « La Condition laïque. Réflexions sur le problème de la laïcité en Turquie et en France », *Cahiers d’Etudes sur la Méditerranée Orientale et le Monde Turco-Iranien* (CEMOTI), no. 19 (Janvier-Juin 1995), p. 43.

⁸ See Baskin Oran’s Internet site:

http://baskinoran.com/belge/Contre_acte_d_accusation_Baskin_Oran.pdf

parliamentary representative of the single party. He was a hard-boiled Kemalist, and a convinced anti-communist. Kemalists today live in ignorance, and they don't know that France has changed. They don't read, don't inform themselves and don't want to know what is going on. They are moved by all sorts of fears: fear that the Islamists would come to power and force their daughters to cover themselves, or that the European Union would provoke a break-up of the country, if the Kurds don't do it... This all follows on from the "Paranoia of Sèvres".⁹ Since the massacres of the Armenians in 1915, the Turks have never sought for any solutions to fundamental problems concerning Armenian, Islamic, Kurdish or Cypriot issues. All these ghosts have been kept in the cupboard, coming to haunt a whole series of fears in present day Turkey, and reinforcing each other. The American socio-psychologist Vamik Volkan, who is of Turkish-Cypriot origin, has developed the concept of a "chosen trauma". According to him, nations are founded on basis of a twofold process of myth construction, drawing on national victories and defeats. Fear ultimately binds people together, rather than common joy. The Kemalists use this.

Apart from this paranoia which is carefully maintained, Kemalists do not want to give up their privileges. These are the privileges of "White Turks", in other words persons who meet all the criteria of being Secular, Hanafi, Sunni, Muslim and Turkish.¹⁰

⁹ The Treaty of Sèvres, which crowned the dismantling of the Ottoman Empire, was signed 10 August 1920. It set out, in particular, the creation of an "autonomous Kurdish territory" (Articles 62 and 64) and an "independent Armenian Republic", as well as the progressive construction of the Kingdom of Greece and certain territories on the Aegean coast, including Smyrne. France and Italy respectively acquired zones of influence in Cilicie and around Adana. The Arab provinces of the Empire were placed under French authority (Lebanon and Syria) or British authority (Iraq and Palestine). The Treaty was never ratified, but revised in 1923 by the Treaty of Lausanne, which fixed the frontiers of the present Turkish State, including Anatolia and western Thrace. The mythology of Sèvres nevertheless continues to feed "an atavistic fear of a new break-up, brought on by foreigners, and which is embodied by minorities living on Turkish soil (Armenians, Greeks, and Kurds)". It is this fear which has been named the "Sèvres syndrome" or the "Paranoia of Sèvres". See D. Schmid, « Introduction », in « Turquie : enjeux internes et choix diplomatiques », *Politique étrangère* 1/2010, (Printemps), p. 10-11.

¹⁰ The expression "White Turk" (Beyaz Türk) was invented by Ufuk Güldemir (a journalist) in his book *Texas Malatya*, Tekin Yayinevi, Istanbul 1992. At the time, the author was describing a fringe of Turkish society that was ill at ease with Turgut Özal's leadership. He was President of the Republic, but had had no military training, and was of Kurdish origin and religious. The expression refers directly to the American concept of White, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant (WASP). It became popular in the 1990s, but has several meanings depending on who is using it. Generally speaking, "White Turk" refers to a westernised elite, which is secular and educated, with Kemalist

D.S: When Turks speak about a Kemalist Republic, what exactly do they mean by Republic? Are they referring to the birth of a political regime or a Turkish Nation-State?

B.O.: Nowadays, Kemalists claim that they want to “protect the Republic”, to “protect the State” in all its component parts. This is a reference to the secular conception of the 1930s, and to everything which I have already said about assimilationist politics, etc. In Turkey, few people refer to the literature on the subject and those taking part in the public debate are a minority. When Kemalist intellectuals express themselves, they often mix up these concepts, either deliberately or not. In particular, they mix up concepts of the unitary State, the Nation-State and the Republic. In reality, the key concept is that of the Nation-State. The rest is mere detail. But what is the Nation-State? Here again, Kemalist intellectuals do not hold very clear ideas. Their view of a Nation-State revolves around the fantasy of a monolithic nation, from an ethnic and religious point of view. As a result, they refuse to recognise sub-identities, which correspond to all the different ethnic and religious groups that actually exist in Turkey. In principle, the State is assimilationist, assimilating non-Turkish Muslims. And when that isn't possible, ethno-religious cleansing of non-Muslims takes place. Why does religion play such an important role in the system? Because the leading component of “national” identity in the Balkans and the Middle East is not ethnic, nor linguistic, but religious. This is a left-over of the “Millet” system established by the Ottomans in 1454.¹¹

D.S.: Is Kemalism in fact a democratic ideology?

B.O.: Things have to be put in their historical context: where did democracy exist in Europe in Atatürk's time? France was prey to Boulangism, then the leagues. Portugal had Salazar, Spain Franco, Poland Pilsudski, Greece Metaxàs, Italy Mussolini, and Germany Hitler. Europe was plagued by with fascism. It is stupid to say that Kemal Atatürk was not a democrat, because there was no democracy in his time. Atatürk copied strictly in Turkey what he saw as “contemporary civilisation”, and at that time, politics in practice was “monistic”. That's Kemalism's greatest problem. During the 1920s and 1930s, Kemalism was a top-down revolution, and ran into resistance from below, especially from religious persons. Today, the grand-

inclinations. See Ö. Öğret, “White Turks, Black Turks and the Grey Debate”, *Hürriyet Daily News*, 22 November 2010.

¹¹ The word *Millet* under the Ottoman Empire referred to religious communities that were legally recognised by the State. The life of each community, whether minorities (*dhimmi*) or Muslims, was thus organised according to a religious order. The Millet system was made up of two parts: the *Millet-i Hakime* (or dominant *Millet*) which brought together all Muslims, and a second *Millet* with much autonomy, but which also corresponded to a sort of second class citizenship.

children of these Kemalists are trying to oppose reforms linked to the process of acceding to the European Union, while the grand-children of the religious reaction of the 1920s and 1930s support pro-European reforms. Today, reaction is no longer religious, it is Kemalist. What the heirs to Kemal have done with the revolution has a depressive impact on Turkey: the fear of ghosts and the loss of privileges.

D.S.: As a Turkish intellectual, how do you view the French Republican model? Do you have the feeling that French institutions are still viable?

B.O.: Yes of course, because France, which was idealised by Kemalists, gives rights to minorities. From this point of view, it is still a model to follow. France still leads in that regard: it did so in the 19th century and still does so today, because France has known how to change. France remains a model for Turkey because it resembles Turkey, and vice-versa. Kemalists then have to discover what this model really contains.

D.S.: What social similarities do you see in France and Turkey, which justify the pertinence of the French “model”?

B.O.: In the past, France was able to struggle against feudalism, monarchy, and the hold of Catholicism. That's why we took it as a model during Atatürk's time. Today, France is a multiethnic society, as well as being pluralist from a religious point of view, as many Muslims live in France. It is a multi-confessional country. France thus continues to be a model for us, not only because France remains ahead, but because France resembles us. I like to think that the Sarkozy period is transitory.

D.S.: Many French people still think that Kemalism saved Turkey. I don't know exactly how Kemalism constructed its image in France, but most of our intellectuals seem to believe that it is the only thing keeping Turkey together still...

B.O.: The elites in both countries are Jacobine and reinforce their Jacobinism respectively. Also, French people don't really know what is going on in Turkey. They don't know about the complexity and richness of Turkey's intellectual landscape. They don't know our great universities, Bilgi or Sabancı. Nor our NGOs and think-tanks. They are not informed about conferences which take place here about the Armenian and Kurdish questions. And today's France is also the France of Sarkozy, and perhaps one can also say that it is the France of Le Pen?

D.S.: French analysts follow the AKP...

B.O.: Yes, but I guess that they are not very comfortable with that. And it must be asked what the AKP actually is. It is a party of quasi-peasants, who are being gentrified day-by-day as they are getting rich fast. True, it remains quite coarse in its thinking, and its doctrine is not linear: they zigzag incredibly, two steps forward, one step back... But couldn't the same thing be said about the EU? In any case, the AKP is not a party of democrats. How do you want them to be so, as its founders are engineers from small, provincial towns? They are pillars of conservatism, in Turkey and the world over. That said, the post-AKP generation will necessarily be democratic. But it will take a generation or two for real change to appear. Albania did not change immediately after the death of its leader, and nor will Cuba or China change quickly. It must be remembered that Turkey's recent history has concentrated in seventy years what Western Europe took four centuries to achieve.

D.S.: But Atatürk has been dead a long time...

B.O.: Certainly, but Kemalism, compared to other nationalisms, has done a lot for Turkey. No other ideology of top-down revolution has succeeded throughout the world as Kemalism has. For example, the Soviets were unable to create "Soviet man", and Mao did not succeed with his Cultural Revolution. Yet these have been the world's most radical revolutions. For all its faults, Kemalism still exists. It continues to exist because it brought to Turks the contemporary civilisation of the 1930s, copying from Europe at the time. The main problem is that today's Kemalists are stubborn: they are still trying to copy Europe of the 1930s, a second time. This is bringing Kemalism to an end, transforming it into an aristocracy which is conservative and destructive. If you like, the AKP is today playing the role played historically by your Protestants, while the CHP (the Kemalist Party) are the Catholics.

D.S.: Does France have an interest in Turkey sticking to its Kemalist certainties? Wouldn't it be easier for France to respect Turkey, or to keep it at a distance if Turkey remains a little reactionary?

B.O.: French people with such attitudes shouldn't get it wrong. It is unthinkable that Turkey stops evolving. It is impossible to put a stop to reform moving towards modernisation and westernization in the age of globalisation, especially if the dominant class is leading it. Up until the 1990s, Turkey's *grande bourgeoisie* or upper class was opposed to reform. That is why it supported the shift towards fascism sparked by the coup d'état on the 12 September 1980. The *grande bourgeoisie* feared the so-called "2 K +1", i.e.: Communism (*Kommunism* in Turkish), Kurdism and Islam. The first fear, of communism, fell away in 1989, while this bourgeoisie progressively

dropped its second fear after the capture of Öcalan in 1999. Only the third fear, of Islam, has remained.

Yet today it is precisely the AKP which is undergoing a new transformation, if not a real metamorphosis. The result is clear to see: in 1995, the TOBB (*Türkiye Odalar ve Borsalar Birliği* – the Union of Chambers of Commodity Exchanges of Turkey), which represents the petty and middle bourgeoisie, commissioned Professor Doğu Ergil to study the “Eastern problem”.¹² Two years later in 1997, Turkey’s main employers’ association the TÜSIAD (*Türk Sanayicileri ve İşadamları Derneği* or the Turkish Industry & Business Association) published a report written by Professor Bülent Taner on “The Outlook for Democratisation in Turkey”. These organisations had to make political gestures because they were unable to sell their products: neither in Eastern Turkey which was in a state of quasi civil war, nor abroad. The “We cannot sell t-shirts with this human rights record” slogan was circulating. Today, the TÜSIAD allows itself to support the prospects of a new democratic constitution, albeit timidly. Timidly because all fears have not yet disappeared, especially concerning Islamists, let’s say former Islamists who have become *nouveaux riches* today.

D.S.: What do you think about the constitutional debate in Turkey? Does the country need a new constitution?

B.O.: A new constitution for Turkey is vital. It is a difficult process, because radical constitutional changes usually take place in the wake of major catastrophes. But it shouldn’t be forgotten that the Kurdish conflict in Turkey has led to nearly 40,000 victims since 1984, without counting earlier losses. And the changing Kurdish attitudes to Turkey also need to be taken into account, since the creation of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in Iraq: they have glimpsed at the possibility of an alternative. Much will depend on how this Iraqi Kurdistan will develop.

In Turkey’s case, I am against using the expression of “opening up on the Kurdish question”, which suggests possible initiatives for resolving the question. I prefer the concept of “democratic opening”, or an “initiative for democracy”, for example. I am also against using the work “Kurd” in the constitution. It will only lead to ethnic nationalism by Turks and revive the Sèvres syndrome. Instead, Turkey has to be able to eliminate all limits to democracy. Adding Kurdish to Turkish as an official language would be a bad idea, as it wouldn’t take into account other minorities. It could almost be considered that they have been penalised for not taking up arms. It would also be a provocation to Turkish nationalism, and it would

¹² D. Ergil, *Doğu sorunu*, TOBB, July 1995. At the time, the report led to very violent reactions, especially in nationalist circles. See in particular, M. Turgut, *Doğu sorunu raporu*, Boğaziçi Yayınları, 1996.

mean losing the opportunity of moving forward in the democratic process together.

On the other hand, Article 3, paragraph 1 of the Constitution which states that “every person linked to the Turkish State by citizenship is Turkish” needs to be changed. Instead, it should refer to “Türkiyeli”, in other words “someone from Turkey”. Kurdish nationalists contest the name “Türkiye” (or Turkey in Turkish) and prefer to talk of the “Republic of Anatolia”, but this would not be historically coherent. Europeans did indeed talk of “Turkey” as of the 16th century. When my father got very angry, he would use the expression “Türkiya”. I used to think he did this because it was easier to make oneself heard by using a strong vowel at the end of a sentence like “a”, rather than “e” or “i”. Now I realise that the word had an Italian, or rather Venetian origin, whereby the Ottoman Empire was referred to as Turchia. This is a historical fact which shouldn't be changed. It would be a provocation to Turks. Symbols should be left untouched: the national anthem, the flag. All symbols must be preserved. But we have to cast aside all limits to democracy. For example, if the official language remains Turkish, it is also necessary to import Article 75-1 of the French Constitution. Municipalities where Kurdish residents are in a majority should be able to decide for themselves if Kurdish is taught in schools alongside Turkish.

D.S.: How should Franco-Turkish relations move forward in your opinion? Do you believe that the position of the French president is a major obstacle to EU membership or is it an epiphenomenon?

B.O.: It is impossible to repara the relationship at present. Two reasons may be given for this, from the French point of view. First, the position of Nicolas Sarkozy and the rise of Islamophobia in France. Nicolas Sarkozy himself isn't really that important, nor more so than was George Bush. But Islamophobia is unlikely to disappear soon: it is as rooted in France as the paranoia of Sèvres is in Turkey. On the Turkish side, the position of Prime Minister Erdoğan is the main obstacle: he strengthens his electoral base as soon as he criticises foreigners. One should not therefore ask for the impossible at present, but contacts must be kept open. And French people should also be helped in understanding democratic advances in Turkey, and the fact that there are two Turkeys, as indeed there were two Frances at the start of the 20th century: the France of the Republican Marianne and the France of the Virgin Mary.

D.S.: According to you, do Europeans really want Turkey to democratise?

B.O.: Europeans want Turkey to democratise because their parents and their grand-parents witnessed a weakened democracy. They want Turkey to evolve like Europe evolved. Europeans would like Turks to experience the same process which their parents

experienced. There are other factors too, obviously. When Turkey will be more democratic, Europeans will trade more with it, travel more as tourists to Turkey, etc. If Turkey resembles Europe, then it will be more attached to Europe. But at the same time, it is normal that there are people in Europe who do not want a democratised Turkey, as it risks joining the EU. Turkey's membership of the EU could dilute the Union's power, as indeed the Anglo-Saxons are seeking. Also, an extreme position is usually incapable of surviving without its extreme opposite: Islamophobia is balanced by the Sèvres syndrome.

D.S.: Has the AKP developed civil liberties in Turkey?

B.O.: Yes, absolutely and for several reasons. First, the AKP needed to import legitimacy via the EU. It had to get rid of the military, and appropriate the superstructure of capitalism in the age of globalisation. Next, the AKP is the antithesis of Kemalism, which merely seeks to return to the 1920s.

But as I have already said, the roots of the founders of the AKP are not democratic. They come from small towns, which are rarely democratic. And they have learnt from the aristocrats of the CHP, from the army and the judges to put pressure on anyone who is different. If the AKP supports religious freedom for Muslims, it denies the right to drink alcohol to others. This is flagrant during Ramadan, when all restaurants in Anatolia are closed! It is impossible to have a beer then, apart from in 5-star hotels, and even then not openly. We have to struggle against this. A few years ago, in the very heart of Istanbul, a luxurious building was sold to private developers committed to building a semi-Olympic swimming pool. But the Board of Directors decided that it would be impossible to allow access to women in bikinis. So the swimming pool was converted into a garden.

The AKP still has a long way to go in learning about democracy. We have to resist all this, within the bounds of democracy and legality of course. We have to demonstrate our disapproval as citizens. But we mustn't ask the army to intervene.

D.S.: So you actually favour a form of civil resistance?

B.O.: Civil resistance and resistance via NGOs, etc. For example, we should bathe in decorative fountains, express our views in the media, go to court, eat bread and cheese in front of restaurants which are closed for Ramadan and in government buildings. We should also commemorate publicly the mourning of all Armenians on 24 April, against the Kemalists. But we will never, never favour military action. Because we have entered into the era of civil society. The old-school CHP strove to smother Islam using the army. For us, the civil society, the army is the worst of all solutions. It is simply the worst thing possible, as the army itself resists change, just at the time when Islamists are undergoing surprisingly rapid change themselves.