
Turkey: the Sèvres syndrome, or the endless war

Dorothee SCHMID

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Ifri
27, rue de la Procession
75740 Paris Cedex 15 – FRANCE
Tél. : +33 (0)1 40 61 60 00
Fax : +33 (0)1 40 61 60 60
Email : accueil@ifri.org

Ifri-Bruxelles
Rue Marie-Thérèse, 21
1000 – Bruxelles – BELGIQUE
Tél. : +32 (0)2 238 51 10
Fax : +32 (0)2 238 51 15
Email : info.bruxelles@ifri.org

Website : ifri.org

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Editor: Dorothee Schmid

Author

Dorothee Schmid is a graduate of Sciences Po (Paris Institute of Political Studies) and holds a PhD in political science from Paris II (Pantheon-Assas University). She joined Ifri in 2002 as a specialist on EU policies in the Mediterranean region and the Middle East. Since 2008, Ms Schmid has run Ifri's Turkey programme, which focuses on internal politics in Turkey, the re-emergence of Turkish diplomacy, political transition and power relationships in the Middle East. She has worked as a consultant for several public bodies, NGOs and private companies. Ms Schmid appears regularly in the French and international media.

Abstract

For Turks, the Treaty of Sèvres symbolises the dissolution of the empire and the carving up of Turkey by foreign powers. The historic effect of the treaty survives as a syndrome, which explains the vision of a nation under siege struggling for survival. Apart from the current neo-Ottomanism, a reconsidered dialogue with Europe could perhaps provide the country with a new relationship with its history and help it move beyond a syndrome used by all sections of its political class.

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Introduction

This paper is the translation of Dorothee Schmid's article published in French in Ifri's journal Politique étrangère n°2014-1, special edition for the First World War Centenary.

The First World War divided Europe from Turkey. This much is clear, while the commemoration of its centenary brings the Western European nations together in memory of a historical disaster which led to other eventually unifying events, for its part, Turkey conforms to a similar account: that of the birth of the modern Turkish nation from a defeated Ottoman empire. The nationalist impulse remains strong and in 2015 Turkey will celebrate the battle of the Dardanelles more than it will mark the memory of the Armenian genocide.

Nevertheless, history is being cast off in the country nowadays against a background of endless questioning about identity. The factory of history has produced a positive, integrative narrative throughout the xxth century, overcoming the nightmare of the end of the Empire, sorting and putting events in order since the foundation of the Republic. However, faults are appearing here and there, and debates are unfolding about a past waiting to be discovered by many. Thus, questioning is emerging on an ongoing and founding historical theme of the modern Turkish collective consciousness: the Treaty of Sèvres, whose one-sided clauses were imposed on the Empire in 1920 by the victorious countries. A phantom treaty, replaced in 1923 by the Treaty of Lausanne, but which remains the starting point of a reflex of fear among Turks: the dread of betrayal and fear, commonly referred to by the expression "Sèvres syndrome."

The infinite variations of Turkish political rhetoric around the subject of Sèvres now seem considerably anachronistic, and increasingly out of touch with the actual power balance, both regionally and in Turkey itself. The initial trauma, which was never overcome, and the memory of which was cultivated by successive political generations, perpetuates an obsession with security in Turkey. The survival of the syndrome and its tactical exploitation by some players in the government system are ultimately indicative of obstacles to Turkish democracy, which for a long time was confined in a paranoid self-segregation.

The First World War as seen by Turkey

The First World War left a particular imprint on Turkey, which is recorded for the Turks in a *continuum* of confrontations of several decades with the European powers and which continued until 1922. The Republic of Turkey, born from a reforming "war of independence", is the paradoxical winner of a war which ended the Empire.

Choosing its side

When it entered the First World War on the side of the Triple Alliance, the Ottoman Empire, which had been at war continuously against the national offensives of its provinces, was already very weak. Referred to as the "sick man of Europe" in 1853 by Tsar Nicolas Ist; it disintegrated under the anxious and interested eyes of the major European powers. The Young Turks of the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), which took power in 1908, hastened the disaster by trying to restore an authoritarian centralism, and the two Balkan wars of 1912 and 1913 had the effect of breaking off what remained of the Balkans from the Empire. Hence, before the war, the Turks had lost almost all of European Turkey and they only kept eastern Thrace to the west of the straits.

This accelerated contraction of Ottoman territory was alarming and it had serious consequences: large-scale massacres hastened the return of hundreds of thousands of Muslims from the Balkans to Anatolia and influenced the balance of power. The spectre of final dismantlement emerged and the melting-pot of Turkish nationalism was at boiling point. Therefore, it was under conditions of extreme weakness and high volatility that the Empire entered into the great conflict of European imperialism in November 1914.

Which side should it be on? The history of its European friendships was full of reversals¹, and the CUP was divided, but the

¹. For the detailed and complex relationships between the European and Ottoman powers, see J.-F. Solnon, *Le Turban et la Stamboulina. L'Empire ottoman et*

main enemy at this time was Russia, which precipitated the fall of the Balkans and coveted the Bosphorus and Dardanelles straits. The ambitions of France and Great Britain in the Middle East posed another threat and their financial control brought the Empire economically to its knees. Germany, which was responsible for modernising the Ottoman army, appeared as the only natural friend. It was a CUP driven by an expansionist nationalist dream, now turned towards central Asia and anxious to consolidate its power, which initiated hostilities against Russia.

The war would only be a series of disasters for the Turks, with the exception of the Battle of the Dardanelles. Their heroic resistance at Gallipoli, as demonstrated by Lieutenant-Colonel Kemal Atatürk then promoted to "pasha" (general) probably delayed the end of the conflict by two years for the Entente - partly explaining the extreme severity of the conditions imposed at the end of the war. The attempted extermination of the Armenians from 1915 also earned the Ottomans opprobrium. In the autumn of 1918, the collapse of Bulgaria opened up the way to eastern Thrace for the French and the Ottoman army surrendered unconditionally in October in Moudros harbour. The CUP dissolved itself and its *leaders* Enver, Djemal and Talaat Pacha went into exile, but the war continued. The Greeks, who took Smyrna, launched an assault on Anatolia; the Italians and French seized entire regions in the south; and the surviving Armenians tried to consolidate their presence in the Caucasus and to resettle in Cilicia. In March 1920, Istanbul was occupied by the French and the British. The last Ottoman Sultan, Mehmet VI, chose to co-operate with the Allies and resigned in August on signing the Treaty of Sèvres.

Sèvres, final stage of the loss

The Treaty of Sèvres imposed exceptionally harsh treatment on the Ottomans. Its initial intention was really to punish them for their participation in the war and the crimes committed, but it was also intended to satisfy Franco-British ambitions in the east. Taner Akçam considers that it also endorsed the definitive rejection of the Turks from Europe and belatedly avenged the fall of Constantinople².

The Empire was dismembered and its territories changed hands. The Arab provinces came under British (Palestine, Jordan, and Iraq) and French (Syria, Lebanon) rule. The remaining territory was divided into zones of influence among the occupying powers: France, Italy and Greece. The fate of the minorities, which had been

l'Europe, XVI^e-XX^e siècles, affrontement et fascination réciproques, Paris, Perrin, 2009.

². T. Akçam, "The Treaties of Sèvres and Lausanne: An Alternative Perspective", in *From Empire to Republic: Turkish Nationalism and the Armenian Genocide*, London and New York, Zed Books, 2004, p. 180-207.

of concern to the European powers since the XIXth century, was widely addressed. The protection of Turkish Christians was ensured. Above all, the application of the principle of nationalities and the right of people to self-determination was imposed in relation to the fledgling Republic of Armenia, created from the collapse of the Russian Empire, and part of the Armenian areas of Anatolia. For their part, the Kurds obtained an "autonomous region" in the south-east of Anatolia.

Freedom of movement was imposed in the straits, which were demilitarised and administered by an international Commission. Turkey was commanded to hand over its fleet and to reduce its army to 15 000 men and 35 000 policemen. The defeat was also applied from an economic point of view: Capitulations, which were abolished at the start of the war, were extended to all of the victors and the Turkish finances and administration came under Anglo-Franco-Italian control.

Therefore, Sèvres ended the Empire thoroughly from a territorial, national, material and symbolic point of view.

The national revival: Turkey, the paradoxical victor

The Allies, who seem to have overlooked the importance of the Turkish nationalist movement, fairly quickly realised their inability to apply the treaty (which would never be ratified) and some of them called for its revision. Indeed, the severity of the clauses of Sèvres was what rallied a large part of Turkish population and most of the Kurdish notables to Mustafa Kemal, who had formed a resistance. It was "continued war, repeated war"³: from May 1919 to July 1923, the Turkish nationalists fought both against the Sultan who had betrayed the Empire, the Republic of Armenia, which came under the control of the new Soviet government and would have to return 60% of the territory acquired to the Turks in the Treaty of Kars, and against the European armies of occupation.

The French and Italians withdrew fairly quickly, but the reconquest was longer against the Greek forces. It ended in September 1922 with the capture of Smyrna and the burning of the city. Kemal, who gained the title Gazi (the victorious) in the operation, was also able to impose a more favourable settlement for Turkey on the former victors: the Treaty of Lausanne, signed on 24 July 1923, which definitely marked the end of the First World War. It granted

³. S. Audoin-Rouzeau et C. Prochasson, introduction of the book published under their supervision, *Sortir de la Grande Guerre. Le monde et l'après-1918*, Paris, Tallandier, 2008, p. 18.

Turkey full sovereignty and guaranteed its territorial unity: the borders have not moved since then, except for the incorporation of the Sanjak of Alexandretta, handed over by the French in 1938.

While the fate of the Arab provinces and the Dodecanese (which became Italian) was unchanged, practically all the other clauses of the Treaty of Sèvres were corrected. This was the end of the Allies' control on Turkish finances and armed forces, the end of the Capitulations, the abolition of the demilitarised zone around the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles, which however remained open to international traffic. There was no further mention of Armenia or Kurdistan. The third section of the treaty established the rights and protection of minorities, and was defined on a purely religious criterion: Armenians, Greeks, and Jews. Massive population exchanges were arranged between Greece and Turkey to ensure demographic homogeneity of the areas.

The Turks emerged as the victors from almost more than ten years of continuous war, but their victory was obviously paradoxical: the Ottoman Empire was really dead and Turkey was absolutely exhausted. Above all, the Sèvres effect persists: its consequences would be tremendous. The Treaty of Versailles paved the way for Nazi barbarism and resulted in the Second World War, and the Treaty of Trianon rallied the Hungarians to Nazi Germany in a revisionist hope. The Turks obtained the correction of the treaty deemed as unfair, but Lausanne did not efface Sèvres from the collective memory. Hungary has its own "Trianon syndrome"⁴; Turkey would have its "Sèvres syndrome", except that Sèvres was not implemented. With the Europeans expelled from the area, the Treaty of Sèvres continues to demonstrate their destructive intentions with regard to the Turks. Sèvres, a phantom treaty, replicates the effect of a "phantom limb" in Turkey: the collective suffering continues and the possible repetition of the 1920 disaster haunts the Turks.

Turkey was built between pride in the national victory and the absolute trauma of the actual and imagined loss of the Empire. Kemal, who became Atatürk (the father of the Turks), established the new country in a contradictory double movement of political closure to Europe and accelerated westernisation of institutions and customs. Turkey was camped on the threshold of a continent which would sink again; it repeatedly saw the events which it turned away from in an elaborately maintained nightmare.

⁴. K. Gerner, "Between the Holocaust and Trianon – Historical Culture in Hungary", in M.L. Davies and C.-C. W. Szejnmann (dir.), *How the Holocaust Looks Now: International Perspectives*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, p. 97-106.

Extension of the scope of Sèvres: Turkey as hostage

It was the momentum of the patriotic war which saved Turkey. For a long time, nationalism was the main political resource of a country on the alert. Despite the fundamental shift in the parameters which dictated the Treaty of Sèvres, its memory preserved an entire series of protective reflexes which gradually lost all connection with reality. Therefore, "Sèvres syndrome" keeps Turkey in a very specific system of isolation.

Appearance and versions of Sèvres syndrome

Hamit Bozarslan summarised the triple disaster which underpinned the Kemalist reaction from 1919 in this way: invasion by foreigners; betrayal by the Christian minorities; and betrayal by the Ottoman elite themselves⁵. The national narrative which ensued – brilliantly exemplified by the *Nutuk*, the lengthy speech made by the *Gazi* before the Turkish parliament in October 1927 – incorporated these elements according to a simple historic line to derive a political vision that both regenerated and protected the country. Forced modernisation, state control, cultural homogenisation, and exaltation of the national Turkish character were the foundation of the Kemalist progressive utopia. Perhaps it only differed from the fascist ideologies of its time on one point: it was not imperialist. The paradox of the Sèvres-Lausanne pair remained. Indeed, it was the folly of the Empire which gave rise to Turkish resistance.

The very specific emotional matrix of the post-war period that moreover was found in Europe interacted with the Kemalist ideological framework to produce the "Sèvres syndrome". The memory of the disaster of 1919 bred the fear of other losses and the overriding obsession of defending the new borders. The fear of seeing Turkish territory broken up again to satisfy Western imperialist aims became the collective obsession. So, the syndrome consolidated the Turkish sense of belonging, by constantly calling on them to defend the endangered Fatherland against the invader.

⁵. H. Bozarslan, « Empire ottoman, Turquie, monde arabe: de la fin de la guerre à la fin de l'Empire », in S. Audoin-Rouzeau et C. Prochasson, *op. cit.*, p. 329.

Whilst it is difficult to locate the exact origin of the term "Sèvres syndrome", which has passed into everyday language in Turkey and is even the subject of opinion polls⁶, the time of its appearance and its historic development have been meticulously documented by the Turkish-American historian Fatma Müge Göçek⁷. She describes the gradual shift from an original fear rooted in historic reality to a largely paranoid belief system in Kemalist Turkey, which continues to the present day by changing marginally.

Identification and designation of the enemy are at the heart of the process. The expression of this syndrome can be seen in all accusations brought nowadays against foreign pressure, which are still regularly made by politicians, the army or some intellectuals, who recall past sufferings or warn against "a new Sèvres"⁸. Minorities, combined with Western Europeans and Russia, in their undermining efforts, may still turn into the enemy within; the Ottoman culture and its tradition of diversity, which brought ruin to the Turks, are viewed as suspicious...

The foreigner is really the main character in this obsession. Its definition – broad – has evolved in the xxth century, taking the new international balance of powers into account, and particularly the internal balance of powers. The foreign enemy is the West, taken in an increasingly broader sense, starting from the core of European powers actually more involved in the final disintegration of the Empire and the Sèvres affair - Britain, France and Greece. Soviet Russia, an occasional ally in the 20s, would be included with the Cold War in the spectrum of threats. The United States is often associated with it, particularly when it supports the Kurds in the Middle East. The European Union (EU) is nowadays regularly accused of wanting to dismantle Turkey by supporting hypothetical Armenian or Kurdish territorial claims. As for the enemy within, the "fifth column" initially recruits among the minorities acknowledged in the Treaty of Lausanne: Armenians and Greeks above all, and Jews more recently; the Kurds joined the list of traitors to the Fatherland when their fight for social recognition turned to conflict – the insurgency led by the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) against the Turkish state from 1984 definitely placed them on the dark side of the narrative.

⁶. Opinion poll "Measurement of the Sèvres syndrome", conducted by the International Republican Institute in December 2006, quoted by L. Hovsepyan in *The Fears of Turkey: Manifestations of the "Sèvres Syndrome" in Turkey's Socio-Political Discourse*, Erevan, Yerevan Information and Public Relation Center, 2012, p. 42.

⁷. Interview with Fatma Müge Göçek, January 2014; see her book *The Transformation of Turkey: Redefining State and Society From the Ottoman Empire To the Modern Era*, London and New York, I.B. Tauris, 2011, particularly the chapter "Why Is There Still a 'Sevres Syndrome'? An Analysis of Turkey's Uneasy Association with the West", p. 98-185.

⁸. L. Hovsepyan identifies very comprehensively the circumstances in which the treaty is still expressly mentioned in Turkish public rhetoric; *art. cit.*

The fear of border changes in favour of the Armenians or Kurds comes directly out of the relevant clauses in Sèvres. However, the perception of the country's outlines also shows the ambiguity of a syndrome which still hesitates between a defensive and offensive position: hence, regularly published maps sketch a "greater Turkey", which may reinstate the Iraqi provinces of Mosul and Kirkuk or reclaim territory in present-day Armenia⁹. The Turkish occupation of the northern part of Cyprus after 1974 also allows for this territory to be combined with Turkey according to an ethnic criterion (the presence of Turkish Cypriots): denouncing the partition of Cyprus is putting the integrity of Turkey in danger...

The syndrome changes and is thus extended as circumstances change, experiencing significant outbreaks in times of tension or geopolitical restructuring. After the Second World War, Turkey was tormented by the fear of potential claims on its borders at the instigation of the USSR. The political upheavals caused by the fall of the Berlin Wall later awakened these concerns. In 2003, Turkey was concerned that the American intervention in Iraq might revive Kurdish secessionism. The Syrian crisis is now bringing attention to the Middle Eastern borders resulting from the Sykes-Picot Agreement in 1916 and is further fuelling the fear of a new Sèvres.

Handing over the syndrome

As in any paranoid process, the recurring designation of new enemies can make real enemies. A critical trend covered by academics generally working outside of Turkey, is now analysing these collective obsessions, and challenges the systematic interpretation of any political reality through the perspective of the Sèvres disaster. And if Taner Akçam or Fatma Göcek runs the risk of being placed in the "renegade" camp, it is because they take stock of the obstructions caused by the prevalence of the syndrome in Turkish political culture.

The historical investigation about this syndrome starts from the standard question: "Who benefits from this crime?" And the resulting answer more fully reflects the sociology of power than geopolitics. Surprised by the persistence and increasingly anachronistic nature of the syndrome, historians are exploring the avenue of its social usefulness. They confirm that its dissemination in the collective consciousness was initially attributable to the Kemalists, who dominated the system of government in Turkey for a long time: they have intentionally maintained and handed down the Sèvres syndrome to successive generations of Turks, particularly through education - since Turkey is a country where children learn at primary

⁹. L. Hovsepyan describes a "war of maps": *art. cit.*, p. 31-39.

school that they are surrounded by "three seas and four enemies"¹⁰. The systematic structuring of public debate on the subject of the threat has done the rest.

In fact, Fatma Göçek characterises three consolidation stages of the syndrome, corresponding to the three development stages – implicitly of deterioration – of the Kemalist ideology. The issue appears during the period of "orthodox Kemalism", even during the lifetime of Atatürk, while the war was still a recent memory and the suffering associated with it very present. Then came the turn of "guardian Kemalism", where the military controlled the government to maintain and defend Kemal's political legacy; the syndrome rooted in Turkish society, is increasingly out of touch with the facts, and provides new points of fixation. The third period approximately covers the last two decades: it is the period of "heterodox Kemalism", where ultra-nationalist groups are redefining Kemalism according to their own interests, defending a vision of Turkey increasingly isolated from the world. The military and parties of the extreme right, such as the MHP (Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi, the Nationalist Action Party) are always in this group and are the most effective at conveying the syndrome.

The contagion is indeed very wide: over time the subject of Sèvres has become broadly cross-party, with the Islamists using it on occasion. When Turkey concluded a customs union with the EU in 1996, Necmettin Erbakan, *leader* of Refah Partisi (the Welfare Party), a forerunner of the AKP currently in power (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, Justice and Development Party), stated that the agreement would have the same consequences as the Treaty of Sèvres and the *Tanzimat*, the edicts for modernisation issued by the Ottoman sultans from 1839, and which were deemed to have brought ruin on the Empire. Therefore, he called for a war of liberation to be undertaken¹¹.

Indeed often, Sèvres syndrome doubles as a "*Tanzimat* syndrome": the fear of reforms imposed on Turkey by foreign powers, as they were on an Ottoman Empire practically subject to European demands from the middle of the XIXth century. For Baskin Oran, who talks about "Sèvres paranoia", these different syndromes are defensive reflexes, which have developed in Turkey in periods of accelerated modernisation. The pro-European reforms of the last 15 years may be reminiscent of the abrupt Kemalist changes of the 1920s, reviving an atavistic sense of insecurity. Sèvres syndrome is therefore conservative: the obsession of the social forces which support it, is to keep their place in the existing distribution of power,

¹⁰. T. Jossieran, « Turquie: repenser l'Empire. La nouvelle politique étrangère turque », *Diploweb*, 16 September 2011, available at <www.diploweb.com/Turquie-repenser-l-Empire.html>.

¹¹. Quoted by L. Hovsepyan, *art. cit.*, p. 50.

starting from a decision-making core group of "white Turks" – "beyaz Türk"¹².

The isolated country

Sèvres syndrome forces Turkish political culture to be isolated. This deteriorated Kemalist survival ideology has extensively contaminated the political arena, up to the point of practically sterilising it, and largely explains the difficulty of democratic progress in Turkey. Indeed, it consolidates an invasive security culture, keeping the country in a permanent state of emergency which warrants loss of liberty and abuses.

The most obvious harm relates to how the minorities are perceived and treated. The enemies of Turkey are inevitably defined by ethnic or religious criteria: non-Turks or non-Muslims. The Kurds, who are not a minority in the sense of the Treaty of Lausanne, suffered ongoing ostracism between two episodes of repression. The Armenians are under surveillance, especially the efforts of the diaspora for Armenian Genocide Recognition which are considered as a plot intended to disparage Turkey and ultimately to obtain border adjustments. Many Turks see themselves as victims in this context¹³.

Fear is a formidable tool of social domestication. The worry inspired by actual events is collected here by the State, which is responsible for accurately defining the threats and then organising resistance. In Turkey, the State which saved the nation from planned disappearance by the Europeans, has the task of ensuring the safety of its citizens before worrying about their welfare; submission to its will is a moral and social duty. Sèvres syndrome is here made into Stockholm syndrome: the remarkable tolerance of Turkish society with regard to repressive practices stems from long-term education for the extended demands of reasons of state. It should be remembered that the country has experienced four military coups d'état, committed in fairly different circumstances, but always with the pretext of protecting the nation from the danger of dissolution fomented by enemies within and helped by obscure foreign powers. The National Security Council (Milli Güvenlik Kurulu, MGK), the body through which the military controlled the actions of the civil governments up to 2003, may be seen as an institutionalisation of Sèvres syndrome.

¹². An expression which corresponds to an American "WASP". B. Oran specifies these conservatives more specifically as "LAHASUMUT": LAypeople, HAnafi rite, of SUnni origin, MUslims and Turks; in *Franco-Turkish Visions of a Republic, interview with Baskin Oran*, Paris, Ifri, 2011, «Note franco-turque», No. 6.

¹³. Erevan, interviews at the sidelines of Turkish-Armenian dialogue workshop, October 2009.

Indeed, the recurring mention of Sèvres radiates through Turkish political life with its irrationality; it trivialises the practices of manipulation and breeds chronic belief in conspiracy theories. The practice of blaming every political or economic crisis on non-Turkish elements is part of the Sèvres tradition. The Prime Minister, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who has been fighting against rising protests since 2013, even conforms to it when he accuses "foreign powers" of destabilising the country¹⁴.

In foreign policy, Sèvres syndrome acts as a nationalist stimulant, and above all prevents any healthy relationship with the European Union. The EU, a threatening supranational political form in itself for a militant nation-state, is constantly suspected of wanting to break up Turkey by promoting minorities' rights. The westernised, liberal Kemalist elites, who in theory support the European perspective, in reality nurture very contradictory feelings about it. This deeply embedded distrust is an internal check to membership¹⁵.

¹⁴. N. Hakikat, «Rattrapé par les affaires, Erdoğan dénonce une conspiration contre la Turquie», *Le Figaro*, 30 December 2013.

¹⁵. This distrust is perfectly described in the documentary account *The Ferryman of Istanbul*, by Irene Van der Linde and Nicole Segers, Paris, Éditions Noir sur Blanc, 2013.

Bypassing, extending, or moving beyond Sèvres: the Turkish dilemma

The exploitation of the syndrome for tactical purposes has become so commonplace a practice in Turkey that it can be talked about as a political tradition. However to cure the obsession, it is not enough to expose it: it is necessary to understand the weaknesses which make it possible.

The syndrome and disease

The "optimist" interpretation of Sèvres syndrome simply considers it as a social habit¹⁶. Fatma Göçek states that meanwhile with the end of the Cold War, which freed Turkey from the burden of the Soviet threat, the syndrome has become a "disease". It may be considered that the particularly unstable post-"Arab Spring" environment of the Middle East is objectively conducive to an outbreak of this syndrome. Did some Turkish commentators not raise the strange assumption of responsibility of the British and French in the conduct of North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) operations in 2011 in Libya - as a harbinger of a new Sykes-Picot¹⁷?

The pathological path leads us towards psychiatry to understand and cure the problem - or at least towards psychoanalysis, which had specifically found a singular area of study in war neuroses from the First World War. From the clinical descriptions of the time provided by Freud or Ferenczi¹⁸, Sèvres syndrome could easily be characterised as a form of anxiety neurosis appearing after an extreme traumatic shock in this case collectively – a series of continuous wars, fall of the Empire, the forced birth of modern Turkey. A shift occurs that then leads to greater or lesser

¹⁶. This point of view is developed by Dietrich Jung in the article "The Sèvres Syndrome: Turkish Foreign Policy and its Historical Legacies", *American Diplomacy*, August 2003, available at <www.unc.edu/depts/diplomat/archives_roll/2003_07-09/jung_sevres/jung_sevres.html>.

¹⁷. Y. Kanli (cf. note 20), "New Sykes-Picot Deal?", *Hürriyet Daily News*, 27 March 2011.

¹⁸. S. Freud, S. Ferenczi et K. Abraham, *Sur les névroses de guerre*, choix de textes, Paris, Payot, 2010.

strange obsessional fixations. The American sociopsychologist Vamik Volkan, of Turkish Cypriot origin, who has been trying for several decades to decipher the strata of the national psyche, argues that nations are founded on the mythologising process of a "selected trauma"¹⁹. Describing reconciliation workshops that he conducted in the 1990s in post-soviet societies, he let drop a sentence in the course of an interview, whose resonance seems obvious: "We knew that the collapse of an empire is a horrid thing - whether we like it or not"²⁰. From this collapse, identity construction processes emerged which produced new conflicts.

Yet it is admitted that the described behaviour is partly delusional. In Turkey itself, it is difficult to suggest that it is the impossibility of moving beyond the events which poses problems. It is essential to realise the fundamental weaknesses that it shows in order to overcome the syndrome. Turkey has experienced a perpetual identity crisis, because its post-Ottoman value system, which tacks simple explanations onto a complex human and social reality concentrated in the extreme by the territorial losses incurred, is full of contradictions. The closed relationship with authority which is found nowadays provides a form of paradoxical reassurance for Turkish society²¹.

The Neo-Ottoman path: bypassing Sèvres or moving beyond it

The *Ottomania* which has recently seized Turkey is sometimes presented as a step towards healing the syndrome²². It is accompanied by the ambitious vision of Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu's foreign policy. He wants to restore to Turkey its rightful place in the world, by relying on the mobilising power of the Moslem identity in areas which were once controlled by the Empire (Middle East and Balkans) and beyond (Africa and Asia). Advocating a *soft power* of reconciliation, Davutoğlu wants to forget the defeat of the First World War and to minimise the Kemalist reconquest; he believes that the solution would finally make Sèvres forgotten and not surpass it²³. The Minister sees the divisions inherited from Sèvres as a pure invention of the West, which has imposed its obsession with ethnic and

¹⁹. V.D. Volkan, "Chosen Trauma, The Political Ideology of Entitlement and Violence", Berlin Meeting, 10 June 2004, available at <www.vamikvolkan.com>.

²⁰. "Putting Enemies on the Couch: Vamik Volkan's Unofficial Diplomacy", *The University of Virginia Magazine*, Spring 2007.

²¹. Fatma Göçek documents that the State and society "remain immune to their insecurities"; *op. cit.*, p. 110.

²². Interview, Özgür Ünlühisarcıklı, GMF Ankara, September 2013.

²³. J. Pilch, "Turkey's Recent National Role Conceptions and Shifts in its Foreign Policy", Master's dissertation, Budapest, 2012, p. 24, available at <www.etd.ceu.hu/2012/pilch_jakub.pdf>.

religious differences on Turkey. The objective is *on the contrary* to rebuild national pride based on a consensual continuum between Turkey and its regional environment – the well-known "zero problems with the neighbours" which dissolves all the barriers erected by republican Turkey.

By updating the myth – at least partially – of the multicultural and tolerant Empire, however Davutoğlu denies the constant use made by the Ottomans of religion and ethnicity as a tool for managing the Empire and the power of their nationalism. The fiction of the model imposed still prevents Sèvres from being integrated as a moment of Turkish development in itself. Worse, the neo-Ottoman manoeuvres of the AKP *ultimately* reinforce the paranoia of some Kemalist observers, who consider reviving the past will inevitably result in ... a new Sèvres²⁴.

Indeed in many respects, the AKP's Ottoman passion actually overtakes the appetite of the traditional Turkish political class for manipulating history. However, it is finally a change in the relationship with history which could open up the game. The constant reassessment of the past firstly deprives Turkey of any vision of the future. Far from appearing as a projection into the future, the repetition of the Republic's centenary, which will be celebrated in 2023, like a mantra instead effectively, ensures the outlook is blocked by a return to its origins – the celebration of the heroic 1920s, etc.

However, Sèvres syndrome especially reveals a partial relationship administered by memory, which consolidates obstructions of any kind and voluntary isolation. Hence, Olivier Abel explains the impossible dialogue with the Armenian diaspora by the methodological distance which separates the two parties, the strength of the Turkish national historiography colliding with the intimate memories of the events of 1915 cultivated by the survivors' families. The author asks if , "Turkish society can [...] shatter the rhetoric of amnesia without exploding into pieces itself, without losing the cornerstone of its identity²⁵". An endeavour doubtlessly vital to finally moving beyond Sèvres; F.Göçek rightly suggests an urgent study of historical contextualisation. A study which could be used usefully in a dialogue with Europe – to reach a shared narrative of the First World War and to put an end to the war 100 years later.

²⁴. L. Hovsepyan, *art. cit.*, p. 62.

²⁵. O. Abel, " Le conflit des mémoires. Débris ottomans et Turquie contemporaine", *Esprit*, n° 1, 2001, p. 124-139.