

The Treaty of Sevres

The Treaty of Sèvres was signed on August 10th 1920 after more than fifteen months was spent on drawing it up. Great Britain, Italy and France signed it for the victorious Allies. Russia was excluded from the process and by 1920 America had withdrawn into a policy of isolation.

Britain and France had already decided what would happen to the area generally referred to as the 'Middle East'. Britain took effective possession and control of Palestine while France took over Syria, Lebanon and some land in southern Anatolia. East and West Anatolia were declared areas of French influence. This had already been decided some three years before the Treaty of Sèvres in the secret Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1917. Britain also took over Iraq and was given very generous oil concessions there via the British-controlled Turkish Petroleum Company, later renamed the Iraq Petroleum Company.

The Kingdom of Hejaz was given formal international recognition as an independent kingdom, with Mecca and Medina as its most important cities. Armenia was recognized as a separate sovereign state. Smyrna was put under effective control of Greece, and also gave the people of Smyrna the chance of a plebiscite (vote) on whether they wished to join Greece as opposed to remaining in the Ottoman Empire. This plebiscite would be overseen by the League of Nations. The Dardanelles Straits was made an international waterway with the Ottoman Empire having no control over it. Certain ports near to Constantinople were declared "free zones" as they were deemed to be of international importance.

The Treaty of Sèvres failed to deal with the issue of a Kurdistan. There was an initial agreement on the boundaries of a Kurdistan but nationalist Kurds rejected this as it failed to include a region called Van. The issue ended with some Kurds living in Turkey where they were deemed by the government there as being Turks and some in northwest Iraq where they were deemed to be Iraqis.

Like the other defeated Central Powers, the Ottoman Empire had military restrictions imposed on it. The Ottoman Army was limited to 50,000 men. An air force was forbidden and the navy was limited to thirteen boats – six schooners and seven torpedo boats. The Treaty of Sèvres also contained clauses that allowed the Allies to supervise these military terms.

The financial consequences of the Treaty of Sèvres equaled those of the Treaty of Versailles in terms of severity; however, the new Weimar Germany was allowed to run her own economy – though the terms of Versailles obviously impacted this. The Ottoman Empire had the control of its finances and economy taken away from her and handed over to the Allies. This included the control over imports and exports and control over financial regulations. The Allies controlled even debt repayments. The Ottoman Empire was also forbidden from having any economic collaboration with Germany, Austria, Hungary and Bulgaria and all the economic assets of these four states were liquidated within the Ottoman Empire.

The Grand Vizier, Ahmed Pasha, of the Empire planned to ratify the Treaty of Sèvres but was faced with a rebellion by the Turkish nationalist leader Mustafa Kemal. Pasha's defeat meant that Kemal refused to sign the Treaty of Sèvres, which he viewed as unacceptable with regards to its terms that directly impacted Turkey. Kemal believed that the leaders of the Ottoman Empire had taken the people of Turkey into World War One and that the Turkish people should not be punished for the actions of their former leaders. His stand meant that the victorious Allies and the newly created Turkey had to start treaty negotiations afresh.