

S E C T I O N   V I I

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Covering Letter of President Wilson  
to the Supreme Council and  
Arbitral Decision of President Wilson.

The President  
of the Supreme Council  
of the Allied Powers.

Mr. President:

By action of the Supreme Council taken on April 26th of this year an invitation was tendered to me to arbitrate the question of the boundaries between Turkey and the new state of Armenia. Representatives of the powers signatory on August 10th of this year to the Treaty of Sèvres have acquiesced in conferring this honor upon me and have signified their intention of accepting frontiers which are to be determined by my decision, as well as any stipulations which I may prescribe as to access for Armenia to the sea and any arrangements for the demilitarization of Turkish territory lying along the frontier thus established. According to the terms of the arbitral reference set forth in Part III, Section 6, Article 89, of the Treaty of Sèvres, the scope of the arbitral competence assigned to me is clearly limited to the determination of the frontiers of Turkey and Armenia in the Vilayets of Erzerum, Trebizond, Van and Bitlis. With full consciousness of the responsibility placed upon me by your request, I have approached this difficult task with eagerness to serve the best interests of the Armenian people as well as the remaining inhabitants, of whatever race or religious

belief they may be, in this stricken country, attempting to exercise also the strictest possible justice toward the populations, whether Turkish, Kurdish, Greek or Armenian, living in the adjacent areas.

In approaching this problem it was obvious that the existing ethnic and religious distribution of the populations in the four vilayets could not, as in other parts of the world, be regarded as the guiding element of the decision. The ethnic consideration, in the case of a population originally so complexly intermingled, is further beclouded by the terrible results of the massacres and deportations of Armenians and Greeks, and by the dreadful losses also suffered by the Moslem inhabitants through refugee movements and the scourge of typhus and other diseases. The limitation of the arbitral assignment to the four vilayets named in Article 89 of the Treaty made it seem a duty and an obligation that as large an area within these vilayets be granted to the Armenian state as could be done, while meeting the basic requirements of an adequate natural frontier and of geographic and economic unity for the new state. It was essential to keep in mind that the new state of Armenia, including as it will a large section of the former Armenian provinces of Transcaucasian Russia, will at the outset have a population about equally divided between Moslem and Christian elements and of diverse racial and tribal relationship. The citizenship of the Armenian Republic will, by the tests of language and religion,

be composed of Turks, Kurds, Greeks, Kizilbashis, Lazes and others, as well as Armenians. The conflicting territorial desires of Armenians, Turks, Kurds and Greeks along the boundaries assigned to my arbitral decision could not always be harmonized. In such cases it was my belief that consideration of a healthy economic life for the future state of Armenia should be decisive. Where, however, the requirements of a correct geographic boundary permitted, all mountain and valley districts along the border which were predominantly Kurdish or Turkish have been left to Turkey rather than assigned to Armenia, unless trade relations with definite market towns threw them necessarily into the Armenian state. Wherever information upon tribal relations and seasonal migrations was obtainable, the attempt was made to respect the integrity of tribal groupings and nomad pastoral movements.

From the Persian border southwest of the town of Kotur the boundary line of Armenia is determined by a rugged natural barrier of great height, extending south of Lake Van and lying southwest of the Armenian cities of Bitlis and Mush. This boundary line leaves as a part of the Turkish state the entire Sandjak of Hakkiari, or about one-half of the Vilayet of Van, and almost the entire Sandjak of Sairt. The sound physiographic reason which seemed to justify this decision was further strengthened by the ethnographic consideration that Hakkiari and Sairt are predominantly Kurdish in population and economic relations.

It did not seem to the best interest of the Armenian state to include in it the upper valley of the Great Zab River, largely Kurdish and Nestorian Christian in population and an essential element of the great Tigris river irrigation system of Turkish Kurdistan and Mesopotamia. The control of these headwaters should be kept, wherever possible, within the domain of the two interested states, Turkey and Mesopotamia. For these reasons the Armenian claim upon the upper valley of the Great Zab could not be satisfied.

The boundary upon the west from Bitlis and Mush northward to the vicinity of Erzingan lies well within Bitlis and Erzerum vilayets. It follows a natural geographic barrier, which furnishes Armenia with perfect security and leaves to the Turkish state an area which is strongly Kurdish. Armenian villages and village nuclei in this section, such as Kighi and Temran, necessarily remain Turkish because of the strong commercial and church ties which connect them with Kharput rather than with any Armenian market and religious centers which lie within Bitlis or Erzerum vilayets. This decision seemed an unavoidable consequence of the inclusion of the city and district of Kharput in the Turkish state as determined by Article 27 II (4) and Article 89 of the Treaty of Sèvres.

From the northern border of the Dersim the nature and direction of the frontier decision was primarily dependent upon the vital question of supplying an adequate access to the sea for the

state of Armenia. Upon the correct solution of this problem depends, in my judgment, the future economic well-being of the entire population, Turkish, Kurdish, Greek, Armenian, or Yezidi, in those portions of the Vilayets of Erzerum, Bitlis and Van which will lie within the state of Armenia. I was not unmindful of the desire of the Pontic Greeks, submitted to me in a memorandum similar, no doubt, in argument and content to that presented to the Supreme Council last March at its London Conference, that the unity of the coastal area of the Black Sea inhabited by them be preserved and that arrangements be made for an autonomous administration for the region stretching from Riza to a point west of Sinope. The arbitral jurisdiction assigned to me by Article 89 of the Treaty of Sèvres does not include the possibility of decision or recommendation by me upon the question of their desire for independence, or failing that, for autonomy. Nor does it include the right to deal with the littoral of the independent Sandjak of Djanik or of the Vilayet of Kastamuni into which extends the region of the unity and autonomy desired by the Pontic Greeks.

Three possible courses lay open to me: to so delimit the boundary that the whole of Trebizond Vilayet would lie within Turkey, to grant it in its entirety to Armenia, or to grant a part of it to Armenia and leave the remainder to Turkey. The majority of the population of Trebizond Vilayet is incontestably Moslem

and the Armenian element, according to all pre-war estimates, was undeniably inferior numerically to the Greek portion of the Christian minority. Against a decision so clearly indicated on ethnographic grounds weighed heavily the future of Armenia. I could only regard the question in the light of the needs of a new political entity, Armenia, with mingled Moslem and Christian populations, rather than as a question of the future of the Armenians alone. It has been and is now increasingly my conviction that the arrangements providing for Armenia's access to the sea must be such as to offer every possibility for the development of this state as one capable of reassuming and maintaining that useful role in the commerce of the world which its geographic position, athwart a great historic trade route, assigned to it in the past. The civilization and happiness of its mingled population will largely depend upon the building of railways and the increased accessibility of the hinterland of the three vilayets to European trade and cultural influences.

Eastward from the port of Trebizond along the coast of Lazistan no adequate harbor facilities are to be found and the rugged character of the Pontic range separating Lazistan Sandjak from the Vilayet of Erzerum is such as to isolate the hinterland from the coast so far as practicable railway construction is concerned. The existing caravan route from Persia across the plains of Bayazid and Erzerum, which passes

through the towns of Baiburt and Gumush-khana and debouches upon the Black Sea at Trebizond, has behind it a long record of persistent usefulness.

These were the considerations which have forced me to revert to my original conviction that the town and harbor of Trebizond must become an integral part of Armenia. Because of the still greater adaptibility of the route of the Karshut valley, ending at the town of Tireboli, for successful railway construction and operation I have deemed it also essential to include this valley in Armenia, with enough territory lying west of it to insure its adequate protection. I am not unaware that the leaders of the Armenian delegations have expressed their willingness to renounce claim upon that portion of Trebizond Vilayet lying west of Surmena. Commendable as is their desire to avoid the assumption of authority over a territory so predominantly Moslem, I am confident that, in acquiescing in their eagerness to do justice to the Turks and Greeks in Trebizond I should be doing an irreparable injury to the future of the land of Armenia and its entire population, of which they will be a part.

It was upon such a basis, Mr. President, that the boundaries were so drawn as to follow mountain ridges west of the city of Erzingan to the Pontic range and thence to the Black Sea, in such a way as to include in Armenia the indentation called

Zephyr Bay. The decision to leave to Turkey the harbor towns and hinterland of Kerasun and Ordu in Trebizond Sandjak was dictated by the fact that the population of this region is strongly Moslem and Turkish and that these towns are the outlets for the easternmost sections of the Turkish vilayet of Sivas. The parts of Erzerum and Trebizond Vilayets which, by reason of this delimitation, remain Turkish rather than become Armenian comprise approximately 12,120 square kilometers.

In the matter of the demilitarization of Turkish territory adjacent to the Armenian border as it has been broadly described above, it seemed both impracticable and unnecessary to establish a demilitarized zone which would require elaborate prescriptions and complex agencies for their execution. Fortunately, Article 177 of the Treaty of Sèvres prescribes the disarming of all existing forts throughout Turkey. Articles 159 and 196-200 provide in addition agencies entirely adequate to meet all the dangers of disorder which may arise along the borders, the former by the requirement that a proportion of the officers of the gendarmerie shall be supplied by the various Allied or neutral Powers, the latter by the establishment of a Military Inter-Allied Commission of Control and Organization. In these circumstances the only additional prescriptions which seemed necessary and advisable were that the Military Inter-Allied Commission of Control and Organization should, in conformity with the powers bestowed upon it by

Article 200 of the Treaty, select the superior officers of the gendarmerie to be stationed in the vilayets of Turkey lying contiguous to the frontiers of Armenia solely from those officers who will be detailed by the Allied or neutral Powers in accordance with Article 159 of the Treaty; and that these officers, under the supervision of the Military Inter-Allied Commission of Organization and Control, should be especially charged with the duty of preventing military preparations directed against the Armenian frontier.

It is my confident expectation that the Armenian refugees and their leaders, in the period of their return into the territory thus assigned to them, will by refraining from any and all form of reprisals give to the world an example of that high moral courage which must always be the foundation of national strength. The world expects of them that they give every encouragement and help within their power to those Turkish refugees who may desire to return to their former homes in the districts of Trebizond, Erzerum, Van and Bitlis, remembering that these peoples, too, have suffered greatly. It is my further expectation that they will offer such considerate treatment to the Laz and the Greek inhabitants of the coastal region of the Black Sea, surpassing in the liberality of their administrative arrangements, if necessary, even the ample provisions for non-Armenian racial and religious groups embodied in the Minorities Treaty

Treaty signed by them upon August 10th of this year, that these peoples will gladly and willingly work in completest harmony with the Armenians in laying firmly the foundation of the new Republic of Armenia.

I have the honor to submit herewith the text of my decision.

Accept, Mr. President, the renewed assurance of my highest consideration.

(Signed) Woodrow Wilson

The White House,  
Washington,

November 22, 1920.