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From Voluntary to Compulsory Population Exchange, Ethnic Tensions in Turkish-Greek Relations (1914-1923): A Case Study of İzmir

Abstract: The aim of this study is to comparatively analyze the similarities and differences between the 1914 Voluntary Population Exchange Agreement and the 1923 Compulsory Population Exchange Agreement within the framework of the historical, political, and social dynamics underlying these processes. By exploring the roots of the ethnic crisis between Türkiye and Greece, the study focuses on the reasons that led the parties to implement population exchanges. It examines the issue in the context of developments such as the Aegean Islands Question, the invasion of İzmir, and the Turkish War of Independence. In this context, the study evaluates not only the diplomatic dimensions of the two population exchange agreements but also their impacts on local populations, the roles of international actors, and the consequences for ethnic communities. Adopting a holistic approach, the research aims to assess the lasting effects of these processes on Turkish-Greek relations and to understand the role of the exchanges in regional stability and nation-state building. This analysis provides a deep exploration of historical events while also offering a foundation for understanding the key turning points and fractures in Turkish-Greek relations

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that persist to the present day. The study aims to analyze the relevant processes from an İzmir-centered perspective. İzmir was not only a place where political and ethnic conflicts took place, but also held great significance as the setting where these processes escalated into war, the war came to an end, and a final resolution to the issue of population exchange was reached.

Keywords: Greece, Türkiye, İzmir, Population Exchange, World War I, War of Independence,

GÖNÜLLÜ NÜFUS MÜBADELESİ ANTLAŞMASI'NDAN ZORUNLU NÜFUS MÜBADELESİ ANTLAŞMASI'NA, TÜRK-YUNAN İLİŞKİLERİNDE ETNİK UZLAŞMAZLIKLAR, 1914-1923: İZMİR ÖRNEĞİ

Özet: Bu çalışmanın amacı, 1914 Gönüllü Nüfus Mübadelesi Anlaşması ile 1923 Zorunlu Nüfus Mübadelesi Anlaşması arasındaki benzerlikleri ve farklılıkları, bu süreçlerin arka planını oluşturan tarihsel, siyasi ve toplumsal dinamikler çerçevesinde karşılaştırmalı bir şekilde analiz etmektir. Çalışma, Türkiye ve Yunanistan arasındaki azınlık krizinin temellerini açıklayarak, tarafları mübadeleye sevk eden nedenlere odaklanmakta; meseleyi Ege Adaları Sorunu, İzmir'in işgali ve Kurtuluş Savaşı sürecinde yaşanan gelişmeler bağlamında ele almaktadır. Bu kapsamda, iki mübadele anlaşmasının yalnızca diplomatik bağlamları değil, aynı zamanda bu süreçlerin yerel halklar üzerindeki etkileri, uluslararası aktörlerin rolleri ve azınlıklar üzerindeki sonuçları da değerlendirilmektedir. Meseleye holistik yaklaşmayı amaçlayan çalışma, bu süreçlerin Türkiye-Yunanistan ilişkileri üzerindeki kalıcı etkilerini irdelemeyi ve mübadelelerin bölgesel istikrar ve ulus-devlet inşasındaki yerini anlamayı hedeflemektedir. Bu analiz, sadece tarihsel olayların derinlemesine bir incelemesini değil, aynı zamanda günümüze uzanan Türk-Yunan ilişkilerindeki kırılma ve dönüşüm noktalarını da anlamak için bir zemin oluşturmaktadır. Bu çalışma, ilgili süreçleri İzmir merkezli bir perspektifle incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. İzmir, iki ülke arasındaki siyasi rekabetin ve etnik çatışmaların merkezi olmasının yanı sıra, etnik gerilimlerin başladığı, sona erdiği ve mübadele meselesine nihai çözümün bulunduğu yer olarak da büyük bir önem arz etmekteydi.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Türkiye, Yunanistan, İzmir, Mübadele, Birinci Dünya Savaşı, Kurtuluş Savaşı

Historical Background²

The June 1914 voluntary population exchange agreement between the Ottoman Empire and Greece must be examined within the context of their bilateral relations and the broader dynamics of the Eastern Question. This includes addressing the ethnic issue, which emerged in the Balkans and Anatolia (*Asia Minor* in Greek sources) as a result of the Ottoman Empire's withdrawal from the region. The issue of migration and its associated challenges emerged as a significant concern for the Ottoman Empire following the failure of the 1683 Siege of Vienna, which marked the beginning of a systematic retreat from European territories. This retreat resulted in the forced migration of substantial Muslim populations to the Balkans.

However, the migration problem reached a critical juncture in the aftermath of the 1877-1878 Ottoman-Russian War and the signing of the Berlin Treaty. This treaty recognized the independence of Serbia, Montenegro, and Romania, substantially diminishing Ottoman influence in the Balkans and exacerbating ethnic and religious tensions, particularly in Macedonia³. In the wake of the Berlin Treaty, the Muslim populations in the Balkans, subjected to escalating nationalist pressures and discriminatory policies, were compelled to migrate to Anatolia. These large-scale migrations profoundly disrupted the Ottoman Empire's demographic balance and transferred the social unrest of the Balkans to Anatolia. The resettlement and integration of migrants, coupled with the need to meet their basic needs and foster social cohesion, placed a significant economic, administrative, and social strain on the Ottoman state⁴. Beyond its demographic and economic ramifications, this migration process had deep political and cultural implications. The experiences of displacement, trauma, and persecution faced by Muslims in the Balkans contributed to the emergence and strengthening

² This study builds upon the paper titled "From 'Voluntary' to Compulsory Exchange: Internal and External Dynamics Influencing the Minority Issue in Turkish-Greek Relations and Their Impact on the Final Agreement, 1914–1923", originally presented at the *Revisiting the Turkish-Greek Population Exchange at Its Centennial Congress*, held on September 19–21, 2024, in Cappadocia. While addressing the same subject, the text has been extensively restructured, its scope narrowed to İzmir and enriched with additional archival sources. Furthermore, the historical process has been analyzed in greater depth.

³ H. Yıldırım Ađanođlu, *Osmanlı'dan Cumhuriyete Balkanlar'ın Makus Talihi Göç*, Kum Saati Yayınları, İstanbul, 2001, pp.175-192.

⁴ Feroz Ahmad, *The Young Turks and the Ottoman Nationalities: Armenians, Greeks, Albanians, Jews, and Arabs, 1908-1918*, The University of Utah Press, Salt Lake City, 2014, p.45.

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of nationalist ideologies, particularly Turkish nationalism, within Anatolia. This shift further eroded the Ottoman Empire's historically multi-ethnic framework, intensifying societal fragmentation. By the final decades of the empire, migration and ethnic issues had evolved into deeply entrenched structural problems that were increasingly difficult to resolve.

The relations between the Ottoman Empire and Greece transformed into a complex ethnic issue with the start of the *Greek War of Independence*⁵ in 1821, and the dynamics between the two sides remained tense for many years. *The Greek revolt of 1821* deeply affected not only the status of the Orthodox Rum⁶ population (*Millet-i Rum*) within the Ottoman Empire but also the multi-ethnic structure of the empire itself. Greece's independence in 1830⁷ introduced a new dimension to Ottoman-Greek relations, while Greece's Megali Idea policy, aimed at expanding its territory at the expense of the Ottoman Empire, posed a constant threat from the Ottoman perspective. This situation further deepened the ethnic crisis, as it was tied to Greece's rhetoric of "liberating" the Rum population within Ottoman lands. The reforms implemented during the Tanzimat period aimed to expand the rights and improve the living conditions of non-Muslims in the Ottoman Empire. While these efforts proved insufficient in fully addressing the Ottoman-Greek ethnic issue, they significantly improved the conditions of Greeks living within the empire, granting them notable privileges and enhancing their quality of life. As a result, the anticipated migration "from the periphery to the center"

⁵ In Greek historiography, it is referred to as the Greek Revolution. In contrast, in national literature, it is commonly termed the Rum Revolt/Greek Revolt or Uprising. (Rum İsyanı/Yunan İsyanı, Ayaklanması)

⁶ In international literature, the term "Greeks" (For Greeks also "Hellenes") is commonly used. In the text, the term *Greeks* also used in certain cases to maintain the original language of the documents or newspapers.

⁷ The independence, had only been achieved through several stages at both Ottoman and international levels. The Greeks had declared their de facto independence in January 1822, and this declaration was recognized by the Great Powers in 1826. In 1829, the Treaty of Adrianople granted Greece an autonomous status. Finally, on February 3, 1830, the Great Powers, and on April 24, 1830, the Ottoman Empire officially recognized Greece's independence. The border disputes with the Ottoman Empire, however, were not resolved until 1832. See Giorgos Limantzakis, «Oi diplomatikés kai politikés exelíxeis pou odígisan ston apokleismo tis Kritis apo to próto anexártito ellinikó krátos (1828-1832)», En Chanióis, t. 15, Chania 2021, pp.183-212; Arzu Erman, Erken Dönem Osmanlı Devleti-Yunanistan Krallığı İlişkileri: Problemler, Çatışan Faktörler ve Uzlaşma, Unpublished PhD Thesis, Hacettepe Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Ankara, 2019, pp.59-68.

(from Ottoman territories to Greece) did not materialize to the expected extent. On the contrary, cities like İzmir experienced significant inward migration and grew substantially during this period.

In particular, the Cretan uprisings and the Ottoman-Greek War of 1897 heightened tensions between the two nations. The autonomy granted to Crete in 1898 and its subsequent union with Greece in 1913 added a new layer to the crisis. The Balkan Wars marked a turning point, as Greece expanded its borders further and the situation of the Rum population in Ottoman territories became even more complex. The events of this period not only fueled diplomatic and political tensions but also left lasting societal impacts on the relations between the two sides.

The second critical turning point in the process leading to the 1914 agreement emerged in the aftermath of the Balkan Wars. Following their victory, the Balkan League pursued policies of ethnic homogenization in the territories they had annexed, citing "historical rights" as justification. These policies prompted a significant migration wave from the Balkans to Anatolia. According to Ottoman accounts, systematic pressures were applied to the Turkish populations residing in regions incorporated into Bulgarian, Serbian, and Greek territories, compelling approximately 250,000 individuals to migrate to Anatolia. In response to this crisis, and to manage the transportation, sustenance, and resettlement of migrants while also curbing further emigration, the Regulation on the Settlement of Immigrants (*İşkan-ı Muhacirin Nizamnamesi*) was enacted on May 13, 1913⁸.

The Balkan Wars, driven by the territorial expansionist ambitions of the Balkan states at the expense of the Ottoman Empire, resulted in profound trauma not only at the state level but also among the Muslim population forced to migrate due to escalating nationalist pressures during and after the conflicts. One of the most notable consequences of this trauma was the emergence of deep-seated resentment among Muslim migrants resettled in Anatolia toward the local Rum populations. The Ottoman Empire faced considerable difficulties in managing and regulating these migration movements, while the actions of some Muslim migrants, motivated by a sense of "revenge," further destabilized the social harmony and balance within the region. These developments not only deepened

⁸ Fuat Dündar, *İttihat ve Terakki'nin Müslümanları İşkân Politikası*, İletişim, İstanbul, 2002, p.60.

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the ethnic crisis between the Ottoman Empire and Greece but also led to the disruption of social harmony and balance in Western Anatolia⁹.

Despite numerous challenges, resolving the ethnic issue was not an unattainable goal. In the aftermath of the Balkan Wars, several states engaged in negotiations concerning population exchanges, with some successfully reaching formal agreements. A prominent example is the Ottoman Empire, which faced significant territorial losses and severe pressures on its Muslim population during the First Balkan War, particularly from Bulgaria. According to the claims in Cemal Pasha's memoirs, during this period, Muslims who had been subjected to the "atrocities" of the Greeks, Serbs, and Bulgarians and had endured "the most heinous forms of torture" before being expelled from these regions and forced to seek refuge in the Ottoman Empire, began to carry out attacks against local Greeks¹⁰. Determined to normalize relations and address population-related tensions, the Ottoman Empire adopted a strategic and proactive approach. After extensive negotiations, an agreement was finalized, culminating in the signing of the Treaty of Istanbul on September 29, 1913, which resolved both territorial disputes and the migration crisis. The treaty ensured the protection of Muslim rights in Bulgaria and established population exchange commissions to oversee the reciprocal relocation of approximately 50,000 Muslims and 50,000 Bulgarians¹¹. This agreement effectively marked the end of the protracted conflict between the two parties and laid the groundwork for mutual trust. From the Ottoman Empire's perspective, the treaty's most notable achievement was the containment of Bulgarian irredentism and the significant alleviation of perceived threats emanating from Bulgaria toward Eastern Thrace.

A similar agreement or alternative resolution could not be established in Ottoman-Greek relations. The fundamental reason for this was that the expansionist-protectionist rivalry between the two countries did not end with the Balkan Wars but rather evolved into a more complex and dangerous form. Greece, unwilling to settle for the territorial gains it had achieved during the

⁹ "Muslim Flight from Greek Territory: Alleged Atrocities", *Daily Telegraph*, 5 May 1914.

¹⁰ Cemal Paşa, *Hatıralar: İttihat ve Terakki, I. Dünya Savaşı Anıları*, haz. Alpay Kabacalı, Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, İstanbul, 2001, p.79.

¹¹ For detailed information regarding the agreement, see, Fahir Armaoğlu, *19. Yüzyıl Siyasî Tarihi (1789-1914)*, Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınları, Ankara, 1997, p.689.

Balkan Wars, pursued a policy aimed at extending its control over Western Anatolia. This stance led the Ottoman Empire to perceive the Rum population in Western Anatolia as a potential threat, one that Greece might exploit as a pretext to justify an invasion (*occupation*) of the region. According to the Ottoman perspective, resolving the ethnic issue definitively required Greece to abandon its expansionist policies. However, Greece showed no inclination to retreat from its ambitions. To counter these dynamics, the Ottoman Empire proposed a population exchange, suggesting the relocation of the Rum population in İzmir in return for the Muslim populations in Macedonia and Epirus. However, such a proposal could only have been accepted by Greece if it had decided to forgo its expansionist aims in Western Anatolia. Neither Greece, determined to unify with the Rum population in Western Anatolia, nor the Ottoman Empire, resolute in its efforts to prevent such unification, demonstrated the willingness to establish such an agreement. Greece, under the ideological framework of the *Megali Idea*, sought to build upon its victories and territorial gains from the Balkan Wars by expanding into Anatolia. In response, the Ottoman Empire focused on defending Anatolia and preserving the state against these territorial ambitions. In this context, the process of voluntary population exchange began to take shape for the Ottoman Empire immediately after the Balkan Wars, and the dynamics related to ethnic issues became more pronounced during this period. According to the Ottoman Empire, the ideal solution was the homogenization of Western Anatolia in response to the homogenization of the Balkans. The priority was İzmir due to the perception of the Greek expansionist threat. The Ottoman Empire was concerned that Greece might use the Greek Orthodox population in İzmir as a pretext to occupy the region. In the Greek press, this was generally interpreted as the Committee of Union and Progress's policy of cleansing Western Anatolia of its Greek Orthodox population¹². Halil Menteře, one of the prominent members of the Committee of Union and Progress, partially supports this assertion with his statement about 'cleansing the country of the elements that stood out for their treachery during the Balkan War'¹³.

The normalization of relations between the Ottoman Empire and Greece was obstructed not only by the presence of the *Rum* population in Western Anatolia but also by the Aegean Islands Question, which significantly exacerbated

¹² "I Fovera Tragogia tis M. Asias: Ta Orgia ton Neotourkon", *Skip*, 13 Iouniou 1914.

¹³ *Osmanlı Meclisi Mebusan Reisi Hâlıl Menteře'nin Anıları*, haz. İsmail Arar, Hürriyet Vakfı Yayınları, İstanbul, 1986, p.165-166. This information is also referenced in the author's book on the Aegean Islands Issue. See: Yellice, *op. cit.*, p.271.

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tensions. These two issues were closely interconnected, each reinforcing the other and entrenching the conflict between the two states. During this period, the rivalry between the Ottoman Empire and Greece increasingly revolved around sovereignty claims over the Aegean Islands, making the resolution of the ethnic question even more challenging. Initially emerging as a dispute between the Ottoman Empire and Italy, the Aegean Islands issue gradually transformed into a core Ottoman-Greek conflict, ultimately bringing the two nations to the brink of war on the eve of World War I¹⁴. The escalating tensions over the islands not only aggravated the ethnic crisis but also played a critical role in shaping the conditions that led to the eventual signing of a voluntary population exchange agreement.

The Aegean Islands Dispute initially emerged with Italy's invasion of the Dodecanese Islands in May 1912. Although the issue seemed to have been resolved with the signing of the Treaty of Ouchy (Lausanne) on October 18, 1912, Greece's invasion of the Northeastern Aegean Islands during the First Balkan War escalated the matter and transformed it into an international crisis. During peace negotiations, the Ottoman Empire demanded the return of Chios and Mytilini, citing their strategic importance for the security of İzmir. However, Greece's outright rejection of these demands further exacerbated the crisis. This dispute became one of the most critical impediments to resolving the state of war between the two countries during the period spanning the Balkan Wars to World War I and directly influenced efforts to address ethnic issues. Despite several agreements, the inability to resolve the dispute generated significant security concerns within the Committee of Union and Progress (*İttihat ve Terakki Partisi*). The CUP leadership maintained that Greece planned to use Chios and Mytilini as a base to facilitate the invasion of İzmir, and that the dense Rum population on these islands would provide Greece with a decisive advantage in any such endeavor. The Unionists (*İttihatçılar*) regarded İzmir as the last bastion in preventing the fragmentation and division of the state and they were determined to protect it at all costs. As a result, during peace negotiations, the Ottoman side unequivocally asserted that Turkish-Greek relations could not be normalized

¹⁴ The issue of the Aegean Islands, which began with the Ottoman-Italian disputes, reflected in Ottoman-Greek relations, and evolved into an international crisis, along with the dynamics that brought the Ottoman Empire and Greece to the brink of war, is examined in detail in this study, Gürhan Yellice, *Ege Adaları Meselesi, 1911-1914*, Siyasal Kitabevi, Ankara, 2022.

unless these two islands were returned. The stark divergence in the positions of the two sides made a resolution impossible, compelling both parties to accept the arbitration of the Great Powers for a final decision. Reluctantly, the Ottoman Empire agreed to this arrangement¹⁵. After prolonged discussions and negotiations, the Great Powers announced their final decision on February 13, 1914. This decision was conveyed to Greece on the same date as follows:

*"According to Article 5 of the Treaty of London, signed between the Ottoman Empire and the Balkan allies on May 30, 1913, and Article 15 of the agreement signed between the Ottoman Empire and Greece on December 14, 1913, the Greek Government consented to the final determination of the fate of the Aegean Islands by the Six Great Powers. As a result, these powers decided to cede all Aegean Islands under Greek invasion, except for Gökçeada, Bozcaada, and Meis, to Greece. Greece pledged that the islands under its sovereignty would not be fortified or used for military purposes, and that effective measures would be taken to prevent smuggling activities from these islands into Ottoman territory. Greece would provide satisfactory assurances to both the Great Powers and the Ottoman Empire regarding these commitments. The Great Powers declared that they would exert the necessary influence on the Greek Government to ensure the implementation and future adherence to these conditions. Additionally, the Great Powers required Greece to provide satisfactory guarantees for the protection of the Muslim ethnic residing on these islands. The final annexation of these islands to Greece would only be possible upon the withdrawal of Greek forces from Albanian territories, as stipulated in the Florence Protocol signed on December 17, 1913. Greece officially agreed to adhere to the order established by the Great Powers in the region and not to support, either directly or indirectly, any rebellion or resistance. The evacuation of the region [Southern Albania] was scheduled to begin on March 1, 1914, and to be completed by March 31, 1914. The Great Powers expressed their confidence that the above-mentioned decisions would be respected by the Greek Government."*¹⁶

The decision not only failed to resolve the crisis but also deepened it further. Disappointed by the outcome, the CUP expressed their discontent in a note to the Great Powers, stating that the final decision did not consider the interests of either country and declaring their intention to continue their struggle until the

¹⁵ Yellice, *op. cit*, pp.148-178.

¹⁶ BD/10/1, Mallet to Grey, "Collective Note addressed to M. Streit", No.252, Athenes, le 13 fevrier (31 janvier), 1914.

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requested islands were reclaimed¹⁷. This stance clearly indicated that normalization of relations with Greece was not on the agenda. One of the most significant consequences of this approach was the escalation of the ethnic crisis between the two countries. The primary reason for the growing tension was CUP's determination to reclaim Chios and Mytilini at any cost. As a "last resort" (*ultima ratio*), the CUP adopted a policy of using the Rum population in Western Anatolia as a bargaining tool to pressure Greece into making concessions.

Formation of the Voluntary Population Exchange Agreement, June 1914

The Unionists' strategy for reclaiming the islands was based on bypassing the Great Powers, pressuring Greece—who had accepted the decision—into bilateral negotiations and securing the return of Chios and Mytilini through these talks. To bring Greece to the negotiating table, they planned to increase migration pressure on the Rum population in Western Anatolia. However, the Unionists made a severely flawed assessment by believing that this strategy would yield definite results. This misguided belief became evident when, a few months ago Talat Bey declared, "within four or five months, Greece will be forced to capitulate."¹⁸ One of the most significant developments that heightened pressure on the Greeks was the resettlement of Muslim migrants from the Balkans into Greek neighborhoods. While it remains debatable whether this move was directly orchestrated by the government, it undeniably escalated tensions between the two sides.

Venizelos's eventual agreement to enter bilateral negotiations created hope among the Unionists that their strategy might succeed. However, the Greek Prime Minister's intention in participating in these talks was not to make concessions regarding the Aegean Islands but to buy time and alleviate the

¹⁷ "Reservations by Türkiye and Greece: Demands of the Porte", *The Times*, 18 February 1914. At this point, it is necessary to highlight an important aspect regarding the Sublime Porte's reaction to the decision. The Sublime Porte neither explicitly declared that the decision would not be recognized nor stated that it would not be accepted. Indeed, a few days after the counter-note was issued, Russia's "advice" that the response to the note was ambiguous and that it would be best for the Sublime Porte to acquiesce to the decision can be cited as an example of this stance. BOA, HR.SFR.1, 172-31, 20-02-1914.

¹⁸ Yellice, *op. cit.*, p.236.

migration pressure on the Rum population. In particular, a decline in the Rum population of İzmir—a city central to Greece’s invasion plans—was a scenario that Venizelos was completely unwilling to accept. Thus, Venizelos’s approach was not focused on resolving the issue but rather on safeguarding Greece’s strategic interests and maintaining the existing status quo. In this context, contrary to the Unionists’ expectations, Venizelos’s strategy not only failed to resolve the crisis but also complicated the dynamics in the long run, further deepening tensions between the two countries.

Bilateral negotiations between the two countries, initiated in April 1914, primarily revolved around the exchange of the Dodecanese Islands (*Oniki Ada*), under Italian invasion at the time, for Chios and Mytilini, if not in full, at least partially. The dialogue initiated between the Ottoman Empire and Greece laid the groundwork for both parties to adopt a more determined and constructive approach to resolving the ethnic crisis, significantly reducing tensions surrounding the issue during this process. The increasing number of mutual complaints necessitated a thorough investigation; accordingly, Talat Bey examined the situation of the Greeks in the Edirne province, while Venizelos visited Thessaloniki to observe the conditions of the Muslim population in the region¹⁹. While the Ottoman Government took steps to reduce pressure on the Rum population, Greece supported mutual improvement efforts by allowing Galip Bey, the Ottoman Ambassador to Athens, to address the issues faced by Muslims in Macedonia²⁰.

In addition to these mutually positive steps, discussions were held in Athens between Venizelos and Galip Bey concerning the ethnic issue, during which the topic of population exchange came to the forefront. Galip Bey was the first to propose the idea, suggesting during his meeting with Venizelos on May 12 the exchange of Muslims in Macedonia with Greeks in the Aydın Province. In his memoirs, Galip Bey identifies two primary reasons that compelled the Ottoman Empire to pursue this policy: the diminishing likelihood of improving the conditions of Muslims in the Balkans, leading to the consideration of their relocation to Anatolia, and the plan to secure İzmir by relocating the Rum population from the region. He states: “*On the other hand, Monsieur Venizelos also visited Thessaloniki to personally investigate the matter and conveyed his findings to me.*”

¹⁹ Galip Kemali Söylemezođlu, *Canlı Tarihler, Hatıralar, Atina Sefareti (1913-1916)*, Türkiye Yayınevi, İstanbul, 1946, pp.100-101.

²⁰ “Return of Dispossessed Turks”, *The Times*, 3 June 1914.

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However, it became evident that the definitive prevention of these mutual complaints could not be achieved through endless disputes, investigations, objections, assigning blame, or even providing guarantees, no matter how sincere. This had been demonstrated time and again by the unprecedented events that had befallen the unfortunate Muslim population across the Balkan countries since the signing of the Berlin Treaty in 1878, which marked the calamity of separation from our empire.”²¹

Regarding the security of İzmir, Galip Bey further remarks: *“Indeed, had we, at that time, relocated two to three hundred thousand Muslims from Macedonia and settled them along the shores of İzmir Province, while sending a proportional number of Greeks to Greece, the great catastrophe that befell İzmir in 1919 would have been impossible, as there would have been no Greeks left in the area.”²²* These statements clearly illustrate that the Ottoman Empire did not believe the ethnic issue could be resolved through measures aimed at improving conditions for minorities. Instead, it viewed population exchange as the only viable solution to address the problem fundamentally and permanently.

The Ottoman Empire’s proposal was accepted by Venizelos on May 22. Although he expressed concerns over the pressure and violence directed toward the Rum population during his discussions with Galip Bey, he stated that he viewed the Ottoman Empire’s proposal for a final resolution to the crisis favorably, provided it was implemented on a voluntary basis²³. These discussions also resulted in the decision to establish a joint commission to address the issue systematically²⁴. As inferred from Galip Bey’s remarks, despite the starkly opposing approaches of the two countries, whether these positive developments regarding the ethnic

²¹ Söylemezoğlu, *op. cit.*, pp.101-102.

²² Söylemezoğlu, *op. cit.*, pp.101-102.

²³ For detailed information on the analysis of discussions about the Ottoman-Greek Population Exchange based on Ottoman sources, see Nurten Çetin, “1914 Osmanlı-Yunan Nüfus Mübadelesi Girişimi” (*The 1914 Ottoman-Greek Population Exchange Initiative*), *Selçuk Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi*, 24/2010, pp. 155-165. For a study that evaluates the issue through the archival sources of the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs and essentially interprets the process as “Ottoman atrocities,” and for a comparative perspective, see: Mourellos, Yannis, “The 1914 Persecutions and the First Attempt at an Exchange of Minorities between Greece and Türkiye,” *Balkan Studies*, 26, No. 2, 1985, pp. 388-413.

²⁴ Mourellos, *op. cit.*, p.397.

issue could culminate in a final agreement largely depended on the fate of the Aegean Islands.

The seemingly positive atmosphere surrounding the Aegean Islands issue ended in a major fiasco by late May, with the breakdown of Ottoman-Greek negotiations plunging the ethnic question into further uncertainty. Italy's refusal to relinquish its occupied islands and Greece's insistence on retaining Chios resulted in a deadlock, culminating in Venizelos's decision to abandon the negotiation table. This decision was influenced by Venizelos's belief that a final agreement with the Ottoman Empire was impossible and that war was the only viable solution. The failure of the talks significantly escalated the ethnic crisis, bringing both sides to the brink of war. On the Ottoman side, the CUP abandoned its policy of reducing ethnic tensions during the negotiations and adopted a harsher stance. This shift led to an increase in violence against Greeks, with the events of June 11-12, 1914, in Foça, Menemen, and Karaburun resulting in numerous Greek deaths. According to Greek sources, at least 50,000 Greeks were forced to migrate to Chios, Mytilini, and Samos. These developments underscored how the unresolved ethnic issue deepened ethnic and political tensions in the region, exacerbating the already volatile situation²⁵.

The crisis, marked by uncontrollable violence and loss of life, brought both countries to a critical crossroads. Greece was the first to take decisive action at this juncture. The resurgence of the ethnic crisis, the CUP's unwavering stance on retaining Chios and Mytilini, the Great Powers' reluctance to collectively enforce their decisions on the Ottoman Empire, and concerns that the ethnic issue might culminate in the mass migration of Greeks from Western Anatolia, all contributed to Greece perceiving a significant threat. Notably, the potential exodus of Greeks from the region posed a substantial risk to Venizelos's envisioned invasion of İzmir. These developments heightened tensions on the Greek side and emboldened Venizelos to initiate a war he deemed inevitable with the Ottoman Empire. Following the events in İzmir, Venizelos sent a note to the Ottoman government on June 12, accusing it of perpetrating widespread atrocities against Greeks, claiming the population was suffering immensely, and asserting that the Ottoman government had failed to take effective measures²⁶. Venizelos warned of war if the "atrocities" were not stopped. Around the same

²⁵ AYE/1914/A21/A,, "Diogmoi Ellinon stin Tourkia. Tragiki Katastasi Imeron sti M. Asia kai Traki", Petihakis (Midilli) pros YPEX, AP: 16974, 15 Iouniou 1914.

²⁶ Söylemezoğlu, *op. cit.*, pp.113-114.

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time, he delivered a speech in the Greek Parliament where he explicitly mentioned war for the first time. Subsequently, Greece began both military and diplomatic preparations for conflict. According to Erskine, the British ambassador in Athens, Greece was resolute in its intention to go to war. Venizelos believed war was inevitable if the demands in the note were not immediately addressed, and Greece's naval superiority was the key factor bolstering his confidence²⁷.

The escalation of the ethnic crisis to a radical level and the potential outbreak of war between the two countries, or even across Europe, were likely prevented by the stances of Serbia and Romania. Despite Venizelos's firm determination, the political dynamics in the Balkans forced him to step back. Venizelos, despite all his efforts, failed to form a new alliance in the Balkans to counter the Bulgarian threat²⁸. He was seriously concerned that, during a war with the Ottoman Empire, Bulgaria—regarded as a "victim of the Balkan Wars"—might seize the opportunity to occupy Thessaloniki. To prevent this threat, he believed that an alliance with Serbia and Romania was essential. However, Serbia and Romania, fearing that the post-Balkan Wars status quo might be disrupted, rejected Venizelos's proposal for an alliance and instead suggested resolving the issue through bilateral negotiations with the Ottoman Empire²⁹. This situation left Venizelos convinced that going to war with the Ottoman Empire without allies would pose a significant risk for Greece. As a result, while he did not completely abandon his decision for war, the shifting balance of power in the Balkans and his failure to secure an alliance compelled him to postpone his plans³⁰.

Regardless of the failure of Venizelos's Balkan Alliance project, within the context of Ottoman-Greek relations, his note marked perhaps the most critical moment in the long-standing tensions between the two nations—a point where both sides stood on the brink of war. As Galip Bey also stated in his memoirs, the note clearly contained a language of threat and was written in an extremely harsh tone³¹. The Ottoman Empire's stance and response to this note were not merely

²⁷ *Ege Sorunu Belgeleri*, Haz. Şimşir, Bilal, Cilt II (1913-1914), TTK Yayınları, Ankara, 1989, p.538.

²⁸ Vincent, J. Seligman, *O Thriamvos tou Venizelou*, Ekdoseis Eirmos, Athina, 1990, p.37.

²⁹ BD/10/1, No. 289, Barclay to Grey, Bucharest, 18 June 1914.

³⁰ The date when this decision was practically implemented was May 15, 1919.

³¹ Söylemezoğlu, p.118.

diplomatic moves but crucial strategic decisions. The leaders of the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), like Venizelos, believed that issues such as the Aegean Islands Question and the ethnic crisis could not be resolved through peaceful means, concluding that war was inevitable. However, the existing conditions highlighted the immense risks a war would pose for the Ottoman Empire. Naval dominance in the Aegean still belonged to the Greek navy, and the *Sultan Osman* battleship, ordered from Britain in late 1913 and expected to decisively alter this balance, had yet to be delivered³². In this situation, yielding to Greece's indirect call for war risked not only the complete loss of the Aegean Islands but also the invasion of İzmir and the acceleration of the Ottoman Empire's fragmentation. Fully aware of this precarious balance, the CUP leaders adopted a pragmatic and realistic policy, acting swiftly and strategically to manage the crisis and mitigate potential risks. This approach underscored the Ottoman Empire's urgent need to maintain balance both diplomatically and militarily, ultimately helping to avert a major military disaster and escape a severe diplomatic crisis.

To mitigate tensions, the Ottoman government's initial response was to dispatch Interior Minister Talat Bey to Western Anatolia. This decision aimed to observe the escalating dynamics of the crisis on-site and to implement measures to de-escalate the situation. Talat Bey's primary mandate was to investigate and address the impact of migration pressures on the Rum population, restore state authority in the region through coordination with local officials, and stabilize the area. British newspapers, including *The Times* and *Daily Telegraph*, which closely monitored the crisis, reported that Talat Bey had undertaken significant efforts to resolve the issue, with the measures implemented yielding swift results. According to these accounts, the pressures exerted on the Rum population were rapidly curtailed under Talat Bey's intervention, and tensions in the region were substantially alleviated. These developments were regarded as a pivotal step in the government's crisis management strategy. Concurrently with Talat Bey's visit to Western Anatolia, Galip Bey, engaged in critical discussions with Greek Prime Minister Venizelos and Foreign Minister Georgios Streit. These diplomatic initiatives provided a crucial foundation for addressing the crisis and contributed significantly to managing and controlling the tensions between the two parties³³.

³² Şimşir, Cilt II, p.175.

³³ "Türkiye, Greece and the Aegean Islands", *Daily Telegraph*, 15 June 1914; "Persecutions of Greeks: Talaat Bey's Mission to Asia Minor", *The Times*, 17 June 1914.

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In addition to these initiatives, the Ottoman Empire sought to counter the negative perception that Greece had cultivated among the Great Powers by issuing statements aimed at clarifying its position. In a note delivered to the embassies in Istanbul on June 15, the Ottoman government asserted that the unrest in the region primarily stemmed from the actions of Muslim refugees³⁴ who had been forced to migrate to Anatolia due to persecution. The note emphasized the care and effort invested in addressing and resolving the issue. Furthermore, the note highlighted that complete order had been restored in the region following visits conducted by Talat Bey. To demonstrate the sincerity of its measures, the Ottoman Empire expressed its willingness to allow foreign embassies to appoint representatives to accompany Talat Bey's delegation³⁵. This gesture underscored the government's commitment to transparency and collaboration with the international community. These actions reflect the Ottoman Empire's dual objective: to address domestic disturbances while simultaneously rebuilding trust and improving its image in the eyes of the Great Powers³⁶. This approach demonstrated a deliberate effort to balance internal stability with diplomatic engagement on the global stage.

The constructive stance adopted by the Ottoman Empire swiftly facilitated an atmosphere of détente and reconciliation between the two states. To prevent the ethnic issue from escalating into another major crisis, both governments resolved to adopt a more resolute and collaborative approach. In the aftermath of the crisis, negotiations between the two parties were expedited, culminating in a

³⁴ Throughout 1914, one of the most significant arguments employed by the Ottoman administration to refute allegations of "arbitrary" migration pressure on Greeks and to challenge Greece's claims—often exaggerated or entirely fabricated—was the large-scale migration triggered by events in Macedonia. Ottoman officials, under constant scrutiny due to the international public pressure orchestrated by Greece, frequently provided clarifications, particularly in response to foreign ambassadors who, acting on instructions from their governments, urged the Sublime Porte to take measures on this issue. For instance, in a meeting with Ambassador Bompard on June 17, Sait Halim Pasha drew attention to the scale of migrations from Macedonia to Anatolia. He noted that, so far, only 30,000 to 40,000 Muslims had migrated from Salonica, but the government was deeply concerned about the potential arrival of an additional 200,000 individuals. This statement underscored the immense demographic pressures facing the Ottoman Empire and served to counter narratives that framed its policies as baseless or excessive, presenting them instead as necessary responses to an ongoing crisis. DDF/3/10, Bompard a Viviani, No.390, Péra, 17 juin 1914.

³⁵ BOA, HR.SFR.04, 876-4, 15-06-1914.

³⁶ "Greek Grievances: Conciliatory Reply by the Porte", *The Times*, 19 June 1914.

significant agreement on principles reached on June 16, 1914, between the Ottoman Empire and Greece. According to this agreement, the voluntary exchange of populations was endorsed, whereby Greeks residing in the İzmir region and Muslims in Macedonia would relocate on the basis of mutual consent. Furthermore, the agreement provided for the establishment of a joint commission tasked with resolving the technical and procedural details of the exchange through cooperative deliberation. Additionally, the parties concurred that the Ottoman government would issue an official communiqué affirming that the treatment of Greeks in Anatolia had been a reaction to the treatment of Muslims in Macedonia and pledged to implement the necessary measures to address the matter³⁷.

In the conciliatory and friendly response to Greece's note on June 18, the Ottoman Empire attributed the core issue to the influx of 250,000 Muslim refugees and emphasized the restoration of order under Talat Bey's leadership. The allegations made by Venizelos were tactfully dismissed (*fin de non-recevoir*). While acknowledging the occurrence of some disorder in Thrace and Asia Minor, the Ottoman response stressed that the issue had been resolved and would not recur³⁸. Subsequent to the agreement, an international commission was established to oversee and regulate population movements effectively³⁹. This settlement, founded on the principle of voluntariness, substantially eased tensions between the two nations and opened the door to a renewed diplomatic dialogue. Both sides concurred on resolving all outstanding disputes through a summit meeting planned to take place in Brussels. Nevertheless, the outbreak of the First World War shortly thereafter disrupted these plans, forcing their suspension. As a result, this second crucial opportunity to achieve a comprehensive resolution to the crisis was lost. Once again, external events derailed efforts to address the longstanding tensions between the two states through negotiation and compromise.

³⁷ Söylemezoğlu, *op. cit.*, pp.117-118.

³⁸ "Turkish Reply to Greece Criticized", *The Times*, 20 June 1914.

³⁹ "Persecutions of the Greeks", *The Times*, 22 June 1914.

Gürhan YELLİCE

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Interruptions in Population Movements: World War I and Ottoman-Greek Policies

During World War I, relations between the Ottoman Empire and Greece were shaped by the necessities of war and strategic concerns. Although the concept of a "voluntary population exchange" receded into the background due to wartime priorities, the ethnic issue, in general, remained a significant focus, particularly on Greece's agenda. The Ottoman Empire, which entered the war at the end of October 1914 and was compelled to fight on multiple fronts, took care to adhere to the terms of the still-unimplemented voluntary population exchange agreement. This was influenced by its concern not to provide any justification for Greece, which maintained its neutrality, to enter the war. During the period when Greece considered participating in the Gallipoli campaign and after its entry into the war, the Ottoman Empire made minor adjustments to its policy. Apart from the deportation of some Greeks for strategic reasons, no large-scale tensions arose between the two countries that could escalate into a crisis⁴⁰.

On the other hand, Venizelos adopted a strategic policy from the outset of the war, leveraging the Rum population in Western Anatolia as a political argument to legitimize Greece's potential entry into the conflict. Although Greece initially declared its neutrality, Venizelos clearly articulated his determination to join the war during confidential negotiations with Britain. He was firmly convinced of Britain's eventual victory and argued that the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire was an inevitable outcome of the war. He contended that Greece was well-positioned to fill the power vacuum that would arise from the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. In line with this belief, Venizelos consistently expressed his willingness to align Greece with the Allied Powers. For instance, in a proposal to Britain on August 18, he conveyed Greece's readiness to deploy its entire military and naval forces-comprising 250,000 personnel-to support Serbia and engage in combat against the Ottoman Empire, should such an intervention be deemed necessary by the Allies⁴¹. Nevertheless, during the period preceding the Ottoman

⁴⁰ BOA, DH. ŞFR, 566-72.

⁴¹ David Lloyd George, *The Truth about the Peace Treaties*, Vol. II, Victor Gollanc Ltd, London, 1938, s.1205-1209.

Empire's entry into the war, Britain declined Venizelos's proposal, opting to delay Greece's active participation in the conflict.

The Ottoman Empire's entry into the war significantly altered the regional dynamics and carried the potential to directly influence the course of the conflict. As a result, the Allied Powers began seeking a formula to neutralize the Ottoman Empire and remove it from the war. Within this framework, Greece's proposal became a topic of discussion. When Britain and France decided to launch a campaign at Gallipoli, they sought the support of the Greek navy and army for the operation. In return, they promised Greece territorial gains in Western Anatolia, particularly İzmir⁴². This offer marked a critical turning point both in Greek domestic politics and in Ottoman-Greek relations⁴³. Greece's participation in the war would solidify the outcome—whether favorable or unfavorable—of the invasion of İzmir, a goal that Venizelos had been planning for an extended period, and the resolution of the broader Asia Minor Question. Venizelos viewed the proposal as an opportunity, as he regarded war with the Ottoman Empire as inevitable. For him, Greece's entry into the conflict presented a strategic advantage to achieve long-held national aspirations, including the invasion of İzmir.

However, there was a significant challenge for Greece at this juncture. In Greece, especially in matters of foreign policy, Prime Minister Venizelos was not the sole authority. To secure Greece's entry into the war, Venizelos needed to convince the pro-German King Constantine, who held a contrasting perspective. King

⁴² Demetra Vaka, *In the Heart of German Intrigue*, Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston/New York, 1918, p.107-108.

⁴³ Britain's offer of territorial concessions in Anatolia sparked great excitement for Venizelos. When he returned to power in 1917, in his speech during the first parliamentary session in Athens, Venizelos openly expressed how thrilled he was by Britain's proposal. This excitement stemmed from the possibility of realizing Greece's territorial claims in Asia Minor. In the same speech, Venizelos compared his excitement to the feelings evoked by the Treaty of Bucharest, which doubled Greece's territory following the Balkan Wars ("Greek Secrets: Constantine's Decision About Gallipoli," *Daily Mail*, 31 August 1917). This comparison highlights how deeply he nurtured the vision of expanding Greece's borders and how Britain's proposal reignited these aspirations. The potential for territorial gains in Anatolia appeared to Venizelos as a historic opportunity for Greece, serving as a powerful source of motivation both for himself and his supporters. Venizelos's enthusiasm was not only tied to his personal political ambitions but also directly linked to his desire to realize Greece's Megali Idea of expansion. The fact that Britain's offer was met with a level of elation similar to the triumph following the Balkan Wars demonstrates the significant role it played in shaping Venizelos's pursuit of broader objectives in Anatolia. The prospect of acquiring land in Anatolia became a driving force for Venizelos and cemented his vision of a greater Greece.

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Constantine adopted a more cautious approach, believing that opening a new front in the Balkans could disrupt the region's delicate balance. Consequently, he remained distant from the idea of Greece joining the war and insisted on maintaining a policy of neutrality. The conflicting strategies of Venizelos, who pursued an aggressive and opportunistic approach, and King Constantine, who favored caution, created a deep political divide in Greek politics during the war. Venizelos firmly believed that Greece must participate in the war to protect the "Hellenic" population in Western Anatolia, but King Constantine considered this to be too risky. In an effort to persuade the King, Venizelos wrote numerous letters, placing the ethnic issue at the center of his arguments. In one such letter, Venizelos wrote: *"If we do not enter the war, we will inevitably lose the Greeks living in Asia Minor. Should the Allied Powers emerge victorious, they will divide Asia Minor and the remaining Ottoman territories among themselves or with Italy. On the other hand, if Germany and the Ottoman Empire win, not only will the 200,000 Greeks living in the region lose all hope of ever returning to their homes, but the entire Rum population of Asia Minor will face a catastrophic displacement. In any case, German dominance will guarantee the complete invasion of Asia Minor"*⁴⁴.

This argument underscores Venizelos's belief that Greece's participation in the war was not just an opportunity but a necessity to secure its interests and protect the Rum population in Asia Minor. However, his "strong argument" regarding the ethnic issue was insufficient to convince King Constantine. The King viewed the prospect of entering the war as highly risky, with his primary concern being the potential invasion of Thessaloniki by Bulgaria if Greece engaged in a conflict with the Ottoman Empire⁴⁵. To address this concern, Venizelos proposed ceding Kavala to Bulgaria as a concession. In a letter he wrote to persuade the King, Venizelos included the following remarks about the ethnic crisis and Kavala:

"The concession of Kavala is undoubtedly a distressing matter, and I am deeply grieved in spirit because of it. However, considering the need to secure our national interests, I have no hesitation in directly proposing its transfer to Bulgaria. Moreover, I believe that the concessions in Asia Minor, as proposed by [British Foreign Secretary] Grey, can only

⁴⁴ Georgios Ventiris, *I Ellas tou 1910-1920, Istoriki Meleti*, Tomos I, Ekdoseis Ikaros, Athina, 1970, p.374-375; Foivos Grigoriadis, *Dixasmos-Mikra Asia, Istorika Mias Eikosaetias 1909-1920*, Ekdoseis Kerdinos, Athina, 1971, s.254; Dimitris Pournaras, *op. cit*, s.400-401.

⁴⁵ Ioannis Metaxas, *To Prosopiko tou Imerologiou*, Tomos II, B, Athina, 1960. pp.386-387;407-413.

materialize if the necessary concessions are made to Bulgaria. I firmly believe that from the Allied Powers, we can demand the entire western coastline stretching from Antalya to Edremit, covering 125,000 square kilometers. [In contrast,] the region proposed for cession to Bulgaria (Kavala, Drama, and Serres) is no larger than 2,000 square kilometers. For the 30,000 Greeks residing there, Asia Minor is home to 800,000 Greeks. Under these circumstances, Your Majesty, I believe with unwavering conviction that Greece must enter the war. It seems unlikely that the Hellenic nation will ever encounter such an opportunity again. If we do not enter the war, we will inevitably lose the Greeks living in Asia Minor. If the Allied Powers emerge victorious, they will divide Asia Minor and the remaining Ottoman territories among themselves or with Italy. On the other hand, if Germany and the Ottoman Empire win, not only will the 200,000 Greeks in the region lose all hope of returning to their homes, but the entire Rum population of Asia Minor will face a massive and devastating displacement. In any case, German dominance will guarantee the complete invasion of Asia Minor.”⁴⁶

Venizelos's letter highlights his strategic calculations and the depth of his concern for the future of the Rum population in Asia Minor. While he viewed the cession of Kavala as a painful compromise, he regarded Greece's participation in the war as essential for securing broader territorial gains and protecting Greek interests in Asia Minor. This stark difference in priorities between Venizelos and Constantine underscored the deep divisions within Greek politics during this critical period. This letter also failed to convince King Constantine. The King maintained his insistence that Greece should not enter the war unless attacked by the Ottoman Empire. This disagreement caused a significant political crisis within Greece, leading to Venizelos resigning twice in 1915. The Aleksandros Zaimis government, which succeeded him, managed to maintain Greece's neutrality policy. However, Greece's eventual entry into the war became possible through the interventions of the Allied Powers. At the end of 1916, Venizelos left Athens and established a parallel government in Thessaloniki. In June 1917, under intense pressure and direct intervention from the Allied Powers, King Constantine was forced to abdicate, and his son Alexander was placed on the throne. This political intervention not only resolved the monarchical-venizelist conflict in Greece but also paved the way for Greece to play a more active role in

⁴⁶ Ventiris, *op. cit.*, p.374-375; Dimitris Pournaras, *op. cit.*, p.400-401.

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the war. Venizelos returned from Thessaloniki to Athens, resumed control of the government, and formally aligned Greece with the Allied Powers⁴⁷.

The strategic impact of Greece's entry into the war on the Allied Powers remains a matter of debate. Nevertheless, Venizelos viewed this development as a diplomatic opportunity. He leveraged Greece's participation in the war as a means to legitimize the country's territorial claims in the post-war settlement. This approach enabled Greece to build a strong diplomatic foundation to advocate for its expansionist policies. The regional impact of Greece's involvement in the war became more evident during the post-war period. Venizelos's aggressive expansionist strategies laid the groundwork for a prolonged period of conflict in Turkish-Greek relations. The invasion of Western Anatolia and the claim of protecting the Rum population in Asia Minor became central to Greece's post-war strategic ambitions. This process not only shaped Greece's national identity and territorial aspirations but also emerged as a significant factor in accelerating the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire.

The Process Leading to the Compulsory Population Exchange, January 1923

The process leading to the compulsory population exchange emerged as a result of the new political and social dynamics shaped by the collapse of the Ottoman Empire following World War I. It was driven by the peak of expansionist and protective rivalries between the parties. Greece, as one of the victors of the war, saw the invasion of strategic regions of the defeated Ottoman Empire as a significant opportunity to resolve the ethnic issue in its favor and to realize the *Megali Idea*. However, the unexpected emergence of Turkish resistance in Anatolia disrupted Greece's plans. This, ultimately led to the population exchange process concluding unfavorably for Greece, marking a dramatic shift in the balance of power in the region.

After the war, the *League of Nations* played a central role in addressing ethnic and ethnic issues, particularly among the Balkan states. In pursuit of the goal of

⁴⁷ George B. Leontaritis, *Greece and The First World War: Neutrality to Intervention, 1917-1918*, Boulder, 1990, pp.147-195.

“permanent peace”, ideas such as ethnic adjustments⁴⁸ and population homogenization gained increasing acceptance within the international community. These approaches provided Greece with a significant diplomatic advantage in its ethnic-related disputes, enabling its claims to be framed on a more legitimate international basis. From as early as 1914, Greece effectively brought to international attention allegations of oppression and persecution of Greeks in Western Anatolia by the Ottoman Empire⁴⁹. This argument became one of the most compelling elements supporting Greece's territorial claims in the post-war period. The narrative of "oppressed nations," used as a key element of Greek propaganda, played a decisive role in securing international support for its aspirations. These developments transformed the issues of population exchange and ethnic rights from a bilateral matter between two nations into part of an international framework for regulation and peacebuilding. This process created an environment that enabled the implementation of radical policies, such as "compulsory population exchange," designed to reshape the region's ethnic composition. Consequently, ethnic issues came to be seen not only as a regional concern but also as a tool for ensuring global peace.

Venizelos, World War I's aftermath presented a unique opportunity to reshape Greece's geopolitical position, and he took decisive steps to leverage the prevailing political and diplomatic climate in Greece's favor. At the Paris Peace Conference, he framed Greece's territorial demands not merely as strategic acquisitions but as essential steps toward resolving long-standing ethnic and ethnic issues⁵⁰. These claims were strategically aligned with the broader narrative of Greek national identity and the supposed historical and cultural connections

⁴⁸ Stephen P. Ladas, *The Exchange of Minorities Bulgaria, Greece and Türkiye*, New York, MacMillan Company, 1932, pp.29.

⁴⁹ In Greek historiography, this process is considered as persecution? “οι διωγμοί των ελλήνων από τη μικρασία”. There is a considerable body of work and extensive literature in Greece supporting this argument. For an example, see, Evangelias D. Boubougiatzis, *Oi Diogmoi ton Ellinon tis Ionias 1914-1922*, Adimosiefti Didaktoriki Diatrivi, Panepistimio Dytikis Makedonias, Tmima Valkanikon Spoudon, Florina 2009.

⁵⁰ In an interview with *The Times* on January 14, he expressed the following on the matter: “One of the primary objectives of the conference will be to complete and secure the national identity of small nations. Greece will do everything in its power to achieve this goal in Northern Epirus, Thrace, Asia Minor, and the islands”. Gürhan Yellice, “Megali İdea mı Mare Nostrum Mu? Mondros Mütarekesi’nden İzmir’in İşgaline İtalyan-Yunan İlişkileri ve Propaganda Savaşı, 1918-1919”, *Tarih Okulu Dergisi*, Ekim 2018, Yıl 11, Sayı XXXVI, p.183.

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between the claimed regions and Greece⁵¹. In the conference on February 3, 1919, Venizelos put forward a detailed argument for the annexation of Northern Epirus, Western and Eastern Thrace, the Eastern Aegean Islands, and İzmir⁵². He justified these demands primarily on "ethnic grounds", arguing that these regions were home to significant Rum populations who had endured systematic oppression under Ottoman rule. He portrayed the Greeks in İzmir as victims of centuries-long "Turkish atrocities," asserting that the region's dominant culture was inherently Hellenic. To Venizelos, the Aegean and Western Anatolia were not just proximate territories but a historically and culturally indivisible unity, making their inclusion in Greece both natural and necessary⁵³.

Moreover, he painted a dire picture of the Greeks in the region, claiming they faced an imminent threat of mass violence. He argued that a Greek military intervention was not only justified but essential to prevent what he described as a looming humanitarian catastrophe. This framing was critical in garnering support for Greece's territorial aspirations and in positioning Greece as a protector of vulnerable ethnic communities, a narrative that resonated with the global discourse on self-determination and ethnic rights. To strengthen his case on the international stage, Venizelos appealed to U.S. President Woodrow Wilson, whose post-war principles emphasized the protection of ethnic groups and their right to autonomous development⁵⁴. In a letter dated March 14, 1919,

⁵¹ After World War I, the global Greek population was estimated to be around 8-9 million. Of this population, 55% resided in Greece, while the remainder was dispersed across various regions outside the country. Some of the areas with the highest concentrations of Rum populations included Anatolia, Thrace, and Istanbul. Approximately 1.7 million Greeks lived in Anatolia, and 731,000 were in Thrace and Istanbul. Additionally, there were 150,000 Greeks in Northern Epirus, 43,000 in Bulgaria, 102,000 in the Dodecanese Islands, and 235,000 in Cyprus. In Egypt and its surroundings, the Rum population was about 150,000, while Northern Russia was home to 400,000 Greeks. The Greek diaspora in the United States reached approximately 450,000. See, Emmanouel Roukouna, *Eksoteriki Politiki, 1914-1923*, Ekdoseis Grigori, Athina, 1978, pp.299-300.

⁵² Kitsikis Dimitris, *Propagande et pressions en politique internationale. La Grèce et ses revendications à la Conférence de la Paix (1919-1920)*. Presses universitaires de France, 1963; Alexander Karagiannis, *Greece's Quest for Empire at the Paris Peace Conference, 1919-1920: The Diplomacy of Illusions*, Unpublished PhD Thesis, Indiana University, 1981, pp.72-120.

⁵³ Venizelos had presented similar arguments for Northern Epirus, Macedonia, and Thrace. According to Venizelos, there were 120,000 Greeks living in Northern Epirus compared to 80,000 "Albanians". Karagiannis, *op. cit.*, p.106.

⁵⁴ Harry N. Howard, *The Partition of Türkiye*, Norman, University of Oklahoma Press, 1931, p.202.

Venizelos sought to align Greece's claims with these principles, presenting them as consistent with the broader goals of peace and stability in the post-war world. In his letter, he emphasized that Greece's territorial demands were not expansionist but necessary for the protection and development of the Rum population in these contested regions. By doing so, Venizelos aimed to legitimize Greece's claims within the framework of emerging international norms, thus bolstering his diplomatic efforts: *"I have no doubt that you will graciously dedicate the necessary time to this critical issue, which concerns the future of a nation with the oldest democratic tradition in history and aligns perfectly with the principles you have espoused. The Greek nation has endured indescribable suffering under Turkish rule for many years and has therefore made a heartfelt appeal to the global community for freedom and assistance. Mr. President, I am convinced that a just resolution to the issue of Hellenism in Asia Minor, in a way that allows the Greek people to achieve national unity, will greatly contribute to the advancement of civilization and democracy in the Near East."*⁵⁵

This rhetoric demonstrates that Venizelos sought to legitimize Greece's claims not solely on ethnic grounds but also through concepts widely accepted in the international community, such as civilization and democratic ideals. The narrative of "Turkish atrocities" was frequently employed by the Greek side as a key argument to support its claims over Western Anatolia on the global stage. This approach exemplifies Venizelos's strategic effort to combine political, cultural, and moral justifications to create a robust diplomatic foundation for achieving his objectives. By framing Greece's demands within the broader context of universal ideals, Venizelos aimed to garner international support and strengthen the legitimacy of Greece's territorial aspirations.

While Venizelos was achieving significant diplomatic success in advocating for Greek demands in Paris, ethnic tensions in İzmir were systematically escalating and turning against the Turks. The Greek side claimed that the Turks were arming themselves for resistance⁵⁶, while the Turkish side feared that Greece and the Greeks were intensifying divisive policies to realize the Megali Idea. During this period, Greece and the Greeks held the psychological upper hand. The continuation of the forced migration events that began in 1914 seemed

⁵⁵ Yellice, *op. cit.*, pp.192-193.

⁵⁶ According to Celal Bayar, the Greek side believed that Nurettin Pasha was distributing weapons and engaging in organizational activities. See, Celal Bayar, Ben de Yazdım, Cilt 5, Sabah Yayınları, İstanbul, 1997, pp.151-152.

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increasingly unlikely; the policy of ethnic homogenization appeared to have reversed. As a result of policies implemented by the Unionists, Greeks who were forced to leave İzmir—or, in the controversial words of Celal Bayar, those who "fled"—were now returning to the city in groups⁵⁷. Meanwhile, the Muslim population that had settled in the region from the Balkans faced the risk of a new wave of displacement. According to Turkish sources, Greeks were organizing in regions such as Urla, Söke, Dikili, and Ayvalık and engaging in banditry⁵⁸. Consequently, the overall atmosphere in İzmir was unfavorable to the Turks, with increasing pressure and stress on them. The Turks believed that Greece's ultimate goal was to increase the Greek population in the region as much as possible⁵⁹.

The "provocative" actions of Metropolitan Chrysostomos of İzmir were a significant source of concern among the Turks. A graduate of the Halki Theological School, Chrysostomos was appointed as Metropolitan of İzmir in 1910. Considering the dense Greek population in İzmir and its surroundings, this appointment was seen as a strategic move. Throughout his tenure, he strongly supported the Megali Idea and the idea of connecting the Greeks of Anatolia to Greece. Chrysostomos was not only a religious leader but also regarded as a supporter and strategic figure of the Greek national movements. As a result, he frequently clashed with Turkish officials, particularly with İzmir Governor Rahmi Bey. According to Cemal Pasha, Rahmi Bey believed that Chrysostomos

⁵⁷ Bayar, *op. cit.*, p.153.

⁵⁸ Zafer Çakmak, *İzmir ve Çevresinde Yunan İşgali ve Rum Mezalimi*, Yeditepe Yayınevi, İstanbul, 2007, pp.78-79.

⁵⁹ Even while the war was ongoing, Greece launched a large-scale propaganda campaign to prove that the Greeks living in Western Anatolia statistically outnumbered others. For instance, on February 26, 1918, Greece's Ambassador to London, Ioannides Gennadios, sent a highly confidential telegram to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, stating that the Italians had begun to increase pressure on the Allied Powers to assert their "claims" over İzmir. According to Gennadios, the Greek Government needed to take action on this matter; it was necessary to remind "ally/[friend] Italy" (dost İtalya) once again that the Greeks in the region were statistically in the majority. See AYE/1918/A/5/VI (8) Fakelos Smirnis, Gennadios pros YPEX, AP: 88226, Fevrouariou 1918.

would repeat in İzmir⁶⁰ the tension-inciting activities he had carried out in Rumelia (where he served as Metropolitan of Drama between 1902-1910)⁶¹.

Before the war, he was removed from İzmir and sent to Istanbul. However, after the signing of the Armistice, he returned to İzmir. Upon his return, Chrysostomos adopted a revanchist attitude and quickly emerged as a political figure. According to Celal Bayar, as soon as he arrived, he orchestrated the dismissal of Nurettin Pasha. In protest letters sent to the Great Powers, Chrysostomos accused Nurettin Pasha of organizing İzmir's defense, distributing weapons to Turks, and imposing heavy taxes on Greeks. These accusations ultimately led to Nurettin Pasha's removal from office⁶². Such activities intensified following the Armistice. Greek-language newspapers in İzmir continued their pro-Greek propaganda, which they had initiated before the Armistice, without interruption⁶³. The Greeks of İzmir followed the recommendations of these newspapers, hoisting Greek flags and openly expressing their opposition to Turkish administration. Responding to the call of Metropolitan Chrysostomos, Greeks boycotted the municipal elections held on January 25, 1919, clearly demonstrating their rejection of Turkish governance⁶⁴.

Venizelos's diplomatic efforts in Paris yielded significant results. During ongoing border negotiations, Italy's unilateral invasion of Antalya and the possibility of extending this invasion toward İzmir caused considerable unease among Britain, France, and the United States⁶⁵. While Italy expected the territories promised to

⁶⁰ Celal Bayar, *op. cit.*, pp.151-152.

⁶¹ Bülent Atalay, "İşgal Döneminde İzmir Metropoliti Hrisostomos (1919-1922)", *Trakya Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, Haziran 2009 Cilt 11 Sayı, p.33.

⁶² Bayar, *op. cit.*, p.152.

⁶³ Similarly, for detailed information on the propaganda efforts of the Greek press in Istanbul advocating for the cession of Istanbul to Greece and the objections and counterarguments of the Turkish press, see, Ramazan Erhan Güllü, "Mondros Mütarekesi Sonrası İstanbul'a Dair Rum/Yunan Taleplerine Türk Kamuoyunun Tepkisi", *Atatürk Yolu Dergisi* S.67, 2020, pp.289-321.

⁶⁴ Atalay, *op. cit.*, p.32.

⁶⁵ The invasion of İzmir held a significant place on Italy's agenda. During the war, through secret negotiations and agreements among the Allied Powers, Italy had secured various "assurances" regarding this issue. After the war ended, as one of the victorious states, Italy expected these promises to be fulfilled. However, the involvement of the United States and Greece in the war shifted the balance of power and jeopardized Italy's plans for İzmir. At the Paris Peace Conference, the issue of İzmir's invasion sparked intense competition between Italy and Greece. For more on the rivalry between the two countries, see, Gürhan Yellice, "Megali idea mı Mare Nostrum mu? Mondros Mütarekesi'nden İzmir'in işgaline İtalyan-Yunan İlişkileri ve propaganda Savası, 1918-1919," *Tarih Okulu Dergisi*, no.36, 2018, pp.177-228.

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it during the war through secret agreements to be delivered, the United States, which joined the war later, considered these promises "excessive" and pursued a different policy⁶⁶. These developments created a context in which the Allied Powers, seeking to safeguard their interests, began to view Greece's demands more favorably and to support them. In this framework, the Allies approved Greece's invasion of İzmir to balance and limit Italy's influence in the region. With this decision, and supported by the Allied fleet, Greek forces landed in İzmir on May 15, 1919. This event marked a turning point that not only shifted the military balance in the region but also profoundly impacted the political and demographic structure of Western Anatolia. It set the stage for further tensions and conflicts that would shape the trajectory of Greek Turkish relations in the post-war period.

The invasion of İzmir not only brought the ethnic issue in the region to a new dimension but also provided Venizelos with a platform to implement his policies of homogenization. There was no apparent obstacle to Greece applying a similar demographic and cultural homogenization strategy in İzmir as it had previously implemented in Macedonia after the Balkan Wars⁶⁷. This process not only supported Greece's territorial expansion goals but also triggered a profound transformation in the ethnic composition of Western Anatolia. However, these policies inflicted deep trauma on the Turkish population in the region, further reinforcing the mutual distrust between the two sides. The violence, looting, and demographic interventions accompanying the invasion of İzmir became one of the key factors fueling the rise of the Turkish resistance movement. The invasion spurred significant population movements in the region. A new wave of

⁶⁶ Margaret MacMillan, *Paris 1919: Paris Barış Konferansı ve Dünyayı Değiştiren Altı Ayın Hikayesi*, ODTÜ, Ankara, 2004, pp.273-275.

⁶⁷ Celal Bayar expresses the concerns of the administrators in the context of Chrysostomos as follows: "Chrysostomos was appointed as the Metropolitan of İzmir before the First World War. At that time, he was at odds with Governor Rahmi Bey. [Rahmi Bey believed that] 'He came to İzmir to play his historical role and to repeat the atrocities of Rumelia here. During one of their meetings, the governor said to the metropolitan: If you do not continue your role of conquering the fortress from within, you cannot repeat the events of Thessaloniki here. We will no longer allow this.' "The loss of the war created a fertile ground for these concerns to materialize. Chrysostomos, who had been removed from İzmir before the war, returned after the armistice and accused Rahmi Bey of "organizing massacres" in the course of his political activities. These accusations mobilized the Allied High Commissioners in Istanbul, leading to Rahmi Bey's resignation from his position as governor. See, Bayar, *op. cit.*, p.152.

displacement emerged, affecting migrants who had been settled in the area after the Balkan Wars, and many Turks were forced to move further inland⁶⁸. According to Justin McCarthy, who compared the events following the invasion to the atrocities witnessed during the 1877-1878 Ottoman-Russian War and the Balkan Wars, tensions caused by Greek soldiers led to widespread looting and destruction of Muslim properties, and many defenseless Turks were killed during this period. Greek invasion forces pursued a policy of disarming Turks while arming local Greeks, creating an atmosphere of terror aimed at forcing Muslims to flee. This strategy of forced migration and demographic reshaping reflected a broader attempt to consolidate Greek control over İzmir and the surrounding areas⁶⁹. The Greek government aimed to fully integrate İzmir under its sovereignty and establish Greek dominance in the region if the war were won. This strategic goal was seen as a critical step toward completing Greece's transformation into an "ethnic state". Maybe better to state, "expanded ethnic state".

In this context, after the occupation of İzmir, the policy of increasing the Greek population gained momentum. According to Turkish sources, Greeks and Greek nationals in the Aydın Province were attempting to purchase land owned by Turks. As reported by Zafer Çakmak, a memorandum sent by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the Ottoman Grand Vizierate in November 1919 included the following statement: *"Ninety percent of the real estate purchased in the Aydın Province is being bought by Greeks and Greek nationals. The decision previously made by the Council of Ministers, which prohibited enemy states from buying and selling property within the country and was later repealed, needs to be reinstated. However, since reinstating this decision may provoke objections from the Allied Powers, it should only be applied to Greece, with a reminder of the restrictions imposed by Greece on the Muslim population within its own territory."*⁷⁰ These statements clearly reveal the deep mistrust of the Turkish administration toward the Greek population and Greece during this period. According to the Turkish perspective, these land purchases were viewed as attempts to alter the ethnic balance in the region and to strengthen Greece's claims over Anatolia in line with its Megali Idea policy.

⁶⁸ See Cemile Şahin, İsmail Şahin, "İşgal ve Göç: İzmir Örneği", *Yönetim ve Ekonomi Arařtırmaları Dergisi*, Cilt 19, Sayı 4, Aralık 2021, pp. 265-269.

⁶⁹ Justin McCarthy, *Ölüm ve Sürgün: Osmanlı Müslümanlarına karşı yürütölen ulus temizleme işlemleri, 1821-1922*, İnkılap, İstanbul, 1998, pp.289-297.

⁷⁰ Çakmak, *op. cit.*, p.81.

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These policies were an extension of Greece's homogenization strategies previously applied in the Balkans, particularly in Thrace and Macedonia. Under Venizelos's leadership, the Greek government sought to address ethnic issues in the Balkans through demographic adjustments, successfully reducing the Bulgarian population in these regions. During the Paris Peace Conference, Venizelos actively advocated for the resettlement of the Bulgarian population from Thrace and Macedonia, persuading the Allied Powers to support this plan. As a result of these efforts, the Treaty of Neuilly was signed with Bulgaria on November 27, 1919, and came into effect on August 9, 1920.⁷¹ A key provision of the treaty was the "Voluntary Exchange of Minorities" agreement between Bulgaria and Greece. This agreement effectively nullified Bulgaria's territorial claims over Macedonia and restricted its access to the Aegean Sea⁷². The treaty's first article stipulated that minorities belonging to different languages, religions, and nationalities residing within the borders of either country would be allowed to migrate voluntarily to the other country. This agreement represented a significant step in resolving territorial and ethnic disputes between Greece and Bulgaria and established a precedent for employing population exchanges as a mechanism to manage and resolve ethnic conflicts in the region.

With the Treaty of Neuilly, Greece successfully shifted the ethnic balance in Thrace in its favor, and it sought to replicate this strategy in Anatolia. Venizelos aimed to Hellenize İzmir by increasing the dominance of the Rum population in the region and reducing the influence of the Turkish population. In the lead-up to the invasion and during the invasion, the negative language used in the Greek press became one of the most significant factors laying the groundwork for these policies and heightening concerns on the Turkish side⁷³. Although some

⁷¹ Stephen P. Ladas, *The Exchange of Minorities Bulgaria, Greece and Türkiye*, New York, MacMillan Company, 1932, s.27; İbrahim Kâmil, "Neuilly Barış Antlaşması ve Bulgaristan-Yunanistan Nüfus Mübadelesi (1919-1927)", Ankara Üniversitesi Türk İnkılâp Tarihi Enstitüsü Atatürk Yolu Dergisi Sayı: 60, Bahar 2017, p.107.

⁷² Stanley G. Evans, *A Short History of Bulgaria*, Lawrence&Wishart LTD, London, 1960, p.159.

⁷³ "I ennoia tis apovaseos", *Rizospastis*, 16 Maiou 1919. Rizospastis should be evaluated in a different context in this regard. In its article titled "The Meaning of the Landing" written a day after Greek military forces occupied İzmir, *Rizospastis* criticized the Venizelos government for following the misguided path of imperialism and, in a sense, aligning itself with the imperialist powers, thereby making a grave mistake. According to the communist newspaper, the actions of Greek forces in İzmir were no different from the Allied Powers' approach to occupying Anatolia. The government, by

newspapers included articles suggesting that the two communities could coexist peacefully and that Greek administration would be fair, the overall narrative took a different direction. Enthusiastic declarations about İzmir finally being "liberated" were combined with commentary that Greece's primary goal was to establish itself as a powerful state in Anatolia and Asia. The press frequently emphasized the need to Hellenize Asia Minor and called for the economic and political weakening of Türkiye⁷⁴. This rhetoric not only reinforced the Hellenization agenda but also exerted psychological pressure on the Turkish population in the region. In this context, the invasion of İzmir and the subsequent policies were not merely a military operation but also an ideological and cultural transformation project. The invasion was framed as a mission to reshape the region's demographic and cultural identity in alignment with Greece's broader ambitions for territorial and political expansion.

However, the demographic interventions in İzmir did not yield a resolution similar to that achieved in the Balkans; instead, they strengthened Turkish resistance in the region. The invasion of İzmir, the events during the invasion, and its overall impact on the Turkish side made it clear that an exchange agreement akin to the one with Bulgaria would not be feasible in Anatolia. The first significant indication of this was the incidents that occurred on the day of the invasion. The invasion of İzmir was met with unexpected resistance. According to Turkish researchers, chaos erupted following the Greek army's landing in the city, triggered by what became known as the "first bullet" fired. In the ensuing disorder, it is claimed that the Greek army launched a widespread "hunt for Turks" across the city⁷⁵. Within the first few days, it is alleged that at least 2,000 people, both soldiers and civilians, were killed⁷⁶. These events underscored the deep-seated tension in the region and foreshadowed the

undertaking an extremely risky action, had endangered both Greece and the Rum population living in İzmir.

⁷⁴ "I Apovasis tou Ellinikou Stratou eis tin Smirnin", *Embros*, 16 Maiou 1919.

⁷⁵ Mevlüt Çelebi, "Bir İtalyan Gazetecinin Kaleminden İzmir'in İşgali", *Çağdaş Türkiye Tarihi Arařtırmaları*, Özel Sayı, İzmir'in İşgali, pp.131-154.

⁷⁶ There is a significant discrepancy between Greek and Turkish sources on this matter. According to Greek sources, during the incidents on the first day, 5 Ottoman soldiers were killed compared to 2 Greek soldiers, while 47 people of various ethnicities lost their lives compared to 9 Greeks. However, after the events subsided, evaluations based on "joint commission reports" claimed that 300-400 Ottomans lost their lives compared to 88 Greeks ("Hellenes"). See Boubougiatzis, aforementioned thesis, p.273.

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intensification of Turkish resistance, marking İzmir's invasion as a catalyst for broader opposition to Greek advances in Anatolia.

These developments further heightened the reactive sentiment among the Turkish population, severely destabilizing the Turkish-Greek social balance in İzmir and across Anatolia. Patriotic demonstrations and actions in Greece and Western Anatolia during the invasion reinforced this revanchist stance, fueling even greater resistance to the Greek invasion among the Turkish population. In Istanbul, the Patriarchate's support for Greece's propaganda regarding the 'liberation of Christian brothers in Anatolia'⁷⁷ and its active role in this regard were among the factors that encouraged, excited, and provoked Chrysostomos in İzmir. These events not only deepened tensions between the two communities but also significantly diminished the likelihood of a peaceful resolution to the ethnic crisis. Unlike in the Balkans, where voluntary population exchanges had been negotiated, the events in İzmir accelerated the process that ultimately compelled the Turkish and Greek governments to adopt a policy of compulsory population exchange. The invasion and subsequent societal conflicts transformed the ethnic issue in Western Anatolia into an international matter, one that required resolution between the victors and vanquished of the war. This shift highlighted the extent to which the invasion of İzmir and its aftermath had reshaped the ethnic and political dynamics of the region, pushing the crisis onto a global stage. Following the invasion of İzmir, efforts to adopt a more cautious approach to prevent further societal tensions and conflicts were made, yet the crisis had already escalated to an irreversible level. The violence and demographic interventions during the invasion placed Greece in a difficult position on the international stage. In response, Venizelos found himself compelled to take significant steps to demonstrate that the two communities could coexist peacefully. To address the unrest in İzmir and mitigate international criticism, Venizelos implemented several measures, including the appointment of Aristidis Stergiadis as High Commissioner of İzmir. This move was particularly significant, as Stergiadis was tasked with curbing the enthusiasm of the Greek Orthodox community—especially figures like

⁷⁷ For detailed information on the attitudes of the Athens and Istanbul Greek Orthodox Churches towards the invasions, see, Ramazan Erhan Güllü, "Yunan İşgal ve Eylemlerinde Dini Motivasyon: Atina ve İstanbul Rum Kiliselerinin İşgallere Yönelik Tutumları," *Yunanistan Tarafından Anadolu'da İşlenen İnsanlık Suçları: İşgalci Mağdur Olabilir mi?*, Türkiye, 2022, pp.39-57.

Chrysostomos Kalafatis⁷⁸—preventing celebrations and provocations and reducing tensions among the Turkish population. Venizelos feared that the chaotic atmosphere in İzmir could further fuel Turkish resistance⁷⁹.

Instructions sent from Athens to İzmir during this period emphasized the prohibition of any celebrations or demonstrations that might provoke the Turkish community. Venizelos repeatedly reminded international audiences that İzmir's status had not yet been finalized, emphasizing that the invasion was temporary and would only last for a limited period⁸⁰. This strategy aimed to shift the focus of the Great Powers from the future of İzmir to ensuring stability in the region. Ultimately, the invasion of İzmir and its resolution became a critical turning point in the international relations of both Greece and Türkiye. Venizelos sought to frame the temporary invasion as a national success to the Greek public, but the discontent of both the local Turkish population and other ethnic groups in the region made this strategy increasingly challenging. Despite these efforts, the invasion further destabilized the region, intensifying tensions and shaping the trajectory of Turkish-Greek relations in the years to come.

However, these efforts failed to prevent the emergence of a new environment of conflict and competition between the two sides over the ethnic issue. Following the invasion, migration pressures in the region escalated significantly. Greece, particularly before and after the voluntary population exchange agreement, encouraged Greeks who had left Anatolia to return while simultaneously seeking to homogenize the region by forcing the Muslim population to migrate deeper into the interior of Anatolia. In response, the Turkish side attempted to counter these migrations and maintain the demographic balance in the region. At the same time, it faced the challenge of settling new migrants arriving from Eastern Thrace⁸¹.

⁷⁸ According to Mihail Rodos, Stergiadis was regarded by many as a harsh and ruthless figure. However, Rodos emphasizes that Stergiadis was the only person capable of governing İzmir under extraordinary circumstances. This assessment highlights how Stergiadis's authoritarian leadership style stemmed from his efforts to maintain control over İzmir's complex political and social dynamics during his tenure. Mihail Rodas, *op. cit.*, p..87.

⁷⁹ Vasilis I. Canakaris, *Smirni, 1919-1922*, Metaizmio, 2019, pp.83-85.

⁸⁰ Evangelis Bourbougiazzi, *Oi Diogmoi ton Ellinon tis Ionias 1914-1922*, PhD Thesis, Panepistimiou Ditikis Makedonias, 2009, p.263.

⁸¹ Decisions were made to prohibit migration from İzmir on this matter, and the issue was brought to the agenda of the Allied Powers. BOA, 30-10-0-0 / MUAMELAT GENEL MÜDÜRLÜĞÜ, 116 - 806 -

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This situation further heightened tensions in Western Anatolia. Greece's demographic objectives in Anatolia not only supported its Hellenization plans but also fundamentally disrupted the social balance between Turkish and Greek communities. These reciprocal interventions severely damaged Turkish-Greek relations and deepened the ethnic crisis in Western Anatolia. Efforts to reshape İzmir's demographic structure not only intensified local conflicts but also further weakened the possibility of coexistence between the two communities. This escalation accelerated the move toward a compulsory population exchange, making it increasingly apparent that a peaceful resolution to the ethnic crisis was unlikely. The most significant outcome of these developments was the beginning of the Turkish War of Independence in Anatolia. This war was not only a struggle for Türkiye's independence but also the final stage in determining the fate of the ethnic issue. However, this traumatic process entered a new phase with Mustafa Kemal's arrival in Samsun on May 19, 1919. Under Mustafa Kemal's leadership, the rapid mobilization across Anatolia quickly overcame the demoralization caused by the invasion of İzmir. The Turkish resistance began with Mustafa Kemal's arrival in Samsun, gaining momentum through swift organizational efforts in Anatolia, the establishment of a parliament in Ankara, and the formation of a regular army. Alongside the struggles on the Eastern and Southern fronts, the battles in Western Anatolia against Greece resulted in significant victories for the Turkish side. The war concluded on September 9, 1922, with the entry of the Turkish army into İzmir, marking a turning point in both Turkish-Greek relations and the ethnic issue. This victory not only secured Türkiye's independence but also opened the door to a new era, fundamentally reshaping the dynamics of the region and setting the stage for future negotiations, including the population exchange agreements that would follow.

The successful conclusion of the Turkish War of Independence not only ended the Greek invasion of Anatolia but also further deepened the ethnic crisis between Turkish and Greek communities. The process initiated by the Greek army's invasion of İzmir spread across Western Anatolia, and the practices implemented during the invasion provoked significant resentment among the Turkish population toward the Greeks. The breakdown of order during the

2; 30-18-1-1 / KARARLAR DAİRE BAŞKANLIĞI (1920-1928), 1-4-2; BOA, 272-0-0-11 / İSKAN, 16 – 63-2; 272-0-0-11 / İSKAN, 15-56-5

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invasion, the destruction of towns, massacres, and the perception that local Greeks collaborated with the Greek army severely undermined trust between the two communities. Both sides accused each other of atrocities throughout the war and engaged in extensive propaganda. The Turkish side emphasized that severe atrocities were committed during the Greek invasion, with civilian populations being deliberately targeted. Conversely, Greece justified the invasion as a means to ensure the safety of Greeks in Anatolia and to bring peace to the region.

However, these claims found no resonance among the Turkish population. The hardships experienced by the Turkish people during the war critically diminished the possibility of coexistence between the two communities. The Great Fire of İzmir, one of the largest fires in history, and the ensuing chaos further exacerbated the plight of Greeks and migrants, making their situation increasingly precarious. This combination of conflict, propaganda, and mutual grievances left a lasting impact on Turkish-Greek relations and set the stage for the eventual compulsory population exchange as a means of resolving the ethnic crisis. Under these circumstances, the separation of Turkish and Greek communities and the population exchange evolved from being merely a proposed solution into an internationally recognized necessity. The population exchange was not only a demographic measure but also a reflection of efforts to establish lasting peace and mutual trust between the two states. This process became a tool of international diplomacy, aimed at ending inter-communal conflicts and creating a new order.

For this reason, the population exchange was one of the first issues addressed and quickly resolved after the war. A major tragedy was unfolding in İzmir, and to prevent it from escalating further, the issues of refugees, prisoners of war, and civilian hostages⁸² urgently needed to be resolved. Both societies, having been at war for a decade, were exhausted, and it had become imperative to resolve the social uncertainty in İzmir as soon as possible. Dr. Fridtjof Nansen, who had dealt with refugee issues at the League of Nations after World War I and achieved significant successes in this field, was appointed as a mediator in this matter. At the end of September, Nansen held talks with both countries and gathered their

⁸² For a detailed analysis of the process, see, Hacer Karabağ Arslan, Lozan Barış Antlaşması'nda Türk-Yunan Esir Değişimi ve Mezarlıklar Konusu, Türkiye Cumhuriyeti'nin Tapu Senedi Lozan Barış Antlaşması 100. Yıl, Editör: Behçet Kemal Yeşilbursa, Sentez Yayıncılık, 2023, pp.317-343.

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views on the population exchange⁸³. Upon both sides accepting the exchange in principle, Nansen submitted a report on the Turkish-Greek Population Exchange to the League of Nations at the beginning of November. During the negotiations in Lausanne, Nansen advocated that the exchange should commence within three months⁸⁴. Initially, Nansen's proposal was based on the principle of "voluntary" exchange⁸⁵; however, it soon became clear that the Turkish side would not accept this approach. Due to the insistence of the Turkish side regarding Western Thrace and the Greek side regarding Istanbul, it was decided to exclude both regions from the scope of the exchange.

At the end of all these processes, the Convention and Protocol Concerning the Exchange of Turkish and Greek Populations was signed on January 30, 1923. According to the agreement, the population exchange was based on religious identity, mandating the compulsory relocation of Greek Orthodox Christians in Türkiye and Muslims in Greece. However, exceptions were made for Greek Orthodox Christians who had been settled in Istanbul before October 30, 1918, and for Muslim Turks living in Western Thrace. The relocation of exchanges, as well as the identification and compensation of the properties they left behind, was carried out under international supervision. Thus, alongside the Treaty of Lausanne, the problematic cycle of forced mutual migration, which had gained significant momentum following the Balkan Wars, finally came to an end.

Despite the implementation of the exchange, the issue remained on the agenda of both countries until 1930. It was only then that Türkiye and Greece entered a normalization process, formalizing their relationship through friendship agreements. This marked the resolution of the mutual forced migrations and ethnic issues that had gained momentum since the Balkan Wars. The compulsory population exchange resulted in the relocation of approximately 1.5 million Orthodox Christians from Türkiye to Greece and around 500,000 Muslims from

⁸³ For an analysis of the Nansen-Venizelos diplomatic correspondence and interactions during this process, see, Emine Tutku Vardağlı, "Doğu-Batı Ekseninde Türk- Yunan Diplomasisi: Lozan Barış Görüşmeleri ve Nansen-Venizelos Mektuplaşmaları", *Çağdaş Türkiye Tarihi Araştırmaları Dergisi*, XVII/34, 2017, pp. 97-132.

⁸⁴ Bilal Şimşir, *Lozan Günlüğü*, Bilgi Yayınevi, 2. Basım, Ankara, 2012, p.79-80.

⁸⁵ Bilal Şimşir, *op. cit.*, pp.221-222.

Greece to Türkiye⁸⁶. The exchange primarily targeted Muslims living in Greece and Orthodox Christians living in Anatolia. However, certain groups were excluded from the agreement: approximately 150,000 Muslims in Western Thrace, 100,000 Greeks in Istanbul, and Orthodox Greeks residing on the islands of Gökçeada and Bozcaada.

Conclusion

Between 1914 and 1923, the population exchange between the Ottoman Empire and Greece emerged as a reflection of both nations' nation-building processes. The adoption of ethnic homogenization policies by both sides made this process inevitable. The exchange formalized forced migrations on a legal basis, aiming to fully resolve the crisis between the two countries and prevent new tensions. However, this process created deep social traumas and left long-term socio-economic impacts.

The idea of population exchange in the context of the ethnic issue first arose after the Balkan Wars. Despite peace agreements following these wars, the mutual perception of threats prevented the normalization of relations between the two countries, causing the crisis to escalate. Particularly in the Ottoman Empire, fears such as "Izmir will be occupied, the state will collapse" became major obstacles to a rational and consensus-based resolution of the ethnic issue. During this period, the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) sought to use the Greek ethnic as a bargaining tool, while Greece aimed to protect the Rum population in Western Anatolia and strengthen its influence in the region. These mutual threats, along with disputes like the Aegean Islands issue, further deepened the ethnic crisis instead of resolving it. Although the parties attempted to reach a voluntary agreement to reduce the risk of war, the outbreak of World War I and the lack of confidence in this agreement as a lasting solution hindered progress.

After World War I, Greece, as one of the victorious powers, sought to protect the Rum population in Western Anatolia and expand its borders by occupying Izmir. However, this initiative ended in failure due to military defeats during the Turkish War of Independence, forcing Greece to withdraw from the territories it had occupied. This military failure not only ended Greece's ambitions in the

⁸⁶ For detailed information on the transportation, settlement, and integration of migrants into production processes in Turkey, see Kemal Arı, *Büyük Mübadele, Türkiye'ye Zorunlu Göç (1923-1925)*, Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 3. Baskı, İstanbul, Mart 2023, pp.71-147.

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region but also made the population exchange process inevitable. Relations between the two communities had irreversibly deteriorated during this period, and long-standing mutual migration practices gained legal legitimacy with the compulsory population exchange agreement signed in 1923. This agreement, signed before the Lausanne Peace Treaty in 1923, provided for the forced migration of approximately 1.5 million Greeks from Türkiye to Greece and about 500,000 Muslims from Greece to Türkiye. Moving away from the principle of voluntariness, this policy aimed to achieve ethnic homogenization within the borders of both states. The population exchange was not merely a demographic adjustment but also a political tool aimed at reducing tensions between the two countries. However, the process had severe socio-economic and cultural consequences for the displaced communities. People who were uprooted from their lands faced significant economic challenges and social integration issues in the regions where they were resettled.

In conclusion, the population exchange between 1914 and 1923 symbolized a drastic effort to resolve the ethnic conflicts between Türkiye and Greece. While it succeeded in addressing immediate tensions, it inflicted profound social and cultural wounds, reshaping the lives of millions. İzmir, as a focal point of the crisis, exemplifies the complexities and costs of such policies. This episode remains a poignant reminder of the human consequences of nation-building and the challenges of balancing state interests with social cohesion, leaving an enduring legacy on the trajectory of Turkish-Greek relations.

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