Turkey in the 1920s

Topic A: Turkish-Greek Relations

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Turkish-Greek Relations

Introduction:

Relations between Greece and Turkey faced intense conflict in the years preceding and following the establishment of the Turkish Republic. The diplomatic and internal policy decisions that the Turkish government made in the 1920s would have a permanent effect on international and domestic relations with the Greeks. In fact, claims ranging from large-scale human rights violations to discriminatory policies have been brought against these governmental decisions. Therefore, it is crucial to understand how and why these decisions were made. This will allow for a more complete understanding of Turkey’s relationship with Greece as well as an understanding of what could have been done differently in the crucial years of the 1920s.

The Greco-Turkish War (1919-1922) developed in the geopolitical context of the end of World War I and the partitioning of the Ottoman Empire. At the Paris Peace Conference in 1919, the Western Allies, and particularly the British Prime Minister David Lloyd George, had promised Greece territorial gains—most importantly Eastern Thrace and parts of Anatolia around the city of Smyrna which contained a large Greek population—if Greece entered the war on the side of the Allies. On May 15, 1919, acting on the orders of France, Britain and Russia, Greeks landed in Smyrna and occupied the city. During the war between Turkey and Greece, the Ottoman government completely collapsed and the Empire was divided among the victorious Entente powers with the signing of the Treaty of Sèvres on August 10, 1920. Turkish revolutionaries, commanded by Ataturk, eventually counter-attacked and the Greek military campaign failed against the Turkish National Movement. The war ended with Greece ceding the territory it had gained and returning to its pre-war borders. The Allies were forced to abandon the Treaty of Sèvres and in July 1923
negotiated the Treaty of Lausanne, which recognized the independence of the Republic of Turkey, so long as it gave up its claim to the remainder of the Ottoman Empire, and sovereignty over East Thrace and Anatolia. Many Greeks and Turks living near the borders were displaced during the war, with Greeks living in what would become Turkish territory and vice versa.

In January 1923, the Greek and Turkish governments signed a convention that mandated a compulsory expulsion of Greek Orthodox citizens from Turkey and Muslims from Greece. Two million people were forced to leave their homes, most of whom became refugees and denaturalized from their homelands. The Greeks who remained suffered from punitive measures like the 1932 law that barred Greeks from 30 professions. While the Orthodox Greeks in Turkey had been mainly businessmen and professionals, the Turks and Muslims expelled from Greece were primarily farmers. The large influx of farmers into Turkey slowed its development. The population transfers fueled hatred between Greece and Turkey and heightened nationalism. This geographic dispute presented unique political challenges for both Turkey and Greece, as they received a sudden influx of new minorities that did not always comply with the laws and customs of their new governments.

Delegates will have to contend with these issues of cultural, national, religious, and geographic identity between the Greeks and Turks. Delegates will specifically address Greek-Turkish relations at the beginning of the 1920s before the issuance of the 1923 Convention on the population exchange. Therefore, delegates will be offered the opportunity to re-negotiate the postwar population transfers and territorial disputes and to potentially realign the entire policy framework with which the Turkish government addressed its Greek minority.
Background:

The Ottoman Empire

The Ottoman State was first founded in 1299, when Osman Bey united various Turkish Tribes in Northwest Anatolia. In 1452, Mehmet II conquered Constantinople and transformed the State into the Ottoman Empire. By the 17th century, under the reign of Suleiman the Magnificent, the Ottoman Empire controlled much of Southeast Europe, West Asia, North Africa, and the Middle East.\(^1\) It is estimated that around this time the Ottoman Empire ruled over 12 million people.\(^2\)

The Ottoman Empire had three major languages: Turkish, Persian and Arabic. The majority of people in Anatolia as well as the majority of Muslims in the Balkans spoke Turkish. Persian was spoken merely by the educated. Arabic was spoken mainly in Africa and the Middle East, although it was used for religious rites throughout the Empire. Turkish remained the language of the military and administration until 1876, when it became the official imperial language of the empire.

In the Ottoman imperial system, non-Muslim communities were granted state recognition and protection in the Islamic tradition. Until the second half of the 15th century the empire had a Christian majority, under the rule of a Muslim minority. In the late 19th century, the non-Muslim population of the empire began to fall considerably, not only due to secession, but also because of migratory movements. The proportion of Muslims amounted to 60% in the 1820s, gradually increasing to 69% in the 1870s and then to 76% in the 1890s. By 1914, only 19.1% of the empire's

\(^1\) http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t125/e1801?hi=41&pos=3
population was non-Muslim, mostly made up of Christian Greeks, Assyrians, Armenians, and some Jews.³

In the Ottoman Empire, under the millet system, non-Muslim people were considered subjects of the Empire, but were not subject to the Muslim faith or Muslim law. Christians were guaranteed limited freedoms, such as the right to worship, but had to pay additional taxes, called Jizya. Christians and Jews were treated as second-class citizens: testimony against Muslims by Christians and Jews was inadmissible in courts of law. In addition, a certain number of Christian boys, mainly from the Balkans and Anatolia, were periodically conscripted before they reached adolescence and were brought up as Muslims.⁴

**WWI and the Greco-Turkish War**

As a result of Greece's contribution to the victorious Allied war effort in World War I, the Allies offered Greece parts of Asia Minor, including eastern Thrace and Smyrna, following the end of the war. The Ottoman Empire fought in the war for the Central Powers, and then proceeded to deteriorate during and following WWI. Territorial gains from the old Ottoman Empire seemed to the Allies like a worthy reward to offer the war-ravaged nation of Greece. In May 1919, the Greek forces, which already occupied the Eastern Thrace region, landed in and began to occupy the city of Smyrna located on the Aegean coast of Anatolia with the hope of eventually annexing it. With a mixed population of Greeks, Turks, and others within the city, the city of Smyrna greeted these Greek occupying forces in a variety of ways. Whereas the Greek inhabitants believed their liberators had arrived, the Turks treated Greek troops as a hostile invasion. Though there was some internal

Turkish resistance, the resistance was weak and sporadic, and a good deal of the Turks in Smyrna fled.\(^5\)

Once established securely in the city, the Greek forces launched offensives in the surrounding area to further establish their occupation over all of western and some of northern Asia Minor. Both Venizelos, the Prime Minister of Greece, and British Prime Minister Lloyd George greatly underestimated Turkey's power of resistance. The Turks, with significant help from the Soviet Union as well as from Italy and France, attempted to defend their region. The Greek forces, which received minimal ongoing support from the Allied forces, continued to advance and spread their occupation far beyond Smyrna until the forces met their first significant resistance at the First Battle of Inonu in January 1921.

After hearing of that important defeat and seeing the strength of the Turkish Revolutionary movement, Allied leaders began to consider amending the Treaty of Sèvres with the consultation of both the Turkish Revolutionary and Ottoman governments. The Greeks, however, did not wish to re-negotiate the Treaty of Sèvres until they had proven their military strength and gained more of an upper hand. As the Greeks continued to advance against Turkish forces, the Turkish Revolutionary forces defeated the Greeks at the Second Battle of Inonu in March 1921. The Greeks again attacked the Revolutionary Turkish forces, now under the command of Ataturk, in the Battle of the Sakarya, which lasted twenty-one days until the Greeks withdrew from exhaustion. Soon, the depleted Greek troops retreated further back until they held little more than the area around Smyrna.\(^6\)

The Greeks suffered from a lack of external support beyond limited aid from Britain whereas the Turkish Revolutionary forces benefitted from Soviet, Italian and French aid. The Greek offensive also had weak strategic planning, which was worsened by the struggling postwar Greek

\(^5\) http://www.athensinfoguide.com/history/t8-7asiacampaign.htm

\(^6\) http://www.athensinfoguide.com/history/t8-7asiacampaign.htm
economy. By early 1922 the Allies had abandoned the existing Treaty of Sèvres. At this point, the Turkish Revolutionary forces denied a settlement with Greece while Greek forces remained in Anatolia. With a reorganized Turkish military, Turkish forces launched an offensive in August 1922 that ended in Turkish victory at the Battle of Durnlupinar. The Turkish forces then took control of Smyrna as the Greek troops withdrew from their initial point of occupation. In October 1922, the Greeks and Turks signed the Armistic of Medanya, which gave control of eastern Thrace and Bosporus to the Allies following a Greek evacuation of the region.

In the aftermath of the war, which re-established pre-war borders, there were claims of significant atrocities on both Greek and Turkish sides. Against the Turks, there are claims of huge massacres of Greeks and Armenians and burning of villages. On the other side, there are reports of organized ethnic cleansing by Greeks against Turks living within Greek occupation boundaries.

Figure A: This map illustrates both the Greek and Turkish offensives.


http://www.athensinfoguide.com/history/t8-7asiacampaign.htm
during the war. Furthermore, Turks claimed that as the Greek forces retreated from Anatolia, they executed a scorched-earth policy, meaning that they destroyed land and resources they passed while in retreat. With such significant and dramatic claims of atrocities on both sides, the end of the war between the Greeks and Turks left immense animosity brewing on either side.

**Treaty of Sèvres and Turkey’s Response**

The Ottoman Empire ended its involvement in World War I with the signing of the Treaty of Sèvres on August 10, 1920. Although the Empire had already lost much territory during the war, largely as a result of British offensives, the Allies divided it up further. The Treaty’s terms made Mesopotamia (Iraq) and Palestine League of Nations mandates of Britain and redistributed other Arab territories as well. Kurdistan was to become independent and would include the province of Mosul, and Armenia was to become an independent republic. The critical Bosphorus, Dardanelles and Sea of Marmara connecting the Black Sea and Mediterranean were to be demilitarized and internationalized, and the Ottoman Army and Navy were limited.\(^8\) Worst of all, Western Anatolia, essentially all of the Empire’s European territory including the substantial hinterland of Smyrna (Izmir), were to become Greek territory. This provision was in fulfillment of promises made to Greece in return for its participation in the war. These devastating stipulations would have reduced the former Ottoman Empire to a small state in central Anatolia under foreign economic and military control.\(^9\)

At the time of the signing, the Allies were occupying Istanbul, the Ottoman capital. The Ottoman Parliament had been forced to close earlier in April 1920 and thus could not ratify the

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\(^8\) [http://histclo.com/essay/war/ww1/cou/w1c-tur.html](http://histclo.com/essay/war/ww1/cou/w1c-tur.html)

\(^9\) [http://www.cyprus-conflict.net/turkey-greece%20history.html](http://www.cyprus-conflict.net/turkey-greece%20history.html)
Treaty. Sultan Mehmed V, though he did not sign it, was a figurehead during the negotiations. In defiance of both the Allied occupying powers and the sultan's government in Constantinople, the nationalists of the Turkish Republican Movement elected their own parliament in Ankara on April 23, 1920, under the presidency of Mustafa Pasha Kemal. Kemal refused to ratify the Treaty as well. In February 1921, The Allies offered to adjust the Treaty, but the Ankara government rejected it entirely. Instead, they negotiated a series of treaties with the former belligerent powers, first with the Soviet Union, who was the first country to recognize Turkey's sovereignty. Other treaties established Turkey's eastern borders, allowing Turkey to focus on settling its western borders and the war with Greece.¹⁰

Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greco-Turkish_War_(1919%E2%80%9322

Figure B: This map illustrates the partition of the Ottoman Empire that the Treaty of Sèvres attempted to establish.

¹⁰http://www.cyprus-conflict.net/turkey-greece%20history.html
Treaty of Lausanne

On July 24, 1923, Greece renounced all claims to Asia Minor and to eastern Thrace beyond the Maritza River, although it did make a territorial gain of part of western Thrace. The new frontiers of Turkey encompassed all non-Arab Muslim subjects of the former Ottoman Empire. Turkey retained possession of the Straits, although agreed to demilitarization of the Straits and an international commission to ensure freedom of passage of ships for all nations. The Treaty confirmed Greece's possession of the Aegean Islands, except for Tenedos and Imbros. Turkey recognized British sovereignty over Cyprus.\(^2\)

The 1923 Convention that called for a population exchange between Greece and Turkey is part of the resolution between Greece and Turkey but was signed earlier than the Treaty of Lausanne. Six weeks after the Treaty was signed, the Allies withdrew from Constantinople, and Kemal established the capital of the Turkish Republic at Ankara.\(^4\)


**Figure C:** This map illustrates the borders of Turkey that the Treaty of Lausanne established.
1923 Convention

On January 30, 1923, the Grand National Assembly of Turkey and the Greek Government signed a convention at Lausanne, mandating a compulsory exchange of Greek and Turkish populations. The convention, part VI of the Lausanne Peace Treaty, demanded the expulsion of Muslims living in Greece and Greek Orthodox citizens living in Turkey. This exchange did not apply to the citizens of the islands of Imbros and Tenedos or the Greek residents of Constantinople or the Muslim residents of Western Thrace.  

The exchange involved many provisions that were detailed in the convention. For example, the expelled populations and the emigrants were not allowed to return to the lands without permission from either the Turkish or Greek governments. The emigrants also lost the nationality of the previous country they inhabited and acquired a new nationality of the country in which they would reside. The emigrants were allowed to arrange ways to transport their own property and their community’s movable property. Immovable property from rural, urban, or community areas would be liquidated according to the methods of the Mixed Commission. Emigrants were to receive property of equal value to the property left behind in their previous residence. The High Contracting Parties were given permission to modify any laws necessary to ensure the execution of the convention.

Five members of the Turkish and Greek governments signed the convention. They were E.K. Veniselos, D. Caclamanos, Ismet Inonu, Dr. Ryza Nour, and Hassan. Ismet Inonu, the prime minister of the Turkish Republic, negotiated for Turkey at the convention. Three copies of the

convention were made and sent to the Greek Government, the Government of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey, and the archives of the Government of the French Republic.\textsuperscript{12}

Before the treaty was signed, the Greek Orthodox Christians were violently expelled from Turkey. The convention served as a way to regularize the expulsions from both sides, yet both sides still claimed ethnic cleansing took place. Around two million people were expelled from their homes, yet a majority of Greeks had already left Anatolia. Few inhabitants wanted to leave their current place of residence, especially since Orthodox Christian and Muslim groups lived peacefully together before the exchange. Some protests occurred as a response to the convention, especially by the Turks on February 4, 1923 and onwards.

Many Orthodox Christians converted to Islam, yet continued to secretly practice Christianity in Turkey. In Greece, converts continued Christian practices while also practicing Islam. Due to these vague distinctions regarding religion, the convention caused much confusion between the communities. Refugees from both sides suffered from language and cultural limitations and found it difficult to assimilate and adopt a new national identity in their new place of residence.\textsuperscript{13}

\textbf{Ottoman and Turkish Minority Policies}

Ottoman rule of the Greek people was characterized by two main functions: collecting taxes and maintaining a military establishment\textsuperscript{14}. Greeks were heavily taxed by the Ottoman Empire and forced to pay a “tribute of children” to the capital. One male child in five within every Christian family was enrolled in the Janissary military units, which served as the Sultan’s bodyguards and household troops. The military establishment was feudal in nature, with ethnic Turks allotted the

\textsuperscript{12} http://www.nytimes.com/2006/09/17/books/review/Cooper.t.html?_r=0

\textsuperscript{13} http://www.princeton.edu/~achaney/tmve/wiki100k/docs/Treaty_of_Lausanne.html

\textsuperscript{14} Woodhouse, 101.
largest plots of land and highest social status and Greeks, Jews, and other minorities allotted little land as peasants or subsistence farmers\(^\text{15}\). No Greeks could testify against Turks in the court of law, and all non-Muslims were forbidden from carrying arms. Muslims donated a portion of their earning to the religious institutions within the empire, as one of the five pillars of Islam. Thus, Greeks and other non-Muslims were forced to pay a jizya, or Islamic poll-tax, to compensate. Failure to pay could result in forced conversion, enslavement or death\(^\text{16}\).

During the WWI period, there were considerable Ottoman efforts to systematically cleanse the Christian Ottoman Greek population from its historic homelands in Asia Minor and central Anatolia. The Ottoman Empire employed summary expulsions, arbitrary executions, massacre, forced deportation, and destruction of Christian Orthodox cultural and religious monuments. Estimates of the total Anatolian Greek death toll range from 500,000 to 900,000\(^\text{17}\). The Greek genocide soured relationships between the Greek allies and Turkey, and in the Treaty of Sèvres, the European allies demanded that the Turkish pay retribution to Greek families affected by the incident. The Treaty was never ratified by the Turkish government and was ultimately replaced by the Treaty of Lausanne\(^\text{18}\). The Treaty of Lausanne, in 1923, codified “the compulsory exchange of Turkish nationals of Greek Orthodox religion established in Turkish territory, and of Greek nationals of the Muslim religion established in Greek territory.”\(^\text{19}\) The only exception, which was codified by Greek Prime Minister Eleftherios Venizelos and his Turkish counterpart Ismet Pasha in Article 2 of the Lausanne Treaty, was made for the 270,000 Greeks who had lived in Constantinople and the islands of Imbros and Tenedos. According to the Treaty of Lausanne, 73,000 Greeks in

\(^{15}\) Mazower, 126.  
\(^{16}\) Lindsay, 121.  
\(^{17}\) Jones, 166.  
\(^{18}\) Bassiouni, 66.  
\(^{19}\) Horton
Istanbul were accorded Turkish citizenship and 30,000 citizens remained permanent residents of the country\textsuperscript{20}.  

Foreseeing future power struggles with the Greek minority in Turkey’s largest city, the Turkish government insisted on expelling the Ecumenical Patriarchate, or Greek Patriarch of Constantinople, who served as the spiritual leader of the Greek Orthodox religion. The Greeks were steadfast in their preservation of the patriarchy in the historical homeland of the Church, and received the support of European Allies, namely Britain and France, to oppose the Turks. Under a compromise plan crafted by Turkey and the new European Allies, the Patriarch was allowed to stay in Constantinople, but became subject to the jurisdiction of Turkish law. One of the most limiting laws required candidates for the position to be Turkish citizens by birth\textsuperscript{21}.

\textbf{Bloc Positions:}

\textbf{Military Leaders}

After fighting a hard three-year war and eventually driving the Greek forces from its occupation of Anatolia, the military commanders would likely support the removal of the rest of the civilian Greek population from Turkey. In the immediate years following the war, the generals also tended to be staunch supporters of Atatürk. Atatürk was able to initiate and perpetuate his reforms not solely because of his much-vaunted charisma and his shrewd political machinations but because he had the total support and loyalty of the Turkish military. The military group held the most seats in the Grand National Assembly and was the largest single occupational or interest group. Former military officers followed Atatürk’s rising star throughout the war and believed that his reform

\textsuperscript{20} Hellenic Resources Network.
\textsuperscript{21} Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople.
program was the only hope for a resolution of the social, economic, and political chaos that the nascent Republic of Turkey faced in the 1920s.\textsuperscript{22}

**Economists**

Relocation could threaten the stability of Turkey’s economy in a time when so much is already changing in the political, cultural, social, and religious realms of the country. During the Ottoman Empire, the Greeks were heavily taxed and comprised most of the subsistence farming, an industry so laborious and limited in profit that only poor Greeks were willing to take up the job. For Turkey to prosper as a country, it needed the cheap labor and extra tax revenue provided by minority groups like the Greeks. There is also a minority of prosperous Greeks in Constantinople and the Ionian islands, who have developed businesses and garnered large assets on Turkish lands. It is in their economic interest to stay where their investments are, so many would likely be willing to pay tribute or taxes to the state to prevent removal.\textsuperscript{23}

**Religious Leaders**

Given that Ataturk planned to execute major secular reforms in the country, it was in the religious leaders’ best interests to keep a strong Muslim base in Turkey. The Greeks posed the greatest religious threat to Turkey, as Greeks were primarily Christian-Orthodox while Turks were primarily Sunni Muslim. Even though the Kurds were an ethnic minority, they were majority Muslim as well and could adapt to the religious customs of Turkey. Therefore, religious leaders supported the removal of all Greek Orthodox inhabitants within the Turkish borders and encouraged all Muslim Turks in neighboring countries to relocate to Turkey. It is important for the religious leaders

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{22} http://www.airpower.maxwell.af.mil/airchronicles/aureview/1982/jan-feb/johnson.html
\item \textsuperscript{23} http://staff.lib.msu.edu/sowards/balkan/lecture6.html
\end{itemize}
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that religious identity was the main criterion in population exchanges between Turkey and Greece in 1923.24

Republican People’s Party- “First Group”

A Kemalist, social liberal and social democratic political party, the RPP was originally a union of resistance groups against the invasion of Anatolia. The union represented Turkish people as a unified front during the Turkish War of Independence. In September 1923, the "People's Party" officially declared itself a political organization and on October 29, 1923, announced the establishment of the Turkish Republic. In the period of 1925-1930, the Republican People's Party introduced measures transforming Turkey into a modern State. Central to these reforms was the belief that Turkish society would have to westernize both politically and culturally in order to modernize. The interests of this party are based mainly in creating a Turkish national identity, which many believed would be stronger and more solidified if non-Turks were not in the country.25

Progressive Republican Party- “Second Group”

The government blamed this opposition party for being Islamic oriented, even though it supported a liberal democracy for domestic policy. Ataturk blamed retired General Kâzım Karabekir, the leader of the party, for the Kurdish rebellion as well as the assassination attempt made on Ataturk’s life in Izmir. The party was forcibly closed on 5 June by the government. In essence, the party was banned for trying to redefine the secular nature of the Republic. If some party members did have interests in building a Muslim base, it would probably support the return of Muslims to Turkey and the expulsion of Greek Orthodox Christians.

24 http://www.nytimes.com/2006/09/17/books/review/Cooper.t.html?_r=0
Questions to Consider:

1. What are the short-term and long-term consequences of the population exchange with Greece? Could these consequences be lessened or eliminated?

2. Concerning the goal of creating a strong new national identity, what policy options does the Turkish government have in regards to Greeks living with Turkish borders?

3. Should the Greeks be taxed, relocated to a special space in Turkey, expelled, or something else? What are the pros and cons of the different policy options?

4. To what extent would Greeks in Turkey damage the solidarity of Turkish national identity? Is there a way to let Greeks remain in Turkey while limiting their impact on the solidarity of Turkish national identity?

5. How does the population exchange impact labor issues in Turkey? How can the negative economic effects be remedied?

6. What are the human rights concerns associated with a population exchange?

7. How was Turkish development slowed as a result of the population exchange and an influx of peasant farmers? How could this have been remedied?

8. What rights should minority groups receive in the new constitution? Should these same rights extend to the majority Muslim Turkish population, or do minorities need special protections?

9. What is the best way to approach border disputes with Greece? Should Greece employ diplomacy or use military aggression/intimidation? How should Turkey address disputes over Cyprus and the Aegean Sea?
Recommended Sources:

   


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