

The Compulsory Population Exchange of 1923 as a Nation-Building Policy

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The 1923 compulsory population exchange between Greece and Turkey has been used as an important precedent in the future discourse concerning conflict resolution in the post-WWII context; it has been singled out as an important causal factor for the development of the two nation-states; and, it has spurred a critical debate in the social sciences about the adverse humanitarian consequences and traumatic effects of such policies. But was this population exchange an unavoidable outcome? What were the conditions that precipitated the collapse of the Ottoman Empire? What would have happened if there had been no population exchange? In this presentation, I intend to put the events into a larger historical context of the spread of nationalist ideology through mass schooling, the consequent allergy to alien rule of nationalized peoples, and the homogenization imperative capturing the imagination of most rulers of existing and aspiring nation-states. Within such a context, population exchange was one of the many policies that governing elites could use to render the borders of the state congruent with those of the nation, the most critical element of nationalist ideology. Modernity in South-East Europe has led to ethnic separation, not integration or multiculturalism.