

“Our people over there ...”

The Fraught Role of Minorities in the Greek-Turkish Relations.

by Giorgos Mavrommatis

Signed at Lausanne in 30th January 1923, the Convention Concerning the Exchange of Greek and Turkish Populations (followed by the Lausanne Peace Treaty), forced some two million people from Greece and Turkey to leave their fatherlands. Interestingly enough, Article 2 exempted “the Greek inhabitants of Constantinople” and “the Moslem inhabitants of Western Thrace” from compulsory removal and gave them the right to remain on their lands. In this way, the two minorities were institutionalized and, soon, set to the service of their kin-States, in their attempt to serve their national interests.

During the 1923-1990 period, all knowledge regarding the minority issue derived mainly from material published by State institutes. With regard to its content, this information material placed its main focus on the oppression 'their people over there' suffered from the neighboring State policies, the special good care they themselves provided to the minority people on their lands or, in some cases, the attempt to legitimize the negative steps they “had to” take, as an answer to the neighbor's initiatives regarding 'their people over there'. This situation changed in the 1990s. During the last two decades there has been a great deal of research thoroughly examining the minority issue by keeping a critical attitude and integrating scientific disciplines, setting in this way the discussion of the minority issue into wider theoretical schemes.

Following this approach and based on archival research findings (1945-1957 period), the present paper aims at examining the attitudes Greece and Turkey used to have towards the minorities, within the wider framework of the Nation-State building process, focusing on the “reciprocity issue”, mainly as presented in the Minority Educational Policy.