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Christians, Muslims, and Jews: Turkey and the management of refugees from Greece during World War II

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Abstract

Approximately 70,000 people were displaced from Greece to Turkey and the Middle East during World War II. Following a presentation of the geography, statistics, and timeframe of the displacement, and Turkey's interwar demographic policies, the article studies Turkey's management of this refugee movement. Based on Greek, Turkish, and British archival material, the article argues that Turkish wartime refugee policy took shape in the intersection of two occasionally contradictory attributes. On the one hand, there were the state's demographic desiderata and policies that differentiated incoming refugees on account of their ethnic and religious identities. On the other, Turkey's reaction was necessarily conditioned by the military, political, and diplomatic conjuncture of the war. It was this conditionality that explains the inconsistencies and shifts in refugee management and its rationale during the war, for instance, the differentiation in the treatment of Jewish and Christian refugees, but also in the management of Greek Muslims in 1941–1942 and in 1944–1945.

Keywords: World War II; Turkey; refugees; displacement management; Greek refugees

Introduction

This article studies the management of displacement from Greece to Turkey during World War II (WWII) by Turkish state authorities. It aims to contribute to a recently growing strand of literature that studies the trajectory of displacement between Europe, the Middle East, and Africa during the war (Mihailidis 2018; Bieber 2020; Grigsby 2020; Lingelbach 2020; Lamprou 2021). Exploring Turkey's role is indispensable for the study of the Middle East trajectory of wartime displacement, as Turkey was one of the few non-belligerent countries that functioned as a critical refugee outlet and transit space. A second and parallel aim is to contextualize the specific case of displacement within Turkey's historical experience of displacement and population mobility management, thus contributing to the burgeoning literature on late Ottoman/early Republican population management and demographic engineering. In that respect, WWII displacement to Turkey constitutes a unique case study as

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it included both Muslim and non-Muslim refugees. The article specifically explores the extent to which the shifting war conjuncture conditioned Turkey's reactions to displacement and how previous experiences and historically shaped regimes of displacement management determined the country's perspectives and politics over refugees.

Starting with a short presentation of the displacement from Greece, the article explores Turkey's reactions to the displacement and management of refugees with different ethnic and religious backgrounds as it unfolded during the war years. The article is based on critical readings of archival sources and recollections from Turkey, Greece, and the United Kingdom (UK).

Population displacement from Greece and the Dodecanese¹

Greece entered WWII in October 1940 when attacked by Italy. In April 1941 Germany invaded Greece from Bulgaria and Yugoslavia and quickly defeated the Greek army. Greece was then occupied by Germany, Italy, and Bulgaria until late 1944. The first mass movement took place in April 1941 from Thrace, where the Bulgarian occupation led to the displacement of 10,000–15,000 Muslims. Another 6,000 soldiers and civilians crossed to Turkey from Thrace and the islands of the Aegean Sea. The harsh conditions of the military occupation and the Allied blockade of the occupied areas led to the famine of 1941–1942. Tens of thousands died as a result of the famine which also displaced thousands throughout Greece. From the islands of Chios and Samos alone, nearly 10,000 people fled to Turkey (Kalvokoresis, 194 and 259). The next mass displacement of civilians to Turkey was caused by military operations in late 1943, when no less than 10,000 from Samos and the Dodecanese crossed to Turkey (Danacıoğlu 2006; Danacıoğlu 2009). Again, hunger was the prime reason a few thousand refugees fled from Rhodes and Kos in early 1945. In addition, throughout the occupation years (1941–1944) thousands more from mainland Greece reached Turkey in small boats. In total, no less than 70,000 refugees moved from Greece to Turkey during WWII.² The Muslim refugees

¹ The Dodecanese are a cluster of islands in the Eastern Mediterranean, between Crete and the Anatolian coast. They were occupied by Italy in 1912 and remained an Italian possession until 1947, when they were united with Greece.

² Greek, Bulgarian, and Turkish sources estimate the Muslim refugees from Thrace between 12,000 and 15,000 (Geray 1962, Annex, Table 2; "Population Movements in Bulgarian occupied Macedonia and Thrace", 30.11.1944, Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Greece [AYE] 1944/21.6; Featherstone et al. 2011, 166). Turkish sources indicate that around 4,000 Muslims from the Dodecanese fled to Turkey (Report of Settlement Agency, 15.1.1947, Turkish Red Crescent Archive [KGMA] 2885, 1944–1949/9–4). In all, 25,000 Greek refugees were registered in refugee camps in the summer of 1944 (Greek State Archives, Middle East Archive [GAK, MEA]/1000). In addition, several hundred were not registered in the refugee camps, as they resided in cities in the Middle East (15.4.1945 report of legal advisor to the Greek Welfare Ministry, GAK, MEA/1026). The largest part of the Greek armed forces in the Middle East (25,000–30,000) were refugees from Greece (out of a total of 35,000) (Katsikostas 2015, 334). Around 2,000 Greek Jews also managed to escape through Turkey (Lampsa and Simpi 2014, 325). Lastly, during the last months of 1944 and until May 1945 around 3,500 fled to Turkey from the islands of the Dodecanese that were still under German control. They were not sent to the Middle East but remained for a short period in Turkey until sent to the islands of Kasos and Karpathos, where the British had established makeshift refugee camps ("Friends Ambulance Unit, Report on Work in Dodecanese, 27 April–24 May 1945," Archive of Society of Friends [FAU] 1947/3/5). All these numbers put together indicate that between 70,000 and 75,000 Greek nationals fled to Turkey during WWII.

stayed in Turkey (Davies, 411–413). The Christians and Jews were sent to the Middle East and Africa, where around half were enlisted in the Greek Armed Forces and the rest spent the war in refugee settlements and camps in Cyprus, Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, Egypt, and the Belgian Congo. While the Christian and a part of the Jewish Greek refugees were repatriated in 1945–1946, the majority of the Muslims most likely did not return (Lamprou 2021, 17–29).

Demographic policies and refugee management in Turkey

Turkey's wartime refugee management policies, notwithstanding the shifting military and diplomatic conjuncture, must be first of all placed within the context of the country's population policies which aimed at decreasing the numbers of non-Muslims while increasing those of Muslims mainly through migration. Since World War I, various demographic engineering policies (Sigalas and Toumarkine 2008; Sigalas and Toumarkine 2013) had been enacted to that end, such as population settlement, deportation, exchange, denaturalization, and assimilation (Üngör 2008). In particular, following the forced migration of vast numbers of Balkan Muslims during the first decades of the twentieth century into Ottoman territory, in the 1920s and 1930s Turkey actively encouraged the immigration of Muslims from the Balkans (Dündar 2021, 87–88, 122), while the emigration of non-Muslims, even if not openly advocated, was essentially instigated and amplified through discriminatory laws and state practices.

The policy aims to welcome incoming Muslim populations and facilitate the emigration of non-Muslims were exemplified in the case of around 200,000 refugees of the Russian Civil War. These were the only incoming non-Muslim refugees that Turkey was obliged to cope with until the exodus of European Jews in the 1930s and Greeks during WWII. Very few of the Russian refugees eventually stayed in Turkey, as Turkey discouraged their permanent settlement and rejected their applications for citizenship, in effect accepting only the very few who had converted, mostly women married to Muslim refugees or Turkish citizens (Dağlar Macar and Macar 2010, 263–266; Erder 2018, 61; Üre 2019).

During the 1920s and 1930s legal texts and everyday state practice shaped the way refugee and immigrant categories were constructed and managed. The basic criteria upon which different refugee groups and the corresponding state policies were constructed were unmistakably religious and ethnic identity, place of origin, previous Ottoman citizenship, and, increasingly after 1929, financial considerations (Becan 2021, 211–220, 227, 234). In the following exploration of Turkey's reaction to the war-time displacement from Greece, I treat refugee groups with different ethnic/religious identities and the corresponding state policies in tandem, keeping in mind that the different state reactions to incoming and outgoing – Muslim and non-Muslim – refugees were part of a larger demographic rationale.

Muslim refugees from Greece and the Dodecanese

With the outbreak of the war in September 1939, the Turkish government issued a decision that prohibited the entry and settlement in Turkey of persons of “Turkish origin from the islands of the Aegean and the Mediterranean as well as from Greek

and Bulgarian Thrace.”³ The timing of the decision suggests that the government became wary of such a possibility and felt the need to inform its state authorities and the potential refugees themselves against an inflow. In essence, it was a reiteration of the interwar policy to disallow the immigration of the Muslim/Turkish population of Greece and Bulgaria. Although actively promoting the immigration and settlement of ex-Ottoman Balkan Muslims, Turkey tried to maintain the Muslims of Greek and Bulgarian Western Thrace in their ancestral lands (Öksüz 2006, 53–54).⁴ The decision of the Turkish government (2/11966, September 19, 1939) decreed that only those who were facing discriminatory measures by Greece and Bulgaria, those whose family had already been settled in Turkey, those who had already bought land and property and were at the time working in Turkey, and those coming for university studies were to be accepted. These exceptions were apparently based on practical considerations but also humanitarian reasons. On the one hand, the decision excluded those who could easily and without great state support integrate socially and financially in Turkey, perhaps those who would prefer to stay among their relatives in Turkey even without legal recognition. In both cases, the state was legalizing *post facto* what it could not easily alter, that is, Turks of Bulgarian and Greek nationality who had settled in Turkey and had little or no incentive to return to Greece or Bulgaria. On the other hand, with this decision the Turkish state provided for the protection of those persecuted – in essence again legitimizing *post facto* an irreversible situation, as the repatriation of those who had faced persecution was probably difficult.

The document reveals a double intentionality: Turkey’s desire to sustain the community in place and at the same time the forging of close relations between these communities and the “national center” acting as their protector. Yet, these two aims could counteract each other, as close relations triggered more immigration to Turkey, while protecting the community in times of need might necessitate the abandonment of the policy to keep them in place. Here lies the inherently ambivalent stance of Turkey when faced with the exodus of thousands of Thracian Muslims in 1941.

With the beginning of the occupation in April 1941 and until the autumn of the same year, thousands of Muslims – between 12,000 and 15,000 – crossed the border to Turkey (Geray 1962, Appendix; Featherstone et al. 2011, 109). Already until July 1941, “9,160 Turks had entered Turkey as refugees,” as the Greek Ambassador reported.⁵ Although the exodus had essentially ceased by September 1941, it seems that the flight persisted throughout the war, albeit in smaller numbers.⁶ However, in the spring of 1941 the Turkish authorities were taken completely by surprise, overwhelmed by the sheer numbers and speed of the flight. On April 10, 1941, an official reported that “only today 1,200 Turkish villagers” with their animals and carts passed through one border pass and that many had already been and would later be

³ 2/11966, 19.9.1939, T.C. Cumhurbaşkanlığı Devlet Arşivleri, Cumhuriyet Dönemi (BCA) 00.30.18.1.2/88.91.10.

⁴ The Muslims of Western Thrace were exempted from the compulsory population exchange between Turkey and Greece agreed in Lausanne in 1923.

⁵ 2666, 13.8.1941, AYE 1941/11-3-1.

⁶ In August 1944 “945 Turks with thirty-five carts and 285 animals” crossed the border. Customs Ministry, 7.9.1944, BCA 00.30.10/117.815.6. Their exodus would resume during the Greek Civil War. Between 1946 and 1948 as many as 17,000 Greek Muslims fled to Turkey (Öksüz 2006, 68; Featherstone et al. 2011, 258–268).

transported by train and boat to the interior and Anatolia.⁷ Behind this mass flight of the Muslims from occupied Western Thrace to Turkey, as well as the internal displacement of hundreds of thousands of Christians, was the violent policy of Bulgarianization implemented by the Bulgarian occupation authorities. Contributing to the mass flight, especially among the Pomak population, were the memories of the violence and assimilationist policies during the previous Bulgarian occupation of the region in 1913–1919 but also the hunger experienced in 1941–1942 in several isolated areas that Pomaks were inhabiting (Kotzageorgi and Kazamias 1994; Featherstone et al. 2011, 99–100, 106–107).

Turkish diplomatic authorities complained to the Bulgarian government, asking for the repatriation of the displaced. The Bulgarian government denied the charges that it had instigated the flight, arguing that it was caused by the acts of the Turkish consulate in Thrace. The Bulgarian side refused to allow their return, claiming that the refugees had fled on their own account and after previously selling their property (Petrov 2009, 6–8). According to the Turkish Foreign Minister, the Bulgarian authorities tried to force the exodus of the Muslim population by pushing them to declare that they were Turkish and not Greek citizens, in order to ease their emigration to Turkey (Tsouderos 1990, 152). Despite all their protests the Turkish authorities could do nothing but accept the refugees.

A month later, in mid-May 1941, the government took two decisions concerning the refugees from Greece, nos. 15802 and 15626. Issued on May 14, 1941, decision 15802 decreed that all those who had fled “from the islands of the Aegean and the Mediterranean after the 20th of April 1941 due to the war and the extraordinary situation” and all those “that will flee in the future as long as this situation continues” would be treated as refugees independently of the provisions of the decision of September 1939 not to accept refugees from Greek and Bulgarian Thrace and the islands.⁸ The decision did not mention any ethnic or religious affiliation of the refugees. Yet, as an annex to the September 1939 decision, which refers only to those refugees who were of “Turkish origin,” the decision obviously referred to Muslims/Turks. In addition, the decision covered only those fleeing to Turkey after the occupation of Greece and not those who had fled to Turkey before. On August 13, 1941, another government decision complemented the two decisions (2/15802 and 2/15626), stating that those Turks who had fled to Turkey before the dates stipulated in those two decisions (April 1, 1941 from Thrace and April 20, 1941 from the islands) should also be treated as free immigrants (*serbest göçmen*), because they could not be sent back. Additionally, as they could not be given refugee status due to the two previous decisions, “they cannot establish any legal bond and they thus cannot take advantage of any citizen’s right or benefit.”⁹

At that moment and following a number of decisions seemingly at odds with each other that had been taken in haste due to the pressing circumstances, the government doubtlessly felt that a misunderstanding regarding its policy might arise among the state authorities involved with refugee management. As a result, a day later the Council of Ministers issued a decision clarifying the overall policy “regarding the

⁷ Kâzım Dirik, 659, 10.4.1941, BCA 00.30.10/73.481.12.

⁸ BCA 00.30.18.1.2/95.41.17.

⁹ 16418, 13.8.1941, BCA 00.30.18.1.2/96.72.3.

acceptance or not of the refugees from Greek Western Thrace.” The decision stipulated that “the [government’s] basic principle to have the Turkish population of Western Thrace stay there” had not changed. Yet, those who had come due to the war and “had been settled in various places together with their families . . . will be immediately” given Turkish citizenship. As for the refugees who were at that time still in Eastern Thrace, the decision ordered those “whose return is possible” to be sent back.¹⁰ Probably following this decision, the Turkish authorities tried in August 1941 to restrain the inflow by sending “more than 5,000 Turkish refugees” back to the Greek side of the border and within the German occupation zone. Eventually, the Turkish authorities had to accept these refugees back as the Bulgarian authorities did not permit their return and only those Muslims who had fled from the German occupation zone were reportedly obliged to return.¹¹

Then the Turkish government decided very quickly to settle all Muslim refugees, allotting them land and dwellings to sustain themselves and, starting on August 13, 1941, naturalizing thousands of them. For instance, of the 4,517 Muslim refugees the government naturalized with only ten decisions between August 1941 and May 1942, 3,157 were Greek Muslims who had fled to Turkey in 1941.¹² The actual number was definitely higher, as many more government decisions to naturalize Muslim refugees were taken in 1942. The naturalization procedure followed bureaucratic practice established for the swift naturalization of Muslim immigrants from the Balkans (yet explicitly not from Greece) in the 1930s (Becan 2021, 220–234, 252–265). The procedure was then used to quickly naturalize the Muslim refugees from Greek Thrace, who were generally excluded from naturalization.¹³

The majority of those fleeing as families were registered as farmers (more than 80 percent) and were settled in villages, receiving state land and dwellings.¹⁴ The rest were registered as artisans, small merchants, and workers and usually settled in towns. The criteria according to which they were settled and/or naturalized were not stated in the surviving documents. Based on statistical data we can only assume that farmers tended to cross the border as families and were settled (*iskanlı*), i.e. given land and dwellings in villages or small towns. In contrast, the majority of those who fled individually were mostly accepted or chose themselves to register as “free immigrants” (*serbest göçmen*). That was an administrative category denoting those who were naturalized without being given any property. In contrast to the majority who received land and were obliged to settle in a specific locality, “free immigrants” were free to reside wherever they chose. Here, there seems to be an arrangement according to which rural and urban populations were bureaucratically handled with the explicit aim to have them uphold their previous residential, occupational, social identity, and position: farmers in villages and urbanites in towns – an old and

¹⁰ 16434, 14.8.1941, BCA 00.30.18.1.2/96.73.1

¹¹ 4th Intelligence Bulletin, 26.11.1941, p. 92, AYE 1941/7-4-1.

¹² Decisions of 13.8.1941, 18.10.1941, 10.11.1941, 16.11.1941, 24.12.1941, 29.1.1942, 29.1.1942, 29.1.1942, 14.2.1942, and 11.3.1942, BCA 00.30.18.1.2/96.71.2; 96.88.16; 96.90.19; 96.93.20; 97.105.9; 97.111.18; 97.111.19; 97.112.1; 97.117.18; and 97.126.11, respectively.

¹³ In a similar reaction, the Turkish government offering citizenship to “the Turks of Western Thrace who were compelled to flee as refugees or free immigrants” during the Greek Civil War. 12.2.1948, BCA 00.30.12.1.2/115.93.14. Their return was considered improbable given that many had sold their property.

¹⁴ Estimation based on data from two lists: BCA 00.30.18.1.2/97.111.18 and 97.105.09.

persistent policy of the Ottoman Empire that had been inherited by the Turkish state (Erder 2018, 42, 98).

In short, faced with a demographic fait accompli in 1941 the Turkish government, in complete contrast to its own policy, decided to naturalize and settle a large part of the Greek Muslim refugees within a few months of their flight. In their responses, Turkish authorities appeared torn between humanitarian and practical necessities of refugee management as opposed to more general and strategic considerations of foreign policy. Their response was to reiterate their policy goal to keep the minority in Greece, while in practice they breached that policy by naturalizing and settling the refugees.

The decision was taken by the Council of Ministers, following consultation with other state offices (ministries of foreign affairs, interior, and national defense), which in all probability had different agendas and priorities. A document drafted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, albeit in a different conjuncture of the war, offers a slightly different perspective concerning the handling of the Muslim refugees and perhaps a veiled criticism of previous decisions. In November 1943, the Minister of Foreign Affairs informed the Prime Minister that there were rumors that Turks from Thrace were murdered by Bulgarians when sent back from Turkey. Those refugees that were still in “our Thracian provinces obstinately declare that if sent back they will be killed.” In order to prevent “the killing of our racial brothers” (*ırkdaşlarımız*), the Minister was asking for a decision to accept as refugees all those Turks (and those speaking Turkish) who had passed to Turkey after June 1, 1943 and those who would pass in the future from Greek Thrace as long as the extraordinary situation continued. Yet, the Minister cautioned against the taking of “a general government decision to accept as refugees those of Turkish race and those Turkish-speaking people” because “in brief, such a decision will definitely provoke a general flight among our racial brothers [*soydaşlarımız*] as in 1941 and because it will not be consistent with the principles intended with the Lausanne treaty for the Turks of this area.”¹⁵ The Lausanne Treaty excluded the Muslims of Greek Thrace and the Greek Orthodox of İstanbul from the compulsory population exchange between Turkey and Greece. By late 1943, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs viewed the 1941 decision to accept as refugees and naturalize the Thracian Muslims as contrary to the country’s policy regarding the Muslim/Turkish community in Greek Thrace. Perhaps more than a routine disagreement between state agencies, this differentiation in 1943 had its root in the changing conjuncture of the war. This is more evident in the case of the Muslim refugees from the Dodecanese in 1944–1945.

In 1944 and early 1945, around half of the Muslims of the Dodecanese islands (around 4,000 of 9,000)¹⁶ also fled to Turkey (Georgiadis 1997, 207). These Muslims, however, were handled in a completely different way. Most were “temporarily settled in Fethiye” and were not allowed to move outside the province of Muğla.¹⁷ The obvious aim was to have them return to the islands as soon as possible. Indeed, under

¹⁵ 4/17690, 20.11.1943, BCA 00.30.10/117.813.9.

¹⁶ Letter sent “in the name of the people of Rhodes,” 19.7.1945; and Report of General Directorship of Settlement, 15.1.1947, KGMA 2885, 1944–1949/9-4.

¹⁷ 28.4.1945, KGMA 2789, 1943-9-4c; 2.5.1945, BCA 00.30.10/124.882.12.

the auspices of the Turkish government they were repatriated en masse in 1945;¹⁸ their repatriation related to Turkey's hopes regarding the Dodecanese islands' postwar fate (Kaymakçı and Özgün 2015, 44–45; Papuççular 2018, 413–414).

Turkish state authorities evidently responded differently in 1941–1942 and in 1944–1945, although for both communities the official policy aims were to keep them in their ancestral lands. In fact, only the Muslims from the islands were handled primarily with that aim in mind. While thousands of Muslims from Thrace were swiftly settled and given citizenship in 1941–1942, the state neither settled nor gave land to the Muslim refugees from the Dodecanese but had them repatriated as early as the summer of 1945. We can only speculate on the reasons for this divergence as reports indicating the rationale behind government decisions are not available. In all probability, the Turkish authorities in 1941 and early 1942 considered that the possibility of return was minimal. Large parts of Northern Greece had been unilaterally annexed by Bulgaria. In 1941–1942, the Axis powers seemed to have the upper hand or were at least far from defeated. What is more, Bulgaria had no legal obligations with regard to the Muslim minority in the parts of Greek Thrace it occupied. Greece, in contrast, had specific obligations in accordance with the Lausanne Treaty. In addition, Bulgarian authorities in the occupied territories of the Greek and Yugoslav state were implementing a policy of demographic Bulgarization, the first victims of which were local Muslims. As a result, many Muslims fled as families, with their animals and their movable property on carts. This indicates a permanent flight and very few hopes for return. Coupled with the financial burden of sustaining their numbers for an unforeseeable future (given the additional distress caused by the war), the authorities decided to give them state land to sustain themselves. This, in turn, necessitated their legal settlement as well, that is, citizenship.

Yet, it seems that not all state authorities involved shared the same priorities. A late 1943 document of the Foreign Affairs Ministry asked for a government decision regarding the incoming Muslim refugees that would not run, as in 1941, contrary to the state's policy on Greek Thrace as it had been set in the Lausanne Treaty. The war conjuncture in late 1943 indicated that a return to the status quo *ante bellum* in Thrace was quite likely, but perhaps apart from the shifting war conjuncture, the different priorities of the state authorities involved also influenced their reaction to the refugee crisis. Unlike officials of the Interior Ministry, Turkish diplomats were not engaged in the day-to-day management of thousands of refugees. In that respect, they could be more detached and prone to see to the state's general interests than the refugees' imminent ones.

When the Muslims of Kos and Rhodes started fleeing to Turkey in 1944–1945, the war was undoubtedly at its end and the Italian Dodecanese had not yet been given to Greece. In the war conjuncture of 1945, the return of the refugees was serving Turkey's hopes for some kind of role in the postwar fate of the islands. There were hopes that some islands might be given to Turkey on the basis of population, or strategic and historical considerations, such as their geographical proximity to Turkey and their Ottoman past.

¹⁸ Minister of Health and Social Assistance, 2.5.1945, BCA 00.30.10/124.882.12; and 16.10.1945, BCA 00.30.10/124.882.16. Letter of 320 refugees from Kos, 108714, 17.9.1945, KGMA 2885, 1944–1949/9–4; Muğla Governor, 13.7.1945, 106148, KGMA 2885, 1944–1949/9–4.

Acceptable as it appeared to be in terms of the state's demographic objectives, the shift in the policy regarding the naturalization and settlement of Greek Muslim refugees in Turkey in 1941–1942 was nevertheless running against Turkey's declared foreign policy aims. Rejected on both accounts (i.e. demographic and foreign policy), a similar solution was not even considered when it came to non-Muslim refugees. And yet, Turkey was obliged to handle tens of thousands of non-Muslim refugees from Greece for extended periods of time.

Christians from Greece and the Dodecanese

In the beginning, those crossing the Greek–Turkish border in Thrace in April 1941 were Greek soldiers and men of military age. Once in Turkey they were interned in camps under the supervision of the Ministry of National Defense. Until they were dispatched to the Middle East, the Turkish state had to accommodate and feed them and pay their salaries.¹⁹ Those wishing to continue fighting, around 1,500, were secretly dispatched in civilian clothes (GES/DIS 1995, 17) from Mersin to Palestine in June 1941.²⁰

The flow of men continued in the summer of 1941 from the Aegean islands. Again, most escapees were male: officers, soldiers, and conscripts. In contrast to the uniformed men in April though, the Turkish authorities accepted the men escaping after May 1941 as civilians. In fact, Greek authorities “had informed them in time that it was necessary to discard their military identity [clothes] and in that they were secretly assisted by the local authorities in Kuşadası” (Argyropoulos 1971, 60).

Accepting them as civilians, Turkey could lawfully allow them safe passage²¹ to the countries of the Middle East and Africa that were still under the control of the British and French as mandates, colonies, or protectorates. Taking advantage of the Allies' need for soldiers, the Turkish government was getting rid of thousands of foreign troops that it would otherwise have to intern in accordance with Articles 11 and 12 of Convention (V) respecting the Rights and Duties of Neutral Powers and Persons in Case of War on Land, signed in the Hague, October 18, 1907 (Brown Scott 1915, 135).²² Turkey was thus avoiding a financial burden while at the same time holding an extra card in its relations with Britain, which in 1941–1942 were probably not at their best. As a neutral country, Turkey was, according to international law, obliged to detain any soldiers of belligerent countries. Allowing soldiers from belligerent countries to travel abroad then was a clear violation of the country's declared neutrality and it should also be seen as a part of the balancing policy Turkey was following in its attempt to remain non-belligerent. To avoid pressure Turkey was simultaneously dealing with both sides, giving each side something in return

¹⁹ 2/15877, 23.5.1941, BCA 00.30.18.01.02/95.45.2; and 2/16686, 14.10.1941, BCA 00.30.18.1.2/96.85.10. “Muharip yabancı ordu mensuplarından Türkiye'ye iltica edenler hakkında kanun,” *Resmî Gazete*, No. 4887, 17.8.1941.

²⁰ 28.6.1941, [Greek] Army History Directory (DIS)/Middle East Collection 802 E.

²¹ With documents issued by Greek and British consular authorities. Raphael, 2842, 31.8.1941, AYE 1941/11-3-1.

²² Turkey was not the only state that did not fully implement the obligation of the Convention. Hungary and Romania also did not obstruct, as they were obliged to do, the escape through their lands of Polish soldiers in 1939–1940 (Kochanski 2012, 205).

(Deringil 1989). In 1941–1942, facilitating the flow of military men to the Middle East was probably one of the few ways it could please the British. Yet, this gesture of goodwill also had its limits.

In October 1941, following German diplomatic complaints,²³ the Turkish authorities announced that they would close the border and disallow the transit visas that had been until then issued to move refugees to the Middle East (Long 1953, 315).²⁴ As the refugee tide was rising during the end of 1941 the Turkish authorities also started an intensified policy of refoulement, trying forcefully, but mostly unsuccessfully, to push back refugees.²⁵ When Greek authorities complained that Greek officers who were pushed back could be imprisoned or even executed by the occupying forces, Turkey consented to accepting only officers (not soldiers), but had them interned in Turkey.²⁶ Yet, even when they had to accede to German pressure, the Turkish authorities connived with Allied personnel to have military men transhipped from the boats passing them to the Turkish waters into small boats bound for Cyprus. In that way Turkey could not be held accountable as she was merely covertly involved and could feign ignorance.²⁷ Eventually even the interned were discreetly dispatched to the Middle East²⁸ in small groups and supposedly as civilians. Some were even asked to sign a statement that they were civilian refugees (Kakadelis 1992, 121).

The Turkish government made another attempt to lawfully accept the Greek soldiers as *de facto* civilians. In April 1942 the Turkish Ministry of National Defense drafted some amendments to the “Regulations regarding the soldiers of foreign armies fleeing to Turkey,” stipulating that the Defense Minister would decide whether “the members of the armed forces of a country that is under occupation . . . and thus non-belligerent or not in a state of war” would be accepted as civilian refugees.²⁹ Eventually, with the tide of war changing after Stalingrad and El Alamein in early 1943, the Allied forces gained much more leverage over Ankara, with Greek and Allied military personnel allowed to move in and through Turkey almost unhindered.

Displaced civilians presented the sole problem to this arrangement, as no side appeared willing to handle them in 1941. While the majority of the refugees then were men enlisted or about to enlist in the Greek army, by the end of the year a few thousand civilians – women, children and non-combatant men – also passed to Turkey. The Turkish authorities were requesting their speedy removal, accepting them *de facto* only as refugees in transit. Hard pressed as they were in the Middle East, in the summer of 1941 the British were willing to accept only trained soldiers.³⁰ To the displeasure of British and Greek officials, the Turkish authorities managed to send

²³ Raphael, 3189, 7.10.1941; 3821, 31.10.1941; 3541, 5.11.1941; 3758, 19.11.1941, AYE 1941/11-3-1.

²⁴ Raphael, 3146, 4.10.1941; 3189, 7.10.1941, AYE 1941/11-3-1.

²⁵ Raphael, 3433, 3541, 3758, 3798, 3814, 3877, October–November 1941, AYE 1941/11-3-1.

²⁶ Raphael, 3877, 26.11.1941, AYE 1941/11-3-1.

²⁷ Knatchbull-Hugessen, 1025, 21.5.1942, The National Archives, UK (TNA), Admiralty, and Ministry of Defence (ADM) 199/540.

²⁸ Raphael, 766, 16.2.1942, AYE 1942/12-4-1.

²⁹ “Yabancı Ordu Mensuplarından Türkiye’ye İltica edenler Hakkında (13559) Sayılı Talimata Ek,” § 9, 2.4.1942, BCA 0030.10/55.367.2.

³⁰ Greek Military Attaché, 19.5.1941, DIS/Middle East Collection 802 E.

some women and children. Apparently, Turkish authorities “insisted that in order to give the contingents [of military refugees] the air of being bona fide refugees a certain number of women and children should be included.”³¹

In the event, though, Turkey was obliged to temporarily settle and cater for almost 2,000 refugees for a period of several months in 1941.³² They were handled by the Ministry of Health and Social Assistance (Sıhhat ve İctimai Muavenet Vekâleti), which had them “dispersed in seven towns along the İzmir–Adana railroad under the agreement between Turkish officials and the Greek embassy that, following some days’ notice, the Turkish authorities would transport them in groups to Mersin on time to board a ship” (Argyropoulos 1971, 60). For a period of several months, they were temporarily housed and given a small amount of pocket money by the Turkish state. Following an agreement with the British authorities they were sent to Palestine by the end of 1941. Most spent the war in Jerusalem and Beirut.³³

Yet, what all involved governments wanted to avoid began in earnest in February and peaked in March and April 1942 (Argenti 1996, 236–237). The exodus of around 10,000 refugees from Chios totally changed the way the refugee issue was understood and managed by the involved authorities. These were not just men wishing to enlist, whose swift transfer to and incorporation into already existing military facilities in the Middle East were feasible. In the spring and summer of 1942, men, women, children, and whole families were fleeing a grave famine that had occurred in occupied Greece in 1942 (Hionidou 2021). The peninsula of Çeşme, opposite Chios, was flooded by thousands, who were temporarily lodged in every available empty or old building, in tents, but also in hotels and houses rented by British and Greek authorities. The tragic irony was, of course, that many of these dwellings had been previously occupied by Ottoman Greeks, expelled in 1922. Refugees received food and pocket money from Turkish, British, and Greek officials.³⁴

The first reaction of the Turkish state was to intensify security measures in an unsuccessful attempt to curtail the influx, i.e. more policemen and soldiers on the shores, refolement and combating trafficking networks. In general, the German occupying forces did not accept the refugees back. In one recorded case, the Turkish authorities brought a ship to Çeşme, loaded it with around 600 refugees and sent it to Chios, only to be refused by the German authorities. The Turkish authorities were also attempting to send the refugees back by re-embarking them on the vessels with which the refugees had approached the shores; in most cases this was also unsuccessful as the refugees would simply disembark to another spot on the shore. In several cases, the small boats coming from the islands were fired upon by Turkish forces, while there were also reports of beatings of refugees by Turkish gendarmes in an attempt to prevent further arrivals (Makridakis 2010).³⁵ However, it was almost impossible to check the disembarkation of famine-stricken refugees from hundreds of small boats on hundreds of kilometers of shoreline. The state’s policy was also disrupted by

³¹ British Military Attaché, 30.7.1941, TNA War Office (WO) 201/128.

³² Minister of Health and Social Assistance, 65277, 8.3.1943, BCA 00.30.10/124.882.4.

³³ *Resmi Gazete*, 22.1.1942, 5013. Greek Military Attaché, above note 30.

³⁴ Ministry of Commerce, 15/14781, 18.5.1942, BCA 490.1/611.120.8.7.

³⁵ Reports by Ambassador Knatchbull-Hugessen, no. 89, 27.4.1942, no. 130, 21.5.1942, and several other documents in TNA, ADM 199/540.

gendarmes and local officials who were reported to habitually take bribes in order not to send refugees back (Makridakis 2010).³⁶ There were perhaps several reasons why Turkish authorities were not keen to cater for Greek refugees. Apart from the overall policy to reduce the numbers of non-Muslims in Turkey, throughout the war Turkey was struggling to maintain a mobilized army, to accommodate several thousand Muslim refugees from Greece, but also to deal with the internal displacement of thousands of Turkish citizens from Turkish Thrace to Istanbul and Anatolia in 1941. This displacement was caused by a widespread fear caused by rumors that Turkey was about to be invaded by Germany (Bakar 2007).

The failure of the push-back policy left Turkish officials with no alternative but to try to speedily send the refugees to British-controlled Syria or Cyprus through diplomatic means.³⁷ At that moment they applied constant pressure on the British.³⁸ Another measure was “not to allow recruits to leave with weekly batches of refugees . . . and by embarking fresh arrivals in schooners chartered for other purposes and sending them to sea.”³⁹ Young men to be recruited were given priority by the British. Although alarming for the Turkish authorities, wary as they were of being left with thousands of unwanted refugees to look after for indefinite periods of time, this priority could also provide Turkish authorities with some diplomatic leverage against the British.

Given the Turkish officials’ vigilance regarding non-Muslim minorities, it is interesting that it was only in the spring of 1942, when the number of Greek refugees in Çeşme had exceeded 5,000,⁴⁰ that a Turkish official appeared concerned about the possibility of a long-term stay of Greek refugees in Turkey. The British Ambassador reported that Foreign Minister Şükrü Saraçoğlu told him that

he wished to avoid at all costs the squatting in Turkey of a large number of refugees who would have to be fed by the Turkish government and secondly the reconstitution of a Greek minority in the Izmir district. So long as we guarantee to pass refugees through regularly and expeditiously and to feed them, he did not mind how many came, but he must be certain that they were all in transit.⁴¹

Assurances were given by the British Ambassador that the refugees would be cleared out of Turkey,⁴² and the evacuation to Syria and Cyprus started slowly in June 1942.⁴³

The evacuation commenced as the Turkish side announced the decision to send batches of 300 refugees by rail to Syria three times a week. The decision was apparently unmediated by previous discussions with the British (or Greek authorities) which were prompted to organize the gradual evacuation of refugees from Turkey.⁴⁴ Yet many – mostly women and children, as priority of evacuation was given to

³⁶ Bahtihar Göker, 28.4.1942, BCA 490.1/611.120.8.7.

³⁷ Hüseyin Alataş, 25.5.1942, 51872; and Interior Minister, 13.8.1942, 3/164, BCA 490.1/611.120.8.7.

³⁸ Knatchbull-Hugessen, 1636, 5.9.1942; 1756, 25.9.1942; 299, 8.10.1942, TNA, ADM 199/540.

³⁹ British Consul in Izmir, 174, 24.9.1942, TNA, ADM 199/540.

⁴⁰ Raphael, 2207, 9.5.1942; 2412, 22.5.1942, AYE 1942/12-4-1.

⁴¹ Knatchbull-Hugessen, 1026, 21.5.1942, TNA, ADM 199/540.

⁴² *ibid.*

⁴³ Raphael, 2668, 7.6.1942, AYE 1942/12-4-1.

⁴⁴ Knatchbull-Hugessen, 1037, 23.5.1942; 243, 2.6.1942; Minister of State, 21, 2.6.1942, TNA, ADM 199/540.

men – had to stay for several months. As more refugees continued crossing the Aegean during the summer and autumn, the Çeşme peninsula was eventually cleared of refugees as late as February 1943.⁴⁵

Following initial unsuccessful attempts to curtail the exodus, the eventual intention of the Turkish authorities was to agree with the British on a swift evacuation. As long as the refugees were not Muslims, the refugee wave was from the beginning considered primarily as an issue of foreign policy to be solved through interstate relations. It is not a coincidence that the *ad hoc* committee established in the spring of 1942 to coordinate state authorities on the refugee issue was headed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which did all the negotiation with the British diplomatic authorities on the issue.⁴⁶ The distribution of foodstuffs to the Greek islands was another method to curtail the exodus of their population that necessitated interstate cooperation and all the involved authorities, British, Greek, and Turkish, cooperated in that respect so that by autumn 1942 the regular distribution of food through Turkey alleviated the situation and the mass exodus eventually stopped (Argenti 1996, 55).

An advantage that refugees were offering Turkey was the ability to counter the colossal loss of workforce caused by the country's mobilization. Many refugees were employed for as much as several months as carpenters, masons, and even as agricultural laborers, usually for lower wages than local workers. Hundreds worked in the state textile factory in Nazilli (Koç 1999, 399; Tekeli and İlkin 2013, 606; Bratsos 2017, *passim*). Refugees were also seen as a source of much-needed intelligence from Greece and were occasionally welcomed in that respect by Turkish military/intelligence authorities.⁴⁷

By the time the next mass exodus took place from Samos and the Dodecanese in late 1943 and early 1944, the infrastructure for the management of refugees in the Middle East had been laid down. The allied authorities had more means at their disposal to manage the displaced. They were simply more prepared to receive, register, and quickly dispatch them to the refugee camps that had been established in 1942 and 1943 in the Middle East and Africa. As a result, the Turkish authorities had only a short engagement with the refugees after 1943 as they were speedily sent to the Middle East shortly after reaching the shores of Turkey.⁴⁸

In short, Turkish officials did not portray Greek refugees as a potential threat to their demographic policies. Instead, their presence was primarily seen as a logistic burden on the country's limited resources and a diplomatic entanglement. This attitude vividly contrasted with the way thousands of European Jews trying to flee the Holocaust through Turkey were considered by Turkish officials.

Contrasts and parallels: the fate of European Jews

The exodus of European Jews in the 1930s had repercussions for Turkey, as thousands attempted to flee to, but mostly, through Turkey. Many had been Ottoman or Turkish

⁴⁵ Raphael, 1454, 2.3.1943, AYE 1943/18-2-1.

⁴⁶ Interior Minister F. Tüzer, 13.8.1942, 3/164, BCA 490.1/611.120.8.7.

⁴⁷ Edirne Consul, 24.9.1942, AYE 1943/17-4-1; Seligman (1997, 204–211).

⁴⁸ DIS/Middle East Collection 811A, p. 19.

citizens that Turkey had been systematically denaturalizing since the 1920s. Most had immigrated to France (Guttstadt 2012, 240–255). Turkey’s declared policy and consequent decisions aimed to block any Jewish exodus to or through Turkey (Bali 2000; Şimşir 2010; Guttstadt 2012; Bahar 2015). This policy practically persisted until mid-1944 when, following pressure from the United States, Turkey accepted the transit of a few thousand Jews to the Middle East. As a result, between 1940 and 1945 around 13,000 transited through Turkey legally. Most passed till 1941 (around 4,800) and after the summer of 1944 (6,800). Between 1941 and 1944, as the transit of European Jews through Turkey was hindered, the flight of Turkish-citizen Jews from Turkey to Palestine was peaking practically uninhibited, if not promoted through discriminatory policies targeting non-Muslim Turks (Aktar 2000). As a result, more Turkish Jews left for Palestine than European Jews transited Turkey to Palestine (Guttstadt 2012, 213–214).

The refusal to accept Jewish refugees was not particular to Turkey in the 1930s, but a rather common attitude of most countries (Bartrop 2017). In Turkey’s case it of course fitted with the country’s overall demographic policy. Recent scholarship has demonstrated that Turkish authorities – with an ample degree of nationalistic and anti-Semitic paranoia – saw Jewish refugees as a threat to their demographic desiderata. In a number of available documents, Turkish officials expressed a phobia that stateless Jewish refugees would (wish to) immigrate to Turkey. The knowledge that several had been denaturalized ex-Ottoman and Turkish citizens who still had relatives in Turkey, who could make their return less arduous, probably fed into such fears. For instance, in response to intelligence reports in October 1942 that four to five thousand Jews were to attempt to pass through Turkey, the Interior Minister expressed the fear that their aim was not to go to Palestine,⁴⁹ but to “stay as a burden to Turkey,” as “not only it is difficult to get rid of them, but with the incitement of humanitarian sentiments in the international public opinion, they generate negative opinions about our country for something we did not cause.”⁵⁰ It is within that mindset that Turkish authorities refused calls in 1944 to allow transit camps on Turkish soil for Jews and preferred their removal to Palestine by sea (Wasserstein 1979, 151; Bahar 2015, 224–226).

This stubborn refusal to allow Jewish refugees even to set foot on Turkish soil is interesting when compared to the policy towards Greek refugees. In comparison to the strict police surveillance of Jews transiting through Turkey (Guttstadt 2012, 220), Turkish authorities were significantly more liberal in their treatment of Greek refugees. In the summer of 1941, for instance, hundreds of Greeks spent several weeks in Manisa, where they faced no restriction of movement. They made contact with İstanbul Greeks and received help, clothing, and money. Some were able to find temporary jobs with the help of policemen, while the Turkish authorities did not even register them properly (Tamvaklis 2003, 17–41). What is more, for Greek refugees, Turkish authorities temporarily settled refugees in various towns and even allowed foreign diplomatic and military personnel to carry out refugee relief operations independently. This amounted to offering some kind of *ad hoc* and restricted extraterritorial rights. This was interesting given Turkey’s adamant position since the

⁴⁹ 9.9.1942, BCA 0030.10/99.641.13.

⁵⁰ 19.9.1942, BCA 0030.10/99.641.13.

Treaty of Lausanne to get rid of or minimize foreign interference and dependence. Yet when asked to commit themselves to fewer *ad hoc* measures with the establishment of an official temporary camp for Greek refugees in 1942, Turkish officials rejected the request on the grounds that it could form a precedent for other refugees, “that is, Jews.”⁵¹ It is telling that, although they had been already catering for Greek refugees in *de facto* temporary camps, Turkish officials did not desire to recognize them as such, in order to be able to avoid doing the same for Jewish refugees.

What is more, while adamantly refusing entry to Jewish refugees from Europe, the Turkish government even offered to cater for 1,000 Greek children in early 1942 (Macar 2008, 93–94). And apart from a hint to the British Ambassador in 1942, Turkish officials did not seem to express any reservations that the displaced Greeks might eventually settle in Western Anatolia, even when many had been forcefully displaced from the same area to Greece in the 1920s (Lamprou 2022a). Obviously, the obligatory transfer of the Orthodox population of Turkey to Greece included in the Lausanne Treaty functioned as a legal guarantee that eased any misgivings that Turkish officials might have had. Yet, more than that, I argue the Turkish officials’ viewpoint was also shaped by a “nation-state bias:” in the event, the existence of a (nation-) state to claim the refugees – even a past enemy as Greece – was reassuring. It was there, across the border, and it could be, at the very least, negotiated with. Its absence, in contrast, must have been discomfiting. The attitude of the Turkish authorities towards Greek Jews seems to support this argument. Turkish authorities did not register Greek Jews escaping to Turkey separately or differently (Bowman 2006, 31–51; Heuck Allen 2011, 201; Lampsas and Simpi 2014, 358). So, as long as there was a state to claim them or willing to have them evacuated expeditiously from Turkey to the Middle East, as in the case of Greek Jews, the Turkish state authorities appeared more amenable than in the case of stateless Jews.

The issue of whether anti-Semitism influenced Turkey’s policy towards Jewish refugees remains. Recent scholarship has indicated the proliferation of anti-Semitism among Turkish nationalist elites in the 1930s and 1940s (Bayraktar 2004; Baer 2013; Lamprou 2022b). We may contemplate that, next to the difficulty that nationalist state elites probably were facing to associate Jewish refugees to a nation-state, expelled as they had been by their states for being Jews, key notions of anti-Semitism, such as their supposed “international character” and their portrayal as “parasites,” were perhaps nurturing considerations that Jewish refugees were aiming to settle in Turkey. For many foreign actors involved in the evacuation of refugees to and from Turkey, anti-Semitism was an element affecting the Turkish authorities’ policies and decisions (Bowman 2006, 45; Guttstadt 2012, 233). Yet, I would concur with Wasserstein’s point regarding the role of anti-Semitism in British policy during the war. He argues (Wasserstein 1979, 353–354) that the principal factor explaining the low priority accorded to aid for the Jews was not the existence or not of anti-Semitism among British officials, but the lack of “the essential attribute of state sovereignty.” The significance of this attribute becomes more evident when British aid to other European refugees (Greeks, Poles, and Yugoslavs) is compared to that towards the Jews. British authorities accepted, catered for, and protected Polish, Greek, and Yugoslav nationals in the Middle East. In contrast, they appeared, until late in the war,

⁵¹ Knatchbull-Hugessen, 160, 6.6.1942, TNA, ADM 199/540.

quite reluctant to do so for Jews who had been denaturalized and persecuted by several European states. A disclaimer is necessary here; I do not argue that anti-Semitism was non-existent among Turkish and European officials or that it did not play any role in the general disinclination to assist Jewish as opposed to Christian refugees. I rather argue that the existing sources suggest that this disinclination of Turkish and British authorities was primary grounded on the British policy on Palestine and the lack of state sovereignty on behalf of the Jewish refugees.

The Greek refugee issue was handled in the context of relations between Turkish, Greek, and British state authorities. And as much as the British and Greek governments were reliant on Turkey to cope with the refugee flow, Turkey was also well aware of the resentment its refusal to actively support Greece when attacked by Bulgaria (in contrast to previous pledges by Turkish officials) had caused in 1941. The damage Turkey pointedly inflicted on its non-Muslim citizens and the foreigners living in Turkey – the most numerous being Greek nationals – with the infamous Wealth Tax in 1942–1943 was another blow to its relations with the Greek and other allied governments (Alexandris 1982, 174–181, 189–195). Providing for the refugees could, among other concessions, mitigate the effects of similar choices impairing Turkey's relations with its allies (von Papen 1952, 521; Deringil 1989, 150–151). On the one hand refugees were a financial and logistical burden; on the other they presented Turkey with some well-needed leverage in its relations with the Allies. Cooperation on the refugee issue was a way to resist the allied pressure to join the war.

Already in the wake of El Alamein in October 1942, the Turkish authorities recognized that they needed new ways to counter British pressure (Deringil 1989, 141). Throughout the failed Allied military intervention in the Dodecanese in late 1943, the Turkish authorities took care to support the Allied military effort in various ways. Material and men were continuously ferried to the islands through Turkey, while the Turkish officials assisted with the evacuation of thousands of soldiers and civilians from the islands. The aim of the Turkish state was to make “an investment in British goodwill.” Responsible for the coordination of the evacuation from the Turkish side was the Minister of Foreign Affairs Numan Menemencioğlu, an indication of the importance Turkey was giving to its participation (Deringil 1989, 141, 170). In response to the coordinated pressure of US President Franklin D. Roosevelt and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill to enter the war during the Cairo Summit of December 1943, President İsmet İnönü replied that in its unremitting cooperation with the Allies Turkey had done much that had *de facto* lifted Turkish neutrality, a fact well noticed by the Germans (Tekeli and İlkin 2013, 306).

Conclusions

In reacting to the influx of Muslim refugees from Greece Turkey appeared pragmatic and flexible. Turkish authorities reacted differently in the handling of Thracian Muslims in 1941–1942 and Dodecanese Muslims in 1944–1945, although common policy for both communities was to avoid their immigration to Turkey. When the aim to repatriate them seemed untenable in 1941–1942, Turkey permanently settled and naturalized the Thracian Muslims in accordance with state practices that had been formulated in the 1930s for the speedy naturalization of Muslim refugees and immigrants. In contrast, in the context of the war's end in 1944–1945, Turkey opted for

temporary hosting and repatriating Muslim refugees. In both cases, Turkish officials seemed to navigate between practical and ideological, financial, humanitarian, and foreign policy considerations. Yet, in any case, there is no indication that Turkey entered into any negotiations with the Allies regarding the fate of the Muslim refugees, which was, in contrast, the basic *modus operandi* in regard to non-Muslim refugees.

In the case of non-Muslim refugees, Turkey's unambiguous policy was to prevent the settlement and expedite their departure. In that respect, the existing agencies for handling Muslim refugees were fundamentally irrelevant, as they had been established within the contours of a demographic policy that excluded non-Muslims. Diplomats, policemen, army, and intelligence officers were for the most part the officials essentially engaged in the management of non-Muslim refugees, mobilized as they were to realize an unambiguous policy – surveillance and transfer abroad. In that respect, it was negotiations with the Allies that determined the outcome. And yet, European Jews were handled quite differently than Christians and Greek Jews.

Once admitted into the country, Greek refugees enjoyed comparatively favorable conditions and relative freedom of movement. Imbued by Turkish nationalism and shaped by the ideological format and everyday practices of the nation-state, Turkish officials considered stateless Jews a greater threat and reacted towards them in a more “principled” and unyielding manner. Unlike Greek refugees who could one way or the other “end up” in Greece, European Jews were effectively considered to not yet have a (nation-)state to claim them and with which Turkey could negotiate their fate.

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