
TURKISH REVIEW

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The Past and Present of Western Thrace

Ergün Aybars
Kemal Arı

Western Thrace has been a significant issue in Turkish-Greek relations throughout their history. Today, over 120,000 Greek citizens of Turkish origin inhabit the region, their minority rights under the protection of the Treaty of Lausanne.

Thrace takes its name from the ancient Thracian tribes that lived in this area in 2000-1200 B.C.. Limited by the Black Sea to the East, and the Sea of Marmara, the Dardanelles and the Aegean Sea to the South, its north-west boundary is a subject of dispute today as in the past. Western Thrace covers 8,578km² in a long narrow strip along the northern shoreline to the west of the River Meriç

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(Maritza). Administratively, it comprises Evros to the East, (adminis-center; Dedeağaç-Aleksandropolis), Rodop in the center (adminis-center Gümülcine-Komotini) and Ksanthi to the West (adminis-center İskeçe-Ksanthi).

The most fertile lands of Greece lie within Western Thrace. Alongside livestock farming, tobacco, wheat, olives and cotton are grown and double and even triple harvests are possible thanks to an ample supply of water from the nearby mountains and subterranean sources.

The Ottomans used the term "Rumeli" to refer to Thrace. The term was used for the lands that lay across the sea from Anatolia and had been taken from the Byzantines.

To own and inhabit these lands had been a passion with Turks for a long time, but the endorsement of the region of Dobruca by Emperor Mihail Palaeologos to İzzal-Din Keykâvus, a Selçuk Turk who fled to Byzantine with his soldiers in 1264, marks the beginning of the Turkish existence in Thrace. In the XIVth century, when the conquest of Thrace by the Ottoman Turks started, the Byzantine Empire was beset by serious political, social and economic problems. While Sean the Vth and Mathieu Cantacuse fought for the throne, the western and eastern churches came into serious conflict. Petrorque (1304-1380), in a letter written to Pope Urbain V (1362-1380), expressed the opinion that "The Ottomans are only enemies. The heretic Byzantines fear and hate us with all their beings".

The poverty caused by earthquakes and severe storms, deaths caused by epidemics and heavy taxation had taken a heavy toll on the people of eastern Thrace. In particular, the settlements in northern Gallipoli were virtually abandoned and in ruins. Consequently, the Ottoman sultans who conquered these lands did not only achieve a military conquest but undertook a complete reorganization and resettlement of the region. The Ottoman conquest was followed by substantial relocation of population from Anatolia to Thrace, reconstruction of cities and towns, construction of roads, bridges, guard houses, mosques and caravanserais and the settling of new areas.

The second Ottoman sultan, Orhan, became an ally of Cantacuzen and married his daughter Theodora. Ottoman Turks, who supported Cantacuzen against Ivannis V in the second internal revolt that happened in the Byzantine Empire certainly eliminated Serbian and Greek forces. This incident, in the fall of 1352, was a decisive turning point in the Turkish presence in Thrace; thereafter, Rumeli (Thrace) became a constant scene for the activities of the Ottoman ghazis. The

ghazis frequently crossed to Thrace to interfere in the Byzantine Empire's internal problems or to support military operations against Serbians or Bulgarians, and to make raids as well.

Parallel to their new conquests in Thrace, the Ottomans carried out an orderly mass relocation of population from Anatolia to this region. While these lands were being settled, the new administrators behaved in a way that would not alienate the local population. While the forward military operations continued at the frontiers, the people of the already conquered lands were accepted and treated as citizens, and the protection and security of peasants was given special importance. Feudal lords were removed, and those who did not resist were allowed to join the Ottoman military ranks. This attitude towards the local population certainly facilitated the Ottoman expansion in Thrace. But of even greater importance in the acceptance of Ottoman rule by the masses were the tolerance shown to the orthodox Church and the justness of the taxation system employed.

Turks created a new medium of civilization by their works of art and architecture. Turkish names like Kayı, Türkmen, Akça-Koyunlu, Saruhanlı, Doğançı, Çavuş, Hacı Timurhan, Ada, Hisarlı, Eskice and Pazar were given to the newly created settlements. In these settlements, they lived in separate districts from the Christian population. In a short time the Turkish population in Thrace had become a majority. During the rule of Suleiman the Magnificent the Turkish population outnumbered the Christian population several-fold.

The ethnic structure of the Balkan nations under Ottoman sovereignty underwent significant change in the XVIIIth century. At the beginning of the century, peoples of different races, speaking different languages, lived mingled together in the Balkan countries under Ottoman rule. Although the Turks had political dominance, the other groups enjoyed a climate of great tolerance, religious freedom and equality with their conquerors. And while Turks lived grouped together in regions like Bosna, Albania, Bulgaria, Deliorman, Eastern Rumeli, Dobruca, Vardar Valley (Macedonia) and Theselia, they mingled with the Christian population in the cities and towns. Their main occupation was farming.

The worldwide influence of the French Revolution in 1789 did not take long to reach the Balkans. Further encouraged by weakening Ottoman authority, the aspirations of the Balkan nations to statehood led to underground organization and guerilla warfare. The first separatist movements that thus started in the Ottoman Empire engulfed the whole of Greece after the Mora Uprising. These uprisings were only to be expected as nationalist movements spread worldwide. The

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whole of the Balkans had been turned into a warground by nations fighting against the Ottomans for their independence and against each other for wider boundaries. In the XIXth century the Ottoman Empire could no longer maintain the earlier balances of power in the Balkans, and separatism could not be curtailed.

One by one the Balkan nations gained their independence. A series of uprisings brought great suffering to the Balkan Turks, and many were uprooted. In particular, the Bulgarian uprisings that continued at an accelerated rate between 1848 and 1876 were aimed at annihilating the Turkish population. In fact, Turks were annihilated in large groups during the 1875 uprising, before the uprising was suppressed by the army. This resulted in great waves of migration.

In spite of widespread guerilla activity, most of the Balkans remained under Ottoman rule until the end of the Balkan wars. Under Russian provocation, the Balkan nations united against the Ottoman Empire and the First Balkan Wars ended with an unexpected defeat for the Ottomans. The Empire lost all of its lands in the Balkans. By 1912, the Bulgarian occupation of these lands was complete, and Bulgarian forces had come as far as Çatalca. The Ottomans were able to salvage lands extending to Edirne, together with the city itself. The treaties of London (May 30, 1913) Bucharest (Aug.10,1913) and Istanbul (September.20,1913) put an end to Turkish rule in Western Thrace. The 3rd Protocol under the Athens Treaty, also signed in 1913, drew up the legal rights and status of Turks living in the parts of Western Thrace under Greek rule. For the most part, however, the rights of the Turkish population living in Western Thrace existed only on paper, and Greek and Bulgarian terrorization of these people resulted in mass migrations to eastern Thrace and Anatolia.

Bulgaria entered World War I on the side of Germany and faced defeat. As a result, Western Thrace came under French control. Widespread and vigorous propaganda to the effect that Thrace was in fact Greek in origin gained political acceptance. A book on this matter written in English by the Council General of Greece in London and entitled "The Thracian Issue" influenced public opinion strongly. This was followed by many papers, memories, books and other publications on the issue, most of which had an emotional orientation rather than being based on historic fact.

In the six years between 1913 and 1919, the pressure and terrorism exerted on the Turkish population of Thrace by Bulgarian guerillas had taken a heavy toll on the Turks. In the August of 1913, Enver Bey, then the Army Corps Staff Commander, ordered the chief of guerilla bands Kuşçubaşı Eşref Bey to cross

the border at Edirne to help the Western Thracian Turks. This force of 116 people proved to be very effective. Gümülcine was taken back and a provisional government of Western Thrace was established in August, 1913. This government was composed of prominent Thracian Turkish citizens under the supervision of Süleyman Askeri Bey, who was then the man responsible for Western Thracian affairs of the Ottoman Committee of Union and Progress (Osmanlı İttihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti). The new government went on to annex the cities of İskeçe, Dedeağaç, Kırcaali and Koşukkavak and adopted democracy as a method of government. The name of the new democracy was changed to the "State of Independent Western Thrace". Its flag was a star on crescent on a red background. The local republic enlisted 29,170 soldiers into its army, and attempted to prepare a budget envisaging a future enlistment of 61,000. Postal stamps were issued, and a Western Thrace news agency set up to make its voice heard in Europe. In addition, there were attempts to publish a newspaper named "Independent" in Turkish and French.

Upon pressure from the superpowers, the Istanbul Treaty did away with this First Turkish Republic. Turkish sovereignty was never reestablished in Western Thrace.

A second effort was started on July 31, 1915, in the village of Radalios in the Drama region by infantry captain Fuat Balkan. With World War I raging all over Europe, Greek and Bulgarian guerilla bands were exerting unimaginable pressure on Turkish settlements. Fuat Bey, Şakir Zümre and Cevat Bey helped to organize the Western Thrace Liberation Committee on July 29, 1915. The organization of this committee in Turkish towns and villages was prevented by strong Bulgarian opposition. For this reason, on September 27, 1917, the 39th National Battalion under the control of Fuat Bey left Drama for Anatolia.

Upon news of an impending Greek invasion of İskeçe in 1918, Süleyman Askeri Bey, made responsible for Western Thracian Affairs by Enver Pasha, headed the West Thracian Committee. The Committee moved its headquarters to Gümülcine in order to be in close contact with the popular movements.

World War I ended in defeat for the Ottoman Empire. The Mondros Treaty signed on October 18, 1918, affirmed the unconditional surrender of the Ottoman state to the winning powers. The Entente Powers decided to divide the Ottoman Empire among themselves at the Paris Conference, but were confronted with a serious obstacle. The new leader Mustafa Kemal Paşa was not only deter-

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mined to fight for Turkish independence but also determined to put an end to the Sultanate and Caliphate, as obsolete forms of sovereignty. He envisaged a new Turkish state based on the sovereignty of the people and was able to orient the nation to this new goal. At a time when the country was in peril he led a life and death struggle against both foreign powers and the powers representing the status quo within the country, to make his vision a reality. This movement found its justification in the Wilson Principles and Human Rights.

The National Pact drawn up personally by Mustafa Kemal was accepted by the members of the Ottoman Parliament on January 28, 1920. The third article of this pact of ten articles directly concerned Western Thrace under the Greek occupation. The article demands that "The issue of the legal standing of Western Thrace awaiting settlement within the framework of the peace to be drawn up with Turkey will have to be based on the free votes of the people of Western Thrace."

The National Pact was in accordance with the Wilson Principles. It voices an agreement to accept any result determined by the free votes of the people. Confidence of a Turkish majority in Western Thrace was a significant factor affecting the drawing up of this article. Together with the other five articles, the National Pact lays the basic framework of foreign policy during the Turkish War of Independence. Above all, it is a national document.

While carrying on the Turkish Independence War on many fronts, Mustafa Kemal kept close watch on the developments in Western Thrace. Commander of the First Army Corps Cafer Tayyar Bey who was in Western Thrace at the time of the invasion, Trakya Paşaeli Committee pursuing the aim of at least regional independence for Western Thrace, and Celal Bey and Iskeçeli Arif Bey of the aforesaid Committee of Western Thrace sent regular reports to him. Kemal Paşa sent back his own evaluation promptly and tried to prevent lines of action that would not comply with their general policies. His views on this issue as can be observed from these documents can be summarized: "Our primary goal is to preserve the unity and independence of our country. We must vary in our contacts with the foreign powers on the issue of Western Thrace. Our goal should be to keep Western Thrace unified and under Turkish control and annex it to the motherland at an appropriate time. We cannot let a part of the Turkish homeland become a colony to any foreign power. Political considerations prevent the Ottoman Government from helping the Western Thracian Turks. The soundest decision for Western Thrace would be for our brethren, who have a

definite majority in this region, to develop their national organization and demand their rights as stated in the Wilson Principles, and they should as a first step try to declare their independence and autonomy. It is not appropriate to consider Western and Eastern Thrace in one single whole. Eastern Thrace is undisputably a part of the Turkish homeland. Western Thrace on the other hand is a part of the homeland which has been lost in a peace treaty. To persist in considering both parts in union might give rise to foreign claims on Eastern Thrace as well”.

During the armistice, when the Ottoman State was under the de facto sovereignty of the foreign powers, Eastern Thrace was indeed in peril. Greek guerillas had been organized in this region with Western Thrace. Trakya Paşaeli Society and First Army Corps Commander Cafer Tayyar Bey were actively putting up resistance against these guerilla bands. The Defence of Legality movement (Müdafaa-i Hukuk) was born as a result of these efforts.

Acting on the resolution of the San Remo Treaty, the Greek forces started entering Gümülcine by rail from İskeçe on May 14, 1920, landing troops at Kamal and Dedeğaç at the same time. By June 4, 1920, they had completely overtaken Western Thrace. The French, who were surrendering the region to the Greeks, provided full assistance in the takeover. Prime Minister Venizelos, while announcing the occupation of Western Thrace in the Greek assembly, openly thanked the French army and General Charpy for their efforts. The occupation of Western Thrace and the abolition of the government of Western Thrace which had been established in the southern part of this region caused great concern and distress among the population of Eastern and Western Thrace. The Ottoman Government showed no reaction to the occupation. Bulgarian Prime Minister İstanbuliski voiced his reaction in the following statement: “Leaving Western Thrace to Greece has caused great distress in the heart of every Bulgarian. But the Bulgarian nation should never doubt that they will gain a door to the Mediterranean in the near future. Greece will not be able to hang on to these lands very long; just as Bulgaria could not keep Macadonia, Thrace and Çatalca, so will Greece be unable to digest the big bone that lies in their little stomach too.”

Upon the Greek invasion of Western Thrace up to the River Meriç (Maritza), the First Army Corps Headquarters announced a state of general mobilization to which the Thracian responded eagerly. The ranks of 5,000 enlisted solidiers soon swelled to 12,000. During this time, Tayyar Bey was replaced by Colonel Muhiddin as Commander of the First Army Corps responsible for defending

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Eastern Thrace. Cafer Tayyar Bey was chosen national leader and tried to set up national detachments with the help of Trakya Paşaeli Society. These detachments were to operate in Western Thrace. Rüştü Bey and Fuat (Balkan) Bey were appointed as first and second commanders of these troops. The headquarters of the society had made an allowance of 9,286 Lira in its budget for a staff of 30 officers, 25 sergeants, 50 corporals and 425 privates. These forces staged a series of attacks on important positions under Greek occupation. But then the Greek army began to enter Eastern Thrace by way of Marmara. Significant battles were fought, and the First Army Corps retreated into Bulgaria without leaving any of its arsenal to the Greek forces. By mid-1920, Greek forces had occupied all of Thrace up to Çatalca. The Treaty of Sevres, which was never accepted by Anatolia, foresaw Greek sovereignty over Thrace as a whole.

The War of Independence led by Mustafa Kemal Paşa in Anatolia against the Western Powers turned into a complete victory at the Battle of Sakarya. Among the other issues that were taken up at the Paris Conference was the issue of Eastern Thrace. Greece and Turkey both contended that the region belonged to them, while Bulgaria insisted on an independent state there. Although Yusuf Kemal Bey was successful in clarifying the Turkish position, as put forth by Atatürk, on an international platform, and although the conference did yield political advantages for the Turkish side, the Conference did not reach a solution to the real issue.

The great offensive which started on August 26, 1922, finally brought the culmination of the efforts of the Turkish Nation to free their homeland of foreign occupation. The offensive had been planned and executed to the finest detail by Commander in Chief Atatürk and ended in almost complete annihilation of the Greek Forces. Following the fleeing Greek Forces, the Turkish Troops reached İzmir on September 9, 1922. In a reply to the Cabinet on September 5, 1922, Atatürk stressed the following condition for an armistice: "Within fifteen days of the armistice, Thrace will be unconditionally evacuated and surrendered to the officials and officers of the Turkish National Congress Government".

The allies undertook to give Eastern Thrace as far as Edirne and the River Meriç if the Turks would agree the conditions that Turks will not pass to Eastern Thrace, Bosphorus and Marmara region. In an answer signed and sent by Minister of Foreign Affairs Yusuf Kemal (Tengirşenk) Bey to the bill dated September 23 1922 of the Allied Powers, it is noted that not only Edirne but also Thrace should be evacuated as far as the west bank of the Meriç (Maritza) immediately.

The armistice talks at the Mudanya Conference ended with the resolution that Eastern Thrace up to the Meriç (Maritza) be surrendered to the Turks. The resolution of the issue on an international platform took place with the Treaty of Lausanne.

The Lausanne Conference started on November 20, 1922, at the Montbenon Chateau with an opening address from Swiss President Haab. The Turkish suggestion was to return to the frontiers as accepted by the Istanbul Treaty (April 29, 1913) and to resort to popular vote in Western Thrace. Venizelos opposed this proposition. On the other hand, Bulgarian Prime Minister İstanbuliski contended that Western Thrace should be returned to Bulgaria or at least be set up as an independent region under the jurisdiction of the superpowers. Lord Curzon blamed Turkey for jeopardizing the peace talks with unacceptable propositions. The Trakya-Paşaeli Society and Western Thrace Defense of Legality Society (Batı Trakya Mudafaa Hukuk Cemiyeti), who were keeping a close watch on the developments, had sent Galip Bahtiyar Bey and İskeçeli Arif Bey and Sabri Bey to Lausanne. In their reports to their respective societies, these commissaries contended that the Turkish delegation at the talks was not sufficiently persistent on the issue of Western Thrace. In a protocol agreement reached on January 30, 1923, it was decided that with the exception of Istanbul Greeks who had settled there before January 30, 1918, and the moslem population of Western Thrace, the Greek orthodox citizens of the Ottoman Empire living within the boundaries of Turkey and the moslem population living within the boundaries of Greece would be mutually exchanged. The exemption of the moslem population of Western Thrace from the compulsory exchange settlement terms carried a potential for creating very sensitive balances between the two nations in the future. According to the terms of the peace treaty signed on July 24, 1923, Greece pledged to give all the political, social, economic, cultural, religious and legal rights to her moslem Turkish citizens that the citizens of Greek origin in Turkey enjoyed. This meant equal rights and guarantees of life and freedom for all Greek citizens regardless of origin of birth, nationality, race, language or religion. Also, this treaty stated that Greece officially accepted the right of its moslem citizens to travel or migrate freely, to speak their own language in private or commercial relations, to establish any religious or social foundations to collect and dispense with funds, to establish, manage and supervise educational institutions, to teach and speak their languages in these institutions freely and to have equality with the christians in worshipping and following their religion.

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Some problems arising from compulsory population exchange were taken up in the "1930 Turkish-Greek Friendship, Neutrality, Reconciliation and Arbitration Pact" which brought a softening to Turkish-Greek relations. The effect of this pact was further fortified by the "Turkey-Greece Agreement Pact" signed in 1933 and the "Turkish-Greek Treaty" signed in 1938. The Turkish-Greek Cultural Commission Protocol was signed in 1968, in spite of the negative atmosphere created by the Cyprus issue.

The new Turkish state undertook a series of radical transformations to modernize all aspects of social, educational, political and religious life and to tear down all remnants of Ottoman tradition. These modernization movements were reflected in the Turkish moslem communities outside the country. The Turkish consulate which was opened in Selanik in 1923 took an active part in spreading these civil-cultural revolutions among the West Thracian Turks. The West Thracians were divided over whether to accept these transformations. This cleavage in the moslem society was fully encouraged by the Greek government, resulting in the formation of a youth group that was openly against the modernization movements of Atatürk. By 1924, in some mosques in Selanik, Friday prayers were still held for the last Ottoman Sultan Vahdettin, who had proved his treason to the Turkish Independence movement by countless animosities toward the Kemalist forces fighting in Anatolia for three years and who had fled the country one-and-a-half years earlier. Propaganda against modern Turkey carried out by hostile religious leader Naibzade Ali Hoca was proving to be effective. The replacement of religious schools by modern schools, as had been done in Turkey, could not be materialized in Western Thrace. The influence and authority of local landlords and prominent persons and families was broken down to a great extent in Turkey. The feudal landlord structure persisted for a long time in Western Thrace. The scholarships intended for poor Thracian Turkish children were given to the children of these landlords and social leaders instead. Although Turkey had abandoned Friday as the official weekend, Greek authorities encouraged the keeping of the moslem sabbath, telling the moslem community this was their religious prerogative and that they would not interfere with religious matters. The Turkish request that the Western weekend be observed was used as another means of strengthening negative feelings toward modern Turkey based on the claim that "We are losing our religion". In 1928, the Arabic alphabet was abandoned in favor of the Latin alphabet in Turkey. This and the connected issue of education caused great furor among West Thracian Turks, incited by orthodox muslims and the "hundred-and-fifteen" banished for betrayal

during the Turkish National War. It was only after the 1954 Educational Pact that the Latin alphabet became compulsory in the education of West Thracian Turks.

The Greek policy towards the moslem population focussed on encouraging and strengthening the conservative potential on the one hand and taking advantage of the differences and cleavages between the conservatives and those who wanted to follow the modernization movements in Turkey to follow a divide-and-rule policy on the other hand. Churches were built in settlements where the moslem population had a crushing majority, and children were subjected to christian indoctrination at day care centers and kindergartens. It was suggested that the secular state in Turkey meant a step towards atheism and that the moslem community in Greece should look to other moslem nations for religious leaders. All of these activities had one purpose: to weaken and sever the cultural and ideological ties between the new generation of Thracian Turks and Turkey and to promote hostility between these people and their country of origin.

The moslem population was subjected to all sorts of obstacles under any possible pretext. The policy of creating a Greek Western Thrace has been highly succesful in time. The moslem population has fallen to a minority position from their original majority, and their economic and cultural potential has been effectively suppressed. Greek groups migrating from Turkey at different times have been settled in Western Thrace, common pastures of the Turks distributed to newcomers and their private properties of more than 60, 80 and 125 acres bought at very low prices and reallocated also to the newly settled Greek population. The new Greek land registry system intentionally narrowed down the borders of moslem real estate. Turkish villagers could not use commercial agricultural credits. Greek émigrés who escaped to Greece after the Turkish National War were settled in Turkish villages, where to take revenge for the Anatolian defeat they brought up their children as anti-Turkish nationalists. Then this generation became the enemy of the Turks. This created several disorders among Turks. Control of the publicaton of and destruction or prohibiton of books on Turkish culture was another form of pressure.

The policy of animosity toward Turks and Turkey had its effects on the Greek people as a whole. Being subjected to these teachings from their early school years onward, the Greek people and its officals took animosity towards Turks and the frequent projection of this feeling to be synonymous with being a good Greek citizen. This attitude could easily be observed in official offices where

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citizens of Turkish origin went for their ordinary business. These people were treated roughly by officials and even very common procedures such as obtaining a driving licence became a major issue. Turkish drivers caught without a license were subjected to penalties much greater than those for Greek drivers. Their land holdings were held at a minimum by nationalization on every possible pretext. Even cemeteries that had a special moral value within the Turkish historical heritage could not escape nationalization or relocation. Citizens of Turkish origin found it almost impossible to obtain construction licences from the municipalities even for mending their houses or garden walls, let alone for building new houses.

The Cyprus Operation in 1974 started a new period of mounting tension in Turkish-Greek relations. Hunting arms of the minority were collected and never returned, with the exception of a chosen few. The ice grew thicker between the Greeks and the Turkish minority. Provocations and some individual incidents led to attacks against the Turkish minority that went as far as tearing down mosques.

The father of modern Turkey, Atatürk, was born in Salonika (Selanik) in 1881. The house he was born in has been turned into a museum as a result of the efforts of Turkish governments. In periods of tension between the two countries this house has become a focus of hatred and emotional discharge for Greek youths raised on daily subjection, from their schools to the sermons in their churches, to teachings of animosity towards Turks and Turkey and highly emotional nationalism. The attacks have frequently taken the form of smearing mud on the walls and efforts at tearing down the front walls with irons. Acts of this sort remind one of the contrast between the attitude of King Constantine, who entered İzmir walking over a Turkish flag after the city's invasion by Greek forces, and that of Atatürk who refused to do the same saying that "A flag represents a nation's honour".

Actions and attitudes of the sort summarized above will achieve nothing but heightened animosity. We are now in an age of friendship and tolerance not of animosities. Human considerations and mutual interests dictate that the two nations be allies not enemies. Unfortunately, however, the policies followed by Greece have accelerated the migration of its Turkish minority from Western Thrace and other parts of the country to Turkey. At the time of the Treaty of Lausanne, Turks outnumbered Greeks in Western Thrace by 4 to 1. The Turkish population is now a minority in this region. The 1951 population census gives the number of Turks in Western Thrace as 98,839 as compared to a total of

336,954 for the region. This fall to 30-35% from 85% in 1921 is a result of the Greek policy of assimilating the Turkish minority. The Turkish population in Western Thrace today is estimated to be around 100,000-120,000. Considering a total population of 329,551 the Turkish minority can be taken as 30-36% of the population of Western Thrace, 25% of which live in the rural sections.

Agriculture is still the sole economic activity of Western Thrace. The region is classified as the poorest region in the country by the Greek authorities. The portion of land under agriculture is 92.6%, which is the highest for any region of the country. In 1923, the portion of agricultural land belonging to the Turks was 84%, with Greeks owning the remaining 16%. According to the 1957 edition of the *Epitomon Enciklopedikan Leksikon*, ownership of agricultural land by Turks had fallen to 35% by that year. Turkish-owned land had been reallocated by illegal means to Greeks. Only 5% of the Turkish population earns its livelihood from commerce.

In spite of this extremely unfavorable climate the Western Thracian Turks are putting up a fight for existence in the social, political, cultural and economic fields, and many other aspects of their daily lives. The Union of Turkish Youth offers activities in sports, libraries, music and drama. The Union for the Care of Poor Turkish Students in Gümülcine, the Union of Islam Society (Gümülcine), the Awakening of Islam Society (Gümülcine), the Western Thrace Turkish Primary Teachers Union (İskeçe), and the Union of Moslem Teachers from Religious Schools are other active cultural bodies founded by the Turkish community. Among these the Moslem Teachers Union and the Society for the Awakening of Islam have been encouraged by Greek propaganda and are carrying on activities detrimental to the Turkish existence in Thrace.

West Thracian Turks are also actively involved in the press. In 1932 they were putting out seven weekly publications: Thrace, The New Step, The Ideal, Republic, Defense of Islam, National. In 1958 five weekly publications were active: Thrace, National, Akin, Perseverance and the Conservative. In 1957-1958 Perseverance and the Conservative were still being published in the Arabic alphabet and denounced everything related to Turkey.

Works of architectural Ottoman heritage that survive today can be seen in major cities like Athens and Selanik and in Vardar, Yenicesu, Karaferya, Kesriye, Florina, Ostrona, Vodina and Kavala. Mosques and some other architectural works can also be seen in Morda, Mirotsda, Beneşte, Pasova. Anabolu, Turkala,

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Dimetoka, Halmiros and Eğriboz Island. A great number of Ottoman buildings, mosques and public works have been unable to escape destruction. Of a lot of these works, which were described in detail by the renowned Turkish explorer Evliya Çelebi, even the foundations are non-existent. A few remain in ruins. Of the two remaining mosques in Anabolu, both their minarets completely gone, one is currently used as a movie house. Of the seven mosques mentioned by Evliya Çelebi in Tesalya and Turkala, only one remains: the Osman Şah mosque, and even this is greatly damaged. Of all that was constructed in Greece by Ottomans during the 580 years of their rule, only a handful of damaged structures remain.

The legal identity of Western Thracian Turks, the physical and cultural heritage they have left there, is under the assurance and protection of bilateral and international treaties and pacts and even articles of the Greek Constitution. In reality, however, as this paper has tried to show, the principles and dictates of these treaties and pacts often go unheeded. The fourth article of the Greek Constitution dictates that all Greek citizens are equal before the law. The Treaty of Lausanne carries the same decree. These articles state that the political, social, religious and cultural rights of the Turkish minority are under equal protection before the law as those of Greek citizens. The information in this paper shows that the Greek authorities violate these treaties, which bear their signature, and even their own constitution, and that they do so openly before the eyes of the civilized world. Freedom of travel, migration and re-entry into one's country of citizenship and freedom of education are natural rights enjoyed by Greek citizens which nevertheless are denied to the Turkish minority. In spite of being cautioned by the European Council on the protection of cultural heritage acts of demolition can be observed almost daily. In short, Greece today is in clear violation of the Helsinki Declaration (article 7 of Basic Human Rights Declaration), the Declaration of Human Rights (article 34) and the Greek Constitution (articles 1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 13, 42 and 43).

To conclude, since gaining her independence from the Ottoman Empire in 1829 with the help of England, France and Russia, Greece has made it a policy to be ally to all states hostile to the Empire in an effort to expand her frontiers at the expense of the Ottoman Empire. During World War I, she obtained promises of the recession of Thrace and Western Anatolia from Britain in a series of secret pacts. On May 15 1919, Greece landed troops at İzmir to start the actual occupation of these receded lands. After the defeats of August 26 and September 9, 1922, she seemed to have abandoned her claims on Turkish soil

(the Megalo Idea). Venizelos and Atatürk actively tried to end hostility between the two nations. Turkey opened her arms to thousands of Greeks whose country was under the German invasion in World War II. After World II, both countries entered NATO. The Megalo Idea, however, was beneath the surface in the relations of Greece with Turkey, and it surfaced to create the Cyprus and Aegean issues. Both of these problems could be solved by peaceful means. But the desire of Greece to own everything has cut off all roads to a peaceful solution. The relations of the two nations have entered another era of tension.

As can be observed, although Western Thrace has been a homeland to Turks for a long time in history, systematic Greek pressure has slowly eradicated Turkish existence from these lands. This eradication has not only been of a quantitative nature but also qualitative in that activities and groups aimed at forming anti-Turkey public opinion and denouncing all the modernization movements in Turkey and the principles laid down by Atatürk have been set up or encouraged. This of course is the most painful aspect of the issue. The most serious damage by the numerous violations of Turkish minority rights, as dictated by international pacts and treaties, is done to the culmination of a sincere desire for friendly and peaceful co-existence of the peoples of the two nations. Mutually-felt friendship, not animosity, will help pave the way for the solution of issues between these peoples.