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# Crossing the borders in reality and in press: the case of the newspapers *Yeni Adım* and *Yarın* in the late 1920s

Yannis Bonos

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- 1 This article focuses on the way two newspapers contributed to the control of public opinion. More precisely, this case study gives an insight into the ways the editors of *Yeni Adım* (in Turkish, 'The New Step') and *Yarın* (in Turkish, 'The Day After'), which appeared in Xanthi in late September 1926 and in late July 1927, respectively, kept silent about the migration that took place in mid-October 1928 on the Greek-Turkish land border. Insofar as the emigration of 'non-exchangeables'<sup>1</sup> from Greece has been attributed to the demographic engineering operated by the Greek state in the 1920s, this case study on the ways two editorships made use of the mid-October 1928 discussions on emigration to Turkey touches upon the broader issue of the government of a minority by consent.
- 2 In the most detailed account of the interwar emigration of 'non-exchangeables' from Greece, H. Öksüz related their immigration to Turkey to the settlement of exchanged refugees by the Greek state in the border territory which lies to the west of Turkey and to the south of Bulgaria (Öksüz 2004: 250-278). By stressing, however, the geopolitical importance of that territory named Western Thrace after the Balkan Wars (1912-13) for the Ottoman, Bulgarian and Greek states, Öksüz neglected, as have several scholars interested in the history of the 'non-exchangeables' in Greek Thrace, the question of how that minority population was governed.
- 3 From that novel perspective, the main interest of this case study lies with the disciplinary function of *Yeni Adım* and *Yarın* editorships within the 'non-exchangeables' who talked both about the Greek refugee settlement and the emigration to Turkey. In fact, opinion control and consensual government in Greek Thrace has never received the attention given by scholarly literature to state demographic plans since the 1920s (Doxiadis 1928: 53-69; Schultze 1937; Öksüz 2004: 250-278; Hersant 2009: 141-162; Dalegre 1997; Koutsoukos 2012).

# 1. Demographic engineering from 1878 to 1928

- 4 Ottoman concerns about populations' faithfulness in the areas of Gümülcine<sup>2</sup> and Dedeğaç<sup>3</sup> manifested itself clearly during the 1877-78 war with the Romanov Empire. During that war, which ended with an Ottoman defeat and a treaty providing for the creation of a Bulgarian state, Abdul Hamid II thought of using the refugees who fled en masse from the battlefields and banditry zones as a defensive wall for the vilayets lying between Adrianople (in Turkish, Edirne) and Yanya (in Greek, Ioannina) (Toumarkine 2000: 202). In order to defend its last possessions in the Balkans from rival nationalisms and competing imperialisms, the Ottoman state tried to settle the 1877-78 war refugees in a territory inhabited by Bulgarian- and Greek-speaking Christians by, first, prohibiting emigration from the Balkan provinces to the Anatolian vilayets. Then, it tried to make out of the body of destitute refugees a means of defense of the Empire by distributing them across the newly founded provinces such as the sanjak of Gümülcine established on the border with the autonomous vilayet of Eastern Rumelia (Şimşir 1970: 120; 279).
- 5 Administrative and consular reports as well as letters to Istanbul newspapers depict quite dramatically the precarious state of the refugees, their struggle for livelihoods, their conflicts with the 'Muslim' and 'Christian' subjects of the Sultan, and their expectations from the Ottoman sovereign. According to an agent of the French consul in Salonika who gathered information about the refugees in the plains of İskeçe (in Greek, Xanthi / in Bulgarian, Sketcha), half of them were accusing the Sultan of being a traitor while others were expecting 'the elimination of the infidels as a remedy for the situation' (Şimşir 1968: 486). Under that popular pressure, the Ottoman state started to take care of the wounded, the widows and the orphans by establishing institutions such as the hospitals and orphanages proposed for the area of Gümülcine in summer 1878.<sup>4</sup> After the creation of the Commission for the General Administration of Refugees (in Turkish, *İdare-i Umûmiye-i Muhâcirîn Komisyonu*), the Ottoman state must have pursued more meticulously its demographic engineering in the border territories of İskeçe, Gümülcine, Dedeğaç and Dimetoka (in Greek, Didymotiho / in Bulgarian, Dimotika).
- 6 In fact, Ottoman demographic engineering in the vilayet of Adrianople and more particularly in its southwestern provinces such as the recently established (1884) sanjak of Dedeğaç has to be further examined. A brief survey of the relevant Ottoman archives which have to be closely scrutinized shows that the Ottoman authorities were not so respectful of the Sultan's desires to prevent refugee flows to Anatolia.<sup>5</sup> According to a later rough estimation, the subjects supposedly loyal to the Ottoman state<sup>6</sup> rose only by 5%, up to the 65% of the population living in the sancaks of Gumulcine and of Dedeğaç from 1888 to 1906 (Schultze 1937: 236). However, thousands of refugees moved to these sanjaks following the annexation of Bosnia to the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1908 (Trifonov 1989: 105-106 cited by Crampton 2007: 430). According to the president of a Greek irredentist association (1918-19) who later became minister of health and welfare of the Greek state (1922-28), the Ottomans had pursued colonization by transferring people from Bosnia, Bulgaria and other countries (Doxiadis 1928: 53-69).
- 7 Following the Balkan Wars (1912-13) and the partition of the Andrianople vilayet between the Ottoman Empire and the Bulgarian kingdom, demographic engineering in

the former Gümülcine and Dedeağac sancaks underwent a major change. Contrary to widespread belief, demographic engineering in the Aegean Thrace (in Bulgarian, Belomorska Trakija) was not pursued just by the Bulgarian state but by the Ottoman state too. As the Young Turks were hoping to regain control of the lost sancaks, the Ottoman state tried to preserve a population presumably loyal to it by prohibiting emigration to the Ottoman part of Thrace (Yıldırım Ağanoglu 2001: 111 cited by Öksüz 2004: 250-278). For the same reason, the Bulgarian governments carried out a demographic engineering following the massive displacements caused by regular troops and irregular forces during the wars. More particularly, the Bulgarian and the Ottoman governments had agreed to settle about 50.000 refugees in the properties abandoned by an equal number of refugees who had departed from Aegean Thrace and the new vilayet of Andrianople (Ladas 1932: 18-20). The struggle between these states to achieve population balances in accordance with their leaders' aspirations continued throughout the Great War.

- 8 Since 1914, various Ottoman bureaus like the state security and the Dedeağac consulate issued warnings and orders to prohibit emigration of Muslims and non-Muslims to the vilayet of Andrianople (Osmanlı belgelerinde Batı Trakya 2009: 90, 112, 114, 122). More numerous were, however, the reports on the pressure put through different means by the Bulgarian state on presumably disloyal populations to emigrate to the Ottoman Empire (*ibid.*: 64, 90, 92, 96, 100, 122). Among the most important incentives for emigration was the colonization of, first, the lands next to the Ottoman and the Greek borders and, then, of the countryside around the towns (Schultze 1937: 238). The settlement of emigres from the Bulgarian hinterland and of refugees forced to leave in the Balkan Wars from the later Greek and Serbian parts of Macedonia as well as the Ottoman part of Thrace had been assigned to a central committee in Sofia which directed 16 subcommittees operating in Aegean Thrace (Koutsoukos 2012: 154). Until autumn 1915 when the Ottoman district of Dimetoka was annexed to Bulgaria, the Bulgarian authorities had managed to settle about 35.000 refugees and settlers (*ibid.*: 157-8). From the late 1916 on, demographic engineering in the Aegean Thrace kept on less energetically on Bulgaria's part due to the Great War.
- 9 With the end of the war, the Ottoman state's involvement faded as the Greek state tried to override the Bulgarian demographic arrangements. According to the treaty of Neuilly-sur-Seine (27 November 1919), Bulgaria renounced 'in favor of the Principal Allied and Associated Powers all rights and title over the territories in Thrace' and reached an agreement with Greece 'respecting reciprocal voluntary emigration of the racial, linguistic and religious minorities in Greece and Bulgaria'. Consequently, the Allied Government of Western Thrace (in French, Gouvernement de la Thrace Interalliée), the French-led military administration which replaced the Bulgarian civil authorities in the former Bulgarian Thrace, dealt with the rival population plans of the Greek and Bulgarian delegates awaiting the Paris peace conference's final decisions on the future of the former Ottoman territory. As the Greek and Bulgarian delegates to the Allied Government struggled to achieve population figures in accordance with the principle of the national self-determination, the partisans of Cafer Tayyar, founding member of the Turkish nationalist Association for the Defense of the Rights of Thrace (in Turkish, *Trakya-Paşaeli Müdafâ-i Hukuk Cemiyet-i Osmaniyesi*), and the followers of Ali Rıza, grand vizier of Mehmed VI, disagreed over the repatriation of around 45.000 refugees living in the Andrianople vilayet to the part of Thrace under Allied occupation.<sup>7</sup> In fact, the Turkish plan to increase the majority population by expelling

refugees from the Balkan Wars and the Great War was abandoned as the Greek army marched towards the occupied Ottoman capital in early summer 1920.

- 10 Following the treaty of Sevres (10 August 1920), the Greek state pursued the demographic engineering initiated a year ago in Allied-occupied Thrace. In this effort, Greek authorities tried to avoid events that would harm the image which they had to build on the liberal principles of minority protection. However, the Greek attempt to gain the support of public opinion in England and France as well as the sympathy of the minorities in Greece with the irredentist objective expressed by the slogan Greece of two continents and of five seas suffered, two years later, the well-known outcome of the Greek military campaign in Ottoman Thrace and Anatolia. In autumn 1922, the Greek defeat by the National Forces (in Turkish, *Kuvvayi Milliye*) was followed by the exodus of more than a million people from their homelands. Faced with an unprecedented state of exception, the Greek state managed to use in a few years a large number of these refugees as a means of demographic engineering, as the principal advocate of the Greek Great Idea had recommended from his place of exile:

[...] the successful solution of the problem will contribute to the recovery in a few years from the burdens that the unfortunate end of the war leaves to us and to the consolidation, after the collapse of Greater Greece, the consolidation of the Great Greece whose borders will never be secure unless Western Thrace and Macedonia become Greek countries from both political and ethnological points of view.<sup>8</sup>

### **'Non-exchangeables' responses to the Greek-Turkish exchange**

- 11 Following the massive arrival of refugees in Greece, the League of Nations' High Commissioner for Refugees, F. Nansen (1861-1930), mediated between the Greek and the Turkish governments for the rapid settlement of these refugees. At the end of five months of negotiations, Greek and Turkish delegates at the Lausanne peace conference agreed on the compulsory exchange of Greek and Turkish populations with the exception of 'the Greek inhabitants of Istanbul and the Moslem inhabitants of Greek Thrace (League of Nations 1925: 77-87)'. 'Non-exchangeables' emigration from Greek Thrace evolved according to the Greek demographic engineering and the Turkish no-emigration policies.
- 12 Provisional measures taken for the relief of the refugees (forced cohabitation, seizure of buildings, cattle and crops) as well as the long-term policy executed by the Refugee Settlement Commission for about 200.000 of these exchanged refugees in Greek Thrace (land redistribution, construction of new villages and city quarters) culminated in the exodus of about 2.000 families of 'non-exchangeables' to Turkish Thrace by early 1925 (Pelagidis 1997: 199). However, the number of the 'non-exchangeables' who had emigrated from Greece to Bulgaria cannot be easily estimated.<sup>9</sup> Since November 1923, the Turkish state tried to prevent 'non-exchangeables' from emigrating by denying them Turkish citizenship<sup>10</sup> and citizenship rights such as the right to the lands abandoned by the exchanged in Turkey and distributed by the state to the exchanged who were coming from Greece (Öksüz 2004: 250-278). Although the Turkish authorities drove back to the Greek border the 'non-exchangeables' who applied for asylum or looked for land in Turkey, 'non-exchangeables' fled Greek Thrace as is evidenced by the repeated orders of the Greek General Staff 'for the prohibition of illegal emigration and measures for the collection of information on relevant movements.'<sup>11</sup>

- 13 In fact, a general will to leave from Greek Thrace was widespread, at least, since autumn 1924. In that autumn, Mehmet Hilmi (1902-29), chief editor of *Yeni Ziya* (in Turkish, 'The New Light'), a newspaper appeared in Xanthi in June 1924, acknowledged that:
- Today the population of Thrace waits impatiently for the roads to Turkey to open. Everyday, in front of the Turkish Consulate and of the [Mixed] Exchange Commission, hundreds of persons ask to immigrate to Turkey by denying that they're Thracians. There is no civil servant, no solution to which they did not appeal.<sup>12</sup>
- 14 This absolutely intelligible desire to leave Greek Thrace – in fact, the population increase since autumn 1922 and Greek demographic engineering resulted in the rapid increase of cheap manpower, the cost of living, of the property-related crime and of racist violence – began to fade away by early 1925.
- 15 According to the report submitted by E. Ekstrand and M. de Lara 'on the situation of the Greek minority in Istanbul and of the Turkish minority in Western Thrace', after the field trip of the Mixed Exchange Commission, almost all of the 'representatives of the Turkish minority stated categorically their desire to leave Western Thrace in order to go to Turkey (in many cases, by abandoning their property without indemnity).'<sup>13</sup> However, the lower strata of the social pyramid expressed, according to the same report, just their feelings 'of fear for the future and of resentment for their reduction to a minority after the establishment of refugees in Thrace'. In fact, the question of emigration to Turkey or remaining in Greece had turned through the April 1925 field-trip into a debate on whether these views reflected free will or whether they were the result of pressure put on minority representatives by the Greek and Turkish authorities. The two state authorities' efforts to convey to the Mixed Exchange Commission completely opposing impressions of the conditions of the minority in Greece are quite obvious, if one considers two reports classifying minority representatives as either friends or enemies of the national states.
- 16 In the first case, a Turkish official reported to the Turkish ministry of foreign affairs that Hafiz Salih (1868-1934) and Hafiz Galip (1880-1948), two prominent politicians in Greek Thrace, as well as Mustafa Ağa, deputy in the Greek parliament, and Hafiz Nezvad, mufti of Komotini, 'were able to explain in every detail the situation.'<sup>14</sup> On the contrary, the deputy from Xanthi, Mestan Efendi had been found 'involved into activities against the Turks'. In the second case, the mufti of Alexandroupolis, Hacı Veleddin, denounced to the Greek authorities the Turkish consul in Komotini and the Turkish delegate to the Komotini 9th Exchange Sub-commission for having tried to engage a notable of Alexandroupolis to 'declare his desire to immigrate to Turkey since the Greek administration behaves in a prejudiced manner towards Muslims.'<sup>15</sup> As an outcome of the Exchange Commission's field trip, two 'secret' parties had been created.
- 17 The first was led by Hafiz Galip. According to the Greek intelligence service, it addressed a plea to the Turkish consulate in Komotini in which 'the godsend M. Kemal was begged to save them and to see to their transfer to an area in Turkey where they would settle together.'<sup>16</sup> The second party, under the leadership of the deputy Mustafa Ağa, was in favour of staying in Greece and had not taken any action against its opponents. In fact, both parties mediated between 'non-exchangeables' and state authorities in Greek Thrace without informing the public.<sup>17</sup>

## 2. Caught between silence and clattering noise

- 18 Since the Balkan Wars (1912-13), state authorities gathered information on acts of violence in order to fight against rival national claims by attracting public outcry. For example, the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs considered turning Turkish speaking populations against Bulgaria by collecting complaints for the Bulgarian army's conduct and dispatching these denunciations through special agents in Xanthi to the Istanbul papers that were read by these populations (Glavinas 2005: 157-172). In that respect, Turkish-language public sphere in Xanthi and, generally, in the part of Thrace which came under Greek rule in May 1920 underwent a major change in 1924.
- 19 Up until then Turkish-language newspapers published in Istanbul and the Greek bureaucracy had been the main recipients and conduits for complaint letters. In January 1924 the founding of a Turkish Consulate in Komotini<sup>18</sup> provided an additional channel for such letters or for oral complaints. Very soon the Turkish and the Greek bureaucratic services (the General Administration of Thrace, the Consulate of Turkey and the 9th Exchange Sub-commission) engaged in a battle over the monopoly on information channels. In April 1924, for instance, the Governor General of Thrace asked the muftis of Komotini, Xanthi, and Alexandroupolis to make publicly known that non-exchangeables could make their complaints either by visiting him or by writing to him in Turkish without paying extensive amounts for translations in Greek.<sup>19</sup> Accordingly, the two states' contest for the title of the minority protector expanded to both 'high-level' issues such as the nomination of the Komotini mufti and to 'low-level' matters such as the establishing of information networks. Soon enough, intelligence service employees began to doubt the trustworthiness of their colleagues in state security and to denounce them to their directors for collaboration with the enemy.<sup>20</sup> Afraid of the success of the Turkish Consulate in recruiting informants and its claim to stand for minority rights, Greek authorities thought of multiplying public protest channels.
- 20 Accordingly, Greek authorities authorized V. Evaggelidis, general secretary of Xanthi Tobacco Trade Union and the Greek Communist Party's candidate in the 1923 elections, to publish *Yeni Ziya*, a newspaper that, since 10 June 1924, advocated communism as it had been defined by the Comintern.<sup>21</sup> As soon as *Yeni Ziya* began to attract a regular audience, the General Administration of Thrace, instead of closing down the newspaper in accordance with the 1923 martial law clauses on the press,<sup>22</sup> to assist a group of political refugees who had helped the Greek army in Anatolia and worked since autumn 1922 as informants for the Greek authorities and as teachers at minority schools in publishing a newspaper. *Itila* (in Turkish, 'Elevation') appeared in Xanthi in mid-August 1924 in order to struggle against communism and Kemalism; the chief editor of *Yeni Ziya* rejected *Itila*'s discourse as false accusations (in Turkish, *jurnal*) and stigmas (in Turkish, *leke*). Through this spectacular debate, the older, more comprehensive divide between progressives and conservatives evolved into a confusing divide between state partisans or supporters of Turkey and supporters of Greece<sup>23</sup> as we saw in the reports on the field trip of the Joint Exchange Commission in spring 1925.
- 21 The 'non-exchangeables' population in Greek Thrace appeared divided in regard to the question of which national state would supposedly be its protector, a divide that has recurred several times since then. In early February 1926, for instance, the Governor General of Thrace called 'non-exchangeables' to exercise the right to opt for Turkish nationality until the 6th of August 1926.<sup>24</sup> Although this call conformed perfectly to the



clauses of international agreements, a good number of the 'non-exchangeables' thought that the Greek state used this clause in order to make them leave. This was, at least, what the president of the Turkish delegation to the Joint Exchange Commission reported to *Akşam* (in Turkish, 'Evening'), a daily newspaper published in Istanbul.<sup>25</sup> By interpreting public opinion, the chief editor of *Yeni Yol* (in Turkish, 'The New Way'), a weekly which appeared in Xanthi after the closing of *Yeni Ziya* in January 1926, criticized the Governor's initiative as being the minimum the Greek state was required to do in order to secure the Lausanne treaty:

Above all, we request that the government apply the part of the Lausanne treaty regarding the minorities, that is, to take rapid action to secure the rights and well-being of the Turks of Thrace.<sup>26</sup>

- 22 In fact, the general impression that the Greek state did not really care about the 'non-exchangeables' in Thrace spread among them with the rumor about a new population exchange. Aziz Nuri, the editor of *Adalet* (in Turkish, 'Justice'), which appeared in Komotini in spring 1926, denounced that rumor about Thrace and Istanbul minorities' exchange as a weapon in the hands of the supporters of the Kemalist reforms:

However, in spite of the articles of Anatolian and Thracian newspapers on that issue, some people of bad character who do not feel too ashamed to put forward that, after the forthcoming exchange, the assistance will be great to those who wear a hat, do not abstain from putting out that propaganda.<sup>27</sup>

- 23 In fact, journalists' and bureaucrats' mediation produced so much noise as silence. Since newspaper editors such as A. Nuri or M. Hilmi spoke on behalf of the 'non-exchangeables' who used these newspapers by reading them collectively or by posting letters, these people progressively lost their appetite for true dialogue which is free from any kind of mediation (Debord 2002 :8), by consuming quite willingly the newspapers' black and white blurring images of Greece and Turkey, Islam and Kemalism, and good and evil. As it happened in other parts of the world in the interwar period, the development of the Turkish-language press in Greek Thrace contributed to the control of the public opinion in making everybody incapable of distinguishing between the true and the false: propaganda, slander, lies and denials, flattery and rumor became the key words in the everyday 'dialogue' between the opposing sides of the public sphere. The public debate about whether the modernists and the conservatives were telling the truth in their newspapers about a 'common good', the 'Turks' or the 'Muslims', Greece or Turkey, developed as long as the Greek bureaucracy followed the liberal principles of the government by consent.
- 24 Following the closing of *Yeni Yol* in spring 1926 and the second banishment of M. Hilmi for communist propaganda (Sarris 1992: 493-496), Greek authorities allowed Sabri Ali, a young teacher from Xanthi, to publish a new newspaper. *Yeni Adım* appeared in Xanthi on 30 September 1926, amid the electoral campaigns of 'the progressive and the conservative groups.'<sup>28</sup> After the elections of November 1926, M. Hilmi struggled together with Osman Nuri and Hifzi Abdurrahman, his constant companions since the *Yeni Yol* days, for 'the progress and the rights of the Turks of Western Thrace'. However, the emphasis put on human, citizen and minority rights since April 1927 made the Greek authorities to consider whether they should get rid of Hilmi's group once and for all<sup>29</sup> or whether they should counter *Yeni Adım*'s impact by the same means. As in the case with *Yeni Ziya*, liberal thought prevailed by allowing a new newspaper next to *Yeni Adım*.



- 25 *Yarın* appeared in Xanthi on 22 July 1927 under the editorship of H. Fehmi, a political refugee from Turkey appointed like other political refugees as teacher in minority schools in Xanthi. According to the first editorial, the newspaper's aims were to 'fight against atheism and to reveal its plot to destroy the traditional beliefs in the conscience of the common people by efforts that are incompatible with the elite's level.'<sup>30</sup> In fact, Mustafa Sabri, grand vizier assistant in Damad Ferid's governments (1919-20), and his son Ibrahim undertook to fight Kemalism and more generally ideas of progress and belonging coming from the Enlightenment on the grounds of Islamic philosophy and G. Le Bon's works. Editorials and articles on the 'apostate Ankara regime' and on the 'hypocrites, the covert enemies of Islam' provoked angry reactions from *Yeni Adım* and from the Turkish diplomatic missions in Greece. The fierce polemics about the nature, aims and scope of the Kemalist reforms and of their adherents in Greek Thrace and, above that divide, the pressure of the Turkish embassy in Athens made the Greek authorities consider banishing the editors of *İtila* and *Yarın* towards the end of 1927. However, the Greek authorities abstained from that measure (Tsioumis 1994: 126).
- 26 In fact, the Greek bureaucracy rarely exercised repressive censorship and even more rarely a preventive one on the Turkish-language press in Greek Thrace. When a newspaper article was judged prejudicial on the Greek state's image, the state security officers in Xanthi or the Governor General in Komotini summoned the newspaper editors to their offices for a talk on the veracity of their writings, on the arguments or the tone of their language and tried to extract promises to toe the line in the future.<sup>31</sup> Cases of seizing copies from selling points<sup>32</sup> or at the borders, in the case of newspapers imported from Istanbul,<sup>33</sup> were quite rare. As a general rule, the Turkish-speaking public sphere in Greek Thrace had been structured on the democratic principles of the freedom of speech and of the press which were subject to the limitations brought by the Greek laws on the state of exception and on the press. What was then the role of *Yarın* and *Yeni Adım* editors in disciplining those who talked about emigration to Turkey?

### 3. Crossing the Greek-Turkish borders in October 1928: the state responses

- 27 Since the beginning of 1928, 'non-exchangeables' by the dozens defied Greek and Turkish measures against emigration from Greek Thrace. In response to the repeated requests of Turkish authorities to prevent the emigration of people whom 'the government of the republic cannot send back given the affinity of race'<sup>34</sup>, the Governor General of Thrace maintained that 'no more than a hundred to two hundreds landless, unemployed or extremely nationalist Turks would take advantage of the opportunity if all restrictions were abolished and emigration to Turkey was authorized.'<sup>35</sup> Within less than a month the Greek authorities were confronted with a 'particularly intense wave in the district of New Orestiada,<sup>36</sup> a town opposite Adrianople. The management of the situation by the state started after the request of the General Administration of Thrace to the Greek ministry of foreign affairs for further instructions.
- 28 Athens called both the General Administration of Thrace and the General Staff to issue 'relevant orders on the prohibition of departures in groups or individually, such as the order no. 12010 of 20 October 1926.'<sup>37</sup> Four days later, the foreign affairs ministry asked the Administration 'to establish and dispatch a detailed table of illegal emigrants by

name and by village.<sup>38</sup> At the same time, civil and military authorities under the Governor General in the Turkish part of Thrace tried to find and expel the refugees back to Greece 'where they were mistreated anew.'<sup>39</sup> The Turkish Delegation to the Joint Exchange Commission had already appealed to 'the humanist sentiments of the honourable commission in order to take action in view of an end to the martyrdom of this unfortunate population'. After that appeal, the case was brought to the knowledge of the Commission which was preparing its third field trip to investigate on the state of the 'non-exchangeables' in Greek Thrace (Tsioumis 1994: 90).

- 29 According to the Turkish Delegation, a violent expatriation was taking place. 'Under the pressure exerted by Greeks and because of the difficulties to which they are constantly subject, Turkish refugees from Western Thrace flow en masse in the vilayet of Adrianople.'<sup>40</sup> Contrary to the Turkish claims, the Greek delegation argued that these refugees were either landless, indebted to private individuals or encouraged by 'secret propaganda by some Turks that the Turks of Western Thrace will be exchanged.'<sup>41</sup> The conflict between Turkish and Greek officials on the motives of the October emigrants went on through the exchange of documents giving more details on the expectations of these refugees and on the ways of their emigration towards Turkey.
- 30 In addition to the drought that had made the crossing of the Maritsa River easier at certain points,<sup>42</sup> refugees had profited from the behaviour of the border authorities. Greek police did not really check to see if holders of Greek passports had been granted a Turkish visa or not.<sup>43</sup> Between July 25 and October 29, Greek authorities had issued 119 passports to Turkey and 69 passports to Bulgaria, to the requests of 258 and 95 non-exchangeable individuals, respectively.<sup>44</sup> After the mid-October investigation, the General Administration identified 96 missing 'non-exchangeables' and estimated 60 more absentees as illegal refugees to Turkey. But as has already been suggested, having a passport or not did not make a real difference. Since the Turkish Consulate in Komotini refused to grant visas, Greek border authorities did not bother to check for the Turkish state's approval.<sup>45</sup> Taking advantage of that behaviour, refugees rid themselves of state identity papers before presenting themselves as fugitives to the Turkish border authorities.<sup>46</sup> At that second checkpoint, refugees were either stopped and sent back to Greece or allowed to enter Turkey by the border authorities who presumably sympathized with the refugees' hopes and fears.
- 31 Some of these migrants were refugees who had left from Bulgaria to Greece in the Balkan or the First World wars and lived in Greek Thrace landless. Others had left following those who emigrated recently to Turkey from Bulgaria and Serbia.<sup>47</sup> Others had received letters by relatives telling them on the coming exchange of the minorities in Istanbul and Greek Thrace.<sup>48</sup> Young people tried to avoid military service in the Greek army while others were not able to pay back loans to traders or shopkeepers. Others could not stand the muftis' measures against the partisans of the Kemalist reforms and vexations by the Greek police or civil servants.<sup>49</sup> All these claims made by the Turkish and the Greek delegations to the Joint Exchange Commission gave rise to a tussle behind the doors where the Turkish delegate informally proposed the exchange of minorities and his Greek counterpart argued that the Turkish delegation was just trying to promote the image of Turkey as the sole national state interested in the minority in Thrace.<sup>50</sup> While, then, the Joint Exchange Commission investigated 'the situation of the Turkish minority in Western Thrace' once more, *Yarın* and *Yeni Adım* editors did their best to express the opinions of the 'non-exchangeables'.

## Crossing the Greek-Turkish borders in autumn 1928: press responses

- 32 Without any doubt, the news about the ill-fated venture of the emigrants and the separate efforts of Greek and Turkish authorities to identify them and return them to the status of non-exchangeable spread rapidly among ‘non-exchangeables’, both via the Greek authorities searching for absentees as well as the emigrants who had been sent back and spoke about their misfortunes. It is also quite possible that the news also spread through the field trip of the Joint Exchange Commission despite its presumed efforts to avoid negative publicity. For their part, the editors of *Yeni Adım* and *Yarın* tried to cover up the whole case by echoing the public debate on the emigration affair.
- 33 The editor of *Yeni Adım*, M. Hilmi, touched upon the heated discussion by arguing that ‘under these conditions life for us is impossible.’<sup>51</sup> This idea was not new, of course. Since spring 1927, Hilmi was claiming that ‘Turks are now thinking of how to escape from this place.’<sup>52</sup> With time, Hilmi insisted more and more on this proposal which made his most close friends abandon the group around *Yeni Adım* towards the end of November 1927 (Kırlıdökme 2008: 450-451). According to R. Kırlıdökme, O. Nuri and Hifzi Abdurrahman were unhappy with the submission of Hilmi to the wills of the rich group that funded the newspaper (Kırlıdökme 2000: 9). If, as the Greek authorities were pleased to say,<sup>53</sup> *Yeni Adım* received financial support from the Turkish state via the Turkish Consulate in Komotini, then we have to admit that M. Hilmi had become a highly accomplished journalist:
- Under these conditions life for us becomes certainly impossible. Because our masters desired it in this way, they pushed us into such results. Since 1924, all the rich, broad-minded, wide-awake Turks of the homeland went from Xanthi and Komotini [to Turkey]. Today every Turk is looking for an opportunity to escape. The Turkish people of the villages and of the town of Komotini flee in groups.<sup>54</sup>
- 34 Through this vague reference to an emigration from Komotini and the surrounding villages (a careful reader can easily notice that the editor maintains his silence on the destination of the rich and poor emigrants from Greek Thrace), M. Hilmi skipped over what had really happened on the Greek-Turkish borders in mid-October 1928. The presentation of the emigration as a result of a supposedly foreign and yet familiar power (‘our masters’) did not of course intend to put into question the paternalism displayed by the Greek and the Turkish states in minority protection since 1923-24. By silencing any possible critics of the Greek and the Turkish responses to the ‘non-exchangeables’ emigration, M. Hilmi did not try to hide the news from the public but to keep on serving a part of the public opinion by defining what could be publicly known and said in an usual event such as the mid-October 1928 emigration to Turkey. In the next issue of *Yeni Adım*, for instance, Hilmi repeated what he had first told in 1927: ‘We, the Turks of Western Thrace, remain are a mass remaining like a hostage between two governments.’<sup>55</sup>
- 35 Banality advances, of course, when supposedly new and fresh ideas are being repeated. Following an editorial on a statement which reveals in fact the financial limitations of the Greek demographic engineering,<sup>56</sup> *Yeni Adım* provided a series of articles in a form of a memorandum to both governments and the Joint Exchange Commission about the scarcity of land and pastures, the lack of security,<sup>57</sup> national and religious harassment,<sup>58</sup>

despair and disarray. As anyone familiar with the newspaper could have predicted, Hilmi claimed that ‘non-exchangeables’ should be removed from Greek Thrace.<sup>59</sup>

- 36 On the other hand, *Yarın* editors covered up the emigration incident by reporting some cases of unsuccessful emigration to Turkey. In the first case, according to *Progrès*, a Thessaloniki newspaper, ‘Muslims from Serbia, Romania and Bulgaria had, in recent days, abandoned their plans of immigrating to Turkey.’<sup>60</sup> According to the *Yarın* editors, a person who had met a pater familias from Serbia on the train from Alexandroupolis to Komotini had told the newspaper editors that this family had set off back ‘home’ because the Turkish border authorities had forced his women to remove their headscarves.<sup>61</sup> In fact, *Yarın*’s insistence that emigrants from the Balkans to Turkey had a sudden change of heart cannot be understood independently of its editors concern for authority within the public opinion.
- 37 If *Yarın* mentioned the October 1928 emigration from Greek Thrace, it would offer an explicit refutation of the warnings about the ‘apostate and atheist Ankara regime’. In other words, that episode would make perfectly clear that the influence of an ‘uncontested’ authority such as the former Shaikh al-Islam had certain limits. This is also true for the chief editor of *Yeni Adım* who contented himself with mentioning vaguely emigration from Greek Thrace without reporting on the bad fortune of the immigrants. From that perspective, the editors of *Yarın* equally diverted public attention from the Greek and the Turkish states’ reactions and plagued ‘non-exchangeables’ in Greek Thrace by the problem of making choices free of the constraints placed by the Kemalist regime on the Muslim way of life. This is quite explicitly said in the call made, after the first article on the Muslims’ withdrawal from immigration to Turkey, to believe in *Yarın*’s warnings without being eyewitness of the Turkish authorities’ political zeal on the border (‘he would not have believed it if he hadn’t seen it himself’). By lying about the will of the Turkish state to keep ‘non-exchangeables’ out of Turkey, the editors of *Yarın* called on them to disregard *Yeni Adım*’s pleas for immigration to Turkey and to give their consent to the Lausanne settlement.

## In place of a conclusion

- 38 Following the Greek military defeat in Anatolia and the arrival of more than a million refugees in Greece, life conditions changed radically for both these refugees and the people who were exempted from the population exchange agreed in early 1923 at Lausanne. As the Greek state undertook to settle these refugees – by carrying on the continuing policies of demographic engineering introduced by the Ottoman Empire and pursued by the Bulgarian state – in the territory claimed by the Bulgarian, Greek and Turkish nationalisms; ‘non-exchangeables’ in Greek Thrace began to leave collectively either to Turkey or to Bulgaria. The ‘non-exchangeables’ who remained in Greek Thrace continued to passionately discuss leaving or living in a place which could hardly remind them of their hometowns due to the state of exception that followed the massive arrival of refugees and the large-scale Greek demographic engineering.
- 39 In that debate, which is really hard to reconstruct because of many gaps in the Greek and the Turkish state archives and of the lack of several Turkish-language newspapers edited in Xanthi and in Komotini during the 1920s, the disciplinary function of the *Yeni Adım* and *Yarın* editorships cannot be underestimated. Following the October 1928

emigration to Turkey, the editors of *Yeni Adım* and *Yarın* lapsed into silence all by expressing the conflicting views, ideas, or beliefs of ‘non-exchangeables’ about life in Greece and in Turkey. Speaking in the name of all the ‘non-exchangeables’ who lived in Greek Thrace, M. Hilmi expressed the idea of leaving the place immediately, while M. Sabri and his companions were advocating exactly the opposite, without any of them telling the public the whole truth about that autumn’s emigration to Turkey and, more precisely, how the Greek and Turkish state authorities tried to return emigrants to the status of ‘non-exchangeables’. In fact, the opinion control and the government by consent of the ‘non-exchangeables’ in interwar Greek Thrace should be more thoroughly investigated by using with precaution all that had been brought to their knowledge through means of mass communication like *Yeni Adım* and *Yarın*.

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## APPENDIXES

### Sources and abbreviations

- AMFA: archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Athens)
- AVBM: archive of E. Venizelos, Benaki Museum (Athens)
- BCA: Prime Minister archive of Republican period (Ankara)
- BOA: Prime Minister archive of Ottoman period (Istanbul)

### Selected newspapers

- *Adalet* ('Justice'), Komotini, unknown period of publication
- *Yarın* ('The Day After'), Xanthi/Komotini, from 22 July 1927 to 5 September 1930
- *Yeni Adım* ('The New Step'), Xanthi, from 30 September 1926 to 5 September 1930 (available issues)

- *Yeni Yol* ('The New Way'), Xanthi, from 11 February 1926 to 6 March 1926
- *Yeni Ziya* ('The New Light'), Xanthi, from 10 June 1924 to 5 January 1926

## NOTES

1. 'Non-exchangeable' or 'established' were two equivalent terms introduced in opposition to the terms 'exchangeable' or 'exchanged' by the Convention on the Exchange of Greek and Turkish Populations, signed at Lausanne on January 30<sup>th</sup> 1923. Following the Article 2 of the Convention, 'the following persons shall not be included in the exchange provided in Article 1: (a) the Greek inhabitants of Constantinople (b) the Moslem inhabitants of Western Thrace. All Greeks who were already established [...]'. For a full text of the Convention, see *League of Nations*, 1925: 77-87.
2. In Bulgarian, Giumurdjina / in Greek, Giumuldjina, since 1920, in Greek, Komotini.
3. In Bulgarian and in Greek, Dedeagatch, since 1920, in Greek, Alexandroupolis.
4. *Osmanlı belgelerinde Batı Trakya*, 2009: 288.
5. www.devletarsivleri.gov.tr
6. It would be important to remind here G. Agamben's philosophical inquiries (1998, 2005, 2011) on the origins of the state/sovereign power and of the power in its governmental and spectacular aspects in the West, which calls into question the easygoing understanding of the state loyalty and, more particularly, the opposition between friend and enemy which is fundamental in western politics according to the jurist C. Schmitt (1885-1985).
7. While C. Tayyar and his followers were for the repatriation of these refugees in order to make clear the majority in the former Bulgarian Thrace, the Istanbul government under A. Rıza was afraid both of the Entente reaction to that repatriation and of the Muslim population's weakening in the *vilayet* of Andrianople during the Paris peace conference, for more details see Başer, 2000: 135-140.
8. Venizelos, 17 October 1922, letter to the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs, no. 3435, AVBM, D. 42.
9. Scattered archival documents mention emigration of groups of 84 or 135 'non-exchangeables' to Bulgaria, see for instance, the reports dated 7 September 1924, BCA, 30.10/219.479.8 and 8 October 1924, BCA, 30.10/219.479.12.
10. This becomes clear from the application made by the General Director of Consular and Commercial Affairs of the Turkish ministry of Foreign Affairs to the undersecretary of the Prime Minister's office for an exception of a clerk in the General Direction of Consular and Commercial Affairs from the provisions of the 4 November 1923 governmental decision, see document dated 16 May 1926, BCA, 30.10/116.808.2.
11. General Staff order no. 5703/2413, prot. no. 9926 / 19 August 1926, AMFA, D. 1926/Γ/68/AİE; D. 1926/Γ/68/VI. A second order issued by the General Staff in 20 October 1926 is mentioned by the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs in mid-October 1928, see *infra*.
12. Hilmi, 'Kırpikleri uzundur yarık hayale sığmaz; bu eski misaldir, mızrak çuvala sığmaz', *Yeni Ziya*, no. 35 / 15 November 1924, p.1.
13. Report of the neutral members of the Mixed Exchange Commission to the *League of Nations*, 29 November 1925, AMFA, D. 1928/80.7.
14. Report of the General Direction of Political Affairs of the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, prot. no. 22642/102, 12 May 1925, BCA, 30.10/253.708.44.
15. Reports of the mufti of Alexandroupolis, 25 and 27 April 1925, AMFA, D. 1930/B.
16. Confidential communication of May bulletin of intelligence service by the General Administration of Thrace, prot. no. 889 / 15 June 1925, AMFA, D. 1925/A/2,1.
17. *Ibid.*



18. For relevant information see bureaucratic correspondence between 29 December 1923 and 15 June 1924 conserved in BOA, HR. IM.
19. Circular by the Governor General of Thrace to the muftis of Thrace, prot. no. 13087 / 29 April 1924, AMFA, D. 1924/B/33, 2.
20. Communication of a Circassian chief bandit by the Special Security Service, prot. no. – [missing] / 21 June 1924, AMFA, D. 1925/A/2,1.
21. It would be important to remember that the political program of the Comintern included since 1923-24 the independence of Macedonia and Thrace from the Balkan nation states. This fact provides a good indication of the Greek authorities' eagerness to undermine wishful thinking about the continuation of the *Kuvvayi Milliye* task, through confusion, more precisely, by consenting to the diffusion of an emancipation plan opposed both to Turkish irredentism and to Greek nationalism.
22. On the progressive extension of the provisions of the martial law in Greece since autumn 1922, see Alivizatos, 1979: 19 and passim.
23. Pro-Turkey minority members claimed that minority's progress would result from the Kemalist reforms and that the minority's protection was ensured by the Turkish state against the Greek state. Conversely, pro-Greece minority members argued that minority's existence depended on the minority's protection by the Greek state from Kemalist atheism. Throughout the debate, the Greek state appeared as if it opposed Kemalist modernization, while the Turkish state appeared as the protector from Greek nationalism and the persecutor of the Muslim way of life.
24. Report by the president of the 9<sup>th</sup> Exchange Sub-Commission, 18 February 1926, AMFA, D. 1930/B.
25. Telegram by the Greek Consulate in Istanbul, 18 February 1926, AMFA, D. 1930/B.
26. Hilmi, 'Ehem muhime tercih olunur', *Yeni Yol*, no. 2 / 15 February 1926, p.2.
27. Nuri, 'Mübadele yoktur ve olamaz! Aldanmayalım', *Adalet*, no. 7 / 23 May 1926, p.1.
28. Hilmi, 'Nasıl mebus isteriz?', *Yeni Adım*, no. 1 / 30 September 1926, p.1.
29. Confidential report by the deputy of the Governor General of Thrace, prot. no. 14578 / 16 July 1927, AMFA, D. 1929/B/61.
30. Fehmi (?), 'Mesleğimiz', *Yarın*, no.1 / 22 July 1927, p.1.
31. Hilmi, 'Rodop Vali-i Umumisi – Ğarbi Trakya Türkleri ve Yeni Adım', *Yeni Adım*, no. 40 / 4 May 1927, p.1-2.
32. Hilmi, 'Nazar-i dikkate', *Yeni Ziya*, no. 40 / 20 December 1924, p.3.
33. Hilmi, 'Sansür', *Yeni Adım*, no. 97 / 18 February 1928, p.2.
34. Notice by the Turkish ambassador to the Greek minister of Foreign Affairs, prot. no. 8746 / 21 July 1928, AMFA, D. 1927-28/93.2 (B)
35. Report by the Governor General of Thrace, prot. no. 920 / 13 September 1928, AMFA, D. 1927-28/93.2 (B)
36. Encrypted telegram by the General Administration of Thrace to the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs, prot. no. 11302 / 13 October 1928, AMFA, D. 1929/B/37.
37. Order by the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the Greek General Staff, prot. no. 11025 / 15 October 1928, AMFA, D. 1929/B/37
38. Encrypted telegram by the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the General Administration of Thrace, prot. no. 11302 / 19 October 1928, AMFA, D. 1929/B/37. Due to the lack of relevant information, we cannot describe this extraordinary population census.
39. Report by the Turkish delegation to the Mixed Exchange Commission, no. 29295 / 22 October 1928, AMFA, D. 1928/80.7.
40. Report by the Turkish delegation, no. 29295 / 22 October 1928, AMFA, D. 1928/80.7. Compare to the report by the Turkish Ministry of Interior, 24 October 1928, BCA, 30.10/81.530.12.

41. Report by the Greek delegate to the 9<sup>th</sup> Exchange Commission to the Greek vice-president of the Mixed Exchange Commission, 23 October 1928, AMFA, D. 1928/80.7
42. *Ibid.*
43. *Ibid.*
44. It seems that passports were issued on the request either of a single person or of a group leader like a family chief. According to Greek estimates, twenty-two families had immigrated illegally to Turkey from 25 July to 29 October 1928, see report by the deputy Governor General of Thrace, prot. no. 1057 / 29 October 1928, AMFA, D. 1929/B/37.
45. *Ibid.*
46. *Ibid.*
47. *Ibid.*
48. If this was true, it implies that Greek authorities were checking private correspondence.
49. Report by the Greek delegate to the 9<sup>th</sup> Exchange Commission to the Greek vice-president of the Mixed Exchange Commission, 23 October 1928, AMFA, D. 1928/80.7
50. *Ibid.*
51. Hilmi, 'Bu şerait dahilinde hayat bizim için imkânsız', *Yeni Adım*, no. 160 / 17 October 1928, p. 1.
52. Hilmi, 'Lozan muahedenamesinin ma'hud maddesi - imha tedbirleri - muhacir iskânı - Turkia kaçakları - netice...', *Yeni Adım*, no. 39 / 24 April 1927, p.1; Hilmi, 'Bir az da mebuslarla konuşalım...', *Yeni Adım*, no. 42 / 14 May 1927, p.1.
53. Confidential report by the Administration Inspector, A. L. Dasios, prot. no. 8922 / 25 June 1927, AFAM, D. 1927/93.3 (2).
54. Hilmi, 'Bu şerait dahilinde hayat bizim için imkânsız', *Yeni Adım*, no. 160 / 17 October 1928, p. 1.
55. Hilmi, 'Muhtelit Mübadele Komisyonları geliyormuş, ne görecekler?', *Yeni Adım*, no. 161 / 20 October 1928, p.1.
56. 'If this coffee shop can contain 100 people and we have to put 200 people in it, then we must either kill or throw out 100 of them' was a statement made by a Refugee Settlement Commission agent and illustrated, following M. Hilmi, very well the non-exchangeables' situation in Greece. See M. Hilmi, 'Vaziyetimiz hakkında pek güzel bir misal', *Yeni Adım*, no. 162 / 24 October 1928, p. 1.
57. Hilmi, 'Vaziyetimizin icmalî (Mukaddeme)', *Yeni Adım*, no. 167 / 10 November 1928, pp.1-2.
58. Hilmi, 'Vaziyetimizin icmalî (Millî ve dinî hakaretler)', *Yeni Adım*, no. 168 / 14 November 1928, pp.1-2.
59. Hilmi, 'Vaziyetimizin icmalî (Netice)', *Yeni Adım*, no. 169 / 17 November 1928, p.1.
60. Fehmi (?), 'Geç değil mi?', *Yarın*, no. 33 / 23 November 1927 - 10 Cemaziyel'ahir 1347, p.3.
61. Fehmi (?), 'Gözüyle görmeden inanmamış!', *Yarın*, no. 35 / 21 December 1927 - 8 Receb 1347, p.3.

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## ABSTRACTS

Contrary to what the title of this article may eventually lead to understand, this paper is mainly about the management of public opinion by the editors of two newspapers published in interwar Thrace, *Yeni Adım* and *Yarın*. More precisely, this paper focuses on their use of the news that

spread by mid-October 1928 among the ‘non-exchangeable’ inhabitants in Greek Thrace, regarding the emigration of their fellows to Turkish Thrace and the reactions of the Turkish and Greek authorities to that small scale migration. The emigration of ‘non-exchangeables’ from Greek Thrace has already been considered as the main reaction of that people who had been exempted, in early 1923, from the compulsory exchange of Greek and Turkish populations, to state policies that aimed to settle ‘exchangeables’ in Thrace. While offering a historical account of the Greek demographic engineering in two Ottoman provinces which had formed a Bulgarian province between 1913-19, this paper describes how ‘non-exchangeables’ debated the emigration to Turkey, which has been curiously neglected as an issue of public debate by current scholarship on that minority. The paper also dwells on the transformation of the public sphere of ‘non-exchangeables’ following the establishment of a Turkish Consulate in Komotini and the spread of Turkish-language newspapers from Xanthi and Komotini. My focus then tries to identify the ways people tried to pass the Greek-Turkish border in autumn 1928, the ways the Turkish and Greek authorities tried to stop that ‘leak’ of ‘non-exchangeables’ and to reassign that status those who had tried to leave it, and, at last, the ways *Yeni Adım* and *Yarın* editorial teams spoke about these particular events in the name and place of their audiences, the ‘Western Thrace Turks’ and the ‘Muslims of Western Thrace’ respectively. Since this investigation rests on information and opinions exchanged through newspapers, the present paper necessarily addresses the need to move from the traditional approach of the ‘state minority policy’ towards questions of ‘government by consent’.

## INDEX

**Mots-clés:** Bulgarie, émigration, ingénierie démographique, Empire ottoman, non-échangeables, musulmans, Thrace de Grèce  
**Keywords:** Bulgaria, emigration, demographic engineering, Greek Thrace, non-exchangeables, Muslims, Ottoman Empire