

# *Are We Going to Establish this Nation Divided?*

## Institutionalization of Refugee Identity and State Opposition After the 1923 Greco-Turkish Population Exchange

### **Research Goal:**

This paper aims to reconsider the role of *mübadil* (exchanged Muslims from Greece) in early republican Turkey by investigating why their civil society organizations were shut down by the Turkish state just a few years within their inception.

### **The Population Exchange (1923-4):**

1.2 million Greek-Orthodox Christian Anatolians (*Rumoi*) and 400,000 Greek Muslims were stripped of their pre-war citizenship, uprooted them from their homes, and forced to resettle on the opposite shores of the Aegean Sea. The population exchange, fully sanctioned by the League of Nations, was a tragic manifestation of the 19th/20th century trend of nation building.



**“To be a mübadil in Turkey was difficult. The exchange is devastation... The first generation [of mübadil] faced many difficulties in Turkey... We had to hide our identities for a period”**

- First generation mübadil Mehmet Filiz interviewed by İskender Özsoy in *İki Vatan Yorgunlari*, 2003 (p. 144)

### **Conclusion:**

*Mübadil* were viewed by republican politicians as disturbances to Turkish nation-state. Politicians expressed outrage at the mübadil desire to develop community solidarity as such activities would lead to the ‘establishment of a divided nation’. As such, it seems that the government shuttered the Mübadele Cemiyeti by 1927 or 1928 utilizing the authoritarian legal tools permitted by the 1925 *Takrir-i Sükun Yasası*.

At the core of government’s closure of the *Mübadele Cemiyeti* lies a great irony about the population exchange: although the exchange was justified through the claim that Greek-Orthodox Christians were disturbances to the Turkish nation state, the incoming Muslims were viewed by some nationalists as disturbances, too.