

Synopsis from Dr. Andrew R. Novo

The Treaty of Lausanne remains enormously significant because it redrew the map of the Near East after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. But it also has contemporary relevance, as we witnessed in campaigning during Turkey's recent elections. In theory, the Lausanne Treaty concluded a period of genocidal war (the First World War in the Near East, Turkey's war against its Christian minorities, the Turkish War of Independence, etc), but violence continued even after the treaty. Lausanne was signed after the horrors of the great war, the Armenian genocide and the Arab revolt. It codified the elimination of most of the new Turkish Republic's Christian minorities, with the notable exception of the Greeks of Constantinople. Lausanne's provisions for population exchange need to be understood within this context. Through massacre, deportation, starvation, and disease, Turkey eliminated an enormous number of its minorities over the period between 1894 and 1923. The population exchange of Lausanne was only the legal codification of the removal of most of the remaining Christians in Turkey. Population exchange was complicated by the fact that not all Greeks meant to be included in the exchange were simply Greek citizens of the new Turkish republic waiting to take ship to Greece. By the end of 1922, more than half a million Greeks remained in Asia Minor. But these included hundreds of thousands of individuals in three very vulnerable categories: men of military age who the Turks did not release from custody as they were supposed to do under the terms of the treaty, young women who had been "married" off to Turks, and children who had been sold to Turkish families or "adopted" by them. The last two categories had often been "Islamized." If they survived until 1923, they were often not included in the resettlement agreement. Not all Turkish-speaking minorities wanted to leave Greece and not all Greek-speakers wanted to remain in Greece. After the final peace agreement, some wished to return to Asia Minor, hoping that they would be able to reclaim some part of their former lives. The Treaty of Lausanne left the Patriarch as the spiritual head of a Christian community dramatically reduced in size, economic power, and security. Almost all of the modern Turkish Republic's Greek population was now in Constantinople, more vulnerable than ever before. And, although meant to settle decades of violence and war, the security of that community would soon come under renewed pressure.