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.

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.

“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)