

Psomiades/Nansen

Theodore A. Couloumbis

This is an impeccably written and carefully researched study by a prominent political scientist. Harry Psomiades focuses on a most critical period (1921–23) that has left a permanent mark on the fortunes of 20th century Greece and Turkey. Two powerful personalities dominate the narrative: Eleftherios Venizelos and Fridtjof Nansen. The former was a prominent statesman who modernized his country and managed through carefully crafted regional alliances and insightful decisions to double Greece's territory during the Balkan Wars and World War I. The latter was a dashing Norwegian adventurer and explorer and Nobel Prize winner, who remains a central figure in international humanitarian work through his associations with the League of Nations and the International Red Cross.

This fascinating story, covering Greece's defeat in the hands of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's Turkey during the 1921–22 Anatolian campaign, raises questions that are of central relevance to the present time: What is the role of international organizations and civil society in helping governments, following periods of tragic warfare, to control the damage and address the needs of civilians that are caught in the middle? Is a compulsory population exchange—based on religion or ethnicity—a painful but necessary instrument to support the peace after a war? Are we moving toward a United Europe that can sustain multiculturalism or is the “clash of civiliza-

tions" an inevitable element of the future? Is history the product of chance and a myriad of events or is it best explained by the decisions of wise statesmen or the omissions and actions of populist politicians? The reader of this fine volume will be helped to form some answers to these and many other difficult questions.

Fridtjof Nansen and the Greek Refugee Crisis, 1922–1924

Harry J. Psomiades

Prologue

Why did all of the participants at the Lausanne conference for a Near East peace, 1922–1923, find it necessary to accept the principle of a compulsory rather than a voluntary exchange of populations between Greece and Turkey as a solution to the Greek refugee crisis? Why had all the delegates at Lausanne expressed their deep misgiving and concern over the legitimacy and morality of a forced population exchange but at the same time agreed to its passage? Indeed, their open and unanimous condemnation of the principle of coercion as being unjust and bereft of human dignity must largely explain their denial of any responsibility for its paternity. Yet, at the same time, they all backed the agreement, although none wished to sponsor it openly. Was it yet another case of a constant condition in politics involving the clash between pragmatism and principles, between perceived national interests and the emerging international obligation of humanitarian intervention?

For the first time in human history, the participants at Lausanne were establishing the principle of the involuntary displacement of populations as an international norm. The violation of the basic human right of choice, the uprooting of people from their ancestral homes, with no say in the matter, had to be viewed as a regressive