

League of Nations' Refugee Operations through İstanbul: Back to the Origins of International Refugee Question

E. Tutku Vardađlı*

Abstract

The key objective of this study is to understand the main predicaments of the contemporary international refugee management system by tracing back to the origins. Therefore, the modern day refugee question is searched through the League of Nations' (LN) refugee operations. It is indicated that the palliative approach of the LN assuming the international refugee question in a vast area in the aftermath of the First World War (WWI) determined the international standards. Specifically, the operations of the League of Nations' High Commissariat for Refugees (LNHCR) office in İstanbul are taken into close consideration as a case to delineate in depth. It is indicated that the state-centered structure of the international organizations is not capable of resolving the refugee question, which is indeed a transnational problem.

Keywords

League of Nations, refugee policy, İstanbul, Turkey, transnational.

* Ph.D. Lecturer, İstanbul Aydın University, This research is funded by The Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey (TÜBİTAK) 2219 Program. etutkuvardagli@aydin.edu.tr. (orcid.org/0000-0001-6466-7881)
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Özet

Bu çalışmanın amacı çağdaş uluslararası mülteci yönetim sisteminin temel açmazlarını konunun kökenine inerek anlamaktır. Bu nedenle, günümüz mülteci meseleleri Milletler Cemiyeti'nin (MC) mülteci operasyonları üzerinden incelenmektedir. Birinci Dünya Savaşı'nın sonucunda geniş bir alanda mülteci sorununu üstlenen MC'nin geçici çözüm odaklı yaklaşımının uluslararası standardı belirlediğine dikkat çekilmektedir. Özel olarak, Milletler Cemiyeti Mülteciler Yüksek Komiserliği'nin (MCMYK) İstanbul Ofisinin faaliyetleri vaka olarak derinlemesine incelemeye alınmıştır. Uluslararası örgütlerin devlet merkezli yapısının aslında transnasyonal bir mesele olan mülteci meselesine çözüm getirebilme kapasitesinin bulunmadığına dikkat çekilmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler

Milletler Cemiyeti, Mülteci politikası, İstanbul, Türkiye, Ulusötesi.

Introduction

The agreement on the “Readmission of Persons Residing without Authorization” signed between Turkey and the EU in 2014 upon the sudden influx of refugees from Syria generated a critical turn in current migration and refugee studies in many regards. Not only the moral values of the EU and Turkey were questioned, but also the role of international institutionalism was opened to debate. Regarding the readmission of the refugees, the safety, political liberty and economic well-being conditions in Turkey has been questioned so far.¹ The limited capabilities of Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon as the host countries are obvious. The unavoidability of more active participation of international institutionalism into the refugee question is becoming more pressing as the wars and political turmoil persist in the Middle East and the surrounding areas since the 1990s.² Therefore, the role of international institutionalism regarding the ever-globalizing refugee question requires a thorough examination. In an attempt to get to the bottom line of the issue, this study focuses on how the international institutionalism represented by the LN responded to the first international refugee question following the WWI.

The immediate aftermath of the WWI is suggested as a pertinent period of time to delineate the role of modern international institutionalism regarding the

¹ Sarah Wolff, “The Politics of Negotiating EU Readmission Agreements: Insights from Morocco and Turkey”, *European Journal of Migration and Law*, Vol. 16, No.1, (February 2014), pp. 69-95; Mehdi Rais, “European Union Readmission Agreements”, *Forced Migration Review*, Vol. 51, (January 2016), pp.45-46.

² Emily Copeland, “Global refugee policy: an agenda for the 1990s”, *International Migration Review*, Vol. 26, No. 3, (September 1992), pp. 992-999.

refugee question. It is argued that the LN's refugee operations in the immediate aftermath of the WWI generated the norms and standards of the contemporary refugee management system. While the humanitarian values of the LN Convention molded the moral standards of the refugee protection, its organizational structure set forth the institutional framework, which would be transferred to the UN as a successor. Specifically, the LNHCR is taken into close consideration to understand the original and substantive predicaments of the international refugee management system that still persist today.

The protection and resettlement of Russian refugees in İstanbul and its environs is examined in depth, as a large-scale rule-making refugee operation in the post-WWI period managed by the LNHCR. Starting from the Balkan Wars in 1912-1913, İstanbul and several other places in Anatolia hosted large numbers of refugees having different ethnic and religious identities. Regarding the post-WWI refugee question, the international society represented by the LN at that time turned its gaze to İstanbul for several reasons. First, large numbers of refugees were clustered in İstanbul during and after the war. Secondly, the transportation opportunities of the city facilitated the resettlement schemes at the regional level. Last but not the least, the LNHCR authorities in İstanbul would be able to operate under the protection of the Allied Forces occupying the city between 1920 and 1922, which was another facilitating factor for them. Thus, İstanbul was an ideal location for the LNHCR to manage its regional refugee operations. The LNHCR treated İstanbul first as a relief and then an evacuation center to distribute the refugees to surrounding countries for permanent settlement. This organization had to make deals with the Ankara Government after the retreat of the Allied forces from İstanbul for the organization of relief and evacuation works. It also tried to reach agreement with the surrounding Balkan states for the permanent resettlement of the Russian refugees.

Methodologically, the relations between the LNHCR and the national authorities are examined through historical sources to understand the national and international responses to the refugee question. The predicaments of international institutionalism regarding the refugee question are documented in reference to the LN archive sources and discussed in the context of transnationalism.³ The bulk of historical material utilized in this study includes; the legislative minutes and reports of the LN, Ottoman and early Republican archive records on the refugee question and the official correspondences between the LN and the Ankara government as well as the governmental

³ See Henk Overbeek, "Globalization, Sovereignty and Transnational Regulation: reshaping the governance of international migration", Bimal Ghosh (ed.), *Managing Migration, Time for a New International Regime*, Oxford, New York, Oxford University Press, 2000, pp.48-74; Khalid Koser, "Refugees, Transnationalism and the State", *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, Vol. 33, No. 2, (January 2007), pp. 233-254.

authorities of the neighboring Balkan states. Besides the standard benefits of complementarity from the methodological point of view, these archive sources help to see the responses of international organizations and the concerned nation states to the refugee question at hand. It is intended that the structural predicaments of the international ‘refugee management’⁴ system today can be disclosed in this way. Such a historical evaluation can help us today to take a critical distance towards the current situation of the international refugee question and then to question what we have taken for granted so far.

Contemporary studies rarely take the international refugee question back to its origins. When they do so, the refugee question is usually mentioned briefly under the title of the social work of the LN. So far, the existing literature depicted the social work of the LN as a relative success compared to the disarmament or arbitration issues for example. A handful of studies especially by Henig, Northedge and Pedersen cannot take a step further from appreciating the virtuous and benevolent intentions of the LN, when it comes to the refugee matters.⁵ Whereas, the refugee works of the LN requires a thorough research rather than a mere appreciation. There is another strand of the literature that provides us valuable firsthand accounts. Thanks to the LN officials’ memoirs and monographs. They published some monographic studies on this field, which take us directly into the heart of the refugee issue.⁶ The most comprehensive research and analysis on the social work of the LN has been achieved by a group of scholars interested in international institutionalism.⁷ On the other hand, Skran and Housden have studied the refugee work of the LN in specific.⁸ While Skran emphasizes the system-formation impact of the LN on international refugee

⁴ ‘Refugee management’ phrase is used here critically implying that it was not a protection system but a palliative management issue in the modern sense of the term. For further details, see Stephan Scheel and Philipp Ratfisch, “Refugee Protection Meets Migration Management: UNHCR as a global police of populations”, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, Vol. 40, No. 6, (December 2014), pp. 924-941.

⁵ Susan Pedersen, “Back to the League of Nations”, *The American Historical Review*, No.1124, (2007), pp.1108-1109.

⁶ See Charles P. Howland, “Greece and Her Refugees”, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 4, No. 4, (July 1926), pp. 620-24; Rachel E. Crowdy, “The Humanitarian Activities of the League of Nations”, *Journal of Royal Institute of International Affairs*, Vol.6, No.3, (May 1927), pp.153-169; John H. Simpson, “The Work of the Greek Refugee Settlement Commission”, *Journal of the Royal Institute of International Affairs*, Vol. 8, No. 6, (November 1929), pp.583-86; Martin Hill, “The League of Nations and the Work of Refugee Settlement and Financial Reconstruction in Greece, 1922-30”, *Weltwirtschaftliches Archiv*, No. 34, (1931), pp.264-69.

⁷ See Garcia M. Rodriguez et.al. *League of Nations' Work on Social Issues: visions, endeavours and experiments*, Geneva, UN, 2016.

⁸ Claudena Skran, *Refugees in the Interwar Period: the emergence of a regime*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1995; Martyn Housden, “White Russians Crossing the Black Sea: Fridtjof Nansen, Constantinople and the First Modern Repatriation of Refugees Displaced by Civil Conflict 1922-232”, *The Slavonic and East European Review*, Vol. 88, No. 3, (July 2010), pp.495-524.

issues, Housden focuses on the refugee operations of the LNHCR and regards it as a “success.” This study challenges both views arguing that the LN did not generate a system for the international refugee matters but offered palliative measures that evolved into international customary practices. Specifically, the Russian refugee operations of the LNHCR from İstanbul is not presented here as a “success story” as Housden did. Taking into account the limits of the LN and LNHCR as newly established organizations and appreciating the benevolent intentions of some authorities like Dr. Nansen, the High Commissioner of the LNHCR, this study intends to raise scientific suspicion about the role of international institutionalism on the refugee question and to probe into the systemic failures.

By focusing on the norm-setting, large-scale refugee operations of the LN, this study intends to enrich scholarly knowledge on the issue. Taking a different path, the study provides first hand data to analyze conceptual, operational and administrative predicaments of the LN refugee management system and sheds light on the root causes of the current international refugee matters.

First World War and the Refugee Puzzle in İstanbul: descriptive questions

From the late nineteenth century, Anatolia hosted a series of migrant populations having their own political and economic motives behind. This section focuses on the post-WWI population movements in İstanbul. Both the refugees and the philanthropic organizations trying to help these refugees preferred İstanbul for convenience. The city provided easy access to transportation and communication channels and closer contact with the diplomatic and other official bodies. Therefore, İstanbul assumed the role of a refugee convention center since the Balkan Wars in 1912-1913. During the series of wars starting with the Balkan Wars, following with the WWI and coming to end with the Turkish-Greek War between 1919 and 1922, the country was both receiving and sending refugees. On the one hand, large numbers of Muslims from the Balkans took their route to İstanbul and Anatolia.⁹ On the other hand, the non-Muslim populations of the declining Ottoman Empire had been relegated to the position of refugees and internally displaced communities. The deportation and exile of Armenians, Greeks and other non-Muslim subjects of the Empire alarmed the Western powers to protect these refugees.¹⁰ Moreover,

⁹ See Kemal H. Karpat, *Osmanlı'dan Günümüze Etnik Yapılanma ve Göçler*, İstanbul, Timaş Yayınları, 2010; Fuat Dünder, *İttihat ve Terakkinin Müslümanları İskan Politikası*, İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2013.

¹⁰ Stephen P. Ladas, *The Exchange of Minorities: Bulgaria, Greece and Turkey*, New York, Macmillan, 1932.

the refugees from neighboring Russia, demobilized soldiers and displaced civilians were stuck in İstanbul in the aftermath of the WWI, turned the city into a refugee convention center. Therefore, it makes more sense for this period of time to describe the country as a refugee hub to depict the whole picture of outflows, inflows, internal displacements, as well as the back and forth movements of the refugees within and across the borders.¹¹ In this refugee hub, a particular solution for a specific refugee group might not have helped another group. For example, it was a waiting room or corridor for much of the Russian refugees, a destination point for the Muslim refugees from the Balkans, country of origin and a destination of resettlement for the deported Armenians, Greeks and other non-Muslim communities. In fact, these differences would further complicate the refugee situation in İstanbul, especially the relief works.

The refugee population in İstanbul and several other places in Anatolia in the post WWI period was not only comprised of the people uprooted due to the WWI, but included also those displaced in the wars preceding and following the WWI. As Hoerder points out, the dissolution of the multi-ethnic structure of the Empire was already a refugee-generating phenomenon by itself.¹² In the Ottoman context, it can be added that the Empire was dissolved by a series of wars each one generating a new refugee group accumulating over one another. For this reason, when the LNHCR officials arrived in İstanbul they were puzzled with the different clusters of refugees accumulated over one another in a series of wars.

The İstanbul office of the LNHCR was established in the midst of the Turkish-Greek war between 1919 and 1922 and its initial mission was to help the Russian refugees fleeing from the Soviet regime.¹³ However, they had to tackle with different refugee groups other than the Russians, such as the Anatolian Greeks fleeing from the country behind the Greek Army and previously displaced Armenian and other non-Muslim populations searching for resettlement. This was a complex and complicated question imposing new moral obligations upon the LNHCR. The urgent needs of the variety of refugee groups in İstanbul were far beyond not only the financial and organizational capacities of the LNHCR, but also their knowledge and experience as a newly established organization. Therefore, the LNHCR's task in İstanbul was not easy at all. As

¹¹ Stanford J. Shaw, "Resettlement of Refugees in Anatolia 1918-1923", *Turkish Studies Association Bulletin*, Vol. 22, No. 1, (Spring 1998), pp.58-90.

¹² Dirk Hoerder, *Migrations and Belonging*, Cambridge, London, Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014, pp. 137-139.

¹³ Martyn Housden, *The League of Nations and the Organization of Peace*, London, New York: Routledge, 2014, p.63.

Housden puts it “If ever there was a litmus test for the management of refugees in the early 1920s, Constantinople was it.”¹⁴

The first mission of the LNHCR office in İstanbul was to help Russian refugees fleeing from the Soviet regime. At first sight, it seems that the “Russian refugee” title refers to the country of origin as a descriptive category. However, the key motivation of the LN to help these refugees reminds us that this title was indeed a misleading one referring selectively to a certain part of Russian refugees. LN authorities referred specifically to the victims of the Soviet regime when they mentioned “Russian refugees.” The key motivating factor behind the mobilization of the LN for the protection of “Russian refugees” was indeed an ideological one. The Great Powers had previously supported the White Army against the Red Army of the Soviet regime. When the White Army was defeated and took refuge in İstanbul in great numbers, the Great Powers mobilized the LNHCR to help these refugees, who were mainly comprised of ex-soldiers.¹⁵ However, the LNHCR officials on the field soon realized that this “Russian refugees” were not just comprised of the ex-soldiers of the White Army. They found out that different categories of “Russian refugees” clustered over one another in a decade of wars in the region were asking their support. Therefore, the first predicament of this international organization was a descriptive one regarding refugee title and the following entitlements. The discrepancy between the views of the LN authorities in Geneva and the LNHCR officials experiencing the refugee situation on the field would become more explicit on the operational stage, as would be discussed in detail in the following section.

On the other side, the Russian refugee question was not perceived in the same way in İstanbul, where the large bulks of refugees were hosted. From the point of the LN, it was largely a matter of saving the soldiers and civilians from the atrocities of the Soviet regime. Whereas, the Russian refugee question was an ongoing phenomenon for the Ottoman administration and its successor Ankara government since the last quarter of the nineteenth century. For this reason, the complexity of the Russian refugee title can be better observed from İstanbul. Both mass and sporadic migrations were already taking source from Russia since 1877-78 Russian-Ottoman War. Their religious, ethnic, economic, gender, age and skill profiles were remarkably different. For example, the majority of those coming from Russia in this early period were largely composed of the Muslims and they were settled by the Ottoman government in the Central Anatolia and in the hinterland of the Eastern Black Sea coast.¹⁶ On the other hand, those taking

¹⁴ Housden, “White Russians...” p.500.

¹⁵ Alexis Wrangel, *General Wrangel: Russia's White Crusader*, Wisconsin, Leo Cooper Books, 1987.

¹⁶ Republic of Turkey Presidency Ottoman Archives, (COA), BEO, 21.M.1330, 3989/29911; MV, 04.S.1330, 161/5; BEO, 07.S.1330, 3995/299556; DH.EUM.EMN, 14.B.1330, 6/26; DH.SYS, 28.S.1331, 4/5; DH.SYS, 04.Ca.1332, 6/3. For a detailed information on the

refugee in the Anatolian lands during the October Revolution were an overwhelmingly non-Muslim refugee population.¹⁷ This refugee group was also divided between civilians and soldiers. For example, General Wrangel's and General Denikin's Armies which had fought against the Red Army with the support of Western Allies constituted an ex-soldier refugee group as a special category. These ex-soldier refugees were settled mostly in Istanbul and Gallipoli. They were deployed by the French Army on the militarily strategic points such as the outskirts of Istanbul like Hadımköy, Çatalca and in Gallipoli.¹⁸ After the war, the French Army took away only the highly qualified soldiers to employ them for its national car industry.¹⁹ However, large numbers of Russian ex-soldiers were still waiting for a solution. Thus, the task was left to the LNHCR.

Another group titled as "Russian refugees" was consisting of mainly Russian, Greek and Armenian refugees migrating from Russia to the several towns of Black Sea coast in Anatolia. These were mainly composed of the civilians fleeing from the war front. Particularly, the Greeks and Armenians within this group were those who had been previously engaged in a kind of shuttle migration between the Ottoman and Russian shores of the Black Sea during the late nineteenth century. Many of them had established business relations with Russia.²⁰ The War and the October Revolution destabilized this economically motivated cross-border movement between the two countries. Border crossing for job and business was replaced at that time by flees for life and security. This migratory wave was accelerated especially after the October Revolution.²¹ Unfortunately, when they arrived on the Black Sea coast another war was waiting for these civilians. Therefore, these war weary people were in a constant move across the borders. Some of them were settled in the inlands of Anatolia.²² That means the refugee settlement machinery of the country was already in force before the establishment of the LNHCR office in İstanbul.

Ottoman settlement policy in the late nineteenth century see, Başak Kale, 'Transforming an Empire: The Ottoman Empire's Immigration and Settlement Policies in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries', *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol.50, No.2, (March 2014), pp.252-271.

¹⁷ See, Kimberly A. Lowe, 'Humanitarianism and National Sovereignty: Red Cross Intervention on Behalf of Political Prisoners in Soviet Russia', *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 49, No. 4, (September 2014), pp.652-674.

¹⁸ COA, DH.İUM, 11.Ra.1339, 20/14; DH.İUM, 14.Ca.339, 19/1; DH.İUM, 23.R.1339, 19/1.

¹⁹ Housden, *White Russians...*, p.506.

²⁰ Christopher Clay, "Labor Migration and Economic Conditions in Nineteenth Century Anatolia", *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 34, No. 4, (December 1998), p.27.

²¹ COA, DH.ŞFR, 19.Ca.1338, 107/46.

²² COA, DH.ŞFR 20.B.1333, 53/225; DH.İUM, 23.Ra.1339, 19/1; MV, 2/1329, 159/36; DH.EUM.EMN, 20.Ca.1330, 5/13.

A third group within those titled, as the “Russian refugees” were comprised of the Georgians,²³ a religiously mixed population made up of Muslims and Christians. Mostly, these people were the war weary civilians and the political opponents. They were either arriving directly to the Black Sea coast or coming through Constanta.²⁴ The British Army, which was in İstanbul at that time recruited Christian males from this group of refugees and settled them on the İstanbul port.²⁵ That was quite similar to the situation of the ex-soldiers of the General Wrangel’s and General Denikin’s Army. Therefore, it comes out that both conscripted and non-conscripted civilians fleeing from a war situation were frequently trapped in another war in this period of war series.

A fourth group within those titled, as “Russian refugees” was indeed comprised of Greeks in Russia, who had moved there especially for business during the nineteenth century. The Greek government settled these Greek refugees originating from Russia in the houses and lands of the fleeing Muslims during the Greek military campaign in Eastern Thrace.²⁶ After the end of the Turkish-Greek war, they would be displaced once more. However, this group had a final destination at least. Since it was the heydays of ethnic nationalism, the Greek state would offer them permanent settlement.²⁷

According to the conventional practices of the international system, ethnic and/or religious conformity was the sufficient criteria for a nation state to assume the responsibility of its own ethnic and/or religious fellows. This was also the case for example with the German refugees originating from Russia. They were taken under the protection of the German state.²⁸ Thus, ethnic and/or religious criteria prevailed over the others to recognize one’s refugee status and provide protection. Nevertheless, the question was who would be responsible from the ethnic or religious groups deprived of the protection of any state? How the international institutionalism would act on behalf of the Georgians and Jews originating from the Russian Empire, or Armenians, Chaldeans, Assyrians originating from the Ottoman Empire, or Persians, Russians and Armenians originating from Iran?²⁹ All these refugee groups constituted different clusters at that time in İstanbul and elsewhere in Anatolia.

²³ Oktay Özel, “Migration and Power Politics: The Settlement of Georgian Immigrants in Turkey (1878-1908)”, *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 46, No. 4, (August 2010), pp.477-496.

²⁴ COA, DH.EUM.EMN, 28.N.1332, 91/8; HR.İM, 11.1924, 107/66.

²⁵ COA, DH.İUM, 04.Za.1339, 20/14.

²⁶ League of Nations Archives, (LNA), *Notes on Conversation between Hamid Bey, President of the Ottoman Red Crescent and Nansen*, 15.10.1922, 48/24323723548

²⁷ Elina Multanen, “British Policy towards Russian Refugees in the Aftermath of the Bolshevik Revolution”, *Revolutionary Russia*, Vol. 12, No. 1, (June 1999), pp.44-68.

²⁸ Kaprielian I. Churchill, “‘Rejecting ‘Misfits’: Canada and the Nansen Passport”, *The International Migration Review*, Vol. 28, No. 2, (June 1994), p.283.

²⁹ COA, DH.SYS, 08.L.1331, 5/3.

The question of title matters because it is not just a name given for a group of refugees, but the title determines entitlements of the refugees and their chances of protection. As the above description of the “Russian refugees” suggests, even a single refugee title contains such different groups that no single receipt will offer a remedy for all. As a result, the Russian refugee case indicates that the LN had to tackle with a conceptual problem at first. The LN’s definition did not help LNHCR officials on the field. Because, the LN definition of “Russian refugees” was indeed quite an ideological one, which represented only a certain section of “Russian refugees.” Then, the next question is how the LNHCR dealt with this multitude of refugees.

Russian Refugee Operations of the LNHCR from İstanbul: operational incapacities

When the refugee crisis broke out in the aftermath of the WWI, there was no proper international policy framework in the hands of the international society to respond to this puzzling situation. The LN had to shoulder this question as a newly established international organization. Skran notes that, the LN’s decision in 1921 to help Russian refugees laid the foundation of the international refugee regime.³⁰ However, it is argued here that the LN established international customary practices rather than a proper international refugee protection system.

Given the above mentioned complexity of the international refugee question, lack of resources and previous experiences, it should be admitted that it was not an easy task at all for the LNHCR to handle this refugee situation. Despite admitting these difficulties, it should also be noted that the LN could not approach to the international refugee question at hand in a systematic way. Therefore, they could not achieve more than saving the day by palliative measures. Specifically speaking, deprived of the necessary means to resolve this refugee question, the LNHCR had to resort to the subsidiary mechanisms like calling the long established international humanitarian organizations into work, utilizing the minority protection system and the motivations of the newly established states to protect their national or religious fellows.

Established as an agency of an ambitious international organization like the LN, the LNHCR was more than a relief organization. Rather than offering direct relief to the refugees, this international body emerged as a coordination and supervision authority having diplomatic powers at the same time. It chaired the committees attended by the local, national and international relief organizations including the Red Cross organizations and the Near East Relief (NER)

³⁰ Skran Ibid.

administration of the USA.³¹ In 1920, the International Red Cross (ICRC) appealed to the LN in regard to the refugees and war prisoners as, “the only supernational political authority capable of solving a problem which is beyond the power of exclusively humanitarian organizations”³² In addition, many civil society organizations established to support the LN as a progressive, idealist, cosmopolitan initiative expected a grassroots solution to the international refugee problem at hand and it was voiced by the International Federation of League of Nations Societies.³³ Then the question is how these expectations found resonance in the LN. A closer examination of the operational works of the LNHCR can reply this question.

According to Petersen, the refugee operations of the LNHCR were divided into three consecutive stages: confinement of the refugees within certain spaces (refugee camps), relief and rehabilitation and eventual return to ‘normal’ status of citizens of a sovereign state.³⁴ However, this schematization of the LNHCR’s work represents rather an ideal type. First, the LNHCR did not have refugee camps in Turkey, but only a few warehouses to store food, clothing and other stuff granted for the refugees by several benevolent organizations.³⁵ In fact, the relief task was assigned by the LNHCR to several international humanitarian relief organizations already working on the field in Turkey. The LN never had financial resources to meet relief expenses by itself. International relief organizations like the Near East Relief Association, American Red Cross and smaller scale philanthropic societies had already been working actively in İstanbul and Anatolia to help the refugees, even before the establishment of the LNHCR agency.³⁶ Nevertheless, especially in the immediate aftermath of the WWI, no single relief organization was in a position to cope with the refugee question in İstanbul or elsewhere in Anatolia by relying on its own resources.³⁷ Indeed, the LNHCR was in a worse position than these relief organizations due to its lack of

³¹ LNA, Communique by Nansen, 6.10.1922, 48/24437/24357

³² John P. Dunbabin, “The League of Nations' Place in the International System”, *History*, No.78 (October 1993), p.434.

³³ Thomas R. Davies, “Internationalism in a Divided World: the experience of the International Federation of League of Nations Societies, 1919–1939”, *Peace & Change*, Vol. 37, No.2 (March 2012), pp. 227-252.

³⁴ Glen Peterson, “Colonialism, Sovereignty and the History of International Refugee Regime”, Matthew Frank, Jessica Reinisch (ed.), *Refugees in Europe, 1919-1959: A Forty Years' Crisis?*, London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017, p. 215.

³⁵ LNA, Instructions to Fielden, 7.11.1922, 48/24229/23548.

³⁶ Arden G. Hulme-Beaman, *Twenty Years in the Near East*, Methuen & co., 1898; Jame L. Barton (ed.), *Turkish Atrocities: statements of American missionaries on the destruction of Christian communities in Ottoman Turkey, 1915-1917*, Vol. 2., London, Gomidas Institute, 1998.

³⁷ Davide Rodogno, ‘The American Red Cross and the International Committee of Red Cross’ Humanitarian Politics and Policies in Asia Minor and Greece (1922-1923)’, *First World War Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 1, (April 2014), pp.83-99.

financial resources, staff and experience. The LN raised revenue out of the direct financial contributions of the member states, which was always an insufficient sum to pay even the salaries of the small LNHCR staff.³⁸ Facing its own incapacity on the field, the LNHCR resorted first to the pre-established international relief organizations in Anatolia. It farmed out the feeding and sheltering tasks to the American relief organizations in Anatolia and searched for possible host countries especially in the Balkans to transfer the refugees before the exhaustion of financial resources.

The final 'normalization' stage defined by Pedersen is also questionable due to the settlement failures of different kinds. The first and foremost mission of the LNHCR in İstanbul was to take the Russian refugees under protection and transfer them to favorable destinations outside Turkey. The LNHCR allocated the Russian refugees in Turkey as well as those in Greece mostly among the Balkan countries like Bulgaria, Serbia, Romania and Yugoslavia. The LNHCR negotiated with each of these countries. Although, the religious fellowship was a facilitating factor for the settlement of these refugees in the Balkans, economic hardships turned the matter into a mere bargaining.

Dr. Fridtjof Nansen, the LNHCR High Commissioner, usually had to undertake the economic burden of settling these refugees in order to be able to persuade the governments of the host countries. For example, he promised 11.000 leva to the Bulgarian government to settle a bulk of Russian refugees³⁹ and it made a deal of 10.000 sterling with Serbian-Croatian-Slovene Kingdom for the settlement of 5000 refugees.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, the High Commissariat did not have sufficient financial resources to meet these sums in fact. For this reason, Nansen made once more call to the international relief organizations like the American Red Cross and Near East Relief Association. The economic incapacity of the League was obvious. The LNHCR was not able to afford the expenses of even the smallest group of refugees. For instance, Mr. Raymond, as a representative of the LNHCR told the Austrian government that the LNHCR would not be able to make any economic contribution for 150 German refugee agriculturalists to be sent there from Bulgaria.⁴¹ The American Relief Administration which was much more resourceful than the LNHCR undertook the feeding of refugees in Serbia, Bulgaria and partly in İstanbul.⁴² Later on, Nansen would praise the generous works of the American relief organizations in

³⁸ LNA, Council 21st Session, 19. 9.1922, 48/23560/23548

³⁹ LNA, Confidential Liaison Report (LNHCR and ILO), 6.11.1922, 48/25018/24277

⁴⁰ LNA, Confidential Liaison Report (LNHCR and ILO), 1.11.1922, 48/25018/24277

⁴¹ LNA, Confidential Liaison Report (LNHCR and ILO), 5.3.1923, 48/25018/24277

⁴² LNA, Minutes of Meeting, 8.11.1922, 48/24891/23548

the Near East and admit that without their support, the LNHCR would not be able to complete its Russian refugee work.⁴³

Although the overwhelming majority of the Russian refugees were distributed among the Balkan countries, they were also settled in Europe to a lesser extent. They were sent as far as the USA and South Africa.⁴⁴ For example, the USA would receive 1200 Russian refugees.⁴⁵ Some orphans were sent to France⁴⁶ and 92 of them were sent to Austria.⁴⁷ This distribution profile tells us that the international system generated in practice three main positions for the countries regarding the refugee issues: transit points, peripheral stores and ideal destinations. In this formulation, Turkey was assigned the transit point role. The newly established Balkan states constituted the European periphery, where most of the refugees were expected to be absorbed, and lastly Europe and the USA constituted the ideal destinations. As the numbers suggests, the refugees were distributed in fact according to this scheme.

Despite the devoted efforts of the LNHCR officials, it was still difficult to absorb the Russian refugee population. For the reasons of economic shortages, conflicts between the refugees and the locals, discriminatory policies of the governments and the activities of human traffickers, the refugees who were ostensibly settled by the LNHCR, came under maltreatment or deportation.⁴⁸ For example, it came out that the Russian orphans were sold in France as the agricultural laborers.⁴⁹ The countries like Poland, Romania, Serbian- Croatian-Slovene Kingdom and Bulgaria deported the refugees sometime after the settlement deal with the LNHCR.⁵⁰ The LN did not have a sanctioning power against these deportations or maltreatments. Therefore, its response could not go beyond diplomatic condemnations.⁵¹

Consequently, the international refugee question was transformed into a question of absorption capacity. The USA and most of the European countries established migration quotas and strictly regulated the migratory flows. Thus, a very large bulk of the refugees were kept in the Balkans, despite the fact that this

⁴³ LNA, Letter from the High Commissariat to Ross Hill, 7.11.1922, 48/24810/

⁴⁴ LNA, Confidential Liaison Report (LNHCR and ILO), 10.11.1922, 48/25018/24277

⁴⁵ LNA, Minutes of Executive Meeting, 13.12.1923, 48/24891/23548

⁴⁶ LNA, Confidential Liaison Report (LNHCR and ILO), 5.3.1923, 48/25018/24277

⁴⁷ COA, DH.İUM.EK, H-28-10-1340, 62/48.

⁴⁸ LNA, Confidential Liaison Report (LNHCR and ILO), 23.3.1923, 48/25018/24277; Confidential Liaison Report (LNHCR and ILO), 5.3.1923, 48/25018/24277. Confidential Liaison Report (LNHCR and ILO), 6.11.1922, 48/25018/24277.

⁴⁹ LNA, Confidential Liaison Report (LNHCR and ILO), 6.11.1922, 48/25018/24277

⁵⁰ LNA, Confidential Liaison Report (LNHCR and ILO), 26.2.1923, 48/25018/24277; Confidential Liaison Report (LNHCR and ILO), 23.3.1923, 48/25018/24277; Confidential Liaison Report (LNHCR and ILO), 1.11.1922, 48/25018/24277

⁵¹ LNA, Confidential Liaison Report (LNHCR and ILO), 23.3.1923, 48/25018/24277

region was not a safe haven for the refugees. For example, the deportation of the refugees was still in force in Romania and Bulgaria despite the guarantees given by the concerned governments to the LNHCR.⁵² Louise W. Holborn, who was not only an authority on refugee scholarship at that time, but also a witness of the period explained the responses of the host governments as such:

The governments of receiving countries, most of which were already facing serious reconstruction problems, economic crisis, depreciated currencies, chronic unemployment and political unrest were ill prepared for this influx of destitute people whose political ambitions and dubious legal status made them a political problem.⁵³

As a result, it comes out that the Pedersen's sketch was an ideal type. In fact, the İstanbul Office of the LNHCR followed a different path; handing over relief work to the humanitarian organizations, distribution of refugees among the neighboring Balkan states and diplomatic condemnations against the maltreatment and deportation of the refugees.

When it comes to the role of Ankara government during these refugee operations, it can be noted that the Ankara government took a reserved stance towards the LNHCR. Shortly before the appointment of Nansen to the LNHCR mission, Ankara Government declared that it would not accept any relief organization into the country except the Near Eastern Relief (NER) of the USA.⁵⁴ Although Ankara government did not openly challenged the LNHCR after taking power in İstanbul, it did not follow its instructions either. For example, the LNHCR demanded from the Ankara government to register the Russian refugees, but the Government rejected it and asked the immediate evacuation of the Russian refugees.⁵⁵ Ankara Government was also responsive to the demands of the Soviet Russian Government parallel to its foreign policy. Therefore, the Ankara Government was in an in-between position. Moreover, the Government was under the public pressure because of the misery of the Muslim refugees whose number in the city as around 65.000 at that time, as was confirmed by General Harrington and the American Red Cross.⁵⁶

⁵² LNA, Confidential Liaison Report (LNHCR and ILO), 23.3.1923, 48/25018/24277

⁵³ L.W. Holborn, 'The League of Nations and the Refugee Problem', *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol.203, No. 1 (1939), p.124.

⁵⁴ Presidency Republican Archives, Turkey (CCA), 28.6.1922, No. 1648, File: 239-7 / 30..18.1.1, Place: 5.19.4

⁵⁵ COA, HR.İM, M-01-03-1923, 68/2

⁵⁶ Oya D.Macar, Elçin Macar, *Beyaz Rus Ordusu Türkiye'de*, İstanbul, Libra, 2010, s.67.

LNCHR Responding to Other Refugee Questions: administrative predicaments

While the problems about the Russian refugee settlement were still persisting, another crisis broke out on the Aegean. Large numbers of refugees were on the way towards Greece after the end of Turkish-Greek war between 1919 and 1922. Upon the break out of this refugee crisis, the LNHCR handed over the Russian refugee work to the mercy of the international relief organizations. At that time, Greek, Armenian and other non-Muslim civilians were leaving Anatolia in large numbers. When this new refugee wave came to a head, the Russian refugee work started to malfunction. As a result, the LNHCR was stuck in a hard position concerning the multiplicity and the emergency of different refugee problems at the same time. The Russian newspapers abroad wrote that LNHCR High Commissioner Nansen left the Russian refugees in lurch. Upon these criticisms, he had to make an explanation and said that such complaints did not have any foundation.⁵⁷ As was mentioned before, the outbreak of the Greek refugee crisis imposed another moral obligation on the LNCHR. Upon the arrival of many thousands of Greek and Armenian refugees to İstanbul on September 1922, Nansen directed a critical question to the LN Assembly: "I would ask the Assembly whether the League ought not now, according to the Article 11 of the Covenant to 'take action that may be deemed wise and effectual to safeguard the Peace.'"⁵⁸ Nansen expressed the situation of stateless refugees in the most striking way. Although his question disclosed an administrative predicament of the LN, it is understood that the LN authorities were more concerned with the economic problems.

The financial resources to respond to these two overlapping refugee matters was the most critical question for the LN at that time. The LN Assembly resolution divided the refugee fund at hand between the Russian and Greek refugees and noted that it was a temporary situation to respond to the emergency.⁵⁹ The Russian Refugee Office and coordinating committee were adopted for general refugee work and mobilized to arrange refugee matters in İstanbul and in Athens as well.⁶⁰ The bottom line of the issue was the lack of international refugee policy.⁶¹ Nansen's small team and a handful of humanitarian organizations were trying to manage the situation by palliative measures. The

⁵⁷ LNA, Confidential Liaison Report (LNHCR and ILO), 30.10.1922, 48/25018/24277

⁵⁸ LNA, Extract from Verbatim Record of 10th Meeting of the Assembly, 18.Sept.1922, letter from Nansen to the President, 48/23560/23548

⁵⁹ LNA, Resolution adopted by the Assembly at its meeting held on 19th Sept.1922, 48/24439/23548

⁶⁰ LNA, Note for Athens Committee Meeting, 6.Nov.1922, 48/24915X/23548

⁶¹ Richrd Black, 'Fifty Years of Refugee Studies: from theory to policy', *The International Migration Review*, Vol.35, No.1 (2001), pp. 57-78.

administrative predicaments of the international system under the LN started to come to surface at this point.

Unlike the Russian refugee question, the Greek refugee question was brought onto the agenda of the international diplomacy at the highest level as part of the peace negotiations between Turkey and Greece together with its Allies. Due to the peace negotiations in Lausanne, the situations of Turkish and Greek refugees were overemphasized at the expense of other refugee groups. The peace negotiations disclosed the willingness of the young nation states to protect their national fellows. Nevertheless, the situation of non-Muslim refugees from Anatolia other than the Greeks was still pending. In fact, considerable numbers of Armenian,⁶² Assyrian and Circassian⁶³ populations were also found among the Greek refugees trying to take refuge in Greece after the defeat of the Greek army in Anatolia. Nevertheless, this population movement was portrayed on the diplomacy table as a homogenous exchange between Turkish and Greek populations. The “others” were largely left out of the orbit of the LN’s internationalism and the international law. Thus, the fate of these “other” refugees were again left to the persuasive capacities of Nansen to distribute them among the neighboring countries.⁶⁴

The Vice General Secretary of the LN Phillip Baker mentioned in his report that at least 50.000 Armenians took refuge in Greece⁶⁵ and totally, 300.000 were expected.⁶⁶ A part of Chaldean population in Anatolia at that time, were directed mostly to Mosul and its environs.⁶⁷ Moreover, in the report Nansen presented to the League Assembly, he enucleated the question in the most explicit way. He stated that the Greek refugees would be subjected to the terms of the agreement to be concluded with the Greek government. Then, he asked the Assembly; what would happen to the Armenian refugees? He followed that the Armenian refugees would bring a great responsibility and work load for the League.⁶⁸ Indeed, the question raised by Nansen unraveled one of the main predicaments of the international refugee protection system under the LN. The number of Armenian refugees was not negligible, so that they could come on to the LN agenda. Besides, their cause was supported by some international committees,

⁶² LNA, P. Baker’s Notes on the ‘Present Situation’, 12.10.1922, 48/24190/23545; Assembly Minute, 25.9.1922, 48/23788/23788

⁶³ LNA, Letter from the High Commissariat to Colonel Gauthier, 24.11.1922, 48/24010/24010; Letter from Colonel Gauthier to Nansen, 30.11.1922, 48/24010/24010.

⁶⁴ Fink, ‘The League of Nations and the Minorities Question’, *World Affairs*, Vol.157, No.4 (Spring 1995), pp.197-205.

⁶⁵ LNA, Baker’s Notes on the ‘Present Situation’, 12.10.1922, 48/24190/ 23545

⁶⁶ LNA, Note on Work to be carried out on Behalf of Refugees in the Near East, by Baker, 25.11.1922, 48/23750/23548.

⁶⁷ LNA, Minutes of Executive Meeting, 13.12.1922, 48/24891/23548

⁶⁸ LNA, Assembly Minute, 25.9.1922, 48/23788/23788.

which were bringing the question on the diplomacy table from time to time.⁶⁹ However, there was almost no mention of the situation of Assyrian, Chaldean or Circassian refugees. Moreover, when these refugees were referred briefly as a small supplement to the large groups of refugees, this was generally an account about which international relief organization could be arranged to look after them.⁷⁰

As highlighted by Nansen, the LN as an international organization was indeed challenged by a transnational question. What would the League do with the refugees for whom there was no “responsible” state authority to negotiate? This was the point where the emerging international refugee protection system of the LN reached a deadlock. The LNHCR could no longer rely on the support of the relief organizations, the minority protection system was also having its own deadlocks⁷¹ and the small Balkan states were not able to absorb more refugees. As a result, it came out that the League system did not have proper mechanisms to protect the “other” refugees, who did not have a kin state to seek protection. The state-centered structure of the new international institutionalism was not adequate to resolve this question.⁷²

The Impacts of LNHCR Refugee Operations: system or custom?

The above documented deportations of the refugees assumed to be resettled in the Balkans raise doubts about the successful completion of the LNHCR's refugee operations. Soon after, it was understood that sending deported refugees from one country to another would not remedy the situation. The only result of this strategy was the exhaustion of the LNHCR's refugee transportation fund.⁷³ It was a costly and inefficient strategy still far from resolving the settlement problems. For this reason, the LNHCR had to change its strategy once more. This time, the LNHCR authorities started to make an effort to keep the refugees where they were. At the expense of forcing the limits, the LNHCR and the ILO turned to the strategy of promoting the economic conditions of the refugees and getting into dialogue with the host governments about the benefits of these refugees for their national economic development. As in the cases of Austria,

⁶⁹ LNA, Letter from Eastbourne Branch of Armenian Red Cross and Refugee Fund to Sir Eric Drummond, 25.11.1922, 48/23605/23548; Letter from the Committee of Friends of Armenia to Nansen, 20.9.1922, 48/23606/23548

⁷⁰ LNA, Telegram from Childs to Nansen, 18.10.1922, 48/24681/23559

⁷¹ Patrick B. Finney, “An Evil for All Concerned: Great Britain and Minority Protection after 1919”, *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 30, No.3, (July 1995), pp.533-551.

⁷² For further discussion see, Nevzat Soğuk, *States and Strangers: Refugees and displacements of statecraft*, Minnesota, University of Minnesota Press, 1999.

⁷³ LNA, Letter from the Near East Relief Association to Johnson, 19.7.1923, 48/28828/23559; LNA, Letter from Johnson to Adosides, 8.5.1923, 48/24915/23548.

France and Hungary, the refugees were presented as the most needed agricultural laborers,⁷⁴ valuable textile weavers,⁷⁵ or the best cigarette rolling women with their small hands.⁷⁶

In fact, the LNHCR authorities treated the Ankara government in the same way. Despite that fact that Turkey was treated first as a transit country to transfer the refugees to the further west, soon after it came out that the resettlement schemes in the Balkans did not generated the expected results. Therefore, the League authorities started to come to terms with the new administration in Turkey to keep the refugees in the country. Despite the mass evacuations of the Russian refugees from Turkey, some of them still remained in the country in the late 1920s. To secure these refugees' permanent settlement in the country, Nansen asked the Turkish Government to remove the ban on the employment of foreigners in several job categories and allow the Russian refugees to work as drivers, waiters, restaurant owners, sailors etc.⁷⁷ Employment opportunities were key to safe and durable settlement as was documented in other cases in the Balkans.

After all these efforts, one can ask how many of the Russian refugees in İstanbul could be resettled by the LNHCR. Although the available data may not represent the precise numbers, it can give an idea about the conclusion of this refugee operation or at least raise some questions about the effectiveness of the LNHCR operations from İstanbul. According to Kaplan, who utilizes both Turkish and Russian sources, the approximate number of the Russian refugees in İstanbul was 145.000-150.000 in 1920.⁷⁸ Utilizing from the LN sources, Housden also quotes similar numbers stating that 130.000 arrived in İstanbul and 24.000 landed on Gallipoli.⁷⁹ According to Kaplan, the number of these refugees reduced to 120.000 on April 1921, to 65.777 on August 1921 and 34.000 on November 1921.⁸⁰ These numbers lead to another perplexing question. If it is taken into account that Nansen was appointed to the LN High Commissioner for refugees on 27 June 1921 and started working on 1 September 1921,⁸¹ it

⁷⁴ LNA, Confidential Liaison Report (LNHCR and ILO), 5.3.1923, 48/25018/24277; Confidential Liaison Report (LNHCR and ILO), 23.3.1923, 48/25018/24277. Note that a portion of Wrangel's Army was sent to Hungary to work in the harvest. Housden, *White Russians Crossing the Black Sea*, p.505.

⁷⁵ LNA, Imperial War Relief, Weekly Notes, 75/3, 48/30275/23735.

⁷⁶ Howland, *Ibid.*, p.623.

⁷⁷ COA. 20/1926, 173/21, HR.IM.

⁷⁸ LNA, 45/15164X13564.

⁷⁹ Housden, "White Russians...", p. 498.

⁸⁰ Kezban A. Kaplan, "Beyaz Rus Mültecilerinin Gözünden Milli Mücadele ve Ankara Hükümeti ile Olan İlişkileri", *Tarih İncelemeleri Dergisi*, Vol. XXXII, No.2, (February 2017), p.318.

⁸¹ IO BIO, Biographical Dictionary of Secretaries-General of International Organizations, Web page: www.ru.nl/fm/iobio, (accessed on 21.3.2019).

comes out that much of the refugees had already left İstanbul in some ways before the advent of the LNHCR. The LNHCR İstanbul office started registering the Russian refugees from 1 January 1922 and registered around 30.000 refugees.⁸²

According to the above figures, it is evident that the LN could not respond promptly to the refugee situation in İstanbul. Moreover, the same pattern is observed in the case of Greek refugees in Anatolia. The LN took the matter at hand after two thirds of the Greek refugees had already left the country.⁸³

Then the question is who carried out this refugee settlement issue before the advent of the LNHCR? The prompt answer is the interested national state authorities. British and French authorities in İstanbul already offered relief for the refugees for some time for their political and economic purposes. The old regime in Russia was highly indebted to Great Britain. Therefore, they were anxious about collecting the money from the new regime. In addition, the French authorities were concerned with the commercial concessions they obtained in Russia during the old regime. Therefore, both governments continued to support the White Russian struggle that promised to undertake the burden of compensating the losses of both governments.⁸⁴ However, reaching a commercial agreement with the Soviet government, the British left the relief field earlier than the French government. French authorities sustained the humanitarian relief and arranged the resettlement of the Russian refugees in İstanbul by way of bilateral agreements with several countries. However, they maintained the refugee work until their funds exhausted. Then, their activities also came to a halt upon the decision of the French government about the repatriation of the Russian refugees, although refugees themselves opposed this idea.⁸⁵ The same question of national interest was also in operation in the Greek refugee case following the Russian one. Regarding the Greek refugee case, British Foreign Secretary Lord Balfour said, "Let's leave it to the rich Greeks abroad and should the LN retrieve fund from the individual discussions. If a larger scheme will be adopted, it is necessary for the Council to ask the supports of the governments".⁸⁶ Indeed, Balfour's proposal summarized the response of the international institutionalism to the refugee question in the most explicit way. The first response of the international institutionalism was to farm out the refugee issue to the interested kin state or to the rich fellows.

⁸² Macar, *Ibid.*, p.233.

⁸³ Howland, *Ibid.*, p.613.

⁸⁴ Macar, *Ibid.*, p.193-206.

⁸⁵ Macar, *Ibid.*, pp.221-222.

⁸⁶ LNA, Council 21st Session, 19. 9.1922, 48/23560/23548

To sum up, state-centric formation and economic limitations of the LN could not give way to the establishment of a proper refugee protection policy. It is evident that the LN was a novel, unexperienced and resourceless organization; however neither the challenging questions of Nansen nor the expectations of international organizations motivated the LN authorities at least to discuss the structural problems of the refugee work. When the refugee questions came onto the League agenda, they were generally discussed in terms of the urgency of supplies and how much of the funds to release. No serious discussions took place in the LN Assembly or Council to generate a grassroots international refugee policy or just to offer a principal approach. As Karatani puts it, it seems that the LN authorities evaluated the post war refugee question as a temporary emergency and undermined the need for a grassroots policy framework.⁸⁷ Nevertheless, the LN's measures for saving the day generated the international norms and standards.

Concluding Remarks:

The LN refugee operations from İstanbul, which are documented mainly through LN historical sources, manifest the transnational character of the refugee question. It is claimed that the unrecognition of this transnational fact complicates the modern international refugee management system since the WWI. It is argued that the endeavors of the League of Nations as an international organization of its own kind was in a position to determine the international norms and standards of the modern refugee protection system. However, it developed into an international customary practice based on palliative measures at the operational level. Neither the descriptive categories nor the resources or administrative mechanisms of the LN was capable of responding properly to the refugee question in the post-WWI period.

Starting with an ideological motivation to protect the White Army survivors against the Soviet regime, the LN found itself undertaking the international responsibility to protect the refugees in general. Although no legal foundation was established, the LN refugee operations set the rules of the game on the practical ground. As today, refugee operations from İstanbul played a critical role to determine the international norms and standards. It is indicated that the origins of this traditional policy approach to international refugee question dates back to the post-WWI refugee deals and since then Turkey assumed the role of a refugee hub with quite heterogeneous refugee populations

⁸⁷ Rieko Karatani, "How History Separated Refugee and Migrant Regimes: In Search of Their Institutional Origins", *International Journal of Refugee Law*, Vol. 17, No. 3, (September 2005), pp.521-22.

with inflows, outflows, back and forth movements. This is why the LNHCR operations from İstanbul is critical to understand the origins of the international refugee question. Another continuous pattern since the post-WWI period is the peripheral position of the Balkans. It comes out that the Balkans have always been the first station from the Turkish gate in the century long westward journey of the refugees. The Balkan states were designated as a better alternative than Turkey for the settlement of the refugees. However, restrictive measures and over regulations were put into force as the refugees move westward from the Balkan periphery.

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