

The Legal Status of Russian Refugees in Turkey in the 1920s

Abstract:

Following the October Revolution in 1917, a civil war broke out between the Bolsheviks and their opponents, who consisted mostly of officers and commanders of the Tsarist Army, Cossacks and aristocrats. There were also some peasants and non-Russian groups such as Kalmuks, Tatars and others. Even though the Russian Civil War took place from 1917 to 1925, the anti-Bolshevik groups began to leave Russia and migrate to other countries from the spring of 1919. The great majority of them, however, left Russia in November 1920, when the White Army faced defeat at the hands of the Bolshevik troops. Of these refugees, approximately 145,000–150,000 came to Istanbul, Turkey. Although their number was greater than the Ottoman government and the Allied Powers expected, both Ottoman officials and the Allied Powers accepted them. However, from the early 1920s a new government came to power in Ankara, which claimed to represent Anatolia, and to be the only legal power since it fought against the Allied Powers that either occupied different parts of Anatolia or supported the Greek Army. Since it aimed to create a new nation state, the Ankara government imposed a new nationality policy, affecting non-Turkish or more specifically non-Muslims in Turkey. This article, based on primary sources such as archival documents and newspaper articles and secondary sources, aims to explain the major aspects of this new policy of nationality and how the policy affected Russian refugees living in Turkey.

Keywords: *Russian Civil War, Russian refugees, the White Army, Wrangel, Istanbul, Ankara, Turkey, 1920s.*