



# **International Boundary Study**

**No. 41 – November 23, 1964**

## **Greece – Turkey Boundary**

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**The Geographer  
Office of the Geographer  
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# INTERNATIONAL BOUNDARY STUDY

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## **GREECE – TURKEY BOUNDARY**

### **I. BOUNDARY BRIEF**

The Greece-Turkey Boundary is 128 miles (206 km) in length and is demarcated.<sup>1</sup> Beginning in the north on the Maritsa River at the Tripoint of Bulgaria, Greece, and Turkey at approximately 41°42' N. and 26°21' E., the boundary follows the median line of the river or the main channel southward to the confluence of the Arda. Turning upstream westward along the Arda River for six-tenths of a mile, the line leaves the river at boundary marker No. 2. The boundary then follows land markers numbered 2 through 23 in a southeasterly direction, a distance of 6.7 miles to a point on the Maritsa five-eighths of a mile (1 km) below the Turkish town of Bosna. Returning to the Maritsa, the line runs southward to the Aegean Sea.

The boundary and the location of the pillars are shown on sheets 1 through 10 of the Carte de la Frontière Gréco-Turque prepared by the Boundary Commission of 1925-1926 as provided in the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne. There are no parts of the boundary in dispute.

### **II. BACKGROUND**

#### **A. History**

Few boundary regions have been fought over more arduously or for so long as the one separating Greece from Turkey. Through history many peoples have struggled to control this general area, a key land bridge connecting Europe and Asia and crossing the double narrows of the Dardanelles and the Bosphorus.

Edirne (Adrianople), a focal point on the boundary, is second only to Istanbul as a key city on the Eurasian land bridge. Recognizing its strategic importance, the Romans founded the city of Hadrianopolis on a knoll at the confluence of three streams (Arda, Maritsa, and the Tunca) the valleys of which provide easy land routes in all directions. From Hadrianopolis, Rome protected the seaway through the Straits from land enemies of the eastern and central European plains. To Turkey and the Muslim World, the city was a symbol of power and prestige. A century before the Turkish conquest of Constantinople in 1453, Adrianople became the capital of the Ottomans.

The fortunes of the Ottoman Empire waxed and waned in the next four centuries, and in the years immediately preceding and following World War I, Turkey's European border was convulsed by a series of wars and altered in a sequence of treaties.

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<sup>1</sup> Measured in the Office of the Geographer on the official 1:50,000 maps of the Boundary Commission.

## **The Balkan Wars and the Great War**

In May 1913, after the First Balkan War (Treaty of London), the Turkish boundary in Europe extended from Midye on the Black Sea in a straight line to Enez (Enos) on the Aegean. After the Second Balkan War

(Treaty of Constantinople) the line was pushed to the Maritsa River.<sup>2</sup> With the signing of the Mudros Armistice on October 30, 1918, the Ottoman Empire's participation in World War I ended, and Allies occupied Istanbul and the Straits and Cilicia. Although the Paris Peace Conference convened in January 1919, the Allies postponed Near Eastern questions because they were busy with European peace terms. Finally, on August 10, 1920, the Treaty of Sèvres was signed by the Ottoman Government. Sèvres, together with the simultaneous Tripartite Agreement among France, Great Britain, and Italy, divided Asia Minor into spheres of influence. Although the Treaty was later nullified, some of its terms served as a model for the final Treaty of Lausanne and therefore are worth noting.

1. Constantinople was all that was to be left of European Turkey.
2. The Straits were to be internationalized.
3. Navigation in the Straits was to be open both in peace and in war to the merchant vessels and warships, including aircraft, of all nations.
4. Smyrna and its hinterland was to be occupied by Greece for five years.

## **Greek–Turkish War (1919–1922)**

In the meantime, on May 15, 1919, the Greek Army, under cover of British, French, and American warships, occupied Izmir (Smyrna) and the surrounding countryside. The Greek forces whose landing, it was announced, was to subdue unruly Turkish irregulars and to protect the substantial Greek population in the district, openly annexed large portions of Western Anatolia beyond the limits conceded by the Allies. The arrival of Greek troops was accompanied by excesses by both sides. The Turks feared that the Greeks intended to remain in Anatolia, although occupation was sanctioned by the Allies as a temporary measure only. Allied occupation of Istanbul (Constantinople) and loss of the remainder of European Turkey, combined with the Greek occupation of Anatolia, sparked the fires of national defense. A powerful leader, Mustafa Kemal (later Atatürk), led the Turks in three years of bitter war that culminated in the final ejection of the Greek army and the birth of a new and defiant Turkish state.

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<sup>2</sup> At this time, the boundary line separated Turkey and Bulgaria.

The armistice signed at Mudania on October 11, 1922, which later formed the basis of the final Peace Treaty at Lausanne, has been interpreted as an Allied surrender to the demands of the Kemalists. It was agreed

1. To evacuate the Greeks immediately from Eastern Thrace
2. To restore Thrace as far as the Maritsa River to Turkey

Turkey thus recovered a substantial foothold in Europe, in spite of Allied attempt to confine her to Asia Minor and to a conditional possession of Istanbul. Greek aspirations to Izmir (Smyrna) and Eastern Thrace were rejected by the Allies and were abandoned by the Greeks themselves, who signed the Mudania Armistice three days later on October 14, 1922.

### **The Treaty of Lausanne**

The ending of hostilities by the temporary settlement of Mudania led to the Lausanne Conference on November 20, 1922. Territorial matters were among the most important issues of the Conference. Most of the first phase discussions related to delimitation of the Greek-Turkish frontier. Although the status quo of Mudania, conceding Eastern Thrace to the Maritsa River, was maintained, Turkish demands for territory on the right bank in Western Thrace was the subject of considerable contention. Negotiations dragged on for many months until the Treaty of Peace was finally signed at Lausanne on July 24, 1923.

Delimitation of the Greek-Turkish frontier gave Turkey the whole of Eastern Thrace as far west as the Maritsa River. Opposite Edirne (Adrianople), Turkey received a bridge-head containing a section of the railway on the western bank of the Maritsa in satisfaction of her reparation claims against Greece.<sup>3</sup>

To the newly-created Turkish Republic whose orientation included abolition of Ottoman custom and practice in favor of acceptance of Europeaness and modernism, the foothold in Europe was of utmost importance. Its tenacity between 1918 and 1923 ensured that Turkey would not be confined to Asia Minor.

### **B. Geography**

The Greek–Turkish boundary region is located in the southeastern extremity of the Balkan Peninsula. Chief physiographic features of the region include the Balkan Mountains in the northwest and the Rhodope Mountains (massif) in the southwest. Between the two mountain ranges, in Bulgaria, is the Rumelian Basin through which

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<sup>3</sup> The Treaty also confirmed Turkish sovereignty of the Aegean Islands of Imbros and Tenedos (Article 14), and Greek sovereignty of Lemnos, Samothrace, Mytelene, Chios, Samos, and Nikaria (Article 12), as well as Italian sovereignty over the Dodecanese Islands and Castellorizo (Article 15). In 1947 they were transferred to Greece in the Treaty of Paris (Article 14).

the Maritsa River flows. Beyond the boundary in the northeast is the low-lying Istranca mountain range.

The major part of the frontier area is low-lying land. Most of the 9,000 square miles of European Turkey, about 3 percent of the total area of Turkey, extending from the Aegean to the Black Sea, is relatively fertile land. Several routes that cross the tangled ranges of the Balkans converge at Edirne (Adrianople). From there the main lines of communication run southeasterly through ridge and valley country south of the Istranca mountains toward Istanbul and the Bosphorus. The land route to the Dardanelles has been of secondary importance except when the Bosphorus crossing has been debarred. However, the route from the Dardanelles into Macedonia along the north shore of the Aegean Sea has figured prominently as a highway for armies.

The Maritsa (Greek, Évros) River from Edirne southward has a slight fall. Over a distance of 90 miles from its highest elevation to the Aegean it falls about 130 feet. The valley is broad and open for the entire course and is subject to flooding. On the Greek side of the boundary, the west bank from Edirne to the mouth is marshy practically over the whole distance. The east bank is slightly higher and firmer, as far as the confluence of the Ergene River where it becomes marshy. About 21 miles before reaching the Aegean, the river divides into two channels; the eastern or main channel is the boundary line to the sea at Enez (Enos). Between the western channel in Greek territory and the main channel is marshland forming the Maritsa Delta. In winter and spring it is impassable. In summer the delta is used as meadowland and can be traversed. The river is navigable for flat-bottomed boats to Edirne at all seasons and for large barges from October to June. The average depth of the river is 7–10 feet and the rate of the current is about 2 miles per hour in summer. There are no rapids and no fords except in a very dry season.

The boundary region, especially that facing the Aegean Sea, is typically Mediterranean in climate. The Balkan Mountains in the north, standing as a barrier between the northerly winds of the European continent and the warmer weather from the Mediterranean and the south, affect the nature of the climate. During the summer months the plains area on the south side, under the shadow of the Balkan Mountains from which warm and dry air currents descend after depositing much of their moisture on the northern slopes, enjoys a warm subtropical climate.

The cold, dry conditions that prevail on the Russian steppes in the winter months frequently extend to the Balkan Peninsula, accounting for the moderate rainfall and low temperature then experienced. Average monthly precipitation during the winter rainy season is between three and four inches while that of the dry summer months does not exceed two inches. Temperature ranges between the mean minimum of 36° in January to the mean maximum of 86° in July or August.

### **C. Ethnography**

The human landscape on the Greek–Turkish frontier area has had marked changes. Prior to World War I, the area was almost minutely divided by race and creed. Turk, Greek, Bulgar, Armenian, Jew, Serb, and Albanian formed an ethnic mosaic with distinctions and separateness defined in an overall pattern that was clearly discernible. The generic term "Balkanization" aptly describes the political and human geography of the region at that time.

Population figures in the later Ottoman years vary considerably. However, one can accept a 1912 estimate of the relative proportion of ethnic groupings in Eastern Thrace (i.e., the area east of the Maritsa River to the Sea of Marmara); two-thirds of the population were Turks and one-fourth were Greeks. In the towns, however, Turks formed a little more than one-third of the population, while Greeks were a larger proportion, constituting more than 50 percent of the inhabitants of some of the maritime towns. Armenians lived principally in the larger cities—perhaps 200,000 in Istanbul (Constantinople), 9,000 in Adrianople, and 1,000 to 2,000 in Tekirdag (Rodosto), Gallipoli, and Kirklareli (Kirk Kilisse).

At the outbreak of the First Balkan War (1912–13) about 60,000 Bulgarians were driven out of Eastern Thrace, although a few were allowed to remain in Adrianople and Kirklareli. In addition, about 60,000 of the Greek population, which may have numbered 200,000 in 1912, had emigrated west of the Maritsa by August 1914.

The void caused by emigration became partially filled by immigration of Turks, Pomaks, and other Muslims from Bulgaria, Serbian Macedonia, Albania, and Greece, all territories formerly part of Ottoman Turkey. This two-way movement of population across the boundary was well under way before World War I, and before Turkish nationalists under Mustafa Kemal and the new Turkish Republic avowed a vigorous policy of Turkification including an aggressive effort to erase all Ottoman patterns.

Striking demographic changes took place in the years immediately following World War I. A direct result of the Greek defeat following occupation of Izmir (Smyrna) and the surrounding countryside in 1919 was the exclusion of all Greeks from Eastern Thrace (excepting Constantinople) east of the Maritsa. This provision was included in the Greek–Turkish Armistice signed at Mudania in October 1922 and later confirmed in the treaty of Lausanne.

Today, nearly all trace of the ethnographic mosaic of Ottoman times is erased. On the Turkish side of the boundary, the population, based on the census estimate of 1960, is 2,284,621. The area is essentially homogeneous, consisting of Turks, but including Pomaks who can be described as Turkified Muslims of Bulgarian extraction. The Greek population has been reduced to about 60,000 Turkish citizens and about 5,000 Greek citizens living in Istanbul.

On the Greek side of the boundary frontier, the population estimate of Western Thrace totals 356,555 as of the 1960 census. This figure includes about 95,000 Muslims, of whom Turks number about 65,000 and Pamaks about 25,000.

### **III. ANALYSIS OF THE BOUNDARY**

The Greece–Turkey boundary begins in the north on the Maritsa River at the tripoint with Bulgaria at approximately 41°42' North latitude and 26°21' East longitude. Boundary pillars are shown on sheets 1 through 10 of the Carte de la Frontière Gréco–Turque prepared by the official international Boundary Commission. Boundary marker No. 1 is situated on the southern extremity of island "A" of the Kavak Island group. Its location was determined in relation to the distance between terminal marker No. 320 of the Bulgaria–Turkey (demarcated) boundary on the northern shore of the Maritsa and boundary marker No. 320A (restored by the boundary Commission) on the southern or Greek side of the river. The actual tripoint in the river is 196.9 feet south of marker No. 1. Thence from marker No. 1 the boundary follows the median line either of the river or of the main channel southward a distance of 9.3 miles to its confluence with the Arda River, where it turns westward upstream on the Arda for 0.6 mile at which point the boundary leaves the river.

The boundary then follows intervisible landmarks numbered 2 through 23 in a southeasterly direction a distance of 6.7 miles to a point on the Maritsa five-eighths of a mile below the Turkish town of Bosna. To assure intervisibility of the landmarks, an additional pillar numbered 11A has been placed between markers numbered 11 and 12 where the boundary turns slightly eastward.

Returning to the median of the Maritsa, or of its principal channel, the boundary continues southward past islands on the west or Greek side and others to the east or Turkish side of the boundary a distance of 19.3 miles to boundary marker No. 24 on the northern end of an island designated "Q". Thence, the boundary line extends a distance of 800.5 feet to marker No. 25 near the center, thence a distance of 1,804 feet to marker No. 26 on the southwestern extremity of island "Q". Between markers No. 24 and 25 a bridge crossing connects a roadway on both sides of the international boundary; 1.3 miles north of island "Q", a railroad bridge crosses the international boundary.

Continuing in the river from marker No. 26, the boundary extends southward a distance of 47.2 miles to the confluence of the Ergene River. Thence the boundary follows the median of the Maritsa, a distance of 24.2 miles at which point the river divides into a western and eastern branch, the boundary following the eastern, principal branch southward a distance of 21.1 miles to the Aegean Sea.



#### IV. TREATIES

The treaty relating directly to the present Greece–Turkey boundary is the Treaty of Lausanne (1923), which delimited the boundary and provided for an international boundary commission to demarcate the boundary. The Treaty of Sèvres (1920), later nullified, is included as background reference.

**A. Treaty of Sèvres between Turkey and various Allied Powers**, signed at Sèvres, August 10, 1920; The Treaties of Peace 1919–1923, Vol. II, Carnegie Endowment, New York, 1924.

Article 27, Section I (2) defines the frontier with Greece.

This treaty was signed by the Ottoman Government of Constantinople, which subsequently collapsed. The new Turkish Government at Ankara refused to acknowledge the treaty.

**B. Treaty of Lausanne between Turkey and various Allied powers**, signed at Lausanne, July 24, 1923. Treaty Series No. 16, London, 1923.

Article 2, (2) delimites the boundary between Turkey and Greece.

Articles 5 through 11 provide for the composition of the international boundary commission and for rules, definitions, and responsibilities of the commission.

**C. Commission de Délimitation de la Frontière Gréco–Turque. Protocole des Conclusions de la Commission**, signed at Athens, November 3, 1926.

The conclusions of the mixed boundary commission in accordance with the mandate of the Treaty of Lausanne.

#### V. SUMMARY

The Greece–Turkey Boundary is 128 miles long and is demarcated. Other than a distance of 6.7 miles of land boundary delimiting a small enclave west of the Maritsa River opposite Edirne (Adrianople), the entire boundary follows rivers. No active disputes on the boundary are known to exist.

Location of the boundary markers are shown on Sheets 1 through 10 of the Carte de la Frontière Gréco-Turque 1:50,000 prepared by the Boundary Commission. For a large-scale depiction of the boundary, this series is recommended. An accurate medium-scale representation of the boundary is found on Army Map Service 1:250,000 scale (Series K502) sheets NK 35-8 and NK 35-11. A small-scale depiction of the boundary on a single sheet is found on Army Map Service 1:1,000,000 scale (Series 1301) Sheet NK-35.

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