

# GREAT FIRE OF İZMİR

→ Who burnt İzmir?

Hakan HERDEM\*

**C**ontroversial issues are debated even if we don't attend the debate. Individuals do not simply give up the habit of evaluating events from their own perspectives. Innovative history teachers are aware of the fact that it is richness for their students to be informed about all perspectives. "Great Fire of İzmir" activity includes analysis of different explanations and claims resulting from different perspectives in the context of Great İzmir Fire who took place in 1922 just as Greeks were leaving İzmir. Students will calmly face provocative claims and investigate them in detail. They will realize that history is not only conclusive answers but also investigation and debate. Then, they will construct their own justified perspectives about an event.



## INTENDED LEARNING OUTCOMES

- **All students:** will realize that there are various perspectives for a historical event considering the example of İzmir Fire.
- **Most students:** will critically evaluate different evidences and perspectives considering the example of İzmir Fire.
- **Some students:** will evaluate controversial issues considering the example of İzmir Fire.

**Grade:** 11

**Time:** 80 minutes.

### Key Question:

Who burnt İzmir?

### The Aim of the Lesson:

To evaluate evidences and perspectives about controversial issues considering İzmir Fire example.

### Curricular links:

Students gain an understanding of the signing and application process of Mudros Armistice.

Students evaluates the important role played by the victories of Battle of Sakarya and Great Attack during National Liberation War.

### Preparation

Make copies of the worksheets according to the number of groups. The video for this activity could be downloaded from the website of EUROCLIO: <http://www.euroclio.eu>

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## STARTER



1. Divide the students in groups and hand out **Worksheet-1** to the groups. Ask students to answer the questions on the basis of the video clip. Play Great İzmir Fire video clip. (The video clip is provided on the EUROCLIO's website).

2. Inform your students that Great İzmir Fire took place between 13 and 17 September 1922. Then, read **Worksheet-2** out loudly to your students and address the following question to your students: Who burnt İzmir?

3. Hand out **Worksheet-3** to the groups. Ask them to study perspectives about Great İzmir Fire and answer the questions related to the sources.

4. Hand out **Worksheet-4** to your students. Ask them to evaluate the claims that are blaming Turks and write to the attached space. Then, ask them to create their own perspective about the event and write to the attached space.

5. Distribute **Worksheet-5** to your students. Ask them to evaluate the claims that are blaming Greeks and Armenians and answer attached questions.

6. Then, ask them to make final analysis of the sources that are blaming Greeks and Armenians given in Worksheet-4 and write to the attached space.

7. Distribute **Worksheet-6** and ask them to read it.

8. Establish two groups and organize a debate about who to blame for the İzmir Fire.

10 min.

5 min.

20 min.

5 min.

20 min.

5 min.

5 min.

10 min.

time

**Evaluation:**

Ask your students to come up with three questions about what they learned in this class, and answer one of these questions.



📌 Fill in the blanks on the basis of the video clip.

1. What is the extent of the fire?

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2. Who has been living in the city before the fire?

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3. Who has been escaping from the city during the fire?

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4. Who did stay in the city after the fire?

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.....



↘ **SELECTIONS FROM THE PRESS DURING THE TIME OF THE EVENT:**

**Le Figaro (France)**

Izmir is burnt by Turks...

**New York Times (USA)**

Turks burned the city for revenge...

**Temps (France)**

Greeks burned the city...

**Times (United Kingdom)**

Greeks are responsible...

**Le Matin (France)**

Armenians burned the city...



■ **Source 1 : ETHEN MAHÇUPYAN, Turkish-Armenian journalist and writer**

*Turkey is not brave enough to leave history to historians. It is not only about Armenian issue; we have an understanding that bitterly protects formal views of the state in terms of whole contemporary history. Eventually, honesty must be shown up in front of historical facts...*

*...For instance, it needs to be confessed that İzmir is not burnt by the Greeks; fire has started after 4 days of their withdrawal and only Greek and Armenian districts suffered... It is not plausible to expect 'proper' behavior while denying a fact that is known by the whole world.*

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**Source:** Zaman Daily Newspaper, 11 June 2006

1. Is it obviously stated that Turks are responsible for the fire?
2. Is the claim that blames the Turks supported with evidence?

■ **Source 2 : ETHEN MAHÇUPYAN, Turkish-Armenian journalist and writer**

*Why did Armenian gangs burn their own districts instead of Turkish districts? Falih Rifkı Atay, a close friend of Atatürk has confessed that the city was burnt by Turks in his book Çankaya.*

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**Source:** Zaman Daily Newspaper, 11 June 2006

1. Is it obviously stated that Turks are responsible for the fire?
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■ **Source 3 : Falih Rifkı Atay, close friend of Atatürk**

*Why were we burning İzmir? Were we afraid of the possibility that we could not get rid of minorities if Kordon mansions, hotels and outdoor cafes exist? In the First World War, we have burned all the districts of Anatolian cities and towns during Armenian emigration because of the same fear...*

*Doubtlessly, Nureddin Pasha, whom I regard as annoying demagogue, took strength from the anger and revengeful feelings of his officers and soldiers that witnessed weepy people on their way whose towns ruined by Greeks.*

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**Source:** Çankaya, 1958 edition, Dünya Press, pp. 212-213.

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■ **Source 4 : Şevket Eygi, journalist**

*It is alleged that Armenians are blamable for Great İzmir Fire that started (or that was started) after 3 days of 9 September 1922. In my opinion, it was started by Nureddin Pasha's chaps. As a Muslim, I do not appreciate this fire.*

**Source:** Milli Gazete Daily Newspaper, 08 APRIL 2010

1. Is it obviously stated that Turks are responsible for the fire?
2. Is the claim that blames the Turks supported with evidence?

■ **Source 5 : 16 September 1922, London Times, Newspaper:**

*...Fire was started by Turkish gangs before the arrival of the standing armies...Turkish efforts came up short in getting rid of the fire.*

1. Is it obviously stated that Turks are responsible for the fire?
2. Is the claim that blames the Turks supported with evidence?

■ **Source 6 : Djagatamart (Front War), Armenian Newspaper, 19 September 1922**

*In the afternoon of the 9th September, Turkish cavalier entered to city from the Kordon district at a gallop with their swords in their hands. While Turks were entering to city Greek people were trying to escape with fear. Greek soldiers were also escaping and trying to get rid of their uniforms and weapons. In the night, Turkish soldiers and gangs started to arrest whom they came across and took them to uncertain place. In Sunday morning, gangs and soldiers attacked the bazaar, plundered and took everything they acquire with their carriages and horses. They were forcing into the houses and plundering everything by reason of investigation. In Tuesday morning strong wind started to blow from the south to the sea. Smoke rose from an Armenian house which is in front of the Basmane Station. Fire grew and spread over Armenian district and the church.*

1. Is it obviously stated that Turks are responsible for the fire?
2. Is the claim that blames the Turks supported with evidence?

■ **Source 7: Ereskoviç, eyewitness of an event**

*Great fire has started at an Armenian district in the morning of 13 September 1922. Fire has started at a house next to the Armenian Church and spread so quickly. At the same time, fire started at an Armenian Church and it was followed by other fires at another Armenian residence in Basmane, then in Soğuk Çeşme. In the meantime at least 25 Armenian residences were subject to fire. While fire brigades were struggling with these fires, another fire has started at Peştimalcıbaşı and spread all over the city.*

**Source:** Mustafa TURAN, *İstirdatta İzmir Büyük Yangını*, p.214, 220 Medrese Kitabevi, Afyon, 1995.

1. Is it obviously stated that Turks are responsible for the fire?
2. Is the claim that blames the Turks supported with evidence?



<b>Turks are responsible!</b>	<b>Greeks or Armenians are responsible!</b>
Perspectives	Perspectives
Consistency of the Perspectives	Consistency of the Perspectives
Evidences	Evidences
Consistency of the Evidences	Consistency of the Evidences
My Perspective	My Perspective



**■ Source 1: 30 September 1922 L'illustration, War Correspondent G. Ercole**

*In the afternoon around 2:00pm, an intensive smoke is heading up over Armenian district. In addition, this fire is not spreading and likely to die down. However, people are in panic and gathering at the waterfront. An American boat has to move away since people are in panic and jumping into the sea in order to get into the boat.*

*In the meantime, two new fires have started at Armenian district. The situation is becoming serious because of the wind from the south that is blowing away the fire to French district. I hear gunfire and grenade explosions. Armenians who prefer to die instead of living under Turkish rule are burning their residences. They are fighting against Turkish soldiers. Armories are exploding with an incredible noise. It is 9:00pm now. We passed from day to night without notice. The sky is like a fire cloud.*

**Source:** Oktay GÖKDEMİR, "Fransız Kaynaklarının Işığında 1922 İzmir Yangını", ÇTTAD, VI/15, (2007/Güz), pp. 14-15

1. Is it obviously stated that Greeks and Armenians are responsible for the fire?
2. Is the claim that blames the Greeks and Armenians supported with evidence?

**■ Source 2: 21 September 1922, Le Levant, French newspaper of İzmir**

*We have already reported that İzmir Fire is provoked by Armenians and now explicit declarations verify it... The first fire is seen at a residence 100 meter away from Armenian Church. This first attempt is counteracted by fire brigades. In a few hours explosives around the church caught fire. Simultaneously Armenian residences at Basmane, Soğukçeşme caught fire and it is followed by other residences at Ayavukla, Ayaparaskeri, and Kireçağırı. Before the fire, all Armenian residences are locked and there was no clue of life in them. Armed Armenians appeared with the fire. Besides, we have seen an Armenian who set his own residence on fire. It was observed that there were several tatters in the residences that urged the fire. People in Armenian district shoot up the fire brigades who were trying to counteract the fire.*

**Source:** Oktay GÖKDEMİR, "Fransız Kaynaklarının Işığında 1922 İzmir Yangını", ÇTTAD, VI/15, (2007/Güz), p. 8.

1. Is it obviously stated that Greeks and Armenians are responsible for the fire?
2. Is the claim that blames the Greeks and Armenians supported with evidence?

**■ Source 3: JUSTIN McCARTHY, Historian**

*I wonder whether there is any other similar irrational event in the course of Turkish Liberation War. Was Mustafa Kemal a sort of person who could allow the burning of a productive Anatolian city just because of increased number of Greek settlements during the invasion?*

**Source:** Justin McCARTHY, *The Ottoman Peoples and the End of the Empire*, London:2001, Arnold, p.145-146.

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■ **Source 4: MARK P.PRENTISS, an American Engineer working in İzmir**

*An important fact that may attract honest historian's attention is that a few people were blaming Turks during the fire or in the following weeks. Everybody knows that Turks can be blamed because of their negligence. On the other hand, I did not come across any clue that can be proving Turkish soldiers or civilians burned the city on purpose.*

**Source:** Yaşar AKSOY, "İzmir'i Ermeniler Yaktı", *Aktüel*, 8-14 Eylül 1994, p.15.

1. Is it obviously stated that Greeks and Armenians are responsible for the fire?
2. Is the claim that blames the Greeks and Armenians supported with evidence?

■ **Source 5: MAYNARD BARNES, İzmir Consulate General of USA**

Most of the Americans in the city believe that Armenians are responsible for the fire.

**Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1970 edition, Great Fire of Smyrna**

**Source:** Heath W. LOWRY, "Turkish history: Or whose sources will it be based? A case study on the burning of İzmir", *Osmanlı Araştırmaları*, İstanbul, 1989 p. 16

1. Is it obviously stated that Greeks and Armenians are responsible for the fire?
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■ **Source 6: FERDİNANDO STANO, Eyewitness**

*In that night, fire started at Gazi Boulevard. Children, my mom and daddy were all at home. We took a blanket without knowing where to sleep. Going deep into Anatolia...? No vehicle, no car, nothing... Armenians were the first to blame for the fire. There were some Greeks fighting against Turks. Turks were beyond... at Eşrefpaşa. Armenians and Greeks were fighting side by side. They fired İzmir when they realized that Turks would be able to go down from Eşrefpaşa to İzmir.*

**Source:** Pelin BÖKE, "İzmir 'Felaketi'ne dair...", Edited by: Arus Yumul ve Fahri Dikkaya, *Avrupalı mı Levanten mi?*, İstanbul 2006, Bağlam Yayınları, p. 148.

1. Is it obviously stated that Greeks and Armenians are responsible for the fire?
2. Is the claim that blames the Greeks and Armenians supported with evidence?



**Source 7: FALİH RIFKI ATAY, close friend of Atatürk**

*In the meantime, Armenian gangs who wanted to cause a trouble fired the city. A strong wind spread the fire. In two days districts of Christians and other minorities burned from end to end.*

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**Source:** Falih Rifki ATAY, *Babanız Atatürk*, İstanbul: 2006, Pozitif Yayınları, pp. 92-93.

1. Is it obviously stated that Greeks and Armenians are responsible for the fire?
2. Is the claim that blames the Greeks and Armenians supported with evidence?

**Source 8: LETTER FROM MUSTAFA KEMAL TO DEPUTY PRESIDENT OF THE RED CRESCENT**

*We need to address a speech about İzmir fire as seen below... Our army took measures to prevent city from all sorts of accidents. However, Greeks and Armenians have already planned to burn the city with a pre-established group. Burning İzmir was a seen as a holy duty.*

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**Source:** Yaşar AKSOY, "İzmir'i Ermeniler Yaktı", *Aktüel*, 8-14 September 1994, p.17.

1. Is it obviously stated that Greeks and Armenians are responsible for the fire?
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### ■ Source: A Court Decision

December 1924, London. There was an interesting case at Superior Court of Justice. Claimant was American Tobacco Company. Defendant was Guardian Insurance Company. Tobacco Company was demanding compensation for damage made by İzmir Fire. Insurance company was using war conditions as an excuse in order to avoid any sort of payment. Demanded compensation was around 600.000 dollars and it may set a precedent for other cases which may get through to 1.000.000.000 dollars...

It was huge amount of money and it means that first legal showdown for İzmir Fire would be in London.

Parties invite several witnesses from different nations to the court. Chester Griswold, an American employee, has stated that he has not seen any sort of violent event before or after the fire. Rene Guichet, French engineer has stated that he has only seen a few fireworks for celebration and nothing else. Mr. Archbell, Director of the Tobacco Company, has stated that he has only seen a single fire and the wind spread it. As a result, Justice Rowlandi judge of the court has admitted that İzmir Fire was the most equivocal event that he has seen in his career.

The situation was really complex. There were various statements that blame Greeks, Armenians or Turks but which one is right? Finally, at 19 December 1924, judge declared the decision. Insurance Company won the case. Tobacco Company could not get any compensation. According to the decision there was not any deliberate action and it was impossible to reveal the real responsible and their aims under war conditions.

*Marjorie Housepian 'in Smyrna 1922: The Destruction of a City (Londra 1972, Faber&Faber, p. 230).*

