



1928

**THE
CONSTANTINOPOLITAN
SOCIETY**

GREEKS EXPATRIATED FROM ISTANBUL
BY TURKISH COERCION

**Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting (SHDM) III
on The Role of Civil Society in the Promotion and Protection of
Tolerance and Non-Discrimination**

26 - 27 June 2023

Vienna

Day 2, Session II: Towards Tolerance and Non-discrimination and
Addressing Hate Crime for Communities at Risk

**The Greek Minority in Turkey
Intolerance and discrimination policies**

STATEMENT

We represent the Constantinopolitan Society, a civil society organization, established in 1928 in Greece by expatriated members of the Greek Minority of Istanbul. Our intervention will be focused on discriminatory policies implemented by Turkey, which resulted in the Greek Minority being on the verge of extinction.

The Turkish oppressive policies of the years 1914 – 1922 resulted in the expulsion of 1,300,000 Greeks from their native land. The pogrom of 6-7 September 1955 and the expulsions of Greek citizens in 1964 have led to the dramatic decline of Greek population of Turkey from over 130,000 persons after the Treaty of Lausanne to less than 2,000 at present.

In contrast, the thriving Muslim minority in Greek Thrace numbers around 120,000 members at present, while the two minorities were equal in number at the time the Lausanne Treaty was signed. The numbers speak for themselves.

In 21 September 2022, at the 77th United Nations General Assembly Thirtieth anniversary of the adoption of the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities, the European Union delivered a Statement by EU Special Representative for Human Rights Eamon Gilmore, which, inter alia, pointed out that: *“The EU deeply regrets past discriminatory policies implemented by Turkey, which resulted in the Greek Minority currently being on the verge of extinction. In this context, the EU reiterates the call on Turkey to protect human rights, fundamental freedoms and the rule of law, including property rights of persons belonging to minorities and minorities' legal entities”*.

It should be noted that the Turkish government treats the Greek Minority as an exhibition species for political exploitation.

Persisting shortcomings

The Greek minority in Turkey continues to suffer numerous injustices, as a result of discriminatory and oppressive policies. The rule of law regarding minorities often is not respected. The Turkish Grand National Assembly has repeatedly rejected the prospect of giving the floor to minority representatives or invite them in parliamentary committee gatherings to share their insight with the rest of the lawmakers. What is more, the governing party AKP leaves unanswered requests for info related to minority issues posed by various parliamentarians. This constitutes an affront to Turkey's non-Muslim citizens.

The Greek minority's Foundations have suffered from massive confiscations of their properties. The property rights of the Greek Minority Foundations continue to be violated. The most serious shortcomings are:

The new Law does not provide for the return of “seized/fused foundations” and their properties. The management of them has been assumed by the General Directorate of Foundations(GDF). The provisional article 7 does not allow for the holding of new elections for the 23 seized foundations.

Article 5 provides for the establishment and management of new foundations in accordance with the Turkish Civil Code (TCC). However, TCC in article 101 (4) does not allow the establishment of foundations of non-Muslim minorities. Unfortunately, the new Regulation for elections (June 2022) does not include any provisions concerning the hand over of the management of seized/fused foundations, whose management and administration had been taken over.

Hate Crimes

The Turkish government has converted arbitrarily several historical Byzantine churches into islamic mosques. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's decision to convert the historical world heritage monument Aghia Sophia into a mosque, in July 2020, followed by provocative declarations of Erdoğan's ultranationalist partner Devlet Bahçeli that the legal basis for converting Hagia

Sophia rests on “the right of the sword”, clearly consists a hate rhetoric which not only puts the sacred heritage of Turkey’s religious minorities at risk, but also threatens their lives, making them potential targets of hate crimes.

Minority schools are still treated as private schools and they are being deprived of state funds, even though it is foreseen by the Lausanne Treaty. Consequently, their outdated infrastructure does not meet the current requirements and training needs regarding the use of new technologies and digital tools to improve the educational process. This policy leads to discrimination against minorities and further degradation of the education provided to them.

Closing statement

As a participating state in OSCE, Turkey has obligations under Article VII of the Helsinki Accords to guarantee and protect the rights of national minorities.

Turkey is called upon to take seriously into consideration the recommendations by EU and other international organizations pertaining to human rights and make more strenuous efforts to prevent discrimination and intolerance.

The Turkish government should not only fully abide by its constitutional and international obligations, as far as the protection of human and minority rights is concerned, but rather also initiate measures and policies of affirmative action that would guarantee the survival, the well-being and the future of the Greek Minority and the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Our association, Constantinopolitan Society, as a civil society organization, calls on Turkey to:

- protect human rights, fundamental freedoms and the rules of Law, including property rights of citizens belonging to minorities
- redress violated rights of non-Muslim foundations so as to provide justice. The sized-fused foundation practice, which is against the principles of a democratic State, governed by the rule of Law, must be abandoned immediately
- recognize the legal status of Ecumenical Patriarchate, so that it may enjoy ownership rights and exercise property ownership, administration and management. The main goal of introducing new regulations regarding the issues of non-Muslim foundations must be the protection of justice and the rule of Law
- reopen without any delay and prerequisite the Theological School of Halki with exactly the same status it held before 1971
- stop hate crimes and hate speech against minorities._