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**THE
CONSTANTINOPOLITAN
SOCIETY**GREEKS EXPATRIATED FROM ISTANBUL
BY TURKISH COERCION**Warsaw Human Dimension Conference**

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Plenary Session 7: Tolerance and non-discrimination II, including:

- Rights of persons belonging to national minorities
- Roma and Sinti issues

The Greek Minority in Türkiye**STATEMENT**

My name is Kleanthi Perifanou and I represent the Constantinopolitan Society, a civil society organization, established in 1928 in Greece by forcibly expatriated members of the Greek Minority of İstanbul.

We thank the OSCE and the Finnish Chairmanship for the opportunity to present our concerns about the actual implementation of OSCE human dimension commitments and identify further action, which may be taken by Türkiye, as participating State, regarding the Greek Minority in this country.

Non-Muslim minorities in Türkiye have suffered numerous injustices, as a result of discriminatory and oppressive state policies. Especially, the annihilation of the Greek Minority in Türkiye is the continuation of the Genocide that had systematically exterminated the Greek populations of Asia Minor, Eastern Thrace, Imbros (Gökçeada), Tenedos (Bozcaada) and İstanbul through combined means of massacres, atrocities, mass deportations in the period of 1914 - 1922 which resulted in the expulsion of more than 1,300,000 Greeks from their native land.

It is practically impossible to describe all the state practices that led to the extermination of the Greek Minority of İstanbul, so we will mention only a few:

In 1929, the total burning of 5,000 Greek residences of Tatavla (Kurtulus), the most renowned Greek suburb of İstanbul.

In 1932, Law 2007, passed by the Turkish National Assembly, banned Greeks from the exercise of thirty professions, in order to force them to leave the country.

In 1941, all Christians between 18 and 45 years old were dragged to the army and were scattered in the depths of Asia Minor to construct roads and military buildings under the most adverse circumstances. Due to unbearable hardships, thousands of them died.

In 1942, the Turkish Government put into force the Law 4305, known as “Varlık Vergisi”, using as criteria religion and ethnicity, imposed a burdensome wealth tax on property, which aimed at the financial extinction of minorities in Türkiye.

In 1955, the Turkish Government, in a cold-blooded perfectly prepared and professionally organized manner, launched a murderous pogrom against Greek Minority in İstanbul with widespread destruction and looting of thousands of houses, school buildings, stores, factories as well as many other churches and cemeteries.

In 1964, the mass deportations of a total of 60,000 Greeks from İstanbul and the implementation of an inhumane plan to depopulate the islands of Imbros (Gökçeada) and Tenedos (Bozcaada) from Greek native inhabitants.

All those atrocities and oppressive measures later on stand as a historical affirmation that the permanent goal of every successive Turkish regime is to totally annihilate the Greek Minority in Türkiye. After the Lausanne Treaty (1923), there were still over 130,000 Greeks in İstanbul. Since then, as a consequence of systematic persecutions by the Turkish State, these policies have led to the dramatic decline of the Greek population of Türkiye, from over 100,000 in the 1950’s to less than 1,200 at present. In contrast, the thriving Muslim minority in Greek Thrace numbers approx. 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.

Persisting shortcomings

European Commission’s Türkiye 2024 Report issued on 30.10.2024 clearly states that *“The overall human rights situation in the country has not improved and remains an issue of concern”*.

In particular, the Greek Minority in Türkiye 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.

The property rights of the Greek Minority Foundations continue to be violated. The most serious shortcomings are the following:

- 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

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any provisions concerning the handover of the management of seized/fused foundations, whose management and administration had been taken over.

Finally, the new regulation does not bring minority communities freedom or allow foundations to be run democratically. It extends state control, and sometimes authorizes direct intervention into minority affairs.

- As regards Board of Director elections process at Balıklı Greek Hospital and Social Welfare Foundation (BGHF), the most prominent institution of the Greek Minority, established in 1794, the General Directorate of Foundations (GDF) stated on July 24, 2024, that Election Regulations of Minority Foundations entered into force after being published in the Official Gazette on June 18, 2022, and that the elections for community foundations which possess hospitals will be regulated by a new regulation based on the positive opinion of the Ministry of Health within one year from the date of entry into force of the regulation and that the elections must be completed by December 31, 2023. However, the relevant election regulations have not yet been published and consequently the elections have not been held so far.
- The illegally confiscated in 1925 valuable historical archives and the library of more than 50.000 volumes of the Hellenic Literary Society of Constantinople which it represents the intellectual heritage of the Hellenism of Constantinople, should be conveyed to a Greek Minority Foundation in İstanbul, where it legally belongs. Also, the grand building of the Hellenic Literary Society of Constantinople, located in Beyoğlu district of İstanbul, was illegally confiscated by the Turkish government in 1941 and later on it was demolished. This building lot should be returned to the Greek Minority Foundations, which are the legal owners.

Educational issues

Despite some favorable regulations, Greek Minority schools still face a number of procedural difficulties and bureaucratic obstacles.

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 and is inevitably leading to the gradual dissolution of the Greek Minority schools protected under the Lausanne Treaty (Articles 40 & 41). It should be pointed out that in 1955, just one year before the horrible pogrom of 1955, the number of students in Greek Minority schools was more than 18,000. Currently, this number is less than 220 students.

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Discriminatory practices - Hate speech / intimidation

All members of non-Muslim minorities continue to be treated by the Turkish authorities as “aliens”. As a consequence, the members belonging to the non-Muslim

minorities are excluded from posts in public sector and services, the police forces, the army or the judiciary.

Hate speech and intimidation directed against Greek Minority remain a serious problem.

Restrictions against the individuals' property rights

The Turkish administration, by means of arbitrary and deliberate actions and/or omissions has been and still is expropriating the real estate of the Greek minority. Ignores or interprets at will the amended legislation on property acquisition, whereas it does not confer any real estate property rights to ethnic Greeks and hinders access of interested persons or their legal representatives to the cadastral registries. The descendants of expatriated minority Greeks are deprived of their hereditary rights and forced to liquidate or sell their properties.

Denial of succession rights

Türkiye continues refusing the succession rights of members of the Minority with Greek nationality. The descendants of expatriated Greeks are deprived of their hereditary rights and forced to liquidate or sell their properties. A new law enforces the sale of property that is inherited, having essentially as a result the annulment of the succession right.

In this context, not only the restitution of the Turkish Republic citizenship to Greek minority members living abroad should be facilitated, but Turkish authorities should primarily issue permanent residence and work permit to those who are willing to live in Türkiye.

Closing statement

This was only an indicative review of some of the challenges that the Greek minority continue to face in Türkiye. They were by no means exhaustive; this would require a detailed account of the historic and religious background of the matters in question. Türkiye's reservations and declarations - pertaining to the rights of minorities, the right to education, etc. - upon the ratification of these Covenants and Convention, continue to be causes of concern.

As a concluding remark, we would like to underline that respect for human and minority rights is a responsibility for every State. It is not a matter that statements of good intentions alone can address. It calls for firm will, constructive dialogue and continuity of effort.

RECOMMENDATIONS

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

- take seriously into consideration the recommendations by EU and international organizations pertaining to human rights and act upon them and make more strenuous efforts to prevent discrimination and intolerance.
- not only fully abide by its constitutional and international obligations, as far as the protection of human and minority rights is concerned, but also initiate measures and policies of affirmative action that would guarantee the survival, the well-being and the future of the Greek Minority in İstanbul.
- redress violated fundamental rights of Greek Minority 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._

Thank you for your attention._