

THE CONSTANTINOPOLITAN SOCIETY
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The Constantinopolitan Society, established in 1928, is a non-governmental, non-profit organization which over the past decades has been presenting to you both the appalling events of the past and the enormous problems that the Greek Minority and the Ecumenical Patriarchate face in Turkey and concern the violation of human – Minority rights and the non respect of religious freedom, pursuant to the European Convention on Human Rights and other International Treaties.

We will point out, briefly, the basic issues that are related to the religious freedom, to the rights of ownership and, in general, to the human rights, which they have not been resolved and are in contrast with what is in effect internationally and with the European criteria for human rights, as well as with the related articles of the Treaty of Lausanne about the protection of the non-Muslim minorities of Turkey.

Ecumenical Patriarchate

The Ecumenical Patriarchate, and the Throne of the Ecumenical Patriarch, which was established by Ecumenical Synods nine centuries before the conquest of Constantinople by the Ottoman Turks in 1453, and its status, as well as its Seat, have been recognized by the Ottoman regime with a series of formal legislative acts. The status which governs the Ecumenical Patriarchate today has been validated by important international agreements, which are still valid, such as the Treaties of Paris in 1856 and of Berlin in 1878 and the Minutes of the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923.

The ecumenicity of the Patriarchate is also established in the Holy Canons of Orthodoxy, in history and in the ecclesiastical tradition.

This ecumenicity of the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I, religious Leader of three hundred millions Orthodox Christians throughout the world, is recognized globally except Turkey, the country in which is situated.

Thus, Turkey refuses to recognize the ecumenicity of the Ecumenical Patriarchate and is unilaterally trying to restrict its activity through various manipulations. Specifically:

1. Decision of the Supreme Court of Turkey, in which the use of the title “Ecumenical” is forbidden to the Ecumenical Patriarch.
Based on this decision, a suit was filed, during August 2008, against the Ecumenical Patriarch, as well as the Greek Minority’s newspaper “Apogevmatini”, which is published in Istanbul.
2. Denial of recognition of legal entity of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, having as consequence the deprivation from its property, as well as the prohibition to call and employ clergy from abroad to carry out its spiritual mission.
3. The Theological School of Halki, which had been operating since 1844, was closed by the Turkish Authorities in 1971. The Turkish Government, despite the promises of the last years that it will re-open it, prevents with various pretences and excuses its operation. Thus, since 1971, the Ecumenical Patriarchate is deprived of the educational religious seminars and of the capability to educate clergymen.
4. The election of the spiritual Leader of 300 millions Orthodox Christians depends on the pre-approval of the prefect of Istanbul and is required for the candidate to possess the Turkish citizenship.
5. The denial to the Ecumenical Patriarchate to have its own printing facilities for the publishing of religious texts, books, etc.
6. The Ecumenical Patriarchate keeps being a target of humiliating actions. For example, in the schoolbook on national security, published by the Ministry of Education of Turkey, in the chapter “The geographic position of Turkey and the threats against Turkey” and in the sub-chapter “Greece”, the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Theological School of Halki Seminary are also mentioned among the problems regarding the relations with this country. This way, the Patriarchate is subject to hostile actions. Such action is also mentioned in the bill of indictment that the Public Prosecutor filed for the terror organization “Ergenekon”, which had targeted the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I.

Communal and Church Property

Law 5737/2008 on the Vakif (charitable institutions) regarding the real estate and their management does not set things right in many cases – the major ones – for the property of the Greek Minority institutions, e.g. those which has been confiscated, came to the jurisdiction of the Turkish government and later sold to third parties.

Consequently, the rights of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, as well as those of the Greek Minority’s over their own property are not recognized, and are being infringed instead. In this way, their property has diminished by 94% the last 60 years. In particular:

- a) Reimbursement of the property of the minorities' foundations which the State has confiscated and then distributed to third parties, is not foreseen.
- b) Restitution for the property that the state has characterized as *Mazbut* ("occupied") and which has been devolved to its jurisdiction, is not foreseen. In this category belong, mainly, monasteries that have been under the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate and the Greek Community for hundred of years.
Moreover, the delay of issuing administrative decrees which are foreseen by law, despite the fact that an 18-month deadline for the submission of the claims for the return of the confiscated properties is provided, creates serious concerns that other properties that belong to minorities will eventually be lost in favour of the State.

Therefore, the rights of the Ecumenical Patriarchate and of the Greek Minority over their property are not recognized, but on the contrary they are infringed, this way having as a consequence the reduction by 94% of their property in the last 60 years.

Denial of Succession Rights

Turkey refuses to accept the succession rights of members of the Minority with Greek citizenship. The law enforces the sale of the property that is inherited, having essentially as a result the annulment of the succession right. This measure, essentially, aims at cutting off even the last tie of the members of the Greek minority that were forced to leave the country, and of their descendants.

Educational problems

The Turkish Authorities have never ceased to occasionally refuse the appointment of teachers from the Minority.

Security problems and use of psychological pressure

Over the last year, provoking actions by State Authorities or acts of vandalism that cause concerns for the security of religious places and members of the Community as well have been observed..

In November 2007, a crew of the Forest Department proceeded to a partial demolition of the roof from a church in Halki (Heybeliada) with the excuse of the absence of a repair permit for the roof. The destructions that have been caused are serious, and so far they have not been restored by the Authorities. At the same time period, two Greek Orthodox Churches (Kadikoy and Tarabya), have been attacked by nationalists. In the case of Kadikoy, they also assaulted the personnel of the church.

In July 2008, two attacks with destructions in a small church on the island Kinaliada were recorded.

As I have reported to you in brief, combined with the past actions against the Greek Minority on the part of the Turkish state, namely the unbearable tax *Varlik Vergisi*, the forced recruitment of the Minority people only, the pogrom

of the 6/7 September 1955 and the overnight expulsion in 1964, have resulted in the dramatic decrease of the Greek population in Turkey. More specifically, before 1920 the Greek population in Istanbul was 350,000 people. Today, the Greek population is less than 5,000 people. As far as the Gokceada (Imvros) and Bozcaada (Tenedos) islands are concerned, there were about 7,000 Greek people in the 60's, while there are hardly 200 people left now.

Thank you for your attention.