

**THE CONSTANTINOPOLITANS SOCIETY
ESTABLISHED 1928**

**Address of the representative of
THE CONSTANTINOPOLITANS SOCIETY
Mrs. MARINA KALOUMENOU-KYRIACOPOULOU
to the 2007 Human Dimension Implementation Meeting of the O.S.C.E.**

**Warsaw
Monday, 24 September 2007**

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Ladies and gentlemen,

The Constantinopolitans Society, which I have the honour to represent, was founded in 1928 and is a non-governmental, non-profit organization that over the past decades has been concerned with the huge problems that the non-Muslim minorities are faced with in Turkey. Of course, all those problems cannot be set out just in a few minutes.

Therefore, we have chosen to touch upon one of the basic issues: the problems faced by the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Greek minority in Turkey.

First of all, we must stress that the Ecumenical status of the Patriarchate of Constantinople is founded on the holy rules of Christian Orthodox Tradition and Church Canon Law, as well as International Treaties.

The Throne of the Patriarchate was instituted by Ecumenical Synods, nine whole centuries before the establishment of the Turkish State. Besides, after the conquer of Constantinople in 1453 by Ottoman Turks, the status, as well as the throne of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, was recognized by the Ottoman State through a whole series of official legal acts, which had been promulgated successively by different Sultans. The status governing the Ecumenical Patriarchate has been ratified also by stipulations in important international agreements, which are still valid, such as the Agreements of Paris in 1856 and Berlin in 1878, as well as the Records of Proceeding of Lausanne Treaty in 1923.

The term "Ecumenical" of the Patriarchate, as well as of His All Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, being spiritual leader of approximately 300 million Orthodox Christians, is recognised by the European Union, the U.S.A. and generally all the nations of the world, as well as by the Catholic Church and the other Christian denominations. In addition, it is recognised by Muslim States and Institutions. This recognition was even confirmed by the visit of the Pope to the Ecumenical Patriarch in November 2006.

This aforementioned recognition, however, is denied only by the country in which the Ecumenical Patriarch is based. Turkey refuses to acknowledge the Ecumenical status of the Patriarchate and is trying unilaterally by various unreasonable means to limit its activity.

Some particular examples which we can cite are the following:

1. The Holy Theological School of Halki, on one of the Princes' island, the island of Halki (Heybeliada), which opened in 1844, ceased to function in 1971, when the Turkish Authorities ordered its closing down. The Turkish Government, despite its promises, is presenting a variety of excuses in order to prevent the reopening of the School. Consequently, since 1971, the Ecumenical Patriarchate is deprived of the educational religious seminars to train clergymen.

2. The rights on the real estate of both the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Greek communities are denied and violated. Using various means, the Turkish Administration is depriving the Ecumenical Patriarchate and Patriarchal affiliated institutions of their properties, fact which has resulted to a total reduction of 94% of the number of these properties. The international Press very often refers to these litigations and problems related to that question.

Some blatant cases of the appropriation of properties affiliated with the Ecumenical Patriarchate are:

- The Baloukli Hospital and Home for the Aged, which is essentially a charity institution and serves some 30.000 Turkish citizens each year free of charge, is gradually and continuously deprived of its properties.
- The Orphanage on the island of Pringhipos (Buyukada), a facility which has cared for hundreds of orphans since its founding in 1902, has been "seized" by the General Directorate for Foundations, which means it no longer belongs to its rightful owner, the Ecumenical Patriarchate.
- The Patriarchal Summer Camp at the Monastery of Metamorphosis on the island of Proti (Kinaliada), faces great difficulties regarding its operation, because the Turkish Government demanded that the Ecumenical Patriarchate should formally admit that the Monastery belongs to the Turkish State.

3. The refusal of the Turkish Government to permit the Ecumenical Patriarchate to have its own printing facility to publish religious texts, treatises, and books.

The Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Ecumenical Patriarch is a real bridge between the Muslim and the Christian world and it is imperative that their spiritual and religious duties can be exercised freely. Nevertheless, the Turkish Government using various methods obstructs this free exercise. Obviously, it cannot understand that it is the Ecumenical Patriarchate that would help Turkey in its European and Occidental orientation. A positive policy toward the Patriarchate could assist Turkey in its accession route to Europe.

Whilst the recognition of the Ecumenical Patriarch as a spiritual leader is deeply rooted in the conscience of millions of Christians, Orthodox or not, all around the world, recently, at the end of last June, the 4th Section of the Turkish Supreme Court of Appeal decided that the Ecumenical Patriarch is not "Ecumenical" nor the spiritual leader of the Orthodox Christians of all the world, but he is simply the Head of the Greek Orthodox Community of Constantinople.

Obviously, Turkey by this refusal turns a blind eye to the letter and the spirit of Article 9 of the European Convention for Human Rights and the relevant jurisprudence of the European Court for Human Rights.

In addition to all the above, we must say a few words regarding in general the attitude of Turkey towards the Greek minority.

Before 1920 the Greek population of Constantinople numbered 350.000 people, i.e. 20% of the total population of the city. Today it is less than 5.000 people.

The action to eliminate the minorities is obvious. In the islands of Imvros (Gokceada) and Tenedos (Bozcaada), the Greek population has been limited to insignificant numbers. (During my recent visit to Tenedos, I felt chagrined at the fact that only 12 Greek people remain on the island). The community properties, the schools, the communal institutions and all the personal properties have been lost in various ways.

The Turkish Government must not remain dedicated to the spirit manifested during the notorious pogrom of September 6-7, 1955 against the Greek minority, which had as result, according to official archives, the destruction within a few hours, of approximately 1.000 dwellings, 4.000 stores, 71 churches, 2 cemeteries, 31 schools, 5 newspapers, 5 athletic or cultural organizations and 2 monasteries. Also, clergymen and civilians have been killed or wounded.

This year, in the first days of September, we have commemorated the 52nd anniversary of this pogrom. A lot of us, being then little children, recollect the terrible facts of the catastrophe with fear and horror. I am personally one of those children.

Thank you for your attention.