



1928

**THE
CONSTANTINOPOLITAN
SOCIETY**

GREEKS EXPATRIATED FROM ISTANBUL
BY TURKISH COERCION

**Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting (SHDM) I
on Media Freedom and Gender Equality
8 - 9 March 2021**

Day 2, Session II: The Role of the Media in the implementation
of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda

**The Greek Minority and the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Turkey
Media Freedom and Hate Speech Issues**

STATEMENT

Introduction

We represent the Constantinopolitan Society, a non - governmental / non - profit organization, established in 1928 in Greece by forcibly expatriated members of the Greek minority of Istanbul. Our intervention will focus on the basic issues that are related to media freedom and hate speech in Turkey and address our concerns about the actual implementation of the OSCE commitments and identify further action which may be taken by Turkey, regarding media freedom and hate speech in this country.

Media Freedom

Media freedom and freedom of expression in Turkey is under sustained and increasing attack. Since the failed coup attempt in July 2016, academics, journalists and writers who criticize the government risk criminal investigation and prosecution, intimidation, harassment and censorship. According to Amnesty International, at least 156 media outlets have been shut down by executive decree since July 2016. More than 114,00 websites are blocked.

An estimated 2,500 journalists and other media workers have lost their jobs as a result, and unsubstantiated and disproportionate sentences curtailing freedom of expression handed down. In addition, the Directorate General of Press and Information has revoked the press credentials of 778 journalists. More than 120 journalists and other media workers have been detained, some for up to nine months without trial.

The Turkish government continues to impose significant restrictions and serious limitations on human rights, thereby threatening the sustainable well-being, survival and future of the Greek minority in Turkey. These oppressive policies have led to the dramatic decline of the Greek population of Turkey, from over 100,000 in the 1950's to less than 2,000 at present.

Specifically, the Greek minority Press in Istanbul is under constant threat and confronts the same freedom of expression restrictions to a far greater extent. Under these harsh circumstances, its survival is doubtful. The Turkish State purposefully keeps the minority press underfunded and closely supervised by the relevant authorities. A probable closure will be a heavy blow to media pluralism.

Hate speech

In Turkey, government officials and pro-government groups continue to direct hate speech toward non-Muslim citizens. In particular, hate speech and threats directed against the Greek Minority and the Ecumenical Patriarchate remain a serious problem. The Turkish authorities keep on diminishing the Patriarch by stubbornly refusing to call Him as Ecumenical. This title is a purely ecclesiastical one since 6th century AD and all foreign dignitaries use this term without prejudice. In May 2020, in a 176-page special edition of the pro-Islamist Turkish magazine Gerçek Hayat, which belongs to the press group of the well-known pro-government newspaper Yeni Şafak, leading members of religious minorities in Turkey, including the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew became targets. The magazine made unsubstantiated allegations that the Ecumenical Patriarch was among those who helped and collaborated with Fethullah Gülen movement to stage the failed coup attempt in Turkey in July 2016.

Also, other pro-government news commentators published stories attempting to associate the July 2016 coup plotters with the Ecumenical Patriarch. In the aftermath of such statements the Ecumenical Patriarch was targeted by thugs at his personal residence. The perpetrators are still at large.

On top of that, the Turkish authorities without internal deliberation and in breach with UNESCO's procedures, decided to turn the world heritage monuments Hagia Sophia and the Former Church of the Holy Saviour of Chora into mosques. Although operating as museums, they are still reference points for both Christianity and Islam. Such ill-devised initiatives, just for short-term political gain, don't serve a multicultural society. Let's hope that the declaration of President Erdogan on 02.03.2021 will not be another ploy.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Due to significant restrictions and serious limitations on Media Freedom which are threatening the sustainable vitality, survival and future of the Greek Minority in Turkey, OSCE / ODHIR are called upon to urge Turkey -as OSCE participating State- to:

- strengthen the independence of the regulatory authority and its board members and Law in line with the Venice Commission's recommendations with a view to ensuring media pluralism;
- Ensure that journalists can carry out their function of informing public opinion, and conveying information and ideas without threats, harassment or intimidation, and are not prosecuted for expressing views that do not constitute incitement to violence.
- Introduce measures to eradicate hate speech in the media, in order to protect targeted minorities and bring an end to impunity for hate crimes.
- Reform Articles 299 and 301 of the penal code in order to curb discrimination against minorities and violations of the right to freedom of expression. _