



1928

**THE  
CONSTANTINOPOLITAN  
SOCIETY**

GREEKS EXPATRIATED FROM ISTANBUL  
BY TURKISH COERCION

## **Warsaw Human Dimension Conference**

26 September 2022 - 7 October 2022

Monday, 3 October 2022

Plenary Session V: Tolerance and Non-Discrimination II

Rights of persons belonging to national minorities; Treatment of citizens of other States and human rights of migrants; Roma and Sinti issues; Equal opportunities and rights for women and men; Violence against women and children

### **The Greek Minority and the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Turkey STATEMENT**

#### **Introduction**

We represent the Constantinopolitan Society, a civil society organization, established in 1928 in Greece by forcibly expatriated members of the Greek Minority of Istanbul.

We thank the Polish OSCE 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 Turkey, as participating State, regarding the Greek Minority and the Ecumenical Patriarchate in this country.

The annihilation of the Greek Minority in Turkey is the continuation of the Genocide that had systematically exterminated the Greek populations of Asia Minor, Eastern Thrace, Imvros, Tenedos and Istanbul through combined means of massacres, mass deportations and atrocities of 1914 - 1922 which resulted in the expulsion of more than 1,300,000 Greeks from their native land. The pogrom of 1955 and the forced expulsions of 1964 in Istanbul 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 Turkey. After the Lausanne Treaty (1923), there were still over 130,000 Greeks in Istanbul. 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 Turkey, from over 100,000 in the 1950's 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”*.

### **Persisting shortcomings**

The Greek minority and the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Turkey continue to suffer numerous injustices, as a result of discriminatory and oppressive policies, namely:

### **Minority Foundations**

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.

Following the 9-year non-renewal of the administrations of minority foundations due to the unjustified revocation and non-issuance of regulations for conducting elections of board members -which openly breaches the Lausanne Treaty, Article 40- a new regulation was issued recently which, taking advantage of the hard situation of the Greek minority population, clearly aims at the seizure of Greek Minority property by the General Directorate of Foundations.

### **Religious freedom issues**

The Turkish government has not so far alleviated or done away with serious restrictions on freedom of religion or belief, including state policies and suffocating regulations of the past that deny legal personality to the Ecumenical Patriarchate, its right to own, maintain property, train clergy and offer religious education. On the grounds therefore of these concerns, the 2022 Annual Report of the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) in its Key Findings underlines that: *“In 2021, religious freedom conditions in Turkey remained poor, with no improvement from the previous year... The government took no steps to reopen the Theological School of Halki (Halki Seminary), preventing the Ecumenical Patriarchate from training clergy for more than 50 years”*.

Turkish government should respect the right to freedom of religion or belief as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and allow the reopening of the Halki Seminary.

### **Denial of succession rights**

Turkey 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. The Turkish administration by means of arbitrary and deliberate actions is expropriating the real estate of the Greek minority.

Turkey should ensure that Greek citizens are able to fully enjoy their rights over inherited property, and Turkey conform to the relevant rulings of the European Court for Human Rights and implement its own Registry Law.

### **Educational problems**

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
- Due to intended bureaucratic, time-consuming procedures, the approval of new schoolbooks is delayed at the expense of the educational requirements
- The registration and attendance of European and other nationalities students to Greek minority schools is only permitted as “guest students”, without receiving graduation certificates and, as a consequence, those students are not admitted to universities etc.
- Anti-minority references continue to exist in schoolbooks used for teaching in Turkey. Some of them include discriminatory, xenophobic statements against Greek minority.

These measures are leading to the gradual dissolution of the Greek Minority schools protected under the Lausanne Treaty (Articles 40 & 41).

### **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 international organizations pertaining to human rights and act upon them 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.\_