

Ecumenical Federation of Constantinopolitans (EFC)

Forum on Minority Issues

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Problems arising of the restricted legal recognition of the Greek-Orthodox Minority of Istanbul

The Greek-Orthodox minority community of Istanbul (Community) is an autochthonous minority which status was recognized by the international Lausanne Treaty (1923). This Treaty is also the founding act establishing the state of Turkey. In Lausanne Treaty, Section B (articles 38-42) is devoted to the protection of rights of non-Muslim minorities to whom also the Community belongs. Since this Treaty, 98% of the members of the Community were forced to leave their homeland because of the massive minority rights violations by the consequent governments of Turkey during the period 1923-2003.

Only the minority welfare foundations are recognized being legal bodies on individual basis which includes churches, schools, monasteries, cemeteries, an elderly care house and a hospital.

From 1923 to 1962 there were "Central Administration Boards", which members were elected by the members of the minority and were supervising and coordinating the foundations. However, the Turkish Government abolished in 1962, these Boards following a ruling of the "Special Minority Committee" ("Azinlikar Taali Komisyonu") which members were appointed by the state intelligence and security services. From 1962 to 2004, the assigned duty to this Committee was to plan and implement all anti-minority measures while the Committee had a superseding power of any legislative, executive and judicial power concerning the Community. Today, by not recognizing any legal representation to the minority Community, one has to appeal to numerous authorities in order to cope or to raise a minority problem. In order to solve this problem and taking into account the ongoing process of the structuring of a new Constitution of Turkey, the issue of recognition of minority entities should be solved.

The Greek-Orthodox minority is requesting to the Turkish Government to

- Cancel the illegal abolition of Central Administrative Bodies allowing their functioning and
- Establish a competent and fair state authority to accept the complaints and requests of minorities and support the efforts to solve the problems faced by minority groups.

Furthermore another serious pending problem of the Minority is the still continuing prohibition of the operation of the Heybeliada-Chalki Theological School which remains closed from 1971 after an illegal ruling of the Turkish Government of that time. This prevents the education of clergyman to provide services to the Ecumenical Patriarchate, the religious Centre of more than 300 Million Orthodox Christians of the World. The School should be opened immediately.