

OSCE - ODIHR
Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting (SHDM) III:
National Minorities, Bridge Building and Integration
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ECUMENICAL FEDERATION OF CONSTANTINOPOLITANS
(EFC)

The Experience of the Greek-Orthodox Minority of Istanbul on the issue of present Conference being the "Bridge Building and Integration", during the last Century, has been a most painful one since in numerous cases anti-minority measures by past Governments of Republic of Turkey, during the period 1923-2003, were exercised in the name of foreign relations of Turkey. The justification of anti-minority measures was based on the ungrounded so called principle of "Reciprocity" according which a State can punish a minority community considered to be somehow related to a foreign state. In this context non-Muslim minorities were named to be "Foreign – Citizens", such as in the ruling of Higher Court Yargitay on the issue of Minority Welfare Foundations in 1974 opening to mass scale seizure of their real estate properties which is still an open issue.

The legal status of the Minority was established and placed under the protection of the International Treaty of Lausanne (24/7/1923). Even though the Treaty enabled the foundation of the Republic of Turkey, nevertheless the minority has experienced extensive violations of their human and religious rights during the period 1923-2003. The most severe violations towards the ethnic minority were: (a) the mobilization to work battalions of 18-45 aged minority men in 1941, (b) the "welfare tax" of 1942-44 aiming the economic destruction of minorities, (c) the massive scale Pogrom of the 6-7 September 1955 in Istanbul, one of the most severe massive scale violence in post War Europe, (d) the forced deportation of members of the Greek Community of Istanbul holding the Etablis status according to Lausanne Treaty. Furthermore, the anti-minority state measures were strengthened after the Coup de Etat of 1960 by the establishment of the "Special Minority Commission (Azinliklar Taali Komisyonu)" with superseding powers of all executive, legislative and judicial authorities and whose members were primarily selected from the state security services until 2004. All the above violations happened, despite the fact that the Republic of Turkey endorsed the European Convention of Human Rights as early as 1954.

However a careful analysis of the above mentioned gross scale violations of Human Rights shows that in principle these have its origin of nation-state mentality considering any minority, some of them more, a potential threat to state security. Certainly anti-minority measures are the other side of the coin of anti-democratic state policies. Therefore the respect of minority rights should be considered as criteria of assessing the respect of democracy and more of human rights by a state.

Finally it is important to emphasize the vital importance of states to endorse the principles of the U.N. Resolution 60/147 on the Basic Principles and Guidelines on the Right to a Remedy and Reparation for Victims of Gross Violations of International Human Rights Law and Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law. The Greek-Orthodox Community of Istanbul, because of the above mentioned anti-minority measures, presently is living as an Expatriate Community to an extend 98% of its population and only 2% of members are living in Istanbul.

In conclusion, considering the severe depletion of the population of the Community because of the above-mentioned anti-minority measures, it is imperative that the Government of Republic of Turkey should expedite the proposed remedy and reparation measures towards the Greek-Orthodox Community of Istanbul. This requires a careful review and implementation of the proposals submitted by the EFC to the authorities of the Republic of Turkey, and a speeding up of the process to achieve concrete results.

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