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**PROCEEDINGS OF SIDE EVENT**

**Organized by**

**Ecumenical Federation of Constantinopolitans**

**"Effective Remedy Measures to prevent the disappearance of  
autochthonous Minorities in their native land: the case of the Greek  
Orthodox Minority of Istanbul"**

**9 October 2024, 14:30-15:30 –**

**Venue : Sofitel – Victoria Hotel -Meeting Room 3 – Krolewski**

**Summary:** In the context of Human Rights, a neglected issue is the remedy and reparations towards communities that have been subjected to violations of their rights. The U.N. General Assembly Resolution 60/147 on the “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”, incorporates the fundamental principles to alleviate the consequence of past injustices. The situation of minorities that faced in the past grave violations of their human and minority rights leading to their massive expatriation is a severe problem since in certain cases their very existence is endangered due to their population erosion to the degree that their biological continuation is in question. The case of the Greek-Orthodox Minority of Türkiye which was exempted from the infamous “Populations Exchange” of the Lausanne Treaty (1923) is a characteristic one. While this Minority has a population of 130.000 early 1960's today is less than 2.000

members. The most severe violations after 1950 were : (1) The mass scale Pogrom of 6-7 September 1955, (2) The massive deportation of the members of the Minority holding the Etablis status of Laussane Treaty, (3) During the years 1962-2004 under the coordination of the “Minority Special Committee”; implementation of a dismantling program of the Minority institutions such the schools, foundations etc including violations of their religious rights. Although after 2003 some of the past harmful measures were abolished the prime issue of the future of the Minority is uncertain. EFC has proposed several measures to face effectively this problem by the present Government of Türkiye such as necessity to support the repatriation of the young members of the expatriated Minority still positive responses are waited from Türkiye.

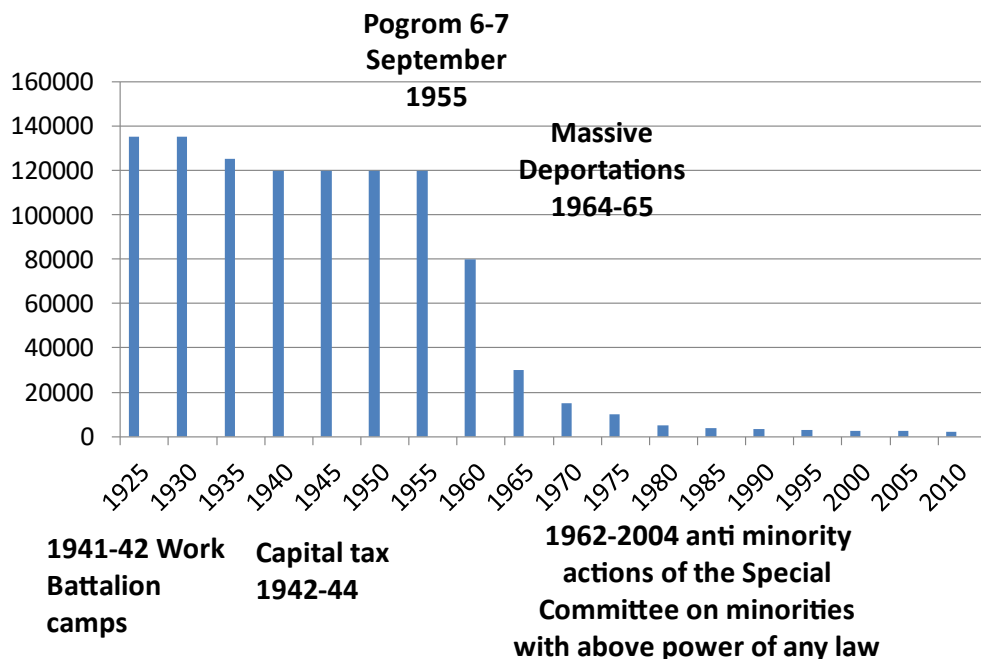
## Introduction – Historical Note

### *Nikolaos Ouzounoglou*

President of EFC

Ecumenical Federation of Constantinopolitans is the unifying association of the Greek – Orthodox Minority of Istanbul. This Minority together with the Greek-Orthodox communities of the two islands Gokceada-Imbros and Bozcaada- Tenedos were exempted from the infamous Exchange of Populations between Greece and Türkiye after the international Laussane Treaty which included a chapter on the protection of non-Muslim minorities in Türkiye. The total population of the Minority was 140.000 in total in the mentioned geographies. Unfortunately, throughout the years 1923-2003 the Minority rights were severely violated as shown in the following graph.

### The Greek-Orthodox Minority Population of Türkiye



Because of these violations, presently the Minority is an expatriate community to the extent 98% of the population ought to be living in Istanbul and the same is valid for the two mentioned islands.

During the last 20 years on several occasions top officials of Republic of Türkiye recognized the misdoings against the Minority. Recently of 27 May this year the President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on the tragic anniversary of the military takeover of an elected government of Türkiye in 1960 mentioned that the derailing of democracy in Türkiye started with pressing button with the Pogrom of 6-7 September 1955.

There is a fundamental issue: What is the meaning of asking respect of human rights by states if no remedy and reparations is not foreseen in case of violation takes place. This is most important if as result of violations the a Minority is in the edge of disappearance because of the banishment of their members due to a long time antiminority measures exercised against their members.

Moreover in case of our Minority the highly critical issue is if nothing will happen because of biology the present population of 1.000 persons with the 100 deaths and 4-5 births every year, its population will be 500 persons in 5 years and less than 100 persons in 10 years.

The question is whether this can be averted. As EFC we state this is possible provided at least even a small number of young members of the expatriated community is repatriated.

The efforts of EFC the last 15 years to achieve this by cultivating this idea towards different directions and especially through submission specific proposal to responsible authorities of Turkiye remained unanswered. To mention few of the proposals of EFC I like to mention:

- Acquiring citizenship to repatriate members of the Minority. Because of the gap of one generation and the systematic stripping of citizenship from Minority members and the strict law in obtaining citizenship at least one parent to hold the citizenship is a serious obstacle. It is impossible to work in Türkiye without citizenship.

- Supportive measures such as specific scholarship programs to attract youths of the Minority to study in Universities of Türkiye is very important.

- Equally important is the formulation and implementation of a support program for housing and job finding which should be supported by Republic of Türkiye.

- The largest and oldest Minority Foundation BALIKLI a Social and Hospital Institution has been administrated without elections and has been alienated from the Minority. Numerous applications of medical doctors holding citizenship and certificate remained unanswered.

- The proposal of EFC to establish research institutes with contribution of expatriate scientists in the fields of biomedical engineering, traffic accident prevention, teaching technologies remained also unanswered.

These are few examples of the efforts of EFC which have been pending in front of authorities of Republic of Türkiye.

**Reparations and Transitional Justice**  
**In the context of human and minority rights violations**

***Georgia Aimilia Voulgari***

***Lawyer***

In the context of Human Rights, an issue not properly highlighted is remedies and reparations towards communities, that have been subjected to violations of their rights; in particular of Minorities that have faced grave violations of their human and minority rights – except for physical extermination - that lead to their massive expatriation, to such a degree that their very existence in their native land is threatened.

**I. On Reparations**

The UN GA 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” may serve as a starting point. Drawing from the negotiating history of the Resolution, as presented by Theo van Boven, the Former Special Rapporteur for the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities that drafted the Resolution, two points are worth to be stressed:

- (a) the provisions of the Resolution do not affect the right to a remedy and reparation for victims of all violations of international human rights.
- (b) The notion of victim refers to an individual that has suffered physical or mental harm, economic loss, or impairment of fundamental human rights;

victims can be both, direct and indirect, such as family members or dependents of the direct victim; most important, it is recognized that persons can suffer harm individually or collectively.

In international law, reparations may be monetary and non-monetary. According to the legal typology of reparations, by line of precedent:

- Restitution, i.e. measures that restore the victim to their original situation, as it was before the violation of their rights took place; it includes, inter alia, return to their place of residence, restoration of employment and return of property.
- Compensation, i.e. monetary reparation for any economically assessable damage.
- Rehabilitation includes medical and psychological care, as well as legal and social services.
- Satisfaction includes a broad range of measures, from those aiming at the cessation of violations to truth seeking, public apologies, commemoration, and human rights training.
- Guarantees of non-repetition, comprise structural measures of a policy nature.

## **II. The concept of Transitional Justice**

In the context of remedies and reparations for violations of human and minority rights, the concept of Transitional Justice has emerged, as a dynamic concept, that evolves through new research, jurisprudence, international treaties, domestic policies and good practices.

The five pillars of transitional justice are:

- (a) TRUTH – promotion of truth and memory about past violations
- (b) JUSTICE

(c) REPARATIONS – remedies to victims

(d) GUARANTEES OF NON-REPETITION – reform of the national institutional and legal framework and promotion of the rule of law in accordance with international human rights law; restoration of confidence in the institutions of the State

(e) MEMORY – ensure that current and future generations are informed about past human rights violations

“The 5 pillars do not represent an “a la carte” menu”, to quote the former UN Special Rapporteur, Fabian Salvioli; all five have to be observed, to implement a comprehensive approach, as stressed in the UN Resolution HRC/RES/45/10. Therefore, the full and effective participation of victims is required. Monetary compensation, alone, is not enough; positive measures for restitution are the most effective tool.

Focusing on transitional justice, drawing from a recent Report (A/HRC/57/50, 15.07.2024) on Transversal transitional justice issues, of the newly appointed Special Rapporteur on the promotion of truth, justice, reparation and guarantees of non-recurrence, Bernard Duhaime, we feel that we should focus on four (4) issues, that are relevant to the subject of this side event:

#### 1. Documentation

In order to map, collect and preserve past violations, it is indicated to

- gather testimonies from victims and witnesses;
- have access to and preserve official records documenting the violations.
- support civil society initiatives in the field.

Documentation is not required only as part of history, but it serves as a guarantee of non-recurrence, as well.



## 2. Transdisciplinary approach

A transdisciplinary approach is required for transitional justice to be effective; drawing on disciplines e.g. of law, policy, demography, gender studies, journalism, education, culture, political economy, social sciences, the arts and humanities, provides a holistic approach, capable of generating social and policy change, therefore better fulfil the aspirations of transitional justice

## 3. Economic, social and cultural rights

They are recognized by international law as universal and essential to the inherent dignity of every person. However, historically, transitional justice mechanisms have focused on abuses of civil and political rights.

The importance of economic, social and cultural rights should be neither undermined nor neglected; their violation often lies in the roots of broader violations of human and minority rights.

In the case of the Greek Orthodox Minority of Istanbul, Gokceada / Imbros and Bozcaada / Tenedos, a number and variety of measures that had been adopted by the Republic of Turkiye from 1955 until 2004, harming the economic, social and cultural rights of its members, have forced a significant number of its members to leave their native land, a fact that caused the situation that the Minority faces today.

## 4. Transgenerational perspective

The integration of a transgenerational perspective into transitional justice policies and mechanisms is important.

First, it is an acknowledgement of the significance of the intergenerational trauma.

Most important, the integration of youth – centered approaches to transitional justice and restitution to new generations, has a double positive effect:

(a) it restores the dignity of victims for past harm done and

(b) it shapes a culture of inclusivity, that eliminates discrimination, racism and hatred; it is one of the guarantees for non-recurrence.

### **III. The case of the Greek Orthodox Minority of Istanbul, Gokceada / Imbros and Bozcaada / Tenedos**

A severe violation of minority rights undeniably, in our view, includes a minority's cultural extermination and its forced disappearance from its native land.

The Greek Orthodox Minority of Istanbul, Gokceada / Imbros and Bozcaada / Tenedos is presently expatriated at a percentage of 98%. To prevent its complete disappearance from its native land, where the Minority thrived for centuries and developed a unique civilization, positive measures need to be taken, in the form of reparations and / or in the context of transitional justice.

Since 2004 the Government of the Republic of Turkiye has changed noticeably the attitude towards non-Muslims; it recognized, in numerous occasions, past abuses of the Minority's rights and the violations of its members' rights and opened a dialogue with the majority of the representation of the expatriate Minority. This is a significant first step in the context of transitional justice.

However, transitional justice requires positive measures. The Ecumenical Federation of Constantinopolitans through the work of volunteers, has done a lot of background work. EFC, for the past fifteen (15) years EFC has

been submitting reports to the Government of the Republic of Türkiye, proposing specific measures that have to be taken to prevent the Minority's complete eradication from its native land.

Taking into account our proposals is in line with internationally recognized good practices, according to which, victims and civil society organizations should have a meaningful role in the design, implementation and monitoring of positive measures.

To conclude, reparations in the form of Restitution, require the restoration of the victims' rights. Reparative measures should be designed to assist those who have been affected by past harms. This indicates the direct and indirect victims, individually and collectively, as members of the Minority. Reparative measures should be granted to the direct victims and to their direct descendants (children and grand-children), i.e. to minority members expelled, deported or otherwise forced to abandon their lives - well-established in their native land, the land of their ancestors- as well as their proper ties. Repatriation and positive measures to facilitate repatriation is the closest measure to restitution, in the case of the G.O.M. of Istanbul, Gokceada / Imbros and Bozcaada / Tenedos.

Our aim today is to raise awareness on the pressing and significant issue that the G.O.M. of Istanbul, Imbros and Tenedos faces and – most significant – to ask for the adoption of effective, positive measures to prevent its imminent disappearance from its native land. We invite the authorities of the R.T. to take into account the above recommendations, to consider the proposals that EFC have been submitting for the past 15 years and to take necessary action to prevent the G.O.M of Istanbul, Gokceada / Imbros and Bozcaada / Tenedos from being extinguished

**Minority Institutions, Legal Issues, and Struggle for Rights in Türkiye:  
The Case of the Balıklı Greek Hospital Foundation**

***Seda Alçınar***

***(Lawyer, Istanbul, Türkiye)***

**Introduction: The Lausanne Treaty and the Granting of Minority Status**

The Lausanne Treaty, signed on July 24, 1923, officially concluded the military conflict between the former Ottoman Empire and the Allied forces. The treaty established Türkiye as an internationally-recognized independent state and drew the boundaries of the modern Turkish Republic founded in October 1923. The Lausanne Treaty also addressed the status of various ethnic and religious minorities within the borders of the new Turkish state and therefore marked a significant turning point in the history of non-Muslim populations in this country. The modern Turkish Republic emerged as the main successor of the Ottoman Empire and non-Muslim populations within the boundaries of Türkiye became minorities living under the rule of a newly founded nation-state. As a result of the Lausanne Treaty, the Turkish state officially acknowledged its non-Muslim populations, including the Orthodox Greeks, Armenians, and Jews, as minorities under government protection. For the first time in Ottoman-Turkish history, certain communities were officially categorized as minority (*azınlık* in Turkish).

The Lausanne Treaty clearly established that the new Turkish state recognize these populations as minorities and promise to protect their rights. Particularly, the related part of the treaty, namely from Article 37 to Article 45, provided for the protection of non-Muslim minorities, stipulating that they practice their religions freely, manage communal affairs through their traditional institutions (including religious

establishments and schools), and maintain their cultural identities in a predominantly Muslim environment.

### **The Realities of Turkish Nationalism and Nation-Formation: Challenges, Obstacles, and Discrimination Faced by the Minorities of Türkiye**

At a time when the nation-state dominated the political imagination and sought to homogenize differences, the granting of a minority status and rights was a significant development for non-Muslim communities in Türkiye. On paper, non-Muslim minorities, including the Greeks, enjoy an autonomous legal status granted by the Turkish government in accordance with the Lausanne Treaty. However, the practical implementation of the treaty's articles regarding the minority question frequently did not align with these ideals. The new Turkish state's policies that emphasized a homogeneous national identity were incompatible with ideals of pluralism and inclusion. Since the 1920s, the realities of Turkish state policies have often undermined the rights of minority groups. Historically, mainstream Turkish politicians, particularly nationalist circles, government officials, and media have often viewed non-Muslim minorities with suspicion.

Consequently, the legacy of the Lausanne Treaty and the related law and regulations has been marked by contradictions, double standards, and ambiguities in government policies. Despite the formal recognition of their rights by the Turkish government, these communities faced discrimination, restrictions on their cultural expressions, and significant challenges in maintaining their languages and traditions. The administration of minority institutions, including churches, schools, and foundations, faced bureaucratic obstacles, restrictions, and delays. Although the minority rights guaranteed by the Lausanne Treaty formally

granted these communities a relative autonomous status, the minority institutions have been subjected to strict government control, which has often been accompanied by arbitrary actions, treatments, and interventions on the part of Turkish government agencies and judicial authorities.

### **The Greeks of Türkiye: A Declining Minority**

The Greek minority in Türkiye has seen a significant decline in population over the decades. Today, estimates suggest that only about 2,000 to 3,000 Greeks remain in Türkiye. Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, systematic discrimination, economic hardships, and fear of violence prompted many Greeks to emigrate. Economic hardships were caused by high taxes, property confiscations, and restrictions on business operations. For example, the Wealth Tax of 1942 mainly targeted non-Muslims, including Greeks, leading to financial ruin and the confiscation of assets. Additionally, events like the Istanbul pogrom in 1955 caused fear, leading to further emigration. Moreover, in 1964, the Turkish government issued a series of decrees that targeted the Greeks of Istanbul holding the citizenship of Greece. Many Greeks were subjected to arbitrary arrests, deportations, and expulsion from the country. In subsequent years, many more Greeks left Türkiye.

Greeks in Türkiye have also encountered significant bureaucratic hurdles when attempting to practice their religion or maintain their cultural identity. The state imposes strict regulations on religious institutions, including limitations on the operation of churches. For example, the Halki Seminary, formally known as the Theological School of Halki located on the island of Heybeliada near Istanbul, was closed by the government in 1971 on the ground of new regulations on higher education. The closure

of the Seminary has limited the community's capacity to train clergy for the Greek Orthodox Church and sustain its religious practices. Efforts have been made to reopen the seminary, but it remains closed.

In recent years, specifically in the 2000s, there have been some signs of progress regarding the rights of minorities in Türkiye. The government has occasionally taken steps to improve their situation. For example, a regulation in 2008 allowed for the return of all properties confiscated by the government from minority foundations. However, these reforms have remained limited and inconsistent, and many foundations still face significant challenges in reclaiming lost properties or obtaining permits for new activities.

As a result, since the 1923, the implementation of the articles of the Lausanne Treaty concerning minorities and the related laws was inadequate to protect minorities and to make sure that the representatives of minority communities, including the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Istanbul and Greek foundations, operate their institutions without arbitrary interventions and legal barriers.

### **The Case of the Balıklı Greek Hospital Foundation: Minority Institutions and Legal/Bureaucratic Obstacles in Türkiye**

Indeed, the religious and secular institutions of the Greek minority in Türkiye often encounter obstacles in registering their organizations, building new places, electing their members of boards, or conducting business. This has led to a decline in the operational capacity of these institutions. The Balıklı Greek Hospital Foundation is a clear case of how bureaucratic obstacles and arbitrary judicial interventions affected the operations of a minority institution and how discrimination against

minorities in Türkiye work at the highest levels of bureaucracy and judiciary.

Founded by the Ottoman Greeks of Istanbul in 1794, the Balıklı Greek Hospital is a health care institution located in Zeytinburnu, Istanbul. As a Greek communal property, the hospital is administrated by the Balıklı Greek Hospital Foundation. The Foundation was created by members of Istanbul's Greek community for the purpose of managing this health institution. From its inception, the Balıklı Greek Hospital Foundation must be managed by members of the Greek community of Türkiye.

The foundation's Board of Directors was last elected in 1991, and since then, community members have been unable to hold board elections because of bureaucratic hurdles. The main reason for this is that after the relevant regulation was repealed in 2008, no new regulation was introduced. Due to this legal gap, a minority foundation cannot operate effectively.

Until 2014, various applications made by community members to the Turkish General Directorate of Foundations did not yield results. In 2014, five of the foundation's natural members filed a lawsuit against the Turkish General Directorate of Foundations, seeking legal avenues for the election of a new board. Community members indicated that legal obstacles prevented elections that should have taken place in 2004, 2008, and 2021, and requested the court to use its authority to determine the election date and procedure. In its defense at the court, the General Directorate of Foundations stated that board elections could not be held until a new regulation was prepared. In response, the court rejected the case in 2015, stating that although there was a legal provision requiring the election of board members to be determined by a regulation, there was currently no



regulation in place. The Supreme Court (Yargıtay) upheld this ruling, finalizing the decision of the lower court. Subsequently, in 2019, the foundation members filed an individual application to the Constitutional Court, citing violations of freedom of religion and conscience, property rights, and the freedom to organize. The Constitutional Court, as Türkiye's highest court, examined the application and decided in December 2023 that the application was admissible, and that the applicants' "freedom of organization" had been violated. It also ruled that each applicant should be compensated 10,000,- Turkish Liras in non-pecuniary damages (approximately 250,- Euros).

This decision is significant as it was made against the bureaucratic obstacles faced by minority institutions in Türkiye. According to the reasoning of the decision, the state's failure to make the necessary regulatory arrangements and the prolonged nature of complaints in this regard made it impossible to access the rights conferred by the freedom to organize. As a result, the Constitutional Court concluded that the Turkish state did not take the necessary steps for the applicants to effectively enjoy their right to act collectively within the foundation. According to the court, the state bureaucracy did not fulfill its positive obligations.

Furthermore, the Constitutional Court did not see the need for a retrial and expressed that the regulation made in 2022 could rectify the deficiencies. After the Constitutional Court's decision, community members again applied to the General Directorate of Foundations but received a response stating that elections could not be held since no decree had yet been issued on this matter. In summary, the legal situation has reverted to that of 2014.

The Constitutional Court's decision clearly indicated the necessity for minority foundation members to hold elections for representation within their foundations and provided guidance on the state's obligations in this regard. However, the legal gap persists. Due to these bureaucratic obstacles and legal gaps, the property and organizational rights of the Greek community members have been violated for 33 years. The return to the starting point in the foundation members' decade-long struggle for rights indicates that there is no effective legal recourse. The continuous management of the foundation, hospitals, and foundation properties by the same administration for 33 years has eradicated the right of other members to be represented.

Ensuring that minorities can democratically manage their own foundations and properties is a positive obligation placed on the Turkish state. Foundations are not ordinary legal entities. Especially minority foundations play a crucial role in managing valuable properties and institutions of vital importance, such as schools, churches, and hospitals. Being managed by the same individuals for 33 consecutive years, with no new elections held even to replace deceased managers, is undoubtedly a form of abuse. This case demonstrates that the government and judiciary have remained indifferent to the effective functioning of minority institutions and the legal pursuits of minority communities. It is also significant for understanding the perspective of the judiciary and state institutions toward minority foundations and, consequently, toward minorities in Türkiye.

This situation—that is, the Greek minority's rights of property, organization, and expression are restricted—also directly affects other fundamental rights such as housing, health, and education. The judiciary's

ineffective rulings over the past decade regarding the state's responsibilities in this matter only serve to delay the rights-seeking members.

When discussing this case, it is also necessary to answer the question, "What is the role of the Constitutional Court in Türkiye?" In recent years, first-instance courts in Türkiye have unlawfully disregarded the decisions of the Constitutional Court, the country's highest judicial institution (for example Can Atalay Case), and the binding decisions of the European Court of Human Rights (for example Selahaddin Demirtaş Case), showing resistance to their own rulings bolstered by political support from those in power. Considering this situation, it would be naive to expect even a Constitutional Court decision to yield effective results for the claimants and the communities they represent. Indeed, the General Directorate of Foundations has still not taken the necessary steps regarding the case involving the Balıklı Greek Hospital Foundation. In summary, while the Constitutional Court decision imposes positive obligations on the administration, the implementation of the decision has been obstructed by administrative barriers, and ultimately, politicized bureaucracy has prevailed over the judiciary.

### **Conclusion**

As a result, the Greeks of Türkiye are a very small community now and they have limited access to political participation and representation in local and national government. The absence of political advocacy and meaningful representation worsens their marginalization. Yet the community struggles to have its voice heard on issues affecting their rights and interests in contemporary Türkiye. The legal struggle for the Balıklı Greek Hospital Foundation is a clear example of the community's efforts

to defend their rights, institutions, and culture in an unfavorable political atmosphere dominated by nationalist politics and sentiments. The need for domestic and international advocacy is critical for minority institutions to enhance their effectiveness and secure their rights.

## **The Greek Minority of Imvros (Gokceada) and Tenedos (Bozcaada):**

### **A brief overview**

***Nefeli Papatheodorou***

Ladies and Gentlemen,

My name is Nefeli Papatheodorou and I am a member of Imvrian Association of Athens, an NGO in special consultative status with United Nations Organisation (UNO) since 2016. Our Association consists of members of the expatriate Greek population of Imvros (*İmroz* in Turkish renamed Gökçeada since 1970), an island of the Aegean Sea which, along with the island of Tenedos (Bozcaada), was ceded to Türkiye under the Treaty of Lausanne of 1923 although both islands were inhabited almost exclusively by Greeks.

Article 14 of the Lausanne Treaty provided for a special self-administration status of the indigenous Greek population and guaranteed property rights and safety of persons. That system, however, was never applied while, in 1927, education in Greek language was abolished and all Greek community properties passed under state ownership by virtue of Turkish law no. 1151.

After a short interval of 15 years (1951-1964), during which the prohibition of Greek education was lifted and while the two islands continued to be inhabited almost exclusively by Greeks, almost the whole of the indigenous population was obliged to depart during the 1960's-1970's due to the policies implemented by the Turkish authorities at that time, including the following:

- forced closure of Greek schools

- expropriation of almost all the cultivable land at nominal compensations
- establishment of an open prison next to Schinoudi (Dereköy), the biggest village of Imvros, whose convicts spread terror committing murders, rapes and thefts
- prohibition of export of livestock from the island
- prohibition of fishing and sponge diving
- alteration of the population's composition by way of transfer of thousands of Muslim settlers from the mainland and their establishment at the expropriated land
- renaming the Greek origin name of the island from İmroz to Gökçeada
- qualification of the island of Imvros as a military zone with restricted access to all previous inhabitants.

All the above measures made part of a project implemented by the Turkish government bearing the name "Eritme Programı" ("Dissolution Program"), which was aimed at the deprivation of all economic resources from the local population, its intimidation and eventual departure from its native land.

As a matter of fact and as a result of the above policies that were implemented from the 1960's until the late 1980's, the Greek population of Imvros was reduced from 6,500 to a mere 200, while the Muslim population was raised from 200 to more than 8,000! The Greek population of the island of Tenedos does not exceed a dozen people today!

Following the improvement of relations between Greece and Türkiye during the 1990's, a first number of Imvrians started to visit the island

occasionally and gradually restore their houses and revive their religious rituals and feasts, followed by hundreds of others over the years. Thus, at the time the accession negotiations started in 2004 between the EU and Türkiye, there are many expatriate Greeks who wish to return to their native land demanding restoration of the injustices of the past and full respect of their minority and individual rights.

Our Association played a key role in making the public opinion aware, within Europe and also in Türkiye, of the severe violations of human rights suffered in the past and of the willingness of the Greek expatriates to return to their homeland and form a bridge of peace, friendship, tolerance and mutual understanding between the peoples of Greece and Türkiye, based upon the principles of the rule of law and equal treatment. These efforts have resulted in the establishment of the Greek minority of Imvros and Tenedos as a benchmark, in respect of the compliance of Türkiye with the European standards concerning the respect of human and minority rights. All annual reports of the European Commission on Türkiye and the respective resolutions of the European Parliament, as well as several other reports and documents of international organisations, include references and recommendations in respect of the situation of our minority.

The most important instrument so far is Resolution no. 1625 (2008) of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe bearing the title “Gökçeada (Imbros) and Bozcaada (Tenedos): preserving the bicultural character of the two Turkish islands as a model for co-operation between Türkiye and Greece in the interest of the people concerned”, which was also endorsed by Turkish MP’s. This Resolution constitutes the roadmap to the survival of the Greek population and culture of the two islands. The recommendations of the Council of Europe related to problems

encountered by the entire Greek Orthodox community of Türkiye, in Imvros, Tenedos and Istanbul, as well as to the special condition of the two islands, -i.e.:

- The reopening of a Greek school on Imvros
- Return of expropriated land
- Return of confiscated Community properties
- Restitution of “seized” («mazbut») non-Muslim foundations
- Return of individual properties passed to the ownership of the State through the new Land Registry recordation process
- Restitution of the right to inherit to Greek and other non-Turkish citizens
- Restitution of Turkish citizenship to those who lost it and to their descendants
- Restitution and preservation of the natural and cultural wealth of Imvros and Tenedos
- Improvement of basic infrastructures and living conditions
- Direct link, by sea, of Imvros with Tenedos and of the two islands with Greece, taking also into account the viability of the two local economies.

As a result of these initiatives, a Greek minority school has re-opened on Imvros since 2013, several people have taken back the Turkish citizenship, the Greek population has risen to more than 500 people and new births have been recorded on the island after decades.

These positive developments gave way to a repatriation process that lasts for two decades now but is not without problems. The main obstacles concern mostly the restitution of property rights and return or acquisition of Turkish citizenship. Non-Turkish citizens encounter difficulties for



finding jobs, they may not be elected in local administration or local associations, and they may still not inherit the houses and land of their parents despite several judgments of the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) which considered this as a severe violation of human rights. The Greek villages of Imvros are threatened by recent decrees that allow construction of modern buildings causing an imminent threat to the preservation of their traditional architecture and unique characteristics. Moreover, a series of hate crimes have recently been targeting the Greek population, including His All Holiness the Ecumenical Patriarch Mr. Bartholomew who also originates from Imvros. Certain Turkish newspapers and sites have been publishing false news and conspiracy theories, unleashing a new wave of hatred against Greece and Turkish citizens of ethnic Greek descent.

We urge the Turkish authorities and the Turkish society but also the international organisations concerned, including the UNO and the OSCE, to continue to support the strive of the Greek Community of Imvros and Tenedos, as well as those of the Greek Community of Istanbul, for their survival and for the preservation of their cultural identity. Both Türkiye and the World Community could only benefit from keeping this success story alive and viable for the next generations.

Thank you for your attention!