

Ecumenical Federation of Constantinopolitans

U.N. 16'th session of the Forum on Minority Issues

Geneva, 30 November- 1 December 2023

Item 3: Legal and Structural Approaches to More Inclusive Societies

The Ecumenical Federation of Constantinopolitans (EFECON) is the all-world union of the Greek-Orthodox community of Istanbul whose international status was recognized by the Lausanne Treaty of 1923 when its population was 125.000 members constituting 20% of the population of Istanbul. Today this population is less than 2.000 people, predominantly elderly people while the population of Istanbul is 16 million. This enormous population depletion took place during the period of 1955-2003 due to the severe and continuous violations of the Minority rights leading to massive expatriation. It is noteworthy to mention the two most serious violations. Firstly the global scale Pogrom of 6-7/9/1955 and secondly the mass scale deportation of Minority members during the period of 1964-66.

Furthermore, a system of legal and structural exclusion mechanisms set in place by the Special Minority Commission of the Government of Türkiye, after its establishment by the Prime Minister's office in 1962 and continued its operations until 2004 when the present Government of the Republic of Türkiye dissolved it. This Commission had superseding powers above legislative, juridical, and even executive authorities. The exclusion mechanisms were based on the ideological concept that non-Muslim minorities are "foreign citizens" of the country. In 1974 the ruling of the Higher Appellate Court for the mass scale confiscation of the minority welfare foundation real estate properties was based on this argument.

The only way to prevent the complete banishment of the Greek-Orthodox minority of Istanbul is to take legal and structural measures to support the repatriation of young members of the expatriated minority. The prime responsibility here falls on the shoulders of Türkiye. This could be achieved through inclusive legislatives and structural reforms. EFECON during the last 13 years has submitted specific proposals to the authorities of Türkiye along this direction.

EFECON asks from the Republic of Türkiye to support urgently the REPATRIATION PROGRAM which was submitted several times during the past 10 years.