

**Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
Human Dimension Implementation Meeting 2019**

**Working session 12: Tolerance and non-discrimination II, including address by the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities: – Rights of persons belonging to national minorities
Contribution of Ecumenical Federation of Constantinopolitans (EFC)
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The severe violations which took place against the Greek Orthodox Community of Istanbul during the years 1923-2003 have been well documented and presented on several meetings of U.N. Minority Forums, Human Rights Meetings and other international organizations. The most visible consequence of these anti-minority measures against the Greek-Orthodox Minority of Istanbul, is the fact that 98% of the population of this Community is presently living under expatriated conditions in various countries. The present Government of Turkey being in power from 2003, on several occasions recognised the unjust acts of the past against the Community. In April 2018 the President Republic of Turkey Mr. Recep Tayyip Erdogan in a nationwide TV interview mentioned this issue by saying that: "...there were thousands, I say hundred thousand Greek-Orthodox (Rum) in our country. They were forced to emigrate because of mistakes, and this was a pity". Also, for the first time the government of the Republic of Turkey provided a donation to Social Solidarity Programme of EFC supporting expatriated Community.

The very existence of the Greek Orthodox Community in its homeland depends on the reversal of the population depletion of the Community living inside Istanbul. This could only be achieved by repatriation of younger people from the Community, from abroad. In this process the support of the Welfare Foundations of the Community is crucial, taking into account that these are the only legal bodies which have any recognition status for the minority Community. Despite this and the well defines clause of Lausanne Treaty stating that the minorities will administer their own welfare foundations, effective 2013 the General Directorate of Welfare Foundation (G.D.W.F.) by claiming the need of revision of election regulations, effectively prohibited the elections of members of the administration boards in the minority welfare foundations. This situation is causing severe problems in the administration of the Foundations. This fact that has been raised many times with the authorities of the Republic of Turkey. Furthermore, on 13 March 2019 the G.D.W.F. through a circular encouraged the administration of minority welfare foundations to appoint themselves members in the administration board in case of absences. This measure prolongs the serious drawbacks caused by the prohibition of elections to the Minority Welfare Foundations and above all is in full contradiction with the laws of the Republic of Turkey as well as the Lausanne Treaty. It should be emphasized that the most important Greek-Orthodox Foundation the Balikli Hospital and Elderly Care Foundation has not held any elections for the last 30 years.

Considering the above facts, the Republic of Turkey is urgently called upon to take all necessary legal and administrative measures for elections to be carried out in the Minority Welfare Foundations respecting in full the democratic principles.