

---

**Freedom of religion and other human rights for non-Muslim minorities in Turkey**

**Doc. 10714**

6 October 2005

**Motion for a resolution**

presented by M. Pourgourides and others

*This motion has not been discussed in the Assembly and commits only the members who have signed it*

---

1. Turkey is predominantly Muslim, but it also has ancient Christian and Jewish minorities, which have benefited over centuries from an atmosphere of religious tolerance. The Christian communities include Armenian, Greek and Syrian Orthodox, Armenian and Syrian Catholics and members of various protestant denominations.

2. The exact numbers of these religious minorities can only be estimated, as there has been no census data since 1965, when about 200 000 Christians and 45 000 Jews lived in Turkey. The number of Christians and Jews is likely to have dwindled since the 1960s.

3. Whilst Turkey is officially a secular state, the practical conditions for the exercise of religious rights and other freedoms and traditions for non-Muslims are still very harsh.

4. The Greek Orthodox Church's Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, located in the Fener quarter of Istanbul, is the central church authority for Greek Orthodox Christians in most of Europe and beyond. Because the Patriarch's authority extends to all Orthodox believers outside Greece and the Middle East, he is considered the honorary head of the Church for communities of Orthodox Christians living in the United States, Canada, Latin America, Australia and New Zealand.

5. The Assembly is worried about the lack of recognition of the ecumenical role of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, which the Turkish State merely considers as the spiritual leader of less than 20 000 Greek Orthodox Christians still residing in this country. In particular, it considers as unacceptable the requirement of Turkish nationality for the Patriarch of Constantinople, which has always been, over many centuries, a most cosmopolitan spiritual leader.

6. The Assembly is also concerned about property expropriation and obstacles to ownership and repair of churches, and about the respect of property rights of the members of non-Muslim religious groups. The Government seizes property that has fallen into disuse, sometimes after years of placing practical obstacles in the path of the use of church property. Lack of legal recognition by the authorities threatens 1 100 of the remaining 1 700 patriarch-owned properties, which still numbered 8 000 in 1936.

7. Finally, it is outraged at the continued closure, since its seizure in 1971, of the Halki seminary, which is the only educational institution in Turkey for Orthodox Christian leadership, and which has a deleterious effect on the ability of Turkey's Greek Orthodox citizens to train the next generation of clergy.

8. Turkey has a proud history of religious tolerance, but current government policies appear targeted to bring about the eventual exodus of the Greek Orthodox under other religious minorities from Turkey entirely.

9. Such policies threaten the viability of the Patriarch's presence in Istanbul, and violate Turkey's commitments under the Statute of the Council of Europe and the European Convention on Human Rights.

*Signed* <sup>[1]</sup>:

POURGOURIDES, Christos, Cyprus, EPP/CD  
BARTUMEU CASSANY, Jaume, Andorra, SOC  
BATET, Meritxell, Spain, SOC  
BEMELMANS-VIDEC, Marie-Louise, Netherlands, EPP/CD  
BINDIG, Rudolf, Germany, SOC  
CHRISTODOULIDES, Doros, Cyprus, UEL  
CILEVICS, Boriss, Latvia, SOC  
de PUIG, Lluís Maria, Spain, SOC  
EINARSSON, Mats, Sweden, UEL  
ELO, Mikko, Finland, SOC  
GARDETTO, Jean-Charles, Monaco, EPP/CD  
GLESENER, Marcel, Luxembourg, EPP/CD  
GORIS, Stef, Belgium, ALDE  
GREBENNIKOV, Valery, Russia, EDG  
GROSS, Andreas, Switzerland, SOC  
GUBERT, Renzo, Italy, EPP/CD  
HOLOVATY, Serhiy, Ukraine, ALDE  
KASTENS, Oskars, Latvia, EPP/CD  
LLOYD, Tony, United Kingdom, SOC  
MEALE, Alan, United Kingdom, SOC  
ORMONDE, Ann, Ireland, ALDE  
PAPADIMITRIOU, Elsa, Greece, EPP/CD  
PRENTICE, Gordon, United Kingdom, SOC  
PROVERA, Fiorello, Italy, ALDE  
RUSTAMYAN, Armen, Armenia, SOC  
SEVERIN, Adrian, Romania, SOC  
SPINDELEGGER, Michael, Austria, EPP/CD  
TOROSYAN, Tigran, Armenia, EDG  
VARVITSIOTIS, Miltiadis, Greece, EPP/CD  
WIELOWIEYSKI, Andrzej, Poland, EPP/CD

---

[1] SOC Socialist Group  
EPP/CD Group of the European People's Party  
ALDE Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe  
EDG European Democratic Group  
UEL Group of the Unified European Left  
NR not registered in a group