Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies

“Trapped” in “Enemy Territory” or Pilots Towards Regional Integration? A Challenge for Democracy in the South - Eastern Mediterranean Region

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RSC No. 2001/ 19

MEDITERRANEAN PROGRAMME SERIES

EUI WORKING PAPERS

EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTE

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Printed in Italy in June 2001
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Mediterranean Programme

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The Mediterranean Programme has received generous financial support for Socio-Political Studies from three major institutions who have guaranteed their support for four years: ENI S.p.A, Ente Cassa di Risparmio di Firenze, and Mediocredito Centrale. The European Investment Bank, Compagnia di San Paolo and Monte dei Paschi di Siena have offered generous financial support for four years for studies in Political Economy which will be launched in Spring 2000. In addition, a number of grants and fellowships for nationals of the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean countries have been made available by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (for doctoral students) and the City of Florence (Giorgio La Pira Fellowship for post-doctoral fellows).

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INTRODUCTION

Ethnic diversity within Eastern Mediterranean nation states has almost always been considered as an embarrassment or/and a potential conflict cause in the eyes of their ruling elite.

In fact, after the final dismantling of the multinational and multicultural Ottoman Empire at the end of the first World War, most of the countries that emerged or just territorially benefited from its defeat, underwent similar nation building processes, focusing on the creation of ethnically homogenous unicultural nation-states.

Consequently, the elaborate international system of protection for ethnic and/or cultural minorities, designed under the aegis of the newly established League of Nations, was viewed with suspicion by most of these countries[1]. The general tendency in Europe in favour of the "nation-state" model[2] after the collapse of the most important multinational entities and the way the minority protection system was imposed by the victorious great powers, contributed to make it particularly unpopular amongst governments and in the public opinion.

Furthermore, excessive sanctification of nationhood and patriotic myths as a way to construct a common ethnic identity for all the populations living in their interior, often served to legitimise authoritarian schemes in government, party structure or national administration. It equally favoured the development of revisionist attitudes, transforming same ethnicity communities outside national borders into "enslaved brothers" and minority communities inside national territory into potential traitors/excuses for foreign intervention in the countries' domestic affairs.

World War II and the end of the interwar world order, brought a legal end to almost all these minority protection obligations binding nation states in the framework of the League of Nations international system.

However, the passing of some of the South Eastern Mediterranean countries under communist rule and the popularity of internationalist ideologies in some of the newly emerged or already existing states of the region, did not bring significant changes to the way minority communities were viewed by respective national authorities.

And even though, nowadays, democratic governance and protection of Human Rights officially figure amongst the main political guidelines of the

prominent powers and international organisations of the "new world order", neither the European integration process nor the general tendency in favour of multiculturalism has succeeded in eradicating completely nationalistic minded policies and national homogenisation objectives from the agendas of the regions' governments and political parties.

The respective attitude of Greece and Turkey, two of the most rival countries of the Eastern Mediterranean framework, towards the minority ethnic/cultural communities remaining in their territory after the 1923 mutual exchange of populations, does not constitute an exception to the above.

In the following pages, we will try to examine the links between democratic consolidation and regional integration on the one hand and the Muslim minority of Western Thrace/ the Greek-Orthodox minority of Istanbul on the other, in the context of the two countries' often conflictual relations and their common current European orientation.

A COMMON ITINERARY

A Common Background

Tension, or even conflict, has never been absent from Greek-Turkish bilateral relations.

In fact, even though the two countries have not been at war with each other since the signature of the 1923 Lausanne Treaty, the nation building model followed by their respective governing elite was highly instrumental – along with a number of other factors – in contributing to the installation of a quasi constant "cold war" political climate between the two borders of the Aegean Sea[3].

The consequences of the way both nationhood and the neighbouring country were perceived in Ankara and Athens are particularly important, not only for the populations living in the "wrong side of the border", but equally for the progress of democratic evolution in the interior of the two states .

Greece and Turkey were profoundly transformed after the first World War and their bitter 1920-22 conflict which sealed the collapse of their respective aspirations to regional hegemony.

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In both Ankara and Athens, consolidating national cohesion by redesigning its intellectual foundations in the light of regional and international realities became a major priority.

In both countries, long periods of authoritarian or even military government have been justified by local elite and foreign allies as an unfortunate necessity, in order to "safeguard national unity" and "protect" the nation from internal and external "ideological or territorial threats".

And in both states, the vast exchange of populations[4] that followed the conflict was believed to be the wisest way to guarantee reciprocal respect of frontiers and national homogeneity in their interior[5].

In fact, it was the presence of these "brother" populations that has always constituted the main argument of the "revisionist" ambitions, reappearing after the end of each one of the numerous wars that followed the establishment of an independent Hellenic state in the south of the Balkan peninsula.

The Greek-Orthodox community of Istanbul and the Muslim community of Western Thrace were, for various reasons[6], the only ones to escape from this exchange of populations, which remains until today an open trauma for those brutally obliged to abandon a still cherished way of life, along with their centuries old homes, towns and villages in Crete, Asia Minor, Macedonia and Eastern Thrace, or the islands of the Aegean.

Their energetic adherence to the "mother land's cause[7] (despite the attitude of discretion accompanied by regular manifestations of loyalty, which traditionally governed their relations with the "infidel" authority), was not without long lasting and multiple consequences for inter-community relations and democracy in Greece and Turkey respectively.

A Religion-based Organisation

The socio-economic situation of these minorities and the respective "strategic importance" they have for Greek and Turkish decision-makers in the context of the difficult relations between the two countries, was and remains quite different.

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Nevertheless and notwithstanding the significant differences of their respective socio-economic characteristics, both communities have in common an internal organisation and mentality highly marked by the religion based Ottoman "millet" system.

Cosmopolitan and quite wealthy in the past, the Greek-Orthodox minority of the former imperial capital, which is still counting a number of intellectuals, industrialists and merchants among its members, is a community mainly organised around its religious institutions.

In fact, as the titular head of Eastern Orthodox Christianity, the community's supreme religious leader occupied a prominent position in the Ottoman administration and was vested with an extended temporary authority over all the Orthodox and a number of the other Christian subjects of the Sultan.

Today, the "Ecumenical patriarch" remains the incontestable leader of the minority, whilst the impressive amount of the church's activities outside Turkey earned the institution an important international prestige.

For most of the Istanbuliot Greeks, Orthodoxy is one of the basic constituents of their ethnic/cultural identity, along with their consciousness that they form an integral and even quite important, part of the Hellenic nation, the later conceived through a rather glorifying version of its history.

For the Western Thracian Muslim minority, mainly composed of farmers, tobacco merchants and recently, of an urban middle class, religion constitutes one of the basic elements of community conscience.

In fact, the lack of linguistic and ethnic homogeneity inside this community, despite the predominance of the Turkish language among its members and the efforts to construct a common Turkish identity, is counterbalanced by a strong feeling of adherence to Islam[8] and a quasi unanimous strict respect for traditional and conservative social practises.

Furthermore, the persistence of an administration of religious nature, in the face of the three Mufti who still administer official justice in personal low affairs of the minority[9] and the importance of the religious curriculum of public education in minority schools, little prepares this community to open itself to social evolutions of secular nature.

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This strong religious affiliation is decisive for these communities' perception of themselves, as in opposition with the "others". It is equally decisive for the majority's conception of "otherness" and the impact both conceptions have in inter-community relations.

Reciprocally Guaranteed Rights

The Treaty of Lausanne

Even though Greece and Turkey are nowadays parts of a considerable number of international Conventions on Human Rights and cultural/ethnic diversity, the Treaty signed in Lausanne on 24 July 1923, is still widely regarded in both countries as the main legal instrument guaranteeing reciprocal respect for minority rights.

In fact, its minority clauses are the only ones (along with the Declaration of Finland on the Aaland islands) of such obligations adopted in the post World War I context that still apply to their signatories after the establishment of the UN.

These clauses, along with the 1923 "Convention between Greece and Turkey concerning the exchange of Greek and Turkish populations", were the fruit of long and painful negotiations, which started soon after the victory of Mustafa Kemal's troops over the Greeks in September 1922. The continuation of the Allied occupation of Istanbul and the neutral zone during these negotiations played a significant role in their outcome.

According to the article 2 of the exchange Convention : "The following persons shall not be included in the exchange provided for in Article 1.: (a) The Greek inhabitants of Constantinople (b) The Moslem inhabitants of Western Thrace. All Greeks who were already established before October 1918 within the areas under the prefecture of the City of Constantinople, as defined by the law of 1912, shall be considered as Greek inhabitants of Constantinople. All Moslems established in the region to the east of the frontier line laid down in 1913 by the Treaty of Bucharest shall be considered as Moslem inhabitants of Western Thrace".

The indigenous Greek populations of the (at that time) mainly Greek inhabited islands Bozcaada (Tenedos) and Gökçeada (Imvros) in the Aegean archipelago are equally exempted from the exchange and granted a limited autonomy status inside Turkey (clause 14 of the Lausanne Treaty).

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At the end of its deliberation in 1934, after long negotiations over the definition and the number of the "established" non-exchangeable, the question of the properties of the exchangeable and some bitter incidents that raised mutual mistrust[10], the Mixed Committee of Greek, Turkish and neutral experts supervising the population exchange has issued 106.000 certificates of non-exchangeability to Western Thracian Moslems[11].

The reinstallation of a great number of Greek refugees from the Turkish to the Greek part of Thrace, along with the ongoing tension between the two countries, forced some of them to choose immigration and changed the demographic character of the region. The number of the remaining ones corresponded to approximately 27% of the total of the region's population[12], whilst this community represented the 40.8% of the inhabitants of Western Thrace according to the interallied census of 1920[13].

In a report prepared by the same Mixed Committee in 1934, their Greek counterparts in Turkey were estimated at 111.200 (125.046 according to the Turkish census of 1935). In this estimation were included the 30.000 non-exchangeable Istanbuliot Greeks of Hellenic nationality and the 8.200 Greek inhabitants of Gökçeada and Bozcaada[14].

Official statistics saw a significant demographic change in that case too. According to the 1924 data, Constantinople, a major cosmopolitan city, had 1.065.866 inhabitants, with Greeks representing 26.24%. Only three years later, their population corresponded only to 11.5% of Istanbuls' 806.993 citizens, while the departure of a considerable number of Christians, Jews and other foreigners left the city with much less an international character than ever in its history[15].

Clauses 37 to 44 of the Lausanne Treaty set out the obligations the new republican Turkish state undertakes towards these "Turkish subjects belonging to non-Moslem minorities" and towards "all inhabitants of Turkey without distinction of birth, nationality, language, race or religion".

They provide mainly for their equal treatment in the eyes of the law in all matters, their right to use, learn and teach "non-Turkish language", freedom for their religious observances, a distinct family law and personal status as well as protection and facilities for their religious premises and institutions.

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Furthermore, Turkey undertook the obligation to recognise clauses 38 to 44 as fundamental laws, committing itself that "no law, no regulation, nor official action shall conflict or interfere with these stipulations, nor shall any law, regulation, nor official action prevail over them".

The clause 45 of the Treaty ensures the reciprocal character of the above mentioned engagements, stipulating that "The rights conferred by the provisions of the present Section on the non-Moslem minorities of Turkey will be similarly conferred by Greece on the Moslem minority in her territory". A Convention between Greece and the allied powers (Sevres, 1920), guaranteeing the continuation of the special social and religious status of Thracian Moslems by the Hellenic state, has equally started to apply as of 1924.

Turkey did not undertake any Treaty obligations concerning the Ecumenical Patriarchate, supreme religious authority of the Greek community of Istanbul and "primus inter pares" amongst the Orthodox churches internationally.

In fact, the rather obvious anti-Turkish activities of the institution during the years that followed the Ottoman defeat at World War I, its energetic international lobbying in favour of the Hellenic cause and the secularist ideology of the Kemalist regime, made the Greek efforts to maintain its see in Istanbul particularly difficult.

The Patriarchate's expulsion from Turkey, energetically demanded by the Turkish negotiators in Lausanne, was finally avoided because of intense international pressure against it[16].

A Turkish verbal engagement allowing it to remain in the Phanar "with all its organisations and constituent bodies", but without any political or non-ecclesiastic attributes, was finally embodied in the Lausanne proceedings. However, the failure of the Patriarchates' allies to obtain a written guarantee of its privileges and international character was not without decisive consequences for the future of the institution in an officially secular country, dominated by an actively anticlerical and nationalistic-minded elite[17].

It is interesting to note that whilst the possibility of an abrogation of this Treaty has never seemed to be unimaginable or even undesirable for Turkish governments, the Greek part was and remains fervently against any discussion of the subject[18].

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The symbolic importance of the Patriarchate, considered to be the nations' last link with a still quite regretted and idealised imperial past, constitutes today the main reason for this obstinacy in conserving the Lausanne framework which could be regarded as somehow outdated, in the light of the recent international evolutions in matters of human rights.

Modern International Protection of Human/Minority Rights

Notwithstanding the reluctance and suspicion which both Ankara and Athens have always manifested towards international legal protection of minority or/and human rights, their common "western" orientation made their participation in the major instruments of such a protection almost unavoidable.

The two countries have often found themselves on the same side in forums such as the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the Council of Europe or the European Convention on Human Rights, defending the inviolability of the states' sovereignty in internal matters and presenting more or less flattering, self prepared reports on the "impeccable" application of human/minority rights inside their respective national territories. The uneasiness of both countries about international instruments of such nature is equally betrayed by their considerable delays in ratifying them.

In fact, the "traumatic" phases Greek-Turkish relations have known in the last two centuries and the bitter experience of the two states with populations having particularistic loyalties inside their national frontiers, contributed to their adoption of a completely formalistic, legal approach of the minority rights' question.

Thus, the framework provided for by Lausanne is considered by both Greek and Turkish decision-makers as less dangerous for the preservation of their respective countries' ethnic homogeneity, than the modern tendency to internationalise this kind of issues. Its provisions have been several times cited by respective officials as a proof of the non-existence of other ethnic minorities in their territories, while there is no permanent impartial organ for the solution of the potential problems generated in its' framework.[19]

However, it is true that, with the exception of the efficient but still quite conservative system of the European Convention on Human Rights, the non-binding character of most of the other international acts of similar nature (notably the 1990 OSCE Copenhagen document, the OSCE Commissioner for Human rights and minorities and the 1995 Convention Frame for the protection of national minorities) makes them much less committing in the eyes of

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countries profoundly attached to the concept of national sovereignty and that, despite their high symbolic value.

Today, what seems to be the irrevocable commitment of Ankara and Athens to the European integration process, is susceptible to bringing substantial changes to the above mentioned attitude of the two states towards augmenting international concern for human rights issues.

A common difficult evolution towards democracy and European integration.

The trajectory of democratic consolidation has been a quite difficult one in both Greece and Turkey.

Since the collapse of the "great idea" that marked Hellenic internal and foreign politics from the country's independence to 1922[20], Greece has experienced several periods of dictatorship, authoritarian government and political instability, as well as a bloody civil war, which divided the country for many decades after its end and generated strong bitter passions, still persisting among those who participated in it.

Successive governments in Athens, notwithstanding their proclaimed ideological affiliation or the means of their accession to power, have followed quite similar policies concerning common identity building and internal national unity.

Achieving and consolidating an ethnic, cultural and religious homogeneity of the state on the basis of the "Hellenic-Christian heritage" constituted the main guideline of these policies.

Supported by the particularly influential Orthodox church, and diffused by public education, legislation and media, an idealised, mythical conception of Hellenic nationhood was popularised to such an extend that it is still quite a taboo to challenge it in the internal official or even popular discourse.

According to that conception, the nation is the direct heir of the glorious classic and Byzantine ancestors, the defender of the "true faith" and the bastion of civilisation, surrounded by "barbarian" enemies or jealous friends.[21]

Neighbouring Turkey and Communism shared for many decades the first place in the list of these "barbarians", whose existence was in the very heart of

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the official identity construction scheme. The impact of the latter's dominance in Greek political life on those inside the country who, by birth or ideological conviction, were susceptible to sympathise with Ankara "the eternal enemy" or Moscow the "ungodly", was obviously immense.

The way the complications of the Cyprus questions were perceived by the majority of Greeks since the 1950s and the emergence of a "new world order" after the collapse of the Soviet bloc, reinforced the credibility of the above mentioned conception of Hellenic nationhood, both inside the country and amongst the diaspora.

The persistence of the nationalistic self-conceptions' popularity, despite the return to multiparty democracy in the 1970s and the state's accession to the European Community in the 1980s , has negative consequences for the country's reputation in matters of human rights and respect for cultural/ethnic difference.

In fact, even though the Hellenic Republic is today a "western democracy" and a member of the European Union, the Constitution of 1975/1986 (art.1.3) stipulates that "all powers derive from the people (and) exist in favour of them *and of the nation*", the "indissoluble union between Orthodoxy and Hellenism"[22] continues to be officially proclaimed by statesmen during public ceremonies, whilst religious affiliation is still mentioned on police delivered identity cards.

Furthermore, the Greek political figures, press and public opinion, seem to be rather hostile towards multiculturalism and manifestations of ethnic difference inside the country[23].

In that framework, it is interested to note that, despite the fact that the country is one of the most linguistically, ethnically and religiously homogenous ones in Europe and thus has little to fear from potential "separatism" movements, its administration actively refuses to recognise the existence of any other "particular' group inside the national territory, apart from the Moslem minority of Western Thrace, as defined by the Treaty of Lausanne. The subject constitutes a taboo even for the scientific community. The latter is often auto-restricted to a sterile defence of more or less official positions, even though the emergence of a courageous evolution amongst scholars can be observed in the recent years[24].

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Such an insistence in a rather outdated view of national belonging interconnected to religious creeds, costs the country several condemning decisions in the framework of the European Convention on Human Rights, as well as numerous negative comments from international non-governmental organisations active in the human rights field. At the same time, it constitutes the last serious incoherence in the Greece's otherwise remarkable transformation, from a military governed, quasi fascist state from 1967 to 1974, to an active EU member, ready to join the economic and monetary union in 2001.

Turkey, on the other hand, has equally experienced three military regimes and a long authoritarian one-party system since the dismantling of the Ottoman Empire and the civil war that preceded the proclamation of the Republic.

Nowadays, even though the Turkish political system is widely considered to be the most "western style" one amongst the Middle-Eastern states of Moslem majority, the traditionally nationalistic minded army still plays a prominent and even constitutionally guaranteed role in decision making (art. 118.3, Const. of 1982, installing the "National Security Council"), whilst the Republic is officially proclaimed to be " loyal to the nationalism of Ataturk" (art. 2,Const. of 1982).

In fact, the nation building model, initiated by the founder of the modern Turkish state and still quite faithfully followed by his successors, has transformed nationhood into almost a religion through the state controlled compulsory education system and the official sanctification of patriotism, of a mythic version of Turkish history and of Kemal Ataturk's personality.

Governing elite in Ankara and public opinion in the country has never completely overcome the trauma of the 1918-1922 foreign occupation and the enthusiasm with which minority communities welcomed it around the country.

Thus, besides its fear of Kurdish separatism, successive Turkish governments continue to treat the remaining non-Moslem minorities as agents of a potential invader, despite their currently insignificant numerical proportions.

Furthermore, the state energetically denies the existence of any other minority community inside its borders but the Lausanne recognised ones and actively tries to restrict any kind of "distinct" or "non-Turkish" identity manifestation, including pro-minority rights voices coming from Turkish scholars and human rights activists .

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Turkey's particular relationship with Islam, the religion professed by the vast majority of its citizens, is another obstacle to the country's road towards democratic governance.

An officially secular state (art.2, 1982 Const.), considering anti-secularism propaganda as punishable by law (Art. 163 of the Penal Code), the Turkish Republic has been repressive towards partisans of a more Islamic approach to national politics, denying them the right to form political parties or prohibiting the wearing of religious garments in public places and the existence of religious orders.

At the same time, Turkey is a member of all the major international Islamic organisations, strictly controls the formation of preachers, imposes compulsory "instruction in religious culture and moral education (art.24, 1982 Const.)" , whilst officials often stress the importance of the links between Islam and the Turkish nation in public ceremonies[25].

The analysis of the numerous and complicated reasons of such a contradiction does not directly concern the subject of the present paper. However, it is interesting to note that this contradiction is not without consequences for the religious, ethnic and cultural minorities of the country and for the state's evolution towards democratic governance.

The numerous condemnations of Ankara for human rights abuses by a considerable number of international organisations and the authoritarian practices of the Turkish administration have seriously jeopardised in the past the country's European ambitions[26].

In the light of the above, Turkey's potential EU membership might constitute a real chance in the country's difficult path to democracy. Such an evolution though is still endangered by the uneasy relations with Greece, the still unsettled problem of Cyprus, the Kurdish issue and the popularity of ultra-nationalistic or Islamic political parties amongst a public tired of the continuous war in the eastern provinces and impoverished by urbanisation, corruption and neo-liberal economic policies.

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THE "STRATEGIC" IMPORTANCE OF WESTERN THRACIAN MOSLEMS AND ISTANBULIOT GREEKS

The Moslem communities of Western Thrace

Concentrated in the three prefectures of Rodopi, Xanthi and Evros, the Moslem minority of Western Thrace owns its cohesion to a strong attachment to the land and to traditional Islamic values.

The exact number of its' members is difficult to define accurately since language and religion do not figure anymore in Greek censuses. According to minority sources, Western-Thracian Moslems are estimated to be around 150.000, as opposed to Greek and international sources who claim they are between 120.000 and 130.000.[27]

All of the above mentioned numbers do not represent more than the 1.5% of the total population of Greece. However, the community's percentage in the population of the region of Thrace and in each one of its' respective prefectures is far more important.

Independent sources, estimate Thracian Moslems to represent approximately between 35% and 37% of the regions inhabitants (the population of Thrace is 338.005 according to the Greek census of 1991) and they are believed to be even more numerically important in Xanthi and Rodopi. [28]

The ethnic composition of the minority has never been a homogenous one even though the Turkish element has always been dominant.

The census conducted by the allied occupation authorities of the region in 1919-1920 divides the Moslem population of Western Thrace between Turks (73.220), Pomaks (11.739) and Moslem Gypsies (1.834). Approximately 2.000 Circasians, mostly soldiers who helped the Greek army during the 1920-1922 war with Turkey, have also emigrated in the region after the victory of M. Kemal[29].

Ethnic Turks nowadays constitute the dominant element of the minority. More numerous, wealthy and politically active than the other constituents of the Moslem community, they also count some intellectuals and an urban middle

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class amongst them. Their number is estimated to represent between 68% and 48% of its' population (approximately 60.000)[30].

Moslem Gypsies are mostly concentrated in the Alexandroupolis prefecture. Their community, is estimated to represent 18% of the Moslem population of Western Thrace (approximately 25.000)[31].

Even though most of the rest of the minority has somehow looked down on them in the past, an integration of these "Roma" to the Greek Moslem community took place in the last decades, with consequences in their language and education practises. Today, Turkish tends to replace their native "Romany" language of oral tradition even in everyday use, whilst an increase in school attendance is equally observed amongst their youngsters. Notwithstanding this evolution, illiteracy is still higher amongst young and elder Gypsies than amongst any other population of the Western Thracian Moslem community.

Pomaks constitute another distinct community with ethnic origins disputed by Greece, Turkey and Bulgaria (where their population is estimated from 120.000 to 250.000) . They speak a language close to Bulgarian with Greek and Turkish idioms (Pomahtsu) and their customs have Slavic, Greek and Turkish influences[32]. Most of them still live in mountainous villages and are known "for their piety and their blind devotion to the Prophet"[33].

Historically, the community has not always been on best terms with the Turkish element of the minority. Their attachment to religion and traditional values made them reject Ankara's calls for adjustment to the Kemalist reforms, whilst a considerable number of them collaborated with the Bulgarian occupation forces of the region in 1941-1944, in opposition to their persecuted Turkish co-religionists[34]. Nowadays, Pomaks are estimated to represent between 22% and 30% (approximately 35.000 people) of the total minority population[35].

In recent years, the spread of the Turkish language amongst Western Thracian Moslems of Pomak origin and the general emergence of a Turkish identity in a large part of the minority, generated a number of public and private Greek initiatives in favour of teaching Pomahtsu in the community's schools. A primary school reading book, a grammar book, two dictionaries and children books have already been published in Pomahtsu. The official introduction of this language in minority schools of Pomak villages has been pointed out by

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minority circles as an attempt to divide the community. It has equally been criticised by Bulgaria, the latter fearing the emergence of a potential "Pomak issue"[36].

In fact, the Greek-Turkish educational agreements of 1951 and 1968 concerning, amongst other things, the teaching of standard Turkish[37] in all the Western Thracian minority schools, gave Turkish a de facto status of vernacular language amongst the Greek Moslem community.

The negligence Athenian governments saw in promoting Greek-Turkish/Pomahtsu/Romani bilingualism and alphabetisation in the ranks of the Moslem population or in organising a higher education appealing to both the Christian and the Minority element of the region contributed to the above[38]. In parallel, press and radio-television programs, both from within the minority in question and from neighbouring Turkey, accentuated even more the predominance of the Turkish language and culture[39], thus facilitating the emergence of a Turkish-Muslim ethnic identity tending to minimise the importance of belonging in distinct ethnic groups.

This integration process of the three ethnic constituents of the religious minority's population, begun during the 1930s with the Venizelos-Ataturk rapprochement, which provided for the creation of a Turkish Consulate General in Komotini (1934) and for the expulsion of anti-Kemalist elements from the region[40].

In the years that followed, successive Greek governments have favoured this evolution for various reasons, despite the obvious Turkization of the minority such a process was implying.

The guarantee of reciprocal rights for the Greek minority of Istanbul was never the principal one of these reasons. In fact, Athens was either eager to obtain security for its eastern borders at a time when invasion was feared from elsewhere (1930s) or obliged to satisfy its major Atlantic allies in order to consolidate its' regime and to gain sympathies for its cause in Cyprus.

The eclipse of the "communist danger" and the installation of multiparty democracy, along with the effect that created in Greece the evolutions in the Cyprus issue as of 1974 and more recently the success of two independent minority candidates with clear sympathies for Ankara in the April 1990 general

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election, persuaded the Greek government to modify its' attitude towards the minority and the region in general[41].

Suggestions that the pro-Turkish sympathies of a part of the minority population might transform the latter into a "fifth column" of Ankara in case of a potential bilateral conflict or even into a pretext for Turkish claims on Greek soil, have always been advanced in the past by politicians from all sides and by a part of the Greek press.

But such fears have been given added credibility by the openly professed irredentism of most of the associations of Western Thracian Moslem immigrants, suspected to receive Turkish financial help[42], or by the equally revisionist discourse of radio-television programmes, broadcast to Greek territory by high powered transmitters installed for that purpose on the other side of the bilateral border.

The insistence of the two independent minority MPs to describe as "Turkish" the Western Thracian Moslem community as a whole and their attempts to attract international attention on what they believed to by a Greek denial of the minority's "Turkish" ethnic identity, increased further Hellenic worries.

Official efforts to win Moslem loyalties through education or control of religious institutions were met by the multiplication of outspoken grievances within the community elite and by numerous electronic and written press publications fiercely condemning "Greek oppression"[43].

As a reaction, voices have been raised, both among Greek political figures and through the media, in favour of a strict respect of the Lausanne's reciprocity provisions, with all the consequences such a move might imply given the enormous reduction of the Istanbouliot Greeks. In the Thracian region itself, the local Orthodox church, local politicians and Greek public opinion manifested several times their fears of a repetition of the "Cyprus scenario" in Greek Thrace[44].

Successive Greek governments were further annoyed by the results of the last two official censuses in Western Thrace. In fact, from 345.220 in 1981, the population of the region fell to 338.005 in 1991. At the same time, the birth rate

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of the Moslem population was estimated to be three times greater than the one of their fellow citizens of Orthodox religion.

All of the above evolutions, along with the geopolitical/strategic importance of the Moslem minority's location in Greek territory, have persuaded many among the Hellenic political elite that "the already shaken balances of Lausanne might be reversed with 'known' consequences"[45].

Consequently, the electoral law has been changed soon after the 1990 elections in order to render impossible the election of independent minority candidates[46], the use of the world "Turkish" to describe "Greek citizens of Moslem religion" was officially prohibited by decision of the High Court as a "threat to public order"[47] (many minority NGOs have been outlawed as a consequence)[48] and a new law has been adopted enabling the state to appoint the Muftis, highest juridical and religious authority of the Western Thracian Moslem community[49].

It is interesting to note that these restrictive measures, to which one should add the numerous trials of prominent members of the minority's press and political elite for "spreading false rumours" or "dividing the people" have not caused anything more than discrete diplomatic reaction from the Turkish side.

The latter's efforts to achieve EU candidate status, obtain European financial help and resolve its' own thorny internal problems are probably not stranger to the above.

Minority political figures on the other hand, have profited from the framework of the European Convention on Human Rights in order to achieve international, legally binding condemnation of Greece for alleged breaking of minority/human rights related provisions.

In some cases, as in the one of Dr. A. Sadik's suit against Greece (18877/91) for forbidding him to use the word "Turkish" referring to the Moslem minority, the report of the European Committee for Human Rights condemned the Greek attitude as "non necessary in a democratic society"[50]

On the other hand, the ever more active engagement of the EU with "the principles of liberty, democracy, respect of human rights and fundamental

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liberties"[51] and the pressures upon the country to ameliorate its performance in human rights issues (which reached their peak with the State Department Report of 1991) moved Greek governments towards a restructuring of its minority politics.

In that context, two of the issues negatively affecting democratic governance in the country and the Moslem minority as such, have been positively settled in recent years.

In 1995, Greece abolished the "restricted military zone regime" applying to the mountainous, mostly Moslem inhabited area of the three prefectures of Western Thrace as of 1936. The measure, adopted at the time of general Metaxas fascist regime and maintained during Cold War years (the military zone was bordering with Bulgaria), provided for military checkpoints at of all roads leading to the area in question, special identity cards for its inhabitants and special short time permissions for visitors, as well as for the prohibition of access from midnight to 5 AM.

The abolition, in 1998 of the "infamous" article 19 of the Greek Citizenship Code of 1955 providing for the deprivation of Greek nationality from "persons of non-Greek origin, leaving Greece without the intention of returning, persons of non-Greek origin born and domiciled abroad and minor children whose parents or surviving parent have lost the same" was the second important positive step. This article, adopted also during Cold War times, has been used in the past to deprive many members of the minority of their Greek nationality, whilst its racial foundation had been a permanent cause of severe criticism towards Greece by international bodies.

The recent Greek-Turkish rapprochement and Turkey's EU candidate status might attenuate the, still very present conception of the minority as a potential conflict source in the eyes of Greek officials and public opinion.

In what it is concerned, Turkey is equally susceptible to refraining from encouraging the emergence of ultra-nationalistic or revisionist tendencies amongst Western Thracian Moslems.

This latter group, "a closed and somewhat suspicious community, which…have neither assimilated nor adopted twentieth century life", composed of "simple, hardworking and intelligent people"[52] does not wish to be considered a negotiation card or a means of pressure in a never-ending story of neighbour rivalry.

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The Greek-Orthodox community of Istanbul

A mere shadow of its past, the Greek-Orthodox minority of Istanbul seems to be a community destined to disappear.

In fact, the number of Istanbuliot Greeks, which never ceased to decline since the end of World War II is nowadays estimated to be between 2.500 and 5.000 (the question of religious affiliation is not anymore asked in Turkish censuses). Most of these Greek-Orthodox Turkish citizens are old, whilst the immigration rate is particularly high amongst the few remaining youngsters[53].

The minority had indeed a strategic position before the first World War and during the 1918-1922 conflict period, when its number and the prominent role many of its members played in the city's life, made its leaders feel they could effectively lobby for autonomy or even annexation to the Hellenic State[54].

The persistence of the bitter memories of that time in both the Turkish public opinion and governing elite along with the latter's consciousness of the symbolic importance the community still has for Greece are actually the reasons of its spectacular decline.

Since the signing of the Lausanne Treaty, Greek-Orthodox have been subjected to a quite selective application of secularism and equality legal provisions, aiming to reduce the role of minorities in the new Turkish state, eager not to repeat the faults of its imperial predecessor.

This attitude reached its peak during the 1942-1944 period, with the adoption of the "varlik vergisi", a capital tax dividing citizens according to their religious beliefs and aiming at destroying Christian and Jewish owned businesses by imposing them to pay ten times the amount demanded for Moslems with equal wealth.

The emergence of the Cyprus issue in the 1950s definitely sealed the minority's fate. During the "Saint Barthelemy night" of the 6/7 September 1955 and whilst the Tripartite London Conference was holding important negotiations on Cyprus, mobs, fanaticised after a bomb explosion in front of the house of Ataturk in Thessaloniki, caused widespread damage to Greek community and private property everywhere in Istanbul, terrorising the minority population with police tolerance[55]. Interestingly enough, grievances of the Greek government, absorbed by the Cyprus problem, were rather discrete and no retaliation took

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place in Western Thrace. However and despite the official trials and condemnations of alleged responsible, the Greek-orthodox minority never recovered from the incident.

Today the imposition of numerous restrictions to all non Moslem communities of Istanbul by the officially secular Turkey, such as the 1971 prohibition from purchasing new "vakif" property despite the provisions of the clause 43 of the Lausanne Treaty, testify to Ankara's persistence in the model of perfect national homogeneity and to the limits of its current democratisation process.

The absolutely insignificant percentage these communities represent inside the state (0.2%)[56] de facto deprives them today of any possible separatist ambitions, whilst their international ties could transform them into efficient ambassadors of the country's image once respect for their rights is ensured.

But if the Greek-Orthodox minority of Istanbul, "still undergoing an irreversible eclipse"[57], is deprived of everything but purely emotional/symbolic importance, its religious leadership continues to play a significant international role, which has even increased in the course of the last decade, due to the fall of communist rule in Eastern European countries of Orthodox majority.

In fact, the "Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople-New Rome" is the first amongst equals in the hierarchy of the Orthodox church, numbering approximately 200.000 members around the world.

Besides this important faction, the Patriarch and his Synod residing in the Fener district, in Istanbul, name bishops in the Dodecanese, supervise autonomous Orthodox churches in Crete, Finland and Estonia and directly administer the Greek-Orthodox communities of the Hellenic diaspora.

The last ones, particularly well organised in North America and Australia, often use their solid local connections to lobby in favour of the Patriarcate's rights and Greek government's causes under the guidance of Istanbul-appointed bishops, thus adding credibility to the suspicion with which Turkish public opinion and officials view the institution ever since its active pro-Greek position during the Anatolian war.

Financially supported by the Greek government and the communities of the diaspora, the Patriarchate has intensified its international activities since the reign of Athenagoras I (1949-1972), cultivating relations with the other

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Christian churches and making itself known to governments, public opinions and decision makers[58].

Further more the traditionally close interconnection between church and state in countries of Orthodox majority[59] links the institution with most of the governments of Turkey's Balkan neighbours and Russia, whilst the establishment of active Theological schools and study centres in Europe and America gained friendships for the "Great Church of Christ" amongst Western intellectuals.

Despite this world-wide recognised importance, the Patriarchate is officially regarded by Ankara as a uniquely Turkish internal institution, existing for the spiritual needs of the country's few remaining Greek-Orthodox and "whose activities are strictly and modestly confined within the frontiers of the country"[60].

In that spirit, the Turkish government continues to impose the obligation of Turkish citizenship to the tenant of the See and the members of the Synod , thus making doubtful the endurance of the Patriarchate after the approaching disappearance of the minority.

It equally reserves the right to eliminate candidates to the Patriarchal dignity who are not judged compatible with Turkish interests, with obvious negative consequences for the institution's international credibility[61].

Finally, the 1971 law forbidding private institutions for higher education has deprived the Patriarchate of the Halki Faculty of theology in Heybeliada, its only training centre for clerics inside Turkey. Notwithstanding intense international and Greek pressure for the abolishment of this prohibition[62], the non-reopening of the school adds considerably to the uncertainty of the Patriarchates' future in the Turkish Republic.

Quite curiously, the latter has rarely tried to profit from the existence of such a prestigious international institution inside its national borders and limited itself to its use as a mean of pressure on successive Greek governments, which are usually adopting a rather emotional approach to the issue.

The Patriarchate's active support to the Turkish request for EU membership status, the numerous ecological events it has initiated in Istanbul

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and the efficient help it provided during the recent earthquakes, have somehow gained sympathies for the institution in press and public opinion[63].

At a time when calls are multiplying for the right of the Ecumenical Throne to maintain the location of his ancient see in a modern and democratic Turkey, an eventual change of the country's attitude towards it, could transform this institution from an arm against a neighbour into a tool for making new friends.

On the other side, Greek nationalistic-minded decision makers should equally cease to regard the Patriarchate as the last link with an idealised national past or as the remaining bastion of Hellenism inside what was the capital of the Byzantine Orthodox Empire. Greece's de-connection from the institution's own policies could greatly help the latter to affirm its international nature, whilst it would equally be of great service to bilateral relations.

MINORITY RIGHTS AND DEMOCRATIC EVOLUTION

Democracy is not a top down imposed political system, but rather a constantly ongoing process, implying evolution of mentalities through education and continuous challenge of the each time achieved level of popular participation in the public affairs of the "city".

Greece is today a member of the EU whilst Turkey seems to be irrevocably oriented towards European integration and thus committed to promote democratic governance and respect for human rights inside its borders.

A European democratic future appears to be in fact the only possible choice for both countries.

Opting out of the EU or adopting politics susceptible to lead it to isolation would most probably create serious economic problems and a major internal instability in Greece whose financial and foreign policies are based largely on the country's European membership.

Turkey's exclusion from the European process would most likely oblige the country to orient its diplomacy towards its' Middle Eastern environment. Such an option creates serious fears amongst the "Kemalist" elite in power which does not wish to put in danger the country's current achievements in matters of democratic governance and secularisation. The same elite is particularly sensitive to the impact such an evolution would have for Turkey's

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international prestige as a natural intermediate between the West and the Islamic world.

In this context, the two respective minorities have more than ever the chance to serve as "a 'uniting link' between the two nations, …(to) be a help, instead of a hindrance, in the development of friendly relations between Athens and Ankara"[64].

Some of the possible conditions for a successful transformation of Western Thracian Moslems and Istanbouliot Greeks/ the Ecumenical Patriarchate into factors of strengthening for the regional integration process and of deepening for democratic governance and human rights respect, might be the following:

a. Profound secularisation of legislation and administrative practises in both countries. Absolute religious neutrality of the state. Religious institutions should of course enjoy every possible liberty in the exercise of their proper functions without any state interference.
b. Spread of education amongst all the elements of the country's population.
c. Development and encouragement of the dissemination, through education and media, of historical approaches meant to limit mutual bitterness and mistrust.
d. Encouragement of interest (equally through education and media), for cultures different than the country's dominant one,.
e. Development and encouragement of "difference respect" policies and campaigns on a national level.
f. Development and encouragement of cultural interactions between the minority communities and the other parts of the country's population.
g. Promotion of civic values rather than ethnic identity as a model of consolidating national unity.
h. Encouragement of development projects in regions/suburbs with big percentages of minority population. Encouragement of such population's direct implication in the realisation of these projects.
i. Encouraging minority immigrants to maintain ties with their countries of birth.
j. Encouragement and facilitation of the full participation of minority populations in the countries cultural, economical, social and political life.
k. Strict respect for international Treaties and Conventions on human rights.

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At a time when the European Union, in plain negotiation with future members, is affirming more than ever its will to constitute an entity based on democracy, liberty and respect for human rights and in view of the benefits generated by "the end of divisions in the European continent" Western Thracian Moslem and Istanbuliot Greeks do have a role to play.

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ENDNOTES

1 See Northledge F. S. (1986) The League of Nations, its life and times1920-1946, New York, Holmes and Meier, partim.
2 See Macartney C. A. (1934) National states and national minorities, Oxford, Oxford University Press, partim.
3. See Alexandris A. (1992) The Greek minority of Istanbul and the Greek-Turkish relations, Athens, Centre for Asia Minor Studies, for the 1930-40, 1947-54 and 1959 -64 "detente" periods in Greek-Turkish relations.
4 1.344.000 Greek-Orthodox from Asia Minor and Eastern Thrace have been exchanged with 464.000 Moslems from Greece (with the exception of Western Thrace). Religious affiliation was the only criterion of this population exchange. Thus, number of the Ottoman Greek-Orthodox obliged to leave Turkey were Turkish speakers, whilst many of the Moslems who left from Greece ignored the Turkish language. See Courbage Y., Fargues Ph. (1997) Chrétiens et Juifs dans l'Islam arabe et turc, Paris, Payot, pp228.
5 See Divani L. (1999) Greece and minorities. The League of Nations' system of international protection (in Greek) Athens, Kastaniotis, p.66
6 See Alexandris A., op.cit., pp 85-124
7 See Dalègre J. Citoyens Hellènes de religion musulmane, p.174, in Bozdémir M. dir. (1996) Islam et Laicité approches globales et régionales, Paris, L'Harmattan. Also see Alexandris A. op.cit., pp.52-69 and « Anatoli », August 1999, Athens, p.7.
8 See Dalègre J., op.cit., p.174 on the "bektachi" element of this minority.
9 It is interesting to note that the article 42 of the Lausanne Treaty, guaranteeing family and personal status law "in accordance with the customs of (the) minorities" is not applied by Turkey since the introduction of a secular Civil Code in 1926. Non-Moslem minorities have formally renounced the article in 1925. See Alexandris A., op.cit., pp 135-139 on the reactions of Greece and of the Greek-Orthodox minority to the above.
10 Such as the expulsion of the Ecumenical Patriarch Constantine VI from Turkey or the confiscation of Moslem property by the Hellenic state in Western Thrace in order to cover the needs of Greek refugees.
11 See Divani L. op.cit., p.174
12 Idem
13 See Alexandris A., op.cit. pp.124
14 Idem pp.142-143. For another estimation see Y. Courbage, Ph. Fargues, op.cit. p.229
15 See Alexandris A. op.cit. p. 142
16 Idem, pp 87-95
17 The abolition of the Caliphate, the highest Moslem religious authority by the Kemalist regime in 1924 has been used as an argument by Turkish negotiators for the installation of the Patriarchate outside their country. See A.Alexandris, op.cit., pp.87,88, See also Divani L., op.cit., pp 205-207
18 See Alexandris A., op.cit., partim
19 See Hiraclidis A., Minorities, foreign policy and Greece, in Tsitselikis K.,Hristopoulos D. (1997) The minority phenomenon in Greece, Athens, Kritiki, pp207-243
20 See Hiraclidis A., op.cit., pp 227-228
21 Idem., see also « Le Monde »,20/01/1998, p.13
22 See Dalègre J., op.cit., p.169
23 See Kourtovik G., Justice and minorities, in Tsitselikis K., op.cit. pp.247-279
24 See Valognes J. P. (1994) Vie et mort des Chrétiens d'Orient, Paris , Fayard, pp829-830
25 See Wagstaff M. dir. (1990) Aspects of religion in secular Turkey, Durham, Univ.of

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Durham, partim. See also Georgeon Fr., A la recherche d'une identité : le nationalisme turc. In Gokalp A. ed. (1986) La Turquie en transition. Disparités identités pouvoirs, Paris, Maison-Neuve Larose, partim.

26 Turkey has been refused EU candidature status in 1997 (Luxembourg Summit), mainly because of its poor record concerning democratic governance and respect for human rights. The progress the country realised since and the official promises of continuation and deepening of democratic reforms (letter of Prime-Minister Ecevit to Chancellor Schröder, 26/05/1999) persuaded EU members not to refuse Turkey this status in 1999 (Helsinki Summit). However, becoming "a stable democracy that respect the rule of law and human rights" remains the major condition for the accomplishment of Ankara's European ambitions. See the interview of M. A. Birand in "Le Soir" of 13/12/1999 and the declarations of EU Enlargement Commissioner G. Verheugen in "International Herald Tribune" of 11/03/2000.

27 See Sgouridis P. (2000) The problematic of Thrace in front of the 21st century, Kastaniotis, Athens, p.53. Also see J. Dalègre, op.cit., p.172

28 See Dalègre J., op.cit., p.172

29 See Divani L., op.cit. , p.170. See also A. Alexandris op.cit. p.124 and Y. Courbage op.cit., p229

30 See Sgouridis P. op.cit., p.56, J.Dalègre, op.cit., p173, Alexandris A., op.cit., p313

31 See Sgouridis P. op.cit., p.56. See also Zeginis E. (1994) The Moslem Gypsies of Thrace, Thessaloniki, Institute for Balkan Studies, for a more general study of this community .

32 See Arvanitou E. (1984)Turks et Pomaks en Grèce du Nord, Paris, Thèse de doctorat de 3ème cycle, Univ. de Paris VII, also see Siguàn M. (1990) Les minorités linguistiques dans la Communauté économique européenne, Luxembourg, Office des publications officielles des Communautés européennes, Série "document".

33 The Greek Consul of Philipoupolis in one of his reports, 1/12/1927, in Divani L., op.cit., p170

34 See Alexandris A., op.cit., p.310

35 Idem, p.313, also see Sgouridis P., op.cit. p.56

36 See Baltsiotis L., Greek administration and minority education in Western Thrace, in K. Tsitselikis, op.cit., pp.317-346

37 The Turkish language spoken by Western Thracian Moslems is characterised by some elements of the ancient Turkish and a number of words (notably concerning administration or every day life) of Greek origin. See Sella Mazi E., Bilingualism and less spoken languages in Greece, in Tsitselikis K., op.cit., p. 393

38 See Baltsiotis L., op.cit., partim

39 Only one of the numerous newspaper and reviews published by Western Thracian Moslems defends the "Islamic character" of the community as in opposition to "Turkish" ethnic belonging professed by all the other minority press. See Dalègre J., nop.cit. p.187

40 Some of the most important opponents to the Kemalist regime (among them Mustafa Sabri, the last Ottoman seyh-ül-Islam) have found refuge in Greek Thrace after being banished from Turkey in 1923. Their presence accentuated the division of the region's Moslem minority between "Kemalists", and traditionalists.

41 See Sgouridis P., op.cit. p.67

42 Such associations exist today in Istanbul (Western Thrace Turkish Solidarity Association), Australia (Western Tharce Turkish Islamic Association of Victoria Inc.), Germany (Federation of West Thracian Turks in Germany) and in the UK (Western Thrace Solidarity Association of Turkish Minority).

43 Despite the positive effects a number of these actions might bring to the Moslem Western Thracian minority as such. The Law 2341/95 which provides for a quota of minority school graduates in Greek public Universities, excepting them from the highly selective

examination all Greek college graduates should take, is an example of the above. Despite the fact that such a measure enables Moslem Western Thracians to study in their own country, a considerable number within the minority saw it with suspicion. The number of young Western Thracian Moslems studying in Turkey has not diminished since. See Baltsiotis L., op.cit., p.320. Other measures such as the Greek government's decision not to allow Turkish published reading books in minority schools (nowadays reading books in Turkish are prepared and published by the Hellenic Ministry of education) or the offer of public ceremonial cars to the state-appointed Muftis have of course a more "ambiguous" character..

44 See Sgouridis P. op.cit. pp 56, 100-108.

45 Idem, pp.31-32

46 Greek electoral law after 1990 imposes a minimum of percentage on national scale for the representation of a party in Parliament. Consequently, the election of Western Thracian Moslems in the Greek Parliament is possible only if their candidates appear in one of the lists of the parties represented in national scale. Even though Messrs. A. Sadik and A.Faikoglou, the two independent Moslem MPs of the 1990-93 period, have not been re elected after the September 1993 elections, the 1996-2000 Parliament counted 3 Western Thracian MPs (Messrs Galip, Akifoglou and Moustafa elected with the Socialist Party "PASOK", the conservative party "New Democracy" and the Left Wing Alliance "Synaspismos" respectively).

47 The Greek High Court has prohibited the use of the word "Turkish" in minority NGO titles in 1988. It is interesting to note that notwithstanding the population exchange Convention of 1923 which refers to "the Greek inhabitants of Constantinople" and the "Moslem inhabitants of Western Thrace", Turkey officially distinct the Greek-Orthodox minority of Istanbul ("Rum Ortodox") from the ethnic Greeks ("Yunan")

48 See G. Kourtovik op.cit.pp.253-254

49 Law 1920/90. The new Muftis' names are suggested by a Committee in which participate all the elected political figures of the minority and take their office after decision of the prefect of the region. The Greek government argued that judges are not elected in the Hellenic Republic (the Muftis acts as official judges in matters of family law) and that Muftis are government appointed everywhere in the Islamic world. See Sgouridis P., op;cit. pp. 62-65

50 See Giakoumopoulos H., The minority phenomenon and the European Convention on Human Rights, in Tsitselikis K., op.cit. p. 54

51 Amsterdam Treaty , art. F.1

52 See P.Sgouridis op.cit. p58 and A. Alexandris, op.cit. p313

53 See Valognes J. P. op. cit., p.821

54 See Alexandris A. op.cit., pp52-69

55 For a detailed description of the September 1955 riots see H. Ioannidis, (1995) Neo-Ottoman imperialism 1955-1995, Athens –New York Karatzas-Trohalia, pp119-160

56 See Courbage Y. Fargues Ph. op.cit., p328

57 See Alexandris A., op.cit. p.319

58 See the monthly review "Service Orthodoxe de Presse", Courbevoie for updated description of the institutions' multiple international activities

59 See Thual Fr. (1994) Géopolitique de l'Orhodoxie, Paris, Dunod, partim.See also "Le Monde" , 20/01/1998, p.13

60 Declaration of the Turkish Ambassador in Paris, the 27/04/1965, see Alexandris A., op. cit., p. 304-305

61 See Valognes J. P. op.cit. pp316-317

62 See article of Ch. Kupchan and I. O. Lesser in "The International Herald Tribune" of 11/02/2000

63 See "The Turkish Daily News" of 29/02/2000

64 Letter of the Greek representative in Ankara S. Polychroniadis to E. Venizelos in 1930, Alexandris A., op.cit. p.186

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