Greek Minority in Turkey

by Ted Karakostas

Ethnic Greeks have been residing in what is now "Istanbul" since ancient times. According to the Ecumenical Patriarchate, Saint Andrew the Apostle became the first bishop of the Church in what was then "Byzantium". Throughout the next millennium, the Byzantine empire came to be established and flourished throughout Asia minor and the near east with brilliant Churches and Christian artwork. Great fathers of the Church, honored in the west as well as the east such as Saints John Chrysostom, Basil the Great, Athanasius, and Gregory the Theologian emerged from Constantinople and it's surrounding territory to settle the questions over Christian doctrine and truth.

By 1453 Constantinople had been conquered by the Ottoman Turks. The Turks subsequently, conquered all Hellenic territory ushering in centuries of brutal occupation and oppression. In 1821, a revolution was declared by the Greeks that set the stage for the establishment of the first independent Greek state in four centuries. Independent Greece steadily set about expanding and liberating Greeks left behind under Ottoman Turkish rule. The ultimate goal of Greece was to liberate the old capital of Constantinople, the city of the Patriarchate and the Great Christian counterpart of the Acropolis, Aghia Sophia. Greece was successful in it's mission until 1922 when it's attempt to liberate the enslaved Greeks of Asia Minor ended in military defeat and the extermination and successive deportations of over one million Greeks from Asia Minor.

Modern History on Greek minority in Turkey

Modern Greek-Turkish relations are based on the 1923 "Treaty of Lausanne". This Treaty formally ended the Greek-Turkish war of 1919-1922 while establishing as permanent the present borders between the nations in the region of Thrace. The Lausanne Treaty is significant here only for what it states concerning the Greek minority of Turkey

"As from the 1st May, 1923, there shall take place a compulsory exchange of Turkish nationals of the Greek Orthodox Religion established in Turkish territory, and of Greek nationals of the Moslem religion established in Greek territory".(Article 1, Treaty of Lausanne).

Thus, well over one million ethnic Greeks from Asia minor and Pontus were deported by the Turkish government while 500,000 Muslims from the Greek region of Macedonia left Greece to
settle in Turkey. This was a tragic example of ethnic cleansing.

Regarding the Asia Minor Greeks Winston Churchill wrote in 1928: "Turkey lost a great mass of citizens who had for centuries played a vital part in the economic life of every Turkish village and township." (The World Crises, Aftermath. XIX Chanak, The Treaty of Lausanne. 1929. Easton Press. Norwalk, Connecticut.)

Churchill also referred to the presence of Greeks in Smyrna, Asia Minor before the city was conquered by the Turkish army in September 1922: "Smyrna and portions of its littoral had been populated extensively by Greeks for thousands of years. It's prosperity was largely attributable to their intelligence and to their industry and agriculture". (The World Crises, Aftermath. XVII Turkey alive, Insurgence and Paralysis. 1929. Easton Press. Norwalk, Connecticut.)

The New York Times noted on January 11, 1923: "In the name of peace and justice 1,000,000 men, women, and children are to be torn from their homes and forcibly taken to other lands. Such was the remarkable decision taken today by this remarkable Near East conference".

Further on, the same Times article noted that Greece opposed the forced expulsion not only of Turkey's Greeks, but the Moslems of Greece". The Times stated: "That there must be no misunderstanding, it must be plain that this extraordinary step is due entirely and exclusively to the Turk's determination to expel the Greeks from their country. It was only after this determination became plain that the Greeks demanded that the Turks in Greece be expelled in order to make room for the Greeks who must leave Turkey, where their forefathers in many cases, had lived for many centuries."

Finally, one last commentary made in 1922 needs to be cited, especially in light of what was to later occur to the Greek population of Constantinople. Two statements by George Horton, onetime American Consulate General of Smyrna are interesting. "The regime of the Greeks in Asia Minor was the only civilized and beneficient regime which that country has seen since historic times". SUBJECT: The Near East Question. By the American Consul General to Smyrna George Horton to The Secretary of State Washington. September 27, 1922.

Furthermore, Mr. Horton went on to describe Turkish atrocities and was adamantly opposed to allowing the Turkish army into Constantinople, then occupied by the western powers: "...I see no reason why the Turks should massacre Armenians and Greeks, in the Pontus, in Armenia and Asia Minor, and give them a kindly and benevolent reign" in Constantinople". SUBJECT: The near east question. By the American Consul General to Smyrna George Horton to the Secretary of State Washington. September 27, 1922.

Mr. Horton further stated the following when he heard the powers in occupation of Constantinople would allow Kemal Ataturk's armies to enter: "The native Christians do well to leave, such of them as can get away, for even if measures are taken to prevent a savage massacre on the arrival of the Kemalist troops, the life of the Christians will be intolerable and unsafe and massacres will surely be perpetrated from time to time in the future." SUBJECT: The near east question. By the American Consul General to Smyrna George Horton to the
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Secretary of State Washington. September 27, 1922.

As will be shown further, George Horton would prove to be prophetic with his comments about massacres in the future. I consider it proper regarding the Greeks of Turkey today, and the Ecumenical Patriarchate to place their tragic situation in the proper context regarding the historic events which created this situation. Indeed, the origins of the nearly extinct Greek community in old Constantinople have its roots in the events noted above as well as the events in part B.

The Ottoman empire had been crumbling for at least a century before it finally disintegrated in 1918. For centuries, Russia, “the Third Rome” had desired to gain possession of the city. In 1915, the British and French agreed to let the Russians take possession. The Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 changed that.

The Greek state, having expanded greatly since gaining independance was looking to return to it’s old capital. In Greece, this was referred to as the “Megali Idea”, the dream of reclaiming the Byzantine capital. Greece’s entry in WW1 on what turned out to be the winning side made this a realistic ambition.

Greek Prime Minister Eleutherios Venizelos based Greece’s claim to Constantinople at the Paris peace conference in 1919 on two principles. 1) American President Woodrow Wilson’s fourteen points which stressed self determination for nations in the Ottoman empire. 2) Venizelos pointed out in a memorandum that the “principal native element of the population of Constantinople is Greek, being numerically greater than all the other nationalities put together except the Turks.” Quote taken from a New York Times article of January 16, 1919.

In the end Greece liberated Smyrna and the western portions of Asia minor as well as Eastern Thrace. The Greeks of Pontus sought to form a state of their own. Greece was not allowed to enter Constantinople, although the idea of Greek claims was considered and ultimately rejected. In September 1920, Venizelos petitioned the allies to turn Constantinople over to the Greek army, and in return the allies refused (From New York Times article of September 20, 1920.)

In July 1921, Prime Minister Gounaris argued that Greece had the right to march on Constantinople, which the allies had by then intended to preserve as a Turkish capital, as a result of Greek military victories up to that time. The allies countered that their respective armies numbered 10,000 soldiers and all would be used to resist a Greek march on Constantinople. (From New York Times article “Talk of Greek March on Constantinople”. July 27, 1921.)

The Greeks continued to hope that they would enter Constantinople up until Kemal Ataturk’s armies entered in the fall of 1922. It is interesting that when the British entered Constantinople following the Ottoman empire’s collapse Greek hopes were high. Greek flags rose in Constantinople. The Patriarch Meletios IV lobbied the allies to support union with Greece. It is ironic that the Greeks of Constantinople and Asia minor survived into the twentieth century only to disappear almost entirely by the twentyfirst when the world had become more
enlightened to the plights of minorities and human rights.

Article 2.
The following persons shall not be included in the exchange provided for in article 1.a)
The Greek inhabitants of Constantinople
All Greeks who were already established before the 30th 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.
The above references to the Greek minority in the Treaty of Lausanne were concluded after a long debate. Venizelos, a former (and future) Greek Prime Minister represented Athens at the Peace conference. He and his Turkish counterpart Ismet Pasha agreed that the Greeks of Constantinople and Moslems of western Thrace should be excluded from the population exchange.

The Turks insisted on expelling the Ecumenical Patriarchate. The New York Times reported on January 5, 1923 that: ".....the Turks came out flatly with a demand that the Patriarch quit Constantinople, whereas for two weeks they had been considering under what conditions the Patriarchate might remain in Turkey". On this issue, Greece had the support of the allies. Under a compromise plan the Patriarchate renounced the political privileges granted to it by the Ottomans in exchange for it's right to stay in it's historic homeland.

The Greeks of Constantinople received temporary stability upon the founding of a Republic by Kemal Ataturk. The Revolutionary government in Ankara had it's attention on the Patriarchate. At once, the Turkish Republic began it's obstructionist policies against the Patriarchate which continue today. According to a New York Times report on January 31, 1925 the Turkish authorities deported Ecumenical Patriarch Constantinos VI.

The Times article further reported that the Turkish police sought to deport the Greek Metropolitans of the sees of Cyzicus, Prince's Islands, Caesarea, and Sardis. Steadily, an uneasy relationship between the Patriarchate and the Turkish authorities stabilized. The rumblings of trouble for the Greek community began during the second World war when Turkey imposed an extremely harsh tax on it's non-Moslem populations (Greeks, Jews, Armenians).

In 1948 Turkey accepted under American pressure the election of the American Greek Orthodox Archbishop Athenagoras to the Patriarchate. This period was the early cold war era in which the United States sought to contain the Soviet Union and were the final years of the "golden age of Greek-Turkish relations" begun by Venizelos and Ataturk in 1930 through the Treaty of Greek-Turkish friendship.

Greek-Turkish friendship was destroyed in 1955 and has never been restored. Although Cyprus had emerged as an issue of dispute that year it was not the issue that destroyed relations between Athens and Ankara. Rather, the events that transpired against the Greeks of Turkey in September 1955 destroyed relations between the NATO "allies".
On September 6, 1955 anti-Greek riots broke out in historic Constantinople. The Turkish government of Prime Minister Adnan Menderes denied responsibility for the riots: "He also disassociated the Government and the nation from the riots" (Rioting in Turkey called danger sign. Michael L. Hoffman. New York Times. September 17, 1955.) According to this same times article "More than 4,000 shops, mostly Greek or Armenian owned, were totally wrecked by the rioters the night of Sept. 6."

The Times further mentioned "Observers of the early hours of the disturbance are unanimous in reporting that the police did nothing to interfere for some time". The 1992 Helsinki Watch publication "Denying Human Rights and Ethnic Identity: The Greeks of Turkey" quotes the American consul General who was in Turkey when the riots broke out: "the destruction was completely out of hand with no evidence of police or military attempts to control it. I personally witnessed the looting of many shops while the police stood idly by or cheered on the mob".

The Helsinki Watch publication further asserts regarding the 1955 riots: "More than 4,000 Greek shops were sacked and plundered; 38 Churches were burned down and 35 more Churches vandalized and, in some cases, destroyed; more than 2,000 Greek homes were vandalized and robbed; and 52 Greek schools were stripped of their furniture, books, and equipment."

The anti-Greek riots took place in the aftermath of the bombing of the Turkish consulate in Thessaloniki, Greece in which the house where Kemal Ataturk was born had also been damaged. Helsinki Watch addresses that issue as well: "Six years later, after a military coup, a Turkish court tried Adnan Menderes, prime minister of Turkey at the time of the riots, on various charges. The court found, among other things that the Thessaloniki bombing had been ordered by Prime Minister Menderes and others in his government to incite and justify anti-Greek violence in Turkey."

In 1960, a military coup took place in Ankara. Govermental and political leaders from the overthrown regime that had lost the favor of the military were put on trial. The anti-Greek riots of 1955 were addressed at the trial. The New York Times wrote on October 19, 1960: "The special inquiry committee has evidence that former President Celal Bayar, former Premier Adnan Menderes and former Foreign Minister Fatin Rustu Zorlu plotted the anti-Greek uprising to spark fervor for Turkey's cause in the long dispute with Greece over Cyprus". On October 26, 1960 the Times wrote concerning the trials: "The riots, the prosecution charges were designed to stir up Turkish enthusiasm in a dispute with the Greek government over Cyprus."

Through the Yassiada trials mentioned above, Turkey in an extremely rare act, acknowledged the state's responsibility for the mistreatment of minorities. Menderes and Zorlu would be executed for other offenses. Former President Bayar would be spared due to his advanced years. The tactics used by the Menderes government in 1955 are similar to the tactics of the Nazis. In 1938, Nazi Germany incited its own population to physically attack Jews and destroy Jewish property on the night called "Kristaalnacht", (night of broken glass). The 1955 anti-Greek pogroms with destroyed Greek shops, Churches, and homes recalls such barbarism.

Regarding the actions and attitudes of Greece, The United States, and NATO in the aftermath
of the pogroms. According to a New York Times report on September 11, 1955: "The United States thinks Greece behaved in an exemplary manner following the anti-Greek riots in Turkey, Ray L. Thurston, United States Charge d' Affaires, told Panayotis Kanellopoulos Deputy Premier and Minister of Defense, today". One can consider talk of Greece's behaviour in the aftermath of the pogroms with regard to the 120,000 Moslems of Greek Thrace. The attitudes of the United States and NATO were less honourable.

The New York Times noted from Athens on September 11, 1955 that "There also is criticism of the United States for not having condemned officially the recent Turkish excesses in Istanbul and Izmir". (Gruenther Acts in Turkish Riots. By A.C. Sedgwick. September 11, 1955.) The U.S. government showed immense insensitivity with regard to Secretary of State John Foster Dulles' references to the pogroms as "the unhappy events of the past two weeks" in his letter to Greek Prime Minister Papagos on September 18, 1955. The late Greek politician and Prime Minister Andreas Papandreou, writing in 1970 wrote the following in his book "Democracy at Gunpoint: The Greek Front" with regards to the pogroms: "Similar acts were perpetrated against Greek army officers and their families in Smyrna, the location of NATO's headquarters in Turkey. The Greek army did not react, for it was the American's wish that they should do nothing to undermine the alliance between Greece and Turkey". Not only were Turkish citizens of Greek descent subject to physical attack, Greek officers serving the western alliance were likewise attacked without any noticeable protests from the United States or NATO.

By 1964, Ismet Inonu who had represented Turkey at the Lausanne Conference in 1923 and had been Kemal Ataturk's close ally was Prime Minister. Following ethnic fighting in Cyprus, the Prime Minister took action against the remaining Greeks of Turkey, who had nothing to do with the Greek-Turkish conflict whatsoever. Prime Minister Inonu renounced the Greek-Turkish Treaty of Friendship and then took action against the Greek minority.

"Over a thousand Greeks were promptly expelled, most on a few hours' notice. They were permitted to take with them only $22 and one suitcase of clothes. Another 5,000 were expelled shortly thereafter. Another 10,000 to 11,000 Greeks were expelled after September 1964, when Turkey discontinued renewing residence permits of Greek citizens. On October 11, 1964, The Turkish newspaper Cumhurriyet, reported that 30,000 Turkish nationals of Greek descent had left permanently, in addition to the Greeks who had been expelled." "Denying Human Rights & Ethnic Identity. The Greeks of Turkey. Helsinki Watch. A division of Human Rights Watch. March 1992.

With the bulk of Turkey's Greeks having been expelled from Turkish soil, the wrath of Ankara now aimed at the Patriarchate. During the mid and late 1960's the Turkish government threatened to expel the Patriarchate from Turkey. Pressure from the United States kept Turkey from taking such a step. According to Turkish writer Tozun Bachelli in his "Greek-Turkish relations since 1955": "There were fears that if the Patriarchate, as the center of Orthodox Christianity was removed from Istanbul, the Soviets might use the Russian Orthodox Church to assume a position of leadership and larger influence among the Orthodox Christians. This may very well have served as an added restraint to Turkey in its deliberations over the possible expulsion of the Patriarchate."
"But in the 1960's the Turkish government placed restrictions on the Patriarchate and threatened to remove it from Turkey. Two senior Churchmen were expelled and the Patriarchate's printing house was ordered closed". Denying Human Rights & Ethnic Identity: The Greeks of Turkey. Helsinki watch, A division of Human Rights Watch. March 1992.


"The authorities monitor the activities of Eastern Orthodox Churches and their affiliated operations. The Ecumenical Patriarchate in Istanbul has consistently expressed interest in reopening the Seminary on the island of Halki in the Sea of Marmara. The Seminary has been closed since the 1970's when the state nationalized most private institutions of higher learning". TURKEY. Country Reports on Human Rights practices for 1996. Department of State. February 1997.

"The Turkish Government vetoed today the candidacy of Archbishop Iakovos of New York as a possible successor to Patriarch Athenagoras I. A Foreign Ministry spokesman said the Archbishop was not acceptable because of his United States citizenship". New York Times. July 9, 1972.


"Greeks in Istanbul told Helsinki Watch of being harassed by police-called in and threatened."

"According to ethnic Greeks, the Turkish government does not permit newspapers or magazines published in Greece to be imported into the country, and no Greek books are available in bookstores."

"Helsinki Watch concludes that the Greek minority has been denied equal treatment in education and the right to control its schools, in violation of international human rights agreements, the Lausanne Treaty and the Turkish Constitution".

"Helsinki Watch concludes that the Turkish government has denied the Greek community in Turkey the right to express its ethnic identity, in violation of international human rights laws and agreements".

During the 1912-1913 Balkan wars, the islands of Imbros and Tenedos were among the territories liberated by Greece. At the Lausanne Conference Greece was forced to hand them back to Turkey. The Lausanne Treaty specified the rights of the Greeks of these two islands:

"The islands of Imbros and Tenedos, remaining under Turkish sovereignty, shall enjoy a special administrative organization composed of local elements and furnishing every guarantee for the native non-Moslem population in so far as concerns local administration and the protection of persons and property. The maintenance of order will be assured therein by a police force recruited from amongst the local population by the local administration above provided for and placed under its orders. The agreements which have been, or may be, concluded between Greece and Turkey relating to the exchange of the Greek and Turkish populations will not be applied to the inhabitants of the islands of Imbros and Tenedos". Treaty of Lausanne, Article 14.

"In 1920 about 9,000 Greeks lived on the two islands; Imbros was inhabited almost entirely by Greeks, and Tenedos was about eighty percent Greek. By the early 1970's, only 2,622 Greeks lived on Imbros and 1,400 on Tenedos. Today, according to the Constantinopolitan Society of Athens, the Greek population of the islands has dwindled to about 480, most of them elderly." Helsinki Watch, A Division of Human Rights Watch. March 1992.

The Greeks in Imbros and Tenedos have likewise been victimized by the Turks contrary to the guarantees of the Lausanne Treaty. It is only a matter of time before Hellenism becomes extinct in Turkey.

The following statements have been made about the Ecumenical Patriarchate in documents from the Turkish Foreign Ministry.

"In this regard we have noted recently that there is a growing tendency in some circles to bring to agenda the so called "ecumenical character" of the Patriarchate....".

"Ostensibly the Patriarchate has acted in its relations with the Turkish authorities as if it accepted the status determined in Lausanne-but it has never deviated from the goal of officially gaining an "ecumenic" character:......".

"Furthermore, in the hierarchy among the Christian Churches the Archbishop of Istanbul would rise to the same rank as the Pope. Taking that path would lead to the creation of an independant religious authority entitled to international representation, a kind of "religious state" within the Turkish state".

The above statements come from two documents "The Greek Orthodox Patriarchate's Status" and "Turkey's Religious Tolerance" available from the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Regarding the "Ecumenical" question it is an established fact that the Patriarchate of Constantinople has been using the "Ecumenical" label since the sixth century and therefore, no disrespect toward the Turkish Republic can be reasonably ascertained. The Patriarch of Constantinople is "Ecumenical Patriarch" and "First among equals" among the fourteen
autocephalous Eastern Orthodox Patriarchate's and Churches worldwide.

The name of the Ecumenical Patriarch is commemorated first, according to his rank by the heads of the Orthodox Churches during worship. At Pan-Orthodox synods and councils the Ecumenical Patriarch receives a place of honor, and serves Orthodoxy in general as a sort of President. Regarding the comparison to the Papacy, no autocephalous Orthodox Church or Patriarchate anywhere at anytime has ever had the status of the Papacy as a state. Such a desire would be contrary to Orthodoxy. The Ecumenical Patriarchate's religious duties include maintaining communion with all Orthodox Churches, administering to those Orthodox around the globe under its jurisdiction, and overseeing Orthodox relations with western Churches and other religions.

It is interesting that the Turkish authorities worry about the Patriarchate's activities. The Patriarchate has never had as much secular power as it had during the centuries of the Ottoman empire. The Ottoman Sultans invested the Patriarchate with secular responsibilities that had been unheard of even in the Byzantine empire. The Patriarchate renounced its secular responsibilities in 1923. Such irresponsible accusations about the Patriarchate planning to create a state has contributed to the hatred against the Patriarchate by Turkish Islamic fundamentalists.

A press release of the Ecumenical Patriarchate dated January 20, 1997 mentioned the arrest of Metropolitan Iakovos, a member of the Patriarchate's holy synod. "An Istanbul lower court has sentenced his eminence Metropolitan Iakovos of Laodikeia, a Hierarch of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, to a five month suspended prison term and a fine of approximately two dollars for officiating at the Easter day service at the Bulgarian Orthodox Church of Saint Stephen, Istanbul. The judicial conviction is unprecedented, as the secular Turkish Republic has no official religion, and civil courts, according to Turkish law, have no jurisdiction over internal or ecclesiastical matters." Turkish lower court sentences Orthodox Metropolitan to Five Months prison term. The Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople Press Release. January 20, 1997.

In August of 1991 the Patriarchate was under siege by a group of Islamists for several days. "A mob of about 150 people calling themselves "Turks of Western Thrace", a group tied to elements of the Nationalist Islamic Organizations in Turkey, surrounded the Patriarchate from Aug 25-29 to protest the appointment by Greek authorities of a Moslem mufti (religious leader) in Xanthi. The protesters sought to impose their own candidate. The group set a deadline for a list of demands and threatened to storm the closed gate of the Patriarchate unless the Patriarch would issue a statement condemning the Greek government's policy in Western Thrace." Compiled from Athens News Agency reports. Siege ends Unsatisfactorily. Orthodox Observer. October 1991.

In the fall of 1993 a Greek Orthodox cemetery was desecrated. In October of that year an arson attack took place against the Patriarchate. In March of 1994 Islamic fundamentalism began its ascension with victories in Mayoral elections throughout Turkey. The mayor of Constantinople (modern Istanbul) among them, pledged to enter the Patriarchate through the 9 / 11
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gates where Patriarch Gregorius was hanged from from in 1821 following the outbreak of Greek independance and which has been closed to this day. Islamic extremists have taken responsibly for various attacks on the Patriarchate.

"During the last few years, there have been instances of graffiti, stones tossed over the walls, and press attacks on the Patriarchate and the Patriarch. In May three bombs were found inside the Patriarchate walls." TURKEY. Country Reports on Human Rights practices for 1994. Department of State. February 1995.


"In December a bomb was thrown onto the roof of the Ecumenical Patriarchate cathedral where it exploded. A patriarchal deacon was severely injured and remains hospitalized. Structural damage was minimal, although many windows were broken." TURKEY. Country Reports on Human Rights practices for 1997. January 1998.

Responsability for these attacks has been claimed by groups such as "Islamic great east raiders front" and "Hizbullah" (unrelated to the Lebanese group with the same name. These attacks have come with the political rise of Justice and Development, an Islamic party that overall behaved moderately in it's year in party. The Islamic awakening in Turkey has it's moderate and extremist factions. Despite the banning of the predecessors of the Justice and Development Party by Turkey's armed forces, Islamic fundamentalist has grown to the point where the Islamists won Turkish national elections in November 2002.

It is clear that the extremists have a base inside Justice and are not isolated to the terrorists mentioned above. On the whole, Turkey's fundamentalists are emerging as a totalitarian political movement. The movement's seething hatred of the Patriarchate and the remaining Greek and Armenian Christians does not bode well for minorities in the future.

As with other totalitarian movements, Turkey's fundamentalists seek to eradicate culture and civilization. There is an active movement to convert Aghia Sophia back into a Mosque, which means the great mosaics in the Church will be eradicated. Kemal banned the word "Constantinople" when he renamed it Istanbul. The Islamists are ready to finish the job by erasing all vestiges of the city's Greek past. A New York Times article "Discontent seethes in Once thriving Turkey" published on March 2, 1995 referred to a proposal to destroy the walls of the old city: ".....and advocating but disavowing a proposal after it created a storm-that Istanbul's ancient walls be torn down as a symbol of Byzantine Christendom".
The process of ethnic cleansing of the Greeks of Turkey is on the verge of being completed. The Patriarchate is the last life of Hellenism and Orthodoxy in the city. Its removal or dismantling will signify the success of Turkey in its quiet and successful destruction of an entire culture. Following the bombing of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in December 1997, a Greek caretaker at a Church was murdered. Shortly after, a Greek Church on Imbros was destroyed. On April 3, 1998 Reuters reported: "Unknown attackers have desecrated 72 Greek Orthodox graves in Istanbul, state run Anatolian news agency said on Friday. It said the attackers broke gravestones and opened 15 tombs, breaking crosses and covering the area with bones taken from one of the graves at a cemetery in the city's Kurtulus district".

On September 14, 2004, the Greek American National Herald Newspaper reported that the Turkish Military and National Security Council refused to allow the reopening of the Halki Seminary. Subsequently, Foreign Minister Abdullah Gul has stated that Turkey will not recognize the "Ecumenical" status of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. In October 2004, the Ecumenical Patriarchate was bombed yet again by fanatics.

The Grey Wolves routinely demonstrate outside the Phanar and burn the Patriarch in effigy. Last fall, the Prinkipos orphanage was confiscated from the Greek community of Constantinople by the Turkish government. The only thing that has changed in Turkey from the previous years and decades is that there are now few Greeks left in Constantinople, Imbros, and Tenedos. The policies of persecution, discrimination, and overall ethnic cleansing are still very much in place. Nothing has changed for the Greeks since 1922 or 1955.