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The Anti Hellenic Bias of Human Rights Watch

By

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Since 1996, I have requested that Human Rights Watch cover the plight of ethnic Greeks in Turkey and Greek-Cypriots in occupied Cyprus. I began writing following the murders of Solomos Solomou and Tasos Isaac in Cyprus, and after a bomb attack at the Ecumenical Patriarchate all in summer of 1996. Unfortunately, I have found that Human Rights Watch is no

more democratic than the various dictatorships they criticize. They become easily irritated when challenged in any way.

I received a response from an HRW associate named Holly Cartner, who in 1996 sent me a nice little letter about not having the resources to cover Cyprus or the Greeks of Turkey. In 1998, I received another nice letter from Christopher Panico who was their researcher on Turkey at the time. He told me the same thing about time and resources. This is important because in January 1999 they published a report about the "Turks of Western Thrace." And guess whose names were among those credited for the report? None other than Holly Cartner and Christopher Panico.

I brought this to the attention of Human Rights Watch and repeatedly sought to determine how much time, money, and effort has been spent documenting Western Thrace's Muslims—referred to as "Turks." Time and again, I have contrasted the rights accorded Muslims in Greece, to the plight of Greeks in Constantinople and Greek Cypriots in Cyprus. Admittedly, I have been rather persistent.

I am summarizing without ignoring crucial details. I find the absence of accountability of NGO's remarkable. For several months during 1999, I emailed an individual that HRW had referred me to, without response until I reached the individual one evening in the NY office. Then I received a two or three sentence statement denying bias and an indication that HRW would "continue" monitoring the Greeks of Turkey. I still have this persons' email address, but never got his name.

During the summer of 1999, Holly Cartner (who first replied to me in 1996) wrote stating that there are more important human rights abuses in the world than the Greeks. Such comments about HRW having to cover the most dangerous areas in the world such as Sudan, China etc. would seem reasonable except for the fact that they have devoted a great deal of attention attacking Greece's human rights record.

In addition to reports on the "Turks" of Western Thrace, they have published propaganda on behalf of the Skopjans. Annual Human Rights Watch "World Reports" contain alleged misdeeds by Greece against an alleged "Macedonian" minority. Their 1995, document entitled "Denying Human Rights and Ethnic Identity: the Macedonians of Greece" constitutes an appalling propagandistic assault on Hellenism.

As such, during the summer of 1999 Ms. Cartner threatened they would never respond to me again, etc. Regretfully, my computer crashed and I do not have a copy of this letter. In all this time, they never directly addressed my queries on how they fund all their publications against alleged abuses by Greece, but have no allocation for reporting Turkish crimes such as the brutal killings of Greek Cypriots Solomos Solomou and Tasos Isaac, or the bombings of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

I have repeatedly notified them of human rights violations by Turkey against Greeks and Greek Cypriots: the closure of the theological seminary in Halki, the killing of a Greek caretaker in Turkey in 1998, the murder of a nine year old Greek boy on the island of Imbros in 1999, the seizure of Prinkipos Orphanage in 2004 etc. To which I received no response.

In all fairness, there is one person who was genuinely sincere. In December 1999, I began corresponding with an HRW researcher on Turkey whom I decline to name. Our correspondence continued until his tenure ended recently.

While he took the time to respond to my concerns, ultimately there were no results. If one wants to consider the outrages of HRW, one needs to consider that in the late 1990's, a Muslim from Thrace, Abdulhalim Dede was awarded a grant from HRW for alleged "past persecution" by the Greek authorities. I asked my contact at HRW about this affair involving Abdulhalim Dede, and I received the following response in a letter dated November 19, 2001,

"RE: Abdulhalim Dede. He was a recipient of the Hellman-Hammett award, which is

not HRW money or awarded by HRW, but HRW does do the administration connected

with the fund (hosting meetings of the selection committee, handling dispatch etc)."

The following excerpt from the 1999 Human Rights Watch World Report,

"Abdulhalim Dede, a journalist won a 1998 Hellman/Hammett grant from Human Rights Watch for *past persecution* (emphasis mine), was again sentenced in September to eight months imprisonment for installing an antenna without a permit.

Although more than 3,000 radio stations in Greece function without licenses and many build their antennas without permits, few are prosecuted. Human rights groups believed that Mr. Dede was singled out primarily because he is an ethnic Turk."

Human Rights Watch went to a great deal of trouble to support this individual while failing to even acknowledge the cold blooded slaughters of Solomos Solomou and Tasos Isaac, the bombing of the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the 1997 arrest of one of the members of the Holy Synod, Metropolitan Iakovos, for officiating at a service for the Bulgarian Orthodox community by the Turks, were also met with silence. More recently in 2004, the Ecumenical Patriarch was summoned to court in Turkey to answer to charges that he was attempting to "Hellenize" the Bulgarians.

More recently, there were hopeful signs. My contact told me he went to the Phanar in Turkey and obtained some information. He also told me he photographed the Prinkipos orphanage which was seized two years ago by the Turkish government. Last spring, he told me he was working on a document on the Greeks of Turkey that would be published before September. For reasons that remain unclear, this document was not published. I am still trying to find out why.

It appears to me that the anti-Hellenic biases of Human Rights groups cannot be separated from the anti-Hellenism that routinely appears in the American media. Human Rights Watch is a respected organization and its press releases and reports attract a great deal of attention. My opinion is that this organization has been blatantly compromised by an ideological and political slant that is expressed in support for the enemies of Hellenism such as Turkey and Skopje.

One of my motivations in attempting to obtain HRW coverage for the Greeks of Cyprus and Constantinople was to ensure the existence of an important record of what is happening right now. In my opinion, their complete failure to document atrocities against the Greeks is censorship. I have told them this several times in my letters. The publications of Human Rights Watch will stand as a matter of record, and future historians will find no shortage of documents indicating that Greece persecutes minorities while there will be no reference that the community of Greeks in Turkey is about to be ethnically cleansed once and for all.

The plight of Greeks under Turkish rule in Constantinople and occupied Cyprus today is dire, and the same problem of censorship that worked against Asia Minor Hellenism in 1922 is working against them today. Admiral Mark Bristol ordered the suppression of reports affirming Turkish atrocities against the Greeks in 1922. The likes of Human Rights Watch are no better than Admiral Bristol.

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