



The President

Mr Nikolaos Ouzounoglou
President
Ecumenical Federation of Constantinopolitans
Kapodistriou Avenu 17
Filothei Athens 15237-Greece

Dear Mr Ouzounoglou,

I would like to thank you your letter bringing to the European Parliament's attention the issue of the situation of the Greek minority in Istanbul and more widely in Turkey.

As you rightly point out in your letter, minority issues in Turkey are important because they are directly linked with the democratisation of the Turkish state and society. Furthermore, for the European Union the treatment of minorities is also one of the key benchmarks in order to assess a candidate country's readiness to become a member of the Union as laid down in the so-called Copenhagen criteria.

During the last EU-Turkey Association Council held on 22 June, the EU underlined that further efforts towards fully meeting the Copenhagen criteria are also required, *inter alia*, as regards property rights, trade union rights, rights of persons belonging to minorities, women's and children's rights, antidiscrimination and gender equality, and the fight against torture and ill-treatment. The EU also called on Turkey to enhance its efforts to implement all the judgements of the European Court of Human Rights.

The European Parliament also expressed its position clearly on the situation of the Greek minority. The Parliament's last resolution on the 2011 Annual Progress Report on Turkey welcomed and expected the speedy implementation of the declaration of the Government of Turkey to reopen a Greek minority school on the island of Gökçeada (Imbros), which constitutes a positive step towards the preservation of the bicultural character of the Turkish islands of Gökçeada (Imbros) and Bozcaada (Tenedos), in line with Resolution 1625 (2008) of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. At the same time, Parliament's resolution underlined, however, that further steps are needed in order to address the problems encountered by members of the Greek minority, particularly with regard to their property rights.

The issue of remedy and reparation for victims of gross violations of international human rights law is part of the wider efforts to protect minority rights and resolution 60/147 of the United Nations General Assembly provide recommendations to UN Member States. Resolution 1625 (2008) of the Parliamentary Assembly of the

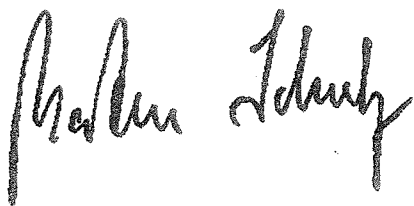
Council of Europe addressed the specific issue of the two islands you also refer to in your letter and the cooperation between Turkey and Greece. The European Parliament remains committed to follow up on these resolutions and Turkey's other commitments and obligations under international law.

During my visit to Turkey at the end of May I emphasised that the current constitutional reform process should be an opportunity to incorporate all of Turkish society, especially bringing into the discussion those historically excluded from the political process: women, youth, ethnic and religious minorities. Minorities especially should be protected by any constitution purporting to represent all of Turkey and this must go beyond the simple recognition of their status as a minority. Furthermore, the role of civil society is also key. Turkey will not be able to join the EU until it encourages the participation by civil society in decision making.

This is why I was particularly pleased to be present at the opening ceremony of the EU project "Civil Society Facility - Parliamentary Exchange Dialogue". In line with my personal conviction, I also took great care to meet as many civil society representatives as possible to discuss, among other things, minority rights, including the situation of the Greek minority. I participated at a special roundtable on freedom of religion and belief with representatives of various religious groups and I also had the honour of an audience with His Holiness Bartholomeos, Greek Orthodox Ecumenical Patriarch.

I am glad to have been informed that your Federation is actively involved in the pursuit of protecting the rights of the Greek and other ethnic and religious minorities. I welcome in particular your efforts to pursue a dialogue with the Turkish government and authorities and encourage you to continue these efforts that are worthy of the attention and support of the European Parliament and the EU institutions.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Martin Schulz', written in a cursive style.

Martin Schulz