

Squinting at Religious Discrimination

The following are excerpts from an article by Bruce Fein, TCA Resident Scholar, published in the Huffington Post on December 2, 2011.

"Is the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom squinting at a transparent Turkish Muslim injustice perpetrated by a Christian Greek government?"

"Article 19 of the Greek Nationality Code was brandished by the Government of Greece from 1959-1998 to strip approximately 50,000 Greek citizens of Turkish descent in Western Thrace of citizenship. The now-repealed article provided: "A person of non-Greek ethnic origin leaving Greece without the intent of returning may be declared to have lost his or her nationality." Nazi Germany's Nuremberg Laws similarly deprived German Jews of citizenship.

"Circumstantial evidence is convincing that Greece deprived Turkish Muslim citizens of Greek citizenship based on religion or ethnicity. Greece's population is 98 percent Eastern Orthodox, but is less than 1 percent Muslim; and, Turkish Muslims were the overwhelming percentage of persons of non-Greek ethnic origin who were deprived of citizenship during Article 19's lifetime. It speaks further volumes that Athens is barren of even a single mosque.

"The International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 created a 10-Member Commission on International Religious Freedom to identify religious persecution or discrimination abroad. The Commission is directed to publish an annual report on international religious freedom; and, to designate "Countries of Particular Concern." Sunshine is the best disinfectant.

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“But the Commission has ignored the continuing plight of stateless Turkish Muslims arbitrarily stripped of citizenship by the Greek government.

“Moreover, the Report neglected Greece's notorious prohibition on Turkish Muslims identifying themselves and associating under a Turkish emblem. Greece banned the "Turkish Union of Xanthi", the "Rodopi Turkish Women's Cultural Association" and the "Evros Minority Youth Association." The European Court of Human Rights unanimously denounced the proscriptions as affronts to the right of freedom of assembly and of association. The International Religious Freedom Report's entry on Cyprus similarly overlooked the nineteen sites of Christian worship open in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, compared with but three mosques in Greek Cyprus.

“Restoring Greek citizenship to all persons of non-ethnic Greek origin who were arbitrarily stripped of their citizenship would be no novelty. The Commission on International Religious Freedom should urge Greece to restore citizenship to non-ethnic Greeks who were deprived of citizenship under Article 19. This is no time for the United States to create even an appearance that while all religions are equal, some are more.”

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