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Gökçeada (Imbros) and Bozcaada (Tenedos): preserving the bicultural character of the two Turkish islands as a model for co-operation between Turkey and Greece in the interest of the people concerned

Report¹

Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights
Rapporteur: Mr Andreas GROSS, Switzerland, Socialist Group

Summary

The two Turkish islands of Gökçeada (Imbros) and Bozcaada (Tenedos), situated at the entrance of the Dardanelles, have been inhabited mostly by ethnic Greeks since antiquity, whilst they were governed over the centuries essentially by Venitian and Ottoman rulers, and, since 1922, by the Turkish Republic.

The Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights regrets that as a consequence of various measures taken by the authorities in the second half of the 20th century (closure of all Greek community schools on the islands, large-scale expropriations, various forms of harassment), but also for economic reasons, the vast majority of the original inhabitants of the islands have emigrated, leaving only about 250 mostly elderly members of the ethnic Greek community on Gökçeada (Imbros) and 25 on Bozcaada (Tenedos). At the same time, many thousands of exiled islanders and their offspring have demonstrated their desire to maintain close links with their homeland.

The committee makes a number of specific proposals for urgent positive measures needed in order to stem or at least partly reverse the departure of the ethnic Greek population from the islands so that their bicultural character can be preserved.

It finds that such positive action by the Turkish authorities will not only be a tangible sign of Turkey's respect for the rights of her own citizens, but could also serve as a model for cooperation between Turkey and Greece.

A positive attitude towards the ethnic Greek islanders and their descendants would also be an excellent example of Turkey's willingness to overcome outdated nationalist attitudes and to embrace European values of good neighbourliness.

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A. Draft resolution

1. The Parliamentary Assembly warmly welcomes the recent improvement in the relations between Turkey and Greece which have stimulated a strong increase in economic and cultural exchanges between the two states.

2. These improved relations have made it possible for the former heads of the Greek and Turkish Assembly delegations, Elsa Papademetriou and Murat Mercan, to undertake, in 2005, a historic visit to the islands of Gökçeada (Imbros) and Bozcaada (Tenedos), whose population has suffered too long also from the consequences of different crises in relations between the two states.

3. The 2005 visit was followed by the joint presentation of the motion which is at the origin of the present resolution. The small size of the islands and of their population makes it possible to extricate them from the wider context of bilateral Greco-Turkish minority issues, which will be the subject of another report of the Assembly.

4. The Assembly finds that positive action by the Turkish authorities to preserve the bicultural character of the two small Turkish islands will not only be a tangible sign of Turkey's respect for the rights of her own citizens, but could also serve as a model for cooperation between Turkey and Greece in the sole interest of the people concerned.

5. A positive attitude towards the ethnic Greek islanders and their descendants would also be an excellent example of Turkey's willingness to overcome outdated nationalist attitudes and to embrace European values of good neighbourliness.

6. The Assembly regrets that as a consequence of various measures taken by the authorities at that time (closure of all Greek community schools on the islands, large-scale expropriations, various forms of harassment), but also for economic reasons, the vast majority of the original (ethnic Greek) inhabitants of the islands have emigrated, leaving only about 250 mostly elderly members of this community on Gökçeada (Imbros) and 25 on Bozcaada (Tenedos). At the same time, many thousands of exiled islanders and their offspring have demonstrated their desire to maintain close links with their homeland by returning regularly to their ancestral home for traditional feasts, family reunions and holidays and a number of them are seriously considering resettling there either as retirees or as entrepreneurs. Members of the diaspora associations play an important role in assisting the permanent residents in coping with the objective difficulties they face.

7. Positive measures are now urgently needed in order to stem or at least partly reverse the departure of the ethnic Greek population from the islands so that their bicultural character can be sustainably preserved.

8. The Assembly welcomes the fact that the Turkish authorities have recently made a number of positive gestures, including:

8.1. the reconstruction of the bell tower of the Greek community church of Bozcaada (Tenedos), following the visit of the Turkish Prime Minister and his dedicated will;

8.2. the recent refurbishment of the Agios Nikolaos church in Kaleköy (Kastro) on Gökçeada (Imbros);

8.3. the imminent (already approved and funded) restoration of the island's former cathedral church, Agia Marina, in the same town;

8.4. the much-noted reassuring and helpful attitude of both local sub-prefects ("Kaymakams") towards the ethnic Greek population.

9. In order to increase the positive momentum, the following additional measures are particularly urgent:

9.1. to permit the re-opening of at least one Greek community school on Gökçeada (Imbros), along the lines of the Greek Orthodox community schools in Istanbul or the Muslim community schools in Western Thrace, as soon as a sufficient number of ethnic Greek families with school-age children have committed themselves to resettling on the island. The new school shall promote bi-culturalism and offer Greek language and culture classes also for the children of ethnic Turkish residents;

9.2. to return expropriated land and buildings to their previous owners, whenever the land is not, or no longer, used for the public purposes for which it was expropriated. When the land cannot reasonably be returned because it has been transferred to new inhabitants, the previous owners should be offered equitable compensation, preferably in the form of other state-owned land on the same island;

9.3. to adopt specific measures that would ensure the return (in areas where the cadastral process has been completed) or the proper recording of community and family properties, including the following:

9.3.1. to provide for the practical accessibility, to all inhabitants of the islands and their descendents, of the Ottoman-era cadastral archives and the results of the survey made for property tax purposes in 1936 and to admit such documents as proof of ownership in the ongoing cadastral process;

9.3.2. to abolish the practice followed by the islands' cadastral officers and courts according to which ethnic Greek residents do not only have to prove – by witness – that they were in possession of the land for at least 20 years, but that they also still "exploit" the fields or houses at the time of application although they were obliged to leave them "unexploited" for reasons that are beyond their control;

9.3.3. to withhold the cadastral process that began on the islands in 1996 until the adoption of the measures mentioned in paragraphs 9.3.1. and 9.3.2. above, thereby sparing inhabitants the expensive, time-consuming and aleatory court proceedings needed to rectify an inaccurate administrative decision;

9.3.4. to provide for a period of ten years during which all claims that were dismissed, whether by administrative process or in court, will be reviewed under the new regime following simple, cost-effective administrative procedures;

9.4. to apply the recent judgments of the European Court of Human Rights upholding the inheritance rights of non-citizens to all pending and future cases involving inhabitants of the islands and their descendants, and to refrain from applying new restrictions based on the perceived military-strategic importance of the islands with respect to exiled islanders who have lost their Turkish citizenship, and whose presence cannot conceivably have "strategic" significance;

9.5. to repair in due course the damage already done to the natural and cultural heritage of the islands, in particular by:

9.5.1. simplifying and speeding up the procedure for owners of protected historical buildings on both islands to obtain the required permits for their restoration and reconstruction;

9.5.2. speedily granting the Greek Orthodox parish of Bozcaada (Tenedos) the permit required for the restoration of the chapel of Agia Paraskevi and issuing proper ownership titles both in respect of the particular chapel and all other property of this religious foundation;

9.5.3. reviewing the permit given to the "Wind-Surf Club" built in the sensitive natural habitat zone between the salt lake and the Aegean Sea on the south-eastern coast of Gökçeada (Imbros);

9.5.4. banning any further excavations at the natural monument of "Kaskavalia Rocks" near the harbour of Kuzulimani (Agios Kyrikos) at Gökçeada (Imbros) and repairing the damage already done;

9.5.5. removing the unused, ruined concrete shack built by the military on the scenic site of the former festivities area of the village of Tepeköy (Agridia) known as Pinarbasi (Spilia) on Gökçeada (Imbros) and making the whole area available again for traditional festivities and funding the reconstruction of the Agia Marina chapel;

9.5.6. restoring, to the extent possible, the classical-era port of Kaleköy (Kastro) on Gökçeada (Imbros) destroyed

during the recent construction of a modern marina on this site, and preserving the remnants of the ancient Venetian/Byzantine-era castle overlooking the same village;

9.5.7. maintaining the original religious purpose of the newly restored church of Agios Nikolaos in Kaleköy (Kastro);

9.6. to return the Turkish citizenship to those of the islanders who lost it in the past and their descendants;

9.7. to establish a direct link, by sea, between Gökçeada (Imbros) and Bozcaada (Tenedos), and between Gökçeada and Greece, taking into consideration also its commercial viability;

9.8. to improve infrastructure facilities for the villages on Gökçeada (Imbros) that are still settled by significant numbers of ethnic Greek inhabitants – in particular, in Tepeköy (Agridia), Dereköy (Schinouli), Zeytinliköy (Aghii Theodori), and Eski Bademli (Glyky).

10. In order to assist in the implementation of the measures recommended above, and to promote the early detection of any other issues needing to be addressed, the Assembly recommends the instauration of an informal mechanism for regular dialogue (“round table”) involving the local Turkish authorities and representatives of the two communities.

11. The Assembly invites its Monitoring Committee to include the follow-up of the proposed measures (paragraph 9 above) in its post-monitoring dialogue with Turkey.

B. Explanatory memorandum by Mr Andreas Gross, rapporteur

1. Introduction

1. Let me begin by explaining why this is an unusual topic, with an unusual background, which therefore deserves unusual attention from this Committee.

2. Gökçeada (Imbros) and Bozcaada (Tenedos) are two small Northern Aegean islands, which have been inhabited since time immemorial mostly by ethnic Greeks, and which have been governed throughout their history by numerous rulers, including for many centuries the Ottomans, and, since 1923, the Turkish Republic. The islanders have always been hostages of the ups and downs of relations between Turkey and Greece and they have suffered terribly especially from 1964 through the 1980s, when the islands were almost emptied of their original inhabitants. Thanks to the personal initiative of Elsa Papademetriou and Murat Mercan, then heads of the Greek and Turkish delegations to the Parliamentary Assembly, who had undertaken a historic visit to the islands in 2005 on behalf of the Assembly’s Bureau and who had co-sponsored the motion underlying this report, hopes are now very high on the islands and beyond that this issue may become an example of mutually beneficial cooperation between Greece and Turkey.

3. The very fact that these islands are so insignificant – even their “strategic” location at the mouth of the Dardanelles has no military importance any more in the day and age of long-range missiles and satellites – should really make it possible to overcome old nationalistic reflexes and negotiate a fair deal in the sole interest of the people concerned, namely the old and the new inhabitants of the islands as well as the exiled islanders who have maintained a loving relationship with their old homeland in different ways, and Turkish citizens who have discovered the beauty of the islands in recent times and who like to spend time and possibly retire there. Gökçeada (Imbros) and Bozcaada (Tenedos) could serve in a way as a “litmus test” for Turkey’s willingness and ability to generously right past wrongs. The positive role which Mrs Papademetriou and Mr Mercan have played together, and the concrete action taken by Prime Minister Erdogan after his own visit to the islands in April 2005² have raised many hopes among the islanders and among those in the Council of Europe who believe that old rivalries like those between Greeks and Turks can give way to true partnership and cooperation.

4. I want to make it perfectly clear from the very start that nobody among the ethnic Greek islanders, the diaspora, let alone the Greek authorities, and certainly not myself or anyone else in the Council of Europe, harbours any “territorial” agenda: the islands are under full Turkish sovereignty, since 1923 as far as the Turkish Republic is concerned, and for many centuries before under Ottoman rule, with only very short interruptions of British and Greek rule at the beginning of the last century. Any “land” or property issues concern private

2. During my visit, I was told many times by grateful ethnic Greek islanders and members of the diaspora that Mr Erdogan had personally ensured the speedy renovation of the bell tower on Bozcaada (Tenedos), speedily fulfilling a promise he had made during his visit.

individuals – Turkish citizens, albeit of Greek culture, or their direct descendants – and foundations only and have no bearing whatsoever on national sovereignty over the territories in question.

5. In the same way, I should like to acknowledge from the beginning that I am fully aware of the fact that the sufferings of the ethnic Greek inhabitants of Gökçeada (Imbros) and Bozcaada (Tenedos) did not happen in isolation – the measures taken in 1964 were linked to earlier attacks on Turkish Cypriots, other measures coincided with the flare-up of the Cypriot crisis in 1974. Turkish policies towards the islanders may also have been influenced by the problems experienced by the ethnic Turkish minority in Western Thrace, in Greece. These will be the subject of the report by our colleague Michel Hunault, whose mandate covers more generally the problems of the ethnic Greek minority in Turkey and of the ethnic Turkish minority in Greece. But this report is not intended to “judge” the behaviour of the Turkish authorities towards the islanders. If that were the case, it might indeed be necessary to take into account the perceived “provocations” from the Greek side in order to reach a “balanced” judgment. But it is my intention – and that of the Committee, which decided to keep this topic separate from Mr Hunault’s mandate – to propose practical solutions for the problems encountered by the islanders, including their descendants living abroad, outside the vicious circle of “tit for tat” reactions to perceived injustices committed by the other side.

6. In order to understand the present situation, and to propose fair solutions, it is unavoidable to look at the way this situation has come to be, in the most objective manner. If this can be interpreted as implying some criticism of certain measures taken by the (historical) authorities, so be it – we need to learn the lessons of history, or else we are condemned to repeat past errors. And let us also not forget that the victims of the violations that I will not be able to avoid mentioning, as a matter of my own credibility and that of the Council of Europe as a whole, were all and still are in their vast majority Turkish citizens; and that the islands, whose situation our proposals are intended to improve, are Turkish islands. If this report can help turn the two islands into a positive example for tolerance, mutual respect and prosperity, it will be a very “pro-Turkish” report. This is my sincere intention, as a friend of Turkey and clear supporter of its European ambitions.

7. In this spirit, I should like to appeal to our Turkish friends to do everything in their power in order to avoid that the fate of the inhabitants of the two small islands becomes hostage to the ongoing struggle for influence between “nationalist” political forces and those who are labouring in favour of a decisively “European” orientation of Turkish politics. The strategic ‘insignificance’ of these two small islands should make it easier to allow basic fairness to prevail for the benefit of all inhabitants without worrying about any danger for national security. As I said during my fact-finding visit to Turkey : the more powerful partner can afford to show its wisdom by taking the first step towards the other side.

8. My own interest in this topic is related to the report I prepared for the Committee on Political Affairs in 2003 on “Positive experiences of autonomous regions as a source of inspiration for conflict resolution in Europe”³. I am still fascinated by the positive way in which the Åland Islands in the Baltic Sea, whilst undisputedly under Finnish sovereignty, have been able to maintain their original Swedish culture. However, I am aware that the international context makes the case of the two Turkish islands very different from the Finnish ones.

9. Proceedings to date include the tabling of the motion (Doc 10536 of 29 April 2005), which was forwarded to the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights for report on 27 January 2006. At its meeting on 13 March 2006, the Committee appointed me as Rapporteur, and on 15 September 2006, it authorised me to undertake fact-finding visits to the region. I undertook a brief visit to Athens on 22 November 2006 meeting with representatives of the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs and representatives of the Diaspora originating from Gökçeada (Imbros) and Bozcaada (Tenedos), I met the Ecumenical Patriarch of Istanbul, who is a native of Gökçeada (Imbros), on 17 May 2007, after which I also had talks with the Turkish authorities in Ankara. Finally, I have visited the islands themselves, followed by fresh talks in Ankara from 28 April until 2 May 2008⁴

2. A short historical overview

10. As you can see from the introduction, it is not the aim of this report to investigate past human rights violations and to “name and shame” the perpetrators. In order to develop and propose a fair and reasonable solution for the future, it is nevertheless necessary to understand the historical background of the present situation – even if this background is not so flattering for the authorities that were in power back in the 1960s, 70s and 80s, and also for the historic Greek Governments and the wider international community, which allowed these policies to proceed practically unopposed, for reasons of cold war strategy, wider national or economic interests, or simply for not caring a lot about the fate of such a small community.

11. The previously Byzantine islands were annexed by the Ottoman Empire in 1455/56, whilst their ethnic, religious and cultural make-up remained largely unchanged under the mostly tolerant regime of the Ottomans. In 1912, the Imvriot population of 9,456 inhabitants was composed of 9,357 ethnic Greeks and 99 Turks, whereas Bozcaada (Tenedos) had a more balanced mix of 5,420 Greeks and 1,200 Turks, for a total of 6,620 inhabitants.

12. Between 1912 and 1923, the islands were drawn into the Greco-Turkish conflict as well as into World War I, and changed hands several times. Whilst the 1920 Treaty of Sèvres, never ratified by Turkey, granted sovereignty over the islands to Greece, the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne, negotiated after the Turkish military successes in the so-called Anatolian war, gave the

3. Doc 9824, 03.06.2003.

4. The detailed programme of the visit is appended.

islands back to Turkey. But article 14 of the Treaty of Lausanne stipulated a strong regime of local autonomy in favour of the traditional inhabitants:

“The islands of Imbros and Tenedos, remaining under Turkish sovereignty, shall enjoy a special administrative organisation 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 person 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 maybe, 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.”

13. After 1923, as the islanders had feared, the Turkish Government was reluctant to fulfil the undertaking of article 14 of the Lausanne Treaty⁵. Indeed, Article 14 of Law No 1151 of 1927 establishing the “special status” of the islands abolished public Greek-language education.

14. In 1946, the first group of Muslim Turkish citizens were brought to the island by the Turkish government. The 1950s, with the Democratic Party in power in Turkey, are seen by ethnic Greek Imvriots and Tenedians as a period of tranquillity and liberty. Article 14 of law No 1151 (1927) was abrogated by virtue of law No. 5713 (1952) and education on the islands regained a semi-autonomous status.

15. After the military coup in Turkey in 1960, the situation worsened dramatically for the islanders. In 1964, coinciding with inter-communitarian clashes in Cyprus, article 14 of law No 1151 was put in force again by virtue of law 502/1964 and the Greek-language schools were closed. Most of the viable agricultural lands were expropriated, for the construction of an airport and a military base, the establishment of an “open prison” (agricultural prison) on the southwest coast of Gökçeada (Imbros) in 1965, and for the establishment of a state-owned agricultural production enterprise (TIGEM) in 1966. According to testimonies collected by a Turkish researcher⁶, and by some of the islanders themselves whom I met during my on-site visit, the inmates of the “open prison” committed many criminal acts against the (then still mostly ethnic Greek) inhabitants to the point of driving many to emigration, whilst the authorities did not intervene effectively. Representatives of the local Turkish authorities stressed that the inmates of the prison had been suitably supervised and denied that such criminal acts occurred during the later years of the existence of the prisons, without being able to exclude that some such acts were committed in the first years of the existence of the prison.

16. Other factors motivating the emigration of most of the ethnic Greek islanders were economic: the Turkish authorities rightly pointed out that during the same period, many island dwellers living on Aegean islands under Greek sovereignty had also left their homes and sought better fortunes in Athens, or even as “guest workers” outside of Greece, as did many Turkish citizens from the mainland.

17. But the emigration of almost all ethnic Greek inhabitants in such a short period of time cannot be explained, in my view, by the general migratory “pull” factors prevailing at the time. The islanders of Gökçeada (Imbros) and Bozcaada (Tenedos) were clearly subjected to local “push” factors created by the policies put into place since 1964, which must have suggested to most ethnic Greek islanders that they and their children had no future on the islands.

18. The main “push factor” cited by representatives of the ethnic Greek community was the closure of the Greek-speaking schools in 1964, which, combined with the other factors referred to in paragraphs 19-21 below, lead to the immediate departure of most inhabitants with school-age children. The Turkish authorities questioned the importance of this factor, as a similar measure in 1927 had not provoked a mass exodus. But representatives of the Greek diaspora pointed out that the importance the islanders attached to the education of their children had much increased between the 1920s and the 1960s.

19. Most islanders were traditionally either fishermen or farmers, who were also engaging in animal husbandry. In 1964, fishing was generally banned all around Gökçeada (Imbros), for environmental reasons, whose credibility is doubtful as fishing continued in neighbouring waters, including around Bozcaada (Tenedos), where ethnic Turkish fishermen would also have been hit by a ban.

20. At roughly the same time, farming was made *de facto* impossible by the expropriation for the above-mentioned purposes (agricultural prison, state farm, and airport and military facilities), of the most fertile agricultural lands – in particular, the three large plains we saw on Gökçeada (Imbros), the rest of the island being mountainous and rocky and surely more difficult to farm, although we were told that many hillsides were planted with vines.

21. Again at about the same time, the then flourishing export of meat to the mainland was prohibited for sanitary reasons.

22. In my view, these local migratory “push factors”, whether or not they were created by the authorities of the time by design⁷, or by inadvertence, were objectively very powerful and the consequence was – again, whether intended or not – the departure of the vast majority of the original ethnic Greek inhabitants from the islands.

5. Cf. Alexis Alexandris, Imbros and Tenedos: A Study of Turkish Attitudes Toward two Ethnic Greek Island Communities since 1923, in: Journal of the Hellenic Diaspora; .

6. Elif Müyesser Babül, “Belonging to Imbros: Citizenship and Sovereignty in the Turkish Republic”, doctoral thesis, Bogazici University, Istanbul 2003.

23. By a decree of 29 July 1970⁸, Imbros (Imroz in Turkish) was renamed Gökçeada, and Greek place names were replaced by Turkish ones. In the following years, the population of entire villages was transferred from the Anatolian mainland to the islands (in 1973, from the Black Sea (Trabzon) region, in 1984 from Isparta, Budur and Mukla, and in 2000 from Canakkale and Biga), often in the wake of natural disasters or as part of hydro dam projects involving the flooding of villages on the mainland.

24. The “open prison” was closed in December 1991, after most of the ethnic Greeks had left the island. Whilst the ethnic Greek islanders believe that this was done because the new inhabitants from Anatolia had also suffered from harassment by inmates, the Turkish authorities insist that the closure, as well as the opening of the prison in 1965, was in line with the carceral policies applied throughout Turkey.

25. The peak of the exodus of the ethnic Greek islanders was in 1974, following new disturbances triggered by a fresh round of conflict in Cyprus. The numbers speak for themselves: in 1960, 5,487 ethnic Greeks and 289 ethnic Turks lived on the island of Gökçeada (Imbros); in 1970, the numbers were 2,571 and 4,020; in 1985, 472 and 7,138; in 1990, 300 and 7,200 respectively⁹. At present, as the authorities as well as the ethnic Greek community agree, about 250 mostly elderly ethnic Greek islanders live on the island year-round, whereas between 2000 and 4000 spend some time in their ancestral homeland as seasonal visitors, in particular around the religious festivals at Christmas, Easter and in mid-August for the Assumption of Holy Mary (Panayia).

26. On Bozcaada (Tenedos), 25 mostly elderly ethnic Greeks are still living permanently on the island (total population: 2274). Greek community representatives said that in the 1950s, their number was around 1,700, with over 240 children in the Greek school at the time of its closure in 1964. The Turkish prefect could not cite any official figures but thought, following talks he had with aged inhabitants, that there were about 600 ethnic Greeks in 1960, out of a total of 1350 inhabitants at the time. He pointed out that it is difficult for the authorities at present to maintain the population on the island. The Turkish school on Bozcaada (Tenedos) presently has only 34 students in the 1st, 2nd and 3rd grades combined.

27. Most exiled ethnic Greek islanders have ended up living in Greece but considerable numbers emigrated to places as far away as the United States, Australia and South Africa. As I could see for myself during my visit to Athens, when I met with many representatives of different groups of diaspora representatives, the exiled Imvriots and Tenedians are making a great effort to distinguish themselves from other Greek and Turkish diaspora groups, retaining a specific Imbriot and Tenedian identity. I am impressed by their dedication and affection for their homeland, which helps them maintain the links with the islands over the generations. Many members of the diaspora were present on the islands and participated actively in the meetings we had during my visit, which took place just after the Greek Orthodox Easter weekend.

28. The year 1993 brought a new shift in policy towards the islands. Special visa requirements for travelling to Gökçeada (Imbros), which had effectively prevented exiles from returning to visit their homeland, were abrogated, and the Government provided funding for the development of tourism. Since 1993, in increasing numbers each year, exiled Imbriots and their offspring come back to their native lands in the summer, especially during Panayia¹⁰. The new policy recasts former inhabitants as tourists, welcoming as such those who had once been made to leave. They are joined by a group of wealthy and cultured Istanbulites who come to the islands in search of a culturally authentic vacation spot, and who tend to be critical vis-à-vis the destruction wrought on the original culture by earlier policies much in the same way as the exiled islanders themselves.¹¹

3. The situation on the islands at the present time: what are the problems that need to be addressed today?

29. The situation – as it presents itself today as well as its historical development – differs considerably between the two islands. On Gökçeada (Imbros), an almost exclusively ethnic Greek population has been all but replaced by fairly recent arrivals¹² of ethnic Turkish inhabitants from the mainland. On Bozcaada (Tenedos), a sizeable ethnic Turkish population with its own centuries-old cultural traditions has always cohabited with ethnic Greeks, although most of these have now departed for similar reasons as their cousins on Gökçeada (Imbros). I will try to take the differences between the two islands into account for the three issues to be developed below: the preservation of the islands’ cultural and natural heritage (i.), as well as the protection

7. Representatives of the diaspora gave me copy of an English summary of two classified decrees of the Turkish National Security Council dated 27.03.1964 (decree no. 35) and 28.01.1975 (decree no. 206), as published by the Greek newspaper “Eleftherotipia” on 26.04.1988. These decrees (if they are genuine) lay out a systematic programme of de-hellenisation of the islands (“Eritme Programi” or “Dissolution Programme”), using expropriations, the cutting of cultural and religious ties and the militarisation of the islands as tactical means. For the purposes of this report, I do not find it necessary to explore whether such decrees have existed. It is sufficient to take note of the objective results of the policies pursued in the past, whether they were intended or not, and to make practical proposals to correct these results in order to facilitate the harmonious development of both communities on the island in future.

8. Law No 5442/decision 8479.

9. Source: Elif M. Babül, “Belonging to Imbros: Citizenship and Sovereignty in the Turkish Republic”, in: Oxford Balkan Society, South East European Studies Programme, Conference on Nationalism, Society and Culture in post-Ottoman South East Europe (St Peter’s College, Oxford, 29-30.05.2004); the publication is an abridged version of the thesis mentioned in note 2 above.

10. The Greek orthodox religious festival for the commemoration of the death of Virgin Mary, on 16 August.

11. Cf. Elif Babül (thesis cited in note 2), pp 85, pp 105.

12. I refuse to use the emotionally-charged term of “colonists”, but it seems to me that the coordinated arrival of most inhabitants of entire villages from the mainland did not happen without the encouragement of the authorities at the time.

of the ethnic Greeks' property rights and their transmission to the following generations (ii.), and finally the islands' infrastructure problems (iii.).

3.1. Protection of the islands' cultural and natural heritage

3.1.1. Cultural heritage

30. The islands' cultural heritage is the product of their historical development. On Gökçeada (Imbros), whose population had been over many centuries almost exclusively ethnic Greek, historic buildings, churches etc. are all "Greek". The historic villages, whilst in a depressingly bad state of repair, must have once housed thriving communities. We were shown the former houses of rich merchants, doctors, pharmacists, shops, large farm and vintner's houses. The historic island capital of Kaleköy (Kastro) features the remains of a large Venetian/Byzantine fortress built on an ancient Athenian acropolis (ancient Athens had settled a colony on the island since the 5th century B.C.), a harbour also dating back to the classic Greek period, and the island's former cathedral church of Agia Marina, which was vandalised in 1974 but, whose rehabilitation has recently been approved. The villages of Zeytinliköy (Aghii Theodori) – the birth place of the present Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew and of the former Archbishop of the Americas Iakovos –, Eski Bademli (Glyky), Tepeköy (Agridia), Dereköy (Schinouli) and Yeni Mahalle (Eulampion) all have beautifully maintained Greek orthodox churches.

31. Bozcaada (Tenedos) with its historically mixed population logically also features a Greco-Turkish cultural "mix". The well-preserved Venetian/Byzantine/Ottoman fortress at the harbour, the recently restored¹³ bell tower of the Greek community church coexist harmoniously with wineries and town and farm houses in Greek and Turkish style. The atmosphere on the island is generally pleasant – a living bi-cultural community, in which very few buildings are derelict and in which the atmosphere between the two population groups is relaxed and positive – as was confirmed both by the few remaining elderly ethnic Greek inhabitants and by the representatives of the diaspora present during our visit.

32. During my visit on the islands, I have observed that a number of important "Greek" cultural sites are either quite run-down, or have been put to uses that appear to be quite incompatible with their status as cultural or religious monuments.

33. The destruction of the antique harbour of Kaleköy (Kastro) on Gökçeada (Imbros) for the construction of a modern concrete marina is an outrage that my official Turkish interlocutors (the Governor as well as the Mayor) regretted as much any other lovers of the island.

34. The alleged destruction of the old Greek village of Pyrgos for the construction of a Ministry of Justice resort has given rise to conflicting versions: ethnic Greek representatives say that on 5 March 1966, villagers were ordered to hand over the keys of their houses and leave with what they were able to carry, the rest to be thrown

into the sea. They have delivered a number of documents and pictures showing that the 35 houses as well as the church of St. Anna and the customs house were bulldozed in the early 1980s to make room for the resort. According to the Turkish authorities, the Ministry of Justice resort was built in 1985 above the site of an ancient sunken village, and some observers hinted to me that both versions constitute in fact the whole truth i.e. both an ancient and a more recent settlement were affected by the construction of that resort.

35. The old primary school of Zeytinliköy (Aghii Teodori), whose construction had been completed by the ethnic Greek community just before Greek schools were prohibited on the islands, is now in ruins. The former primary school of Dereköy (Schinouli) was in the meantime reportedly converted into a disco (though at the time of our visit, fresh paint was hiding the commercial insignia). The former primary school of Eski Bademli (Glyky) was also converted into a hotel and restaurant. The same is true for the former Greek community school and kindergarten on the island of Bozcaada (Tenedos).

36. The ruined villages on Gökçeada (Imbros) I mentioned are a depressing sight. Their deplorable state is the result not only of the departure of most of their inhabitants, but also of the bureaucratic and, frankly speaking, counter-productive rules governing the granting of permits for the restoration of these houses under the so-called SIT regime (protection of the cultural and natural heritage). Almost the entire surface of the islands is placed under this regime, which involves expert committees on the mainland deciding on each repair or restoration project. The procedure often lasts more than two years, and the application can only be made once the owners have had their legal title recognised in the slow-moving property registration process (below paras. 55 pp.). The authorities have recognised the problem and indicated that the SIT committee's capacity has recently been increased so that the length of the procedures should come closer, in future, of the time limit of six months foreseen in law. The inhabitants are understandably frustrated, as the passage of time makes the renovation of their houses ever more costly, and they observe that the protection of the cultural and natural heritage on the islands does not seem to be a priority of the authorities on many other occasions.

37. During my visit, I have also seen several examples of the successful preservation of cultural monuments. The well-kept churches on Gökçeada (Imbros) I mentioned above (para. 29 in fine) along with the island's present cathedral in the capital and the adjacent building which is the seat of the Metropolitan are as many witnesses of respect for the religious traditions of the ethnic Greek minority. The St. Nicolas (Agios Nikolaos) church in the harbour area of Kaleköy (Kastro) has been recently restored with government funds, but the Metropolitan fears that it may be transformed into a museum – something he strongly opposes. I trust that the already decided and imminent restoration of the former cathedral church of Agia Marina in Kaleköy (Kastro), again with Turkish Government

13. On the initiative of the Turkish Prime Minister, cf. § 3 and footnote 2 above

funds, is a future example of the successful preservation of cultural monuments. The positive steps leading to the preservation of both these monuments should be coupled with resolving their property status as well as the property and administrative status of the rest of the property of the Kaleköy (Kastro) Greek orthodox religious foundation.

38. Another future example will be the renovation of the chapel of Agia Paraskevi on Bozcaada (Tenedos). This chapel is particularly close to the heart of the small ethnic Greek community there, as it is the site of their traditional summer festival in July. They have applied for a permit for restoration work, which they will be able to fund themselves. The already-mentioned renovation of the bell tower of the Greek community church in Bozcaada (Tenedos) was even funded by the Turkish Government, thanks to the personal initiative of the Prime Minister.

39. If the historic cultural heritage shall be viable, it must also be transmitted to the following generation. The cultural autonomy granted in Article 14 of the Treaty of Lausanne¹⁴ therefore presupposes the possibility for the ethnic Greek inhabitants to school their children also in their native tongue. As we have seen, the closure in 1964, by the military regime, of the Greek-language schools that had been allowed to flourish during the 1950's has surely been an important "push" factor for ethnic Greeks with school-age children. If the Turkish authorities are serious about allowing the islands' original cultural heritage to flourish again, they should provide for effective access to Greek-language schooling, either by allow the ethnic Greek community to re-open a school of their own on each of the islands, or by providing for high-quality Greek-language schooling in the existing public schools on the islands.

40. Representatives of the ethnic Greek community assured me that they would be able to fund Greek community schools on the islands in the same way as is presently done in Istanbul, without support from the Turkish Government.

41. Representatives of the Turkish authorities (both local prefects, and the representatives of the Ministry of Education I met in Ankara) assured me that they would be prepared to open a school for the ethnic Greek islanders if and when at least 10 children would be in need of schooling on each of the islands. The Metropolitan of the islands insisted that he could find the requisite number of families with children willing to resettle there as soon as they were assured that there would be a school for their children.

42. As I was under the impression that the representatives of the Ministry of Education might have been unaware of the law of 1964 abolishing the Greek community schools on the island¹⁵, I asked whether there were any legal obstacles against opening such a school now. As the answer was that there is indeed no obstacle, I can only conclude that the law of 1964 no longer applies. That would be an important and most welcome development indeed.

43. With good will on both sides, it should also be possible to solve the problem of the "chicken and the egg": understandably, parents will only move to the island when they are fully assured that appropriate schooling for their children is guaranteed upon their arrival. The authorities should therefore agree to treat the application before the actual move takes place, and make a firm commitment for the opening of a school on the strength of a list of names to be provided by the Metropolitan of families that are ready to move if and when a school is opened.

44. An appropriate Greek-language schooling offer on the islands would also greatly benefit the more recently arrived ethnic Turkish residents of Gökçeada (Imbros), as well as the long-established ethnic Turkish population on Bozcaada (Tenedos). Giving their children the opportunity to learn Greek as well as Turkish, alongside ethnic Greek children, would give rise to a truly bilingual population that would be ideally placed to seize the job opportunities that would be generated by the development of tourism around the attractive cultural and natural heritage of the islands. Such a bilingual population, prosperous and open to the world, could also serve as a bridge between Turkey and Greece and Europe as a whole.

3.1.2. Natural heritage

45. As I was able to see for myself during my visit on the islands, their natural heritage – a stunning coastline, beautiful beaches, mountains with breath-taking views – is a world-class attraction. Together with its historic and cultural heritage, it should enable the islanders to develop tourism in a sustainable way.

46. Unfortunately, I have also seen four "building sins" on Gökçeada (Imbros) that ought to be remedied as soon as possible:

47. The first is the so-called "Wind-Surf-Club" in the south-eastern corner of the island, which is a monstrous concrete block placed right on a narrow patch of land between the beach and a shallow salt lake, which is an important bird sanctuary, right in the middle of a large nature protection zone. We actually saw people surfing on the salt lake, towards a group of flamingos. The owner of the club, whom I asked how he had obtained the extraordinary permit to build in this particularly sensitive zone, reacted very aggressively. He showed me a picture of a similar monstrosity on a neighbouring Greek island and accused me of wanting to destroy the economic basis of the Turkish community on the island. The authorities were aware of the equally critical findings of the 2005 mission of Mr Mercan and Mrs Papademetriou. They acknowledged that "tourist facilities" were not allowed in this zone, but argued that this was not a tourist facility, but an educational establishment (a surfing and diving school) and that the permit was therefore legal. Frankly speaking, I am not convinced.

14. Cf. § 12 above.

15. Law 502/1964 reinstating article 14 of Law 1151/1927 banning Greek education on both islands published in Government Gazette bulletin no. 11761 dated 23 July 1964.

48. The second is the construction, by the military, of a small, fenced-in concrete shack right on top of a stunningly beautiful hillside which serves as the summer festivities area of the village of Tepeköy (Agridia) known as Pinarbasi (Spilia). The shack is obviously no longer in use (according to local inhabitants, since 2003), its roof is partly fallen in. It should be removed as soon as possible, or transformed into a small ecological café open for all, the chapel of Agia Marina should be reconstructed and the expropriated land handed back to the local community, so that the area can be restored in its original splendour for the traditional festivities in August that attract both the ethnic Greek and Turkish inhabitants of the island and their summer guests.

49. The third is the destruction of the entire settlement of Pyrgos¹⁶ including the church of Agia Anna and the deplorable condition of the pre-classic tower on this site. Both these monuments should be restored and at least part of the area where the resort is located should be made accessible to the public.

50. The fourth are the excavations on the back side of the "Kaskavalia Rocks", a monument of nature off the harbour of Gökçeada (Imbros), which has begun to tumble down. Excavation work should be stopped and necessary measures taken to restore the landscape.

3.2. Property issues

51. Clearly, a harmonious development of the islands including both ethnic groups presupposes a fair settlement of property issues. I am not directing any accusations at the present Turkish authorities, and I do not even wish to speculate about the intentions of the authorities at the time. I will limit myself to describing the objective outcomes of the past and present policies, legislation and administrative practice, assessing these outcomes in the light of the political objectives pursued by this report, and making practical proposals on how to achieve any desirable corrections of these outcomes.

52. The above-mentioned historical "push" factors (schools closure, confiscation of agricultural lands, prohibition of fishing and meat exports, open prison), together with the economic "pull" factors of better-off regions and countries have created a situation in which only a few hundred mostly elderly ethnic Greeks live on the islands permanently whilst entire villages have been deserted by their inhabitants. Some of the agricultural lands expropriated for the purposes of the TIGEM and the open prison are now cultivated by more recently arrived ethnic Turkish inhabitants, to whom these lands were given in compensation for expropriations they suffered themselves on the mainland, for example because of the construction of a power plant. On the other hand, the olive grove surrounding the village of Zeytinliköy (Agii Theodori) which was expropriated for the TIGEM state farm has now been leased to a businessman from the mainland against a nominal consideration while other plots of expropriated land are

still being tendered for long-term leases under similar terms. According to the diaspora representatives, all the ethnic Turkish settlements on Gökçeada (Imbros) were constructed on expropriated land: Yeni Bademli on the land expropriated for the state farm, Sahinkaya, Sirinköy and Ugurlu on that expropriated for the prison, and Eselek on land expropriated in the area of Aydıncık (Kefalos)¹⁷.

53. Much of the expropriated land has remained unused for many years, up to the present time. Satellite pictures we were given by diaspora representatives¹⁸ show in impressive detail how the three expropriated fertile plains had been cultivated intensively – in small plots using every available piece of land – in 1963, just before the expropriations, and how the same plains were deserted and no longer cultivated ten years later, after the expropriations. Even today, during our visit, we had the impression that much of the fertile land was still not being used, even by the new settlers.

54. Ethnic Greek inhabitants complained bitterly about the "humiliating" compensation they were paid for the expropriated land: 0.14 TL per square meter of fertile land at a time when an egg cost 0.12 TL. The Turkish authorities insisted that the expropriations were done in accordance with the law and that the land on the island had in fact little value due to the lack of accessibility. They also pointed out that the expropriated farms had legal remedies before the Turkish courts at their disposal in order to challenge the relevant administrative decisions.

55. Even most of the property that was not officially expropriated is likely to be lost for the original owners and their descendants, through the workings of three separate mechanisms, which are described in the following paragraphs. Again, it is not my intention to make any accusations that these property losses which I would tend to call *de facto* expropriations were intended by the authorities. The rules in question apply to the whole of Turkey and do not target the islands specifically, but in view of the specific historic situation, they have a disproportionate effect on the islanders.

56. The first such mechanism is created by Turkish land law, which has negative and probably unforeseen and unintended effects on Gökçeada (Imbros) and, to a lesser extent, on Bozcaada (Tenedos). Land titles had been kept in the past by the Ottoman authorities, in Arabic script, which few officials are nowadays able to read. In order to modernise the cadastral system, Law 2644 of 1934 ("Cadastral Law") required that all land owners (including home owners) re-establish their titles by proving, by witnesses, that they have been in undisputed possession of a given property over 20 years. Strangely, the cadastral process started on the islands only in 1993, i.e. almost sixty years after the adoption of the Cadastral Law, when most potential witnesses had either left the island or were deceased. In two ethnic Greek villages, the cadastral process is still not concluded, although the authorities assured me that

16. Cf. § 34 above.

17. We were given copies of letters of the Directorate General of Agricultural Exploitations (09.03.2005, No. B.12.2.TIG.0.61.10 16-1/364/1589) and of the Directorate General of Penitentiary Institutions of 16.03.2005 (No. B.03.0.C.T.E.0.6.) giving details of the surface of expropriated lands and the uses made thereof.

18. Obtained by the diaspora associations from open sources on the internet.

this would be the case by the end of 2008. The present and former ethnic Greek inhabitants of Gökçeada (Imbros) have a particularly difficult time proving their ownership under these rules because they often do not have neighbours or other witnesses who can testify that they were in possession of the land over such a long period of time. They are nevertheless required to produce witnesses identifying their property and its boundaries even when they are in possession of previous ownership titles or when they can prove that they have paid the property taxes on the land in question over many decades, on the basis of a property tax survey carried out on the islands in 1936.

57. Even when they succeed in proving continuous possession of their property for a period of 20 years¹⁹, and even when no other person claims possession of the same property, their application is dismissed by the authorities when the property is found not to be “exploited” at the time of the submission of the claim – without taking into account the circumstances which obliged most inhabitants to leave the island so that they could hardly be expected to regularly maintain or exploit their property.

58. The Ottoman-era cadastral archives cannot, in practice, be relied upon for establishing ownership in the cadastral process, as they have not been translated into modern Turkish, and the cadastral authorities require the date of issue of the title and the serial number as well as written proof of the relation between the applicant and the registered owner in order to grant access to the archives.²⁰ The issue of the accessibility of the Ottoman archives seems to be also a matter of concern for the European Union.

59. The practical unavailability of the Ottoman archives, in conjunction with a rule brought in by Law 5226/2004 amending Law 2863/1983 on “Preservation of Natural and Cultural Wealth”, which excluded usucaption (proof of 20-year unopposed possession as a method to obtain title) for land covered by the 1983 law’s protection regime – i.e. 80% of the island – has caused many properties of ethnic Greeks on Gökçeada (Imbros) to be registered in the name of the State. Law 5663/2007 has brought back the possibility of usucaption for a number of properties covered by the protection regime, but it is unclear to what extent the effects of the 2004 law will be reversed – e.g. individual houses which have been qualified as “protected monuments” may still not be recognised as belonging to their original owners or their descendants even if they can prove by witnesses that they built them themselves.

60. When a putative owner’s title is not recognised by the cadastral office, the land is registered in the name of the State. The decision can be challenged in court, but

the proceedings are often slow and disproportionately costly, in view of the small size of the plots of land concerned. I was told of one case dragging on for 38 years in court, and of many more in which the putative owners were forced to re-start the proceedings all over again several times, just before they were completed. But I also learnt – separately from the prefect and from the person concerned – of a case in which an ethnic Greek woman wishing to resettle in her family home that had been “squatted” in the meantime by others was helped by the prefect to regain possession of her house.

61. The authorities provided statistical data according to which the applicants won the vast majority of their cases in court²¹. The ethnic Greek islanders countered that the cases that were taken to court were only the tip of the iceberg, as most owners can simply not afford to pursue their rights in the courts. The same statistics, which were contradicted by some individual cases²², also showed that the vast majority of cadastral decisions were wrong, to the detriment of ethnic Greek owners. I heard many complaints about lawyers charging exorbitant fees, in relation to the value of the land in question, and insisting on payment up front, and heard testimony of persons complaining about high-handed treatment from the courts. I was told that many islanders have their cases pending before the court for years due to the fact that the witness procedure (*kesif*) is adjourned continuously. An inhabitant of the capital town of Merkez (Panaghia) told me that her property, as well as that of all her ethnic Greek neighbours, had been registered in the name of the State, whilst “squatters” from the Black Sea region who had simply taken over deserted houses of ethnic Greeks were given their titles without any problems. I raised these issues in the Ministry of Justice, whose representatives stressed that Turkish courts are independent and that they apply the law to all regardless of their ethnic origins. Individual judges who made comments that could make them appear biased would be disciplined and could be repudiated by the aggrieved party.

62. To sum up, the cadastral procedure, if it is not attenuated for the benefit of the islanders, is likely to lead to the loss of the vast majority of those properties of the current and former ethnic Greek inhabitants of Gökçeada (Imbros) which were not covered by the past expropriations.

63. This particular issue appears to be less acute on Bozcaada (Tenedos), as the ethnic Greeks who left the island during the height of the tensions stoked by the authorities at the time, in the 1960s, had (ethnic Turkish) neighbours to whom they often sold their properties, albeit at particularly low prices, which may well have reflected the situation of duress under which these persons felt they had to leave. By contrast, ethnic

19. So-called usucaption.

20. This is confirmed in a letter by the Vice-President of the Land and Mortgage Registry Department of 14.03.2005 (reference: B.09.1.TKG.4176001) given to me by diaspora representatives.

21. The prefect of Gökçeada said that of 120 cases filed in the court of first instance, 98 were won by the owner; of 103 cases opened in the special cadastral courts, 91 were won by the owner. We were later told by representatives of the diaspora that these figures do not include the period from 2005 until 2008. In the Justice Ministry, I was given the figure of 287 cases opened (of which 230 won by the applicants) for Gökçeada, and of 56 (of which 37 won) for Bozcaada. No figures were given as to the number of cases that are still pending.

22. I was handed a written statement by an individual who has initiated proceedings in respect of 114 different properties since the beginning of the cadastral process and has so far been awarded only 21, the remainder still pending before the court after many years.

Greeks leaving Gökçeada (Imbros) simply left their properties behind, as there was at the time no one to whom they could sell them. But those who did not sell their land appear to face similar problems as their cousins on Gökçeada (Imbros).²³

64. The second mechanism contributing to the loss of property by the original owners and their descendants is the law on inheritance requiring that only Turkish citizens can inherit property in Turkey. The exiled islanders' next generation has largely lost its Turkish citizenship, not least because of the requirement for young men to fulfil their military obligations as a precondition to maintaining citizenship. Two recent judgments of the European Court of Human Rights²⁴ have clarified the situation in the sense that inheritance laws shall not discriminate against non-citizens. I hope that the cases concerning exiled islanders that are still pending before the Turkish courts will be decided in the light of the clear rulings of the European Court of Human Rights, which should also govern future administrative practice. Otherwise, the passage of property from one generation to the next and by implication the maintenance of the links of the ethnic Greek community with their homeland will be seriously impeded in future. This would also be the case if foreign nationals inheriting land on the islands would be obliged to sell it again, because of the classification of the islands as "national security zones". It is difficult to see how, in the 21st century, the ownership of houses or plots of agricultural land on one of these islands by private individuals of whatever nationality can have any effect on the safety of shipping through the Dardanelles, or on any other military-strategic consideration.

65. The third mechanism that works objectively against the ethnic Greek islanders' property rights is the practice followed by the authorities to consider religious or minority foundations as "mazbut" – i.e. to place them under the direct administration of the Directorate General of Vakıfs – on various grounds. This applies not only to church buildings, but to all property belonging to a parish (including churches, school buildings, houses, and fields). On Gökçeada (Imbros), the religious foundation of Kaleköy (Kastro) was declared "mazbut" after all its Greek Orthodox inhabitants were forced to leave in 1974. Moreover, the religious foundation of Yeni Mahalle (Eulampio) was also declared "mazbut", whilst this village never ceased to have Christian inhabitants²⁵.

66. The combined effect of the three mechanisms described above is that the property situation of the ethnic Greek inhabitants of Gökçeada (Imbros) and, to a lesser extent, of Bozcaada (Tenedos) is bleak, unless urgent remedial action is taken by the competent authorities. This applies both to those who still live on the islands and to the members of the diaspora who

wish to hold on to their family property either for holiday or (future) retirement purposes or because they wish to resettle permanently on the islands.

3.3. Infrastructure problems

67. As I found out for myself, the absence of a direct link between Gökçeada (Imbros) and Bozcaada (Tenedos) is a serious impediment for the maintenance and development of links between the two islands united by a common destiny and cultural specificity. On my fact-finding visit, the trip between the two islands (which are within easy eyeshot from each other) took 7 hours and involved taking three different ferryboats. The positive signals I heard from the prefect of Bozcaada (Tenedos) give rise to hopes that such a link may indeed soon be realised, the schedule over the seasons depending on considerations of commercial viability.

68. There is also no link between any of the two islands and any Greek harbours. The Turkish authorities have convinced me that this is not their responsibility. Turkey has practically completed the construction of a customs building at the port of Ugurlu (Livounia) on Gökçeada (Imbros), which would be necessary in order to open an international link. Both the ethnic Greek and Turkish communities on the islands agree on the usefulness of a direct link with a Greek port, but according to the Turkish interlocutors on the island, the Greek authorities have so far refused to allow its establishment, citing problems with the Schengen rules as a reason. But the Schengen rules have not prevented the establishment of other boat links between Greek and Turkish ports.

69. The ethnic Greek islanders of Gökçeada (Imbros) have also complained about the lack of infrastructure facilities in the villages inhabited primarily by them, including roads, public transport, and garbage disposal²⁶. This made everyday life quite harsh, especially in winter. The prefect pointed out the limited resources at his disposal and stressed his policy of treating all citizens alike. This included payment of social assistance (YTL 250 per trimester²⁷) to needy citizens over 65 years, including those of Greek origin. Both prefects stressed their will to protect their ethnic Greek citizens against any threats. The ethnic Greek islanders and the representatives of the diaspora confirmed to me that they have indeed felt a positive change in the attitude of the local authorities towards them over the past years and that relations between the different communities were very good.

23. I was informed of the circumstances of a number of ongoing court cases, including before the European Court of Human Rights, and of cases of ancestral vineyards being suddenly declared as "forest areas", etc.

24. *Apostolidi and others v. Turkey* (no. 45628/99), judgment of 27.03.2007 and *Nacaryan and Deryan and others v. Turkey* (Nos 19558/02 and 27904/02), judgment of 08.01.2008

25. Whom we met during our visit, and who very kindly asked to be given back the olive orchard next to the church, so they could use the oil for the ritual lamps.

26. The citizens of Tepeköy (Agridia) were grateful, though somewhat amused, that in the morning before my visit, the garbage bags piling up in front of the former school were (apparently exceptionally) disposed of by a municipal garbage truck.

27. Equivalent to about € 125 at the current exchange rate.

4. Conclusions

70. If the bicultural character of Gökçeada (Imbros) and Bozcaada (Tenedos) shall be saved *in extremis*, the situation requires urgent action. The key to success lies with the competent Turkish authorities: if they wish to turn these two Turkish islands into the showcase example of what open-minded, honest cooperation among European partners can achieve, they still have the opportunity to create a real “win-win” situation in the interest of all citizens of the islands whatever ethnic background they might have.

71. If the necessary measures are taken, the former and present ethnic Greek inhabitants of the islands could still be able to hold on to their collective cultural heritage and to their individual family inheritances. This would stimulate the return of a significant number of ethnic Greeks, as tourists, retirees, or entrepreneurs, especially those from the younger generation. The money they would spend and the investments they would make in the local economy would contribute to an economic upswing that would provide jobs and income, and a more stimulating cultural environment also for the benefit of the ethnic Turkish inhabitants, and last but not least, significant increases in the tax revenues for the Turkish state.

72. In order for such a “win-win” scenario to be actually realised, it would be necessary first of all for the Turkish authorities at the central level to send a clear political message to the islanders and the diaspora communities that this is indeed their intention. Such a message from the highest political level would encourage the local and regional authorities to use their powers and administrative discretion in the sense of facilitating matters for all inhabitants of the islands, including the remaining ethnic Greek islanders and the diaspora.

73. The political message should be underpinned by a package of concrete measures aimed at realising such a common project.

74. In particular, quality education in Greek should be made available on the islands, preferably by allowing the ethnic Greek community to re-establish a school of their own, as they existed on the islands before 1964 and as they still exist in Istanbul. As long as the number of families with school-age children prepared to move to the islands is insufficient, high-quality Greek language and culture classes, taught by native Greek speakers, should be made available in Turkish state schools on the islands. In any event, all Turkish children on the islands should be given the opportunity to benefit from high-quality Greek language classes.

75. Some of the public buildings previously owned by the ethnic Greek community (religious foundations and municipalities) should be returned to their previous owners as cultural centres and meeting rooms.

76. Special measures should urgently be taken to compensate for the specific difficulties with which many ethnic Greek islanders have been confronted in re-establishing the legal title for their family properties under the cadastral rules²⁸. These difficulties are due to the departure of a large number of them between the 1960's and the 1990's due to the policies put into place by the authorities of the time²⁹. Granting easy access to the Ottoman-era cadastral archives and the 1936 property tax survey in order to facilitate proof of ownership, facilitating proof of possession, reviewing cases of obviously unfair treatment (thus minimising the need of recourse to court proceedings) would demonstrate convincingly that it is not the intention of the present-day authorities to dispossess the ethnic Greek islanders of their houses and land.

77. In the same spirit, lands expropriated in the 1960s for the purposes of the model state farm (TIGEM), the former agricultural prison or the construction of the airport or certain military facilities should be returned to their original owners insofar as they are not, or no longer, needed for the public purposes for which they were expropriated. If actual return is no longer possible, because the land has in the meantime been transferred by the State to new inhabitants, the State should adequately compensate the original owners, preferably in the form of other state-owned land on the same island³⁰.

78. The transfer of family property to the next generation should be facilitated, as a matter of urgency, by dropping nationality requirements for inheritance, in line with the recent judgments of the European Court of Human Rights³¹, without obliging foreign nationals inheriting property on the islands to sell their land for reasons of “national security”.

79. A further positive measure and a clear political message for re-integrating the exiled islanders – especially the younger generation – would be the return of the Turkish citizenship to those of the islanders who lost it in the past and to their descendants.

80. The islands' natural heritage should be protected in such a way that sustainable development of tourism, agriculture and fisheries is made possible for the benefit of all inhabitants and their guests. This would imply the demolition of the “Wind-Surf-Club” situated in a most delicate natural habitat on the south-eastern coast of Gökçeada (Imbros) and the prohibition of excavation works at “Kaskavalia Rocks” next to the island's harbour.
32

81. Links by boat should be opened as soon as possible between the two islands, and with Greek ports.

82. The follow-up of these measures and the resolution of any problems concerning local issues would greatly benefit from the establishment of a regular

28. See §§ 55-62 above.

29. See §§ 18-24 above.

30. See §§ 52-54 above.

31. See footnote 23.

32. See § 50 above.

informal dialogue, which should include representatives of the Turkish authorities and of the islands' ethnic Turkish and Greek communities.

83. The Parliamentary Assembly could follow up the implementation of its proposals in the framework of the ongoing post-monitoring dialogue with Turkey.

Appendix - Programme of the visit to Gökçeada (Imbros), Tenedos (Bozcaada) and Ankaraof Mr Andreas Gross, rapporteur³³

28 April – 2 May 2008

Monday 28 April 2008

06 h 00	Departure from Istanbul to Gökçeada (Imbros)
13 h 00	Arrival at Kuzulimanı (Agios Kyrikos) port
13 h 30	Working lunch with the Island's Sub-Prefect (<i>Kaymakam</i>), Mr Kemalettin Sakin, and the Mayor, Mr Halil Rust Akgun
15 h 00	Merkez (Panaghia) – meeting with the Island's Sub-Prefect (<i>Kaymakam</i>), the Mayor and the Director of the local Cadastral Office
17 h 00	Meeting with the Islands' Orthodox Metropolitan, His Eminence Kyrillos
18 h 00	Zeytinliköy (Agii Theodori): Visit to the former kindergarten – the only Greek community building registered in the name of the local commune, now used as the seat of the local association "Imroz/Gökçeada", opposite the ruins of the former primary school
18 h 30	Eski Bademli (Glyky): Visit to the former primary school, now converted into a hotel and restaurant
19 h 00	Kaleköy (Kastro): Visit to the Island's former cathedral Agia Marina, the old castle, the new marina and the newly restored Chapel of Agios Nikolaos

Tuesday 29 April 2008

09 h 00 Departure to Tepeköy (Agridia), the only village still inhabited exclusively by Greeks

Visits to the ruins of the former primary school, the village's kindergarten, church and artisanal school; the festivities area of the village of Pinarbası (Spilia)

11 h 00 Departure to Dereköy (Schinoudi)

Visit to the former primary school converted into a disco, the village's two main churches and a cultural centre

33. Accompanied by Mr Günter Schirmer, Secretary of the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights.

13 h 00	Return to Merkez via the south road	13 h 30	Working lunch with members of the Turkish Delegation to the PACE, hosted by Mr Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, Head of the Delegation
	Visit to the "open prison" and the expropriated plain; the new settlement Uğurlu and the customs facilities; the former Greek settlement of Pyrgos converted into a Ministry of Justice holiday resort; the natural site of Aydıncık (Kefalos) and the "Wind-surf Club"	15 h 15	Meeting at the Ministry of Justice, with the Deputy Undersecretary and the Director of International Relations
15 h 30	Visit to Yeni Mahalle (Eulampion) and the Agia Varvara Parish Church	16 h 30	Meeting at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, with Mr Ertuğrul Apakan, Undersecretary
16 h 15	Second meeting with the local authorities (<i>Kaymakam</i> and the Mayor)	20 h 00	Dinner hosted by Mr Murat Mercan, Chairperson of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Turkish Parliament
	Press conference		
17 h 30	Meetings with representatives of the ethnic Greek community		
Wednesday 30 April 2008		<i>Reporting committee:</i> Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights	
07 h 00	Departure by ferry from Gökçeada (Imbros)	<i>Reference to committee:</i> Doc. 10536, Reference No. 3171 of 27 January 2006	
15 h 00	Arrival at Tenedos (Bozcaada)	<i>Draft resolution</i> unanimously adopted by the committee on 2 June 2008	
	Meeting with the local Sub-Prefect (<i>Kaymakam</i>), Mr İbrahim Çenet	<i>Members of the committee:</i> Mrs Herta Däubler-Gmelin (Chairperson), Mr Christos Pourgourides , Mr Pietro Marcenaro , Mrs Nino Nakashidzé, (Vice-Chairpersons), Mr Miguel Arias, Mr José Luis Arnaut, Mrs Meritxell Batet, Mrs Marie-Louise Bemelmans-Vidéc , Mrs Anna Benaki , Mr Erol Aslan Cebeci, Mrs Ingrida Circene (alternate: Mr Boriss Cilevičs), Mrs Alma Čolo, Mr Joe Costello (alternate: Mr Terry Leyden), Mrs Lydie Err , Mr Valeriy Fedorov , Mrs Mirjana Ferić-Vac, Mr Aniello Formisano, Mr György Frunda, Mr Jean-Charles Gardetto , Mr József Gedei, Mrs Svetlana Goryacheva (alternate: Mr Alexey Aleksandrov), Mrs Carina Hägg, Mr Holger Haibach , Mrs Gultakin Hajiyeva , Mrs Karin Hakl, Mr Andres Herkel, Mr Serhiy Holovaty , Mr Michel Hunault , Mr Rafael Huseynov, Mrs Fatme Ilyaz, Mr Kastriot Islami, Mr Želiko Ivanji , Mrs Igluca Ivanova , Mrs Kateřina Jacques, Mr Karol Karski, Mr Andrés Kelemen, Mrs Kateřina Konečná, Mr Eduard Kukan, Mr Oleksandr Lavrynovych, Mrs Darja Lavtižar-Bebler, Mrs Sabine Leutheusser-Schnarrenberger, Mr Humfrey Malins (alternate: Mr Christopher Chope), Mr Andrija Mandić, Mr Alberto Martins, Mr Dick Marty (alternate: Mr Andreas Gross), Mrs Assunta Meloni, Mr Morten Messerschmidt, Mrs Ilinka Mitreva, Mr Philippe Monfils, Mr Felix Müri, Mr Philippe Nachbar, Mr Fritz Neugebauer, Mr Tomislav Nikolić, Mr Anastassios Papaligouras (alternate: Mr Miltiadis Varvitsiotis), Mr Ángel Pérez Martínez, Mrs Maria Postoico, Mrs Marietta de Pourbaix-Lundin, Mr John Prescott, Mr Jeffrey Pullicino Orlando, Mr Valeriy Pysarenko (alternate: Mr Hryhoriy Omelchenko), Mrs Marie-Line Reynaud, Mr François Rochebloine, Mr Francesco Saverio Romano, Mr Paul Rowen , Mr Armen Rustamyan , Mr Kimmo Sasi , Mr Ellert Schram, Mr Yuri Sharandin (alternate: Mr Sergey Markov), Mr Christoph Strässer, Lord John Tomlinson, Mr Mihai Tudose, Mr Tuğrul Türkeş , Mrs Özlem Türköne , Mr Vasile Ioan Dănuț Ungureanu, Mr Øyvind Vaksdal , Mr Hugo Vandenberghe, Mr Egidijus Vareikis , Mr Klaas de Vries,	
	Visit to the newly restored bell house of the Greek Community Church		
	Visit to the Greek community's three former schools (the high school converted into a hospital; the primary school converted into a hotel; the kindergarten converted into a restaurant)		
17 h 00	Meeting with ethnic Greek Tenedians at the Greek Community Church		
19 h 30	Working dinner with the local authorities		
Thursday 1 May 2008			
07 h 00	Departure from Tenedos (Bozcaada) to Ankara		
20 h 00	Arrival in Ankara		
Friday 2 May 2008			
09 h 30	Meeting at the Ministry of the Interior, with the Undersecretary and the Director of International Relations		
10 h 45	Meeting at the Ministry of Education		

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Mr Dimitry **Vyatkin**, Mrs Renate **Wohlwend**, Mr Marco Zacchera (alternate: Mr Giuseppe **Valentino**), Mr Krzysztof **Zaremba**, Mr Łukasz **Zbonikowski**

N.B.: The names of the members who took part in the meeting are printed in **bold**

Secretariat of the committee: Mr Drzemczewski, Mr Schirmer, Mrs Maffucci-Hugel, Ms Heurtin, Ms Schuetze-Reymann