

Synopsis from Dr. Alexandros K. Kyrou

Turkey's singular record of violations of both international treaties and basic human rights, especially religious freedom, converge acutely around Ankara's treatment of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople. Indeed, the Patriarchate has been subjected to more sustained and systematic state persecution than any other historic institution in Turkey. Although Turkey's effort to expel the Patriarchate from Constantinople during the establishment of the Kemalist Republic in 1922-1923 failed, that failure did not dampen Ankara's objective of eliminating the Patriarchate. Only the strategy to achieve this goal, not the Turkish state's ultimate objective has changed since 1923.

The Turkish state has over the preceding century used a host of measures aimed at producing the Patriarchate's extinction. Ankara's policy—the "Eliminasyon" strategy, also known as the "Eritme" policy—of gradual religious, cultural, institutional, and group annihilation represents one of the most sophisticated and methodical policies and methods of persecution practiced by any state.

Under the elimination policy, the Patriarchate and Turkey's Greek Orthodox community have been subjected to a battery of abuses and violations of their rights by every successive government that has presided over the Turkish state. The policy of annihilation has aimed to create conditions so unbearable for Turkey's ethnic Greek Christians that they would be forced to flee Turkey—an adroit approach to ethnic cleansing. Turkish officials have anticipated that by producing this forced exodus, and the consequent eradication of the Greek Orthodox community in Istanbul, which comprised the largest ethnic group in the city in 1922, the Patriarchate would in turn be forced into an inevitable, slow death. This brief presentation considers Ankara's policy of elimination as a state-directed attack against the status and the legal protections of Turkey's Greek Orthodox population and its community's religious and other institutions that were codified into international law by the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne.