

Resolution 1625 (2008)¹

Gökçeada (Imbros) and Bozcaada (Tenedos):² 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

1. The Parliamentary Assembly warmly welcomes the recent improvement in relations between Turkey and Greece, which has 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 for too long from the consequences of political crises between the two states and from economic difficulties.

3. The 2005 visit was followed by the joint presentation of the motion which is at the origin of the present resolution. The small number of inhabitants of the islands would make it possible to address their problems outside the wider context of Greco-Turkish relations.

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 its own citizens, but could also serve as a model for co-operation 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 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, maltreatment), but also for economic reasons, the vast majority of the original (ethnic Greek) inhabitants of the islands have emigrated, leaving only about 250 members of this community on Gökçeada (Imbros) and 25 on Bozcaada (Tenedos), mainly elderly people. At the same time, many thousands of former islanders and their offspring have demonstrated their desire to maintain close links with their homeland by returning regularly to their ancestral home for traditional celebrations, family reunions and holidays and a number of them are seriously considering resettling there either as retirees or as entrepreneurs. Members of 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 so that the bicultural character of the islands 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 at his express request;

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 this positive momentum, the following additional measures are particularly urgent to consider:

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 Turkish Muslim community schools for the people of Turkish origin, the Pomaks and the Roma 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 biculturalism and offer Greek language and culture classes;

9.2. to return expropriated land and buildings to their previous owners, whenever they are not, or are no longer, used for the public purposes for which they were expropriated. When 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 return public buildings having belonged to the ethnic Greek community (religious foundations and municipalities), as well as religious foundations and their property, that were seized (as "mazbut") and placed under the direct administration of the Vakifs' Directorate General;

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

9.4.1. to provide practical access for all inhabitants of the islands and their descendants to 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 revision process;

9.4.2. to abolish the practice followed by the islands' cadastral officers and courts according to which ethnic Greek residents not only have to prove – by witness statements – that they were in possession of the land for at least twenty years, but also that they 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;

9.4.3. to withhold the cadastral revision process that began on the islands in 1996 until the adoption of the measures mentioned in paragraphs 9.4.1 and 9.4.2 above, thereby sparing inhabitants the expensive, time-consuming and aleatory court proceedings needed to rectify an inaccurate administrative decision;

9.4.4. 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;

9.5. 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 former islanders who have lost their Turkish citizenship, and whose presence cannot conceivably have "strategic" significance;

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

9.6.1. simplify and speed up the procedure for owners of protected historical buildings on both islands to obtain the required permits for their restoration and reconstruction;

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

9.6.3. review 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);

9.6.4. ban any further excavations in the area of "Kaskavalia Rocks" near the harbour of Kuzulimani (Agios Kyrikos) at Gökçeada (Imbros) and repair the damage already done to this natural monument;

9.6.5. remove 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 make the whole area available once again for its original purpose and fund the reconstruction of the Agia Marina chapel;

9.6.6. restore, as far as possible, the classical-era port of Kaleköy (Kastro) on Gökçeada (Imbros), destroyed during the recent construction of a modern marina on this site, and preserve the remnants of the ancient Venetian/Byzantine-era castle overlooking the same village;

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

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

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

9.9. 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 also invites Turkey and Greece to initiate a dialogue and consultation mechanism by which all the issues pertaining to the respective minorities as stipulated by the Lausanne Peace Treaty would be taken up in a bilateral context.

12. 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.

1. *Assembly debate* on 27 June 2008 (27th Sitting) (see [Doc. 11629](#), report of the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights, rapporteur: Mr Gross). *Text adopted by the Assembly* on 27 June 2008 (27th Sitting).

2. According to the Third UN Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names, nation states enjoy the right to name the geographical locations under their sovereignty.