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## THE POLITICAL ASPECT OF THE CONCEPT OF ECUMENISM AND THE FENER GREEK PATRIARCHATE

The status of the Fener Greek Patriarchate (Greek Patriarchate of İstanbul) within the legal system of the Republic of Türkiye, as well as its practices that extend beyond the areas of authority recognized by Türkiye, have been addressed in various AVİM articles.<sup>1</sup> Recently, in the context of press reports on the reopening of the Heybeliada Theological School, the Patriarchate's use of the title "ecumenical" (meaning "universality") has been a subject of ongoing debate over its compatibility with

<sup>1</sup> Mehmet Oğuzhan Tulun, "Fener Rum Patrikhanesinin Siyasileştirilmesinin Zararlı Etkileri", *Avrasya İncelemeleri Merkezi (AVİM)*, Analiz No: 2025/36, 18 Eylül 2025, <https://avim.org.tr/tr/Analiz/FENER-RUM-PATRIKHANESININ-SIYASILESTIRILMESI-NIN-ZARARLI-ETKILERI>; Gözde Kılıç Yaşın, "Fener Rum Patrikhanesinin Statü İlerletme Çabası Ve Yarattığı Dügümler", *Avrasya İncelemeleri Merkezi (AVİM)*, Analiz No: 2022/31, 24 Kasım 2022, <https://avim.org.tr/tr/Analiz/FENER-RUM-PATRIKHANESININ-STATU-ILERLETME-CABASI-VE-YARATTIGI-DUGUMLER>; Gözde Kılıç Yaşın, "Ulusal Güvenlik Ve Dini Özgürlükler Çatışmasında Fener Rum Patrikhanesi", *Avrasya İncelemeleri Merkezi (AVİM)*, Analiz No: 2023/5, 20 Ocak 2023, <https://avim.org.tr/tr/Analiz/ULUSAL-GUVENLIK-VE-DINI-OZGURLUKLER-CATISMASINDA-FENER-RUM-PATRIKHANESI>

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the administrative system and laws of Türkiye. In this context, it will be useful to briefly examine the concept of “ecumenical” from the perspective of canonical law and theological aspects, with reference to the decisions (canons) taken at Christian councils, and to explain the fundamental elements of the verbal agreement that emerged from the during the 1923 Lausanne Peace Treaty negotiations concerning the continuation of the Patriarchate’s presence in Türkiye.

### **From the Perspective of the Fener Greek Patriarchate, the Christian Council Decrees that Gave Rise to the Concept of “Ecumenical”**

Derived from the Greek words “oikoumenē” (inhabited world) and “oikos” (house), ecumenism, as a theological and canonical law concept, represents the universality of Christianity, contributing to the formation of both the intellectual foundations of the Christian faith and the institutional and administrative order based on these foundations. It is a concept that aims to create a common understanding, influencing the beliefs of Christians and their ways of thinking about the church and the world. In the early centuries of Christianity, it was used to refer to councils whose decisions represented Christianity as the universal church. Councils are meetings where bishops and other religious leaders come together to discuss and decide on doctrine, administration, discipline, and other matters. An ecumenical or general council is a meeting of all the bishops of the Church.<sup>2</sup>

In this context, the first universally accepted council of the Christian church was convened in response to a movement that emerged in the early period of Christianity, championed by the Alexandrian priest Arius, which rejected the divinity of Prophet Jesus (Jesus of Nazareth) and asserted that he was a created being. Arius thus opposed the Church’s teaching that the Father (God) and the Son (Jesus) share the same essence, arguing that it was incompatible with the understanding of God’s unity and that it established the relationship between God and the world through the Son. This movement, considered heretical, plunged the eastern parts of the Roman Empire into turmoil. To end these debates and to establish and disseminate what was considered to be sound doctrines by the Church, efforts were made to convene a general universal Christian council with the participation of all bishops affiliated with the Church, and the first universal (ecumenical) council was held in İznik (Nicaea) on 19 June 325, at the invitation of Emperor Constantine, under his honorary presidency. The most important aspect of the Council of İznik is the determination of the first ecumenical creed in the history of Christianity. The essence of this decision, which can be described as the “Nicene Creed” (*İznik İnanç Bildirgesi*), is the emphasis that Jesus shares the same essence as the Father, that he was not created later, and that he is the begotten true God. Furthermore, this decision stipulates the

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2 “Ecumenism”, *Encyclopedia Britannica Online*, accessed 17.08.2026, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/ecumenism> britannica.com.

excommunication of those who do not accept this belief.<sup>3</sup> The İznik Council resolutions do not mention the universality of the Fener Greek Patriarchate. In this context, it is important to remember that İstanbul (known as “Constantinople” at that time) was not yet the capital of the Roman Empire when the Council of Nicaea was convened, and that Emperor Constantine declared it as the capital under the name of “New Rome” in 330.

The second universal Christian council after İznik was the First Council of İstanbul (Constantinople) in 381. The third canonical law of this council determined that the Bishop of İstanbul ranked second after the Bishop of Rome, stating that this ranking stemmed from İstanbul being the New Rome and that Rome held first place.<sup>4</sup>

The third universal council was the First Council of Efes (Ephesus) in 431. This council addressed issues concerning the true nature of Jesus. The council’s decisions contain no reference to the ecumenical title of the Fener Greek Patriarchate.

The council that gave rise to the Fener Greek Patriarchate’s use of the ecumenical title was the fourth universal council, convened in Kadıköy (Chalcedon) in 451. The main topic of this council was the debate on the nature of Jesus, ultimately resulting in the acceptance of the definition that Jesus possessed both divine and human natures.<sup>5</sup> This council officially confirmed that İstanbul as a religious office had equal privileges to Rome. The 28th “canon” of the Council of Kadıköy on this subject is as follows:

“28 - Resolution concerning the prerogatives of the see of Constantinople

Following in every way the decrees of the holy fathers and recognizing the canon which has recently been read out — the canon of the 150 most devout bishops who assembled in the time of the great Theodosius of pious memory, then emperor, in imperial Constantinople, new Rome — we issue the same decree and resolution concerning the prerogatives of the most holy church of the same Constantinople, new Rome. The fathers rightly accorded prerogatives to the see of older Rome, since that is an imperial city; and moved by the same purpose, the 150 most devout bishops apportioned equal prerogatives to the most holy see of new Rome, reasonably judging that the city which is honored by the imperial power and senate and enjoying privileges equalling older imperial Rome, should also be elevated to her level in ecclesiastical affairs and take

3 Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, Vol. 14: Second Series: The Seven Ecumenical Councils. Reprint (Edinburgh: T&T Clarke, 1998), p. 3 ; Norman P. Tanner (ed.), *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils, Vol. I, Nicaea I to Lateran V* (London: Sheed & Ward; Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1990), p. 5. In Tanner’s book, the English text containing the Nicaea Council’s decision on this matter is as follows:

“We believe in one God the Father all powerful, maker of all things both seen and unseen. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the only-begotten begotten from the Father, that is from the substance of the Father, God from God, light from light, true God from true God, begotten not made, consubstantial with the Father, through whom all things came to be, both those in heaven and those in earth; for us humans and for our salvation he came down and became incarnate, became human, suffered and rose up on the third day, went up into the heavens, is coming to judge the living and the dead. And in the holy Spirit. And those\* who say “there once was when he was not”, and “before he was begotten he was not”, and that he came to be from things that were not, or from another hypostasis or substance, affirming that the Son of God is subject to change or alteration — these the catholic and apostolic church anathematizes.”

4 Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, p. 32. The English text of the section in question is as follows: “3. That the bishop of Constantinople comes second to the bishop of Rome. Because it is new Rome, the bishop of Constantinople is to enjoy the privileges of honour after the bishop of Rome”.

5 Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, p. 75.

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second place after her. The metropolitans of the dioceses of Pontus, Asia and Thrace, but only these, as well as the bishops of these dioceses who work among non-Greeks, are to be ordained by the aforesaid most holy see of the most holy church in Constantinople. That is, each metropolitan of the aforesaid dioceses, along with the bishops of the province, ordains the bishops of the province, as has been declared in the divine canons. Still, the metropolitans of the aforesaid dioceses, as has been said, are to be ordained by the archbishop of Constantinople, once agreement has been reached by vote in the usual way and has been reported to him.”<sup>6</sup>

According to academic sources on this subject, Emperor Marcian and Patriarch Anatolius of İstanbul requested the Pope’s (the Bishop of Rome) approval in a letter, as the Pope’s representatives opposed this decision. However, the Pope approved only the doctrinal decisions of the council, rejecting decision number 28 concerning the universality of the Patriarch of İstanbul (Bishop of Constantinople) because it ran counter to the canons of Nicaea and the privileges of certain churches. In February 452, Emperor Marcian legally implemented the council’s decisions and laws throughout the empire with four separate edicts.<sup>7</sup> Although the Pope rejected it, the status of the Patriarch of İstanbul was formalized in the Eastern world (in the Roman Empire’s mindset) by a political decision, thanks to the political and military power of the eastern administrative half of the Roman Empire centered in İstanbul. This outcome emerged as a political rather than theological struggle between the belief in the Pope’s divine supremacy and universal authority over all churches and the Eastern Church’s desire to maintain its regional and egalitarian structure with imperial support. This conflict lasted for years. In this context, the Fener Greek Patriarchate first began using the title “Ecumenical Patriarch” in its official correspondence at the end of the 6th century. The Papacy strongly opposed the use of this title, characterizing it as an arrogant claim to universal authority that undermined the equality of bishops.<sup>8</sup> Subsequently, the two churches mutually excommunicated each other in July 1054, resulting in the Great Schism, which officially ended relations between the Western and Eastern churches of Christianity. It is possible to say that the sacking of then Constantinople by the Latin armies during the Fourth Crusade in 1204 brought this division to a permanent and irreversible new stage, and that this deep division lasted for more than nine centuries.

6 Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, p. 99-100. The Turkish descriptive translation of the church canon in question is as follows:

“28 - İstanbul Piskoposluğunun Ayrıcalıklarına İlişkin Karar

Kutsal Babaların kararnamelerini her yönden izleyerek ve yakın zamanda okunan kilise kanunu (canon) -büyük ve dindar hatıralı İmparator Teodosius zamanında, İmparatorluk İstanbul’unda (yeni Roma) toplanan 150 dindar piskoposun kilise kanunu - kabul ederek, aynı kararnameyi ve kararı, aynı İstanbul’un (yeni Roma) en kutsal kilisesinin ayrıcalıklarına ilişkin olarak yayınlıyoruz. Babalar, eski Roma’nın piskoposluğuna haklı olarak ayrıcalıklar tanıdılar, çünkü bu bir imparatorluk şehridir ve aynı amaçla hareket eden 150 dindar piskopos, imparatorluk gücü ve senatosu tarafından onurlandırılan ve eski imparatorluk Roma’ya eşit ayrıcalıklara sahip olan şehrin, kilise işlerinde de onun seviyesine yükseltilmesi ve ondan sonra ikinci sırada yer alması gerektiğine makul bir şekilde karar vererek, yeni Roma’nın en kutsal piskoposluğuna eşit ayrıcalıklar tahsis ettiler. Pontus, Asya ve Trakya piskoposluklarının metropolitleri, ancak yalnızca bunlar ve bu piskoposlukların Yunan olmayanlar arasında çalışan piskoposları, İstanbul’daki en kutsal kilisenin yukarıda adı geçen en kutsal makamı tarafından atanacaktır. Yani, yukarıda adı geçen piskoposlukların her bir metropoliti, eyaletin piskoposlarıyla birlikte, ilahi kanunlarda belirtildiği gibi, eyaletin piskoposlarını atar; ancak yukarıda adı geçen piskoposlukların metropolitleri, söylendiği gibi, olağan şekilde oylama yoluyla anlaşmaya varıldıktan ve kendisine bildirildikten sonra, İstanbul başpiskoposu tarafından atanacaktır.”

7 Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, p. 76.

8 G.E. Demacopoulos, “Gregory the Great and the Sixth-Century Dispute over the Ecumenical Title”, *Theological Studies* 3, Issue 70 (2009): 600-621.

In the 20th century, the doors of dialogue were opened between the two churches. Following the meeting between Pope Paul VI and Patriarch Athenagoras in Jerusalem in 1964, the excommunications of 1054 were simultaneously revoked in a joint declaration in Rome and İstanbul on 7 December 1965. However, the lifting of the excommunications did not go beyond a step towards reconciliation and dialogue. The governance of the two churches and some fundamental dogmas have not been unified. While Catholic Christians accept the Pope's universal leadership and infallibility, Orthodox Christians continue to view the Pope only as an "honorary leader". Both churches recognize the first seven councils as common. However, while the Catholic Church recognizes 21 councils, the Orthodox Church does not consider any after the seventh to be ecumenical. Theological differences thus persist in this context. It is possible to say that the basis of this separation lies less in theological differences than in the centralist claims to power of both sides. The 1965 meeting was merely a step towards reconciliation between the two churches. Theological and administrative integration has not occurred, and it seems highly unlikely that integration will take place in the foreseeable future.<sup>9</sup>

The information presented in this section reveals that the political aspect of the ecumenical concept carries a much deeper meaning than its theological aspect, and that there has been a highly significant international struggle within Christianity with a strong political character for almost 1575 years.

### **Formal Discussions and Negotiations Regarding the Fener Greek Patriarchate in the Lausanne Peace Conference**

The 1923 Lausanne Peace Treaty and other Lausanne documents make no mention of the Fener Greek Patriarchate, nor do they contain any provisions concerning it. Discussions and negotiations regarding the Patriarchate are entirely documented in the Lausanne Conference minutes. Therefore, to accurately diagnose and understand the legal, administrative, and political status of this patriarchate within the Republic of Türkiye, it is necessary to examine the minutes of the conference.

Three main commissions were established to conduct negotiations at the Lausanne Peace Conference. Sub-commissions were also formed under these main commissions to discuss more specific issues. The first commission dealt with national and military issues and the Turkish Straits regime. This commission was chaired by Lord Curzon, the British Foreign Secretary and head of the British delegation, who also chaired the Conference. Five sub-commissions were formed for the first commission. The third sub-commission dealt with population exchange, and the fourth with the protection of minorities. These two sub-commissions were chaired by Cesar Montagna, the second member of the Italian delegation (at that time the Italian Minister-Counselor in Athens, and later the Italian Ambassador to the Republic of Türkiye in 1924-1925). A concise, non-detailed explanation of how the issue of the Fener

<sup>9</sup> "East-West Schism Christianity", *Encyclopedia Britannica Online*, accessed 17.08.2026, <https://www.britannica.com/event/East-West-Schism-1054>

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Greek Patriarchate was addressed at the Conference is presented below in chronological order:

At the First Commission meeting on 1 December 1922, Lord Curzon delivered a lengthy speech reflecting the Allied Powers (the Allies) consensus on the issue of minorities in Türkiye. He raised the possibility of a population exchange between Türkiye and Greece, noting that Nansen, the first High Commissioner for Refugees of the League of Nations, had prepared a report on the matter. The head of the Turkish delegation, İsmet Pasha (İnönü), responded at length, detailing the situation of minorities in the Ottoman State and stating that while they had been granted numerous rights, these rights were being abused by the minorities. He emphasized that the most lasting solution for minorities was their exchange with Turks in neighboring countries, particularly Greece, and that those who remained in Türkiye and were not included in the exchange should be subject to Turkish law.<sup>10</sup>

The sub-commission on population exchange began its work on 2 December 1922, and discussions on minorities continued during the first main commission's sessions on 13 and 14 December 1922. At the session on 13 December, İsmet Pasha announced that they had accepted the exclusion of the İstanbul Greek population from the population exchange. Lord Curzon, however, delivered a long and extremely harsh speech. In his speech, Curzon directly referred to the Patriarchate issue. He stated that İsmet Pasha, in his speech the previous day, had spoken of the generous treatment of minorities residing in Türkiye by Ottoman Sultans, citing the special privileges granted by Mehmed II to the Greek Patriarchate in İstanbul as an example. Curzon, in a sarcastic tone, stated that he had learned that morning that the Population Exchange Sub-Committee's final meeting had stipulated that the first condition for allowing the Greek population to remain in İstanbul was the removal of the Greek Patriarchate and all its institutions from the capital, and that this stance was an indication of how the Turkish government was following the example set by Mehmed II. As such, in the discussions held at the session on 13 December 1922, the issue of the Patriarchate was mentioned for the first time not in terms of its historical background, but as a problem in the discussions, as far as we can ascertain from the minutes. In this context, Lord Curzon, in his speech, referred to the Patriarchate only as "the Greek Patriarchate in Istanbul," and did not use the word "ecumenical".<sup>11</sup>

At the First Commission's session on 14 December 1922, the issue of minorities continued to be discussed, but no discussion took place regarding the Patriarchate.

The minutes of the First Commission's session on 10 January 1923, where the report of the Italian representative Montagna, chairperson of the Population Exchange Sub-commission established by the First Commission, submitted to Lord Curzon on 8 January 1923, contain detailed information regarding the Patriarchate. The explicit reference to the Turkish dele-

10 *Lausanne Conference on Near Eastern Affairs, 1922–1923, Records of Proceedings and Draft Terms of Peace*. Great Britain, Parliament (London: His Majesties Stationary Office, 1923), p. 190-204. Annex to No. 16. Statement read by İsmet Pasha.

11 *Lausanne Conference on Near Eastern Affairs, 1922–1923, Records of Proceedings and Draft Terms of Peace*, p. 211 ; Seha Meray, *Lozan Barış Konferansı Tutanaklar Belgeler, Takım 1, Cilt 1, Kitap 1*, Ankara Üniversitesi Siyasal Bilgiler Fakültesi Yayını No. 291 (Ankara Üniversitesi Yayınevi, 1969), p. 213.

gation's request for the removal of the Patriarchate from Türkiye is also found in the report submitted by the sub-committee chairperson, Montagna. In his report, Montagna states that at the meeting on 16 December 1922, the Turkish delegation submitted a written statement to the sub-committee. Montagna explains that the statement included the phrase, "Since the Patriarchate, which has always been a political body, has completely lost its *raison d'être* as a result of the elimination of its former political privileges and the organic institutions attached to it, it needs to be moved to a location outside the borders of Türkiye" and that this demand caused lengthy discussions. Montagna requests that the issue be resolved by the First Commission.<sup>12</sup>

At the First Commission meeting on 10 January 1923, in subsequent discussions, Lord Curzon emphasized that the condition for the Patriarchate to remain in Türkiye was that it should deal only with spiritual and ecclesiastical matters, and that it should lose its political and administrative character in the future. Lord Curzon's statement was reflected in the English minutes as follows:

"On behalf of my colleagues—and I know they all agree with me—I wish to state that the Allied States accept that the Patriarchate should lose its political and administrative character in the future and become a purely religious institution while remaining in Istanbul. This is the proposal I dare to present to the Turkish delegation and the conference."<sup>13</sup>

Following these statements, İsmet Pasha explained in detail his views on the report of Montagna, the chairperson of the Population Exchange Sub-Commission, and the issues discussed by the said Sub-Commission. The points İsmet Pasha made regarding the Patriarchate are recorded in the Lausanne Minutes as follows:

"Regarding the Patriarchate issue, we consider as a testament the official speeches and guarantees made before the Conference by the Allied and Greek delegations, stating that the Patriarchate will no longer be involved in political or administrative affairs, but will only deal with matters within the religious sphere. As for the removal of the Patriarchate from Istanbul, this was proposed by the Turks when the exclusion of the Istanbul Greeks from the exchange was being discussed. [İsmet Pasha], in order to demonstrate the greatest proof of the conciliatory tendencies of the Delegation he heads, is abandoning this proposal under the conditions he stated and based on the guarantees he considers as a testament."<sup>14</sup>

12 *Lausanne Conference on Near Eastern Affairs, 1922–1923, Records of Proceedings and Draft Terms of Peace*, p. 333; Meray, *Lozan Barış Konferansı Tutanaklar Belgeler*, p. 337-338.

13 *Lausanne Conference on Near Eastern Affairs, 1922–1923, Records of Proceedings and Draft Terms of Peace*, p. 318-319 ; Meray, *Lozan Barış Konferansı Tutanaklar Belgeler*, p. 324-325.

14 *Lausanne Conference on Near Eastern Affairs, 1922–1923, Records of Proceedings and Draft Terms of Peace*, p.318-319 ; Meray, *Lozan Barış Konferansı Tutanaklar Belgeler*, p. 324-325.

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### How Was the Demand for the Expulsion of the Fener Greek Patriarchate from Türkiye Raised in Lausanne?

The Turkish delegation to the Lausanne Conference was headed by İsmet Pasha, who was then appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs. The second delegate was Dr. Rıza Nur (former Minister of National Education, Minister of Health, and Member of Parliament for Sinop), and the third was Hasan Saka (former Minister of Economy and Member of Parliament for Trabzon). The Turkish delegation went to Lausanne with a relatively short set of instructions consisting of 14 points.<sup>15</sup> Of these 14 points, two of these included definitive instructions to break off negotiations and return home, with the possibility of returning to war. The first point stipulated that negotiations would be immediately suspended if an “Armenian homeland” was demanded. The second point stated that negotiations could be broken off, if necessary, regarding the infamous capitulations that had been in effect in the Ottoman State.

The harmful conduct of the Fener Greek Patriarchate and its politically abused presence in Turkish lands was a matter of great concern for Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the leader of the Turkish National Struggle (*Milli Mücadele*) and the founder of the Republic of Türkiye. The Turkish request to relocate the Patriarchate outside the borders of Türkiye was initially put forth by Dr. Rıza Nur, the second-in-command of the Turkish Delegation at Lausanne after İsmet Pasha.<sup>16</sup> It is on the record that Nur was vehemently insistent on this issue during the negotiations.

In the Lausanne section of his memoirs, İsmet İnönü describes in detail how the negotiations concerning minorities were discussed in very turbulent sessions and also touches upon the issue of the Patriarchate. İnönü recounts his discussions with Lord Curzon on this matter, noting that the Allied Powers attempted to portray the removal of the Patriarchate from Türkiye as a matter of Turkishness versus Christianity, and that his interlocutors were unwilling to accept even the criticism or condemnation of the Patriarchate’s centuries-old traditions and policies. While İnönü found Nur’s stance on the Patriarchate to be correct, he points out that lessons should be derived from this stance for future negotiations, and makes the following points:

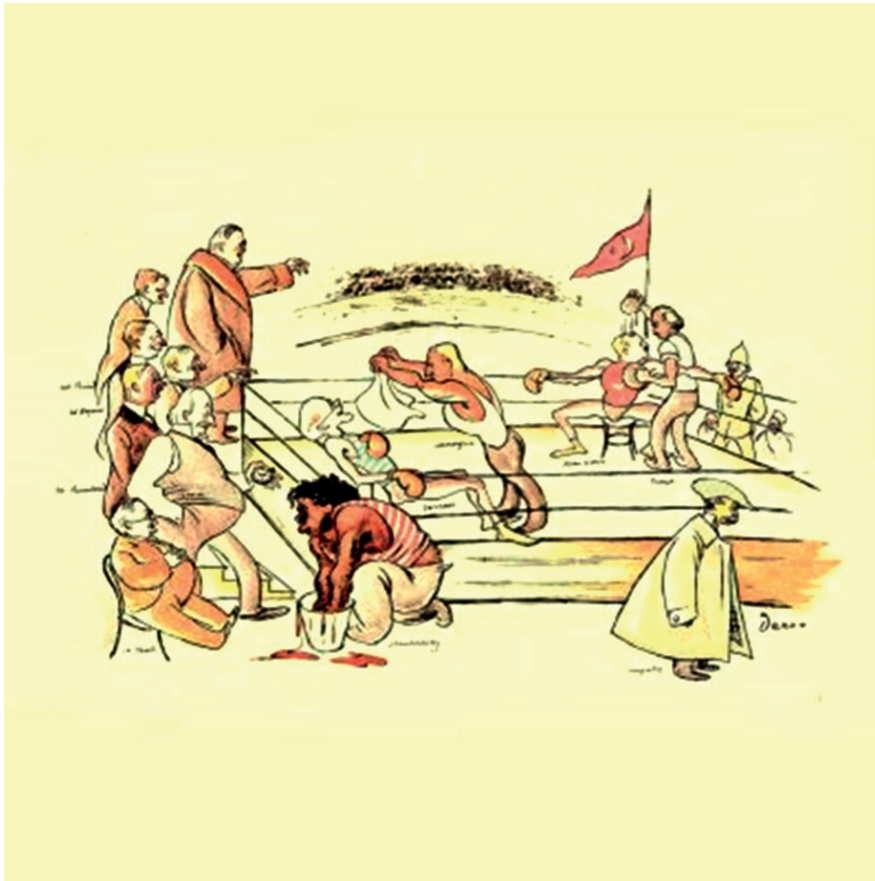
“It would be unfair to portray Dr. Rıza Nur Bey’s actions [during the negotiations] as contradicting his good intentions in his duties. He actually lacks such a disposition. I cite this incident as an important example to illustrate how difficult the methods of struggle are under such circumstances, and how serious the consequences can be of even the slightest carelessness in constantly keeping the records in mind. I say this as a lesson to highlight the importance of maintaining focused attention within a delegation and during a general discussion.”<sup>17</sup>

15 Bilal Şimşir, *Lozan Telgrafları -Türk Diplomatik Belgelerinde Lozan Barış Konferansı, Cilt 1 (Kasım 1922-Şubat 1923)* (Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1990), s. XIV-XV.

16 *Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi Gizli Celse Zabıtları* (Minutes of the Secret Sessions of the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye), Cilt: 4. 2 Mart 1339 (1923) - 25 Teşrinievvel 1934 (Ankara: TBMM Basımevi, 2023), İkinci İnkat-2 Mart 1339 Cuma-Üçüncü Celse, s. 15 ; Rıza Nur, *Dr. Rıza Nur’un Lozan Hatıraları* (İstanbul: Boğaziçi Yayınları, 1991), s. 113.

17 *İsmet İnönü, Hatıralar, 2. Kitap*, Birinci Basım (Bilgi Basımevi, Kasım 1987), s. 132. Also see: Sabahattin Selek (haz.), *İsmet İnönü, - Hatıralar (Lozan Bölümü)* - S 313/S 426, tek cilt halinde (Bilgi Yayınevi, 2006): İnönü Vakfı, <https://www.ismetinonu.org.tr/lozan-antlasmasi.htm>

One point that needs to be mentioned in this context is that, while negotiating on extremely sensitive issues such as minorities and population exchange, the Turkish delegation particularly challenged and irritated the Greek representative, Eleftherios Venizelos, even causing him to faint during one session. Nur mentions this incident in his Lausanne memoirs and explains the details of the fainting from his perspective, but notes that the event was not recorded in the minutes. It is understood from the examination of various source documents that the incident probably occurred during the sub-committee meeting on 21 December 1922. This event was widely reported in the foreign press. Since the use of cameras was prohibited during the League of Nations negotiations at that time, press organizations followed the negotiations with cartoonists and artists. Hungarian cartoonists Alois Derso and Emery Kelen, who followed the Lausanne negotiations, published their cartoons under the signatures “Derso and Kelen”. The cartoon by Derso, published in relation to the session where Venizelos reportedly fainted, depicts Venizelos’s predicament in front of Nur, who was coached by İsmet Pasha, and is presented below. As can be seen in the examination, in the cartoon, Venizelos is coached by Montagna, the Italian representative and head of the sub-committee, and behind him are all the allies, primarily Lord Curzon. Behind İnönü and Nur, however, are only the Turkish flag and a Turkish soldier.



**Source:** İnönü Foundation. Lausanne Cartoons. <https://www.ismetinonu.org.tr/lozan-karikaturleri/>

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During a period of heated debate regarding minorities at the Conference on 25 December 1922, Atatürk, in a statement given to Paul Heriot, a correspondent for the French Newspaper *Le Journal*, at Çankaya (Ankara), described the Fener Greek Patriarchate as a “hotbed of sedition and treason”, stating that it was sowing seeds of discord in the country. He posed the questions: “What reasons or pretexts could compel us to maintain this dangerous organization in our country? Isn’t the true home of this hotbed of sedition in Greece?” He also stated that instructions to this effect had been given to the Lausanne delegation.<sup>18</sup>

In light of the points mentioned above, it is possible to state that the proposal for the expulsion of the Patriarchate from Türkiye, due to its extremely hostile stance during the Turkish National Struggle period, the support given by the Fener Greek Patriarch to the Greek forces attempting to invade Anatolia, and the massacres committed by the Greek forces, was strongly supported by the members of TBMM, the TBMM Government, Turkish public opinion, İsmet Pasha, the head of the Turkish delegation at Lausanne, and most importantly, by Atatürk himself.

### Conclusion

The fundamental sentence in the Lausanne Peace Conference Minutes that prevented the expulsion of the Fener Greek Patriarchate and ensured its continued presence in Türkiye is İsmet Pasha’s statement: “We consider the official speeches and guarantees made by the Allied and Greek Delegations before the Conference -to the effect- that the Patriarchate will no longer engage in political or administrative affairs and will only deal with matters within the religious sphere, as a binding document.” It is clear that the Fener Greek Patriarchate was able to remain in Türkiye within the framework of this verbal agreement. The fundamental document containing this verbal agreement is the Lausanne Peace Conference Minutes.

According to Prof. Dr. Suat Bilge (Professor of International Law, Former Dean of the Faculty of Political Science of Ankara University, First Legal Advisor to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ambassador of Türkiye in Bern and Lisbon, Minister of Justice of the Republic of Türkiye in two different periods), “an unwritten agreement is as valid as a written one. He underlines that ‘the Republic of Türkiye has no legal obligation to recognize the ecumenical status of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate. According to the unwritten agreement of the Lausanne Conference, the Patriarchate’s continued presence in Istanbul is only possible on the condition that it does not interfere in secular affairs.’”<sup>19</sup>

The point Bilge makes in the above assessment is essentially found in Article 3 of the 1969 Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties, concerning unwritten agreements between states. Article 3 states that the 1969 Convention shall not affect the legal force of unwritten inter-

18 Yüksel Özgen (ed.), *Atatürk’ün Söylev ve Demeçleri, Cilt II (1922-1924)* (Ankara: Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi Yayınları No. 573, 2024), s. 1.

19 Suat Bilge, “The Fener Greek Patriarchate”, *Perception: Journal of International Affairs* 3, no. 1 (March-May 1998): <https://dergipark.org.tr/en/download/article-file/817184>

national agreements concluded between states and other subjects of international law, or between such other subjects of international law, or their application between the parties to such agreements.<sup>20</sup>

The Fener Greek Patriarchate was transformed into a new entity following the Lausanne Peace Treaty and the establishment of the Republic of Türkiye. The stance of İsmet Pasha, the head of the Turkish negotiating team, as recorded in the minutes of the Lausanne Conference, stating that the Patriarchate would “never again engage in political or administrative affairs, but would confine itself to matters within the religious sphere,” was the first step in shaping the new status of the Patriarchate in the Republic of Türkiye. From its inception, Türkiye did not accept the use of the universal title by the Patriarchate. The Patriarchate was considered a religious institution that could operate within the framework of Articles 37-48 of the Third Section, titled “Protection of Minorities,” of the First Chapter of the Lausanne Treaty. The official view was that the “ecumenical” title, which has a transnational character, cannot be used. The Patriarchate was not granted legal status. The continuation of the Patriarchate’s privileged status from the Ottoman State period was prevented in the Republic of Türkiye. Given the Patriarchate’s close ties to religious matters and the political role it seeks to play on the international stage, Türkiye has deemed it inappropriate for the Patriarchate to attempt to exercise its spiritual authority, intertwined with theology and politics, on a universal level. This stance, adopted by the Republic of Türkiye since its founding, has been consistently applied by TBMM and all subsequent Republican governments to this day.

The use of the title “ecumenical” by the Patriarchate is clearly illegitimate from the perspective of Türkiye. In this context, the 2007 decision of the 4th Criminal Chamber of the Supreme Court of Appeals, which ruled that the title “ecumenical” has no legal basis, is essentially correct from the perspective of Turkish law.<sup>21</sup> We believe that the efforts and political pressure exerted by Western actors, particularly by the United States (the US) and the European Union (the EU), to recognize the “ecumenical” title and support the Patriarchate’s global role within the framework of their own religious, national, and organizational priorities, cannot change Türkiye’s resolute stance and practice on “ecumenism,” which it has maintained for more than a hundred years. This stance is an integral part of the Lausanne Treaty, the founding document of the Republic of Türkiye.

On the other hand, Turkish authorities have not prevented the mentioned Patriarch from using this title cautiously and prudently on the international stage. Although the Patriarchate has at times been excessively involved in international political affairs, no investigation has been launched to date regarding the use of this title. Respect has been shown to the Patriarch’s spiritual status as a religious leader. It can thus be said that a delicate *modus vivendi* has been established in this regard. This approach is expected to be maintained meticulously,

20 *Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties 1969*. Done at Vienna on 23 May 1969. Entered into force on 27 January 1980. United Nations, Treaty Series, Vol. 1155, p. 331, [https://legal.un.org/ilc/texts/instruments/english/conventions/1\\_1\\_1969.pdf](https://legal.un.org/ilc/texts/instruments/english/conventions/1_1_1969.pdf)

21 “Fener Rum Patrikhanesinin ‘Ekümeniklik’ İddiasına İlişkin Basın Açıklamamız, 15.08.2022” (“Our Press Release Regarding the Fener Greek Patriarchate’s Claim of ‘Ecumenism’, 15.08.2022”), *T.C. Fatih/İstanbul Kaymakamlığı (Fatih/İstanbul District Governorship of the Republic of Türkiye)*, 15 Ağustos 2022, <https://www.fatih.gov.tr/fener-rum-patrikhanesinin-ekumeniklik-id-diasina-iliskin-basin-aciklamamiz>

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provided certain boundaries are not crossed. However, it is necessary to proceed cautiously. If the aforementioned Patriarchate, with the support of the US, attempts to promote the title of “ecumenism” behind the scenes through activities such as the reopening of the Heybeliada Theological School, or if it unilaterally uses this title through unacceptable *faits accomplis* at certain international political meetings, it will definitely provoke a strong reaction, disapproval, and condemnation from the Turkish public opinion. Such a pattern of behavior might destroy the tolerant treatment it has received up until now with its own hands. There are examples of this in the distant and recent past.

On the other hand, it is also necessary to consider in this context the existence of a troubled environment in which the religious rights of the Turkish Muslim minority of Greece in Western Thrace are subjected to harsh interference, the legitimacy of elected muftis is systematically questioned and not recognized, the decisions of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) on this matter are ignored, and minority schools are gradually closed down based on various excuses by the Greek authorities. This is a phenomenon that is increasingly deeply offending the Muslim-Turkish minority in Western Thrace.<sup>22</sup> There is no doubt that there is a direct or indirect link, both on paper and morally as well as mentally, between the issue of the Patriarchate and the minority rights of the Turkish Muslim minority in Western Thrace. It would be appropriate for international circles, which have made it a habit to exert pressure on Türkiye regarding the aforementioned Patriarchate, to also consider this matter.

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22 Teoman Ertuğrul Tulun, “Religious Assimilation Policies In Greece: Pressure On Turkish Muftis As A Continuation Of Minority Rights Violations”, *Center for Eurasian Studies (AVİM)*, Commentary No: 2025/38, August 21, 2025, <https://avim.org.tr/en/Yorum/RELIGIOUS-ASSIMILATION-POLICIES-IN-GREECE-PRESSURE-ON-TURKISH-MUFTIS-AS-A-CONTINUATION-OF-MINORITY-RIGHTS-VIOLATIONS> ; Teoman Ertuğrul Tulun, “Greek Policies Towards Turkish Minority Schools Risk Repeating History”, *Center for Eurasian Studies (AVİM)*, Analysis No: 2025/19, August 19, 2025, <https://avim.org.tr/en/Analiz/GREEK-POLICIES-TOWARDS-TURKISH-MINORITY-SCHOOLS-RISK-REPEATING-HISTORY>

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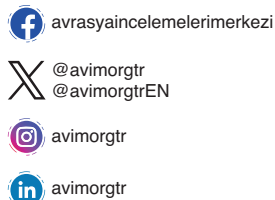
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