



RECENSIONE

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In recent years, the denied rights of minorities have been in the headlines more and more due to the increasing attention being paid to them. On the one hand, we have a world where states are increasingly becoming multi-ethnic and multi-religious communities. On the other, we have the friction caused by this reality. It is astonishing to see how very often states are blind to the evolution of the population's social composition within their borders and how they fail to guarantee all people within their borders the enjoyment of the same rights, be they related to religion or other basic issues.

Reading this volume, one seems to understand that Turkey is no exception to this reality. It emerges from these pages how, since the birth of the republic in 1923, the Anatolian state has had problems recognising that it is a truly multi-ethnic and multi-religious state, whereas it was constitutionally born and developed as a single nation's state. Between the pages of this volume, besides the long-standing and famous issue of relations with the Kurdish minority, the stories (and struggles) of the other minorities present in the Anatolian country emerge, all more or less united by a history in which they are not recognised as an ethnic group or population in their own right, and are therefore unable to speak in their language, to educate their children in their traditions and customs, and to practise their religion.

Not only the story of the Kurds, therefore, but also the stories of the Greeks of Istanbul, the Armenians, the Circassians, and the Alevi. Stories that, in one way or another, see people struggling against a culture, a bureaucracy and sometimes even



winning and having certain demands recognised. Stories of those who, however, know that the road to egalitarianism is still long and far from over.

The text opens with a preface by Prof. Fabio Grassi, who summarizes the history of the Republic of Turkey concerning the theme of the volume. It emerges how from the very beginning the issue of minorities is approached as a problem to be solved by eliminating its root causes: minorities themselves. In this, the efforts of the fledgling republic to erase or deliberately ignore all traces of ethnic, religious and linguistic diversity within the Anatolian state emerge. It seems paradoxical, in particular, how a state devoted to observing the strictest secularism rests part of the construction of its identity on the observance of Sunni Islam. This will be at the expense of all those religious denominations that are not part of that community, among the most notorious examples of which will be sadly provided by the Alevites. Professor Grassi rightly points out and emphasises how Turkey has made great strides in the hundred years of its history on the issue of respect for minority rights, but that the way it approached this issue at the beginning of its history has marked the political and social development of the country.

The book proceeds with an intervention by Professor Mihaela Gavrilă who emphasises the concept of 'indifference'. The book proceeds with a talk by Professor Mihaela Gavrilă, who emphasises the concept of 'indifference' and its implications in the field of minority rights. The professor emphasises, through the words of other well-known authors such as Arendt, M'Bow or Mandela, the need for civil society as well as the media and academia to overcome indifference about issues concerning minorities and their rights. Only awareness and education can be the keys through which injustice and inequality can be avoided.

This is followed by a chapter written by Professor Baskın Oran. The topic of the legal treatment of minority rights is dealt with here from a historical perspective. It is described how we move from an almost paternalistic approach of the Ottoman Empire towards non-Muslims to a more attentive, at least in theory, to a minority rights approach after the advent of the republic in 1923. In theory, because the professor describes in detail all the times the Anatolian state has violated the rights of its citizens since the Treaty of Lausanne. Professor Oran describes very how Turkey is a 'nation-state' in which the dominant one ends up assimilating or oppressing all the others, whose very existence is even denied. The paradox is that the latter do exist and even have customs, languages and religions quite distinct from Turkish ones.

Among these minorities, one of the oldest and most representative is certainly that of the Greeks of Turkey. They call themselves '*Romioi*' or '*Romios*' and thus Turks ended up calling them '*Rum*' and that is how Professor Samim Akgönül addresses them in the chapter that follows. describes the difficulties faced over the years by the Greek minority spread mainly in Istanbul. A history of deportations and expulsions (in 1923 and 1964) and the consequent, constant fear of extinction both as an ethnic group and as a culture. For a long time, the Greeks of Turkey could hardly open and maintain their schools due



to the laws in force (a problem shared by other minorities as well). A problem whose solution is not in sight, even though the Greeks of Turkey (especially of Istanbul) continue to propose initiatives and struggles to keep their identity and culture alive.

The following chapter, by Dr Clémence Scalbert Yücel, deals with the now long-standing and notorious issue of Turkey's relations with the Kurdish minority. In particular, she focuses on the issue inherent to the Kurdish language rights, education and public image during the AKP years. It is well described here how the AKP has indeed promoted the use of the Kurdish language in public broadcasting, furthering its survival, but that further steps are required on its use in institutions and schools. It is also argued how the AKP has dealt with this issue more for electoral purposes than anything else, and how the road to further openings stalled when pro-Kurdish parties began to hegemonize among the Kurdish electorate in the southeast of the country. The stop to openings toward the Kurdish minority has thus entailed a worsening of conditions for the latter, as hostility toward them seems to have grown in recent years.

The following chapter by Professor Arus Yumul, on the other hand, deals with the Armenian minority. It is described how the peculiarity of the latter has long been to conceal their identity and demonstrate an almost fanatical patriotism for fear of being subjected to further violence and repression after the well-known (and controversial, in Turkey) genocide of 1915. Prof. Yumul describes how the advent of Hrant Dink and his political commitment to the recognition of the rights of the Armenian minority was a turning point. Indeed, Dink's assassination seems to have shaken the Armenians of Turkey, who now share a much more combative attitude than in the past against the discrimination they face. It is touching, however, to note how this attitude has contributed to the revival of anti-Armenian sentiments in part of civil society.

The following chapter is by Emanuela Claudia del Re and addresses the issue of Syrian refugees in Turkey. Today, Turkey is the world's largest host of refugees and the Syrian migration to Turkey since 2011 has brought a series of challenges in terms of developing and implementing regulations and policies. Indeed, Syrians in Turkey have to struggle not only with poverty and hardship but also with the perception of being 'privileged', being subject to policies and initiatives devoted to ensuring their welfare by local authorities. Clear, from the author's text, how the absence of the Turkish state in developing social cohesion and integration policies weighs at this juncture, as precisely much of the effort and resources on behalf of Syrian refugees rest on NGOs and local authorities, which, however, can do little either to improve the legal situation of refugees or to prevent conflict with the Turkish population.

Instead, the following chapter, written by Prof. Cahit Aslan, tells a beautiful story of hope for the Circassian minority in Turkey. Like the other minorities mentioned so far, the Circassians of Turkey seemed doomed to extinction as a culture, especially since they too had to juggle objective and legal obstacles to open and maintain schools and language courses. Unlike other minorities, however, Circassians seem to have managed to circumvent second chances by taking advantage of changes in the legislative framework



on language teaching in 2012. Since then, the lack of enough students and language teachers continues to weigh on the fate of Turkey's Circassian minority, but at least resistance from the state seems to have been overcome.

The last contribution in this volume is by Professor Martin van Bruinessen and deals with perhaps the thorniest issue concerning minorities in Turkey, that of the Alevi. The latter, in fact, unlike the other minorities cannot be properly defined as either an ethnicity or a religious community and are fragmented into various groups. The lack of unity toward the state and action against the prejudice they have been subjected to since the time of the Ottoman Empire has meant that discrimination (and, sometimes, even the most serious forms of violence) against the Alevi is still particularly severe. Prof. van Bruinessen describes the Turkish state's (unsuccessful) attempts to come to terms with the Alevite minority, at least at the level of recognizing their religious rights. He also describes the process of 'revival' of the common Alevite identity and their efforts in attempting to protect and promote their newly found common cultural and religious identity. However, these initiatives and demands, while supported by the European Court of Rights, have gone unheeded by the Turkish state.

Each of these contributions emphasises a particular aspect of the Turkish state's relationship with a minority and the problems that accompany it. The *trait d'union* between all these contributions is the difficulty that members of these minority groups encounter when they want to speak or publish something in their language, open schools that allow their culture to replicate itself through new generations, and observe their religion. These are all actions that in a modern democratic state are now taken for granted, and it is therefore surprising that in Turkey it is still difficult for members of the minorities enumerated in this book to be able to perform such actions. It is surprising for two reasons: firstly because the republic of Turkey has gone through numerous changes (including three coups) and different modes and directions of the government, but indifference to minorities seems to have united virtually every political season in the Anatolian state. Secondly, it is surprising because the first years of the AKP government seemed to have shown that the wind had changed and that, albeit sometimes awkwardly and ineffectively, the state had made progress in recognising the rights of minorities. Today, there seems to be no trace of these small steps forward.

Professor Grassi opened the volume by theorising that how the republic had come into being had indissolubly marked its functioning, including the way it dealt with minorities. Reading this volume, this truth appears incontrovertible. Yet, in the face of the anti-discrimination efforts of the various communities analysed in this volume, one cannot help but hope that 100 years after its birth, the republic will sooner or later set aside the legacy of Lausanne and embrace a more conciliatory outlook towards *all* its citizens.