

Remember pogrom against Greeks in Istanbul, don't forget one against people of Afrin

by Gokcan Aydogan - 07/09/2018 09:15



Today marks the anniversary of pogrom against the Greeks living in Istanbul in 1955. It has been 63 years, but it seems that Turkey's civil society has never made bold to turn to the dark side of its past.

Istiklal Boulevard, today, a fashionable shopping area in the old city of Istanbul, was the scene of looting, killing, and rape in 1955.

63 years ago, in the night from September 5th to September 6th 1955, loudly roaring hordes of conservatives armed with axes, hammers, sabres and dynamite storm along Istiklal Boulevard, they attacked the local Greek community, burned and plundered businesses belonging to them. The mob attacked mainly Greek-populated districts throughout Istanbul, destroying more than 4000 shops, 70 churches and 30 schools. Priests were beaten, Greek Orthodox cemeteries were desecrated.

The images of that night, the night of unspeakable shame for civil society in Turkey, was missing for half a century. For the first time after 50 years, in 2005, photos taken by the Turkish secret police appeared on Istiklal Boulevard as an exhibition.

All these pictures were collected by a military judge, Fakri Coker, who failed in his attempt in 1956 to bring the perpetrators to justice. The Turkish judiciary suppressed the investigation, and Coker's charges were not even accepted.

Coker kept the 250 photos and numerous documents privately for 40 years until 1995. He then bequeathed them all to the Istanbul private historian Tarih Vakfi with the proviso that only after his death will pictures be published.

From Menderes to Erdogan

This was the motto of the then Turkish Prime Minister Adnan Menderes, Turkey's President Erdogan's role model and "democracy martyr", who immediately suspected the communists for the pogrom in 1955. After a military coup in 1960, Menderes himself was put on trial. To give a facade of democracy to their military regime in the eyes of the world public, the generals decided to re-examine the dark events of 1955.

During the trial, it became clear that the ruling Democrat Party (DP), had organised the mob; they even brought attackers to Istanbul by train and ship from cities around. The atmospheric preparation took place through a racist propaganda campaign that was intended to poison public opinion and fuel latent hatred against minorities, alleged hostility among themselves.

This is not the first time that uninvolved minorities have been victims of power struggles in Turkey. Virtually since Kemal Ataturk founded the republic in 1923, Turkey has been persecuted by the paranoia that its minorities, primarily Greeks, Armenians, and nowadays Kurds, as the puppets of foreign powers, secret allies of Ankara's enemies. This fear, which became a "subterranean" smouldering fire due to the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, has repeatedly been instrumentalised in Turkish politics for very different purposes.

On the eve of September 6, there was an attack on Kemal Ataturk's childhood house in Thessaloniki. Thus the fuse was put on the torch of blazing emotions and set on fire. Although the ringleaders allegedly had not distributed weapons to the mob, the pogrom night ended with over 30 dead, hundreds injured, and dozens of women raped.

Menderes had incited and instigated the mob. With the riots, he hoped to draw attention away from his failed liberal economic policy. Following his role model, Erdogan followed the same path. With the occupation Afrin, Erdogan hoped to turn

the eyes away from the severe economic crisis on the horizon.

Today in 2016 only about 2000 Greeks still live in Istanbul. Until 1955, the situation was different. Around 90% of the companies on Istiklal Boulevard belonged to the Greeks, Armenians or Jews. In the criminal furore of the pogrom night, their businesses were raided by a mob, motivated by nationalism and envy against the minorities. , unpunished to this day.

Since the civil society in Turkey has never faced with its dark past, people of Afrin share the same destiny today. The stage and motivation are the same. A couple of missiles allegedly from Afrin hit neighbouring Turkey's cities. Erdogan declared that he wants retaliation. Today, the enemy, puppets of the enemies of Ankara, is Syrian Kurdish Peoples' Protection Units (YPG). And, in the fight against the "enemy", the people of Afrin were robbed, persecuted, beaten, kicked, tortured, expelled and murdered by Turkey-backed jihadist and rebel groups.

Now they have left their hometown, to be more clear; forced to leave, like the local Greek minority leaving Istanbul.