

Turkish gov't to return properties to minorities

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Turkish government signs a historic decree to return property taken away from minority foundations by the 1936 proclamation. The decision includes schools, churches, stores, houses and even nightclubs.

Surp Pırgıç Armenian Hospital Foundation in Istanbul has six houses, stores and buildings that will be returned. Other foundations are also expecting to receive theirs. Hürriyet photo

The Turkish government has signed a historic decree to return property taken away from minority foundations 75 years ago, a decision announced ahead of the prime minister's Ramadan fast-breaking dinner Sunday with minority group representatives.

Published in the Official Gazette on Saturday and made by the order of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the decision also states that minority groups will be paid market value for property that was sold to third parties.

The Treasury or the General Directorate of Foundations will be responsible for the payments, with the amounts to be determined by the Finance Ministry.

Under the new decree, the minority properties that were claimed in the 1936 proclamation but had been registered as public or foundation property will be returned to their rightful owners.

According to information obtained by the Anatolia news agency from the General Directorate of Foundations, minority groups gave the government a proclamation in 1936 detailing their immovable property. However, over the years, these properties were not registered under the minority foundations' names, and some were even sold to third parties.

In 2008, the government took steps toward remedying this problem, but the efforts fell short and caused some foundations to take their cases to the European Court of Human Rights. The court ruled in favor of the minority groups and sentenced Turkey to pay large sums in compensation to the foundations.

'Revolutionary' decree

The new decree, while labeled "revolutionary" and a step toward "equal citizenship" by the foundations' lawyer Kezban Hatemi, is still seen as insufficient by those who think the properties sold to third parties should also be returned to their rightful owners.

The problem stemmed from the 1936 proclamation, and the European court did not find it enough to define real estate by that alone, said Rıza Türmen, a member of the main opposition Republican People's Party, or CHP.

Some of the property set to be returned to Armenian, Greek and Syriac foundations include schools, churches, stores, hundreds of houses, buildings and apartments, cemeteries, factories, and even nightclubs.

Minority foundations have 12 months to apply, with the Foundations Assembly set to review each case before making the final decision to return the property to its rightful owner.

Sources

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