



ASIA/TURKEY-The government grants the legal personality to the Foundations of religious minorities

Istanbul (Agenzia Fides) - The General Directorate of Foundations in Turkey, a government organization, has decided to grant legal personality to the Foundations belonging to non-Islamic religious minorities, recognized in the Treaty of Lausanne of 1923. As Fides learns from the Episcopal Conference of Turkey, the first official step was the legal recognition for the Foundation of the greek high School "Beyoglu", one of the oldest in Turkey. The decision was welcomed by religious minority communities, such as the Christian greek rite, Armenian and Jewish: all minorities that, to manage social and charitable works such as hospitals and schools, have had the necessity to create private Foundations, not having the same legal personality. According to minorities, there is an additional "positive signal" after last September when the government of Recep Tayyip Erdogan had announced the return of property confiscated from religious minorities.

The Latin Church is a different case as it is not among the communities recognized in the Treaty of Lausanne. The Dominican Father Claudio Monge, OP, who for years has been a missionary in Turkey, explains to Fides: "The decision of the Directorate for Foundations recognizes, at a long-range, the legal status of the cultural, social and even religious Foundations. The Islamic Sufi brotherhoods, many other Islamic foundations, and even those belonging to minorities recognized as the Greek Church, the Armenian and Jewish communities all benefit from this situation. These Foundations have specific obligations, such as having a turkish citizen as president, and are subject to a set of rules, established by the General Directorate of Foundations".

Fr. Monge continues: "It is a positive step, in the sense that the government, with this act, recognizes the Foundations full right to exist, with the exclusion of being able to 'lay hands' on those properties. But this is not the solution for the status of religious minorities in Turkey. The true knot is the full recognition of legal personality concerning churches, religious orders and other organizations. As Latin Church, we still suffer from the strict interpretation of the Treaty of Lausanne, which sees among the recognized religious minorities only the Christian greek rite, Armenians and Jews. It is a distinction that had its day: everybody says it, but to introduce a new law a complex pattern of constitutional reform would be necessary. For its implementation, the government of Prime Minister Erdogan needs the placet of the opposition parties, and this makes the project even more difficult. It is premature, therefore, to say when and how this can happen". (PA) (Agenzia Fides 22/11/2011)