

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	312
Land:	Tyrkiet
Kilde:	U.S. Department of State
Titel:	July – December, 2010 International Religious Freedom Report
Udgivet:	13. september 2011
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	21. september 2011



[Home](#) » [Under Secretary for Democracy and Global Affairs](#) » [Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor](#) » [Releases](#) » [International Religious Freedom](#) » [July-December, 2010 International Religious Freedom Report](#) » [Europe and Eurasia](#) » [Turkey](#)

Turkey

BUREAU OF DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND LABOR

July-December, 2010 International Religious Freedom Report

Report

September 13, 2011

[Subscribe to Updates](#)

The constitution protects religious freedom, and, in practice, the government generally enforced these protections; however, some constitutional provisions regarding the integrity and existence of the secular state restrict these rights.

The government generally respected religious freedom in practice. During the reporting period, the government took steps to improve religious freedom. Notably the government permitted religious services to be held annually in historic Christian sites that had been turned into state museums after decades of disuse. The government continued to impose limitations on Muslim and other religious groups, including restrictions placed on Muslim religious expression in government offices and state-run institutions, including universities, for the stated reason of preserving the "secular state." The government has yet to reopen Greek Orthodox Halki seminary after 40 years of closure. Authorities continued their broad ban on wearing Muslim religious headscarves in government offices as well as public schools, although the ban was relaxed in universities and ignored in some workplaces. Members of some religious groups said they were effectively blocked from careers in state institutions because of their faith. Some religious groups also faced difficulties regarding freedom of worship, registration with the government, property ownership, and the training of their followers and clergy. Although religious speech and persuasion was legal, some Muslims, Christians, and Bahais faced restrictions and occasional harassment for alleged proselytizing or providing religious instruction to children.

There were reports of societal abuses and discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Threats against non-Muslims created an atmosphere of pressure and diminished freedom for some non-Muslim communities. Many Christians, Bahais, Jews, and Alevis faced societal suspicion and mistrust, and some elements of society continued to express anti-Semitic sentiments. Additionally persons wishing to convert from Islam sometimes experienced social harassment and violence from relatives and neighbors.

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom with the government and state institutions as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. During the reporting period, embassy and consulate representatives met frequently with government officials and representatives of religious groups to discuss matters related to religious freedom, including legal reforms aimed at lifting restrictions on religious groups.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 301,383 square miles and a population of 77.8 million. According to the government, 99 percent of the population is Muslim, the majority of which is Hanafi Sunni. According to representatives of various religious communities, the actual percentage of Muslims is slightly lower.

In addition to the Sunni Muslim majority, academics estimate that there are between 15 million and 20 million Alevis, followers of a belief system that incorporates aspects of both Shia and Sunni Islam and draws on the traditions of other religious groups indigenous to the region. The government considered Alevism a heterodox Muslim sect; some Alevis and Sunnis maintained that Alevis were not Muslims.

There are several other religious groups constituting less than 1 percent of the country's population, mostly concentrated in Istanbul and other large cities. While exact membership figures are not available, these religious groups include approximately 500,000 Shiite Caferi Muslims; 60,000 Armenian Orthodox Christians; 23,000 Jews; 20,000 Syrian Orthodox (Syriac) Christians; 10,000 Bahais; 5,000 Yezidis; 3,600 Jehovah's Witnesses; 3,500 members of various other Protestant sects; approximately 3,000 Iraqi Chaldean Christians; and up to 2,500 Greek Orthodox Christians. There are also small, undetermined numbers of Bulgarian Orthodox, Nestorian, Georgian Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Syriac Catholic, and Maronite Christians.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

Please refer to Appendix C in the Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for the status of the government's

acceptance of international legal standards <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2010/appendices/index.htm>.

The constitution protects religious freedom and, in practice, the government generally enforced these protections; however, constitutional provisions regarding the integrity and existence of the secular state restrict these rights. The 1982 constitution establishes the country as a secular state and provides for freedom of belief, worship, and the private dissemination of religious ideas. The constitution prohibits discrimination on religious grounds.

Core institutions of the state, including the presidency, armed forces, judiciary, and state bureaucracy, have played the role of defending secularism throughout the history of the republic. In some cases elements of the state have opposed activities of the elected government on grounds that these actions threatened the secular state.

The penal code prohibits imams, priests, rabbis, and other religious leaders from "reproaching or vilifying" the government or the laws of the state while performing their duties. Violations were punishable by prison terms of one month to one year, or three months to two years if the crime involved inciting others to disobey the law.

There are legal restrictions against insulting a recognized religion, interfering with such a religious group's services, or defacing its property.

The government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: three days at the end of Ramadan (Ramazan Bayram) and five days for the feast of the sacrifice (Kurban Bayram).

The government does not recognize conscientious objection to military service, and those who opposed mandatory military service on religious grounds faced charges in civil court and prison sentences.

Registration with the government was not mandatory for religious groups; however, unregistered religious groups have no legal standing and can face greater harassment than registered groups. Organizations, including religious groups, have the opportunity to register as an association or a foundation, but not on religious grounds.

While both foundations and associations receive equal protection by law, associations must be nonprofit by definition and may receive financial support only in the form of donations. A foundation has greater fiscal freedom and may earn income through companies and rent-earning properties. However, the process for establishing a foundation is substantially lengthier and more expensive than that for establishing an association. Parliament determines on an annual basis the minimum capital requirement for creating a foundation. During the year the minimum was set at approximately 50,000 lira (\$33,300).

There were several categories of foundations, including religious community foundations, education foundations, and aid foundations. There were 161 religious community foundations, the vast majority of which existed during the Ottoman Empire and were grandfathered into the country's foundation system. Since 1936 religious groups may not register as community foundations and gain the legal rights held by such foundations. Religious groups may apply to register as a "new foundation" promoting charitable works, not a religious purpose. For example, the foundation may not focus its activities on a particular religious or ethnic community. To begin the process, applicants must pay a sum, determined by the General Directorate of Foundations (GDF), according to the extent of their intended activities. Religious community foundations are the only religious groups that may own real estate. A foundation of any category may be closed only by a court judgment, which provides some protection for religious community foundations.

The process for religious communities to become an association can take as little as three months, with no capital requirement. A group must submit a registration application to the provincial governor's office and may immediately begin operating while awaiting confirmation from the governor's office that its bylaws are constitutional. Associations can be closed by court orders, and they have fewer legal rights and protections at the local level. Associations are bound by the civil code not to discriminate on the grounds of religion, ethnicity, or race. As a result associations focused on support for one religious group were not permitted.

The GDF regulated activities of all religious community foundations and their affiliated property, including 74 Greek Orthodox foundations; 48 Armenian Orthodox foundations; and 12 Jewish foundations; as well as Syriac Orthodox, Syriac Catholic, Chaldean, Bulgarian Orthodox, Georgian, and Maronite foundations. The GDF also regulated all charitable foundations with a religious affiliation, both Muslim and non-Muslim, and assessed whether the foundations were operating within the stated objectives of their organizational statute.

The government oversees Muslim religious facilities and extracurricular Qur'an courses through the Directorate of Religious Affairs (Diyanet), which is under the authority of the Prime Ministry. The Diyanet is responsible for regulating the operation of more than 77,500 registered mosques and employing local and provincial imams, who are civil servants.

The constitution establishes compulsory religious and moral instruction in public primary and secondary schools, with content determined by the Ministry of National Education's Department of Religious Instruction. Only Greek Orthodox, Armenian Orthodox, and Jewish religious foundations may operate schools under the supervision of the Education Ministry. The curricula of these schools included information unique to the cultures of the three groups. The ministry reportedly verified if the child's father or mother was a Turkish citizen from that minority community before the child could enroll. Other non-Muslim communities may not operate schools of their own.

The constitution provides that no one shall be compelled to reveal his or her religious beliefs. Although there is a space in which to list one's religious affiliation on national identity cards, citizens may choose not to include a religion on their cards. Many religious groups complained that by not including an identity or listing something other than Muslim, individuals were precluded from jobs in the state bureaucracy or government and discriminated against in the private sector.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The government generally respected religious freedom in practice. The government took steps to improve the status of respect for religious freedom during the reporting period; however, the government continued to impose limitations on Muslim and other religious groups and significant restrictions on Muslim religious expression in government offices and state-run institutions, including universities, for the stated reason of preserving the "secular state." However, in state buildings, including universities, there are often mescits (small mosques), in which Muslims may pray.

Mystical Sufi and other religious-social orders (tarikats) and lodges (cemaats), banned officially since 1925, remained active and widespread. Some prominent citizens reportedly continued to associate with tarikats, cemaats, and other Muslim organizations.

Some religious groups reported difficulties opening, maintaining, and operating houses of worship. Under the law religious services may take place only in designated places of worship. Municipal codes mandated that only the government can designate a place of worship, and if a religion has no legal standing in the country, it cannot register a site. Non-Muslim religious services, especially for religious groups that did not own property recognized by the GDF, often took place on diplomatic property or in private apartments. While police and prosecutors did not attempt to prevent or prosecute such gatherings, landlords were hesitant to rent to groups without confirmation that they would not be harassed by the police.

There were reports that local officials harassed persons who converted from Islam to another religion when they sought to amend their identity cards. Some non-Muslims maintained that listing their religious affiliation on the cards exposed them to discrimination and harassment.

Members of recognized non-Muslim religious communities were exempted legally from compulsory religious and moral instruction in primary and secondary schools but in practice faced difficulty obtaining exemptions from the compulsory instruction, particularly if their identification cards did not list a religion other than Islam. The government claimed the compulsory instruction covered the range of world religions, but religious groups asserted that the courses reflect Hanafi Sunni Islamic doctrine.

Alevi children received the same compulsory religious education as all Muslim students, and many Alevis alleged discrimination in the government's failure to include any of their distinct doctrines or beliefs in religious instruction classes in public schools. A 2007 decision by the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) allowed an Alevi parent to request that his daughter be exempted from her school's compulsory religious education. However, parents faced difficulties obtaining these exemptions. During the reporting period, Alevis had nearly 20 court cases pending against the Ministry of Education alleging discrimination. Material on Alevism was added to the religious course curriculum after the ECHR decision, but many Alevis believed it to be inadequate and, in some cases, incorrect.

No law explicitly prohibited religious speech or religious conversions; nevertheless, many prosecutors and police regarded religious speech and religious activism with suspicion. Christians and Bahais engaging in religious advocacy were occasionally threatened or pressured by government and state officials. Antimissionary rhetoric remained in required school textbooks, and police officers occasionally reported students who met with Christian missionaries to their families or to university authorities.

Religious groups generally faced administrative challenges when seeking to employ foreign religious personnel because there is no visa category for religious workers.

The state provided training for Sunni Muslim clerics; religious communities outside the Sunni Muslim mainstream have not found a suitable system to train leadership inside the country within the current legal framework. Coreligionists from outside the country were permitted to assume leadership positions in some cases, but in general all religious community leaders, including patriarchs and chief rabbis, must be citizens according to a mandate by the Istanbul Governorate where these leaders reside, in an arrangement dating to Ottoman times.

Authorities continued to monitor the activities of churches but generally did not interfere with their religious activities. However, significant restrictions were placed on the administration of the churches. The government previously maintained that only Turkish citizens may be members of the Greek Orthodox Church's Holy Synod and participate in patriarchal elections, despite the Ecumenical Patriarch's appeal to allow non-Turkish prelates. Members of the Greek Orthodox community claimed that the legal restrictions particularly threatened the survival of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Istanbul, because the community was becoming too small to provide enough Turkish citizen prelate candidates to maintain the institution. In January Prime Minister Erdogan offered citizenship to non-Turkish metropolitans who chose to apply for it. Approximately 25 metropolitans submitted paperwork, and 13 of them received Turkish citizenship in October. The other applications had not been approved at the end of the year.

Government officials acknowledged that the 1923 Lausanne Treaty does not address the issue of the patriarch's ecumenical status, although the government historically has not recognized the title of ecumenical patriarch.

In past years officers and noncommissioned officers were dismissed periodically from the military for ignoring repeated warnings from superior officers concerning their ties to what the military considered Islamic fundamentalist organizations. In contrast with the previous reporting period, the military high council reported no dismissals based on alleged Islamic fundamentalism.

The Higher Education Council announced that the long-standing ban on the wearing of headscarves by students in universities would no longer be enforced. This decision did not extend to students in primary and secondary schools, and the ban remained in force for civil servants in public buildings, although some government offices unofficially allowed

employees to wear headscarves openly. The government at times disciplined or fired women who worked in the public sector as nurses or teachers and wore headscarves.

A few religious groups, such as the Bahai, Alevi, and Yezidi, were unable to state their religious identity on their national identity cards because their religion was not included among the available options. Despite a 2006 regulation allowing persons to leave the religious identity section of their identity cards blank or change the religious identity section by written application, the government continued to restrict applicants' choice of religion. Applicants must either leave the religious identity section blank or choose from the following: Muslim, Greek Orthodox, Christian, Jew, Hindu, Zoroastrian, Confucian, Taoist, Buddhist, Religionless, or Other.

On February 2, the ECHR ruled that allowing a citizen to leave the religious identity section blank was not enough to provide for religious freedom. The decision was in response to a case brought by an Alevi man who wished to list "Alevi" as his religion. The ECHR suggested that omitting any reference to religion on national identity cards would be one way for the country to comply with the ruling. There was no change in the design of national identity cards by the end of the year.

Alevis freely practiced their beliefs and built cem houses (places of gathering), although these have no legal status as places of worship. Representatives of Alevi organizations maintained they often faced obstacles when attempting to establish cem houses. They said there were approximately 100 cem houses in the country, which was an insufficient number to meet their needs. Alevis also charged there was bias in the Diyanet, which did not allocate specific funds for Alevi activities or religious leadership. The Diyanet budget was reserved for the majority Sunni community, covering the salaries of imams and other costs. The government does not pay for utilities in cem houses or other facilities not recognized by the government as places of worship, as it does for mosques affiliated with the Sunni majority. However, there were reports that some local municipalities granted free utilities to cem houses. Some Alevi groups wanted cem houses brought under the authority of the Diyanet, while others feared that such a step would bring too much government control over their religious practices.

The Caferis, the country's principal Shia community – which is largely of Azeri-Iranian origin and concentrated mostly in the eastern part of the country and in Istanbul – were permitted to build and operate their own mosques and appoint their own imams. As with the Alevis, their places of worship had no legal status and received no financial support from the Diyanet.

The law requires eight years of compulsory secular education, after which students may pursue studies at general state schools or vocational high schools, which include imam hatip (Muslim preacher) high schools. Graduates of vocational schools, as well as general state schools, faced an automatic minimal reduction in their university entrance examination grades if they applied for university programs outside their field of high school specialization. This reduction made it more difficult for imam hatip graduates to enroll in university programs other than theology. Most families that enrolled their children in imam hatip schools claimed they did so to expose them to more extensive religious education, not to train them as imams. Students were permitted to enroll in summer Qur'an classes provided by the Diyanet after completing the fifth grade (typically at the age of 11). Individuals who completed the eighth grade or reached 16 years of age could attend year-long Qur'an courses provided by the Diyanet. Unofficial Qur'an courses outside the Diyanet's control are also taught.

The government interpreted the 1923 Lausanne Treaty as granting special legal minority status exclusively to three recognized groups – Armenian Orthodox Christians, Jews, and Greek Orthodox Christians – although the treaty referred broadly to "non-Muslim minorities" without listing specific groups. Since this recognition does not extend to the religious leadership organs, the administrations of these religious communities do not have legal personality. The Armenian Orthodox and Ecumenical Greek Orthodox patriarchates continued to seek legal recognition of their status as patriarchates, rather than conglomerations of community foundations. Without legal personality they do not have the right to own and transfer property. However, on November 29, the government gave the deed of the Buyukada orphanage to the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate as mandated in a June ECHR decision. Because the government requires all places of learning to be under the control of the Education Ministry, the Greek Orthodox and Armenian Orthodox patriarchates chose not to train their clerics in the country.

The Ecumenical Greek Orthodox Patriarchate in Istanbul continued to seek to reopen the Halki seminary on the island of Heybeli in the Sea of Marmara. The seminary was closed in 1971 after the patriarchate chose not to comply with a state requirement to nationalize to avoid the seminary being administered by the state.

In 1974 the High Court of Appeals ruled that community religious foundations had no right to acquire properties beyond those listed in their 1936 declarations, and the state then seized control of properties acquired after 1936. An amended foundations law governing religious community property rights, which became effective in 2008, facilitates the return of religious community foundation properties expropriated as a result of the 1974 ruling. However, the law did not account for properties that have been sold to third parties or to those expropriated when the associated foundations were taken under government control. Due to the Greek community's small population, this applied to the majority of expropriated Greek Orthodox properties, as the foundations that oversaw the properties became defunct due to lack of personnel. The law also does not rescind the authority of the GDF to expropriate property. Officials claimed that the amended foundations law should make it easier for non-Muslim communities to manage and establish new foundations. In June the Constitutional Court upheld the provisions of the foundation law that concern religious community foundations in response to an opposition party's appeal.

The amended law allows the 161 non-Muslim religious foundations recognized by the GDF to acquire property, but it does not allow the communities to reclaim all of the properties affiliated with foundations expropriated by the state over the years, nor can the communities claim rights to property acquired prior to 1936 but not included on the list. After the

foundations law went into effect in 2008, foundations had the opportunity to submit applications requesting registration of new properties and claiming some old properties. Foundations submitted 1,410 applications in the first wave of claims, which remained open until August 2009. Of those claims, 96 were approved; the rest were rejected or deferred pending receipt of further supporting documents. A second opportunity to submit applications ended in August.

Non-Muslim communities complained that implementing the regulations of the foundations law has led to interference in the elections of foundation boards, the treatment of charitable community foundations as business corporations for tax purposes, the freezing of revenue from real estate transactions, and a ban on transferring surplus income from one foundation to another. According to the amended law, religious community foundations can receive financial grants from individuals and institutions domestically or internationally and can provide such grants to similar foundations and associations either in or outside the country.

Religious groups lost numerous properties to the state in the past and continued to fight efforts by the state to expropriate properties. In many cases the government had taken control of non-Muslim religious foundations and expropriated associated properties on the grounds that the foundations were not operating in accordance with their charters or that the non-Muslim communities they supported had insufficient populations to sustain the foundations. Such expropriations were frequently appealed to the Danistay (Council of State) and, if unsuccessful at that level, to the ECHR.

Many local officials continued to impose standards on churches, such as minimum space requirements, that are not imposed on mosques. In numerous instances Protestant groups faced the requirement of having to purchase 27,000 square feet of land to construct a church, even for very small congregations. Many municipalities denied legally required approval on various grounds to Protestant groups seeking to build churches.

Restoration or construction may be carried out on buildings and monuments considered "ancient" only with authorization of the regional board for the protection of cultural and national wealth. In the past bureaucratic procedures and considerations relating to historic preservation impeded repairs to religious facilities.

Beginning in 2008 the Undersecretariat of the Treasury, the Department of Forestry, and nearby villages initiated a series of court cases against a Syriac monastery in Midyat to claim ownership of parcels of land inside and outside the monastery walls. In its defense the monastery presented tax records for the property dating from 1937 and ownership documents dating from 1935. Local courts decided in favor of the monastery in two cases and against the monastery in another. A fourth case was pending at the end of the reporting period. In a series of appeals, some of the decisions were overturned. The monastery does not have legal status and was represented by a foundation established during the Ottoman Empire.

In October 2009 the ECHR ruled that the government violated the freedom of assembly of a Protestant congregation in Ankara that had petitioned to form a foundation in 2000. The congregation registered as a charitable association while its court case proceeded, and it had not changed its registration to a foundation by the end of the year. Another case filed with the ECHR by a member of the Protestant Association of Turkey involving a complaint regarding the zoning of property as a place of worship was pending at the end of the year.

In December 2009 the Danistay rejected a petition by Jehovah's Witnesses to overturn the closure of one of its kingdom halls (places of worship). The community then took the case to the ECHR; it was pending at the end of the year.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

There were reports of abuses of religious freedom in the country, including a religious prisoner. Due to Jehovah's Witnesses' stance as conscientious objectors to military service, members continued to face difficulties. According to Jehovah's Witnesses officials, at the end of the year, 21 members faced prosecution and fines for their refusal in accordance with their beliefs to serve in the military. One objector, Baris Gormez, had been charged six times for "disobedience of orders" and had been in prison since 2007. The Jehovah's Witnesses community had three applications regarding conscientious objection pending acceptance by the ECHR at the end of the year. The ECHR was processing two other cases of conscientious objectors at the end of the year.

Another conscientious objector, Enver Aydemir, refused to perform military service based on his Islamic beliefs and has faced periodic detention since 2007. He was rearrested in December 2009 but released in June after a psychiatric evaluation that diagnosed him as possessing an "antisocial personality."

A foreign citizen performing missionary work and his family were deported in June and charged by the Ministry of Interior with threatening public order and national security. However, they were allowed to reenter the country without difficulty in September.

Nationalist sentiments sometimes contained anti-Christian or anti-Semitic overtones. In response to a complaint by a Protestant community leader, in October 2009 the Ministry of Education changed the description of Christian missionary activities in junior high textbooks from "criminal" to "separatist." The description as "separatist" remained unchanged at the end of the reporting period.

During the reporting period, two converts to Christianity from Islam were acquitted of the 2006 charges of "insulting Turkishness" by violating article 301 of the penal code and inciting hatred against Islam; however, they were convicted of secretly compiling data on private citizens for a Bible correspondence course. They were sentenced to nine months in prison, which was reduced to a 4,500 lira (\$3,000) fine.

In October 2009 the state-run television channel began broadcasting the series Ayrilik ("Separation"), in which Israeli

soldiers were portrayed murdering children in the Palestinian territories. A trailer of the series was also advertised in metro stations in Istanbul. After complaints the government worked with the producers of the series to remove the offensive content.

There were reports of a prisoner held for his religious beliefs, a Jehovah's Witness conscientious objector.

Improvements and Positive Development in Respect for Religious Freedom

During the reporting period, the government as well as local municipalities took steps to improve religious freedom. Notably the government permitted religious services to be held annually in historic religious sites that had been turned into state museums after decades of disuse.

On August 15, the government allowed the ecumenical patriarch to lead a religious service in Sumela Monastery, a former Orthodox monastery near Trabzon that was abandoned in the 1920s and restored by the government in recent years. Similarly, on September 19, the acting Armenian Orthodox patriarch led a worship service in the historic Armenian church on Akdamar Island near Van. Thousands of pilgrims from Turkey and abroad travelled to each service. The government gave permission to both churches to repeat the services in 2011. In response to these services, Turkish politicians from an opposition party led an Islamic prayer service in Fethiye Mosque in Ani, which was an Armenian church before it was converted to a mosque and then into a museum. On Christmas Eve Roman Catholic services were held in Antakya in the Church of Saint Peter, which is also a state museum.

The municipality of Diyarbakir contributed money and support to the renovation of an abandoned Armenian church in the city. The mayor of Sisli municipality, a district of Istanbul, contributed money to the restoration of a prominent Armenian church in a neighboring municipality.

Section III. Status of Societal Actions Affecting Enjoyment of Religious Freedom

There were reports of societal abuses and discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, and practice. Threats against non-Muslims during the reporting period created an atmosphere of pressure and diminished freedom for some non-Muslim communities. Religious pluralism was widely viewed as a threat to Islam and to "national unity." Muslims, Christians, Jews, Bahais, and members of other religious communities faced societal suspicion and mistrust.

In November an Adana mental hospital declared the arrested driver of Bishop Luigi Padovese, a Roman Catholic bishop who was the apostolic vicar for Anatolia, mentally unstable at the time of the June 3 fatal attack at the official residence in Iskenderun. The prosecutor in the case appealed the ruling on November 30; the case continued at year's end.

On December 11, a Christian woman and her Muslim husband allegedly were killed by her brother because the husband refused to convert to Christianity. The couple reportedly married in secret because her family refused her permission for the marriage. The trial of the alleged killer had not yet begun at the end of the year.

The trial of five suspects involved in the 2007 alleged torture and killing of three members of a Protestant church in Malatya continued at the end of the year.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs condemned the desecration on October 28 by unknown individuals of 78 graves in the Greek Orthodox cemetery in Merkez on the island of Gokceada. An investigation opened by the Public Prosecutor's Office continued at the end of the year.

Jewish leaders in the country expressed concern about the potential for anti-Semitism in the country and believed occurrences of anti-Semitism were directly related to events in the Middle East. However, Jewish community members reported that they did not believe they were held responsible for these events by most of the public.

In June a citizen was arrested on charges of planning the assassination of rabbis. Although he stated that he "hated Jews," he denied the accusation of planning such killings. Investigation of the case against him was merged with that of the "Cage Action Plan," an alleged plot to cause instability in the country by assassinating religious and cultural figures. At year's end the case had not concluded.

A variety of newspapers and television shows continued to feature anti-Christian and anti-Jewish messages, and anti-Semitic literature was common in bookstores. Advertisements for a forthcoming movie in the Valley of the Wolves franchise, purportedly taking place after the May 31 intervention on the Mavi Marmara by Israeli defense forces, depicted Israeli soldiers shooting bound Palestinians and other civilians.

Several Protestant pastors, some Protestant church legal advisors, and several Protestant churches across the country received heightened police protection due to threats. Some pastors reported receiving threatening telephone calls or messages during the reporting period.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom with the government and state institutions as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. ambassador, the consul general in Istanbul, and the consul in Adana, as well as staffs of all three posts, maintained close relations with Muslim religious leaders and other religious groups. The ambassador and other officials continued to urge the government to permit the reopening of Halki seminary on Heybeli Island and restore the expropriated property of non-Muslim communities.

In meetings with cabinet members and other officials, the ambassador and other officials regularly discussed government policy regarding Muslims and other religious groups, as well as specific cases of religious discrimination and other topics concerning religious freedom.

[Back to Top](#)

The Office of Electronic Information, Bureau of Public Affairs, manages this site as a portal for information from the U.S. State Department. External links to other Internet sites should not be construed as an endorsement of the views or privacy policies contained therein.