
EUROPEAN COURT OF HUMAN RIGHTS REJECTS ARMENIAN CHURCH FOUNDATION'S COMPLAINT OVER ISTANBUL ZONING PLAN

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A ruling by the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) in January has closed a years-long legal battle between an Armenian Christian foundation in Istanbul and Turkish authorities, but it has also renewed scrutiny of how urban planning decisions can reshape, and in some cases destabilize, the economic foundations of minority religious institutions.

In a unanimous decision delivered on 22 January, the Court declared inadmissible the application of the Foundation of the Sulumanastır Surp Kevork Armenian Church in Samatya and the Sahakyan Nunyan Armenian Cemetery and School, which had challenged the reclassification of some of its property as green space under Istanbul's zoning plans.

The case centered on several plots of land in Istanbul's historic Fatih district owned by the Armenian minority foundation. On one of those parcels, the foundation operates a café whose income supports its religious, educational, and charitable activities. In 2011, the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality designated certain plots in its 1:5,000-scale zoning plan as green spaces, a planning category that, while not immediately altering property use, can lay the groundwork for future expropriation.

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