

Turkish extremists stone Greeks at Black Sea environment forum

**Paul Brown
in Trabzon, Black Sea**

BISHOPS, politicians and scientists from 20 countries were stoned and spat at by a Turkish nationalist group known as the Grey Wolves yesterday when they arrived in private jets at the northern Turkish fort of Trabzon for an environmental conference.

Leaders of the Greek Orthodox Church in full regalia, the targets of the well-planned attack, were forced to run for cover as the police refused to intervene.

The delegates were joining a ship, *El Venizelos*, at Trabzon to take part in the "Black Sea in Crisis" conference. They had expected red-carpet treatment. Instead they were lucky to escape uninjured. There had been a hostile article in the local paper calling for demonstrations and an attack on the ship.

The organiser, Maria Becket, was later warned by the local governor, Vali Civelec, that he could not guarantee the safety of the ship's passengers if they came ashore. Planned visits to a monastery and a fishing village were cancelled.

The incident has embarrassed the Turkish government, which was holding



talks on the same day with Tom Spencer, the chairman of the foreign affairs committee of the European Parliament.

The foreign ministry had been reassuring him that extremism in Turkey had ended and the country was ready to join the European Union.

Later, when Mr Spencer arrived at the ship, he found that other delegates were being held at the airport. They included his wife Elizabeth, the Bishop of London, the Rt Rev Richard Chartes, and the botanist David Bellamy. Money was being demanded to let them in.

After telephoning Ankara to protest, he said: "The Turks were very embarrassed

and got on to the local governor straight away to get the people at the airport released.

"I had already told the Turks that it would be some time before they would be considered ready for EU membership; this can only underline that."

The conference is part of a clean-up scheme by the six countries bordering the Black Sea. The refuse of 21 countries and 121 million people discharges into the Black Sea, which scientists say risks becoming the world's first biologically dead sea.

During the nine-day trip the ship is visiting Georgia, Russia, Crimea and Odessa in Ukraine, and Istanbul.

The leader of the Greek Orthodox Church, Patriarch Bartholomew, opened the conference in Trabzon and will remain on board throughout.

He said: "The core of our concerns for the Black Sea and the environmental dangers threatening it is focused on those people who live in the surrounding regions, not on the sea itself.

"Fish are disappearing, crystalline water becomes choked with green algae, the beaches and harbours are polluted, and its beauty is soiled by the hand of mankind.

"It is obvious that the rapacious exploitation of natural resources, which derives from greed and not from an extraordinary circumstance of need ... is as unethical as it is irrational."

Professor Anthony Bryer, an expert on the Byzantine empire who was to have led one of the field trips in Trabzon, said the joint religious and scientific approach being attempted by the conference was impossible in this part of Turkey which, he said, was controlled by Refah Muslim fundamentalists.

"Arriving in the full Orthodox outfit was a mistake, a provocation: a bit like cardinals in full regalia strolling down the Shankhill Road in Belfast. It's a pity, because we are here to try and help."

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