00:04: Emre: Hello.

00:05-Nihat Dirim: Hello.

00:06: Emre: Let’s start with your name, last name, your relationship with Foça, your carrier, a little biographic introduction about you.

00:14: Nihat Dirim: I was born in 1959 in Foça, I started school here, later when my father died I went to Izmir and continued my studies there. I graduated from the university of Ege, faculty of agriculture. I am a farmer now but in 89-99 I was the mayor of Foça, now I do cow dairying.00:42

00:43- While I was the mayor of Foça, I had the chance to meet Foça up close, I led many studies on Foça’s history, culture, natural and historical environment.

00:57-Emre: Thank you.

01:02: Could you also state your name. I can ask about your family so that you can add your name.-Ok.

01:13: Emre: Can you tell us, your name, surname, your family, your family’s relation to Foça.

01:18- My name is Nihat Dirim, my generation is the 8th generation that is in Foça. They came in early 1800s. Our grand father who came form Ahıska was sent here as a sir, in the Ottoman Empire that’s the administration class. We have been here for 7-8 generations. The striking thing about our family is that my father and grandfather were also mayors of Foça. The family has mainly worked the lands in Bağarası, they did stock raising and agriculture. 02:04

02:09-Emre: Can you tell us what you did in Foça as a mayor, about it’s history and culture? 02:20

02:21-Nihat Dirim: Sure. I was born in Foça. I know Foça but when I became mayor my interest in Foça’s history took a different turn. In 1989 when I was elected, the year I went to office, 3rd generation archaeological digs started and are still on-going for 30 years. When the 3rd generation archaeological digs coincided with me being a mayor, increased my interest in history. We know that Foça is a very old city. In 89, the known history dated back to 3000 years, then with the 3rd generation digs we found out that it goes back to Miken, the Miken civilization, we live on a very old history and culture. 03:20

03:21-Emre: Very nice. While you were mayor, you had other initiatives after the digging, can you tell us about it? 03:30

03:31- Nihat Dirim: Let me tell you that, our relations with the archaeological digs wasn’t very healthy, we couldn’t manage to have a clean relationship with the Foça Dig Directorate. But me as the mayor, I took a lot of initiatives because I believe in the history and culture of Foça. One of the initiatives that I took was the relationship between Foça and Marseille. In 1993 we went to Marseille as guests of Marseille Municipality. We know that Marseille was built in the Antiquity by sailors from Foça. We made a first come true, we created the Foça Marseille relationship which the French call jumage.

04:22-We managed to have them open the exhibition of Foça in the history museum. We wanted the art from Foça to be displayed there, as the municipality of Marseille and Foça joint decision. However it didn’t go through because of some issues with the ministry of culture. Besides that, in terms of Turkish –Greek relations, our Greek brother who left from here, created 2 Foças there; Palea Phokaia and Nea Phokaia.

04:57 Palea Phocaia is in the south of Athens and the other one is in the south of Thessaloniki in Halkidiki. We have very healthy relations with of them. They took the first step back in 1991, a woman called Zaharo, with whom we became close friends and still are in touch, was a municipality councillor in Palea Phokaia. They came in 91, we welcomed them for 3 days and they invited us back. In 93 we did an amazing trip with 2 bus and 70 people. It lasted for 1 week, we left from Ipsala.

05:42- Also I’m sure you have discussed the particularities of Foça. Foça allowed immigrants from 3 different places; the Mytilene Island, Lindi Island and Kavala. Especially people who came from Kavala visited their own towns, they relived their childhood memories, they saw their houses. We continued to Thessaloniki, there were people from Thessaloniki and the area,

06:11- we stayed in Thessaloniki and then we went to Plaea Phokaia through Athens. It was a glorious welcoming, we spend great 2 days, they prepared an exquisite banquet in the schoolyard , they cut lamb, they danced the folklore. Our friendship continued this way, we kept visiting each other.

06:37-Later on, within the antiquity period colonial relationships that we created, we expanded to the city of Elea in Italy, Nice in France, Ampolya in Spain and realised visits back and forth. We organized cultural events, Palea Phokaia was involved also. We had a great time. 07:01

07:02: Emre: Thank you. I think while you were mayor you also had the initiative of gathering the academicians, can you tell us about that? 07:08

07:09-Nihat Dirim: In 96 we created a panel with the subject of Foça’s yesterday, today and tomorrow, it’s social and financial state, it’s nature, history and culture. It lasted for 3 days and there were talks under different headlines. People from Greece came, they told about Foça in the exchange period.

07:38-There were people from Marseille historical centre. They wrote an article on Foça’s rooster symbol, which we thought it came from Foça but that turns out comes from Bergama originally. So we turned this into writing and in 96 we published a booklet about it. 08:07

08:09- Emre: Thank you. In the history conference, World War I, the population exchange, the forced migration in 1914, the economical growth of Foça through it’s trade, as you know, as all mentioned. Do you have stories that cross over with you or your family? Any surprising stories during your administration? 08:31

08:32-Nihat Dirim: Engin Berber, whom I respect and love, is the one who organized the symposium. After I met Engin Berber, I got the opportunity of look into Foça’s exchange period and the period from 1910 to the Republic.

08:53-The history crosses over with my family too. My grandfather born in 1890, Raşit Dirim who would later become the mayor, when the WWI started, as you know, there was a both sided forced migration going on, the Muslims were forced from the islands to the main land and the Ottomans sent illegally the Greeks and non-Muslims from the main lands to the Islands.

09:32-In those complicated and difficult years, my grandfather sheltered for 6 months 30 Greeks, especially those who couldn’t run away, children and woman. Later when things got calm they left. This is the 1st story and the second one is, my grandfather who is a farmer;

09:59-there is a town called Söğütçük close to the prison where mostly Greek people live, which in most Foça towns Greeks and Turks live together but there, there aren’t many turks and they are also mostly farmers who own sheep. When they are forced to migrate, all the animal are left behind and other people took them to other towns, to Bağarası, Kozbeyli. My grandfather was asked to take some of the animals and he refused. That’s another one of the stories that are told. 10:37

10:38 Emre: Do you know if there was any communication between your grandfather and those 30 Greeks? 11:40

10:47-Nihat Dirim: No there wasn’t but in 1919 when Anatolia was under siege, when the Greeks came back here, they also slaughtered everything. My grandfather escaped to Menemen. The Greek soldiers surrounded a house there, my grandfather told his name; Raşit Dirim, the commander knew the story, the ones who left told the story. He stopped the soldiers and told Raşit Dirim that he was free to go. That’s another memory about him. 11:36

11:37: Emre: I see. Do you have any other story about that incident? 11:40

11:41: Nihat Dirim: Not that I know of.

11:54: Emre: those 30 people was in 1914?

11:55: Nihat Dirim: 1914.

12:02: Emre: How did you first heard about the 1914 migration events, did you hear it from your family, did you read an academic study, the city’s history?

12:11

12:13: Nihat Dİrim: I first heard about It through Fikret Adanır. A relative of the engineer Sertiaux who is also known as the French archaeologist of the first period dig meets with a friend of Fikret in Istanbul who actually lives in France and are neighbours in France, I guess it’s Sertiaux’s grandchild but I’m not sure.

A lot of article are found there.

12:53-The pictures that Sertiaux took during 1912-1914 during the digs which is also the years of migration. From what I gathered, he is a Greek fan, he doesn’t like the Ottomans and the photographs that he took are very striking. There are photographs of Greeks forced to migrate sleeping on the floors and beaches.

13:28-A study was made with those pictures, an academician living in France with Greek roots made a compilation and published a book. That’s when I first witness all of it. Obviously since Fikret knew all of this very well, he explained and organized a meeting, if you remember, you contributed a lot. After that meeting we decided to have a celebratory meeting 100 years later in 2014, I don’t know if you know about it but we couldn’t do it. So many things happened here in Foça in 1914. Again the Foça dig directorate prevented it. 14:08

14:11: Emre: Ok. Did you find out about your grandfather’s story before or after the photographs? 14:25

14:26: Nihat Dİrim: Before. I knew from before. I have another memory. My uncle used to tell us these stories because my father died when I was a kid. This is a known story too, people knew about his attitude of helping Greeks. This one story is about my grandmother.

14:50-She is from Chios Island, she was born there, actually my name comes from her father; Ahmet Nihat. The forced migration happens when she is a young girl; the Muslims are being sent away. She and her father and her father’s sisters leave Chios in 1914 leaving all their belongings and cross to Izmir. They live there in quarantine.

15:20-After everything goes back to normal in 1922 they go back to Chios to their home. They didn’t know but their neighbour took all of their belongings back then and kept them for them, the family. My uncle used to tell us about my grandmother’s joy and happiness. It’s very important in terms of neighbourhood values. 15:50

15:55-Emre: When we look at Foça, compared to other Anatolian towns, we see an urban development perspective that respects and invests in historical artefacts, in the Ottoman period as much as in the Antiquity. Some of these houses are Muslim houses, some are Greek houses. How did the process of these houses being protected and adopted by the people and restored, take place? Do you have any experience as the mayor? 16:16

16:17: Nihat Dirim: Now this is very important. The Aegean houses that form Foça’s urban texture are actually houses made by Greeks. Turks got inspired by them and they used the same material, stone.

16:37-I live in a house like that too. It was constructed in 1814, sorry in 1890 and I love it. However there is no cement in them, they used lime and hay so there was a lot of dust. There is dust and leakage and the women don’t want to live there.

17:07-In the 70s a wave of constructors came here and unfortunately a lot of the Greek houses were tear down. Some 3 floor unidentified buildings replace them. Later on, with the registration act that came in 77, in terms of individual housing, architecture and area, the registration act in 77 created a sense of protection, which is supported by the people’s mindfulness.

17:49-There is no such mindfulness in 77 or even 80 and even in 84 the mayor then had many houses demolished. The people started protecting and recognizing the value years later. I think that right now there is very important protection consciousness. The houses are being restored and are added to the urban texture of Foça. I wish it had started much earlier but I’m happy with where we are now. There is huge restoration work going on and the houses are being brought back. 18:30

18:31: Emre: Thank you so much. Any questions for us?

18:33: Nihat Dirim: No, thank you. I would like to say that, it was a pleasure first of all, I’m a person that really believes in the Turkish-Greek friendship. In 97 during the Kardak crisis, during the Turkish-Greek crisis, we organized a Turkish-Greek friendship festival in Foça, the flags of both countries were waved by children. So besides the mainstream politics, as a local politician, I deeply believe in the Turkish-Greek friendship. 19:04

19:05: Emre: Thank you.