



OSCE
HUMAN DIMENSION IMPLEMENTATION MEETING
11 – 22 September 2017
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Working Session 2: Fundamental freedoms I, including:
– **Freedom of peaceful assembly and association**
– **National human rights institutions and the role of civil society in the protection of human rights**

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Thank you Ms/Mr Moderator,

Distinguished Delegates,

We call upon the Greek State:

1. To respect and implement the 2008 decisions of European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) about the re-opening of “Xanthi Turkish Union”.
2. To respect and promote the establishment of “The Cultural Association of the Turkish Women of the Region of Rhodopi” and “Evros Minority Youth Association” based on 2008 decision of ECtHR.
3. To ensure that the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association is enjoyed by the whole society, either individually or as group, without discrimination and restriction on the basis of ethnic or social origin.
4. To repeal any restrictions on the right to freedom of association discriminating against Turkish Minority.

It is a fact that Greek state recognizes the mother tongue of the Minority as Turkish and thus provides Turkish education in Minority primary schools which are bilingual to all minority members in Western Thrace. Unfortunately and paradoxically, Greek state does not recognize our minority as Turkish Minority but as Muslim Minority. Because of this basic identity issue, many human rights issues emerged through the years, especially since 80s. Until the 80s, Greek state has been recognizing our Minority as Turkish Minority, with the “Turkish Minority” signs in minority schools and in NGOs. Since 80s, all the signs in minority schools had been changed to “Muslim Minority” and the legal NGOs that had “Turkish” word in terms of ethnic origin in their titles were banned by Greek authorities.

Related to this denial of ethnic identity, “Xanthi Turkish Union” founded in 1927, “Komotini Turkish Youth Union” founded in 1928, “Western Thrace Turkish Teachers Union” founded in 1936, all these three associations were closed down after 1983, although Greece had become EU Member then. Besides these closings, Greek state also did not allow officially the establishment of any minority foundation which contained “Turkish” word in terms of ethnic origin in its title.



In 2008, the ECtHR decided that Greece violated the right to freedom of assembly and association by closing “Xanthi Turkish Union” and not permitting the establishment of “The Cultural Association of the Turkish Women of the Region of Rhodopi” and “Evros Minority Youth Association”. Despite these decisions in favour of our minority, Greek authorities insistently keep on repeating at various national and international meetings that they are working on new regulations in order to solve these issues. But it is clear that Greece has no intention to follow these decisions because as Turkish Minority unfortunately we are considered as a threat to its national security.

Despite the fact that the Committee of Ministers of CoE in its resolutions called upon the Greek authorities to take all necessary measures so that our minority can benefit from the above referred proceedings in compliance with the convention requirements, the issue is still on the agenda of the Committee, since Greek authorities fail to adopt and execute these judgements of the Court.

It is very obvious that there is inconsistency in Greek State attitude, because on the one hand Greek state emphasizes that the Minority is Muslim that contains Turkish, Pomak and Roma people, on the other hand it permits officially the establishment of foundations that contain in their titles “Pomak” and “Roma” words, but unfortunately not the ones with the “Turkish” word.

By these past implementations and the present intentions of Greek state it is obvious that there is no freedom of assembly and association in Greece for the only recognized Minority within its borders. Nevertheless, historically recorded as a peaceful minority, we believe that Greek state could get over this “Turkish” word obsession by remembering its ancient times of multiculturalism and just implementing the simple decisions of the ECtHR.

Thank you for your attention.