

**OSCE****HUMAN DIMENSION****IMPLEMENTATION MEETING****22 September to 3 October 2014****Warsaw, Poland****Working Session 14 Fundamental Freedoms II, including freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief****Contact Person: Pervin Chairoula**chairoulap@yahoo.com**Religious Intolerance in Greece**

Thank you very much Mr. Moderator,

My name is Pervin Hayrullah (Chairoula). I am representing the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace in Greece, here.

The important problem of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace in terms of religious freedoms is the non-recognition of the elected Muftis by our State authorities. The Turkish Minority has the right to freely, “establish, manage and control any charitable, religious and social institutions” and thus elect its own religious leaders. This right was safeguarded by bilateral agreements and international treaties; however, our authorities do not implement the relevant provisions of those international binding documents.

I regret to inform you that the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace did not have any “Mufti” problem until the passing away of the then Mufti of Komotini in 1985 and the then Mufti of Xanthi in 1990. However, Greece, unlike her international obligations and misusing the European Union human rights standards at the beginning of 1990s, enacted the Law No: 1920/1991 providing for the appointment of the Muftis directly by the state authorities. These appointments have created disappointment and reaction among the Turkish Minority. The Turkish Minority has never accepted these appointments and was left with no choice but to elect their own Muftis in Komotini and Xanthi.

The main official and public pretext of our authorities for insisting on the appointment of the Muftis is that “Muftis are religious judges and in Greece all judges are appointed” However, the Islamic Law exercised in a traditional and a very limited fashion by the Muftis in Western Thrace is not obligatory. That is to say, members of the Minority have right to decide whether to choose the Sharia Law or Greek Civil Law regarding their inheritance and civic issues. Another claim of the Greek authorities regarding the appointment is that the Muftis are appointed in all Muslim countries including Turkey. However, this is a false and misleading analogy. Muslim Turks of Western Thrace consist a Minority in Greece, whereas Muslims make up the majority of Turkey’s population. If a comparison is to be made, it should be drawn with the Greek Orthodox Minority in Turkey where the Greek Orthodox Patriarch is elected in conformity with long-lasting traditions. Also, in some countries like Bulgaria Muftis are elected.

The Turkish Minority of Western Thrace would like to have a sincere, constructive and result oriented dialogue with the Greek authorities to find a viable solution to the long-lasting problem.

Besides the Mufti issue, the Law No: 4115/2013 on the appointment of religious teachers to state schools and mosques, and the issue of Awqaf / Religious Charitable Foundations are the vicious problems that affect the Turkish Minority deeply.

Mr. Moderator,

Recalling that the democratic values are based on human dignity, respect, and mutual understanding,
Recalling that being a member of European Union necessitates respect to human and minority rights and fulfillment of international obligations,



Western Thrace Minority
University Graduates Association

The Turkish Minority of Western Thrace urges Greece to

Take necessary steps to recognize the popularly elected muftis, and abolish the practice of state appointed officials / imams that is against the religious autonomy of the Turkish-Muslim minority,

Ensure the revision of the law No: 3647/2008 regarding the charitable foundations (Wakfs) passed by the Greek Parliament and entered into force on February 29, 2008, which was prepared without taking the opinion and will of Western Thrace Turkish Minority and recognize that it cannot be accepted or implemented in its current form.

Thank you very much.