



OSCE Supplementary Human Human Dimension Meeting

Promotion of Freedom of Expression:

Rights, Responsibilities and OSCE Commitments

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My name is Aysel Homko. I am participating on behalf of the Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association. I am a lawyer and at the same time I am the Deputy President of the Turkish Union of Xanthi which was closed down because of the term "Turkish" in its title. And it is still being closed down despite the positive verdict of the European Court of Human Rights in favor of the Turkish Union of Xanthi.

Now I would like to inform you about the violation of freedom of expression of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace. I will give you some examples about the issue.

The first example is about the elected Muftis of the Turkish Minority. The elected Muftis applied to the European Court of Human Rights against Greece since the Greek government violated Articles 9 and 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights. On several cases the Court decided that Greece violated article 9 of the Convention. However, the Greek authorities still continue to violate the right to freedom of expression of the Turkish Minority. On another related topic, on the issue of 240 Imam Law, the State authorities insistently continue to violate the Minority's rights. Despite the strong reaction of the Minority the Greek authorities enacted the Law no: 4115 which is known as 240 Imam Law that foresees the appointment of Quran teachers to the state schools and to our holy mosques. The Turkish Minority has already expressed its disagreement and strong reaction through public statements. This official Quran courses started in some state schools and our Holy Book which is originally Arabic is now being taught to Turkish Students in Greek language. This is really absurd. Moreover it is also public knowledge that in one village uniformed police officers escorted one of those "religious teachers" to intimidate the villagers so that they could not express their disapproval. I did not see with my own eyes but heard it. It is year 2014; our country is the cradle of democracy; senior member in many international organizations such as the European Union and the Council of Europe, but in one of the villages in Europe the police still threaten its own citizens. This is really bad.

I want to conclude by drawing your kind attention to a ban on Turkish language in Komotini last year. A conference was organized in Komotini in November titled "The Treaty of Lausanne: 90 Years Later – Framing Minority Issues". One of the organizers of the conference was the ELIAMEP, which is the Hellenic Foundation for the European and Foreign Policy. In that conference a Minority member journalist was prevented by an official of our country from delivering his speech in Turkish even though he had been told that he could speak Turkish and also despite the presence of an officially certified translator arranged for that purpose. Of course most of the other speakers, including a member of parliament, withdrew from the conference in protest of this ban. Turkish is our mother language and also the official language of the Minority.

There are unfortunately other examples of the Greek violation of the right to freedom of expression. Again last year in the state hospital in Komotini the then Director of the Hospital banned the usage of the Turkish between the doctors and the patients. After a big reaction we understood that the order was cancelled by his successor.

Also, in a football match last year, a coach of the Minority football team was warned and even threatened by some supporters watching the game not to give his tactics to the players in Turkish.

These are just few examples to show the Greek violation of the right to freedom of expression contrarily to its international obligations.

Thank you very much.