



Avrupa Batı Trakya Türk Federasyonu Föderation der West-Thrakiern Türken in Europa Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe Ευρωπαϊκή Ομοσπονδία Τούρκων Δυτικής Θράκης Fédération des Turcs de Thrace Occidentale en Europe

NGO in Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations
Member of the Fundamental Rights Platform (FRP) of the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights
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WORKING SESSION 8: Tolerance and non-discrimination

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Dear Moderator,
Distinguished representatives,
And esteemed NGO Delegates,

Despite commitments of participating States and their efforts to eradicate racism and intolerance with manifestations of hate crime, crimes motivated by bias or hatred remain a daily reality across the OSCE region. As noted by the ODIHR, serious discrimination has continued across the OSCE region, manifesting itself, inter alia, through hate crimes and other acts of intolerance targeting religious and/or ethnic minorities and other vulnerable groups.

A particular concern is the lack of proper engagement by key institutions with civil society, since government responses to hate-motivated incidents and attacks are inadequate in many participating states, including Greece. Our organization, the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF), reports every year to the ODIHR's hate-motivated attacks and incidents against members, institutions and places which belong to the Turkish community in the region of Western Thrace.

We share ODIHR's comment that hate crimes are message crimes, a rejection of the victim's identity which often has a marginalizing effect on the entire communities. Greece witnessed violations of fundamental rights of people through verbal abuse, physical attacks or murders motivated by prejudice with the rise of far-right extremist neo-Nazi Golden Dawn in Greece. The U.S. International Religious Freedom Report for 2016 on Greece reported that there were incidents of anti-Semitic and anti-Islamic discrimination and hate speech, including against immigrants in 2016, although the law prohibits discrimination and criminalizes hate speech on the grounds of religion.

Greece witnessed violations of fundamental rights of people through verbal abuse, physical attacks or murders motivated by prejudice with the rise of far-right extremist neo-Nazi Golden Dawn in Greece. The Muslim Turkish community in Western Thrace¹, which is the only recognized minority

¹ Under the 1923 Lausanne Peace Treaty, Turkish Minority of Western Thrace has an equal right with the non-Muslim minority in Turkey to establish, manage and control at their own expense, any charitable, religious and social institution, any school and other establishment for instruction and education, with the right to use their own language and to exer-

as “Muslim minority in Thrace” in Greece has been a target of hate-motivated attacks in the past years.

The U.S. International Religious Freedom Report for 2016 on Greece² noted the Golden Dawn’s attack during the anniversary of death of the Turkish community’s leader, Dr. Sadık Ahmet in July 2016. Participants in a demonstration organized by Golden Dawn threw rocks and shouted racist slogans “Turks are murderers” and threw stones at commemoration ceremony of Dr. Sadık Ahmet, leader of the Western Thrace Turkish community and founder of the Friendship, Equality, Peace (FEP) Party, organized with participation of 800 people on the occasion of 21st anniversary of death. The report stated that it is the first time where an attack was made at the commemoration of Sadık Ahmet and indicated the police used tear gas to break up the crowd and there is no arrests made by the police.

Two attacks against civil society organizations which represent the Turkish community in Western Thrace took place in 2016 outside the region of Western Thrace, one in Brussels and one in Athens. Neo-Nazi Golden Dawn MPs in the European Parliament in Brussels and in the Greek Parliament disrupted events about the rights of the Turkish community in Greece. In March 2016, two MEPs from fascist Golden Dawn party in Greece yesterday forcefully disrupted a European Parliament conference titled ‘Freedom of Association in Greece: A Loophole in European Minority Rights Standards’. MEP Csaba Sógor (Romania/EPP), hosted the conference in association with the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO) and the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF). In December 2016, a group of people including three MPs from fascist Golden Dawn forcefully disrupted the conference and used abusive language against the Turkish community’s political party leader during a roundtable meeting organized by Greek Helsinki Monitor and the community’s Friendship, Equality, Peace Party on national minorities in Greece.

Vasilis Levendis, President of Central Union Party in Greece, as a response to a question related to election system addressed at the press conference held at Thessaloniki International Trade Fair in September 2017 stated, “If the votes of the Muslim party were 5%, we would make the threshold 5%” implying FEP Party, the political party of the Western Thrace Turkish community. Levendis stated that since Muslims have a voting power between 1.8 and 2.2%, they wouldn’t allow a Muslim party to enter the parliament. He further insisted that this is not an issue of 3% but about the interests of the country.

Negative portrayals, stereotypes and prejudices towards Muslim Turkish community in the region create a general climate of mistrust, fear and hostility towards Muslim communities in the territories they are used to live in. An Imam who is working at the Elected Mufti Office of Xanthi Ahmet Mete was kidnapped by unknown assailants fully covered with mask in January 2016. The perpetrators called themselves as “The Guardians of Thrace” threatened Imam saying that they will kill the Elected Mufti of Xanthi, will attack the children of him³.

The Western Thrace Turkish media in the region has been a target in the region. A private radio station belonging to the Turkish community in Western Thrace was attacked in January 2017, and a month later, the private car of the owner of a minority newspaper was burned in the Komotini city centre. Police launched an investigation, but no assailants were brought before the justice.

In addressing the phenomenon in general terms, ODIHR should pay more and continuing attention to hate-motivated incidents and crimes against Muslims in the OSCE area and establish a more concrete cooperation mechanism with NGOs in reporting racism and racist hate crimes they face in

cise their own religion freely therein. Greece only recognizes a “Muslim minority in Thrace” and denies the existence of an ethnic Turkish minority in Western Thrace.

² <https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm#wrapper>

³ <http://www.iskecemuftulugu.org/haber.php?duyid=353>

countries which they live, which indeed needs organization of an OSCE High Level Conference on Intolerance against Muslims.