

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION “NORTHERN EPIRUS 1914”

OSCE HUMAN DIMENSION IMPLEMENTATION MEETING

21 September - 2 October 2015

Warsaw – Poland

Working session 17: Tolerance and non-discrimination II, including
Rights of persons belonging to national minorities (1st October 2015)

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Thank you Ms/Mr Moderator,

Distinguished Delegates,

On May 17, 1914 the government of the newly formed Albanian state and the Great Powers (Great Britain, France, the Russian Empire, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Germany, Italy), signed the Protocol of Corfu, which ratified autonomy in the area with the historical name of Northern Epirus. Under the Statute of Autonomy, both Greek and Albanian element enjoyed the same rights (subjects of education, police, religion, justice, etc.)

Since then, the Albanian state, infringes these rights of Greek National Minority in Albania and attempts to demographic changes, cultural changes, while is still denying the national self-determination in many areas. These policies are in stark contrast with the international conventions signed by Albania, the last being is the Convention - Council of Europe Framework Convention on National Minorities.

It is striking that today the Albanian state recognizes as minority areas only 99 villages in Vlora regions (areas Saranda, Delvino) and Argyrokastro. So, only the inhabitants of these villages are recognized as Greeks and beyond them, self-identification as a Greek is a criminal offense, such as Korca and Himara. Also after the events in Kosovo, the Albanian government cared Albanian refugees who come from there to install them in an arbitrary manner, not only in areas where Greek populations constituted a majority, but also in Greek fortunes that were

abandoned. The same example was followed by other Albanians originating from areas within Albania, with the overarching Chams with the main example of the city of Saranda.

The incidents of human rights violations of the Greeks of Northern Epirus since the establishment of the Albanian state are a lot. They have already been described in earlier reports, letters and texts to international organizations since the League of Nations until today.

After the fall of the communist regime (1991) this policy against the Greek minority continued with the same and greater severity. From 1992 to today, numerous incidents involving victims of minority Greeks or the exercise of minority rights have taken place, most notable the murder of a 37-year old Greek Aristotelis Goumas from Himara on August 12, 2010, by Albanian nationalists, because he wanted to speak Greek. Note that Ilir Mukai the driver of the car that stepped him three times, was sentenced in prison for twelve years, but no one knows if he really served his sentence. It is characteristic that the victim's family was not notified to appear at the hearing, the decision of which they learned after days. Meanwhile the other three men who were in the car which took away the life of Aristotelis Goumas were released from the first day.

In April 1994, five leading members of the Greek National Minority were imprisoned by unfounded allegations and kept in prison for nine months, where they were tortured.

While Albania, especially with Greek support, has become a member of NATO and is trying to join the European Union, while is already a member of other international and European organizations, continues at the same aggressive policy against the Greek minority.

To be more specific we will mention events and incidents that occurred the last two years:

- 1) Demographic altering
 - a) the new administrative division in the Albanian territory, during the formation of new municipalities, provinces which are majority ethnic Greek citizens and the Christian Orthodox religion, are fused with areas inhabited by Albanian Muslims. It

is characteristic that the Municipality of Himara, whose inhabitants are the overwhelming majority of Greek Orthodox Christians joined with the province Vranisti which is populated by Albanian Muslims. Also a recognized minority Tsouka village on the coast of the Ionian Sea, is part of the municipality of Saranda, where Albanians now are a majority. This way the officially recognized as minority areas are isolated from the sea.

- b) Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama himself had announced in September 2014 (especially from Twitter) to conduct an international tender for the exploitation of the coastal zone of "New Himara" and the alleged restoration of beautiful villages, under a new economic development of the "Reborn Himara" under the new administrative division. Among the projects foreseen in the bay of Palermo (Panormos), six kilometers south of Himara, is the creation of a residential area with aesthetically unsuitable buildings that will serve Albanian settlers.

- c) As denounced the president of the Democratic Union of National Greek Minority "Omonia" Mr. Leonidas Pappas by letter - complaint to the Albanian Interior Minister Saimir Tahiri, on January 26, 2015, one six-member family from purely Muslim town Lazarati Argyrokastro (Albanian drug production center), moved arbitrarily in the minority village Polytsani Province Pogoni, built a house on land that did not belong to them and then asked to register at the Population Register - Registry of the Province. Despite the protests from the governor Thanasis Kyros and other local authorities for the correct application of the law, not only did nothing happen, but the General Registry of Albania under the Ministry of Interior, exerted pressure on the head of the Registry of the District Sofia Mantziou, causing her to enter the Municipal Roll members of that family.

Alteration of the population in minority areas is expressly prohibited by the Council's Framework Convention for Europe, signed and approved by the Albanian Parliament in 1999 and is a state law, as in Article 16 states:

"The Parties shall refrain from taking measures, which alter the proportions of the population in a geographical area inhabited by persons belonging to national minorities "

2) Terrorisation of Greek minors

The evening of October 14, 2014 the inhabitants of the Greek minority village Dervitsani Argyrokastro accepted unprovoked attack by Albanian fanatics, after cessation of the football match between the national Teams Serbia and Albania in Belgrade, in the qualification round of the European Football Championship 2016. The reason for the frenzy of Albanians was the emergence of a huge flag depicting the map so-called "Greater Albania", which includes territories from neighboring states, especially from Greece. A result of the attack in Dervitsani was a serious injury of a Greek minor, Mr. Aristotle Diamanti in the head, and serious damage to the village shops and parked cars. Meanwhile, during the attack, the assailants chanted including "Greeks should leave, here is Albania", "We will burn you." Albanian police carried out as usual, a belated intervention ultimately anticipating the worst, but once again they did not arrest someone in charge. These episodes inherited this policy is not condemned by someone of the Albanian political scene. Note that the former Prime Minister Sali Berisha has in a prominent place in his office a map of "Greater Albania", while the current Prime Minister Edi Rama projected this map onto the wall of the Prime Minister's palace in Tirana.

On September 7, 2015 two ethnic Albanians attacked 77 year old priest Christos Pappas in Saranda in his house, whom he tortured for several minutes, with punches, kicks and even throwing detergent on it. The fact that they stole nothing from his home and that Father Christos is the father of the president of the Democratic Union of National Greek Minority 'Omonia' Leonidas Pappas, in conjunction with that he starred in memory ceremonies for Champions for Autonomy in Northern Epirus in 1914, lead us to conclusion that the 77 year old Greek minor priest was

not a random target some "bandits" who attack the elderly. The perpetrators were not identified.

3) Grabbing properties

That issue concerns both Greek and Albanian state at least from 1945 until today. The flight, because of persecution, of Greek minors of Northern Epirus to Greece obviously accompanied by abandonment of property in the territory of the Albanian state, which previously confiscated and sometimes destroyed the property documents to be considered now stray especially in cases of land tenure.

We mention the following case:

According to what denounces the lawyer of the villagers Kostari Mr. Hlias Thanasis "The economic issue of pasture village Kostari, is a pure usurpation communal property that had eternally held by the villagers. Pastures, based on the decision of the Albanian Government no. 700 23/10/1995 and no. 755 28/5/2008, are property of the Province Mesopotamos. The Commission of Return and Compensation of Property Vlora with Executive Decision no. 88 19/02/2002 recognized Albanians, allegedly former owners, 760 acres of pastures near the village Kostari Province Mesopotamia. The same "owners" with Court decision brought by a court of Saranda on 29/04/2003 acknowledged another 600 acres, adjacent to 760 acres. To acquire ownership title to 1,360 acres used a forged document, concerning alleged act of donation in 1937. This false document was accepted by the relevant government agencies without any consideration of its authenticity. After 2005, successive attempts, the villagers of Kostari found no response in the Albanian justice. The question remains open, while residents have sued the Commission of Return and Compensation of Property Albania lawsuit which faces far continued chicanery.

4) Cultural alteration:

Greek inscriptions in ancient and medieval sites are systematically destroyed and even restored in Albanian so naive. In this systematic intervention on monuments and sites of archaeological importance, rather than hamper, the Albanian Archaeological Service is leading. As example, the recent catastrophe Greek inscription to the castle of Porto Palermo, in Himara. Generally, systematic policy is followed deterioration or destruction of the Greek cultural heritage with organ distortion of historical reality as the ancient monuments in Phoenike, Andrianoupoli and Butrint.

5) Measures against the Greek Language and Education:

The use of Greek in education of National Greek Minority, in the recognized public minority schools, is very limited. In the first years of compulsory education, Greek is being taught more hours, progressively at each subsequent class, hours are reduced by ending at the last of the twelve education classes be taught Greek few hours, essentially as a foreign language. In areas not recognized by the Albanian state as a minority, as in Himara, Korca, Premeti, Erseka the right to establish public Greek minority school is not recognized since the required number of 25 students is completed.

At the same time during the school year 2014 - 2015, remained in history and geography textbooks of Albania irredentist references against neighboring countries including Greece. These courses are taught to the students of the Greek National Minority.

In public administration the use of Greek language is lacking even at local government level (municipalities where the Greek element is the vast majority). There is no question of use of Greek language out of minority areas, only as a foreign language in specific cases (eg. Private Greek schools of Tirana, Korca and Himara). Let even mentioned as a conclusion, that few public signs in Greek, in recognized Greek minority areas are coming under increasing vandalism.

6) Violation of religious freedoms of Greek Orthodox Christians

Since 1991 they have not yet returned to their total, fortunes of the Church and parishes of the Greek minority villages to the beneficial owners, which had been confiscated by the state under the Communist regime.

But last incidents of violence are being recorded against the Orthodox Christian Greeks and the Holy Temple:

a) On August 16, 2013 policemen and officials marked the Church of the Virgin Mary in Premeti, after having seized the ecclesiastical objects and violently evacuated the priest and other faithful Orthodox there. The Mayor Gilberto Jace claimed that the space normally is a cultural center, but the evidence contradicts him, since there was a temple that was demolished in 1967 by the communist atheistic regime of Enver Hoxha and after the restoration of democracy believers created a new temple.

b) On August 26, 2015, at 4 am, the Urban Planning of the Municipality of Himara, after machinations of the Socialist Party of Albania and also with the support of the same Prime Minister Edi Rama, knocked down the church St. Athanasios at Dhermi.

The excuse which they used was that the sign is a "cultural monument" which denied the Culture Service of the Region of Vlora. It also crashed the claim that the site was buried a Catholic missionary of the 17th century.

The church of St. Athanasius in Dhermi was built around 1671, was demolished by the atheist regime in 1972 and in 1992 believers built in its place a small church.

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