

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION “NORTHERN EPIRUS 1914”
OSCE HUMAN DIMENSION IMPLEMENTATION MEETING

11 September - 22 September 2017

Warsaw – Poland

WORKING SESSION 10

Tolerance and non-discrimination I, including

- Rights of persons belonging to national minorities
- Roma and Sinti issues, including implementation of the OSCE

Action Plan on Improving the Situation of Roma and Sinti

- Preventing aggressive nationalism, racism and chauvinism

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Thank you Mr/Mrs Moderator,

Honorable representatives, for yet one more year, the National Greek Minority in Albania, which resides in the North Epirus region, has experienced a harsh violation of its human rights. The main problem we are facing is that of property ownership.

In the Greek minority villages of the Municipality of Finiki, in the area of Agioi Saranta, foreigners often show up and claim to be owners of large areas as descendants of landowners of the Ottoman Empire and ask of the indigenous residents to give them their property.

Also, the issue of ecclesiastical property remains unsolved as well. Until now, the Albanian authorities have not returned to the Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania many temples and monasteries, withholding their property on the grounds that these buildings and sites have historical value and should be under state management.

However, the Albanian justice and state mechanisms are proceeding even in privatizations of these monuments, as it happened with the historic Holy Monastery of Forty Saints.

The biggest problem regarding the property is located in the Municipality of Himara, where, on the pretext of a development plan for tourism, the Albanian government in cooperation with the local authorities is trying to demolish buildings that belong to Greeks in order to install Albanian settlers in the area.

Every winter, the members of the Greek minority in Dropolis experience a climate of fear and uncertainty with the repeated burglaries that occur in their homes, without any arrests taking place whatsoever, while last summer the area had to face huge fires.

The geography textbooks in the Albanian schools, although there were relevant bilateral agreements signed in the recent years, continue to include expansionist references against Greece and other neighboring countries.

We also denounce the tolerance of the Albanian authorities to the terrorist activity of Tahir Veliou's chauvinist group, which burned Greek flags that he stole from public places and Greek houses in two towns and five villages in Northern Epirus in order to terrorize the minority.

All of the above serve what appears to be a state organized plan for a "velvet ethnic cleansing" of the area from the indigenous National Greek Minority.

Ladies and gentlemen, the solution for the survival of the Greeks of Northern Epirus in their ancestral homes is firstly the implementation of the international treaties that protect ethnic minorities and secondly the implementation the 1914 Protocol of Corfu signed by Albania, which provides the Autonomy Statute, which many other ethnic minorities in European countries enjoy.