



Western Thrace Minority
University Graduates Association

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VIOLATIONS OF THE RIGHT TO FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION OF WESTERN THRACE TURKISH MINORITY

Thank you very much Mr./Ms. Chairperson

My name is Sampachettin Aptourachman (Sebahattin Abdurrahman), on behalf of the Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association I represent, here, around 150000 Turks living in Western Thrace, Greece.

In this session, I would like to mention the continuous Greek violation of the right of freedom of Association of the Western Thrace Turkish Minority.

The right to freedom of association is a basic fundamental human right and it is stipulated by most of the fundamental human rights instruments, like the paragraph 32.2 and 32.6 of the 1990 CSCE Copenhagen Document, the Article 11 of the European Convention on Human Rights and the Article 3.2 of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, and nowadays it is accepted as an inseparable and indispensable part of human rights. However, in Greece, the Turkish Associations were banned and courts continue to refuse registering new Turkish associations.

The Cases of Xanthi Turkish Union (Tourkiki Enosi Xanthis v. Greece, No: 26698/05) and The Cultural Association of Turkish Women of Rodopi (Emin and others v. Greece, No: 34144/05) are the striking examples of this unlawful implementations of the Greek authorities. It should be also important to note that even the word 'minority' caused problem for the establishment of a new minority association, especially in the Prefecture of Evros. Since 1995, "Evros Minority Youth Association" has been struggling to register the association despite the existence of the relevant ECtHR decision (Bekir-Ousta and others v. Greece, No: 35151/05). Application by another minority association that was formed by the minority people living in the Southern Evros region was also rejected by the Court of First Instance of Alexandroupolis (on 23 April 2009) and Court of Appeals of Thrace (on 12 February 2010). The argument was that the word "minority" in the title of the association



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("Western Thrace Minority Southern Evros Culture and Education Association") was vague and might endanger public order.

In this framework, the Greek government do not implement the decisions given by the European Court of Human Rights regarding the Turkish Union of Xanthi (Tourkiki Enosi Xanthis v. Greece, No: 26698/05) and Cultural Association of the Turkish Women of Rodopi prefecture (Emin and others v. Greece, No: 34144/05) indicating that the freedom of association was indeed violated on both cases. On the other hand, the State officially recognises and allowed the establishment of the Center for Pomak Studies in Komotini in 1997 and the Pomak Cultural Association of Xanthi in 2007. It is hard to understand "How the existence of the Pomak associations doesn't constitute a threat to the unity of Greece and to the Greek public order while the ones with the "Turkish" denomination does?

To conclude, the changes in the minority policy of Greece in 1990s has been welcomed. However, changes observed only in the field of basic human rights but not in that of the minority rights. Today, in 2010, we are waiting from our country, Greece, to respect our right of freedom of association and let us to establish our associations with the denomination 'Turk/Turkish'.

Recommendations

We call upon the Greek State to ensure immediately that freedom of association which is guaranteed by the Greek Constitution for all persons concerned and demand that the Greek authorities abolish all restrictions on the freedom of association of the Turkish minority.

We urge the Greek State to immediately end the abuse of the right of freedom of association so that civil and political rights of minorities are guaranteed for all persons concerned.

We further urge Greece to respect and act according to the recent written notifications of European Court of Human Rights on the cases of Tourkiki Enosi Xanthis and Others v. Greece (no. 26698/05), Emin and Others v. Greece (no. 34144/05), and Bekir-Ousta and Others v. Greece (no. 35151/05) which resulted in favour of the said associations and indicated the violation of the freedom of association.