



**OSCE  
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**Working Session 2: Fundamental Freedoms II  
Freedom of assembly and association**

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**FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION IN WESTERN THRACE - GREECE**

The right to freedom of association is a basic fundamental human right and it is stipulated by most of the fundamental human rights instruments, to which Greece is a party too. However, The Turkish Muslim Minority of Western Thrace faces serious impediments in establishing associations and NGOs.

There are three ECtHR rulings indicating that the freedom of association in Western Thrace has been violated. (*Tourkiki Enosi Xanthis v. Greece, No: 26698/05*), (*Emin and others v. Greece, No: 34144/05*) (*Bekir-Ousta and others v. Greece, No: 35151/05*).

In the case of Xanthis Turkish Union which was established in 1927 (*Tourkiki Enosi Xanthis and Others v. Greece – No: 26698/05*) the ECtHR decided that the freedom of association of the Turkish minority has been violated.

After the ECtHR Decision the Xanthis Turkish Union, applied to both Court of First Instance with Multi-Judges in Xanthis and in the Court of Appeal of Thrace in line with code 758 of the Greek Civil Procedure in order to cancel previous court decisions that closed down the Xanthis Turkish Union.

The judgement of the Court of Appeal was announced in 2010 and the petition was rejected. The decision was appealed and the case was held on the Supreme Court on 7 October 2011. The decision released unofficially on 24 February 2012, and the request of the association was once again rejected by the Supreme Court.

The case of Turkish Union of Xanthis is once again before the ECtHR.

Since 1984, three minority associations<sup>1</sup> have been closed (on the grounds that their titles included the word “Turkish/Minority”) and many other associations’ applications were refused. While the Greek authorities did not allow the establishment of other Turkish Minority associations, State officially recognises other ethnic identities and allows establishment of other associations with different ethnic denominations like “Pomak” and “Roma”.

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It is also worth mentioning that even the word "minority" was objected by the Greek courts, especially by the ones 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. The argument was that the word "**minority**" in its title ("**Western Thrace Minority Southern Evros Culture and Education Association**") was vague and that it might endanger public order.

Of course there are many other examples of violation of freedom of association. But I believe the examples I gave are enough to understand our country's detection of freedom of Association.

Therefore we call upon the Greek State

- To respect and implement its duties from the international instruments in which the freedom of association is safeguarded,
- To recognize and implement the ECtHR decisions.