

Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association

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Ms/Mr. Moderator,

On behalf of the Western Thrace Turkish Minority in Greece, which numbers approximately 150.000, our association takes part in this meeting. By attending this meeting we would like to have the opportunity to underline the overall problems affecting Western Thrace Turkish Minority.

At the beginning of the last decade the new minority policy based on the principles “equality before the law” and “equality in civil rights” put into practice since then there have been some improvements concerning the basic citizenship rights. For instance, now it is possible to get driving licenses, bank credits and building or restoration permits for Turkish Minority members. Members of the Turkish Minority of course, accept these as positive developments. However, concerning the basic minority rights there is still no step taken by the Greek government. Denial of ethnic identity, freedom of association and peaceful assembly, educational rights, religious freedom, charitable foundations and expelled citizens are still the main problems of Western Thrace Turkish Minority.

Ms/Mr. Moderator,

The denial of ethnic identity of Western Thrace Turks by the Greek government has been one of the most contentious issues regarding the government’s minority policy. Until the Junta regime in 1967 the identification of the Minority as Turkish was not a problem. By the advent of Junta regime, however, the authorities started to call the Minority as “Muslim” and since then, they continued to reject the ethnic Turkish identity in Western Thrace. Today, in 2006, Greece still insists on the policy of denying ethnic Turkish identity of the minority.

Moreover, Turkish associations are still banned and courts continue to refuse registering new Turkish associations. The Cases of Ksanthi Turkish Union and The Cultural Association of Turkish Women of Rodopi are the striking examples of this unacceptable implementation of the Greek authorities. The former established in 1927 and functioned peacefully until the date that the Greek Supreme Court banned it in 1984. The same Court, on the other hand, banned the latter one with the final decision on 1 April 2005 due to the term “Turkish” in its title. To note that, both of these two associations, consuming all the local remedies have applied to the ECHR (European Court of Human Rights).

Furthermore, according to many human and minority rights instruments and article 40 of Peace Treaty of Lausanne, members of the minority have the right to establish, manage and control their own schools and to use their own language freely. But, because of the Governments’ interference the autonomous structure of Turkish Minority education has been changed radically. So, the present form of the educational system of Turkish Minority cannot serve fundamental educational needs.

Then, Greek State continues to disregard minority's elected Muftis and works through a number of appointed officers who lack credibility and respect even among their own people. The Muslim Charitable Foundations, similarly, have been governing by the people appointed by the Military Junta of 1967. Because of being an essential part of Minority's cultural, historic and religious heritage the practice of appointing the boards of these foundations is a clear violation of minority rights.

Lastly, the application of Article 19 of the Greek Citizenship Law (3370/1955) was an obvious racial discrimination. According to this article "A citizen of non-Greek origin leaving Greece without the intention of returning may be declared having lost Greek citizenship...". As a positive development, the Greek Government repealed the Article 19 on 23 January 1998. However, until that day more than 60.000 Turkish people lost their citizenships and until today no positive steps have been taken to solve this problem. With very few exceptions, expelled citizens have not regained their Greek nationality yet.

Ms/Mr. Moderator,

Today, as Turkish Minority members we wish to bridge the gaps between the Greek State and Turkish Minority. One of the main aims of our association is to collaborate with the State institutions to find the best way to solve these issues affecting Western Thrace Turkish Minority.

Recommendations

- 1- We recommend Greece fully implement the provisions of the 1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document.
- 2- We recommend Greece to ratify the Council of Europe's Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities that has signed 1997.
- 3- Furthermore, we recommend Greece to fully implement all the regional and international instruments, which has signed and ratified, for the protection of minority rights.

Thank you for giving me this opportunity.

Pervin Chairoula

Board Member

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