

OSCE
HUMAN DIMENSION
IMPLEMENTATION MEETING
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Warsaw-Poland

Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association

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Ms/Mr. Moderator,

My name is Pervin Chairoula. On behalf of Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association we represent, here, around 150.000 Turks that live in Western Thrace, the northeastern part of Greece.

In this working session I want to mention about the violations of freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief in Western Thrace, Greece.

Ms/Mr. Moderator,

According to the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion, Western Thrace Turkish Minority has the right to:

“Train, appoint, elect, or designate by succession appropriate leaders called for the requirements and standards of any religion or belief,”

which is also supported by many other international human and minority rights documents and the Athens Treaty of 1913. In addition to these international instruments, it is also guaranteed by the Greek Law no. 2345/1920 that the minority has the right to elect its own religious leaders. However, 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. And unfortunately, there has no progress towards the settlement of the problem of the Muftis. It would be important to note that Greece has been sentenced 5 times of abusing article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights which states:

- 1. Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief, in worship, teaching, practice and observance.*
- 2. Freedom to manifest one's religion or beliefs shall be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary in a democratic society in the interests of public safety, for the protection of public order, health or morals, or the protection of the rights and freedoms of others.*

The last cases were announced on 13 July 2006 (Agga v. Greece (No. 3) (no. 32186/02) / (No.4) (no. 33331/02)).

After the death of Mr. Mehmet Emin Agga on 9 September 2006, Turkish people living in Ksanthi are going to elect their new Religious Leader in the following weeks.

Ms/Mr. Moderator, Ladies and Gentlemen:

Another issue related to the Religious rights of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace is the mosques issue. There are about 300 mosques functioning in Western Thrace. 8 of them are in Ksanthi city center. According to the Ksanthi city plan, which was lastly revised in 1996, 4 of them are going to be expropriated. In Komotini, on the other hand, according to the 1933 city-plan many mosques will be affected seriously if the city plan is applied. With this aforementioned city-plan most of the new roads in Komotini will pass on the mosques. Some of the mosques in will be damaged totally and some of them partially. Up to 2006, these plans have not been applied. However, this does not imply that one-day in the near future they will not be applied. To note that, many of those mosques are historic monuments built during the Ottoman period. So, one can be suspicious about these city plans whether they were prepared intentionally or not.

Ms/Mr. Moderator,

- 1- We recommend OSCE to appoint an observer for the elections of new Mufti of Ksanthi.
- 2- We recommend Greece to respect minority's right to elect its own religious leaders.
- 3- We recommend OSCE to question these aforementioned city- plans and we recommend Greece to make the necessary changes on these plans for the sake of the protection of our mosques.
- 4- We recommend Greece to apply the provisions of Copenhagen Document and the other international human and minority rights documents.
- 5- We, also, recommend Greece to ratify the Council of Europe's Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities.

Thank you for giving me this opportunity.

Pervin Chairoula

Board Member

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