



Western Thrace Minority  
University Graduates Association

## **Copenhagen Anniversary Conference “20 years of the OSCE Copenhagen Document: Status and future perspectives” Copenhagen, 10-11 June 2010**

### **Turkish Minority of Western Thrace in Greece**

-An estimated number of 150.000 ethnic Turks live in the North East part of Greece. Members of the Muslim Turkish Minority who have been living in this region for centuries identify themselves as ethnic Turks. The legal status of this minority was established by the Peace Treaty of Lausanne which was signed in 1923, the bilateral agreements signed between Greece and Turkey and the international instruments concerning human and minority rights which Greece has signed and ratified.

-In the last years, the situation of the Muslim Turkish Minority of Western Thrace in Greece has slightly improved however, still much remains to be done for the full implementation of minority rights.

-As a representative of the **Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association** on behalf of the **Muslim Turkish Minority of Western Thrace** I would like to make the following recommendations.

-Recalling that the European Union is founded on the principles of liberty, democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and the rule of law; principles which are common to the Member States,

-Recalling that tolerance and non-discrimination rank high among the priorities of the OSCE and participating States have repeatedly expressed concerns about manifestations of racism, xenophobia, and other forms of intolerance,

-Recalling that the protection of minorities is inherent in the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms,

-Recalling that the Copenhagen Document constitutes a breakthrough in international standard-setting on national minority issues. It was the first negotiated multilateral document, which brought about an extensive list of minority standards,

-Recalling that Greece has signed the Charter for Fundamental Rights of the European Union and is Party to the European Convention on Human Rights, the International Covenant on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the European Court of Human Rights, the 1990 Copenhagen Document.

#### **We call upon the Greek state to:**

1. Respect the collective usage of individual right and recognise the existence of a Turkish minority in Greece.

2. Ratify, without delay and any reservations, the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages.

3. Take steps to ensure the immediate rectification of the unfortunate consequences arising from deprivation of Greek citizenship on the basis of former Article 19 of the Citizenship Code for all persons concerned, especially ethnic Turks. In particular, we urge the authorities to genuinely facilitate these persons' recovery of their citizenship by removing any obstacle, including the need for them to go through the naturalisation procedure.

4. Ensure the revision of the new law No: 3647/2008 regarding the pious foundations (Wakfs) passed by the Greek Parliament and entered into force on February 29, 2008, which was



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prepared without taking the opinion and will of Western Thrace Turkish Minority and recognise that it cannot be accepted or implemented in its current form.

5. 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. Remembering that it is prohibited using the denomination “Turkish” and “Minority” in some cases in names for associations by the Supreme Court which dissolved in 1987 the Turkish Union of Xanthi that was founded in 1927 and ruled out the foundation of the Cultural Association of Turkish Women of the Region of Rodopi, Western Thrace Minority Southern Evros Education and Culture Association, and Evros Minority Youth Association.

6. 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.

7. Ensure the equal opportunity for the instruction in mother tongue and the state language. Greece should also take immediate steps to ensure that the right to education for the Turkish minority is guaranteed so that children in Western Thrace have a bilingual (Greek and Turkish) preschool education. Remembering that the Turkish minority has the right to take education in its native language according to the Treaty of Lausanne, as well as other bilateral agreements between Greece and Turkey, we in particular urge the Greek State to abolish the discriminatory clauses of the new Preschool law (3518/2006) that anticipates the Greek language as a must in preschool education.

8. Revise the new law on media (Law no:3592/2007 which is not in line with the right to the free flow of information, freedom of expression and pluralism and make the appropriate urgent changes, given that the said law fails to consent the use of minority languages in the media.

9. Ensure the full implementation of the provisions of the 1990 CSCE/OSCE Copenhagen Document that Greece has signed and ratified.

10. Establish an objective and productive dialogue mechanism with the minority in order to understand and find satisfactory solutions to the problems of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace.

11. Withdraw 3% electoral threshold for independent candidates to be elected, as well as other restrictive measures on the full and effective political participation of the Turkish Minority on the national and local levels.

12. Take necessary steps to recognize and appoint popularly elected muftis, and abolish the practice of state appointed imams (law no: 3536/2007) that is against the religious autonomy of the Turkish-Muslim minority that was enshrined in the 1913 Athens, 1920 Sevres and 1923 Lausanne Treaties

Tzemil Kapza (Mr.)