

Muslim Denomination in Bulgaria**(Grand Mufti's Office in the Republic of Bulgaria)**

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2012 OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting**(Warsaw, October 1, 2012)*****Working session 10-11*****RIGHT OF REPLY:**

Written statement in the exercise of the right of reply to the statement of the Bulgarian Delegation Regarding Statement in Response to the Representative Muslim denomination on Freedom of thought, conscience, religion and belief

Regarding the comment of the legal proceedings we are stating that we are not the only ones commenting on the corrupted judicial practices of the Bulgarian court. It is not possible under one and the same circumstances to have a different approach and total difference in different countries in EU. Moreover, the comment does not refer so much to the work of the legal system but it concerns the work of the authorities of proceedings before the lawsuit. As an example we can point out the signing of testimonies by illiterate witnesses, signing of testimonies by witnesses who do not know Bulgarian very well. It is worth saying that the only evidence supporting the charges of the prosecution is the testimonies given by a protected witness (of secret identity) who is an employee of State Agency for National Security and states that he has information acquired in an operative manner and charges the accused with the crimes in particular.

The claim that they have performed an antidemocratic propaganda which has elements of fascism is ungrounded and ridiculous because racism shapes the foundation of fascism whereas in the last case it is talked about "group" formed by members of different races. In the prosecutor's indictment it is said that antidemocratic ideology has been preached not only verbally but through clothing and appearances which wide clothes and beards of part of the accused appear to be. This is ridiculous.

Regarding the registration we can state the following:

The Bulgarian Orthodox Church is treated under a different regime in comparison to all other denominations of the Republic of Bulgaria. The Orthodox Church exists under the law and is not subjected to registration at court or by another authority (Muslims in Bulgaria don't have anything against this fact. That's as it should be) while registration and successive changes in the circumstances are obligatory for all the rest. The amendments required in the Law on Denominations do not tend to place Islam at an equal base as a traditional religion with the Eastern Orthodoxy but they aim to give opportunity to the community itself to succeed in summoning its supreme forum that can define the central collective bodies. Apparently by the

legal framework of the Law on Denominations the management of the denomination is given the opportunity to summon such a supreme forum but the problem is not solved if the term of office has expired or in case of lack of will or an actual possibility by the management body to summon such a forum, how to proceed. This confusion in the legislation and constitution has been driving the Muslim community in Bulgaria into a state of crisis and chaos for more than 20 years. On the other hand, other members of the management of the Muslim denomination, despite the expired term of office, continue to have claims to be the representative of the denomination. All that means that justice has been acting selectively and individually depending on who stays on the opposite side.

Regarding the statistical data for the praying houses – it is accurate but not correct because it is claimed there are 1200 mosques in Bulgaria and it is the biggest number of mosques per capita in EU. But it is not taken into account how the mosques are distributed in towns and villages. The Bulgarian Muslims are sparse in the countryside, in small settlements, up to 1000 people in the most populated case. There are mosques in almost all of these settlements but the situation is different in the big towns. As an example we can give Sofia where the population is more than 1 million people but there is only one mosque which makes it one of the EU cities with the fewest mosques per capita. The incident before the mosque on 20th May 2011 is notorious when supporters of the extreme right part ATAKA assaulted worshippers because they were praying on the pavement. And it was because the mosque is too small and it is the only one.

The cases in other bigger cities in Bulgaria are similar to the aforementioned one. In Burgas (population- about 250 thousand people) there is no mosque, for instance. Furthermore, it is not possible to stop the construction of a mosque on the ground that we have the most numerous mosques in percentage in EU.