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## **NATIONAL ASSOCIATION “NORTHERN EPIRUS 1914”**

### **Long Standing and Recent Violations against the Greek Minority of Albania**

On May 17, 1914 the government of the newly formed Albanian state and the Great Powers (Great Britain, France, the Russian Empire, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Germany, Italy), signed the Protocol of Corfu, which ratified the autonomy in the region historically called Northern Epirus. Under the Statute of Autonomy, both Greek and Albanian element enjoyed the same rights (on education, police force, religion, justice, etc.)

Since then, the Albanian state, infringes the rights of Greek National Minority in Albania and attempts to change the demographic constitution of the region, impose cultural changes, while is still denying the recognition of minority status to Greeks in many regions. These policies are in full contradiction to the international conventions signed by Albania, the last being the Framework Convention of the Protection of National Minorities of the Council of Europe.

Until today the Albanian state recognizes as minority areas only the 99 villages in Vloja regions (perfects of Saranda, Delvino) and Argyrokastrë. So, only the inhabitants of these villages are recognized belonging to Greek minority. In regions outside of the mentioned areas the self-identification someone as a Greek is a criminal offense (i.e. such in the perfects of Korça and Himarë). Furthermore after the events in Kosovo, the Albanian government moved refugees into minority region and installed them into houses belonging to Greeks living abroad.

After the fall of the communist regime (1991) the discriminatory and repressive policies against the Greek minority continued with the same and greater severity. From 1992 to today, numerous incidents involving minority Greeks as victims and violations of their human rights have taken place.

The most serious violations being:

- 1) The murder of a 37-year old Greek Aristotelis Goumas from Himarë on August 12, 2010, by Albanian nationalists, because he wanted to speak Greek. Ilir Mukaj the driver of the car hitting the victim was sentenced in prison for twelve years, but no one knows if he really served his sentence. It is characteristic that the victim's family was not notified to appear at the tribunal hearing and learned the court decision latter. Meanwhile the other three men who were in the car were released from the first day.

2) In April 1994, five leading members of the Greek National Minority were imprisoned by unfounded allegations and kept in prison for nine months, where they were tortured.

3) Alteration of Demographic Constitution of Minority Regions:

a) the new administrative division in the Albanian territory, during the establishment of new municipalities, provinces which have majority ethnic Greeks and of Christian - Orthodox religion, are fused with areas inhabited by Albanian Muslims. It is characteristic that the Municipality of Himara, whose inhabitants are the overwhelmingly Greek-Orthodox Christians were joined with the province Vranisti which is populated by Muslims. Also the recognized as minority village Tsouka on the coast of the Ionian Sea, was placed to be part of the municipality of Saranda, where Albanians now are a majority. Through such measures the officially recognized minority areas are isolated from the sea.

b) The Albanian Prime Minister Mr. Edi Rama announced in September 2014 to conduct an international tender for the exploitation of the coastal zone of "New Himara" and the alleged restoration of villages, under a new economic development naming them "Reborn Himara" under a new administrative division. Among the projects foreseen in the bay of Palermo (Panormos), six kilometers south of Himara, with the plan to create a residential area making harm to environment with the aim to bring new settlers.

c) The president of the Democratic Union of National Greek Minority "Omonia" Mr. Leonidas Pappas sent a protest letter to Minister of Interior Mr. Saimir Tahiri, on January 26, 2015, because of the occupation and erection of a building on a property belonging to Greek minority member in the minority village Polytsani province of Pogoni. Despite the protests from the governor Thanasis Kyros and other local authorities asking the right implementation of the law, because the intervention of the General Register of Albania and exerting pressure on the head of the Registry of the District Sofia Mantziou the illegal registration took place.

4) Terrorisation of Greek Mayors

a) On the evening of October 14, 2014 the inhabitants of the Greek minority village Dervitsani Argyrokastro accepted unprovoked attacks by Albanian fanatics, after end of the football match between the national teams of Serbia and Albania in Belgrade. As a result of the attack in Dervitsani the Greek mayor, Mr. Aristotelis Diamantis was injured seriously in his head, and serious damages took place to shops and parked cars belonging to members of the Greek minority. Meanwhile, during the attack, the assailants chanted including "Greeks should leave, here is Albania", "We will burn you". The police forces carried out as usual, a belated intervention ultimately anticipating the worst, but once again they did not arrest someone of the attackers.

b) On September 7, 2015 two ethnic Albanians attacked 77 year old priest Christos Pappas in his home at the city of Saranda, father of the president of the Democratic

Union of National Greek Minority 'Omonia' Leonidas Pappas, and tortured him severely. The perpetrators were not identified.

c) On September 11, 2015 a 82 years old Thomas Haidis was bitten outside of his house at the Loukovo of the Himara County by brothers members of the Albanian settlers family Rahim Halil Lagji, Zenel Lagji, Genti Lagji, because of land disputes. The perpetrators were not arrested. It should be noticed the brother of the perpetrators Edil Lagji is president of the Socialist party of the Loukovo district

#### 5) Confiscation of properties

This is a long standing problem because of the forced expatriation of members of the Greek minority starting from the year 1945 when the dictatorial communist regime was established in Albania. The properties of the expatriated Greeks were confiscated on a massive scale.

However this policy of confiscation continued till today. As an example the following case is mentioned:

According to lawyer of the villagers Kostari Mr. HliasThanasis "The economic issue of the pasture village Kostari, is a pure usurpation communal property that had eternally held by the villagers. Pastures, based on the decision of the Albanian Government no. 700 23/10/1995 and no. 755 28/5/2008, are property of the Province Mesopotamos. The Commission of Return and Compensation of Property Vlora with Executive Decision no. 88 19/02/2002 recognized Albanians, allegedly former owners, 760 acres of pastures near the village Kostari Province Mesopotamia. The same "owners" with Court decision brought by a court of Saranda on 29/04/2003 acknowledged another 600 acres, adjacent to 760 acres. To acquire ownership title to 1,360 acres used a forged document, concerning alleged act of donation in 1937. This false document was accepted by the relevant government agencies without any consideration of its authenticity. After 2005, successive attempts, the villagers of Kostari found no response in the Albanian justice. The question remains open, while residents have sued the Commission of Return and Compensation of Property Albania lawsuit which faces far continued chicanery.

#### 6) Cultural alteration:

Greek inscriptions in ancient and medieval sites are systematically destroyed and even restored in Albanian. In this systematic intervention on monuments and sites of archaeological importance the Albanian Archaeological Service is playing a leading role. As an example, the recent catastrophe Greek inscription to the castle of Porto Palermo, in Himara is mentioned. Generally, systematic policy is followed deterioration or destruction of the Greek cultural heritage with organ distortion of historical reality as the ancient monuments in Phoenike, Andrianoupoli and Butrint.

#### 7) Measures against the Greek Language and Education:

The use of Greek in education of National Greek Minority, in the recognized public minority schools, is limited very much. In the first years of compulsory education, Greek is being taught more hours, while progressively at each subsequent class, hours are reduced by ending at the last of the twelve year education classes being taught Greek are few hours and essentially as a foreign language. In areas not recognized by the Albanian state as a minority, as in Himara, Korca, Premeti, Erseka the right to establish public Greek minority school is not allowed since the required number of 25 students is impossible to fill.

At the same time, during the school year 2014 - 2015, in the history and geography textbooks taught in Albanian schools irredentist references exists against neighbouring countries including Greece.

In public administration the use of Greek language is lacking even at local government level (municipalities where the Greek element is of vast majority). There is no question of use of Greek language out of minority areas, only as a foreign language in specific cases (eg. Private Greek schools of Tirana, Korca and Himara). Let even mentioned as a conclusion, that few public signs in Greek, in recognized Greek minority areas are coming under increasing vandalism.

#### 8) Violation of religious freedoms of Greek Orthodox Christians

a) Since 1991 the fall of the Communist regime a significant part of the Orthodox Church properties have not been returned which was confiscated by the state under the Communist regime.

b) On August 16, 2013 policemen and officials marked the Church of the Virgin Mary in Premeti, after having seized the ecclesiastical objects and violently evacuated the priest and other faithful Orthodox there. The Mayor Gilberto Jace claimed that the space normally is a cultural center, but the evidence contradicts him, since there was a temple that was demolished in 1967 by the communist atheistic regime of EnverHoxha and after the restoration of democracy believers created a new temple.

c) On August 26, 2015, at 4 am, the Urban Planning of the Municipality of Himara, after machinations of the Socialist Party of Albania and also with the support of the same Prime Minister Mr. Edi Rama, knocked down the church St. Athanasios at Dhermi. The excuse which they used was that the sign is a "cultural monument" which denied the Culture Service of the Region of Vlora. It also crashed the claim that the site was buried a Catholic missionary of the 17th century. The church of St. Athanasios in Dhermi was built around 1671, was demolished by the atheist regime in 1972 and in 1992 believers built in its place a small church.

d) On October 5, 2015 the vandalism at the Holy Temple of Virgin Mary in Korca took place.

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