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NGO in Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations  
Member of the Fundamental Rights Platform (FRP) of the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights  
Member of the Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN)

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Dear President,  
Distinguished Representatives  
And NGO Representatives,

In the 45 states that belong to Europe, there exist over 300 minorities with about 100 million members. This means that about 1 in 7 Europeans admit to belonging to an autochthonous and/or national minority. Although there is a heightened interest in the protection of minorities, discrimination persists and is a part of real life in many parts of the world, even in many OSCE participating States. And, OSCE High Level Conference on Tolerance and Non-Discrimination on 29 June 2010 discussed that the media has a large role to play that free and independent media can have on preventing the increase of bias and prejudice and in promoting mutual respect and understanding, including through specific educational and awareness-raising programmes, while racist, xenophobic and intolerant statements against specific groups and intolerant speech in the media could provoke intolerance and violence against the vulnerable groups in society, including autochthonous and/or national minorities.

Aware that freedom of opinion and expression is an essential right in democracies, the circulation of hate material on the media, including Internet still remains a serious concern and needs to be balanced. Therefore, the OSCE and its participating States should provide adequate legal responses to the hatred propaganda, and they should combat all forms of discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. However, national legislation in most of the OSCE Participating States do not/cannot provide adequate legal measures and mechanisms to combat against racist, xenophobic, anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim propaganda in the media.

The National Commission for Human Rights in Greece notes that there is a trend in news bulletins to reproduce stereotypes and prejudice concerning different ethnic or social groups. Today, there have been very few prosecutions and convictions under the criminal law provisions addressing racist offences, although a few exemplary penalties have been imposed. However, racist incidents have occurred in Greece - including racist statements made in public or reported in the press, and acts of racist violence - and that such incidents have not been prosecuted or indeed given all due attention by the Greek authorities. The problem is that the interpretation of the notion of racism by certain judicial authorities, leading to either no charges are being brought, or charges are dropped in the cases.

Some media express certain prejudices and negative stereotypes towards members of minority groups, including the Turkish Minority in Western Thrace. In Greece, Law 927/1979 on punishing acts or activities aiming at racial discrimination with regard to the incitement to hatred and dissemination of racist ideas penalizes “to wilfully and publicly, either orally or by the press or by written texts or through pictures or any other means, incite to acts or activities which may result in discrimination, hatred or violence against individuals or groups of individuals on the sole grounds of the latter’s racial or national origin(or by virtue of article 24 of Law 1419/1984) religion, and, “to express publicly, either orally or by the press or by written texts or through pictures or any other means offensive ideas against any individual or group of individuals on the grounds of the latter’s racial or national origin or religion”. Besides, Law 3719/2008 entered into force in November 2008 stipulates that a crime committed on the basis of national, racial or religious hatred, or hatred on the grounds of sexual orientation constitutes an aggravating circumstance for sentencing. Although Circular No 21979/13.2003 of the Ministry of the Press and Media aims at increasing the awareness of professionals working in the media against racism and xenophobia, racist articles and opinions are being published by some media organizations in the country.

ABITF notes with concern this increasing trend of assaults against journalists in the entire region, which may translate into greater violence in future. On 19 February 2009, Abdülhalim Dede while he was on-air during the morning programme, *Kalimera Ellada*, broadcast by the Athens, Greece-based Antenna TV. The Turkish Ziraat Bank had invited, among others, Dimitris Stamatis, Secretary General of the Region of East Macedonia and Thrace at that time, to attend the opening of its first branch in Komotini, Thrace, Greece. Stamatis declined because the letter of invitation was written in English and Turkish, but not in Greek, and because the city of Komotini was referred to by its Turkish name only, Gümülçine. Abdülhalim Dede, activist on the promotion of minority rights of the Turkish Minority in Western Thrace and publisher and director of the newspaper *Trakyanın Sesi* was invited by the hosts of *Kalimera Ellada* to express his opinion live from Komotini on Antenna TV. During the interview, an unknown man approached Dede, shouted at him using obscene language, and physically attacked him. The main studio in Athens immediately terminated the live broadcasting.

The OSCE participating States, including Greece should promote educational and awareness-raising programmes for combating intolerant discourse, and they should encourage the promotion of tolerance, dialogue, respect and mutual understanding through the Media, including the Internet. They should counter prejudices and misrepresentation of the persons belonging to national minorities and the journalist with minority background in general society, and their efforts should in particular be targeted at the younger generation in order to build up their understanding of the need for tolerance and the importance of reconciliation and peaceful coexistence.