

OSCE  
HUMAN DIMENSION IMPLEMENTATION MEETING  
11 – 22 September 2017  
Warsaw – Poland

HDIM.NGO/0172/17/EN

14 September 2017

**Working Session 6: Fundamental freedoms II, including: – Freedom of thought, conscience, religion, or belief**

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Thank you Ms/Mr Moderator,

Distinguished Delegates,

*Representing the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace, as the oldest Muslim community of European Union, we call upon the Greek State:*

- To guarantee freedom of religion to Turkish Minority including the election of Muftis and the WAQF boards
- To abolish the Law no 4115/2013 known as “240 Imam Law” that is against the religious autonomy of Turkish Minority

The religious autonomy of the Western Thrace Turkish Minority was safeguarded in 1923 Lausanne Peace Treaty and the 1913 Athens Treaty. The religious leadership and the management of cultural, historical and religious heritage of the Minority still continue to be examples of Greece’s violation against these treaties:

The Greek authorities do not respect the Turkish Minority’s will to elect and choose its own religious leaders/Muftis (Muslim Bishops) and Imams (Muslim Priests) and do not take any special measures for the recognition of the elected Muftis of the Turkish Minority.

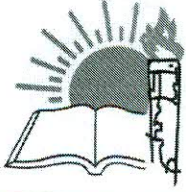
There are 2 kinds of Muftis in Western Thrace in Greece:

- The Elected Muftis are chosen by members of the Turkish Minority, but the Greek State refers to them as ‘fake Muftis’ and so they have no formality and authority in any religious activity, whereas the Greek Church community and any church community in the world is totally autonomous.
- The Appointed Muftis and their community are Greek civil servants appointed by the Greek State and they are recognized as official Muftis and implement all the formal religious activities, whereas their Christian equivalents and the Church community are totally independent from the Greek State.

There are 2 kinds of Imams in Western Thrace in Greece:

- The Elected Imams are chosen by the Turkish Minority community in each village, they have an university degree in Islam theology and they teach the Holy Qur’an in Turkish, the mother tongue of Turkish Minority as recognized by the Greek State. However the Greek State does not recognize them.
- The Appointed Imams are Greek civil servants appointed by the Greek State, they do not have university degree in Islam theology, but they have obtained certificates by Christian theology instructors and they teach the Holy Qur’an in Greek.





BATİ TRAKYA AZINLIĞI YÜKSEK TAHSİLLİLER DERNEĞİ  
ΣΥΛΛΟΓΟΣ ΕΠΙΣΤΗΜΟΝΩΝ ΜΕΙΟΝΟΤΗΤΑΣ ΔΥΤΙΚΗΣ ΘΡΑΚΗΣ  
WESTERN THRACE MINORITY UNIVERSITY GRADUATES ASSOCIATION

The Greek authorities prosecuted the Elected Muftis of the Minority several times under the penal code for usurping religious authority of the appointed Mufti. The European Court of Human Rights decided that those prosecutions violated Article 9 of the European Convention of Human Rights (Serif vs Greece 38178/1997, decision date 14-12-1999, Aga vs Greece 50776/1999 and 52912/1999, decision date 17-10-2002, Aga vs Greece 32186/2002 and 33331/2002, decision date 13-7-2006) which enshrines the rights of freedom of thought, conscience and religion. Despite these decisions Greek authorities did not act accordingly and has continued to prosecute the elected Muftis recently.

The Greek authorities enacted a law known as "240 Imam Law" regarding religious education of the Turkish Minority youth without taking into consideration of the Minority's will. They appoint non-qualified teachers, which constitute a clear violation of our religious rights and autonomy.

In Turkish Minority, all the cultural, historical and religious heritage of nearly 700 years has been called the WAQFs. The WAQFs is consisted of historical, cultural and religious monuments, buildings and lands belonged to Turkish Minority. The WAQFs is in total control of the Greek State with its appointed officers who do not have knowledge about the administration and maintenance of those properties. The Minority society does not accept them, because they have caused the plundering and the waste of those properties. Because of the bad management, the WAQFs administration faced large debts, but with the help of the Greek State, a law passed in 2007 (No: 3554) and erased the existing debts of WAQFs. Also, Greek State does not share any benefit from these heritage with the Minority. Thus, Turkish Minority cannot economically benefit from them, neither can manage them.

What is interesting in Komotini WAQF board is that the head of the appointed WAQF board is the son in law of the appointed Mufti of Komotini which is also in total control of Greek State. It is by all means unacceptable that the management of the two most important religious foundations of Minority is practiced by a family who is appointed by the Greek State.

**Thank you for your attention.**