

HDIM.NGO/0329/16/EN

27 September 2016

OSCE HUMAN DIMENSION
IMPLEMENTATION MEETING

19 to 30 September 2016

Warsaw –Poland

Working Session XII: Fundamental freedoms I, including freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief.

Contact Persons: Onour Moustafa Achmet & Esra Ismail
info@btaytd.com

Thank you Ms/Mr Moderator,

The right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion is one of the core units to build tolerance to others, to construct multi-cultural societies. One of the eternal verities of peaceful, understandable, and intercultural societies is the dialogue. If dialogue is constructed, then mutual comprehension comes easily. On the other hand, alienation, differentiation, and segregation can cause complex, fear, and hatred.

The perception of the other is important. Is your neighbor a historical enemy or a brother/sister? Your point of view plays a key role here.

I would like to give some examples of Greek experience here.

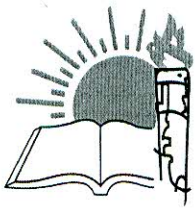
During the history and the revolution period the religious identity played a key role while the construction of nation-states. However, religion was not the only identifier. This is also accepted for minorities. As A. Eide suggests that a separate category of religious minority does not exist outside of a combination of ethnic or national consciousness, as identity cannot “be solely on religious belief, since the person who holds these beliefs wants to be a part of a wider-society”¹ where language and culture create patterns of social solidarity. Actually, it could be claimed that religion coexists with other aspects of identities like language, ethnicity or nationality. The Muslim Turkish Minority of Western Thrace in Greece is a very good example of this issue.

Gradually, ethnic and religious pluralism were taken under protection by international law, however, in reality, the practice in States are contradicting with international law when the minorities regarded. In this context the Minority’s status stems from an international treaty concluded with the kin-state, Turkey. So, the minority protection instead of serving an additional form of legal protection can be politicized and become a tool to cause vulnerability.

Greece is a member state or a participating state of many international organizations. However, while practicing the obligations the responsibilities and interests clash with each other. And the double standards of international organizations, for example of European Union have been come to the front line. Since becoming a member state of EU a country during the accession process should overcome many human and minority rights deficits.

One of the important issues of the Muslim Turkish Minority of Western Thrace in terms of religious freedoms is the non-recognition of the elected Muftis by the Greek authorities. The Muslim Turkish people have the right to freely, “establish, manage and control any charitable, religious and social institutions” and

¹¹ UN Doc., E/CN.4Sub.2/19923:18



thus elect its own religious leaders. This right was safeguarded by bilateral agreements and international treaties; however, Greek authorities do not implement the relevant provisions of those internationally binding documents.

The main official and public pretext of the Greek authorities for insisting on the appointment of the Muftis is that “Muftis are religious judges and in Greece all judges are appointed”. However, in reality, the Islamic Law exercised in a traditional and a very limited fashion by the Muftis in Western Thrace is not obligatory. That is to say, members of the Minority have right to decide whether to choose the Sharia Law or Greek Civil Law regarding their inheritance and civic issues. Another claim of the Greek authorities regarding the appointment is that the Muftis are appointed in all Muslim countries including Turkey. However, this is a false and misleading analogy. Muslim Turks of Western Thrace consist a Minority in Greece, whereas Muslims make up the majority of Turkey’s population. If a comparison is to be made, it should be drawn with the Greek Orthodox Minority in Turkey where the Greek Orthodox Patriarch is elected in conformity with long-lasting traditions. Also, in some countries like Bulgaria Muftis are elected.

Therefore, Western Thrace Muslim Turkish Minority calls upon the Greek State

- To take necessary steps to eliminate the problems regarding the religious rights of the Muslim Turkish Minority.
- To recognize the elected muftis of the Turkish Minority.
- To respect and implement the provisions of 1913 Athens Treaty and 1923 Lausanne Peace Treaty.
- To have a dialogue with the representatives of the Turkish Minority.