

ASSOCIATION FOR CULTURAL INTERACTION

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2012 OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting (Warsaw, 24-25 September 2012)

Written statement to:

Working Session I (Fundamental Freedoms 1: Freedom of expression, free media and information)

The rights and circumstances of the Turks in Bulgaria

Changes occurred in the life of the Muslim minority in the transition to democracy period. Their political, religious and partially cultural rights began to be restored in accordance with some of the International Treaties that Bulgaria ratified and in accordance with the Constitution from 1991. Notwithstanding, today we are beset with so many problems exercising our rights. In regard to the freedom of expression, free media and information I would like to share with you the following:

1. Lack of visibility of Turks in the public sphere, coupled with the absence of any private Turkish radio or TV stations.

Very often the impediment of the ten minutes news in mother language on National TV becomes a current issue of the nationalist circles. This is the only TV transmission in Turkish and there is no other broadcast or media through which the Turkish minority to be presented.

The solution of the problem is to be enacted new Law on media or to make amendments to the Media law that have not been made up to now, despite the demands and needs of the Turkish minority in the country. We are a part of a multicultural environment where such media must exist, as there is broadcast for ethnic groups in the mother tongue on public TVs' in other European countries.

2. Political discrimination in the electoral law. Freedom of expression in mother language:

The right to express freely the opinion and the right to obtain information or to access to information in own language is of great importance of the democracies. Despite recommendations of OSCE/ODIHR and Council of Europe to provide persons belonging to minorities with election materials in their mother tongue, in order to enhance the understanding of the processes for all communities, a ban on the use of languages other than Bulgarian in election campaigns continued. Also a ban on use of Turkish is in effect. This restricts the right to vote for those citizens living abroad, especially in Turkey. This is a discrimination and failure to observe the Main Documents and International commitments.

3. *Public displays of animosity:*

Notwithstanding the progress made since the advent of democracy in Bulgaria 1990, discrimination, ethnic hatred and prejudice against the Turkish-Muslim minority persists in the country.

To this end political parties and formations are more often and more threatening as they periodically arrange different types of campaigns, share opinions that impair Turkish dignity and that aim to restrict their rights. Repeatedly, during the meetings they called for termination of ten minutes news programme in mother tongue on National TV.

The letter and spirit of the statements nationalistic far right formations intend to usurp fundamental freedoms accorded to the Turkish minority during the transition period. They openly incite hatred against Turks-Muslims in Bulgaria by a persistent defamation campaign through the media.

I have a list of recommendations. Let me deliver only few of them if I have time.

The Turkish minority in Bulgaria encourage the Bulgarian authorities:

- To take effective measures, including the adoption, in conformity with constitutional systems and international obligations, of such laws which can be necessary to provide protection against any acts that constitute discrimination, racism, incitement to hatred;
- To enact or make amendments to the Media law that makes enable to establish broadcast and media in mother language.
- To engage in partnerships with private media, including Internet providers, in order to prevent the dissemination of prejudice, stereotypes and hatred;
- To guarantee that public broadcasting services avoid stereotyping of individuals and groups, and report fairly on individuals and groups in conformity with the highest professional and ethical standards including during election periods and public gatherings;
- Make efforts to abolish the ban on use of mother language in the electoral law
- To ensure that public officials at all levels, including ministers, refrain from making statements that incite to violence and discrimination;
- To develop codes of conduct for political representatives in unequivocally and publicly condemning manifestations of hate in public discourse and acts of violence based on bias and refraining from making discriminatory statements;

My recommendation to OSCE is:

- OSCE to observe closely the process of combating intolerance and discrimination against Turks and Muslims and to suggest to Bulgarian authorities specific measures on that issue.