



HUMAN DIMENSION IMPLEMENTATION MEETING

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My name is Gjergj Xhafa and I'm the Executive Director of the Institute of Cham Studies.

First I want to make a short introduction what the Institute of Cham Studies represents and what Chameria Issue stands for. The activity of this Institute is based on promoting the history, the culture and academic facts on a land with peculiar view pictures and with a population of characteristics that differentiate it from the surrounding neighbours and which is located in the south-western part of the Balkans Peninsula, along the eastern coasts of the Ionian sea, extending from the Butrinti Lake in the north, near the actual official south border of Albania up to Arta gulf in the south. The region is known by the Albanians as Chameria. In international literature this area is recognized also as Southern Epirus.

The Balkans region continues to cause debates between its nations that populate it and all this because of the former wrong historic decisions that have left hanging in the air many important matters and open wounds among which the most tragic one is the Cham Issue, as a result of the London Conference of 1913, which chopped Albania in 5 countries.

The representation of the Cham Voice has never been in the accurate levels beginning from the 20th century when the Chameria lands were chopped from Albania, also during and after the World Wars when the Chams were evicted and were sent away in an inhuman and cruel way from their homes. Their voice and problems have not been stressed and heard as strong as it had to, both in international and national levels.

After the outbreak of the II WW, the Greek Authorities of Chameria prepared a campaign and tried to secure all the necessary means for removing every Albanian in Chameria, so that when the foreign armies entered, they would find no sign of the Albanians.

In memory of 250,000 Albanians of Chameria and the Albanian nation, June 27 its an official date and is fixed as the day of the Greek genocide, the first great massacre, followed by bigger ones, was carried out under the direction of the criminal of the II World War, of a General of that time Greek

Army, like Napoleon Zervas who was supported by the Metropolitan of the Greek church Dorotheu; both close associates of Hitler's forces.

From June 1944 till March 1945 in Chameria were massacred more than 2900 innocent people mostly being women, children with the reason that they were Albanians. Many women were kidnapped and violated.

Greece has set up also a monument to the memory for this Criminal of war and author of this genocide, general Napoleon Zervas and still continues to protect it with fanaticism.

So, the massacre on the unprotected population of the ethnic Albanian minority of Chameria and its ethnical cleansing were not actions of separate bands but also of a criminal racist policy, elaborated for a long period and implemented systematically by Greek authorities in the past and still protected by the actual one in Greece.

An important fact also is that mostly the displaced Chams were of muslim religion. The orthodox ones were left there also in miserable conditions, as per an old Greek idea that everyone whom religion is orthodox is Greek and can stay in Chameria, not taking in consideration the national identity.

The rights of national minorities emerged in foreground immediately after the end of Cold War and now these are the most important issues in the agendas of international relation between every country. Currently, in Greece there is a minority of Albanian native of 300.000 people in the territory named from centuries Chameria and the north-western part of Greece. This Albanian native minority and others like Macedonian and Turkish minorities are never recognised from the Greek state. Based in one of the Peace Treaties signed by Greece and Turkey in the 1920', the Greek authorities in that period recognised the presence of several national minorities. But in the upcoming years towards the Muslim part of Chameria, around 35,000 people before the II World War, their Albanian national identity was denied and in their IDs was only listed the religion. By denying their national identity, Greek authorities are still aiming and promoting their old aspirations based on the Megali-Idea.

As mentioned before, with the end the of the Cold War, the sensibilization towards the minority rights has raised up and the international community has led the standardization and codification of the minority rights, which the one of main documents is the UN declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities adapted by the General Assembly resolution in the December of 1992. These were followed by other important declarations such as the UN Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and the European Charter for the Regional or Minority Language. All of them haven't been ratified from the Greek authorities and they still deny the existence of whatever

national minority within their official borders except the religious ones. One of the reasons of the these Greek authorities attitude is that in fact there are very light penalties from the national organizations regarding such issues.

In Chameria, nowadays it is thought to live 165 000 Cham orthodox and Greek authorities are the only ones in the region which do not recognise these facts and numbers which is a paradox if you think about the multi-culture background of the Balkans. For example in Chameria, from more than 70 years there is no school where the Chams can learn Albanian language although between each others in non public places, they still speak Albanian. In cases where someone can speak Albanian or admits his origin several punishments can be provided to him and to his family.

In this region there is showed no care towards the culture heritage, as the culture monuments represent different nationality and religious. The Greek authorities are trying to transform every Albanian, Macedonian etc in homogeneous Greeks and in a certain level they have achieved it. But it's almost impossible to provide nowadays a total assimilation as the globalization and the all integration processes of the Balkans region and no country is able to monopolize all the means by denying the spread of the culture of the coexistence in such a region as the Balkans with full of history and tradition. The time has come that the minority registration in Greece has to be provided within EU standards in order that all the upcoming policies towards them to be helpful for the integration of every single one and so on the all Balkan region. Paradoxically the Greek authorities are asking for fulfilling of EU standards of this census in every country which shares its official borders. On the other hand they are not doing the same. There is no more credibility in the Greek authorities and their policies.

A very important aspect of this Issue, the Cham Issue, which also affects human being like me, and all the Cham community in Albania, which were forced to leave their houses and properties and which is strongly connected with their request is the right they have by the international laws for returning to their houses and lands and coexisting with every other people distinguished from them only by the nationality and maybe religion and not by the desire of having what it's their right from such a long time, the right of the property, the right of living in the land of their ancestors.

An unconstitutional act and decision has been made by that time by Greek authorities in the collective unilateral removal of the Greek citizenship of the Cham Albanians as act that finds no precedent in the civilized nations. The paradox goes through when the Albanian dictator approved and provided another non sense legal act by giving to all of the Chams, in a collective decision the Albanian citizenship. Both these acts can not find similarity in every point of view.

The nonsense goes on by the Greek authorities, in the public but also in the diplomatic levels, they try to deny the existence of such an issue and want to keep it out from every possible agenda or diplomatic meetings between both the parties. The Issue is unsolved and as the actual diplomatic

climate shows can not stay anymore resting in the drawers of the memory of every one of us and furthermore in any authorities desk in both countries. An issue which also is strongly connected with the minority rights, with the diplomatic relations between Albania and Greece etc, is that between both these countries there is in force the Law of War, although they have stable diplomatic relations since 1971 and both countries are part of NATO and other European organization. The reason is that by still keeping the Law of War in force, and other its derivatives, the Greek authorities keep away the Chams rights for returning in their houses and properties and so on the existing Albanian Chams minority in Chameria for the basic rights like for example learning the Albanian language.

After the visa liberalization process towards the Albanian citizens, which was ratified later in 2010 by all the Schengen Agreement countries, a lot of “deny access” in Greece were applied to backward a normal visit of a Cham with the Albanian citizenship and a birthplace in Chameria (as shown in the official ID of the Republic of Albania). This “deny access” was used by the Greek Border authorities even to very old age Albanians from Chameria with the nonsense reason that he or she might be dangerous for Greece or more than one European country.

The truth also is that on the other hand Albanian state has done almost nothing for such vital issues because most of them think that the disregard of this important problem, that is hanging high in relations with Greece, paves the way towards the membership in European structures. This is becoming a common threat by the Greek state towards natural aspirations of several countries in the Balkans for entering in the European structure. One of the last is also regarding the name of another Greece neighbour, Macedonia.

As you probably have noticed, I have mentioned many time the word „Greek authorities” because Greek People know that an injustice is going on from almost 100 years towards a population with whom they have a lot of things in common, have lived, share and have been mixed up in such a multi culture region, as the Balkans are.

What can be a unique proposal towards OSCE countries is to be more informed about this tragic history such as the Cham Issue and to address all the means within their respective functions for solving this issue as first of all for implementing the basic rights of this population, which will surely can stumble the diplomatic relation between Greece and Albania in the near future.

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