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Working Session 8: Tolerance and non-discrimination I, including rights of persons belonging to national minorities, and preventing aggressive nationalism, racism and chauvinism
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The Violation of the Minority Rights in Greece The Turkish Minority of Western Thrace

Thank you Ms/Mr Moderator,

The Turkish Minority in Western Thrace gained its status in 1923 with the Peace Treaty of Lausanne. Today, members of the Turkish Minority are facing serious problems regarding enjoying their rights which emanate from and guaranteed by bilateral and international conventions and agreements.

First of all, we would like to highlight once more that the ethnic identity of the Turkish minority is still denied by the Greek authorities. Also, no steps have been taken to compensate the loss of minority individuals affected by the application of Article 19 of the Greek citizenship code, which can be considered as an example of racism or ethnic cleansing. Under the implementation of Article 19, 60 thousand Turkish Minority members lost their Greek citizenship between the years 1955 and 1998.

In accordance with the international and bilateral conventions, the Turkish minority has the right to establish, manage and control its own educational establishments. Also, the Hague Recommendations and the Ljubljana Guidelines underline the importance of educational rights of the minorities. However, these rights have been constantly violated by the Greek State. The Greek authorities still turn deaf ears to Minority kindergartens. The application of Culture and Education Foundation of Western Thrace Minority (PEKEM) for opening a private kindergarten remains unanswered since 2011. PEKEM, in March 2018, re-applied for a private kindergarten and is still waiting for a response. The two-year pre-school education became compulsory and beginning from the 2018-2019 education period it will be put into practice also in the regions where the minority populated densely. Moreover, the need for the upgrading of the existing two and the opening of an additional Minority secondary-high schools is completely ignored by the local and central authorities.

Therefore, we would like to repeat once more that the Turkish Minority would be honored if a fact finding mission of the office of OSCE High Commissioner for National Minorities pay a visit to Western Thrace to see one of the most least-developed regions of the EU.

We would like to recommend Greece to:

Recognize the Turkish ethnic identity in Western Thrace,
Take all necessary steps to redress grievances of the victims of Article 19 without any delay,
Take into consideration its international obligations and respect to the Turkish Minority's right to education,
To allow the Turkish Minority to establish bilingual nursery schools,
To have a sincere and concrete cooperation with the Turkish Minority representatives during the legislation processes.

Thank you for your attention.