



OSCE Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting  
OSCE Contribution to the Protection of National Minorities

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Session III: Empowering civil society to build bridges on the grassroots level

Contact Person: Ali Chouseinoglou (alihuseyinoglu1@gmail.com)

Thank you very much Madame/Mister Moderator,

Since the establishment of the OSCE, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) belonging to national minorities have always had massive contribution to the development of civil society across the OSCE region. Yet, their role in building bridges within a given minority group or between minorities and majorities still remains underdeveloped.

In Greece, there is a variety of NGOs belonging to the Muslim Turkish Minority of Western Thrace. Yet, the concept of civil society inside Western Thrace remains quite weak compared to that in other regions of Greece. As in the case of registration of the Xanthi Turkish Union, the ones with ethnic Turkish denomination still not allowed to get registered and contribute to the development of the concept of civil society in Greece as of 2016. It is useful to note that this prohibition is peculiar to the native ethnic Turkish identity inside Western Thrace; other relatively-smaller non-Greek ethnic groups are given the same right to establish and function their own associations titles of which depict their ethnic differentiation.

The other Minority unions using either religious or local denominations are generally given the official permission to function freely. Nevertheless, their influence in decision-making bodies of the country is almost non-existent. Since the incorporation of Western Thrace into territories of Greece in early 1920, no Greek government has ever established a mechanism of dialogue with Minority associations in Western Thrace. Rather, different Greek state apparatuses have preferred not to strengthen the bridge role of the Minority at the grassroots level. As a result, members of the Muslim Turkish Minority (including the elected ones as MPs) still have weak impact on decisions taken in Athens regarding different matters about the historical survival of their ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious characteristics.

In the given context, we call upon the Greek State to:

Strengthen the concept of civil society across Western Thrace

Emphasize the role of Minority NGOs and their roles as bridge-building entities between the minority and majority communities at the grassroots level.

Enable establishment of associations with ethnic Turkish denomination in their titles and empower NGOs belonging to the Muslim Turkish Minority.



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WESTERN THRACE MINORITY UNIVERSITY GRADUATES ASSOCIATION

Introduce an effective mechanism of dialogue and cooperation between the Minority and the Greek state.

Thank you for your attention.  
Mr. Ali Chouseinoglou