

**OSCE  
HUMAN DIMENSION  
IMPLEMENTATION MEETING  
Warsaw, 24 September to 5 October  
Working Session I**

HDIM.NGO/31/07  
24 September 2007

**Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association**

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Ms/Mr. Moderator,  
Thank you for the floor.

In the beginning of the post-Cold War Era, in May 1991 Greece officially declared the change in its minority policy of Western Thrace based on the principles of “equality before the law” and “equality in civil rights”. Since then, most of the basic citizenship rights have been given back. Thus, there are some improvements in the socio-economic and political lives of the Minority. However, most of the basic minority rights are still not applied and major problems that affect the Muslim Turkish minority still have not been resolved by the Greek state.

The official denial of ethnic “Turkish” identity of the overall Minority still prevails over the bilateral and international agreements that Greece signed and ratified regarding the protection of minority rights. The 1923 Lausanne Treaty, accepted as the basic treaty protecting the Western Thrace Minority, refers to the existence of the “Muslim” minority in Western Thrace as it is continuously stipulated by the Greek delegation here. It is true that the Lausanne Treaty refers to the existence of Muslim minority but this does not imply that the Lausanne Treaty prohibits the collective ethnic “Turkish” identification of the Minority.

The associations of the Minority bearing the term “Turk/Turkish” in their titles have officially been banned since 1987. Taking into account that these associations had operated without a problem with the Greek state for more than 50 years since 1930s the ban with a decision of the Greek High Court in 1987 seems to be purely political. Consuming all local remedies the cases of the Xanthi Turkish Union and the Cultural Association of Turkish Women of Rodopi are before the European Court of Human Rights. Nowadays, even the term “Minority” seems to be unbearable by the Greek state authorities. Despite the existence of some associations bearing the term “minority” in their titles the Greek High Court refused the establishment of the Evros Minority Youth Association on the grounds that the kind of Minority, whether ethnic, religious or national, was not clear.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The quality of the education in the Minority Primary Schools falls far behind from that of in the majority Greek schools. The Article 40 of the Lausanne Peace Treaty protects the right to establish, manage and control the Minority schools. However, due to the governmental interferences since 1970s the character of the Minority education has come to an end. And today it cannot serve for the basic educational needs of the Minority.

The problem between elected and appointed muftis, religious leaders, still constitutes one of the major problems regarding the freedom of religion or belief. Although the muftis appointed by the Greek authorities lack credibility and even respect among the Muslim Turks the Greek state continues to reject the right of the Minority to elect its own religious figure.

Formerly, the Muslim Turks were electing the governors of the charitable organizations, *wakfs*. However, starting from the 1967 Military Junta regime the control of these organizations passed to the Minority members appointed by the Greek state. Since then, the boards of the *wakfs* in three prefects of Western Thrace have been governed by the people appointed by the Junta regime.

Finally, the Article 19 of the Greek Citizenship Law (No: 3370 of 1955) was an obvious case of racial discrimination and a flagrant violation of the fundamental right to citizenship. It was in breach of the Greek constitution and international law. This article stated that: "A citizen of non-Greek origin leaving Greece without the intention of returning may be declared having lost Greek citizenship..." From 1955 till 1998 this article had continuously been used to change demographic figures of the region on behalf of the majority Greek population. Around sixty thousand people have been suffering from the application of Article 19. Since the abolishment of this Article in 1998, almost nothing has been done to remedy the situation. Regarding the stateless people, other victims of the application of this article, a little progress has been achieved since 1998. With few exceptions, stateless people have not regained their Greek nationality yet. It is inconceivable how those citizens of Greece most of whom never left the country could have been stripped-off their citizenship under Article 19.

Ms/Mr. Moderator, Ladies and Gentlemen,

#### Recommendations

- 1- We recommend Greece to take into account and implement fully the laws and the regulations arising from the bilateral and multilateral agreements or instruments that she signed and ratified.
- 2- We recommend Greece to implement the provisions of the 1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document and to urgently ratify the Council of Europe's Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities that she signed in 1997.

Thank you for your attention.

Pervin Chairoula  
Deputy President