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**OSCE HUMAN DIMENSION
IMPLEMENTATION MEETING
21 September – 2 October 2015
Warsaw – Poland**

Working Session XV: Fundamental Freedoms II, including freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief

Contact Persons: Ali Chousein Oglou & Onour Moustafa Achmet
alihuseyinoglu1@gmail.com & onurmustafaahmet@gmail.com & btaytd@otenet.gr

Thank you Ms/Mr Moderator,

Distinguished Delegates,

Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association calls upon the Greek State:

- To respect the Turkish Minority's religious autonomy and stop the implementation of appointed imams,
- To respect the Turkish Minority's right to elect its imams according to the minority's long lasting traditions,
- To stop creating disturbance within the Turkish society via appointed officials,

The Turkish Minority is facing problems regarding the implementation of the Law No: 4115/2013 which is foreseeing the appointment of "imams/religious instructors" to state schools and mosques.

The Minority has already expressed its strong reaction to this Law which actually aims to undermining the Kor'an courses that have already been provided for a long time by imams in mosques. Nevertheless, as of 2015, more than a hundred so-called "religious instructors" have been hired by the Greek state. Unfortunately, the members of the Turkish Minority have seen that, as expected, these instructors do not have the necessary educational background and qualifications. Nor there was a collective demand from the Turkish Minority for the hiring of "religious instructors" to mosques.

On the implementation of this Law No: 4115/2013, the Greek authorities even resorted to outdated intimidation tactics. To give a concrete example, one of those "instructors" has been appointed as "muezzin" to the mosque in the village of Mega Derio. Actually this is against the well-established traditions since in all the villages in Western Thrace the Muslims employ the imams and the muezzins themselves. However, on March 14, 2014, in that village, many uniformed police officers deployed themselves in the coffee house of the village just half an hour before the Friday Adhan. Under their "protecting eyes", that "instructor" walked into the mosque with apparent intention to lead the service. The community in the mosque of course did not allow him. But those police officers asked the people coming out of the mosque if he could lead the prayer or not. This police escort continued several weeks. This was a junta-like application and imposing the appointed officers with police force.

The implementation of the Law No: 4115/2013 exemplifies also the Greek authority's negative intention towards the Turkish Minority. Besides members of Turkish Minority, in Greece there are almost 700.000 Muslims who live outside of Western Thrace. But, the implementation of this Law started in Western Thrace although the Minority has autonomous status and expressed its strong reactions. This is just one of the most recent examples of Greek intolerance to freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief.

Thank you for your attention.