

2008 OSCE HUMAN DIMENSION IMPLEMENTATION MEETING
Working Session 3: Freedom of Media and Freedom of Expression

Statement of Rainbow – Organisation of the Macedonian Minority of Greece

Thank you Mr Moderator.

I am here today to speak about the lack of freedom of expression and free media for the Macedonian minority of Greece.

Let me start by stating that in 2008, it would not be an unusual thing to hear ethnic music and singing in a minority language. For instance it would be quite normal to listen to Greek songs/Greek language on the radio in southern Albania or in Istanbul, Turkey.

Equally, one would expect that there would be nothing strange about hearing Macedonian songs on a Greek radio station. Well, surprise, surprise! The year before last, a private amateur radio station tried to broadcast Macedonian language songs in the town around the town of Negush/Naoussa in Northern Greece. Without warning the broadcasting of Macedonian language broadcasts was shut down by Greek authorities. The police entered the studio of the radio station, ended the emission and confiscated all Macedonian language material from the station. The same afternoon the local policeman visited owner of the station, Mr Aris Votaris, at his home. The police intimidated Mr Votaris and told him not to, and I quote, “*Do ever again broadcast these dirty Skopian songs*”. The term “Skopjan songs” is a derogatory term for the Macedonian language.

The situation with public broadcasting in minority language is even worse. The new Law No. 3592/2007 is not in line with the right to the free flow of information, freedom of expression and pluralism and makes the appropriate urgent changes given that the said law fails to consent to the use of minority language in the media.

In drafting the Guidelines on the use of Minority Languages in the Broadcast Media, the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities has stated that:

"Access to the media in one's own language is particularly important for persons belonging to national minorities. Being able to read magazines and newspapers, listen to the radio and watch TV programmes in minority languages is vital for maintaining and developing their cultural and linguistic identity. Furthermore, it determines whether minorities have access to social, economic and political opportunities."

Indeed many OSCE member states have implemented these guidelines. Regrettably, Greece remains one of the states which has thus far ignored these guidelines with respect to Macedonian minority media. In fact the Greek government is not even willing to entertain the idea of Macedonian language media. The well known political party of the Macedonian minority, the European Free Alliance – *Vinozhito* has on a number of occasions written to the Greek Ministry of Communication and Media to request the introduction of the Macedonian language in public radio and television in Greece. There has never been a response by the officials to any letter sent.*

So we ask the Greek delegation today, is it the official policy of Greece to ignore the Guidelines on the use of Minority Languages in the Broadcast Media the High Commissioner?

And finally, does the Greek government intend to at least meet with representatives of the Macedonian minority of Greece, to at least discuss the issue of Macedonian language broadcasting?

Thank you Mr Moderator.

** At this point in the presentation the Representative of Rainbow showed the audience the letter that was sent to the Greek government.*