



OSCE HUMAN DIMENSION  
IMPLEMENTATION MEETING  
10 to 21 September 2018  
Warsaw – Poland

HDIM.NGO/0199/2018/EN  
13 September 2018

Working Session 7: Fundamental Freedoms I  
Contact Persons: Ali Chousein Oglou & Pervin Chairoula  
[alihuseyinoglu1@gmail.com](mailto:alihuseyinoglu1@gmail.com) & [chairoulap@yahoo.com](mailto:chairoulap@yahoo.com)

### **Freedom of Religion in Western Thrace, Greece The Case of the Muslim Turkish Minority**

Thank you Ms/Mr Moderator,

Islam is quite an old phenomenon in Greece. Muslims in Greece number approximately 1 million constituting almost 1.2% of the whole population. They face a variety of discrimination and physical-verbal attacks based on their faith.

Muslim Turks in Western Thrace, numbering around 150.000, cannot fully enjoy their religious liberties. That is to say, they have no right to define their own religious leaders/muftis. Since 1990 Greece has been insisting on appointing muftis while rejecting the ones elected by the Muslim Turkish community, thus creating and promoting a double-headed structure regarding religious representation of the Minority at the highest level. Recently, the two appointed muftis have been replaced by new appointed ones contrary to Minority's reactions. Greece insists on dictating religious leadership to the Muslim Turkish minority on the grounds that muftis have also partial judiciary power based on the Islamic Law. Even if it has been applied since the 1923 Peace Treaty of Lausanne, no appointment of muftis had been the case until 1990. This indicates that such appointments are rather political decisions and contravene to the religious autonomy of the Minority.

Furthermore, religious charitable foundations of the Minority face similar problems. That is to say, administrative boards of these foundations have been appointed by the Greek governments since the 1967 Junta Regime. No right has still been given to the Muslim Turks of Western Thrace to define members to these boards of their historical foundations based on their own will.

At each and every locality with Muslim Turkish presence within Western Thrace, mosques and Islamic cemeteries have been unabatedly functioning since 1923. Yet, there are still some major problems with functioning of these sacred places. That is, they are occasionally targeted by Islamophobic attacks. Also, a law passed in 2007 and renewed in 2013 foresees the appointment of imams as teachers of the Holy Quran. Even if there have been strong reactions from the Minority to another example of imposing clergy, no step has been taken yet by the Greek authorities.

As the Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association, we urge Greece to

- Respect the bilateral and international binding documents that has already been signed and ratified that safeguard religious rights of the Muslim Turkish Minority in Western Thrace
- Cease appointing religious elites and clergy to posts of muftiates, religious charitable foundations and mosques
- Develop the mechanism of collaboration with the Muslim Turkish minority so as to find possible solutions for the old and new problems regarding freedom of religion, conscience and belief inside Western Thrace.

Thank you for your attention.