

MOVEMENT FOR THE RENAISSANCE OF NORTHERN EPIRUS

OSCE HUMAN DIMENSION IMPLEMENTATION MEETING

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Warsaw – Poland

Working session 4: Rule of law I, including independence of the judiciary, right to a fair trial, democratic law making

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Thank you Mr/Mrs Moderator,

Honorable representatives,

The members of the Greek National Minorities in Albania face serious problems with the Albanian justice regarding the properties issues.

In particular, Albanian encroachers claim large areas in northern Epirus with false documents allegedly from the Ottoman Empire (1431 - 1912) or the Zogou Monarchy era (1924-1939) and steal the property of the Greeks National Minority. This phenomenon goes on for decades, especially in the villages of the Municipality of Finiki, whose inhabitants are giving legal battles against people who claim they are the descendants of old owners. Similar problems are also observed in the Municipality of Dropolis, as in the village of Vrachogorazi.

A characteristic example of such real estate stealing is the case of the village of Kostari in the Municipality of Finiki.

The Avlona Committee for the Return of Properties had illegally granted 136 hectares of grassland and forest land which belong to the villagers of Kostari, to non-beneficiaries (Decision no. 88 date 19.04.2002). The people challenged the decision and a five-year legal marathon begun with endless court proceedings and postponements. There were also continues changes of judges who were...chosen every time by the encroachers and their political patrons(!) something that the people of Kostari repeatedly denounced. Finally, on January 17<sup>th</sup> 2018 the Court of First Instance of Agioi Saranta ruled against the Greek villagers making the Greek minority lose faith once again on the Albanian legal system.

Once again, the intransigence of the Albanian state and justice has been confirmed. They make it crystal clear that they will not take a step back regarding the property issues of the Greek National Minority, even when there are undisputable proofs of counterfeiting, which are confirmed by the same state authorities from which they were supposedly issued.

Simply put, any hope that there would be some justice on the property issue of the Greek minority by the Albanian legal system has been lost with the above decision. The campaign of the advocated cleansing of justice, is an empty promise for the Greeks of Albania.

We should also never forget the murder of Aristotle Goumas on August 12<sup>th</sup> 2010 in Himara by Albanian nationalists, simply because he was speaking in his native Greek language, in his own homeland.

The Albanian justice set the accessories to the murder free and sentenced the driver who run over Aristotle Goumas twice, to just 12 years imprisonment. Until now it is not known if he actually serves his sentence.

It should be noted that the victim's family was not called to the court and was not officially informed of the decision. They learned that there had even been a trial by a journalist who asked them what their thoughts were of the decision...

There are, however, cases where the government does not respect those court decisions they don't like. On October 31<sup>st</sup> 2017, the Albanian Prime Minister Eddie Rama decided to proceed with the demolition of houses and shops belonging to the Greeks of Himaras, despite the fact that the administrative court of Avlona had ordered for the demolitions to stop.