

**Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association**

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Ms/Mr. Moderator,

My name is Ali Chousein. On behalf of the Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association we represent, here, around 150.000 Muslim Turks that live in the northeastern part of Greece.

In this meeting, I want to mention the continuous Greek violation of the right of freedom of association of the Turkish minority of Western Thrace since the beginning of 1980s. Affirming the decision of the Court of Appeals of Thrace, the Greek Supreme Court in November 1987 decided to dissolve the Komotini Turkish Youth Union (founded in 1928) and the Union of Turkish Teachers of Western Thrace (founded in 1936) on the basis that the denomination `Turkish` in their titles referred to the citizens of Turkey and it constituted a threat to the unity and the public order of Greece.

Strongly protesting the decision of the Greek Supreme Court for the denial of the ethnic identity, for the first time in the history of the Minority, around 10.000 Turks made mass demonstrations on the 29<sup>th</sup> of January 1988 in Komotini. In the anniversary of the "29 January events" in 1990, organized Greek mobs damaged and looted around 400 shops of the Turkish minority in Komotini as well as beating some of the Minority members. To note, almost none of these shopkeepers have been compensated since then. As well as their dissolutions, in 1991, the Prefecture of Rhodopi sent further notifications for these associations to remove their nameplates.

Now, I want to focus on the two recent cases on the issue of freedom of association in Greece: The case of Xanthi Turkish Union and the case of the Cultural Association of Turkish Women of Rhodopi.

Xanthi Turkish Union (XTU) was established as the `Home of Turkish Youth of Xanthi` in 1927 and it was renamed later in 1936. Up until 1984, it has functioned quite properly as a civil society association. Not only Muslim Turks but also Greek Orthodox citizens had been members of this union in the past. The case of the Xanthi Turkish Union that started in 1984 has lasted in 2005 with the dissolution verdict by the Greek Supreme Court due to the denomination of the term "Turkish" in its title.

Besides the case of the XTU, the application for the establishment of the Cultural Association of Turkish Women of Rodopi was firstly rejected by the First Instance Court of Thrace on 17 January 2003 and then by the Greek Supreme Court on the 1<sup>st</sup> of April 2005. After exhausting all local remedies the executive committees of these two associations applied to the European Court of Human Rights. At least for these two cases that are in the agenda of the ECHR, the Muslim Turks of Western Thrace are waiting for a decision that will respect the principle of multiculturalism, democracy and human rights in the European continent.

After evaluating all of these cases I want to underline that from a legal point of view the Paragraph 32.2 and 32.6 of the 1990 CSCE Copenhagen Document, the Article 11 of the European Convention on Human Rights and the Article 3.2 of the Framework Convention for Protection of National Minorities (though signed in 1997 but hasn't still ratified) which protect the rights of the freedom of association of the Turkish minority are clearly violated by Greece.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In comparison with the banned Turkish associations, in today's Greece, there are two Armenian associations functioning officially for years in Western Thrace. The Cultural and Educational Association of Armenians in Komotini and the Association of Orthodox Armenians, Saint Grigorios in Komotini. Then one should ask this question: "How the existence of the Armenian associations does not constitute a threat to the unity of Greece and to the Greek public order while the ones with the "Turkish" denomination does?" Taking into account the existence of the Armenian associations in Komotini and the aforementioned international treaty provisions protecting the rights of the Turkish minority it should be questioned whether the decisions of the Greek Supreme Court for the dissolution of the Turkish associations are in the same line with democracy and human rights.

Furthermore, I want to stress that all of these three associations, which contributed for the multicultural character of Greece, had functioned for almost 50 years unabatedly without having problems with the Greek governments and with a court verdict they were all dissolved. By 2006, Greece gives the right of self-identification for the Minority members but insists on preventing the collecting usage of this right via rejecting the establishment of associations carrying the denominations `Turk/Turkish` in their titles. Such a prevention for using individual rights collectively works totally against to the Paragraph 32 of the 1990 CSCE Copenhagen Document, Article 2 Paragraph 4 of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to the National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities that are signed and ratified by Greece.

To conclude, the change in traditional minority policy of Greece in the beginning of the 1990s, based on the principles of `equality before law` and `equality in civil rights` has been quite welcomed by the Muslim Turkish minority of Western Thrace. However, changes have mainly been observed in the field of basic human rights but not in that of the minority rights.

Living in the cradle of democracy and within the boundaries of the European Union as European citizens since 1981, we are waiting from our country, Greece, to respect our right of freedom of association and let us to establish our associations with the denomination `Turk/Turkish`. Otherwise, there will not be so much difference from the 1967-1974 Colonels regime period whenever three Greek citizens had come together they had forcibly been dissolved by the soldiers fearing that they could have been organized against the Junta regime.

### **Recommendations**

We recommend OSCE to re-consider whether Greece fully implements the provisions of the 1990 CSCE / OSCE Copenhagen Document that has signed and ratified

We recommend Greece to ratify the Council of Europe's Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities that has signed in 1997.

We recommend Greece to respect the collective usage of individual rights of the Turkish minority.

Thank you for your attention.

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Member

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