

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION "NORTHERN EPIRUS 1914"

OSCE HUMAN DIMENSION IMPLEMENTATION MEETING

19 September - 30 September 2016

Warsaw – Poland

WORKING SESSION 10

Tolerance and non-discrimination I, including address by
the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities

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Thank you Ms/Mr Moderator,

Distinguished Delegates,

Since the August 26th 2015 when the church of Agios Athanasios in Drimades was demolished, a new round of aggression by the Albanian government has started against the Ethnic Greek Minority of Albania that resides in the area historically called Northern Epirus.

During the last winter tens of homes in the villages of the Greek Minority, especially in the area of Argyrokastro, became target of burglaries, with the perpetrators still at large. Consequently, every year the safety of the people in the area instead of improving is deteriorating.

The biggest blow for the Greek Minority, however, is suffered on the property issue. The courts and other Albanian state actors favor forgers that appear as former owners and they are take huge areas that normally belong to members of the Greek Minority.

For example, at the Municipality of Finiki that is almost entirely populated by the Greek Minority, the State Service for Property Return gave more than 20.000 acres in foreigners that have absolutely no relation whatsoever with the wider area.

It is of particular importance the area of Himara, where I come from, where the Albanian government refuses to recognize to its inhabitants the status and the rights of the Ethnic Greek Minority. The result of this policy was that, amongst others, the assassination of my uncle Aristotelis Goumas by Albanian nationalists in August the 12th 2010 because he simply insisting in talking in his mother language, which is the Greek language.

As for the properties, with the pretext of the tourist development of this coastal area, Edi Rama's government is plotting in the last 3 years a "velvet" ethnic cleansing of the Greeks and our expulsion from our ancestral homes.

The first stage of the plan is to characterize the whole area of Himara as tourist, to be taken away from its natural owners, to given them -even with forged property titles-

to government friendly “businesspeople” and in the final stage, to install population from other parts of Albania in order to make the Greek Minority disappear from Himara!

The highlight of terrorism to all those that want to defend their land or even their own houses from the so-called “tourist development”, was the violent attack that the rightful owners suffered inside the City Council of Himara on June the 30th 2016 by the henchmen of the so-called “investors”.

I want to add that the Albanian authorities intimidate many of those who speak publicly about the obvious rights of the Greek National Minority, with hours of control delays and psychological violence at border crossings.

We demand the implementation of the Protocol of Corfu that Albania signed in 1914 which offers us autonomy, as well as the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities so that the Ethnic Greek Minority of Northern Epirus in Albania will be efficiently protected.

ANNEX

“DIMOKRATIANEWS.GR”, January 10th 2016

Tirana grab the land of the Greeks in Himara

With the pretext of developing the “Albanian Riviera”, Edi Rama grabs the fields from their natural owners and gives them to his friends. They are uprooting ancient olive trees.

Nikos Stavroulakis

The Hellenism of Himara is under attack! With the pretext of tourist development of the privileged -due to its natural beauty- area, the government of the “socialist” **Prime Minister Edi Rama** methodically puts through in the last years a plan of ethnically cleansing of the Greeks from their ancestral properties. The plan had as a first stage the informal change of the use of land (from agricultural to tourist), its secondment from its Greek natural owners, its distribution even with forged titles to “investors” that are friends of the government and finally the transportation and resettlement of the population in other parts of Albania so that the Greek element in the area will disappear!

Everything is ready for the transgression to the new reality. The “right people” are there (business people with interesting the area, bullies of the mayors, members of the Albanian parliament, even mafia “godfathers”), the laws (7501/19.7.1991, the return of lands to the local population after the Hotza regime, the vagueness that complicates the property status), the development excuse, that in the case of Himara is the tourist transformation and the blue-prints on the ground.

The Sunday edition of Dimokratia newspaper managed to get the unpublished plans of the coastal reconstruction of Himara and presents one of them, that of the area of **Kiparo**. There the Albanian Urban Planning Department has already the uprooting of ancient olive trees. In their place a hotel unit is rising, parking places, sidewalks, organized beaches in the now virgine area that has been characterized as the “Albanian Riviera”.

A few days ago the bulldozers of Edi Rama begun the uprooting from lands belonging to Greeks without(!) any compensation or even warning of their owners, in an operations that has elements of a psychological warfare. Their target is that to break the resistance of the Greek organizations with these raids. The “psy ops” begun with the demolition of the church of Agios Athanasios in the village of Drimades, as a power demonstration of government.

The real intentions of the authorities are openly admitted in the Albanian Parliament by the leaders of the two bigger political parties, with Edi Rama and Sali Berisha exchanging accusations publically as to who has inflicted the bigger “catastrophe”. As reported in the Albanian media, the argument begun in mid-December, after some statements of Rama in Agioi Saranta regarding the “grabing” of the coastal plot of the Monastery of Saint George by a person from somewhere in the north of Albania.

Rama admitted openly that 50.000 acres had been “stolen” in Agioi Saranta and Himara. *“They have taken the lands of the Himariots with forged titles and corruption, people that no connection or origin from the area. People that Berisha brought from the Alps and made them owners of the Ionian Sea”* stated the Albanian Prime Minister, throwing all responsibilities to the previous government.

In stead of any other response, Berisha admitted his own plan for the distortion of the Greek populations! *“I have worked with a program in Agioi Saranta, where I have brought Labides”*, he states. Berisha knew what he was talking about. “Labides” are muslim residents of the area of Laberia, an area east of Himara, with feelings similar to that of the people of Chameria. They often celebrate the “historic successes” of the Ottoman army, that drowned in blood the revolution of 1878, burning the Greek villages of Northern Epirus.

In a counter attack, Berisha accused Edi Rama of advancing his own “people” in the area. He mentioned that Edi Rama has given the responsibility of sharing the coastal area to the member of parliament of the Socialist Party, advisor and corrupted businessman (of Greek origin), Kotso Kokdima, with the excuse that *“the Kokdima family in Himara supported in the past the Government of the Autonomous Northern Epirus under George Zografos”*!

In reality, behind the counter accusations of both sides and the crocodile tears of Edi Rama for the lose of *“the lands of the Himariots”* is hidden the same plan of systematic and scheduled distortion of the Greek population, as Kotso Kokdimas is behind the “tourist reconstruction” of the coastal zone of Himara. It is known that all Albanian governments have attempted to distort the Greek population, but it is the first time that the Albanian leaders openly admit it.

Traitors for the dirty job

The businessman Kotsos Kokdimas is a close friend of advisor to the Prime Minister Edi Rama. He comes from Himara and his business deals with constructions, wood trading as well as the media, as he owns the “Shekulli” newspaper, a radio station (“+2”) and the magazine “Spector”. In the previous years he was the No.1 opposition of the previous mayor Himara and for many years a distinguished representative of the National Greek Minority in Albania, Basili Bolano, because he was taking the “jobs” he wanted. Despite of his Greek origin, he is said to have deep anti-Greek feelings. Himariots mentioned to our newspaper that in absolute alignment with mayor Goros (also of Greek origin, that stated before the elections that “*the Greeks in Himara are immigrants in Greece*”) he states that he will make all of Himara muslim, while when some people remind him that due to the minority he should not forget the opinion of Greece on the matter, he answers: “*We are Athens!*”

The Albanian governments are taking advantage of the vagueness of the law 7501 that was formed after the fall of the Hotza regime, for the return of the lands. This most basic law had special provisions regarding the place.

For the Albanian standards the law was giving ownership but not a title. The problems were many, due to forgeries, topography and due to the fact that the implementation of the law was given to local committees formed by people without specialized knowledge. Based on these not good foundations the Albanian governments are interpreting the law as to who owns what and what is the use of land per area.

Also, many of the Greek Minority, with out any direction or advise from Greece, were detached from their lands and they do not know where their own lands are. All these details make the government do what it pleases without any resistance.

The strangulation effect

In the last 25 years the policy of Albania was simple:

Taking of the Greek properties, causing economic difficulties and forcing them to leave their lands. Their properties ended up to Albanians that in turn move to their new lands, thus changing the population synthesis of every given area. It is an effective ethnic cleansing through economic strangulation. When the plan will be fulfilled, the Greeks will be alienated from the strong bond one has with his land. The Albanian deep state will thus have permanently get rid of the Greek presence in the area for the first time since the antiquity! This way one more destruction will have taken place, with the Greek state just observing afterwards and lamenting.

<http://www.dimokratianews.gr/content/57603/ta-tirana-arpazoyn-ti-gi-ton-ellinon-sti-heimarra>

“*HUFFINGTONPOST.GR*”, February 5th 2016

Burglaries aiming to intimidate the Greek Minority in Albania the mayor of Dropolis denounces

The increased number of burglaries in houses of the Greeks in Albania, cause concern among the members of the Greek Minority. The phenomenon tends to take the form of an “epidemic” in the minority villages at the **valley of Dropolis** in the **Province of Argyrokaastro**, where according to the **mayor of the Municipality of Dropolis Achilleas Detsikas**, in the last few days some unknown people broke into more than 20 houses belonging to Greeks that live and work in Greece.

What is even more worrying and peculiar, according to the mayor, is that the “intruders” are excessively violent destroying everything but without taking anything. What is indicative of the frequency of the “raids” is the fact that in the **village of Georgoutsates**, 6 houses were broken into in just one night. Mr. Detsikas reported to the Athens News Agency that the attacks have as an objective to terrorise the members of the Greek Minority.

[Based on info from Athens News Agency - Macedonian Press Agency (ANA-MPA)]

http://www.huffingtonpost.gr/2016/02/05/koinonia-diethnes-alvania-diarrixeis_n_9166350.html#

“HIMARA.GR”, March 29th 2016

Albania: They give churches, monasteries and cultural monuments to civilians

The **Albanian Ministry of Culture** decided to give to civilians the cultural monuments of the country with the **No.5110 Decision of 13/10/2015 “For the renting and management of cultural monuments for the purpose of revivification”**, with the excuse that the necessary funding and the personnel will be managed by the ministry.

Questions are risen due to the fact that the decision has been taken on October 13th 2015 but it was published in the Government Gazette (and has legal effect) on March 17th 2016, just 5 days after the Clerical Convention of the Independent Church of Albania submitted a request to have their churches and holy relics that the Albanian state still manages. We remind that there was an scandalous catwalk of wedding dresses in two of the most important and older Orthodox churches in Berati and Elbasan, where models were photographed in a provocative manner in front of the church’s chancel and on the Despotic Throne. These two churches are managed by the Albanian state as cultural monuments.

In the Ministry’s decision there is no specific mentioning of churches and monasteries, but it does not exempt civilians from acquiring them since it talks generally and vaguely about cultural monuments. If we look into the list of them we see that at least 125 churches and 36 monasteries, a great number of which is under the ministry’s management as museums and exhibitions of Byzantine art and frescoes.

The contracts for renting cultural monuments to civilians will last from one to twenty years depending on the size of the monument, with an option for an extension of the contract.

According to the legal base on which this decision is being taken, the state properties that are given to civilians for exploitation, can not be returned to the owner before the end of the contract.

As a result of all that we have mentioned, the Independent Orthodox church of Albania won't be able to take back the ownership of these cultural monuments before the end of the contract and the **National Committee for Property Return** has the right to reject the request for the return of the property with the excuse that it is not free.

The decision: http://www.qbz.gov.al/botime/fletore_zyrtare/2015/12/257.pdf

<http://www.himara.gr/epikairotita/5174-alvania-paraxoroun-ekklisies-monastiria-kai-politistika-mnimeia-stous-idiotes>

“HIMARA.GR”, May 12th 2016

The ownership genocide at Himara is funded by the EU!

During the Greek Orthodox Easter, the **Human Rights Union Party (KEAA)** that represents the **Greek national minority in Albania**, accused the Albanian government of committing “**ownership genocide**” at the **Himara villages of Vouno and Drimades**, with the occasion of the demolition of houses and businesses as well as the removal of ownership titles that belonged to Greek families.

The forces of the **Urban Planning Police (IKTM)** and of the **Albanian Army**, have demolished so far 25 buildings and structures at the villages of Drimades and Vouno, stating that this is a part of a development plan of the area of Himara materialized by the Albanian government. The demolition operations in those villages continue to this day and they are expected to be extended to the **Old Town of Himara** with the target being the demolition of buildings and businesses that have been built in those villages after 1991.

The **Community of Himara (Komuniteti Himariot)** based in Tirana, denounces that this plan is named: “*Development of the Albanian Alps and seaside areas of the Ionian Sea*” and it is funded by the **EU** through the **Development Bank (CEB)** of the **European Council** that manages money from the European Union. The funding available for this plan by the EU and it is 28.700.000 Euro while the Albanian participation is limited only to the payment of the VAT that is roughly 6.000.000 Euro.

According to articles in the official website of the **Albanian Development Fund (FSHZH)** that manages and supervises the funding, the plan is about studies and relevant works for the purpose of developing the area of Himara. But as the Community denounces, and based on the demolition of Greek families' buildings, the whole plan is used for the “ownership genocide” of the indigenous Greek population of the wider area of Himara.

This scene brings back into memory the negative incidents of 2007, where houses and business of people living by the seaside at the areas of Giali and Himara were brought down in accordance with the development plan that was funded with 50.000.000 by the World Bank. The money was spent and the only part of the plan that actually materialized was the demolition of houses and stores, in the name of the implementation of the World Bank's development plan.

The Community of Himara has asked for explanations from the EU delegation in Albania and from the management office of the relevant fund at Tirana and is waiting for answers and their position regarding the objectives of the plan and the demolitions that take place in the name of the plan that is funded by the EU.

<http://www.himara.gr/epikairotita/topika-dromena/5333-i-idioktisiaki-genoktonia-stin-himara-xrimatodotite-apo-tin-ee>

“HIMARA.GR”, June 6th 2016

Berisha: “Rama is building a resort in Himara with public funds”

The **ex-Prime Minister of Albania Sali Berisha** revealed through his personal Facebook page that the **current Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama** along with his brother is building a tourist resort at the village of **Gilekates in Himara**.

According to **Berisha**, the **building permit No. 7 of March 7th 2014** to EUROCOL Shpk company for the construction of a huge tourist resort was issued by the **National Urban Planning Committee** with the signature of Rama himself, being a private investment of his family.

This company belongs to Rama's personal contractor, **Pantelis Tsarapoulis**, who has also built the Prime Minister's residence and now he has undertaken the task of building the tourist resort of Rama's family. As Berisha says, the contractor will be paid with a small percentage of the resort for the execution of the construction plans. Rama will use public funds and state companies for the construction of the resort.

Berisha's revelations:

https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=605862996241278&id=121577844669798

<http://www.himara.gr/epikairotita/topika-dromena/5406-mperisa-o-rama-xtizei-touristiko-theretro-stin-himara-me-kratika-kondylia>

“KANALIENA.GR”, July 1st 2016

Albanians stormed Himara City Council

Turmoil erupted in the meeting of the **City Council Himara in Northern Epirus on June 30** caused unknown Albanians.

Their purpose was to terrorize Greeks indigenous residents who oppose the machinations of the Albanian state for taking away their property.

Specifically on the agenda of the City Council included two issues of major concern in the last year for the residents of the city, the redevelopment plan of the center of Himara (Spilea) and the management of beaches during the summer season.

Residents and shopkeepers of the coastal road in Spilea, attended the meeting expressing their disagreement, not only because it affected their property but it also alters the character of the center of Himara, as the ultimate goal is the seizure of their property by non-Greeks.

According to a press release of the **Democratic Union of National Greek Minority "Omonia" (Concord)**, the reactions of citizens were intense also for the way in which the Public Authority manages the beaches as they are not rented - as in previous years - on citizens who make a living from tourism during the summer months, but to Albanian investors.

During the procedure, just when the members of the City Council seemed to be getting convinced by the arguments of the citizens to vote against the proposals of the **Mayor of Himara Jorgo Goro**, five to six people, with strong physique, unknown in the region, attacked the citizens and members of the City Council turning the room into a boxing ring.

The Democratic Union of National Greek Minority "Omonia", immediately denounced the repeated provocative exercise of physical and psychological violence to the inhabitants of Himara, featuring as instigators tensions the **government of Edi Rama** and the appointed (according to Omonia) Mayor Jorgo Goro.

"Omonia" appealed the Councilors of all municipal associations, for *"an alliance for the defense of Himara interests and to resist the corrupt practices of local and central government"*. Also appealed to all the diplomatic missions in the country to turn their attention to Himara and in general to the **National Greek Minority in Albania** who is faced with constant challenges state and parastatal centers.

The reactions from Greece

The **Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs** immediately reacted to the events. In an official statement expressed its deep concern, condemning the unacceptable incidents of violence that took place at the last meeting of the City Council Himara. The Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs called on the Albanian government *"to respect international and European obligations and the requirements imposed by a modern state of law, respecting its commitments on the Greek national minority and ensuring the protection of all of its members' rights, including certainly the right to property"*. *"The creation of faits accomplis through illegal tampering property rights and the abuse of property of Greek national minority, are inconsistent with the requirements of a modern European state of law"*, noted the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The incidents in the Himara City Council were condemned by the **Party "New Democracy"**. In a joint statement by the Coordinator of Defense and Foreign Affairs of the party, **Deputy of Athens Dora Bakoyannis** and Head of the Foreign Affairs of the party, **Deputy of Rethymno, Ioannis Kefalogiannis**, urged the Albanian government to *"take all necessary measures to deal effectively with these challenges by the parastatal and other centers against citizens of the territory"*.

At the same time they stressed that *"it must be clearly understood that the European course of the country is also determined by its successful response to international and European obligations and passes through the protection of human rights of each and everyone of its citizens"*.

The answer of the Albanian government

On the other side, the **Albanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs** expressed *"regret that neighboring Greece uses reprehensible acts of some people in Himara, wanting to include them in respect of matters of Greek Minority Rights in Albania"*.

As it claims, *"the case was dealt with by the relevant Albanian authorities and in this context, the reaction of the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs constitutes a repeated interference in the internal affairs of Albania which contradicts the commitment of Greece to good neighborly relations"*.

The Albanian side even went a step further by describing *"unacceptable that, a priori, and constantly, paternalistic claims are being induced and legitimized for Himara"* by Greece.

As the Albanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs provocatively argues *"both history and present clearly testify that there is no basis to advertise Himara as a region of Greek minority"*.

Indeed the Albanian government notes that *"the continuous efforts to use the personal resentments as collective are aimed at distorting the reality of the excellent coexistence between the Albanian people and the Greek minority, which"* always according to the Albanian government *"they enjoy full rights under the laws of the country, as well as international norms and conventions"*.

Theodor Asvestopoulos

<http://kanaliena.gr/επεισόδια-από-αλβανούς-στο-δημοτικό-σ/>

"Eleftheros Logos Argyrokastrou", July 12th 2016

The president of "Omonia" on the population census and property grabbing in Northern Epirus

Excerpt from the speech of the **President of Democratic Union of Greek National Minority "Omonoia" Mr. Leonidas Pappas** at the conference of the **Human Rights Union Party** (July 2, 2016):

"...All minority organizations not only denounced the 2011 census population in Albania, but "Omonoia" and other representatives appealed for abstention, in response to the criminalization of freedom of statement and unacceptable last minute changes. The numbers of this census shows minorities in numbers that reach 10% of the actual numbers.

And while the Berisha government, who carried out this census, did not dare to exploit these numbers perhaps calculating the condemning reports of the international community, the current government is based on these numbers for the

allocation of state funds to municipalities, resulting in municipalities where the Greek minority resides, government funds are not sufficient even for their operating costs.

The National Greek minority and minorities in general in Albania are not only confronted with the official corruption that plagues the entire country, but are also confronted with a diffused nationalism that does not allow you to disagree.

*In the last 15 years we are faced with an invasion that wants to strip our property. Courts, the **National Committee for Property Return** and other state bodies, are willing collaborators of counterfeiters who appearing as former owners and benefiting vast areas.*

In the last year we gathered all these cases and I will mention some examples:

*1) The hill of the Agioi Saranta monastery, a monument that gave its name to the city Aghioi Saranta (Saints Forty) which is there for over 1500 years, is owned by a family who came to the city 70 years ago. This can be confirmed by the assistant of the Prime Minister and my colleague **Artan Shkreli** who fell victim to physical violence when he wanted to visit the monastery without their permission.*

*2) The **National Committee for Property Return** by **Decision 57 / 27.2.1998** grants in the **region of Pogoni**, a region with a purely Greek population, rangeland area of 925 hectares to **Mr. Galip Agarai** and **Mr. Shefqet Agaraj**. These are two people who have no connection with the area and no resident knows them.*

*3) The mountain of the **Greek minority village Costari**, where there is one of the most important religious monuments in the wider region of **Delvino**, the **monastery of Virgin Mary**, is also owned by someone who has nothing to do with this particular region. This is a blatant forgery and in the litigation that the **Province of Mesopotamos** started -and continues now by the **Municipality Finiki**- in the last four years there have been 57 court hearings and there is still no decision.*

*4) In Finiki Municipality with a population of about 40,000, of whom 97% are Greeks, the **National Committee for Property Return** recognized residents of the municipality as former owners of 2,520 acres of grassland and gave 20,560 acres in people who have no connection with the area. These data are from the official site of the Committy.”*

http://ellogosar.blogspot.gr/2016/07/blog-post_12.html

“National Association ‘Northern Epirus 1914’”, July 14th 2016

Europeans are buying houses in Northern Epirus from an Albanian real estate company – Anyone listening in Athens? Are the organizations that represent the minority mobilizing?

We republish **Deutsche Welle**’s article to keep you fully informed:

Foreigners buy houses in Albania

Are you in a mood for adventure or a smart investment? More and more foreigners are buying seaside houses in Albania and the price is not the only thing that matters in their decision. However, there are some dangers too.

Albania still remains in reality a widely unknown country for most Europeans. Lately, however, more and more foreigners are showing interest in buying a plot in Albania.

Swen Oglund from Norway bought last year a house by the sea at **Agioi Saranta**. *“I only knew that there is mafia in Albania and I had heard very bad stories. My first impression was that the country has a fantastic climate, few tourists and good food. For us from Norway it’s not hard to get to Albania. We used to have a cottage in Brasil”* he says.

Apart from Norwegians there is interest in buying property in Albania from Swedish, Danish, French and Polish. Since last year there is a growing interest from Ukrainians too. **Ilir Konomi**, manager of the real estate company ‘Albanian Property Group’ speaks of 400 foreign buyers.

During the last days, after the Brexit, there has been an increase of 15%, he adds. Every year the tourist flow towards Albania is increasing. During the summer of 2015 over 620.000 tourists visited the country of the just 3.000.000 people population.

Low prices, but be carefull...

Albania becomes an increasingly known country through the internet and special tourist web pages. *“The good prices attract an increased number of people. A house for the summer can cost between 30.000 to 60.000 euros. With the low interest rates that Europe has many think that it is a good investment”* according to Ilir Konomi.

The low prices convinced **Hans Diter Blazer from Munich** to buy a house at Agioi Saranta. The area has a lot of demand lately, mainly because the airport of Corfu is convenient for the tourists.

For Ilir Konomi the lack of a **National Cadastre** is the biggest problem for the attraction of tourists that would be interested to invest. Many Albanians hope that there will be reforms to the law system, but until then many potential buyers will be lost. For Swen Oglund from Norway, the country where he bought a house *“is a developed country but under development in many sectors”*.

Transl.: Lidita Arapi/Maria Rigoutsou

“National Association ‘Northern Epirus 1914’” position:

The German network **Deutsche Welle** informs us of Europeans (one Norwegian and one German) who bought houses at a low price in Albania and more specifically in Agioi Saranta.

In this way the manager of the real estate company ‘Albanian Property Group’ (a company of Albanian interests) Ilir Konomi, is advertising without any shame –

warning however for the dangers– the sale of land that belongs to the Greeks of Northern Epirus.

Agioi Saranta, the town itself as well as the wider area, was inhabited up until 1991 to its greatest percentage by a Greek population. Since then the well known demographic distortion begun.

In late 2015 the **Prime Minister Edi Rama** himself argued openly with his predecessor **Sali Berisha** about who moved the most settlers in order to achieve the demographic distortion. In parallel with the demographic distortion, naturally, came the seizure of the Greek properties.

The report mentions the purchase of houses by foreigners in Agioi Saranta, without clarifying if these properties are inside or outside of the actual town. Most likely they are properties by the coast line between **Agioi Saranta** and **Examilia**, which is developing constantly since 2000. A big part of this land zone (also known as Berdenesi) belonged to the **Greek Minority Province of Aliko**.

Under the new administrative division, however, as voted in July 2014, regardless of the fact that the total of the Aliko Province joined with the new **Greek Minority Municipality of Finiki**, the **Community of Tsouka** was attached to the Municipality of Agioi Saranta, whose national composition was distorted almost completely during the last 25 years.

In this way the new Minority Municipality of Finiki but also the part of the Greek Minority that is recognized by the Albanian state (in contrast with Himara that the government refuses to recognize as a Greek Minority area) does not have access to the Ionian Sea!

Consequently, for anything that is legislated and decided for the seaside zone from **Logaras of Himara** all the way to **Examilia**, the local administration of the National Greek Minority has no saying whatsoever.

Of course, we must underline that the Greeks that were elected in the Minority Provinces are not blameless for the condition that has been shaped regarding the property problem all these years...

Meanwhile, the Deutsche Welle article mentions the lack of a National Cadastre in Albania, a factor that the Albanians wishers can use at will.

The acquisition of properties that belong to the Greeks of Northern Epirus by foreigners, a peculiar “sell out (and laundering) of land” takes place through the real estate companies!

Is Athens listening???

Are the organizations that represent the minority mobilizing???

National Association ‘Northern Epirus 1914’

http://esvh1914.blogspot.gr/2016/07/blog-post_14.html

“HIMARA.GR”, August 30th 2016

Resolution protest of the residents of Himara

Spilia - Himara, August 15, 2016

Signed by the following political and social institutions of Himara:

- Human Rights Union Party
- Democratic Union of Greek National Minority “Omonia”
- Community of Himara
- Himariots’ Union of Greece
- Himariots’ Community of USA
- Association for the Property Rights of Community of Himara “Bregdeti”

This resolution is signed by Himariots’, with free will, and addressed to:

- Albanian Government and Prime Minister Edi Rama
- The Diplomatic Representatives in Albania of:
 - a) United States of America
 - b) European Union / Council of Europe
 - c) Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

RESOLUTION

The situation in the Himara area, in terms of property rights has deteriorated in the last 25 years because of actions and abuses of the Albanian Government, which encourages people with political and economic power and gang members of organized crime and the mafia to encroach and systematically steal the properties of Himariots.

The Parliament, the Government, the Judiciary, the Public Administration and the media in Albania are being used to destroy Himara and its history and enforce assimilation policies adopted by the new legal framework and the Albanian Government decisions and result in the violation of basic human rights and freedoms and the Constitution of Albania.

We the residents of Himara:

1. We demand the immediate abolition of all development plans, expropriation and communal land donations to any domestic or foreign pseudo-investment schemes the Albanian government plans and implements in our region, until a proper, fair and guaranteed registration system of private and community property is completed for the entire region of Himara.
2. We demand the abolition of the devastating **7501 Law "On Agricultural Land"**, which resulted in the seizure of farmlands from the real owners, the destruction of thousands of olive trees and building offensive buildings based on false deeds. All this is aided by the absence of procedures for the complete recording of property, the prohibition of property registration that was legally returned to their rightful owners as well as the prohibition of the seized property restitution process.

3. We appeal to international, European and American partners to put pressure on Albanian legislative and administrative institutions to cancel all the unconstitutional laws and government decisions that violate basic human principle entitlements starting from the new administrative reform, the new law on compensation for expropriated property and the new law "On Tourism".

4. We demand the final return of all communal lands and those belonging to the **Greek Orthodox Christian Church of Himara**, which the Government has to respect. Also the return of property which was confiscated by the Armed Forces and property belonging to the municipality.

5. We demand the immediate cessation of the resorts construction work and so-called "tourist villages" until the Albanian government proves with transparency to the Himariots the legitimacy of property titles on the basis of which it gave the relevant construction permits.

6. We appeal to your representatives in Albania to exert pressure to implement the new "decriminalization process" and "judicial reform" as quickly as possible and to include the area of Himara where huge cases of fraud and theft of property have taken place by members of the Albanian mafia and organized crime associated with politicians, oligarchs and people close to the administrative and judicial institutions, under the umbrella of the so-called "draft for the development of tourism".

With faith in God and respect for the Albanian Constitution, the Himariots express with this RESOLUTION our free will and our expectations, hoping for your support and your understanding in this difficult effort to protect our basic human rights and to achieve the enforcement of law and justice in the Himara region and throughout Albania.

Sincerely,
Signed by all the free indigenous Himariots.

<http://www.himara.gr/epikairotita/5567-psifizma-diamartirias-ton-ximarioton>

Newspaper "ETHNOS", Sept. 5th 2016

The expensive plots at the mercy of Tirana

The looting of the Greek minority's properties with the pretext of an Albanian...Riviera

They trample, demolish and give away, with the development of their own interests as their...guide, circumventing every sense of common law at the expense of the Greek national minority.

In an orgy of corruption and forgery, the Albanian authorities confiscate the property of the Greeks at the seaside town of **Himara**, in order to hand them into the hands of "friendly" business people. It is not a new phenomenon. It exists as a trend for years, within the wider complex of the Albanian pathogenicity. In the last months however,

the seizures are climaxing as the Rama government pushes forward plans for the creation of a “new” (obviously Greek-free) Himara in the under development tourist area of the Albanian Riviera.

Moreover, if we connect this with other “attacks” against the Greek minority (in the education sector, the funding of the minority municipalities etc.), the property problem forms a context of increasing hostile pressure on the minority rights in Albania. As **Leonidas Pappas, president of the Greek minority organization “Omonia”** states, *“in the area of the Greek Minority there are nationalist motives that desire to despoil us of our properties”* and he denounces the *“generalized phenomena of corruption and forgery”*.

Lately the Albanian authorities, with a remarkable...zeal, annul the ownership titles of Greeks (a classic example being the village of **Drimades** where a few months ago 123 titles of Greek families were annulled). They demolish buildings (including churches or 300 years old houses) as illegal constructions (while at the same time they legalize illegal buildings all over Albania). They flatten buildings with the excuse that they do not comply with the “traditional-historic character” of settlements and generally they refuse to give to the members of the minority their ancestral properties in areas that were inhabited by Greeks for centuries in the province of **Agioi Saranta (Sarande)**.

It must be reminded that even during the Ottoman occupation, the area of Himara had a special status of autonomy with officially recognized property rights (private, community and ecclesiastical). The Albanian state rushes to confiscate even many of the croplands that were given back to Greeks with the **Law 7501 of 1991**.

Complaints

With a resolution protest (in the 15th August 2016) the Himara minority organizations denounce *“huge cases of fraud and property theft from members of the Albanian mafia and organized crime that have connections with politicians, oligarchs and people close to administrative and judicial institutions, under the umbrella of the so called ‘plans for the tourist development’”*.

There are complains for people that appear out of nowhere like...parachutists from other parts of the Albania and state that their great grand parents owned lands in Himara which they claim and eventually...take back with the blessings of the Albanian state for nickel-and-dime (1 Euro). By “coincidence” of course, these lands happen to be “filets” by the sea, and the ones that claim them “friends” of the government.

“Descendants of ‘great landowners’ from other parts of the country that supposedly own vast areas of land in areas where the Greek minority resides, appear before the Albanian courts and other state authorities in order to take back their ‘heritage’”, as it is denounced in a special report about the property problems by “Omonia” on May 2016.

“The problem is complex. We are in a transitional stage in the last 25 years. While other ex-communist countries have solved their property issues in 4-5 years, here the

problem remains. The problems especially towards the Greeks exist for the last 15 years. Even the few Greeks that have ownership titles, they had a really difficult time taking them. We are not against development plans. However, the property problem must be resolved first, the properties must be given back to their rightful owners, and then the development plans can begin with clarity and transparency”, argues Mr. Pappas.

Mayors-minions

What is the most disturbing, though, is that the seizure of the Greek properties takes place...under the coverage of the local authorities. *“Especially in Himara, the mayor, although of Greek origin, functions as a proxy for the government”*, the 42 year old Greek points out referring to the mayor **George Goros** and adds:

“In the 25 years of the political changeover in Albania, unfortunately we never had free and democratic elections. Especially during the last years politics and politicians are held hostages of the underworld and black money. This phenomenon worries the international community so much as to take some reformative initiatives but without any real results”.

Regarding now the position of the **prime minister himself Edi Rama**, the president of “Omonia” argues that *“there is no willingness to communicate on behalf of the Albanian government. Contrariwise, they demonstrate an unprecedented authoritarianism”*.

Spyros Benos:

“They demolished our store and we haven’t received a single Euro”

*“Now everyone is leaving”, states Spyros Benos to “Ethnos Sunday Edition”, referring to the members of the Greek minority who are forced to leave **Northern Epirus (Southern Albania)** “hunted” by these conditions. Mr. Benos talks based on his own experience, as his family indeed went abroad in the last months, since the authorities demolished the café-restaurant that they owned in Himara. “In 1995 we bought a 800 sq.m. store in the Himara towncenter. It was a building that the state had built during the communist era, which means that no one can claim that it was an illegal construction. We bought it legally, with a contract, from its rightful owner, paying a sum of 40.000.000 drachmas back then. It was the most legal store in Himara”, Mr. Benos recalls as he talks to the “Ethnos Sunday Edition”. “About a year ago they informed us that they want to demolish the building to reconstruct the square”, he continues. “We went to the mayor, we asked him, and he was telling us ‘don’t worry’. Until one day some people from the municipality showed up with no papers, to measure the property and set a compensation. They finally told us that for a building of 800 sq.m. right on the seaside, we would get a compensation of 160.000 euros. The store was finally demolished on January 2016. Moreover, when they came for the demolition, on their papers they had written some different name. Until now we haven’t received not even one euro”, he concludes.*

The case of the Benos family is however just one among many. The general feeling now in Northern Epirus has the characteristics of persecution of the Greeks. *“We would like more support so that Hellenism will survive here, because unfortunately in*

some areas all that remain are old people” says Mr. Pappas. “For the foreign affairs of the Albanian state, Greece is No 1 priority. For Greece, however, it isn’t so, maybe justifiably to some degree”. As for the future, the president of “Omonia” is “neither optimistic, nor pessimistic”. “We have learned to live through the difficulties”, he declares “we continue to fight with every democratic means”.

By George Skafidas
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http://www.ethnos.gr/koinonia/arthro/pliatsiko_stis_periousies_ton_ellinon_me_proxima_tin_albaniki_ribiera-64481953/