

~~Himara Dhermi~~

Reply to the ~~.....~~ "*Northern Epirus 1914*" (*N.E. 1914*)

Thank you Mr. Moderator,

I would like to use the right of the reply to the ~~.....~~ *N.E. 1914* because in their presentation in front of this respective audience they have presented disinformation and deformation of the reality in Albania, simply, because, they do not operate in Albania and are not aware of the developments in this respect. The reality of the *Greek minority* in Albania is quite different.

The Albanian Government considers that connections made by Greek authorities between the urban requalification in Himara municipality project and pretended violation of minorities rights in Albania are unjustified and ill-founded.

The rule of law is in the interest of all Albanian citizens, without distinction exemption or discrimination. They have the right to address the Albanian courts as the competent bodies for the interpretation of the law in the Republic of Albania, and, if not satisfied, they may send their case to the European Court of Human Rights.

Any Albanian citizen and specifically each owner of the constructions to be affected in Himara and elsewhere throughout the country's territory has full guarantee and the constitutional right under Article 42 of the Albanian Constitution and Article 6 of the ECHR to a fair hearing in the Courts with regard to every action of the State administrative bodies or institutions in the Republic of Albania.

Urban requalification planning is a prerequisite for the economic development of Himara city and the surrounding area, as well as a preventative factor for migration. Consequently, it shouldn't be seen as a vector of tension risking to affect the positive climate of the Albanian-Greek relationship. Nor should it become an instrument to impose or dictate through local residents outside meddling into Albania's internal affairs and policies. Latest conflicting rhetoric and blocking of the procedure session of the Municipal Council provide ground for concern and ought to be prevented at any cost. Periodical inciting Statements by the Greek Foreign Ministry, besides being uniformed and not reflecting the reality aren't also helping to diffuse tensions. It is absurd and counterproductive that problems of a developmental and economic character in this part of the country end-up being politicized and artificially aggravated.

The Albanian Government is confident that as a European Union member, Greece should be politically interested in promoting economic and social development conditions in Albania as a whole, Himara included, that would favor Albanian citizens find their prosperity and future in their own country rather than their emigrating in Greece or European countries. Furthermore, it should support the

respect for the rule of law in Albania in an unbiased way and without implying double standards approaches.

The Rehabilitation and Development Planning Projects initiated by the Albanian Government clearly serve Himara's economic and social progress and encourage Himara citizens to return and conduct their economic life and activities in Albania. Without neglecting the necessity to resolve any objective problems that have emerged in the territorial and urban development reform, the Albanian government is fully resolved to establish a unique and nondiscriminatory reform throughout the whole territory of the country. In this context the Albanian competent institutions stand ready to discuss with Himara citizens on specific problems or disputes over the procedures applied, as well on implementing best compensation plans and options.

Himara citizens who claimed irregularities in the process of the approval of the project by the Municipal Council have not pretended that their property rights will be infringed because of their minority belonging. They are claiming as Albanian citizens like all other Albanian citizens affected by the territorial and urban planning reform under development in the whole Albanian territory.

As regards, minorities' rights protection, the Albanian government is permanently fully determined to guarantee and promote their constitutional rights throughout the country without any discrimination. In addition, minorities enjoy effectively all rights enshrined in the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities of the Council of Europe, as well as the in other international conventions on human rights protection or domestic legislation in force. On the other side, Albanian citizens are all equally subject to law regardless of their ethnic, racial, gender or diverse belonging.

The Albanian Government strongly believes that only solutions based on the rule of law and respect of the law for all can guarantee the European perspective of the country, as highlighted in the conclusions of the EU Council of General Affairs of December 2016.

But, seemingly, the representatives of the *N. E. 1814* are not aware of these developments.

Thank You.