

Warsaw, 29/09/2009

MUSLIM MINORITY PRACTICING RELIGION IN GREEK THRACE

Good morning Ladies and Gentlemen, dear participants of today's session

First of all we would like to thank the organising committee of the OSCE conference for giving us the chance to represent here, today, the 3 Mufti offices of Greek Thrace. (The Mufti Office of Komotini for the Rodopi Prefecture, that of Xanthi and of Didymoteixo)

My name is Dr Jihad HALIL and those are my fellow colleagues Dr Yasar SERIF DAMADOGLU and Mr HASAN TZAMPAZ MOLA MEHMET.

Since the early 20s the flourish of the moderate Islam in Greek Thrace is largely due to the mufti system. The Muftis are religious leaders who offer religious guidance to the Muslim congregation of the region, and in their capacity to apply Islamic Law on family and inheritance matters, they are also high ranking judicial functionaries of the state.

More specifically Mufti offices are institutional organisations which

- maintain close cooperation with foundation administrations for the management of the Muslim minority property
- undertake the maintenance of mosques
- choose and supervise the Muslim clerics
- organise the practice of the Islamic law
- represent Greek Islam at international conferences and other religious activities all over the world.

Even when there are disagreements among the members of the Muslim minority, the Mufti leaders, act effectively as mediators and facilitate the communication between the relevant authorities, according to the Islamic principles

Currently there are in Greek Thrace, some 106.000 Muslim Greek citizens, members of the larger European family who practice their faith and preserve their valuable Islamic traditions.

Every day men and women are wearing their special religious outfits and participate in the social life of the local community, in schools, in markets, in all of the public places. For example, recently, during the holy month of Ramazan, imams invited believers, for worshipping 5 times a day in perfect harmony with the sound of the church bells, all over the neighbourhoods in Thrace.

Furthermore the 300 mosques and 460 Muslim clerics are a testimony to the intensely religious character of this community.

Also high quality religious education is provided in two high-grade religious seminaries (madrasah) bringing together reading of the Koran and Islamic knowledge with modern education curriculum.

On the stands in the entrance, you will find copies of a new book, publicied by our Mufti offices, about the "Muslim Monuments in Thrace", through which we aim to bring to you images from the situation we described so shortly today.

Today, in Thrace, despite the efforts of certain circles to mix religion and politics, the great majority of both Muslim and Christian citizens dismiss religious or racial

intolerance and are staunch adherents of moderation and coexistence.