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Египќани
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Working Session 5: Tolerance and non-discrimination I.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentleman,

The members of Balkan Egyptians' ethnic community are suffering discrimination in many fields in the states of the Western Balkans, for which there are numerous reports by a number of monitoring committees and commissions from the international organizations.

The worst situation is in Albania, where Balkan Egyptians consists 10% of the total population, but the authorities are refusing to recognise them as separate national minority, to protect their human and minority rights, and to integrate them in the society. Moreover, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance, by the Council of Europe, in its Third Report on Albania, published on June 14th 2005. *"...notes that de facto Egyptians seem to be perceived as a distinct minority in Albanian society, by the public, the media as well as some Albanian officials, who perceive Egyptians as distinct and commonly refer to them with specific group designation. In this connection, ECRI is concerned that the specific terms by which Egyptians are designated in Albanian society often contain pejorative connotation, and may to refer simply to their dark skin colour.*

ECRI is deeply concerned that this situation has resulted in the discrimination of the Egyptians as compared to other minorities in Albania with respect to their ability to bring their specific problems and concerns to the attention of the authorities.

A deep concern about the Egyptians' issue in Albania, expresses and AC of FCPNM, by the Council of Europe in its Second Opinion adopted on 29 May 2008, where a recommendation is given for the Albanian authorities to start an intensive dialogue with the Egyptians to discuss the necessary measures with a view to preserving their specific identity. In addition, their policy towards the Egyptians should be based on the principles of the Framework Convention.

Albanian authorities based on their prejudices and stereotypes for building a homogeneous nation-state, without any objective argument and using different methods to confuse the international community, deny the existence of Balkan Egyptians' minority in Albania. If we make an analysis of the official comments and opinions of Albanian authorities we may see a very unstable position without any objective basis. For example, as an answer to the ECRI's report from 14 June 2005, they said that Egyptians in Albania

“...do not have their own language and can speak only the Albanian language. They have been integrated completely in the Albanian population and their only difference from the other part of Albanian people is the colour of their skin...”, rather ...”The allegation of a group of people that is so called “Egyptians” and requires to be considered as minority group exists only in Albania”, even that “an Embassy of the Arab Republic of Egypt in Tirana has declared that it does not acknowledge any Egyptian minority in Albania and this community which lives in Albania has no ethnic relation to the Egyptian people...”.

However, on comments and opinions to the report of AC of FCPNM from 29 May 2008, and probably as a result of the fact that Egyptian community is mentioned in Kosovo Constitution, they retried the position of non-existence of Egyptians in other states of the region, but they are still keeping the position of *“no special language (they speak only Albanian language), it has no special culture (their culture is the same with that of the areas where they live), they have no special religion (their religion is the same with that of Albanian population in the areas where they live). The only distinction from the Albanian inhabitants is their colour.* For this official position, scholars and scientists declare that Albanian people belong to one race (white or Caucasian race), and not to two or more races. Regarding the special culture of Egyptians in Albania a large number of books by prominent Albanian scholars are written, even by the Albanian Academy of Science. Almost in every official comment or opinion by the Albanian Government, the so-called position of never-mentioned representatives of Egyptian Embassy in Tirana is mentioned, that *“this community has no connection to Egyptians and they do not recognize an Egyptian community in Albania”.* As a result of our communications with Embassy of AR of Egypt in Tirana, we are convinced that such position or such document was never issued.

Moreover, in another Balkan state- Republic of Macedonia, the members of Balkan Egyptians minority are suffering an indirect discrimination. Since the Constitution in 1991, R. of Macedonia made a stratification and classification of national minorities with their “mentioning” and “not mentioning” in the Preamble of the Constitution of Republic of Macedonia. Thus was never told in public, but in practice only “nationalities” which were mentioned in the Preamble of Constitution from 1991 enjoy all minorities’ rights. Egyptians were not mentioned and for that reason they were **totally marginalized and ignored from the State System.** With the Constitution changes from 2001, and as a consequence of the so-called “Ohrid Framework Agreement” the Balkan Egyptians in Republic of Macedonia became a group of a third rang. In Macedonia exist communities of first rang: with more than 20% (Macedonians and Albanians), communities of second rang- under 20% which are mentioned in the Constitution, and communities of third rang (others) that are not mentioned in the Preamble of the Constitution. Besides Egyptians, in this group of communities that are not mentioned in the Preamble of the Constitution fall the following: Croatians, Montenegrins, Slovenians, Polish, Russians, Bulgarians, Armenians and others. All of these minorities are denied recognition by the state and also protection of their identity and culture. In addition, in the First State Report, the position of R. of Macedonia was that only communities that are mentioned in the Preamble of the Constitution will enjoy the protection of FCPNM.

But on the other hand, after the so called “Ohrid Agreement”, under the terminology of “building the multicultural society in Macedonia”, processes in Macedonia are leading to building bicultural polarised society among Macedonians and ethnic Albanians, unfortunately under the supervision of the International Community, including OSCE. Multicultural society means integration and active

participation of all citizens, not only of people that belong to Macedonian and Albanian Communities in R. Macedonia.

AC of FCPNM on its opinions for FYR of Macedonia, recommended that the authorities should put Egyptians under the protection of FCPNM. Representatives of the Egyptian Community were invited by the official of MFA of R. of Macedonia, with the purpose to start negotiations for protection of the Egyptian Community in Macedonia. Unfortunately, until now only that meeting and no other was held, because MFA is only making a report and giving opinions regarding the FCPNM, and because there is no ministry, body or department in the Macedonian political system, with mandate to communicate and to negotiate with representatives of communities for implementation of the recommendations concerning the FCPNM. In July 2008 a law was adopted and State Agency for protection of communities which are less than 20% has been established, but until now, more than one year, this Agency has not been functioning properly.

Recommendations:

1. High Commissioner for Protection of National Minorities by OSCE according to his mandate as well as reports from AC of FCPNM, ECRI and other international instruments to take an arbitrary role on solving the Balkan Egyptian issue in Albania.
2. International Community, including OSCE and its instruments, has to respect the international document on supervising the development of Macedonian multicultural society, with focus on all citizens without any discrimination of ethnic belonging, because Macedonia is continuing to develop as a bicultural society under the terminology and mask of multiculturalism.
3. Authorities of FYR of Macedonia have to provide normal conditions for the State Agency for Protection of Communities to work and function efficiently, and to make sure that it respects the law that is proposed by the Government and adopted by the Parliament.