



Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association
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**OSCE
Human Dimension Implementation Meeting
28 September – 09 October 2009
Warsaw, Poland**

Working Session 12

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION IN WESTERN THRACE

Mr./Ms Moderator,

Thank you very much for the floor. My name is Pervin Chairoula, and I am representing the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace in Greece.

One of the basic issues that have been debated during the last fifteen years has been the use of the word “Turkish” in the names of associations of the minority. According to Greek authorities, the word “Turkish” expresses the identity of citizens of a specific State and not an ethnic identity. Greek officials base their claim on the Lausanne Treaty’s articles that are based on religious criterion.

The word “Turk” as definition of an individual can be used, but the word “Turkish” as a definition of a group/community is not yet accepted by the Greek state. The basic problem started when in 1988; the Turkish Associations of Western Thrace were ordered closed by the Greek Supreme Court because of the word “Turkish”. On April 25 and 26 1991, the Rodopi Court of First Instance ordered the closing of the Western Thrace Turkish Teachers’ Association and the Komotini Turkish Youth Association because of the word “Turkish” in their titles. The official explanation of the Supreme Court decision was that “The association creates the impression that it is a Turkish association. The word Turkish seems to refer not to those of other ethnic origin, religion or language, but specifically to the citizens of a foreign country. Therefore, the functions of the aforementioned associations became illegal and a threat to the public order.”

Concerning the issue of identity of the minority, the Greek government insistently continues not to recognize the individual’s right for self-identification, and recognizes the Minority only as Muslim. As a result, some individuals who define themselves as members of a minority find it difficult to express their identity freely.

Therefore, we, as the members of Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association call upon the international community to urge Greece to take necessary steps for the recognition of the freedom of expression and association for the members of the Turkish Minority in Western Thrace. Moreover, we call upon the Greek State to ratify, without delay and without reservations, the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities.

Pervin Chairoula

Member
Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association