



OSCE HUMAN DIMENSION
IMPLEMENTATION MEETING

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Working Session 6: Tolerance and Non-Discrimination I

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Combating Islamophobia in Greece

Muslim of different ethnic origins living in Greece have a variety of problems professing their religious beliefs. For those living outside Western Thrace, there is no single official mosque where they can pray. There is no Islamic cemetery as well. Many Muslims also face discrimination based on their ethnic, cultural and religious identities. They are frequently targeted and physically-verbally abused particularly by members of the ultra-nationalist groups. Golden Dawn is one of the most prominent political fronts that depicts anti-Islam and racist attitudes at different platforms, including the European and Greek Parliaments. Likely, another leader of a Greek political party, Vasilis Leventis, did not refrain from using Islamophobic and anti-Turkish discourse in public spheres. With the same token, even those Muslim converts of ethnic Greek origin do not feel themselves comfortable to show their religious affiliation in public areas due to the possibility of stigmatization and otherization. Also, some prominent figures of the Greek Church use a clear Islamophobic discourse while commenting issues of Muslim in Greece.

From time to time, Muslims of ethnic Turkish origin in Western Thrace also face Islamophobia in their everyday lives. Smashing of windows, defamation with graffiti, destruction of tombstones located inside Muslim cemeteries are some of the actions targeting the historical survival of Islam in this part of the country. Furthermore, necessary works have not been started yet at the Celebi Mehmet Sultan Mosque in Didymoticho that had almost collapsed after a devastating fire in March 2017. Even though it is one of the oldest historical monuments all over the Balkan Peninsula, there were some Greek journalists who overtly manifested their anti-Islamic sentiments by applauding the fire on this site of cultural heritage. Moreover, masjids owned and functioned by members of the Muslim Turkish minority living permanently outside of Western Thrace such as Thessaloniki have recently been closed and no right has been given yet to open such places of worship.

As the Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association, we urge Greece to

- Respect religious rights of Muslims across the country
- Discourage and prevent any physical and verbal Islamophobic attack including the ones coming from Greek politicians and clergy
- Introduce new legislative measures and a mechanism of monitoring to combat effectively with Islamophobia in Greece

Thank you for your attention.