

MOVEMENT FOR THE RENAISSANCE OF NORTHERN EPIRUS

OSCE HUMAN DIMENSION IMPLEMENTATION MEETING

10 September - 21 September 2018

Warsaw – Poland

Working session 8: Tolerance and non-discrimination I (continued), including rights of persons belonging to national minorities, and preventing aggressive nationalism, racism and chauvinism

Contact Person: Nikolaos Kolilas

northepirusmovement@gmail.com

Thank you Mr/Mrs Moderator,

Honorable representatives,

Since the Communist regime (1945-1990), the Albanian government has recognized as Greek National Minority with the corresponding rights, only 99 villages in the Municipalities of Dropolis and Fimiki. However, they do not fully respect them even there.

Areas with an indigenous Greek population such as Himara, Arta of Avlona, Moursi and many Greek villages in Koritsa and Premeti continue to be deprived of any right they should have as part of the Greek National Minority.

In October 2017 a so-called Law on Minorities was adopted, which, in terms of its practical application, depends on the "goodwill" of the Albanian government. Although this law provides free national self-determination, if someone who is not registered as Greek in the registry office wants to change that in his official record and declare his Greek nationality, the office says it's not authorized to make the change. Thus the member of the minority is sucked into a vicious circle in the labyrinth of the Albanian bureaucracy. **1.30'**

In the urban centers of Northern Epirus, such as Gjirokastró and Agioi Saranta, the population has been completely altered, which is also taking place in Himara. Even within the villages that are part of the so-called "Greek Minority Zone", which are supposed to be protected by Albanian and international laws, day by day, settlers come continuously.

A typical example of this in the village Politsani of the Pogoni area, where a family of Muslims was officially registered in the registry office in violation of Article 16 of the Council of Europe Framework Convention on National Minorities. **0.50'**

Various tricks such as fake documents from the time of the Ottoman Empire or the Monarchy of Ahmet Zogkou they steal the properties of the Greeks in Northern Epirus, as is the case with the villages of the Finiki region whose residents are desperately trying to save their homes through the Albanian courts. courts with squatters who appear as descendants of ages. Similar problems are also observed in the Municipality of Dropolis, as in the village of Vrachogorlati.

Under the pretext of "tourism development", a population replacement is being underway the Municipality of Himara.

In Himara, the demolition of 19 buildings belonging to the Greeks has been launched under the pretext of creating a tourist park. The demolitions were postponed by a decision of the Court of Avlona, but this is only a temporary decision and the Greek properties are not permanently secured. **1.20'**

An extensive looting of land belonging to Greeks is in progress on the coastal front of Yali - Drimades - Dralos - Palassa, where already large tourist complexes of Albanian interests are being built.

In the spring of 2016 in the village of Drymades, the Albanian government also removed land ownership titles from 123 native families to make it easier for Albanian settlers to move in the village at the expense of the supposedly protected Greek minority.

Since 2009, residents of the village of Nivitsa have no access to the Kakomaia beach where tourist properties have been built, which are being protected on a 24h basis by private security guards. The beach has been turned into a forbidden zone for the locals, with the entrance reminding of a border station. Kakomaia beach, since way before the Albanian state was even created, belonged to owners from the neighboring village of Nivitsa. Also, a big part of the beach belongs to the Panayia Monastery of Kakomaia, located in the same bay. **1.30'**

During Communism, as it is well known, everything had been nationalized. On October 14, 1994, the Prefectural Council of Agioi Saranta, granted 20 hectares of arable land to the residents of Nivitsa under Law 7501. However, the Albanian government granted the beach to a private company, ignoring the legitimate beneficiaries who went to the Albanian Supreme Court where they finally won the case. By decision No 592 of 16 November 2013, the Municipality of Himara, on the basis of that decision, issued titles to the rightful owners, but the land registry refused to register them. For 27 years the members of the Greek minority have struggled to take back their land. A struggle that would require many more pages to give you a picture. A struggle with injured people, blood and repression by the government forces.

At the same time there are transgressions of the church property at the monastery of Aghioi Theodoroi in the Drymades and the monastery of Agioi Saranta.

The Greek Heritage in Northern Epirus is either destroyed or is being usurped by the Albanian government, as it is evident by the cases of the ancient finds at Vouthroto, Finiki, Dryinoupolis and Panormos Castle in Himara. **1.50'**

In the public schools of the Greek National Minority, each year the students, they are gradually being taught more lessons in Albanian and much fewer hours in Greek, until their native language reaches in the last grade to be taught as a foreign language, a total of one or two hours a week.

In public documents, both in state and local government, even in the municipalities that constitute the recognized Greek National Minority, the Greek language is virtually absent and the bullying to anyone who speaks Greek in public is an everyday phenomenon.

The murder of Aristotelis Goumas in Himara by Albanians near his home on August 12th 2010, simply because he insisted on speaking Greek in his own homeland, should never be forgotten.

In 2014, the Albanian government implemented the new administrative division with which arbitrary municipalities were created. Purely Greek provinces merged with areas where the Albanian and Muslim elements prevailed, with a characteristic example being the annexation of the province of Vranisti in the municipality of Himara.

A big blow is also the annexation of the Tsouka community to the Municipality of Agioi Saranta, while as part of the Alyko District it should have been incorporated into the minority municipality of Finiki. **1.55'**

Yet even the recognized minority Municipality of Finiki suffers flagrant violations of its limits. At the beginning of May 2018, the Municipality of Konispoli (Constance), in which the population is overwhelmingly Albanian Muslims, arbitrarily extended its limits right outside the minority village of Bagalates, stealing large areas of the Municipality of Finiki.

As a reaction, the representatives of the Municipality of Phoeniki removed the illegal sign that showed these new limits. However, the police, instead of taking action against the Municipality of Koniskolis, arrested the representative of Finiki!

The crime rate against the Greek minority is growing. In the Dropolis as well as other Greek populated areas, over the last four years there have been hundreds of burglaries every year in homes and churches, without the perpetrators being captured, thus increasing the insecurity of the Greeks of Northern Epirus.

The signs on the Kakavia - Argyrokastro highway that are written in Greek (a right that national minorities have) are constantly being vandalized as it also happens with Greek flags both in public places and houses, without the criminals being persecuted.

The ways by which the Greek minority is being bullied and provoked are unfortunately too many to be described in full in a few pages. **2.10'**