



Avrupa Batı Trakya Türk Federasyonu Föderation der West-Thrakien Türken in Europa Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe Ευρωπαϊκή Ομοσπονδία Τούρκων Δυτικής Θράκης Fédération des Turcs de Thrace Occidentale en Europe

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Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting

Upholding the Principles of Tolerance and Non-Discrimination, including
in the Promotion and Protection of Freedom of Religion or Belief

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Hofburg, Vienna

SESSION I: Root Causes and Consequences of Racism and Discrimination in Connection to Religion or Belief: Implementing the OSCE's Comprehensive Approach while Addressing the Particular Needs of Marginalized Groups

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Dear Moderator,

Distinguished representatives, delegates and NGO representatives,

Despite commitments of OSCE participating States and their efforts to eradicate racism and intolerance with manifestations of hate crime, racial and ethnic hatred, xenophobia, and discrimination against Muslims remain a daily reality across the OSCE region.

ODIHR has constantly shared its concern that bias-motivated violence and discriminatory discourse and practices have reached a worrying point across the region. We are fully aware that manifestations of racism and intolerance in the form of discrimination or hate crime against persons belonging to ethnic and/or national, religious minorities and other marginalized groups threaten the security of individuals, communities and societies and may give rise to wider scale conflict and violence that undermine international stability and security.

As Mr. Max van der Stoel, the first OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM), turned his attention, there are many disputes between minorities and central authorities in Europe which has the potential to escalate. Persons belonging to national/ethnic groups who constitute the numerical majority in one State but the numerical minority in another State are considered as part of bilateral relations between States and may be subject to manifestations of racism, hatred and hate speech on grounds of their race, ethnicity and religion.

The Turkish Muslim population in Greece and the Greek Orthodox population in Turkey were subject to population exchange in accordance with the agreement which Turkey and Greece signed in 1923. The Turkish community in Western Thrace and the Greek population in İstanbul, Gökçeada(Imbros) and Bozcaada(Tenedos) were exempted from population exchange and become minorities in the territories they live in for centuries.

The 1923 Treaty of Lausanne determined the treatment of the minorities on the basis of reciprocity. The attitudes of the two countries towards their relevant minorities have been shaped according to the level of relations between them. When Turkey and Greece's relations have been moderate; minorities have benefited but when their relations soured, they suffered.

The religious autonomy of the Turkish community granted by the 1913 Athens Treaty and ensured by the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne has been undermined and diminished through several governmental practices and laws without prior consultation with representatives of the Turkish community. Greece doesn't recognize the right of the Turkish community in Western Thrace to elect its own religious leaders. Today in Western Thrace there is a dual structure where there are muftis appointed by the state and muftis elected by Western Thrace Turkish community. In the past elected muftis were prosecuted and sentenced to prison with charges of usurping the Office of Mufti and illegal use of religious symbols.

The Turkish community in Western Thrace are considered as representatives of Turkey, whose very existence is a tool for irredentist foreign policies. Historically, the Turks of Western Thrace were seen as reminiscent of the era of Ottoman yoke. Such views have produced an understanding of the Turkish community as "Trojan horses" which are seen as hindrances to national unity and integrity as well as public order. Turkish MPs in the Greek parliament have been even accused of "Turkish spy" in many occasions.

The hatred against representatives and institutions of the Muslim Turkish community in Western Thrace has increased in the last few years. An organization which calls itself as "The Guardians of Thrace" targets the Turkish community in the region.

Furthermore, historical mosques outside the region of Western Thrace are not allowed to use for Friday prayers or religious holidays. Applications made by Turkish associations for permission for the use of a historical mosque for a religious prayer or a religious event which will last only two hours were declined on grounds that the mosques were used for exhibitions and cultural events.

Furthermore, the Turkish community is highly concerned about attempts of intimidation and deterrence by the governmental authorities in the region in recent years. Juridical investigations and lawsuits against religious leaders have revealed there is an environment of political intimidation and pressure against the community.

The elected Mufti of Komotini, İbrahim Şerif was subjected to seven juridical investigations within ten months in 2017. He was summoned to testify at State Security Department in Komotini Police Department in November 2017 upon the order of the Public Prosecutor of Alexandroupolis on the ground that he executed Friday prayer in 2016 with Western Thrace Turks in the Turkish village Musaköy (Komara).

Recalling that every person should have a right to freedom of expression and the right to freely to profess and practice their religion in the framework of freedom of religion or belief, we demand from Greek authorities to stop intimidation and deterrence against religious leaders of the Muslim Turkish community in full respect for the right to freedom of expression and freedom of religion. I would demand from the Government of Greece to ensure that Muslim Turkish community enjoys its right to elect its own religious leaders as other known religions in Greece.

We call on Greece and all participating States not to interfere in matters concerning the issues of faith, belief, or the organization of a religious group and continue their efforts to ensure the effective practical enforcement of the Race Equality Directive (2000/43/EC) and to ensure effective enforcement of the Framework Decision on Racism and Xenophobia to tackle persisting discrimination against marginalized groups including Muslims.