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NGO in Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations
Member of the Fundamental Rights Platform (FRP) of the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights
Member of the Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN)

Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting

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

1 – 2 April 2019

Hofburg, Vienna

SESSION II: Security of Communities and Support to Victims: Good Practices of Addressing
Discrimination, Hate and Violence against Christians, Jews, Muslims and other Religious or Belief
Communities

Name of the Organization: Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF)

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Dear Moderator,

Distinguished representatives, delegates and NGO representatives,

Hate-motivated attacks, crimes and hate speech are part of structural and systematic discrimination against persons belonging to national minorities, religious groups and other marginalized certain individuals and groups. In order to fully address racism and discrimination, we need to analyze manifestations of them, understand their root causes and consequences.

ODIHR publishes an annual hate crime report every year based on the data from states and NGOs for its annual hate crime report. As ODIHR notes many victims do not report these incidents to law enforcement or the authorities for a variety of reasons despite being victims of hate crimes and hate incidents which results with under-reporting.

Concerning the situation of the Turkish community in Western Thrace, Greece, the Lausanne Treaty does not give definition of minorities concerned or situate them geographically. On this ground, Greece only recognizes a “Muslim minority in Thrace” and denies the existence of an ethnic Turkish minority in Western Thrace on grounds that the Lausanne Treaty only refers to the Muslim minority in the region.

Even though Turkey-Greece relations have progressed in the post-1999 era, the situation of the Turkish community in Western Thrace did not change and problems of the Turkish community remain unsolved. The main reason of this situation is that Greece did not take minority issues within humanitarian and lawful context and did not establish any formal dialogue with representatives of

the minority in the region. Furthermore, opening the Halki Seminary School and the election of the Muftis has continued to act as an obstacle between Turkey and Greece and directly affected the situation of the Turkish community in the region.

The first visit to Greece by a Turkish president for 65 years in December 2017 unexpectedly turned into an escalation of the dispute over the status of the minority and created a risk for escalation of tensions in the region of Western Thrace. Erdoğan said that 94-year-old treaty should be revised, however Greek President Prokopis Pavlopoulos ruled out any change to the treaty and said, “This is the bedrock of our friendship. It has no flaws, it does not need to be reviewed or updated”. Erdogan replied, “It was also supposed to protect the Turkish minority in northern Greece, whom Erdogan said were still discriminated against. You can’t find such treatment of my citizens of Greek origin in Turkey”.¹ On the other hand, the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs published on its website that the attempt by Turkey to revise and change the Treaty of Lausanne raises disputes and claims against the sovereign rights and the jurisdiction of Greece.²

Before Erdogan’s visit to the region, twenty-two associations functioning in Western Thrace belonging to Greek majority published a joint statement and protested the visit of the Turkish president. In a joint letter sent to the Greek President, Prime Minister and Foreign Minister with an headline “No to Erdoğan’s visit to Thrace,” associations used offensive and racist language saying “Following divisive cries of Hakan Çavuşoğlu (Deputy Prime Minister of Turkey) and yet the local community has not settled now they will bring us their boss”. Regarding Turkish president’s visit to Komotini and Xanthi where Western Thrace Turks live, threatening messages were distributed to houses belonging to the Turks in region noting that “Think once again! Erdoğan will leave, but you will be here tomorrow too...” and crosses were drawn on the walls of some of houses belonging to the Turkish representatives, including the house of the leader of Western Thrace Turks deceased Dr. Sadik Ahmet.

These incidents of hate-motivated bias and hate speech against persons belonging to the Turkish community in Western Thrace are bias motivations based on racism and bias against Muslims with an indicator of racial, ethnic and religious differences. As ODIHR indicates in its Annual Hate Crime Report for 2017 that our organization regularly reports hate-motivated attacks and incidents and hate speech against persons belonging to the Turkish community in Western Thrace, there were violent attacks against people and attacks against property with a racist motivation. A vehicle belonging to the owner of a Turkish newspaper was subjected to an arson attack with flammable liquids and a Molotov cocktail and a minority school's doors and windows were vandalized over two consecutive days and a Turkish language news radio station was attacked and the main antenna damaged, which temporarily stopped the broadcasting.

Although Greece regularly reports hate crime data to ODIHR, there is an important gap between hate crimes reported by police and hate crimes reported by other resources. Hate crimes by bias against Muslims reported by the police in 2017 is 3, while data gathered by other sources in this category is 8. The other problem is the implementation of the Criminal Code which contains a general penalty-enhancement provision for hate crimes. Although 123 hate crimes were recorded by police in 2017, 46 were prosecuted and only 6 hate crimes were sentenced.

As ODIHR notes growing instances of violations of freedom of religion or belief as well as of related human rights threaten internal and regional stability and security and limit the potential of religious communities to contribute social cohesion and peace. Therefore, ODIHR and participating States must address this very important issue and dedicate a special effort in order to increase reporting and punishment of hate crimes.

¹ <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/erdogan-greece-tsipras-visit-old-disputes-athens-latest-a8097961.html>

² <https://www.mfa.gr/en/blog/greece-bilateral-relations/turkey/>