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Responses to and prevention of hate crimes in the OSCE area

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The Examples of Hate Crimes in Western Thrace

In Greece, there is a general protection for religious freedom and equality before the law. Article 4(1) of the Greek constitution states that **“All Greeks are equal before the law”** and Article 13 **“Freedom of religious conscience is inviolable. The enjoyment of civil rights and liberties does not depend on the individual's religious beliefs”**.

Article 5(2) provides that **“All persons living within the Greek territory shall enjoy full protection of their life, honour and liberty irrespective of nationality, race or language and of religious or political beliefs. Exceptions shall be permitted only in cases provided by international law.”**

There are also few specific anti-racism laws. On the other hand, there is no official body registering anti-racist or hate crimes incidents in Greece.

Law 3719/2008 entered into force in November 2008 providing that the commission of a crime on the basis of national, racial or religious hatred or hatred on the grounds of a different sexual orientation constitutes an aggravating circumstance.¹

Hate Crimes against Minority Holy Places

In the recent years, hatred towards the holy places of the Muslim-Turkish Minority appears to be widespread. Violent incidents against Muslim-Turkish Minority and their holy places are often triggered by local and national media and anti-Turkish/Muslim hysteria of some ultra-nationalist groups. The authorities, on the other hand, have not introduced satisfactory measures or precautions, but simply announce investigations and occasionally condemn the hate crimes.



During the year of 2010 Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association recorded 6 hate crime incidents towards Turkish Muslim Minority's holy places or associations. Some of these hate crime incidents are also indicated in the latest **US International Religious Freedom Report covering the period of July 2010-December 2010** which was released on 14th September 2011. These attacks continue also in 2011.

Attack to the Muslim Cemetery in Komotini (February 2010): The historical cemetery in the centre of the city of Komotini (called Poşboş Cemetery) was attacked by people affiliated to the ultra-nationalist groups. The tombs were painted with some degrading phrases.

Attack to the Turkish Youth Union of Komotini – (March 2010) On 21 March 2010, an attack took place against the Turkish Youth Union of Komotini. During the attack on Sunday night around 03:00 am, an unidentified person or persons broke the windows of the building with paving stones. Police officers have investigated the crime scene and estimate that the attacks took place approximately around 03:00 am. Because windows were broken with cobblestones, it is thought that at least two persons were involved in the attacks. Still, due to the fact that the door on the west-side of the building could not be opened, the persons failed to enter the building. During the investigation of the crime scene, police took fingerprints. Up to now the vandals could not be arrested.

Attacks to Kahveci and Kirmahalle Neighborhood Cemeteries: According to the local e-news site "Olay" before 20 May 2010 two different Muslim Cemeteries in Komotini ("Kahveci" and "Kirmahalle Neighborhood" Cemeteries) were attacked by unknown person or persons and many tombstones were destroyed.

Attack to Poshbosh (Posbos) Muslim Cemetery (August 2010) On Friday evening, 13 August 2010, unknown people attacked to the Pospos neighborhood Muslim cemetery. More than 20 gravestones were broken. The vandals wrote on the walls of the cemetery: "Get out of the Consulate", "The Golden Dawn Organization".

Attack to Avato Mosque (13 December 2010) The mosque in the village of Avato (Beykoy), located in the Prefecture of Xanthi, was attacked by some unidentified person/s with a molotov cocktail in the morning face on 13th December 2010. The windows of the mosque were broken with the affect of molotov cocktails. The attackers ran away by motorbike. As it can be seen from the pictures the windows and the door of the mosque were damaged.

The Impious Attack to Halil Bey Mosque in Kavala (3 February 2011): One of the most recent attacks occurred on 3rd February 2011 in Kavala. Unidentified people slaughtered a pig, which is forbidden in Islam, in front of the Halil Bey Mosque and hung its head on the front door of the Mosque. The rest of the animal was left around the mosque. Halil Bey Mosque is known as one of the oldest and important Ottoman monument and was built in the mid 16th century. Last year it was restored. The Mayor of Kavala condemned the attack expressing that the heinous act must be committed by "sick" brains. The perpetrators have not been arrested yet, as is the case for the previous attacks to Turkish Muslim holy places.



Attack to Isalo (Uysalli) Mosque (2 March 2011) On 2 March 2011 unidentified people attacked to the mosque in Isalo village. The windows of the mosque were broken with pavement stones / pieces of asphalt. The religious officer of the village noticed the attack early in the morning when he went to morning praying. The same mosque was also attacked in 2003.

Our hope and expectations are to stop these kinds of attacks which are harassing the harmony between the Christian and the Muslim societies therefore we hardly recommend the Greek State:

- To end all oppressive and discriminative practices targeting the minorities in Greece,
- To pay more attention on arresting the perpetrators of these incidents,
- And finally, to implement an objective and satisfactory legislation in order to prevent hate crimes, as well as hate motivated discourse and to take all necessary precautions to better police and prosecute these crimes.

ⁱ Written Contribution by the Greek Delegation, OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting, October 2008.