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Contact Person: Pervin Chairoula
chairoulap@yahoo.com

Hate-Motivated Crimes/Hate Speech and State-Hand Discrimination against the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace in Greece

Thank you very much Mr. Moderator,

My name is Pervin Hayrullah (Chairoula). I am representing the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace, here.

The Turkish Minority, living in Western Thrace, numbers approximately 150.000. The Lausanne Peace Treaty signed in 1923 provides for the autonomous status of the Minority. The rights of the Minority are also under the safeguard of the Athens Peace Treaty of 1913, as well as other international conventions to which Greece is a party. However, especially since the military Junta regime (1967-74) the Minority has been facing some restrictions / limitations regarding the basic human and minority rights. Many implementations of the Junta regime continued after the restoration of democracy.

Besides the violated human and minority rights like the right to self-identification, the right to education, the right to freedom of assembly and association, electing the religious leaders, and electing the administrative bodies of the charitable foundations, the Members of the Turkish Minority, as Greek citizens, have been subject to racism and xenophobia as well as hate motivated crimes, hate speech and state-hand discrimination.

The rise of racism and xenophobia is a more recent concern for the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace. "Golden Dawn" and its proxies spare no effort in their provocations and intimidations towards the Turkish Minority.

Houses of worships that belong to the Turkish Minority have frequently been targeted by ultra nationalist, Islamophobic and racist groups. And, unfortunately, perpetrators of the violent acts mostly remain unidentified.

Recently, hate speech towards the Muslims has risen in Greece. On May 19, 2013, Spokesperson of the Golden Dawn party Mr. Ilias Kasidiaris told supporters that "If a mosque is constructed for Islamist criminals in Greece, a front of 100,000 Greeks headed by Golden Dawn will be created".¹ The threat came days after the far-right party has given an ultimatum for Muslims to leave Greece or they will be "slaughtered like chickens". Then, the Muslim Association of Greece received a letter with the emblem of the far-right party threatening that if Muslims do not leave the country "there will be blood". The letter was in Greek, English and Arabic.

After that, an example of state-hand discrimination and intimidation occurred on 22-23 November 2013 in a conference.

¹ <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/greek-neo-nazis-threaten-to-mobilize-againstmosque.aspx?pageID=238&nid=47230>



In a conference a Turkish journalist member of the Minority was prevented by an official representative of the Greek government from delivering his speech in Turkish despite the fact that he had been clearly assured before by the organizers that he could do so and despite the presence of an officially certified translator arranged for this purpose. Despite the fact that the organizers openly assumed the full responsibility, it was understood later that the order of restriction was given by Mr. George Kalantzis, the Secretary General for Religious Affairs of the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs, directly to the organizers. Things got worse during the speech of Mr. Kalantzis that he used insulting/threatening words and false accusations against the Minority.

The attitude of a very high level official of the Greek government towards the Turkish minority openly reveals the minority perception of the Greek authorities. Since they treat the Turkish Minority as an enemy within the borders.

The examples of hate crimes, hate speech and discriminations, presented here, mainly based on the ethnic identity of the Turkish Minority. The most unacceptable practice here is the state – hand discrimination based on ethnicity and the prohibition of Turkish minority's mother tongue in public place by a governmental official. While the members of the Turkish minority are waiting solutions from the Greek public officials, they prevent the Minority from using the mother tongue – Turkish – in public space. Therefore, the created stereotypes and prejudices towards the members of the Muslim Turkish Minority lead a general climate of mistrust, fear and hostility in the society.

Therefore, Mr Moderator,

The Turkish Minority of Western Thrace recommends Greece

To consider the Turkish Minority as equal citizens not only in papers but also in practice,
To treat the members of the Turkish Minority as citizens of Greece not historical enemies,
To respect the Turkish Minority's ethnic, linguistic and cultural background,
To conduct an objective, effective, result-oriented dialogue mechanism with the Turkish Minority Representatives.

Thank you for your attention.