

Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association

Egnatias 75, 69100 Komotini Greece Tel/Fax: +302531029705
E-mail: btaytd@otenet.gr URL: www.btaytd.org

Ms/ Mr. Moderator,

Thank you very much for giving this opportunity to me to point out the some unlawful implementations of the Greek administrations regarding the freedom of associations of Western Thrace Turks within the framework of combating intolerance and discrimination due to ethnic base.

For minorities, the preservation and transmission of their specific identity are often the most important aspects of their lives and minority associations play significant role on this issue. For this purpose, international human rights law strongly emphasizes the right of the freedom of association and it has become inseparable part of human rights law.

From 1930s up until the 1980s the minority associations bearing the term Turkish in their titles operated peacefully without having any problem with the Greek administrative units. These associations made significant contributions to the relationships between the minority and majority in terms of understanding each other. Unfortunately, starting from the Military Junta regime and onwards the problems with naming the associations come to the forefront and using the term Turkish started to be considered as a treat and finally the term Turkish was prohibited in the late 1980s. The Greek Supreme Court in 1987 decided to dissolve the Komotini Turkish Youth Union and the Union of Turkish Teachers of Western Thrace on the basis that the term Turkish in their titles referred to the citizens of Turkey and constituted a threat to the unity and the public order of Greece. However, until today the reasons and justifications for the alleged threat have not been indicated concretely.

Today, these two associations including The Xsanthi Turkish Union are officially dissolved, while the establishment of the Cultural Association of Turkish Women of Rodopi was rejected by the Greek Supreme Court in April 2005. After consuming all domestic legal remedies, both cases are now before of the ECHR.

Moreover, in 2007, the Greek state seems not to tolerate even the term “Minority”. Despite the existence of some associations with the term “minority” in their titles the Greek High Court in 2007 refused the establishment of the Evros Minority Youth Association on the grounds that the kind of Minority, whether ethnic, religious or national, was not clear.

According to paragraph 32.2 and 32.6 of the 1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document, Article 11 of the European Convention of Human Rights, Article 4.2 of the Declarations on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities and the article 3.2 of Framework Convention for the protection of National Minorities and *inter alia*, it is quite clear that the right of the freedom of association of the minority is violated.

Especially, the Article 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which is a binding treaty for state parties, indicates that persons belonging to a minority shall not be denied the right to enjoy their own culture in community with the other members of their group. The Human Rights Committee of the United Nations (the HRC) has also emphasized on its Comment 23 that “states are obliged to protect the identity of a minority ...” and it is believed that associations provide this opportunity for the members of minorities.

Nowadays, as indicated above states are obliged to ensure the survival and continued development of the cultural, religious and social identity of minorities according to international law, and that will provide cultural pluralism as an essential feature of humanity.

To conclude, every member of the minority has the right to identify himself/herself as a Turk. However, the collective usage of this right is forbidden in today's Greece.

Recommendations

- 1- We recommend that the Greek State authorities should respect the collective usage of the right of self-identification and let us establish our own "Turkish" associations.
- 2- We recommend Greece to ratify the Council of Europe's Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities signed in 1997.

Sebahattin Abdurrahman

Member

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