



SUPPLEMENTARY HUMAN DIMENTION MEETING

FREEDOM OF RELIGION OR BELIEF, FOSTERING MUTUAL RESPECT AND UNDERSTANDING

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Sessions I&II

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RELIGIOUS INTOLERANCE IN GREECE THE CASE OF THE TURKISH MINORITY OF WESTERN THRACE

In Western Thrace, the introduction and development of Islam is a historical phenomenon which dates back to the 14th century. Since then, the characteristics of Islam have survived easily under the Ottoman administration. Nevertheless, after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the start of the Greek political and administrative rule the Muslim Turkish minority in Western Thrace started to face serious problems regarding issues on religious liberties despite being safeguarded by bilateral and international treaties that Greece is a party of, for example the 1923 Peace Treaty of Lausanne, the 1913 Athens Treaty, as well as the OSCE Commitments. (Specifically, article 16.4 and article 16.6 of the Vienna Document.)

The commitments of the 1989 Vienna Document state that:

- (16.4) - *respect the right of these religious communities to*
- *establish and maintain freely accessible places of worship or assembly,*
 - *organize themselves according to their own hierarchical and institutional structure,*
 - *select, appoint and replace their personnel in accordance with their respective requirements and standards as well as with any freely accepted arrangement between them and their State,*
 - *solicit and receive voluntary financial and other contributions;*
- (16.6) - *respect the right of everyone to give and receive religious education in the language of his choice, whether individually or in association with others;*

The Greek application is against to the international legal obligations. The Turkish Minority of Western Thrace has problems on defining its religious leaders. Since the beginning of the 1990s, Greece has been rejecting the right of the Minority members to elect their muftis. Rather, it insists on appointing Muftis as the Government's civil servants whose authorities are rejected by the vast majority of the Turkish Minority people and who lack credibility and respect even among the Muslim Turkish people. The Greek authorities claim that "*in terms of comparative law and practice, there is not a single method for the selection of Muftis. Each country, be it Muslim or not, has the right to establish its own process, provided that such process is in accordance with the Islamic tradition and religious rights and freedoms*"; however, the provisions of international treaties that Greece is a party ensure the minority's right to elect its religious leaders. Additionally, if the reciprocity principle is considered, the Greek minority in Istanbul elects its religious officials as well as its patriarch. Ironically, the Greek authorities refrain from the appointment of religious officials to the churches in contrast with the appointment of Muslim religious officials. It is clear that the Greek application for the different religious groups in its territory is inconsistent and arbitrary.



Apart from the Mufti issue, Greece by adoption of the Law No: 4115/2013 regarding the appointment of religious teachers to state schools and mosques, and the issue of Awqaf / Religious Charitable Foundations (Law No: 3647/2008) create vicious legal problems that affect the Turkish Minority deeply. The above-mentioned law on religious teachers is also against to the OSCE Commitments of the 1989 Vienna Document. (Par. 16.6)

Furthermore, the attacks against the Turkish Minority's freedom of religion and identity is another example of Greek intolerance to "the others". Some recent attacks occurred in April this year. A suspicious fire caused damage to the Mahmut Agha Mosque, located in the "Yenice" neighbourhood, at Antigoni Street in Komotini in the early morning on Friday, April 17, 2015, and in the same hours, the trees in the compound of "the Alankuyu Masjid (Prayer Room)" located a few meters away from the Mahmut Agha Mosque were cut down by unidentified persons. These events took place on a symbolically very important day for Muslims, "the celebrations of the birth of our Prophet Mohammad". Another noteworthy aspect was that the location of the attacks is only a couple of hundred meters from the home of the elected Mufti of Komotini. Clearly all adding up to a multiple message of intolerance to the Turkish Muslim Minority!

Although two and half months have passed the Turkish Minority fails to see a thorough and proper investigation to shed light on these two grave incidents. According to the local fire department's initial assessment, the fire was caused by an electrical circuit. This hasty assessment about the suspicious fire completely and prejudicially ignores "the possibility of arson". It also fails to explain why the trees were cut down, the same night.

The day after the fire, the Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mr. Konstantinos Koutras stated, "The fire department's investigation will be completed early next week". The Minority is still waiting.

It is clear that the ethnic Turkish identity of the Minority and its religious characteristics are the targets of these hate attacks. Furthermore, what is troublesome in all incidents is that the perpetrators remain unidentified and/or not brought to justice. Last but not least, is the oblivion of the Greek authorities and society; the vast majority of the Greek society continues to turn a deaf ear to hate speeches and Islamophobic attacks in the press and in official circles against the Turkish Muslim Minority of Western Thrace.

The Turkish Minority of Western Thrace requests the OSCE Participating States to monitor Greek arbitrary applications and implementations of the OSCE Commitments in Greece.

Also the Minority urges Greece to

Take necessary steps to recognize the popularly elected muftis,

Abolish the practice of state appointed officials / imams that is against the religious autonomy of the Turkish-Muslim minority,

Ensure the revision of the law No: 3647/2008 regarding the charitable foundations (Wakfs), which was prepared without taking the opinion and will of Western Thrace Turkish Minority.