

**OSCE****Human Dimension****Implementation Meeting****24 September – 5 October 2012****Warsaw, Poland****Working Session 14: Tolerance and non-discrimination II: Review of the implementation of commitments on promotion of mutual respect and understanding****Name of Contact Person: Pervin Chairoula****Email: chairoulap@yahoo.com / btaytd@otenet.gr**

**Combating intolerance and discrimination against
Western Thrace Muslim Turkish Minority
Examples of Hate Crimes**

Introduction

Western Thrace is a region that extends on an area of 8578 square kilometers in the northeast part of Greece. It consists of three provinces: Ksanthi, Rodopi and Evros. Today, an estimated number of 150.000 ethnic Turks live in Western Thrace. Members of the Muslim Turkish Minority who have been living in this region for centuries identify themselves as ethnic Turks.

In recent years the situation of the Turkish Muslim Minority has relatively improved. But there has not been progress in the field of established minority rights. Greece alleges that "equality among citizens" policy provides sufficient reforms and continues to ignore its obligations regarding the rights of the Turkish Muslim Minority by violating the bilateral and international treaty obligations to which is a party. Denial of the Turkish Identity, occupation of the Charitable Foundations and practice of the state appointed muftis instead of the elected muftis continue unabated. More than 60.000 people still suffer from the deprivation of the article 19 of the citizenship law and the situation of minority education continues to be as miserable as ever, the level of education in mother tongue decreases day by day. And somehow the violent attacks still continue.

As a natural result of oppressive and discriminative assimilation policies of the Greek State and the provocative nature of the majority media, the members of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace have long suffered as victims of hate crimes in Greece.

The local newspapers and our human rights branch recorded some incidents in 2011 that are involving damaging or painting of provocative slogans on the walls/tombstones and also on the walls of Turkish Minority Associations. On the other hand, some recent incidents involved slaughtering of pigs in front of holy Muslim venues such as mosques and martyrdoms.

In 2011

The Impious Attack to Halil Bey Mosque in Kavala (3 February 2011) On 3 February 2011 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 in Kavala. The rest of the animal was left around the mosque. Halil Bey Mosque is known as one of the oldest and most important Ottoman monuments in the area and was built in the mid-16th century. 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 they were 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.

In 2012

Attack to Poshbosh (Poşboş) Muslim Cemetery (16 February 2012) On Thursday evening, 16 February 2012, unknown people attacked to the Pospos neighborhood Muslim cemetery. Around 10 gravestones were damaged. This is the third attack in two years to the same cemetery.



Attack to Xanthi Turkish Union (23 March 2012) On Friday, March 23, 2012, Xanthi Turkish Union was attacked by an unidentified person or persons. The perpetrators wrote “ΕΞΩ ΟΙ ΤΟΥΡΚΟΙ (TURKS OUT)” on the walls of the Union.





Attack to Bektashi tomb in Xanthi (23 March 2012). On 23 March 2012 an unidentified person or persons wrote "ΤΟΥΡΚΟΣ ΚΑΛΟΣ ΜΟΝΟ ΝΕΚΡΟΣ (The best Turk is the dead Turk)" on the walls of a Bektashi tomb located in the downtown Xanthi.



Attack to Komotini Turkish Youth Union (6 August 2012). On 6 August 2012 some members (around 150 people) of the Golden Dawn – extreme right-wing organization- attacked to Komotini Turkish Youth Union.

After the demonstration in the Komotini city center that was organized by local authorities about the issue of the refugees, a group of people – members of the Golden Dawn organization – marched towards the Turkish Consulate General in Komotini and chanted slogans against Turkish Minority and Turkey. The police did not allow them to enter to the street where the Turkish Consulate is located. Then, the group

gathered in front of the Komotini Turkish Youth Union, they read Greek National Anthem and they threw plastic bottles to the Turkish people sitting in the garden of the Union.



Furthermore, recently, the members of the Golden Dawn organization have visited the villages inhabited by the members of Turkish minority and chanted slogans against Turkish minority and created social unrest.



Moreover, on a very recent occasion, some members of an extremist-right group attacked to a Turkish teacher and his friends on 18 September 2012 in Xanthi. Mr. Mulazim Cemali is a teacher and he was candidate MP of the Antarsia party – the extremist left. Also, he is a member of an anti-racist organization. The perpetrators hit Mr. Mulazim Cemali and his friends. One of the perpetrators was arrested and taken to the court. The case was discussed and he was sentenced to eight months imprisonment, but the penalty was postponed.

Conclusion

The examples of hate crimes which have been presented above took place in an ethnic context in Western Thrace/Greece. Many Muslim Turkish holy places and associations have been on the target of violent attacks of ultra nationalist groups because of the ethnic Turkish identity. The examples of attacks to mosques and to other Turkish institutions indicate that there is an explicit hatred towards the others in Greece. What is bothersome in all incidents, the perpetrators remain unidentified and/or unarrested. And except one/two incident(s), which is condemned by a small number of Greek authorities, there appears no strong condemnation of the hate crimes committed against the Turkish Muslim Minority in Greece from the majority members.

Therefore we recommend the Greek authorities to:

Take necessary steps to prevent the verbal and actual attacks which are harassing the harmony between the Christian and the Muslim societies and to end all oppressive and discriminative practices targeting the minorities in Greece.

Also, we recommend the OSCE to look into manifestations of the hate speech in the Greek media and pay a visit to Western Thrace to observe the real situation objectively.