



OSCE
HUMAN DIMENTION IMPLEMENTATION MEETING
11-22 SEPTEMBER 2017
WARSAW-POLAND

HDIM.NGO/0005/17/EN
11 September 2017

Working Session I: Fundamental freedoms I, including: freedom of expression, free media and information

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Thank you Ms/Mr Moderator,

Distinguished Delegates,

The Turkish Minority, residing in Western Thrace, numbers approximately 140,000-145,000, according to the recent official estimates of the regional administrative authority.

As the representatives of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace in Greece, we would like to inform you about the recent conditions in Western Thrace and challenges faced by the Turkish Minority.

We would like to highlight the problems of the Western Thrace Turkish Minority and also we would like to recommend the international organizations as well as to the OSCE:

- To raise the issue of Western Thrace Turkish Minority in terms of fundamental freedoms in the bilateral meetings with Greek authorities.
- To monitor effectively the situation of the Turkish Minority regarding the discrimination and intolerance and also violation of the basic human rights.
- To pay a visit to Western Thrace in order to get first-hand information and to observe objectively through the High Commissioner on National Minorities, the Representative on Freedom of Media and the Personal Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office on Combating Intolerance and Discrimination against Muslims.

The Turkish Minority of Western Thrace cannot enjoy the basic human rights that are envisaged by the Greek constitution and the universal and European standards. The freedom of expression is one of those rights that the Greek authorities try to coerce the Turkish Minority. To give an example; the authorities have increased the pressure on our elected Mufties, the religious leaders by using legal procedures as a systematic tool of intimidation. We have lost track of the number of times that they have been summoned by the prosecutor's office, police or courts to be questioned for accusations that have no legal ground at all. Currently, there is a court case waiting to be heard about the elected Mufti of Xanthi on the grounds that he led a funeral prayer of a minority member. The elected Mufti of Komotini, on the other hand, was interrogated on the grounds that he attended a circumcision ceremony.

We, as the representatives of the Turkish Minority, face with degrading and racist identifications, as well as have been targeted by the ultra – nationalist media organizations just because we identify ourselves as Turks, or the members of the Turkish Minority. The Greek authorities, however, do not take any precautions regarding the issue.

Therefore Ms/Mr Moderator,

We as the representatives of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace call upon the Greek state;
To respect the provisions of the international human and minority rights standards,
To respect the right to freedom of expression of the Turkish Minority,
To take special measures to protect the Turkish minority's right to free speech.

Thank you for your attention.