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Forum on Minority Issues**

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**“Beyond Freedom of Religion or belief:
Guaranteeing the rights of religious minorities”
The Case of the Turkish Muslim Minority of Western Thrace in Greece**

Thank you Ms Moderator,

My name is Pervin Hayrullah, I am representing the Turkish Minority residing in Western Thrace –Greece whose number is around 150.000.

The Muslim Turkish Minority has an autonomous religious status based on 1923 Lausanne Treaty; however, with the Greek violations of the Treaty the Minority cannot fully enjoy its religious rights and liberties.

Let me give some examples: A couple of days ago in a conference in Komotini the Secretary General of Religious Affairs of the Ministry of Education in his speech threatened the minority with his manner of speech and language and also he prevented organizers from translating into and from Turkish language which is the mother tongue of the minority. The second example is the implementation of the law regarding the appointment of imams/Quran teacher. The implementation of the amended Law 4115/2013 started in August when a list of 63 candidates was officially announced.

The Greek authorities claim that *“The Koran teachers are selected, through a fully transparent and inclusive procedure, by a qualified 5-member Committee, which is composed exclusively of eminent Muslim personalities and is presided by the local Mufti”*¹. However, according to the list released in the local Greek newspapers only three of the 63 people are graduates of a university, 14 of them are graduates of Special Pedagogical Academy of Thessaloniki, 22 of them are high school graduates and 24 of them are graduates of basic compulsory education. It is hard to understand without any pedagogical formation on related topic how a person could be appointed as a teacher by a state since teaching demands a formative process. The second controversial point about the issue is that why this law is applied only in Western Thrace. Since, there are approximately 750.000 Muslim people in Athens, Thessaloniki, and other cities out of Western Thrace.

We call upon the Greek state:

- To promote implementation of the international commitments regarding religious liberties of the Minority in Western Thrace,
- To respect the right of the Muslim Turkish Minority to elect its own religious leaders and to stop work with appointed Muftis,
- To ensure the revision of the Law regarding the pious foundations (Waqfs),
- To give permission for praying outside Western Thrace,
- To stop the application of the Law regarding the appointment of imams/Quran teachers,
- To respect the Turkish Minority’s linguistic rights,
- To establish an objective and productive dialogue mechanism with the minority in order to understand and find satisfactory solutions to the problems of the Turkish Muslim Minority of Western Thrace.

¹ HDIM.DEL/0305/13 – 27 September 2013