



General Assembly

Distr.: General
17 October 2017

Original: English

Human Rights Council

Thirty-sixth session

11-29 September 2017

Agenda item 3

**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Note verbale dated 28 September 2017 from the Permanent Mission of Greece to the United Nations Office at Geneva and other international organizations in Switzerland addressed to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

The Permanent Mission of Greece to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva presents its compliments to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and has the honour to provide herewith the comments of the Government of Greece in relation to the written statement submitted by the “Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe”, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council (A/HRC/36/NGO/77) (see annex).

The Permanent Mission of Greece kindly requests the Office of the High Commissioner to circulate the present note verbale and the annex thereto* as a document of the thirty-sixth session of the Human Rights Council under agenda item 3.

* Reproduced as received, in the language of submission only.



Annex to the note verbale dated 28 September 2017 from the Permanent Mission of Greece to the United Nations Office at Geneva and other international organizations in Switzerland addressed to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

Comments of the Greek Government in relation to the written statement A/HRC/36/NGO/77 submitted by the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe

First of all, we would like to invite the “FWTTE” “NGO” to respect and abide by international law. Though in its statement it makes a clear reference to the 1923 Lausanne Treaty, it intentionally lies when it mentions that the “legal status of the Turkish community in Western Thrace is based on the Treaty of Lausanne of 1923”. There is not a single line in the Lausanne Treaty that makes reference or even allusion to a “Turkish community”. We challenge the “FWTTE” “NGO” to prove us wrong, otherwise their already seriously eroded credibility will be further diluted.

Moreover, it is sad that a so-called “NGO” merely serves as a branch of the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs as anyone can witness, since they simply reproduce misleading claims from the website of the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (www.mfa.gov.tr/turkish-minority-of-western-thrace.en.mfa).

As far as Law 4115/2013 is concerned, the main objective of the Law is to create 240 posts of Koran teachers, who may also be appointed in the Greek public schools in Thrace. It is a forward-looking initiative because, for the first time, Muslim Minority students, who attend public schools in increasing numbers, will have the opportunity, if they so wish, to study the Holy Koran in public schools.

The Koran teachers are selected, through a fully transparent and inclusive procedure, by a qualified Committee presided by the local Mufti. The Koran teachers receive a steady salary provided by the Greek State and also enjoy social security benefits. The Koran teachers have the right to freely choose whether they want to join this scheme. The entire philosophy of the law is based on this principle.

The Law 4115/2013 does not touch upon the status of Imams. The Imams in Thrace are selected in accordance with the Islamic law, the traditions and the practices of the Muslim Minority, without any involvement whatsoever of the State. They exercise their religious duties freely, without any impediment.

The same applies with the minority students and the teaching of the Holy Koran in public schools. The children (or their parents) can freely decide whether they wish or not to attend the classes.

An innovative and forward looking policy is implemented, in full respect of the freedom of religion and in accordance with international standards. It is also clear that this legislative framework follows closely current trends and best practices in the fields of education and respect of diversity.

The ongoing campaign to present a different picture on the pretext of alleged state involvement in the religious freedom of the Minority is simply misleading.

The rights of the members of the Muslim Minority, residing in the Greek region of Thrace, are protected and promoted through the implementation of the highest contemporary international standards in the field of human rights, the provisions of the

Treaty of Lausanne, which established their status, the European Union acquis and the Greek Constitution.

The members of the Muslim Minority enjoy full equality before the law, without any discrimination. For Greece, meeting the needs of its Muslim citizens, members of the Muslim Minority in Thrace, is an ever evolving challenge and commitment.
