

6th session of the Forum on Minority Issues

IV. Promotion and protection of the identity of religious minorities

University of Athens

Intervention by Metzo Tzamali Mufti of Komotini (27 November 2013)

In North Eastern Greece, in the area known as Western Thrace, lives a Muslim minority with a population of 120.000 and 3 Muftiates. The Muftis are religious leaders, while in parallel they have judicial powers in matters relative to family and personal law in which the principles of Sharia law are followed. In this way, engagements, weddings, divorces, and other personal matters are adjudicated on the basis of our Islamic faith. The Greek courts on their part are required by law to recognize the decisions of the Mufti. Since the Mufti is an official judge of the Greek State, the latter is obliged to grant him a salary that equals the one of a civil judge. Of course, every Muslim citizen has the right to chose between an Islamic and a civil court.

Greece is the only European country which has a Constitution that protects the right of the members of its Muslim minority to choose between civil and religious law for the settlement of their judicial matters and this year marks the 100th anniversary of the creation of the Muftiate institution in Greece.

Personally, I learned the Holy Quran by heart when I was twelve, have served my religion for 64 years and 23 as a Mufti. What I can say is that the relations between the Muslim minority and their Christian fellow citizens are brotherly and in my life so far I had the chance to follow closely all the efforts made to promote this equality. In that framework, the State decided to provide for the payment of the salaries of the Islamic teachers (a newly created function that aims to secure the teaching of the Quran in public schools) as it is the case of the Orthodox teachers and of the Jewish ones. And it is thanks to my personal intervention that it was established by law that the members of the committee that appoint the Islamic teachers should necessarily be all Muslims.

The confidence of the Muslim community towards me is what gives me the strength to go on. On the other hand, I firmly believe that Greece recognises its Muslim citizens' goodwill.

Source:

<http://www.mfa.gr/missionsabroad/en/permanent-mission-geneva/news/sixth-session-of-the-forum-on-minority-issues-of-the-human-rights-council.html>