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## **Human Rights Council**

### **Seventh Session of the Forum on Minority Issues on “Preventing and addressing violence and atrocity crimes targeted against minorities”**

25-26 November 2014, Geneva

## **Agenda item IV**

### **The rise of xenophobic violence in Greece and hate crimes against the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace**

We have been experiencing for the last years a rapid rise of far-right extremism and aggressive nationalism in Europe, which has been leading to violence and atrocity crimes against minorities. The situation is all the more serious as extremist political parties have gained an increased influence in national parliaments, governments and lastly in the European Parliament. A striking example for this very negative development is the rise of the neo-Nazi Golden Dawn Party in Greece. The Golden Dawn has strengthened its position both at national and European levels after it had received 9.4 % of the popular vote at the European Parliament elections in May 2014 and won three seats. The economic crisis in Greece, which has been exploited by the Golden Dawn and other extreme rightist groups to gain popularity among the Greek population, has deepened xenophobia and intolerance against migrants and asylum seekers as well as autochthonous and ethnic minority groups in the country.

The extreme rightist groups in Greece have also targeted against the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace of which status and rights have been established by the Lausanne Peace Treaty in 1923. Violence and hate-motivated attacks against persons, properties and places of worship belonging to the Turkish Minority have increased rapidly, which have created an environment of fear and anxiety among the persons belonging to the Minority. Besides, the persistent hate speech in the mainstream media with an explicit manifestation of hatred against Turkey makes the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace, of which members are all Greek citizens, a vulnerable target for extreme rightist groups.

On 29 March 2013, supporters of the extreme right Golden Dawn Party attacked Cüneyt Serdar belonging to the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace at Xanthi City Centre, and beat him blatantly. On 13 April 2014, a pig's head cut into pieces and left in blood was found in front of entry door of the masjid in the city of Alexandroupolis (Dedeagaç) of Greece. The masjid has been offering Qur'an lectures to the persons belonging to the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace as well

Furthermore, the ethnic Muslim Turkish community living on the island of Rhodes was also the target of hate crimes. On 23 February 2014, unknown individuals tore the Koran and threw Golden Dawn leaflets at the local cemetery in Rhodes.

As stated in the draft recommendation 14 that States must adopt the necessary national legislation prohibiting and punishing discrimination on the ground of nationality, ethnicity, religion and language, we as the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) on behalf of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace welcome the positive measures, although too late, having been taken by the Greek

Government in the recent past at the level of national legislation to combat racism and hate crimes in the country. All forms of hate and atrocity crimes and violence targeted against minorities and other vulnerable groups constitute serious human rights violations and there is a need to impose on the perpetrators of sentences that are effective, proportionate and appropriate to the offence committed.

Recalling the draft recommendations to prevent violence and atrocity crimes, inter alia, the recommendation 12, stating that States should comply with international standards of minority rights protection, equality and non-discrimination, and implement the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities and other relevant regional and international standards in full,

We urge the Greek State:

- To impose effective penalties or prohibition, if necessary for the extremist activities of political organizations, including the neo-Nazi Golden Dawn Party. Such political parties, where evidence demonstrates that they advocate for and are involved directly or indirectly in acts of racist violence, must be banned and excluded from all state subsidies which are usually provided to political parties.
- To counter prejudices and misrepresentation in the Greek majority population, to promote educational and awareness-raising programs for combating intolerant discourse and to encourage the promotion of tolerance, dialogue, respect and mutual understanding through the media including the internet. Its efforts should in particular be targeted at the younger generation in order to build up their understanding of the need for tolerance and the importance of reconciliation and peaceful co-existence.
- To abolish the nationwide 3% electoral threshold applied also to independent candidates and minority parties in national elections, which will ensure the participation of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace at all levels of politics and decision-making bodies in Greece as an essential measure that hate crimes and violence targeted against the Minority are recognized as early as possible and are appropriately addressed by the Government and public bodies.
- To ensure co-operation, where appropriate, at both national and international levels including with relevant international bodies and between police forces, to combat violence and hate crimes targeted against the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace and other vulnerable groups in Greece.