

Forum on Minority Issues  
“Minorities in situations of humanitarian crises”  
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**Agenda Item III:** Respecting minority rights as a means of preventing or mitigating the impact of humanitarian crises

Dear Mr. President,  
Distinguished representatives of Member States,  
And esteemed NGOs,

The refugee crisis in Europe is a huge challenge for all European countries. Increasing number of refugees and migrant take their chances aboard in a desperate bid to reach Europe. According to the statistical data of the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) there was 1,015,078 arrivals by sea in 2015 and 318,280 arrivals in 2016. 168,630 arrivals were from Greece, which cannot manage this situation alone.

In its UPR Report, Greece noted that it has received more than 1 million refugees and irregular migrants since the beginning of 2015. The Greek National Commission for Human Rights (GNCHR) noted in its oral statement delivered at the 33rd Session of the Human Rights Council during the adoption of Greece's UPR report that in the light of the multiple crisis that Greece is facing, Greek Government should address the existing deficiencies in the investigation and awareness-raising on racism and intolerance against marginalised groups which remains a general issue of concern in Greece.

This issue has intensively been discussed during Greece's UPR Second Cycle Review held on 3 May 2016 at the 25th Session of the UPR Working Group, and several Member States made recommendations to Greece on the prevention of hate crimes against vulnerable groups including national minorities.

There is a danger of rising racism and xenophobia in Greece during that period, as was the case in many European countries. The Commission underlined that the protection of human rights must be proved in practice and many measures for the protection of human rights in Greece should be adopted as a matter of urgency.

In his letter of 25 July 2016 addressed to Mr. Toskas, Alternate Minister of Interior and of Administrative Reconstruction of Greece, and to Mr. Paraskevopoulos, Minister of Justice of Greece, the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, Nils Muiznieks also warned that during his last visit to the country, he received reports indicating an increase of hate crimes in Greece

We note with very concern that the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace has been a target of hate crime attacks in recent years and persons, institutions and places of worship belonging to the Turkish minority are being attacked by unknown perpetrators. U.S. International Religious Freedom Report for 2015 on Greece mentioned that there were

incidents of vandalism of Jewish cemeteries and memorials and attacks on Muslim houses of worship.

On 7 March 2015, In Dimetoka(Didimoticho), a town inhabited with a significant proportion of Turkish Minority members, Dimetoka Muslims, Sports, Cultural and Educational Association was attacked by unknown assailants. Nobody was injured, but windows were broken.

On 17 April 2015, the Komotini (Gümülcine) Mahmutaga mosque located in the same yard as Yenice Neighbourhood Minority School in Komotini, was set on fire by an unidentified person or persons in the morning. At the Alankuyu Masjid, a hundred meters away, trees were cut. Another noteworthy aspect of this attack is that the elected Mufti of Komotini Ibrahim Serif's residence is very close.

On 8 December 2015, the only political party of the Western Thrace Turkish Minority, the Friendship Equality and Peace (FEP) Party suffered an attack. The new headquarters of the FEP Party was attacked during the late hours by an organization called "Guardians of Thrace"; the building's windows were broken and the organization name was written on the walls with blue paint. The sad thing is that the Party's founder and minority's leader Dr. Sadik Ahmet's car, in which he lost his life in 1995, was stolen. Following these events, the criminal complaint and investigation started by the police, like in other attacks, brought no solution and no official explanation by authorities regarding the attack.

Another hate crime was reported in Xanthi on 28 January 2016. Fully covered with masks, a group of men kidnapped an imam who is working at the Elected Mufti Office of Xanthi and forced him to get on a minibus. According to the imam, they threatened him saying that they would kill the Elected Mufti of Xanthi and would attack his children. They also told that they were closely following the movements of the Mufti Office. The perpetrators called themselves "The Guardians of Thrace" and in the end they released the imam to bring these threatening messages to the Mufti himself.

Although there is no history of ethnic and or religious violence in the region of Western Thrace, there is a growing risk of division by combination factors of religion, ethnicity and language during the multiple economic and humanitarian crises in Greece. Therefore we recall Recommendation 20(c) that effective measures should be implemented for advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence. We stress the importance of Recommendation 20(f), which mentions establishment of an institutional framework for ensuring attention to minority issues within relevant national bodies, including those dealing with humanitarian action.

We recall Recommendation 20(a) that States and non-State actors should at all times respect, protection and fulfillment of minority rights as essential elements in their daily governance and development programs in order to defuse potential tensions between minority and majority communities and to foster integrated, resilient and prepared minority communities that are not disadvantaged relative to other groups in society when crises occur.

We recall Recommendation 20(h), (i), (j) that it is very important to work together with minority communities and to establish complaint mechanism in order to prevent discrimination on any grounds.

We request from the Greek Government to take result-oriented measures for eliminating discrimination and hate speech against the Minority and to improve diversity throughout the system by eliminating prejudices and to develop strategies that are inclusive of minorities which would be part of an overall governmental policy for the promotion and protection of minority rights in the country.