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NGO in Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations
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Agenda Item 2: Causes, scale and impact of hate speech targeting minorities in social media

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Thank you, Chair,

My name is Deniz Servantie and I represent the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe, an NGO representing the Turkish community in Western Thrace, Greece.

We recall the Recommendation 1 from the European Regional Forum on “Hate Speech”, Social Media and Minorities¹ which notes that States should effectively implement their obligations and responsibilities to protect the human rights of minorities and concerns about the situations of minorities in other states should not be regarded as a threat to state sovereignty.

The status of the Turkish community in Western Thrace and the Greek community in Istanbul is established by the Lausanne Peace Treaty of 1923 and their rights were guaranteed by several bilateral and multilateral agreements. The Lausanne Peace Treaty (Articles 37-45) cover the rights of non-Muslim minorities in Turkey, while Article 45 states that “the rights conferred by the provisions of the present Section on the non-Moslem minorities of Turkey will be similarly conferred by Greece on the Moslem minority in her territory”.

Based on the 1923 Lausanne Treaty Greece claims that the Minority is Muslim and denies existence of an ethnic Turkish minority, although the Turkish community had been active with its associations bearing the word Turkish for about half a century without hindrance. The recognition of the Turkish community as a national - and not

¹ https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/MinorityIssues/Session13/Europe_Regional_Forum.pdf

merely a religious minority is still denied by the Greek government and a large part of the Greek media.

Intolerant discourse and scapegoating of the Turkish community in Western Thrace have been observed in Greece during the first days of the pandemic. When Prime Minister of Greece, Kyriakos Mitsotakis declared a nationwide curfew to prevent the coronavirus on 23 March 2020 due to the heightened risk of coronavirus, on the same day, the village of Echinós (Şahin) in Xanthi was the first village quarantined in the country after a 72-year-old man from the Turkish community in Western Thrace died.

Names of some members of the Turkish community in Western Thrace who are working for media, academia and government institutions in Turkey were exposed in a Greek website in which they have been allegedly obliged to provide information to Turkish Intelligence Service as civil servants with Greek citizenship. Exposition of their full names and positions in Turkey have made them target of far-right groups in Greece.²

Stressing the importance of the Recommendations 2, 5 and 7, we must not forget that manifestations of racism and intolerance in the form of discrimination or hate crime against persons belonging to national minorities and other marginalized groups threaten the security of individuals, communities and societies and may give rise to wider scale conflict.

Governments should effectively strengthen their mechanisms for identifying hate speech on social media platforms, which may lead to the manifestation of hate crime, as well as the imposition of relevant sanctions.

Thank you for your attention.

² <https://tourkikanea.gr/thraki/mit-183/>