

Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association

Thank you Madame Moderator. I am [inaudible] and I am representing the Turkish minority in Western Thrace, Greece as a member of Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association. Dear participants, building trust and ensuring social cohesion is only possible when people's rights, legal protections, identities, and very existence are recognized and when their concerns are heard by the authorities. On the other hand, social and economic exclusion, the restriction of identities, minority and human rights, and the right to access justice are the greatest barriers to peace and coexistence. Unfortunately, in my region, Western Thrace, in Greece, the second situation prevails. Greece does not recognize the ethnic Turkish national identity of the minority in Western Thrace. It denies the existence of Turks, Macedonians, Vlachs, and other national minorities living in its territory. Greece violates many minority and human rights of the Turkish minority, including their right to education. For example, the Turkish minority is denied the right to Turkish-Greek bilingual education at the kindergarten level. Every year, many minority primary schools are being closed, and even when the required number of students is reached for them to be reopened, they still are not allowed to reopen. In addition, European Court of Human Rights judgements concerning the Turkish associations known as the [inaudible] group of cases have not been implemented for 17 years. Moreover, minority representatives and human rights defenders are demonized in the local Greek media and, in some cases, are labeled as agents in politically-motivated decisions. As citizens of Greece who belong to the Turkish minority, we call upon Greece before the UN to recognize our Turkish identity, our human and minority rights, to provide a modern minority education, to guarantee freedom of association, to ensure justice in the legal processes we face, and for the authorities to engage in dialogue with the minority. I thank you.