

Pomak Cultural Association of Xanthi

Thank you Madame Chair. Ladies and gentlemen, good evening. My name is [inaudible], I represent the Pomak Cultural Association of Xanthi. I am deeply honored to be here today. Being here so close to the place where the Treaty of Lausanne was signed reminds us how strongly history has shaped the Balkans and our identity as Pomaks. The Pomaks are part of the Muslim minority of Western Thrace, a minority made up of different groups, such as Pomaks, Muslim Roma people, Turkish-speaking Muslims, and other groups. This means that the minority has a religious and not national character. With this diversity, the Greek state has protected our dignity and our right to speak our language, follow our faith, and keep our traditions. The recent recognition of the [inaudible] people also shows that the state respects every person's right to say who they are. Since 2007, our association has worked to preserve our identity and traditions. Unfortunately, over the last decade, some informal and unregulated religious groups have been active in our villages, pushing our identity towards the Turkish national direction. These groups are not recognized by the Greek state, UN, or the European Union. They often go beyond religion, trying to impose an identity different from our history. In some villages, people are afraid to speak openly about their roots. This is not guidance, it is pressure. Still, we Pomaks keep our voice alive. We believe in building bridges of respect among all people of Thrace. Only together can we protect our identity and live in harmony. Thank you very much.