



Western Thrace Minority
University Graduates Association

**OSCE
Human Dimension
Implementation Meeting
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Working session 4: Fundamental freedoms I (Freedom of expression, free media and information, including best practices for protection of journalists)

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Freedom of Minority Media in Western Thrace, Greece

Thank you Ms. /Mr. Moderator,

My name is Nilek Osman and I am representing the Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association from Greece.

The legal status of the Turkish Muslim Minority of Western Thrace was established by the Peace Treaty of Lausanne signed in 1923. Since then, the Turkish press has been existing in Western Thrace. As of 2013, only three minority newspapers are published weekly and one every fifteen day. Also, there are three monthly magazines and four radio stations broadcasting in the Turkish language.

The Turkish press continues to face major economic and technical problems and it operates with limited material resources. Subscribers constitute the main source of income for these newspapers. However, as advertisement apprehension has not been developed yet, low income for the newspapers persists.

On the other hand, minority newspapers have also been subjected to various obstacles in terms of utilizing official announcements since the enactment of the Greek media law in 2007.

This Law 3592/2007, known also as the `Law on the Concentration and Licensing of Media Enterprises`, actually brought upon several restrictive provisions that continues endangering the basic principles of freedom of press, expression and dissemination of information. According to provisions of the Law 3592/2007, media entrepreneurs are required to deposit a minimum of 30.000-100.000 Euros, recruit at least 5-20 staff

depending on their specialization, broadcast for 24 hours and use Greek as the main broadcasting language.

In practice, in addition to some other small radio stations across the country radio stations of the Minority broadcasting in the prefectures of Rodopi and Xanthi continue facing serious difficulties in meeting those restrictive provisions of the 2007 Law. In fact, this law endangers basic ideas of pluralism and freedom of minority media in the Turkish language by limiting the usage of the media language with that of the official one of the Greek state.

Gundem is the only Turcophone minority newspaper that fulfills all the requirements for having the right to publish on official advertisement. The rest of the Minority media still lack necessary standards to do so.

The Turkish press of the Minority is trying to operate with limited conditions in terms of not having a printing house and distribution system. Apart from not having qualified staff, journalism, editorial works and even the distributions of the newspapers have to be undertaken by the owners of Minority press and their journalists.

In recent years, the economic crisis in Greece has also jeopardized the freedom of Minority press in Western Thrace. One of the weekly newspapers, Millet, has recently stopped to be published but it continues through internet that costs much cheaper than printing and distribution. Although another minority newspaper, Gundem, is printed regularly, it faces the risk of ending of its printing and distribution due to similar reasons.

Along with facing financial difficulties, freedom of Minority media in Western Thrace is also threatened with trials of both Gundem and Millet newspapers, the two most circulated weekly newspapers of the Minority printed in Turkish.

Minority newspapers on trial: The case and Gundem and Millet

The two weekly newspapers Gundem and Millet face high amount of compensations on the grounds that they published 'unsubstantiated news articles' about a Greek teacher.

The claimant Hara Nikopoulou, Greek teacher of the Minority primary school at the village of Mega Derio in the Evros Prefecture of Western Thrace, asked for 1 million Euro compensation per newspaper, claiming that their news related to the homework 'drawing the picture of Allah' that she gave to the students was false.

Each Gundem and Millet was sentenced to pay 150.000 Euro and 120.000 Euro compensations respectively as a result of civil law suit. Tzemil Kapza from Gundem and Cengiz Omer from Millet newspapers were sentenced to 10 months imprisonment if they did not pay the amount indicated.

The trial of Millet newspaper was held at the First Instance Court of Xanthi by which it was sentenced to pay 120.000 Euros. 30.000 Euros had to be paid immediately. Similarly, the trial of Gundem newspaper was held at the First Instance Court of Rodopi and the newspaper was sentenced with 150.000 Euros, 20.000 Euros of which had to be paid immediately. Cengiz Omer and Bilal Budur (Millet) and Hulya Emin and Tzemil Kapza (Gundem) are those journalists whose bank accounts are still kept blocked by the Greek state.

Similar to the controversy between a member of the Greek majority and the Minority press, another recent dispute occurred inside the Minority when Mufit Ramadanoglu, the former secretary and media adviser to the office of the appointed Mufti in Xanthi, applied to the local Greek court on the grounds that both Gundem and Millet as well a Minority radio station, King FM, produced false news about the `fourteen months of imprisonment given to appointed Mufti of the Xanthi Prefecture by the Greek courts`. Similar to the above-mentioned high amount of compensation demanded by the Greek teacher, Ramadanoglu asked all three parties to pay a total amount of 200.000 Euros as compensation for violating private life of the appointed Mufti in Xanthi.

Thus, we call upon the Greek State;

- To respect the right to freedom of expression, media and press regarding particularly smaller and minority press so that diversity of opinion in the Minority media in Western Thrace is promoted, safeguarded and enriched.
- To uphold the principle of fair and proportional punishment in judicial process
- To revise immediately the Law 3592 /2007 that is not in line with the right to the free flow of information, freedom of expression and pluralism