

Turkish Minority in Western Thrace



April 26, 1996

Briefing of the
Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe

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The OSCE is engaged in standard setting in fields including military security, economic and environmental cooperation, and human rights and humanitarian concerns. In addition, it undertakes a variety of preventive diplomacy initiatives designed to prevent, manage and resolve conflict within and among the participating States.

The OSCE has its main office in Vienna, Austria, where weekly meetings of permanent representatives are held. In addition, specialized seminars and meetings are convened in various locations and periodic consultations among Senior Officials, Ministers and Heads of State or Government are held.

ABOUT THE COMMISSION (CSCE)

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The Commission consists of nine members from the U.S. House of Representatives, nine members from the U.S. Senate, and one member each from the Departments of State, Defense and Commerce. The positions of Chair and Co-Chair are shared by the House and Senate and rotate every two years, when a new Congress convenes. A professional staff assists the Commissioners in their work.

To fulfill its mandate, the Commission gathers and disseminates information on Helsinki-related topics both to the U.S. Congress and the public by convening hearings, issuing reports reflecting the views of the Commission and/or its staff, and providing information about the activities of the Helsinki process and events in OSCE participating States.

At the same time, the Commission contributes its views to the general formulation of U.S. policy on the OSCE and takes part in its execution, including through Member and staff participation on U.S. Delegations to OSCE meetings as well as on certain OSCE bodies. Members of the Commission have regular contact with parliamentarians, government officials, representatives of non-governmental organizations, and private individuals from OSCE participating States.

TURKISH MINORITY IN WESTERN THRACE

FRIDAY, APRIL 26, 1996

COMMISSION ON SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE
WASHINGTON, DC

The Commission met at 10:11 a.m. in room 2172 Rayburn House Office Building, Dorothy Douglas Taft, Chief of Staff, presiding.

Ms. Taft. Good morning. My name is Dorothy Taft, and I am the chief of staff for the Helsinki Commission. I want to welcome everyone here today to our discussion of the status of the Muslim Turkish minority in Greece. I want especially to thank our panelists, some of whom traveled all the way to Washington from Greece to join us this morning.

Among our various responsibilities, the Commission examines human rights issues, including the status of minority groups in OSCE parliamentary participating states.

Since the late 1980s, Commission staff have met with leaders of the Turkish minority in Greece, including the late Dr. Sadik Ahmet, and with Greek officials to discuss developments in western Thrace. Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch/Helsinki, and the U.S. Department of State have raised concerns about the situation of the Turkish minority in Greece. We are very fortunate to have assembled today such a distinguished group to examine the situation of this minority and the implications for relations between two NATO allies, Greece and Turkey.

Before I turn the session over to our moderator, Christopher Panico of Human Rights Watch/Helsinki, I would note that panelists have been asked to give 10-minute presentations. Each will then have an opportunity to respond to each other's comments. Mr. Panico will then open the proceedings to questions from the audience. Because the discussion is being recorded and will be published, I would ask anyone who asks a question to step up to one of the microphones up front and clearly identify himself and the group he is representing. I would also urge audience members to keep questions brief and focus on the topic. Thank you very much for being with us today.

Mr. Panico. Thank you very much for coming. I would like to thank the Commission for holding this briefing and for its work in general in bringing attention to human rights issues and minorities in very fair briefings on Chechnya, Bosnia, the Kurds, the Greeks of Istanbul. These briefings really give a very good opportunity to air ideas and to bring attention to these issues.

I would like to introduce our panel members. I assure you we did not intentionally have the Turks on one side and the Greeks on the other side. Mr. Bekiroglu might need some help with the translations, so that's why we put him next to Mr. Bahcheli, but that was not intentional.

We're going first to have a historical, political perspective given by Mr. Tozun Bahcheli, who is a senior fellow at the U.S. Institute of Peace and a Professor of International Relations at King's College in western Ontario.

He will be followed by Mr. Van Coufoudakis, who is a Vice Chancellor of Academic

Affairs at Indiana University/Purdue and an expert on Greek Turkish relations.

After that, we're going to have a view from the ground by individuals who live in western Thrace. First will be Mr. Adem Bekiroglu, who is an attorney and a leader of the Turkish minority in Thrace.

And then Ms. Irene Laganis, who is a member of the Law School of Democritus at the University of Thrace.

The Commission has asked me in general to outline the problems and the situation of the Turkish minority in Thrace before we hear our four panelists. As I don't want to repeat information that I am sure our speakers will deliver in a much more informed and eloquent way than I, I am going to be as brief as possible.

As a way of background, Human Rights Watch/Helsinki, which was called Helsinki Watch at the time, has issued two reports on the Turks of western Thrace. They were out on the table, so you might have received a copy. The first one is called "Destroying Ethnic Identity: The Turks of Greece," which was published in August 1990. That report included, and I quote, that "a Helsinki Watch mission visited western Thrace and confirmed reports of human rights abuses, including the deprivation of citizenship, denials of the right to buy land or houses, restriction on freedom of expression, movement and religion, and the degrading treatment of ethnic Turks by Greek Government officials."

A follow-up report was done roughly 2 years later, noting some improvement in the situation, and that the then-government of Prime Minister Konstantin Mitsotakis indeed had taken some steps to improve the situation. Reports indicate now that there has been some improvement. One can buy land. There is an affirmative action program for the Turks to go to university.

However, serious problems still remain. That report indicated those problems, and I quote, "The Greek Government has taken significant steps to improve conditions of the Turkish minority, but important problems still remain involving education, the expropriation of land, the selection of muftis who are the religious leaders of the Muslim minority, and control of the Wakfs which are charitable foundations. The Greek Government continued during 1991 to deprive hundreds of ethnic Turks of their Greek citizenship." Now many of these problems still remain.

I would just like to outline very briefly the framework for a lot of these problems, then, in a sentence or two, name four of the major problems. Then I will give the floor to our panelists.

The framework is that the Greek Government still does not fully acknowledge without restriction the existence of the Turkish minority. According to the 1995 State Department report, and I quote, "The only minority Greece formally recognizes is the Muslim minority referred to in the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne." The government insists on that rubric to refer to the several different ethnic communities. The use of the word "Turkos," Turk, is prohibited in titles of organizations. Most recently in 1995 the European Commission on Human Rights of the Council of Europe found that the Greek Government had indeed violated the rights of the late Dr. Sadik Ahmet, who was a former independent parliamentarian from Thrace, who had used the word Turk and Turkish in a campaign in 1989.

I don't want to get into the legal framework—I believe that will be dealt with by our panelists—that protect the minority, but suffice it to say that the Lausanne Treaty, the 1953 European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights, and the CSCE Document on Na-

tional Minorities all protect the right to free exercise of religion and beliefs, full freedom of movement, equality before the law, and the right for the community to manage some cultural, religious, social institutions, and schools.

Now very briefly I would like to mention four problems that I think some of our panelists will either affirm or give a different, alternative perspective on.

The first one is the arbitrary deprivation of citizenship, which is carried out under Article 19 of the Greek citizenship law. This seems clearly directed at the Turkish minority. It deprives citizenship—or can be used to deprive citizenship—of Turks. Those Turks are Greek citizens—ethnic Turks who leave Greece for an extended period of time and then are arbitrarily deprived of their citizenship. According to the U.S. State Department, in 1995, 72 people lost their citizenship, which is up from 42 in 1994. In 1993, 123 individuals were deprived of their citizenship.

Another issue is the election of muftis. Under the Treaty of Lausanne and other treaties, the community had the right to elect muftis, who are the religious leaders of the community. However, in 1990 the Greek Government decided to appoint muftis, and now there has arisen a system of dual muftis, one appointed and one elected. Last year one of the muftis, Mehmet Emin Aga, was given a 10-month sentence, and he served half of it. Then because of ill health he paid a fine and was released.

Job discrimination, as pointed out in the State Department report, is also another problem where ethnic Turks are severely underrepresented in public sector jobs and in the civil service.

Also, as the State Department report from 1995 also points out, there seems to be discrimination in providing public services in that Turkish areas seem to be underfunded in terms of infrastructure, electricity, sewage, and other things compared to Greek settlements that surround them.

So having said that, I would like to turn the floor over to our participants. Mr. Tozun Bahcheli will have 10 minutes to deliver his presentation.

Mr. Bahcheli. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I thank the Commission for asking me to be part of this briefing. I would like to provide you with a short historical background and put the issue of the Turkish community in Greece in the context of Greek-Turkish relations. I'll follow this up with the highlights on my visit to western Thrace and Greece during June 1993. I will not discuss the various grievances of the Turkish community in any comprehensive way, as I understand that Adem Bekiroglu will be doing that. Although the most contentious issues between Greece and Turkey have centered on their interests in Cyprus and the Aegean, periodic accusations by Athens and Ankara regarding the treatment of their respective minorities have caused other irritations. Both the Turkish minority in Greece and the Greek minority in Turkey have experienced difficulties over their treatment and status for many years.

Let me provide you with a bit a history, a very short history. In the aftermath of the failed Greek invasion of Turkey during the years 1919 to 1922, both countries signed the Lausanne Treaty in 1923. Among other things, this treaty provided for a massive exchange of populations between the two countries, with two exceptions: one being the Greek community in Istanbul, and the other the Turkish community in western Thrace. The Treaty of Lausanne conferred on these respective communities the right to run their religious, cultural, and educational institutions. In addition, members of these communities were entitled to the rights

of their fellow citizens as provided by their countries' constitutions. In recent years, such institutions as the European Commission of Human Rights, as well as the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights, were expected to provide additional protection to these ethnic minorities.

The Lausanne Treaty used the criterion of religion to refer to the ethnic communities—hence the reference to Muslim and non-Muslim minorities in the document. Although the terms Greek and Turkish were used in bilateral agreements in subsequent years, Greek Government spokesmen have usually insisted that the basis of identification is religious and not national. Thus Greek officials refer to the Muslim minority in Greece, but deny the existence of a Turkish community.

At the time of the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923, the population of Turks was estimated at 120,000 out of a population in western Thrace of about 190,000. Given an average yearly birth rate of 28 per 1,000, some sources estimate that the population of the community should have more than tripled by now. However, due to a high rate of emigration, higher than that of ethnic Greeks, the number of Thracian Turks has remained virtually unchanged over the past 70 years. Most of the immigrants have settled in Turkey. In recent years, however, a significant number of Thracian Turks have also emigrated to other EU countries, especially Germany.

The conditions of the Turkish community in Thrace have generally mirrored the relationship between Greece and Turkey. When those relations have been smooth—and there was a time when those relations were not too bad—the conditions for the community were good, too. This was the case roughly between 1930 to 1955. From then on, as the Cyprus issue caused Greek-Turkey strains, the conditions for the Turkish community in Thrace deteriorated. This was especially the case after the onset of civil strife in Cyprus in 1963. Subsequently, when Turkey militarily intervened in Cyprus in 1974 in response to the Greek coup in the island, the conditions of the Thracian Turks became even more precarious.

One of the people who has done a lot of fieldwork in western Thrace is the Dutch scholar Frederick De Jonge. I have actually relied quite a bit on his scholarship for my research. In any case, in referring to the post-1974 era Professor De Jonge stated that “harassment, discrimination, and administrative obstruction took place on a wider scale than ever before, and seriously affected communal institutions and the well-being of the community’s members.”

The ongoing problems that face the Turkish community in Thrace have been a serious irritant in the relations between Turkey and Greece for many years. The Turkish media, in particular the press, regularly report on the discriminatory treatment meted out to this minority by the Greek authorities and keep the issue alive, just as the Greek media has regularly reported on the status and problems facing the Greek community and Patriarchate in Istanbul.

I visited western Thrace briefly during June 1993. Having done considerable research on Greek Turkish issues, I wanted to be able to have a firsthand look at the area and its ethnic Turkish inhabitants. I visited Komotini and Xanthi, the two towns with the largest concentrations of urban Turks in western Thrace. I talked to community leaders, newspaper writers, and some of the youth leaders. Among those that I spoke with was a former member of the Greek parliament, the late Dr. Sadik Ahmet.

I would like to convey the most memorable experiences and impressions of this trip. First, whenever I moved about by car or on foot in Komotini and Xanthi, I was followed by

Greek security. As one would expect, this was an unnerving experience. I would liked to have been able to conduct interviews and talk with people in the community without the stress of having security people monitoring my every move. As it was, I cut my visit short and stayed no more than 2 days in the region. I know that this is a problem that others have also faced when they have sought to talk to and spend time with members of the Turkish minority there. Frankly, it's unconscionable that as an EU member Greece restricts and discourages visitors from having contact with members of the Turkish community.

Second, I was shown Turkish houses and those that belong to ethnic Greeks in these towns. The contrast was striking. Virtually every decrepit, sagging, and poor-looking house belonged to the Turks. The modern and well-preserved homes were those that belonged to the ethnic Greeks. I assume that other than relative in poverty in relation to their Greek neighbors, that the difficulties faced by Thracian Turks, particularly in the past in obtaining permits to repair old homes or to build new ones, help explain this state of affairs.

Third, the people that I spoke with emphasized that they did not want to emigrate to Turkey or anywhere else. Many of them spoke warmly of their Greek friends and that what they want is to have the discriminatory measures applied to them to be removed.

Fourth, I was told that, according to Greek authorities themselves, western Thrace is the least developed area in Greece—not just in Greece, but in all of the EU. As I was told, the Turkish community has not benefited at all from the huge subsidies, estimated by some to be in the order of 5 to 6 billion dollars annually, which Greece receives as a less-developed member of the EU.

Last, I wish to convey how anxious these people are that the outside world takes an interest in their predicament. As I was leaving, one young Turk said to me, “Thank you for coming and showing an interest in our community’s grievances. We hope others would do so as well.” This is a community that feels it is not getting the attention it deserves from the outside world. They feel that the publicity of such attention would help persuade the Greek authorities to treat them better than they have been treated for the past few decades.

Thus, it is entirely salutary that the Helsinki Commission is holding this hearing today. I hope something positive comes out of this for this unhappy minority in Greece. I also hope that other human rights organizations here, in Canada, and in Europe, too, would examine the plight of this community and appeal to the Greek Government to address their grievances. The improvement of the rights exercised by this community will not just help remove a constant irritant in the relations between Greece and Turkey, it would also help Greece’s aspiration to be viewed as a European state.

Mr. Panico. Thank you very much, Professor Bahcheli.

Now we’ll hear from Professor Coufoudakis.

Mr. Coufoudakis. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I was amused by the comment that you made that somehow the Greeks and the Turks are sitting at different sides of the table. You’re wrong, because Mr. Bekiroglu is a Greek citizen and therefore you have a Greek sitting on the other side of you. So we’re not really separated, you know that. [Laughter.]

I am pleased to participate in the briefing on the Muslim minority of Greek Thrace. I am here as an American academic. I do not speak for the Government of Greece. I understand the task of your committee to be the monitoring and implementation of the Helsinki Accords, and that this briefing is carried out in this spirit. This is why I was rather surprised not only by the wording of the press release that the Commission issued about today’s briefing, but

also by some of your comments today, because they appear to have predetermined the issues of alleged violations of human rights before we have had any chance here to discuss the issues in question. Anyway, we'll have a chance to reply to very specific issues as we go into our discussion and the questions and answers, and also the rebuttal period.

But let me start by indicating to you that Greece has a strong and continuously improving record of protection of human rights. Human rights are protected under the Greek constitution and by international agreements to which Greece is a party, including the European Convention. Greece observes Article 25 of the European Convention, providing for the right of individual appeal upon exhaustion of domestic remedies. Not very many countries offer that kind of benefit to their citizens. The United States does not have that kind of right beyond the United States Supreme Court.

Now, this important protection is available to all Greek citizens, and that includes the case of the late Dr. Sadik Ahmet who, indeed, feeling that he had not been satisfied with the remedies available to him in Greece, took his case to the European Commission.

Greece today has a population of 10.5 million, including a Muslim minority of about 120,000 who are all Greek citizens. This traditional Muslim community consists of three groups whose common link is their religious affiliation. The largest group is of Turkish origin, and it amounts to about 50 percent of the total. The second group are the Pomaks, an Islamized native community speaking a dialect akin to Bulgarian and Turkish. They make up about 35 percent of the total. The Roma, here sometimes we call them Gypsies, are approximately 15 percent of the total. Thus, this Muslim minority is certainly not monolithic. Even among those of Turkish origin, there are two tendencies reflected in their communal and political life: the so-called old Muslims, who make up the largest part of this community, and the reformist Kemalist group.

Religion, and not ethnicity, have been the criteria utilized by the Lausanne Treaty to define the rights of the Muslim communities in Greek Thrace. Mr. Chairman, I should mention to you that you said something about the muftis being elected under the Lausanne Treaty. The Lausanne Treaty never allowed, never spoke to the election of muftis, never had a provision on that issue, but we can come back to this issue.

The Lausanne Treaty defined the rights of the Muslim communities in Greek Thrace, as I said, on the basis of religion, not ethnicity. The Lausanne Treaty also maintained a balance between the minority communities of the two countries, and it was based on reciprocal obligations toward each of those minorities. The Muslim minority of Turkish origin remained in Greece following the 1923 population exchange, along with 75,000 established Greeks with Turkish citizenship who remained in Istanbul. Protected from the exchange were also 7,000 Greeks on the island of Imbros and about 1,200 on the island of Tenedos. An additional 30,000 Greeks are also allowed to stay in Istanbul under the 1930 Consular Agreement.

The Lausanne Treaty contains specific obligations for the cultural and religious rights of these communities, as well as for the Ecumenical Patriarchate. Special provisions also were contained about the Greeks of Imbros and Tenedos pertaining to the administration of those islands, their educational system, and things like that.

Turkish Government policies such as those of the forced labor battalions of 1941, the capital tax of 1942-1943, the Menderes-sponsored pogrom in Istanbul and Izmir of 1955, the forced expulsion of the Greeks from Istanbul from 1955 to 1964, and property expropriations without—and I want to underline the word “without”—compensation led to the near elimi-

nation of this protected and once-prosperous Greek community. Less than 3,000 remain now in Istanbul, some 250 on Imbros, and about 100 in Tenedos, while the Patriarchate has struggled to survive. Thus, the balance and reciprocity created by the Lausanne Treaty has been destroyed by deliberate and systematic Turkish Government policies.

However, the legal obligations of the Lausanne Treaty remain. Greece, in contrast to Turkey, has fulfilled its obligations under international conventions, despite provocations and interference by Turkey. Thus, the discussion of human rights in Greek Thrace has to be seen in the context of what occurred in the region. At no time since 1923 did Greek officials instigate, support, or undertake measures against the Muslims of Greek Thrace similar to those undertaken by successive Turkish Governments against the Greek minority and the Patriarchate.

Prejudice, ladies and gentlemen, exists in all countries, including our own, and it cannot be eradicated by law. Law, however, provides protection to all Greek citizens from arbitrary actions of public officials. Greece is a nation that lives up to the expectations of international law under very difficult circumstances. As a result, it has paid a price because Turkey today exploits international law to promote irredentism in the region, while violating the standards on its own territory. The rule of thumb should be to treat your own minorities the way you would like others to treat your minority in their territory.

The interest of the Turkish Government in the case of the Moslems in Greek Thrace that have Turkish origins is legal within the context of the Lausanne Treaty as long as it relates to the freedom of religion and to the use of the Turkish language. The Turkish Government, however, cannot instigate irredentist activities or encourage members of the Muslim minority in Greece to engage in violations of Greek law as it has done with regularity since 1974. Turkey's encouragement of separatism in Greek Thrace has been a source of concern to the Christian residents of the region. However, I want to emphasize that, thanks to the efforts of Greek officials and moderate Muslim leaders, Greek Thrace remains an example of peaceful coexistence in the Balkan region, a region torn by ethnic and religious conflict.

Mr. Sadik, when he got involved in certain types of incidents, communal incidents of 1990, I believe, provoked a very interesting comment by Mehmet Ali Birand, one of the best known Turkish journalists—most of you are familiar with Mr. Birand. Writing in *Milliyet*, he wondered what would have happened to a Greek citizen in Turkey had he done the same things that Dr. Sadik did in Greece. There is no answer by the Turkish Government by the way.

Greece, like other states, including our own, can always improve on its human rights record, and Greece is doing so. I suggest that we look at the positive developments in the Greek human rights record, which are recognized in the 1996 report of the U.S. Department of State, along with the fact that Greece is a place of peaceful coexistence and a source of regional stability.

With these considerations in mind, this briefing can contribute to the task of the Commission. Thank you very much.

Mr. Panico. Thank you very much, Mr. Coufoudakis.

Now we'll hear from Ms. Laganis.

Ms. Laganis. My name is Irene Laganis. I am doctor of history of international relations of the University of Sorbonne, and I am lecturer at the Law School of Democritos Uni-

versity in Greek Thrace. I am also a member of two NGOs of international character, the Helsinki Citizen Assembly, and of Women for Mutual Security.

First of all, I would like to emphasize that I speak here as a member of the academic community and not as a representative of the Greek Government.

Although I am very pleased to participate in this meeting, I would like to note that the title of this meeting is rather incorrect in my opinion. If we want to speak on the minority of Greek Thrace, and referring to the Lausanne Treaty as the CSCE news release does, then we have to use the term Muslim minorities and not the term Turkish. This characterization is on the substance, I think, of the issue.

Professor Coufoudakis has already referred to the composition of the Muslim minorities. My concern for Muslim minorities in Greek Thrace reflects the fact that the tensions between Greece and Turkey, particularly since 1974, affects the sense of security felt by both communities, Christian and Muslim. It doesn't contribute to building confidence between them. Despite the tension between Greece and Turkey, the coexistence of Muslims and Christians persists in Greek Thrace and is an example to other countries of the Balkan peninsula torn by religious and other differences.

Recently, the Greek Government, conscious of the special needs of the Muslim minority, has introduced progressive measures addressing positively some of the special needs of the Muslim community. Because most of the instruction of Muslim pupils occurs in Turkish, this limits the fluency of these students in modern Greek and their ability to compete in the university and public service. The Greek Government has implemented an affirmative action plan to address the problem by allowing the Minister of Education to provide special examinations which take into account their lack of fluency in Greek in order, of course, to allow their entrance to universities. The school curriculum has been broadened to include English and physical education, which are taught by special educators.

Another example of progressive policies is that Greece has not interfered in the flow of information to the Muslim minority. The minorities have full and independent access to their own newspapers. More than 10 Turkish language newspapers are published in Greek Thrace. They also have access to radio, television, and other written media coming from Turkey, regardless of their content. Another positive development in the field of religion is that 19 new mosques are being built in the prefecture of Rhodope alone, and I remind you that in the same prefecture the number of mosques exceeds 160.

As far as it concerns the exercise of judicial powers by the Mufti, the supreme Muslim authority, I remind you that Greece is the only Western country where the Mufti has the right to judge according to the Shari'a, the holy Islamic law. Because the application of rules are more onerous than those of the common law for other Greek citizens, especially for women, as always, the Greek civil code provides Muslim women with the right to choose between Islamic and common law.

In order to continue the positive path of reform, the United States and your Committee, in particular, should advise Turkey to stop interfering in the affairs of the Muslim minority and stop using this minority as an instrument of policy in their conflicts with Greece. Without a doubt, such interference on the one hand increases the minority's feeling of insecurity in this relation and, on the other, reduces the minority's issue simply to one more Greek-Turkish problem. In this way, the Muslim minorities become just a hostage of Turkish propaganda.

Thank you very much.

Mr. Panico. Thank you very much, Ms. Laganis. Now we'll hear from Mr. Bekiroglu.

Mr. Bekiroglu. Thank you very much, Mr. Panico.

I am an attorney at law in Komo

tini in Greece. Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. I would like to begin today by thanking the CSCE for granting my colleague, Ms. Nesrin Haci Mehmet, and me the opportunity to speak before this most distinguished panel. This is indeed an important occasion to bring to the attention of our American friends the hardships we are enduring in western Thrace, and we very much welcome and appreciate the Commission's interest. I wish to submit my remarks here today for the record.

Let me begin by saying in no uncertain terms that I am proud to be a Greek citizen—a citizen of Greece. I am equally proud to be a Turk by ethnic origin. I love my country, and I have every respect for it and loyalty to it. The reason I stand before you today is to explain to you, from a purely humanitarian point of view, what we expect our country to do in order to ameliorate the present condition of the Turkish minority in Greece. I should also make clear the point that we have repeatedly voiced our concerns at home and brought them to the attention of the Greek authorities. So our comments today are nothing new.

Our government in Athens already knows where we stand. Nonetheless, I understand that I am not the most popular man in Greece for having been invited to participate here today, and charges leveled against me in the Greek press are nothing short of treason. I am not a traitor, and I have voiced these same concerns repeatedly in the past and will continue to do so.

This commotion in Greece over my appearance here testifies to the fact that there is indeed something very wrong with how the Turkish minority is treated.

I respectfully welcome our deputies from Athens. Had they asked me to convey our concerns, I could have gone to Athens. They would not have had to travel 3,000 miles to be here today. However, I welcome their interest as a sign of political will to restore our rights.

The Turkish minority would be grateful for any efforts which might help our fellow citizens understand exactly what we want. We do not want anything more than to realize our fundamental right to become first class citizens in our own country. We know respect for our minority rights will enable exactly that.

We are not different from any other citizen of Greek ethnic origin, and I simply should not be discriminated against because my ethnic origin happens to be Turkish.

In sum, I only wish to be an equal citizen in my own country, enjoying the minority rights that have been granted to me by bilateral, as well as multilateral, treaties.

I should also add that, despite all the difficulties we have endured for decades, we as a minority have never resorted to violence to obtain our rights. We only wish to be seen as a bridge of friendship between Turkey and Greece. We hope that Turkish-Greek relations normalize soon and do not wish to be looked upon as enemies in our own country. Tensions between Greece and Turkey should not influence our living conditions. It is almost inconceivable to ask a minority to deny its ethnic origin. I happen to be of Turkish origin in western Thrace. This is a fact I was born into. I firmly and strongly believe that being a Turk ethnically and a Greek nationally are not contradictory. This adds to the richness of cultures and testifies to the very spirit of tolerance and equality among people which is one of the pillars of our Western ideals.

What is stipulated in the U.N. Charter, the OSCE, the Lausanne Treaty, and its ensuing bilateral and multilateral agreements, affirm this premise. Nonetheless, what we find in Greece violates this principle.

Let me give some examples. Our late leader, Dr. Sadik Ahmet, was sentenced to prison simply because he addressed the minority as Turkish or what it clearly is. His petition to call himself, as well as the minority, Turkish submitted to the European Commission for Human Rights was found admissible, although after his death. You can review the Commission's report on the case which we have made available to you. All the nameposts of the youth organization and teacher's association bearing the word "Turkish" have been torn down.

The discriminating policy worsens when we consider the Greek citizenship law. Article 19 of the law states, "A person of non-Greek ethnic origin leaving Greece without the intention of returning may be declared as having lost Greek nationality." This is the only racially-based citizenship law in Europe, and it is still enforced today.

I will hand out the names of thousands who have been stripped of their citizenship because of Article 19. The list stops, however, at 1993 because from that year on, Greek authorities decided no longer to inform the minority community of those stripped of their citizenship.

Let me turn to education. Contrary to the provisions of the Lausanne Treaty, the 1951 cultural agreement and the 1968 protocol between Greece and Turkey, the Turkish minority continues to face grave difficulties in education. We are deprived of qualified teachers, educational materials, textbooks, and modern facilities. We face an arbitrary lottery system for the selection of students to enroll in the two minority high schools. Our plight becomes strikingly visible when we consider that every year nearly 1,000 minority students graduate from the minority primary schools. Clearly less than a mere 10 percent of these students continue with their education under this lottery system.

Ironically, the latest education law passed this year in Greece establishes a university entry quota for Turkish minority students. The implication of such a development remains to be seen. By denying minority students a proper high school foundation in the first place, one must question the sincerity of the university quota. The result is evident: Our children are becoming undereducated, second class citizens. Those who opt to travel to Turkey or elsewhere to pursue their education only find out by doing so they face the risk of losing their citizenship.

We have also been deprived of our fundamental political rights to raise our concerns through our own elected deputies. The minority once enjoyed the parliamentary representation of two independent deputies. That is no longer the case. A new Greek election law stipulates that a minimum threshold of 3 percent is needed in vote casts nationwide for political parties, as well as independent candidates to be elected.

To marginalize further the minority voice, the Greek Government combined the minority districts with Greek majority districts for the election of governors. In short, through combining districts in local elections and a nationwide threshold in general elections, the Turkish minority has been completely robbed of a political voice.

With reference to Article 40 of the Lausanne Treaty, the Turkish minority was granted the right to establish and administer its own pious foundations as well as religious and charitable institutions. We have been deprived of this right as well. We have also been deprived of our right to elect our muftis.

I suppose Greece is the only country in the West where a religious leader who has been duly elected by those who have confidence in him, under the rights granted by the Lausanne Treaty, has been imprisoned.

Until recently our authorities were boasting of their tolerance of Islam by showing foreigners a few mosques in Athens at a time when the Turkish minority was being denied permission to repair their own mosques in western Thrace. Today I am happy to say that we have been granted permission to repair our mosques. In fact, we have also been granted permission to build and repair our homes. We only hope that this welcomed right will not be unilaterally revoked.

Of course, I do not need to mention that a huge portion of our usable lands have already been expropriated. Please do not forget that our livelihood depends on our use of this land, because we are not permitted to go out to secure employment with local or state government offices.

To make a long story short, and to conclude my partial list of examples of what the minority is experiencing, allow me to mention another law which is still in effect. Greek law 376-1936 governs the restrictive zone in western Thrace. This zone makes up the largest existing enclave group in the world today and includes all the inhabitants of the mountainous regions of the Xanthi and Rhodope sectors, some 40,000 ethnic Turks who live in 118 villages. All roads leading to this zone have been under police control, thus visiting it requires special short duration permits. Those living in it must carry special identity cards. Now, checkpoint 21 has been opened. Those living in the region welcome this development, although much still needs to be done for those who do not yet enjoy decent living conditions. Having been deprived of contact with and free movement among the outside world, they have a long way to go to catch up. Our concern is that the law still exists.

Finally, let me remind you that we are citizens of the European Union. We wish to live as such, with all our minority rights in western Thrace. We believe this is a most humane request. Thank you.

Mr. Panico. Thank you very much, Mr. Bekiroglu.

We've had four very thoughtful, intelligent presentations, full of information for us to debate and talk about. Before we open the floor to questions, we're going to allow a period of discussion and rebuttal among our panelists. Since Mr. Bekiroglu spoke last, I'll ask Mr. Coufoudakis or Ms. Laganis if they would like to start or perhaps actually we can start rebuttal. Professor Bahcheli.

Mr. Bahcheli. Professor Laganis spoke of representing the Greek academic community in Greece. Are there any Greek academics who in fact have a different perspective on this community, Professor Laganis? Are there any Greek academics who in fact frankly acknowledge that there are some problems being faced by this community? And the question for both of you, actually. What does Greece have to lose if it lets this community call itself what it wants to? I mean, what is the big deal? This community represents 1 percent of the population. If they call themselves Turkish rather than Muslim, what does Greece have to lose from this?

Ms. Laganis. May I answer you with a question? Have you asked all the members of the Muslim community there if they feel they are Turks?

Mr. Bahcheli. Well, no, I haven't asked them.

Ms. Laganis. Why are you asking—

Mr. Bahcheli. I haven't asked all of them, because I have spoken to some of them, but—

Ms. Laganis. I remember people there I have visited many times in the villages, and not only in Ragobi but in almost all of Greek Thrace. I remember Pomaks I met, young people who tried to find their real origins. I am referring to a recent example, the young man who decided to write down a Pomak dictionary, a dictionary of the Pomak language which was not written until now, because for the audience perhaps you don't know that the only languages written of the Muslim minorities in Greek Thrace is Turkish. The Roma people and the Pomaks, they don't have until now a written language. That's why the Turkish language is the language taught in minorities' schools.

So I didn't have until now an answer to my question. If you are sure about the feeling of the people there, how do they feel?

Mr. Bahcheli. Are you denying the veracity of reports produced by this very Commission itself, the Helsinki Commission, the State Department reports, and so on about the problems that this community faces? Didn't Dr. Ahmet get into—

Ms. Laganis. Of course every minority—

Mr. Bahcheli [continuing]. Was jailed for calling themselves Turkish?

Ms. Laganis. Listen, my point of view is that every minority, even sometimes majorities, suffer a lot. I know that very well. In many countries all over the world, this is a general rule. It's not just an exception.

Mr. Bahcheli. You know, I just want to encourage academics like you to own up to the problems that are faced by this community. We know that there are problems in Turkey, in other Balkan countries, and what have you. But you know Greece is an EU member. Greece calls itself or aspires to be European. So this is my point. On occasion I hear some thoughtful Greek academics acknowledge that all is not well with this community. I follow the Greek press as regularly as I possibly can. Even the Deputy Foreign Minister has said there are problems, and we ought to address them. So I didn't get any of that from either of you.

Ms. Laganis. Do you deny that there is an improvement of the situation of the Muslim minorities in Greece? You don't.

Mr. Bahcheli. No, I don't deny it. I referred to it in my presentation.

Ms. Laganis. Don't you think that the involvement of Turkey produced a positive effect on the continuation of the improvement of the situation of the Muslim minorities? Yes or no?

Mr. Bahcheli. Are you judging me? [Laughter.]

Ms. Laganis. No. I have just—

Mr. Bahcheli. You purport to speak for the Greek academic community.

Ms. Laganis. Yes.

Mr. Bahcheli. I presume you've actually consulted them before appearing at this Commission to represent them all. I am suggesting to you that there are some Greek academics who are more liberal than you, who are actually franker than you in saying that there are serious problems facing this community. Sure, there have been improvements in the status of this community. We welcome it. The Helsinki Commission itself has reported it. There ought to be more.

But you haven't really addressed my question. What does Greece have to lose by letting these people call themselves Turkish, 1 percent of the total population, by improving their

lot? I mean, what do you have to lose? You talk of Turkish interference. If these people are disgruntled, they're going to turn to Turkey, they're going to turn to others. I prefer for them to turn to human rights organizations, because I don't want their fate to be a political football between Greece and Turkey. But if their grievances remain, and there are serious grievances that remain, this is going to be a problem facing Greece. I am suggesting in a friendly way that you should own up to it.

Ms. Laganis. Perhaps you don't understand my point. I didn't deny that part of the Muslim minority is of Turkish origin. I don't deny that, OK?

Mr. Panico. Would you like to ask a question, Mr. Bekiroglu?

Mr. Bekiroglu. No.

Mr. Panico. Mr. Coufoudakis?

Mr. Coufoudakis. The only thing that I would have to say on the point of identity is what the Lausanne Treaty provided for—identification is by religion, not by ethnicity. I come back to the fact that the Greek legislation and Greek administration of the area speaks of “tourkoyennis,” so it does not deny people to say that they have Turkic heritage. As I said in my own presentation, the Muslim community of western Thrace, Greek Thrace, is not monolithic. There are three distinct groups, two of which, making almost 50 percent of the total, do not consider themselves to be Turkish. So you have to be very careful how you define those conditions.

I'll tell you something else. Even Dr. Sadik Ahmet, who ran into some problems, has not perhaps told you all the things. Did he show you the flag that was in his office? Did he show you the maps that he had in his office about a united Thrace, an independent Thrace? And did he tell you about statements he had been making that he was the 451st member of the Turkish Grand National Assembly?

Mr. Bahcheli. Can we leave a dead man out of this, Van?

Mr. Coufoudakis. I do not mean to raise ghosts of Christmases past, or Ramadans past. The point is that these are issues that are being brought upon us here as examples of discrimination. If you do not take the context in which these alleged examples occurred, then you're judging unusual things by themselves, and I suggest you don't do that.

Now, if the Turkish Government stays out of the affairs of the minority community, and if the separatist activities stopped, then the confidence level will be built a great deal more among the minority and the majority communities in Thrace; and I think that will help everybody's coexistence.

Anyway, let me just simply say a couple of things in closing. We'll have time to respond to questions. I am glad that Mr. Bekiroglu spoke of the positive things that have been happening, because truly this is what we should be focusing on, not as you say on ghosts of past events.

Now, we heard a lot of good progressive things that are happening. Let's focus on the progressive things. Now, Mr. Bekiroglu is here as a Greek citizen. I understand yesterday Mr. Bekiroglu even came to the Greek embassy, and he met with the Deputy Chief of Mission of the Greek Embassy.

Mr. Bekiroglu. Yes, I did.

Mr. Coufoudakis. I believe you were politely received. I believe that this shows the kind of freedom of travel that you have. I understand from friends who know you in Greece, and I travel to Greece regularly, you have a very successful law practice in Thrace which

includes Christian citizens, not only Muslim citizens, and you have done very well in your law practice. I am very proud of that, because that shows that you are able to operate effectively in the setting that you're saying oppresses you.

Now, you have had access to newspapers, you receive access through broadcasting channels, and things like that that are coming from Turkey, and I think that's very important.

You mentioned Article 19, the citizenship article, and the deprivation of citizenship. Out of 72 cases of Turkish origin who last year lost citizenship, remember that 45 of those came at the request of those very people. That's significant. More than that, no person was left stateless as a result of deprivation of citizenship. They had already attained citizenship someplace else, and in most cases in Turkey.

Now let me finally say one thing because we're singling the Greeks out. I don't know if you're aware that in Germany today, if the German Government finds out that a German citizen applies for the citizenship of another country, that person automatically loses his or her citizenship without a hearing. That's under German law, and Germany's the heart of the European Union. So let's not just single out the Greeks and say those kinds of things.

The electoral law, again I'll come back at the 3-percent cutoff point. It has not deprived your representation. Until the elections of 1993, you had people elected under the banner of the two major Greek political parties. That is true. The record is there.

Germany, by the way, utilizes a 5-percent cutoff point for electoral districts to win a seat in parliament.

I'll take it one step further. In the 1995 Turkish elections, Mr. Bekiroglu, they used a 10-percent cutoff on a national basis to qualify for office. So is the 3-percent in Greece that oppressive? I mean, let's just drop this.

The educational issue. The catch0922 issue. The Greek Government has made available a variety of schools to that area, Koranic as well as Turkish speaking schools, and Greek schools. The Greek Government has been repeatedly accused of attempting to Hellenize and assimilate its Muslim minority. At the same time, we hear the comment that the Muslim minority in Thrace, by not being fluent in Greek, cannot attain admission to universities, cannot attain high-level offices, and things like that. You can't have it both ways. Unless these people start learning Greek and become fluent in Greek, you cannot have that progress.

I'll stop by saying one thing. I agree with you. Minorities ought to be a bridge of friendship between the two countries, and can do that. I think people like you who have credibility both in Greece as well as with the Turkish Government ought to suggest to the consulate of Turkey in Komotini to take that into account and stop interfering. When they do that, I think things are going to improve even more.

Mr. Bekiroglu. Referring to the last word of Mr. Coufoudakis, the Turkish consulate doesn't interfere in our cases. It is not true. He is wrong. When we are going to speak about any restraints referring to the minority right, Greek authorities always say that the Turkish consulate is interfering. That's why we cry. It is not true.

Referring to the 3-percent of the election, though, now it is applied—maybe there is in another country the same thing. But it is not applied for the independent candidate. No. No.

Mr. Coufoudakis. It is applied in Germany against all political parties, and in Turkey the same thing.

Mr. Bekiroglu. Oh no, I don't think so. It is not true. Now, in the primary school in Greece, elementary education is 9 years, according to the Greek constitution. Our students

who finish elementary education, which is 6 years, cannot enter the minority schools. They can enter only by examination or by the lottery system. This is true.

I want to ask Ms. Laganis if the Turkish minority, as you said, is of three groups, of Turkish origin, Pomaks and Roma. Now, which language is used in primary schools?

Ms. Laganis. I explained that it is only Turkish.

Mr. Bekiroglu. Turkish. OK.

Ms. Laganis. Because the only written language is Turkish.

Mr. Bekiroglu. Is Turkish, OK.

Ms. Laganis. Roma don't have a written language, nor Pomaks.

Mr. Bekiroglu. Which language do the Roma speak?

Ms. Laganis. Turkish. Turkish, of course.

Mr. Bekiroglu. Turkish. OK. OK.

Ms. Laganis. Turkish——

Mr. Bekiroglu. If Pomaks use some different——

Ms. Laganis. I am in a——

Mr. Bekiroglu [continuing]. Accent——

Ms. Laganis. One moment. The Roma people have their own dialect which is very complex. As is the Pomaks'. The Pomaks' language, as an aural language, exists. It's a dialect composed of Slavic, Turkish, and Greek words. This is well-known. We cannot deny that.

Mr. Bekiroglu. Now, the old Romas speak Turkish, you said. They are speaking Turkish.

Ms. Laganis. There is a problem because, as you very well know, Greece allows everybody to settle antennas on his own house to catch the stations from wherever he wishes. So people in many villages want to catch the antenna from Turkey. They are not obstructed. You know very well that nowadays television has a very great impact on the people.

Mr. Bekiroglu. OK.

Ms. Laganis. If you don't know a language very well when you go somewhere, you watch the TV to learn the language better. This is the first step.

Mr. Bekiroglu. Now, you referred to the television.

Ms. Laganis. You have noticed that even in very small villages, almost all the houses have antennas?

Mr. Bekiroglu. Good.

Ms. Laganis. Very huge ones. But not for Greek television.

Mr. Panico. Why don't we let Professor Bekiroglu respond?

Mr. Bekiroglu. Yes, can I answer? Until recently the minority couldn't have Turkish television. Only now by the satellite system——

Ms. Laganis. No, it's not true.

Mr. Panico. Why don't we let——

Mr. Bekiroglu. No, I know it myself.

Ms. Laganis. I have visited the Pomak villages.

Mr. Bekiroglu. You said that the minority consists of three groups. If we see the original text of the Lausanne Treaty, which is in French, we will see that it speaks about one minority only. See?

“Les droits reconnus par le stipulation de la presente section au minorite non Musulman dans la Turquie sont egalement reconnus par les greques a la minorite”—one minority—“a la minorite Musulman c’est—[inaudible]—sur son territoire.”

This is one minority only. It is not more than one minority.

Ms. Laganis. It’s not.

Mr. Panico. I am hoping everyone knows French for that. I won’t try a translation. [Laughter.]

Mr. Bekiroglu. Yes, well, after the Lausanne Treaty, the Turkish and Greek people were exchanged between Turkey and Greece. Everyone had this identity card. You see? This identity card. This identity card says—[speaks in Greek.] In the Greek language, excuse me, that means that Ninth Commission, under commission for the exchange of Greek and Turkish populations. It’s called in Turkish. The people who went from Greece to Turkey were mostly Turkish. The people who came from Turkey were Greek—although most of them didn’t know the Greek language; they were speaking the Turkish language.

Ms. Laganis. It is of what year this—

Mr. Bekiroglu. [In Greek.]

Mr. Panico. Would you like to respond?

Ms. Laganis. One moment to read the paper, because—

Mr. Panico. We can discuss this point later, if you’d like. [Laughter.]

Mr. Coufoudakis. I think there is a reply to that. You’re talking about the population exchanges that took place at the time. Remember that many of these people lived in areas liberated by Greece as a result of the Balkan wars and also as a result of World War I. Until that time those areas were under Ottoman and Turkish administration. Therefore these people were indeed Turkish citizens; therefore the League of Nations document out of which this particular piece is taken reflects that situation. It does not reflect any identification of ethnicity affecting the nature or the interpretation of the Lausanne Treaty. So this is a Committee that speaks about the people who were to be exchanged, and these are the people who are to be exchanged under the laws that existed up to the time when the League of Nations and appropriate international institutions decided to deal with citizens of former countries that administered those areas. That’s why you have a piece of paper like that. That does not identify any kind of ethnicity, for heaven’s sake. This is the reality of this document.

Mr. Panico. Would either of you like to respond to that, Professor Bahcheli or Mr. Bekiroglu?

Mr. Bahcheli. Well, actually I am a little bit flustered with this exercise here. I just really want people calling themselves what they want to call themselves. If they’re Pomaks, let them call themselves Pomaks. I don’t think the Pomaks really have enough rights themselves. The gypsies, the Roma, let them be what they are. Let the Turks be what they are. Dare I say, let the Macedonian Slavs be what they are.

Mr. Coufoudakis. We’re discussing the situation involving Muslims. The problems of gypsies are not isolated in Greece, as you know. The problem of gypsies are worldwide. You find them even in the United States. You find them throughout Europe, and actually British papers for years have been writing on and off about the plight of gypsies. So again take into account the nature of what the Roma community is, and therefore what is happening in Greece reflects the very nature of that community, which is very different from that of other Muslim communities or other ethnic communities throughout the world.

Mr. Bekiroglu. Can I answer? Now you said that Pomaks speak another language. If you go and ask anyone of Pomaks what you are, Turk or Pomak, what's going to be their answer?

Ms. Laganis. I am not a Pomak.

Mr. Bekiroglu. What is the answer?

Ms. Laganis. I am not a Pomak.

Mr. Bekiroglu. The answer will be—[laughter]—OK.

Ms. Laganis. To answer you.

Mr. Bekiroglu. OK. Now, is there in Greece another group of men who speak a different language? For example, do the Wakfs speak a different language? But they say they are Greek.

Ms. Laganis. Yes.

Mr. Bekiroglu. Is it true?

Ms. Laganis. Yes.

Mr. Bekiroglu. The same thing, the same thing is with the Pomak. They may have different accent, but they say we are Turks.

Ms. Laganis. No, it's not the same, no. The criteria is not the language. This is well-known.

Mr. Bekiroglu. The Wakfs have a different language, but they say that they are Greek.

Ms. Laganis. Yes, but the criteria of nationality is not the language. Greeks who have not the nationality, have never had the nationality, and live, for instance, in the Black Sea area, felt like Greeks. Now they're repatriated from Russia, from the former Soviet Union. They're repatriated to Greece after many, many years. Their people didn't know Greece before, and they were born in the Soviet Union, for instance, and they come to Greece for the first time in their lives, because they felt Greek; but they didn't speak any Greek at all. They are now in Greece. It's not the criteria of the language for the nationality of somebody. I think that this is well-known.

Mr. Bekiroglu. Yes, I think you know that according to the Final Act of Helsinki everyone is what he feels.

Ms. Laganis. Yes, of course. I don't deny that. Everyone has the right to determine himself as he feels. It is true.

Mr. Coufoudakis. But the Helsinki Act does not define minorities. It defines the individual right of self-definition; it does not define minorities. Also the Wakfs, they're voluntarily assimilated in Greece for years. But that's not the focus of our discussion.

Mr. Bekiroglu. Minorities are combined of individuals, so when the individual is a Turk, the minority is going to be Turks.

Mr. Panico. OK, would our participants like to ask each other any questions? I would like to open the discussion up for questions from the floor.

Mr. Coufoudakis. No, we may as well do questions.

Mr. Panico. OK. We were supposed to have some Greek parliamentarians arrive. The Commission wanted to thank them for coming if they had. Then we also have another guest the Commission would like to acknowledge, Mrs. Nesrin Haci Mehmet, who is the director of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe; and we'd like to allow her to make a brief statement as the first question. So if you just take the microphone.

Ms. Mehmet. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

I am Nesrin Haci Mehmet, the executive director of the Federation of the Western Thrace Turks in Europe. I am residing in Germany, but I was in Greece a few times a year to be with my family to see the misery my fellow minority members have endured the last 20 years.

I want to bring to your attention today that Greece, which is a member of the European Union, which has committed to all human rights resolutions, bilateral or multilateral conventions, is in gross violation of human rights of western Thrace people.

I know it is not easy to understand or to imagine how the Turkish minority lives in Greece when we know Greece is a member of the EU. I wish you had the opportunity like Professor Bahcheli had to come to western Thrace and see the tragedy. But I guess that the statement of Mr. Adem Bekiroglu and the fact that we traveled thousands of miles would prove the seriousness of the Turkish minorities' situation.

I cannot imagine how a country of this status can be permitted, maybe allowed, to subject its minority citizens with these undemocratic measures.

Last I wanted to ask Professor Laganis some questions. In your statement you said there is a young man who searches his identity and wants to bring out a Pomak dictionary. Is it right?

Ms. Laganis. It is true.

Ms. Mehmet. OK. This young man has the right to call himself what he feels.

Ms. Laganis. Of course.

Ms. Mehmet. So why am I not allowed to say I am Turk?

Ms. Laganis. Who told you that?

Ms. Mehmet. You say in Greece it is allowed to say what you feel. You're a Turk. You're a Pomak. You're Roma. What you want to say, it is allowed you said. Is it right?

Ms. Laganis. The right word is "tourkoyennis" in Greek. This, of course, is allowed.

Ms. Mehmet. OK. Then my question to you is why did Greek authorities close the associations which had the name Turk?

Ms. Laganis. I think that it's not the same to——

Ms. Mehmet. Why not? Why not? When I am a Turk in Germany, for example, I can call my association what I want to.

Ms. Laganis. I understand your point of view. But I also understand the point of view of Christians in western and Greek Thrace. I am not a native of Greek Thrace. But since I work there, I many times have realized that the local people, the Christians—there are some people who came from Andrianopolis who are refugees—have very strong feelings of insecurity. Each time that they remember what they have suffered by the exchange, what they have left behind, and each time they hear even the word Turk I don't think that they feel very comfortable, let's say. So I think that it's a measure not to provoke the feeling of the other, just to conserve an atmosphere, a climate of peaceful coexistence, and to preserve what exists now in Thrace where two different religious communities live. We know from the experience, the recent experience we have from other parts in the Balkan Peninsula that people who have suffered a lot from the separation——

Ms. Mehmet. OK, sorry for interrupting you——

Ms. Laganis [continuing]. Obligated separation between communities.

Ms. Mehmet.—But I am not satisfied with your answer. It was not what my question

is.

Ms. Laganis. I think that my answer is very clear.

Ms. Mehmet. OK. You say——

Ms. Laganis. The local people, the Christian people, are provoked by such titles. This is very clear.

Ms. Mehmet. OK, have you ever heard about a violation caused by the Turkish minority?

Ms. Laganis. I beg your pardon?

Ms. Mehmet. Have you ever heard about violations caused by the Turkish minority, if you're talking about provocation?

Mr. Panico. Do you mean caused by the Turkish minority? I don't think they understand this.

Ms. Mehmet. OK, let me go on then.

Mr. Panico. Well, are you finished? I mean, please finish.

Ms. Mehmet. Just one more question. Just one more question.

Mr. Panico. That's fine. One more question.

Ms. Mehmet. OK? And you were talking about free press, and that we have our own Turkish newspapers and so on. So why are there in western Thrace, especially in Xanthi, Komotini, no Turkish newspapers from Turkey, but they are sold in Athens or in Thessalonika?

Mr. Coufoudakis. Are you really serious? Have you ever been there?

Ms. Mehmet. Yes, of course.

Mr. Coufoudakis. There are ten local newspapers available——

Ms. Mehmet. Local newspapers, but no newspapers from Turkey.

Mr. Coufoudakis [continuing]. That publish——just a minute, just a minute. All the Turkish newspapers are widely available throughout Greece, particularly in the most——

Ms. Mehmet. No, it is not. Sir, it is not true.

Mr. Coufoudakis [continuing]. Regardless, and I want to emphasize regardless of their content. Now that's very significant because the kinds of stuff that are being published in printed media in Turkey, let alone in some of the western Thrace newspapers, would have been considered to be seditious in a country like the United States. We know what happens in this country over seditious speech. We have a long history on that topic.

Now, let me just come back to you for a minute, because you came all the way from Germany here to tell us that Greece basically is the greatest trauma, the greatest prison that exists on Earth. Be serious. You represent organizations that have been created by the Turkish Government, have been funded by the Turkish Government, and have employed Turkish paid propagandists; and I'll tell you who: Mumtaz Soysal, Salahi Sonyel, Fikret Alysiya, and Turkaya Ataov. These people have been in the pay of the Turkish Government, helping you write the kinds of pamphlets that you have been sending out; and then you tell me about interference in Greece.

You're not the most objective person coming all the way from Germany here to tell us about conditions in Greece. If you want to talk about conditions in Greece, compare what has happened to Turks in general, not only from western Thrace, but the migrant workers that have come to Germany. Compare what has happened to them in Germany, another big, civilized European country, and if you find something comparable happening in Greece, come

back and tell me about it and give me specifics.

Mr. Panico. Thank you very much. Professor Bahcheli would like to make a response to that.

Mr. Bahcheli. Professor Coufoudakis, I admire your nerve in bringing up those names and saying that they're supported by the Turkish Government. Some of those people are the Turkish Government, like Professor Soysal. But for that to come from you—you and I have known each other for a long time, and I have found you to be in fact more hard-line than the Greek Government itself sometimes, including this issue. Wherever the Greek official positions are to be academically expressed, I find Professor Coufoudakis. So you're trying to browbeat a woman who has lived in western Thrace, who still has family there. I think we should let her have the courtesy of describing the conditions as she sees them. She is—you know, she lives there. You don't.

Mr. Coufoudakis. No, she doesn't live there. She lives in Germany.

Mr. Bahcheli. Well, at the moment she lives in Germany, but she was growing up there.

Mr. Panico. OK, if you'd like to respond, Professor Coufoudakis, then I would like to open the floor up for questions from other people. A very brief response.

Mr. Coufoudakis. Yes, the only other thing I am going to say is that I am an American academic. I was raised in this country. Whether my views are those of the Greek Government or not, it means absolutely nothing to me. I'll tell you something else: because of my particular views—the Greek Government years ago, the military dictatorship that was in power, found them quite objectionable—I could not travel to Greece for 7 years, even though I was a U.S. citizen at the time when Greece was under a military dictatorship. Therefore, the fact that I am of Greek heritage means absolutely nothing. I do not speak for them, and my views do not reflect their views. Whether I am more hard-line than they are, I am proud to do that. It doesn't make any difference to me.

Mr. Panico. Thank you. Sure.

Mr. Bekiroglu. I should add something. I say that what Nesrin said is true, because you can find Turkish newspapers in Athens, as well as in Thessalonika. They're bought freely there, sold there freely. But you cannot find a Turkish newspaper in Thrace. It's true.

Ms. Laganis. But if you go—

Mr. Bekiroglu. It is true. When coming from Turkey, for example: I myself have the experience, coming from Turkey. If you have Turkish newspapers, in customs the officials take them. They do not allow a Turkish newspaper to come to—yes, for me, for myself.

Ms. Laganis. Well, me too.

Mr. Bekiroglu. I had the experience. That's right. They are afraid of Turkish propaganda by Turkish newspapers.

Ms. Laganis. May I answer?

Mr. Panico. Very briefly.

Ms. Laganis. Yes. I have traveled many times with taxis from Komotini to Andrianopolis and with Muslims also. I have seen that they bought newspapers, Turkish newspapers; and we didn't have any problem when we came back.

Mr. Panico. Thank you very much. I would like to open the floor now to questions. If you can first limit yourself— as a member of a human rights organization, I don't mean to

limit free expression—but if you could limit yourself to the situation on hand, the Turkish minority in western Thrace, and try to make questions rather than statements. Step to the mike and identify yourself.

This gentleman right here.

Questioner. Thank you, Mr. Panico. I am with the Diaspora Newsletter. I am trying to avoid the temptation to make a very short remark, but please allow me to do so. I have just recently watched another presentation by Dr. Bahcheli. It was very well articulated, very well versed on these issues. I must say on that occasion it was an event in Turkey. Interestingly enough, Mr. Bahcheli didn't observe anything about political prisoners' disappearances, killings, and burned down villages, and so forth. But all of a sudden, he's very sensitive and very observant of the issues here—although those are utterly relevant. I am just saying that kind of this elective sensitivity just kind of took my attention.

I was in south Greece. I studied there from 1983 to 1989. Interestingly enough, I could get a very clear signal from Turkish television. I couldn't get a very clear signal from Greek television. That shows what kind of response of the Greek Government for the entire region.

My question is mainly to Dr. Coufoudakis, and I would like for him, if he can, to brief us about the efforts of the Greek Government in relation to education of the Muslim minority and maybe the reaction of the Turkish side. Thank you very much for taking so much time.

Mr. Coufoudakis. Well, perhaps Dr. Laganis can also say something on that. The only thing that I can say is that there has been significant progress made in the area of education, both in the provision of teachers and classroom materials. They are intended to bring up to date the kind of education Muslim students are receiving in public schools today. More than that, the introduction of English and physical education courses is beginning to broaden the curriculum, because up until recently these curricular changes had been more or less opposed by the local community as depriving it of its heritage. Yet these types of measures are the kinds of measures that are going to help the minority attain a better social, economic, and political standing.

In the area of the universities, we have the affirmative action plan that has been put into effect providing for special entrance examinations for those who come from minority schools so that they can overcome the kind of barriers they faced because of their lack of fluency in modern Greek.

I keep coming back again that these are important measures, these are very positive measures, and I know that they're going to run, and have already run, into criticisms from Turkey that by introducing English and by doing these types of things they're trying to Hellenize the Muslim minority. But again it's a question of economic and social progress through education, and unless they attain fluency in Greek, or the ability to communicate in English, which is the language of progress today, that is going to continue to be a problem. Focus on the very positive things that are being done.

Mr. Panico. Would you like to say something, Mrs. Laganis?

Ms. Laganis. Yes. Just that there are 240 minority schools now in Greek Thrace, and in 1994 approximately 1.5 billion drachmas were provided for maintenance of existing minority school infrastructure, and new primary secondary schools are presently being constructed at a total cost of 2 billion drachmas. I think that perhaps you have now an image of the education.

But really the issue of education is rather complicated, because it's not easy for pupils of

a minority to learn Greek with restricted hours of Greek lessons.

Mr. Panico. Would you like to comment, Mr. Bekiroglu or Mr. Bahcheli?

Mr. Bekiroglu. What I want to say that we hope that our authorities are going to improve the living conditions there. What I said here, all what I said, is true. Now, what we expect the new conditions, new improvements. I hope that the tension between Greece and Turkey should not influence our conditions there, our situation there. That's what I hope. We are Greek citizens, and we are living in Greece as loyal citizens there. We want to be looked upon as Greek citizens, full of rights, as every other Greek citizen. That's what we want.

Now we can buy land. I forgot to say that. We can buy land now, since 1992. Before that we couldn't get permission to buy land. Now we can buy land since 1992. We can buy land now, but only with permission because it is bordering on foreign countries. But I am afraid that this permission somehow may be stopped. I think that this law is against the Greek constitution, too. It must be abolished, too. But it is not true.

Now why, if we are Greek citizens, do we have to get permission from the authorities in order to get the land, a part of land? Are there good and bad citizens in Greece? Why is permission required to obtain the land, or a part of land?

Mr. Coufoudakis. Well, the only thing that I can say, Mr. Bekiroglu, is that these are laws that came out of the cold war experience, in particular, because of safety zones, security zones, and things like that, and they did not single out Muslims. They apply equally to everybody who happens to live in those areas, whether they happen to be Christians, whether they happen to be Pomaks, or whoever they happen to be; and it applies to all of them. These restrictions are now slowly falling apart, and I think this is one of the most positive developments we have seen in the aftermath of the end of the cold war.

Mr. Bahcheli. I think this positive development should be welcomed, but let me say for the record that in 1923 Thracian Turks owned 80 percent of the land. Today they own 20 percent.

Mr. Panico. OK, do I have——

Mr. Coufoudakis. That is an example of how the nature of that community has changed and how their economic occupation has moved away from farming into other areas. If you look at the question of how many Greeks were farmers and owned land in the 1920s compared to what farming consists in Greece today, you're going to find some dramatically different statistics. So to claim that this is something that happened in the Muslim community alone, you're not looking at the total package of the Greek economy today.

Mr. Panico. OK, let me take another question from the floor. This woman in the front row right here.

Questioner. Thank you.

Mr. Panico. Yes, please go to the mike. It's being recorded. Thank you.

Questioner. My question is generally to the panel, but if Professor Bahcheli or Mr. Coufoudakis would like to address it, and it's just generally you made the point that it's an issue that Greece should have to deal with. You know, you have a group of people who do identify themselves as Turks and would like to do that before it becomes a political football. I think that was the word you used.

Mr. Bahcheli. It is a political football. It has been for a long time.

Questioner. Yes. Is it a political football, and how closely tied in is dealing with, you know, the issues facing this community? How closely tied in are those issues to the issues

facing, say, the Greek minority in Istanbul? I mean, how much progress can be made with the one if there is equally not progress being made with the other? I am just curious how much of a political football it is.

Mr. Bahcheli. Well, I made two references in my presentation to the difficulties of the Istanbul Greeks and the Patriarchate as well. So there's no question that there have been difficulties there. I understand that the Commission has dealt with the status of the Istanbul Greeks and the Patriarchate before. So the focus today is on the western Thrace Turks, not to say—not to deny anything about the——

Questioner. [Off mike.]

Mr. Bahcheli. Well, in the ideal world, you know, Greece should treat its minorities, including the Turkish minority, in accordance with its legal obligations, in accordance with its moral aspirations, and in accordance with its EU obligations and so on. Sure, there is some kind of balance there, there is some kind of reciprocity expected; and I hope the Turks deal with the remaining Istanbul Greeks and the Patriarchate as well as it would like the community in western Thrace to be treated.

Mr. Coufoudakis. Well, you know, there is an answer to that again. Reciprocity, as you said, is the issue; and I think this is what we ought to aim for. The only problem is that the Greek community of Istanbul is now gone, virtually gone. There are very few left. So the reciprocity element has now disappeared. But I agree with Mr. Bekiroglu. Minorities ought to be bridges of cooperation, not of division. They should not be used for political purposes. Greece, despite the problems it faces in that area, has avoided using the minorities as hostages in a broader political struggle. You know that. I know that.

If Greece had taken the same measures that the successive Turkish governments took since the time of World War II and after, there wouldn't be any Muslims in Thrace today, and there would not be any problem to discuss here today. But because the Greek Government did not take such measures, did not use them as hostages, that's why we're sitting around this table today.

As I said in my presentation, every country's human rights record can improve. There are overzealous local officials that have done a lot of stupid things. They did a lot of stupid things to me because I happened to disagree with the Greek Junta. But it happens in a lot of countries. Greece is not an open prison, as some of you have tried to describe it.

Mr. Panico. OK. If for lack of—I don't want to get a mutiny from the audience, but as a privilege of the Chair I would like to ask a question to our panelists. The Article 19, the deprivation of citizenship, how does that work out, because on the face of the law it seems in serious contradiction to international jurisprudence, and then the fact that even if you trace the number of individuals, as Professor Coufoudakis said, who reportedly themselves said they did not want citizenship, you still have 30 people last year who were deprived of——

Mr. Coufoudakis. Forty some.

Mr. Panico. Or 40 or 30 who are——

Mr. Coufoudakis. Who are voluntary.

Mr. Panico. Right. So you have 30 who are deprived involuntarily of citizenship, which is a very serious act for a government to do. Do you have any insights into that?

Mr. Coufoudakis. Yes, I do. First of all, let me tell you that this particular citizenship code is the result of the cold war. Thanks to some help that we received from the United States Government at the time that had a hand in drafting some of the security legislation in

Greece. I know Ambassador Keeley may disagree or Jim Warren may disagree with me on that, but there was some security-oriented legislation that came as a result of American inspiration designed to deal with cold war issues. The citizenship code of the period was never drafted with the intent of depriving Muslims of any rights to citizenship or anything else.

Now the issue has become that some Muslim citizens have lost citizenship. But, as I pointed out before, one, these people who have lost citizenship have not become stateless persons. They had already attained citizenship someplace else, and they had cut any tie to the Greek state. They had no more property, no more presence in Greece, some of them for a long time. For that matter, even if the Greek state had sought them out to invite them to a hearing over their future and their future standing, some of them would not come, because the Greeks didn't even know where in the world they were. Some of them who could be traced, if they happened to live in Turkey and admitted that they had gotten involved in citizenship questions in Greece, they would have had a very difficult time finding permanent residence or citizenship in Turkey.

So the code is a very peculiar one left over from the cold war. Until the whole total civil code in Greece is rewritten, including that particular portion, you're going to have cases of people who fall in that category and fall through the cracks, and indeed may be affected by it.

Mr. Panico. Would you like to comment, Mr. Bekiroglu?

Mr. Bekiroglu. Yes, yes. Many people who live for a short time in Turkey by Greek passports, when they want to return to Greece, they are informed only in the customs, at the border, that they have lost their Greek citizenship, and they are not allowed to enter into Greece.

Mr. Coufoudakis. Yes, I—

Mr. Bekiroglu. I know many cases of this.

Mr. Coufoudakis. Yes, and I think it would help if you would send to the appropriate ministers in Greece a list of these people so they can perhaps look into that. I would even take it a next step further that there is an appeal process. If you're denied citizenship in Greece, under Greek law there is an appeals process available to you in Greek courts. If you're still unhappy with the decision of the Greek courts, that's a matter that under the European convention that you can take to the European Commission and follow the task from there.

Mr. Bekiroglu. You cannot go to the European Commission, because when he is prevented to enter Greece, he still is obliged to live in Turkey, outside of Greece. How can he appeal to the high courts?

Mr. Coufoudakis. There are methods by which you can appeal to the Greek courts and file petitions in that respect. Once you file the petition, there is an administrative process that allows you to have cases of this type heard in the Greek court system and then beyond that to the European Commission.

Mr. Bekiroglu. There are examples of persons who were living in Turkey as students. When they returned to Turkey and went to the Greek army, they are informed after 7 months that they had been deprived of Greek citizenship. There are examples.

Mr. Coufoudakis. Well, I think in that case, that would be very strange to serve for 7 months in the Greek army, then be told you're not a Greek citizen. But if you know of these names, bring them to the attention of the Greek Government. This is the best thing. I mean,

you're able to tell us that here. You're able to function in Greece. Tell that to the appropriate Greek ministries.

Mr. Panico. One very quick comment.

Mr. Bekiroglu. Mr. Mitsotakis has promised many times when he was prime minister that he is going to abolish Article 19, but he has done nothing until now.

Mr. Panico. We have time for two quick questions, if you could just step up to the microphone, this woman right here and this gentleman right there. Just make a very quick question.

Questioner. Hello. I am a student at Georgetown University School of Foreign Service. I am majoring in international law with a focus on human rights. I would like to direct a question to Professor Coufoudakis. I believe you mentioned something earlier about the Muslim minority in Thrace and the practice of religious freedom. I was wondering if the Greek Government allows this minority to build mosques, and if you could comment a little bit more on this?

Mr. Coufoudakis. Yes. As Dr. Laganis mentioned in her presentation, she gave data—I don't have the data in front of me as she did—as to how many new mosques have been built in Greek Thrace today. If you compare the number of total mosques available, let alone those that have been refurbished, to the ratio of population, I am amazed that they are able to support that many mosques and religious institutions. So, yes, there is ample freedom of religion. Yes, there are mosques that are being repaired and built. I think Dr. Laganis responded to that.

Mr. Panico. Would either of you like to comment on that? Do you have a comment on that at all?

Mr. Bekiroglu. I should like to ask Dr. Coufoudakis about the loan for bank lend? The first one—excuse me, the first law was passed in 1938. It was for the Communist in that time in order to prevent that Communists have land in the borders with former Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, and Albania. Now the Communists have fallen down. There is no Communist country. Our relations with Greece and Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, and Albania are well.

Mr. Coufoudakis. And that's why the restrictions are being lifted.

Mr. Bekiroglu. Now for what is this law needed? Why is permission for buying land needed now? The law is very recent, 1990.

Mr. Coufoudakis. Mr. Bekiroglu, I left Greece in 1955 and I am happy to be in this country. But even in this country that does not have an oppressive bureaucracy like some southern European states do, laws and practices change very, very slowly. Bureaucracies keep files that go back hundreds of years. Again unless appropriate pressure builds up to bring legislation up to date to conform to the new conditions that have developed in the last 5 years, bureaucracies by themselves are not likely to move very easily. That's the nature of the bureaucratic phenomenon.

Mr. Panico. Thank you. The last question from this gentleman in the second row.

Questioner. When this panel was introduced by the Chairman, and he cited a report of the Helsinki Watch of '92, it was summed up in two words: Problems remain. Well remain is the present indicative. We are in a different present now. I would like to just ask two specific questions to be answered in the present indicative about the situation now, not what it was before. On the question of the nomination of muftis, is this being handled in a way that is illegal according to the original treaty? And on the question of voting rights, are Turks and

the Muslim minority discriminated against any more than any other small group in the question of national elections? In other words, is the cutoff point more severe for them than for other minority parties? And regarding local elections, is that free or freer than it was before?

Mr. Panico. Are you directing that to me or to our panelists?

Questioner. To the panel.

Mr. Bahcheli. Actually, I am going to let my Greek colleagues address most of what—our Ambassador Kelly?

Questioner. No.

Mr. Bahcheli. Oh, OK, sorry, your Ambassador Kelly, OK. Because I thought I might pose a question to you, too. On the question of the second question that you posed, are the Turks any more disadvantaged by any other minority group? No minority group should be disadvantaged, but the Turks are the most numerous of the various ethnic minorities in Greece. So they're the ones that have really, in effect, suffered in terms of losing their representation. They were able to elect two independent members to the Greek parliament. They cannot do so now, because of the 3 percent ceiling that individual candidates have to be able to obtain nationally. So they have a case even though they may be as discriminated against or less discriminated against than other minorities.

Mr. Bekiroglu. I should say that the Turkish minority is the only minority in Greece officially acknowledged by the Lausanne Treaty.

Mr. Coufoudakis. The only thing that I am going to say on this point, so that I don't repeat what I said before, the 3 percent applies to all political parties in Greece, be they Christian, Muslim or any other independent formations, small, large or whatever, period. Greek Muslims have not been discriminated specifically with that law, and I gave you statistics about Germany, and I gave you statistics about Turkey, the cutoffs. If you find the 3 percent objectionable, from 1927 through the elections of 1989, Muslims were enjoying the election of two of their deputies from Thrace. Percentage-wise, given the size of the Greek parliament, this is a very fair representation. When these people joined regular, major Greek political parties, and as long as they were part of those major Greek political parties, that community was democratically represented in the Greek parliament.

Now, they ran as independents in 1993. They did not make the 3-percent cut. Therefore they did not get represented. But this was not because someone kept them from running; it was because they chose a different method because the Turkish consulate interfered in the elections of 1989, and the elections of 1993. It pressured candidates not to join major political parties, and I can document that. It urged political candidates from the Muslim community to run under independent political formations. That's why they did not do it.

Finally I would say on the question of this election of muftis, this election of muftis is done in a very democratic way. There is a committee that nominates muftis made up of community leaders in western Thrace, Muslim community leaders in western Thrace, who have both religious and secular affiliations. I would also say that in no Islamic country are Muslim muftis elected. Tell me one, tell me Turkey or any other country that elects its muftis, and then I'll be happy to tell you I was wrong.

Mr. Bekiroglu. I should say that muftis were elected until 1989. The old muftis were elected in 1948, in 1958, then when they died in 1985, the first and in 1988 the second, then the Greek Government went to appoint them. Yes, the old muftis were elected by the people,

by the minority people.

Mr. Coufoudakis. There is a method of selecting through committees. It is not a direct popular election of any type. No cleric in Greece or in any other Islamic country gets elected by popular vote.

Mr. Panico. Do any of the panelists have a last comment on the last question? OK, I would like to thank the Commission for giving us an opportunity to have this briefing, and I would like to thank the panelists and the audience for coming. It was a very interesting and fact-filled debate. By the number of people who stayed to the end, it seems you were interested by it. Thank you very much.

Ms. Laganis. Thank you very much.

[Whereupon at 12:01 p.m., the Commission adjourned.]