

**2008 OSCE HUMAN DIMENSION IMPLEMENTATION MEETING**  
**Working Session 4: Freedom of Association**

**Statement of the Home of Macedonian Culture, Greece**

Thank you Mr Moderator.

I would like to bring everyone's attention to a case concerning Greece's refusal to respect the right of freedom of association.

In early 1989, the Berlin Wall was still standing. At the same time, a local court in Greece denied the application of a group of Greek citizens to form a non-profit making organisation called the "Home of Macedonian Culture." The group proceeded to register this association with the local court in the town of Florina/Lerin. The court rejected the application asserting that the objective of the association was to promote the idea that, and I quote, "...there is a Macedonian minority in Greece, which is contrary to the national interest and subsequently contrary to the law".

In 1994 the highest court in Greece upheld this decision. The applicants then appealed the case to the European Court of Human Rights. In 1998 the court found that there was a violation of Article 11 of the European Convention on Human Rights.

Following the Strasbourg ruling, the applicants tried once again to register the association. However for the next few years, there was no lawyer in the Florina/Lerin area who would take up the case. Following the intervention of the Greek Ombudsperson, the local bar association appointed a lawyer and a new application was submitted to the court. However in December 2003, the local court in Florina/Lerin again refused to register the association, thus ignoring the Strasbourg ruling.

The case is due to be heard by the Greek Supreme Court which has already postponed the case on multiple occasions. This deliberate tactic of continually delaying the case is an attempt to avoid a new application to the European

Court of Human Rights which Greece knows in all likelihood will result in other positive judgment for the Macedonian minority.

The denial of registration of the Home of Macedonian Culture raises serious doubts about Greece's commitment to OSCE principles. The right to association is guaranteed in paragraph 10.3 of the Copenhagen Document. Furthermore, the right of a minority, which of course includes the right of the members of the Macedonian minority of Greece, to form cultural associations is also guaranteed in paragraph 32.6 of the same document.

Mr Moderator, almost two decades have passed since 1989. The Berlin Wall has been destroyed, yet the walls of prejudice and injustice against the Macedonian minority stand tall in Greece.

In 2009 Greece will hold the Chairmanship of the OSCE. We sincerely hope that Greece will use this opportunity to meet its OSCE obligations with respect to freedom of association and that the Home of Macedonian Culture will finally be registered. I invite the Greek delegation to give such a commitment today and to inform us all how it plans to implement the aforementioned judgment of the European Court of Human Rights.

Thank you.