

The Albanian reply to the NATIONAL ASSOCIATION "NORTHERN EPIRUS 1914"

Thank you Mr. Moderator,

I would like to use the right of reply to the statement of the NORTHERN EPIRUS 1914 because in their presentation they have presented disinformation and deformation of the reality in Albania. That might have been caused due to the fact that they do not operate in Albania and do not seem to be aware of the real developments on the ground or for any other subjective and/or politically motivated reasons in this respect. The reality of the Greek minority in Albania is quite different.

Claiming minority rights, including property rights, represents a universal endeavor as long as it abides by the rule of law and also sustained by concrete facts verifiable on the ground.

From the outset, the Northern Epirus 1914 statement and their other subsequent claims didn't correspond to the reality. And the reality has to do with a public resettlement project city center in the framework of the Urban Renaissance Government strategy. Despite the fact, that the matter in question implying government development policies is strictly an internal matter overriding any other external interference on its handling as it has been the case, we believe that shedding more light on the real situation on the ground will only add to the full transparency provided by the Albanian authorities.

First of all, Albania makes no distinction in respecting the principles of the rule of law for any of its citizens. Our policies and legislative framework for the property do not discriminate anyone. In this very spirit, the respective legal proceedings were initiated by Himara Municipality, in full transparency and in accordance with the domestic legislation in force, focusing on transforming this wonderful seaside town into a European tourist destination with modern public spaces and services, benefitting directly the local community. Since January, the municipal authorities, besides publishing online the transformational feasibility study have also engaged into a public dialogue with all relevant stakeholders and inhabitants on the areas of this urban rearrangement and the properties that would be affected by this public project.

In this context, judicial proceedings, legal timelines and notifications, including expropriation rights towards the owners have been met, all in accordance with the relevant provisions in force in the Republic of Albania. Such process includes full freedom on behalf of the citizens to address the any related issue with local and central public administrations, should they be interested in appealing, complaints or potentially perceived violations related to the process. Nevertheless, it should be clearly stressed that the Himara's urban development plan is absolutely not biased, specific or selective in any respect, as has been the case throughout the Albanian territory. Such an approach is in the interest of all its citizens, whether Albanians, Greek minority representatives or other minority representatives without distinction, exclusion or discrimination.

As a starting point, the Constitution and domestic legal framework guarantee the rights of persons belonging to minorities(including Greek minority), namely the right of free-self-identification, the right to maintain and develop their identity, the right of education in

mother tongue, their culture, religion, and other fundamental freedoms and rights, including property rights.

Albania is part of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, which –constitutes the appropriate legal -bases for the respect and protection of all minorities in Albania.

The existing domestic legislation guarantees the rights of minorities in accordance with our international commitments, while the Council of Europe reports estimate as positive aspects the efforts to enhance the implementation of Framework Convention on minorities, and the improvement of the legal framework on minority rights.

Greek minority as well as all other minorities in Albania enjoys full rights in accordance with the Constitution, domestic legislation, and European and international conventions ratified by Albania. With regard to Albania's European path, we are proud and encouraged by the steady and continued progress made with regard to the 5 key priorities for the opening of negotiations for membership in the European Union, including the issue of ownership, which is also expressly recognized by the European Commission.

In line with the recommendations of the European Commission and the recommendations of the Council of Europe, Albanian institutions are committed to finalize a comprehensive Law on Minorities, in full accordance with the highest European standards, taking into account the recommendations of international monitoring bodies (the Advisory Committee of the Framework Convention Council of Europe on National Minorities).

Albania is committed to further improve the implementation of national and international legislation regarding the protection and promotion of human rights. We will not spare any efforts to closely work with neighboring Greece (countries) in advancing our bilateral relationship, in the spirit of mutual respect, good neighborly relations as well as common European perspective.