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QUESTION OF THE VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS
IN ANY PART OF THE WORLD, WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO COLONIAL
AND OTHER DEPENDENT COUNTRIES AND TERRITORIES

Letter dated 31 January 1990 from the Minister of Foreign Affairs
of Turkey to the United Nations Office at Geneva addressed to
the Secretary-General

1. I am writing to you in order to focus attention on the grave situation which has developed during the recent days in Western Thrace, Greece, where a Turkish Muslim minority is living under the protection of the Lausanne Peace Treaty of 1923 and naturally of many modern instruments on the protection of human rights. The oppression of this minority and the violation of its rights by successive Greek Governments and régimes has always been a cause of deep concern for us in Turkey.
2. The scope of the violent attacks directed against the members of the minority since last week in the town of Komotini urgently requires international attention to supplement our efforts in order to reverse the unfortunate course of events in this corner of Europe.
3. Dr. Sadik Ahmet, one of the leaders of the Turkish Muslim minority in Western Thrace and a former member of Parliament from Komotini, and Mr. Ibrahim Serif, an independent candidate from the same district, after a mock trial at the Rodop Criminal Court in Komotini on 25 January 1990, have

been sentenced to 18 months of imprisonment and have been deprived of their political rights for 3 years. Dr. Ahmet and Mr. Serif have been put into immediate detention pending appeal. The President of the Istanbul Bar Association who followed the trial has characterized the verdict and the proceedings as "the registration of a freak anger and the feelings of revenge, rather than a fair judgement".

4. This was the third court case brought against Dr. Sadik Ahmet, essentially for attempting to voice the grievances and the reaction of the Turkish Muslim minority in Western Thrace, against persistent discrimination, harassment and oppression. In this case Dr. Sadik Ahmet and his colleague were charged with the "crime" of using the "Turkish" adjective to describe the minority in Western Thrace in their election statements prior to the elections held in Greece on 5 November 1989.

5. Prior to the aforementioned elections, enormous pressure was exerted, amounting to threats, in order to prevent the Turkish Muslim minority of Western Thrace from freely exercising its political right to elect and be elected as equal Greek citizens. The accusations against Dr. Ahmet and Mr. Serif were merely a continuation of the same campaign to silence these two members of the Turkish community in Western Thrace.

6. At the trial in Komotini, an attempt was made to prosecute not only Dr. Ahmet and Mr. Serif but the entire Turkish minority virtually in the atmosphere of a people's court. The following points particularly demonstrate under which unfair and indeed deplorable conditions this trial has taken place:

(a) Throughout the trial, the Chief Judge has put questions to the prosecutor's witnesses, which have also contained the required replies. He has made irresponsible and provocative political remarks denying the existence of a Turkish minority in Western Thrace.

(b) In fact, the court was turned into a forum to debate this allegation while the defence witnesses and the accused were silenced.

(c) While the prosecutor's witnesses enjoyed nearly one hour of speaking time, the defence witnesses were rebuked, silenced and many of them were dismissed within the first couple of minutes.

(d) The defence lawyers' objections with regard to procedure and court order were ignored. Their legal rejection of the second judge for prejudicial conduct was not properly examined and was perfunctorily ruled out.

(e) Upon the withdrawal of the defence lawyers from the case, Dr. Ahmet requested postponement of the trial until new lawyers could be assigned and an adequate interpreter could be provided. This request was not considered. As a result, both defendants were tried without lawyers and without an adequate interpreter. Moreover, their personal right of defence was severely restricted.

(f) The court room was occupied by a crowd demonstrating against and trying to intimidate the defendants. These demonstrations were tolerated and even condoned by the judges and the security officers on duty.

7. On the morning of 26 January 1990, when the decision against the defendants was made public, street demonstrations were organized against the Turkish minority in Komotini.
8. We immediately expressed our indignation in the face of this situation which has marred the concept of justice. We also drew the attention of the Greek Government to the tension which prevailed in Komotini and requested full security measures to be taken in order to prevent mass attacks against the Turkish minority. We were given assurances by the Greek authorities that all precautions would be taken.
9. Despite these assurances, Komotini became the scene of organized mass violence against the Turkish minority on 29 January 1990. Grave assaults took place against the members of the minority and their shops and offices were destroyed and looted by savage mobs. Similarly the offices of two local Turkish language newspapers, "Akin" and "Gercek" were ransacked. Members of the minority were forcefully prevented from entering the main mosque in Komotini for a prayer service. Many were wounded, some of them seriously during these incidents.
10. Throughout the entire course of this episode, Greek police and officials did not take any preventive action and were content to be mere spectators to the violence that unfolded before their eyes. All the radio stations in Komotini made provocative broadcasts, instigating and supporting the brutal attacks against the minority. The Greek Government, despite our persistent demarches, took no decisive action to put an end to this totally unacceptable situation.
11. We strongly deplore these incidents and the conduct of the Greek authorities. The full responsibility for these incidents rests with the Greek Government which is under the obligation to protect not only the rights but also the security of the Turkish minority as equal Greek citizens.
12. We expect that, like us, you will find it impossible to ignore or to excuse such use of brute force in a member country of the European community.
13. Both the trial of Dr. Sadik Ahmet and Mr. Ibrahim Serif and the scope of the violence directed against the minority testify to the violation of human rights in Western Thrace.
14. We expect Greece to respect its contractual obligations, to offer indemnity for the losses suffered by the minority and to take action in good will to resolve the serious problems in Western Thrace.
15. I wish to appeal to you to firmly uphold human rights in Western Thrace. The trial of Dr. Sadik Ahmet and Ibrahim Serif is a violation of fundamental concepts such as a fair and public hearing by an impartial tribunal, the right to defend himself in person or through legal assistance, to have the free assistance of an interpreter if he cannot speak the language used in court, and the right to freedom of expression. The organized violence which has pursued the trial has violated many more basic principles, starting with the right to security of person.

16. At a time when human rights and democratic norms are so decisively gaining ground in Europe and elsewhere, I am confident that you will not wish to fail to contribute to the protection and the promotion of the same values in Western Thrace. I hope you will take an active interest in the human rights problems in this region of Greece and assist our efforts for impressing upon the Greek Government the urgent need to deal with these problems peacefully within a humanitarian and enlightened context.

(Signed) Mesut Yilmaz
Minister of Foreign Affairs