

Cultural and Educational Women Association of Drosero Xanthi “ELPIDA” (“THE HOPE”)



617 R/N
20 JUNE 2019

TO:
ERIO
(European Roma Information Office)

PRESS RELEASE

The Roma of Thrace Reject Being Identified as Ethnic Turks

Xanthi 18 June 2019 | In the wake of the EU elections, provocative statements by Tsigdem Asafoglou, President of the K.I.E.F. Party, which represents the Muslim minority in Thrace, have once again embroiled the region in a debate on the status of the minority.

Ms. Asafoglou, whose party made a strong showing in recent elections, asserted, in a TV appearance on 29 May 2019, that her party is a Turkish party and that she herself identifies as Turkish, even if her passport is Greek.

ELPIDA, as an organization representing Muslim Roma in Thrace, takes strong exception to Ms. Asafoglou's statements. The statements are consistent with the ongoing rhetoric of the Turkish Consulate in Komotini, which seeks to portray the entire Muslim minority of Thrace as ethnically Turkish.

K.I.E.F. is currently the strongest party representing the Muslim minority of Thrace, having gained approximately 50% of the minority vote in the recent EU elections. This does not mean, however, that Ms. Asafoglou can speak for the Muslims of Thrace generally. The Muslim minority is diverse and includes Roma, Pomaks and Bektashis.

The Roma of Thrace consider themselves Greek citizens first and foremost, and continually seek to assert their rights and fulfill their duties as Greek citizens. The Roma of Drosero, the largest Roma settlement in Greece and where ELPIDA is based, speak Romani and Greek and have no affiliation with Turkey or the Turkish language.

During the 14 years that ELPIDA has worked to further the rights of the Roma and protect their language and cultural heritage, we have felt the detrimental effects of the efforts to portray the entire Muslim minority as ethnically Turkish. We aim to continue our work and draw attention to instances of our rights being trampled and our ethnicity denied. We call on the Greek state to uphold our right to our ethnic identity as Roma and our rights as Greek citizens. We would also welcome a public debate between Ms. Suleiman, director of ELPIDA, and Ms. Asafoglou on this issue.

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About ELPIDA:

ELPIDA (which means 'hope' in Greek), is a non-governmental organization, founded in August of 2006 on the initiative of 20 women in the Roma settlement of Drosero, near Xanthi, Greece. Elpida aims to improve the living conditions of the Roma in the settlement through education, dissemination of information, and advocacy.

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Sincerely,

The President of the Women Association of
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«ELPIDA»



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