

Thank you,

I want to present a speech from Mr. Festim Lato who represents the Cham community.

The Cham are an indigenous people with a Cham-Albanian culture who lived for many centuries in the historical region of Chameria, which is now Northwestern Greece.

The citizenship of my parents and their generation was taken away by the Greek government through a special Law in 1947, after they drove us out by force into Albania during World War Two. This was described in great detail by the international community. The Albanian government did not help the Cham. Instead, they forced the Albanian citizenship upon the Cham community in 1953.

Because the Greek government took away the citizenship of the Cham we lost our houses and properties. This historical problem has not been solved and continues to limit the Cham people today.

Because the Greek government took the citizenship of my parents' generation we also lost our political, cultural, social and economical rights. The Law of Confiscation adopted by the Greek government in 1953-54 formalised the seizure of Cham properties. In practice this means that many of the Cham are poor and are unable to cross the Albanian-Greek border even though they have valid Albanian passports.

The Greek government uses the argument that passports of people with Albanian citizenship who were born in the region of Chameria need to specifically state that their country of birth was Greece. The passports of Cham people born in the region of Chameria are completely valid documents with which they can travel to all countries in the Schengen area, except to Greece. This issue was discussed in the European Parliament this year.

Furthermore, in the territory where the Cham used to form the majority, the language is not recognised and the Cham are also not recognised as a minority.

Therefore, I call upon Greece to repeal the laws that took away our citizenship and properties. I also request the United Nations to support the Cham people and help resolve the Cham issue. We want to be recognised as Cham and we deserve the return of our citizenship and properties that were taken away from us.