

**DCM Thomas Countryman's Telephone Interview with  
Journalist Vasiliki Siouti for Sunday *Eleftherotypia*  
Given at the Request of Ms. Siouti**

**Wednesday, November 1, 2006**

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**Ms. Siouti:** What has changed so that the US speaks about a Turkish minority (and not a Moslem one)?

**Mr. Countryman:** I think there is no change in the United States' position. The Warsaw meeting of the human dimension of OSCE -- I should explain this meeting. Fifty European countries and the United States and Canada signed the Helsinki Final Act and agreed to abide by all of its measures. And once a year all of these countries get together and evaluate each other and have an honest exchange of views about how each of us is implementing the obligations that each of us undertook. So, when the European Union, of which Greece is a member, made a speech that criticized the United States' policy in some areas, we did not take this as a new position, we did not take this as a campaign of pressure, we did not take this as an anti-American gesture. We took it in the sense in which it was intended, an honest difference of opinion between friends who have all agreed to do the same things, and now we are evaluating each other. And I think that's the way that anybody should look at what the United States said this year and compare it to what we have said previously, and you'll see there is not a change in our position.

**Ms. Siouti:** Mr. Bond in Poland (OSCE) said that there's a problem with the behavior of Greece towards the Turkish minority. What are the problems in your opinion?

**Mr. Countryman:** I did not see where the United States said that, and I did not see where Greece said that most of the Muslims are Slavic Muslims, that is Pomak. So, I don't know exactly what you are quoting...

**Ms. Siouti:** (inaudible)

**Mr. Countryman:** Well, I think that is our evaluation, that of the Muslims in northern Greece, those Greek citizens in northern Greece, the majority of them are ethnically Turkish. That is they descend from Turkish families and they speak Turkish, and therefore we consider them ethnically Turkish in the same way that we consider people who live in America and speak Greek and come from Greek parents to be ethnically Greek. We feel it is inconsistent logically to say that there are Greeks living in America, there are Greeks living in Albania, there are Greeks living in Turkey, but there are no Turks living in Greece. This is not a logically consistent definition.

**Ms. Siouti:** (inaudible)

**Mr. Countryman:** I understand that, and that's exactly why we have the human dimension meetings, so that we can express our disagreements and nobody is forced or pressured to swallow someone else's definition of the requirements. So, for example, when the United States was criticized by Greece and other European Union countries on the issue of capital punishment, even though as far as I know capital punishment is not addressed in the Helsinki Final Act, we did not take this as pressure. We took it as a disagreement, and we disagreed politely.

**Ms. Siouti:** (inaudible)

**Mr. Countryman:** Just as we speak about a Greek minority in Albania...

**Ms. Siouti:** (inaudible)

**Mr. Countryman:** I think the primary problem is that they are not accorded the rights contained in the Helsinki Final Act to identify themselves as they wish to identify themselves; that they are not given the option of identifying themselves as ethnic Turks. If the same right were denied to a Greek minority in a neighboring country, I think that it would be fairly clear here that that would also be inconsistent with the Helsinki Final Act.

**Ms. Siouti:** Do you think the problem is that Greece talks all the time about the treaty of Lausanne?

**Mr. Countryman:** I don't think that's the problem. The Lausanne Treaty is a milestone. It is a very important and very relevant treaty. However, it is not the last treaty that Greece and Turkey signed. They also signed the Helsinki Final Act which, as is normal in international law, developed new principles and new obligations that Greece and Turkey and the U.S. freely, voluntarily agreed to honor in 1975. And subsequently, Greece became a member of the European Union, and accepted additional obligations on minority policy under European Union documents. So, the Lausanne Treaty is very important, but it is not the last word in international law.