

ENGLISH only

**Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting**  
**Freedom of Religion or Belief : Issues, Opportunities, and the Specific Challenges of**  
**Combatting Anti-semitism and Intolerance and discrimination against Christians,**  
**Muslims and Members of Other Religious**  
**STATEMENT BY THE DELEGATION OF GREECE**  
**- RIGHT OF REPLY- (Session I)**

Regarding the appointment of the Muftis that it was mentioned by the representatives of the Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association and ABTTF, I would like to underline that Greece is in consultation with the Muslim minority in Thrace and cares for the protection of its human rights, including religious freedom. The Heads of the three Mufti- offices, who are the religious leaders of the minority in Thrace, are selected by a pave of esteemed preachers of Islam through transparent and inclusive procedures.

Concerning allegations that Muftis should be elected, it is to be noted that every sovereign state, be it Islamic or not, has the right to determines the appropriate legal framework, always in accordance with the Islamic tradition and the religious rights and freedoms. There is no internationally binding procedure for the appointment of Muftis. Besides, quite all Islamic States (also Turkey, Saudi Arabia etc.) abide by the traditional assignment method for the Muftis, which is their appointment after a selection procedure.

With regard to the allegations contained in their statement as to what is happening in other religious communities in Greece, the following should be noted: the bishops of the Orthodox Church of Greece are not elected through general elections in which its adherents would participate, but by elections conducted by the Holy Synod in which only the Bishops of the Church of Greece have the right to vote. The bishops of the Catholic Church in Greece are not elected but selected by the Pope. Neither the Rabbis of the Jewish community are elected through elections involving all Greek Jews; instead they are selected by the boards of the Jewish communities.

From the above, it is clear that in none of the cases mentioned, are the religious leaders being elected by their adherents but either their election is the choice of their supreme religious leader, or it is the choice of an electoral body, which is composed of religious officers, or a limited number of representatives of their community. And of course, there is another distinctive difference: none of the above is exerting judicial powers over his followers, as the Muftis in Greece do.

Therefore, the «Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe» requests from Greece to apply a preferential status for the Muslims of Thrace that it is neither provided in the Treaty of Lausanne, nor followed by any other major religious community in Greece, or applied by any Islamic country in the world.

Finally, concerning the closure of worships, also mentioned, I would like to stress that the proper function of legal “masjids” is not prohibited. The Greek authorities closed down a number of so - called “masjids” that were illegally run by certain associations without having obtained the necessary administrative license thereto.

To conclude, I would like to repeat the words of the Greek Deputy Foreign Minister, Yannis Ammanatidis, who said, - during the recent visit of the Turkish Prime Minister Binali Yildirim in Western Thrace, - “that the region of Thrace is an example of peaceful and harmonious co-existence of different religious, Muslims and Christians”.