

**STATEMENT BY THE DELEGATION OF GREECE -RIGHT OF REPLY****Working session 14: Tolerance and non-discrimination II, including:**

- Combating racism, xenophobia and discrimination, also focusing on intolerance and discrimination against Christians and members of other religions**
- Combating anti-Semitism**
- Combating intolerance and discrimination against Muslims**

In reply to two NGO statements, I would like to stress that Greece fully respects the rights of the persons belonging to all three components of the Muslim minority in Thrace, namely persons of Turkish, Pomak and Roma origin. What cannot be accepted, in accordance with international standards, is to establish a single ethnic identity for the entire minority and to subsume Pomak and Roma persons under a Turkish identity which is not their own.

In contrast to the perceptions of our NGO colleague, every single Ministry of the Greek Government performs its duties and tasks in Thrace, as in any other part of Greece. The mission of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is limited to monitoring compliance with Greece's international obligations. This, I think, should not be a cause for concern for our NGO colleagues.

I would like to recall that each country, including Muslim ones, establishes its own process for the selection of Muftis.

The Greek law ensures the selection of notable, distinguished teachers of Islam in accordance with the Islamic tradition and religious rights and freedoms.

Furthermore, one has to take into account the fact that the Muftis also exercise some judicial tasks on family and inheritance law matters of the Muslim minority in Thrace.

The so-called “elected Muftis” are not officially recognized; however, the State does not obstruct their religious or other activities, showing maximum tolerance and restraint despite the evident disrespect for the existing legislation and an often non-constructive attitude.

Our legislation has accommodated the longstanding request of the Muslim Minority to elect the members of the three main Management Vakif Committees. Some members of the minority have raised concerns with regard to specific provisions of the relevant law. Ways to address such concerns are being explored.

Finally, our legislation has substantially enhanced the status of religious preachers who are free to choose whether or not to join the applicable legislative scheme and to benefit from it.