

Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting
National Minorities, Bridge building and Integration

ENGLISH only

STATEMENT BY THE DELEGATION OF GREECE

- RIGHT OF REPLY- (Session 3)

Freedom of association is unequivocally, firmly and broadly protected by the Greek constitution. It must be stressed that in Thrace, there is a thriving civil society comprising a large number of Muslim minority associations and NGOs that have been registered by the competent courts and operate unimpeded, thus preserving, highlighting and promoting all aspects of the cultural, educational and economic life of this minority. For instance, more than 50 minority associations have been registered since January 2008. The courts decide ad hoc on every NGO's/association's application for registration. Three cases had, however, been brought before the European Court of Human Rights by three minority associations and decisions were reached.

The Greek Government is considering appropriate ways and means of implementing three judgments of the European Court of Human Rights including potential legislative adjustments in order to make possible the reopening of relevant domestic procedures. In fact, full implementation is still pending, due to procedural reasons, as identified by the competent national courts, and are not related to the statute or the activities of any particular association.

The Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, which is examining the execution of the above judgments, stated in March 2016 that it took note with interest of the information provided by the Greek authorities about the forthcoming establishment of a special structure responsible for the execution of the Court's judgments and that it decided to resume consideration of this question in March 2017 at the latest in order to make a substantive assessment of the developments. A draft law, which has already been submitted to open, public consultation, provides for the creation of a National Monitoring Mechanism of the implementation of European Court's judgments. The draft bill will soon be tabled before Parliament.

Also, the European Court delivered in December 2015 its judgments that dismissed two new cases brought before it by two of the aforementioned three minority associations based on alleged new violations of the freedom of association, finding that Greece had not committed such further violations.

It is noted that the competent Ministry of justice is already establishing the abovementioned "special structure responsible for the execution of the Court's judgments". In the meantime,

the Greek courts, in practice, take into consideration the standards of the Europe Court of Human Rights so that since the abovementioned decisions in 2007 and 2008, minority members freely establish their associations, no matter if their mother tongue is Turkish, Pomak or Romani.

Furthermore, it is not accurate to claim that the associations were not registered on the grounds that they had word "Turkish" in their title. Recently, an association was registered, in the title of which the word "Turkish" was used to denote the mother language of its members ("Sports and Cultural Association Solidarity-Development of Greek citizens of Muslim religion having Turkish as their mother language").

The Greek Government attaches great importance to the dialogue with civil society, a dialogue which is an all-inclusive process aimed at promoting and enhancing prosperity, stability and equal opportunities for all Greek citizens, irrespective of their religious belief, origin or cultural backgrounds.

It is, therefore, through this process that the Greek Government will continue to seek further ways and means to meet the needs of the members of the Muslim minority and enhance their progress, prosperity and well being.