

## STATEMENT BY THE DELEGATION OF GREECE

### -RIGHT OF REPLY-

#### **Working session 6: Fundamental freedoms II, including: – Freedom of thought, conscience, religion, or belief**

In reply to two NGO statements, I would like to stress the following.

The Muslim minority in Thrace is defined by its religious identity and is not an ethnic or national one.

The three (3) Muftis in Thrace are selected through an open and inclusive process, by a pool of notable and esteemed teachers of Islam, members of the minority, and are subsequently nominated to the Mufti Offices by the state. Greece assigns the Muftis to their Office in accordance with the Islamic tradition, fully respecting freedom of religion. There is no single, internationally established method for the Muftis' assignment. It is noteworthy that, in all Muslim countries, Muftis are appointed by the State and are not elected.

The so called "elected Muftis" are not officially recognized: despite attitudes of evident disrespect to the existing legislation and an often provocative attitude, the State does not obstruct their activities, showing maximum tolerance and restraint.

The Muslim charitable foundations (*waqfs*) have been granted property and tax exemptions, as it is the case with the Greek Orthodox Church. Additionally, Law 3647/2008 provides for their self-governance, pursuant to Islamic tradition. It is the wish of the Greek State to see Law 3647/2008 be fully implemented.

Greek citizens of Muslim faith residing in the Greek islands of Rhodes and Kos neither constitute nor consider themselves as a minority. Their religious and cultural rights are fully respected by the State, as it is the case with every Greek citizen. The Greek State has devoted significant resources to the restoration of Ottoman monuments, including in Rhodes and Kos, thus stressing the importance given to cultural heritage monuments in the country.