

**STATEMENT BY THE DELEGATION OF GREECE****-RIGHT OF REPLY-****Working session 8: Tolerance and non-discrimination I (continued)**

In reply to two NGO statements, I would like to recall that the Muslim minority in Thrace consists of three distinct groups whose members are of Turkish, Pomak and Roma origin, having the Muslim faith as their common denominator. Each of these groups has its own spoken language, cultural traditions and heritage, which are fully respected by the Greek state. The only common denominator of the aforementioned three, otherwise distinct, components is their Muslim faith. It is on the basis of this objective fact that the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne that establishes the status of the minority in Thrace refers to it as being a religious minority.

In keeping with the principle of individual self-identification, persons belonging to the Muslim minority in Thrace are free to declare their origin, speak their language, exercise their religion and observe their particular customs and traditions. What is not acceptable, in accordance with all relevant international standards, is the attempt to establish a single ethnic identity for the entire Muslim minority in Thrace, so as to subsume Pomak and Roma persons under a Turkish identity which is not their own.

In the field of education, in Thrace, there are more than 120 minority primary schools, 2 minority high schools and 2 Koranic schools, in respect of which special measures have been designed and put in place by the Ministry of Education, in cooperation with other entities. At the same time, measures with regard to the religious education of Muslim minority students are implemented in public schools.

On freedom of association, a law adopted in October 2017 allows the reopening of non-contentious judicial procedures, including those related to the registration of associations, following a judgment of the European Court of Human Rights finding a violation of the Convention. Relevant cases under the new legislation have not yet been brought before the Supreme Court. There is a thriving social society in Thrace and dozens of minority associations have been registered by the courts in the last ten years.