

WARSAW, 11 October 2006

**OSCE HDIM-WORKING SESSION 14:
Promotion of Tolerance and Non-Discrimination. National Minorities**

**STATEMENT BY THE GREEK DELEGATION
in exercise of its Right of Reply**

1. My delegation requested to exercise its “right of reply” to a statement made by the distinguished representative of the United States of America, who mentioned the existence of “Albanian, Macedonian and Turkish” minorities in Greece. The views contained therein are erroneous, misleading and suggest an unwarranted severity of the situation in my country. After all, many of the terms used by the distinguished representative for describing the above situation, come into stark contrast with those (terms) used on many occasions, in written and oral form, by prominent representatives of the U.S. Administration.

2. With respect to the Muslim minority in Thrace, one should note that the 1923 Lausanne Treaty provides solely for a Muslim minority in Greece. The members of the Muslim minority are free to declare their ethnic origin (Turkish, Pomak or Roma), speak their language, exercise their religion and observe their particular customs and traditions. The principle of individual self-identification is fully protected in Greece. What is not acceptable to the Greek State 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 single identity.

The members of the Muslim minority enjoy a wide range of educational rights. Today, there are 210 primary minority schools in Thrace. Courses are taught in the Greek and Turkish languages. Around 400 Muslim teachers are employed in these schools. The vast majority of them are graduates from the Special Pedagogical Academy of Thessaloniki. Two minority secondary education schools operate in the cities of Xanthi and Komotini. The schools are housed in buildings provided by the Greek State. Two Koranic schools operate in Komotini and Echinós, which are recognized as equivalent to the Religious Lyceums of the country. In order to improve the skills of the pupils in the Greek language, additional educational programs are applied, producing

positive results. Furthermore, in the beginning of the current year, the teaching of the Turkish language was introduced, on an optional basis, in a number of non-minority public schools in Thrace.

As far as tertiary education is concerned, Greek Law provides for a special quota of 0,5% for the admission of students from the minority to Greek higher education institutions. When this law entered into force in 1996, 70 students were admitted in Universities. This year, 315 minority students were admitted in tertiary education institutions.

The rights of the members of the Muslim minority in Thrace are fully guaranteed and effectively protected in a democratic society, where the rule of law prevails. Greek legislation provides for special measures in favour of the Muslim minority and is in line with the European Convention of Human Rights, the values of the European Union, as well as OSCE commitments.

In conclusion : Greece, indeed, continues to cite the Lausanne Treaty as the basis for the definition, recognition **and protection** of the minorities envisaged in this binding text of International Law. This is the reason why the Muslim Minority in Greece (of Turkish, Pomak and Roma ethnic origin) is well, “alive” and thriving, while another minority, Greek-Orthodox this time, in a neighboring country, also mentioned in the Lausanne Treaty, is practically on its deathbed, without the distinguished representative of the USA having spent one single word in his statement, on its dismal fate.

3. International law does not oblige States to recognize migrant communities as “minorities”. There is no “customary international law” to that effect. Members of these communities are fully protected by the general human rights instruments. Legislation and practice of most European countries, as reflected in national laws, declarations or national reports under relevant international instruments, follow the same approach.

4. The use of the term “Albanian minority group” in the distinguished representative’s statement is unfortunate. There is, indeed, a sizable **community** of Albanian citizens, who reside and work in my country in order to achieve a better future for themselves, their families and the economy of their country. Greece spares no effort to improve the standard of living of all its economic immigrants and has, to that effect, enacted a series of appropriate laws. These immigrants are effectively integrated into Greek society. Marginalization and ghettos have been avoided.

On a more general level, a law was adopted in 2005 (transposing relevant EU directives), which aims at implementing the principle of equal treatment regardless of, *inter alia*, racial or ethnic origin, religious or other convictions, and covers a wide variety of fields. Furthermore, it designates or establishes bodies for the promotion of equal treatment.

5. Let me underline that almost two and a half million Greek Macedonians really loathe to be downgraded to the status of a “minority” in a region, Macedonia, they have inhabited for thousands of years. If by the term “Macedonian minority” the distinguished representative implies the existence of a handful of Greek citizens, who wish to identify themselves with the Slav-Macedonians of our northern neighbor, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, then let me inform him that the members of this group are full-fledged citizens of my country, enjoying equal rights, being free and able to express their views, form political parties and associations.

The fact that a small number of persons who live in Northern Greece use, without restrictions, in addition to the Greek language, Slavic oral idioms, confined to family or colloquial use, does not indicate the existence of a minority, since the persons using these idioms have never considered themselves other than Greek and vehemently reject any attempt by some circles to define them as members of a different national, ethnic or linguistic group.

International law does not place upon States the obligation to officially recognize a group of persons as a “minority”, solely on the basis that a small number of their citizens occasionally make use also of other, local idioms.

Finally, in order to place the whole issue in its real perspective, let me add that the above Slav-oriented group of Greek citizens in Macedonia have been freely participating with their own political party in parliamentary elections in Greece, each time showing a downward trend to the already insignificant number of votes they were able to win, covering not more than 0,02% of the electoral vote. It is indicative that the above Slav-oriented group cannot attract the attention even of the people whose interests they claim to promote and protect.