

**STATEMENT BY THE DELEGATION OF GREECE
-RIGHT OF REPLY-**

**Working Session 10: Tolerance and non-discrimination I, including address
by the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities (26.9.2016)**

In reply to statements made by three NGOs, I would like to recall that the Muslim minority in Thrace is defined by its religious identity and is not an ethnic or national minority. In fact, Muslim minority members have different origins (Turkish, Pomak or Romani); hence, the 1923 Lausanne Treaty identifies the minority as a religious one. Greek Muslim citizens residing in Thrace are free to identify themselves as they wish despite their distinct cultural background. However, any attempt to establish a single ethnic identity for the entire religious Muslim minority in Thrace, so as to subsume Pomak and Roma members of the minority under a Turkish identity which is not their own contradicts the letter and the spirit of the OSCE principles and cannot be accepted.

With regard to freedom of association, Greece fully respects the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights and currently elaborates on the appropriate measures to implement them. The Ministry of Justice, Transparency and Human Rights is already establishing a special structure responsible for the execution of the Court's judgments, which was taken note with interest by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe in March 2016. I would like to stress that, as also explained last week, tens of minority associations have been established and recognized since 2008, in full conformity with the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights, including an association in the title of which the word "Turkish" was used to denote the mother language of its members.

In almost all successive parliamentary elections held in Greece since 1927, candidates that were members of the Muslim minority in Thrace have been elected as Members of Parliament (MPs) - with the governing party, the opposition or, in most cases, on both sides of the Parliament. Currently, there are four MPs that are members of the said minority. Furthermore, the members of the minority do actively participate in all levels of the region's Local Administration. This continues to be the case, following the most recent (May 2014) regional and local elections. Roughly 120 Greek citizens - members of the Muslim minority - were elected at the local and regional Councils in Thrace. The threshold of 3% required for obtaining seats in Parliament is among the lowest in Europe and is fully in conformity with the case-law of the European Court of Human Rights, which has found that a threshold of 10% does not violate the European Convention.

On the right to education, we continue our policy of improving the functioning of the existing 132 primary minority schools, 2 secondary and 2 Koranic/Islamic schools, while successfully accommodating the preference to the public, non-minority educational system shown by the minority members who select it. There are also at least 57 public

kindergartens in minority villages, which minority children can attend before entering primary education schools.

Finally I would like to recall that, as recognized by the European Court of Human Rights, States have the right to control the entry and stay of foreign nationals in their territory. The prohibition to enter a specific country is a national prerogative that every State uses in a discretionary manner. As far as we have been informed, regarding the case referred to in one NGO statement, the measure of prohibition to enter the country's territory was neither related to the concerned person's personal identity (nationality, gender, religion or beliefs, etc.), nor to any other ground covered by the OSCE commitments.