

STATEMENT BY THE DELEGATION OF GREECE**-RIGHT OF REPLY-****Working session 7: Fundamental Freedoms I**

In reply to two NGO statements, I would like to stress that the process for the appointment of the three Muftis in Thrace is fully consistent with the practice followed by other states, including Muslim ones, bearing also in mind that the Muftis in Thrace exercise judicial responsibilities alongside their religious tasks.

According to recently adopted laws, the jurisdiction of the Muftis in family and inheritance law matters of the Muslim minority in Thrace is exceptional and depends on the mutual consent of the parties. A draft Presidential Decree defining the relevant procedural rules as well as the organization and operation of the respective Department at the Muftiates, has been drawn up.

Such measures are fully in line with the international treaty establishing the status and protecting the rights of persons belonging to the Muslim minority in Thrace, namely the Treaty of Lausanne, as well as the European Convention on Human Rights and the recommendations of UN treaty bodies. Furthermore, Muftis must compulsorily leave their post at the age of 67, in order for the State to program a smooth succession procedure. Finally, the operating expenditures of the Muftiates are to be borne by the budget of the Ministry of Education, so as to cover the religious needs of the Muslim minority in the best possible way and to safeguard transparency.

The abovementioned measures improve substantially the legal framework of the Muftiates and further strengthen the protection of the rights of persons belonging to the religious Muslim minority in Thrace.