

## Statement by the delegation of Greece

### Working Session 6: Freedom of Religion or Belief and the Law 4115/2013

Greece remains fully committed to safeguard the respect and protection of freedom of religion or belief, which constitutes a fundamental right for every human being, regardless of his/her origin, cultural background or conviction.

The main objective of Law 4115/2013 is to create 240 posts of Koran teachers, who may also be appointed in the Greek public schools in Thrace. It is a forward-looking initiative because, for the first time, Muslim Minority students, who attend public schools in increasing numbers, will have the opportunity, if they so wish, to study the Holy Koran in public schools.

The Koran teachers are selected, through a fully transparent and inclusive procedure, by a qualified 5-member Committee, which is composed exclusively of eminent Muslim personalities and is presided by the local Mufti.

In fact, the first stage of the procedure has been successfully concluded, at the end of August 2013, with the selection of sixty three qualified candidate as Koran teachers. They will receive a steady salary provided by the Greek State and will enjoy social security benefits. Their standing in society, in these times of economic crisis, will improve substantially.

It should be noted that Koran teachers have the right to **freely choose** whether they want to join this scheme. The entire philosophy of the law is based on this principle. Should they desire to be part of it, they will be selected by a transparent procedure. In this respect, it should be made absolutely clear that Law 4115/2013 does not touch upon the status of Imams. The Imams in Thrace are selected in accordance with the Islamic law, the traditions and the practices of the Muslim Minority, without any involvement whatsoever of the State. It goes without saying that they exercise their religious duties freely, without any impediment.

The same applies with the minority students and the teaching of the Holy Koran in public schools. The children (or their parents) can freely decide whether they wish or not to attend the classes.

In light of the above it is clear that, by virtue of this law, an innovative and forward looking policy is implemented, in full respect of the freedom of religion and in accordance with international standards, including OSCE commitments on freedom of religion. It is also clear that the new legislative framework follows closely current trends and best practices in the fields of education and respect of diversity.

The ongoing campaign to present a different picture on the pretext of alleged state involvement in the religious freedom of the Minority, smack of political expediency and is misleading.

We would like to underline, that the rights of the members of the Muslim minority residing in the Greek region of Thrace, are protected and promoted through the implementation of the highest contemporary international standards in the field of human rights, the provisions of the Treaty of Lausanne, which established their status, the European Union *acquis* and the Greek Constitution. The members of the Muslim minority enjoy full equality before the law, without any discrimination. For Greece, meeting the needs of its Muslim citizens, members of the Muslim minority in Thrace, is an ever evolving challenge and commitment.