

**Human Dimension Implementation Meeting
Warsaw, 16-27 September 2019**

GREECE

RIGHT OF REPLY

**Working session 12: Tolerance and non-discrimination II, including address by the
OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities: – Rights of persons belonging to
national minorities**

In reply to another, rather repetitive NGO statement, I would like to recall that the Muslim minority in Thrace, the status of which was established by the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne, consists of three distinct groups, whose members are of Turkish, Pomak and Roma origin, having the Muslim faith as their common denominator.

We fully respect the principle of individual self-identification. Persons living in Greece are free to declare their origin, speak their language, exercise their religion and observe their particular customs and traditions. What is not acceptable 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.

Our general approach and policies with regard to the Muslim minority in Thrace are based on the Treaty of Lausanne, but also on the implementation of modern human rights treaties, which are applied without discrimination to the members of the Muslim minority, including with regard to freedom of association.

As far as minority education is concerned, there are 123 minority elementary schools in Thrace, hosting more than 4,500 minority students. There are also about 40 public kindergartens in minority villages in Thrace. Since May 2018, a pilot program has been launched in public kindergartens in the region, where, alongside the main educator in the classroom, there are language facilitators who speak the mother tongue of the children belonging to the Muslim minority. This aims at facilitating the integration into the educational system of children who do not speak sufficiently well the Greek language and at better preparing them for minority elementary school, where half of the curriculum is taught in Greek. Currently, the pilot programme is implemented in 12 kindergartens. Minority children in these schools do not have sufficient knowledge of the Greek language, which is the most significant challenge for them. We firmly believe that it is of paramount importance for minority children to learn the language of the country in which they are living, in order for them to be active members of this society.