

Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting

ENGLISH only

National Minorities, Bridge building and Integration

STATEMENT BY THE DELEGATION OF GREECE

- RIGHT OF REPLY- (Session 1)

In Greece, one group of persons is qualified as “minority”, namely the Muslim minority in Thrace, the status of which was established by the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne. The Muslim minority consists of three distinct groups, whose members are of Turkish, Pomak and Roma origin. Each of these groups has its own spoken language, cultural traditions and heritage, which are fully respected by the Greek state. The only common denominator of the aforementioned three, otherwise distinct, components is their Muslim faith, and this objective fact explains why this minority is recognized as a religious one. In view of the above, 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, cannot be accepted.

Greece fully respects 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. However, our firm position is that the decision of a State to recognize a group as a minority and to provide to its members specific minority rights, additional to those guaranteed by human rights treaties, must be based, not only on subjective claims or perceptions of numerically small number of persons but also on objective facts and criteria.

Relying on solid and objective legal and factual grounds, Greece does not recognize other groups as “minorities”. However, the members of groups which are not officially recognized as “minorities”, since they do not fulfill the relevant objective criteria, fully enjoy their rights under relevant human rights treaties.

With regard to the Greek citizens of Muslim faith residing in Rhodes and Kos, I would like to stress that they are fully integrated in the local society, living peacefully with all other residents, no matter their religion. They enjoy the same rights and have the same obligations as all Greek citizens. No Treaty or other international instrument designates them as a “minority”. Nevertheless, their religious and cultural rights are fully respected.

Finally, I would like to stress the meaning of the topic of this SHDIM, pointing to the fact that, regrettably, there was no mention by the young representative of the NGO ABTTF to the various activities taking place in Thrace, the focus of which is to build bridges. Let me refer indicatively to only a few of them, such as the establishment of Youth Councils with the

Participation and active involvement of young Christians and Muslims alike and also the cultural festivities that have been hosted in Thrace, through the cooperation of Greek – Turkish municipal authorities with the active involvement of minority associations and NGOs, including artists invited from Turkey.

Nevertheless we have a genuine understanding that criticism is a result of insufficient available information to persons that have no connection with the region.