

**OSCE HUMAN DIMENSION IMPLEMENTATION MEETING
WORKING SESSION 3: FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS II (30.9.2008)
WORKING SESSION 5: TOLERANCE AND NON-DISCRIMINATION
I (1.10.2008)**

**STATEMENT BY THE GREEK DELEGATION
in exercise of its Right of Reply**

Freedom of Media

Law 3592/2007 has been issued in order to provide the necessary conditions for the operation of television and radio stations. This Law is a product of lengthy consultations between the General Secretariat of Communication/Information and competent EU authorities. A number of criteria have been taken into account to ensure that media operators abide by high standards, safeguarding at the same time fundamental rights of media operators, individuals and consumers. Thus, media pluralism, commercial viability, quality of programming, technical requirements, freedom of expression and information are amongst other criteria specified for license eligibility. It must also be taken into account that frequencies constitute a “public good”, which must be carefully managed, bearing always in mind the public interest.

Provisions of the said Law in no way hinder any local or regional applicant from obtaining a license, which is granted by a local (prefecture level) or regional authority. The relevant provisions for minimum disbursed capital (distinguishing between news and information providers and others) linked to population ratio (according to latest population census data) and/or employing a certain number of staff for radio stations, are amongst other requirements which purport to guarantee commercial viability, quantity and quality of programming, professional sustainability and better employment conditions, fully respecting national and international regulations and in line with the demands of professional groups (trade unions) themselves. Serious professionals abiding by the minimum requirements and universal criteria and conditions set by this new media legislation have nothing to be afraid of.

In the said Law, Greek is provided for as main, but not exclusive language of broadcasting. By this provision, which is only of a guiding nature, the Law provides for the use of the Greek language in conformity with the principles of the European Union which ensure and promote linguistic pluralism within the European area. Otherwise, spoken programming can be broadcast in languages other than Greek, thus ensuring the right to the free flow of information, freedom of expression and pluralism, free from any sort of discrimination.

Muslim minority in Thrace

The Muslim minority in Thrace, which is the officially recognized minority in Greece, numbers around 100,000 persons and consists of three distinct groups, whose members are of Turkish, Pomak or Roma origin. Each of these groups has its own distinct spoken language and cultural traditions. They share, however, a common religion, which is the basic reason for the denomination of the minority in its entirety as “Muslim” in the Lausanne Treaty of 1923, establishing the status of the above minority.

Members of the Muslim minority in Thrace 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.

Greece’s policy towards her Muslim minority in Thrace unfolds as follows: First, Greece **fully implements** her commitments pursuant to the relevant articles of the 1923 Lausanne International Treaty, which established the status of the Muslim minority in Thrace. In addition, the Muslims in Thrace, in accordance with the principle of equality before the law and of civil rights, enjoy the **same rights and obligations** as their Christian fellow citizens. In almost all successive parliamentary elections from 1927 onwards, there have been **Muslim deputies** within the main governing and opposition Greek political parties, whereas Muslims do participate in all the levels of **Local Administration** in Thrace. Second, in keeping with the European Convention on Human Rights and the U.N. human rights covenants, Greece has also adopted **positive discrimination** measures towards the Muslim minority, i.e. the two quotas (**0.5%**) for the admission of **minority students** to Universities and for their employment in the public sector. Third, members of the Muslim minority, namely **women and young persons**, have been, and continue to be, **beneficiaries under nation – wide programmes and projects**, co – financed by the E.U., i.e. on vulnerable social groups, on gender equality, on fighting racism and xenophobia, on equal opportunities as for the access to employment and on inter – cultural dialogue.

In general, over the last fifteen years, the Muslim minority has reaped all the benefits of Greece’s long membership in the European Union, as have all other Greek citizens. This has been, and continues to be, tangible evidence of our political culture and of our commitment to ensure the **smooth integration** of the minority in the social, economic and educational tissue of the country.

In spite of this evident progress, the same repeated grievances on the “plight” of the Muslim minority are being expressed by the Turkish – origin component of the minority and by Turkey itself. The more these grievances become tougher and orchestrated, the more they will bear clear evidence that Greece’s policy, over these past fifteen years, accompanied by concrete positive discrimination measures, **is on the right track**.

Two concepts cannot converge in Thrace: promoting **smooth integration**, on one hand, and marginalisation and a “ghetto” mentality, on the other.

Positive measures in favour of members of the Muslim minority

Indicatively, the Greek state has adopted and implemented the following measures in favour of the Muslim minority:

–**Turkish language** courses have been introduced (*since 2006*) in public schools curricula in Thrace, as an optional foreign language.

–A programme of **Greek language & civilization courses** has been successfully initiated for **Muslim parents**.

–As far as tertiary education is concerned, **the introduction of a 0,5 % quota** for the admission of Muslim students to Universities and Higher Technical Schools, has long borne its fruits.

–Mindful of the need to enhance the **participation** of the minority in the **public sector** in Thrace, we have introduced another **quota of 0,5 % to the State exams**, as provided for in a newly enacted law.

At the same time, the overall situation on the ground, concerning certain professions, is more than satisfactory. For instance, there is a large number of teachers from the minority, not to mention those working in banks and state hospitals in Thrace.

–In the framework of a law, adopted early in 2007, the Ministry of Education and Religion has provided for **the appointment of 240 Imams, and their remuneration**, to the three Mufti Offices.

–By virtue of the new law on the administration and the management of Muslim Wakifs in Thrace, both the members of the Wakif Committees as well as of the three main Management Committees **are to be elected**. Thus, **a longstanding request** by the Muslim minority **is being met** by the Greek state.

Previously, in 2007, the Muslim Wakifs had been **exempted** from submitting the Tax Declarations on Income, Land Property and Major Land Property of previous years, and consequently their accumulated registered **debts, fines** and existing **mortgages have been lifted**. Furthermore, as of 2008, the Muslim Wakifs **are now exempted from paying the Major Land Property tax**.

–Aiming at promoting inter – cultural dialogue, Greece has taken the initiative, in the context of an E.U. project, **to establish Youth Councils**, involving young Christians & Muslims alike, as part of the Local Administration network in Thrace.

Muftis

The Muftis, erroneously considered religious leaders, are high ranking Muslim clerics / officials.

By means of a selection procedure, whereby prominent Muslim personalities and theology professors are consulted, the **three Muftis** are subsequently chosen and appointed by the Greek state, as is the case in all Muslim countries and in Turkey itself.

The two, illicitly and arbitrarily elected, so – called Muftis act as if they were quasi **political** – religious leaders of the minority, contravening the rules and principles of a democratic state.

The members of the Muslim minority in Thrace perform their religious duties and follow their traditions without any restriction, retaining in full the right to worship in every day life.

Minority Education

In implementing the letter and the spirit of the Lausanne Treaty, Greece fosters the proper functioning of the **existing** minority schools in Thrace.

In parallel, the minority is, more than ever before, determined to bring **their children** to the **public** educational system, so the Greek state needs to respond to this request. The common feature of all democracies is the policy towards integration of their minorities, while promoting their cultural and linguistic characteristics.

The Greek Government has indeed extended the period of compulsory education from nine to ten years. This tenth year applies to children between five and six years old, who attend kindergartens. Children at kindergartens do not have Greek textbooks – actually they do not have any textbook – and do not follow any curriculum. In keeping with international and E.U. educational standards, the various activities and games at Greek kindergartens serve as a smooth introduction to primary education. We encourage kindergarten teachers, members of the Muslim minority in Thrace, to work at kindergartens in areas where there are many Muslims. Nevertheless, for the time being, the number of university – educated kindergarten teachers from the Muslim minority is still low, not exceeding 10 members. The situation is going to improve in the following years.

Associations

Greece, an E.U. member, does advocate and respect the institutional role of the European Court on Human Rights and its decisions.

It's worth mentioning that the reality in Thrace (proof that freedom of association is fully protected in the Greek legal order) is indicative: **a large number** of minority associations and non – governmental organizations have been recognized and function unimpeded.

Stateless persons

In 1998, the Greek government abolished article 19 of the Nationality Code, on the basis of which, in the past, a number of persons of non – Greek origin, who left the Greek territory with no intention of coming back, were deprived of their nationality.

Today, the process of acquiring the Greek citizenship is being completed for the remaining number (less than 20) of “stateless” **Muslims from Thrace**.