

7th Forum on Minority Issues – 2nd Intervention by Greece

Thank you Mr Chairman

We had previously the opportunity to present a list of positive measures that have been taken with regard to the Muslim minority in Thrace which is defined by its religious identity and consists of three distinct groups whose members are Greek citizens of Turkish, Pomak and Roma origin and cultural background. Here, pertinent to the draft rec no 15, we would like to make special reference to The new anti-racist law in our country which 1) imposes imprisonments and fines against hate speech or activities which may result to discrimination, hatred or violence against individuals or groups of individuals defined by race, colour, religion, national descent or ethnic origin, sexual orientation, gender identity or disability, (and which, 2) was adopted by the Greek Parliament only two months ago. Hence, let us show good faith and work towards its effectiveness in a cooperative spirit, avoiding attempts to discredit it so early on, while at the same time the Greek government is considering amendments to make the penal code stricter, stressing that our state defends legality and the rule of law and will not tolerate criminal activities perpetuating the cycle of violence.

Furthermore, insisting on educational measures playing a key role for protection of minority rights also on post conflict situations, we are pleased to mention that 1) the number of minority students attending public schools, whose courses aim at preserving their cultural and linguistic characteristics, has tripled since 1996. 2) that three quarters of minority students attend secondary public schools. And 3) that the number of Muslim minority University students has increased eightfold since 1996. These numbers prove the undisputable renewed confidence of the minority students' families to the Greek public education system.

As far as draft recommendations 18 and 19 are concerned, We would also like to mention that the Greek government undertakes and sponsors initiatives that highlight intercultural dialogue, integration and social coherence including through EU projects. An example of such a project is the initiative to establish youth councils, with the participation and active involvement of young Christians and Muslims alike, as part of the local administration network in Thrace. Cultural events are also hosted in Thrace with the participation from neighboring countries such as Turkey, promoting interaction with the minority. Additional steps have been taken enabling members of the Muslim minority especially women and young persons to be beneficiaries of projects cofinanced by the EU. These projects are designed for vulnerable social groups and focus on gender equality, combating xenophobia promoting equal opportunities, access to employment and into cultural dialogue.

Thank you, Mr Chairman