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Racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related forms of intolerance: follow-up to and implementation of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action

Note verbale dated 16 October 2024 from the Permanent Mission of Greece to the United Nations Office at Geneva addressed to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

The Permanent Mission of Greece to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva provides herewith the comments of the Government of Greece in relation to the written statement submitted by the “Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe”, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status¹ (see annex).

The Permanent Mission of Greece kindly requests the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to circulate the present note verbale and the annex thereto * as a document of the Human Rights Council under agenda item 9.

¹ A/HRC/57/NGO/4.

* Reproduced as received, in the language of submission only.



Annex to the note verbale dated 16 October 2024 from the Permanent Mission of Greece to the United Nations Office at Geneva addressed to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

The Muslim Minority in Thrace is a religious minority according to the 1923 Lausanne Treaty, which provided for its status in Greece and made no reference to the ethnic origin of its members (Turkish, Pomak and Roma). The Minority numbers more than 120.000 members and constitutes approximately one third of the overall population of the region of Thrace. The members of the Muslim Minority as Greek citizens enjoy without any discrimination all freedoms and rights guaranteed by the Greek Constitution as well as all benefits derived from their European citizenship.

Their educational and religious rights and freedoms are also safeguarded by the 1923 Lausanne Treaty, which accorded special minority rights to the members of the Muslim Minority in Thrace. With respect to those rights, the Greek state funds 88 Minority schools and 2 Koranic schools (Madrasas) in Thrace. The number of minority schools is sufficient to accommodate all requests for enrolments. The number of operative mosques in Thrace, which is higher than 240, eloquently testifies to the respect of the Greek State towards the right of Minority members to exercise their faith. It is the highest ratio of mosques per citizen of Islamic faith in Europe. The imams of those mosques are remunerated by the three Muftiates in place, which are institutions of the Ministry of Education and Religion.

Moreover, the Greek State has, systematically and consistently, adopted several advantageous measures to the benefit of the members of the Muslim Minority in Thrace in order to promote and facilitate their participation in the economic life and the labour market. To name a few, a 0,5% preferential quota to the State exams system for civil service has been established in favour of persons belonging to the Muslim Minority in order to encourage them to join the public sector, whereas, a 0.5% quota in their favour has long been introduced for their admission to Universities.

The freedom, independence and pluralism of the media is guaranteed by Greek legislation. As every Greek citizen, the members of the Muslim Minority in Thrace enjoy the right to operate all forms of media, in accordance with the relevant legal framework. Currently in Thrace, Minority members manage 5 radio stations, 6 daily newspapers, 5 news websites and one magazine, which provide information services with no interference on the part of Greek authorities as to the content of their newscasts. Moreover, Greek authorities take all necessary actions to combat threats or attacks against Greek journalists, including from the Minority. Rare litigation cases involving media of the Minority have not been initiated by Greek authorities but by individuals, often themselves members of the Minority.

As a state that respects the rule of law, Greece respects and protects the fundamental freedom of expression, which includes freedom of opinion and the right to receive or disseminate information or ideas without the interference of a public authority. At the same time, persons and groups of persons self-defining by reference to religion are protected by Greek legislation (No 4491/2017) against anyone who publicly incites, provokes, stirs, either orally or through the press, the internet or any other means, acts of violence, or hatred in a manner that endangers the public order and exposes their life, physical integrity and freedom to danger.
