



General Assembly

Distr.: General
11 March 2013

Original: English

Human Rights Council

Twenty-second session

Agenda item 3

**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Note verbale dated 22 February 2013 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 at Geneva and other international organizations in Switzerland presents its compliments to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, and has the honour to provide 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 status (A/HRC/22/NGO/18).

The Permanent Mission of Greece kindly requests the Office of the High Commissioner to circulate the attached text* as a document of the twenty-second session of the Human Rights Council.

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

Annex

[English only]

Referring to the written statement submitted by the NGO "Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe", under agenda item 3, which focuses on a recently adopted Greek law about Muslim Preachers in Thrace, (A/HRC/22/NGO/18) Greece would like to raise the following points:

The basic parameters of the law in question (Law 4115/2013) are the following:

- For the first time, teaching of the Holy Koran is made possible in Greek public schools in Thrace, to the benefit of students of the Minority who choose the public educational system.
- The Muslim preachers who will teach the Holy Koran will be selected, through a fully transparent and inclusive procedure, by a qualified 5 member Committee, which will include the Mufti, a reputable Muslim academic and a Muslim theologian.
- The Holy Koran teachers will receive a steady and legal salary, with social security benefits. Their standing in society, in these times of crisis, will improve and they will not depend from other uncertain or unspecified sources of income.
- It goes without saying that Koran teachers have the right to freely choose whether they want to join this scheme. The entire philosophy of the law is based on this principle. Should they desire to be part of it, they will be selected by a transparent procedure.
- The same applies with the teaching of the Holy Koran in public schools. The minority children can freely decide whether they wish or not to attend the classes.

In light of the above, it is clear that, contrary to the allegation of the NGO "Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe", by virtue of this law a forward looking policy addressing the needs of the Muslim Minority, within the institutional framework of Greece is implemented. The text of the law is attached herewith, for all those interested in forming their own opinion about its true content.

Furthermore, we would like to underline, that the members of the Muslim minority residing in the Greek region of Thrace, are protected by the highest international standards in accordance with the provisions of the Treaty of Lausanne, which established their status, the Greek constitution and the European Union acquis. They enjoy full equality before the law, without any discrimination. As to their religious needs, they are fully respected. More than 300 mosques, two Koranic Schools, 3 Muftis bestowed also with judicial authority in family and inheritance matters and numerous imams and religious preachers are serving the needs of the Minority.

Any bona fide visitor who has been to the region, will see a diverse, vibrant society where Christians and Muslims live in harmony, cooperation and mutual respect. Of course there is always room for improvement on different issues that concern the minority, including in the field of religious freedoms. Therefore Greece always welcomes well meaning and constructive criticism of its policies towards the Minority, no matter where this criticism is coming from. Nevertheless, she cannot accept the orchestrated campaign of those who try to raise, on every opportunity and in a tendentious and biased manner, issues that are totally unrelated with the facts on the ground. For Greece, meeting the needs of its Muslim citizens, members of the Muslim minority in Thrace, is an ever evolving challenge and commitment.