

Forum on Minority Issues
Geneva, 15-16 December 2008

Statement by the Representative of the Hellenic Government
Deputy Permanent Representative of Greece
Ambassador M. Diamessis

Thematic focus on
"Minorities and the Right to Education"

Madame President,

- We thank the Independent Expert on Minority Issues for her work and her leadership as well as you, Madame President, for chairing this meeting. We also thank the High Commissioner for Human Rights Ms Navi Pillay for her insightful remarks.
- Now, allow me some brief comments:
- Greece believes that it is of utmost importance to promote the integration of minorities into the societies they live in while respecting their particularities. We strongly support the recommendation provided for in **paragraph 9 of Chapter III** of the draft Recommendations entitled "Essential requirements for an effective strategy". We do believe that **state or local policies of educational segregation through special classes or special schools for minority pupils should be discouraged;**
- We do, however **fully respect the status of minority schools as established by the Lausanne Treaty of 1923, both in Greece and Turkey.**
- I thought, Madame President, that we are here to comment on the draft recommendations, not to issue political declarations, such as the one delivered by Mr. Voskopoulos, *a Greek civil servant himself*, who represents **Rainbow**, a political party that has **freely participated** in a series of previous elections in Greece.

Nonetheless, allow me to point out that the Greek citizens to whom he referred to who speak both Greek and a slav dialect, do not meet the group of criteria for minorities, as accepted by the UN. The same applies for Vlachs, who have been mentioned by Mr. Voskopoulos, and for Greek Romas who consider themselves not as a minority but as a vulnerable group.

- Regarding some allegations concerning the extension of compulsory education in Greece from 9 to 10 years and the subsequent exclusion of the Muslim minority, it has to be pointed out that children at kindergartens do not have Greek textbooks, actually they do not have any textbooks, and do not follow any specific curriculum. Activities and games are the only means used in Kindergartens which serve as a smooth introduction to primary education and help to avoid segregation of the Muslim minority from the rest of the Greek society. Moreover, we also encourage kindergarten teachers coming from the Muslim minority to work at kindergartens in areas where there are many Muslims.