

Forum on Minority Issues
Geneva, 15-16 December 2008

Statement by the Representative of the Hellenic Government
Secretary for Inter-cultural Education
of the Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs
Dr. A. Syrigos

Thematic focus on
"Minorities and the Right to Education"
16 December 2008
agenda item VI

Thank you Madame President,

- We welcome **Chapter VI, on "the Relationship between De-Segregation Strategies, Cultural Autonomy and Integration in the Quest for Social Cohesion"** which coincides with a clear international trend to do away with social exclusion. We cannot but subscribe to the notion that the educational systems should ensure contacts and exchanges between minority members and the general population, as mentioned in the draft recommendations.
- **Cultural autonomy** is of utmost importance to a minority as is **social cohesion** for the society they live in. It is therefore crucial that in cases where members of minorities establish their own educational institutions, their right to do so should not be exercised in a manner that prevents them from understanding the culture and language of the rest of the society and from participating in its activities.
- Furthermore, we fully agree with the paragraph stipulating that the issue of wearing of religious symbols or particular modes of dress should be discussed between religious minorities and secular authorities. Religious symbols cannot be an obstacle to education – in no way.
- As it concerns the allegations made by the Association of Minority University Graduates and by the representative of a Greek political party, Mr. Voskopoulos, for a second time a few minutes ago, let

me remind participants that these issues have already been answered clearly, in our intervention, yesterday.