

My name is Thalia Dragonas and I am a professor at the University of Athens, Greece and I would like to thank Ms Gay McDougal for the invitation as independent expert on minorities. One of the major obstacles in ensuring employment is lack of national language competence. Two years ago in this room we discussed education.

In Greece the most important and the only officially recognised minority (as you heard this morning) is that of the Muslim minority in the North-Eastern region of the country. While the minority should enjoy the right of learning its maternal language, competence in Greek (the national language) is absolutely essential. For the past, almost 15 years my colleague Professor Frangoudaki present here today, and myself have been in charge of a large scale Ministry of Education project in reforming the education addressing the minority. While respecting linguistic, religious and cultural rights of the Muslim minority there has been continuing effort in furthering the educational opportunities for the mastery of Greek language. The most important challenge is to introduce children from preschool age to decent Greek language learning. Yet opportunities for second chance schooling are also very important allowing youths or older people to catch up with Greek. Drop out rates for minority children are very high compared to the national mean. Yet we are proud in that our work is bearing fruit and that the number of children enrolling in upper secondary education is growing very quickly while drop out rates from compulsory school is going down at a fast pace, ensuring thus the gradual growth of good Greek speaking minority members.

