

**OSCE HUMAN DIMENSION IMPLEMENTATION MEETING
WORKING SESSION 3: FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS II (30.9.2008)
WORKING SESSION 5: TOLERANCE AND NON-DISCRIMINATION I
(1.10.2008)**

**STATEMENT BY THE GREEK DELEGATION
in exercise of its Right of Reply**

“Macedonian” minority in Greece

There has never been a “Macedonian” minority in Greece. Any individual who claims to belong to a distinct ethnic or cultural group is free to do so and there are no negative consequences resulting from such an expression of wish. However, subjective claims or perceptions of a small number of persons, which are not based on objective facts and criteria, do not establish by themselves a corresponding obligation of the State to officially recognize a group as a «minority» and to guarantee to its members specific minority rights, additional to those guaranteed by human rights treaties.

There is a small number of people in Greek Macedonia, mainly in the prefecture of Florina, who, apart from Greek, speak a Slav dialect, which is confined to family or colloquial use.

In fact, the non-recognition of a group as a minority, enjoying specific minority rights, on the basis of solid legal and factual grounds, does not deprive persons belonging to such group from the enjoyment of all civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights, which are recognized under national and international law.

Greece has ratified the most important international treaties for the protection of human rights and has adopted a series of measures, legislative and other, for their implementation. The provisions of the above mentioned international treaties have been fully integrated into the Greek legislation and once ratified by law, prevail over internal legislation. Both the judiciary and the administration are bound by the Greek Constitution to implement these provisions. Moreover, every person who considers that his or her rights are being breached can take the case to the Greek courts. They also have the possibility to appeal to the competent international bodies, as provided for under the relevant treaties.

Rainbow party

A political party claiming to represent the so-called “Macedonian minority” in Greece, called the “Rainbow” party, was set up in 1994. Since then it participates freely in both National Elections as well as in the Elections for the European Parliament. In the 1996 National Elections it was voted by

3.476 people (percentage of 0,05%). During the April 2000 parliamentary elections the party joined other minor parties into a coalition called OAKKE ("Organization for the Reconstruction of the Communist Party of Greece") which received overall a percentage of 0,017% (namely, 1139 votes). During the elections for the European Parliament of 2004, the coalition of parties to which the Rainbow Party belonged, received the percentage of 0, 10 (6.138 votes). Most probably, due to the fact that in the course of the last years the party's number of votes has decreased significantly, it decided not to participate in the National Elections of 2004 and 2007. The small number of votes this party is receiving at elections taking place in Greece could serve as a proof that it does not manage to win the support of the people it is claiming to represent.

With regard to the issue of the sign located at the entrance of the offices of the Rainbow Party, depicting the name of the party in the Slavic dialect, it should be noted that the local population, including those that the party is claiming to represent, are the first ones to feel disturbed and the protagonists of the complaints for such a provocative action, as they do not wish to become tools in serving the interests of political aspirations and foreign propaganda they do not share.

Cultural and religious freedoms

The Greek Constitution guarantees full protection of human rights and liberties of all persons residing in Greece, irrespective of their nationality, language, religious or political affiliation. Everyone is free to declare his/her origin, speak his/her language, exercise his/her religion and observe his/her particular customs and traditions.

The festivities and cultural events that regularly take place in the region of Florina are integral part of the local population's culture and should not be the vehicle of a small number of people who are trying to usurp the cultural particularity of the region, which is also attributed to its border-character, as well as the cultural and historical heritage of the Greek Macedonia.

Establishment of "Macedonian" Cultural Centers

It is to be noted that the adjective "Macedonian" is being extensively used in the Greek region of Macedonia as well as throughout the country and the diaspora by Greeks originating from Macedonia. There are hundreds of scientific, business, professional and sports associations which bear the Macedonian name to denote their regional and/or cultural provenance.

The use of the word "Macedonian" for the denomination of an association founded by a small number of individuals who attach to it a different meaning, in terms of culture or origin, would inevitably create great confusion as to what they actually mean or pursue by using this word. One would assume that this association is a Greek-Macedonian one, like hundreds

of other Greek associations bearing the word “Macedonian” in their denomination, while, in fact, it refers to another, different culture.

Moreover, the use of the term “Macedonian” by an association of a small number of people, with a different ethnic and cultural identity, negatively affects the exercise of the rights of the majority of the population of the region, which attaches to the term a completely different meaning. Consequently, the exercise of the right of self-identification by a small number of people could be viewed as a deliberate effort to prevent the whole population of the region to determine themselves with the name “Macedonian”.

The use of the “Macedonian” language and the obligation to be introduced in the educational programs in Greek schools

Every person has the right to freely speak the Slavic dialect. In fact, people who wish to do so sing in Slavic at festivities organised regularly by the local communities. Another expression of the free use of this dialect in Greece is the fact that the idiom is being developed and is spoken in different forms in some villages of the region.

Efforts being made by the Rainbow party, seconded by the official authorities of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, to name this dialect “Macedonian” language and claim that it should be introduced in the educational programs of Greek schools of the region is politically motivated. Such a claim is not even supported by the small number of people who, apart from Greek, speak the dialect. The use of the “Macedonian” language in Greek schools is one of the main priorities for the Rainbow party, but such an agenda does not seem to be attractive for the people of the region.

It is surprising to observe the persistence by which the Rainbow Party and the official authorities in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia are trying to establish the term “Macedonian language” when referring to this dialect. Such an effort runs contrary to the fact that scholars in international linguistic conferences (a) have defined the dialect as well as the language spoken in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia as being of Slavic character and (b) that the term “Macedonian” could only be applied to the Greek dialect spoken in Ancient Macedonia.

It is obvious from the above that efforts to upgrade and rename the said dialect are politically motivated and resulting in harming the cultural diversity of the region where the dialect is spoken, as well as insulting 2,5 million people in Greek Macedonia, who attach to the terms “Macedonia” and “Macedonian” a completely different meaning.

One should also bear in mind that the Slavic idiom spoken in Greek Macedonia is not identical with the language spoken in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

Given the above, it is clear that the Greek state has no obligation to introduce the Slavic dialect in the educational programs of Greek schools in the region.

The use of the term Macedonia

Exercising the right of self-identification should not result in harming neighbouring countries, nor should it imply territorial claims against them.

Macedonia is a geographical region which extends “beyond one sovereignty”, that is Greece, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Bulgaria and Albania all include different parts of geographic Macedonia in their own sovereign territories.

The problem arises because one country, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, insists on monopolizing the name of this particular geographic region as the name of its own state and nation, although a) the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia’s sovereignty extends only in part (35%) over this region and b) another state, Greece, which includes 55% of geographic Macedonia in its sovereign territory, uses the same name. Not surprisingly, this name constitutes the foremost element for the self definition of the Greek population (2,5 million people) in Macedonia, yet with a completely different content than that in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

From this perspective, the use of the name Macedonia by the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, without any further clarification or definition, is totally misleading, because it directs to the erroneous identification of millions of citizens of one state (Greece) with that of the citizens of a neighboring state (the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia), who have a totally different perception of themselves, their culture, their ethnic identity and language.

It is more than obvious that a same term for two completely different cases, provokes only confusion on every level and in every sector (semantic, symbolic, geographic, ethnological, linguistic, etc.), with consequences which, in any case, are negative, dangerous and totally unnecessary for all sides concerned.

Greece does not claim exclusive rights on the geographical region of Macedonia, but is opposed to efforts of falsification of history, resulting in monopolizing a certain culture and heritage.

Greece does not monopolize being heir of the geographical region of Macedonia. But it is opposed to efforts of falsification of history, resulting in monopolizing a certain culture and heritage.

Property issues

Quite recently, Prime Minister Gruevski undertook - through a series of letters addressed to a large number of countries - an effort to derail and undermine the UN negotiation process, by raising well-known unacceptable

property issues of people that left Greece in the aftermath of the Second World War.

We recall the reply already given by the Greek Prime Minister to his counterpart of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, stating that allegations raised by our neighbouring country are unacceptable, unfounded, politically motivated and disrespectful of the historic reality of the region.

In any case, any individual could make use of any legal recourse before the Courts on such issues, including the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg, and does certainly not need to be patronized by the Prime Minister of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.