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Working session 14: National minorities

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Thank you Mr. Moderator.

My statement shall focus on the linguistic rights of national minorities. Specifically I shall speak about the Macedonian speaking community in Greece.

Although various human rights bodies have strongly recommended the Greek state to take measures for the recognition and the protection of the linguistic rights of the Macedonian population in Greece, the Greek government continues to ignore such advice. For example, in 2003 the European Commission for Racism and Intolerance recommended that Greece should sign the European Charter of Regional or Minority Languages as well as ratify the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities.

I would like to mention here that it is a common practice of Greek representatives in various international fora, as it was the case last year with the Greek representative in the Council of Europe Mr. Ayfantis, to claim that “there is a small number of people speaking a Slavic dialect or idiom in Northern Greece” referring to the Macedonian

speaking community. So the question must be asked: Why has the Greek government not taken any measures to protect and promote the so-called “dialect”? I should mention here that the so-called dialect or idiom that the Greek government refers to actually belongs to a language. This language is the Macedonian language.

Another strange approach of the Greek government as we heard on Monday from the Greek Ambassador, is to equate the size of the Macedonian minority with the political affiliation of the citizens as expressed in the elections. Mr. Ambassador, you should be aware that Macedonian speakers vote for many parties and not just exclusively for Rainbow. The most democratic and accurate way to measure the number of persons belonging to a linguistic or national minority is not through elections but through the national census. Unfortunately the right to express one’s linguistic or national identity is not possible through the Greek census. We strongly encourage the Greek government to make this possible at the next census in 2011.

But even if the results of a future census were to show that the Macedonian minority is less than 1% as the distinguished Greek Ambassador claimed on Monday’s session referring to the votes of Rainbow, are they not entitled to cultural rights? Of a total population of 70.000.000 people in Turkey, the Greek orthodox minority numbers less than 2000 people which accounts for only 0,002% of the population. Of course this minority is no less deserving of basic linguistic rights, which by the way they already enjoy.

Rainbow believes that in a situation where a minority is small in numbers the State policy towards this minority should be even more progressive in the protection of their identity. We as members of the Macedonian minority in Greece have taken the first step towards

achieving this, by printing a Primer of the Macedonian language. We hope this initiative will finally convince the Ministry of Education in our country to take the necessary measures to introduce the Macedonian language to the Greek educational system.

In this regard Mr. Ambassador I would like you to be the first representative of the Greek government to officially receive this publication.

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Thank you all for your attention