

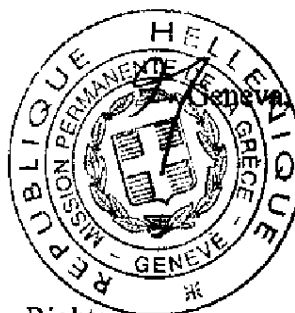
**PERMANENT MISSION OF GREECE  
TO THE UN & OTHER INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS  
IN GENEVA**

No 6175.11/15/AS 2177

**NOTE VERBALE**

The Permanent Mission of Greece to the United Nations Office at Geneva and other International Organizations in Switzerland presents its compliments to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and has the honor to attach herewith the information by the competent Hellenic Authorities on the follow-up to the recommendations following the visit to Greece (2008) of the (then) Independent Expert on Minority Issues, Ms. G. Mc Dougall.

The Permanent Mission of Greece to the United Nations Office at Geneva and other International Organizations in Switzerland avails itself of this opportunity to renew to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights the assurances of its highest consideration.



Geneva, 18 November 2016

**To:**

-Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights  
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## **INFORMATION ON THE FOLLOW-UP TO THE RECOMMENDATIONS FOLLOWING THE VISIT TO GREECE (2008) OF THE (THEN) INDEPENDENT EXPERT ON MINORITY ISSUES**

I.1. At the outset, we would like to refer to the comments of the Greek Government on the report of the (then) Independent Expert on minority issues following her visit to Greece, contained in document A/HRC/10/G/5/10.3.2009, circulated as an official document of the 10<sup>th</sup> session of the Human Rights Council. In that document, the Greek Government stated Greece's position on a number of issues raised in the Independent Expert's report, in particular those upon which the Greek Government was not in a position to share the analysis and/or conclusions of the Independent Expert. The comments of the Greek Government remain valid and pertinent in the context of the follow-up to the abovementioned country visit. We would like to stress, however, that measures which have recently been adopted in a variety of fields address a number of the concerns reflected in the Independent Expert's report, as will be explained in Part III of this document.

II.2. The Greek Government wishes to recall its longstanding and principled approach of minority issues, on the basis of international law norms and standards and the specific conditions existing in the country.

3. Protection of the rights of persons belonging to minorities forms an integral part of the international protection of human rights. The treatment of persons belonging to minorities must be based on international human rights and minority treaties and not on mere policy choices linked to inter-state relations.

4. In Greece, one group of persons is qualified as a "minority", namely the Muslim minority in Thrace, the status of which was established by the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne. Greece's general approach and policies with regard to the Muslim minority in Thrace are based on the Treaty of Lausanne, but also on the assessment of objective facts and criteria with regard to the composition of the minority and on the implementation of modern human rights treaties.

5. The Muslim minority consists of three distinct groups, whose members are of Turkish, Pomak and Roma origin. Each of these groups has its own spoken language, cultural traditions and heritage, which are fully respected by the Greek state. The only common denominator of the aforementioned three, otherwise distinct, components is their Muslim faith, and this objective fact explains why this minority is recognized as a religious, not an ethnic or national one.

6. Greece fully respects the principle of individual self-identification. Persons living in Greece are free to declare their origin, speak their language, exercise their religion and observe their particular customs and traditions. However, the decision of a State to recognize a group as a minority and to provide to its members specific minority rights, additional to those guaranteed by human rights treaties, must be based, not only on subjective claims or perceptions of a numerically small number of persons, but also on objective facts and criteria.

7. Relying on solid and objective legal and factual grounds, Greece does not recognize other groups as "minorities". However, the members of groups which are not officially recognized as "minorities", since they do not fulfill the abovementioned objective criteria, fully enjoy and freely exercise their rights under the relevant human rights treaties.

8. Greece rejects references to the existence of a "Macedonian ethnic minority". Such claims do not correspond to existing realities and are misleading for a variety of reasons. In fact, in the Northern Greek region of Macedonia, there live a small number of persons who, in addition to the Greek language, speak a Slavic idiom, confined to family or colloquial use. A segment of this group has been promoting the idea of a "Macedonian minority", through a political party, called

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“Rainbow”. The said party has taken part in many elections since 1996. In the 2014 elections for the European Parliament, the said party obtained only 0,1% of the vote, which explains why it chose not to participate in the two general elections held in 2015. This electoral result proves that the level of support for a political agenda focusing on the existence of a “Macedonian minority” is extremely low among those theoretically concerned by such claims and aspirations. The use of the term “Macedonian” to qualify the abovementioned small group of persons, without any qualifier reflecting their Slav-oriented identity, clearly infringes upon the rights and the very identity of more than 2,5 million of Greek Macedonians, who use, for centuries, the adjective “Macedonian” to denote their regional and/or cultural provenance and not, of course, a distinct national identity. Having said that, nothing prevents these persons from freely expressing their views, organizing cultural events, festivities, etc., speaking their idiom and participating in the cultural life of their region.

III.9. With regard to the adoption and implementation of specific laws, policies and programs since the Independent Expert’s visit, we would like to stress the following:

**Para. 90**

10. The Greek Government is still considering appropriate ways and means of executing the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights in three cases concerning an equal number of Muslim minority (purported) associations, including possible legislative adjustments allowing the re-opening of relevant cases before civil courts. Full implementation is pending, due to procedural reasons identified by the competent courts, not related to the statute or the activities of any particular association

11. The Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe examined the implementation process of the cases and stated, inter alia, in March 2016 that [the Ministers’ Deputies] “took note with interest of the information provided by the Greek authorities during the meeting according to which a procedure has started aiming at establishing a special structure responsible for the execution of the Court’s judgments” and they “decided to resume consideration of this question at their DH meeting in March 2017 (DH) at the latest in order to make a substantive assessment of the developments”.

12. It is to be noted that the competent Ministry of Justice, Transparency and Human Rights is already establishing the abovementioned “special structure responsible for the execution of the Court’s judgments”. A relevant draft legislative provision is to be tabled soon before Parliament.

13. Also, the European Court delivered in December 2015 its judgments dismissing two new cases brought before it by two of the aforementioned three minority associations based on alleged new violations of the freedom of association, finding that Greece had not committed any new violations of freedom of association.

14. In the meantime, the Greek Courts in practice take into consideration the ECtHR standards, so that, since the above-mentioned decisions in 2007 and 2008, minority members freely establish their associations, no matter if their mother tongue is Turkish, Pomak or Romani.

15. Furthermore, the European Court of Human Rights has found a violation of the right to freedom of association on the grounds that the Greek courts have refused to register an association bearing the name of “Home of Macedonian Civilization”. It is to be noted that the inclusion of the qualifier “Macedonian” in the statute of the said association creates confusion as to the purposes and the actions to be undertaken by the association, since the same qualifier is used by hundreds of other associations established by Greek Macedonians, which, however, use the adjective “Macedonian” to denote the regional and/or cultural provenance of their members and not a distinct national identity. Such confusion, which also creates problems of public order and infringes upon the human rights of others, could have been avoided if the founders of the said association had used a name for the latter which corresponds to their Slav-oriented identity.

16. It is significant that the European Court explicitly rejected as manifestly ill-founded the applicants' complaint that the disputed decision of the court was based on discriminatory grounds. The Court considered this case as a freedom of association case, not as a dispute involving minority rights or discrimination on the ground of association with a national minority.

### **Paras. 92-93**

17. The Greek State continues to be firmly committed to its policy to uphold the right to education for the members of the Muslim minority in Thrace. The "Education of the Children of the Muslim Minority in Thrace" programme, implemented by the University of Athens, constitutes an effective policy of the Greek State which started already in the 1990s within the general framework of intercultural education and is still implemented.

18. Furthermore, it should be noted that the majority of children of primary school age attend minority education that offers a bilingual programme, by which both Greek and Turkish are used as languages of instruction, but also constitute separate language subjects in the curriculum.

19. An increasing number, though, of persons belonging to the Muslim minority in Thrace are showing a preference for the state mainstream educational system. The competent authorities have successfully accommodated this preference, while at the same time offering courses aimed at preserving the cultural and linguistic characteristics of persons belonging to the minority who attend mainstream schools. Almost all students complete the elementary education programme, while the number of minority students attending secondary school has significantly increased in the last 10 years. About one quarter attend a school exclusively for the minority (minority high school or seminary), while three quarters of students are in public mainstream schools. It is also important to mention that the ratio of girls and boys attending school has been quite balanced for some years now.

20. Instruction of the Holy Quran is delivered by religious preachers in the mosques or in public schools in Thrace for those students, members of the minority, who select it. The pupils can freely decide whether they wish to attend the Koranic classes or not. The same applies to the participation of religious preachers in the instruction of the Holy Quran in public schools. It is to be noted that Law 4115/2013, which amended Law 3536/2007 on Religious Preachers, enhances the status of religious preachers, who are employed by the civil service with all the social security benefits and professional stability this offers.

21. Additionally, the special 0.5% quota for the admission to Universities and Higher Technical Educational Institutes of students who are members of the Muslim minority in Thrace constitutes an integral part of the positive measures adopted. This measure has indeed had a positive effect in the number of students from the minority entering higher education institutions, but it also has improved their chances of accessing the job market.

22. With regard to bilingual instruction in the pre-school level, we are exploring ways for an even improved support of children of the Muslim minority in kindergartens in Thrace. Our approach aims at a balanced linguistic development, which will achieve "additive bilingualism" in an educational environment. Our policy will combine action research and in-service training, scientific support of the teachers and collaborators who will participate in it, as well as parental involvement.

23. Finally, according to Law 4310/2014, members of the Muslim minority who wish to become teachers are admitted to all universities with a special quota (which practically means that additional places are provisioned in every University so that exclusively students who are members of the Muslim minority are admitted to them) and have the same professional rights as all graduates. Simultaneously, the law ensures that the teaching positions of the minority programme of minority schools in Thrace will be occupied exclusively by members of the Muslim minority. Those who wish to be appointed to these special places should have the necessary expertise in the methodology

of teaching the language of the minority programme and the Muslim religion. For this reason, they have to attend the respective courses of the Department of Primary Level Education in Alexandroupolis lasting one year. Thus, the new law gave a double professional right for all members of the Muslim minority in Thrace. The said law starts from the notion that the teachers of the minority educational programme in minority schools must have the skills and knowledge that the teachers of public schools have, as well as additional expertise in the language and in the Muslim religion that this position requires.

#### **Para. 95**

24. In the case of the Muslim minority of Thrace, the appointment of the Mufti by the Greek State does not constitute an infringement on freedom of religion. On the contrary, it reflects a *sui generis* situation, involving the full extent of the nature of the Mufti's lawful duties, i.e. their judicial responsibilities in family and inheritance law matters of the members of the Muslim minority in Thrace, which advance well beyond those of a *stricto sensu* religious official.

25. More specifically, according to article 4 of Law 1920/1991 "About Muslim Religious Officials", the Muftis are quasi-permanent Greek civil servants, ranking as "Director Generals" and remunerated as every other Greek civil servant. They perform administrative, judicial as well as religious duties for the members of the Muslim Minority of Thrace (article 5). Decisions of the Muftis on family and inheritance law cases brought before them by members of the Muslim minority of Thrace are not enforceable unless they are so declared by local Civil Courts, which check whether the abovementioned decisions fall within the Muftis' jurisdiction and whether they contravene the Constitution (article 5 (3)). Thus, the Greek legislation offers the possibility to Greek Muslims, residents of Thrace, to regulate their family and inheritance law matters according to the Islamic Law (Sharia), while, at the same time, providing judicial guarantees of compliance of the relevant decisions of the Mufti with human rights and fundamental freedoms. On this issue, the Greek Government takes into consideration the expressed preferences and wishes and the social trends within the majority of the Muslim minority on religious, social and legal matters, as well its obligations under the relevant human rights treaties.

26. Furthermore, according to article 1 (5) of Law 1920/1991, in the whole process of a Mufti's appointment, an eleven-member consultative Committee is also involved, whose members are Muslim minority religious officials, as well as eminent Muslim minority members and is presided by the State's local Prefect. Its members have to express their opinion on the qualifications of each candidate for the Office of Mufti. Eligible applicants (art. 1 (2)) may be only Muslim Greek citizens of moral integrity, holders of tertiary education degree on Islamic theology or similar theological qualifications or even serving Imams who have been performing their duties for at least ten years. Thus, the participation of persons belonging to the Muslim minority in the overall procedure leading to the final appointment of the Muftis is guaranteed by the Law.

27. It is also noteworthy that, in all Muslim countries, Muftis are appointed by the State and are not elected; moreover, according to Muslim religious law, the appointment of Muftis by the State is acceptable in non-Muslim countries as long as the State does not interfere with the Muslim religious customs.

#### **Paras. 96-99**

28. Greek Gypsies (Roma) constitute an integral part of the Greek population. As Greek citizens, they are not registered separately, neither during the national census nor in the municipal rolls. They are considered as a vulnerable group, whose members enjoy all their civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights on an equal footing with other Greek citizens.

29. During the last three years (2014-2016), an effort has been initiated through the National Strategy for Roma social inclusion (2014-2020) aiming to bridge the gap of inequality between Roma and the other vulnerable groups, as it is referred in the conditionalities Axis 9.2.

30. The planning and the implementation of Regional Strategies in the 13 Regions of Greece, which are based on the National Strategy for Roma social inclusion, is considered as a breakthrough in the relevant Government's policies. Specifically, for the first time the Roma community has been included in the national and regional policy, together with the other vulnerable communities. According to the planning of the new actions, the parameter of needs differentiation has been considered, such as living conditions and the degree of the social inclusion in local communities. Therefore, the actions are targeted and differentiated depending on the Romas' living on rural or urban locations. Special focus is given to the sustainability of actions / interventions, as a prerequisite for their successful materialization.

31. The National Roma Contact Point (NRCP) collaborates with a) the Regional Authorities to support the implementation of the regional strategies, b) the European Social Fund Coordination and Monitoring Authority (EYSEKT) and other government agencies for the updating of the National Strategy, so as to meet the real needs of the Roma group.

32. At present, all Regions are at the stage of an ongoing consultation with all stakeholders and they gradually announce that they are ready to start projects addressed to the Roma and other vulnerable social groups. Most important projects which are advanced in the majority of Regions are projects for the development of social structures, such as Social Markets, Social Pharmacies, Food Kitchens, etc.

33. A major development is the establishment of Community Centers (nearly 300) at the municipality level, which are aimed to offer a wide spectrum of all inclusive supportive services at local level. These centers promote access to employment and social inclusion. Branches of Community Centers are designed to be established in areas where Roma live, to address the latter's specific needs. Such projects are in progress in most regions of Greece.

34. In view of promoting social inclusion, the following actions are implemented:

- A specific website for Roma issues ([www.roma-ekka.gr](http://www.roma-ekka.gr));
- A data base using geographical criteria, containing data about living conditions, population, social structures, employment conditions, etc, of the Roma establishments;
- A dialogue and consultation process between local authorities and the Roma Communities is ongoing under the supervision of the Greek NRCP, in the framework of the project "Development of consultation and dialogue platform";
- The activation of three networks in the field of Roma inclusion, aiming at the interconnectivity of services and agencies, governmental as well as non- governmental bodies: a) an Ombudsman's Network which connects various agencies and collects information concerning issues of social rights and legislation, b) a Network of 57 Municipalities which have significant Roma population; the network's status has recently been reactivated and the involvement of the Roma themselves in activities related to their social inclusion has been strengthened;
- Organized meetings under the auspices of the NRCP, with the participation of representatives of the Roma community.

35. Moreover, there are specialized networks promoting Roma issues and interconnectivity among their agencies, more specifically a) the Network of the Centers for Vulnerable and Roma Groups and b) the Network of the Roma mediators, which consists of members of Roma community at the national level.

36. With regard to the right to health of Roma persons, under a 2016 Law, members of the vulnerable social groups including Roma, enjoy equal access to the first and second degree of medical services as every Greek citizen does.

37. Finally, a recent positive development is the upgrading of the administrative structure for Roma issues, namely the establishment of a Special Secretariat for Roma under the supervision of

the Ministry of Labour. The Secretariat will be the new NRCP, monitoring the implementation of the National Roma Strategy, as well as of the Regional Strategies.

38. As regards the education of the Greek Roma children and young people, who are entitled by law to the same schooling as all other Greek citizens, the Ministry of Education has continued to apply the additional proactive measures and special programmes, considering the particular needs of the Romani population and the prejudice or exclusion that Roma children might face during their schooling.

39. The main axes of the Greek Ministry of Education policy for Roma education which is reflected in the programme "Education of Roma children" (implemented by the University of Thessalonica and the University of Athens) continues and will continue to be implemented under the supervision of the Ministry. Further efforts will be made in the new programming period to employ more Roma school mediators to facilitate the implementation of certain actions in the framework of the programme, and within the wider aim of reducing school dropouts and increasing participation levels of students in secondary education.

40. Additionally, Roma families with low income can still benefit from an annual allowance for every child enrolled in public school of compulsory education which can be granted to them only at the end of each school year, upon submission of a certificate of regular school attendance.

41. The Ministry of Education is aware of the cases in which Roma students might receive schooling in segregated schools and will continue all efforts to address them effectively.

42. Measures have been adopted to further promote equality before the law and access to justice, which also benefit persons of Roma origin, alongside all other persons living in Greece, or are of particular relevance to the Roma.

43. Law 3226/2004, which provides legal aid to citizens with low income and therefore, eliminates the danger of restriction of access to justice, continues to be implemented. Furthermore, according to Law 4285/2014, victims of racial, or other forms of discrimination, are exempted from the obligation to pay a fee when submitting a criminal complaint or participating as a civil party in a criminal procedure.

44. Law 3304/2005, "Application of the principle of equal treatment irrespectively of racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation", is currently being amended with the intention to increase its effectiveness, and strengthen even more the responsibilities of the Greek Ombudsman as Equality and anti-discrimination body.

45. Important measures have also been adopted to ensure due process and the right to a speedy trial, which also benefit persons of Roma origin, such as:

- Law 4055/2012 on "fair trial and its reasonable duration" which provides for the acceleration of provisional judicial protection, establishes the procedure of judicial mediation, develops alternative methods of resolving private disputes and changes processing of cases. In criminal, civil and administrative law judicial procedures, reforms have been introduced aiming at court decongestion and trial time shortening, which have yielded positive results. The Law also introduces provisions on the just satisfaction of (all) litigants due to the excessive length of administrative judicial proceedings and on the request to speed up the process (articles 53-60).

- Law 4239/2014 introduced remedies in order to ensure "just satisfaction for exceeding the reasonable duration of proceedings in civil and criminal courts and the Court of Audit". It should be mentioned that since 2012 the electronic submission of legal documents to the courts has been provided for, by the respective legal framework.

- Alternative dispute resolution methods are utilized, such as mediation and judicial mediation that are expected to lead to a gradual reduction of courts' workload and the consolidation of a culture of compromise.

- In addition, the drafting of a new Criminal Code and of a new Code of Criminal Procedure is in progress, including new provisions for the acceleration and rationalization of the court proceedings, ensuring, thus, a more effective access to the right of speedy trial, for all defendants and litigants.

- Finally, a launch event for the presentation of the JUSTROM programme of the Council of Europe and European Commission on "Roma and Traveler Women's access to Justice in Bulgaria, Greece, Ireland, Italy and Romania" is organized in Athens on 22 of November 2016.

The abovementioned event aims to raise awareness on the joint programme and to further develop at national level partnerships with Ministries, local authorities, human rights institutions, bar associations, NGOs and other relevant stakeholders at national level for the effective implementation of the programme.

## **Paras. 100, 102**

46. Members of the Muslim minority, in particular women, are beneficiaries of relevant nationwide programmes and projects, focusing, in particular, on issues of gender equality and promoting equal opportunities and access to employment.

47. Regarding disproportionately high level of unemployment among women, the General Secretariat for Gender Equality (GSGE) has recently undertaken the following measures-policies, for all categories of women (including Roma and women members of the Muslim minority in Thrace):

- An "Observatory on Gender Equality" has been set up in the General Secretariat for Gender Equality (GSGE), with the aim to support Public Administration and Local Governments to design, implement and evaluate policies concerning gender equality, including female employment, through detailed data on equality issues (statistics and surveys) deriving from the development and function of relevant tools. The European Commission has selected the specific Project as an example of good practice for the 2015 Annual Report on Equality between Women and Men in Europe (March 2016);

- The GSGE has supported the creation of methodologies and toolkits aiming to gender mainstreaming in public policies of the 13 Regions and the 15 most populated Municipalities of Greece. One of its elements is also the promotion of female employment at the regional and local level;

- Cooperation with the top five social partners in the public and the private sector of Greece through financing the establishment of Equality Offices in the top five Unions of Employers and Employees;

- The Directorate for Development & Support of Policies on Gender Equality at the GSGE is implementing continuously throughout the year a comprehensive set of actions on information and sensitization of the Hellenic Parliament, Independent Authorities (e.g. the Ombudsman), the National Commission for Human Rights, Ministries and relevant public authorities, the private sector, NGOs, the academic community, the Mass Media, as well as the general public on the right to work and the advancement of the status of women in employment;

- Implementation of a Project on women in economic decision-making;

- The political leadership in charge of gender equality is contacting a number of representatives of Ministries, Agencies and social partners aiming at a holistic approach to the implementation of gender equality policies. The Secretary General for Gender Equality has already prepared the final draft of a Bill on substantive gender equality.

- A new National Action Plan on Gender Equality is being drafted. The promotion of female employment and women's economic empowerment are top priorities for the New Programming Period 2014-2020.

48. The GSGE has been implementing since 2010 the «National Programme on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women» which is the first comprehensive and coherent national action programme on the field, covers all forms of gender-based violence (e.g. domestic violence, rape,



sexual harassment, trafficking in women) and comprises preventive actions, measures to support the victims and legislative interventions that reinforce the institutional framework.

49. Preventing and supporting actions include the following:

- Establishment and operation of 62 structures for women victims of violence, more specifically the bilingual SOS telephone helpline 15900, 40 Counseling Centers and 21 shelters;
- Elaboration of training modules as well as protocols of operation and counseling to be used, inter alia, by the relevant structures (Counseling Centers, Shelters, Helpline); .

- Implementation of an awareness raising campaign.

50. In the new programming period (2016-2020), the GSGE has secured funding, so that the structures and actions of the above described programme will continue to operate. Services will be expanded to provide labor counseling. The target group of the services will be both women victims of gender based violence and women victims of multiple discrimination, including Roma.

51. Legislative actions include the setting up of a Working Group tasked to identify gaps between domestic law and the Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence of the Council of Europe and to make proposals towards harmonization of our national law, in view of the ratification of the Convention.

52. Other issues, such as child marriages (which happen unfortunately among Roma population), are addressed in the New National Action Plan on Gender Equality (2016-2020), which is still under drafting process.

53. Greece through the GSGE has undertaken a project entitled "Strengthening the actions of non-governmental and women organizations", working on gender equality and/or the protection of the women's rights. The project refers to the implementation of 2-year Action Plans in support and empowerment of women and gender equality. One of the topics of the project referred to Roma women. The Implementation took place in 2 phases (2011 & 2013), 54 projects in total have been contracted and implemented all over Greece. Each action plan was financed from 50.000 to 80.000€ and included actions of counseling, training, awareness raising and networking. 33 out of these 54 action plans aimed at supporting Roma women, among others.

54. The GSGE designed and implemented, in 2012, the Project entitled: "Gender mainstreaming in Greek municipalities, with emphasis on women belonging to socially vulnerable groups (migrants, refugees, Roma, elderly living alone and women with disabilities)". The project was funded by EU PROGRESS Programme 2007-2013 and produced the following outcomes:

- the organization of four workshops which provided training on gender mainstreaming issues;
- the publication of four manuals/guides, each for every target group of women, namely elder women, Roma women, women with disabilities, migrant women. These manuals/guides incorporated the results of implementing the methods and tools of Gender Impact Assessment and Gender Budgeting in eight Municipalities of the country, with a view to supporting local authorities, which intended to introduce gender mainstreaming in their policies. The manual/guide and tools had been developed in collaboration with gender experts and experts on vulnerable groups of women, including Roma, as well as through the active participation of executives from municipalities, who, through training workshops, acquired a perspective on gender mainstreaming, exchanged "know how" and experiences and tackled problems and difficulties that arose during the pilot implementation of methodology.

55. Finally, the New National Action Plan on Gender Equality (2016-2020), which is currently in preparation, will include actions on social inclusion of vulnerable groups of women, among them Roma women.

**a) The new Law on the Legal Organization of Religious Communities**

56. A decisive step towards a more efficient legal organization of religious communities in Greece has been taken with the implementation of Law 4301/2014 "Organization of the Legal Form of Religious Communities and their organizations in Greece" whereby it is introduced, for the first time in the national legal framework, the concept of Religious / Ecclesiastical Legal Persons.

57. The process and the formalities of obtaining religious legal personality are described in Article 3, according to which, inter alia, the registration of a Religious Legal Person falls within the competence of the courts.

58. Keeping in mind that the constitutional principle of equality (article 4 of the Constitution) provides for the identical treatment of identical cases and for the proportionally differentiated treatment of different cases, the status of Public Legal Entity, which is granted to the Orthodox Church of Greece and to the Jewish Communities of Greece, due mostly to long standing special historical and social circumstances, does not reflect any legislative bias against all other religious communities in Greece.

59. The aforementioned principle applies also to Article 13 of Law 4301/2014, whereby, due to special historical circumstances, a number of specific religious communities in Greece are being granted automatically (ex lege) the status of Religious or Ecclesiastical Legal Persons, without having to follow the formal judicial procedures of articles 3 and 12 of said Law. These are namely the Catholic Church, the Anglican Church, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, the Coptic Orthodox Church, the Church of Orthodox Armenians, the German-speaking Evangelical Church, the Greek Evangelical Church and the Assyrian Orthodox Church.

**b) On the Houses of Worship**

60. Concerning the establishment of places of worship (prayer houses) for all religious communities, a new updated joint Circular was issued in July 2016 on the implementation of the legislation on granting a permit to establish and operate places of worship of religious communities other than the Orthodox Church.

61. According to said Circular, the relevant administrative authorization for a temple or place of worship of a religion or denomination- other than the Church of Greece - is issued by decision of the Minister of Education, Research and Religious Affairs, under circumscribed powers, as set out in the case-law. The Ministerial decision is issued following verification that, first, the three conditions laid down in article 13 (2) of the Constitution are fulfilled, namely, that it is a "known religion" without secret dogmas, that proselytism is not carried out and that the practice of rites of worship is in conformity with public order or good usages and, secondly, the other conditions set out in the legislation in force are applied. The control conducted by the administration aims to confirm that each condition prescribed by the law is fulfilled, through the use of formal and easily verifiable conditions and rules set by mandatory rules. In accordance with the provisions of article 1 of the Royal Decree 20-05/02-06-1939, an application of at least fifty (50) families is required for issuing the authorization required for establishing and operating a temple, whereas even a one-digit number of applicants is sufficient for issuing the authorization of a place of worship (case-law of the Council of State has upheld the number of five applicants as sufficient).

62. In addition to the relevant provisions of the Constitution and the specific legislation, it is clear that, for the issue of the authorization and the lawful operation of a place of worship, compliance with the laws on street planning, urban planning and health regulations is required as well as the provisions on quiet times, i.e. mandatory rules universally applicable which may not be excluded by private citizens, and regulations designated to ensure the necessary conditions of security and protection of assembled citizens.

63. It is to be noted that, by virtue of the abovementioned Law 4301/2014, in 2015, four religious communities obtained Religious Legal Personality status (two Pentecostal Christian, and two 'Old-Calendarist' Christian Orthodox communities), with two more applications under consideration.

64. In conclusion, it should be stressed out that the administrative prerequisites for the issuing of a house of prayer permit are by no means arbitrary; instead, they proportionately and effectively provide for the minimal constitutionally imposed restrictions, which safeguard both the safety and the protection of the faithful congregated in the place of worship, as well as the safety and quality of life of those residing nearby. Moreover, they are wholly in line with standard provisions on permissible restrictions under the ICCPR and the ECHR.

**c) On countering general biases in public attitudes (religious intolerance, racism, anti-Semitism, etc.)**

65. Among the main objectives of the Secretariat General for Religious Affairs (SGRA) of the Greek Ministry for Education, Research and Religious Affairs is planning and implementing policies which counter religious intolerance (e.g. anti-Semitism), as well as encouraging and promoting interfaith dialogue. To this effect, the Ministry and its Secretariat General for Religious Affairs aspire, among others, to map out and implement a comprehensive strategy to combat anti-Semitism and raise awareness, especially among students and teachers. Thus, in order to promote religious tolerance in education, there have been undertaken, so far, the following:

- Cooperation and Legislative initiatives:
  - A Memorandum of Cooperation between the SGRA and the Jewish Museum of Greece has been signed and is being implemented since 2014, by which, the latter party has been acknowledged as the exclusive official consulting body on Greek-Jews issues, as well as the main body to organize and implement activities on Holocaust Remembrance;
  - Relevant to this, Law 4310/2014 provided for the equal status of the Jewish Museum of Greece to State Research Centers;
- Students' Contests on the topic of the Holocaust;
- Other Students' initiatives, such as participation in an international high schools social networking program on the Holocaust and Genocides;
- Teachers' Seminars on Holocaust Education;
- Lifelong Learning Programme for Christian and Muslim Theologians of Thrace;
- Ecclesiastical Schools' initiatives. Aiming at widening the conceptual framework and horizons of Ecclesiastical Schools' teaching staff and pupils and to prove the insubstantial nature of stereotypes about modern Orthodox Church's appeal within and coping with a diverse and multi-religious environment, Ecclesiastical Schools have collaborated with non-Orthodox Christian religious schools both in Greece and abroad, during school year 2015-2016. The SGRA plans to continue and increase similar initiatives.

- Other Initiatives:

To underpin religious freedom in a more effective manner, the SGRA monitors, collects and evaluates data on incidents of vandalism and desecration of religious sites of all religious communities in Greece, by networking with other State authorities and the religious communities themselves. The findings about year 2015 have been recently published in a multipage "Report on incidents against Places of Religious Significance", soon about to become available in English as well.