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Minority women and effective participation in economic, social and cultural life

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The UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities states that persons belonging to minorities have the right to participate in cultural, religious, social, economic and public life, and, the UN Declaration of the Right to Development recognizes a comprehensive economic, social, cultural and political process, which aims at the constant improvement of the well-being of the entire population and of all individuals on the basis of their active, free and meaningful participation in development and in the fair distribution of benefits resulting there from.

National or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities across many parts of Member States have been and are still being excluded from full and effective participation in economic life, and they are often poorly represented in economic, social and cultural life of their country. In response to the need for the wider protection of minority rights in Europe, the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities stipulates that the Parties shall create the conditions necessary for the effective participation of persons belonging to national minorities in cultural, social and economic life and in public affairs, in particular those affecting them (Article 15).

The legislation and policy-making processes on the full and effective participation of minorities in economic life often fail to address the needs of persons belonging to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities, in most countries due to the lack of participation in the design and implementation. Positive measures or affirmative action to remedy the inequalities experienced by persons belonging to national or ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities has not often bridged the gap between the majority and persons belonging to these minorities. Positive measures or affirmative action which aim to address inequality that prevents persons belonging to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities from meaningful and effective participation in economic life are often imperfect due to the non-recognition of minorities by Member States in their territory. The recognition of the existence of minority groups is important for full participation of minorities in society and development, and for the full realization of their rights.

Discrimination against persons belonging to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities is one of the largest barriers to the effective and full participation in economic life. The intersectional discrimination against persons belonging to minorities burden additional barriers and contribute to even further marginalization exclusion of minorities in all aspects of life. Though there are a large number of international, regional and domestic laws and policies adopted by Governments to ad-

dress discrimination and the inequalities experienced by persons belonging to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities, there is still discrimination and inequality in participation of these minorities in economic life.

The Greek Ombudsman, which is entrusted with combating racism and racial discrimination in the public and private sectors in Greece, monitors the implementation of the anti-discrimination law (Law 3304/2005), including the public sector; local and regional authorities; other public bodies, private law corporate entities, enterprises and organizations which are controlled by the state, or by public law entities. However, The Ombudsman cannot intervene if more than six months have elapsed from the time the complainant initially learned of the public administration's illegal action, or failure to act. Under Law 3304/2005(Art. 19) Greece established the Labour Inspectorate to ensure equal treatment in employment. The Labour Inspectorate has informed ECRI that all bodies are required to provide it with the necessary assistance. It has indicated that it has received no complaints of racial discrimination, though NGOs reported ECRI the existence of discrimination in economic life.

The former UN Independent Expert on Minority Issues, Ms. Gay McDougall, stated in her report following her visit to Greece in September 2008 stated that women belonging to the Turkish Minority experience severe inequalities in access to education and consequent disproportionately high levels of illiteracy and unemployment. Most of minority women do not speak Greek, and therefore there are described as being confined to their homes and villages with few opportunities for employment or social interaction. Surveys which were made in different villages in Rhodope and Xanthi have proved that the minority women in Western Thrace cannot fully participate in economic life of the country due to the low level of education. According the surveys, 45% of the women who are between 21-30 ages and 38.9% of the women between 31 and 40 ages are housewives, and most of them are workers in their own small farmyard.

In the situation of deep economic crisis, unemployment rate in the region of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace, where the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace reside increased to 20.7 % in the second quarter of 2011, which recorded one of the highest unemployment rate in the country, while the unemployment rate in the country is 16.3%. In the period of deep economic crisis, economic conditions of the persons, including women belonging to the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace have deteriorated, and the unequal distribution of resources and services prevents the persons belonging to this minority from enjoying their economic and social rights.

In order to redress the imbalances in the representation and participation of the Minority in economic life, Greece introduced a 0.5 % quota under Law 3647/2008 for persons belonging to the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace in the civil service where there is high level of unemployment. Though, this special measure has, thus far, not been implemented in Greece. The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI)'s 4th Monitoring Cycle Report on Greece in 2009 highlighted that a comprehensive long-term programme has not yet been established by the authorities to improve the integration of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace into the labour market, and it noted that reports indicate that the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace continue to be under-represented in the public sector and state-owned corporations.

We strongly support the recommendation that Governments should ensure that minority women realize their economic rights by developing policies geared to build their capacity and create new employment opportunities for them as alternatives to traditional gendered occupations. And certain measures, including the creation of specific project for minority women in such areas as training and support for business initiatives or quota systems to enhance their participation. In specific to Greece, Government of Greece should carry out a program and/or project in order to increase the participation of minority women in economic, social and cultural life with a legal and institutional framework that would support full and effective participation of minority women in economic, social and cultural life.