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Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association
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Minority Women and Effective Political Participation

Western Thrace Turkish Minority Women in Political Life of Greece

Madam Chairperson,
Distinguished delegates,
And civil society representatives,

Universal Declaration of Human Rights, International Covenant on Civic and Political Rights, European Convention on Human Rights, Declaration on the rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities, and 1990 Copenhagen Document and other relevant documents, which Greece is a party, defined the right to political participation and representation of minorities.

In line with all those documents the States shall respect the right to political participation and representation of minorities as well as the right to participation to decision making procedures. Also, States shall encourage full and effective political participation of minorities in order to develop a peaceful and democratic society.

Moreover, CEDAW General Recommendation No. 23 (based on articles 7 and 8) advises states parties to identify and implement temporary strategies to increase women's political participation and equal representation, i.e. the targeted recruitment of female candidates; financial assistance and training of such candidates; amendment of electoral procedures; and appointment of women to public positions that hold significant decision-making abilities to affect society.

The participation of Turkish Minority women in political and public life, however, is limited.

There are only fifteen minority women elected for the municipal and local councils and just one for the Eastern Macedonia – Thrace Regional Council.

2002 was the first year that a quota system implemented in the elections for local government, requiring that 30% of all candidates be women. However, no training seminars for women's participation in the elections or programs to help Greek society adapt to the quota system were organized, nor they encouraged by authorities to be candidates or to participate in public life. Today, for example in Western Thrace, the rate of the elected women is no more than five percent.

Most of Greece's local administration is a closed circle. It is a male dominated system.

As is known the rights and freedoms of the Turkish Muslim Minority in Western Thrace of Greece are safeguarded in particular in the Lausanne Peace Treaty of 1923, as well as in other relevant bilateral and international agreements and covenants. It is acknowledged that there has recently been some improvement regarding the utilization of citizenship rights of the minority, but the problems stemming from limitations on the minority rights still persist.



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Generally speaking, the Turkish minority in Greece is not adequately represented in the political and public life of Greece. Despite the existence of two minority MPs in the Greek Parliament and more than 250 minority people in local administrations, there are some structural limitations on the political representation of minority. After the election of the first independent minority MP to the Greek Parliament in late 1980s, the Greek electoral law was changed on 24 October 1990 and an electoral threshold of 3% was introduced for the first time. Since the threshold was also implemented for the independent candidates, the minority has lost the chance of being represented in the parliament through its own party and/or with an independent MP (3% of the total population of Greece means nearly 300.000 votes, whereas the total population of the minority is estimated about 150.000). That is why minority is represented with the MPs elected through majority political parties in the parliament, which in turn, often proves to be a hindrance to express their thoughts and feelings freely regarding minority affairs.

As far as the local elections are concerned, the Law no 2218/1994 arbitrarily merged the electoral districts populated by the minority with that of the majority in order to prevent the possibility of the election of governors with minority background in the provinces of Xanthi and Rodopi. In this respect, Rodopi prefecture was merged with neighboring Evros, whereas the Xanthi was merged with the Drama and Kavala Prefectures. In order to hide the discriminatory nature of this artificial implication, this notorious system of "enlarged electoral districts" was implemented in the Attica region as well. Furthermore, the Greek government applied policies aimed to change demographic structure of the region by transferring population from the ex-Soviet Union countries. Such an implementation of demographic change increases the overall number of Christian Greek Population in Western Thrace and facilitates the election of more Christian Greeks for the local administration.

The government introduced a quota measure (%0.5) for the recruitment of minority people in the public sector with the Law No: 3647/2008. The Turkish minority requests the implementation of the quota for public sector positions in the Western Thrace region, which is the natural habitat of the minority. So far, the quota measure has been used for the positions outside the region.

Bearing in mind the population rates in the region, the disadvantageous status of the Turkish minority of Western Thrace,

We call upon the Greek State:

- To take special measures for the effective and adequate participation and representation of the Turkish minority women to political life in Greece.
- To introduce at least 50% special quota for the minority women in local administrations.
- To withdraw the 3% electoral threshold for independent candidates so that independent MPs can be elected.
- To protect and promote full and effective participation of the Minority in political decisions on the national and regional level concerning the region in which the Minority lives, and to create a consultative mechanism, at national, regional and local levels which would ensure an institutionalized, open, sincere and continuous dialogue with representatives of the Turkish Minority.
- To take all necessary steps in line with the international standards in order to ensure the effective participation of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace to the political life in Greece.