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**OSCE – HUMAN DIMENSION IMPLEMENTATION MEETING**

**11 – 22 September 2017**

**Warsaw – Poland**

**Working Session 4: Specifically selected topic: Ensuring equal enjoyment of rights and equal participation in political and public life**

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Thank you Ms/Mr Moderator,

Distinguished Delegates,

Full and effective political participation is an essential component of a peaceful and democratic society. The 1990 Copenhagen Document, UN Declaration on Human Rights, International Covenant on Civic and Political Rights and other relevant documents state the right to political participation and representation of minorities.

The case in Western Thrace, however, is not in line with the provisions of the above-mentioned documents. The Turkish Minority of Western Thrace in Greece is inadequately represented in the society's policy and decision making system.

After the Minority elected an independent MP in 1989, a new electoral law was introduced in Greece, which set a threshold of 3% of the nationwide vote for a party and for an independent candidate to be represented in the Parliament (Article 3 of the Law no 1907/1990). Under the current electoral law of "reinforced proportionality", political parties and independent candidates cannot enter the Parliament unless they obtain at least 3% of the votes throughout the country, although they may have enough votes to get electoral seats in specific electoral districts. This provision hinders full and effective participation of the Turkish Minority in the political system. Since the introduction of the 3% threshold the Minority was forced to run candidates with national parties, even though all these parties oppose the Minority's major demands. 3% of the total population of Greece means nearly 300.000 votes, whereas the total population of the minority is estimated about 150.000.

Regarding the issue, 2 days ago, during his press conference at the Thessaloniki International Fair, the leader of Union of Centrists, a Greek political party with seven seats, Vasilis Leventis underlined that the main reason for keeping the 3% electoral threshold is to prevent the party of the Muslim Turkish Minority in Western Thrace from entering to the Greek Parliament. Mr. Leventis stated that the total amount of Minority votes ranges between 1.8% to 2.2%. He also added that if the number was 5%, then they would support the rising of the threshold to 5% mainly for a simple reason: "It is for the interest of Greece to keep a Muslim Party out of the Greek Parliament. It would have been a negative phenomenon the existence of political party composed exclusively by Muslim MPs".

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Greece has been governed by such a racist approach with Muslim - Turkish complex for a long time.

Therefore, we call upon the Greek State to take all necessary steps in line with the international standards in order to ensure the effective and full participation of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace to the political life in Greece and to withdraw the 3% electoral threshold.

Thank you for your attention.