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## Working Session 11 (Specifically selected topic): Rights of persons belonging to national minorities

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### The Electoral Threshold of 3 % in Greece and Political Representation of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace

Dear President,  
Distinguished representatives  
And esteemed NGO delegates,

The OSCE participating States including Greece has committed in the Copenhagen document of 1990 to respect the right of persons belonging to national minorities “to effective participation in public affairs, including participation in the affairs of relating to the protection and promotion of the identity of such minorities”, and reaffirmed their commitment in the Helsinki document of 1992.

The representation of national minorities in political process, which is one of the most essential and clearest examples of participation in public life, is a strong indicator of the level of minority rights in modern democracies. National minorities can either have a right to self-government or they can participate in legislative institutions at both national and local level or take part in consultative bodies in order to take a key role in decision-making processes which are interest to them. Persons belonging to national minorities can nominate through non-minority/majority parties or they form their own parties and achieve representation at the national and regional level.

It is very important that parties and legislation are inclusive and represent broader society including national minorities. Electoral law or electoral system does have a great impact on the full and effective participation of persons, including persons belonging to national minorities. Only few states provide for specific rules on the representation of minorities in the elected bodies, but there are no established democracies that have adopted quota laws for national minorities. Yet there have been efforts among political parties to widen their support and get their votes among ethnic communities and to recruit national minority candidates in local and national elections.

The Turkish Minority of Western Thrace in Greece is not adequately represented in national and regional level and in decision making processes. The electoral system referred as “reinforced proportionality” is a form of semi-proportional representation with a 3% of electoral threshold for political parties and independent candidates and an awarded extra 50 seats for the political party that wins a plurality of votes cast. Under the current electoral system 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 makes it almost impossible for members of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace to be elected to the Parliament as independent candidate, therefore members of the Minority stand for elections from majority parties. In the last elections, three persons belonging to the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace were elected to the Greek Parliament. The deputies are Ahmet Hacıosman, PASOK MP for Rhodope; Ayhan Karayusuf, SYRIZA MP for Rhodope and Hüseyin Zeybek, SYRIZA MP for Xanthi.

The regional administration in Greece has gone an extensive reform process, of which second phase was implemented in 2010. The number of municipalities have been reduced to 325, and 54 prefectures have been merged into 13 administrative regions, i.e. peripheries. Each region acquired a directly elected governor (periferiarchis) and regional council roughly proportional to its population. Political parties are not permitted to contest local and regional elections and, therefore, the elections are contested by open regional lists headed by a candidate governor. In practice, however, most of these lists are openly created, supported or otherwise endorsed by political parties. In all local elections, the winning candidacy list is guaranteed a minimum three-fifths majority in the respective councils. In 2010, Greece held its first regional elections concurrently held with municipal elections. The elections for the regional governors and councils take place every five years under a two-round majority run-off electoral system where the winning list elects the governor. The regional elections including municipal elections in Greece were held on 18 May 2014 (first round) and on 25 May 2014 (second round). Following the first and second round municipal elections in Greece, three members of the Turkish Minority in Arriana (Kozlukebir), Iasmos (Yassıköy) and Myki (Mustafçova) municipalities have been elected as mayor.<sup>1</sup>

Starting in 2014, peripheral and municipal elections are to be held every five years, concurrently with elections for the European Parliament. At the second round of local elections in Greece, on 25 May 2014, European Parliament elections were held in Greece. Greece comprises one national electoral district for the EP elections and the electoral threshold is 3%, while 14 EU countries do not apply any electoral threshold for the EP elections. 49 political parties participated in the 2014 EP elections, and party lists were closed and blocked. For the first time in the history, the Turkish Minority’s political party, Friendship, Equality, Peace (FEP) Party, run for the EP elections, with 38 candidates from Rhodope, Xanthi and Evros.

With the slogan ‘Europe Europe Hear Our Voice’, the FEP Party participated in the EP elections in order to give the message “We are Here Aswell” to Athens and Europe. The FEP Party announced they participated in the EP elections to give the necessary message to the mindset which does not take into consideration the demands of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace. Following the results of the EP elections in Greece, the FEP Party was the first party in Rhodope and Xanthi, where the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace lives. The Minority party won 41.68% in Rhodope and 25.89% in Xanthi. The FEP Party became the third party and received 42,533 votes with 12.25% share of the vote in Eastern Macedonia-Thrace Prefecture. Since the FEP party received 46,620 votes and won 0.76% of at the nationwide.<sup>2</sup> The results clearly indicate how the application

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.ekloges.ypes.gr/may2014/dn/public/index.html#{"page":"level","params":{"level":"snom\\_n","id":1}}](http://www.ekloges.ypes.gr/may2014/dn/public/index.html#{)

<sup>2</sup> For FEP Party’s elections results  
[http://www.ekloges.ypes.gr/may2014/e/public/index.html#{"cls":"party","params":{"id":73}}](http://www.ekloges.ypes.gr/may2014/e/public/index.html#{)

of 3% threshold for individuals prevents the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace from electing their representatives freely.

Thus, ABTTF urges the Greek government to:

- Abolish the 3% electoral threshold quota applied for political parties and independent candidates at national elections.
- Introduce special provisions to guarantee that the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace is represented in the Greek Parliament.
- Abolish the 3% electoral threshold quota applied at EP elections in Greece.
- Ensure that the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace participates in legislative institutions at regional, local and national level or takes part in consultative bodies in order to take a key role in decision-making processes which are interest to them.

Thank you for your attention.