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Political Rights of Western Thrace Turkish Minority

Political participation of national minorities in decision-making process, especially on the issues regarding the minority is considered as the key indicator of the democratic system of a country.

The limited/restricted political/social rights among the population of a country reflect the deficiency in the democracy.

The States shall promote effective political participation and representation of minorities as well as the right to participation to decision making procedures.

The political participation of Turkish Minority in Western Thrace, Greece, should be considered as democratic pluralism in the region. In accordance with the provisions of 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 Greece shall encourage full and effective political participation of Turkish minority in order to develop a peaceful and democratic society.

However, political participation opportunities of the Turkish Minority are limited. Civil society could be considered as the most important option to participate in decision making process.

During the last elections the Western Thrace Turkish Minority was able to elect three MPs. However, there are still some structural limitations on the political representation of the minority. The 3% electoral threshold, which was also implemented for the independent candidates, restricted the minority's representation by its own party or independent candidates. The 3% of the total population of Greece means nearly 300.000 votes, whereas the total population of the minority is estimated about 150.000. Due to these regulations the minority can only be represented by 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.

Greece has signed but not ratified the Council of Europe Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities so the Turkish Minority could not enjoy the rights that FCNM provide for the



national minorities as well as the rights derived from other bilateral and international human and minority rights instruments. Also, the Council of Europe monitoring process regarding the rights of national minorities is remaining just a minimal rank.

As can be seen from the example above, Greece with many law and regulations restricted political participation of the Turkish minority to the decision making procedures. Such as, the Law no 2539/1997 put in force in the second half of 1990s. With this law the Ministry of Interior applied a plan to combine several prefectures of Thrace and East Macedonian Regions under super-prefecture to prevent minority to elect its own Prefect in Thrace. This system merged the electoral districts where the Turkish Minority lives with that of Christian Greek population. In order to hide the discriminatory nature of this implication, the system of super-prefectures was also used in local elections in the Attica region together with Western Thrace. Also, 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.

Furthermore, access to public office/service or to have position in public administrative bodies of the minority representatives reflects the participatory aspect of States democratic values.

Holding a public office position of a minority representative such as in ministries or in any other administrative bodies provides him/her the direct involvement in the policy making and implementation processes. The situation in Greece is, however, not in line with the democratic values especially for the members of Turkish minority in Western Thrace. In Western Thrace the Turkish Minority consist of almost half of the population. The number of Turkish representatives in public service is limited. For example, in Komotini Municipality there are about 200 civil servants and unfortunately just five or ten of them are from Turkish Minority. There is no minority representative as civil servant in any ministries, although Muslim Turkish Minority is a recognised minority. There is no minority representative in the National Human Rights Committee that prepares human an minority rights reports.

In this respect Turkish Minority of Western Thrace calls upon the Greek State to:

Take into account the provisions of bilateral and international human and minority rights instruments in terms of political participation.

Take special measures for the effective and adequate participation and representation of the Turkish minority to political and social life.

Withdraw the 3% electoral threshold for independent candidates so that independent MPs can be elected.

Take special measure to prevent social injustice in the regions where the Turkish minority lives.