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NGO in Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations  
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SESSION III: Enhancing the participation of associations in public decision-making processes

## SUPPLEMENTARY HUMAN DIMENSION MEETING ON FREEDOMS OF PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY AND ASSOCIATION, WITH EMPHASIS ON FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION 16-17 April 2015

Dear Moderator,  
Distinguished Representatives,  
And NGO Representatives,

It is important to recall the commitments undertaken by all OSCE participating States, in particular those of the 1990 Copenhagen Document of the Conference on the Human Dimension which, in Part IV, articulates detailed standards relating to national minorities. In its recommendations, the High Commissioner for National Minorities (HCNM) encouraged and facilitated the adoption by participating States of specific measures related to national minorities and the standards the HCNM has promoted have been interpreted specifically to ensure the coherence of their application in open and democratic States.

Noting that OSCE commitments are not legally binding, but rather political commitments, the OSCE has created a sort of mini-treaty of political standards on national minorities for the OSCE area. The implementation of OSCE commitments by participating States and the results achieved in further standard-setting and interpretation of minority standards is still challenging. All the areas where national minority commitments have been developed require a detailed analysis in the field of participation of national minorities in public life.

In the framework of its work on the participation of persons belonging to national minorities in public decision-making processes, the European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission) underlines in a document on "Electoral law and national minorities" that only few states provide for specific rules on the representation of minorities in the elected bodies.

The Turkish Minority of Western Thrace in Greece is inadequately represented in policy and decision making system. Greek Government recognizes only a "Muslim minority" in Greece and

denies the ethnic identity of the Minority as “Turkish”. ABTTF would like to remind although the Treaty of Lausanne does not specifically mention the ethnic identity of the Muslim minority in Western Thrace, there is a specific reference to the Turkish ethnic identity of the Muslim minority in Western Thrace in legal and international documents. “Etabli Documents“ which were the documents given to the people of Greek and Turkish origin who were left out of the exchange procedure in accordance with the provisions of the Agreement on the Exchange of Turkish and Greek Populations on 30 January 1923 mentioned the ethnic origin of Muslim minority in Western Thrace as Turkish.

The Kallikratis Reform re-established local administration with the aim of creation of strong and viable municipalities and reduced the number of municipalities and communities in Greece. In the region of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace, the number of municipalities decreased which from 35 to 13 in total. The Reform established new municipalities of Komotini, Maroneia, Iasmos and Arriana in Rhodope(4), Xanthi, Myki, Dimokritos and Topeiros in the city of Xanthi(4) and Alexandroupolis, Soufli, Didymoteicho, Orestiada, Samothrace in Evros(5). This brought the question of adequate and fair participation and representation of the minority people at local and regional level.

The associations which bear the word “Turkish” in their titles were dissolved in the early 1980’s on the sole basis of a suspicion that the applicants intended to promote the idea that an ethnic minority existed in Greece and that this constituted a threat to public order in the country. There are currently no associations in Greece operating legally with their names including the word “Turkish” in their title. Therefore, it is not possible for minority associations in decision-making processes at the local, regional level and national level.

Since inadequate representation of minority groups in decision making system ensues impediments to the full enjoyment of many civic, cultural, economic, political and social rights, full and effective participation in public and political life is of vital importance in expressing and maintaining identities of minorities. Last but definitely not least, OSCE participating States, including Greece should create a consultative mechanism, at national, regional and local levels which would ensure an institutionalised, open, sincere and continuous dialogue based on mutual respect and tolerance with the representatives of the minorities on issues which interest to them.

A mechanism for dialogue between governmental authorities and national minorities should be established in the form of advisory or consultative bodies that would be the channel for national minorities to raise their own voices. Such bodies might also include special purpose committees for addressing such issues as housing, land, education, language, and culture. The composition of such bodies should reflect their purpose and contribute to more effective communication and advancement of minority interests.