



Western Thrace Minority
University Graduates Association

**OSCE
Human Dimension Sessions
Of The 2010 Review Conference
30 September – 8 October 2010
Warsaw – Poland**

RC.NGO/13/10
1 October 2010

ENGLISH only

Working Session 1

Name of Contact Person(s): Ms. Pervin Chairoula
E-mail(s): chairoulap@yahoo.com

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND REPRESENTATION OF WESTERN THRACE TURKISH MINORITY

Thank you very much Mr./Ms. Moderator,

My name is Pervin Chairoula, and I am representing the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace in Greece.

Full and effective political participation is an essential component of a peaceful and democratic society. According to many international documents persons belonging to minorities have the right to participate effectively in decision making procedures. However, the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace in Greece is inadequately represented in society's policy and decision making system.

After the Second World War, Greece lived a civil war (1946-1949) and a *junta regime* led by colonels (1967-1974). The Turks of Western Thrace, who acquired minority status according to the Articles 37-45 of the Lausanne Peace Treaty, had the opportunity to be represented in the Greek Parliament within the present political parties during the times when Greece overcame the problems and implemented democracy. However, in parallel with the minority rights which gained importance based on the principle of immutability of borders in Helsinki Final Agreement signed in 1975, the Turks of Western Thrace tried to elect their MPs from the independent lists for the Greek Parliament. But the election of independent MPs of the Turkish minority caused discomfort in Greece. Consequently, in order to be elected as independent MPs, 3% threshold of votes throughout the country was brought in 1990s. This made it impossible for the candidates to be elected independently because; the total number of Turks living in Western Thrace is about 150.000. Since then, the Turks of Western Thrace have never had the opportunity been represented by independent MPs in Greek parliament.¹ Today there are two minority MPs in the Hellenic Parliament and around 280 minority people in local administrations, however, the limitations on the political representation of minority still persist. The MPs

¹ H. Oksuz "Representation of the Western Thracian Turkish Minority in the Greek Parliament"



Western Thrace Minority
University Graduates Association

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.

According to the Law no 2539/1997 put in force in the second half of 1990s, the Ministry of Interior applied a new plan which combined several prefectures of Thrace and East Macedonian Regions under super-prefecture to prevent minority to elect its own Prefect in Thrace. This system merges 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 is 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.

The minority is also concerned about the current "Kallikratis" Plan regarding the restructuring of local administrations. The plans for the Rhodopi, Xanthi and Evros prefectures would hinder the political representation of the minority once more. Currently, out of 9 municipalities and 3 communes in Rhodopi, 6 of them are administered by the minority mayors or administrators. The Kallikratis Plan would decrease the total number of local units to 4 by merging the regions populated with the minority and majority in such a way that the minority would be in a position to elect only one/two mayor(s) with a minority background. Similarly, 7 municipalities and 3 communes in Xanthi (5 of which were currently administered with mayors/administrators with minority background) would be unified with a serious craftsmanship that it will be possible for minority to be politically viable only in one municipality and elect mayor.

Bearing in mind the population rates in the region, the minority of Western Thrace call upon the Greek State:

To take special measures for the effective and adequate participation and representation of the minority to political life, introducing a special quota for the minority should be considered as positive discrimination.

To withdraw the 3% electoral threshold for an independent candidate to 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.