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Democratic institutions, including: democratic elections; democracy at the national, regional and local levels; citizenship and political rights

Dear President,
Distinguished Representatives,
And esteemed NGO Delegates,

Full and effective political participation is an essential component of a peaceful and democratic society. Persons belonging to minorities should have the right to participate effectively in decisions on the national and, where appropriate, regional level concerning the minority to which they belong or the regions in which they live, in a manner not incompatible with national legislation.

However, the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace in Greece is inadequately represented in society's policy and decision making system. After the Turkish Minority elected an independent deputy 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. 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 makes it almost impossible for members of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace to be elected to the Parliament, unless they run candidates with majority political parties.

Law 2240/1994, which reduced the number of prefectures and sub-districts, established enlarged electoral districts in Western Thrace which in turn caused a decrease in number of elected representatives from the Minority. The redistribution of the electoral districts in 1994 has very adversely influenced the chances for the election of Muslim prefects or prefectural councillors, because the election law merged Xanthi with neighbouring Kavala and Drama, and Rhodope with neighbouring Evros, where the Turkish Minority is densely populated.

Full and effective participation of the Minority in political life requires an inherently pluralistic society in which the existence of the Minority is considered as a major factor, not of division, but of enrichment for the Greek society. However, there is a strong trend in news bulletins and regional or national newspapers to reproduce negative stereotypes and certain prejudices concerning the Minority, which in turn threatens the solidarity in society.

In order to ensure that the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace can fully and effectively participate in political life of Greece, ABTTF calls upon Greece and all OSCE Participating States to protect and promote full and effective participation of minorities in political life and take every step to prosecute and punish any bias motivated crime or discriminatory treatment on the grounds of ethnic or racial origin or religious or other beliefs, which is essential for an effective participation in decisions on the national and regional level concerning the region in which minorities live.