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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Written statement* submitted by the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF), a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[24 August 2012]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

The far-right politics in Greece and the rise of xenophobic violence and hate-motivated attacks

The rise of the far-right under conditions of economic crisis is a serious concern in Greece, where economic hardship and the increasing number of undocumented migrants in the country deepened xenophobia and intolerance against migrants and asylum seekers in central Athens and other regions in Greece.

In the time of deep economic crisis, nationalist and far-right wing parties such as Golden Dawn has presented a strong discourse against migrants and asylum seekers in Greece and it has gained strength and popularity among Greeks. Golden Dawn won 18 seats in the June 2012 national elections and entered the Greek Parliament for the first time in its history. In an interview with Human Rights Watch before the elections, the leader of the Golden Dawn, Nikolaos Michaloliakos explained, “We want Greece to belong to the Greeks. We are proud to be Greek; we want to save our national identity, our thousands-year history. If that means we are racist, then yes we are. We don’t want to share the same fate of the Native Americans. Right now, the immigrants are the cowboys and we are the Apache.”¹

The migrants and asylum seekers face a hostile environment over the past decade; however xenophobia and intolerance against migrants and asylum seekers turned into xenophobic incidents and hate-motivated attacks in the last years. Extreme nationalist discourse drifts towards violence against vulnerable groups, in particular against migrants and asylum seekers in Greece. Greek Helsinki Monitor stated that hate-motivated incidents against migrants and asylum seekers on the basis of the colour of their skin, their religion or their country of origin have increased dramatically and have become an almost daily phenomenon in Greece.²

Lastly, on 12 August 2012, an Iraqi migrant has been attacked in the capital city Athens. The migrant has been attacked on Anaxagora Street in the early hours of the morning; he was taken to a hospital but lost his life at the hospital. According to police investigation, five suspects who are believed to be involved in the killing of Iraqi migrant attacked a Romanian and a Moroccan earlier, but managed to flee.

The extent of xenophobic violence and hate-motivated attacks against migrants and asylum seekers is unknown due to lack of reliable statistics in Greece. Greek Helsinki Monitor claimed that such criminal acts, perpetrated by groups on motorcycles, have been documented since March 2012. However, the competent authorities have not taken any particular measures to prevent and address such acts which have contributed to an escalation of violence.

The xenophobic and hate-motivated violence appears to be not limited to migrants and asylum seekers in and around Athens. The political discourse against migrants and asylum seekers has led to violence against persons with different nationality and/or ethnic origin, religion or language in other parts of the country.

The Turkish Minority of Western Thrace, of which status and rights are determined by the Lausanne Peace Treaty in 1923, has also become a vulnerable target, and activities of far-right and/or extremist groups. There is an increasing trend in hate-motivated attacks against the places of worship which belong to the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace in Greece. This increasing trend in hate-motivated attacks against persons, properties and places of

¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Nikolaos Michaloliakos, Athens, January 12, 2012.

² http://cm.greekhelsinki.gr/uploads/2012_files/ghm1418_racist_violence_diktyo_english.pdf.

worship belonging to the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace has created an environment of fear and anxiety among the members of the Turkish minority.

On 23 March 2012, an unidentified person or a group spray painted some figures on the walls of the Xanthi Turkish Union in Xanthi, Greece and wrote “ΕΞΩ ΟΙ ΤΟΥΡΚΟΙ (Turks Out)” on the entrance door. The Board of the Xanthi Turkish Union published a press release and condemned the attack and said, “We strongly condemn this attack, and we want that the vicious person or persons, who want to destroy the peace in the region in a period we have difficult times as country, to be brought before justice.” In the same day, an identified person or a group wrote “ΤΟΥΡΚΟΣ ΚΑΛΟΣ ΜΟΝΟ ΝΕΚΡΟΣ (The only good Turk is a dead Turk)” on the wall of the Bektashi lodge in Aşağımahalle (Kato Thermes) in Xanthi, Greece.

Since the election of Golden Dawn to the Greek Parliament in the June elections, the Turkish Minority faces an increasing hostile environment. The election of Golden Dawn to the Greek Parliament in the June elections has resulted in a fear among the members of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace that attacks against persons and properties belonging to the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace would increase.

The period after the election of Golden Dawn to the Parliament has proved to be true that the political discourse which has been harshened after the June elections has turned into an anti-Greek sentiment and triggered xenophobia and racially-motivated hate crimes in the country. On 6 August 2012, a group of nearly 150 members of extreme nationalist Golden Dawn (Chrysi Avgi) party marched toward Komotini Turkish Youth Union (Gümülcine Türk Gençler Birliği) (GTGB) and chanted slogans against Turkey and Turkish Minority of Western Thrace, and the group threw bottles to the garden of the association. At that day, Golden Dawn organized a demonstration in order to protest the settlement of illegal immigrant to the police schools in Komotini and Xanthi. After the demonstration, a group of demonstrators marched toward the Turkish Consulate in Komotini, but the police did refuse access of the group to the street on which the consulate is located. Subsequently, the group congregated in front of the GTGB building. The group chanted Greek national anthem and shouted slogans against Turkish Minority and Turkey, then threw bottles to the garden.

On 12 August 2012, a group of members of the Xanthi provincial organization of Golden Dawn (Chrysi Avgi), who carried Greek flags in their hands, drove by the Turkish villages in Xanthi by motorbikes and cars and nurtured a climate of fear among the minority living in the Turkish villages of Yenice, Beyköy and Okçular. Lastly, on 23 August 2012, headquarter of Party of Friendship, Equality, Peace (Κόμμα Ισότητας, Ειρήνης και Φιλίας), which is established by Turkish Minority of Western Thrace, was attacked in the late hours of evening and illuminated sign of the party was broken with rocks.

The far-right has sharply risen as the economic downturn deepens in the country and the current situation in Greece shows how quickly such political discourse against persons with different backgrounds can expand as xenophobia and racially motivated hate crimes in Greece. Since the June elections in Greece, it is recorded a marked rise in violence and intimidation against migrants and asylum seekers by members of Golden Dawn and its sympathizers. The strong political discourse against foreigners has started to become an anti-Greek sentiment by members of Golden Dawn.

The persistent hate speech in the mainstream media with an explicit manifestation of hatred against Turkey makes the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace, of which all of whom are Greek citizens, a vulnerable target for far-right and/or extremist groups. The attack against Komotini Turkish Youth Union shows that members of Golden Dawn and its sympathizers represent a strong political opposition for persons belonging to a different nationality and/or

ethnic origin, although the members of Turkish Minority of Western Thrace are all Greek citizens.

The Greek Government should investigate and prosecute perpetrators, and should condemn publicly and unequivocally such incidents, and it should undertake effective measures to prevent xenophobic and hate-motivated crimes. ABTTF urges the Greek authorities to:

- ensure co-operation, where appropriate, at the national and international levels, including with relevant international bodies and between police forces, to combat violent hate crime;
- call on the competent authorities to intervene decisively on websites and social media, whenever racist speech openly instigates acts of violence and criminal acts;
- set up of a national consultation body which acts as a permanent monitoring centre and increase public awareness of the problem of the dissemination of incitement to hatred in public discourse.

ABTTF invites the Human Rights Council to question the Greek government about steps taken to address racist and xenophobic violence during Greece's second cycle review under the Universal Periodic Review in 2016.
