



# General Assembly

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## Human Rights Council

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Agenda item 3

**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, 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.

[17 May 2010]

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

## **The problem of participation of women belonging to minority groups in public and political life**

Equal participation of women in public and political life is one of the foundations of democracy and one of the goals of the United Nations. Unfortunately, the situation in most places of the world including Europe demonstrates that women are still under-represented in public and political life, nearly thirty five years after the first UN World Conference on Women in Mexico City. Although Ms. Rachel Majanya, the UN Secretary-General's Special Adviser on Gender Issues, noted that ECOSOC had set a target of 30 percent women in leadership positions to be met by 1995, the overall progress has been slow in the world, like the European countries. Women still hold less than 20% of parliamentary seats and ministerial positions worldwide.

The participation of women in public and political life is still limited in most of European states, including Greece. The Greek Constitution of 1975 does establish the principle of equality and the revisions of 2001 do oblige the Greek State to take appropriate measures to eliminate all forms of discrimination. The General Secretariat for Equality, which is now a part of the Ministry of Justice, Transparency and Human Rights in Greece, is the governmental agency competent to plan, implement, and monitor the implementation of policies on equality between women and men in all sectors. New mechanisms of promoting gender equality have been established in Greece, and a permanent Parliamentary Committee on Equality and Human Rights has been created. Besides, a National Committee for Equality between the State, the social partners and NGOs for the formulation of National Strategy has been established. Although the participation of women in public and political life has increased in recent years, gender equality in public and political life is not still balanced in Greece. The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) has criticized in 2006 that patriarchal attitudes and deep-rooted stereotypes regarding the roles and responsibilities of women and men in the family and society persist in Greece. These stereotypes present an impediment to the implementation of gender balance in society. Women are still in a disadvantaged position in a number of areas, including all sectors of the labour market and in political and public life.

The effective participation of members of minority groups in the public and political life of the society they belong to is an essential component of a peaceful and democratic society. However, minority groups around the world, in Europe in particular, are not adequately represented in policy and decision-making systems. In order to eliminate negative stereotypes with regard to the role of women in public and political life, Greece launched a programme for the sensitization of public school teachers and implemented in regions of the country. However, the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace, which is the only officially recognized minority group on its religious ground in Greece, has not been included in the programme since the programme only applied to the public schools. Greece also implemented a program of enriching libraries with relevant material in all public schools of technological education with the aim of tackling professional segregation and stereotypes. In order to challenge stereotypes, special training programmes, which are named "Parents' Schools", have been implemented throughout Greece first in 2003. However, the programme did not include the schools in Western Thrace where women of the Turkish Minority are in a very disadvantaged position.

The women in the region of Western Thrace have a very low level education is under-represented in Greece. Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association (BTAYTD) implemented a research project with a view to recording the problems and the needs of the Muslim women in Western Thrace. With the project KÖYEP (Reaching out to

the Countryside), BTAYTD visited the minority women in their own places, and the problems and the needs of the minority women have been recorded. Data on the level of education of the minority women, their professional status and their family model has been collected. Surveys, which were made in different villages in Rhodope and Xanthi, have proved that the level of education of the minority women in Western Thrace is at a very low level. Only 5.3% of women participated in the survey are university graduate or university student, 4.7% of them are high school graduate or student, and 6.6% of them are secondary school graduate or student. 82.6 % of the women interviewed are primary school graduate. The very low level of education prevents the minority women to participate in public and political life. The professional status of the participants have pointed out that 45% of the women who are between 21-30 ages and 38.9% of the women between 31 and 40 ages are housewives, and most of them are workers in their own small farmyard.

The participation of minority women in political life represents another deep rooted problem in Western Thrace and the participation of women in political life is still not in a gender balanced proportion in political life and society in general. In October 2009 elections, the percent of women in the Greek Parliament has increased to 17.33%, and today there are 52 women MPs in the Greek Parliament. However, there are no women who belong to the member of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace elected to the Greek Parliament. In 2009 elections in Greece, mainstream parties nominated fourteen candidates who are members of the Turkish Minority, but there were only two women candidates in the lists of mainstream parties. The participation of women in political life at the regional level is slightly different from the national level.

The government with Law 3647/2008 has introduced a quota measure of 0.5 % for the recruitment of minority people in the public sector. However this quota has been used for the positions outside the region of Western Thrace, which is the natural habitat of the minority. In 2002, an obligatory 1/3 quota for women has been introduced to the electoral lists for prefectural and municipal elections. Since then, there has been a steady increase of female elected members to the prefectural and municipal posts. However, there are only three elected minority women who do actively participate in political life at the regional level. The case of Mrs. Sibel Mustafaoğlu presents an example to the negative stereotypes and discrimination of minority women on the ground of their minority status. In the last local elections of 2006, Mrs. Sibel Mustafaoğlu has been elected to the Prefectural Council of Rodopi and appointed as Vice- Prefect. She ran for the European Parliament elections in June 2009, as the only minority candidate in the PASOK list. Since she is one of the most promising politicians at the local level, she has been considered to be appointed as the Head of the Komotini in April 2010. However, the Church and the local right wing newspapers initiated a campaign to cast her out and pressured the government to appoint another person to this post. This campaign has been successful and a man from the majority has been appointed to the relevant post.

In order to promote gender balance and participation of minority women in public and political life, ABTTF encourages the Greek State to:

- Reform the electoral system in a way which would strengthen women's representation in the Parliament. The electoral system with a proportional representation list system should provide not only a high proportion of female candidates including women who belong to the minorities, but also a strict rank-order rule.
- Pay more attention to the women who are members of the vulnerable groups, and carry out a program and/or project on the problems and the needs of these women. This includes research with a view to recording the needs of their families and their education structures of those women, and the existing legal and institutional

framework should support full and effective participation of minority women in public and political life.

- Implement a policy which gives a first priority to the education of the minority women in the area of Western Thrace. Since the minority women in Western Thrace live in rural areas, rural development projects should be implemented in the region. The minority women should be included in the rural development projects. Thus, their participation to the public and political life is to be strengthened in the region of Western Thrace.

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