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Working Group II – Equal participation of women and men in political parties

**The representation of Turkish Minority Women
in Political and Public Life**

Thank you Ms/Mr Moderator,

My name is Pervin Hayrullah (Chairoula). I am representing Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association.

Participatory democracy is a fundamental principle of political governance in today's Europe and in some other parts of the world. Equal participation of men and women in political and public life is the requirement of a democratic society.

Participation in government decision making system through elected representatives ensures government's accountability and its responsiveness of the needs of the represented society.

Many international documents, as well as CEDAW General Recommendation No. 23 advises states/parties to develop temporary strategies to increase women's political participation.

However, as it is stated US 2010 Human Rights Report on Greece also, the participation of Greek women in political and public life is still limited.

"There were 51 women in the 300-seat parliament and three women in the 17-member cabinet. A quota system requires 30 percent of all local government candidates to be women. At the three highest courts, 14 of 61 Council of State justices, 28 of 59 Supreme Administrative Court justices, and three of 62 Supreme Court justices were women."

2002 was the first year that a quota system implemented in the elections for local government, requiring that 30% of all candidates be women. However, no training seminars for women's participation in the elections or programs to help Greek society adapt to the quota system were organized, nor they encouraged by authorities to be candidates or to participate in public life. Most of Greece's local administration can be considered as a closed circle.



Participation of the Turkish Minority Women in Political and Public Life

There are two members of the Muslim Turkish Minority in the 300-seat parliament; there is no minority member in the cabinet. Also, since 1920s no minority woman has been elected as an MP.

The participation of Turkish Minority women to public life is also restricted. Especially, if we consider that the pursuit of equal right to political participation by national minorities is linked to their ability to assert and exercise other fundamental freedoms including freedom of opinion and expression, freedom of assembly and association.

I would like to give two examples regarding the restrictions on the fundamental rights of Turkish Minority Women of Western Thrace. In 2001, Turkish Minority women took the initiative and tried to establish the "Cultural Association of Turkish Women of Rodopi" to alleviate problems faced by the women in Thrace. However, the Greek courts did not allow the association to be established because of the word "Turkish" in its title. And recently, on 1 December 2010 a group of Turkish women in Xanthi applied to establish "The Cultural Association of the Turkish Women of the Region of Xanthi". However, this application was rejected by the First Instance Court of Xanthi on 17 February 2011, too. I would like to kindly draw Your attention to some points of the decision dated 17 February 2011:

- In rejecting the application of the establishment of a new association, the Court briefly touches upon the right to self-identification. In the decision it is stated that self-identification is a personal right guaranteed by the international instruments and that it cannot be considered as a collective right. Thus it is implied that a person may identify himself/herself as a Turk or as of Turkish origin; however a group of people cannot express their ethnic "Turkish" identity nor can they form an association. On the other hand, contradicting with this line of understanding, the Court gives the example of "Roma" ethnic identity, concluding that not only people who identify themselves as of "Roma" ethnic origin can claim so collectively, but also some associations having "Roman" ethnic denomination can function legally.

- The Court persistently identifies the minority in Greece with its religious qualifications, as opposed to ethnic self-identification. Indeed, this logic has long been maintained by Greek authorities, who suggest that the wording of the Lausanne Peace Treaty does not include ethnic identity. Yet, the Court refers to "Greeks living in Istanbul and Muslims living in Western Thrace". This phrase alone indicates that the decision is taken under political considerations.

The abovementioned decisions of the Greek courts clearly illustrate the structural impediments on the freedom of association that was guaranteed under Article 11 of the European Convention on Human Rights.