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Working Session 12: Tolerance and non-discrimination II, including address by the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities: Rights of persons belonging to national minorities  
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### **The Turkish Minority in Greece**

Thank you very much Ms/Mr. Moderator,

My name is Pervin Chairoula, I am representing the Turkish Minority in Greece.

The Turkish Minority in Western Thrace has been officially recognized by Greece in 1923 with the Lausanne Peace Treaty. In this regard, it is fair to say that the Lausanne Peace Treaty is the backbone of the status of the Turkish Minority in Western Thrace.

Yet, it goes without saying that the contemporary Minority rights go well beyond what the said Treaty had anticipated. In other words, the international documents such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), the International Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), and the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) are basic supplementary frameworks that determine the rights of Minorities all around the world.

We would like to reiterate that members of the Turkish Minority are facing serious problems in terms of using their rights emanating from and guaranteed by the said conventions/agreements to which Greece is also a party.

The Greek authorities deny the ethnic identity of the Turkish minority of Western Thrace on the grounds that the Lausanne Peace Treaty refers to “Muslim minority”. They prefer to define the Minority by its religious characteristics as opposed to its ethnicity. However, “Etabli Documents” which were issued to the people of Greek and Turkish origin who were left out of the exchange procedure in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Agreement on the Exchange of Turkish and Greek Populations, on 30 January 1923, refer to the ethnic origin of the Muslim minority in Greece as Turkish. In practice all Greek citizens, including the members of the Minority, have the right to self-identification. However, the Turkish Minority is prohibited from establishing associations with the word “Turkish” in their names.

According to the provisions of the 1923 Lausanne Peace Treaty, the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace *has the right to establish, manage and control at their own expense, any charitable, religious and social institution, any school and other establishment for instruction and education, with the right to use their own language and to exercise their own religion freely therein...* However, the Greek authorities dissolved the associations like the Xanthi Turkish Union (est. 1927), the Komotini Turkish Youth Union (est. 1928) and the Western Thrace Turkish Teachers’ Union (1936) which were registered and operated in the region until the late 1980’s. On



the other side, the Pomak or Roman ethnic groups are recognized and even welcomed and supported by the authorities, as there are free to establish and operate their NGOs, by using the words “Pomak” and “Roma” in the names of the institutions.

The educational autonomy has been undermined and diminished by governmental practices over years. At the pre-school level, Turkish children are obliged to attend public kindergartens where the instruction is only in Greek, under Law 3518/2006, which extends the compulsory period in education. The extension of compulsory education period is deliberately not being reflected to the minority schooling system. There are no minority/private kindergartens for the minority children to learn their mother tongue in their early childhood. The Greek authorities refrain from replying to the applications of Minority to open Turkish-Greek bilingual kindergartens, in the existing bilingual minority primary schools.

There is a significant ambiguity in the teacher training system for the minority schools. Teachers in the Greek curriculum do not know the mother tongue of the minority pupils and have no special training for teaching in minority schools, while the teachers in the Turkish curriculum are graduates of a former special pedagogical academy in Thessaloniki with very limited courses taught in Turkish. As a result of this, the quality of education in minority schools remains very low.

The Turkish Minority of Western Thrace calls upon the OSCE Participating States

- To monitor Greece in terms of minority policies and encourage the Greek authorities to implement the provisions of minority rights protection mechanisms,

We call upon the Greek State

- To respect the minority’s right to self-identification and to promote its collective usage,
- To have a sincere dialogue and cooperation with the minority representatives in order to build mutual trust,

Thank you for your attention.