

Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF)

Name of contact person: Ms. Melek Kırmacı

E-mail(s): melek.kirmaci@abtff.org, info@abtff.org

HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

Forum on Minority Issues

Second session

Geneva, 12-13 November 2009

Agenda Item 3

Madam Chairperson,
Distinguished delegates,
And civil society representatives,

Full and effective political participation is an essential component of a peaceful and democratic society. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights protects the right to everyone “to take part in the government of his country” and to “equal access to public service in his country”. The UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities states that “persons belonging to minorities 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”.

The electoral law or electoral system does have a great impact on the full and effective participation of persons belonging to national minorities. In the framework of its work on the participation of persons belonging to national minorities in public life, the European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission) underlines in a document on “Electoral law and national minorities” that only few states provide for specific rules on the representation of minorities in the elected bodies. The participation of persons belonging to national minorities in the national Parliaments requires a detailed examination of electoral law and, in particular, of the influence of the electoral systems on the representation of political groups.

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 mainstream parties. In 1993, the independent minority candidate who had the largest vote among all Greek and Turkish candidates in Rhodope was unable to be elected although the candidate had exceeded the district’s electoral quota for a seat.

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, because the election law Xanthi with neighbouring Kavala and Drama, and Rhodope with neighbouring Evros, where Turkish Minority is densely populated.

European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) stated in its first report that “the redistribution of the electoral districts in 1994 had adversely influenced the chances for the election of Muslim prefects or prefectural councillors”.

ABTTF calls upon the Greek State:

- To immediately ratify the Council of Europe’s Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities,
- To protect and promote full and effective participation of the Minority in political decisions on the national and regional level concerning the region in which the Minority lives,
- To create a consultative mechanism, at national, regional and local levels which would ensure an institutionalised, open, sincere and continuous dialogue with representatives of the Turkish Minority,
- To withdraw the 3% electoral threshold for an independent candidate to be elected,
- To review and amend Law 2240/1994 taking Minority's demands into account and abolish the division of local districts into enlarged electoral districts which are now implemented in the prefectures of Rhodope and Xanthi.

Thank you

Ms. Melek Kırmacı