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**Racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related
forms of intolerance: follow-up to and implementation
of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action**

Written statement* submitted by 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.

[30 May 2023]

* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.



Elections in Greece and Otherization and Marginalization of Members of Turkish Community in Western Thrace in Politics

Our country Greece headed legislative parliamentary elections on 21 May, less than three months after the deadly head-on train collision at Tempe that killed 57 passengers. Due to a new voting law, the elections are held under a proportional representation system, wherein the leading party needs to secure at least 46% to have a chance to win absolute majority in parliament. However, Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis, scored a landslide election but without the seats in parliament to win outright. The two parties refused to form a coalition and pushed for a second vote on June 25.

The first vote triggered ongoing polarization in the Greek political system most notably through marginalization, otherization of persons belonging to Turkish community in Western Thrace and Turkish MP candidates nominated from major political parties because the electoral system, which has a 3% threshold, requires political parties and independent candidates to get at least 3% of the vote across the country.

Before the elections which had been anticipated in April, MERA 25, represented in the parliament, published a party program in Turkish and included a detailed minority programme in accordance with demands of the Turkish community with the slogan “The only party that supports the minority and the rightful demands of the minority”. We believed that it could have been an important step in the political history of our country that the MERA25 Party announced the party program about our community and shared it with the public through brochures published in Turkish.

As the Turkish community in Western Thrace, we did not want to be scapegoated in politics and the media at every opportunity, and we do not want to be portrayed as a threat to the integrity and public order of our country. Unfortunately, the reality on site did prove the opposite. Before the elections, Protothema claimed that SYRIZA's Rhodope Provincial Deputy candidate Özgür Ferhat, member of the Turkish community, “is a partner in Ankara’s propaganda that systematically tries to attribute national characteristics to the region’s well-known religion, the Muslim minority” because he referred to the community in the region as Turkish.

We would like to remind that the Turkish community in Western Thrace has been granted minority status and special minority rights with the 1923 Lausanne Peace Treaty. The Turkish community in Western Thrace which we represent was defined as the Turkish Minority by the state and its representative governments from 1923 until the Colonels’ Junta in 1967. Turkish community in Western Thrace sent deputies to the Greek parliament since 1920. With the Cyprus Crisis between our kin-state Türkiye and our country Greece and the subsequent establishment of the Turkish Cypriot authorities in 1983, our country has changed its policy towards us. Since then, it has started to use the definition of “Muslim Minority” by ignoring our Turkish identity.

In the elections held on 21 May Sunday, the President of our NGO, Halit Habip Oglu, casted his vote in his village in Komotini and published a photo on his own social media accounts. Editor of KomotiniPress News Portal published a message on his social media account and accused our NGO being associated with para-statal structures and claimed that our President blackmailed the long-defeated local political power by saying “Therefore, all parties should know that it is not possible for them to succeed in the region by ignoring us! I hope that everyone will act with the awareness of this fact in the future.”¹ The editor made a clear target our President on social media and the comments below his post asked Greece not to allow him to enter the country, despite the fact that he was born in Greece and a Greek citizen.

Under such political climate, the parliamentary candidates from the Turkish community received 43.950 votes in total. 11 candidates from Turkish community in the province of Rhodope, who were nominated from different parties, received 26.109 votes, while 10 Turkish candidates in the province of Xanthi received 17.841 votes. 4 out of 6 deputies in both provinces are elected from our community.

And the only province in which SYRIZA received more than the governing New Democracy Party is Rodopi, where Özgür Ferhat, Turkish candidate from SYRIZA, got 12.680 votes.

The elections results in Rhodope fuelled otherization of members of the Turkish community in the region. Turkish community is considered as representatives of the kinstate Türkiye of which very existence is a tool for irredentist foreign policies.

After the elections, Eleni Laftzi, who was the mayoral candidate of Komotini from SYRIZA, commented on her social media account and wrote: “Congratulations to the Turkish Consulate, which once again managed to intervene in political affairs in Rhodope! I also congratulate those who contributed to the election of the so-called left crutch of the Erdogan state as a member of parliament in Rhodope. I also congratulate those who tried to portray Türkiye’s intervention as a victory of the left to the public. I’m sorry, but this supported election is neither leftist nor progressive. It’s just rude and bad interference!”² This is scapegoating of the Turkish candidate who won more than 12 thousand votes in Rhodope. We would like to remind that Özgür Ferhat, who narrowly lost the election four years ago, respected the decision of the voters and welcomed the election result with great maturity.

Liberal³ commented that Turkism mechanisms in the regions are supported by SYRIZA and PASOK in Xanthi and SYRIZA in Rhodope. In this context, it is noted that SYRIZA owes an apology for Rhodope, where which it has dyed pink under the influence of the Turkish Consulate in Komotini. The newspaper claimed that SYRIZA repeats its mistake of surrendering the “Muslim minority” to the manipulation of the Turkish Consulate, thus placing the small party plans above the national interests and at the same time condemning “the Greek citizens of Muslim faith” to stay in the arms of the Turkish Consulate in Komotini.

Alexandroupoli Metropolitan Anthimos also condemned the “instrumentalization of the religious identity of citizens by centres and forces aimed at manipulating citizens in elections”.⁴ Underlining that the elections held last week included a serious problem and concern, Anthimos stated that the religious identity of the citizens was instrumentalized by foreign powers and centres to intervene in the political mechanism.

It is really sad to see that even the results of the democratic elections are not respected in our country when we read the news and statements that directly target our society after the May 21 general elections. Especially in the Rhodope province, the record votes received by SYRIZA candidate Özgür Ferhat are highlighted, and it is claimed that this is the result of external forces directing our society. However, this point is deliberately ignored: Our society constitutes the majority of the population in the Rhodope province, and therefore, it is quite normal for a Turkish candidate to be elected as a deputy with the support of our society, with the most votes. Our society, of its own free will, went to the polls on May 21 and gave the vote to Turkish candidates from Rhodope and Xanthi.

Full and effective political participation is an essential component of a peaceful and democratic society. 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”.

Turkish community in Western Thrace sent deputies to the Greek parliament since 1920. Until 1993, when the 3% electoral threshold for political parties and independent candidates was adopted, we elected our independent deputies as a society and sent them to the Greek Parliament.

Our society, of its own free will, went to the polls on May 21 and gave the vote to Turkish candidates from Rhodope and Xanthi. Moreover, in the early general elections held in September 2015, 3 of the 3 deputies elected to the Greek Parliament from the Rhodope province were Turkish.

Our society, which is ignored in our country, gives its votes to Turkish candidates in every election, reminding our country's administrators and political parties of its existence and power in the most democratic way, and saying “We are here with our Turkish identity”.

1 <https://www.facebook.com/nikos.arvanites>

2 <https://fonirodopis.gr/press/137929/elene-laftsi-sygharitiria-sto-tourkiko-proxeneio-gia-tin-eklogi-tou-ozgur-ferhat/>

3 <https://www.liberal.gr/politiki/i-ofeilomeni-syggnomi-toy-syriza-stin-meionotita-se-xanthi-rodopi>

4 <https://www.iefimerida.gr/ekloges/aihmes-toy-alexandroypoleos-anthimoy-gia-ti-rodopi>