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The Struggle for Effective Representation in the Greek Parliament: Friendship-Equality-Peace Party and the Western Thrace Turks*

Yunan Parlamentosunda Etkin Temsil Etme Mücadelesi: Batı Trakya Türkleri
ve Dostluk-Eşitlik-Barış Partisi

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Abstract: The political participation of minorities is still one of the most controversial subjects in current affairs. In many states, policies regarding minority communities are designed disregarding the minorities' needs and aspirations. Greece falls in that category of state where ethnic, religious or linguistic groups are often ignored in the decision-making process as in the case of Western Thrace Turks. Since 1923, a number of MPs from the minority have been elected and representing it in the Greek Parliament. However, practice and the continuity of minority rights violations suggest that the minority parliamentarians have not been successful in influencing decisions. Here we briefly examine the political behaviour of the Western Thrace Turks. To illustrate the challenges for the minority, we analyse the formation process of the Friendship-Equality-Peace Party and its strategy in its attempt to influence decision making in the Greek Parliament.

Keywords: Western Thrace Turks, Greece, Political Participation, Elections, Minority Political Parties

Özet: Azınlıkların politikaya katılımı hala siyaset biliminin en çelişkili konularından birisidir. Birçok ülkede, azınlıklarla ilgili politikalar, azınlıkların kendi görüşleri dikkate alınmadan planlanmaktadır. Yunanistan devleti de bu kategoriye girmekte ve Batı Trakya Türkleri örneğinde olduğu gibi azınlıkları karar alma sürecinde göz ardı etmektedir. 1923'ten beri azınlık grubundan seçilen pek çok milletvekili Yunan Parlamentosuna girmiştir. Fakat, buna rağmen azınlık hakları ihlallerinin devam etmesi; milletvekillerinin karar alma süreçlerinde etkisiz kaldıklarını göstermektedir. Bu çalışmada öncelikle Batı Trakya Türkleri'nin politik duruşları incelenecek olup; aynı zamanda Dostluk-Eşitlik-Barış Partisi'nin kuruluş süreci, Yunan Parlamentosu'nda karar alma aşamasında etkili olabileceği stratejileri ele alınacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Batı Trakya Türkleri, Yunanistan, Siyasal Katılım, Azınlık, Seçimler, Azınlık Partileri

Introduction

The engagement of Western Thrace Turks in Greek politics through a minority or under majority political parties to influence effectively the decision making process is a matter of ongoing debate among the members of the minority. The discussions have intensified since the general assembly of the Friendship-Equality-Peace Party (DEBP) in 2010. The general pattern for the community members is involvement in Greek politics under majority or mainstream political parties. Despite their success in national and local elections, important positions are generally granted to the majority, not minority, politicians. The minority MPs are mostly neglected or excluded when decisions regarding the Western Thrace Turks are taken. Putting into effect various laws and regulations against the will of the minority raises, among

* I would like to particularly thank the Culture and Education Foundation of Western Thrace Minority (PEKEM-BAKEŞ) for allowing me to benefit from its archive.

others, an important question: to what extent are the minority representatives able to influence decisions on minority issues such as education, religion and so on?

Under such circumstances, the Friendship-Equality-Peace Party introduces itself as the only ideological space where minority people can be involved in politics effectively, not only when policies are designed but also to inform the domestic and international public without pressure by party authorities. In the party's programmatic claims, minority candidates are accepted by majority parties exclusively to win minority votes rather than to provide the possibility for minority members to influence decisions. Hence the DEBP urges the minority to stop supporting majority parties and reclaim its own voice.

This article will first briefly look into the political behaviour of the Western Thrace Turks and analyse the degree of their presence in the Greek Parliament and influences in decisions on minority issues. Approaches for and against the DEBP will be elucidated. The article will also touch on the formation of the DEBP and its growth process since establishment. As a conclusion, the study analyses the success of strategies put forward by the DEBP in terms of being effective in both the Greek Parliament and decision making processes.

Political Participation of Minorities

Introducing laws and shaping policies in line with majority cultural-religious aspects and perspectives continues in most countries despite the increasing ethnic and religious diversity of modern societies. As Hastings points out, "the majority of our political and legal systems do not accurately reflect the racial and ethnic diversity of our societies".¹ Imposing policies defined exclusively by the majority generally results in the exclusion of minorities from all forms of public life in their country, even in matters that directly affect them, such as the structure and language of education, or the issues related to their religious freedom and identity. Therefore, minority representatives face strong challenges to make their voice heard by law makers when the right of participation of minorities is not fully exercised.

Nowadays, participation of minorities in cultural, economic, social and political life is genuinely accepted as a right of minorities in addition to being a general human right. Thus, it is stipulated in the relevant international legal instruments,² under which states are obliged to create conditions for effective participation.³ As a human rights expert, Verstichel claims too that "[t]he effective participation of minorities has become a matter of international concern".⁴

¹ Alcee L. Hastings, "Concrete Steps to Advance Minority Political Participation and to Build Capacity of Minorities to Participate Effectively." The Second Session of the Forum on Minority Issues, Last accessed 07 January 2014,

<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/Minority/Pages/Session2Statements.aspx>

² Such instrument can be divided into two categories; legally and politically binding documents. The 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (Article 25, 27), the 1995 Framework Convention for the protection of National Minorities (Article 15), and the 1992 UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities are the most known legally binding instruments. The 1990 Concluding Document of the Copenhagen Meeting of the Conference on the Human Dimension of the Security and Cooperation in Europe is a political binding document.

³ Zdenka Machnyikova and Lanna Hello, "The Principles of Non-discrimination and Full and Effective Equality and Political Participation," in *Political Participation of Minorities: A Commentary on International Standards and Practice*, ed. Marc Weller. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 97.

⁴ Annelies Verstichel, "Understanding Minority Participation and Representation and the Issue of Citizenship," in *Political Participation of Minorities: A Commentary on International Standards and Practice*, ed. Marc Weller. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 74.



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Apart from being a legal obligation for states, its application is considered a key factor for a sustainably diverse democracy by many scholars, experts and studies. As indicated in the Commentary on the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities (hereinafter, the Commentary), effective participation “can serve as a means of dispute resolution and sustain diversity as a condition for the dynamic stability of a society”.⁵ A similar approach is taken by the Lund Recommendations on the Effective Participation of National Minorities in Public Life as well and it is defined as “an essential component of a peaceful and democratic society”.⁶ According to Vollebaek, effective minority participation is in the interest of both states and minorities.⁷ Vollebaek also looked into the issue from both association and security perspectives and argued that there is a risk to the stability of societies if minorities feel that their voices are not being heard. In his view, “nothing is more dangerous in the long term than a cohesive group of disgruntled citizens who sees no point showing loyalty to a State because it feels “foreign” to them”.⁸

Within the framework of international human rights law, effective participation of minorities can be guaranteed in many ways, including minority representatives in elected bodies such as parliaments, regional or local councils and governments. According to the Commentary, minority representation is required in legislative and governing bodies for effective participation and taking the opinion of minorities into account should be before decisions concerning them are adopted. However, participation of minorities in decision making processes alone may be insufficient to ensure minority interests are represented or the impact of minorities on decisions regarding them. They might be allowed to raise their concerns and be listened to, but their legitimate demands can easily be ignored, particularly when minority representatives are from unrecognised groups within a given state. Therefore, the mechanism providing the presence of minorities in decision making processes sometimes cannot be enough for the exercise of the right to effective minority participation and as Verstichel stresses, their presence needs to be translated into influence on the outcome of decisions.⁹ In this context, it seems appropriate to acknowledge the distinction between the concepts of participation and representation that she points out.

In the view of Verstichel, the mechanism allowing minority persons to sit in local or national parliaments or take up positions as civil servants constitute participation, and the mechanism providing further participation and representation in decision-making process by promotion and protection of minority identity is representation. The former is for integration and inclusion in order to eliminate discrimination, the latter is to promote the distinct minority identity in order to reverse/prevent assimilation. According to her, the essence of

⁵ The Commentary of the Working Group on Minorities to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities, United Nations Economic and Social Council, Last accessed 11 December 2013, http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Events/Minority2012/G0513385_en.pdf

⁶ The Lund Recommendations of National Minorities in Public Life & Explanatory Note, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, Last accessed 12 December 2013, <http://www.osce.org/hcnm/32240>

⁷ Knot Vollebaek, Foreword to *Political Participation of Minorities: A Commentary on International Standards and Practice*, by Marc Weller (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), xii.

⁸ Knot Vollebaek, United Nations, The Second Session of the Forum on Minority Issues. Last accessed 05 December 2013,

<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/Minority/Pages/Session2Statements.aspx>

⁹ Verstichel, *Understanding Minority*, 75.



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representation is that minority representatives are authorised to represent a minority and there is 'a link of accountability between the minority representatives and the minority or minorities they represent'. To illustrate this distinction, Verstichel uses the mechanism applied in the Slovenian Parliament where the Italian and Hungarian minority MPs have a veto right regarding laws and other regulations on minority issues. These two MPs have been elected to a reserved seat by voters registered on a special minority voter register and their position is clearly different than a minority member who might have been offered an eligible position in the list of a mainstream party. In the first example, MPs are elected authorised minority representatives, entitled to take part in committees dealing with minority concerns crucial for the definition/ preservation of the identity of the minority. However, in the second example, an MP can be interested in all areas and there is no obligation for him or her to be involved particularly in the decision-making process regarding minority issues.¹⁰

Verstichel's explanation indicates clearly that the application of the right to effective participation of minorities depends mostly on the extent to which minority representatives are able to influence decisions. Therefore only the presence of minority members either in elected or administrative bodies does not guarantee the effective participation of minorities. Accordingly, in some cases, there is the need for a special representation mechanism for minorities; such special mechanism may vary from taking measures in the electoral system to provide reserved minority seats in the parliament and on advisory committees or commissions. In this respect, Verstichel argues that "when voting patterns generally run along ethnic, religious, or linguistic lines, at least, when matters are decided which are of particular importance to the identity of a minority, special representation mechanism will be necessary".¹¹ For Verstichel, "there are more mechanisms related to the presence of minorities in decision-making process and fewer related to the influence of minorities on the outcome of these processes".¹²

Concerning the distinction between the concepts of participation and representation made by Verstichel, Greece is a state where special measures for taking minority views into account are absent from the decision-making process. As a consequence, policies on minority groups are almost designed in the light of majoritarianism as is evident from the case of the Western Thrace Turks. However, it is useful to begin with a short introduction of the Greek political history since 1923 prior to the analysis of the political behaviour of Muslim-Turks and their ability to influence decisions.

Greek Parliamentary History

When Greece signed the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923, the country was in a political crisis stemming from the conflict between the Liberal Party (*Komma Phileleftheron*) and People's Party (*Laikon Komma*) over the type of the regime. Elections in December 1923 resulted in the victory of the Liberal Party and accordingly, the Liberal Party founder Eleftherios Venizelos returned to Greece but was obliged once more to move into exile in February 1924. In the following years, Greece saw two military coups and a number of government formations. The Liberal Party's victory in the 1928 elections brought a relative political stability until 1932 when Venizelos lost his position as prime minister. The Liberal Party claimed again a narrow victory over the People's Party in elections in 1932, but the government was formed by Panayis Tsaldaris, the leader of the People's Party, since Venizelos

¹⁰ Ibid, 79-80.

¹¹ Ibid, 78.

¹² Ibid, 76.



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was unwilling to form a government.¹³ Tsaldaris' minority government was short-lived and new elections were held in 1933, resulting in the victory of the People's Party. Tsaldaris was also successful in the June 1935 elections and his party secured with its allies (Ethnikon Rizospastikon Komma) 281 out of 300 seats in parliament. In October, Tsaldaris resigned over the dispute of restoration of the king and he was replaced by General Kondylis who took the initiative to organise a plebiscite which resulted in favour of the return of King George II to Greece. Konstantinos Demertzis was appointed by King George II as head of a provisional 'service' government to hold elections and remained as prime minister even after the elections in 1936, since supporters and opponents of Venizelos failed to form a new government. Following the sudden death of Demertzis in 1936, King George II appointed Ioannis Metaxas as an interim prime minister. A short time after his appointment, Metaxas imposed a dictatorship with the backing of King George II and suspended the parliament which was opened again following the first post-World War II elections in 1946.

Following the end of resistance to the AXIS and turbulent occupation years, Georgios Papandreou's coalition government, formed under British tutelage, returned to Greece from Cairo in 1944. A year later, the Varkiza Agreement was signed and all sides agreed, inter alia, to hold a genuine plebiscite on the constitutional question and elections for a constituent assembly to draft a new constitution.¹⁴ Although a number of disputes occurred over the implementation of Varkiza terms, elections were held in 1946 with 44 parties competing. Konstantinos Tsaldaris formed the new government but holding plebiscite for the return of the King to Greece in September 1946 deteriorated the existing political flux, leading to the second stage of the Greek Civil War which ended in 1949.¹⁵ In a deeply polarised political climate and under British and American interference, political actors failed to overcome the political instability and three elections were subsequently held within two years. Papagos' overwhelming victory in elections of 1952, with its allies, brought stability and new elections were held four years later in 1956, despite his death in 1955. Papagos' death paved the way for Konstantinos Karamanlis to emerge as the main figure in Greek politics for decades. Karamanlis founded the National Radical Union (*Ethniki Rizospastiki Enosis*) and won three subsequent elections; 1956, 1958 and 1961. Karamanlis stayed in office as prime minister until his resignation in 1963 over the dispute between Karamanlis and the Palace and accusations about the 1961 electoral results. New elections were held in November 1963 under the control of a caretaker government led by Stylianos Mavromikhalis, but attempts to form a new government failed because Georgios Papandreou's Centre Union (*Enosis Kentrou*) victory over the National Radical Union was too narrow. New elections took place in February 1964 and Papandreou secured a clear overall majority in parliament. In 1966, he resigned when the King refused to agree with Papandreou's move to exercise his authority over the army. Political crisis increased following his resignation and at the end of the year Papandreou and Kanellopoulos, the leader of National Radical Union after Karamanlis left, agreed to hold new elections within five months. While politicians were preparing to campaign for the scheduled elections in May, a group of army officers staged a coup d'état and imposed military dictatorship on 21st April 1967. A new constitution was drafted and approved by an overwhelming majority. Like previous military interventions, all political parties were proscribed, most civil liberties were abolished and huge number of politicians, particularly those with leftist reputations, were either arrested or imprisoned. The use of brutal methods to

¹³ Richard Clogg, *Parties and Elections in Greece: The Search for Legitimacy* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1987), 10.

¹⁴ Ibid, 14.

¹⁵ Hikmet Öksüz, *Batı Trakya Türkleri-Makaleler-* (Çorum: KaramYayıncılık, 2006), 225.



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end student occupations of university buildings and the defeat in the Cyprus conflict against the Turks resulted in the collapse of the military dictatorship in 1974. In the view of Lyrintzis, the end of dictatorship is “a turning point in modern Greek political history, a point marking a significant rupture with the past”.¹⁶

After the fall of the junta, Karamanlis was invited to return to Greece for the country's restoration under civilian rule. Following his swearing in as prime minister of the national unity government, new elections were decided. Subsequently, elections were held in November 1974 with the participation of many parties, for instance, the New Democracy (*Nea Demokratiai*- ND) a new party founded by Karamanlis, the Centre Union-New Forces (*Enosis Kendrou- NeesDynamis*), the United Left (*Enomeni Aristera*) and the Panhellenic Socialist Movement (*Panhellinio Socialistiko Kinima*- PASOK) which was an entirely new party created by Andreas Papandreou, son of George Papandreou. Karamanlis' New Democracy won with an overwhelming majority in the Greek Parliament. The elections were followed by a referendum about the future of the monarchy which resulted in the establishment of a parliamentary republic and the abolition of monarchy. The next elections were held a year earlier than scheduled, in 1977, and Karamanlis repeated his success by winning enough votes to retain his party's parliamentary majority despite a decrease in votes. Nonetheless, it is generally accepted that the real winner of the elections was PASOK which doubled its votes, increased its parliamentary representation from 13 to 93 and emerged as the major opposition party.¹⁷ According to Lyrintzis, PASOK's victory “enables the party to present itself as a serious contender for power and as the only alternative to the ND”.¹⁸ PASOK did not wait long before taking power in 1981 when it won the parliamentary election. The victory, on the one hand, ended New Democracy's seven-year rule, on the other hand, it marked the beginning of the first PASOK era. PASOK stayed in power for eight years between 1981 and 1989, winning a second four-year term in 1985. Following two inconclusive elections in which no single party secured a majority in the parliament, the New Democracy returned to power in 1990 under a new leader, Konstantinos Mitsotakis. This return was a short comeback as the government was able to rule only three and a half years. Obtaining only the absolute minimum number of seats required constitutionally (150) and the resignation of Andonis Samaras from ND were the two main factors for the government's collapse. The important outcome of the 1990 elections for the Western Thrace Turks was the election of two independent deputies representing the minority, for the first time since the Treaty of Lausanne was signed.

The victory of Papandreou in the 1993 election began the second PASOK era, despite the party leader change later. Under the leadership of Kostas Simitis, who was elected as the new party leader when Papandreou's health deteriorated in 1996, PASOK managed to win the 1996 and 2000 elections with a comfortable majority in Parliament. It is worth to note that the 1993 elections were held with the application of the three per cent electoral threshold that ended the possible election of independent minority deputies in future. Although the rationale behind the adoption of a national threshold is to create more stable governments and lower contestation in the parliament, it drowns alternative voices, such as minority voices.

¹⁶ Christos Lyrintzis, “The Changing Party System: Stable Democracy, Contested Modernisation”, *West European Politics* 28:2 (2005): 242.

¹⁷ Nikoforos P. Diamandouros, “The Political System in Postauthorian Greece (1974-1996): Outline and Interpretations,” in *The Organization of Political Parties in Southern Europe*, ed. Piero Ignazi and Colette Ysmal. (USA: Praeger Publishers, 1998), 183.

¹⁸ Christos Lyrintzis, “Political Parties in Post-junta Greece: A Case of ‘bureaucratic clientelism’?” *West European Politics* 7:2 (1984): 106.



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In the years following the 2000 elections, PASOK lost its connection to the problems of the masses, and for Lyrantzis, “the idea of a new centre-left never gathered momentum...”¹⁹ Consequently ND returned to power again in the 2004 elections under a new leader, Kostas Karamanlis, after eleven years in the opposition. ND achieved a comfortable majority in the parliament, and it was re-elected in 2007, by 152 seats- one more than the minimum governing majority.²⁰ In this election, under the new electoral law, among the 300 seats, 260 were distributed to all parties obtaining the minimum required votes (over three per cent threshold) and the first party of election, ND, was awarded an extra 40 seats. Small parties, namely the Coalition of the Radical left (*Synaspismos Rizospastikis Aristeras* -SYRIZA) and LAOS emerged as real winners by almost doubling their votes.²¹ Two years later, the elections of 2009 brought PASOK back to power, while Andreas Papandreou’s son, George Papandreou, became prime minister.

After the formation of the new government, a huge economic and financial crisis broke out and a number of austerity measures had to be implemented. In 2010, the government was forced to go under administration by the EU and IMF, after failing to service its debt obligations. Papandreou resigned in 2011 following his announcement of a referendum over a second bailout deal. He was replaced by Lucas Papademos who formed a caretaker coalition government to deal with the second bailout conditions and implementation policies with the responsibility to hold new elections. The elections of the 6th of May 2012 were the first under the financial administration of the EU/IMF, without any party securing the majority vote to form a government. The election was a big defeat for the two main parties that dominated Greek political life for decades, PASOK and ND and it marked the end of the two-party system in Greece. For Dimitrakopoulos, the election results show that ordinary Greeks have no faith in the ability of any of these parties to rule.²² Six parties entered the parliament, while SYRIZA emerged as the ultimate winner after dramatically increasing its votes, compared to the 2009 elections, becoming the main opposition party.²³ Another winner of the election, and much more controversial, was the Golden Dawn (*Hrisi Avgi*), the fascist party, whose votes skyrocketed from 0.3 per cent in 2009 to 7 per cent in 2012. Following the failure of the talks to form a new government, the Greek President, Karolos Papoulias, dissolved the newly elected parliament and made a call for new elections for the 17th of June 2012. ND increased its votes compared to the 6th of May 2012 and became the relative majority party, winning 129 seats (including 50 seats awarded to the largest party), but it was not enough to achieve a parliamentary majority and form a new government alone. The election results were very similar to the previous ones in May, meaning that SYRIZA remained the main opposition party, whereas PASOK came third. This time Andonis Samaras, the leader of the ND since 2009, succeeded to form a coalition government with PASOK and the Political Left -DIMAR. After a year in coalition, DIMAR, which has 14 seats in parliament, withdrew from the

¹⁹ Lyrantzis, “*The changing party system*,” 251.

²⁰ For more information see: Elias Dinas, “The Greek General Election of 2007: You Cannot Lose If Your Opponent Cannot Win,” *West European Politics* 31:3 (2008): 604-605; Kostas Gemenis, “The 2007 parliamentary election in Greece,” *Mediterranean Politics* 13:1 (2008): 98.

²¹ Elias Dinas, “The Greek General Election of 2007,” 605.

²² Dionyssis G. Dimitrakopoulos, “The Greek Elections of 2012 and Greece’s Future in the Eurozone,” Swedish Institute for European Policy Studies, Last accessed 02 January 2014, <http://www.sieps.se/en/publikationer/the-greek-elections-of-2012-and-greeces-future-in-the-eurozone-20127epa>

²³ SYRIZA, the Coalition of the Radical left, brings together the former members and officials of the Communist Party, left radicals, far leftists and some ecologists.



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government following a dispute over the closure of the national broadcasting service, ERT. The current Greek government is composed of the members of ND and PASOK and it has, with 153 seats, a slim majority in Parliament.²⁴

The general principles of elections are provided by the Greek Constitution (Articles 51- 59) and ordinary laws. According to the first paragraph of Article 51, the number of parliament members cannot be below two hundred or over three hundred. Today, political parties contest to secure the majority of 300 seats in the parliament. Article 53 states that “The members of the Parliament shall be elected for a term of four consecutive years, commencing on the day of the elections”.²⁵ By Article 54 (par. 1), the determination of the electoral system and constituencies is given to law makers and changing the provisions of the electoral law for the interest of majority parties emerges as a common practice. Apart from various changes that have been made on principles of elections, the introduction of the 3% nationwide threshold was almost about to prevent the election of independent deputies, or very small parties. As a result, under the current political system, minorities can be represented only through majority mainstream parties in the Greek Parliament, as in the case of Western Thrace Turks.

The Western Thrace Turks Engagement in Greek Politics through Mainstream Parties

The history of political representation of Western Thrace Turks in Greek Parliament goes back to the 1920s when the region of Western Thrace became part of the Greek territory.²⁶ After the ratification of the Treaty of Lausanne by Greece in 1923, Mustafa Deveci, Müderris Mestan Efendi and Hasan Eminbeyzade became the first MPs representing the minority in the Greek Parliament.²⁷ From 1923 until the beginning of Metaxas’ dictatorship in 1936, the minority was represented with four MPs in every parliamentary term.²⁸ Hafis Galip and Mustafa Deveci, from Rhodopi (Rodop) district, were the most prominent MPs of that period as the former represented the minority for ten years continuously, and the latter eight years in total. In the years following the post-Second World War elections, Osman Nuri Fettahoğlu, Osman Üstüner and Molla Yusuf, among others, emerged as the main politicians within the minority who were elected numerous times. For instance, Osman Nuri Fettahoğlu, from Xanthi (İskeçe) district, was elected eight times and Molla Yusuf and Osman Üstüner, from Rhodopi (Rodop) district, six and five times respectively. Except for Osman Üstüner, owning newspapers was a common practice of other MPs and according to Öksüz, they used their own newspapers to make propaganda or attack other candidates.²⁹ Since 1974 being an MP as well as a journalist gradually became less common and Dr. Sadık Ahmet (1989-93) was the last minority MP who owned a newspaper.

Sebahattin Galip and Hafis Yaşar, from Rhodopi (Rodop) district, were the first MPs in the post-1974 era; both were elected from the opposition party Centre Union (Enosis Kentrou). In the view of Aarbakke, the elected MPs represented the minority’s traditional groups; modernists and conservatives. While Galip represented the Kemalist wing, Hafis Yaşar

²⁴ “State Broadcaster Row Splits Greek Coalition,” European Voice, Last Accessed 18 February 2014, <http://www.europeanvoice.com/article/imported/news-from-the-capitals-/77658.aspx>

²⁵ The Constitution of Greece.

²⁶ Western Thrace is the name of the region which is located in the north-eastern part of Greece and is mostly composed of three prefectures: Komotini (Gümülcine in Turkish), Xanthi (İskeçe in Turkish) and Alexandroupoli (Dedeğaç in Turkish).

²⁷ Öksüz, *Batı Trakya Türkleri*, 230.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid, 232-233.



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was the man of the conservatives.³⁰ Aarbakke argues that in the elections of 1974 minority politics were more or less the same as before the military coup of 1967 and “the candidates did not represent any political innovation, but were rather a continuation of the political constellations of the 1960s”.³¹ These two MPs failed to receive enough votes to claim victory in the 1977 elections in which MPs from the new generation of the minority were elected for the first time. Both Hasan İmamoğlu and Orhan Hacıbrahim were Greek university graduates with legal background and had a good knowledge of Greek, although the latter lost his seat following the final adjustments by the electoral court, making Celal Zeybek an MP for Xanthi. In the 1981 elections, votes in Xanthi were not enough to send a minority candidate to the Greek Parliament in which the minority was represented by two Komotini MPs until the next elections in 1985. One was Ahmet Mehmet, a young car mechanic with poor education, from PASOK, the party that won a considerable majority in parliament. The other MP elected from the same district was ND’s candidate Hafis Yaşar, who was generally favoured by the Greek authorities. According to Aarbakke, their election meant that “the minority’s political representatives posed no serious challenge to the Greek authorities and their discrimination policy”.³² The 1985 elections were different than the previous once for two reasons: first, voters did not have a chance to cross off their preferred candidate since their sequence on the list was determined by the parties. This increased the risk that minority MP candidates would not be elected if they were not in the first or second place on the ballot. The second reason is that the minority for the first time formed an independent ballot in both districts. It should be mentioned that since 1923 all minority MPs had been elected through majority parties. Of course, the first reason influenced the decision to form independent ballots, but it seems that the Greek state’s discriminative and oppressive practices towards the minority as well as the treatment of the elected minority MPs by the majority parties played a role in this shift. It is worth noting that from the early 1970s until the mid-1990s was the period when the minority members were not able to repair/ buy their houses, and minority associations using the term ‘Turkish’ in their names were shut down.³³ Although an independent candidate (Sebahattin Galip) in Rhodop and the list (Barış) in Xanthi received a considerable number of votes, it was short of securing an independent seat in the parliament. Nevertheless it was enough to give hope to the minority that they can have independent MPs, as happened just four years later in the elections of 1989 and 1990. Between 1985 and 1989, the minority were represented by two MPs: Ahmet Faikoğlu, who worked in the Xanthi Mufti office from PASOK, and Mehmet Müftüoğlu, who was the second MP with a law background from ND.

Unquestionably, the elections of 1990 and 1993 have a special place in minority politics. The elections of 1990, as well as the previous two inconclusive elections in 1989, resulted in the election of the first independent minority MPs in minority history and marked the beginning of Dr. Sadık Ahmet’s era. After testing the possibility of sending independent minority representatives to the Greek parliament in 1985 elections, forming again an independent list for the next elections had always been an option. The continuation of the

³⁰ Vermund Aarbakke, “The Muslim minority of Greek Thrace.” (PhD Thesis-unpublished-, University of Bergen, 2001), 218.

³¹ Ibid, 216.

³² Vermund Aarbakke, “The Concept of Reciprocity and its Significance for the Political Organisation of the Muslim Minority in Greece,” in *Reciprocity: Greek and Turkish Minorities law, Religion and Politics*, ed. Samim Akgönül. (İstanbul: İstanbul Bilgi University Press, 2008), 127.

³³ For more details about the discrimination faced the minority see: The Human Rights Watch report on “Destroying Ethnic Identity: The Turks in Greece.”1990. Last accessed 03 January 2014.

<http://www.hrw.org/reports/1990/08/01/destroying-ethnic-identity>

Greek state's discriminatory policies and the failure in solving the long existing problems faced by the minority through the majority parties within the Greek political system appear as the main factors for the creation of an independent ballot for the second time. Following the announcement of elections, independent ballots were formed; the Trust (Güven) ballot led by Sadık Ahmet and Destiny (İkbal) led first by Mehmet Emin Aga, then Ahmet Faikoğlu, a former PASOK MP. After two inconclusive elections in 1989 and various legal and administrative obstacles introduced against candidates and minority voters to prevent the election of independent minority MPs, both Sadık Ahmet and Ahmet Faikoğlu received enough votes to secure their seats in the parliament in April 1990.³⁴ Since their activities created strong reactions and tensions within the Greek political circles, the Greek government decided to introduce the 3% national threshold, targeting both the small parties and the independent minority MPs, applied from the next election onwards. As a consequence, a new election law was approved by the parliament in October-1990 and it is still in force.

The 3% threshold means that minority independent candidates have to receive approximately 200,000 votes to be elected in the parliament which would be impossible in the case of Western Thrace minority since its total population is less than this required number. Nevertheless, in the 1993 elections, the minority voted for the independent candidates to protest against the introduction of a nationwide threshold. As a consequence, from 1993 to 1996, the minority was left for the first time with no representatives in the Greek Parliament. Sadık Ahmet to overcome the impasse decided to form the DEBP which will be elaborated on later.

After his death in 1995, interestingly, the minority shifted easily again to mainstream parties without considering and discussing whether the minority should continue its fight to abolish the 3% national threshold or whether a candidacy with the mainstream parties is in the best interests of the minority. A year later, in 1996, new elections were held and a very common heading 'Turk's vote to Turk' (*Türkün oyu Türk'e*) appeared once more in minority newspapers. Three candidates from the minority won seats in the parliament and Mustafa Mustafa became the first minority MP elected from communist/left party (Kommunistiko Komma Elladas -KKE). In the following years, while the trend of involving politics through mainstream parties obtained momentum, the DEB Party and its discourses became less heard, until 2010.

Currently the Western Thrace Turks are represented by three MPs, Ahmet Hacıosman, Ayhan Karayusuf and Hüseyin Zeybek, who contested under and for their parties. The elections of Hüseyin Zeybek and Ayhan Karayusuf in 2012 marked the shift of minority votes from two mainstream parties, PASOK and ND, to SYRIZA. SYRIZA more or less puts forward the same argument as the minority discourse. It is worth nothing that the minority voters have continuously supported PASOK and ND despite the fact that all discriminative policies inflicted upon them for the last four decades have been designed and decided mainly by these two parties' politicians. Since the end of the military junta in 1974, approximately twenty minority candidates were elected as MPs through the mainstream parties' ballot. Looking at the current situation in Western Thrace and the field of the application of minority rights, however, it becomes clearly confirmed that their existence in parliament has made no serious impact on decisions concerning minority problems. The effectiveness of minority MPs and their treatment by majority parties are criticised strongly now not only by ordinary people but also on the institutional level by the Friendship, Equality and Peace Party. For DEBP, the

³⁴ For more details see: Baskın Oran, *Türk-Yunan İlişkilerinde Batı Trakya Sorun* (Ankara: Bilgi Yayınevi, 1991), 200-209.



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time is to do politics under minority independent political movement and DEBP is the right address for that.

The Friendship, Equality and Peace Party

In mid-August 1991 the minority press in Western Thrace started printing news about the formation of a minority party. A few weeks later, on the 12th of September, Sadık Ahmet announced the formation of the Friendship, Equality and Peace Party (DEBP).³⁵ As expected, there were various reactions both towards him and the party's policies. Sadık Ahmet and the DEBP dominated minority politics until his death on 24th July 1995. After his death, DEBP struggled to survive. Apart from occasionally issuing statements, it became nearly obsolete. Following a general assembly in 2010, DEBP has gradually become more active in minority politics by branding itself as an alternative political party compared to mainstream parties with reference to the defence of human and minority rights. In order to evaluate the degree of its ability to challenge the consolidated, strikingly bipolar, Greek politics, it is pertinent to analyse its ideological development from its formation in 1991 to 2010 and from the general assembly in 2010 until today.

According to Sadık Ahmet in his speech during the party's first open-air meeting on 26th October 1991, the protection of the unity of the minority was the main reason for the decision to form the DEBP. He claimed that "now the minority has its own political party, so it will be more unified than it used to be".³⁶ In his view, the Greek administration introduced the 3% national threshold assuming that the minority would be unable to elect its independent MP, and divided by engaging different political parties.³⁷ Sadık, in his statement issued after the party's formation, gave some hints about his future strategy in politics by saying that "we may not be able to send a minority MP to the Greek Parliament because of the national threshold, but we can elect an MP for the European Parliament".³⁸ Additionally, he argued, "the election of an MP does not mean that all our problems would be solved. If that was the case, today we would not have any problems because we have had representatives in the parliament for the last seventy years".³⁹ Sadık made similar statements in the first assembly of the DEBP on 17th of April 1992 when he was elected as the leader of the party. For him, "to elect an MP cannot be the only object of the minority party, the representation of our political existence can be exercised without electing an MP".⁴⁰ More importantly, he portrayed DEBP as the only minority agent with the right to talk in the name of the minority from then onwards.⁴¹ Such a view was a very clear indication of his ambition to not only to be the party's leader, but also a community leader controlling minority politics through the DEBP. Sadık, in the third assembly of the DEBP on the 21st of January 1995, expressed more strongly his leadership and dominance aspirations of the DEBP within the minority by saying that "DEBP is the biggest and the only minority political organisation and there is no chance of any political initiative to be successful without consent of the DEBP".⁴²

³⁵ "Dostluk-Eşitlik-Barış Partisi," *Yuvamız*, October, 1991, 5.

³⁶ "Milletvekili Dr Sadık Ahmet'in ilk açık hava toplantısı," *Yuvamız*, November, 1991, 63.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ "Dr Sadık Ahmet'in azınlığımıza önemli açıklaması," *DEB Partisi Gazetesi*, 1991: 1.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ "Batı Trakya Müslüman Türk Toplumu'nun ilk siyasi partisi olan Dostluk-Eşitlik-Barış Partisi, 1. Kurultayı'nı yaparak Dr. Sadık Ahmet'i Genel Başkan seçti," *Yuvamız*, May 1992, 4-5.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² "DEB Partisi'nin 3. Olağan Kurultay'ı G.T. G. Birliği Salonu'nda yapıldı," *Yuvamız*, January 1995, 4-5.



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After its formation, the DEBP gradually expanded its power within the minority and, in short time, became the dominant agent in minority politics; likewise its leader too. Regarding its political activities, two issues are worth mentioning: the reaction against books distributed to minority schools, and the 1993 general elections in which the minority supported independent candidates. The first came to the agenda of the minority when the Greek state imposed the use of newly published books in minority schools in September 1992. Most senior minority figures found it unacceptable since it was against the 1968 bilateral agreement signed between Greece and Turkey. However, one can easily notice the discord within the minority by looking at the minority press; the DEBP and the minority executive committee (composed of muftis, former MPs, etc.), could not cooperate to deal with the issue, at least in the beginning.⁴³ In the following days Sadık assumed leadership and asked minority parents to bring the books in question to the party office.⁴⁴ Then, in protest all collected books were left at the entrance of the Ministry of Education as Sadık lead a group of minority members to Athens.⁴⁵

The DEBP's second important political activity was the drawing of an independent ballot in the 1993 elections, despite the fact that there was no chance that a minority MP would be elected. Following the announcement for general elections, the party's Central Executive Committee met and made two decisions: first, the party was ready to cooperate with other parties, and, second, if other parties would not approach the DEBP, then it would participate in the elections independently. In the first option, the issue of minority rights was put on the table.⁴⁶ The decision to draw an independent ballot created disputes, again, between the DEBP and the minority executive committee. Representatives of the two groups could not manage to reach an agreement in their first meeting because the DEBP found the minority executive committee's offer unacceptable. Sadık and Faikoğlu were asked not to be on independent ballots, but, later, an agreement was reached on the drawing of independent ballots in two districts under the names of Sadık and Faikoğlu.⁴⁷ In the absence of formal contact from mainstream parties, participation to elections through independent ballots was confirmed. Although Sadık Ahmet received more votes than officially required in the district, he could not become MP due to the 3% national threshold.

Following the elections, there were different reactions towards the independent ballots and the independent candidates. From the DEBP and its supporters' perspective, the drawing of independent ballots was "the minority's most meaningful challenge of its seventy-year history".⁴⁸ Mustafa, the editor of Balkan newspaper, assumed that "although not elected as an MP in the Greek Parliament, his position as a de facto leader who would represent the minority in the globe was consolidated".⁴⁹ In his newspaper, Balkan, the elections were a victory of the Western Thrace Turks and the elections confirmed that "he is the real and only representative of the minority".⁵⁰

⁴³ "Dr Sadık Ahmet'in Yazıhanesi kitap deposuna dönüştü," *Yuvamız*, November 1992, 9.

⁴⁴ "İlimizde kitaplar toplandı," *Balkan*, 28 October 1992, 1.

⁴⁵ "Toplumsal sorunlar karşısında tek yumruk olduğumuzu yine kanıtladık," *Yuvamız*, December 1992, 5.

⁴⁶ "Bu zafer de bizim olacak," *Yuvamız*, October 1993, 4.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ "Yeni seçim zaferi" *Yuvamız*, November 1993, 6-7.

⁵⁰ "Gün DEB'in günü" *Balkan*, 13 October 1993.



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However, there was criticism against him and his decision to draw independent ballots. Salih Halil questioned his leadership and his party's future survival past the momentum, as well as whether party leadership is synonymous to community leadership.⁵¹ Additionally, he criticised the independence of MPs, saying that "in the parliament, the minority has never seen such an ugly and vicious political attitude in its history".⁵² Onsunoglu was another minority figure who strongly criticised the voting for independent ballots. According to him, sending representatives to a national parliament is an issue of 'national-self' and a 'national matter'.⁵³ In his view, the result of elections was a national rout for the minority but it was a big victory for people who created this atmosphere.⁵⁴

All discussions about the DEBP and Sadık Ahmet's policies ended when he died. For most of the minority members, he was a hero and the leader of the Western Thrace Turks. He dominated the minority politics from 1985, when he started to collect signatures about discriminations against the minority, until 1995. Under his leadership, there was no dialogue between the DEBP and political actors from mainstream parties. Following his death, his wife was elected as the leader of the party, succeeded later by Ahmet Hacıosman and Mustafa Boşnak as party leaders. In almost eight years, as mentioned above, apart from issuing statements from time to time, the DEBP became nearly absent from the minority politics.

By the general assembly on 11th July 2010, the second period in the history of DEBP began. In the absence of other candidates, Mustafa Ali Çavuş was elected as the fifth leader of the DEBP bringing along a young and educated team. Çavuş defined the assembly as a 'restructuring congress' and promised that the party would always be on the minority side, together with the people who support DEBP.⁵⁵ Two years later, when the party celebrated its 21st anniversary, Çavuş mapped the party's strategy, prioritising in making the community's voice heard first in Greece, Turkey and Europe.⁵⁶ During the anniversary ceremony, a protocol of cooperation was signed between the DEBP and other minority umbrella organisations, such as the Solidarity Association of Western Thrace Turks –Istanbul based- and the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe – Germany based- although the terms of the protocol are still unknown. In the following days, discussions and news in the minority press confirmed that DEBP would break from its past. Indeed, the number of party members increased and, within two years, the party opened branches in three districts; Komotini, Xanthi and Evros. Çetin Mandacı, a former PASOK MP of Xanthi, invited people (the minority) to support the DEBP for the progress of the minority, thus becoming the first minority senior politician to openly express his support.⁵⁷

Obviously, the composition and human capital of the party were not the only changes during the last three years, but its political structure and behaviour as well. Since its re-establishment, the party issued numerous statements not only on the immediate concerns of the minority, but also on general problems in Greece. For instance, in its statement dated 17th of December 2011, the party announced its objection to the application of the new and further austerity measures. Supporting the sectors of agriculture and construction was proposed as a solution to economic problems. In May 2013, the DEBP issued another statement focussing on

⁵¹ "DEB'in lideri aynı zamanda azınlığın lideri mi demektir," *İleri*, 15 June 1993.

⁵² "İnşallah Yol Olmaz!," *İleri*, 16 October 1993.

⁵³ "Azınlıkta Seçimler: Eleştiri 1," *İleri*, 5 November 1993.

⁵⁴ "Azınlıkta Seçimler: Eleştiri 2/B," *İleri*, 12 November 1993.

⁵⁵ "D.E.B Partisinde yeni dönem," *Gündem*, 19 July 2010.

⁵⁶ "D.E.B Partisi 21 Yaşında," *Gündem*, 11 September 2012.

⁵⁷ "Milletvekili Mandacı'dan Şok açıklamalar," *Gündem*, 04 July 2011.



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the areas of agriculture and animal husbandry.⁵⁸ These two statements can be interpreted as the party's first attempt to engage with the county's everyday problems and a wider audience beyond the confines of minority politics.

Due to its nature as a minority party, the minority education, election of muftis, or closed minority associations constitute the DEBP's principal agenda and the bulk of its activity. Nonetheless, the DEBP's approaches concerning these issues are quite similar to the claims of other minority organisations, as becomes evident by statements demanding bilingual minority nursery schools.⁵⁹ The DEBP forwarded the statement directly to the Greek Ministry of Education making clear its intention to establish a dialogue with the ministry hoping to overcome the problem.

Apart from such initiatives, the DEBP also issued announcements on guiding minority voters' support, the electoral law and the national threshold. The first announcement was made just before the elections of May 2012 and minority voters were asked to participate in the elections and vote for minority candidates of mainstream parties. In this statement, the importance of having representatives in a central level (the Greek Parliament) was emphasised in terms of making minority demands and concerns heard.⁶⁰ As a consequence three minority candidates were elected as MPs. This move was a clear shift from the party's older political strategy. During the leadership of Sadık Ahmet, the election of any minority MPs from mainstream parties was condemned, arguing that the national threshold was the main factor, among others, to support mainstream parties' candidates. In 2013, the DEBP issued an announcement about the electoral law and the national threshold, demanding the abolishment of the national threshold to make the election of independent MPs possible. With this statement, the DEBP also asked for a new electoral law which would allow small parties to cooperate.

In addition to its concern with domestic issues, the DEBP has gradually become involved in international activities related to minorities. In 2013, the DEBP's application for Federal Union of European Nationalities (hereinafter FUEN) membership was accepted by the FUEN general assembly on 22nd June 2013.⁶¹ The expectation is that membership will allow exchange of information between the DEBP and other minority parties in Europe while giving it the opportunity to increase its audience.

Conclusion

The right of effective political participation of minorities is now accepted as a minority right and a number of international human rights instruments recognise it. Effective participation is considered an essential aspect of a sustainably diverse democracy in addition to being a legal matter.

The Western Thrace Turks have over time managed to elect many MPs. Although deputies from the minority generally portrayed themselves as representatives of the community in the Greek Parliament and as politicians who work to solve minority rights problems, the current situation confirms that they have not been successful in this respect. Although they bring minority issues to the attention of law and policy makers, they are not able to influence

⁵⁸ "D.E.B Partisi'nin tarım ve hayvancılık sektörüyle ilgili talepleri," D.E.B, Last accessed 02 January 2014,

<http://www.debpartisi.org/indexY.php?s=detay&id=1935>

⁵⁹ "DEB Partisi Azınlık Anaokulları talebini yeniledi," *Gündem*, 23 September 2013.

⁶⁰ "DEP Partisi'nden seçim açıklaması," *Gündem*, 30th April 2012.

⁶¹ "FUEN Kongresi'nde tarihi başarı," *Gündem*, 1st July 2013.



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decisions related to their cultural, political and religious life. According to Verstichel's explanation, minority MPs cannot be considered as "representatives" since they have no influence on shaping policies regarding the minority. Indeed, in most cases, they are not listened to or informed.

Since 1985, another political trend emerged in Western Thrace; independent candidates and the formation of minority parties aiming to be effective in politics and elected bodies. For the proponents of that trend, minority MPs from mainstream political parties do not benefit the minority as their voices disappear under the parties' discipline. For three years, there were two independent PMs, but to what extent they were successful in terms of addressing minority problems is debatable.

The establishment of the Friendship, Equality and Peace Party is an important development in minority politics in terms of offering an alternative political participation. There is no doubt that the DEBP's second period is different to the first one from various perspectives. Currently, the party can easily recruit dynamic, educated young people, which reflects its organisation and agenda. It is open for dialogue with other political actors and to some extent it tries to deal with affecting all Greek citizens' daily life.

However the DEBP has failed in both bringing the minority's influential politicians to the party and having concrete strategies and policies which can effectively inform the decision-making process. It seems that the greatest challenge for the DEBP is whether it would manage to integrate into Greek politics by establishing dialogue with other political actors, or it would be isolated in the name of the protection of minority rights. It should be kept in mind that a dialogue demands clear intentions and sacrifices from all sides, which will put to test both mainstream parties and the cohesion of the minority.

The election either as an independent or a party MP does not guarantee effective participation in the decision-making process. It seems very difficult to be heard in the Greek Parliament in the absence of a special mechanism providing real participation and pragmatic support. Such a special mechanism should for instance create a number of reserved seats with veto right in minority issues. Additionally, the abolishment of the national threshold would allow minority MPs to express their approaches without facing party pressure and challenge more freely the Greek state's restrictive minority policies. Without such mechanisms, the Western Thrace Turks would always be excluded from the process.

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