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Contact Persons: Pervin Chairoula & Ali Chousein Oglou
chairoulap@yahoo.com & alihuseyinoglu1@gmail.com

Educational freedoms in Western Thrace, Greece

Article 45 of the Ljubljana Guidelines is dedicated to matters of educational rights of persons belonging to minorities:

States should respect the right of persons belonging to minorities to be taught their language or to receive instruction in this language, as appropriate, especially in areas inhabited by them traditionally or in substantial numbers. States should complement this by developing integrated and multilingual education systems at all levels designed to provide equal access, opportunities and educational outcomes for all pupils, regardless of their majority or minority background. Such integrated education should also include teaching all pupils about the diversity in their society.

This article provides persons belonging to national minorities the right to have instruction in their mother tongue. Similarly, many other human and minority rights instruments as well as the 1923 Peace Treaty of Lausanne enable members of the minority freedom to establish, manage and control their own schools and use their own language freely in public or private. But, as a result of the Greek governments' continuous interference in educational matters of the Turkish Minority since 1923, the type of education provided at Minority primary and secondary schools has gradually changed. That is to say, minority education that was supposed to be both private and autonomous has now a *sui generis* character; it is neither fully private nor autonomous. It is a combination of private and public in which the impact of the Minority over issues of education remains highly restricted while that of the Greek state has been increasing over the decades.

From time to time, the Greek state has put in force a number of laws, decrees and governmental decisions regarding the minority education from nursery to secondary level. These regulations not only contributed more to the improvement of the state language instruction (Greek) at minority schools but also undermined the educational autonomy and resulted in lessening of courses taught in Turkish within the Turkish curriculum.

Regarding bilingual primary education, the number of minority schools keeps closing. After 2000, around 100 minority primary schools across Western Thrace were stopped functioning. As of mid 2015, this number decreased to 140. The closing of minority schools in Western Thrace, have been done without taking into account the distance between villages with Minority population and infrastructural deficiency of school buildings.

The compulsory education in Greece (including the pre-school education) is 10 years which was not fully applied for the minority schooling system. This has slightly changed in recent years in a way that Greek authorities do not allow Minority pupils to register primary education unless they have finished nursery schools. Yet, nursery schools keep functioning only in the Greek language; mother tongue Turkish is still absent. Also, there still lacks a number of nursery schools at localities



with Minority concentration. It is useful to underline that nursery education became compulsory with infrastructural deficiencies at the pre-school level.

As for the secondary education, the number of minority secondary and high schools where education is held in both Turkish and Greek still remains inadequate. There are only two bilingual minority secondary and high schools in the region, one in Komotini and the other one in Xanthi. Also, there are two Quranic-religious schools/*madrasah*. Although almost half of the population in Western Thrace is Turkish, there are only four bilingual secondary and high schools (two of them are *madrasah*) while the number of monolingual Greek public schools counts more than 100 in all three prefectures of Western Thrace. As a result, bilingual secondary and high schools cannot satisfy demands of the Minority parents choosing bilingual secondary education for their children. Even though numerous demands from the Turkish minority have been raised for the construction of new bilingual secondary and high schools in recent decades, none of them have been satisfied by the Greek state. As a result, many minority students do not have any other alternatives for secondary except monolingual public education.

Henceforth, we recommend Greece:

- To recognize and promote the autonomy in the realm of bilingual minority education in Western Thrace
- To enable establishment of bilingual nursery schools
- To give the necessary official permission for opening of new bilingual secondary schools
- To develop the overall level of both Turkish and Greek education at minority primary and secondary schools.

Thank you Mr. Moderator.