



WESTERN THRACE MINORITY UNIVERSITY GRADUATES ASSOCIATION

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Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association was established in 1982. It came into life just before the banning of Turkish Minority's century-old associations. Following the imposition of restrictions on our freedom of association in Greece, we practically have been functioning as the single officially-recognized and broad-based civil organization of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace since the beginning of 1980's.

Today, our organization represents a community of nearly 2.000 university graduates and nearly 150.000 people who we hope to bridge gaps, between the Turkish Minority and the majority population, as well as between the minority and the Greek State. We try to address each and every one of our community's outstanding problem through research and advocacy and do best to draw attention of the authorities and the international community to the problems of the Turkish Minority.

Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association tries to meet the needs of the Turkish society with its branches like:

- Reaching Out To The Countryside Project
- Women's Club
- Children's Clubs
- Theatre Club
- Handicrafts Club
- Painting Club
- Health Club
- Law and Economy Commission

HISTORY AND BACKGROUND OF WESTERN THRACE TURKISH MINORITY

Western Thrace is located in the northeast part of Greece between the rivers Evros and Nestos. It is one of the nine regions of Greece. Its area is 8578 square kilometer and it is divided into three prefectures, Ksanthi, Rodopi and Evros. The number of Turks living in Western Thrace is approximately 150.000.

Since 2000 B.C., the Thracians, a group of tribes with the origin of Indo-European had lived in Western Thrace under the rule of the Persian, Greek and Macedonian civilizations since 7th century B.C. and the Thracian Kingdom had come into power and ruled till 335. Then, Western Thrace lived under the rule of the Roman and the Byzantine Empire. It is known that the Turks have been living in the Balkan Peninsula since the Scythia Turks and tribes that emigrating from Central Asia to the West in the 2nd century B.C.

The first independent Turkish Republic in the history was the Turkish Republic of Western Thrace. It was founded on August 31, 1913 and it was abolished with the Istanbul Agreement on October 29, 1913 and Western Thrace was left to the control of Bulgaria. After the World War I, the region passed into the hands of Greece. Since 1923, Western Thrace Turks have been living as minority within the Greek territory.

OUTSTANDING ISSUES AFFECTING WESTERN THRACE TURKISH MINORITY

I- Denial of Ethnic Identity

Since the 1967 Colonels regime, Greek governments have been denying the ethnic “Turkish” identity of the Minority in Western Thrace on the basis that the 1923 Lausanne Peace Treaty defines the minority of Western Thrace as “Muslim” and the minorities of Turkey as “Non-Muslim”.

The Lausanne Treaty may not refer to the ethnic identity of the Turkish Minority but this doesn’t imply that it forbids the ethnic identification of this Minority.

Related to this issue, the terms “Turkish” and “Greek” for the minorities were firstly used in the “Convention Concerning the Exchange of Greek and Turkish Population”, which was signed on 30th January, 1923.

Also, in the mid of 1950s, Greek authorities made it obligatory for the Minority to be named as “Turkish” and its members as “Turks” by an order, widely known as Order of Fessopoulos.

“KINGDOM OF GREECE

GENERAL ADMINISTRATION OF THRACE

INTERNAL AFFAIRS MINISTRY

Komotini, 28/1/1954

URGENT

TO: The Mayors and Presidents of the Communes of the Prefecture of Rodope

Following the order of the President of the Government we ask you that from now on and all occasions the terms “Turk-Turkish” are used instead of the terms “Muslim-of Muslim”

The General Administrative of Thrace

G. Fessopoulos”

In spite of this order and other international documents which refer to or protect the ethnic identification of the minority Greece continues to deny the existence of an ethnically Turkish identity in Western Thrace.

II- Violation of Educational Rights

According to the Peace Treaty of Lausanne Western Thrace Turkish Minority has the right to establish, manage and control at its own expense any schools and other establishments for instruction and education.

Since 1960s, minority education has been subjected to constant interference by the Greek Governments. As a result, the autonomous nature of the education underwent radical changes and the quality of education has substantially been eroded.

Currently, minority schools are governed through a series of complex rules which are consistent neither with Greece’s national educational targets, nor with the delicate balance between Turkish curriculum and Greek language instruction.

Some developments in the field of education are as follows: The distribution of new Turkish textbooks in the primary Minority schools since 2000 and in the two secondary and high schools of Minority since 2005 and the application of the University Quota System since 1996. In spite of such developments, in its present form, minority education system still cannot possibly serve fundamental educational needs of the minority youth. Nor it can help build mutual respect and confidence between the citizen and the State.

III- Freedom of Conscience and Religion

According to the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion, Western Thrace Turkish Minority has the right to:

“Train, appoint, elect, or designate by succession appropriate leaders called for the requirements and standards of any religion or belief,”

which is also supported by many other international human and minority rights documents and the Athens Treaty of 1913. In addition to these international instruments it is also guaranteed by the Greek Law no. 2345/1920 that the Minority has the right to elect its own religious leaders. However, Greek State continues to disregard Minority's elected Muftis and works through a number appointed officers who lack credibility and respect among the minority. Unfortunately, up until today no progress has been observed towards the settlement of the problem of the Muftis. It would be important to note that Greece has been sentenced 5 times of abusing article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights which protects religious freedom. By 2006 Greece still insists on not recognizing the elected Muftis as the religious leaders of the minority.

IV- Freedom of Association

Since 1960s, the Greek state have been rejecting the establishment and functioning of the associations with the denomination "Turkish" in their titles. The Komotini Turkish Youth Union (founded in 1928) and the Union of Turkish Teachers of Western Thrace (founded in 1936) were dissolved by the Greek Supreme Court in 1987 and Xanthi Turkish Union (founded in 1927) in 2005.

The reason was that the denomination `Turkish` in their titles referred to the citizens of Turkey and it constituted a threat to the unity and the public order of Greece. Moreover, the application for the establishment of the Cultural Association of Turkish Women of Rodopi was rejected by the same court on 1 April 2005 for the same reason. Exhausting all local remedies, the Xanthi Turkish Union and the Cultural Association of Turkish Women of Rodopi applied to the European Court of Human Rights.

The right of the freedom of association of the Turkish Minority is under the protection of 1990 CSCE Copenhagen Document, the UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to the National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities and the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. The first two treaties are signed and ratified by Greece but the last one though signed in 1997 has not been ratified yet.

These three associations had functioned for almost 50 years unabatedly without having problems with the Greek governments and by the verdict of the Greek Supreme Court they were all dissolved. Living in the cradle of democracy, the Turkish Minority wants to establish its own Turkish associations in Western Thrace.

V- Deprivation from Citizenship

According to the Article 19 of the Greek Citizenship Law (3370/1955) "A citizen of non-Greek origin leaving Greece without the intention of returning may be declared having lost Greek citizenship...". In 1998, this article was abolished. However, as a result of its application more than 60.000 Western Thrace Turks lost their citizenships and some of them even continue to live as stateless people within the boundaries of Greece and Turkey. Due to the principle of non-retrospectivity of Article 19 the expelled citizens cannot apply for Greek citizenship as former Greek citizens but as a foreigner. Actually, no positive steps have been taken to solve the problems of the expelled and stateless citizens. With some exceptions, expelled citizens have not regained their Greek nationality and the stateless ones continue to suffer from the consequences of this article.