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**OSCE  
HUMAN DIMENSION  
IMPLEMENTATION MEETING  
WARSAW, 28 September – 9 October  
Working Session 5,  
National Minorities**

**Problems the Turks of Western Thrace  
With Specific Focus on Education**

Ms/ Mr. Moderator,

I would like to thank you for allowing me to point out how and whether minority rights are practiced in conformity with the generality of international human rights documents in Greece, includes the Treaty of Lausanne which indicates directly minority rights for the Turkish minority. Although, I am going to talk about the current general problems regarding the implementation of minority rights, I will focus more the education rights of the minority because the issue is one of the most important and controversial issues in the minority rights debate.

Besides the educational problems, the denial of ethnic identity and the expelled citizens are the issues which I will mention here.

The denial of ethnic identity of Western Thrace Turks by the Greek state is one of the most contentious issues regarding the government's minority policy. By the advent of Junta regime, the authorities started to call the Minority as "Muslim" and since then, they have continued to reject the ethnic Turkish identity in Western Thrace.

Another problematic issue is expelled citizens. The Article 19 of the Greek Citizenship Law (No: 3370 of 1955) was an obvious case of racial discrimination and it was in breach of the Greek constitution and international law. The Minister of Interior on April 2005 announced that the numbers of Muslim Turks were deprived from the Greek citizenship until 1998 was 46.638. So far, apart from some 200 persons living in Greece, no steps have been taken in

order to reinstate thousands of unlawfully expelled citizens and their children who continue living as stateless persons.

The last point which I want to mention is the Western Thrace minority education. Practising their minority education rights has a long history for Turks in Greece, but the implementation of the minority educational rights in Greece has been controversial throughout the last four decades. According to many human and minority rights instruments, but mainly to the article of 40 of the Treaty of Lausanne members of the minority have the right to establish, manage and control their own schools and to use their own language freely. But, because of the Governments' interference the autonomous structure of Turkish Minority education has been changed radically.

The Greek state since 1923 has put in force more than 70 new laws, decrees and governmental decisions regarding the minority education. While these new regulations are more in favor for the improvement of the state language instruction (Greek), they undermine the autonomy and increase the weakness of the instruction of the Turkish curriculum.

According to the Law No. 3518/2006 pre-school education in Greece since 2007 has become compulsory for children 4 and 5 years old. The new law is not in line with the international and bilateral agreements concerning the minority education system in a way that all pupils with different linguistic, religious and cultural background across the country as well as the members of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace are obliged to follow the compulsory pre-school education which is only in Greek language. The new law on pre-school education does not stipulate any special measures for minorities.

There is no minority or bilingual nursery school in Western Thrace. The recent announcements of the Minister of Education and Religious Affairs regarding the establishment of multicultural nurseries is ambiguous and far from sincerity.

The secondary education of the minority is another problematic field within the minority education concept in Western Thrace. The members of the minority constitutes more than half of the population of the city of Komotini, however there is only one minority high school (apart from religious school) but there are 24 majority state high schools. Moreover, in Xanthi, % 45 of the population of which is of the Turkish minority, but there is just one Turkish minority high school vis-à-vis 37 state high schools. Therefore, most of the minority students do not have the opportunity to finish the secondary education if they desire to attend

the minority secondary schools. This imbalance in numbers has affected the continuity of the minority children to higher education.

The compulsory education in Greece (including the pre-school education) is 10 years. But it is not applied for the minority schools. In minority schools the duration of education is 6 years. This 10 year compulsory education system which is perceived as double standard and seen as application of isolation by the Muslim Turkish Minority of Western Thrace.

Although, there have been taken some positive steps regarding the minority education, the key problems are still to be solved.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

We call upon the Greek State:

- To prepare an action plan to improve the quality of the education in the Western Thrace Turkish Minority Schools.
- Ensure the equal opportunity for the instruction in mother tongue and the state language.
- Greece should also take immediate steps to ensure that the rights to education for the ethnic minorities are guaranteed so that children in Western Thrace have a bilingual preschool education. Turkish minority has the right to take education in its native language according to the Treaty of Lausanne and international human rights instruments.
- To demand that Greek authorities take steps to ensure the immediate rectification of the unfortunate consequences arising from deprivation of Greek citizenship on the basis of former Article 19 of the Greek Citizenship Code for all persons concerned, especially ethnic Turks.
- In particular, we urge the authorities to genuinely facilitate these persons' recovery of their citizenship by removing any obstacle, including the need for them to go through the naturalization procedure.

**SEBAHATTIN ABDURRAHMAN**

**MEMBER**

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