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**OSCE
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IMPLEMENTATION MEETING
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Working Session 5,
National Minorities**

WESTERN THRACE TURKISH MINORITY

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.

Greece, similar to other South East European countries, contains national minorities, the largest being the Turkish-Muslim minority since the ratification of the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923. The estimated number is around 150.000 and members of the minority identify themselves as ethnic Turks. The legal status of this minority was established by the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne and bilateral treaties which were signed between Greece and Turkey. Moreover, the Turkish minority, as an 'old' or 'historical' one, is the only one which directly holds minority rights.

Apart from the minority educational problems, denial of ethnic identity, freedom of association and peaceful assembly, religious freedom, charitable foundations, expelled citizens are still the main problems which the Western Thrace Turkish minority faces at the present.

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. Until the Junta regime in 1967 the identification of the minority as Turkish was not a problem. By the advent of Junta regime, however, the authorities started to call the minority as "Muslim" and since then, they have continued to reject the ethnic Turkish identity in Western Thrace.

The other 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 a flagrant violation of the fundamental right to citizenship. It was in breach of the

Greek constitution and international law. It provided that: "A citizen of non-Greek origin leaving Greece without the intention of returning may be declared having lost Greek citizenship." On 23 January 1998, Article 19 of the Greek Citizenship was repealed by the Greek Parliament. This act was welcomed both by the international community, as well as within the ranks of the Turkish minority. However abolishment did not include a retroactive effect. The Minister of Interior on April 2005 announced the number of Muslim Turks 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.

At the beginning of the last decade the new minority policy based on the principles "equality before the law" and "equality in civil rights" was put into practice, since then there have been some improvements concerning the basic citizenship rights. Members of the Turkish Minority of course, accept these as positive developments; however, still much remains to be done if the situation of the minority is to become wholly satisfactory.

According to many human and minority rights instruments and article 40 of the Peace 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. So, the present form of the educational system of Turkish Minority cannot serve fundamental educational needs.

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. Furthermore, the Minority is not allowed to directly elect board members of the minority schools since 1972.

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.

As for the year of 2009 there are 185 Private Minority Primary schools across the region of Western Thrace. The number minority schools have been decreased from 240 to 185 since 1950s. And the number of students decreased from 12.000 to 6.000. The instruction in these schools is bilingual, in Greek and Turkish. Many students attend these schools where some teachers are employed for the Turkish instruction

and some for the Greek instruction. Both teachers are paid by the Greek Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs. Text books for the Turkish instruction are provided by Turkey according to the 1968 bilateral agreement between Greece and Turkey and the textbooks for the Greek instruction are supplied by the Greek state.

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.

The number of secondary minority schools in Western Thrace is inadequate. There are only 2 minority high schools in the region, one in Komotini, the other in Xanthi. In Komotini, where the Turkish minority constitutes more than half of the population, there is only one Turkish minority high school vis-à-vis 24 state high schools. Likewise, in Xanthi, % 45 of the population of which is of the Turkish minority, there is just one Turkish minority high school vis-à-vis 37 state high schools.

Most of the minority students do not have the opportunity to finish the minority secondary education if they desire to attend the bilingual minority secondary schools. Every year more than 2.000 students attend the secondary education. There are only two Minority secondary and high schools in Western Thrace with the capacity of 1000 students, the Celal Bayar Minority High School in Komotini and the Muzaffer Salihoglu High School in Xanthi. Those who have no opportunity to continue their educations in these schools are obliged to attend the public schools where the instruction is only in Greek. The Greek state is rejecting minority's applications for the establishment of new minority high schools.

In the last 10 years the Greek state has taken major steps (such as preparing new text books, educating teachers, supplying additional courses in Greek) by using EU financial sources for improving the curriculum of the Greek language. However, no major step has been taken for the improvement of the Turkish curriculum. Actually, the main problem of these schools is the poor quality of the Turkish curriculum. There are no more well trained and qualified teachers for the Turkish instruction. Most of the teachers graduated from a two/three year the Special Pedagogical Academy of Thessaloniki are not qualified to teach the text books provided by Turkey. As a result, students who attend these Minority Schools are not able to learn both languages. Today, there are many successful examples of bilingual schools. The success of the bilingual or the multilingual educational system has been proved by academicians and is a phenomenon in today's world. It is also important to note that the Minority primary schools were a good example in the past.

This academy, founded in 1968, trains members of the Minority as teachers for Minority schools. The main language of instruction of the EPATH is Greek. The duration of education used to be two years but recently, it has been increased to three years. Although all of the pedagogical academies in Greece were replaced by the Faculties of Education or Departments of Education in 1989, the EPATH still remains as the unique Teacher Training Institution of this type. In the preparatory year, the EPATH students are taught Greek, Basic Mathematics, History, Psychology,

Geometry, Music, Turkish language, Sports, Geography of Greece and Techniques. It is useful to stress that although these teachers will educate the Minority children in Turkish, all of the courses in EPATH except Turkish language are taught in Greek that affects the level of their teaching capacity in Turkish. By 2009, all teachers in minority primary Schools are graduates of this academy.

Taking into account that their three year of education is predominantly in Greek, the EPATH teachers have highly been criticized for their poor level of knowledge in Turkish language. Some teachers admit their weakness of teaching properly the Turkish language and the lessons in Turkish and they have been demanding additional educational seminars to improve their quality of teaching in Turkish for years. This strengthens the suspect among the Muslim Turks that EPATH teachers have been used deliberately by the Greek State for not giving a proper and modern education to the Western Thrace Minority Pupils; such an attitude of the State authorities can widely be interpreted as an impediment against the improvement of the level of education of the Minority.

Some of the demands of the EPATH Teachers Associations of Rodop-Evros and Xanthi submitted to the Ministry of Education on June 2008 are like:

- *We would like the regulations and the criteria which have been stated in the laws, constitution and as well as the international documents about the appointments of the principles of minority schools be implemented.*
- *At the beginning of school period we would like the new Turkish books be introduced with seminars by authors of the books.*
- *We would like our school libraries be decked out with books both in Turkish and Greek languages and references....*

The recently introduced practice of elective Turkish classes in Greek high schools can not replace the right to minority education. In fact, the Turkish Minority reacted to this practice as a breach of minority rights and as a vehicle for assimilation.

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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. Remembering that the ethnic Turkish minority has the right to take education in its native language according to the Treaty of Lausanne, we in particular urge the Greek State to abolish the discriminatory clauses of the new Preschool law that anticipates the Greek language is a must in preschool education.

- 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.

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MEMBER

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UNIVERSITY GRADUATES ASSOCIATION**