



Western Thrace Minority  
University Graduates Association

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### **Working Session 7**

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### **VIOLATION OF MINORITY RIGHTS IN GREECE The Case of Western Thrace Turks**

The estimated number of 150.000 ethnic Turks lives in the North-East part of Greece. Members of the Muslim Turkish Minority, who have been living in this region for centuries identify, themselves as ethnic Turks. The legal status of this minority was established by the Peace Treaty of Lausanne which was signed in 1923, the bilateral agreements signed between Greece and Turkey and the international instruments concerning human and minority rights which Greece signed and ratified.

At the beginning of the last decade the new minority policy based on the principles "equality before the law" and "equality in civil rights" 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 for the full utilization of minority rights. Denial of ethnic identity, expelled citizens and educational rights are still the main problems of Western Thrace Turkish Minority.

#### **DENIAL OF ETHNIC IDENTITY**

The denial of ethnic identity of Western Thrace Turks by the Greek government has been 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 prohibited. By the advent of Junta regime, however, the authorities started to call the Minority as "Muslim" and since then, they continued to reject the ethnic Turkish identity in Western Thrace. Today, Greece still insists on the policy of denying ethnic Turkish identity of the minority.

#### **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was repealed by the Greek Parliament.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.

## **EDUCATION**

According to many human and minority rights instruments and Article 40 of 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 educational 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. 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 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 Muslim Turkish Minority of Western Thrace would like the pre-school education to be included within the autonomous minority education system so that in nurseries pupils would have the opportunity to get instruction both in Greek and Turkish languages. To address Minority's need for bilingual (Turkish-Greek) nursery schools 211 local administrators with minority background (including mayors, ex members of the Hellenic Parliament and members of the city councils) signed a petition in which they highlighted minority's will of opening bilingual minority nursery schools. The signatures were handed over to the Minister of Education by minority MPs.

As for the year of 2010 there are 194 Private Minority Primary schools across the region of Western Thrace. The instruction in these schools is bilingual, in Greek and Turkish. Many students attend to these schools where some teachers are employed for the Turkish instruction and some for the Greek instruction. Both teachers are paid by the



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Greek Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs. Text books for the Turkish instruction, according to agreement between Greece and Turkey are provided by Turkey. The textbooks for the Greek instruction are supplied by the Greek state.

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 Special Pedagogical Academy of Thessaloniki are not qualified to teach the text books provided by Turkey. This weakness is also accepted by some of the graduates of this Academy. As a result, students who attend to these Minority Schools are not able to learn both languages. Today, there are many successful examples of bilingual schools worldwide. 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.

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

The number of minority secondary and high 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. In this respect, to meet the needs of minority, the Culture and Education Foundation of Western Thrace Minority (PEKEM) would like to establish a bilingual minority secondary and high school in the Region. The Foundation applied to the Fillira Municipality in Rodopi Prefecture for a piece of land to establish the school. Although the members of the Municipality Council approved the Foundation's application the Secretary General of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace Region rejected three times the Municipality Council's decision.

## **THE SITUATION IN RHODES AND KOS**

There are also more than 5.000 Turkish people living in the Dodecanese islands, acquired by Greece in 1947 according to the provisions of the Paris Treaty signed after the Second World War. Greece officially denies the minority status of the Muslim-Turks in the region by arguing that they are excluded from the minority protection regime stipulated under 1923 Lausanne Treaty. Muslim-Turks living in these islands are faced with similar problems with that of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace (inter alia, administration of



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Muslim pious foundations called waqfs, election of their religious leader called Mufti, having an access to minority education in Turkish and the like).

The Turkish minority of Dodecanese islands have also suffered from hate crimes. For example, the eight tombs belonging to the prominent religious figures as well as the Muslim cemetery comprised of 256 graves, both located in the religious complex called Murat Reis Külliyesi in Rhodes, were totally left to demolition. The small-scale restoration project initiated by the government had nothing to do with preservation of the historical-religious character of the religious complex, and the attacks to the historical tombs located in the cemetery continued in the year 2009. It was also reported that some groups have occasionally distributed leaflets to discourage shopping from the minority owned enterprises.

**We call upon the Greek State to:**

Respect the collective usage of individual right and recognise the existence of a Turkish minority in Greece.

Ratify, without delay and any reservations, the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages

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 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 naturalisation procedure.

Ensure the equal opportunity for the instruction in mother tongue and the state language. Greece should also take immediate steps to ensure that the right to education for the Turkish minority is guaranteed so that children in Western Thrace have a bilingual (Greek and Turkish) preschool education. Remembering that the Turkish minority has the right to take education in its native language according to the Treaty of Lausanne, as well as other bilateral agreements between Greece and Turkey, we in particular urge the Greek State to abolish the discriminatory clauses of the new Preschool law (3518/2006) that anticipates the Greek language as a must in preschool education.