



Avrupa Batı Trakya Türk Federasyonu Föderation der West-Thrakien Türken in Europa Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe Ευρωπαϊκή Ομοσπονδία Τούρκων Δυτικής Θράκης Fédération des Turcs de Thrace Occidentale en Europe

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Name of Organization: Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF)

Name of Main Contact Person(s): Ms. Melek Kırmacı Arık

E-mail(s): melek.kirmaci@abtff.org; info@abtff.org

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SESSION 3: National minorities in inter-State relations and the Bolzano/Bozen Recommendations

Mr/Mrs. Moderator,

Distinguished representatives of delegates,

And esteemed NGO representatives,

The legal status of the Muslim minority is based on the Treaty of Lausanne of 1923 signed between Turkey and Greece. The obligations assumed by Greece under Section III of this Treaty which deal with the protection of minorities, include the following basic rights and liberties with a right to establish, manage and control at their own expense, any charitable, religious and social institutions, any schools and other establishments for instruction and education, with the right to use their own language and to exercise their own religion freely therein.

In the Bolzano recommendations it is noted that States may offer assistance to support education abroad, for example, with regard to textbooks, language training, teacher training, scholarships and school facilities. However, the educational autonomy enshrined in the 1923 Lausanne Treaty signed between Turkey and Greece has been diminished by governmental practices over years through more than seventy legislations. State intervention on minority issues to such an extent that in practice, the Greek Government, through the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs, has wide-ranging control over the minority schools at all levels, whether it concerns the composition and the functioning of the school boards, the hiring and firing of teachers, the distribution of textbooks or the building and repair of school buildings.

- At the pre-school level, minority children are obliged to attend public kindergartens where the instruction is only in Greek under Law 3518/2006 which extends the compulsory period in education in Greece from nine to ten years, but not includes minority schooling system. The former UN Independent Expert on Minority Issues Gay McDougall commented that bilingual education would allow better knowledge of both Turkish and Greek from an early age and enable greater

choice of whether to go to minority or Greek public primary school.¹ Due to the persistent lack of bilingual kindergartens, a number of families have reluctantly decided to send their children to Greek-language state kindergartens despite the risk of losing their linguistic and cultural identity.

- At the primary level, when the UN Independent Expert on Minority Issues carried out a fact-finding in 2008, there were 194 minority primary schools in Thrace with courses taught in both Turkish and Greek². The number minority primary schools decreased to 188 in 2011, 170 in 2014, and 164 in 2015. The closure of minority schools ended with an important decrease in the number of minority schools and the teaching staff in minority schools but no improvement in quality of education.
- The number of minority secondary schools is not sufficient. While 52% of the population of the Rhodope Prefecture and 45% of the Xanthi Prefecture are Turkish speaking, there is only one minority school in each prefecture against 24 and 37 public (secondary and vocational) Greek-language schools respectively. In the Evros Prefecture, there are more than 45 Greek-speaking secondary schools but no minority secondary school for the Turkish-speaking families who represent 10% of the population.
- Two private minority secondary schools operate in Xanthi and Komotini while two Koranic schools operate in Komotini and Echinós. All the teachers are paid by the school board. Although these minority secondary schools should be administered and run as any other private secondary schools in Greece, the Greek state determines how many students can attend that school and how they will be enrolled.
- The shortage in the number of classrooms in the two minority secondary schools is an urgent problem which has resulted in many minority children enrolling in Greek-language state schools. The number of students in these two minority schools has increased in the school year of 2015-2016, but there are not enough classrooms for their students. Double-shift schooling is being applied at the in Xanthi and two modular classrooms have been placed at the garden of the school in Komotini.
- The 1968 Cultural Protocol provides for the production and use of textbooks in minority schools for both the Turkish minority of Western Thrace and the Greek minority in İstanbul. There are long delays in distribution of the textbooks to the minority schools in Western Thrace. However, the textbooks sent from Turkey have last been distributed not at the beginning of the school year, but in spring.
- On 16 September 2015, the right of horizontal transition in graduate programs for the members of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace which has a special quota of % 0.05 in entrance to the higher education in Greece has been removed by the interim government in Greece headed by the Prime Minister Vassiliki Thanou. Horizontal transitions which have been applied since 1996 since the establishment of a special quota for the minority students, has thus been ended for the Minority students. Most of the minority students prefer to have education in universities which are close to their home town due to the huge economic crisis in Greece. This decision may have a significant impact on the minority students in entrance to the higher education.
- On 27 November 2014, the new Law for “Research, Technological Development and Innovation and other Provisions” was approved by the Greek Parliament. Law 4310/2014 introduces reforms and changes in administrative organizations, in issues related to teaching staff at minority schools, issues related to the

¹ <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G09/111/98/PDF/G0911198.pdf?OpenElement>

² <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G09/111/98/PDF/G0911198.pdf?OpenElement>

functioning and scientific-pedagogical support of the minority schools, establishment of a teachers school under Democritus University of Thrace and appointment and hiring of educators to primary minority schools. Law 4310/2014 was prepared with no prior consultation and/or dialogue with the Turkish minority.

- The Department of Minority Programme Teacher School will give a graduate diploma to members of the Minority who have a four year undergraduate education and the right to education in this department will only belong to members of the Minority who are graduated from domestic elementary pedagogic departments in Greece. The right to education in that department should not be limited to only those who are graduated from pedagogic departments in Greece. Members of the minority who are graduated from other universities in Europe and other countries and received diploma equivalence in Greece should have the right to enter that department. Furthermore, one-year education after graduation of four-year undergraduate education will not be enough for a high quality education in Turkish curriculum at minority schools.
- Members of the Minority are not allowed to teach in Greek curriculum at minority schools any more. Teaching positions of the minority programme of minority schools in Thrace will be occupied exclusively by members of the Muslim minority. Whereas all teachers in Greece become qualified after graduating from a four-year Academy, Turkish-language minority teachers will have to study five or more years to become qualified, while at the same time they are disqualified to teach the Greek-language classes in the minority schools after graduating from the four year Teachers' Academy.

We call upon Greece to restore the educational and religious autonomy of the Turkish minority of Western Thrace enshrined in the 1923 Lausanne Treaty. We urge the Government of Greece to revise its policies concerning the minority primary and secondary schools, including their number and their location, the training and hiring of teachers, curriculum and textbooks to be used. As noted in the Bolzano recommendations, we request from the Greek Government to make good use of all available domestic and international instruments including advisory and consultative bodies in order to address problems in minority issues.