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**Working Session 12: Tolerance and Non-discrimination  
National Minorities**

**Contact Person:** Pervin Chairoula  
[chairoulap@yahoo.com](mailto:chairoulap@yahoo.com) / [pervinc@hotmail.com](mailto:pervinc@hotmail.com)

**Turkish Minority of Western Thrace**

An estimated number of 150.000 ethnic Turks live 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 1990s the new minority policy based on the principles “equality before the law” and “equality in civil rights” put into practice in Greece. Since then, there have been some improvements concerning the basic citizenship rights. Members of the Turkish Minority of course, acknowledge these as positive developments; however, still much remains to be done for the full utilization of minority rights. Among others, 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 Military 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 identify the Minority as “Muslim” and since then, they continued to reject the ethnic Turkish identity and the existence of Turks 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.”** As a result of this Article, approximately 60 thousand Muslim Turks lost their citizenship without any notification. 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 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 has become compulsory since 2007. 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.

As for the year of 2011 there were 188 Private Minority Primary schools across the region of Western Thrace. In May 2011 with the decision of Ministry of Education, Lifelong Learning and Religious Affairs the number of schools of Turkish Minority decreased to 174 by combining schools. However, the combination was done without taking into consideration the distance among villages in the region and with deficiency in infrastructure. The students of different grades are having lessons in one same classroom.



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 problems of these schools are the poor quality of the Turkish curriculum as well as the lack of well trained and qualified teachers for the Turkish instruction.

The compulsory education in Greece (including the pre-school education) is 10 years which unfortunately 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.

Therefore, we call upon the Greek State:

- Respect the collective usage of individual right and recognise the existence of a Turkish minority in Greece.
- 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 of the official language for the minority which is Turkish and the state language.
- 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.
- Ratify, without delay and any reservations, the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities.