



# 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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## **SESSION II: Promoting the bridge building role of national minority issues across various policy areas**

As part of Germany's chairmanship of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in 2016, the High Commissioner on National Minorities has tasked the European Centre for Minority Issues (ECMI) with conducting a study highlighting the abilities of diverse ethnic groups and minorities (including national, linguistic, religious, cultural and similar) as bridge-builders and agents of reconciliation between states. The outcome of the project will be to provide OSCE members with recommendations based on positive examples of these diverse groups and their institutions working productively in collaboration with local municipalities and authorities. In order to gather information for this project, ECMI asked minority organisations, civil society and regional or local municipalities to participate in a nine-question survey, which will help us build a picture of ethnic groups' and minority communities' activity across the OSCE member states. We would like to hear the outcomes of this project which could gather best-practices for national minorities in bridge-building.

The role of education as a tool for integration is being disregarded in Greece, which in turn hinders the development of a cohesive society. In its survey ECMI asked whether ethnic groups and minority communities cooperate with institutions of their kin-state concerning issues of education. They might have student and teacher exchanges, a representative on the school ministry, common discussion of teaching materials, common study programmes at universities, or support for minority schools.

The Turkish Minority of Western Thrace is granted with the right to education in its native language and autonomy in the management of its educational institutions.

a) The Treaty of Lausanne which was signed between Greece and Turkey in 1923 determining the status and the basic rights of the Minority in general. Article 41 of the Treaty granted rights to the Muslim Turkish minority in Thrace ensuring that in the primary schools the instruction shall be given to the children of such Turkish nationals through the medium of their own language.

b) The Cultural Protocol signed between Turkey and Greece on 20 April 1951 and the Exchange of Notes in 1952 regarding the issue of exchange teachers who would be assigned in Minority Schools. The 1951 Educational Agreement was abolished and replaced by the Bilateral Agreement on Cultur-

al Cooperation in 2000 (hereinafter “the Bilateral Agreement”). The Bilateral Agreement is based on the context of strengthening the political relations between Greece and Turkey on an educational level. The educational cooperation between the two countries is based on an international model of the Council of Europe, the Organization for Security and Cooperation (OSCE) and UNESCO.

c) The Protocol of the Turkish-Greek Cultural Commission, signed in 1968.

Although the right to education of the Minority is guaranteed and protected under the Lausanne Treaty, the autonomy of the Minority in education has systematically been violated by the State. The Turkish Minority of Western Thrace was called as “Turkish” by Greek authorities back in the 1950’s and the minority schools were legally referred as “Turkish schools”. However, the Greek authorities changed their policy in 1970s on political grounds and thus started calling the minority as the “Muslim minority.”

The autonomy in education and religious affairs was exercised until the Greek military junta regime in 1967, but was not restored after the return to democracy in 1974. During a fact-finding mission in 2012 with the participation of Hans Heinrich Hansen, President of Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN), former Member of the European Parliament François Alfonsi (France) and Willy Fautre, Director of Human Rights without Frontiers Int’l, the delegation found that the problems in the field of education are alarming.<sup>1</sup>

Considering that in Greece;

1. 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 this does not include the minority schooling system.
2. At the primary level, when the former UN Independent Expert on Minority Issues Ms. Gay McDougall carried out a fact-finding in 2008, there were 194 minority primary schools in Thrace with courses taught in both Turkish and Greek. The Greek authorities merged the minority primary schools in the region without taking into consideration the autonomous status of minority education. In accordance with the decision of the Ministry of Education, Research and Religion in 2010 that schools which do not have sufficient number of students will be closed down for economic reasons, the total number of minority primary schools closed down by Greek authorities reached to 60. Although the Turkish Minority should be autonomous in the field of education under the Lausanne Treaty, the Ministry’s decision included the minority schooling system. The number minority primary schools decreased to 188 in 2011, 170 in 2014, and 164 in 2015 and 132 in 2016.
3. The number of minority secondary schools is not sufficient. Although almost half of the population in Western Thrace is Turkish-speaking, there are only two minority schools operating in Komotini and Xanthi and two Islamic schools in Komotini and Echinus against many public (secondary and vocational) Greek-language schools.
4. All the teachers are paid by the school board. Although the above mentioned minority secondary schools should be administered and run as any other private secondary schools in Greece, the Greek Government determines how many students can attend and how they will be enrolled.
5. In accordance with Exchange of Notes of 1952 and 1955 between Turkey and Greece, number of teachers to be assigned by Turkey and Greece to work in each other’s minority schools was mutually agreed as 35. Yet, this number was unilaterally reduced by Greece to 16 as of 1990-91 school year. The Greek authorities do not allow the teachers from Turkey to work at the Turkish minority schools in Xanthi. The teachers who had education in

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.abttf.org/images/22\\_Raporlar/2012-1128-Report-Ethnic-Turks\\_.pdf](https://www.abttf.org/images/22_Raporlar/2012-1128-Report-Ethnic-Turks_.pdf)

Turkey have not been allowed to work at minority elementary schools since 2002-2003 school year either.

6. The 1968 Cultural Protocol between Greece and Turkey provides for the production and use of textbooks in minority schools for both the Turkish minority of Western Thrace and the Greek minority in Istanbul. There are long and unreasonable delays in distribution of the textbooks sent from Turkey to the minority schools in the region.
7. Law 4310/2014 was prepared with no prior consultation and/or dialogue with the Turkish minority and introduced reforms and changes in administrative organizations, in issues related to teaching staff at minority schools, issues related to the functioning and scientific-pedagogical support of the minority schools, establishment of a teacher training school under Democritus University of Thrace and appointment and hiring of educators to primary minority schools.
  - The Department of Minority Programme Teacher School will give a graduate diploma to members of the minority who have a four year undergraduate education. In addition to that, teachers who have graduated from domestic elementary pedagogic departments in Greece should complete the supplementary teaching training programme in order to have the right to teach in minority schools. The right to education in that department should not be limited to only those who have graduated from pedagogic departments in Greece but also graduates of universities abroad.
  - According to the provisions of the above mentioned law, members of the Turkish Minority who have graduated from Greek faculties of education and are teachers of Greek curriculum in minority schools are not allowed to teach the mentioned curriculum any more. This application is an example of violation of the principle of equality enshrined in the Greek constitution.

**We call on the Government of Greece to:**

1. respect its obligations under the Treaty of Lausanne and take measures in order to restore the autonomous structure in the field of education and religion. Greece should respect, protect and promote the rights enshrined in the Lausanne Treaty and act in full compliance with the provisions of the Treaty and the core international human rights treaties of which Greece is a party,
2. establish bilingual minority kindergartens in Western Thrace in line with the minority schooling system, and allow the Turkish Minority to establish private nursery schools where the language of education will be Turkish and Greek,
3. 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,
4. amend Law 4310/2014 regarding the educational supervision and the appointment of minority school teachers and improve the quality of minority schooling system,
5. make good use of all available domestic and international instruments including advisory and consultative bodies in order to address problems in minority issues.