



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

NGO in Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations
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**The right to education in mother tongue and the problem of bilingual minority
kindergartens in Greece**

Dear President,
Distinguished representatives
And esteemed NGO Delegates,

In accordance with the 1923 Lausanne Peace Treaty, the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace has an equal right with the non-Muslim minority in Turkey to establish, manage and control at their own expense, any charitable, religious and social institution, any school and other establishment for instruction and education, with the right to use their own language and to exercise their own religion freely therein.

Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) would like to highlight the discrimination in education against the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace. Law 3518/2006 envisages the extension of the compulsory period in education from nine to ten years starting from the school year 2007-2008. Although the Turkish minority is granted the right to establish, maintain and manage its own educational institutions that give education on the mother tongue of the minority, the minority children who completed the 5th year of their age has to attend in majority kindergartens under the Ministry of Education.

The law does not bring any regulation about ethnic and cultural difference of the children in Greece, all children who have completed the 5th year of their age is obliged to attend state kindergartens where the language of education is only in Greek. The right not to be discriminated is violated because Greece without an objective and reasonable justification fails to treat differently minority children who speak a different language other than Greek.

The implementation of the above-mentioned law presents a serious problem for the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace. When the 2012-2013 school year started, some children belonging to the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace in Echinus village, Xanthi have not been enrolled in minority primary schools on the ground that those children did not attend kindergarten. The parents stated that they did not prefer to send their children to public kindergarten, of which the language of education is only Greek.

In the second week of problem in the Echinus Turkish Minority Primary School, the Principal of the Minority School, Hasan Kurak has been referred to the disciplinary board by the state inspectorship of the Ministry of Education and penalized with an administrative warning.

The Turkish Minority of Western Thrace should have a right to participate in the life of the State and in decisions affecting them. Greece should provide adequate opportunities to persons belonging to the Turkish minority to learn its mother tongue or to learn through the medium of the mother tongue, alternatives which should not be understood as mutually exclusive. In the particular context of pre-school education, delivery of educational services with the established bilingual minority kindergartens is a right stemming from their right to establish, maintain and manage its own educational institutions.

The former UN Independent Expert on Minority Issues, Gay McDougall, also noted in her country visit report on Greece¹ in 2008 that a commonly stated problem is the absence of bilingual kindergartens for the minority. The expert stated that bilingual kindergartens would allow better knowledge of both Turkish and Greek from an early stage therefore providing benefits in terms of integration, and enabling greater choice of whether to go minority of Greek public primary school.

In specific to the problem in the pre-school level of education, we call the Greek State to:

- establish bilingual minority kindergartens in region in line with the minority schooling system
- give bilingual education in public kindergartens in the region until bilingual minority schools are established
- allow the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace to establish private kindergartens where the language of education will be Turkish and Greek.

Thank you.

Melek Kırmacı Arık

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