



Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association
Egnatias 75, 69100 Komotini-Greece
Tel/Fax: +302531029705
E-mail: btaytd@otenet.gr URL: www.btaytd.com

Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association (WTMUGA), established in 1982, focuses on cultural and social development of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace-Greece. Monitors human and minority rights violations in the region, prepares reports, parallel reports to different International Bodies on human and minority rights abuses in the region. WTMUGA's main working areas are: - Social, cultural and educational development of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace, - Representation of Western Thrace Turkish Minority in the international platform, - Combating racism and xenophobia, - Monitoring and reporting human and minority rights violations of the region.

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THE TURKISH MUSLIM MINORITY OF WESTERN THRACE-GREECE

An estimate 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.

In the recent years, the situation of the Muslim Turkish Minority of Western Thrace has slightly improved; however, still much remains to be done if the situation of the minority is to become wholly satisfactory. Education is one of the main problematic issues affecting the minority.

THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

THE MUSLIM TURKISH MINORITY IN WESTERN THRACE/GREECE

Western Thrace Minority's education system is based and protected by international treaties and bilateral agreements such as the International peace Treaty of Lausanne signed in 1923, the Cultural Agreement of 1951 between Greece and Turkey which was in force until 2001 and replaced by the Cultural Cooperation between Greece and Turkey on 19 July 2001 and the Cultural Protocol signed between the two countries in 1968. These international and bilateral legal instruments provide autonomy to the Minority Education in Western Thrace.

The private and autonomous Minority education is also protected by the EU regulations which Greece, as a full member of EU since 1981, is a party to and other international instruments concerning human and minority rights.

Article 40 of the Lausanne Treaty states that, "...They shall have an equal right to establish, manage and control at their own expense, any charitable, religious and social institutions, any school and other establishments for instruction and education, with the right to use their own language and to exercise their own religion therein"

Article 41 of the same treaty clarifies that minority educational institutions and foundations in those towns and districts inhabited mostly by members of the minority, "...shall be assured an equitable share in employment and application of the sums which may be provided out of public funds under the State, municipal, or other budgets for educational, religious, or charitable purposes. The sums in question shall be paid to the qualified representatives of the establishments and institutions concerned."

By Article 37 of the Treaty of Lausanne, Turkey and Greece have undertaken that the provisions contained in Articles 38 to 44 shall be recognized as fundamental laws, and that no law, no regulation,

nor official action shall conflict or interfere with these stipulations, nor shall any law, regulation or official action prevail over them.

Although the minority education system is guaranteed and protected by international and bilateral agreements the authorities systematically undermine the autonomy of the minority education system through different ways. 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 autonomy and increase the weakness of the instruction of the Turkish curriculum.

PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION

According to the Law No. 3518/2006 pre-school education in Greece since 2007 has become compulsory for children 4 and 5 years old. 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.

Therefore the Muslim Turkish Minority of Western Thrace is calling upon the Greek State to review and change the new law on pre-school education and include the pre-school education to the private-autonomous minority education system so that pupils have the opportunity to get instruction both in Greek and Turkish language.

MINORITY PRIMARY EDUCATION

As for the year of 2008 there are 198 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.....for the Greek instruction. Both teachers are paid by the 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. 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. 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.

Another problematic area in these schools is the management system. While according to international agreements and regulations the school boards of the Minority schools have the right to choose their own teachers at their own expenses, the usage of this right is not in force any more.

Therefore the Muslim Turkish Minority of Western Thrace calls the Greek state to take an immediate action for the improvement of the Turkish curriculum of the Minority schools. In short there are schools, pupils, text books, teaching materials but not qualified teachers for the Turkish language. To enable the school boards to use the right to choose and employ teachers should be put in force so that well trained and qualified teachers take over the Turkish instruction.

SECONDARY EDUCATION

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

Most of the minority students do not have the opportunity to finish the secondary education. Every year more than 2.000 students attend the secondary education. There are only two Minority secondary and high schools in Western Thrace with the capacity of 1000 students, the Celal Bayar Minority High School in Komotini and the Muzaffer Salihoglu High School in Xanthi. The instruction in these schools is bilingual, in Greek and Turkish. In the last five years the quality of education of these schools has been increased. Teachers with university degree have been employed for the Turkish instruction. Most of the graduates of these schools succeed to enter a university either in Greece or Turkey. Most of them also succeed to graduate. Those who have no opportunity to continue their educations in these schools are obliged to attend the public schools where the instruction is only in Greek. The Greek state is rejecting minority's applications for the establishment of new minority high schools.

Therefore the Minority is calling the Greek state to establish new minority high schools where the instruction will be in Turkish and Greek language. The establishment of new minority high schools will enable most of the minority students (especially girls) to complete their 10 year compulsory education.

THE SPECIAL PEDAGOGICAL ACADEMY OF THESSALONIKI (EPATH)

This academy, founded in 1968, trains members of the Minority as teachers for Minority schools. The main language of instruction of the EPATH is Greek. The duration of education used to be two years but recently, it increased to three years. Although all of the pedagogical academies in Greece were replaced by the Faculties of Education or Departments of Education

in 1989, EPATH still remains as the unique Teacher Training Institution of this type. In the preparatory year, the EPATH students are taught Greek, Basic Mathematics, History, Psychology, Geometry, Music, Turkish, Sports, Geography of Greece and Techniques. It is useful to stress that although these teachers will educate the Minority children in Turkish all of the courses except Turkish are taught in Greek that affects the level of their teaching capacity in Turkish. Today, all teachers in minority primary Schools are graduates of this academy.

Taking into account that their three year of education is predominantly in Greek, the EPATH teachers have highly been criticized for their poor level of knowledge in Turkish language. Some teachers admit their weakness of teaching properly the Turkish language and the lessons in Turkish. This increases the suspect among the Muslim Turks that EPATH teachers have been used deliberately by the Greek State for not giving a proper and modern education to the Western Thrace Minority Pupils, such an attitude of the State authorities can widely be interpreted as an impediment against the improvement of the level of education of the Minority.

Some of the demands of the EPATH Teachers Associations of Rodop-Evros and Xanthi submitted to the Ministry of Education on June 2008 are like:

- *We would like the regulations and the criteria which have been stated in the laws, constitution and as well as the international documents about the appointments of the principles of minority schools be implemented.*
- *At the beginning of school period we would like the new Turkish books be introduced with seminars by authors of the books.*
- *We would like our school libraries be decked out with books both in Turkish and Greek languages and references....*
- *(For full text, please see attachments)*

Therefore the minority calls the Greek state to close the EPATH and after a dialogue with the minority and the cooperation between Greece and Turkey to establish a pedagogical faculty for the adequate training of teachers in the Turkish language.

THE HIGHER EDUCATION AND THE MINORITY QUOTA SYSTEM

One of the revolutionary developments within the realm of minority education is the introduction of the quota system. In 1996, for the first time a special minority quota of %0.5 was introduced which facilitated the entrance of the minority students into the Greek universities. All Greek universities started to set aside places for the minority students. By the introduction of the quota system, the entrance to the Greek universities became much easier than before for the minority students as the minority students started to compete only among themselves but not with all the other Orthodox Greek university candidates.

In the first year of the quota system, only 74 minority students entered to the Greek universities while this number increased year by year. From 1996 till 2008, the approximate number of the Minority students entering universities in Greece is around 2000. However, due to the poor level of instruction in primary and secondary schools, students who entered the universities are

in difficulty to complete their higher education. Most of them either quit or change their departments. As a result the number of graduates from the Greek universities is insufficient.

THE SITUATION OF THE TURKS IN RODOS AND KOS

There are more than 5000 ethnic Turks living in these two islands. These people do not have a status of a recognized minority. However as they have been living in these islands for more than 350 years they had religious, linguistic and cultural rights. There was a school where the mother tongue (Turkish) was taught until 1970's. Since then these people do not have the opportunity to learn their mother tongue. Today they are under the threat of losing their ethnic, linguistic and cultural identities. The Greek government has never given an answer to their requirement for learning the Turkish language.

The Turks of these islands call upon the Greek state to pay attention to their requirement for learning their mother tongue, learning their religion (Islam) and improve their cultural life. The protection of the historical monuments, buildings and mosques should be taken into account by the Greek state

CONCLUSION

In its current form, the Minority Education System does not reinforce and promote relations between the State and the Minority. On the contrary, it creates tension and crisis of trust. This state of affairs not only undermines the obligations that Greece has undertaken by treaties and agreements, but it also contradicts with the EU legislation, directives and criteria. The current distorted structure of the Minority Education drives the minority children who enjoy both Greek and E.U. citizenship, into becoming inadequate, second-class citizens.

Therefore we call the Greek state to take all possible major steps for the improvement of the Minority Education.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- a) *In order to improve the quality and conditions of minority education it is desirable that a dialogue is initiated between the Ministries of Education Affairs of Greece and Turkey.*
- b) *The number of teachers who would be sent by Turkey to teach at minority schools in Thrace should be restored to 36, as has been agreed by the Exchange of Letters in 1952. These teachers should be allowed to serve at minority schools in a fair and balanced manner as it used to be and they should be charged in a balanced way at all schools of the region.*
- c) *The general principle of the 9-year (recently has become 10-year) compulsory education should be extended to cover the minority schooling system.*
- d) *Physical infrastructure, equipment and teaching staff of the minority secondary and high schools in Komotini and Xanthi should be improved.*
- e) *4 new minority secondary and high schools, 1 minority vocational training school should be founded. While the ownership and management of these schools would*

belong to the minority, the State is also expected to protect and support these institutions.

- f) A dormitory section needs to be established for the students of the minority high school in Xanthi.*
- g) Kindergarten education in the areas inhabited by Turks should be in mother tongue/ or bilingual.*

REFERENCES

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- 4- Onsunoglou, Impram, “Κριτική στη μειονοτική εκπαίδευση” (A Critique in the education of the Minority), *Συγχρονά Θέματα*, Vol.63, April-May 1997
- 5- Panagiotidis, Nathanail M., *Το Μειονοτικό Εκπαιδευτικό Σύστημα της Ελλάδας (The Minority Education System of Greece)* (Aleksandroupoli: Gnomi, 1996)
- 6- *Τρίτη Έκθεση για την Ελλάδα (Third Report on Greece) 2004*
- 7- *US Country Reports on Human Rights Practises*, 2001
- 8- www.kemo.gr

ATTACHMENTS

(1)

The meeting of the Administrative Boards of the Associations of Graduates of Special Pedagogical Academy of Thessaloniki in Rodop-Evros and Xanthi with The Minister of Education and Religious Affairs on 21st June 2008 at the office of Nomarch .

DEMANDS FROM THE MINISTER OF EDUCATION AND RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS

- 1- We would like the regulations and the criteria which have been stated in the laws, constitution and as well as the international documents about the appointments of the principles of minority schools be implemented.
- 2- We would like the current indefinite and inadequate ministerial decree about the authorities of principles and vice-principles of minority schools be replaced with a new decree that will define clearly the authorities of the aforementioned charged people as it is in the other majority schools.
- 3- 5+1 service rule that was applied to the teachers in minority schools should be kept as it is stated in the specific documents of the General Budget of State.
- 4- At the beginning of the 2008-2009 school year we would like to get a set of new Turkish books which will be used during school period.
- 5- At the beginning of school period we would like the new Turkish books be introduced with seminars by authors of the books.
- 6- Credit to buy houses.
- 7- In the minority schools there are 85 free places which have to be placed urgently with the graduates of the aforementioned academy.
- 8- The duration of education in the aforementioned academy must be 4 years in which Turkish Language and Literature and Islam be taught in cooperation with the higher educational institutions of Turkey (Educational Cooperation of Turkey-Greece). The basic-introductory subjects must be taught both in Turkish and Greek.
- 9- We, as the Graduates of Special Pedagogical Academy of Thessaloniki, would like to get degrees and be at the same level of the graduates of other higher educational institutions.
- 10- We would like our school libraries be decked out with books both in Turkish and Greek languages and references.
- 11- We would like to get all the Turkish books of the 6th grade which haven't been sent yet before starting the new school year of 2008-09.

The Administrative Boards
Head of Association the Associations

Mehmet Derdiman

Karadai Halil