

RESOLUTION 2016-04

Resolution on the situation of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace in Greece

submitted by the Delegation of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace:

Friendship, Equality, Peace Party; Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association;
Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe

At the Assembly of Delegates in Wrocław / Breslau, on 21 May 2016, the Delegates of the Member Organisations of the Federal Union of European Nationalities adopted the following resolution:

Turkish Minority of Western Thrace in Greece

The status and the rights of the Turkish minority of Western Thrace in Greece are established, prescribed and safeguarded by bilateral and multilateral agreements, treaties and protocols since 1913. Within the framework of these agreements, treaties and protocols the Turkish minority of Western Thrace has the right 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.

The autonomy in education 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.¹

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, the geographical difficulties of students in access to education and the quality of education depending on the consequences of the economic crisis. As a result, the

¹ https://www.abttf.org/images/22_Raporlar/2012-1128-Report-Ethnic-Turks_.pdf

number of minority primary schools in the three provinces of Western Thrace decreased to 140 in 2015.

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. 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.
6. On 16 September 2015, the right of horizontal transition in graduate programs for the members of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace who have a special quota of % 0.05 in entrance to the higher education in Greece has been removed by the interim government headed by the Prime Minister Vassiliki Thanou. This may end with the increase in drop-out rates in higher education because many minority students prefer to have education in universities which are close to their home town due to the huge economic crisis in Greece.
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.

The violation of religious rights of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace has been a significant problem during the past two decades. Recent laws and regulations as well as attacks on sacred places and religious leaders have caused the emergence of new problems.

Some examples of the unacceptable implementations, physical and verbal attacks concerning the freedom of religion are mentioned below:

- Law 4115/2013, known as the '240 Imam Act' inhibits the Turkish Minority's freedom to choose its imams.
- Attack on the Macedonia – Thrace Muslim Cultural and Educational Association in Thessaloniki on 17 December 2015: the association's funeral vehicle's windows were broken and tires cut. The perpetrators were not found by the authorities.

- Members of the organisation who identify themselves as ‘Guardians of Thrace’, beat on 28th January 2016 an official working for Xanthi’s elected Mufti forcing him into a vehicle and tried to spread fear by stating ‘tell the Mufti, it’s his turn’.

Reminding that the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace is and should be autonomous in the field of education and religion under the 1923 Peace Treaty of Lausanne;

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,
6. respect the religious autonomy and abolish Law 4115/2013 which contradicts with the provisions of international treaties,
7. take measures concerning the free practice of religion in Western Thrace and ensure safety of life to religious leaders of the minority.