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Minority women and girls and the right to education

The Right to Education of Turkish Minority Women
in Western Thrace — GREECE

Madam Chairperson,
Distinguished delegates,
And civil society representatives,

The article 10 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Woman states equal rights with men in the field of education.

Article 10

States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in order to ensure to them equal rights with men in the field of education and in particular to ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women:

Besides the mentioned Convention, many human and minority rights instruments and Peace Treaty of Lausanne state that, 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. That is why the drop-out rates, especially for the female students in Western Thrace is among the highest level in Greece.

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 has been 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-a-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-a-vis 37 state high schools.

Therefore, we call upon the Greek State,

In consultation with the Turkish Minority Representatives

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,

To prepare projects for young females of Minority to continue at least the basic education.