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Föderation der West-Thrakiens 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
Member of the Fundamental Rights Platform (FRP) of the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights
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Agenda Item III: Public policy objectives for education in, and the teaching of, minority languages

Dear Moderator,

Distinguished representatives, delegates and NGO representatives,

Persons belonging to national minorities in various regions of the world suffer disproportionately from unequal or restricted access to quality education and inappropriate education strategies. Goal 4 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is quality education and its aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education for all.

The Turkish community in Western Thrace, Greece is granted with the Lausanne Treaty the right to establish, manage and control at their own expense any school for instruction and education, with the right to use their own language and to exercise their own religion freely therein. The autonomy in education has been undermined and diminished by governmental practices over years with complex legal provisions that put minority education under the full control of the state at all levels, in a stark contradiction to the relevant international documents.

The minority primary schools follow a bilingual – half Greek half Turkish – curriculum, although scholars categorize this type of education model as two parallel monolingual education systems, not bilingual education system. In 2008, there were 194 minority primary schools in Western Thrace. Despite autonomy in education, minority primary schools were closed with decision of the Directorate of Primary and Secondary Education in the Eastern Macedonia and Thrace since 2010. The number gradually decreased to 188 in 2011, 170 in 2014, and 164 in 2015 and 133 in 2016 and 130 in 2017, 128 in 2018 and 123 in 2019 on grounds of decreasing number of pupils in schools, while there is no further education planning for bussed education for pupils who need to go another village for education.

The Minority Rights Group Europe (MRGE) visited the Western Thrace region in September 2018 and had consultations with representatives of the Turkish community. In its report on the Turkish community published in October 2019, MRGE notes that the balance of hours per language per subject in minority education significantly shifted over the years in favour of the majority language. Turkish language, mathematics, science, religion, music and art (painting) are taught in Turkish, while Greek language, history, geography, civic education, and English are taught in Greek. Physical education is taught in either Turkish or Greek, depending on the size of the school. The Turkish curriculum is designed without approval or input from minority teachers. Moreover, Greek is the

only language used by the authorities for school administration as counsellors supervising minority education are not expected to understand Turkish. While principals are from the Turkish community, vice-principals, always coming from the Greek majority, have more powers than them. Moreover, the overall quality of education in minority primary schools falls far below Greek public schools. This often means that children have poor command of both Greek and Turkish on leaving primary school.

Furthermore, textbooks used by the Turkish schools for the Greek curriculum are printed and distributed by the Ministry of Education. Textbooks used for the Turkish curriculum, are written, edited and printed in Turkey especially for the minority pupils and are imported and distributed after approval of the Greek Ministry of Education. Due to the long delays in distribution, Turkish textbooks are outdated and the last textbooks were printed in 2010. Teachers in the Greek curriculum do not know the mother tongue of the minority pupils and have no special training for teaching in Turkish minority schools, while all teachers in the Turkish curriculum are graduates of a former special pedagogical academy in Thessaloniki with very limited courses taught in Turkish and with no internal education training programmes.

Moreover, MRGE notes that the Ministry for Education in Greece initiated the Programme of Education of Muslim Children (PEM) in 1997, known as Frangoudaki program, as part of the European Union policy against social exclusion. The main objective of the programme is to integrate Turkish children smoothly into the Greek society through the educational system. The project's main goal was to improve the Greek-language program of minority primary schools through production of new textbooks and educational materials for the Greek-language program and training of school teachers in the Greek programme. This programme has been extensively criticized by members of the Turkish community due to the fact that the programme only focuses on the Greek programme in Turkish minority primary schools. No steps have been taken to improve the quality of education in the Turkish programme which provides education in mother tongue in the region. Textbooks and educational materials for the Greek program have not been renewed since 1997.

As a result of the programme, minority school pupils' Greek language skills improved, minority school drop-out rates decreased, and the rate of secondary school attendance significantly increased. Nevertheless, weaknesses remained in the overall quality of education. In September 2018, Turkish minority primary schools belonging to the Turkish community in Western Thrace started a demonstration for demanding education with current Greek textbooks used in public schools instead of simplified Greek textbooks which were prepared under PEM. After protests by 48 Turkish minority primary schools, the Minister of Education issued a circular that ordered the use of Greek textbooks used at public schools to be used as supplementary material in Turkish minority schools.

European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) noted in its report on Greece in 2015 that the situation in minority schools, together with a general lack of teaching resources, resulted in lower educational standards and attainment levels amongst minority children, and ultimately their social and economic marginalisation and exclusion. Pupils often have to give up their right to bilingual education, if they wish to access the better-quality education provided in monolingual (Greek-language) schools. Also, MRGE notes that since minority schools were failing to serve the fundamental needs of the community, some Turkish families started sending their children to monolingual Greek public schools with a risk of assimilation.

As ABTTF, we call upon Greece to restore the educational and religious autonomy of the Turkish community in Western Thrace enshrined in the 1923 Lausanne Treaty. We urge the Government of Greece to 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.