



16th session of the UN Forum on Minority Issues
“Minorities and Cohesive Societies: Equality, Social Inclusion, and Socioeconomic Participation”
(30 November – 1 December, 2023 - Geneva, Room XX)

Item 2: Socio-economic Empowerment

Thank you Ms/Mr Moderator,

I am Meltem Gkiritli and I am representing Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association as a member of the Turkish Minority in Western Thrace, Greece.

Dear Participants,

The Turkish minority has long suffered from segregation policies of Greece. During the 1970s and 1980s, Turks in Western Thrace were restricted from conducting business, getting a driver's license, or purchasing property. The aim of these policies was summarized by the words of a high rank Greek official that recently have been revealed in secret state archives. “When all the properties of the Turks are taken away, Turks will leave Western Thrace.” This has been the approach of Greece towards the Turkish minority for decades. Maybe it is even today.

Because it is evident that today Western Thrace is one of the most underdeveloped regions of Greece and the EU. The Turkish minority is economically the most disadvantaged community in Western Thrace as migration to Western European countries is quite high among Turkish youth.

According to state archives Greek population in Western Thrace has been boosted by secret national loans for decades when the Turkish minority has been victim of discrimination and poverty. Restrictions were abolished in the mid of 1990s. However legacy of socio-economic isolation that created developmental and capital gap between the Turkish minority and Greek majority affect the current situation of Western Thrace.

Besides, arbitrary interventions on minority education and inequalities in opportunities for the Turkish minority students that gradually reduced the quality of the education is another aspect of underdevelopment in the region.

This fact, block the Turkish minority benefiting from many EU funds even today. Proportion of members of the Turkish minority benefited from EU funds is quite limited when their proportion within the region's population is calculated. It is clear that there are quite limited Turkish minority beneficiaries of EU funds when someone considers the Turkish minority's population percentage in the Xanthi and Rodopi provinces, which is around 45 and 55 percent, respectively. A simple tour in Turkish villages would demonstrate a rigid segregation in terms of infrastructure between minority and majority settlements.

Physical conditions of minority schools that are not compatible with modern education standards adds another dimension to vicious cycle of underdevelopment in Western Thrace. It should be noted that the Turkish minority are Greek citizens and taxpayers who fulfill all responsibilities towards the country and does not deserve to be second class citizens.

Therefore, we recommend to Greece to embrace the Turkish minority as its equal citizens and promote economic development and infrastructure projects in minority regions.

Thank you