



Avrupa Batı Trakya Türk Federasyonu Föderation der West-Thrakien Türken in Europa Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe Ευρωπαϊκή Ομοσπονδία Τούρκων Δυτικής Θράκης Fédération des Turcs de Thrace Occidentale en Europe

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Name of the Organization: Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF)
Main contact person(s): Mrs. Melek Kırmaçlı Arık
E-mail: info@abttf.org, melek.kirmaci@abttf.org

Item II: Inclusive education to empower minority youth

Dear Moderator,
Distinguished representatives,
And esteemed NGO Delegates,

Principle of equality and non-discrimination in the enjoyment of the right to education is a key to securing equal access to quality education for persons belonging to minority groups. We underline the importance of para. 16 of the Recommendations at the inaugural session in 2008 which noted that States should take appropriate measures so that, wherever possible, persons belonging to minorities may have adequate opportunities to learn their mother tongue or to have instruction in their mother tongue and that these measures are most critical in preschool and primary schools, but may extend to subsequent stages of education.

The Turkish community in Western Thrace, Greece is granted with the right to education in its mother tongue and autonomy in the management of its educational institutions with the Treaty of Lausanne which determined the status and basic rights in general. Although the Turkish community in the region has autonomous structure in the field of education under the 1923 Lausanne Treaty, more than 60 minority primary schools in the region have been closed down with the decision of the Ministry of Education, Research and Religion on closure of schools with low number of pupils since 2010.

Furthermore, there are no bilingual kindergartens or nurseries for the Turkish children to learn their mother tongue in their early childhood, although compulsory education includes pre-school education under a law adopted in 2006. As noted in the U.S. International Religious Freedom Report for 2016 on Greece, some leaders of the Turkish community in the region continued to criticize the absence of bilingual kindergartens in Thrace¹.

The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance of the Council of Europe (ECRI) also mentioned in its fifth report on Greece in 2015 that there are no special measures for the minority under Law No. 3518/2006 which has made pre-school education compulsory. The ECRI noted that the Government has rejected proposals to open Turkish- Greek bilingual kindergartens in the existing bilingual primary schools and referred to the case in Echinus where the regional school

¹ <https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm#wrapper>

inspectors refused to enroll 20 children who had not attended the obligatory kindergarten and dismissed a bilingual school's principal, who had registered and taught them.

The ECRI stressed that children's right to schooling should not be jeopardized and further recommended that the authorities should take all necessary steps to ensure that minority children have access to a bilingual or monolingual elementary school, as per their parents' choice². There is still no step taken by Greek authorities or there are no plans on how to avoid such situations like in Echinus in the next school year.

The former UN Independent Expert on Minority Issues, Gay McDougall, had recommended in her country visit report on Greece³ in 2008 that bilingual kindergartens would allow better knowledge of both Turkish and Greek from an early stage therefore providing benefits in terms of integration, and enabling greater choice of whether to go minority of Greek public primary school. Today, minority children are obliged to attend public kindergartens and families reluctantly send their children to Greek-language state kindergartens despite the risk of losing their linguistic and cultural identity.

Despite many applications by the community organizations for establishment of bilingual kindergartens within the special education system that the Turkish community has been granted and establishment of other private bilingual kindergartens in the region, the Greek government rejected proposals to open Turkish- Greek bilingual kindergartens in the existing bilingual primary schools and rather adopted a legal framework in August 2017 for the implementation of a pilot project which envisages that a bilingual minority member, graduated from one of the higher education institutions in Greece, would work with a teacher in a kindergarten class in public schools in six provinces where children belonging to the Turkish community in Western Thrace lives. Previously, the Institute of Educational Policies under the Ministry of Education of Greece declared that the pilot project would be implemented in the remaining part of the academic year in six public kindergartens for an easy adaptation of the children to kindergartens, where minority children have no option than to go the public kindergartens since there is no permit for minority kindergartens in the country.

We would like to recall paragraph 58 of the Recommendations at the inaugural session in 2008 that States should provide adequate opportunities to persons belonging to minorities to learn their mother tongue or to learn through the medium of the mother tongue, alternatives which should not be understood as mutually exclusive. Specific forms of such opportunities should be chosen in consultation with persons belonging to minorities and taking into account their freely expressed wishes.

The learning and the use of the mother tongue in early childhood education is very important during transition to school to prepare children for multi-language education in primary school. Research has shown that children's first language is the optimal language for literacy and learning throughout primary school. In spite of growing evidence and parent demand, Greece ignores the need for the establishment of minority kindergartens and private nurseries and insists on the enrollment of minority children to state kindergartens based on the argument that the children do not have any textbooks and do not follow any curriculum.⁴

We call upon Greece to restore the educational autonomy of the Turkish minority of Western Thrace. We request from Greek authorities to establish bilingual minority kindergartens in Western Thrace in line with the minority schooling system and allow the Turkish Minority to establish private kindergartens where the language of education will be in Turkish and Greek.

² <https://www.coe.int/t/dgbl/monitoring/ecri/Country-by-country/Greece/GRC-CbC-V-2015-001-ENG.pdf>

³ <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G09/111/98/PDF/G0911198.pdf?OpenElement>

⁴ <https://daccess-ods.un.org/TMP/93252.5843381882.html>