

MINORITY EDUCATION IN GREECE

Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association

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THE CASE OF WESTERN THRACE TURKS

The Laws and Regulations

Minority education in Western Thrace based on three treaties/protocols. The most important of them is the Lausanne Treaty. Another one is the Cultural Agreement of 1951 that was in force till 2001 and replaced by a new one, Cultural Cooperation between Greece and Turkey signed on 19 July 2001. The last one is the cultural protocol of 1968.

The following articles of the Lausanne Treaty clearly define the Turkish Muslim Minority's educational rights.

Article 40.

Turkish nationals belonging to non-Muslim minorities shall enjoy the same treatment and security in law and in fact as other Turkish nationals. In particular, they shall have an equal right to establish, manage and control at their own expense, any charitable, religious and social institutions, any school and other establishments for instruction and education, with the right to use their own language and to exercise their own religion therein.

Article 41.

As regards to public instruction, the Turkish Government will grant in those towns and districts, where a considerable proportion of non-Muslim nationals are resident, adequate facilities for ensuring that in the primary schools the instruction shall be given to the children of such Turkish nationals through the medium of their language. This provision will not prevent the Turkish Government from making the teaching of the Turkish language obligatory in the said schools.

In those towns and districts where a considerable proportion of Turkish nationals belonging to non-Muslim minorities, these minorities shall be assured an equitable share in employment and application of the sums which may be provided out of public funds under the State, municipal, or other budgets for educational, religious, or charitable purposes.

The sums in question shall be paid to the qualified representatives of the establishments and institutions concerned.

...

Article 45.

The rights conferred by the provisions of the present Section on the non-Muslim minorities of Turkey will be similarly conferred by Greece on the Muslim minority in her territory.

The other laws/decrees related to Turkish Minority Education were accepted or passed in the parliament and put into force infringing or without taking into consideration the Lausanne treaty.

Up to now for about 70 new laws, governmental decisions or decrees were accepted about minority education.

The first arrangements were done by the law no 3065/1954. With this law the minority schools were addressed as Turkish Schools. Furthermore, the school boards were able to choose the teachers. But with law no 1109/1972 the school board members lost their rights to choose teachers. And they just were making comments. Also with this law the name plates of schools were changed from Turkish Schools to Minority Schools. Then, the law number 694/1977 was accepted and all the regulations against this law were annulled. Reciprocity was accepted with this law. The most important thing was the appointments of the graduates of Special Pedagogical Academy of Thessaloniki (EPATH) to the minority schools. The EPATH teachers were appointed directly as civil servants. The law no 695/1977 brought some more arrangements to minority education. According to this law the graduates of EPATH would be the preferred teachers to appoint to the minority schools. The law no 16287/1978 describes the principles of the minority schools. The preferred principles would be from the graduates of EPATH. The governmental decision Z2/15/9.1.1985 took the nature education course from Turkish curriculum to Greek one. The governmental decision Z2/141/31.5.1995 describes the teachers' appointment. The only authority is the Nomarch of region. Law no 2341/1995 describes the assessments of teachers, the acceptance of students to EPATH and other arrangements. The governmental decision Z2/412/8.11.1995 is about rotation of teachers. The governmental decision F.152, 11/B3/790/28.2.1996 is about the %0.5 quota system for university entrance. ...

The Administration of Minority Primary Schools in Western Thrace

In Western Thrace, all primary minority schools of the Muslim Turks are private in character and managed by the school boards elected by the parents of the students. As well as public schools, all minority schools in the region are controlled by the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs. In those schools, there are different kinds of teachers; some of them are majority Greeks, some are from Turkish nationals from Turkey and the majority of them are members of minority who are graduates of Special Pedagogical Academy of Thessaloniki (EPATH). To add, the Minority interpreted this mixed administration as being detrimental for the Muslim Turks because it allowed the State to manipulate affairs to its liking without providing necessary means of support.¹

The EPATH

EPATH is an academy founded in 1968 in order to train members of the Minority as teachers for Minority schools. It started in the academic year of 1968-1969 with thirty students, who were all graduates of *medreses* (religious schools) in Komotini and Echinus. The main language of instruction of the EPATH is Greek. The duration of education used to be two years but recently, it increased to three years. Although all of the pedagogical academies in Greece were replaced by the Faculties of Education or Departments of

¹ HRW Report, *op.cit.*, 1999, p.20

Education in 1989, EPATH still remains as the unique Teacher Training Institution of this type. In the preparatory year, the EPATH students are taught Greek, Basic Mathematics, History, Psychology, Geometry, Music, Turkish, Sports, Geography of Greece and Technics². It is useful to stress that although these teachers will educate the Minority children in Turkish all of the courses except Turkish are taught in Greek that affects the level of their teaching capacity in Turkish.

Since 1967, it has frequently been stipulated that the EPATH graduates would one day replace all minority teachers in those schools who were graduated from the Turkish Teacher Training schools or those graduates of medreses. According to the education policies of the Greek governments' related to the minority of Western Thrace, today, this has proven to be true; if one looks to the minority teachers in minority primary schools it can be clearly seen that, except two teachers, all of them are graduates of EPATH whose number reaches up to 350.

Taking into account their three year of education predominantly in Greek, the EPATH teachers have highly been criticized for not knowing the Turkish language well enough to teach. This increases the suspect among the Muslim Turks that EPATH teachers have been used deliberately by the Greek State for not giving a proper and modern education to the Western Thrace Minority Pupils, such an attitude of the State authorities can widely be interpreted as an impediment against the improvement of the level of education of the Minority.

Even, there were some events in 1980s when some parents in some villages protested the appointments of EPATH graduates and their low level education as in the case of Simandra, a village in the Xanthi Prefecture.³

Related to the minority education in Western Thrace, European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) noted that in addition to the low education standards in the minority primary schools, the EPATH teachers are, also, not adequately trained to teach either in Turkish or Greek.⁴

Minority Primary Education

The Coordinating Bureau for Minority Schools based in the city of Komotini is the main state authority responsible for the administration of minority schools in Thrace. All decisions and announcements regarding Minority schools are delivered by this Bureau.

The main problems regarding the primary schools of the Western Thrace Minority have started in 1960s. As well as the problems in the minority schools, The Muslim Turks were not allowed to elect members to the schools' boards. The Law No. 694 on the "Teaching and Supervision in Minority Schools in Western Thrace" and the Law No. 695 on "Teaching and Supervision in Minority Schools and Special Academy for Teachers' Training of Thessalonica (EPATH)" are related with the status of the Minority primary schools. The Law No. 694 resulted in the gradual elimination of the teachers who had finished Teacher

² Panagiotidis, *op. cit.*, 1996, p.96

³ Neofitos Gonatas and Paraskevas Kidoniatis, *op. cit.*, p.111. See also Impram Onsunoglou, "Κριτική στη μειονοτική εκπαίδευση" (A Critique in the education of the Minority), *Συγχρονά Θέματα*, Vol.63, April-May 1997, p.62

⁴ *Τρίτη Εκθεση για την Ελλάδα* (Third Report on Greece), *op. cit.*, 2004, p.27

Training Schools in Turkey from the primary schools in Western Thrace by replacements with those of the EPATH.

The curriculum in the Minority primary schools has been bilingual. Greek, history, geography, civics, and environmental education were taught in Greek while mathematics, physics, chemistry, religion, Turkish, art, and physical education were taught in Turkish.⁵ However, the Greek language taught at these primary schools was inadequate. As a result, most of the students finishing their primary educations and attending for the secondary education in Greek secondary schools faced with a problem in Greek language and most of them failed in the first or second years of their secondary education.

The number of those finishing the Greek secondary and high schools and entering to a Greek university was too small. Also, there was inadequacy in the number of classrooms at the schools. Sometimes, the children of two different classes were taught their courses in a single classroom that had directly and negatively affected the quality of the education in minority schools. Also, the libraries within the Minority primary schools started to be abolished by the Military regime of 1967.⁶

Secondary Education

After their primary education, the minority pupils can choose to go either to the minority secondary and high schools, Celal Bayar in Komotini and Muzaffer Salihoğlu in Xanthi, or to the Greek secondary and high schools or to the two Koranic schools. According to the 2001 US Report on Greece, the number of the Minority children attending to the minority primary schools was over 8.000. In the secondary education, there were 150 minority students in the two Koranic schools, approximately 700 in the two minority secondary schools and approximately 1300 in the Greek secondary schools.⁷

Regarding the two minority secondary and high schools, their capacity is not enough to accept all the minority pupils' applications.

Related with the two Koranic schools one in Komotini and one in Ehinós, the Law 2621/1998 enabled the recognition of these schools as equivalent to the high schools of Greece. In 1999, the curriculum of these religious schools was set by the decision of the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs (G2/5560) in 1999.⁸ Since then, all the courses except Turkish, Arabic and the Religion are taught in Greek. Moreover, starting from 2000 girls are also accepted to these Koranic Schools. Today, most of the minority children applied for the EPATH are the graduates from these schools.

The Higher Education and the Minority Quota System

One of the revolutionary developments within the realm of minority education is the introduction of the quota system. In 1996, for the first time a special minority quota of %0.5 was introduced which facilitated the entrance of the minority students into the Greek universities. All Greek universities started to set aside places for the minority students. By the introduction of the quota system, the entrance to the Greek universities became much easier than before for the minority students as the minority students started to compete only among

⁵ HRW Report, *op. cit.*, 1999, p.19

⁶ Kurtuluş, *op. cit.*, p.133

⁷ *US Country Report on Human Rights Practices*, 2001, Greece, p.6

⁸ Mavrommatis and Tsitselikis, *op. cit.*, p.12

themselves but not with all the other Orthodox Greek university candidates. In the first year of the quota system, only 74 minority students entered to the Greek universities while this number increased to 114 out of 334 available places in 1998.⁹ Also, during the 2000-2001 term there were 400 available spaces but only 35 Muslim students entered universities and technical institutes.¹⁰

Conclusion

In its current form, the Minority Education System does not reinforce and promote relations between the State and the Minority. On the contrary, it creates tension and crisis of trust. This state of affairs not only undermines the obligations that Greece has undertaken by treaties and agreements, but it also contradicts with the EU legislation, directives and criteria. The current distorted structure of the Minority Education drives the minority children who enjoy both Greek and E.U. citizenship, into becoming inadequate, second-class citizens.

Recommendations

- a) *In order to improve the quality and conditions of minority education it is desirable that a dialogue is initiated between the Ministries of Education and Religious Affairs of Greece and Turkey.*
- b) *The number of teachers who would be sent by Turkey to teach at minority schools in Thrace should be restored to 36, as has been agreed by the Exchange of Letters in 1952. These teachers should be allowed to serve at minority schools in a fair and balanced manner as it was and they should be charged in a balanced way at all schools of the region.*
- c) *The general principle of the 9-year (recently has become 10-year) compulsory education should be extended to cover the minority schooling system.*
- d) *Physical infrastructure, equipment and teaching staff of the minority secondary and high schools in Komotini and Xanthi should be improved.*
- e) *4 new minority secondary and high schools, 1 minority vocational training school should be founded. While the ownership and management of these schools would belong to the minority, the State is also expected to protect and support these institutions.*
- f) *A dormitory section needs to be established for the students of the minority high school in Xanthi.*
- g) *Kindergarten education in the areas inhabited by Turks should be in mother tongue/ or bilingual.*

⁹ HRW Report, *op. cit.*, 1999, p.9

¹⁰ 2001 US Country Reports on Human Rights Practises, *op. cit.*, p.7

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