



# General Assembly

Distr.: General  
23 July 2019

Original: English

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## Human Rights Council

### Forty-first session

24 June–12 July 2019

Agenda item 3

**Promotion and protection of all human rights,  
civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights,  
including the right to development**

### **Note verbale dated 5 July 2019 from the Permanent Mission of Greece to the United Nations Office at Geneva addressed to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights**

The Permanent Mission of Greece to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva presents its compliments to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, and has the honour to provide herewith the comments of the Government of Greece in relation to the written statement submitted by the “Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe”, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status (A/HRC/41/NGO/17) (see annex).

The Permanent Mission of Greece kindly requests the Office of the High Commissioner to circulate the present note verbale and the text attached\* as a document of the forty-first session of the Human Rights Council under agenda item 3.

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\* Reproduced as received, in the language of submission only.



**Annex to the note verbale dated 5 July 2019 from the Permanent Mission of Greece to the United Nations Office at Geneva addressed to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights**

**Comments of the Government of Greece in relation to the written statement submitted by the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (A/HRC/41/NGO/17)**

The non-governmental organization “Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe” has circulated, under document A/HRC/41/NGO/17/19.06.19, a written statement containing false and misleading allegations regarding the education of the Muslim minority in Greece.

First of all, it is to be noted that the said NGO continues to use inaccurately the terms “Turkish community” and “Turkish minority” in Thrace, instead of “Muslim minority”, which is the correct term used in the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne which established the status of the said religious minority in Greece. The Muslim minority in Greece, located in the region of Thrace, is composed by three distinct groups, whose mother tongue is Turkish, Pomak or Romani. Moreover, there are no “Turkish” primary/minority schools in Greece as alleged by the above mentioned NGO. Bilingual schools for the minority have been established as “minority primary/secondary schools” since they are addressed to all members of the minority, i.e. persons of Turkish, Pomak and Roma origin.

Parents of pupils belonging to the Muslim minority in Thrace have the option to enrol their children either in ordinary public schools or in minority schools. In both cases, the special cultural, religious and linguistic characteristics of the Muslim minority are protected.

Minority schools in Greece function under a special status and, unlike the other public schools in the country, are granted a degree of autonomy in their functioning. In particular, the directors of minority schools are members of the Muslim minority and the “School Committees”, elected by the pupils’ parents of each school, play an important role in the administration of these schools (budget management, recruitment of teachers for the Turkish program of secondary minority schools, etc).

As far as kindergartens are concerned, a pilot program has been launched by the Ministry of Education, aiming at assisting minority children to adapt to the new school environment. In this context, in each class, alongside the Greek speaking main teacher, there is an assistant teacher (“facilitator”) who speaks the mother tongue of the majority of the students. The aim of the program is to facilitate the integration of minority pupils in the educational system and to better prepare them for elementary school where, in minority schools, half of the curriculum is in Greek. Given that there is a serious lack of knowledge of the Greek language, it is of paramount importance for minority children to learn the language of the country they live in from an early age, in order to be active members of this society in the future.

As regards minority schoolbooks, the Ministry of Education is currently working on their renewal, in order to better accommodate the needs of the minority students. A scientific committee, set up in 2018, is assessing the current educational material and will submit proposals for its update in the near future. In the meantime, additional teaching material has been prepared for the Greek section adapted to the needs of the pupils whose mother tongue is not Greek.

The textbooks of the Turkish section of minority schools fall under the responsibility of the Turkish Ministry of Education. Therefore, the complaints regarding their poor quality and outdated character should be addressed to the Turkish authorities. As regards delays in their distribution, it is noted that for the textbooks to be used in 2019-2020, the competent Greek authorities have already granted their approval since March 2019. It is therefore the responsibility of the Turkish side to print them and send them on time to Greece for the beginning of the new school year.

As regards minority secondary schools in Xanthi and Komotini, the Ministry of Education is examining ways to extend and upgrade the existing classrooms, as well as to

improve the overall operating conditions of these schools. Every effort is being made in order to satisfy all minority students' applications to these schools. The establishment of minority secondary schools in the countryside is not feasible given that this would require the presence of teachers of many different specializations.

Greece, while fully complying with the relevant provisions of the Lausanne Treaty, will spare no effort in further improving minority education, thus promoting the integration of the members of the minority into all aspects of both local and national society.

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