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

Written statement* submitted by Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[30 May 2019]

* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.



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. As the UN Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues, Prof. Fernand de Varennes referred at the international conference organized by the civil society organizations of the Turkish community in Western Thrace in co-operation the Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN) on 2 March 2019 in Komotini that the UN Handbook on “Language Rights of Linguistic Minorities: A Practical Guide for Implementation” notes that establishment and operation of private schools and educational services using minority languages as a medium of instruction should be allowed, recognized and even facilitated and legislation must clearly allow the establishment and operation of private schools teaching minorities in their own language.

The education of the Turkish community in Western Thrace is regulated by the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne which granted the right to establish, manage and control at their own expense any school and other establishment 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 by governmental practices over years and the Greek government has wide-ranging control over the minority schools at all levels with complex legal provisions which governs their establishment and operation.

At the pre-school level there are no minority/private kindergartens or minority/private nurseries for Turkish children to learn their mother tongue in their early childhood. The Government of Greece has rejected proposals to open Turkish-Greek bilingual kindergartens in the existing bilingual minority primary schools, despite many applications by the community organizations for establishment of bilingual kindergartens within minority schooling system and other private bilingual kindergartens in the region.

The right not to be discriminated is violated because the Greek government, fails, without an objective and reasonable justification to treat differently Turkish children who speak a different language other than Greek. Bilingual education would allow better knowledge of both Turkish and Greek from an early age and enable greater choice of whether to go to minority or Greek public primary school.

The quality in bilingual education in minority schools is very far below Greek public schools and minority schools do not meet modern needs of the minority children. The European Commission against Racism (ECRI) also noted in its fifth report on Greece that the general lack of teaching resources for the bilingual primary schools 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.

The Turkish primary schools follow a bilingual – half Greek half Turkish – curriculum, although scholars categorize this type of education model as two parallel monolingual education system, not a bilingual education model. For a qualified education in minority schools’ protests were started in 48 Turkish primary schools in September 2018 to demand textbooks which are used in state schools to be used in the Greek curriculum in minority schools instead of simplified Greek textbooks prepared under the “Program for the Education of Muslim Children” (PEM), as part of the European Union policy against social exclusion started in 1997. The protests were ended only after the meeting with the Minister of Education and his decision to the establishment of a commission for the Greek curriculum in Turkish minority schools in Western Thrace and a circular which orders the use of the textbooks in state schools as supplementary material in Turkish minority schools.

The textbooks used by the minority 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 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.

There are only two private minority secondary schools operate in Xanthi and Komotini while two religious schools operate in Komotini and Echinis. All the teachers are paid by the school board. Although these minority secondary schools should be administered and managed as any other private secondary schools in Greece, public authorities decide on the procedure of enrolment of students to these minority schools. The shortage in the number of classrooms in the two minority secondary schools is an urgent problem which has resulted in many minority children enrolling in Greek-language state schools.

Greece provides a quota of 0.5% for admission of minority students to Greek universities. Although this positive discrimination measure has been introduced, a quota of 0.5% for the Minority students on their entrance to higher education has had a slight impact due to the poor level of quality in education in minority schools.

The end result is a very low quality of education in minority schools which in turn lead social segregation, exclusion and marginalization of minority members as second-class citizens. The assimilation imposed through the medium of education, or enforced social segregation generated through educational processes, are harmful to the rights and interests of minority communities and to the wider social interest.

We call on Greek authorities to:

- a) Restore autonomy in education granted to the Turkish Minority in Western Thrace by the 1923 Lausanne Treaty in full compliance with the special status of the Turkish minority in education,
- b) Establish bilingual kindergartens within minority schooling system and allow the Turkish community in Western Thrace to establish private bilingual kindergartens where the language of education will be Turkish and Greek,
- c) Revise its policies concerning the primary and secondary schools of the Turkish minority, including their number and location, management of school councils, recruitment and training of teachers of both Greek and the Turkish curriculum, and to secure the revision and modernisation of textbooks and education materials to be used for both curriculums together with experts from both countries and the Turkish minority as well as the distribution of textbooks of Turkish curriculum in due time,
- d) Cancel the decision to minority primary schools on economic grounds in full compliance with special status of the Turkish community in education.
- e) Make good use of all available domestic and international instruments and establish co-operation and collaboration with the Turkish minority through advisory and consultative bodies in order to address problems in education at all levels including higher education.