



General Assembly

Distr.
GENERAL

A/HRC/9/G/9
9 October 2008

Original: ENGLISH

HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL
Ninth session
Agenda item 8

**FOLLOW-UP TO AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE VIENNA DECLARATION
AND PROGRAMME OF ACTION**

**Letter dated 24 September 2008 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 at Geneva and other international organizations in Switzerland presents its compliments to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and has the honour to provide herewith the reply of the Government of Greece* to the written statement made by the “Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe”, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status (A/HRC/9/NGO/38), submitted to the Council at its ninth session under agenda item 8.

The Permanent Mission of Greece kindly requests the Office of the High Commissioner to circulate the reply as a document of the ninth session.

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

Annex

MUSLIM MINORITY IN THRACE

The status of the Muslim minority in Thrace was established and has, ever since, been governed by the 1923 Lausanne International Treaty.

In general terms, based on the principle of equality before the law and of civil rights, as well as in the framework of the rule of law, guaranteed by the Greek Constitution, and in accordance with the U.N. human rights covenants, as well as the European Convention of Human Rights and the very values of the European Union, the members of the Muslim minority enjoy the same rights and obligations as any other Greek citizen, irrespective of his or her religious beliefs. In this context, they enjoy a wide range of educational rights having more than 200 primary minority schools in Thrace, with courses being taught in both languages (Greek and Turkish). In the same vein, early in 2006, the Turkish language was introduced, on an optional basis, in a number of non-minority public schools in Thrace, a condition *sine qua non* for the integration of minorities where they live.

Regarding the specific issues raised by the N.G.O. “Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe” the following should be mentioned:

- The Greek Government has indeed extended the period of compulsory education from nine to ten years. Nevertheless, this tenth year applies to children between five and six years, who go to kindergartens. Contrary to the written statement annexed to the A/I-ICR/9/NGQ/38 General Assembly document (Human Rights Council, 9th session), children at kindergartens do not have Greek textbooks (actually they do not have any textbooks) and do not follow any curriculum. Following international educational standards, the activities and games at Greek kindergartens serve as a smooth introduction to primary education. The Greek Government encourages kindergarten teachers, coming from the Muslim minority, to work at kindergartens in areas where there are many Muslims. Nevertheless, for the time being, the number of university-educated kindergarten teachers from the Muslim minority is still low, not exceeding 10 members. The situation will improve in the following years.
- Contrary to the view expressed in the written statement contained in the A/HCR/9/NGO/38 General Assembly document (Human Rights Council, 9th session), which focuses on kindergartens, the Greek Ministry of Education considers that the main problem in minority education is that the integration of Muslim pupils in the Greek society is still very low. The Greek state has adopted positive measures concerning the admission of Muslim students to Greek Universities (e.g. 0,5% of the total number of the students in all Greek Universities is reserved for students coming from the Muslim minority) and has spent over 21 million euros during the last ten years for the improvement of education in the 200 minority schools in Thrace. Nevertheless, Muslim students still have one of the highest drop-out rates both from primary and secondary education, which is mainly due to inadequate knowledge of the Greek language and trilingualism. This last problem is especially apparent among Pomaks and Roma population, which, together with those of Turkish origin, comprise the Muslim minority in Thrace.

- It has also to be pointed out that the core international documents, mentioned in the written statement contained in the A/HCR/9/NGO/38 General Assembly document (Human Rights Council, 9th session), are the 1923 Lausanne Treaty and the 1951 Cultural Convention between Greece and Turkey. It is to be mentioned that Greece is applying the said international agreements, even if 21st century developments in the field of human rights seem to go beyond the scope of the application of the agreements mentioned above. To this end, the 1951 Cultural Convention, still valid in the minority schools in Thrace, is responsible for retrogress of minority education. In the 1990's, for example, it was very difficult to introduce new subjects (e.g. computers, the English language) to minority education, simply because there was no reference to them in the 1951 Protocol! That is the reason why every year there is a geometric progress of the number of pupils belonging to the Muslim minority, who prefer to be educated in public schools.
- In a broader context, respecting and promoting diversity of cultures and multilingualism is an asset and shared responsibility within the European Union policy and practices. Therefore, Greece encourages intercultural education in the school system. Above all, this well-rooted respect of different cultures and languages is a fact of life, instead of an argument occasionally raised or used in favourable circumstances.
- To that end, we express our concern on forced “acculturation” tactics by segments of the largest in numbers part of the minority population in Thrace - that of Turkish origin - who discriminate against non-Turkish speaking members of the Muslim minority.

Within the rural social context of Muslim villages, psychological pressure ends up in massive attendance of extra-systemic “Quranic schools”, which fundamentally disrupt the educational process provided for by minority schools. This not only contributes to the structural inefficiency of minority schools but also promotes an ethno-religious pattern, alien to both the minority and the society in Thrace as a whole. Islamic values are invested with ethnic concepts affiliated with the socio-economic processes in Turkey. It is deeply disconcerting that “Quranic schools” alienate the young generation of the minority, at their first steps in life, from the social mainstream of their country, thus turning them against the values of the rest of the society.

- The articles of the 1923 Lausanne Treaty {mentioned in the written statement contained in the A/HCR/9/NGO/38 General Assembly document (Human Rights Council, 9th session)} deal with the protection of the rights of non-Muslim minorities in Turkey. Since the establishment of the Turkish Republic, these rights have been continuously and methodically violated. As a result, the vast majority of the Greek populations in Turkey have left, often forcibly, and 80% of community properties has been either seized or confiscated by the Turkish state. Infringing the Lausanne Treaty is still under way in Turkey, forming part of every day life for the remaining Greek minority population. It goes without saying that any reference to the 1923 Lausanne Treaty has to go along with mentioning these violations.
