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Western Thrace Minority
University Graduates Association

**Human Rights Council
Forum on Minority Issues
Fifth Session**

Geneva, 27-28 November 2012

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Approximately 150.000¹ Muslim Turkish People² live in Western Thrace - the northeast part of Greece. The legal status of this minority was established by the Peace Treaty of Lausanne (1923), the bilateral agreements signed between Greece and Turkey and the international instruments concerning human and minority rights, which Greece signed and ratified.

Education and religious freedom are amongst the fundamental issues creating tension and controversy between the Greek state and the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace. As it is highlighted in Articles 2, 4, and 6 of the 1992 UN Declaration, States should provide necessary conditions for members of minorities to practice their own religion freely as well as getting instruction in their mother tongue.

Article 2

- 1. Persons belonging to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities (hereinafter referred to as persons belonging to minorities) have the right to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practise their own religion, and to use their own language, in private and in public, freely and without interference or any form of discrimination.*
- 2. Persons belonging to minorities have the right to participate effectively in cultural, religious, social, economic and public life.*

Article 4

- 1. States shall take measures where required to ensure that persons belonging to minorities may exercise fully and effectively all their human rights and fundamental freedoms without any discrimination and in full equality before the law.*
- 2. States shall take measures to create favourable conditions to enable persons belonging to minorities to express their characteristics and to develop their culture, language, religion, traditions and customs, except where specific practices are in violation of national law and contrary to international standards.*
- 3. 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.*
- 4. States should, where appropriate, take measures in the field of education, in order to encourage knowledge of the history, traditions, language and culture of the minorities*

¹ According to the information taken from the Web page of The Secretariat of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace the population of the Turks living in Thrace is around 140.000-145.000.

² Recognized as Muslim Minority by the authorities.



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existing within their territory. Persons belonging to minorities should have adequate opportunities to gain knowledge of the society as a whole.

Article 6

States should cooperate on questions relating to persons belonging to minorities, inter alia, exchanging information and experiences, in order to promote mutual understanding and confidence. Page | 2

To begin with educational matters, **Article 4.3 of the Declaration gives persons belonging to minorities the right to have instruction in their mother tongue. Similarly, many human and minority rights instruments and Peace Treaty of Lausanne state that, members of the minority have the right to establish, manage and control their own schools and to use their own language freely.** But, as a result of the Greek governments' continuous interference in the educational issues of the Turkish Minority, the type of education provided at Minority primary and secondary schools has gradually changed. That is, minority education that was supposed to be private and autonomous has now a *sui generis* character; it is a combination of private and public in which the impact of the Minority over issues of education remains highly restricted, which fails to serve fundamental educational needs.

The Greek state has put in force a number of laws, decrees and governmental decisions regarding the minority education from nursery to secondary level. These regulations not only contributed more to the improvement of the state language instruction (Greek) at minority schools but also undermined the educational autonomy and increased the weakness of the instruction of the Turkish curriculum.

Regarding bilingual primary education, as for the year of 2011 there were 188 minority primary schools functioning across Western Thrace. In May 2011, this number decreased to 174 with the decision of Ministry of Education, Lifelong Learning and Religious Affairs that enabled combining schools across the country. However, the combination in Western Thrace has been done without taking into account the distance between villages with Minority population and infrastructural deficiency.

The compulsory education in Greece (including the pre-school education) is 10 years which is not applied for the minority education; the Greek officials responsible for matters of minority education keep ignoring those Minority students who stop their education after finishing primary schools. The existence of six-year compulsory education for minority students as opposed to 10-year compulsory education for the majority ones is not only perceived and interpreted by the Minority as a double standard infringing the principle of equality of citizens, but also as another Greek application contributing to isolation of the Muslim Turkish Minority by keeping its educational level below the average across Greece.

As for the secondary education, the number of minority secondary and high schools where education is held in both Turkish and Greek remains inadequate. There are only two minority secondary and high schools in the region, one in Komotini and the other one in Xanthi. Also, there are two quranic-religious schools/*madrasah*. Although almost half of the population in Western Thrace is Turkish, there are only four bilingual secondary and high schools (two of



them are *madrasah*) while the number of monolingual Greek public schools count more than 100 in all three prefectures of Western Thrace.

Similar to those in minority education, fundamental problems in the realm of religious freedom and development of religious characteristics of the Turkish minority in Western Thrace still persist. One of them is the right to elect the religious heads/muftis which is guaranteed with 1881 Istanbul Treaty, 1913 Athens Treaty, the Treaty of Sevres (Greek Sevres) and 1923 Peace Treaty of Lausanne and referred also in **Article 4.2 of the Declaration**. However, since the beginning of 1990s Greece has been rejecting the right of the Minority members to elect their muftis. It rather insists on appointing them in spite of 5 instances, i.e. *Serif v. Greece* (14 December 1999-Case No: 38178/97), *Agga v. Greece* (No.1-2) (17 October 2002-Case No: 50776/99 & 52912/99), *Agga v. Greece* (No.3) (13 July 2006 – Case No: 32186/02) and *Agga v. Greece* (No.4) (13 July 2006 – Case No: 33331/02) concluded against Greece for violating Article 9 of the ECHR.

There are more than 250 mosques operating in Western Thrace, where Muslims can freely perform their prayers. Almost all imams functioning at these mosques are selected and paid by the members of the Muslim Community. **Along with matters about election of muftis, the Law 3536/2007** is highly controversial and has been opposed by the Minority on the grounds that it is contrary to the article 43 of the Peace Treaty of Lausanne that protects the religious freedom of the Muslim Turkish Minority. According to the provisions of this law, 240 imams or seminary teachers would be appointed by a five-member committee composed of Christian officials only that is incompatible with the Islamic Faith. Similar to those enshrined in **Article 6 of the Declaration**, provisions of international treaties and documents that Greece signed and ratified contradict with this Law which does not promote mutual understanding and cooperation between the Minority and the Greek State, thus infringing religious autonomy and threatening the freedom of faith.

Similar to mosques, Muslim charitable foundations/waqf constitute an essential part of Minority's cultural, historical and religious heritage. Until the advent of the 1967 Junta regime, the Minority had defined members of Administrative Boards of the Muslim Foundations. Since then, the Greek governments have been appointing Minority members to these boards as a result of which the minority lost its control over administrations of these foundations.

Religious and ethnic institutions that are mentioned above usually suffer from being victims violent Islamophobic and hate-motivated attacks. Some examples of recent attacks are as follows:

1. Poshbosh (Poşboş) Muslim Cemetery (16 February 2012): On Thursday evening, 16 February 2012, unknown people attacked to the Pospos neighborhood Muslim cemetery. Around 10 gravestones were damaged. This is the third attack in two years to the same cemetery.

2. Xanthi Turkish Union (23 March 2012) On Friday, March 23, 2012, Xanthi Turkish Union was attacked by an unidentified person or persons. The perpetrators wrote “ΕΕΩ ΟΙ ΤΟΥΡΚΟΙ (TURKS OUT)” on the walls of the Union.



3. Bektashi tomb in Xanthi (23 March 2012). On 23 March 2012 an unidentified person or persons wrote "ΤΟΥΡΚΟΣ ΚΑΛΟΣ ΜΟΝΟ ΝΕΚΡΟΣ (The best Turk is the dead Turk)" on the walls of a Bektashi tomb located in the downtown Xanthi.

4. Komotini Turkish Youth Union (6 August 2012). On 6 August 2012 some members (around 150 people) of the Golden Dawn – extreme right-wing organization- attacked to Komotini Turkish Youth Union. After the demonstration in the Komotini city center that was organized by local authorities about the issue of the refugees, a group of people – members of the Golden Dawn organization – marched towards the Turkish Consulate General in Komotini and chanted slogans against Turkish Minority and Turkey. The police did not allow them to enter to the street where the Turkish Consulate is located. Then, the group gathered in front of the Komotini Turkish Youth Union, they read Greek National Anthem and they threw plastic bottles to the Turkish people sitting in the garden of the Union. Page | 4

Members of the Turkish Minority have also been facing difficulties in having permission to pray or to organize cultural activities at the mosques and religiously important sites nearby Thrace since 2010. The members of the Association of the Religious Officials of Western Thrace Mosques applied on several occasions to the Greek authorities in order to have permission for performing religious ceremonies at the Zincirli Mosque in Serres, at the Fethiye Mosque in Ioannina, and at the Osman Sah- Kursun Mosque in Trikala. All the applications were declined.

Lastly, the situation in Rhodes and Kos of the Dodecanese islands is getting worse day by day. In these two islands where more than 5.000 Turkish people live, Greece officially denies the minority status of the Muslim Turks in the region arguing that they are excluded from the minority protection regime stipulated under 1923 Lausanne Treaty. Muslim Turks living in these islands are also faced with similar problems with that of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace (inter alia, administration of Muslim pious foundations called waqfs, election of their religious leader called Mufti, having an access to minority education in Turkish and the like).

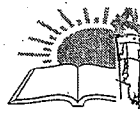
Ms/Mr. Chairperson,

Therefore, we call upon the Greek State

To respect the provisions of the 1992 Declaration and other human and minority rights instruments as well as 1923 Peace Treaty of Lausanne regarding educational and religious autonomy of the Muslim Turkish Minority in Western Thrace,

To introduce new measures for the solution of problems in the realm of bilingual minority education,

To take necessary steps to recognize the elected muftis of the Turkish Minority,



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Take into account the minority's will regarding the law No: 3647/2008 about charitable foundations passed by the Greek Parliament and entered into force on February 29, 2008, and make necessary changes and revise it after a dialogue with Minority representatives,

To abolish the practice of state appointed imams (law no: 3536/2007) that violates the religious autonomy of the Turkish-Muslim minority enshrined in the 1913 Athens, 1920 Greek Sevres and 1923 Lausanne Treaty, Page | 5

To make necessary arrangements to give permission for the Turkish Minority people to pray nearby Western Thrace without any restrictions,

Dr. Ali Huseyinoglu
Member

