



General Assembly

Distr.: General
3 September 2010

English only

Human Rights Council

Fifteenth session

Agenda items 2 and 3

**Annual report of the United Nations High Commissioner
for Human Rights and reports of the Office of the
High Commissioner and the Secretary-General**

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

Written statement* submitted by the 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.

[23 August 2010]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

The problem of high-quality minority education and the EPATH

The report on the rights of persons belonging to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (A/HRC/15/42) summarized the most relevant concluding observations on the rights of the minorities made by treaty bodies in considering initial and periodic reports of States parties. The Committee on the Elimination Racial Discrimination (CERD), in its concluding observations on the report submitted by Greece, requested more information about the groups that form the Muslim minority in Thrace, and about the measures the Government had taken to protect the identity and human rights of these groups.

Since there is no data with regard to the ethnic division of the population in Greece, there could be no certain information about ethno-linguistic division of the minority. Today the Turkish Muslim minority in Western Thrace has an estimated membership of 150.000 in Greece, mainly concentrated in Xanthi(İskeçe), Komotini(Gümülçine), Alexandroupolis(Dedeğaç). The Turkish Minority in Western Thrace may have different linguistic groups within it, while they are all members of the Muslim minority, of which ethnicity is defined as Turkish in the Etabli Documents granted in accordance with the provisions of the Agreement on the Exchange of Turkish and Greek Populations on 30 January 1923. The document of the League of Nations submitted to the Council on 23 December 1924 and remarked C. 774 on the “Minorities of Turkish Race in Western Thrace” used the term “Turkish” for the minority living in Greece. The Muslim Turkish minority in Western Thrace accounted for 65% of the local population in the region in the 1920s, the first years when the Treaty of Lausanne was signed, whereas they now account only for 30% of the local population in the region, and 1.3% of the total population (2001 census).

In the report by Thomas Hammarberg, Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe¹, following his visit to Greece on 8-10 December 2008, which was released on February 2009, the Commissioner recalled that freedom of ethnic self-identification was a major principle in which democratic pluralistic societies should be grounded and should be effectively applied to all minority groups, be they national, religious or linguistic. On 18 February 2009, the report of the UN Independent Expert on Minority Issues, Gay McDougall, following her mission to Greece on 8-16 September 2008, stated that “the absence of formal recognition by the state of a particular societal group as constituting “a minority” is not conclusive”. The Independent Expert continued that, “Rather, the existence of a group to which a state owes minority protections is a matter of objective facts and exercise of the right of self-identification by persons belonging to the group”. However, Greece does not subscribe to the right of any group to self-identification on a collective basis and the right of assembly or association of the group which seeks to determine its identity. Although so-called other segments within the minority are recognized and even welcomed and supported by Greek authorities, the Turks are not allowed to use their right of self-identification, while the existence in a country of ethnic minorities is defined on the basis of collective rights.

¹ Report by Thomas Hammarberg, Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe, following his visit to Greece on 8-10 December 2008, CommDH(2009)9, <https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?id=1409353&Site=CommDH&BackColorInternet=FEC65B&BackColorIntranet=FEC65B&BackColorLogged=FFC679>.

The Committee, in its report, expressed its concern about the reports of forced dissolution and the refusal to register associations with words such as “minority”, “Turkish” or “Macedonian” in their titles. It is unfortunate to state that this issue still remains to be solved, despite the Committee’s expression of its concern about a year ago. Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights Thomas Hammarberg, also expressed his worry that this situation led in fact to a number of relevant applications before and of unanimous judgments against Greece by the European Court of Human Rights. To date, there are no measures or steps taken by the Greek authorities on the solution of this problem. Lately, the application of South Evros Minority Culture and Education Association for registration has been rejected by Greek civil court on the ground that the term “minority” has a vague definition. There is still no step taken on registration of that association.²

The Committee concerned at the obstacles encountered by Roma and Turkish speaking persons, particularly in their access to employment, housing, health care and education. ABTTF would like to mention that although the right to education of the Minority is guaranteed and protected under the Lausanne Treaty, the autonomy of the Minority in education has systematically been violated by the State. The Turkish Minority in Western Thrace does suffer problems in the field of education, although the situation has slightly improved in recent years.

The right to education is not in practice enjoyed equally by the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace, and the Minority suffers from unequal access to quality education due to bad and inappropriate education strategies. ABTTF would like to draw attention to an old but recently most discussed problem with regard to education of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace, Special Teacher Training Academy of Thessaloniki (EPATH), which is founded in 1968 by the Junta regime in stark violation of the rights of the Minority guaranteed by the treaties.

EPATH, which provides training for future teachers who will work in the minority schools of the Turkish Minority in Western Thrace, does provide a low-quality education predominantly in Greek language. Although all pedagogic academies in Greece have been replaced by the Faculties of Education or Departments of Education, EPATH still exists in its current form. Moreover, the main language of education is predominantly Greek in EPATH, teachers have poor level of knowledge in Turkish language. It remains a serious concern that teachers graduating from EPATH are not qualified to have skills to teach in Greek and Turkish languages. That prevents Minority students who attend the Minority schools to learn both Greek and Turkish languages. Now, there left only teachers graduated from EPATH, since there are no more Turkish teachers graduated from Teacher Training Schools in Turkey, as of June 2009. Today, over 400 teachers in the minority schools are mostly graduates of the EPATH. This bad education strategy violates human rights of the Minority and is harmful to its interests.

In the report “Freedom of religion and other human rights for non-Muslim minorities in Turkey and for the Muslim minority in Thrace (Eastern Greece)” (Doc. 11860, 21 April 2009) prepared by Michel Hunault, member of the Parliamentary Assembly of Council of Europe, the rapporteur noted that it remained a serious cause for concern that the teachers graduating from the EPATH, which trained teachers for the Muslim minority primary schools in Thrace, were reported to have poor skills in both the Greek and Turkish languages (in which they were supposed to teach). The report noted that some members of the Academy were replaced by a faculty of a higher level.

² Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe, “Güney Meriç Azınlık Kültür ve Eğitim Derneği’nin kurulmasına red kararı”, Press Release, 7 May 2009, <https://www.abtff.org/html/index.php?link=detay&id=2042&arsiv=1>.

In the panel meeting “EPATH: Past, Present and Future” on 26 June 2010, organized by Thalia Dragonas, the Special Secretary for Educational Planning and Intercultural Education at the Greek Ministry of Education, Lifelong Learning and Religious Affairs, the representatives of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace stated that the EPATH should be replaced by a faculty of four-year higher education of which students were admitted only from members belonging to the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace. On 30 July 2010, Dragonas sent a letter to the EPATH that there was going to be no entrance examination to the EPATH in the 2010-2011 education years. Though, the uncertainty still remains about the future of the EPATH.

The Turkish Minority should have a right to participate in the life of the State and in decisions affecting itself and its children’s future. In the field of education, this right implies input by minorities into the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of education programmes and the administration of educational institutions.

In light of the information above ABTTF calls upon the Greek authorities:

- To adopt urgently all necessary measures in order to make possible the effective enjoyment by Minority members of their right to freedom of association, in full alignment with the Council of Europe human rights and minority protection standards.
- To replace the EPATH by a department of four-year higher education that will admit students only from the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace, and to establish a mechanism for dialogue between governmental authorities and the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace in the form of advisory or consultative bodies that will be the channel for the Minority to raise its own voice.