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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 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.

[22 August 2013]

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

The right not to be discriminated and the education in mother tongue: The problem of bilingual minority pre-school education in Greece

Every person has a right to education and to any other fundamental right dependent upon the realization of the right to education, the principle of equality and non-discrimination in the enjoyment of the right to education is a key to securing equal access to quality education for persons belonging to minority groups. The discrimination in educational opportunities and marginalization prevent minority children to take part fully in economic, social, cultural and political life of their country.

Under the 1923 Lausanne Peace Treaty, Turkish Minority of Western Thrace has an equal right with the non-Muslim minority in Turkey to establish, manage and control at their own expense, any charitable, religious and social institution, 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 through a number of regulations and practices, which resulted in a low-qualified education in minority schools with structural problems regarding training of teachers, the curriculum and textbooks.

During fact-finding mission that Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) and Friendship, Equality, Peace Party- the minority's own political party- organized on 16-20 October 2012 with the participation of Hans Heinrich Hansen, President of Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN), MEP François Alfonsi (France) and Willy Fautre, Director of Human Rights Without Frontiers Int'l, the delegation found that the problems in the field of education are alarming and that the school education of minority children in Turkish and in Greek is an emergency issue.

The rapporteur Willy Fautre, Director of Human Rights Without Frontiers Int'l, stated in his report entitled, "Ethnic Turks in Greece: A Muslim Minority" based on his observations and consultations with the minority people that "the reality is however far from the provisions of this treaty (Lausanne) and from the official position of the Greek Government."¹ The rapporteur noted that state intervention on minority issues to such an extent that in practice, the Greek Government, through the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs, has wide-ranging control over the minority schools at all levels, whether it concerns the composition and the functioning of the school boards, the hiring and firing of teachers, the distribution of textbooks or the building and repair of school buildings.

When the former UN Independent Expert on Minority Issues, Gay McDougall, visited Greece on 8-16 September 2008, there were 194 minority primary schools in Western Thrace with courses taught in both Turkish and Greek.² The number of minority schools was 188 in 2011 and the Ministry of Education, Lifelong Learning and Religious Affairs declared in May 2011 that the number would be decreased to 174 minority schools due to the economic crisis. In the decision of minority schools merger, the distance between the minority villages and infrastructural problems were not taken into consideration.

In February 2013, Greek Ministry of Education, Lifelong Learning and Religious Affairs has decided upon a temporary closure of 12 minority schools on the grounds of insufficient number of students. SYRIZA Xanthi Deputy, Mr. Hüseyin Zeybek- a member of the

¹ For the full report, please visit https://www.abtff.org/images/22._Raporlar/2012-1128-Report-Ethnic-Turks_.pdf

² A/HRC/10/11/Add.3 para. 24, <http://daccess-dds.ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G09/111/98/PDF/G0911198.pdf?OpenElement>

Minority- asked, in July 2013, a written question to the Ministry of Education that on what ground the decision to suspend the activities of minority schools is taken and requested the copy of the official decision.³ The minority deputy stated that the number of pupils on minority schools which were temporarily closed has increased this year and local representatives and the parents asked the authorities to resume activities of these 12 minority schools.

When the former UN Independent Expert on Minority Issues visited Greece in 2008, she stated in her report that a commonly stated problem is the absence of bilingual kindergartens for the Muslim minority. Four years later, Willy Fautre also noted that one of the most important problem stated during consultations with minority representatives and civil society organizations is the absence of bilingual minority kindergartens for the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace. In accordance with Act 3518/2006 which envisages the extension of the compulsory period in education from nine to ten years, the pre-school education for all children at the age of 5 has been made compulsory. The Act does not bring any regulation about ethnic and cultural difference of the children in Greece; all children who complete the 5th year of their age are obliged to attend state kindergartens where the language of education is only in Greek.

In reply of the written statement submitted by ABTTF to the 9th Session of the UN Human Rights Council, the Permanent Mission of Greece to the United Nations Office at Geneva on behalf of the Government Greece, submitted a letter to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and claimed that children at kindergartens did not have Greek textbooks, because they did not have any textbooks or any specific curriculum.⁴ The Representative underlined that activities and games were the only means used in kindergartens which served as a smooth introduction to primary education and helped to avoid segregation of the Muslim minority from the rest of the Greek society.⁵

The right not to be discriminated is violated because Greece without an objective and reasonable justification fails to treat differently minority children who speak a different language other than Greek. The local representatives of the Minority- the Minority MPs at the Hellenic Parliament, mayors and elected local representatives-signed a petition in 2010 for the inclusion of pre-school education into the minority schooling and submitted it to the Greek Ministry of Education. Though, the petition was not taken into consideration by Greek authorities.

During fact-finding mission in October 2012, the delegation visited Echinós(Şahin) village in Xanthi and met parents of the 20 minority children of whom children were not enrolled to the first grade of the primary school in September 2012 on the ground that those children did not attend public kindergarten. The delegation talked with the principal of primary minority school in Echinós, Hasan Kurak, who was dismissed from his position by the regional school inspectors because he allowed the children to attend the classes.

During consultations, the parents stated that they did not want to send their children to public kindergartens where the language of education is only Greek. Mothers of the concerned children told Human Rights Without Frontiers in Echinós, “We were told by the educational authorities to write in one of the documents to be completed that our children had not been able to go to a kindergarten because they had been sick during the whole school-year or because we did not have the financial means to do so, but we refuse to lie.”

³ http://www.gundemgazetesi.com/news/detay_02.php?h1_id=1401

⁴ See http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/minority/oral_statements_forum_minority_2008.htm

⁵ <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G08/164/39/PDF/G0816439.pdf?OpenElement>

The problem has been solved in November 2012, this, however, does not mean a long-lasting solution to the problem of bilingual minority kindergartens. Since minority children are obliged to attend public kindergartens where the education is only Greek, a similar problem may break out in other villages in the next school year.

The former UN Independent Expert on Minority Issues, Gay McDougall, recommended in her country visit report on Greece⁶ in 2008 that bilingual kindergartens would allow better knowledge of both Turkish and Greek from an early stage therefore providing benefits in terms of integration, and enabling greater choice of whether to go to minority or Greek public primary school.

The Government of Greece should be urged to respect its obligations under the Treaty of Lausanne and take measures in order to restore the autonomous structure in the field of education. Greece should respect, protect and promote the rights enshrined in the Lausanne Treaty and act in full compliance with the provisions of the Treaty and the core international human rights treaties of which Greece is a party.

We urge Government of Greece to:

- establish bilingual minority kindergartens in region in line with the minority schooling system;
- give bilingual education in public kindergartens in the region until bilingual minority schools are established;
- allow the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace to establish private kindergartens where the language of education will be Turkish and Greek.

⁶ See <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G09/111/98/PDF/G0911198.pdf?OpenElement>