

# UNRECOGNIZED MINORITIES IN GREECE

## ALBANIAN, MACEDONIAN AND WALLACHIAN MINORITIES

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FEDERATION OF WESTERN THRACE TURKS IN EUROPE

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## **Albanian Minority**

Albanians are one of the oldest peoples of the Balkan Peninsula and it is believed that their origins go back to Illyrians. The Albanians living in Greece can be categorized in 3 groups:

- Orthodox Albanians (Arvanites)
- Muslim Albanians (Chameria / Thesprotia Albanians)
- The immigrant Albanians from Greece after the Cold War

The Albanians in the first 2 groups have been subject to exile or ethnic cleansing or assimilation at different times by the Greek state. The Greek administration does not acknowledge their ethnic identity and existence and claim that those especially belonging to the Orthodox branch of Christianity are “Hellenist”. Although there are those who define themselves Greek in this group qualified as “Arvanites”, the underlying reason for this situation is the Greek policy based on assimilation.

According to the findings of Hugh Poulton, an expert on the Balkans, a crowded Albanian population existed in Attika, Boeotika, south Evvoia and Hidra, and even in the Plaka district of Athens up to three generations before. Plaka was known to be the Albanian district of Athens, their own courts existed there and the transactions were conducted in Albanian. This situation continued until 1940's, and after the claims made by the Greeks during the World War II and the Greek civil war that “Albanians cooperated with the occupying Italians”, the Albanians in the country were either deported, or massacred or were exiled to the various regions of Greece. The language of the Arvanites which stayed in Greece is faced with the danger of extinction as a result of the Greek national Orthodox church and the assimilatory education system education system and the social pressure. According to the data of the European Bureau of Lesser Used Languages, Albanian is spoken in the disconnected regions far away from each other in the central and southern regions of Greece. However, this is only possible in private life, inside the house. The fact that it is spoken openly within the society is reacted by the Greek public.

The other Albanian group living in Greece, Chamerian Albanians have been the target of a comprehensive genocide. During the civil war, the EDES gangs under the command of General Napoleon Zervas comprising the anti-communist front was struggling against the communist

EAM-ELLAS forces on the one hand, and conducting a mopping-up operation against the non-Greek elements such as Macedonians and Albanians on the other hand.

Before the Greek occupation when a mobilization was declared in Greece, the Chamerian Albanians, which were the Greek citizens, applied to the Greek government to express their wish to enlist and yet they were used as construction workers with pickaxe and shovel although they were registered within the scope of mobilization. The Greek administration feeling worried about this mistake they had made a short time ago during the Italian occupation exiled all the men aged 14 and above to concentration camps and treated them as wars of prisoners. The main great massacre against the Albanian public in Chamerean region was started to be committed on 27 June 1944. A genocide was conducted in which people were dismembered and the pregnant women as well as the babies were massacred.

Between 27 June 1944 and March 1945, Greeks massacred 3242 civilian people in Chameria as a whole of which 2900 were old or young men, 214 were women and 96 were children. Also 745 women were raped, 76 women were abducted, 32 babies below the age of 3 were massacred, 68 villages were completely destroyed, 5800 houses and worship buildings were demolished. After these atrocities, the surviving Chamerian Albanians had to leave their homeland. The survivors found themselves in a position of not using their own tongue in their own homeland as a result of the policy of Athens which denies the Albanian ethnic identity except the Orthodox identity. The properties and possessions of the Albanians who were deported or ran away were distributed to the settlers brought to the region and all the place names in the region were translated into Greek.

Today the Chamerian Albanians continue their struggle for their rights through the Chamerian Political Patriots Association located in Tirana. The Albanian People's Council approved and declared 27 June as the commemoration day for the Chamerian genocide with the decree passed 30 June 1994.

The Chamerian issue was dealt with in the 4th general assembly meeting of the Organization for the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples in January 1995 and as Decree 12 the following points were emphasized.

- Returning of the Chamerian people to their homeland and returning of their rights,

- Granting the right of returning their possessions to the Chamerian people,
  
- Granting the rights resulting from the international agreements and documents, and to this effect acknowledging the historical facts of the Chamerian issue and taking serious steps by the Greek government. Especially with the efforts of the Chamerian Political Patriotic Association, the issue of “Chamerian genocide” has been discussed in the international platforms in such a way that some results have been obtained: According to this;
  
- In the special session held on 20.08.2002 by the U.S. Senate, Cham issue was discussed and the Albanian press carried that the U.S. Senate turned on the green light for the solution, that an international ground was created with the US handling the issue of Cham which is an important subject and the first victory was won, and that the statements made by the Representative of Greece in reply were not considered satisfactory.
  
- International Radical Party on the advisory status in the UN has taken the decision that Chamerian issue would be submitted to the European Union Parliament and required the Greek Government to respect the rights of Chamerian people in accordance with the agreement on human rights. One of the deputies in the EU Parliament of the Radical Party, Ema Bonino stated that they signed a motion together with 6 EU deputies in order to ensure the issue to be discussed in the EU Parliament.
  
- In the UK, the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst and the Center for Investigation and Inquiry of Discrepancy has the book entitled “Chamarian Issue” published.

The immigrant Albanians comprising the third group include those who came to Greece especially after cold war which is assessed to be an appropriate place to find a job as it is EU member. At the moment there are almost 300.000 Albanian immigrants in Greece, which has a high potential for illegal immigration, and it has been the Albanians which have been affected the most by the measures against the immigrants taken by the Greek administration. For example, while 200.000 illegal immigrants were deported in 1992, 150.000 of them were Albanians.

The smear campaigns conducted against the Albanian immigrants in the Greek press have resulted in the emergence of animosity against Albanians called Albanophobia in the Greek society.

As they are illegal immigrants, the Greek people have abused this weakness of theirs and there have been Greek people who have employed the Albanians at a very low wages, who have not paid for the work they conducted and who have threatened to notify the police if they claim for their rights.

The practices against the Albanian immigrants in Greece are always on the agenda of the annual reports of the human rights organizations. In the press release on 27 March 1998, it is stated that the mayor of Palio Keramidi in Pieria banned the Albanian immigrants to go out after the sunset and this has been a decision violating the human rights as well as a racial one. In the same press release it is mentioned that the members of the organization established by the name of “Committee for the Robbery Victims” in Ikaria wearing the dresses similar to Ku-Klux-Klan organization in the USA have attacked the innocent Albanians. One of the examples included in the reports is that in 1995 an employer in the Crete killed his two Albanian immigrant employee in order to pay their wages.

All the Albanians working in Greece whether legally or illegally are viewed with prejudice and considered as criminals and they have a disorderly life as they have no social security and their children have no opportunities for education - training.

It appears that the Albanians in Greece whether they are the Chams remained in the region surviving the genocide, whether they have been artificially categorized as Orthodox-Arvanites or whether they are the immigrants who are the Albanian citizens will continue to be the victims of the systematic discrimination and assimilation policies in this country as long as the irrational calumnies of the “albanophobia” which is a shame of humanity exist.



## **Macedonian Minority**

A community defining itself as of Macedonian origin and defending that they have different ethnical origin from the other Greek citizens, and therefore they constitute a minority exists in the region surrounded by the Pindus Mountains, the Rhodope Mountains and the Aegean Sea. Greek government considers the word “Macedonian” as a geographical term defining all the Greek citizens living in the North of Greece, rejects the claims that the minority of Macedonians exists in Greece and defines this minority group as the “Slavic-Greeks” or “bilinguals”. Since the first invasion movements, Indo-Germans, Celts, Illyrians, Thracians, Dacians, Dorians, Akas, Avars, Kuman-Kipchaks, Mikens, Bulgarians, Slavics, Romans influenced this land either through temporary invasions or permanent occupations; various tribes reigned through different administrations. A small tribe called Macedonian established an administration around the River Bisritsa under the leadership of Perdikas I. at the beginning of 1000 B.C..

During the long history of Macedonia, from 7th century BC to 10th century BC, the Macedonian Kingdom (Philip II, Alexander the Great), the Roman Empire, the Eastern Roman (Byzantine) Empire, Bulgarian and Serbian Kingdoms and Ottoman Empire ruled over this region.

The Balkan Wars of 1912-1913 were one of the significant milestones in the Macedonian history. While Serbia annexed “Vardar Macedonia”, Bulgaria annexed “Pirin Macedonia”, Greece seized “Aegean Macedonia” covering an area of 33.953 square kilometers and having a population of more than one million and it began to repress and “non-nationalize” the Aegean Macedonians through the intensive policy of assimilation and ethnic cleansing which has lasted up to now.

With the Law 352 of 1926, Greece initiated a large- scale campaign to “Hellenize” all the place names in Aegean Macedonia and the names of Macedonian families. In addition to the place names included in the copies number 322 and 324 on 21 and 23 November 1926 of the Gazette it was made obligatory to change the family names to the names with the suffixes “os”, “is” or “pulos”.

On the other hand, all the Macedonian names, symbols were removed from the churches, monuments, archeological pieces and graveyards, all the religious and literary work in Slavic-

Macedonian were seized and burnt. Speaking in Macedonian was strictly forbidden, it was not even allowed to use in wedding and religious ceremonies and the Macedonians were sent to the obligatory language courses in Greek. Those who spoke in Macedonian were subject to repressions, they were sent to the prisons or concentration camps and yet this policy has caused their national conscious to be strengthened more.

In consequence of the civil war in Greece during and after the World War II, the massacres against Aegean Macedonians increased, 16 thousand people were killed in the west of Aegean Macedonia, 440 women and girls were raped, 120 thousand people were tortured in the concentration camps, hundreds of people went mad in consequence of the tortures, arson attacks were carried out against 1291 houses, 80 villages were plundered and thousands of people had to leave their homes. These pressures caused a significant number of Aegean Macedonians to immigrate overseas especially the USA and Australia. With the Law 3958 of 1959 the lands of those who were “not Greek by birth” and left Greece and did not return to the country for five years were confiscated and it was Aegean Macedonians who were affected by this law most.

All these pressures caused Aegean Macedonians inside and outside of Greece to unite further and to establish associations in order to protect and maintain their national existence. The non-governmental organizations such as Macedonian Human Rights Central Organization Committee, Humanitarian and National Rights Movement for the Macedonians of Aegean Macedonians, Macedonian Human Rights Center which were established in 1980's within the boundaries of Greece and yet not considered as legal by the Greek administration began work to fight against any pressure applied against Macedonians in Greece and to struggle to use their mother tongue Macedonian in education, churches and every field of live and to improve the language.

In fact, all the Slavic-Macedonian formations - whether they are legal or illegal (the establishments of which are not approved by the Greek Government) living in Aegean Macedonia are basically legal. For the members of the Macedonian minority living in Greece are the citizens of this country and Greece is in the position of a state which has made commitments on minority rights and human rights by signing many international documents and especially as a member of the European Union by making a series of commitments and yet not fulfilling any of them.

Being very good at assuming the non-existence of international practices, Greece has claimed “the Alexander the Great of Macedonia” and hasn’t acknowledged the name, the constitution and the flag of the Macedonian Republic with its sixteen-pointed star of Vergina on the red ground after it declared independence in 1991 in consequence of the collapse of Yugoslavia. However, as a result of the severe economic embargos imposed by Greece, Macedonia had to change certain items in her flag and constitution.

Feeling uneasy about the new Macedonian government due to the Macedonian ethnic minority in its land, Greece, as the first job, declared the diplomas received from the University of Kiril I Metodi in Skopje null and void on the grounds that the language of instruction in this university was Macedonian and there was no such a language as Macedonian.

On the other hand, because Greece had not obtained the expected support either from the European public opinion or the USA despite all its attempts; on the contrary because an atmosphere favoring Macedonia and disfavoring Greece has occurred, Greece started to prevent all the commercial activities except the shipment of materials of urgent need in addition to its efforts to prevent the shipment of goods and oil which it had started to apply against this country. It applied a strict embargo against Macedonia especially concerning Thessaloniki-Skopje railway between 1994-1995. This resulted in the occurrence of serious problems in the Macedonian economy.

Despite being a party to significant international agreements on human rights Greece conducts practices against the minorities in the country, which are not overlooked and which are displayed in many reports issued up to now. In the human rights reports issued by the USA in 1990 and the following years Greece has been criticized decisively for the discriminative and oppressive policies it has applied against the Macedonian and Turkish minorities and similar expressions are also included in the annual reports of the many international organizations such as Amnesty International and Helsinki Watch, etc. The Macedonian human rights promoters in Greece are always monitored and subject to repression as well. Of these, the prominent ones who are involved in the events drawing attention of the international community compared to other activists are Hristos Sidiripulos, Tasos Bulis, Nikodimos Tsarknias, Petros Dimitsis, Stavros Anastasiadis, Konstantinos Gotsis, Stavros Sovislis. The judicial and administrative pressures

those people have been subject to and the physical damages inflicted by the security forces have been reported by many organizations and announced to the international public opinion.

One of the Macedonian human rights advocates Sidiripulos, stating that immediately after the occupation of the Aegean Macedonia in 1913, in order to frighten the Macedonian public and to prevent the children from attending the Macedonian schools, his grandfather was hanged by the tongue by the Greeks and his father was tortured severely on the grounds that he collaborated with the communists during the Greek civil war, was convicted for intending to establish “Macedonian Culture Center” which he tried to realize for keeping alive the Macedonian language and the culture in 1990 for the first time and for using the statement that “there is Macedonian minority in Greece” in the OSCE Humanitarian Dimension Meeting held in Copenhagen in June 1990. In a report-commentary carried in the Times on 22 August 1994 it was stated “Sidiripulos should be granted asylum by the UK vis-à-vis the repression deemed proper for him.”

One of the Macedonian human rights defendants, Nikodimos Tsarknias the priest was subject to great repression and physical manhandling, spent years in courts and he was discharged from the priesthood in consequence of defamation although he only requested the essential rights of speaking in Macedonian, conducting their religious ceremonies in their mother tongue, singing their national songs and had no request or made statement that Aegean Macedonia should separate from Greece. Such practices against Tsarknias being physical attack in character were proved with health reports and they were included in the agenda of the human rights organizations.

Almost 30.000 children at the ages of 2 – 14 who were taken outside of the country by the Red Cross for protection in 1947-48 are around 50's at the moment and they have not been able to return their homeland in Greece. Those people who are not even allowed to enter and short-term stay in Greece have become organized among them and established an association called “The Association of Refugee Children from Aegean Macedonia”.

In 1998 the members of this association planned to have a gathering and commemoration in order to see and visit the places they were born on the 50th anniversary of 1948; however, as they knew the attitude of the Greece they got in touch with International Helsinki Federation of

Human Rights and required assistance. Yet, these people were not allowed into the country despite the fact that this organization got in touch with the Greek deputy minister of Foreign Affairs Yorgo Papandreu of the time, requested his assistance and received a positive answer. This situation brings to mind the question of to what extent and how the Greek bureaucracy and the statesmen can be trusted.

Greece does not grant any rights to Aegean Macedonians with regards to political activities. The Macedonian minority party called “Vinojito” established in Lerin (Florina) on 6 September 1995 was reacted immediately; the party building was attacked with stones and clubs in consequence of the provocation of the Mayor of Florina and its signboard was taken down.

The party founders Vasilis Romas, Kostas Tasopulos, Petros Vasilidis and Pavlos Vaskopulos were tried for “they used their mother tongue openly”, in the trial held 15 September 1998 the Vinojito Party was acquitted in presence of the representatives of the international organizations participated on the announcements and invitations of Macedonians.

A political organization called “the Macedonian Movement for the Welfare of the Balkans” established in Sobotsko (Aridea) in 1989 is also included in the struggle of the Macedonian minority for their rights in Greece. Although this movement participated in the elections of the European Parliament held in Greece in 1994 jointly with the Vinojito, it was able to receive only 7.263 votes in consequence of the obstructions and the various measures taken through administrative and legal means by the Greek authorities.

As the legal process on “the Macedonian Cultural Center” (Macedonian Civilization House)” which the Macedonian minority intended to establish in 1990 but which was not opened with the decree of the regional court of Florina (Lerin) was completed in Greece and no permission was given, the founders took up the subject to the European Court of Human Rights in Strasburg. The trial process, which began on 24 March 1998, was finalized on 10 June 1998. European Court of Human Rights sentenced Greece in accordance with the Article 11 of the European Convention and the decisions taken in the OSCE Humanitarian Dimension Meeting held in Copenhagen. Unfortunately, Athens administration, in an illegal way, still resists not give permission for the opening of this center.

It is possible to see the mentioned practices of the Greek Administration violating the Aegean Macedonians' human rights in the annual reports of all the human rights organizations and it is wished for Greece, an EU country, to give up considering all the minorities living on its territories as an ethnic danger and to start treating them at least in accordance with the due citizenship rights.

## **Wallachian Minority**

The Wallachians, which are among the local elements of the Balkan Peninsula and one of the oldest communities of the region are one of the non-Greek minorities living in Greece. The Wallachians is a Macedonian-Romanian speaking community of Latin origin which settled in the Balkans at very early times having a population of 2.500.000 scattered to various countries. Although the Wallachians call themselves as Romani, Romeni, Aromani, they are defined by the Greeks as Helens speaking a certain dialect or Kutsovlakh, or even Latinized Helens in times of Roman Empire. According to the Wallachian Diaspora sources, the number of Wallachians living in Greece may be 250.000 – 1.200.000. Evangelos Averof of Wallachian origin, one of the former Greek foreign and defense ministers stated that this number was 150-200.000 as of 1948. In Greece 2 different Wallachian languages are used, one being the Megleno-Romanian and the other being Wallachian. The group speaking Megleno-Romanian are called Vlasi and this group is the Latinized branch of Pechenek and Kipchak Turks according to Winnifrith known for the Wallachian studies.

The Wallachian minority living mainly in the mountainous regions and the regions of valley in Greece is a community dealing with herd shepherdness, farming and trade. The Wallachians live in the Pindus mountains and its vicinity in Greece, Thessalia, the western and northern regions of the Aegean Macedonia, Vermion Mountain and its vicinity and the region of Meglen in the north of Thessaloniki.

According to Wace and Thompson known for their research on Wallachians, they come from the same origin as the Romanians. Also, the fact that the Wallachians have a nomadic – shepherding life, a feature established by all researchers, does not allow they have any kind of connection with Greeks from socio-cultural and anthropological respects which claim persistently that they have had a settled civilized structure for centuries. Even Richard Clogg who is known for a Greek sympathizer state that the Wallachians speak a language similar to Romanian and they are an important minority in Greece today.

The most important turning point in the history of Wallachians is the acknowledgement In consequence of the educational activities conducted by Margarit the Wallachian priest born in the Pindus region, an intensive conscious raising movement occurred among the Wallachians in the second half of XIX century. The education given by Margarit to Wallachian youth, the fact that he taught the language of Wallachian to them and the Romanian schools opened up in the region

over time activated the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate and as a result, the Patriarchate which had established an indisputable hegemony over all the Balkan Orthodox people for centuries felt very uneasy about this development and reacted against it. As a result Margarit went to Bucharest and joined the Macedonian – Romanian Committee. However, these developments were taking place during the rule of the Ottoman Empire in the region. Within this framework, 6 Wallachian representatives and 2 priests who came to Istanbul in 1892 complained about the activities and the pressures of the Patriarchate against them and requested help. As a result, the Ottoman administration made it possible for Wallachians to establish their own churches and to hold their religious ceremonies in their own language. The Greeks felt uneasy about these developments and they threatened the Wallachian priests with gangs. In February-March 1905, the Greeks attacked the Wallachians living in the villager of Florina-Nikhovan and murdered 6 people.

Acknowledged by the Ottoman State in 1905, the Wallachians had a short but a new period in which they had equal rights officially for the first time; thus, they were able to elect their own administrators, have their own churches and schools and send representatives to the Ottoman Parliament. In the process up to the Balkan Wars, the Wallachian deputies were present in the Ottoman Parliament and worked with the deputies of other “nations”.

With the mentioned granted rights, the number of the Wallachian primary schools in the region until 1912 increased to 114, high schools to 4 and they published almost 20 journals-newspapers in their own language.

The national anthome lyrics written by Wallachians national poet Konstantin Belematse, after being recognised as a nation by Sultan Abdulhamit II, is still alive.

The Balkan Wars of 1912-1913 affected the Wallachians in a negative way as it affected all the minorities living on the territories of the Ottoman state in which it lost its dominance. With the 1913 Bucharest Agreement Greece acknowledged the Wallachians in the Aegean Macedonia coming under its own rule and allowed their schools and churches at first, however, it also took precautions limiting the use of their language in the public places in order to destroy the national conscious among the Wallachians.

In the period between two wars, especially during the dictatorship of Metaksas, in consequence of the state terrorism applied in Greece, the Wallachians were pressurized to learn Greek like the



Macedonians and those who attended the Wallachian schools were discriminated against those attending the Greek schools.

The second turning point in the history of Wallachian history is the period of “Pindus Princedom”. During the World War II in Greece which is under the occupation of Italy, the establishment of “Pindus Princedom” under the Italian guidance and the leadership of Alkibiades Diamandi which is intended to be won from Wallachians for “fascist cause” was made possible. Diamandi who was declared as the prince for this formation that is autonomous was at the same time leading the military force known as “Roman Legion” and the Princedom included Epirus as well as the whole of Thessalia. However in consequence of the defeat of Italy this attempt ended in failure. Some of the Wallachians considering themselves separate and different from the Greeks accepted the assimilation policy applied by the Greek State to a certain extent. They were even assimilated, however, those who displayed stiffer attitude left Greece and immigrated to the overseas countries such as the USA and Australia and they formed a Wallachian Diaspora.

The national conscious of the Wallachians immigrated to the USA, Australia and Western European countries is stronger and they have maintained their relations through the associations they have established. “the Farsarotul Association” in the USA, the Wallachian Language and Cultural Union established in Germany/Freiburg lead by Vasile BARBA can be given as examples. On the other hand, with the initiatives of BARBA, the professorships of Romanistic of Mannheim and Freiburg universities made a protocol and realization of the “International Aromence Profesorship” in August 1986. There are almost 3000 Wallachians in Germany and they try to maintain their language and identity through the Center for Wallachian Language and Cultural Union and Wallachian Studies.

On the other hand, in 1998 the European charter of Regional and Minority Languages which was also signed by Greece and put into practice by the European Council Balkans Committee in 1998 introduce a protection including the language of Wallachian. Although the initiative called European Bureau of Lesser Used Languages (EBLUL) stipulating the protection and survival of the lesser used languages in Europe is supported by the European Union, the EU member Greece is reacted.

However although the Greek propaganda finding a solution for every problem has the Wallachian associations established under its own guidance conduct activities and try to give the

image that the Wallachians maintain their cultural existence, the fact that they are conducted in Greek indicate clearly that the so-called scenarios are performed.

The Greek officials, overlooking the activities of the so-called associations established for their own purposes, was not tolerant for the Wallachian minority leader called Sotiris Bletsas trying to distribute a map prepared by EBLUL in 1995 and illustrating the “Lesser Used Languages in Europe”. Bletsas was manhandled by the police for his act, he was sentenced to 15 month imprisonment and a fine for 500.000 Drachma. P. Dimitras, the Spokesman for the Greek Helsinki Monitor who was closely interested in the subject was attacked physically by a YDP deputy in a television program. After the event of Bletsas who was arrested for distributing the map prepared by the EBLUL supported by the EU, a Western diplomat felt the need to say that “Let’s see when they will arrest the EU.”

In consequence of the fact that one of the leaders of the Wallachian Diaspora in Germany BARBA’s requesting support from the Romanian Parliament in 1994 and the reports submitted to the European Council, the European Council started to deal with the Wallachian issue since 1996. As a result, the European Council approved the report submitted by the Spanish deputy Luis Maria de Puig on 24 June 1997 unanimously.