

report

The Right to Education in Mother Tongue and State Intervention in the Autonomous Education System of the Turkish Community in Western Thrace



Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe



Kalfa Turkish Primary School, Belirli Tarih Arşivi
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Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe

Föderation der West-Thrakien Türken in Europa
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Introduction

This study aims to address the educational problem faced by the Turkish community in Western Thrace living in Greece from the past to the present. Our autonomous and private education system, which is important for the continuation of our Turkish identity, language and culture, has been dismantled by the state's intervention and arbitrary practice over the years.

This study addresses the problem faced over the years by the Turkish community in Western Thrace, which was granted national minority status in Greece under the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne, in the field of education within the historical process. The problems encountered in kindergarten, primary school, secondary school, high school, and religious school within the Turkish school system are presented under separate headings.

This study reveals how our Turkish school system, registered as a private school and granted autonomy, was dismantled by the state as a result of changes in laws and regulations and arbitrary practices. It also includes the advocacy and lobbying efforts of ABTTF, the international representative of the Turkish community in Western Thrace.

The conclusion of the study includes our demand for the autonomy of the Turkish school system, which was granted autonomy through international agreement, to be reinstated in order to resolve the current problem.

The additional section at the end of the study presents the fieldwork conducted by our institutions active in the field of education in our region with parents, teachers and board members, along with the observations and assessments related to the results.

With this study, we aim to reach you as the voice of the Turkish community in Western Thrace in the international arena and to gain your support for the right to education in the mother tongue, which is of critical importance for our future generation, and for the full restoration of our private and autonomous education system, guaranteed by the treaties.



Halit HABİP OĞLU
ABTTF President

Where is Western Thrace?

Geographically, Western Thrace refers to the region between the Evros River and the Nestos River, which today defines the Turkish-Greek border in the northeast of Greece. Today, Western Thrace consists of the prefecture of Evros (Meri),

Komotini(Gümülcine) and Xanthi(İskeçe).

With the signing of the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne between Türkiye and Greece, the Turkish community in Western Thrace was granted national minority status in Greece.



The Private and Autonomous Education System of the Western Thrace Turks in the Historical Process

Greece declared its independence from the Ottoman Empire by signing the Treaty of Edirne in 1829. Following the declaration of independence, the right of the Turkish community living within the border of Greece to receive education in their mother tongue was enshrined in the 1881 Treaty of Istanbul, the 1913 Treaty of Athens, the 1920 Treaty of Sèvres on the Protection of Minorities in Greece (to which Türkiye was not a party), and the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne.

According to the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne, the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace has the right to establish, administer and manage 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 (Article 40).

As can be observed, education in the mother tongue, i.e. Turkish language education is guaranteed. Turkish schools are "autonomous" and therefore have "private school" status, granted by the aforementioned Treaty of Lausanne.

Historically, private and autonomous Turkish schools have been directly affected by developments related to the country's own political condition and the course of relations with Türkiye, a party to the Treaty of Lausanne.

While regulation concerning Turkish schools were being made in national legislation between 1923 and 1936, the Metaxas coup in Greece in 1936 led to a hardening of attitude toward the Turkish community in Western Thrace. After the coup, the position and teaching of Turkish books, which were

the mean of mother-tongue education in Turkish school, was banned without receiving permission from the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs.

In 1949, during the reign of the First King, some improvements were made to restrictive practices of the coup regime. During this period, the Turkish community in Western Thrace was granted the authority to employ teachers for Turkish schools. The authority to employ teachers was granted to school boards consisting of three members, who were elected by parents. School boards were made responsible for the general operation of the school, with the authority to employ teachers in cities and villages for a fixed salary. Thus, the operation of Turkish schools, which were granted autonomy in education, was regulated by domestic law.

After 1950, during the Cold War period, Turkey and Greece joined NATO in response to the Soviet threat and danger, marking the beginning of a positive period between the two countries. During this period, a Cultural Protocol was signed between Turkey and Greece in 1951. Under this Protocol, based on the principle of reciprocity, teachers who had graduated from teacher training colleges in Turkey came to Western Thrace for the first time, and Greek teachers were sent to Greek schools in Turkey. Teachers known as "quota teachers" were assigned to schools in Western Thrace and to schools belonging to the Greek community in Turkey on a reciprocal basis. Young people belonging to the Turkish community in Western Thrace studied at teacher training colleges in Turkey with mutually defined scholarships. At the same time, the curriculum in Turkish schools in Western Thrace was re-organized, and Turkish textbooks were used within the scope of the Turkish curriculum in the schools.

The positive course of bilateral relations paved the way for the opening of the first Turkish secondary and high school in our region. The then President of Turkey, Celal Bayar, visited the region in December 1952 and attended the groundbreaking ceremony for the first Turkish Secondary and High School in the region. The school was named Celal Bayar Secondary and High School after the visiting President.

During this period, the "Minority School Education Law" came into force in 1954; signs bearing the word "Turkish" were hung on Turkish schools, and report cards and diplomas were issued in Turkish, the language of instruction, and Greek, the official language of the country. This situation is proof that the ethnic Turkish identity of the Turkish community in Western Thrace, which is denied today, was officially recognized by the state at that time. However, as you will see below, today the state does not recognize the ethnic Turkish identity of the Turkish community in Western Thrace and, despite the fact that

education in Turkish schools continues in two languages, Greek and the language of instruction and Turkish as the mother tongue, it does not use the term "Turkish" in any official documents or correspondence.

The course of relations between the two countries has always had a direct impact on the Turkish community in Western Thrace. Problems between Turkey and Greece over the Cyprus issue have resulted in increased political pressure on the Turkish community in Western Thrace. During this process, in 1964, a problem arose over the name of the secondary school and the name of Celal Bayar High School was changed to "Komotini High School".

When the Greek military junta seized power in 1967, all the rights of the Turkish community in Western Thrace were suspended. In the year following the end of the coup, laws, regulations and practices were implemented that dismantled the autonomous structure in education and practically eliminated it entirely.

One of the most striking examples of attempts to dismantle the autonomous structure was the ban on the definition of "Turkish" schools by the Inspectorate under the Ministry of Education. This ban was implemented without any change to the legislation; it was applied entirely arbitrarily.

One of the biggest blows to the Turkish school system, which was autonomous and registered as a private school, was the junta's ban on the election of school boards in Turkish schools. The boards were appointed by the junta, preventing parents from freely electing the administration of Turkish schools. With the law enacted in 1972, the definition of "Turkish School" was officially abolished, and the power of the school boards responsible for the operation of the schools were formally restricted following arbitrary practices.

Another measure implemented by the state with the deliberate and intentional aim of lowering the quality of education in Turkish schools was the establishment of the Special Pedagogical Academy of Thessaloniki (EPATH). Founded in 1968 by the junta regime to train teachers for Turkish schools, EPATH conducted its education in Greek, with Turkish, the mother tongue, taught only as a language course.

Although the junta regime ended in 1974 and democracy was restored in the country, the opposite happened for the Turkish community in Western Thrace, and our rights and freedoms were gradually taken away. Instead of being abolished, EPATH, which was established under the junta regime, continued to exist.

As you will read in this study, the weakening of the private and

autonomous Turkish school system within the scope of the right to education in the mother tongue of the Turkish community in Western Thrace has been a state policy implemented since the founding of Greece, not by individual government. In other words, throughout the historical process marked by positive and negative development depending on the course of relations between the two countries, the strengthening of the autonomous Turkish school system has never been the goal. On the contrary, despite changing conditions, the long-term objective has always been to weaken the education system by reducing its quality and ultimately eliminate it entirely.

As a reflection of this state policy, the transition to democracy did not bring about significant change in Western Thrace; on the contrary, undemocratic methods continued to be implemented in the region. Individuals who graduated from religious schools belonging to the Turkish community in Western Thrace were admitted to the aforementioned EPATH. This step aimed to create division within our community and provided education in Greece to individuals who graduated from schools that trained religious officials to serve in mosques in the region. When these individuals graduated from the academy and were appointed as teachers to give instruction in Turkish at Turkish schools, they possessed neither the necessary proficiency in the Turkish language nor the academic competence and pedagogical training required to give instruction.

Article 31 of Law No. 695/1977 stipulates that "EPATH graduates shall be preferred when appointing and employing Muslim teachers." This prevented the employment of teachers who had graduated from teacher training colleges in Turkey, thus dealing a fatal blow to the policy implemented to lower the quality of education in Turkish schools.

The changes made to the powers of the board elected by parents' vote in the operation and administration of autonomous Turkish schools are another blow to the autonomous school system after EPATH.

With the 1978 "Ministerial Decision No. 70464/29.6.178 on the Duties and Competencies of the Minority School Board in Western Thrace" (Official Government Gazette B' 579, 1978), the duties and competencies of the board in Turkish schools were determined. This decision effectively transferred the powers of school boards regarding the establishment and management of Turkish schools to the Governor. This arbitrary application of the law was carried out through the definition of "Administrative Institution" found in all articles of the law. Due to the broad discretionary power granted to the Governor, the education system, which should have been autonomous, has been largely dismantled. The management of privately registered Turkish schools gradually passed into the hands of the state, creating

a complex structure between the state and the private school system.

As can be observed, the appointment of school boards by the Governor and the employment of academy graduates rather than graduates of teacher training colleges in Turkey in Turkish schools were decisions taken with the aim of lowering the quality of education in Turkish schools in the region.

Turkey's intervention in Cyprus in 1974 and the subsequent establishment of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) in the north of the island in 1983 marked the peak of the period of poor relations between Turkey and Greece. Greece, citing the Treaty of Lausanne, claimed that there were no Turks in Western Thrace, based on the definition of a "Muslim minority in Thrace"; the three oldest associations in the region were dissolved because of the word "Turkish" in their names. One of the three associations was the Western Thrace Turkish Teachers' Union, which represented Turkish teachers working in Turkish schools.

Following the 1980s, when the autonomous structure of education was hollowed out by legislative changes and arbitrary practices, bilateral relations between Turkey and Greece took a positive turn in the 1990s thanks to the friendship that developed between the then Greek Foreign Minister George Papandreou and Turkish Foreign Minister İsmail Cem.

This situation has also had a positive impact on the Turkish community in Western Thrace. In 1995, a 0.5 per cent quota was introduced to allow Turkish students from Western Thrace to enrol in Greek universities, thereby facilitating access for students belonging to the Turkish community in Western Thrace. However, over the years, students graduating from Turkish schools, where the quality of education has declined due to state intervention, have lagged behind their peers in Greek universities and have experienced serious difficulties in higher education, which continue to this day.

A special education project, the "Programme for the Education of Muslim Children (PEM)", was implemented between 1997 and 2008 with funding from the EU. However, as mentioned above, even during a period of positive bilateral relations, the goal of eliminating the autonomous Turkish education system in the long term was not abandoned. Although the language of instruction in Turkish schools is Turkish, their mother tongue, and Greek, the official language of the country, and although this programme was implemented in Turkish schools, it was named the "Programme for the Education of Muslim Children"; this name is proof that the state did not pursue a well-intentioned and sincere policy. The programme did not aim to develop the Greek language skills of students attending Turkish schools and

raise bilingual children; on the contrary, it aimed to teach Greek to foreigners, meaning that Greek was taught to students as a second language. Furthermore, the programme did not take any steps to strengthen the mother tongue, Turkish, as the language of instruction in Turkish schools.

Following the earthquake in Greece in 1999, as a reflection of the improvement in bilateral relations, books prepared by Türkiye for students who had been forced to read photocopies of old Turkish books for years began to be distributed in Turkish schools in 2000, although this had been the case in the past. Board elections, which had not been held for years, were finally held in 2000. However, the power of the board has been reduced to almost nothing over time due to numerous laws and regulations.

As a result, the steps taken aimed to indirectly steer children toward public schools rather than strengthening Greek in

Turkish schools. This has led to a decline in the quality of education in Turkish schools. This situation has also caused the social segregation, exclusion and marginalization of Western Thrace Turkish as a second-class citizen.

As you will see below, when viewed from the historical perspective described here, the problem at all levels of how that the state's education policy toward the Turkish community in Western Thrace has been aimed at eliminating the autonomous and private Turkish education system in the long term from the very beginning.

Below, the level of education in the autonomous Turkish school system will be examined individually, and the right to education in the mother tongue and the problem in education will be conveyed for each level.

Primary Education in Western Thrace

Kindergartens

One of the most significant problems for the Turkish community in Western Thrace is the absence of Turkish kindergartens providing education in the mother tongue.

Law No. 3518/2006 rendered pre-school education compulsory in the country, but when this law was implemented, the educational autonomy of the Turkish community in Western Thrace was not taken into account. In other words, when the law was implemented, no separate provision was made for Turkish children who speak another mother tongue.

Despite the implementation of the law in primary schools belonging to the Turkish community in Western Thrace, permission has not been granted to open Turkish kindergartens within the framework of educational autonomy. Furthermore, the state does not permit the establishment of private kindergartens in the region that would provide education in both Turkish and Greek.

This situation violates the principle of equality in education.

On the other hand, the state does not prevent the existence of German or French kindergartens in the country. The state does not interfere with foreign schools in the country providing pre-school education in their own native language within their own

private school systems. Under these conditions, only children belonging to the Turkish community are denied the right to receive education in their own native language, Turkish, at the pre-school level.

Preventing Turkish children who speak another mother tongue and who are Greek citizens from establishing schools that allow them to receive education in their mother tongue without an objective and reasonable justification constitutes discrimination.

Today, Turkey constitutes 55 per cent of the population in Rodopi, 45 per cent in Xanthi and 10 per cent in Evros. There are 43 public kindergartens in Rodopi, 49 in Xanthi and 81 in Evros, but there is not a single kindergarten in any of the three prefectures where the native language is Turkish.

Since kindergarten education is compulsory, Turkish families have no choice but to send their children to public kindergartens and children attending public kindergartens experience a rapid detachment from their mother tongue due to the fact that the language of instruction is exclusively Greek.

The Culture and Education Foundation of Western Thrace Minority (PEKEM)¹, which operates in Western Thrace, applied to open bilingual nursery schools in the village of

¹ PEKEM is a non-profit, foundation-type company established in Xanthi (Iskeçe) on 7 May 2007 with 44 founding members. PEKEM's fundamental mission is to support scientific research and cultural studies related to Western Thrace and the Turkish minority, to co-operate with local and foreign institutions and organizations in accordance with the company's articles of association, and to raise the educational and cultural level of the Turkish community in Western Thrace by opening educational institutions.

Thamna (Eşekçili) and Selero (Gökçeler) among the private kindergartens existing in Greece, but the application was rejected. Consequently, the matter has been taken to court. The first hearing of the case concerning the application for the school in Thamna was expected to be held on 16 November 2022, but the hearing has been postponed to 25 September 2024. The hearing for the case in Selero was expected to be held on 14 December 2022, but was finally held on 26 June 2024. However, the outcome remained unchanged; PEKEM's application to open bilingual kindergartens were rejected.

As of today, there is not a single kindergarten in Western Thrace that provides education in the mother tongue, i.e. Turkish, and Turkish children have no choice but to attend public school. Many children find it difficult to adapt to public kindergartens where only Greek is used. After a difficult adaptation process, Turkish children are faced with the choice between Turkish primary schools and public primary schools after finishing kindergarten. Increasingly, families are choosing to send their children to public primary school. As we have always said, this situation is an indirect result of a deliberate state policy aimed at the long-term elimination of the Turkish school system.

Primary Schools

According to the Treaty of Lausanne, Turkish schools in Western Thrace belonged to the Turkish minority and had a private and autonomous functioning, meaning that all school expenses and management were also the responsibility of the community. Every Turkish village has its own charitable foundation, and the village school, mosque and land are managed by a board of trustees elected by the community. The school's expenses were covered by the rental income generated by the foundation and donations from parents. The management of the school was the responsibility of a committee elected by the parents.

With the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne granting autonomy in education, Turkish schools provided education in two languages: Turkish and Greek. Even during the Second World War, when the region was under Bulgarian occupation, bilingual education continued in Turkish schools, this time in Turkish and Bulgarian. After the war, with the return of Western Thrace to Greece, education was organized in Turkish and Greek, and report cards and diplomas were issued in both languages.

In summary, the system of private and autonomous Turkish schools has suffered greatly over the years due to state intervention, and educational autonomy has been largely dismantled.

However, in addition to the Treaty of Lausanne, international treaties to which Greece is a party also stipulate that the child's mother tongue must be protected and the right to education in the mother tongue must be observed, and that the state has a responsibility and obligation in this regard. Article 4(4) of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities, Article 18 and 22 of the UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 2(1) of the UN International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Article 13, 14 and 15, Article 7 of the UN International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, Articles 28 and 29 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child guarantee the principle of education in the mother tongue and equality in education.

However, the state is pursuing the opposite policy, deliberately implementing measures aimed at undermining the private and autonomous Turkish school system. Our country persistently avoids becoming a party to the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCNM) and the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (ECML) of the Council of Europe.

Another major blow to the Turkish community in Western Thrace's autonomy in education was dealt following Law No. 694/1977 and Ministerial Decree No. 55369/1978. While education in schools continued in Turkish and Greek, the schools were designated as "Minority Schools" rather than Turkish schools, and report cards and diplomas were prepared only in Greek. This practice continues today, and the official language of correspondence in Turkish schools is exclusively Greek.

The decline in educational quality in primary schools, which the state has attempted to render ineffective through laws, decrees and ministerial decisions, has led to an increase in the number of parents choosing the public school system over time. The same scenario has been applied in Rhodes (Rodo) and Kos (İstanköy). This situation heightens our concern that the region will eventually experience a similar outcome to what happened in Rhodes and Kos. When Rhodes and Kos were transferred from Italy to Greece under the 1947 Treaty of Paris, the Turkish community on the island had its own schools and provided education in Turkish. The three Turkish schools in Rhodes and the two Turkish schools in Kos were closed in 1972 and have never re-opened. Today, the state defines the Turks living in Rhodes and Kos as "Muslim Greeks".

Structural problems in primary schools

As stated above, private and autonomous Turkish school run two curriculum consisting of Turkish and Greek lessons. Since the ethnic Turkish identity of the Turkish community in Western Thrace is not recognized, there are currently two curriculum in Turkish school: the "Minority Programme" and the "Greek Programme", administered by the state.

In accordance with the 1957 Ministerial Decree issued under the 1951 Turkish-Greek Cultural Protocol, the objective and principle of the Turkish language, science, mathematics, geometry, life skills, religious studies, art, music and physical education courses taught in Turkish within the Turkish curriculum have been determined.

Due to the changing number of classrooms in school, periods also have changed. However, when we look at the number of lessons in the Turkish and Greek curriculum following the signing of the Treaty of Lausanne, we can observe that in the early years, the number of lessons taught in Turkish was more than those taught in Greek, but over the years this distribution has reversed. Over time, the curriculum has been changed by numerous circulars, and the number of lessons taught in Greek has steadily increased.

Today, subjects such as Turkish, Mathematics, Science, Religious Culture, Art and Music are taught in Turkish, while subjects such as Greek, History, Geography, Civic and Life Skills are taught in Greek. In primary school with fewer than four grades, Physical Education is taught in Turkish, but in school with more than four grades, it is taught in Greek as a subject. Similarly, English is also taught as a subject in Greek. Today, in six-year primary school, the total number of Turkish lessons has been reduced from 126 hours to 83 hours. The total number of lessons taught in Greek has been increased from 60 hours to 112 hours. However, in autonomous Turkish school, the number of lessons should be divided equally between Turkish and Greek, maintaining a balance between the Turkish and Greek curriculum.

Another structural problem in primary school is textbooks. Textbooks for subjects taught in Greek are distributed free of charge by the Ministry of Education, as is the case in other public schools. The real problem lies with Turkish textbooks. According to the 1951 Cultural Protocol between Turkey and Greece, Turkish textbooks should be prepared by Turkey and distributed in Turkish schools after approval by the Greek Ministry of Education. However, for many years, Turkish textbooks were not distributed to Turkish schools. In particular, after 1970,

Greece did not allow the use of textbooks from Turkey, and this situation continued until the 1999 earthquake. As a result of the positive impact of the 1999 earthquake on relations between the two countries, textbooks from Turkey arrived in Greece; however, problems with the Ministry of Education's approval and the distribution of textbooks to schools continued until the 2005-2006 school year. Until that year, the textbooks used in primary schools were old editions, which were photocopied and used in classrooms. This problem was resolved in 2006 with the arrival of new textbooks from Turkey.

As stated above, the teacher shortage in Turkish schools also seriously affects the quality of education. The fact that Western Thrace Turks who graduated from Turkey were not employed and only EPATH graduates were employed in Turkish schools has led to a decline in the quality of education provided in our schools. EPATH was closed in 2010 and replaced by department affiliated with the Faculty of Education at Aristotle University of Thessaloniki but this is far from solving the problem in education.

On the other hand, Greek teachers who teach Greek language courses do not know Turkish, and despite working in the private and autonomous Turkish school system, they do not have separate pedagogical training. The state does not provide special training for teachers who teach in Greek, nor does it meet the request of Turkish teachers who teach in Turkish for in-service training and seminars in Greece or Turkey.

In summary, despite the autonomy of the Turkish school system being guaranteed in treaties, the overall quality of education in Turkish primary schools, which struggle with chronic problems due to state intervention, lags behind that of Greek public schools.

In its 2015 report on Greece, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) noted that the situation in Turkish schools was generally due to a lack of teaching resources (<http://rm.coe.int/fifth-report-on-greece/16808b5796>). The Commission stated that this situation led to lower educational standards and achievement levels among Turkish children and, consequently, to their social and economic exclusion.

As detailed in the historical process, this situation is a manifestation of the state policy aimed at completely eliminating the Turkish school system in the long term, as in Rhodes and Kos.

The rapid decline in the number of primary schools

Looking at the number of Turkish schools belonging to the Turkish community in Western Thrace, a shocking overall picture emerges. While there were 305 Turkish primary schools in 1930, the number of Turkish primary schools in the 1954-1955 school year was 292.

Due to migration to European countries and Türkiye as a result of changing political conditions over time, the number of schools has decreased, with 76 primary schools closing in 70 years, bringing the total to 229.

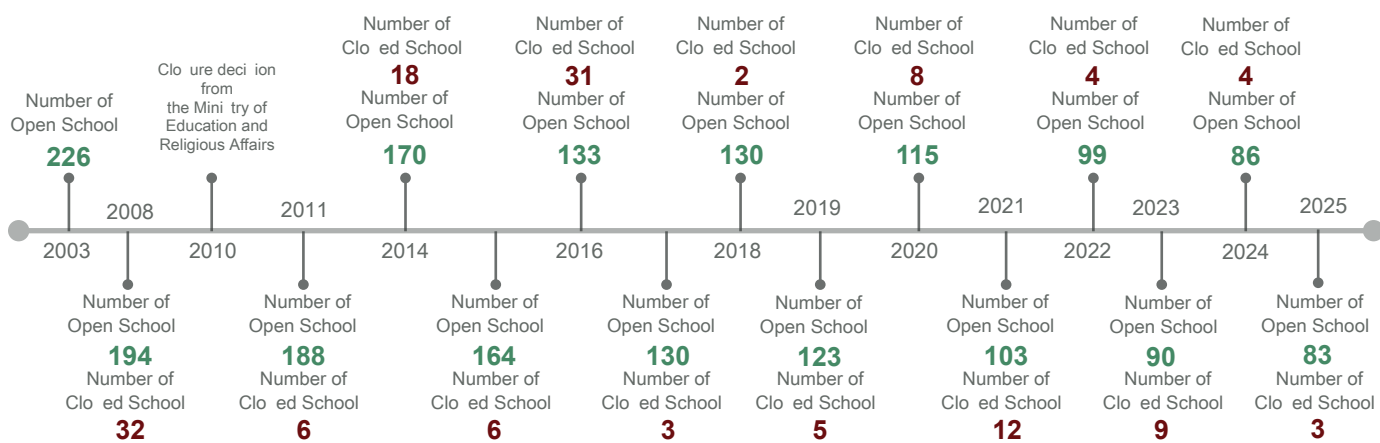
However, the dramatic decline in the number of Turkish primary schools occurred after 2010. In 2010, as part of austerity measures to combat the economic and financial crisis, the government decided to temporarily suspend the activities of public schools with fewer than nine pupils for three years and to close them if the number of pupils did not increase after three years.

However, this method which was applied to public schools was also unfairly applied to private and autonomous Turkish primary schools. According to the Treaty of Lausanne, the Turkish minority has the right to establish, administer and manage its own schools, but this autonomy was again ignored and Turkish primary schools were also closed on grounds that they had a low number of students.

In the 2009-2010 school year, there were 194 Turkish primary schools in Western Thrace. When the Ministry's decision was implemented in 2011, the number of Turkish primary schools was 188, but this figure fell to 170 in 2014, 164 in 2015, 133 in 2016, 130 in 2017, 128 in 2018, 123 in 2019, 115 in 2020, 103 in 2021, 99 in 2022, 90 in 2023, 86 in 2024, and 83 in 2025.

As can be observed, this practice has become a systematic tool of discrimination against the Turkish community in Western Thrace. Since 2010, there has been a very rapid decline in the number of Turkish primary schools. This is because the closure decisions were taken unilaterally without any consultation with the Turkish community in Western Thrace, and the closure decisions were communicated to the schools.

The number of Turkish primary schools belonging to the Turkish community in Western Thrace has fallen rapidly due to the suspension and subsequent permanent closure of schools with fewer than nine pupils. Families wishing to send their children to Turkish primary schools are forced to send them to Turkish primary schools in neighbouring villages via transport education due to the closure of the Turkish primary schools in their own villages. However, the school transportation system also brings other problems. For this reason, families have begun to prefer sending their children to public schools.

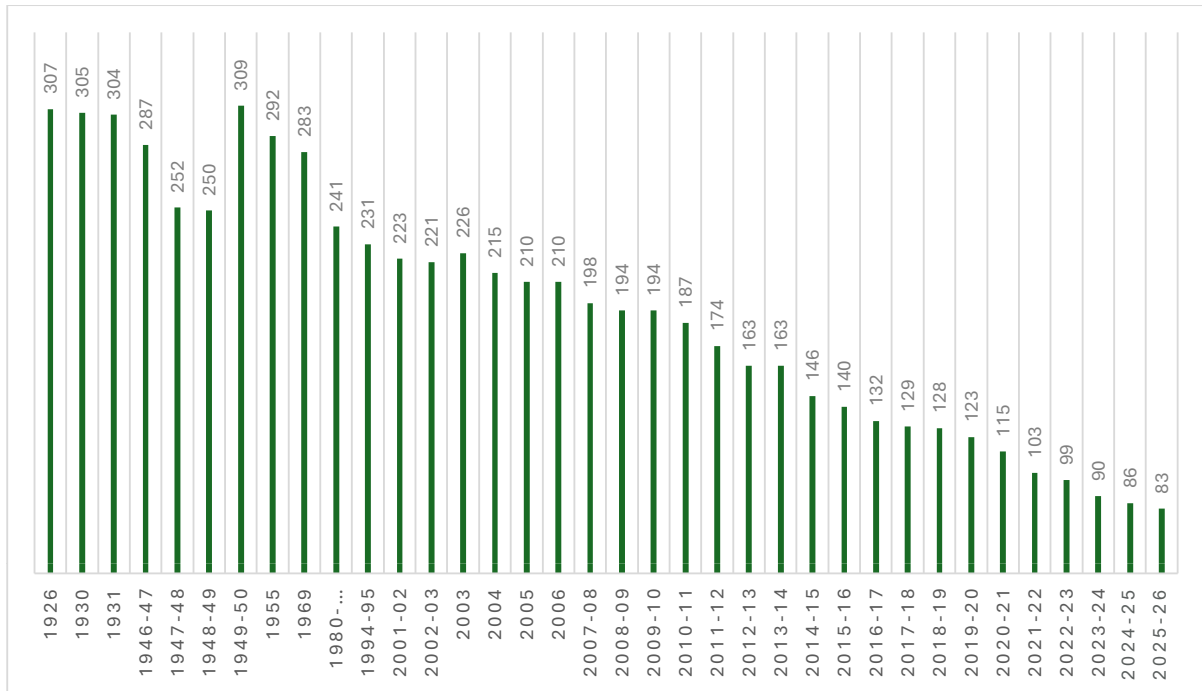


As agreed, the state will improve education by upgrading private and autonomous Turkish schools in line with the demands of the Turkish community in Western Thrace. Instead of creating equal opportunities, it has prioritized the Greek public school system.

All organizations representing the Turkish community in Western Thrace indicate that the most pressing issue is education, but

the state ignores their complaints and demands.

Under the current conditions, more families will choose Greek public schools, which will result in the disappearance of private and autonomous Turkish schools in the long term, as planned by the state.



Secondary and High Schools

In the prefecture of Xanthi and Komotini, where the Turkish community in Western Thrace is concentrated, there are two private Turkish secondary school and two private religious school.

The biggest problem at secondary level is the number of school. As mentioned earlier, the Turkish community in Western Thrace constitute the majority in Rodopi and nearly half of the population in Xanthi.

In contrast, while there is only one private Turkish secondary and high school in Rodopi, there are 14 public secondary school and 9 public high school, making a total of 23 public secondary and high school.

In Xanthi, there is also only one private Turkish secondary and high school. However, there are 20 public secondary school and 9 public high school. The total number of public secondary and high school is 29.

In Evros, although Turkish make up 10 per cent of the population, there is not a single Turkish secondary and high school. In contrast, there are 27 public secondary school and 15 public high school.

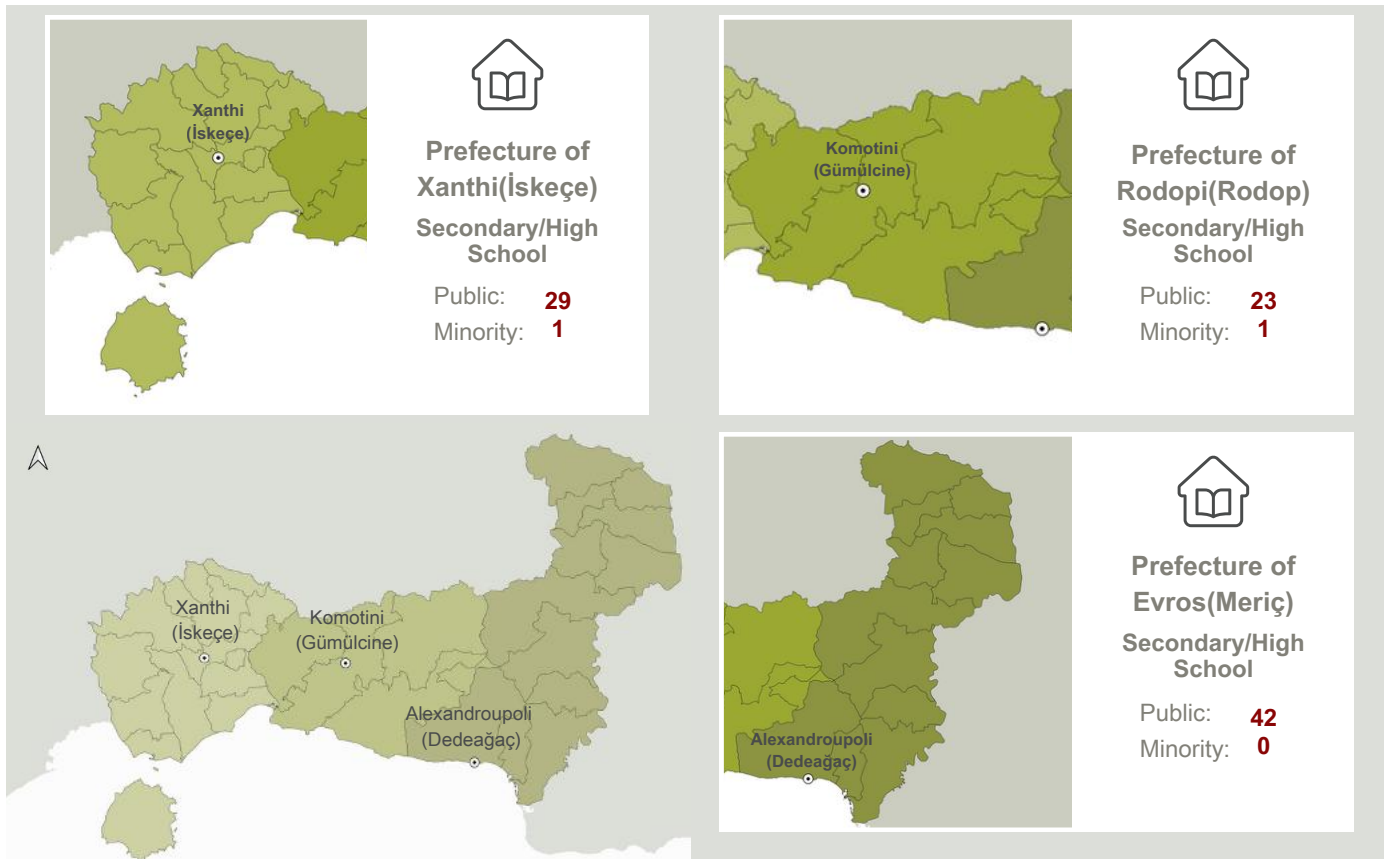
The two private Turkish secondary and high school in Rodopi and Xanthi should be administered and operated like other private secondary school in Greece, but the two school are

also under state management and supervision.

In other words, while the state does not intervene in other private school in the country, it determines the number of student and the enrolment procedure for the two secondary and high school registered at a private school belonging to the Turkish community in Western Thrace.

According to the law, the headmaster is a teacher belonging to the Turkish community in Western Thrace, while the deputy headmaster is a Greek teacher who is a civil servant. Both private Turkish school are under the control of the Coordination Office of Minority Schools.

As a recent example of this situation, Eastern Macedonia – Thrace Regional Directorate for Primary and Secondary Education appointed new principal to two private Turkish secondary and high school in its decision dated 2 September 2024, without taking into account the opinion of the board of trustees. In a joint statement published on 4 September 2024, the school board of the Xanthi Turkish Secondary and High School and the Komotini Turkish Secondary and High School stated that the appointment, that are contrary to the power exercised by the board, violated international and bilateral treaties concerning the education of the Turkish community, international law, and the custom that had been applied until now. However, the relevant department of the Ministry did not take this objection into consideration.



Komotini Private Turkish Secondary and High School

The Celal Bayar Turkish Secondary and High School, established as a private school in Komotini, is indicative of the good relations between Türkiye and Greece in the 1950s.

Following the Greek government's invitation to Türkiye, construction of the school began by decree and was completed in four months.

The distribution of subjects and timetable for the first year of secondary school are as follows:

Course Section	Course Name	Course Hours
Turkish	Turkish Language and Literature	3
Turkish	Religious Education	2
Turkish	Physics	3
Turkish	Chemistry	2
Turkish	Biology	1
Turkish	Maths	5
Turkish	Foreign Language	3
Turkish	Physical Education	2
Greek	Greek Language (Ancient)	9
Greek	History	2
Greek	Computer Science	1
Greek	Project	3
Total	12	36

Initially named “CELAL BAYAR HIGH SCHOOL” when it was first established in 1952, the school continued to operate under the name “Komotini Muslim Secondary and High School” until 2001; after 2001, it was renamed “Komotini Minority Secondary and High School.”

Today, the Komotini Private Turkish Secondary and High School has 18 classrooms. It also has a computer lab, music room,

physics, chemistry and biology lab, and a library. All subjects taught in the secondary and high school comply with the law and have been implemented in the same manner for many years. In the high school section, subjects such as Turkish Language and Literature, Religion, Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Foreign Language, and Physical Education are taught in Turkish, while subjects such as Greek Language and Literature, History, Principles of Law, and Computer Science are taught in Greek.

Xanthi Private Turkish and Secondary High School

In 1952, when Celal Bayar Secondary and High School was opened, a request was sent to Athens to open a secondary and high school in Xanthi, and a delegation from the Turkish community in Western Thrace met with the then Minister of Foreign Affairs. Following negotiations that lasted until 1965, this request was accepted, but a condition was to be established as a private school, a name had to be given as the owner of the high school. Muzaffer Salihoğlu, the Community President at the time, was nominated, and the school took its name from him.

The Xanthi Private Turkish Secondary and High School opened in a building known as the “Small School” at the secondary school level. As the number of students increased, the school building became inadequate, so Muzaffer Salihoğlu applied to the Xanthi Governor’s Office requesting a new location. The Governor’s Office deemed Salihoğlu’s request as appropriate, and a building that had previously belonged to the governor’s office was designated as the location for the high school section of the school.

The Xanthi Private Turkish Secondary and High School moved to its current building in 1970. The building has two floors and a total area of 735 square metres, both indoor and outdoor. As with the Celal Bayar Secondary and High School in Komotini, the secondary and high school in Xanthi were also incorporated into the private and autonomous Turkish school system, and the school’s name was changed to “Xanthi Minority Turkish Secondary and High School”.

What happened during the demands and protests for a new school building?

The current building of the private Turkish secondary and high school in Xanthi was built in the late 19th century and was used as a tobacco warehouse during the Ottoman period. It has a basement and two floors, a significant portion of which is made of wood, and in its current state, it lacks quality and modern educational facilities.

The Turkish community in Western Thrace has been demanding a new school building in Xanthi for years, but the government has turned a deaf ear to the demand.

Despite a significant increase in student numbers after 2010, no new building was constructed, forcing students to use even the basement classrooms. However, in response to the demand of students, parents and the school board for a new school building, the Turkish secondary and high school switched to double-shift schooling in 2015 on grounds that there were insufficient classrooms. Accordingly, one group of students attended school in the morning and another group in the afternoon.

In 2017, the then Prime Minister of Greece, Alexis Tsipras, visited the school and pledged that a new school building would be constructed, but unfortunately, this promise was not kept. The long-standing demand for a new school building was persistently ignored, ultimately leading to protests in 2019.

In 2019, when the number of students at the school reached 740, the double-shift schooling system was implemented again.

Ultimately, due to the failure to respond to the demands of the Turkish community in Western Thrace, Turkish students, parents and board members in Xanthi organized a protest on 23 September 2019 to make their voices heard. Two thousand people took part in this demonstration.

As there is only one Turkish secondary and high school in Xanthi, the fact that Turkish living in village and mountainous areas in Xanthi have to come to school in two groups, one in the morning and one in the afternoon, has brought other problems in practice. For this reason, some Turkish families have enrolled their children in Greek public secondary and high schools closer to the village where they live.

In 2019, the number of pupils at the school reached 740, it

higher level, after which the number of pupils at the school has declined every year. In addition to the overall decline in the number of pupils, the main reason for this decline has been the double-shift schooling system, a Turkish pupil who did not want double-shift schooling went to public secondary school that did not have the aforementioned system.

On the other hand, the low quality of education at the school and the guidance that public secondary and high school were a better choice for the children's future, as a reflection of deliberate state policy, also played a role in the students' preference for Greek public secondary and high schools. Unfortunately, these directives also aim to eliminate the private and autonomous Turkish school system in the long term.

Even after 2019, despite the School Family Association and the School Board sending letters to official authorities and requesting a new school building, the letters remained unanswered.

In 2023, even though the number of students at the school did not require double-shift schooling, the Directorate for Secondary Education in Xanthi insisted on continuing this double-shift schooling system, which is not implemented in public schools in Greece.

As a result, a protest was decided upon on 15 September 2023, and the protest action, which began on 18 September, lasted for 11 days until 28 September. Those who participated in the protest demanded an end to the aforementioned system and a new school building.

As a result of the protest in 2023, double-shift schooling was discontinued, but the school building issue has not been resolved to date. The Board and the School Parents' Association of the Xanthi Private Turkish Secondary and High School sent a letter

to Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis in May 2024, requesting a new school building, but this initiative also went unanswered.

The School Board and the School Parents' Association forwarded their request for a new school building to the President, the Prime Minister and the Ministry of Education, Religious Affairs and Sport in November 2024; however, they have not received a response from any institution.

The issue was also brought before Parliament, where on 16 December 2024, Hüseyin Zeybek, Member of Parliament for New Left in Xanthi, questioned the Ministry of Education, Religious Affairs and Sport regarding the building problem and the request for a new building for the Xanthi Private Turkish Secondary and High School. Deputy Minister Zetta Mavri responded that the school's current building was adequate and safe and that there was no need for a new school building. The issue was then brought to the attention of the Xanthi Municipal Council, which stated that the school was not under the municipality's jurisdiction but was entirely under the Ministry of Education. After lengthy correspondence and confusion over jurisdiction, the Ministry of Education finally decided to restore and renovate the school building. However, restoration is only a temporary solution to the building problem. Since the school building is a "listed and protected structure", extensive restoration is not possible.

As one can observe, the demand for a new school building for the only private Turkish secondary and high school in Xanthi has still not been met. This is because, as we have always said, state policy aims to eliminate the Turkish school system. Therefore, following a delaying tactic under the guise of inter-institutional confusion of authority, the Ministry will promise limited restoration work, creating the impression that it has resolved the issue, and once again turn a deaf ear to the demand of the Turkish community.

Religious Schools

Religious schools, formerly known as madrasas, established to train religious figures to serve in the mosques belonging to the Turkish community in Western Thrace, are educational institutions that have existed in the region since the Ottoman Empire. With the Treaty of Lausanne, the Turkish Minority in Western Thrace was granted autonomy in the fields of education and religion, and the administration and management of the religious schools also became the responsibility of the Turkish community. With the law enacted, religious schools were defined within the Turkish school system, just like other Turkish schools. In other Turkish schools, lessons in the religious schools are taught in two languages: Turkish, the mother

tongue, and Greek, the official language of the state.

Following the opening of the Special Pedagogical Academy of Thessaloniki (EPATH) in 1968, students graduating from the religious schools were admitted to EPATH without examination, and those who graduated from there were employed as teachers in private and autonomous Turkish primary schools.

Today, there are two religious schools in Komotini and Xanthi. In the religious schools, where lessons are taught in Turkish, Arabic and Greek, the curriculum is largely in Greek, and objections to this have not been met with a response.

In December 2020, the signboard of the religious school in Komotini and Xanthi were replaced, and the word “Minority” on the signboard was replaced with “Muslim”. This situation is also a malicious practice by the state to separate religious school from the Turkish community and deprive them of the name, status and rights.

The Law on the Improvement of Special Education and Other Emergency Provisions, dated 29 July 2020 and numbered 4713/2020, issued by the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs, is another example of the state’s direct intervention in the operation of religious school in the region. This is because the amendment to the law provides for the appointment of deputy mufti, who are religious representative appointed by the government but not recognized by the Turkish community in Western Thrace, as chairmen of the school board of the two religious schools.

Furthermore, in a joint decision taken on 31 July 2021, the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs and the Ministry of the Interior provided for the appointment of religious officials to religious school in Komotini and Xanthi, again in accordance

with Law No. 4115/2013, which the Turkish community in Western Thrace has requested be repealed.

This law essentially provides for the appointment of 240 religious officials in mosques and schools belonging to the Turkish community in Western Thrace, under the authority of mufti appointed by the state, whom the Turkish community does not recognize. Thanks to the reaction of the Turkish community, which has opposed this law from the outset and demanded its repeal, no religious officials have been appointed to any mosque in the region to date, with the exception of a few mosques affiliated with the appointed mufti. However, the state has employed religious officials who are not competent in their field and do not even have a university degree to teach optional Islamic studies in Greek state school in the region under this law.

As can be understood, appointing appointed mufti to the chairmanship of the board of religious school and employing religious officials in religious schools under the aforementioned law essentially means taking religious school away from the Turkish community.

The Issue of the Administration of Autonomous Turkish Schools

As stated above, the operation, administration and supervision of Turkish school belonging to the Turkish community in Western Thrace are the responsibility of the Turkish minority itself.

The operation and administration of private and autonomous Turkish school is the responsibility of a board consisting of three members elected by the parents’ vote. Within the scope of educational autonomy defined by the Treaty of Lausanne, the first legal regulation concerning the school boards was enacted by Law No. 3065/1954. School boards are responsible for overseeing the school’s income and expenditure, paying the salaries and insurance of contracted teachers from the money collected from parents, ensuring the maintenance of the school’s movable and immovable property, and, most importantly, representing parents at the school.

However, state intervention and the Ministry of Education’s arbitrary practice increased over time, and the school boards exercised their authority to employ and appoint teachers for the last time in the 1970–71 school year.

With Law No. 694, enacted in 1977, the management of Turkish

school was changed from being directly elected by the parents of the student to the governor electing three people from a list of no more than fifteen. With Law No. 695, enacted in the same year, the school boards were also stripped of their right to appoint teachers.

Furthermore, as mentioned above, this law stipulated that teachers who would teach Turkish in Turkish school would be employed primarily from among EPATH graduates, thereby excluding Greek citizens who were members of the Turkish community in Western Thrace and who were teachers who had graduated from teacher training colleges in Türkiye.

Their employment in school has been prevented. In other words, by largely stripping the school boards of their power and employing EPATH graduates as Turkish language teachers in Turkish school through state intervention, a deliberate and irreparable blow has been dealt to our private and autonomous school system.

Over the years, the power of school boards have been revised many times, and the power they possessed have been increasingly restricted. With the Ministry’s decision issued in

2002, the school board lost their authority over Turkish schools and were tasked only with managing school expenditure without the approval of the education directorate. In other words, our right to manage our schools autonomously, as defined in 1923, was taken away from us.

Despite appearing to comply with the legislation throughout history, arbitrary practices have continued. An example of this situation occurred in the last school board election. At the school board in Turkish schools are elected every three years

for the school boards whose term of office expired on 31 December 2023, Eastern Macedonia – Thrace Regional Directorate for Primary and Secondary Education, sent a call for candidacy for the election to be held on 20 December 2023 to the school on 4 December 2023, stipulating that candidacy application by 8 December. Considering that two of the four days designated for the submission of candidature fell on weekends, it is possible to say that the Directorate for Education deliberately set a short deadline for the submission of candidacy application.

Developments at the International Level

Despite our autonomy in education, the Turkish private school system has been weakened and degraded due to years of state intervention and arbitrary practices. ABTTF, the representative of the Turkish community in Western Thrace in the international arena, has been the voice of the community internationally since its establishment in 1988, defending the rights of the Turkish community in Western Thrace.

The problems in education are reflected in international reports as a result of ABTTF's work with international organizations.

Regarding the kindergarten issue, Gay Mc Dougall, former Independent Expert on Minority Issues at the UN, stated in her 2008 country visit report to Greece (http://www.refworld.org/reference/mi_ion/unhrc/2009/en/66463) that the bilingual kindergarten would enable both Turkish and Greek to be learned better from an early stage and would therefore provide benefits in terms of integration and offer minorities more options regarding whether or not to attend Greek public primary school.

The same issue is also addressed in the 2015 report of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI). ECRI emphasizes that children's right to attend school must not be jeopardized; the report notes that authorities must take all necessary steps to ensure access to bilingual or monolingual primary school according to parents' preference.

The issue of kindergarten has also been raised in the European Parliament. A petition was submitted to the European Parliament's Committee on Petitions (PETI) in 2019 (<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/petition/en/petition/content/0058%252F2019/html/Petition-%2528Gree-%2529-on-teaching-Turkish-in-pre-school-education-to-children-belonging-to-the-Turkish-community-in-Western-Thrace>). In addition, a complaint was lodged with the Greek Ombudsman in February 2020, and in May 2020, a letter was sent to the Minister of Education regarding the lack of bilingual kindergarten within

the current educational autonomy and the rejection of the application to establish kindergarten.

However, no response was received from either the Ombudsman or the Ministry of Education. The European Parliament's Committee on Petitions also concluded that education falls within the competence of Member States and that it has no authority to intervene in this matter.

A solution to the problem could be found, following the initiative of ABTTF, MEP submitted a question for written answer to the European Commission on 6 July 2023 titled "Access to high-quality pre-school education for children from the Turkish-minority community in Western Thrace (Greece)". The question for written answer noted that the Turkish community in Western Thrace living in Greece has the right to establish and manage its own school within the scope of its educational autonomy, but that the number of bilingual Turkish primary schools has decreased due to the state's approach. (http://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/E-9-2023-002144_EN.html).

The question also stated that despite the Turkish community's educational autonomy in Western Thrace, the fact that children belonging to the Turkish community are deprived of pre-school education in their mother tongue creates inequality in education.

At secondary school level, the issue of double-shift schooling and the new school building at the Xanthi Private Turkish Secondary and High School, which has been ongoing for years, has once again been brought to the attention of the European Parliament. Regarding the 11-day "No to Double-Shift Schooling" protest in 2023, Member of the European Parliament François Alfonsi (France, Green/EFA), Loránt Vincze (Romania, EPP), Herbert Dorfmann (Italy, EPP) and Jana Toom (Estonia, Renew Europe) submitted a question for written answer to the European Commission titled "Double-shift schooling

in Western Thrace” (http://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/E-9-2023-003346_EN.html). In the question written answer, MEP asked the European Commission how it would protect the rights of EU citizens belonging to a national minority and ensure equal access to quality education in the aforementioned region of Greece, thereby preserving linguistic and cultural diversity. However, the European Commission has indicated that the solution to the problem lies in Greece, stating that education falls under the authority of the member state.

Therefore, the response provided by the European Commission reiterates that education falls within the national sovereignty of

EU member states. In other words, there is no mechanism at the EU level to protect the rights of national minorities in face of the deliberate state policy of our EU member state, Greece, to eliminate the private and autonomous school system of the Turkish community in Western Thrace.

In addition to the parliamentary question cited above, ABTTF raises educational problems at the international level through presentations and reports to the EU, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, the United Nations, and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

Conclusion

The autonomous structure of the Turkish community in Western Thrace in education, whose status and rights were established by the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne, has been largely dismantled today. As stipulated by the Treaty, the Turkish community in Western Thrace is today deprived of its right to establish, manage and supervise its own schools and, due to state intervention, the educational system has become a structure with complex problems but without the ability to solve them. The state itself is responsible for this situation.

Although pre-school education is compulsory today, there is not a single Turkish kindergarten in Evros, Rodopi and Xanthi, where the Turkish community of Western Thrace lives; because the state and its representative government reject application for bilingual kindergarten or entirely private bilingual kindergarten within the Turkish school system, which is private and autonomous. In contrast, the Greek minority in Istanbul, Göççada and Bozcaada, whose status and rights are defined by the Treaty of Lausanne, have their own kindergarten. Furthermore, in our country, Greece, there are entirely private foreign schools, such as American or German kindergarten.

Primary schools belonging to the Turkish community in Western Thrace lack sufficient teaching materials, school libraries and teachers. Within the Turkish school system, both in primary school and in secondary and high school, the number of Turkish students has been gradually reduced in the distribution of language according to subject in the bilingual curriculum, the initial 50-50 balance has been disrupted, and today the number of Greek students exceeds that of Turkish.

The problems arising in the operation and management of Turkish schools stem from the limited duties, powers and responsibilities of their boards, as today board members are carrying out the simple administrative tasks and accounts of the schools.

The programmes implemented by the state in the 1990s and early 2000s were aimed solely at improving the teaching of the Greek language within the Turkish school system. However, no steps were taken to improve the curriculum in the mother tongue, Turkish; no training was provided for Turkish teachers working in the Turkish-language curriculum. Today, seminars requested by teachers working in Turkish schools who graduated from the now-closed EPATH on Turkish-language school textbooks are not being held. The teachers are not being given the opportunity to develop their capacities through cooperation or training with educational institutions in their motherland Türkiye.

Although the Western Thrace Turkish constitute approximately 50 per cent of the total population in our region, as stated in the report, there is only one private Turkish secondary school and one private Turkish high school in the prefecture of Xanthi and Rodopi. The issue of the demand for a new school building for the Xanthi Private Secondary and High School has been awaiting a solution for years. The confusion of authority experienced in this regard and the decision ultimately taken to renovate the existing monument-status building instead of constructing a new school building also indicate that the problems of the Turkish community in Western Thrace are being ignored.

In higher education, it has been reported that the quota system for admission to Greek universities is insufficient in terms of results. This is because, as a result of the policies and practices deliberately implemented by the state to lower the quality of education in Turkish primary schools, our students, who lack a solid basic education, fall behind their Greek peers when they reach university, despite receiving a good education in Turkish secondary and high schools because our Turkish children do not have access to quality education at the primary school level. The state is responsible for this situation.

In order to resolve the problem in the private and autonomous Turkish school system belonging to the Turkish community in Western Thrace and to improve the quality of education, our demands are as follows :

- The educational autonomy of the Turkish community in Western Thrace, which was granted autonomy by the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne but has been largely dismantled by legal changes and arbitrary practice, must be restored.
- Kindergartens teaching in our mother tongue, Turkish, and in the official language of the state, Greek, should be permitted within the Turkish school system.
- In schools belonging to the Turkish community in Western Thrace, the Turkish and Greek curriculum should be organized in accordance with bilateral agreement, law and regulation, and the number of lessons taught in our mother tongue, Turkish, should be increased.
- The state's priority in schools belonging to the Turkish community in Western Thrace should be to improve the quality of education. To this end, steps to be taken to improve not only the Greek but also the Turkish curriculum should be determined in consultation with teachers, educators and Turkish NGOs working in the field of education in the region who belong to the Turkish community.
- Turkish teachers working in Turkish schools should be granted the opportunity to attend in-service seminars and training at educational institutions in Greece and Türkiye.
- The duties and powers of the school boards working in schools belonging to the Turkish community in Western Thrace should be restored as they were in the past.
- Turkish schools should be provided with the necessary educational tools and books to offer a modern and innovative education.
- The inclusion of schools belonging to the Turkish community in Western Thrace in the practice of closing schools with fewer than nine students contrary to our educational autonomy. Decisions regarding Turkish schools with low numbers of students should be made by our community itself, in accordance with autonomy.
- The request for a new school building for the Xanthi Private Turkish Secondary and High School should be met urgently, and a school that meets the need of modern and innovative education should be built.
- The defined quota for transition to higher education should be continued as a positive practice, but, recognizing that education policy requires a holistic approach, the Turkish school system and the quality of education should be improved across the board. To this end, a multi-stakeholder consultation mechanism should be established, with priority given to meeting the needs and demands of the Turkish community in Western Thrace.

An Empirical Assessment of Education of the Turkish Community in Western Thrace

Introduction

The Turkish community in Western Thrace has long been noted for the problems it faces in the field of education. These problems are shaped not only at the pedagogical level, but also culturally, administratively and socio-politically. Education represents a critical area for minorities not only in terms of individual success, but also in terms of preserving identity, cultural continuity and social participation.

This assessment is based on the analysis of seven thematic surveys conducted with 360 participants from different types of schools (public school, Turkish school, kindergarten, and secondary education institution).

The seven thematic surveys are listed below:

Survey 1: Education Quality, Participation and Identity in Turkish Primary School in Western Thrace: An Assessment Based on Parent Opinion

Survey 2: Research on Parent Experience in Public Primary School

Survey 3: Research on Parent Experience in Public Kindergarten

Survey 4: Research on the Educational Experience of Turkish Students in Public Secondary School

Survey 5: Assessment of Educational Quality and Administrative Functioning in Turkish Secondary School

Survey 6: Assessment of the Diploma Equivalence Process in Greece

Survey 7: Turkish Students' University Experiences: An Assessment of Ethnic Identity, Perceptions of Discrimination and Future Perspective

Findings regarding the experience of Turkish students studying at Greek public universities have also been included in this report. The assessment aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the current situation and offer guidance for policymakers.

Thematic Findings

Quality of Education

Survey data reveal that perception of education quality in state school (particularly Survey 2 and 3) are relatively positive. In contrast, perception of quality in public secondary school (Survey 4) are significantly lower. In Turkish schools (Surveys

1 and 5), educational quality is generally assessed as low. This negative picture stems from a lack of transparency in teacher appointments, insufficient up-to-date pedagogical materials, and problems in curriculum implementation.

Cultural Integration and Preservation of Identity

Turkish schools stand out as a key institution in terms of preserving Turkish identity and sustaining cultural belonging. The main motivation for parents choosing the school is for their children to learn their mother tongue and strengthen their ties with their cultural identity. On the other hand, while social

integration generally appears to be achieved in public schools overall, there have been reports of exclusion and bullying in some cases. In particular, the 80% demand for bilingual education in public kindergarten is an important indicator that could increase both pedagogical success and cultural integration.

Participation in Management and School Board Mechanisms

In Turkish school, parents' desire to participate in the school board is remarkably high (Survey 1 and 5). This situation indicates a strong desire to have a say in school management; however, the current system is inadequate in meeting this need.

It is how that demand for this type of programme is weaker in public school; this indicates either a low level of satisfaction among parents or a lack of information about participation mechanisms.

Curriculum and Teaching Materials

The curriculum implemented in public secondary school (Survey 4) has been negatively evaluated by 50%, particularly in terms of history teaching. It has been stated that the teaching is presented within a one-sided ideological framework, far from the principle of pluralism and impartiality. It has been reported that

there are also serious structural problems in Turkish school (Survey 1) regarding the implementation of the curriculum and teaching material. This is how that students are at a disadvantage both pedagogically and culturally.

Diploma Equivalence and Perception of Discrimination

The issue of diploma equivalence addressed in Survey 6 is a critical indicator in terms of the system's perception of fairness. Although the 87 per cent professional practice rate following equivalence presents a positive picture in terms of structural

functioning, the 39 per cent perception of discrimination and lack of transparency regarding the process undermine the system's credibility. This finding points to an issue that has not only technical but also psychological and social dimensions.

Higher Education and the Experiences of Turkish Students

The experience of students belonging to the Turkish community in Western Thrace at Greek universities (Survey 7) are generally egalitarian. It begins with a registration process. However, some

traces of micro-level discrimination are encountered during the process:

- **The registration process** has generally been a smooth and fair.
- **In the academic environment**, indirect or questioning attitudes of teaching staff towards Turkish identity have been reported, albeit in a small number of cases.
- **Friendships** are largely positive or neutral.
- **In terms of future prospects**, students are equally divided: half cannot see a future for themselves in the country, while the other half are hopeful. This situation reflects Turkish youth's lack of faith in the opportunities offered by the system and their perception of social insecurity.

Findings Consistent with the Theoretical Framework

The data obtained are directly related to the fundamental concepts of educational sociology:

- In the context of the "hidden curriculum," the oppression or disregard of identities points to the ideological aspect of the system.
- The concepts of "Institutional discrimination" and "Microaggression" explain the form of indirect exclusion seen particularly in the academic environment.
- When viewed through Bourdieu's concepts of "cultural capital" and "field," it is evident that Turkish students, despite entering the higher education system, are unable to attain an effective position within it and are marginalised within the system.

General Assessment and Policy Recommendations

Areas of Concern

- The inadequacy of the curriculum in terms of content and impartiality is particularly evident in history lessons.
- Teacher appointment and educational material create serious structural inequalities in Turkish schools.
- The high demand for bilingual education in state kindergartens demonstrates the direct link between cultural integration and pedagogical success.
- Parental involvement in management is limited; communication problems are particularly evident among groups with low Greek language proficiency.

Policy Recommendations

1. Bilingual Education: Bilingual education should be expanded starting from kindergartens; this practice will both support language development and contribute to identity development.
2. Curriculum Reform: All content used in public schools, particularly the history curriculum, should be restructured in line with the principle of multiculturalism and pluralism.
3. Participatory Management Mechanism: The functionality of school management bodies such as school boards should be enhanced; the participation of Turkish parents should be encouraged by providing legal guarantees for their structure.
4. Review of Teacher Policies: Teacher appointments should be made with consideration for cultural diversity and community needs. The quota system should be made transparent, and local demands should be taken into account.
5. Monitoring of Diploma Equivalency Process: Independent monitoring mechanisms should be established, supported by the principles of transparency, impartiality and efficiency.
6. Cultural Awareness Training: Anti-bias and cultural sensitivity programmes should be implemented for academic staff working at universities.
7. Psychosocial Support Units: Counselling and support units should be established where Turkish students can share their identity-based experiences.
8. Discrimination Monitoring Mechanism: Independent and reliable systems should be implemented in universities to record complaints of discrimination.
9. Positive Policies for Equal Employment: Incentive programmes and positive discrimination policies should be developed to ensure equal access to employment for Turkish graduates in the public and private sectors.

Conclusion

The problems experienced by the Turkish community in Western Thrace in the field of education are not limited to technical deficiencies at the school level. The problems are concentrated in multidimensional areas such as cultural representation, institutional participation, language of instruction, curriculum equity and future security.

The findings reveal that some formal equality provisions within the system have not been sufficiently internalised in practice and

that cultural diversity remains weak. This situation highlights the need to restructure education not only academically but also in terms of establishing social justice.

Comprehensive and sensitive education policies that are implemented will both respond to the demands of the Turkish community in Western Thrace for equal citizenship in education and contribute to deepening social cohesion in Greece.

Education of the Turkish Community in Western Thrace - Thematic Assessment Table

Thematic Area	Key Findings	Problems / Challenges	Policy Recommendations
1. Quality of Education	Relatively positive in state schools, low in Turkish schools	Lack of transparency in teacher appointments, insufficient materials	Review of teacher policies, material support
2. Cultural Adaptation and Identity Preservation	Turkish schools are important for cultural identity	Lack of bilingualism in public kindergartens	The expansion of the bilingual education system
3. Participation in management	High demand for participation among Turkish parents	Ineffectiveness of participation mechanisms inaction	Ensuring the legal security of council structures
4. Curriculum and Materials	History curriculum lacks pluralism	One-sided history narrative, lack of materials	Curriculum reform (multicultural and pluralistic content)
5. Diploma Equivalence and Discrimination	Despite equivalence, 39% perception of discrimination	Non-transparent process, lack of trust	Establishment of independent oversight mechanisms establishment
6. Higher education Experience	The registration process is fair; there is no micro-discrimination within the process	Indirect exclusion in the academic environment indirect exclusion	Cultural awareness training, support units
7. Future Perspective	Students are divided into two groups (hopeful/hopeless)	Social insecurity, feeling of exclusion within the system	Positive policies for equal employment, psychosocial support
8. Parental involvement	In Turkish schools high desire to participate	Language barrier, lack of knowledge	Participatory management, awareness-raising activities

Overall Assessment

- **General Trend:** Structural inequalities in education are concentrated in cultural, pedagogical and managerial area .
- **Key Themes:** Identity, representation, equality, institutional participation and future security.
- **Strategic Orientation:** Implementation of pluralistic, participatory and culturally sensitive policies .

