

**European Regional Forum on Education, Language and the Human Rights of
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Interventions of Greece**

Panel 2

The education system in Greece is a generally centralized system; curricula and textbooks are proposed by the Institute for Educational Policy and are decided by the Ministry of Education.

This also applies to the curricula and the teaching materials of the Greek section of minority schools. (For the Turkish section, according to the provisions of the protocols signed by the two countries in the field of the education, it is the Turkish Ministry of Education that is responsible).

Systematic efforts have been made the last twenty years to improve the learning outcomes of Muslim pupils and to reduce the phenomenon of school dropout that is more intense in their case than in the case of non-Muslim pupils. The measures and the initiatives taken under the umbrella of the programme “Education of the Muslim Minority Children in Thrace” have produced significant results: the indicator of school dropout has been visibly reduced. Some of the measures taken are the following: Additional teaching material has been created for the Greek section, adapted to the needs of these pupils whose mother tongue is not Greek. This teaching material is also distributed to Muslim children attending non-minority schools. In addition, the number of pupils required to operate a minority school as a full-time school is clearly lower than that required in the case of non-minority schools. There is also a Greek language program aimed at Muslim mothers in order to facilitate their communication with the Greek-speaking teachers and to be able to supervise their children in their study. Moreover, in order to compensate for the difficulty that Muslim students probably encounter in admission examinations in Universities (which are conducted in Greek), a percentage of students accepted in all higher education institutions is offered exclusively to minority candidates (affirmative action).

As far as pre-primary education is concerned, since reading and writing is not an essential part of its curricula, this educational level permits a different arrangement, more adapted to the specific language background of Muslim children. In the kindergarten the fact that the Pomak has no written form is of no importance; so Pomak, which is the mother language of the second largest group within the Muslim minority, is being used in some pilot kindergartens, where along with the Greek-speaking teacher, there is also an assistant teacher who speaks the mother tongue of the children. Thus, Muslim children become familiar with the Greek language in an easier, softer way and are better prepared for elementary school, where half of the curriculum is in Greek. It would not be pedagogically correct to extend the system of bilingual schools with a Greek-Turkish program to pre-school education as this would mean that Pomak and Roma children of a very young age would have to cope with two unknown languages at the same time.

It is true that theoretically it would be better for teachers of the Greek section in the bilingual schools to know the mother language of their students but it is not feasible to put this condition on. There are two technical impediments: first there are three mother languages involved and second the selection and the allocation of teachers in the Greek system is done by the Ministry of Education, which receives applications from all over Greece, so it is very likely that a teacher from Crete is appointed to a minority school in Thrace.