

**European Regional Forum on Education, Language and the Human Rights of
Minorities, 6-7/5/2019
Interventions of Greece**

Panel 1

The Treaty of Lausanne (1923) recognised the existence of a Muslim minority in Thrace (Greece), which includes populations whose mother tongue is Turkish or Pomak or Romani, and whose common element is religion.

There are minority schools where the teaching hours are equally divided in lessons held in Greek and lessons held in Turkish. The Pomak language has no written form, for the time being it is only oral, therefore it cannot be used as a language of instruction, while the Romani language is the mother tongue of a small portion of the Muslim Roma population.

Minority schools function under a special status: they are considered schools of the Muslim community, which provides them with a degree of autonomy that the other public schools do not have. They are funded by the Greek authorities (central or local) for their infrastructure, their operating expenses and the salaries of their staff, except for some Turkish-speaking secondary school teachers. The directors of minority schools belong to the minority and the so called "School Committees", which are democratically elected by the pupils' parents of each minority school, play an important role in the administration of these schools; in fact, parents of minority schools have a greater institutional role in administering their children's schools than parents of non-minority schools.

For practical reasons it is difficult to satisfy all the different wishes of Muslim parents regarding the education of their children. For example, there are Pomak parents who would prefer to enroll their children in a mainstream public school and not to attend the Greek-Turkish program of minority schools, since Turkish is not their mother tongue. However, in the villages of Western Thrace, it is difficult to operate at the same time a minority and a nonminority school because of the small number of pupils; so Pomak parents are obliged to enrol their children in a school with a Greek-Turkish program. At the same time, it is difficult to establish a secondary bilingual school in the villages, because it requires teachers of many different specialties and in the case of a small number of students the cost per pupil is disproportionate.

As far as kindergartens are concerned, there is a pilot programme aiming to help minority children to adapt to the new school environment. This program began two years ago, providing a two-member staff in each class, one Greek speaking teacher and one assistant teacher who speaks the mother tongue of the majority of students in the class, that is either Turkish or Pomak; there is also provision for Roma assistant teachers and they will be hired as soon as we have Roma graduates from Schools of Early Childhood Education.