

(De)limiting Educational and Linguistic Rights of Minorities in Europe: The case of Greece

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Introduction

- **Minority: Not a novel concept in the context of Greece**
 - Islam as an Ottoman Heritage in the old and new lands of Greece
- **Minorities in Greece (after 1923)**
 - Turks, Vlachs, Albanians-Arvanites, Slavic-speakers (e.g. Macedonians, Bulgarians)
 - 1923 -: Muslim Turks of Western Thrace (The only officially-recognized minority group in Greece)
- **Immigrants, refugees, asylum seekers, et. al. (post-Cold War epoch)**
 - Influx of Syrian refugees in recent years crossing the Aegean Sea
 - Major old and new immigrant communities based especially in major urban Greek centers (e.g. Athens, Thessaloniki, Patra)

Coexistence in Western Thrace

- **Coexistence of differences: A long history in Western Thrace**
- **Ottoman administration of Greece**
- **Coexistence of minority-majority identities**
- **1991: A new minority policy of Greece regarding the Minority and Western Thrace**







Demography

- **Land: 8575 km acres**
- **Overall population: 369,430 (2011 census)**
- **Coexistence of the two identities: Locality matters!**
 - Common in mixed localities (e.g. cities, towns and villages)
 - Not applicable at small villages domiciled by Turks or Greeks only

Minority language and schooling

- **No bilingual education at pre-school level**
- **No bilingual tertiary education at any of the Greek universities**
 - Only some programs or courses of the Turkish language
- **Functioning of bilingual (Turkish and Greek) secondary schools**
 - Only two schools dating back to 1952 and 1965
 - Not a third one in spite of growing demand of the Turkish minority
- **Primary schools since 1923**
 - The 1923 Lausanne Peace Treaty (Minority Treaties of the post WWI)
 - 1923-1949: Period of “ignorance” by the Greek state (Almost full level of autonomy given to the Muslim Turkish minority of Western Thrace)
 - 1949-1955: Steps taken for improvement of education at bilingual level
 - 1955-....: Gradual penetration of the Greek state authorities into the realm of educational autonomy of the Minority
 - Declaration of new laws and regulations
 - Increasing some courses taught in Greek while decreasing the ones in Turkish
 - Some steps for development of bilingual education
 - New EU-funded programs aiming to develop the Greek curriculum only at the bilingual schooling
 - Solving some infrastructural problems at these schools
 - Introduction of a new quota, exclusively for those university applicants from the Minority community
 - Distribution of new Turkish textbooks sent from Turkey since early 2000s.

Notes from the Greek case - 1

- **Bilingual schooling is a right for those Minority members only. No other Greek citizen can attend to these schools.**
 - **It is restricted with the region of Western Thrace.**
- **As an idea, on paper, bilingual minority schooling in Western Thrace looks amazing. A child of 7 will learn both Turkish and Greek, as well as basics of Islam and beginner level of English. Yet, the practice has proven to be totally different.**
- **Almost all interventions made by the Greek state on matters of educational rights of the Turkish minority have been unilaterally since 1960s.**
 - **No effective cooperation with the Minority**
 - **Minority stakeholders were almost never included in decision making processes regarding any fundamental issue of the Minority.**

Notes from the Greek case - 2

- **Bilingual schools have slowly been downgraded since 1960s and became less attractive for members of the Turkish minority**
 - **Many of the fundamental problems about teachers of the Turkish curriculum**
 - **Minority schools – problems with teaching both Turkish and Greek**
 - **EU-funded projects tackle teaching of the Greek curriculum**
 - **Greek teachers' Turkish fluency is almost non-existent.**
 - **Infrastructural needs of the minority schools still remain unresolved**
 - **Closing of these schools since the number of children remains below 10.**
 - **In 1930s almost 300 schools ----- in 2019: around 128.**
 - **No opening of new bilingual minority schools in some districts in need of bilingual schooling (city centres)**
 - **No opening of bilingual nursery minority schools at the pre-schooling**
- **As a result, monolingual public schooling getting more attraction by minority parents at all levels**

Conclusion

- **Lessons driven from the Greek case?**
 - **Decision making bodies should be in close cooperation with minority stakeholders dealing with educational and linguistic issues**
 - **Show of good will by states tackling issues of their old and new minorities/minoritized communities**
 - **Education in mother tongue is vital for continuity of minority regimes in Europe**

Thank you for your attention!



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