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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Written statement* submitted by Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[23 January 2025]

* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.



Obstacles to Access to Quality Education for Children Belonging to the Turkish Community in Thrace in Greece

According to the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne, Thrace Turks in Greece have the right to establish, manage and control, at their own expense, all kinds of charitable, religious and social institutions, all kinds of schools and other institutions for education and training. However, this autonomous structure in education has been complicated by fait accompli legal practices and taken under the control of the state without consulting our community.

There are two Turkish minority secondary schools and high schools in Thrace, one in Komotini and the other in Xanthi, but the management of these schools is also in the hands of the state in violation of the treaties and legislation. Lately, the Regional Directorate of Education of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace, in its decision dated 2 September 2024, changed the practice that has continued until today and appointed new principals to two schools without considering the opinion of the board members elected by the votes of the parents of the students belonging to the Turkish community.

Of these two secondary schools and high schools, the school building issue at the Xanthi Turkish Minority Secondary and High School is persisting. The current building of the Xanthi Minority Secondary and High School was built in the late 19th century and was used as a tobacco warehouse during the Ottoman period and later converted into a school. The two-storey school building, which also has a basement, consists of a significant part of wood and lacks the facilities to provide quality and modern education in its current state.

In 2017, the then Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras visited the school and promised that a new school building would be built, but this promise was not fulfilled.

With the increase in the number of students, the school building issue became serious, and in 2019, when the number of students reached 740, the school switched to the double-shift schooling system again. At that time, prefabricated classrooms were requested as a temporary solution due to the increase in the number of students, but this request was not taken into consideration by the authorities. Although the parent-teachers association and the board members sent letters to the authorities, the letters remained unanswered. A protest was organised and 2,000 people participated in the protest on 23 September 2019.

In 2023, despite the fact that the number of students decreased to 585 and there were no students in the school requiring double-shift schooling, the Directorate for Secondary Education in Xanthi decided to continue with double-shift schooling, which is not available in public schools. Upon this, the parents and student representatives of the students at the Xanthi Minority Secondary and High School decided to protest against the imposition of double-shift schooling at the school by the Directorate for Secondary Education in Xanthi and to demand a solution to the school building issue on 15 September 2023, and the protest action started on 18 September and continued for 11 days until 28 September. The Turkish community in Thrace demanded the construction of a new building for the Xanthi Minority Secondary and High School where education and training will be provided at EU standards and where there will be no need for a double-shift schooling, or the school should be moved to a new and modern building for a definitive solution to the aforementioned issue.

The 11-day “No to Double-Shift Schooling” protest action was brought to the agenda of the European Parliament (EP) by MEPs François Alfonsi (France, Greens/EFA), Loránt Vincze (Romania, EPP), Herbert Dorfmann (Italy, EPP) and Yana Toom (Estonia, Renew) with a question for written answer to the European Commission titled “Double-shift schooling in Western Thrace” (1). However, the European Commission pointed out that education is the competence of the Member States and that the solution to the issue lies with Greece.

After reaching 740 students in 2019, the number of students in the school has decreased every year. In addition to the decrease in the overall number of students, the main reason for this decrease, besides the decrease in the overall number of students, was the implementation of double-shift schooling, because Turkish students who did not want this double-shift schooling went to public secondary schools where there was no such system.

As a result of the protests in 2023, double-shift schooling was discontinued, but the issue of the school building has not been solved to date, despite the letters of the school board and the parent teacher's association to the relevant authorities. Finally, in May 2024, a letter was sent to Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis, in which the lack of physical capacity of the school was underscored and a new school building was requested.

Moreover, in November 2024, the School Board of Trustees and the Parent-Teacher's Association sent a letter to the "Building Infrastructures A.S." (Κτιριακές Υποδομές Α.Ε.), the Municipality of Xanthi and other authorities, noting that the request for a new school building has been sent to the President Katerina Sakellaropoulou, Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis, the Ministry of Education, Religious Affairs and Sport, Building Infrastructure and Construction Co. and the Region of East Macedonia and Thrace, but no written response has been received so far. In this letter, it was indicated that the organisations to which the applications were made have not given an explanatory answer about the solution of the building issue of the school and the process to be followed until today; They stated that contradictory guidance was given in the verbal interviews and asked for the procedure required for the new school building.

After the issue was once again brought to the agenda with a question for written answer, the confusion of competencies came to the forefront again. On 16 December 2024, Xanthi New Left MP Hüseyin Zeybek asked a question to the Ministry of Education, Religious Affairs and Sports regarding the building issue of the Xanthi Turkish Minority Secondary and High School and the demand for a new building, Deputy Minister Zeta Makri explained that the existing building of the school is sufficient and safe and that there is no need for a new school building and that the state has been supporting the school in Xanthi for 50 years, but that the authority lies with the municipality, not the ministry with respect to this particular issue.

Following the reply that the building issue of the school is not under the competence of the ministry, the issue was brought to the agenda of the Municipality of Xanthi and at the Xanthi Municipality Council meeting held on Thursday, 19 December, Mayor Efstratios Kontos stated that the school is not affiliated to the Municipality of Xanthi, but entirely to the Ministry of Education, and therefore, it should be applied to the ministry.

The right to education, the principle of equality and non-discrimination also includes equal access to quality education for persons belonging to minority groups. The barrier of equal access to quality education reduces the access of children belonging to minorities to their civil and political rights and increases segregation in society as a result of the marginalisation of minority children.

- Having regard to Article 4(4) of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities;
- Having regard to Articles 18 and 22 of the UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights;
- Having regard to Articles 2(1), 13, 14 and 15 of the UN International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights;
- Having regard to Article 7 of the UN International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination;
- Having regard to Articles 28 and 29 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child;

We call upon Greece to do the following:

1. Greece should restore the educational autonomy of the Turkish community in Thrace as enshrined in the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne.
2. Taking into account the right of Turkish students studying at Xanthi Turkish Minority Secondary and High School to access a quality and modern education, the request for the allocation of a new school building should be fulfilled, and while fulfilling this request, communication should be maintained with the School Board and the Parent-Teacher's Association and the opinions and demands of these two institutions should be acted upon.

1. https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/E-9-2023-003346_EN.html