

Minority Education in Thrace

Greek Muslims living in Thrace are a religious minority, the main feature of which is the heterogeneous composition of the population and their geographical distribution. This minority consists of three primary groups:

- (a) Turks who remained after the exchange of population between the two countries (Greece and Turkey) in 1922
- b) Pomaks, inhabitants of the Thracian mountains, who were Islamized during the Ottoman domination
- c) Roma

The mother tongues of these people are dependent on group and are Turkish, Pomakic (a South Slavic language of the Rhodope region) and Romani, respectively.

Multicultural Thrace has for many years respected the culture of these people. By accepting the diversity of their students, teachers in this region have worked hard to manage the establishment of Greek as the second language of children from this Muslim minority.

The Treaty of Lausanne (peace treaty) was signed in Lausanne, Switzerland on 24 July 1923 by Greece, Turkey, and other countries that fought in the First World War and in the Asia Minor Campaign (1919-1922), including the USSR. Article 41, paragraph 1 (in conjunction with Article 45) of the Treaty of Lausanne stipulates that Greece will provide “in the field of public education, the appropriate facilities to ensure the provision of teaching in the municipal schools in the same language of the children of those Greek nationals.”

The minority exchange that occurred led to large-scale population movements on the basis of religion. Indeed, Article 2b of the Treaty explicitly used religious, not ethnic, terms. Christian Turkish citizens moved from Asia Minor and Eastern Thrace to Greece (about 2,000,000) and Muslim Greek citizens moved from Greece to Turkey (about 670,000). In the Thracian area, however, many Muslims remained and now live and work in the region.

In recent years, we have seen a large number of Muslim students in public schools (primary schools, gymnasiums, lyceums). In the region of Thrace, there are 129 minority primary schools (6 years/classes - A-F classes), with specifically 11 such schools in Evros, 73 in Rodopi and 45 in Xanthi. Regarding secondary education, there are 2 secular “Ierospoudastiria-Madrasi” schools that specialize in religion (of six years study), one in Komotini and one in Xanthi, and two minority gymnasiums-lyceums (Komotini and Xanthi), with 268 and 1,518 students respectively.

Table 1. *Students that Study in the Minority Primary Schools of Thrace*

Academic Year	Number of Students
1960-1961	11.268
1966-1967	14.276
1970-1971	15.637
1974-1975	13.978
1979-1980	12.500
1985-1986	10.965
1990-1991	9.829
1995-1996	8.359
2000-2001	7.107
2017-2018	5.061

Until 1998, the duration of studies at the “Ierospoudastiria-Madrasi” was five years. According to article 4 of Law 2621/1998, these schools were upgraded to six-year education schools, equal to the ecclesiastical gymnasiums-lyceums.

In minority primary and secondary schools Muslim Directors and Christian Deputy Directors are appointed. The responsibilities of the Deputy Director are considerably increased when compared with the responsibilities of the Director. In these minority schools, both Christian and Muslim teachers are appointed, though the numbers depend on the size and potential of the individual school. Christian teachers are responsible for the teaching of Greek-language courses, and Muslim teachers are responsible for the teaching of Turkish-language courses.

Although Christian teachers, permanent or substitute, are civil servants, the legal framework that regulates the position of Muslim teachers is characterized by the coexistence of different regimes. First, there are Muslim teachers, graduates of the Special Pedagogical Academy of Thessaloniki, who are also appointed as civil servants. There also exists a limited number of teachers (recruits) who are Turkish citizens appointed for a specified time, according to the Greek-Turkish agreement of 2000 on Cultural Cooperation (articles 1.e and 10) and the Ministerial Decisions 55368/16.5.1978 and Z2/219/24.5.1993, which provide a framework for educational exchanges between the staff of minority schools in Istanbul and Thrace.

The peculiarity of the content of the curriculum relates firstly to the language of instruction and, secondly, to religious education. In the minority primary schools of Thrace, the courses that are being taught in Greek are history, environmental studies, geography, civic and social education, and Greek language. Meanwhile, religion studies, physics, chemistry, physical education, arts, music studies and Turkish language are taught in Turkish. The teaching time of the courses in Greek and in Turkish is equal. The teaching of the Quran in primary schools corresponds to the religious peculiarity of the minority and contributes to the cultivation of their religious identity.

With the appointment of educational specializations and the establishment of all-day classes in the minority primary schools, courses such as foreign language (English) and new technologies (computers) are also being taught by the appropriate teachers. Until 1998, the books of the Greek language program were those that were being taught in the public schools of the rest of Greece. However, since 1998 (pilot program) and 2000 definitively, books of the education program for Muslim children (approved by the Ministry of Education) are based more on images and less on lengthy texts, linking the daily routine of these

children with their domestic environment and their own social and cultural activities. They emphasize the coexistence of Christians and Muslims and social, friendly and professional relationships between Muslim and Christian children, as well as adults. In the texts of the books there are the names of the heroes of both religious groups that coexist in Thrace.

The school textbooks (books, exercise books, additional material, teacher's books) follow an intercultural approach to the teaching of the Greek language and are divided into two categories: the first includes the books on Greek language teaching (which is considered to be the second language of the students), and the second includes non-linguistic courses. This educational material takes into account the parameters under which the minority education takes place, namely the bilingual program, differences in student levels, and cultural differences. The curriculum aims primarily to cover the basic knowledge included in the courses of the Greek language program and to facilitate the learning process for minority students. In the Greek courses, we approach different aspects, such as the sociocultural framework of education as well as the issues of identity and diversity.

Most of the children of the Muslim minority in Thrace, and especially those that live in the mountainous areas where the population is purely Muslim, have no experience with the Greek language until they attend public kindergartens or minority primary schools. For this reason, learning the Greek language (writing and reading) in the first grades of primary school is holistic until the complete learning of the Greek alphabet. It has been proven over the last few years that in this way children learn faster, understand more words and phrases, and can express themselves more easily in speaking and writing. The books of the Turkish language program come from Turkey in agreement between the two countries and between the two Ministries of Education. As such, they are the same as those being taught in the primary schools of Turkey.