

**MINORITY EDUCATION IN WESTERN THRACE UNDER THE
'MODERN EUROPEAN MINORITY POLICY' OF KOSTAS
KARAMANLIS (2004-2009)**

Ali HÜSEYİNOĞLU*

ABSTRACT

People who belong to the Muslim Turkish minority of Western Thrace and reside in Greece constitute the only officially-recognized minority in Greece. Along with the Greek Constitution, both individual and group-based collective rights of this community are under the protection of different bilateral and international agreements to which Greece is a party. Since the incorporation of Western Thrace into Greek national territories in the 1920s, subsequent Greek governments followed similar policies while dealing with Minority-related issues, including education of the minority students from nursery to tertiary education. The Modern European Minority Policy (MEMP) introduced under the Kostas Karamanlis government between 2004 and 2009 constitutes an exemption to this trend since it was a policy dedicated to members of the Western Thracian minority. The main purpose of this study is to emphasize the main principles of the MEMP, to what extent it differed from policies of previous Greek governments, and to what extent it achieved to solve fundamental problems in the realm of minority education in Western Thrace.

Key Words: Greece, Karamanlis, Western Thrace, Minority, Muslim, Turkish, Education.

**KOSTAS KARAMANLİS'İN 'MODERN AVRUPA AZINLIK
POLİTİKASI'NDA BATI TRAKYA'DA AZINLIK EĞİTİMİ
(2004-2009)**

ÖZET

Yunanistan'ın Batı Trakya bölgesinde yaşayan Müslüman Türkler, resmi tanınmış azınlık statüsüne sahip tek topluluktur. Sahip oldukları

* Assist. Prof. Dr., Trakya University, Balkan Research Institute, Balkan Political Science and International Relations, Edirne, E-mektup: alihuseyinoglu1@gmail.com.

ALİ HÜSEYİNOĞLU

haklar Yunan Anayasası'nın yanında Yunanistan'ın taraf olduğu ikili ve uluslararası anlaşmalarla korunmaktadır. Batı Trakya bölgesinin 1920'lerde Yunan resmi topraklarına dahil olmasından günümüze kadar olan süreçte, Yunan hükümetleri azınlık meselelerine yönelik, azınlık eğitimi ile ilgili konular da dahil, benzer politikalar izlemişlerdir. 2004 ve 2009 yılları arasında Kostas Karamanlis hükümeti tarafından uygulanan 'Modern Avrupa Azınlık Politikası' yukarıda bahsedilen bu gidişata bir istisna teşkil etmektedir. Çünkü ilgili politika sadece Batı Trakya Azınlığına mensup kişileri ilgilendirmektedir. Bu çalışmanın amacı 'Modern Avrupa Azınlık Politikası'nın temel prensiplerini vurgulamak, bu politikanın önceki hükümetler döneminden farklı olup olmadığını ve Batı Trakya'daki azınlık eğitimi ilgili konularda kronikleşmiş sorunlara ne derece çözüm bulunduğunu sorgulamaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Yunanistan, Karamanlis, Batı Trakya, Azınlık, Müslüman, Türk, Eğitim.

INTRODUCTION

Kostas Karamanlis paid a visit to Western Thrace¹ on January 27, 2004 as a part of his campaign for the elections in March 2004. Speaking at the Rodopi Prefecture in Komotini (*Gümülcine*), he referred to main problems of the region and officially declared the minority policy of his political party, New Democracy (hereinafter ND), under the name of 'Modern European Minority Policy' (hereinafter MEMP).

Before mentioning details of his speech, I want to state that it is not something common for the Greek political parties to have special policies on various matters regarding members of the Muslim Turkish minority of Western Thrace. Throughout the history from 1923 onwards, one can easily observe that Greek governments were more or less following similar policies of their predecessors regarding the treatment of Greece's autochthonous Muslim Turkish residing in the northeastern region of the country; they pretended to be consistent dealing with different issues of the Turkish minority. Thus, looking from a broader perspective one can easily notify that the Greek policy of Western Thrace is widely interpreted to be

¹ Western Thrace is one of the ten regions of Greece with a population of approximately 360.000. The population of the Minority is approximately about 150.000. The region is composed of three prefectures, Rodopi, Xanthi and Evros, with the capital cities of Komotini (*Gümülcine*), Xanthi (*İskeçe*) and Aleksandroupolis (*Dedeağaç*) respectively.

MINORITY EDUCATION IN WESTERN THRACE

bounded more to the authorities of the Greek state than to the Greek party politics although opinions of some Greek politicians may differ from each other. However, as this paper does, the interpretation of Minority issues within the framework of the political parties still needs to be taken into account while focusing on the contemporary minority issues in Western Thrace.

From this point of view, official declaration of such a minority policy, i.e. MEMP, by one of the mainstream Greek political parties might seem to be crucial. However, what is more important was to question to what extent provisions of the MEMP would be put into practice by the Karamanlis government between March 2004 and October 2009 when the ND lost elections with a great defeat against the main rival, George Papandreou-led Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK).

Taking the declaration of Karamanlis as a starting point, the main purpose of this study is to analyze to what extent the statements under the MEMP that focused exclusively on the education of the Muslim Turkish minority were put into practice in Greece under the Karamanlis government. While doing so, it also aims to find possible answers to the question of what the contribution of the MEMP actually was for the overall development of the Minority education in Western Thrace between 2004 and 2009. For this purpose, books and articles written in English, Greek and Turkish languages as well as local Turkish and Greek sources printed in Western Thrace are used, which contributes the reader to have a broader understanding on various aspects of the main research theme of this project. Having a deeper analysis of priorities of the MEMP and practices of the Karamanlis government in the realm of Minority education, this study argues that although MEMP contributed for the overall development of Minority education at different levels (from nursery to higher education) it actually failed to solve fundamental problems in the domain of Minority education in Western Thrace.

1. KARAMANLIS IN KOMOTINI: A NEW BEGINNING?

In the beginning of his speech in Komotini, Karamanlis explained basics of the new minority policy of ND, which was composed three pillars, as follows:

ALİ HÜSEYİNOĞLU

*“First, it is the European logic on which we base all our issues. Second, it is ideas and thoughts of the members of the Muslim Minority that is expressed through a continuous and systematic dialogue. Last, respect to international treaties, especially that of the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne”.*²

During his speech, he mainly focused on priorities of the MEMP that fell into the domain of three main pillars:

Firstly, the first and the most urgent priority of the MEMP for Karamanlis was the development of Minority education in Thrace that would fit to other examples of minority education in the EU. Highlighting the significance of education, he promised to the audiences that buildings and the infrastructure of the Minority schools would be developed and technical equipment of these schools would be modernized. Also, special programs would be applied for teachers of the primary and secondary education targeting the improvement of their level of education as well as modernization of their methods of teaching. In his speech, he also used the term ‘Modern European School’ referring to the Minority schools in the region where the education in the mother tongue Turkish, Greek and a third language was guaranteed. He stated that after graduating from Minority primary schools, the Minority kids could speak three languages. Furthermore, Karamanlis mentioned to the transformation of the Special Pedagogical Academy of Thessaloniki (hereinafter EPATH) into a department of education. Related with EPATH, he also added that there would be held new lecturers and close cooperation would be made with other institutions outside of Greece. Moreover, he mentioned the Greek law of nine-year compulsory education that was applicable for all Greek citizens would also be applied in the Minority education. He also emphasized that special language classes would be organized for the mature members of the Minority who wanted to learn basic Greek language, which would contribute to fighting the high level of illiteracy among the Turkish Minority members.

Secondly, there would be an absolute respect for the religious freedom in addition to all other individual and collective rights of the Minority. All the properties of the religious charitable organizations/awqaf (*evkaf*) would

² The speech of Karamanlis quoted in “Basika sēmeia tōn eksaggeliōn gia tēn Thraki” [Basic points of announcements for Thrace], Xronos, 27 January 2004.

MINORITY EDUCATION IN WESTERN THRACE

be protected and new measures would be taken for a more effective administration of the waqf boards in the region. For Karamanlis, one of the main reasons showing respect to the religion of the Minority was because of the fact that in a modern society, concepts like difference, living together and cooperation were a source of power for states, not a weakness.

Thirdly, the necessary infrastructural needs related with water, roads and technology would be provided to enhance the quality of life in Thrace, especially at the remote areas and villages in the mountainous part of the region.³

Before focusing on the Minority education, this study gives a very brief information about the main characteristics of the Minority education that will contribute for a better understanding of the subject.

Since the official incorporation of Western Thrace to the Greek national territories with the 1923 Lausanne Treaty, Minority primary schools have been functioning in the cities, towns and villages where members of the Minority lives. The first Minority secondary and high school, Celal Bayar High School, was opened in Komotini in 1954 and the other one, Muzaffer Salihoglu High School, in Xanthi in 1965. Besides, there are two religious schools, madrasah, one in Komotini and the other in Echinós (*Şahin*) town of the Xanthi prefecture that have been operating from 1949 and 1956 respectively. By the 2000s, nursery education started to become popular and new kindergartens started to open in the region.

Other than the Minority primary schools, in the last decade, Muslim Turkish families started also send their children to the public primary schools where the education is only in Greek. After their primary education, Minority students have different options; to continue secondary education either at the restricted number of Minority secondary schools or public secondary schools, to leave the region and go to Turkey for secondary education, or to cease their education.⁴ Although compulsory education for

³Ibid., See also “Metra gia tē Mousoulmanikē Meionotēta eksēggeile o k. Karamanlēs” [K.Karamanlis declared measures for the Muslim Minority], Macedonian Press Agency, 27 January 2004, http://www.mpa.gr/article.html?doc_id=430101 (5.6.2004).

⁴ By 2006, 60 percent of the Minority members who live in Komotini had not completed the nine-year compulsory education. “6 stous 10 katoikoys tou N. Rodopēs den echoun tēn basikē ekpaidevsē” [6 out of 10 Minority members in Komotini had not completed the nine-year compulsory education], Turuncu, 9 August 2006.

ALİ HÜSEYİNOĞLU

all Greek citizens was nine years from 1976 until 2006 and ten years afterwards, it has never been fully applied in Western Thrace in the last 35 years, thus enabling the dropout rates to remain much higher than the average rate of Greece.⁵

Regarding teachers, all the kindergartens in today's Western Thrace are monolingual, in Greek only, and all teachers are Greek. Also, the Turkish curriculum at the bilingual Minority primary schools is taught by the Minority members all of whom are graduates of EPATH and some Turkish teachers sent by the Turkish state. The Greek curriculum is taught by the Greek teachers. At the two Minority secondary schools, the Turkish courses are taught mainly by Minority teachers who graduated from a Turkish university and Greek ones by the Greek university graduates. And at the two religious schools, the Minority teachers are responsible for the Turkish and Arabic curricula while Greek courses are taught by Greek teachers.

As for the number of Muslim Turkish students, by 2006, approximately 6.800 and 1.800 students were attending the Minority primary schools and Greek public primary schools respectively. Around 1.000 Turkish students study at the two Minority secondary and high schools in Komotini and Xanthi and about 2.000 of them study at the Greek public secondary and high schools. For the same academic year, there were about 250 Turkish students at the first three classes of the two religious schools.⁶ Having provided this brief introduction, now, the next section focuses on different issues of Minority education under the Karamanlis leadership in the second half of 2000s.

2. PRE-SCHOOL/NURSERY EDUCATION

Nursery schools or kindergartens have been interpreted as one of the first steps for the education of pupils in Greece since the 1990s. They have been highly functional for parents both of whom work and they do not have

⁵ See Askouni, Nelli, “*Ē diarroē tōn mathitōn tēs meionotētas tēs Thrakēs apo tēn ypochreōtikē ekpaidevsē* [The dropout rates of the Minority of Thrace at the compulsory education]”, Frangoudaki, Anna; Dragona, Thalia (eds.), *Prothesē ochi Apharesē, Pollaplasiasmos ochi Diaresē* [Addition, not Subtraction/ Multiplication, not Division], Metaixmio, Athens, 2007, pp.123-137.

⁶ Mavrommatis, Giorgos, “*Ekpaidevontas tēn Meionotēta* [Educating the Minority]”, *Elefterotipia*, 4 June 2006.

MINORITY EDUCATION IN WESTERN THRACE

a time to look after their children for some hours during the weekdays. As for the Minority, it is quite a recent phenomenon to observe Turkish families sending their children to kindergartens. Especially from the beginning of 2000, Turkish families started to realize the role of nursery education for their own children. However, during the Karamanlis leadership, great number of families continued to reject sending their children to these schools for several reasons:

First of all, the space was predominantly ‘Greek’ and ‘Christian’, which was highly foreign and unfamiliar for a kid with a ‘Turkish’ and ‘Muslim’ experience at home. Second, communication between the Minority kids and the Greek teacher was highly limited since the Turkish mother tongue was absent at these schools. Moreover, some Greek teachers were not sensitive towards the ethnic or religious background of the Minority students. According to some Minority families, some Greek teachers taught all kids some basic practices of Christianity, such as doing the sign of the cross before the meal, at nursery schools where Muslim Turkish children were also present.⁷ Third, the number of monolingual Greek kindergartens was insufficient. Under the Karamanlis government, one can clearly see that one of the main demands of the Minority families was the establishment of bilingual or monolingual Turkish kindergartens especially after the inclusion of nursery education into the compulsory education system of Greece that it is mentioned in the coming paragraph. To note, although new kindergartens were opened in the region under the Karamanlis government none of them were either bilingual or Turkish.⁸

Law No. 3518/2006⁹ made the nursery education compulsory for all Greek citizens of 4 and 5 years old. Thus, the compulsory education in

⁷ During my fieldwork in Western Thrace, I was also told a story of one of my interviewees who witnessed a friend of him whose children was showing to him how their teacher at one of the nursery schools taught them to cross himself.

⁸ There are some children clubs that operate in the two main cities and some towns but they operate under the Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association and they are mainly composed of children whose families are a member of this NGO. Indeed, it is a facility for the children of its members. For 2006, the number of children attending these clubs were around 300. Baltiotis, Lambros; Tsitselikis Konstantinos, “È Meionotikē Ekpaidevsē tēs Thrakēs: Nōmiko Kathestōs, Problēmata kai Prooptikes [Minority Education of Thrace: Legal Framework, Problems and Future Propects]”, Frangoudaki, Anna; Dragona, Thalia (eds.), *Prothesē ochi Aphairesē, Pollaplasiasmos ochi Diairesē* [Addition, not Subtraction/ Multiplication, not Division], Metaixmio, Athens, 2007, p. 63.

⁹ The Greek Official Gazette, FEK A’ 272, 21 December 2006.

Greece increased from nine to ten years. However, although the nursery education became compulsory there were not sufficient nursery schools for the Turkish kids in Western Thrace. Especially, a great number of villages composed of Turks only did not have any nursery school. Therefore, it was not possible for the new law to be fully applied all over the region. İlhan Ahmet, the only representative of the Minority from the ND between 2004 and 2007 at the Greek Parliament, had met with the Minister of Education and Religious Affairs and discussed various issues of Minority education in Thrace. The Minister underlined that officials of the Ministry had already begun to work on the establishment of bilingual nursery schools according to the Law No. 2413/1996.¹⁰ Although Ahmet stated in 2007 that the necessary decision for the establishment of eight bilingual kindergartens had been made by the Karamanlis government, nothing would be put into practice in the following years.¹¹

In spite of the increasing number of Turkish families sending their children to the Greek nursery schools, a great number of the Minority pupils did not have the opportunity to receive nursery education due to causes that it is mentioned above. The non-existence of Turkish or bilingual nursery school persists as of 2013. No official response has been given since the end of the Karamanlis government in 2009. Henceforth, this paper argues that provided that the foundation of an education system is accepted to be the nursery level and if Greece continues ignoring basic demands of the Minority members in the realm of nursery education, e.g. opening of the Turkish or bilingual kindergartens, then, it seems that the fundamental problems faced by the Minority students at the primary education, the majority of which are elaborated in the next section of this paper, are likely to continue in the coming decades.

3. PRIMARY EDUCATION

Primary schooling which lasts for six years constitutes the backbone of education in Greece. Since the incorporation of Western Thrace into Greek territories, no major problem has occurred about the non-existence of

¹⁰ “SÖPA lağvedilsin ya da çağdaş yüksek öğrenim kurumuna yükseltilsin [EPATH to be either dissolved or upgraded into a modern higher education institution]”, *Gündem*, 17 February 2006.

¹¹ Ahmet, İlhan, *Batı Trakya Müslüman Türk Azınlığının Sorunlarıyla İlgili Parlamento Çalışmaları (2004-2007)* [Parliamentary Works regarding the problems of the Muslim Turkish Minority of Western Thrace (2004-2007)], 2007, p. 54.

MINORITY EDUCATION IN WESTERN THRACE

bilingual Minority primary schools across Western Thrace. Under the Karamanlis government, the number of Minority primary schools functioning in Western Thrace was around 230. A great number of them were located in villages and composed of two classrooms where education was provided by a Turkish and Greek teacher. Because of the low number of Turkish children, the vast majority of students continued to be taught in combined classes where the quality of the education was questionable. For the 2005-2006 academic year, there were 133 Minority schools functioning in the Rodopi prefecture, 75 and 21 in the Xanthi and Evros prefectures respectively. The number of Minority students studying at both Minority and majority Greek primary schools was estimated to be around 12.000.¹²

Moreover, although elections of the school boards of the minority primary schools continued their functioning and authorities were quite restricted compared to the premises enshrined in the Article 40 of the 1923 Lausanne Treaty. Furthermore, although there was a number of Minority teachers graduated from the Turkish universities the priority continued to be given to the EPATH graduates¹³ in case of an appointment of a Turkish teacher to a Minority primary school.

Furthermore, in the 2004-2005 academic year the application of all-day schooling was introduced for the first time under the Karamanlis government. However, the major criticism coming from the Minority was that only courses in Greek were taught in the afternoon session and it provided nothing for the strengthening of the courses taught in Turkish.¹⁴

¹² “Yeni Eğitim Yılı, Eski Sorunlar” [The new academic year, old problems], *Gündem*, 21 September 2007.

¹³ There are different kinds of teachers functioning at the Minority Primary Schools in Western Thrace: Greek teachers are responsible only for the Greek curriculum while the Turkish courses are taught by Minority graduates from EPATH, Minority graduates from religious schools/madrasahs, and teachers with Turkish citizenship who come from Turkey and paid by the Turkish state. EPATH was an academy founded in 1968 and abolished in 2010. It aimed to train members of the Minority as teachers to teach the Turkish curriculum at bilingual Minority schools. However, because of the fact that education in EPATH was predominantly in Greek and those graduating EPATH were not fluent enough in Turkish, EPATH teachers were continuously criticized by the Minority. For more information see Huseyinoglu, Ali, *The Development of Minority Education at the South-easternmost Corner of the EU: The Case of Muslim Turks in Western Thrace, Greece*, Unpublished PhD Dissertation, University of Sussex, 2012, pp.190-195.

¹⁴ “Öğretmen ve Encümenlerden Ortak Karar” [Common decision from teachers and school boards], *Gündem*, 21 May 2004.

ALİ HÜSEYİNOĞLU

Besides, economic aid from the Greek Ministry of Education provided to the Minority primary schools increased from 1.115.000 Euros to 1.923.000 Euros between 2004 and 2008.¹⁵

Issues regarding the EPATH teachers continued to rank the first place in most of the debates over the Minority education. Major problems kept being raised especially by the Turkish families who were sending their children to the Minority primary schools where the Turkish curriculum is taught by the EPATH teachers. The main complaint of the families was about the insufficient capability of the EPATH teachers to teach the Turkish courses. Such reactions increased especially when new Turkish textbooks provided by Turkey started to be distributed in the region by the beginning of 2000. As in the case of Dilina and Kalhas, parents of the school children protested the appointed EPATH by not sending their children to the school for a couple of days.¹⁶

Regarding the low-level of education and insufficiency in teaching the new Turkish textbooks, the EPATH Graduates Association of Rodopi-Evros continued to send letters to the Greek Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs demanding seminars for the EPATH graduates to develop their knowledge and capability to teach with new Turkish textbooks at the Minority primary schools. They also kept proposing the transformation of EPATH into a department of education under a Greek university. Besides reactions from the Turkish Minority, the Greek academicians as well did not hesitate to raise criticism against the functioning of EPATH.¹⁷ In spite of widespread criticisms against the EPATH, no step was taken by the Karamanlis government for solution of the above-mentioned problems; EPATH teachers kept having priority over other Minority graduates of Turkish universities for being appointed as teachers to the Minority primary

¹⁵ Stilianidis, Evripidis, Thrace: Model of a Pluralistic, Open, Democratic Society, pp. 8-9.

¹⁶ “Delinazköy ilkokulunda boykot” [Boycott at the Dilina primary school], *Gündem* 8 October 2004 ;“Kalfa ilkokulunda geçici çözüm” [Temporary solution at the Kalhas primary school] *Gündem*, 5 November 2004.

¹⁷ Anna Frangoudaki, “Ë Thrakē Allazei: Epimetro scholio gia tēs prooptikes kai ta embodia” [Thrace is changing: Concluding Remarks for prospects and hindrances] in Anna Frangoudaki and Thalia Dragona, eds., *Prosthesē ochi Aphairesē, Pollaplasiasmos ochi Diairesē* [Addition, not Subtraction/ Multiplication, not Division] (Athens: Metaixmio, 2007) pp. 486-487. See also Iris Kalliopi Boussiakou, “The Educational Rights of the Muslim Minority under Greek Law”, *Journal of Ethnopolitics and Minority Issues in Europe (JEMIE)*, vol. 6, no.1, (2007) pp. 16-17, <http://www.ecmi.de/jemie/indexauthor.html> (29.11.2013).

MINORITY EDUCATION IN WESTERN THRACE

schools based on the Law No. 695/1977¹⁸ while no seminar would be organized for them in upcoming years.

Other than problems with EPATH teachers, the Program for Education of Muslim Children (PEM) was another issue that precipitated the debates over the Minority education. It was an 80 percent EU-funded project that started in 1997. The main goals of PEM was to enhance the level of the Greek language of the Muslim Turkish children that would assist them integrating into the Greek society under the motto of "Addition, not Subtraction/Multiplication, not Division".¹⁹ During the Karamanlis government, the PEM continued to function by which it contributed for the overall development of the fluency of the Minority children in Greek. It also helped for increasing number of Turkish children continuing secondary and higher education in Greece; the number of those finishing secondary schools, either Greek or Minority ones, increased approximately 60 percent in 2007 compared to the figures of 2003.²⁰

However, the main criticisms raised by the Minority against the PEM in Western Thrace continued in the second half of the 2000s on the basis that this Program was targeting only the Greek curriculum in the bilingual primary and secondary education; it had nothing to do for the development of the Turkish curriculum taught at the same schools. It might be for this reason that some Minority member had interpreted PEM as an 'assimilation project' of the Greek state.²¹ Keeping in mind that one of the main aims of the PEM was the gradual integration of the Minority pupils into the Greek society, then, this target would have been quite difficult to achieve in case the Turkish curriculum was completely ignored.

In the following years, a few initiatives were actually introduced by the PEM such as teaching Turkish to Greek teachers collaborating with this Program on voluntary basis. However, this was not able to stop major criticism against the one-sided character of this Program, i.e. focusing only on the improvement of the Greek curriculum in a bilingual environment.

¹⁸ The Greek Official Gazette, FEK A' 264, 16 September 1977.

¹⁹ For the overall activities of the PEM visit its website www.museduc.gr (19.11.2013).

²⁰ Frangoudaki, Anna; Dragona, Thalia, "Eisagōgē", Frangoudaki, Anna; Dragona, Thalia (eds.), *Prothesē ochi Apharesē, Pollaplasiasmos ochi Diaresē* [Addition, not Subtraction/Multiplication, not Division], *Metaixmio*, Athens, 2007, p.54.

²¹ Cengiz Ömer, "Azınlık Eğitimi veya 'Düşmanı Eğitmek' " [Minority education or 'educating the enemy'], *Millet*, 23 November 2005.

ALİ HÜSEYİNOĞLU

Considering from a broader perspective, it was obvious that at a Minority institution where education continued to be provided in both Turkish and Greek languages, special programs such as the PEM, which targeted only the development of the Greek language, could not work efficiently. Here, it seems that one of the core premises of the discipline of education - those educated well in mother tongue can learn a second language more easily and quickly - was overtly ignored or underestimated by officials of the Ministry of Education. Reasons of such an ignorance is another topic of discussion that needs further research and deeper understanding about policies and priorities of the Greek Ministry of Education regarding education of its Muslim Turkish citizens in Western Thrace.

Under his MEMP, Karamanlis had promised that Minority graduates of 'European' schools would speak three languages. Nevertheless, this never happened. Leaving aside the third language, i.e. English, the vast majority of the Minority students who finished bilingual primary education still faced significant problems in writing and speaking both languages; they kept finishing their primary education without being fluent either in Turkish or Greek. This picture has not changed since 2009 when PASOK came to the power. As of 2013, almost all of the problems highlighted in this section continues to influence the choice of Minority families for primary and secondary education of their children. A Muslim Turkish child is still not fluent either in Turkish or Greek after six years of bilingual education since Greece has not been able to find solutions for the fundamental problems in the realm of Minority education. As a result, the number of Minority parents choosing monolingual primary and secondary education has recently been increased. This change in the preference of Minority parents constitutes one of the primary reasons why some bilingual Minority primary schools have recently been closed due to very low number (a handful) of Muslim Turkish students.

4. SECONDARY EDUCATION

Secondary education in Greece is six years. Half of it, i.e. the first three years after primary education, is included within the scheme of compulsory education while the rest of it constitutes high schools education across Greece. All students finishing secondary schools also have the right to choose vocational high schools. Compared to bilingual primary schools located at each place where Minority members live, there are only two bilingual secondary and high schools across Western Thrace that cannot

MINORITY EDUCATION IN WESTERN THRACE

satisfy the overall demand of those Minority families who prefer to send their children bilingual school for secondary education.

Looking closer to issues in the realm of secondary education of the Muslim Turkish minority within the framework of the MEMP policy of the Karamanlis government, some improvements as well as continuities of problems need to be underlined. First, new Turkish textbooks prepared and printed by the Turkish authorities were finally approved by the Greek state and started to be used in the two bilingual Minority secondary schools for the first time in the 2005-2006 academic year. Thus, after a half century, the old and outdated textbooks were replaced by new and modern ones in the Minority secondary education. This undertaking that contributed to the development of the Turkish curriculum was quite welcomed by the members of the Turkish minority.²² Second, Turkish was introduced in three Greek public secondary schools as an elective course in 2006²³. But, some local Greeks, as that of the local archbishop of the region, Damaskinos, sent letters to the Ministries of Education and Foreign Affairs in which he interpreted the aforementioned course as a 'time bomb' that would cause problems for the region in the future.²⁴

Third, different programs for the teaching of the Greek language to adult Minority members was also put into practice where people with no knowledge of the Greek language or those who were not fluent in Greek - mainly the Muslim Turks and some Pontiac Greeks that arrived Greece after the dissolution of the former USSR - had the chance to learn the Greek language. These were applied especially in the cities and towns and they were financed by the EU. Similarly, second-chance schools continued to function in some cities and towns of the region mainly for adult Greek citizens who wanted to get a school diploma or even study a Greek university. The number of the Turks participating in these schools remained highly low compared to those Minority members without diplomas from Greek secondary education. Such developments indicate that measures of the Karamanlis government aiming to decrease the overall level of illiteracy

²² "Yarım Asır Bekledik" [We waited for half a century], Ötüken, 24 January 2006.

²³ The Ministerial Decision 61539/Γ/ 20.6.2006, The Greek Official Gazette, FEK B' 867, 10 July 2006. See also, McDougall, Gay, United Nations-Independent Expert on Minority Issues, "Report on Greece, 18 February 2009", retrieved from <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/country,GRC,4562d8b62,49b7b2e52,0.html>, (20.2.2009).

²⁴ "Saatli Bomba" [Time Bomb], Ötüken, 21 September 2006.

ALİ HÜSEYİNOĞLU

across the country were welcomed by the Turkish Minority in Western Thrace.

Unlike the above-mentioned developments, the number of the Minority secondary and high schools in Western Thrace did not change under the Karamanlis government. Contrary to demands of Minority families for founding of new bilingual secondary schools, no bilingual secondary school was opened within the framework of MEMP. As it is emphasized, although the Muslim Turkish minority constituted around 52 percent of the population in the Rodopi region and 45 percent in the Xanthi region, there were 24 public secondary, high, and vocational high schools operating in Rodopi and 37 schools in Xanthi compared to the two Minority secondary and high schools in these two prefectures.²⁵ These figures show that Minority's demand for bilingual secondary education felt on deaf ears of the Karamanlis government. As a result, most of the Turkish students had only two options; they would either continue going to the monolingual Greek public secondary schools²⁶ or leave the region and go to Turkey for secondary education that had an extra heavy economic burden for their families.

Regarding the establishment of new Minority secondary schools, what İlhan Ahmet underlined seems to constitute another significant aspect of the MEMP of the Karamanlis government; the lack of dialogue and cooperation between Athens and Western Thrace at different levels. Although Karamanlis emphasized the dialogue with the Minority during his speech in 2004, his government's applications in the realm of Minority education reveal that they were definitely not a product of dialogue between Athens and Thrace. According to Ahmet, the-then Minority MP under the political party of Karamanlis, during his term the Minority MP he met with the Turkish Prime Minister, R. Tayyip Erdogan, almost five times where he had the chance to talk also about the need for establishment of new Minority secondary and high schools in cooperation between Turkish and Greek governments. However, for the same time period, he found no chance to meet with Karamanlis and discuss on such issues although both of them

²⁵ Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association, Parallel Summary Report on Greece's Compliance with the International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination submitted to the United Nations' Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) as a contribution of the Periodic Reports of Greece (CERD/C/GRC/19), CERD's 75th Session (3-28 August 2009), July 2009, p.9.

²⁶ See Askouni, 2006, op.cit, pp.217-245.

MINORITY EDUCATION IN WESTERN THRACE

were belonging to the same political party, ND.²⁷ Along with this lack of communication and cooperation within the Karamanlis government, it is quite noteworthy that although Evripidis Stilianidis, the Minister of Education between 2007 and 2009, was elected from Komotini and knew major problems of the Turkish minority quite well. Yet, as the two Minority MPs of the opposition party (PASOK), Ahmet Hacıosman and Çetin Mandacı, underlined, Stilianidis had never given a positive response to demands of the two PASOK MPs for a meeting with them where they would have discussed analytically various problems of Minority education in Western Thrace.²⁸

On the one hand, the continuity of problems under the MEMP strengthened high dropout rates of Muslim Turkish students at the level of high school. On the other hand, as elaborated in the following section of this paper, it affected the overall performance and success of the Minority students continuing higher education either in Greece or abroad. Although the MEMP of the Karamanlis government supported some programs targeting to fight against the high level of illiteracy within the Muslim Turkish minority, fundamental problems some of which are highlighted above still await solution from today's government of Greece.

5. HIGHER EDUCATION

In the pre-1990s, the number of the Muslim Turkish students at Greek universities was highly limited. The vast majority of the Minority students had a poor educational background and very limited knowledge of Greek. Therefore, they were not able to finish even the secondary schools that were compulsory for all students in Greece. Thus, the main trend was to continue secondary education in the neighboring country, Turkey. This started to change slightly in the second half of the 1990s when Greece introduced a measure of positive discrimination for members of its Muslim Turkish minority citizens, i.e. 0.5 percent special quota based on the Law No. 2341/1995.²⁹ For the first time, Minority students would sit for the same university entrance exam but they would compete only with those students

²⁷ "Interview with İlhan Ahmet", 5 January 2009, http://www.birlikgazetesi.info/?pid=3&id_news=327, (10.1.2009).

²⁸ My Interviews with Ahmet Hacıosman, Komotini, 8 August 2009 and Çetin Mandacı, Xanthi, 27 July 2009.

²⁹ The Greek Official Gazette, FEK A' 208.

ALİ HÜSEYİNOĞLU

belonging to the same Minority, not with the majority students of the country. This measure introduced in 1996 enabled a significant increase of Minority students at institutions of the Greek tertiary education. For instance, there were 150 Minority students who won a place at a Greek university in 2002, while this number increased to 400 and 500 in 2006 and 2008 respectively.³⁰

Within the MEMP of the Karamanlis government, a couple of measures contributed to the increasing numbers of Minority students continuing higher education in Greece.

First, the scope of the 0.5 percent quota system was broadened so as to comprise university technology institutes, TEI, according to the Law No. 3404/2005.³¹ This implied that Minority graduates of Greek technical high schools would be given the opportunity to benefit from the same measure of positive discrimination and get a place at the Greek technological institutes much easier ever than before. Second, Marietta Giannakou, the then Greek Minister of Education and Religious Affairs, noted during her speech at the Parliament that all Greek citizens entering the Greek universities from 2005 and onwards had to pass the 10 score limit over 20 so that they could have access to any Greek university. Students belonging to the Minority in Western Thrace were not subjected to this regulation. In this respect, this exemption had a significant contribution to the increasing number of Minority students at the Greek tertiary education since a big number of Minority candidates could not score above 10 over 20 at Greek university entrance exams.³² Third, for the academic years of 2006-2007 and 2009-2010 the Hellenic State Scholarships Foundation (*IKY*) granted, for the first time, a total number of 15 scholarships only for the Minority students who would choose graduate education at Greek

³⁰ Stilianidis, Evripidis, Thrace: Model of a Pluralistic, Open, Democratic Society, 2009, p.16. For more information about the special quota application and its consequences see Huseyinoglu, op.cit., 236-242.

³¹ Hunault, Michel, MP, Parliamentary Assembly-CoE, Report, Freedom of Religion and other Human Rights for non-Muslim minorities in Turkey and for the Muslim minority in Thrace (Eastern Greece), 21 April 2009, <http://assembly.coe.int/Main.asp?link=/Documents/WorkingDocs/Doc09/EDOC11860.htm> (29.4.2009).

³² Speech of Marietta Giannakou, Minutes at the Greek Parliament, Period: IA, Meeting D, 8 February 2007, <http://www.parliament.gr/ergasies/showfile.asp?file=end070208.txt>, (10.9.2009).

MINORITY EDUCATION IN WESTERN THRACE

universities.³³ Fourth, the 0.5 percent special quota for the Minority members applying for the Greek public sector was also introduced by the Karamanlis government and officially put into practice in January 2009.³⁴

Despite the aforementioned measures put into practice by the Karamanlis government, the numerical difference between the number of those Minority students entering the Greek universities and those graduating has been persisted since the 2000s. A number of Minority students still do not manage complete their education and graduate from their universities while it is rare to witness a Minority student who finishes her/his education on time. The continuity of major problems that Minority students face during their primary and secondary education and their low level of fluency in the Greek language constitute some of the main reasons for the above-mentioned numerical disparity at the Greek tertiary education.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Recalling what Karamanlis declared on Minority education in 2004 and what the ND-led Greek government did for two terms, it becomes blatant that most of the major promises highlighted by the MEMP were not put into practice. As it is elaborated in this study, repairing the old school buildings, providing educational and technical materials to Minority schools, establishment of new Minority primary schools and monolingual (Greek) kindergartens, and educating some Minority and majority teachers under the PEM were not able to cure fundamental educational problems in Western Thrace that had been affecting everyday life of the Muslim Turks since the 1960s.

Having analyzed the first priority of the MEMP under the Karamanlis leadership, this paper argued that the main aim under the MEMP was to solve problems in the realm of Minority education from above, not from below. Else, the first step should have been to start dealing with major problems in the field of nursery and primary education of the Minority in Western Thrace such as opening of bilingual or Turkish nursery

³³ The necessary application forms and information about the 5 scholarships retrieved from the website of the Hellenic State Scholarships Foundation (IKY), <http://www.iky.gr/IKY/portal/gr/default/CMSGWindow?action=2&uri=/gr/greek-scholarships/loipes/thraki.html>, (15.7.2009).

³⁴ The Greek Official Gazette, FEK A' 18, 27.1.2009.

schools. Thus, the first priority of the Modern European Minority Policy of the Karamanlis government was actually unable to solve the ongoing fundamental problems of the Minority education.

This paper also emphasizes that although the MEMP was officially applied in Western Thrace, the concepts of ‘modernity’ and ‘European’ that are highly subjective, vague and open to further discussions were never clarified by the Karamanlis government. This constitutes a terminological weakness of the MEMP to which the then Prime Minister frequently referred during his term in office.³⁵

The aforementioned analysis on various but interrelated issues of Minority education in Western Thrace depicts that although some significant steps had been taken for the improvement of Minority education in Western Thrace, the interpretation of these two basic concepts by the Karamanlis government was quite different than that of Europe’s. Making comparisons between educational regimes of historical minorities across Europe is actually beyond the scope of this paper. On the one hand, some minorities in Europe continued to have even higher education in their own languages - as in the case of the Swedish Minority in Turku/Finland and Hungarian Minority in Transylvania/Romania. On the other hand, some other minorities, e.g. the Turkish minority in Greece, were still rejected to have even nursery education in their own mother tongue. Similar examples about different treatments of national and ethnic minorities across Europe actually contributes to a better understanding what the conceptual understanding of the Karamanlis government was regarding a minority policy based on ‘modern’ and ‘European’ values and in what ways it differed from other examples of Minority treatment in the European continent.

To conclude, this study underlines that various applications in the realm of Minority education in Western Thrace under the MEMP of the Karamanlis government between 2004 and 2009 had an ‘aspirin’ impact in a way that it provided some short-term solutions for the fundamental socio-educational problems in the realm of Minority education in Western Thrace. Nevertheless, the Minority was rather in need of some ‘antibiotics’ that would target structural problems of the Minority education.

³⁵ Opening speech of Kostas Karamanlis at the 71st International Fair of Thessaloniki, 8 September 2006, www.minpress.gr/minpress/scriptpage.html?id=28633403 (11.11.2009).

MINORITY EDUCATION IN WESTERN THRACE

As of 2013, almost all of the basic problems that are mentioned above remain unresolved. If today's Greek coalition government under the leaderships of Samaras and Venizelos aims to promote the integration of the Minority with majority of the Greek society, then, the first and foremost important consideration should be to tackle solving major educational problems of the Muslim Turkish minority some of which are elaborated above. At this point, effective dialogue with the Minority members should not be underemphasized. If some new policies regarding the Minority education will continue to be introduced unilaterally without any dialogue and cooperation with members of the Minority, as it has been the case for years since the 1960s, then, it is foreseeable that fundamental educational problems of the Minority will persist in the second decade of the 21st century.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Ahmet, İlhan, Batı Trakya Müslüman Türk Azınlığının Sorunlarıyla İlgili Parlamento Çalışmaları (2004-2007) [Parliamentary Works regarding the problems of the Muslim Turkish Minority of Western Thrace (2004-2007)], 2007.

Askouni, Nelli, “Ἐ diarroē tōn mathitōn tēs meionotētās tēs Thrakēs apo tēn ypochreōtikē ekpaidevsē [The dropout rates of the Minority of Thrace at the compulsory education]”, Frangoudaki, Anna; Dragona, Thalia (eds.), Prothesē ochi Aphairesē, Pollaplasiasmos ochi Diairesē [Addition, not Subtraction/ Multiplication, not Division], Metaixmio, Athens, 2007, pp.123-138.

Baltsiotis, Lambros; Tsitselikis Konstantinos, “Ἐ Meionotikē Ekpaidevsē tēs Thrakēs: Nōmiko Kathestōs, Problēmata kai Prooptikes [Minority Education of Thrace: Legal Framework, Problems and Future Propects]”, Frangoudaki, Anna; Dragona, Thalia (eds.), Prothesē ochi Aphairesē, Pollaplasiasmos ochi Diairesē [Addition, not Subtraction/ Multiplication, not Division], Metaixmio, Athens, 2007, pp.59-90.

Cengiz Ömer, “Azınlık Eğitimi veya ‘Düşmanı Eğitmek’ ” [Minority education or ‘educating the enemy’], Millet, 23 November 2005.

Frangoudaki, Anna; Dragona, Thalia, “Eisagōgē [Introduction]”, Frangoudaki, Anna; Dragona, Thalia (eds.), Prothesē ochi Aphairesē,

ALİ HÜSEYİNOĞLU

Pollaplasiasmos ochi Diairesē [Addition, not Subtraction/ Multiplication, not Division], Metaixmio, Athens, 2007, pp.17-58

Frangoudaki, Anna, “Ē Thrakē Allazei: Epimetro scholio gia tēs prooptikes kai ta embodia” [Thrace is changing: Concluding Remarks for prospects and hindrances] in Anna Frangoudaki and Thalia Dragona, eds., Prothesē ochi Aphairesē, Pollaplasiasmos ochi Diairesē [Addition, not Subtraction/ Multiplication, not Division] Metaixmio, Athens, 2007.

Hellenic State Scholarships Foundation (*IKY*),
<http://www.iky.gr/IKY/portal/gr/default/CMSGRWindow?action=2&uri=/gr/greek-scholarships/loipes/thraki.html>, (15.7.2009).

Hunault, Michel, MP, Parliamentary Assembly-CoE, Report, Freedom of Religion and other Human Rights for non-Muslim minorities in Turkey and for the Muslim minority in Thrace (Eastern Greece), 21 April 2009,<http://assembly.coe.int/Main.asp?link=/Documents/WorkingDocs/Doc09/EDOC11860.htm>, (29.4.2009).

Huseyinoglu, Ali, The Development of Minority Education at the South-easternmost Corner of the EU: The Case of Muslim Turks in Western Thrace, Greece, Unpublished PhD Dissertation, University of Sussex, 2012.

Interview with Ahmet Haciosman (MP, PASOK), Komotini, 8 August 2009

Interview with Çetin Mandacı (MP, PASOK), Xanthi, 27 July 2009.

Iris Kalliopi Boussiakou, “The Educational Rights of the Muslim Minority under Greek Law”, *Journal of Ethnopolitics and Minority Issues in Europe (JEMIE)*, Vol. 6, No.1, 2007, <http://www.ecmi.de/jemie/indexauthor.html> (29.11.2013).

Mavrommatis, Giorgos, “Ekpaidevontas tēn Meionotēta [Educating the Minority]”, *Elefterotipia*, 4 June 2006.

McDougall, Gay, United Nations-Independent Expert on Minority Issues, “Report on Greece, 18 February 2009”, retrieved from <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/country,,,GRC,4562d8b62,49b7b2e52,0.html> (20.2.2009).

MINORITY EDUCATION IN WESTERN THRACE

Program for Education of Muslim Children, www.museduc.gr (19.11.2013).

Speech of Marietta Giannakou, Minutes at the Greek Parliament, Period: IA, Meeting D, 8 February 2007, <http://www.parliament.gr/ergasies/showfile.asp?file=end070208.txt>, (10.9.2009).

Stilianidis, Evripidis, Thrace: Model of a Pluralistic, Open, Democratic Society.

The Greek Official Gazette, FEK A' 18, 27.1.2009.

The Greek Official Gazette, FEK A' 264, 16 September 1977.

The Greek Official Gazette, FEK B' 867, 10 July 2006.

The Greek Official Gazette, FEK A' 272, 21 December 2006.

The Greek Official Gazette, FEK A' 208.

Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association, Parallel Summary Report on Greece's Compliance with the International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination submitted to the United Nations' Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) as a contribution of the Periodic Reports of Greece (CERD/C/GRC/19), CERD's 75th Session (3-28 August 2009), July 2009.

Opening speech of Kostas.Karamanlis at the 71st International Fair of Thessaloniki, 8 September 2006, www.minpress.gr/minpress/scriptpage.html?id=28633403 (11.11.2009).

“6 stous 10 katoikoys tou N. Rodopēs den echoun tēn basikē ekpaidevsē” [6 out of 10 Minority members in Komotini had not completed the nine-year compulsory education], Turuncu, 9 August 2006.

“Delinazköy ilkokulunda boykot” [Boycott at the Dilina primary school], Gündem 8 October 2004.

“Interview with İlhan Ahmet”, 5 January 2009, http://www.birlikgazetesi.info/?pid=3&id_news=327, (10.1.2009).

ALİ HÜSEYİNOĞLU

“Kalfa ilkokulunda geçici çözüm” [Temporary solution at the Kalhas primary school] Gündem, 5 November 2004.

“Öğretmen ve Encümenlerden Ortak Karar” [Common decision from teachers and school boards], Gündem, 21 May 2004.

“Saatli Bomba” [Time Bomb], Ötüken, 21 September 2006.

“SÖPA Lağvedilsin ya da çağdaş yüksek öğrenim kurumuna yükseltisin [EPATH to be either dissolved or upgraded into a modern higher education institution]”, Gündem, 17 February 2006.

“Yarım Asır Bekledik” [We waited for half a century], Ötüken, 24 January 2006.

“Yeni Eğitim Yılı, Eski Sorunlar” [The new academic year, old problems], Gündem, 21 September 2007.

“Basika sēmeia tōn eksaggeliōn gia tēn Thraki” [Basic points of announcements for Thrace], Xronos, 27 January 2004.

“Metra gia tē Mousoulmanikē Meionotēta eksēggeile o k. Karamanlēs” [K.Karamanlis declared measures for the Muslim Minority], Macedonian Press Agency, 27 January 2004, http://www.mpa.gr/article.html?doc_id=430101 (5.6.2004).