



General Assembly

Distr.: General
17 February 2026

English only

Human Rights Council

Sixty-first session

23 February–2 April 2026

Agenda item 3

**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.

[22 January 2026]

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



Denial of Turkish Children's Rights to Quality Education due to the Violation of the Educational Autonomy of the Turkish Community in Western Thrace, Greece

The legal status of the Turkish community in Western Thrace living in Greece is defined by the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne, which grants autonomy in the fields of education and religion. The Turkish community has the right to establish, manage and control all kinds of charitable organisations, religious or social institutions, all kinds of schools and similar teaching and educational institutions at its own expense, and to freely use its own language and perform religious ceremonies.

According to the Treaty of Lausanne, Turkish schools belonging to the Turkish community in Western Thrace were owned by the Turkish community and had autonomous management and operation, therefore all expenses and management of the schools were also their responsibility. The operation and administration of private and autonomous Turkish schools is the responsibility of a school board consisting of three persons elected by the votes of the parents. The first legal regulation concerning the school boards was enacted by Law No. 3065/1954 and the school boards are responsible for overseeing the school's income and expenditure, paying the salaries and insurance of contracted teachers in the Turkish curriculum, ensuring the maintenance of the school's movable and immovable property, and, most importantly, representing parents at the school.

State intervention regarding the authority of school boards has increased over time, with school boards exercising their authority to employ and appoint teachers for the last time in the 1970–71 school year. Under Law No. 694, enacted in 1977, the management of Turkish schools was changed from being directly elected by parents to the governor selecting three people from a list of no more than fifteen candidates. Law No. 695, enacted in the same year, also removed the boards' right to hire teachers in the Turkish curriculum.

This law stipulates that teachers who will teach in the Turkish curriculum in Turkish schools shall be employed primarily from among EPATH (Special Pedagogical Academy of Thessaloniki) graduates, thereby preventing Greek citizens belonging to the Turkish community in Western Thrace, Greece who are graduates of teacher training colleges in Türkiye from being employed in these schools. In other words, by stripping the boards of their powers and having EPATH graduates employed by the state as teachers of Turkish in our schools, a deliberate and irreparable blow has been dealt to our private and autonomous school system.

Over the years, the prerogatives of school boards have been revised numerous times, and the prerogatives held by these boards have been progressively restricted. With the Ministry Decision issued in 2002, the boards lost their authority over Turkish schools. Throughout history, arbitrary practices have continued despite appearing to comply with legislation. Most recently, as stated above, the school boards responsible for the administration and operation of schools have been banned from entering school buildings. As the school board of the Xanthi Turkish Secondary and High school was prohibited from entering the school, they met with the Minister of Education, who visited on the first day of the school year, at the school gate and reiterated their long-standing demands for a new school building. Subsequently, the office of the school board within the secondary and high school building was also vacated.

On 6 October, the Regional Education Directorate of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace accused the school board of the Xanthi Turkish Secondary and High School of continuing to enter the school illegally without any legal justification. Referring to the establishment of a Turkish Secondary and High School in Komotini in 1952, and the subsequent establishment of the Xanthi Turkish Secondary and High School in 1965 with the signature of the then President, the Education Directorate noting that it was founded as a private school at that time, argues that the Treaty of Lausanne only covers minority education at the primary school level, and that this school was established as a result of a conscious and unconditional choice by Greece and not as a product of any obligation. However, the Treaty of Lausanne grants the Turkish community the right to establish, manage, and control all types of schools and similar educational institutions.

Following this debate, Hüseyin Zeybek, a Turkish Member of Parliament from Xanthi, posed a question to the Minister of Education. In response to the MP's question (132/9-10-2025), the Minister asserted that school boards solely have financial responsibilities. Yet, the practical reduction of school boards to merely accounting functions is contrary to both the relevant law and the agreements to which Greece is a party.

Finally, according to recent press reports as of 1 August 2026, all school boards operating temporarily under Law No. 5056/2023 will be completely abolished, and all their prerogatives and responsibilities will be transferred to the municipalities. According to the information obtained, this decision currently applies only to public schools. However, there is concern within the Turkish community in Western Thrace, Greece that this decision will also apply to autonomous and private Turkish schools, because despite autonomy in the field of education, the state and its representative governments have taken countless decisions and arbitrary measures over the years that have undermined this very autonomy. If this decision is also applied to Turkish schools belonging to the Turkish community in Western Thrace, Greece it will deal a major blow to autonomy in education, and Turkish organisations in Western Thrace, Greece will not accept this.

Indeed, the Turkish community continues to experience an analogous situation in a very painful manner. For the decision to temporarily suspend the activities of Turkish primary schools and then permanently close them three years later, taken by the government in 2010 as part of its austerity measures, was also applied to Turkish schools belonging to the Turkish community in Western Thrace, Greece and this decision, taken as part of economic and financial measures, has become a tool of systematic discrimination.

Due to closures resulting from declining pupil numbers in schools, the number of primary schools, which was 188 in 2011, decreased to 83 in 2025-2026. As can be observed, the number of Turkish primary schools has declined rapidly.

The government has not backed down despite all the objections raised following this decision, which is contrary to the educational autonomy. Moreover, the Turkish primary school in the village of Paleo Zigos (Mizanlı), which was closed by suspending its activities in the 2023-2024 school year on grounds of insufficient pupil numbers, has not been reopened for the 2025-2026 school year, even though the number of pupils in the village has reached 10. Despite applications made by parents, the Greek authorities did not allow the school to resume its activities, which was protested on 11 September 2025. In a press statement read during a protest organised by the Union of Western Thrace Turkish Minority Schools, it was emphasised that the Greek state has closed dozens of Turkish primary schools over the years under the pretext of "lack of pupils" but has not reopened them even though the number of students has increased. But, a public primary school has opened in the village of Argiri in Karditsa with one pupil for the 2024-2025 school year, and another with two pupils on Pserimos Island this year.

The state has prioritised the Greek public school system rather than creating equal opportunities in education by improving private and autonomous Turkish schools in line with the demands of the Turkish community in Western Thrace, Greece. This situation aims to erode and eliminate the Turkish school system in the long term.

Unfortunately, Turkish primary schools, whose activities have been suspended and subsequently permanently closed due to a lack of pupils, are owned by each village's foundation and managed by the village board of trustees. However, the use of these school buildings for other purposes is not permitted.

In May 2025, a fire broke out in the Turkish primary school building in Aşağıköy (Arsakio), which is part of the Municipality of Maroneia-Sapes (Maronya-Şapçı), rendering the school unusable. No clear information is available on exactly when the fire started, how it began, or who started it.

On 4 January 2026, an attack took place on the Turkish primary school in the village of Aratos (Kara-caoğlu) which had been closed during the 2021-2022 school year as part of unjust practices. The school's entrance gate, classroom doors, cupboards, and radiators were damaged. The bookcases in the classrooms were also destroyed, with books scattered on the floor. The police investigation concluded that the incident was a theft. The Ministry of

Education's refusal to allow the closed Turkish primary schools to be used for different purposes violates the autonomy of the Turkish community in education, while the attacks and thefts committed against these closed school buildings create a security vulnerability and threaten property and life safety.

The educational autonomy of the Turkish community in Western Thrace must be restored, and decisions regarding Turkish schools must belong to our community.

-
1. <https://www.milletnews.com/western-thrace/greek-education-minister-zaharaki-visits-iskece-minority-high-school-school-board-denied-entry>
 2. <https://www.milletnews.com/western-thrace/striking-claims-from-greek-education-authorities-iskece-minority-high-school-and-board-of-trustees-targeted>
 3. <https://www.milletnews.com/western-thrace/zeybek-criticizes-ministry-minority-schools-structure-and-authorities-overlooked>
 5. <https://www.milletnews.com/western-thrace/why-is-the-minority-primary-school-in-mizanli-iskece-still-closed>
 6. <https://www.milletnews.com/western-thrace/despite-having-ten-pupils-minority-school-in-iskece-remains-closed>
 7. <https://www.milletnews.com/western-thrace/suspicious-fire-destroys-turkish-minority-school-in-asagikoy>
 8. <https://www.milletnews.com/western-thrace/damage-reported-at-karacaoglan-turkish-minority-primary-school>