

BROKEN TREATY: IGNORED RIGHTS OF TURKISH MUSLIM MINORITY IN GREECE - DAILY SABAH - 12.09.2025

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Greece continues to violate the treaty-based legal rights of the Turkish minority of Western Thrace

Western Thrace is a historical and geographical region in Greece, located on the border of Türkiye and Bulgaria, where the continents of Europe and Asia meet. Today, Western Thrace is separated from Türkiye to the east by the Maritsa River. The region remained under Ottoman rule until the First Balkan War of 1912-1913, when the Ottoman Empire lost all its European territories. Throughout centuries of Ottoman rule, however, a considerable Turkish population has resided in the area.

Fundamental source of legal rights

The fundamental source of rights for the Turkish Muslim minority of Western Thrace is the 1923 Lausanne Treaty, which was concluded within the framework of the Lausanne Conference. The conference produced 17 separate but related instruments, listed in the Final Act. The first is the Treaty of Peace," signed on July 24, 1923. The sixth is the Convention respecting the Exchange of Greek and Turkish Populations and Protocol," signed on Jan. 30, 1923.

Under the population exchange instrument, the Turkish Muslim population in Greece (except those in Western Thrace) and the Greek Orthodox population in Türkiye (except those in Istanbul, Gökçeada and Bozcaada) were subject to a population exchange. Article 2 of the convention specifically excluded Greek inhabitants of Istanbul and Muslims in Western Thrace. The convention was signed between "the Government of the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye and the Greek Government."

The third section of the Treaty of Peace, titled Protection of Minorities," outlines minority rights. Articles 37 to 44 cover the rights of non-Muslim minorities in Türkiye, while Article 45 states that the rights conferred by the provisions of the present Section on the non-Muslim minorities of Türkiye will be similarly conferred by Greece on the Muslim minority in her territory.

Fundamental rights under the treaty include freedom of religion and language, equal civil and political rights, autonomy in religious affairs and education, and the ability to establish, manage, and control charitable, religious, and social institutions, schools, and other educational establishments.

Two articles are particularly important regarding education and religion. Article 41 mandates the Greek government to provide, in those towns and districts with significant Turkish Muslim populations, adequate facilities to ensure primary education is available in the Turkish language. Article 40 grants the Turkish Muslim minority the right to establish, manage and control, at their own expense, charitable, religious and social institutions, as well as schools and other establishments for instruction and education, with the freedom to use their own language and practice their religion.

To read the rest of the article, please click: https://www.dailysabah.com/opinion/op-ed/broken-treaty-ignored-rights-of-turkish-muslim-minority-in-greece

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