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## **Stateless for 22 years**

***"My country is my prison," says Mrs Gülten Kayal. HRWF Int'l urges Greece to solve this case***

HRWF (31.08.2015) - A high number of ethnic Turks in Greece have had their citizenship withdrawn under Article 19 of the Citizenship Law that was in force from 1955 until 1998. This law was abused by the Greek authorities during that period to get rid of a maximum of ethnic Turks.

The most amazing case is the story of Mrs Gülten Kayal from Rhodes who HRWF Int'l met last week. She went to Germany in 1985 and was married in Frankfurt to another ethnic Turk two years later. On several occasions, she had her visa renewed without any problem at the local Greek consulate. In 1993, she went back to Greece to take part in the elections. Imagine her surprise when she was told she had lost her citizenship! Her husband however was not deprived of his but until he went back to Rhodes several years later, he lived and worked abroad without his wife because she did not dare leave Rhodes in case she would not be allowed back to her country.

Since then she has tried three times with the help of a lawyer to get back her citizenship. To no avail. This has dramatic consequences because she is still stateless more than 20 years later. She cannot vote, she cannot open a bank account, she cannot get a loan, she cannot get her pension, she cannot be covered by the national health insurance, she cannot...



"Since 1993, my country has been my prison because I am undocumented," she told HRWF Int'l.

According to a reply by the Greek Ministry of the Interior to a parliamentary question asked by Ilhan Ahmet, the former MP for Rhodope in the Greek Parliament in May 2005, 46,638 Turks (Muslims) in Thrace and the Island of Rhodes (Dodecanese Islands) were deprived of citizenship until 1998.

The provision was repealed in 1998, although failing to nullify previous decisions of withdrawal of citizenship. The only process made available for regaining Greek citizenship was to apply for naturalization as any foreign citizen.

The former Article 19 of the Greek Nationality Code was in contravention of, inter alia, Article 12, paragraph 4, of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ratified by Greece by Law 2462/1997), which provides that 'no one shall be arbitrarily deprived of the right to enter his own country,' and Article 3, paragraph 2, of the Fourth Protocol to the European Convention on Human Rights, which states that 'no one shall be deprived of the right to enter the territory of the State of which he is a national.' This Fourth Protocol has yet to be ratified by Greece. National and international organizations continue to urge Greece to resolve the negative consequences of Article 19.

The case of Mrs Gülten Kayal is probably only one among many others that are still pending. HRWF Int'l urges the Greek authorities to solve this case and any other that will come to its knowledge.

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## **FUEN Congress in Western Thrace**

By Herküles Millas

Zaman (19.05.2015) - The FUEN (Federal Union of European Nationalities) Congress took place in Komotini between the 13<sup>th</sup> -17<sup>th</sup> May. FUEN is an influential organization in defense of minority rights. Among members from Greece are some organizations of the Muslim Turkish minority and The Ecumenical Federation of Greeks of Istanbul. More than one hundred delegates from twenty countries participated in the said meeting. Various issues, such as the Romanians in Hungary, the minorities of Ukraine and Muslim Turks of Western Thrace were discussed.

It is not possible to summarize here the meeting. I will mention only the main points of my presentation. I did not speak about the myriad problems of the minorities since these were pointed out continuously in our meeting, but I only reminded that the practices against the minorities were violations of international agreements and of basic human rights. I focused on the ideologies behind the injustice.

It is interesting to see that the parties could readily remember and remind the wrongs done to them by the "other side", but they do not notice what "their own side" (or the state they associate themselves with) has done to the "other". They either "forget" or take too lightly the doings of their own; by injustice what is understood are the deeds of the other.

The minorities in Greece and Turkey that were recognized after the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923 faced two basic problems. First, they have always been under the tutelage and custody of both Greece and Turkey simultaneously. They were actually hostages in their own country. Secondly, they were subjected to an inhuman status known as "reciprocity". The reason for these practices is the erroneous understanding that existed in both nation-states from the outset: The nation and the citizenship were understood on racist and religious bases. "Our people" were only those who belong to a specific ethnicity and religion and speak the same language – by force if needed.

In consequence, those who were somehow "different" within the country were perceived as foreigners and even as a "fifth column" of a foreign country. On the contrary, our kin in the other country were seen as very close to us and even our compatriots. Once the situation is experienced like this what follows is understandable. To get rid of the "foreigners" turns to an ideal. We know and we see what happens.

Hypocrisy is the word that can summarize the situation. The doings against the minorities are justified as legitimate legal procedures or as requirements of "reciprocity" or as isolated "mistakes". Whereas they are all the results of a conscious policy: an old-fashioned understanding of citizenship and nationality is behind the screen. And the way out of the vicious circle is the emancipation of the minorities of the double tutelage of the two states and acquiring their own and independent voice. If instead it is declared that (as I heard yesterday during the conference) "we only trust our mother-country" (i.e., the other country) then the meaning of citizenship is jeopardized and discrimination is triggered.

The responsibility of this situation naturally lies with the two states. The minorities are forced to seek protection from abroad. As long as the states see their own citizens as foreigners and the citizens of the other country as their own this anomaly and state of mistrust will persist. The minorities are the loser in any case: if they side with the "mother-country" they will be suspected in their own country; if they distance themselves from the other country and try to be integrated in their own then they will be accused of being against the mother-country and the main body of the minority.

At this point a second exclusion is experienced: Securing the solidarity and unity of the minority. When some members of the minority do not follow the generally accepted policies of the minority or they do not share the same identity with their group then a situation similar to the one of majority/minority is repeated. The ones who think differently are turned into the "minority of the minority" and they are stigmatized as harmful to the minority and even as traitors. We experienced this case in our Congress, too. There were some people among the audience who declared that they did not carry a Turkish identity but a Pomak or a Roma one.

I had a related objection, too. Some of the speakers said that there is a "Christian Greek minority" in Istanbul that corresponds to the Muslim Turkish one in Western Thrace. Whereas the minority of Istanbul of which I am a member, is called Rum (a paraphrase

of Roman) and not Greek (Yunan in Turkish). Even our language officially in Turkey is "Rumca." The term "Greek minority" is not used by the minority itself but by the Greek state for its own purposes.

The tension related to the minorities in Western Thrace originates from the rivalry and even from the fight between Athens and Ankara. My experience may be helpful to show that. In 2008 I had the opportunity within an educational program financed by EU to prepare together with some minority members a textbook for the minority. The textbook was not intended to replace the textbooks that are sent from Ankara. All the texts in the book were selected from writers of the minority, all the photographs showed the cultural heritage of the minority and all the issues presented had to do with the everyday life and problems of the minority. The book was "rejected" by both the minority organizations (with few exceptions) and by the Greek Ministry of Education. The book was not criticized for any particular shortcoming, it was not evaluated for its quality; it was simply unacceptable since it was not a product of Athens or Ankara. That was the message of my speech: It seems as if we discuss issues such as the education, the religious liberties or the property of the minority. But actually what we experience is always the same: Who will control the minority politically, Athens or Ankara?

Unless the minorities free themselves from the double tutelage and wardship of both Athens and Ankara they will be under the pressure of doubt and insecurity. However, at present the minorities themselves do not seem to be able to succeed this. It is more probable that the states themselves will evolve to appropriate a more modern understanding of citizenship. Still, this will require at least a few decades. What is optimistic is that similar issues are at least started to be discussed within a relative freedom of speech.

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## **New Greek government has deep, long-standing ties with Russian 'fascist' dugin**

Radio Free Europe (28.01.2015) <http://www.rferl.org/content/greek-syriza-deep-ties-russian-eurasianist-dugin/26818523.html> - Europe-watchers [understood immediately](#) that the new leftist Syriza-led government in Greece could shatter the European Union's fragile solidarity condemning Russian aggression in Ukraine.

But recently leaked e-mails are revealing some of the extent and duration of Syriza's ties with Kremlin-connected Eurasianist ideologue Aleksandr Dugin and Russian oligarch Konstantin Malofeyev, who is believed to have bankrolled much of the separatist movement in Ukraine.

Anton Shekhovtsov, a researcher who [studies far-right politics in Europe](#), says that sympathy for Russia by Syriza and its coalition partner, the right-wing Independent Greeks party, goes far beyond the norm for Greece.

"Pro-Russian sentiment is quite widespread in Greece overall," Shekhovtsov says. "But these two parties -- their foreign policy is overtly, openly pro-Russia. And the fact that the new government's prime minister, Alexis Tsipras, his first contacts were with the ambassador of Russia in Greece, that means probably they will be trying to establish more significant cooperation with Russia."

### **Hacked Correspondence**

In December 2014, a Russian hacker group named Shaltai Boltai released a trove of e-mails taken from Georgy Gavrish, a close friend of Dugin's and an official in Dugin's

Eurasia movement. Many of the e-mails relate to efforts by Dugin and Malofeyev to create a circle of European politicians and intellectuals sympathetic to Russia.

Several dozen of the e-mails reveal conversations between Gavrish and people inside Syriza, says Christo Grozev, a media investor and blogger specializing in information issues in eastern Europe.

The messages show "very close cooperation on strategy, on PR, and so on," Grozev says. He says that Syriza consultants would send "strategic memoranda" on party positions and policies to Dugin and Gavrish for their comments and suggestions.

Gavrish lived in Greece for several years until about 2013. "Over those five years, he [Gavrish] served, apparently, as a proxy for Dugin to find like-minded or susceptible politicians and public figures in Greece to engage with Dugin's ideology of Eurasianism versus Atlanticism," Grozev says.

### ***Fellow Travellers***

One of the people involved in the exchanges is Nicolas Laos, a Greek intellectual and Syriza adviser with business ties to Russia. He is a partner of the Russian corporate-security firm [R-Tekhno](#).

In one leaked e-mail, Laos writes to Dugin, "I know very well how the enemy works, and, under your patronage, I can strike back effectively and hard."

Another message apparently refers to Panos Kammenos, head of the Independent Greeks party and now Greece's new defense minister. The October 25, 2014, message -- written by influential blogger Dimitris Konstantakopoulos, who was apparently doing strategy consultation for Syriza -- discusses the Athens-based Institute of Geopolitical Studies, which Kammenos founded with his friend, University of Thrace professor Filippos Tsalidis.

"Panos appeared almost one month ago full of 'enthusiasm,' asking for regular cooperation. And then he went to Moscow for personal reasons, as he told us (for a friend's wedding) and then disappeared from the face of the Earth in a quite impressive manner. I am very curious if I will ever know what reasons he will give for disappearing," the message says.

One month after the message was written, Kammenos's institute signed a "memorandum of understanding" with the influential Russian Institute for Strategic Studies (RISI). RISI was part of Russia's Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR) until it was brought under the office of the Russian president in 2009. Its director, Leonid Reshetnikov, is a retired SVR lieutenant general.

Dugin is also tied to Greece's new foreign minister, Nikos Kotzias. In April 2013, Kotzias - - then a professor at the University of Piraeus -- invited Dugin to give a lecture on [International Politics and the Eurasianist Vision](#). During that lecture, Dugin said that Greece should not join the Russia-led Eurasian Union, but instead should play a role "in the re-creation of the architecture of Europe" and form an "eastern pole of European identity" within the EU together with Serbia and others.

### ***'A Fascist Program'***

Dugin has been engaged in such activity across Europe for many years, says Andreas Umland, a professor at Kyiv's Mohyla Academy. "He is closely connected already for more

than 20 years with a whole variety of right-wing intellectuals in France, Italy, Belgium, Great Britain," Umland says. "He is reading them and they read him. Some of his books have been translated. It is not a very public sort of activity because it is more in the realm of publishing, pseudo-academia, intellectual circles, and elite discourse."

Those efforts gained fairly little traction until Dugin joined forces with billionaire Konstantin Malofeyev, a conservative Russian Orthodox nationalist. On February 20, 2014, Dugin wrote Malofeyev a memo identifying key potential partners in Western Europe.

Grozev says Dugin encouraged Malofeyev to "engage with" these figures "in order to create an 'elite club' of politicians, as [Dugin] calls it, supporting the Russian line."

At the end of May 2014, Dugin and Malofeyev hosted representatives of these movements -- including Syriza -- at a secret conference in Vienna, according to media reports.

At that meeting, researcher Shekhovtsov says, Dugin and Malofeyev "met with representatives of the Austrian Freedom Party, of Bulgarian Ataka, of the French Front Nationale. All of these are far-right parties."

"So they have been trying to get -- already together, not Dugin alone -- to build those links in order to promote Russian foreign policy," he adds.

Grozev stresses that there are no direct references to Dugin or Malofeyev providing funding or material support to Syriza or any of the other parties. However, he notes that Dugin and Gavrish often include people close to Malofeyev in the recipient lists of their e-mails.

One of the Malofeyev associates whose name appears most frequently is Aleksei Komov, an Orthodox businessman who is the Russian representative on the conservative World Congress of Families. In February 2014, Komov gave a speech at the National Press Club in Washington at which he blamed "Wall Street bankers" for imposing communism on Russia.

Grozev says that he has been surprised by the extent of the "mysticism" he sees in the correspondence between the Greeks and Dugin's people. Nicolas Laos and Gavrish, particularly, are constantly talking about alleged Freemasons "within the Greek political environment who are, by definition, according to them, the biggest enemies of the Russian line."

The details of the ideology are confused and contradictory. Umland describes Dugin's vision as "a radical form of anti-Westernism" that ultimately comes down to "a fascist program."

"He is a fascist," Umland says of Dugin. "He promotes an ideology that comes down to a rebirth of the Russian nation as a new Eurasian nation and a total restructuring both of world politics and Russian domestic politics. He has praised the SS in the past. He has made ambivalent statements about the Third Reich, Italian fascism, German Nazism. He sees himself also in a fascist tradition."

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## **Human Rights Without Frontiers calls upon Greece to guarantee the rights of its ethnic Turks, a Muslim minority**

HRWF (09.01.2014) - **Human Rights Without Frontiers**, a Brussels-based NGO, is calling upon Greece, the new chair of the European Union, to guarantee the rights of the ethnic Turks, a Muslim minority, in five areas: the right to self-identification, freedom of association, freedom of expression and of the minority media, freedom of education, freedom of religion as well as the appointment of muftis and imams. This is based on a fact-finding mission carried out by HRWF, in Thrace (north-eastern part of Greece) in October 2012 to investigate a number of violations of human rights concerning Muslim ethnic Turks protected by the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne (Report can be viewed at [www.hrwf.org](http://www.hrwf.org)).

### ***Concerning the right to self-identification***

**Human Rights Without Frontiers** urges the Greek authorities to respect the right to self-identification of the persons belonging to the minority, which is protected by the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne, and to discontinue the sterile debate about how to name the group but instead to prioritize the safeguarding of the individual and collective human rights of its members as it was requested at Greece's UN Universal Periodical Review in 2011.

### ***Concerning the freedom of association***

**Human Rights Without Frontiers** strongly recommends to Greece

- to implement three rulings of the European Court of Human Rights which condemned the closure of several associations because they identified themselves as "Turkish";
- to allow the registration of associations under the names chosen by their founding members, including whether they contain the name of an ethnic group or the word "minority";
- to amend the Code of Civil Procedures in such a way that it allows the implementation of the European Court decisions in matters related to freedom of association.

### ***Concerning the freedom of expression and of the media***

Turkish-language newspapers and radio stations have been subjected to draconian measures, including the imposition of unreasonable conditions for registration, excessive fines, the misuse of defamation laws and other actions to silence the Turkish-language media.

In this regard, **Human Rights Without Frontiers** urges the Greek authorities

- to respect the freedom of the media of the Turkish-speaking minority in order to protect the diversity of opinions;
- to only prosecute serious cases of alleged defamation;
- to uphold the principle of fair and proportionate punishment in the judicial process;
- to respect the letter and the spirit of the Treaty of Lisbon along with all other European covenants and declarations while implementing Article 14 of the Constitution of the Hellenic Republic on freedom of expression and the press.

### **Concerning school education for minority children**

Under the Treaty of Lausanne, the right of the ethnic Turkish minority to establish schools was guaranteed, including "the right to use their own language and to exercise their own religion freely therein." However, several policies of the Greek government have made the realisation of these provisions highly problematic. Limited access to adequate Turkish-language educational resources, including curriculum, textbooks and teachers, are also noteworthy.

In this regard, **Human Rights Without Frontiers** urges the Greek authorities

- to revise a number of policies concerning the minority primary and secondary schools: their number and location, the training and hiring of teachers, the curriculum and textbooks to be used;
- to extend the bilingual (Turkish-Greek) primary school system to the Greek-language kindergartens exclusively attended by children of the Turkish ethnic minority.

### **Concerning the freedom of religion and the appointment of Muftis**

Christians and Jews have the right to elect their religious leaders but Muslims of Thrace have not had this possibility because for more than 20 years Greece has been applying a discriminatory policy towards them. A law adopted in 1991 gave the Greek State power to appoint the Muftis, even without the support of the Muslim minority of Thrace. This law dramatically amputates its autonomy, guaranteed by the Treaty of Lausanne, and created divisions and tensions in the community.

Correctly, Greece was condemned twice by the European Court of Human Rights in cases where two muftis elected by their community were sentenced to prison terms on the alleged ground that they had usurped the title of state-appointed muftis that the Muslim community refused to recognize as their spiritual leaders.

**Human Rights Without Frontiers** urges the Greek authorities to treat the Muslim minority on the same footing as the Catholic and Jewish minorities in matters concerning the choice of their religious leaders.

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## **Is EU-member Greece truly secular?**

Today's Zaman (16.12.2013) - I was taken aback when I heard Turkey's Deputy Prime Minister Bülent Arınç imply that his government is considering converting the Hagia Sophia museum into a mosque. Hagia Sophia was built in the sixth century as a Greek Orthodox cathedral and served as a mosque between 1453 and 1931, and is registered as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. It is surely one of the most treasured historic sites of İstanbul.

I was also taken aback some time ago when I learned that the Hagia Sophia museum in Trabzon had been converted back into a mosque. I could not quite understand the logic behind it, as the government had not so long ago restored the 10th-century Armenian Akdamar cathedral in Van, allowing religious services to be held there at certain times of the year, and also restored to its original condition the 19th-century Greek Orthodox Taksiyarhis Church in Ayvalık, used as a storehouse since the 1920s.

It is really difficult to comprehend the logic behind converting the Hagia Sophia museums back into mosques, because these buildings are some of the finest examples of Turkey's historic-cultural heritage, which certainly includes Christianity. Turkey is a Muslim-



majority country, but surely it is not a country of Muslims only, having tens of thousands of Christian citizens and receiving every year millions of tourists who visit these historic sites. It is absolutely necessary to treat these sites as historic-cultural treasures consigned to the Turkish government's protection.

It did appear to me that Arınc's call to convert the Hagia Sophia museum in İstanbul back into a mosque was perhaps "reciprocity" for the Greek government's pussyfooting on the construction of a mosque in Athens it decided to build some time ago. That the Greek Orthodox Halki Seminary on Heybeliada island, closed since 1971, is still closed -- despite all the official statements that it would be opened over the last decade, including statements from Arınc -- may also be the Turkish government's "reciprocity" for the Greek government not allowing the Muslims of Western Thrace elect their religious leaders, muftis, themselves.

If, however, Turkey is a truly secular state, it has to respect the religious rights of all its citizens -- and thus without delay allow the reopening of Halki Seminary, which once trained Greek Orthodox clergy. It surely is understandable when a spokesperson for the Greek Foreign Ministry says, "Statements by high-ranking Turkish officials concerning intentions to convert Byzantine churches into mosques hurt the feelings of millions of Christians." It is, however, also understandable when a spokesman for the Turkish Foreign Ministry replies, "There is nothing Turkey can learn from Greece about religious freedoms."

The fact is that Greece is not much better than Turkey in terms of respecting the religious rights of citizens. The Greek state decides which religions are acceptable and which are not. The Orthodox Church is part of the state administration, like the Directorate of Religious Affairs in Turkey. The government pays for salaries and religious training of Orthodox clergy, partially finances the maintenance of Orthodox Church buildings, and provides a tax exemption for the Orthodox Church's property revenues. Orthodox religious courses are mandatory in public schools. Students may request exemptions, but there is no alternative religious instruction for the non-Orthodox. Proselytizing is forbidden, as in Putin's Russia.

There are three Muslims in Greece's Parliament, but Muslims are highly underrepresented in public sector employment. Aside from the 140,000 to 150,000 citizens who belong to the officially recognized Muslim minority in Thrace, an estimated 500,000 to 700,000 Muslim immigrants live in the Athens area. They frequent about 120 unregistered, informal places of worship, since there is not a single mosque (or Muslim cemetery) outside of Thrace, and have to travel to Thrace for official Islamic marriages and funerals.

It is indeed questionable whether EU-member Greece is a truly secular state, as one can read in the US State Department's International Religious Freedom Report. Both Turkey and Greece badly need to liberalize their secularism.

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## **Turkish language in public suffocated in Greece**

Today's Zaman (15.12.2013) - When I drove through Greece's beautiful Western Thrace region, where a Turkish-speaking Muslim minority (Turks, Pomaks and Roma) live, the backwash of the scandal was still rather strong.

Whomever I met in the city of Komotini was taken aback, talking about it.

The event went unnoticed by both the Turkish and Greek media. But it deserves everyone's attention.

On Nov. 22-23, a conference was arranged in Komotini jointly by the Greek think tank Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy (ELIAMEP) and the Programme on Education of Muslim Children (PEN), under the title "The Treaty of Lausanne: 90 years later -- framing migration issues." A large number of experts, scholars, Greek bureaucrats and representatives of the Turkish minority attended.

The initiative by Professor Thalia Dragona and Professor Anna Frangoudaki, both from PEN, was actually a bold one, when one considers the sharp rise of the violent far-right and xenophobia in Greece, due to the country's financial crisis.

Yet it was also timely because, as I argued here in this column, some clauses in the Treaty of Lausanne and the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) now contradict one another. Both Ankara and Athens resort to those outdated clauses to create pretexts to ignore the demands of both Greek and Turkish minorities.

Tension was visible when the conference began because a colleague of mine from the region, Evren Dede, who runs the *Azınlıkça* newspaper and website, had earlier notified the organizers that he wished to address the audience in his mother tongue: Turkish.

But his co-panelist, Georgios Kalantzis, secretary-general of the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs, told the organizers that there is no way he would allow Turkish to be spoken there. "It is either me or him," he told them.

When Dede was told that he would not be allowed to speak his native tongue, he silently walked out of the hall. His text was read out in Greek by a colleague, Aydın Bostancı, as the minority members in the audience were apparently in shock.

More shocking, however, was that no Greek participant, many of them intellectuals, raised an objection, let alone protest, to what had happened.

Although the second day of the conference was boycotted by many minority members, as reported by the *Gündem* newspaper of Western Thrace, Greeks continued to attend "as if nothing had happened."

A wave of dismay swept through the minority. The former and current minority deputies in parliament issued protests, followed by the Syriza Party, which emphasized the irony of a language being suffocated and a person's right to speak in his mother tongue being openly banned at a conference whose core was about just those rights.

I met Dede in Komotini. He was saddened, bitter. He told me he had no wish to comment on the incident. Once more, as had happened before, a prominent minority figure and a hard-working, fair journalist was receiving threats and was subjected to hate campaigns.

Another remarkable part is that this is happening in a country that is a member of the Council of Europe and the European Union. What is striking is, although Kurdish as a mother tongue is now being "normalized" in Turkey, the issue of Turkish -- a common feature uniting the minority in Western Thrace -- remains a stark taboo.

Greek media largely ignored the scandal. There were, indeed, very few voices criticizing the maltreatment of a Greek citizen among Greek intellectuals, some of whom were witnessing the very event.

Hülya Emin, editor of the *Gündem* weekly in Komotini, wrote: "How sad that in this meeting where the former Greek ombudsman Nikiforos Diamandouros, former ECtHR judge Christos Rosakis and Professor Herkul Millas were present, no joint action of protest against a basic human right was taken."

One of the few brave Greek voices was of Panagiotis Dimitras, spokesperson of Helsinki Watch in Greece, who wrote in a blog that the de facto ban on Turkish was an attack on confidence in majority-minority relations. He asked whether the "Greek deep state has again taken over rule in Western Thrace" and concluded that there will be "no open society where people are forced to only speak Greek."

This is where the Treaty of Lausanne is, after 90 years.

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## **Greek/Turkey border: The tragic limits of European migration policies**

FIDH (18.11.2013) - Tighter controls at the border between Greece and Turkey are forcing many people fleeing conflict to use increasingly dangerous routes. Migrants who manage to reach the EU border have been victims of push-backs and those who cross over into Greece are systematically detained on arrival, in inhuman and degrading conditions. The response of the European Union is to strengthen means of surveillance and interception. There is an urgent need to shift the focus away from criminalisation to the conditions of reception of migrants.

These are the conclusions of a fact-finding mission to Greece and Turkey, where our delegation was able to interview refugees and migrants and access several Greek detention centres. The delegation observed widespread violations of human rights at the borders, which cannot be ignored by the various bodies involved in migration control at the Greek-Turkish border.

In Greece, many victims report having been pushed back by Greek coastguards at sea or even upon reaching European soil [1]. These victims do not find their way into statistics. The delegation was able to meet with some of these invisible people, who gave details of acts of violence perpetrated by coastguards: ill-treatment (including of pregnant women and children), theft (jewellery, money, mobile phones), confiscation of identity papers which are often thrown overboard and boats pushed back towards Turkish coasts.

Reforms to migration and asylum laws are under-way, aimed at addressing systemic failures which have been repeatedly condemned by European courts. Yet, confusion reigns over responsibility for intercepted migrants. Those who manage to remain on Greek territory are systematically detained by the authorities, including unaccompanied minors awaiting identification – a practice for which Greece has recently been condemned. Migrants who are released are given an order to leave within 30 days. They have no rights on Greek territory. The rate of acceptance of asylum claims is very low and racist attacks are steadily increasing.

Afghans, Iraqis, Somalis, Sudanese, Eritreans, Syrians, Palestinians are trapped between Greece and Turkey. Both countries, with Europe's support, use the presence of these populations as a justification for increasingly repressive border control policies.

In Turkey, the adoption of a new law on immigration and international protection, which will come into force in April 2014, has done little to alleviate concerns regarding violations of migrants' human rights. Turkey maintains geographical reservations to the

1951 Geneva Convention on the status of refugees, which exclude non-Europeans from asylum claims. Although it has been heralded as a sign progress, the new law reproduces many of the legal shortcomings of European law (increased use of accelerated procedures for asylum claims; detention of persons pending return for up to 12 months). These reforms are a sign that Turkey is taking a 'European turn', without meeting international human rights obligations. Among the most serious violations: difficulty in accessing asylum procedures in particular for persons in detention centres, absence of laws on the protection of personal data, detention of minors and families, lack of access to legal aid. Since the first arrivals, the Turkish authorities have forcibly returned hundreds of Syrian refugees to Syria. The impact of the reform has been limited by structural failures to meet international obligations, but also by the fact that Turkey is forced to bear final responsibility for people who have no legal possibilities to enter the EU.

What is Europe doing? What is the position of the European Agency for border management, Frontex, and the European institutions behind it, as they witness and participate, at least indirectly, in these violations?

The EU's support to Greece over the past several years on migration issues has been primarily focused on strengthening the presence of Frontex, at the sea and land borders between Greece and Turkey. However, the presence of Frontex has made no difference to the reception conditions of migrants. Nor has it addressed the risks for migrants taking this route, while human rights violations persist at the border.

The gravity of the situation of migrants in Turkey appears to be no obstacle to the EU's negotiation of a readmission agreement with Turkey, the funding of detention centres, or future cooperation opportunities between Turkish authorities and Frontex.

Over the past few weeks, the tragedy that took place at the shores of Lampedusa seems to have raised awareness about the distress faced by migrants trying to reach the European continent. To address this situation, the EU is now considering increasing the capacity of Frontex. However, our organizations have tirelessly warned that the misery of migrants and the risky nature of the routes they take are linked to the lack of alternatives to access EU territory and to unsatisfactory reception conditions within European borders.

Increased border control does not save lives but leads instead to grave human rights violations and even deaths of women, men and children.

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## **Anti-Semitic poster in the streets of Athens**

The Central Board of Jewish Communities in Greece (21.02.2013) -An antisemitic poster displaying a Magen David with a swastika interlaced in its center, is placed all over the main boulevards of Athens. The poster advertises the musical show of a provocative Greek singer. The same poster is also placed on the façade of the night club where the performance will be on show.

The Central Board of Jewish Communities in Greece addressed letters to the Minister of Justice, as well as to the Secretary General for Religions, of the Ministry of Education, asking for their competent reaction to this repulsive advertisement. As the Greek Jewry stresses in these letters: "The design depicted on the poster fiercely insults our very religion as well as the memory of the six million Jews, victims of the Holocaust".

In addition to the above, our Board addressed letters to the mayors of the local districts where the posters are placed, asking for their intervention for the removal of the insulting posters. There is already positive reaction on behalf of some municipalities.

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## **Announcement for the interpellation submitted by a Golden Dawn MP**

Greek Helsinki Committee (21.02.2013) - Following an interpellation motion submitted to the Greek Parliament by a Golden Dawn M.P. in which he severely criticizes the commemoration events held on the Holocaust Remembrance Day, and condemns the educational initiatives and the teaching of Holocaust history in Greek schools, the Central Board of Jewish Communities in Greece issued an announcement expressing the concern and the outrage of the Greek Jewry and called upon all political parties to condemn its content.

As the announcement points out: "Now more than ever it is eminent to remind the explanatory report that introduced law 3218, which was unanimously voted by the Greek Parliament in 2004 and established the 27th of January as the national "Remembrance Day for Jewish Greek Martyrs and Heroes of the Holocaust".

The report states: "The recognition of the Holocaust Remembrance Day aims at preserving the memory of our Jewish compatriots victims of the Holocaust. It also serves as a continuous reminder of what may happen if bigotry, hatred and indifference become the prevailing characteristics of a society.

Through the contact with the Holocaust history our intention is to stimulate our thought and activity with regard to major moral issues related to the Holocaust, as well as to our responsibility as citizens of a democratic society".

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## **In Echinus, 20 Muslim mothers challenge the law denying their children pre-school education both in Turkish and Greek**

### ***Bilingual Turkish-Greek kindergartens are a big issue for the Muslim ethnic Turkish minority***

HRWF (24.10.2012) - Twenty mothers of Echinus (Thrace, Xanthi Prefecture) belonging to the Muslim ethnic Turkish minority<sup>[1]</sup> are openly challenging Law 3518/2006 introducing compulsory school education from the age of five because the local Greek educational authorities have repeatedly rejected their requests for opening a Greek-Turkish kindergarten in the bilingual primary school operating in the community's premises.

In September of this year, the vice-president of the school council, who happens to be a Greek Orthodox nationalist, alerted the school inspection that the concerned children had not attended a kindergarten before going to the primary school and therefore failed to fulfil one of the access conditions. The law provides for a fine of 60 EUR in case of non-compliance.

***'We refuse to lie'***

"Our primary schools are bilingual in Thrace, we do not want our kids to lose their language and to be assimilated by another culture. If they start in a Greek-speaking kindergarten, they will want to stay with their classmates in a Greek state primary school and they will lose their language and their culture," the 20 mothers told in one and the same voice Willy Fautré, director of *Human Rights Without Frontiers*. And they added "We do not reject the Greek culture. We consider it is an asset to be educated in two languages but the protection of the mother language is a priority".

The inclusion of a bilingual kindergarten in the 174 existing bilingual primary schools (100 in Rhodope Prefecture, 58 in Xanthi Prefecture and 16 in Evros Prefecture) the buildings of which belong to the minority community is a big issue for the Turkish-speaking community. The 1923 Treaty of Lausanne (Article 40) provides that members of the Muslim minority have the right to establish, manage and control their own schools, and to use their own language freely. Article 30 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child notes that in the States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities exist, a child belonging to such a minority shall not be denied the right, in community with other members of his or her group, to use his or her own language.

A number of families have reluctantly decided to send their children to a Greek-speaking state kindergarten despite the risk of their losing their linguistic and cultural identity. Others are resisting and have refused, notably in the town of Echinus. "We were told by the educational authorities to write in one of the documents to be completed that our children had not been able to go to a kindergarten because they had been sick during the whole school-year or because we did not have the financing means to do so but we refuse to lie."

### ***'I was threatened and dismissed from the position of principal of the school'***

The principal, Hasan Kurak, who has been teaching for 33 years, including 15 years in Equinos, told *Human Rights Without Frontiers* "My priority was to guarantee the future of the children, I decided to register them, to give them access to the school and to teach them. I was fired from my position of principal of the school for that and threatened to lose my retirement pension if I persisted." He was replaced by a Turkish-speaking colleague.

Kurak distributed the school material in Turkish to the pupils but the vice-president of the school council forbade him to give them the books in Greek. According to an agreement between Greece and Turkey, Athens provides the books in Greek and Ankara the books in Turkish.

Mothers and teachers remain concerned about the future of the 20 children. They fear they might not be allowed to take exams or to receive a state-certified diploma.

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[1] According to the 2001 official census, 362,038 people were then living in Thrace. Official ethnic or religious statistics do not exist.

*According to the 2011 Annual Report of the US Department of State on International Religious Freedom, "the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne created an officially recognized 'Muslim minority,' which consists of an estimated 140,000 to 150,000 individuals residing in Thrace."*

*The Muslim ethnic Turkish minority in Greece is a peaceful law-abiding community which does not have a separatist agenda and does not constitute a threat to the security of the country. The criminality rate in their region is also the lowest in the whole country.*

*These ethnic Turks have preserved their homogeneity around their culture, their religion and their language. They have acquired Greek citizenship, got Greek IDs and Greek passports, performed military service in the Greek army and a number of them lost their lives in WW II as well as in the Civil War to defend their country but they still identify themselves as Turkish. The peaceful co-existence of these two identities is a fact that cannot be negated or ignored and no serious evidence has ever been shown that it is endangering the security, the public order or the territorial integrity of the country.*