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Restricted
CM(94)115
Addendum

For consideration at the 518th meeting
of the Ministers' Deputies
(October 1994, item 9.4)

THE SITUATION OF REGIONAL OR MINORITY LANGUAGES IN EUROPE

Publication of additional contributions

1. Following the publication of document DELA(94)1 entitled "The situation of regional and minority languages", authorised by the Ministers' Deputies at their 506bis meeting (24 January 1994, item ENV1), the Secretariat circulated on 10 July 1994, document CM(94)115 containing:

- a contribution from the Turkish Delegation (cf. Appendix 1) on 14 March 1994,
- a contribution from the Greek Delegation (cf. Appendix 2) on 3 May 1994,
- a contribution from the Turkish Delegation (cf. Appendix 3) on 14 June 1994.

2. The Deputies were seized of the question of publication of additional contributions appearing in document CM(94)115 at their 516th meeting (September 1994, item 9.4).

3. Subsequently, the Secretariat received a new contribution from the Greek Delegation dated 9 September 1994 which is reproduced in the present document (CM(94)115 Addendum).

4. The Committee of Ministers is invited to continue examination of this question.

TRANSLATION

Letter of 9 September 1994
from the Permanent Representative of Greece to the Council of Europe,
to Mr F Albanese, Director of Environment and Local Authorities

Dear Sir,

Having taken cognizance of the letter (ref No 208) sent to you by my Turkish colleague on 14 June of this year concerning my Government's contribution to CM(93)213 "The Situation of Regional or Minority Languages in Europe", I wish to add certain further clarifications about the Muslim minority in Thrace. I consider these clarifications necessary because the comments of the Turkish Permanent Delegation are not an accurate reflection of the actual situation.

Yours faithfully,

(signed)

Antonios Exarchos
Ambassador

ADDITIONAL OBSERVATIONS

The Greek Government has carefully considered the Turkish Government's comments concerning the Muslim minority in Thrace and finds that they by no means accurately reflect the actual situation. Being responsible for its (Christian and Muslim) citizens, the Greek Government is bound to make substantial corrections, lest a false impression be gained by readers of the Turkish document which, probably due to its authors' lack of objective information, describes the situation in Thrace from a point of view which distorts reality and gives the impression of seeking not to further the welfare of the minority in question but to slander Greece.

1. Firstly, Greece has never denied or rejected the origin of the members of this minority. On the contrary, it has repeatedly stated that the Muslim minority in Thrace comprises three ethnic groups, the largest of which (50%) is of Turkish origin. No-one prevents the Muslims of Thrace from identifying themselves as being of Turkish origin, whether they are or not, the remainder being made up of Pomaks (35%) and Gypsies (15%). Greece does no more than abide by the stipulation of Article 45 of the Lausanne Peace Treaty (1923), which makes reference only to a Muslim minority and not a Turkish minority.

We then find ourselves faced with a bizarre phenomenon whereby Turkey demands that Greece recognise all the members of the Muslim minority as Turks. It would be helpful if the Turkish Government would explain why it insists on all the Muslims of Thrace identifying themselves en bloc as Turks.

The Lausanne Peace Treaty describes the Muslim minority as being composed - as we have said - of three different ethnic groups. Seeking to persuade both the minority itself and outsiders that the whole of the minority is Turkish could give the impression that the Turkish Government is not concerned with the welfare of the Muslim minority, but with other political interests. And when the Turkish Government refers to the Greek minority in Albania, it omits to mention that this minority is recognised as such and that is precisely why the Greek Government uses the term.

It may be noted here, by way of information, that the Turkish Government, contrary to what it says, does not permit the Greeks of Istanbul, Imvros (GOKDEADA) and Tenedos (BOZCAADA) to claim their Greek identity - in writing or in speech - but obliges them to identify themselves as RUM and not YUNAN (= Greek).

2. Let us turn now to Article 19 of the Greek Citizenship Code. The Turkish Government is bent on repeating that anyone deprived of Greek nationality has no right of appeal. This is completely false: everyone is fully entitled to appeal either to the Administration, or to the Greek courts or to specialist international bodies. We are witnessing an attempt to conceal reality purely for purposes of propaganda against a country (Greece) where the rule of law functions perfectly well and all of whose citizens enjoy untrammelled access to legal remedies.

3. Equally bizarre is the Turkish Government's assertion that members of the Muslim minority living in the restricted-access zone of Thrace cannot move more than 30km away. Nothing could be further from the truth. Anyone living in that area can enter or leave it at any time of the day or night. Only non-residents (Christian or Muslim) need a special access permit, because the area, as a frontier area, is under army surveillance.

4. The Turkish Government claims that the Greek authorities do not issue driving licences or licences to buy or sell property to members of the Muslim minority, while taking quite a different attitude to other Greek citizens.

This is quite untrue; all Greek citizens, whether Christians or Muslims, enjoy exactly the same rights.

5. Where freedom of religion is concerned, it should be remembered that the Thrace Muslim minority has three religious leaders, the Muftis, who are appointed by the state on the advice of a committee of Muslim dignitaries. It is worth adding that there is not a single country in the world where the Muftis are elected and it may be wondered why the Turkish Government mentions the Athens Agreement of 1913 and the Greek Act No 2345 of 1920 which have never been implemented because they were superseded by the Lausanne Peace Treaty of 1923. Also in Turkey, the Muftis are not elected, but appointed by the Provincial Governor.

6. It should be noted that the purpose of the electoral threshold of 3% is to preserve political stability - the same as the Turkish Government's purpose in introducing an electoral threshold of 10% (rising to 20% in such regions as South-East Turkey, for obvious reasons).

It should be noted that Greece - where the Left and Progress Alliance failed to reach the 3% threshold - has merely followed the example of other member States of the European Union. This threshold has absolutely nothing to do with the Muslim minority which since 1923 has been represented in parliament by members standing for one or other of the major Greek parties - as they are able to do unhindered today.

7. As regards education for the Thrace Muslims, the Lausanne Peace Treaty required Greece and Turkey to provide primary education for their minorities and there are now 231 minority schools operating in Thrace. As regards secondary education (not provided for by the Treaty), there are two secondary schools and two Koranic schools in Thrace. Entry to the former is by lot, as in all model schools in Greece. There are also 5 lower secondary schools in the Thrace mountains (inhabited almost exclusively by Muslims), where the pupils' tuition, board and lodging are provided free by the Greek Government.

8. Muslims' access to Greek universities is completely unrestricted. The fact that the number of students from the minority is small is due to their poor knowledge of Greek, which is required for the university entrance examination. A large number of Muslim graduates of Greek universities live in Thrace and some among them have been elected to the Greek parliament.

9. Freedom of the press is guaranteed by the Greek constitution. More than 10 Turkish-language newspapers are published in Thrace. Newspapers from Turkey can be sold at any press outlet in Thrace where they find buyers.

Greek radio broadcasts daily in minority languages. Furthermore, Turkish radio and television reception in Thrace is good. Thanks to parabolic antennae erected on the initiative of the Christian mayor of Komotini, satellite broadcasts from Turkey are relayed for the benefit of Muslim viewers.

10. Where freedom of association is concerned, every Muslim Greek citizen enjoys complete freedom. There is nothing to prevent them using terms relating to their ethnic origin (Turkish, Pomak, Gypsy). It would be inappropriate, however, to describe an association as Turkish, which could give rise to uncertainty about the citizenship and origin of its members - especially at a time when the Turkish Government is showing increased interest in Greek Thrace, as in several regions of the Balkans where it believes there are Turks.

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That is the Greek Government's reply to the Turkish Government's observations. The Turkish Government could really contribute to the welfare of the Muslim minority in Thrace if it allowed it to enjoy its rights without seeking to distort reality by means of propaganda intended to disorient it as a means of attacking Greece.

The rights of the Muslim minority in Greece are not threatened. In the second decade of this century the Muslim minority numbered 86,000; it now numbers 120,000. What of the Greek minority in Istanbul, Imvros (GOKCEADA) and Tenedos (BOZCAADA) which at that time numbered 300,000, of whom fewer than 2,000 remain today ?