

Policy Brief

The Muslims of Western Thrace, Greece. Recommendations for Regional Development Strategies

Dr. Dia Anagnostou and Dr. Anna Triandafyllidou

Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy
(ELIAMEP)

Translated by Dimostenis Yagcioglu

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For further information, please contact the authors at
anna@eliamep.gr or danagnos@eliamep.gr

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The border region of Western Thrace, in northeastern Greece, is home to a small but significant population of about 120,000 Muslims, who coexist there with the Christian majority. The aim of the EUROREG research program was to examine the extent to which the European policies for regional development, with their emphasis on human rights and on the protection of minorities within the framework of European integration, have:

- (a) promoted the political and economic inclusion of minorities into regional development processes, and
- (b) contributed to a relative decline in nationalistic policies prevalent in the past.

With regard to this second objective, the program's working hypothesis was that, as part of the changes resulting from the European integration, the interests -- but also the identity -- of minorities and majorities have been leaning increasingly toward socio-economic integration, political equality and participation, as opposed to the pursuit of ethnic differentiation and isolation.

Main Conclusions:

The conclusions of this research are based on primary and secondary sources. The primary ones include material from thirty-five interviews that were conducted between April and December of 2006, with representatives from the following groups: Elected officials, members of the Minority elite, representatives of the local press and local organizations, high-level officials from the public and private sector who are actively involved in development programmes, and individuals that have received grants from EU (and other) development programmes in order to set up or expand their business. About 1/3 of the individuals who were interviewed were from the majority and 2/3 from the minority. In our selection of interviewees we tried to establish a gender and age balance. The researchers also gathered data from reports that deal with the development issues of Thrace, issued by the Administration of the Region (*Περιφέρεια - Periféria*) of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace and by other public and private organizations, by political documents, by newspaper articles, and also by the scientific literature on development, on local and prefectural self-government, and on topics regarding the Minority. The detailed results and conclusions of this research are available in the EUROREG website, at:

http://www.eliamep.gr/eliamep/content/home/research/research_projects/euroreg/en/

Based on the findings of the research, we can make the following observations:

The Community Support Frameworks (CSF) have played an important part in the improvement of the regional economic infrastructure through public and private investments. Thus, they have indirectly influenced the socio-economic conditions of, and the opportunities for, the minority. However, the inadequate know-how of many local government officials on how to benefit from these EU-financed opportunities has limited the access of minority communities to them.

Although there is no sufficient systematic evidence to document this, it appears that **most of the resources made available through the three CSFs have been invested in the southern areas of Western Thrace, that are inhabited mainly by Christians**, as opposed to the northern areas of the Rhodope and Xanthi prefectures in the region, where most of the Muslim population lives. As a result, and given that some requirements may not have been

fulfilled, **the CSFs may have had a paradoxical outcome**: They may have increased the socio-economic distance keeping apart the big municipalities and urban areas (inhabited both by majority and minority members) from the mountain communities, inhabited mainly by the minority population, that remain isolated and marginalized. The latter have had difficulty participating in the overall development process of the region.

The causes of the disparity in the distribution of resources between the Christians (mainly in the southern) and the Muslims (primarily inhabiting the northern part of the region), and also the limited participation of the minority in the EU-financed programmes, can be attributed to **the legacy of the socio-economic exclusion, and to the social idiosyncrasies of the Muslim community**. Some social and political actors from the Minority, who gave interviews within the framework of the field research of EUROREG, regard this disparity as part of **a broad spectrum of discriminatory practices** by the Greek authorities against their community.

Some minority members have developed a lingering distrust toward the Greek political parties, which refuse or avoid recognizing their community's right to self-identification as an ethnic Turkish minority. This distrust notwithstanding, **the participation and cooperation of Muslims of Turkish origin (as they identify themselves) with Greek parties is stronger, compared to the past**. The feature that is considered "new" in the political tactics of the Minority in Thrace is the manifestation of a Turkish ethnic identity *parallel to and together with* the pursuit of integration into the Greek society. The former is no longer seen as contradictory to the latter; their identification as Turkish is no longer antagonistic to their efforts for integration into the local society. The local representatives of the minority **recognize the importance of the European framework of human rights**. The minority seems to put more trust in the European Union (EU) than in the Greek State, but has developed an even deeper trust in Turkey.

We need to stress that the findings of the research enhance the view that the social integration of the minorities is a complex and multi-dimensional process, which is tightly connected, but not exclusively related, to economic development. It is closely associated to the existing social conditions. These conditions may impede people and groups from using the opportunities that present themselves or, to the contrary, they may induce them to do so. The integration of minorities is also linked to the prevailing political trends and established balances, as well as to the trend toward a certain cultural identification and, in general, to the way a group collectively defines and identifies itself. These factors are not static, but they are redefined over time and under the impact of changing historical and political conditions.

Our political recommendations regarding the strategies of regional development include the following:

- **More transparency in the announcements and dissemination of information** concerning the applications for community and other funding.
- **Maximization of transparency with respect to the application submission-approval-selection process**, and the allocation of resources.
- As an interim measure for breaking the Minority's isolation, promotion of **bilingualism** in public services which are actively involved in local and regional development processes, so as to help these services tackle more effectively the special problems of communication and information about the regional development programmes that concern individuals with a limited knowledge of the Greek language.
- **Allocating regional development resources to programmes that give incentives to cooperation between minority and majority members.**
- **The regional development programmes should give more emphasis on strategies that aim at solving the problems of the mountainous areas, and the ones largely inhabited by minority** populations in the northern parts of the Xanthi and the Rhodope prefectures.

The Muslims of Western Thrace, Greece

In the border region of Western Thrace, in northeastern Greece, there is a small but significant population of about 120,000 Muslims who are Greek citizens, Turkish speakers, and mostly with a Turkish ethnic consciousness. The Thrace region borders Turkey to the east and Bulgaria to the north. On the other side of the northern borders, i.e., in the southern and southeastern areas of Bulgaria, there are territorially concentrated Turkish-speaking communities that constitute quite a large portion of the Turkish minority of that country. Thrace is part of the Administrative Region (*Periféria*) of East Macedonia and Thrace, and consists of three prefectures (or counties), Xanthi, Rhodope, and Evros. Being one of the least economically developed regions in Greece, Thrace is a case of a 'double periphery' that ranks at the low end of the EU scale in terms of per capita income and overall development. Indeed, according to the figures of CSF of 2000-2006 for this region, the per capita GDP (gross domestic product) in Eastern Macedonia and Thrace equals to the 79% of the national average per capita GDP (it has the second lowest per capita GDP among the 13 regions of Greece), and is equal to 58.6 % of the EU average per capita GDP (as calculated from the Eurostat figures for 2001).

Comprising individuals of Turkish origin, Gypsies (Roma), and Pomaks (whose mother tongue is a dialect of Bulgarian), the Muslims of Thrace prior to World War II coexisted largely as a religious community characteristic of the Ottoman *millet* system. Since the '50s, however, they have transformed into a minority with ethnic consciousness, and in the past twenty years they have mobilized to assert a common Turkish identity. The latter has caused a major and ongoing rift with Greek authorities, which -- invoking the Lausanne Treaty of 1923 -- officially recognize a 'Muslim minority'.

Despite Greece's transition to democracy (after a seven-year dictatorship) in 1974, State-minority relations in Thrace deteriorated due to the deepening crisis with Turkey involving Cyprus and the Aegean Sea, and because of the fear that the minority could play the role of a 'Trojan horse' for the Turkish claims in Thrace. This situation led the Greek State to take a series of restrictive measures, which deprived the Muslim population of basic social and economic rights. In reaction to these measures, in the second half of the 1980s, the minority mobilized politically on the basis of Turkish nationalism.

Alarmed by tumultuous conditions and the tensions between Muslims and Christians in Thrace at the turn of the decade, the Greek government, having completed all aspects of its accession to the EU, decided in 1991 to abolish the discriminatory measures, and announced a new approach towards the minority to be guided by the principles of 'equality before the law' and 'equal citizenship' (*ισονομία & ισοπολιτεία* -- *isonomia & isopolitia*). This approach was for the first time put to practice through a new regional development strategy for border regions, which was launched right after the "*Findings of the Inter-party Committee for Border Regions*" were submitted to the Greek Parliament, in 1992.

Despite the fact that the reorientation of government policy towards the rights of the minority, and the incorporation of this community into regional development strategies was not directly prompted by the EU, socio-economic development in Thrace would not have been possible outside of Greece's processes of European integration.

The change in minority policy coincided with the intensification of EC/EU integration processes. Concern with the growing gap between the Greek and the EU economy led to the transfer of increasing amounts of structural funds to Greece. A significant portion of these resources from structural funds have been allocated to Thrace, a border region of strategic importance in the post-Cold War Balkans, thus enabling intensified development efforts and infrastructure investments.

Of the 13 regional development programmes under the Community Support Frameworks for 1989-1993, 1994-1999, and 2000-2006, Eastern Macedonia and Thrace received the third largest funding in Greece (after the two major urban areas of Athens/Attica and Thessaloniki in Central Macedonia).

Besides their financial significance, the EU structural funds for Greece have had equally important institutional implications for this country's local government structures. A series of measures that were taken, from the second half of the '80s onwards, by the Greek government at the local, prefectural and regional level are linked, to a great extent, to the structural funds. Among the reforms connected to these measures was the establishment of prefectural administrations elected by the people and of regional (*periféria*-level) administrations. These reforms, however, were fiercely challenged in Thrace by the majority, because of their feared consequences for the inter-ethnic relations in the region. One of these consequences, namely that the measures would make the minority more powerful politically, was partly neutralized by the creation of two "super-prefectures" or "enlarged prefectures" that attached the largely Muslim-populated prefecture of Xanthi to the "Christian" prefectures of Kavala and Drama, and the predominantly Muslim prefecture of Rhodope to the overwhelmingly Christian-populated Evros prefecture. Thus the Christians' political power in the two prefectures was propped up and the possibility of a Muslim prefect being elected eliminated.

The EUROREG Research Program in Western Thrace

The objective of the EUROREG research program was to examine whether the development processes, strengthened through the structural programmes, and also, more widely, through the processes of European integration:

(a) promote the political and economic integration of minorities into the regional framework for development, and, moreover, induce their cooperation with the majority,

and

(b) contribute to a relative decline of the nationalistic policies and of ethnic antagonisms, through the redirection of the interests and the identity of minorities and the majority *more* toward socio-economic development, political equality and participation, and *less* toward the emphasis on ethnic differentiation.

In this policy brief, we present the main conclusions of our empirical research, which, in part, support the first working hypothesis (a). Since the '90s, the Greek government policy in Thrace has been more moderate. At the same time, one can observe significant differences in the perception of rights and citizenship between Thracian Muslims and Christians. Within the framework of European integration, ethnic and cultural differences in Thrace remain pronounced, but have acquired a different content and meaning in comparison to the situation in the '80s.

The main conclusions concerning the reforms in the structure of regional, prefectural and local (municipal) self-government and the minority's participation

The transformation of the **Prefectural Council** into an organ whose members are directly elected by the people has facilitated **the participation and the representation of the minority**, and, in this sense, has enhanced the democratic character of politics at the

prefectural and local level. The prefectural candidates and the ones who run for a seat in the prefectural councils, in order to attract the votes of Muslims, have begun making efforts to tackle the inequalities between the Muslims of the north and the Christians of the southern areas.

The introduction of prefectural self-government in 1994 prepared the ground for a **closer political cooperation between Christians and Muslims in local party structures**. The Greek political parties sought and attracted minority candidates for prefectural and local elections and thus to incorporate them into the decentralized structures. In the Rhodope prefecture ten out of twenty-five members of the Prefectural Council are Turkish-speaking Muslims. In Xanthi's Prefectural Council, the minority members are three out of twenty-five.

At the local level, the minority elects its representatives as members of municipal councils, as mayors and as 'presidents of communes' (*πρόεδροι κοινοτήτων / κοινοτάρχες -- proedri kinotiton or kinotarhes*). Since 1999, the political position of the local elected administrators has been strengthened as a result of the formation of larger municipalities by merging smaller communes (the *Kapodistriasis* reform in local administration). In the Xanthi prefecture, the deputy-prefect, one mayor (of Miki, one of Xanthi's six municipalities), and four 'presidents of communes' (in Thérmes, Sátres, Kotyli, and Sélero) are members of the minority. Likewise, in the prefecture of Rhodope, the deputy-prefect, three mayors (Arrianá, Sóstis, and Fillyra; the prefecture includes nine municipalities in total), and three 'presidents of communes' (Kéhros, Amaxádes, and Orgáni) are Muslims.

At the same time though, we have the ongoing **existence of communes only in Muslim-inhabited areas of Thrace**. A commune is an administrative unit that is rare in other parts of Greece, that represents the weak tier of local government and is inherited from the previous system. Due to the lack of human capital and know-how to pursue and implement projects, the communes, unlike many municipalities, are unable to take advantage of the development resources available through CSFs.

Despite the continuous (real or perceived) discrimination against Muslims, the **prefectural reforms** have played a key role in the government strategy of integrating Muslims, who identify themselves as Turks, into the society. These reforms have contributed significantly to the **strengthening of minority members' position as equal citizens**, and in their developing a sense of trust (fragile though it may be) in Greek government bodies at the local level.

There is **widespread support for decentralization** among our interviewees from both the minority and the majority. Yet, this convergence of views does not seem to take any political dimension or translate into any joint initiatives between the two groups. Most likely, such expressed support for decentralization is abstract and does not reflect any joint inter-communal interest at the regional level.

Meanwhile, **the curtailment of prefecture government competences** that took place in the last few years and the transfer of those competences to regional (*periféria*) administration, together with the ongoing existence of enlarged prefectures described above, can be considered a step 'backwards', and a possible cause for the continuing minority skepticism and mistrust towards the Greek State and the Christian majority's political representatives.

In short, our findings show that the reforms in local and prefectural government have promoted the participation of the minority in Thrace. They have contributed to the democratization of the local politics and have reduced the chasm in the relations between the minority and the majority. On the other hand, the efforts to limit the competences of the prefectural administrations have enhanced the distrust and skepticism of the minority toward Greek authorities.

Main conclusions concerning the regional development and the socio-economic position of the minority

The structural funds have played a significant part in public and private investments. They thus have had an indirect effect on the socio-economic conditions and expectations of the minority. For example, the construction of large public works, such as the *Egnatia* highway, as well as public works of a smaller scale, such as the building of sewage and water supply systems have undoubtedly upgraded the region's infrastructure and in this sense have had a positive impact on the entire population – including the minority.

At the same time, however, the lack -- especially in minority-inhabited areas -- of specialized know-how among the local government staff on the process of searching and applying for development funds provided by regional institutions has limited these municipalities' access to them. In fact, despite the increasing influx of development funds into Thrace and the participation of minority representatives in the structures of local and prefectural self-government, **the integration of the minority into the economy of the region has so far been limited.**

Even though there were significant opportunities to do so, until recently **there was limited minority participation in development programmes** targeting individual small-scale entrepreneurs to receive grants in order to start a business, expand it, or upgrade it. Largely funded through the CSFs, these programmes operate on a competitive basis and are allocated through a process of proposal submission, evaluation, and approval.

Despite the lack of sufficient systematic data to document this, it appears that **the bulk of the funds from the three CSFs have gone into the mainly (though not exclusively) Christian-inhabited areas to the south** as opposed to the almost exclusively Muslim-inhabited areas of the north in the Xanthi and Rhodope prefectures. This is primarily due to the fact that the former had better infrastructure to begin with and was thus in a more advantageous position to make use of the funds, in contrast to the northern mountainous areas inhabited by the minority. In the latter, funds have been used to put in place basic infrastructure such as asphalted roads and water supply systems.

In this respect, **the CSFs appear to have a paradoxical effect**: They seem to create a further divide separating the large municipalities and urban areas (both majority and minority inhabited) that benefit from them and prosper, from the mountainous minority-inhabited areas that remain isolated and marginalised, unable to partake in the overall development process of the region.

The disparity in funding allocation between the Christians of the south and the Muslims of the north, and the limited inclusion of minority individuals in programmes, can be attributed to the **legacy of severe socio-economic exclusion, as a result of the past policy of discriminatory measures**, and also to **specific social idiosyncrasies of the Muslim community**. Given their past economic marginalization and their occupation in tobacco growing, most lack the necessary additional private capital required by programmes. Furthermore, minority inhabitants in the mountainous north of Xanthi and Rhodope often do not have proper land ownership titles -- a condition for participation in development programmes.

A number of social and political actors of the minority interviewed for the EUROREG program attribute the aforementioned disparity to **purposeful or implicit discrimination** on the part of Greek authorities. They point to the fact that information and guidance from the central and local authorities are directed, on purpose, to the majority population and are usually shaped to fit the majority's social conditions.

Minority business people and local organizations are either not contacted at all or informed about funding opportunities a few days before the deadline expires. It is, however,

not clear whether this is done due to an intentional government policy, or as a consequence of the influence of some local majority circles to protect their interests. Moreover, one must stress that the lack of adequate information, and the generally limited participation in development programmes, is also due to the minority's reticence in taking initiative and getting involved. In other words, the minority has so far adopted a hesitant or even passive stance in the issue of regional development actions. This stance, which is stated repeatedly by representatives of the minority in our interviews, can be attributed to a lingering distrust toward Greek authorities – a distrust cultivated over time by the discriminatory measures that had been in force until recently. Up to a point, too, this lack of trust may also be linked to diffuse, albeit unspecified, pressures that come from within the minority, because attempts or efforts to cooperate with the Greek authorities are regarded by a portion of this community as an indication of abandoning collective solidarity with the Turkish ethnic group.

Whatever the causes may be, **the minority's socioeconomic position remains vulnerable** due to the decline of agricultural subsidies and their gradual elimination in tobacco growing. Despite increased funds, government authorities at national, regional and local level have not been able to redress the most pressing issue which is the need to create **alternative forms of occupation and cultivation that can replace tobacco** (or, at least, alternative forms of growing tobacco).

Main conclusions concerning the policy for the minority

Despite enhanced opportunities for economic and political participation of the minority, its **politics on the basis of the ethnic Turkish identity has not changed significantly**. Nevertheless, the intransigent nature of the Turkish nationalism that characterized the politics of Thrace's minority in the 1980s and early 1990s seems to have lost its intensity.

Even though over the last 15 years minority members have increasingly joined Greek political parties as candidates in local, prefectural, and national elections, most of them still do not have any consistent and stable affiliation with these parties. The political-ideological differences of the minority leaders (mayors, commune presidents, members of prefectural councils, leading members of civil-society organizations, etc.) appear to fade away as they come together in the unofficial (or extralegal) "Advisory Committee of the Minority". This committee (which was formed under the guidance of the Turkish Consulate of Komotini in the '80s and remains active) expresses and promotes a politics on the basis of the Turkish ethnic identity.

Several members of the minority interviewed in the context of EUROREG still do not trust the Greek political parties, who deny or shy away from acknowledging their community's right to self-identification as a Turkish minority. Nonetheless, **there is greater participation and cooperation of Muslims -- including those who identify themselves as Turks -- with the Greek parties today, compared to the past.**

While still sporadic and not often stated openly and publicly, there have lately been growing intra-communal criticisms of the Advisory Committee. These criticisms are at least partly linked to the closer ties some minority members have developed with political parties through their participation in local and prefectural institutions. **There are numerous examples of minority 'disobedience' to the recommendations of its leadership (i.e., the Committee) that continued to maintain close ties with the Turkish Consulate.** For instance, minority members' response to the recommendations about whom to vote for in national elections, over the past ten years merits closer attention: Within this period, at least two of the minority members who were elected to the Greek Parliament on the ballot of

national political parties did not have the support of this Committee, which had recommended other candidates.

The participation of Muslims in the local/municipal and prefectural institutions, coupled with the opportunities for participation in regional development programmes facilitate the **integration of the minority into the Greek society**. There is a **growing recognition among minority members that their community needs to overcome its own shortcomings and change its mentality**, especially when it comes to their level of education, their proficiency in the Greek language, and the expansion of their socio-economic relations with the majority.

It would be interesting to see what will happen as a **new generation of minority members**, who since 1996-97 have studied at Greek universities, comes of age. Within the frame of a government policy for minority integration, a law established a quota for the entry of minority students in the universities of Greece and several hundreds of young people from the minority now study in or have recently graduated from them.

What is ‘**new**’ in the politics of the minority in Thrace is that the demand for recognition of its ethnic Turkish character appears to go hand in hand with the now visible pursuit for integration into the Greek society. While ten years ago such a pursuit would be considered an unacceptable concession to the Greek state’s wish to assimilate the Muslim community, today it is increasingly seen as a precondition for the effective pursuit of its interests and survival. As one minority member whom we interviewed put it: “If our aim is to attain minority rights, we shall not leave this to those who are unable to express themselves in Greek.”

Main conclusions concerning the cultural and political demands of the minority

Local minority actors also stress **the importance of the European frame of human rights**. Human rights norms are seen to have influenced Greek government policy towards the minority and to have acted as an external pressure to limit and lift the anti-minority discriminatory measures of the past. Among the minority members there is a collective perception of the EU as an external guarantee for their rights, despite its shortcomings, and, moreover, as a guarantee against (Greek) nationalism and an alternative to the nation-state.

By virtue of the fact that it is a multi-cultural entity, the EU, unlike the nation-state, appears to validate the minority cultural demands and claims for collective self-identification. In both of these respects, the **EU provides a way out of the constraints of the nation-state**. The minority displays greater trust for the EU than it does for the Greek state but not nearly as much as it does for Turkey. The latter is considered by most of our minority interviewees as a more reliable external “guarantor” of their rights, when compared to the EU, which has not actively defended them as ardently and consistently as Turkey has.

The EU structural funds may have mattered in the minority views as regards their education needs in an indirect way: Minority members have realised that the low educational level of their community prevents it from taking advantage of the new context of economic opportunities. Some informants put it bluntly: How can the minority benefit from the funding programmes if they are unable to read and speak Greek, or to fill in an application form?

Both the interviewees from the minority and the ones from the majority recognize the freedoms and rights that the Muslims have to enjoy on matters of minority education (which derive from the treaty of Lausanne of 1923). Nevertheless, **the two groups disagree as to the goals of this education and the way it should be provided**. While interviewees from the majority believe that the education issue (which all local actors recognize as of paramount importance for the development of the region) has been solved, our interviewees from the minority think otherwise. They do recognize that infrastructure has largely improved and so

have the textbooks and other teaching materials, but criticize the overall structure of the minority education curriculum and the system for educating and training minority teachers. They ask for full bilingualism in education, so that minority members preserve their ethnic culture, while at the same time (by becoming proficient in Greek) they are successfully integrated in society and the labour market. The importance of speaking and writing Greek fluently is emphasised by almost all the minority members we interviewed. They consider fluency in Greek as part of the minority citizens' obligation towards the Greek state and also as a practical objective that would contribute significantly to their chances of employment and economic advancement. However, it is doubtful whether the existing system of bilingual education of the minority in Thrace has succeeded or can succeed in this double goal of preserving ethnic identity and, simultaneously, providing the means for integration into the university system of Greece, and into the Greek society in general. The recent propping up of this system with the introduction of new features of cross-cultural education may be seen as an admission or an acknowledgement of its inadequacy.

Having not given special emphasis in this research on the issue of education (because this has been the focus of other programmes and studies), we cannot state any systematic and well-founded observations on this topic. We should stress, though, that, granted the importance of education for the economic and social development, there should be a process of radical restructuring of the existing system of minority education – and this process has already begun. The restructuring should move this education toward real compatibility with the contemporary pedagogical approaches to an *intercultural/cross-cultural education*. Meanwhile, and for the success of such a process, it is also necessary that the education system for the Thracian minority be extricated from the bilateral Greek-Turkish relations.

Final Concluding Observations

Overall, ethnic identification matters less than it used to as regards economic activities. Even so, divisions and discrimination against the minority, although considerably diminished now, often persist. They may persist less in the form of institutional discrimination but they do in the form of attitudes and not necessarily intentional favouring of majority members at the expense of minority ones. However, it must be noted that patterns of ethnic favouritist behaviour can be observed in both sides, and result in the perpetuation of distrust, keeping distances, and prejudices.

There is however a new vision and a new conception of identity asserting itself among the younger generation of the minority – one that focuses on what minority members can do for themselves rather than what the Greek State cannot or does not want to do for them. This is a conception that favours regional integration, breaking away from nationalism and moving closer to a sense of cooperative multicultural coexistence in Thrace and in Europe. This attitude, in other words, disputes and challenges, at least to a degree, the monolithic understanding of the Greek and Turkish nationalism that situates the minority constantly between two opposite nationalistic poles .

Nevertheless, Turkish and Greek nationalisms remain salient among minority and majority leaders and social-political actors. We observe two trends with regard to nationalism in Thrace: On the one hand, the nationalistic sentiment appears to have become significantly more moderate over the past fifteen years. This apparent moderateness is tightly linked to the integration, to a larger or smaller extent, of the minority into the local structures of political participation and economic development. On the other hand, though, there is a new trend toward polarization between the Greek and the Turkish nationalisms in the region around the demand for recognition of the Minority's right to identify itself as Turkish.

It should be reiterated here, that a significant number of minority members, primarily of the younger generation, has adopted a critical stance toward Turkish nationalism in its traditional form. They are especially critical of the notion that the minority is or should remain under the patronage of Turkey. The relations of dependency between the minority and Turkey, which have developed over the years, while cultivating a positive bond of identification, lead, in some instances, to circumstances that exert pressure on, and limit, the exercise of the free will of minority individuals. At the same time, however, the minority youth maintains the right to identify themselves as members of a *Turkish* ethnic minority, a demand of symbolic nature, which nevertheless is very important to their community. It is worth noting that the demands for recognition of a distinct identity, that are raised in connection with either the issue of religion or the issue of self-identification, enjoy great acceptance within the minority. These demands are not just supported by groups closely associated with the Turkish Consulate, but by wide segments of this community, and even by those groups that openly criticize the policy and practices of the Consulate. The EU, because of its multicultural and multiethnic character, encourages (even if indirectly) the recognition of the existence of different ethnic identities. The promotion of norms for the protection of human and minority rights has the same effect, as well.

Even though the demand for collective self-identification is, without a doubt, being promoted by Turkey within the framework of a wider Turkish nationalism, such a demand also has to be understood in connection with past economic, cultural and political ties.

The results of our research show, however, that, parallel to this nationalistic demand, there is an equally strong trend toward integration into the Greek society. This trend was not there fifteen years ago. The processes of regional development have very possibly convinced the minority that they have to pursue their interests *through* or *within* the Greek institutions and structures of education and political participation.

Nevertheless, the obstinate stance of the majority and the state authorities *not* to recognize those minority associations that have the adjective “Turkish” in their title, and to be *unresponsive* to the demand for the election of the mufti by the Muslim community itself, constitute factors that perpetuate the distrustfulness of the minority. The Greek authorities and the political parties continue to regard these demands as being raised mainly by Turkey and not by an ethnic minority whose religious identity is already well established in the local institutions and practices. The inability of the authorities to understand the different and manifold meaning given by minority members to these issues could lead to further polarization.

Policy Recommendations

Based on the results of our research, which we presented in this text, we would like to make the following political recommendations:

**** On the strategies of regional development***

Transparency in the provision and dissemination of information regarding announcements on applications for funding and participation in development programmes or other initiatives that promote the social and economic development.

More specifically:

- ▶ Translation of the announcement texts and the application material into Turkish.
- ▶ Setting up bilingual offices in the town halls and in prefectures of the region, which would be in charge of providing guidance to those interested in such programmes and of helping them with the application forms and the process. Such offices may not necessarily or

officially be part of the public administration. Their operation could be assigned to private firms through open public bidding.

Maximization of transparency with regard to the process of application, approval, and selection for development funds, and also with regard to the allocation of funds, in order to prevent any personal influence, favoritism, or other forms of direct or indirect discrimination among the applicants, who are both from the minority and from the majority.

Achieving this goal would probably require the establishment of a **transparency committee**, which would check periodically the selection and assessment processes and would conduct evaluation tests through questionnaires to be answered by the applicants and those who have already received funding.

Promotion of the bilingual character of the public services, which would encourage the minority citizens (particularly those from the mountainous areas) to seek and receive information on development programmes and facilitate their participation in them, and might also help these individuals benefit from other support and development measures.

Providing regional development funds specifically intended for enterprises of a bicomunal character. In selected fields and in selected funding programmes, there needs to be a *preference* for applications that are jointly submitted by members of minority *and* majority or by enterprises that aim to improve the economic cooperation between the two communities in Thrace.

The regional development plans need to put greater emphasis on strategies and proposals that **aim at dealing comprehensively with the serious problems faced by the mountainous areas and those inhabited by the minority** in the southern part of the Xanthi and the Rhodope prefectures.

*** *On the minority's political and cultural demands***

▶ Launching a further restructuring of the minority education system and improvement of the bilingual curriculum in all the minority schools, on the basis of modern methods and the pedagogical principles of intercultural education.

▶ Upgrading the “special” academy in Thessaloniki that prepares teachers for the Turkish-language classes in minority primary schools, by transforming it into a genuine university department or by introducing university courses at every education department for preparing or training teachers who will work at minority primary and secondary schools.

▶ Incorporating the new principles and changes in minority education into the framework of a wider reformation of the national educational system, which would, among other things, lead to this system's recognition of the multicultural, multiethnic, and multireligious character of the Greek society and especially of its pupil/student body today (Greek is not the mother tongue of approximately 10% of the pupils in the primary and secondary education in Greece).

▶ Recognizing the right of minority members to form associations that would include the term “Turkish” in their names -- on the condition, of course, that they abide by the Greek constitution, that they do not promote hatred between the two communities, and that they do not support discrimination on a national or religious basis. This recommendation should not be construed to be in conflict with the official government position that the right to self-identification cannot apply collectively for the minority. The minority would continue officially to be recognized only as Muslim.

► Restructuring the legal status of the muftis in Thrace in a way that would bring this status into line with the practices in other EU member-states, and would take into account the relevant decisions and judgments of the European Court of Human Rights.