



**Contents and practices  
regarding  
the “Religion of the Other”  
in educating the mixed  
(Christian/ Muslim) society  
in Greek Thrace**

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Note: The issue of  
**Contents and practices regarding  
the “Religion of the Other”  
in educating the mixed  
(Christian/ Muslim) society in Greek Thrace**

is examined here  
not as a technical/ operational educational issue.

**My approach lies in the field were  
Education Policy meets Politics of Religion**

Notes in blue letters refer to the  
'politics of the religion' dimension

# Greece 2019



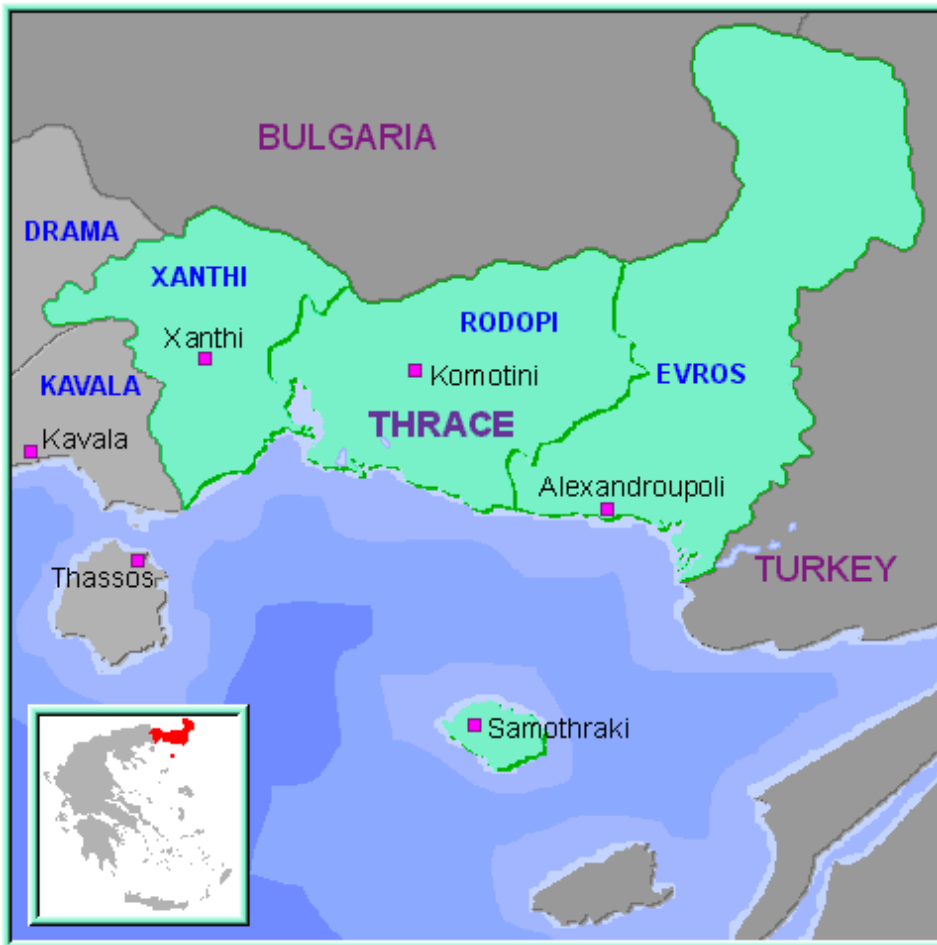
**Total population:  
approx. 11 million**

**Dominant religion:  
Greek Christian  
Orthodox**

**Muslim population:  
approx. 300.000  
migrant workers**

**Thracian Minority  
Muslims:  
Approx. 100.000**

# Greek Thrace 2019



Total population: 360.000

**Muslim Minority of W. Thrace**  
approx. 85.000

**Greek citizens**

(Treaty of Lausanne 1923  
Exclusion from the Greek-  
Turkish Agreement for  
population exchange)

**Enjoyment of Special Rights**  
**(language, education, religion)**  
Internationally Recognized

## Regarding (management of) Religion

- Some 300 *mosques* and *mescit*
- Proportionate staff (*imam, muezzin, vaiz*)
- 3 *mufti*

In Rodopi and Xanthi

1 appointed (controlled by the Greek State)

1 elected (controlled by the Turkish State)

In every mosque a “*Qur’an Kursu*” operates, under the supervision of the elected mufti (as a rule)

# Regarding (secondary) Education

## **For the general population:**

- Public monolingual (Greek language) gymnasia and lycea
- technical education – vocational training
- + 1 ecclesiastical school (only for Christians)

## **For the minority population:**

- 2 Minority bilingual (Greek + Turkish language) gymnasia + lycea
- 2 Islamic seminars/ *medrese* (gymnasia + lycea)

\* The first *medrese* operated in Gümülcine/ Komotini in the mid 14<sup>th</sup> century!

In Thrace's public secondary schools,  
pupils can choose between:

- Not taking any religious lessons
- Take religious lesson of their own religion.

So, in public secondary schools there are Christian Orthodox theologians and Muslim Sunni theologians, teaching in separate classes. They are all appointed and controlled by the State, and they teach their subject in Greek.

## In Thrace's minority secondary schools:

- All pupils attend religious (Muslim Sunni) lessons,
- taught in Turkish,
- by Thracian Muslim Minority theologians,
- educated in Turkey or elsewhere,
- following the Turkish curriculum and using the Turkish school books,
- appointed by the Greek State  
(it is not clear who guides or supervises them)



## In Thrace's Islamic Seminars / *medrese*

- All pupils attend a lot of Islamic religious lessons
- Taught in Turkish (+ lessons of Arabic language)
- by Thracian Muslim Minority theologians,
- educated in Middle East countries or elsewhere,
- following their own curriculum and using handbooks written by the teachers,
- appointed and supervised by the Greek State

\* recently there is a strong confrontation on who has the “upper hand” on *medreses*:

the appointed mufti (Greek State) or the elected mufti (Turkish State)

# Secondary Education in Thrace

## Gymnasium – Lyceum

(the figures approx. - field work findings)

- Total pupil population in public secondary education in Thrace: **21.150**
- Of whom, Thracian Minority Muslims: **8.300**
- Distribution of Muslim minority pupils:
- In public schools: **6.570**
- In minority schools: **1.550**
- In *medrese*: **200**

So

What do our pupils learn about the  
“Religion of the other” ?

(history, structure, dogma, practices, cult etc.)

- - -

field research

Summer – Autumn 2019

Interviews (semi- structured)

with theologians of all types

5 Christians – 4 Muslims

(headmasters of *medrese* and ecclesiastical  
schools and representatives of teachers’ unions)

\* Muslims where inaccessible and quite preserved

Both Christian and Muslim theologians stated:

- “we follow the curriculum”
- Christians said that here is a rich material regarding other religions.

Whoever, it is not clear who does precisely what.

- Muslims said that they follow what is predicted, presenting actually the Islamic approach of Christianity (Indjil as one of the holly books etc.)

- Christians said that they have not the necessary knowledge to proceed to deeper analysis and presentation of Islam

(“we were not taught such things when we were studying in the university”)

- Muslims said that they do not have precise knowledge of the Judaic and Christian elements which exist in Islam, so they can not proceed to such discussions in the classroom

They also say that they ever proceed to “difficult” discussions regarding the issue of the holly trinity (uniqueness of God)

**From none of the sides there isn't even the slightest reference to the shared Abrahamic religious tradition!**

- The pupils of the ecclesiastical school have never visited a mosque and have never meet on purposes and discussed with their Muslim compatriots of the same age about their religious celebrations and practices.
- The pupils of the *medrese* have never visited a church and have never meet on purposes and discussed with their Christian compatriots of the same age about their religious celebrations and practices.

- The headmaster of the ecclesiastical school declared that he is thinking of a possible meeting of his pupils with the pupils of the *medrese* and have some common activities e.g. a football match or a discussion on parts of the Qur'an and the Gospel respectively.
- No similar thoughts seem to exist from the other side, especially in this certain period.

- In public schools, Christian and Muslim pupils coexist all day.
- In cases, Christian and Muslim theologians cooperate, while often *hocas* are asked to play the role of the translator (Turkish – Greek) and the cultural mediator.
- In cases, the Christian and the Muslim theologians of certain schools have cooperated and they have organized educational visits of mixed groups of pupils to mosques – **but not to churches.**



# Concluding remarks

- In Greek Thrace, where Christians and Muslims co-exist for more than 500 years, pupils still don't know enough about the other and the religion of the other.
- Both sides are still quite hesitant – not to say afraid – to approach the “other” , probably being afraid that their certainties (based on stereotypes and prepossessions) and thus their fears, might collapse
- On the issue of approach and learn the “other”, majority Christians seem to be less skeptical than their minority Muslim compatriots.

Thank you  
for your interest