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Greece

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Demographics

Although the actual numbers are uncertain, there are an estimated 370,000 Muslims in Greece, approximately 3.5 percent of the population. Most are from Albania, although there is an indigenous Muslim community in Thrace of about 120,000 persons.

Labor Market

Muslims are substantially underrepresented in state-controlled jobs (US State Dept., 2004).

Education

The OECD collects data on education from various statistical agencies within the country, the majority of which comes from census data from the year 2000. The OECD classifies educational achievement using the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED): ISCED 0/1/2: Less than upper secondary; ISCED 3/4: Upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary; ISCED 5A: "Academic" tertiary; ISCED 5B: "Vocational" tertiary; ISCED 6: Advanced research programs. 0-2 are considered low, 3-4 as medium, and 5 and above are considered high. This data is not reported by religion, but does have country of origin as reported by the respondent. It is thus possible to construct an approximate picture of the educational achievement of the population in the country with ancestry from predominately Muslim countries. One significant problem is that some countries, such as India and Nigeria, have large Muslim populations but the immigrant population cannot be readily classified as predominately Muslim or non-Muslim. As such, the educational data is split by predominately Muslim origin, predominately non-Muslim origin, and a separate category for those whom classification would not seem justified. Proportions are for all reported data, individuals with no reported ancestry or education are excluded.

| | High | Medium | Low |
|---------------|------|--------|-----|
| Muslim | 9% | 34% | 57% |
| Non-Muslim | 14% | 33% | 54% |
| Indeterminate | 27% | 46% | 27% |

State and Church

In Greece, the Greek Orthodox Church is established as the primary recognized religion in Greece. Legislation passed in the 1930's gives only the Orthodox Church the right to construct houses of worship without government approval. Until only recently, the Orthodox Church was consulted before allowing construction. This practice has apparently become less common.

Islam has been given a legal categorization that entails some of the privileges given to Judaism and the Orthodox Church. Due to the presence of a substantial indigenous Muslim (and generally Turkish-speaking) population in Thrace, there is a special agreement between the Greek and Turkish governments known as the Treaty of Lausanne, established in 1923 (US State Dept., 2004). The treaty provides language, religious and education rights to the Thracian community, but the Government claims that those outside Thrace are not covered by the agreement. Thus, Muslims in other parts of the country often have to travel to Thrace to obtain state-recognized functions such as marriage and funerals. As well, the Greek government maintains the right to appoint the religious leaders for the community in Thrace and there has been some controversy over this policy.

Muslims in Legislatures

In the Greek elections of 2004, Ilhan Ahmed was the sole Muslim member of the national parliament.

Muslim Organizations

The Treaty of Lausanne mandates that the Greek state recognize the muftis as religious authorities in Thrace, with various civil and legal privileges. As such, although they officially only represent this specific minority, they can be seen as taking some leadership roles for the Muslim community at large.

Islamic Education

The Treaty of Lausanne dictates that schools should be established for children from the Muslim community in Western Thrace. Instruction is in both Turkish and Greek. In general these are considered poor schools which handicap the ability of the students to succeed in the labor market. Recently, the Greek government has attempted to improve the educational opportunities of the members of the Muslim minority in Western Thrace. Economic incentives, preferential admissions policies at universities, and quota systems for jobs and schools have been instituted. However, the schools remain in poor condition, leading many Muslim families to send their children to the general public schools.

Students in these schools receive instruction in Islam, but such instruction has not been available for communities of Muslims outside Thrace. Although Muslims are allowed to opt out of instruction in Greek Orthodoxy, various organizational issues sometimes make this difficult.

Western Thrace also maintains two high schools to prepare Muslim students for higher level studies in Islamic theology.

Security, Immigration and Anti Terrorism Issues

In Greece, public encouragement to hatred or violence against a person or a group of persons on the grounds of race, national origin or religion is criminalized (Law No.927/1979, Art.1; Law No.1419/1984, Art.24).

The situation has been similar for Muslims in other countries. In Greece, there have been reports of police bias towards Muslims, especially in the run-up to the Olympic Games (IHF, 2005). Greece has been roundly criticized by human rights groups and international monitoring bodies for immigration policies violating international human rights standards. Immigrants are rarely notified of their rights and are deported without access to the asylum procedure. Greece and Turkey agreed to return illegal immigrants after September 11th, and hundreds fleeing persecution are believed to have been forcibly turned back in violation of the principle of non-refoulement (IHF, 2005).

Generally the Greek government has neglected to confront the problems of the immigrant community. However, this attitude seems to be changing slowly. In the last few years an amnesty program was set up to regularize the status of undocumented immigrants. Although it has been poorly administered, the effort represents a step forward on the issue by the government.

Islamic Practice

About 290 mosques operate in Western Thrace and on the islands of Rhodes and Kos, while there is no mosque for the estimated 200,000 Muslims in Athens. Permission was granted by the Greek

government for the building of a mosque in 2000, after decades of lobbying by Muslims. The mosque will be funded by the Saudi Arabian government, but construction has not yet begun. Due to the influence of the Greek Orthodox Church, which argued that "the people are not ready for accepting the site of a minaret in the center of a Christian Orthodox country," the mosque is to be built in the suburb of Peania. Opposition to the mosque in Peania has also arisen with the mayor, local residents and the Orthodox Church objecting. They claim that it will be one of the first buildings seen from the airport, damaging the Greek character of the area. Muslims also have objected to the approximately one hour trip required to reach the site from downtown Athens for Friday midday prayers.

The only Muslim cemeteries are in Western Thrace. Although they formally have the right to use municipal cemeteries, this practice is reportedly discouraged, and few have done so. Generally, Muslims in Greece must pursue burials either in Thrace or other countries, which can be a substantial burden for the less wealthy.

Greece allows halal slaughter with no restrictions.

The Treaty of Lausanne also provides powers over some aspects of civil law to muftis in Thrace. These provisions have been respected by the Greek government.

Public Perception of Islam

With rising immigration, anti-immigrant sentiments has been increasing in Greece. A survey commissioned by the EU in 2003 found 83% had either very negative or quite negative attitudes towards immigrants, the highest of all the researched countries. The predominance of the Greek Orthodox church also makes many Greeks consider non-Orthodox individuals as fundamentally non-Greek. These attitudes are sometimes reflected in the rhetoric of Orthodox clergy, and official handling of this problem has been remiss due to the continuing power of the Greek Orthodox Church.