

## Greek Thrace: a region populated by Christians and Muslims in the European Mediterranean

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# Greek Thrace – a region populated by Christians and Muslims in the European Mediterranean

HERMANN KANDLER

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## *Zusammenfassung*

### **Griechisch-Thrakien – eine von Christen und Muslimen bewohnte Region im europäischen Mittelmeerraum**

Seit dem Vordringen der Osmanen auf europäisches Territorium im 14. Jahrhundert konnte sich im Südosten des Kontinents eine islamisch geprägte Bevölkerung etablieren, die über Jahrhunderte diesen Raum prägten. Erst seit der Gründung überwiegend christlich ausgerichteter Nationalstaaten auf dem Balkan seit dem 19. Jahrhundert wurden die islamischen Bevölkerungsgruppen mit ethnisch-türkischer Ausrichtung zu Minderheiten, deren Beziehungen zu den mehrheitlich christlich geprägten Nominalvölkern aufgrund regionaler historischer Entwicklungen oftmals schwierig sind. Die Muslime in Griechisch-Thrakien, vom Bevölkerungsaustausch zwischen Griechenland und der Türkei 1923 ausgenommen, blieben in den folgenden Jahrzehnten dabei immer politischer Spielball Griechenlands und der Türkei. Die Betonung des Türkischen in der Minderheit erweckte bei den Griechen immer wieder das Bild der Minderheit als fünfte Kolonne der Türkei, was besonders während der Militärdiktatur (1967-1974) und darüber hinaus zu Einschränkungen der Minderheitenrechte führte. Nach dieser Phase der Repressionen gelang es der Minderheit sich in der Weltöffentlichkeit Gehör zu verschaffen und mithilfe internationaler Organisation wie der EU, Griechenland zum Überdenken seiner Minderheitenpolitik zu bewegen. Der Prozess der Gleichstellung von Christen und Muslimen in Thrakien ist jedoch noch nicht abgeschlossen. Das christlich-muslimische Thrakien zeigt, welche spezifischen Beziehungsmuster sich in einer gemischtreligiösen Bevölkerung entwickeln können, die sich in charakteristischer Weise von monoreligiösen oder geschlossenen Gemeinschaften abheben. Somit lässt sich die indigene muslimische Bevölkerung in Thrakien nicht mit westeuropäischen Migrantengesellschaften vergleichen, allein, weil die thrakischen Muslime wie ihre christlichen Mitbürger die Region als ihre Heimat empfinden und somit ein anderes Selbstverständnis ausbilden konnten als z.B. muslimische Migranten in Westeuropa.

*Muslime, Christen „Vertrag von Lausanne“, Bevölkerungsaustausch, Griechen, Türken, gemischtreligiös, Sadık Ahmet, Griechisch-Thrakien*

## *Abstract*

After the Ottomans advanced into European territory in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, an Islamic population was able to establish itself in the south-east of the continent and shaped the region for centuries. It was not until the largely Christian national states were established in the Balkans as of the 19<sup>th</sup> century that the Islamic population groups with Turkish ethnicity became minorities whose relationships with the Christian majority are often difficult owing to historical regional developments. The Muslims in Greek Thrace remained a political football for Greece and Turkey in the decades that followed, with the exception of the population exchange between Greece and Turkey in 1923. The emphasis on Turkish in the minority repeatedly revived the image of the minority as fifth columnists for Turkey among the Greeks, which resulted in curtailments of the minority's rights, particularly during the military dictatorship (1967-1974) and beyond. After this phase of repression, the minority succeeded in gaining an audience in the world's public and getting Greece to rethink its minority policy with the help of international organisations and the EU. However, the process of achieving equal treatment for Christians and Muslims in Thrace is not finished yet. Christian-Muslim Thrace shows the specific relationship patterns that can develop in a mixed-religion population, which have different characteristics from mono-religious or closed communities. This means that the indigenous Muslim population in Thrace cannot be compared to Western European migrant societies because both the Muslims in Thrace and their Christian compatriots see the region as their homeland and have therefore been able to develop a different identity from that of Muslim migrants in Western Europe, for example.

*Muslims, Christians, Treaty of Lausanne, population exchange, Greeks, Turks, mixed religion, Sadık Ahmet, Greek Thrace*

## **Christian and Muslim populations in the Balkans**

In a speech on 10 February 2008, Turkish prime minister Erdoğan called for the Turks living in Western Europe not to become assimilated. It is statements like this that keep discussions on how to integrate Muslims into our occidental Christian society alive. Integration is needed to prevent the pillarisation of society and all its consequences, in other

words, more or less closed communities living alongside each other. This is more pronounced in the Netherlands, for instance, where the term “pillarisation” was coined to describe the social segregation.

However, the question is whether discussions on integration can be held in a place where indigenous populations with different cultural and religious characters have grown into a region together,

perceive and claim it as home and thus do not wish for integration in the above sense. It is only to be expected that the understanding of cultural and religious diversity, which has formed there over time, differs from that in Western European immigrant societies.

South East Europe, in particular, offers up a whole range of different forms of Christian and Muslim coexistence, the latest case being Kosovo. Although

Kosovo's declaration of independence on 16 February 2008 is contested internationally and is only being recognised step by step, it was the only chance to avoid a further escalation of the conflict between the Serbs and Albanians, since Serbia was not prepared to grant minority rights to the Albanians in its autonomous republic. The historically-founded claim to Kosovo on both sides – it was settled by Albanians and is seen as the home of Serbian nationalism by the Serbs – prevented any idea of peaceful coexistence. AHTISAARI's report stresses that: "A history of enmity and mistrust has long antagonised the relationship between Kosovo Albanians and Serbs" (AHTISAARI 2007, p. 80). Now the question is whether the new state of Kosovo will find ways of integrating the Serbian minority.

And although Bosnia and Herzegovina is well on the way to becoming a modern, democratic state, it cannot be described as nation-building. Integration is not an issue in its society. Instead, the state consists of a three-fold religious and ethnic structure, with the Croats generally linked to Catholicism, the Serbs to Orthodoxy and the Bosnians to "Muslims in an ethnic sense" (STEINDORFF 2007, p. 108). The social principle of integration has never had a tradition in Bosnia either. During the Ottoman era, "the groups lived side by side in an organised manner with boundaries that were never questioned" (STEINDORFF 2007, p. 105).

Albania could be taken as a successful example of integration with its Muslim majority (70 %) and Christian minority. But in this case too it is debatable whether integration strategies were ever or ever had to be implemented. Since the beginning of the Ottoman era, syncretism has been common in the Balkans (SCHMIDT 2007, p. 96), particularly in Albania. This was reflected in the creed of early Albanian nationalism as well – "The Albanians' religion is Albanianism!" – and was consistently championed in the Stalinist-led Albania of Enver Hoxha where any religious or cultural deviation was nipped in the bud (CELA 1997, p. 141). Thus, integration is not necessarily an issue in Albania.

The Balkan states with a Christian-Islamic society could be regarded as the "clashing civilisations" of HUNTINGTON's cultural fault lines (1997, p. 331).

### Muslims and Christians – the historical development of the minority situation in Greek Thrace

The case study of Thrace in the north-east of Greece (Fig. 1) features historical and geographical singularities, which have led to the formation of a society that differs enormously from developments in other countries. As elsewhere in the Balkans, the society was based on the organisation of the Ottoman state and, more specifically, on its *millet* system. This state organisational form was based on the guarantee of considerable autonomy for individual "national" (*millet* = Turkish for "population") or ethnic or religious groups in the Ottoman Empire. Apart from their declaration of loyalty, they were often bound to the Sublime Porte in Istanbul by taxes alone. The state thus stood out from other state structures of the time in terms of tolerance, although it differed from modern, pluralistic social systems in many respects. The foundations of an indigenous European Islam were laid when the Ottomans conquered Thrace in the 14<sup>th</sup> century.

In urban areas in particular, the percentage of Turkish Muslims was very high during the consolidation phase of the Ottoman Empire in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The number in the provincial capital of Gümülcine (Komotini) is estimated at 87 % (DEDE 1975, p. 27). Greek sources contradict this, quoting the traveller Belon du Mans (1546), who claimed that "Greeks and a few(!) Turks lived" in the city in the 16<sup>th</sup> century (KANDLER 2007, p. 11). The population estimates are popularly used to prove one particular group's natural, historical right to live in Thrace or to contradict the opposing view.

The Ottoman reform policy of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Tanzimat) granted non-Muslims further freedoms. In the prospering economic sectors, in particular, they took over a leading role: In 1912, for instance, the Komotini bank and trading company comprised 33 Greeks, six Armenians, four Jews and only three Turks (LIAPIS 1993, p. 24). This unequal participation of the population groups in socially highly regarded professions is still noticeable today in the economic structure of Thrace. After Thrace was assigned its current borders in the peace treaties of Istanbul and Bucharest (1913), a separate Western Thrace state was formed in the borderlands of today's Greek Thrace (Fig. 1). Although it barely existed two months, it was seen as the first Turkish republic

and is highly valued in the historical consciousness, not just of the Turkish Muslim population in Thrace, but also in Turkey (DEDE 1975, p. 48). The 10 years that followed, however, showed that this Thrace at the intersection of Greece, Bulgaria and the declining Ottoman Empire had no chance to develop as an individual state.

The population exchange between Greece and Turkey (Lausanne 14/7/1923) meant a significant break for Thrace.

According to Article 2 of Appendix A of the convention signed by the Grand National Assembly of Turkey and the Greek government on 30 January, the "compulsory exchange of Turkish nationals of the Greek Orthodox religion established in Turkish territory and Greek nationals of the Muslim religion established in Greek territory" (Art. 1) does not include:

- a) "The Greek inhabitants of Constantinople and
- b) The Muslim inhabitants of Western Thrace" (quotation from WHITMAN 1990, p. 45), the region of Thrace, which was separated from the Turkish part of Thrace by the still unchanged frontier of the Evros/Meriç riverbed ever since the Lausanne Treaty (DALEGRE 1994, p. 134).

The terms "Greek" and "Muslim" (but *not* Turkish) still provoke discussions about the legality of the use of the national ethnic name of "Turkish" in officialdom today (e.g. German newspaper FAZ 28/3/2008). At the time of the treaty, however, there was no differentiation made between national and religious designations. "*Rum*" means "Greek Orthodox members" in Turkish while, although "Muslim" refers to the faith, from the foreign viewpoint of the Greek Christians it naturally meant the Turks (AARBAKKE 2000, p. 48). "Greeks" were Christians. "Muslim" was a common synonym for Turk from the viewpoint of the Christians in the Balkans. However, the choice of name did not meet with any opposition back then. After all, everybody knew who was meant, there was no Turkish national feeling in Thrace at that time and the new Turkish state preferred the term "Muslims", partly to distance themselves from the Ottoman clerics living in Thrace (e.g. the group of "150" scheming against Atatürk) (PANAGIOTIDIS 1995, p. 148).

These stipulations meant that the Muslim minority developed differently from other minority groups in the Balkans.

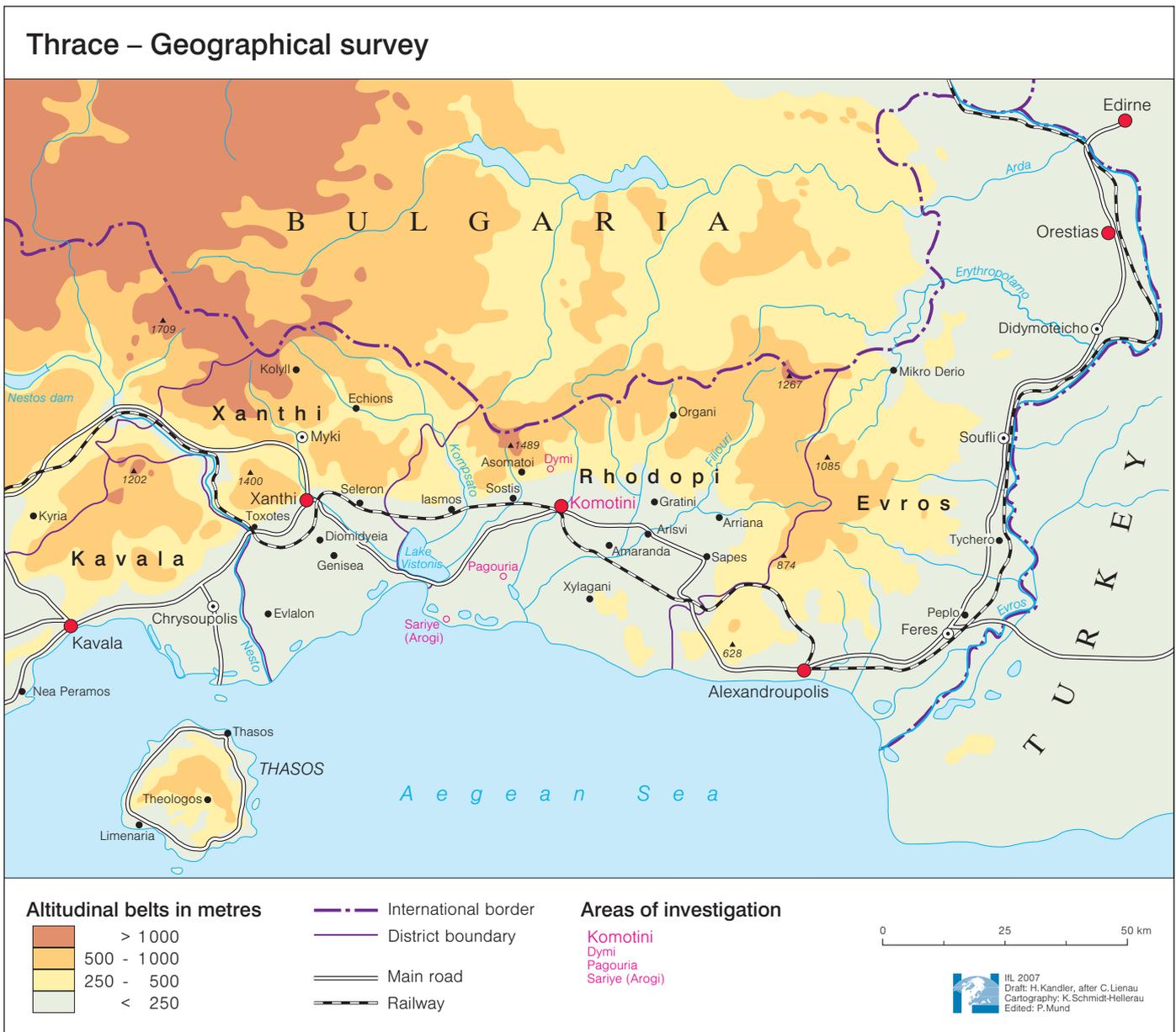


Fig. 1: Greek Thrace  
Source: own design

Although the minority enjoyed special privileges with their rights as Greek nationals, their situation was always closely bound up in Greco-Turkish relations as a counterbalance to the Greeks remaining in Istanbul and on the islands. And when the Greek minority in Turkey dwindled to almost nothing, Thrace became a third bone of contention between Athens and Ankara, along with Cyprus and the Aegean question, although all three problem areas were interlinked. The unrest in Cyprus as of the 1950s therefore had a negative impact on the treatment of the minorities in Turkey and Greece as well.

As long as the minority saw itself as Muslim, the Greek state granted them rights and supported them as a religious

minority “which lived side by side the Greeks with little integration ...” (AAR-BAKKE 2000, p. 48). Since the minority found it difficult to identify themselves with the secular mother country of Turkey, their community became increasingly pillarised within the Greek state. “The traditional attitudes connected to the Ottoman model of closed communities did not dispose people towards integration, and the stereotypes each community (Christians and Muslims [author’s note]) held of each other would help to preserve the differences” (AAR-BAKKE 2000, p. 48).

Greek Thrace faced its first crucial test shortly after the Treaty of Lausanne was ratified when the Greek government seized accommodation and land for the

refugees who had come to Thrace before 1923 and for Greeks evacuated from Asia Minor. This phase meant a considerable redistribution of agricultural property. Between 1923 and 1924, 8,245 rooms in the countryside and 5,590 in urban areas belonging to Muslims were seized for the new citizens. Mosques and schools were also used as emergency accommodation. Although these measures also affected local Christians, the refugees traumatised by the war in Asia Minor saw the local Muslims as ethnic relatives of the hated Turkish Turks and treated them as such. Local Muslims were ordered to give parts of their homes to the refugees – without any consideration for the women’s privacy – even though there were Greek-owned properties available.

Western Thrace  
Population development from 1912 to 1924

| Ethnic group | Population     |              |                |              | Increase/<br>Decrease |
|--------------|----------------|--------------|----------------|--------------|-----------------------|
|              | 1912           |              | 1924           |              |                       |
|              | absolute       | %            | absolute       | %            |                       |
| Greeks       | 87,000         | 36.7         | 189,000        | 62.2         | 117.2                 |
| Turks        | 111,000        | 46.8         | 84,000         | 27.6         | -24.3                 |
| Bulgarians   | 35,000         | 14.7         | 23,000         | 7.6          | -34.3                 |
| Other groups | 4,000          | 1.8          | 8,000          | 2.6          | 44.4                  |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>237,000</b> | <b>100.0</b> | <b>304,000</b> | <b>100.0</b> |                       |

Tab. 1: Population development in Western Thrace from 1912 to 1924  
Source: acc. to SCHULTZE 1935, p. 173

This meant that in some instances two families had to live in one room. Locals who refused were beaten and driven away (DEDE 1978, p. 212). Livestock and harvests were distributed among the new arrivals, along with the land, and the Muslims were generally left with nothing. In some cases, local families had to provide for the refugees and the animals they brought with them (DEDE 1978, p. 214). Although these developments were doubtlessly not planned, they were tolerated by the authorities, something that still rankles in the memories of the minority today.

The flood of around 110,000 immigrants continued until 1928 (Tab. 1). The change in the ratio of Greeks to Turks also forced the economic dominance of the Christians, which was already noticeable during the Ottoman era and was ultimately reflected in the social structure as well. It is therefore not surprising that the new population structure was used as a political tool. The “fresh blood from Anatolia” was supposed to increase the homogeneity of the population in the north of Greece, in particular, and to strengthen “notions of national unity” there as well (GINARAKIS, quotation from R. 1930, p. 404). The area was to be deliberately Graecised by expanding industry and settlements. The rebuilding of Thrace thus consisted of the establishment of tobacco factories in Kavala, Drama, Xanthi and Komotini (DEDE 1978, p. 93). The necessary funds were raised by taxes, which brought suffering to the Muslims affected by the seizures and dispossessions in particular. The outward appearance of the Thracian towns changed just as that of the rural areas did. The provision of 20 million drachmae enabled 20,000 set-

tlers – mainly from Eastern Thrace – to settle on land taken from “Greek Muslim citizens” (SCHULTZE 1935, p. 174). During this phase, towns and villages alike were expanded with colonist settlements and new settlements were founded. Very few new settlements were built in the *yaka*, the “lower slopes of the mountains”, in other words, the piedmont zone of the Rhodope Massif in the traditional tobacco-growing area, where the resident population “made full use of their right to remain in the country” (SCHULTZE 1935, p. 175). However, there was a planned interior colonisation in the former marshland and steppe of the *orta kışla* (Turkish for “middle winter camp”), in other words, the former winter pastures of the mountain nomads between the coast and the mountains (PLANHOL). The new settlements were often built between two Muslim villages, which became influenced by them over time. This tactical Graecising was also documented in the changed place names. After 1923, Ottoman place names were changed to or back to Greek names (e.g. *Gümülcine* became *Komotini* and *Sapçı Sappes*), places were renamed at will (*Sendelli* became *Dymi*) or were named after the home communities of the immigrants from Asia Minor (*Fanari* from *Fanari/Fener* in Istanbul) or given the adjective “new” (*Nea Zanta* from *Zanta* near *Rize*).

The fact that the new settlements were meant to force the old communities into the background politically still remains in the collective memory of the minority. This became an issue again in 1995 when the arrival of 50,000 Pontic Greek Orthodox refugees (Ileri 5/1/1996, p. 1) from the war-torn areas of the Caucasus was announced. Ultimately, far fewer refugees actually settled in Thrace, part-

ly because many went to try their luck in the central areas of Greece or abroad.

The settlement issue was initially resolved, up until the 1950s. The minority even benefited from their loyalty during the Greek civil war (1944-1949) on the side of monarchist Greece. As a result, Greece granted them guaranteed freedom of religion and free self-designation as “Turks”. Turkish-speaking grammar schools were opened, for instance, which is why many minority citizens still talk of the “golden ’50s” today. This fact is important to note because Greece’s behaviour towards the minority changed. The reasons for this lay in a combination of the Enosis revolt in Cyprus and the expulsion of the Greek minority from Istanbul in 1955 and 1964 and from the Aegean islands of Tenedos and Imbros. Greece began to view the minority as not merely being of a different faith, but as potential placeholders for Turkey on Greek soil. The minority, in turn, became aware of the potential revanchism of the Christians or Greeks, causing many to strengthen their Turkey-orientated attitudes, which led to the beginnings of neglect and discrimination (DALEGRE 1991, p. 51).

This neglect was one of the reasons for the ever greater emphasis on the Turkish aspect of the minority and the associated turning to Turkey the antagonist. Back in 1959, Yiannis Kapsis warned of a “fanatical group of Turks who were striving for autonomy” (AARBAKKE 2000, p. 138). But it was not until the time of the Greek junta that it became clear in which areas the minority were disadvantaged.

Due to neglected education, in particular, the minority fell behind the Christian majority. The education protocol from 1968 specified that lessons were to be taught in the pupils’ native language, with the exception of a few subjects (history, geography and citizenship). However, because second-rate teachers were appointed, most of whom had been educated in Turkey, the required standard of teaching could no longer be guaranteed. Clauses in the bilateral protocols on education from 1952 and 1968, which granted the authorities the right to control and veto the introduction of books, meant that the Turkish textbooks from Turkey that were still available in 1955 were copied many times over. In the 1990s, it was discovered with bitterness that pupils were learning that “people walk” (Ileri 26/5/1995a, p. 4). As a

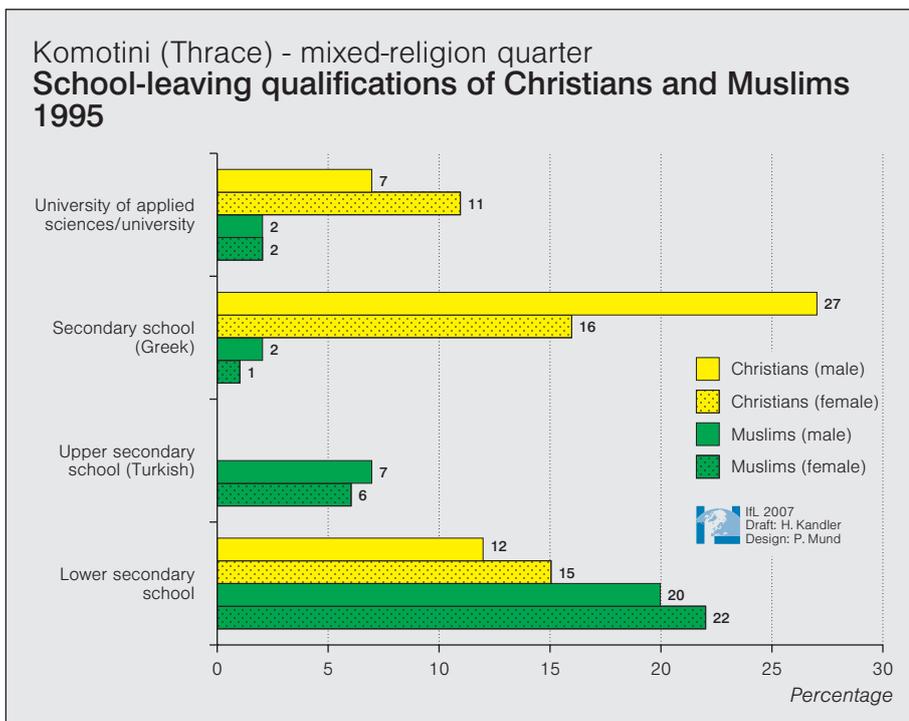


Fig. 2: Christians and Muslims with school-leaving qualifications in a mixed-religion quarter of Komotini

Note: secondary school (Turkish) = Turkish-speaking Celal Bayar grammar school, secondary school (Greek) = Greek-speaking grammar schools (also for Turks)

Source: own survey; random sample

result, the percentage of pupils from the minority with high school-leaving qualifications is still significantly lower today than that of their contemporaries from the majority, as shown by a survey in a mixed-religion quarter of Komotini (Fig. 2). New teaching syllabuses are only taking hold there slowly, partly because the Greek education policy is in need of a general overhaul (Apogevmatini tis Kyriakis, 13/12/1998, p. 4), which, in turn, has a particularly strong impact on economically underdeveloped areas such as Thrace. The number of school leavers completing secondary school was below average throughout the economic region of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace, particularly in Nomos Rodopi (Rhodope Prefecture). There, the average was 27 graduates per 1,000 inhabitants – the average for Greece as a whole was 39 per 1,000 inhabitants (LIENAU & KATSAROS 2004, p. 26).

The fact that Frangoudaki (University of Athens), who was in charge of a new education syllabus, and Stavropoulos, prefect of Rhodope at the time, spoke frankly about the weaknesses in minority education for the first time in 2002 shows that the country is now becoming aware of the responsibility. The minority also acknowledges this. But in a dispute over school books, they also criticise the

fact that Athens is refusing to approve the textbook “Our Turkish(sic!) Book” (Türkçe kitabımız), partly because of the simple reason that the title contains the word “Turkish”. At the same time, the minority’s representatives make it clear that they are against the importing of school literature from Turkey because the topics are not suitable for Western Thracian primary schools – which is why they favour the publication of their own books: “We are people of the same country (“vatan” = Turkish for “state”, in other words, Greece) and share the same destiny. We love our country as much as anyone”, hence the majority should not regard the minority as a threat (ABTTF = Avrupa Batı Trakya Türk Federasyonu = Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe 14/4/2008). These words conceal a trusting attitude, which would have been hard to imagine 20 years before when the minority felt it “offensive” to be addressed as “Greek citizens” (Ileri 10/5/1996, p. 1). At the beginning of the 1980s, one decade after Greece’s return to democracy and at the time of the country’s entry into the EU (1984), the minority politician Sadık Ahmet (1947-1995) first spoke openly about the violations against the granted minority right, as well as the rejection of the self-designation “Turk”, the expatriation of Thracian

Muslims and discrimination in day-to-day life. He also started discussions on the appointing of muftis by the Greek government and the legal status of religious foundations (KANDLER 1998, pp. 28-31, AARBAKKE 2000, pp. 359ff.). It is thanks to Sadık Ahmet that the difficult situation of the minority population was made public outside Greece and Turkey.

The official name of the minority was always dependent on Athens’ political stance regarding Turkey. Whereas the government demanded that official institutions of the minority be designated “Turkish” and not “Muslim” in 1954, it has been opposing the use of the term “Turkish” since 1967. Athens’ disregard for the minority – also fuelled by Turkey – caused the conscious feeling of otherness to be strengthened to such a degree that initial attempts by Greece to help the minority were brusquely rejected by their representatives. “If they won’t let us call ourselves Turks, they are denying us our origins. We are loyal citizens of Greece, but we are Turks and demand the right to call ourselves Turks” (quotation from WHITMAN 1990, p. 15). The population is clearly turning to Turkey, the motherland (*anavatan*): “Those who say that Turkishness in Western Thrace is not related to Turkishness in Turkey have hostile intentions” (Ileri 1/12/95, p. 4).

Now, both the terms “Turk” and “Muslim” are used as synonyms in everyday life. But it was not until 2007 and 2008 that the European Court of Human Rights ruled that the minority had the right to use the adjective “Türk” (Turkish) when naming their organisations (e.g. İskeçe Türk Birliği = Turkish Union of Xanthi), abolishing a decree of the Greek Court from 1996 (ABTTF 27/3/2008, German newspaper FAZ, see above). In light of the fact that the minority does not form an ethnic entity, but is ethnically divided into “Muslims, Pomaks and Roma” (WHITMAN 1990, p. 2), the Turkish language, which is spoken by all, is the bond uniting the different ethnic groups. However, the question remains as to whether the victory in Strasbourg actually constituted progress in improving the minority’s quality of life or whether it was merely a victory of political prestige, in the face of the minority’s cultural diversity.

The revoking of Greek nationality, in accordance with Article 19 of the Greek Constitution, is a far more serious matter. During the junta era in particular

(1967-1974), “a person of non-Greek ethnic origin leaving Greece without the intention of returning may be declared as having lost Greek citizenship” (no. 3370/1955, Chapter B, Section VI, Art. 19 “Citizenship Code”), which could, of course, be applied easily to Greek citizens with Turkish Muslim origins. The semi-official justification for the expatriation was that these citizens were working against Greece – difficult to believe in the case of minor children (AARBAKKE 2000, p. 583). In 2005, the Greek parliament allegedly confirmed that 46,638 Muslims had been stripped of their nationality before Article 19 was repealed in 1998 (ABTTF 27/5/2005). I saw for myself that Muslims from Greek Thrace had difficulties entering the country that year, which shows that the abolition of the law did not immediately mean repatriation for those affected. Since 2006, ABTTF has provided a form in the Turkish section of its website for those who lost their citizenship because of Article 19. The organisation passes the forms on to the European Court of Human Rights ([www.abtff.org](http://www.abtff.org) 1/1/2008). On 16/6/2007, the application by expatriates affected by Article 19, which was rescinded in 1998, to be repatriated was accepted by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (ABTTF 18/5/2007).

Obstacles to private development (acquiring land, building houses, public sector employment, acquiring driving licences, loans and credit, AHMET 1989, pp. 39-44) from the authorities were also the order of the day well into the 1990s. “Cultural bureaus” – in reality, branches of the Foreign Office in the prefecture capitals – brought this out of the background.

On the other hand, the Greek state’s intervention in religious matters of the Muslim community includes complex problems, such as the legality of the appointing of muftis by the Greek government or the controlling of minority religious foundations. These were once treated internationally as violations too but, from today’s viewpoint, cannot necessarily be regarded as deliberate discrimination (AARBAKKE 2000, pp. 359ff.).

In this area, in particular, it is becoming clear how Turkey exploited the situation in Thrace for its foreign policy manoeuvres. After all, it was Turkey with its strict, secular stance that refused all contact with the muftis until the issues became part of the minority protest in

the 1980s thanks to minority politician Sadık Ahmet (AARBAKKE 2000, p. 357), and Turkey tried to instrumentalise the minority as a “co-national spearhead” (SEEWANN 1995, p. 8). This, in turn, excited fears among the Greek population. Many Christians were all ready to “get over the Nestos (western border of Thrace) in time” if Turkey were to invade.

In 1988 and 1990, violent clashes actually occurred. Protest marches by the Muslim minority and a lawsuit against Sadık Ahmet resulted in militant Greek nationalists attacking shops owned by Muslim citizens. The US State Department therefore judged Thrace to be one of the future hot spots of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (KANDLER 2007, p. 10). This unrest was also a wake-up call for Greece. This, along with pressure from the international public, the decline of the political overreaction after Sadık’s death and the appeasement policy between Greece and Turkey – especially following the earthquake diplomacy of the two former foreign ministers Georgios Papandreou and Ismail Cem as of 1999 – enabled Greek politics to turn gradually to its Muslim minority (KANDLER 2000, pp. 286ff., AARBAKKE 2000, p. 680). Thrace is no longer a bone of contention between Greece and Turkey.

### Geographical aspects of the mixed-religion region of Thrace

The changes in minority policy in Greece, which have been taking place for some 15 years now, are of course only slowly becoming reflected in the structure of Greek Thracian society. However, this is not only because the process of gaining trust and the growing together of two population groups takes time, at least at an official level, but also because the region itself has to fight general economic underdevelopment as well as the problem of bi-communality.

As part of the economic region of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace, Thrace belongs to the Greek peripheries and, as such, has deficits in development compared to the central regions. The percentage of people in primary employment was the highest of all the economic regions of Greece in 2001 (17 %: Greece as a whole 8 %) and the percentage of those in the tertiary sector was one of the lowest (56 %: Greece as a whole 69 %). Only the secondary sector was above average (27 %: Greece as a whole: 23 %) due to recent efforts at a selective establishment

| Thrace<br>Employment structure 2004 |                     |      |      |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------|------|------|
| Prefecture                          | Economic Sector (%) |      |      |
|                                     | I.                  | II.  | III. |
| Rodopi                              | 49.6                | 15.4 | 35.0 |
| Xanthi                              | 28.4                | 26.7 | 44.9 |
| Evros                               | 27.6                | 16.9 | 55.6 |

Tab. 2: Employment structure in Thrace  
Source: acc. to LIENAU & KATSAROS 2004, pp. 22-24

of companies (Kavala, Komotini, Xanthi and Alexandroupolis) (Tab. 2). But all the economic sectors have characteristics of the peripheries: Agriculture is characterised by smallholdings and fragmented ownership as well as inefficiency and obsolete production methods. Trade and industry show below-average company sizes, insufficient and sometimes obsolete facilities and below-average labour productivity.

Labour-intensive agricultural sectors (such as tobacco growing) and industry (food and beverage) dominate the region’s economy and are characterised by a largely unskilled workforce. Rhodope Prefecture (Nomos Rodopi), home to the two settlements looked at below, shows the greatest deficits in development by far, even compared to the other prefectures. This economic underdevelopment is clearly reflected in the population growth, which showed a slight plus in Xanthi, in the west of the region, but was negative in the Turkish-Bulgarian border area (for 1981-1994, DALEGRE 1994, p. 141).

### Thracian cultural zones taking Rhodope Prefecture as a case study

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, an occupation with mountainous settlement areas gave rise to the view that specific natural conditions limit the living space of a population (Ratzel, quotation from BRUNNBAUER 2007, p. 17) and thus determine their cultural way of life. This geographical determinism was put into perspective by possibilism, according to which the environment sets constraints on people, but can also enable a wide range of possibilities in the area concerned (BRUNNBAUER 2007, p. 18). This can be seen in the western part of Greek Thrace (Xanthi and Rhodope) where many distinct similarities can be identified between clearly classifiable geographical areas and a specific cultural form. This is so marked that it



Fig. 3: Geographical and administrative classification in Rhodope Prefecture, taking religious beliefs into account  
Source: own design

can almost be described as typing of the respective population group (Fig. 3). In an epic poem, for instance, the Muslims from Thrace are separated into “inhabitants of the mountains, *yaka* (summer pastures) and *ova*” with an awareness of the differing ethnicity (Ileri 19/1/1996, p. 2). And although the minority want to appear as one entity to the outside world, they are aware of internal differentiation into Pomaks in the mountains, the traditionally well-regarded Osmanlis of

the *yaka*, and the “modern” Turks in the towns and *ova* (Ileri 13/6/1997).

The figure shows the distribution of mono-religious and mixed-religion communities, which noticeably match the geographical zones: mountains, *balkana* (I = the Rhodopes), the *yaka* (II = lower slopes of the mountains) and the *ova* or *orta kışla* (III). It covers the marshland and steppe, which were improved for and later by the Greek refugees from the 1920s onwards. Their settlements were often

built right next-door to existing Muslim settlements. These generally straggling, planned settlements differ greatly from the traditional, mostly pure Muslim nucleated villages of the lower mountain zone (*yaka*) in terms of physiognomy, but also with respect to the cultural and social structure of their populations. Two communities, Dymi (*yaka*) and Pagouria (*orta kışla*), are compared below as case studies. These represent distinctly opposite types of Thracian settlements, which

is why there are no examples from the other two zones – the Rhodopes and the coast – at this point.

### Dymi

Dymi (see Fig. 3) is a nucleated Muslim village. Traditional building methods predominate, with courtyards protected from sight by high walls. Like the other *yaka* villages, Dymi stands on an alluvial fan at the discharge point of a seasonal watercourse right at the beginning of the foothills. The village centre consists of a square surrounded by a mosque, café and hairdresser's and is ornamented with a fountain which was donated by family members working in Germany, as was the minaret of the mosque. The courtyards are mostly bordered by a one or two-room house where tobacco is sometimes stored during harvest time. The surrounding walls incorporate the courtyard into the living area, especially in summer, whether it is where housework is done, children play or the family sleep on particularly hot nights. In terms of character, Dymi thus resembles many older villages in Western Anatolia (HÖHFELD 1991, p. 32). The school, café for young people and single homesteads belonging to more wealthy farmers are outside the old centre of the village.

In terms of population structure, Dymi is a classic example of a *yaka* community. According to its own censuses, the village had 394 inhabitants in 1994, which represents an absolute increase in population of just 17(!) inhabitants since 1920 (AYDINLI 1971, p. 343) and indicates the high rate of outward migration from Thrace since the mid-1960s. Nevertheless, the generative behaviour has more similarities with developments in traditional farming societies in Anatolia (WITTEW-BACKOFEN 1987) than with a state on the southern periphery of Europe. Most men marry between the ages of 20 and 24 years and women between 14 and 19 years. Only very few – generally young men and women with grammar school qualifications or university degrees – said they wanted to marry late (>24 years) or not at all. The difference in age at which women marry and have their first child is also characteristic. Almost 60 % of women give birth to their first child one to two years after getting married. Of these, around 40 % give birth in the first year after marriage.

Dymi is also a textbook *yaka* community in terms of its economy. The pre-

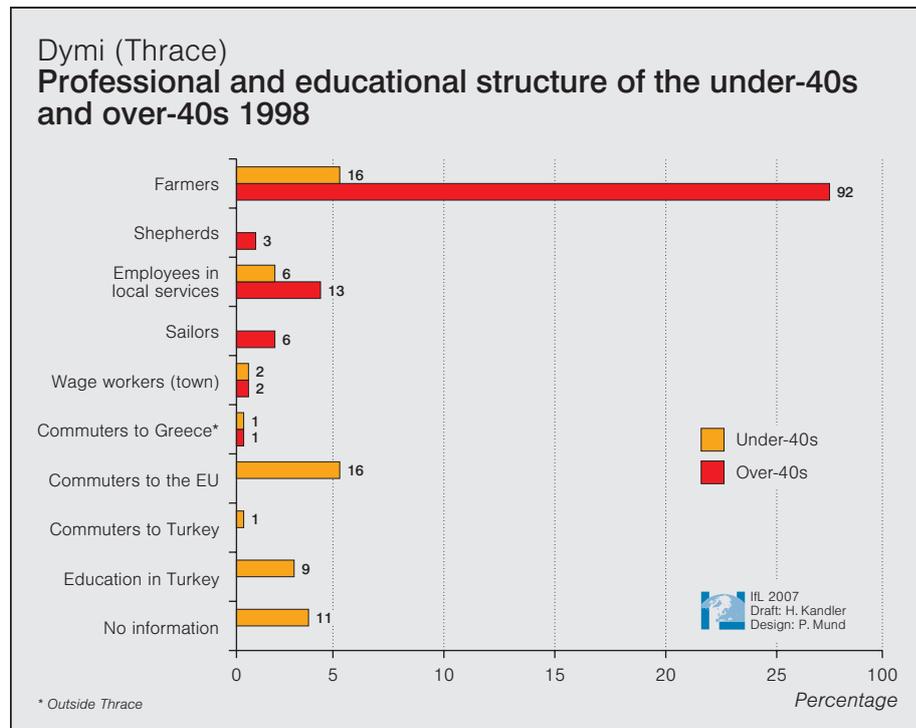


Fig. 4: Professional and educational structure of the over-40s and under-40s in Dymi  
Source: own design

dominance of cherry orchards right near the village is noticeable (particularly during the flowering season), while tobacco fields shape the farming land one kilometre away. The village livestock, particularly sheep, is kept in the mountains in summer and let out in the harvested fields in winter. The traditional way of life is reflected in the farming. The main product grown in the *yaka* is tobacco, which takes up the majority of the 400 *dönüm* (around 400 ha) that constitute the village's arable land. Although the cultivation of tobacco may safeguard a family income "as nothing else can" – in relation to the small farm sizes (75 % between 2-15 ha) (LIENAU 1989, p. 144) – oriental tobacco growing is time-consuming and labour-intensive. The whole process of planting and cultivating (growing in cold frames, frequent irrigation, bedding out, frequent cleaning of the fields, transplanting the flowers and labour-intensive sorting procedures) is in family "hands" in both senses of the word. Tractors are barely used on smaller areas of land. Even in 1995, almost every third household used mules, donkeys or horses as working animals. It is debatable how long tobacco farming can continue there, in spite of EU subsidies and a changeover to more robust hybrids and first-class Virginia tobacco (Diyalog 6/2/1998, pp. 3-4), in light of the declining demand, anti-smoking campaigns in

many European countries and the associated drop in prices.

Only few big farmers risk modernising their businesses because professional diversification is more pronounced among the under-40s and a large number of them were or are employed in far-off regions of Greece, Turkey or Western Europe (Fig. 4).

Traditional patterns determine life in the village as well as the farming. The topics under discussion in the café are not just concerned with day-to-day business, but also with moral issues, while the speakers consume tea or juice – not alcohol. The contact person there is the imam who has a leading role as mediator and teacher.

The view of Turkey is particular interesting owing to the numerous connections between the village's inhabitants and family members working and studying in Turkey.

The people feel close to Turkey and are interested in Turkish domestic politics and sporting events. Their solidarity with Turkish policy is always conspicuous, even in cases of hotly disputed actions, as in the case with the Kurds. And whenever tensions arise with Greece, the people tend to agree with Ankara's position. In sports, their "natural" affinity to Turkey becomes particularly apparent. A study shows that even school pupils tend to favour Turkish culture and Turkey.

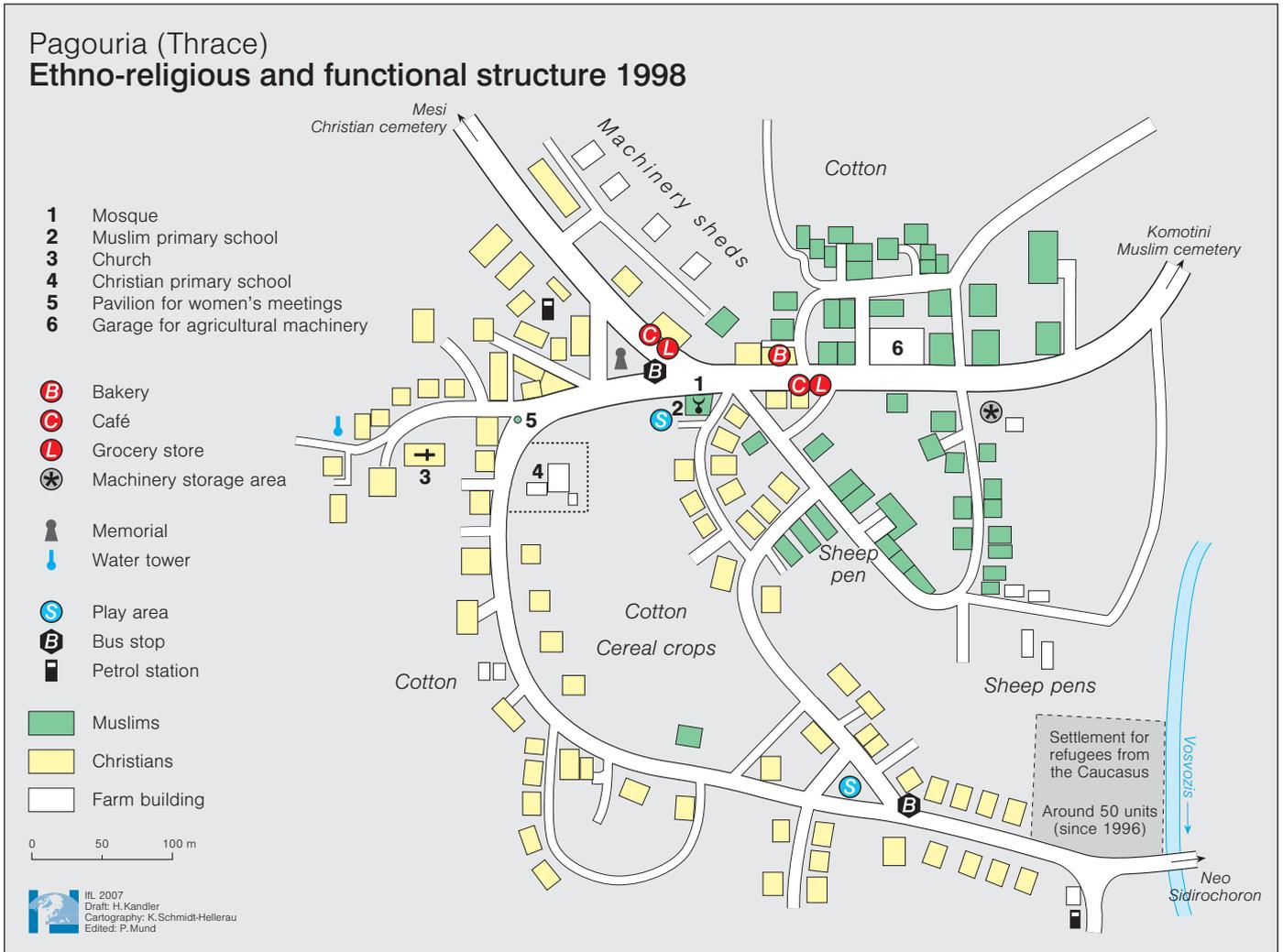


Fig. 5: Pagouria – ethno-religious and functional structure (1998)  
Source: own design

The Turkish national basketball team is more popular (45 %) than the Greek team (36 %). The inhabitants of Dymi support Galatasaray or Beşiktaş Istanbul, or sport the colours of Trabzonspor. This solidarity in the fan cult area is particularly significant since the attitude towards Greece practically takes a back-seat. These demonstrations of sympathy are often regarded as irredentism by the Christians. But hardly anyone is demanding annexation to Turkey, if only because they enjoy all of the EU rights, unlike the Turkish EU citizens in Turkey.

The collective identity of the *yaka* inhabitants comes across in particular whenever the government takes measures that may be seen as arbitrary towards the “Turks”, such as the seizure of land belonging to *yaka* farmers to build a university campus near Komotini in 1978, of which a third has been built at most.

The case of a small church between Dymi and Folea – in the middle of the *yaka* in Muslim territory – shows how

deeply rooted the awareness of a congruence between area and population group is in Thracian society. Its construction is seen as a deliberate religious provocation against the Turkish Muslim sovereignty in the area (Ileri 12/12/1997, p. 2), even though many Christians by no means regard the chapel as a place of pilgrimage and the Metropolitan Bishop of Komotini saw its building as “a thrust against Islam”.

#### Pagouria

The spaciouly laid out colonist village of Pagouria is situated in the foreland (*orta kışla*) and is a clear contrast to Dymi (see Fig. 3). It was built in the early 1930s on the boundary of an existing Bulgarian Muslim village. The plural ending “-a” indicates the original dual-centred structure of the village, although the part with traditional buildings now only makes up one quarter of the whole village since the Muslims have either left the village or have moved into larger modern houses themselves. In the 1990s, the village was

extended with new buildings for refugees from the Caucasus (Fig. 5). Although there were still a few pastures left in 1998 between the village and the River Vosvozis (Fig. 5) – relics of the former semi-nomadic economy – the driving force of agriculture is cotton, the symbol of the *orta kışla*, which is reflected in the appearance of the village with its spacious machinery stores and wide streets for the outsize cotton harvesters.

The situation of the Christian areas in the higher part of the village, dominated by the church and the water tower, symbolises the – on average – economic and social supremacy of the Christian population. The Greek colonisation helped to create a clear Christian hegemony, which is expressed in the number of homesteads (1996: 41 Christian, 20 Muslim) as well as in the share of agricultural land (Fig. 6).

In their everyday working lives and private lives, the villagers talk to each other, help each other and share joy and hardships. They attend village festivals

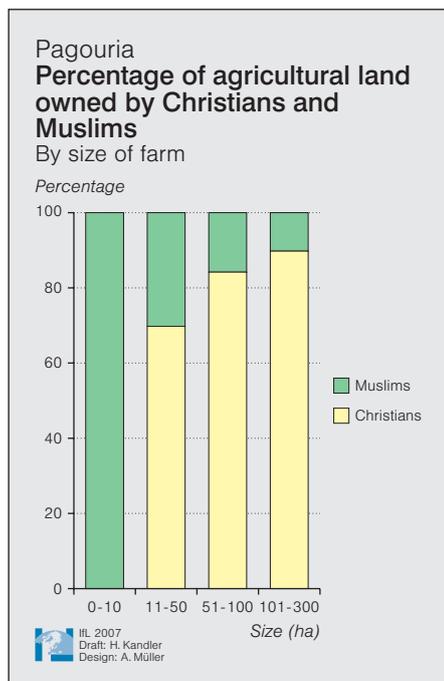


Fig. 6: Pagouria – percentage of agricultural land owned by to Christians and Muslims by size of farm  
Source: own design

together, pay their respects to the others on religious festive days or on the occasion of bereavements and drink ouzo or rakı together – alcohol is not taboo in the cafés. On the other hand, both the Imam and the Pope complained jointly about low attendance at services and the farmers complained jointly about the new EU directives. These findings aim to show that daily life can be shared together. The fact that explosive topics on Greco-Turkish relations can be heatedly debated yesterday and today without causing long-term quarrels shows that this mixed-religion community has developed mechanisms over the decades enabling them to live together. And cases such as the Imia-Kardak dispute in 1995, when Greek and Turkish warships surrounded the islets in the Aegean and the villagers soon said that the “ships were just cruising around”, prove that they have long-standing experience of the others, which outsiders do not share. The people live together according to the motto: “In the village community, everyone has enemies among Muslims and Christians alike” (KANDLER 2007, p. 81).

Language is not an obstacle to daily communication. Most of the Muslims living in Thrace can speak at least a few words of Greek and the Turkish language is not foreign to older Greeks, in particular, who grew up side by side with Muslims or who came into contact with it in

their homes in Asia Minor. Thus, Pagouria, as other mixed-religion settlements, makes an ideal field of investigation for linguists researching language development and language interference between Turkish and Greek as representatives of different language families. In conversations between native Greek and Turkish speakers, words from the other language quickly slip in and are understood. I was also able to observe that speakers do not just take over single words – often unintentionally – but that syntactic shifts occur during speech. Turkish sentences are not infrequently formed with Indo-European word order.

But it has to be remembered that the Turkish language is surviving in an environment shaped by Greek culture and does not share the fate of languages of purely cultural minorities which, in some cases, practically have the status of an old custom (such as Upper and Lower Sorbish in the German state of Saxony). Turkish is the language of everyday use and is struggling for official recognition. This survival has several reasons:

Since the 1950s, in particular, when Greece started holding the Muslim minority – as Turkish charges – partly responsible for the expulsion of Greeks from Turkey and later even controlled and oppressed them as fifth columnists of the arch enemy, the forced situation has strengthened the bond between the minority and their mother country (“anavatan” in Turkish). Since Turkish was propagated as a national-ethnic configuration characteristic during the era of Sadık Ahmet in the 1980s, it has gained an important function as an identity-giver – supported by the regional media (newspapers and later radio stations) – which was to overcome ethnic differences between Pomaks, Athinganoi and Osmanlıs. It is therefore understandable that attempts in the 1990s on the part of Greek organisations to make Pomak – a language without a fixed writing system – a basis of identity for the Pomaks to release them from the Turkish association met with only little success.

The bilaterally negotiated education protocols permitted the use of Turkish literature. Although it may have been unsuitable from a teaching point of view, it nonetheless imparted the Turkish language standards from Turkey.

The emphasis on the Turkish language and the limited options available for non-native speakers to learn Greek

meant that only few pupils were able to learn Greek to a standard that allowed them to go on to further education and professional careers in Greece. The consequence of this was that young people went on to further education in Turkey or even found jobs and homes there, after completing their final year of school at the latest. Some of these citizens ran the risk of losing their nationality in accordance with Article 19. These educational difficulties have resulted in a curious situation, which is not that uncommon, whereby Muslims from Greek Thrace living and working in Germany as Greek nationals can speak German and Turkish, but not a single word of Greek.

Many women lack sufficient knowledge of Greek. A random test in a mixed-religion quarter of Komotini showed that only 41.3 % of Muslim women understood Greek (1996: 70.8 % of Christian women understood Turkish). This is partly because many parents traditionally gave priority to their male children when it came to education. Older women, in particular (1996: >40), but also men, did not have to worry about going about their daily business in public (shopping, school, visiting authorities) since the service providers either spoke Turkish or employed staff with Turkish language skills.

This means that Thrace is truly bilingual.

While the process of convergence is still underway at an official level, the way in which people interact on a private level shows far more experience. A few indications are listed here in brief:

The appearance of Muslim women in mixed-religion communities, particularly younger women, has more similarities with that of Christian women than in mono-religious communities.

Religious activities in public places enjoy mutual respect and are celebrated together on occasion (funeral services, presents and congratulations on the others’ festive days). Muslim school pupils and folklore groups even take part in the festivities on 25 March, the anniversary of Greek independence from the Ottoman Empire. And the funeral service of Sadık Ahmet in 1996 was followed closely by the fairly Islam-critical Greek-speaking local press – not out of spitefulness or journalistic voyeurism, but out of genuine sympathy (KANDLER 2007, p. 95).

The attempt at assigning religious phenomena in Christianity and Islam

to shared roots is interesting. Easter (slaughter of the lamb) is comparable to the Festival of Sacrifice, *kurban bayramı*, for instance.

On a business level, communication between Muslims and Christians is a matter of course. Many shops welcome their customers in their native language. Competition and partnership do not keep to religious boundaries. However, religious principles do form invisible boundaries, which are observed very closely by both sides. There are hardly any interfaith marriages. There are apparently some interfaith couples, but they no longer live in Thrace owing to the strict moral code there.

The two-class status is persisting the longest at a political level. A local Muslim politician said: "Among 50,000 Christians I have only ten serious enemies. But at a political level, we are second-class citizens" (KANDLER 2007, p. 97). Since 2006, İlhan Ahmet, a Thracian Muslim, has been a member of the Greek parliament, Ahmet Hacıosman is Vice-Prefect of Rhodope (ABTTF 25/11/2006) and Gülbeyaz Karahasan was the first Thracian Muslim woman to run for the office of Prefect for the Xanthi-Kavala-Drama region.

### Conclusion

The aim was to show that a settlement area, which is lived in by communities from different ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds, is perceived and claimed as home by both in equal measures. This situation, as found in Greek Thrace, cannot be explained using the common conception of integration (or assimilation), which is explicitly acknowledged as being a "dynamic, lengthy and ... differentiated process of growing together" (HILLMANN 1994, p. 56), but which implicitly assumes that a society is expanded with new groups. Taking this definition, integration cannot be achieved in Thrace in the foreseeable future. Integration in the Western European sense is not wanted. Christians and Muslims are not yet treated as equals. But despite this, both groups see Thrace as their homeland, unlike some immigrant societies in Western Europe.

Unlike in Western and Central Europe, the goal in Thrace must be to build trust by putting an end to the subliminal classification into "same origin" (omogenis) and "foreign origin" (allogenis) – in this case Greek and Turkish – in the

minds of the Greek population and to put this into practise in everyday dealings with the minority. There is hope that the irritations, which are still the order of the day, such as the curtailing of Turkish radio stations by a new Greek media law (ABTTF 3/8/2007), will at some point be seen in a more relaxed way.

The current situation, as presented in brief, raises the hope that Christians and Muslims will continue to grow together. The Greek authorities appear to have recognised the importance of this. Karamanlis, Greek Prime Minister since 2004, said that the government has set the improvement of minority settlement areas in Western Thrace as a goal because of the region's future alone, and that "Muslims have to share in national developments ..." (ABTTF 29/9/2007).

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