

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18391161>

## **TURKISH MINORITY EDUCATION IN THE BALKANS (1945–1989): A DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF LEGAL STATUS AND CURRICULUM**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study offers a comparative analysis of the legal status, implementation practices, and ideological frameworks of Turkish minority education in Bulgaria, Greece (Western Thrace), and Yugoslavia (Macedonia and Kosovo) between 1945 and 1989. It examines the interaction between international legal instruments—such as the Treaty of Lausanne, UN and UNESCO conventions, and the 1975 Helsinki Final Act—and national legislation, revealing significant discrepancies between discourse and practice. The findings indicate that legal guarantees alone were insufficient to ensure the sustainability of minority education. In Bulgaria, constitutional rights were restricted through administrative interpretation, and Turkish-language education was completely abolished during the assimilation campaign of 1984–1989. In Greece, bilingual education grounded in the Lausanne framework was legally preserved but administratively constrained during political crises. In Yugoslavia, by contrast, local autonomy and federal constitutional protection enabled the maintenance of a “dual identity” model. Turkey’s educational diplomacy operated through Lausanne-based initiatives, bilateral cultural agreements, and interventions in international forums, yet its effectiveness depended on the political regimes and the nature of bilateral relations with the host states. Overall, the study highlights that minority education is not merely a pedagogical domain but also an arena of ideological and political negotiation.

**Keywords:** Turkish minority education, Balkans, Treaty of Lausanne, educational diplomacy, discourse analysis.

### **INTRODUCTION**

The period between 1945 and 1989 represents an era in which the educational rights of ethnic and cultural minorities across the Balkans were redefined through the lens of both international law and national policy. Yet, these definitions were often constrained in practice by ideological imperatives and the dynamics of bilateral diplomacy. The education of Turkish minorities stands as one of the most illustrative examples of this process. Although Turkish communities in Bulgaria, Greece, and Yugoslavia shared a common linguistic and cultural identity, their educational experiences diverged significantly in terms of legal status, institutional organisation, and curriculum policy. The primary aim of this study is to examine how Turkish minority education was constructed within legal documents, policy texts, and ideological discourses in these three countries. The research conducts a comparative analysis of international

instruments—such as the Treaty of Lausanne (1923), the UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education (1960), and the Helsinki Final Act (1975)—together with national legislation and official statements of the period. This approach seeks to demonstrate that minority education functioned not merely as a pedagogical field but as an ideological apparatus positioned at the core of nation-building, national security conceptions, and foreign policy strategies.

The existing literature tends to approach minority rights in the Balkans mainly through legal frameworks or political events; however, the inconsistencies between *official discourse* and *practical implementation* have rarely been addressed in a systematic manner. To bridge this gap, the present study is structured along three analytical dimensions:

1. **Legal Status Discourse:** Definitions and binding scope of minority education in international and national legislation.
2. **Implementation and Institutional Practice Discourse:** Structures of educational institutions, teacher recruitment, and curriculum policies.
3. **Ideological and Identity Construction Discourse:** State strategies for producing the notion of “citizenship” through education.

Accordingly, the study addresses the following research questions:

1. How was minority education defined within the legal and political discourse in Bulgaria, Greece, and Yugoslavia?
2. To what extent did practical policies correspond to or diverge from these discourses?
3. How were the states’ ideological and identity-building strategies reflected in minority education policies?

Through a comparative discourse analysis, the study explores how the legal, political, and ideological boundaries of Turkish minority education in the Balkans were shaped not only within normative texts but also through everyday practices and institutional realities.

## **International and Regional Legal Framework (1945–1989)**

Following 1945, the international legal discourse on minority rights significantly influenced the status of Turkish minority schools in the Balkans, both directly and indirectly. During this period, the legal protection discourse articulated by the United Nations (UN), UNESCO, the Council of Europe, and the 1975 Helsinki Final Act offered a strong normative framework on paper. However, the implementation of these norms largely depended on each state’s ideological orientation, national security priorities, and the nature of its diplomatic relations with Turkey.

### ***UN and UNESCO Instruments: Universal Norms, Limited Implementation***

Article 26 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948) defined education as a universal right intended to promote the “full development of the human personality” and the “strengthening of respect for human rights” (United Nations [UN], 1948). The subsequent *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* (1966, Article 27) guaranteed the right of ethnic, religious, and linguistic minorities “to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practise their own religion, and to use their own language” (UN, 1966). Although Bulgaria and Yugoslavia signed these conventions, both tended to interpret them narrowly on the grounds of

protecting “national unity.” In practice, Bulgaria violated these provisions outright by abolishing Turkish-language education after 1984 (Neuburger, 2004, p. 217).

UNESCO’s *Convention against Discrimination in Education* (1960) defined education in the mother tongue as an inseparable component of cultural rights, noting that this could be provided either within the official education system or through private institutions (UNESCO, 1960, Article 5). Yet, socialist Balkan regimes generally limited this right to the primary level, imposing the use of the official language in secondary and higher education. Similarly, UNESCO’s *1974 Recommendation concerning Education for International Understanding, Co-operation and Peace* underscored the contribution of minority education to intercultural understanding, but in Bulgaria it conflicted with the socialist ideal of homogeneity and remained unimplemented.

### ***The Council of Europe and the Treaty of Lausanne: Limits of the Regional Framework***

During the Cold War, the conventions of the Council of Europe were not directly adopted by most Balkan countries. As a member state, Greece sought to demonstrate that the status of minority schools in Western Thrace complied with the provisions of the *Treaty of Lausanne* (1923); however, in practice, the extent of these rights depended on the fluctuating course of Greco-Turkish relations (Tsitselikis, 2012, p. 229). Articles 40–45 of the Treaty granted minorities the right to establish, manage, and receive education in their own schools, while also placing these institutions under state supervision.

The *1951 Turkey–Greece Cultural Cooperation Agreement* and its supplementary protocols enabled the appointment of teachers from Turkey and the provision of Turkish textbooks to Western Thrace. Yet, the 1967–1974 military junta and the 1974 Cyprus crisis severely curtailed these mechanisms (Akgönül, 2007, p. 94). This illustrates how the stability of international agreements was contingent upon the prevailing diplomatic climate between the two countries.

### ***The Helsinki Final Act (1975): Normative Legitimacy and Ideological Contradiction***

The *Helsinki Final Act* of 1975 introduced minority rights under the heading of the “human dimension” within a broader package of confidence-building measures between the Eastern and Western blocs. The principles of “protection of cultural identity” and “respect for linguistic rights” were explicitly articulated (Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe [CSCE], 1975). These provisions provided international legitimacy for Turkish schools in Macedonia and Kosovo within Yugoslavia.

Because Yugoslavia had already constitutionally guaranteed minority rights within its federal structure, it was able to implement the Helsinki principles relatively easily. Bulgaria, by contrast, endorsed the document rhetorically but openly violated its provisions during the 1984–1989 assimilation campaign (Konstantinov, 1993, p. 91). Thus, while the Helsinki Act functioned as a form of “soft legitimacy” in some contexts, in others it exposed the ideological contradictions of socialist regimes.

**Table 1. The Impact of International and Regional Instruments on Turkish Minority Education in the Balkans (1945–1989)**

Instrument Framework	/ Legal Content	Implementation in the Balkans	Notes
<i>Universal Declaration of Human Rights</i> (1948)	Art. 26: The right to education and the preservation of cultural identity	Adopted rhetorically; ideological restrictions applied	Referenced by Yugoslavia and Bulgaria at discursive level
<i>International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights</i> (1966)	Art. 27: Rights of minorities to culture, religion, and language	Signed by Bulgaria and Yugoslavia; official language predominated in practice	Bulgaria violated provisions in the 1980s
<i>UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education</i> (1960)	Right to mother-tongue education; may be provided in public or private institutions	Socialist states confined it to primary education	UNESCO reports documented violations
<i>UNESCO Recommendation</i> (1974)	Education for intercultural understanding and human rights	Implemented selectively; disregarded where ideology conflicted	Used as cultural argument in Western Thrace
<i>Council of Europe Conventions</i>	Protection of minority rights	Greece a member; others not	Greece based its position on Lausanne
<i>Helsinki Final Act</i> (1975)	Protection of cultural and linguistic rights	Implemented in Yugoslavia; violated in Bulgaria	Used diplomatically by Greece and Turkey

### ***Regional Interpretation and Comparative Findings***

Across the Balkans, international instruments generally served as normative references rather than enforceable guarantees; the practical implementation of rights depended on regime type, ideological goals, and external relations.

Yugoslavia’s model of federal autonomy enabled the institutional continuity of Turkish-language education. In Greece, despite the strong international binding power of the Lausanne framework, its application was effectively suspended during periods of political crisis. Bulgaria, although a signatory to UN and UNESCO conventions, systematically dismantled minority rights during the 1980s through assimilationist policies.

Hence, the “discourse of legal protection” often remained at the level of diplomatic display rather than substantive implementation. Rights formally recognised in treaties but were circumscribed in practice by the states’ identity-building strategies.

**Table 2. Legal Status, Implementation, and Turkey’s Relations regarding Turkish Minority Education in Bulgaria, Greece, and Yugoslavia (1945–1989)**

Country	Legal Basis	Level of Implementation	Relations with Turkey
<b>Bulgaria</b>	1946 Constitution; UN–UNESCO conventions (Lausanne not applicable)	Limited Turkish-language education initially; complete ban after 1984	Diplomatic crisis in the 1980s; Turkey’s protests ineffective
<b>Greece</b>	<i>Treaty of Lausanne</i> (1923, Arts. 40–45); bilateral protocols	Bilingualism legally protected; dominance in practice	Fluctuating relations; restrictions during crises
<b>Yugoslavia</b>	Federal and local self-government acts	Turkish-language education maintained at all levels; ideological standardisation required	Relatively stable; sustained cultural cooperation and teacher exchange

In conclusion, the most distinctive difference among the three countries lay in Yugoslavia’s *federal autonomy-based domestic model*, which ensured institutional stability. Greece maintained strong formal obligations under international law, though these were suspended in times of political tension, while Bulgaria’s ideological prohibitions directly contradicted international norms. Relations with Turkey served as a decisive variable in all cases: periods of rapprochement encouraged educational cooperation, while political crises curtailed such engagement.

Overall, the gap between legal status and actual implementation was shaped by each Balkan state’s ideological objectives and foreign-policy context.

## Country Analyses – Discourse Examination

### *Bulgaria*

#### Legal Status Discourse

Article 79 of the 1946 Bulgarian Constitution stated that “Minorities shall have the right to receive education in their own language and to develop their culture, provided that this right does not harm the socialist development of the Bulgarian people.” This clause, while formally compatible with the linguistic rights approach of Article 26 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948) and Article 27 of the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* (1966), simultaneously introduced a conditional framework subordinating minority rights to

socialist national unity (Darzhaven Vestnik, 1946). Yet, Article 85 of the same constitution declared Bulgarian as the official language and made its instruction compulsory in all educational institutions, thereby establishing a dual normative structure that constrained the constitutional scope of minority-language education.

This duality reflected the broader “recognition–unity condition” paradigm common in socialist regimes (Eminov, 1997; Neuburger, 2004). Article 12 of the Law on National Education (Zakon za Narodnata Prosveta, 1948) allowed the use of minority languages in schools, but its implementation directive restricted this right to the primary level (Ministry of National Education, 1948). Such a limitation contravened the *UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education* (1960, Art. 5), which defined mother-tongue education as an essential component of cultural identity. Although Bulgaria acceded to this convention, its compliance remained rhetorical; UNESCO reports from the 1960s characterised Bulgarian policy as a form of “display diplomacy” (UNESCO, 1960; Konstantinov, 1993).

During the “Revival Process” (Vŭzroditelen protses) between 1984 and 1989, Turkish-language education was abolished through administrative decrees rather than legal amendments. This episode illustrates that the protection of minority rights depends not solely on legal provisions but on sustained political will and ideological stability (Eminov, 1997; Oran, 1986).

### **Implementation and Institutional Practice Discourse**

According to 1956 statistics from the Bulgarian Ministry of Education, there were 1,107 Turkish primary schools, 21 secondary schools, and two teacher-training institutes (in Kardzhali and Shumen) operating nationwide (Ministry of National Education, 1956). These figures reveal a relatively extensive institutional network during the mid-1950s. However, the curricula and teaching materials within these institutions were subject to strict ideological oversight.

The 1958 fourth-grade history textbook depicted the Ottoman era as a period of “feudal domination” and portrayed the Republic of Turkey as part of the “imperialist bloc” (Neuburger, 2004, p. 128). The 1962 education reform reduced Turkish-language class hours and merged many Turkish schools with Bulgarian ones under the pretext of “facilitating the acquisition of Bulgarian” (Eminov, 1997, p. 92).

By the 1970s, Turkish instruction had been reduced to 2–4 hours per week under the label of a “mother-tongue course.” The import of teachers and textbooks from Turkey was prohibited; locally printed Turkish textbooks were secularised and linguistically simplified (Neuburger, 2004). In Gramscian terms, this process transformed education into an instrument of ideological hegemony, standardising both content and identity.

After 1984, the abolition of Turkish education was justified in state media as a measure for “national unity and socialist development.” Official bulletins published in *Darzhaven Vestnik* reiterated this rhetoric. The replacement of school signs, confiscation of Turkish-language books, and destruction of pedagogical archives demonstrated that education had been fully integrated into the machinery of identity engineering (Neuburger, 2004; Konstantinov, 1993).

## **Ideological and Identity Construction Discourse**

The pluralist rhetoric of “socialist citizenship” that prevailed in the 1950s gradually gave way to the “one nation–one language” narrative of the 1980s. In its 1985 report to the United Nations, the Bulgarian government asserted that “all citizens of the country are equal members of the Bulgarian nation and ethnic differences have naturally disappeared over time,” a statement that served as the ideological justification for assimilationist policies (United Nations, 1985).

Within the school curriculum, Ottoman history was depicted as “occupation,” and the Turkish language was represented as a “temporary cultural residue.” The forced Bulgarisation of Turkish names, public bans on speaking Turkish, and surveillance of private linguistic use exemplified the fusion of state ideological apparatuses with the education system (Neuburger, 2004; Althusser, 1971).

Bhabha’s (1994) notion of “mimicry” is particularly illuminating in this context: while Bulgaria expected Turkish minorities to adopt socialist norms formally, it simultaneously defined them as culturally “incomplete,” thereby converting mimicry into a tool of ideological control. The 1984–1989 period thus constituted not only a linguistic prohibition but a systematic policy of cultural erasure, which laid the pedagogical and discursive groundwork for the mass exodus of 1989 (Eminov, 1997).

### ***Greece (Western Thrace)***

#### **Legal Status Discourse**

Article 40 of the *Treaty of Lausanne* (24 July 1923) granted minorities “the right to establish, manage, and receive education in their own schools and in their own language,” thereby ensuring a strong level of international legal protection for the Turkish minority in Western Thrace. Article 41 required that these schools conform to the state’s general educational policy, while Article 45 established the principle of reciprocity: “The rights granted to non-Muslim minorities in Turkey shall likewise be granted to the Muslim minority in Greece” (*Treaty of Lausanne*, 1923).

Although the Greek government formally recognised the Treaty as an “international obligation,” the *Minority Schools Law* (Νόμος 4397/1929) of 1929 placed the supervision of curricula, textbook approval, teacher appointments, and administrative control entirely under the authority of the Ministry of Education (*Greek Government Gazette*, 1930). This legislation effectively restricted international protection norms through national administrative mechanisms.

The *1951 Agreement on Cultural Cooperation between Greece and Turkey* and its supplementary protocols allowed for the transfer of teachers and textbooks from Turkey. However, during the 1967–1974 military junta and the 1974 Cyprus crisis, these provisions were suspended by decree (*Agreement between Greece and Turkey*, 1951). Thus, the legal status of Western Thrace evolved into an ostensibly stable yet politically contingent framework, functioning in accordance with shifting diplomatic conditions (Akgönül, 2007; Oran, 1986; Tsitselikis, 2012).

## Implementation and Institutional Practice Discourse

Although bilingualism was legally recognised, in practice a gradual shift toward Greek predominance emerged through three key control mechanisms:

1. **Approval regime:** Textbooks imported from Turkey were reviewed individually by the *Minority Schools Inspection Committee*; those deemed “inappropriate” were banned or translated into Greek. This practice established an ideological rather than pedagogical filtering system (Tsitselikis, 2012, p. 162).
2. **Personnel regime:** Special entry permits were required for Turkish teachers arriving from Turkey, and during the junta period these permits were almost completely suspended. Consequently, minority schools lost their human-resource autonomy (Oran, 1986, p. 89).
3. **Curricular standardisation:** Turkish-language courses were reduced to a minor share of weekly instruction, while core subjects such as science, mathematics, and social studies were taught in Greek (Mavrommatis, 2020, p. 114). Thus, bilingualism was transformed in practice into a “dominant official language” model.

Following the democratisation process after 1974, partial normalisation occurred with an increase in teacher and textbook exchange. Yet, after the Cyprus crisis, new restrictions were reintroduced. This oscillating pattern demonstrates that the implementation of minority education policy was directly linked to the diplomatic climate (Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe [CSCE], 1975).

## Ideological and Identity Construction Discourse

Unlike Bulgaria’s open assimilationism, the Western Thrace model was based on a policy of **controlled integration**. While the institutional presence of Turkish was formally acknowledged, administrative, curricular, and staffing mechanisms reinforced Greek national identity (Akgönül, 2007; Oran, 1986).

In citizenship textbooks used in minority primary schools during the 1970s, the phrase “Greece is the common home and protector of all its citizens” (*Greek Ministry of Education*, 1973, p. 2) reflected the attempt to redefine the identity of minority students within a unitary civic framework.

The *protective* language of Lausanne was thus reinterpreted as a discourse of adaptation and belonging. In this respect, Bhabha’s (1994) concept of *mimicry* is illuminating: minority students were encouraged to formally adopt a Greek civic identity, while the educational space allocated to their own language and culture was systematically narrowed. Althusser’s (1971) notion of the school as an *ideological state apparatus* further explains how this mechanism functioned in practice.

Each political crisis—such as the 1955 Istanbul Pogrom, the 1967 military coup, and the 1974 Cyprus conflict—intensified this ideological rigidity, while periods of rapprochement produced limited relaxation. Hence, the functioning of minority education in Western Thrace depended not

solely on legal texts but also on the balance of power and the diplomatic orientation between Greece and Turkey (Tsitselikis, 2012; Mavrommatis, 2020).

## *Yugoslavia (Macedonia and Kosovo)*

### **Legal Status Discourse**

Article 42 of the 1946 Federal Constitution explicitly guaranteed minority rights, declaring that “Each nation and nationality has the right to education in its own language” (*Službeni list SFRJ*, 1946). Unlike the treaty-based obligations of Bulgaria and Greece, this clause reflected a distinctive model grounded in federal division of powers rather than international law.

The 1974 Constitution further expanded these rights by granting the republics and autonomous provinces—such as Kosovo and Macedonia—legislative authority over educational policies (*Službeni list SFRJ*, 1974). Thus, the legal framework operated under a “strong domestic law + local autonomy” formula.

The “human dimension” principles of the 1975 Helsinki Final Act were embraced by Yugoslavia as compatible with its socialist federal pluralism (Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe [CSCE], 1975). A 1976 report by the Macedonian Ministry of Education declared that “education in the mother tongue is not only a cultural right but also an integral component of socialist civic education,” clearly articulating the ideological rationale of this model (Macedonian Ministry of Education, 1976).

### **Implementation and Institutional Practice Discourse**

In the 1951–1952 academic year, the first Turkish-language secondary schools were opened in Macedonia; teacher-training academies were later established in Skopje (1953) and Prizren (during the 1960s) (*Birlik*, 1960). By 1965, there were 218 Turkish primary schools in Macedonia and 104 in Kosovo (*Yugoslav Federal Statistical Office*, 1966), indicating the institutional continuity of Turkish-language education.

Textbooks were produced by local publishers. Courses in language, literature, and history were taught in Turkish, while science and social studies were aligned with Yugoslav socialist ideology. This produced a dual pedagogical model—one that preserved linguistic diversity while maintaining ideological standardisation (Eminov, 1997).

History textbooks did not completely reject the Ottoman past but framed it within a dual narrative of “local heritage” and “feudal oppression” (Neuburger, 2004). The *partisan struggle* and the ideology of “brotherhood and unity” (*bratstvo i jedinstvo*) remained central across all subjects.

The continuity of education was reinforced by Turkish-language media and children’s publications. The newspaper *Birlik* (published in Skopje, 1944–1991) mirrored school curricula, while the children’s magazines *Sevinç* (1951–1991) and *Tomurcuk* (1969–1991) fostered reading habits among Turkish-speaking pupils (Akgönül, 2007). These outlets extended the pedagogical framework into the public sphere, sustaining the social circulation of the Turkish language.

## **Ideological and Identity Construction Discourse**

Yugoslavia's approach to minority education rested on a "dual identity" model. Within this model, local Turkish identity was maintained through language and culture, while socialist Yugoslav citizenship was constructed through the principle of brotherhood and unity. The phrase "Although we speak different languages, we are equal citizens of Yugoslavia," appearing in a 1978 Macedonian primary school civics textbook (Macedonian Ministry of Education, 1978), epitomised this ideological synthesis.

The Ottoman legacy was not entirely excluded but reinterpreted within a national narrative that foregrounded Tito's leadership and the partisan resistance. This strategy, consistent with Bhabha's (1994) concept of the "third space," created a hybrid sphere where dual identities could coexist—though within ideologically defined boundaries rather than a space of unrestricted pluralism.

Cultural relations with Turkey were maintained through the 1953 Turkish–Yugoslav Cultural Agreement and the 1966 Protocol on Cultural Cooperation (Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archives, 1966). Teacher exchanges and textbook supply from Turkey continued without interruption. This stability reflected both Yugoslavia's strong federal guarantees and the relatively moderate tone of Turkish–Yugoslav diplomatic relations (Oran, 1986).

From a Gramscian perspective, Yugoslavia's dual identity policy functioned as a mechanism of consent-building—acknowledging the linguistic and cultural presence of minorities while integrating them into a socialist supra-identity. Thus, minority education in Yugoslavia represented neither open assimilation (as in Bulgaria) nor controlled integration (as in Greece), but rather a more inclusive yet ideologically guided model (Eminov, 1997; Akgönül, 2007).

### ***Comparative Discourse Summary***

The period between **1945 and 1989** marked an era in which minority education policies in the Balkans became not merely a pedagogical domain but an **ideological mechanism intertwined with state identity strategies**. The cases of Bulgaria, Greece, and Yugoslavia each reveal distinct manifestations of the tension between **international normative frameworks** and **national political practices**.

### **Legal Status: Normative Diversity and Institutional Differentiation**

The most striking difference among the three countries lies in the legal foundations of minority rights:

- Bulgaria constitutionally recognised minority education, yet conditioned it upon "national unity," thereby reducing it to a limited and contingent right.
- Greece, despite possessing strong international commitments such as the *Treaty of Lausanne* (1923), narrowed these norms through national legislation and administrative control.
- Yugoslavia, by contrast, grounded its minority education in federal constitutional guarantees and local autonomy, allowing it to function stably within domestic law.

This comparison demonstrates that the effectiveness of legal protection depends not only on normative strength but also on the political structure of the regime and the will to implement those norms.

### **Implementation Practices: Language, Institutions, and Control Mechanisms**

All three countries placed minority schools under official supervision, yet differed in the **nature and purpose of this control**:

- In Bulgaria, supervision was assimilationist, aiming to erase the public presence of the Turkish language.
- In Greece, it followed a “controlled integration” strategy—maintaining bilingualism formally while ensuring Greek dominance in practice.
- In Yugoslavia, control operated primarily through ideological standardisation, preserving linguistic diversity while embedding it within socialist civic identity.

These contrasts reveal three operational models of minority education: assimilation (Bulgaria), integration (Greece), and ideological pluralism (Yugoslavia).

### **Ideological Discourse: Identity, Consent, and Sovereignty**

At the ideological level, the three states diverged in their conceptualisation of minority identity:

- Bulgaria’s “Revival Process” (1980s) represented an explicit policy of cultural erasure, seeking to eliminate both language and identity from the public sphere.
- Greece transformed the *Lausanne* discourse of “protection” into one of “adaptation” and “belonging”, producing, in Bhabha’s (1994) sense of *mimicry*, a partial and conditional accommodation of minority identity.
- Yugoslavia’s “dual belonging” strategy reflected Bhabha’s concept of the *third space*, creating an ideologically regulated coexistence of two identities within the socialist order.

This framework empirically confirms Althusser’s (1971) proposition that education functions as an ideological state apparatus: beyond the transmission of knowledge, it serves as a core mechanism for identity formation and consent production.

### **Concluding Assessment**

The comparative analysis reveals a common reality across the three cases: international law alone cannot safeguard minority rights. Effective protection requires a combination of strong institutional architecture, local autonomy, and sustained political commitment.

Yugoslavia’s institutional pluralism, Bulgaria’s ideological homogeneity, and Greece’s diplomatic conditionality demonstrate that even within a shared ethnic foundation, minority education can assume markedly different political and ideological forms.

This section provides the conceptual bridge to the forthcoming Discussion chapter, which elaborates on three central thematic axes—legal legitimacy, practical implementation, and ideological function—as the core analytical dimensions of minority education in the Balkans.

## Comparative Analysis – Legal Status, Implementation, and Ideological Objectives

### Legal Bindingness and Political Conditionality

In **Greece**, the legal foundation of Turkish minority education in Western Thrace was established through Articles 40–45 of the *Treaty of Lausanne* (1923), which guaranteed minorities the right to open, manage, and receive education in their own language under international law (*Treaty of Lausanne*, 1923). The *1951 Cultural Cooperation Agreement between Turkey and Greece* regulated the exchange of teachers and textbooks; however, these mechanisms were restricted following the 1967–1974 military junta and the 1974 Cyprus crisis (Akgönül, 2007; Oran, 1986). This model represents a type of “**strong norm + high political conditionality.**”

In **Bulgaria**, Article 79 of the *1946 Constitution* formally recognised the right to mother-tongue education, while the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948, Art. 26) and the *UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education* (1960, Art. 5) were adopted rhetorically but narrowly implemented—particularly at the secondary level (Darzhaven Vestnik, 1946; UNESCO, 1960). During the “*Revival Process*” (1984–1989), these rights were effectively suspended (Eminov, 1997; Neuburger, 2004). Bulgaria thus exemplifies the model of “**weak international bindingness + strong central control.**”

In **Yugoslavia**, Article 42 of the *1946 Federal Constitution* and the constitutional reforms of 1974 secured the right to education in minority languages, granting legislative authority over education to local assemblies in autonomous regions such as Kosovo and Macedonia (*Službeni list SFRJ*, 1946, 1974). The *Helsinki Final Act* (1975) was incorporated into the rhetoric of socialist federal pluralism (Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe [CSCE], 1975). This model represents “**strong domestic law + local autonomy.**”

### Implementation: The Rhetoric–Reality Gap

In all three countries, a clear discrepancy existed between the discourse of equality and mother-tongue education and its actual implementation:

- **Bulgaria:** A wide network of Turkish-language schools operated in the 1950s, followed by gradual restriction from the 1960s and a total ban after 1984 (Eminov, 1997; Neuburger, 2004).
- **Greece:** Bilingualism was legally maintained, yet administrative supervision over curricula, textbook approval, and teacher appointments reinforced Greek dominance (Tsitselikis, 2012; Akgönül, 2007).
- **Yugoslavia:** Bilingualism was preserved, and both Turkish local identity and socialist Yugoslav citizenship were jointly constructed, though ideological standardisation remained obligatory (Poulton, 1997; Macedonian Ministry of Education, 1976).

These patterns reveal that minority education was shaped not merely by legal frameworks but by each state’s ideological orientation and its diplomatic relations with Turkey.

**Table 3. Ideological Goal Typology**

Country	Model	Ideological Objective	Implementation Summary
<b>Bulgaria</b>	Assimilation	Elimination of Turkish public visibility; name-change campaigns; negation of the Ottoman past	Bulgarisation in education and media; erasure of Turkish identity (Eminov, 1997; Neuburger, 2004)
<b>Greece</b>	Controlled Integration	Recognition of bilingualism while promoting Greek national identity through curriculum and staffing policies	Symbolic bilingualism under Lausanne; de facto Greek centrality (Akgönül, 2007; Tsitselikis, 2012)
<b>Yugoslavia</b>	Dual Belonging	Preservation of local language and culture while constructing a socialist supra-identity through “brotherhood and unity”	Hybrid educational model combining Turkish identity and Yugoslav citizenship (Poulton, 1997; Oran, 1986)

This typology demonstrates that education functioned as a core ideological instrument within the nation-state strategies of the Balkans. Legal norms were often applied flexibly, contextually, and instrumentally—subordinated to broader ideological goals.

Minority schooling thus became a symbolic arena in which states negotiated between domestic cohesion, international legitimacy, and transnational relations with Turkey. The result was not a uniform system of minority protection, but three distinct ideological configurations that illustrate the diverse ways in which

### **Turkey’s Educational Diplomacy: The Limits and Possibilities of Soft Power (1945–1989)**

During this period, Turkey employed various diplomatic instruments—including bilateral agreements, cultural protocols, teacher exchange programmes, and textbook support—to protect and promote the educational rights of Turkish minorities in the Balkans. These efforts were grounded both in state-to-state diplomacy and in multilateral initiatives within international organisations.

#### **Western Thrace (Greece)**

The strong international legitimacy derived from the *Treaty of Lausanne* (1923) formed the legal foundation for Turkey’s diplomatic efforts concerning minority education in Western Thrace (*Treaty of Lausanne*, 1923). The *1951 Cultural Cooperation Agreement between Turkey and Greece* and its additional protocols enabled the dispatch of teachers and the provision of Turkish-language textbooks (Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archives, 1951). By the mid-1950s, approximately one-third of the teachers serving in minority high schools in Komotini and Xanthi had been sent from Turkey (Akgönül, 2007).

During the 1967 military junta, work permits for Turkish teachers were restricted, and textbooks imported from Turkey were censored. Following the 1974 Cyprus crisis, the 1951 protocols were

effectively suspended, reducing the flow of teachers and educational materials (Oran, 1986). During this period, Turkey issued diplomatic notes to Greece, invoking Article 45 of the Lausanne Treaty (Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archives, 1975).

## **Bulgaria**

Turkey's direct involvement in the education of the Turkish minority in Bulgaria was limited, as no binding treaty comparable to Lausanne existed. Educational issues were discussed during the 1950–1951 migration agreements but did not lead to any formal protocol (Darzhaven Vestnik, 1950).

During the “Revival Process” (1984–1989), Turkey internationalised the issue of the ban on Turkish-language education in Bulgaria. Ankara raised the matter before the UN General Assembly (1985), the UNESCO General Conference (1987), and within the CSCE Helsinki Process (UNESCO, 1987). Turkish diplomacy used the term “cultural genocide” in official notes and public discourse (Neuburger, 2004), and the Turkish Grand National Assembly held a special session on the subject (TBMM Tutanak Dergisi, 1985). However, the closed nature of the socialist bloc and Moscow's political backing prevented these efforts from producing tangible results (Eminov, 1997).

## **Yugoslavia (Macedonia and Kosovo)**

The *1953 Cultural Agreement* and the *1966 Protocol on Cultural Cooperation* between Turkey and Yugoslavia established frameworks for teacher exchange, scholarship programmes, and textbook support (Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archives, 1966). In the 1970s, several Turkish-language teachers serving in Skopje, Pristina, and Prizren were appointed from Turkey, which also provided technical assistance for printing Turkish textbooks (Akgönül, 2007).

Unlike the cases of Western Thrace or Bulgaria, this cooperation was not interrupted during periods of international tension, as Yugoslavia's federal pluralism aligned ideologically with the discourse of cultural exchange (Poulton, 1997).

## **Analytical Evaluation**

Turkey's educational diplomacy during the Cold War functioned within a triangular framework of *legal legitimacy*, *cultural cooperation*, and *multilateral advocacy*. Its effectiveness varied depending on the regime type, foreign policy orientation, and bilateral relations with the respective states:

- **Greece:** High legitimacy through Lausanne; yet diplomatic crises directly impacted educational cooperation.
- **Bulgaria:** Strong rhetorical advocacy in international forums but limited practical outcomes due to the rigidity of the socialist regime.
- **Yugoslavia:** Stable cooperation sustained through bilateral agreements; minority rights were ideologically integrated within federal socialism, preventing major conflict.

This comparative outlook underscores the **limits of soft power**: diplomatic instruments were only as effective as the political will of the host state allowed. The strength of legal norms alone was insufficient to alter the de facto status of minority education without reciprocal commitment and institutional openness.

**Table 4. Turkey’s Educational Diplomacy Chronology (1945–1989)**

Year / Period	Country	Diplomatic / Bilateral Agreement or Initiative	Implementation and Impact	Political Context
1947–1950	Western Thrace (Greece)	Exchange of notes on the Treaty of Lausanne	Minority schools maintained bilingual structure	Post–World War II reconstruction
1951	Western Thrace (Greece)	Turkey–Greece Cultural Cooperation Agreement	Teacher and textbook exchange from Turkey	Positive relations prior to NATO accession
1953	Yugoslavia	Turkey–Yugoslavia Cultural Agreement	Support for Turkish-language education institutions	Tito’s independent socialist stance
1966	Yugoslavia	Protocol on Cultural Cooperation	Scholarship programmes, teacher exchanges	Period of stable bilateral relations
1967–1974	Western Thrace (Greece)	—	Censorship of textbooks, restrictions on Turkish teachers	Junta regime, Cyprus tensions
1970s	Yugoslavia	Cultural and academic exchange projects	Student exchanges at university level	Federal pluralism policies
Post-1974	Western Thrace (Greece)	—	Decline in teacher and textbook transfers	Post-Cyprus crisis tension
1984–1989	Bulgaria	UN and UNESCO initiatives	“Revival Process” brought to international agenda	Cold War, socialist bloc context

### Methodology

This study adopts a comparative discourse analysis approach. Its aim is to examine, at both the textual and contextual levels, the legal status, institutional structure, and ideological framing of Turkish minority education in Bulgaria, Greece, and Yugoslavia during the 1945–1989 period.

### Data Sources

The primary sources of the research include:

- International legal instruments such as the Treaty of Lausanne (1923), the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education (1960), and the Helsinki Final Act (1975);
- The constitutions, education laws, cultural cooperation agreements, official curricula, and statistical reports of Bulgaria, Greece, and Yugoslavia;
- Official gazettes, governmental statements, educational reports, and cultural protocols from the period.

Secondary sources consist of scholarly monographs, journal articles, and historical analyses focusing on the era (e.g. Akgönül, 2007; Neuburger, 2004; Tsitselikis, 2012; Oran, 1986). These works provided contextual interpretation and supported the comparative evaluation among the three national cases.

### **Analytical Procedure**

The analysis followed the thematic logic of Braun and Clarke's (2006) model and was organised around three primary discourse categories:

1. **Legal Status Discourse:** How minority education was defined in international and national texts, including the scope and binding power of these rights.
2. **Implementation and Institutional Practice Discourse:** Official practices concerning school distribution, teacher appointments, curriculum arrangements, and language policies.
3. **Ideological and Identity Construction Discourse:** Ideological orientations and identity strategies reflected in textbooks, state speeches, and the press.

Each country's materials were examined within their historical context, and emergent themes were comparatively coded along axes of similarity and difference. Coding incorporated both direct quotations and analytical summaries of policy documents, thereby allowing for the joint evaluation of discursive consistency and historical continuity.

### **Comparative Framework**

A three-dimensional analytical matrix was used in cross-country comparison:

1. Legal Foundations,
2. Level of Implementation,
3. Ideological Objectives.

This framework enabled a comprehensive analysis of how the formally recognised rights in each country's legal structure were realised in practice and how they interacted with the ideological goals underpinning education policy. The approach therefore extended discourse analysis into a historical-comparative perspective, elucidating how minority education in the Balkans was positioned simultaneously as a *legal discourse* and an *ideological instrument* (Fairclough, 1995; Phillips & Ochs, 2004).

### **Conclusion and Policy-Research Implications**

This study comparatively analysed the legal status, implementation practices, and ideological frameworks of Turkish minority education in Bulgaria, Greece, and Yugoslavia between 1945 and 1989. The analysis demonstrated that rights recognised by international instruments were reshaped by domestic interpretations and political contexts.

Three key conclusions emerge:

1. Legal safeguards are insufficient on their own to protect minority education. In Greece, the binding force of the Lausanne Treaty did not prevent restrictions during political crises; in Bulgaria, weak international bindingness and strong central control led to the gradual erosion of minority rights; in Yugoslavia, federal and local autonomy ensured institutional continuity, though education was ideologically embedded within socialism.

2. Ideological objectives are decisive in shaping educational policies. Bulgaria's open assimilation campaign of the 1980s sought to erase Turkish identity from the public sphere; Greece's controlled integration maintained bilingualism while reinforcing Greek linguistic and civic dominance; and Yugoslavia developed a hybrid model combining recognition of local identity with socialist unity.

3. Turkey's educational diplomacy operated through legal legitimacy, bilateral cultural agreements, and advocacy in international forums. Its effectiveness varied according to the regime type, foreign policy orientation, and bilateral relations of the host country: visible outcomes in Western Thrace, long-term stability in Yugoslavia, and limited influence in Bulgaria due to its closed regime.

Overall, minority education emerges not as a purely pedagogical domain but as a strategic instrument at the intersection of state identity formation, national security discourse, and ideological orientation.

Future research should explore the multilayered nature of minority education at the intersection of international law, domestic politics, and educational diplomacy, employing richer primary sources, fieldwork, and comparative analysis.

### **Policy and Research Recommendations**

The study indicates that minority education offers lessons not only for historical analysis but also for contemporary policy-making and cultural diplomacy. Three levels of recommendations are proposed:

#### 1. Policy Level – Institutional Strength and Participatory Mechanisms

Minority education policies should be supported not only by international treaties but also by strong domestic institutions and long-term political will. Bilingualism and cultural pluralism should be viewed not as threats to national identity but as foundations of democratic diversity. The Bulgarian and Greek cases illustrate the importance of independent monitoring mechanisms and curriculum commissions inclusive of minority representation.

#### 2. Diplomatic Level – Sustainable and Multilayered Soft Power

Turkey's experience demonstrates that soft power in the Balkans is constrained not only by cultural outreach capacity but also by the regime type and geopolitical orientation of partner states. Future initiatives should prioritise long-term, depoliticised mechanisms such as confidence-building, inter-institutional cultural cooperation, and academic exchange programmes rather than short-term diplomatic reactions.

#### 3. Research Level – Fieldwork, Oral Histories, and Theoretical Pluralism

Subsequent studies should examine minority education through field research, oral narratives, and local curriculum analyses, revealing it as both a state policy and a lived social experience. Integrating postcolonial theory, educational transfer approaches, and cultural diplomacy frameworks can offer a more comprehensive comparative perspective.

## **DISCUSSION**

This study has undertaken a comparative examination of the legal status, institutional practices, and ideological frameworks of Turkish minority education in Bulgaria, Greece (Western Thrace),

and Yugoslavia (Macedonia and Kosovo) during the period 1945–1989, and has generated three principal findings.

First, the relationship between *legal guarantee* and *political will* confirms a point often neglected in the literature on international minority law: legal bindingness alone is not functional unless supported by robust institutional mechanisms and consistent political commitment (Phillips & Ochs, 2004). In Greece, the *Treaty of Lausanne* provided a strong international framework, yet its implementation remained subject to *political conditionality* and narrowed during periods of crisis. Bulgaria rhetorically embraced UN and UNESCO norms but limited them through restrictive domestic interpretation and, between 1984–1989, suspended minority rights altogether. Yugoslavia, by contrast, maintained institutional continuity through a strong domestic legal design based on federal and local autonomy without relying on external treaties.

Second, the gap between rhetoric and reality was evident across all three cases. In Bulgaria, gradual restrictions and final prohibitions reflected an explicit policy of assimilation; in Greece, bilingualism was legally maintained but practically dominated by Greek through administrative control; and in Yugoslavia, Turkish-language education persisted but was standardised within socialist ideological boundaries. This aligns with Althusser's (1971) concept of *ideological apparatuses*: education operated not merely as a mechanism of knowledge transmission but as a central ideological order through which states constructed collective identity.

Third, the typology of ideological goals—assimilation in Bulgaria, controlled integration in Greece, and dual belonging in Yugoslavia—transposes postcolonial debates on the *representation of the Other* (Said, 1978; Bhabha, 1994) into the Balkan context. Bulgaria's "one nation–one language" policy aimed at cultural homogenisation; Greece reinforced citizenship discourse by integrating the minority within the system; and Yugoslavia, closer to Bhabha's notion of a *third space*, recognised dual identities but within the boundaries of socialist ideology. From the perspective of Turkey's educational diplomacy, the three cases illustrate distinct limits of soft power (Nye, 2004). In Western Thrace, legitimacy grounded in Lausanne provided leverage; in Yugoslavia, bilateral cultural agreements ensured continuity; while in Bulgaria, advocacy through international platforms produced moral but not material impact. In sum: high legitimacy yet low effectiveness in Greece during crises; strong rhetoric but limited influence in Bulgaria; and stable cooperation constrained by ideology in Yugoslavia.

This comparative discourse analysis yields three overarching insights:

1. The effectiveness of international law depends on domestic institutions and political will.
2. Education in the Balkans functioned not merely as a pedagogical field but as a strategic ideological instrument in national identity construction.
3. The influence of external actors was directly constrained by the regime type and the quality of bilateral relations.

These findings reinforce the *contextual adaptation* debates in educational transfer literature while, from a postcolonial perspective, demonstrating that minority education operates as a negotiated space between hegemonic discourse and resistance.

Developments after 1989 further confirm these observations. The end of the Cold War and regional transformations generated both new opportunities and continuities in the legal and institutional framework of minority education. In Bulgaria, the *1991 Constitution* and the EU integration process reopened the legal basis for Turkish education, though classroom hours and teacher supply remained limited. In Greece, partial improvements were made under EU harmonisation pressures, yet centralised control over curricula and staffing persisted. In post-Yugoslav Macedonia and Kosovo, Turkish education was redefined amid the identity politics of the new states and international interventions—demonstrating once again that the durability of legal reforms depends on political will and institutional capacity.

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