

Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) is the highest institution and sole representation of the Turkish immigrants from Western Thrace in Greece who have organized rapidly throughout Germany after the foundation of the first Western Thrace Turkish minority association in 1979 in Giessen. It was founded on 28 February 1988 through getting together of 7 minority associations, and is today the umbrella organization of 30 associations from entire Europe. It operates solely on a non-profit basis.



Since July 2006, Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe is in Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council **ECOSOC** of the United Nations **UN**, and in May 2007, it has become ordinary member of the Federal Union of European Nationalities **FUEN**. ABTTF was founded with the aim of proclaiming both in western European countries and in the international arena the voice of Western Thrace Turkish minority which is being obliged to live under very severe conditions, and is active through lobbying for the solution of the problems of the Turkish minority before international organizations such as **UN**, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe **OSCE**, European Union **EU** and Council of Europe **CoE**. It is the voluntary ambassador of our minority in western Europe, and lobbies for the solution of its problems.

For this purpose, ABTTF publishes newsletters, bulletins, pamphlets, periodicals and reports related to our minority and the current developments in Western Thrace in the languages of Turkish, English, German and Greek, and these are then provided and submitted to the information and attention of the concerning institutions, international governmental and non-governmental organizations, media and academic and political persons such as MPs in the European Parliament. Furthermore, ABTTF organizes activities in order to satisfy the social needs of Turkish immigrants from Western Thrace living in western European countries, and undertakes also many social activities in order to bring the Western Thrace Turks together. Evening meals organized by ABTTF with the support of the member associations during the months of Ramadan, and the traditional "Dr. Sadik Ahmet Football Tournament", which is organized every year during the summer months, are the main ones of these social activities. In order to present the problems of our minority scholarly, the existing studies are being carried on, and preparatory works of an academic publication are being also further continued. Moreover, news about Greece and Western Thrace published in the Turkish newspapers in Europe are being archived by the Press Office of the ABTTF in order to provide them to the experts dealing with this subject, and a monthly news bulletin announcing the activities of ABTTF to the public audience is published.

ABTTF

Avrupa Batı Trakya Türk Federasyonu
Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe
Föderation der West-Thrakien Türken in Europa
Ευρωπαϊκή Ομοσπονδία Τούρκων Δυτικής Θράκης

Wemerstraße 2 · 58454 Witten / Germany
Tel.: +49 2302 91 32 91 · Fax: +49 2302 91 32 93
E-Mail: info@abtff.org
www.abtff.org

In Western Thrace, which is the name of the region stretching out from the Turkish border up to Karasu River, 150 thousand Turks live today. They came to and settled in the region during the conquests of the Ottoman Empire in the Balkans. In 1923, with the Peace Treaty of Lausanne, the minority rights of these 150 thousand Turks have been guaranteed and the region has been left to Greece.

Since the Western Thrace Turks have been living in Greece as a minority, it was tried through various injustices and pressures to compel them to immigrate, and even an assimilation of them in the long term was aspired. During the 1990's, they were apparently discriminated; they could not obtain a driving licence for tractor in order to cultivate their lands, repair their defective roofs of their homes, acquire real estates and were not even allowed to benefit from basic rights like right of citizenship. Till the Article 19 of the Greek Citizenship Law was abolished in 1998, the persons of "non-Greek ethnic origin" to had gone abroad for a long time, sometimes even for a short time, were deprived of their Greek citizenship through an administrative decision. Again, until the mid 1990's, the minority was condemned to live isolated through the application of a "military zone" against the so-called "communist infiltrations." In 1923, the Western Thrace Turks formed the most populated ethnic group with a population number of 129 thousand, and possessed 84% of the lands in the region. Although they as an agrarian community possessed high rate of population, they could not demonstrate a population increase due to the continuous emigration, and possess today only 30% of the lands. Although the Western Thrace Turks have begun to benefit from the basic citizenship rights parallel to the increasing importance of the minority rights in the new era in Europe and in the world, and through intensifying foreign pressures on Greece, in the field of minority rights, which have been guaranteed by the Peace Treaty of Lausanne and other international treaties, no improvement has been able to be achieved till now.

Infrastructural,
Developmental and
Educational Problems



ABTTF

Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe

NGO in Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations
Member of the Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN)

Western Thrace is one of the most underdeveloped regions in the European Union



The regional development funds of the European Union (EU) destined for Western Thrace do not reach their destinations in their fully extent. Particularly, with regard to the funds received for the development of infrastructure, double standards are applied.

Thus, the Turkish minority of Western Thrace and residential areas with high Turkish population do not profit sufficiently from the regional development funds granted by the EU for Western Thrace.

Especially the residential areas and municipalities with high Turkish population suffer serious privations of infrastructure. Only a few Turkish municipalities have a sewage system.



The roads in the villages are mostly gravel or dirt roads, and are needed to be asphalted.

Although there is urgent need for new bridges, construction of these is hindered due to conflicts between authorities. The lack of bridges leads to over and over again the closing of some roads to traffic when it rains.



The Turkish minority of Western Thrace encounters serious problems in the field of education



Although the Turkish minority of Western Thrace is granted with the right to have education in its native language, and it does have an autonomy in the management of its educational institutions by the Treaty of Lausanne signed between Greece and Turkey in 1923, and by the bilateral educational agreements, the Educational Agreement (1951) and the Cultural Protocol (1968), it is subjected to pressure in the field of education.

There is no single kindergarten in Western Thrace, in which Turkish minority children are educated in their native language. Although the administration of kindergartens in general are subordinated to the local governments, the Turkish municipalities have been deprived of this authority. There are only two secondary schools, where the education is in Turkish. That is why many Turkish minority children have to continue their secondary school education at other schools, where education is only in Greek. In the surroundings of the villages, there are no secondary schools.



Therefore, the minority children have to attend schools in the towns. The teachers, who teach at these schools, are not able to speak Turkish and do not dispose of a Turkish-speaking background. In the villages and village schools, there are no libraries.



As a consequence of the policies implemented by Greece, the Turkish minority is underdeveloped and disadvantaged in every aspect



As a result of the oppressive policies of the Greek state since the 1970's, the Turkish minority of Western Thrace has been suffering seriously in the fields of development, infrastructure, local governments, education and culture. Financial aids from the EU-funds for families living from agriculture and stock farming bear temporary and insufficient solutions. Despite these financial aids, annual average income of a family of five persons is less than 10,000 €.



Today, about 90% of the rural Turkish population live from agriculture, mostly from tobacco production. It is still unclear how they are supposed to ensure their living expenses when the EU fully cuts tobacco growing subsidies in 2014.

Furthermore, at residential areas, where the Turkish minority is densely populated, there are no cinemas or theatres. There are almost no cultural or artistic events.



- The investments have to be distributed well-proportioned and without discrimination to all regions in Greece. This is the only measure in order to create new jobs and to increase the living standards of the Turkish minority of Western Thrace.
- In order to overcome the problems with regard to infrastructure in regions with Turkish population, the corresponding projects and financial aids should be granted to the Turkish municipalities.
- In the field of education, improvements have to be achieved by complying with the rights granted by bilateral and international agreements to the Turkish minority.
- In villages and towns with Turkish population, kindergartens for Turkish minority children, in which the education language is Turkish, have to be established urgently. The administration and management of these kindergartens has to be left to the local governments.
- Teachers, who dispose of Turkish language skills and a corresponding educational background, have to be assigned to those Turkish minority schools.
- In regions, where The Turkish minority is densely populated, libraries, cinemas and theatres, which are easily accessible for the public, have to be opened. Only by these means, it is ensured that the public, in particular the youth has the opportunity to develop themselves in cultural and artistic fields. Moreover, in order to make sports prevalent for all, more sports grounds have to be created and the public should be encouraged to do sports.
- In order to promote the relations between the Turkish and Greek populations, the Turkish minority should be encouraged to learn Greek, and for this purpose, Greek language courses should be opened.