

# Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europa Newsletter



NGO in Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations  
Member of the Fundamental Rights Platform (FRP) of the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights  
Member of the Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN)

No. 35 | February 2017 | Year 12

## Members of the European Parliament and delegates from international non-governmental organizations on a fact-finding mission in Western Thrace



During the fact-finding mission organized by ABTTF, the members of the European Parliament and representatives of the international non-governmental organizations examined on the ground the problems of the Turkish Minority of Western-Thrace in Greece and collected first-hand evidence.

The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) organized from 19 to 22 September 2016 a fact-finding mission to Western Thrace which included the two members of the European Parliament (MEP) and representatives of the international non-governmental organizations (NGOs). During the mission, the delegation observed on the spot the basic and current problems of the Turkish

Minority of Western Thrace.

The mission delegation was headed by the ABTTF President Halit Habip Oğlu and composed of Nils Torvalds MEP (ALDE) who belongs to the Swedish-speaking minority in Finland, Pal Csaky MEP (EPP) who belongs to the Hungarian minority in Slovakia, Marino Busdachin, Secretary General of the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO), Miguel Martinez Tomey, Member of the Board of Centre Maurits Coppieters (CMC) and Vice-President of the European Free Alliance (EFA) and Panayote Dimitras, Spokesperson of the Greek Helsinki Monitor (GHM) which is one of the leading NGOs dealing with human and minority rights in Greece.

On the first day of the fact-finding mission attended also by Mehmet Hüseyin, ABTTF

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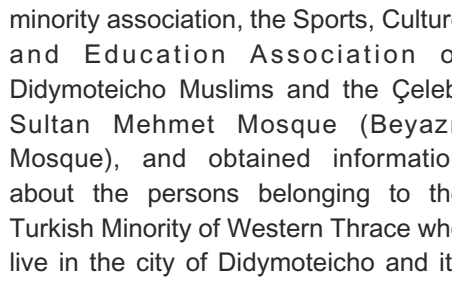


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Vice-President, K. Engin Soyyılmaz, ABTTF Head Office Manager and Ali Ali Çavuş, Member of the ABTTF International Affairs and Lobbying Group, the delegation first visited the Elected Mufti of Komotini İbrahim Şerif in his office. Afterwards, the delegation had a joint meeting with the Culture and Education Foundation of Western Thrace Minority, the Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association and the Western Thrace Turkish Teachers Union to hear the problems in the field of education. Later, the delegation visited the Komotini Turkish Youth Union and obtained information on the historical and legal struggle of the association which was closed by the Greek authorities because its title contained the word "Turkish". After visiting the Turkish and Greek villages in Komotini, the delegation met with the Xanthi Turkish Union and listened to the legal struggle of the association which was also closed due to the word "Turkish" in its title and won the case before the European Court of Human Rights after more than twenty years. In the evening, the delegation also came together with the representatives of the Turkish minority media in the premises of the Western Thrace Turkish Teachers Union.

The fact-finding mission continued on 21 September with the delegates from the international NGOs as the MEPs had to leave due to their heavy agenda. On the second day of the mission, the representatives of UNPO, CMC and GHM first visited the headquarters of the single political party of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace, the Friendship, Equality and Peace (FEP) Party in Komotini, which is also a member of EFA. During the meeting, the FEP Party provided the delegation with detailed information on the official state policy of Greece towards the Turkish minority and underlined this policy containing many problematic issues should be changed urgently. Afterwards, the delegation visited the Turkish



minority association, the Sports, Culture and Education Association of Didymoteicho Muslims and the Çelebi Sultan Mehmet Mosque (Beyazıt Mosque), and obtained information about the persons belonging to the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace who live in the city of Didymoteicho and its neighbourhood.

# ABTTF on a working visit in Brussels



The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) made a working visit to Brussels, capital of the European Union (EU). ABTTF President Halit Habip Oğlu and ABTTF Head Office Manager K. Engin Soyilmaz met during the working visit with the MEPs Pál Csáky (EPP, Slovakia) and Csaba Sógor (EPP, Romania) as well as the Secretary General of the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO) Marino Busdachin.

## Problems of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace and recent developments expressed during the meetings

The first meeting was held with the MEP Pál Csáky (EPP-Christian Democrats) who belongs to the Hungarian minority in Slovakia in his working office in the EP. During the meeting, ABTTF President Halit Habip Oğlu expressed the recent happenings in Western Thrace, Greece where Csáky was on a fact-finding mission on 19-22 September 2016, adding the mayor of Yassıkoy (Iasmos) of Rhodope Province İsmet Kadı who belongs to Turkish Minority of Western



Thrace was detained by police in December 2016 because he drove his official car outside of the municipality borders and for private affairs. Habip Oğlu said the real intention behind this is to intimidate and frighten the Turkish minority and to keep it under constant pressure.

Afterwards, the ABTTF delegation met with the MEP Csaba Sógor who belongs to the Hungarian minority in Romania. During the meeting, ABTTF President Halit Habip Oğlu stated discrimination and racist rhetoric against the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace is ongoing, adding the panel discussion organised by the Friendship Equality Peace (FEP) Party together with the Greek Helsinki Monitor (GHM) on 12 December 2016 in



Athens was violently invaded by the racist Golden Dawn Party MPs and its sympathizers, and the panel speakers were insulted and subjected to threats as it happened during the panel discussion he hosted on 2 March 2016 in the EP.

The last meeting was held with the UNPO Secretary General Marino Busdachin at the ABTTF Brussels Office, which was also attended by Justice Séran from UNPO. During the meeting, the delegations of ABTTF and UNPO exchanged views about the fact-finding mission to Western Thrace on 19-22 September 2016, in which Busdachin also participated, and recent developments of concern to the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace.

## Third Annual Meeting of FUEN TAG held in Berlin



Kardzhali Turkish Culture and Art Association from Bulgaria attended the meeting for the first time and represented the Turkish minorities/communities in the Balkans.

**FUEN President Lorant Vincze listened to the problems of the Turkish minorities and communities and gave the message of support as FUEN**

FUEN TAG's 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Meeting greeting speech delivered by FUEN's Vice-President Halit Habip Oğlu. Then, FUEN President Lorant Vincze informed the participants about the activities of FUEN and expressed FUEN will continue to support the Turkish minorities and communities. The FUEN TAG member organizations' representatives thanked to the FUEN for its support and had the opportunity to transfer the problems they faced in the countries they lived directly to the President of FUEN and prospectively expressed their expectations from the FUEN.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Meeting of the Working Group of the Turkish Minorities/Communities (TAG) inside the Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN) was held from 14 to 17 November 2016 in Berlin, Germany. The FUEN President Lorant Vincze attended the meeting that was held with the logistical support of the FUEN Working Group of the German Minorities (AGDM) in the Federal German Interior Ministry's Building.

**Kosovo and Bulgarian Turks attended the meeting for the first time**

The meeting brought together the Turkish minorities and communities

living in different European countries. At the meeting, the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace was represented by the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF), the Friendship Equality and Peace (FEP) Party and the Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association (WTMUGA). The meeting was also attended by the representatives of the Society of Meskhetian (Ahiska) Turks VATAN in Azerbaijan, the International Society of Meskhetian (Ahiska) Turks VATAN from Moscow, the Social Organization for Fostering and Development of the Karachay-Balkar Traditions Bars El, the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar People and the Association of Crimean Karaites Krymkarailar. In addition, Kosovo Youth Union Association from Kosovo and

FUEN Berlin Office/FUEN AGDM Coordination Officer Eva Adel Penzes also participated in the meeting and transferred the works of FUEN AGDM.

**Participants shared their experiences about education in mother tongue and the problems they face**

The participant organizations transferred the developments they experienced in their minorities/communities over the past year. The President of Kosova Youth Union Association from Kosovo Cengiz Kovaç and the Vice-President of the Kardzhali Turkish Culture and Art Association from Bulgaria Seyhan



Mehmet, whose organizations are not yet FUEN members, introduced the Turks living in Kosovo and Bulgaria, and conveyed the problems they face in the countries they live.

During the working session on mother tongue learning and education in the mother tongue, the press counsellor of the Society of Meskhetian (Ahiska) Turks VATAN in Azerbaijan Mevlüt Işık, Secretary General of WTMUGA Mehmet Mehmet, Elvin Kadyrov from the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar People made

presentations. After that, the participants conveyed the problems they face in their countries they live regarding the learning of mother tongue and education in the mother tongue and shared their works they carried out for the protection of mother tongue and mother tongue education as civil society representatives.

**FUEN TAG regulation accepted unanimously**

The FUEN Vice-President Halit Habip Oğlu delivered a presentation about the regulation changes during the FUEN 2016 Congress and working group regulations. After the presentation, each paragraph of the regulation prepared by FUEN was read out and presented to the participants for approval. At the end, the FUEN TAG regulation was unanimously accepted. The meeting was ended after the participants delivered their opinions and proposals for the activities and roadmap for 2017.

## Radio station Çınar FM belonging to the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace in Greece attacked

Halit Habip Oğlu: “This ugly attack on our radio station Çınar FM, which directly aimed at the freedom of expression and media of our minority, intended to silence the voice of our minority.”

The first and only Turkish language news radio station Çınar FM of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace, which is based in Komotini, Greece, was attacked. The main antenna of Çınar FM, which was established by the persons belonging to the Turkish minority, was intentionally damaged by unidentified persons. Due to the major damage of the main antenna following the attack, Çınar FM will be broadcasting temporarily through the spare antenna until the completion of repair works. The Çınar FM officials stated, a similar attack took place in the recent past and during this attack in January 2015, both the antenna



and the transmitters of Çınar FM were damaged.

“As ABTTF representing the Western Thrace Turks living in Europe, we strongly condemn this atrocious attack on our radio station Çınar FM. Çınar FM is a radio station of news, culture and information that has been successfully broadcasting for years within democratic and legal rules. This attack on Çınar FM broadcasting in Turkish is in fact an attack aimed at silencing the voice of our minority, targeting the expression and media freedom of the Turkish Minority of



Western Thrace. The perpetrators must be seized and brought to justice at once. The Greek authorities should actively take measures to prevent such and similar attacks against freedom of expression and media of our minority so that these will not be repeating in the future, and to settle the culture of tolerance for different voices in our country Greece” said Halit Habip Oğlu, President of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF).

\*Image: [www.milletgazetesi.gr](http://www.milletgazetesi.gr)

## ABTTF attends UN Forum on Minority Issues

In the theme "minorities in the context of the humanitarian crisis" forum, ABTTF stated that hate-based attacks against the Western Thrace Turkish Minority increased during the humanitarian and economic crisis in Greece.

The European Western Thrace Turkish Federation (ABTTF) attended the 9th Session of the UN Minority Issues Forum in Geneva, UN House on 24-25 November 2016. Melek Kirmacı Arık, ABTTF International Relations Director representing Western Thrace Turkish Minority participated in the session entitled "Minorities in the context of the Humanitarian Crisis". Frank de Boer, FUEN Brussels Office Officer and Legal Adviser of the Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN), followed the meeting. ABTTF is a member of FUEN.

In a session where the protection of minority rights during the humanitarian crisis and the protection of minority rights to prevent the humanitarian crisis were discussed in detail, ABTTF carried out hate attacks against the Western Thrace Turkish Minority. Speaking at a session on the protection of minority rights to prevent the humanitarian crisis, Melek Kirmacı said that the Greek National Commission on Human Rights, in his speech to the UN Human Rights Council on the adoption of the 2nd Report of the Universal Periodic Review of Greece (UPR) racism and intolerance against vulnerable groups are an important problem in the economic and refugee crisis environment. ABTTF, who said that the Western Thrace Turkish minority, which is known as a religious minority rather than an ethnic group, has become the target of racist attacks in recent years, that this issue was also expressed in the US



International Religious Freedom Report. As an example of an attack on places of worship, ABTTF, who voiced the attack on Mahmutaga Mosque in Komotini in April 2015, that there had been no ethnic or religious violence in the region before but there was an increasing tension in recent years. ABTTF recommended the establishment of an effective measures to prevent racism and discrimination and an institutional mechanism to deal with minority issues within the national authorities concerned. Drawing attention to the importance of creating a grievance mechanism with the minority to prevent discrimination, ABTTF

wanted Greek authorities to take result-oriented measures.

Speaking during the protection of minorities during the humanitarian crisis, Greece spoke about the refugee crisis and expressed the legal steps taken in fighting racism. Greece, which continues to refuse the ethnic Turkish identity of the Western Thrace Turkish Minority and uses the phrase "Muslim minority in Thrace", claimed that the hate-based attacks on the Western Thrace Turkish Minority are not connected with the subject or the reality in the region.

## Turkish Minority of Western Thrace at OSCE

ABTTF and BTAYTD raised violations of rights against Turkish Minority of Western Thrace at the OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting in Warsaw.

Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) participated to the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Human Dimension Implementation Meeting in Warsaw on 26-27 September 2016. ABTTF and BTAYTD (Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association) represented the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace at the meeting.

FUEN (Federal Union of European Nations) Legal Consultant and FUEN Brussels Office Manager Frank de Boer also attended the meeting to which FUEN members Meskhetian Turks and Crimean Tatars equally participated along with Turkish Minority of Western Thrace.

### Western Thrace Turks criticized discriminatory practices against the minority

During the morning session on 26 September entitled “anti-discrimination and tolerance”, ABTTF criticized the law issued on 2006 that made it mandatory for all minority kids to participate to state kindergartens. In its response at this session, Greece declared that there were 57 state kindergartens where minority kids live in Western Thrace.

During the afternoon session over hate crimes, ABTTF stated that hate-motivated crimes against Turkish Minority of Western Thrace have been on rise and hate speeches became more visible in political field. Kirmacı gave the example that 2 MEPs from Neo-Nazi Golden Dawn Party disrupted by oral



attack the conference on freedom of association organised by ABTTF in the European Parliament on 2 March 2016. In its response at this session, Greece highlighted that criminal sanctions against racism were strengthened through legislative acts in 2014 and 2015 and that the judicial process against Golden Dawn members including parliamentarians were still ongoing. Claiming that Turkish Minority of Western Thrace lived in harmony with Christian population in the region with no hate-based crimes observed, Greece told that those 2 cases were individual ones.

During the session on the morning of 27 September entitled “freedom of religion or belief”, ABTTF criticised the 240 Imam Law enacted in 2013 which stipulated the placement of 240 imams under the auspices of appointed muftis who are not recognised by the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace as Islam teachers at state schools and mosques in Western Thrace. ABTTF demanded the repeal of this law which contradicts with minority's religious autonomy. In its response, Greece stated that imams were willingly included in this legal framework and that the Islam lesson given at state schools were not obligatory.

## ABTTF participated in the OSCE Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting

ABTTF said that Greece insistently refused to enter the dialogue with the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace.

The Federation of Western Thrace Turks (ABTTF) attended the OSCE Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting entitled "National Minorities, Bridge Construction and Harmony" on November 10-11.2016. ABTTF International Affairs and Lobbying Group member Funda Reşit Taştekin and BTAYTD member Assist. Prof. Dr. Ali Hüseyinoğlu represented the Western Thrace Turkish Minority at the meeting that was organised by the OSCE Presidency of Germany, the Office of the Supreme Commissariat of the OSCE National Minorities and the OSCE Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) in Austria's Vienna.

**Greece does not recognize the ethnic Turkish identity of the minority and ignores its education and religion autonomy**

ABTTF International Studies and Lobby Group member Funda Reşit Taştekin spoke in three thematic sessions of the meeting and presented the problems of the Western Thrace Turkish Minority and the violations of the rights they were subjected to. Reşit Taştekin talked about that there was no formal dialogue mechanism between the minority and Greek state authorities because of the lack of recognition of the ethnic Turkish identity of the Western Thrace Turkish minority who live within the borders of Greece in the session entitled "Legal Mechanisms for Building Bridges Between States". Speaking at the session entitled "Promoting the Role of



the National Minority Famine in Building the Bridge between the Various Policy Areas", Reşit Taştekin highlighted the importance of education in harmony but Greece ignored that and there were some against practises concerning education autonomy of Western Thrace Turkish Minority that is guaranteed by treaties. Also, Greece does not let the opening of bilingual minority nursery schools she said. During the „Strengthening Civil Society for the Construction of the Standing Bridge” Reşit Taştekin presented a speech about the closure of associations bearing the word Turk on their names by Greece and newly founded ones are not registered and The European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) decision on this

issue is not implemented yet. Speaking at the second and third thematic sessions, BTAYTD member Assist. Prof. Dr. Ali Hüseyinoğlu also stated that Greece regarded the Western Thrace Turkish Minority as a threat to the state and faced problems learning its mother tongue and electing its own muftis and associations bearing the word Turk on their names are not registered by Greek authorities.

Using the right to answer, The OSCE Permanent Representation in Greece stated that only the "Muslim minority in Thrace" was officially recognized in Greece, claiming that the minority had all the rights.



# Parallel report by ABTTF on the US 2015 International Religious Freedom Report on Greece

The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) prepared a parallel report to the 2015 International Religious Freedom Report on Greece released on 10 August 2016 by the United States Department of State and submitted it to the relevant US departments. In its parallel report, ABTTF put forward the problems the minority faces in the religious freedom field and highlighted the demands and comments of the minority on the subject.



## Greece doesn't recognise the minority's ethnic Turkish identity

The US report mentions that according to the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), there are approximately 120,000 individuals residing in Thrace and descended from the officially recognized Muslim minority established by the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne. Reminding first that the Turkish Muslim minority of Western Thrace is estimated approximately 150.000, ABTTF claimed that Greece did not recognize "ethnic minority" or "linguistic minority" as legal terms and thus did not affirm the right of collective self-identification by members of an ethnic or linguistic group. Therefore, it was underlined that the existence of an ethnic Turkish minority in the country was denied.

## Religious autonomy of Turkish Minority of Western Thrace is ignored

ABTTF noted that under the 1923 Lausanne Peace Treaty, Turkish Minority of Western Thrace has an autonomy in education and religious affairs and thus, has the right to establish, manage and control at their



own expense, any religious and educational institution. It was indicated that the most important problem in religious freedom was the issue of Muftis. Explaining that the right to elect its own religious leaders (muftis) were taken away from the minority by Greece, ABTTF stated that Greece had appointed muftis since 1991. However, the minority members have not approved these muftis and elected their own ones in reaction who are not recognised by the Greek authorities. ABTTF warned that this implementation was totally in contrast with the religious autonomy of the minority guaranteed by 1923 Lausanne Treaty as well as other international agreements.

## "240 Imam Law" is a direct intervention to the religious autonomy of Turkish Minority of Western Thrace

In its parallel report, ABTTF declared that the law registered as 4115/2013 and

generally called by the minority members as "240 Imam Law" was drafted without any prior consultation with the minority and put in practice despite of strong reaction from the minority. The law in question envisaged the appointment of 240 Islamic religious instructors to teach Islam to the children belonging to the Turkish minority in Greek-language public primary and secondary schools and mosques in Western Thrace under the auspices of the government-appointed muftis.

Having mentioned the issue of waqifs, ABTTF expressed that although 1923 Lausanne Treaty guaranteed the right of the minority to set up and manage its own waqifs, Greek government continued to appoint the Board of Directors for those waqifs.

## ABTTF drew attention to bilingual kindergartens issue

ABTTF also mentioned in its report the problems that the minority kids face during pre-school education stating that the Greek authorities did not permit bilingual kindergartens to operate in Western Thrace and thus forced the minority children to go to state schools where the language of instruction was solely in Greek.

## Demonstration against the closure of Turkish minority schools in Western Thrace



Halit Habip Oğlu: “We demand an immediate repeal of the decision that foresees the closure of minority schools that have special statutes, violating the right of education of the kids belonging to Turkish Minority of Western Thrace.”

Following the decision of the Head of Education at Eastern Macedonia and Thrace region of Greece Panayotis Keramaris of closing 9 more Turkish minority schools in Western Thrace, a demonstration took place to protest the decision and to demand its repeal. According to the daily *Gündem*, the demonstration organised by Thessaloniki Private Pedagogy Institute (SÖPA) Graduate Teacher's Association and Xanthi SÖPA Graduate Teacher's Association in Rhodope-Evros region took place on 28 September 2016 in Komotini in front of the building of Education Directorate of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace region. The representatives of Turkish minority associations, minority mayors and many teachers and parents took part in the protest, which was equally supported by Confederation of Civil Servant Trade Unions (ADEDI) Komotini Branch Chair

Yorgos Triandafilopoulos, President of Rhodope Primary Teachers Association Yota Venetopulu and Antarsia (Greek Anticapitalistic Left Front) Party members.

During the demonstration, a manifesto addressed to the Head of Education at Eastern Macedonia and Thrace region of Greece Panayotis Keramaris was read out by the President of SÖPA Graduate Teacher's Association in Rhodope-Evros region Salih Ahmet while different banners demanding the repeal of the decision of closure of minority schools as well as improvement in the minority education were carried. Following the press release, a delegation composed of chairs and board members of teacher's associations, representatives of supporting institutions and minority mayors met with Regional Head of Education Panayotis Keramaris and repeated their demand to repeal the decision of closing minority schools. 2 representatives from SÖPA Graduate Teacher's Association of Xanthi Nurettin Kıyıcı and of Rhodope-Evros region Salih Ahmet, indicated that the minority students from closed schools and their parents were in a difficult situation and

requested that their demands were to be taken into consideration. The representatives also emphasized the necessity that Greek authorities must get into dialog and consultation with Turkish Minority of Western Thrace on issues related to minority education.

Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) President Halit Habip Oğlu: “Turkish Minority of Western Thrace has collectively said “no” to the decision to close minority schools taken unilaterally by Education Directorate of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace region. Our minority showed its determination not to let the educational autonomy guaranteed by treaties be destroyed in practice by illegal and arbitrary approaches by Greek authorities. As representing the Western Thrace Turks living in Europe, ABTTF demands that the decision to close minority schools, which have autonomous statutes, is a violation of educational rights of minority kids and offers no contribution to their education and should be abandoned immediately. We would also like to assert our support for the demonstration against the decision of closure.”

\*Image: [www.gundemgazetesi.com](http://www.gundemgazetesi.com)

# Habip Oğlu met the Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee at Turkish Parliament

The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) President and Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN) Vice-President Halit Habip Oğlu, met with AK Party Member of Parliament from Malatya and the Chair of Foreign Affairs Committee at Grand National Assembly of Turkey (TBMM) Taha Özhan at his office in Ankara for the first time. Accompanied by ABTTF International Affairs Director Melek Kırmacı Arık, Habip Oğlu firstly expressed his condolences in the name of ABTTF and Western Thrace Turks in Europe in the aftermath of the traitorous coup attempt committed by FETÖ/PDY terrorist organisation on 15 July 2016 in motherland Turkey.



## ABTTF works internationally for the rights of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace

Saying that he also belongs to the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace in Greece, Habip Oğlu stated that the minority members who migrated to Germany began setting up local associations in different cities. These associations came together in 1988 under the umbrella of ABTTF, which functions a sort of Ministry of Foreign Affairs for the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace. Noting that the minority exists and fights for its rights through elected Muftis, parliamentarians, Friendship, Equality Peace (FEP) Party and associations, Habip Oğlu explained that ABTTF conducted different activities at international platforms as an NGO and gave the example of the fact-finding missions to the Western Thrace organised with the participation of MEP's and European NGO's.

## The problems of Turkic communities/minorities are regularly raised at international platforms thanks to the working group established under FUEN

Habip Oğlu stated that he has been Vice-President of FUEN (Federal Union of European Nationalities), which is the largest umbrella organisation for traditional and national minorities/ethnic groups in Europe, since 2013. He further informed that, in addition to the already-existing German and Slavic working groups, the Working Group of Turkic Communities/Minorities (TAG) was established under FUEN thanks to his initiatives. Informing Mr. Özhan about the Turkic associations within FUEN TAG, Habip Oğlu said that the first FUEN TAG meeting was held in 2014 in Ankara while the second one was organised in 2015 in Baku. He told that the third meeting will be conducted this year in the

German capital, Berlin with the backing of FUEN Working Group of German Minorities. Habip Oğlu explained that they were especially focusing on the urgent problems of Turkish Minority of Western Thrace, Rhodes and Kos Turks, Meskhetian Turks and Crimean Tatars as FUEN TAG and further informed about the works undertaken at international platforms of Parliamentary Assembly of Council of Europe (PACE), Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the UN. Habip Oğlu stated that one of the objectives of FUEN TAG was to bring together the Turkic communities/minorities in Turkic geography under FUEN, with a special attention to the Balkan region, and help them raise their voices harder at international arena. Listening carefully to the explanations of Habip Oğlu, Mr. Özhan expressed his gratitude for the short briefing and stated that the efforts in favour of Turkic communities/minorities were invaluable.



# Young ABTTF attended the YEN Youth Leader Seminar



Many youth organizations representing different minorities in Europe took part in the seminar entitled "Breaking the walls".

The Young Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) attended the Youth Leader Seminar organised by the Youth of European Nationalities (YEN) from 26 September to 2 October 2016. The Young ABTTF Spokesperson and Former YEN Chair Fatma Reşit participated in the seminar in Burgenland that was organised by the youth association of Croats "Hrvatski akademski klub (HAK)" and the youth association of Carinthia Slovenians "Klub slovenskih študentk in študentov na Dunaju (KSŠŠD)".

The official inauguration of the seminar entitled "Breaking the walls" took place on 26 September in the city centre of Livka/Lockenhaus. YEN Chair Britta Tästensen greeted the participants at the official inauguration where the Mayor of Livka Christian Vlasich was also present. On the first evening, the traditional exchange market took place where participants had the opportunity to introduce their minority and region while tasting the traditional food of hosting Burgenland Croats and Carinthia Slovenians and listening music.

The attendees visited the Austrian Parliament in Vienna on the third day of the seminar. A panel was organised in the parliament with the participation of the

representatives from all 6 political parties where the issues of the current legal state of Carinthia Slovenians and Burgenland Croats, bilingual street signs, improvement of minority language education and the financial support to the associations working on minorities were discussed. After paying a courtesy visit to the offices of hosting associations in Vienna, participants took part in the flash mob event with the theme "Diversity connects".

The participants held 4 workshops on different topics on the fourth day. At the workshop on minority languages, Young ABTTF Spokesperson Fatma Reşit talked about the current situation of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace while informing the participants about problems in the field of bilingual education and the fight of the associations that were closed on the grounds of using the word "Turk" in their names. A panel was organised in the evening of the fourth day with the participation of persons who have taken posts at YEN Board in the past where the former board members including Former YEN Chair Fatma Reşit replied the questions on YEN's works and activities.

\*Image: [www.facebook.com/yeni.org](http://www.facebook.com/yeni.org)

## ABTTF Newsletter

The ABTTF Newsletter in four languages, namely in Turkish, English, Greek and German, is celebrating its twelfth year.

The ABTTF Newsletter, in which the matters of grave concern to the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace, recent developments and current events in Western Thrace and Greece, in particular pertaining to the minority issues and policies, international activities and lobbying of ABTTF aimed at obtaining solutions for the for the problems of the Turkish minority through democracy and peace and information on the activities of the associations of the Turkish minority throughout Europe and the world are dealt with, is being followed with great interest not only by Western Thrace Turks, but also by large parts of the public.

To have more information on subscription to the ABTTF Newsletter, please do not hesitate to contact us.

## ABTTF

### Avrupa Batı Trakya Türk Federasyonu

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