



# 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)

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## ABTTF elected its new presidium



With the elections, the Presidium of the 21st legislative period along with the Audit and Disciplinary Boards were elected to govern ABTTF for the next four years.

The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europa (ABTTF) realised its 21st Ordinary General Assembly meeting on Saturday 23 October 2021. Within the framework of the measures implemented in the fight against the new type of coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic, the new president and vice presidents of ABTTF and new members of the audit and disciplinary boards were elected as a result of the elections held at the General Assembly meeting held in Giessen, Germany with the participation of the dele-

gates from the ABTTF member associations according to the 3G rule (the obligation to have been vaccinated, recovered from the disease or proof of a negative test).

**Habip Oğlu: “As ABTTF, we will continue to defend the just cause of the Western Thrace Turks with the same tenacity and determination”**

The ABTTF 21st Ordinary General Assembly Meeting began with a minute's silence in memory of first and foremost the late Dr. Sadık Ahmet, leader of the Turkish community in Western Thrace along with all those who served the Western Thrace Turkish cause.

### CONTENTS

ABTTF elected its new presidium **pages 1-2**



We will show our presence in Athens with strength! **page 3**



21st period ABTTF Presidium determined its distribution of roles **page 4**



ABTTF paid a working visit to Athens **page 5**



ABTTF attended the 2021 European Regional Forum on Minorities **page 6**



Western Thrace Turkish delegation attended OSCE conference **page 7**



ABTTF attended the OSCE Human Dimension Seminar **page 8**



Hate crimes targeting the Turkish community in Western Thrace included within the OSCE 2020 Hate Crimes Report **page 9**



The Greek political parties are again in a hurry to collect the votes of the Turkish community in Western Thrace before the elections! **page 10**



Greece among the ten countries with the most complaints against it at the ECtHR **page 11**



There is still no Muslim cemetery in Athens **page 11**



Arbitrary investigations and trials as a means of political repression against muftis elected by the Western Thrace Turks **page 12**





Following the minute's silence, ABTTTF President Halit Habip Oğlu delivered the opening remarks of the meeting. In his speech, Habip Oğlu stated that the autonomous primary schools belonging to the Turkish community in Western Thrace are closing one by one every year, citing economic and financial measures, noting that in the 2021-2022 school year, the total number of Turkish primary schools in Western Thrace has fallen to 103. Furthermore, Habip Oğlu noted that the muftis elected by the Turkish community in Western Thrace are subjected to arbitrary investigations and trials as a means of political repression and intimidation, and that the Turkish identity of the Turkish community in Western Thrace is denied by Greece, and that the associations bearing the word 'Turkish' are still remaining closed despite the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) judgments. Stating that the 1923 Lausanne Peace Treaty granted the rights to the Turkish community in Western Thrace in

Greece and the Greek Orthodox minority in Turkey on the basis of reciprocity, Habip Oğlu indicated that although Turkey has taken positive steps towards the Greek Orthodox minority, the rights and freedoms of the Turkish community in Western Thrace in Greece have been taken away over the years and its educational and religious autonomy has been obliterated. Reminding that ABTTTF, founded in 1988, today defends the just cause of the Turkish community in Western Thrace within the framework of the international platforms through its headquarters and its Brussels and Athens offices and raises its issues, Habip Oğlu stressed that ABTTTF will continue to fight with the same tenacity and determination. Habip Oğlu ended his remarks by thanking all the delegates who attended the general assembly meeting despite the extraordinary conditions caused by the coronavirus pandemic in daily life. With the votes of all the delegates attending ABTTTF 21st Ordinary General Assembly Meeting, Solidarity Association of Western Thrace Turks in Giessen Member Rıdvan Hasan was elected Council Board Chair and Culture and Solidarity Association of Western Thrace Turks in Viersen Member Fatma Kalekoğlu along with ABTTTF Head Office Manager K. Engin Soyylmaz were elected as Council Board secretaries.



The General Assembly meeting continued with the reading and discussion of the 20th period activities report by Head Office Manager K. Engin Soyylmaz, the 20th period treasury report by ABTTTF Vice President Sebahattin Mümin and the 20th audit report by ABTTTF Audit Board President Halit Haşim. Immediately afterwards, ABTTTF 20th Period Presi-

um was discharged by a majority vote.

## ABTTTF 21st Period President and Vice Presidents along with Audit and Disciplinary Boards were elected

The elections were held following the introductory speeches realised by the candidates. Halit Habip Oğlu, who stood for the ABTTTF 21st Period presidential election as the only candidate, was re-elected as ABTTTF President for four years with the votes of all the delegates.



As a result of the elections, ABTTTF 21st Period Presidium, Audit and Disciplinary Boards were formed as follows:

### ABTTTF 21st Period Presidium

President: Halit Habip Oğlu  
Vice President: Nabi İbrahimcik  
Vice President: Serdar Kalekoğlu  
Vice President: Mehmet Hüseyin  
Vice President: Aydın Ahmet  
Vice President: Mustafa Kasap  
Vice President: Sami Yusuf  
Vice President: Sebahattin Mümin  
Vice President: Vedat Arap  
Vice President: Fuat Ali  
Vice President: Ali Osman

### ABTTTF 21st Period Audit Board

Halit Haşim  
Şerif Şerif  
Yasin Hasan

### ABTTTF 21st Period Disciplinary Board

İsmail Apti Oğlu  
Erol Haşim  
Halit Faik Oğlu

The first meeting of the 21st Period Presidium which is composed of 11 members will determine the distribution of duties among the Vice Presidents in the coming days.

Following the elections, two separate texts regarding the autonomous status of the Turkish community in Western Thrace with respect to education and the empowerment of its political struggle were unanimously adopted by the ABTTTF General Assembly.

# We will show our presence in Athens with strength!

Dear readers,

As the ABTTF 20th Period Presidium, we held our Ordinary General Assembly on 23 October 2021 to account for the four years of our term.

We elected our 21st period administration with the vote in the general assembly organised within the framework of the measures implemented in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic.

Since our term of office is four years, we have carried out a lot of work at the international level during our tenure as ABTTF.

Along with our office in Brussels, we have opened a representation in Athens and have made important initiatives at the level of our country.

Although the last year and a half of these four years were under the conditions brought about by the pandemic, we quickly adapted to these changing conditions and we participated in international meetings online as international meetings were moved on the internet.

As ABTTF, we have understood these changing conditions correctly.

As the Turkish community in Western Thrace, we have held online panels to draw the attention of Athens and the international community as regards our freedom to form associations for which we have been struggling for several years.

During this period, we were in constant communication with our base and

informed our associations during the pandemic.

In addition, during this period, ABTTF provided a total of 13,000 euros in financial support to our associations for their activities to protect and maintain our customs and traditions.

I restored trust by being elected president in the elections that we realised at the General Assembly and my 8 friends who are part of the Presidium also restored trust by also being re-elected altogether.

Moreover, it is very gratifying that we have also two young friends that are now part of the Presidium for the first time.

In addition, after the elections, we unanimously adopted two separate texts on the autonomous status of the Turkish community in Western Thrace as regards education and with respect to the strengthening of its political struggle.

In the 21st period, we will continue to be the voice of our community at the level of the international organisations as the international representative of the Turkish community in Western Thrace.

As the 21st Period Presidium, together with our headquarters based in Germany and our representative offices in Brussels and Athens, we aim to show our presence strongly in Athens through our Athens Office, which we brought into being with the decision we took in the 20th Period.



We want to bring our 30 years of experience at the international level to Athens.

Indeed, we do acknowledge that the solution to our problems in our country where we live resides in Athens.

As the first act of the new period, we will make a working visit to Athens on 16-17 November 2021.

In addition, we will continue to cooperate with our non-governmental organisations based in Western Thrace and work with these organisations that are operating in different fields to support them at the national and international levels.

Because we know that strength comes from unity!

Yours sincerely,

Halit Habip Oğlu  
ABTTF President

# 21st period ABTTF Presidium determined its distribution of roles

The President and the Vice Presidents of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) were elected as a result of the elections held at the 21st Ordinary General Assembly meeting held in Giessen, Germany on 23 October 2021, within the framework of measures implemented to combat the new type of coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic.



The 21st period ABTTF Presidium, which took office in this election, distributed the roles among the Vice Presidents at its first meeting held on 30 October 2021.

The distribution of roles set out at the meeting at ABTTF Head Office in Witten, Germany, is as follows:

Nabi İbrahimcik: Vice President in charge of Economy and Development

Sami Yusuf: Vice President in charge of Finance

Mustafa Kasap: Vice President in charge of Social Activities

Mehmet Hüseyin: Vice President in charge of Sports

Sebahattin Mümin: Vice President in charge of Organisation

Serdar Kalekoğlu: Vice President in charge of Education

Aydın Ahmet: Vice President in charge of Public Relations

Vedat Arap: Vice President in charge of Cultural Activities

FuatAli: Vice President in charge of Youth

Ali Osman: Vice President in charge of Press and Publications

ABTTF President Halit Habip Oğlu and 10 Vice Presidents will carry out their work for the next four years according to this distribution of roles.

2022 activities were discussed

At the meeting, the ABTTF Presidium discussed the roadmap that ABTTF plans to carry out in the 21st four-year period from 2021 to 2025. Within this framework, the Presidium first discussed the international initiatives in 2021, which are projected to be carried out in 2022 within the framework of a short-term plan.

In addition, the Presidium discussed the support granted to ABTTF member associations implemented in the previous period with respect to social and cultural activities of the Western Thrace Turks living in Germany during the important national, cultural and religious days and months. The Presidium indicated that after the risks of the pandemic will have disappeared, they wished to continue to support the member associations as they were before the pandemic.

## 2022 activities were discussed



# ABTTF paid a working visit to Athens

The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) paid a working visit to Athens, Greece, on 16-17 November 2021. President Halit Habip Oğlu and Vice-President Mustafa Kasap, who travelled to Athens as the first act of the ABTTF 21st Presidium, had a series of meetings within the framework of the working visit in Athens which is the actual place to find long lasting solutions to the issues of the Turkish community in Western Thrace, along with Nihan Ayan from ABTTF Athens Office.



## The discrimination and rights violations faced by the Turkish community in Western Thrace were discussed

The ABTTF delegation met on Tuesday 16 November with Xanthi KINAL MP Burhan Baran and Maria Gianakaki, former MP and former Secretary General of the Greek Ministry of Justice, Transparency and Human

Rights. During the talks, the problems of the Turkish community in Western Thrace and the discrimination and rights violations suffered were discussed and an exchange of views with respect to the latest developments in Greece was realised.

The ABTTF delegation met on Wednesday 17 November with Anna Stamou, Public Relations Specialist of

the Muslim Association of Greece. Current issues concerning the Turkish community in Western Thrace and Muslims living in Greece were assessed during the meeting.

The ABTTF delegation also paid a courtesy visit to the Embassy of the Republic of Turkey in Athens, the motherland of the Turkish community in Western Thrace, as part of the working visit.



# ABTTF attended the 2021 European Regional Forum on Minorities

In its presentation at the Forum, ABTTF cited examples of structural and systematic discrimination against the Turkish community in Western Thrace in Greece.

The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) representing the Turkish community of Western Thrace participated to the European Regional Forum on Minorities which was held online on 12-13 October 2021 under the heading of “Conflict Prevention and the Protection of the Human Rights Minorities”.

ABTTF International Affairs Director Melek Kirmacı Arık attended the Forum which was held by the Budapest based Tom Lantos Institute which is also one of the joint organisations of the Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN) and at the initiative of United Nations (UN) Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues Prof. Fernand de Varennes.

## The Turkish community in Western Thrace is being discriminated against structurally and systematically

In the opening panel which was held under the moderation of Tom Lantos Institute Director Anna-Mária Biró, Ministry of European and International Affairs of Austria Legal Adviser Ambassador Helmut Tichy, OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities Kairat Abdrakhmanov, UN Office of High Commissioner for Human Rights Regional Representative for Central Asia Ryszard Komenda, Armands Pupols from the UN Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia, UN Office of High Commissioner for Human Rights Chief of Indigenous Peoples and Minorities Section Paulo David and UN Spe-



cial Rapporteur on Minority Issues Prof. Fernand de Varennes underlined the importance of protecting the rights of minorities in order to prevent conflict in multicultural and multi-ethnic communities.



Intervening in the thematic session titled “Substantive root causes of contemporary conflicts involving minorities”, ABTTF indicated that the Turkish community in Western Thrace is perceived in Greece as a threat to national security and public order and that it is seen as motherland Turkey’s Trojan horse in Turkey

and that as a result of this, the Turkish community in Western Thrace is faced with structural and systematic discrimination. Referring to the letter it sent to the UN Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues in September 2021, ABTTF added that as a result of this systematic discrimination, the current situation in the areas of recognition of ethnic identity, freedom of association and freedom of religion or belief is getting worse.

In the second day of the Forum and in the thematic forum where the gaps in human rights mechanisms to protect minorities and prevent conflicts was addressed, FUEN President and Member of European Parliament (MEP) Loránt Vincze, Petra Roter from the University of Ljubljana, Marina Elbakidze from the Caucasus Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development and Sardorbek Abdukhalilov from the Spravedlivost Human Rights Organisation assessed the gaps in human rights mechanisms, including those of the UN, the Council of Europe and the European Union (EU) to protect minorities and prevent conflicts. The speakers noted that a general protection mechanism is lacking with respect to the protection of national minorities, noting that diversity management is needed through minority rights.

The 2021 European Regional Forum on Minority Issues ended with the reading and sharing of the recommendations regarding the thematic sessions with the participants and the closing statements of UN Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues Prof. Fernand de Varennes.



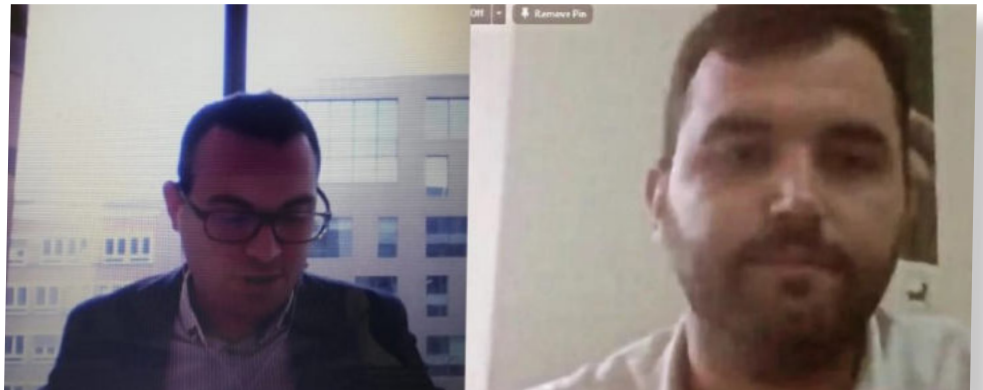
# Western Thrace Turkish delegation attended OSCE conference

The Western Thrace Turkish delegation which was comprised of ABTTF and WTMUGA representatives explained the violation of the freedom of assembly of the Turkish community in Western Thrace and the ECtHR judgments as regards the Western Thrace Turkish associations which Greece has not executed for the past 13 years.

The Turkish community in Western represented by the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) and the Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association (WTMUGA) attended the conference titled "ODIHR: 3 decades and ready for the future: Democracy, human rights and security in the OSCE" organised in a hybrid format by the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) on 14-15 October 2021.

Deniz Servantie from ABTTF and Human Rights Experts Expert Kerem Abdurahimoğlu from WTMUGA attended the conference which was organised at the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) jointly by OSCE/ODIHR, Swedish OSCE Chairpersonship and host country Poland.

OSCE participating States, OSCE institutions, intergovernmental institutions and representatives from civil society organisations along with researchers attended the conference. In the conference which began with the opening remarks of OSCE/ODIHR Director Matteo



Meccaci, OSCE Chairperson-in-Office and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Sweden Anna Lind and Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Poland Szymon Sękowski vel Sęk, ODIHR's last 3 decades was assessed and challenges regarding the new period were tackled.



Taking the floor during the session titled "Promoting and protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms together" on 15 October, ABTTF indicated that Greece denies the ethnic Turkish identity of the Turkish community in Western Thrace and that associations bearing the word 'Turkish' are not allowed and further noted that that the judgment of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) as regards the Xanthi Turkish Union which was closed in 1986 has not been executed by Greece for the past 13 years. ABTTF further called upon Greece to immediately execute ECtHR judgments as regards the Western Thrace Turkish associations and to ratify the Council

of Europe's Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities.

Intervening in the same session, WTMUGA noted that the Greek Court of Cassation (Areios Pagos) recently rejected XTU's appeal for the restoration of its official legal entity and further stated that the decision of the Court of Cassation denied the freedom of association of the members of XTU which constitutes the oldest association of the Turkish community in Western Thrace. WTMUGA called upon the OSCE to encourage Greece to recognise the ethnic Turkish identity of the Turkish community in Western Thrace and respect ECtHR judgments.



Using its right of reply, the Permanent Representation of Greece to the OSCE indicated that Greece only recognises a "Muslim minority" in Western Thrace, adding that the minority has many rights and is not discriminated against.

# ABTTF attended the OSCE Human Dimension Seminar

The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) participated in the Human Dimension Seminar entitled “Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Girls” organised by the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) on 16-17 November 2021. Deniz Servantie from ABTTF Brussels Office participated in the seminar which took place in a hybrid format.

Starting with the opening speeches of OSCE/ODIHR Director Matteo Meccaci and Permanent Representative of Sweden to the OSCE Chairperson of OSCE Ulrike Fulnered, the relevant OSCE commitments and the implementation of international human rights standards to prevent violence against women and girls which constitutes a serious violation of human rights were discussed during the seminar.

Intervening in the second working group of the seminar entitled “Violence against women in political



and public life”, ABTTF stated that the Cultural Association of Turkish Women of Rodopi, founded by women from the Turkish community in Western Thrace, and the Cultural

Association of Turkish Women of Xanthi are still not registered by national courts, noting that Greece has not yet executed the 2008 judgment of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) regarding the Cultural Association of Turkish Women of Rodopi which was established in 2001. ABTTF underscored that as a result of the non-registration of the abovementioned associations on grounds of the word ‘Turkish’ in their names, Western Thrace Turkish women living in the region faced an obstacle in their participation to public life. ABTTF called on Greek authorities to provide equal opportunities for all citizens, regardless of ethnic or religious identity and gender.

Using its right of reply, the Permanent Representation of Greece to the OSCE reiterated the Greek state’s official view regarding the Turkish community in Western Thrace, indicating that Greece recognises only a “Muslim minority” in Western Thrace and that freedom of association is protected by the Greek constitution.



**2021 Human Dimension Seminar**

**on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Girls**



# Hate crimes targeting the Turkish community in Western Thrace included within the OSCE 2020 Hate Crimes Report

The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) published the 2020 Hate Crimes Report. The section related to Greece in the report, which includes information on hate crime incidents in states in the OSCE region and statistics on them, also includes hate motivated attacks and hate speech targeting the Turkish community in Western Thrace reported by the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF).

The 2020 Hate Crimes Report, which provides official data from the OSCE's 42 participating States, includes information on hate incidents in 46 Participating States reported by 136 non-governmental organizations, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and OSCE missions.

OSCE/ODIHR Director Matteo Mecacci underlined that hate crime is a human rights abuse, noting that many states in the OSCE region have taken concrete steps against hate crimes, but most of them still remain unreported, unrecorded or unprosecuted, leaving victims without support or redress.

ABTTF had earlier issued a written statement in preparation for the OSCE 2020 Hate Crimes Report, reporting hate-based attacks and hate speech targeting the Turkish community in Western Thrace in Greece.

The report notes that on 12 May 2020, an unidentified person or persons attacked a fountain built by a philanthropist from the Turkish community in



Western Thrace in Nimfea (Yanıköy) which is linked to Komotini, smashing the marble slab with the name of the benefactor and the date of the fountain's construction, and spray-painting anti-Turkish insults on the fountain wall.

mosque in the Diomidia (Hemitli) village linked to Avdira (Bulustra) Municipality in Xanthi province was destroyed by unidentified persons or persons, adding that on 25 September 2020, the association founded by Turks who migrated from Western Thrace to Imathia province was attacked and the windows of the association building were broken.

The report also notes that on 27 November 2020, 'A Good Turk is a Dead Turk' and other threats were written in the mirror of the elevator of the apartment where Mufti of Xanthi Ahmet Mete which was elected by the Western Thrace Turks lives.

Please click on the following link for more information on the section related to Greece of the OSCE 2020 Hate Crimes Report: <https://hatecrime.osce.org/greece?year=2020>



Moreover, the report indicates that on 16 July 2020, the minaret of the historic

# The Greek political parties are again in a hurry to collect the votes of the Turkish community in Western Thrace before the elections!

ABTTF President: “We make up almost half the population in Western Thrace, but we are constantly treated as stepchildren by our country. All the problems will be solved once our country sees us as equal before the law. Indeed, strength comes from unity, and we can only overcome these challenges, whether they are political or economic, together. Mutual goodwill and trust are also key to this success.”

The leader of Greece’s main opposition party SYRIZA Alexis Tsipras visited the Rodopi province in Western Thrace on 11 November 2021. Nikos Androulakis, a candidate for the chairmanship of the KINAL Party was also in Komotini at the same time.



Tsipras began his visit to the Rodopi province from Iasmos (Yassıköy) and later moved to Komotini. In his evening speech in Komotini, Tsipras also referred to issues pertaining to the mufti office, minority education and foundations that directly concern the Turkish community in Western Thrace. Tsipras indicated that SYRIZA supports and will continue to support the democratic reforms needed to strengt-



hen the rights of the Muslim minority.

Androulakis, a candidate for the chairmanship of the KINAL Party, told at a news conference in Komotini that the ruling New Democracy Party (NDP) had made great mistakes with respect to the pandemic, the economy, national issues and migrants, and that the SYRIZA Party was not a serious alternative, urging citizens to participate in the elections and have a say in the future of KINAL.

A statement by the NDP Rodopi County Election District Management Committee regarding Tsipras’ visit to the Rodopi Province underscored that Tsipras had denigrated the NDP government with his statements and that in no way he managed to convince the people of Rodopi.

“On Thursday 11 November, the leaders of the opposition SYRIZA and KINAL parties visited our region. As always, they outlined their abundant promises before the elections. However, when they come to power, they immediately forget these promises and implement their own agenda totally. In-

deed, it may not be comparable to that of NDP, but it cannot be said that the policies and practices of these parties also protect and advance the rights of the Turkish community in Western Thrace. As for the NDP Rodop regional government, it is understood from the words it used in the statement it released as regards the visit of Tsipras that it is already in a state of panic ahead of the elections. If the NDP regional government told the truth instead of making such statements, it would be more credible to the public. We make up almost half the population in Western Thrace, but we are constantly treated as stepchildren by our country. All the problems will be solved once our country sees us as equal before the law. Indeed, strength comes from unity, and we can only overcome these challenges, whether they are political or economic, together. Mutual goodwill and trust are also key to this success”, said Halit Habip Oğlu, President of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF).

\*Image: [www.protothema.gr](http://www.protothema.gr), [www.foni-rodopis.gr](http://www.foni-rodopis.gr)

## Greece among the ten countries with the most complaints against it at the ECtHR

ABTTF President: “As the judge from our country at the ECtHR, Ioannis Ktistakis, made it clear, our country should execute immediately ECtHR judgments against it as regards the Bekir-Ousta and Others Group of Cases where Western Thrace Turkish associations are included and thus end a 13-year long weakness for itself.”

The European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) judge Ioannis Ktistakis told an online panel that ECtHR judgments against Greece, which it has not executed for more than a decade, include also those related to associations belonging to the Turkish community in Western Thrace.



According to an article in *Gündem* newspaper, Ktistakis noted that Greece is among the top ten countries in the ECtHR with the most cases against it, noting that for Greece, the failure to execute the ECHR judgments against it by the national courts is a major weakness.

“ECtHR judge Ioannis Ktistakis reveals in numbers how weak our

country’s ECtHR scorecard is, saying it is improper of our country that is an EU Member State. It is important that this fact, which we have been expressing for years but which our country persistently ignores, is clearly expressed by a judge from our country at the ECtHR. Our country should execute immediately ECtHR judgments against it as regards the Bekir-Ousta and Others Group of Cases where Western Thrace Turkish associations are included and thus end a 13-year long weakness for itself”, said Halit Habip Oğlu, President of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF).

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

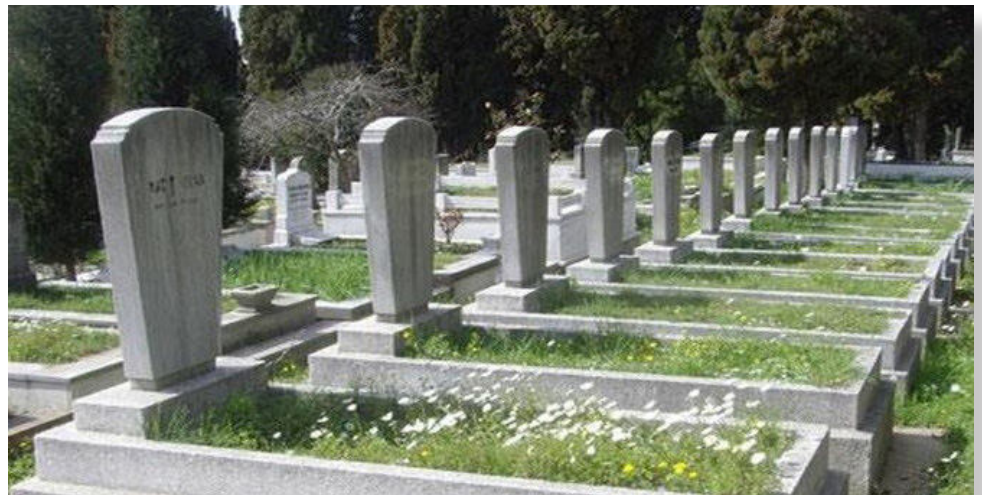
## There is still no Muslim cemetery in Athens

ABTTF President: “Reminding our country Greece of its obligations in the field of freedom of religion and worship, we invite the Greek authorities to respond positively immediately to the requests of Western Thrace Turks living in Thessaloniki for mosques and cemeteries.”

There is still no Muslim cemetery in Greece’s capital Athens. In 2005, a land was allocated for the opening of a Muslim cemetery in the Attica region, but no action has been taken by the Greek authorities so far. The cemetery application continues to be on the dusty shelves of the Greek Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs.

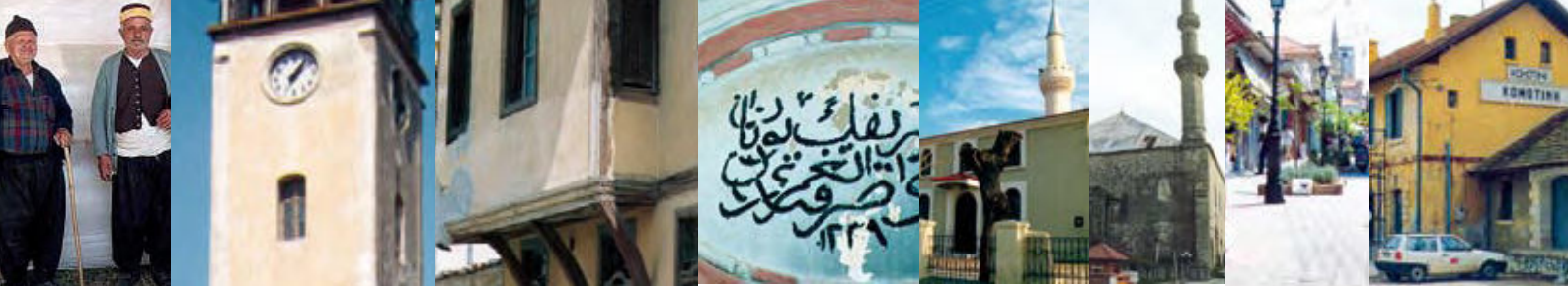
The Union of Muslims of Greece also criticised the Ministry’s failure to take any steps to open a Muslim cemetery in Athens, home to hundreds of thousands of Muslims.

“The fact that there is still no Muslim ce-



metery in Athens, a capital city where hundreds of thousands of Muslims live, is shameful for our country’s democracy and proof that our country has a long way to go in fulfilling its obligations in the field of religious freedom. As in Athens, there is no Muslim cemetery or even a mosque open for worship in the second largest city of our country Thessaloniki, where thousands of Western Thrace Turks live. Muslims living in Athens and Thessaloniki are forced to bury their bodies in Western Thra-

ce which is the only region in Greece with Muslim cemeteries or even in their home countries. This situation creates tremendous problems for the funeral holders both financially and spiritually. The authorities of our country must immediately take steps to open Muslim cemeteries in both cities and thus stop being more silent at the request of thousands of Muslims living in Athens and Thessaloniki”, said Halit Habip Oğlu, President of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF).



## Arbitrary investigations and trials as a means of political repression against muftis elected by the Western Thrace Turks

ABTTF President: "While the ECtHR has a judgment against our country on a similar issue, it is clear that the presentation of our mufti Ibrahim Şerif before the court on charges of 'usurpation of office' is based on political motives and is a means of intimidating our community."

The hearing of the case against Rodopi Mufti Ibrahim Şerif who was elected by Western Thrace Turks which was opened against him on grounds of 'usurpation of office' as a result of a mass circumcision celebration to which children belonging to the Turkish community in Western Thrace had attended in the neighbourhood of Alankuyu in Komotini in 2016 and where Şerif had read prayers from the Quran which was initially planned for 7 October 2021 at the Thessaloniki Criminal Court of First Instance was adjourned to 8 December 2021 as the witness of the allegations was not present in the court.

The case had been opened by the prosecutor in 2017 based on the allegation that the Mufti Şerif had committed a crime of 'usurpation of office' under the pretention of being an official mufti by reading prayers during a mass circumcision celebration.



"As is known, our Rodopi Mufti Ibrahim Şerif has been accused of 'usurpation of office' in the past years, and our mufti has applied to the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) as a result of the sentence he had in this case in our country Greece. In its decision in 1999, the ECtHR ruled that our country had violated Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights regarding freedom of religion and conscience with the sentence it gave to our mufti. In its judgment, the

ECtHR stated that the national courts could not adequately base the crime of 'usurpation of office', as well as that it is a necessity in all democratic societies to protect all kinds of differences and tolerate them, and in this context, each community is free to determine its own religious leader, and that the sentence given to our mufti prevented him from fulfilling his duties as a religious leader. Our mufti attended the circumcision ceremony as a mufti elected by our community and his behaviour is in accordance with the ECtHR judgment related to him that was given earlier. Therefore, while the ECtHR has a judgment against our country on a similar issue, it is clear that the re-appealing of our mufti to the court on charges of 'usurpation of office' is based on political motives and is a means of intimidating and our community. Furthermore, it is clear that if our mufti reapplies to the ECtHR as a result of a possible sentence in this latest case against him, the court will deliver a judgment similar to the ECtHR's previous judgment against our country. As ABTTF, we stand by and support our mufti throughout the entire legal process", said Halit Habip Ođlu, President of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF).

\*Image: www.birlikgazetesi.org

### ABTTF Newsletter

ABTTF Newsletter, which has been distributed since May 2005, is published in Turkish, Greek, English and German.

ABTTF Newsletter covers matters of grave concern to the Turkish community in Western Thrace, current developments in Western Thrace and Greece, ABTTF's international activities and lobbying as well as the activities of ABTTF member associations and plays an important role in promoting the Turkish community in Western Thrace.

ABTTF Newsletter is sent to homes by mail and can also be obtained from our member associations.

In order to receive ABTTF Newsletter by mail and for further information on the newsletter:

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### ABTTF

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