



The 67th FUEN Congress was held in Hungary



The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF), representing the Turkish community in Western Thrace, attended the 67th Congress of the Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN) on 7-10 September 2023.

ABTTF President and FUEN Working Group of Turkic Minorities/Communities (TAG) Spokesman Halit Habip Oğlu and ABTTF Vice President and FUEN Vice President Nabi Ibrahimcik were in Pécs/Fünfkirchen/Pečuh, Hungary for the 67th edition of the Congress, which is the largest meeting uni-

ting national minorities and linguistic communities living in Europe under the same roof.

The German minority in Hungary was the host of this year's Congress, which was attended by approximately 200 people from 26 countries and 50 member organisations. At the Congress, where the situation of German and other minorities in Hungary was discussed in a broad framework with panel sessions and visits to local minority educational institutions, the current developments with respect to the minority policies in Europe were assessed.

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In his speech at the Congress, FUEN President and Member of the European Parliament (MEP) Loránt Vincze indicated that Hungary has an important place in the history of FUEN because the first congress after the fall of the Iron Curtain was held in Budapest and that with this congress, FUEN was able to expand to Central and Eastern Europe. Noting that FUEN has become the largest minority rights defender organisation in Europe, Vincze further added that FUEN is now a leading organisation for European and international organisations.



FUEN's activities in 2023 were evaluated at the FUEN Assembly of Delegates

FUEN's activities in 2023 were discussed at the FUEN Assembly of Delegates held on Saturday, 9 September. In this context, ABTTF Vice President Nabi İbrahimcik, in his quality as FUEN Vice President, and ABTTF President Halit Habip Oğlu, in his quality as FUEN TAG Spokesman, informed the delegates about the activities realised in 2023.

FUEN calls on Europe to strengthen mechanisms for the protection of national minorities

At the Assembly of Delegates, where draft resolutions submitted by the member organisations were discussed and voted on, the attention was drawn to the need to protect the national minorities in Ukraine as the main resolution of the FUEN Congress. In the second part of the resolution, it was requested to strengthen the mechanisms between policymakers and national minorities throughout Europe with a broad perspective and to establish a permanent advisory body, especially under the auspices of the European Parliament.

The issues of the Western Thrace Turks and the Turks in Rhodes and Kos were tackled at the agenda of FUEN

At the FUEN Assembly of Delegates, where ten resolutions were voted on, the draft resolution submitted jointly by the Western Thrace Turkish delegation composed of ABTTF, WTMUGA and the FEP Party representing the Turkish community in Western Thrace was also adopted. In the resolution, examples regarding the othering and stigma of the Turkish community in Western Thrace in politics and media after the first general elections held in Greece on 21 May 2023 were cited, and it was demanded that the structural and systematic discrimination caused by the marginalisation and stigmatisation of Western Thra-



ce Turks be ended. In the resolution, which demanded respect for the free will and right to vote of the voters belonging to the Turkish community in Western Thrace, it was demanded from Greece to prevent the spread of hate speech in politics and media.

The resolution presented by FUEN member Rhodes, Kos and the Dodecanese Turks Culture and Solidarity Association (ROISDER) was also adopted at the Congress. In the resolution, it was requested from Greece to acknowledge the Muslim-Turkish presence in Rhodes and Kos, to reopen schools with bilingual education and to stop the destruction of mosques, tombs and cemeteries.

Five more organisations joined the FUEN family

As a result of the voting in the Assembly of Delegates, Bretons from France, Germans from Switzerland, Rusyns from Hungary, and German organisations from Serbia joined the FUEN family. In addition, the Friuli Philological Society from the Friuli-Venezia Giulia region of Italy joined FUEN as a new member organisation with a supporting member status.

The 2024 FUEN Congress will be held in Germany

With the decision taken by the Assembly of Delegates, the 2024 FUEN Congress will be held in Husum/Hüsem, Germany, hosted by the Northern Frisians on 19-22 September 2024.

The only EU country that does not recognise national minorities: Greece

Dear readers,

We are approaching the end of another year.

After a period of uncertainty and anxiety due to the pandemic, life has returned to its normal flow. So, we went back to our old busy schedule.

If I have to allude to our recent activities, I would like to mention that we paid a working visit to Strasbourg in October, parallel to the autumn session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe.

We were in Western Thrace in the first week of November. Our Turkic brothers from different geographies, from the Caucasus to the Balkans, came to our region for the annual meeting of the Working Group of Turkic Minorities/Communities (TAG) of the Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN), of which I am the spokesman. In the two-day programme, our Turkic brothers met with the representatives of our community in Komotini and Xanthi and listened to them about our community and our issues.

I was in Athens right after. The hearing of the claim for damages we filed against the news website newsbreak.gr, which published defamatory and false news about our Federation in 2021, took place in a high court, and our legal struggle continues.

Last week we were in Strasbourg for the meeting of the Intergroup on Traditional Minorities, National Communities and Languages at the European Parliament (EP). Our Federation, representing the Western Thrace Turks, and the Rhodes, Kos and the Dodecanese Turks Culture and Solidarity Association, representing the Rhodes and Kos Turks, conveyed the issues in the field of education in mother tongue and education to the Members of the European Parliament.

This week, we will be in Geneva for the UN Forum on Minority Issues, this time we will convey our issues on the UN platform.

In the first part of the meeting at the European Parliament in Strasbourg, the representative of the Ladin minority in Italy explained how the Ladins, while on the verge of assimilation, preserved their language and identity with the cooperation of the German minority in the region and the support of the Italian government. The representative of the Ladin minority said

that although they only have a population of 30 thousand today, their population has increased compared to the past and this is an exceptional situation among minority groups in the world!

In addition, Ladins receive education in Ladin language in all schools in the different provinces where they live within the Autonomous Province South Tyrol in Italy. More interestingly, in all schools in the places where the Ladins live, not only members of the Ladin minority but also everyone living in that region learns the Ladin language.

Wonderful!

At the FUEN Congress held in Pécs, Hungary in September, we learned that there are 13 officially recognised minorities, including the Greek minority, in Hungary, which became a member of the EU during the great wave of enlargement.

The Greek minority is the smallest minority in Hungary in terms of population; according to 2011 data, their population is only 4,700. However, Greeks have their own kindergarten, primary school and secondary school, as well as their own cultural house, library, cultural institute, research institute and theatre. Like other recognised national minorities in Hungary, the Greeks can elect their own nationality delegates to the Hungarian National Assembly every four years.

On the other hand, let's look at Albania, which wants to become a member of the EU. Greeks living in Albania constitute 1 percent of the population in Albania, and according to 2011 official figures, their approximate population is 25 thousand. According to the latest census conducted by the umbrella organisation of the Greek minority, "Democratic Union of the Greek Minority – OMONOIA", it is indicated that the population of Greeks has increased to 287 thousand.

The Greek minority, which is the largest among the 9 minorities in the country, is officially recognised by the state. Greeks are provided with education in both Greek and Albanian in the minority areas; there are also kindergartens, primary/middle schools and high schools where instruction is provided in Greek.

Let's look at the three countries, one of them is Italy, an old member of the EU; the other is Hungary, which became a member of the EU in 2004; Albania is a candidate



country currently negotiating membership negotiations with the EU... The rights of minorities in all three countries are far, far ahead of Greece, which became a member of the EU in 1981 and boasts of being the cradle of democracy!

So why does our country not accept the existence of the Turkish minority that has lived in these lands for centuries? Unfortunately, Greece is the only country in the 27 member EU that, far from recognising national minorities, tries to hide their existence, ignores them, and tries to assimilate them by ignoring them! However, we, the Turks, exist in this land! It's not just the Turks! There are also Macedonians, Vlachs, Cham Albanians and Armenians in this country!

Greece is an EU country, but it is far, far away from the EU's values! With a spoiled attitude, it continues to disregard EU values with the belief that its place in the EU family will not be shaken.

Since this is the case, we will continue to do what we know. We will continue to claim at the international level that the situation in Greece is not at all what our country shows. We will work with the same perseverance, determination and discipline in 2024!

I would like to take this opportunity to wish everyone a happy new year and hope that 2024 will bring health, happiness, peace and well-being to everyone.

Yours sincerely,

Halit Habip Oğlu
ABTTF President

The 9th Annual Meeting of FUEN TAG was hosted by the Turkish community in Western Thrace

The hosts of the meeting, the Western Thrace Turkish delegation, consisting of the representatives from ABTTF, FEP Party and WTMUGA, conveyed the current issues of the Turkish community in Western Thrace.

The 9th annual meeting of the Working Group of Turkic Minorities/Communities within the Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN) (TAG), the umbrella organisation of national and autochthonous minorities in Europe, was hosted by the Turkish community in Western Thrace and held in Western Thrace, Greece on 1-4 November 2023.

ABTTF President and FUEN TAG Spokesman Halit Habip Oğlu, ABTTF Vice President and FUEN Vice President Nabi Ibrahimcik attended the meeting organised jointly with the Friendship Equality Peace (FEP) Party and the Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association (WTMUGA) under the coordination of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF). Moreover, ABTTF Vice President Mustafa Kasap and ABTTF International Relations Director Melek Kırmacı Arık and Deniz Servantie from the ABTTF Brussels Office also attended the meetings on behalf of the FUEN TAG Secretariat.

Representatives of Turkic minorities and communities came together at the meeting



from the Balkans to the Caucasus. ABTTF, FEP Party and WTMUGA, representing the Turkish community in Western Thrace; the Public Organisation of Meskhetian Turks “VATAN” representing the Meskhetian Turks; the Kosovo Youth Union Association representing the Turks in Kosovo; the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar People representing the Crimean Tatars (QTMM); the Tatar Democratic Union representing the Romanian Tatars; Kırcaali Turkish Culture and Art Association (TÜRKSAD) representing the Turks in Bulgaria; the Ukrainian Gagauz Union representing the Ukrainian Gagauz people and “Meraz” Association, which protects and develops the Gagauz Language and Culture, representing the Gagauz people in Moldova all attended the meetings.

Representatives from ten Turkic organisations from eight different European countries attended the meeting, which brought together Turkic minorities and communities living in a wide geography

Participants had the opportunity to get to know the Turkish community in Western Thrace and the Western Thrace region closely

Within the framework of the cultural and visit programme hosted by ABTTF, FEP Party and WTMUGA, the participants were received by Aykut Ünal, Consul General of the Republic of Türkiye in Komotini, in the garden of the Consulate General on Thursday, 2 November.

Following the meeting with Consul General Ünal, the participants visited the Office of the Elected Mufti of Komotini, FEP Party Headquarters, WTMUGA Headquarters, Western Thrace Minority Culture and Education Company (PEKEM), Komotini Turkish Youth Union (GTGB) and the Western Thrace Turkish Teachers Union (BTTÖB). The participants, who were informed about the activities and works of the institutions and organisations in question during the visits, thus gathered the chance to examine the issues of the Turkish community in Western Thrace on site.

Following the visits, the participants visited Komotini city centre accompanied by a guide and attended a cultural night event hosted by GTGB in the evening. At the night, BTTÖB Turkish Classical Music Choir delivered a special concert to the participants.

A common road map for 2024 was constituted with the opinions and suggestions of the participants



The participants, who travelled Komotini to Xanthi on Friday, 3 November, first met with the Elected Mufti of Xanthi Mustafa Trampa, and later visited the Xanthi Turkish Union (ITB). During the meetings, the issues faced by the Turkish community in Western Thrace in the field of freedom of religion and freedom of association were discussed, and participants were informed about ITB's 40-year long struggle for their rights and justice.

At the 9th Annual Meeting of FUEN TAG held at WTMUGA Xanthi Cultural Centre in the afternoon, FUEN TAG Spokesman Halit Habip Oğlu and FUEN Vice President Nabi Ibrahimcik gave information

with respect to the latest developments in FUEN and FUEN TAG in the last year.

At the meeting, representatives of the host Western Thrace Turks, Meskhetian Turks, Kosovo Turks, Bulgarian Turks, Crimean Tatars, Romanian Tatars, Ukrainian Gagauz and Moldovan Gagauz conveyed the issues of the Turkic minorities and communities they belong to and the activities of the organisations they represent.

After the meeting, the participants came together at the cultural night hosted by ITB, and the ITB Turkish Classical Music Choir delivered a concert in the evening.

ABTTF paid a working visit to Strasbourg

During the meetings held during the working visit, the current issues of the Turkish community in Western Thrace, especially those related to education and freedom of association were discussed.

The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) paid a working visit to Strasbourg on 9-11 October 2023, in parallel with the Autumn Session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE).

The ABTTF delegation, consisting of ABTTF President Halit Habip Ođlu and ABTTF International Relations Director Melek Kırmacı Arık, expressed the current issues of the Turkish community in Western Thrace in their meetings with PACE members and the Council of Europe bodies. The ABTTF delegation also attended the three-day general assembly meeting of the Council of Europe Conference of International NGOs (CINGO).

During the meetings with politicians and eurocrats, the ABTTF delegation discussed the issues pertaining to the Xanthi Turkish Union, the Cultural Association of Turkish Women of the Prefecture of Rodopi and Evros Prefecture Minority Youth Association in the Bekir-Ousta and Others Group of Cases, which were examined by the Commit-



tee of Ministers of the Council of Europe in its meeting in June 2023 within the scope of freedom of association and it was further stressed that the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) regarding the aforementioned associations have not been executed by Greece for the past fifteen years. Indicating that a lawsuit was filed for the second time requesting the revocation of the registration of the Western Thrace Fenerbahçe Culture and Sports Association, which was established in October 2022, the ABTTF delegation noted that the hearing of the case was held on 6 September 2023 and that the court is expected to announce its decision.

Within the framework of the issues faced by the Turkish community in Western Thrace in the field of education, the ABTTF delegation explained that the primary schools with autonomous status belonging to the Turkish community in Western Thrace are closed by unilateral ministerial decisions under

the pretext of a lack of sufficient pupils, and it was added, in this regard, that with the closure of 9 primary schools in Western Thrace in the 2023-2024 school year, the number of Turkish primary schools in Western Thrace, which was 235 in 1995 dropped to 90 today.

Furthermore, the ABTTF delegation reminded that with the participation of school board members along with student parents, students and representatives of the Turkish community in Western Thrace, an 11-day protest was organised from 18 September to 28 September against the double-shift schooling imposed by the Directorate of Secondary Education of Xanthi at the Xanthi Turkish Minority Secondary and High School which was successfully concluded. It was emphasised that the Greek authorities persistently ignore the justified demands of the Turkish community in Western Thrace regarding education, such as the example of bilingual minority kindergartens. Moreover, the ABTTF delegation pointed out that the Turkish community in Western Thrace is directly targeted and marginalised in politics and mainstream media, as in the general elections held in Greece in May and June 2023, and that individuals and institutions representing the Turkish community are subjected to hate speech, and that even SYRIZA MP from Xanthi Hüseyin Zeybek was threatened with death during a live broadcast on a local television programme.

ABTTF paid a working visit to Brussels

The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) paid a working visit to Brussels, the capital of the European Union (EU), on 26 September 2023.

ABTTF President Halit Habip Oğlu, accompanied by Deniz Servantie from ABTTF Brussels Office, met with the Member of the European Parliament (MEP) François Alfonsi (Greens/EFA, France) from the Corsica region of France within the framework of his working visit.

Current issues of the Turkish community in Western Thrace were conveyed

During the meeting with MEP Alfonsi, the current issues of the Turkish community in Western Thrace and the latest developments in Greece and Western Thrace were discussed.

During the meeting, ABTTF President Halit Habip Oğlu indicated that the educational autonomy of the Turkish community in Western Thrace is guaranteed by virtue of the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne, but that this educational autonomy was taken away from the Turkish community with various laws and practices over the years, and that Turkish primary schools with autonomous status in Western Thrace are being closed down by unilateral ministerial decisions one by one every year under the pretext of the lack of sufficient pupils. Furthermore, Habip Oğlu added that 9 more Turkish primary schools belonging to the Turkish community in Western Thrace were closed in the 2023-2024 school year, and while there were 194 Turkish primary schools in Western Thrace in 2008, this number decreased to 90 today.

Moreover, Habip Oğlu noted that the



protest against the imposition of shift teaching by the Directorate of Secondary Education of Xanthi at the Xanthi Turkish Minority Secondary High School has entered its 9th day and explained that the Greek authorities persistently continue to ignore the legitimate demands of the Turkish community in Western Thrace regarding education.

Habip Oğlu stated that the Turkish community in Western Thrace was directly targeted, marginalised, and stigmatised in politics and mainstream media during the general elections in Greece in May and June 2023, and indicated that the free will and democratic choice of the voters who voted for Turkish candidates in the elections was ignored.

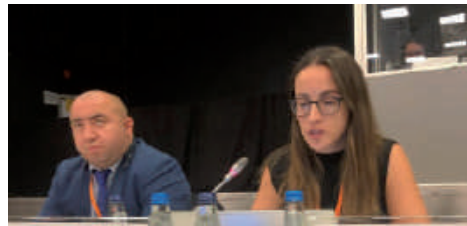
The representatives of the Turkish community in Western Thrace were at the OSCE

Participating in the Human Dimension Conference in Warsaw, ABTTF conveyed the issues in the fields of freedom of religion and freedom of association.

The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) and the Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association (WTMUGA) attended the Human Dimension Conference of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), organised by the 2023 OSCE Chairpersonship of North Macedonia in Warsaw on 2-13 October 2023.

At the conference where ABTTF International Relations Director Melek Kırmacı and WTMUGA member Kerem Abdurahimoğlu represented the Turkish community in Western Thrace, the issues that constitute examples of systematic discrimination, especially the current problems of the Turkish community in Western Thrace in the fields of education, religion and freedom of association were conveyed.

At the conference attended by OSCE participating States, OSCE institutions, international organisations, and civil society representatives, ABTTF indicated that with the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne, the Turkish community in Western Thrace was granted autonomy in the fields of education and religion, but that this autonomy was dismantled by the state. ABTTF noted that the Turkish community in Western Thrace had the right to determine their own religious leaders



and that this was implemented until 1985, but that this right was taken away from them with a law passed in 1991. Furthermore, ABTTF explained that the state intervenes in the religious affairs of the Turkish community in Western Thrace, while not interfering in the religious affairs of the dominant religion, the Greek Orthodox Church, and the Jewish community in Greece, one of the recognised religions, and added that this situation is a violation of international treaties and a clear discrimination against the Turkish community in Western Thrace when compared to other religions. ABTTF criticised the transformation of mufti offices into ordinary state offices under the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs within the framework of the Law on the Modernisation of the Mufti Offices. ABTTF asked Greece to restore the religious autonomy of the Turkish community in Western Thrace.

Regarding freedom of association, ABTTF indicated that associations containing the word “Turkish” in their names are closed and that new ones are not allowed to be established. ABTTF noted that the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights regarding the three cases known as the Bekir-Ousta and Others group of cases have not been executed by Greece for the past 15 years.

Finally, ABTTF explained that although the “Western Thrace Fenerbahçe Supporters Culture and Sports Association”, established by sports club fans in Western Thrace, was officially established and registered, two lawsuits were filed by the prosecutor’s office requesting the revocation of its registration. Stating that the association went to court three times in nine months, ABTTF added that the registration of the association was requested to be revoked at the last hearing on 6 September. ABTTF indicated that the debate over a simple fans’ association reveals the attitude towards the Turkish community in Western Thrace. As regards the Bekir-Ousta group of cases, ABTTF demanded that Greece urgently executes the judgments of the ECtHR.

ABTTF brought the issues experienced by the Turkish community in Western Thrace in the field of education to the UN

The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) attended the 54th session of the United Nations (UN) Human Rights Council held in Geneva, Switzerland and presented a written statement titled "Rapid decline in the number of primary schools in which children belonging to the Turkish community in Western Thrace in Greece have access to pre-school education in their native language".

In its written statement, ABTTF underlined that the Turkish community in Western Thrace in Greece has been granted educational autonomy according to the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne and indicated that the autonomous structure in education has been greatly damaged by various laws, regulations and practices over the years, and noted it has been further taken within the realm of the control of the state through fait accompli legal practices.

Noting that the number of primary schools belonging to the Turkish community in Western Thrace has decreased rapidly, ABTTF further added that within the framework of the ministerial decision issued in 2010, schools with fewer than nine students began to be closed, and Turkish primary schools were also subject to the same practice, despite having autonomous status in accordance with the Treaty of Lausanne.

Pointing out that this practice has become a systematic means of discrimination against the Turkish community in Western Thrace, ABTTF explained that there were 194 Turkish minority primary schools in Western Thrace in 2008, and this number increased to 188 in 2011, 170 in 2014, and 170 in 2015 due to closures. to 164, to 133 in 2016, to 130 in

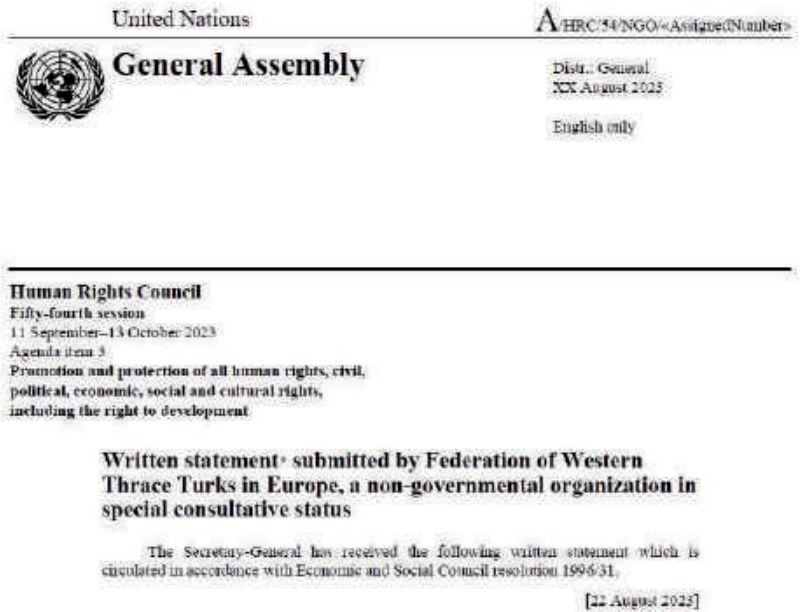
2017, to 128 in 2018, to 123 in 2019, to 115 in 2020, to 103 in 2021, to 99 in 2022. It further noted that it dropped to 90 in the 2023-2024 school year.

Explaining that the government rejected the applications for the establishment of bilingual minority kindergartens in Western Thrace, where Turkish children can also receive education in their native language Turkish, ABTTF indicated that it is problematic for children whose native language is Turkish to be taught only in Greek as the language of instruction in kindergarten and that it negatively affects their start to education.

ABTTF further indicated that Greece insists on ignoring the need to establish bilingual minority kindergartens and continues to close Turkish primary

schools, on grounds of the lack of sufficient students. On the other hand, it is noted that for the Greek Orthodox minority in Türkiye, whose status and rights were also determined by the Treaty of Lausanne, 21 children are currently studying in the primary school, which was opened in Gökçeada in 2013 with only 4 children and which also includes a kindergarten, and 35 students are studying in the secondary and high school opened in 2015.

Recalling the UN treaties to which Greece is a party, ABTTF further called on Greece to restore the educational autonomy of the Turkish community in Western Thrace guaranteed by the Treaty of Lausanne, to allow the establishment of Turkish kindergartens, including fully private ones, within the Turkish minority school system, and to stop closing Turkish elementary schools with autonomous status by unilateral decisions on grounds of the lack of sufficient number of students.



The guest of the “Facts about Our Country” programme was MEP François Alfonsi

The eleventh part of the online programme series of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) titled “Facts about Our Country” was broadcast on 12 October 2023.

Member of the European Parliament (MEP) François Alfonsi (Greens/EFA), who belongs to the Corsican community on the French island of Corsica, was the guest of the programme.

In the programme moderated by Deniz Servantie from ABTTF Brussels Office, Alfonsi answered the questions with respect to the situation of the national minorities in Europe, the protection of national minorities at the European Union (EU) level, Greece’s approach with respect to the national minorities and the current issues of the Turkish community in Western Thrace, especially in the field of education.

Alfonsi, who is also the Co-Chair of the EP Intergroup on Traditional Minorities, National Communities and Languages, indicated that the situation of national minorities in Europe varies from country to country and that the rights of the Danish minority on the Germany-Denmark border or the German minority in the South Tyrol region of Italy are guaranteed and implemented within the framework of treaties but that in contrast, he stressed that the situation of the Turkish community in Western Thrace in Greece is difficult in terms of the implementation of their rights and that there are other examples like this in Europe. Alfonsi underlined that there has been a serious decline in the protection of the rights of national minorities in Europe in recent years.



Highlighting that the Greek government is responsible for the discrimination faced by the Turkish community in Western Thrace, Alfonsi also emphasised that the French government is responsible for the current difficult situation of the Corsican language on the island of Corsica, and that it is necessary to return to the essence of the Copenhagen Criteria regarding minority rights.



As he was reminded that he was one of the first MEPs to visit Western Thrace in 2012, Alfonsi noted that Greece adopted a centralist state model within the framework of its national priorities and that minority identities are denied in the country. Noting that the situation of national minorities in Greece would be

much worse without the support of the EU, Alfonsi explained that if the EU gives importance to minority rights again, there may be a change in the attitude of the Member States on this issue.

Noting that education in the mother tongue is of critical importance in terms of identity and culture, Alfonsi underlined that it is the most legitimate right of children belonging to the Turkish community in Western Thrace to be educated in their mother tongue which is Turkish. Furthermore, Alfonsi indicated that the history of the Turkish community in Western Thrace constitutes an indivisible part of the history of Europe, and emphasised that Europe can only continue with diversity, and that Greece should not deny the diversity of Western Thrace in its history and that on the contrary, it should accept and value it.

You can watch the entire programme, which was broadcast live simultaneously on ABTTF’s YouTube channel and Facebook page, in English and French by clicking the links below:

YouTube English broadcast: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rFZt-7fP90s0&ab>

YouTube French broadcast: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N_puHtpak58&ab

Facebook English broadcast: <https://www.facebook.com/events/6406123276164548>

Facebook French broadcast: <https://www.facebook.com/events/306221988795549>

Answer from the European Commission to the written question regarding the educational issues of the Turkish community in Western Thrace

The European Commission answered the written question titled “Access to high-quality preschool education for children from the Turkish-minority community in Western Thrace (Greece)” presented by Members of the European Parliament (MEP) Loránt Vincze (Romania, EPP), François Alfonsi (France, Greens/EFA), Herbert Dorfmann (Italy, EPP) and Yana Toom (Estonia, Renew) on 6 July 2023.

In the answer submitted on 24 October 2023 by Iliana Ivanova, Commissioner for Innovation, Research, Culture, Education and Youth, on behalf of the European Commission, it was noted that in accordance with Article 165 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU, Member States are fully responsible for the organisation of their own educational systems and it was further highlighted that the choice of the language of instruction remains within the purview of the Member States.

Ivanova noted that the European Commission is working with Member States to promote support for language learning and multilingual diversity within the EU’s limited competences, adding that the 2019 Council Recommendation on High-Quality Early Childhood Education and Care Systems (ECEC) is particularly relevant for multilingual countries and that it encourages early language learning and bilingual schools in the regions, but it was further added that it does not constitute a legally binding act.

Indicating that the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU prohibits any



form of discrimination and states the EU’s obligation to respect cultural, religious and linguistic diversity, Ivanova explained that these provisions are applicable to Member States only when they are implementing Union law.

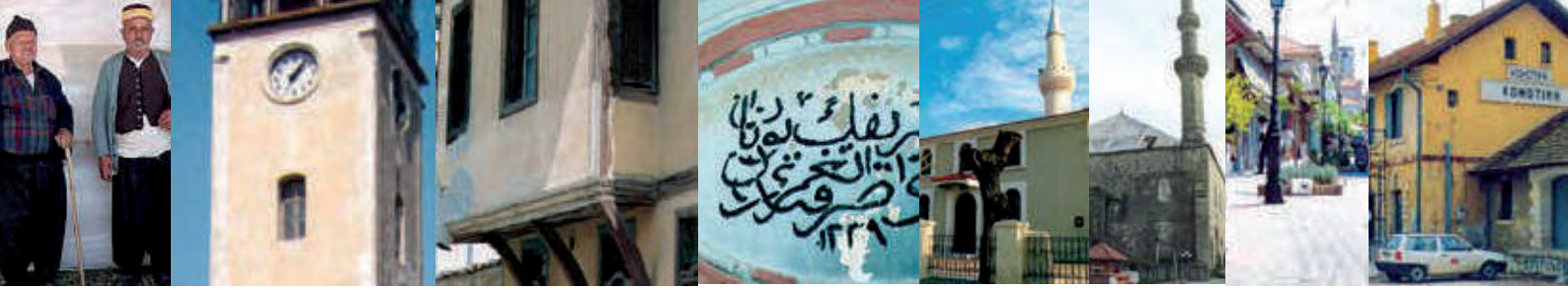
In the written question submitted at the initiative of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) with the joint signature of four MEPs, it was noted that the Turkish community in Western Thrace living in Greece has the right to establish and manage its own schools within the scope of educational autonomy, but that the number of bilingual Turkish primary schools has decreased due to the approach of the state.

In the written question, it was pointed out that there is not even a single bilin-

gual minority kindergarten in Western Thrace and that the Greek authorities left the Turkish community’s requests for private kindergartens unanswered, and it was indicated that the deprivation of children belonging to the Turkish community from pre-school education in their mother tongue creates inequality in education.

MEPs Vincze, Alfonsi, Dorfmann and Toom asked what steps the European Commission plans to take to ensure that the educational rights of children belonging to the Turkish community are guaranteed in accordance with the Charter of Fundamental Rights and EU legislation.

*Image: www.anadoluiimages.com



ABTTF expressed the educational issues of the Turkish community in Western Thrace at the EP Intergroup on Minorities

The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) made a presentation titled "Problems in equal access to quality education for children belonging to the Turkish community in Western Thrace, Greece" at a meeting of the Intergroup on Traditional Minorities, National Communities and Languages at the European Parliament (EP) on 23 November 2023.

ABTTF President Halit Habip Oğlu and ABTTF International Relations Director Melek Kırmacı Arık attended the meeting held at the EP building in Strasbourg, chaired by Intergroup Co-Chairs Loránt Vincze (EPP, Romania) and François Alfonsi (Greens/EFA, France). The meeting was also attended by Rhodes, Kos and the Dodecanese Turks Culture and Solidarity Association (ROISDER) President Prof. Dr. Mustafa Kaymakçı who participated and made a presentation about the educational issues of the Turkish community in Rhodes and Kos.

In his opening speech, ABTTF President Halit Habip Oğlu pointed out that our country Greece is the only Member State of the European Union (EU) that denies the existence of autochthonous national minorities and noted that although kindergarten education is



compulsory in the country, the establishment of bilingual kindergartens is not allowed in the Western Thrace region where the Turkish community lives. Indicating that there are serious issues pertaining to bilingual primary schools belonging to the Turkish community, Habip Oğlu explained that the number of Turkish primary schools in Western Thrace has decreased from 226 to 90 over the years, from 9 to 0 in Rhodes, and from 3 to 0 in Kos and he noted that the numbers speak for themselves and reveal the truth in all its nakedness.

In its presentation at the meeting, ABTTF noted that although the Turkish community in Western Thrace has educational autonomy guaranteed by the Treaty of Lausanne, Turkish primary schools with autonomous status in Western Thrace are closed on the pretext of lack of sufficient pupils. Underlining that the number of Turkish primary schools in Western Thrace has decreased significantly since 2010, ABTTF indicated that the number of primary schools decrea-

sed to 90 in the 2023-2024 school year.

Pointing out that there are no bilingual Turkish minority kindergartens in Western Thrace and that the Greek authorities left the Turkish community's requests for private kindergartens unanswered, ABTTF stated that the number of Turkish secondary schools is significantly insufficient compared to the population rate in the region, and that there is only one bilingual Turkish secondary school in the prefectures of Komotini and Xanthi. Furthermore, ABTTF noted that an 11-day action to protest the imposition of double-shift schooling at the Xanthi Turkish Minority Secondary and High School was organised in order to demand a solution to the school's building problem, which has been going on for years, and that the problem continues despite the protest action, and further added that a written question was recently submitted to the European Commission on the issue.

ABTTF also noted that the situation of minority communities in a country is a very clear indicator in terms of understanding the level of democracy in that country and called on our country Greece to restore the educational autonomy of the Turkish community in Western Thrace.

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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