



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. 41 | May 2021 | Year 17

The problem of the non-execution of ECtHR judgments regarding Western Thrace Turkish associations was discussed



During the online panel, the issue of non-execution by Greece of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) judgments regarding the Turkish Union of Xanthi, the Cultural Association of Turkish Women in the Prefecture of Rodopi and Evros Prefecture Minority Youth Association in the Bekir-Ousta and Others group of cases was discussed.

The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europa (ABTTF), the Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association (WTMUGA) and the Greek Helsinki Monitor (GHM) co-organised on 25 February 2021 an online panel entitled “The Problem of Execution of ECtHR Judgments in Greece: Bekir Ousta and Others Group of Cases”.

The webinar, which was realised with

the moderation of Turkish Union of Xanthi President Ozan Ahmetoğlu started with the opening remarks of ABTTF President Halit Habip Oğlu and WTMUGA President Dr. Hüseyin Baltacı.

In her keynote speech, Cultural Association of Turkish Women in the Prefecture of Rodopi President Hülya Emin indicated she hoped that today’s event with respect to the ECtHR judgments of which Western Thrace Turkish associations are still awaiting their execution would mark the beginning of an open and constructive dialogue. Noting that the associations in question are not being the tools of anti-Greek propaganda, she explained that the fact the members of the associations are being targeted and that they are being portrayed as constituting a threat to the Greek community at every opportunity is a great injustice.

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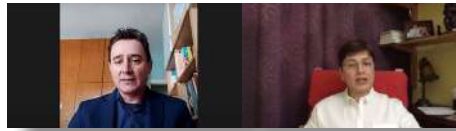
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Attorney Ahmet Kara who was the first to take the floor during the panel, indicated that he has been pleading in the Bekir-Ousta and Others group of cases since 2011, adding that the ECtHR has condemned Greece regarding the violation of Article 11 of the European Convention on Human Rights on freedom of assembly and association, but that Greece is adamant in not executing the said judgments. Noting that the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe has closely reviewed these cases and called on Greece to execute the ECtHR judgments with its interim resolutions, Kara said that following the 16 October 2020 hearing regarding the Turkish Union of Xanthi, the decision of the Supreme Court had been awaited and that the Supreme Court scheduled 18 March 2022 as the hearing date for the other two associations.



In the presentation he made, GHM Spokesman and European Implementation Network (EIN) Board Member Panayote Dimitras indicated that GHM requested the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe to re-

call that the Greek government has not implemented the ECtHR judgments regarding the Western Thrace Turkish associations in the Bekir-Ousta and Others group of cases for 13 years and that the ECtHR judgements have still not been implemented neither on the House of Macedonian Civilization for 23 years. Dimitras also said the GHM has repeatedly urged the Committee of Ministers to ask Greece to take legislative measures to change the procedure for registration of associations while bearing in mind the ECtHR judgments in this group of cases. Dimitras stated that if the procedure is changed, all associations of the Turkish and Macedonian minorities would be (re-)registered by the end of 2021, and that would be "tangible progress" that the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe CM would welcome.



The last person to intervene during the panel session was Human Rights Specialist, former MP and former Secretary General for Human Rights at the Ministry of Justice, Transparency and Human Rights of Greece Maria Giannakaki. Giannakaki said that according to the Article 46 of the European Convention on Human Rights, States that are Parties to it must comply with ECtHR judgments, adding that she was one of the persons to write the first draft of amendments regarding the Civil Procedure Law in 2017, but that a much different legal arrangement had been made than the first draft presented to the Parliament

and it had been disappointing. Indicating that it is unfortunate that Greek governments are not focused on solving a problem but rather on time-gaining, Giannakaki added that there are three different focal points about the execution of ECtHR judgments and that these are legal process, execution process and judicial process. Giannakaki also stressed that in Greece it is not the fact that there are laws that are contrary to the European Convention on Human Rights, but rather that the judgments of local courts, that is the case-law, is of the essence and that the main issue is whether people having judicial power are willing to implement ECtHR judgments.

After the panel session, the event ended with a Q&A session and closing remarks by the moderator Ozan Ahmetoğlu.



You may watch the event which took place on Zoom from ABTTF's YouTube and Facebook accounts: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZsWelJ3hhgE&t=290s> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4hjzdG0ihdM&t=2170s> <https://www.facebook.com/ABTTF-Avrupa-Bat%C4%B1-Trakya-T%C3%BCrk-Federasyonu-939989616164959>

ABTTF paid a working visit to Athens

The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) paid a working visit to Athens, Greece. ABTTF President Halit Habip Oglu and ABTTF Vice President Mustafa Kasap held a series of meetings within the framework of the visit.



with Deputy Head of Mission of German Embassy Heike Dettmann who accepted the ABTTF delegation in her office, the activities of ABTTF and the problems of the Turkish community in Western Thrace were conveyed.

ABTTF activities and the problems of the Turkish community in Western Thrace were discussed

ABTTF delegation first met with Petros Konstantinou, President of the United Movement Against Racism and the Fascist Threat (KEERFA), a non-governmental organisation that operates extensively throughout Greece. During the meeting held at KEERFA's head office, the activities of ABTTF and the problems of the Turkish community in Western Thrace were discussed.

One of the key stops of the visit was the Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany in Athens as about 30,000 Western Thrace Turks live in Germany. During the meeting

In the Athens branch of the Young Academicians' Community (GAT), young Western Thrace Turks studying at the universities in Athens welcomed the ABTTF delegation, and they

exchanged warm and friendly conversations. Young people, who had thus the opportunity to learn more about the activities of ABTTF, indicated that the Turkish community in Western Thrace is not well known in Athens, while stressing that they are open to co-operation to promote the Turkish community in Western Thrace and its culture in Athens.



The ABTTF delegation also paid a courtesy visit to the Embassy of the Republic of Turkey in Athens as part of its working visit.

When will our country stop saying, "I haven't seen it, I haven't heard it, I don't know"?

Dear readers,

As you all know and follow from the press, our country's Minister of Foreign Affairs Nikos Dendias paid a visit to Ankara, the capital of our motherland Turkey, in mid-April.

Five years later, the exploratory talks between our country and our motherland began in January, and Dendias was scheduled to visit Ankara in March after a visit to Athens by our motherland's Minister of Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu.

During this visit, our country wanted to limit the issues it would negotiate with our motherland, while our motherland wanted to discuss all issues that are sources of disagreement between the two countries. These included the issue of minorities in the two countries. During the talks, our motherland put on the table the situation of the Turkish community in Western Thrace, that is us, which has acquired minority status in Greece with the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne.

The first visit, which took place at the level of minister from our country to the motherland in 2 years, started amicably but ended quite tensely. Tensions rose at a joint press conference between the two ministers following the meeting. One of the moments of tension during the press conference was again about us, about our very identity.

At the meeting, Dendias reiterated the official view expressed by our country Greece at every opportunity and indicated the following: "I had the opportunity to meet with the Ecumenical Patriarch in Istanbul yesterday and during this meeting I had the opportunity to listen to the problems of the Greek community in Turkey. I am obliged to indicate this here. There is a Muslim minority in Greece, it is recognised by the Treaty of Lausanne, this is the view of the Greek state."

Our country's minister says "Greek community in Turkey" when talking about his meetings during his visit to our motherland, but on the other side, he talks about a "Muslim minority in Greece" when talking about us by mentioning Lausanne! It is correct, the Lausanne does indeed mention a Muslim minority. However, Dendias must know very well that there is no Greek minority in the Lausanne, but a non-Muslim minority! You know what they say in these situations: "What a contrast, how inconsistent!"

In face of this the inconceivable explanation from Dendias, Çavuşoğlu added the fol-

lowing: "We, as Turkey, recognise the Greek Orthodox minority. But you say 'No, you are not Turkish' to Turks who say, 'I am Turkish'. This is neither a humanitarian situation nor a legal situation. You lecture us about human rights all the time but there are three ECtHR judgments regarding Turkish minority associations. You do not implement these. You say that they are Muslims. And what Muslims are they? Are they Greek Muslims? If they call themselves Turkish, they are Turkish -- you have to recognise this."

That's it! That's a pretty clear answer! To tell you the truth, I am ashamed of our country's persistent attempts to ignore and distort the facts! Indeed, in a country that states that it is governed by the principle of democracy and the rule of law, such a statement contradicts all the principles and principles it claims to be bound by! Sad!

Afterwards, Dendias met with Prime Minister Mitsotakis and gave details of the meetings in Ankara. According to media reports, the approach of Dendias during the press conference in Ankara came in full agreement with Prime Minister Mitsotakis. Of course! Indeed, Dendias' rhetoric and inconceivable statements are just a reflection of the state policy that ignores the Turkish community in Western Thrace in our country!

So, what happened next? Mitsotakis said that he will meet with the President of our motherland because the two countries need to talk! Yes, the two countries need to talk! But talking means listening, that is to negotiate by being really open to dialogue. However, if we look at Dendias' approach at the press conference in Ankara, our country does not want dialogue, it pretends to want it.

Following the visit of our country's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of our motherland Yavuz Selim Kiran visited our region. On the occasion of Ramadan, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of our motherland met with our muftis and organisations and representatives representing our community in Komotini and Xanthi. The visit of the Deputy Minister can also be read as a sign that we are not alone, that our motherland will not leave us alone at all times and under any circumstances. Indeed, our motherland reminds our country once again with this visit that the promise it made to us with the Treaty of Lausanne is of the essence, not so-called.

In his speech in Komotini, the Deputy Minister underlined the importance of diplomacy



and dialogue in terms of relations between the two countries and said they would strongly support any step taken by Greece in this respect. The Deputy Minister further continued as follows: "No one should expect us to remain silent about the violation of the rights of the minority, the attempts to erode it. We will continue to raise our voices and make our voices heard at the bilateral level and within international platforms to protect the rights of the Minority."

We think likewise. We want to discuss and solve our problems in dialogue with the rulers and authorities within our country. We would have liked for our country to establish a dialogue with us just as our motherland has established such a dialogue with the Greek Orthodox minority in Turkey! We would very much like to be able to sit around a table and talk candidly about our problems. We have always believed and continue to believe that our problems can be solved if we really have the chance to have a dialogue. But for this, our country must first take a concrete step to establish a sincere and real dialogue with us! It seems impossible to reach this atmosphere if the steps taken by ignoring, distorting the facts, going around behind the scenes continue.

Unfortunately, this is the prevailing situation! But we haven't given up hope today as we have in the past, and we won't lose hope either in the future!

Stay healthy.

Halit Habip Oğlu
ABTTF President

Working visit by ABTTF 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 4 February 2020. ABTTF President Halit Habip Oglu and ABTTF Vice-President Sami Yusuf were accompanied by Deniz Servantie from ABTTF Brussels Office. The ABTTF delegation had meetings with the members of the European Parliament (EP) including Herbert Dorfmann (EPP, Italy) belonging to the German minority in Italy, Tatjana Ždanoka (Greens/EFA, Latvia) belonging to the Russian minority in Latvia as well as Loránt Vincze (EPP, Romania) belonging to the Hungarian minority in Romania and who is also President of the Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN) at the same time.



[Current developments related to the Turkish community in Western Thrace were conveyed, and possibility of cooperation was discussed](#)

During the meetings with the MEPs who are

specialised in minority rights, the current problems of the Turkish community in Western Thrace and latest developments in the Western Thrace region were conveyed. As such, ABTTF President Habip Oğlu referred to continuing hate speech in Greece against the Turkish community in Western Thrace. Indeed, he indicated that in the remarks of some Greek politicians as well as in some news and comments, the Turkish community in Western Thrace is seen as the “other”

and that it is continued to be portrayed as if it constituted a “threat” and “danger” for Greece.

Underlining the fact that the educational and religious autonomy of the Turkish community in Western Thrace which is enshrined within the framework of the relevant treaties is systematically being violated by the Greek authorities, Habip Oğlu stated the Turkish minority schools in Western Thrace are being closed down one by one with the pretext that there are not enough pupils attending these, adding the Greek government still does not recognise the muftis elected by Western Thrace Turks. Furthermore, also referring to the freedom of association of the Turkish community in Western Thrace and to the current problems in that regard, Habip Oğlu noted Greece is still falling short of implementing the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) of 2008 with respect to the Western Thrace Turkish associations.

Delegation of the Turkish community in Western Thrace attended the UN Forum on Minority Issues

The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) and the Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association (WTMUGA) representing the Turkish community in Western Thrace attended the 13th session of the United Nations (UN) Forum on Minority Issues under the heading “Hate Speech, Social Media and Minorities” on 19-20 November 2020. Deniz Servantie from ABTTF Brussels Office and the WTMUGA member Kerem Abdurahimoğlu attended the Forum which was held online due to the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic.

Intervening during the session entitled “Causes, scale and impact of hate speech targeting minorities in social media”, ABTTF noted that the ethnic Turkish identity of the Turkish community in Western Thrace whose status has been determined by the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne is not recognised and denied by Greece. Further indicating that hate speech against the Turkish community in Western Thrace in Greece is prevalent in much of the political and media arenas, ABTTF explained that there had been attempts at scapegoating the Turkish community during



the first period of the coronavirus pandemic.

Intervening at the same session, WTMUGA said that the Turkish community in Western Thrace had been targeted with nationalistic and hate speech in the majority media in Greece both at local and national levels and that this constitutes a direct violation of Article 19 of the UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) with respect to freedom of opinion and expression. WTMUGA demanded from the

Greek state to recognize the ethnic Turkish identity of the Turkish community in Western Thrace and to take the necessary measures to prevent hate speech and hate crimes that are its natural consequences.

Intervening during the session entitled “Regulation of online hate speech: the role and responsibility of intergovernmental organizations, States, internet companies and social media platforms” on the second day of the Forum, ABTTF indicated that the Turkish community in Western Thrace in Greece had been subjected to numerous hate attacks in the last years and that institutions and places of worship belonging to the Turkish community had been attacked by unknown perpetrators. Calling on the Greek government to take measures against hate speech and crimes targeting the Turkish community in Western Thrace, ABTTF underlined the need to strengthen mechanisms in order to accurately identify hate speech present on social media platforms which may well lead to hate crimes and to take the necessary sanctions in that respect.

Western Thrace Turkish delegation attended the OSCE Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting

The Western Thrace Turkish delegation consisting of representatives of ABTTF, WTMUGA and FEP Party stated that the Turkish community in Western Thrace is not included in the legislative and decision-making process on issues of direct interest to it.

The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF), the Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association (WTMUGA) and Friendship, Equality and Peace (FEP) Party, representing the Turkish community in Western Thrace attended the Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) entitled "Democratic Law-Making: Ensuring Participation" which was held online on 26-27 April 2021.

Deniz Servantie and Nihan Ayan from ABTTF, Dr. Pervin Hayrullah and Kerem Abdurahimoğlu from WTMUGA and General Coordinator Fatih Hüseyinoğlu from FEP Party attended the meeting which was organised by the Swedish OSCE Chairpersonship and OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR).

The meeting, which was attended by representatives of the OSCE participating States, non-governmental organisations, international organisations and national human rights organisations along with experts, began with the opening speeches by Annika Ben David, Ambassador-at-large for Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law from the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Sweden on behalf of the 2021 Swedish OSCE Chairpersonship, OSCE/ODIHR Director Matteo Mecacci and OSCE President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly Lord Peter Bowness.

Speaking at the first session entitled "Open and Inclusive Law-Making" on 26 April, WTMUGA noted that although Greece is a party to the European Convention on Human Rights, it has not yet implemented the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) judgments with respect



to the Xanthi Turkish Union, the Cultural Association of Turkish Women in the Prefecture of Rodopi and the Evros Prefecture Minority Youth Association in the Bekir-Ousta and Others group of cases for political reasons. Underlining that the rule of law is a prerequisite for the prevention of fundamental injustice and corruption, WTMUGA called on Greece to consider the views and needs of the Turkish community whilst drafting laws pertaining to the Turkish community in Western Thrace.



Intervening in the same session, ABTTF stated that Greece has not implemented ECtHR judgments regarding the associations belonging to the Turkish community in Western Thrace in the Bekir-Ousta and Others group of cases for 13 years, adding that despite the warnings of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, the applications of the regarding associations have still not re-examined on their merits by the Greek national courts in light of the ECtHR's case law. Noting that Greece's rejection of the ethnic Turkish identity of the Turkish community in Western Thrace and a lack of political will were at the heart of the failure to implement the ECtHR judgments, ABTTF demanded that Greece implement the ECtHR judgments immediately. Speaking at the third session titled "Pub-

lic Participation and the Digital Space", ABTTF stated that the Turkish community in Western Thrace is poorly represented within the policy-making and decision-making system of Greece, noting that the 3 percent electoral threshold applied to independent candidates, together with political parties in general elections and European Parliament (EP) elections, has blocked the representation of the Turkish community in parliament through independent candidates or through its own political party. ABTTF called for the establishment of a dialogue mechanism between government authorities and the Turkish community in Western Thrace, as outlined in the OSCE Lund Recommendations on the Effective Participation of National Minorities in Public Life, adding that this would be a major step towards solving existing problems.

Intervening at the same session, WTMUGA indicated that the decisions and laws on issues of direct interest to the Turkish community in Western Thrace, such as identity, education, mufti and foundations, were arbitrarily created by the Greek authorities without the consent of the Turkish community, adding that the names of historical schools belonging to the Turkish community in Western Thrace were changed and legal associations which comprised the word 'Turkish' in their name were banned. WTMUGA called for OSCE participating States to encourage Greece to adopt a more transparent and inclusive legislative system.



Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting

on Democratic Law-Making: Ensuring Participation

26-27 April 2021
(Online)

Using its right of reply in both sessions, Greece reminded that the Greek state recognised solely a "Muslim minority" in Western Thrace, claiming that minority members actively participated in all aspects of daily public, civil and political life, both at the regional and national levels.

ABTTF attended the FUEN Assembly of Delegates 2020

ABTTF, WTMUGA and FEP Party represented the Turkish community in Western Thrace at the meeting which was held online.

The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) attended the Assembly of Delegates of the Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN) which was organised online due to the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic on 24 October 2020. ABTTF President and FUEN Vice President Halit Habip Oğlu and ABTTF International Affairs Director Melek Kırmacı Arık participated in the online meeting where the Turkish community in Western Thrace was represented together by ABTTF, the Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association (WTMUGA) and the Friendship, Equality and Peace (FEP) Party.

The FUEN Assembly of Delegates, which was attended by more than 200 delegates belonging to minorities from different European countries, began with a welcome speech



by FUEN President Loránt Vincze. Following this, FUEN President, Vice Presidents and Secretary General explained the activities of FUEN and the working groups under the umbrella of FUEN and FUEN's 2020-2021 programme was presented. ABTTF President and FUEN Vice President Halit Habip Oğlu delivered information with respect to the activities of the Working Group of Turkic Minorities/Communities (TAG) inside FUEN.

The FUEN Assembly of Delegates adopted a resolution with respect to the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on the national minorities and linguistic communities in Europe. The resolution also states that there was insufficient information given in

mother tongue to the Turkish community in Western Thrace which also participated in FUEN's survey on the Covid-19 pandemic.

The delegates were also informed at the meeting that the FUEN 2021 Congress would be held in Nova Gorica/Gorizia at the Italian-Slovenian border region and that the FUEN 2022 Congress would be held in Estonia's capital city Tallinn.



At the FUEN Assembly of Delegates, the organization "Qumuqlar" representing the Kumyk community in Russia which participated as a guest in the FUEN TAG meetings was accepted by the votes of the delegates as an ordinary member of FUEN.

Delegation of Western Thrace Turks attended the 6th Annual Meeting of FUEN TAG

Delegation of Western Thrace Turks composed of representatives from ABTTF, WTMUGA and FEP Party expressed the latest developments with respect to the Turkish community in Western Thrace.

The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF), the Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association (WTMUGA) and the Friendship, Equality and Peace (FEP) Party representing the Turkish community in Western Thrace attended the 6th Annual Meeting of the Working Group of Turkic Minorities/Communities in the Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN), which was held online on 22 December 2020.

In the meeting which brought together Turkic minorities and communities living in a vast geography from the Balkans to the Caucasus, ABTTF, WTMUGA and FEP Party representing the Turkish community in Western Thrace, Rhodes, Kos and the Dodecanese Turks Culture and Solidarity Association



(ROISDER) representing Rhodes and Kos Turks, the Public Organisation of Meskhetian Turks "VATAN" and the Public Union Of Meskhetian (Ahıska) Turks living in Azerbaijan "VATAN" representing Meskhetian Turks, the Social Organisation for Fostering and Development of the Karachay-Balkar Traditions "Bars El" representing Karachay-Balkar Turks, Kosovo Youth Union Association representing Turks in Kosovo, the regional civil society organization "Qumuqlar" in charge of the protection of the Kumuk language and the coordination of Kumuk projects, Kırcaali Turkish Culture and Arts Association representing Turks in Bulgaria and the Ukrainian Gagauz Union representing the Gagauz people in Ukraine participated in the meeting. During the meeting, FEP Party General

Coordinator Fatih Hüseyinoğlu and FEP Party Youth Section President Burak Adil, on behalf of the delegation of Western Thrace Turks, expressed the difficulties experienced by the Turkish community in Western Thrace lately and indicated that the educational and religious autonomy of the Turkish community in Western Thrace is violated by the Greek State and that its ethnic Turkish identity is denied.

In the afternoon session of the two-session meeting, the representatives of the delegation of Western Thrace Turks explained that during the first period of the Covid-19 pandemic, Western Thrace Turks had been targeted and scapegoated.

In the meeting where FUEN TAG's 2021 working plan and road map was also determined, the participants from the Turkic minorities and communities decided to meet on a regular basis within the framework of the online platform in 2021.

Western Thrace Turkish delegation attended FUEN TAG's 1st thematic seminar

Western Thrace Turkish delegation composed of ABTTF, WTMUGA and FEP Party representatives explained the current developments and issues experienced in lately by the Turkish community in Western Thrace.



The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF), the Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association (WTMUGA) and the Friendship, Equality and Peace (FEP) Party, representing the Turkish community in Western Thrace attended the 1st thematic seminar of the Working Group of Turkic Minorities/Communities (TAG) in the Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN) which was held online on 25 March 2021.

Within the framework of the decision to meet regularly on the online platform as a result of the Covid-19 outbreak which was taken at the FUEN TAG 6th Annual Meeting in the last December, ABTTF, WTMUGA and FEP Party representing the Western Thrace Turks, the Public Organisation of Meskhetian Turks "VATAN" and the Public Union Of Meskhetian (Ahıska)

Turks living in Azerbaijan "VATAN" representing Meskhetian Turks, the Social Organisation for Fostering and Development of the Karachay-Balkar Traditions (Bars EI) representing the Karachay-Balkars and the Ukrainian Gagauz Union representing the Ukrainian Gagauz people attended the online seminar which brought together the Turkic minorities and communities.

In the first part of the seminar, which started with a greeting and opening speech by FUEN Vice-President and FUEN TAG Spokesperson Halit Habip Oğlu, Bars EI Board Member Nadia Hadjieva gave a video presentation regarding the Karachay-Balkar Turks in the Russian Federation. Hadjieva cited the work and projects of Bars EI and Bars EI's youth organisation Elbrusoid for the preservation and development of the culture, language and traditions of Karachay-Balkar Turks.

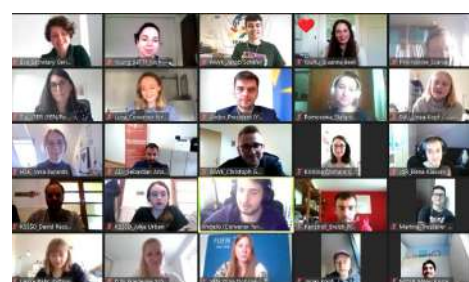
In the second part of the seminar, the participating organisations conveyed the latest developments and current issues in the Turkish minorities and communities they represent and their countries. In this context, WTMUGA Vice-Chair İlhan Memet and FEP Party General Coordinator Fatih Hüseyinoglu, on behalf of the Western Thrace Turkish delegation, expressed the recent problems of the Turkish community in Western Thrace. The Turkish delegation of Western Thrace stated that the economic difficulties in the region due to the economic crisis and the pandemic deeply affected the Turkish community in Western Thrace, and that during the pandemic, the state in Greece provided financial support to olive and melon producers, but that there was no financial support for cotton and tobacco in the region, which the Turkish community in Western Thrace is providing for. Referring to the current problems in education, the Western Thrace Turkish delegation indicated that the elections of councillors' delegation in the Turkish minority schools in Western Thrace were repeatedly postponed due to the pandemic by the Greek authorities, but that on the other hand, deputy muftis appointed as the heads of the boards of madrasahs in Komotini and Xanthi were brought in.

Young ABTTF attended the YEN General Assembly 2021

New members of the YEN Executive Board and working groups were elected at the meeting attended by young people belonging to minorities from different countries in Europe.

Young ABTTF attended the General Assembly of the Youth of European Nationalities (YEN) which was held online on 8 May 2021. Nihan Ayan, representing Young ABTTF, attended the meeting. Angelika Mlinar, Vice-President of the Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN), also took part in the meeting as a guest participant.

The meeting began with the opening remarks by YEN President Andor Barabás. Barabás stated that this year is quite different from other years, adding that the pandemic



has greatly affected YEN's activity planning.

Following this, the YEN 2020-2021 annual report was presented and the amendments to the YEN statutes were put to a vote and adopted.

As a result of the elections held at the meeting, new members of the YEN Executive Board were also elected. Linea Kopf belonging to the Danish minority in Germany

was elected as Vice-President for Internal Relations and Ewelina Stefańska belonging to the Kashubian minority in Poland was elected as Convenor for the Working Group on Minority Rights and Politics.



YEN General Assembly 2021
JEV Hauptversammlung 2021

The meeting ended with the introduction of member organisations that will host the events and events that YEN plans to organise in 2022 and 2023.

ABTTF parallel report regarding the “Report on Incidents Against Places of Religious Importance in Greece” by the Greek Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs

New members of the YEN Executive Board and working groups were elected at the meeting attended by young people belonging to minorities from different countries in Europe.

The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) prepared a parallel report with the aim of responding to the issues pertaining to the Turkish community in Western Thrace which were included in the ‘Report on Incidents Against Places of Religious Importance in Greece’ published by the Greek Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs on 30 December 2020 and sent it to Greek President Katerina Sakellariopoulou and Greek Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs Niki Kerameus.

In its parallel report, ABTTF detailed the problems encountered by the Turkish community in Western Thrace, which has religious autonomy in accordance with bilateral and international treaties and expressed its views and demands.

ABTTF criticised the unilateral portrayal of issues related to the Turkish community in Western Thrace in the Ministry’s report which only reflected the official state approach, adding that the religious autonomy and rights of the Turkish community in Western Thrace were ignored, and that the information and explanations in the report did not address the current problems of the Turkish community in Western Thrace.

ABTTF stated that in contradiction to its autonomous structure in the religious sphere, the Turkish community in Western Thrace was stripped of its right to choose its Muftis which are its own religious leaders, and stated that the office of the Mufti in Western Thrace, which



is autonomous, was restructured by the Presidential Decree dated 52/2019 and reduced to a public institution with the status of general manager of the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs. ABTTF further noted that the decree violates the autonomous status and rights of the Turkish community in Western Thrace along with its religious freedom which is guaranteed by the treaties, including international treaties, legal documents and principles.

Regarding the repair, construction and protection of mosques in Western Thrace within the scope of cultural heritage, ABTTF stated that the report which alleges that the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs has met all the demands for the repair and renovation of old mosques and the construction of new mosques does not reflect the reality, and that there is no mention of bureaucratic and other obstacles in the construction and repair of mosques, and cited the fact that the terrain of the Poşpoş Tekke, which was demolished by the Municipality of Komotini in 1989, has not yet been granted construction permits. ABTTF also noted that the Turkish community in Western Thrace expects the restoration of the Çelebi Sul-

tan Mehmet Mosque in Didymoteicho, which was badly damaged by a fire on 22 March 2017, to be carried out meticulously, restoring the mosque immediately and preserving it for future generations as part of its architectural heritage.

Regarding Rhodes and Kos, which are listed in the Ministry’s report under the heading Muslims outside Western Thrace, ABTTF informed about the Turkish community in Rhodes and Kos and conveyed the problems related to charitable foundations, i.e. vakfs belonging to the Turkish community on the islands. ABTTF stated that Defterdar Ibrahim Efendi and Germe Mosques in Kos, which were severely damaged in the July 2017 earthquake, have not been repaired, so there are no mosques open for worship in Kos today.

Halit Habip Oğlu, President of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) made the following statement: “After our first parallel report last year, ABTTF prepared a parallel report on the report of the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs on important incidents in religious areas our country Greece and expressed the views and demands of the Turkish community in Western Thrace. In our report, we demanded that our country respect our religious autonomy and restore our right to choose our muftis. We want to have a direct dialogue with the rulers of our country with the parallel report in which we detail our problems related to our religious autonomy”.

Please click here for the full text of the “2019 Report on Incidents Against Places of Religious Importance in Greece”: https://www.minedu.gov.gr/publications/docs2020/%CE%88-%CE%BA%CE%B8%CE%B5-%CF%83%CE%B7%202019_opt.pdf

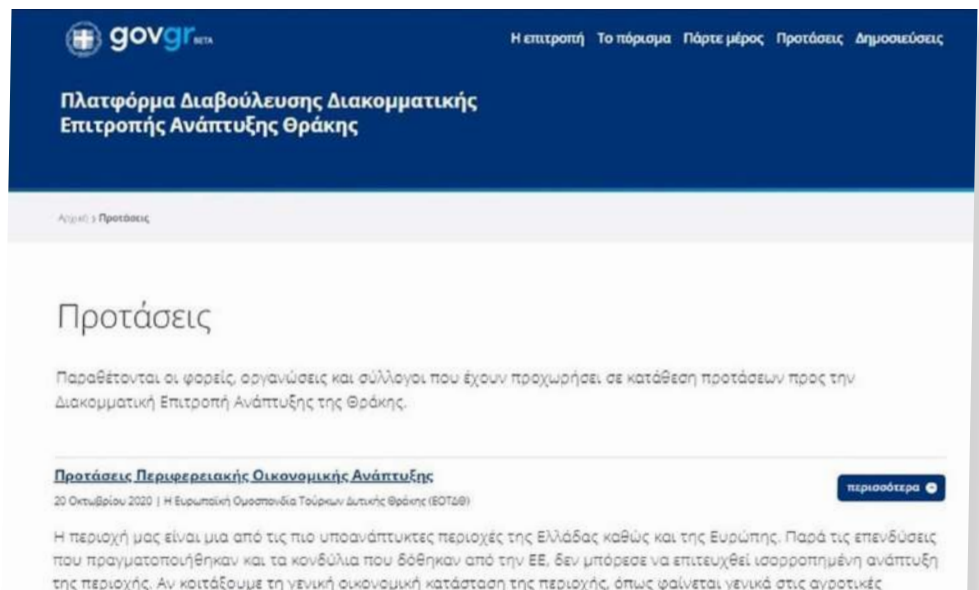
ABTTF submitted its proposals to the Committee for the Development of Thrace

ABTTF President: “Our country can be seen as a ship and everyone living in this country are those pursuing their lives in the same ship. If there is a crack at any point in the ship, if it is broken, the whole ship will sink over time.”

The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) submitted to the the Inter-Party Parliamentary Committee for the Development of Thrace its proposals regarding economic development in Western Thrace in the areas of agriculture, livestock, industry, tourism and regional administration.

ABTTF which took part in the public consultation process ongoing until 31 October 2020 of the Committee for the Development of Thrace which was set up under the proposal of Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis on 16 July 2020 through the link <https://epitropithrakis.gov.gr/i-epitropi/>, requested for the preparation of a special development model and programme for the region by taking into consideration the geographic, economic and socio-cultural structure of the region and conveyed its concrete proposals and requests to the Committee with respect to regional economic development. Giving the example of Italy’s South Tyrol Region which implements a regional development model by promoting different business types and making alternative production and investments, ABTTF proposed for the examination of the development model and programme of South Tyrol.

Indicating that as a country which have lived for years through the hardships of life brought by the economic and financial crisis and adding that just as in all of the countries of the world that they are struggling with extra other difficulties end economic recession brought by the COVID-19 pandemic, ABTTF requested that the Turkish community



in Western Thrace should be considered in all the steps aimed at the economic development of the region in these difficult conditions. Explaining that for many years there has not been a balanced development in Western Thrace for various reasons because of having ignored the general and special needs and that this constitutes a priority condition for equal and balanced development, ABTTF said that otherwise, it would not be possible to achieve a balanced development in the long term.

Halit Habip Oğlu, President of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) made the following statement: “As ABTTF, we have sent our concrete proposals to the Committee as regards regional development in Western Thrace. We had sent in the beginning of September our letter to Committee President Dora Bakoyannis and Committee members where we were expressing our readiness to contribute in every way with all our good will. We did not have any response to this letter and we realised that the letter we had sent to the Committee was leaked to the press through a news we saw in the Greek press and as ABTTF we have become the target of the far-right press. A few days ago, the press release we

made regarding statements made by ruling-party MP Evripidis Stilyanidis at a speech he made at the committee regarding the Turkish community in Western Thrace implied as a risk of ‘threat’ was reported at the far-right press and we were accused of targeting Stilyanidis. On the contrary, as ABTTF, we have acted from the beginning with the hope that the Committee for the Development of Thrace will be a platform based on goodwill and sincerity and we have made this clear in our letters and proposals addressed to the Committee. We have made this view clear to the Committee: ‘Our country can be seen as a ship and everyone living in this country are those pursuing their lives in the same ship. If there is a crack at any point in the ship, if it is broken, the whole ship will sink over time’. At this point, instead of statements that exclude the Turkish community in Western Thrace and portray it as a threat, we should present concrete proposals to the Committee as people of the region and strive together for the development of the region. Otherwise, if the discriminatory mindset towards the Turkish community in Western Thrace dominates the work of the Committee, the committee’s report will then unfortunately be null and void in terms of result for Western Thrace Turks.”

A new blow to the educational autonomy of the Turkish community in Western Thrace!

ABTTF President: “It is impossible for us to accept such appointments by our country Greece which are aimed at eradicating the autonomous status of our madrasahs. We therefore request the decision taken by the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs to be cancelled at once.”

The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) attended the Assembly of Delegates of the Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN) which was organised online due to the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic on 24 October 2020. ABTTF President and FUEN Vice President Halit Habip Oğlu and ABTTF International Affairs Director Melek Kırmacı Arık participated in the online meeting where the Turkish community in Western Thrace was represented together by ABTTF, the Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association (WTMUGA) and the Friendship, Equality and Peace (FEP) Party.

The FUEN Assembly of Delegates, which was attended by more than 200 delegates



belonging to minorities from different European countries, began with a welcome speech by FUEN President Loránt Vincze. Following this, FUEN President, Vice Presidents and Secretary General explained the activities of FUEN and the working groups under the umbrella of FUEN and FUEN’s 2020-2021 programme was presented. ABTTF President and FUEN Vice President Halit Habip Oğlu delivered information with respect to the activities of the Working Group of Turkic Minorities/Communities (TAG) inside FUEN. The FUEN Assembly of Delegates adopted a resolution with respect to the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on the national minorities and linguistic communities

in Europe. The resolution also states that there was insufficient information given in mother tongue to the Turkish community in Western Thrace which also participated in FUEN’s survey on the Covid-19 pandemic.

The delegates were also informed at the meeting that the FUEN 2021 Congress would be held in Nova Gorica/Gorizia at the Italian-Slovenian border region and that the FUEN 2022 Congress would be held in Estonia’s capital city Tallinn.



At the FUEN Assembly of Delegates, the organization “Qumuqlar” representing the Kumyk community in Russia which participated as a guest in the FUEN TAG meetings was accepted by the votes of the delegates as an ordinary member of FUEN.

The Turkish community in Western Thrace has been discriminated again!

ABTTF President: “Our country Greece pursues its official policy of denying the existence of the Turkish community in Western Thrace by ignoring the Turkish press which is operating within the framework of the laws in Western Thrace.”



In order to inform the citizens regarding the coronavirus pandemic in Greece, the Government Spokesman Stelios Petsas announced the amounts of financial support given to written press, internet websites, television channels and radios by the New Democracy Party government. According to Rodop Rüzgarı, while media organisations were supported by approximately 20 million euros in all of Greece, no such payment has been made to the Western Thrace Turkish minority press which is operating in Turkish language.

“As part of the campaign to inform citizens about the coronavirus pandemic, our country Greece has continued to apply the policy of discrimination and denial against the Turkish

community in Western Thrace by excluding the Western Thrace Turkish minority press from the government’s financial support to media organisations. However, the Western Thrace Turkish minority press, which is publishing within the framework of existing laws, has been informing the Turkish community in our mother tongue Turkish with its own means from the very first days of the pandemic regularly and achieving what the government has not been doing, considering the fact that one of government’s basic responsibilities is protecting public health. On the other hand, compared to Greece, there are very positive examples in other countries in Europe. In Germany, for example, besides

the official language German, there is official information about the pandemic and measures taken by the federal government and state governments in the native languages of minorities and communities. Meanwhile, in our country which prides itself as being the cradle of democracy, there has been no information given in Turkish language with respect to combating the coronavirus at the local level by the government despite the fact that the Turkish community constitutes the majority of the population in the Rodopi province and almost half of the population in Xanthi province in Western Thrace. The Western Thrace Turks have been rendered as scapegoats in the spread of the coronavirus and have been targeted. The Greek state should immediately stop seeing and excluding us who are citizens of this country as its stepchildren all the time”, said Halit Habip Oğlu, President of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF).

*Image: www.burasibatirakya.com

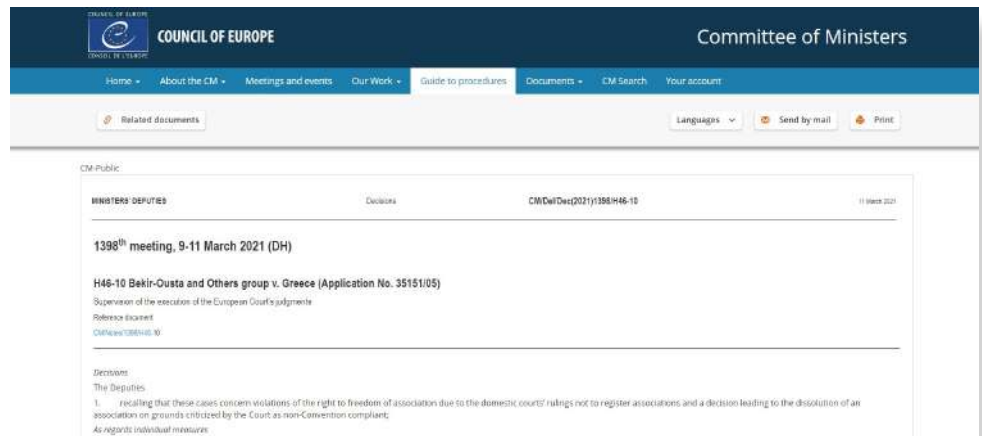
The Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe warned once again Greece!

ABTTF President: “As confirmed by the Committee of Ministers, our country must now stop playing for time, it should fully and urgently execute the ECtHR judgments regarding our associations in accordance with its obligations arising from the European Convention on Human Rights to which it is a party.”

The Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe examined the Bekir-Ousta and Others group of cases which concern associations belonging to the Turkish community in Western Thrace in its meeting in Strasbourg on 9-11 March 2021. The Committee of Ministers criticised the fact that the applications by the Xanthi Turkish Union (XTU), the Cultural Association of Turkish Women in the Prefecture of Rodopi and the Evros Prefecture Minority Youth Association, under the name of the “Bekir-Ousta and Others” group of cases have still not re-examined on their merits by the Greek domestic courts in light of the Court’s case-law 13 years after the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) judgments and also despite the amendment in the Code of Civil Procedure in Greece in 2017.

It was also noted with concern in the decision dated 11.03.2021 that following the rejection by the Thrace Court of Appeal on procedural grounds the request of the Xanthi Turkish Union for re-examination of the decision dissolving the applicant association, the appeal lodged against before the Court of Cassation was held through a hearing on 16 October 2020 but it was further indicated that the hearing took place two years following the lodging of the appeal. The Committee of Ministers thus urged the Greek authorities to take immediate action with respect to the appeal fully and effectively in compliance with Article 11 of the European Convention on Human Rights pertaining to the freedom of assembly and association and as well as the Court’s case-law.

The Committee of Ministers further indicated that the Cultural Association of Turkish



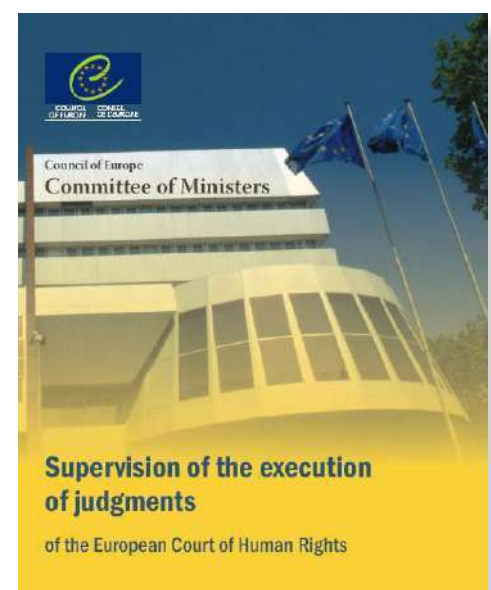
Women in the Prefecture of Rodopi and the Evros Prefecture Minority Youth Association appealed against the rejection of their requests to re-examine the cases by the Thrace Court of Appeal on 20 May 2020, noted that the reason behind these decisions to reject by the same court is almost identical to the reason for the decisions it gave in 2018 and urged the Greek authorities to redouble its efforts to ensure that the appeals of the two associations are swiftly concluded. The Committee of Ministers urged the Greek authorities to take all necessary measures to ensure that the hearing, which will examine the cases of the two associations, is held earlier than the date envisaged by the Court of Cassation on 18 March 2022.

Noting with deep concern that it has been reported that domestic courts in Greece have rejected similar applications, the Committee of Ministers urged the Greek authorities to redouble their efforts to raise awareness of the Court’s case law before national courts.

Taking the decision to resume its examination of the Bekir-Ousta and Others group of cases in its meeting in June 2021, the Committee of Ministers requested from the Secretariat to prepare a draft interim resolution in the event that no tangible progress has been realised with respect to the implementation of the individual measures.

Halit Habip Oğlu, President of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) made the following statement: “In its latest decision, the Council of Europe’s Committee of Ministers called on Greece to take action by the domestic courts to fina-

lise the appeals of our associations in the cases of the Bekir-Ousta and Others group of cases as soon as possible. Despite the amendment in the law in 2017, the Committee of Ministers has once again made clear its deep concern that our associations’ requests for a re-examination of their cases have been rejected and that ECtHR judgments have not been executed for 13 years. As confirmed by the Committee of Ministers, our country must now stop playing for time and execute the ECtHR judgments concerning our associations fully and immediately in accordance with its obligations arising from the European Convention on Human Rights to which it is a party.”



Please click here for the full text of the decision: https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result_details.aspx?ObjectID=090001680a1ac23



Minister of Foreign Affairs of Greece Dendias once again denied the ethnic Turkish identity of the Turkish community in Western Thrace

ABTTF President: “Our country, which claims to be the cradle of democracy, disregards the most basic human rights by forbidding us to define ourselves as ‘Turks’. The policy of denial of our identity by the rulers of our country will never change the fact that we are Turks.”

The Minister of Foreign Affairs of Greece Nikos Dendias met with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu in Ankara on 15 April 2021. Earlier, the President of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdoğan welcomed Dendias at the Presidential Complex. A joint press conference was held after the meeting between Dendias and Çavuşoğlu.

Çavuşoğlu stated that they made the problems experienced by the Turkish community in Western Thrace clear during the bilateral talks, noting that Turkey



has implemented many positive practices in dialogue on the problems of the Turkish citizens of Greek origin and that they expect the same constructive approach for Western Thrace Turks.

Dendias stated that the minority in (Western) Thrace is a Muslim Minority, and that this is the official view of the Greek state and added that provocative actions on these issues have damaged the relations.

“During his visit to Ankara, our country’s Minister of Foreign Affairs Dendias reiterated his past statements and again

denied the ethnic Turkish identity of the Turkish community in Western Thrace. Dendias stated that this is the official opinion of the Greek state and thus affirmed that our country does not recognise the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) regarding our three associations. Our country, which claims to be the cradle of democracy, disregards the most basic human rights by forbidding us to define ourselves as ‘Turks’. The policy of denial of our identity by the rulers of our country will never change the fact that we are Turks. As Western Thrace Turks, we would like to thank the Minister of Foreign Affairs of our motherland Çavuşoğlu for supporting us by stating that it is not correct for our country to be uncomfortable with us calling ourselves Turks”, said Halit Habip Oğlu, President of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF).

*Image: www.aa.com.tr

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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