



ABTTT President Habip Oğlu paid a working visit to Brussels



President of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTT) Halit Habip Oğlu paid a working visit to Brussels, the capital of the European Union (EU), on 9 December 2025.

Habip Oğlu, accompanied by Deniz Servantie

from the ABTTT Brussels Office, paid his last working visit of the year to Members of the European Parliament (EP), including Ilhan Kyuchuk (Renew Europe, Bulgaria), and Loránt Vincze (EPP, Romania), a member of the Hungarian minority in Romania and also the Chair

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of the EP Intergroup on Traditional Minorities, National Communities and Languages.

During the meetings with MEPs working on minority rights under the EP umbrella, the current issues of the Turkish community in Western Thrace and recent events in Greece were raised, and developments concerning national minorities in the European Union (EU) in 2025 were assessed.

Habip Oğlu pointed out that the decline in



the rule of law and the independence of the

judiciary in Greece has continued to worsen in 2025, reminding that Greece has failed to execute the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) regarding Turkish associations in the Bekir-Ousta and Others group of cases for nearly 18 years.

During the meetings, views were further exchanged on topics of cooperation and joint work in 2026 at the EP, primarily at the Intergroup on Traditional Minorities, National Communities and Languages.

Written statement from ABTTF to the UN Human Rights Council

The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) submitted a written statement to the 59th regular session of the United Nations (UN) Human Rights Council titled “Interference with the Freedom of Expression of NGOs and Continuing Violation of the Freedom of Association of the Turkish community in Western Thrace in Greece”.

ABTTF emphasised that it has contributed to the UN Human Rights Council through written and oral presentations as a non-governmental organisation (NGO) in special consultative status with the UN Economic and Social Council since 2006. It indicated that all the terms “Western Thrace” used in the written statements submitted by ABTTF, representing the Turkish community in Western Thrace living in Greece, to the 56th, 57th, and 58th regular sessions of the UN Human Rights Council were changed to “Thrace” after the aforementioned written statements were uploaded to the UN system. Noting that this constituted a clear intervention in the content of a written statement submitted by an NGO and a violation of Resolution 1996/31 of the UN Economic and Social Council, ABTTF explained in consequence that the freedom of expression of the Turkish community in Western Thrace had been violated.

In its written statement, ABTTF stated that the Turkish community has lived in the Western Thrace region for centuries and has enjoyed educational and religious autonomy

since the 1923 Treaty of Lau-sanne, adding that this educational and religious autonomy was in place in Greece until 1967 but was subsequently undermined over the years by various laws and state practices.

ABTTF emphasised that although associations with the word “Turkish” in their names operated with-out any obstacles for almost half a century in Greece, they were dissolved in 1983. It also highlighted that Greece has failed to execute the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) judgments in the Bekir-Ousta and Others group of cases regarding dissolved or unregistered Turkish associations for over 17 years.

ABTTF stipulated that the registration application of the Cultural Association of Turkish Women of the Prefecture of Xanthi was also rejected by the Greek national courts, and reminded that the West-ern Thrace Fenerbahçe Cultural and Sports Association, established by supporters of a sports club, was officially registered in 2022 but was dissolved by a court in May 2024 on grounds that the phrase “Western Thrace”

in its name was contrary to the law and public order.

Noting that the Turkish community in Western Thrace has been struggling with systematic discrimina-tion in Greece for many years, ABTTF stated that whenever the state wants to increase pressure on the Turkish community, it resorts to judicial investigations against prominent figures in the Turkish com-munity with false pretexts for the purpose of intimidation.

ABTTF demanded that Greece develop effective policies against structural discrimination and inequal-ity towards the Turkish community in Western Thrace and condemn and punish defamation, stigmatisation and hate speech against human rights defenders belonging to the Turkish community at all levels of public and political life.

Please click below for the written statement submitted by ABTTF:

<https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/g25/202/44/pdf/g2520244.pdf>

Human Rights Council
 Fifty-ninth session
 16 June–11 July 2025
 Agenda item 3
 Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development

Written statement submitted by Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status*

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[23 May 2025]

Why do our iftars bother some people?

Dear readers,

We continue to follow with concern the events unfolding in the wake of the weekend attacks by the U.S. and Israel on Iran. We hope that the war that began in the Middle East during this blessed month of Ramadan will not spread throughout the world.

Meanwhile, life goes on, everywhere, for everyone...

As every year, the blessed month of Ramadan continues with enthusiasm in our region.

Being able to sit at the same table, break our fast together, convene with our community in our mosques and associations, and say "Amen" together with our families is a great blessing and source of gratitude for us.

Iftar tables are set up in three of our municipalities, namely, Myki (Mustafçova), Arriana (Kozlukebiri) and Iasmos (Yassıköy), as well as in other towns such as Sapes (Şapçı), where our people gather around them. Every day, in different villages, our people break their fast together at crowded iftar tables. As in different countries across Europe, we feel the blessings of Ramadan in our region of our Western Thrace through these iftar tables.

Representatives from our motherland, Türkiye, also join our iftar tables, feeling the spirit of sharing and solidarity of Ramadan with us. Breaking our fast together with our valued guests from our motherland has a special meaning for us, as these visits are more than just a reminder that we are not forgotten; they are a spiritual communion that brings those far away closer to us during this blessed month of Ramadan.

However, for some reason, these gatherings seem to have disturbed certain circles. Why is that?

Yet, our country's representatives also

participate in religious ceremonies and important cultural events organised by Greek communities in Istanbul, Bozcaada, and Gökçeada, which were excluded from the population exchange in accordance with the treaty between our country, Greece, and our motherland, Türkiye.

Every year, on 6 January, during the Feast of Ta Fota (also known as Epiphany), when the Greeks commemorate the birth and baptism of Prophet Jesus, they perform a ceremony of retrieving a cross from the sea, which politicians from our country sometimes attend.

Türkiye grants special permission to Greeks living in Istanbul and Orthodox Christians visiting from Greece to worship in historic churches. For example, Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Fener Bartholomew presides over services at the Church of St. Voukolos in Izmir, where very few Greeks live today. Many Greeks from the Greek islands attend these services, and some Greek television channels broadcast them live.

Meanwhile, services have been held for 12 years at the Sumela Monastery in Trabzon, where there is no longer a Greek population. Last year's service was led by Metropolitan Pavlos Sofianopoulos of Kırklareli, and Orthodox Christians from Greece also were in attendance.

In fact, four years ago, during his visit to Türkiye in March, Prime Minister Mitsotakis visited the Fener Greek Patriarchate with his delegation and attended the service held there to celebrate the Feast of Orthodoxy.

These visits have never constituted a problem for Türkiye's leaders. But it is impossible to see this pretty picture in our country...

In Rodopi, where we, the Turkish community of Western Thrace, constitute more than half of the population, and in



Xanthi, where we constitute nearly half, the participation of guests from our motherland in the iftar dinners organised under the leadership of our Turkish municipalities is met with hostility. Moreover, certain circles are once again targeting us with false and misleading claims due to these visits.

Certain circles, deliberately seeking to heighten tensions in our region, are pursuing their provocations. The cross drawn on the wall of the Hürriyet Mosque in Xanthi is also a result of this provocation... We are well aware of these provocations, but we will never be deceived by them.

This blessed month of Ramadan is a month of sharing and solidarity for us. We welcome our guests from the motherland to our iftar tables in our region and seek to experience the beautiful spirit of Ramadan together with them.

I would like to conclude by wishing the Turkish community in Western Thrace and the entire Islamic world a blessed Ramadan, and I hope that everyone will welcome the approaching Ramadan holiday with peace, tranquillity and good health.

Stay well....

Halit Habip Oğlu
ABTTF President

ABTTF participated in the 3rd thematic meeting of the FUEN Women of Minorities Project



The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) participated in the 3rd thematic meeting of the “Women of Minorities” project of the Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN), of which it is a full member, held in Budapest, the capital of Hungary, on 1-3 December 2025.

ABTTF International Relations Director Melek Kirmacı attended the conference titled “Equality in Political Participation and Representation of Minorities,” hosted by the Landesselbstverwaltung der Ungarndeutschen (LdU) of Germans in Hungary, a member of FUEN, which brought together experts, activists, politicians and minority representatives from various European countries.

The meeting began with a welcome speech by FUEN Secretary General Eva Edel Penzes. Later, as the keynote speaker, Member of the Advisory Committee of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCNM) of the Council of Europe Prof. Dr. Tove Malloy, delivered an introductory presentation on the theme of the meeting.

Moderated by FUEN Women of Minorities Project Coordinator Dr. Zora Popova, participants spent two days discussing how women belonging to minorities can



gain more visibility, influence and space in political and public life.

Intervening in the panel titled “Participation & Representation of Women of Minorities – Country Reports On Barriers And Positive Practices”, ABTTF noted that the ethnic Turkish identity of the Turkish community in Western Thrace living in Greece is denied by the state, and that a cultural association founded by Turkish women in the prefecture of Rodopi in 2001 was not registered by the national courts on grounds of the word “Turkish” in its name. Noting that the association in question won its case before the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) in 2008, ABTTF indicated that Greece has failed to execute the ECtHR judgments concerning the Bekir-Ousta and



Others group of cases, which also includes this women’s association, for over 17 years.

Furthermore, ABTTF stated that a cultural association established in 2010 by Turkish women living in the prefecture of Xanthi was also not registered by the national courts for the same reason, and that this association also appealed to the ECtHR, which ruled unanimously in June 2025 that Greece had once again violated the freedom of association.

Pointing out that, due to systematic and structural discrimination against the Turkish community in Greece, members of the Turkish community unfortunately have a very limited role in political life, ABTTF explained that there is currently no law or

policy in Greece that supports the political participation of the Turkish community.

ABTTF emphasised that hate speech in politics and the media in Greece is part of systematic and structural discrimination against the Turkish community, and reminded that the Friendship, Equality, Peace (FEP) Party, was explicitly targeted by the Greek media after the party came first



in the prefectures of Rodopi and Xanthi in the 2019 and 2024 European Parliament

(EP) elections.

ABTTF recommended that the general economic development of the Western Thrace region be ensured and that women be encouraged to take up leadership positions in civil society organisations and politics in order to empower women belonging to the Turkish community in Western Thrace in the public and political spheres.

Written opinion from ABTTF on the report of the Greek Ministry of Education, Religious Affairs and Sport

The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) prepared a written opinion on the issues concerning the Turkish community in Western Thrace included in the report titled “2024 Report on Incidents Against Places of Religious Importance in Greece” published by the Greek Ministry of Education, Religious Affairs and Sport, and submitted it to the competent Greek authorities.

In its written opinion, ABTTF highlighted the problems and demands of the Turkish community in Western Thrace, which has religious autonomy under international treaties, as well as the violation of the religious freedoms of the Turkish communities in Rhodes and Kos by the state. ABTTF also conveyed the problems encountered in the preservation and restoration of historical mosques inherited from the Ottoman Empire in Greece.

Criticising the report for containing superficial, incomplete and inaccurate information about the Turkish community in Western Thrace and Turks in Rhodes and Kos, and for reiterating the state’s official narrative and thus being biased, ABTTF noted that this undermined the fundamental accuracy and reliability of the report.

ABTTF emphasised that the Turkish community in Western Thrace was granted autonomy in religious matters by the 1830 Protocol, the 1881 Treaty, the 1913 Treaty of Athens and the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne, indicating that the state does not interfere with the organisation and functioning of the



Orthodox Christian Church, which is defined as the dominant religion in the Constitution, or the Jewish community, which is known as an established religion in the country, but that it directly interferes in the religious affairs of the Turkish community, thereby violating the aforementioned international treaties to which Greece is a party.

Noting that, contrary to the religious autonomy of the Turkish community in Western Thrace, muftis began to be appointed by the state in Komotini, Xanthi and Didymoteicho with the law adopted in 1991, ABTTF explained that today there is a dual structure in Western Thrace consisting of muftis appointed by the state but not recognised by the community

and muftis elected by the community.

Moreover, ABTTF stressed that, in accordance with Law No. 4964/2022 entitled “Modernisation of the Mufti Offices in Thrace”, which the Turkish community in Western Thrace has opposed from the outset, a new mufti has been appointed in Didymoteicho. It noted that Greece, by unilaterally appointing a mufti in Didymoteicho by virtue of a ministerial decision, has once again disregarded the religious autonomy and will of the Turkish community, as defined by the 1913 Treaty of Athens and guaranteed by the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne.

Drawing attention to the fact that the religious freedoms of the Turkish community in Rhodes and Kos have again been usurped by the state, ABTTF highlighted that the mufti on the islands continued to perform his duties until his death in 1974, and that since then, the state has closed the mufti’s office in Rhodes, depriving the Turkish community of their right to determine their religious leaders on the islands, and that there is still no mufti on the islands today.

ABTTF called for the restoration of the religious autonomy of the Turkish community in Western Thrace, for the muftis elected by their free will to be recognised by the government as official religious leaders, and for the repeal of Law No. 4115/2013, Presidential Decree No. 52/2019 and Law No. 4964/2022, and for the restoration of the religious, cultural and educational rights of the Turkish community in Rhodes and Kos.

ABTTF brought the current problems faced by the Turkish community in Western Thrace in the field of education to the attention of the UN Human Rights Council

The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) submitted a written statement titled “Denial of Turkish Children’s Rights to Quality Education due to the Violation of the Educational Autonomy of the Turkish Community in Western Thrace, Greece” to the 61st session of the United Nations (UN) Human Rights Council.

In its written statement, ABTTF emphasised that the Turkish community in Western Thrace living in Greece was granted educational autonomy by the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne, noting that within the scope of this educational autonomy, the administration and functioning of the private and autonomous Turkish schools belonging to the Turkish community is the responsibility of a school board consisting of three persons elected by the parents of pupils studying there.

Noting that the authority and responsibilities of these school boards have been restricted by the state over the years, ABTTF indicated that Law No. 694, enacted in 1977, stipulated that the three-member boards of Turkish schools were to be appointed by the governor of the prefecture from a list of up to fifteen names, and that Law No. 695, enacted in the same year, also stripped the boards of their right to hire teachers.

ABTTF explained that, despite the decision taken by the Greek Ministry of Education in 2002, the boards no longer had any authority over Turkish schools, and that although this appeared to be in line with the legal framework, arbitrary practices by the state persisted. It noted that, most recently, the board of the Xanthi Turkish Secondary and High School had been banned from entering the school building and its office inside the building had been vacated.

According to press reports, ABTTF stated that as of 1 August 2026, all school boards temporarily operating in state schools under Law No. 5056/2023 will be completely



abolished and all their prerogatives and responsibilities will be transferred to the municipalities. ABTTF highlighted that if this decision is also applied to the private and autonomous Turkish schools belonging to the Turkish community in Western Thrace, it would constitute a major blow to the Turkish community’s educational autonomy.

Furthermore, ABTTF pinpointed that the government’s decision in 2010, as part of its austerity measures, to temporarily suspend the activities of schools with fewer than nine pupils and to close them permanently after three years was applied to private and autonomous Turkish schools in a manner in contradiction to the educational autonomy of the Turkish community in Western Thrace, reminding that the number of Turkish primary schools, which was 188 in 2011, had fallen

to 83 in the 2025-2026 school year due to these closures.

ABTTF also added that the Turkish primary school in the village of Paleo Zigos (Mizanlı), which was effectively closed in the 2023-2024 school year due to insufficient number of pupils, did not reopen in the 2025-2026 school year despite the number of pupils reaching 10.

However, it stated that the state primary school in the village of Argiri, in the prefecture of Karditsa, reopened in 2024 with one pupil, and the state primary school on Pserimos Island reopened in 2025 with two pupils.

ABTTF emphasised that decisions regarding private and autonomous Turkish schools should belong to the Turkish community in Western Thrace and called on Greece to restore the Turkish community’s educational autonomy, which is guaranteed by the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne.

Please click below for the written statement submitted by ABTTF:
<https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/g26/019/61/pdf/g2601961.pdf>

United Nations A/HRC/61/NGO/81

General Assembly

Distr.: General
17 February 2026

English only

Human Rights Council
 Sixty-first session
 23 February–2 April 2026
 Agenda item 3
Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development

Written statement submitted by Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status*

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement, which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[22 January 2026]

Written contribution from ABTTF to the 2026 Rule of Law Report of the European Commission

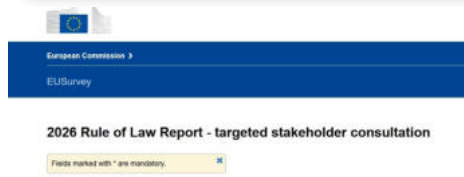
The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) submitted its written contribution regarding the 2026 Rule of Law Report to be published by the European Commission.

ABTTF participated in the online consultation process organised by the European Commission on its 2026 Rule of Law Report, which is aimed at civil society organisations, international organisations, academic institutions, public authorities, media and other stakeholders. In its written contribution to the chapter on Greece, ABTTF highlighted the issues faced by the Turkish community in Western Thrace and the human rights violations and discrimination they are subjected to in the country.

ABTTF indicated that Greece denies the existence of the Turkish community in Western Thrace, whose educational and religious autonomy are guaranteed by the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne, and its ethnic Turkish identity, noting that Greece does not permit associations with the word “Turkish” in their names, and that Greece has failed to execute the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) in the Bekir-Ousta and Others group of cases concerning the dissolved Xanthi Turkish Union and the unregistered Cultural Association of Turkish Women of the Prefecture of Rodopi and the Evros Prefecture Minority Youth Association for the past 18 years.

ABTTF also reminded that the Cultural Association of Turkish Women of the Prefecture of Xanthi, established in 2010 but not registered by the competent Greek national courts on the same grounds, lodged an application with the ECtHR in 2018. added that in its unanimous judgment on 24 June 2025 in the case of “Sagir and Others”, the ECtHR once again ruled that Greece had violated Article 11 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) concerning the freedom of assembly and association.

ABTTF pointed out that, contrary to the



educational autonomy enjoyed by the Turkish community in Western Thrace, private and autonomous Turkish primary schools in the region are being closed one by one each year by the Greek authorities under the pretext of low number of pupils, and that 3 more Turkish primary schools were closed in the 2025-2026 school year, bringing the number of Turkish primary schools from 188 in 2011 to 83 today.

ABTTF stated that despite all applications from the Turkish community in Western Thrace following the inclusion of kindergarten in compulsory education in Greece in 2006, the state has not permitted the establishment of bilingual Turkish and Greek kindergartens, either within the autonomous Turkish school system or entirely privately owned. ABTTF also noted that the Turkish community's request for a new building for the Xanthi Turkish Minority Secondary and High School, due to the school's current building being very old and inadequate,

has been ignored by the Greek authorities, and that the school board has been denied access to the school.

Moreover, ABTTF highlighted that Greece has been violating the religious autonomy of the Turkish community in Western Thrace since 1991 by appointing muftis or mufti regents and not recognising the muftis elected by the community itself. Despite all objections from the Turkish community, the “Law on the Modernisation of the Mufti Offices”, which was adopted by the Greek Parliament in August 2022, transformed all autonomous mufti offices into ordinary public offices under the Ministry of Education, Religious Affairs, and Sports, officially and de facto eliminating the religious autonomy of the Turkish community.

ABTTF emphasised that the Turkish community in Western Thrace is systematically marginalised and subjected to hate speech in the mainstream Greek media, explaining that prominent representatives of the Turkish community are targeted and subjected to baseless and defamatory news reports.

*Image: www.anadoluiimages.com

The Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe criticised Greece for persistently failing to execute the European Court of Human Rights judgments concerning the Bekir-Ousta and Others group of cases

ABTTF President: “Our country, which is once again playing for time, has gained more time with this latest decision by the Committee of Ministers. However, the reality is that the aggrievement of our associations has continued for nearly 18 years, and our community’s freedom of association has been violated.”

At its latest meeting in Strasbourg, France, on 2-4 December 2025, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe examined the Bekir-Ousta and Others group of cases concerning Greece’s violation of the freedom of association of the Turkish community in Western Thrace.

In its decision dated 4 December, the Committee of Ministers reiterated the fundamental importance of freedom of association in a democratic state, recalling that the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) judgments on the Xanthi Turkish Union, the Cultural Association of Turkish Women of the Prefecture of Rodopi and the Evros Prefecture Minority Youth Association in this group of cases concern the violations of freedom of association.

Noting that approximately 18 years have passed since the aforementioned ECtHR judgments were issued, the Committee of Ministers criticised Greece for failing to restore the status quo ante (restitutio in integrum) to the applicant associations, despite Greece’s adoption in 2017 of the legislative amendments enabling the reopening of the impugned proceedings and despite the associations having exhausted all domestic legal remedies.

The Committee of Ministers, in its ruling on the Sagir and Others case concerning the Cultural Association of Turkish Women of the Prefecture of Xanthi, which became final on 25 September 2025, reminded that the



ECtHR had ruled that the local courts’ refusal to register the association on grounds that its name was misleading was not justified. It expressed hope that the local courts would consider any request for reopening from the association.

Noting that it welcomed the decision to amend the Civil Code following the examination of the recommendations in the report of the Committee of Experts established by the Greek authorities, the Committee of Ministers encouraged the Greek authorities to proceed without delay with the drafting and adoption of the amendments to the Civil Code by Parliament.

The Committee of Ministers decided to continue examining the Bekir-Ousta and Others group of cases at its meeting in June 2026 to review the progress made.

“Our country Greece, which politicises the ECtHR judgments in the Bekir-Ousta and Others group of cases and has no intention of executing them, continues to take steps

to prolong the process today, as it did yesterday. The promised amendment to the Civil Code is yet another step aimed at prolonging the process before the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe. Moreover, it is unclear whether the relevant legislative amendment will lead to the execution of the ECtHR judgments concerning our associations. Our country, which is once again playing for time, has gained more time with this latest decision by the Committee of Ministers. However, the reality is that the aggrievement of our associations has continued for nearly 18 years, and our community’s freedom of association has been violated”, said Halit Habip Oğlu, President of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF).

Please click below to access the relevant decision of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe: [https://search.coe.int/cm/#{%22CoEIdentifier%22:\[%2209125948802992af%22\],%22sort%22:\[%22CoEValidationDate%20Descending%22\]}](https://search.coe.int/cm/#{%22CoEIdentifier%22:[%2209125948802992af%22],%22sort%22:[%22CoEValidationDate%20Descending%22]}).

Prime Minister Mitsotakis paid an official visit to Ankara

ABTTF President: “As the Turkish community in Western Thrace, we too wish to act as a bridge between our country and our motherland, but unfortunately this is not possible due to the perception of an “enemy within” created by the state targeting our community in our country. We want the government to develop a sincere, honest and dialogue-based approach on issues that directly concern our community. As we have always stated, with dialogue and goodwill, there is no problem within our community that cannot be resolved.”

Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis paid an official visit to Ankara on 11 February 2026. Mitsotakis was received by President of the Republic of Türkiye Recep Tayyip Erdoğan.

Following high-level talks at the Presidential Complex, President Erdoğan and Prime Minister Mitsotakis chaired the 6th meeting of the High-Level Cooperation Council between Türkiye and Greece. After the meeting, President Erdoğan and Prime Minister Mitsotakis signed a joint declaration between the two countries.

Following the closed-door high-level talks, President Erdoğan and Prime Minister Mitsotakis held a joint press conference.

At the press conference, President Erdoğan indicated that during his talks with Prime Minister Mitsotakis, they once again discussed the positions of the two countries on the Aegean and the Eastern Mediterranean in a clear and sincere manner, noting that although the current issues are complex, they are not unsolvable on the basis of international law, adding, “as long as there is goodwill, constructive dialogue and the will to find a solution”.

Referring to the Turkish community in Western Thrace in his speech, President Erdoğan noted the following: “We need to act with a sense of historical responsibility regarding minorities, who constitute the human element of our relations. I shared



our expectations with the Prime Minister regarding the full enjoyment of religious freedoms and educational opportunities by the Turkish minority in Western Thrace.’

Prime Minister Mitsotakis also explained that they were in Ankara for the 6th meeting of the High-Level Cooperation Council, adding that these meetings demonstrated how important and valuable good neighbourly relations and dialogue are.

Prime Minister Mitsotakis noted that they base their approach to minorities on the Treaty of Lausanne, which refers to a religious minority, a Muslim minority, in Thrace. He noted that Greek Muslims in Thrace live in great harmony with Christians in the region and are equal before the law. Prime Minister Mitsotakis added that although the Greek minority in Istanbul, Türkiye, has dwindled, it continues to be a colourful part of the country’s cultural and social life, adding, “Indeed, minorities in both countries can play a bridging role and a role of mutual understanding between the

two countries”.

“The President of our motherland Türkiye and the Prime Minister of our country Greece emphasised the importance of dialogue and cooperation in bilateral relations in their statements and reaffirmed their determination to maintain the positive agenda in bilateral relations in December 2023 following their meetings in Athens. On the other hand, our prime minister has once again resorted to distorting the facts by interpreting the Treaty of Lausanne in a biased manner. As clearly stated in the provisions of the Treaty of Lausanne, only the term “non-Muslim minorities” is used for minorities in our motherland. We would like to take this opportunity to remind our Prime Minister of this fact once again. As the Turkish community in Western Thrace, we too wish to act as a bridge between our country and our motherland, but unfortunately this is not possible due to the perception of an “enemy within” created by the state targeting our community in our country. We want the government to develop a sincere, honest and dialogue-based approach on issues that directly concern our community. As we have always stated, with dialogue and goodwill, there is no problem within our community that cannot be resolved”, said Halit Habip Oğlu, President of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF).

*Image: www.anadoluiimages.com

ABTTF President Habip Oğlu: The religious autonomy of the Turkish community in Western Thrace has once again been disregarded!

ABTTF President: “In our country, the Greek Orthodox Church -the prevailing religion- and the recognised Jewish community are religiously autonomous; as communities, they freely organise their internal affairs without state intervention. All known religions in the country have an autonomous structure; the state intervenes only in ours. The appointment of the muftis is a usurpation by the state of our right, which is guaranteed by international treaties.”

In a report published on the NewsFire news site regarding the appointment of a new mufti to Didymoteicho by decision of the Greek Ministry of Education, Religious Affairs, and Sport, it was claimed that this reform -implemented under Law 4964/2022- abandons the decades-long method of direct appointment in favor of a modern institutional framework based on transparency, meritocracy, and participation.

Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis, in his weekly evaluation message, also touched upon the appointment of the new mufti in Didymoteicho. He claimed that the legal framework enacted in 2022 regarding the functioning of the muftis was being implemented in practice for the first time and that this process is fully compatible with the Constitution, the Treaty of Lausanne, and



European law.

On the other hand, Chairman of the Western Thrace Turkish Minority Advisory Board (BTTADK) and Mufti of Xanthi Mustafa Trampa, reacted strongly to the appointment during a press conference held on 26 January 2026, attended by BTTADK members. He stated that the issue of determining a mufti cannot be treated as a mere administrative discretion; rather, it is the right of the Turkish community in Western Thrace to elect its own religious representative, a right granted by the international treaties.

Emphasising that their expectation from the Greek state is dialogue instead of conflict and consultation instead of imposition, Trampa noted that the issue is not only a religious one but a clear problem of democracy and representation. He remarked that the

Western Thrace Turks possess the maturity and will to elect their own religious leader.

“Religious autonomy was granted to our community by the 1913 Treaty of Athens, and this autonomy was guaranteed by the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne. The claim made by our country’s Prime Minister Mitsotakis and the mainstream Greek media -that the appointment of a new mufti to Didymoteicho is compatible with the Treaty of Lausanne- is a complete falsehood. This appointment is a violation of our religious autonomy and a total disregard for the will of our community. In our country, the Greek Orthodox Church -the prevailing religion- and the recognised Jewish community are religiously autonomous; as communities, they freely organise their internal affairs without state intervention. All known religions in the country have an autonomous structure; the state intervenes only in ours. The determination of the muftis is a usurpation of our right, which is guaranteed by the treaties. As the Turkish community in western Thrace, we will never allow the state to achieve its true objective: the total elimination of our religious autonomy”, said Halit Habip Oğlu, President of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF).

*Image: www.anadoluiimages.com

Imposition of Orthodox Christian rituals on Muslim pupils belonging to the Turkish community in Western Thrace

ABTTF President: “We strongly condemn this event, which constitutes a clear attack on the religious and cultural values of our community with the aim of alienating our pupils from their own identities through assimilation. We call upon the relevant authorities to fully respect our pupils’ freedom of religion and conscience and to take the necessary measures to prevent the recurrence of such events in the future.”



In the village of Sminthi (Dolaphan), located

within the boundaries of the Municipality of Myki (Mustafçova) in the Xanthi regional unit of Greece’s Western Thrace region, an event called “Kalanta”, a tradition belonging to the Orthodox Christian faith, was staged at a public secondary school attended exclusively by Muslim Turkish pupils.

As part of the event, the pupils sang “Kalanta” carols under the guidance of

their teachers and accompanied by musical instruments. "Kalanta" holds an important place in the Orthodox Christian faith and is known as a religious and cultural ritual performed during the periods of Christmas, New Year and Epiphany (Fota/Theophany).

"The performance of a religious ritual associated with Orthodox Christianity in a

public secondary school where there are no Christian pupils, and where all pupils belong to the Turkish community in Western Thrace, is absolutely unacceptable. It is clear that there is no good faith in organising such an event, which disregards the cultural and religious identities of our pupils. We strongly condemn this event, which constitutes a clear attack on the religious and cultural values

of our community with the aim of alienating our pupils from their own identities through assimilation. We call on the authorities to fully respect our pupils' freedom of religion and conscience and to take the necessary measures to prevent the recurrence of such events in the future", said Halit Habip Ođlu, President of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF).

A cross was drawn on the wall of the Hürriyet Mosque in Xanthi



ABTTF President: "We condemn in the strongest terms this despicable attack on our mosque during the holy month of Ramadan. This ugly attack against our sacred place and the Turkish community in Western Thrace, which aims to damage the atmosphere of peace and tranquillity in our region, is absolutely unacceptable. We expect the authorities to swiftly investigate the attack, identify the perpetrators as soon as possible, bring them to justice, and punish them as they deserve."

On the night of Thursday, 26 February, an unknown person or persons drew a cross and some letters on the outer wall of the Hürriyet Mosque in the city of Xanthi, Greece. This ugly attack, carried out during the holy month of Ramadan, caused great sadness and outrage among the Turkish community in Western Thrace.

"We condemn in the strongest terms this despicable attack on our mosque during the holy month of Ramadan. This ugly attack

against our sacred place and the Turkish community in Western Thrace, which aims to damage the atmosphere of peace and tranquillity in our region, is absolutely unacceptable. We expect the authorities to swiftly investigate the attack, identify the perpetrators as soon as possible, bring them to justice, and punish them as they deserve", said Halit Habip Ođlu, President of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF).

*Image: www.anadoluiimages.com



We condemn in the strongest terms the despicable attack on the Turkish primary school in the village of Aratos (Karacaoğlan)!



The Turkish primary school in the village of Aratos (Karacaoğlan), which is part of the Municipality of Arriana (Kozlukebiri) in the Western Thrace region of Greece, was attacked by unidentified individuals.

According to the information obtained, the entrance door of the primary school, which was closed by the Greek authorities in the 2021-2022 school year on grounds of insufficient number of pupils, as well as

classroom doors, cupboards, books and radiators were vandalised, and fires were lit inside the classrooms.

It is not known exactly when the attack took place, but villagers accidentally discovered it on 4 January 2026 and immediately reported it to the police.

The Presidium and family of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Western Thrace

(ABTTF), on behalf of all Western Thrace Turks living in Europe, strongly condemn the despicable attack on the Turkish primary school in the village of Aratos (Karacaoğlan) and demand that the attack be promptly investigated by the competent authorities, that the perpetrators be apprehended, brought to justice and punished.

*Image: www.ulkugazetesi.net

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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