



# Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europa Newsletter

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

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## Western Thrace Turkish delegation attended the Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting in Vienna



The Western Thrace Turkish delegation consisting of ABTTF and WTMUGA brought forward that the freedom of association of the Turkish community in Western Thrace has been violated and that the ECtHR judgments have not been executed for the past 14 years.

The Western Thrace Turkish delegation,

consisting of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) and the Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association (WTMUGA) attended the OSCE Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting titled "The Functioning of Democratic Institutions in Times of Crisis: Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting II" which was held in Vienna on 16-17 May 2022. ABTTF International Relations Director Melek Kırmacı and WTMUGA Human Rights Expert Kerem Abdurahimoğlu represented the Turkish community in Western Thrace at the second human dimension meeting of 2022.

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The role of national and local institutions as guardians of democracy in times of crisis, as well as the importance of freedom of association and freedom of the media in the OSCE region were discussed at the meeting, which was held in cooperation with the Polish OSCE Chairmanship and the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR).

In the morning session where the importance of freedom of association in the OSCE region was tackled, ABTTF indicated that the freedom of association of the Turkish community in Western Thrace has been violated by Greece. ABTTF noted that in the three cases known as Bekir-Ousta Group of Cases, Greece has not executed the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) for the past 14 years. Stating that the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe will examine the Bekir-Ousta Group of Cases in June 2022, ABTTF stated that they requested the initiation of the infringement procedure against Greece since no steps were taken to execute the ECtHR judgments.

Intervening in the same session, WT-MUGA noted that the Xanthi Turkish Union, which is part of the Bekir-Ousta Group of Cases, has once again exhausted the domestic law with the rejection by the Court of Cassation on 29 June 2021 of its appeal before the national courts. Furthermore, WTMUGA noted that following the decision ren-



dered by the Court of Cassation and of protest that was held by the Xanthi Turkish Union, seven months after that, an investigation was launched against Xanthi Turkish Union President Ozan Ahmetoğlu and leading figures of the Turkish community in Western Thrace.

## Mainstream media displays a biased approach towards the Turkish community in Western Thrace

In the session on media freedom, ABTTF indicated that the official policy of Greece of not recognizing the ethnic Turkish identity of the Turkish community in Western Thrace and that there is only a religious minority in the country had an impact on the media as well. Stating that there is a prejudiced approach towards the Turkish community in Western Thrace in the media, ABTTF stated that racist and hate-based discourse against the Turkish community in Western Thrace in the online and offline media has increased fear and insecurity throughout the country. Indicating that this situation may trigger hate crimes, ABTTF requested from the country authorities to take responsibility for reporting and punishing hate speech and hate-based attacks.

Using its right of reply at the closing session, Greece repeated the official thesis that there is a Muslim minority in Thrace as a religious minority according to the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne, claiming that the Minority is enjoying all sorts of positive rights without any discrimination.

## ABTTF reported attacks targeting the Turkish community in Western Thrace and Islamophobic hate attacks and hate speech to the OSCE

The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) forwarded to the OSCE its written contribution to the 2021 Hate Crimes Report of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), which includes the Turkish community in Western Thrace and Islamophobic hate-based attacks and hate speech in Greece.

In its written contribution, ABTTF quoted Archbishop Ieronymos II of Athens, leader of the Orthodox Church, as saying in a documentary broadcast



on a television channel in January 2021 that 'Islam is not a religion, but a political party and people are people of war' and indicated that he had been engaged directly in hate speech.

Noting that an improvised explosive

device containing screws and nails was thrown at a building used as a mosque in Athens, Greece, in January 2022, ABTTF noted that in the same month, an anti-Islam poster reading 'Stop the Islamization of Evros now!' was put up by an unidentified person or persons on a wall opposite the historic Çelebi Sultan Mehmet Mosque in the town of Didymoteicho in the province of Evros.

The OSCE 2021 Hate Crimes Report will be published on the International Day for Tolerance on 16 November, as it does every year.

# Dangerous games are being played in our region Western Thrace!

Dear readers,

In our country, we have been going through days in the last month that will go down in history as a scandal.

The reveal that PASOK-KINAL President and European Parliament (EP) Deputy Nikos Androulakis and journalist Thanasis Koukakis were tapped with a software called "Predator" by the National Intelligence Service (EYP), affiliated to Prime Minister Mitsotakis, fell like a bomb on the country's agenda.

Following the outbreak of the wiretapping scandal, Prime Minister Mitsotakis' statement escalated dramatically discussions about democracy and rule of law in the country, as it also brought up the impact of "dark forces" within the state.

While discussions were very much heated, the wiretapping scandal also spread to our region. Ruling MP and Second Deputy Speaker of the Hellenic Parliament Athanasiou, referred our Turkish deputies, saying that in cases where national security is a priority, our deputies can be wiretapped legally.

First Mitsotakis, then Athanasiou, said that the wiretapping was legal. With the outbreak of Androulakis' wiretapping during a period when early elections were on the agenda, I think that the New Democracy Party, since it came to power, the ruling party has been acting in an attitude that does not trust the deputies in the parliament, journalists in the media and the people on the street.

When the wiretapping scandal broke out, the EU Commission stepped in and asked the government to investigate this scandal.

In the parliament, action was taken to establish a commission to investigate the scandal. Although the government has a majority in the parliament, it does not seem possible to cover up this huge scandal. Considering that the support given to Mitsotakis has decreased, let's see when the government will declare early elections?

While this scandal was discussed with all

its fervor in the country's politics, the marginalizing language and practice against us in our region has increased even more recently. While the policy of the government, which sees us as a threat to national security in the country, continues in words and actions, it seems like a campaign is being carried out against us in the media.

In the past, political parties and political figures in our country who turned their eyes on us, depending on the developments in the bilateral relations between our country and our motherland Türkiye, used to threaten us, now we have added rhetoric to reinforce the threat perception in our region in order to pursue a political or academic career.

Claiming that our presence in our region poses a threat, it is desired to create an atmosphere of fear in our country.

Why? Because we are Turkish, of course! Why? Because, like the Greek minority in our motherland Türkiye, we are in dialogue with our motherland. Why? Because we demand our rights in education in accordance with the agreements in our schools! Why? Because the Turkish press in our region conveys the injustices against our society to the people of the region! Why? Because we want to serve both our region and our country in politics through different political parties in our country!

In other words, we want to continue to exist by protecting our status and rights as the Turks, while serving our country and working for our country! But because we are Turkish, there is always suspicion against us, some politicians and some other circles continue to pump that this may pose a threat!

We were used to the fact that some local newspapers operating in our region constantly bring news focused on Turkey and the Turkish community in Western Thrace to the agenda, marginalizing us and presenting us as a threat.

However, as another remarkable development, many news portals have been established in our region recently, using the possibilities of digitalization to report only negative news about Turkey and our com-



munity. The aim is to spread fear in the region, thereby creating a provocation!

As a matter of fact, a few days ago, a Turkish teenager was attacked by a group of 20 people in Xanthi, and the attackers shouted, "Nasty Turk, we will kill you next time." I wish the young man a speedy recovery, get well soon!

These provocative events are very, very dangerous! Imagine if similar events took place in within the borders of Komotini, Maronia-Sapes or Iasmos in Rhodope and Avdira or Myki in Xanthi!

Is the government not aware of this dangerous situation? While going through a difficult period in terms of both domestic politics and bilateral relations, the government should be very careful and use a unifying language, not a divisive one! It should produce discourses and policies that will strengthen the trust of the people in the state and power in our region and in our country!

None of us would even want to think otherwise!

Kind regards,

Halit Habip Oglu  
ABTTF President

# ABTTF attended the 49th session of the UN Human Rights Council

ABTTF, which participated in the Conclusion Session of the Universal Periodic Review Mechanism with respect to Greece, presented its recommendations on the issues regarding the recognition of the ethnic Turkish identity of the Turkish community in Western Thrace, the restoration of the educational and religious autonomy, and the execution of the ECtHR judgment as regards the freedom to form associations.

The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) participated in the session titled “Results of the Universal Periodic Review Mechanism (UPR)” as part of the agenda of the 49th regular session of the United Nations (UN) Human Rights Council held on 28 February-1 April 2022.

ABTTF, which is in special consultation status with the UN Economic and Social Council, attended the UPR Results session held on 23-24 March 2022, where the results of the 3rd Cycle Review of Greece were discussed, and it presented its recommendations on the Turkish community in Western Thrace.

At the meeting in Geneva, which was attended by ABTTF International Affairs Director Melek Kırmacı Arık, the results of the review as regards Greece which had been tackled during the UPR Working Group on 1 November 2021 were discussed. Following the November review as regards Greece, ABTTF prepared a report in parallel with the national report submitted by Greece, citing all the issues of the Turkish community in Western Thrace and presenting its recommendations to Greece. Following the review results session held on 23 March 2022, ABTTF presented its recommendations on the issues of the Turkish community in Western Thrace regarding the results of the review.

At the session held on 23 March 2022, Greece indicated that following the review on 1 November 2021 and the report presented by the UPR Working Group,



Greece had carefully examined the recommendations which were presented to Greece within the framework of the mechanism as regards the Member States of the UN Human Rights Council. Furthermore, Greece noted that it had accepted 219 of the 239 recommendations submitted to Greece, adding that they would submit an interim periodic report ahead of the next review as part of their confidence in the UPR mechanism.



Intervening at this session, Turkey noted that Greece did not accept any of the recommendations presented by Turkey with respect to the Turkish community in Western Thrace, indicating that the issues of the Turkish community in Western Thrace regarding the freedom of education, religion, the freedom to form associations and the execution of the related ECtHR judgments were persisting. Moreover, Turkey exp-

lained that Greece had not executed the ECtHR judgments for the past 14 years, adding that a cemetery in Western Thrace had recently been demolished in order to build a football field. In its closing remarks, Greece indicated that it would continue to adhere to international law and all important human rights provisions, including the international minority standards, and fully implement the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne, which ensures the livelihood and enriches the Muslim minority.

ABTTF also presented a written statement to the UN Human Rights Council with respect to the UPR results of Greece and presented its recommendations on the issues regarding the recognition of the Turkish ethnic identity of the Turkish community in Western Thrace, the restoration of the educational and religious autonomy, and the execution of the ECtHR judgments as regards the freedom to form associations. In addition, ABTTF criticized the identification of the Turkish community in Rhodes and Kos as Muslim Greek citizens by Greece, noting that the Turkish community in Rhodes and Kos has no means of ensuring education in the mother tongue and choosing its own religious leaders.

ABTTF, which attended the final session, expressed its regrets that Greece did not accept any of the recommendations regarding the Turkish community in Western Thrace and the Turkish community in Rhodes and Kos in its oral presentation to the Council. ABTTF stated that the State intervenes in all areas of the educational and religious autonomy of the Turkish community in Western Thrace granted by the Treaty of Lausanne, noting that the ethnic Turkish identity of the Turkish community in Western Thrace is not recognised and that therefore the associations with the word “Turkish” in their names are being closed. Furthermore, ABTTF reminded that although the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) had ruled against Greece in the three cases known as the Bekir-Ousta and Others Group of cases, it has not been executing the ECtHR judgments for the past 14 years.

# Written statement by ABTTF to the UN Human Rights Council

The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) presented a written statement to the 51st session of the United Nations (UN) Human Rights Council titled “A further violation of the religious autonomy of the Turkish community in Western Thrace, Greece with the Act on Modernization of the Muftiates”. In its written statement, ABTTF raised the issue of the muftis in focus of the new law adopted by the Greek Parliament in July 2022, noting that the religious autonomy of the Turkish community in Western Thrace, guaranteed by treaties, would be completely abolished under the pretext of modernising the muftis in the autonomous structure.

## New law completely abolishes the religious autonomy of the Turkish community in Western Thrace

ABTTF indicated that the religious autonomy of the Turkish community in Western Thrace, which today has a population of about 150,000, was guaranteed by the 1923 Lausanne Peace Treaty, and that contrary to the 1913 Treaty of Athens, to which Greece is a party, it did not allow the Turkish community to elect its own religious leaders and did not recognise the elected muftis.

Noting that the community has chosen its own muftis in response to the appointment of muftis by the state since 1990, ABTTF stated that the elected muftis that are not recognised by the state have been prosecuted and sentenced to prison for the illegal use of religious symbols. ABTTF noted that today there is a dual structure in Western Thrace, namely state-recognized mufti regents and muftis elected by the Turkish community in Western Thrace.

Indicating that the religious autonomy of the Turkish community in Wes-

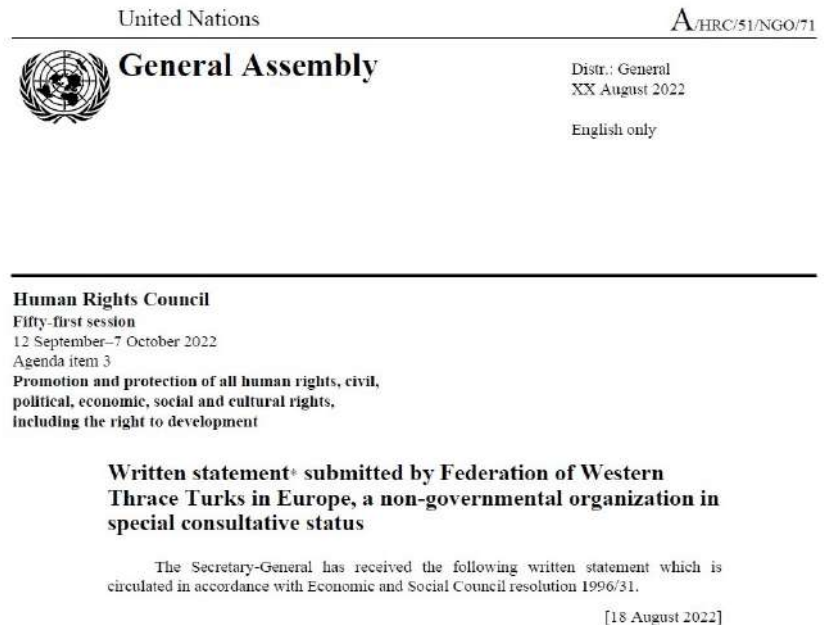


tern Thrace was once again undermined by the Presidential decree No. 52/2019, which severely limited the powers of the muftis by affiliating the mufti offices (muftiates) entirely to the Greek Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs, ABTTF stated that the State Council rejected the application filed for the annulment of the decree.

ABTTF noted that the act under the title “Modernization of the Muftiates” adopted by the Greek Parliament on 29 July 2022, contrary to the provisions of the 1913 Treaty of Athens and the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne, which defines the religious autonomy of the Turkish community in Western Thrace, aims at completely and officially eliminating the religious autonomy of the Turkish community.

Underlining that the act has been drafted without any consultation with the Turkish community in Western Thrace, ABTTF pointed out that the law does not foresee a regulation on the selection of the muftis in Rhodope, Xanthi and Didymoteicho by the community, and that it is apparent that the process of choosing the muftis is attempted to be transformed into a mixed system of selection-appointment. ABTTF indicated that the state aims to establish full control and audit over the Muftiates because the act does not stipulate that both contracted and state employees who will work in the administrative units of the Muftiates must be members of the Muslim and Turkish communities.

ABTTF called upon Greece to ensure that the Turkish community in Western Thrace enjoys its right to elect its own religious leaders in accordance with the 1913 Treaty of Athens and the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne, and to annul the act titled “Modernization of the Muftiates” and the Presidential decree No. 52/2019.



# ABTTF attended the EP Minorities Intergroup meeting

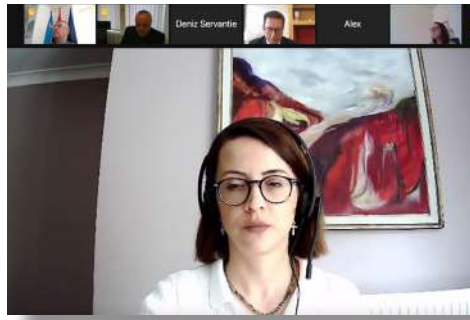
In its presentation at the meeting, ABTTF expressed the issues experienced by the Turkish community in Western Thrace in the field of education.

The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) participated on 7 April 2022 in the meeting of the Intergroup for Traditional Minorities, National Communities and Languages in the European Parliament (EP), which was held online. ABTTF International Affairs Director Melek Kırmacı Arık attended the meeting and delivered a presentation with respect to the issues experienced by the Turkish community in Western Thrace in the field of education, with a special focus on the lack of bilingual minority kindergartens to teach Turkish and Greek in Western Thrace.

Approximately fifty people attended the meeting which was moderated by Intergroup Co-Chairs François Alfonsi (MEP, France) and Loránt Vincze (MEP, Romania).

The first session, moderated by Alfonsi, discussed how regional autonomy could constitute an alternative in resolving conflicts as well as in securing the linguistic and cultural rights of the linguistic minorities. Intervening in this session, Minister for Industry and Trade in Åland's government Fredrik Karlström and Director at the Åland Peace Institute Sia Spiliopoulou Åkermark touched upon the past and current state of autonomy in the Åland Autonomous Administration, where the Swedish-speaking community in Finland lives.

Intervening in the second session whi-



ch was moderated by Vincze, ABTTF International Relations Director Melek Kırmacı Arık noted that Greece does not recognize the 'Turkish' identity of the Turkish community in Western Thrace and that it has repeatedly interfered in its educational autonomy. Noting that the Turkish primary schools in the Western Thrace region have been closed one by one by the Greek authorities over the past years on grounds of an insufficient number of students, Kırmacı Arık stated that although pre-school education is mandatory in Greece, bilingual Turkish kindergartens are not allowed to be established in Western Thrace, and that children belonging to the Turkish community are deprived of their right to a good education in their mother tongue Turkish.



Furthermore, Kırmacı Arık indicated that the words "Turkish community in Western Thrace" in the original title of the petition submitted to the EP Committee on Petitions with the signature of the student's parent Ozan Ahmetoğlu as regards to the lack of bilingual Turkish kindergartens in Western Thrace was removed following a meeting about the

petition at the Committee on 10 January 2022. Kırmacı Arık also explained in detail the issue of the bilingual kindergartens as the EP Committee on Petitions had sent the petition to the EP Committee on Culture and Education and prior to the opinion regarding the petition awaiting to be formulated by the latter.

Calling upon Greece to respect the educational autonomy of the Turkish community in Western Thrace, Kırmacı Arık demanded that the Greek authorities allow the applications for the establishment of bilingual Turkish kindergartens in Western Thrace within the framework of the Turkish minority schools system and as well as the establishment of bilingual private kindergartens in the region.



**Traditional Minorities, National Communities and Languages**

Speaking during the Q&A following the presentation, Vincze indicated that the Greek Members of the European Parliament (MEP) reject the existence of a Turkish minority in Greece and that it is almost impossible to have a dialogue with them, while Alfonsi noted that as MEPs, they should condemn the approach of Greece towards the Turkish community in Western Thrace.

## Western Thrace Turkish delegation attended the European-Central Asian Regional Forum on Minority Issues

The Western Thrace Turkish delegation comprised of the representatives of ABTTF and WTMUGA explained about the legal obstacles to the Turkish community in Western Thrace in its presentations at the meeting.

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 to the European-Central Asian Forum on Minority Issues under the heading of “30th anniversary of the UN Declaration on the rights of minorities 1992-2022” which was held in hybrid format on 2-3 May 2022. Deniz Servantie from ABTTF Brussels Office and WTMUGA Member Kerem Abdurahimoğlu attended the forum which was organised in cooperation between the United Nations (UN) Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues Fernand de Varennes, the Federal Ministry of European and International Affairs of the Republic of Austria and the Budapest based Tom Lantos Institute and in which the Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN) has also taken part.

Intervening as a panellist in the second session titled “Implementation: Institutions, Mechanisms, Policies and Programmes”, Vice-Head of the Balkan Research Institute at the Edirne based Trakya University and member of the Turkish community in Western Thrace Associate Professor Ali Hüseyinoğlu mentioned the importance of a robust normative framework for the functional protection of minority rights and noted that rights violations and discrimination against national minorities have increased in Europe in recent years. Pointing to the current rights situation



of the Turkish community in Western Thrace, Hüseyinoğlu indicated that Greece has not yet executed the judgments taken by the ECtHR on associations related to the Turkish community in Western Thrace, and that the ethnic Turkish identity is still not recognized in Greece. Referring to the fact that the UN and the Council of Europe are important institutions for consolidating the rights of national minorities, Hüseyinoğlu explained that the active participation of minority representatives in such institutions should be strengthened.



Speaking at the same session, ABTTF stated that nothing with respect to the discrimination suffered by the Turkish community in Western Thrace for years has changed positively, reminding that the states parties are obliged to fully implement the Declaration on the 30th anniversary of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Minorities. In addition, ABTTF mentioned that policies on protecting minority rights should be included in all government policies

and touched upon the importance of implementation within this framework.

Intervening in the same session, WTMUGA reminded that the current legal process with respect to the Xanthi Turkish Union (XTU) is an extremely important example as regards Greece's commitment to universal values of diversity and human rights, and that the judgment of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) to restore the official status of the association in 2008 is still not executed by Greece, and that despite the judgment of the ECtHR, the Greek Court of Cassation rejected the appeal made by the association again in June 2021. WTMUGA called for new initiatives to support international minority protection units in Greece.



Speaking once again at the fourth session titled “Moving Forward: Reforming the Protection and Implementation of the Minority Rights Framework” on the second day of the meeting, ABTTF reminded that the Turkish community in Western Thrace consistently receives the answer that the European Commission is not in a position to take any specific action with respect to this area when asked questions about the national minorities through the Members of the European Parliament. ABTTF stressed that the protection of the culture and language of national and linguistic minorities should be included in the EU treaties as a mandate and obligation. ABTTF recommended promoting education and awareness-raising programmes in combating the prejudices in the majority population, as well as initiatives involving tolerance, dialogue, respect and mutual understanding through the media, including on the internet.

# Parallel report by ABTTF to the Greece 2021 Human Rights Report

In its parallel report, ABTTF detailed the issues of the Turkish community in Western Thrace and the violations of its rights that it is being subjected to.

The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) prepared a report in parallel to the Greece 2021 Human Rights Report published by the Department of State of the United States of America (USA) and forwarded it to the US authorities. In its parallel report, ABTTF detailed the issues faced by the Turkish community in Western Thrace in the field of human and minority rights and provided updates on the issues and current developments of the Turkish community, which were not included in the US report.

In its parallel report, ABTTF expressed disappointment that the 2021 report had the title pertaining to the members of national/racial/ethnic minority groups removed and that the issues of the Turkish community in Western Thrace had been given limited space within the framework of the report.

ABTTF stated that the Court of Cassation rejected in its decision of 29 June 2021 for the execution of the judgment of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) and the restoration of the official legal entity of the Xanthi Turkish Union (XTU), which had been closed due to the word 'Turkish' in its name, and it was further noted that XTU had protested against the decision rendered by the Court of Cassation which ignored ECtHR case-law in a protest march it realised on 10 July 2021.

Noting that the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe monitors closely the execution of the judgments of the



ECtHR with respect to the 'Bekir-Ousta and Others Group of Cases', which includes the Turkish community in Western Thrace, ABTTF noted that the appeals of the Cultural Association of Turkish Women of the Prefecture of Rodopi and the Evros Prefecture Minority Youth Association, which were not recorded by the Greek national courts, were discussed on 1 October 2021, but it was further indicated that the Court of Cassation is not expected to make a positive decision on either of the two associations in this fully politicized group of cases.

ABTTF urged Greece to immediately take all necessary measures to execute the ECtHR judgments concerning the 'Bekir-Ousta and Others Group of Cases' without further delay and to allow the registration of associations bearing the word 'Turkish' in their names.

Indicating that under the heading of religious freedom, the Turkish community in Western Thrace was granted the right to choose its own religious leaders by the 1913 Treaty of Athens, which was further guaranteed by the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne, ABTTF noted that in spite of all this, Greece does not recognise the muftis elected by the Turkish community in Western Thrace and

that it continues to appoint the muftis. Noting that the Turkish community in Western Thrace has the right to establish, manage and control its own educational institutions within the framework of the the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne under the heading of education, ABTTF stated that this autonomy of the Turkish community in Western Thrace has been destroyed by various legal regulations and practices over the years. Furthermore, ABTTF noted that bilingual Turkish primary schools in Western Thrace were closed one by one every year under the austerity measures taken in 2010, on grounds of a lack of students, and that the number of Turkish primary schools decreased over the years from 194 in 2008 to 103 in the 2021-2022 school year as a result of this practice, which has become a tool of systematic discrimination against the Turkish community in Western Thrace.

ABTTF urged Greece to restore the educational autonomy guaranteed by the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne to the Turkish community in Western Thrace and to allow the Turkish community in Western Thrace to establish bilingual private kindergartens with the opening of bilingual kindergartens within the Turkish minority school system.



## Parallel report by ABTTF to the Greece 2021 Report on International Religious Freedom

In its parallel report, ABTTF detailed the issues that the Turkish community in Western Thrace is dealing with in the field of religious freedom and called on our country Greece to restore the religious autonomy of the Turkish community in Western Thrace.

The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) prepared a parallel report in response to the Greece 2021 Report on International Religious Freedom published by the Department of State of the United States of America (USA) on 2 June 2022 and forwarded it to the competent authorities of the United States. In its parallel report, ABTTF detailed the issues of the Turkish community in Western Thrace, which enjoys religious autonomy in accordance with international treaties, in the field of religious freedom, especially the issue pertaining to the muftis.

In its parallel report, ABTTF stated that the population of the Turkish community in Western Thrace was given as approximately 140,000 according to government sources based on the 2011 data, and that the Turkish community lived in the Dodecanese Islands, especially in Rhodes and Kos accounted to a population of approximately 6,000.

ABTTF stated that the dominant religion according to the constitution of our country is 'Greek Orthodoxy', as noted in the US report, and emphasised that the Greek state interferes in the internal affairs of the Muslim Turkish community in Western Thrace while not doing the same in the internal affairs of the Greek Orthodox Church and the Jewish community.

Noting that the Turkish community in Western Thrace was granted the right



to elect their own religious leaders which consist of the muftis with the 1913 Treaty of Athens and that this right was guaranteed by the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne, ABTTF indicated that despite this, the government had been appointing muftis or mufti regents since 1991.

Underlining in contradiction to the religious autonomy that have the Western Thrace Turks insofar as they have the ability to choose their own muftis but that the elected muftis are not recognised by the government, ABTTF stated that the elected muftis were subjected to judicial prosecution and received prison sentences for illegally using religious symbols, and that there was a decision of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) condemning our country for violating Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights.

Moreover, ABTTF noted that with the Presidential Decree No. 52/2019, the muftis which have an autonomous structure in Western Thrace were completely subordinated to the Greek Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs and turned into ordinary government offices and that the powers of the muftis were highly limited, adding that the decree was in stark violation of the religious autonomy of the Turkish community in Western Thrace.

ABTTF also stressed that in accordance with Law No. 4115/2013, known as the "Law on 240 Imams", which was opposed by the Turkish community in Western Thrace, religious officials/instructors attached to government-appointed muftis were assigned to teach Islam in Greek to the children belonging to the Turkish community in Western Thrace studying in mosques and state primary and secondary schools in Western Thrace.

Noting that although the Treaty of Lausanne grants the Turkish community in Western Thrace the right to establish, manage and control its own religious institutions, the government has appointed the administrative committees of the minority charitable foundations when the military junta came to power in 1967, ABTTF pointed out that Law No. 3647/2008 paved the way for the sale of foundation property and their transfer to local governments.

ABTTF called on the government to respect the right of the Turkish community in Western Thrace to elect its own muftis and the members of the administrative board of the charitable foundations it owns, calling on our country Greece to restore the religious autonomy of the Turkish community in Western Thrace guaranteed by the international treaties.

# Greek MEP Kefalogiannis' written question as regards the Treaty of Lausanne

ABTTF President: "In our opinion, it is Kefalogiannis himself who misreads and interprets Lausanne. For this, it will be sufficient for the Turkish community in Western Thrace to examine the practices in our region within the framework of the status and rights it had with Lausanne in the period from 1923 to the period of the Colonels' Junta in 1967."

Greek MEP Manolis K. Kefalogiannis (EPP-Christian Democrats) submitted a question to the European Commission on the statements of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan of motherland Türkiye at the occasion of the anniversary of the Treaty of Lausanne of 24 July 1923. In his written question, Kefalogiannis asserted that according to the provisions of the Treaty of Lausanne, a "Muslim minority" is defined in Western Thrace, and according to the provisions of the same treaty, a "Greek National Minority" is defined in Istanbul, Gökçeada (Imbros) and Bozcaada (Tenedos) in Türkiye. Kefalogiannis indicated that Greece has fully complied with the Lausanne provisions and that Greece has fulfilled all its obligations under the treaty towards the Turkish community in Western Thrace.

Earlier, Kefalogiannis had sent a letter to previous and late EP President David Sassoli about the webinar that had been organised on 2 June 2021 on the issue of the freedom of association of the Turkish community in Western Thrace, requesting the cancellation of the event, arguing that the event hosted by MEP François Alfonsi was aimed at challenging the Treaty of Lausanne.

ABTTF, which has a representative office in Brussels, sent a letter to EU circles as regards to the written question of Kefalogiannis and noted that the statements about the Turkish community in Western Thrace in his written question



do not reflect the truth. Contrary to the statement made by Kefalogiannis, ABTTF indicated that the Treaty of Lausanne mentions a "Muslim minority" in Greece and "non-Muslim" minorities in Türkiye, and that the Turkish community in Western Thrace in Greece was defined as a Turkish Minority by the state and representative governments from 1923 until the Colonels' Junta in 1967.



ABTTF recalled that the bilingual schools belonging to the Turkish community in Western Thrace within the scope of its educational autonomy in accordance with the definition of "Turkish Minority" adopted and used by the state were called Turkish schools and that those who studied in these schools were given report cards in which Turkish and Greek were written together. Furthermore, ABTTF stated that while democracy was restored in the country with the end of the Colonels' Junta in 1974, oppressive and discriminatory policies against the Turkish community in Western Thrace continued. Indicating that Greece changed its policy towards the Turkish community in Western Thrace with the Cyprus Crisis between Türkiye and Greece and the subsequent establishment of the Turkish Republic of Northern

Cyprus, ABTTF highlighted that since then, Greece has started to use the definition of "Muslim Minority" by ignoring the Turkish identity in the country.

ABTTF, which demands from Greece the recognition of the ethnic Turkish identity of the Turkish community in Western Thrace, indicated in its letter that it further requests the restoration of its educational and religious autonomy, which was actually exercised before the 1967 Colonels' Junta. In addition, ABTTF demanded that the EP and the European Commission be actively engaged in the situation arising from the lack of a general protection mechanism for the protection of national minorities in Europe and the lack of any concrete steps at national and European level to solve persisting issues.

"The statements made by our country's MEP Kefalogiannis as regards the status of our community and its current situation in his written question to the European Commission amount to a conscious distortion of the truth. It is Kefalogiannis himself who misreads and interprets Lausanne. As ABTTF, we could not remain silent on this issue, because this is not the truth! For this, in the period from 1923 to the period of the 1967 Colonels' Junta, it will be sufficient for the Turkish community in Western Thrace to examine the practices in our region within the framework of the status and rights it has with Lausanne", said Halit Habip Oğlu, President of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF).

Please click below for the full text of the written question of MEP Kefalogiannis: <https://www.kefalogiannis.gr/el/nea/eyrwpaika-8emata/o-toyrkos-proedros-sto-plaisio-ths-ana8ewrhtikhs-politikhs-toy-synexizei-na-amfisbhtei-thn-kyriarxia-twn-ellhnikwn-nhsiwn-kai-na-katastrathgei-th-syn8hkh-ths-lwzanh>

## National Minorities in Europe and the Turkish community in Western Thrace were discussed in the “Facts about our Country” programme

The ninth part of the online programme series of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) titled “Facts about Our Country” was broadcast on 14 July 2022.

The guest of the ninth programme was Loránt Vincze, Member of the European Parliament (MEP) and President of the Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN), who belongs to the Hungarian minority in Romania.

In the programme moderated by Deniz Servantie from ABTTF Brussels Office, Vincze answered questions with respect to the current situation of the national minorities in Europe, the steps to be taken towards the protection of national minorities at the European Union (EU) level and the European Citizens’ Initiative “Minority SafePack (MSPI)” coordinated by FUEN and the Turkish community in Western Thrace in Greece and the broader view of minority rights in the country.

Vincze, who is also Co-Chair of the EP Intergroup for Traditional Minorities, National Communities and Languages, indicated that the communities that differ from the majority population by their own language, culture, customs and traditions are defined as national or indigenous minorities, noting that some of the EU Member States, such as Greece, do not recognise in any way national minorities within their borders.

Noting that approximately 40 million people in Europe speak various minority languages, Vincze said that opportunities should be granted to the national minorities in different areas such as education in mother tongue, financing institutions belonging to the national minorities and allowing media outlets as well as facilitating the use of minority languages in the public sphere. Highlighting that the situation in the EU Member States is different in this regard, Vincze no-



ted that while national minorities are not recognised in Greece and France, the Swedish-speaking community in Finland and the rights of German and Ladin national minorities in the South Tyrol region in Italy are strongly protected.

Vincze stated that the term ‘Muslim minority in Thrace’ is used by Greece for the Turkish community in Western Thrace and that this is unacceptable, indicating that language and religion are two different issues. Underlining that even in the execution of the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights (ECTHR) on the associations belonging to the Turkish community in Western Thrace, Greece has not taken the slightest positive step, Vincze further indicated that Greece is far from being the cradle of democracy because it does not implement basic standards for minority rights.

Furthermore, Vincze noted that FUEN has resorted to different means to in-

crease the pressure against Greece to find solutions to the issues of the Turkish community in Western Thrace, but that this has not been sufficient, pointing out that the pressure should come from institutions across Europe such as the Council of Europe and the EU.

Vincze also explained that MSPI, coordinated by FUEN, was launched with the aim of providing strong support for national minorities and their rights, cultures and languages, and that in this context, many different demands were added to the initiative, adding that MSPI has become a concept and that they were now stronger and more determined, despite the rejection of the legislative proposals in the initiative by the European Commission. Noting that the EU Member States such as Germany, Denmark, Belgium, Italy and Hungary are already backing the initiative, Vincze further indicated that they expect to soon win a case before the European Court of Justice with respect to the rejection of the initiative.

Finally, Vincze said that they encourage the support of the languages and cultures of national minorities that constitute a part of Europe’s cultural heritage, and that the EU should pay more attention to national minorities and their languages and cultures, and this should also be supported by majority populations.

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

YouTube: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UIO\\_oBSYXLU&t=146s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UIO_oBSYXLU&t=146s)

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/939989616164959/videos/454795379825247>

## Wiretapping scandal shows the influence of the deep state in Greece in the country's governance

ABTTF President: “While in real democracies, national minorities are considered as a source of wealth within a multicultural and multilingual structure, in our country the issue of national minorities and of that of the Turkish community in Western Thrace is taboo and treated as a threat to national security and public order! For this reason, a truly democratic transformation in the country is not politically possible, because the deep state always has a priority and an unquestionable role in these matters!”

The scandal is growing as it was revealed that the phones of PASOK-KINAL President and Member of the European Parliament (MEP) Nikos Androulakis and journalist Thanasis Koukakis were tapped by Greece's National Intelligence Service (EYP).

Regarding the scandal that resulted in the resignation of EYP Director Panagiotis Kontoleon and General Secretary of the Prime Minister's Office Grigoris Dimitriadis, Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis stated that although the wiretapping was done legally, it could not be accepted politically, and that the situation developed without his knowledge.

Following the statement made by Mitsotakis, Greek President Katerina Sakellariopoulou called for a thorough investigation of the issue, indicating that the principle of trans-



parency in state affairs is an indicator of democracy, and called for the improvement of the functioning of the EYP. The President reminded that the exceptions to be applied to privacy laws on the grounds of national security should be proportionate and compatible with the basic principles of law. Meanwhile, the European Commission noted that it expected the government in Greece to conduct an in-depth investigation.



In response to Mitsotakis' comments, Nikos Androulakis said that his secrecy as a party leader was clearly violated, and that Mitsotakis regularly refrained from making statements about the established deep state order. Androulakis demanded that the EYP make a clear and unambiguous statement regarding his hearing.

“With the scandal that erupted with Androulakis and Koukakis, it became clear that while our country is seemingly democratic, in reality it has another face. The wiretapping scan-

dal, which is said to be legally motivated on national security grounds, ignores the principles of democracy and the rule of law. Considering the fact that EYP was directly linked to the Prime Minister under the New Democracy government, the Prime Minister bears primary responsibility in this scandal. If we accept that the wiretapping took place without the knowledge of Mitsotakis, the question arises as to what else the cadres we call the deep state are doing in our region and in our country under conditions where intelligence can listen to a party leader without the knowledge of the country's prime minister. We are aware that the deep state constitutes a major obstacle to democratisation. Indeed, while in real democracies, national minorities are considered as a source of wealth within a multicultural and multi-lingual structure, in our country the issue of national minorities and of that of the Turkish community in Western Thrace is taboo and treated as a threat to national security and public order! For this reason, a truly democratic transformation in the country is not politically possible, because the deep state always has a priority and an unquestionable role in these matters! The government should conduct a serious investigation into this scandal, and it should be a step towards democratic transformation in the country's governance”, said Halit Habip Oglu, President of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF).

\*Image: <https://haber.aa.com.tr/>

## Scandalous statement by Second Deputy Speaker of the Greek Parliament Athanasiou

ABTTF President: “Whatever the dervish’s idea is, it is his chant’, that is, what the heart thinks, the tongue speaks. We are perceived as a threat to national security and public order in our own country! Unfortunately, this perception is not limited to Athanasiou! This is the mentality of the state, the perception in today’s politics, and the view of the media! We are marginalised, we are perceived as a threat!”

New Democracy Party Deputy and Second Deputy Speaker of the Greek Parliament Charalampos Athanasiou made a scandalous statement. Athanasiou alluded to the Turkish deputies belonging to the Turkish community in Western Thrace, noting that if a Muslim deputy from northern Greece who is not Orthodox but has a completely different religious orientation, informs a neighbouring country about where migrants will arrive, the deputy can be wiretapped as national security constitutes a priority.

In a television interview, Athanasiou indicated that under certain circumstances, it may be legal to wiretap deputies, adding that according to Article 19 of the Greek Constitution regarding the secrecy of communications, the confidentiality of all correspondence and communications



is inviolable, further noting that in the same article, the guarantees under which the judicial authority shall not be bound by this secrecy as for reasons related to national security are specified by law. As an example of this situation, Athanasiou’s allusion to the Turkish deputies belonging to the Turkish community in Western Thrace and saying that it would be possible for the deputies to be legally wiretapped on grounds of national security dropped like a bombshell.

“Charalampos Athanasiou’s statement is absolutely scandalous! Is Greece not an EU country but a banana republic? What should we understand from Athanasiou’s statement? Are our deputies in the Parliament being wiretapped as a source danger on grounds of national security? First of all, legal wiretapping on grounds of national security does not show that this is legitimate! The fact that Athanasiou cites our Turkish deputies in parliament as an example of how deputies

can be legally wire-tapped clearly shows his perspective on the Turkish community in Western Thrace in the country and our deputies who represent our community in parliament. ‘Whatever the dervish’s idea is, it is his chant’, that is, what the heart thinks, the tongue speaks. We are perceived as a threat to national security and public order in our own country! After this statement, Athanasiou should resign! I regret to say that this perception is not limited to Athanasiou! This is the mentality of the state, the perception in today’s politics, and the view of the media! We are marginalised, we are perceived as a threat! We are not seen as part of this country; we are not treated as such! The Minority policy of the state from past to present reflects this understanding and attitude!”, said Halit Habip Oğlu, President of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF).

# Our religious autonomy will be officially abolished under the claim of modernising our mufti offices

ABTTF President: “With this draft law, the institution of the Mufti office, which is managed by the Minority with its own resources, will be completely abolished, and the mufti offices will be turned into state offices under the control and direction of the state in terms of their organisational structure and functioning. It is not possible for this draft law to be accepted by our community, and any regulation prepared without considering our religious autonomy will be null and void for us.”

On 22 July 2022, a new legal regulation on the functioning of the mufti offices belonging to the Turkish community in Western Thrace in Greece was presented at the Parliament. In the new draft law presented to the Parliament within the scope of the Omnibus bill and with the definition of the Muslim minority in Thrace, the organisation and activities of the mufti offices are included under the heading of “Modernisation of the Mufti Offices in Thrace”, while provisions with respect to the status of the mufti offices and their functioning are included within the framework of the heading of the position and situation of the mufti offices and the competencies of the mufti offices.

The draft law revises the provisions on the functioning of the mufti offices with Presidential Decree No. 52/2019, which the Turkish community in Western Thrace had applied to the Council of State with the request for its annulment, but which ultimately the Council of State had rejected, but also further introduces new provisions that will completely eliminate religious autonomy in violation of the provisions of the 1913 Treaty of Athens and the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne, which define the autonomy of the Turkish community in Western Thrace in the field of religion.

In the part regarding the mufti offices, it is stated that the mufti offices are public institutions subjected to the decentralisation system and at the level

of general directorates, and it is further indicated that the mufti offices are directly subordinated to the Minister of Education and Religious Affairs, and that the purpose of the mufti offices is to deal with the religious affairs of the Minority and to exercise their judicial powers within the scope stipulated by the law. In this respect, the draft law, which repeats the organisational chart introduced by the Presidential Decree, once again envisages a structure under the control of the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs with the claim that the mufti offices will be given an organised and modern structure by disregarding the religious autonomy of the Turkish community in Western Thrace. Full control and audit of the state over the mufti offices is envisaged because both contracted and state employees who will work in the administrative units of the mufti offices are not obliged to be Muslims and from the Minority, and that artificial transitions of state officials from other units to the mufti offices can be provided. In addition, as it is the case in the Presidential Decree, Greek will have to be used as a compulsory and official correspondence language in the mufti offices which will have been converted into public institutions.

Moreover, provisions are introduced regarding the qualifications sought for the designation of the muftis and their duties and responsibilities regarding the position and status of the mufti offices. Under the new provisions as regards the conditions of being a Mufti Regent and the structure and functioning of the Board

to be formed under the chairmanship of the Mufti Regent and the provisions on the process of selecting the muftis, it is endeavoured to transform the process of designating the mufti into a mixed system of selection and appointment.

In the draft law, the status of the Mufti is defined as that of a clergyman which heads a public service and that has judicial powers. The draft law, which indicates that the co-existence of three qualities in the same person imposes a separate responsibility on the state for the selection of them and the regulation of the way they operate, does not entail a regulation as regards the election of the Mufti by the community. Instead, it is envisaged through the



decision of the Mufti Regent to form a committee consisting of 33 members of the Minority and that those 33 people be chosen by casting a lot among those who teach Islamic studies or in madrasahs, imams, and through Law No. 4115/2013, that is those that have been assigned through the 240 Imams Law as well as leading theologians.

The draft law stipulates that the board will decide whether the mufti candidates are suitable or not, designate the names of those who have the qualifications to serve as Mufti in alphabetical order and forward them to the Minister of Education and Religious Affairs, and the Minister of Education will choose one of the candidates and appoint him by virtue of the Presidential Decree.

Halit Habip Oğlu, President of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) made the following statement: “Following the death of our Mufti of Xanthi Ahmet Mete, the new draft law submitted to the Parliament by the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs alleging to the modernisation of the mufti offices was prepared once again by ignoring the fact that the Turkish community in Western Thrace is autonomous in the religious field. As stated in the general preamble of the draft law, it is noted that the 1913 Treaty of Athens is no longer valid and that this was confirmed by the decision of the Council of State, and that the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne and the Treaty of Athens were implicitly cancelled. This draft law is in total contradiction to the

Treaty of Athens! As we had expressed it through our objection to the 2019 Presidential Decree, this draft law is totally wiping out the religious autonomy of our mufti offices. The new law takes state control of the mufti offices a step further and paves the way for Greek civil servants to work in the administrative staff of the mufti offices. The most important innovation introduced by the draft law is that the muftis will no longer be appointed directly by the state, but that rather following the application of candidates and the formation of a Board in which the candidates are to be presented, one of the candidates would be appointed by the state. Although this method is somewhat similar in form to the way the Patriarch in Türkiye is appointed, it is completely different in essence. Indeed,

although the candidates in Türkiye are the candidates elected by the Orthodox Greek Minority and over which the state has no control in any way, I would like to emphasise a situation in which all the members of the Board that will choose the Mufti candidates will consist of names close to the state and assigned by the state. With this draft law, the institution of the Mufti office, which is managed by the Minority with its own resources, will be completely abolished, and the mufti offices will be turned into state offices under the control and direction of the state in terms of their organisational structure and functioning. It is not possible for this draft law to be accepted by our community, and any regulation prepared without considering our religious autonomy will be null and void for us”.

## 4 more Turkish primary schools are closing in Western Thrace in the next school year!

In the 2022-2023 school year, 4 more primary schools belonging to the Turkish community in Western Thrace will be closed. According to the decision taken by the Ministry of Education, due to the fact that the number of students is less than 9, the primary schools located in Ergani (Yardımlı) and Kikidion (Tuzçuköy) in the province of Rodopi and Akarpo (Koruköy) and Revma (Çaymahalle) in the province of Xanthi will be closed.



the primary schools closed due to a lack of sufficient pupils. With this latest decision, the number of Turkish primary schools will decrease to 99.

In the context of the economic austerity measures in Greece, the number of Turkish primary schools belonging to the Turkish community in Western Thrace has declined very rapidly since 2011 within the framework of the decision to close primary schools with less than 9 students throughout the country. Following the fact that the number of primary schools belonging to the Turkish community in Western Thrace fell to 188 in 2011, it decreased further to 103 in the 2021-2022 school year with

“Although we, as the Turkish community in Western Thrace, gained a status of autonomy in the field of education within the framework of the Treaty of Lausanne and have thus the right to establish and manage our own schools, the autonomous structure in education has been distorted over the years. With the economic and financial crisis in our country, the number of our primary schools decreased rapidly due to the low number of pupils. With the decision of the Ministry, the number of our primary schools has

decreased by almost half due to the decision of the Ministry to temporarily suspend the activities of schools with less than 9 students, including Turkish primary schools, for a period of 2 years and to close them at the end of 2 years. This is a very serious figure! Although we have an autonomous status in education, our country is closing our primary schools, and on the other hand, primary schools are being opened with only 4 children in our motherland Turkey. We demand that the right to manage our own schools in accordance with our autonomous status and rights in education be implemented in accordance with the treaties, and we further request that the practice of closing our schools as a result of the decision of the ministry on the grounds of the low number of pupils be ended”, said Halit Habip Oğlu, President of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF).

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



# We strongly condemn the racist attack on a Turkish youth in Xanthi!

As the Presidium and whole family of ABTTF, we strongly condemn this racist and heinous attack on our youth and extend our best wishes to him and his family. Racist and hate-motivated attacks targeting the Turkish community in Western Thrace and its members threaten the atmosphere of peace in our region and harm the peaceful coexistence. We call on the police to carry out a proper investigation into the attack and demand that the perpetrators are caught immediately and handed over to the judicial authorities.

On the evening of Friday, August 26 in Xanthi, Greece, a 16-year-old youth belonging to the Turkish community in Western Thrace was attacked by a group of about 20 young pe-



ople. The 16-year-old Turkish youth was so badly beaten up by the group that he needed to be hospitalized.

According to local news reports, the assailants beat the Turkish youth at the same time by shouting and swearing "Nasty Turk, next time we will kill you". It was stated the group of 20 young people left the crime scene after some citizens had intervened.

The Turkish youth, who had suffered many injuries on his body, was taken to the State Hospital of Xanthi by his mother after the attack and discharged after treatment.

According to the daily Gündem, the family of the Turkish youth who was attacked will bring the matter before the court and file a criminal complaint against the assailants.

As the Presidium and whole family of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF), we strongly condemn this racist and heinous attack on our youth and extend our best wishes to him and his family. Racist and hate-motivated attacks targeting the Turkish community in Western Thrace and its members by groups espousing far-right ideology threaten the atmosphere of peace in our region and harm the peaceful coexistence. We call on the police to carry out a proper investigation into the attack and demand that the perpetrators are caught immediately and handed over to the judicial authorities.

## 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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