



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)
Member of the European Language Equality Network (ELEN)

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ABTTT President Habip Oğlu held high-level meetings during his working visit to Strasbourg



During the meetings held as part of the working visit, the current issues facing the Turkish community in Western Thrace were discussed, with a particular focus on education, association, and religious freedom.

President of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTT) Halit Habip Oğlu, paid a working visit to Strasbourg on 21-22 April 2026, in conjunction with the Spring Session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE).

During the working visit, accompanied by ABTTT International Relations Director Melek Kırmacı, Habip Oğlu met with PACE President Petra Bayr, PACE Vice-President and Chairperson of the Finnish National Delegation to PACE Miapeta Kumpula-Natri, and Chairperson of the PACE Group of Socialists, Democrats and Greens Frank Schwabe, PACE Vice-President and Chairperson of the PACE Turkish National Delegation Yıldırım Tuğrul Türkeş, along with members of the PACE Turkish National Delegation, the Secretariat of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of

Europe, and the Department for the Execution of Judgments of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR).

Habip Oğlu pointed out that Greece has not executed the ECtHR judgments in the Bekir-Ousta and Others group of cases, which includes associations of the Turkish community in Western Thrace, for the past 18 years, and noted that in the "Sagir and Others" case, filed by the Cultural Association of Turkish Women of the Prefecture of Xanthi which was not registered by the Greek national courts because of the word "Turkish" in its name, the ECtHR once again condemned Greece on the same grounds.

Habip Oğlu noted that, contrary to the educational autonomy guaranteed to the Turkish community in Western Thrace by the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne, Greek authorities have closed private and autonomous Turkish primary schools under the pretext of insufficient number of pupils. He further indicated that while there were 188 Turkish primary schools in Western Thrace in 2011, this number had dropped to 83 by the 2025-2026

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school year.

Habip Oğlu stressed that while Greece does not interfere with the organisation and operation of the Orthodox Christian community—the prevailing religion under the country's Constitution—and other known religious communities, it does not recognise the muftis elected by the Turkish community through its free will. In this regard, he explained that Greece continues to violate the Turkish community's religious autonomy and freedom of religion—guaranteed by the conventions—by unilaterally appointing a mufti to Didymoteicho at the beginning of 2026 despite the Turkish community's opposition from the very start, and by now initiating the process of appointing muftis to Xanthi and Komotini.



Note verbale from Greece to the written statement submitted by ABTTF to the UN Human Rights Council

The Permanent Mission of Greece to the United Nations (UN) Office in Geneva has responded to the written statement submitted by the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) to the 61st session of the UN Human Rights Council regarding the current problems faced by the Turkish Minority in Western Thrace in the field of education.

In its note verbale to the UN, Greece claimed that members of the Muslim minority in (Western) Thrace—recognised as a religious minority under the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne and comprising over 120,000 Greek citizens—enjoy not only special protections in the fields of education, religion and civil life but also all rights guaranteed by the Constitution and European law.

Stating that education is at the heart of this policy, Greece argued that the practice of temporarily suspending education in minority schools is not discriminatory in nature and is consistent with the approach applied across the national education system.

Greece noted that the duties of the boards of minority schools are defined in detail and

Human Rights Council
Sixty-first session
23 February - 3 April 2026
Agenda item 5
Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development

Note verbale dated 30 March 2026 from the Permanent Mission of Greece to the United Nations Office at Geneva addressed to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights



comprehensively in Ministerial Decision No. 62092/2002 and are limited solely to the management of the school's revenues and operating expenses, it claimed that the committees do not have the right to permanently use school classrooms or offices in state or private schools, including minority schools.

In the note verbale, it was argued that Greece's education policy is shaped in accordance with the principles of inclusivity, equal opportunities and excellence in education; it was further claimed that

the Greek State aims to equip young people from minority communities with the knowledge, skills and critical thinking abilities necessary to succeed in modern society by continuously enhancing the quality of the education provided.

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, held in Geneva, Switzerland, from 23 February to 31 March 2026. The statement brought to light the systematic violation by Greece of the educational autonomy of the Turkish Minority in Western Thrace, guaranteed by the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne.

Please click below for the full text of the written response from the Permanent Mission of Greece to the UN Office in Geneva to ABTTF:

https://hrcmeetings.ohchr.org/HRCSessions/RegularSessions/61/DL_G_Working_Documents/A%20HRC%2061%20G.4%20Advance%20version.pdf

The Realities of Western Thrace as Observed from the Village Coffeehouse

Dear readers,

Our summer vacation started a little earlier than usual this year. Plus, our vacation is a full month long this year...

I was so happy to be able to stay in our village, in our house there, for such a long time.

It was a first for me.

Staying in our region for such a long time had its own special joys.

We managed to make it to both a wedding and a holiday here. After many years, I attended a village wedding again.

It was my godson Uğur's wedding.

We had a traditional wedding in our village. Meals were cooked in large pots and served to the guests. Together in our village, we celebrated the happiness of our young people and had plenty of fun.

Everything was so, so beautiful...

I saw once again that a wedding is not just about the happiness of two people.

The wedding was also a symbol of unity, sharing, and mutual support.

Eid was a special beauty in its own right.

I caught up with my elders whom I hadn't seen in years. I kissed their hands and received their blessings.

At the Eid feasts, I enjoyed our neighbours' delicious baklava.

I recalled the flavours of my childhood once again.

On the second day of the holiday, I attended the traditional holiday celebration at our motherland's Turkish Consulate

General in Komotini, where I exchanged holiday greetings with representatives of institutions and organizations in our region.

I visited our Mufti of Komotini, İbrahim Şerif, at his office and congratulated him on Eid.

At the Eid gathering at the Komotini Turkish Youth Association, we shared the joy of the holiday together with both the elders and the younger members of the Association.

Thanks to the wedding and Eid, I also reunited with my friends living in Türkiye. We talked about the old days and refreshed our memories. We caught up on old times.

One of the most beautiful moments of the days I spent in the village was the morning coffee. With the first light of day, the young and the old gathered at the village coffeehouse.

Looking out at the greenery stretching before us, we drank our coffee together and started the day with conversation.

Naturally, agriculture was the main topic of conversation at the café.

However, another reality caught my attention during our chats.

Some of our friends, who had relied solely on farming for years, have now given up this work. Some work abroad on a seasonal basis. Some work in other jobs alongside farming. Others are trying to make a living entirely from different fields.

Unfortunately, this situation is not limited to our village alone.

A similar situation exists throughout Western Thrace.

The problems that have been discussed for years are now becoming more visible. The consequences of decisions not made in time, policies not implemented, and



development strategies left incomplete are now coming to light.

Various initiatives have been undertaken over the years for the region's development.

Committees were established. Reports were prepared.

However, the expected results were not achieved.

Now, we are seeing new studies being launched regarding the demographic crisis.

A delegation of OECD experts is conducting investigations in the region. I hope the reports prepared this time do not end up gathering dust on the shelves.

I hope these studies signal a new beginning.

That is because Western Thrace has no time to lose.

We need to keep our youth in the region, increase production in our region, and look to the future with hope.

I would like to once again extend my best wishes for your recent Eid.

I wish everyone on vacation a wonderful time.

Take care and stay healthy.

Halit Habip Oğlu
ABTTF President

A delegation of Western Thrace Turks attended the OSCE Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting in Vienna

The delegation of Western Thrace Turks, comprising representatives from ABTTF, WTMUGA and the FEP Party, raised the issues facing the Turkish Minority in Western Thrace.

Representing the Turkish Minority in Western Thrace, the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF), the Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association (WTMUGA) and the Friendship, Equality and Peace (FEP) Party, attended the OSCE Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting on the theme of “Safeguarding Civic Space in the Digital Age”, held in Vienna, the capital of Austria, on 11–12 May 2026.

The second Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting of the year, co-organised by the Swiss OSCE Chairpersonship, the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) and the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, was attended by Fuat Ali and Melek Kirmacı on behalf of ABTTF, Dr Pervin Hayrullah on behalf of WTMUGA, and Kerem Abdurahimoğlu on behalf of the FEP Party.

Speaking during the first session of the meeting, titled “Digital threats to civil space”, the FEP Party highlighted that members and representatives of the Turkish Minority in Western Thrace are constantly targeted on digital platforms and subjected to hate speech, indicating that social media posts following the conference on national minorities they organised at the European Parliament (EP) also contained calls for exile, ethnic cleansing and death threats.

Speaking at the same session, WTMUGA stated that members of the Turkish Minority in Western Thrace, as well as educators and civil society actors belonging to the Turkish minority, were hesitant to express their identities, cross-border cultural ties and views on minority rights due to concerns that their communications on digital platforms



could be monitored and that they might face administrative sanctions.

Intervening in the session titled “Disinformation and civic space: implications for human rights and democracy”, WTMUGA noted that the Turkish Minority in Western Thrace, along with its political representatives and civil society actors, had recently been subjected to smear campaigns and disinformation. As the most concrete example of this situation, they cited the case of FEP Party President Çiğdem Asafoğlu, who had become the target of sexist and discriminatory rhetoric.

Speaking at the same session, ABTTF emphasised that the Turkish Minority in Western Thrace is portrayed in Greece as a “national threat” or a “representative of foreign powers”, and that this fuels prejudice and hostility within society. Noting that an Athens-based news site had published a report containing baseless and inflammatory statements about ABTTF, and that they had subsequently filed a claim for damages in the Greek courts with the appeal process ongoing, ABTTF drew attention to the fact that the publication of photographs of leading representatives of the Turkish minority in a local Greek newspaper, thereby singling them out, posed a serious risk in terms of freedom of expression and personal safety.

Speaking at the third session titled

“Strengthening digital resilience for the protection of civic space”, ABTTF noted that recent reports prepared by international organisations had highlighted the weakening of judicial independence in Greece and restrictions affecting civil society, stating that these developments were particularly concerning for the Turkish Minority in Western Thrace, noting that the Turkish minority faces structural issues regarding the violation of its freedom of association by Greece and the failure to execute the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) judgments concerning the Bekir-Ousta and Others group of cases.

Intervening at the same session, WTMUGA explained that the Turkish Minority in Western Thrace is being stigmatised in the local Greek media through unfounded reports, stressing that Greece’s denial of the Turkish minority’s Turkish identity creates a conducive environment for this, and that in lawsuits filed by members of the Turkish minority over false reports, individuals with a political affiliation may act as parties.

The FEP Party, which took the floor during this session, highlighted that Greece’s denial of the Turkish identity of the Turkish Minority in Western Thrace, restrictions on minority rights and religious freedoms, and its refusal to engage in dialogue with representatives of the Turkish minority, when considered

alongside the digital dimension, exacerbate the impact of the issue. The FEP Party, together with the European Free Alliance (EFA), called on Greece to cooperate in order to protect the Turkish, Macedonian, Vlach, Albanian and other national minorities in the country, as well as human rights defenders, from the dangers of the digital sphere.

Greece, which exercised its right of reply in all sessions, claimed that the minority in (Western) Thrace is defined as a "Muslim minority" on the basis of religion under the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne, and that its members, as Greek citizens, enjoy constitutional rights and freedoms and can engage in media activities within the legal framework, just like all other Greek citizens.



FUEN raised the issues faced by the Turkish community in Western Thrace at the CINGOs General Assembly

The Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN), of which the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) is a full member, attended the Spring General Assembly of the Conference of International Non-Governmental Organisations (CINGOs) of the Council of Europe which was held from 14 to 17 April 2026, and gathered and opportunity in raising the issue of Greece's systematic violation of the freedom of association of the Macedonian and Western Thrace Turkish communities in Greece.

The Secretariat of the Working Group on Turkic Minorities/Communities (TAG), which has represented FUEN at CINGOs level for years, attended the CINGOs General Assembly and highlighted that the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) judgments in the Bekir-Ousta and Others group of cases regarding the freedom of the Turkish community in Western Thrace to establish associations have not been executed for the past 18 years.

The General Assembly discussed the report on Greece prepared by CINGOs following



its fact-finding visit to Greece on 12-14 November 2025. In this context, Chair of the Expert Council on NGO Law and author of the Greece report Jeremy McBride strongly criticised Greece's failure to execute the ECtHR judgments regarding the associations of the Turkish community in Western Thrace.

Rapporteur Jeremy McBride indicated

during their meetings with Greek authorities in Athens that the geopolitical justifications Greece had put forward regarding the execution of ECtHR judgments were of a political nature and could not serve as a justification for the ongoing violation of the freedom of association. Additionally, McBride noted that the second legislative amendment currently being prepared by Greece would not pave the way for the execution of the ECtHR judgments in this group of cases under these conditions. Rapporteur McBride expressed that the Committee of Ministers, which continues to examine the Bekir-Ousta group of cases should adopt a tougher stance against Greece in this group of cases.

Following the presentation of the Greece report, Melek Kirmacı from the TAG Secretariat, speaking on behalf of FUEN, underscored that the Greek authorities defended their objections to the term "Turkish" on geopolitical grounds, as written in the report, but that these arguments were neither legally nor democratically valid. FUEN further noted that the ECtHR judgments regarding the Bekir-Ousta and Others group of cases

are clear, and that the ethnic designation in the name of an association cannot, in itself, be considered a threat to public order or national security.

Drawing attention to the fact that the Turkish community in Western Thrace and the Macedonian minority face serious human rights violations in Greece, particularly regarding the freedom of association,



Kirmacı noted that, in contrast, no obstacles were raised to the establishment of an association bearing the name “Pomak”. Kirmacı emphasised that this situation is not merely a matter of name but directly affects the existence and functionality of civil society in Greece; she explained that the swift execution of the ECtHR judgments is a necessity for a democratic state and the rule of law.

CINGOs, affiliated with the Council of Europe, has published its report on Greece

ABTTF President: “The findings of the delegation in the CINGOs report on Greece are highly significant, because, as we have always said, this group of cases has been politicised, and it is clear that Greece does not wish to execute the ECtHR judgments relating to this group of cases”.

The Conference of International Non-Governmental Organisations (CINGOs), established to act as a bridge between civil society and politicians with the aim of ensuring civil society's participation in the Council of Europe's decision-making processes and strengthening democratic values across Europe, and bringing together more than 300 international non-governmental organisations, has published its report on Greece.

In the report, published following its visit to Greece from 11 to 15 November 2025, CINGOs made significant observations regarding the environment in which civil society organisations operate in the country.

Noting that while a legal framework exists for civil society organisations, serious problems exist in practice, the CINGOs delegation indicated that registration and certification processes are complex, lengthy and costly. The CINGOs delegation noted that civil society organisations are occasionally discredited by political actors and that organisations working specifically in the fields of human rights, migration and minority issues are targeted.

Having visited Komotini to discuss the Bekir-

Civil participation
in the decision-making process

First fact finding visit to Greece
11-15 November 2025
Report

Ousta and Others group of cases—which concerns violations of the Turkish Minority in Western Thrace's freedom to establish associations—the CINGOs delegation met with CSOs representing the Western Thrace Turks and the aggrieved associations. In its report, the delegation explained that the ECtHR judgments in this group of cases have not been executed for many years. The CINGOs delegation, recalling that the ECtHR has clearly established that the expression of ethnic identity does not pose a threat to a democratic society, stated that despite this ruling by the ECtHR, the Greek authorities continue to maintain the approach that there is only a “religious minority” in the country based on the Treaty of Lausanne, and on this grounds continue to refuse the use of the word “Turkish” in the names of associations.

Furthermore, the CINGOs delegation highlighted that, in their meetings with Greek authorities, they observed a tendency of Greece to treat minority issues as a security matter, particularly in the context of its relations with Türkiye and its geopolitical position in the Eastern Mediterranean. In the report, the delegation stressed that this approach is shaped not only by legal but also by geopolitical considerations, emphasising

that this geopolitical context has contributed to the narrowing of the civil society sphere and delays in resolving issues related to minority rights.

“During our working visits to Strasbourg, in our meetings with the President of CINGOs, we consistently raised the issue of the freedom of association for Western Thrace Turks. The Expert Council on NGO Law affiliated with CINGOs, have occasionally contributed to the review process in the Committee of Ministers within the Bekir Usta and Others group of cases. Indeed, the group of cases led by Bekir-Ousta is one of the first to be examined by the Committee of Ministers, as the ECtHR judgments in this group of cases have not been executed for the past 18 years. The findings of the delegation in the CINGOs report on Greece are highly significant, because, as we have always said, this group of cases has been politicised, and it is clear that Greece does not wish to execute the ECtHR judgments relating to this group of cases. That is why they are now playing for time by claiming they will make amendments to the Civil Code. As ABTTF, we have explained this to all our counterparts in Strasbourg, and we will continue to do so”, said Halit Habip Oğlu, President of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF).

Please click below for the CINGOs Greece report:

<https://www.coe.int/en/web/ingo/-/civil-participation-in-serbia-and-greece-cingo-publishes-two-country-reports-calling-for-improvements>

Written contribution from ABTTF on the issues facing the Turkish community in Western Thrace to Greece's Universal Periodic Review

The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) submitted a written contribution to the fourth cycle (2022-2027) of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) mechanism of the United Nations (UN) Human Rights Council, which reviews the human rights performance of all member States, regarding the problems and human rights violations suffered by the Turkish community in Western Thrace.

In its written contribution, ABTTF reported on the status of implementation of the recommendations concerning the Turkish community in Western Thrace contained in the report on Greece adopted at the 49th session of the UPR Working Group during the third cycle.

ABTTF noted that, whilst the UPR Working Group's report recommended the protection of persons belonging to ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities in Greece against all forms of discrimination and the strengthening of plans and policies to safeguard minority rights, Greece ranks among the countries with the worst track record in Europe regarding the protection of the rights of persons belonging to national minorities.

Highlighting that Greece denies the ethnic Turkish identity of the Turkish community in Western Thrace, ABTTF indicated that Greece has failed to execute the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) judgments in the Bekir-Ousta and Others group of cases regarding associations that were dissolved or not registered because the word "Turkish" appeared in their respective names, and that these judgments have not been executed by Greece for the past 18 years. ABTTF called on the UPR Working Group to request concrete and clear information from the Greek authorities regarding the timeline for the steps they will take to ensure the execution of the aforementioned ECtHR judgments.

ABTTF noted that the 1923 Treaty of



Lausanne granted the Turkish community in Western Thrace autonomy in the fields of education and religion, but also explained that as a result of the decision to close primary schools nationwide with fewer than nine pupils—taken by the government in 2010 as part of austerity measures—being applied to primary schools belonging to the Turkish community that held a special and autonomous status, there has been a very rapid decline in the number of Turkish primary schools from 2011 to the present day, and noted that the number of Turkish primary schools, which stood at 188 in 2011, had fallen to 83 by the 2025–2026 school year.

Noting that the religious autonomy of the

Turkish community in Western Thrace was established by the 1913 Treaty of Athens and guaranteed by the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne, ABTTF stipulated that whilst Greece does not interfere with the organisation and functioning of the communities of other known religions in the country, it does not recognise the muftis elected by the Turkish community through its own free will; furthermore, by unilaterally appointing a mufti to Didymoteicho, Greece has once again disregarded the religious autonomy of the Turkish community.

ABTTF added that the Turkish community in Western Thrace is subjected to hate speech in politics and the mainstream Greek media, stating that leading representatives of the Turkish community are being stigmatised and that unfounded and defamatory reports are being published about them, and that such reports carry the risk of fostering prejudice and false perceptions against the Turkish community within society at large.

ABTTF called on Greece to recognise the ethnic Turkish identity of the Turkish community in Western Thrace, to restore

its educational and religious autonomy—which has been largely undermined over the years by various legal changes and arbitrary practices—and to ratify the Council of Europe’s Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCNM)

and the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (ECRML).

Greece will also be examined at the 53rd session of the UPR Working Group, to be held in Geneva, Switzerland, from 2 to 13

November 2026, as part of the fourth cycle. During this session, the Working Group will conduct its review of Greece, considering the written contributions submitted by ABTTF and other civil society organisations regarding Greece.

ELEN raised the issue of human rights violations faced by the Turkish community in Western Thrace at the UN UPR

The European Language Equality Network (ELEN), of which the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) is a member submitted a written contribution regarding the issues faced by the Turkish community in Western Thrace and the human rights violations they endure, in connection with Greece’s country report to the (UN) Human Rights Council’s Universal Periodic Review (UPR) mechanism, specifically within the fourth cycle (2022–2027).

In its written contribution, ELEN noted that Greece has not ratified the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCNM) or the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (ECRML), emphasising that these two binding treaties serve as cornerstones for the protection of national and linguistic minorities.

According to the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne, ELEN indicated that Turkish schools belonging to the Turkish community in Western Thrace are under the ownership of the Turkish community and possess autonomous status. ELEN noted that the operation and administration of these private and autonomous Turkish schools are the responsibility of boards of trustees consisting of three members elected by parents, but that their authority has been progressively restricted over the years.

ELEN highlighted that, under the pretext of lack of sufficient number of pupils, Greek authorities have been closing Turkish primary schools in the Western Thrace region one by one every year since 2010, noting that the number of Turkish elementary schools,

which stood at 188 in 2011, had dropped to 83 by the 2025–2026 school year.

Noting that Greece has prioritised the public school system over improving private and autonomous Turkish schools to create equal educational opportunities in line with the demands of the Turkish community in Western Thrace, ELEN explained that this aims to weaken the Turkish school system in the long term and ultimately eliminate it.

ELEN asked what concrete steps Greece plans to take to ensure that members of the Turkish community in Western Thrace are granted the right to self-determination regarding their identity, and what steps will be taken to ensure that children from the Turkish community have equal access to quality education in the Turkish language.

ELEN demanded that Greece re-establish the educational autonomy of the Turkish community in Western Thrace, which was recognised by the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne but has since been largely eliminated through legal changes and arbitrary practices.

Calling on Greece to immediately ratify the FCNM and ECRML, ELEN demanded that Greece ensure the full protection of national and linguistic minorities within the country, as required by Article 2 of the Treaty of the European Union (EU), of which Greece is a member.



ELEN SUBMISSION TO THE UN UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW

53rd SESSION, GREECE.

April 10th 2026.



Our right to elect our muftis is not up for debate; the State is usurping our rights!

ABTTF President: "We condemn all of the state's unlawful and illegitimate practices based on the usurpation of rights. The mufti issue is directly linked not only to the religious identity but also to the cultural and social identity of the Turkish community in Western Thrace. Therefore, any practice that disregards the will of the Turkish community in Western Thrace by usurping our rights guaranteed by the conventions is neither legitimate nor sustainable."

According to Law No. 4964/2022, our mufti offices, which should be autonomous, have been transformed into public offices at the general directorate level under the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs. This law, which the Turkish community in Western Thrace has consistently opposed, stipulates that muftis will be selected and appointed through boards determined by the Ministry and will serve as civil servants. Subsequently, regulations that completely placed the mufti offices under state control were implemented. In January 2026, a mufti was appointed to Didymoteicho, and in February 2026, a new five-year appointment process was initiated for the mufti offices of Xanthi and Komotini.

The process implemented in Didymoteicho, presented under the guise of an "election", is in reality nothing more than an appointment devoid of democratic legitimacy. The attempt to implement a similar practice in Komotini and Xanthi today demonstrates that our



country, Greece, is persisting in this flawed policy.

These practices violate not only democratic principles but also international law, particularly the 1913 Treaty of Athens and the 1923 Lausanne Peace Treaty. Furthermore, this approach is incompatible with European human rights standards.

Moreover, these recently implemented decisions raise serious concerns that this process is not merely an administrative measure but also part of a planned approach with the potential to create social tension.

"We condemn all of the state's unlawful and illegitimate practices based on the usurpation of rights. The right of the Turkish community in Western Thrace to elect its own religious

leaders is not a matter open to debate. As the Turkish community in Western Thrace, our demand is the restoration of our right, which is guaranteed by international law. Any step to the contrary only deepens the problem instead of solving it. The mufti issue is directly linked not only to the religious identity but also to the cultural and social identity of the Turkish community in Western Thrace. Therefore, any practice that usurps our rights guaranteed by conventions and disregards the will of the Turkish community in Western Thrace is neither legitimate nor sustainable. We want it to be known that we will continue to loudly demand our rights both domestically and internationally against these unlawful and illegitimate practices", said Halit Habip Oğlu, President of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF).

Greece disregards international law and violates the principles of the rule of law!

Following the appointment of a mufti to Didymoteicho, disregarding the religious autonomy of the Turkish community in Western Thrace, and the initiation of the appointment process in Komotini and Xanthi, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of our motherland, the Republic of Türkiye, issued a statement on 8 April 2026. In its statement, the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs noted that the non-recognition of muftis elected by

the Turkish community in Western Thrace and the imposition of state-appointed muftis constitutes a violation of the religious rights guaranteed by the Treaty of Lausanne.

Responding to Türkiye's statement, the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs indicated that the minority status in Western Thrace is determined by international conventions and that deviating from this framework is out

of the question. The Greek Foreign Ministry further explained that the Treaty of Lausanne contains no provision regarding the election of muftis, and that this would be impossible given that muftis also bear judicial and administrative responsibilities. The Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs asserted that, as a country committed to the rule of law, Greece addresses issues concerning the "Muslim minority of Thrace" on the basis of

equality and equal treatment, and above all, by guaranteeing the religious freedom of its members.

“We read the statement from the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs with astonishment. First, we would like to reiterate that if the minority defined by the Treaty of Lausanne is the “Muslim minority”, then why does our country, Greece, use the term “Greeks” based on ethnicity rather than religion for the Greeks in Istanbul, Gökçeada, and Bozcaada, whose status and rights are also defined by the very same treaty? Therefore, when the Ministry of Foreign Affairs refers to its own minorities in Türkiye, it should use the term “non-Muslims”. Furthermore, regarding the mufti issue, the Ministry’s statement is one that disregards international law. The 1913 Athens and 1923 Lausanne Peace



Treaties granted autonomy to the Western Thrace Turks in the fields of education and religion. Laws were enacted in accordance with this, and until 1985, our community itself elected its muftis. To now disregard this and claim that there is no provision in the Treaty of Lausanne regarding the election of muftis is unlawful. From another perspective, we would like to ask our country, which claims to be a state governed by the rule of law and asserts that it guarantees equality before

the law and religious freedoms for all: Even when the Constitution defines the Orthodox Christian Church as the prevailing religion, the state does not appoint the Church’s clergy itself. Other known religions in the country are also autonomous in religious matters. The state is only usurping the religious autonomy of the Western Thrace Turks! Since 1990, it has been appointing our muftis, and with the latest law, it is appointing them under the guise of elections. Our mufti offices are defined by law as public offices, and the appointed muftis are defined as civil servants at the level of general directors in the public sector. Is this equality for all based on the principle of the rule of law?”, said Halit Habip Oğlu, President of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF).

*Image: www.anadoluimages.com

Defence Minister Dendias once again denied the Turkish identity of the Turkish Minority in Western Thrace

Minister of National Defence of Greece Nikos Dendias attended a ceremony held on 13 May 2026, in the village of Oraíon (Yassiören), part of the Municipality of Myki (Mustafçova) in Xanthi, in memory of approximately 65 soldiers from the Turkish Minority in Western Thrace who were killed in action on the battlefields during World War II.

In his speech at the memorial ceremony, Dendias emphasised that the sacrifices of these soldiers, who fell while defending Greece, are an integral part of the national memory, noting that (Western) Thrace, where different cultures converge, serves as a model of harmonious co-existence.

Stating that the Greek Muslim minority is a valuable and indispensable element of the country’s identity, Dendias noted that Greece’s national unity is built not on exclusion but on inclusivity, equality, recognition, and trust.

“Minister of National Defence of Greece Dendias has once again denied the Turkish identity of our minority by referring to the Turkish Minority in Western Thrace as a “Muslim minority.” The presence of the



Turkish Minority in Western Thrace is an undeniable fact. As we have always said, we who have lived on this land for centuries are an inseparable part of our country through our Turkish identity, and we are a source of wealth for our country. However, contrary to Dendias’ claims, our country is excluding us, the Western Thrace Turks, as a result of a policy that denies our Turkish identity, and perceives us as a “national threat”. Our country, which banned the “Turkish” associations that operated legally and officially until 1983 and has refused to allow new ones to be established, has failed to execute the European Court of Human Rights’ judgments against it regarding our

associations for the past 18 years. The educational and religious autonomy of our Minority, guaranteed by the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne, has been eroded over the years through various laws and practices. Autonomous and private Turkish primary schools in Western Thrace are being closed, and the muftis elected by our Minority through free will are not recognised. Given all these facts, it is unfortunately impossible to speak of an inclusive and equality-based national unity, as Dendias claims”, said Halit Habip Oğlu, President of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF).

*Image: www.anadoluimages.com

The Justice Observatory noted that structural problems concerning the rule of law persist in Greece

ABTTF President: "Our country, which is condemned dozens of times each year by the ECtHR, has failed to execute the ECtHR judgments in the Bekir-Ousta and Others group of cases concerning the associations of the Turkish community in Western Thrace for the past 18 years, disregarding international law and the rule of law. The government must take the necessary steps without delay to protect and develop the independence of the judiciary and the rule of law, considering the warnings and recommendations of the Justice Observatory and other independent organisations, as well as those of the European Union, of which our country is a member."

The Justice Observatory, an independent organisation that monitors and evaluates the overall functioning of the justice system in Greece, highlighted ongoing structural problems related to the rule of law in the country in its new report.

The report, which addresses areas of friction in Greece regarding compliance with the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and respect for fundamental rights, the qualitative characteristics of cases brought before the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR), and recurring structural problems, reveals that the country is particularly plagued by excessively long judicial processes, violations of the presumption of innocence, and persistent serious allegations concerning the treatment of migrants.

The report states that Greece was convicted 19 times by the ECtHR in 2025 and that the most frequently violated right was the right to a fair trial. It also indicates that at the end of 2025, 2,500 applications against Greece were still pending before the ECtHR and that Greece ranked sixth among the countries with the most cases against them.

"The Justice Observatory has once again



warned the government, emphasising the urgent need for institutional reforms to end the structural problems concerning the rule of law in our country, Greece, and to accelerate the delivery of justice. Following a series of legal scandals in recent years, such as illegal wiretapping and the Tempi train accident, for which the government bears direct responsibility, the vast majority of citizens no longer have confidence in the independence of the judiciary or the government. The government, which uses strategic lawsuits for political purposes as a means of intimidation and directly interferes with the judiciary, systematically violates the rule of law. Our country, which is condemned dozens of times each year by the ECtHR, has failed to execute the ECtHR judgments

in the Bekir-Ousta and Others group of cases concerning the associations of the Turkish community in Western Thrace for the past 18 years, disregarding international law and the rule of law. The government must take the necessary steps without delay to protect and develop the independence of the judiciary and the rule of law, considering the warnings and recommendations of the Justice Observatory and other independent organisations, as well as those of the European Union, of which our country is a member", said Halit Habip Oğlu, President of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF).

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A request was made to ban Turkish and headscarves at Komotini Public Hospital

ABTTF President: "The Spartakos List's letter, which is entirely provocative in content and disregards our society's native language, culture, and religious beliefs, is absolutely unacceptable and aims to disrupt the peace and tranquillity in our region of Western Thrace".

The far-right Spartakos List, represented in the Komotini Municipal Council, sent a letter to Eleni Rafaela, Director of Komotini Public Hospital, demanding that Turkish be banned from being spoken in the hospital and that headscarves be prohibited.

The letter claimed that doctors and nurses wearing headscarves while on duty violated the principle of religious neutrality that should exist in healthcare institutions.

The letter claimed that Turkish-speaking healthcare workers belonging to the Turkish community in Western Thrace caused communication problems during their work, that this situation complicated operations within the hospital, and that it disturbed some patients and employees belonging to the majority. It further indicated that Turkish could only be used for translation purposes



for patients who did not speak Greek.

"The Spartakos List's letter, which is entirely provocative in content and disregards our community's native language, culture, and religious beliefs, is absolutely unacceptable and aims to disrupt the peace and tranquillity in our region of Western Thrace. It is a complete lie that the health personnel serving at the Komotini Public Hospital in the prefecture of Rodopi, where Western Thrace Turks constitute the majority of the population, speaking their native language, Turkish, among themselves is their most fundamental human right and that this situation harms the institutional functioning of the hospital. Everyone is free to dress

according to their religious beliefs and fulfil their religious obligations, provided that this does not violate the Constitution and laws of our country and does not harm the rights and freedoms of others. Therefore, the demand for a headscarf ban expressed in the letter is a clear violation of freedom of religion and conscience. We believe that by responding appropriately to this provocative letter, which targets the identity, mother tongue, and religious beliefs of our community, the hospital administration will contribute to the preservation and development of social peace in our region", said Halit Habip Oğlu, President of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF).

*Image: www.anadoluiimages.com

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.

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