



Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europa Newsletter

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ABTTT paid a working visit to Strasbourg



Conveying the latest developments in Western Thrace, ABTTT President brought to the agenda the closure of the Fenerbahçe Association and the portrayal of the success of the FEP Party in the EP elections as a threat to the national integrity of the Turkish community.

The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTT) paid a working visit to Strasbourg on 25-26 June 2024, in parallel to the summer session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE).

During the working visit where ABTTT President Halit Habip Oğlu was accompanied by ABTTT International Affairs Director Melek Kırmacı, Habip Oğlu expressed the current issues of the Turkish community in Western Thrace during his meetings with the PACE members.

Within the framework of his contacts in Strasbourg, Habip Oğlu focused on meetings with the representatives of our motherland Republic of Türkiye in PACE and informed the Turkish Del-

PACE Turkish Delegation about the important developments in Western Thrace. In this context, Habip Oğlu held meetings at different times with Chairperson of the PACE Turkish Delegation and AK Party MP Yıldırım Tuğrul Türkeş, and AK Party MPs Mustafa Canbey and Merem Göka; CHP MPs Namık Tan, Yunus Emre, Gökçe Gökçen and Aysu Bankoğlu; MHP MPs Konur Alp Koçak and Pelin Yılık and İYİ Party MP Mehmet Akalın.

During the meetings, Habip Oğlu shared the latest developments on the Bekir-Ousta group of cases regarding the violation of the freedom of association of the Turkish community in Western Thrace, which has been pending for 16 years to be executed, he further revealed the decision of the Committee of Ministers on 11-13 June and indicated that Greece is following a strategy to prolong the process by not executing the ECtHR judgments. Habip Oğlu underscored that the closure of the Western Thrace Fenerbahçe Culture and Sports Association by the court is another violation of the freedom of association

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and added that similar violations will continue to occur unless the judgments with respect to the Bekir-Ousta group of cases are executed.

Moreover, Habip Oğlu also stated that the recent EP elections and the votes casted to the Friendship, Equality and Peace (FEP) Party, the political party of the Turkish community in Western Thrace, are proof of the existence of the Turkish community in Western Thrace. Regarding the assessment of the electoral success of the FEP Party in politics and media in Greece, Habip Oğlu said that the Turkish community is portrayed as a threat to the national integrity. Habip Oğlu underlined that Greece denies the existence and identity of the Turkish community in Western Thrace and continues to marginalize it with hate speech in politics and mainstream media.



Religious ceremony in the historical Sümela Monastery and religious freedoms and rights of the Turkish community in Western Thrace that are violated



A religious ceremony will be held for the eleventh time on 23 August 2024 in the historical Sümela Monastery in Maçka district of Trabzon province in Türkiye.

The ceremony, which is going to be held on the anniversary of the “Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary”, a holy feast in the Christian world, will be led by the Greek Orthodox Patriarch Bartholomew I of Fener, as was the case last year.

“Our motherland Turkey has once again shown that it respects the different religions and cultures within its borders by allowing the holding of a religious ceremony in the Sümela Monastery this year, too. On the one side there is our motherland which has allowed the holding of religious ceremonies in the Sümela Monastery since 2010, even though there is no Greek Orthodox community in that region, and on the other side there is our country Greece which has been

violating the religious freedoms and rights of our community for years through various laws and government practices. Our country does not recognize the muftis elected by our community, transforms our mufti offices into ordinary government offices, which contradicts our religious autonomy, and has been appointing the management boards of our waqf foundations since 1967. We would hope that the latest positive developments in the bilateral relations between our country and our motherland would have a positive impact on our community in practice and that it would not remain just as empty words and statements by the governing politician of our country. Unfortunately, this is not the case! Our country, far from taking the tolerant practices of our motherland towards the Greek Orthodox minority as an example, sees no harm in further destroying the religious autonomy of our community at every opportunity and violating the international treaties to which it is a party”, said Halit Habip Oğlu, President of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF).
*Image: www.anadoluiimages.com

Is it asking too much to live a free, fair and prosperous life?

Dear readers,

Another summer vacation has passed. Unfortunately, our country has experienced wildfires again due to the scorching heat of summer, and many green areas have turned to ash. In our region, small-scale fires broke out, but thankfully they were brought under control quickly.

On the other hand, as announced before each academic year, the schools that will be closed have been declared. According to the ministerial decision, due to insufficient student numbers, our primary schools in the villages of Hacıören (Vyrsini), Keziren (Kimi), and Payamlar (Plagia) in Rhodope, and in the village of Karaköy (Palaio Katramio) in Xanthi will be closed. With the decision to close our four schools, the number of schools has decreased to 86.

Let's look at the numbers! As part of economic measures, the government at that time decided to suspend the operations of schools with low student numbers for two years, then followed by closure. With the implementation of this decision to our autonomous primary schools too, we had 188 primary schools in the first year of the decision, which was 2011, and this number has decreased to 86 in 15 years. From 188 to 86!

Our education is being destroyed by the state! Because the aim is to erase our education and ultimately erase Turkish identity from these lands!

On the other side of the water, in our homeland Türkiye, the situation is the opposite.

As every year, this year, a ceremony was held at the Sumela Monastery in Trabzon on the anniversary of the Assumption of Mary.

Last year's ceremony was led by the Fener Greek Orthodox Patriarch Bartholomew I who said in his speech, "Let us get to know each other better, love people, and respect different cultures. May these lands be an

example and may neighboring countries be inspired".

What a beautiful wish!

When this year's ceremony was postponed by a week, it was conducted by Metropolitan Stefanos Dinidis from Gelibolu who thanked for the support given for organizing the ceremony in our homeland.

We hoped that the positive atmosphere in the bilateral relations between our homeland and our country would reflect on us as well, but we were mistaken. Looking at the words, everything seems good and beautiful, but we, who live here, know the reality well.

Our country continues to try to eliminate the educational and religious autonomy of our society, rather than taking the tolerant practices towards the Greek Orthodox minority in our homeland as a model. Why? Like many of us, I spent my summer vacation in my hometown again this year. For our people, who have been struggling with extreme heat for the last two years, living conditions in the region seem to have worsened. Unfortunately, our people, who earn their living from agriculture, are fighting a life-and-death struggle.

In the face of extreme heat, a lot of watering is required for the yield of the crops planted in the fields, which means both labour and a significant cost. Some give up and stop planting in the fields, migrating abroad for seasonal work. Unfortunately, those in the government, politicians, or state officials are not taking any steps to prevent this migration.

However, the issue of drought in agriculture is also experienced in Italy and France. In addition to creating regional policies at the regional level in these countries, they also benefit from existing EU programs. I learned from officials during my visit to the region how the region of South Tyrol in Italy, which is very similar to our region, has become prosperous thanks to its development programs; I saw it firsthand.



Why can't we do the same as other countries? It feels as though we have been intentionally left to our own fate here...

Yet our region has such great potential! Firstly, we are very fortunate in terms of geographical location and natural beauty in tourism sector. As I observed throughout the summer, so many tourists came to our region from Romania, Bulgaria, and Türkiye! These people stayed in hotels in our region, swam in our beaches, and dined in our restaurants.

If tourism potential is developed and investments are made in our region, mass tourism will flourish. This will also increase the vibrancy in our region. However, regional policies must be established, and incentives must be provided for that.

Policies should be developed not only for tourism but also to address existing issues in agriculture. Then, with the development of agriculture and the service sectors, our region will achieve progress. Strong regions turn into strong economies.

Our hope is to live a free, fair, and prosperous life in these lands as we deserve! That's all! But for those who can see, for those who want to see!

Best regards,

Halit Habip Oğlu
ABTTF President

ABTTF submitted two written statements to the UN

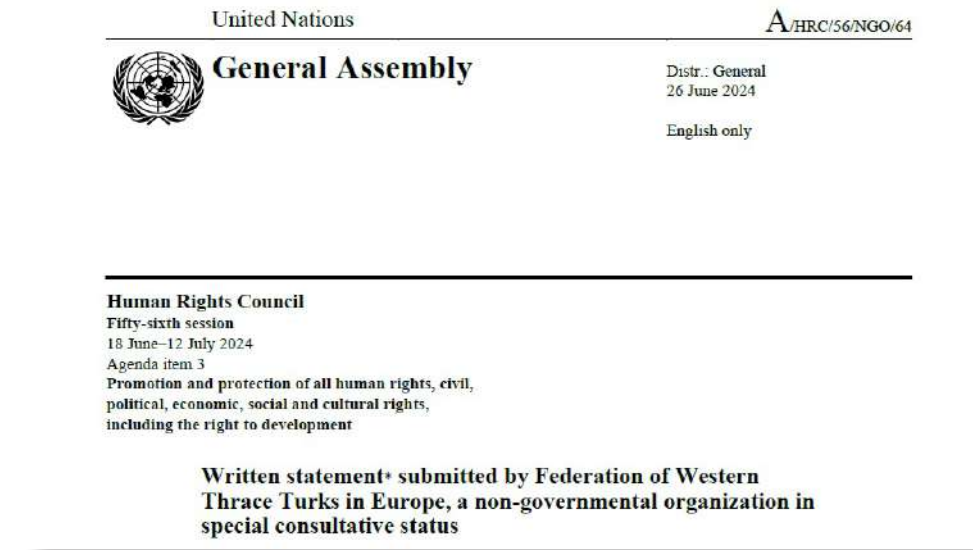
ABTTF brought the issue of freedom of association and the targeting of the Turkish community in Western Thrace to the agenda and emphasised that the rule of law in Greece has been seriously undermined

The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) submitted two written statements to the 56th Session of the United Nations (UN) Human Rights Council held in Geneva, Switzerland between 18 June-12 July 2024, entitled “Violation of Freedom of Association within the Framework of Restrictions on Democracy and the Rule of Law in Greece” and “Systematic Discrimination against the Turkish Community in Western Thrace and Discrediting and Targeting Human Rights Defenders of the Turkish Community”.

Regarding the issue of the rule of law and freedom of association, ABTTF indicated that the Turkish community in Western Thrace, whose status was determined by the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne, has been struggling with systematic discrimination for many years and that in recent years, the rule of law in our country Greece has been undermined and pressure and difficulties against human rights defenders and national minorities have increased.

Stating that freedom of association and the execution of ECtHR judgments is one of the most important indicators of democracy and the rule of law, ABTTF explained that Greece has persistently failed to execute the three judgments with respect to the associations of the Turkish community in Western Thrace, known as Bekir-Ousta and Others group of cases, for the past 16 years. ABTTF called on Greece to fully respect the freedom of association of the Turkish community in Western Thrace and to immediately execute the aforementioned ECtHR judgments concerning the three Turkish associations.

ABTTF also reminded that as a result of a lawsuit filed against the Western Thrace Fernbahçe Culture and Sports Association, an officially registered fans’ association founded by Western Thrace Turks, on grounds that the use of the word “Western Thrace” is



against the law and public order and poses a danger to the territorial integrity and national sovereignty of the country, there was a decision to dissolve the association. ABTTF noted that this decision constitutes a clear violation of the freedom of association and is a step taken to penalise our community.

In the second statement titled “Systematic Discrimination against the Turkish Community in Western Thrace and Discrediting and Targeting Human Rights Defenders of the Turkish Community”, ABTTF highlighted that Greece has one of the countries with the worst record on minority rights in Europe and has not ratified the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and has not signed the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages.

ABTTF indicated that Turkish MPs, heads of associations and representatives of our community representing the Turkish community in Western Thrace in our country are cons-

tantly subjected to pressure and intimidation and that the news reports in the media that steer provocation and manipulation against the members of the Turkish community in Western Thrace render them as targets.

Noting that prosecutions and investigations were carried out as a means of pressure and intimidation, ABTTF further added that Ozan Ahmetoğlu, the president of our oldest association, the Xanthi Turkish Union, was investigated and then sued.

Explaining that investigations have been initiated many times against the Elected Muftis in Xanthi and Rodopi, ABTTF explained that the Turkish community in Western Thrace and the rights defenders representing the community continue to face discrimination and racism.

In a news article published in October 2021 on newsbreak.gr, a news website based in Athens, ABTTF indicated that unfounded and defamatory accusations were made and that ABTTF President Halit Habip Oğlu was constantly targeted in the local press. ABTTF called for the prevention of stigmatisation, defamation and discrediting in the political sphere and in the media.

ABTTF’s two written statements can be accessed at the link below:
<https://hrcmeetings.ohchr.org/HRCSessions/RegularSessions/56/Pages/NGO%20liaison%20information.aspx>

Parallel report by ABTTF on the U.S. 2023 International Religious Freedom Report on Greece



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Greece

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In its parallel report, ABTTF expressed in detail the issues faced by the Turkish community in Western Thrace in the religious field and the current developments regarding freedom of religion.

The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) prepared a parallel report in response to the 2023 International Religious Freedom Report on Greece published by the Department of State of the United States of America (USA) on 26 June 2024 and submitted it to the competent authorities of the U.S.

In its parallel report, ABTTF expressed in detail the issues faced by the Turkish community in Western Thrace, which has been granted religious autonomy in accordance with international treaties, in the religious field and the current developments regarding freedom of religion.

ABTTF noted that the state does not interfere in the internal affairs of the Greek Ortho-



dox Church, which is the dominant religion in the country, or the Jewish Community of Greece, which is one of the known religions, but that the religious freedom and autonomy of the Muslim Turkish community in Western Thrace is violated by law and governmental practices, despite having been granted religious autonomy in accordance with the international treaties.

ABTTF indicated that the government has been appointing muftis or mufti regents in Western Thrace since 1991 in violation of the

religious autonomy of the Turkish community in Western Thrace and does not recognise the muftis elected by the Turkish community.

ABTTF pointed out that the religious autonomous structure of the Turkish community was further undermined with the 'Law on the Modernisation of the Mufti Offices' adopted by the Greek Parliament in August 2022 despite all the objections of the Turkish community in Western Thrace and highlighted that the government appointed the administrative boards of the foundations belonging to the Turkish community since 1967 and that a law enacted in 2008 paved the way for the sale and transfer of foundation immovables to the local administrations.

ABTTF called on Greece to restore the educational and religious autonomy of the Turkish community in Western Thrace guaranteed by the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne and to respect the religious rights and freedoms of the Turkish community in the country.

FEP Party made history again in the European Parliament elections!

ABTTF President: "With the great success of our party in the EP elections, our community delivered a very strong message to those who govern our country, saying 'We exist, and we are Turks!' to those who persistently deny our existence and identity in our country. I wholeheartedly congratulate our FEP Party, which made history for the third time in the EP elections."

The Friendship Equality Peace (FEP) Party, the only political party and representative of the Turkish community in Western Thrace in the political field, once again achieved a historic success in the European Parliament (EP) elections held in Greece on Sunday, 9 June 2024. The FEP Party, which participated in the elections with the slogan "We are here!", became the first party in the prefectures of Rodopi and Xanthi by receiving the most votes in the 2024 EP elections, as in 2014 and 2019.

Participating in the 2024 EP elections with a total of 42 candidates, the FEP Party became the first party in the prefecture of Rodopi with 14,448 votes and a vote rate of 36.10%. In the prefecture of Rodopi, the ruling New Democracy (ND) came second with 19.61% of the votes, and PASOK-KINAL Party came third with 8.87%. The FEP Party became the first party in the prefecture of Xanthi with 11,176 votes and 27.16% of the votes, while ND came se-

cond with 20.39% and the main opposition SYRIZA came third with 9.90% of the votes.

The ND became the winner of the 2024 EP elections, where the participation rate in the elections throughout Greece remained at 41.39% and political parties at the right end of the political spectrum showed a huge increase. In Greece, which has 21 seats in the EP, ND exceeded the nationwide threshold of 3 percent with 28.31% of the vote gained 7 seats, SYRIZA with 14.92% of the vote gained 4 seats, PASOK-KINAL with 12.79% of the vote gained 3 seats, the Greek Solution Party with 9.30% of the vote gained 2 seats, the Communist Party of Greece (KKE) with 9.25% of the vote gained 2 seats, the Victory Party (NIKI), the Freedom Course Party and the Voice of Logic Party with 4.37%, 3.40% and 3.04% respectively with the percentages of votes obtained 1 seat each.

President of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) Halit Habip Oğlu made the following statement with respect to the historic success of the FEP Party in the 2024 EP Elections: "After 2014 and 2019, our FEP Party, which became the first party by a large margin by receiving the most votes in the prefectures of Rodopi and Xanthi in the 2024 EP elections, achieved a historical success again. With the great success of our party in the EP elections, our community delivered a very strong message



to those who govern our country, saying 'We exist, and we are Turks!' to those who persistently deny our existence and identity in our country. The biggest share in the historical success of our party, which has made a difference on the political map of our country for the third time in a row in the EP elections and is the voice of our community, belongs first of all to the leader of our party, and then to our party managers, MEP candidates, members and our community, who support our party with their votes. I wholeheartedly congratulate our FEP Party, which made history for the third time in the EP elections."

*Image: Greek Ministry of Interior

ABTTF President Habip Oğlu: "We showed that we are 'Turks' with the votes we casted to our party in the 2024 EP elections, and we proved our existence in the region with the votes our party received"

In the European Parliament (EP) elections held in Greece on 9 June 2024, the Friendship Equality and Peace (FEP) Party, the only political party and representative of the Turkish community in Western Thrace in the political field, became the first party by receiving the most votes in the prefectures

of Rodopi and Xanthi, as in 2014 and 2019. and achieved another historical success.

The FEP Party became the first party in the prefecture of Rodopi with 36.10% of the votes and in the prefecture of Xanthi with 27.16% of the votes, while the ruling New Democracy

(ND) became the second party with 19.61% of the votes in Rodopi and 20.39% in Xanthi.

President of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) Halit Habip Oğlu made the following statement with respect to the historic success realised by

the FEP Party in the 2024 EP elections: "We have left the EP elections behind us again. In these elections, we showed that we are 'Turks' with the votes we casted to our party, and we proved our existence in the region to the government and the entire public with the votes our party received. First, I congratulate the FEP Party for joining the democratic election race with its decision to participate in the elections, and the entire Turkish community for showing our unity and solidarity to everyone by going to the polls and voting for our party. However, our success must have upset some people in our country, as groundless accusations against our FEP Party came to the fore again. Drop these empty words! In 2024, the picture is the same in the previous two elections. Who lives in in Western Thrace? We do exist. Who are we? We are Turks! In other words, there is a community in the region that speaks Turkish, lives and maintains Turkish traditions, customs and culture, and



has been transmitting Turkish culture from generation to generation for centuries. But

our country is trying to deny this fact! On the other hand, New Democracy, which governs our country, nominated Alfred Beleri, an Albanian citizen and member of the Greek minority in Albania, who was sentenced to prison for corruption in local elections, as a candidate in the EP elections and had him elected to the EP. But when we say we are 'Turks' and when we fight for the rights and freedoms of our community, there is nothing left unsaid for us. Enough! You are making yourself, our country, a laughing stock within the European family. You support the Greek minority in Albania and Romania, you support the Greek minority in Istanbul, but when it comes to the 'Turkish' minority in your own land, you deny its existence. How does this work? It's unbelievable! We exist, we are Turks! Everything will change the day our country, like other EU countries, perceives the minorities in its country as wealth rather than a threat. Sooner or later, it will happen!"

*Image: www.anadoluiimages.com

Mitsotakis: We received the message of the people in the EP elections

ABTTF President: "I hope that our Prime Minister has also received the message we gave with the votes we casted to the FEP Party in Rodopi and Xanthi. Indeed, as the Turkish community in Western Thrace, by making the FEP Party the first party in Rodopi and Xanthi on the map, we showed to the government and all political parties that it is not possible to ignore the Turkish community in our region."

The Prime Minister of our country Kyriakos Mitsotakis assessed the European Parliament elections in his speech at a conference of the Economist magazine.

Mitsotakis indicated that New Democracy received more than twice as many votes as the party that came second in the EP elections and that they showed that they were the dominant power. Admitting that his party could not reach the target of 33 per cent of the votes, Mitsotakis said that the citizens gave a message about the cost of living in the elections and that they received this message.



President of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) Halit Habip Oğlu made the following statement: "Prime Minister Mitsotakis says that as a result of the EP elections the people gave a message to the government about the cost of living and that they have received the people's order for reform. I hope that our Prime Minister has also received the message we gave with our votes for the FEP Party in Rodopi and Xanthi. Indeed, as the Turkish community in Western Thrace, by making

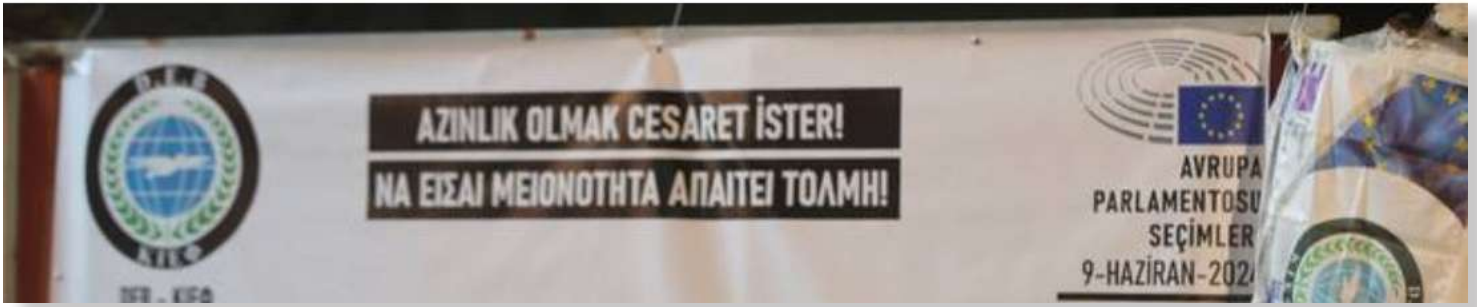
the FEP Party the first party in Rodopi and Xanthi on the map, we showed to the government and all political parties that it is not possible to ignore the Turkish community in our region. The ruling New Democracy should take our message seriously and take a step for a new beginning by putting an end to the state and government policy that ignores us in terms of the recognition of our existence and the restoration of our rights."

*Image: www.anadoluiimages.com

ABTTF President Habip Ođlu spoke to TRT World about the participation of the FEP Party in the EP elections

Ethnic Turkish party in Greece fights far-right discourse in EU polls

FEP Party of ethnic Turks of Western Thrace, competing in EU Parliament



ABTTF President: "Through the FEP Party in Greece, Turks in Western Thrace want to tell the world: 'We are here too, hear us! Listen to our problems!'"

The upcoming European Parliament (EP) elections and the participation of the Friendship Equality Peace (DEB) Party in the elections were discussed in the special news report published on the website of TRT World, the English-language channel of the Turkish Radio and Television Corporation (TRT) on 31 May 2024.

Written by Ayşe Işın Kirenci, the news report titled "Ethnic Turkish party in Greece fights far-right discourse in EU polls" also includes sections from the interview with Halit Habip Ođlu, President of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF).

It was noted in the news report that 350 million people from 27 member states across the European Union (EU) will go to the polls to elect Members of the European Parliament (MEP) between 6-9 June 2024, and that the FEP Party, the political party of the Western Thrace Turks in Greece will be participating in the EP elections despite being faced with a 3 percent election threshold across the country.



In the news report, it was further explained that ABTTF President Habip Ođlu highlighted that people's trust in democracy was shaken after the process that broke out with the wiretapping scandal in Greece and that 51 percent of them thought there was a democracy deficit in the country, and that Habip Ođlu thought that opposition parties could benefit from this year's EP elections and that it is noted that if it happens, the government may even change its course.

Moreover, it was noted in the news report that Fredi Beleri, who was elected as the mayor of the city of Himara in Albania but was sentenced to prison for corruption in the elections, was included in the EP candidate list of the ruling New Democracy, and Habip Ođlu said that Beleri's candidacy would bring the relations between Greece and Albania to

the attention of the European Parliament. In the news report, it was explained that Habip Ođlu said that even if the 3 percent threshold in Greece makes it impossible for the FEP Party to enter the EP, the expected success in the country is expected to send a message to the parties holding power in the EU countries. Through the media, Western Thrace Turks want to tell the world: "We are here too, hear us! Listen to our problems!" he added.

It is further indicated in the news report that Habip Ođlu explained that thanks to its membership in the European Free Alliance (EFA), the FEP Party's door to Europe was opened but that this situation also disturbed the Greek state. Finally, the new report underscored that Habip Ođlu said that the Western Thrace Turks are a taboo subject in Greece, that Turks are perceived as a threat to the unity and solidarity of the country in politics and media, and that this perception is reproduced many times every day in politics and media.

Please click below to access the TRT World news report in English: <https://www.trtworld.com/turkiye/ethnic-turkish-party-in-greece-fights-far-right-discourse-in-eu-polls-18169145>.

Here is justice in our country: Western Thrace Fenerbahçe Association is being dissolved!

ABTTF President: "In the Bekir-Ousta and Others group of cases, we said that unless the ECtHR judgments were executed, similar cases would come before the ECtHR. Unfortunately, we were right. In circumstances where the ECtHR judgments regarding the Bekir-Ousta and Others group of cases have not been executed by Greece for the past 16 years, the dissolution of this association, which has not gone beyond the statute to date, is a step taken to punish not only our association but also our community."

The Civil Court of First Instance of Rodopi decided to dissolve the fans' association established in Komotini under the name "Western Thrace Fenerbahçe Culture and Sports Association" in 2022 on 28 May 2024.

Following the hearing held on 6 September 2023, the Court of First Instance with a Single Judge of Rodopi ruled to revoke the registration of the "Western Thrace Fenerbahçe Association" with the decision announced on 28 May.

A lawsuit was filed requesting the revocation of the registration of the fans' association established in Komotini under the name of "Western Thrace Fenerbahçe Culture and Sports Association", claiming that its name was against the law, and the objection was withdrawn at the hearing dated 14



June 2023. The second lawsuit was filed by the Rodopi First Instance Prosecutor's Office on 16 June 2023, and it was claimed in the indictment that the expression "Western Thrace" in the name of the association was against the law and public order. The hearing of the case for the closure of the association, which was brought to justice for the third time in nine months, was held on 6 September 2023, and the Kaf-kasköy (Thri-lorio) Pontus Sports and Culture Association in the region also intervened in the case against the Fenerbahçe Association.

President of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) Halit Habip Oğlu made the following statement: "We are very disappointed with the decision to

dissolve the Western Thrace Fenerbahçe Association, and we condemn this decision, which is a clear violation of the freedom of association. In the Bekir-Ousta and Others group of cases, we said that unless the ECtHR judgments were executed, similar cases would come before the ECtHR. Unfortunately, we were right. In circumstances where the ECtHR judgments regarding the Bekir-Ousta and Others group of cases have not been executed by Greece for the past 16 years, the dissolution of this association, which has not gone beyond the statute to date, is a step taken to punish not only our association but also our community. This is one step further in the usurpation of our rights and freedoms by the state. We will not remain silent in face of this unlawfulness."

The European Commission published the 2024 Rule of Law Report

The report also referred to the non-execution of ECtHR judgments by Greece and the violation of the freedom of association of the Turkish community in Western Thrace.

The European Commission published the 2024 Rule of Law Report, which objectively and systematically analyses developments pertaining to the rule of law in the 27 EU

Member States and EU accession countries.

The country report on Greece criticised the state of the rule of law in the country, but also noted some positive steps taken by the government. The report noted the adoption of a legislative proposal on the justice system in the country, which envisages the involvement of the judiciary in the appoint-

ments to the highest positions in the judiciary and drew attention to the persistence of serious difficulties regarding the length of cases before the civil courts of first instance and the Council of State.

The report indicated some progress in the adoption of non-legislative safeguards to improve the protection of journalists in the



Brussels, 24.7.2024
SWD(2024) 808 final

COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT

2024 Rule of Law Report Country Chapter on the rule of law situation in Greece

country but explained that concerns about media independence remain.

The report also noted that challenges remain with respect to the quality of the law-making process in Greece and that the independent authorities established under the constitution face challenges that could undermine their status and ability to fulfil their mandate effectively.

The report, which also refers to the violation of the freedom of association of the Turkish community in Western Thrace, stated that the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) judgments, which have been pending execution by Greece for more than 15 years, are related to the violation of the right to freedom of association due to the decisions of national courts not to register or dissolve associations on grounds that their purpose is to promote the idea that an ethnic minority exists in the country. In a footnote in the report, it is noted that the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, in its resolution adopted at its meeting in December 2023, expressed its deep concern that following the legislative amendment adopted



by Greece in 2017 allowing the reopening of the impugned proceedings, the applicants in the Bekir-Ousta and Others group have still not been reinstated, despite having exhausted the possibilities available to them within the domestic legal system.

The report includes recommendations for Greece, inter alia, to continue efforts to establish a solid record of prosecution and final verdicts in corruption cases, including high-level corruption, to further advance the process of adopting legal and non-legal safeguards to improve the protection of journalists, and to develop a structured dialogue with civil society organisations.

The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) actively participated in the consultation process for civil society organisations and other stakeholders regarding the European Commission's 2024 Rule of Law Report and submitted its written contribution to the European Commission. In its written contribution where it conveyed the issues of the Turkish community in Western Thrace, ABTTF indicated that Greece has not executed the ECtHR judgments on the Bekir-Ousta and Others group of cases involving Western Thrace Turkish associations since 2008 despite the decisions and all warnings of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe and violated the freedom of association of the Turkish community.

Please click below to access the 2024 Rule of Law Report on Greece published by the European Commission:

https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/6741f4b2-6a10-44ba-b40c-97a-5a38e6827_en?filename=21_1_58062_coun_chap_greece_en.pdf

*Image: www.anadoluiimages.com

Minority school in Gökçeada enables the return of the population

With the opening of the Private Gökçeada Greek Primary School in 2013 and the Private Gökçeada Greek Secondary and High School in 2015, the number of Greeks settling on the island is increasing.

Speaking to In Newspaper, Zeytinliköy Primary School Principal Stelios Berberis indicated that 6 out of 18 students graduated from the primary school and 3 out of 30 students graduated from the secondary and high school, and that a dream came true in 2012 when Türkiye allowed the opening of a private primary school on the island. Berberis noted that young couples have decided to settle in Gökçeada due to the good level of education for the children in the island and that the Greek population, which dropped to 200 in 2000, has reached 700 today.

President of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) Halit Habip Oğlu made the following statement: "We are



happy on behalf of the Greek population on the island that the population on the island, which decreased with the opening of primary, secondary and high school in Gökçeada in Türkiye, has increased today, because the primary school has opened with only 3 students with the permission of Türkiye. The point reached today is very pleasing. In our Western Thrace, the situation is exactly the opposite. As a result of the decision to close

primary schools with less than 9 students, the number of Turkish primary schools decreased from 188 in 2011 to 90 today. The reason for the low number of students in our primary schools is not the decrease in the population in these schools, but the decrease in the quality of education in our schools due to the state control of our autonomous schools. We have no kindergartens, and the issues persist in our secondary and high schools. Our meetings with the state authorities and the letters we send do not yield any results and our demands are not met. If the state had heard our justified demands that we have been expressing for years and restored our educational autonomy, our children would have the opportunity to be taught in schools with high quality of education like in Gökçeada, the number of students in our schools would not decrease and our schools would not be closed."

*Image: www.anadoluiimages.com

ND MP Syrigos ignored the right of children belonging to the Turkish community in Western Thrace to education in their mother tongue

ABTTF President: "While bilingual kindergartens can be opened and operate without any issues in other Member States of the European Union, the government in our country should consider and fulfil the demand of our community, both as citizens and voters, for bilingual kindergartens."

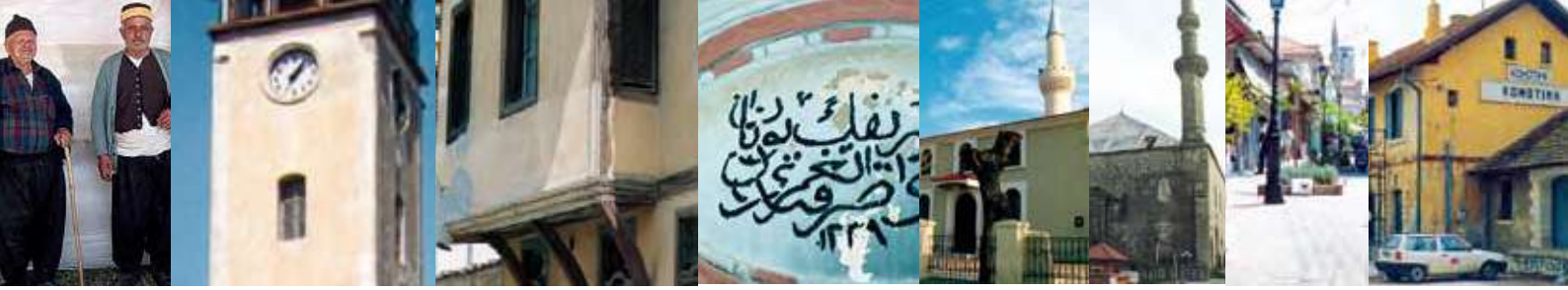
In his speech at the Greek Parliament, New Democracy (ND) MP from Athens Aggelos Syrigos referred to the demand of the Turkish community in Western Thrace for bilingual kindergartens where education will be provided in Greek or Turkish.

Indicating that he thought it would be provocative to impose Turkish on kindergarten children, Syrigos argued that children should not be forced to adopt a different linguistic identity or faced with challenges from the first years of their school education.



"I read with astonishment the statements of Syrigos, a member of parliament from the ruling party of our country, ignoring the right of our children to education in their mother tongue, Turkish. It is really incomprehensible! With the permission of our motherland, upon

the request of the Greek Orthodox minority, with whom we share the same fate under the Treaty of Lausanne, a Greek primary school is being opened in Gökçeada for only 3 students. Again, with the initiative of the Greek minority in Romania, a Greek primary school for 20 students was authorised in 2008. On the other hand, our country closes our autonomous Turkish primary schools one by one every year under the pretext of insufficient number of students and ignores our demand for bilingual minority kindergartens for years. While bilingual kindergartens can be opened and operate without any issues in other Member States of the European Union, the government in our country should consider and fulfil the demand of our community, both as citizens and voters, for bilingual kindergartens", said Halit Habip Oğlu, President of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF).



4 more Turkish primary schools in Western Thrace are being closed!

ABTTF President: "On the one hand, the Greek primary school opened for only 3 students with the permission of our motherland in Gökçeada upon the request of the Greek Orthodox minority, with whom we share the same fate, and on the other hand, our Turkish primary schools which have an autonomous status, are closed down by our country one by one every year! The aim here is obvious: There is an attempt at completely eliminating our educational autonomy, which is guaranteed by the treaties, by the state with a long-term plan. We call on our country to respect the educational autonomy and the right to education of our community by taking our motherland as an example, and we demand an immediate end to the closure of our community's primary schools under the pretext of lack of sufficient students."

In the 2024-2025 school year, 4 more primary schools belonging to the Turkish community in Western Thrace will be closed by the competent authorities of our country Greece on grounds of lack of sufficient number of students.

According to the decision taken, the Turkish primary schools in the villages of Vyrsini (Hacıören), Kymi (Keziren) and Plagia (Payamlar) in the prefecture of Rodopi and Palaio Katramio (Karaköy) in



the prefecture of Xanthi will be closed.

In our country Greece, within the scope of the economic austerity measures taken by the Greek Ministry of Education, Religious Affairs and Sports in 2010, and within the framework of the decision to close primary schools with less than nine students throughout the country, there has been a very rapid decrease in the number of primary schools with autonomous status belonging to the Turkish community in Western Thrace since 2011. While the number of Turkish primary schools in Western Thrace was 188 in 2011, with this latest decision, the number of Turkish primary schools will decrease to 86.

"Although the Turkish community in Western Thrace has been granted educational autonomy in accordance with the 1923 Treaty of

Lausanne and has the right to establish and manage its own schools, our educational autonomy has been dismantled by various laws and arbitrary practices over the years. Our country, disregarding our educational autonomy, continues to close our primary schools with autonomous status belonging to our community on the pretext of insufficient number of students and usurps the right to education of our children. On the one hand, the Greek primary school opened for only 3 students with the permission of our motherland in Gökçeada upon the request of the Greek Orthodox minority, with whom we share the same fate, and on the other hand, our Turkish primary schools with autonomous status, which are closed one by one every year by our country! The aim here is obvious: There is an attempt at completely eliminating our educational autonomy, which is guaranteed by the treaties, by the state with a long-term plan. We call on our country to respect the educational autonomy and the right to education of our community by taking our motherland as an example, and we demand an immediate end to the closure of our community's primary schools under the pretext of lack of sufficient students", said Halit Habip Oğlu, President of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF).

*Image: www.gundemgazetesi.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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