



Federation of Western Thracian Turks in Europa Newsletter

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Habip Oğlu met with the PACE President



During the working visit held in parallel to the PACE Winter Session, ABTTT met with the PACE President Tiny Kox.

The Federation of Western Thracian Turks in Europe (ABTTT) paid a working visit to Strasbourg in parallel to the Winter Ordinary Session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council

of Europe (PACE). During the working visit held on 23-24 January 2023, the ABTTT delegation, consisting of ABTTT President Halit Habip Oğlu and ABTTT International Affairs Director Melek Kırmacı Arık, expressed the current issues of the Turkish community in Western Thracian during their meetings with the organs of the Council of Europe and politicians.

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During the two-day working visit, ABTTF met with Tiny Kox (Netherlands/UEL) in his office, who was elected as the President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) for the second time in the elections held on 23 January 2023.

Within the scope of the meetings with politicians, ABTTF met with the Third Vice-Chairperson of the PACE Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media Laura Castel (UEL/Spain), Chairperson of the Turkish Delegation to PACE Ahmet Yıldız and the members of the Turkish Delegation to PACE. Furthermore, within the framework of its Strasbourg contacts, ABTTF held meetings with the Head of the Department of the Execution of Judgments of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) of the Council of Europe Clare Ovey and President of the Conference of INGOs of the Council of Europe Gerhard Ermischer.

During the meeting with the Department of the Execution of Judgments of the ECtHR, ABTTF indicated that our country Greece, did not take any concrete steps regarding the Bekir-Ousta and Others group



of cases and noted that a marginalising attitude was displayed against the officials of the associations representing the Turkish community in Western Thrace.



During the talks in Strasbourg, ABTTF President Halit Habip Oğlu stated that the institutions and individuals represen-



ting the Turkish community in Western Thrace are targeted by otherising them in politics and media. During the meeting held with the PACE President in his office, Halit Habip Oğlu revealed examples from the recent events that made the Turkish community in Western Thrace a target in politics and media through a discourse based on marginalisation, discrimination and hatred in its own country. Habip Oğlu indicated that although Athens remains the main place to find a solution to the issues of the Turkish community in Western Thrace, the hostile attitude towards our community also hinders the demand for dialogue with the rulers of our country.

ABTTF paid a working visit to Strasbourg

The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) paid a working visit to Strasbourg on 19-21 June 2023 in parallel with the Summer Session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE). The ABTTF delegation, consisting of ABTTF President Halit Habip Oğlu and ABTTF International Relations Director Melek Kirmacı Arık, discussed the current issues of the Turkish community in Western Thrace during their meetings with PACE member deputies and the Council of Europe bodies.

During the meetings with politicians and eurocrats, the ABTTF delegation indicated that the discourse of marginalisation and stigmatisation targeting the Turkish community in Western Thrace in politics and media during the general elections in Greece, and that the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) regarding the Western Thrace Turkish associations have not been executed by Greece for the past fifteen years and they further informed as regards the ongoing legal process before the Greek national courts in this respect.

During the meetings in Strasbourg, ABTTF President Halit Habip Oğlu noted that after a Turkish candidate received the most votes in the prefecture of Rodopi, where the Turkish community in Western Thrace



constitutes the majority of the population as a result of the general elections held in Greece on 21 May 2023, and that New Democracy (ND) failed to become the first party only in Rodopi, the Turkish community in Western Thrace was directly targeted and marginalised in discussions that began in the political arena and mainstream media.

Furthermore, Habip Oğlu indicated that with the smear campaign launched against the Turkish deputies elected from Rodopi and Xanthi in the general elections on 21 May, an attempt was made to prevent them from placing them at the top of the electoral lists of the parties they were nominated for in the elections to be held on 25 June 2023 and that the media is trying to discredit him, and thus the free will and democratic choice of the voters who voted for him is being ignored.

Explaining that Greece does not intend to execute the ECtHR judgments as regards the Xanthi Turkish Union, the Cultural Association of Turkish Women of the Prefecture of Rodopi and the Evros Prefecture Minority Youth Association belonging to the Turkish community in Western Thrace, which are in the Bekir-Ousta and others group of cases, Habip Oğlu reminded that within the framework of the decision taken at the meetings held on 5-7 June 2023, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe demanded that the Greek authorities adopt urgent measures aimed at taking steps to execute the aforementioned judgments and that it would resume the examination of this group of cases during the meetings to be held in December 2023.

Opportunity for change!

Dear readers,

As of 25 June, after the heated election period, I said that politicians and the public deserved to rest. Indeed, the period between the two elections was very active, very controversial, and very heated for everyone.

Like every year, I was in my hometown in Western Thrace, to spend my summer vacation with my family. Naturally, I also talked to our people and representatives of our community in the region.

While I was in the region, I attended a commemoration ceremony held at the grave of my brother, Dr. Sadik Ahmet, who was the leader and pioneer of our community, and with whom I worked internationally many times during his lifetime. On this occasion, I once again commemorate him with mercy and respect.

While the drowsiness brought by the summer following the elections is continuing, we have received the news that 9 more primary schools will be closed in the 2023-2024 school year.

Our schools are ours; we have autonomy in education, but who cares! Since 2011, there has been a rapid decrease in the number of primary schools every year.

There are 21 children in the Greek primary school, which was opened with only 4 children in 2013 in the island of Gökçeada in our motherland, and there are 35 students in the secondary and high school opened there in 2015.

Meanwhile, while the number of primary schools in Western Thrace was 231 in 1995, the number of primary schools decreased to 90 in the last 28 years, with 9 primary schools to be closed in the 2023-24 school year.

It is said that it is a practice that is applied

throughout the country, but the truth is that the state does not have the right to interfere with our schools! That's why, as we always say, this situation has turned into a tool of systematic discrimination against our community. The number of our primary schools is decreasing day by day!

Our kindergartens issue continues! In Xanthi, nearly half of the population is Turkish, and in Rodopi it is the majority. But while there are 42 state kindergartens in Rodopi and 30 in Xanthi, we do not have a single kindergarten in both prefectures. All requests and applications were left unanswered!

The aim of our country is to implement the strategy that is in applied in Rhodes and Kos! 3 Turkish schools in Rhodes (Rodos) and 2 Turkish schools in Kos (İstanköy) were closed in 1972 and never opened again. The main aim is to dissolve the Turkish schools in Western Thrace as well!

Our country does not accept our Turkishness, it forbids the definition of Turkish in the names of our associations; closing our schools; and it does not recognise our muf-tis.

Why all these restrictions? Our country wants to take our autonomy in the field of education and religion first under the control of the state and ultimately destroy it.

The main purpose is to show as if the Turkish presence in Western Thrace does not exist, to create such a perception. Indeed, it realised this in Rhodes and Kos!

State policy based on denial also finds an echo in the media. The discriminatory, stigmatising, and marginalising language against our community is dominant in the media! We experienced this very vividly after the 21 May elections.

We also witnessed that some politicians and academics in our country made some



positive statements regarding our existence and identity between and after the two elections. Are these the first footsteps of change?

Indeed, as Mitsotakis' father implemented the policy of isonomia-isopolitia, that is, equality before the law and equal citizenship, may be the son Mitsotakis would talk about change as the government!

However, the government must first show its goodwill towards our community, and this would be implementation of the ECtHR judgments that have not been executed for the past 15 years.

Subsequently, it must establish a dialogue mechanism to produce solutions to all our issues together, at equal eye level, by saying "For the minority, together with the minority" rather than "For the minority, despite the minority".

We do not know if those days will come, but this is the truth! We are determined to voice this demand out loud!

Greetings and yours sincerely,

Halit Habip Oğlu
ABTTF President

ABTTF paid a working visit to Brussels

The President of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) Halit Habip Oğlu paid a working visit to Brussels, capital of the European Union (EU), on 7 February 2023. Accompanied by Deniz Servantie from the ABTTF Brussels Office, ABTTF President held meetings with the Members of the European Parliament (MEP) Loránt Vincze (EPP, Romania) from the Hungarian minority in Romania, Jordi Solé (EFA, Spain) from the Catalan region of Spain and Cyrus Engerer (S&D, Malta).

ABTTF President Habip Oğlu talked about the Turkish community in Western Thrace and its issues to Jordi Solé and Cyrus Engerer, whom ABTTF met for the first time as part of the political lobbying activities carried out in Brussels. Since Jordi Solé is a member of the European Free Alliance (EFA) and that he knows the Turkish community in Western Thrace, the ABTTF President conveyed the current issues in Western Thrace, and detailed the interventions in the field of education and religion within the framework of recent developments.

In the first meeting in 2023 with MEP Loránt Vincze (EPP, Romania), who is the President of the Federal Union of European



Nationalities (FUEN) and knows the Turkish community in Western Thrace very well, alarming developments which took place in Western Thrace were conveyed.



In this context, in his meetings with the three MEPs, Habip Oğlu drew attention to the hate speech targeting the Turkish community in Western Thrace in Greece. Habip Oğlu revealed examples from recent events that rendered the Turkish community in Western Thrace as a target in politics and media with a discourse based on othering, discriminating and hatred in its own country. Habip Oğlu indicated that despite the efforts of the Turkish community in Western Thrace to solve the issues, the hostile attitude towards our community is also preventing the demand for dialogue with the rulers of our country.

Western Thrace Turkish business people and cooperative representatives and Turkish supermarket chains operating in Berlin gathered together

ABTTF President: “The Turkish community in Western Thrace in our region is a community based on agriculture, but due to the structural issues in our region, especially after the financial and financial crisis, migration has increased considerably. For this reason, we think that employment should be increased by enhancing production in our region.”



The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) initiated a programme between Turkish business people and cooperative representatives operating in the agriculture and food sector in Western Thrace and Turkish supermarket chains in Berlin in order to explore opportunities for the economic development of Western Thrace and job creation in Western Thrace and thus gathered its officials in Berlin.



Erol Ahmet, owner of MAX Dairy Products Company from Western Thrace, Ersin Mehmet, owner of NEDİM Patisserie, Okan Haliloğlu, owner of OKAL Food Company and Erdi Şerif, President of the Thrace Agricultural Cooperative attended the program held on 23-25 April 2023. At the meeting hosted by the Embassy of the Republic of Türkiye in Berlin on Monday, 24 April 2023, the Western Thrace Turkish delegation met with the officials of AC Eurogida GmbH and Bolu Lebensmittelhandels GmbH, Turkish chain markets operating in Berlin.

In his opening speech at the meeting in Berlin, Ambassador of the Republic of Türkiye to Berlin, Ahmet Başar Şen greeted all the participants and underscored the following: "The economic activities of the German Turkish community have the potential to contribute to the welfare of our kinsmen in Western Thrace and the region they live in. We must work together to achieve this goal". In his opening speech, ABTTF President Halit Habip Oğlu explained that with this initiative led by ABTTF, they want to stop the migration of young people from our region by increasing production and employment in Western Thrace.



Within the scope of the programme, ABTTF made a presentation with respect to the agricultural products grown in Western Thrace. Later, representatives of the Western Thrace Turkish food companies and agricultural cooperatives in the delegation and representatives of the Turkish supermarket chains in Berlin introduced their companies and activities.

After the meeting at the embassy, the Western Thrace Turkish delegation visited Bolu Lebensmittelhandels GmbH in Berlin and met with its owner, Mehmet Şükrü Kazancıoğlu, and learned about the activities of the company.



On the evening of Monday, 24 April, the Western Thrace Turkish delegation had a private meeting with the De-

puty Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Türkiye Yasin Ekrem Serim, who was in Berlin for the Eid celebration at the Berlin Embassy and the celebration ceremony held at the occasion of the 23 April National Sovereignty and Children's Day, which coincided with the same date, and attended the Eid ceremony at the embassy.



President of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) Halit Habip Oğlu made the following statement: "The Eastern Macedonia and Thrace State, where Western Thrace is located, is the least economically developed region of Greece and one of the regions with the highest unemployment rate. The Turkish community in Western Thrace in our region is a community based on agriculture. Due to the structural issues in our region, migration has increased considerably, especially after the financial and economic crisis. For this reason, we think that employment in our region should be increased by enhancing production. In order to explore the possibilities in this regard, we made a visit to South Tyrol in 2016 with the participation of Turkish mayors belonging to the Turkish community in Western Thrace and examined the regional and rural development model of that region. Now, we have taken an initiative to sell the food and agricultural products grown in our Western Thrace in Turkish supermarket chains in Germany. In this way, we want to contribute to the development of our region and our community and to slow down and stop the outward migration in the long run which is a result of the lack of job opportunities in the region".

ABTTF paid a working visit to Berlin

The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) paid a working visit to Berlin, the capital of Germany, on 23 November 2022. ABTTF President Halit Habip Oğlu, accompanied by ABTTF Head Office Manager K. Engin Soyyılmaz, met with German Bundestag deputies Filiz Polat (Alliance 90/The Greens) and Boris Mijatović (Alliance 90/The Greens) during the working visit.

ABTTF President Habip Oğlu indicated that Greece, which denies the “Turkish” identity of the Turkish community in Western Thrace and claims that it is not “Turkish” within its borders, has not executed the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) as regards the associations of the Turkish community, namely the Xanthi Turkish Union, the Cultural Association of Turkish Women of the Prefecture of Rodopi and the Evros Prefecture Minority Youth Association, for more than 14 years,



despite all the warnings of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe.

Habip Oğlu stated that the Turkish com-

munity in Western Thrace is seen and shown as an “enemy within the country” and a “threat” in politics and media in Greece, and that as the result of this negative perception based on prejudice, hate speech and attacks targeting the Turkish community have increased especially in the recent period. Furthermore, Habip Oğlu cited examples of Xanthi SYRIZA Deputy Hüseyin Zeybek being threatened with death during a live broadcast on a local television channel and a Turkish teenager in Xanthi being insulted and physically assaulted as a “Dirty Turk” as an illustration of these attacks.

Habip Oğlu noted that Greece, as an old member of the European Union (EU), must be persuaded to be a country that is truly compatible with the EU’s core values and principles and fully respects the rule of law.

ABTTF President met with the Members of the Bundestag in Berlin

The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) paid a working visit to the capital of Germany, Berlin, on 1 March 2023. ABTTF President Halit Habip Oğlu met with German Bundestag deputies Carsten Träger (SPD) and Knut Abraham (CDU) during his working visit accompanied by ABTTF Head Office Manager K. Engin Soyyılmaz.

ABTTF President Habip Oğlu, who expressed the current issues of the Turkish community in Western Thrace and the discrimination and rights violations it has been subjected to in the meetings with the deputies, indicated that the people and institutions representing the Turkish community in Western Thrace have been overtly targeted in the written and visual media lately. Underlining that the Turkish community in Western Thrace is portrayed as a “threat” and “danger” in politics and media in his own country, Habip Oğlu noted that this hostile attitude hinders the demand of the Turkish community for dialogue with the rulers of his country.



Stating that the educational and religious autonomy of the Turkish community in Western Thrace, which is guaranteed by the bilateral and international agreements, has been liquidated with various laws and practices over the years, Habip Oğlu noted that the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) with respect to the Xanthi Turkish Union, the Cultural Association of Turkish Women of the Prefecture of Rodopi and the Evros Prefecture Minority Youth Association have persis-

tently not been executed by Greece for the past 15 years despite all the warnings and decisions of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe.



Furthermore, Habip Oğlu noted that the latest example of hostility and prejudice against the Turkish community in Western Thrace is the filing of a lawsuit requesting the revocation of the registration of the Western Thrace Fenerbahçe Association, which was officially established in October 2022 with the signature of the Rodopi Provincial Prosecutor.

The issues of Western Thrace Turks were on the agenda at the United Nations

In its oral statement at the UN, attended by all states, UN bodies and many civil society representatives in the world, ABTTF said that the Turkish community in Western Thrace is seen as a threat in its own country, and that because of this, it has been made the target of hate speech in politics and media.

The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF), which represents the Turkish community in Western Thrace at the UN, attended in the 52nd Regular Session of the United Nations (UN) Human Rights Council held in Geneva on 27 February-4 April 2023.

ABTTF, which has special consultative status with the UN Economic and Social Council, constantly expresses the issues of the Turkish community in Western Thrace at the UN Human Rights Council, which is held three times a year and attended by the representatives of all UN member states. As the voice of the Western Thrace Turks, it brings the current issues of the community to the forefront.

In this context, International Affairs Director Melek Kirmacı Arık attended the first UN Human Rights Council meeting of the year representing ABTTF. Participating in the agenda items titled UN Human Rights Bodies and Mechanisms with the session in which UN Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues Fernand de Varennnes presented his report on 23-24 March 2023, ABTTF brought up the stigma, targeting and hate-based discourses against the Turkish community in Western Thrace.

On 23 March 2023, at the UN Human Rights Council, where Fernand de Va-



rennes, the UN Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues, participated for the last time as a special rapporteur, Varennnes indicated that it was too late to take concrete steps to protect minorities, their human rights and identities. The Special Rapporteur demanded that all states put an end to neglect and inaction in the field of minority rights, demanding the preparation of a permanent forum on minority rights and a new treaty.



In its speech on 24 March 2023, ABTTF reminded that, as discussed at the UN Forum on Minority Issues in December 2022, human rights defenders cannot be stigmatised, targeted or subjected to any form of hate speech for their sta-

tements and activities to defend the rights of a minority group and it further indicated that the Turkish community in Western Thrace in Greece is perceived as a threat in politics and media.

Noting that there is systematic and structural discrimination against the Turkish community in Western Thrace in Greece, ABTTF indicated that the representatives of the Turkish community in Western Thrace were targeted due to the hate speech present in politics and the media. Criticising the stigmatisation and targeting of community representatives by some media outlets, ABTTF noted that the representatives of the Turkish community in Western Thrace were openly targeted by the publication of their photographs. Noting that there is hate speech against Turkish deputies in the Greek parliament in politics, ABTTF added that Xanthi SYRIZA Deputy Hüseyin Zeybek was threatened with death by a viewer during a local television broadcast in Xanthi.

Drawing attention to the impact of politics on discourse and language in mainstream media, ABTTF further indicated that the use of the media as a means of provocation and manipulation that may lead to hostility towards members of a certain group should be prevented.

ABTTF attended the OSCE Human Dimension Conference

At the conference, ABTTF raised the current issues of the Turkish community in Western Thrace and its increasing targeting in politics and media.

The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF), representing the Turkish community in Western Thrace, participated in the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Human Dimension Conference on 28-29 September 2022 in Warsaw, Poland.

Deniz Servantie from the ABTTF Brussels Office participated in the ten-day conference on the state of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the OSCE region, organised by the OSCE Polish Presidency with the support of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR).

Intervening at the session titled ‘Addressing racism, xenophobia, discrimination and intolerance, including based on religion or belief’ of the conference, which was attended by representatives of the OSCE participating States, OSCE institutions, international organisations and civil society, ABTTF noted that the systematic violations of the religious autonomy of the Turkish community in Western Thrace guaranteed by the treaties continue in Greece. Indicating that the state does not recognise the muftis elected by the Turkish community in Western Thrace and that there is a dual structure in Western Thrace insofar as with state-appointed muftis and elected muftis, ABTTF explained that the muftis



elected by the Turkish community are tried and sentenced to prison on grounds of illegally using religious symbols.

Indicating that the religious autonomy of the Turkish community in Western Thrace was further weakened by the Presidential decree No. 52/2019 and the new act under the title of ‘Modernisation of the Mufti Offices’ adopted by the Greek parliament on 29 July 2022, ABTTF pointed out that the new law was violating the 1913 Treaty of Athens and the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne and was intended to establish full control and audit over the muftiates that have the autonomous structure.



Moreover, ABTTF indicated that following the passing of Mufti of Xanthi Ahmet Mete, deputies and representatives of the Turkish community in Western Thrace were directly targeted in politics and media during

the election of a new mufti in Xanthi.

Underlining that Greece’s policies and practices regarding the right of the Turkish community in Western Thrace to its freedom of association and the exercise of religious freedom are in no way compatible with the European Union



(EU) standards of which it is a member and the European Convention on Human Rights, to which it is a party, ABTTF asked the Greek government to respect the right of the Turkish community in Western Thrace to elect its own religious leaders, the muftis, in accordance with the 1913 Treaty of Athens and the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne. Furthermore, ABTTF also called on Greece to repeal the new act titled ‘Modernisation of the Mufti Offices’ as well as the Presidential decree No. 52/2019.

Western Thrace Turkish Delegation at OSCE

At the meeting which was focusing on media freedom, ABTTF and WTMUGA indicated that political discourse and actions also shape the media and pointed out that the news targeting Western Thrace Turks and hate speech in the media have increased.



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 Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) on 13-14 March 2023 in Vienna. ABTTF International Relations Director Melek Kirmacı Arık and WTMUGA Human Rights Expert Kerem Abdurahimoğlu represented the Turkish community in Western Thrace at the first OSCE meeting of the year titled “Media Freedom as a Central Pillar of Comprehensive Security”.

In the meeting organised by the OSCE Chairpersonship of North Macedonia, the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media and the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), media freedom and the relationship between media freedom and democracy were discussed in the context of the security concept, covering political-military, economic, environmental and humanitarian aspects.

Intervening in the context of the relationship between media freedom and democracy, ABTTF noted that there is a hostile environment for human rights

defenders and civil society in Greece, adding that such a situation is also included in the statements made by the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe and the European Parliament Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs (LIBE). Noting that the Turkish community in Western Thrace is marginalised in Greece, ABTTF explained that the description made by Prime Minister Mitsotakis of the reason for visiting Western Thrace as national during his visit to Western Thrace in January 2023 strengthened the perception that the Turkish community poses a threat to public order and national unity of the state, and it was also indicated that this situation in the media is also reflected through hate-based news targeting the community. Stating that the media should not be a propaganda tool, ABTTF said that false news about individuals and organisations

representing the Turkish community in Western Thrace cannot be handled within the framework of media freedom, citing the case against Newsbreak.gr website, which made slanderous and false information about ABTTF.



Speaking on the second day of the meeting, WTMUGA indicated that pluralism in the media does not mean suppressing the voice of the Turkish community in Western Thrace and human rights defenders, and stated that in recent years, news has been made in a way that threatens the security of the representatives of the Turkish community in Western Thrace. In this context, WTMUGA noted that some websites constantly target people who are the representatives of the community, publishing the names and photos of these people and making them clear targets. Explaining that the main purpose of this strategy is to silence the representatives of the community, WTMUGA underlined that freedom of expression and media should not be misused and turned into anti-minority propaganda.

Report from ABTTF in response to the Greece Report on the U.S. Human Rights Practices Report for 2022

ABTTF President: “Unfortunately, the U.S. Greece Human Rights Report gives less and less coverage to the issues of our community each year, which damages the credibility and reliability of the U.S. report. As every year, we have clearly expressed this criticism in the report we prepared as a response to the US Greece 2022 Human Rights Report. Indeed, we know that minority rights are equal to human rights”.

The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) prepared a report parallel to the Country Reports on Human Rights Practices, known as the Human Rights Report- on Greece published annually by the Department of State of the United States of America, and submitted it to the U.S. authorities.

In its report, ABTTF indicated that Greece is one of the countries with the worst record of minority rights in Europe and criticized the fact, although there has been no improvement with respect to the situation of the Turkish community in Western Thrace and the Turkish community in Rhodes, Kos and the Dodecanese Islands and the Turkish community in Greece as a whole, the issues pertaining to the communities are almost absent from the U.S. report.

Underscoring that minority rights are equal to human rights, ABTTF reported the issues and current developments of the Turkish community that were not included in the U.S. report and revealed detailed information with respect to the issues faced by the Turkish community in Western Thrace in the field of human and minority rights.

Indicating that a reference was made to the 29 June decision of the Court of Cassation as regards the Xanthi Turkish Union, it nonetheless criticised the fact that the Court of Cassation rejected the applications lodged by the other two associations that are part of the group of cases, namely the Cultural Association of Turkish Women of the Prefecture



of Rodopi and the Evros Prefecture Minority Youth Association. Stating that the ECtHR judgments have not been executed for the past 15 years in the Bekir-Ousta and Others group of cases, which the European Court of Human Rights concluded that Greece violated the freedom of association, ABTTF criticised the very superficial coverage of this important issue in the report. In addition, within the scope of recent developments, ABTTF provided detailed information as regards the lawsuit filed for the revocation of the registration of the “Western Thrace Fenerbahçe Association”, which was registered on 11 October 2022.

Regarding the issues faced by the Turkish community in Western Thrace in the field of education, ABTTF criticised the U.S. report’s failure to mention any issues pertaining to minority education. Highlighting that the educational autonomy granted to the Turkish community has been undermined by various regulations and practices over the years, ABTTF reported in detail the lack of bilingual kindergartens in education, the structural issues in Turkish primary schools and the closure of primary schools, the lack of secondary schools, the status of religious schools in Western Thrace and the interventions in the functioning of religious schools.

Regarding discrimination and hate attacks, ABTTF noted that hate speech

and hate-based attacks targeting the Turkish community in Western Thrace were not included in the U.S. report, that the “Turkish” identity of the Turkish community in Western Thrace is rejected in Greece and that there is a systematic structural discrimination against the Turkish community in politics and media in the country. Stated. Noting that Turks and Macedonians living in the country are not recognised, but Romani, Pomak and Armenians as other ethnic groups can establish associations under their own names, ABTTF indicated that Turks are perceived as a threat to public order and are reflected in this way in the media. Recollecting the hate speech attacks in 2022 in its report, ABTTF reported in detail as regards the attack in which a Turkish youth was insulted with slurs such as “Nasty Turk” and beaten in Xanthi in August, and further reminded the accusation of being a “Turkish spy” and the subsequent death threat to which Xanthi Deputy Hüseyin Zeybek was subjected to in a live television broadcast

President of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) Halit Habip Oğlu made the following statement: “Unfortunately, the U.S. Greece Human Rights Report gives less and less coverage to the problems of our community each year, which damages the credibility and reliability of the U.S. report. As every year, we have clearly expressed this criticism in the report we prepared as a response to the U.S. Greece 2022 Human Rights Report. Indeed, we know that minority rights are equal to human rights. It is therefore unacceptable that the U.S. report makes little or no reference to the Turkish community in Western Thrace and other national minorities in Greece. Again, we did what had to do, and we detailed the issues of our community in the topics that were not included in the U.S. report or were expressed incompletely. As the Turkish community in Western Thrace, we listed our demands from Greece, and we asked the U.S. authorities to meet with the representatives of our community in our region during the preparation of the report and to listen to our issues and reflect the current situation in the region in the U.S. report”.



The Turkish community in Western Thrace will be represented by four deputies in the Greek Parliament in the new legislative period

ABTTF President: “We demand that the ND government, which has taken office, learn from the mistakes it has made in the last four years and deal with the issues of our community sincerely, and consult with us by establishing a one-to-one dialogue from the very beginning on the reforms it will carry out on matters directly related to us”.

New Democracy (ND), led by Kyriakos Mitsotakis, who has been serving as the Prime Minister for the last four years, won the general elections held on Sunday, 25 June 2023 in our country Greece. According to the election results, New Democracy gained 158 deputies in the 300-seat parliament with 40.5 percent of the vote. The Coalition of the Radical Left – Progressive Alliance (SYRIZA) gained 48 seats with 17.83 percent, while PASOK-KINAL got 32 seats with 11.84 percent, the Communist Party (KKE) 20 seats with 7.69 percent, Spartans 12 seats with 4.63 percent, Greek Solution 12 seats with 4.44 percent, Democratic Patriotic Movement – Victory 10 seats with 3.69 percent and Course of Freedom 8 seats with 3.17 percent.

While ND exceeded the number of 151 seats required to be in power alone in the general elections and where the turnout was 52.84 percent, the far right gained representation in the Greek Parliament through 3 parties that are Spartan, Victory, and Greek Solution.

As in the 21 May general elections, the same four members of the Trace Turkish community in Western Thrace were



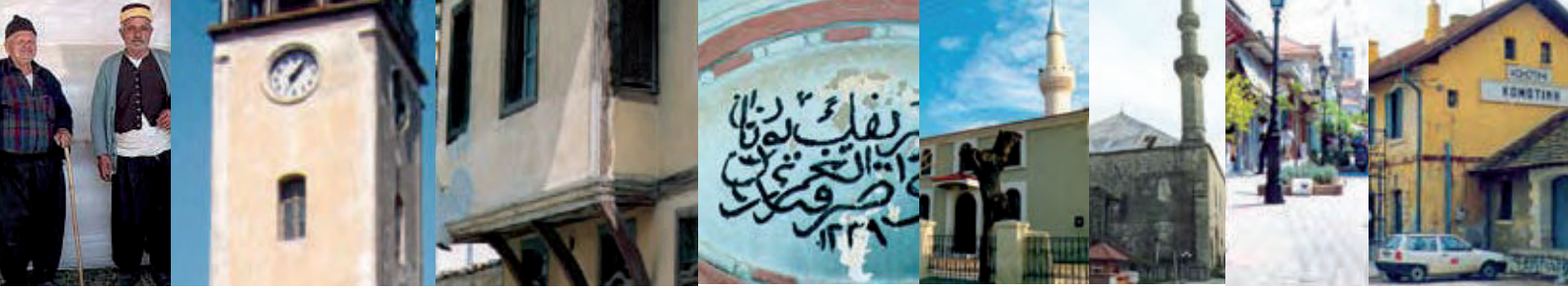
elected as deputies in the 25 June general elections. In the prefecture of Rodopi, where SYRIZA achieved the highest number of votes, the candidate from this party, Özgür Ferhat, was re-elected as a deputy. In the prefecture of Xanthi, Hüseyin Zeybek from SYRIZA and Burhan Baran from PASOK-KINAL succeeded in re-entering the Greek Parliament. While SYRIZA was the first party in Rodopi with 33.60 percent, ND took the first place in Xanthi with 30.32 percent.

ND Leader Kyriakos Mitsotakis was sworn in on 26 June 2023 and started his four-year term as Prime Minister. The new cabinet, consisting of 64 members, including the Prime Minister, Ministers, Deputy Ministers, and Alternate Ministers, took the oath at the Presidency on 27 June 2023.

In his assessment of the election results, Halit Habip Oğlu, President of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) made the following statement: “Following the general elections which were held on 21 May, we left behind the general elections on 25

June. Our community, which has been targeted in politics and the mainstream media and is exposed to an othering and stigmatising discourse as it has never been before a general election, sent the best answer against this on 25 June with their free will at the ballot box, and four Turkish deputies from the prefectures of Rodopi and Xanthi were again elected to the Parliament with their votes. Despite all the denial policy of our country, the results of the 25 June general elections once again clearly demonstrate our presence in our region and our power with our voting potential. Prime Minister Mitsotakis, in his statement right after the election results, indicated that the new government would carry out important reforms in our country. We demand that the ND government, which has taken office, learn from the mistakes it has made in the last four years and deal with the issues of our community sincerely, and consult with us by establishing a one-to-one dialogue from the very beginning on the reforms it will carry out on matters directly related to us”.

*Image: www.anadoluiimages.com



9 more Turkish primary schools will be closed in the new academic year in Western Thrace!

ABTTF President: "Like the previous ones, this latest decision of the Ministry of Education to close our schools is completely against the Treaty of Lausanne! We call on our country to immediately put an end to the closure of our primary schools, which is a clear violation of our educational autonomy, and to establish a direct dialogue with us before making decisions regarding our schools."

In the 2023-2024 academic year, 9 more primary schools belonging to the Turkish community in Western Thrace will be closed citing the lack of sufficient number of students.

According to the decision issued by the Greek Ministry of Education, Religious Affairs and Sports, Turkish primary schools in seven villages in Rhodope and two villages in Xanthi will be closed. In accordance with the relevant decision, Turkish primary schools in Amaranta (Yahyabeyli), Darmeni (Değirmendere), Amfia (Hacımustafaköy), Kato Kardamos (Gerdeme), Porpi (Ortakışla), Salpi (Sasallı) and Stilarion (Baraklı) in the Rhodope province and in Eora (Salıncak) and Palio Zigo (Mizanlı) in the Xanthi province will be closed.



Following the decision to close primary schools with less than nine students across the country in line with the economic measures in 2011, there has been a rapid decrease in the number of Turkish primary schools, which have, in fact, autonomous status. 12 Turkish primary schools were closed in 2021, 4 in 2022 and 9 in 2023. While the number of Turkish primary schools in Western Thrace was 231 in 1995, the number of Turkish primary schools decreased to 90 in the last 28 years with this latest decision.

"Our country continues to close our primary schools in autonomous status, ignoring our educational autonomy guaranteed by the Treaty of Lausanne. Like the previous ones, this latest decision of the Ministry of Education to close is completely against the Treaty of Lausanne! Our country, which calls our homeland to comply with the provisions of the Treaty of Lausanne at every opportunity and to respect the right to education of the Greek

Orthodox minority in our homeland, sees no harm in violating Lausanne when it comes to the Turkish community in Western Thrace! Although we have the right to establish, manage and supervise our own schools, our country has constantly interfered with our educational autonomy with numerous laws and practices over the years. The aim here is obvious: Our country wants to completely abolish our educational autonomy by closing all our autonomous schools over time. On the other hand, in line with the demand of the Greek Orthodox minority with whom we share the same fate, thanks to the opportunity to open a kindergarten and primary school with only 5 children in 2013 in Imbros (Gökçeada) with the support of our homeland, on the contrary, our primary schools in villages in neighbouring or close to each other in Western Thrace have been closed one by one in recent years. In the last ten years, the number of our primary schools has decreased from 226 to 90. We call on our country to immediately put an end to the closure of our primary schools, which is a clear violation of our educational autonomy, and to establish a direct dialogue with us before making decisions regarding our schools", 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.

In order to receive ABTTF Newsletter by mail and for further information on the newsletter:

www.abttf.org
+49 2302 913291

ABTTF

Avrupa Batı Trakya Türk Federasyonu

Föderation der West-Thrakien Türken in Europa
Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe
Ευρωπαϊκή Ομοσπονδία Τουρικών Δυτικής Θράκης
Fédération des Turcs de Thrace Occidentale en Europe

ABTTF Head Office

Wemerstr. 2, D-58454 Witten, Germany
Tel.: +49 (0) 2302 91 32 91 - Fax: +49 (0) 2302 91 32 93

ABTTF Brussels Office

Square de Meeûs 38/40, B-1000 Brussels, Belgium
Tel.: +32 (0) 2 401 61 98 - Mobile: +32 (0) 474 45 45 76

ABTTF Athens Office

24 Lagoumitzi str., GR-17671 Athens, Greece
Tel.: +30 (0) 211 109 72 33 - Mobile: +30 (0) 694 467 36 61

E-mail: info@abttf.org - www.abttf.org

Executive Editor: K. Engin Soyylmaz Editor: Merve Öztiryaki