



Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europa Newsletter

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Member of the Fundamental Rights Platform (FRP) of the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights
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Greece's failure to execute the ECtHR judgments on Western Thrace Turkish associations was discussed at an online panel organised by ABTTT



It was noted during the event that the fact that the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) judgments regarding the Xanthi Turkish Union which was closed, and the Cultural Association of Turkish Women of the Rodopi Province and the Evros Prefecture Minority Youth Association which were not registered by the national courts, have not been executed by Greece for more than 13 years contradicted the principles of democracy and the rule of law.

The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTT), with the support of the member of the European Parliament (EP) François Alfonsi (Greens/EFA) organised a webinar entitled "The Long-Standing Problem of Non-Execution of ECtHR's Judgments by Greece: The Bekir Ousta and Others Group of Cases" on 2 June 2021.

The webinar began with the opening remarks of ABTTT President Halit Habip Oğlu. Habip Oğlu stated that Greece is a country that has gained a place in the history of the world as the "cradle of democracy" but has not reconciled with multiculturalism, adding that Greece must now take the final concrete step in executing the ECtHR

judgments concerning the three associations of the Turkish community in Western Thrace in the Bekir-Ousta and Others group of cases.

MEP François Alfonsi, Legal Counsel of Bekir Ousta and Others Group of Cases and Doctoral Researcher at the Human Rights Centre of Ghent University İlker Tsavousoglou and Greek Helsinki Monitor (GHM) Spokesperson and Board Member of European Implementation Network (EIN) Panayote Dimitras were present as panellists at the panel session which was moderated by ABTTT International Affairs Director Melek Kirmacı Arık.

Alfonsi noted that Greece, which has not executed ECtHR judgments regarding the associations of the Turkish community in Western Thrace, rejects the existence of a historic minority of the European Union (EU), saying this is intolerable for all democrats and minorities in Europe. Underlining that Greece denies European democracy by acting in this way, Alfonsi said that not what constitutes a problem is not merely Greece's stance, but also those who do not impose any sanctions by allowing this behaviour. Alfonsi noted that the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe will have a new decision pertaining to the Bekir-Ousta and Others group of cases in a few days, adding that members of the Turkish community in Western Thrace are EU citizens and that their rights should be fully respected in this context.

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Tsavousoglou stated that the ECtHR has ruled that Greece violated Article 11 of the European Convention on Human Rights on freedom of association in cases involving Western Thrace Turkish associations which have been closed or not allowed to be established on the grounds that their names include the word “Turkish”, adding that the Court considers that the decisions have not been executed for 13 years and that it violates basic democratic values. Tsavousoglou underlined



that the acceptance of the existence of the ethnic Turkish minority in Greece is a political taboo, but that compliance with the ECtHR judgments is not optional, and that the failure to execute the ECtHR judgments regarding the Bekir-Ousta and Others group of cases fully and effectively would be a lost opportunity for the European Human Rights system to reiterate its commitments to protect minorities.



Dimitras stressed that the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe should take urgent measures in order that the ECtHR judgments concerning the Western Thrace Turkish associations in the Bekir-Ousta and Others group of cases are executed, saying that following the interim decision a decade ago, a similar decision could not happen again, and that it was time to introduce the Infringement Procedure against Greece. Dimitras said that due to the failure in the execution of the ECtHR judgments, the national courts cannot be bla-

med, adding that the Greek government can change the existing law if it really wants to, and then the said associations can be registered and/or re-registered by national courts.



The panel ended with a Q&A session and closing remarks by the panellists.

You can watch a recording of the event on Zoom in English and Greek on ABTTF's YouTube channel and Facebook page: English video on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2yxvE751oIU&t=196s> Greek video on YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u3ZepEik_vc&t=13s English video on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/939989616164959/videos/959003728180523> Greek video on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/939989616164959/videos/145830780930058>

Young ABTTF attended the YEN Seminar on “Story of My Life”

Young ABTTF, the youth organisation of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF), participated in the seminar titled “Story of My Life” organised by the Youth of European Nationalities (YEN) in Strasbourg, France on 1-5 September 2021 with the contributions of the European Youth Foundation of the Council of Europe. Nihan Ayan from Young ABTTF attended the seminar.



On the first day of the seminar, which was attended by Hungarians in Slovakia, Slovenians in Italy, Romansh in Switzerland and Alsatis in Lorraine, and Western Thrace Turks in Greece, the Strasbourg European Youth Centre gave a keynote address to representatives of minority youth organisations from many different countries in Europe. Following the speech, the participants were divided into groups with instructors from Poland and the United States for workshops titled “My Identity”, “Stories About My Minority”. In the seminar, which focused on issues such as the process of defining the identity



of minorities, narrative identity, stereotypes and discrimination, the participants gave interviews about their identity within the scope of identity identification and education.



At the Minorities Market held after the workshops, the participants delivered presentations introducing the minorities and the organisation to which they belonged. Nihan Ayan from Young ABTTF introduced the Turkish community in Western Thrace and ABTTF and informed the other participants about the problems experienced by the Turkish community in Western Thrace.

On the second day of the seminar, the participants examined basic theories on critical



thinking, and as they were divided into different groups, they examined media articles about their minorities, and carried out studies that recorded the accuracy of the news.



On the last day of the seminar and at during the “Stereotypes and Discrimination” workshop, Nihan Ayan expressed the unjust treatment of the Turkish community in Western Thrace as a result of stereotypes and prejudices against the Turkish community in Western Thrace that are persisting for many years.

We are the only ignored, unregarded minority in the EU!

Dear readers,

I attended the congress of the Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN) in Trieste, Italy on 9-12 September 2021, where we are a full member as the Turkish community in Western Thrace and I am also part of the board.

Due to the pandemic, we were unable to hold our congress last year, but this year we were able to meet representatives of different national minorities from Europe in Trieste, albeit with limited participation.

Autochthonous national minorities from different geographies had in the past formed the majority in the lands where they had lived for centuries, but as a result of wars and the changes in the borders, they remain as minorities within the new borders.

Together with Germany, Romania, Italy, Hungary, Bulgaria and our country Greece, the national minorities in the FUEN family today, whose name I cannot name here, are all Western minorities, all living in EU Member States.

When the main topic of the Congress was with respect to education, we thus had the opportunity to listen to the educational systems of the Slovenes and Germans living in Italy along with the Germans living in Italy where they all live as national minorities.

The presentations made by these minority communities as regards the educational systems in their countries from kindergarten to university and the structure and functioning of their schools was very interesting. It is further interesting to note that the system and practices based on

the educational autonomy of these minorities in Europe were established following the Second World War.

In contrast, our own educational autonomy in our country goes back to 25 years before those of the other national minorities in Europe.

As it stands, it would be expected that the educational autonomy that we have and the schools that are tied to this educational system and functioning should operate in a more established and orderly fashion but this is not the reality!

The educational autonomies of the national minorities in Europe operate very systematically and properly within a wide-ranging and detailed system, taking into account the needs of science and modern education. In simple words, whilst education is moving forward and expanding in their case, in our case, it is going backwards and contracting.

The autonomous education system we have today is characterised as mixed.

While we should be autonomous, in fact, there is no structure left to be called autonomous.

This year, 12 of our primary schools were closed again.

Whereas the countries that I mentioned above keep the identities, customs and rituals and education of the minorities at the same value as the majority population, it seems as if our country would drown us in a spoonful of water.

I can say that out of the 27 countries that are members of the European Union, it is the only country



that is in such a denialist approach with respect to the minorities.

According to our country, we are Greek Muslims!

Our very existence is being denied!

It is a pity that the policy of the state and the governments that represent it which is based on ignoring these facts has transformed the Greek people in this way...

Indeed, it was possible to create a diverse and rich country together where our differences are a source of enrichment, where we embrace each other with our differences...

It's a shame....

Yours sincerely,

Halit Habip Oğlu
ABTTF President

Western Thrace Turkish delegation attended FUEN 2021 Congress

The resolution on the non-execution of ECtHR judgments on Western Thrace Turkish associations by Greece was adopted by the FUEN Assembly of Delegates.



The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) attended the 65th annual Congress of the Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN) held in Trieste, Italy on 9-12 September 2021. The Congress, hosted by Italy's Slovenian minority, was attended by ABTTF President and FUEN Vice-President Halit Habip Oğlu and Secretary General of the Friendship Equality Peace (FEP) Party Yeşim Hasan from Trieste and ABTTF Director of International Affairs Melek Kırmacı Arık and Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association (WTMUGA) Member Şükriye Mehmet online.

Panel sessions discussed the future of Europe's cultural and linguistic diversity and the educational models of minorities in Europe, and touched upon the situation of Italy's Slovenian minority



The FUEN 2021 Congress, attended by more than 140 minority representatives from 20 different countries in Europe and moderated by writer and journalist Vida Valenčič, officially began on 9 September with the opening speech of FUEN President and Member of European Parliament (MEP) Loránt Vincze.



FUEN President and MEP Loránt Vincze, United Nations (UN) Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues Dr. Fernand de Varennas, Italian Parliament Senator Tatjana Rojc and MEP François Alfonsi were present at the first panel session titled 'the future of Europe's cultural and linguistic diversity'.



The FUEN Prize, awarded to those who contribute to the protection of national minorities, was presented this year to UN Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues Dr. Fernand de Varennas.



The panel sessions on Friday 10 September focused first on the educational models of minorities in Europe, and second on the situation of the Slovenian minority living in Italy, the host of this year's Congress.

Draft resolutions submitted by Western Thrace Turks and Turks of Rhodes, Kos and Dodecanese Islands were adopted

While ABTTF President and FUEN Vice President Halit Habip Oğlu and FEP Party Secretary General Yeşim Hasan attended the meetings from Trieste, ABTTF Director of International Affairs Melek Kırmacı Arık and WTMUGA Member Şükriye Mehmet attended the FUEN Assembly of Delegates held hybridly online on Saturday 11 September. The decision text of the resolution on the non-execution of the ECtHR judgements by Greece regarding the Bekir-Ousta and Others Group of Cases which includes the Xanthi Turkish Union, the Cultural Association of Turkish Women of the Rodopi Province and Evros Prefecture Minority Youth Association, which violates the freedom of association of the Turkish community in Western Thrace jointly presented by ABTTF, WTMUGA and FEP Party as the Western Thrace Turkish delegation was adopted by a majority vote in the FUEN Assembly of Delegates.

The draft resolution on the issues and current situation of the Turks of Rhodes, Kos and Dodecanese Islands in Greece, presented by the Rhodes, Kos and the Dodecanese Turks Culture and Solidarity Association (ROISDER), a member of FUEN, was adopted by a majority of votes.

In the FUEN Assembly of Delegates, where amendments to the FUEN charter were also voted, the FUEN main text of the resolution on the future of autochthonous national and linguistic

minorities in the European Union (EU) and that is demanding that their status be fully incorporated into the EU's legal mechanism was adopted.

Two new member organisations in FUEN



Representatives of the Tatar community in Romania known as the Democratic Union of Tatars and the Italian Union which represents the Italian community in Slovenia and Croatia whose applications for membership to FUEN were accepted have effectively become the new member organisations of FUEN during the FUEN Assembly of Delegates.

Western Thrace Turkish delegation attended 3rd Thematic Seminar of FUEN TAG

The Western Thrace Turkish delegation composed of representatives of ABTTF and WTMUGA expressed the violations of the freedom of association of the Western Thrace Turkish community in Western Thrace and problems in the field of education.

The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF and the Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association (WTMUGA) representing the Turkish community in Western Thrace attended the 3rd Thematic Seminar of the Working Group of Turkic Minorities/Communities (TAG) in the Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN) which was held online on 24 September 2021.



and the activities carried out by FUEN.

Following the greeting speech, President of the Tatar Democratic Union Naim Belgin, the new distinguished member of FUEN, briefed on the activities of the Tatar Community in Romania and the Tatar Democratic Union, which was established in 2008.



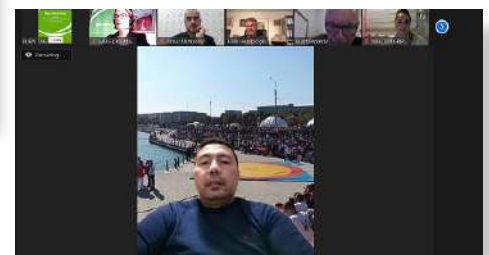
The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) and the Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association (WTMUGA) representing the Turkish community in Western Thrace, the Rhodes Kos and the Dodecanese Turks Culture and Solidarity Association (ROISDER) representing Rhodes and Kos Turks, the Public Organisation of Meskhetian Turks "VATAN" and the Public Union Of Meskhetian (Ahıska) Turks living In Azerbaijan "VATAN" representing Meskhetian Turks and the Tatar Democratic Union representing the Romanian Tatars all attended the online seminar which brought together Turkic minorities and communities within the online platform.

The seminar began with a greeting speech by FUEN Vice-President and FUEN TAG Spokesman Halit Habip Oğlu. Habip Oğlu informed about the developments related to FUEN and FUEN TAG since the second thematic seminar in June 2021



On behalf of the Public Organisation of Meskhetian Turks "VATAN", Head of Foreign Relations and Researcher Ansar Usmanov, delivered a presentation on the history and culture of Meskhetian Turks, the theme of the seminar, and their struggle to return to their ancestral lands in Georgia. Usmanov stated that the Meskhetian Turks, whose ancestral lands are located in the south of Georgia, were exiled by Soviet Leader Stalin on 14 November 1944 and added that the Russian Public Organisation of Meskhetian Turks 'VATAN' representing Meskhetian Turks and the Public Union of Meskhetian Turks living In Azerbaijan 'VATAN' are actively working both in Russia and Azerbaijan, where they are based, and on international platforms for the return of Meskhetian Turks to their ancestral lands.

In the second part of the seminar, the participating organisations conveyed the developments related to the Turkic minorities and communities they represent and their current problems. On behalf of the Western



Thrace Turkish delegation, WTMUGA Secretary-General Meltem Giritli stated that the Greek Court of Cassation rejected the appeal for the return of the official legal status of the Xanthi Turkish Union with its decision of 29 June 2021 and indicated that Greece does not allow associations bearing the word 'Turkish' in its name as a result of a policy of denial of the ethnic Turkish identity of the Turkish community in Western Thrace and has still not executed the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) judgments with respect to the Western Thrace Turkish associations for the past 13 years. Giritli also stated that in the 2021-2022 school year, 12 more Turkish primary schools belonging to the Turkish community in Western Thrace were closed due to insufficient student numbers, and that the number of Turkish primary schools in Western Thrace decreased to 103.

Working visit by ABTTF to Strasbourg

Within the scope of the working visit, the non-execution of ECtHR judgments regarding Western Thrace Turkish associations by Greece was brought to the agenda, and current developments regarding the Turkish community in Western Thrace were conveyed.

The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) paid a working visit to Strasbourg, where the Council of Europe is located on 27-28 August 2021. ABTTF delegation comprised of ABTTF President Halit Habip Oğlu, ABTTF Vice-President Nabi Ibrahimcik and ABTTF Head Office Manager K. Engin Soyyılmaz met with the Department for the Execution of Judgments of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) and Turkish NGOs based in Strasbourg during the two-day working visit.

ABTTF: The decision of the Greek Court of Cassation to reject the appeal of the Xanthi Turkish Union is a political decision, not a legal one

ABTTF delegation met with Head of the Department for the Execution of Judgments of the ECtHR Clare Ovey and Head of Division Nikolaos Sitaropoulos and Head of Section Bojana Nikolin.

During the meeting held before the Meeting of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on 14-16 September 2021, ABTTF delegation discussed the problems in executing the ECtHR judgments against Greece regarding the Xanthi Turkish Union, the Cultural Association of Turkish Women of the Rodopi Province and Evros Prefecture Minority Youth Association, the associations of the Turkish community in Western Th-



race, which are part of the Bekir Ousta and Others Group of Cases along with the latest developments in the proceedings before the national courts.

ABTTF President Habip Oğlu stated that on 29 June 2021, the Greek Court of Cassation (Arios Pagos) rejected the request of the Xanthi Turkish Uni-

on, which has been engaged in legal battles for the past 38 years, as regards the execution of the ECtHR judgment and restoration its official legal and that the Court of Cassation through its reasoned decision ignored the related ECtHR judgments with respect to the Bekir Ousta and Others Group of Cases, ECtHR case law and the related resolutions of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe.

Noting that in light of the latest decision of the Court of Cassation, the results of the hearings on 1 October 2021, when the appeals of the Cultural Association of Turkish Women of the Rodopi Province and Evros Prefecture Minority Youth Association will be discussed, are expected to be negative, Habip Oğlu said that the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe should continue to closely monitor the group of cases in order for the injustice that has been continuing for the past 13 years to be addressed and for the immediate execution of ECtHR judgments on the Bekir Ousta and Others Group of Cases which are directly related to the negation of the ethnic Turkish identity of the Turkish community in Western Thrace and which have become a national issue in Greece.

On Saturday 28 August 2021, ABTTF delegation met with the directors of the Union of International Democrats (UID) Alsace-Strasbourg Regional Centre, the Turkish-Islamic Union of Religious Affairs (DITIB) Strasbourg Regional Centre, the COJEP International and Islamic Community Milli Görüş (ITMG) Strasbourg Regional Centre, and informed them about the current problems of the Turkish community in Western Thrace and the violations of its rights that it is subjected to.

Western Thrace Turks attended the third OSCE Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting of the year

During the meeting, the Western Thrace Turkish delegation comprised of representatives from ABTTF, WTMUGA and FEP Party expressed the rights violations and the discriminations faced by the Turkish community in Western Thrace in the digital age.

The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF), the Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association (WTMUGA) and Friendship, Equality and Peace (FEP) Party, representing the Turkish community in Western Thrace attended the Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) entitled “Digital Technologies and Human Rights – Opportunities and Challenges” which was held online on 12-13 July 2021.

Deniz Servantie and Nihan Ayan from ABTTF, Dr. Pervin Hayrullah and Secretary General Meltem Giritli from WTMUGA and General Coordinator Fatih Hüseyinoğlu from FEP Party attended the meeting which was organised by the Swedish OSCE Chairpersonship and OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR).

In the meeting which started with the opening remarks of 2021 Swedish OSCE Chairpersonship Director-General for Political Affairs at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Sweden Elinor Hammar skjöld, OSCE/ODIHR First Deputy Director Kateryna Ryabiko and UN Special Rapporteur on the



right to privacy Joseph Cannataci, the impact of the design and use of digital technologies in the 21st century upon human rights was discussed.

Speaking at the first session entitled “Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms in the Digital Age” on 12 July, ABTTF stated that the Turkish community in Western Thrace has been discriminated against and targeted in the digital age, adding that the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) judgments concerning Western Thrace Turkish associations have not been executed by Greece for 13 years. ABTTF urged Greek authorities to take measures against disinformation and hate speech targeting the Turkish community in Western Thrace in the media, including in the digital space.



Intervening at the same session, WTMUGA noted that Greece denies the Turkish identity of the Turkish community in Western Thrace in the digital age, closes its associations and does not allow its culture to live freely. WTMUGA urged Greece to abide by international law and human rights conventions.

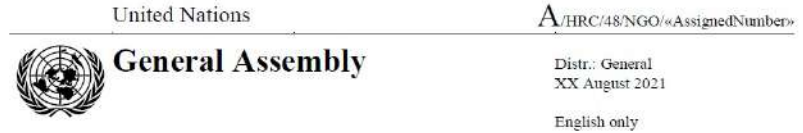
Also speaking at the first session, the FEP Party said that although the Turkish community in Western Thrace is a peaceful community, those who demand the rights of the Turkish community have been defamed in local and national media and that they have been targeted by revealing their names and addresses in the media. The FEP Party urged Greece to take the necessary steps to protect the Turkish community which is targeted by radical groups by following the provocation writings and those who commit hate crimes. Speaking at the second session entitled “Collection and Use of Personal Data” on 13 July, WTMUGA noted that activists defending the rights of the Turkish community in Western Thrace in Greece are subjected to hate speech on digital platforms every day and recommended Greece to take special measures to protect the Turkish community from cyberattacks and hateful publications.



Using its right of reply in both sessions, Greece reminded that the Greek state recognises solely a “Muslim minority” in Western Thrace and that the minority is not experiencing discrimination.

Written statement from ABTTF to the UN Human Rights Council

The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) presented a written statement titled “The limitations in civil rights granted to the Turkish community in Western Thrace, Greece” to the 48th session of the United Nations (UN) Human Rights Council which will be held from 13 September to 1 October 2021. In its written statement, ABTTF raised the issue of the rejection of the Greek Court of Cassation in the case of the Xanthi Turkish Union within the scope of freedom of association and the closure of 12 other primary schools belonging to the Turkish community in Western Thrace in the new school year.



Human Rights Council
 Forty-eighth session
 13 September–1 October 2021
 Agenda item 3
 Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development

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

Greece is persistently failing to execute the ECtHR judgments

ABTTF indicated that the Xanthi Turkish Union (XTU), the oldest association of the Turkish community in Western Thrace, which was closed due to the word ‘Turkish’, and the Cultural Association of Turkish Women of the Rodopi Province and Evros Prefecture Minority Youth Association, whose registration applications were rejected, had applied to the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR), and added that in the judgments of the ECtHR in 2007 and 2008 ruled that Greece violated Article 11 of the European Convention on Human Rights with respect to freedom of association.

ABTTF noted that the Greek Court of Cassation (Arios Pagos) rejected the request of the Xanthi Turkish Union, which has been engaged in legal battles for the past 38 years, to execute the ECtHR judgment with respect to the restoration of its official legal entity on 29 June 2021. Moreover, ABTTF stated that the Court of Cassation cited the participation of the executi-

ves of the Xanthi Turkish Union to panels organised by ABTTF in February and June 2021 with respect to the fact that Greece did not implement fully the ECtHR judgments as a reason for the its rejection. ABTTF further indicated that the Court of Cassation ignored the ECtHR judgments and ECtHR case law and the relevant decisions and interim resolutions of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe with its approach to the reasoned decision.

ABTTF underscored that the appeals of the Cultural Association of Turkish Women of the Rodopi Province and Evros Prefecture Minority Youth Association will be heard on 1 October 2021, but that the Court of Cassation is not expected to take a different decision on these two associations in the Bekir Ousta and Others Group of Cases, which have been fully politicised in Greece.

The educational autonomy of the Turkish community in Western Thrace is violated

ABTTF indicated that although the Turkish community in Western Thrace has



the right to establish, manage and control its own schools in accordance with the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne, another 12 Turkish primary schools which have autonomous status in Western Thrace will be closed in the 2021-2022 school year due to the shortage of students. Emphasising that the decision of the Greek Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs goes against the educational autonomy of the Turkish community in Western Thrace, ABTTF noted that the number of Turkish primary schools will fall from 115 in the 2020-21 school year to 103 in this school year. ABTTF called on Greece to execute ECtHR judgments concerning the Bekir Ousta and Others Group of Cases and to restore the educational autonomy of the Turkish community in Western Thrace guaranteed by the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne. ABTTF also asked the UN and its bodies to send a strong political message to Greece about the rights violations endured by the Turkish community in Western Thrace.

Letter from ABTTF to international authorities about Greece's usurpation of the rights and freedoms of the Turkish community in Western Thrace

ABTTF President: "While our motherland Turkey takes positive steps that improve the rights and freedoms of the Greek Orthodox minority regardless of the reciprocity defined by the Treaty of Lausanne, our country Greece ignores the Turkish community in Western Thrace and sees it as a threat to the unity of the country and public order."

In a letter addressed to the international authorities, the Federation of Western Thrace of Turks in Europe (ABTTF) stated the systematic usurpation of the rights and freedoms of the Turkish community in Western Thrace by Greece. In its letter, ABTTF indicated that the 1923 Lausanne Peace Treaty granted rights to the Turkish community in Western Thrace in Greece and the Greek Orthodox minority in Turkey on the basis of reciprocity, adding that Turkey has taken positive steps towards the Greek Orthodox minority, especially in recent years, while the rights and freedoms of the Turkish community in Western Thrace in Greece have been taken away for the past years.

In its letter, ABTTF noted the following:

- While Turkey restores the real estate property belonging to the Greek community, our country which holds the goods and real estate properties belonging to our community, appoints by order of the state the administrative boards of the foundations of the community which have every right of disposition,
- While the Greek community in Turkey chooses its own religious leaders, our country Greece appoints the Muftis which constitute our religious leaders again by order of the state,
- While in Turkey, even historical religious buildings outside of Istanbul, Imbros (Gökçeada) and Tenedos (Bozcaada) are preserved, restored and rites and rituals are allowed on special occasions, historical and religious monuments outside of Western Thrace in Greece are left

12 *Société des Nations — Recueil des Traités.* 1924

No. 701.—*Traité de Paix, signé à Lausanne le 24 Juillet 1923.*⁽¹⁾

Texte officiel français communiqué par la Délégation française à la cinquième Assemblée de la Société des Nations. L'enregistrement de ce traité a eu lieu le 5 septembre 1924.

L'EMPIRE BRITANNIQUE, LA FRANCE, L'ITALIE, LE JAPON, LA GRÈCE, LA ROUMANIE, L'ÉTAT SERBE-CROATE-SLOVÈNE,

et la TURQUIE,

d'une part,

d'autre part,

Animés du même désir de mettre fin définitivement à l'état de guerre qui, depuis 1914, a troublé l'Orient, Soucieux de rétablir entre eux les relations d'amitié et de commerce nécessaires au bien-être commun de leurs nations respectives,

Et considérant que ces relations doivent être basées sur le respect de l'indépendance et de la souveraineté des États,

Ont décidé de conclure un Traité à cet effet et ont désigné pour leurs Plénipotentiaires, savoir :

SA MAJESTÉ LE ROI DU ROYAUME-UNI DE GRANDE-BRETAGNE ET

to their fate or closed under the pretext of restoration or to the destruction of time,

- In Western Thrace, where the Turkish community lives, permits for repair or new mosques, and various problems arise in the construction of new ones,
- In Turkey, all places of worship belonging not only to the Greek community but also churches and synagogues of other religious communities are also being restored. In fact, although there are no congregations in that region and while 7,000 Turks live in Thessaloniki in Greece; Hamza Bey, Hortacı Süleyman Efendi, Yeni Cami (New Mosque) and Alaca Imaret Cami (Alara Imaret Mosque) are closed for worship. This is happening not only in Thessaloniki but throughout Greece,
- While non-Muslim minorities living in Turkey have the right to express their ethnicity collectively as Greek, Armenian, Bulgarian or Jewish and manage the foundations and the goods belonging to their communities in accordance with the Treaty of Lausanne, we are not even allowed to manage the foundations belonging to our community, let alone the collective acceptance of our ethnic Turkish identity in our country Greece.

In its letter, ABTTF asked international authorities to draw attention to the problems of the Turkish community in Western Thrace, which is one of the worst-off

groups in the European Union (EU) for minority rights, and to urge Greece to take steps to improve the situation of the Turkish community in Western Thrace.

"As a result of the 1923 Lausanne Peace Treaty, our status and rights and those of the Greek Orthodox minority in our motherland of Turkey were determined and our fate was drawn together. However, while there have been positive developments in our homeland on behalf of the Greek Orthodox minority with whom we share the same fate in recent years, political repression and discriminatory policies against us persist in our country. While our motherland takes positive steps that improve the rights and freedoms of the Greek Orthodox minority regardless of the reciprocity defined by the Treaty of Lausanne, our country Greece ignores the Turkish community in Western Thrace and sees it as a threat to the unity of the country and public order. As ABTTF and as the representative of Western Thrace Turks living in Europe, we believed that these positive steps taken by our motherland could constitute a model for the Turkish community in Western Thrace by having a similar effect in our country, but we found that we were very wrong at this point. Today, we have the opportunity to live a life in our country, where we are left as a minority, neither humanely nor within the framework of the rights we have", said Halit Habip Oğlu, President of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF).

12 more Turkish primary schools to close in the new school year

ABTTF President: “Although the Lausanne Peace Treaty grants the right to establish, manage and control its own schools by recognising autonomous status in the field of education, Turkish primary schools belonging to the Turkish community in Western Thrace continue to be closed on the grounds of shortage of students and as a further example of state intervention in all areas pertaining to education.”

Twelve additional Turkish primary schools belonging to the Turkish community in Western Thrace will be closed in the 2021-2022 school year due to a shortage of students. According to a statement made by the Greek Ministry of Education, Lifelong Learning and Religious Affairs, Turkish primary schools in Drania (Kozdere), Paterná (Payamdere), Aratos (Karacaoğlan), Hrisa



(Altinköy), İpion (Işıklar), Thámna (Eşekçili), Nevra (Sınırdere), Rizoma (Gebecili) villages and Erasmio (Taraşmanlı), in Cami Mahallesi area of Satres (Sinikova), Kremastí (Kurthasanlı) and Exochi (Karagözlü) villages will be closed in the province of Rodopi. Thus, the number of Turkish primary schools will fall from 115 in the 2020-21 school year to 103 in this school year.

Halit Habip Oğlu, President of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) made the following statement: “Although

we have the right to establish, manage and supervise our schools autonomously in the field of education with the Lausanne Peace Treaty, the state intervenes in all areas of education. The closure of our schools under the pretext of a shortage of students is primarily contrary to Lausanne! Moreover, our government, which prides itself on its democratic rules and functioning, does not meet with the boards in our schools when it decides to close them. If it's not contrary to democracy and ethics, what is it? Imagine that our parents that are preparing to send their children to primary schools in their villages, and suddenly they found out that the school in their village had been closed! How is this possible? We've been saying for years that the schools are ours and that it should be stopped to close them once and for all under the pretext of shortage of students!”

*Image: www.aa.com.tr

A new blow to the educational autonomy of the Turkish community in Western Thrace!

ABTTF President: “Our country Greece continues its unilateral policies and practices aimed at completely eliminating our educational autonomy. A discriminatory law submitted and adopted by the Ministry of Education to the Parliament is the latest example of this and we demand that the law be amended to include the Western Thrace Turkish minority schools and that the discriminatory measures regarding our schools in the law be immediately revoked.”

The Greek Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs' draft law on 'Improving and developing the levels of schools and educators', which envisions a series of changes to the education system of the Turkish community in Western Thrace was adopted by a majority of the votes in the Parliament. According to the law in question, Western Thrace Turkish minority schools are excluded from the facilities brought to public schools, they are prohibited from cooperating with other institutions and associations, and they are prevented from earning income through donations or grants. The law pre-



vents the introduction of a ban on the use of the buildings of Turkish minority schools, which were closed in the past on grounds that the number of students is insufficient and prevents any activities within the scope of minority education in these buildings.

“In our country Greece, the government again ignored the Turkish community in Western Thrace and brought to Parliament a new draft law that violates our educational autonomy which has been adopted. The state and its representative government continue to make decisions by excluding us on issues that directly concern and affect us. According to the Treaty of Lausanne, the Turkish community in Western Thrace enjoys the right to establish, manage and supervise its own schools. It is not possible for us to

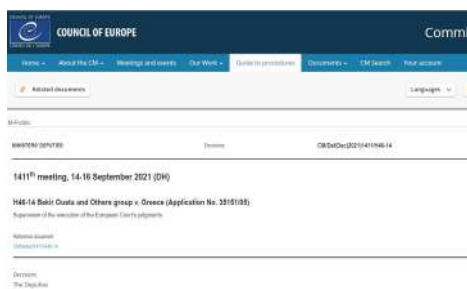
accept this law, which essentially constitutes a new fait accompli regarding our schools which are of autonomous status and where our children are educated. The new law aims to transform our community's schools into public buildings. On the other hand, while the draft law is being discussed in the general assembly, we also find it difficult to understand the use of statements by Deputy Speaker Nikitas Kaklamanis regarding schools belonging to the Greek Orthodox minority in Istanbul, although it has nothing to do with the issue. The relevant law contains blatantly discriminatory measures regarding the Western Thrace Turkish minority schools, and this is exactly what we oppose. We demand that this discriminatory law, which was submitted and adopted by the Ministry of Education, be amended to include the Western Thrace Turkish minority schools and that the discriminatory measures regarding our schools in the law be immediately revoked and we call upon our country to end its policies and measures aimed at eliminating our educational autonomy”, said Halit Habip Oğlu, President of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF).

The Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe called on Greece to urgently execute the ECtHR judgments

ABTTF President: “Due to the fact that our country has not executed the ECtHR judgments regarding the Bekir-Ousta and Others Group of Cases for the past 13 years and ignores the ECtHR case-law, we ask the Committee of Ministers to initiate the infringement procedure against our country in accordance with Article 46 of the ECHR in its next review.”

At its last meeting in Strasbourg, which was held on 14-16 September 2021, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe re-examined the Bekir-Ousta and Others Group of Cases as regards the associations of the Turkish community in Western Thrace. In its resolution on 16 September 2021, the Committee of Ministers criticised the fact that the cases of the Cultural Association of Turkish Women of the Rodopi Province and Evros Prefecture Minority Youth Association have still not been examined by the national courts, 13 years after the final judgments given by the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) and following the rejection of the appeal for the restoration of the official status of the Xanthi Turkish Union by the Greek Court of Cassation (Arios Pagos).

The Committee of Ministers noted with particular concern that judgment 840/2021 of 29 June 2021 delivered by the Court of Cassation, which rejected the appeal of the Xanthi Turkish Union and stated that the dissolution of the association was legal, was based on the same grounds that the ECtHR explicitly rejected in its final judgment of 27 September 2008 and further expressed their regret that in the judgment delivered by the Court of Cassation, they did not take into consideration the ‘essential element’ noted by the ECtHR that the president or the members of the association have never advocated violence, uprising or any other form of rejection of democratic principles and that no evidence has been presented which showed the opposite.



In addition, the Committee of Ministers stated that the additional grounds used by the Court of Cassation as regards the statutes of Xanthi Turkish Union with respect to the objectives of the association were not expressly impugned by the ECtHR, and underlined that the judgment of the Court of Cassation to approve the dissolution of the association on the basis of these reasons was not in accordance with the results and spirit of the ECtHR judgment that Greece is in the legal obligation to execute.

The Committee of Ministers also stressed that the amendment to the Code of Civil Procedure in 2017, which allows the reopening of cases, did not lead to the swift, full and effective execution of the ECtHR judgment on the Xanthi Turkish Union.

Moreover, the Committee of Ministers noted with concern that in light of the recent judgment rendered by the Court of Cassation, the Greek authorities did not leave any other choice but for the Xanthi Turkish Union to lodge a new application before the ECtHR as it considers itself as victims of a violation of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and called upon the Greek authorities to reinforce their dialogue with the Secretariat in order to explore alternative avenues which may well possibly be envisaged by which the violation found in the case may be rectified in full and effective conformity with Article 11 of the ECHR as regards freedom of assembly and association and the related ECtHR judgment. The Committee of Ministers also urged the Greek authorities to take measures in order to fully ensure that the appeals of the Cultural Association of Turkish Women of the Rodopi Province and Evros Prefecture

Minority Youth Association whose hearings are scheduled to take place on 1 October 2021 are decided by the Court of Cassation and in full and effective compliance with Article 11 of the ECHR and ECtHR case-law.

Noting with deep concern that with the judgment 840/2021 rendered by the Court of Cassation which rejected the appeal of the Xanthi Turkish Union and ignored the ECtHR judgment and that to this date the Court of Cassation has not aligned its case-law with that of the ECtHR fully and effectively, the Committee of Ministers decided to resume considerations as regards the Bekir-Ousta and Others Group of Cases at the latest at its June 2022 meeting.

“The Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe made it very clear that our country is ignoring ECtHR judgments and ECtHR case-law regarding the Bekir-Ousta and Others Group of Cases and demanded an immediate end to the violation of the freedom of association of our community. The Committee of Ministers reaffirmed that the reasons put forward by the Court of Cassation in the last rejection judgment were not already clearly accepted in the final judgment of the ECtHR in 2008 and called on our country to end the injustice experienced by the Xanthi Turkish Union for the past 38 years. On the other hand, the judgment rendered by the Court of Cassation dated 29 June 2021 reflects our country’s policy of denial of the Turkish identity of our community and is a political decision, not a legal one. Due to the fact that our country has not executed the ECtHR judgments regarding the Bekir-Ousta and Others Group of Cases for the past 13 years and ignores the ECtHR case-law, we ask the Committee of Ministers to initiate the infringement procedure against our country in accordance with Article 46 of the ECHR in its next review”, said Halit Habip Oğlu, President of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF).

Please click here for the full text of the resolution: https://search.coe.int/cm/pages/result_details.aspx?objectId=0900001680a3c11d



Greece's Court of Cassation again rejected the appeal of the Xanthi Turkish Union for the reinstatement of its legal status!

ABTTF President: "The Court of Cassation's decision on the Xanthi Turkish Union which has been struggling for justice for 38 years showed once again that our country Greece disregards the principles of democracy and the rule of law."

Greece's Court of Cassation (Areios Pagos) rejected the appeal of the Xanthi Turkish Union, the oldest association of the Turkish community in Western Thrace, for the execution of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) judgment and the reinstatement of its official legal entity. Despite the ECtHR judgment and the warnings of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, Greece's Court of Cassation once again rejected the appeal of the Xanthi Turkish Union in its decision rendered eight and a half months after the hearing of the case in Athens on 16 October 2020.

Established in 1927, the Xanthi Turkish Union had been closed in 1986 on grounds of the word "Turkish" in its name within the framework of our country's policy denying the Turkish identity of the Turkish community in Western Thrace. The Xanthi Turkish Union



had applied to the ECtHR in 2005 after more than two decades of civil legal struggle, and the ECtHR had ruled in 2008 that our country had violated freedom of association.

Following the ECtHR judgment, the request of the Xanthi Turkish Union, which had reapplied to the Greek domestic law for the cancellation of the closure decision and the reinstatement of its legal status, had been rejected on the grounds that domestic law does not allow the execution of ECtHR judgments. The Xanthi Turkish Union had applied to the Thrace Court of Appeal following the amendments to the Code of Civil Procedure adopted by the Greek parliament in 2017, which had allowed ECtHR judgments to be recognised at Greece's national courts, but the court had rejected the association's appeal. The Xanthi Turkish Union had then

appealed to the Court of Cassation.

"The Court of Cassation's decision on the Xanthi Turkish Union which has been struggling for justice for 38 years showed once again that our country Greece disregards the principles of democracy and the rule of law. Our country has ignored all warnings and calls by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe to immediately execute the ECtHR judgments regarding the associations of the Turkish community in Western Thrace and for the Court of Cassation to decide in light of the court's case law. While the ECtHR judgments have been ignored by the Court of Cassation's decision, it was proved that the law is not operating in our country. As ABTTF, we have been conveying for years to our interlocutors before the European Union and the Council of Europe that in our country, which claims to be the cradle of democracy, democracy is not operating essentially but in name only. We will continue to support the Xanthi Turkish Union in its struggle for rights and inform international institutions and organisations about the Court of Cassation's decision which is a projection of our country's official policy that 'there are no Turks in Western Thrace'", said Halit Habip Oğlu, President of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF).

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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