



Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europa Newsletter

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

No. 53 | September 2025 | Year 21

ABTTT attended the 11th Annual Meeting of FUEN TAG



Seventeen Turkic organisations from ten different European countries participated in the meeting hosted by the Turkish community in Bulgaria.

The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTT) participated in the 11th Annual Meeting of the Working Group of Turkic Minorities/Communities (TAG) of the Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN), of which it is a member, held on 29 May-1 June 2025.

Representing the Bulgaria Turks, the meeting was organised by the Youth and Innovative Development Association and held in Varna. ABTTT President Halit Habip Oğlu attended as FUEN TAG Spokesperson, ABTTT Vice President Nabi İbrahimcik as FUEN Vice President, and ABTTT Vice President Sebahattin Mümin also participated on behalf of ABTTT.

The meeting was attended by representatives of Western Thrace Turks, the Turks of Rhodes and

Kos, the Meskhetian Turks, the Crimean Tatars, the Turks of Kosovo, the Gagauz Turks of Ukraine, the Turks of North Macedonia, the Gagauz Turks of Moldova, the Bulgarian Turks, and the Turks of Romania. Representatives of seventeen Turkic organisations from ten different European countries attended the meeting, where FUEN TAG members had the opportunity to get to know the Bulgarian Turks and their current problems closely.

The delegation, led by FUEN TAG Spokesperson Halit Habip Oğlu, visited the Sherif Halil Pasha Mosque (Tombul Mosque) in the city of Shumen, located in the Ludogorie (Deliorman) region in northeastern Bulgaria, on Friday, 30 May, as part of the programme.

During the visit, which was also attended by Consul General of the Republic of Türkiye in Burgas Tolga Orkun, the FUEN TAG delegation visited Regional Mufti of Shumen Mesut Mehmed and learned about the activities of the mufti's office and the region. The TAG delegation later visited the 103-year-old "Nüvvab" Religious High School in Shumen and learned about the history of the school from its director Şerif Hüsnü.

CONTENTS

ABTTT attended the 11th Annual Meeting of FUEN TAG
pages 1-2



Divide-and-Rule tactic doesn't work in Western Thrace; we are an indivisible community!
page 3



ABTTT organised a fact-finding mission to Western Thrace with the participation of the European Language Equality Network
page 4



Special meeting with ELEN on educational issues facing the Turkish community in Western Thrace
page 5



ABTTT raised the issues of the Turkish community in Western Thrace at an event in the European Parliament
pages 6-7



ABTTT President paid a working visit to Brussels
page 7



ABTTT delivered a presentation on the issues of the Turkish community in Western Thrace at the ALDE Group meeting in Strasbourg
page 8



Threats against human rights defenders were discussed at OSCE
page 9



Written statement from ABTTT to the 58th session of the UN Human Rights Council
page 10



The Turkish community in Western Thrace protested against Greece's discriminatory education policy!
page 11



The ECtHR once again condemns Greece for violating the freedom of association of the Turkish community in Western Thrace
page 12



On the first day of the programme in Shumen, the FUEN TAG delegation met with representatives of the Turkish community in the Ludogorie (Deliorman) region. Consul General of the Republic of Türkiye in Burgas Tolga Orkun and Social Affairs Attaché of the Burgas Consulate General Mehmet Ungan also attended the meeting as guests of honour. At this meeting, the problems faced by the Turkish community in Bulgaria in terms of education, teaching in their mother tongue, preservation of Turkish identity and cultural heritage were discussed.

Following the meeting, the FUEN TAG delegation visited the museum house of the famous wrestler Koca Yusuf in the village

of Cherna (Karalar), located in the district of Hitrino (Şeytancık) of the province of Shumen, and was informed about Yusuf's life and achievements by the village mayor, İsmail Ebazer.

The FUEN TAG roundtable meeting held on 31 May began with opening and welcoming speeches by FUEN TAG Spokesperson Halit Habip Oğlu and FUEN Vice President Nabi İbrahimcik. Habip Oğlu provided information about TAG's recent activities, while İbrahimcik briefed the participants on FUEN's recent actions.

Following this, the participants shared important developments in their regions over

the past year, their current issues, and the activities of the organisations they represent. The meeting concluded with the adoption of the 2025-2026 activity programme of FUEN TAG and a joint roadmap with the contributions of the participating organisations.

Following the meeting, the FUEN TAG delegation participated in a city tour of Varna hosted by Member of the European Parliament İlhan Kyuchyuk and attended the subsequent dinner. The dinner was also attended by Consul General of the Republic of Türkiye in Burgas Tolga Orkun and Member of the Bulgarian Parliament from Varna from the Movement for Rights and Freedoms (MRF) Hüsni Adem.



Divide-and-Rule tactic doesn't work in Western Thrace; we are an indivisible community!

Dear readers,

We are preparing to bid farewell to summer. September began quite quickly, as at the end of August our country implemented a new scenario based on the familiar "divide-and-rule" tactic. The real goal behind what we have experienced from the past to the present is to eradicate the "Turkishness" of Western Thrace!

Referring to the Treaty of Lausanne, they claimed that there is a "Muslim minority" in Lausanne, not a Turkish one, and that this Muslim minority consists of Pomaks, Roma, and those of "Turkish origin." Associations were established in our region under the names "Hellenic Pomaks" and "Hellenic Roma," but the goal remained always the same! They said, "There are no Turks in Western Thrace!"

First, they dissolved our associations, namely the Xanthi Turkish Union, the Komotini Turkish Youth Union and the Western Thrace Turkish Teachers Association! That was not enough; they did not allow new ones to be established either.

This time, they did not register the Evros Minority Youth Association, because it did not have "Turkish" in its name but the word "minority"!

Still not satisfied, they set their sights on our associations that included the words "Western Thrace" in their names. They first registered our Western Thrace Fenerbahçe Culture and Sports Association, then claimed that the word "Western Thrace" in its name was contrary to public order and attempted to close our association by court order.

At that time, while the ECtHR rulings condemning our country had not been implemented for years, this time they again refused to register our Cultural Association of Turkish Women in Xanthi. This association also won its case before

the ECtHR!

But our country continues to target our Turkishness. At that time, another divide-and-rule scenario based on our religious identity gained momentum.

As we all know, there was also controversy over the Seçek Oil Wrestling Festival, which has been organized by our ancestors for centuries. As a result, after the controversy created over the events organized by the SEÇEK Minority Education and Culture Association, our events began to be held on the football field instead of the plateau.

Our people continued to stand up for this place, because what mattered was being one and together!

Our country ignores us, tries to divide us! But no, we won't fall for it! What have we seen, what have we experienced over the years! The outcome has not changed!

We are here, we are Turks, we exist as Turks, no matter what they say to us, no matter how hard they try to divide us, the Turkish presence in our region will continue strongly!

Just like the Greeks in Istanbul, Gökçeada, and Bozcaada! Their numbers have decreased over the years, but their presence has never disappeared, nor can it! Because those are the lands they have lived on for centuries, and they continue to exist there with their own languages, religions, and cultures!

Moreover, the existence of both peoples was guaranteed by the Treaty of Lausanne. Both peoples were granted autonomy in the fields of education and religion through treaties. Our kinstate Türkiye has respected this autonomy and strictly implemented the provisions of the Treaty of Lausanne.

Going beyond this, it allows Orthodox Greeks to hold services at the Sumela Monastery in Trabzon, and for the past



10 years, the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople has been conducting services at the monastery.

However, in our country, the cradle of democracy, our existing rights have been gradually taken away, and every day, new scenarios are being devised to take things even further.

While Orthodox Christians, Protestants, and Jews in our country determine their own community leaders, despite our rights being guaranteed by treaties, the muftis elected by our people are not being installed in their positions.

Instead, since 1991, the state has been appointing muftis itself. How many people in our community accept these appointed muftis and follow them? Not even a handful! Once again, our people are giving the best response!

Without giving up, without falling for the divide-and-rule tactics, without paying attention to them, our people are following the names they have chosen! This is how it happened with the mufti! Our people did not fear, did not cower, did not give up!

This latest divide-and-rule scenario will not succeed either! No matter how hard they try, we are an indivisible community!

With respect and regards!

Halit Habip Oğlu
ABTTF President

ABTTF organised a fact-finding mission to Western Thrace with the participation of the European Language Equality Network

The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) organised a fact-finding mission to Western Thrace this year with the participation of the European Language Equality Network (ELEN), of which it is a member.

The delegation, which included ABTTF President Halit Habip Oğlu and ABTTF International Relations Director Melek Kırmacı, was also joined by ELEN President Elin Jones and ELEN Secretary General Davyith Hicks.

Within the framework of the programme organised and prepared by ABTTF, the ELEN delegation first visited President of the Western Thrace Turkish Minority Advisory Board (BTTADK) and Elected Mufti of Xanthi Mustafa Trampa, at his office on 2 May 2025 and was briefed on the violations of the religious autonomy guaranteed to the Turkish community of Western Thrace under international agreements and the issues they face in the field of religion.

Immediately afterwards, the delegation



visited the Xanthi Turkish Union (İTB), the oldest civil society organisation of the Turkish community in Western Thrace, which was dissolved because of the word "Turkish" in its name. During the visit, the delegation was informed about the İTB's legal struggle, which has been ongoing for over 40 years, and Greece's failure to execute the relevant judgment of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) regarding the İTB for the past 17 years, despite all the warnings of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe.

The delegation met with Elected Mufti of Komotini, İbrahim Şerif, at his office, where they were briefed on the mufti office's activities. It was indicated that the law titled "Modernisation of Mufti Offices in Thrace" envisages the state's full control and supervision over mufti offices with autonomous structures, and that efforts are being made to dissolve mufti offices by transforming them into regular state offices.

As in the İTB, the delegation visited the Western Thrace Turkish Teachers' Union (BTTÖB) and the Komotini Turkish Youth Union (GTGB), which were dissolved as a result of Greece's policy of denying the ethnic Turkish identity and the existence of Turks in the country, due to the word "Turkish" in their names. The delegation was informed about their respective history, struggle, and activities.

Furthermore, the delegation also paid a visit to the headquarters of the Friendship, Equality, and Peace (FEP) Party, the only political party of the Turkish community in Western Thrace, in Komotini, where it was reported that politicians belonging to the Turkish community in Western Thrace were being directly targeted by both Greek politicians and the Greek media. The delegation was also briefed regarding the 3% election threshold introduced in Greece's election law on 24 October 1990 and applied nationwide to independent candidates prevents the Turkish community from being represented by independent members of parliament in the Greek Parliament.



Special meeting with ELEN on educational issues facing the Turkish community in Western Thrace

Within the scope of the fact-finding mission organised by the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) with the participation of the European Language Equality Network (ELEN) on 1-4 May 2025, a special meeting was held on 3 May 2025 to discuss the problems of the Turkish community in Western Thrace in the field of education.

The meeting, organised by ABTTF and hosted by the Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association (WTMUGA), was attended by the Western Thrace Turkish Teachers' Union (BTTÖB), the Culture and Education Foundation of Western Thrace Minority (PEKEM), the Union of Western Thrace Turkish Minority School Board Members, the Xanthi Turkish Minority Middle and High School Board, the Xanthi Turkish Minority Primary School Board and the Friendship, Equality, and Peace (FEP) Party.

At the special education meeting held with ELEN, which aims to ensure multilingualism within the framework of linguistic equality and human rights for communities in Europe that speak regional, minority or endangered languages, and which raises the issues of these communities at local, regional, national, European and international levels, the presidents and administrators of institutions and organisations representing the Turkish community in Western Thrace in the field of education discussed the issues faced by the Turkish community in Western Thrace at the primary school, primary, and secondary school levels.

At this special meeting, representatives of institutions and organisations representing the Turkish community in Western Thrace in the field of education detailed how the Turkish community was granted autonomy in education under the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne, but how this autonomous structure was dismantled over time through laws, regulations and arbitrary practices.

During the meeting, which addressed issues



at various levels of education, representatives of the Turkish community in Western Thrace stated that, due to the rejection by Greek authorities of their demands for the establishment of bilingual kindergartens within the autonomous school system and under fully private school status, all Turkish children in the region are currently forced to attend public kindergartens where only Greek is taught.

At the meeting, representatives of the Turkish community indicated that the Greek state was deliberately undermining the autonomous structure and implementing measures aimed at lowering the quality of education in Turkish schools by taking control of their operation and management. In this context, the representatives highlighted issues such as teacher appointments, the powers of the school boards, and issues in the implementation of the bilingual curriculum. They noted that the decision to close schools with insufficient number of pupils, made in 2010 as part of economic and financial measures, was also applied to private and autonomous Turkish schools, leading to a sharp decline in the number of Turkish primary schools. Noting that there were 307

Turkish primary schools at the time the Treaty of Lausanne was signed, but that this number has now fallen to 86, the representatives explained that the ultimate goal in the long term is the elimination of the Turkish minority school system.

The representatives also detailed the issues faced at the middle and high school levels, particularly the problems surrounding the new school building for the Xanthi Turkish Minority Middle and High School.

ELEN President Elin Jones and ELEN Secretary General Davyth Hicks stated that the issues faced by the Turkish community in Western Thrace in Greece today in the field of education and the current general situation are not befitting of the 21st century, and that the state's policies and practices are outdated and anti-democratic. ELEN officials noted that Greece's discriminatory policies toward minorities and languages are even worse than those frequently criticised in France. ELEN officials noted that they are ready to provide support at both the national and international levels to address the educational challenges faced by the Turkish community in Western Thrace.

ABTTF raised the issues of the Turkish community in Western Thrace at an event in the European Parliament



The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) delivered a presentation at the event titled “Name, Identity and Memory: 40 Years Since the Final Stage of the Change of Muslim-Turkish Names in Bulgaria” hosted by Member of the European Parliament (MEP) from the Turkish minority in Bulgaria Ilhan Kyuchyuk (Renew Europe, Bulgaria) in Brussels on 21 May 2025.

ABTTF President Halit Habip Oğlu, ABTTF International Relations Director Melek Kırmacı and Deniz Servantie from ABTTF Brussels Office participated in the event held at the EP.

The event was also attended by Member of the European Parliament and President of the Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN) Loránt Vincze (EPP, Romania) and European Commission Coordinator on combating anti-Muslim hatred Marion Lalisse.

In his opening remarks, Kyuchyuk noted that the Turks of Bulgaria were subjected to assimilation by the communist regime in the 1970s and 1980s and that their names were



forcibly changed.

Chair of the Intergroup for Traditional Minorities, National Communities and Languages Vincze emphasised the crucial importance of raising minority issues and the need to include minority issues in the shared competence of EU Member States and the European Commission.

Habip Oğlu noted that Greece, one of the oldest members of the EU, denies the ethnic Turkish identity and existence of

the Turkish community in Western Thrace and aims to eliminate its educational and religious autonomy through various laws and practices.

In her presentation at the event, Kırmacı indicated that Greece's assimilation policy towards the Turkish community in Western Thrace continues today as it did in the past, and that 60,000 Western Thrace Turks were stripped of their Greek citizenship under the racist provisions of Article 19 of the Greek Citizenship Law, which was in force between

1955 and 1998.

Noting that the Turkish community's education and religious autonomy, guaranteed by the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne, continue to be an issue, Kirmacı said that that while there were 307 Turkish primary schools in Western Thrace in 1923, this number has now fallen to 86, that the 1991 law deprived the Turkish community of its right to appoint its own muftis, and that the most recent law transformed the autonomous mufti offices into public agencies under the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs.

Kirmacı emphasised that Greece has persistently failed to execute the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) judgments regarding the associations of the Turkish community in the Bekir-Ousta and Others



group of cases for the past 17 years, stating that the Turkish community's freedom of association has been deliberately violated. Explaining that the Turkish community in Western Thrace demands the restoration of their educational and religious autonomy

from Greece, Kirmacı noted that they also demand the EP to take a leading role in guaranteeing the rights of national minorities in EU Member States, including Greece.

Speaking on behalf of the European Commission at the event, Lalisie pointed out that hate speech and crimes against Muslims have increased across the EU in recent times and added that the European Commission will take new initiatives in this area.

Meanwhile, Emine Bayraktarova, a representative of the Turkish community in Bulgaria, said that the Turkish community in Bulgaria had lived in a good environment until the 1950s, but that the communist regime had subjected Turks to forced assimilation thereafter.

ABTTF President paid a working visit to Brussels

President of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks of Europe (ABTTF) Halit Habip Oğlu paid a working visit to Brussels, the capital of the European Union (EU), on 21 May 2025.

During his working visit, accompanied by ABTTF International Relations Director Melek Kirmacı and Deniz Servantie from ABTTF Brussels Office, Habip Oğlu met with Member of the European Parliament (MEP) Herbert Dorfmann (EPP, Italy), representing the German minority in Italy.

Congratulating Dorfmann on his re-election in the EP elections held in June 2024, Habip Oğlu conveyed to him the current issues and human rights violations faced by the Turkish community in Western Thrace.

Habip Oğlu indicated that Greece has persistently failed to execute the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) judgments regarding the Bekir-Ousta and Others group of cases for the past 17 years, and noted that the Western Thrace Fenerbahçe Culture and Sports Association, established in 2022 and officially registered, was dissolved on 28 May 2024 on grounds that the phrase



“Western Thrace” in its name was contrary to public order.

Referring to the claim for damages filed by

ABTTF against the Athens-based news site newsbreak.gr for defamatory and false news about ABTTF, Habip Oğlu explained that the hearing of the case in the higher court was held on 8 May 2025, that the legal process is ongoing, and that they are awaiting the court's decision.

During the meeting, which also addressed the economic development of Western Thrace, ideas were exchanged regarding potential joint initiatives that could be undertaken at the European Parliament.

ABTTF delivered a presentation on the issues of the Turkish community in Western Thrace at the ALDE Group meeting in Strasbourg

The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) delivered a presentation on the Turkish community in Western Thrace at the meeting of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) Group on 9 April 2025 in parallel with the Spring Session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE).

During the working visit to Strasbourg within the framework of the presentation at the ALDE group meeting, the latest current developments in the region were also conveyed during the meetings with politicians and bureaucrats.

During the group meeting hosted by ALDE Group President Iulian Bulai (Romania), ABTTF International Relations Director Melek Kirmacı conveyed the issues faced by the Turkish community in Western Thrace in the field of ethnic recognition and freedom of association and the problems experienced in education at all levels within the framework of the dismantlement of the autonomous structure in education.

In its presentation at the ALDE group meeting, ABTTF indicated that the Turkish community in Western Thrace was granted autonomy in the field of education and religion by the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne, but that this autonomous structure has been dismantled over the years. ABTTF further explained the process in which the ethnic Turkish identity of the Turkish minority in the region was rejected and the associations with the word "Turkish" in their names were dissolved. ABTTF stated that the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) in the Bekir-Ousta and Others group of cases, which includes the Xanthi Turkish Union, Evros Prefecture Minority Youth Association and Cultural Association of Turkish Women in the Prefecture of Rodopi have been persistently not executed by Greece for the past 17 years. ABTTF further noted that the next review of the Committee of Ministers will take place in June 2025 and



that they demanded the full and immediate execution of the three ECtHR judgments in the Bekir-Ousta and Others group of cases, but Greece pursued a strategy to delay the execution of the aforementioned judgments by prolonging the process.

In its presentation, ABTTF expressed the issues faced in the autonomised education system and explained that there are no bilingual Turkish kindergartens in our region and that the applications made in this regard are rejected. ABTTF pointed out that the number of Turkish primary schools at the primary school level is rapidly decreasing and indicated that the decision taken in 2010 to close public schools with less than 9 students within the scope of the financial measure was also applied to the autonomous Turkish schools. ABTTF noted that the number of Turkish primary schools, which was 188 in 2011, decreased to 86 in the 2024-2025 school year following this decision of the ministry. ABTTF explained that if this trend continues, the Turkish school system will disappear in the long run because the state's main aim is to dismantle the Turkish school system instead



of strengthening it.

Moreover, ABTTF touched upon the long-standing building issue at the Xanthi Turkish Minority Secondary and High School at the secondary school level and reminded that following the confusion of competencies between the Ministry of Education and Municipality of Xanthi, the Ministry will renovate the school building but the main demand for a new school building is still not met.

ABTTF drew the attention of the ALDE group MPs to the issues faced by the Turkish community in Western Thrace in Greece, which boasts of being the cradle of democracy, and asked for the support of the MPs in their work at PACE. ABTTF explained that the rule of law in Greece is under serious threat, which is also stipulated in the reports of the European Commission and international non-governmental organisations, and that this alarming situation in Greece, a member of the Council, directly affects members of national minorities and thus requested PACE to be vigilant and take necessary steps in this regard.

Threats against human rights defenders were discussed at OSCE

ABTTF indicated that individuals and institutions representing the Turkish community in Western Thrace have been subjected to stigmatisation, targeting and hate speech, and that associations have dissolved or not registered because their names contain the words “Turkish” or “Western Thrace”, thereby attempting to intimidate and silence the Turkish community.

The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) participated in the meeting titled “Protecting civic space- the role of human rights defenders and freedom of peaceful assembly: Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting II”.

The meeting, which brought together representatives of OSCE countries, international organisations, civil society and human rights defenders and was attended by approximately 300 people, was attended by ABTTF International Relations Director Melek Kirmacı, representing the Turkish community of Western Thrace.

The meeting discussed good practices in the protection of human rights defenders and the challenges faced by civil society organisations and human rights defenders. It was noted that the civil space is increasingly under threat through defamation, criminalisation and direct attacks against human rights defenders.

Speaking at the meeting, which addressed challenges such as stigmatisation and discrediting campaigns, judicial harassment, censorship and surveillance faced by human rights defenders, ABTTF emphasised that the OSCE Guidelines on Freedom of Peaceful Assembly consider the freedom of peaceful assembly to be an important step in protecting the identity of minorities and preserving and developing minority cultures. It was also underlined that the increasing pressure on human rights defenders in Greece has been frequently criticised in reports by international organisations.



Referring to the European Parliament's resolution in February 2024 and the European Commission's Rule of Law Report on Greece in July 2024, ABTTF explained that the deteriorating situation in Greece regarding the rule of law and the protection of the civil sphere is also a cause for concern for the Turkish community in Western Thrace.

Moreover, ABTTF reported that individuals and institutions representing the Turkish community in Western Thrace have been subjected to stigmatisation, targeting and hate speech, noting that the Turkish community in Western Thrace is still perceived as the “other” in the lands they have lived in for centuries and is perceived as a threat to the country's national unity and public order. Citing the presence of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' office in the region as proof, ABTTF added that this regional office is highly effective in matters related to the Turkish minority in Western Thrace.

Stating that the judicial proceedings against representatives of the Turkish community in Western Thrace are being used as a tool to increase pressure on the community, ABTTF noted that the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) judgments in the Bekir-Ousta and Others group of cases have not been executed for the past 17 years, in violation of the Turkish community's freedom of association. Regarding the continued narrowing of the civil society space, ABTTF noted that while the ECtHR judgments in the Bekir-Ousta group of cases are not executed, the Cultural Association of Turkish Women of the Prefecture of Xanthi was also not permitted to be established in the prefecture of Xanthi because its name included the word “Turkish”. Additionally, ABTTF noted that the Western Thrace Fenerbahce Culture and Sports Association, officially established in 2022, was dissolved in 2024 on grounds that the term “Western Thrace” in its name was deemed contrary to public order.

Greece, exercising its right of reply at the meeting, claimed that the minority in the country is not Turkish, but a Muslim minority defined on religious grounds. Regarding the freedom to establish associations, Greece stipulated that it continues its efforts to execute the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) judgments in the Bekir-Ousta group of cases. It also mentioned that an Committee of Experts has been established in Greece and that the committee has submitted its roadmap to the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers, claiming that Greece continues to fulfil its obligations.

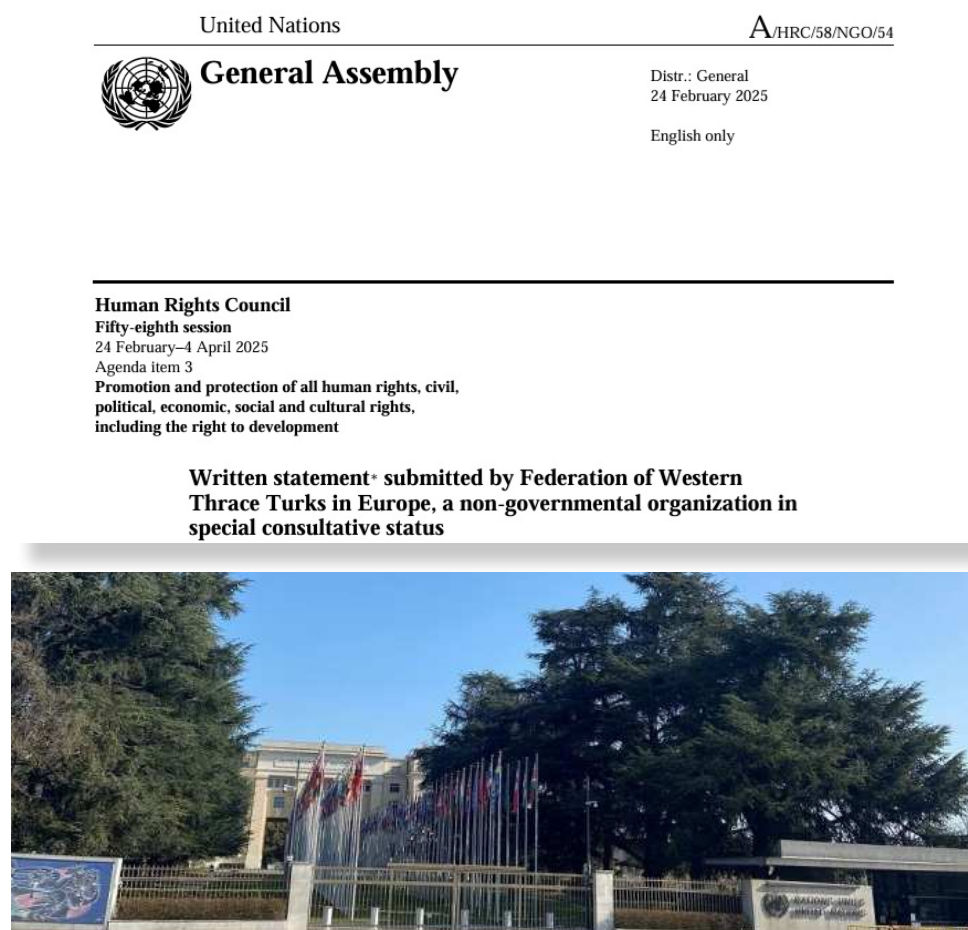
Written statement from ABTTF to the 58th session of the UN Human Rights Council

The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) submitted a written statement titled "Obstacles to Access to Quality Education for Children Belonging to the Turkish Community in Thrace in Greece" to the 58th session of the United Nations (UN) Human Rights Council held in Geneva, Switzerland on 24 February-4 April 2025.

In its written statement, ABTTF pointed out that according to the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne, the Turkish community in Western Thrace in Greece has the right to establish, manage and control all kinds of charitable, religious and social institutions and all kinds of schools and other institutions for education and training purposes at its own expense and noted that this autonomous structure in education has been taken under the control of the state through fait accompli legal practices without consulting the Turkish community.

ABTTF indicated that there are two Turkish minority secondary schools and high schools in Western Thrace, one in Komotini and the other in Xanthi, but the management of these schools is in the hands of the state in violation of international and bilateral treaties and legislation. Moreover, ABTTF noted that with its decision dated 2 September 2024, the Regional Directorate of Education of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace changed the practice that has continued until today and appointed two new principals to the Xanthi Turkish Minority Secondary and High School and the Komotini Celal Bayar Turkish Minority Secondary and High School without considering the opinion of the board members elected by the votes of the parents of the students belonging to the Turkish community.

ABTTF stated that the current building of the Xanthi Turkish Minority Secondary and High School, which was built in the late 19th century, lacks the facilities to provide quality



United Nations

A/HRC/58/NGO/54



General Assembly

Distr.: General
24 February 2025

English only

Human Rights Council

Fifty-eighth session

24 February–4 April 2025

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

and modern education and that the Turkish community in Western Thrace has been demanding for years for the construction of a new school building where teaching will be provided at European Union (EU) standards and there will be no need for the double-shift schooling system, but that this demand has been ignored by the Greek authorities.

Reminding that in 2017, the then Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras visited the Xanthi Turkish Minority Secondary and High School and promised that a new school building would be built but this promise has not been fulfilled until today, ABTTF explained that the school building issue has not been resolved till this day despite the fact that the School Council Committee and the Parent-Teachers' Association sent letters to the relevant official authorities.

ABTTF underlined that the right to education and the principle of equality and non-discrimination also includes equal access to quality education for members of minority groups and called on Greece to restore the educational autonomy of the Turkish community in Western Thrace guaranteed by the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne and to fulfil the Turkish community's demand for the allocation of a new school building, taking into account the right of Turkish students studying at the Xanthi Turkish Minority Secondary and High School to have full access to quality and modern education.

Please click below for the written statement submitted by ABTTF:

<https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/g25/029/78/pdf/g2502978.pdf>

The Turkish community in Western Thrace protested against Greece's discriminatory education policy!



ABTTF President: "Over the years, our country has systematically closed dozens of our primary schools in violation of our educational autonomy guaranteed by the Treaty of Lausanne, thereby infringing upon our community's right to education and jeopardising our children's future."

The Turkish community in Western Thrace protested on 11 September 2025 against the Greek authorities' refusal to allow the Turkish primary school in the village of Zigos (Mizanlı), in the prefecture of Xanthi, to reopen, despite reaching the required number of pupils and applications being made by parents.

In a press statement read during the protest action organised by the Union of Western Thrace Turkish Minority Schools in front of the Turkish primary school in the village of Zigos (Mizanlı), attended by parents and representatives of the Turkish community in Western Thrace, it was emphasised that the Greek state has closed dozens of Turkish primary schools over the years under the pretext of "lack of sufficient number of pupils" but has not re-opened them even when the number of students has increased.

The press statement recalled that last year a primary school was opened for one pupil in the village of Argiri in Karditsa, and this year for two pupils on Pserimos Island,



and explained that the failure to apply the same practice to Turkish primary schools deeply saddened the Turkish community in Western Thrace.

Furthermore, the press release demanded the immediate reopening of the Turkish primary school in the village of Zigos (Mizanlı), an end to discriminatory policies against Turkish minority schools, and the guarantee of the Turkish community in Western Thrace's right to education in accordance with the Treaty of Lausanne.

As is known, in 2010, Greece's Ministry of Education, Religious Affairs and Sport decided to close the primary schools with fewer than nine pupils nationwide as part of the austerity measures to combat the economic and financial crisis. In accordance with this decision, the Turkish primary school in the village of Zigos (Mizanlı) was closed in the 2023-2024 school year on grounds of lack of sufficient number of pupils. After

the number of pupils in the village reached ten, parents submitted two petitions to the Directorate of Primary Education in Xanthi in February and August 2025 requesting the re-opening of the primary school, but these applications were rejected on various grounds.

"The sharp discrimination our community faces in the field of education continues. While schools in our country Greece are re-opening for one or two pupils, the refusal by the official authorities to allow the Turkish primary school in the village of Zigos (Mizanlı) to re-open for ten pupils is a clear double standard and proof that there is no equality in education in our country. Over the years, our country has systematically closed dozens of our primary schools in violation of our educational autonomy guaranteed by the Treaty of Lausanne, violating our community's right to education and mortgaging our children's future. We call on the official authorities of our country to immediately cease their practices aimed at completely eliminating our autonomous schools and demand the re-opening of our primary school in the village of Zigos (Mizanlı), which has reached the required number of pupils", said Halit Habip Oğlu, President of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF).

*Image: gundemgazetesi.com



The ECtHR once again condemns Greece for violating the freedom of association of the Turkish community in Western Thrace

The European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) ruled against Greece in a case brought by the Cultural Association of Turkish Women of the Prefecture of Xanthi, which was not registered by Greek national courts due to the word “Turkish” in its name.

In its unanimous decision on 24 June 2025 in the case of Sağır and Others v. Greece (Application No. 34724/18), the ECHR ruled that Greece had violated Article 11 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), which guarantees freedom of association, by refusing to register the association.

In its reasoning, the ECtHR emphasised that freedom of association is particularly important for persons belonging to minorities, including national and ethnic minorities, and noted that Greece had failed to provide any concrete evidence that the name of the Cultural Association of Turkish Women of the Prefecture of Xanthi constituted a threat to public order, and that the word “Turkish” in the association’s name could not be considered a threat to a democratic society.

Following its judgments in October 2007 regarding the Evros Prefecture Minority Youth Association, in March 2008 regarding



the Xanthi Turkish Union, and in March 2008 regarding the Cultural Association of Turkish Women of the Prefecture of Rodopi, the ECtHR ruled for the fourth time that Greece had violated the freedom of association of the Turkish community in Western Thrace with its decision regarding the Cultural Association of Turkish Women of the Prefecture of Xanthi.

Seven adult women residing in Xanthi and holding Greek citizenship applied to the Xanthi Court of First Instance in 2010 for the registration of the Cultural Association of Turkish Women of the Prefecture of Xanthi. However, the court rejected the registration request on grounds that the association’s name included the word “Turkish” and that this could create a “misleading impression”. In 2014, the Thrace Court of Appeal, and in 2017, the Greek Court of Cassation rejected the applicants’ appeals. Having exhausted domestic legal remedies, the applicants filed a lawsuit against Greece at the ECtHR,

relying on Article 11 of the Convention (freedom of assembly and association), claiming that their association had not been registered.

“The European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) has once again ruled against Greece in the case of the Cultural Association of Turkish Women of the Prefecture of Xanthi, citing the same grounds as in its previous rulings regarding the dissolved Xanthi Turkish Union, the unregistered Cultural Association of Turkish Women of the Prefecture of Rodopi, and the Evros Prefecture Minority Youth Association. With this latest decision, it is no longer possible for our country to continue denying the ethnic Turkish identity of our community. Our country, which has tried every means to avoid executing the ECtHR’s previous three judgments regarding our associations and has ignored international law for over 17 years by burying its head in the sand, now has no further excuses. We call on our country to immediately execute all of the ECtHR’s judgments regarding our associations in full and effectively, and to recognise the ethnic Turkish identity of our community”, said Halit Habip Oğlu, President of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF).

*Image: www.anadoluiimages.com

ABTTF Newsletter

ABTTF Newsletter, which has been distributed since May 2005, is published in Turkish, Greek, English and German.

ABTTF Newsletter covers matters of grave concern to the Turkish community in Western Thrace, current developments in Western Thrace and Greece, ABTTF’s international activities and lobbying as well as the activities of ABTTF member associations and plays an important role in promoting the Turkish community in Western Thrace.

ABTTF Newsletter is sent to homes by mail and can also be obtained from our member associations.

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

www.abtff.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 Τουρκόφωνων 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

46 Kefallinias & Patission Av., GR-11251 Athens, Greece
Tel.: +30 (0) 211 109 72 33 - Mobile: +30 (0) 694 467 36 61

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

Executive Editor: K. Engin Soyylmaz Editor: Nihan Ayan