



# Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europa Newsletter

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## ABTTF President paid a working visit to Brussels



President of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) Halit Habip Oğlu paid a working visit to Brussels, the capital of the European Union (EU) on Tuesday, 10 December 2024.

Within the scope of the working visit, Habip Oğlu, accompanied by Deniz Servantie from ABTTF Brussels Office, held meetings with various Members of the European Parliament (MEP). In this regard, he met with member of the Hungarian minority in Romania and President of the Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN) Loránt Vincze (EPP, Romania), Rasmus Andresen from the Danish minority in Germany (Greens/EFA, Germany) and İlhan Kyuchyuk from the Turkish community in Bulgaria (Renew Europe, Bulgaria) as well as European Language Equality Network (ELEN) Secretary General Davyth Hicks.

During the meetings with the MEPs dealing with minority rights and issues under the EP, the basic and current issues of the Turkish community in Western Thrace and the latest developments in Greece and Western Thrace were conveyed.

Habip Oğlu pointed out that the systematic discrimination, stigmatisation and marginalisation against the Turkish community in Western Thrace in Greece continues and reached its peak before, during and after the European Parliament (EP) elections in June 2024 and noted that lawsuits were filed in the Council of State and the Court of Cassation with the demand for the dissolution of the Friendship Equality Peace (FEP) Party, which again became the first party by receiving the highest number of votes in the prefectures of Rodopi and Xanthi in the EP elections after 2024 and 2019.

Habip Oğlu further indicated that the interventions by the Greek government against the educational and religious autonomy of the Turkish community in Western Thrace guaranteed by the treaties continued in 2024, indeed, 4 more Turkish primary schools were closed in the 2024-2025 scho-

Current developments regarding the Turkish community in Western Thrace were conveyed and cooperation subjects were discussed

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ol year, the number of Turkish primary schools with autonomous status decreased from 188 in 2011 to 86, and the muftis elected by the Western Thrace Turks are not recognised by the Greek government.

Habip Oğlu pointed out that the systematic violation of the rule of law in our country Greece in 2024 continues to increase and emphasised that the most striking example of this situation is that the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) regarding the Western Thrace Turkish associations have not been executed for more than 16 years despite the decisions and all warnings of the Committee of Ministers of the



Council of Europe.

During the meetings with the MEPs, views were also exchanged on the re-establish-

ment of the Intergroup for Traditional Minorities, National Communities and Languages in the new legislative term of the EP and future cooperation issues.

During the meeting with ELEN Secretary-General Davyth Hicks, Habip Oğlu stated that the applications of the Turkish community in Western Thrace for the opening of bilingual Turkish and Greek minority kindergartens in the region have been ignored and left unanswered by the Greek authorities for years and that the children belonging to the Turkish community in Western Thrace are deprived of their right to learn their mother tongue Turkish.

## ABTTF President paid a working visit to Brussels

Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) President Halit Habip Oğlu paid a working visit to Brussels, the capital of the European Union (EU) on 18 February 2025.

Habip Oğlu, accompanied by Deniz Servantie from ABTTF Brussels Office, met with MEPs from the European Parliament (EP) Iuliu Winkler (EPP, Romania) from the Hungarian minority in Romania and İlhan Kyuchyuk (Renew Europe, Bulgaria) from the Bulgarian Turks.

The current issues of the Turkish community in Western Thrace and the rights violations it is subjected to were conveyed

Habip Oğlu conveyed the current issues of the Turkish community in Western Thrace and the recent important events in Western Thrace and Greece during his meetings with the MEPs dealing with minority and human rights issues.

Habip Oğlu indicated that the European Commission, EP and leading international non-governmental organisations drew attention to the systematic violation of the rule of law in Greece and noted that Greece has persistently failed to execute the judgments



of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) concerning the Bekir-Ousta and Others group of cases involving Western Thrace Turkish associations for 17 years despite

all the warnings and calls of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe.

Habip Oğlu further noted that the Turkish community in Western Thrace is subjected to hate speech, stigmatisation and marginalisation in politics and mainstream media in Greece and noted that MPs and prominent representatives of the Turkish community in the Greek parliament are targeted.

Habip Oğlu informed the MEPs about the issues faced by the children belonging to the Turkish community in Western Thrace in accessing quality education and in this context, touched upon the building issue at the Xanthi Turkish Minority Secondary and High School which has been going on for years and the demand of the Turkish community for a new building; moreover, Habip Oğlu explained that although the Turkish community has been granted educational autonomy, Turkish primary schools in Western Thrace with autonomous status continue to be closed by the state under the pretext of lack of pupils and that as a result of this, the number of Turkish primary schools, which was 188 in 2011, has decreased to 86 today.

During the meetings, there were also opportunities to exchange views on the joint work that can be done at the EP and future cooperation in this regard.

# When will our state be honest and fair?

Dear readers,

On 28 February 2023, on the second anniversary of the Tempi train crash in which 57 people were killed and many injured, protest marches were held across the country and many trade unions went on a 24-hour strike.

Among the protests organised in more than 300 cities in our country and abroad, 430 thousand people attended a demonstration held in Athens, the capital of our country. In our region, protests were also organised in Xanthi, Komotini and Alexandroupoli and the people of our region were on the streets demanding justice.

Why was everyone on the streets? Because 57 innocent people lost their lives in this tragic train accident, which unfortunately was not an accident, but murder caused by tremendous negligence.

Since the day of the accident, instead of mobilising to uncover the truth, the government has turned its back on the truth, choosing to return to its own agenda as if to cover up the disaster.

This is always the behaviour of the rulers of our country! However, 2 years have passed since the accident and the people have not forgotten it, everyone took to the streets across the country so that it would not be forgotten!

As the Turkish community in Western Thrace, we have been experiencing, knowing and seeing this reckless attitude and covering up the facts by the rulers of our country for years.

Whenever there is a problem, instead of addressing the problem, the rulers of the country endeavour to paint a false picture that everything is perfect. That beats all!

When will the state take the necessary steps for the security of the citizens living in this country? When will the state treat

its citizens equally and protect their rights? When will the state embrace the different cultures of this country and recognise the minorities living in our country as a source of wealth for this country?

In Xanthi, as Western Thrace Turks, we constitute almost half of the population, but in our region, while there are 49 public kindergartens, 39 public primary schools, 20 public secondary schools and 9 public high schools in Xanthi, we have only 1 secondary and high school and no kindergarten!

The picture is similar in Komotini! Even though we constitute the majority in the prefecture of Rodopi, the number of primary schools is decreasing day by day, we have only one secondary school and no kindergarten!

Meanwhile, older and newer EU member states such as Germany, Italy, Romania, Hungary, Denmark, etc. allocate state budgets to protect the language, religion, culture, customs and traditions of their minorities and provide them with education in their mother tongue and protect their minorities like jew-els.

But in our country, the state prefers to ignore us, thinking that if it ignores us, it will assimilate us.

There was a time when we had schools in Rhodes and Kos that taught Turkish, mosques where we prayed, and when we had mufti offices. Now there are none! Yet there are still Turks living there!

During his visit to our motherland Türkiye in February 2025, Greek Minister of Education, Religious Affairs and Sports, Kyriakos Pierrakakis, met with the administrators of the Greek minority schools in Istanbul, listened to their problems in the field of education and conveyed the government's own solutions.

Moreover, our country is looking after the Greek minority in Albania and protecting



its rights. The rulers of our country protect the Greek minority in Albania and negotiate with Albania for the protection and development of their rights.

Our motherland does the same for our community, protects us as it should, and naturally brings our problems to the agenda in bilateral relations.

But when the same situation is experienced for us, the rulers of our country stand up for all segments! What is this called now? When will our state follow a fair and egalitarian policy, when will it be honest and sincere towards us? When?

Dear friends,

May the month of Ramadan be blessed for the Turkish community in Western Thrace and the whole Islamic world! May the mercy and blessings of Almighty Allah be with us in this blessed month.

I wish you a Ramadan where our prayers are accepted, and our hearts are filled with peace.

Yours sincerely,

Halit Habip Oğlu  
ABTTF President

## ABTTF paid a working visit to Strasbourg



ABTTF President Halit Habip Oğlu, during his meetings, brought to the agenda the non-execution of the ECtHR judgments on the Bekir-Ousta and Others group of cases by Greece for the past 17 years and the building issue and the confusion of competencies with respect to the the Xanthi Turkish Minority Secondary and High School.

President of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) Halit Habip Oğlu paid a working visit to Strasbourg on 28-29 January 2025 in parallel with the Winter Session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE).

During his working visit, Habip Oğlu, accompanied by ABTTF Head Office Manager K. Engin Soy-yılmaz, conveyed the current issues of the Turkish community in Western Thrace and the rights violations it is subjected to during his meetings with Chairperson of the national delegation of San Marino at PACE Gerardo Giovagnoli and Chairperson of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) Group at PACE Iulian Bulai.

Habip Oğlu pointed out that Greece has persistently failed to execute the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) concerning the Bekir-Ousta and Others group of cases, which includes the



Western Thrace Turkish associations, for the past 17 years and indicated that despite all the warnings and decisions from the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, Gre-

ece pursues a strategy to prolong the execution process of the aforementioned judgments. Moreover, Habip Oğlu conveyed details pertaining to the building issue of the Xanthi Turkish Minority Secondary and High School, which has been going on for years, and informed about the developments related to the confusion of competencies caused by the Greek authorities passing the responsibility to each other, and further drew attention to the issues faced by the children belonging to the Turkish community in Western Thrace in accessing quality education.

Habip Oğlu stated that the Turkish community in Western Thrace, whose existence and ethnic Turkish identity is denied by Greece, is subjected to hate speech and marginalisation in politics and mainstream media in the country and that the leading representatives of the Turkish community are targeted and stigmatised.

Habip Oğlu explained that Greece, which is one of the oldest members of the European Union (EU) and claims to be the cradle of democracy, takes into account minority and human rights when it comes to the Greek minority in Albania, but applies double standards when it comes to the rights of the Turkish community in Western Thrace, all of whom are Greek citizens.

# ABTTF was in Geneva for the UN Forum on Minority Issues

Representatives of the Turkish community in Western Thrace raised the issues in the field of education, which has a great impact on the future of the Turkish community in Western Thrace, in the session on the representation of minorities in education.

The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) participated in the 17th Session of the United Nations (UN) Forum on Minority Issues on 28-29 November 2024. ABTTF and Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association (WTMUGA) represented the Turkish community in Western Thrace at the forum themed "Minority representation and self-representation in public spaces and discourses" organised in Geneva, Switzerland.

ABTTF International Relations Director Melek Kirmacı and WTMUGA member Kerem Abdu-rahimoğlu, who participated in the forum within the framework of the sessions where the representation of minorities in public spaces, education, media including social media, arts and culture were discussed, conveyed the issues faced by the Turkish community in Western Thrace in the field of education.

In her speech at the session on the representation of minorities in public spaces, Vice President Olivia Schubert from the Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN), of which ABTTF and WTMUGA are members, indicated that FUEN, as the largest umbrella organisation bringing together national minorities in Europe, supports the establishment of a legal mechanism or treaty for the protection of national minorities and expressed that they would like the UN Forum on Minority Issues to turn into a permanent forum.

Intervening at the session on the representation of minorities in education on the first day of the forum, ABTTF noted that Greece is one of the countries with the worst record on the rights of national minorities in Europe and that it has not ratified the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCNM) and has not signed the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages.



Reminding that within the framework of the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne, the Turkish community in Western Thrace was granted the right to establish and manage its own schools, but that this autonomy recognised in education has been dismantled as a result of government interventions, ABTTF stated and expressed the issues at different levels of education.

Furthermore, ABTTF stated that pre-school education is compulsory but despite the fact that the Turkish community in Western Thrace constitutes 55 per cent of the population in Rodopi, 45 per cent in Xanthi and 10 per cent in Evros, there is not a single Turkish kindergarten within the Turkish school system or completely private and that the state rejects

the applications in this direction.

Pointing out that the number of Turkish primary schools in the region is decreasing rapidly, ABTTF explained that the decision to close schools with less than nine students in 2010 was also valid for Turkish primary schools which should be autonomous, and this practice has become a systematic discrimination tool. ABTTF added that the number of Turkish primary schools decreased from 194 in 2008 to 86 in 2024.

Explaining that the number of Turkish secondary schools is low, ABTTF indicated that the demand for a new school building in the Xanthi Turkish Minority Secondary and High School has not been met due to the increasing number of students. Speaking at the same session, WTMUGA expressed the issues in education and reminded the issue of double-shift schooling in Xanthi Turkish Minority Secondary and High School and the process leading to the protests and noted that the double-shift schooling system ended as a result of the protests but that the demand for a new school building was not met despite the letters sent to the government authorities.

In their speeches, the representatives of the Turkish community in Western Thrace demanded the return of the autonomous structure of the Turkish community in Western Thrace in education and asked that the demands of the Turkish community be considered urgently in solving the issues in education.

## ABTTF realised a written contribution to the European Commission's Rule of Law Report 2025



# European Commission

The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) submitted its written contribution to the European Commission's 2025 Rule of Law Report. ABTTF, which participated in the online consultation process open to civil society organisations and other stakeholders in EU Member States initiated by the European Commission for the 2025 Rule of Law Report, conveyed the issues of the Turkish community in Western Thrace and the rights violations it is subjected to in order to contribute to the chapter on Greece in the report to be prepared.

In its written contribution, ABTTF underlined that Greece denies the existence of the Turkish community in Western Thrace and its Turkish ethnic identity and has persistently failed to execute the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) in the Bekir-Ousta and Others group of cases for the past 17 years and violated the freedom of association of the Turkish community.

ABTTF noted that the Civil Court of First Instance of Rodopi ruled on 28 May 2024 for the dissolution and revocation of the registration of a fans' association established in 2022 in Komotini under the name of "Western Thrace Fenerbahçe Culture and Sports Association" and indicated that the dissolution of this association, which has not gone

beyond the statute, is a new example of the usurpation of the rights and freedoms of the Turkish community in Western Thrace by the state.

ABTTF further explained that although the Turkish community in Western Thrace has been granted educational autonomy within the boundaries of the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne, the number of Turkish primary schools with autonomous status in the region has decreased over the years due to the closure of Turkish primary schools one by one every year, and that 4 more Turkish primary schools were closed in the 2024-2025 school year and that the number of Turkish primary schools decreased from 188 in 2011 to 86 today.

Moreover, ABTTF pointed out that there is no bilingual Turkish minority kindergarten in the region despite the demand of the Turkish community in Western Thrace and underscored that although the existing building of Xanthi Turkish Minority Secondary and High School is insufficient, the Greek authorities ignored the request for a new building and passed the responsibility to each other.

ABTTF indicated that the MPs and prominent representatives of the Turkish community in Western Thrace are exposed to

serious hate speech in the mainstream Greek media and stated that Turkish MPs are scapegoated just because they participate in activities of Turkish organisations in Western Thrace or because of their work in Parliament to protect the rights of the Turkish community and unfounded and defamatory news were published about the rights defenders of the Turkish community.

Furthermore, ABTTF reminded that the Turkish community in Western Thrace has been granted religious autonomy in accordance with the international treaties and noted that Greece has violated the religious autonomy of the Turkish community by appointing muftis or regents of muftis in Western Thrace since 1991 and that it does not recognise the muftis elected by the Turkish community. ABTTF noted that despite all the objections of the Turkish community in Western Thrace, the religious autonomy of the Turkish community has been further weakened with the "Law on the Modernisation of the Mufti Offices" adopted by the Greek Parliament in August 2022, which envisages the transformation of the autonomous mufti offices into ordinary public offices by completely connecting them to the Ministry of Education, Religious Affairs and Sports.

# Written contribution from ABTTF to the thematic report to be prepared by the UN Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues



**United Nations**



**UNITED NATIONS  
HUMAN RIGHTS  
OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER**

What are human rights? ▾

Topics ▾

Countries ▾

CALL FOR INPUT | SPECIAL PROCEDURES

## Call for Inputs: What are Minority Issues?

The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) submitted its written contribution to the office of the United Nations (UN) Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues Prof. Nicolas Levrat for the thematic report to be submitted to the 61st Session of the UN Human Rights Council in March 2026.

In its written contribution, ABTTF conveyed the attitude towards minorities in Greece and the problems and rights violations faced by the Turkish community in Western Thrace. ABTTF noted that no national or ethnic group is granted official minority status in Greece and indicated that the ethnic Turkish identity of the Turkish community in Western Thrace, which is officially recognised as a minority and whose rights are guaranteed by the 1923 Lausanne Peace Treaty, is not recognised by Greece.

ABTTF explained that approximately 60 thousand Western Thrace Turks were dep-

rived of citizenship with the provisions of the former Article 19 of the Greek Citizenship Law with racist content which was in force from 1955 to 1998, that associations with “Turkish” names were dissolved in Greece, that Greece has not executed the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) against the Bekir-Ousta and Others group of cases for the past 17 years and violated the freedom of association of the Turkish community in Western Thrace. ABTTF pointed out that Greece has usurped the educational and religious autonomy of the Turkish community in Western Thrace guaranteed by the 1923 Lausanne Peace Treaty through various laws and unilateral practices and stated that the Turkish primary schools with autonomous status are closed down, the muftis elected by the Turkish community are not recognised and with the latest law the mufti offices with autonomous status are transformed into ordinary public offices directly under the Ministry of Education, Re-

ligious Affairs and Sports.

ABTTF noted that rights defender individuals and associations representing the Turkish community in Western Thrace are stigmatised and subjected to hate speech in politics and Greek mainstream media and indicated that hate speech in politics is a part of structural and systematic discrimination against the Turkish community in Greece and that the Turkish community is perceived as “other”, “foreign” or “not belonging” in the lands where it has lived for centuries.

ABTTF noted that the non-recognition and assimilation of national minorities in Greece is an official state policy and demanded Greece to restore the educational and religious autonomy of the Turkish community in Western Thrace and to establish a consultation mechanism with the broad participation of the representatives of the Turkish community to solve the existing problems.

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

The Permanent Mission of Greece to the United Nations (UN) Office and other international organizations in Geneva responded to the written statements submitted by the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) to the 57th session of the UN Human Rights Council on the demand for the dissolution of the Friendship Equality Peace (FEP) Party and the targeting of political representatives of the Turkish community in Western Thrace.

In its written reply to the UN, Greece indicated that according to the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne, the Muslim minority in (Western) Thrace is recognised as a religious minority and claimed that the members of the Muslim minority, as Greek citizens, enjoy all freedoms and rights guaranteed by the Greek Constitution as well as all the benefits derived from their European citizenship without any discrimination.

Greece claimed that the Muslim minority in (Western) Thrace respects its educational and religious autonomy as stipulated in the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne and claimed that the Muslim minority is represented at all levels of politics, be it national, regional or local.

Greece further noted that the FEP Party, as a party formed by members of the Muslim minority, has participated in the elections of the European Parliament (EP) three times in a row, in 2014, 2019 and 2024, and that it is free to participate in national elections as well, and argued that the appeals to the Greek judiciary to declare the FEP Party illegal are still pending in the courts. Nevertheless, it underlined that declaring a political party illegal in the country is a measure of last resort taken by the judiciary when the organisational structure of a party or its activity runs counter to the functioning of the democratic form of government in the country.

Furthermore, Greece argued that the fundamental right to freedom of expression, which includes the right to receive or impart



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## Human Rights Council

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Agenda item 3

Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development

**Note verbale dated 16 October 2024 from the Permanent Mission of Greece to the United Nations Office at Geneva addressed to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights**



information or ideas without interference by public authority, is respected and protected in the country and that protection is provided against incitement to hatred or violence on the basis of religious beliefs in accordance with the relevant Law No. 4491/2017.

ABTTF submitted two written statements to the 57th session of the United Nations (UN) Human Rights Council held in Geneva, Switzerland on 9 September-11 October 2024, entitled “Demand for Dissolution of the Friendship, Equality and Peace (FEP) Party in Greece and Right to Vote and Stand for Election of the Turkish Community in Thra-

ce” and “Targeting of Political Representatives of the Turkish Community in Western Thrace” and brought to the agenda the systematic discrimination, stigmatisation and marginalisation of the Turkish community in Western Thrace for years.

Please click below to access the note verbale of the Permanent Mission of Greece to the United Nations (UN) Office and other international organizations in Geneva in response to ABTTF:

<https://hrcmeetings.ohchr.org/HRCSessions/RegularSessions/57/Pages/Communications%20from%20governments.aspx>

## Human Rights Watch: The issues of democracy, human rights and the rule of law in Greece due to state actions are very serious



ABTTF President: "Our country is moving further away from being a country that is free, democratic and fully committed to the rule of law. In face of this worrying situation, both our country and international organisations should take the reports of international organisations seriously and take the necessary steps."

Human Rights Watch, one of the leading organisations in the field of human rights, published its World Report 2025. In the chapter on Greece of the report, which evaluates the developments in the field of human rights worldwide in 2024, the issues arising from state actions in the field of democracy, rule of law and human rights in our country were criticised.

On freedom of media, the report notes that Greece continues to rank last in the EU in terms of press freedom, according to Reporters Without Borders, indicating the existence of a hostile environment for journalists facing state surveillance, abusive lawsuits, government interference and smear campaigns.

In the area of civil society, the Greek National Commission for Human Rights warned that smear campaigns, harassment and prosecutions against migrant rights defenders for providing humanitarian aid have created a pervasive climate of fear in the country. The report also noted that human rights defenders Panayote Dimitras of the Greek



Helsinki Monitor and Tommy Olsen of Aegean Boat Report were subjected to criminal proceedings for exposing violations at Greece's borders and that Dimitras is still under a travel ban.

Under the heading of racism and intolerance, the report referred to the 2023 report of the Racist Violence Recording Network (RVRN), which indicated a sharp rise in racist violence in Greece in 2023.

"Human Rights Watch's 2024 report clearly demonstrates the persisting issues in the area of democracy, human rights and the rule of law in our country Greece. As revealed in the reports of many human rights organisations, unjust investigations, prosecutions and smear campaigns against human rights defenders, especially in the field of civil society, are of serious concern. Representatives of the Turkish community in Western Thrace

in our region are also experiencing similar examples in this worrying environment. Our Federation has also been targeted by defamation and discrediting due to false news reports, and our legal struggle is continuing. Our country is moving further away from being a country that is free, democratic and fully committed to the principles of the rule of law for each of us. In face of this worrying situation, both our country and international organisations should take the reports of international organisations seriously and take the necessary steps", said Halit Habip Oğlu, President of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF).

Please click below to access HRW'2024 Greece report:

<https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2025/country-chapters/greece>

\*Image: [www.anadoluiimages.com](http://www.anadoluiimages.com)

## ECRI assesses the status of implementation of its recommendations for Greece

On 19 February 2025, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) of the Council of Europe released its concluding observations on whether and how Greece has implemented the priority recommendations of its 6th country report on Greece, published in September 2022.

In its conclusions, which are based on the Greek government's responses and information gathered from other sources, ECRI notes that it recognises the positive steps taken by Greece but notes that much of the rhetoric has not translated into action.

ECRI welcomes the Greek government's efforts to strengthen the institution of the Ombudsman but indicates that its recommendation to enact legislation enabling the Ombudsman to intervene as *amicus curiae*



(friend of the court) in court cases by providing information, expertise or insights has not been implemented to date.

ECRI recognises the important efforts and positive steps taken in the field of intersex persons but notes that Greece has only partially implemented its recommendation in this regard.

In its sixth country report on Greece, ECRI expressed concern about the continuing inequalities and racism in policing in the country and noted that hate speech in the

country is sometimes expressed by politicians and even state officials.

The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) actively participated in the preparation process of ECRI's 6th country report on Greece and submitted a written statement to ECRI on discrimination, racism and hate speech against the Turkish community in Western Thrace in Greece. Within the scope of ECRI's visit to Greece in November 2021, ABTTF participated in the meeting with civil society organisations in Athens, where it realised a presentation on the current and fundamental issues of the Turkish community in Western Thrace in Greece under the headings of denial of the ethnic Turkish identity, freedom of association, freedom of religion, education and hate speech/hate-based attacks.

## Greece blacklisted for human rights and rule of law in EP report

Greece has been included in the European Parliament's (EP) Committee on Foreign Affairs' annual report on the state of human rights and democracy in non-EU countries in 2024.

SYRIZA MEP Kostas Arvanitis underlined that it is a very negative development that Greece is included in the list of human rights violations in the EP's report together with third world countries due to the failure to investigate the murder of journalist Giorgos Karaivaz, who was murdered on 9 April 2021, and noted that this situation is an indicator of the failure of the current government on human rights.

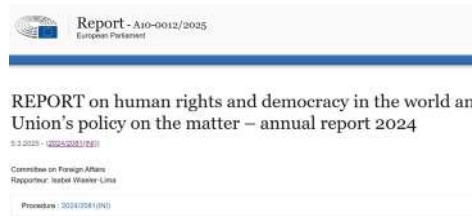
The EP Committee on Foreign Affairs report titled "Human rights and democracy in the world and the European Union's policy on the matter - Annual Report 2024" will be put to vote at the EP Plenary Session in Strasbourg on 11 March 2025.



"The EP's inclusion of our country in its annual report analysing violations of human rights, rule of law and democracy in non-EU countries is a stern warning to the government. This latest report of the EP is humiliating for the democracy of our country,

whose reputation in the international arena has declined in recent years due to the government's policies. Just last week, thousands of people took to the streets across the country and protested against the government on the second anniversary of the

Tempi train accident in which 57 people lost their lives. As in the case of the murder of journalist Karaivaz, the government did not take any steps to reveal the truth about the Tempis train accident, on the contrary, it chose to return to its own agenda as if to cover up the truth. This is always the behaviour of the rulers of our country! For years we have been facing, knowing and seeing this indifferent attitude of the rulers of our country in the issues of our community. Our country,



which has not executed the three judgments of the European Court of Human Rights with respect to the associations of our community for the past 17 years despite all the warnings

of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, continues to disregard the rule of law and international law. With this latest report of the EP, the serious issues in the field of democracy, law and the rule of law in our country have once again become evident”, said Halit Habip Oğlu, President of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF).

\*Image: www.anadoluiimages.com

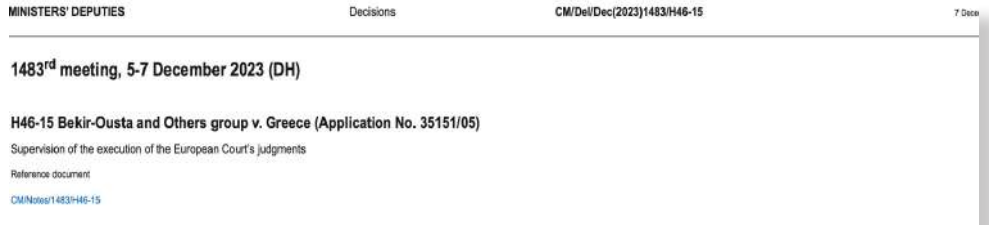
## The Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe examined the Bekir-Ousta and Others group of cases

The Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe examined the Bekir-Ousta and Others group of cases concerning the violation by Greece of the freedom of association of the Turkish community in Western Thrace at its meeting in Strasbourg in France on 3-5 December 2024.

In its decision adopted on 5 December, the Committee of Ministers reiterated once again the fundamental importance of freedom of association in a democratic state and criticised the non-execution by Greece of the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) concerning the Xanthi Turkish Union, the Cultural Association of Turkish Women of the Prefecture of Rodopi and the Evros Prefecture Minority Youth Association for more than 16 years.

Recalling that any progress on both individual and general measures in this group of cases appears to be dependent on the work of the Committee of Experts established by Greece, the Committee of Ministers strongly urged the competent authorities to keep it regularly informed of developments in the work of the Committee of Experts, including in respect of the consultative process with the applicant associations.

The Committee of Ministers decided to resume its examination of the Bekir-Ousta and Others group of cases at its meeting in June 2025 to review the progress achieved, en-



couraging the Greek authorities to make full use of the Council of Europe's assistance and expertise in this field to ensure compliance of any proposed measures with the European Convention on Human Rights.

“As we have indicated it before, our country deliberately set up the Committee of Experts and now uses it as a tool to further delay the execution of the ECtHR judgments on the Bekir-Ousta and Others group of cases and to stall the Committee of Ministers. Moreover, the roadmap submitted by the Committee of Experts to the Committee of Ministers does not mention the execution of

the aforementioned ECtHR judgments. As we can see in the judgments of the Court of Cassation, our country does not intend to execute all three judgments in this group of cases in any way and is constantly playing for time. Although more than 16 years have passed since the ECtHR judgments, the official legal status of our Xanthi Turkish Union has still not been restored and the other two associations have still not been registered by the national courts! We will continue to follow the developments closely and inform the Committee of Ministers about the work of the Committee of Experts. We hereby reiterate our call on the Committee of Ministers to initiate an infringement procedure against our country, which has disregarded its obligations under the Convention, as soon as possible” said Halit Habip Oğlu, President of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF).

Please click below to access the relevant decision of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/cm/-/1514th-human-rights-meeting-of-the-ministers-deputies-3-5-december-2024>



## Racist attack on a young child from the Turkish community in Western Thrace in Komotini!

ABTTF President: “We condemn in the strongest terms the racist and vile attack on a defenceless little boy in Komotini. The competent authorities of our country should urgently take the necessary measures to prevent such racist and hate attacks, which harm the peace and tranquillity in our region and the culture of living together and should never allow the far-right ideology to take root in our region”.

In the city of Komotini in Greece, a video showing a small child belonging to the Turkish community in Western Thrace being threatened by a racist group triggered a reaction throughout the country.

In the video, which was also reflected in the press, it is seen that a racist group forced a 10-year-old boy, whom they cornered, to say “Long live in reference to Ilias Kasidiaris, the former spokesman of Golden Dawn, which has been declared as a criminal organisation by a court.

The attackers then shout at the boy, who appears to be quite frightened, and tell him to get away from there quickly.

It is noted that the video in question was



posted on Instagram two months ago by an account known as “Nationalists of Komotini”, but it is not yet known exactly when it was taken.

In 2020, the court ruled that the racist Golden Dawn was a criminal organisation and found the leader of the party, Nikolaos Michaloliakos, and six members of the party, Ilias Kasidiaris, Yiannis Lagos, Giorgos Germanis, Ilias Panagiotaros, Panagiotis Iliopoulos and Nikos Pappas, guilty of leading a criminal organisation and eighteen other defendants guilty of being members of a criminal organisation.

“We condemn in the strongest terms the racist and vile attack on a defenceless little

boy in Komotini. This attack clearly shows that despite the banning of Golden Dawn, the racism and racist threats targeting our community in Western Thrace still continues and the activities of far-right groups have not ended. The competent authorities of our country should urgently take the necessary measures to prevent such racist and hate attacks, which harm the peace and tranquillity in our region and the culture of living together, from happening again and should never allow the far-right ideology to take root in our region”, said Halit Habip Oğlu, President of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF).

\*Image: [www.gundemgazetesi.com](http://www.gundemgazetesi.com)

### ABTTF Newsletter

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

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

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

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

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