

Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europa Newsletter

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Educational problems of Western Thrace Turkish Community addressed at the international conference



Outputs and recommendations achieved at the event which was carried out in two phases as workshop and conference and participated by academics and the experts on bilingual education will be made into a report and submitted to the Greek authorities.

Federation of Western Thrace Turks (ABTTF), Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association (BTAYTD) and Culture and Education Foundation of Western Thrace Minority (PEKEM) in cooperation with Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN) organized an international workshop and conference on 2 March 2019 with the topic "Bilingual Education: A Minority Issue-

Bilingualism in Turkish/Muslim Minority Education and Different Approaches in the World- Problems and Possible Solutions". Academics, bilingual education experts, educators belonging to the Turkish community in Western Thrace and civil society organizations representatives participated at the workshop and conference held in the city of Komotini. At the event, Prof. Dr. Fernand de Varenes, United Nations (UN) Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues, made a speech as the special guest.

Prior to the workshop and conference, guest academics and experts participated at the cultural programme organized by the host Western Thrace Turkish civil society organizations. As part of the cultural programme, the guests visited Komotini and Xanthi and Western Thrace

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Turkish villages and met with the representatives of the Turkish community in Western Thrace.

At the workshop, academics and experts expressed their views regarding bilingual education in Western Thrace

In the morning on 2 March 2019, Saturday, representatives of the host civil society organizations organized a two-session workshop with the managers of the Western Thrace Turkish community associations working in the field of education with participation of academics and experts from Turkey, Greece, Germany, Denmark, Belgium and the Netherlands. At the workshop as the host associations, Dr. Hüseyin Baltacı, President of BTAYTD and Halit Habip Oğlu, President of ABTTF and the partner of the event Gösta Toft, Vice-president of FUEN delivered welcome speeches.

In the first session during which Associate Professor Dr. İbrahim Kelağa Ahmet, Faculty Member of Trakya University, Department of Balkan Languages and Literatures was the moderator and Dr Pervin Hayrullah, Director General of PEKEM was the rapporteur, bilingual minority education model in Western Thrace, current situation, weaknesses and strengths of the model were discussed. And in the second session moderated by Ozan Ahmetoğlu, President of Xanthi Turkish Union, academics, experts and representatives of the civil society organizations conveyed their views and recommendations regarding the development of bilingual minority education system in Western Thrace. At the workshop, Prof. Dr. Fernand de Varennes, United Nations (UN) Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues made a speech too.

At the conference, importance of mother tongue and bilingual education for the Turkish community in Western Thrace has been underlined

Following the workshop at the conference held open to public in two sessions, on behalf of the organizing institutions Dr. Hüseyin Baltacı, President of BTAYTD and Halit Habip Oğlu, President of ABTTF and Gösta Toft, Vice-president of partner organization



FUEN delivered welcome speeches. Opening remarks for the conference were made by Prof. Dr. Fernand de Varennes, United Nations (UN) Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues.

The first session with the topic "Importance of Mother Tongue and Bilingual Education for National Minorities" moderated by Halit Habip Oğlu, President of ABTTF and in this session

Assist. Prof. Dr. George Mavrommatis from the Department of Education Sciences in Early Childhood at Democritus University of Thrace, Willy Fautre, Director of Human Rights without Frontiers (HRWF) Organization, Prof. Dr. Çiğdem Sağın Şimşek, Head of the Department of Foreign Language Education at Middle East Technical University, Prof. Dr. Thalia Dragona from the Department of Early Childhood Education at National and Kapodistrian University of Athens and

Associate Prof. Dr. Elena Antonova Ünlü, Deputy Head of the Department of Translation and Interpretation at Hacettepe University made presentations one each.

In the second session with the topic "How to improve bilingual education system of the Turkish Minority in Western Thrace??" was moderated by Assist. Prof. Dr. Ali Hüseyinoğlu, Faculty Member at Trakya University. In the second session, Dr. Cor van der Meer, Head of Mercator European Research Centre on Multilingualism and Language Learning & Member of the Management Board of Fryske Akademy and Member of Management Board of Fryske Academy, Prof. Dr. Anna Frangoudaki from the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Zeliha Yazıcı, Deputy Head of the Department of Primary Education at Akdeniz University, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Nelly Askouni Nelly Askouni from the Department of Early Childhood Education at National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Binnur Genç İter, Head of the Department of Foreign Language Education at Akdeniz University and Assoc. Prof. Dr. İbrahim Kelağa Ahmet, Member of the Department of Balkan Languages and Literatures Trakya University made speeches.

Closing and evaluation of the conference was made by Prof. Dr. Fernand de Varennes, United Nations Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues.

The international conference convened academics and experts from Turkey, Greece and Europe and the problems of the Turkish community in Western Thrace experienced in the field of bilingual minority education system were addressed in detail and solution proposals were articulated. At the conference, the audience was composed of Murat Ömeroğlu, Consul General of Komotini of Motherland Republic of Turkey, İbrahim Şerif, President of Western Thrace Turkish Minority Advisory Board (BTTADK) and Virtuous Mufti of Komotini, Mustafa Mustafa, Rodopi SYRIZA MP, İlhan Ahmet, Rodopi KINAL MP, Çiğdem Asafoğlu, President of DEB Party, Sami Yusuf, Vice President of ABTTF, Melek Kırmacı Arık, ABTTF International Relations Director, Fatma Ahmetcik, ABTTF International Studies and Lobbying Group Member, presidents and managers of the civil society organizations of the Turkish community in Western Thrace in the region and many educators.

Message to the Greek Government: We want our educational autonomy to be restored!

Dear Readers,

Turkish community in Western Thrace has autonomy in fields of education and religion with the Lausanne Treaty. Just like Greeks living in İstanbul, Gökçeada (Imbros) and Bozcaada (Tenedos).

Problems in education are pending for many years. Each year, a new one has been added to the existing problems. Since 2010 our primary schools have been closed on grounds of decreasing number of pupils, therefore number of our schools has fallen ever year. And our existing primary schools with bilingual education has low-quality of education due to numerous interventions by the state.

We discussed bilingual education system of the Turkish community in Western Thrace extensively on 2 March 2019, Saturday at the workshop and the following conference held open to public. Prior to the conference we addressed the issue of bilingual education with experts and scholars of bilingual education from our country Greece and motherland Turkey, civil society representatives from the Netherlands, Denmark and Belgium with best-practices of bilingual minority education models, and our teachers from Western Thrace.

It is very pleasing that there has been an intensive participation by Turkish community in Western Thrace at the conference in Komotini. Another pleasure is that our teachers at Turkish schools including the Hayriye Madrasah

in Komotini attended the conference as well. With participation of Prof. Fernand de Varennes, the UN Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues, as the guest of honour, it is no doubt that the conference has gained a different dimension.

As a result of the discussions in the workshop and the conference, as Western Thrace Turks, we will convey our demands in education to the Greek government and the relevant authorities. However, if I must summarize it in a single sentence, our autonomy in education which has been entirely politicized should be urgently taken out of field of politics! Issues concerning us should be discussed with us, solutions for problems should be sought together with us!

Even though scholars from our country admitted that there is an unjust treatment against us, majority of them opted for Turkish lessons within the state school system as the solution. And they say that reason for this is the poor quality of education in Turkish schools!

I want to reiterate here what I said constantly at the workshop and conference: From 1923 to 1967 while good results were achieved thanks to the autonomy we had, today this autonomy is considered being bad. Because, the issue of education has been politicized since the 1970's, the state has taken this autonomy through countless interventions. Consequently, the result has been a poor-quality education with a complex structure in our schools.



Schools were closed due to the lack of enough students.

So, what's the solution? The solution is to restore the autonomous structure granted by the treaties! The Turkish community in Western Thrace should be allowed to provide bilingual education, as part of the right to education in mother tongue, in its own schools with a political approach based on good will. Just like Greeks living in the island of Gökçeada (Imbros) in Turkey, where they could re-open their own schools based on their autonomy in education, we also expect a sincere and real step from our country.

Yet, our country asks for education in mother tongue for the Greeks living in Albania and follows diplomatic initiatives for this end. Well then, why the same Greece cannot ask the same thing for the Turks in its own country? What's more, we are a community granted autonomy in education with the treaties!

Then I ask: Where is the mistake, who is mistaken? Is it us who allegedly do not want to integrate with their country or is it the state which has lost the confidence of Western Thrace Turks due to its numerous interventions in education?

Don't you also think, the answer is obvious?

Sincerely,

Halit Habip Oğlu
ABTTF President

ABTTF and EFA co-organized a conference on education at the European Parliament

Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) organized a joint conference at the European Parliament (EP) in Brussels on March 20, 2019 with the European Free Alliance (EFA) which has a political group within the European Parliament. Conference with the theme “Fundamental Problems in Education Facing Minorities in Europe: Comparing The Cases of Western Thrace Turks and German Minority in Denmark” was hosted by MEP Josep-Maria Terricabras, Vice President of the Greens/ EFA Group in the European Parliament and Co-Chairs of the European Parliament Intergroup “Traditional Minorities, National Communities and Languages.

Halit Habip Oğlu, President of ABTTF and Sami Yusuf and Vedat Arap, ABTTF Vice-Presidents, K. Engin Soyylmaz, ABTTF Head Office Manager and Aykut Garipoğlu, ABTTF Brussels Office Coordinator participated in the conference as the representatives of the ABTTF.

The best practices for minority education system in Europe were addressed comparatively and the fundamental problems in education facing the Turkish community in Western Thrace were expressed.

The conference which drew great interest and was well attended, started with the opening speeches of MEP Josep-Maria Terricabras and Halit Habip Oğlu, President of ABTTF. Dr. Pervin Hayrullah, General Director of Culture and Education Foundation of Western Thrace Minority (PEKEM), Käthe Freiberg-Nissen, Pedagogical Consultant at German School and Language Association in North Schleswig, Denmark, Anke Tästensen,



Pedagogical Director at German School and Language Association in North Schleswig, Denmark, Dr. Alex Riemersma, Chair on Frisian and Multilingualism in Education at NHL Stenden university in Ljouwert/Leeuwarden and EFA Director Günther Dauwen made speeches at the conference.

In his opening speech, MEP Josep-Maria Terricabras stressed the importance of the multilingual education for minorities. Afterwards, Habip Oğlu, President of ABTTF, expressed his gratitude to MEP Terricabras, host of the conference and the speakers. Habip Oğlu emphasized that the autonomy in

education granted to the Turkish community in Western Thrace by the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923 was undermined by various laws and regulations throughout the years beginning with the military junta regime in Greece in 1967. Habip Oğlu stated that as the Turkish community in Western Thrace, they demand that the educational and religious autonomy guaranteed by international agreements should be given back.




Following the opening remarks, firstly, Pervin Hayrullah General Director of PEKEM made a presentation. Hayrullah informed the participants about the fundamental problems in all levels of

education faced by the Turkish community in Western Thrace, Greece and she conveyed that the number of bilingual Turkish minority schools in Western Thrace was decreased and consequently these schools were shut down by the Greek government. Hayrullah indicated, because of the obligatory pre-school education in Greece, the Turkish community in Western Thrace demanded to open bilingual minority kindergartens, however this demand has been disregarded by Greece for years. At the end of her speech Hayrullah noted that they called on Greece to solve the issues of the Turkish community in Western Thrace in the field of education at the workshop and conference organized on 28 February and 2 March 2019 in Komotini, with the participation of Prof. Dr. Fernand de Varennes, UN Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues and academicians and experts from various countries of Europe including Turkey and Greece and she stated that they reiterate this call once again under the roof of the EP.

Afterwards, Käthe Freiberg-Nissen, Pedagogical Consultant at German School and Language Association in North Schleswig, Denmark, Anke Tästensen, Pedagogical Director at German School and Language Association in North Schleswig, Denmark had the floor and they provided information about the minority education system in Danish-German border region as an example of a good practice. Moreover, Dr. Alex Riemersma, Chair on Frisian and Multilingualism in Education at NHL Stenden university in Ljouwert/Leeuwarden conveyed the common problems of minorities in education.

At the closing session, EFA Director Günther Dauwen presented the recommendations regarding the solution for the problems of the Turkish community in Western Thrace experiencing in the field of education, which were derived from the result of conference and will be conveyed to Greece and European Commission.



**FUNDAMENTAL PROBLEMS
IN EDUCATION FACING
MINORITIES IN EUROPE:
COMPARING THE CASES OF
WESTERN THRACE TURKS
AND GERMAN MINORITY IN
DENMARK**

HOSTED BY:
MEP JOSEP-MARIA TERRICABRAS (GREENS-EFA)

20 March 2019 | 09:30-12:00 | European Parliament | Room A5E1



Working visit by ABTTF to Brussels

The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) paid a working visit to Brussels, the capital of the European Union (EU), on 6 February 2019. Halit Habip Oğlu, President of ABTTF, accompanied by Aykut Garipoğlu from the Brussels Office of ABTTF met within the scope of the working visit met with the members of the European Parliament (EP) Pál Csáky (EPP, Slovakia) and Bodil Valero (Greens/EFA, Sweden) as well as with Günther Dauwen, Director of the European Free Alliance (EFA), and Ralph Bunche, Secretary General of the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO).

Recent developments related to the Turkish community in Western Thrace were conveyed and joint activities for future were discussed

The first meeting within the scope of the working visit was held with the MEP Pál Csáky belonging to the Hungarian minority in Slovakia in his office at the EP. At the meeting, ABTTF President Habip Oğlu conveyed Csáky the recent developments regarding the problems and unjust treatments experienced by the Turkish community Western Thrace in the fields of education and freedom of religion to. The EP elections to be held in May 2019 were also discussed during the meeting.

ABTT President Habip Oğlu provided the MEP Bodil Valero, who was met by ABTTF for the first time, with information on the major problems of the Turkish community in Western Thrace. Habip Oğlu conveyed the problems experienced by the Turkish community in Western Thrace in the field of freedom of education to Valero who is the shadow rapporteur of the EP report on "Minimum standards for minorities in the EU" on behalf of the political group of the Greens/EFA. During the meeting, the



current minority problems in the EU were also discussed.

At the meeting held with the EFA Director Günther Dauwen at the headquarters of EFA in Brussels, joint activities between ABTTF and EFA for future were discussed. Within the scope of the working visit, the last meeting was held at the Brussels Office of ABTTF with Ralph Bunche, new secretary general of UNPO, an organization operating in the field of minority rights



and ABTTF cooperated with in the past, where collaboration opportunities between the two organizations were evaluated.

Working visit to Strasbourg by Western Thrace Turkish delegation

During the working visit, the judgements of ECtHR and ongoing legal process on Cultural Association of Turkish Women in the Prefecture of Rodopi and other Western Thrace Turkish Associations were brought onto the agenda.

The Western Thrace Turkish delegation under the leadership of Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF), in parallel to the 2019 Winter Ordinary General Session of Parliamentary Assembly of Council of Europe (PACE), made a visit to Strasbourg on 22-23 January 2019. The Western Thrace Turkish delegation composed of Halit Habip Ođlu, President of ABTTF, Hülya Emin, President of Cultural Association of Turkish Women in the Prefecture of Rodopi, Dr. Pervin Hayrullah, General Director of Culture and Education Foundation of Western Thrace Minority (BAKEŞ) and Head of Human Rights Department of Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association and Melek Kırmacı Arık, ABTTF International Relations Director held meetings with politicians, diplomats and eurocrats in Strasbourg.

On 22nd of January Tuesday, Western Thrace Turkish delegation had a meeting with Birger Gjelsten Veum, Deputy to the Permanent Representative of Norwegian Delegation to the Council of Europe, Viorel Riceard Badea, Vice-Chair of PACE Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination who drafted the report "promoting the rights of persons belonging to national minorities" and, George Stafford, Director of the European Implementation Network, a civil society organization advocating for fully and efficiently implementation of the judgements of European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) by the Council of Europe member states, Boriana Aberg, Chairperson of PACE Swedish National Delegation and Mustafa Yenerođlu, member of PACE Turkish delegation and AK Party İstanbul MP. The Western Thrace Turkish delegation continued its interventions at PACE on 23rd of



Commissioner for Human Rights, Genevieve Mayer, Deputy Head of the Secretariat of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe and Hohn Darcy from the Secretariat and Frank Schwabe, Deputy Chairperson of PACE German National Delegation.



During the meetings Halit Habip Ođlu, President of ABTTF and Hülya Emin, President of Cultural Association of Turkish Women in the Prefecture of Rodopi, emphasized that the judgements of ECtHR related to Western Thrace Turkish minority associations known to be "Bekir Ousta group cases" have not been implemented for 10 years and provided information about the ongoing legal process at Greek national courts. Habip Ođlu and Emin denoted that the judgements of ECtHR related to Xanthi Turkish Union-closed on the grounds of restrictions brought with the law number 4491/2017 and adopted in October 2017 at the Greek Parliament- and Cultural Association of Turkish Women in the Prefecture of Rodopi and Evros Minority Youth Association-unregistered due to the same law-have been made impossible to be implemented and asked the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe to continue supervising Greece closely for the cases of "Bekir Ousta group".



At the meetings, the delegation also conveyed the current problems that the Turkish community in Western Thrace experiences in the fields of education and religion accordingly expressed that through several laws and implementations, Greece explicitly violates the educational and religious autonomy of the Turkish community in Western Thrace guaranteed by the international and bilateral treaties. Prior to the voting on the report "promoting the rights of persons belonging to national minorities" and related resolution at the PACE General Assembly, the Western Thrace Turkish delegation in its meeting with the rapporteur Badea, explained the opinions and comments of the Turkish community in Western Thrace regarding the chapter on Greece of the report.



January, Wednesday and had meetings with Fredrik Sundberg, Head of the Department for the Execution of Judgments of the European Court of Human Rights and Nikolaos Sitaroploulos, lawyer from the aforementioned department, Matthieu Birker, Advisor of the Council of Europe

Western Thrace Turkish delegation attended the OSCE meeting on freedom of religion or belief

The Western Thrace Turkish delegation, consisted of representatives of ABTTF and WTMUGA, expressed the Greece's interferences aimed at abolishing the religious autonomy of the Turkish community in Western Thrace and the judicial proceedings against the elected Muftis.

Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) and Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association (WTMUGA) as representatives of the Turkish community in Western Thrace, participated at Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting organized by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) on 1-2 April 2019 in Vienna, Austria. At the first human dimension meeting of 2019 entitled "Upholding the Principles of Tolerance and Non-Discrimination, including in the Promotion and Protection of Freedom of Religion or Belief", Western Thrace Turkish delegation consisted of Melek Kırmacı Arık, ABTTF International Affairs Director, and Dr. Ali Hüseyinoğlu, Faculty Member and WTMUGA member raised the problems of the Turkish community in Western Thrace experienced in the area of freedom of religion and violation of the right to religious autonomy.

The Western Thrace Turkish delegation had the floor in the first session of the meeting on "Root Causes and Consequences of Racism and Discrimination in Connection to Religion or Belief", organized by Slovakia's OSCE Chairmanship for 2019 and OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR). The delegation recalled that the religious autonomy of the Turkish community in Western Thrace was guaranteed by the international treaties and had the right to choose its own religious leaders, the Muftis, and noted that Greece has been trying to abolish the autonomy of the Turkish community in Western Thrace in the field of religion through unilateral practices.

The Western Thrace Turkish delegation



stated that Greece does not recognize the Muftis elected by Western Thrace Turks and Muftis are appointed by the government according to the law entered into force in early 1990s. The delegation added that the administrative boards of foundations belonging to the Turkish community in Western Thrace have been identified through appointment since 1970s. The Western Thrace Turkish delegation conveyed the judicial proceedings against the Muftis elected by the Turkish community in Western which have been increased in recent years and turned out to be a tool of political pressure and intimidation. The delegation demanded that Greece should respect the right of the Turkish community in Western Thrace to elect their own religious leaders and stop the state interventions infringing their religious autonomy. Finally, the Western Thrace Turkish delegation reminded that Greece has a similar attitude

towards the Turks living on Rhodes, Kos and the Dodecanese regarding the issue of Muftis and foundations and noted that the Turkish community on the islands has not been able to fully enjoy their religious freedom for the last fifty years.

On the second day of the meeting, the Western Thrace Turkish delegation, had the floor in the second session entitled the "Security of Communities and Support to Victims: Good Practices of Addressing Discrimination, Hate and Violence against Christians, Jews, Muslims and other Religious or Belief Communities". The Western Thrace Turkish delegation indicated that hate speech against the Turkish community in Western Thrace threatens the peaceful environment in the region and expressed the examples of hate discourse in politics and media. The Western Thrace Turkish delegation noted that prior to the visit of Recep Tayyip Erdogan, President of Republic of Turkey, motherland of Western Thrace Turks, in December 2017, the papers including threat messages were laid in the streets and crosses were scratched on the walls of some houses. The delegation indicated that ABTTF and WTMUGA, representing the Turkish community in Western Thrace contribute to the OSCE Hate Crimes Report each year. The Western Thrace Turkish delegation stated that according to OSCE 2017 Hate Crimes Report, 128 hate crimes were recorded by the Greek police and about 46 out of which, judicial proceedings were conducted and only 6 of them resulted in conviction. The delegation added that majority of hated crimes based on Islamophobia has not yet been recognized in Greece and therefore they are not punished by the Greek authorities.

Greece, which used the right of reply in both sessions, stated that there is no country where the Muftis are assigned through election in the Islamic world and indicated that the Muftis are appointed by the state in Greece. Greece claimed that religious and cultural freedoms of the Turkish community in Western Thrace are fully respected and repeated the official state thesis and rejected the criticism of the Western Thrace Turkish delegation articulated in their presentations.

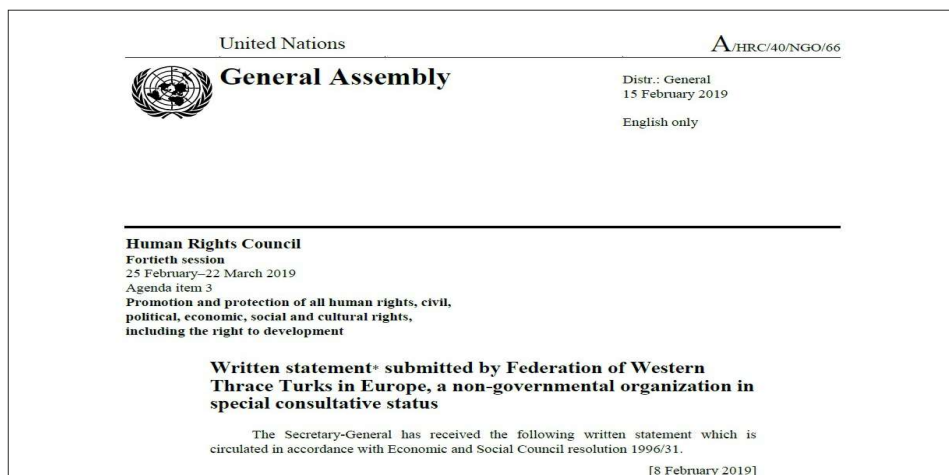
Written statement by ABTTF to the UN Human Rights Council

ABTTF brought the issue of non-execution of ECtHR judgements related to the associations of the Turkish community in Western Thrace by Greece onto the agenda.

Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) presented a written statement with the title “Restricting legislation threatening the freedom of association in Greece and problem of non-execution of ECtHR judgements regarding the Turkish community in Western Thrace” to the 40th ordinary session of United Nations (UN) Human Rights Council held on 25 February-22 March 2019 in Geneva, Switzerland. In its written statement, ABTTF emphasized that associations with “Turkish” name were closed and new ones were not allowed to be established and noted Greece breaches the freedom of association of the Turkish community in Western Thrace despite the judgements made by the European Court of Human Rights in three cases against Greece.

Greece insistently does not implement the judgements of ECtHR

ABTTF noted that Xanthi Turkish Union (İTB), the first association of the Turkish community in Western Thrace which was shut down because of the word “Turkish” in its name and Cultural Association of Turkish Women in the Prefecture of Rodopi and Evros Minority Youth Association of which their applications were declared inadmissible had lodged appeal to the ECtHR. ABTTF stated ECtHR found the three associations right and adjudicated that Greece breaches the article 11 of European Convention on Human Rights regarding the freedom of association.



ABTTF underscored, despite that 10 years have passed ECtHR judgements regarding the three associations of the Turkish community in Western Thrace were not executed and conveyed that Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe supervises the execution of the said judgements of the ECtHR under the name “Bekir Ousta group” and follows closely the ongoing legal process at the Greek national courts.

ABTTF drew the attention that judgements of ECtHR related to the Western Thrace Turkish associations were made impossible to be executed as per the new restrictions foreseen by the law 4491/7107 adopted in October 2017 by the Greek Parliament and indicated main objective of this law is not to permit the establishment of associations with “Turkish” name in Greece. ABTTF stated, following the adoption of the law in subject, the appeal made by Xanthi Turkish Union for the return of its official identity was rejected by the Court of Appeal of Thrace, thereupon the association applied to the Greek

Supreme Court however the date of the hearing has not yet been announced. Besides, ABTTF reported Cultural Association of Turkish Women in the Prefecture of Rodopi and Evros Minority Youth Association have appealed to the Court of Appeal of Thrace for the nullification of previous judgements of the court and these cases would be heard on 30 October 2019.

ABTTF underlined that currently there is no association in Western Thrace which bear the word “Turkish” in its name. ABTTF noted, the Cultural Association of Turkish Women in the Prefecture of Xanthi was first refused registration by the domestic court, then by the Court of Appeal of Thrace, and finally by the Supreme Court noting that the association's title was considered misleading and hence ABTTF called on Greece to take all necessary measures immediately in its national law regarding the execution of ECtHR judgements and respect the freedom of association of the Turkish community in Western Thrace.

You may access the written statement of ABTTF presented to UN Human Rights Council at the following link: <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G19/040/46/PDF/G1904046.pdf?OpenElement>

Study visit by ABTTF to Western Thrace with the participation of foreign experts

The foreign delegation consisted of the representatives of Minority Rights Group Europe, one of the prominent international organizations in the field of minority rights, observed on site the problems of the Turkish community in Western Thrace and developments in the region on site.

The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) organized a study visit to the region of Western Thrace in Greece. Neil Clarke, Managing Director of Minority Rights Group (MRG) Europe and Head of Europe & Central Asia Programmes with Anna Alboth, MRG Europe Media Programs Coordinator were among the study visit delegation consisted of Serdar Kalekoğlu, Vice President of ABTTF, Melek Kırmacı Arık, Director of International Affairs of ABTTF and Fatma Ahmetcik, Member of International Affairs and Lobbying Group of ABTTF.

On the first day of the study visit, the delegation firstly met with Hülya Emin, Chairwoman of the Cultural Association of Turkish Women of the Region of Rodopi. Right after, the delegation visited İbrahim Şerif, Virtuous Mufti of Komotini and President of Consultative Committee of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace (BTTADK) in his office and received information about history of the mufti question in Western Thrace. At the meeting it was conveyed that the Greek government would turn autonomous Mufti Offices into simple state departments and render the Mufti Offices incompetent, therefore, the Turkish community in Western Thrace entirely denies the draft presidential decree of 28.08.2018 and demands for



its withdrawal.

At the meeting hosted by Western Thrace Turkish Teachers Union (BTTÖB), the delegation had a joint meeting with BTTÖB, Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association (WTMUGA) and Culture and Education Foundation of Western Thrace Minority (BAKEŞ/C.E.FO.M.) and was provided information regarding the problems that the members of the Turkish community in Western Thrace face at the levels of primary, secondary, high school and higher education and their demands. Afterwards the delegation met with İsmet Kadi, Mayor

of Iasmos (Yassıköy), where they were informed about the services provided by the municipality and it was noted Turkish and Greek populations living together within the borders of the municipality are treated equally. At the meeting, also, while the details regarding the Mayor Kadi's recent detention were provided, it was mentioned that the mayor was called to bear testimony many times on various grounds.

Following the visit to Municipality of Iasmos (Yassıköy), the delegation had a meeting at Komotini Turkish Youth Union (GTGB) and here received information about the history and

activities of the association which was banned because its name includes the word "Turkish". Later the delegation visited the headquarters of the Friendship, Equality, Peace Party (DEB); political representative of the Turkish community in Western Thrace, in Komotini. At the meeting held here, the history of establishment of the DEB Party, the Party's success in European Parliament (EP) elections in May 2014 and issues regarding the three percent election threshold which also applies for independent candidates in the whole of Greece were conveyed and the statistics related to impacts of the economic crisis in Greece on Western Thrace region were exchanged with the delegation.

On the second day of the study visit, the delegation firstly met with Ahmet Mete, Virtuous Mufti of Komotini. At the meeting, the delegation was informed about the Mufti question in Western Thrace, 240 Imam Law and the draft presidential decree seeking to restructure autonomous Mufti Offices and bring a new working system. Afterwards, the delegation visited Xanthi Turkish Union and received information about their ongoing legal struggle and the work of the association which was banned because of the word "Turkish" in its name and had filed a case and won at European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR).

As part of the visit, lastly, the delegation met with Cemil Kabza, Mayor of Myki (Mustafçova) and Vice President of BTTADK and the delegation was given information about the work of the municipality- of which all its population is Turkish- and the representation of the Turkish community in Western Thrace at local level.





Hate motivated attacks against the Turkish community in Western Thrace addressed in the OSCE 2017 Hate Crime Data

The Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) published on 16 November on the International Day for Tolerance the 2017 Hate Crime Data. The hate motivated attacks in 2017 targeting the Turkish community in Western Thrace, Greece are also included in the 2017 data.

The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) had provided a written contribution during the preparation of OSCE 2017 Hate Crime Data and reported the hate motivated attacks in 2017 against the Turkish community in Western Thrace. Accordingly, the 2017 data refer to the attack in January 2017 on the radio channel Çınar FM belonging to the Turkish community in Western Thrace with headquarters in Komotini and broadcasting in Turkish and the harm given intentionally to the main antenna of the radio by unknown persons, the arson attack by unknown persons in February 2017 on the private vehicle of İlhan Tahsin, owner and chief editor of the newspaper Birlik belonging to the Turkish community in Western Thrace, the attack on Celal Bayar Minority Secondary and High School in March 2017 through harming the doors and windows of the school, dropping sound bomb in the garden of İdadiye Türk Minority Primary School during the class of physical education



by unknown persons, pointing as target and threatening directly the executives of the Xanthi Turkish Union (İTB) which is the oldest association of the Turkish community in

Western Thrace on some internet pages and social media with their names and photographs given by a racist group who call themselves as "High-Level Patrol Group" and the attack on the branch of the Didymoteicho-Evros Muslims Education and Cultural Association in Feres one day after its inauguration and breaking of the windows of the association by unknown persons in October 2017, and the attack on the Macedonian-Thrace Muslims Education and Culture Association in Thessaloniki through throwing eggs on the windows of the association prior to the Friday prayer in December 2017. Furthermore, the attempted arson attack with Molotov cocktails by a group wearing masks on the Consulate General of Turkey in Thessaloniki in April 2017 is also included in the 2017 data.

The 2017 Hate Crime Data contain official information reported by 39 OSCE participating States as well as information on hate incidents in 47 OSCE participating States, as reported by 124 civil society groups. As per official data reported by Greece, 128 hate crimes were recorded in 2017 by the Greek police, 46 of them were prosecuted and there were 6 sentences.

The 2017 hate crime data related to Greece is available at:

<http://hatecrime.osce.org/greece>

ABTTF Newsletter

The ABTTF Newsletter in four languages, namely in Turkish, English, Greek and German, is celebrating its 15th year.

The ABTTF Newsletter, in which the matters of grave concern to the Turkish community in Western Thrace, latest developments in Western Thrace and Greece, in particular pertaining to the minority issues and policies, international activities and lobbying of ABTTF aimed at obtaining solutions for the for the problems of the Turkish community through democracy and peace and information on the activities of the associations of the Turkish community throughout Europe and the world are dealt with, is being followed with great interest not only by Western Thrace Turks, but also by large parts of the public.

To have more information on subscription to the ABTTF Newsletter, please do not hesitate to contact us.

ABTTF

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