



Avrupa Batı Trakya Türk Federasyonu Föderation der West-Thrakien Türken in Europa Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe Ευρωπαϊκή Ομοσπονδία Τούρκων Δυτικής Θράκης Fédération des Turcs de Thrace Occidentale en Europe

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)

Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) International Activities January-December 2019

Summary Activity Report

Study visit to the Council of Europe, 22-23 January 2019/Strasbourg, France



At the study 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 to the agenda.

The Western Thrace Turkish delegation under the leadership of 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 Oğlu, 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 (EIN), 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 Yeneroğlu, member of PACE Turkish delegation and AK Party İstanbul MP. The Western Thrace Turkish delegation continued its interventions at PACE on 23rd of 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 Sitaropoulos, lawyer from the aforementioned department, Matthieu Birker, Advisor of the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, Genevieve Mayer, Deputy Head of the Secretariat of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe and John

Darcy from the Secretariat and Frank Schwabe, Deputy Chairperson of PACE German National Delegation.

During the meetings, the Western Thrace Turkish delegation 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.

Working visit to Brussels, 6 February 2019/ Brussels, Belgium

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). During the meetings, ABTTF President Halit Habip Oğlu explained the latest developments regarding issues and injustices the Turkish community in Western Thrace faces regarding education and freedom of worship. Furthermore, he discussed future joint efforts and cooperation with EFA and UNPO.



Written Statement to UN Human Rights Council’s 40th session, 25 February- 21 March 2019/ Geneva, Switzerland



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-21 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.

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.

“Bilingual Education: A Minority Issue-Bilingualism in Turkish/Muslim Minority Education and Different Approaches in the World- Problems and Possible Solutions” international workshop and conference, 2 March 2019/ Komotini, Greece



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 Varennes, United Nations (UN) Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues, made a speech as the special guest.

In the morning of 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. The conference focused on the importance of mother tongue and bilingual education for national minorities and the development of the minority's bilingual education system in Western Thrace. Bringing together academics and experts from Turkey, Greece and Europe, the problems experienced in the bilingual minority education system of the Turkish community in Western Thrace were discussed in detail and solutions were expressed.

“Fundamental Problems in Education Facing Minorities in Europe: Comparing the Cases of Western Thrace Turks and German Minority in Denmark” Conference, 20 March 2019/ Brussels, Belgium



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.

The conference which drew great interest and was well attended, started with the opening speeches of MEP Josep-Maria Terricabras and Halit Habip Ođlu, President of ABTTF. Dr. Pervin Hayrullah, General Director of Culture and Education Foundation of Western Thrace Minority (PEKEM), Kathe 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.

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.

Parallel report by ABTTF to the Greece 2018 Human Rights Report, 29 March 2019



ABTTF has prepared a parallel report in response to the statements related to the Turkish community in Western Thrace in the Greece 2018 Human Rights Report published by the United States Department of State. In its parallel report submitted to the US authorities, ABTTF gave detailed information on the issues related to the Turkish community in Western Thrace and reported on current developments which are not covered in the USA report.

In its parallel report, ABTTF underlined that the Greece does not recognize the

ethnic Turkish identity of the Turkish community in Western Thrace and stated that today, there is no official association with a Turkish name registered by local courts in Greece. ABTTF noted that Greece has not yet implemented judgements of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) regarding the Xanthi Turkish Union, Turkish Women in the Prefecture of Rodopi and Evros Minority Youth Association even though more than ten years have passed after the judgements. ABTTF also highlighted that the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe follows closely the implementation of the ECtHR judgements on the so-called "Bekir Ousta Group Cases" and provided information in detail about the ongoing legal process at the national Greek courts.

Regarding the issues on education, ABTTF stated that the autonomy of education of the Turkish community in Western Thrace which was guaranteed by the treaties has been undermined by the Greek government's policies and laws in the last years. In its report, ABTTF added that bilingual minority primary schools were closed on the grounds of economic reasons and the number of minority primary schools which was 194 in 2008 has decreased to 128 in 2018.

Regarding freedom of religion, ABTTF reminded that the Turkish community in Western Thrace was granted the right to choose their own religious leaders through the 1940 Athens Treaty and the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne and explained that Greece still does not recognize the Muftis elected by the Turkish community in Western Thrace. Furthermore, ABTTF stated that the law adopted at the Greek Parliament in January 2018 which renders the sharia powers used by the Muftis in the field of family and heritage optional, is another step towards abolishing the religious autonomy of the Turkish community in Western Thrace.

Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting at OSCE, 1-2 April 2019, Vienna/Austria

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.

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 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.

Participation to YEN Easter Seminar, 12-19 April 2019/ Sfantu George/Sepsiszentgyörgy, Romania

Young ABTTF attended the Easter Seminar held by the Youth of European Nations (YEN) on 12-19 April 2019 in Sfantu George/Sepsiszentgyörgy, Romania. The seminar, attended by Aykut Garipoğlu, representing Young ABTTF, was hosted by MIERT, the youth organisation of Romania's Hungarian minority.



On the first day of the seminar, YEN President Giunna Belli and President Oltean Csongor on behalf of the host organization MIERT addressed representatives of minority youth organizations from many different countries of Europe. Following the speeches, participants were

divided into groups for workshops on "protection of the rights of national minorities and the legal framework", "inclusive education" and "media and minorities". The young ABTTF representative, in accordance with the themes of the workshops he participated in, gave information to the participants with respect to the lack of recognition of the Turkish identity, problems experienced in the field of educational autonomy as well as attempts to eliminate religious autonomy of the Turkish community in Western Thrace. Furthermore, information was given to the participants about the current legal instruments on issues of protection of minority rights and inclusive education, such as the 'Framework Convention on the Protection of National Minorities of the Council of Europe' and the Federal Union of European Nations (FUEN) 'Initiative for the Protection of Minorities' (MSPI).

Communication to the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, 30 April 2019



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Satu Mattila-Budich
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Written, 30/04/2019

Subject: The group of cases Bekir-Usta and Others v. Greece (Application No. 35151/05)

Dear Ms. Chairperson of the Ministers' Deputies Satu Mattila-Budich,
 Her Excellency,

I am writing you in my capacity as the President of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) to report the state of execution of the group of cases Bekir Usta and others v. Greece (application No. 35151/05) under Rules 9(1) and 9(2) of the Rules of the Committee of Ministers for the supervision of the execution of judgments with a request that this letter is taken into consideration at the 1354th meeting (September 2019) (DH) of the Ministers' Deputies at the latest.

Following the decision of the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) which stipulated that Greece violated the freedom to form an association with respect to Bekir Usta and others group cases of the Turkish Union of Xanthi, Rhodope Turkish Women's Cultural Association and the Province of Evros Minority Youth, ABTTF prepared a letter containing current developments regarding the Association's applications to the national courts. The letter has been sent to Satu Mattila-Budich, Finland's Permanent Representative to the Council of Europe, and Fredrik Sundberg, head of the ECHR Execution Decisions Department.

Participation to FUEN Education Working Group Meeting, 6-8 May 2019/ Brussels, Belgium



ABTTF participated at the annual meeting of the Education Working Group of the Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN), held on 6-8 May 2019 at the European Committee of the Regions in Brussels. At the meeting held in parallel to the first European Regional Forum on Minority Issues organised by Fernand de Varennes, United Nations (UN) Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues with the support of the Tom Lantos Institute on 6-7 May 2019 in Brussels, ABTTF conveyed the problems experienced in education and the work carried out on education throughout the year to the representatives of other FUEN member minority organisations in Europe.

ABTTF drew attention to the fact that decisions violating the educational autonomy of Turkish community in Western Thrace have been taken by Greece without the approval of the Turkish community in Western Thrace and underlined the importance of the solutions to be presented within the framework of MSPI for the solution of educational problems of the Turkish community in

Western Thrace. The meeting ended after the evaluation and presentation of proposals by the participants.

Participation to first regional forum on UN Minority Issues, 6-7 May 2019/ Brussels, Belgium



ABTTTF participated at the 1st Regional Forum on Minority Issues held on 6-7 May 2019 in Brussels, for the first time, by Prof. Fernand de Varennes, United Nations (UN) Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues. The conference was organized with the support of the Tom Lantos Institute based in Budapest. At the forum where Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN) participated also as one of the partner organizations, as representatives of the Turkish community in Western Thrace, Melek Kırmacı Arık, International Relations Director of ABTTTF and Aykut Garipoğlu, ABTTTF Brussels Office Coordinator attended the forum as well as that Dr. Ali Hüseyinoğlu, Member of Western Thrace Minority University

Graduates Association (BTAYTD) and Faculty Member of the Institute of Balkan Studies at the University of Thrace also participated as a guest speaker at the forum. ABTTTF spoke in the last session and raised the crises in the textbooks in the minority schools and minority schools' protests in September 2018 and brought to the agenda the reduction of Turkish lessons in Medrese-i Hayriye in Komotini. ABTTTF expressed that practices implemented with a unilateral and compelling understanding by Greek authorities created mistrust and called the Greek authorities to bring solutions to the problems in cooperation with the Turkish community in Western Thrace.

FUEN 2019 Congress, 12-16 June 2019/ Bratislava and Dunajská Streda, Slovakia

ABTTTF participated at the 64th annual congress of the Federal Union of the European Nationalities (FUEN), held in Bratislava, capital city of Slovakia, and in the city of Dunajská Streda on 12-16 June 2019. Halit Habip Oğlu, President of ABTTTF and Vice President of FUEN, Sami Yusuf, Sebahattin Mümin, Aydın Ahmet and Bülent Çolak, Vice Presidents of ABTTTF and Melek Kırmacı Arık, ABTTTF International Relations Director participated at the congress in which 70th anniversary of FUEN was celebrated and hosted by the Hungarian minority and Carpathian Germans in Slovakia.



Halit Habip Oğlu, President of ABTTTF has been elected as the Vice President of FUEN for the third time for 2019-2022 period at the FUEN Board of Delegates held within the framework of the congress which was attended by over 200 minority representatives from different countries of Europe. Besides, at the FUEN Board of Delegates, the resolution on the main problems of Turkish community in Western Thrace in education jointly presented by ABTTTF, Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association (WTMUGA) and Friendship Equality Peace Party (FEP) which together represent the Turkish community in Western Thrace under the umbrella of FUEN, was adopted unanimously. And the resolution on the right to learn the mother tongue and education in mother tongue presented by Rhodes, Kos and the Dodecanese Turks Culture and Solidarity

Association (ROISDER) representing Rhodes and Kos Turks at the congress was also adopted unanimously.

Within the framework of the congress, elections were held for the FUEN Presidium consisted of the chairman and six vice-presidents at the FUEN Delegates Board on Saturday, June 15. At the election total of 221 votes were casted and 2 votes were void. The current president of FUEN, Loránt Vincze, who ran in the presidential elections as the only candidate, received 196 votes and was once again elected as FUEN President for the next three years. In total, 9 candidates competed for the Vice Presidency of FUEN. Halit Habip Ođlu, President of ABTTF and current Vice President of FUEN was elected as the Vice President of FUEN for the third time by receiving the second most votes among the candidates with 170 votes.

Written Statement to UN Human Rights Council's 41st session, 24 June- 12 July 2019/ Geneva, Switzerland



At the occasion of the UN Human Rights Council, which was held in Geneva from 24 June to 12 July 2019, ABTTF submitted a written statement entitled "The right to education in mother tongue and problems in the bilingual education system of Turkish society in Western Thrace, Greece". In its statement, ABTTF underlined that children of the Turkish community in Western Thrace do not have minority kindergartens with two languages, their mother tongue, Turkish and the state language

of Greek, and that all Turkish children in preschool period do not have only Greek. Furthermore, it was highlighted that the obligation to attend public kindergartens that provide education is contrary to minority rights.

Parallel report by ABTTF on the US 2018 Report on International Religious Freedom: Greece, 23 July 2019

ABTTF drafted a parallel report in response to 2018 Report of United States (US) Department of State on International Religious Freedom: Greece, which was announced on June 21, 2019 and forwarded it to the US authorities. In the parallel report by the ABTTF, the Mufti issue and foundations belonging to the Turkish community in Western Thrace who has religious autonomy pursuant to the international treaties, and the "240 Imam Law" were mentioned in detail in the scope of religious freedom.



ABTTF stated that although the Turkish community in Western Thrace has the right to choose their own religious leaders, Muftis, according to the 1913 Treaty of Athens and the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne, the Greek government has been appointing the Muftis or Mufti regents since 1991. ABTTF highlighted that Western Thrace Turks who oppose to the appointment of Muftis by the state and elect their own Muftis however those Muftis

are not recognized by the Greek government. ABTTF also noted that Ibrahim řerif, elected Mufti of Rhodope has been constantly subjected to judicial proceedings in recent years on the grounds that "he usurped the Mufti office" and used illegally the religious symbols.

ABTTF reminded that unilateral steps of the Greek government regarding the Muftis are a violation of the religious autonomy of the Turkish community in Western Thrace and called on Greece to restore the educational and religious autonomy of the Turkish community in Western Thrace guaranteed by the international treaties. In addition, ABTTF criticized the US, which included the problems of Western Thrace Turks in the religious field into the report from the Greek point of view based on official policy and claims of the Greek state, and asked from US diplomatic representatives and officials to meet with the Western Thrace Turks and draft the report with more balanced and objective approach by covering the views of the Western Thrace Turks more in the report.

Working visit to Strasbourg, 17 September 2019/ Strasbourg, France



On 17 September 2019, in the visit to Strasbourg, the delegation of Western Thrace Turks raised the problems regarding the non-implementation of the ECtHR judgements by Greece for 11 years on the associations such as Cultural Association of Turkish Women in the Prefecture of Rhodopi and other Western Thrace Turks association.

The delegation consisted of Hülya Emin, President of Cultural Association of Turkish Women in the Prefecture of Rhodopi, Dr. Pervin Hayrullah, Chair of the Human Rights Branch of Western Thrace Minority University Graduates

Association and Melek Kırmacı Arık, International Affairs Director of ABTTF had meetings with Geneviève Mayer, Deputy to the Secretary to the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, John Darcy, officer in the Secretariat and, Nikolaos Sitaropoulos and Dimitrios Kalogiros, lawyers who work in the Department for Execution of ECtHR judgements of Council of Europe.

In the meeting conducted in Strasbourg before the meeting of Committee of Ministers which will be held on 23-25 September 2019, the delegation of Western Thrace Turks explained the current status following the adoption of the law 4491/2017 by providing information about the legal domestic proceedings of the Cultural Association of Turkish Women in the Prefecture of Rhodopi, Xanthi Turkish Union and Evros Minority Youth Association included in the “Bekir Ousta” group of cases.

OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting, 19 September 2019/ Warsaw, Poland



ABTTF, as the representative of the Turkish community in Western Thrace participated in the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Human Dimension Implementation Meeting, which was held in Warsaw, capital of Poland on 16-27 September 2019. K. Engin Soyylmaz, ABTTF Head Office Manager attended the Europe’s largest annual human rights meeting.

The meeting brought together OSCE member states, international organisations, NGO representatives and human rights experts. In the session entitled “fundamental freedoms, including freedom of peaceful assembly and association” which was held on 19th September, ABTTF stated that the associations belonging to the Turkish community in Western Thrace whose names include the word “Turkish” have been shut down and are not allowed to be registered.

ABTTF noted that for 11 years, Greece has not been implementing persistently the judgements of ECtHR against itself on Xanthi Turkish Union, Cultural Association of Turkish Women in the Prefecture of Rhodopi and Evros Minority Youth Association included in the “Bekir Ousta” group of cases. ABTTF added that the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe monitors closely the implementation of these judgements. ABTTF indicated that Xanthi Turkish Union applied for the restoration of its legal entity after the law 4491/2017 was adopted to allegedly pave the way for the implementation of the ECtHR judgements however the application of Xanthi Turkish Union was rejected by the Court of Appeal in Thrace. ABTTF added that the appeal of the association to the Court of Cassation will be heard on 20 March 2020. ABTTF called Greece to fully respect the freedom of association of the Turkish community in Western Thrace and take measures immediately for the implementation of the three judgements taken by the ECtHR against itself.

Meeting with Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, 1 October 2019/ Strasbourg, France

On 1 October 2019, the delegation of Western Thrace Turks paid a special meeting to Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, Minister of Foreign Affairs of motherland Turkey and Honorary President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) in Strasbourg, France. The delegation of Western Thrace Turks was composed of Halit Habip Oğlu, President of ABTTF, Ozan Ahmetoğlu, President of the Xanthi Turkish Union (İTB), Hülya Emin, President of the Cultural Association of Turkish Women in the Prefecture of Rhodopi, Dr. Pervin Hayrullah, General Director of the Culture and Education Foundation of Western Thrace Minority (PEKEM) and Chair of the Human Rights Branch of Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association and Melek Kırmacı Arık, International Affairs Director of ABTTF. During the meeting, the delegation of Western Thrace Turks conveyed to Minister Çavuşoğlu the current problems of the Turkish community in Western Thrace and the lobbying and reporting efforts carried out in that respect within the ranks of the Council of Europe in order to find long lasting solutions.



Working visit to the Council of Europe, 30 September-2 October 2019/ Strasbourg, France

The delegation which consisted of the representatives of the Turkish community in Western Thrace paid a working visit to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe between 30 September and 2 October. During the working visit, the current issues of the Turkish community in Western Thrace particularly non-implementation of the European Court of Human Rights' judgements on the associations of Western Thrace Turks by Greece for 11 years were raised.

The delegation of Western Thrace Turks consisted of Halit Habip Oğlu, President of ABTTF, Ozan Ahmetoğlu, President of the Xanthi Turk-



ish Union (İTB), Hülya Emin, President of the Cultural Association of Turkish Women in the Prefecture of Rhodopi, Dr. Pervin Hayrullah, General Director of the Culture and Education Foundation of Western Thrace Minority (PEKEM) and Chair of the Human Rights Branch of Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association and Melek Kırmacı Arık, International Affairs Director of ABTTF. The delegation had meetings with diplomats and high-level officers in Council of Europe as part of the 2019 Autumn Ordinary Plenary Session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE).

Within the context of the working visit, the delegation had meetings with Dunja Mijatovic, Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, Fredrik Sundberg, Head of the Department for the execution of judgments of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) of the Council of Europe, Goran Beus Richembergh, Chairperson of PACE Sub-Committee on the Rights of Minorities, Sixto Molina, Head of the Secretariat of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, Zeynep Usal Kanzler and Camilla Tesenyi from the Secretariat of European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) and Agnieszka Szklanna from the Secretariat of PACE Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights. Moreover, the delegation met with the diplomats from the permanent delegations of six countries to the Council of Europe in a joint meeting. The delegation also had meetings with deputies from Council of Europe member states. Accordingly, the delegation had an opportunity to meet Yorgo Papandreu, former Prime Minister of Greece and Member of Parliament from KINAL.

In the meetings, the delegation of Western Thrace Turks stated that the judgements of ECtHR regarding the Cultural Association of Turkish Women in the Prefecture of Rhodopi, the Xanthi Turkish Union and Evros Minority Youth Association included in the “Bekir Ousta” group of cases have not been implemented by Greece for 11 years. The delegation provided information about the ongoing legal procedure in Greek domestic courts following the adoption of the law 4491/2017.

OSCE Conference on Lund Recommendations, 14 November 2019/ Lund, Sweden



ABTTF attended the conference entitled “From Lund to Ljubljana: Promoting the participation of national minorities as a pathway to the integration of diverse societies”, hosted by Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) High Commissioner on National Minorities on 14 November 2019. Melek Kırmacı Arık, ABTTF International Affairs Director represented Western Thrace Turks at the conference organised in Lund, Sweden to mark the 20th anniversary of the Lund recommendations on the effective participation of national minorities in public life.

At the session where the minority participation with the focus on Sweden was discussed, ABTTF took the floor and said that because of the non-recognition of the “Turkish” ethnic identity of the Turkish community in Western Thrace, the community faces many obstacles in the participation of social, cultural and religious life in contradiction with the autonomy they have in the field of education and religion.

At the panel in the afternoon where the participation of national minorities in the political life and decision-making process is addressed in detail, ABTTF noted that Greece considers the issue of Western Thrace Turks as a matter of national security therefore considers Western Thrace Turks as dangerous. As an example, ABTTF explained the 3 percent election threshold against the participation of Western Thrace Turks in the political life and added that through this threshold, the representation of Western Thrace Turks with their political party in the parliament is prevented.

Contribution to OSCE Hate Crimes 2018 Greece Report, 16 November 2019



The 2018 Hate Crimes Report, prepared by the Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), was released. The report includes hate crimes and attacks in the OSCE region. ABTTF contributed to the report, as in previous years, by providing written report on prejudice-related hate crimes across Greece in preparation.

The OSCE's 2018 Hate Crimes Report, in which 41 participating States present official data, includes information on hate incidents in 44 Participatory States shared by 178 NGOs. 5,735 hate crimes were committed in the OSCE region in 2018, the report said, according to official data presented by Greece, a total of 164 hate crimes were recorded by the Greek police last year, 17 of them were prosecuted by the prosecutor's office conducted, all 6 prosecutions resulted in convictions.

UN Forum on Minority Issues, 28-29 November 2019/ Geneva, Switzerland



As representatives of the Turkish community in Western Thrace, ABTTF and Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association (WTMUGA) attended the 12th Session of the United Nations (UN) Forum on Minority Issues organised on 28-29 November 2019 in Geneva, Switzerland. Delegation of Western Thrace Turks consisted of K. Engin Soyylmaz, ABTTF Head Office Manager, Meltem Giritli, pedagogue and Executive Committee Member of WTMUGA, İlker Çavuşoğlu, Advisor on International Law and Human Rights at WTMUGA attended the forum organised on the theme "Education, Language and the Human Rights of Minorities". Prof. Mustafa Kaymakçı, President of Rhodes, Kos and the Dodecanese Turks Culture and Solidarity Association (ROİSDER) attended the forum on behalf of Rhodes, Kos and the Dodecanese Turks.

ABTTF took the floor at the third session entitled "public policy objectives for education in, and the teaching of, minority languages" and said that the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne rendered the Turkish community in Western Thrace autonomous in the field of education accordingly the community was granted to the right to establish and manage their schools together with the right to education in mother tongue. ABTTF highlighted that the autonomy in education of the Turkish community in Western Thrace has been systematically violated by Greece. In addition, ABTTF expressed that autonomous primary schools were shut down on the grounds of the low number of students and the establishment of bilingual minority preschools is systematically not permitted by the Greek authorities. ABTTF stated that Greece state pursues unilateral and imposing education policies and called upon Greek authorities to find solutions for the problems in dialogue with the Turkish community in Western Thrace.

Meeting with OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, 9 December 2019/ The Hague, Netherlands

As representatives of the Turkish community in Western Thrace, ABTTF and Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association (WTMUGA) paid a working visit to the Hague, Netherlands on 9 December 2019. During the working visit led by ABTTF, the delegation of Western Thrace Turks consisted of Halit Habip Ođlu, President of ABTTF, Melek Kırmacı Arık, ABTTF International Affairs Director, İlhan Mehmet, Deputy Chairman of WTMUGA, Dr. Pervin Hayrullah, Chair of the Human Rights Committee of WTMUGA. The delegation had a meeting with Ambassador Lamberto Zannier, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) High Commissioner on National Minorities in his office.



In the meeting, the delegation of Western Thrace Turks informed High Commissioner about the hate speech in Greece which considers the Turkish community in Western Thrace, Greece as “the other”, “threat” and “dangerous” and the systematic discrimination to which the community is subjected in daily life by giving examples. The delegation stated that the status and rights of the Turkish community in Western Thrace are defined by 1923 Treaty of Lausanne. Moreover, the delegation noted that Greece treats the Turkish community in Western Thrace as a national security issue and that historical prejudices and dogmatic ideas are in every aspect of social life. Finally, the delegation expressed that there is no direct and constructive dialogue mechanism with Greek state for the solution of current problems.