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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 Studies/Activities January-December 2020

### Summary Activity Report

#### Interview with 'Ilinden' newspaper of Albania's Macedonian minority, 17 January 2020



ABTTF President and Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN) Vice President Halit Habip Oğlu gave a special interview to 'Ilinden', the newspaper of the Macedonian minority living in Albania. Habip Oğlu which responded to the questions of Ilinden Newspaper Editor-in-Chief Nikolla Gjurgjaj in a written manner gave precisions with respect to ABTTF's international activities aimed at resolving the problems of the Turkish community in Western Thrace living in Greece and FUEN's initiatives on national minorities in European Union (EU) countries.

Indicating that oppressive and intimidating policies which started to show its influence against the Turkish community in Western Thrace in Greece in the 1960s and later

intensified in the 1970s bringing large scale emigration from the region, Habip Oğlu added that these policies which were implemented by Greece against Western Thrace Turks showed itself by 'melting down' and 'forceful migration'. Habip Oğlu noted that ABTTF was founded in Germany on 28 February 1988 in an effort to create an umbrella organisation which would bring a voice at the international level against the Greek government which is denying the fact that the Turkish community in Western Thrace in Greece is 'Turkish', adding that ABTTF for more than thirty years has been advocating for rights and pursuing lobbying activities on behalf of Western Thrace Turks at the international level within the framework of the Council of Europe, the United Nations, OSCE and the European Union.

## Working visit to Athens, 21 January 2020 / Athens, Greece

ABTTF paid a working visit to Athens, Greece. ABTTF President Halit Habip Oglu and ABTTF Vice President Mustafa Kasap held a series of meetings within the framework of the visit.

ABTTF delegation first met with Petros Konstantinou, President of the United Movement Against Racism and the Fascist Threat (KEERFA), a non-governmental organisation that operates extensively throughout Greece. During the meeting held at KEERFA's head office, the activities of ABTTF and the problems of the Turkish community in Western Thrace were discussed.

One of the key stops of the visit was the Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany in Athens as about 30,000 Western Thrace Turks live in Germany. During the meeting with Deputy Head of Mission of German Embassy Heike Dettmann who accepted the ABTTF delegation in her office, the activities of ABTTF and the problems of the Turkish community in Western Thrace were conveyed.



In the Athens branch of the Young Academicians' Community (GAT), young Western Thrace Turks studying at the universities in Athens welcomed the ABTTF delegation, and they exchanged warm and friendly conversations.

The ABTTF delegation also paid a courtesy visit to the Embassy of the Republic of Turkey in Athens as part of its working visit.

## Working visit to Brussels, 4 February 2020 / Brussels, Belgium



ABTTF paid a working visit to Brussels, the capital of the European Union (EU). ABTTF President Halit Habip Oglu and ABTTF Vice-President Sami Yusuf were accompanied by Deniz Servantie from ABTTF Brussels Office. The ABTTF delegation had meetings with the members of the European Parliament (EP) including Herbert Dorfmann (EPP, Italy) belonging to the German minority in Italy, Tatjana Ždanoka (Greens/EFA, Latvia) belonging to the Russian minority in Latvia as well as Loránt Vincze (EPP, Romania) belonging to the Hungarian minority in Romania and who is also President of the Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN) at the same time.

During the meetings with the MEPs who are specialised in minority rights, the current problems of the Turkish community in Western Thrace and latest developments in the Western Thrace region were conveyed. As such, ABTTF President Habip Oglu referred to continuing hate speech in Greece against the Turkish community in Western Thrace. Indeed, he indicated it in the remarks of some Greek politicians as well as in some news and comments, the Turkish community in Western

Thrace is seen as the “other” and that it is continued to be portrayed as if it constituted a “threat” and “danger” for Greece.

### **Working visit to Western Thrace, 14 March 2020 / Western Thrace, Greece**

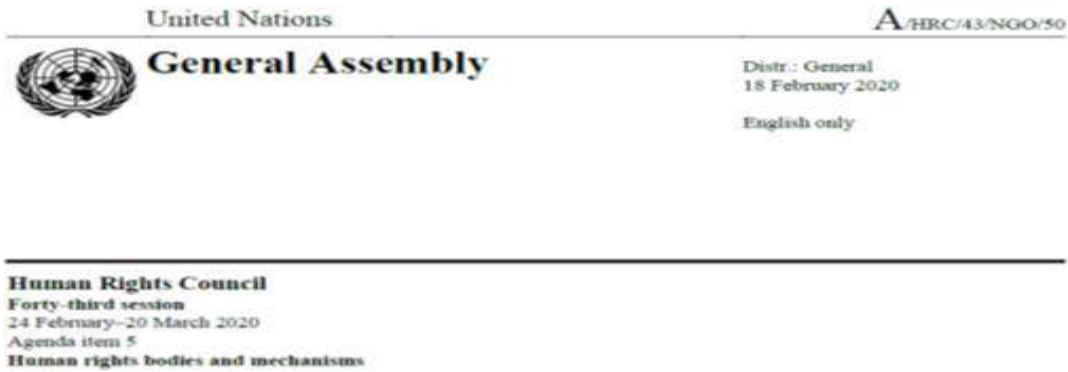
ABITTF delegation, formed by ABITTF President Halit Habip Oğlu and ABITTF Vice President Sami Yusuf visited the offices of the Muftis elected by the Turkish community in Western Thrace and had meetings with the Elected Mufti of Rhodope and the President of Consultative Committee of Turkish Minority of Western Thrace (BTTADK) İbrahim Şerif and the Elected Mufti of Xanthi Ahmet Mete.



Within consultations and meetings in Western Thrace, ABITTF delegation visited İbrahim Şerif in his office in Komotini and congratulated Şerif for being re-elected the president of BTTADK. ABITTF President Halit Habip Oğlu expressed his support for the Consultative Committee and Şerif, the highest decision-making body of the Turkish community in Western Thrace and his readiness for all kinds of cooperation and support as ABITTF in the fight for rights and freedoms of the Turkish community in Western Thrace.

ABITTF delegation also visited Ahmet Mete in Xanthi. ABITTF delegation expressed its solidarity with Mete following his sentence to four-month of imprisonment in the case where he was allegedly accused of ‘usurpation of office’ as a result of having attended a funeral and having led a religious ceremony in the village of Glafki (Gökçeşinar) following the death of Ahmet Katunlu, a member of the Turkish community in Western Thrace who died by drowning during his military service on 14 July 2016. ABITTF President Halit Habip Oğlu expressed support for the Mufti Mete as ABITTF and discussed the current problems of Western Thrace Turks with him.

### **Written statement to the 43<sup>rd</sup> session of the UN Human Rights Council, 24 February- 20 March 2020 / Geneva, Switzerland**



The UN Human Rights Council organised its 43<sup>rd</sup> session on 24 February-20 March in Geneva. ABITTF which is a Member which Special Consultative Status at the UN Economic and Social Council sent its written statement entitled ‘Permanent structural and systematic problems in the education of Turkish community children in Western Thrace, Greece’ to the UN through its online system.

## Parallel report by ABTTF to the Greece 2019 Human Rights Report, 1 April 2020



ABTTF prepared a parallel report as a response to the explanations related to the Turkish community in Western Thrace in the Greece 2018 Human Rights Report published by the United States Department of State and sent it to the US competent authorities. In its parallel report, ABTTF detailed the problems experienced by the Turkish community in Western Thrace and cited current developments not included in the US report.

In its parallel report, ABTTF underlined that Greece does not recognize the ethnic Turkish identity of the Turkish community in Western Thrace, noting that it does not allow associations which include the word “Turkish” in their names. ABTTF noted that the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) had ruled that Greece had violated Article 11 of the European Convention of Human Rights which stipulates freedom of association in three judgments it had delivered in 2007 and 2008 with respect to the closure of the Xanthi Turkish Union and the non-registration by Greek courts of the Cultural Association of Turkish Women of the Rodopi Province and the Evros Prefecture Minority Youth Association. Furthermore, ABTTF indicated that despite the years that have passed, Greece has still not implemented ECtHR judgments regarding the said cases.

Regarding the issue of education, ABTTF stressed that the Turkish community in Western Thrace has educational autonomy within the framework of the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne but that autonomy had been destroyed over the years by the Greek government’s interventions and various legal regulations. Noting that bilingual Turkish primary schools were closed for economic reasons despite being autonomous, ABTTF indicated that that the number of Turkish primary schools fell from 194 in 2008 to 123 in the 2019-2020 school year. ABTTF called on Greece to restore the educational autonomy of the Turkish community in Western Thrace and to allow Turkish-Greek bilingual kindergartens to be opened within schools belonging to the Turkish community.

On religious freedom, ABTTF underlined that the muftis elected by the Turkish community in Western Thrace are still not recognized by Greece, despite the fact that the Turkish community in Western Thrace has been granted the right to elect its own religious leaders within the framework of international treaties. Noting that many lawsuits had been filed against the Elected Mufti of Rodopi İbrahim Şerif and the Elected Mufti of Xanthi Ahmet Mete on grounds of ‘usurpation of the office of mufti’, ABTTF indicated that Şerif was condemned to a prison sentence in a court judgement delivered in 2019 and that Mete had faced the same fate in February 2020.

## Parallel report from ABTTF to the report on attacks on religious sites in Greece, 7 April 2020



As a response to the report published on 19 December 2019 by the Greek Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs titled 'Incidents in areas of religious importance in Greece – 2018' which include parts with respect to the Turkish community in Western Thrace, ABTTF prepared a parallel report which it sent to Greek Minister of Education and Religious Affairs Niki Kerameus and Greek President Katerina Sakellaropoulou.

Furthermore, while ABTTF welcomed the fact that the report mentioned the attacks that the Turkish community in Western Thrace has experienced in its religious areas, it criticised in its own report that it only reflects the government's official view with respect to the status of the minority regarding religious affairs, the right of choosing muftis who are their religious leaders, the functioning of the muftis along with measures aimed at restructuring mufti offices. ABTTF noted that while issues pertaining to the religious

freedoms of the other religious groups are not mentioned within the report, the fact that religious issues as regards the Turkish community in Western Thrace are widely included in the report is a further indication of intervention to the religious autonomy of the Turkish community in Western Thrace.

With respect to the muftis, ABTTF indicated that the right of Western Thrace Turks to choose their own muftis had been violated in 1990 and added that the muftis who had been chosen by the community who appealed to this situation faced legal action on grounds of occupying the office of mufti. Indicating the legal action which has been faced by muftis in the last years, ABTTF criticised the prison sentences which have been given to Rhodope Elected Mufti İbrahim Şerif and Xanthi Elected Mufti Ahmet Mete. Moreover, ABTTF also explained that Presidential Decree No. 52/2019 which aims at restructuring the office of the three muftis in Western Thrace constituted a direct intervention in the structure of religious autonomy of the Turkish community in Western Thrace.

In parallel to the fact that the reparation, construction and protection within the framework of cultural heritage of mosques in Western Thrace along with the issue of historical mosques present outside Western Thrace in Rhodes and Kos are referred to under different headings, ABTTF reminded that with the Treaty of Lausanne, the Turkish community in Western Thrace enjoys the right to manage and control any type of charitable institution, school and other similar institutions under the condition that it covers their own expenses and it further underlined that the mosques do not belong to the state but are the sacred places of the Turkish community in Western Thrace.

Regarding the restoration of mosques of historical importance, ABTTF indicated that the restoration of Çelebi Sultan Mehmet Mosque in Didymoteicho (Dimetoka), which was severely damaged as a result of a fire on 22 March 2017 has not yet been started.

### Participation to the OSCE Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting, 25-26 May 2020 / Online

ABTTF attended the online Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) on behalf of the Turkish community in Western Thrace. Deniz Servantie from ABTTF Brussels Office participated in the meeting titled "Addressing

All Forms of Intolerance and Discrimination” which was held online because of the novel coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic which has spread worldwide. The Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association (WTMUGA) members Dr. Pervin Hayrullah, Onur Mustafa Ahmet and Meltem Giritli also attended the meeting.

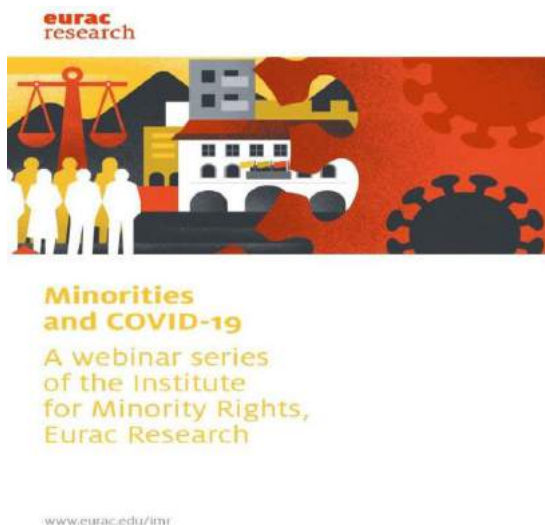
Speaking during the working session on 25 May regarding challenges to realizing tolerance and non-discrimination and the impact of compound crises, at which the United Nations (UN) Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues Prof. Fernand de Varennes delivered a keynote speech, ABTTF indicated examples of discrimination the Turkish community in Western Thrace in Greece is victim of in the extraordinary period as a result of the coronavirus pandemic. Noting that hate speech is on the rise, currently targeting minorities living in the OSCE region, ABTTF called on Greece and all OSCE participatory states to swiftly record and investigate hate-based crimes during the coronavirus crisis.



Speaking at the third session on 26 May regarding early warning and action in prevention of discrimination, ABTTF recalled that the OSCE has established important standards for traditional human rights and norms since 1990, but also noting that problems related to minority rights in Greece continue. Indicating that discrimination against the Turkish community in Western Thrace in Greece gained even more momentum during the coronavirus crisis, ABTTF explained that the Turkish community in Western Thrace was scapegoated as a result of large number of coronavirus cases in Turkish villages in the Western Thrace region. Highlighting that official information regarding the measures regarding the coronavirus pandemic in Greece have not been shared in the mother tongue Turkish of the Turkish community in Western Thrace, ABTTF called upon Greece to take result-oriented measures for eliminating discrimination during the Covid-19 pandemic.

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**Participation to the webinar series on ‘Minorities and COVID-19’ of EURAC Research Centre Minority Rights Institute, 13 May-10 June 2020 / Online**



ABTTF participated in the webinar series on ‘Minorities and COVID-19’ organised by Bolzano, Italy- based EURAC Research, the Institute for Minority Rights.

Deniz Servantie from ABTTF Brussels Office and International Affairs Director Melek Kırmacı Arık followed the series, which comprised a total of five seminars once a week, the first on 13 May. Covid-19's impact on minorities was discussed with the participation of prominent international figures such as OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities Lamberto Zannier, UN Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues Fernand de Varennes and UN Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights Ilze Brands-Kehris.

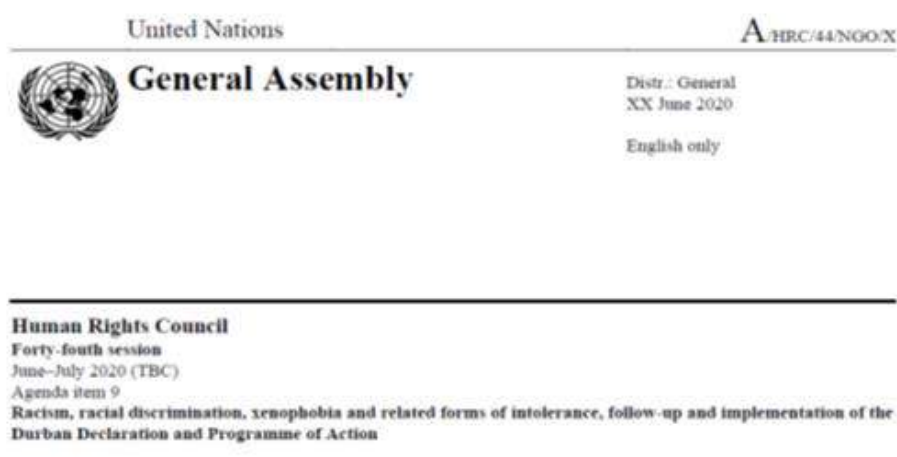
Seminars attended by experts, academics and representatives of international organisations working in the field of human and minority rights discussed how all vulnerable groups

and minorities, including national minorities are affected by the pandemic and the effects of extraordinary measures on the rights of minorities in this period.

During the webinar series, ABTTF indicated that despite the fact that the Turkish community in Western Thrace constitutes the majority of the population in Rhodope and almost half of the population of Xanthi and as a result of the non-recognition of the ethnic Turkish identity, government officials did not issue information in Turkish language during the pandemic period and as a result, the fight against the pandemic has been insufficient. Noting also that there has been discriminatory language used against the Turkish community in Western Thrace in the media during the pandemic, ABTTF explained that right-wing Greek Solution Party President Kyriakos Velopoulos further increased hatred with racist statements as a result of the decision to quarantine the village of Echinós (Şahin).

In the seminars, speakers noted that religious leaders have an important role in informing minority communities ABTTF reported that the state does not cooperate and establish dialogue with elected muftis because the mufti elected by the Turkish community in Western Thrace is not recognised by the state, and that elected muftis and Turkish civil society organisations inform the community with their own special efforts. In addition, ABTTF also explained that there were attempts in limiting the religious rights of the Turkish community in Western Thrace taking the opportunity of the pandemic period as a pretext during the month of Ramadan.

#### **Written statement to the 44<sup>th</sup> session of the UN Human Rights Council, 15 June- 3 July 2020 / Geneva, Switzerland**



The United Nations Human Rights Council organised its 44<sup>th</sup> session on 15 June-3 July 2020. ABTTF which is a member with special consultative status at the UN Economic and Social Council is taking part regularly to council activities through its written statements. Within that framework, ABTTF downloaded its written statement entitled 'Signs of racism and discrimination against the Turkish community in Western Thrace in Greece the COVID-19 pandemic' to the online system.

#### **Participation to the OSCE Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting, 22-23 June 2020 / Online**

ABTTF attended this year's second Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting on 'Freedom of Expression, Media and Information' organised by the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). The meeting which was held online as a result of the measures taken regarding the novel coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic was attended by ABTTF International Affairs Director Melek Kırmacı Arık and Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association (WTMUGA)

Chair of the Human Rights Committee Dr. Pervin Hayrullah and WTMUGA member Kerem Aptürrahimoğlu.



Speaking at the first session, which assessed freedom of expression and its relation with other fundamental rights, ABTTF International Affairs Director Melek Kırmacı Arık criticized that although the Turkish community in Western Thrace constitutes the majority of the population in Rhodope Province and almost half of the population in Xanthi Province, as a result of the non-recognition of its ethnic Turkish identity by the Greek state, there was no information with

respect to combating the coronavirus pandemic in Turkish towards the Turkish community. Moreover, indicating that while the government and the media do not share personal information about those who lost their lives from the virus in their statements, ABTTF added that all of the personal information with respect to one person who died in the village of Echinós (Şahin) was shared with the public by disrespecting the right to privacy and that the Turkish community in Western Thrace was targeted as a result.

### **Participation to the European Regional Forum on Minority Issues, 21-22 September 2020 / Online**



ABTTF and the Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association (WTMUGA), representing the Turkish community in Western Thrace, attended the European Regional Forum on Minority Issues entitled “Hate Speech, Social Media and Minorities” which was organised online on 21-22 September 2020. ABTTF International Affairs Director Melek Kırmacı Arık and WTMUGA Secretary General Meltem Giritli along with WTMUGA member Kerem Aptürrahimoğlu participated in the forum which was organised by the United Nations (UN) Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues, the Federal Ministry of the Republic of Austria and the Budapest-based Tom Lantos Institute, in cooperation with the Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN) as one of the partner organisations.

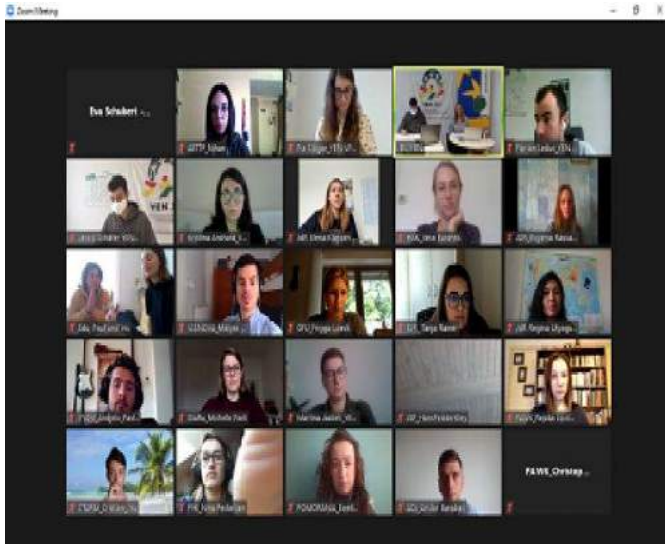
In the first session on causes, scale and impact of hate speech targeting minorities in social media, ABTTF expressed that in Greece, the ethnic Turkish identity of the Turkish community in Western Thrace is not recognised and that hate speech is part of structural and systematic discrimination faced by Western Thrace Turks.

In the third session on the role and responsibility of intergovernmental organisations, states, internet companies and social media platforms in the regulation of online hate speech on the second day of the forum, ABTTF pointed out that in Greece, the Turkish community in Western Thrace is perceived as ‘Trojan horses’ that are a heritage from the Ottoman period and that as a consequence they are seen as an obstacle to national unity and integrity as well as public order. ABTTF also underscored that following the media coverage about the military exercise carried out in the Turkish village of Glafki (Gökçeşinar) in a period of tensions in relations between Turkey and Greece,



Western Thrace Turks had directly been targeted by an internet site which is known for its opposition to the Turkish community in Western Thrace.

### Participation to the YEN General Assembly, 10 October 2020 / Online



Young ABTTF attended the Youth of European Nationalities (YEN) General Assembly which was held online on 10 October 2020. Nihan Ayan represented Young ABTTF at the meeting. The meeting began with a welcome speech by YEN President Giuanna Belli. Belli said they had to organise the meeting online because of the coronavirus pandemic, adding that they made an outstanding effort to make the meeting transparent and democratic. Later, the YEN annual activity report was presented, and a discussion was held regarding the effects of the coronavirus pandemic on young people belonging to minorities in Europe.

DM+ (Društvo mladih Slovencev v Italiji), the youth organisation of Italy's Slovenian minority, was accepted as a member of YEN by the votes of the delegates.

As a result of the elections held at the meeting, new members of the YEN Executive Board were also designated. Andor Barabas belonging to the German minority in Romania was elected as the new president of YEN. Martina Jazbec belonging to the Slovenian minority in Italy was elected as the treasurer and Andjelo Pavlovski belonging to the Vlach (Aromanian) minority in North Macedonia as the conveyor for communication and became new members of the YEN Executive Board.

### Participation to the OSCE Seminar, 14 October 2020 / Online

Unable to hold the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting in Warsaw this year due to the coronavirus pandemic, the OSCE is instead organised a webinar series entitled "Three decades of upholding democracy and human rights". ABTTF representing the Turkish community in Western Thrace attended on 14 October 2020 the third series of online seminars (webinars) entitled "Three decades of upholding democracy and human rights" organized by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

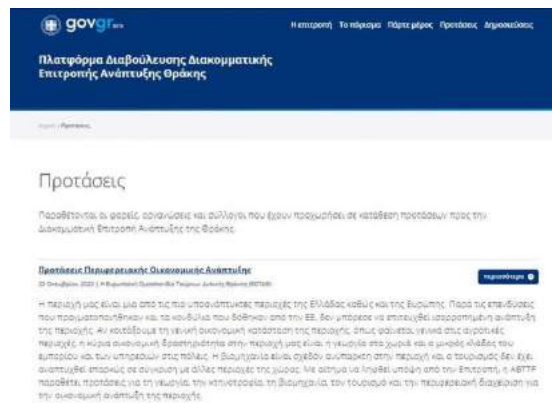


The Director of International Affairs of ABTTF Melek Kirmacı Arık participated in the webinar entitled "Defending and promoting rule of law principles: Challenges and ways forward" organized by the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), in cooperation with the Office of the Representative on Freedom of the Media (RFoM) and the Office of the High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM), and with the support of the 2020 Albanian OSCE Chairmanship.

ABTTF has conveyed its questions and recommendations to the OSCE through the chat room within the framework of the rules of the webinar. ABTTF asked for the full implementation by the OSCE participating States, including Greece of the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) judgments, particularly pertaining to minority rights, in the context of the protection of the rule of law and emphasised the importance of increasing the role of civil society and national human rights institutions in the process of strengthening the rule of law. Furthermore, ABTTF also asked what kind of co-working mechanism could be established between the OSCE and the Council of Europe to promote the principle of the rule of law in the OSCE participating States.

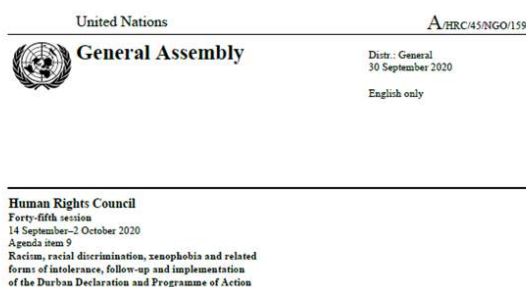
## Proposals for the Inter-Parliamentary Commission on the Development of Thrace, 20 October 2020

ABTTF submitted to the Committee for the Development of Thrace its proposals regarding economic development in Western Thrace in the areas of agriculture, livestock, industry, tourism and regional administration. ABTTF which took part in the public consultation process ongoing until 31 October 2020 of the Committee for the Development of Thrace which was set up under the proposal of Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis on 16 July 2020 through the link <https://epitropithrakis.gov.gr/i-epitropi/>, requested for the preparation of a special development model and programme for the region by taking into consideration the geographic, economic and socio-cultural structure of the region and conveyed its concrete proposals and requests to the Committee with respect to regional economic development. Giving the example of Italy's South Tyrol Region which implements a regional development model by promoting different business types and making alternative production and investments, ABTTF proposed for the examination of the development model and programme of South Tyrol.



Indicating that as a country which have lived for years through the hardships of life brought by the economic and financial crisis and adding that just as in all of the countries of the world that they are struggling with extra other difficulties end economic recession brought by the COVID-19 pandemic, ABTTF requested that the Turkish community in Western Thrace should be considered in all the steps aimed at the economic development of the region in these difficult conditions. Explaining that for many years there has not been a balanced development in Western Thrace for various reasons because of having ignored the general and special needs and that this constitutes a priority condition for equal and balanced development, ABTTF said that otherwise, it would not be possible to achieve a balanced development in the long term.

## Written statement to the 45<sup>th</sup> session of the UN Human Rights Council, 14 September- 6 October 2020 / Geneva, Switzerland



The United Nations Human Rights Council organised its 45<sup>th</sup> session on 14 September-6 October 2020. ABTTF which is a member with special consultative status at the UN Economic and Social Council and thus has the right to attend council meetings and send statements is taking part regularly to council activities through its written statements. Within that framework, ABTTF is putting to the forefront issues with respect to the closure of primary schools belonging to Western Thrace Turks as part of tools of

systematic discrimination against the Turkish community in Western Thrace as well as the changes made regarding the formation and functioning of the councillors delegation of the madrasahs at the level of secondary school and the military operation which took place in Glafki (Gökçeşınar) with the aim of intimidating and threatening the Turkish community in Western Thrace. ABTTF downloaded its written statement to the system.

### **Participation to the public hearing of the European Parliament addressing the ‘Minority Safepack’ initiative, 15 October 2020 / Online**

ABTTF attended the public hearing on the European Citizens’ Initiative entitled “Minority SafePack (MSPI)” at the European Parliament (EP) in Brussels. Deniz Servantie from ABTTF Brussels Office participated in the online hearing organized by the EP Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs (LIBE) and EP Committee on Culture and Education (CULT), in association with the EP Committee on Petitions (PETT).



During the session, MSPI's Citizens’ Committee Representative and Honorary President of FUEN Hans Heinrich Hansen, MSPI's Citizens’ Committee members Karl Heinz Lambertz and Valentin Inzko and Vice Presidents of FUEN Angelika Mlinar and Daniel Alfreider presented the initiative. The MSPI has secured over 1 million 300 thousand signatures and constitutes the fifth European Citizens’ Initiative to be successful by fulfilling the conditions set by the European Commission. The MSPI aims at enhancing the rights of national and linguistic minorities in Europe and the creation of a minority protection mechanism at EU level, and calls upon the EU to use the tools in its possession and to take a series of legislative acts in that respect.

### **Participation to the OSCE Seminar, 21 October 2020 / Online**



ABTTF continues to attend webinar series entitled ‘Three decades of upholding democracy and human rights’ organised by Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), in cooperation with the Office of the Representative on Freedom of the Media (RFoM) and the Office of the High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM), and with the support of the 2020 Albanian OSCE Chairmanship. On 21 October 2020, ABTTF International Affairs Director Melek Kırmacı Arık attended the fourth webinar on ‘Access to information and freedom of the media’.

ABTTF which explained in a written form to the OSCE the issues pertaining to access to information of the Turkish community in Western Thrace during COVID-19 as well as issues experienced in the area of freedom of the media in the country, relayed the fact that as a result of the non-recognition of the ethnic Turkish identity of the Turkish community in Western Thrace, there were no information given in Turkish with respect to the special measures taken by the government during the first period of the COVID-19 pandemic. Indicating that Western Thrace

Turks have followed the developments through the press of the Turkish community in Western Thrace in the region, ABTTF explained that while the government has supported media outlets throughout Greece as part of informing citizens about the coronavirus pandemic with approximately 20 million euros, no such support was granted to the Western Thrace Turkish minority media which is broadcasting in Turkish.

### **Participation to the FUEN Assembly of Delegates, 24 October 2020 / Online**

ABTTF attended the Assembly of Delegates of the Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN) which was organised online due to the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic. ABTTF President and FUEN Vice President Halit Habip Ođlu and ABTTF International Affairs Director Melek Kırmacı Arık participated in the online meeting where the Turkish community in Western Thrace was represented together by ABTTF, the Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association (WTMUGA) and the Friendship, Equality and Peace (FEP) Party.



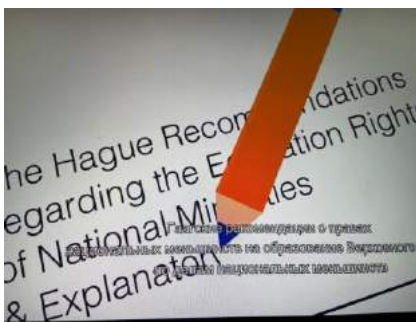
The FUEN Assembly of Delegates, which was attended by more than 200 delegates belonging to minorities from different European countries, began with a welcome speech by FUEN President Loránt Vincze. Following this, FUEN President, Vice Presidents and Secretary General explained the activities of FUEN and the working groups under the umbrella of FUEN and FUEN's 2020-2021 programme was presented. ABTTF President and FUEN Vice President Halit Habip Ođlu delivered information with respect to the activities of the Working Group of Turkic Minorities/Communities (TAG) inside FUEN.

The FUEN Assembly of Delegates adopted a resolution with respect to the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on the national minorities and linguistic communities in Europe. The resolution also states that there was insufficient information given in mother tongue to the Turkish community in Western Thrace which also participated in FUEN's survey on the Covid-19 pandemic.

The delegates were also informed at the meeting that the FUEN 2021 Congress would be held in Nova Gorica/Gorizia at the Italian-Slovenian border region and that the FUEN 2022 Congress would be held in Estonia's capital city Tallinn.

At the FUEN Assembly of Delegates, the organization "Qumuqlar" representing the Kumyk community in Russia which participated as a guest in the FUEN TAG meetings was accepted by the votes of the delegates as an ordinary member of FUEN.

### **Participation to the OSCE Seminar, 4 November 2020 / Online**



The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) and the Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association (WTMUGA), in representation of the Turkish community in Western Thrace attended the online seminar (webinar) titled "The evolution and practice of multilingual education- From the Hague Recommendations to the digital era" organised by the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) on 4 November 2020.

ABTTF International Relations Director Melek Kırmacı Arık and WTMUGA Secretary General Meltem Giritli along with WTMUGA member Kerem Abdurahimoğlu attended the sixth webinar of the online seminar (webinar) series titled ‘Three decades of upholding democracy and human rights’ organised with the support of OSCE Chairmanship Albania and OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) and in cooperation with OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media and OSCE Office of the High Commissioner on National Minorities.

Within the framework of the rules of the webinar where it is possible for participants to lodge their recommendations to the OSCE on a written form, referring to The Hague Recommendations ABTTF underlined the need for national minorities to have the right to have their own educational institutions and further asked restoration of educational autonomy of the Turkish community in Western Thrace granted by the Treaty of Lausanne and demanded establishment of bilingual minority kindergartens.

### **Participation to the OSCE Seminar, 6 November 2020 / Online**

The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) and the Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association (WTMUGA) representing the Turkish community in Western Thrace attended the online seminar (webinar) entitled “The role of human rights defenders in promoting and protecting human rights” organised by the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) on 6 November 2020.



ABTTF International Affairs Director Melek Kırmacı Arık and WTMUGA Secretary General Meltem Giritli along with WTMUGA member Kerem Abdurahimoğlu attended the last webinar of the webinar series entitled “Three decades of upholding democracy and human rights” organised by the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), in cooperation with the OSCE Office of the Representative on Freedom of the Media (RFoM) and the OSCE Office of the High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM), and with the support of the 2020 Albanian OSCE Chairmanship.

Within the framework of the rules of the webinar where it was possible for participants to lodge their recommendations to the OSCE in a written form, ABTTF indicated that freedom of association is of utmost importance to have a strong civil society. Explaining that in Greece, the associations having the word “Turkish” in their titles have been closed and that the new ones are not registered, ABTTF expressed that there is no dialogue or consultation mechanism with respect to finding solutions to issues between the government and the Turkish community in Western Thrace as a result of the non-recognition of the ethnic Turkish identity of the Turkish community.

## Participation to the OSCE Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting, 9-10 November 2020 / Online



ABTTF, the Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association (WTMUGA) and the Friendship, Equality and Peace (FEP) Party representing the Turkish community in Western Thrace attended this year's third Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting entitled "Freedom of Religion or Belief: The Role of Digital Technologies and Civil Society Actors in Advancing This Human Right for All" which was organized online on 9-10 November 2020 by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

ABTTF International Affairs Director Melek Kırmacı Arık, Head of Human Rights Department of WTMUGA Dr. Pervin Hayrullah, WTMUGA Secretary General Meltem Giritli and FEP Party General Coordinator Fatih

Hüseyinoğlu attended the meeting organized by the 2020 Albanian OSCE Chairmanship together with the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR).

Intervening in the first session where the situation of freedom of belief or religion in the OSCE region was discussed, ABTTF expressed that the right to elect the muftis which are the religious leaders of the Turkish community in Western Thrace which enjoys religious autonomy according to international treaties has been usurped by Greece and the muftis elected by the Turkish community were sentenced to prison on the grounds of occupying the mufti offices. Criticising the fact that the mufti offices have been rendered to government offices in Western Thrace with the Presidential Decree 52/2019, ABTTF noted that the Greek Council of State's General Assembly rejected the open case regarding the cancellation of the decree.

Speaking at the third and last session under the heading of the role of civil society in advancing the right to freedom of religion or belief for all, ABTTF indicated that although the Turkish community in Western Thrace has the right to establish, administer and control any type of charity and religious organisation, its right to manage waqfs serving the religious, cultural and social needs of the Turkish community has been stripped. ABTTF added that first the number of hours of lessons in Turkish in two religious schools (madrasahs) belonging to the Turkish community in Western Thrace were reduced and that with the law which was adopted in last July, the government-appointed acting muftis who are not recognized by the Turkish community have been brought to the presidency of the boards of these schools.

## Participation to the UN High Level Seminar, 12 November 2020 / Online

ABTTF, representing the Turkish community in Western Thrace, attended the webinar organized by the United Nations (UN) on 12 November 2020 at the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the mandate of the UN Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association. ABTTF International Affairs Director Melek Kırmacı Arık participated in the webinar entitled "10 Years of Protecting Freedom of Assembly and Association: How Much Have We Progressed and How Can States Do More?".



At the webinar, high ranking officials such as UN Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association Clement Voule, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic Tomáš Petříček, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania Antanas Linkevičius, EU Special Representative for Human Rights Eamon Gilmore and UN Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights Nada Al-Nashif assessed the current situation as regards freedom of peaceful assembly and association and discussed the role of the governments. The speakers indicated that in the digital age, the freedom of physical and online assembly and association should be protected, and civil society should be supported in both platforms. It was also noted that freedom of assembly and association has led to strong and visible civil society in the world to increase.

At the webinar where the participants could lodge their questions in a written manner, ABTTF asked in what ways the UN could encourage states more strongly or call them for action with respect to implementing the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) concerning national minorities.

### **Participation to the UN Forum on Minority Issues, 19-20 November 2020 / Online**



ABTTF and the Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association (WTMUGA) representing the Turkish community in Western Thrace attended the 13th session of the United Nations (UN) Forum on Minority Issues under the heading “Hate Speech, Social Media and Minorities” on 19-20 November 2020. Deniz Servantie from ABTTF Brussels Office and the WTMUGA member Kerem Abdurahimoğlu attended the Forum which was held online due to the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic.

Intervening during the session entitled “Causes, scale and impact of hate speech targeting minorities in social media”, ABTTF noted that the ethnic Turkish identity of the Turkish community in Western Thrace whose status has been determined by the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne is not recognised and denied by Greece. Further indicating that hate speech against the Turkish community in Western Thrace in Greece is prevalent in much of the political and media arenas, ABTTF explained that there had been attempts at scapegoating the Turkish community during the first period of the coronavirus pandemic.

Intervening during the session entitled “Regulation of online hate speech: the role and responsibility of intergovernmental organizations, States, internet companies and social media platforms” on the second day of the Forum, ABTTF indicated that the Turkish community in Western Thrace in Greece had been subjected to numerous hate attacks in the last years and that institutions and places of worship belonging to the Turkish community had been attacked by unknown perpetrators.

### **Contribution to the OSCE/ODIHR’s Hate Crime Report for 2019, 16 November 2020**

The Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) of the OSCE published its 2019 Hate Crime Report. In the report, which includes statistical and descriptive information regarding hate crime incidents in the countries of the OSCE region, hate-motivated attacks and hate speech targeting the Turkish community in Western Thrace in Greece are also included.



ABTTF had submitted a written contribution in preparation for the OSCE 2019 Hate Crime Report and had reported the hate-motivated attacks and hate speech targeting the Turkish community in Western Thrace in Greece. In the part dedicated to Greece in the OSCE 2019 Hate Crime Report where ABTTF is also cited as an organization having contributed to the report, the attacks reported by ABTTF are also included.

In the report, it is being recorded that an attack was realised at Sünne Mosque in Xanthi on 18 May 2019 by unknown perpetrators who threw eggs and wrote racist slogans on the walls of the mosque, that the gravestones in the Turkish cemetery in Alexandroupoli were damaged on 28 May 2019 and that it was written that “Pork meat is tasty” on the entrance door of the Xanthi Minority Secondary and High School on 5 December 2019.

Moreover, the report also indicates that the president of the Friendship, Equality and Peace (FEP) Party received calls to her phone from unknown callers, death threat messages and targeted with hate speech as a result of the success realised by her party in the May 2019 European Parliament (EP) elections.

The report also refers to the attacks in March and October 2019 on the Consulate General in Thessaloniki of the Republic of Turkey which is the motherland of Western Thrace Turks, and the burning of the vehicle of a diplomat working at the Turkish Consulate in Thessaloniki on Monday night, 23 December 2019.

### **Participation to the FRA ‘Fundamental Rights Survey’ Seminar, 2 December 2020 / Online**

ABTTF attended the online seminar (webinar) entitled ‘Fundamental Rights Survey: What do fundamental rights mean for people in the EU’ organised by the European Union (EU) Fundamental Rights Agency on 2 December 2020. Deniz Servantie from ABTTF Brussels Office attended the webinar of FRA where the Fundamental Rights Survey was presented.



In the webinar, which was moderated by FRA Civil Society Coordinator Waltraud Heller, FRA Policy Coordinator Sami Nevala shared the findings of FRA’s latest published Fundamental Rights Survey with the participants. Following the presentation of Nevala, the participants took the floor.

Deniz Servantie from ABTTF Brussels Office first presented ABTTF and the Turkish community in Western Thrace and further reminded that ABTTF represents the Turkish community in Western Thrace which is subjected to rights violations in Greece within the framework of international platforms and that it is striving to find solutions to the issues in that respect.

### **Participation to the INHS Conference ‘Hate, Democracy and Human Rights’, 2-3 December 2020 / Online**



ABTTF attended the online conference entitled ‘Hate, Democracy and Human Rights’ organised by the International Network for Hate Studies (INHS). ABTTF International Affairs Director Melek Kırmacı Arık attended the conference which was co-hosted by the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the University of Plymouth in UK.



At the session entitled “Towards an international understanding of hate crime”, the speakers which were composed of Gay McDougall, Former Vice-Chair of the United Nations (UN) Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD), Stefano Valenti from the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) and Paul Giannasi from the United Kingdom National Police Chiefs’ Council discussed the definition of hate crime within the framework of international organisations and assessed the international provisions that set standards for combating hate crime.

At the session entitled “Traversing disciplines, practices, and institutions” which was held on the second day of the conference, it was noted that there is a gap between academic research on hate crime and policies created to combat hate crime, while underlining that there are profound differences between countries in implementing laws.

During the conference’s final session entitled “From COVID to Cohesion - Drawing pathways for the future’, Graeme Reid from Human Rights Watch (HRW) and Barbara Perry from the University of Ontario in Canada discussed the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on vulnerable communities with examples from around the world. The discussants indicated that in order to counter the bad effects of the epidemic on all fragile communities, there is a need to prevent the spread of hatred on online platforms with plans for national action on political leadership, combating racism and discrimination.

### **Participation to the FRA Conference, 7 December 2020 / Online**

ABTTF attended the online conference entitled ‘Reinforcing the EU Charter: rights of people in the EU in the next decade’ organised by the European Union (EU) Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA). Deniz Servantie from ABTTF Brussels Office attended the conference which was held in two parts.

During the first part of the conference, panellists Vice President of the European Commission for Values and Transparency Věra Jourová, FRA Director Michael O’Flaherty, President of the Court of Justice of the European Union Koen Lenaerts and Portuguese Minister of Justice Francisca Van Dunem tackled the current status of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and its effective implementation within the EU Member States. European Commission Vice President Věra Jourová underlined that the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights represents a milestone for EU law but that there still remain issues with respect to the full implementation of the Charter and that every day people across the EU is subjected to discrimination.

FRA Director Michael O’Flaherty indicated that FRA has been gathering data and publishing reports with respect to fundamental rights at the EU level since the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights entered into force and that FRA is playing a key role in the sharing of good practices.

During the second part of the conference where the participants could send their questions to the panellists, Deniz Servantie from ABTTF Brussels Office asked regarding the activities of FRA with respect to national minorities. In its response to the question, FRA Director Michael O’Flaherty indicated that FRA has always remained vigilant regarding the protection of minorities in general and that it is ready to be of an added value.



**Participation to the presentation of OSCE/ODIHR Guide on ‘Understanding Anti-Muslim Hate Crimes - Addressing the Security Needs of Muslim Communities: A Practical Guide’, 8 December 2020 / Online**



ABTTF attended on 8 December 2020 the online event organized by the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) at which the ODIHR publication entitled “Understanding Anti-Muslim Hate Crimes - Addressing the Security Needs of Muslim Communities: A Practical Guide” was launched. ABTTF International Affairs Director Melek Kırmacı Arık attended the event organized in two sessions and where high-level speakers took part. The event started with the opening

speeches by Katarzyna Gardapkhadze, OSCE/ODIHR First Deputy Director, and Kishan Manocha, Head of the Tolerance and Non-Discrimination Department of OSCE/ODIHR.

The speakers of the first session who were Commissioner for Equality of the European Commission Helena Dalli, Personal Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office on Combating Intolerance and Discrimination against Muslims Ambassador Mehmet Paçacı and United Nations (UN) Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief Ahmed Shaheed shared their views with respect to the understanding of the challenges of discrimination against Muslims in the OSCE region, international standards on intolerance towards Muslims, response to anti-Muslim hate crimes and challenges to the security of Muslim communities which are tackled in the OSCE/ODIHR practical guide.

During the second session, OSCE/ODIHR Advisor for Combatting Intolerance against Muslims Đermana Šeta, Chief Superintendent at the Finland National Police Board Enqvist Måns, Marianne Vorthoren from the Multicoloured Religions Foundation in Rotterdam and Hayri Emin from the Bulgaria Grand Mufti’s Office took part.

**Participation to the Annual Meeting of FUEN Working Group on Education, 10 December 2020 / Online**



ABTTF and the Friendship, Equality and Peace (FEP) Party participated on 10 December 2020 in the annual meeting of the Education Working Group of the Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN) of which they are full members. ABTTF International Affairs Director Melek Kırmacı Arık and FEP Party General Coordinator Fatih Hüseyinoğlu attended the meeting which was held online due to the new type coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic.

At the meeting which started with the welcome speeches of FUEN Vice President and Education Working Group Speaker Daniel Alfreider, Dr. Krisztina Kemény-Gombkötöné from József Eötvös College/Institute for Nationalities and

Foreign Languages in Hungary, and FUEN External Consultant Dr. Zora Popova revealed the results of the online survey entitled 'Educational Situation of Autochthonous National Minorities in Europe'.

Intervening during the session regarding the country reports with respect to the situation of education national minorities in the countries where they live, FEP Party said the Turkish community in Western Thrace in Greece had its autonomy in the field of education violated by laws issued without consulting the Turkish community. Intervening at the same session, ABTTTF explained the issue of secondary and high schools belonging to the Turkish community in Western Thrace. ABTTTF indicated that the Greek government had intervened in the administration of these schools in contradiction with the autonomous status of Turkish secondary and high schools and that in last July with a latest law in that respect, appointed deputy muftis which are not recognised by the Turkish community in Western Thrace were brought to the head of the school councillors' delegation of the madrassahs.

### **Participation to the 6th Annual Meeting of FUEN Working Group on Turkic Minorities and Groups (TAG), 22 December 2020/ Online**



ABTTTF, the Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association (WTMUGA) and the Friendship, Equality and Peace (FEP) Party representing the Turkish community in Western Thrace attended the 6th Annual Meeting of the Working Group of Turkic Minorities/Communities in the Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN), which was held online on 22 December 2020.

In the meeting which brought together Turkic minorities and communities living in a vast geography from the Balkans to the Caucasus, ABTTTF, WTMUGA and FEP Party representing the Turkish community in Western Thrace, Rhodes, Kos and the Dodecanese Turks Culture and Solidarity Association (ROISDER) representing Rhodes and Kos Turks, the Public Organisation of Meskhetian Turks "VATAN" and the Public Union Of Meskhetian (Ahıska) Turks living in Azerbaijan "VATAN" representing Meskhetian Turks, the Social Organisation for Fostering and Development of the Karachay-Balkar Traditions "Bars El" representing Karachay-Balkar Turks, Kosovo Youth Union Association representing Turks in Kosovo, the regional civil society organization "Qumuqlar" in charge of the protection of the Kumuk language and the coordination of Kumuk projects, Kırcaali Turkish Culture and Arts Association representing Turks in Bulgaria and the Ukrainian Gagauz Union representing the Gagauz people in Ukraine participated in the meeting.

During the meeting, FEP Party General Coordinator Fatih Hüseyinođlu and FEP Party Youth Section President Burak Adil, on behalf of the delegation of Western Thrace Turks, expressed the difficulties experienced by the Turkish community in Western Thrace lately and indicated that the educational and religious autonomy of the Turkish community in Western Thrace is violated by the Greek State and that its ethnic Turkish identity is denied.

In the afternoon session of the two-session meeting, the representatives of the delegation of Western Thrace Turks explained that during the first period of the Covid-19 pandemic, Western Thrace Turks had been targeted and scapegoated.