



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 Studies/Activities January-December 2023

Summary Activity Report

International Meetings and Working Visits

Working visit to Strasbourg, 23-24.01.2023 / Strasbourg, France

The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) paid a working visit to Strasbourg in parallel to the Ordinary Winter Session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE). During the working visit held on 23-24 January 2023, the ABTTF delegation, consisting of ABTTF President Halit Habip Oğlu and ABTTF International Affairs Director Melek Kırmacı Arık, expressed the current issues of the Turkish community in Western Thrace during their meetings with the organs of the Council of Europe and politicians.



During the two-day working visit, ABTTF met with Tiny Kox (Netherlands/UEL) in his office, who was elected as the President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) for the second time in the elections held on 23 January 2023. During the talks in Strasbourg, ABTTF President Halit Habip Oğlu stated that the institutions and individuals representing the Turkish community in Western Thrace are targeted by otherising them in politics and media. During the meeting held with the PACE President in his office, Halit Habip Oğlu revealed examples from the recent events that made the Turkish community in Western Thrace a target in politics and media through a discourse based on marginalisation, discrimination and hatred in its own country. Habip Oğlu indicated that although Athens remains the main place to find a solution to the issues of the Turkish community in Western Thrace, the hostile attitude towards our community also hinders the demand for dialogue with the rulers of our country.

Working visit to Brussels 07.02.2023 / Brussels, Belgium



President of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) Halit Habipoğlu paid a working visit to Brussels, the headquarters of the European Union (EU), on 7 February 2023. Accompanied by Deniz Servantie from the ABTTF Brussels Office, ABTTF President held meetings with Member of the European Parliament from the Hungarian minority in Romania, and also President of the Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN) Loránt Vincze (EPP, Romania), Jordi Solé (EFA, Spain) from the Catalan region of Spain and Cyrus Engerer (S&D, Malta).

ABTTF President Halit Habip Oğlu talked about the Turkish community in

Western Thrace and its issues to Jordi Solé and Cyrus Engerer, whom ABTTF met for the first time as part of the political lobbying activities carried out in Brussels. Since Jordi Solé is a member of the European Free Alliance (EFA) and that he knows the Turkish community in Western Thrace, the ABTTF President conveyed the current issues in Western Thrace, and detailed the interventions in the field of education and religion within the framework of recent developments. In the first meeting of 2023, held with MEP Loránt Vincze (EPP, Romania), who is the President of FUEN and knows the Turkish community in Western Thrace very well, alarming developments which took place in Western Thrace were conveyed. In this context, in his meetings with the three MEPs, Halit Habipoğlu drew attention to the hate speech targeting the Turkish community in Western Thrace in Greece.

Working visit to Germany, 01.03.2023 / Berlin, Germany

The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) paid a working visit to the capital of Germany, Berlin, on 1 March 2023. ABTTF President Halit Habip Oğlu met with German Bundestag deputies Carsten Träger (SPD) and Knut Abraham (CDU) during his working visit accompanied by ABTTF Head Office Manager K. Engin Soyyılmaz.



ABTTF President Habip Oğlu, who expressed the current issues of the Turkish community in Western Thrace and the discrimination and rights violations it has been subjected to in the meetings with the deputies, indicated that the people and institutions representing the Turkish community in Western Thrace have been overtly targeted in the written and visual media lately. Underlining that the Turkish community in Western Thrace is portrayed as a “threat” and “danger” in politics and media in his own country, Habip Oğlu noted that this hostile attitude hinders the demand of the Turkish community for dialogue with the rulers of his country.

Participation in the OSCE Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting, 13-14.03.2023 / Vienna, Austria



The Western Thrace Turkish delegation, consisting of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) and the Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association (WTMUGA), attended the Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) on 13-14 March 2023 in Vienna. ABTTF International Relations Director Melek Kırmacı Arık and WTMUGA Human Rights Expert Kerem Abdurahimoğlu represented the Turkish community in Western Thrace at the first OSCE meeting of the year titled “Media Freedom as a Central Pillar of Comprehensive Security”.

Intervening in the context of the relationship between media freedom and democracy, ABTTF noted that there is a hostile environment for human rights defenders and civil society in Greece, adding that such a situation is also included in the statements made by the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe and the European Parliament Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs (LIBE). Noting that the Turkish community in Western Thrace is marginalised in Greece, ABTTF explained that the description made by Prime Minister Mitsotakis of the reason for visiting Western Thrace as national during his visit to Western Thrace in January 2023 strengthened the perception that the Turkish community poses a threat to public order and national unity of the state, and it was also indicated that this situation in the media is also reflected through hate-based news targeting the community. Stating that the media should not be a propaganda tool, ABTTF said that false news about individuals and organisations representing the Turkish community in Western Thrace cannot be handled within the framework of media freedom, citing the case against Newsbreak.gr website, which made slanderous and false information about ABTTF.

Participation in the 52nd session of the UN Human Rights Council, 23-24.03.2023 / Geneva, Switzerland

The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF), which represents the Turkish community in Western Thrace at the UN, attended in the 52nd Regular Session of the United Nations (UN) Human Rights Council held in Geneva on 27 February-4 April 2023. ABTTF, which has special consultative status with the UN Economic and Social Council, constantly expresses the issues of the Turkish community in Western Thrace at the UN Human Rights Council, which is held three times a year and attended by the representatives of all UN member states. As the voice of the Western Thrace Turks, it brings the current issues of the community to the forefront.



In this context, International Affairs Director Melek Kırmacı Arık attended the first UN Human Rights Council meeting of the year representing ABTTF. Participating in the agenda items titled UN Human Rights Bodies and Mechanisms with the session in which UN Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues Fernand de Varennes presented his report on 23-24 March 2023, ABTTF brought up the stigma, targeting and hate-based discourses against the Turkish community in Western Thrace.

Working visit to Berlin with Western Thrace Turkish business people and cooperative representatives, 23-25.04.2023/ Berlin, Germany

The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) initiated a programme between Turkish business people and cooperative representatives operating in the agriculture and food sector in Western Thrace and Turkish supermarket chains in Berlin in order to explore opportunities for the economic development of Western Thrace and job creation in Western Thrace and thus gathered its officials in Berlin.



Erol Ahmet, owner of MAX Dairy Products Company from Western Thrace, Ersin Mehmet, owner of NEDİM Patisserie, Okan Haliloğlu, owner of OKAL Food Company and Erdi Şerif, President of the Thrace Agricultural Cooperative attended the program held on 23-25 April 2023. At the meeting hosted by the Embassy of the Republic of Türkiye in Berlin on Monday, 24 April 2023, the Western Thrace Turkish delegation met with the officials of AC Eurogida GmbH and Bolu Lebensmittelhandels GmbH, Turkish chain markets operating in Berlin.

Working visit to Strasbourg, 19-21.06.2023 / Strasbourg, France



The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) paid a working visit to Strasbourg on 19-21 June 2023 in parallel with the Summer Session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE). The ABTTF delegation, consisting of ABTTF President Halit Habip Oğlu and ABTTF International Relations Director Melek Kırmacı Arık, discussed the current issues of the Turkish community in Western Thrace during their meetings with PACE member deputies and the Council of Europe bodies.

During the meetings with politicians and eurocrats, the ABTTF delegation indicated that the discourse of marginalisation and stigmatisation targeting the Turkish community in Western Thrace in politics and media during the general elections in Greece, and that the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) regarding the Western Thrace Turkish associations have not been executed by Greece for the past fifteen years and they further informed as regards the ongoing legal process before the Greek national courts in this respect.

Participation in the FUEN 67th Congress, 7-10.09.2023 / Pécs, Hungary

The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF), representing the Turkish community in Western Thrace, attended the 67th Congress of the Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN) on 7-10 September 2023. ABTTF President and FUEN Working Group of Turkic Minorities/Communities (TAG) Spokesman Halit Habip Ođlu and ABTTF Vice President and FUEN Vice President Nabi Ibrahimcik were in Pécs/Fünfkirchen/Pečuh, Hungary for the 67th edition of the Congress, which is the largest meeting uniting national minorities and linguistic communities living in Europe under the same roof.



The German minority in Hungary was the host of this year's Congress, which was attended by approximately 200 people from 26 countries and 50 member organisations. At the Congress, where the situation of German and other minorities in Hungary was discussed in a broad framework with panel sessions and visits to local minority educational institutions, the current developments with respect to the minority policies in Europe were assessed. In his speech at the Congress, FUEN President and Member of the European Parliament (MEP) Loránt Vincze indicated that Hungary has an important place in the history of FUEN because the first congress after the fall of the Iron Curtain was held in Budapest and that with this congress, FUEN was able to expand to Central and Eastern Europe. Noting that FUEN has become the largest minority rights defender organisation in Europe, Vincze further added that FUEN is now a leading organisation for European and international organisations.

Working visit to Brussels, 26.09.2023 / Brussels, Belgium



The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) paid a working visit to Brussels, the capital of the European Union (EU), on 26 September 2023. ABTTF President Halit Habip Ođlu, accompanied by Deniz Servantie from ABTTF Brussels Office, met with the Member of the European Parliament (MEP) François Alfonsi (Greens/EFA, France) from the Corsica region of France within the framework of his working visit.

During the meeting with MEP Alfonsi, the current issues of the Turkish community in Western Thrace and the latest developments in Greece and Western Thrace were discussed. During the meeting, ABTTF President Habip Ođlu indicated that the educational autonomy of the Turkish community in Western Thrace is guaranteed by virtue of the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne, but that this educational autonomy was taken away from the Turkish community with various laws and practices over the years, and that Turkish primary schools with autonomous status in Western Thrace are being closed down by unilateral ministerial decisions one by one every year under the pretext of the lack of sufficient pupils. Furthermore, Habip Ođlu added that 9 more Turkish primary schools belonging to the Turkish community in Western Thrace were closed in the 2023-2024 school year, and while there were 194 Turkish primary schools in Western Thrace in 2008, this number decreased to 90 today.

Participation to a panel organised by the FUEN Brussels Office, 26.09.2023 / Brussels, Belgium

The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) attended a panel organised by the Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN), of which it is a full member, at its Brussels office on 26 September 2023, on the occasion of the European Day of Languages. Deniz Servantie from ABTTF Brussels Office participated in the panel titled "Minority Languages as Part of the European Linguistic and Cultural Landscape: Role of Minority NGOs in



preserving diversity in Europe”.

United Nations (UN) Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues Dr. Fernand de Varennes, Co-Chairs of the EP Intergroup on Traditional Minorities, National Communities and Languages Kinga Gál (Independent, Hungary) and François Alfonsi (Greens/EFA, France), Head of the Education and Erasmus+ Schools and Multilingualism (EAC) Unit at the Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture Michael Teutsch and Vice-President of the Network for the Promotion of Linguistic Diversity (NPLD) Anna Jungner-Nordgren, took part as speakers in a panel. Speaking at the panel, MEP François Alfonsi pointed out that education and therefore schools play a key role in the existence of minority languages, and he directly referred to the current educational issues of the Turkish community in Western Thrace, which were conveyed to him by the ABTTTF delegation that he met in his office in the EP before the panel, and drew the attention of the speakers and guests to them. Alfonsi indicated that in many countries, such as the Western Thrace region of Greece, schools belonging to minorities have been closed and therefore the use of minority languages is under threat, and that they have asked the European Commission questions for written answer on this particular subject, but he noted that the European Commission has always responded that such issues are not within its competence.

Participation in the OSCE Human Dimension Conference, 05-06.10.2023 / Warsaw, Poland



The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTTF) and the Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association (WTMUGA) attended the Human Dimension Conference of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), organised by the 2023 OSCE Chairpersonship of North Macedonia in Warsaw on 2-13 October 2023. At the conference where ABTTTF International Relations Director Melek Kırmacı and WTMUGA member Kerem Abdurahimoğlu represented the Turkish community in Western Thrace, the issues that constitute examples of systematic discrimination, especially the current problems of the Turkish community in Western Thrace in the fields of education, religion and freedom of association were conveyed.

At the conference attended by OSCE participating States, OSCE institutions, international organisations, and civil society representatives, ABTTTF indicated that with the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne, the Turkish community in Western Thrace was granted autonomy in the fields of education and religion, but that this autonomy was dismantled by the state. ABTTTF noted that the Turkish community in Western Thrace had the right to determine their own religious leaders and that this was implemented until 1985, but that this right was taken away from them with a law passed in 1991. Furthermore, ABTTTF explained that the state intervenes in the religious affairs of the Turkish community in Western Thrace, while not interfering in the religious affairs of the dominant religion, the Greek Orthodox Church, and the Jewish community in Greece, one of the recognised religions, and added that this situation is a violation of international treaties and a clear discrimination against the Turkish community in Western Thrace when compared to other religions. ABTTTF criticised the transformation of mufti offices into ordinary state offices under the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs within the framework of the Law on the Modernisation of the Mufti Offices. ABTTTF asked Greece to restore the religious autonomy of the Turkish community in Western Thrace.

Working visit to Strasbourg, 09-11.10.2023 / Strasbourg, France

The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTTF) paid a working visit to Strasbourg on 9-11 October 2023, in parallel with the Autumn Session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE). The ABTTTF delegation, consisting of ABTTTF President Halit Habip Oğlu and ABTTTF International Relations Director Melek Kırmacı Arık, expressed the current issues of the Turkish community in Western Thrace in their meetings with PACE members and the Council of Europe bodies. The ABTTTF delegation also at-



tended the three-day general assembly meeting of the Council of Europe Conference of International NGOs (CINGO).

During the meetings with politicians and eurocrats, the ABTTF delegation discussed the issues pertaining to the Xanthi Turkish Union, the Cultural Association of Turkish Women of the Prefecture of Rodopi and Evros Prefecture Minority Youth Association in the Bekir-Ousta and Others Group of Cases, which were examined by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe in its meeting in June 2023 within the scope of freedom of association and it was further stressed that the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) regarding the aforementioned associations have not been executed by Greece for the past fifteen years. Indicating that a lawsuit was filed for the second time requesting the revocation of the registration of the Western Thrace Fenerbahçe Culture and Sports Association, which was established in October 2022, the ABTTF delegation noted that the hearing of the case was held on 6 September 2023 and that the court is expected to announce its decision.

Participation in FUEN TAG 9th Annual Meeting, 01-04.11.2023 / Western Thrace, Greece



The 9th annual meeting of the Working Group of Turkic Minorities/Communities within the Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN) (TAG), the umbrella organisation of national and autochthonous minorities in Europe, was hosted by the Turkish community in Western Thrace and held in Western Thrace, Greece on 1-4 November 2023. ABTTF President and FUEN TAG Spokesman Halit Habip Ođlu, ABTTF Vice President and FUEN Vice President Nabi Ibrahimcik attended the meeting organised jointly with the Friendship Equality Peace (FEP) Party and the Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association (WTMUGA) under the coordination of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF). Moreover, ABTTF Vice President Mustafa Kasap and ABTTF International Relations Director Melek Kırmacı Arık and Deniz Servantie from the ABTTF Brussels Office also attended the meetings on behalf of the FUEN TAG Secretariat.

Representatives from ten Turkic organisations from eight different European countries attended the meeting, which brought together Turkic minorities and communities living in a wide geography from the Balkans to the Caucasus. ABTTF, FEP Party and WTMUGA, representing the Turkish community in Western Thrace; the Public Organisation of Meskhetian Turks “VATAN” representing the Meskhetian Turks; the Kosovo Youth Union Association representing the Turks in Kosovo; the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar People representing the Crimean Tatars (QTMM); the Tatar Democratic Union representing the Romanian Tatars; Kırcaali Turkish Culture and Art Association (TÜRKSAD) representing the Turks in Bulgaria; the Ukrainian Gagauz Union representing the Ukrainian Gagauz people and “Meras” Association, which protects and develops the Gagauz Language and Culture, representing the Gagauz people in Moldova all attended the meetings.

At the 9th Annual Meeting of FUEN TAG held at WTMUGA Xanthi Cultural Centre in the afternoon, FUEN TAG Spokesman Halit Habip Ođlu and FUEN Vice President Nabi Ibrahimcik gave information with respect to the latest developments in FUEN and FUEN TAG in the last year. At the meeting, representatives of the host Western Thrace Turks, Meskhetian Turks, Kosovo Turks, Bulgarian Turks, Crimean Tatars, Romanian Tatars, Ukrainian Gagauz and Moldovan Gagauz conveyed the issues of the Turkic minorities and communities they belong to and the activities of the organisations they represent. At the meeting where FUEN TAG’s 2023 activities were discussed, the 2024 activity programme and common road map were determined with the contributions of the participating organisations.

Participation to the EP Intergroup on Minorities, 23.11.2023 / Strasbourg, France

The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) made a presentation titled “Problems in equal access to quality education for children belonging to the Turkish community in Western Thrace, Greece” at a meeting of the Intergroup on Traditional Minorities, National Communities and Languages at the European Parliament (EP) on 23 November 2023. ABTTF President Halit Habip Ođlu and ABTTF International Relations Director Melek Kırmacı Arık attended the meeting held at the EP building in Strasbourg, chaired by Intergroup Co-Chairs Loránt Vincze (EPP, Romania) and François Alfonsi (Greens/EFA, France). The meeting was also attended by Rhodes, Kos and the Dodecanese Turks Culture and Solidarity Association (ROISDER) President Prof. Dr. Mustafa Kaymakçı who participated and made a presentation about the educational issues of the Turkish community in Rhodes and Kos.



Pointing out that there are no bilingual Turkish minority kindergartens in Western Thrace and that the Greek authorities left the Turkish community’s requests for private kindergartens unanswered, ABTTF stated that the number of Turkish secondary schools is significantly insufficient compared to the population rate in the region, and that there is only one bilingual Turkish secondary school in the prefectures of Komotini and Xanthi. Furthermore, ABTTF noted that an 11-day action to protest the imposition of double-shift schooling at the Xanthi Turkish Minority Secondary and High School was organised in order to demand a solution to the school’s building problem, which has been going on for years, and that the problem continues despite the protest action, and further added that a written question was recently submitted to the European Commission on the issue.

Participation in the UN Forum on Minority Issues, 30.11-01.12.2023 / Geneva, Switzerland



ABTTF attended the 16th Session of the United Nations (UN) Forum on Minority Issues on 30 November - 1 December 2023. ABTTF and the Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association (WTMUGA) represented the Turkish community in Western Thrace at the UN Forum with the theme “Minorities and Cohesive Societies: Equality, Social Inclusion, and Socio-economic Participation” which was held in Geneva, Switzerland. The Western

Thrace Turkish delegation, consisting of ABTTF International Relations Director Melek Kırmacı and WTMUGA members Kerem Abdürrahimođlu and Meltem Giritli, raised the issues of the Turkish community in Western Thrace in the two-day meeting.

Working visit to Ankara, 25-29.12.2023 / Ankara, Türkiye

ABTTF Başkanı Halit Habip Ođlu, 25-29 Aralık 2023 tarihlerinde Batı Trakya Türk toplumunun anavatanı Türkiye’nin başkenti Ankara’ya çalışma ziyareti gerçekleřtirdi. 2023 yılının son çalışma ziyaretinde ABTTF Başkanı, Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi(T.B.M.M) ve T.C. Dışışleri Bakanlıđı’nda siyasiler ve bakan yardımcılarını ile görüşmeler gerçekleřtirdi. Batı Trakya Türk toplumunun güncel sorunlarını dile getirmek, özellikle dernek kurma özgürlüğü alanında Bekir Usta ve diđerleri dava grubunda Yunanistan’ın 15 yıldır uygulamadıđı Avrupa İnsan Hakları Mahkemesi(AİHM) kararlarının Avrupa Konseyi Bakanlar Komitesi incelemesi sonrasında son durumu aktarmak üzere Halit Habip Ođlu, Avrupa Konseyi Parlamenterler Meclisi(AKPM) Türk Heyeti’ne mensup milletvekilleri ile Ankara’da görüştü.



ABTTF President Halit Habipođlu paid a working visit to Ankara, the capital of Türkiye and the motherland of the Turkish community in Western Thrace on 25-29 December 2023. In the last

working visit of 2023, the ABTTF President held meetings with politicians from the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye (T.B.M.M.) and Deputy Ministers at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Türkiye. Halit Habip Oğlu met with the members of the Turkish Delegation of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe(PACE) in Ankara to express the current issues of the Turkish community in Western Thrace, especially in the field of freedom of association and most notably with respect to the latest situation in the Bekir-Ousta and Others group of cases following the last review from the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers regarding the judgements of the European Court of Human Rights(ECTHR), which Greece has not executed for the past 15 years.

Contribution to Reports

Parallel report to the report of the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs of Greece, 29.03.2023



ABTTF prepared a parallel report in response to the issues related to Turkish community in Western Thrace in the “2021 Report on Incidents Against Places of Religious Importance in Greece” published by the Greek Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs on 3 January 2023 and forwarded it to the Greek President, the Greek Minister of Education and Religious Affairs and other relevant public authorities.



In its parallel report, ABTTF detailed the issues faced by the Turkish community in Western Thrace, which has religious autonomy in accordance with bilateral and international agreements and expressed its views and demands. In addition, ABTTF also touched upon the situation of the mosques and places of worship in Western Thrace, as well as the religious issues of the Turkish community in Rhodes, Kos and the Dodecanese Islands, and current issues with respect to the preservation of historical, architectural, and cultural artifacts inherited from the Ottoman period in the islands.

Parallel report to the 2022 Greece Human Rights Practices Report for 2022, 17.04.2023

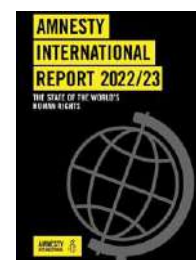
The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) prepared a report parallel to the Country Reports on Human Rights Practices, known as the Human Rights Report- on Greece published annually by the Department of State of the United States of America, and submitted it to the U.S. authorities. In its report, ABTTF indicated that Greece is one of the countries with the worst record of minority rights in Europe and criticized the fact, although there has been no improvement with respect to the situation of the Turkish community in Western Thrace and the Turkish community in Rhodes, Kos and the Dodecanese Islands and the Turkish community in Greece as a whole, the issues pertaining to the communities are almost absent from the U.S. report.



Underscoring that minority rights are equal to human rights, ABTTF reported the issues and current developments of the Turkish community that were not included in the U.S. report and revealed detailed information with respect to the issues faced by the Turkish community in Western Thrace in the field of human and minority rights.

Written opinion regarding the Greece section of Amnesty International’s annual report, 11.05.2023

ABTTF prepared a written opinion on the Greece section of Amnesty International’s 2022/23 report and forwarded it to the organisation. ABTTF



reported the issues of the Turkish community in Western Thrace to Amnesty International in connection with the topics mentioned in the Greece section of the report, which examines the situation of human rights in the world.

Indicating that judicial investigations were opened after the demonstrations of Greek citizens, who are part of the community in Greece, in accordance with the right of assembly and peaceful protest, ABTTF explained that the Xanthi Turkish Union (XTU) which had been banned because of the word “Turkish” in its name had organised a march on 10 July 2022 to protest Greece’s failure to execute the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) judgement in its regard and that 7 months after this march, an investigation was launched against the president of the XTU along with 11 other representatives of the Turkish community in Western Thrace on grounds that pandemic rules were not followed.

Questions for Written Answer

Question for written answer to the European Commission regarding hate speech targeting the Turkish community in Western Thrace, 28.04.2023



Member of the European Parliament (MEP) François Alfonsi (France, Greens/EFA) submitted a question for written answer to the European Commission as regards hate speech and systematic discrimination targeting the Turkish community in Western Thrace in Greece. In the question for written answer which was directed by MEP Alfonsi to the European Commission - whom ABTTF has met many times within the framework of its lobbying activities carried out before the EP – he indicated that the

EP Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs had visited Greece on 6-8 March 2023 and at that occasion, it was noted that there were very serious threats to the rule of law and fundamental rights in the country.

In the response received on 4 August 2023, Commissioner for Justice Didier Reynders, on behalf of the European Commission, indicated that the Commission does not have the competence to intervene in cases of individual discrimination, hate speech or hate crime before the national authorities. Reynders stated that they closely monitor the developments regarding the rule of law in the Greece section of the Rule of Law Report of the Commission, published every year.

Question for written answer to the European Commission about the issues faced by the Turkish community in Western Thrace in the field of education, 06.07.2023

Members of the European Parliament (MEP) Loránt Vincze (Romania, EPP), François Alfonsi (France, Greens/EFA), Herbert Dorfmann (Italy, EPP) and Yana Toom (Estonia, Renew) submitted a written question titled “Access to quality pre-school education for children belonging to an autochthonous community in Western Thrace (Greece)” to the European Commission on 6 July 2023.



At the initiative of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF), the written question was submitted with the joint signature of four Members of the European Parliament, and it is indicated that the Turkish community in Western Thrace living in Greece has the right to establish and manage their own schools within the scope of educational autonomy, but that due to the state’s approach, the number of the bilingual Turkish primary schools is decreasing. Noting that there is not even one bilingual minority kindergarten in Western Thrace and that the Greek authorities have left unanswered the demands of the Turkish community for a private kindergarten, the written question indicates that access to quality early childhood education contributes to children’s healthy development and educational success, and



that depriving children belonging to the Turkish community of pre-school education in their first language creates inequality in education.

In the answer submitted on 24 October 2023 by Iliana Ivanova, Commissioner for Innovation, Research, Culture, Education and Youth, on behalf of the European Commission, it was noted that in accordance with Article 165 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU, Member States are fully responsible for the organisation of their own educational systems and it was further highlighted that the choice of the language of instruction remains within the purview of the Member States. Ivanova noted that the European Commission is working with Member States to promote support for language learning and multilingual diversity within the EU’s limited competences, adding that the 2019 Council Recommendation on High-Quality Early Childhood Education and Care Systems (ECEC) is particularly relevant for multilingual countries and that it encourages early language learning and bilingual schools in the regions, but it was further added that it does not constitute a legally binding act.

Question for written answer to the European Commission regarding the imposition of double-shift schooling at the Xanthi Turkish Minority Secondary and High School and the demand for a new school building, 30.11.2023



Members of the European Parliament (MEP) François Alfonsi (France, Greens/EFA), Loránt Vincze (Romania, EPP), Herbert Dorfmann (Italy, EPP) and Yana Toom (Estonia, Renew) submitted a written question titled “Double-shift schooling in Western Thrace” to the European Commission. In the written

question submitted with the joint signature of four members of the European Parliament, at the initiative of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF), it is noted that there are further problems that concern the Turkish community in Western Thrace in addition to the issues expressed in Written Question E-002144/2023/rev.1 titled “Access to high-quality preschool education for children from the Turkish-minority community in Western Thrace (Greece)”.

In the written question, it is noted that double-shift schooling has been in place at Xanthi Minority Secondary School and High School for many years due to the lack of sufficient and sustainable classrooms, but that students and parents are opposed to it, and it is further indicated that a protest demonstration was held between 18 and 28 September 2023, demanding the end to double-shift schooling and a new school building but that no response was yet received from the authorities. In the written question, Alfonsi, Vincze, Dorfmann and Toom asked how the European Commission can protect the rights of EU citizens belonging to a national minority and ensure equal access to quality education in this region of Greece and safeguard linguistic and cultural diversity.

Written Statements

Written statement to the UN Human Rights Council, 14.08.2023



In its written statement submitted to the 53rd Session of the Human Rights Council of the United Nations (UN) held in Geneva, the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) conveyed the behaviour and discourses which targeted the Turkish community in Western Thrace in the first snap elections which were held in Greece on 21 May 2023 to the agenda of the UN. ABTTF indicated that the statements within the ranks of the opposition, the government, and media with claims that Türkiye intervened in the elections through its consulate in Komotini

and thus contributing for SYRIZA’s Rhodope Provincial Deputy candidate Özgür Ferhat, a member of the Turkish community in Western Thrace, to win the elections on 21 May 2023 have led to the targeting of the whole community.

ABTTF noted that instead of respecting the election results, a nasty smear campaign was carried out in order to prevent the Turkish candidates who received high votes in the first snap elections from being nominated from the top of the list in the second round, with baseless and unrealistic claims, and criticised the use of the community as an election tool during the inter-election period.

The issues faced by the Turkish community in Western Thrace in the field of education were brought to the UN, 22.09.2023

The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) presented a written statement titled “Access to pre-school education in mother tongue and the rapid decrease in primary schools for children belonging to Turkish community in Western Thrace, Greece” to the 54th regular session of the United Nations (UN) Human Rights Council held in Geneva, Switzerland. In its written statement, ABTTF underlined that the Turkish community in Western Thrace in Greece has been granted educational autonomy according to the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne and indicated that the autonomous structure in education has been greatly damaged by various laws, regulations, and practices over the years, and noted it has been fully under the control of the state through *fait accompli* legal practices.



Noting that the number of primary schools belonging to the Turkish community in Western Thrace has decreased rapidly, ABTTF further added that within the framework of the ministerial decision issued in 2010, schools with fewer than nine students began to be closed, and Turkish primary schools were also subject to the same practice, despite having autonomous status in accordance with the Treaty of Lausanne. Pointing out that this practice has become a systematic means of discrimination against the Turkish community in Western Thrace, ABTTF explained that there were 194 Turkish minority primary schools in Western Thrace in 2008, and this number increased to 188 in 2011, 170 in 2014, and 170 in 2015 due to closures. to 164, to 133 in 2016, to 130 in 2017, to 128 in 2018, to 123 in 2019, to 115 in 2020, to 103 in 2021, to 99 in 2022 It further noted that it dropped to 90 in the 2023-2024 school year.

Broadcasts/Social Media Programmes

“Facts about Our Country” programme series, 11th programme, 12.10.2023 / Online



The eleventh part of the online programme series of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) titled “Facts about Our Country” was broadcast on 12 October 2023. Member of the European Parliament (MEP) François Alfonsi (Greens/EFA), who belongs to the Corsican community on the French island of Corsica, was the guest of the programme. In the programme moderated by Deniz Servantie from

ABTTF Brussels Office, Alfonsi answered the questions with respect to the situation of the national minorities in Europe, the protection of national minorities at the European Union (EU) level, Greece’s approach with respect to the national minorities and the current issues of the Turkish community in Western Thrace, especially in the field of education.

Alfonsi, who is also the Co-Chair of the EP Intergroup on Traditional Minorities, National Communities and Languages, indicated that the situation of national minorities in Europe varies from country to country and that the rights of the Danish minority on the Germany-Denmark border or the German minority in the South Tyrol region of Italy are guaranteed and implemented within the framework of treaties but that in contrast, he stressed that the situation of the Turkish community in in Western Thrace in Greece is difficult in terms of the implementation of their rights and that there are other examples like this in Europe. Alfonsi underlined that there has been a serious decline in the protection of the rights of national minorities in Europe in recent years.