



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

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Distinguished representatives,
And esteemed NGO Delegates,

Greece only recognizes a “Muslim minority in Thrace” and denies the existence of an ethnic Turkish minority in Western Thrace. Although some other groups are recognized and even welcomed and supported by Greek authorities, there are currently no associations in Greece operating legally with their names including the word “Turkish”, which reflect the ethnic or national identity of their members. The Greek government declared in 1983 that there were no Turks in Greece and claimed that the members of Muslim minority are Greek Muslims. Xanthi Turkish Union, Komotini Turkish Youth Union and Western Thrace Turkish Teachers’ Union were dissolved in 1986 by local courts and the Supreme Court decided the dissolution of the associations on the ground that the word “Turkish” referred to citizens of Turkey and could not be used to describe citizens of Greece.

ECRI Report on Greece (fifth monitoring cycle) notes discrimination against Turkish Minority in Western Thrace in fields of education and citizenship in particular and examines the extent to which ECRI’s main recommendations from fourth monitoring cycle report in 2009 have been followed and includes recommendations to Greek Government.¹ ECRI notes in its report that the influence of the offices of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in issues concerning the Minority creates a perception that members of the Minority are not equal citizens and that they are still perceived as “others” in their home country where they live for centuries. Although the Greek authorities claim that the offices of the Ministry exercise over issues concerning the status of the minority, it is perceived that Greece feels threatened by the existence of the Minority in the border region Greece and Turkey.

In the EP elections, 90% voters from the Turkish minority in Western Thrace have voted for the Friendship, Equality and Peace (DEB) party, led by Mustafa Ali Çavuş and the FEP Party has been the first party in Rhodope and Xanthi, where the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace lives in. The FEP Party’s success in the EP elections delivered a shock in the Greek media. Here are striking headlines:

¹ https://www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/ecri/Country-by-country/Greece/Greece_CBC_en.asp

“Greece has lost Western Thrace in the elections. The “ostensible victory” of the politicians suffered national defeat... Thrace has been abandoned for a handful of votes.”(http://www.freepen.gr/2014/05/blog-post_50.html?m=1)

“Athens is dead on its feet: The Turkish lovers are celebrating the success of the Turkish party. No one is dealing with our national issues... They are busy with the increase of Golden Dawn”.
(http://www.stoxos.gr/2014/05/blog-post_4746.html)

“Thrace wants new Kosovo: Grey Wolfes(FEP Party) runs for the EP elections and Athens is sleeping”(http://ellas.me/aenaos_ellhnismos.php?action=detail&id=1397133219)

These headlines show intolerance against members of the Minority and the political party representing its interests.

Council of Europe’s Commissioner for Human Rights, Nils Muiznieks noted in his country visit report on Greece that in addition to migrants, other social groups have also been targeted by hate speech and violence including Muslim minority of Turkish origin.² In the past few years, the far-right extremist Golden Dawn party supporters made demonstrations in the villages where the Minority lives and chanted slogans against the Minority and Turkey.

Golden Dawn Deputy Ilias Panagiotaros, who was arrested under the police investigation for the murder of hip-hop singer Pavlos Fyssas in September 2013, submitted question in the Greek Parliament and asked Ministers of Justice, Interior and Foreign for the cancellation of FUEN Congress 2015, which was hosted by three minority organizations, Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe(ABTTF), Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association(WTMUGA) and Friendship, Equality, Peace Party(FEP Party) in hometown region of the Turkish Minority, Western Thrace in Greece on 13-17 May 2015.³ The main theme discussed in the Congress was the current status in educational and religious autonomy of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace.

Although Greek national and local authorities were invited to the Congress 2015, no representatives from the majority participated or even sent a reply to the invitation of FUEN. Before the Congress, an arson attack against a mosque in Yenice District in Komotini, and an attack against a masjid in Alankuyu District in Komotini took place on the same day in April 2015. Mahmutağa mosque in the Komotini’s district Yenice was set on fire by an unidentified person or persons in the morning face on Friday, April 17, 2015.⁴

The Director of Human Rights Without Frontiers(HRWF) Int’l Willy Fautré, who made fact-finding mission to the region in 2012 and wrote a report on the Turkish minority, said during the FUEN Congress that “It is essential to assure mutual trust and respect in order to obtain a long-lasting solution between Greek state and the minority”.

A mechanism for dialogue between governmental authorities and the Minority should be established in the form of advisory or consultative bodies that would be the channel for the Turkish minority to raise its own voice. Such bodies might also include special purpose committees that would reflect their purpose and contribute to more effective communication and advancement of minority interests. Such a dialogue mechanism will help much to end discrimination and intolerance against the Minority and build mutual trust and tolerance between the parts.

² <https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?id=2053611>

³ <http://www.birlikgazetesi.info/haberler/10245-qaltin-afakq-fuen-kongresnn-ptaln-sted.html>

⁴ <http://www.zaman.com.tr/dunya-bati-trakyada-cami-kundaklandi-2289643.html>