



# 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)

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## **Working session 10: Tolerance and non-discrimination I, including address by the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities**

Name of the Organization: Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF)

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Dear Moderator,

Distinguished representatives, delegates and NGO representatives,

The Copenhagen Document and other OSCE commitments stipulate that the exercise of the right to access, disseminate and exchange information in mother tongue, without discrimination, is essential for persons belonging to national minorities to express, preserve and develop their identities and to maintain and develop their culture.

### **The right to learn mother tongue and preservation and development of minority identity and culture**

The Turkish Minority of Western Thrace is granted with the right to education in its native language and autonomy in the management of its educational institutions under the 1923 Lausanne Treaty. The autonomy in education and religious affairs was in practice until the Greek military junta regime in 1967, but was not restored after the return to democracy in 1974. The educational autonomy has been undermined and diminished by governmental practices over years. The Greek government has wide-ranging control over the minority schools at all levels. This resulted in a low-qualified education in minority schools with structural problems regarding training of teachers, the curriculum and textbooks.

At the pre-school level, minority children are obliged to attend public kindergartens where the instruction is only in Greek under Law 3518/2006 which extends the compulsory period in education in Greece from nine to ten years. The extension of compulsory education period does not include minority schooling system, there are, therefore, no minority/private kindergartens or minority/private nurseries for the minority children to learn their mother tongue in their early childhood. The requests for the establishment of minority kindergartens or private bilingual kindergartens are dismissed, although the former UN Independent Expert on Minority Issues, Gay McDougall, had recommended in her country visit report on Greece<sup>1</sup> in 2008 that bilingual kindergartens would allow better knowledge of both Turkish and Greek from an early stage

<sup>1</sup> <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G09/111/98/PDF/G0911198.pdf?OpenElement>

therefore providing benefits in terms of integration, and enabling greater choice of whether to go minority of Greek public primary school. Today, minority children are obliged to attend public kindergartens and families reluctantly send their children to Greek-language state kindergartens despite the risk of losing their linguistic and cultural identity.

The right to learn mother language is restricted by the closure of two branch offices of a minority NGO in Greece on 23 May 2016 for their activities for the minority children on the ground that the branch offices were unlicensed nurseries.

Since there is no choice for minority children other than home to learn their mother tongue in early childhood, Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association (WTMUGA) supports minority children's learning their mother tongue in a socialized environment with social and cultural activities in branch offices.

The Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association (WTMUGA) is a minority NGO established and legally registered in 1982 with more than 1200 members from different professions and regularly attends OSCE's human dimension meetings.

With a vision to preserve culture and traditions of the Minority and contribute to cultural, social and intellectual progress of the Minority, its mission includes organizing cultural and academic events generally in education and culture fields and preparing reports, statements and submitting proposals to the relevant authorities on the problems of its members. With its vision to promote and develop the ideals of friendship, humanitarian values and human rights, democracy and freedom between the nations, in particular between Turkish and Greek nations, the association continues its activities with no legal restrict since 1982, while minority associations which bear the title of "Turkish" in their names were dissolved in 1986 and no new registration is authorized for minority association with the word "Turkish" in their names, even with the word "minority" in some cases.

On 12 April 2016, Social Assistance Unit of the Municipality of Komotini sent a letter to the association and requested information about the activities in its branch offices A and B in the city of Komotini based on the prior letters by the Rhodope Office of the Public Prosecutor and the Macedonia-Thrace Local Government Unit. Following two police raids on 21 April and 10 May, the two branches were closed down by the decision of the Mayor of Komotini on 23 May 2016.

The minority NGO published a press release that it does not operate any kindergartens or nurseries in its branch offices and the branch offices carries out social and cultural activities and work for the children along with other activities in accordance with its statutes. The NGO noted only activities for the minority children in branch offices were taken into consideration and claimed that the NGO is operating unlicensed nurseries, while all other activities in branches were totally ignored. The association underlined that there is no nursery or kindergarten under its roof, but there are branches in different places with many activities for minority people.<sup>2</sup>

The learning and the use of the mother tongue in early childhood education is very important during transition to school to prepare children for multi-language education in primary school. Research has shown that children's first language is the optimal language for literacy and learning throughout primary school. In spite of growing evidence and parent demand, Greece ignores the need for the establishment of minority kindergartens and private nurseries and insists on the enrollment of minority children to state kindergartens based on the argument that the children do not have any textbooks and do not follow any curriculum.<sup>3</sup>

We call upon Greece to restore the educational autonomy of the Turkish minority of Western Thrace. We request from Greek authorities to establish bilingual minority kindergartens in Western

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.braytd.com/v2/view.php?lng=tr&id=158>

<sup>3</sup> <https://daccess-ods.un.org/TMP/93252.5843381882.html>

Thrace in line with the minority schooling system and allow the Turkish Minority to establish private kindergartens where the language of education will be in Turkish and Greek.

### **The dissemination of information in mother tongue and minority media**

As noted in the annotated agenda, the right to access to media and the exercise of the right to access, disseminate and exchange information in mother tongue is also underpinned by the OSCE political commitments related to freedom of expression and free media.

Among issues raised with participating States, we have, on various occasions, expressed our serious concern on freedom of the media and the free flow of information in Greece. The media law in Greece requires television stations to broadcast at least 25 percent of their programming in Greek. The law contains a number of provisions regarding language, employment and finances that hinder potential local and regional media from obtaining licenses for news and music radio stations.

The minority radio stations KRAL FM and Tele Radio FM were penalized on the ground that they did broadcast in the Greek language less than 25 percent of their transmission time in 2011. National Radio and Television Council(ESR) has issued recommendation decisions of warning against Radio City FM, Cınar FM and Joy FM for the same reason in March 2014.

As a recent development, the owner of KRAL FM, Huseyin Karadayı has been fined 15.000€ and has been sentenced to 17 months imprisonment for illegal transmission. Huseyin Karadayı explained that KRAL FM has been listed illegal by ESR in 2015 on the ground that it has established a new radio fm station without legal permission in Stavroupoli near mountainous area in Xanthi. Karadayı notes that their radio station has been shutted off by the decision of the public prosecutor, although they appealed to the ESR.

On 4 May 2016, Huseyin Karadayı was detained for 18 hours and fined 7500€ monetary penalty and sentenced to 7 months imprisonment. On 10 May 2016 Huseyin Karadayı was arrested again and kept under custody with his wife Mumine Hasanoğlu, owner of Radio Dee Jay, for 24 hours upon ungrounded warnings that the KRAL FM continued transmitting. Huseyin Karadayı and his wife were fined 7500€ monetary penalty and sentenced to 10 months imprisonment by summary court. However, Karadayı notes that KRAL FM has not established a new radio station, but it has set up a mid-range fm in Stavroupoli in order to reach the people in the mountainous region of Xanthi.<sup>4</sup>

ABTTF has noted in several letters that it wrote in previous years to the Representative on Freedom of the Media that the ESR's administrative penalties on the grounds that radio stations do not broadcast in the original Greek language more than 25% of their transmission time, do threaten maintenance of the existence of radio stations owners belonging to the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace, while it undermines its freedom of expression and media and the free flow of information in the country. The Representative on Freedom of the Media also noted that her Office said on several occasions that the relevant Greek legislation needs to be reformed, as it sets a high threshold for minority, community and low-cost broadcasters because of the language requirement, as well as financial and personnel requirements, which can endanger media pluralism.

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.birlikgazetesi.info/haberler/11620-2016-05-16-17-12-57.html>