

Witten, 06.05.2025

Press Release

FUEN TAG member organisations participated in the OSCE meeting

Turkic organisations that are members of the Working Group of Turkic Minorities/Communities in the Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN) (TAG) participated in the Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) held in Vienna, the capital of Austria, on 5-6 May 2025.

The meeting, titled “Protecting Civic Space - the Role of Human Rights Defenders and Freedom of Peaceful Assembly” was attended by the Western Thrace Turks and Meskhetian Turks, members of the Working Group of Turkic Minorities/Communities in FUEN (TAG). The Turkish community in Western Thrace was represented by the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF), and the Meskhetian Turks were represented by the International Meskhetian Turks Association “VATAN”.

The meeting, organised by the Finnish OSCE Chairpersonship and the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), was attended by over 300 participants. It addressed the shrinking of the civil space in the OSCE area, restrictions on the freedom of peaceful assembly, and challenges faced by human rights defenders in their work.

Intervening at the meeting, which addressed stigmatisation and discrediting campaigns against human rights defenders, ABTTF noted that the increasing pressure on human rights defenders in Greece has been frequently criticised in reports by international organisations. Stating that civil society organisations and representatives defending the rights of the Turkish community in Western Thrace are constantly subjected to pressure, intimidation and stigmatisation, ABTTF noted that the Turkish community in Western Thrace is still perceived as “other” in the lands they have lived in for centuries and is further perceived as a threat to the national unity and public order of the country.

ABTTF also explained that representatives of the Turkish community in Western Thrace are being stigmatised and discredited through legal proceedings and targeting in the media. Drawing attention to the issues encountered in the area of freedom of association in relation to the restriction of civil society, ABTTF pointed out that Greece has failed to execute the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) judgments concerning the associations of the Turkish community in Western Thrace in the Bekir-Ousta group of cases for the past 17 years.

In its speech at the meeting, the International Meskhetian Turks Association “VATAN” conveyed the issues encountered by the Meskhetian Turks, who were deported to Central Asia in 1944 by order of Soviet leader Joseph Stalin, in the process of returning to their homeland in Georgia; it was noted that Georgia, which is responsible for completing the return process, has not fulfilled its obligations. Emphasising that the Meskhetian Turks are currently being prevented from entering Georgia, VATAN called on the Georgian authorities to engage in dialogue with the OSCE, the Council of Europe, and relevant UN bodies to create the necessary conditions for the return of the Meskhetian Turks to their ancestral homeland.

Additionally, the “All-Ukrainian Public Organization of Meskhetian Turks “Vatan Ahıska”, representing the Meskhetian Turks in Ukraine, also participated in the meeting. They shared the issues faced by the Meskhetian Turks during their return process to Georgia and noted that the Meskhetian

Turks who left Ukraine due to the war are also experiencing difficulties in settling in Georgia.

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