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Press Release

FUEN member Turkic organisations at the UN Forum on Minority Issues

Turkic organisations that are members of the Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN) participated in the 17th Session of the United Nations (UN) Forum on Minority Issues held in Geneva, Switzerland on 28-29 November 2024.

The Western Thrace Turks and Meskhetian Turks, members of the FUEN Working Group on Turkic Minorities/Communities (TAG), participated in the session themed “Representation of minorities and self-representation in public spaces and discourses”. The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTTF) and Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association (WTMUGA) represented the Turkish community in Western Thrace and the Public Organisation of Meskhetian Turks “VATAN” represented the Meskhetian Turks at the meeting. FUEN Vice President Olivia Schubert also attended the session.

In the session where the representation of minorities in public spaces, education, media including social media and in the fields of arts and culture were discussed, FUEN, in its speech as the largest umbrella organisation bringing together national minorities in Europe, indicated that a legal mechanism or treaty should be established for the protection of national minorities and expressed their wish for the UN Forum on Minority Issues to turn into a permanent forum.

In their speeches at the session, ABTTTF and WTMUGA conveyed the issues faced by the Turkish community in Western Thrace in the field of education. Stating that within the framework of the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne, the Turkish community in Western Thrace was granted the right to establish, manage and supervise its own schools but that the educational autonomy of the Turkish community has been dismantled nowadays as a result of the government interventions, ABTTTF and WTMUGA noted that the authorities rejected the applications of the Turkish community for the opening of a bilingual Turkish minority kindergarten in Turkish and Greek languages. ABTTTF and WTMUGA pointed out that the Turkish primary schools with autonomous status are closed down one by one every year as a result of systematic discrimination and the number of Turkish primary schools in the Western Thrace region decreased from 194 in 2008 to 86 in 2024 and demanded from the Greek state to immediately restore the educational autonomy of the Turkish community in Western Thrace.

In its presentation, the Public Organisation of Meskhetian Turks “VATAN” noted that the Meskhetian Turks, the indigenous people of the southern regions of Georgia, were forcibly exiled to Central Asia in 1944 by the order of Leader of the Soviet Union Joseph Stalin and that today they live in 9 different countries of the world. VATAN conveyed the issues faced by the Meskhetian Turks in the process of returning to their ancestral homeland in Georgia and called on Georgia to fully and unconditionally fulfil its obligations undertaken in its application for membership to the Council of Europe in 2007 and to update the legal mechanisms for return with the participation of representatives of Meskhetian Turks, considering reasonable and realistic procedures and conditions.