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Press Release

FUEN member Turkic organisations attended OSCE meeting

Turkic organisations that are members of the Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN) attended the Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) held in Vienna, the capital of Austria, on 22-23 April 2024.

The Western Thrace Turks and Meskhetian Turks, members of Working Group of Turkic Minorities/Communities in FUEN (TAG) attended the meeting titled “The Role of Civil Society in the Promotion and Protection of International Human Rights Law and International Humanitarian Law”. At the meeting, the Turkish community in Western Thrace was represented by the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) and the Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association (WTMUGA) and the Meskhetian Turks were represented by the International Meskhetian Turks Association “VATAN”.

Organised by the Malta OSCE Chairmanship and the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), the importance of civil society in documenting violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law, especially in times of conflict and humanitarian crises, and the significant threats faced by human rights defenders in the OSCE region and how these challenges confront them were discussed during the meetings. Furthermore, the impact that such challenges have on their safety and ability to conduct their work effectively was addressed.

In their respective interventions at the meeting, ABTTF and WTMUGA pointed out that the rule of law has been systematically violated in Greece in the recent period, and as an important indicator of the rule of law, it was stressed that the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) regarding the Bekir-Ousta and Others group of cases, in which Western Thrace Turkish associations took part, were cited as an important indicator of the rule of law. Moreover, it was noted that despite all the warnings of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Ministers, Greece has failed to execute the aforementioned judgments for the past 16 years.

ABTTF and WTMUGA stated that the non-governmental organisations and representatives upholding the rights of the Turkish community in Western Thrace in Greece are constantly subjected to pressure, intimidation and stigmatisation and underlined that the Greek government implements isolation and marginalisation policies against the Turkish community in Western Thrace, denies its identity and does not recognise its elected muftis.

In its intervention, the International Meskhetian Turks Association “VATAN” expressed the issues faced in the return process of Meskhetian Turks, who were exiled to Central Asia by the order of Soviet Leader Joseph Stalin in 1944, to their homeland in Georgia, and stated that Georgia, which was obliged to complete the return process, did not fulfil its obligations. VATAN called on Georgia to comply with its obligations promised in its application for membership to the Council of Europe and to fulfil the necessary conditions for the return of the exiled Meskhetian Turks to their homeland.