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Press Release

The 6th annual meeting of the FUEN Education Working Group was held in Helsinki

The 6th Annual Meeting of the Education Working Group of the Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN) was held in Helsinki, the capital of Finland, on 9-10 April 2024. The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF), representing the Turkish community in Western Thrace, which is a member of the Working Group of Turkic Minorities/Communities in FUEN (TAG), attended the meeting themed “Primary school - primary education level in minority education”, hosted by the Swedish minority in Finland.

At the meeting attended by FUEN Vice President Gösta Toft and FUEN Vice President and FUEN Education Working Group Spokesperson Daniel Alfreider, ABTTF realised a presentation about the issues faced by the Turkish community in Western Thrace in the field of education.

In its presentation, ABTTF indicated that between 1923 and 1967, the schools belonging to the Turkish community in Western Thrace were recognized as “Turkish schools” by the Greek state, but this was later changed by the Colonels’ Junta, and that despite the restoration of democracy in Greece in 1974, the Turkish community did not take back the educational autonomy guaranteed by the treaties which has eroded by various laws and practices.

Pointing out that the Turkish community in Western Thrace faces discrimination at all levels in equal access to education, ABTTF noted that the curriculum at the primary school level was prepared without the approval and contribution of teachers from the Turkish community and that Turkish lessons have gradually decreased in recent years, and that Turkish primary schools with autonomous status have been systematically closed down. Furthermore, ABTTF underscored that while the Turkish community had 226 primary schools in 2003, this number decreased to 90 in the 2023-2024 school year due to the closures made by the Greek authorities in violation of the educational autonomy.

Stressing that the educational issues of the Turkish community in Western Thrace were brought to the agenda through questions for written answer and petitions before the European Parliament (EP), ABTTF called on Greece to restore the educational autonomy of the Turkish community and to end the closure of Turkish primary schools in Western Thrace.

On the second day of the meeting, participants visited the Matlidens Lågstadium primary school belonging to the Swedish minority in Finland.