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Press Release

**The educational issues of the Turkish communities in Greece were voiced at the EP Intergroup on Minorities**

The educational issues of Western Thrace Turks and Turks from Rhodes and Kos that are part of the Turkish community in Greece were conveyed at a meeting of the Intergroup on Traditional Minorities, National Communities and Languages at the European Parliament (EP) on 23 November 2023.

At the initiative of the Working Group of Turkic Minorities/Communities within the Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN) (TAG), the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) and the Rhodes, Kos and the Dodecanese Turks Culture and Solidarity Association (ROISDER) realised their presentations at a meeting held at the EP building in Strasbourg.

FUEN TAG Spokesman and ABTTF President Halit Habip Ođlu, ABTTF International Relations Director Melek Kırmacı Arık and ROISDER President Prof. Dr. Mustafa Kaymakçı attended the meeting which was chaired by Intergroup Co-Chairs Loránt Vincze (EPP, Romania) and François Alfonsi (Greens/EFA, France).

In his opening speech, FUEN TAG Spokesman and ABTTF President Halit Habip Ođlu pointed out that Greece is the only Member State of the European Union (EU) that denies the existence of autochthonous national minorities and noted that although kindergarten education is compulsory in the country, the establishment of bilingual kindergartens is not allowed in the Western Thrace region where the Turkish community lives. Indicating that there are serious issues pertaining to bilingual primary schools belonging to the Turkish community, Habip Ođlu explained that the number of Turkish primary schools in Western Thrace has decreased from 226 to 90 over the years, from 9 to 0 in Rhodes, and from 3 to 0 in Kos.

In his presentation titled “Educational problems of the Turkish community in Rhodes and Kos”, ROISDER President Prof. Dr. Mustafa Kaymakçı noted that between 1912 and 1947, the Turks on the islands were provided with education Turkish in primary and secondary schools under the Italian, German and British administrations, respectively. Kaymakçı indicated that Turkish and Greek bilingual education was provided in Turkish schools in Rhodes and Kos until 1972 after the transfer of the islands to Greece in 1947 and he further noted that during this period there were 9 Turkish primary schools and 1 Turkish kindergarten in Rhodes, 3 Turkish primary schools and 1 Turkish kindergarten in Kos. Kaymakçı stated that Turkish lessons were abolished in Turkish schools before the 1971-1972 school year and religious lessons were abolished in 1973, and that Turkish teachers were sent home, but their salaries continued to be paid and they later retired. Kaymakçı highlighted that they submitted a petition to the EP Committee on Petitions (PETI) requesting that children from the Turkish community on the Greek island of Kos be taught their native language, Turkish, and that they received the answer that the Commission does not have a general authority to review the decisions of the Member States. Kaymakçı pointed out that Greece denies the existence of Turks living in Rhodes and Kos, and that the Turks on the islands are deprived of the right to learn their native language, Turkish.

In her presentation titled “Problems in equal access to quality education for children belonging to the Turkish community in Western Thrace, Greece”, ABTIF International Relations Director Melek Kırmacı Arık noted that although the Turkish community in Western Thrace has educational autonomy, Turkish primary schools with autonomous status in Western Thrace were closed on the pretext of a lack of sufficient pupils. Underlining that the number of Turkish primary schools has decreased significantly since 2010, Kırmacı Arık said that the number of primary schools decreased to 90 in the 2023-2024 school year. Kırmacı Arık pointed out that there are no bilingual Turkish minority kindergartens in Western Thrace and that the Greek authorities left the Turkish community’s requests for private kindergartens unanswered and further added that the number of Turkish secondary schools is significantly insufficient compared to the population rate in the region, and that there is only one bilingual Turkish secondary school in the prefectures of Komotini and Xanthi. Noting that the school organised an 11-day action to protest the imposition of double-shift schooling at the Xanthi Turkish Minority Secondary and High School to demand a solution to the building problem that has been going on for years, Kırmacı Arık noted that the issues continue to this day despite the protest action, and further added that a written question was recently submitted to the European Commission on the issue. Kırmacı Arık indicated that the situation of minority communities in a country is a very clear indicator in terms of understanding the level of democracy in that country and called on Greece to restore the educational autonomy of the Turkish community in Western Thrace.