



Avrupa Batı Trakya Türk Federasyonu Föderation der West-Thrakien Türken in Europa Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe Ευρωπαϊκή Ομοσπονδία Τούρκων Δυτικής Θράκης Fédération des Turcs de Thrace Occidentale en Europe

NGO in Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations
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Member of the Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN)

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Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting on promotion of freedom of expression: rights, responsibilities and OSCE commitments

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SESSION 2: The Responsibilities in the Framework of Freedom of Expression

OSCE participating States agree that freedom of expression is a fundamental human right and a basic component of a democratic society. The National Commission for Human Rights in Greece notes that there is a trend in news bulletins to reproduce stereotypes and prejudice concerning different ethnic or social groups. The political discourse against migrants and asylum seekers has led to violence against persons with different nationality and/or ethnic origin, religion or language in other parts of the country. Some media express certain prejudices and negative stereotypes towards members of minority groups, including the Turkish Minority in Western Thrace.

With the slogan 'Europe Europe Hear Our Voice', for the first time in history minority political party Friendship, Equality, Peace (FEP) Party has run for the EP elections, with 38 candidates from Rhodope, Xanthi and Evros. FEP Party announced that they participated in the elections to give the necessary message to the mindset which does not take into consideration the demands of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace. Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN) expressed its concern over the detention of Turkish language teacher Cahit Mustafa in Rhodes for three times on the grounds of spreading propaganda for our member organization Friendship, Equality, Peace (FEP) Party before the European Parliament elections on May 25, 2014 in Greece. Before the EP elections in Greece, Cahit Mustafa, who publicly expressed his Turkish identity, openly supported the minority party and distributed FEP Party's election leaflets in Rhodes. He has been arrested by the police for three times and kept under detention for one hour at the first time, two hours at the second time and more long hours at the third time on the grounds that he spread propaganda for the FEP Party. We would like to stress the importance of individual right to freedom of expression including written and oral communications and their right to take part in the government of his country, directly or through freely chosen representatives. Therefore we condemn the arbitrary detention of Cahit Mustafa by the Greek police and urges Greek government to respect every citizen's right to elect and express his political opinion freely.

In the EP elections, 90% voters from the Turkish minority in Western Thrace have voted for the Friendship, Equality and Peace (DEB) party, led by Mustafa Ali Çavuş and the FEP Party has been the first party in Rhodope and Xanthi, where the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace lives. The FEP Party's success in the EP elections delivered a shock in the Greek media. Here are striking headlines:

“Greece has lost Western Thrace in the elections. The “ostensible victory” of the politicians suffered national defeat... Thrace has been abandoned for a handful of votes.”(http://www.freepen.gr/2014/05/blog-post_50.html?m=1)

“Athens is dead on its feet: The Turkish lovers are celebrating the success of the Turkish party. No one is dealing with our national issues... They are busy with the increase of Golden Dawn”.
(http://www.stoxos.gr/2014/05/blog-post_4746.html)

“Thrace wants new Kosovo: Grey Wolfes(FEP Party) runs for the EP elections and Athens is sleeping”(http://ellas.me/aenaos_ellhnismos.php?action=detail&id=1397133219)

“The aim of Turkey is to increase tension in Thrace!”

These headlines show how the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace and its political party is perceived. The persistent hate speech in the mainstream media with an explicit manifestation of hatred against Turkey makes the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace, of which all of whom are Greek citizens, a vulnerable target for far-right and/or extremist groups.

Events in Greece before the local and regional elections on 18 and 25 May 2014 show that Turkish Minority is still perceived and accepted as “the other” in Greece. New Democracy (NEA) Party Rodopi Deputy and former Minister of Education and Religious Affairs Evripidis Stilyanidis gave reportage to Greek daily Eleftheros Typos on 27 April 2014. Stilyanidis’ statements regarding the Western Thrace Turkish Minority received big reactions. According to Birlik, a daily of Western Thrace Turkish Minority, Stilyanidis affirmed the necessity to introduce new regulations to country’s administrative structure on the grounds that the municipalities have been Islamised especially when the examples of Maroneia and Iasmos were taken into account. Further to this point, Stilyanidis suggested the municipalities in Western Thrace, which were predominantly run by the Western Thrace Turkish Minority, shall be redistributed to those which were run by Christians.

The far-right has sharply risen as the economic downturn deepens in the country and the current situation in Greece shows how quickly such political discourse against persons with different backgrounds can expand as xenophobia and racially motivated hate crimes in Greece. The period after the election of Golden Dawn to the Parliament in June 2012 has proved to be true that the political discourse which has been harshened after the June elections has turned into an anti-Greek sentiment and triggered xenophobia and racially-motivated hate crimes in the country. The European elections were held in 28 Member States on 22-25 May 2014 revealed an increased ratio of support to far-right political parties throughout European Union, including Greece. The Neo-Nazi party Golden Dawn secured 3 out of 21, total seat number of Greece in the EP.

We fully support that any legislation restricting the right to freedom of opinion and expression, or the flow of information, must be applied by a body which is independent of any political, commercial or other unwarranted influence in a manner that is neither arbitrary nor discriminatory, and with adequate safeguards against abuse. The right to freedom of expression is and must be respected by all parties, but there should be a clear line between freedom of expression and of the media and the right to freedom from discrimination. The problem is that the interpretation of hate speech of racism by certain judicial authorities, leading to either no charges are being brought, or charges are dropped in the cases.