



General Assembly

Distr.: General
11 September 2024

English only

Human Rights Council

Fifty-seventh session

9 September–9 October 2024

Agenda item 9

Racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related forms of intolerance, follow-up to and implementation of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action

Written statement* submitted by Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[5 August 2024]

* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.



Targeting of Political Representatives of the Turkish Community in Thrace

Article 1 of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities stipulates that States shall protect the existence and the national or ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic identity of minorities within their respective territories and shall encourage conditions for the promotion of that identity and Article 2 notes that persons belonging to minorities have the right to participate effectively in cultural, religious, social, economic and public life.¹

However, the rights of the Turkish community in Thrace in Greece, which was granted “minority” status and autonomy in the fields of education and religion by the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne, were suspended in 1967 when Colonels’ Junta came to power, and this situation continues today despite the restoration of democracy in 1974.

Recognizing the Turkish community in Thrace only as a religious minority, Greece denies and rejects its ethnic Turkish national identity. As a reflection of this official state policy, MPs belonging to the Turkish community in Thrace, all of whom are Greek citizens, and rights defenders fighting for the national identity of the Turkish community are subjected to serious hate speech in the mainstream Greek media and unfounded and defamatory news are constantly published about them. Such news carries the danger of creating prejudices, unrealistic perceptions and ultimately hostility against the Turkish community in Thrace in the society at large.

Following the success of the political party of the Turkish community in Thrace, the Friendship, Equality and Peace (FEP) Party in the 2024 European Parliament (EP) elections, there has been an increase in the number of news reports in the Greek media directly targeting MPs from the Turkish community. Turkish MPs are scapegoated and subjected to unfounded accusations just because they participate in events organized by the institutions and organizations of the Turkish community in Thrace in the region or because of the parliamentary work they carry out as part of their responsibilities to protect the rights of the Turkish community.

New Left Party Xanthi MP Hüseyin Zeybek was targeted in the Greek press following his written parliamentary question to the Ministry of Education on the refusal of the Directorate of Primary Education to allow the use of the gardens of the schools of the Turkish community in Thrace in the prefecture of Xanthi for events.² In the news article, it is claimed that Hüseyin Zeybek represents the Turkish para-statal structures in Thrace in the Greek national assembly with his lies.³

In another news report, it was claimed that New Left Party MPs Hüseyin Zeybek and Özgür Ferhat were sworn supporters of the Consulate General of Türkiye in Komotini for attending the commemoration ceremony held on 14 July 2024 at the grave of the late Ahmet Mete, the former elected Mufti of Xanthi, on the occasion of the second anniversary of his death, and for advocating religious nationalism in Thrace, replacing secular nationalism and using political Islam as a tool.⁴

The deliberate marginalization of the MPs belonging to the Turkish community in Thrace in the Greek media fuels polarization in the society and the Greek political system and shows the erosion of democratic principles and the gradual disappearance of the democratic environment in the country.

The competent authorities of our country Greece should use all legal measures and mechanisms at their disposal to prevent hate and racist discourse in politics and media that directly targets the Turkish community in Thrace and should closely monitor those who commit hate crimes and take criminal sanctions against them.

¹ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/declaration-rights-persons-belonging-national-or-ethnic>

2 <https://gundemgazetesi.com/detayh.php?id=19213>

3 <https://www.komotinipress.gr/o-x-zeimpek-psevdomenos-ekprosopi-to-parakratos-tis-thrakis-stin-vouli-to-xeri-o-al-xaritsis/>

4 <https://www.komotinipress.gr/zfisam/>