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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

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.



Demand for Dissolution of the Friendship, Equality and Peace (FEP) Party in Greece and Right to Vote and Stand for Election of the Turkish Community in Thrace

The UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that “everyone has the right to take part in the government of his country, directly or through freely chosen representatives”¹ and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities stipulates that “persons belonging to minorities have the right to participate effectively in decisions on the national and, where appropriate, regional level concerning the minority to which they belong or the regions in which they live, in a manner not incompatible with national legislation”.²

Representation of national minorities in politics and respect for the right to vote and be elected without discrimination is a fundamental element of a state governed by the rule of law and a strong indicator of the level of minority rights in modern democracies. In a democratic country, individuals belonging to national minorities can either stand as candidates in elections at the national and local level through the majority parties, or they can establish their own parties to provide political representation.

With the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne, the Turkish community in the Thrace region of Greece was granted “minority” status and guaranteed educational and religious autonomy and rights. The Turkish community in Thrace, with a population of approximately 150 thousand, constitutes the majority of the population in the prefecture of Rodopi with 52% and almost half of the population in the prefecture of Xanthi with 45%.

The only political party of the Turkish community in Thrace defending its rights and freedoms in the political arena, the Friendship Equality Peace (FEP) Party was established in 1991. On 9 June 2024, in the European Parliament (EP) elections held in Greece, the FEP Party once again achieved a historic success and became the first party in the prefectures of Rodopi and Xanthi, as in 2014 and 2019, with the slogan “We are here!”³

Participating in the 2024 EP elections with a total of 42 candidates, the FEP Party became the first party in Rodopi with 14,448 votes and 36.10% of the votes and in Xanthi with 11,176 votes and 27.16% of the votes, winning the elections in both prefectures by far ahead of the ruling New Democracy (ND). However, due to the country-wide 3% electoral threshold, which was put into effect in Greece in 1989 after the Turkish community in Thrace elected an independent deputy to the national parliament and which was also applied in the EP elections, it could not send a deputy to the EP in the prefectures of Rhodope and Xanthi, despite having far more than 3% of the votes.

In the 9th June EP elections in Rodopi and Xanthi, where the Turkish community in Thrace is densely populated, the party’s large vote share and success disturbed some political and media circles in Greece and the FEP Party faced stigmatisation and hate speech. Allegations that the FEP Party was supported by Türkiye were brought to the agenda and political speeches and media reports claiming that the party posed an alleged danger to Greece’s national security and territorial integrity turned into a smear campaign with the aim of dissolving the party.

Xronos newspaper wrote that after the FEP Party nominated a person who identifies himself as Macedonian, some extremists who want to create a “Macedonian” minority in the country are playing a big diplomatic game of ethnic identity to create a minority issue through some communities.⁴

Dimos Kirilidis, Member of the Assembly of the region of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace, in a statement on the EP elections, noted the following: “Do the politicians in charge know that this party is directed by Turkish power centres?”. He further added, “Everyone who feels like a minority should go to Türkiye or Skopje”.⁵

Nikolaos Papadopoulos, a lecturer at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki and Democratic Patriotic Movement “Niki” MP from Thessaloniki, brought the Court of Cassation decision approving the participation of the FEP Party in the elections and the discourse of supervision of the activities of the FEP Party to the agenda.⁶

Two academicians applied to the Council of State for the FEP Party to be declared illegal and its activities to be suspended.⁷

The Spartans Party headed by Vasilis Stigkas applied to the Court of Cassation and requested that the FEP Party be declared illegal.⁸

In a statement released on 6 July 2024, the FEP Party announced that it had learned that some individuals, including the leaders of the far-right parties, had applied to the Council of State and the Court of Cassation with the demand that their party be audited, its legal activities be suspended and the EP elections held on 9 June be renewed in Thrace, on grounds that the party members referred to themselves as Turks.⁹

As can be seen, the stigmatisation, manipulation and defamation launched today in politics and media after the success of the FEP Party in Thrace in the EP elections held on 9 June is a campaign launched with the aim of shutting down the party. As a result of this ugly campaign launched against the FEP Party in politics and media in Greece, efforts are being made to stop the activities of the party.

We would like to remind that the participation of the FEP Party in the 2024 EP elections was realised following the approval of the Court of Cassation, the highest court in Greece. Respect for the right to vote and to be elected without discrimination is one of the fundamental elements of any state of law and the demand to ban the legal activities of the FEP Party due to its discourse and thoughts within the framework of the law is an extremely negative situation in the name of democracy and law in Greece and is a direct attack on the freedom of opinion, the right to vote and to be elected of the Turkish community in Thrace.

As Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF), we call on our country Greece to fully respect the freedom of opinion and expression and the right to vote and be elected of the Turkish community in Thrace and we believe that the Court of Cassation and the Council of State will act in accordance with the Constitution, laws and UN conventions to which our country is a party and will not allow undemocratic attempts by some political and media circles in our country to target and silence the Turkish community in Thrace through the FEP Party.

1 <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights#:~:text=Article%2021,or%20through%20freely%20chosen%20representatives>

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

3 <https://ekloges.ypes.gr/current/e/home/en/index.html>

4 <https://xronos.gr/mikrokomotinaika/mikrokomotinaika-03-07-2024>

5 https://www.aridaia365.gr/2024/06/blog-post_27.html

6 <https://veteranos.gr/krououn-oi-kabanes-tou-kindynou-sti-thraki-mas/>

7 <https://www.kalimera-arkadia.gr/ellada/item/167996-panepistimiakoi-zitoyn-na-tethei-ektos-nomou-to-komma-isotitas-eirinis-kai-filias-pou-mila-gia-tourkiki-meionotita-sti-thraki.html>

8 <https://www.naftemporiki.gr/politics/1707008/spartiates-na-tethei-ektos-nomoy-to-kief-ypomnima-ston-areio-pago/>

9 <https://www.milletnews.com/western-thrace/western-thrace-turks-targeted-again-in-greece-legal-action-against-the-fep-party>