

RESOLUTION 2023-03

Turkish Minority of Western Thrace, submitted by the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF), the Friendship, Equality and Peace (FEP) Party and the Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association (WTMUGA)

The Delegates of the Member Organisations of the Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN) adopted the following resolution at their Assembly of Delegates in Pécs • Fünfkirchen • Pečuh, Hungary on 9 September 2023:

Discourse of Othering and Stigma of the Turkish Minority in Western Thrace in Greece

Greece has a reputation for being the cradle of democracy, but minority protection lags far behind the minority protection regime provided by international treaties and international standards.

The Turkish minority in Western Thrace is an autochthonous, national minority in Greece. Although it was granted autonomy in the field of education and religion with the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne, this autonomous structure is not implemented in practice. The ethnic Turkish identity is not recognised by the Greek state and the Minority is subjected to systematic discrimination in social, economic, public, and political life.

Two out of three deputies both in the prefectures of Rodopi and Xanthi in the 21 May elections were members of the Turkish minority. The only province in which SYRIZA received more than the ruling New Democracy was Rodopi, where the Turkish minority in Western Thrace forms the majority in terms of population.

The developments in the period between the 21 May elections and the renewed elections on 25 June 2023 have clearly revealed the stigmatisation and marginalisation of politicians belonging to the Turkish minority.

After the election result in Rodopi, a political smear campaign was launched, and Turkish deputies and candidates were targeted by using them as tools of the election campaign. The will of the voters and their free elections were ignored, and there were attempts at trying to discredit the Turkish deputies in politics and the media, based on the claim that the high number of votes of the Turkish deputy elected from SYRIZA in Rodopi is the result of Türkiye's interference in the election.

A smear campaign was carried out against the re-elected and the newly elected Turkish deputies from Rodopi and Xanthi, and the aim was to prevent the Turkish deputies from being placed at the top of the election lists in the 25 June 2023 elections. New Democracy MP Candidate from Rodopi Mustafa Katrancı, who has indicated that he will pursue his duty as a deputy with the aim of bringing harmony in the livelihoods of the Christians and Muslims living together in Rodopi, withdrew his candidacy in the elections on 25 June.

The presence of the Turkish minority in the political arena and the ugly political campaigns carried out over the loyalty of the Turkish parliamentary candidates to their country threatens the peaceful environment in the

region. During the election campaign, SYRIZA President Alexis Tsipras used the expression “Turkish minority” in a TV programme, and there were aggressive reactions and verbal attacks insofar as the Minority was not Turkish but described as a “Muslim minority”.

Dora Bakoyannis, one of the leading figures of New Democracy, visited a mountainous Turkish village in Rodopi and intimidated the minority by explaining that the conditions would worsen if the members of the Minority did not vote for them.

The campaign of defamation and targeting against the deputies of the Turkish minority in Western Thrace in the political arena was carried out in the media, and there were attempts at trying to manipulate the will of the electorate by using a provocative and aggressive language in the news, including in the mainstream media. This situation deepens the structural and systematic discrimination against the Turkish minority.

The FUEN Assembly of Delegates calls on Greece to:

- end structural and systematic discrimination against the members of the Turkish Minority in Western Thrace.
- prevent the Turkish minority from being instrumentalised by using it as election campaign tool by preventing stigmatisation, defamation and discrediting in the political arena and in the media.
- prevent and punish the spread of hate speech and hate-based thoughts by prohibiting aggressive and offensive language in politics and media.
- encourage the free exercise of all political rights of the Turkish minority in Western Thrace and to respect the free will and right to vote of minority voters.
- guarantee, protect and encourage the participation of the Turkish minority in Western Thrace in political life.
- sign and ratify the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCNM) and the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (ECML).