

RESOLUTION

Federal Union of European Nationalities

Resolution on the situation of minority rights in Greece on the occasion of the FUEN Congress 2015 in Komotini/Gümülcine

The Assembly of Delegates of the Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN) adopted the following resolution at the FUEN Congress in 2015 held in the home region of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace, in Komotini/Gümülcine, Greece, on 16 May 2015:

The Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN) organizes its annual congress in cooperation with our member organizations the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF), the Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association (WTMUGA) and the Friendship, Equality, Peace (FEP) Party in Komotini/Gümülcine, in the home region of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace.

The Federal Union of European Nationalities and the representatives of minorities / ethnic groups and nationalities from all over Europe gathered together in Komotini/Gümülcine for the Congress 2015.

FUEN and the representatives of minorities / ethnic groups and nationalities are deeply concerned that rights of persons belonging to national or ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities are at an alarming level in Greece. FUEN has, therefore, decided to hold its annual Congress this year in Komotini/Gümülcine in order to attract the attention of the international community to the problems of national minorities in Greece.

FUEN closely monitors the situation of national minorities in Greece based on the information gathered from international monitoring bodies and mechanisms and from legal cases that received significant international public attention before international courts. Greece has not signed the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (ECRML). However, it signed the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities in 1997, but has not yet ratified it.

Greece only recognizes a “Muslim minority in Thrace” and denies the existence of an ethnic Turkish minority in Western Thrace. The legal status of the Muslim minority is based on the Treaty of Lausanne of 1923 and the Turkish minority has a similar right as the non-Muslim minority in Turkey to establish, manage and control at their own expense, any charitable, religious and social institution, any school and other establishment for instruction and education, including the right to use their own language and to exercise their own religion freely. The educational and religious autonomy of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace has been in practice until the Greek military junta regime from 1967. After seven years of military rule and the return to democracy in 1974, the autonomy in education and religious affairs has not been restored.

The Turkish community living in Rhodes, Kos and the Dodecanese is not included in the minority protection regime enshrined in the Lausanne Treaty on the grounds that these islands were not part of Greece when the Lausanne Treaty of 1923 was signed. The fact that those islands were occupied by Italy in 1912 and left to Greece with the 1947 Paris Treaty should not be a reason to deprive the Turkish population on the islands of their minority rights, and the minority rights enshrined in the Lausanne Peace Treaty of 1923 and European standards on minority rights should be applied to persons of Turkish ethnic origin of those islands.

Greece's stance toward minorities is periodically reviewed by a number of national and international human rights monitoring bodies. Based on the information gathered, Greece often categorically states that it does not recognize that "a distinct ethnic or linguistic minority exists in its territory by the name 'Macedonian'" and maintains that minority status cannot be granted to other groups because of lack of fulfillment of objective criteria.

We monitor numerous breaches which have occurred in this context, as demonstrated by the number of cases in which the European Court of Human Rights has found against Greece, particularly the cases "Home of Macedonian Civilization" (Stegi Makedonikou Politismou) and "Xanthi Turkish Union", "Cultural Association of Turkish Women of the Region of Rodopi" and "Evros Prefecture Minority Youth Association" (Bekir-Ousta group of cases). We express our serious concern that the repeated refusals to revoke the decisions related to the aforementioned groups are related to their work in defense of the rights and freedoms of minorities, including by expressing dissenting views and exercising the right to associate freely.

We consider that Greece, which is proud to be the cradle of democracy, must ensure that the rights of these minority groups are respected, protected and promoted by a legislative framework based on an open and institutionalized dialogue and consultation process with representatives of respective minorities mentioned above.

We call upon Greece to:

- restore the educational and religious autonomy of the Turkish minority of Western Thrace enshrined in the 1923 Lausanne Treaty as in practice until the 1967 military junta,
- withdraw from the dispute over whether there is a Macedonian minority in Greece and focus on freedom of expression and freedom of association of this minority and implement these freedoms without discrimination,
- implement fully and completely the judgments of ECtHR and amend the Code of Civil Procedures in such a way that it allows for the implementation of the European Court decisions in matters related to freedom of association,
- ratify the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages and establish a policy standard for the protection of national minorities, having due regard to international documents.