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

Written statement* submitted by the Federal Union of European Nationalities, 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.

[12 February 2017]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

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The political deterrence and intimidation against members of the Turkish minority of Western Thrace in Greece

The Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN) has previously expressed its deep concern about the increasing trend in hate speech and crimes against persons belonging to the Turkish minority of Western Thrace. The political bias and hatred against members of Turkish minority created an environment of pressure and intimidation as a part of government policy in the region.

The Turkish Minority of Western Thrace, which is represented in our organization by three different organizations, namely the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF), the Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association (WTMUGA) and the Friendship, Equality and Peace (FEP) Party, is highly concerned about attempts of intimidation and deterrence by governmental authorities in the region.

In visits to the region of Western Thrace since 2010, FUEN conducted extensive consultations with the minority members and had acknowledged first-hand experience and made observations on the ground. In its Concluding observations on the second periodic report of Greece on 27 October 2015, the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights noted with concern that the State party recognizes only the Muslim religious minority in Western Thrace as a minority¹. FUEN regrets that Greece refuses to recognize the presence of a Turkish Minority in the region of Western Thrace and rather defines the minority based on its religious affiliation.

Under the 1923 Lausanne Peace Treaty, Turkish minority in Western Thrace has an equal right with 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, with the right to use their own language and to exercise their own religion freely therein.

The autonomy in education and religious affairs has been undermined and diminished by governmental practices over years. In addition, many hate crimes motivated by racism were perpetrated against the people and institutions of the Muslim Turkish Minority of Western Thrace in the years of 2015 and 2016. The minority members feel threatened against the political climate of intimidation in the region by incidents that took place in the last year.

In March 2016, the Director of the State Education Department of Eastern Macedonia-Thrace Panayotis Keramaris has banned the use of Turkish by teachers from the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace in their communications². In April 2016, the Director declared that teachers in minority primary schools shall speak only Greek with students in their statements, announcements and declarations. The decisions, which restricted the use of the Turkish language in the Turkish minority schools, evoked a strong reaction from the members of the Turkish Minority. The Union of Counsellors of Minority Schools noted that this would practically end the use of the Turkish language in minority schools³.

On 30 August 2016, the Director of the State Education Department of Eastern Macedonia-Thrace Panayotis Keramaris decided to close down nine more minority primary schools in the region of Western Thrace on the grounds that these schools do not have sufficient numbers of students in accordance with the decision of the Ministry of Education, Research and Religion in 2010. When the former UN Independent Expert on Minority Issues Ms. Gay McDougall carried out a fact-finding mission to the region in 2008, there were 194 minority primary schools in Western Thrace

¹http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=E%2fC.12%2fGRC%2fCO%2f2&Lang=en

² <http://www.gundemgazetesi.com/haber/detay/1502>

³ <http://www.gundemgazetesi.com/haber/detay/1557>

with courses taught in both Turkish and Greek⁴. The number minority primary schools decreased to 188 in 2011, 170 in 2014, and 164 in 2015 and 133 in 2016.

Although the Turkish Minority should be autonomous in the field of education under the Lausanne Treaty, the Ministry's decision included the minority schooling system. Therefore, the closure of minority primary schools gained a very strong reaction from the minority representatives. The representatives of Turkish minority associations, minority mayors and a large number of teachers and parents took part in the protest organised by Thessaloniki Private Pedagogy Institute (SÖPA) Graduate Teacher's Association and Xanthi SÖPA Graduate Teacher's Association in Rhodope-Evros on 28 September 2016⁵.

Juridical investigations against representatives of the Turkish minority have revealed that there is an environment of political intimidation and pressure against the Minority.

The neo-Nazi Golden Dawn Party, before the "Search for Justice" march organised by the FEP Party on 24th July 2016 filed a criminal complaint against FEP Party President Mustafa Ali Çavuş and Vice President Ozan Ahmetoğlu. Following this, prosecutors launched an investigation. Due to the initiated investigation, President Mustafa Ali Çavuş, on 30th July 2016, and Vice President Ozan Ahmetoğlu, on 8th August, along with Acting President and Legal Advisor Ahmet Kara made their depositions to the Rhodope Police Department⁶.

On 4 October 2016, our member organization Friendship, Equality, Peace (FEP) Party President Mustafa Ali Çavuş made his deposition in relation to an investigation for his speech during the FEP Party 4th General Congress on 22 May 2016, about the theft of the Party's founder and first President Dr. Sadik Ahmet's vehicle in which he lost his life⁷. The Party stated that "Systematic investigations continue to be opened aimed at silencing, scaring and intimidating FEP Party President Mustafa Ali Çavuş and his colleagues, who loudly voice the injustices suffered by the Western Thrace Muslim Turkish Minority".

On 23 January 2017, the Elected Mufti of Komotini İbrahim Şerif made his second deposition to the police for his speech at the opening ceremony of the new headquarters of the FEP Party in January 2016, in which he chanted the slogan and carried the campaign flag that FEP Party used during the EP elections in 2014 in order to attract attention to the problems of the Minority⁸.

Furthermore, Elected Mufti of Xanthi Ahmet Mete and the Imam of Gökçeşinar (Glafki) Erkan Azizoğlu will stand on trial on 31 March 2017 for their actions of the funeral of a young minority member who died while performing his military service in the Greek army on 20 July 2016. During the memorial ceremony on 20 July 2016 the appointed Mufti of Xanthi, who is not recognized by minority members, wanted to make the prayer at the funeral and minority members prevented him from making the prayer. The Public Prosecutor's Office in Xanthi filed a suit against the Elected Mufti of Xanthi and the Imam of Gökçeşinar. The Elected Mufti will be tried for allegedly usurpation of the office and for allegedly being the instigator for disruption of the public order and the removal of the appointed Mufti from the funeral⁹.

Elected Mufti Ahmet Mete was also asked to make a deposition in late January 2017 for his speech about the controversial Law 4115/2013, known as "240 Imams Law", which was strongly opposed by minority members since the law clearly violated the religious autonomy guaranteed by the Lausanne Treaty¹⁰.

⁴ <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G09/111/98/PDF/G0911198.pdf?OpenElement>

⁵ <http://www.gundemgazetesi.com/haberyunanistan/detay/2098>

⁶ <http://milletgazetesi.gr/view.php?id=5336>

⁷ <http://www.debpartisi.org/indexENG1.php?s=detailsENG&id=4742>

⁸ <http://www.birlikgazetesi.net/haberler/12395-mueftue-brahm-erf-avrupa-avrupa-duy-sesmez-bayraini-elne-aldi-dye-pulse-fade-verd.html>

⁹ <http://www.gundemgazetesi.com/haber/detay/2142>

¹⁰ <http://www.gundemgazetesi.com/haber/detay/2585>

Mayor of Yassıkoy (Iasmos) Municipality İsmet Kadı, a member of the Turkish minority, was sentenced to a four-month-imprisonment on the ground that he allegedly used the official car outside the municipality borders and for his personal affairs. On 19 December 2016, the Mayor was stopped by the police while driving in the vehicle after leaving his children to school in the morning. The police took the Mayor into custody immediately and brought him to the Security Directorate in Rhodope. On 30 December 2016, the court ordered a four-month of imprisonment, which was appealed by the Mayor to a higher court. Kadı explained that the treatment of the public prosecutor of Komotini and the police officers against himself as a mayor was not proper. The Mayor and institutions of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace declared that the treatment against the Mayor is an act of intimidation against the Minority itself¹¹.

Our member organizations representing the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace and FUEN have repeatedly asked Greek authorities to protect, respect and promote the rights of the Turkish minority guaranteed by the Treaty of Lausanne and restore the autonomous structures in the fields of education and religions with no further interventions.

We request from the Greek Government to end discrimination and eliminate prejudices against the Minority at all levels of government and law enforcement departments. We ask the Greek Government to end the strategy of intimidation and deterrence against members of the minority in full respect for the right to freedom of expression and opinion and treat members of the Turkish minority as equal citizens of the country.

¹¹ <http://www.gundemgazetesi.com/haberyunanistan/detay/2457>