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### **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.

[29 August 2016]

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

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## **The increasing trend in hate speech and hate crimes against the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace in Greece**

The Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN) is deeply concerned about the increasing trend in hate speech and hate crimes in Greece against vulnerable groups, including religious and ethnic minorities. This issue has intensively been discussed during Greece's UPR Second Cycle Review held on 3 May 2016 at the 25th Session of the UPR Working Group.

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 increasing hate speech and hate-motivated attacks against members, institutions and religious places belonging to the Minority.

Despite efforts of European states to eradicate racism and intolerance with manifestations of hate crime, crimes motivated by bias or hatred remain a daily reality across the EU region. Some international organisations have constantly shared their concern in the past few years that the level of bias-motivated violence across the region remains a cause for serious concern, although a number of steps have been taken by international institutions as well as by individual states over the past years. In his letter of 25 July 2016 addressed to Mr. Toskas, Alternate Minister of Interior and of Administrative Reconstruction of Greece, and to Mr. Paraskevopoulos, Minister of Justice of Greece, the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, Nils Muižnieks noted that during his last visit to the country, he received reports indicating an increase of hate crimes in Greece.<sup>1</sup>

FUEN visited Western Thrace four times in 2012, 2013 and 2015, where extensive consultations were conducted with minority representatives, civil society organizations, religious leaders and the minority members in Xanthi and Komotini. FUEN notes with deep concern that Greece does not confer official status on any indigenous ethnic group nor recognizes "ethnic minority" or "linguistic minority" as legal terms; it affirms an individual's right of self-identification, not a right of collective self-identification by members of an ethnic or linguistic group.

The Muslim Turkish Minority of Western Thrace, which is the only recognized minority as "Muslim minority in Thrace" in Greece has become a target of hate-motivated attacks in the past five years. Although 2014 was a silent year regarding hate crimes for the Muslim-Turkish minority, 2015 was the opposite, unfortunately. Throughout the year of 2015 and the start of 2016, many hate crimes motivated by racism were conducted against the people and institutions of the Muslim Turkish Minority of Western Thrace.

On 7 March 2015, in Dimetoka (Didimoticho), a town inhabited with a significant proportion of Turkish Minority members, Dimetoka Muslims, Sports, Cultural and Educational Association was attacked by unknown assailants. Nobody was injured, but windows were broken<sup>2</sup>.

On 17 April 2015, the Komotini (Gümülcine) Mahmutağa mosque located in the same yard as Yenice Neighbourhood Minority School in Komotini, was set on fire by an unidentified person or persons in the morning<sup>3</sup>. At the Alankuyu Masjid, a hundred meters away, trees were cut. Another noteworthy aspect of this attack is that the elected Mufti of Komotini İbrahim Şerif's residence is very close.

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<sup>1</sup><https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?p=&id=2437603&Site=COE&BackColorInternet=DBDCF2&BackColorIntranet=FDC864&BackColorLogged=FDC864&direct=true>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.trakyaninsesi.com/haber/4592/dimetoka-musulmanlari-dernege-saldiri.html>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.trakyaninsesi.com/haber/5026/gumulcinede-camii-kundaklandi.html>

On 8 December 2015, the only political party of the Western Thrace Turkish Minority, the Friendship Equality and Peace (FEP) Party suffered an attack. The new headquarters of the FEP Party was attacked during the late hours by an organization called “ΟΙ ΦΡΟΥΡΟΙ ΤΗΣ ΘΡΑΚΗΣ” –“Guardians of Thrace”; the building’s windows were broken and the organisation’s name was written on the walls with blue paint. Also a photocopy machine was broken, cupboards and mirrors were smashed<sup>4</sup>. The most painful was the theft of the Party’s founder and minority’s leader Dr. Sadik Ahmet’s car, in which he lost his life in 1995. Following these events, the criminal complaint and investigation started by the police, like in other attacks, brought no solution and no official explanation by authorities regarding the attack.

Another hate crime was reported in Xanthi on 28 January 2016. Fully covered with masks, a group of men kidnapped an imam who is working at the Elected Mufti Office of Xanthi and forced him to get on a minibus. According to the imam, they threatened him saying that they would kill the Elected Mufti of Xanthi and would attack his children. They also told that they were closely following the movements of the Mufti Office. The perpetrators called themselves “The Guardians of Thrace” and in the end they released the imam to bring these threatening messages to the Mufti himself. It is important to note that all perpetrators of these attacks remain unknown and unpunished. Therefore, we urge the Government of Greece to find the perpetrators, and try them at a court. Also, we stress the importance of taking the necessary steps to prevent similar future hate crimes against the Minority of Western Thrace and other groups in the country.

According to the statement by the Elected Mufti of Xanthi Ahmet Mete, the Mufti has constantly been receiving death threats since he was elected Mufti by minority members in 2007. He noted that if anything happens to him or his family, the responsible would be the Greek State, because the elected Muftis are under threat while performing their religious duties.<sup>5</sup> The hatred against representatives and institutions of the Muslim Turkish Minority of Western Thrace has increased in the last few years and the organization which calls itself “The Guardians of Thrace” targets the autochthonous Turkish minority in the region. ECRI Report on Greece (fifth monitoring cycle) notes that the influence of the offices of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in issues concerning the Minority creates a perception that members of the Minority are not equal citizens and that they are still perceived as “others” in their home country where they have lived for centuries.<sup>6</sup>

On 2 March 2016, the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) organised a conference at the European Parliament in Brussels in association with the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO). The conference, hosted by Csaba Sógor MEP (EPP) and entitled ‘Freedom of Association in Greece: A Loophole in European Minority Rights Standards’, received unexpected attention as two Golden Dawn MEPs (non-attached) came to the meeting room just before the beginning of the conference and verbally attacked and threatened the host MEP Csaba Sógor. They were caught on camera attempting to derail the conversation, immediately denying the existence of any minority other than the ‘Muslim minority’ referred to in the Lausanne Treaty<sup>7</sup>.

Lastly, on 4 August 2016, during the parliamentary debate regarding the construction of a mosque in Athens, SYRIZA MP from Xanthi Hüseyin Zeybek, a member of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace, was attacked by neo-Nazi Golden Dawn MPs Ilias Panagiotaros and Yannis Lagos. During the debate in the parliament, Golden Dawn MPs accused him of recently burning the Greek flag during the funeral of a young minority member who died while performing his military service in the Greek army. Another Golden Dawn MP Yannis Lagos called Hüseyin Zeybek ‘pro-Turk’ and a ‘Turkish agent’ during the debate. The Vice President of Parliament Nikitas Kaklamanis intervened and ordered the Golden Dawn MPs to ‘sit down’ and leave the room<sup>8</sup>.

FUEN recalls Recommendations 134.38 (Canada) and 136.8 (Pakistan) which enjoyed the support of Greece at the second UPR Review of Greece and Recommendation 137.12 (Turkey) which calls on Greece to take result-oriented

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.debpartisi.org/indexENG1.php?s=detailsENG&id=3963>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.iskecemuftulugu.org/haber.php?duyid=353>

<sup>6</sup> [https://www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/ecri/Country-by-country/Greece/Greece\\_CBC\\_en.asp](https://www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/ecri/Country-by-country/Greece/Greece_CBC_en.asp)

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.xryshaygh.com/enimerosi/view/anthellhniko-aischos-sthn-eurboulh-to-laiko-komma-nd-sundiorganwnei-ekdhlw>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.tovima.gr/en/article/?aid=820062>

measures for eliminating discrimination and hate speech against migrants, Muslims and the members of the Turkish Muslim minority, though this recommendation did not enjoy the support of Greece.

Our member organisations, the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF), the Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association and the Friendship, Equality and Peace Party have repeatedly asked Greek authorities to respect their obligations under the Treaty of Lausanne and act in full compliance with the provisions of the Treaty and the core international human rights treaties to which Greece is a party.

FUEN urges Greece to recognize the right of Turkish minority to self-identification on a collective basis and to recognize the ethnic Turkish identity of the minority in Western Thrace and respect its obligations under the Treaty of Lausanne and act in full compliance with the provisions of the Treaty and the core international human rights treaties of which Greece is a party. We request from the Greek Government to end discrimination against the Minority and improve diversity throughout the system by eliminating prejudices and develop strategies that are inclusive of minorities, which would be part of an overall governmental policy for the promotion and protection of minority rights in the country.

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