

Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe

Thank you Madame Chair. The Turkish community in Western Thrace living in Greece has been granted national minority and autonomy status in the fields of education and religion under the Lausanne Treaty signed in 1923. Greece, which recognized the Turkish minority as the Turkish minority when the Treaty of Lausanne was signed allowed sign boards in Turkish schools in both Turkish and Greek to be hung in our schools began gradually increased political pressure over years. First, the name of our schools was changed to minority school, and in the years that followed, Greece denied our Turkish identity and defined us as the Muslim minority in Thrace. It dissolved our associations, which had been operating for fifty years and removed the word “Turkish” in their names. And our right to elect our own religious leaders has been usurped by governmental authorities since 1991. Today, the Turkish community in Western Thrace is subject to systematic discrimination in many areas. The European Language Equality Network (ELEN) visited our region in May, and as observed by ELEN, “the normalized discrimination against the Turkish community, which manifests itself in areas of daily life stems fundamentally from the state-sponsored perception of the Turkish community as an enemy within in the politics and media. Hate speech is a part of the political structure and systematic discrimination against the Turkish community. Turkish MPs are being rendered scapegoats because they carry out their parliamentary duties to protect the rights of the Turkish community. The perception of “enemy within” is constantly being repeated and human rights defenders of the Turkish community in Western Thrace are being targeted. By combating historical prejudices and stereotypes, the perception of the Turkish community as “the other” must be put to an end. Thank you very much.