



## ABTTF organized an international panel discussion in the European Parliament

On 17 April 2008 Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) organized an international panel discussion which was held in the European Parliament on "Ignored Minorities of Greece: Western Thrace Turks and Macedonians". Before the panel discussion a press conference was held in the European Parliament and Halit Habipoğlu, the President of the ABTTF; Hans Heinrich Hansen, the President of the Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN), Nelly Maes, the President of the European Free Alliance (EFA), Mikel Irujo Amazega, a member of the Greens/EFA, and Petros Kazias, a member of the Central Council of EFA-Rainbow replied the questions of 48 members of Greek and Turkish press.



### Maes: Greece violates the rules of the Union by violating human rights

It is stated in the press conference that Greece ignores the existence and the rights of the minorities of ethnic Macedonian and Turks living in the country and that Greek policy does not comply with European norms and values. Nelly Maes indicated that ethnic minorities are not recognized therefore ethnic minorities with different languages and religions have no right to express their opinions in a democratic environment. And, Maes stated that Greece

violates the rules of the Union by violating human rights of ethnic minorities in Greece. Besides, Maes stated that Greece is not open for dialogue although EFA wants to establish communication with the state.

Amazega, a member of the Greens/EFA, stated that minorities should be respected in accordance with international treaties and reminded that Greece has not signed the Framework Convention for Protection of National Minorities and the Minority Languages Charter and European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. Amazega stated that Greece has responsibilities towards the minorities living within its borders but Greece does not behave in way that an EU member country must have.

Hansen, the President of FUEN, stressed that the minority associations belonging to the ethnic Macedonians and Turks are members of FUEN and stated that Greece subject these minorities to assimilation in various ways. And Hansen said, "We observed the violations of the rights of the minorities in our visit to Greece".

Habipoğlu, "Greece accepts the Western Thrace Turkish Minority as a threat to its existence". It rejects any proposal on dialogue between the Turkish Minority and the state. Our demand from the state is to establish a dialogue with the Minority. We do not constitute any threat rather a richness of our country. The EU is constituted on the richness of language and cul-

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ture. We call upon the Greek state to establish a dialogue with the Minority and solve the problems together". And he added, "To establish such dialogue ABTTF has organized this in-ternational panel discussion in the European Parliament with the help of EFA". Then he declared that the fact that the most of the press members are from Greece shows that dialogue has been established between the Greek State and the Minority". And Habipoğlu reminded the ECHR decision on 27 March 2008 which indicted Greece for the violation of the right to assembly and association of the Western Thrace Turkish Minority and added that ABTTF hopes the Greek state to establish a constructive dialogue with the minorities living the coun-try after the ECHR decision and international panel discussion.

## A Historical Success in the European Parliament

The panel on "Ignored Minorities in Greece: Western Thrace Turks and Macedonians" was very well attended and more than 120 people attended the panel discussion. The panel discus-sion was chaired by Hans Heinrich Hansen, the President of FUEN. After the opening speeches from Nelly Maes, the President of the European Free Alliance - European Political Party, Halit Habipoğlu, President of the Federation of Western Thrace

Turks in Europe (ABTTF) and Petros Kazias, a member of the Central Council of EFA-Rainbow the following presentations were made.



Kinga Gal, MEP, the Vice Chairwoman of the Subcommittee on Human Rights made the first presentation called "Minorities in the Context of the Balkans". Gal stated that the pace of improvements in the rights of the minorities is very slow at national levels and added that Greece has made improvements on the rights of the minorities since 1993 but still lacks some other improvements



Then Asst. Prof. Dr. Halim Cavuşoglu made a speech on the Western Thrace Turkish Mi-nority and the Victims of Article 19 of the Greek Citi-

zenship Code. Cavusoğlu stated that it is a necessity of being a democratic state that Western Thrace Turks who were arbitrarily deprived of their nationalities must be given back.

In his presentation titled "The Macedonian Minority in Greece", Katzias told that there is an ethnic and a linguistic Macedonian minority in Greece, and he urged the Greek state to give an end to the official exclusion policy and to establish dialogue with the representatives of the Macedonian minority. Petros Kazias of the European Free Alliance – Rainbow made a presentation on the ethnic Macedonian minority of Greece. Katzias, in his presentation "Macedonian Minority in Greece" stated that there is an ethnic and linguistic Macedonian minority therefore Greece should end its official exclusion policy and establish a dialog with the representatives of minority.



Then Panayote Dimitras, the Spokesperson of the Greek Helsinki Monitor, made a presentation on "Tolerance of Intolerance towards Minorities in Greece" and said that the existence of minority is a matter of fact. Dimitras, "The existence of the Turkish Minority is denied in Greece. The Greek state should reassess its position on the minorities. The Greek democracy is so rigid and the one who respects the minorities at the lowest level".



A statement from Lazslo Tokes MEP was read out by his assistant Helen Struff in which he offered to mediate between representatives of the two minority groups and the Greek government.



The final presentation "Standards of Council of Europe and Minorities in Greece" was made by Boriss Cilevics, a member of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. Cilevics stated that Greece, despite refusal to ratify the instruments of the Council of Europe on minority protection, still has certain obligations with regard to minority rights under Council of Europe obligations and commitments. And Cilevics expressed the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) which monitors the fulfillment obligations wrote that minority groups still encounter difficulties, the Macedonians and Turks. Then he concluded that the refusal to ratify the key instruments relevant to minority rights does not exempt a Council of Europe member state from a number of obligations relevant to minority protection.

The presentations were followed by an interesting interactive discussion in which a range of views were expressed in a question-and-answer session. ABTTF regrets that some groups wanted to use the panel discussion for their own political purposes.



The closing remarks of the international panel discussion were made by Mikel Irujo Amezaga MEP of the Greens/EFA Group. Amezaga stated the majority and the minority in Greece must respect

each other and tolerance in this mutual respect is of vital importance. And he concluded that the aim of this international panel discussion is to establish a constructive dialogue

between the majority and the minority.

Habipoğlu, the President of ABTTF, states that the international panel discussion on "Ignored Minorities in Greece: Western Thrace Turks and Macedonians" has attained its objective. And he adds that it is a success for ABTTF that such discussion was held in the European Parliament. He concludes that ABTTF which is founded on a strong basis would like

to thank to Rainbow which shares the same destiny with the Western Thrace Turkish Minority and EFA and FUEN outside the borders of Greece for the international panel discussion held in the European Parliament.



# Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe participated in the 53rd FUEN Congress

Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) for the first time as a full member participated in the 53rd Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN) Congress held on from 21 to 25 May 2008 in Pecs, Hungary. Together with ABTTF, Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association (BTAYTD) participated in the Congress after it had been accepted to FUEN as a full member. In accordance with the decision adopted in 2006, Western Thrace Turkish minority is represented by ABTTF and BTAYTD together in the Congress. On behalf of ABTTF, Halit Habipoğlu, the President of ABTTF and Özkan Reşit, Secretary General of ABTTF participated in the Congress, while BTAYTD was represented by Pervin Hayrullah and Advocate Sinan Kavaz, members of the association.



Have gathered in various places in Europe, the 53rd Congress of FUEN was held in Pecs, Hungary, which was hosted by the Hungarian German Minority and the Government of Hungary. As a respected discussion partner for governments and parliaments in many countries of Europe and in European and international institutions through its consistent adherence to democracy and rights, its unwavering work for better

protection of ethnic groups and its stance for peaceful dialogue, FUEN serves the ethnic groups in Europe and pursues the goal of preserving their national identity, their language, culture and the history of national minorities. The Federal Union of European Nationalities, which is an independent union of the organisations of national minorities in Europe, was established in 1949 today number 84 member

organisations from 32 states. As a pool and umbrella organisation for national minorities, FUEN has changed its statute in the 52nd Congress to enable ABTTF to become a full member of FUEN.

## Two significant successes pioneered by ABTTF were achieved at the Congress

After a year that ABTTF and BTAYTD have become full members of FUEN, two important successes pioneered by ABTTF were achieved in the 53rd Congress. Firstly, a resolution stating violations of Greece against the Western Thrace Turkish Minority was adopted in the Assembly of Delegates of FUEN on 24 May 2008 in Pecs. Greece was called upon to recognise the existence of a Turkish ethnic

and linguistic minority living in the country with its right to freedom of assembly and association and right to education, and it was demanded from the Greek authorities to take steps to ensure the immediate rectification of the unfortunate consequences arising from deprivation of Greek citizenship on the basis of former Article 19 of the Citizenship Code by recalling that the EU is founded on the principles of liberty, democracy and respect for human rights and freedoms and the rule of law. Secondly, Halit Habipoğlu, the President of ABTTF, has been elected to the European Dialogue Forum which is to be co-chaired by the Intergroup for Traditional Minorities in the European Parliament and FUEN in association with the Youth of European Nationalities (YEN). As a result of the strategic partnership in the last few years with YEN, FUEN is to bring eight delegates besides the FUEN President to the European Dialogue Forum of Traditional and National Mi-



norities, Constitutional Regions and Regional Languages, in short European Forum Dialogue. The Forum will discuss current challenges, problems and long term strategies in Europe and contact between politics and the European minorities will thereby be brought into an institutional framework. And it is important that one representative from the Western Thrace Turkish Minority is to have a seat in the Forum. Therefore it is a huge success that Halit Habipoğlu has been elected as one of the seven delega-

tes from FUEN to work at this Forum.

ABTTF, which was represented in the Congress by two delegates, the President and the Secretary General, returned back with a very positive impression about the 53rd Congress. Halit Habipoğlu, the President of ABTTF, underlined that ABTTF had participated in FUEN congresses for four years and been granted with the status of full membership to FUEN after a long and sincere lobby activity although FUEN statue

did not allow the minority organisations outside the home country to become full members to FUEN. Habipoğlu made an assessment on the Congress as follows: "ABTTF has achieved two important successes at the 53rd Congress only after a year it became a full member of FUEN. We, the Western Thrace Turkish Minority, has succeeded that a resolution on the situation of the Minority and violations against it were adopted in the Assembly of Delegates. And a representative from our Minority was elected to the European Dialogue Forum, besides other six delegates elected from FUEN. It is amid that the Minority has grabbed a great chance to involve directly in minority policies and strategies of the European Parliament. And we have no doubt that we will become more powerful in the following years. ABTTF together with BTAYTD will work in future with enthusiasm for the sake of the Minority in close cooperation with FUEN."

## Our demand of bilingual pre-schools is declared at UN Human Rights Council



On 8 September 2008, Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) submitted a written statement to

the 9<sup>th</sup> session of the Human Rights Council in Geneva, Switzerland. Under the agenda item of follow up and implementation of the Vienna Declaration and programme of action, ABTTF, in its "Right to Education in Native Language: Bilingual Education at Kindergartens" brought up the demand of the Turkish minority of Western Thrace for the establishment of bilingu-

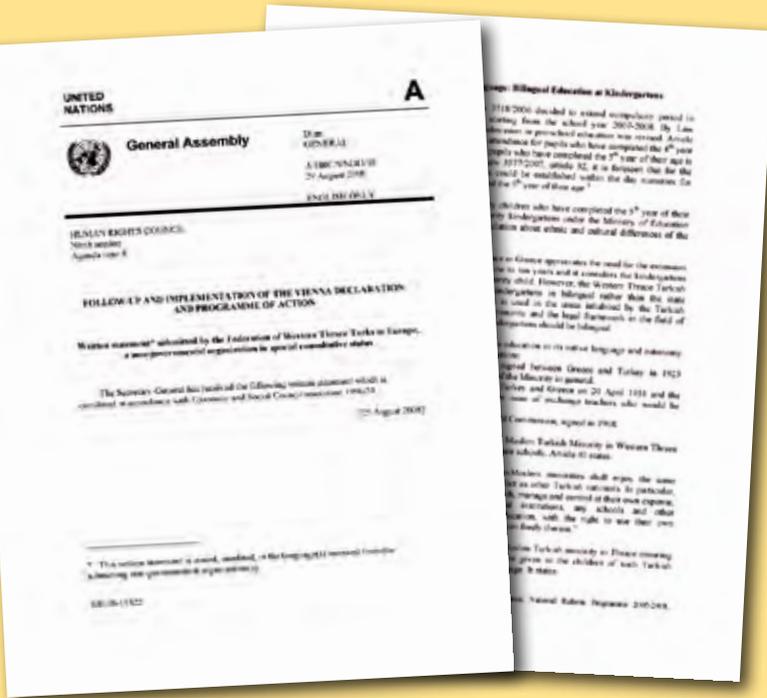
al kindergartens in Greece. While ABTTF does acknowledge the vital importance of the pre-school education for the

**ABTTF: Bilingual kindergartens are the legal and legitimate right of our minority**

next generations of the mi-

nority child, it is determined to establish bilingual minority kindergartens in regions where the Turkish minority is densely populated rather than the state kindergartens, in which the education language is Greek.

The Law 3518/2006 decided to extend compulsory period in education from nine to ten years starting from the school



year 2007-2008, and the condition of pupils' admission in pre-school education was revised and the attendance of those pupils who have completed their 5th age is now obligatory. Since the Law does not bring any regulation about ethnic and cultural differences of the children in Greece, the minority children in Western Thrace at the age of five is compelled to attend the majority kindergartens. However, it is stated in the written statement that the Western Thrace Turkish Minority is granted with the right to education in its native language and autonomy in the management of its educational institutions under the Treaty of Lausanne which was signed between Greece and Turkey in 1923 determining the status and the basic rights of the Minority in general, the Cultural Protocol signed between Turkey and Greece on 20 April 1951 and the Exchange of Notes in 1952 regarding the issue of exchange teachers who would be assigned in Minority Schools, the Protocol of the Turkish-Greek Cultural Commission, signed in 1968 as well as the Bilateral Agreement on Cultural Cooperation in 2000 based on

the context of strengthening the political relations between Greece and Turkey on an educational level. The educational cooperation between the two countries is based on an international model of the Council of Europe, the Organization for Security and Cooperation (OSCE) and UNESCO, which replaced the 1951 Cultural Protocol.

**Habipoğlu:  
Education is the most  
important problem of  
our minority**

ABTTF uttered that the practices of the Greek state in the field of minority education are against the Hague Recommendations Regarding the Educational Rights of National Minorities in 1996. Besides it has been reminded that the UN Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, of which Greece is a part, do protect the rights of the minority, and that Committee on the Rights of the Child in 1998 concluded that "the general principles of non-discrimination (art. 2), the best interests of the child (art. 3) and respect for the vi-

ews of the child (art. 12), are not being fully integrated into the legislative policies and programmes relevant to children, in particular in relation to children from vulnerable categories such as those belonging to national and ethnic minorities". Moreover, UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education prohibits discrimination based on several grounds, including language. According to Article 1(2) of the Convention, education refers to all types and levels, including access to education.

ABTTF, asserted in its written statement that the minority education system in Greece should be reconstructed according to the principles of multiculturalism and multilingualism and encouraged the Greek government to provide Muslim Turkish students with sufficient opportunities to learn both the official language of the state and their mother tongue. The most important thing is that ABTTF urged the Greek government to take the necessary steps to guarantee the right to education of the ethnic minorities in the country in order that the minority children have the right to bilingual pre-school education.

Expressing his views, Halit Habipoğlu, the President of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) said: "The problem of bilingual minority kindergartens is the most recent problem of our minority in the field of education, but it is not the only one. The minority education in our Western Thrace region is in critical situation. The minority schools are inadequate in number. Besides the quality in minority education is very low and

the number of teachers in minority schools has been diminished. The latest example to the situation in the field of minority education is that 24 minority children whose late registration to the 1st Minority School is approved by the principal of the school was not approved by the Supervisor of the minority schools. This is the situation in the field of minority schools, and therefore the priority of ABTTF is the problem of minority education in Western Thrace. That is why we aimed to bring up in the 9th session of the Human Rights Council the problem of bilingual minority kindergartens within the framework of the right to education in native language. ABTTF aims to attract the interest of international society to the Western Thrace Turkish Minority and to give voice to the problems of the Western Thrace Turkish Minority at the international platform. The written statement we submitted to the Human Rights Council will get more voice in the next days. The visit by the UN independent expert on minority issues



es Gay McDougall to Western Thrace and the talks she made with the minority representatives yielded the results ABTTF desired. The role played by ABTTF in the UN mechanisms and the consequent visit by the UN independent expert on minority issues to Western Thrace makes us more and tenacious in our democratic struggle for the rights of our minority."

# Panel on the Problems of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace in Greece

On 13 March 2008, the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) organized within the context of its 20th foundation year a panel on the "Problems of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace in Greece within the Framework of Promotion and Protection of All Human Rights" in a parallel meeting to the 7th Session of the Human Rights Council of the United Nations in Geneva. At the panel, rights of Western Thrace Turkish Minority and violation of rights of the minority were conveyed to a very wide and serious audience. The chairman of the discussion was the President of Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN), Mr. Hans Heinrich Hansen, and the speakers were Ms. Pervin Hayrullah and Mr. Sinan Kavaz, who both are members of the Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association.

Following the opening speech by the Director of International Affairs of ABTTF, K. Engin Soyyilmaz, Mr. Hansen made a speech on minorities in Europe and minority rights and expressed that minorities and states had mutual responsibilities. On continuation of his speech, Mr. Hansen emphasized that minorities were elements of richness for the majority, and protection and promotion of all cultural rights of minorities contrary not the rejection of existence of minorities living within the boundaries of states is one of the essential responsibilities of states.

Ms. Hayrullah uttered in detail the exercise and violation of minority rights in Greece which rejects Turkish ethnic



identity of the Turkish minority of Western Thrace. Then, Mr. Kavaz conveyed to the participants that associations founded by the minority bearing the word "Turkish" in their titles were closed down and new associations were banned. Furthermore, he talked about the violation of rights toward 60 thousand Western Thrace Turks, who were deprived of their Greek citizenship under the ex-Article 19 of the Greek Citizenship Law.

## Western Thrace question was carried to the UN Agenda

The participation of Mr. Michael Diamessis and Mr. Marios Lyberopoulos from the Permanent Mission of Greece to the UN Office in Geneva in the panel as listeners is an indication that problems of Turkish Minority in Western Thrace were carried to a wide and serious audience. The speech Mr. Diamessis made using his right of reply on the Greek policy towards the Western Thrace Turkish Minority and the forthcoming exercises is considerably important because the meeting succeeded to

gather the minority and the Greek state officials together.

The panel organized by ABTTF in a parallel meeting to the 7th Session of the UN Human Rights Council which representatives of 202 countries and more than 2000 NGOs participated in has reached its goal. Dialog has been established between the minority and the majority and the panel has laid the groundwork for the start of talks on Greek violation of human and minority rights of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace at such an important international platform. The reaped great success at first important event after being a member to the UN ECOSOC body is reasonably satisfactory development for the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace. And, a great step on the way to getting support of international society has thus been taken for solution of our

problems.

Have attracted attention to the importance of the panel at which problems of Turkish Minority of Western Thrace was carried to the UN agenda, Halit Habipoglu, President of ABTTF said, "Speaking regretfully that our country makes an effort to establish a dialog with us only when we raise our problems at such international platform. The President stated, "Despite the existence of legislations of minority concern approved by those who were grown up among us without taking the opinion of the minority itself, ABTTF, the voice of the minority in the world, will continue to work with great determination and decisiveness". And the President attracted notice that such hope to establish dialog between the minority and the Greek state appeared at the panel despite distant relations between the two parts. Habipoglu also stated that ABTTF was the voice of the minority in the world which was defined as a "global village" due to positive effects of globalization and long-life decisive lobby activities carried out by ABTTF for more than twenty years. Habipoglu concluded that ABTTF, which struggled for democratic rights and freedoms, would continue on its way as more powerful at every day that passed.



# Western Thrace Turkish Minority has won a victory before the ECHR

The European Court of Human Rights (ECHR), has notified in writing its Chamber judgments in the cases of *Tourkiki Enosi Xanthis (Xanthi Turkish Union) and Others v. Greece* and *Emin and Others v. Greece* and the Court convicted Greece for the cases that was brought before the ECHR in the date of July 2005 by the Xanthi Turkish Union which was abolished because it had denomination "Turk" in its name and the Cultural Association Turkish Women of the Region of Rodopi which had never been registered because the Greek courts had founded that the association constituted a danger to public policy. On 27 March 2008 the Western Thrace Turkish Minority has thus won a second victory before the ECHR after the Court, on October 2007, held in the case of *Evros Prefecture Minority Youth Association* that there had been a violation of Article 11 of the European Convention of Human Rights which protects the freedom of assembly and association. Thence, Western Thrace Turks, whose associations are dissolved only because they have denomination the word "Turk" in its name, have reaped a great success on the way that Greece's approval of the existence of Turkish identity in Western Thrace.

The ECHR, in the cases of "*Xanthi Turkish Union and others v. Greece*" (no. 26698/05) and *Emin and Others v. Greece* (application no. 34144/05) held unanimously that Greece violated the "right to freedom of assembly and association". In the case of the



Xanthi Turkish Union and others v. Greece that brought before the Court by Galip Galip and other seven applicants after that the Xanthi Turkish Union and Academic Graduates Circle of the Minority in Western Thrace were dissolved because the term "Turkish" are used on any document, stamp or sign, the Court noted that the proceedings in question had lasted more than 21 years, and it considered that Greece failed to satisfy the "reasonable time" requirement therefore there had been a violation of Article 6(1) (right to a fair hearing within a reasonable time) of the Convention. Besides, the Court awarded the association Xanthi Turkish Union 8,000 euros (EUR) in respect of non-pecuniary damage. In the second case of *Emin and Others v. Greece* which was brought before the ECHR by Hülya Emin and other six applicants after the Greek courts dismissed a request for registration of the association of the Cultural Association of Turkish Women of the Region of Rodopi on the ground that its title might mislead the public regarding the origin of its members and that the Greek Court of Appeal upheld

a decision that by virtue of the Treaty of Lausanne only a Muslim minority and not a Turkish minority had been recognized in the region of Western Thrace, the Court held that the finding of a violation constituted in itself just satisfaction for the non-pecuniary damage suffered by the applicants.

## The ECHR terminated the issue of identity in Western Thrace

The Court stated in its judgment "even supposing the real aim of the association had been to promote the idea that there was an ethnic minority in Greece, this could not be said to constitute a threat to democratic society". And the Court terminated the issue of identity in Western Thrace be reiterating that



the "existence of minorities and different cultures in a country was a historical fact that a democratic society had to tolerate and even protect and support according to the principles of international law". Moreover, the Court considered that "freedom of association involved the right of everyone to express, in a lawful context, their beliefs about their ethnic identity" and added that "however shocking and unacceptable certain views or words used might appear to the authorities, their dissemination should not automatically be regarded as a threat to public policy or to the territorial integrity of a country". The President of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe, Halit Habipoglu, stated the Court decision had a significant importance for the Western Thrace Turkish Minority that had never resorted to violence and remained loyal to their country Greece all the time in history and that there had no more room for Greece to deny the Turkish identity of the Minority. Habipoglu said "After the Court decision to convict Greece once more for the abolished or not even registered associations founded by persons belonging to the Western Thrace Turkish Minority; Greece had to revise and change its attitude and policies towards all the ethnic minorities in the country". And the President added, "The just struggle the Minority had gone along for long years had been strengthened after the Court decision. The Western Thrace Turkish Minority would ever proceed on its way more strongly".

# Education year started with problems in the 1st Minority School in Xanthi



Problems of the Western Thracian Turkish Minority in the field of education still continue in the 2008-2009 education year. 24 students, who could not make their registration to the 1st Minority School in Xanthi between 1-20 June 2008 due to specific reasons applied for late registration between 1-7 September 2008, and the principal of the school approved the late registration of those students after the submission of the required documents. Parents, who paid the first instalment of the tuition fee, learned that the late registration of their children was not approved by the Supervisor of the Minority Schools. The justification made out was the exceeding number of pupils applied for the registration. The Supervisor of the Minority Schools, who visited the 1st Minority School in Xanthi, demanded the students to make registration to the 2nd School in Xanthi established by the Greek state.

On 12 September 2008, upon the decision of the Western Thracian Turkish Minority Advisory Board, the member of the Turkish minority started to raise a silent protest at the front of the 1st Minority School. Then, the principal of the school first accepted the said children; however the prob-

lem still remains unresolved. The meeting between the President of the School Board, Binnur Osmanoğlu and the MP of Xanthi, Çetin Mandacı and the President of Parents Association, Şennur Hasan and the responsible person for the private and minority schools under the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs and the Secretary for Intercultural Education Aggelos Sirigos has not yet brought any solution to the problem.

## The reaction of the Minority continues

A similar case made out last year in the Minority High School in Xanthi makes the Western Thracian Turkish Minority perceive the event occurred in the 1st Minority School in Xanthi as an effort of the Greek state to direct the Minority children to the state schools rather than the minority schools. In view of that the registrations of the concerned children was cancelled because of the limitation of 25 student per classroom, the minority representatives expressed that since there were used to be three classrooms for the first grade in the 1st Minority School in Xanthi, the number of students who applied for registration did not exceed the limit.

The events occurred in the Xanthi 1st Minority School have prompted the reaction of the parents. The damnification of the children in the first day of

the school causes the Minority to react to the Greek authorities. Expressing his views about the issue, President of the Federation of Western Thracian Turks in Europe (ABTTF), said that "The problem occurred in the first day of the education year at the 1st Minority School in Xanthi cannot be accepted. The children's right to education cannot be hindered in any circumstances. The lack of sufficient classroom or the exceeding number of students should not prevent the minority children's right to education. If the problem had really been the excessive number of students who want to be registered to the school, this should have been enounced to the parents before the education year started. However, the call-off of the late registration of the students whose late registration was approved only a few days ago is considerably meaningful."



Reminding the autonomous status of the Western Thracian Turkish Minority with regard to education, Habipoğlu said, "Education is the most important ongoing problem of the Minority. Unfair and anti-democratic practices prevent the establishment of mutual trust between the Minority and the majority. A part of Greek media called the prob-

lem in the 1st Minority school in Xanthi as a "paltry reaction" of the Minority, which in turn deeply offends the loyal citizens of the country, our Minority".

## Habipoğlu: Problems in education steals from the future of our children

Reminding an ongoing problem in the field of education, Habipoğlu stated that "The problem with the Greek teacher, Hara Nikopulu at the school in Büyük Derbent village, in Alexandroupolis last year still remains unresolved. Although the coordinator and inspector responsible for the minority school had promised that the teacher Nikopulu would have worked at another school after the petition of the guardians of the minority children, the teacher still works at the above mentioned school. And, the parents protest the situation, and they declare that they do not send their children to the school until the workplace of the concerned teacher is changed. However, the loser in that situation is, with no doubt, our children. Until the problems in the field of minority education are resolved, the future of our children is pledged. These children are the Greek citizens belonging to Turkish ethnicity. They are born and grow up in this country. Therefore, the Greek state is responsible for evolving and implementing a policy in line with this fact and reality."

# The problems of the minority were discussed during the plenary session of the Greek Parliament



On 23 June 2008, Ahmet Haciosman, MP of PASOK political party from Rodopi district, made a speech during the debates on the draft law on "the General Framework of the Plan for Public Works and Sustainable Development" prepared by the Ministry of Public Works, Housing and Environment in the Greek Par-

## The problems of the minority in the sectors of agriculture and infrastructure were underlined

liament. Haciosman expressed criticism that although it had laid down the foundations for a versatile development, the concerning draft law did not touch in many aspects on the substance of the problems. He reminded also the existence of regions having low welfare, development and revenue level and negative development factor like Thrace, and while informing about the general characteristics of Rodopi region, Haciosman

mentioned the deficiencies, needs and undertakings to be carried out.

Haciosman described in details the problems the minority had to face in the sectors of agriculture and infrastructure, and said that the draft law was pursuing a passive policy with regard to the city planning and rational disposition of the land. He stated that instead of bringing new proposals, the draft law kept the old regime. Reminding that Komotini had not grown since 1976, Haciosman pointed out that sources needed to be supplied by changing the actual legal regulation. Furthermore, he also mentioned the land registry problem in the Balkan arm of the Rodopi district and stated that although development programmes for the Balkan arm had been already announced, no participation could be succeeded due to the land registry problem. Haciosman also stated that the master plan for public works envisaged the formation of a Komotini-Alexandropolis axle in the region of Thrace, and Komotini as being the administrative centre of the region of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace should equally benefit from the development chances. Besides, he said that Komotini had become in the meantime a transit passing point in energy transport, and in order



to transform it to an energy centre, sources were needed to be supplied.

Haciosman pointed out that preservation of the actual regime did not only delay the city planning works of the administration, but also hinder to reach effective results in meeting the demands for such as house or vacation spot, and stated that it was quite contradictory that the Master Plan for City Planning, which had been kept waiting since 1982, had not been approved yet. Lastly, he mentioned the appeal that the proposals, which were outlined by the Governorship of Rodopi with regard to "the General Framework of the Plan for Public Works and Sustainable Development" following the meeting attended by the leading persons

of the Rodopi district, local authorities, intellectuals and representatives of the organizations in the region, should be considered.



Halit Habipoglu, President of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF), made a statement on the issue and said: "We appreciate very much the activities of the deputies of the minority in the Greek Parliament to defend and promote its interests. Expressing of the problems the minority face in the Parliament is no doubt quite effective for their solution."

# Paris hosted "Human Rights for All: Universal Declaration of Human Rights at 60" Conference



On 3-5 September 2008, the Federation of Western Thracian Turks in Europe (ABTTF) participated in the Conference on Reaffirming Human Rights for All: Universal Declaration at 60", which is organized by the UN Department of Public Information/Non-governmental Organization (DPI/NGO) at the UNESCO House in Paris. The Conference marked the first time in history that it was held outside of New York, at the UNESCO Headquarters in Paris, the place where the UN General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights on 10 December 1948.

On behalf of the ABTTF, member of International Affairs & Lobby Group Melek Kirmaci



participated in the 61. Annual DPI/NGO Conference, which attracted more than 1600 NGO representatives from 65 countries, highlighted the effective ways in which civil society, in partnership with other actors, can contribute to the advancement of human rights at the international, regional, national and local levels. The Conference, which is a part of celebration of the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration which is the first universal on the basic principles of the human rights to which peoples of all nations are entitled, aimed active participation of the NGOs whether through involvement in the five roundtables, the 42 midday workshops or several breakout sessions.

The three-day Conference, which is organized by the UN DPI/NGO Department in cooperation with the Government of France and with the assistance of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the United Nations Educational

Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), aimed to generate greater awareness about the impact of the Universal Declaration and attended Covenants on the activities of the non-governmental organizations. The Conference is critically important in the sense that the meeting has given an opportunity for wide cross sections of the global NGO community, civil society organizations, grassroots constituencies, UN agencies and organizations, Member States, and representatives of the media, academia, the private sector and other institutions to share knowledge and experience about how best to promote and contribute to the advancement of human rights around the world.

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### The „universal“ and „indivisible“ character of human rights reaffirmed

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On 3 September 2008, the Conference opened by the opening addresses of the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon and the President of the 62nd Session of the General Assembly, United Nations after the UNESCO and OHCHR's welcome. It was recalled that while the Universal Declaration had become a ubiquitous norm today, enjoyment of all human rights remained far from being achieved, and it was noted that in the era of globalization, the controversies involving human rights and so-called sovereignty issues had to be overcome. Besides, it was highlighted that there were the difficulties in the implementation of the Universal in a number of countries, although the Declaration was signed some 60 years ago.

During the conference, which included the five roundtables, the 13 breakout sessions and the 42 midday workshops, reaffirmed the human rights for all in an extensive scale, from women's rights to the rights





of the child; from the right to food to the rights of the disabled people; from struggle against discrimination to the human rights ns human security; and from human rights education to the violation of human rights. In the Conference, Article 1 of the Universal Declaration, "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood" was reaffirmed by all participants. During the Conference, the universal and indivisible character of human rights reaffirmed again and again.

While stated that nation states should not try to undermine human rights due to state security concerns, the participants acknowledged that the Universal Declaration is under threat at its 60 year because states have serious concerns about the implementation of basic principles and values enshrined in the Declaration.

The UN DPI/NGO Department, which declared that it aimed to organize this event in various places of the world outside of the UN Headquarters in New York, stated that nongovernmental organization had an unignored and unstoped role in the preparation of the Universal Declaration and in defense and encouragement of human rights.

On 5 September 2008, the 61st Annual Department of Public Information/Non-Governmental Organization (DPI/NGO) Conference, dedi-

cated to the implementation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, closed its three-day session in Paris, providing a summary of its work and reflecting on follow-up measures to be undertaken. On the closing session, the UN Secretary-General stated that more than 1600 NGO representative reaffirmed their commitment to human rights during the all conference and highlighted that the Universal Declaration, which was signed sixty years ago, has still kept up to date and it is being perpetuated by the efforts of NGOs.

Have sent the message that human dignity is to be supported with a spirit of cooperation, participants reaffirmed that indifference is the worst enemy of the good. Expressing the views on the conference, ABTTF, conclu-



des that nongovernmental organizations play a significant role in defense of human rights, but nationstates do continue to undermine and even ignore human rights with the concern of the state security.

On behalf of ABTTF, member of International Affairs and Lobby Group, Melek Kirmaci, expressed her views that, "In Greece, which is considered to be the cradle of democracy, is a place where grassroots violation of human rights have occurred. This is why existing mechanisms and instruments in the field of human rights need to be strengthened. The Paris Conference has reaffirmed once more that NGOs are the pioneers of the change in their own societies. Struggle for human rights is a part of our daily lives. We, ABTTF, go have our own struggle for democratic rights for the Western Thrace Turkish Minority, everyday. This UN Conference has encouraged the NGOs in their daily struggle for human rights".



[www.abtff.org](http://www.abtff.org)

ABTTF special info-website for **UN-HABITAT 4<sup>th</sup>**

As a consequence of successful and professional works it has been carrying out for years, Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) is today a very-well known and respected non-governmental organization before international organizations, and has deservedly obtained a prestigious position at international platforms.

On its homepage [www.abtff.org](http://www.abtff.org), news and current issues relating to the Turkish minority of Western Thrace in Greece are broadcasted in details, and conveyed instantly to the public opinion. In line with making the problems the minority faces

known more comprehensively at international platforms and by the public, our new website

**[www.habitat.abtff.org](http://www.habitat.abtff.org)**

which will contain amongst others ABTTF research papers and current issues and occurrences with regard to the Turkish minority of Western Thrace, and possess a data base character, will start to operate on 30.10.2008.



**[www.habitat.abtff.org](http://www.habitat.abtff.org)**



# “Hıdır Baba Dervish Lodge” has been changed into “Agios Georgios Monastery”

Father Hıdır (Hıdır Baba) is one of the second alperen groups which came to the “Balkans to meet the people there with Turkishness and Islam” after the Simply Yellow (Sarı Saltuk). In the book named “History of Edirne and Memoirs of the Balkan Wars” written by Dağdevirenzâde Mustafa Şevket who was a mutasarrıf, the governor of a district, in Dedeâğaç (Alexandropolis) and İskeçe (Xanthi) between 1898 and 1899- which was translated into Turkish by Dr. Ratip Kazancıgil- a dervish lodge had been named in Taşlık (Petrota) village within the Şapçı(Sapes) Prefecture. And there were stone quarries below the place where the dervish lodge was built. Vinegar was being produced from the stones which were made in those stone quarries and the millstone and it was being exported to other countries till Romania.



Today, the Father Hıdır Dervish Lodge in the Taşlık village which is mostly visited by the Muslim population of the region has been claimed by the Church with the name “Agios Georgios”. The name change of the Father Hıdır into Agios Georgios who was believed to have therapeutic mark has enacted reaction within the Minority. Had been devastated for the first time by the Bulgarians who invaded the Western Thrace, the dervish lodge in the Father Hıdır remained till the Greek military cunta in 1967. The dervish lodge in the Father Hıdır was completely destroyed during the military cunta period and a monastery was built

above the dervish lodge. But, the gravestone with turban still existed in that monastery. The marble over the door of the Church has recently been removed. And another room was built near the building. And a fring with tiles has been built upon the concrete files.

A declaration was made on the issue by Halit Habipoğlu, the President of the Federation of the Western Thrace Turks (ABTTF), and he stated his reaction as follows: “The cultural heritage of the Western Thrace Turkish Minority is being systematically destroyed

by the Greek State. The Father Hıdır dervish lodge is the latest example to such destruction. Foundations and mosques belonging to the Minority has been confiscated and new enterprises have been opened there. Restoration of mosques and historical places which are part of our cultural heritage is not permitted by the Greek State, therefore building inherited from the Ottoman Empire have been ceased to exist.

The cultural consciousness of the Minority and its links with the Turkish culture is thereby being tried to be destroyed. This is an indignity towards the Minority. We condemn this, and call upon the Greek state and the Government to apologize for that destruction of our cultural heritage”.



## ABTTF Newsletter

The News Bulletins published by ABTTF in four languages, namely in Turkish, English, German and Greek will start its fourth incoming year.

ABTTF News Bulletins, in which the current issues with regard to the Western Thrace Turkish minority, the latest occurrences in Western Thrace and in Greece, in particular with regard to the minority issues and policies, international activities and lobbying of ABTTF aimed at finding solutions for the problems of the Turkish minority and information on the activities of the Western Thrace Turkish associations throughout Europe and the world are dealt with, are being followed with great interest by Western Thrace Turks and by large parts of the public.

To get more information on subscription to ABTTF News Bulletin, please contact us.

## ABTTF

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Föderation der West-Thrakien Türken in Europa  
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