



Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe

# Newsletter

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## There should be no allowance for Reciprocity

Halit Habipoğlu, chairman of Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) drew attention to the possible implementation risk of “Reciprocity” in the report that will evaluate the problems of Western Thrace Turkish minority and the problems of non-muslim minorities living in Turkey. There has been recently a tendency to evaluate these two separate problems in a common report by Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE).

► Turkish Delegation presented a report that put the important problems of Western Thrace Turkish minority like; not being able to select religion head man, not being able to express their identity as well as loss of territory, and denaturalization process, on the agenda of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) and Greece Delegation criticised Turkey with a counter report that emphasized on the rights of the non-muslim minorities that live in Turkey.

PACE Political Office delivered opinion at its November meeting as to evaluate both of the reports together and send them to for Judicial Commission for judicial evaluation.

The meeting of the Judicial Commission will be held on 13.12.2005 and in case of a positive decision, problems of the Western Thrace Turkish minority and non-muslim minorities living in Turkey will be on the EU Parliament's agenda contemporaneously.

Habipoğlu reminds that they wrote letters to Turkish and Greece Delegations chairmen and asked them to put the problems of Western Thrace Turkish minority on EU agenda as well as they presented a report about the



problems of the Turkish minority to Alvaro Gil-Robles, Commissioner of European Court of Human Rights and called for democratic process to take place as soon as possible in the region. He continues as “It is a great pleasure for us to see that EU Parliament discuss and show interest to the problems of our minority and we are proud that our efforts bring good results”.

### Also Macedonian, Albanian and Wallachian minorities should be covered

Habipoğlu called attention to the risk of entering the “dangerous area” in case that the report covers the minorities in both of the countries, Greece and Turkey. “The 37-45 articles of Lausanne Treaty, which guarantee the rights of the non-muslim minorities living in Turkey and the Western Thrace Turkish minority, were implemented in the framework of Reciprocity which was actually against international law.

Reciprocity does not mean that a country can hinder its citizens' rights and it does not make this hinder legal when another country makes an unjustness to the referred country's citizens. This mistake was made in the past and I hope the report will not repeat this historical mistake” said Habipoğlu.

“In Greece, there are other minorities like Macedonian, Albanian and Wallachian minorities, whose rights were not guaranteed by Lausanne Treaty, and these minorities should not be ignored and should be covered by the report” commented Habipoğlu. ■

# European Courts of Human Rights will have the final call over the Identity Question

Following the Turkish Union of Xanthi, which was shut down referring only to the expression “Turkish” in its title, the Rodhope Cultural Association of Turkish Women, whose foundation is not permitted by the Greek Supreme Court, has applied to the European Court of Human Rights.

► The Turkish identity, which wasn't considered as a problematic field for a long time, has appeared as a problem after the tension between Turkey and Greece increased due to the Cyprus conflict. The denial of the Turkish identity, developing step by step after the mid 60s, had its climax as the name plates of the Turkish Union of Xanthi (ITB, founded in 1927), Union of the Turkish Youth of Komotini (GTGB, founded in 1928) and the Union of Turkish Teachers of Western Thrace (BTTÖB, founded in 1936), organizations with “Turkish” expression in their names, were taken down following the declaration of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus in 1983. The GTGB and BTTÖB cases brought a decisive shut down decision forth. In addition, the ITB case which was held on the wait list, was reopened and after a long legal struggle, came to an end in the beginning of the year 2005 with the same decision: Shut down. Another decision

made parallel to this development, which let the Greek Foreign Minister Papandreu's statement in 1999 down, which was in the direction of recognizing the Turkish identity, was not to give the permission for the foundation of the Rodhope Cultural Association of Turkish Women. The common point in all these decisions is the evaluation of the possibility that “the ‘Turk’ expression may create a minority problem that currently does not exist and thus lead to a possible threat to the internal security.”

Considering these decisions of the Greek Supreme Court as judicial catastrophe, the President of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) Halit Hatipoğlu stated, “Healthy, contemporary and well functioning judicial systems do not judge the possibilities, instead the realities. Western Thrace Turks have always been loyal to their country and never pursued an independence seeking policy. The shutting down of their associations, which have been continuing their activities within the legal framework since their foundations in 1920s, does not fit into the terms of logic.” The fact that the Cultural Association of Turkish Women of Rhodope is not even allowed to swing into action indicates this said Hatipoğlu and added, “It is surely unacceptable and outdated that the word “Turkish” forms the red line of the right to be organized in an European Union member state.”.

As the options in the Greek judicial system came to the end, the Cultural Association of Turkish Women of Rhodope had applied to the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR), just after the application of ITB in July. Emphasizing his belief that the ECHR would solve the issues, Halit Hatipoğlu stated that they would support ITB and the Cultural Association of Turkish Women of Rhodope through their rightful cases. ■

## Blow to the Friendship

The positive developments in relations between Turkey and Greece and the increasing dialog between the communities are pleasing, however the latest incident that Erol Kasifoğlu, the President of the Solidarity Association of Western Thrace (BTTDD), was not let into Greece and made to return back from the Border of Kipi as he was travelling with a delegation from the Istanbul Chamber of Commerce, had raised attention.

► Starting with the earthquakes, the friendship connections between Turkey and Greece have been getting stronger, the traffic of delegations visiting each other getting denser and even Turkey's membership to the EU is being supported by Greece, a country who has considered Turkey as its enemy for long years, whereas repetition of some incidents, which were thought to belong to past are creating worries. Such an incident has happened to Erol Kasifoğlu, the President of the Solidarity Association of Western Thrace (BTTDD), who was accompanying Muharrem Keçeli during his visit to the Western Thrace; he was not allowed to enter Greece.

Kasifoğlu, who was expelled from Greek citizenship in 1987 with a decision, referring to the article 19 of the Greek Citizenship Law, had entered Greece many times with a Schengen visum, however was blocked at his last attempt. According to the information provided by BTTDD



authorities, Kasifoglu has been issued a document that states he is disturbing the internal security of the land, his entrance stamps were canceled and became the first director to be declared unwanted when on charge. In the past, Selahattin Yıldız, Tahsin Salihoğlu, Halit Eren, Taner Mustafaoğlu ve Burhaneddin Hakgüder, all names of previous directors of BTDD, weren't permitted to enter Greece with the same justification.

### Western Thrace Turks are the bridge to peace

Rating the incident as unpleasant, the President of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks of Europe (ABTTF) stated the necessity of an immediate redress of this grievance and added: "Western Thrace Turks are the

bridge to peace between Greece and Turkey. Each of the Western Thrace Turks' organizations, which are active in Western Thrace, Turkey, Western Europe or even in U.S. and Australia are working with this consciousness. Such treatments, which exclude us from the dialog and friendship environment, mean to burn the bridges. Greece's attitude towards such positive attempts of Western Thrace Turks are depressing us." The Western Thrace Turks have been making strenuous efforts on such dialog attempts. Beside the delegations and regional dance groups sent to the festivals in Western Thrace, this year mayor of a Greek city took part in the festivities which were organized by the BTDD's Bursa affiliate. Thereafter, mayor of the city of Topiros, Mr. Hacievangelou was targeted heavily by the Greek press.

Drawing attention to the fact that unpleasant incidents such as what Kaşifoğlu went through, presents actual opportunities that can lead to the environment of friendship and dialog, Habipoğlu said: "What to Mr. Kaşifoğlu happened, had been happening often to Western Thrace Turks in Turkey as well. Their connection to their land, Greece, where they were born and have grown up and where their families, relatives and friends live, was wanted to be cut. Therefore, we are demanding the return of the citizenship rights of our people, which were taken away referring to the 19th article. As a compensation of the unjust made to Mr. Kaşifoğlu, the Greek government should show its bona fides and give the Western Thrace Turks the right to enter their land without the requirement of a visum. ■

## Western Thrace Turkish Minority was the hot debate on the agenda at Human Dimension Meeting of OSCE

Greece delegation that answered Özkan Reşit, the representative of ABTTF, at "Human Dimension" meeting of Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) continued their policy of denying the Turkish identity of the minority by identifying the minority only as "Muslims", and they claimed that Greece had a democracy which met all international standards of democracy by rejecting all the political restrictions put on Turkish minority.

► Özkan Reşit had the opportunity to express the political problems of Western Thrace Turks, the difficulties faced by 46.638 denaturalized Western Thrace Turks and the serious restrictions on freedom of associations to the international public opinion at OSCE Human Dimension meeting in Warsaw during 19-30 September 2005. Representative of ABTTF during his first speech at the first session brought up the political restrictions that the Turkish minority lived. He discussed the aim of the election barrage of 3% in 1993. He said the election barrage was formed due to the concern after 1989 and 1990 elections. The Greece worried about the possibility that the Turkish minority could elect their independent representatives and decided to form an election barrage to block this possibility. He continued as "This election barrage does not aim the political stability but instead the minorities. In European countries there are various election barrages according to their political conditions. The most confusing point in Greece is that the barrage covers the independent candidates as well. This political implementation special to Greece so clearly aims to hinder the political participation of the minorities.

The independent candidate principle which does not hinder political stability, instead it enables other voices to be heard in the pluralist democracy. Even if all the members of the Turkish minority that make up 1-1,5 % of the whole population, ballot for a candidate, it is impossible for the candidate to win except in Athens". On the other hand, with the "Kapodistrias Plan" which aims to hinder the local representation of the minority, the areas where Turkish minority are in majority were merged with the areas where the Greek population is in majority. By this plan, the minority can elect their local representatives only in 4 municipalities and 7 subdistricts. This was one of the topics that Reşit emphasized during his speech.

The Greece delegation that answered to Reşit, continued to identify the minority as "Muslims" and they defended the election barrage by giving the election barrages in Germany and Turkey as examples. The delegation preferred not to give answer when the ABTTF representative explained that the election barrage was not valid for the independent representatives neither in Germany nor in Turkey. They also claimed that the "Kapodistrias Plan" covered all Greece not only the areas where the Turkish minority was in majority.

The second session of the meeting was not held due to lack of time stemming from the keen interest to the meeting. The representative delivered the second presentation via electronic mail and as printed example. Ther important topic was the 46.638 Western Thrace Turks who were denaturalized since depending on 2 reasons as; "not being from Heroic Race" and "leaving the country without any intention to come back". In his presentation Reşit demanded the restoration of their rights without reserve.

At the second day of the meeting, the topic was the "Basic Rights". Özkan Reşit uttered the problems of the minority associations that were closed since they had the word "Turk" in their association names.

He reminded as well that Greece signed the "Framework Convention on the Protection of National Minorities", which is the Europea's basic convention on the protection of national minorities, ten years ago but the parliament has not ratified the convention yet in spite of the passed ten years time.

Reşit demanded Greece to ratify the mentioned convention as soon as possible and to recognize the identity of the Turkish minority. He contunied as " Today Greece, our country, should ratify this convention and prove that it does not sign the international conventions and agreements only to show up. It must satisfy its obligations. It is a great shame to close an association only because of its name



and to reject the identity of 150.000 people in 21st century's Europe. We wait for OSCE to use the necessary mechanisms to eliminate this unfair implementations and we demand Greece to recognize Turkish, Albanian and Macedonian identities and ratify the "Framework Convention on the Protection of National Minorities".

Halit Habipoğlu, chairman of ABTTF evaluated the OSCE initiative of ABTTF as "Although our minority live in an EU country, they face a lot of problems. The solution for all our problems will come from Europe. Having this in mind, I hope to get the benefits of such initiatives soon". He said that the presentations and speeches got so much attention from international human rights associations that they demanded the texts from the ABTTF representatives. "Greece should face the realities and defeat the paranoia. To approve the identity of the Western Thrace Turkish minority who never disobeyed their country, to put an end to the pressure that we live through in religion, education, political, citizenship, economical fields are the responsibilities of our country that is proud of being a EU member at the 21st century. " said Habipoğlu. ■



# Greece should work off its complexes

When the photos of the Muslims, who had to perform their ritual prayer at religious feast in stadium corridors in Athens due to places of worship lack, were published in the press, “Greece should work off its complexes by opening worship places” says Halit Habipoğlu, chairman of (ABTTF).

► Greece resists not to open the places of worship, mosques, in Athens in spite of all international pressures. 200.000 Muslims live in Athens, 15.000 of them are Turks and still there is not a place of worship where the Muslims can perform their ritual prayer. In this sense, Greece is the only country that does not have a mosque in its capital city in EU-15. The Church is the most important player that is against the mosque project which was a hot debate before Olympic Games. The Church has principal privileges stemming from its historical role in the formation of Greece nationalism. Also Greece is an semi-theocratic state and this contributes the power of the Church as well. None of the political parties including Socialist-Communist parties have been able to discuss the privileged position of the Church.

The only conflict between the Church and the politics was about the elimination of the religious classification on the national identity cards few years ago. The Church has a determining role in politics and this was its first defeat. It still resists against the mosque project in Athens.

Islam Center project was a hot debate before and during Olympic Games but the Church pressed for an contra decision to be made with a last minute move and it was decided that the building was to be constructed 40 km out of the city. The project was then suspended due to two reasons; Muslims found this decision humiliating and also the strong resistance of the ones, who thought that a mosque near to Athens airport would give the image of an Islam country, affected the suspension process.

The ones who suffer most from this ambiguity are the Muslims while they are to perform the worship at unhealthy locations. The situation of the ones who would like to perform their feast ritual prayer collectively at Ramazan Feast clarifies the seriousness of the problem. About 5000 Muslims had to take shelter in a stadium corridor while it was raining heavily.



“This is a very clear form of religion freedom violation” says Halit Habipoğlu, chairman of (ABTTF) “The difficulties that the Muslims had to live to perform their feast ritual prayer collectively are opprobrium for my country, Greece. Putting obstacles in religious activities because of complexes and prejudices is unapprehensible. Greece should not ignore the difficulties of the Muslims” emphasizes. Habipoğlu. Besides the mosque project that has not been able to applied until now, there are work of arts that are from Ottoman Empire time and these are either not in use or been used as museum. Habipoğlu continues as “These work of arts should be opened for worship. In Greece all the affairs that are related with Muslims are under the control of the Church. To be able to get permission from the metropolital; the minaret of the mosques built in Western Thrace must not be taller than campanile. We demand our rights, warranted by international treaties, to be able to select our müfti, we demand Greece to approve the authorization of the müfti and the authorized müfti will be responsible for the affairs related with Muslims. We demand these requests to be satisfied to be able to survive as a minority in a semi-theocratic country”. ■



# Greece must save itself out of the “gray area”

In the report published by the Amnesty International, Greece has received much of criticism due to the mistreatment of minorities, migrants and asylum seekers and it was emphasized that the human rights stay still in twilight.

► The report, published by the Amnesty International on 5th of October, 2005, has put forth the situation of minorities, migrants and asylum seekers with all its clarity for consideration. In this report, stressed is the fact that Greece hasn't recognized the Western Thrace Turkish and the Macedonian minorities, which consequently gives rise to violation of human rights in areas such as freedom of speech and freedom of reunion as well as freedom of association. The shutting down of the Turkish Union of Xanthi (ITB) and disallowing of the foundation of Macedonian Culture House were used as examples of these violations.

Also mentioned in this report are the members of the Western Thrace Turks minority who lost their Greek citizenships referring to the Greek Citizenship Law's 19th article, which is now obsolete. Furthermore, the refusal of Greek authorities in giving the citizenships back to those, whose Greek passports were taken away and the hard living conditions of those living without social rights are stressed.

“Since the last report, published in 2002, there has been not much of a change”, stated the report, in which the ill treatment and human rights violations that the migrants and asylum seekers lived through were explained with case examples. Greece was criticized through hard statements for all these human rights violations, and was called to reevaluate its policies towards the minorities, migrants and asylum seekers and approve the agreements on minorities, migrants and human rights that were already signed.

The secretary general of ABTTF Mustafa Kasap has assessed the outcomes of this report and stated: “The way Greece, the so called cradle of civilization, was mentioned in this report has depressed us all the Western Thrace Turks, like all citizens of Greece. Mr. President Kostas Karamanlis had promised us before the elections of 7th March that he would solve the problems of our minority. The reality that until now no single step forward is made had however disappointed us.”

Reminding the Karamanlis government this statement one more time, Kasap has claimed that Greece should recognize the Macedonian and Turkish minorities, who stay still unrecognized and stop the human rights violations against the migrants and the asylum seekers. He concluded by saying, “As once more declared in this report, we are calling Greece to ratify ‘the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities’ which was signed in 1997. This would consequently put an end to the human rights violations in the country and would initiate enlightenment in this ‘grey area’, in which we were somehow obliged to live.” ■

# Riots in France offers much to learn from

Commentating on the riots that caused a lot of damage in the French suburbs, Halit Hatipoğlu, the President of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks of Europe stated that there is no possibility that these incidents would recur in Germany however they offer much to learn from.

► The incidents in France, which exploded following the deaths of two young immigrants and then expanded very quickly and a few incidents of small scale in Belgium and Germany, started the discussion in Germany basing on the question “Would incidents of this sort can happen in Germany as well?”

The President of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks of Europe, Halit Hatipoğlu answered this question back, rating the possibility of such riots happening in Germany connected with the Turkish immigrants very low. Pointing out the differences of origins between the immigrants in Germany and France, Hatipoğlu stated that the incidents in France are more of an outcome of a sociological phenomenon with historical deepness than an occurrence of current conditions. Emphasizing the fact that the rioters, who got involved in the incidents in France have their roots from France's former colonies, Hatipoğlu said: “The Turkish immigrants are very different, when compared to the immigrants of North Africa origins because they were never colonized during the history. Besides, unlike France, Germany has never been a colonial power. That's why, the Germans and the Turks can sit around the table and discuss about the subjects of migration and indeed without complexes coming from the past. Hatipoğlu however,

have underlined the fact that the migration and integration issues in Germany are no sunshine and stated: "Much more than the question, if the incidents in France would happen in Germany or not, It should be discussed what we should be doing to prevent it from happening by us. In France, two parallel communities ex-isted for such a long time. The basic lesson that these conflicts that these two parallel communities that have not much contact in their daily lives is that the lack of equal opportunities accelerate the coming into being of such parallel communities. Unfortunately, there had been not much progress made in the development of the equal opportunities in the immigration countries of Western Europe. In times of economical crisis, it's always the immigrants the first to be released. They are also experiencing disadvantages in terms of profiting from education and state-run services. Above all, the solid increase of religious prejudices after 9/11, are fostering this process." and added, "In order to counter the riots of today and the



future, steps must be taken without losing more time to ensure the equal opportunities. The second step to be taken is the realization of the immigrants as minorities in the countries they have been living and then in order to compensate the social disadvantages, they should be granted certain privileges." ■

## Is the Great Coalition end of Turkey's EU dreams?

The 18th September election and the political ambivalence made the "Great Coalition" of two leading parties, CDU/CSU with SPD inevitable and party assemblies brought the stringent coalition bargainings that have been going on for more than one month to an end on Monday.

► In case of a succesful parliamentary voting , Angela Merkel will be in the office for the coming four years. It remains as a vague question whether the government established by the leadership of Merkel, who stood out with her arguments aganist Turkey and its EU membership, will have the capability to meet the expectations of Turkish voters. The great coalition can be ratified as optimal for the voter layer who want to get out of recession but do not want to sacrifice their social rights says Halit Habipoğlu, the chairman of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe and adds " The two parties represent the common voter layer when we talk about the middle-income class but their voter layers among the high - income and low-income classes are completely opposite and even polarized".

This is evaluated as an important contradiction by Habipoğlu and he comments as " This contradiction may shorten the office period of the coalition and the effort to carry on the coaliton may cause both parties to lose their

voter layer as well cause a direction change in the center politics of Germany."

The coalition agreement authorized by party assemblies of both parties does not seem to have satisfied the Turkish voters emphasizes Habipoğlu and adds " The new coaliton does not seem to follow short but important steps policy in such a determined way as Green/Social Democrats coalition especially for migration and integration policy. "It is disappointing that in the new coalition agreement, the adaptation of migrants are referred as the adaptation foreigners in a country, which declared to be a migration country at the beginning of year 2005 but on the other hand the statement to render support and help to the women and youth that are in need is an affirmative action".

"In the pre-election political era, Turkey's EU membership was one of the most important topics but post-election tendency seems to be in line with CDU's view and this counters the ideals of the Turks who live in the borders of EU and sees the Turkey's membership as a guarantee for their future" comments Habipoğlu and adds " It is a paradoxical situation to talk about other alternatives like open-ended accession negotiations or privileged membership instead of full membership while Bulgaria, Romania and Croatoria's EU memberships are to be welcomed".

In the coalition aggrement, it was stated that the internalization capacity of EU will be taken account as well as whether Turkey satisfies the conditions and it remains as a very important question for the coming years how this statement will affect the foreign policy of Germany and the Turkey's EU perspective. ■

# Greece should also be aware of her own Deficiencies

Upon the criticisms of the President of Republic of Greece Karolas Papoulias of Turkey regarding the subject matter of minority rights, the President of Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) Halit Habipoglu made a statement, and said: "It is very common and even appreciated that the states warn each other related to the matter of human and minority rights. However, while my country Greece raises such claims, she should also not forget to acknowledge the rights of Turkish, Macedonian and Albanian minorities living within her boundaries."

► The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) gave reply to the statement of the President of Republic of Greece Papoulias related to the religious and minority rights in Turkey. Papoulias had said that the religious and minority rights in Turkey should have been respected, and brought this up as a pre-condition of Turkey's relationships with the European Union. He had also demanded that the seminary for theological education in Istanbul was opened, and the "ecumenical" status was entitled to the Patriarch. The President of ABTTF Halit Habipoglu replied to all of the claims of the President of Republic of Greece, and said: "It is regular and natural that the candidate countries are asked for such demands for the membership to the European Union which has become the geography of human and minority rights. However, these are obligations, which are effective not only for the candidate countries, but also for the member countries. Nevertheless, in my country Greece, which is a EU member since 1981, the minority rights are being violated, and my region Western Thrace is existing further as an island of rights' violations." Habipoglu added also: "After all of these that Greece today does not permit



the minorities living within her boundaries to define themselves with their own ethnic identities, closes down the associations founded with ethnic names, does not recognize the authority of the Muftis (highest religious authority of a province) elected by the minority members within the framework of the rights international law ensures them and holds these offices and our associations under control through the persons she has appointed, brings our educational institutions to the state that they cannot function any more, and blocks every channel through various methods of electing independent political representatives by us, it is unaccountable that she is still able to find the right and power to criticize the third countries."

Mr. Habipoglu attracted attention that the President of Republic of Greece had held the Office of Foreign Ministry, and should therefore know the minority very well, and said: "In Greece, the Foreign Ministry is the authorized institution for the Western Thrace Turks who are respectful citizens to the laws,. This is the clearest wording that a country considers its own citizens as hostages." Habipoglu pointed out that it was impossible that the President was uninformed of the injustices the Western Thrace Turks subjected to, although he had worked as permanent undersecretary and then as minister in the Greek Foreign Ministry, and said: "Regarding the minorities, Mr. Papoulias should be able to demonstrate the same sensitiveness for the Western Thrace Turks, Macedonians and Albanians." ■



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