

Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europa Newsletter



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ABTTTF met with the members of the European Parliament in Brussels



The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTTF) paid on 20 October 2015 a working visit to the European Parliament (EP) in Brussels. Accompanied by the ABTTTF Brussels Office, ABTTTF President Halit Habip Oğlu and ABTTTF Vice-President Mustafa Kasap met with the MEPs Pál Csáky (EPP-Christian Democrats) belonging to the Hungarian minority in Slovakia and Herbert Dorfmann (EPP-Christian Democrats) belonging to the German minority in Italy.

Problems having been faced by and current issues of concern to the Turkish minority of Western Thrace in Greece expressed to the MEPs

The ABTTTF delegation first met with MEP Pál Csáky (EPP-Christian Democrats)

who held in the past the positions of Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for European Union Affairs of Slovakia in his office in the EP. ABTTTF President Habip Oğlu expressed the problems of the Turkish minority of Western Thrace in the field of freedom of association and referred to the three judgments of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) with regard to the Turkish Union of Xanthi, the Cultural Association of Turkish Women of the Region of Rodopi and the Evros Prefecture Minority Youth Association, which have still not been implemented by Greece. Habip Oğlu set forth the Turkish minority has also been facing serious problems in the field of education, adding tens of primary schools belonging to the minority have been closed one after another by the Greek government and invited Csáky to Western Thrace to observe the said problems on the spot.

CONTENTS

ABTTTF met with the members of the European Parliament in Brussels pages 1-2	
ABTTTF paid a working visit to Brussels page 2	
ABTTTF attended the United Nations Forum on Minority Issues in Geneva page 3	
Problems of the Turkish minority of Western Thrace brought onto the OSCE agenda page 4	
Problems being faced by the Turkish minority of Western Thrace in Greece brought onto the OSCE agenda page 5	
ABTTTF attended the second annual meeting of FUEN TAG page 6	
Written statement by ABTTTF to the UN Human Rights Council page 7	
Parallel report by ABTTTF on the Greece 2014 International Religious Freedom Report pages 8	
Greece among the nine member States ignoring at most the ECtHR judgments pages 9	
Hate-motivated violence against the Turkish minority of Western Thrace included in the OSCE-ODIHR's 2014 Hate Crime Reporting page 10	
Eight more primary schools belonging to the Turkish minority of Western Thrace in Greece to be closed down page 10	
Greece further ignores the religious autonomy of the Turkish minority of Western Thrace page 11	
Outrageous attack on the New Mosque in the Greek city of Komotini! page 12	

During the meeting with the member of the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee (AGRI) of the EP Herbert Dorfmann (EPP-Christian Democrats, Habip Oğlu thanked the MEP for his participation in and presentation at the annual congress of the Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN) that was held from 13 to 17 May 2015 in Western Thrace and hosted by the Turkish minority. Habip Oğlu stated although Western Thrace is the most



economically underdeveloped region of Greece, it cannot sufficiently benefit



from the related funds of the European Union.

ABTTF paid a working visit to Brussels

Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) paid a working visit to the European Parliament in Brussels on 29 September 2015. Accompanied by ABTTF Brussels Office, ABTTF President Halit Habip Oğlu conducted meetings with UNPO (Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organisation) General Secretary Marino Busdachin, Member of the European Parliament and Co-Chair of the Minority Intergroup in the EP Nils Torvalds (Finland/ALDE) and Member of the European Parliament Andor Deli (Hungary/EPP).



During the meeting with MEP Andor Deli who is the member of Hungarian minority in Serbia, Habip Oğlu shortly explained the general problems of the Turkish Minority in Western Thrace focusing particularly on the issues concerning minority's autonomy on education and religious affairs. Mr Deli stated that the conditions of minorities were fairly good in Serbia where there are approximately 20 minority groups. He expressed his support for the cause of Western Thrace Turks in the EP works.

ABTTF met members of the European Parliament Nils Torvalds and Andor Deli

During the meeting with MEP Nils Torvalds who is the member of Swedish minority in Finland, ABTTF President Halit Habip Oğlu stated his gratitude to him for being present at 2015 FUEN Congress in Western Thrace where he had the chance to personally observe the problems of the Turkish Minority. Habip Oğlu discussed with him not only the problems of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace but the ones of Rhodes and Kos Turks. He also put on the table the possible steps to be taken within the Minority Intergroup where Mr Torvalds is co-chair.



UNPO General Secretary Marino Busdachin: "The Greek politicians are notorious in Brussels for boycotting everything and are the least loved ones"



Having met twice with the UNPO (Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organisation) General Secretary Marino Busdachin, Habip Oğlu discussed with him the possibilities of collaboration between UNPO and ABTTF. Busdachin declared that they were always open to the cooperation demands from minorities as well as unrepresented groups while expressing his contentment to concretise some joint projects with ABTTF in the near future.

ABTTF attended the United Nations Forum on Minority Issues in Geneva

The problems of the Turkish minority of Western Thrace with regard to recognition based on ethnicity and freedom of association brought forward by ABTTF

The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) participated in the 8th session of the United Nations (UN) Forum on Minority Issues that was held from 24 to 25 November 2015 in Geneva, Switzerland. ABTTF Vice-President Mehmet Hüseyin and Funda Reşit, member of the International Affairs and Lobbying Group of ABTTF, represented the Turkish minority of Western Thrace at the session entitled “Minorities in the criminal justice system”.

The ethnic Turkish identity of the Turkish minority of Western Thrace is not recognized and consequentially its freedom of association is violated

Speaking under the fourth agenda item “Challenges of criminal justice systems in addressing the needs and demands of minorities, Funda Reşit, member of the International Affairs and Lobbying Group of ABTTF, referred to the restrictions and limitations on the right to freedom of association that are still persistent in Greece and stated Greece recognizes the Turkish minority of Western Thrace as the “Muslim minority in Thrace” by denying its ethnic Turkish identity and the Greek government does not permit the minority associations that have the word “Turkish” in their names. Reşit mentioned the three judgments of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) with regard to the Turkish Union of Xanthi, the Cultural Association



of Turkish Women of the Region of Rodopi and Evros Prefecture Minority Youth Association which were either dissolved or not registered by the Greek authorities on the grounds that their names included the words “Turkish” or “minority”, and said although the Court held unanimously in 2007 and 2008 that there had been a violation by Greece of

the Article 11 (freedom of assembly and association) of the European Convention on Human Rights, Greece has not implemented yet the concerning judgments, adding according to a report adopted by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) during its Autumn Session 2015, Greece is among the nine member states of the Council of Europe that ignore at most the ECtHR judgments. Reşit urged the Greek government to implement, without any further delay, the judgments of ECtHR and to amend the national Code of Civil Procedures in such a way that it allows the implementation of the Court judgments in matters related to freedom of association.

The Permanent Mission of Greece to the United Nations Office at Geneva made use of its right to reply during the session and stated there is no discrimination existing against the “Muslim minority in Thrace” in the Greek national justice system, when hiring for the public sector, a 0,5%-contingent in favour of the minority is implemented, the procedure that the management boards of the charity organizations (waqfs) belonging to the minority are elected has been again put into practice and there are currently over fifty registered associations belonging to the minority in Greece.

Problems of the Turkish minority of Western Thrace brought onto the OSCE agenda

The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF), the Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association (WTMUGA) and the Rhodes, Kos and the Dodecanese Turks Culture and Solidarity Association, which are all regular members of the Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN), participated on 29-30 October 2015 in the meeting on OSCE Contribution to the Protection of National Minorities: HCNM recommendations and guideline in Vienna. Funda Reşit, member of the International Affairs and Lobbying Group of ABTTF, Yakup Uzun from ABTTF Brussels Office and WTMUGA members Asst. Prof. Dr. Ali Hüseyinoğlu and Pervin Hayrullah represented the Turkish minority of Western Thrace in Greece at the meeting organized by the Serbian OSCE Chairmanship, the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) and the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM)

From those Turkic minorities/communities under the umbrella of FUEN, the Turks living on the islands of Rhodes and Kos in Greece also attended the OSCE meeting with the support of FUEN. Prof. Dr. Mustafa Kaymakçı, Chairman of the Rhodes, Kos and the Dodecanese Turks Culture and Solidarity Association, expressed the problems having been faced by the Turks on Rhodes and Kos.

Turkish ethnic identity of the minority not recognized and associations having the word “Turkish” in their titles not permitted

During the session on “25 years after the adoption of the Copenhagen Document”, Funda Reşit took the floor



and stated the Turkish ethnic identity of the minority is not being recognized and minority associations having the word “Turkish” in their titles have therefore not been permitted by the Greek authorities. Reşit referred to the three judgments of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) against Greece with regard to

the violation of freedom of association, adding these judgments have not been implemented yet by Greece.

Inequalities and discrimination continue in all areas of public life

Reşit expressed during the session on “Integration of diverse societies and The Ljubljana Guidelines” the ethnic identity of the Turkish minority of Western Thrace is not being recognized and the persons belonging to the minority has been discriminated as regards of citizenship, education, freedom of religion and participation in public affairs.

Educational autonomy of the Turkish minority weakened

During the session on “National minorities in inter-State relations and The Bolzano / Bozen Recommendations”, Reşit noted the educational autonomy of the Turkish minority of Western Thrace has been guaranteed under the Lausanne Peace Treaty signed between Greece and Turkey, adding this autonomy in educational field has been undermined by Greece through more than 70 acts adopted, which led as a result to serious educational problems at nursery, primary and secondary school levels.

FUEN President Hans Heinrich Hansen spoke also at this session and presented FUEN's opinion on the state of minority protection in Europe. Referring to the German minority in Denmark he belongs to and mentioning his own experiences in positive developments that took place in the German-Danish border region, Hansen underlined the importance of mutual dialogue and good will between states in minority issues, adding FUEN tries to contribute positively to such inter-state relations.

Problems being faced by the Turkish minority of Western Thrace in Greece brought onto the OSCE agenda

The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) participated on 30 September-1 October 2015 in the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). At the meeting that took place in Warsaw, Poland, the Turkish minority of Western Thrace in Greece was represented by Melek Kırmacı Arık, Director of International Affairs of ABTTF, Funda Reşit, member of the International Affairs and Lobbying Group of ABTTF, Assist. Prof. Dr. Ali Hüseyinoğlu and Onur Mustafa Ahmet, both members of the Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association (WTMUGA).



With the support of the Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN) of which ABTTF is a regular member, the Turkic minorities/communities under the umbrella of FUEN, namely the Turks on the islands of Rhodes and Kos in Greece and Meskhetian Turks also took part for the first time in the OSCE meeting. During the meeting, Prof. Dr. Mustafa Kaymakçı, Chairman of the Rhodes, Kos and the Dodecanese Turks Culture and Solidarity Association reported about the problems of the Turkish community from Rhodes-Kos and Zhavid Aliev, Chairman of the International Society of Meskhetian Turks "VATAN" asked for a solution to the issue of the repatriation of the Meskhetian Turks to their homeland in Georgia.

Intolerance and discrimination against the Turkish minority of Western Thrace continue!

During the working session on combating intolerance and discrimination against Muslims, Melek Kırmacı Arık and Onur Mustafa Ahmet

referred to the discriminatory practices by Greece against the Turkish minority of Western Thrace such as the Law 3536/2008 on minority charitable foundations (waqfs) and the Law 4115/2013 on the appointment of 240 imams ("240 Imams Law") and hate speech and crimes against the minority and the perception by the Greek state of the Turkish minority as "the other", giving the example of the success attained by the minority political party Friendship Equality Peace (DEB) at the European Parliament elections in 2014.

During the working session on freedom of religion or belief, Assist. Prof. Dr. Ali Hüseyinoğlu and Funda Reşit reported about the implementation of the Law 4115/2013 despite the strong reactions coming from the Turkish minority and violation by Greece of the right of the minority to elect its own religious leaders (Muftis). Reşit also noted the Greek authorities do not recognise the Muftis having been elected by the Turkish minority and these were in the past prosecuted and sentenced to prison for the illegal use of religious symbols, adding İbrahim Şerif, elected Mufti of

Komotini, received in August 2015 a subpoena to give a deposition to the attorney general and will be heard in a case appealed by a Greek citizen on the ground of usurping the Muftiate.

Minority education is one of the most problematic areas in Western Thrace

During the working session on rights of persons belonging to national minorities, Melek Kırmacı Arık and Onur Mustafa Ahmet expressed the problems being faced by the Turkish minority in the field of education and mentioned the practices by the Greek government that have been undermining the minority's educational autonomy, giving the example of the Law 4310/2014 as the most current one. At this session, Panayote Dimitras, Spokesperson of the Greek Helsinki Monitor, supported also the Turkish minority's view in this issue and indicated the new law on education has a discriminatory character.

The Greek delegation made during all the three working sessions use of its right to reply and repeated the official Greek thesis that the minority in Western Thrace cannot be recognized and defined as "Turkish", adding the Turks on Rhodes and Kos do not possess the minority status arising from the 1923 Lausanne Peace Treaty and these Muslim Greek citizens with "Turkish cultural background" are very well integrated with the Greek society and their religious rights are respected.

The full text versions of the written statements submitted by ABTTF to the OSCE are available at:

http://www.osce.org/odhr/hdim_2015

ABTTF attended the second annual meeting of FUEN TAG

The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) participated from 9 to 12 November 2014 in Baku, Azerbaijan in the second annual meeting of the Working Group of Turkic Minorities (TAG) under the umbrella of the Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN). While ABTTF President Halit Habip Oglu as FUEN Vice-President attended the meeting hosted by the FUEN member organisation Association of Meskhetian Turks "VATAN" in Azerbaijan, Vice-President Sami Yusuf represented ABTTF during the meeting.



support of Azerbaijan for the repatriation of Meskhetian Turks to their homeland Georgia.

FUEN TAG members decided on the common strategy for 2016

During the second roundtable meeting of FUEN TAG on 11 November 2015, FUEN Vice-President Habip Oğlu presented the FUEN TAG activities carried out in the last year. Then, the participants expressed the latest developments related to their minorities.

Representatives of Turkic minorities from six different countries in Europe participated in the meeting

The meeting, which brought together the representatives of the umbrella organisations of Turkic minorities from six different countries in Europe, was attended by, alongside ABTTF from Germany, the Friendship, Equality and Peace (DEB) Party and the Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association (BTAYTD) representing the Turkish minority of Western Thrace in Greece, the Rhodes, Kos and the Dodecanese Turks Culture and Solidarity Association from Turkey, the International Society of Meshketian Turks "VATAN" and the Social Organisation for Fostering and Development of the Karachay-Balkar Traditions "Bars El" from Russia, the Association of Meskhetian Turks "VATAN" from Azerbaijan as well as the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar People and the Association of Crimean Karaites "Krymkarailar" from Ukraine. The Kumyk Association representing the Kumyk Turks, which is not a FUEN member organisation yet, also participated in the meeting

On the first day of the meeting, a total of fifteen participants visited the historical and cultural places in Baku. The delegation first visited the graveyard called Fahri Hiyaban where the Former President of Azerbaijan Heydar Aliyev and other important figures, who served the Azerbaijani people and state, lie and placed a wreath on Aliyev's mausoleum. The delegation later on visited the martyrdom called Şehitler Hiyabanı where Azerbaijani and Turkish soldiers killed during the battle of Baku in 1918 have been buried. The delegation also met with the Counsellor for Religious Services of the Embassy of Turkey in Baku Prof. Dr. Kamil Güneş and visited in the afternoon the Palace of the Shirvanshahs.

At the end of the first day of the meeting, the delegation met with Kamal Abdullayev, Minister for InterNations, Multiculturalism and Religious Affairs before President of the Republic of Azerbaijan. During the meeting, FUEN Vice-President Habip Oğlu presented the Minister FUEN and the Working Group of Turkic Minorities (TAG). Habip Oğlu provided Abdullayev with information on the Turkic minorities that are TAG members and asked for the

Afterwards, the Chairman of the Kumyk Association Ramazan Alpaut, who participated for the first time in a FUEN TAG annual meeting, made a presentation on the Kumyk Turks who today mostly live in Dagestan. Following the presentation by the Chairman of the host organisation Association of Meskhetian Turks "VATAN" in Azerbaijan İbrahim Ziyaoğlu on the problem of repatriation of Meskhetian Turks to Georgia and their demands concerning the issue, Alpaut made a second presentation on the Turkic minorities and communities living in Russia.

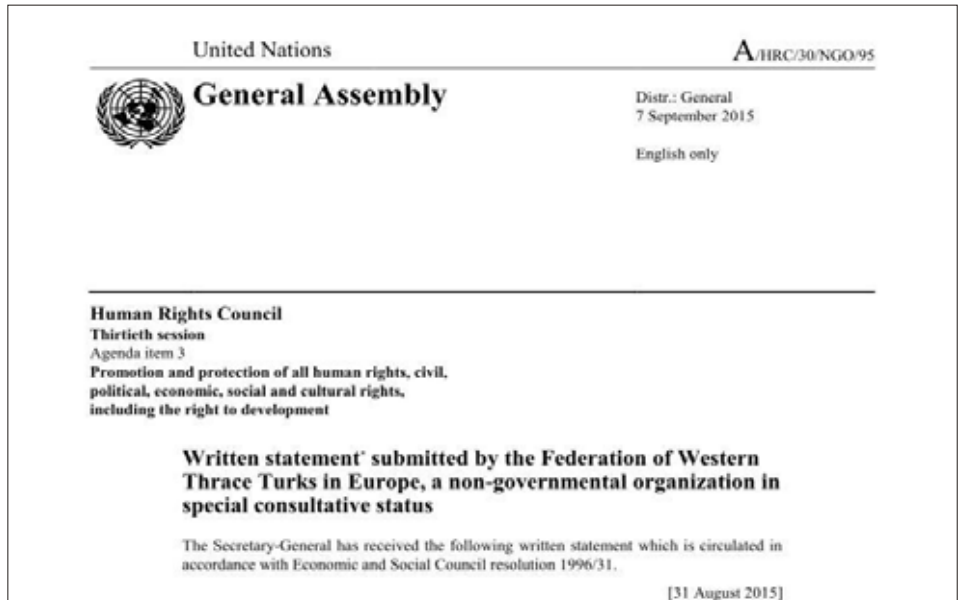
During the second part of the roundtable meeting, ABTTF International Affairs Director Melek Kırmacı Arık expressed the works carried out by FUEN at international platforms for the Turkic minorities/communities as well as potential activities before international organizations. After the expectations of TAG member organisations from FUEN and potential cooperation options had been evaluated, proposals for strengthening collaboration among FUEN TAG members were discussed and accordingly, the common strategy for 2016 was decided on.

Written statement by ABTTF to the UN Human Rights Council

The written submitted to the 30th session of the UN Human Rights Council brings the problems being currently faced by the Turkish minority of Western Thrace in Greece onto the agenda

The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) submitted a written statement entitled “The Problems of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace in Education” to the 30th regular session of the Human Rights Council of the United Nations (UN) to be held from 14 September to 2 October 2015 in Geneva, Switzerland. ABTTF describes in its written statement in details the current problems the Turkish minority of Western Thrace has been facing and brings the need for extra classrooms of the two private minority secondary schools operating in the cities of Komotini and Xanthi and the problem of the bilingual minority kindergartens that is still to be solved onto the agenda.

ABTTF noted the status of the Turkish minority of Western Thrace in Greece was established by the 1923 Lausanne Peace Treaty which guarantees the educational autonomy of the minority and underlined its right to establish, manage and control at its own expense, any schools and other establishments for instruction and education, with the right to use its own language freely therein. ABTTF stated although they are privately owned by the persons belonging to the Turkish minority, the Greek Ministry of Culture, Education and Religious Affairs determines contrary to the guaranteed educational autonomy of the minority how many pupils shall attend the Muzaffer Salihoğlu Minority High School in Xanthi and Celal Bayar Minority High School in Komotini and how they will be enrolled. ABTTF



indicated there is an urgent need for new classrooms in these two minority secondary schools as the number of pupils at Celal Bayar Minority High School in Komotini will rise through new enrolments in the school year of 2015-2016 from 780 to 860 and at Muzaffer Salihoğlu Minority High School in Xanthi from 550 to 640, and referred to the statement by the Director of the State Education Department of the East Macedonia and Thrace Region Panagiotis Keramaris from 25 August 2015 that whereas two modular classrooms will be placed in the garden of the Celal Bayar Minority High School in Komotini to accommodate growing pupil numbers, a double-shift schooling will be introduced in Xanthi.

ABTTF also referred to the problem of the establishment of bilingual kindergartens in Western Thrace and

noted the Culture and Education Foundation of Western Thrace Minority (CEFOM) has received till today no response from the Greek local authorities to its application from 2011 for the establishment of a private minority bilingual kindergarten, adding the regarding problem is still pending and all the minority children at the age of five are still obliged to attend public kindergartens also in the school year of 2015-2016.

ABTTF calls in its written statement on the Greek government to comply with the 1923 Lausanne Peace Treaty and to restore the educational autonomy of the Turkish minority of Western Thrace, and urges it to establish a consultative dialogue mechanism between the competent authorities and the minority and to establish bilingual minority kindergartens in Western Thrace in line with the minority schooling system.

The full text version of the written statement submitted by ABTTF to the 30th regular session of the UN Human Rights Council is available at: http://ap.ohchr.org/documents/sdpage_e.aspx?b=10&se=168&t=7

Parallel report by ABTTF on the Greece 2014 International Religious Freedom Report

The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) prepared a parallel report on the Greece 2014 International Religious Freedom Report that was released by the Department of State of the United States (U.S.) in October 2015, and submitted it to the U.S. competent authorities. ABTTF provided in its parallel report detailed information on the issues in relation to the problems having been faced by the Turkish minority of Western Thrace in the field of religion, which were missing or inadequately addressed in the U.S. report, and brought forward the views and demands of the minority.

In response to the expression in the U.S. report that there are approximately 120,000 individuals residing in Thrace and descended from the officially recognized "Muslim minority" established by the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne, ABTTF underlined the ethnic identity of the Muslim minority in Western Thrace as "Turkish" and stated the "Etabli Documents", which were handed to the people of Greek and Turkish origin who were left out of the exchange procedure provided by the 1923 Agreement on the Exchange of Turkish and Greek Populations, evidently referred to the minority's ethnic Turkish origin, adding the minority has actually a total population of 150,000 persons.

Government practices intending to eradicate the religious autonomy of the Turkish minority of Western Thrace increasingly continue

ABTTF underlined in its parallel report the Turkish minority of Western Thrace was granted religious autonomy by the 1923 Peace Treaty of Lausanne and stated the Law 4115/2013, which is better known by the minority as the "240



Imams Law" and provides for 240 Islamic religious instructors to teach Islam in Greek-language public schools and mosques belonging to the minority in Western Thrace, was passed in 2013 without consulting the minority itself at any stage and by ignoring its demands. ABTTF noted despite the great reactions of the Turkish minority, implementation of the regarding law started first in the Greek-language public schools and then in the mosques in Western Thrace, adding within the scope of the law, an Islamic religious instructor was appointed to the mosque in the Turkish minority village of Mega Derio. Accompanied by uniformed police officers, noted ABTTF, he arrived in the village on 14 March 2014 before the Friday call to prayer, walked into the mosque with apparent intention to lead the service, but the mosque's community did not allow him to do so.

ABTTF mentioned the Turkish minority of Western Thrace has been deprived by the Greek State of its right to elect its own religious leaders, i.e. Muftis, adding the minority has, pursuant to the international treaties Greece is a party to, the right to elect directly its muftis and imams and the appointment of muftis by the Greek government violates the

minority's freedom of religion.

ABTTF referred also in its parallel report to the problems with regard to the religious charitable organizations i.e. waqfs belonging to the Turkish minority of Western Thrace that were not mentioned in the U.S. report. ABTTF stated the law adopted in 2013 on the religious charitable organizations has failed to solve the long-lasting problems, adding since the waqfs belonging to the Turks living in Rhodes, Kos and Dodecanese are not embraced by the concerning law, these cannot enjoy the tax exemptions and have to pay property tax equal to any commercial establishment in Greece.

Problems of the Turks living in Rhodes, Kos and Dodecanese ignored

ABTTF noted the fact that Rhodes, Kos and Dodecanese were not part of Greece when the 1923 Peace Treaty of Lausanne was signed should not be a reason to deprive these people of their minority status and rights, adding the U.S. report fully ignored the religious problems having been faced by the Turkish community living on these islands.

Greece among the nine member States ignoring at most the ECtHR judgments

The PACE report and resolution have revealed the lack of political will of those member States including Greece of the Council of Europe to fully and rapidly implement the ECtHR judgments



The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) adopted on 30 September 2015 the report and resolution based on the report on the implementation by member States of judgments of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR). In the report by the Dutch parliamentarian Klaas de Vries, it is noted about 11,000 judgments of the Court have still not been implemented by the States concerned by the end of 2014 and almost 80% of the backlog came from only nine states including Greece having 558 cases which have not been implemented by the Greek authorities. The report has identified in those nine member States deep-seated structural problems which were leading to non-implementation of the Court judgments. The main problems include excessive length of domestic judicial proceedings, unlawful and poor detention conditions, ill treatment by law-enforcement officials and lack of an effective remedy.

The rapporteur de Vries states the number of cases requiring oversight by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe has been on the rise since 2006, making it more and more difficult for the supervisory body to effectively exercise its functions. The PACE urges therefore in the recommendation based on the report the Committee of Ministers to make use of the new "infringement procedure", introduced in 2010, which allows the Court to rule on whether a member State has breached its obligation to abide by the European Convention on Human



Rights.

Concerning freedom of association of the Turkish minority of Western Thrace, the report refers to the three judgments of the ECtHR which have still not been implemented by Greece. In the cases of Bekir-Ousta and others v. Greece (application no. 35151/05, judgment of 11 October 2007), Emin and others v. Greece (application no. 34144/05, judgment of 27 March 2008) and Tourkiki Enosi Xanthis and Others v. Greece (application no. 26698/05, judgment of 27 March 2008), the Court held unanimously that there had been a violation by Greece of the Article 11 (freedom of assembly and association) of the European Convention on Human Rights. The Greek authorities had dissolved the Turkish Union of Xanthi due to the word "Turkish" in its name and refused to register the Cultural Association of Turkish Women of the Region of Rodopi and Evros Prefecture Minority Youth Association on the grounds that whereas the name the first association had indicated the word "Turkish", the title of the latter had been confusing due to the word "minority".

According to a statement dated 5 January 2015, the Court will rehear the concerning three cases listed under "Bekir-Ousta group"

During the report's preparation process, the Federation of Western Thrace Turks (ABTTF) had met the member of the PACE Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights Klaas de Vries in Strasbourg and provided him with information on the problems faced by the Turkish minority of Western Thrace in the field of freedom of association in Greece. Moreover, ABTTF had organized on 25 April 2013 a side event on "the right to freedom of association of the Turkish minority of Western Thrace and (non-) implementation by Greece of ECtHR judgments".

The full text versions of the PACE report on the implementation of ECtHR judgments and related resolution and recommendation based on the report are available at:

<http://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-XML2HTML-en.asp?fileid=22005&lang=en>
<http://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-XML2HTML-EN.asp?fileid=22197&lang=en>
<http://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-XML2HTML-en.asp?fileid=22198&lang=en>

Hate-motivated violence against the Turkish minority of Western Thrace included in the OSCE-ODIHR's 2014 Hate Crime Reporting

The hate-motivated attacks on the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace in Greece during 2014 were covered by the 2014 Hate Crime Reporting that was released by the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) on 16 November 2016 marking the International Day for Tolerance). The OSCE-ODIHR's annual hate crime report refers to the data submitted by the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) in April 2015.

The OSCE-ODIHR's 2014 Hate Crime Reporting includes information submitted by 43 participating States, as well as incidents reported by 122 civil society organizations covering a total of 46 countries. In the report, hate incidents and hate crime data are classified according to bias motivation, and namely racism and xenophobia, bias against



Roma and Sinti, anti-Semitism, bias against Muslims, bias against Christians and members of other religions, bias against other groups, bias against lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) and bias against people with disabilities and other groups. It is stated that Greece regularly reports hate crime data to ODIHR and the Greek Ministry of Justice, Transparency and Human Rights, the Public Prosecutor's Office and the State Security headquarters of the Greek Police collect hate crime data. According to the data reported by Greece, the Greek police recorded 71 hate crimes during 2014, of which 29 were prosecuted, and there were 9 sentences at the end.

ABTTF reported hate incidents occurred in 2014 in Western Thrace

ABTTF had reported to OSCE-ODIHR the hate-motivated attacks on the persons and establishments belonging to the Turkish minority of Western Thrace as well as on the Muslim cemeteries and mosques in Western Thrace during 2014. The attack on a masjid in Alexandroupoli by leaving a pig's head cut into peaces on 13 April 2014 and the attack by tearing Quran pages and throwing them along with neo-Nazi Golden Dawn Party leaflets at the local cemetery of Rhodes on 23 February 2014 have been included in the OSCE-ODIHR's annual hate crime report.

The OSCE-ODIHR's 2014 Hate Crime Reporting on Greece is available at: <http://hatecrime.osce.org/greece>

Eight more primary schools belonging to the Turkish minority of Western Thrace in Greece to be closed down

ABTTF President Halit Habip Oğlu: "Through the Greek Education Ministry's last unilateral decision representing an immediate impact on the education of the minority children, the autonomous structure of the Turkish minority of Western Thrace in the field of education has once more been ignored"

The Greek Ministry of Culture, Education and Religious Affairs has decided to close down eight more primary schools belonging to the Turkish minority of Western Thrace on the grounds that these schools have recorded diminishing pupil numbers. According to the daily *Gündem*, based on the report released by the Directorate of Education of the East Macedonia and Thrace Region and beginning with the academic year of 2015-2016, four minority primary schools (Payamdere-Paterma, Karagözü-Exochi, Muratlı-Mirana and Çuka-Tsouka) in the Rhodope prefecture, three (Sinikova-Satre, Çaymahalle-Revma and Güney Mahalle-Prosilia) in the Xanthi prefecture plus one (Aksakal-Polia) in the Evros prefecture will be



closed down by the Ministry.

In the past, the Greek Ministry of Education had already decided to close down a total of 44 primary schools belonging to the Turkish minority of Western Thrace, namely 14 schools in 2011, 12 in 2013 and 18 in 2014.

"Through the Greek Education Ministry's last unilateral decision, the autonomous structure of the Turkish minority of Western Thrace in the field of education has once more been ignored by the Greek government. It is not inadmissible that the primary schools belonging to our minority are going to be closed down without any prior consultation

with it. The Ministry justified its decision with the diminishing pupil numbers and deep economic crisis in Greece. However, we cannot follow the Ministry's justification as these primary schools are not public schools. Then the eight primary schools to be closed down short before the beginning of the academic year of 2015-2016 possess private school status like all the other minority schools, and apart from those Greek teachers instructing the Greek language, all the other Turkish teachers serving at these schools have been financed by the Turkish minority itself. We as the Turkish minority of Western Thrace are therefore ready to pay further the salaries of our teachers. We urge the Greek government to consult by all means with our minority before taking such decisions representing an immediate impact on the education and future of our children and to incorporate it from the beginning till the end in the decision-making process" stated Halit Habip Oğlu, President of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF).

Greece further ignores the religious autonomy of the Turkish minority of Western Thrace

ABTTF President Halit Habip Oğlu: “We call on Greece to end immediately its policies and practices intending to eradicate the religious autonomy of our minority”

Within the framework of the “Lifelong Learning” programmes having been carried out under the auspices of the Greek Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs, an international scientific conference on “Intercultural Religious Education and Islamic Studies: Challenges and Prospects in Greece and Europe” took place from 10 to 11 October 2015 in the Greek city of Kavala. According to the daily Birlık, the conference, which was hosted by the MOHA Centre, was held on the occasion of completion of the education programme for theologians and instructors of religion. Theologians belonging to the Turkish minority of Western Thrace and who have been employed by the Greek government as short-term civil servants within the scope of the Law 4115/2013 which is better known as the “240 Imams Law” by the Turkish minority, instructors of religion and teachers having graduated from the Special Pedagogical Academy of Thessaloniki (EPATH) and who have been serving at least for two years at public schools in Greece. The purpose of the concerning education programme is to teach the children belonging to the Turkish minority at public primary and secondary schools in Western Thrace their own religion Islam through religion books in the Greek language that have been already published and are going to be soon distributed.

“The international conference held in Kavala has again proved the rightness of all criticism and reservations of the Turkish minority of Western Thrace with



regard to the “240 Imams Law”. The instructors of religion having been trained within the framework of the “Lifelong Learning” programmes will teach as religion teachers according to the said law the children belonging to our minority attending public primary and

secondary schools their own religion Islam in the Greek language. Moreover, within the scope of the concerning law which has first been implemented at public schools, an instructor of religion was appointed in March 2014 to the mosque belonging to our minority in the village of Mega Derio. Accompanied by uniformed police officers, he arrived in the village on a Friday before the call to prayer, walked into the mosque with apparent intention to lead the service, but the community in the mosque did not allow him to do so. All these examples clearly indicate that the ultimate aim of the “240 Imams Law” is the eradication by the Greek state of our minority's religious autonomy that has been guaranteed under the 1923 Lausanne Peace Treaty. Our homeland Greece should be honest with the Turkish minority of Western Thrace and end immediately such policies and practices intending to eradicate the religious autonomy of our minority” stated Halit Habip Oğlu, President of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF).



Outrageous attack on the New Mosque in the Greek city of Komotini!



ABTTF President Halit Habip Oğlu: “The Turkish minority of Western Thrace has been living in the region for centuries and is a part of Greece”

The New Mosque (Yeni Cami) belonging to the Turkish minority of Western Thrace in the Greek city of Komotini was attacked on 10 October 2015. According to the daily Millet, an unidentified person or persons spray-painted black, presumably at night, “ΕΞΩ ΟΙ ΤΟΥΡΚΟΙ

(Turks Out)” on the historical wooden door of the mosque. It is quite conspicuous that the attack occurred on the same day as men's football team of Galatasaray İstanbul SK arrived in Komotini to play a friendly match against PAE Panthrakikos.

“As ABTTF, we strongly condemn this outrageous attack on the New Mosque in Komotini and demand the perpetrators to be seized and brought to justice. The Turkish minority of Western Thrace has been living together with the Greek majority peacefully in the region for

centuries and is a part of Greece. The real intention behind this racist attack against our minority is, as in the similar cases in the past, to harm peace and tranquillity in the region by causing tension between the majority and minority. At this point, the primary responsibility for the prevention of such tensions lies with the Greek state and society themselves” stated Halit Habip Oğlu, President of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF).

*Image: www.birlikgazetesi.info

ABTTF Newsletter

The ABTTF Newsletter in four languages, namely in Turkish, English, Greek and German, is celebrating its eleventh year.

The ABTTF Newsletter, in which the matters of grave concern to the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace, recent developments and current events in Western Thrace and Greece, in particular pertaining to the minority issues and policies, international activities and lobbying of ABTTF aimed at obtaining solutions for the for the problems of the Turkish minority through democracy and peace and information on the activities of the associations of the Turkish minority throughout Europe and the world are dealt with, is being followed with great interest not only by Western Thrace Turks, but also by large parts of the public.

To have more information on subscription to the ABTTF Newsletter, please do not hesitate to contact us.

ABTTF

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