

Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europa Newsletter

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Member of the Fundamental Rights Platform (FRP) of the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights
Member of the Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN)



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Problems of Western Thrace Turkish Minority were discussed in the European Parliament



ABTTF once again undersigned an outstanding initiative through the conference "Human Rights Violations against Ethnic Turks in Greece" on 28 November 2012 organised in cooperation with the Party of Friendship, Equality and Peace and the Brussels based NGO, Human Rights Without Frontiers International and hosted by François Alfonsi, Member of the European Parliament and the Co-chair of the Traditional Minorities, National Communities and Languages.

The audience has witnessed real observations of the host MEP, Mr. Alfonsi from his mission to Western Thrace on 16-20 October 2012 when he was joined by Hans Heinrich Hansen, the President of the Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN), who transmitted his

experiences as being the moderator of conference.

Willy Fautre, Director of Human Rights Without Frontiers International, as the keynote speaker presented the human rights report, the outcome of his analysis on the situation of ethnic Turks in Greece during the fact finding mission 16-20 October 2012.

[ABTTF and DEB Party: The human rights violations against ethnic Turks in Greece for the first time explicitly admitted by an international community in the European Parliament](#)

FUEN President Hans Heinrich Hansen moderated the conference, which received increasing attention of European circles, especially that of MEPs and

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Brussels based policy groups. The President of ABTTF Halit Habipoğlu and President of Party of Friendship, Equality and Peace Mustafa Ali Çavuş delivered a welcoming speech whereby they expressed gratitude for being able to transmit the problems of the Western Thrace Turkish Minority to the European Parliament through observations and acknowledgement of the international community.

François Alfonsi, hosting MEP of the conference, stated his point of reference as the Turkish Minority of Western Trace is to freely exercise the rights and freedoms it was initially conferred upon and Greece is to comply with European values in terms of its minority policy.

The HRWF Director Willy Fautre presented his report on Western Thrace fact finding mission. Fautre stressed the collective and individual rights and freedoms of the persons belonging to respective minority, defined and guaranteed by the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923, regardless of their mother tongue and form and substance of their self-identification.

Cemil Kabza, President of the Western Thrace Minority Culture and Education Foundation and the editor of the daily newspaper, Gündem, expressed the problems Western Thrace Turkish Minority faces in the realm of freedom of expression and media. Kabza outlined

the fundamental problem in two categories as the two dailies 'Gündem' and 'Millet' being accused of publishing unfounded information in the Hara Nikopoulou case thus, sentenced by unproportionate fines of compensation.

Attorney in Law Sinan Kavaz explained the violations in freedom of association through the case of Xanthi Turkish Union, sentenced with closure in 1983 on ground of having the word "Turkish" in its title. Though in 2008 the European Court of Human Rights announced the void of the decision by the Greek, Greece still has not implemented the decision of the European Court of Human Rights.

FUEN President Hans Heinrich Hansen stressed the goodwill of Greece as determinant factor in the resolutions of the problems Turkish minority encounters in the region and he called Greece to stop considering the minority as a thread but to adopt it as an asset to the country.



ABTTF addresses the Western Thrace Turkish Minority's right to education in mother tongue and the problem of bilingual kindergartens at the European Parliament

Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) presented the issue of Western Thrace Turkish Minority in right for access to education in mother tongue and the problems arising from the lack bilingual kindergartens in Western Thrace at the regular meeting of European Parliament Intergroup for Traditional Minorities, National Communities and Languages on 14 March 2013 in Strasbourg.



Attended by the ABTTF President Halit Habipoğlu and ABTTF Brussels Office, the vitally important problematic Western Thrace Turkish minority faces in education with the lack of bilingual kindergartens is presented by Human Rights Without Frontiers (HRWF) Director Willy Fautré and Dr. Ali Huseyinoglu, specialist in minority rights and member of the Western Thrace Turkish minority.

Co-chaired by the (Member of the European Parliament) MEP François Alfonsi and Csaba Sandor Tabajdi and an attendance up to 50 persons with participation of Intergroup members and

education problems in Greece in comparison with the other EU member states, such as Finland, Belgium and Romania.



Fautré shared his findings from the mission to Western Thrace in October 2012 with Intergroup members and transmitted his experience of meeting the pupils and their parents in the Echinós (Şahin) village where the 20 children were the very same year refused from registration to minority primary school. Mr. Fautré described the situation on the ground as disintegration caused by lack of kindergartens or education institutions

respective NGOs, the Intergroup presentation provided Mr. Fautré ground to address the minority's

[HRWF Director Willy Fautré stated in order to mend the shortcomings in education Greece should integrate the bilingual minority kindergartens to the minority school system](#)



from early age that children can attend in their mother tongue. Fautre suggested that Greece should include bilingual kindergartens to minority education in order to settle this problem.

Dr. Ali Hüseyinoğlu stated that the legislation 3518/2006 on education is in contradiction with the educational autonomy of the minority as it was defined under the Lausanne Treaty

Dr. Ali Huseyinoglu, having completed his PhD in International Relations at Sussex University, has come up with a clarification on critics to the legislation 3518/2006 from the minority. Huseyinoglu explained that the respective legislation is in conflict with minority's educational autonomy, which was granted by and guaranteed in the Lausanne Treaty. Relying on pedagogical studies, Huseyinoglu explained that it is essential for a child to learn first of all his mother tongue in order to be able to learn a second language. In the case of Greek public kindergartens, the children belonging to the Western Thrace Turkish minority come into contact for the first time with Greek language thus, do cannot communicate with Greek teachers.

Hüseyinoğlu, furthermore gave an insight Greece's education policy towards the minority such that neither bilingual public kindergartens are established nor the private undertakings of the minority in attempt to found private bilingual kindergartens are allowed. Huseyinoglu exemplified this with the case of PEKEM (Western Thrace Minority Culture and Education Foundation) application to Greek authorities in 2011 to establish a bilingual private kindergarten and the absence of any response from the Greek authorities by now. Huseyinoglu wrapped his speech with



recommendation to Greek authorities for adopting bilingual education in public schools and kindergartens. Lastly, Huseyinoglu called on the Greek authorities to give permission for the

establishment of private bilingual kindergartens.

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ABTTF on a working visit to Brussels

ABTTF paid a working visit to the European Parliament, Brussels on 19 February 2013. ABTTF President Halit Habipoğlu met Mr. François Alfonsi, Member of the European Parliament and Mr. Willy Fautré, the Director of the Human Rights Without Frontiers International (HRWF).



President Habipoğlu meets Corsican MEP François Alfonsi

The meeting, accompanied by the attendance of ABTTF Brussels Representation, provided President Habipoğlu a unique occasion to reiterate his grateful thanks to Mr. Alfonsi for his participation at the fact finding mission to Western Thrace in October 2012 together with the Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN) President Hans-Heinrich Hansen and HRWF Director Willy Fautré.

Furthermore, President Habipoğlu transmitted to Mr. Alfonsi his sincere gratitude for graciously hosting the ABTTF conference in partnership with HRWF at the European Parliament on 28

November 2012. Having shared the assessment of the year 2012 in terms of progress in finding solution to the problems of the Western Thrace Turkish Minority, Habipoğlu equally informed Mr. Alfonsi of the action plan for 2013.

ABTTF expressed disapproval to additional protocol passed regarding the 240 Imams Law

At his visit to HRWF Director Willy Fautré, President Habipoğlu reiterated his gratitude to Mr. Fautré for compiling the findings of the fact finding mission in October 2012 in an in dept human rights report. Mr. Habipoğlu informed Mr. Fautre on the recent developments in Western Thrace, in particular on Greek

Parliament adopt a additional regulations to the law 3536/2007 which foresees and legitimizes the appointment of 240 Muslim scholars under the delegation of state-appointed muftis. Habipoğlu reported on the absence of any consultative action with the subjects of the legislation, i.e. the Western Thrace Turkish Minority as well as the verbal insults of the extreme right wing members of the Greek Parliament towards the ethnic Turk deputies opposing the regulation during the voting session at Greek Parliament.

Habipoğlu, in representation of the Western Thrace Turkish minority, called for entire annulment of the respective legislation which is in full violation of freedom of religion or belief.

ABTTF meets with the Council of Europe

Commissioner for Human Rights, Nils Muižnieks

The President of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF), Halit Habipoğlu, and member of the ABTTF International Affairs Department, Seyhan Sarica, met on 16 November 2012 with the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, Nils Muižnieks, and discussed the problems the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace in Greece has been facing in the fields of self-identification, religion and education.

At the beginning of the meeting attended also by the experts from the Office of the Commissioner for Human Rights,



ABTTF President Habipoğlu stated following the entry of the political party Golden Dawn to the Greek Parliament, the hate-motivated attacks against the Turkish Minority of Western-Trace have increased, and reported the attacks and

demonstrations by the party supporters in Western Thrace.

During the meeting, President Habipoğlu pointed out under the former article 19 of the Greek Citizenship Code, about 60 thousand Western Thrace Turks have been deprived of their citizenship. Habipoğlu mentioned also the problems in the field of religion, and said the Turkish Minority has not been allowed to elect its own religious leaders, adding although there was an imam who was charged by the community itself, and was serving for three years in the İbrahim Pasha Mosque in Rhodes, the Office of

The assigned Mufti in Dimetoka appointed another imam to the same mosque, though it has no legal power to do so.

With regard to the problems in the field of education, Habipoğlu stated 20 children belonging to the Turkish minority have not been enrolled in the Turkish Minority Primary School in the village of Echinós (Şahin) on the grounds that they did not attend a public kindergarten where the instruction is only in the Greek language, adding the Turkish school principal, who admitted all those children to classes, was dismissed from duty.



Furthermore, Habipoğlu said a delegation consisted of the Co-Chair of the “Intergroup Traditional Minorities, National Communities and Languages” at the European Parliament, François

Alfonsi MEP, the President of the Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN), Hans Heinrich Hansen, and the Director of the Human Rights Without Frontiers Int'l., Willy Fautré, paid a visit to Western Thrace from 16 to 20 October 2012, and observed the human and minority rights violations in the region by carrying out an examination of these on the spot, adding a report on the fact-finding visit, which is being prepared by the HRWF Director, Willy Fautré, will be presented at a conference on 28 November 2012 in the European Parliament in Brussels.

ABTTF attended the UN Forum on Minority Issues

ABTTF and BTAYTD (Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association) brought the very problems Western Thrace Turkish Minority faces to the agenda

Federation of Western Thrace Turkish Minority (ABTTF) has attended the Fifth Session of the UN Forum on Minority Issues on 27-28 November 2012. The minority was represented by ABTTF International Affairs Director Melek Kırmacı Arık, Member of the ABTTF International Affairs and Lobby Department Nazif Tachsim, member of BTAYTD and the Director of Western Thrace Minority Culture and Education Foundation Pervin Hayrullah and member of BTAYTD Dr. Ali Hüseyinoğlu during the meeting on implementation of the “Declaration on the Rights of Persons belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities”, which dates back to 1992



Melek Kırmacı Arık, ABTTF Director of International Affairs, raised the problem on Greece's denial of minority's ethnic identity as “Turkish” while recognizing it only as the “Muslim Minority in Thrace” and the repercussions on freedom of association within the course of a discussion held in order to evaluate the developments in the last two decades as for the implementation of the declaration.

Greece: Nowhere in the world the Muftis enjoy religious and judicial autonomy. Greece appoints the Muftis for their judicial autonomy upon the Muslim population in Thrace

During the awareness-rising discussion on the declaration, the BTAYD delivered a speech on Greece not allowing the Western Thrace Turkish Minority to elect/determine its own religious leaders and muftis. In follow up with the expression of the problem by BTAYD, Angelos Sirigos submitted a declaration on Greek official policy that being a unique case and the Muftis having both religious and judicial autonomy in Greece, they assume office by appointment not by election.

ABTTF: Greece denies the Western Thrace Turkish Minority from the collective self-identification as “Turks”

ABTTF attended the Expert Meeting on Minority Citizens Initiative

Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) attended the expert meeting on European Citizens' Initiative for the minorities of Europe, organised by the Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN) on 22 January 2013 and hosted by Iuliu Winkler, MEP (Romania) through the participation of ABTTF President Halit Habipoğlu and ABTTF Brussels Representation.

The Initiative is to take off in June 2013

ABTTF President Halit Habipoğlu joined the lunch reception hosted by Iuliu Winkler. Following the special lunch reception, Habipoğlu attended the expert meeting where the roadmap for launching a legislative proposal to the European Commission has been discussed.

In partnership with the Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania (RDMSZ) in representation of Hungarian minority in Romania at FUEN, the South Tyrolean People's Party (SVP) in autonomous South Tyrol and Youth of European Nationalities (YEN) in representation of Youth associations of European minorities, Minority Citizens' Initiative has been studied through an in-depth analysis.

The Initiative will unite the European minorities on the way to a common mission

The objective of the Minority Citizen Initiative is to form a comprehensive package of measures for the protection of European minorities. Equally, the Initiative will be a political campaign for the sake of mobilizing European nationalities towards a common objective in the even of European Parliamentary elections to be held in



2014. To this end, FUEN as the founding father of the Initiative will establish partnerships with the associations in representaiton of the other European minorities.

Target: 1 Milion signature !

Esteemed participants of the meeting; Frank Hoffmeister Deputy Head of Cabinet of Karel De Gucht European Commission Vice President for Trade, Dimitry Kochenov Chair of European Constitutional Law at the Groningen University, Dr. Gabriel Toggenburg



European Fundamental Rights Agency Legal Research Programme Manager and Dr. Günther Rautz Researcher at European Academy in Bolzano have exchanged their views and expertise on

legal aspects of the initiative.

The experts meeting hosted by Iuliu Winkler has been attended by other MEPs, including Herbert Dorfmann (Italy), Csaba Sandor Tabajdi (Hungary) and Csaba Sogor (Romania).Csaba Sandor Tabajdi, Co-chair of the Intergroup for Traditional Minorities, National Communities and Languages, expressed his concerns that the initiative does not imply the immigrant minorities in Europe, but solely addresses the traditional and autochtonous minorities on the European territories. Once the



Initiative is started, it should be supported by European minorities and that will be the time and occasion for the European minorities to show solidarity, according to Tabajdi.

Count down started for Minority Citizens' Initiative



Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN) Director Jan Diedrichsen visited the Head Office of Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) in Witten. Director Diedrichsen and ABTTF President Halit Habipoglu held a meeting on "Minority Citizens' Initiative", which is to take off in June 2013.

[ABTTF and FUEN discussed the details of the Minority Citizens' Initiative](#)

FUEN will give a start to the Minority Citizens' Initiative formed in reference to the European Citizens Initiative in force since 1 April 2012 and confers European citizens the right to submit legislative proposal to the European Commission. Likewise, Minority Citizens' Initiative is to guarantee the same rights to the citizens which belong to minorities.

[Western Thrace Turkish Minority will be one of the contributors to Citizens' Initiative](#)

Provided European Commission approves the proposal which will be submitted in June 2013, the initiative requires 1 Billion signatures from at least 7 out of 27 Member States of the EU: In accordance with the respective regulations, the Western Thrace Turkish Minority will be one the seven founding partners of the initiative with 16.500 (from Greece) and 74.250

(from Germany) potential signatures. As an ally to initiative, ABTTF will run a parallel campaign in Greece in partnership with institutions in representation of the Western Thrace Turkish Minority.

Minority Citizens Initiative will at the same be a political campaign for the sake of gathering the European minorities under an umbrella for a common mission by 2014 when the European elections are due. FUEN and its partners are expected to collect 1 Million signatures in a year. The validity of the signatures collected in each Member State is going to be evaluated by national authorities. At the end of the process, with 1 Million signatures collected and verified, the European Commission will completed further executive procedure and hold a public hearing in at the European Parliament within three months and announce the adoption of a decision on the initiative.

ABTTF Young participated in YEN Youth Leader Seminar

[ABTTF President Halit Habipoğlu: The election of a young person belonging to the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace as YEN President deserves a big round of applause.](#)

On 9-14 October 2012, ABTTF Young participated in Youth Leader Seminar "Solidarity in Diversity" organized by Youth of European Nationalities(YEN) in Gdansk, Poland. ABTTF Young Spokesperson and YEN Commissioner for Politics Fatma Reşit and ABTTF Young Members Faik Sali and Ebru Reşit attended to the seminar hosted by YEN Member Kashubian Student Club, Pomorania.

In the second day of the seminar, ABTTF Young members and the Spokesperson attended the traditional exchange market and introduced the traditional tastes which are unique to the Turkish Minority of

Western Thrace and the Turkish culture.

On 13 October, ABTTF Young joined the parade and the presentation of minorities and ABTTF Young members in traditional clothes of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace with other young members of traditional minorities passed the Gdansk Old Street and introduced the Western Thrace Turkish culture.

[ABTTF Young Spokesperson Fatma Reşit elected as YEN President](#)

At the YEN Members Council on 12 October, the elections were held for the YEN Presidency due to the withdrawal of YEN President Sebastian Seehauser from his office. ABTTF Young Spokesperson Fatma Reşit who was nominated by Südtiroler Jugendring elected as new YEN



President.

President of Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe(ABTTF), Halit Habipoğlu stated, "As ABTTF Executive Board, we congratulate ABTTF Young Spokesperson Fatma Reşit for her election as YEN President. We wish her success in the activities that she will be doing as YEN President, and we believe that the problems of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace will be brought more to the European agenda in her presidency."

PEKEM, DEB Party and ABTTF commonly hosted an international media conference



ABTTF President Halit Habipoğlu: We are here to support Gundem and Millet

Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF), Western Thrace Minority Culture and Education Foundation (PEKEM), Friendship, Equality and Peace (DEB) Party have commonly hosted an international conference "Minority Press in Europe; Freedom of Expression and Media" in Komotini in order to raise the problems Western Thrace Turkish Minority goes through in terms of media freedom.

PEKEM President and editor of Gundem newspaper Cemil Kabza, DEB Party President Mustafa Ali Çavuş and ABTTF President Halit Habipoğlu took floor within the opening address of the conference in the evening of 22 March. PEKEM President Cemil Kabza described the minority press, going through a tough period, as the mirror of respective society and the sole rapporteur of the Western Thrace Turkish Minority. DEB Party President Mustafa Ali Çavuş pointed out the restraints imposed on Western Thrace Turkish Minority in terms of right to education, media freedom and freedom of religion or belief. ABTTF President

Halit Habipoğlu, with a remark on this unique occasion that the three minority institutions for the first time gathered to organise this event, said 'Today we undersign a unique historical event with the participation of Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN) President Hans Heinrich Hansen and European Association of Daily Newspapers in Minority and Regional Languages (MIDAS) Governing Board Member Bojan Brezigar. In solidarity with Gundem and Millet at their trial with Hara Nikopoulou case, which sentenced the two newspapers to excessive fines of compensation, we are in Western Thrace together with Mr. Hansen and Mr. Brezigar'.

Hülya Emin: Minority press is, in several cases, perceived and reflected as a threat to national integrity

The speakers of the first session were Professor Kostas Tsitselikis from the Department of Balkan, Slavic and Oriental Studies at University of Macedonia and Hülya Emin, the owner and General Director of Gundem Newspaper. Drawing the attention of the participants on nationalist discourses recently on rise in Greece, Tsitselikis

stated that the tolerance to diversity affirms the credibility of democracy. Having held his speech on the media legislation in Greece and freedom of expression and press, Tsitselikis indicated that the legislation on press is problematic. Hülya Emin suggested that apart from economic and technical problems, the minority press faces obstacles on grounds of being from and serving minority. Emin underlined that the minority press is in several cases perceived and reflected as a threat to national integrity.

MIDAS Governing Board Member Bojan Brezigar: The minorities form 10% of the whole population in Europe

In the second session, moderated by Dr. Ali Huseyinoglu, referring to the 6000 languages spoken in the world, MIDAS Governing Board Member Bojan Brezigar declared that the minorities in Europe make up 10% of the population.

FUEN President Hansen: The States should support the minority press institutions

With a mention on his first visit to Western Thrace in October 2012, FUEN President Hans Heinrich Hansen asserted the obligation of states to support minority press institutions. Hansen has furthermore provided detailed information on 'Minority Citizen Initiative' which in its adoption would enable EU citizens to submit European Commission legislative proposals. As he could not travel to Komotini given a health issue, Oliver Vujovic, General Secretary of (South East Europe Media Organization SEEMO delivered his speech online.

Gündem and Millet Newspapers' Case was on trial at Thrace Court of Appeal

Thrace Court of Appeal held the trial of Gündem and Millet vs. Hara Nikopoulou Case on 22 March 2013. Following Gündem and Millet newspapers' press release in relation to Mega Derio Minority School Teacher Hara Nikopoulou's asking the pupils "to draw Allah's picture", the two dailies were sued by Hara Nikopoulou and subsequently been sentenced to 150.000 Euros (Gündem) and 120.000 Euros (Millet) fines by the Xanthi Multi-Judge Court of First Instance.

FUEN President Hansen and MIDAS Governing Board Member Brezigar were also present at the trial

In solidarity with Gündem and Millet Newspapers, who appealed the case at Thrace Court of Appeal on grounds of excessive fines of compensation,

Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN) President Hans Heinrich Hansen, European Association of Daily Newspapers in Minority and Regional Languages (MIDAS) Governing Board Member Bojan Brezigar and Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) President Halit Habipoğlu were present at the trial as observing attendees.

Many other minority institutions attended the trial in support to Gündem ve Millet cause

Many other institutions representing Western Thrace Turkish Minority attended the trial on 22 March morning in support to Gündem ve Millet cause. DIMAR Rodopi Municipal Council participated in the trial in pioneership of former Member of Parliament (New Democracy/Rodopi Prefecture) MP



candidate (DIMAR/Rodopi Prefecture) Ilhan Ahmet. The trial of the case, attended by MP Terens Kuik (Independent Greeks) in support to Hara Nikopoulou, has been concluded with Thrace Court of Appeal's approval of appeal by Gündem and Millet. A declaration on the verdict of court is expected within four month-period.

FUEN and MIDAS visited Western Thrace

Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN) President Hans-Heinrich Hansen and The European Association of Daily Newspapers in Minority and Regional Languages (MIDAS) member of the Governing Board Bojan Brezigar have visited press and media institutions, civil society organisations in representation of the Western Thrace Turkish and Mega Derio, the village in Western Thrace where the Hara Nikopoulou vs. Gündem and Millet case has broken out. The event including the visit of the two human rights and press activists has been commonly hosted by the Western Thrace Minority Culture and Education Foundation (PEKEM), the Friendship, Equality and Peace (DEB) Party and the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) on 22-23 March 2013.





FUEN President Hansen and MIDAS Governing Board Member Brezigar was on a visit to DEB Party and PEKEM

After the trial of Gundem and Millet vs. Hara Nikopoulou case at Thrace Court of Appeal on 22 March 2013, FUEN President Hansen and MIDAS Governing Board Member Brezigar were present for observation, a visit accompanied by ABTTF President Halit Habipoğlu and PEKEM President Cemil Kabza has been paid to DEB Party Headquarters. On the occasion of this visit, DEB Party President Mustafa Ali Çavuş expressed the problems encountered in terms of political

representation. The application of the 3% threshold to independent candidacy is in contrast with democracy according to Çavuş. The respective delegation visited PEKEM on 23 March 2013 when it has been informed of foundation's work. PEKEM President Kabza indicated that though the foundation submitted an application in 2011 to Ministry of Education for opening one private kindergarten and one secondary school still no communication has been received from the corresponding authorities.

FUEN and MIDAS harken problems of Minority press and media associations

Following their visit to the premises of Millet newspaper, Çınar FM, Radio City and Gundem newspaper on 22 March Friday, Hansen, Brezigar and Habipoğlu have only met the representatives of the İnsanca, Olay and Bülten dailies given the insufficient place to host visitors. The representatives of minority press and media expressed the difficulties which threaten their freedom of expression and media as constantly decreasing revenues from advertising and the institutional restrictions embedded in media law.

Mega Derio peasants shared their experience with Hara Nikopoulou

Having paid a visit to DEB Party Evros Provincial Branch on 23 March, the delegation attended an excursion to Mega Derio, where a reunion with residents of the village has taken place. Ayşe Kaşayka, the defendant of the law suit issued by Hara Nikopoulou with a claim of compensation 5000 € (Euros), and the then principal of the minority primary school Ali Abdurrahman was among the participants of the meeting at the village's cafeteria.



Greece responded ABTTF on 240 Imams Law

ABTTF President Halit Habipoğlu: The governors of our country claim the legislation favours Western Thrace Turkish Minority despite the mass reaction of representatives of the minority

Greece has responded to the written statement on 240 Imams Law submitted to United Nations Human Rights Council by Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF). Greece, in its note verbale submitted at the twenty-second session of the UN Human Rights Council, put forth the 240 Imams Law, 3536/2007 in original and adopted with additional regulations (4115/2013) in January 2013, is a forward looking policy addressing the needs of its Muslim Minority.

Greece: Contrary to ABTTF's claim, Greece pursues a forward looking policy addressing the needs of the Muslim Minority

In relation to the respective law (4115/2013) Greece, reiterated that regulation would enable the minority students, who decide to attend public schools, to learn the Holy Koran. Furthermore, Greece described the implementation of the legislation as such that the Muslim scholars to teach the Holy Koran were to be selected by a five-member Committee, which is to be composed of one appointed Mufti, one reputable Muslim academic and one Muslim theologian, which would ensure a transparent and inclusive procedure. It has been indicated that the Holy Koran teachers, namely Imams, would receive a steady and legal salary with social security benefits, while stating that these imams, thereby would not depend on other uncertain or unspecified sources of income. Furthermore, Greece specified that the Holy Koran teachers, namely



Imams, would have the right to freely choose if they would like to join the scheme. The minority children are also referred in the statement that they could freely decide whether they wish to attend the classes or not.

Greece: "Muslim Minority is protected by the highest international standards!"

Greece claimed that the members of the Muslim Minority residing in the Greek region of Thrace are protected by the highest standards in accordance with the provisions of the Treaty of Lausanne, which established their status, the Greek constitution and the European Union acquis. While pointing out that it welcomes constructive criticism in terms

of its minority policy, Greece asserted that it could not accept an orchestrated and biased campaign which brings about the subject having no relation to the facts on the ground.

ABTTF President Halit Habipoglu stated: "Whereas the members of the Greek Parliament, selected among from the minority, the Muftis elected by the minority members and also the appointed Muftis, minority representative at local government administrations and the entire Western Thrace Turkish Minority opposes the 240 Imams Law and the additional regulation by explicitly saying "No", the governors of our country argue the legislation favours us. The Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN) and the European Muslim Initiative for Social Cohesion (EMISCO) criticised the legislation on the grounds that it threatens the freedom of religion or belief. Yet, Greece is in a persistent endeavour to pursue imposing and one-sided approach in this very vital matter, which has direct implications on Western Thrace Turkish Minority's daily life".

You can access the response of Greece under the following link: <http://daccessddsny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G13/117/64/PDF/G1311764.pdf?OpenElement>



U.S. Mission to the OSCE responds to ABTTF

The United States (U.S.) Mission to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in Vienna responded to the letter of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF), which expressed the reaction of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace against the law 3536/2007 on the appointment of 240 religious preachers i.e. Imams by the Greek State to serve at mosques and schools in Western Thrace. In his letter of February 26, the U.S. Ambassador encourages ABTTF to continue its advocacy at the OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting (HDIM), as it did in 2012 at the



Assembly and Association.

Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting (SHDM) on Freedom of

In his letter, the Permanent Representative of the U.S. to the OSCE, Ambassador Ian Kelly states the U.S. Mission to the OSCE places great importance on the freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief as outlined in the Helsinki Final Act (1975) and the Concluding Act of Vienna (1989), as well as other relevant commitments, adding that he will remain attentive to this issue, and the United States will continue to encourage all participating States to fully implement their commitments on freedom or religion or belief.

Organization of Islamic Cooperation supports Turkish Minority of Western Thrace

The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) has expressed its support to the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace with regard to the adoption by the Greek Parliament of Law No. 3536/2007 with additional amendment on the appointment of 240 religious preachers i.e. Imams by the Greek State to serve at mosques and schools in Western Thrace. In the Final Communiqué adopted at the 12th Session of the Islamic Summit Conference entitled “The Muslim World: New Challenges & Expanding Opportunities” that was held from 6 to 7 February 2013 in Cairo, Egypt, the Member States express their support to the just cause of the Turkish Muslim Minority in Western Thrace and the Muslim population of the Dodecanese islands.



In the 75th paragraph of the Final Communiqué, the OIC Member States call on Greece to take all necessary measures to ensure the respect of the rights of Muslim community and their identity and culture, taking into account the widespread reactions of the Muslim Minority in Western Thrace against the

latest regulations on the appointment of 240 Imams in Greece, and for refraining from taking further steps on that matter against the will of its Muslim citizens.

The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) had sent in February 2013 a letter to the diplomatic missions in Athens of the OIC Member States, the OIC Secretary General and the State's Permanent Representations to OIC in

Jeddah, expressing the reaction of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace against the “240 Imams Law”, and asked the OIC Member States to bring the issue on the agenda of the 12th Session of the Islamic Summit Conference on 6-7 February 2013 and to issue a joint statement on the said situation in Greece with regard to the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace.

Closure is announced for another 12 minority schools in Western Thrace

ABTTF President Halit Habipoglu: The Greek Government should take into the autonomous status of the Western Thrace Turkish minority in terms of education hence, should act in conformity with it

Greek Ministry of Education, Lifelong Learning and Religious Affairs has decided upon a temporary closure of 12 minority schools, which belong to the Western Thrace Turkish minority, on the grounds of insufficient number of pupils. According to the decision published in the Official Gazette on 15 February 2013, to 12 Minority Schools, 7 out of which is in Xanthi, 4 in Rodopi and 1 in Evros no appointment will be made and their activities will temporarily be suspended.

7 Minority Schools in Xanthi, 4 in Rodopi and 1 in Evros will temporarily be suspended

According to Rodop Rüzgari, a monthly journal in Western Thrace, the activities of the minority schools in Mursalli, Memkova, Para Mahallesi, Öksüzlü, Mikmilli, Yelkenciler, Yenice villages of Xanthi; Kuzüren, Manastir, Palazli ve Yeniköy villages in Rodopi and Gürece village in Evros will be temporarily suspended. Unless there is an increase in the number of students, the respective school will gradually be closed down.

In 2011, Greece went for combined schooling for the sake of reducing expenditure and improving the quality of education at present schools. The outcome of this policy was a nation-wide reduction in the number of schools; from



1933 to 877, including 14 minority schools closed down in Western Thrace.

Following the decision in 2011 on the closure of 14 minority schools in Western Thrace, the number of schools in the region has been reduced to 174. The current decision of Greek Ministry of Education for temporary suspension of 12 minority schools in Western Thrace will further lower the number of the schools in the region down to 162.

Federation of Western Thrace Turks (ABTTF) President Halit Habipoglu states on the issue: "The decision on the suspension of 12 minority schools on the grounds of insufficient number of pupils has been taken by Greek Ministry of Education with no consultation or exchange with the Western Thrace Turkish minority. Whilst the number of pupils attending the suspended minority schools ranks low, the decision on the closure is to be taken in consultation with the Western Thrace Turkish minority, whose education autonomy is

guaranteed under the Lausanne Treaty. The number of minority schools, which belong to Western Thrace Turkish minority in Greece, is gradually decreasing for several reasons. The current decision proves the decision on the suspension of 12 minority schools is taken by Greece unilaterally. In reverse case; following the closure of their school for insufficient number of pupils, the Greek Orthodox minority in Istanbul requested a primary school in Imbros (Gökçeada), which has been well received and accepted by the Turkish Government.

ABTTF, in representation of the Western Thrace Turkish minority, calls on the Greek Government to adapt an inclusive approach towards the minority in decision-making process on matters which are in direct concern and interest of the minority itself. Upon the education, Greek Government shall take into account the minority's autonomy in the respective field and shall give room to the discretion of minority in decision-making".

Golden Dawn Supporters attack Cuneyt Serdar



ABTTF President Halit Habipoglu: Golden Dawn continuously threatens the state of peace in Greece, such that it gradually grows into a phase, which is out of control

A group of militants affiliated to the extreme right Golden Dawn Party in Greece attacked Western Thrace Turkish Minority member Cuneyt Serdar. Amid the rising tension between an anarchist group, on demonstration yesterday late afternoon at Xanthi City Centre, and the Golden Dawn members, Cuneyt Serdar has been

blatantly beaten by the Golden Dawn supporters. Cuneyt Serdar (30, Pahnı Village of Xanthi) has been taken to hospital with ambulance given the serious injury he has got on his head and face that he had to have stitches. It has been reported that the wounds overcame the seriousness.

Member of the Western Thrace Turkish Minority Cüneyt Serdar has been blatantly beaten

According to the Azinlikça, an online minority news portal, upon anti-racist slogans voiced by an anarchist group demonstrating in Xanthi City Centre yesterday late afternoon the extreme right and racist Golden Dawn members gathered at the same square. In opposition to the anarchist group, the Golden Dawn members chanted slogans against Turkey and Turks. The tension escalated into fray and Cuneyt Serdar, being on the square where the anarchist group withdrawn, has been exposed to Golden Dawn members'

attack. Upon the arrival of police, Golden Dawn members dispersed into the Avenue of Komotini at Xanthi.

Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) President Halit Habipoglu said "ABTTF strongly condemns the attack at Western Thrace Turkish Minority member Cuneyt Serdar and wishes Serdar an immediate recovery. The Golden Dawn continuously threatens the state of peace in Greece, such that it gradually grows into a phase, which is out of control ABTTF on several occasions expressed its concern on hate motivated attacks at Western Thrace Turkish Minority and called on the Greek Government to take precautionary measure against the rise of Golden Dawn. Yet, we reiterate our worries on the case and call for governmental action to take necessary measures, including the closure of the party, in order to curtail the this threat"

* Image: www.xanthipress.gr

Golden Dawn supporters attack the car of Turkish Consul General in Komotini

ABTTF President Halit Habipoglu: We strongly condemn the attack on Turkish Consul General in Komotini, Osman İlhan Sener, and call on the Greek Government to take immediate measures against the Golden Dawn threat

The supporters of the far-right political party Golden Dawn attacked the official car of Turkish Consul General Osman İlhan Şener during his visit to the Mayor of Kavala, Kostas Simichis on Wednesday. A group of 30 protesters from the Golden Dawn, holding Greek flags, gathered in front of the municipality building, and chanted slogans against Turkey and founder of Turkey, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. After the Consul General had got into his car, some persons from the group attacked it with punches and kicks, and smirched its front screen.



In its statement he gave to the Turkish television NTV, the Consul General Osman İlhan Şener said as they drove in the Kavala city, they were stopped by the Greek police and informed of the Golden Dawn supporters who gathered in front of the municipality building, adding the protests continued even during the one-hour-meeting with the mayor. The Consul General and the accompanying delegation

had to stay in the building for an hour until the additional police force arrived, and then could leave the city with police escort.

"As the ABTTF Executive Board, we strongly condemn the attack on Turkish Consul General in Komotini, Osman İlhan Sener. The oral and physical attacks staged by the supporters of Golden Dawn, which include the violent ones against the groups living in the country with different linguistic, religious or ethnic origin, have reached today such a dimension that even the police have difficulties to intervene in them. The Greek Government should take immediate measures against this gradually growing threat, and seriously deal with all the options including the banning of the party." stated Halit Habipoglu, Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF).

* Images: www.birlikgazetesi.info



18th term at ABTTF

The 18th Ordinary General Assembly of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) took place on 23 February 2013 in Giessen, Germany. At the General Assembly attended by 205 delegates from 25 member associations, the new Executive Board of ABTTF was elected.

On 2 March 2013, the ABTTF Executive Board held its first meeting to decide the allocation of responsibilities which have resulted as follows:

President: Halit Habipoglu
 Vice-President (in charge of internal and organizational affairs): Cengiz Ismail
 Vice-President: Ridvan Hacibedel
 Vice-President: Engin Ismail
 Secretary General: Gökhan Kocaveli
 Accountant: Ismail Rüsüt
 Person in charge of Cooperative Funeral Fund: Mustafa Kasap



Person in charge of Foreign Affairs: Dr. Sebahattin Abdurrahman
 Person in charge of Youth and Cultural Activities: Erdin Kazimoglu
 Person in charge of Social, Cultural and Sports Activities: Bülent Ekrem
 Person in charge of University Graduates: Dr. Mesut Hüseyin / Nabi Ibrahimcik (each will take over the said responsibility alternately for one year)

Halit Habipoglu re-elected as president

“As ABTTF Executive Board of the 18th term, we will work with perseverance to support the struggle of the Turkish

Minority of Western Thrace in Greece for rights and freedoms. Being conscious of our duties and responsibilities, we will continue the initiatives having been started in the previous term and strive to move the ABTTF further forward. We thank all the delegates who supported us with their votes at the General Assembly, and former members of the ABTTF Executive Board. As the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe, we will continue on our course with the power that we receive from our member associations.” stated Halit Habipoglu who was re-elected as president at the allocation of responsibilities during the first meeting of the Executive Board.

ABTTF Newsletter

The ABTTF-Newsletter in four languages, namely in Turkish, English, Greek and German, is celebrating its eighth 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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