

ABTTTF President Halit Habipoğlu was on mission to Brussels



Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTTF) President Halit Habipoğlu was on mission to Brussels on 5 November 2013. Accompanied by the ABTTTF Brussels Representation, Habipoğlu met Brussels-based civil society organisations, business world representatives and members of the European Parliament.

ABTTTF met ENAR, the leading organisation in fight against racism

Having had a meeting with Michael Privot, Director of European Network Against Racism (ENAR), Brussels-based leading civil society organisation for anti-discrimination and fight against racism, Halit Habipoğlu uttered the problems

Western Thrace Turkish Minority faces in Greece and informed on the activities carried on by ABTTTF on the international arena for contributing to settlement of the ongoing problems. ENAR Director Michael Privot informed on future campaigns ENAR is planning to hold in relation to racism and xenophobia in 2014 and indicated that the support of the national and autochthonous minorities in Europe to the respective campaigns would constitute a significant improvement for efforts to curtail increasing extremism.

Habipoğlu met MUSIAD Brussels Representative Alperen Özdemir

The Brussels mission of ABTTTF President Halit Habipoğlu included a meeting with Independent Industrialists' and

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Businessmen's Association (MUSIAD) Brussels Representative Mustafa Alperen Özdemir. Having explained the problems of the Western Thrace Turkish Minority to the Brussels representative of the business association operational in 60 countries and in service through 143 branches, Habipoğlu reiterated the urgent need for investments in Western Thrace, a region in economic crisis driven Greece and forming the borderline with Turkey.

ABTTF President discussed Minority's problems with Members of the European Parliament

Having had meetings with Members of the European Parliament Nils Torvalds (Finland), Alajos Meszaros (Slovakia) and François Alfonsi (France), ABTTF President Halit Habipoğlu expressed problems Western Thrace Turkish Minority encounters in terms of access to education and religious freedom. In the aftermath of Golden Dawn's election to the Hellenic Parliament, Western Thrace Turkish Minority has become one of the targets of the extremist party, hence the extreme right which is in rise in Europe should be curtailed, said Habipoğlu. Furthermore, Habipoğlu called for cooperation with national minorities in efforts to fight against racism that the EP elections to be held in 2014 would require great responsibility and common sense of politicians.



ABTTF met Egemen Bağış, Chief Negotiator and EU Minister of the Republic of Turkey

Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) President Halit Habipoğlu was on a working visit to Brussels on 5 November 2013. The mission included among others also a meeting with Egemen Bağış, Minister for EU Affairs and Chief Negotiator of the Republic of Turkey.

During his mission to Brussels upon the opening of 22. chapter on regional policy and coordination of structural instruments for Turkey's accession to the EU, Minister of EU Affairs and Chief Negotiator of the Republic of Turkey,



Egemen Bağış has received ABTTF President Halit Habipoğlu, as well. On this occasion, ABTTF President Habipoğlu uttered gratitude to the Minister for his responsive approach to the problems of the Western Thrace Turkish Minority. In follow up with Minister's recent visit to Western Thrace, in October 2013, ABTTF President Habipoğlu informed on latest developments regarding the problems of the Minority and the activities pursued on international arena by ABTTF for the sake of contributing to the settlement of ongoing problems.

ABTTF met Vice-President of the European Commission Viviane Reding



the Western Thrace Turkish Minority does not have the right to self-identification on collective means. As an outcome of this, the associations which include the word “Turk” in their titles are not authorised to establish in Greece. Regarding Minority's problems in freedom of association, Habipoğlu informed despite the three decisions of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR), which favour the re-establishment of the suspended associations, Greece still fails to execute the ECtHR decisions.

Having uttered Minority's main problems in the field of education and religion, Habipoğlu explained that the Western Thrace Turkish Minority is perceived as “the other” in Greece and therefore, throughout the recent years the Minority became target to attacks of the racist groups. Habipoğlu underlined that especially in the aftermath of neo-Nazi political party Golden Dawn's election to the Hellenic Parliament, several hate motivated attacks have been directed to the premises of Minority's organisations and the Minority members have been subject to attacks organised by groups in support of Golden Dawn.

Having reiterated the awareness that the subject of national minorities are not within the competence of the EU but of the EU Member States, Habipoğlu nevertheless signalled the very presence of peculiar situation to address national minorities at national level in order to obtain comprehensive and far-reaching solutions. For this reason, President Habipoğlu revealed that ABTTF works together with Europe's national minorities, which amounts to 100 million, under the roof of Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN) and contributes to common efforts to reach a solution to national minorities' problems at the EU level.

Problems of the Western Thrace Turkish Minority were explained from primary source at the meeting realized upon initiative of François Alfonsi, Member of the European Parliament who visited Western Thrace in October 2012

Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) met European Commission Vice-President and Commissioner for Justice, Fundamental Rights and Citizenship Viviane Reding on 9 October 2013 under the premises of European Parliament in Strasbourg. At the meeting, organised upon initiative of François Alfonsi, Member of the European Parliament (France), ABTTF President Halit Habipoğlu provided Ms. Reding in-depth information on problems of the Western Thrace Turkish Minority.

Member of the European Parliament François Alfonsi: Western Thrace Turkish Minority is in serious trouble!

At the meeting carried on between three

parties, MEP François Alfonsi indicated that the visit he paid to the region a year ago provided him the opportunity to have first hand observations regarding the situation of the Western Thrace Turkish Minority. Having drawn attention on the importance of consultations with representatives and members of the minority, Alfonsi, affirmed the situation of the minority in region as very miserable. Alfonsi added that he was very much touched by the situation he witnessed thus; he wanted to share this with Ms Reding.

Halit Habipoğlu: Minority's autonomous status in religion and education has deliberately been wrecked by state

At the meeting held with presence of ABTTF Brussels Representation, ABTTF President Halit Habipoğlu stressed Minority's autonomy in religion and education, which is guaranteed by Lausanne Treaty whereby the rights and status of the Minority were also defined, has deliberately been abrogated by several national policies. In addition, Habipoğlu recalled that despite and since its accession to the EU in 1981,

ABTTF attended OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting

ABTTF and WTMUGA gave voice to problems Western Thrace Turkish Minority encounters on several grounds

Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) participated at 2013 Human Dimension Implementation Meeting (HDIM) organised by the OSCE Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights in 24-27 September 2013. At HDIM annual meeting, Western Thrace Turkish Minority was represented by ABTTF Board member Dr. Sebahattin Abdurrahman, ABTTF International Affairs Director Melek Kırmacı Arık, Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association (WTMUGA) Board member Dilek Osman and WTMUGA member Dr. Ali Hüseyinoğlu.

Greece: Tension is on rise!

ABTTF International Affairs Director Melek Kırmacı, at her speech in the session on tolerance and non-discrimination on 24 September, pointed out Western Thrace Turkish Minority has been a target of the extreme right, which is on rise in Greece especially following Golden Dawn's election to the Hellenic Parliament. ABTTF called on the Greek government to adopt effective



measures, including the suspension of Golden Dawn, in view of fighting against extremism.

WTMUGA member Dr. Ali Hüseyinoğlu informed on hate motivated attacks to Muslim worship establishments and cemeteries in the region and noted that perpetrators of the attacks are not reported therefore, not prosecuted.

Media freedom is threatened!

At the session on media freedom, ABTTF Board member Dr. Sebahattin Abdurrahman told Gündem and Millet v. Hara Nikopoulou case and said the fine charges to Gündem and Millet dailies are disproportionate. Abdurrahman contended fines for compensation of

defamation cases shall not be in undermining nature of a pluralistic media. WTMUGA Board member Dilek Osman informed on the media law adopted in 2007 and provided an analysis on the respective law by indicating broadcasting stations operating in Xanthi and Komotini face severe difficulties in order to meet the requirements introduced by new legislation.

Greek authorities responded minority representatives and claimed fines charged to Gündem and Millet dailies as compensation at the defamation case are in line with each case's special condition born in general national legislation. Greece noted the fines in question are determined according to proportionality principle; moreover the trial of respective dailies is still ongoing in national court.

The Mufti Question and "240 Imams Law"

WTMUGA member Dr. Ali Hüseyinoğlu, referring to the Mufti question, attested the minority is deprived of the right to determine its own religious leaders. WTMUGA furthermore, reiterated that instead of recognising the religious leaders elected by the minority itself,



Greece appoints official religious leaders and assigns them the duties of Mufti.

ABTTF International Affairs Director Melek Kırmacı reported on “240 Imams Law”, a recent regulation (4115/2013) adopted with amendments in 2013, initially drafted in 2007, foresees appointment of 240 religious scholars to be assigned serve duty in mosques and public schools in Western Thrace. ABTTF underlined that the respective regulation is a new intervention in Western Thrace Turkish Minority's rights in terms of religious freedom.

At this stage, Greece responded the legislation 4115/2013 the number of minority children attending to public schools is continuously increasing and offering Qur'an courses in these schools to minority children is prone to good outcomes. Further to this, Greece affirmed that the regulation does not touch upon the status of Imams, who are appointed in line with Islamic rules and Muslim minority's traditions. Regarding the appointment of Muftis, Greece claimed given the judicial competence of Muftis in civil and family law applying to Muslim minority, state assumes the right to choose Muftis. In addition, it is communicated that Athens is working on new elements which would enable rather transparent and pluralistic procedure for the selection of Muftis.



No green light to associations with name “Turk”! Greece does not execute European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) Decisions

At the session on freedom of association, WTMUGA Board member Dilek Osman brought up the problem Western Thrace Turkish Minority and uncovered the issue with a comparison that while the other minorities are allowed to assembly and establish associations in line with their ethnic background, associations founded by Western Thrace Turkish Minority and

including the word “Turk” in their titles are suspended and not authorised for re-establishment.

ABTTF Board member Dr. Sebahattin Abdurrahman informed on developments following ECtHR decisions and said since 2008 the ECtHR decisions are not executed. Having noted that despite the five years elapsed after the ECtHR decisions no concrete steps were taken by Greece, Abdurrahman called on Greek authorities to urgently execute ECtHR decisions.

Upon these remarks, Greece responded Greek law of criminal procedure does not provide way for direct implementation of the ECtHR decisions yet the efforts to implement the decisions of the ECtHR are ongoing. In addition, Greece noted that the three associations, previously suspended, still perform their activities without any intervention. Having underlined many associations founded by minority members in the region and bearing the word “minority” in their names are present and freely exercising their activities

240 Imams Law was discussed in Warsaw



A side event at the OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting (HDIM) has for the first time been co-chaired by ABTTF and BTAYTD

In cooperation with Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association (BTAYTD), Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) held a side event on “240 Imams Law”, featured as one of the striking issues Western Thrace Turkish Minority encounters regarding freedom of religion and belief. The side event, taken place under premises of OSCE in Warsaw during HDIM in the evening of 26 September, discussed the “240 Imams Law” and underlined that the respective regulation aims for expansion of state control on freedom of religion and belief of the Western Thrace Turkish Minority.

ABTTF and BTAYD: Our target is draw attention on “240 Imams Law”!

Organised in partnership with European Muslim Initiative for Social Cohesion (EMISCO), the side event “State intervention in internal religious affairs of

minorities and the freedom of religion: the case of Western Thrace Turkish Minority” was moderated by ABTTF International Affairs Director Melek Kırmacı Arık.

Arık indicated the event aims to discuss the extent of state intervention in minorities' religious affairs and the actions which can be undertaken by the minorities in response to state intervention. Further to opening remarks, Kırmacı said the event aims to shed a light on the respective regulation, which is named “240 Imams Law” by Western Thrace Turkish Minority, while providing the reasons of elaborated reaction to the regulation from the minority itself.

BTAYTD Board member Dilek Osman during her welcoming address said that co-organising a side event at the OSCE together with ABTTF aims to draw extended public attention on “240 Imams Law” which will have direct and determinant impact on Western Thrace Turkish Minority's daily life.

Dr. Sebahattin Abdurrahman: 240 Imams Law violates International Law!

ABTTF Board member Dr. Sebahattin Abdurrahman briefed the audience on implementation of religious rights of Western Thrace Turkish Minority under the framework of its rights and status. Abdurrahman pointed that the legislation (3536/2007 and 4115/2013) issued in 2007 and modified in 2013 proves a grave state intervention in religious sphere. The 240 positions opened for “teaching Qur'an in mosques in Thrace” is to be staffed by “Qur'an teachers” appointed by Greece but these occupations are not sufficiently specified whether they would be filled by imams or religious education teachers or by Muslim scholars, said Abdurrahman. Having informed on the implementation of the regulation, the appointment of the respective “Qur'an teachers” and their duty at the minority primary and secondary schools, Abdurrahman provided reasons of minority's reaction to the respective regulation.

Following his explanations, Abdurrahman stressed that the regulation violates the bilateral agreements and international legal covenants which defines and guarantees the status and rights of the Western Thrace Turkish Minority and warned the full implementation of the regulation would bring out demise of the

Minority's religious autonomy, which was granted by international agreements.

Hayri Emin: Current state of affairs influences relation between state and the institution of Mufti

Hayri Emin, Specialist at the Department of Foreign Relations of Head Office of Mufti in Bulgaria, elucidated the relation of the Mufti institution with the state of Bulgaria. Through his insightful speech on status of the Mufti as the official representative of the Muslim community in Bulgaria, Emin stressed the regime changes in Bulgaria had had a direct impact on relations between state and the institution of Mufti.

The political intervention in Mufti and supervisory bodies' election manifest itself as the main problematic, yet in the aftermath of turmoil during election of Mufti in the years of 2009 and 2011, since 2011 a considerable improvement in Mufti's relations with state has been observed, said Emin.

Bashy Quraishy: On the name of teaching Qur'an, the minority has been deprived of the right to determine its own religious leader and its religious autonomy is violated

EMISCO Secretary General Bashy Quraishy stated that Muslim communities in Europe are in general discriminated on the grounds of Islamophobia and historical hatred. Having voiced the Western Thrace Turkish Minority be exposed to discrimination on several grounds in Greek social and political life, Quraishy echoed Human Rights Without Frontiers International (HRWF) findings from its mission to the region in October 2012 while asserting HRWF's mission report reveals the situation on the ground with full transparency. On EMISCO's position



regarding the “240 Imams Law”, Quraishy explained the legislation with was modified with an additional regulation has been kept classified until its adoption in 2013, by then no consultations with the Minority representatives in Athens had been held. Quraishy suggested on the name of teaching Qur'an, the minority has been deprived of the right to determine

its own religious leader and its religious autonomy is violated.

On behalf of EMISCO, Quraishy called on Greek authorities to review the legislation and reminded that Greece known as the cradle of democracy is expected to act accordingly, otherwise it is bound to be in contradiction with its very spirit of existence.

ABTTF met with Council of Europe officials in Strasbourg

ABTTF communicated Minority's ongoing problems to the Office of Council Europe Human Rights Commissioner and European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI)

Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) paid an official visit to European Council Parliamentary Assembly (PACE) on 1-2 October 2013. Organised during the plenary session and attended by ABTTF General Secretary Gökhan Kocaveli and ABTTF General Director K.Engin Soyyılmaz, the visit included meetings with Matthieu Birker advisor of Nils Muiznieks, Council of Europe Human Rights Commissioner, and consultations with ECRI expert Tobias Bergmann.

ABTTF informed the Office of the Commissioner Muiznieks that a large group of public officials, including leaders of Golden Dawn Party, have been arrested upon investigations following the murder of Pavlos Fyssas, a Greek hip-hop artist. ABTTF called for full transparency in investigation of Golden Dawn and underlined that as it was stated at Commissioner's report, previously released after his visit to Greece in December 2012, Western Thrace Turkish Minority is targeted by groups in support of Golden Dawn ideology and activities.

ABTTF informed on severe interventions in Western Thrace Turkish Minority's autonomy in religion and education by providing details on "240 Imams Law", a new regulation 4115/2013, which foresees 240 religious scholars to be appointed by the state and teach in mosques and public schools. Having reported that the respective bill passed in 2013 after modifications on initial form issued in 2007 is already in



implementation and the first badge of state appointed religious scholars started their duty in public schools.

Regarding the autonomy in education, ABTTF informed on the last education reform in 2006, when kindergartens were included in mandatory education system. Upon this briefing, ABTTF indicated as the Greek state does not authorise establishment of bilingual kindergartens, the pupils belonging to minority are obliged to attend public schools, which offer education only in Greek. ABTTF underlined that despite last year's education scandal in Echinus (Şahin) which was led by denial of 20 kids from registry to primary school and dismissal of the principal of the minority school, the problem with bilingual education in kindergartens are still waiting for a settlement.

Lastly ABTTF informed on the suspended associations, which included the word "Turk" in their names, and added that the new ones to be established are not authorised for registrations. Despite the three decisions of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) favouring the re-establishment of the respective associations, Greece still fails to comply with ECtHR rulings in this matter.

The problem of the minority education is again on the UN agenda

Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) submitted a written statement to the 24th Session of the United Nations Human Rights Council. Through the written statement on the subject of “the right not to be discriminated and the education in mother tongue: The Problem of bilingual minority pre-school education in Greece”, ABTTF conveyed the problem of bilingual education to the UN agenda.



While informing on the education reform introduced by the legislation 3518/2006 which rendered pre-school education mandatory for each child, ABTTF stressed because there are no bilingual kindergartens given the government blockage on them for establishment the pupils belonging to the minority families are forced to attend public schools which offer education only in Greek.

ABTTF reported in September 2012 in Echinós (Şahin) not only the pupils who had not attended public kindergartens were refused to be registered to the minority primary school but also the principal of the respective school, who received the pupils to lesson only with pre-registration, had been dismissed from duty. ABTTF provided further details on the issue that the kids were admitted to school following the registration which was completed only in 2012 November. Yet, as an ultimate solution has not been reached regarding the problem, a similar case and problems are likely to emerge in the new school year.

In its written statement, having made note on the fact-finding mission organised in October 2012 in presence of Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN) President Hans-Heinrich Hansen and Human Rights Without Frontiers Int'l (HRWF) Director Willy Fautré when consultations held with parents in Echinós (Şahin), ABTTF



called on Government of Greece to authorise the establishment of bilingual minority kindergartens. In addition, ABTTF urged Greek government to provide bilingual education in public kindergartens in the region by the time bilingual minority schools are established.

The problem of minority schools in Greece is emergency situation!

Pointing out the insufficiency of the minority schooling system despite the educational autonomy granted to the Minority by the Lausanne Peace Treaty undersigned in 1923, ABTTF uncovered a number of regulations, including training of teachers, curricula, and textbooks, resulted in low-quality education in minority schools. Further to

this, ABTTF reported the international delegation who visited the region in October 2012 had described the situation as an emergency issue.

In reference to former UN Independent Expert on Minority Issues Gay McDougall's visit to the region in 2008, ABTTF reiterated the expert's findings that 194 minority schools had been providing education in the region and later in 2011 upon the decision of the Ministry of Education, Life-Long Learning and Religious Affairs the number of minority schools had been decreased to 174.

Another twelve minority schools in the region have been suspended in February 2013 upon the decision of the Ministry, on the grounds of insufficient number of pupils. Informing on the latest developments on the issue, ABTTF referred to SYRIZA Xanthi Deputy's submission of a parliamentary question on the subject and call for respective minority schools to be authorised for resuming their activities as the number of students has increased.

You can access the written statement via following link:
<http://daccess-dds.ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G13/166/96/PDF/G1316696.pdf?OpenElement>

FUEN Board Meeting has been held in Brussels

Elected in June 2013, members of the FUEN Board has for the first time summoned with the new members of European Dialogue Forum

Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN) Board and FUEN European Dialog Forum have held their first common and parallel meetings at the European Parliament (EP) in Brussels on 25 September 2013. Hosted by Member of the European Parliament (MEP) Iuliu Winkler, a member of the Hungarian minority in Romania, FUEN Board summoned under the chairmanship of FUEN President Hans-Heinrich Hansen and FUEN Vice-Presidents Halit Habipoğlu, Bernhard Ziesch, Loránt Vincze, Olga Martens and Dieter Paul Küssner and joined by Youth of European Nationalities (YEN) President Fatma Reşit.

FUEN President Hansen noted FUEN Board meeting taking place in Brussels under the premises of the European Parliament as a unique occasion and therefore reiterated gratitude to Mr Winkler for his gracious support. Whilst centered on "1 Million Signatures" campaign of the European Citizen Initiative, the opening remarks of the President was followed up by set of activities and task distribution among the new board members, who will be on duty in the next three years.



As a result of the discussions on institutional structuring, FUEN Vice-President Martha Stocker (South Tyrolean People's Party) has been designated as the FUEN Vice-President in charge of rules and regulations. Loránt Vincze (Democratic Alliance of Hungarians of Romania – RMDSZ) and Dieter Paul Küssner (Sydslesvigsk Forening – Danish Minority of Germany) have unanimously been elected as Vice-President in charge of relations with the European Parliament and the Vice-President in charge of organising 2014 FUEN Congress in the border region between Denmark and Germany.

Halit Habipoğlu (ABTTF, Western Thrace Turkish Minority) has been elected as Vice-President in charge of relations with the FUEN member

associations in Balkans with unanimous vote. Vice-President Habipoğlu will carry out his post with the support of Jenni Ali-Huokuna, members' coordinator and supervisor for internal affairs at the FUEN Secretariat. In addition, Bernhard Ziesch (Domowina, Sorb Minority of Germany) and Olga Martens (IVDK – German Minority of Russia) has unanimously been elected Vice-President in charge of FUEN's finances and Vice-President in charge of Russian speaking minorities under FUEN's umbrella.

Besides, in parallel with German Minorities Working Group and Slavic Minorities Working Group within the FUEN structure, Vice-President Halit Habipoğlu's proposal to set up third working group dedicated as "Turkish Minorities Working Group" has been approved by the board members.

Having "1 Million Signatures" Campaign as its main concern, the board concluded that the open discussion to take place on 26 September 2013 at the EP shall give way to the first concrete action to be taken upon the Commission's refusal of registry to the proposed citizen initiative on 16 September 2013.



The European Commission refuses the 1 Million Signatures Campaign of the Minority SafePack Initiative!

ABTTF President Halit Habipoğlu: The Commission's refusal caused a great disappointment among Europe's national minorities!



The European Commission (EC) has refused to register the 1 Million Signatures Campaign submitted by the Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN), the South Tyrolean People's Party (SVP), Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania (RMDSZ) and the Youth of European Nationalities (YEN) within the framework of the Minority SafePack Initiative.

FUEN Congress held in June 2013. An official request for the registry had been submitted to the EC on 15 July 2013. The EC, on the final date for the official response, refused the initiative, which would have constituted the first step for the protection of Europe's national and linguistic minorities.

In its response dated 16 September 2013, the EC refused to register "Minority SafePack Initiative" on the ground that the proposed citizens' initiative falls outside the framework of the Commission's powers. The "1 Million Signatures" Campaign, of which the Western Thrace Turkish Minority has been a party, had been given start at the

FUEN President Hans-Heinrich Hansen contended EC's response as non-comprehensive from their side and added that FUEN does not agree with the EC on the reasoning for refusal that the 1 Million Signatures campaign falls out of competences of the EC. RMDSZ President Hunor Kelemen, member of the Citizen Committee formed for the

proposed initiative, said that the EC's response is influenced by political dynamics as the legal and technical procedures had been followed in line with the EC requirements.

Currently, the partners are considering ways for appeal against the decision of the EC. The dialog meeting to be held on 26 September 2013 at the European Parliament in Brussels will include discussion on "Minority SafePack" within the framework of European Citizen Initiative for the minorities.

Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) President Halit Habipoğlu, "The EC's refusal of the 1 Million signatures Campaign, which would build the first step to form a protection mechanism at EU level for Europe's national and linguistic minorities, has caused a big disappointment. Seeing an initiative, both technically and legally well-grounded, be refused by the European Commission is only astonishing".

Parliamentary Question on Golden Dawn's hate speech targeted to Western Thrace Turkish Minority

European Commission: To investigate any instances of hate speech or Holocaust denial and to prosecute the perpetrators of such offences are under the national authorities



The European Commission answered the Parliamentary Question on hate speeches committed by members of the Hellenic Parliament, which was

submitted by Member of the European Parliament (MEP) Ms Sophia in't Veld (The Netherlands) on 14 August 2013.

At the Parliamentary Question, MEP Ms. in't Veld referred to numerous racist and xenophobic statements perpetuated by the members of the Hellenic Parliament both inside and outside of the Parliament. In't Veld stressed that not only the Jewish minority but also other minorities including Western Thrace

Turkish Minority has become target of Golden Dawn deputies. Having questioned the Commission's view regarding Greek MPs racist statements in relation to the EU Framework Decision on racism and xenophobia (2008/913/JHA), in't Veld noted that although the deadline for transposing the respective legislation into national law was November 2010, Greece failed to do it. Further to these remarks, in't Veld asked what instruments the Commission had in order to ensure the correct transposition of framework Decision into the Greek national law.

In't Veld lastly questioned whether Charter of the Fundamental Rights of the European Union is applicable in the case

of racist statements and if so, whether these incidents are in breach of the provisions of the Charter.

The answer given by the EU Vice-President Mrs. Viviane Reding on behalf of the Commission cites that the Commission condemns all forms and manifestations of racism and xenophobia, as they are incompatible with the principal values the EU is founded on. Furthermore, the answer indicated that the Commission closely follows developments as regards the issue in Greece and any other locality where serious concerns are on rise. The current monitoring on Member States' implementing measures of Framework decision was planned to be integrated

into a comprehensive report due for publication in December 2013, communicated Mrs. Reding within the answer.

Lastly, the Commission indicated that investigation of any instances of hate speech or Holocaust denial and prosecution of perpetrators of such offences were under the national authorities.

You can access the Parliamentary Question by MEP Sophia in't Veld and the answer on:

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getAllAnswers.do?reference=E-2013-009567&language=EN>

Given their involvement with Golden Dawn eight chiefs of police in Greece have been relieved of duty

ABTTF President Halit Habipoğlu: Dismissal of high level staff within the Greek Security Forces, which is entitled to ensure security in the country and safeguard citizens, releases the dreadful dimension neo-Nazi political party Golden Dawn brought the whole country.

Following the murder of hip-hop artist Pavlos Fyssas on 17 September by a member of the neo-Nazi political party Golden Dawn, eight chiefs of police involved in the events have been dismissed.

According to minority daily Azınlıkça, officers of the Internal Affairs Department of the Greek Directorate General for Security, who are allegedly involved in the activities of the neo-Nazi political party Golden Dawn had been replaced by 8 new chiefs of police in order to ensure the impartiality of



investigations.

The Directorate General of Security released that upon the order of Greek Minister of Public Order and Citizen Protection Nikos Dendias, General Director Niolaos Papayannopoulos called on Director of Internal Affairs Panayotis Stathis to verify the allegations spread through the Greek press regarding the involvement of certain police officers in the activities of Golden Dawn Party.

Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) President Halit Habipoğlu said "Eight chiefs of police being relieved of duty due to allegations of involvement in neo-Nazi Golden Dawn Party has been an outrageous development for Greek Government and society. The dismissal of high level staff within the Greek Security Forces, which is entitled to ensure security in the country and safeguard citizens, releases the dreadful dimension neo-Nazi political party Golden Dawn brought the whole country. Golden Dawn is an immediate threat to democracy, peace and the state of welfare in the country. The citizens, who believe to have police on their side and safeguarding their presence, are dreadfully disappointed. In view of restoring civic confidence security forces, the ongoing investigations shall urgently be finalised. Equally, concrete steps shall be taken by the government for the closure of Golden Dawn".

* Photo: <http://www.birlikgazetesi.info/>

The hip-hop artist Pavlos Fissas killed by Golden Dawn in Greece

ABTTF President: The government shall take immediate action for the ban of neo-Nazi political party Golden Dawn.

Over an argument inflamed following the soccer game between Olympiakos and Paris St. Germain towards the midnight of 17 September 2013, the hip-hop artist Pavlos Fissas has been stabbed to death allegedly by a member of the Golden Dawn.

According to Ekathimerini, an argument strike out between the 45-year-old, who is charged with murder, and 34-year-old artist who has been watching Olympiakos-St. Germain soccer game with the company of his friends at a café. Escalation of the argument gave way to upheavals in streets of the district Amfiali. Fissas was chased by a group of attackers of approximately 50 persons and stabbed by the 45-year-old he had an argument at the café. Fissas lost his live at the hospital where he was taken by his friends.

The murder of Pavlos Fissas alerted Greece. The society manifested its reaction to Golden Dawn, which spreads violence against immigrants and non-Greek origin citizens. At the protests organised in Athens, Thessaloniki and Patra, clashes and confrontations have been witnessed between police forces and the protesters. Protests were



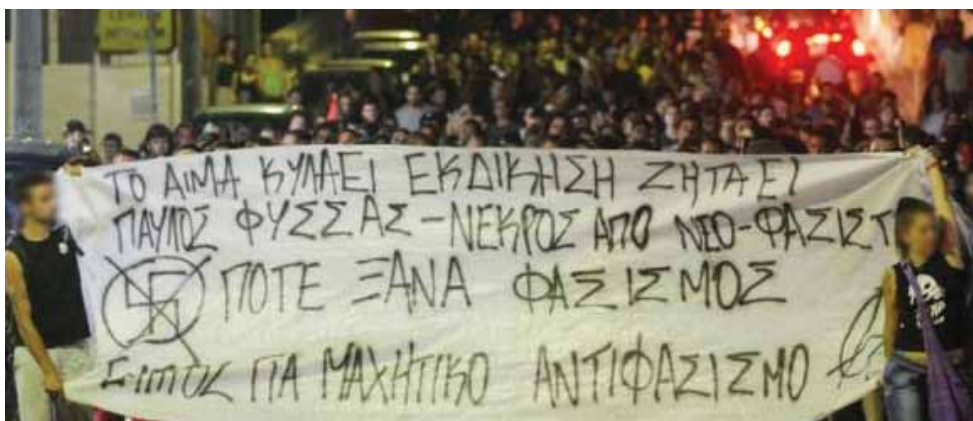
organised in Xanthi and Komotini to call on the government to stop the violence by Golden Dawn.

The government condemned the murder. While calling on the political forces to condemn this tragedy, the government spokesman Simos Kedikoglou stated an end should be given to the ongoing bloodshed caused by tensions and violence.

The Minister of Public Order Nikos Dendias indicated that a new legislation on this subject will be adopted in the parliament. Prime Minister Antonis Samaras and Deputy Prime Minister Evangelos Venizelos held a meeting at the official residence of the prime

minister on 18 September 2013. Following the bilateral meeting, Venizelos released “Golden Dawn's priority is violence. Therefore, it has to be treated as a terrorist organisation. These actions shows they are gone far beyond the tolerance thus, the rule of law shall prevail”.

Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) President Halit Habipoğlu said “Seeing a young citizen, Pavlos Fissas stabbed to death in Greece is outrageous. Herewith, we share sorrow this tragic incident caused and condemn the case to the fullest. The extent of insecurity and danger in the country is evident at the murder of Pavlos Fissas by a group of Golden Dawn supporters. Regarding Golden Dawn' being a threat to security and peace in the country, we have been restless to express our concerns to the government authorities at several occasions. The government shall take immediate action to close down this neo-Nazi extreme right political party”.



* Photos: www.ekathimerini.com
www.azinlikca.net

The suspended Minority Schools will be closed also in the new scholar year

ABTTF President Halit Habipoğlu: The constant violation of our autonomy in education leads the fortune of minority schools only to the hands of Greek authorities



Greek Ministry of Education, Life-Long Learning and Religious Affairs has responded to the parliamentary question of the SYRIZA Deputy of Xanthi requesting the Minority Schools, which were previously suspended in accordance with the decisions Φ.8.1/2007/12/11/2012 and Φ.8.1/1094/01.07.2013, to resume their activities and assume functions given the increased number of students in the new scholar year. The Ministry indicated that activities of the respective Minority Schools would be on hold during this scholar year as well.

According to the minority daily Azınlıkça, the Minister stated “the schools in question are situated in close distance to the schools offering education in multiple classes” and “the students who were attending the suspended schools will

without any problems be provided transport to their new schools”. The Minister furthermore explained “The measures and legal framework foreseen in terms of education and transport of the students of all public schools at national level will be applied equally in the case of students who used to attend the temporarily suspended schools thus, there will be no burdens left on the families of the concerned students”.

Regarding the Deputy's question in relation to the relocation of the teachers instructing Greek and Turkish in the suspended schools, the Minister responded that the Turkish language teachers of the temporarily suspended schools are foreseen to practice their profession in other minority schools in the region. The Minister specified that only the Greek language teachers were

going to be relocated to minority schools or to other schools.

Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) President Halit Habipoğlu stated “Western Thrace Turkish Minority is deprived of its autonomy in education and its competence to decide on minority schools had been relegated to Greek authorities. Amid the economic crisis, the schools with fewer students have been suspended and their teachers decided to continue their profession in other schools. The Minority's opinion has been ignored during decision making and implementation phases of these policies. Should the educational autonomy of the Western Thrace Turkish Minority fully restored the quality of education in minority schools will be improved and minority pupils attending to public schools for a better education will prefer minority schools system. Equally, the teachers instructing in minority schools will be paid by the minority members therefore there will be no reasons to suspend any or combine multiple minority schools on the grounds of economic hardship.”

State appointed Imams will soon be on duty at public schools!

ABTTF President Halit Habipoğlu: We call for the annulment of 240 Imams Law, which violates the freedom of religion or belief

The legislation 4115/2013, which entails 240 state appointed Muslim clerics to serve duty at the mosques and public schools in Western Thrace therefore called “240 Imams Law” by the Western Thrace Turkish Minority is on implementation. According to study



conducted by the Hellenic Ministry of Education, Life-Long Learning and Religious Affairs, the 63 Muslim schools in Western Thrace are currently to serve

only in the public schools.

According to minority daily Gündem, the pre-selected students who successfully completed the first phase of the qualification exam, will take the oral exam organised by the East Macedonia and Thrace Regional Education Directorate. As a result, 63 persons with highest ranking at the final exam will start duty in public schools as contractual staff.

The religious scholars will teach Quran

at the public schools of secondary level. Komotini will be allotted 31 religious schools, while 19 and 13 Muslim clergymen will be assigned duty in Xanthi and Evros. So the clarification, the state appointed scholars will for the time being not serve duty in the mosques.

Federation of Western Thrace Turkish

Minority (ABTTF) President Halit Habipoğlu stressed "Despite the Western Thrace Turkish Minority's vast reaction and requests for annulment, Greek Government insists on the execution of the legislation. The government prepares room for further steps by starting to execute the legislation first by assigning the state appointed religious scholars to public

schools rather than to mosques. What is next? This legislation is in full contradiction with the freedom of religion and belief as well as with the bilateral and international agreements to which Greece is a party. For this very reason, we call on our country Greece to stop interfering with minority's religious affairs and as a corollary to annul the respective legislation."

The biennial video displayed at Alaca İmaret Mosque angers Muslims in Thessaloniki

ABTTF President Halit Habipoğlu: The Greek state must apologize for such disrespectful action and satisfy the demand of Muslims for opening of Alaca İmaret Mosque to worship

The French artist Ange Leccia's video work titled "Nimfea" displayed at Thessaloniki Biennial in the historical Alaca İmaret Mosque- which is now closed to worship and used as a museum and exhibition area- angered Muslims living in the city. Turkey also reacted against the projection of Nimfea video which is depicting a seemingly naked woman down to her chest in water at this very important mosque for Muslims living in Thessaloniki.

The President of Eastern Macedonia-Thracian Muslims Education and Culture Association Mr. Osman İsmailoğlu complained about this video to Thessaloniki Mayor Yiannis Butaris



which he found erotic and requested its removal from the mosque. The Turkish Consulate General in Thessaloniki sent a letter to the Greek authorities including Thessaloniki Mayor and the Bishop Anthimos of Thessaloniki and stated in the letter that "Alaca İmaret is built as a mosque and its closure to worship now does not diminish its importance for Muslims" and asked removal of the obscene video from the mosque.

Due to reactions from Turkey, Eastern Macedonia-Thracian Muslims Education and Culture Association and Muslim tourists visiting Thessaloniki, Nimfea was removed from Alaca İmaret Mosque and displayed at another space, but it was again projected at the mosque. Turkey once again reacted, and Nimfea was again removed from Alaca İmaret.

Europe (ABTTF)'s President Halit Habipoğlu made the following explanation on the issue: "Alaca İmaret Mosque is of utmost importance for Muslims living in Thessaloniki. While expecting its opening for worship on religious holidays and days, the display of an art work at the biennial in the Mosque is a disrespectful act on religious sensitivities of Muslims living in the city. This action which might be considered as provocative in this regard is taken not by extreme rightist or atheists, but by the state itself. The Greek state must apologize for such disrespectful action and grant the request of Muslims living in the region for opening of Alaca İmaret Mosque to worship."

* Photos: www.hurriyet.com.tr,
www.yunanistandaosmanlieserleri.com

Federation of Western Thrace Turks in





Xanthi Sport Union Kids' Soccer Game between Xanthi Sport Union and Elpides PAOK mired down due to reactions to guide pupils in Turkish

ABTTF President Halit Habipoğlu:
Sport should not be an instrument
to forge hostilities but to reinforce
fraternity and friendship.

The Kids' soccer game between Xanthi Sport Union and Elpides PAOK on 19 October 2013 mired down due to the warnings "not to speak Turkish". The reactions from parents of the pupils playing in PAOK to the coach of Xanthi Sport Union because he guided kids in Turkish led the Xanthi Sport Union to leave the game off.

At the interview given to minority daily *Gündem*, the Chair and Coach of Xanthi Sport Union Hakan İsmetoğlu said "We agreed to play a friendly game on Saturday, the 19th October. Our players are composed of those who are born in 2006-2007. This is our smallest team. The Coach of our kids' team is Erkan Kiracı. Naturally, some parents were also there to watch the game. Our coach Erkan was giving tips to kids during the game. And very naturally, he was doing



this in Turkish and guiding kids. In the meanwhile, a parent came up complaining on our coach's speaking Turkish and warned him not to speak Turkish. They sent him away from the playground and the incident has been terminated without escalation. Shortly after, the chair of the team came up and reacted in the same manner. He said that their part is getting agitated by Turkish conversations and asked if we were doing it on purpose. Upon these statements, we withdrew from the game."

Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) President Halit Habipoğlu, "It is very disappointing to see the soccer game mired down between

the kids' teams of Xanthi Sport Union and Elpides PAOK upon the reactions on "Speaking in Turkish". It neither can nor should be an offensive or agitating element to have one speaking in his mother tongue. Sport should not be an instrument to forge hostilities but to reinforce fraternity and friendship. We strongly condemn this incident, which initially started with intentions of friendship and included 6-7 year-old generation as the main actors to serve the means of the game, and call on Elpides PAOK Chair to apologize on behalf of the entire team".

* Photo: www.gundemgazetesi.com

ABTTF Newsletter

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