

Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europa Newsletter

NGO in Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations
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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ABTTT and FEP Party were on mission to Brussels



ABTTT President Halit Habip Oğlu and FEP Party President Mustafa Ali Çavuş organised a common working visit to Brussels

Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTT) and Friendship, Equality, Peace (FEP) Party were on mission to Brussels on 12 February 2014. On the occasion of its visits to Western Thrace Turks' associations established in Germany together ABTTT President Halit Habip Oğlu, FEP Party President Mustafa Ali Çavuş and the Advisor of the Party President Aydın Ahmet organised a working visit to Brussels.

ABTTT and FEP Party attended the Conference on State of Freedom of Religion or Belief in the World

ABTTT and FEP Party attended to conference on the state of freedom of religion or belief in the world co-organised by US Commission on International Religious Freedom and (USCIRF) and European Platform on Religious Intolerance and Discrimination (EPRID) and hosted by the European Parliament Working Group on Freedom of Religion or

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2000 farmers of Western Thrace Turkish Minority marched in Komotini chanting "Farmers are to be given allocation!" page 17



Western Thrace Turkish Minority of Greece, which holds Council Presidency of the EU, faces constant discrimination pages 18-19



Regardless of the reactions from the Minority, 23 "appointed religion teachers" started duty in public schools page 20



Belief (EP WG FORB) on 12 February 2014. Having had exchange with Human Rights Without Frontiers Int'l (HRWF) Director Willy Fautre, ABTTF and FEP Party informed politicians and eurocrats on "240 Imams Law", one of the most important problems Turkish Minority of Western Thrace encounters in the field of freedom of religion or belief.

ABTTF and FEP Party noted on "240 Imams Law"

Following the presentation of Dr. Heiner Bielefeldt, United Nations (UN) Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, Turkish Minority of Western Thrace's representative delegation took floor and raised the Mufti question and

"240 Imams Law", most important problems the Minority faces in terms of freedom of religion or belief. Having provided a breakthrough on the issue, the delegation asked for UN's recommendations upon Greece's violation of Turkish Minority of Western Thrace's freedom of religion or belief. UN Special Rapporteur Dr. Bielefeldt affirmed UN support to Turkish Minority of Western Thrace in Greece within the framework of UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities in force since 1993.

Round Table Discussion with ENAR

ABTTF and FEP Party had a meeting with Michael Privot, Director of European Network Against Racism (ENAR), Brussels-based prominent organisation for fight against racism and discrimination. At the meeting, which was realized as the first dialogue of FEP Party and ABTTF with ENAR, FEP Party President Mustafa Ali Çavuş introduced the party as the unique representative of the Minority in political sphere and informed about works and activities of the Minority's party. Besides, ABTTF and FEP Party held discussions on ENAR's projects regarding EP elections and possible cooperation in this field.



ABTTF and FEP Party visited Member of the German Federal Parliament Cemile Yusuf

ABTTF President Halit Habip Ođlu and FEP Party President Mustafa Ali avuş discussed with Cemile Yusuf the current problems of the Minority

Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) President Halit Habip Ođlu and Western Thrace Turkish Minority's political party Friendship, Equality, Peace (FEP) Party President Mustafa Ali avuş paid a visit to Cemile Yusuf, who has been elected to German Federal Parliament as the first Turkish origin candidate from the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) in the last elections held in September 2013. Yusuf is originally from Western Thrace. FEP Party President's Advisor Aydın Ahmet and Dr. Deniz Nergis, advisor of Cemile Yusuf have also taken part in the meeting held on Friday, 7 February 2014.

FEP Party President Mustafa Ali avuş congratulated Cemile Yusuf for being elected to the German Federal Parliament and expressed honours on behalf of Western Thrace Turks by the election of Cemile Yusuf to Bundestag. Having expressed the economic, social and political problems in Western Thrace, Mustafa Ali avuş noted



Greece does not have a sincere approach in restoring the rights granted by the Lausanne Peace Treaty. Mustafa Ali avuş told there are many problems waiting for solution both in terms of citizenship and minority rights.

ABTTF President Halit Habip Ođlu pointed out the education problem and explained the quality of education is deteriorated in the Minority schools due to several deliberate policies therefore the families are obliged to enrol their children to public schools. Having noted that the educational autonomy of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace diminished to a great extend, Habip Ođlu said teachers graduated from Special Pedagogical Academy of

Thessaloniki (EPATH) encounter difficulties in giving lectures in Turkish, which results in serious shortcomings in education of mother tongue. Having uttered regrets the non-use of teachers completed their education and graduated in Turkey, ABTTF President stressed Greece failing to have goodwill regarding the Minority schools.

Deputy Cemile Yusuf expressed being pleased for receiving FEP Party President Mustafa Ali avuş and ABTTF President Halit Habip Ođlu. Being very interested in the current problems of the Western Thrace Turkish Minority, Cemile Yusuf informed given the newly formed government in Germany, her agenda is quite busy. She nevertheless emphasized that she would try to spare some time to pay a visit to Western Thrace. Following the meeting, Yusuf companied her visitors for a tour in Bundestag and informed them about the functioning of the institution.



ABTTF attended UN Forum on Minority Issues

Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) attended the 6th Session of the UN Forum on Minority Issues with the subject "Beyond Freedom of Religion or Belief: Guaranteeing the Rights of Religious Minorities". Western Thrace Turkish Minority was represented at the Forum by ABTTF Vice-President Rıdvan Hacibedel, ABTTF Board member Dr. Sebahattin Abdurrahman, ABTTF International Affairs Director Melek Kırmacı Arık and Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association (BTAYTD) member and Western Thrace Minority Culture and Education Foundation (PEKEM) General Director Pervin Hayrullah. The problems of the Rhodes, Kos and Dodecanese Turks were expressed by Rhodes, Kos and Dodecanese Turks Culture and Solidarity Association President Prof. Dr. Mustafa Kaymakçı, who participated at the Forum for the first time on behalf of Rhodes, Kos and Dodecanese Turks.

Golden Dawn targets not only immigrants but also Western Thrace Turkish Minority

At her intervention during the afternoon session on protection of the existence of and prevention of violence against religious minorities, ABTTF International Affairs Director Melek Kırmacı Arık dwelled on increasing hate motivated violence in Europe and pointed out the violence environment spread by neo-Nazi Golden Dawn in Greece.

Having noted the hate motivated attacks perpetuated not only towards immigrants but also towards the Western Thrace Turkish Minority, ABTTF informed Golden Dawn supporters attacked to Komotini Turkish Youth Union, chanted slogans past the villages inhabited by the Minority and even



tragically beaten two Minority members.

Religious Affairs General Secretariat Kalacis: "Given the legal competences of the (appointed) Muftis, Greece is unique in Europe"

On the first day of the Forum, Yorgos

Kalacis the General Secretary in charge of Religious Affairs from the Greek Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs has spoken on behalf of Greece. With his speech at the conference organised by Project for Reform in Education of Muslim Children (PEM) and Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy (ELIAMEP) on 22 November 2013, Kalacis had received vast reaction from the Western Thrace

Turkish Minority.

Having pointed Greece as a unique example in Europe given the appointed Muftis endowed with legal competences in family law, Kalancis uncovered the regulation, which is referred as 240 Imams Law by the Minority, entails Greece to pay the salaries of three (appointed) Muftis and 240 "Religion teachers".

Referring to the 240 Imams Law the Western Thrace Turkish Minority strongly opposes and calls for annulment, Kalancis cherished the respective law by telling from the year 2013 the Minority children are given the opportunity to learn Qur'an at the public schools.



BTAYTD: Only 3 of the 63 "Qur'an teachers" foreseen to be appointed to the public schools under the framework 240 Imams Law are university graduates!

Greek Helsinki Monitor Spokesperson Panayote Dimitras, at his intervention on the second day of the Forum said despite European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) three decisions in favour of restoring the official status of previous suspended associations of the Minority, Greece still prohibits the establishment of the associations, which include the word "Turk" in their titles. Dimitras asserted use of Turkish, which is Minority's mother tongue, has both by de facto and through official policies prohibited. Further to his argument, Dimitras referred the two recent incidents by explaining Komotini State Hospital issued a notice prohibiting doctors of speaking an "unknown language" and the blockage on use of Turkish for giving a presentation at a conference on Lausanne Peace Treaty in Komotini.

BTAYTD member and PEKEM General Director Pervin Hayrullah at her intervention during the same session



informed Religious Affairs General Secretary Kalancis threatened the Minority at the conference in Komotini through his approach and manner, while having played a determinant role in preventing translation in Turkish. Hayrullah reported the 240 Imams Law, which foresees appointment of 240 "Qur'an teachers" to server duty at the public schools and mosques in Western Thrace, is on implementation. Further to

this development, Hayrullah noted out of 63 persons selected for the position, only 3 hold a university degree, 14 are graduates of Thessaloniki Academia of Pedagogy, 22 are high school graduates and 24 are primary school graduates. On the basis of these figures, Ms. Hayrullah asked how a person can be appointed a "teacher" without holding any pedagogical training.

Western Thrace Turkish Minority and Rhodes, Kos and Dodecanese Turks were at the UN

ABTTF and Rhodes, Kos and Dodecanese Turks Culture and Solidarity Association have for the first time co-organised a side event at the UN Forum on Minority Issues

Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) and Rhodes, Kos and Dodecanese Turks Culture and Solidarity Association have co-organised a side event on "Freedom of Religion and Challenges faced by religious/ethnic Minorities in Greece" on 27 November 2013 during the 6th Session of the UN Forum on Minority Issues.



First at the hospital then at the conference: Reaction to ban on the use of Turkish is on rise

ABTTF Vice-President Rıdvan Hacibedel, at his welcoming address, raised the issue on prohibition of use of Turkish by pointing the recent incident of 22 November 2013 at the conference on Lausanne Peace Treaty and regulations in relations to the Minority. Vice-President Hacibedel asserted that despite previous confirmation of organisers of the event and the very presence of Turkish-Greek translators at the conference hall, a journalist from the Minority was not allowed to give his presentation in Turkish.

Panayote Dimitras: Ban on the use of Turkish has posed considerable damage to efforts on confidence building between majority and the Minority

At the side event moderated by ABTTF International Affairs Director Melek Kırmacı Arık, Panayote Dimitras, Greek Helsinki Monitor Spokesperson, informed Komotini State Hospital recently issued a decree prohibiting the doctors use an "unknown" language on duty. Dimitras criticized the recent incident occurred at the conference in Komotini and made remark on Greek speakers' indifferent attitude that they were not in solidarity with the Minority and even they did not leave the conference hall to show support.

Kaymakçı: Recognised as "Greek Muslims" Rhodes, Kos and Dodecanese Turks are barely known!

Having taken floor after Dimitras, who delivered a speech on problems of Jews and other religious minorities in Greece, President of Rhodes, Kos and Dodecanese Turks Culture and Solidarity Association Prof. Dr. Mustafa

Kaymakçı indicated in comparison with the Western Thrace Turkish Minority problems of Rhodes, Kos and Dodecanese Turks are much less known.

Kaymakçı informed Rhodes, Kos and Dodecanese Turks living in Aegean island, ceded to Greece at the Paris Agreement in 1947, are recognised as "Greek Muslims" thus, a population of approximately 6.000 Turkish speaking citizens are deprived of education in mother tongue, while the religious leadership, hence the office of Mufti, is vacant since 1972.

Human Rights Without Frontiers Int'l Director Willy Fautre, in follow up with his report drafted upon the fact-finding mission organised to Western Thrace in October 2013, stated at 2011 Universal Periodic Review Greece had not accepted any of the recommendations presented by Turkey for settlement of problems of the Western Thrace Turkish Minority.

While having reiterated recommendations to Greek authorities upon solution of problems faced by the Minority, Mr. Fautre provided in-depth explanation on religious freedom and Mufti problem. In concrete terms, Mr Fautre reported Komotini elected Mufti İbrahim Şerif had been sentenced to 6 months of imprisonment in 1996, which had later on been refuted European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) and Komotini elected Mufti İbrahim Şerif had been declared in culpable.



Abdurrahman: 240 Imams Law abrogates the religious freedom Minority had been granted through international law

ABTTF Board member Dr. Sebahattin Abdurrahman provided in-depth analysis on “240 Imams Law” and reasons for the Minority to react to the respective regulation. Abdurrahman uttered no clarifications has been introduced regarding the assignment of 240 staff to “teach the Qur’an” on the first state of implementation of the regulation. Abdurrahman specified the concerns that the respective “Qur’an teachers” are not clearly defined as for their academic and scholar backgrounds, whether they would be Imams, religious education teachers or Muslim preachers. Having informed that in accordance with international agreements which are set to define the status and rights of the



Minority and also considering proceedings of the international law, the 240 Imams Law is regulation is unlawful, Abdurrahman stated implementation of

the respective law would fully abrogate the religious freedom Minority had been granted through international law.



ABTTF and DEB Party attended conference on substance and practice of European language rights in Cottbus

The conference united language experts, local and regional administrative bodies and minority representatives

Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) attended “Substance and Practice of European Language Rights” conference in Cottbus, Germany on 5-7 December 2013. At the conference commonly organised by Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN), University of Hamburg, and Sorbian Institute, Western Thrace Turkish Minority has been represented through the participation of ABTTF President and FUEN Vice-President Halit Habip Oğlu, ABTTF Vice-President Cengiz İsmail and ABTTF Director General K. Engin Soyyılmaz. Xanthi Turkish Union (ITB) Board member Lawyer Sinan Molla attended the event on behalf of the Friendship, Equality, Peace (DEB) Party.

Chair of the Supervisory Board on Youth, Culture and Social Affairs of the City of Cottbus Berndt Weiße, Sorbian Minority Union DOMOWINA General Director and FUEN Vice-President Bernhard Ziesch, Director in charge of Cottbus branch of the Sorbian Institute and FUEN Language Expert Dr. Hauke Bartels and Chairman of the Independent Committee of Experts of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages and professor at the Institute for International Affairs of the Faculty of Law of the University of Hamburg Prof. Dr. Stefan Oeter delivered the opening speech of the conference. At the conference, which brought experts on language rights together with minority representatives on local, regional and national levels, language rights in Europe on the basis of



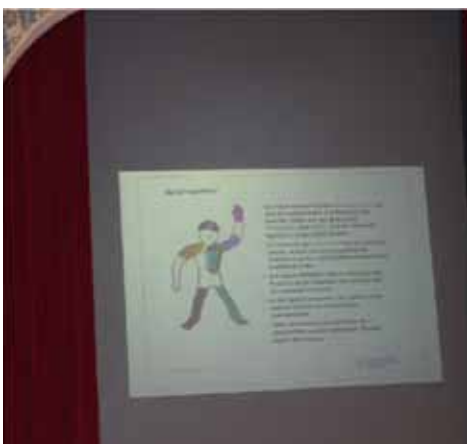
protection of minorities were discussed. The Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages have entered into force in 1998. The 15-year period and experiences since both agreements' entry into force has been evaluated

throughout the conference.

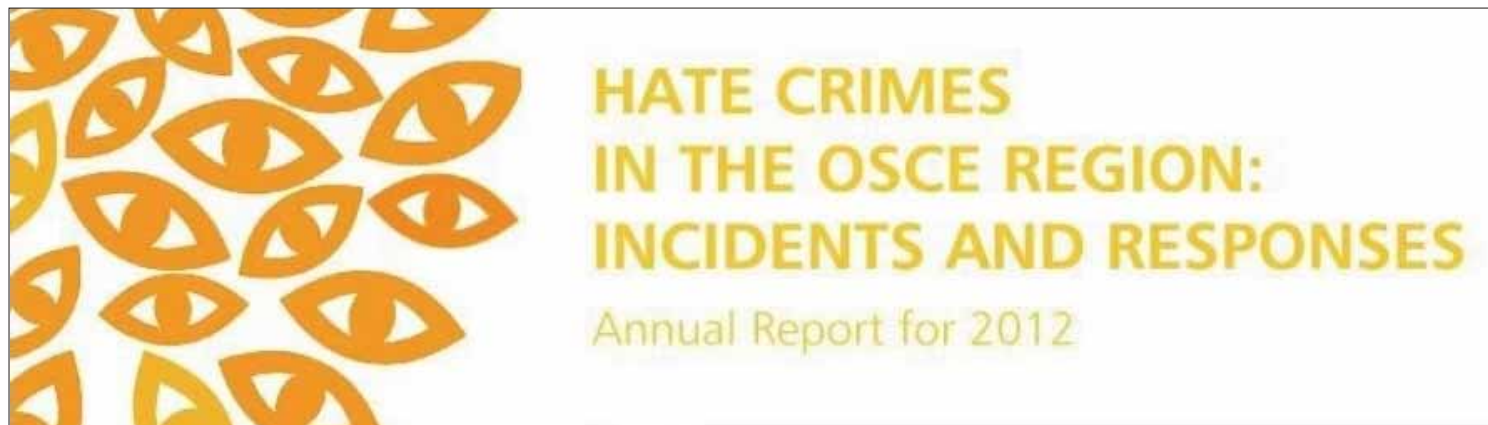
Sinan Molla: The pupils belonging to Minority families have no other choice but attending public schools with education only in Greek!

Having attended the conference with the initiative of ABTTF and on behalf of DEB Party, Lawyer Sinan Molla started his presentation by introducing himself as the board member of the Xanthi Turkish Union (ITB) which has been banned approximately 30 years ago despite the European Court of Human Rights' decision condemning Greece for closure. Molla informed conference participants on problems Western Thrace Turkish Minority faces in terms of primary and secondary school education in addition to previous practice of exchange of teachers between Greece and Turkey. Having noted the problems on secondary school education as rather exacerbated than on the primary schools, Molla voiced Western Thrace Minority Culture and Education Foundation (PEKEM) has not been given any response to requests submitted to the Ministry in charge of education for opening of secondary and high school in areas densely populated by the Minority and a private kindergarten in the city of Xanthi.

Regarding the problem of Minority kindergartens, Molla said the needs and requests from the Western Thrace Turkish Minority for bilingual kindergartens to instruct in Greek and Turkish have not been met. Having made a remark that Greek Orthodox Minority in Istanbul had bilingual kindergartens, Molla recalled that pupils belonging to Minority families in Western Thrace have no other choice but attending public schools with education only in Greek.



OSCE Annual Report on Hate Crimes covers attacks to Western Thrace Turkish Minority



The hate motivated attacks perpetuated towards the Western Thrace Turkish Minority were also covered by the 2012 Annual Report on Hate Crimes of the Organisation of Security (OSCE) and Cooperation in Europe. Published by the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) in November 2013, the report provides figures of hate crimes reported by the Federation of Western Thrace Turkish Minority (ABTTF) and Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association (BTAYTD) to the OSCE.



ABTTF and BTAYTD reported the hate crimes in 2012 to OSCE

Having indicated the contributions of 31 civil society organisations from 18 countries on hate motivated and xenophobic crimes and incidents, ODIHR noted that among from the contributing states 16 states, including Greece, have provided input to the report for 2012 and Greece reported additionally the particular situations as well.

In reference to input from National Liaison Office on Fight Against Hate Crime in Greece (NPC), ODIHR reported demolition of business centre run by two African men in Greece, ODIHR noted that Human Rights Watch (HRW) and UN Refugees Agency (UNHCR) are in collaboration with The Racist Violence Recording Network for reporting the hate crimes and incidents committed towards immigrants and refugees in Greece.

Having stated no official report were submitted by Greece regarding the crimes committed with Islam phobic motivations, ODIHR noted that ABTTF and BTAYTD had submitted reports on graffiti including xenophobic insult painted to the wall of Xanthi Turkish Union. The graffiti, which was painted on 23 March 2013 on Xanthi Turkish Union (ITB) main entry door and walls, included "ΕΞΩ ΟΙ ΤΟΥΡΚΟΙ (Turks Out)". ODIHR noted ABTTF and BTAYTD reports and placed the vandalisation of the graves into the hate crime report. The very same day when the xenophobic graffiti was painted on the wall of ITB, "The best Turk is the dead Turk" has been written on the wall of a Bektashi tomb in Xanthi. Approximately a month before these incidents, in February 2012, the

cemetery situated in Komotini had been segregated and almost 20 gravestones were broken.

The report also refers to inputs provided by ABTTF with indications on two physical attacks and three incidents which resulted in damage to properties. In August 2012, the headquarters of the Friendship, Equality, Peace (DEB) Party had been vandalised. Again in August 2012, a group of Golden Dawn supporters walked past the Komotini Turkish Youth Union by chanting racist slogans and threw bottles into the garden of the Union. In September 2012, Cemali Mulazim, a member of the Western Thrace Turkish Minority, had been heavily beaten by a group of Golden Dawn supporters. ABTTF, in its written statement submitted to ODIHR in April 2013, reported the escorted drives organised by the Golden Dawn supporters past the villages populated by Western Thrace Turkish Minority and conveyed the tension environment created through racist slogans. In addition, ABTTF noted the incident that Cüneyt Serdar, a member of the Western Thrace Turkish Minority, had been blatantly beaten by Golden Dawn supporters in March 2013

You can access the full report through following link: <http://tandis.odihr.pl/hcr2012/>

U.S. Department of State released Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2013

ABTTF President Halit Habip Oğlu: The US report, which analyses the problems of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace from a superficial and unilateral perspective, unfortunately repeats the Greek State's official position

U.S. Department of State released Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2013. In its chapter on Greece, the report has several times referred to the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace as "Muslim Minority in Thrace".

Turkish Minority of Western Thrace in the Report

Underlining the most critical human rights issue in the country as hate motivated violence against migrants and persons with non-Greek origin, the report indicates discrimination and social exclusion against the officially recognised "Muslim Minority in Thrace" among other human rights violations.

Application of Sharia law in Western Thrace is criticized

Upon the procedures of trial, it is reported that the Greek government recognises Sharia law regarding the matters regulating family and civic issues of the "Muslim Minority in Thrace" and it is uncovered that the marriage of Muslims concluded by state-appointed Muftis is subject to Sharia law. As it is covered by the part on discrimination, it is reported that UN independent expert on minority issues noted that in some instances Sharia law subjected Muslim women to norms incompatible with the constitution, legislation, and international standards. Besides, the



report points out that National Human Rights Council gave advises for state-appointed Muftis' powers to be limited to religious ones.

The Government officially recognises only the "Muslim minority in Thrace"

The report puts forth a number of citizens identifying themselves as Turks, Pomaks, Vlachs, Roma, Arvanites or Macedonian claim to be officially recognised as "linguistic minorities" or "minorities". Furthermore, it is reported that within the framework of Lausanne Treaty signed in 1923, 120.000 persons composed of Turkish, Pomak and Romani communities in Thrace is officially recognised.

The associations bearing the work "Turk" in their titles are not recognised

The report notes although the government recognizes an individual's right to self-identification, many individuals who defined themselves as members of a minority group found it difficult to express their identity freely and maintain their culture. Despite the

fact that many individuals identify themselves as Turks, the word "Turks" is forbidden from use in association titles and furthermore those which bear the word "Turks" in their titles are denied from official recognition, specifies the report. The report lastly informs on the Greek Supreme Court's (Areios Pagos) denial in April 2012 to comply with the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) decision in 2008 for the recognition of Xanthi Turkish Union.

Halit Habip Oğlu: Last year's report indicated the Minority's population as 150.000 while this year it is mentioned as 120.000

Halit Habip Oğlu, President of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF), stated: "Regarding the situation of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace, US Department of State Report on Human Rights Practices in Greece for 2013 suffices only by repeating Greece's official position. The report, which does not make any mention on the problems of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace except those on freedom of assembly and association, had indicated Minority's population as 150.000 last year and this year the figure is given as 120.000,

which is the official number provided by the Greek government. Despite the consultative meetings held with the representative organisations and persons belonging to the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace and parallel reports submitted by ABTTF and other minority organisations, the problems of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace are unfortunately mentioned superficially and from a unilateral perspective within the US Report on



Human Rights Practices in Greece for 2013. In line with our usual policy as ABTTF, we will reiterate the opinion of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace to the US authorities through a parallel report.”

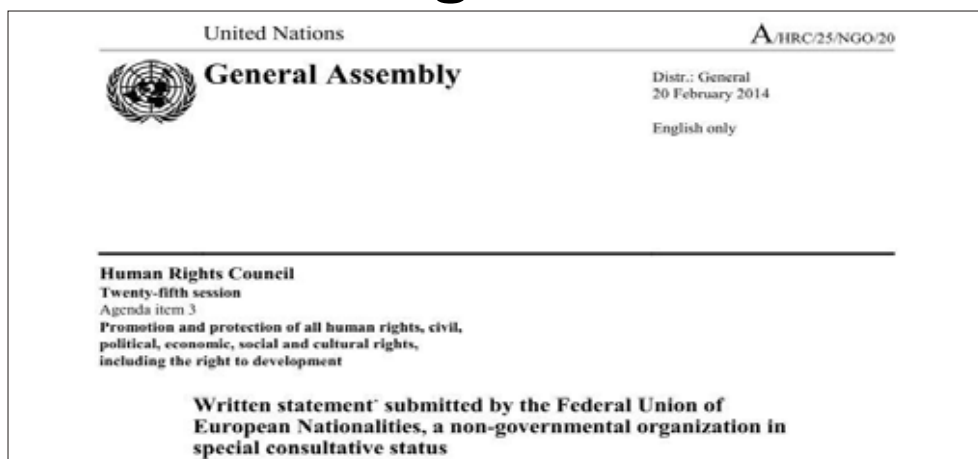
You can access the full report via following link:

<http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/index.htm#wrapper>

FUEN submitted written statement on problems of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace to UN Human Rights Council

Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN), as a non-governmental organization in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations, has for the first time submitted a written statement to the UN Human Rights Council (UN HRC). Within its first written statement to UN HRC, FUEN called for the attention of the international arena to the problems of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace and asked Greece to comply with its obligations under the Lausanne Treaty, to which Greece is an undersigning party. FUEN called on Greece, with reference to the Greek EU Presidency, to initiate a dialogue mechanism during this period with the Minority representatives regarding the solution of problems and include the Minority to decision-making process in settlement of problems which are relevant with the Minority.

[In follow up with its three successive visits to Western Thrace in 2012 and 2013, FUEN draw attention on main problems of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace](#)



Having reported its observations depending on consultations with representatives of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace, civil society organizations and religious leaders during the three visits to the region in 2012 and 2013, FUEN indicated the main problems Turkish Minority of Western Thrace face in terms of self-identification, freedom of association, education and religious freedom.

FUEN pointed out the problems regarding bilingual minority kindergartens and “240 Imams Law” in terms of education and religious freedom and asked Greece, which runs the EU Presidency for the fifth time, to ratify the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages and the Framework

Convention for the Protection of National Minorities.

Having underlined that the protection of persons belonging to minorities through Treaty of Lisbon and the Charter of Fundamental Rights is an essential part of the EU legislation, FUEN asked the Greek Presidency of the EU to ratify European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages and the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities.

You can access respective written statement through the following link:

[Http://daccess-ods.un.org/TMP/5363816.61891937.html](http://daccess-ods.un.org/TMP/5363816.61891937.html)

European Parliament adopted resolution on the situation of fundamental rights in the EU in 2012

On 27 February 2014, the European Parliament adopted a resolution on the situation of fundamental rights in the EU for 2012. The resolution prepared within the realm of EP Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs (LIBE) Committee by the rapporteur MEP Louis Michel has been adopted at the Strasbourg Plenary Session.

Federation of Western Thracian Turks in Europe (ABTTF) was in liaison with LIBE Committee members during the preparatory phase of the report and submitted proposals for amendments regarding equality, solidarity, citizenship and justice. Certain amendment proposals submitted by ABTTF to MEPs were forwarded to the Committee and following the last review they have been adopted by all committee members.

National minorities are treated as secondary citizens in their own countries

Reporting traditional, ethnic and linguistic minorities as 10% of the total



EU population, the resolution states national or ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities encounter obstacles in justice, health and social services, as well as in education and culture. The resolution furthermore underlines the respective minorities, which are treated as second-class citizens by the national authorities of their own Member States, have specific needs that are different from those of other minority groups, and calls public policies to focus on addressing

these needs in a more appropriate way.

EC shall establish a policy standard to protect national minorities

The resolutions states regarding the traditional minorities in the EU Member States a single solution cannot be reached, yet underlines the urgency to formulate common minimum standards at disposal of public authorities. Following the example of the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies, MEPs stresses the need for a comprehensive EU protection system for traditional national minorities, regional linguistic groups and constitutional regions accompanied by a functioning monitoring mechanism.

You can access the resolution under the following link:
<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=TA&reference=P7-TA-2014-0173&format=XML&language=EN>



At the conference on Lausanne Peace Treaty, presentation in Turkish has not been allowed



ABTTF President Halit Habipoğlu: First the incident at the kids' soccer game in Xanthi, secondly the Komotini State Hospital issue a new regulation on the use of working language as only Greek, and lastly the blockage on Turkish presentation at the conference provide indications of Turkish, hence the Western Thrace Turkish Minority, being ignored in Western Thrace.

At the conference "The Treaty of Lausanne: 90 years later framing migration issues" co-organised in Komotini by the Programme on Education of Muslim Children (PEN)

and Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy (ELIAMEP) on 22-23 November 2013, tension has been high due to a presentation in Turkish. Having participated as speaker in the first day of the event, Evren Dede, journalist from Azınlıkça minority bulletin from the region, has not been allowed to deliver his speech in Turkish, though he had given notice to the organisers well in advance. In reaction to this, Dede left the conference and upon his request the Greek translation of his presentation "How does the Minority view the Islamic Family Law?" originally prepared in Turkish has been read to the participants by journalist Aydın Bostancı.

Further to the incident, Evren Dede,

at his release made only to Azınlıkça, transmitted the big disappointment he went through and uttered that he wishes not to experience the same dispute again. Member of the Greek Parliament (SYRIZA/Rhodope) Ayhan Karayusuf and former Member of the Greek Parliament İlhan Ahmet published press releases in reaction to the incident and noted that they will not participate at the conference.

According to Azınlıkça, with participation of notable academics, legal scholars, political figures and journalists, "education Minority and public schools, implementation of Shari'a, positive discrimination for the Minority, Lausanne Peace Treaty after 90 years of signature and (Western) Thrace Turkish Minority



Within the framework of Europe” formed the main subjects of debates.

Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) President Halit Habipoğlu “Blocking a presentation in Turkish at a conference with subject Lausanne Peace Treaty is a clear indication Turkish language in Western Thrace thus, Western Thrace Turkish Minority’s presence in the region is ignored. First Turkish speaking at the kids’ soccer game was banned, later Komotini State Hospital issued a regulation on using only Greek as working language and now we have the prohibition to give a presentation in Turkish. It can be viewed as a coincidence or not. Yet, all these prove the considerable distance Greek State and Greek authorities take before they attempt go into dialogue with the Minority, at the same time these show the Minority being seen as the “other” one.



ABTTF strongly condemns the conference organisers, who decided on the blockage for presentation in Turkish language and who violated the freedom of speech and expression as the most fundamental right of the Minority, and the Greek government, which bears

responsibility for the respective dispute. We wish and request the policies denying the ethnic identity of the Minority in our country Greece to come to an end within the shortest delay possible.”

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

Komotini State Hospital asked doctors to use only Greek as working language



ABTTF President Halit Habipoğlu: Taking into account the fact that Turkish is the most used language after Greek in the region, it is clear why the regulation received reaction from the Western Thrace Turkish Minority

With the notice published on 11 November 2013, Komotini State Hospital requested doctors providing service under its premises to use only Greek as working language. The new regulation received reaction from the Minority as it was perceived as a step to prevent the use of Turkish language at the hospital where besides Greek doctors three specialists and thirteen Turkish speaking assistants are on duty.

In the letter sent to all departments

Komotini State Hospital Director Hadjinestoras pointed out some assistant doctors as speaking an “unknown language” and stated that this situation could constitute threat to the health of patients hence doctors were requested to speak Greek with the patients. Upon the reactions from the Minority and the Turkish speaking doctors serving duty, the director of the hospital Hadjinestoras spoke to Minority daily *Gündem* and clarified that “inappropriate language” as indicated at the notice does not necessarily mean Turkish, it covers beside Turkish the other languages such as Russian and other languages spoken at the migrants' centre in Komotini. Hadjinestoras explained that the regulation does not target a certain language but only a smooth dialogue which is to be ensured by doctors' understanding the conversation between assistant doctors and patient.

Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) President Halit Habipoğlu uttered “Taking into account the fact that Turkish is the most used language after Greek in the region, it is clear why the regulation received reaction from the Western Thrace Turkish Minority. Publication of this notice is unfortunate amid the resolution on right against racism is about to be voted at the General Assembly. This has been brought to the agenda by representatives of Friendship, Equality and Peace Party (DEB) at the meeting to be organised by European Network Against Racism (ENAR) in presence of Greek Ombudsman.”

Photo:

<http://www.millettgazetesi.gr/view.php?id=2163>

2000 farmers of Western Thrace Turkish Minority marched in Komotini chanting “Farmers are to be given allocation!”

ABTTF President Halit Habip Oğlu: “It is enough! We are Greek citizens who are members of the Western Thrace Turkish Minority! Equally, we are citizens of this country just as Kostas and Maria are!”

Thousands of farmers, members of the Western Thrace Turkish Minority, were on strike in Komotini. Approximately 2000 farmers summoned in front of the East Macedonia and Thrace General Secretariat on 12 February 2014 and demonstrated their reaction against decision Greek government's recent decisions taken at the expense of farmers.

On 5 February 2014 the farmers summoned in front of Regional General Secretary Aris Yannikidis' office in Komotini in order to reiterate their demands. As Yannikidis was not in the office then, it was decided to resume assembly in front of the General Secretariat on 12 February.

Farmers protested government's agricultural policy with slogans “We do not want to farm tobacco for the same price as spinach”

According to Rodop Rüzgarı, a Minority daily, co-organised by Tobacco Growers Cooperative of Thrace, Association of Animal Husbandry in Rodopi and Beekeepers Association of Rodopi, the demonstration was attended by several minority representatives and thousands of farmers.

Esat Hüseyin, President of Tobacco Growers Cooperative of Thrace uttered the demands of the farmers for



prevention of deductions from European Common Agricultural policy's allocations for tobacco growers, giving an end to prosecutions and confiscations and freezing of farmers' bank accounts due to agricultural debts, reducing production costs, reduction on the age of retirement, provision of cheap fuel for farmers and a reduction of 50% on prices of electricity for agricultural use.

During demonstration, a group of women from Western Thrace Turkish Minority showed their reaction with slogan “It is enough, we do not want to sell tobacco for the price of spinach” and scattered the tobacco and spinach they brought along. A group of approximately 2000 persons marching in the town hall of Komotini chanted slogans “Farmers shall be paid!” and “It is enough, we cannot stand anymore!” and ended the

demonstration in front of the Pireus Bank without any incidents.

Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) President Halit Habip Oğlu said “The gradual decrease of allocations dedicated to tobacco production under the Common Agricultural Policy has the most affected the Minority's farmers. Unfortunately, our country Greece could not assume the necessary action timely thus has not been able to accomplish its duties. Could it be for the reason that 80% of the tobacco farmers in the country are from the Western Thrace Turkish Minority? This is sufficient! We are Greek citizens, who are members of the Western Thrace Turkish Minority. We are citizens of this country just as Kostas and Maria are!”

*Photo: www.burasibatitrakya.com

Western Thrace Turkish Minority of Greece, which holds Council Presidency of the EU, faces constant discrimination



ABTTF President Halit Habip Oğlu: We urge Greece, a country that prides itself for being the “cradle of democracy”, to approach the problems of our Minority through an official dialogue mechanism developed on the basis of sincerity, mutual understanding and tolerance.

As of 1 January 2014, Greece has taken over the Presidency of the Council of the European Union. The six-month period of Presidency to be run by Greece has presented its priorities as growth and jobs cohesion, further integration of EU-Eurozone, migration, borders, mobility and enhanced security in maritime

borders. During the 5th Presidency period Greece will be running within the next six months, the European elections will be held as well.

In Greece, holding the Presidency of the EU, Western Thrace Turkish Minority faces discrimination in every aspect of life though its status and rights were defined by the Lausanne Peace Treaty in 1923. First of all, Greece recognises the Western Thrace Turkish Minority as the “Muslim Minority in Thrace” but not as “Turkish”. After its collective rights to self-identification has been abrogated, the associations established by the Western Thrace Turkish Minority and including the word “Turk” in their titles were closed down and the new ones are denied registry. The three suspended

associations Xanthi Turkish Union, Evros Minority Youth Association and Cultural Association of the Turkish Women of Rodopi filed a complaint at the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR). The ECtHR verdict in 2008 concluded Greece violates the freedom of association through closure of the three associations of the Minority. Despite the six years elapsed, Greece still does not execute the ECtHR decisions.

Between 1955 and 1998, approximately 60.000 Western Thrace Turks were denaturalised on the basis of Article 19 of the former Greek Nationality Code, which foresees denaturalisation for Greek citizens of “non-Greek ethnic origin” in the case of “leaving Greece



With no intention of return". Currently, there are thousands of Western Thrace Turks residing stateless in Greece or living abroad by being naturalised to the country of new residence after being denaturalised. Greece does not restore the citizenship of the Western Thrace Turks who were denaturalised on unconstitutional and artificial grounds.

According to the Lausanne Peace Treaty, Western Thrace Turkish Minority is vested autonomy to establish and manage its own educational and religious institutions. Yet, throughout the years past the respective autonomous status of the Minority has been diluted by several state policies. Given the structural problems, the quality of minority education has been reduced to a large extent. The most significant problem regarding the education is the issue on minority kindergartens. The recent education reform in Greece rendered the pre-school education mandatory. However, because there are no kindergartens within the minority education system, the children belonging to the Minority families are

obliged to attend the public kindergartens which offer education only in Greek. The requests submitted by the Western Thrace Turkish Minority for authorisation to establish bilingual minority kindergartens are however ignored by Greek authorities.

Whilst not recognising the elected religious leaders of the Western Thrace Turkish Minority and instead assigning state-appointed Muftis to duty of the Minority, by adoption of a recent regulation Greece gears up appointing 240 Imams to serve as "Qur-an teachers" in mosques and public schools in Western Thrace. The respective regulation, for which the opinion of the Minority was neither consulted nor its reactions were taken into consideration, is decided to be first implemented in public schools. The Minority, being unaware of the next steps of this policy, is still left out of all decision making mechanisms.

Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) President Halit Habip Oğlu said "The Western Thrace Turkish

Minority in Greece that will run the EU Presidency in the first half of 2014 is waiting for urgent solution to its problems on several areas. The efforts and endeavours of our Minority, subject to discrimination on several domains of life, do not receive any rewards given the insincere and careless attitude of our country. In its 5th Presidency to the EU, when also the European elections will be witnessed, as the Western Thrace Turkish Minority, we urge Greece to restore our rights and freedoms guaranteed by international agreements and to safeguard in accordance with international norms and values the collective rights of the Western Thrace Turkish Minority. It is an unacceptable fact that a country running the EU Presidency follows policies in contrast with the EU norms and values. We call upon Greece, a country that praises itself for being the "cradle of democracy", to approach the problems of our Minority through an official dialogue mechanism developed on the basis of sincerity, mutual understanding and tolerance. This is how an EU Member State should act."



Regardless of the reactions from the Minority, 23 “appointed religion teachers” started duty in public schools

ABTTF President Halit Habip Oğlu: Policies in place as a outcome of the “Despite the Minority, for the Minority” mentality are certainly no use

The regulation 4115/2013, which foresees employment of 240 Imams under the supervision of state appointed Muftis in Western Thrace, is official started for implementation. The “religion teachers”, foreseen to serve in initially at secondary schools, have started duty as of 10 January 2014. In light of the respective regulation, passed and put in place despite reactions of the Minority, 63 religious schoolars are selected by Greek Ministry of Education, Life-Long Learning and Religious Affairs to be only employed at the public schools in Western Thrace. As a result of interviews carried out by Eastern Macedonia Thrace Regional Directorate for Education, the selected 63 religious schoolars are appointed as contractual officials and were given training on the subject.

According to minority journal Gündem, first badge of religious schoolars were



appointed on 9 January 2014 thus, the first group of “religion teachers” (ierodidaskalos) of 23 persons started duty in public secondary and high schools. Hence, the distribution of the “religion teachers” as 9 in Komotini, 9 in Xanthi and 5 in Evros was in force on 10 January 2014. As indicated by local press, the 22 out of 23 appointed religious schoolars are graduates of Special Pedagogical Academy of Thessaloniki (SÖPA) and one of them is of theological background.

Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) President Halit Habip Oğlu stated: “The 240 Imams Law”,

adopted despite the vehement reaction of the Western Thrace Turkish Minority, has officially started to be implemented in public schools in Western Thrace. The Greek government enforces the regulation with the pretext of having set it up for the benefit of the Western Thrace Turkish Minority, which has in no means been consulted neither taken into account as for its reactions by the Greek authorities. Policies in place as a outcome of the “Despite the Minority, for the Minority” mentality are certainly no use. This position and respective policy has deeply insulted our Minority's confidence and belief in state authorities.

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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