



Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe

Newsletter

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NGO in Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations

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IT IS NOT ALLOWED TO USE

Up to now, it was not allowed to establish associations with „Turkish“ word in it in Greece and now it is not allowed to use „Minority“ word in associations names as well.

On 14 December 1995, Western Thrace Turkish Minority Youth conveyed their request to Dedeagac (Alexandroupolis) Civil Court of First Instance to recognize their association „Meric Minority Youth“. Their petition was rejected by Dedeagac (Alexandroupolis) Civil Court of First Instance by 58 - 1996 dated decision and by Trakya (Thrace) Civil Court of . First Instance by 423 - 1998 numbered decision. Supreme Court of Appeals handled the case in 2006 and it was rejected as there is „minority“ word in the name of the association

It is not clear whether mentioned association represents Muslims or Turks

The reason as to why the association can not be founded was summarized as follows; The name of an association determines its structure and identity. However, we see an ambiguity as to whether that association represents Turkish Minority Youth or Muslim Youth. That creates concern, conflict and suspicion which is against public order and in that sense it is also illegal.

„MINORITY“



Reason suggested by Supreme Court of Appeals was surprising

Halit Habipoglu made a press release about the subject and revealed that it was sad for Greece that it had not accomplished any improvement in the human right issues for years. Habipoglu cited that they had been struggling for a long time for the rights of the associations that were closed due to „Turkish“ word and he continued as „Cases of Iskece (Xanthi) Turkish Solidarity Association (it was closed) and Rodop Turkish Women Culture Association (foundation permission was not granted) are still at European Council of Human Rights. As we are struggling for the rights of the associations that were closed due to „Turkish“ word in their names, now Greek authorities begin to ban the foundations of the associations that have „minority“ word in their names. I find the reason suggested by Supreme Court of Appeals surprising. It was cited that there is an ambiguity as to whether that „minority“ word refers to Muslim minority or Turkish minority. Should we derive the result that it is good when that refers to Muslim minority and bad when it refers to Turkish minority. Our minority is forced to identify themselves as Muslim.“

Chairman's Message



Dear All,

If we make a general analysis, we see that all the countries have problems specially after they accepted euro as their national currency. All the European Union countries, Germany as being the most severely affected country, begin to experience economic problems. Day by day, it is becoming more difficult to survive in Europe. We should not forget that, in addition to economic difficulties, Western Thrace Turkish experience problems related with religion, education and not being able to use their freedom of identity.

Although, there have been some minor improvements, we still have great problems in exercising our basic minority as well as human rights in Western Thrace. As of the recent examples, *Meric Minority Youth Association* could be remembered as it could not be founded since its name possessed the word „minority“ in its name and Besime Nurseloglu who was deported after being prisoned on 12 December 2006 due to 19th Article of Citizenship Law.

5th International General Assembly of Western Thrace Turks in Istanbul in September 2006 was a very important platform to discuss the problems of our minority and Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Prime Minister of

Turkish Republic honoured us with his participation. Western Thrace Turks from Germany, United States of America, Greece and Austria had the opportunity to express their problems and determined new solution policies. We formed commissions in the selected problematic areas like „Local Governments-Freedom of Political and Civil Associations, Human Rights and Law, Education and Culture, Religion Affairs, International Relations, Press and Information, Economics, those commissions expressed their problems and their solution proposals in the Results Declaration of Assembly. Executive Committee Members, Experts from ABTTF participated the General Assembly of Western Thrace Turks in Istanbul.

We do our best to represent our minority at international platforms. In 2006, we had the opportunity to make cooperation with various international organizations like Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, FUEN, BM HABITAT, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). Our web site (www.abtff.org), academic works and monthly newsletter in Turkish, German, English and Greek languages issued for 2 years are the instruments via which we express the problems of our minority.

The most striking event of 2006 for us was our membership of Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) of the United Nations. We can not identify ourselves as Turk in Greece, it was a great honor for us to become a NGO accredited by United Nations. Now, we have the opportunity to work more efficiently by the support of United Nations. We are forming an ECOSOC group of the interested scholars to research

issues like minority rights, migration, international law, religion, human rights, local governments, education, culture, economics, development, family, gender, children&youth.

We are the representatives of our minority in Europe. For the solution of the problems, minority organizations and minority politicians in Western Thrace shall take more responsibility. They experience the problems themselves and they have the chance to communicate the majority“members more than we have.

The third stand of our work is in Turkey. Our associations in Turkey and politicians of being Western Thrace origin shall speed up their efforts to solve the existing problems. When it is about the Ethnic Greeks of Istanbul, Greece reflects the problems to the international community and our associations in Turkey should express our rightful case at international platforms as Greece does.

Our initiatives and successful works give us the motivation to make it better in 2007. We will speed up our activities in the coming year. We hope for the same motivation from the Turkish and Greek authorities. Solidarity is the only way to solve our problems.

I wish 2007 will be a peaceful year not only for our minority but also for the human being,

Halit Habipoglu,

Chairman of Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe

Is Greece trying to fool people?



As readers remember, Greece denaturalized Western Thrace Turkish minority members as they are not from Hellen race. Now, Greece changed its long lasting policy suddenly and renaturalized 41 people recently. Meanwhile, a Western Thrace Turkish minority member was deported after she was given her new Greek passport and identity card. Halit Habipoglu, chairman of Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe, evaluates this new event as; "Greece is trying to fool people by taking small steps"

During 43 years of its implementation, 19th Article of Greek citizenship law caused direct grievances of 46.638 Western Thrace Turkish Minority members, according to the official announcements of Greek authorities while that sum rises to 60 thousand according to calculations of ECRI. The only reason for that unfair implementation was the origin of the victims. No solution has been offered by Greek authorities for 9 years.

There have not been any unconditional restitution of rights to the victims whose sum reaches 80 thousand, according to the calculations of ABTTF. That article caused direct and indirect grievances of Western Thrace Turkish Minority members living in Greece, Turkey, Germany and Australia and with the latest event, it became a serious question mark whether it has been abolished or not.

In 2006 December, a Western Thrace origin woman went to Greece and she was deported after 5 days of custody

although she had used her voting right in Greece and had Greek identity card before. That event caused great concern and reaction among Turkish minority members in Western Thrace. Ilhan Ahmet, Rodop Deputy, announced that Greece would renaturalize 41 Western Thrace Turkish minority members who lived in Greece as heimatlos.

Halit Habipoglu found that announcement insufficient as well as a step to fool Turkish minority members. He continued „It is not enough to give citizenship rights only to 41 Western Thrace Minority members after 9 years of suffering as we still have 80 thousand victims.“

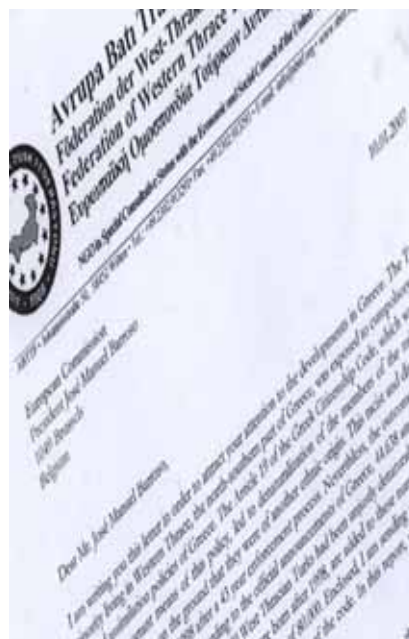
Habipoğlu repeated their offer for cooperation for which they have not had any response. He called Ilhan Ahmet, Rodop Deputy, to take more actions to solve the problems of the 19th Article victims.

Habipoglu called Barroso to take action

Halit Habipoglu, chairman of Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe, wrote a letter to José Manuel Barroso, President of European Commission and called for more action to solve the problems of Western Thrace Turkish minority members. In addition to that, Habipoglu emphasized the need to be more sensitive to the problems of Western Thrace Turkish minority since

Greece denaturalized 8 thousand minority members during 1981-1998 when it was an European Union member country. In that sense, this problem does not only belong to Greece but also to EU.

In his letter to Barroso, Habipoğlu wrote „ To realize our dream of a united Europe, half million European shall form a united soul that does not discriminate people on language, religion and ethnicity grounds. 80 thousand European Union citizens lost their citizenship rights due to their ethnic roots and this is a serious wound that can not be sustained for a long time in a democratic Europe. We must work together to cure that social wound to build a more democratic Europe.“



„Greece must recognise Turkish Minority's identity“

Halit Habipoglu, chairman of ABTTF, revealed that any organization containing „Turk“ in its name were closed. Within the context of Greek government's implementations, it would be an illusion to accept that Greece was a democratic, modern country where human rights and legal equality were of uttermost important.

Thomas Countryman's statement as of „Greece persistently opposes the right of Western Thrace Turkish minority to define themselves as Turkish within the context of ethnic identity and this behaviour of Greece is illogical.“ Caused discomfort in Greece.

Halit Habipoglu made a press release about the above - mentioned statement of Thomas Countryman and said „Problems of Greek's minority policy are yet drawing attention of other countries. Greece must recognize Turkish Minority's identity.“

Halit Habipoglu continued as “Not recognizing the identity of minorities living in your country constitutes a human rights - contradictory situation. Our country, Greece, still feels discomfort with the usage of „Turk“ in the names of Turkish organizations in the public area and continues rejecting our Turkish identity within the context of the expression „Muslim Minority“ in the Lousanne Treaty. We permanently express our complaints, but Greek authorities do not take that into consideration. Meanwhile, it causes crisis between countries when other countries recognize the human rights violation imposed to Western Thrace Turkish minority.“

Cases of Xanthi Turkish Solidarity and Rodop Turkish Women Association are still in process at European Council of Human Rights.

Halit Habipoglu called attention to the above - mentioned statement of Teodoros Rusopolos, Greek government spokesman, about Greek and he said:

„Xanthi Turkish Association, established in 1927, Komotini Turkish Youth Solidarity Association, established in 1928, Western Thrace Turkish Teachers Association, established in 1936, are closed officially due to „Turkish“ saying in their names since 1984. Rodop Turkish Women Association was founded in 2001 but could not get any foundation permit due to „Turkish“ saying in its name. Cases of Xanthi Turkish Solidarity and Rodop Turkish Women Association are still in process at European Council of Human Rights. In spite of all these examples, it would be an illusion to claim that Greece is a democratic and modern country.“

Western Thrace Turkish minority as „ethnically Turkish,

Athens requested an explanation from Thomas Countryman, US Embassy Deputy Chief of Mission, who defined Western Thrace Turkish minority as „ethnically Turkish,

Thomas Countryman, US Embassy Deputy Chief of Mission, made an interview with journalist Vasiliki Siouti for Sunday Eleftherotypia. In his interview, he defined Western Thrace Turkish minority as „ethnically Turkish“. However, that interview caused tension between Washington and Athens. According to Greek media, Charles Ries, United States Ambassador to Greece, was invited to Greek Foreign Affairs Ministry and Greece's discomfort with Thomas Countryman's definition of Western Thrace Turkish minority as „ethnically Turkish“ was conveyed to him.



According to Greek media Haralambos Rokanas, Foreign Affairs Ministry Secretary General, expressed that such initiatives could harm the bilateral relations between Greece and United States. According to Greek media, Charles Ries, United States Ambassador to Greece revealed that „United States does not want to have such conflicts“. Greek media commented that US and Greece had two different minority definitions and that was the underlying reason behind the misunderstanding.

As a remainder, Thomas Countryman, US Embassy Deputy Chief of Mission, revealed in his interview with journalist Vasiliki Siouti for Sunday Elefthero-

typia that „Greece persistently opposes the right of Western Thrace Turkish minority to define themselves as Turkish within the context of ethnic identity and this behaviour of Greece is illogical.“ / Athens, aa

January 29ths are unforgettable

During the 1960s, due to Cyprus conflict, relations between Turkey - Greek deteriorated and that stress affected Western Thrace Turkish minority negatively. Our country, Greece, implemented limitless pressure politics on the Western Thrace Turkish minority. Impacts of migration, if not assimilation, oriented politics have not been absorbed even today. Our country, Greece, sold tractors to Western Thrace Turkish minority members but did not give driving licenses to the minority members. In addition to that, Greek authorities denaturalized minority members who left the country for travel or education purposes. However Turkish minority members resisted all the pressure and unfair implementations of Greek authorities. Suddenly, Greek touched "untouchables". Turkish organizations began to be closed due to their names. The ones who did not have anything other than "Turkish identity" gathered together



in Gumulcine (Komotini) against the ones who rejected their identity. That crowd became one heart and one soul, cried out their identity with the words "We are Turkish" which became our motto since then.

That day founded the rightful action of Western Thrace Turks. However it did not take too much for the fanatical nationalist to take the revenge of 29 January 1988. On 29 January 1990, shops of Turkish minority were plundered, Ahmet Faikoglu, independent DM, Mehmet Emin Aga, elected Mufti of Xanthi,



were beaten murderously. There were no policemen who would help the Turkish minority. Damages have been compensated as of today. It is thought provoking that such an event took place in an EU member country at the threshold of 21. Century.

29 Januarys tough us that rights are not given but rather taken at a cost. We have the responsibility to teach the importance of 29 January to our children. If we tell our children the cost of granting their future, they will not give up the attainments easily and will not lose their hope to get back our rights.

Congratulations to new Mufti from ABTTF

Federation of Western Thrace Turkish Minority (ABTTF) congratulated Ahmet Mete, elected Mufti of Iskece (Xanthi) on his new post.

Ahmet Mete was elected with the majority of Turkish Minority's votes at the first day of Kurban Bayrami at the mosques of Iskece (Xanthi). Halit Habipoglu, chairman of ABTTF congratulated, Ahmet Mete and said "I learned that Ahmet Mete was elected with the majority of Turkish Minority's votes and this is a very happy and important event for Ahmet Mete while he will fulfill a very important role after our very valuable ex-Mufti, the deceased Mehmet Emin Aga. I believe without any hesitation that he will achieve this very important duty."

Halit Habipoglu revealed that all the Western Thrace Turkish minority members in Europe are supporting their new Mufti although they could not use their voting right due to some technical problems and urgency of the elections. He reported that all the Western Thrace Turkish minority members recognized the necessity of institutionalization to win their rights back and he added that they would achieve that process together in the coming years.



We are backing our rightful action

Greek government and Turkish minority in Western Thrace have been living conflicts on the Mufti issue since 1985. The reason of that conflict stems from Greek governments' attitude. Greek governments insist not to let Turkish minority elect their own Mufti on the bases of 1913 dated Athens Treaty. Turkish minority is densely populated in Iskece (Xanthi) and Gumulcine (Komotini) and there are four Muftis in these cities since 1990, two of whom are elected by .



Turkish minority and two are promoted by Greek government Halit Habipoglu underlined that Greece's attitude not to recognize Muftis's elected by Turkish minority is against international law. He added that ABTTF devotes great effort to correct that implementation

and that will continue with Ahmet Mete.

Young Mufti

Ahmet Mete was born in 1965 in Iskece (Xanthi). He completed his education in Turkey and graduated from Faculty of Theology, University of Uludag. He completed his post at Islam University of Medine. He returned to Western Thrace after completing his education. He works as imam at village of Yassio-ren. He is married and has 3 children. He is also the vice president of Western Thrace Turkish Minority Sermon and Guidance Council.

Rods – Evros demands the renewal of the elections

Election of Ahmet Haciosman as Rodop Deputy Governor with 16 thousand votes caused discomfort amongst some people

Ahmet Haciosman, chairman of Peace and Equality Party (DEB), was elected as Rodop Deputy Governor with 16 thousand votes at the general elections, held on 15 October. However, that success caused discomfort amongst some people and they demand the renewal of the elections revealing that Ahmet Haciosman was chaplain.

Halit Habipoglu made a statement about the subject and he said "I would like to congratulate Western Thrace Turkish Minority members, they were very sensitive and conscious to use their voting right. However, in Greece success of our minority always causes concern among the Greek institutions. Request of election renewal is a sign of that concern. Campaigns against Western Thrace Turkish Minority members do not make any good to Greece. We should work together to solve the problems."

According to the Article 21, paragraph 1 of the Governorship & City Council Candidate Law, judges, members of the army, chaplains can not be candidate at the elections.

Halit Habipoglu revealed that for some time, Haciosman worked as a chaplain at Tekke Mosque and after that he worked as a member of the army after that post at Tekke Mosque. Haciosman has been a member of the executive committee of DEB. Habipoglu continued as „Ahmet Haciosman was also Rodop Deputy Governor before. I can not understand why such a conflict suddenly appeared after he was elected with a record high level of votes.“



With the new election area regulations, the possibility of electing a Turkish Governor is completely eliminated, according to statements of Halit Habipoglu and he continued as „Actually, it is possible to elect a Turkish governor from the election area of

Rodop when we consider the population of Turkish minority in Rodop. However, with the new „extended governorship regulation“ Turkish voters became minority in their habitats and their right to elect their governor is eliminated completely. In addition to that, they do not let our elected minority governor to work and satisfy his duties.“

After the local elections, 11 Turkish took seat in the Rodop City Council. 9 of them are from PASOK while 2 are from YDP.

ABTTF Executive Committee Gathered

ABTTF Executive Committee gathered at the first meeting 2007 and revealed 2007 working program.

2007 working program was prepared with the motivation of the achievements realized in 2006. Executive Committee decided to implement ABTTF working program. In 2007, working program foresees international works as well as participation to various international meetings together with visits to international organizations.

Scientific work will gain weight

Members of Executive Committee agreed on the necessity to make scientific works to introduce the problems of Western Thrace Turkish minority to the international public. The scope of the scientific works will be identity, religion, language and education problems and they will be the primary information



source to eliminate the information lack about Western Thrace Turkish minority. ABTTF will cover the Turkish minority not only in Greece but also in Germany with the new studies. ABTTF aims to form a statistical information database about the Turkish minority in Germany.

Not only problems but also culture will be presented

Parallel to scientific works, culture of Western Thrace Turkish minority will be presented in Europe.

Minority members are on the agenda always due to their problems and with the cultural activities, they will be on the agenda also with their cultural wealth.

As the readers remember, ABTTF become an ECOSOC member and with the new BM-ECOSOC group, ABTTF will accelerate the research base.

Halit Habipoglu reported in his speech that ABTTF worked hard to reach 2006 target and with 2007 new duties are on the way. He added that ABTTF became a respected organization although it has not completed its institutionalization yet. He said "We will realize our targets mentioned in our 2007 working program and make important international cooperation with respected international organizations in 2008."

ABTTF continues scientific studies

The work named "The problems of The Turkish Minority of Western Thrace in Greece" issued in the beginning of January reveals the problems of Turkish Minority in Western Thrace in English.

In the study problems regarding identity, education, religion and participation to political life, citizenship rights and foundation were revealed with examples. In addition to that, rights of the minority resulting from Turkey-Greek Treaties as well as international treaties are explained in study.

Halit Habipoglu, chairman of ABTTF, devoted great effort for years to present and solve the problems of Turkish minority in Western Thrace. He commented on the study and said "We prepared this study to tell the human right violations experienced in Western Thrace

in a more detailed way. We will present this detailed study to all the responsible establishments and express not only our problems but also the human rights violations in Western Thrace."



ABTTF will have the opportunity to attend international meetings more frequently on the back of its BM-ECOSOC membership status and also as a result, ABTTF will strengthen its relations with the international organizations. In 2007, ABTTF aims to take more part in international scientific projects. That mentioned study is in English but it will be prepared in Turkish, German, Greek and will be conveyed to all the related organizations.

Confiscation Scenarios in Western Thrace

Western Thrace Turkish Minority members, majority of whom are engaged in farming, are apprehensive that their land will be confiscated by the Greek authorities.

As the reader might remember, Greece confiscated the lands of Western Thrace Turkish Minority members due to systematic migration policy although land is the unique means of subsistence for Western Thrace Turkish Minority members. New railway project that will be implemented by the Greek authorities in Western Thrace reminds the old scenarios.

Confiscation of Turkish villages of Yahyabeyli, Vakif, Seymen are likely to be on the agenda if Gümülcine (Komotini) Industry Zone is joined with the new railway line. That means confiscation of approximately 375.000m² of land which belongs to Turkish farmers.

According to the comments of Mustafa Katranci, member of Council of Maronya Municipality, there are two alternatives if that new project project is going to be implemented. The first alternative foresees the confiscation of 375.000m² of land which belongs to Turkish farmers. Within that alternative, Gümülcine (Komotini) Industry Zone will be joined with the new railway line. In the second alternative, new railway line will pass through the Gümülcine (Komotini) Industry Zone as one - line and under that second alternative, the amount of the land that will be confiscated will decrease.

“If it is a must to implement this project, Greek authorities shall act in good faith” revealed Halit Habipoglu, chairman of Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe. He continued as “We are apprehensive about our country’s projects while we have lived some bad experiences. Greek authorities confiscated our land due to a university project but they did not do anything with that land until now and we must pay rent for our own properties. In 1923, Greek authorities divested the Western Thrace Turkish Minority of 84% of their land via land unifications, ban on land purchase, special incentives given to Greek farmers. If we talk about confiscation of 20% of our land, this clearly shows that our concerns are not illogical. If the project must be implemented, then the idea of the Turkish farmers must be taken as well. This can not be a one-sided decision. He reported that they would follow the process closely and in case of a violation of right of property then they would not hesitate to apply to international human rights organizations in Europe.

Thousand of land in villages of Cepelli, Bulatköy, Gebeceli, Esekçili, Ayazma, Sendeli and Yuvacili that belonged to Turkish minority were confiscated in 1998 via university project, construction of industrial zone, land unification. That caused the Turkish minority to have serious financial problems as they were engaged in farming. As a result, they were forced to leave their land and migrate.



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