



CERD considered the state report of Greece

Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) participated in the 75th Session of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) of the United Nations between 10 and 11 August 2009. CERD considered the state report of Greece on her implementation of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD). Melek Kirmaci, member of ABTTF International Affairs and Lobbying Group and Pervin Hayrullah, member of the Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association represented the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace at the meeting.



The Committee considered the state report of Greece for two days and directed questions to Greece on ethnic structure of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace, freedom of association, problem of Muftis and education in mother tongue. The Committee will represent their observations and advices on 28 August 2009.

The problems of the Turkish Minority were uttered at the unofficial meeting

Melek Kirmaci and Pervin Hayrullah participated in the round table meeting that was held by Helsinki Monitor on

August 10th, 2009 and uttered the problems of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace. The parallel summary reports on Greece's compliance with ICERD, which were prepared by ABTTF and BTAYTD individually, were accepted by the Secretary and the members of the Committee were informed about the issue prior to the meeting. At the unofficial meeting, Pervin Hayrullah discussed the education problem of the Turkish Minority. In addition to the examples of hate speeches in the media expressed by Hayrullah, Melek Kirmaci told the problems regarding the freedom of association that the Minority members faced. Kirmaci informed the members of the Committee about the current

situation of the Turkish Minority living in Rhodes and Kos, stating that it was unacceptable not to recognize the rights of Turkish minority living on those islands due to the fact that those islands did not belong to Greece when Lausanne Treaty was signed.

Greece stated the obvious once again

Greece, that had not submitted her periodic reports since 2003, explained the problems of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace (named as "Muslim minority members in Thrace" by Greece) in details in her 19th periodic report. Maria Telalian, Legal Advisor, Head of the Section of Public International Law of Ministry

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www.abtff.org

WEblink

You can reach the state report of Greece under the link www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cerd/cerds75.htm, while information on the meeting, at which the state report of Greece was considered by the CERD, is available at: [www.unog.ch/80256EDD006B9C2E/\(httpNewsByYear_en\)/E70BAE8DBF374DD4C125760F002F9B2B?OpenDocument](http://www.unog.ch/80256EDD006B9C2E/(httpNewsByYear_en)/E70BAE8DBF374DD4C125760F002F9B2B?OpenDocument)

of Foreign Affairs of Greece, presented the report. Telalian stated that the Muslim minority in Thrace numbered around 100,000 persons and consisted of three distinct groups, whose members were of Turkish, Pomak and Roma origin.

Telalian also told that the policies that were implemented by the Greek State aimed at guaranteeing the integration of the Muslim minority of Thrace in the social fabric of the country, while protecting its cultural and religious identity and preventing exploitation of its problems by radical circles which wished to keep the minority marginalized with an inward-looking mentality. In that sense, any attempt of the Turkish-origin component of this minority to impose its cultural characteristics and traditions on the Pomaks and Roma components was not in conformity with the Lausanne Treaty that regulates the status of the Muslim minority in Thrace, underlined Telalian.

With regard to education in mother tongue, Greece repeated her official view, stating that school books in Greek were not studied in the kindergartens. As for the freedom of association, Greece stated that procedure about the implementation of the European Court of Human Right's verdicts was being reviewed and a final decision was likely to be announced in December 2009.

Western Thrace Turkish Minority members attended the OSCE Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting



In addition to 56 OSCE member countries, 112 non-governmental organizations attended the meeting that lasted 2 days. Focuses of the meeting were the "from commitments to implementation: freedom of religion or belief in OSCE area", "status of religious or belief communities" and "places of worship".

Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) attended the Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) between 9 and 10 July, 2009. Fatma Resit, member of the International Affairs and Lobbying Group of ABTTF and Pervin Hayrullah, member of the Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association represented the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace at the meeting.

Problem of Muftis and "Appointed Imams Law"

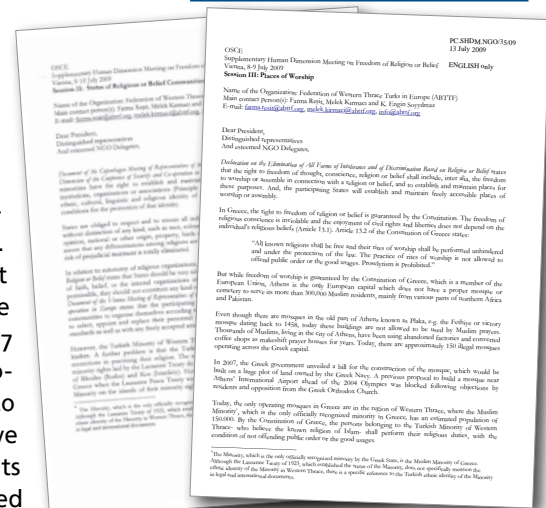
Ms. Hayrullah took the floor at the opening session and stated that members of the Muslim Turkish minority of Western Thrace have the right to decide whether to choose the Sharia Law or Greek Civil Law regarding the family and

inheritance issues, yet Mufti's judicial decisions do not take into effect unless approved by competent Greek Courts.

At the second session on status of religious or belief communities on July 10th, Ms. Resit, clearly stated that states should in no way intervene to any matters regarding issues of faith, belief, or the organization of a religious group. Thus, Ms. Resit stated that the Law 3536/2007 envisaging appointment of 240 imams to serve as public servants for the appointed muftis of Komo-

tini, Xanthi and Dimetoka clearly violated "freedom of religion and belief" of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace.

Mosques and the height of minarets



At the last session of the meeting on places of worship, Ms. Resit said that although the Greek Constitution guaranteed freedom of religion and belief, there was neither appropriate place for exercising religious activities nor graveyard in Athens where more than 300.000 Muslims live. Ms. Resit expressed that Western Thrace Turkish Minority faced serious problems in

restoring and building mosques, adding that height of minarets was another source of conflict. Furthermore, she drew attention to the problems the Turkish Minority living in Rhodes and Kos islands face when practicing their religion, and noted that only one of the still existing 12 mosques in Rhodes was open for religious services.

Regarding the places of worship, Ms. Hayrullah analyzed the problem of the height of minarets from a historical perspective stating that mosques in Demirbeyli, Kalenderköy and Sirkeli villages in Western Thrace had minaret building problems.



Reply of the Permanent Mission of Greece to the UN Office in Geneva to the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe

On 17 June 2009, the Permanent Mission of Greece to the UN Office in Geneva replied to the written statement entitled "Discrimination on the Ground of Ethnicity: the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace and Hate Speech in the Media" that was submitted by the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) to the 11th session of the United Nations Human Rights Council.



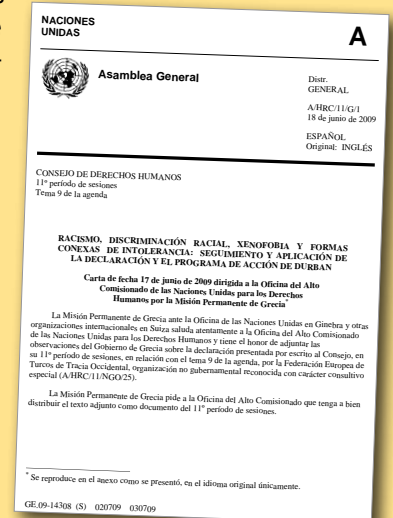
In the written reply, it is stated that based on the principle of equality before the law and of civil rights, as well as in the framework of rule of law, guaranteed by the Greek Constitution, the members of the "Muslim minority in Thrace, Greece" enjoy the same rights and obligations as any other Greek citizen, irrespective of his or her religious beliefs. Accordingly, it is mentioned that the region of Thrace has long been a place of harmonious coexistence between Christians and Muslims, even before the terms "xenophobia" and/or "islamophobia" - "christianophobia" were brought to the agenda of the international community. Furthermore, it is noted that Thrace is a place where human rights and freedom of religion of the Muslim minority are fully respected. It is also stated in the written reply that fringe electronic or written media comments and one isolated incident of verbal violence –which has never been reported by the minority press or denounced to the authorities- cannot constitute a hate crime whatsoever, nor can they be the basis for any claims that a racist, hostile to the Muslim minority, environment exists in Greece.

In the written reply, it is asserted that the Government of Greece rejects any allegations of hate speech in the media, and on the contrary, one could turn not a blind eye to hate-biased speeches delivered by few but influential Muslim religious leaders in Thrace, which insult the Christian majority. With re-

gard to ABTTF, it is stated that the few provocative statements by a specific NGO should leave the vast majority of the members of the Muslim minority in Thrace to continue living in harmony with their Christian fellow-Greek citizens.

With regard to the reply of Greece, Halit Habipoglu, President of ABTTF,

stated "Greece had to reply to our written statement we submitted to the UN Human Rights Council, yet the reply is significantly far away from being satisfactory. In Western Thrace, the Minority and majority has been living together in peace for a long period of time. However, due to the increasing news in visual and printed media that target the members of the Minority, social peace is under serious threat." Regarding the comment on ABTTF, Habipoglu stated "ABTTF brings all the happenings and realities in Western Thrace to the agenda of the international community. Evaluating the realities as "provocative" is a clear signal that Greece avoids to build a genuine dialogue with the Minority".



The reply of Greece to the written statement of ABTTF can be reached under the link:

<http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/11session/docs/governments.htm>

European Court of Human Rights sentenced Greece regarding the case “Zeybek v. Greece”



On July 9th, 2009, the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR in the case of Zeybek v. Greece (Application No: 46368/06)) sentenced Greece to money penalty. Bedriye Zeybek had prosecuted Greece due to Greece’s refusal to provide Mrs. Zeybek as “the mother of big family” life long pension. The Court held unanimously that there had been a **violation of Article 1 of Protocol No. 1 (protection of property)** to the European Convention on Human Rights, and in conjunction with **Article 14 (prohibition of discrimination)** of the Convention. Additionally, under the Article 41 (fair satisfaction), the Court ruled Greece to pay 13,455 Euro for pecuniary and non-pecuniary damage and 2,500 Euro for other expenses.

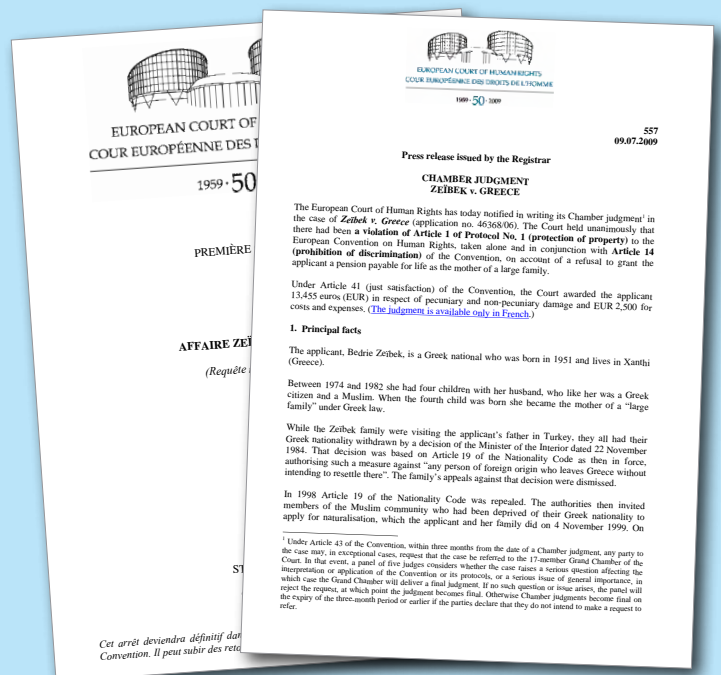
Mrs. Zeybek, the applicant born in 1951, was denaturalized by a decision of Ministry of Interior in 1984 when she was visiting Turkey with her family. Following the abolishment of Article 19 in 1998, Mrs. Zeybek and her family applied for naturalization in

November 1999. Yet, Zeybek’s daughter, Ilkay Zeybek’s application was refused as she was married and under statutory age. Zeybek’s and her other daughters’ application were accepted.

With the birth of her fourth daughter in 1982, Mrs. Zeybek became “the mother of a large family”. On 19 December 2001, Mrs.Zeybek applied for a pension, payable for life, as the mother of a large family, in accordance with law no. 1982/1990. However, her application was rejected on 22 November 2002 on the ground that her four children did not all have Greek nationality. On 22 May 1996 the Supreme Administrative Court decided that Article 21 of the Constitution – which protects the family and motherhood – was relevant only to the need to preserve and promote the Greek nation and did not cover foreign families living in Greece. However, European Court of Human Rights stated that even if one or more of the children ceased to be attached to the family and

regardless of the children’s nationality (provided the mother lived permanently and legally in Greece), the status did not change. Thus, the Court found it surprising that the Supreme Administrative Court, in its judgment, had associated the granting of such protection with the “need to preserve and promote the Greek nation” – a criterion based not on Greek nationality but on national origin.

With regard to the judgment of ECHR, Halit Habipoglu, President of ABTTF, stated that “The case of Mrs. Zeybek has great importance for Western Thrace Turkish Minority. Remember that between 1955 and 1998, 60.000 members of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace were denaturalized, losing all their citizenship rights. After the abolishment of the related law, the ones who applied for the Greek citizenship were naturalized yet they lost their acquired rights. Now, the process continues very slowly and with high costs. Greece should give all the citizenship rights back to the persons who were deprived of their citizenship under the former Article 19 of the Greek Nationality Code without making any distinction between the ones still living as stateless in Greece and the ones who acquired the citizenship of a third country.”



Press release and the Chamber judgment on Zeybek v. Greece case are available at the link:

<http://cmiskp.echr.coe.int/tkp197/view.asp?item=2&portal=hbk&action=html&highlight=46368/06&sessionId=29593176&skin=hudoc-pr-en>

Outrageous accusation from Daily *Paratiritis* against **ABTTF**

Daily Paratiritis made news about the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) on July 30th, 2009. As might be recalled, ABTTF had criticized Dimitris Stamatis, Secretary General of the Region of East Macedonia and Thrace, due to his response to the news "Stamatis: to be removed from the office immediately" published in the daily Birlık. Following the indignation letter of ABTTF, daily Paratiritis made an outrageous accusation and claimed that Umit Yardim, Consul General of the Republic of Turkey in Stuttgart, is the main figure behind the indignation letter of ABTTF. In the news, it was stated that Yardim, who officiated in Western Thrace five years ago, was one of the leading civil servants that served the interests of the Turkish Republic in the region, adding that according to the Greek authorities, main reason behind the recent activities of ABTTF was the insistence of the aforementioned person (Yardim) to strengthen the Turkish identity and Turkish concept in Thrace. In the news, it was underlined that ABTTF having a serious technical knowledge and

budget was an observer not only at the United Nations, but also at the Council of Europe, stressing that ABTTF was actually very "active" recently.

Habipoglu:
ABTTF is a NGO,
independent
from politics and
bureaucracy

About the issue, Halit Habipoglu, President of ABTTF, stated that "Paratiritis, that feels uncomfortable due to the successful activities of ABTTF, made an outrageous accusation against it. Claiming that the reason behind our indignation letter addressed to Secretary General of the Region of East Macedonia and Thrace is the support of Umit Yardim, Consul General of the Republic of Turkey in Stuttgart, is another outrageous accusation. ABTTF condemns that outrages and false accusation. ABTTF is an umbrella organization that was established in 1988 as a result of long lasting efforts of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace living in Germany. Today, ABTTF connects 5100 Greek citizens with Turkish

origin from Western Thrace and has 30 member associations. As a pluralist, libertarian, democratic and law abiding organization, ABTTF is independent from political parties and governments. The main reason of existence of ABTTF is to be concerned with the problems of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace and to find solutions for its problems. ABTTF has achieved a corporate identity and become a prestigious organization at international platforms. Reasons behind the efficient and successful activities of ABTTF are the second and third generation members of the



Turkish Minority of Western Thrace who work at high level positions in Germany and the voluntary activities and great support of Western Thrace Turkish Minority members living in other European countries.

Today, including the members of the ABTTF Executive Board, our members work voluntarily. Works coordinated by the ABTTF Executive Board elected by the ABTTF Assembly of Delegates, brought that success. It is not fair to seek either an institution or a person behind that success."



Greek Foreign Minister Bakoyannis gave an interview to Daily Hurriyet



On 1 August 2009, Greek Foreign Minister Dora Bakoyannis evaluated the relations between Turkey and Greece after Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu took the office for the Daily Hurriyet.

Bakoyannis: Greece is implementing a policy of "affirmative action"

Upon the questions regarding the statements of the Turkish side about re-opening of the Heybeliada (Halki) Seminary, Bakoyanni stated that Greece was implementing a policy of "affirmative

action" in Thrace, in favor of their Muslim fellow citizens in Western Thrace. As might be recalled, Turkey had said that re-opening of the Halki Seminary and granting rights to the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace should be taken into consideration simultaneously. Bakoyanni mentioned that the meeting she had with Turkish Foreign Minister Davutoglu in Korfu was very interesting, stating that when they discussed human rights, they both agreed that it was the duty of modern European countries towards their citizens to protect them – especially minority rights. Bakoyanni stated that "Everyone in Greece en-

joys the rights and privileges of a European citizen" adding that "Respect of these rights is in no way a bilateral issue between Greece and Turkey. (...) the idea of reciprocity runs contrary to any notion of human rights protection in the modern world. In the twenty first century human rights protection can not serve purposes of political expediency."

Habipoglu: Greece misinforms the international community

Regarding the statements of Bakoyannis, Halit Habipoglu, President of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) commented that "Interview of Bakoyannis to Daily Hurriyet shows that Greece wants to stay away from the reciprocity principle related to the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace. Yet, the reciprocity principle, guaranteed by the Lausanne Treaty, aims to secure the rights of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace living in Greece and the Greek minority living in Turkey. In the 21st century, common belief of the international community should be summarized; free of conditions in human and minority rights, improving and protecting human and minority rights should be the main aim of the authorities without referring to reciprocity principle. As a result of that belief, Greece should not only take

the necessary actions to improve the rights of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace, but also remember that Western Thrace Turks are Greek citizens whose rights should be taken under guarantee. Yet, the ones who closely monitor the region know that the situation is far



away from being optimal. Statements, which are formulated for the international community, do not reflect the current situation in the region, yet rather figured out by the government consciously. Thus, Greece misinforms the international community by presenting an artificial and incorrect outlook. The ones, who seem to believe the story made up by the Greek government, should understand that we will never be fooled by such statements."

The news regarding the interview of Bakoyannis is available under the link

<http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/12192917.asp>

while the full interview is available at

http://www.mfa.gr/www.mfa.gr/Articles/en-US/010809_P1845.htm



Minister Evripidis Stilianidis organized a meeting in Komotini



At a meeting held on July 9th, 2009 in Komotini, former Minister of Education and Religious Affairs Evripidis Stilianidis explained the "Modern Minority Policy" of the Government of Greece. According to Millet weekly, at the meeting, at which mainly the issues of education and schools were discussed, there were about 200 participants, among them representatives of local governments that support the governing party New Democracy Party, and other eminent people.

Stilianidis talked about the "Modern Minority policy" of the Greek Government (!)

In his speech, Stilianidis summarized the activities of the New Democracy Party regarding the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace since 2004. Stilianidis informed the participants about the booklet published in Turkish, English

and Greek, adding that the activities of his party regarding the Minority were actually positive and successful.

Stilianidis stated, "Thrace is a very good example of a open democratic society", adding that the Government not only tried hard to improve the living standards in the region, but also modernized the infrastructure of schools to provide a more qualified education. With regard to the issue of religion, Stilianidis defined the "Appointed Imams Law", which was seriously criticized by the Minority, as a step to strengthen respect for Islam.

"Talk of former Minister of Education and Religious Affairs does not go beyond repeating the already known facts. Is it possible to define an understanding, which does not consider other party's views, as a "modern minority policy"? When you do not take the opinion of the Minority about the issues that directly affect it, then you can not say "all these are for the Minority". Such decisions and implementations are only for themselves. Yet, we are happy that the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace can understand the logic and the real beneficiaries of the Greek minority policy. The New Democracy Party, which has been in office since 2004, has not realized any of its pre-election promises. Furthermore, the Minority faces serious problems due to the implementation of "Appointed Imams Law" which was adopted during the governance of the New Democracy Party. On the education front,

the members of the Minority see that despite all the efforts to solve the problems stemming from "bilingual minority kindergartens" implementation, there is no improvement on that side. In such an environment, Stilianidis talk about the "Modern Minority Policy" is clearly a move towards the Minority



before a possible early election." commented Halit Habioglu, President of ABTTF.





Mosque of Okcular Village again set on fire

On 2 September 2009, the Mosque of Okcular Village, Xanthi, was again set on fire. According to the news of daily Birlik, police officers, who inspected the crime scene, ascertained the occurrence as an incendiary action. Unidentified person or persons spoiled gasoline on the mosque carpets, after removing the iron railings and breaking a window to entry the mosque. As a result of the incendiary action, carpets of the mosque completely burned down and the air con-

ditioner lapsed. Furthermore, chandelier, wood coatings, pulpit, altar and the Koran of the mosque were also damaged, according to the news of Rodop Rüzgarı. On 3 September, the religious official, entrusted with opening the mosque for the Taravish pray, noticed the incendiary action, which took place during the night of the 2nd September. It is emphasized that the fire luckily extinguished by itself without transmitting to plants placed in the mosque.

Today, only seven Turkish families are living in the village of Okcular (located on the west border of Western Thrace) next to a Christian majority. During the general elections of 2004, the mosque was set on fire for the first time on the 7 March and as a result completely burned down. The second incendiary action took place in 2007, and now on the day of the early election announcement of Greece for the 4th of October 2009, the mosque became a place of vandalism again.

With regard to the incendiary action, Halit Habipoglu, President of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) stated that "We strongly condemn the attacks on the Okcular Mosque and demand the responsible certainly to be caught and punished

for their action of crime. The attacks on mosques, functioning as places of worship, deeply afflict and worry the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace. The increasing amount of attacks on members of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace or their representing institutions creates nervousness and fear and the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace should understand the early elections as an opportunity to present its voting power as a response to the happenings."



ABTTF Newsletter

The ABTTF newsletter in four languages, namely in Turkish, English, Greek and German will start its fourth coming year.

The ABTTF newsletter, in which the current issues with regard to the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace, the latest occurrences in Western Thrace and Greece, in particular with regard to the minority issues and policies, international activities and lobbying of ABTTF aimed at finding solutions for the problems of the Turkish Minority and information on the activities of the associations of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace 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 get more information on subscription to the ABTTF Newsletter, please contact us.

ABTTF

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Föderation der West-Thrakien Türken in Europa
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