

Habipoğlu met with Cem Özdemir, Co-President of the German political party Alliance 90/The Greens



Halit Habipoğlu, President of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF), visited Cem Özdemir, Co-President of the German political party Alliance 90/The Greens, in his office in Berlin and spoke with him about the problems of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace and of the Turkish minority in Rhodes and Kos. During the meeting, which lasted approximately one hour and took place in a familiar atmosphere, Habipoğlu handed Özdemir the documentary entitled „Western Thrace Turkish Minority: from past to present“ and the scientific studies describing the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace and its problems, and invited him to Western Thrace.

Due to the fact that several reports on Greece were published in 2009 by the bodies of the United Nations and of the Council of Europe, Habipoğlu expressed the importance of this year and informed Özdemir about the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace in the mentioned reports. Habipoğlu, while expressing that

positive steps had been taken in Greece in the field of minority rights, also noted that the Minority was experiencing a period, in which problems had not been solved in general, but new ones had been added. Furthermore, Habipoğlu stated that with regard to the problem of the former Article 19 of the Greek Citizenship Code and the freedom of association despite the judgment of the ECHR, no progress had been made. Concerning freedom of religion and conscience, Habipoğlu talked about the problem of the „Appointed Imams Law“, and when the issue of education was raised during the meeting, Habipoğlu noted that with the addition of the problems of bilingual kindergartens, it had been a reached to a deadlock point in the field of education in Western Thrace. In addition, Habipoğlu attached a special importance to the question of political representation of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace and informed Özdemir about the problems arising from implementation of the national electoral threshold of 3% and from

extended constituency application.

Moreover, Habipoğlu took the opportunity to provide Özdemir with information about the problems of the Turkish minority living in Rhodes and Kos, and stated that since the office of mufti had been vacant since 1972, there were no religious leaders of the Muslim community. Habipoğlu also stated that today only one of the twelve mosques in Rhodes was open for religious services, adding that the 7 minority schools in Rhodes and the 3 in Kos were closed down in the course of time, and the Turkish minority was herewith deprived of education in its mother tongue.

Cem Özdemir stated that although Greece was called as the cradle of democracy and older member of the EU, it was having difficulties in applying within its borders the principles of multiculturalism and diversity, which formed the basis of the Union. In addition, Özdemir

pointed out that because Greece was considering its own minority as a threat and applying pressure towards it, the Union was also losing its reputation, and expressed his hopes that positive steps were taken during the government of PASOK. Noting that Papanedreou and he were close friends, Özdemir expressed his belief that a will towards change was going to rise during the premiership of Papandreou, and also underlined that during his future meetings, he would carry the problems of the Turkish Minority to the agenda.

CONTENTS

Habipoğlu met with Cem Özdemir, Co-President of the German political party Alliance 90/The Greens Page 1

FUEN celebrated its 60th foundation day Page 2

ABTTF and BTAYTD attended the 2nd session of the Forum on Minority Issues Page 3

Turkish Minority of Western Thrace present at the OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting Page 4

ABTTF attended the 12th Session of the UN Human Rights Council Page 5

ECRI released the 4th country report on Greece Page 6

U.S. Department of State released its Religious Freedom Report 2009 on Greece Page 7

CERD announced the Concluding Observations on Greece adopted at its 75th session Page 8

Thrace Court of Appeal rejected the application of Xanthi Turkish Union Page 9

The Xanthi Turkish Union trial was postponed Page 9-10

Campaign in Komotini : „Close the Consulate General of the Republic of Turkey in Komotini!“ Page 10-11

Grim accusations from LAOS MP against daily Birlik Page 11

Journalist Ibrahim Baltalı was attacked by a group of fanatic Greeks Page 12



FUEN celebrated its 60th foundation day



From 29 September to 2 October 2009, the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) attended the 60th jubilee congress of the Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN) with the theme of “fundamental right to political participation”. At the congress, the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace was represented by the delegation composed of President Halit Habipoğlu, Vice-President Sami Yusuf, Secretary General Özkan Reşit and member of International Affairs Department Fatma Reşit on behalf of ABTTF and Ali Hüseyin and İrfan Çakır on behalf of the Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association.

On 30 September 2009, a meeting attended by the FUEN delegates who were on a visit to the European Parliament, and by MEPs was organized. Furthermore, on the last day of the congress, on 2 October 2009, draft resolutions submitted by the FUEN delegates were discussed and subsequently adopted.

Issue of the Turkish Minority's political representation was brought to the agenda

Following the presentation by Dr. Oleh Protsyk from the European Center for Minority Issues (ECMI) on the issue of political participation on the first day of the congress held in Brussels, Halit

Habipoğlu, President of ABTTF, raised the problem of political participation faced by the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace during the debate.

Habipoğlu pointed out that according to the new electoral law enacted in 1991 in Greece, candidates had to obtain at least 3% of the votes throughout the country in order to be elected to the Parliament, and thus the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace could not be represented by independent MPs in the Greek Parliament. After Habipoğlu, Ali Hüseyin, member of the Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association, stated that the „Turkish“ ethnic identity of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace was recognized, adding that the Minority had been facing many problems in terms of recognition of its rights in the areas of education and religion where it had autonomy, and had also been facing several problems in the area of political representation.

Two resolutions for recommendation related to the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace were adopted

As the Delegation of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace, ABTTF and the Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association submitted two resolutions for recommendation to be adopted at the FUEN Assembly of Delegates. In the unanimously adopted

text of the resolution for recommendation, ABTTF and the Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association demand from the Greek Government to withdraw the 3% electoral threshold for an independent candidate, and to abolish the division of local districts into enlarged electoral districts which are now implemented in the prefectures of Rhodope and Xanthi.

On the first day of the congress, Habipoğlu also stated that it had been brought on in the Greek newspapers that soldiers serving their time in the 4th Army Corps had had to sign a document stating that they did not want to vote in the places where they had been born, but in Western Thrace. Thus, Habipoğlu expressed his concerns that the democratic electoral process might get jeopardized. As the Delegation of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace, ABTTF and the Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association, prepared a common text of resolution for recommendation demanding the investigation of the regarding allegations, and submitted it to the FUEN Assembly of Delegates on 2 October 2009.

With regard to the issue, Halit Habipoğlu, President of ABTTF, stated that “The fact that the FUEN Congress was held just before the early general elections on 4 October 2009 in Greece increased the importance of this Congress for the Turkish Minority of western Thrace. Therefore, representing the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace, ABTTF and the Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association brought the issue of political representation to the agenda. In addition, upon the allegation that soldiers serving their time in the 4th Army Corps have been had sign a document stating that they would like to vote in the region, we prepared an urgent text of resolution for recommendation related to the issue, and achieved that it was adopted by the FUEN Assembly of Delegates”

ABTTF and BTAYTD attended the 2nd session of the Forum on Minority Issues

The 2nd session of the Forum on Minority Issues with the thematic focus “minorities and effective political participation” took place on 12 and 13 November 2009 at the United Nations Office in Geneva. Representing the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace, Melek Kirmaci, member of International Affairs and Lobbying Group of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) and Pervin Hayrullah, member of the Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association (BTAYTD) attended the Forum. In addition, Abdülhalim Dede, owner of the daily Trakya'nın Sesi and radio Işık FM, and representative of the Turkish Minority Movement for Human and Minority Rights which is member of the Bureau for Lesser-Used Languages (EBLUL) attended the Forum as a special guest.

In relation to the problem of political participation of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace, ABTTF and BTAYTD submitted a joint statement. Melek Kirmaci, member of ABTTF International Affairs and Lobbying Group, presented the joint statement and emphasized the issue of the electoral law in Greece, requiring any party or candidate to pass a 3 percent threshold across the country to enter the Parliament. Pointing out that as a consequence of the law, it had become almost impossible for the Turkish Minority to send deputies to the Parliament by dint of independent lists, Kirmaci also added that resulting from the 2240/1994 numbered law and the realisation of the expanded constituency application, the possibility of the Turkish Minority to be elected had faced negative impact.

Abdülhalim Dede, owner of the daily Trakya'nın Sesi and radio IŞIK FM, expressed as well the issue of the 3



percent threshold for independent candidates, the problem of the super-governor application resulting from the 2218/1994 numbered law as the issue of the expanded constituency application known as Kapodistra 1. Moreover, Dede proposed to perform representation according to the distribution of the population in provinces densely populated by the Minority, and to implement this application into national, local, and public service sectors. With regard to minorities, Dede advocated the establishment of a ministry on minorities or Ombudsman who have extended powers in the field of minority issues. In addition, he also claimed to guarantee the minorities' right for freedom of expression and media, by providing state funds and assistance to minority media organizations.

On 13 November 2009, Counsellor Alexios Marios Lyberpoulos from the Permanent Mission of Greece to the United Nations in Geneva expressed that two deputies were elected to the Parliament at the early general elections held on 4 October 2009, and noted that the Minority was represented at national level. Furthermore, Lyberpoulos also emphasized that the Minority is represented at local level in the densely populated provinces of Rhodope and Xanthi, and noted that in 2008 a 0,5%

quota was introduced with the aim of increasing the Minority's participation in public sector.

Following the speech of Abdülhalim Dede and the joint presentation of ABTTF and BTAYTD, Ambassador Yorgo Kaklikis, Permanent Representative of Greece to the United Nations in Geneva, hold his speech and pointed out the importance of the 3 percent electoral threshold in terms of guaranteeing a functioning political system. With regard to the subject matter of Obudsman with extended powers in the field of minority issues, Kaklikis expressed that there had been no complaints in the reports of Ombudsman in Greece about the allegations of the representatives of the Minority and adding that freedom of expression and media was fully guaranteed and supported in Greece.



Turkish Minority of Western Thrace present at the OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting

Between 5 and 6 October 2009, the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) attended the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting organized by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) from 28 September to 9 October 2009 in Warsaw, Poland. At the meeting, the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace was represented by Fatma Reşit, member of ABTTF International Affairs and Lobbying Group, and Pervin Hayrullah and Sebahattin Abdurrahman, both members of the Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association.

During the meeting, the problems of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace were brought to the agenda. The representatives submitted written statements in which the issues of their speeches were described in details. Greece responded with three written replies to the speeches held by the Delegation of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace and reiterated its official state view.

Non-discrimination and tolerance

Fatma Reşit, member of ABTTF International Affairs and Lobbying Group, spoke during the session held on 5 October 2009 and stated that the Law 3304/2005 had in practice a limited impact. Reşit noted that on 5 September 2009, Ali Karaosman, the Ramadan drummer of Koyunköy, a province of Xanthi, had been attacked by an armed Greek while he was waiting for the drum playing time, but instead of the offender, Karaosman had been taken into custody. In addition, during this session, Pervin Hayrullah, talking on behalf of the Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association, added that hate



crimes in Western Thrace had mainly occurred in the period of 1990 and later, and explained the incidents of 29th January 1988 and 1990.

Freedom of expression and free media

During the session held on 6 October 2009, Fatma Reşit criticized the Law 3592/2007. Reşit stated that the National Commission for Human Rights in Greece noted that there was a trend in news bulletins to reproduce stereotypes and prejudice concerning different ethnic or social groups. With regard to the issue, Reşit presented the attack against Abdülhalim Dede as an example. Moreover, Pervin Hayrullah, who also spoke during this session, explained, related to the freedom of expression, the relationship between individual identification and freedom of association and stated that racist comments in the media negatively affected public opinion.

Private conversation with Ambassador Adil K. Akhmetov, OSCE Special Representative

On 5 October 2009, the Delegation of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace attended the roundtable entitled „Preventing and Responding anti-Muslim Hate Crimes” organized by COJEP International. Fatma Reşit, who spoke at this meeting, stated that hate speech and hate crime against Muslims are often ignored by the international media.

After the meeting, the Delegation of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace, which spoke in private with Ambassador Adil K. Akhmetov, OSCE Special Representative for Combating Intolerance and Discrimination against Muslims, invited the Special Representative to Western Thrace for reviewing the region.



ABTTF attended the 12th Session of the UN Human Rights Council

The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) attended the 12th Session of the United Nations Human Rights Council on 17 and 18 September 2009. Melek Kirmacı, member of ABTTF International Affairs and Lobbying Group, represented the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace during the session which was held at the United Nations Office in Geneva.

Melek Kirmacı, member of ABTTF International Affairs and Lobbying Group, attended the session which dealt with the third agenda item entitled “the promotion and protection of all human rights, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development”. Due to the protest of the Latin American countries that the Delegation of Honduras did not represent the constitutional and legal Government of State President Manuel Zelaya during the opening of the 12th session of the UN Human Rights Council on 14 September 2009, the Council had to cancel the session. Due to the delay in the programme of work of the UN Human Rights Council's 12th session, ABTTF could not make its speech, but submitted a written statement entitled „the Problem of Political Representation of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace“.

[Minority's political representation problem was emphasized in the written statement](#)

Illustrating in its written statement that discrimination on the grounds of race, colour, religion, descent, nationality or ethnic origin further hinders enjoyment of national or



ethnic minorities of their basic human and minority rights including economic, social and cultural rights, ABTTF presented, taking the precedence of the problem of political representation, the problems of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace with regard to the right to citizenship and former Article 19 of the Greek Citizenship Law, freedom of association and the right to education in mother tongue.

With regard to the problem of political representation, ABTTF expressed that full and effective political participation was an essential element of a peaceful and democratic society, and pointed out that persons belonging to minorities had the right to participate effectively in decisions on the national and, where appropriate, regional level concerning the minority to which they belong or the regions in which they live.

ABTTF expressed in its written statement that the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace was inadequately represented in society's policy and decision making system and criticized the electoral law which envisaged the

nation-wide electoral threshold of 3% for independent candidates to be elected. It was stated that under the current electoral law of “reinforced proportionality”, political parties and independent candidates could not enter the Parliament unless they obtained at least 3 % of the votes throughout the country although they might have enough votes to get electoral seats in specific electoral districts. It was emphasized that the current electoral law made it impossible for members of the Turkish Minority to be elected as independent candidates to the Parliament, and the Minority was forced to run candidates with majority political parties. Moreover, the application of enlarged electoral districts was also illustrated in the written statement. It was stated that since 1994, prefects were elected, but the electoral law had merged one of the two prefectures where the Turkish Minority was densely populated, Xanthi, with neighbouring Kavala and Drama; and the other one, Rhodope, with neighbouring Evros, and thus, the possibility of a member of the Turkish Minority to be elected to such positions was inhibited.

U.S. Department of State released its Religious Freedom Report 2009 on Greece



On 26 October 2009, the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor of the U.S. Department of State released its International Religious Freedom Report 2009 on Greece. It is stated in the report that an officially recognized Muslim minority of 100,000 to 120,000 members resides in Thrace, and the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne gives the Muslim minority the right to maintain wakfs, allows muftis to render religious judicial services under Islamic law, Shari'a in the area of family and inheritance law, and provides the right to Turkish-language education.

In the report, it is expressed that while some members of the Muslim minority accepted the authority of the government-appointed muftis, others elected two unofficial muftis to serve their communities, objecting that the government of a non-Islamic country had no right to appoint muftis. In addition, it is expressed that while the Government accepts Shari'a law in the area of family and marital issues, the National Human Rights Commission does not recognize the Government's Shari'a law and

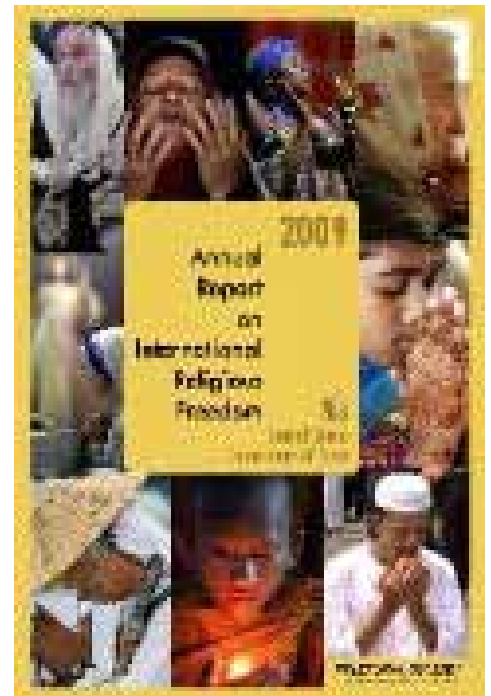
therefore gives the advice that duties of Mufti should be restricted to only those of religious matters.

Under the title "Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom", it is noted in the report that the Government planned to hire 240 imams on contractual basis in 2007. But in addition, it is pointed out that Government officials did not hire the full 240, because the remaining candidates could not certify that they had completed primary school. With regard to restrictions on religious freedom related to the Minority, it is emphasized that members of the Muslim minority in Thrace were underrepresented in public sector employment and in state-owned industries and corporations. Moreover, it is noted that in 2008, the Government passed legislation establishing a new programme to assign 0.5 percent of civil service jobs to Muslims.

The report notes that the Government took steps to address controversy over the management and taxation of wakfs in Thrace, and expresses that in 2007, the Government passed legislation allowing wakf management committees to be directly elected and writing off all tax liens against the wakfs, amounting to approximately \$ 9.1 million, yet problems have been experienced in practice.

With regard to the report, Halit Habipoğlu, President of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks

in Europe (ABTTF), stated that "In the released report on religious freedom, more room was given for official opinion. Especially in relation to the law, expressed as the Minority's problem of "Appointed Imams Law", the report completely portrays the nature of supporting the official government thesis. Another important deficiency is that in the area



of religious freedom with regard to the issue of hate-based or racist attacks, the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace is not mentioned. Before the early general elections in Greece on 4 October 2009, the mosque of Okular was set on fire for the third time, and during the month of Ramadan, the drummer of Koyunköy was attacked".

The entire report can be accessed on the following:

<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2009/127313.htm>

CERD announced the Concluding Observations on Greece adopted at its 75th session

On 15 September 2009, the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) released the Concluding Observations adopted at its 75th session held in Geneva from 8 to 28 August 2009.

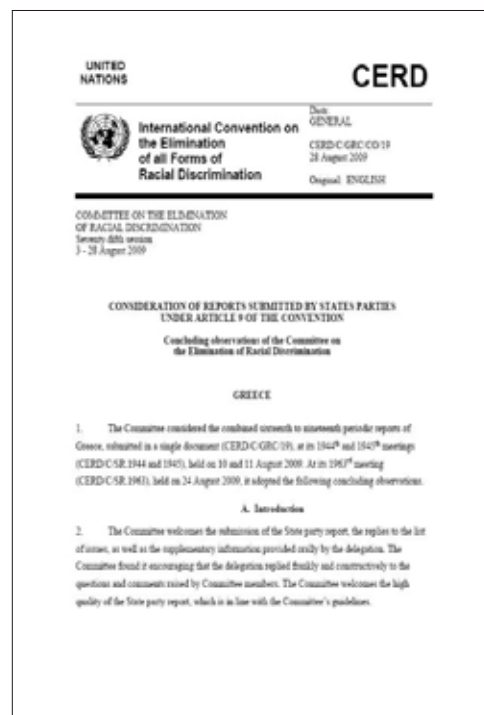


Regarding the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace, the Committee notes that the Muslim minority in Western Thrace consists of the ethnic groups of Turks, Pomaks and Roma. In consideration of the fact that the Government of Greece is willing to ensure these persons' right to use

their own language, CERD wishes the measures taken for the protection of human and identity rights of these persons to be included in future reports.

In addition, the Committee points out its concerns regarding obstacles faced by some ethnic groups in exercising the freedom of association, and in this regard takes note of information on the forced dissolution and refusal to register some associations including the words such as “minority”, “Turkish” or “Macedonian”, as well as of the explanation of such refusal. The Committee recommends that Greece adopts measures to ensure the effective enjoyment by persons belonging to every community or group of their right to freedom of association and of their cultural rights, including the use of mother languages.

Furthermore, CERD notes its concerns about the alleged limited access to quality minority education for the Turkish speaking minority in Western Thrace. The Committee recommends



that the Greek State improves the quality of education for the vulnerable ethnic groups and the Muslim minority, including through the training of teachers belonging to these groups, to ensure that there is a sufficient number of secondary schools, and to create pre-schools that teach in the mother tongue of their students.

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 at the 75th Session of CERD that was held from 3 to 28 August 2009 and submitted the reports on the problems of the Turkish Minority of western Thrace to the Committee.

Please click here for the Concluding Observations of CERD's 75th session on Greece:

<http://www2.ohchr.org/tbru/cerd/CERD-C-GRC-CO-19.pdf>



Thrace Court of Appeal rejected the application of Xanthi Turkish Union

On 30 September 2009, the Thrace Court of Appeal rejected the appeal of the Xanthi Turkish Union. Although the decision is not justified yet, according to information acquired, the Thrace Court of Appeal refused the application of the Union because the possibility of applying decisions of the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) in domestic law of Greece does not exist.

According to the news of daily Embros published on 3 October 2009, the Thrace Court of Appeal announced that it did not have the necessity to comply with the ECHR judgments and that there was no commitment made regarding this. Therefore, the ECHR judgment did not constitute a precedent. Regarding the decision of the Thrace Court of Appeal, Orhan Hacıbram, lawyer of the Xanthi Turkish Union, stated: „I don't believe that the way of thinking of the ECHR's judgment is correctly interpreted in the decision of the Thrace Court of Appeal. The deprivation of the right to establish associations still continues as the Union does not exist as a legal person. The Union, which has been operating with this name since 1928, has been suffering between the wheels of the courts since 1983 when the then governor of Xanthi, Fanis Donas, instructed to shut it down“. Hacıbram also noted in his statement that they were considering to bring the decision of the Thrace Court of Appeal before the Supreme Court.

Despite the judgment of the ECHR, the Union could not regain its official status

On 27 March 2008, the ECHR found the closure of the Xanthi Turkish Union because it contained the term „Turkish“ in its name unjust and held unanimously that Greece had violated Article 11 (freedom of assembly and association) of the European Convention on Human Rights (case of Tourkiki Enosi Xanthis and Others v. Greece (no. 26698/05)). But, the Greek Government declared that at the end of the three-month objection period in June 2008, it would bring the case before the ECHR Grand Chamber, while the ECHR Preliminary Commission consisting of 5 judges concluded unanimously in favour of the Union and rejected the application of Greece. On 19 February 2009, the Xanthi Civil Court of First Instance handled the lawsuit filed by the Union to retrieve its previous legal status as of before 1983. The hearings were made in written form at the lawsuit, and the Federation of Thracian Association based in Thessalonica pled against the Union. Moreover, the lawsuit filed by the Union before the Thrace Court of Appeal in Komotini for restoration of its legal status was handled on Friday, 3 April 2009. In May 2009, the Xanthi Civil Court of First Instance rejected the lawsuit filed by the Union to retrieve its legal status as of before 1983. Subsequently, the Union decided to appeal the judgment of the Xanthi Civil Court of First Instance.



With regard to the issue, Halit Habipoglu, President of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF), stated that “The rejection of the Union's appeal is not surprising, but it is a sad situation. Despite the judgment of the ECHR, the legal status of the Union was not returned, and the problem could not be resolved. During the Government of the New Democracy as Dora Bakoyannis was Foreign Minister of Greece, it was announced that a comprehensive working had been initiated regarding the reflection of ECHR's decisions into domestic law, and it was noted that workings were to be complete till the end of the year. Therefore, we call on George A. Papandreou, who will perform as Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs during the Government of the Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK), to inform the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace by making a statement on the issue. It should not be forgotten that this situation has been damaging the reputation of Greece in the international arena, and harming the prestige of the country, too”.

Photo: Newspaper Birlik

The Xanthi Turkish Union trial was postponed

applied to the Thrace Court of Appeal, but the Court accepted the rationale that lawyers representing the Governor of Xanthi were not prepared, and decided to postpone the trial to October 2010.

Speaking to the daily Birlik, Mehmet Hacıhalil, lawyer of the Xanthi Turkish Union, expressed that hopes related to the hearing which was going to be held on 8 October 2010, were still continuing. In addition, he noted that the absence of

the Federation of Associations of Northern Greece at the court was a positive sign. Hacıhalil stated: “I expect Greece to recognize us. We expect them to embrace us, to implement the judgments of the European Court of

Human Rights (ECHR) and to pay our compensation. We do not expect anything else”.

On 27 March 2008, the ECHR noted the closure of the Xanthi Turkish Union because it contained the word “Turkish” in its name as an inequity and declared in its judgment that Greece violated Article 11 (freedom of assembly and association) of the European Convention on Human Rights by closing associations belonging to the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace. In June 2008, at the end of the three-months objection period, the Greek Government announced to take the case to the ECHR Grand Chamber. The ECHR pre-

commission, consisting of 5 judges, denied the application of Greece.

With regard to the issue, Halit Habipoglu, President of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF), stated that “It is regrettable that the problem in relation to the legal status of the Xanthi Turkish Union, has not been resolved despite the ECHR judgment of March 2008. We hope that the Xanthi Turkish Union continuing its judicial struggle will regain its pre- 1983 legal status in October 2010”.



Campaign in Komotini : „Close the Consulate General of the Republic of Turkey in Komotini!“

On 23 October 2009, the owner of the newspaper Andifonitis, Kostas Karaikos, and an accompanying group of people opened in the city square of Komotini a written banner with the statement „Out with the Consulate! Now!“. In addition to the three banners containing articles in the direction of closing the Consulate General of the Republic of Turkey in Komotini, brochures, which contained ten questions and answers why the Consulate General should be closed, were distributed in the early hours of the same day.*

According to the news of daily Birlik, some statements written in the brochures and on banners were the following:

- Who needs a Turkish Consulate in our city?
- Are there any Turkish citizens in Thrace
- Are there here that many bureaucratic procedures? Especially after visa for Turkey was removed?
- Is a non-state mechanism trying to create a ghetto for our Muslim citizens
- Who is controlling the Minority's



freedom of political expression?
-Do they want to create a Turkish Minority after an ethnic cleansing by using different methods and movements to make the Pomaks and Roma to Turkish?

Already before the early general elections on 4 October 2009, a banner with the written statement “Close the Consulate General of the Republic of Turkey” had been put up by a group of about eight people and the website of

www.proxeneio-stop.gr had initiated a signature campaign for the closure of the Consulate General.

Habipoğlu: What is the community in Western Thrace which speaks Turkish and identifies itself as Turkish, if it is not a Turkish minority?

With regard to the issue, Halit Habipoğlu, President of the Federation

On 27 October 2009, the Thrace Court of Appeal discussed the case of the Xanthi Turkish Union and decided to postpone the case to 8 October 2010. According to the news of daily Birlik, the Xanthi Turkish Union, which was shut down in 1986 as result of lawsuit filed by the Governorship of Xanthi with the claim "Turkish people do not exist in Western Thrace", had appealed to the lower court of Xanthi with the request to cancel the judgment.* But the concerning court rejected the demand. Thus, the Xanthi Turkish Union of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF), stated that "The campaign, which has started with the

banner hung up on the train bridge in Komotini, is as well targeting the Consulate General of the Republic of Turkey in Komotini as it is targeting the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace living in Greece. The question of a non-state mechanism trying to create ghettos for the Muslim citizens is proving this. Furthermore, it is claimed in the distributed brochures that it is desired to create a Turkish Minority by turning the Pomaks and Roma to Turkish. The Minority, which has been left to Greece with the Peace Treaty of Lausanne, is a Turkish Minority. A campaign containing the claim that there is no Turkish Minority

in Western Thrace is as well negating the truth, as it is creating a socially dangerous situation. The aim of this campaign is to separate the majority from the Turkish Minority, which have managed to coexist peacefully in Western Thrace. It should be known that the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace does not intend to follow an exclusionary and aggressive attitude in such a conscious campaign."

* Photo: Newspaper Birlik

Grim accusations from LAOS MP against daily Birlik



Kiriakos Velopoulos*, Member of the Greek Parliament from Popular Orthodox Rally submitted a motion to the Parliament for the closure of daily Birlik. Accordingly, "Birlik" was accused of making dangerous plans to provoke Muslims in the Balkans parallel to Turkey's expansionist policies for the region of Balkans.

Groundless accusations are to be discussed at the Greek Parliament

In the news, the reason behind the motion was stated to be the news "Black wreath to the Greek Consulate". Accordingly, that news was disseminated to the readers after it was

published on the web page of the daily. Daily Birlik affirmed that the news was written by the Kamil Bitis, Secretary General of Albanian Brotherhood Association, adding that the news was taken from the web page of the Association. In the news, it was underlined that following the publishment of the news in the daily Birlik, Ilhan Tahsin owner of the newspaper was invited to the Gümülcine (Komotini) Police Station to make a deposition about the issue.

Ilhan Tahsin stated that he would try all the legal ways and protect his rights, stating that: "MP from LAOS targets me unfairly and the motion submitted by Velopoulos accuses me and my newspaper to service as the press organ

of the Consulate General of the Republic of Turkey in Komotini and this hurts myself and my newspaper seriously. Furthermore, that does not reflect the truth. I will do everything what is necessary, being in conformity with legal procedure."

Habipoglu: Groundless accusations against daily Birlik contradicts with press freedom

Halit Habipoglu, President of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF), stated that "It is very regrettable that Daily Birlik was accused of being the press organ of the Consulate General of the Republic of Turkey in Komotini. It seriously contradicts with the press freedom that a newspaper was defined as a press organ of another government or a group of people due to its opposing stance. With groundless accusations, PM from LAOS targets Ilhan Tahsin and his newspaper. We condemn the motion that targets daily Birlik on groundless accusations and express our support for Ilhan Tahsin."

* Photo: Newspaper Birlik



Journalist Ibrahim Baltalı was attacked by a group of fanatic Greeks



On 19 November 2009, Ibrahim Baltalı*, owner of the journal Rodop Rüzgârı and the website Burası Batı Trakya, was attacked by a group of fanatic Greeks while he was following the lawsuit filed with the claim that Hara Nikopoulou, Greek teacher serving at the Minority school in the village of Büyük Derbent, had been battered by Osman Kasayka. According to the news of the newspaper Olay, Ibrahim Baltalı, who was attacked at the exit of the court

building by a group of fanatic Greeks who were following the suit to support Hara Nikopoulou, unsuccessfully tried to shelter at a place near the court building. Ibrahim Baltalı, who survived through police intervention, was injured as a result of the assaulters' beat, and brought to the Alexandroupoli Faculty of Medicine for treatment.

With regard to the issue, Halit Habipoglu, President of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF), stated that "The assaults on İbrahim Baltalı cannot be accepted. ABTTF strongly condemns the attacks against Ibrahim Baltalı and wishes him to get well soon. In addition, we interpret this attack as an assault upon the freedom of news and media of the

Turkish Minority of Western Thrace. We call upon the authorities to immediately find the perpetrators and punish them. Moreover, I would like to point out here how ironically is that it was presented in the 2008 Annual Report on hate crimes in the OSCE region which was published by the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights that only one hatred based case occurred in Greece had been reported. The real problem related to hate crimes lie within the identification of hate-based crimes and actions, and the failure of reporting these."

* Photo: Newspaper Birlik



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

Avrupa Batı Trakya Türk Federasyonu

Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe
Föderation der West-Thrakien Türken in Europa
Ευρωπαϊκή Ομοσπονδία Τουρκόφωνων Δυτικής Θράκης

Bank account: Stadtparkasse Witten
Account No: 37598 BLZ: 452 500 35
Founded: 28.02.1988, VR 1954, Giessen

Wemerstr. 2, 58454 Witten - Germany
Tel.: +49 2302 91 32 91 - Fax: +49 2302 91 32 93
E-mail: info@abtff.org www.abtff.org

Executive Editor: Özkan Resit Editor: Mustafa Veli