



PACE adopted Hunault's report



On 27 January 2010, the Parliamentary Assembly of Council of Europe (PACE) discussed within the framework of the I. Ordinary General Session the report on "Freedom of religion and other human rights for non-Muslim minorities in Turkey and for the Muslim minority in Thrace (Eastern Greece)", prepared by Michel Hunault, member of the PACE Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights. On Wednesday January 27, the views of the proposed amendments were discussed along with the report and the draft resolution during the afternoon session, and accepted after the voting.

With regard to the draft resolution and the accompanying report, fourteen recommendations for amendments and one oral recommendation for sub-amendment were presented by members of the PACE. Although three amendments to the draft resolution, submitted by Göran Lindblad (EPP / CD), Boriss Cilevics (SOC), Gültekin Hajibayli (EPP / CD), Aydin Abbasov (SOC), Aydın Mirzazada (EDG), Michael Hancock (ALDE), Andreas Gross (SOC) on 26 January 2010, were recognized by the

Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights, they still were denied at the voting of the General Assembly.

The compendium of amendments, presented with regard to the text of the draft resolution, proposed to make changes in three points. The first amendment related to the issue of political participation of the Western-Thrace Turkish Minority, requested to add a new paragraph to the text of the draft decision, which withdraws the 3% electoral threshold for an independent candidate to be elected and reconsiders the redistribution of electoral districts into enlarged electoral districts. In addition, amendment requested to add a new paragraph to the text of the draft decision, regarding former Article 19 of the Greek Citizenship Law. The second amendment proposed to take steps to ensure the immediate rectification of the unfortunate consequences arising from deprivation of Greek citizenship on the basis of former Article 19 of the Citizenship Code for all persons concerned, although they no longer live in Greece, even they have acquired

citizenship of another country. Moreover the demanded amendments note that Greece, in particular, should genuinely facilitate these persons' recovery of their citizenship by removing any obstacle, including the need for them to go through the naturalisation procedure. The third and final amendment, again related to the issue of former Article 19, requested that in the draft decision, cases of people affected by the loss of their Greek citizenship due to the former regulation, should instead of been "resolve[d] as soon as possible" be replaced by the words of been "resolve[d] immediately".

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With regard to the issue, President of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe, (ABTTF), Halit Habipoğlu, made a statement as follows: "It is a pity for ABTTF, that all three amendments, which were proposed by seven parliamentary members of the PACE, were, despite ABTTF's intensive lobby work, first denied by the Commission of Legal Affairs and Human Rights, and later by the General Assembly. However, it presented an important development for us, that due to ABTTF's initiatives, fourteen amendments along with one oral sub-change regarding the report and the accompanying draft resolution, were moved to the agenda. In addition, we were pleased that all persons which accepted the proposals during the conducted voting, were outside of the members of the Turkish Delegation to PACE. This proves that, due to the work of ABTTF, the Western-Thrace Turkish Minority has a lobby on PACE level. In addition, it presented a demonstrative point, that the demand, stating that the expression of the minority, comprising Turks, Pomaks, and Roma, has a tripartite structure and therefore the Special Teacher Training Academy of Thessaloniki should provide education in Pomak and Roma language, besides in Turkish, was denied by the Committee and the General Assembly. It is a positive development that the report, written by Michel Hunault and stating the problems of the Turkish Minority of Western-Thrace, was adopted by the General Assembly with 102 yes votes, despite the lack of information. Moreover, it is important that the

general meaning of the report exceeds the Peace Treaty of Lausanne between Turkey and Greece, and recommends the two countries to increase their efforts to improve the situation of minority citizens.

What does the resolution adopted by the PACE General Assembly contain?

In the 1704(2010) resolution, which was adopted by the General Assembly, the Parliamentary Assembly expresses that minorities in Greece and Turkey are heavily influenced by history and that in 20th century the treatment of minorities was determined to be largely dependant on the course of bilateral relations. Furthermore, in the resolution, it is emphasized that the existence of "national", "religious" and "linguistic" minorities in a country does not divide the society, but rather presents an enrichment for them. Thus, it should be considered as an essential element.

The resolution expresses that Greece and Turkey should note that they are primarily responsible for the citizens living within the borders of their home country, instead of focusing their responsibility on religious minorities living in the neighbouring country. It is noted, that the principle of "reciprocity", basing on Article 45 of the Lausanne Peace Treaty, on which Greece and Turkey refer to, is interpreted in a negative sense. Furthermore, the resolution emphasizes that the implementation of the application on the base of the principle of reciprocity, which is believed to guarantee rights of

minorities despite rejection, may damage each country's national cohesion in 21st century.

Regardless of the treatment towards its citizens in the neighbouring country, the resolution demands from Greece and Turkey to not discriminate its own citizens. Moreover, the decision demands Greece and Turkey to fully provide the rights of national minorities as developed by the European Court of Human Rights case law, regardless of the fact that they have ratified and confirmed the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, or did not. Nevertheless, it is added that with the approval of the mentioned Framework Agreement and the European Convention for Regional and Minority Languages, both countries would indicate their understanding and acceptance of specific cultural characteristics.

Besides the declaration, that the right to ethnic self-identification should effectively implemented for all minority groups in democratic and pluralistic countries, be it national, religious or linguistic, both countries are also requested to take every step possible to change the perception that minorities presented as foreigners.

What does the resolution mean for the Turkish Minority of Western-Thrace?

In the resolution's special section about Greece, recommendations are given primarily to the issue of education. While the decision demands Greek authorities to take necessary steps in order to provide high quality education at minority schools, it also asks to take the the probability of founding new high-minority middle schools into consideration. Furthermore it is demanded that the Special Pedagogical Academy of Thessaloniki should provide high quality education in both, Turkish and Greek languages, to ensure that people, who are going to work at minority schools, will get an appropriate education. In the field of education, the decision calls with regard to the "Muslim Children Education"

program for financial and permanent support. With regard to the issue of foundations, the resolution requests the fully implementation of Law Nr 3627/2008 to provide concise regulations regarding the question of the legal status of foundations belonging to the Muslim minority. In addition, the text of decision states with regard to the issue of Mufti that the Muslim minority should be allowed to chose their religious leaders in a free form (without jurisdiction) due to procedures of election or appointment. Thus, the application of the Sharia Law would be

given an end, and a system compatible with the European Convention on Human Rights would be created.

Regarding the issue of former Article 19, it is stated that cases, related to persons who lost their citizenship due to the application of former Article 19, including those, who became stateless, but are not living in Greece any more, should be resolved as soon as possible. Moreover, the decision calls for full implementation of the European Court of Human Rights decisions and so for approval of foundations of associations containing the

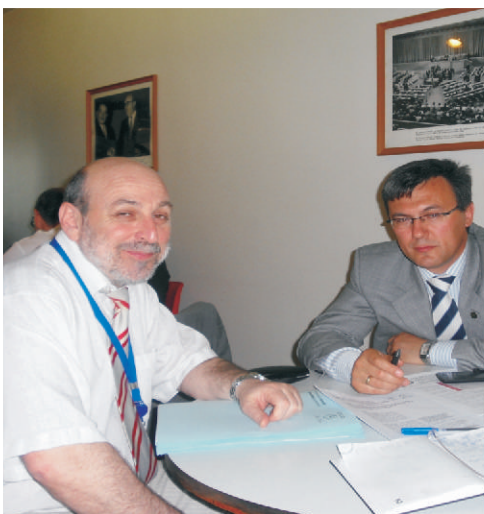
word “Turkish” in its name. In addition, the decision claims to immediately implement the law, which was prepared as well for strengthening the infrastructure and the economy of Thrace, as for the quota system of public services.

The full text of the resolution of 1704 (2010) adopted by the PACE on 27 January 2010 is available at:

<http://assembly.coe.int/Mainf.asp?link=/Documents/AdoptedText/ta10/ERES1704.htm>

Latvian parliamentarian Boriss Cilevics' report was published

On 20 January 2010, the report on “Minority protection in Europe: best practices and deficiencies in implementation of common standards” prepared by Latvian parliamentarian Boriss Cilevics, member of the Sub-Committee on Rights of Minorities in Parliamentary Assembly of Council of Europe was published.



It is expressed in the report that fair treatment of minorities which is an important priority for the Council of Europe is guaranteed, and that the Framework Convention for the

Protection of National Minorities and the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages is hoped to quickly become universally accepted standards in Europe. In addition the report indicates that yet eleven years after it came into force, eight member states of the Council of Europe have still not ratified the framework convention and even in those that have, national authorities were sometimes failing to make sure local authorities do their duty. It is noted that limited definitions were used in the report, excluding certain ethnic groups or discrimination has appeared between minorities and policies due to changing political winds.

The Parliamentary Assembly underlines in the report and the accompanying draft decision that the protection of persons belonging to national minorities as a part of the protection of human rights presents a fundamental importance for Europe’s equality, justice, stability, democratic society and peace. The Assembly reiterates its call upon the four states Belgium, Greece, Iceland and Luxembourg, which have signed the Framework convention but have still not ratified it, and four others Andorra,

France, Monaco and Turkey , which have neither signed nor ratified it, to sign and/or ratify the Framework Convention as soon as possible, without reservations or restrictive declarations.

Under the title of “non-ratification of the framework convention” the case of Greece is specifically reviewed

In the report which is examined in five sections, the situation in Greece is reviewed as a specific case in the section about “limits to the application of the framework convention in Europe”, with regard to the non-ratification of the Framework Convention. In the report’s section about “obligations of the local and regional authorities under the framework convention” it is indicated that in her report on Greece the United Nations Independent Expert on Minority Issues considered that the government must ensure that national policies are not subverted or defied by local authorities who find it more convenient to be responsive to local

prejudices. Furthermore, in the section about “limits to the application of the Framework Convention”, the rapporteur Boriss Cilevics, who visited Athens, Thessaloniki and Florina from 26- 28 February 2009, notes in the report with regard to the issue of Greece that ECRI in its 2004 report on Greece noted that persons wishing to express their Macedonian, Turkish or other identity have incurred the hostility of the population and were targets of prejudices and stereotypes, and sometimes faced discrimination, especially in the labour market”.

Due to the publication of other reports of the Parliamentary Assembly's Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights which address the issue of the Muslim minority in Thrace (Eastern Greece) as well as the situation of Roma in Europe, the rapporteur Boriss Cilevics adds that he limits his focus to the contentious issue of the Macedonian community in Greece, which has also recently been dealt with by the Council of Europe's Human Rights Commissioner and the United Nations independent expert on minority issues. The report notes that Greek authorities only recognize the 'Muslim' minority in Western Thrace, by virtue of the Lausanne Peace Treaty of 24 July 1923 and that in this context, Greece was recently commended by various bodies, including the Parliamentary Assembly's Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights, for a number of measures it had taken to enhance the rights of the Muslim minority in Greece.

Problem of Former Article 19 of the Greek Nationality Code

The issue of the former Article 19 of the Greek Nationality Code which provided that Greek citizens who were not ethnically Greek could have their citizenship revoked if they left the country and the Greek authorities believed that they did not intend to return has also been explained in the report. Furthermore the report underlines the

fact that as a consequence of this provision which is applied from 1955 to 1998, there were approximately 60,000 Greek citizens, including minors, who lost their nationality. Despite the repeal of Article 19, the consequences did not have a retroactive effect. It is also stated in the report that with the instruction of the Ministry to local authorities to accelerate the procedure for naturalizing stateless Muslims in Western Thrace and that ECRI stated in its report that no other regulations have been made to the issue although a group of persons have reacquired their citizenship. Moreover, the report takes reference to the relevant explanation of the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights and states that the European Court of Human Rights has also dealt with the situation of a Muslim Greek applicant who had fallen under Article 19 of the Citizenship Code in its recent judgment *Ze'bek v. Greece* and adds that the Court found that she had been discriminated with regard to her right to retirement pension.

Issue of freedom of association

With regard to the case of *Sidiropoulos and others v. Greece* (freedom of association and right to self-identification), Boriss Cilevics states that during his visit to Greece he expressed the fact that Greece must comply with the ECHR's decision related to the issue of the Turkish community in Greece. Moreover, this issue had been addressed in the ECRI's 2009 report on Greece.

With regard to the issue of the ratification of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, rapporteur Boriss Cilevics expresses that during his visit to Greece, no timeframe was given for ratification. Furthermore, he reminds that ECRI in its 2009 report on Greece has once called upon the Greek authorities to ratify the framework convention as soon as possible. The report contains the statement of the Human Rights

Commissioner, in which he recommends Greek Government to create a consultative mechanism, at national, regional and local levels, which would ensure an institutionalized, open, sincere and continuous dialogue with representatives of different minorities and/or representatives of individual minority groups.

Under the title of obligations of Council of Europe member states which are not Parties to the Council of Europe minority instruments, the report reminds that the European Human Rights Convention guarantees, inter alia, essential rights for persons belonging to minorities: freedom of expression, and freedom of thought, conscience and religion, as well as freedom of association.

With regard to the report, President of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe, (ABTTF), Halit Habipoğlu, made a statement as follows: “The focus of the report, written by the Latvian parliamentarian Boriss Cilevics, is not set on the Western Thrace Turkish Minority and its problems, because Michel Hunault prepared a special report on the issue of the Western Thrace Turkish minority. Despite, the report presents the lack of regulations in Greece, due to the non-ratification of the Framework Convention. Moreover, it is very pleasant that the report deals with the problems of the Turkish Minority,

related to the issue of Article 19 and freedom of association. With the report of Boriss Cilevics, with whom ABTTF is in contact for many years, and who in addition is a minority-friendly politician, four reports have been published about the issue of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace, by the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly during 2009. Thus, the issue of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace has been brought to the PACE agenda”.

The full report written by Boriss Cilevics can be reached at the link <http://assembly.coe.int/Documents/WorKingDocs/Doc10/EDOC12109.pdf>

ABTTF presented its study on the Media Law to international institutions and organizations

On 7 January 2010, Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) prepared a study on Law 3592/2007 which is known as Greek Media known and presented the related study to international institutions and organizations. The National Radio and Television Council (ESR) issued a precautionary recommendation based on the provisions of the related law that Tele Radio 104.2 FM must broadcast 25 percent in Greek language.

ABTTF: The law of media violates the right to freedom of expression and media

The study presents freedom of expression and media as a fundamental human right which should be protected and encouraged. In addition, the study examines in detail, that provisions of Law 3592/2007 on „Media Organizations Concentration and Licensing and Other Provisions“, which was adopted on July 16, 2007, must be revised. Consequently, the law is indicated as a violation of the right of freedom of expression and media in general terms and especially for those local media organizations, which operate in a smaller scale.

Furthermore, the provision of the relevant law, which also applies to regions with a minimum population of 100.000 people, and which additionally regulates for radio owners to own a minimum capital of 100.00 Euros for those broadcasting news, and 60.000 Euros for those broadcasting music, makes it almost impossible for broadcasting radio stations in the poorest region of Greece, Western Thrace. Secondly it is expressed in the study that the provision of the relevant law which brings a requirement for

radio stations whether they broadcast music or news to make broadcasting for 24 hours, burdens additional costs for small-scale radio stations. In violation of International Convention on Civil and Political Rights, the requirements that the main broadcasting language for radio stations must be Greek, and that a certain number of full-term staff must be employed presents a clear violation of the freedom of media and expression of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace.

The decision on Tele Radio FM threatens the existence of minority media organizations

ABTTF notes in the study that Law 3592/2007 has already had a negative impact on local and small-scale media companies and that the law threatens the existence of radio organizations belonging to the Western Thrace Turkish Minority. As an example of this issue, the precautionary recommendation for Tele Radio 104.2 FM issued on October 19, 2009 by the National Radio and Television Council was explained in detail in the study. Particularly attention was given to the Council's expression that if the recommendation was not taken into consideration the Council could resort to tougher sanctions.

In addition, the study notes that the relevant law has been explained in detail in the 4th Country Report on Greece of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI). ABTTF notes that the OSCE Representative on the Freedom of Media already expressed his concerns on the relevant law in 2007. Furthermore, ABTTF urges the Greek Government to review Law 3592/2007 in accordance with international



standards about the free flow of information and media pluralism and ensure that the diverse and pluralistic media environment is guaranteed in Greece. Furthermore ABTTF requests support and invites relevant international institutions and organizations to act immediately.

Reply to ABTTF's study on the law of media



ABTTF's study on the 3592/2007 Greek law about the law of media was replied. On 7 January 2010, ABTTF presented its study on the mentioned law of media, in which the Greek National Radio and Television Council (ESR) precautionary recommended Tele Radio 104.2 FM to broadcast 25 percent in Greek language, to international institutions and organizations. The response letters of 10 February 2010, emphasize that ABTTF's study was taken into consideration and has been forwarded to authorized sub-organizations and institutions.

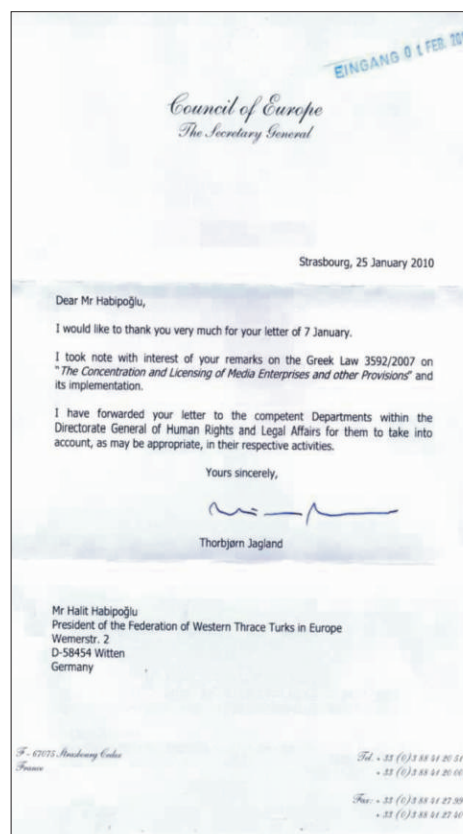
The response, sent by former Chairman of the Parliamentary Assembly of Council of Europe, Lluís Maria de Puig i Olive, contains the information that the issue of freedom of association of the Turkish minority of Western Thrace, from 17 December 2009, and the issue related to the law of media from 7 January 2010, were forwarded to the PACE Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights. Moreover, the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, Thorbjørn Jagland, emphasizes that he has forwarded the study to the Directorate General of Human Rights and Legal Affairs, by expressing that he has noted the issues that have been presented in ABTTF's study, so that it will be dealt with the issue within the

jurisdiction of the General Directorate.

Furthermore, in the response letter, sent by the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), the Commission notes that the concerns of ECRI about the implementation of the mentioned law, which were also expressed in the ABTTF study, were presented in the 2009 Greece Country Report. The Commission also expresses in the response letter its recommendation towards Greece in the report, to review the mentioned issue with regard to media pluralism and the issue of free movement of information, by taking international standards into account. Moreover, the Commission expresses that they have noted their concerns about the impact of the mentioned law on small-scale regional and minority media, as presented in the ABTTF study. ECRI also expresses that the ABTTF letter will be archived as a constant observation of racism and racial discrimination in Greece, as soon as the recommendations of the Commission are implemented.

With regard to the issue, Halit Habipoğlu, President of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF), stated the following: "Via letter, ABTTF is informing international organizations and institutions about issues, related to the problems of the Western Thrace

Turkish minority. The study about the law of media is an example of studies conducted in this context. It is a positive step for us, that letters are responded with the expression, that the subject is forwarded to relevant sub-organizations. ABTTF will continue its studies in this direction and will work, so that different problems will be taken into account by the international community."



Ahmet Haciosman brought the issue of former Article 19 on the agenda of the Assembly Commission



citizenship to collateral and third-country nationals, who have been residing legally for years in Greece, has been discussed.

Haciosman expressed that a number of Western Thrace Turks were expatriated in an arbitrary way, due to former article 19 of the Greek Citizenship Law, and noted, that many victims of the mentioned law were Greek minority members. In addition, Haciosman mentioned that since Article 19 was not repealed retroactively in 1998, today a number of expatriated members of the minority are faced with negative consequences. Haciosman, who said that a definite solution of the problem should be reached, also asked to carefully review his proposal at the commission, which deals with the issue of the draft granting citizenship to immigrants which have been residing in the country legally.

the following: "The fact that Mr. Deputy Ahmet Haciosman has brought up the issue of the Western Thrace Turkish minority at the commission, during a period where the PASOK government has prepared a study with the aim to improve the issue, is an important development. As it is known, ABTTF has conducted an important study about the issue of former Article 19, at the Parliamentary Assembly of Council of Europe, and organized a signature campaign for the solution of the problem. With regard to the issue, ABTTF moved the problems of former Article 19 to the international arena in 2005, by meeting the Secretary General of the Council of Europe of the period, Terry Davis. With the ongoing process, ABTTF also met with the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, Thomas Hammarberg. Moreover, ABTTF managed that a written question with regard to the former Article 19 had been submitted to the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe. In addition, the fact that the reports, prepared by the PACE members Michel Hunault and Boriss Cilevics, contain the issue of former Article 19, indicate the success of ABTTF's long-term studies."

Habipoğlu: ABTTF moved the issue of Article 19 to the international arena

With regard to the issue, Halit Habipoglu, President of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) stated

On 10 February 2010, Pasok deputy of Rhodope, Ahmet Haciosman, raised the issue of Western Thrace Turks, who have lost their citizenship due to the former Article 19 of the Greek Citizenship Law, on the agenda of the Commission for Public Administration, Public Order and Justice. Haciosman claimed that an additional substance should be included to the bill, returning stateless members of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace their Greek citizenship, towards the Commission, where the draft law about granting



Thrace Court of Appeal rejected the application of the South Evros Education and Culture Association

On 7 December 2009, the Thrace Court of Appeal rejected the petition for foundation of the Western Thrace Minority South Evros Education and Culture Association. According to the news from 13 December 2009 on the website of the periodical Azınlıkça, the Thrace Court of Appeal rejected the petition for establishment of the association, relying on the decision of the Alexandropolis Civil Court of First Instance. Due to the rejection by the Alexandropolis Civil Court of First Instance basing on vague expressions by containing the word "minority" in its title and in its petition, the Western Thrace Minority South Evros Education and Culture Association had applied to the Thrace Court of Appeal in May 2009. After the decision of the Court of Appeal, the association announced that it was going to move the case to the Supreme Court.

The Western Thrace Minority South Evros Education and Culture Association, whose petition for establishment was denied on the grounds that the word "minority" in its name and in its petition would have an ambiguous meaning, shares the same fate as the Evros Prefecture Minority Youth Association. With regard to the Evros Prefecture Minority Youth

Association, in October 2007, the European Court of Human Rights held unanimously that Greece had violated the Article 11 (freedom of assembly and association) of the European Convention on Human Rights. After the Evros Prefecture Minority Youth Association was given justice by the ECHR, the association re-applied for establishment to the Alexandropolis Civil Court of First Instance, but was rejected. The result of this case, taken to appeal, is still expected.

With regard to the issue, Halit Habipoğlu, President of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF), stated that "The fact that the rejection of the application for establishment of the Western Thrace Minority South Evros Education and Culture Association by the Thrace Court of First Instance is a sad decision. Even though the ECHR had condemned Greece on the basis of three decisions with regard to the freedom of association of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace, the Minority's problem concerning freedom of association has still found no solution. Although it does not contained the word "Turkish" in its title, the petition for establishment of the Western Thrace Minority South Evros Education and



Culture Association has been rejected. With regard to the the Minority's problem concerning freedom of association, ABTTF has realized studies and been reporting the situation to the international institutions and organizations. ABTTF will immediately take the decision of the case onto international level."

Komotini Civil Court of First Instance rejected the application of the Cultural Association of Turkish Women of the Region of Rodopi

On 4 February 2010, the Komotini Civil Court of First Instance refused the application of the Cultural Association of Turkish Women of the Region of Rodopi, asking for counterdemand of

the decision, which rejected the petition for organization. In addition, the association had applied for a registered establishment.

According to the news of the periodical Azınlıkça, the Civil Court of First Instance refused the application of the Cultural Association of Turkish Women of the Region of Rodopi with the

justification that none of the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR), excluding criminal cases, are required to be implemented in the Greek domestic law. Lawyers of the Cultural Association of Turkish Women of the Region of Rodopi announced that they were going to appeal the decision of the case, whose legal ground is not evident.

On 27 March 2008 in the case of Emin and Others v. Greece (application no. 34144/05), the ECHR held unanimously that Greece had violated Article 11 (freedom of assembly and association) of the European Convention on Human Rights. Greece had rejected to grant permission for establishment to the Cultural Association of Turkish Women of the Region of Rodopi on the grounds that the Lausanne Peace Treaty “did not recognize a Turkish, but a Muslim

minority in Western Thrace” and “due to the nationality of the founders of the association, the name of the association could influence public opinion in a wrong way”. In addition, the ECHR held that the finding of a violation constituted in itself just satisfaction for the non-pecuniary damage suffered by the applicants, namely Hülya Emin and six others, in the case of Emin and Others.

After the decision of the Court, the Cultural Association of Turkish Women of the Region of Rodopi applied to the Rhodope Civil Court of First Instance. But in June 2009, the Court stated the invalidness of the case due to improper application, because Orhan Hacıbram, lawyer of the association, was not registered in the province of Rhodope, but in the prefecture of Xanthi.

With regard to the subject matter, Halit

Habipoğlu, President of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) stated the following: “The decision of the Komotini Civil Court of First Instance demonstrates the fact that the problems of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace, regarding the freedom of association, have not experienced any changes, and are still continuing without improvement. During the period of the New Democracy Government, Foreign Minister Dora Bakoyannis had stated that they had been preparing prepared a study on the reflection of the ECHR decisions into the domestic law. Now, with its study on the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace, we expect the PASOK Government to perform an improvement of the situation by granting the associations' legal status, and permitting the establishment of new associations. Otherwise, in Greece, the concept of democracy and human rights will be destroyed in an irreparable way.”

Greek Government repeats the official state thesis on the issue of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace

During an interview he gave to the “Real News” daily on 22 November 2009, the Greek Deputy Foreign Minister Dimitris Droutsas replied to the question, in relation to the expected meeting between the Greek Prime Minister and Foreign Minister George Papandreou and the Prime Minister of Turkey, R. Tayyip Erdogan, whether Greece was discussing minority issues in Thrace as Erdoğan had asked that Greece did not discuss issues relating to Greek citizens with any foreign government.

Droutsas answered as follows: “I will be categorical. This government does not discuss issues relating to Greek citizens with any foreign governments. Anyone can say what they want. We are not going into any such discussion.

We are a country with a deep democratic tradition and respect in humanitarian values and human rights. So there is no such discussion, a discussion within the framework, in fact, of a false notion of reciprocity that is non-existent.”

Papandreou's letter of reply curiously expected, no hope for the Turkish Minority

According to the news released on the website of the Greek newspaper “Ta Nea” on 25 November 2009, Athens does not agree to hold dialogue with Turkey on all topics. In the regarding news, it is stated that Deputy Foreign Minister Dimitris Droutsas, who was

speaking before the the parliamentary committee on foreign relations and defence, said with regard to Erdogan's suggestion of starting a dialogue on all topics between Athens and Ankara: ““We are not afraid of the direct contact; we are striving for it”. According to the news, Droutsas expressed that the Greek positions were based on strong arguments and the international law, and hinted Costas Karamanlis' government was discussing with Ankara also the Muslim minority issue in Thrace. However, the newspaper wrote that later foreign ministry officials had dissociated themselves from that statement of Dimitris Droutsas.

The Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan had sent a three-page-letter to

the Greek Prime Minister and Foreign Minister George Papandreou on 30 October 2009 in which he declared that his government had the firm will to improve the relationship with Greece in all areas, and was ready to address all the existing problem, and put forward a number of proposals presenting new opportunities for cooperation between the two countries. The expectations for Papandreou's reply are optimistic, yet with regard to the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace, in view of the remarks made by the Deputy Foreign Minister Droutsas, it is expected that Greece will repeat its official state view.

Habipoğlu: Issue of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace as an indicator of sincerity for the Greek Government

With regard to the subject matter, Halit Habipoğlu, President of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF), stated that „Although Greece has the right not to discuss issues relating to Greek citizens with any foreign government, however, it seems to forget that the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace has been left on its territory through the Lausanne Peace Treaty signed between Greece and

Turkey. With regard to the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace, of which status and rights have been defined by this bilateral treaty, Turkey has the right and the obligation arising from the treaty to ask for discussing the problems by starting a dialogue process. But, as stated by Papandreou before the early elections on 4 October 2009, Greece tries to push Turkey outside the issue by interpreting the demand related to the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace as its sovereign authority. Comments on the bases of reciprocity also serve for this purpose. The desire to prevent that minorities are abused by states and governments for political purpose lies under the comment that reciprocity principle does not apply to human and minority rights. We surely share this comment. But history has shown that the Turkish Minority was always directly and adversely affected by the Turkish-Greek relationship. On the other hand, Greece emphasizes in turn that problems associated with the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate in Istanbul do not fall under the sovereignty of Turkey, instead interprets the issue as a problem between the European Union (EU) and Turkey with a view to the EU candidacy of Turkey. Vis-à-vis Turkey, which is obligated as a candidate country to the EU to meet the Copenhagen criteria in a satisfactory manner, Greece as member



of the EU has had to implement already the rights and obligations belonging to the norms and values of democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. We are not talking about rhetoric here, but about real implementation. Relevant international reports on Greece indicate that Greece has not a clean record in the field of human and minority rights. If Greece is not willing to discuss issues relating to its citizens with Turkey, it must fully and satisfactorily grant collective minority rights to the members of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace who are Greek citizens, and actively encourage this through positive practices. The issue of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace is an indicator of sincerity for the Greek Government. If the Government is really sincere in its attitude, it should immediately take the necessary steps.“

Turkey moved the issue of the Western Thrace Turkish Minority on the Greek agenda

Prime Minister of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, commented in an interview published in the EU- Turkey relations news magazine on January 2010, in response to the question if the opening of the Halki Seminary is part of his short-term program, with the issue of the Western Thrace Turkish minority and stated the following:

“The issue of the Halki Seminary requires a multi-dimensional process. An all around investigation of the subject is

required, basing on our legislation and educational system. The work of our minister friends and our institutions related to the topic continues. But of course, also demands of our Turkish minority in Western Thrace towards Greece need to be taken into consideration. Greek Government also needs to incline to these issues and bring a solution to the problems of clergy, leadership, unemployment and issues related to minority associations.”

Erdoğan: Demands of the Western Thrace Turkish Minority should be taken into consideration

Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who often mentioned the problems of the Rum citizens during his expressions, stated the following: “I am not only discussing the issue of the Rum citizens, but also issues of my 72 million citizens, because there problems are my problems. Hopefully, with the process started with our democratic expansion in

the direction of solving this chronic problem, which is disturbing our country, we will be able to solve the issue of our citizens belonging to minority communities. In fact, we have taken important steps in this direction the last 7 years. Since 2004, we have been collecting the issues of the minority on the Assesment Board. We managed to overcome some of the hardships related to minority foundations by passing the New Foundations Law. I also talked personally to representatives of the minority on various occasions, and am still doing. As you know, I recently came together with them at a meeting on the islands which was also open to public.”

Gül: If a large amount of problems exist there (in Western Thrace), you can become incapable of doing the things you really wish to do

On the day of the articles’ publishment, Turkish President Abdullah Gül answered the questions of Hasan Cemal and Cengiz Candar during the TV programm “Experiences speak” on CNN Turkish Television. President Gül raised the issue of the Western Thrace Turkish minority in response to the question of his ideas about the Halki Theological School. Gül stated the following:”If very

close to you, remained in an another country, your minority is living, and even though their fundamental rights and freedom are guaranteed, and they are a full member of the EU, if they still face serious problems, then you can become incapable of doing the things you really wish to do. Gül, indicating that the Halki Theological School has been closed down, pointed on Greece by stating the following: ”We inevitably discuss this issue with our neighbour. There are Muslim Turkish citizens in neighbouring countries who were left outside the borders of Turkey when boundaries were drawn. I believe that it is not very accurate to take into consideration the issue of reciprocity, when looking at the issue of fundamental rights and freedom. I will always be generous, this is our generosity.

Habipoğlu: I invite Prime Minister Papandreou to start the dialogue process with Turkey

With regard to the issue, Halit Habipoğlu, President of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) stated the following: In my written statement, regarding the explanation of the Fener Greek Patriarch Bartholomeos, I expressed Turkey’s rights and obligations arising from the Lausanne

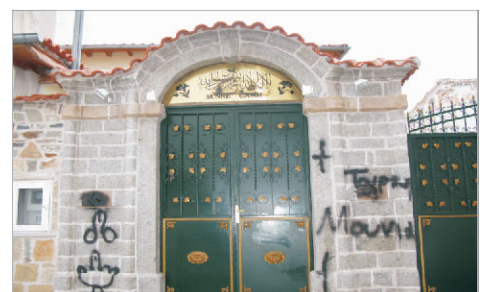


Treaty and noted that the issue of the Western Thrace Turkish Minority is not only a matter regarding the field of national sovereignty. We stated that in the field of fundamental rights and freedoms not reciprocity, but a simultaneous monitoring process should be taken. In the early days of the new year, the comments of Prime Minister Erdogan and President Gül, support a position confirming this. However, our country Greece had exhibited a strict attitude by stating that it will not discuss any issues of its citizens with a foreign country. We present this as a violation of the Lausanne Peace Treaty and repeat our request that Turkey and Greece need to meet at one table to discuss the issues of the minority. This process should start immediately. I invite our Prime Minister and Foreign Minister George Papandreou to immediately take action for the initiation of this process.”

Sunne District Mosque in Xanthi was attacked

On 6 December 2009, the Sunne District Mosque was attacked by an unidentified person, or an unidentified group of persons. According to the written statement by Ahmet Mete, Chairman of the Consultative Committee of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace and elected Mufti of Xanthi, on Sunday night, around 11:40 pm, windows of the Sunne District Mosque were broken by stones thrown during the attack, and slogans were written on walls of the mosque. After the imam of the mosque Remzi Saban had immediately reported the incident to the police, they investigated the crime scene and detected that two windows of the mosque, one at the entrance and one on the side showing to the direction of Mekka, had been broken.

With regard to the issue, Halit Habipoglu, President of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF), stated that “First, as ABTTF we strongly condemn the attack on the Sunne Mosque located very near the Mufti office of Xanthi in the city center, and hope that the perpetrators will be found soon. Furthermore, ABTTF demands that the freedom of religion and worship of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace is guaranteed. When I visited the elected Mufti of Xanthi Ahmet Mete, I also visited the Sunne Mosque and lastly performed the Ramadan ritual prayer there. We deeply regret due to the attack on the mosque. The attack on the Sunne Mosque in Xanthi presents an attack on the freedom of religion and worship of the Turkish Minority of



Western Thrace. The creation of events, which increase tensions in Western Thrace, are damaging the social peace between the minority and the majority in the region. The Turkish Minority of Western Thrace will not allow that the atmosphere of peace, which has been maintained for years on the basis of mutual respect and tolerance,



First meeting of Young ABTTF in Witten

Young ABTTF, created within the framework of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF), had its first meeting on 6 February 2010 in Witten, Germany. The meeting was held at the ABTTF office and had the topic of the Young ABTTF configuration on the

Reşit, external relations responsible; Gökhan Kocaveli, media responsible; Gülşah Reşit, internal relations responsible ; Caner Habipoğlu, responsible for internet and broadcast.

At the end of the meeting, primarily the

the coming-up cultural trip to Istanbul were discussed. At the meeting, Young ABTTF decided to participate with a group in the YEN Macedonia seminary, with the purpose to realize its first lobby work. Secondly, a decision was made, regarding the cultural trip to Istanbul with the aim to get to know the Turkish history. In addition, at the end of the meeting, persons were directed, responsible for the organization of cultural activities.

With regard to the meeting, Young ABTTF President, Fatma Resit, stated the following: "Young ABTTF realized its first meeting, decisions regarding the organizational structure and the functions were made, and the distributions of tasks were determined. With its dynamic structure and energy, Young ABTTF will realize cultural and social activities next to internal events, within the framework of the Federation. For our internal work, we have the goal to bring Western Thrace Turkish youths together, to discuss the issues of our folk. Beside, we will organize cultural and social activities for members of the Western Thrace Turkish minority living in Germany. Moreover, with regard to Young ABTTF external work, we will realize lobby work within Europe. Thus, our first plan is to participate in the YEN Macedonia seminar".



agenda. Directed by Young ABTTF President Fatma Resit, technical issues, including the creation of a logo and a website were discussed. Furthermore, working groups, associated to the organizational structure, were created, and in addition, staff members and their duties were determined.

decision for an establishment of a Young ABTTF website, with the aim to inform young people about current problems in Western Thrace, including the Western Thrace Turkish history and the work of Young ABTTF, was made. Secondly, at the end of the meeting a member was given responsibility for the creation of the website.

At the end of the meeting, persons, responsible for the implementation of Young ABTTF and the areas of their duties were defined: According to decision: Murat Murat, secretary; Funda

In addition, with regard to the topic of upcoming activities, the participation of Young ABTTF at the Youth of European Nationalities seminar in Macedonia, and

ABTTF Newsletter

The ABTTF newsletter in four languages, namely in Turkish, English, Greek and German, is five years old.

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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