

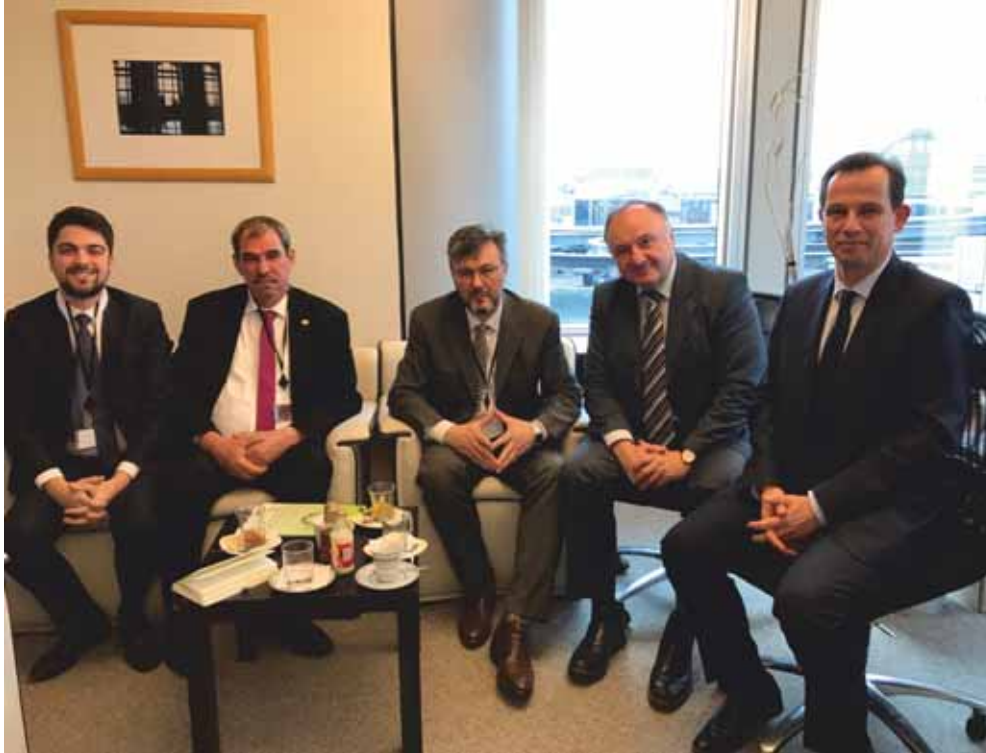
Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europa Newsletter



NGO in Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations
Member of the Fundamental Rights Platform (FRP) of the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights
Member of the Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN)

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Working visit by ABTTTF to Brussels



The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTTF) paid on 7 March 2018 a working visit to Brussels, the capital of the European Union (EU). During the working visit, ABTTTF President Halit Habip Oğlu and ABTTTF Vice President Sami Yusuf, who were accompanied by Aykut Garipoğlu from the Brussels Office of ABTTTF, met with the members of the European Parliament (MEP) Pal Csaky (EPP, Slovakia) and Csaba Sogor (EPP, Romania) along with Günther Dauwen, Director of the European Free Alliance (EFA).

[Current developments regarding the Turkish community in Western Thrace were conveyed and Brussels oriented joint activities were discussed](#)

The first meeting within the scope of the working visit was held with the MEPs Pal Csaky belonging to the Hungarian minority in Slovakia and Csaba Sogor belonging to the Hungarian minority in Romania in the Csaky's office in the EP. ABTTTF President Halit Habip Oğlu thanked Csaky on behalf of the Turkish community in Western Thrace for the effort he has made for adoption of the resolution on "Protection and Non-discrimination with regard to Minorities in the EU Member States" on 7 February 2018 at the plenary session of the EP. Halit Habip Oğlu informed the MEPs about the problems having been faced by the Turkish community in Western Thrace in the fields of education and religion, and stated Greek authorities keep ignoring insistently their demand for opening bilingual minority kindergartens in

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Western Thrace, several legal proceedings were taken against the muftis elected by the Turkish community in Western Thrace on the ground of “usurpation of the office”, the Elected Mufti of Xanthi Ahmet Mete was sentenced to 7 months imprisonment with 3 year-suspension at the trial held in November 2017 in Thessaloniki.

During the meeting with EFA Director Günther Dauwen at the ABTTF Brussels Office, ABTTF President Habip Oğlu provided him with information on the



current problems of the Turkish community in Western Thrace in the fields of educational and religious autonomy and freedom of association. Furthermore, the resolution adopted by

the EP last February pertinent to national minorities in the EU and its impacts on the minorities in Europe were also discussed.

Turcophobic, racist statement by Greek Former Foreign Minister Pangalos

Halit Habip Oğlu: “We strongly condemn the scandalous, racist and fascist statement of Theodoros Pangalos.”

Theodoros Pangalos, Former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Greece, signed a scandal with his statement he made for Radio Skai. Replying to the question related to interventions of Turkey in Aegean, Pangalos said: “The only good Turk is a dead Turk. I believe in this. Because I could find no good Turk. They lack basic values. A Turk has not got a sense of justice”. The Racist and fascist statement by Pangalos caused a great reaction within the Turkish community in Western.

“On behalf of the Western Thrace Turks living in Europe, we as the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe strongly condemn the scandalous, racist and fascist statement by Theodoros Pangalos who served in the past as the Minister for Foreign Affairs in our country. We demand from all politicians who would simplify the statement of Pangalos as a personal statement to be brave, and declare loudly that they cannot accept any turcophobic, racist and fascist discourse and condemn Pangalos! We expect this explanation



from our government and the ones who seek to govern our country as well as from the Greek people to show a prudent approach and condemn the racist, fascist and hate speech in politics,” said

Halit Habip Oğlu, President of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF).

*Image: www.vice.com

Historical success of the national minorities in Europe!

Dear Readers,

It is a wonderful feeling to be one of the 1.2 million people!

I have immense pleasure to share with you this good news. The campaign of the "Minority SafePack Initiative" (MSPI), known as 1 million signatures campaign among Western Thrace Turks, which was launched for establishing a protection mechanism in Europe-wide and strengthening linguistic and cultural diversity for national minorities living in Europe by the Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN), of which the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) is the member and myself is in the presidium as the Vice-President for about five years, was closed on 3 April 2018. Within the signature campaign launched at the FUEN 2016 Congress in Cluj Napoca, 1,215,789 signatures were collected in a year. This is a historical success!

In order for the campaign to be validated, it was required that at least 1 million signatures must be collected from at least seven EU member states. A historical success was achieved, and national threshold was exceeded in the campaign in eleven countries. In Romania 303,695, Slovakia 57,890, Hungary 569,813, Latvia 8,252, Croatia 18,884, Spain 53,772, Denmark 12,194, Lithuania 20,284, Slovenia 6,895, Italy 60,545 and Bulgaria 24,691 signatures were collected.

When we closely look at the figures, it is remarkable that more signatures were collected than the minimum number required to exceed the national threshold in Bulgaria. Because no minority organizations are member of the FUEN in Bulgaria. It is very pleasing that the campaign conducted within the country in cooperation with the FUEN and the Movement for Rights and Freedoms (HÖH), the political party of Turkish minority in Bulgaria, has achieved such a successful result! This situation also counts for Spain. There is no FUEN member minority organization in Spain. However, more than 53 thousand statements of support were received for the campaign. And another striking point was that although there are many FUEN member

organizations in our country Greece, number of people who provided support to the campaign in Greece has been only 5,166, while 15,750 signatures were required to exceed the national threshold in the country.

Why is it so?

When we consider the eleven countries which have passed the national threshold, we see that every national minority living in eleven countries I have listed above, has its own political party. Thanks to the organized structure of the political parties and their hard work on the ground, it has been possible to collect so many signatures in these countries. Thus, we have seen how important a proper campaign management is.

As a result, the FUEN has written a history in real terms! Hereby, from the deep of my heart, I would like to congratulate Loránt Vincze, the President of FUEN, who has worked through night and day for the campaign to be successful. He deserves a big applause and appreciation for his determination and commitment in this tough campaign.

With its initiative, FUEN has presented nine proposals. First of these proposals is the protection and promotion of cultural and linguistic diversity, second is funding programmes for small linguistic communities, third is the creation of a language diversity center, fourth is the inclusion of the protection of national minorities and the promotion of cultural and linguistic diversity among the objectives of EU's regional development funds, fifth is the conduct of research about the added value of minorities to the EU societies and Europe, sixth is equality for stateless minorities, seventh is single copyright law in Europe-wide for services and broadcasting in mother language, eighth is freedom of service and reception of audio-visual content in the minority regions, and the ninth is block exemption of regional and state support for minority culture, media and cultural heritage conservation. And now the EU Commission must take a step!

In other words, the European Union can no longer remain silent to the national minorities in



Europe, crying "Enough is enough, we also exist in Europe". Because, according to the Lisbon Treaty, the European Union is founded on the values of respect for human rights including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. Furthermore, the Treaty clearly states that the EU shall respect cultural and linguistic diversity and the Union will ensure that Europe's cultural heritage is safeguarded and enhanced. However, as we all know, what writes on the paper is not the same with what it happens. It is not enough to be right, there is also need for to be strong! There are more hot topics on the agenda of the EU like the issue of Syria, refugee crisis and Brexit.

This situation should not constitute an impediment for granting the rights for the minorities in Europe, now the EU Commission has got a substantial responsibility in this matter. Nevertheless, political parties and MEPs with minority background in the European Parliament will surely be the followers of this issue! And since the European Parliament elections will take place in 2019, so to say, the cards will be re-shuffled. National minorities in Europe must also show their strength by taking part in the elections in their own countries.

As a final word...

It is a great feeling to be one of the 1.2 million people who provided support to the campaign! Having witnessed this historical moment, the big step taken in the way to create a general protection mechanism for the national minorities in Europe accommodates a great hope for the minorities living in Europe!

We did it!

Sincerely,

Halit Habip Oğlu
ABTTF President

Working visit by ABTTF to Strasbourg

At the meetings held within the scope of the visit, the problems of the Turkish community in Western Thrace awaiting solution, primarily implementation by Greece of the ECtHR judgments, were expressed.

The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) paid a working visit to Strasbourg on 23-24 January 2018 parallel to the Winter Session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE). ABTTF President Halit Habip Oğlu accompanied by Melek Kırmacı Arık, International Affairs Director of ABTTF, had a range of meetings with the members of PACE and officers of the Council of Europe during the working visit.

On Tuesday, 23 January 2018, ABTTF President Habip Oğlu first met with Dimitrios Kalogiros and Nikolaos Sitaropoulos from the Department for the Execution of Judgments of the ECtHR of the Council of Europe. At the meeting Habip Oğlu exchanged his opinion on the law adopted by the Greek Parliament on 10 October 2017 regarding implementation of the ECtHR judgments against Greece by the Greek local courts and conveyed his concerns about the subject matter. Habip Oğlu stated the Xanthi Turkish Union, which has been closed down on the ground that it has the word "Turkish" in its name and won the case against Greece at the ECtHR in 2008, has already applied to the Court of Appeal of Thrace following the adoption of the law, and the case will be heard on 9 February 2018. He requested from the Committee of the Ministers of the Council of Europe to examine further the Bekir-Ousta Group cases pertinent to the associations of the Turkish community in Western Thrace.

During the meeting with Evangelos Venizelos, member of the Greek national



delegation, who is drafting the report on execution of the ECtHR judgments by the member states of the Council of Europe, ABTTF President Habip Oğlu conveyed the problems of the Turkish community in Western Thrace in the field of freedom of association and said with the restrictions brought in by the new law adopted by the Greek Parliament, the way to the execution of the ECtHR

judgments has been obstructed.

On the same day, ABTTF President Habip Oğlu met with the Chairperson of the Turkish national delegation at the PACE and Former Minister of Youth and Sports Akif Çağatay Kılıç and congratulated him on his new assignment. At the meeting, Habip Oğlu introduced Kılıç the ABTTF and the Working Group of Turkic Minorities and Communities (TAG) within the Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN) and conveyed the problems of the Turkish community in Western Thrace.

ABTTF President Habip Oğlu met on Wednesday, 24 January 2018 with the members of the Turkish national delegation at the PACE Mustafa Yeneroğlu, Cemalettin Kani Torun and Zuhul Topçu and the Acting Speaker of the Parliament of Kosovo and deputy of the Turkish Democratic Party of Kosovo (KDTP) Müferra Şinik. During the meeting, the situation of the Turkish minorities and communities living in the Balkans were discussed.

During the meeting with the Former Federal Minister of Justice of Germany Sabine Leutheusser-Schnarrenberger, ABTTF President Habip Oğlu introduced her the Turkish community in Western Thrace and conveyed its problems He noted Greece constantly intervenes in the educational and religious autonomy of the Western Thrace Turks.

During the last meeting of the working visit with the Chairperson of the PACE Sub-Committee on the Rights of Minorities Damien Thiery, ABTTF President Halit Habip Oğlu, provided him with information on the problems of the Turkish community in Western Thrace and articulated the ECtHR judgments related to the associations of the Western Thrace Turkish community has not been implemented by Greece since 2008.

ABTTF attended the UN Forum on Minority Issues

The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) attended the 10th Session of the UN Forum on Minority Issues organized on 30 November-1 December 2017 at UN House in Geneva. The session with the theme “Minority Youth: Towards Diverse and Inclusive Societies” was attended by Melek Kırmacı Arık, ABTTF International Relations Director and Funda Reşit Taştekin, member of ABTTF International Affairs and Lobby Group. At the meeting where ABTTF and Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association (WTMUGA) represented the Turkish community, Western Thrace Turkish representatives conveyed the problems in the minority education system especially in the field of bilingual minority kindergartens.



ABTTF: Despite the demand by Western Thrace Turkish community the Greek government refuses to open bilingual kindergartens

Melek Kırmacı Arık, ABTTF International Relations Director, who spoke in the third session on participation of minority youth in public life, stated that the Greek government, with a claim to improve operation of minority schools, has made many interventions in the Turkish education system with autonomous structure. ABTTF indicated that this causes structural problems in Turkish schools which resulted a low-quality education. Nevertheless, ABTTF expressed that there are no bilingual kindergartens where Turkish children could learn their mother tongue and further noted that despite many applications by Western Thrace Turkish community the Greek government rejects to open bilingual kindergartens.

ABTTF pointed out that 0.5 % quota in

admission to higher education has got a slight impact to due to low quality minority education system and noted that 0.5 % quota provided in the employment in public service is not implemented. ABTTF noted there is a need for a long-term programme for participation of Western Thrace Turkish community youth into public life and labour market.

In its right of reply at the end of the first day, Greece kept its silence about the demand for bilingual kindergartens by the Western Thrace Turkish community and rather replied that a pilot project which provided working of a minority member with command of both languages with the Greek teacher at in pre-schools classes in six state kindergartens in the region. Greece further claimed that that 0.5% quota in

the public service is being implemented and it noted that this quota is being implemented in the border police.

Representing the WTMUGA, Asst. Professor Ali Hüseyinoğlu and Pervin Hayrullah participated at the meeting. Ali Hüseyinoğlu spoke in the fourth session on minority media in digital age and stated that there are no bilingual kindergartens in Western Thrace and further added that the existing primary schools get less in number. In response to WTMUGA, Greece claimed that “Muslim minority in Thrace” has got special rights along with all rights of citizenship. Greece also noted that a four-year programme has been established for the formation of Turkish language teachers in the university in Thessaloniki.

Written Statement by ABTTF to the UN about the issue of associations

The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) submitted a written statement entitled, "The pending question of the freedom of association of the Turkish community in Western Thrace, Greece and non-execution of the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights" to the 37th Regular Session of the United Nations Human Rights Council held on 26 February-23 March 2018, in Geneva, Switzerland. In its statement, ABTTF noted that associations with the word "Turkish" in their names were dissolved and new associations were not registered despite the judgements of the European Court of Human Rights that convicted Greece for the violation of the freedom of association of Western Thrace Turkish community.

Greek government telling that "There are no Turks in Greece", dissolved Turkish associations with the word "Turkish" in its names

ABTTF noted that Xanthi Turkish Union was established in 1927 as the first association in Western Thrace, afterwards Komotini Turkish Youth Union in 1928 and in 1936 Western Thrace Turkish Teachers' Union were established. ABTTF underlined that associations and minority schools with the word "Turkish" in their names had Turkish and Greek signboards in the region in the past. ABTTF further noted that the Greek government which claimed that "There are no Turks in Greece" removed signboards of three Turkish associations in 1983, and the local courts dissolved these three associations on the ground that they acted against the public order and constituted a threat to democratic society.



ABTTF: Greece insists on not to execute of ECtHR's judgments

ABTTF stated that Xanthi Turkish Union rejected the decision of the local court and applied to European Court of Human Rights in 2005 as a result of legal struggle which lasted more than twenty years. ABTTF added that Cultural Association of Turkish Woman in the Prefecture of Rodopi and Evros Minority Youth Association followed Xanthi Turkish Union and applied to the ECtHR for non-registration of their associations due to the word "Turkish" in their names. ABTTF explained that the European court found the three associations justified and convicted Greece and further noted that Greece, however, does not execute the judgments of the ECtHR despite the more than ten years have passed since the decision of the court.

ABTTF pointed out that Greece adopted a new legal framework in October 2017 in order to remove legal obstacles for the execution of the ECtHR's judgments and noted that new restrictions,

however, were added in order to hinder execution of judgments of the ECtHR. The new regulation which notes that new associations to be established should 'not pose a threat against security of the state' and should 'not breach international agreements', national security and public security restrictions were introduced with the new regulation. ABTTF underlined that the main objective of this regulation is, in fact, not to register associations with the word "Turkish" in their names. ABTTF reported that following adoption of the new regulation, Xanthi Turkish Union applied to the local court with the request for the cancellation of the decision of the Thrace Court of Appeal which ordered the dissolution of the association in 2002 and return of its legal entity. ABTTF informed that the Thrace Court of Appeal had heard Xanthi Turkish Union on 9 February 2018 and conveyed that Cultural Association of Turkish Woman in the Prefecture of Rodopi and Evros Minority Youth Association will apply to the court. ABTTF asked Greek authorities to return Western Thrace Turks the right to freedom of association and execute the judgements of the ECtHR.

You may access the written statement of ABTTF to the UN Human Rights Council on the link <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G18/042/57/PDF/G1804257.pdf?OpenElement>.

A parallel report by ABTTF for the U.S. 2016 Greece Religious Freedom Report

The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) prepared a parallel report for the U.S. International Religious Freedom Report 2016 on Greece published by the United States of America (USA) Department of State. In the report conveyed to competent authorities by the US, the issue of muftis and primarily the issue of “240 Imam Law” and problems of Western Thrace Turkish community experienced in the field of religious freedom were articulated in detail.

ABTTF: Elected muftis are called to bear testimony on the ground of “usurpation of office” and they are brought before the court

In its parallel report ABTTF stated that Greece has usurped the right of Western Thrace Turkish community to select its own religious leaders and criticized the appointment of muftis by the state. ABTTF indicated that political pressure has been imposed through legal proceedings conducted for İbrahim Şerif, Elected Mufti of Komotini and Ahmet Mete, Elected Mufti of Xanthi and noted the elected muftis are called to police department to bear testimony many times on the ground that they have “usurped the office of mufti”. Within this scope, ABTTF noted that lawsuit was filed against Ahmet Mete, Elected Mufti of Xanthi because that he led the prayer at the funeral in the village of Gökçepınar(Glafki) in 2016.

Despite the objections by Western Thrace Turkish community, 240 Imam Law is insistently in enforcement

As a response to the U.S. report in which there are no criticisms regarding the



Law 4115/2013 known to be the Law “240 Imam Law” on tutoring course of İslam religion in Greek language at public schools, ABTTF stated that “240 Imam Law” is a critical intervention to autonomous structure of Western Thrace Turkish community in religious field. ABTTF noted that despite the objections of the Western Thrace Turkish community imams are trained under the name of religious instructors and course books are prepared and lastly in August 2017 announcement was made for employment of 120 more imams.

Against the U.S. report in which it is stated the Greek government allows for prayer houses, ABTTF indicated that the demand for opening historical mosques except for the ones in Western Thrace for prayer during religious festivals are rejected. Additionally,

ABTTF expressed that the masjids established by Western Thrace Turkish community members within the associations were closed due to the reason that they did not have a separate working permit.

Discourse of hatred against Western Thrace Turkish community imposes danger

In addition to the U.S. report which refers to the attack of Golden Dawn on 21st commemoration ceremony of Dr. Ahmet Sadık, Leader of Western Thrace Turkish community and founder of Friendship, Equality and Peace(FEP) Party, ABTTF noted down hate-motivated attacks against Western Thrace Turkish community in 2016. ABTTF as a part of current developments stated that explanation by Vasilis Leventis, from Greek Central Union Party at Thessaloniki Trade Fair in September 2017 summarizes perspective on Western Thrace Turkish community in political environment in Greece. ABTTF expressed that hatred discourse is increasing in the region and indicated an organization named Senior Patrol Group showed administrators of Xanthi Turkish Union in October as a target.

Conference by Xanthi Turkish Union in the 10th year of ECtHR judgment

Established in 1927, the Xanthi Turkish Union (İTB), of which signboard was removed in 1983 and which was dissolved in 1986 on the ground that it had the word "Turkish" in its name, organized a conference in the tenth year of the judgment of 2008 of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR), which convicted that Greece violated the right to freedom of association. Represented by Melek Kırmacı Arık, International Affairs Director, and Fatma Ahmetcik, Member of International Affairs and Lobby Group, the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) made a presentation on "ABTTF's Role in Bringing the Xanthi Turkish Union Case to the International Level".

Speakers underlined that ECtHR's judgments have not yet been implemented, although ten years have elapsed since the ECtHR's judgments on the Bekir-Ousta group cases of Xanthi Turkish Union, Cultural Association of Turkish Women in the Prefecture of Rodopi and Evros Minority Youth Association and added that the case is no longer a legal case but has turned into a political case. The speakers conveyed that the restrictions with the new law, which should have enabled the implementation of the ECtHR judgments pending for many years due to procedural reasons, is a result of a malicious policy of the Greek government.

From past to present, Xanthi Turkish Union's struggle for 35 years discussed

At the first session of the conference moderated by Ozan Ahmetoğlu, Chairman of İTB, Orhan Hacıbram, who was the lawyer of the association until its application to the ECtHR, the lawyer Ahmet Kara, the lawyer who has undertaken the case of Xanthi Turkish



Union in 2011, Panayotis Dimitras, Spokesperson of the Greek Helsinki Monitor and Melek Kırmacı Arık, made speeches.

Hacıbram presented the legal struggle of Xanthi Turkish Union from the start of domestic remedies to the application to the European Court. He noted that following the 2008 ECtHR judgment, it was possible to implement the Court's judgment without a new legal regulation on the basis of Article 758 of the Code of Civil Procedure, however, Greek government did not choose this option.

Ahmet Kara mentioned that the legal struggle since 2008 should be separated into two, as the legal and the political

struggle. He presented his legal view concerning the law 4491/2017 adopted on 13 October 2017 and added that Xanthi Turkish Union has been carrying out a political struggle through conveying regular information to the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe and the Department for the Execution of Judgments of the ECtHR.

And Panayote Dimitras, the Spokesperson of the Greek Helsinki Monitor stressed that that the case of Xanthi Turkish Union is a political issue. Dimitras reminded Xanthi Turkish union was dissolved on the ground that its statute was against the public order and public security, which was rejected by the European court in its judgment of

2008. Dimitras stressed that Greece claims that there is only a Muslim minority in Greece, not a Turkish minority and noted that Greece, therefore, rejects the existence of an ethnic Turkish minority.

As the last speaker of the first session, Melek Kırmacı Arık, ABTTF International Relations Director underlined that the İTB case has turned out to be a political case, and she presented the work carried out by ABTTF before the European Union, the United Nations, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the Council of Europe and statements by Greece at the international meeting on this specific issue. ABTTF mentioned that a political synergy should be established after the adoption of law 4491/2017 and added that Greece does not have a problem-solving approach in the case of Xanthi Turkish Union. Furthermore, ABTTF underlined that the re-opening of the legal proceedings by Xanthi Turkish Union at the Thrace Court of Appeal and the hearing on February 9, 2018 for the return of its legal entity should be raised at the international arena.

At the second session, lawyer Halil Mustafa from the Hellenic League for Human Rights, Journalist Damon Damianos and Pervin Hayrullah, the Director General of Western Thrace Minority Culture and Education Company (PEKEM) made their speeches. Halil Mustafa noted that the implementation of the ECtHR's judgment on the basis of the Code of Civil Procedure would have been possible without adoption of a new law. Halil Mustafa added that since the law adopted in the parliament has become a hot political issue due to Xanthi Turkish Union's case, new restrictions were added in the new text after the withdrawal of the first draft in September. Though, Mustafa noted that new restrictions might not cause any hinderance if the court would adapt a legal approach on the basis of the ECtHR's judgments of 2008.

Journalist Damon Damianos presented his views on the Xanthi Turkish Union case with a general perspective of the Greek majority on the Western Thrace Turkish community. Damianos noted that Greece recognizes a "Muslim" minority, rather than a Turkish minority in the region and tries to determine the identity of the people living in this region. Furthermore, Damianos noted that the



Turkish identity is generally perceived as a risk of danger by the Greek majority.

studies they have conducted for the Xanthi Turkish Union.

Pervin Hayrullah, Director General of Western Thrace Minority Culture and Education Company (PEKEM) stressed that the case of İTB is not only about freedom of association but it is directly connected the issue of recognition of the Turkish identity of the minority. As a representative of the Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association at international meetings, Hayrullah gave information about

In his closing speech, Ozan Ahmetoğlu, the Chairman of the Xanthi Turkish union stated that Greece has not implemented the European Court's judgment for more than ten years and noted that they expect Greece to take a brave step for Greece's democracy and comply with the ECtHR judgment in the case of Xanthi Turkish Union.

The Case of Xanthi Turkish Union was heard at Court of Appeal of Thrace

Halit Habip Oğlu: "Regarding the case of Xanthi Turkish Union, which was turned out to be a political problem, we demand from Greek courts to give decision in compliance with the judgments of European Court of Human Rights."

On 9 February 2018, the Court of Appeal of Thrace heard the case regarding the demand for return of official legal entity of Xanthi Turkish Union, which was established in 1927 as the first association of Western Thrace Turkish community and closed in 1986 due to the reason that it has the word "Turkish" in its name. Representatives of Western Thrace Turkish community participated at the hearing in Komotini in order to give support to the Xanthi Turkish Union.

Xanthi Turkish Union asked for cancellation of the judgment of the Court of Appeal of Thrace about dissolution of the Union and demanded implementation of ECtHR judgments

At the hearing held on 9 February 2018 at Court of Appeal of Thrace, Xanthi Turkish Union asked for nullification of decision of Court of Appeal dated 2002 which ratified closing of Xanthi Turkish Union and demanded for return of its official legal entity. Due to the reason that the case of dissolution of the Union was filed by the Governor of Rodopi of that time, attorney of the State of



East Macedonia-Thrace participated at the hearing as the advocate for the opposite party. Federation of Thrace Associations, an NGO based in Thessaloniki, also involved in the law suit. The NGO requested the rejection of Xanthi Turkish Union's application for the return of its official legal entity on grounds that the Lausanne Treaty mentions a Muslim minority, not a Turkish minority in the region. The decision of the court is expected to be announced within 3 or 4 months.

Following the law amendment adopted which would enable the judgments of European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) concerning associations belonging to national minorities living in Greece to be implemented by national Greek courts on 10 October 2017, Xanthi Turkish Union started legal proceedings for return of its official legal entity. Xanthi Turkish Union made an appeal to the Court of Appeal of Thrace in 2017 for the implementation of the judgment released in 2008 and asked for return of the

official legal entity of the Union.

As known in the Greek media as the law which will lead legalization of Xanthi Turkish Union, the law amendment which would enable the ECtHR judgments that convicted Greece in cases lodged by Cultural Association of Turkish Women in the Province of Rhodope and Evros Minority Youth Union as well as Xanthi Turkish Union to be implemented by Greek courts was adopted with the restrictions of national security and public security in addition to the conditions that the Turkish associations to be established in Western Thrace shall not "threaten the state security" and "violate international treaties".

Halit Habip Oğlu, President of Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF), stated, "A new period has begun in the struggle of Xanthi Turkish Union which has been lasting for 35 years. Following the law amendment in October 2017, we expect to receive a positive outcome regarding the appeal of Xanthi Turkish Union it has made to the Court of Appeal of Thrace for the return of its legal identity. We want Western Thrace Turkish community's freedom of association to be restored. As regards the case of Xanthi Turkish Union, which has turned out to be a political problem, we demand from Greek courts to give decision in compliance with judgments of the European Court of Human Rights."

Another blow on religious autonomy of the Turkish community in Western Thrace!

Halit Habip Oğlu: "As it is in laws adopted related to the educational autonomy and their implementation, the objective is to weaken the foundations of the religious autonomy of the Turkish community in Western Thrace which has been guaranteed by international treaties and eventually abolish completely our religious autonomy based on customary law."



Western Thrace, Greece, which has made the sharia competences utilized by muftis in

the field of inheritance, marriage and divorce preferential and enabled the Greek Civil Law applicable in the case that there is disagreement between the parties, was adopted on 9 January 2018 in the Greek Parliament by majority of votes.

Pursuant to the law drafted by the Greek Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs, muftis' sharia competences are restricted through bestowing right of selection to the persons belonging to the Turkish community in Western Thrace between the Greek courts

and mufti offices in the field of family and inheritance law.

Pertinent to the issue, Halit Habip Oğlu, President of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF), stated: "As regards disagreements about inheritance among the persons belonging to the Turkish community in Western Thrace, the Greek Civil Law has been enforced for so long and property sharing has been done according to civil law provisions. Indeed, inheritance lawsuit of Hatice Molla Salih belonging to the Turkish community in Western Thrace could also have been resolved pursuant to the civil

law. However, it did not happen so and upon negative verdict of the Greek Supreme Court, the case was conveyed to the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR). And upon the lawsuit filed at the ECtHR, the law in subject has been drafted and adopted by the Greek Parliament. This situation has shown once again that our country Greece does not approach the Turkish community in Western Thrace with good will. And since Greece does not have the good will, it has not been implementing the judgments of the the ECtHR in favor of the associations of the Turkish community in Western Thrace, namely the Xanthi Turkish Union, the

Cultural Association of Turkish Women in Rodopi and the Evros Minority Youth Association. The objective here is, as it is in laws adopted related to the educational autonomy and their implementation, to weaken the foundations of the religious autonomy of the Turkish community in Western Thrace which has been guaranteed by international treaties and eventually abolish completely our religious autonomy based on customary law."

*Image: <https://tr.wikipedia.org>

7 months of imprisonment for Elected Mufti of Xanthi Ahmet Mete

Halit Habip Oğlu: "Religious autonomy of the Turkish community in Western Thrace, of which right to elect its own religious leaders which are muftis has been usurped by Greece since 1990, has been disregarded once again with the court's judgment of imprisonment."

The Virtuous Mufti of Xanthi Ahmet Mete elected by the Turkish community in Western Thrace, Greece and Imam of the Glafky (Gökçepınar) village Erkan Azizoğlu were both sentenced to 7 months of imprisonment in the lawsuit where they were tried for "usurping the office" and their punishment was delayed for 3 years.

Following the funeral held in the village of Glafky (Gökçepınar) with the presence of the mufti appointed by Greek government for the Western Thrace Turkish community member Ahmet Katunlu who lost his life during his military service last year, Prosecutor of Xanthi made an ex officio denunciation against Mufti Mete and Imam Azizoğlu with the allegation of "usurpation of office" and "preventing the appointed mufti from fulfilling his duty". As a result of the hearing on 13 November 2017 in Thessaloniki Sole Judge Court, Mufti Mete and Imam



Azizoğlu were both sentenced to 7 months of imprisonment. The punishment was delayed for 3 years. Mufti Mete and Imam Azizoğlu objected to the court's judgment and filed an appeal.

"First of all, we convey our good wishes to our esteemed Mufti Ahmet Mete and Imam of the Glafky (Gökçepınar) village Erkan Azizoğlu and affirm hereby that we are always by them. While there is nothing against the law requiring any

sanction, the court's judgment is completely a political decision and has an aim to intimidate the mufti elected by the Western Thrace Turks. Sentencing our mufti and the village imam to imprisonment with accusation of "usurpation of office" is doubtlessly a part of the policy of suppression and intimidation against the Turkish community in Western Thrace and its representatives, which has been rising incrementally recently. The religious autonomy of the Turkish community in Western Thrace, of which right to elect its own religious leaders which are muftis has been usurped by Greece since 1990, has been disregarded once again with the court's judgment of imprisonment. We hope the Appeal Court reverses the judgment at the soonest and the justice is done," said Halit Habip Oğlu, President of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF).

*Image: www.gundemgazetesi.com



Lawsuit against the Elected Mufti of Komotini İbrahim Şerif

Halit Habip Oğlu: “We want actions and practices aiming to suppress and intimidate with groundless accusations the muftis elected by the Turkish community in Western Thrace itself terminated immediately.”

A lawsuit was filed against İbrahim Şerif, Elected Mufti of Komotini in Greece and Chairman of the Western Thrace Turkish Minority Consultative Committee for “usurping the office of the mufti”.

Mufti Şerif is being accused of executing activities at mass circumcision ceremony for the Western Thrace Turks in Alankuyu neighborhood in the city of Komotini in December 2016 by interfering in the field of mandate of the appointed mufti and therefore “usurping the office of the mufti”. The case will be heard on 8 May 2018 at Single Judge Criminal Court in Komotini.

“First of all, we as ABTTF representing the Western Thrace Turks living in Europe would like to extend our best wishes to our valuable Mufti İbrahim Şerif and like him to know that including the litigation process, we are always with



him. Previously, our elected mufti of Xanthi Ahmet Mete was sentenced to imprisonment for 7 months with the same accusation in November 2017. Now we have this lawsuit filed against our elected mufti of Komotini İbrahim Şerif. We want actions and practices aiming to suppress and intimidate with groundless accusations the muftis elected by the

Turkish community in Western Thrace itself terminated immediately and call on our country Greece to respect religious autonomy and freedom of religion of the Western Thrace Turks”, said Halit Habip Oğlu, President of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF).

ABTTF Newsletter

The ABTTF Newsletter in four languages, namely in Turkish, English, Greek and German, is celebrating its 14th year.

The ABTTF Newsletter, in which the matters of grave concern to the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace, recent developments and current events in Western Thrace and Greece, in particular pertaining to the minority issues and policies, international activities and lobbying of ABTTF aimed at obtaining solutions for the for the problems of the Turkish minority through democracy and peace and information on the activities of the associations of the Turkish minority throughout Europe and the world are dealt with, is being followed with great interest not only by Western Thrace Turks, but also by large parts of the public.

To have more information on subscription to the ABTTF Newsletter, please do not hesitate to contact us.

ABTTF

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