

# 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)

No. 37 | September 2017 | Year 13

## Western Thrace Turks at the FUEN 2017 Congress



“Minority SafePack Initiative” was addressed as the main theme at the congress in all its aspects where ABTTTF, WTMUGA and FEP Party attended as representatives of the Western Thrace Turkish community.

Western Thrace Turks participated at the 62nd annual congress of the Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN) held in city of Cluj Napoca/Kolozsvár/Klausenburg in Romania on 17-21 May 2017. At the congress hosted by FUEN member organization Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania (RMDSZ), the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTTF), Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association (WTMUGA) and Friendship, Equality and Peace Party (FEP Party) represented the Western Thrace Turkish community together. Halit Habip Oğlu, ABTTTF President and FUEN

Vice- President, Sebahattin Mümin And Mustafa Kasap, ABTTTF Vice Presidents, K. Engin Soyyılmaz, ABTTTF Head Office Manager, Mutlu Osman Mustafa, FEP Party Vice President and Onur Mustafa Ahmet, member of WTMUGA attended the congress where more than 300 minority representatives and guests from various countries of Europe participated and more than 50 journalists followed.

Representing Rhodes and Kos Turks, Prof. Mustafa Kaymakçı, the President of Rhodes, Kos and Dodecanese Turks Culture and Solidarity Association (ROİSDER) and Atıl Hacimenni, member of the association also participated at the congress. At the FUEN Assembly of Delegates held within the framework of the congress the resolution about political deterrence and intimidation practices against members of the Turkish community in Western Thrace was adopted unanimously.

### CONTENTS

Western Thrace Turks are at the FUEN 2017 Congress .....	pages 1-2	
It is time for SYRIZA to say “Stop” to the inaccuracy in the Western Thrace Turkish policy! .....	page 3	
ABTTTF elected its new executive board .....	pages 4-5	
ABTTTF 20 <sup>th</sup> Presidency Board assigned new duties .....	page 6	
ABTTTF attended the OSCE meeting on freedom of religion or belief .....	page 7	
ABTTTF submitted a written statement to the UN Human Rights Council .....	pages 8	
Religious autonomy of Western Thrace Turks is being abolished step by step by the Greek government .....	page 9	
Mufti of Komotini İbrahim Şerif called once again to bear testimony! .....	page 10	
Response to the letter of ABTTTF by Thorbjørn Jagland, Secretary General of the European Council .....	page 10	
Radical changes are made in educational system in Greece .....	pages 11	
Masjid belonging to Western Thrace Turks in Thessaloniki closed down! .....	page 11	
Municipality of Mustafaçova (Myki) demanded the personnel to be recruited for the EU program have a command of Turkish, prosecution office started investigation .....	page 12	



## The Turkish community in Western Thrace was promoted at the traditional "Minority Market"

At the traditional minority market held on the first day of the congress where cultures of the minorities within FUEN were promoted, ABTTF at its booth presented the Turkish community living in Western Thrace, Greece to the participants. Participants who visited ABTTF's booth which attracted intensive attention were given information about the culture and problems of the Western Thrace Turks accompanied by brochures.

## "Minority SafePack Initiative", general minority protection in Europe and cultural autonomy were discussed as the major topics at the congress

In the first panel session of the congress which started officially with opening remarks of Lorant Vincze, President of FUEN, the European Citizens Initiative named "Minority SafePack" which offers a protection mechanism for national minorities in Europe wide and one million signatures campaign were addressed. In the second panel session where contribution of the local minorities to European cultural heritage was tackled by the keynote speaker Tibor Navracscs, the EU Commissioner for Education, Culture and Sports underpinned the issue of importance of minority communities in Europe in

protection and sustaining of local cultural heritage. And at the panel organized in cooperation with Glasgow University where practices of national-cultural autonomy and challenges confronted in today's Central and Eastern Europe were discussed, it was stated that in order for each national minority to protect its own identity and culture it requires appropriate tools for its own special need and necessities and accordingly there are different autonomy models are available in different countries if Europe.

On 18 May, Thursday one minute's silence was observed on the occasion of 73rd anniversary of Crimean Tatars' exile by Soviet Union in 1944. And on Friday night 19 May, at the gala dinner hosted by Hungarian minority in Romania, Minority SafePack Initiative (MSPI) signature campaign was started officially.

## Representatives of the Turkic minorities and communities convened at the meeting in the congress

FUEN Working Group of Turkic Minorities/Communities (TAG) convened at the meeting held with the initiative of ABTTF which carries out the secretariat of FUEN TAG and under the chairmanship of Halit Habip Oğlu, ABTTF President and FUEN Vice President. Western Thrace Turks, Rhodes-Kos Turks, Ahıska(Meskhetian) Turks, Kosovo Turks, Gagauzian Turks, Crimean Tatars and Crimean Karaites

representatives attended to the TAG meeting

## Draft resolutions introduced by Western Thrace Turks and Rhodes-Kos Turks adopted unanimously

Draft resolution on "Political deterrence and intimidation against the members of the Western Thrace Turks in Greece" presented by ABTTF, WTMUGA and FEP Party as "Western Thrace Turks" delegation and the draft resolution condemning deportation of Prof. Mustafa Kaymakçı, President of ROİSDER from Greece in August 2016 were adopted unanimously at the FUEN 2017 Assembly of Delegates on Saturday, 20 May 2017.

## FUEN 2019 Congress will be organized in Ukraine and EUROPEADA 2020 will be organized in Austria

It was decided at FUEN 2017 Assembly of Delegates that annual FUEN Congress in 2019 will be organized in Ukraine hosted by minority organizations among which there is also Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar people (KTMM). And FUEN 4<sup>th</sup> European Minorities Football Championship "EUROPEADA 2020" will be organized in the region of Carinthia in Austria hosted by Slovenian minority living in Austria. Besides, the organization of the Russian minority living in Estonia named Estonian Russian School was accepted as a regular member to FUEN with the votes of the delegates.



## To which extent do the SYRIZA MPs we assign in Athens protect our benefits?



Dear readers,

In my previous column with the heading “It is time for SYRIZA to say 'STOP' to the inaccuracy in the Western Thrace Turkish policy”, I mentioned that in the last two elections SYRIZA, thanks to us, had most of the votes in country-wide from our region and instead of awarding us it left all the issue to its rightist partner ANEL.

As you know, our country Greece so long tries to abolish educational autonomy of the Western Thrace Turks. Although our educational autonomy has been guaranteed with agreements, New Democracy, PASOK or SYRIZA, no matter which one entered into the government, took their own way and played with our school system as if they are state schools.

If we consider our educational autonomy as a canopy, each government cut and shaped this canopy as they liked and made patches with different fabrics.

What happened at the end? This is no longer our canopy. It has been a canopy which PASOK and SYRIZA made patches over and over.

Well, what are we doing? We elect the Turks who are nominated from the majority parties New Democracy, PASOK, SYRIZA as our MPs and send them to the parliament.

On behalf of us, we expect our MPs to raise our problems in all issues which concern the Western Thrace Turks and want them to play a role in the government of our country as a prerequisite of democracy by electing them for the parliament to

strengthen welfare of our region and our country.

However, we have been experiencing sadly so long that things do not go as planned.

There has not been an improvement in welfare of our Western Thrace.

We cannot find vacancies in public or state institutions proportional to the Western Thrace Turkish population in the region. There has always been injustice at this point and there still is.

Our mayors, muftis, presidents of associations, administrators of parties are continuously called for bearing testimony. When our representatives called for bearing testimony we have never seen our MPs from the governing party saying, “Wait a minute, what are you doing?”

When our primary schools are closed down even though they are not state schools, we did not see especially our SYRIZA MPs, whom we elected and sent to the Parliament, saying, “Stop there, what are you doing?”

When the petitions presented about opening new secondary and high schools are left responded we did not see these MPs saying, “Why our requests are not being taken into consideration?”

Since majority and all the population in Kozlukibir (Arriana) and Yassıköy (Iasmos) and Mustafçova (Myki) respectively are Turkish and when the civil servants with the command of the language of the people living in these regions, which

is Turkish are hindered to be employed, we couldn't see our SYRIZA MPs questioning this condition and saying, “What are you doing?”.

Well, aren't these people the representatives of the “people”? Aren't these people elected by our “people”?

In none of the incidents I mentioned above, our MPs from the governing party showed a reaction. And now they, against us, targeted our institutions who elected them and sent to the parliament, and they publicly criticized for various reasons executives of Muzaffer Salihoğlu Minority Secondary and High School in Xanthi and our teachers' associations of the EPATH graduates in Komotini and Xanthi.

It looks like our MPs from the governing party serve for the interests of the government which ignore rights and demands of our minority over the interests of our minority. And they have now proved this with the recent press statement.

There is no other word I can say apart from “I give up”.

Before I conclude my remarks, I wish a good and safe trip to all our friends who will go to Western Thrace, our motherland Turkey and other countries from Germany and wish them a good summer holiday.

With my deepest respect and love.

Halit Habip Oğlu  
ABTTF President

## ABTTF elected its new executive board

The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) held its 20th Ordinary General Assembly on 15 April 2017. As a result of the elections held at the general assembly in Gießen, Germany with participation of 12 member associations and 109 delegates, new president and vice presidents of ABTTF and members of audit and disciplinary boards were elected. In this first election following the change in the statutes, while the president of ABTTF and vice presidents are elected for 4 years, tenure of office for the new members elected for ABTTF audit and disciplinary boards shall also be four years.



**Halit Habip Oğlu: As ABTTF we will continue advocating rightful case of the Western Thrace Turks with the same impetus and determination**

ABTTF's 20th Ordinary General Assembly started with one minute's silence primarily in memory of the deceased Dr. Sadık Ahmet and the ones who served for Western Thrace Turks case and lost their lives. Afterwards Halit Habip Oğlu, President of ABTTF made opening remarks. Habip Oğlu, indicated unfavorable developments are experienced in educational and religious autonomy in Greece and he stated that recently legal proceedings conducted systematically against representatives of institutions and organizations of Western Thrace Turks have turned out to be an instrument for threatening and intimidation.

Habip Oğlu noted that ABTTF struggles to make the voice of Western Thrace Turks community heard on international level and explained that they are not alone in this path and added that Greece sent a reply to the written statements of the current problems of the Western Thrace Turks submitted to the United Nations Human Rights Council by the



Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN) and referred directly to his name as FUEN vice president with a strong anger by the efforts made for solution of problems of the Western Thrace Turks community. Habip Oğlu explained that along with activities carried out in international arena, ABTTF will conduct intense studies for member associations for Western Thrace Turks and he underlined that in fraternity all these can be achieved, it is important to work fearlessly with good will. He concluded his remarks by saying ABTTF will continue struggling with the same impetus and determination.

At the general assembly, Adv. Engin Bern, member of Gießen Western Thrace Turks Solidarity Association, elected as the Chairperson of the Meeting Committee. And Gökhan Işık, member of Viersen Western Thrace Turks Assistance and Solidarity



Association and Mustafa Şerif, member of Lauf Western Thrace Turks Assistance and Solidarity Association elected as the secretary of Meeting Committee. General Assembly continued with the 19th period activity report read by Aydın Ahmet, ABTTF 19th Period Vice President in charge of Administrative Affairs; 19th period accounting report read by İsmail Rüşüt, 19th Period Vice President in charge of Financial Affairs; and 19th period audit report read by Halit Haşim, 19th Period Member of Audit Board. And subsequently with the open voting ABTTF 19th Period Presidium discharged by majority of votes.

**Habip Oğlu elected as ABTTF President directly by the General Assembly**

Election was held following presentation



talks by the candidates for ABTTF 20th Period Presidency and Vice Presidency and Audit and Disciplinary Boards. Halit Habip Ođlu who entered elections as a single candidate was re-elected as ABTTF President for four years by 91% votes of the delegates. Names who were candidates for 20th Period Presidency and Vice Presidency and their number of votes were as follows:

## ABTTF 20. Period Candidates for Presidency

1. Halit Habip Ođlu: 100 votes

## ABTTF 20. Period Candidates for Vice Presidency

1. Nabi İbrahimcik: 87 votes
2. Sami Yusuf: 86 votes
3. Aydın Ahmet: 81 votes
4. Mehmet Hüseyn: 80 votes
5. Mustafa Kasap: 79 votes
6. Sebahattin Mümin: 78 votes
7. Serdar Kalekođlu: 77 votes
8. Ferruh Hasan: 75 votes
9. Bülent Çolak: 73 votes
10. Vedat Arap: 57 votes
11. Metin Hüseyn: 24 votes
12. Tuncay Kara Çoban: 16 votes

Accordingly, while the first 10 who received majority of the votes were elected as ABTTF 20th Period Vice Presidents, delegation of the duties among the Vice Presidents will be realized in the first meeting of 20th Period Board of Presidency consisted of 11 people to be held in the upcoming days.

At the General Assembly with the votes of the delegates İsmail Rüşüt, Halit Haşim and Yasin Hasan were elected as 20th Period Audit Board members and Erol Haşim, Halit Faik Ođlu and İsmail Apti Ođlu were elected as 20th Period Disciplinary Board members.

Following the elections, all of four distinct texts which makes referrals to current problems of the Western Thrace Turks and to the applications aiming to intimidate and suppress the community of Western Thrace Turks, addressing to



the governments of Greece, motherland Republic of Turkey, Federal Republic of Germany and European Union

Commission were adopted unanimously by the ABTTF General Assembly.

## ABTTF 20<sup>th</sup> Presidency Board assigned new duties

As a result of the elections held at 20<sup>th</sup> Ordinary General Assembly of the Federation of the Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) on 15 April 2017, 20<sup>th</sup> Presidency Board assigned duties of Vice Presidents in its first ordinary meeting held on 23 April 2017.

At the meeting held in the province of Witten at the Headquarters of ABTTF, duties assigned in ABTTF 20<sup>th</sup> Presidency Board are as follows:

President: Halit Habip Ođlu  
Vice President responsible for Education: Nabi İbrahimcik  
Vice President responsible for Financial Affairs: Sami Yusuf  
Vice President responsible for Social Activities: Aydın Ahmet  
Vice President responsible for Sports: Mehmet Hüseyn  
Vice President responsible for Funeral Assistance Fund: Mustafa Kasap  
Vice President responsible for Organization: Sebahattin Mümin  
Vice President responsible for Youth: Serdar Kalekođlu  
Vice President responsible for Public Relations: Ferruh Hasan  
Vice President responsible for Administrative Affairs: Bülent Çolak  
Vice President responsible for Cultural Affairs: Vedat Arap

All of Vice Presidents who were elected directly by the General Assembly for four years with ABTTF President were board members of associations of which they are members and some still continue serving in the board in those associations. Besides, half of ABTTF 20<sup>th</sup> Period Vice Presidents are consisted of young and dynamic people.

### Road map for 20<sup>th</sup> period discussed

At the meeting, it was decided that within



the 20<sup>th</sup> period encompassing four years from 2017 to 2021 activities which will be carried out at international level for solving the problems of the Western Thrace Turks community shall continue with the same impetus and determination. In addition, while a consensus was reached on to concentrate more on needs of people

regarding learning the mother tongue and social and cultural issues not only in Western Thrace, but also regarding Western Thrace Turks living primarily in Germany and other Western European countries. In this respect, a decision was made on the steps to be taken until the end of the year 2017.



## ABTTF attended the OSCE meeting on freedom of religion or belief

At the meeting representatives of the Western Thrace Turkish community criticized the intervention on religious autonomy and brought the recent legal proceedings for the religious leaders on the agenda.

The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) participated in the meeting of Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting on “Freedom of Religion or Belief: Issues, Opportunities, and the Specific Challenges of Combatting Anti-Semitism and Intolerance and Discrimination against Christians, Muslims, and Members of Other Religions”. At the meeting where new emerging problems regarding freedom of religion or belief in the OSCE region were discussed Melek Kırmacı Arık, ABTTF International Relations Director, Funda Reşit-Taştekin, member of International Affairs and Lobbying Group and Assistant Prof. Ali Hüseyinoğlu from Trakya University and member of Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association (WTMUGA) represented the Western Thrace Turkish community.

In the first session of the meeting where the opening remarks were made by Michael Georg Link, Director of OSCE Democratic Institutions and Human Rights Office (ODIHR) Director, Melek Kırmacı Arık, ABTTF International Relations Director had the floor and stated that the Western Thrace Turkish community in Greece has the right to choose its own religious leader through international agreements and with the law enacted in 1991 this right was taken from the Western Thrace Turks and delegated to the state. ABTTF



requested the Greek Government to stop intervening the religious autonomy of the Western Thrace Muslim Turkish community. In the same session Assistant Prof. Ali Hüseyinoğlu, member of WTMUGA, with his speech articulated the general problems experienced by the Western Thrace Muslim Turkish society and he brought the recent problem of masjid in the associations on the agenda. At the end of the first day, in its reply, Greece stated that muftis compliant to Islamic traditions are selected through a transparent procedure and then they are appointed. Greece claimed that the request of the Western Thrace Turkish community to choose muftis by general elections means a demand for a privileged status in the country.

In the second session Melek Kırmacı, ABTTF International Relations Director, had the floor and articulated the criticisms regarding teaching Islam at Greek state schools based on 240 Imams Law and stated that the state hinders the Western Thrace Turkish community to choose its own religious leaders and this law in practice aims to increase the state control over the community through the muftis appointed by the state. In this session Greece

enjoyed its right of reply and noted that Orthodox Christianity lesson at the state schools is not taught by priests but by the theologists identified by state authorities and likewise elective course of Islamic religion is also similarly taught by the theologists determined by the state.

In the last session Funda Reşit Taştekin, member of ABTTF International Affairs and Lobby Group, had the floor and raised the recent legal proceedings against the Western Thrace Turkish community religious leaders. Within this framework ABTTF stated that İbrahim Şerif, Elected Mufti of Komotini was called to bear testimony for six times since the beginning of 2017 based on various justifications and further noted that Ahmet Mete, Elected Mufti of Xanthi, will be put on trial for allegedly usurping the office of Mufti for having lead performance of prayer for a Turkish young man who lost his life during his military service. Greece enjoyed its right of reply and stated that none of Greek citizens would be put on trial without any justification and added that if there are no crimes regarding the legal proceedings for Mete and Şerif then there would not be any punishments either.

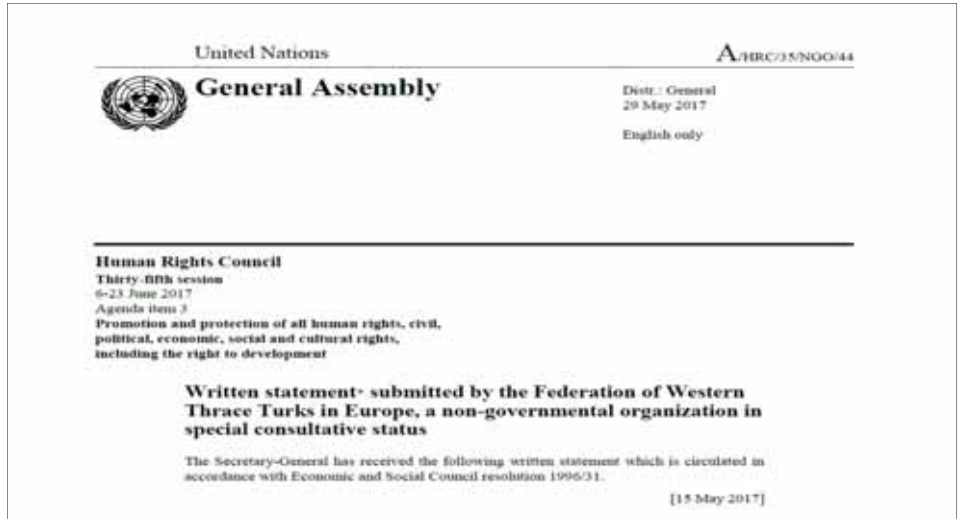
## ABTTF submitted a written statement to the UN Human Rights Council

ABTTF communicated in its written statement the problem of the Turkish community in Western Thrace regarding the right to education in mother tongue and bilingual minority kindergartens.

The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ATTF) submitted a written statement entitled “The problem of bilingual preschool education in Western Thrace, Greece” to the 35<sup>th</sup> regular session of the United Nations (UN) Human Rights Council held on 6-23 June 2017 in Geneva, Switzerland. In its written statement, ABTTF notes the Turkish community in Western Thrace was granted the right to education in its mother tongue and autonomy in the management of its educational institutions with the Treaty of Lausanne, and underlines the Western Thrace Turks have got the right to establish and administer their own educational institutions.

ABTTF states educational autonomy has been undermined and diminished by governmental practices over years, and noted today, the Greek authorities have wide-ranging control over minority schools at all levels, although preschool education in Greece is within the scope of compulsory education, there are no bilingual kindergartens for the Turkish children to learn their mother tongue, the Greek authorities insistently object to opening of bilingual minority kindergartens where education would be provided both in Turkish and Greek within the minority school system of the Turkish community in Western Thrace.

ABTTF informs at the beginning of the scholar year of 2012-2013, children belonging to the Western Thrace



Turkish community in the village of Echinós (Şahin) affiliated to province of Xanthi were not enrolled in the first grade of primary school since they had not attended state kindergartens, their parents mentioned they did not want to send their children to the state kindergartens which only provide education in Greek language, there is yet no step taken by the Greek authorities for not to have this situation experienced in the village of Echinós (Şahin) again in the upcoming school year, and the parents expect to have bilingual minority kindergartens opened. Furthermore, ABTTF states despite that organizations belonging to the Turks community in Western Thrace had made numerous applications, the Greek authorities do not allow for opening of

private bilingual minority kindergartens in the region.

In its written statement, ABTTF calls on the Greek government to establish bilingual minority kindergartens within the minority school system in the Western Thrace, and to allow the Turkish community to establish private bilingual minority kindergartens where education would be provided both in Turkish and Greek languages.

The full text of the written statement submitted by ABTTF to 35<sup>th</sup> regular session of the UN Human Rights Council is available at: <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G17/145/76/PDF/G1714576.pdf?OpenElement>

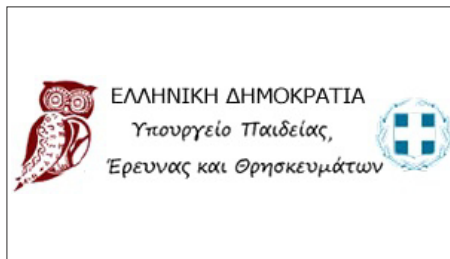


# Religious autonomy of Western Thrace Turks is being abolished step by step by the Greek government

Halit Habip Oğlu: “As the Western Thrace Turks without permitting another fait accompli of the Greek government, we should advocate our religious autonomy within the scope of rules of law to the end which we guaranteed with agreements through utilization of all democratic tools in hand.”

The Greek government established a commission on operation of offices of muftis in the region of Western Thrace where the Turkish community lives. According to the news in Gündem newspaper, while the commission was established with the decision of the Greek Education Minister Kostas Gavroglu to modernize operation and increase the level of the offices of muftis has 4 Greek bureaucrats there is no one representing the Western Thrace Turkish community within the commission. Offices of muftis in Xanthi, Komotini and Didymoteicho will be visited and the report to be prepared on operation judicial power of the office of the mufti by appointed coordinator of the commission, Eleni Anastasopulu, Vice President of Department of Different Sects at Secretary General of Religious Affairs in Greek Ministry of Education, will be presented to Minister of Education Gavroglu.

Related to the subject matter, Halit Habip Oğlu, President of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) stated: “The Greek government first organized teachers of religion course recruited as civil servants on contract basis pursuant to 240 İmam Law under the name “Rhodope-Evros Religion Teachers Association”. Subsequently, administrators of this



association after dismissal of the old mufti visited the acting mufti appointed to Didymoteicho at his office. And the Greek Government in its next step dismissed the appointed muftis in Xanthi and Komotini and now it plans to have the religion teachers serving in the state schools select the new muftis in Komotini, Xanthi and Didymoteicho and plans to appoint them. In meanwhile two separate cases are filed against the muftis selected by the Western Thrace Turkish community on the grounds that they occupy the office of the mufti. And now according to the statements of the Greek government authorities, a commission is established to modernize and increase the level of the offices of muftis however there is no one from Western Thrace Turks in this commission which directly involves Western Thrace Turkish community about the office of mufti. It is also remarkable that this commission was established in the beginning of last March just after the panel organized in Athens where sharia powers of the muftis were questioned. All these incidents experienced recently show that in order to abolish religious autonomy of

Western Thrace Turks completely, the Greek Government applies its sneaky plan step by step. As ABTTF as regards these intentions against our religious autonomy, we drafted a letter and sent it to international organizations. In response to our letter, Federal Union of European Nations (FUEN) with the press release it issued, condemned attitudes of Greek authorities for Ahmet Mete, selected mufti of Xanthi and İbrahim Şerif, selected mufti of Komotini and announced it would be the follower of the cases filed against our muftis. FUEN, brought the issue of legal proceedings as an intimidation and oppression instrument against Western Thrace Turks to the United Nations Human Rights Council. Our country Greece was so disturbed by this explanation that it pointed me as a target as Vice-President of FUEN and responded in a very rude and undiplomatic style and also blamed FUEN for being an NGO serving the Turkish government. Our country devoid of diplomacy and reality impeached me and FUEN severely for working for and supporting Western Thrace Turks. In the light of all these experienced without permitting another fait accompli of the Greek Government we should advocate our religious autonomy within the scope of rules of law to the end which we guaranteed with agreements through utilization of all democratic tools in hand.”

\*Image: [www.gundemgazetesi.com](http://www.gundemgazetesi.com)

## Elected Mufti of Komotini İbrahim Şerif called once again to bear testimony!

Halit Habip Oğlu: “Greek authorities' intention of intimidation and suppression against muftis who are religious leaders of the Western Thrace Turks should immediately come to an end.”

İbrahim Şerif, Mufti of Komotini, elected by the Western Thrace Turks living in Greece, bore once again testimony at the police department upon the order by the prosecution office on 31 May 2017. According to the daily Gündem, Elected Mufti Şerif, who went to the Police Department of Komotini with his advocate within the scope of investigation regarding the circumcision ceremony held in 2016 in Alankuyu neighborhood in the Province of Komotini for the boys belonging to the Turkish community in Western Thrace, presented his defense statement against the accusation of “usurpation of mufti authorities and office”. Mufti Şerif in his explanation he provided to the newspaper informed the circumcision of boys is a significant issue in Islam religion, adding with this circumcision



ceremony they had tried to a certain extent to help poor residents of Alankuyu neighborhood living through tough times with the economic crisis experienced in Greece-wide, and the incident is consisted of these. İbrahim Şerif, Mufti of Komotini, bore testimony at Komotini Police Department upon the order by prosecution office six times including the last one since the

beginning of 2017.

“In our country Greece, the legal proceedings in recent months targeting primarily at our muftis and executives of institutions and organizations belonging to the Turkish community in Western Thrace have turned out to be a political tool for intimidation and suppression. İbrahim Şerif, Mufti of Komotini, who has been elected by the Western Thrace Turks, is accused for usurpation of the office of mufti by the Greek prosecutor office and bore testimony at the police department once again. As ABTTF representing the Western Thrace Turks in Europe, we condemn the attitude of the Greek authorities towards our mufti İbrahim Şerif and present him our support. We call on the Greek authorities to end immediately their intention of intimidation and suppression against our muftis and executives of our institutions who haven't involved in any illegal act”, stated Halit Habip Oğlu, President of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF).

\*Image: [www.gundemgazetesi.com](http://www.gundemgazetesi.com)

## Response to the letter of ABTTF by Thorbjørn Jagland, Secretary General of the European Council

Thorbjørn Jagland, Secretary General of the European Council, responded to the letter of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) on violation by Greece of the right of the Western Thrace Turks for selecting their own religious leader and parallel to this within a historical perspective the recent developments experienced regarding the problem of mufti. Secretary General Jagland in his response letter stated he has taken note with great interest of the detailed information regarding the



current situation of the Turkish community in Western Thrace conveyed to him by ABTTF and

informed he will share ABTTF's letter with the relevant services of the European Council for consideration in their own work on these issues.

In its letter of 8 March 2017, ABTTF had articulated in detail the emergence of the problem of mufti of the Turkish community in Western Thrace within historical process and sent it along with the chronology related to the emergence of the problem of mufti to the Secretary General Jagland.



## Radical changes are made in educational system in Greece

Halit Habip Oğlu: “In planned changes in the education system by the Greek government, autonomous structure of the schools belonging to Western Thrace Turks should definitely be taken into consideration and our request for opening bilingual minority kindergartens within the minority system should be fulfilled urgently.”

Alexis Tsipras, Prime Minister of Greece with Minister Kostas Gavroglu explained about the changes the government plans to enforce in education system at the press conference during the visit he made to the Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs On 9 May 2017. Tsipras and Gavroglu noted that changes and innovations in education encompass pre-school, primary, secondary and higher education.



Within the scope of planned changes, compulsory pre-school education would be increased from one year to two years and total duration of compulsory education would be increased to fourteen years. As of September 2017, in all schools throughout Greece full day education will be practiced. Number of students in primary schools will be reduced gradually and this number is targeted to be decreased to twenty-two within three years. And entrance exams to university will also be abolished gradually. Related draft bill will be put to vote at the Greek Parliament in the coming autumn and the changes in education are planned to be enforced within three years.

Concerning the issue Halit Habip Oğlu, President of Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) made the following the explanation: “Increasing duration of compulsory education to fourteen years and pre-school education to two years will also directly impact the Turkish minority education with the autonomous structure in Western Thrace. The Western Thrace Turkish community of which educational autonomy is guaranteed with the 1923 Lausanne Treaty has the right to establish, administer and control its own schools. In planned changes in the education system, the Greek Government should avoid interventions which would harm the autonomous structure of the schools belonging to the Western Thrace Turkish community and our request for opening bilingual minority kindergartens that would provide Turkish and Greek education should be fulfilled urgently”.

\*Image: [www.griechenland.net](http://www.griechenland.net)

## Masjid belonging to Western Thrace Turks in Thessaloniki closed down!

Halit Habip Oğlu: “Greece hinders the Western Thrace Turks from exercising their prayer freely by closing down the masjids in Alexandria, Didymoteicho and now in Thessaloniki.”

The masjid of the association established by the Western Thrace Turks in the city of Thessaloniki, Greece was closed down. According to the daily Birlik, the masjid under the roof of the Macedonian-Thrace Muslims Educational and Cultural Association, which has been functioning since the opening of the association, was shut down by the order of prosecution office,



and worship in the masjid was banned.

As it would be recalled, in March 2017, first the masjid of the association belonging to the Western Thrace Turks living in Alexandria, and then the masjid within the premises of Didymoteicho Muslims Educational and Cultural Association was closed.

“The Greek government, also with inspiration and guidance of far-right party ANEL in coalition, closes down, one by one, the masjids operating under the roof of legal associations

established by the Western Thrace Turks in various parts of Greece. We condemn the closing down of the masjid serving for the Western Thrace Turks living in Thessaloniki under the roof of the Macedonian-Thrace Muslims Educational and Cultural Association which has been sustaining the masjid's activities through its own possibilities since its opening, and call on our country Greece to end urgently its systematic and direct interventions that hinder the freedom of religion and worship of the Turkish community in Western Thrace”, said Halit Habip Oğlu, President of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF).

\*Image <http://selanikdernegi.blogspot.de>



## Municipality of Mustafçova (Myki) demanded the personnel to be recruited for the EU program have a command of Turkish, prosecution office started investigation

Seeking for Turkish language proficiency in the vacancy announcement made within the framework of the EU programme foreseeing establishment of social centers at municipalities affiliated to the State of the Eastern Macedonia-Thrace by the Municipality of Mustafçova (Myki) which is the only Turkish minority municipality of Xanthi, caused a reaction in the rightists in the country. Upon the news in the local media, prosecutor's office started investigation about Cemil Kabza, Mayor of Mustafçova (Myki) Municipality.

Within the framework of the EU programme which foresees establishment of social centers at the municipalities in the state-wide Mustafçova (Myki) Municipality, after having been included in the EU programme through accomplishing the necessary procedures, made a vacancy call for recruitment of three people to run this programme with the approval of the Administrative Secretary General and by consulting the institution which executes the State Employee Examination. At the Municipality where all its population is Turks, in line with the decision taken by city council unanimously in order to run the programme better, demand for the personnel to be recruited to have a command of Turkish caused a great reaction in provincial organizations of the party Independent Greeks (ANEL) the rightist small



partner of the government and the New Democracy Party (NEA) and some of the local papers. And even Nikos Nikolopoulos, the racist MP of Golden Dawn Party, presented a parliamentary question at the Greek Assembly. Following all these events, prosecutor's office started an investigation about Mayor Cemil Kabza.

As regards the subject Halit Habip Oğlu, President of ABTTF, made the following statement: "What was experienced against the announcement made by Mustafçova (Myki) Municipality as for the demand to have a command of Turkish language among the qualifications sought for recruitment of personnel at the social center to be established within the framework of the EU programme is as if makes one surrender. Nothing is more natural than to demand the personnel to have a command of Turkish

language who will be recruited in a social center at the Municipality where all its population is consisted of Turks. It is unbelievable that some political parties and the local media raise hell about the issue of Turkish language obligation in the vacancy announcement made in line with the municipality procedure and following the necessary approvals. Indignation created by a vacancy announcement made in line with the programme criteria within the framework of a programme financed by the EU funds is a clear indication of the attitude towards the Western Thrace Turks in the country. In the vacancy announcements seeking command of the language of the minority living in the region has been implemented in Italy, South Tyrol where German minority lives. There are also examples of this implementation in new members of the EU like Romania, Hungary, Croatia, Slovakia, Czech Republic and even in our neighbor Bulgaria. However, our country an old member of the EU and praising itself for being the cradle of democracy unfortunately behaves like a banana republic. In the government within partnership of SYRIZA and ANEL, SYRIZA as the grand partner of the government which leaves all the issues related to the Western Thrace Turkish community to its rightist partner ANEL must say 'Enough' for this situation."

\*Image: [www.gundemgazetesi.com](http://www.gundemgazetesi.com)

### ABTTF Newsletter

The ABTTF Newsletter in four languages, namely in Turkish, English, Greek and German, is celebrating its 13<sup>th</sup> 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

#### Avrupa Batı Trakya Türk Federasyonu

Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe  
Föderation der West-Thrakien Türken in Europa  
Ευρωπαϊκή Ομοσπονδία Τουρκικών Δυτικής Θράκης  
Fédération des Turcs de Thrace Occidentale en Europe

##### ABTTF Head Office

Wemerstr. 2, D-8454 Witten Germany  
Tel.: +49 (0) 2302 91 32 91 - Fax: +49 (0) 2302 91 32 93

##### ABTTF Brussels Office

Square de Meeûs 38/40 B-1000 Brussels Belgium  
Tel.: +32 (0) 2 401 61 98 - Fax: +32 (0) 2 401 68 68

Executive Editor: K. Engin Soyylmaz Editor: Mustafa Veli