

Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europa Newsletter



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Western Thrace Turks at the 57th Congress of FUEN



ABTTF and BTAYTD together represented the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace at the Congress

The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) participated from 16 to 20 May 2012 in the Russian capital city of Moscow in the 57th Congress of the Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN). A delegation consisted of Halit Habipoğlu, President of ABTTF, Cengiz İsmail, Vice-Chairman of ABTTF, Özkan Reşit, Secretary General of ABTTF, Sami Yusuf, member of the ABTTF Executive Board and Aydın Ahmet, member of the Audit Board of the Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association (BTAYTD) and Executive Assistant and Advisor to the President of the political party Friendship, Equality and Peace

(DEB), represented the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace at the Congress hosted by the association of the Germans in Russia Internationaler Verband der Deutschen Kultur (IVDK).

170 representatives from 30 minorities living in Europe came together in Moscow

The official opening ceremony of the 57th Congress of FUEN was held on 17 May 2012 in the German-Russian House. Among others, Ralf-René Weingärtner, Director for Human Rights and Anti-Discrimination at the Council of Europe, Csaba Tabajdi MEP, Co-Chair of the Intergroup for Traditional Minorities, National Communities and Languages,

and Luliu Winkler MEP participated in the Congress. MEP Winkler made a presentation on the European Citizen's Initiative. The FUEN members welcomed the idea of starting a campaign in collaboration with the Minority Intergroup to collect 1 million signatures and FUEN was urged to continue working actively on its realisation.

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The problems of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace brought on the agenda of the Assembly of Delegates of FUEN

At the Assembly of Delegates of FUEN, the highest decision-making body of the organisation, ABTTF and BTAYTD submitted jointly a draft resolution and a draft statement related to the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace. In the draft resolution, ABTTF and BTAYTD stated the right of the Turkish minority to freedom of association has been violated by Greece and despite the three judgments of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) against Greece in this issue, the minority associations carrying the word “Turkish” in their titles have been dissolved or the new ones have not been registered. ABTTF and BTAYTD called upon the Greek State to guarantee the effective enjoyment of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace of its right to freedom of association without discrimination of any kind and fully implement the ECtHR judgments related to the minority. On the other hand, ABTTF and BTAYTD



underlined in the draft statement the right to education of the Turkish minority, mentioned the problems in the minority education system in Greece and also put forward solution proposals for these problems. Both the regarding draft resolution and the draft statement were adopted by the Assembly of Delegates of FUEN.

Four new member organizations

At the Assembly of Delegates of FUEN, the applications for membership of the Association of the Carinthian Slovenes SKS, the Croatian Centre of Burgenland Croats from Vienna the BarsEL of Balkars-Karachay and the EBLUL Member State Committee Germany were also admitted.



ABTTF pays a working visit to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe

ABTTF President Halit Habipoğlu: We have determined the first steps of the new strategy regarding our lobbying activities before the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe



The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) paid a working visit to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) from 23 to 25 April 2012 in Strasbourg. During the working visit, ABTTF President Halit Habipoğlu and ABTTF Director General K. Engin Soyylmaz uttered the current issues with regard to the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace in Greece, inter alia, the hate-motivated attacks on the Turkish minority and the problems in the area of freedom of association.



Western Thrace Turks hit hardest by the economic crisis in Greece

During the meeting with the former PACE President and member of the Turkish Delegation to PACE, Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu and Chairperson of the Turkish Delegation to PACE, Nursuna Memecan, President Habipoğlu uttered the current issues with regard to the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace.



During the meeting with Boriss Cilevičs MP, Second Vice-Chairperson of the PACE Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights, President Habipoğlu said due to the deep economic and financial crisis in Greece, unemployment has rapidly increased in the country and the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace has been hit harder than any other group by



this situation.

Hate-motivated attacks on the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace increases

During the meeting with Aline Ausanese, Lawyer at European Commission Against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), President Habipoğlu noted there has been an increase in the hate-motivated attacks on the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace and addressed to the latest attacks on the Xanthi Turkish Union and Bektashi lodge in Xanthi in March 2012.

Greece insists on not implementing the ECtHR's judgments

During the meeting with Irene Kitsou-Milonas, Head of Section at the Department of the Execution of Judgments of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR), President Habipoğlu said the Greek Court of Cassation (Areios Pagos) dismissed in March 2012 the application for the reopening of the Xanthi Turkish Union which was closed in 1986, adding that Greece does still not implement the three judgments of the ECtHR with regard to the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace and one on the Macedonian Cultural Home. Moreover, President Habipoğlu noted in its written reply to the motion for question submitted by Çetin Mandacı MP on the implementation of the ECtHR's judgments by Greece, the Ministry for Justice, Transparency and Human Rights expressed Greece is not obliged to implement those ECtHR's judgments.

ABTTF at the European Parliament



Potential impacts of early parliamentary elections in Greece and their results on the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace discussed

The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) paid a working visit to the European Parliament (EP) in Brussels. From 7 to 11 May 2012, Melek Kırmacı, Director of International Affairs of ABTTF, and Fatima Akkuş, member of the Department of International Affairs of ABTTF, met with the assistants of the MEPs in the EP and reported the major problems of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace in Greece.

During the meetings, the ABTTF delegation discussed the results of early parliamentary elections in Greece on 6 May 2012 and their potential impacts on the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace with the assistants of the MEPs and noted on 5 May 2012, on the night before elections, the Old Mosque in Komotini was attacked with a Molotov cocktail. In addition to the current issues and problems, the ABTTF delegation also mentioned the planned works before the EP for the protection of the rights and freedoms of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace. Moreover, the ABTTF delegation discussed with the assistants of the MEPs how the problems of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace can be brought even more on the agenda of the EP.

ABTTF on a working visit to Brussels

The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) made a one-day working visit to Brussels on 29 March 2012. ABTTF President Halit Habipoğlu and ABTTF Director General K. Engin Soyyılmaz discussed the main problems of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace in Greece with Luliu Winkler MEP and Willy Fautré, Director of Human Rights Without Frontiers Direktörü (HRWF).

ABTTF provided Luliu Winkler MEP with information on the problems of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace

During the meeting with Winkler, ABTTF President Habipoğlu stated that although the Turkish Minority had been granted with autonomy in the areas of education and religion under the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne, this autonomous structure had been practically eliminated during the period after the 1967 Junta regime in Greece. Habipoğlu added that Greece denied to recognize the ethnic "Turkish" identity of the minority and rather used the term "Muslim minority in Thrace" instead of the "Turkish Minority of Western Thrace". Habipoğlu also underlined that during the restructuring of the country, the minority issues needed to be treated with a different perspective in Greece, adding that Greece should be helped



to become a country complying truly with the fundamental values and principles of the European Union.

President Habipoğlu: Greece avoids dialogue and acts unilaterally

During the meeting with HRWF Director Willy Fautré, Habipoğlu said that the minority associations bearing the word "Turkish" in their titles had been either dissolved or not registered, adding that despite the three judgments of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) against Greece due to the violation of Article 11 (freedom of assembly and association) of the European Convention on Human Rights, Greece persistently did not execute those ECtHR's judgments. Habipoğlu also noted that the Greek Court of Cassation (Areios Pagos) had dismissed the application for the reopening of the Xanthi Turkish Union (İTB), which had been dissolved in 1986. Habipoğlu underlined that the minorities issue was also a European issue, saying that for the solution of that problem, a general approach at the level of the European Union which covered all the Member States including Greece should be developed.

ABTTF meets the Co-Chair of the EP Intergroup for Traditional Minorities François Alfonsi

The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) paid a one-day working visit to the European Parliament in Brussels on 11 April 2012. ABTTF President Halit Habipoğlu and ABTTF Director General K. Engin Soyyılmaz discussed the main problems of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace in Greece with François Alfonsi MEP, Co-Chair of the Intergroup for Traditional Minorities, National Communities and Languages.

During the meeting, President Habipoğlu stated that hate-motivated attacks on the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace had increased in the recent times and referred



to the attacks on the Xanthi Turkish Union and the Bektashi lodge in Xanthi in March 2012. Habipoğlu also noted that given the rising extreme nationalism and hate-motivated attacks, the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace was very much concerned about its safety of life. Moreover, Habipoğlu said that Greece had not only in

the economic and financial sphere, but in many other areas significant structural problems and the main problem laid in the way of looking at the happenings. Habipoğlu underlined that the issue of minorities was a common problem of Europe, saying that a solution could only be reached through joint efforts of the Member States at the European Union level. On the other hand, Co-Chair of the Intergroup for Traditional Minorities François Alfonsi said that as the problem of minorities was a part of universal human rights, the European Union should establish at the Union level a mechanism dealing with problems in the area of minority rights in the Member States.

Answer from the EU Commission to the written question on the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace submitted by MEP François Alfonsi

ABTTF President Halit Habipoğlu: The answer of the Commission is facile and inadequate

The EU commission gave an answer to the written question on the problems of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace submitted by MEP François Alfonsi(France). In answer given on behalf on the Commission by Vice-President of the EU Commission and the Commissioner responsible for Justice, Fundamental Freedoms and Citizenship, Viviane Reding replied that the Commission has no general competence regarding minorities.

Alfonsi: Autonomous structure in the areas of education and religion destroyed by Greece

After a series of lobby activities in the EP by ABTTF, MEP François Alfonsi submitted a written question on the protection of the rights of Turkish Minority of Western Thrace to the Commission on 12 April



2012. In written question, Alfonsi stated that the autonomous structure in education and religion was systematically destroyed in the period following the Colonels' coup of 1967. Alfonsi asked whether Greek Government could be urged to respect, protect and promote the rights enshrined in the Treaty of Lausanne. Secondly, Alfonsi asked what the Commission intends to do to protect the rights of members of traditional minorities and national and language communities in the Member States, given that the latter are, under the Treaty of Lisbon and the Charter of Fundamental Rights, obliged to respect the rights of members of minorities.

The EU Commission: We have no general competence on minorities

In answer given by the Commission on 25 May 2012, the Commission stated that it does not have competence on the issue. However, the Commission noted that it ensures that Member States are obliged to respect fundamental rights, including the principle of non-discrimination enshrined in Article 21 of the Charter.

President of Halit Habipoğlu said, "The answer given by the Commission is facile and inadequate. The problem of minorities is the problem of the EU. Although the EU has now no competence regarding minorities, the EU has to develop a more comprehensive approach and policy on minorities in the period after the ratification of Lisbon Treaty and EU Charter of Fundamental Rights. The conditions that candidate countries must comply with should be applied to the current members too."

ABTTF on a working visit to Berlin

The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) made a working visit to Berlin on 28 February 2012. ABTTF President Halit Habipoğlu, ABTTF Vice-President Cengiz İsmail and ABTTF Director General K. Engin Soyyılmaz visited the German Bundestag.

The problems of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace discussed in the Bundestag Committee on the Affairs of the European Union



The ABTTF delegation communicated the problems of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace in the Committee on the Affairs of the European Union of the German Bundestag. During the meeting attended by four members of the Committee, namely Thomas Bareiß (CDU/CSU), Dietmar Nietan (SPD), Heinz-Joachim Barchmann (SPD) and Dr. Diether Dehm (The Left Party), ABTTF President Halit Habipoğlu made a presentation on the problems of the Turkish Minority. First, Habipoglu provided the MPs with information on the work of ABTTF and said that the rights and status of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace

had been determined by the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne. Habipoğlu stated that although the Turkish Minority had been granted with autonomy in the areas of education and religion under the Treaty of Lausanne, this autonomous structure had been practically eliminated during the period after the 1967 Junta regime in Greece.

Habipoglu pointed out that due to the current poor economic situation in Greece, the living conditions of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace had worsened and that before the accession of Bulgaria and Romania to the European Union, the region had been the most economically

underdeveloped region in Europe.

Habipoğlu expressed concern that in an environment in Greece where the economic outlook was close to bankruptcy, the minority issues would be ignored adding that therefore the minority issues needed to be treated with a different perspective during the restructuring of the country. He said that Greece's main problem was how she perceived the events and her deficiency in solving the problems underlining that Greece had to be convinced to become a country complying truly with the fundamental values and principles of the European Union.

ABTTF participated in the 5th Fundamental Rights Platform Meeting

ABTTF reported hate crimes against the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace in Greece

On 19-20 April 2012, Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe(ABTTF), attended the 5th Fundamental Rights Platform meeting. ABTTF International Relations Director Melek Kırmacı and Member of International Affairs and Lobby Group Nazif Tahsim participated in the meeting held in Messe Wien Exhibition and Conference Centre in Vienna.

180 NGO representatives discussed the ways to boost cooperation among national



human rights institutions(NHRIs), equality bodies and ombudsmen and civil society in the 5th meeting of the Fundamental Rights Platform that has been established by Fundamental Rights Agency(FRA) in order to promote cooperation with civil society.

ABTTF: There is an increasing trend in hate crimes in Greece

In the first day of the meeting which gathered the representatives of 180 NGOs, the participants shared their knowledge and experiences in the workshops named "Floor is Yours", which provided an open space for participants to



discuss the issues that they feel are important.

In the workshop hosted by Human Rights Watch, violence and hate-motivated crimes against migrants and Roma in Italy, Germany and Greece were discussed. In this session, ABTTF's International Relations Director Melek Kirmacı stated

there are hate-motivated attacks against the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace in Greece. Melek Kirmacı reported the recent hate-motivated attacks against the Xanthi Turkish Union and the Bektashi lodge in March 2012 and added that there is an increasing trend in hate crimes against the Turkish Minority.

Young ABTTF at the YEN Easter Seminar



joined the traditional exchange market and introduced traditional foods and drinks which are unique to the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace and the Turkish culture.

Re-elected as YEN
Commissioner for Politics,
Fatma Reşit elected as YEN
Delegate to the European
Dialogue Forum

On 31 March-6 April 2012, Young ABTTF, participated in the Easter Seminar organized by the Youth of European Nationalities (YEN). Young ABTTF's Spokesperson Fatma Reşit and members Funda Reşit and Osman Yunusoğlu attended the Easter Seminar in Ritten, South Tyrol Autonomous Region of Italy. 100 young people from different European minorities shared their experiences during a week, and worked together in different projects. Young people discussed the themes "identity" and "minority" in seven different workshops.

In the first day of the seminar, Young ABTTF prepared a mask which tells the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace in Greece in the mask event, and Osman Yunusoğlu and Funda Reşit pictured the Turkish flag in one side of the mask, and the Greek flag on the other side. At the evening of the first day, Young ABTTF

At the YEN Delegates Council Meeting on Monday, elections for the YEN Board of Members and YEN Working Groups were held. Member Young ABTTF, Funda Reşit, was unanimously elected as a member of the Working Group for Communication. Young ABTTF's Spokesperson and YEN Commissioner for Politics Fatma Reşit was re-elected and became YEN's Commissioner for Politics. Furthermore, Fatma Reşit was unanimously elected as YEN Delegate to the European Dialogue Forum.

Young ABTTF joined the
traditional "Exchange Market"



The problems of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace were discussed in the European Parliament Intergroup for Traditional Minorities, National Communities and Languages



The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF), gave a presentation on “The Problems of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace” at the European Parliament Intergroup for Traditional Minorities, National Communities and Languages on 17 November 2011. The meeting co-chaired by MEPS Kinga Gal and Carl Haglund was held at the European Parliament in Strasbourg. ABTTF was represented by President Halit Habipoglu, Director of International Affairs Mrs. Melek Kırmacı Arık and Mr. Ali Türkelli, Member of the ABTTF Department of International Affairs. Around 50 people participated the meeting including MEPs whom are members of the Intergroup and MEPs ABTTF has been in contact via official visits to the European Parliament.

ABTTF informed MEPs on the major problems of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace

ABTTF began its presentation by introducing the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace and continued by

discussing the right to self-identification and the problem of the former Article 19 of the Greek Nationality Code, the right to association and the problem of implementation of ECtHR judgments, the right to freedom to choose its own religious leaders, the right to have a qualified minority education and the right to participate in politics and the problem of political representation. ABTTF informed MEPs and underlined that the autonomous structure in the fields of education and religious affairs have been usurped, despite the fact they are under the guarantee of the International Treaty of Lausanne. ABTTF also pointed out that the 3% national threshold is preventing the Turkish Minority from independent representation at the National Parliament, and called for its removal and for special rules and regulations to guarantee the Minority's representation at the Greek National Parliament.

During the Q&A session, ABTTF answered questions addressed by MEPs mainly concentrating on the economic crisis in Greece and its effects on the Minority, educational problems

and the current state of minority schools and the use of Turkish as a language in social and public spheres.

During the debate, MEPs underlined the necessity of the protection of national minorities through EU regulations and mechanisms, adding that old member states such as Greece should fully comply with the Copenhagen Criteria. At the end of the meeting, ABTTF found the opportunity to engage in close and warm dialogues with MEPs and their assistants exchanging views on possible collaborations for the future.



ABTTF participated in the Fourth Session of the UN Forum on Minority Issues



The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) participated on 29 and 30 November 2011 in the Fourth Session of the Forum on Minority Issues of the United Nations with the thematic focus “Guaranteeing the rights of minority women”. Melek Kirmaci, Director of International Affairs of ABTTF, Funda Resit, member of the ABTTF International Affairs and Lobbying Group and Pervin Hayrullah, member of the Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association (BTAYTD) represented the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace at the Forum in Geneva.

ABTTF and BTAYTD: The autonomous structure in minority education destroyed

Melek Kirmaci, Director of International Affairs of ABTTF, said that although the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace had been granted with the right to autonomy in education under the 1923 Peace Treaty of Lausanne, this autonomous structure had been destroyed over time. Kirmaci underlined that the absence of bilingual kindergartens for the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace was one of the major problems today and as the principle of equality did not necessarily mean the same treatment for everyone, ABTTF asked for the establishment of bilingual (Turkish and Greek) minority

kindergartens in order to finally overcome the problem. Pervin Hayrullah, member of the BTAYTD, reported in her speech that since 1923, more than 70 laws, decrees and government decisions had been adopted, and so the autonomous structure in minority education had been damaged.

Greece: 153 of 1,521 candidates in the Region of East Macedonia and Thrace are Muslims

During the session entitled “Minority women and effective political participation”, Fotini Sianou, Representative of Greece to the United Nations on Gender Equality, stated that in the electoral lists for the municipal and regional councils in the local elections in November 2010 in Greece, 153 of 1,521 candidates nominated in the Region of East Macedonia and Thrace had been women belonging to the Muslim minority, and this meant that 10 % of the all candidates had been Muslim women. In reply to the statement of Sianou, BTAYTD spoke that in the municipalities and on the local level, there were only 15 women belonging to the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace, and there was only one woman in the Regional Council of East Macedonia and Thrace.

With regard to the minority women and effective participation in economic, social and cultural life, Sianou said that Greece had introduced a 0.5 % quota in civil service for the persons belonging to the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace.



ABTTF submitted a written statement to the 19th session of the UN Human Rights Council

The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) submitted a written statement entitled "The freedom of association of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace and the problem of implementation of ECtHR's judgments in Greece" to the 19th session of the United Nations Human Rights Council to be held from 27 February to 23 March 2012 in Geneva. In its written statement, ABTTF indicates that the Greek Government is persisting not to execute the three judgments of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) against Greece.

Greece is unwilling to execute the ECtHR's judgments

In 2008, the ECtHR condemned Greece in the cases of Bekir-Ousta and Others v. Greece (application no. 35151/05), Emin and Others v. Greece (application no. 34144/05) and Tourkiki Enosi Xanthis and Others v. Greece (no. 26698/05). The Court held unanimously that there had been a violation of Article 11 (freedom of assembly and association) of the



European Convention on Human Rights in three cases, which concern associations founded by persons belonging to the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace (Greece).

Following to the ECtHR's judgments, the applicants requested the cancellation of the decision dissolving them (the case of Tourkiki Enosi Xanthis and Others) or submitted a new registration of their associations (the cases Bekir-Ousta and Others and Emin and Others) before the national courts. In its written reply to the motion for question asked by MP Çetin Mandacı in August 2011, in which the MP

asked for the steps that the Government was going to take about the ECtHR's judgment on the Xanthi Turkish Union, the Ministry for Justice, Transparency and Human Rights stated that there was no need to revoke or rectify the judgment of national courts in the case of Xanthi Turkish Union on the basis of new facts or a change.

In its written statement, ABTTF urges the Government of Greece to fully comply with the article 46 of the European Convention on Human Rights and guarantee the right of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace to freedom of association by recalling the firm commitment of the Greek authorities to implementing fully and completely the judgments of the ECtHR concerning Greece.

The full text of the written statement submitted by ABTTF to the 19th session of the United Nations Human Rights Council is available at:

http://ap.ohchr.org/documents/sdpage_e.aspx?b=10&se=126&t=7

ABTTF prepared a parallel report to the US Human Rights Report on Greece

Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) has forwarded its parallel report to Greece Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 2011 published by US Department of State on 25 May 2012. Since the US Report on Greece partially mentioned the problems of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace, ABTTF made detailed explanation to the problems of the Turkish Minority, which were partially or inaccurately mentioned in the US report.

In its report ABTTF mentioned the problems of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace

ABTTF stated in its parallel report that



the persons belonging to Turkish Minority of Western Thrace had to run in the elections from the majority parties due to 3% electoral threshold, and added that three members of the Turkish

Minority entered the Greek Parliament.

Secondly, ABTTF noted that although there were three judgments in which the European Court of Human Rights held that there had been a violation of freedom of association and assembly, associations which included the word "Turk" or "Turkish" in its title were still not allowed in Greece. ABTTF further noted that even association which included the word "minority" were not allowed in Greece and mentioned in detail the that the application for registration by South Evros Minority Educational and Cultural Association and Evrenköy Minority Culture, Folklore and Education Association were denied in Greece.



Furthermore ABTTF restated that the National Council for Radio and Television (ESR) issued penalties under Law No. 3592/2007 Concentration and

Licensing of Mass Media Enterprises and Other Provisions and noted that Tele Radio 104.2 FM ile KRAL FM which broadcasts in Turkish language must

broadcast 25 percent of qualifying time in Greek language. Regarding freedom of press, ABTTF further noted that two minority newspapers, Gündem and Millet were given high fines by a civil court for their articles about a Greek teacher in a minority school and added that the high fines can threaten Gündem and Millet's maintenance of publication life.

ABTTF made an additional contribution to the US Report and reported hate-motivated attacks against the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace in the year 2011 and in the first five months of 2012.

Attack on Okçular Mosque's dwelling

President Habipoğlu: These attacks in such fragile and sensitive period are alarming

On 22 May 2012, Okçular (Toxotes) Mosque's dwelling in Xanthi was attacked. On Tuesday night, an unidentified person or a group stoned the dwelling and caused material damage on the dwelling.

Okçular Mosque became a target of provocative attacks in election periods

There are only seven Turkish families living in Okçular village, which is located at the entrance to Western Thrace from the direction of Thessaloniki. In the village where Christians are the majority, the mosque had been set on fire and completely burned down on 7 March 2004, prior to national elections. The second incendiary action took place in 2007, and now on the day of the early election announcement of Greece for the 4th of October 2009, the mosque became a place of vandalism again. On 2 September 2009, an arson attack took place against the Okçular Village Mosque, and the fire damaged interior carpets, the engine of air conditioner



and part of the roof. Besides lusters, timber panels, pulpit, the book of Qur'an and the stone nish were also damaged in the fire. This was the third time the mosque had been attacked since 2004, each time prior to national elections.

Halit Habipoğlu, President of Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) said, "We strongly condemn attack on dwelling of Okçular Mosque. The mosque has been a target of provocative attacks in election periods in Greece. In the past, there happened three attacks on the mosque. In these days when the country is passing through a really hard time, such provocative attacks are alarming, and these attacks raise fear and concern among the Turkish Minority of Western



Thrace. Still, the Turkish minority must protect its calmness, and it must have a say in the governing of its own country by sending Turkish deputies to the Greek Parliament with their votes they will cast in the elections on 17 June 2012."

* Photo: www.azinlikca.net



Attack on the Xanthi Turkish Union

On 23 March 2012, an unidentified person or a group spray painted some figures on the walls of the Xanthi Turkish Union in Xanthi, Greece and wrote “ΕΞΩ ΟΙ ΤΟΥΡΚΟΙ (Turks Out)” on the entrance door. The Board of the Xanthi Turkish Union published a press release and condemned the attack and said, “We strongly condemn this attack, and we want that the vicious person or persons, who want to destroy the peace in the region in a period we have difficult times as country, to be brought before justice.”



On the same day, an identified person or a group wrote “ΤΟΥΡΚΟΣ ΚΑΛΟΣ ΜΟΝΟ ΝΕΚΡΟΣ (The only good Turk is a dead Turk)” on the wall of the Bektashi lodge in Aşağımahalle (Kato Thermes) in Xanthi, Greece.



They wrote “Turks Out” on the door of the Xanthi Turkish Union

The President of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) Halit Habipoğlu said, “As the Board of Directors, we strongly condemn the attacks against the Xanthi Turkish Union and the Bektashi lodge. The Turkish Minority of Western Thrace lives in these territories for centuries, and the minority is a part of Greece. We are concerned about the increase in racist

attacks at a time that our country is on the verge of bankruptcy. And we want that the responsible persons or the people who threaten the social peace in the

region to be identified as soon as possible.”

* Photo: www.milletgazetesi.gr

ABTTF Newsletter

The ABTTF-Newsletter in four languages, namely in Turkish, English, Greek and German, is celebrating its eighth 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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