

Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europa Newsletter

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ABTTF carries on its official visits to the European Parliament



The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) made on 21 September 2011 and 18 October 2011 two official visits to the European Parliament (EP). ABTTF President Halit Habipoğlu and Ali Türkelli, member of the ABTTF Department of International Affairs, discussed the problems of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace in Greece with MEPs François Alfonsi (France), Herbert Dorfmann (Italy), MEPs Laszlo Surján (Hungary), İsmail Ertuğ (Germany) and Alojz Peterle (Slovenia).

During the meeting with MEP François Alfonsi from Greens/European Free Alliance, ABTTF President Habipoğlu stated that the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace could not utilize in collective terms its right to self-identification and was therefore facing problems in several areas, in particular with respect to right to association.

Habipoğlu said that in Western Thrace, the associations carrying the attribute "Turkish" in their names had been dissolved and request for registration of the new ones were dismissed, even of the ones having the word "minority" in their titles. Habipoğlu stated that 60,000 Western Thrace Turks had been deprived arbitrarily of their citizenship under the former article 19 of the Greek Citizenship Code, and these denaturalized persons had to go through the normal naturalization process which is applied to foreigners, adding that this problem was nothing to do with application for nationality but 'restoration of the nationality'.

**No direct dialogue established
with the Turkish Minority of
Western Thrace!**

During the meeting with MEP Herbert

Dorfmann from the European People's Party-Christian Democrats, ABTTF President Habipoğlu pointed out that although Turkey was taking positive steps towards the Greek Orthodox minority in Istanbul, of which status and rights had been determined, as of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace, by

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the 1923 Lausanne Peace Treaty, Greece was unfortunately not in such an effort. Habipoğlu noted that Turkey had already initiated the process of dialogue with the Greek Orthodox minority in Istanbul which numbered today about 5,000, but on the other hand, Greece was persistently avoiding to set up a dialogue with the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace having a population of 150,000.

ABTTF President Habipoğlu provided the MEP Laszlo Surján from the Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) with information on the structure and activities of the ABTTF and said that although the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace in Greece had judicial right to autonomy in the areas of education and religion, this autonomous structure had been fully destroyed today through various applications. Surján, member of the EP Intergroup for Traditional Minorities, National Communities and Languages, argued that the issue of minority rights were in a sense a European case and hence there should be a macro solution comprising the entire Europe.

During the meeting with the MEP from the Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats İsmail Ertuğ,

President Habipoğlu underlined the Germany's leading position as the driving force of the EU economy by referring to economic crisis in Greece and expressed that they were concerned that the attitude towards minorities and foreigners in Greece were going to be more and more negative in that environment of economic crisis. Upon this, Ertuğ underlined the importance of finding concrete solutions for the problems adding that first, establishment of a dialogue between the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace and Greece was essential.

President Habipoğlu: We ask for our rights, not reciprocity

During the meeting with the MEP Alojz Peterle from the Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats), who is also member of the EP Intergroup for Traditional Minorities, National Communities and Languages, President Habipoğlu noted that despite Turkey's recent decision to return immovable properties to the Greek Orthodox minority in Istanbul, of which status and rights had been determined, as of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace, by the 1923 Lausanne Peace Treaty, Grigoris Delavekouras, Spokesperson

for the Greek Foreign Ministry, had claimed with respect to the immovable properties owned by the Turkish Minority that there had been no significant problems concerning property rights in Greece. President Habipoğlu stated that Greece had on several occasions refused to negotiate the problems of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace with the claim that there could not be reciprocity in the area of human rights issues, but however, the Turkish Minority asked for restoration of its rights, not reciprocity.



ABTTF communicated the problems of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace at the PACE

The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) paid from 4 to 5 October 2011 an official visit to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE). ABTTF President Halit Habipoğlu and ABTTF Director General K. Engin Soyyılmaz discussed the problems of and current issues regarding the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace in Greece with Boriss Cilevičs, Chairperson of the PACE Sub-Committee on Rights of Minorities, Stephanos Stavros, Executive Secretary of the European Commission Against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), Geneviève Mayer, Head of the Department for the Execution of Judgments of the European Court of Human Rights (ECTHR) and Giancarlo Cardinale, Adviser to the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights.



Boriss Cilevičs, ABTTF President Halit Habipoğlu expressed that while the Greek Minister of the Interior Haris Kastanidis was calling for an investigation on the possibility of restoring the Greek citizenship of about 400 Thessaloniki Jews and their relatives with blood ties, 60,000 Western Thrace Turks, who had been deprived arbitrarily of their citizenship under the former article 19 of the Greek Citizenship Code, came never on the agenda. Furthermore, Habipoğlu pointed out that intolerance against the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace had accelerated in the

environment of deep economic crisis in Greece. In response to this, Cilevičs mentioned that a similar situation had been experienced in Latvia three years ago adding that minorities were announced as the “scapegoat” in such hard times.

Problems with regard to the execution of EctHR judgments continue

During the meeting with the Head of the Department for the Execution of Judgments of the EctHR Geneviève Mayer, President Habipoğlu stated that despite the EctHR judgments against Greece with regard to the Turkish Minority associations of the Xanthi Turkish Union, the Cultural Association of Turkish Women of the Region of Rodopi and the Evros Prefecture Minority Youth Association, these judgments had been unfortunately not executed yet by Greece.

No solution yet for the problem of article 19!

During the meeting with the Parliamentarian

ABTTF communicated the problems of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace at the German Bundestag

The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) paid a one day official visit to the German Bundestag on 30 September 2011. ABTTF President Halit Habipoglu and ABTTF Director General K. Engin Soyyılmaz discussed the problems and current issues of the Minority with the Head of the Secretariat of the Committee on Human Rights and Humanitarian Aid Rainer Büscher along with the two other members of the Committee Secretariat and assistant of the Committee President Tom Koenigs.



During the 1955-1998, approximately 60 thousand persons belonging to the Turkish Minority had been deprived of their Greek citizenship and the problem had still not been resolved up to day. Secondly, Habipoglu reminded that due to the 3% national electoral threshold applied also to the independent candidates, the Minority was unable to send its own independent parliamentarians to the national parliament making their election practically impossible.

Habipoğlu continued by saying that discrimination and inequality continued even today and the rights of those, who had been deprived of their citizenship, were not restored while the Greek Minister of the Interior Haris Kastandis was speaking of restoring the citizenship of the Thessalonica Jews who were former Greek citizens. Another example he gave was the statement of Grigoris Delavekouras, the Greek Foreign Ministry Spokesman, who stated “I don't know of any significant problems about property rights” with reference to the trust assets owned by the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace and as the Minority they did not find this statement honest.

Discrimination and inequality is a part of the system in Greece

After presenting the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace in Greece and ABTTF, President Habipoğlu explained that the members of the Minority had been the subject of discrimination and inequality for a very long time in an EU member state that was said to be the 'cradle of democracy'.

Although the Turkish Government was taking positive steps towards the Greek Orthodox minority in Istanbul, Habipoglu said that the Greek Government was reluctant to build a dialogue with Turkish Minority of Western Thrace.

The policies towards the Turkish Minority are not honest

ABTTF participated in OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting

The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) participated in OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting on 26-27 September 2011. Director of International Affairs Melek Kirmacı, ABTTF International Affairs Department Member Ercüment Mustafaoğlu and Cemil Kabza from the Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association (BTAYTD) represented the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace at the meeting held in Warsaw.

Current Media Law is a threat to minorities

ABTTF International Affairs Director Melek Kirmacı stated that the Greek National Council for Radio and Television had issued a 3000 € fine to Kral FM for not broadcasting 25% in Greek while Tele Radio FM got away with only a warning. Kirmacı requested the change of Greek law 3592/2007 as it undermined plurality in the media. Cemil Kabza also mentioned the excessive fines levied on the Gündem and Millet newspapers and said that both newspapers were at the brink of bankruptcy and eventual closure.

Muftis elected by the minority are not recognized

ABTTF International Affairs Department Member Ercüment



Mustafaoğlu noted that the Turkish Minority was quite disappointed with the decision to prolong the term of office of the current appointed Muftis while they had been expecting a solution to the problem. Mustafaoğlu also reminded that the Mufti's Office had been vacant in Rhodes and Kos since 1972.

The right to freedom of association usurped and ECHR Decisions not implemented

Melek Kirmacı reminded that although there were sentences against Greece due to the shutting down of Minority associations with the word "Turk" in their titles, Greece

had been quite unwilling to implement the decisions. Cemil Kabza also mentioned that the Komotini Civil Court of First Instance had dismissed the request for registration of the Evrenos Minority Culture Folklore Education Association on the ground that the word "minority" in its title was not specified and in case it referred to "Turkish" with the word "minority", the title of the association was contrary to public policy.



ABTTF submitted a written statement to the 18th session of the UN Human Rights Council



The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) submitted a written statement entitled “Right to Citizenship and the Problem of Former Article 19 of the Greek Nationality Code” to the 18th session of the United Nations Human Rights Council to be held from 12 to 30 September 2011 in Geneva. In its written statement submitted under the agenda item “Universal Periodic Review”, ABTTF points out the problem of article 19 and urges the Greek Government to find a solution comprising all the victims whether they live in Greece as “stateless” persons or the ones who have acquired citizenship of other countries.

Statelessness is discrimination!

In its written statement, ABTTF describes that about 60,000 Western Thrace Turks were deprived arbitrarily of their citizenship under the former article 19 of the Greek Citizenship Code of 3370/1955 which provided for the denationalisation of 'citizens of different [non-Greek] descent' ('alloyenis', as opposed to 'omoyenis', that is, 'of the same [Greek] descent') who left Greece 'with no intent to return'. As a result of this discriminative practice applied from 1955 till 1998, there are today about 200 stateless persons living in Greece and the rest of the victims had

to acquire citizenship of other countries.

ABTTF states that since there is no retroactive effects in repeal of the article 19, those stateless persons living in Greece have to go through the normal naturalization process which is applied to foreigners and is long, expensive and uncertain as regards the outcome. ABTTF also notes that the Citizenship Council could re-gather in the first quarter of 2011 after two years delay, though the applications are still pending and there is no response given to the applicants about the citizenship process.

President Habipoğlu: We will persistently raise the problem of article 19 on every platform

“The problem of article 19 is one the most major problems of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace. As ABTTF, we have recently launched a new action plan with regard to the problem of article 19. Accordingly, we would like draw attention to the concerning problem at all international organizations, primarily at the European Parliament. Our aim is to draw attention to all Western Thrace Turks who were arbitrarily deprived of their Greek citizenship by virtue of article 19...Hence, we will raise the problem of article 19 on almost every platform.” said Halit Habipoğlu, President of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF).

The full text of the written statement submitted by ABTTF to the 18th session of the United Nations Human Rights Council is available at:

http://ap.ohchr.org/documents/sdpage_e.aspx?b=10&se=117&t=7

ABTTF participates in conference on Interplay of European National and Regional Identities



The Federation of Western Thrace Turks (ABTTF) participated in the conference entitled “Interplay of European National and Regional Identities: Nations between States along the new Eastern borders of the European Union” organized by European National and Regional Studies (ENRI)-East. Ali Türkelli from the ABTTF International Affairs Department participated on behalf of ABTTF in the conference which took place at the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC).

Supported by the 7th Framework Program, the project researched how minorities were formed in Europe

Dr. Andreas Obermaier from DG Research explained that at the end of the 3 year project, supported by the 7th Framework Program, helped shed light on minority issues following EU's eastern enlargement. Prof. Hans-Georg Heinrich stated that the research played an important role in the understanding of European identities and regional culture in the Eastern part of the European continent, as an obvious difference could be seen when maps of Europe in 1914 and 2010 were compared.

Immigration from Central and Eastern Europe brought diversity issues to the table

Dr. Barbara Dietz stated that there was much migration to Germany from Central and Eastern European Countries and they are researching the level of integration of these people to the society. She also explained that immigration from NIS countries have contributed to the migration consideration in Germany, which led them to focus on diversity and pluralisation especially in the labour market and social policy considerations.

Young ABTTF has become a member of YEN



The Young ABTTF participated from 14 to 20 October 2011 in the Youth Leader Seminar organized by the Youth of European Nationalities (YEN). Fatma Reşit, Spokeswoman for the Young ABTTF, and Gülşah Reşit, Secretary General of the Young ABTTF, represented the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace at the seminar hosted by the Sorbian youth organization "PAWK" in Bautzen / Budyšin, Germany. The content of the seminar with the slogan "VolunTEAR" was related to the 2011 European year of voluntary work and it focused on the voluntary efforts and engagement of young people and their added value for the public, politics and civil society.

Membership of Young ABTTF will enrich YEN

On Wednesday, 19 October 2011, the application for membership of the Young ABTTF was debated at the Council of Members of YEN. The Young ABTTF Spokeswoman Fatma Reşit provided the members with information on the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace, the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) and Young ABTTF, which has been created within ABTTF. Then, Madlena Kowar and Berit Nommensen gave information on their study visit to the head office of ABTTF in Witten, Germany in order to examine on site the Young ABTTF's

application for membership. Kowar noted that the Young ABTTF as an "old and new minority" was going to be enrichment for YEN and the YEN Executive Board was supporting membership of Young ABTTF to YEN. As a result of the vote, the Young ABTTF was admitted as a member of YEN.

Fatma Reşit elected as YEN Commissioner for Politics

At the YEN Council of Members, elections were held for the post of Commissioner for Politics of the YEN Executive Board, too. The Young ABTTF Spokeswoman Fatma Reşit, who was nominated by the youth organization "junge SPitzen" of the German in Denmark, was elected as new YEN

Commissioner for Politics, and so has become a member of the YEN Executive Board.

With the membership of Young ABTTF to YEN and after the Young ABTTF Spokeswoman Fatma Reşit has become a member the YEN Executive Board as Commissioner for Politics, the problems of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace will come more often on the agenda within and take up more space in the works of YEN, which brings the minority youth organizations in Europe together. As Western Thrace Turks living in Germany, the Young ABTTF, which possesses the characteristic of being both old and new minority, will bring a new perspective to YEN.



Rebuilding a competitive economy for Greece was debated in Brussels



The Federation of Western Thrace Turks (ABTTF) participated in the panel entitled “Reset Greece: Rebuilding a competitive economy” which took place at the European Parliament hosted by the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE). Mr. Ali Türkelli from the ABTTF International Relations Department participated on behalf of ABTTF in the panel where a sustainable rescue program was discussed along with new opportunities for a new foundation of the Greek State.

Commissioner Olli Rehn: The level of unemployment worries us

EU Commissioner for Economic and Monetary Affairs Olli Rehn explained that the EU has agreed to be more flexible and the private sector will contribute to the solution. Rehn stated that what he finds really worrying is the unemployment rate in the country. Michalis Chrisochoidis (Minister of Regional Development, Competitiveness and Shipping) who spoke in the same panel said they have to find a solution to this crisis: “We need to find a solution, we need to succeed and we will because we are fighters and we are fighters of change” explaining that there are 3 dimensions to change being political, economic and social. Vice-President of the European Investment Bank Plutarchos Sakellaris stated that the challenge is to succeed with the structural reforms and the growth to come with these reforms can only be expected in the medium term; however the main question he said was what had to be done in the short term.

The administration has been weak, the underground economy is enormous

In the second session of the panel entitled “towards a sustainable economic recovery program” EU Commissioner for Regional Policy Johannes Hahn said that the administration in Greece has been weak and there is need to change certain laws in Greece in order to ‘reset’ it. MEP Wolf Klinz who spoke in the same session said that the administration is considered unreliable due to corruption, there is need for an effective tax collection system and the underground economy which is enormous has to be dealt with.

Dora Bakoyannis: Greece needs a coalition government in order to overcome the crisis

Dora Bakaoyannis, leader of the Democratic Alliance for Greece spoke in the third session on opportunities for a new foundation of the Greek State and stressed three problems being political, mentality and corruption. Bakoyannis stated that they had spent more then they produced because it was politically possible and the system was happy to keep the people content by letting them spend more than they produced. Secondly she explained, they taught people that this was a nice way to proceed. The third problem was corruption she said and in order to deal with these problems Greece needs, first time in her history, a coalition government with realists and Pro-Europeans.

Rehn: “It is no secret that within the single market we are not fans of free trade zones”

During the question and answer session following his speech, EU Commissioner for Economic and Monetary Affairs was

addressed a question by ABTTF on The Economic Forum for Thrace’s application for a free trade zone in Thrace. Rehn explained that it was no secret that they are not fans of a free trade zone within the single market. He continued by saying that such a proposal should be checked at the very early stages and found out whether it is compatible with EU rules and regulations.

Chrisochoidis: The region paid the cost of the transfer of funds from Greece to other countries

The second question posed by ABTTF was addressed to Greek Minister Michalis Chrisochoidis on whether the new rebuilding of Greece’s economy is being restructured through new investments could be a good opportunity to invest in Western Thrace as it is considered to be among the least developed regions within the EU and what would his government’s policy be. Minister Chrisochoidis replied there have been many funds available to the region in the 1980s and 1990s and that they are trying to attract new investments to the region. He said that they are trying to restructure the area by supporting manufacturing and growth.

President Habipoğlu: “We are able to make ourselves heard directly; we can ask our questions directly. This is a very significant success”

Mr. Halit Habipoğlu, President of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe has issued the following statement: “It is very important to be able to attend to a panel with top-level participants and be able to pose questions directly in such a forum. This was possible with the establishment of the ABTTF Brussels Office. We, as Western Thrace Turks can make ourselves heard without anyone in between. We are able to pose direct questions similar to those of our MPs in the Greek Parliament on issues concerning us, addressed to the minister and EU Commissioners.”

* Photo: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/aldeadle/sets/72157626696555180/>

Spokesperson Grigoris Delavekouras: There are no significant problems regarding property rights in Greece

Grigoris Delavekouras, spokesperson for the Greek Foreign Ministry, stated that “I don't know of any significant problems about property rights” with reference to the trust assets owned by the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace.



Delavekouras: “A positive step in a long road”

According to Today's Zaman's news, Delavekouras met journalists in a press conference held on 31 August 2011. Upon a question on Turkey's recent decision to return trust assets to non-Muslim minorities, Delavekouras replied “we consider this as an obligation for Turkey” and added that the decision was a “positive one which could possibly heal the unfair actions carried out in the past”.

Delavekouras: There is no reciprocity when the issue is Human Rights

On 28 August 2011, Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs Ahmet Davutoğlu had

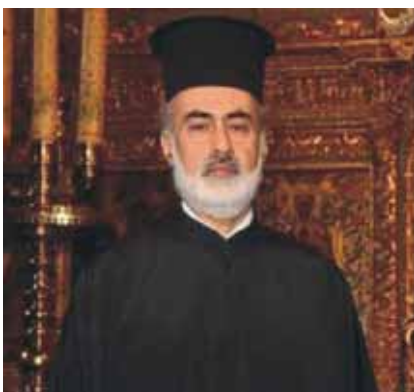
stated that they wished their recent decision could setup an example for other Balkan states, particularly Greece, regarding the restoration of assets passed on from the Ottomans to the minorities who have now become the citizens of the countries they are living in. Upon reminded of Davutoğlu's remarks, Delavekouras replied that reciprocity could not be an issue when it comes to Human Rights and added “Greece never speaks about issues concerning its own citizens with other countries”.

President Habipoglu: “We ask for the restoration of our rights, not reciprocity”

President of the Federation of Western

Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF), President Halit Habipoğlu issued a statement saying: “We recommend Mr. Delavekouras to conduct more research on the issue as he has stated that he does not know of any significant problems regarding the property rights in Greece. When he does, he will see that properties belonging to the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace have been nationalized or taken away via ill treatment. In addition, this issue cannot be delimited as just a human rights issue, as the status of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace has been defined by international and bilateral treaties. Therefore, as the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace, we want the restoration of our minority rights defined by international and bilateral treaties”. President Habipoğlu continued by saying that “Mr. Delavekouras has described the step Turkey has taken as an obligation towards EU membership. I would like to remind him that EU member states are obligated by the same responsibilities on minority rights as are candidate states. Therefore, conditions requested from candidate states are on subjects that should have already been fulfilled by EU member states.”

Father Dositheos Anagnostopoulos: “God has sent us Muslim Erdoğan”



The Spokesman for the Fener Greek Orthodox Patriarchate Father Dositheos Anagnostopoulos spoke to Atlas History Magazine published in Turkish and replied the questions of the magazine's Editor in Chief Behice Tezkaçar. When asked about the restoration of the properties once belonging to the Greek Orthodox minority, Father Dositheos Anagnostopoulos replied: “there have

been ongoing efforts for the last 3.5 years, and we knew that at some point it would bear fruit, however we did not think of it to be so soon. You would laugh if I told you what I feel. God has sent us Muslim Erdoğan”.

“We want Lausanne to be implemented”

According to Hurriyet's news, Father Dositheos Anagnostopoulos also commented on the Halki seminary saying that the Turkish government wanted to interlink it with a university but as they were against it, the Patriarchate chose to shut it down. Due to the dress code in universities and the fact that there is mixed sex education system, he explained that they were against such an engagement. He also added he wished that the Lausanne Treaty would be implemented and the school may reopen with its former status under the Ministry of Education.

“The Patriarch is half way down the crucifix”

Upon reminded of Patriarch

Bartholomeos's words “We feel crucified in Turkey” which led to great dispute, Father Anagnostopoulos said that following the reopening of the Halki seminary, the Patriarch's opinion would change completely and they believe that the government will help them. He concluded “Thus, we can say that the Patriarch could be considered half way down the crucifix”.

President Habipoğlu: As the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace, we want the restoration of our rights

President of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF), Halit Habipoglu, issued a statement saying: “The words of the Spokesman for the Fener Greek Orthodox Patriarchate

Anagnostopoulos are a clear sign of change of perception after the improvements in the field of minority rights. The attitude of the Turkish government towards the Greek Orthodox Minority in Istanbul is welcomed by the Patriarchate. Unfortunately, we cannot speak of a similar improvement in Western Thrace in Greece. The right for autonomy in religion and education granted by the Treaty of Lausanne has been usurped. Moreover, the Greek government is reluctant to engage in dialogue for any solution. In such a state, we can easily say that the ones crucified are the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace. We hope that Turkey's sincere policies will set an example for Greece. However, we should underline that when asking for such a thing, it is not reciprocity we seek, but the restoration of our rights granted by international and bilateral treaties.”

Minister of the Interior Kastanidis is investigating the restoration of citizenship for the Thessalonica Jews



Greek Minister of the Interior, Decentralization and E-government Haris Kastanidis called for an investigation for the opportunity of restoring the citizenship of

Thessalonica Jews and their relatives with blood ties. According to the In.gr website a law on reorganizing residence permits with improved security conditions to foreign citizens and local administration has been recently discussed. Minister Kastanidis, called for an investigation during the meetings, on the possibility of restoring of the citizenship of Greek Citizen Jews and their relatives with blood ties who ran away from the holocaust to Israel. Kastanidis stated that the citizenship application of the Thessalonica Jews, born before 1945 with a population of 400 including families, is an 'honour for Greece' and these restorations should be made with no pre-conditions otherwise it would constitute a grave mistake.

The Jewish population in Thessalonica, living there for nearly 20 centuries, was

around 80 thousand during 1900. After Thessalonica went under Greek rule from the Ottoman Empire, migrations began from the region towards other countries. Upon commencing of the Second World War, the Jewish population in the city decreased by half. On 9 April 1941, the Germans entered Thessalonica and the first thing they did was to send away Jewish men to labour camps. In 1943, the Germans decided on the 'Final Solution' and the holocaust was executed in Thessalonica as it was in the rest of Europe following this decision. During the period 14 March - 7 August 1943, 43.880 Thessalonica Jews were sent to Auschwitz and Birkenau via 19 train convoys. Only very few managed to escape and hid in neighbouring villages and Athens, only to survive. After the war, some Thessalonica Jews were able to return to their city, the ones who did not were deprived of their citizenship.

President Habipoğlu:
“Thousands of Western
Thrace Turks seek the
restoration of their
citizenship”

President of the Federation of Western Thrace Turk in Europe (ABTTF) Halit Habipoğlu issued a statement saying “We believe the step taken by the Minister to look in to the possibility of restoring the citizenship of the Thessalonica Jews is a very positive one. However, we also wish that he would show the same sensitivity towards the Western Thrace Turks who were deprived of their citizenships. There are around 60 thousand Western Thrace Turks who were deprived of their citizenship due to the execution of Former Article 19 of the Greek Citizenship Code. These people were also deprived of all their social rights along with their citizenship. Even today, there are those who live in Greece as “stateless” persons and there have been those who had to take up citizenships of other countries. These people want to regain their citizenship; they want their citizenship to be restored. The government should take into consideration this problem of the Western Thrace Turks, and should take a political step in order to achieve a judicial solution.”

LAOS MP Georgiadis proposed re-laying of anti-personnel mines in the Evros border



/Adonis Georgiadis, MP from the right-wing/nationalist Popular Orthodox Rally (LAOS) political party in Greece, proposed re-laying of anti-personnel mines in the Evros province. Georgiadis told the journal Crash that in order to stop immigrants wishing to enter Greece illegally from Turkey, the border region in the Evros province should be re-mined.

According to the news of the journal Azıncı, “The borders should be sealed in order to that

illegal immigrants cannot enter. Until a few years ago there were mined areas in the Evros province. As it was said that these mined areas were unacceptable, we destroyed the mines. If we want to protect our homeland, the re-laying of anti-personnel mines is required. Even we should put big signboards to warn those who intend to cross these regions.” said Georgiadis.

Georgiadis' proposal contrary to the Ottawa Treaty

“The Ottawa Treaty, which entered into force in 1999, prohibits the use, stockpiling, production and transfer of anti-personnel mines and aims their destruction around the world. Greece also signed in 1997 the treaty which entered into force in the country in 2003. In 2009 Greece has become one of the land-mine free countries. Despite these realities, Georgiadis' proposal of re-laying of anti-personnel mines in the border region is inhumane and contrary to this international treaty.” said Halit Habipoğlu, President of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF).

FRA launches its report on protection of minorities

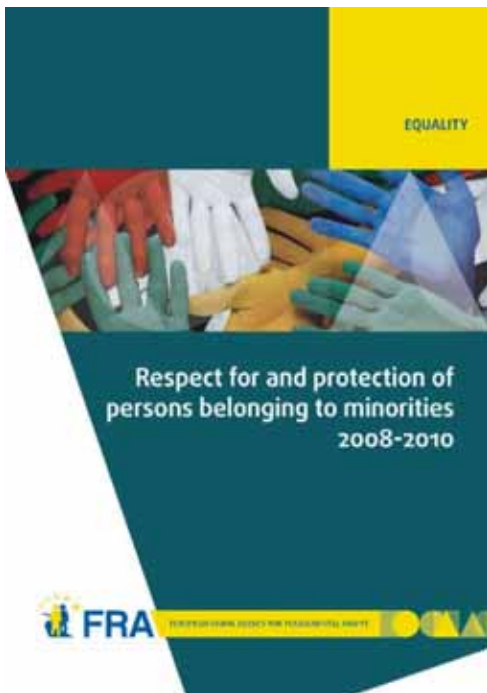


The European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) examines in its report entitled “Respect for and protection of persons belonging to minorities: 2008-2010” what the Treaty of Lisbon has introduced in the field of the protection of minorities. The report provides evidence of the still persistent

phenomenon of discrimination found in many areas of life, including employment, housing, healthcare and education.

The Turkish Minority of Western Thrace in Greece deprived of quality minority education

The Agency also examines in its report discrimination and racism in education and as regards of Greece, it is referred to the 2009 report of the UN Committee for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, in which the Committee expresses concern about the



alleged limited access for children from the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace to quality minority education

“The Agency's report on protection of persons belonging to minorities can be accepted as an indication that importance given to minorities at the EU level has been increasing. Then since we have become a member of the Fundamental Rights Platform (FRP), a network launched by the Agency to ensure a structured dialogue and enhanced cooperation and information exchange with civil society, we have persistently expressed that the Agency does not pay adequate levels of importance to national minorities and requested that the Agency's competence in this area

is increased. After the Treaty of Lisbon entered into force in 2009, for the first time in EU history, the term “the rights of persons belonging to minorities” is used in a legally binding text which constitutes a part of the primary law of the Union. It is quite considerable that the Agency draws attention to the situation of national minorities within the EU by referring to the reports of international organizations as of the moment. We would like the Agency to examine in the near future the situation of national minorities living in Europe on the basis of data collected by the Agency itself.” said Halit Habipoglu, President of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF).

FUEN President Hans Heinrich Hansen receives South Tyrolean Minority Award



The President of the Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN) Hans Heinrich Hansen received on 5 September 2011 at a ceremony in Tyrol Castle near Meran/Merano the South Tyrolean Minority Award for the Federal FUEN from the Governor of Tyrol Luis Durnwalder. The price, which was awarded for the second time, has a worth of 20,000 €.

At the ceremony with around 200 guests, Governor Durnwalder said that FUEN had understood that peaceful

Europe could only exist over the long term if peace reached the most remote corner. He directly addressed FUEN President Hans Heinrich Hansen and thanked him personally for his commitment to and engagement for minorities.

FUEN President Hans Heinrich Hansen thanked South Tyrol for this great honour and considered it as encouragement for the monitoring of the minority policies of the European Union, the regions and states of Europe by FUEN, the largest organisation of civil society representing the national and autochthonous minorities.

President Habipoğlu: “Hansen is a role model for his devotion and determination”

“I sincerely congratulate FUEN and my dear friend Hans Heinrich Hansen for receiving the South Tyrolean Minority

Award. Hansen is one of the leading persons in giving voice to the problems of minorities in Europe and a role model for his determination and devotion. Hansen supports at the same time the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace. He very much supported the ABTTF and Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association to become member of FUEN. He recently drafted a letter addressed to our Prime Minister George A. Papandreou and mentioned in it the problems of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace.” said Halit Habipoğlu, President of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF).





Mehmet Derdiman resigns from teaching

Mehmet Derdiman, principal of the Kurcalı Turkish Minority Elementary School and President of the Thessalonica Private Pedagogy Institute Association, resigned from his duties and retired from teaching. Mehmet Derdiman issued his letter of resignation on 18 October 2011 to the Coordination of Minority Education and explained the relieving of his duties with no prior warning was the main reason behind his resignation.

Derdiman: The law on appointing Principals and Vice-Principals to Minority schools is not implemented transparently

In his press statement, Mehmet Derdiman said that he resigned from his career due to his respect to teaching. He explained that the law on the appointment of principals and vice-principals (Ministry of Education Law 3848/2010, Protocol 1098/106950/22) was not implemented transparently and thus made it very difficult for him and the school administration to fulfill their duties, and due to his respect for teaching and teachers, he chose to resign.

Derdiman continued to explain that the



procedure on the election of Principals and Vice-Principals was never applied to Minority Schools and no one was summoned to the assigned commission. According to Derdiman, the candidate lists were never announced and no right for appeal had been given and the appointment of Minority Principals was always made in a coup fashion, despite the law and mandates.

President Habipoğlu: The autonomy for education has been destroyed due to a variety of applications

President of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe stated that: "According to the Treaty of Lausanne, The Turkish Minority of Western Thrace has a right for autonomy in education. However, certain applications of non transparent and compelling nature have turned minority education in to a mess. The juristic procedure on the appointment of Principals and Vice-Principals is a violation of law. Thus, Mehmet Derdiman has shown his reaction to these unjust and unlawful procedures and has resigned from his career".

* Photo: Rodop Rüzgarı

ABTTF Newsletter

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