

Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europa Newsletter

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Member of the Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN)



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ABTTF meets MEPs in the European Parliament



The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) made two official visits to the European Parliament on 22 June 2011 and on 12 July 2011 respectively. ABTTF President Halit Habipoğlu and Ali Türkelli, Member of ABTTF's International Affairs and Lobbying Group, discussed the problems of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace on June 26 with MEPs Edit Bauer (European People's Party-Christian Democrats), Judith Sargentini (Greens/EFA), Hélène Flautre (Greens/EFA), Filiz Hakaeva Hyusmenova (Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe), Metin Kazak (Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe) and on July 12 with MEP Franziska Keller (Greens/EFA).

[ABTTF discussed the problems of the Turkish Minority in Greece with Bulgaria's Turkish MEPs](#)

Upon meeting with Filiz Hakaeva

Hyusmenova and Metin Kazak, 2 of total 5 Turkish MEPs, President Habipoğlu communicated the socio-economic and political problems of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace. Hyusmenova and Kazak, firstly underlined the importance of diversity for the European Union and stated that within Europe's multi-cultural structure the minorities have a crucial role to play in order to achieve 'unification in diversity'. Both Hyusmenova and Kazak stated that ALDE is a friend of Turkey and the Turks, and that they are ready to support ABTTF.

[Sargentini: Within the European Parliament, most people are not aware of the existence of a Turkish Minority in Western Thrace, however almost everyone knows the Greek minority in Istanbul](#)

President Halit Habipoğlu at his meeting

with Judith Sargentini expressed his hope for a friendly environment as it was during Yorgo Papandreu and Ismail Cem's terms as Ministers of Foreign Affairs. Mr. Habipoğlu also explained that a similar atmosphere in Turkey is to be achieved thanks to the efforts of Prime Minister R. Tayyip Erdoğan and the Foreign Affairs Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu. Habipoğlu reminded that

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during Minister Davutoğlu's visit to Athens, the minister spoke with Greek Istanbuliots but unfortunately the Western Thrace Turks were not able to find any correspondence in Greece. Following Habipoğlu's explanations MEP Sargentini revealed her amazement from what she had heard and stated that although almost everyone knew about the Greeks in Istanbul, most people were not even aware of the existence of the Turkish Minority in Western Thrace.

President Habipoğlu: The autonomous structure in fields of education and religion has been usurped

MEP Héléne Flautre, Co-Chair of the Delegation to the EU-Turkey Joint Parliamentary Committee, enquired to ABTTF President Halit Habipoğlu about the first and foremost problem of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace. Habipoğlu replied despite the fact that there are international and bilateral treaties between Greece and Turkey, the right for autonomy of the Western Thrace Turks in fields of education and religion has been usurped through a variety of applications.

Edit Bauer: Despite the Lisbon Treaty, there are still shortcomings on Minority Rights

During his meeting with MEP Edit Bauer, ABTTF President Habipoğlu illustrated their activities in order to provide solutions to the problems of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace. In this respect, Habipoğlu gave insights on their membership to the Inter-Group on Traditional Minorities, National Communities and Languages via the Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN) and explained their efforts in order to make their voices heard. Bauer agreed that the Inter-Group is the best forum to discuss issues on minority rights, as there are still shortcomings in the field despite the Lisbon Treaty.

ABTTF met MEP Franziska Keller

During his meeting with MEP Franziska Keller, ABTTF President Habipoğlu illustrated the activities of ABTTF's head and Brussels offices in order to provide solutions to the problems of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace. Furthermore, he pointed out that in collective terms, the usage of the ethnic Turkish identity of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace was not permitted, and said that in Western Thrace, the associations carrying the attribute "Turkish" in their names had been dissolved or it was not permitted to found new ones. Habipoğlu uttered that in the past, Western Thrace Turks of "non-Greek ethnic origin" had been deprived of their citizenship under former Article

19 of the Greek Citizenship Code adding that 60 thousand Western Thrace Turks had been denaturalized through decisions taken by administrative authorities, not by judicial ones.



Civil Society and Politics meet at the European Parliament

The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) attended the meeting 'FUEN invitation to lunch in EU Parliament Cooperation between civil society and politics' on 29 June 2011, organized by Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN). ABTTF President Halit Habipoğlu took part in the conference held by Danish MEP Anne E. Jensen (ALDE).



FUEN communicated their activities at the European Parliament

A total of 50 participants comprising EP representatives, minorities, EU Commission and Council of Europe representatives took part in the conference and listened to FUEN President Hans Heinrich Hansen, MEP Anne E. Jansen and Carl Haglund, Co-Chair of the Intergroup for Traditional Minorities, National Communities and Languages.



Hans Heinrich Hansen explained that in order to form a close dialogue with MEPS, they have joined the Intergroup for Traditional Minorities, National Communities and Languages with a delegation of 10 persons and the main objective of the meeting was to provide information on the activities of FUEN. FUEN Director Jan Diedrichsen, also informed participants of a new cooperation mechanism and introduced a plan to establish a centre of competence for Europe's minorities, a project which is receiving financial support from the Danish government.

Secondly, Jan Diedrichsen explained that in order to fill the vacuum in the aftermath of the dissolution of EBLUL at European level, the most recent FUEN congress launched a new initiative in the area of regional and minority languages. Johan Häggman,



former member in the cabinet of the EU Commissioner for Multilingualism Leonard Orban, introduced the new Project.

Thirdly, Jan Diedrichsen mentioned the "Eisenstadt Declaration", FUEN's focus on the problems of the Roma with the title "Solidarity with the Roma!". He continued to explain that under the aegis of former minister Dr. Jürgen Schöning, FUEN is using its position as an umbrella organisation for minorities to also support the Roma, who are the largest European minority, and who daily suffer the most difficult conditions.

Fourthly, Gyula Winkler, MEP and MP of FUEN member organisation RMDSZ, representing the Hungarian minority in Romania, presented the idea of starting a Europe-wide pressure group, 'citizen's initiative', under the aegis of FUEN.

Fifthly, FUEN General Secretary Domowina Bernhard Ziesc, informed the participants of the meeting by giving a presentation on the European Minorities Football Cup EUROPEADA 2012. FUEN is organising this sporting event for the second time, in partnership with the Lausitz Sorbs.

Finally, FUEN President Hans Heinrich Hansen, brought the European Dialogue Forum on the agenda and presented his ideas on how to establish a structural dialogue mechanism.

Members of the FUEN European Dialogue Forum meet at dinner the previous evening

The members of the FUEN European Dialogue Forum met for dinner with President Heinrich Hansen and discussed the recent evolutions of the European Dialogue Forum. The European Dialogue Forum was established on 24 April 2008, by FUEN and the Intergroup for Traditional Minorities, National Communities and Languages. ABTTF President Halit Habipoğlu was elected as a member of the European Dialogue Forum, at the FUEN congress in Pecs, Hungary on 24 May 2008. Following the FUEN congress in Ljubljana on 12-15 May 2010, President Habipoğlu was re-elected for his second term as member of the European Dialogue Forum.

UN Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review released its report on Greece



The United Nations Human Rights Council's Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) released its report on Greece. The Working Group had reviewed Greece's national UPR report on 9 May 2011 during its eleventh session that was held in Geneva from 2 to 13 May 2011.

As regards the question of the "Muslim minority in Thrace" and of the administration and management of the "Muslim Foundations in Thrace", the Working Group notes that a law was passed in 2008 in Greece to respond to the demands of the Muslim minority. Moreover, it is stated in the report that in conjunction with the election of the Muftis in Thrace, the Greek Government is engaged to find through amendments or possible adjustments the proper way to deal with the election of the Muftis and of the members of the three main Muslim Waqf management committees. As for the withdrawal of the Greek citizenship, the report states that the article 19 of the Greek Citizenship Code was repealed in 1998 which allowed for the withdrawal of Greek nationality from persons who "abandoned Greece with no intention to return" adding that there is today a very small number of Muslims who are stateless as a result of the deprivation of

their nationality, and for these individuals who reside in Thrace, a special ID card has been provided and concrete steps have been undertaken to restore the Greek nationality of these few stateless people.

Regarding freedom of association and the three judgments of the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) about an equal number of associations in Thrace (Turkish Union of Xanthi, Cultural Association of Turkish Women of the Region of Rodopi and Evros Prefecture Minority Youth Association), the Working Group states that there is a constructive dialogue with the department for the execution of the ECHR judgments of the Council of Europe adding that there is a large number of Muslim minority associations and NGOs that have been registered with the competent courts and they operate unimpeded in the area of Thrace.

As for the situation of "Greek Muslims" living in two of islands in Dodecanese, Rhodes and Kos, the Working Group states that these individuals are fully integrated in the local societies, and their religious freedom is fully respected and they choose, without any intervention, their Islamic preachers.

The report contains also recommendations made by the state delegations for Greece. With regard to the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace, Turkey makes a number of recommendations for Greece on freedom of association, election of the Muftis by the Turkish Minority and the Law No. 3536/2007 ("appointed imams law"), the relevant legislation concerning the Waqfs, right to education in mother language and resuming Turkish language-education in Rhodes and Kos and the former Article 19 of the Greek Citizenship Code and withdrawal of the citizenship.

Habipoğlu: the UPR mechanism is far away from creating a desired level of impact

Halit Habipoğlu, President of the Federation of the Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF), made the following statement: "Since the Universal Periodic Review is an inter-governmental mechanism, it is not equipped with the power of creating a desired level of impact. As regards of the content, the report is inadequate and biased. Therefore, as ABTTF we will prepare a parallel report and subsequently submit it to the competent authorities."

The full text of the regarding report is available at:

[Http://www2.ohchr.org/SPdocs/UPR/11session/A_HRC_18_13_Greece.doc](http://www2.ohchr.org/SPdocs/UPR/11session/A_HRC_18_13_Greece.doc)



ABTTF submitted its parallel report on the UPR report on Greece



The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) prepared a parallel report on the country report on Greece that was released by the United Nations Human Rights Council's Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), and submitted it to the competent authorities.

In its parallel report, ABTTF expresses explicitly its criticism about the "Law on Waqfs" and the legislation on administration and management of the Waqf properties, and requests that the relevant legislation concerning the Waqfs shall be revised in consultation with the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace with a view to enabling the Minority to directly control and to use its own Waqf properties.

As regards the former article 19 of the Greek Citizenship Code, ABTTF requests, referring to the motion for question presented by Xanthi PASOK Deputy Çetin Mandacı on 19 January 2011, the Greek Government to convene without any delay the Citizenship Committee to inspect the pending applications of the persons belonging to the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace who were deprived of their Greek citizenship under the concerning article.

Regarding freedom of association, ABTTF mentions the problems encountered in the execution of the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) about three Turkish Minority associations which are the Turkish Union of Xanthi, Cultural Association of Turkish Women of the Region of Rodopi and Evros Prefecture Minority Youth Association, and underlines that although the Working Group states in its report that there is a constructive dialogue with the department for the execution of the ECHR judgments of the Council of Europe, there is till today no solution that is currently in practice and the domestic proceedings are still pending.

ABTTF has also pointed out the problems faced by the Turkish communities in Rhodes and Kos in the fields of religious freedom and education in mother language, and requests the Greek Government to find a solution of their problems in cooperation with the NGO's of the Turkish communities.

With regard to the parallel report, Halit Habipoğlu, President of the Federation of the Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF), made the following statement: "ABTTF has clearly expressed its view in relation to any matter which is described imperfectly or incorrectly in the report of the Working Group. Thus, ABTTF aims that the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace has a right to say on the issues related to itself."

EP President Jerzy Buzek replies ABTTF's letter

President of the European Parliament, Mr. Jerzy Buzek has replied ABTTF's letter dated 8 March 2011 on the attacks towards the places of worship belonging to the Turkish Minority in Western Thrace. President Buzek stated in his letter that the European Parliament is concerned about persistent discrimination and denial of human rights faced by persons belonging to particular religious communities including those of minorities, and will continue to encourage the approaches EU has taken in view of the elimination of all forms of intolerance and discrimination based on religion or belief.

ABTTF had voiced its concerns regarding the increase in hate motivated harassments and attacks towards the mosques belonging to the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace by sending a letter on 08 March 2011 to President Buzek. The letter also reported several incidents such as the attacks towards Halil Bey (Alaca) Mosque on 03 February 2011, Uysallı Mosque on 02 March 2011 along with the slaughtering of 30 sheep owned by Sali Fikret in their pen, setting fire on



another barn full of cattle and knifing tyres of 3 cars and 2 tractors on the same date.

ABTTF had stated that Greece was inclined to believe that such attacks were individual cases and underlined the increasing trend in hate motivated crimes against the members, properties and places of worship belonging to the Turkish minority. ABTTF also mentioned that it has very little hope that investigations will be carried out with due diligence and the assailants will be arrested and punished. ABTTF called out to the President of the European Parliament to pay continuous attention to the racist incidents and crimes against Muslims in the Member States, including those of Greece, establish a more concrete cooperation mechanism with NGOs in reporting racism and racist hate crimes and a strengthened observation mechanism in the Member States.

Excessive compensation penalties levied on two Turkish minority newspapers Gündem and Millet were brought to the UN agenda



The Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) submitted a written statement entitled “Freedom of the Minority Press in Greece and Excessive Fines Imposed on Gündem and Millet Newspapers” to the 17th session of the United Nations Human Rights Council to be held from 30 May to 17 June 2011 in Geneva. In its written statement, ABTTF criticizes the astronomic amount of compensation penalties levied on two major newspapers Gündem and Millet which belong to the Turkish minority of Western Thrace in Greece. The Greek teacher Hara Nikopoulou, who worked between 2005 and 2010 in the Turkish minority primary school in the village of Büyük Derbent (Megalo Derio), had sued the above-mentioned newspapers since they had reported that she had asked the first-grade pupils in the concerning minority primary school to draw the picture of God. ABTTF notes that both of the newspapers are not able to pay the excessive fines and so at the brink of bankruptcy. ABTTF underlines also that this situation threatens freedom of press of the Turkish minority, and the amount of

compensation fines should not result in unjust enrichment of the claimant, but rather it should compensate the moral loss of the claimant.

ABTTF states that during her teaching period at the Turkish minority school of Büyük Derbent, Hara Nikopoulou was warned by the Greek Ministry of Education, Lifelong Learning and Religious Affairs due to her extracurricular activities, these 'extracurricular' of activities of Nikopoulou were appeared in the Turkish minority press including Gündem and Millet and on several websites. However, Nikopoulou claimed that the news that she had asked her pupils to draw the picture of God was unfounded and sued subsequently Gündem and Millet asking for 1 million-Euro-compensation from each newspaper. The authorized Greek courts levied compensation fines of 150.000 euros for Gündem and 120.000 euros for Millet to pay to Hara Nikopoulou. The sentence also forces the newspapers for immediate payment of 32.600 euros for Gündem and 22.300 euros for Millet even if they are to appeal.

Unable to cope with such harsh measures, the newspapers were not able to submit to the immediate fines resulting in the freezing of the journalists' bank accounts in April 2011. ABTTF also notes that the cases were adjourned and will be revised on 24 February 2012 by the Thrace Court of Appeal.

In the written statement, it is stated that in her regular report to the Permanent Council, Ms. Dunja Mijatovic, OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, mentioned the cases of Gündem and Millet. According to this, Mijatovic states in her report that the compensatory damage awards that can be levied to ensure that judgments do not lead to bankruptcy and thus weaken media pluralism in the country. Moreover, ABTTF refers also to the concern of the Vienna-based South East Europe Media Organisation (SEEMO), an affiliate of the International Press Institute (IPI), over excessive fines levied on Gündem and Millet. ABTTF notes that in the 2010 World Press Freedom Index released by the Reporters Without Borders, Greece has fallen to the 70th place which is the worst position held by an EU member country, and calls upon the Greek Government to reconsider and revise the relevant legislation with regard to the compensation penalties levied on Gündem and Millet.

The full text of the written statement submitted by ABTTF to the 17th session of the United Nations Human Rights Council is available at: http://ap.ohchr.org/documents/sdpage_e.aspx?b=10&se=116&t=7

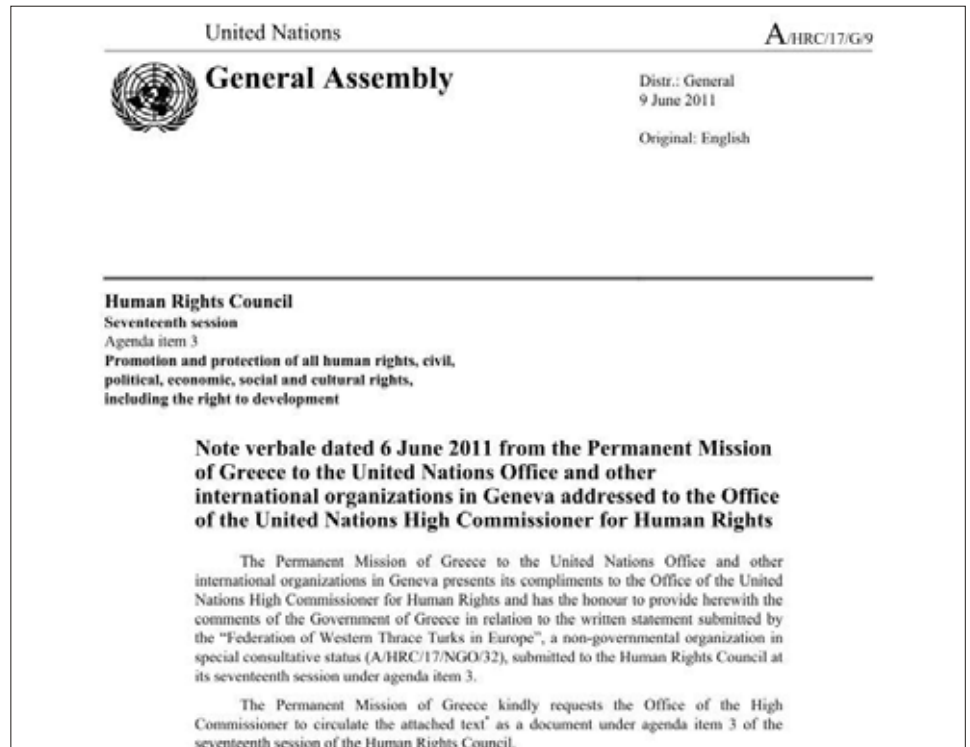
Reply from the Government of Greece to ABTTF

The Permanent Mission of Greece to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva replied to the written statement entitled "Freedom of the Minority Press in Greece and Excessive Fines Imposed on Gündem and Millet Newspapers" that was submitted by the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) to the 17th session of the UN Human Rights Council.

Greece: The Government cannot intervene in the work and decisions of the judiciary

In the note verbale dated 6 June 2011 from the Permanent Mission of Greece to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, it is stated that the Greek Government neither intervenes in the task and work of the independent judiciary nor comments on the latter's decisions. The Permanent Mission of Greece adds that although no interference exists either in the work of Mass Media, third parties see, to their surprise, in judicial rulings such as the ones in the ABTTF's written statement an encouragement to a policy of censorship or an effort to bring particular papers/dailies down to their knees. It is also stated in the note verbale that democratic notions/values such a freedom of press and independence of justice, are kept vivid with respect in everyday life throughout Greece and Thrace, where Greek citizens, members of the Muslim minority live, is no exception.

In its written statement, ABTTF criticizes the astronomic amount of compensation penalties levied on two major newspapers Gündem and Millet which belong to the Turkish minority of Western Thrace in Greece. The Greek teacher Hara Nikopoulou, who worked between



2005 and 2010 in the Turkish minority primary school in the village of Büyük Derbent (Megalo Derio), had sued the above-mentioned newspapers since they had reported that she had asked the first-grade pupils in the concerning minority primary school to draw the picture of God. ABTTF notes that both of the newspapers are not able to pay the excessive fines and so at the brink of bankruptcy. Moreover, it is also referred in the written statement to the regular report submitted by Ms. Dunja Mijatovic, OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media to the Permanent Council, in which she mentions the cases of Gündem and Millet and to the concern of the Vienna-based South East Europe Media Organisation (SEEMO), an affiliate of the International Press Institute (IPI), over excessive fines levied on the aforementioned newspapers.

With regard to the subject matter, Halit Habipoğlu, President of the Federation of the Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF), made the following statement: "It is important that the Greek

Government provided its official comments in relation to the compensation penalties levied on the newspapers Gündem and Millet...Then the concerning penalties were also criticized by OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media and SEEMO...At this point, the aim of ABTTF or OSCE or SEEMO is not to intervene in the decisions of judiciary. However, the decisions of judiciary are not unquestionable...The compensations penalties levied on Gündem and Millet are much higher than those levied on the other papers. In case of the non-payment of compensations penalties, it will result in taking press freedom of the minority under mortgage"

The full text of the concerning note verbale from the Permanent Mission of Greece to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights is available at:

http://ap.ohchr.org/documents/sdpage_e.aspx?b=10&se=116&t=2

Greek daily Apoyevmatini got rid of closure



The Greek-language newspaper Apoyevmatini, which has been in publication since 12 July 1925 in Turkey but was in danger of closing due to economic difficulties, could get rid of closure. The supporters of Apoyevmatini, which is published today once a week and has only 500 subscribers, has launched on the social media a subscription campaign entitled “Why should Apoyevmatini not close down?” against the closure of the newspaper which could attract in a short time great attention. The Turkish Press Advertisement Agency was also supporting Apoyevmatini of which application for official advertisements was denied due to its low circulation. Agency’s Director General Mehmet Atalay visited the newspaper and stated that upon instruction of the Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, they were going to launch a plan aiming at supporting minority newspapers having low circulation.

Support for Apoyevmatini grew in a trice enormously

Mihail Vassiliadis, owner and editor-in-chief of Apoyevmatini, spoke at the panel “Media in Transition Period” which was organized by TESEV (Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation) on 25 June 2011 in Istanbul, and said that as the Hellenic Airways and Ethniki Bank stopped their advertisements due to the economic crisis in Greece and as they could not receive official advertisements due to the newspaper’s low circulation, they had decided to shut it down on July 12, the

newspaper’s anniversary. Upon this, some people present at the panel have launched a support campaign for Apoyevmatini on social media, namely on Facebook and Twitter. Subsequently, many people, although they do not speak Greek, have participated in the campaign and supported the Greek-language Apoyevmatini by subscribing to it.

Director General of the Turkish Press Advertisement Agency visited Apoyevmatini and pledged support

Mehmet Atalay, Director General of the Turkish Press Advertisement Agency, visited Apoyevmatini and met with the owner of the newspaper Mihail Vasiliadis. Atalay stated that upon instruction of the Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, they had launched a support plan and were going to seek for permanent solutions for survival of Apoyevmatini. Atalay also said that they were going to hold a meeting with all minority newspapers at the end of July 2011 and discuss the existing problems: “We will find an agreed solution and try to support these newspapers. I believe that Apoyevmatini will survive for the right to receiving news of our Greek citizens”, so Atalay.

Habipoğlu: “Papandreou should follow Erdoğan”

With regard to the subject matter, Halit Habipoğlu, President of the Federation

of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF), made the following statement: “The support for the campaign launched on the social media against the closure of Apoyevmatini is very encouraging. Upon the news related to Apoyevmatini had appeared on the internet, Turkish Prime Minister Erdoğan took action immediately. This demonstrates that our motherland Turkey is quite sensitive and conscientious with respect to the problems of the Orthodox Greek minority living in Istanbul. We hope that Apoyevmatini continues further its publication life. On the other hand, it is unbelievable that in our home country Greece, the two Turkish minority newspapers Gündem and Millet, which continue their publication life through limited economic means, have been sentenced to compensation penalties in astronomical amounts on the grounds that they published falsified news. In Turkey, many people, who do not speak Greek but want to support Apoyevmatini and so keep a culture alive, have subscribed to the newspaper. This shows that Turkey lays claim to the Orthodox Greek minority living on her territory. The Turkish Minority of Western Thrace reacted to the heavy compensation penalties at international platforms. The reply given by the Greek Government to the Minority goes not further of trying to cover up the facts. I hope that Greek Prime Minister Papandreou follows the attempt of Turkish Prime Minister Erdoğan and takes a step to solve the problem emerged following the heavy compensation penalties levied away from justice on the newspapers Gündem and Millet”.



Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights Thomas Hammarberg warns: several hundred thousand stateless people in Europe need extra protection

Thomas Hammarberg, Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe, released a comment on right to nationality and stateless people in Europe. Having a nationality is a basic human right, so basic that it amounts to a "right to have rights", says Hammarberg adding that many stateless persons have little possibility to make themselves heard and are in many cases silenced by fear of discrimination. The Commissioner for Human Rights expresses that even now, on the 50th anniversary of the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, many people remain without a nationality and the United Nations Refugee Agency UNHCR estimates the number of stateless people in Europe as many as 589 000. Moreover Hammarberg says that stateless persons are often marginalised and when they lack birth certificates, identity cards, passports and other documents, they risk being excluded from education, healthcare, social assistance and the right to vote. Hammarberg calls on the countries hosting

stateless people to comply with the international law adding that governments, ombudsmen, national human rights institutions and non-governmental organisations should take action to defend the rights of stateless people.

Habipoğlu: the problem of Article 19 is the issue of restoration of the nationality

Halit Habipoğlu, President of the Federation of the Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF), made the following statement: "It is very important that the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights Thomas Hammarberg draws attention to the problem of stateless people living in Europe...Yet, the issue of stateless people does not get enough attention in Europe...Therefore, the ABTTF makes special efforts to bring the issue of stateless people who were deprived of their nationality under the former Article 19 of the Greek Nationality Code on to the



international agenda. Most of these denationalized people have today acquired the nationality of another country and live abroad or have remained in Greece and continue their lives as stateless persons. As the Commissioner for Human Rights states, the problem of Article 19 is the issue of 'restoration of the nationality'...And it is our homeland Greece which has to solve this ongoing problem."

Unfortunate Statement by Piraeus Metropolitan Serafim



Piraeus Metropolitan Serafim has criticized Anna Diamandopoulou, Minister of Education, Lifelong Learning and Religious Affairs, for the prospect employment of 250 religion teachers as officials in mosques in Western Thrace.

According to Gündem, Serafim issued a written statement accusing Minister Diamandopoulou for forgetting their

national history and asking: "was it the muftis and preachers in Western Thrace that won our national independence?" Stating that he could not forget the four dark centuries under Ottoman rule, Serafim criticized the allocation of staff and budget to the Muftis (appointed) in a time of deep economic crisis while forgetting the promises made to the church.

President Habipoğlu: We can go nowhere with historic bias and hatred

Mr. Halit Habipoğlu, President of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe has issued the following statement: "Piraeus Metropolitan Serafim's remarks are quite unfortunate. Serafim who describes

the Ottoman Rule as four dark decades, issued a statement with a very similar fashion of hatred upon learning the allocation of a budget and staff to work under the Muftis. This is unbecoming a man of religion, who should be considerate and tolerant towards everyone. Secondly, not to Serafim's knowledge, the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace has been against the appointment of Muftis and religion teachers by the state in accordance with the 'Appointed Imams Law'. The main problem here is that a man of religion and faith is threatening the peaceful environment by issuing a statement without withholding, fuelling historic hatred and looking upon us as if we were 'foreigners'. It is most difficult to construct a solid structure for dialogue based on mutual understanding and tolerance in an atmosphere where such mentalities dominate."

* Photo: www.orthodoxwiki.org

Historical Artefacts from the Ottoman Heritage in Rhodes are being destroyed



A brass band school will be constructed in the court yard of the Murat Reis Mosque and Külliye. According to Zaman, the municipality of Rhodes is preparing to construct a school for brass band and harmonica education in the courtyard of the Murat Reis Külliye, which is at the brink of collapsing due to lack of maintenance.

Brass band school to be constructed in the courtyard of the Murat Reis Külliyesi

According to the sign post in front of the Murat Reis Mosque and Külliye, which has been closed for worship since 1972, the site is undergoing renovation worth 900.000 Euros. However, according to Zaman's article, instead of restoring the historical building, the municipality is preparing to build a centre for brass band and harmonica education. The Muslim inhabitants of the island are protesting the municipality's decision on grounds that the Külliye is taken away from them only to be destroyed.

Murat Reis, who gave his name to both the mosque and the külliye was an Ottoman Naval commander who took part in the Naval Battle of Preveza under the command of Ottoman Admiral Barbaros Hayrettin against the combined fleet of the Holy League commanded by Andrea Doria. Murat Reis was buried in Rhodes after he had fallen fighting in the fronts. The külliye is also known as a Turkish cemetery for martyrs and comprises many tomb stones of Ottoman soldiers died in battle. According to the article, the island is the home for many historical sites and artefacts left from the Ottomans, who ruled the island for nearly four hundred years. Historical sites and artefacts on UNESCO's list of World heritage are being taken away from foundation ownerships on grounds of lack of maintenance and other excuses. It is also argued that the Rhodes Foundation for the Protection of Islamic Works is conniving at this destruction.

Habipoğlu: The traces of the Ottoman Empire are trying to be erased

President of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe, Halit Habipoğlu has issued the following statement: "Rhodes, being one of the leading islands of Greece's cultural and historical heritage also holds an important place in Ottoman History. Today, an important number of historical sites and artefacts left from the Ottomans are facing serious damage and even destruction. Quite similar to the situation in Western Thrace, historical monuments are taken away from foundations with several excuses and then left to decay or even used for different purposes. Constructing a brass band school in the courtyard of the Murat Reis Külliyesi, first and foremost is a grave disrespect to history. But of course, this not the only problem the Turkish minority living in Rhodes and İstanköy are facing. Not being recognized as a minority, their schools and mosques have been shut down for various reasons in the past. Today, there is only one mosque in Rhodes open for prayer. Therefore, Turks living in Rhodes believe that the main intention is to erase the traces of the Ottoman Empire in the island."

Atrocity in the village of Irca!



On 2 March 2011, the sheep pen of Fikret Fikret in the Irca village in Komotini, Greece was attacked by an unidentified person or persons. The assailants killed thirty of sheep in the pen.* According to the news published in the newspaper Birlik, the herdsman Sali Fikret stated that the throat of the sheep had been cut, but none of them had been stolen. On the same night of the attack, the tires of three cars and two tractors were cut. Again on the same night, a shelter of cattle owned by a person belonging to the Turkish minority of

Western Thrace was burned down.

Attacks on the businesses and assets owned by the persons belonging to the Turkish minority are increasing

According to Birlik, the concerning attack is not an exceptional case as the assets belonging to the Turkish minority of Western Thrace in Komotini have been attacked for four weeks. Previously, the workplace of a panel beater belonging to the Turkish minority on the way of the Seymen village, and one week after this, the workplace of person belonging to the Turkish minority in Kalfa was also attacked.

With regard to subject-matter, Halit Habipoğlu, President of the Federation of western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) made the following statement:

“The attack made in the village of Irca is quite surprising although the details about it has not been known yet...The fact that on the same night of the attack, a shelter of cattle was burned down and the tires of some cars were cut, reduces the claim that the concerning attack is a singular one or was made due to personal animosity. Again, the news about the attacks on the businesses and assets owned by the persons belonging to the Turkish minority within the last month cause concern that the peaceful environment in Western Thrace has been deliberately tried to be eradicated. We condemn the concerning attack, and demand that the law enforcement forces in Komotini capture at once the assailants, and find out whether there is a connection between those attacks made in Komotini”.

* Photo: Daily Birlik

Stoxos targets the Turkish Consul General in Komotini, Greece



The daily Stoxos published in its issue of 4 August 2011 a news entitled “Our eyes are on you” about Mustafa Sarnıç, Turkish Consul General in Komotini, Greece and wrote that the Consul General was travelling by an armoured car throughout Western Thrace.

President Habipoğlu: Stoxos sowing seeds of hostility in the region

Regarding the news published in Stoxos, Halit Habipoğlu, President of the Federation of the Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF), made the following statement: “For the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace, Turkey is the motherland. It is quite

comprehensible that as the diplomatic representative of the motherland, Mustafa Sarnıç, Turkish Consul General in Komotini, is participating in the cultural and social activities of the Turkish Minority. However, it is not acceptable that Stoxos is reporting the participation of the Consul General in various events in a distorted manner. Stoxos is a newspaper known for its attitude against the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace... The news published using a hostile language under the headings of hostile propaganda in the newspaper threatens the peaceful environment in the region. At this point, it is nobody else other than Stoxos which sows the seeds of hostility in the region...”



Request for registration of the Evrenköy Minority Culture Folklore Education Association dismissed



The Komotini Civil Court of First Instance dismissed the request for application of the Evrenköy Minority Culture Folklore Education Association.

According to a news from the periodical Rodop Rüzgarı, the Komotini Civil Court of First Instance dismissed on 13 April 2011 the request for application of the association on the ground that the word “minority” in its title was specified neither as “Muslim” nor as “Turkish”. The Court of First Instance held that in case it was referred to “Turkish” with the word “minority”, the title of the association was contrary to public policy and so dismissed the request for application of

the Evrenköy Minority Culture Folklore Education Association.

With regard to the subject matter, Halit Habipoğlu, President of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) made the following statement: “We have become aware of the refusal of the Komotini Civil Court of First Instance to register the Evrenköy Minority Culture Folklore Education Association from the press. The decision of the Greek court explicitly indicates that there has been no concrete development in relation to the execution of the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) by Greece.”

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

Avrupa Batı Trakya Türk Federasyonu

Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe
Föderation der West-Thrakiens Türken in Europa
Ευρωπαϊκή Ομοσπονδία Τούρκων 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