



## ABTTF is at the Parliamentary Assembly of Council of Europe

On 26-28 January 2009, Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) represented by Halit Habipoglu, President, and K. Engin Soyilmaz, Head of International Affairs Department, made an official visit to the Parliamentary Assembly of Council of Europe (PACE). The official visit, which took place during the first part of the 2009 Ordinary Session of the PACE (26-29 January 2009), had a great importance because of the four reports, which will be published in this year and in which the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace and its problems will also be referred to.



During the official visit to PACE, the ABTTF delegation met Silvia Grundmann, Advisor to the Commissioner for Human Rights, Claudia Lam, Lawyer, European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), Mevlüt Cavusoglu, Head of the Turkish Delegation at the PACE, Isild Heurtin, Deputy Secretary of the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights and Boriss Cilevics, member of PACE and the Sub-Committee on Rights of Minorities.

### The problem of Muftis and "Law on Appointed Imams" brought to the agenda

The first meeting, at which Nikolaos Stavropoulos, Thematic Advisor on Minority Issues and Refugees to the Commissioner was also present, was made with Silvia Grundmann, Advisor to the Commissioner for Human Rights. Habipoglu informed Grundmann and Stavropoulos in details on the "Law on Appointed Imams", and stated that the law numbered 3536/2007 could not be acceptable for the Turkish Minority in two basic aspects: that the Greek government had passed the concerning law without establishing a dialogue with and without asking the opinion of the minority and secondly, the selection of the imams as public servants by a committee composed five persons who were all Orthodox Christians. Du-

ring the meeting with Claudia Lam, Lawyer at ECRI Secretariat, Habipoglu informed about the problem of Muftis and said that in Western Thrace, a complicated structure was created and where Muftis were appointed by the Greek state and those elected by the minority.

During the meeting with Isild Heurtin, who assists Michel Hunault, member of the PACE and rapporteur appointed by the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights, in preparing the report entitled "Freedom of Religion and Other Human Rights for non-Muslim Minorities in Turkey and for the Muslim minority in Thrace (Eastern Greece)", Habipoglu provided Heurtin with information on the prob-

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lem of Muftis. He said that in 1990, despite the presence of two minority MPs in the then Parliament, the Greek government had passed without consulting the minority a one-sided law, and started to appoint the religious leader of the minority with the justification that the Muftis had judiciary competences.

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## The problem: Article §19

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During the meeting with Grundmann and Sitaropoulos, who also attended the visit to Greece on the issues of asylum seekers and minorities in Greece carried out by Thomas Hammarberg, the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, from 8 to 10 December 2008, Habipoglu

stated that under the former Article 19 of the Greek Citizenship Code, about 60 thousand Western Thrace Turks had been deprived of their citizenship, and not only the victimization of those living in Greece, but of all victims that already were removed. Claudia Lam told the ABTTF delegation that through the assistance of ABTTF, the ECRI delegation had met the minority representatives during its visit to Greece in September 2008, and gathered detailed information on the problems it faced. Furthermore, she said that in the ECRI's 4th monitoring report on Greece which would be published in September 2009, including Article, 19 all the problems of the minority based on discrimination would be covered, a due diligence regarding the

problems would be made and there would be recommendations to Greece. During the official visit to the PACE, the ABTTF delegation also met Boriss Cilevics, member of the PACE, who submitted the motion numbered Doc. 11261, in which the Article 19 and its victims were also referred to.

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## Habipoglu: PACE is the primary lobbying arena for ABTTF

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Concerning the official visit carried out to the PACE, Halit Habipoglu, President of ABTTF stated: "Due to the fact that four reports, in which the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace and its problems will be covered, will be

published this year, the PACE is the primary lobbying arena for ABTTF. At the meetings we carried out during the visit, including the problems with regard to the freedom of peaceful assembly and association, we got the opportunity to report in details about the problems the Turkish minority faces, in particular about the problems in the field of education and about the "Law on Appointed Imams". At the 21st anniversary of the National Resistance Day of January 29 and through its lobbying before PACE, ABTTF will continue its efforts to attract the attention of the international community to the human rights violations in Greece and to create public opinion in order that Greece changes its policy directed to the minority".

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# The problems in the field of education were carried to the UN Forum on Minority Issues



The first session of the United Nations (UN) Forum on Minority Issues whose thematic focus was "Minorities and the Right to Education", took place on 15 and 16 December 2008 in Palais des Nations in Geneva, Switzerland. The Forum will meet annually for two working days allocated

to thematic discussions. Representing the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF), Melek Kirmaci, member of ABTTF International Affairs Department and Kamuran Omer Oglou, member of ABTTF Executive Board, and representing the Western Thrace Minority University

Graduates Association, Cemil Kabza, former Chairman, and Pervin Hayrullah, Vice-Chairwoman, participated in the Forum, which was organized under the guidance and leadership of Ms. Gay McDougall, Independent Expert on Minority Issues.

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## The demand of the Western Thrace Turkish Minority for bilingual kindergar- tens was brought to the agenda

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On behalf of ABTTF, Ms. Kirmaci stated that under the Law 3518/2006, the Greek go-

vernment had decided to extend the compulsory period in education from nine to ten years by making the one-year pre-school education compulsory starting from the school year 2007-2008, and thus, those pupils, who had completed the 5th year of their age, were obliged to attend majority kindergartens. Kirmaci specified that since the regarding Law did not bring any regulation on ethnic and cultural differences of the children in Greece, the right not to be discriminated was violated, because Greece without an objective and reasonable justification failed to treat differently minority children who spoke a different language other than Greek. Kirmaci underlined that in line with the

status of the minority and the legal framework in the field of education, the children belonging to the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace had the right to education in its native language, and therefore, bilingual minority kindergartens had to be established in the areas which were densely inhabited by the Turkish minority. In reply to the contribution made by Kirmaci, Angelos Syrigos, Professor, Special Secretary of the Ministry of National Education of Greece, put forward that the allegation of violation of the right to education of the Turkish children in their native language was not true as children at public kindergartens do not have textbooks and do not follow any curriculum.

### Dragonas and Frangoudaki described "the Programme on Education of Muslim Children (PEN)"

Thaleia Dragonas, Member of the Parliament, Coordinator of the Project on Muslim Minority in Thrace – Greece, and Anna Frangoudaki, University of Athens, Center of Intercultural Research and Pedagogic Intervention – Greece, who were invited to the Forum as experts, made a joint presentation on "the Programme on Education of Muslim Children (PEN)".

Following the joint presentation of Frangoudaki ve Dragonas, on behalf of the Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association, Cemil Kabza made his contribution, and stated that the Turkish minority was granted with autonomy in the field of education. And Pervin Hayrullah, Vice-Chairwoman of the Western Thrace Minority University Graduates Association, expressed that the Turkish minority was considered by Greece as a threat in ethnical means, and the history books in Greece had still included biased information and approaches on Turkey and the Turkish minority.

### Written notice entitled "Greek Thrace: Modern and European Education Model" was distributed

A written, anonymous notice entitled "Greek Thrace: Modern and European Education Model" was distributed by Greece at the Forum, too. It is put forward in the notice that the Greek education policy aims that each student of the Muslim minority is educated and improves his/her personality freely, and enters the labour market as a modern Greek, Muslim and European citizen on the basis of equality of opportunity. In the same way, it is also argued that, according to the first results of the education policy, the disadvantaged group in Thrace has transformed to notional advantages for winning the tomorrows.



### Western Thrace Turkish Minority and the Greek policy on the eve of 2009

#### Esteemed Western Thrace Turks,

At the last days of the year 2008, Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) has passed through a year of international initiatives and lobby activities. We have participated in various meetings in many places of the world organized by the European Union and United Nations, and we have tried to raise the voice of Our Minority. Lastly, on 8-26 September 2008, ABTTF submitted a written statement "The right to Education in Native Language: Bilingual Education in Kindergartens" and put the demand for bilingual minority kindergartens of the Western Thrace Turkish Minority on the agenda. In this way we brought the problems of the Minority up to the United Nations level. Similarly, we organized an international panel discussion held in the European Parliament on the denial of the Turkish ethnic identity of the Minority and 19th Article issue, and we drew up the agenda there. Although our activities displayed at the international level ended with favourable results, the Greek government did not still establish an open dialogue with the Minority. Nowadays, the concept of democracy in Greece is being re-questioned throughout the world after a 15 year old young person killed after a police shot. International publishing houses and newspapers state that people in Greece do trust less in the government and the democracy in the country, and they react to the government. Evidently, the ruling power and the people who want to rule the country live for themselves, and they rule the country in accordance with their own interests. Instead of trying to solve the problems of the country in deed, the rulers have long kept trying to suppress their own failures in shadows of various problems. People of our country, younger generation in particular rioted when they realized how the ruling elite had been trying to mislead the nation. Besides EU countries are inclined to support the need for a new understanding of democracy in Greece. The majority in our country seem to realized that the ruling power and the postulant politicians who seek to rule the country had been deceiving their people in years. However, the ruling power should understand that it deceives itself, not the people of our country. Western Thrace Turkish Minority is neglected or presented as a threat to the unity and solidarity of the country by the Greek state and the government. We have been presented as the "other" and a threat to integrity of the country. However, the majority will continue to live in peace together with the loyal Western Thrace Turkish Minority, with no doubt!

On the eve of the new year, we wish the year 2009 to be a year of democracy, tolerance and cultural diversity for Greece hand-in-hand with the Minority! We wish that the ruling power and the postulant political parties do establish policies compatible with the reality. We would like to send our season's greetings to the Greek nation, together with Minority and the majority. And I wish that the year 2009 inspired with hope will be the year that the problems of our people get solved.

**Halit HABİPOĞLU**  
Chairman ABTTF

# The Problems of the Minority are on the agenda of the OSCE Civil Society Forum

On 2-3 December 2008, OSCE Civil Society Forum was held in the Helsinki capital hosted by the Chairmanship of Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), in Finland. The OSCE Civil Society Forum which is organized by the Finnish Committee for European Security (STETE) and its Finnish NGO partners was connected to the 16th OSCE Ministerial Council. The Forum concentrated on the OSCE's human dimension issues and gave the participating civil society actors a possibility to carry their recommendations for the high-level discussions of the Ministerial Council. The Working Group Sessions went deeper into these questions concentrating on the specific themes of human rights, human trafficking, and civil society and conflict resolution.



The recommendation prepared by the STETE and the representatives of NGOs submitted to the delegates of the 16th Ministerial Council. Although it was a non-official document, it is important that the recommendations reflected the opinions of NGOs and that it was carried out an intergovernmental level. The Forum, which gathered human rights defenders, activists, journalists and representatives of NGOs together,

reclaimed that security should be indivisible and that human rights were a part of the security concept.

## The OSCE Ministerial Council was asked to address issues with regard to the Greece's OSCE Chairmanship

On behalf of the Western Thrace Turkish Minority, Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) and Western Thrace Minority Graduates Association (BTAYTD) participated in the Forum. A member of International Affairs and Lobby Group, Melek Kırmacı from ABTTF and a member of BTAYTD Adv. Sinan Kavaz participated in the Human Rights working group moderated by Ambassador for Human Rights and Democracy in Finland Kari Kahiluoto which addressed the issues of minority rights, tolerance and non-discrimination, fight against hate crimes, human rights defenders such as activists, critical journalists and opposition politicians, and they shared their knowledge and experiences about the problems of the Western Thrace Turkish Minority living in Greece.

In the human rights recommendations prepared by STETE and strengthened by the participations of representatives of NGOs, it was stated that sixty years after the signing of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, there were still many areas in which participating States needed to focus on

and renew their efforts to live up to the principles outlined therein.

The representative of ABTTF, Melek Kırmacı contributed to the draft human rights recommendations and demanded together with other representatives of NGOs that the OSCE and its participating States, in their discussion of Human Dimension issues, should spend a greater proportion of their time focusing on fundamental freedoms.

Other important contribution to the draft recommendations on the issues which are important to the Western Thrace Turkish Minority had been the demand that the OSCE and its participating States should address issues related to the upcoming Greek chairmanship. The representative of BTAYTD Sinan Kavaz requested that Greece should recognize the existence of the Turkish ethnic and linguistic minority. And it was declared that Greece should ensure that freedom of association and assembly is guaranteed, respect religious beliefs and traditions of the Muslim Turks in western Thrace and in Greece in general, avoid ill-treatment of immigrants while in police or other official custody.

With regard to the issue of education, Melek Kırmacı and other representatives of some NGOs contributed to the draft recommendations that the OSCE and its participating States should strongly support human rights education and minority education. And, it is declared that education plays



a crucial role in improving the situation of minorities. Human rights education empowers individuals to acquire knowledge, understanding and experience about their rights and possibilities. Besides it is stated that often existing law mechanisms are not used effectively because of the lack of awareness and capacity caused by segregation and discrimination in access to education, and, that education should also target the majority, providing a lucid and transparent understanding of the spiritual or cultural background for religious or ethnic specific behaviour, aiming to prevent future intolerance by removal of ignorance as the base of xenophobia.

Expressing his opinion on the NGO Forum, the President of ABTTF Halit Habipoğlu said, "The OSCE Civil Society Forum held in Helsinki is important in the sense that it gathered representatives of many NGOs from the OSCE area. Western Thrace Turkish Minority should take the advantage of Greece's OSCE Chairmanship with a comprehensive and multi-faceted work program. ABTTF will continue to bring the problems of the Minority up to the international level, so that it does continue to be the voice of the Minority".

# ABTTF admitted as member to the Fundamental Rights Platform



Federation of Western Thracian Turks in Europe (ABTTF) is admitted to the Fundamental Rights Platform (FRP), which is a network for cooperation and information exchange, set to act as the main channel for the European Union Fundamental Rights Agency's (FRA) cooperation with civil society.

ABTTF also participated in a consultative meeting held in Brussels with representatives of civil society on the setting up of the Fundamental Rights Platform on 10-11 December 2007 which formed the final stage in the consultation process in which FRA has engaged with those representatives of civil society at the EU level who are concerned with human rights and non-discrimination. Plenary meetings decided to set the Platform as a mechanism for enhancing the exchange of information and pooling of knowledge between FRA and civil society stakeholders which are professionally concerned in human rights and fundamental rights and freedoms, and display its activities built on the European Union Fundamental Rights Agency's Directorate.

The specific tasks of the Platform, which is established with the aim of promoting dialogue with civil society and raising public awareness about activities of the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights established through Council Regulation (EC) No 168/2007 of 15 February 2007 that is being built on the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC), are:

1. to make suggestions on the Annual Work Programme,
2. to give feedback and suggest follow-up on the Annual Report,
3. to communicate outcomes and recommendations of conferences, seminars and meetings relevant to the work of the Agency.

Besides, the Agency will interact with the participants of the Fundamental Rights Platform in accordance with specific needs related to areas identified as a priority for the Agency's work. The first meeting of the Fundamental Rights Platform (FRP) took place on 7 and 8 October 2008 focused on the suggestions for the Agency's work programme in 2009 and, it collected feedback on the Annual Report 2008. The next phase in the setting up of the Platform is to design the basic structures for its work and the Agency with an established interim group will do this during the first half of 2009 in consultation with the current Platform members.

Evaluating the admission of ABTTF to the Fundamental Rights Platform, Chairman Halit Habipoğlu said, "It is important that the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights, which is built on the the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia, will function in cooperation with civil society partners through the Fundamental Rights Platform. All you might know that Our Federation participated in consultative meetings on the establishment of the Platform, and it will be in cooperation with the Fundamental Rights Agency which does have the task to advice to EU institutions and Member States. Our admission to such Platform on behalf of the Western Thracian Turkish Minority is a result of decisive activities at the international level. ABTTF, will do its best and contribute to the work of the Platform and try to put its effort to end discrimination at all levels."



# “Appointed Imams Law ” Issue continues to raise

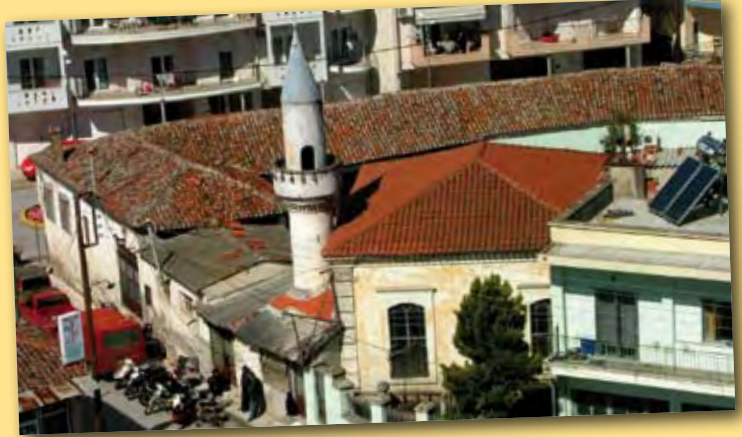
The discussion about the appointment of 240 “ecclesiastic” persons who are to be charged in mosques in Western Thrace with the enactment of the Law 3536/2007 which does envisage appointment of 6.785 people in charge of the public service gets fever. Recently, interview with nominates for the position of “ecclesiastic” in Komotini has come up with the issue of “appointed imams law” once again.



The selection of the imams who are to be appointed as “ecclesiastic” in public service by a committee of five Christians is a violation of the freedom of religion and conscience to the Western Thrace Turkish Minority. In Orthodox Christianity, which is the basic constituent of the Greek culture and Greekness, the State pays salaries of the religious men in the Orthodox church, because they are in charge of the public service.

However, the State still does not have the jurisdiction of appointment of any religious men to the Orthodox church. On the other hand, the Jewish Central Boards and shared Jewish communities have public law entity concept. Nonetheless, the Armenians living in Greece do select their own religious leaders, although they are Orthodox too, like the Jewish and Catholic communities. Besides, the religious leader of the Armenians in Komotini had come to the country from Beirut twelve years ago. The Greek state does not follow an unequal policy on minorities and the freedom of religion and conscience of the religious communities. Therefore, the appointment of a delegation of five Christians to select 240 religious men who are to be appointed to the Komotini, Xanthi and Dimetoka Muftis has caused a right reaction of the Western Thrace Turkish Minority.

In Western Thrace, 1920 Greek Sevres Treaty and 1923 Lausanne Peace Treaty ensured religious freedoms of the Minority members. Although the Lausanne Treaty did not specifically mention the institution of mufti, 1913 Athens Treaty mentioned the institution of mufti in details, and Greece passed the Law 2345/1920, and reflected the Treaty in domestic law. After problems with regard to the appointment of mufti with the Greek government in 1985, Greek authorities cancelled the Law 2345/1920 with the Decree Law on the Establishment of Theology School and the Institution of Mufti in Western Thrace and the authorities reregulated the law with regard to the institution of mufti. The Law 1920/1991 on Muslim Religious Men stated that muftis discharged their duties arising from Sacred Islamic laws and sharia, determines religious people on duty and they inspect, control and dismiss them.



The freedom of religion and conscience is guaranteed by international treaties of which Greece is a part as well as its obligations arising from bilateral treaties signed between Greece and Turkey, and the Greek Constitution and laws. The freedom of free exercise of religion is ensured in Article 13(2) in the Greek Constitution and the law stated that the Muslim Turks who believe in the “recognized” religion of Islam could freely exercise their religion provided that they are against ethics and public policy.

The freedom of religion and conscience of the Muslim Turks are guaranteed by international treaties of which Greece is a part:

- 1948 UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights
- 1965 UN International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination
- 1966 UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
- 1969 UN Declaration on Social Progress and Development and 1981 Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief
- 1993 UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious or Linguistic Minorities
- 1952 European Convention on Human Rights (11<sup>th</sup> Protocol)
- Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union
- UN Covenant on Civil and Political Rights

Besides international documents stated below also guarantees the freedom of religion and conscience:

- 1965 Helsinki Final Act
- 1983 Concluding Document of the Madrid Meeting
- 1989 Concluding Document of the Vienna Meeting
- 1990 Charter of Paris for a New Europe
- 1999 OSCE Charter for European Security

According to the Lausanne Peace Treaty and applicable legislation Mufti (appointed) is a public servant.

Western Thrace Muslim Turkish Minority does and must give a public law entity concept with its Muftis, mosques, lodges and other institutions. However, Greek authorities and legislators

do not accept this status. The aim of the enactment of "appointed imams law" without asking the opinion of the Minority is beyond that Muslim religious men are to be charged in public service so that they get under social security. Without no solution with regard to the Mufti issue, there is no sense to appoint 240 religious men to the mosques, and this attempt has to be evaluated as a move to destroy the religious sovereignty of the Minority. Otherwise, the Greek government must establish policies with an open dialogue with the Minority itself.



Expressing his views the President of the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe Halit Habipoğlu said, "The Law 3536/2007 which envisages the appointment of 240 imams in charge of public service as "ecclesiastic" without asking the opinion of the Western Thrace Turkish Minority itself is a clear indication that Greek government denies to establish a dialogue with the Minority. Besides, the selection of the candidates for the position of religious men under public service by a delegation of five Christians is a clear violation of the freedom of religion and conscience. In addition, it is totally against the principle that "Minority administrates its own religious and vakfs institutions" states in the Lausanne Treaty. If the Greek government is genuine with "modern minority policy", it must construct and develop such policy with the Minority itself and to the advantage of the Minority".

# Minority demands a new education policy

The Turkish Minority of Western Thrace does have a host of problems in the field of education. The President of Western Thrace Minority Education and Culture Company (BAKEŞ) Galip Galip declared that initiatives in the field of education were constantly hindered. Answering the questions of minority newspaper Gündem, Galip told that a new education policy is essentially needed to be established.



to Panathrakikos team as training ground despite the objection by the local council. Therefore, Galip evaluates the recent decision a somewhat prevention of the establishment of the school.

## The foundation of a day care center in Xanthi is being prevented

Concerning the problem of pre-school education which has become a contracted issue since the Minority's demand of bilingual kindergartens is being rejected by the Greek authority, Galip Galip stated that BAKEŞ demanded four different places from the Xanthi Community Authority for the day care center after the day care center under the Western Thrace Minority Graduates Association were closed down. However, Galip told that their demand was rejected. Education with cronical problems is one of the most difficult problem in Western Thrace due to the long-established Greek state and government policy. The Minority educational system with no dialogue with the Minority which lacks necessary reforms for a modern education should be reconstructed. Galip stated that promises given to the Minority were not fulfilled and added that pedagogues and representatives of the Minority should develop a new educational strategy. The President of the Federa-



tion of Western Thrace Turks in Europe Halit Habipoğlu expressed his views as follows: "Education is a chronically problematic field in Western Thrace. The Minority does face with a variety of problems in the field of education. However, initiatives taken towards the solution of the problems have not been replied in the level of state and governments. The recent example to this situation is the neglect of the demand of bilingual minority kindergartens by the Greek government. The Minority educational system is very much far away from a "modern and European model" of education, contrary what the Greek state and government do claim. The minority educational system needs to be reconstructed on the basis of tolerance and equality with an understanding of mutual respect and dialogue. As everybody knows, the child's right to education is an unavoidable and unimpeded human right. A "modern and European" model of minority education which is claimed to exist in Western Thrace can only be established with such understanding".



## The demand of establishment of a Minority secondary school in Domruköy has been rejected

Galip Galip told that they applied to the Sirkeli municipality for appropriation of land for a Minority secondary school in the region of Sirkeli, and that the application was rejected by the Eastern Macedonia- Thrace Regional General Secretary on the grounds that there was no reference that there was a school necessity in the region and that BAKES was a non-profit company, despite the approval of local council. After necessary corrections were made in the application, Galip stated that they were re-applied. However, the application was rejected once again on the ground that there was no decision approved by the local council of Domruköy. However, Galip Galip reminds that the pasture in Tuzcuköy was given over



# Grigoris Vallianatos, who affirmed the existence of a Macedonian minority was sacked from PASOK

On 12 November 2008, Grigoris Vallianatos, one of the chief communication advisers of the main Greek opposition party PASOK, was sacked from his party. The reason behind the expulsion from the party is pointed that he publicly criticized the Greek policy on the Macedonian minority in Greece and the Republic of Macedonia while speaking to the Extra Channel.



When asked for his opinion, Vallianatos who is one of the former advisors to the President of the Greek PASOK Party Giorgos Papandreu stated that Greece should recognize the name of the state of Macedonia as it appears in its Constitution, and that Greece should reach a settlement about the ethnic Macedonian minority in its country. Although Vallianatos said that this was his personal opinion not the official opinion of PASOK, he was officially expelled from his party next day. In the press release, PASOK stated that the party ended its business relationship with Vallianatos in proper with ethical understanding after his statement on foreign policy issues.

On the expulsion of Vallianatos who is also the chief executive of Greek Helsinki Monitor, the organization released a press statement and blamed Papandreu of being populist, self

ensorship and political inconsistency. Papandreu had recommended in his personal website the book named "Inappropriate" written by Vallianatos which includes controversial suggestions about minorities in Greece. Therefore, the expulsion of Vallianatos by Papandreu who very well knows Vallianatos and his opinions is seen as a result of conflict among political interests.

Expressing his views on the issue, President of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) Halit Habipoğlu told, " The expulsion of Grigoris Vallianatos- who also defended that Western Thrace Turkish Minority could express their own ethnic identities in 1999- because he expressed his personal opinion about the ethnic Macedonian minority living in Greece does clearly indicate that ethnic minorities in Greece is a taboo issue. Greece should learn how to reconcile its own minorities. Ethnic minorities such as Western Thrace Turkish Minority and the Macedonian minority ahead should be accepted as part of Greek cultural wealth, not as a threat to the integrity of the state. There cannot and should not exist taboo issue in a country which is a member of the EU for more than thirty years and a country which is perceived as the cradle of democracy. Otherwise, the existence and the function of democracy in that country should be questioned. We kindly urge the Greek state and government and all political parties to face up to this fact".

## ABTTF Newsletter

The News Bulletins published by ABTTF in four languages, namely in Turkish, English, German and Greek will start its fourth incoming year.

ABTTF News Bulletins, in which the current issues with regard to the Western Thrace Turkish minority, the latest occurrences in Western Thrace and in Greece, in particular with regard to the minority issues and policies, international activities and lobbying of ABTTF aimed at finding solutions for the problems of the Turkish minority and information on the activities of the Western Thrace Turkish associations throughout Europe and the world are dealt with, are being followed with great interest by Western Thrace Turks and by large parts of the public.

To get more information on subscription to ABTTF News Bulletin, please contact us.

## ABTTF

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