



## Turkish Minority members are not recruited at Municipality of Gumulcine (Komotini)

It was accrued that discrimination was imposed against Turkish origin workers and civil servants at Municipality of Gumulcine (Komotini). It was understood that there were no Turkish origin workers among the last month recruited 42 workers and 18 civil servants. According to the information gathered from Western Thrace Turkish minority officials, no announcement regarding the new recruitments was made in minority regions and Greek origin workers & civil servants were employed. Additionally, some members of Municipality of Gumulcine (Komotini) submitted a



### Discrimination is at peak in Greece in the 21th century

motion regarding the issue, yet there was no feedback from any Greek authorities for 2 months. It was stated that a lot of new workers and civil servants were recruited at the Municipality of Gumulcine (Komotini). Nevertheless, any of them is Turkish origin which is a clear proof of racial discrimination against Western Thrace Turkish minority members. That mentioned discrimination against Western Thrace Turkish minority members disturbed Turks in Gumulcine (Komotini). That implementation was rather commented as a clear example

of excluding Turkish minority out of social life. Meanwhile following local elections, it was announced that minority members would be given priority at Municipality of Gumulcine (Komotini). However, without making any announcement, 60 Greek origin staff was employed, which disappointed minority members seriously. Halit Habipoglu, chairman of Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe, made a statement regarding the issue on the agenda. Accordingly, Habipoglu stated that those events were a shame for an EU member country in the 21st century. Habipoglu stated that Municipality

of Gumulcine (Komotini) did not back any of its promises following the local elections, continuing " A serious discrimination is imposed to Turkish minority members at Municipality of Gumulcine (Komotini). Authorities did not make any announcement to the Turkish minority although there are a lot of educated minority members seeking job. We invite the Mayor Dimitrios Kotsakis to take some action against this unfair situation and back his promises". There has been no feedback from the Municipality as of yet. Meanwhile, this unfair treatment will be put on the agenda by the members of the Municipality Council.

### CONTENTS

Turkish Minority members are not recruited at Municipality of Gumulcine .....	Page 1	
Educational problems of Western Thrace Turkish Minority maintain their importance on the agenda .....	Page 2	
Motions related with minority education and tobacco production have been submitted to the Hellenic Parliament .....	Page 3	
United Nations issued the last edition of Human Right's Council report Deutschland .....	Page 4	
News on Minority Education .....	Page 5	
ABTTF participated Advisory meeting of European Fundamental Rights Platform .....	Page 6	
Minister of Foreign Affairs Ali Babacan visited Greece .....	Page 7	

# Educational problems of Western Trace Turkish Minority maintain their importance on the agenda



Educational problems of the Western Thrace Turkish Minority maintain their importance as one of the main items on the agenda due to Greek authorities' reluctance to solve long-lasting educational problems of the minorities. Recently, the notice of motion given by Rodop MP Ahmet Haciosman and Iskece (Xanthi) MP Cetin Mandaci created discussion sat the Greek Parliament. Rodop MP Ahmet Haciosman asked Minister of Education, Evripidis Stilianidis, why the request of minorities for a bilingual kindergarten for minority children had not been taken into consideration and why teachers at minority kindergartens had to graduate from Greek universities. Upon the notice of motion submitted by Haciosman, Stilianidis said that "multicultural kindergartens" rather than bilingual

ones would be established, yet such an answer created question marks among minority members.

Iskece (Xanthi) MP Cetin Mandaci submitted a notice of motion to the Minister of Education, asking about the situation of minority youth whose

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## Turkish youth's admission to Iskece (Xanthi) Muzaffer Salihoğlu Minority High School is rejected...

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admission to Iskece Muzaffer Salihoglu Minority High School was not accepted intentionally. Minister said that law prohibited placing more than 30 students in a classroom, adding that necessary conditions to

open an extra classroom were not satisfied.

Halit Habipoglu, chairman of Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe, made a statement regarding the answers of the Minister, saying that answers of the Minister displayed the desperate conditions of minority once again. "The Minister says that the high school does not satisfy the necessary conditions to administer minority children. However, we say permanently that this high school is in an urgent need of reparation but the Greek government does not allow any reparation. What a great conflict it is that the Minister claims that the school does not satisfy conditions to open extra classroom. On the other hand, they express their intention to establish multicultural kindergartens. We know that the main motivation behind this is to separate our minority artificially. Additionally, they only employ teachers who graduate from Greek universities. I would like to ask in which democratic country such a condition is acceptable. The motive behind such a condition is to prevent minority youth who graduated from Turkish universities to teach at these minority kindergartens. I invite the authorities to take some concrete steps for improving minority education and solve the longlasting problems on the agenda" said Habipoglu.

# Prohibi Turkish in Western



Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs of Greece obligated that ceremonies in national festivals, 25 March, 28 October and 17 November, in Turkish minority schools will only be celebrated in Greek language. According to this decision, using of Turkish language in ceremonies in Turkish Minority schools in national festivals of Greece has been prohibited. According to news written in Gundem news-paper which is published in Western Thrace, Directorate General of Foreign and Minority Schools of Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs of Greece obligated that ceremonies in national festivals, 25 March, 28 October and 17 November, in Turkish minority schools will only be celebrated in

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## Turks in Greece are excluded from national and social life purposely

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Greek language, with a mandat signed by Angelos Sirigos, General Directorate. Ministry made out nonusage of Turkish poems and literature in national festivals to prohibition of Turkish language in ceremonies in national festivals in minority schools.

Turkish Minority of Western

# Prohibition of Turkish language in Western Thrace



Thrace made response to decision of the Ministry. Decision caused an annoyance among members of Turkish Minority of Western Thrace and it has been described as a step to exclude Turks in Greece from social life. Turkish Minority authorities in Western Thrace specified that there had not been such an implementation in Minority schools before and they emphasized that the decision was a step to prohibit Turkish language in Western Thrace.

Also, Halit Habipoglu, the President of Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF), reacted against decision and criticized Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs. Habipoglu explained that the decision was clearly a discrimination and a deliberate prohibition on usage of Minority's native language and he invited the Ministry to bring about that mandat. Habipoglu said "Turks in Greece are excluded from national and social life purposely. This decision is an example for that exclusion. Freedom on usage of Turkish language in Turkish Minority schools has also been put under guarantee by Treaty of Lausanne. Our children in our minority schools celebrate our country, Greece's national festivals, too.

*(continued on page 4)*

## Motions related with minority education and tobacco production have been submitted to the Hellenic Parliament



PASOK Xanthi Deputy Dr. Cetin Mandaci submitted 2 motions related with Turkish Minority of Western Thrace to the Hellenic Parliament. Deputy Mandaci uttered educational problems in Xanthi prefecture in his first motion. Mandaci explained that problems in minority education effect general educational level in the region negatively and emphasized that Xanthi prefecture is one of the most underdeveloped region in educational level throughout Greece. Mandaci in his motion submitted to the Hellenic Parliament to be answered by Eviropidis Stilianidis, the Minister of National Education and Religious Affairs, asked that if any measures against reasons lying under educational problems in the region will be taken, or not? In the motion, it is underlined that percentage of university graduates in Xanthi

prefecture is only 12,18 and percentage of primary school graduates is 32,84 – a high percentage. Mandaci stated that these problems have been arising from discriminations in basic educational rights of the

Minority in Western Thrace and he explained that educational level of Turks living in Xanthi is low because of these reasons. Deputy Mandaci emphasized in his motion that Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs has to work to promote minority education and he asked that if the Ministry will start any attempt about this issue, or not?

### Turkish tobacco producers in Western Thrace are in difficult situation

Deputy Mandaci submitted his second motion to the Minister of Agricultural Development and Food. Mandaci in his motion submitted to be answered by the Minister drew attention to problems in agriculture sector in Xanthi prefecture

where Turks mostly work. Mandaci brought up problems especially in tobacco production in his motion. It is stated in the motion that production costs of tobacco has increased during last 4 years but corporations bought tobaccos from producers, most of them are Turks, with low prices and so, Turks in the region who exist with tobacco production have faced with difficult economic circumstances. Mandaci also explained that subventions given by EU for tobacco production will be cut off in 2009 and he admonished that unemployment among Turks in the region will increase because of this reason. Mandaci asked in his motion that if the Hellenic Government will negotiate with EU about subventions given for tobacco production, or not? If the Ministry will take some measures in order to protect tobacco production, or not? And, if the Ministry will call that "press tobacco" is protected registered product, or not, for continuation of tobacco production which has a vital importance for Turks in the region. Related ministers have not answered these motions which have been submitted to the Hellenic Parliament by Deputy Cetin Mandaci on 14 February, yet. Ministry's opinions about this issues which are closely related with Turkish Minority of Western Thrace will appear in answers that will be given in next days.

Because they are nationals of Greece and they consider themselves as a component of Greece. But, it is understood that authorities in Greece do not see them as a component of Greece. There can not be any rational reason for a prohibition on usage of Turkish language in ceremonies in national festivals in Turkish Minority schools. I invite the Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs to bring about that mandate immediately”.

Habipoglu also indicated that Minister of National Education and Religious Affairs was also a deputy of Rhodope, where Turks mostly live in Greece, and was a Western Thracian and they could not understand that how such irrational decisions were taken during his Ministry period. Habipoglu also said “Minister of Education, Mr. Stilianidis is a politician who have lived together with Turkish Minority in Rhodope region and have fit remark minority problems in the region. Although he is a near friend of our former deputy, Ilhan Ahmet and near with Turkish Minority for years, taking such decisions of his Ministry is so bothersome. Besides, it should not be forgotten that the Minister of Education, Mr. Stilianidis is elected as deputy and minister by Turkish electorates’ votes. Because, as it is known, he had lost approximately 5000 votes in the last elections in Rodopis Prefecture in comparison with 2003 elections, however, he had been elected again as deputy by Turkish electorates’ votes in the region. If it is looked from this aspect, decisions taken against Turkish Minority of Western Thrace by his ministry are so negative”.

Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs has not responded Minority’s objection and it has not been commented if the Ministry would bring about the mandat, or not, yet.

# United Nations issued the last edition of Human Right’s Council report



6th annual Report of United Nations Human Rights Council meeting that was held between 10-28 December 2007 in Geneva, has been published. The report declares the decisions taken at the 6th Annual meeting, emphasizing elimination of all kinds of human rights violations all over the world. Meanwhile, one of the interesting points that was touched upon for the first time was the “religious

## Religious freedoms covering an important portion of the report

rights violations”. In the last chapter of the report which was titled “Elimination of all kinds of Religious Basis Discrimination and Intolerance”, United Nations called for more guarantee for different belief groups’ and minority’s religious rights.

The call for recognizing freedom of religious institutions was the

most related issue for Western Thrace Turkish minority. As might be recalled, the Greek authorities do not recognize the Muftis elected by Western Thrace Turkish minority, but rather appoint their own Muftis. Regarding this issue, United Nations Report stated that establishing and managing their own religious institutions should be guaranteed for the minorities. In the report, it was especially underlined that member countries should respect minority’s basic rights to establish and manage their own religious bodies, adding the need to guarantee those rights via necessary national regulations. UN calls for more tolerance for minorities and their religious freedoms, stating that religious basis discrimination increased day by day.

ABTTF’s works under the auspices of United Nations are likely to strengthen UN’s call for eliminating religious basis discrimination against minorities. As might be recalled, ABTTF’s proposal that was

presented by Baris Hasan, ABTTF’s Director of Academic Research, on human rights violations in Western Thrace was accepted at the Human Rights Council meetings. In the proposal, unfair treatment of Greek authorities regarding Muftis was the main issue.

Halit Habipoglu, chairman of ABTTF, made a statement and stated that “I believe that our continuous efforts to present Western Thrace Turkish minority religious problems positively affected the content of the report.”

UN statements should create concern for Greek authorities when we consider Greek’s unfair treatment regarding Muftis. It is widely expected that Greek authorities will have to reconsider their stance on the mentioned issue. It is clear that Greece has been outdated by the improvements realized in the international community recently. It is a big question mark whether Greek authorities will consider their mistake and decide to take the issue on the agenda in 2008.

# News on Minority Education

We should affirm that the Greek government does not seem sincere about "kindergarten" issue as Minister of National Education and Religious Affairs, Evripidis Stilyanidis' answer to the censure motion submitted by Rodop MP Ahmet Haciosman does include statements that are not compatible with our minority's requests.

As might be recalled, Rodop MP Haciosman had submitted a censure motion to the Minister regarding Western Thrace Turkish Minority's request for a "bilingual" kindergarten education, which is mandatory in Greece.

However, MP Haciosman re-submitted his censure motion while Minister's answer satisfied neither the minority nor the MP.

Haciosman stated in his second censure motion that Minister's answers were no way satisfactory but rather created question marks amid the Western Thrace Turkish minority members, adding that Minister' answers were elusive and ambiguous. Mr. Haciosman stated that kindergartens should be reestablished in line with the requests of minority members, international treaties and mutual agreements. Yet the Minister rejected "minority" concept completely, underlining that the kindergartens were to be multicultural (diapolitismiko) and the languages would be determined in accordance with the culture of the children that are to be educated there.

Following that unsatisfactory



answer from Minister, Haciosman re-submitted his censure motion. Haciosman clearly stated that Minority members expected an answer compatible with their problems. "Dear Minister, our minority asks for "minority kindergartens" where in addition to Greek, minority's official mother language, Turkish, is taught as well, rather than multicultural kindergartens. Meanwhile, language usage parallel to culture seems unfavourable and minority members hesitate the outcomes. Additionally, in your answer, you expressed that teaching staff is to graduate from Greek universities, which means minority members that graduate abroad will not be given any opportunity. When you put the conditionality "Greek universities graduates" then you disregard minority members that have the ability to educate in their own mother language." said Haciosman.

The Minister is invited to answer the following questions, yet this time sincerely;

What does the Minister actually mean by multicultural kinder-

garten?

Will the education language in kindergarten be Greek or Turkish? Or does the Ministry have another option?

What will be enrolment criteria to be applied to teaching staff? Will native Turkish speaker minority members that graduated from related branches abroad, be employed in those kindergartens to teach minority children that are native Turkish speakers?

Lawyer Ahmet Kara, one of our columnists, has a research on this issue and underlines the below listed issues;

"Long before Article 3518 was approved, lack of kindergartens that is regarded as the most important initial element of education, for minority children was a problem amid our minority members. Minority members request bilingual kindergartens where Turkish and Greek languages are taught. Greek authorities visiting the region promised to take steps regarding the request of minority yet forgot their promises so quickly. Recently, Greek Minister of For-

eign Affairs Mrs. Bakoyani visited the region and stated that some works were in process regarding bilingual kindergarten need. However, one or two months later Article 3518, which would worsen educational problems of minority members was approved silently at the Parliament. The law will be in force during 2007-2008 term and with the law kindergarten education becomes mandatory. Yet, the law is not compatible with the educational rights of the Western Thrace Turkish Minority which was guaranteed by Treaty of Lausanne. Preschool children, before learning their mother language properly, are forced to learn foreign language. Against this unfair treatment, Western Thrace Turkish Minority has two choices. First is to make pressure on Greek government to open bilingual kindergartens and the second is to open their own kindergartens. Meanwhile, we have a problem regarding the second choice. How many minority members satisfy the conditions to become kindergarten teacher? How many of them are graduated from Greek universities? How many of them are graduated from Turkish universities, thus have the problem of having their diplomas recognized by Greek government? The bitter reality is that we have a few minority members that satisfy all these conditions at the moment. This is a big problem regarding the future of our children and we must solve this problem as soon as possible."

# ABTTF participated Advisory meeting of European Fundamental Rights Platform

Advisory Meetings for the foundation of European Fundamental Rights Platform were held between 10-11 December in Brussels. Accordingly, foundation of the Platform was accomplished while working and membership conditions were discussed. Leading European Non-Governmental Organizations participated the meetings while Federation of Western Thracian Turks in Europe (ABTTF) was represented by the chairman Halit Habipoglu. The main item on the agenda during two day lasting meetings was the

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**It is a significant improvement for ABTTF's to participate Advisory meeting of European Basic Rights Platform**

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contribution of European NGOs for fighting against racism and discrimination. At the end of the meetings, on the back of the common strong belief in the role that the European Basic Rights Platform is likely to play during this process, Platform was announced to be founded. Working groups which concentrated on determining the membership conditions and working methods were established. Working groups reached



consensus on making the professional NGOs, whose area of interest are mainly basic human rights, member to the platform. Additionally, it was decided that Platform will function under European Basic Rights Agency.

Halit Habipoglu, chairman of ABTTF, expressed his appreciation to see the commitment of European Union to fight against racism and discrimination. Habipoglu underlined that it would

be very effective move to cooperate with professional NGOs against racism and discrimination. "We, Western Thracian Turkish Minority members, one of the victims of racism and discrimination, very well learned how to struggle with this problem. If we can cooperate with the other NGOs to fight against this common problem, I strongly believe that we will get very good results, taking the necessary steps to enhance human

rights throughout Europe" said Habipoglu. Habipoglu also commented on the participation of ABTTF to the foundation works of the Platform. Accordingly, Habipoglu stated that ABTTF became a well known and respected NGO in Europe. We are ready to do our best to prevent discrimination and human rights violation throughout Europe. It was stated that Platform was to begin its activities as of January 2008.

# Minister of Foreign Affairs Ali Babacan visited Greece

During his visit to Greece, Minister of Foreign Affairs met minority leaders in Gumulcine following his contacts with Greek authorities in Athens.

Babacan met his Greek counterpart Dora Bakoyanni and discussed economic & military cooperation. Following the meeting, a joint press meeting was held and the ministers unveiled a program which aimed to strengthen military cooperation between Turkey and Greece under the auspices of NATO. Additionally, on the economy front, steps to enhance mutual investments would be on the agenda for both countries. Babacan also met Greek Prime Minister Kostas Karamanlis and expressed his belief that mutual relations were to be improved between two countries.



## Second destination was Gumulcine . . .

Following his contacts with Greek authorities in Athens, Babacan met minority leaders in Gumulcine. Babacan visited Gumulcine Celal Bayar High School and listened the minority's educational problems and also held a meeting with Ibrahim Serif, selected Mufti of minority, for half an hour. After his meeting with Serif, Babacan visited Gumulcine Chamber of Commerce and shared opinions with minority businessmen about prospective investment projects. Babacan's last destination was

ABTTF Newsletter Number 10 / March 2008

the closed Gumulcine Youth Association where he met minority Advisory Board. Meanwhile, Babacan's visit to a closed minority association was commented as a support to Western Thrace Minority.

Minister held a comprehensive meeting with all the representatives of minority community at Chris & Eve and stated that improving relations between Turkey and Greece would bring benefit and contribute to prosperity of Western Thrace Turkish minority. Additionally, Babacan said

that Treaty of Lausanne should be implemented fully to solve all the problems of Turkish minority, underlining that he had conveyed his thoughts to his Greek counterpart Bakoyanni.

Halit Habipoglu, chairman of Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe commented on Babacan's visit to Gumulcine. Habipoglu expressed his appreciation of Turkish authorities' visits to Western Thrace. "Turkey Foreign Minister, Ali Babacan's visit made us very happy. Following Turkish PM Tayyip Erdogan's visit 2 year ago, Ali Babacan's visits and his

messages mean great importance for our minority. We believe that Babacan's message to Bakoyanni on implementing Lausanne Treaty fairly and mentioning Western Thrace in means of strengthening economic cooperation between Turkey and Greece motivate our minority, enhancing economic development. Babacan's visit to Gumulcine Chamber of Commerce with Turkish investors is very significant for us. We hope that these moves will contribute significantly to our minority's economic development." said Habipoglu.



# Contradictory moves from Greek Parliamentarians

Antonis Trakatellis, Greece European Parliamentarian, submitted a censure motion to the European Parliament, asking the reason why the European Commission does not warn Turkey despite the fact that Turkey violates rights of patriarchate.

Additionally, Trakatellis asked the Council whether suspending membership negotiations was on the agenda until Turkey guarantees to respect basic rights and freedoms.

With this censure motion, once again, Greek Parliamentarians reflect their deep contradiction regarding the rights of Western Thracian Turkish minority members. Such a censure motion about an EU candidate country was rather evaluated specious.



Despite the fact that Greece is an EU member country since 1981, today there are serious basic human rights violations in the country. Greek authorities do not recognize elected Muftis, religious leaders, of Western Thracian Turkish minority, although minority members have the right to elect their own religious leaders under the framework of Treaty of Lausanne, but rather appoint government selected Muftis. Greece, not recognizing Turkish identity in Western Thracian, banned Turkish Associations with Turkish names in 80's. While law struggle of these associations continue at European Court of Human Rights,

Greece made one step further and does not allow establishment of minority associations that have "minority" phrase in their names. It created question marks when a Greek Parliamentarian having such human rights violations in his home country submitted such a censure motion about another country.

**We invite our country  
to be sincere about  
basic rights and  
freedoms ...**

Upon the censure motion submitted by Trakatellis, Halit Habipoglu, chairman of Federation of Western Thracian Turks in Europe, said that Greek Parliamentarians had to recognize human rights violations in their home country before they made comment about other countries. "A Greek Parliamentarian has the responsibility to stop basic rights and freedoms violations in his home country. Greek government does not even recognize our elected Muftis and appoints their own Muftis. Of course, we hope for justice in all countries, yet as long as these unfair implementations continue in a 26 years long EU member country, it is not a decent behaviour to give a censure motion about another country. "

## ABTTF Newsletter

News Bulletins published in Turkish, German, English and Greek by Federation of Western Thracian Turks in Europe (ABTTF) will start its 3. incoming year.

ABTTF News Bulletins in which there are current events in Western Thracian, minority policy of Greece, international activities of ABTTF related with problems of Western Thracian Turks, information about Western Thracian Turkish associations in Europe are followed up by Western Thracian Turks at first and large parts of society interestingly.

***In addition and for abonman  
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## ABTTF Newsletter

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