

# **Syriacs react to minister's wording regarding Mor Gabriel Monastery**

2013-07-01

ISTANBUL - Hürriyet Daily News / Vercihan Ziflioğlu

Syriac communities outside Turkey have reacted against recent remarks by EU Minister Egemen Bağış apparently denigrating the value of the Mor Gabriel Monastery. Bağış had said on June 21 that the historical monastery, an issue of contention between the government and Syriacs, was worth "even less" than the EU Affairs building in central Istanbul.

The Brussels-based European Syriac Union (ESU) said in a written statement last week that Bağış's stance was insulting.

"Bağış's approach, which only looks at the monetary value of the monastery, is not a result of senselessness, but a reflection of ignoring the beliefs of people from other religions," it said. The statement condemned Bağış's wording and asked for a correction.

ESU spokesperson David Vergili told the Daily News by phone that Bağış's remarks were "mocking." If the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) really wanted Syriacs to return to Turkey, it should first find a resolution to solve the issue of confiscated lands and monasteries including Mor Gabriel, he said.

The government has recently called on members of minorities who have fled Turkey to come back, but in order for this to happen economic and social hardship should be removed, he added.

Mor Gabriel is a 1,700-year-old historic monastery located in the southeastern province of Mardin's Midyat district. In 2008, the Forestry Ministry, the Land Registry Office and the villages of Yayvantepe, Çandarlı and Eğlence, sued the monastery for allegedly occupying their fields. The court recognized the monastery as an "occupier," after which the case was brought to the European Court of Human Rights.

Source: Hurriyet Daily News

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