On April 24th the European Syriac Union has organized a conference over the genocide, which took place in South East Turkey in 1915. 270 people from Turkish and Syriac origin have attended the conference in the Basilique of Brussels.

With 5 speakers, the conference has started with a prayer for the martyrs and victims spoken by a Syriac Priest. While Prof. Herman Teule, Director of Institute of Eastern Christian Studies of Radboud University, spoke about the history of the Syriacs (Genocide), the French Historian, Author and Orient specialist Mr. Sebastien de Courtois presented official documents and information about the Syriacs. During the break one had the opportunity to see a documentary named “The Unheard Cry”. The film showed the deportation and the death of the Armenians, Assyrians, Persians, and Syriacs after the treaty of the Sivas. People have lost their forathers and with the feeling of being executed and deported from their homeland, the next generation has to live with this fact. Politics have to wake up and demand for the recognition of this terrible tragedy.

It was clear, that there were painful experiences with the Ottoman’s during that time. Many people have lost their forathers and with the feeling of being executed and deported from their homeland, the next generation has to live with this fact. Politics have to wake up and demand for the recognition of this terrible tragedy.

The Syriacs are living between fear and hope after the decision of the Prime Minister of Turkey who set up a committee to deal with this issue and to open up the archives of the Ottomans. After 90 years of suffering and pain, the issue became a political one and that is exactly what the Syriacs are waiting for after a long time of silence from the Western side and the denial from the Turkish side.

The Syriacs have been persecuted due to their Christian faith. Although they had no political power they could retain their identity. While in the region there were no democratic conditions for the Syriacs in the whole Middle East, which could ensure their future existence. Due to the unstable and uncertain situation and the constant suppression they had to leave their homeland into all four directions of the Middle East.

There were also a panel discussion between the speakers and the attendants.

Numerous guests and representatives of the press joined the delegates for the second day of the conference. Mrs. Neriman Aygur, the chairman of the European Syriac Union, started the second day with an inaugural address. After explaining the position of the ESU he presented the Managing Board to all participants.

The following speakers then presented their views to the audience:

Professor Dr. Herman Teule, Director of the Institute of Eastern Christian Orient from the University of Nijmegen (Netherlands)
- Mr. Ayad Mossad, Chairman of the Union of the Christians from the Middle East (Netherlands)
- Mrs. Brigitte Grouwels, Plasmichristian Democratic member of the European Parliament (Netherlands)
- Mr. Walter Vorack, Member of the European Parliament (Austria)
- John Nimrod, Senator ret. and Secretary-General of the Assyrian Universal Alliance (AUA)
- Mr. Esghay Isha, Secretary-General of the Assyrian National Organization (AUA)

The 90th Commemoration of the Genocide: 1915-2005

242 delegates representing 11 institutions participated in a Congress held in Brussels between 14 and 15 May. On the first day of the Congress the draft of the constitution was presented to the delegates and was accepted through democratic and open elections. According to the constitution, the name of the new organization is the “European Syriac Union (ESU)”.

Then the president and the executive council of the union were elected. The president was elected first and then 18 members of the ESU as well as 12 deputy members of the board, altogether 31 members of the board, were elected for the Board of the ESU in separate ballots. Later, the Managing Board Committee selected six members of the Board as the Chairman of this Committee.

The Syriacs are one of the oldest peoples in the world. They appeared in the year 4000 B.C. with different names and at different times. Starting from 2350 B.C. they formed political states, empires and kingdoms under the names of Akkad, Assyria, Babylon, Aram and Arakka (dynasty of Agabrites). The Syriacs are one of the first people who converted to Christianity. Because of their particular civilization and Christian characteristics they spread their culture in the entire Middle East.

For more than 1600 years the Syriacs have been persecuted due to their Christian faith. Although they had no political power they could retain their identity. While in the region there were no democratic conditions for the Syriacs in the whole Middle East, which could ensure their future existence. Due to the unstable and uncertain situation and the constant suppression they had to leave their homeland into all four directions of the Middle East.

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The Establishment of the European Syriac Union
Midyat – A Syriac Town in South-Eastern Turkey

Midyat is the “chief” town of Turabdin in south-eastern Turkey and has been an Episcopal because the Syrian Orthodox church was founded here in 1478 and since then Midyat has been the metropolitan diocese.

The European Synod Union celebrated the traditional Syriac New Year Spring Festival on 1st April in Midyat, in order to re-endorse the Syriac culture in Turabdin (South East of Turkey).

Until a few years ago it was impossible to accomplish such an event in Turabdin because the Syriac Culture was not officially recognized. It was brought about by the exertion of Turkey to join the EU and so to propagate the accomplishment of cultural activities.

On this basis, EUS went ahead with the preparations to undertake a remarkable celebration of 1st April New Year Spring Festival, which is traditionally a significant day for the Syriac people who live in Midyat and Mesopotamia.

The preparations of the festival were carried out by a large organization that included the local Church and the community.

The festival that was celebrated on the occasion of the New Year, it was under the symbol of peace, freedom and brotherhood.

The tradition of holding New Year Celebrations had vanished for more than 100 years in Midyat.

The satellite channel “Suroyo TV” is being launched.

By their performances the singers and dancers of Midyat turned into a massive celebration.

With their performances the leading Syriac singers and dancers of in the whole region participated in the festival.

The European Synod Union, Mr. Fiky Aykut in his speech during the festival, emphasized such events will help Turkey who is on the path of EU to be regarded with due respect on the issue of the Syriac culture.

The aims of Suroyo TV:

- To make no discrimination between the various title holders.
- To treat the different communities that the Syriac people share - Orthodox, Protestant, Maronite and Melkite - alike.
- To not treat unfairly in the reporting any of the regions that the Syriac people live or have their roots.

To serve democratization and to present the Syriac culture and civilization to the world in a new generation so that they can integrate with the society where they live.

To raise the level of knowledge amongst the Syriacs younger generation and those with little education.

To act as a bridge between the Eastern and Western Worlds and to thereby play a role in spreading western democratic values to the Middle East.

To respect and strengthen the integrity of the individual.

To achieve equality in socio-cultural life.

The continuous thread in the stated goals is to give the Syriac a real possibility of integrating into the social structures in which they live and work.

Summery:

Suroyo TV is programming designed with a multicultural and multi-ethnic perspective on entertainment, information, news, lifestyles, community issues and public issues. The broadcasts besides the two Syriac dialects also programs in a few languages spoken in Europe and the Middle East.

From further information please contact:

Suroyo TV
Avenyn 15
15257 SÖDERTÄLJE SWEDEN
Tel. 0404 8 54 06 330
Fax. 0404 8 54 20 337
E-mail: info@suroyotv.com
Website: www.suroyotv.com

Midyat is also known as “Qora Qosh”, a name given to her by the Ottoman Turks. Midyat is located less than 18 miles east of Mardin and is a Syriac Catholic denomination. Currently, it’s the center of a Syriac administrative district which include Birecik and Kaimak.

The name Bakhdida is of Aramaic origin “Beth Kadish” meaning “House of Youth”. Some also call it “Beth Kassel”, “Kassel” meaning “House of the God”. The change of name according to Mr. Hamid Hajla’s research in Ancient Syriac, which increased by 1/6 of its number is much old. In fact in ancient Assyrian (Akkadian) “Qusila” means “bird” (Reference Assyrian Dictionary of Chicago, The Oriental Institute). So this could not be a mere coincidence, and rather the Turkish name is based on the original Ancient Assyrian name. On the other hand “Kas” from the Aramaic “Kardosh” (Friends), and the Turkish “Cid” (Cultural). Based on this it’s believed that “Kara Qosh” (the older name of “Bakhdida”) was original name of the town.

In 1261, Bakhdida was attacked by the Kurds who occupied the town, and its population was reduced to a few hundred women. It was also attacked by the Mongols in 1234 when 4 churches were burned and many of its inhabitants were killed.

In 15th, certain Jacobites of Baghdad began to organizes the celebration of the New Year Festival, the Bishop of Midyan, Mr. Marlin, but it was not until the 18th century that those Jacobites began to join the Syrian Catholic Church or Syriac Orthodox (Syriac Catholics) Church.

In the case of other villages in the plain of Nineveh, Bakhdida was not spared from the massacre and destruction of Nadir Shah’s campaign in 1737 and many Syriac families were killed in 1828 which killed many of its people.

In the area of the Syriac cathedrals and monasteries, manuscripts, and furniture were divided in a special manner between the two Assyrian denominations. The Syriac Bishops of Baghdad became Christians during the anti-Christian persecutions in 1830 and were divided between Syriac Catholics and Syriac Orthodox, the Bishop of the Immaculate, the Church of Virity Mary.


The population of Bakhdida is around 30,000, Syriac Christians make up 96% of the population.

The mayor Midyat has a small number of Syriac Orthodox Church followers. The people in Bakhdida speak Aramaic. Among these groups, it is known as the Neo-Aramaic dialect of Qora Qosh.