Kafro: A village performs pioneer working

At the beginning of the 20th century more than half a million Syriacs lived in Turabdin, a region located in the South East of Turkey. Particularly the persecutions, numerous massacres and the genocide at the end of the 19th century and at the beginning of the 20th century reduced considerably the number of Syriacs. As a result of the mass migration, that took place during the last 40 years, to mainly western countries, only about 4,000 Syriacs nowadays live in Turabdin. The villages of Turabdin are now unhabited and decayed.

Important factors that caused the migration were particularly the social discrimination based on ethnic or religious viewpoints and differences, political persecution through direct or structural acts of repression and expulsion, the violation of fundamental human right, the lack of fundamental freedoms, the failed development and economic policy and the civil war in the region. Today the Syriacs live scattered in Europe, North America, and Australia and in the countries of the Middle East. In Europe there are currently over 200,000 Syriacs nowadays, whose origin is from Turkey.

In the course of the termination of the military conflicts in the south-eastern Turkey and the current Turkish efforts towards an EU membership the situation in the region has eased considerably. The Syriacs have been able to stop and for the first time the Christian population is growing slowly. In the last two years families from Germany and Switzerland returned to their old villages and homes. Many others are visiting their homeland. They inquire about the situation, make restoration and structural repairs. Projects and communities are prepared, which consider a migration from the Diaspora to Turabdin. One of these projects is the resettlement of the village of Kafro.

The village Kafro is located 15 km southeast of Midyat and is lying on an easy elevation. It is surrounded by the adjoining villages of Enih, Harabole and Arte. The past of Kafro is still unknown. Until today the village of Kafro is not examined in the usual archaeological way and all the books and documents referring to the history were destroyed during the uncontrollable tragic fates of the past. There are some ruins and buildings of churches and little commemorative houses in Kafro. Mor Yankir (5th century), Mor Barsavmo (5th century), the commemorative house Mary Mor Ayoud (year unknown), the church Mor Bousus (the year is unknown) and the commemorative house Kadasto (the year is unknown).

In the year 1900 the village was inhabited by 30 families. During the World War I (1914/15), the Syriacs were hurt deeply by the consequences. In this period the village was uninhabited. In 1916 the first 8 families have returned from their ambushes to the village. In 1970 Kafro reached the largest number of population with 46 families. At the beginning of the 1980’s an emigration wave reduced the number of inhabitants to 5 families (1992). In 1995 the last three families in Kafro received order from the military to leave the area. With the emigration of these families Kafro became a ghost village. Today about 150 families are living in Europe, people from Kafro origin is from Kafro. They mainly built a new existence in Germany (134 families), in Switzerland (31 families) and in Sweden (15 families). In the frame of the resettlement project, 15 families will try to settle back in their village. This Kafro Development Association is to be prepared a concept that can guarantee a return on a domestic and international economical basis. That buildings, constructed in an European style, raise just like palaces out of the dreamy panorama of Mountains of Izio. An important step is done!

The families who return back will certainly perform pioneer working and set a sign encouraging other Syriacs living overseas to return home. Besides all the setbacks of the last decades, now it is possible to reconstruct Kafro. But in order to acquire a comprehensive concept, important prerequisites must be considered.

Turkey has to create legal and democratic standards to become a state of law in conformity with international democratic standards in order to improve and to face the situation and the situation determination of the Syriacs in every way. Economic, infrastructural, cultural and scholastic projects are supposed to be constructed and expanded in order to show a life perspective. Business, peace, prosperity and freedom are seen in general as remigration factors and should be guaranteed by Turkey. The State must support and promote projects ideal and financially.

Chairman’s Message

On July 10th 2005, the European Syriac Union (ESU) met for the annual general meeting and elected the delegates of the member organization came to continue in the name of the “Center de Palais de Massoplatone” in the European capital Brussels. The meeting was opened by the first chairman of the Union, Mr. Iskender Alptekin, with a one minute’s silence in memory of the martyrs of the Syriac people and the victims of the terror attacks in Central London after the official greeting.

In the following Mr. Alptekin presented the agenda which went on like this:

- Speech of the first chairman about the reasons and motives of the foundation of the organization and feedback of one year internal work in the organization.
- Presentation of the activity and financial reports.
- Speeches of some guests
- Questions and suggestions concerning working in the organization.

The first part of Alptekin’s speech concentrated on the situation of the ESU and the background of the historical events of the 20th century. Mr. Alptekin said: “In the course of the 20th century our population was subjected to several acts of violence and the consequences. Hundreds of thousands were massacred and persecuted in the process of the genocide in 1915. In the following decades the identity as well as our existence was denied. Because of that, important colors of our culture and tradition faded away.

The foundation of the ESU was explained by him like this: “After that he had the chance to participate in politics in the Diaspora and after some developments were set going which emphasized the necessity of more professions, we founded the ESU in May last year as a political and cultural organization in Europe.”
The Voice of the Syriacs

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“The Turkish Government is developing its reforms gradually to reach the criteria of Copenhagen, but this will take a period of time.”

Interview with ESU Chairman Ishakender Alpeakin

On the 17th December 2004, the presidents of the 25 European Union (EU) countries made a decision about accepting Turkey entering the EU. As a result of this decision, Turkey was promised that another village called Kafro, the Syriac owners was a positive criticism of Turkish government. Many formal reforms were done by the government have removed restrictions there was initial opposition to the EU includes a democratic process in which we find an utility for our people, thus we are happy from the EU for the Syriacs. The Syriacs are preparing to carry out cadastres and restrictions there was initial opposition to the EU includes a democratic process in which we find an utility for our people, thus we are happy from the EU for the Syriacs.

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