The First April Festival in Istanbul

The First April Festival, which is also known as "Akit" is a festival that the Syriacs bequeathed to the world; today it is celebrated under different names and customs. This festival symbolizes the re-birth of the nature, transformation and the new life is celebrated by the Syriacs, who are its native inventors, in various countries and places every year. The spring festival that we inherited from the Sumerian, Acadian, Assyrian and Babylonian civilization has been celebrated by the Syriacs sometimes discreetly and sometimes with small commemorations, for thousands of years.

The changes that took place around the world and especially in the Middle East have contributed to some major developments. One of the countries that have seen some of these changes is Turkey. Therefore, the Syriacs have had an opportunity to celebrate their national festival Akitu for the last two years in Turkey. The spring festival that was celebrated for the first time in Turabdin, this year was celebrated in the multicultural city Istanbul.

This year it was for the first time that the festivity of the First April was being organized by the ESU and MEZOER and was being viewed around the world when it was broadcasted live from the Suroyo TV. As this event was being celebrated for the first time in Istanbul, it drew the attention of many private persons and institutions.

In the event that started in the afternoon hours with a live music program, the Association of Diyarbakır and many people attended to show their support and collaboration. Singers from Europe as well as other singers from Turkey participated and supported the festival. The event that was held in the Ploya Council Facility Halls was attended as a guest by the Vice President of the Association of the Human Rights Mr. Ahmet Birdal. The Secretary of the President of the Republic of Turkey, the Interior Minister, and the towns officially appointed and elected Mayors send their celebrating messages to the First April Spring Festival.

The first message that was read in the event came from the Patriarch of the Syriac Orthodox Church. It was then followed by other messages of the Archbishops of Turabdin and Mardin as well as by hundreds of messages that came from other Syriac institutions and people. Meanwhile hundreds of thousands of Syriacs around the world rejoiced together by watching the event being live broadcasted by the Suroyo TV.

Chairman's message

Today 91 years passed after the genocide (Seyfo), which has been made in 1915 against the Syriacs by the Ottoman Empire and the Kurdish forces. Through murders around 500,000 Syriacs have died, including the victims caused by hunger and diseases.

During the last 15 years the Syriacs became active in the struggle for the political and social issues of their people. Also the genocide issue appears on the international agenda of the Syriacs. Through the last 10 years protests and hunger strikes took place in different metropolises of Europe, thus the Syriac people recognize the meaning of Seyfo and at the same time they could draw the attention of the West on themselv- es. Today the Syriac people carry out the duty for the Seyfo and accept it as part of their identity.

The Syriacs reached a professional approach for their issue, as well as the Seyfo case. This year with the guidance of ESU in Switzerland, in Sweden and in Germany 3 conferences have been held about the Seyfo, where academics and scientists of our people and the Europeans participated, i.e. Martin Tamcke, Gabriela Yonan, etc. Altogether about 1000 Syriacs have participated to these conferences. This proofs that the Syriac people notice their duty for the Seyfo.

To strengthen this fact and reinforce the Seyfo's status, today a new Academic Institution has to be established by the Syriacs together with the Europeans, to serve that aim.

The ESU representatives stated that these problems are making the Syriacs who are planning to return to Turkey anxious and that they make the Syriacs who live in the region afraid. Accordingly, the most appropriate solution would be to establish an enhanced state control, replacing the system of the Federal Aghas in the district of Martin-Midyat and their surrounding region. Also, that should the bribes given to the Aghas for solving the problems are used as economic investments, they could serve greatly to the prosperity of the region.

Also in the meeting, the Syriac delegation answered the questions of Mr. Bulent Aricin. Mr. Aricin asked about the reasons for the emigration of the Syriacs, the Chairman of the European Syriac Union (ESU) Mr. Bulent Aricin underlined the following three points:

As the Syriacs do not have Constitutional rights and they are not recognized as a minority, they are discriminated against. The area being financially not prosperous As a result of the PKK’s activities that started in 1984, a fear being spread in the region and consequently nearly 50 Syriks are killed, arson is one of the biggest problems.

In order to solve these disputes the local Federal Aghas acting as intermediaries and that they take big sums of money in bribes from the Syriacs.

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In order to solve these disputes the local Federal Aghas acting as intermediaries and that they take big sums of money in bribes from the Syriacs.
On 29th April 2006 the European Syriac Union (ESU) together with the Syriac-Asyrian Federation in Sweden, Bethnahrin Cultural Centre in Söderköping and the Swedish Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) organised a conference about the 1915 Genocide. Among the speakers, historian Mr. Zhak Kahadon, politician Mr. Fredrik Malm (a parliamentary candidate) and the Social Democrat MP Mr. Christer Erlandel were present.

The conference started with an introductory speech about the genocide by the ESU representative Mr. Christian Erlandel. He pointed out that the silence was held for the memory of the victims of the genocide, then Archibishop of the Syriac Orthodox Church of Scandavia, Mr. Pauline Atto could establish that the integration in the Swedish society is very good and much better than in Germany.

On 29th January 2006 there have been six attacks on churches, two in Kerkuk and four in Baghdad. After this attack European Syriac Union informed the European Parliament and the European Commission about the situation of the Christians in Iraq.

At 9th of Februari 2006 has Dr. Charles Tannock, member of the European Parliament, asked the European Commission following question:

"What happened after the answer given by the European Commission, while no answer has been given up to now?"

"Since the last meeting, has the European parliament received more information about the current situation of the Christians in Iraq and the Middle East?"

On 29th of April 2006 the European Syriac Union has been designed to cover two main educational courses. The subject to be covered in the first course is the history of the Syriacs into the Christianity and the process of the reformation of their nation under the new religion are considered. Therewith, the denominational divisiveness and the conflicts between the different communities are considered.

Regarding the Assyrian community (Chaldeans, Syriacs and other Christian minorities) MEPS strongly condemn acts of violence against them. They urge the authori- ties and the Multi-National Force (MNF) to prevent the violations of these serious crimes and bring them to justice as soon as possible.

MEPs urge Iraqis authorities to protect the Syriacs from discrimination in accordance with their international obligations.

Parliament urges Iraq's authorities to improve the security situation of the Assyrians and to facilitate the return and resettlement of Assyrian refugees in a secure environment where their customs and way of life are respected. It calls for the involvement of the Christians in Iraq in the reconstruction and administration of their land and villages in Northern Iraq and elsewhere in the region in order to preserve their cultural, religious and ethnic identity within one undivided country.

MEPS strongly support calls by most Iraqi politi- cal and religious leaders for restraint and reconciliation with the participation of all Iraqi communities. They urge the Constitutional Council and the Council of Representatives to preserve the cultural and religious freedom of all Iraqi communities in its constitu- tion for a constitutional amendment.

MEPS call on the Commission and the Council to take all necessary measures to assist and protect the Assyrians.