



## Chairman's Message

During the last few months the Syriacs entered the agenda of the European Union, Turkey and Iraq. The European Parliament, in its 2006 report on Turkey, mentioned for the first time, the 1915 Syriac Genocide (Seyfo).



In a meeting with the representatives of the European Commission, we discussed with them the situation of the Syriacs in Turkey since last year. As a result, some points regarding the fundamental rights of the Syriacs were included in the European Commission Progress Report on Turkey that was published in November. With these developments, the Syriac issue has now attained an established position within the EU-Turkey relations.

Whilst, from the Syriacs point of view, these positive developments were achieved, in Turkey and in Iraq the picture is gloomy for the Syriacs.

In Turkey there has been no progress for ensuring the rights of the Syriacs and during the last few months there have been some serious attacks against them. Whilst the threats the attacks committed by the Village Guards against the Syriacs; especially in Tur Abdin, two bomb attacks against the Syriacs have spread a sense of fear among the Syriacs in the Region. Some Turkish politicians reacted to the Syriac genocide (Seyfo) being mentioned in the European Parliamentary Report with statements such as, 'the European Union is now putting the Syriac Genocide in front of us.'

However, the last few months were even darker for the Syriacs of Iraq. In October, the Syriac Orthodox Priest Father Paulus Iskander was kidnapped and later his head and limbs were cut off, thus brutally murdered in Mosul. Meanwhile, also in Baghdad nine Assyrians and a Mandaean were killed in Baghdad. Lastly, in November the leader of the Syriac movement in Iraq Mr. Yeshu Mageed Haddaya was assassinated in an attack with gunfire in the town of Baghdeda (Karakoush).

On one hand the Syriac issue is gaining an international dimension in Europe, on the other hand in Turkey and Iraq, namely in their homeland, their situation is worsening by days. This situation is causing a general sense of fear and hesitation among the Syriacs. Naturally, they ask this question: 'How is our future going to be?'

The Syriacs have been asking this question for centuries. Because the area where they have been living has not provided them a security and stability they needed and because they have been the scapegoat of the negative developments for the last one thousand years. 1895, 1909, 1915, ..., ..., 2006, and ...

We as ESU ask ourselves: When is this negative trend going to come to an end?

Iskender Alptekin, ESU Chairman

## GERMANY RE-ASSESSSES THE CASES OF THE SYRIAC MIGRANTS

The Court of Kassel this year had reached a verdict, ordering a re-assessment of the files of the Syriacs who migrated to Germany since the 80's. The reason for this determination was that the grounds upon which the Syriacs had filed their applications for immigration were no longer valid. Thus, the court's opinion was that the dangers against the Syriacs in Turkey were eliminated.

Following this ruling a family was deported in June. Upon that, ESU started to actively make researches in order to find out the reasons behind the decision of the Kassel Court and the scale of the possible effect as a result of this verdict. A previous verdict, reached by the Court of Luneburg in 2004, had served as a precedent for the decision of Kassel Court. The reasons for the Luneburg Court's verdict, in turn, were based on some reports by some German institutions and the reports of the



Foreign Affairs Ministry of Germany.

The Syriacs emigration to Germany had started at the end of the 1960's as a labour force. Then, in the 1970's a large wave of migration of Syriacs spread to all of the European countries, including Germany. The reasons for the migration of the Syriacs were, the increase in the attacks and murders against the Syriacs carried out in the 70's and 80's, the armed clashes between the security forces and the PKK and their negative effect on the Syriacs, the economic under-development in the areas where the Syriacs lived, the compulsory Islamic religious education etc. Due to these problems about 45,000 Syriac people left Tur Abdin and established themselves in Europe. The highest population of the Syriacs was concentrated in Germany and Sweden. Currently there are nearly 90,000 /syriacs living in Germany. At least %75 of this population came from Tur Abdin and the rest of them came from Syria. Most of those who migrated from Tur Abdin came as labourers and established themselves in Germany. Some of them obtained temporary leave to remain and some of them are still waiting for their pending cases to be concluded.

The ruling of the Court of Kassel applies to the latter two categories. According to some

sources the number of those who have acquired temporary leave to remain and those who have no leave to remain, altogether, is more than 10,000 people. However, according to the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Germany this number was limited to 125 cases only.

Subsequently, a German committee of 15 members consisting of representatives from the Catholic Church, the Protestant Church, Missio Organisation representatives, a Judge from the Supreme Court of Karlsruhe, several lawyers and journalists together with the representative of ESU Mr. Fikri Aygur visited Tur Abdin between 28 and 30 September, in order to assess, on the ground, the situation of the Syriacs in Tur Abdin. The Committee firstly met with the Governor of Mardin Mr. Mehmet Kiliclar and the Mayor of Midyat Mr. Mustafa Yilmaz (Kaymakam), as the state officials. Also, the Committee members met with the Archbishop of Tur Abdin H.E Samuel Aktash and the Archbishop of Mardin/Diyarbakir H.E Saliba Ozmen, the representative of the Midyat Syriac Cultural Association Mr. Yakup Gabriel, the Syriac lawyer Mr. Rudi Sumer, representatives from Sare and Bsorino Syriac villages whose vineyards were burnt down recently and the representatives of 13 Syriac families who returned from Germany and Switzerland.

At the end of the assessment, the committee came to a conclusion that no economic or legal progress was made in the circumstances of the Syriacs, that between 2000 and 2004 there was a little positive approach towards them, however, since this positive approach had not been legally substantiated with the statutes, during the last few months there have been some serious aggressions against the Syriacs.

On 18 October 2006, the findings of the committee were submitted to the counsellor of the Minister of Internal Affairs of Germany Mr. Peter Altmeier, by a joint sub-committee consisting of the representatives of the Catholic Church and the representatives of ESU. During this meeting Mr. Altmeier stated that he had no information that the Kassel Court ruling would be affecting a large number of people and according to his knowledge this ruling would be affecting only 125 families. However, when the sub-committee informed him that the potential number of the would be affected people and families was much higher, Mr. Altmeier replied by saying that his ministry would undertake a new research about the matter and that they would keep, especially the Syriac people, who have been well integrated with the German society out of this ruling.

## THE ESU COMMITTEE WITH THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION

The ESU Representatives met with Mr. Pierre Mirel from the Turkey Board of the European Commission's Department of Enlargement. The meeting with the European Commission lasted for about one hour and half and was attended by Mr. Iskender Alptekin (Chairman of ESU), Fikri Aygur (Vice Chairman of ESU) and Linda Gabriel (Secretary of ESU). Every year, before the Progress Report on Turkey is drafted, ESU informs the European Commission about the situation of the Syriacs in Turkey. Thus, also this year the ESU Committee prepared a Dossier about the developments in Turkey and submitted it to Mr. Pierre Mirel.

ESU, as a longstanding policy, has always seen the accession of Turkey to the EU as a positive process. However, as this was also mentioned in the Dossier, Turkey has made no progress in the Syriac issue as well as in all other issues. In the 2005 Progress Report on Turkey that was published by The European Commission, it was emphasized that in a number of issues Turkey should make progress to enhance the conditions for the Syriacs living in Turkey. Some of these issues are:

*1- Under the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne, minorities in Turkey consist exclusively of non-Muslim communities. The minorities usually associated by the authorities with the Treaty of Lausanne are Jews, Armenians and Greeks. However, there are other communities in Turkey which, in the light of the relevant international and European standards, could qualify as minorities.*

*2- Non-Muslim minorities not usually associated by the authorities with the Treaty of Lausanne, such as the Syriacs, are still not permitted to establish their schools.*

*3- Very few individuals of Syriac-origin have been able to return from abroad. Those that have lost their Turkish nationality are not able to register their property in the framework of the ongoing land registry in the Southeast of Turkey. In this context, there has been a worrying increase in the number of complaints from Syriacs in Turkey and abroad regarding the seizure of their uninhabited property by both citizens in the region and the land registry authorities. Moreover, those that do return continue to face harassment from the state administered village guards.*

*4- Nationality criteria restrict the ability of non-Turkish clergy, such as the Syriacs and Chaldeans, to work for certain churches.*

Turkey, since last year, has made no progress at all in solving the above mentioned issues.

Moreover, during this period the number of attacks against the Syriacs has increased systematically. Some of these incidents of aggressions that were carried out against the Syriacs were beating ups, burning their vineyards, bomb attacks, threats etc. Thus, during this period the Syriacs experienced serious problems of security.

In the Dossier that was prepared by ESU these incidents of aggressions against the Syriacs were listed in thorough details and a number of necessary issues that ought to be solved by Turkey were included in order to ensure that the Syriacs live in a democratic environment for the Syriacs. The issues included in the Dossier were as follows:

### I - The Social Rights

1 - The recognition of the Syriacs as native people in Turkey

2 - The recognition of the Syriacs as a minority and the enjoyment of the rights granted to the non-Muslims under the Lausanne Treaty

3 - The right of self representation of the Syriacs in the Turkish Parliament

4 - The right of return to the Syriac settlements that have been evacuated since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century,

a) The usage of original Syriac names for the villages and towns in the entire region instead of the newly made up names

b) An appropriate land registry to be kept for the Syriac settlements which would enable the Syriacs who live abroad and who are no longer Turkish nationals to register their lands and properties. (Article 87 of the Villages Act)

c) Building the infrastructure and the social facilities needed in the Syriac settlement areas



d) The necessary financial and other means to be provided for the development of the regions where the Syriacs exist,

e) The necessary projects for the return of the Syriacs to the region to be prepared by Turkey in cooperation with the EU.

5 - An amnesty to be declared for the Syriacs whose Turkish nationality was taken away from them due to not doing their military service and for those who passed the military service age limit.

### II - The Language Rights

1 - The Syriac language to be recognized as an official language

2 - The opening of Syriac teaching Schools

3 - The recognition of publications and broadcasting in the Syriac language

4 - Broadcasting programs in the Syriac language on the state administered radio and television channels.

### III - The Cultural Rights

1 - The official recognition of cultural-traditional days and festivals

2 - Allowing the usage of the names and surnames in the Syriac language.

### IV - The Religious Rights

1 - The official powers and privileges to be returned to the Patriarch of the Syriac Orthodox Church of Antioch who was deported from the Deyrul-Zafaran Monastery (Mardin) in 1931 and the ban for his return to be removed.

2 - The return of the properties, lands, historical manuscripts, documents and ornaments that belong to the churches and monasteries. Also protection of the immovable chattels by the state

3 - The restoration of the Syriac churches and monasteries in the Southeast

4 - The Syriac religious representatives to be officially recognized by the state.

5 - The religious days and festivals to be officially recognized

In the 2006 Progress Report on Turkey that was published by the European Commission during the first week of November, a number of points that were requested to be solved for the Syriacs in the ESU Dossier were included. These points are as follows:

*Furthermore, a number of other problems remain. Non-Muslim religious communities have no access to legal personality and continued to face restricted property rights. They encountered problems in the management of their foundations and in recovering property by judicial means, The June 2005 ruling by the Council of State narrowing the scope for the Directorate General for Foundations to take over the management of foundations was not*



applied during the reporting period.

Furthermore, restrictions on the training of clergy and on foreign clergy to work in Turkey still remain. Turkish legislation does not provide private higher religious education for these communities.

Sermons and publications of the Religious Affairs Directorate (Diyanet) and of local religious authorities occasionally appear hostile towards proselytising activities. Attacks against clergy and places of worship of non-Muslim religious Communities have been reported. The court case concerning the murder of the Catholic Priest Andrea Santoro in a church in the Black Sea region province of Trabzon in February 2006 resulted in a heavy penalty for the perpetrator. Several incidents against Syriacs also occurred.

Turkey's approach to minority rights remains unchanged. According to the Turkish authorities, under the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne, minorities in Turkey consist exclusively of non-Muslim religious communities. The minorities associated in practice by the authorities with the Treaty of Lausanne are Jews, Armenians and Greeks. However, there are other communities in Turkey which, in the light of the relevant international and European standards, could qualify as minorities.

The February 2005 visit of the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM) to Ankara has not been followed up and no progress has been made in starting a dialogue on the situation of national minorities in Turkey. The deepening of such a dialogue between Turkey and the HCNM is necessary. It needs to include relevant areas such as minority education, minority languages, the participation of minorities in public life and broadcasting in minority languages. This would facilitate Turkey's further alignment with international standards and best practice in EU Member States to ensure cultural diversity and to promote respect for and protection of minorities.

There has been no progress in relation to Syriacs who continue to face difficulties in relation to property. Those who have lost their Turkish nationality are not able to register their property in the land registry. In this context, complaints about seizures of property have increased.

Children whose mother tongue is not Turkish cannot learn their mother tongue in the Turkish public schooling system. Such education can only be made by private education institutions. As concerns Kurdish all such courses were closed down in 2004. Therefore, there are no possibilities to learn Kurdish today in the public or private schooling system. Furthermore, there are no measures taken to facilitate access to public services for those who do not speak Turkish.

No progress has been made in addressing the problem of village guards. No action was taken to abolish them.

Overall, Turkey made little progress on ensuring cultural diversity and promoting respect for and protection of minorities in accordance with international standards.

## The attacks on Chaldean-Assyrian-Syriacs are increasing in Iraq

During the last few months we have seen a dramatic increase in the attacks, by the terrorist movements, against the Syriac-Chaldean-Assyrians in Iraq. It is eye-catching that the timing of these intensifying attacks coincides with the ongoing discussions about a Federal System of Iraq.

The areas that are mostly populated with the Syriac-Chaldean-Assyrians, who are indigenous people of Iraq and belong to the Christian religion, are Mousul (Ninwe) with the surrounding villages and Baghdad. Also, a large number of them still live in Dohuk and Zakho provinces of North Iraq, that have been mostly evacuated from their original inhabitants and re-populated by the Kurds in the last thirty years. Currently the population of the Syriac-Assyrian-Chaldean people in and around the Mousul district is about 400,000.

In the aftermath of the First Gulf War tens of thousands Syriac-Assyrian-Chaldean people fled from the country, especially from North Iraq where there is a Kurdish majority, and emigrated to Europe and the US. After the fall of Saddam's regime the Syriac-Assyrian-Chaldeans have been subjected to intensified attacks. During the last three years hundreds of them have been killed and tens of their churches have been bombed and destroyed. These attacks have accelerated the phase of the migration and thousands of people, as a result, have fled to Syria and Jordan. Therefore, especially under the leadership of ESU, so many Syriac-Assyrian-Chaldean organizations have called for the international powers to create a safe zone for the Christians in order to stop them from fleeing the region and to ensure their security.

Whilst the discussions of changing Iraq into a federative state are going on nowadays, the creation of a safe zone for the Christians who are being subjected to intensive attacks has also entered the agenda of the ongoing discussions.

Especially nowadays while these discussions are taking place the attacks against the Syriac-Assyrian-Chaldeans have increased even more in Baghdad and Mousul.

Since 30<sup>th</sup> September 2006 the Christians who live in and around Mousul were complaining about receiving threatening letters from unknown persons or groups.

On 4<sup>th</sup> October 2006 following a bomb attack in the Camp Sara district of Baghdad 9 Assyrians lost their lives. The names of the Assyrians who lost their lives in the explosion caused by the bomb attack are: Khiter Elias, Isaac Addo Mirza, Fadi Adel, Thamer Georges, Hisam Simon, Safaa, Zayd Farouq, Ghazwan, Falah Joseph Zara.

Further, a few days ago a Christian doctor, Joseph Boutrus was also kidnapped and murdered in Baghdad. And Mr. Raed Faleh Mutter, a Mandaean chemistry teacher was shot dead with 16 bullets in the Southeast of

Baghdad.

Following these threats, on 9<sup>th</sup> October 2006 the Syriac Orthodox Priest Paulus Iskander Behnam of St. Afrem Church in Mousul was kidnapped by a terrorist group whose name is still unknown. The terrorist group, as a condition for the release of the priest, demanded an apology from the Pope Benedict XVI for the comments he had recently made against Islam. Alternatively, if Shura Al Sunnah made a decision ordering his release he would be released. However, without waiting for an answer to their demands, two days later, on 11<sup>th</sup> October 2006 the terrorist group murdered Father Rev. Paulus Iskander Behnam. The mutilated body of the priest was found in Al Qahira



district of Mousul on the same day; while the head, the arms and the legs were cut off from his corpse. This brutal murder of the priest has left a deep anxiety and fear among all the

Christians who live in and around Mousul.

These attacks that have been launched against the Assyrian-Chaldean-Syriac Christians of Iraq recently seem to occur systematically. The Assyrian-Chaldean-Syriac people are the most vulnerable and defenceless community in Iraq. Therefore, they are seen as an easy target by the attackers. They become the victims of the terrorist groups as a result of even the smallest act of the West that offends the Muslim World. Accordingly, the terrorist movement in Iraq used the words of the Pope Benedict XVI, which he cited from a historical manuscript written in the middle ages, as an excuse for its recent campaign of massacres. Thus, the Christians of the Middle East are the first victims of any act made by other Christians around the world. We see the same pattern of attacks, motivated by the same reason(s), against the Christians of the Middle East in many Middle Eastern countries such as Iraq, Egypt and Turkey.

Another attack has been added to the campaign of the systematic attacks that has started recently. On 22<sup>nd</sup> November, the leader of the Syriac Society in Iraq Mr. Yesu Haddaya has been shot dead in Baghdeda (Karakush) town near Mousul. Mr. Haddaya, in 2004 had founded the Syriac Society, in order to represent the Syriac community of Iraq whose population is around 150 thousand people. The Syriac Society is the first movement representing the Syriacs of Iraq.



Lastly, Christians in Iraq fear yet another priest has been kidnapped. Fr Douglas Yousef Al Bazy - 34 years old young and dynamic Chaldean priest - left his parish in Baghdad

## The Voice of the Syriacs

### IMPRINT

Information bulletin about the social position of the Syriacs in and outside the Middle East. It appears periodically, published by the European Syriac Union (ESU) in Brussels-Belgium.

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Chaldean Church believe it is "highly likely" that he has been kidnapped.

In order to stop this systematic campaign of massacres and ethnic cleansing that is taking place particularly against the Christians of Iraq; mainly the help of the Coalition Forces in Iraq and the support and the protection of the democratic world is needed. The Christian folk in Iraq has a serious security crisis and the Iraqi forces are unable to offer them the protection they need. If these massacres continue in the current scale, all of the Christian Assyrian-Chaldean-Syriacs who live in Iraq will either be killed or will have to flee out of their country. Without the existence of the Iraqi Christians, it is impossible to transform the fundamental Islamic mentality and establish a

democracy in Iraq. Therefore, the Assyrian-Chaldean-Syriac issue is also the most important obstacle in front of the establishment of a democracy in Iraq.

As a secure zone had been formed for the Kurds in order to protect them from the atrocities of Saddam's regime, today, in our view, it is necessary to form a similar security zone to protect the Christians from the terrorist attacks in Iraq. If such a secure zone is not formed, all modern countries as well as all of the powers of the darkness will witness the wiping out of the Christians from a country that is trying to make progress towards a democracy; and the Assyrian-Chaldean-Syriac people who are one of the most ancient peoples in the world will be buried in the dust of the history of Iraq.

## MASS-GRAVE FROM THE 1915 MASSACRES OF SEYFO-GENOCIDE DISCOVERED IN TUR ABDİN

In October 2006 a mass-grave was found in the Village of Harabe Baba (Kuru), situated between Mardin and Nusaybin, in Tur Abdin.

The news and pictures published on 19<sup>th</sup> October 2006 in a newspaper called Ulkede Ozgur Gundem drew the attention of both the researchers and the Turkish state officials. While the Gendarmerie Station (Military Security forces) of Akarsu village covered up the incident and banned the release of any sort of information about the incident, the Swedish historian and expert on Seyfo Prof. David Gaunt revealed his opinion on the findings.

According to Prof. David Gaunt the human remains in the mass-grave belong to 120 Syriacs and 150 Armenians. These 270 Christians were murdered on 14th June 1915, by the Al-Khamsin death Squad that was taking its orders from the Governor (Mutasarrif) of Mardin Halil Edip who was also one of the leaders of the Ittihat Terakki (A Turkish Nationalist Movement during the World War I).



Prof. David Gaunt who is the author of the book called *Massacres, Resistance, Protectors: Muslim-Christian Relations in Eastern Anatolia During World War I*, is carrying out researches about the 150 massacres that took place in Mardin Province (Sanjak).

The Syriac TV station Suroyo TV, based in Sweden, asked Prof. David Gaunt for his opinion about the finding of a mass-grave in Harabe Baba village. Prof. David Gaunt told Suroyo TV: 'I heard the news of the discovery of a mass-grave in Harabe Baba from my Turkish and Armenian contacts. When I learned from the Kurdish newspaper Ulkede Ozgur Gundem that the mass-grave was found near Harabe Baba village, situated between Mardin and Nusaybin, I compared this information with my pre-

vious researches. This news was exactly matching the findings of my previous researches. A massacre took place on 14 June 1915 where the mass-grave has been found. The mass-grave is near Dara village. Dara village's inhabitants were Syriac-Catholics and Armenians. The heads of Christian families who lived in Dara were captured by the Al Khamsin death squad sent by Halil Edip and taken to the place where the mass-grave has been found and they were murdered. Also, according to the statements taken from the local villagers this mass-grave belongs to some 300 Syriacs and Armenians. As it was seen on the skulls and the bones found in the mass-grave, the victims were murdered by hitting them with hard objects'.

We need to do further archeological and pathological researches and tests on the bones and skeletons. However, the Turkish army has banned carrying out any researches. So far all the researches about the 1915 massacres were carried out by the Turks.

Between May and October 1915 around half a million Syriac-Chaldean-Assyrians were murdered. Tur Abdin was one of the main places where some of the biggest massacres had taken place. Only within three months more than ninety three thousand Syriacs were killed in Tur Abdin. There are tens of mass-graves in Tur Abdin similar to the one found in Harabe Baba village. The Turks and the Kurds were committing massacres against the Christians in the form of mass-murders. Some of the Kurdish tribes who were taking their orders from the Turkish State officials of Diyarbakir, Mardin and Midyat, were going to a Christian village they were gathering all the inhabitants of the village and then they were either killing them one by one or they were taking them somewhere outside the village and killing them all together. Such mass-graves left from the brutal and vicious massacres of that time can be found almost in every village of Tur Abdin.

