



Chairman's Message

Dear friends,

It has been three years now since the foundation of ESU (the European Syriac Union). When we look back at the past three years, we see that ESU has acquired an important place among the Syriac people. The level that ESU has reached is very important. Firstly, ESU has been institutionalised and made new members in many of the European countries. Secondly, ESU has continuously raised the problems of the Syriacs living in the Middle East to the international agenda. Accordingly, some of these problems that have been continuously shouldered by ESU are the constant attacks against the Syriacs living in Iraq and their security issues, as well as the problems faced by the Syriac people living in Turkey. Thirdly, ESU has continuously carried the Syriac issues to the European Commission and as a result it helped the issue to enter into the Progress Report on Turkey. Fourthly, ESU has built a strong bridge between the Syriacs and most of the countries that they live in.



Whilst ESU has successfully shouldered this issues, there has been some important developments regarding the general Syriac cause. The most important development is that, together with the Chaldeans and Assyrians who are from the same ethnic background, they have begun to demand an Autonomous region in Iraq. No matter how risky such a demand could be, however it is the only choice that may preserve our cultural existence.

The Syriac cause that had become totally irrelevant during the cold-war. However, in the past few years it has entered into the agenda of the Middle Eastern and the Western countries. It is noteworthy to underline the fact that in a research carried out by the Leiden University of the Netherlands, the Syriac people are the best integrated Middle Eastern people into the European society. Thus, it could be said that this is a very important milestone for our coalescence with the modern world. In the last few years we see that there are many international symposium held concerning the Syriac history, culture and language. Therefore, it is possible to say that the world has started to feel the existence of the Syriacs.

For the continuity of these developments and for a proper representation of the Syriac people in an international level, ESU will assign a priority to these main issues: The organizational expansion of ESU and opening new representations in many countries, to place importance on the foreign relations so that we will extend the number of our friends, the establishment of the ESU Youth Branch, to carry the voice of the Syriacs living in the Middle East to the world in a higher level and to find more solutions for the social problems of the Syriacs.

Best regards,

Iskender Alptekin, ESU Chairman

THE 2nd CONGRESS OF ESU HELD IN BRUSSELS

The General Council of ESU held its second Congress on 19-20 May 2007 in Brussels. The second congress that has been held three years after the foundation of ESU was attended by more than a hundred members.

The program of the first day of the Congress started with the opening speech of the Member of the Executive Board Miss Rima Tuzun. Thereafter, in remembrance of the Syriac Martyrs a national Poem was read and the attendees stood up a minute of silence.



The President of ESU Mr. Iskender Alptekin informed the attendees about the works carried out by ESU during the last three years. Mr. Alptekin, also made a speech concerning the political developments in the Middle East, the position of the Syriacs within these developments and their importance from the Syriac point of view.

In the Congress, the Director of the Eastern European Board of the Government of Belgium Mr. Thomas Antoine made a very effective speech during the special part that was designed for the guests. Mr. Antoine who had worked as the Consulate General of Belgium in Istanbul for three years, was closely acquainted with the Syriacs of Turkey. Mr. Antoine in his speech stated that he is a friend of the Syriacs, and as the Belgian Government, within the criteria of Copenhagen in their dealings with Turkey,



they seriously take into consideration the problems of the Syriacs and they consider this as an issue that should be solved by Turkey.



The second Guest speaker was a Coptic person, namely Mr. Ayad Mossad, who is one of the first friends of ESU. Mr. Mossad in his speech stated that ESU has made a very good progress during the last three years and has a very strong management. He also stated that, with the great energy of the executive members who have been working with a high velocity and exertion, it has made very significant development during the last three years.

On the second day of the Congress the elections of the president and the Ruling Committee took place. The elections were carried out by a chosen council from the members of the Executive Board, who were Mr. Evgil Turker, Mr. Fikri Aygur and Ms. Neriman Kucukaslan. In the Presidency election the only nominee was the former president Mr. Iskender Alptekin. All the members who attended the Congress, unanimously elected Mr. Alptekin to remain in the post of the President of ESU for another term of three years.

Besides the president, another voting took place in order to elect 25 new members for the ruling committee, in order to further execute the ESU work in Europe. 29 persons were nominated as candidates in the ruling committee elections and 25 of them were elected. Accordingly, the new members of the ruling committee for three years ahead will be:

From the Netherlands

Mr. Fikri Aygur, Mr. Yılmaz Ergün, Mr. Luey Haddad and Ms Naima Gouriye

From Switzerland

Mr. Evgil Türker, Mr. Nail Akçay, Mr. Tuma Çelik, Mr. Albert Akbulut

From Belgium

Mr. Zeki Gezer, Ms Nursel Vergili, Mr. Suleyman Gültekin, Mr. Davut Vergili

From Germany

Mr. George İssa, Mr. Aziz Gergin, Ms Suel Demir, Ms Rima Tüzün, Mr. Abut Can, Mr. Simon Oğuz

From Sweden

Mr. İskender Haddad, Mr. Rubel Varlı, Ms Neriman Küçükaslan, Ms Bahiya Hadodo, Mr. Jacob Mirza, Mr. Nezir Yalçın



The new second three-year term president of ESU Mr. Iskender Alptekin, in his closing speech, at the end of the congress broadly mentioned the issues that will be undertaken during the three years ahead. Accordingly, the most important works to be undertaken will be; further strengthening the organizational structure, the strengthening of the foreign affairs committee, the establishment of the ESU Youth Branch, the expansion of the works



of the Women federations and to deal more effectively with the social problems that are faced by the Syriacs in the countries they are living.

Following the closure of the congress, the Ruling Committee was immediately assembled and elected the new Executive Board. Accordingly, the President of ESU Mr. Iskender Alptekin as well as Mr. Fikri Aygur, Mrs Neriman Kucukaslan, Mr. Evgil Turker, Mr. Aziz Gergin, Mr. Simon Oğuz and Mr. Nail Akcay were elected as the members of the Executive Board.

THE FIRST INTERNATIONAL SYRIAC SYMPOSIUM

On 30-31 March 2007, the First International Syriac Symposium was held in Turabdin's central town of Midyat. This symposium was for the most part financed by the European Union and was jointly organized by the Ulasilabilir Yasam Dernegi (Life Within Reach Association) a social organisation from Turkey and the European Syriac Union (ESU).

To this symposium that lasted for two days, the Archbishop of the Syriac Orthodox Church of Mardin Saliba Ozmen, the Head of the Delegation of the European Commission to Turkey Mr. Yngve Engstrom, the MP of Mardin Mr. Nihat Eri, the Secretary General of the Ulasilabilir Yasam Dernegi Association Belgin Cengiz, the Project Coordinator of the UYD Hacer Faggo, the members of the ruling committee of ESU Mr. Tuma Celik and Ms Linda Gabriel as well as many scientists from various universities in Turkey attended and made speeches.

The opening speech of the Symposium was made by the MP of Mardin Mr. Nihat Eri. Mr. Eri in his speech underlined the changes and the progress that the Turkish officials made regarding the problems faced by the local Syriacs.

The Head of the Delegation of the European Commission to Turkey Mr. Yngve Engstrom in his speech emphasized the importance of the civil organisations, and the significance of such a Symposium that is being held in Turkey.

The member of the ruling committee of ESU who organized the Symposium informed the audience about the reasons for the migration of the Syriacs from Turkey. Thus, stated that the main reasons for this migration are the historical discrimination and persecutions that the Syriacs have been suffering in their homeland. He also emphasized that this migration is not only the loss for the Syriacs who have been living in the region for at least 7 thousand years but it is also a loss for Turkey.

Following the opening speeches Mr. Celik read a paper on the Social and Cultural structure of the Syriacs. During the Syriac Symposium the following people set in the panel as presenters, Nese Erdilek from Bilgi University's research centre on the migration (the Panel on **the Syriac Identity, the Social structure and Law**), Lawyer Sabit Halat (**the Syriacs Diaspora and Migration**) and Mr. Zafer Yoruk (**the Syriac Identity and Cultural Rights**).

The people who read papers during the panels are: the representative of the Syriac Cultural Association in Midyat Mr. Jakop Gabriel, Doc, Dr. Emre Isik from the University of Mimar Sinan in



Istanbul, Doc, Dr. Ahmet Tasgin from Dicle University, the member of the Ruling Committee of ESU Mr. Tuma Celik, the president of the Culture and Solidarity Association of Mesopotamia Mr. Muzaffer Iris, Mr. Hakan Aytekin from Maltepe University, PHD student from Ege University Mr. Ihsan Cetin, Mr. Echoue Gouriye (from Syria), Dr. Abdurrahim Ozmen, Doc, Dr. Suavi Aydin (Hacettepe University) and the secretary of ESU Ms. Linda Gabriel.

This Symposium was in no doubt regarded by the attendees as the first of its kind in the exertion of solving the problems of the Syriac people who have migrated from their homeland either due to the massacres and deportation that they suffered in 1914-15 or due to the armed clashes in the region during the 1980's and 90's.

At the conclusion speeches of the Symposium, the importance of the fact that the problems are now being discussed was emphasized, thus a step had been taken towards finding a solution. Following the Symposium the traditional 1st April New Year and Spring Festival that has been celebrated by the ancestors of the Syriacs in Mesopotamia was celebrated.



The Mythological "First April the Spring and New Year Festival" celebrated in Midyat

Following the First Syriac Symposium that was held together by ESU and the Ulasilabilir Yasam Dernegi (the Life within Reach Association) they organized the historical 1st April The New Year Festival in Midyat. The Syriacs who are still living in Midyat have also made significant contributions to the organizing the festival.



The AK Party MP from the constituency of Mardin Mr. Nihat Eri, the Mayor of Batman Mr. Huseyin Kalkan, the member of the Executive Board of the European Syriac Union (ESU) Mr. Tuma Celik, the Delegate of Turkey in the European Commission Mr. Peter Kovachev, the Chairman of the Ulasilabilir Yasam Dernegi Association Miss, Belgin Cengiz, the Project Coordinator of the Ulasilabilir Yasam Dernegi Association Miss. Hacer Foggo, Lecturer and researcher on the Syriac culture from the Maltepe University Mr. Hakan Aytekin, some Syriac people from Iraq, Syria, and various European countries, leaders, businessmen, Syriac people living in the villages around Midyat as well as some Muslim people from the area attended this festival.

In order to eject fresh oxygen into the social and cultural lives of the Syriacs living in Turabdin and in order to ease the longing of those living abroad, the 1st April spring Festival was celebrated with a great joy in Midyat. The festival started at 12:00 pm and lasted until 19:00 pm.

The Habur Folklore Dance Group who had come from the Town of Hasake in Syria, displayed cultural dance motives that were enjoyed by the audience. The same Folklore Group, once again towards the end of the program, among the applauds of the audience displayed another special dance.

Meanwhile, the Midyat Folklore Group also displayed Syriac dances. The Folklore Group of the Syriac Young girls danced some authentic and unique cultural dances such as Shekhane, Hassade, Bagiye, Delilo and Halay who are still being preserved among the Syriacs.

The Syriac musicians and singers who came from abroad greatly coloured the festival. The bands of Kardes Turkuler from Turkey, Gudo (Band) d'Zalin from Syria and the singers Amanuel Skander and Sharbel Hanna entertained the attendees of the festival with their songs.

The member of the Executive Board of the European Syriac Union (ESU) Mr. Tuma Celik made a speech in Turkish and Syriac languages and said: "We are proud of celebrating this festival on the soil where we were born and grew up. For the last two days we have been discussing the current and future situation of the Syriacs. However, the most impor-

tant issue for the Syriacs is their wish of living peacefully in their homeland. In order to accomplish this wish we need to work harder. In doing so the people other than the Syriacs are also needed."

Some of the significant political figures of Turkey who were invited but couldn't attend the festival for various reasons were the Prime Minister of Turkey Mr. Recep Tayyip Erdogan, The Secretary General of ANAP Party Mr. Erkan Mumcu, AK Party Vice Chairman and MP Mr. Dengir Mir Mehmet Firat, the Governor of Mardin Province Mr. Mehmet Kiliclar, however, all of them sent messages and celebrated the Syriac Spring Festival.



The 1st April New Year and Spring Festival, which has an important place within the historical Mesopotamian culture, has started to be re-enliven in many areas where the Syriacs live. This festival, which has been celebrated for many years in Iraq and in Syria, nowadays is celebrated by the Syriacs around the world. ESU has started the celebration of this annual festival for the last three years.

The Syriac Union of Lebanon Inaugurates its Representative Office in Beirut

The inauguration ceremony of the Syriac Union of Lebanon (SUL) was held on 25.03.2007 at 06:00 pm. Most of the Political parties and organisations attended with their representatives to the inauguration that was coincided with the second Anniversary of SUL.



In the new representative office building of SUL, there is also a representative office for Suroyo TV. Representatives from the Lebanese Syriac Community as well as many representatives from the Lebanese government and other parties attended to the inaugu-

ration ceremony. Among the representatives, Al Mustaqbal Saad Al Hariiri as the representative of the Cabinet of Ministers in the Prime Minister Fuad Siniora's government, the MP Nebil De Frej, the representative of Michael Aoun Mr. Michael De Shdarfian, the representative of the Lebanese Army Mr. Antoine Nejim, the representative of the Ministry of Information Mr. Gazi Al Aridi, and the representative of the Lebanese Kataieb Party Mr. Jihad Bakarduni were present.

Also the representative of the President of Lebanon Mr. Emin Jamayyel, the former President Mr. Sasin Sasin, Mr. Samir Geagea, Dr. Antuan Habashi, the representative of the Ahrar Party Lawyer Joseph Karam, the Archbishop of Zahle and Buak District Bolus Safar, the representative of Suroyo TV Ms. Layla Latte and the President of SUL Mr. Ibrahim Morad made speeches in the inauguration.

In the speeches, it was stated that the historical roots of the state of Lebanon

goes back to the ancestors of the Syriacs. It was also stated that the exertions of the Syriacs for Lebanon are an honour for Lebanon. Further, it was stated that the Syriacs currently do not have a representative in the Lebanese government and it was agreed that there should be such a representation. During the inauguration a portrait of the Christian politician Mr. Piyer Jemayyel who was murdered a few months earlier was presented to his memory. A large number of people numbering around 1400 attended to the inauguration ceremony.



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.

Contact:

Phone: 0032 2 523 4181
 Fax: 0032 2 523 6201
 Internet: www.esu.cc
 e-mail: contact@esu.cc

Address:

European Syriac Union
 Rue Bara 152
 1070 Brussels
 Belgium

Chairman: Mr. Iskender Alptekin

e-mail: iskender.alptekin@esu.cc

Deputy Chair: Mr. Fikri Aygur

e-mail: fikri.aygur@esu.cc

Secretary: Mr. Evgil Turker

e-mail: evgil.turker@esu.cc

Treasurer: Mr. Nail Akcay

e-mail: nail.akcay@esu.cc

Members of the Union

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The Chaldean-Syriac-Assyrians demanded an Autonomous Region in Iraq

On 12-13th March 2007 a congress called the Congress of the Chaldean-Syriac-Assyrians was held in Ankawa. The aim of this congress was to unify the political reasoning of the Chaldean-Syriac-Assyrians.

The most important reason for such a congress to take place was that the Chaldean-Syriac-Assyrians of Iraq are living in a great danger. Since the First Gulf War the Chaldean-Syriac-Assyrians of Iraq, due to the oppressions and fear, were forced to flee abroad. This has reached an alarming level during the last three years. Following the fall of Saddam's regime, the deteriorating situation, the kidnappings, the murders, the attacks on churches caused more than half of the Chaldean-Syriac-Assyrian population to flee abroad. Therefore, the Chaldean-Syriac-Assyrian organisations begun to seek for measures in order to stop this migration.



So far the Chaldean-Syriac-Assyrian parties and organisations jointly held many conferences, meetings, and congresses for the protection of their people's rights. For instance, in 2001 at London, in 2003 at Amsterdam, in 2004 at Baghdad and in 2006 again at Hengelo a town in the Netherlands and in 2007 at Stockholm some joint conferences and meetings took place. However, the results expected from these gatherings were not met. The main reason for the failure of these meetings was that a mutual perspective that would further serve the unity was not accomplished. Also, the draft programs that were prepared were not worked on and not followed up adequately.

The reason for this congress to take place in Iraq was that by doing so it would gain more legitimacy. Accordingly, the Congress took place in the Hedyab Hall at Ankawa on 12-13 March 2007. On the first day of the congress that was attended by the representatives of the Chaldean-Syriac-Assyrian parties and organisations the opening speeches were held and various issues were discussed. Among those who attended the congress as guests, the representative of the PDK (Kurdish Democratic Party), the representative of President Talabani's party YNK (Kurdish Patriotic Union), the Union of Islam Party, the representatives of the Mandean, the Yezidi and the Armenian communities attended the congress.

The Chaldean-Syriac-Assyrian parties, organisations and institutions who did not formally attend the Congress had also sent their representatives to the congress. However, the parties that were formally represented and who attended the congress in the

party level were the HBA (the Patriotic Union of Mesopotamia), the SIMA (the Independent Syriac Community) and the Chaldean-Syriac-Assyrian Council.

Mostly from Duhok, Erbil, Mosul, Baghdad, Kirkuk, Basra and various towns of Iraq, over 1100 people attended the congress. Meanwhile, from the USA, Canada, Australia and various European countries representatives of the Chaldean-Syriac-Assyrian people attended the congress.

At the end of the Congress that lasted for two days the following decisions were made:

To form a parliamentary council of representatives with 41 members.

The 41 membership to this Parliament would be distributed as 21 representatives from various regions of Iraq; 10 representatives from the Diaspora and 10 representatives from the Chaldean-Syriac-Assyrian party and organisations.

The second decision was that the conveyance of the demands of the Chaldean-Syriac-Assyrian people to the regional Parliament of Kurdistan and to the Central Iraqi Parliament of Baghdad.

Some of the requests to be demanded from the parliaments:

1. The Chaldean-Syriac-Assyrians (Suroyo) are a People.
2. The Chaldean-Syriac-Assyrian (Suroyo) People, demands Autonomy in its Geographical areas.
3. An exception to be made for the Chaldean-Syriac-Assyrian People in order to be excluded from being ruled under the Islamic Sheria Laws.

The draft proposal that included the above mentioned two decisions was sent both to the Kurdistan regional Parliament and to the Central Iraqi Parliament in Baghdad.

The draft proposal that was sent to the Parliament of Baghdad immediately made its echoing effect. Hence the Foreign Affairs Minister of Iraq Mr. Hoshar Zebari declared that they see the rightful demand of the Chaldean-Syriac-Assyrian people for an autonomous province or region as a positive development.



The second part of the article "Ephrem the Syriac" will be published in the next issue.