



## Chairman's Message



Among the Syriacs, the month of July is associated with the Treaty of Lausanne. 84 years ago with a treaty signed in Lausanne, the foundations of the Turkish state were laid and so many civil liberties were promised for the non-

Muslim minorities. For some minorities these liberties were never put in practice and for others they had a counter-effect. Whilst the Syriacs have been deprived of these rights, the Armenians and the Greeks have been suffering from discrimination due to their differences.

It is a common practice for the states to form a particular culture of their own when they are founded. The Turkish state which was founded in 1923, gained a formal recognition with the Treaty of Lausanne. The representatives of Turkey who recognized the rights of the minorities in accordance with the relevant articles in Lausanne, did not wish to implement them. The Turkish state that is currently in the negotiation process for joining the EU, even today is being widely criticized for not implementing the promises it has recognized in writing. Probably the roots of this practice go back to the non-implementation of the treaty of Lausanne which was signed 84 years ago. It has become a tradition of Turkey to accept promises on paper but not to put them into practice. It is very hard to change such traditions, especially in countries with deep roots of such traditions. Thus, in the history of Turkish state, many people and state officials who desired to implement a change were put to death. Accordingly, the leading AKP (Justice and Development Party) who wished to carry out some changes in Turkey during its last term in office was put under a heavy strain. Last May, the government that was administered solely by the AKP was collapsed by the pressure of the Army. On July general elections were held in Turkey. After these elections too, the AKP was supported by the majority of the Turkish population and gained an absolute majority of the seats in the parliament. What is interesting here is that Christian minorities such as the Syriacs, the Armenians and the Greeks also supported the AKP in those elections. Because, AKP is a party in which the Islamic religious values have a strong influence. In spite of that, there could be only one single explanation for why would the Syriacs and other Christian groups in Turkey support the AKP. This is because the AKP is the only political party that sincerely deals with the problems of the various ethnic communities who live in Turkey. The Syriacs are expectant from the AKP. Let us see what line would the AKP, who acquired the Government and the Presidency, take. Will it form a new culture of administration for Turkey or will it continue with the old practice of non-implementation?

Iskender Alptekin

## Meeting with Mr. Siniora and Mr. Geagea in Lebanon

On 28th August 2007, the President of the European Syriac Union Mr. Iskender Alptekin and the Vice-President Fikri Aygur had a meeting with the Prime Minister of Lebanon Fouad Siniora and the Leader of the Lebanese Forces Mr. Samir Geagea.

According to Mr. Alptekin, firstly this was a meeting of courtesy to Mr. Siniora and he added that they have presented ESU program of missions and policies to Mr. Siniora. Mr. Alptekin declared that they have welcomed the position of the Lebanese Prime



Minister and said that they are ready for any need and support for Lebanon.

Mr. Siniora also has welcomed the ESU delegation and stated that they are in difficult period and for this reason they need to be sup-

ported. Mr. Siniora also declared that democracy in Lebanon has to work.

The ESU delegation has also met the Lebanese Forces Leader Samir Geagea on 24<sup>th</sup> August 2007 and the ESU delegation explained the program of ESU missions and policies to Mr. Geagea. Mr. Alptekin said that Mr. Samir Geagea is an important figure in the Lebanon politics. It the meeting the situation of the Christians in the Middle East was closely examined and both sides agreed that Christians in the region are passing through hard times.

Mr. Alptekin said that both of the meetings were very useful and as ESU, they will continue to maintain relations in the future.



## Attacks on Christians of Iraq

On 27th June 2007, two members of the Syriac-Chaldean-Assyrian Christian community of Iraq were murdered in Mousul.

Zuhayr Yousef Stayfo (Born in Karemlesh 1958) the head of the Mosul branch of the Bethnahrin Patriotic Union (HBA) and Luay Sleyman Nouman (Born in Tel Esqof 1986) a member of HBA, while driving in a car, their vehicle was stopped by unknown persons in the city of Mousul and were shot dead. Their bodies were later collected by their colleagues in Mousul.

This latest incident of Mr. Zuhayr Yousef Stayfo and Mr. Luay Sleyman Nouman, who were both members of the Bethnahrin Patriotic Union (HBA), shows clearly that situation of Iraqi Christians is very critic. Because of their religion, they are target of different kind of attacks and aggressions. They being threatened by some fanatic Islamic groups, forced to convert into another religion other than their own and made to pay Jizyah (a tax collected from non-Muslims by Muslim rulers). As a result of this fundamentalist mentality, without differentiating between young, old, woman, child or cleric, everyday some

Syriac-Chaldean-Assyrian Christians are being kidnapped and murdered. After 2003 because of intensive terrorist attacks also thousands of Syriac-Chaldean-Assyrians migrated out of Iraq. The fear and panic has become a part of their daily life. Moreover, because they are defenceless against these attacks they feel that they have no security for their future.

Finally, the amount of attacks against the Syriac-Chaldean-Assyrian Christian ethnic and religious minority of Iraq has reached an alarming level. Therefore, a system of security should be urgently implemented in order to eliminate such barbaric outcomes. Otherwise, the daily attacks against them will soon turn into an ethnic cleansing. Therefore, we, as the European Syriac Union (ESU), request from the respective representatives of the United Nations, the European Union, the Arab League and the rulers of the Middle Eastern countries, to take a sensitive approach against such atrocities that are targeting the ethnic and religious minorities especially the defenceless Christian minority of Iraq and kindly ask them not to remain indifferent in finding a solution for their inhumane situation.

## Interview with ESU Vice-Chairman: Fikri Aygur

This interview has been made with Mr. Fikri Aygur who is the Vice-chairman of ESU since 4 years now.



**In general how do you see the situation of the Middle East?**

In the aftermath of 11 September 2001, like all of the world, Middle East too has entered into a new process. During the Cold War, Middle Eastern states have arranged their politics on an east-west block basis. Some of the Middle Eastern states have shaped their politics and economy on these contradictions.

In this medium Middle East has been forming a great danger at its heart. Increasing of terrorist organisations on the basis of fanaticism of religion. The danger of these organisations was understood following the attacks of 2001 against the US, and tried to take measures with Great Middle East Project. Today all of the Middle Eastern states are more or less being effected by this project.

Great Middle East Project is comprehensive and long term alteration project for this, many states have political and social crisis. So the Middle East is in the heart of the problems.

**Iran, despite all of the pressures and demands, insists on nuclear programme. What will be the attitude of the US and the international community in the future?**

United Nations has put in place some sanctions against Iran. The US, which has been stricken by the international terror, insists that the aim of the nuclear programme of Iran is to produce atomic bombs. Iran, one of most powerful state in the region, if it continues to develop nuclear programme and threatens the region, the problems between Shiite and Sunni will occur in the Middle East. If the dominant power of Shiites, Iran, goes to armement the eternal enemy Sunni powers Egypt and Saudi Arabia need the armements too. This situation of armement can increase the tension in the region and even can be transformed to a Shiite-Sunni conflict. Already in Iraq a Shiite-Sunni conflict exists and it grows day by day. These conflicts can leap to the other states too. Consequently, for the achievement of the Great Middle East Project, the US can enlarge economic and political sanctions against Iran in the future. With these sanctions if Iran does not take a step back, the possibility of intervention will progress at the head of the US and international community towards Iran.

**Since assassination of Rafik Hariri in Lebanon, the atmosphere is so strained. Internal conflicts continue. How will the balance be in the future?**

There are so many organisations in Lebanon. Thus, there is a great pressure of Iran and Syria on one part of the society. The situation of Palestinians and their position influences the politics of Lebanon. Contrary to this, great part of Lebanese society is for democracy and they are in peace with international com-

munity. Probably, it is difficult to have a solution on short term to the Lebanon's internal problems which are connected to the Palestinian question and to democratisation of Iran.

**Syria does not maintain an effective coordination with the international community. What is waiting for Syria in the future?**

Internationally Syria is criticized for two reasons. First, interference to Lebanon's internal affairs. Second, the foreign citizen terrorists who pass to Iraq over Syria. Because of these critics Syria pull out its troops from Lebanon. Its effects on Lebanon are not as they have been in the past. Usage of Syria as a passage by the terrorists to pass to Iraq has always been denied by the Syrian authorities. On the other hand the Syrian government tries to show that it is making a democratic progress. These situations can continue as critic-defence game for a long period.

Sunni Arabs consist majority of the Syrian society. In the contrary, the administration is in the hands of the Alawies (part of Shiites). So, Syrian administration naturally approaches to Iran. And what makes Syria in difficulty is the approachment to Iran and alliance with Iran. Naturally this alliance connects Syria to the negative and positive developments which occur in Iran. Consequently, international politics which will be applied to Iran will determine the future of Syria at large.

**In Turkey, political crisis that occurred around presidency election is finished with the victory of Justice and Development Party (AKP). What is waiting for Turkey in the new period?**

In the new period the population entrusted Turkey to AKP. With 47% of votes AKP has taken possession of majority in the Parliament. In this situation AKP will not only govern in Turkey, at the same time it will determine Turkey's new President, too. In the future, besides the government having also the power of presidency makes AKP even more powerful. In Turkey, the President can determine legislative, judicial and executive powers, can appoint the generals to the head of military and teachers for the universities. After determination of government and the President by the AKP, it is sure that new process will begin. AKP, in one side tries to move back Turkey to its social origins and on the other side tries to integrate it with the modern world. The origins of Turkey are based on the Ottoman Empire, social reality which AKP bases is Ottomans culture too. Turkish nationalism did not exist until the last stage of the Ottoman Empire. The Ottoman empire was based on a 'nations' system and for this there was autonomy of religious differences. And what makes AKP attractive to the minorities is the Ottomans 'nations' system. For this reason AKP has been named as the "new ottomans" at the international arena.

In my opinion: AKP will not transform Turkey to a religious state, but unite Turkey to the modern world without giving concessions from its structure of social origins. I think on these basis AKP will continue in the reform process

and also Turkey will show progress with the EU negotiations. It is difficult that this development would transform to a membership in short term, because it is impossible to some religious facts not to increase in the AKP administration. So these could not correspond to the EU democratic standards. High probability is that the EU-Turkey relations will finish like Germany and now France what defend with a 'privileged partnership'.

**Like everytime Iraq is at the top of the actuality. Security problem is in high level. Parallels to this there is demand of autonomy from our community. What means autonomy for our community and from which reality comes?**

Internal war is rising in Iraq. It seems that only Sunnis, Shiites and Kurds affect from internal war. In reality in this war they are Syriac-Chaldean-Assyrians which came from same origins and little with population, especially belong to Christian religion that war affect negatively. Syriac-Chaldean-Assyrians are native nation of Mesopotamia, although from 1990 because of wars that happened they lost great part of their population.

Syriac-Chaldean-Assyrians in Iraq live dispersed. For this they can not maintain the security and also they are open to the terror attacks. So at last three years hundreds killed with the terrorist attacks. Iraqi authorities could not maintain security of the country and for this they less Syriac-Chaldean-Assyrians to their destiny. For this reason Syriac-Chaldean-Assyrians look for their security in Syria, Jordan and in the west. Continuation of these migrations will end existence of Syriac-Chaldean-Assyrians in Iraq.

In Iraq and in concrete shaping an autonomy region for the Syriac-Chaldean-Assyrians can stop intensive migration. But autonomy is not only for security it is also for acceptance of Syriac-Chaldean-Assyrians with their social characters with the new construction of democratic Iraq. Like every nation Syriac-Chaldean-Assyrians have their rights to protect their culture, living it and developing it. For Iraq this is a democracy test, it will a success only if Syriac-Chaldean-Assyrians, which represent culture of Mesopotamia and members of Christianity, are able to protect their cultures in new Iraq. We can not mention democracy in one country that did not recognize a native nation.

At the step of institutionnalisation of democracy in Iraq, giving answer to demands of Syriac-Chaldean-Assyrians is criterion of democracy. The future of Middle East; after passing a hard period looks so bright. So democratisation of Middle East is for our advantage as one of the oldest community in region. There is a great advantage for Syrians to make hopes for democratic Middle East and trying to establish the conditions of returning back. Because of their origins of Middle East, Syrians like other nations at minimum, they have to show effort at the democratisation and the development of Middle East. From now on Syrians have to approach to Middle East problems as native peoples and not as spectators.

## The Treaty of Lausanne

There is no doubt that the most important treaty in the history of the Turkish Republic is the Peace Treaty of Lausanne which was signed on 24th July in the Swiss town of Lausanne.

In 1922 the Ottoman Empire was disintegrated and Mustafa Kemal Ataturk laid the foundations of the modern Turkish Republic on the remains of the empire. In the year 1922 most of the boundaries (except from the Turkey-Iraq border) were defined. In order to formally recognize these borders, a treaty was signed between the countries of Turkey, the United Kingdom, France, Italy, Greece, Romania, Japan and the state of Serbia-Croatia-Slovenia, the peace talks were commenced on 21st November 1922 in Chateau Ouchy of the Swiss town Lausanne. During the preparation talks that were held in Lausanne most of the communities who were living in Turkey were being represented and Agha Petrus attended the meeting as a representative of The Syrians and the Yezidis. Following the preparatory meetings, the talks continued mostly between the state representatives. The meetings regarding the minorities were commenced under the presidency of the British Lord Curzon on 12 December 1922. In his opening speech Lord Curzon addressed the minorities issue on a religious basis and addressed the 'Christian and Muslim minorities' by stating "the equality of the Christian Minority of Asia and the Muslim Minority of Europe."



On 13th December, Ismet Inonu who attended the meeting as the representative of Turkey stated that Turkey wishes to develop good relations with the Syrians and the Armenians. Also, during that meeting some talks took place between Ismet Inonu and Agha Petrus.

General Ismet Pasha (Inonu) accepted that the minority rights will be agreed to by Turkey on the same basis as that have been defined in the recent treaties signed in Europe, on condition that the Muslim minorities who live in the neighbouring countries would benefit from the same rights.

The Lausanne talks, in which the foundations of the Turkish Republic were laid, were concluded and The Treaty of Lausanne became legally binding on 24<sup>th</sup> July 1923 when all the

attending states signed under the treaty. A significant part of this treaty was designed to deal with the issues regarding the Non-Muslim minorities. Some of the articles regarding the Non-Muslim minorities in this treaty are as follows:

The rights and liberties recognized under the relevant articles of this treaty, should we take the conditions of the time into consideration their essence cannot be underestimated. However, the question is who could benefit from these rights and those who could how much have they been benefiting from them?



According to the articles of the treaty, the Non-Muslim minorities could benefit from these liberties. When the Treaty of Lausanne was signed, besides the Greeks, the Armenians, the Syrians and other Christian minorities, the Jews and the Yezidies were also some of the minorities living in Turkey. Even though the names of the minorities were not mentioned in the treaty, however, all these minorities should have benefited from these liberties stated in the articles between 37 and 45. Until today, only the Greeks, the Armenians and the Jews have enjoyed some the liberties recognized under this treaty. The other communities have been left out of the Non-Muslim definition by Turkey and have been deprived of their rights. The Syrians, who are the most ancient Christian community of this region, were not included in the Non-Muslim definition.

Accordingly, the Syrians throughout the 84 years history of the Turkish Republic have not been enjoying any of their civil liberties. The Syrians, who have not been recognized in Turkey as a minority, formally could not benefit from any social, political or legal rights either. On the other hand, Turkish officials have always called the Syrians as "First Class Turkish Citizens". However, during the last half century Syrians in countries such as Iran, Syria and Iraq have been promoted to the highest official positions in their countries, the Syrians in Turkey, despite being "first class citizens", could not even become a lowest degree state official.

The Syrians and the other Non-Muslim minorities, who could not benefit from these rights, are actually leading an illegal life in Turkey. The Syrians, though without a constitutional and legal framework, have managed to preserve their culture, language, religion and social characteristics. How did they manage to do this? They could do so either with the help

of some conscientious officials who were appointed to the region of Tur-Abdin or in return to the bribes they were giving to the local influential individuals. However, not always the officials appointed to the region were conscientious people. Or the bribes given to the local powers were not always satisfactory. In this case the Syrians were highly pressurized and they would start to flee abroad.

In spite of the Treaty of Lausanne which was signed jointly by Turkey and the powerful states of the time, why were the Syrians not formally recognized as a

minority? The Syrians are ethnically a different people with a thousands years old history. The Syrians have been through all of the stages of becoming a nation. The Syrians are a people who have a continuous history that reaches back to at least six thousand years ago, and at some points of their history have founded states and empires. Further, the Syrians are the first community who accepted the Christianity which dawned in the Middle East. The Syriac culture of Christianity spread in the area between the Mediterranean and China. During the first millennium of the Christianity they have greatly contributed to the spread of Christianity around the world. What are the reasons for the Syrians to be left out of the Non-Muslim definition in the Turkish Republic? We find it difficult to understand this and the Turkish and other officials which we asked this question could not give us a satisfactory answer.

Maybe the Turkish state had a political gain by not recognizing the Syrians as a minority. But, how about the other signatory states of the treaty? According to the article 44 of the treaty, 'the governments of the British Empire, France, Italy, and Japan accept the provisions of this treaty'. Accordingly, should Turkey not implement these provisions then the other signatory states would have a right to interfere. If so, why these countries have not interfered in the breach of the law against the treaty that has been going on by the Turkish state against the Syrians and the other Non-Muslim communities?

The approach of Turkey as well as that of the European Union to the Syrians has started to change, following the membership application that has been submitted by Turkey to the European Union. The European Commission in its last progress report on Turkey included some of the problems that the Syrians are facing in Turkey. Maybe, the Syrians who were lost in Lausanne will be re-discovered by Brussels.

## 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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## ESU and the Project for an Autonomous Region in Iraq

The project for an Autonomous Region for our Chaldean-Syriac-Assyrian people in its historical areas in a Federal Iraq, which started officially as a demand of our people in the Ankawa Congress, held on 12. And 13 March 2007 has a large importance in the agenda of the ESU. This project must be understandable and clear to all members of Chaldean-Syriac-Assyrian people. The demand for an autonomous region must be embodied in the Iraqi Constitution as well as in the Kurdistan Federal Constitution.

We see that is the only solution today to save our people from the ongoing attacks, persecutions, kidnappings and killings in Iraq. Beside that an autonomous region will ensure the national unity and will strengthen the connection between our people in the homeland and the Diaspora.

In order to support the demands and efforts of our people in Iraq and by the conviction that each Institution of our people must take active part to support this project;

ESU with the support of one representative of the Chaldean-Syriac-Assyrian peoples Parliament in Sweden, decided to held numerous seminars in the various cultural, social and religious institutions of our people living in Europe.

The seminars were given by a particular committee, namely by Mrs. Linda Gabriel from ESU and Mr. Gebrail Marko, Representative of the Ankawa Congress.

The first seminar on this journey of ESU and the Ankawa congress over the autonomy in the Iraq took place in the Swedish City Linköping on the 27.May 2007. A further-one in Sweden was given on the 23.June 2007 in the Hall of St. George Church in Norsborg. On the 29th July the journey of Seminars has been moved to the British Capital London, where the Seminar took place at the Assyrian House. At the other end of Europe, namely in the Austrian Capital Vienna the Seminar was held on 12.August 2007 in the Canisius Church in Lainz.

The most important question in the seminars was the demand of our people for an autonomous regions and how this project can be achieved. The main points discussed during these seminars were the principles of an autonomous region in a Federal Iraq as well as the urgent need for our people. Not only the lectures but mostly all participants agreed that the only way to save our future in our country is the establishment of an autonomous region.

The lectures Miss Linda Gabriel and Mr. Gebrail Marko pointed out in these seminars, that this would be the last chance for our people to make the dream and struggle of our people come true to build an autonomous regions. In the same time they pointed out the importance of the peace-full living with our neighbors in a new Iraq under democratically Principe's!



## Efrem the Syriac - part II

One important physical link to Ephrem's lifetime is the baptistry of Nisibis. The inscription tells that it was constructed under Bishop Vologeses in 359. That was the year that Shapur began to harry the region once again. The cities around Nisibis were destroyed one by one, and their citizens killed or deported. The Roman Empire was preoccupied in the west, and Constantius II and Julian, struggled for overall control. Eventually, with Constantius dead, Julian the Apostate began his march into Mesopotamia. He brought with him his increasingly stringent persecutions of Christians. Julian began a foolhardy march against the Persian capital, Ctesiphon, where, overstretched and outnumbered, he was



Nisibis Church interior

forced into an immediate retreat back along the same road. Julian was killed defending his retreat, and the army elected Jovian as the new emperor. Unlike his predecessor, Jovian was a Nicene Christian. He was forced by circumstances to ask for terms from Shapur, and conceded Nisibis to Persia, with the provision that the city's Christian community would leave. Bishop Abraham, the successor to Vologeses, led his people into exile.

Ephrem found himself among a large group of refugees that fled west, first to Amida (Diyarbakır), and eventually settling in Edessa (modern Şanlıurfa) in 363. Ephrem, in his late fifties, applied himself to ministry in his new church, and seems to have continued his work as a teacher, perhaps in the School of Edessa. Edessa had always been at the heart of the Syriac-speaking world and the city was full of rival philosophies and religions. Ephrem comments that orthodox Nicene Christians were simply called 'Palutians' in Edessa, after a former bishop. Arians, Marcionites, Manichees, Bardaisanites and various Gnostic sects proclaimed themselves as the true church. In this confusion, Ephrem

wrote a great number of hymns defending Nicene orthodoxy.

A later Syriac writer, Jacob of Serugh, wrote that Ephrem rehearsed all-female choirs to sing his hymns set to Syriac folk tunes in the forum of Edessa. After a ten-year residency in Edessa, in his sixties, Ephrem succumbed to the plague as he ministered to its victims. The most reliable date for his death is 9 June 373.