



## Chairman's Message



Dear readers,

A few months back Turkey reached the peak of the international politics. Parliamentary elections, presidency elections, secularism vs. religiosity debates, veiling, constitutional changes, and armed incursion of the Turkish army into Iraq were being discussed around the world. Finally Turkey came under the spotlight regarding the Syriac issues too.

Two issues regarding the Syriacs drew the attention to Turkey. Firstly, whilst Turkey threatened the Northern Iraq, its army shelled a few Christian (Chaldean-Assyrian-Syriac) villages situated just behind the Turkey-Iraq border and as a result of these shelling their residents were forced to flee their villages.

The second issue was the kidnapping incident of the Syriac Priest Daniel Edip Savci of Mor Jacob Monastery in Tur Abdin on 28th November. After he was held for three days, as a result of the intensive pressure from the Syriacs around the world and the thorough work of the Turkish officials he was released by his kidnappers.

These two issues bring about this conclusion: Whenever there is a political, militarist or constitutional change either in Turkey or generally in The Middle East, the Syriacs suffer from such processes negative effects. For example, since the regime was changed in Iraq, hundreds of Syriac-Chaldean-Assyrians, including some clerics have been killed.

Two years ago the Kurds living in the north-eastern part of Syria in Al Jazeera district rebelled against the state. Soon after that some Kurds attacked the Syriacs in the town of Malikiye whilst they were in the church.

The fundamentalism in Egypt is on the rise and the first harm is caused to the Coptic. Almost every day there is some news about the Coptic people that are being attacked by the fanatical Islamic groups.

Even though they are not in the centre of the political developments, the Christian communities in the Middle East suffer from the most severe attacks against them. Therefore, there is a great need for the protection of the Christian communities during the transformation process of the old Middle East to the New Middle East.

Iskender Alptekin

## An educational day on Turkey-EU subject in Hamburg

The Catholic Academy in Hamburg, the Mar Gabriel Association and the Syriac Orthodox Association held an educational day on 27th October. The subject of the day was the Turkey-EU relations and the situation of the Syriacs within these relations. The head of the German Oriental Institute Prof. Dr. Udo Steinbach, Prof. Dr. Martin Tamcke from Göttingen University, the vice president of ESU Fikri Aygur and responsible official of the religious affairs in Turkey Associate Prof. Dr. Ali Dere attended the day as speakers.

The opening speeches of the day were made by the Catholic Rev. Fr. Wilm Sanders and the provincial MP Reinhard Stuth. Mostly German, around one hundred people attended the meeting.

Prof. Dr. Udo Steinbach in his speech assessed the topic of the political situation in Turkey and whether it is possible for the Christians and the Muslims to live together in Turkey. Prof. Steinbach in his speech elaborated



on the history of the Turkish state and underlined that the republic brought about the secularism. Prof. Steinbach also assessed the minorities rights and stated that when the Armenian Journalist Hrant Dink was murdered the Turkish society denounced this murder by saying "we are all Armenians", thus the solution process of the 1915 Genocide has started. He also stated that a peaceful living between the Christians and Muslims in Turkey is a fundamental condition for the membership of Turkey in the EU.

The subject of the paper read by Prof. Dr. Martin Tamcke was "the history of the Christians in Turkey and their current situation. Prof. Tamcke drew the attention to the growth in the number of attacks against the Christians in Turkey and as examples mentioned the killings of Hrant Dink in Istanbul, the Catholic Priest Andrea Santoro in Trabzon and German Missionary Tilman Giske together with Necati Aydın and Uğur Yüksel in Malatya. Prof. Tamcke also underlined the



fact that the number of the Christian population in Turkey has been decreasing ever since the Ottomans conquered Istanbul in 1453 AD.

The subject of the speech held by the Vice President of ESU Fikri Aygur was "what are the risks and opportunities that the Christians see in the admission of Turkey into the EU".

Aygur in his speech stated that the way the Islamic States approach the Christian minorities was formed by the Islamic Caliph Omar II during the 8th century AD and that this approach has continued and practiced by the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic. Should Turkey become a full member of the European Union the Turkish state will be further bound by the international treaties and the international law and this in turn will lead the Christians to live in a more prosperous life.

On the other hand, if Turkey is not admitted to join the EU, the strategy it will follow is still unclear, therefore the Christians will face an uncertainty and insecurity that may leave



them no choice but to emigrate from Turkey altogether.

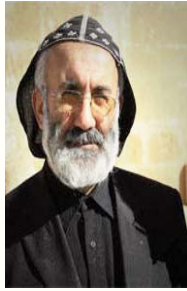
In his conclusion speech Fikri Aygur emphasized the fact that the Syriacs and other Christians are not minorities but indigenous peoples and called upon the Turkish representatives and the Turkish state to be able to accept their Christian citizens and trust them.

## Kidnapped monk Daniel Edip Savci in Turkey, has been released

On 28th November Rev. Father Daniel Edip Savci of Mor Jacob Monastery in Tur Abdin (South-Eastern Turkey) was kidnapped.

The unknown assailants ambushed Fr. Daniel Savci's car as the 43-year-old monk was travelling to the Mor Jacob monastery near the town of Midyat. The kidnappers were reported to have sought a ransom of 300,000 euros (\$442,400).

Fr. Daniel was released by his kidnappers on the



third day on 30th November, as a result of the intensive pressure from the Syriacs around the world and the thorough work of the Turkish officials.

This is not the only incident that the Christian community has suffered in Turkey. Recently, in 2006 Priest Father Andrea Santoro in Trabzon, in 2007 the Armenian Journalist Hrant Dink in Istanbul and the German missionary Tilman Geske with Necati Aydin and Ugur Yüksel in Malatya were murdered as a result of some brutal attacks. We fear that Father Daniel Savci could be the last victim of this chain of brutal incidents against the Christians in Turkey.

## The Ban on Syriac surnames in Turkey continues

Ruben Demircioğlu, who is both Swiss national and Turkish national, returned from Switzerland in order to re-settle in Turkey two years ago. When Mr. R. Demircioğlu became Swiss national, with his family, changed their surname to Hadodo, which is their traditional Syriac old family name.

Currently, Ruben carries the 'Demircioğlu' surname in Turkey and 'Hadodo' in Switzerland. Ruben Demircioğlu, after returning to Turkey on 18th June 2007, applied to the court to change his surname into Hadodo. Ruben's father also for the same reasons had managed to change his surname into Hadodo with a court verdict in Turkey three years ago.

The court case of Ruben that was concluded on 28th September 2007 did not allow him to change his

#	Style Name	Aramaic Script
1	Tur Abdin	ܐܕܝܦܢ ܬܘܪܐܒܕܝܢ
2	Edessa	ܐܕܝܦܢ ܥܕܝܫܐ
3	Antioch	ܐܕܝܦܢ ܐܢܬܝܘܚ
4	Midyat	ܐܕܝܦܢ ܡܝܕܝܬ
5	Nisibin	ܐܕܝܦܢ ܢܝܨܝܒܝܢ
6	Quenneshrin	ܐܕܝܦܢ ܩܘܢܝܫܝܪܝܢ
7	Osroene	ܐܕܝܦܢ ܐܘܫܪܘܢܝܐ
8	Eastern	ܐܕܝܦܢ ܡܘܬܪܝܐ
9	Urhoj	ܐܕܝܦܢ ܘܪܚܝܝܐ
10	Assyrian	ܐܕܝܦܢ ܐܫܘܪܝܐ

surname. Ruben's application was denied on the ground that article 3 of the Turkish Constitution provides that **'surnames of foreign race and nations and surnames that are not suitable to the general public morals or that are disgusting and funny, cannot be used.'** Accordingly, 'Hadodo' was not allowed to be used on the basis that it is a foreign race surname.

However, under article 10 of the Turkish Constitution: **'every person, regardless of their language, race, colour, gender, political opinion, philosophical belief, religion, sect and any other similar attributes, is equal before the law.'**

Ruben Hadodo, due to this problem, cannot run the business he has newly established under his own name and states that they will have problems in registering the surname of their first child he is expecting soon with his wife. Although Ruben is planning to appeal against this decision to the higher court, however, he does not think that the Turkish legal system can reach a reasonable verdict in this case.

In Turkey, Islamic surnames such as of Arabic and Iranian origin are allowed, however the ban on surnames of the Syriac language continues. This is clearly against The European Convention on Human Rights.

## ESU meetings in France

On 17th September 2007 a delegation consisting of the Vice President of ESU Mr. Fikri Aygur and the member of the executive Committee of ESU Mr. Suleyman Gultekin together with the representative of the Assyrian-Chaldean-Syriac Institute in France Mrs. Agnes Ide held some meetings with the French politicians.

The ESU delegates firstly met the representatives of the Socialist Party Mr Karim PKAZAD and Mr. Alain CHENAL. The ESU delegates



informed the representatives of the French Socialist Party about the Autonomous region that is desired to be founded for the Assyrian-Chaldean-Syriac people in Northern Iraq. Also the situation of the Syriacs, should Turkey join the EU, was discussed in

the meeting.

The second meeting was held with Senator Mr. Philippe MARINI and Mr. Marc Le DORH. The situation of the Christians living in Iraq as well as the situation of the Christians living in Syria was discussed with the representative of the France Syria relations.



Also, on 9th October 2007 ESU and the Assyrian-Chaldean-Syriac Institute in France held two meetings with the Finance Ministry Secretary of State Mr. André SANTINI and the governing UMP party MP Mr. Yannick PATERNOTTE.

In both meeting, ESU and the Assyrian-Chaldean-Syriac Institute delegates drew the attention of the French politicians to the situation of the Syriac-Assyrian-Chaldeans in Iraq and in Turkey.

## ESU meeting the Representatives of the European Commission

Since its foundation, one of the most important issues that ESU has been laying stress upon is the Turkey EU relations. Therefore, every year ESU prior to the preparation of the progress report on Turkey, submits its views to the relevant committee of the European Commission.

This year on 24th September 2007 the representatives of ESU Fikri Aygur and Suleyman Gultekin held a meeting with the Enlargement Commission's Turkey Board of the European Commission. In the more than one hour meeting the situation of the Syriacs in Turkey and the position of the Syriacs in the European Union-Turkey relations were assessed.

A report on this issue was submitted by ESU to the representatives of the European Commission. According to the ESU report, Turkey has made no progress regarding the Syriacs in the year 2007, and the reforms regarding the minorities and religious rights have stopped alto-

gether.

Also in the report it was stated that this year the Syriacs have faced less problems than in the year 2006. Fikri Aygur, who stated that the Syriacs main problem is recognition, also stated that the democratization of Turkey and catching up with the European Legal standards is very important for the ethnic Christian minorities in Turkey. Fikri Aygur mentioned as well that some of the urgent problems that the Syriacs are facing in Turkey are mainly the problems they face when trying to register the properties that belong to the Church foundations, the difficulties they face during the ongoing official Land registry-Cadastre works and the problems faced by those who left the Turkish nationality when trying to register the properties they inherit from their parents.

Finally Mr. Aygur emphasized the need that Turkey should adhere more adequately to the treaties it has signed with the EU.

## Interview with Suroyo TV's representative: Metin Rhawi

Interview made with Mr. Metin Rhawi about Suroyo TV; its objectives, the impact on the syriac people and the development for the future.



**As you know, media has an important role in this period. And for the Syriac, Suroyo TV also is important. Suroyotv when and why has started to broadcasting?**

As broadcasting channel Suroyo TV started 4th July 2004, but of course we had to do a lot of preparations before that, it took us about a year with all the necessary papers.

**What is the philosophy and policies of Suroyo TV?**

Suroyo TV's main goals is to broadcast program in the Aramaic language for the Assyrian/Syriac/Chaldeans/Aramaic people. Furthermore Suroyo TV tries in its program to educate and enlighten its viewers. One of many obligations Suroyo TV has is to provide a platform for discussion in different fields. We, as Suroyo TV, sees that it is very important that target viewers integrates within the community they live in therefore we do many programs to encourage such steps. Suroyo TV works like the public service model for the above mentioned people.

**What were the social, cultural and political demands of Syriacs concerning to foundation of Suroyo TV?**

That Suroyo TV should take responsibility and discuss important issues whether they concern social, cultural and/or political areas. Suroyo TV should challenge our community to face and do programs regardless the sensitivity of the issue.

**During the time that you have been broadcasting and experience with Suroyo TV, what role it has within Syriac society?**

In our opinion Suroyo TV is the major channel among our community our people sees Suroyo TV as an objective and national channel.

**How Syriacs accept the television? And what Suroyo TV can do for them?**

The acceptance level of Suroyo TV among our community is high. When it comes to what Suroyo TV can do for its people, the expectations are very high of course as soon any national or local issue appears our people awaits different programs to be shown and that Suroyo TV stand at the same time on our peoples side and demand the peoples rights whether it is from EU or other parts.

**What will be the mission of Suroyo TV in the future?**

Of course to continue to be part of the development of our community and to enlighten it. To show the importance of the integration within the community we live. To broadcast objective news and programs that concerns our people or the communities that live within.

**As a television do you have any relations with international media institutions and especially with Swedish media?**

Unfortunately the answer is not as good as we should have. There are two reasons to the situation the first one is our lack of competence on our side the second is the acceptance from the Swedish media in general.

**Why Syriacs have to watch and follow Suroyo TV?**

Suroyo TV has during this time that we have been on air we have shown that we can fill there media and news needs.

**As last question, for the 2008 do you have any changes and modifications of programmes or diffusion of any new programmes?**

Of course Suroyo TV like other international channels we always try to develop ourselves. At least once a year we do modifications and changes in our programs to fill the needs and to show interesting programs.

For more info:

<http://www.suroyotv.com>



## Education on the Syriacs in Rome

On 24th October 2007 with the initiative of various Italian institutions, a meeting was held in Rome regarding the 'history of the Syriacs and the relations between the Christians and Muslims in Syria'.



Besides the Italian initiative group, ESU contributed to the realization of this meeting. The Syriac Orthodox Church Archbishop of Aleppo H.E Yuhanna Ibrahim attended this meeting as a speaker.

Around 100 Italian businessmen,

an ESU delegation and the Syrian Ambassador in Italy attended the meeting.

H.E Archbishop Yuhanna Ibrahim in his very articulate speech that he made in Italian language, besides the Syriac history, also spoke about the Christian-Muslim relations in Syria.



An Italian group visit is now expected to go to Syria in order to visit the Syriac Culture.

## 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

Union der Suryoye Vereine in der Schweiz  
 Switzerland

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 Austria

## United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

Thursday 13th December was an important day for the Indigenous Peoples in the world and all organisations working with and for them. Indeed after more than 20 years of negotiation between nation-states and Indigenous Peoples, the General Assembly of the United Nations Organisation adopted a symbolic but important declaration which aims to recognise and protect the rights for Indigenous Peoples.

Indigenous Peoples worldwide number between 300-500 million, embody and nurture 80% of the world's cultural and biological diversity, and occupy 20% of the world's land surface. The Indigenous Peoples of the world are very diverse. They live in nearly all the countries on all the continents of the world and form a spectrum of humanity, ranging from traditional hunter-gatherers and subsistence farmers to legal scholars. In some countries, Indigenous Peoples form the majority of the population; others comprise small minorities. Indigenous Peoples are concerned with preserving land, protecting language and promoting culture.

Despite such extensive diversity in Indigenous communities throughout the world, all Indigenous Peoples have one thing in common - they all share a history of injustice. Indigenous Peoples have been killed, tortured and enslaved. In many cases, they have been the victims of genocide. They have been denied the right to participate in governing processes of the current state systems. Conquest and colonization have attempted to steal their dignity and identity as indigenous peoples, as well as the fundamental right of self-determination.

The UN declaration proclaims the "right for self-determination" for Indigenous Peoples and recognizes the urgent need to respect and promote the inherent rights of indigenous peoples which derive from their political, economic and social structures and from their cultures, spiritual traditions, histories and philosophies, especially their rights to their lands, territories and resources.

It also states for Indigenous peoples, in exercising their right to self-determination, the right to have autonomy or self-government in matters relating to their internal and local affairs, as well as ways and means for financing their autonomous functions.

The UN declaration recognizes for Indigenous Peoples to have the right to revitalize, use, develop and transmit to future generations their histories, languages, oral traditions, philosophies, writing systems and literatures, and to designate and retain their own names for communities, places and persons.

Other important points are the right for Indigenous peoples to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning.

In the same line, Indigenous peoples have the right to establish their own media in their own languages and to have access to all forms of non-indigenous media without discrimination.

Despite some progress over the last decade, indigenous peoples around the world continue to live in hardship and danger due to the failure of

states to uphold their fundamental human rights. Cut off from resources and traditions vital to their welfare and survival, many indigenous peoples are unable to fully enjoy such human rights as the right to food, the right to health, the right to housing, or cultural rights. Instead they face marginalisation, poverty, disease and violence – in some instances extinction as a people.



What we could regret is that, although it is very positive to get such declaration adopted by UN General Assembly, it remains a declaration and is not a treaty; meaning it won't have a legal effect on national states. On the other hand the declaration recognizes also the urgent need to

respect and promote the rights of indigenous peoples affirmed in treaties, agreements and other constructive arrangements with States.

#### Definitions:

In order to get the full insight of the UN Declaration it might be useful to define who are the Indigenous Peoples.

For this you'll find below 2 definitions, one from the University of Minnesota and the other from the UN Special Rapporteur himself.

#### Who are Indigenous Peoples?

People who inhabited a land before it was conquered by colonial societies and who consider themselves distinct from the societies currently governing those territories are called Indigenous Peoples. (University of Minnesota – Human Rights Library)

As defined by the United Nations Special Rapporteur to the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, Indigenous communities, peoples and nations are: ...those which having a historical continuity with pre-invasion and pre-colonial societies that developed on their territories, consider themselves distinct from other sectors of societies now prevailing in those territories, or parts of them. They form at present non-dominant sectors of society and are determined to preserve, develop, and transmit to future generations their ancestral territories, and their ethnic identity, as the basis of their continued existence as peoples, in accordance with their own cultural patterns, social institutions and legal systems. Martinez-Cobo, 1984

#### Self-determination

The right of a cohesive national group ("peoples") living in a territory to choose for themselves a form of political and legal organization for that territory.

#### Read full UN Declaration here:

<http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfi/en/drip.html>

Suleyman Gultekin  
 E.S.U. Board Member

**Sources:** UNO, University of Minnesota, Le Monde, Amnesty International