



## 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, military 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

## Manifestation in Brussels

On 19th April 2008 with the lead of European Syriac Union, more than 5000 Chaldean-Syriac-Assyrian Christians coming from several countries marched in Brussels to show their support to the Iraqi Christians. Among them representatives of different organisations were also present. In addition, the Archbishop of Belgium and France Severius Hazail Soumi as well as the clerics were present.

The purpose of the manifestation was to draw the attention of the USA, the European Union and the UN on the ongoing terror, violence and especially the killings of the clerics of the Chaldean-Syriac-Assyrian Christians in Iraq.

Following the collapse of Saddam's dictatorship regime, a systematic operation of ethnic cleansing against the Chaldean-Syriac-Assyrians has begun. As a result of the persecution and acts of terror, from 2004 to 2008, one half of the population of the Chaldean-Syriac-Assyrians was forced to flee outside Iraq.



The attacks are mainly targeting the churches, the clerics, the businesses and the young girls of the Chaldean-Syriac-Assyrian people. The aim of these attacks carried out against the Chaldean-Syriac-Assyrians is to drive out from Iraq those who belong to the Christian faith.

According to the Organizing Committee information, on 11th October 2006, the Syriac Orthodox Priest Rev. Paulus Iskander Behnam was beheaded in Mosul. On 3rd June 2007, the Chaldean Priest Rev. Father Ragheed Ganni and three deacons were slaughtered in Mosul. On 29th February 2008, the Chaldean Archbishop Msgr. Boulus Faraj Rahho was kidnapped with his two guards; his body was later found on 13th March 2008 in Mosul. On 5th April 2008 the Syriac Orthodox Priest Rev. Father Youssef



Adel Aboudi was shot dead in Baghdad. In addition to these, many other clergymen have been kidnapped.

ESU Chairman Iskender Alptekin at his speech said that with the autonomy our people in Iraq will be in peace. Mr Alptekin declared that "everyone has great responsibilities to do. The only solution for our people is the realisation of an autonomy. For this as we have done this today, everytime we have to support this project. We as ESU promised to work for our people everywhere and especially for autonomy of our people in Iraq."

According to the participant organizations, the Chaldean-Syriac-Assyrians are kindly requesting from the USA, the EU and the UN to meet their following demands:

- 1- The recognition of the Chaldean-Syriac-Assyrians as indigenous people of Iraq under the Iraqi Constitution
- 2- The acceptance of an Autonomous Safe Zone in North Iraq in the areas where the Chaldean-Syriac-Assyrians have a majority of the population
- 3- An official recognition of the Autonomous Status of this region to be requested from both the Iraqi Government and the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG)
- 4- The security of the Autonomous region to be left to the responsibility of the UN and the international powers.
- 5- An international plan to be made for the resettlement of the Chaldean-Syriac-Assyrians in the Autonomous region.



## ESU demands autonomy for Christians in Iraq

Interview made with Mr. Fikri Aygur Vice Chairman of European Syriac Union. We present you a detailed interview about latest situation of Chaldean-Assyrian-Syriac Christians of Iraq and last activities of ESU for the Iraqi Christians.



**Mr Aygür, despite all off the measures taken in Iraq violence continues in the country, especially Christians of Iraq face great atrocities.**

**Lastly you have made a visit to Iraq for ESU. Could you explain us the general situation in Iraq?**

After Saddam regime the main problem is Iraq is the security issue. Fundamentalists groups which want "state of sheria" in Iraq, break democracy process in different ways. Especially the groups which are near or dependant to Sunni and to El- Kaida, making terror on the non-Muslims and Sunni groups. The main targets of these acts are the non-Muslim Syriac-Chaldean-Assyrian Christians, Mandaes and Yezidis. At the last five years more than five hundred Christians have been killed, nearly half million of them fled abroad, more than forty churches have been bombed and twelve clergymen are killed.

**The violence continues in all Iraq, what is the influence of this situation on our people and their daily lives?**

We have to analyze situation of our people from two regions. First one is North Iraq. In this region there is not security problem and our people continue their lives normally. At last two years nearly 10 thousand families from big cities like Baghdad, Mosul, Basra and Kirkuk are came to this region because of the fear of killings. For these domestic emigrants 150 new villages have been constructed. The main problem of these people is unemployment.



Second region is the rest of Iraqi territories. Syriac-Chaldean-Assyrians which live in the big cities do not have any economic problems but the only and great problem is the security. Nearly everyday they suffer terror attacks. Their quarters and churches are under the threats. At the some districts there is oppression and threats to convert to Islam. They force young girls to veil themselves and to accord the sheria laws. These are the main reasons why Christians flee in the country and to abroad.

**Against this violent atmosphere, what is the position of our people?**

Against this violence our people have two alternatives. Either they will flee abroad, besides at last five years nearly half million of Christians have made this choice and they escaped to Syria, Turkey, Jordan and to the Western countries. Or they will go to the North Iraq where there is security. Also according to this at last three years nearly 10 thousand families (average of 60 thousand persons) are went to North Iraq. Two alternatives were not ideal solutions. For this, our people started to work with their initiative to form an autonomy region in the North Iraq where they are densely populated. With this, our people will be capable to maintain their security and for the rest of people there will be a safe region inside Iraq. So, they will not need to go abroad for the raison of security.

**For the several times our people in Iraq had been subject of international rapports and studies.**

**Can you mention what are the demands of ESU for our people in Iraq?**

Following points are demands of ESU for our people of Iraq.

1. Accepting Syriac-Chaldean-Assyrians in the Iraqi Constitution as the indigenous people.

2. Forming an autonomous region in Iraq for the Syriac-Chaldean-Assyrians.

3. Taking control of this autonomous region by the United Nations or by the international forces.

4. Realizing a programme by the UN for the Syriac-Chaldean-Assyrians who fled out to return to the autonomous region.

**How do you explain the manifestation that had done by the name of "Support for Iraqi Christians" in Brussels last month? As you know manifestation was subject to the world media for long times.**

Brussels manifestation was very important activity for our people. Indeed for the first time our people which live in Europe rised their voices against ethnic cleansing of our people in Iraq. There was participation of Syriac-Chaldean-Assyrians who fled from Syria, Turkey and Iraq. So it was a national demonstration and it has been broadcasted from world media. Suroyo TV had a live programme for this event. Also AP, Reuters, AFP, El-Jeezira TV, Euronews and many other media organisations made news about this day.

**Following the demonstration did you received any support from any organisations, institutions or countries? Do you have any workings or meetings about this?**

After the manifestation, ESU representatives had a meeting with the Unites States Embassy in Brussels and they presented the demands of our people to the US authorities by the intermediate of Ambassador. Then we had meetings in the European Parliament with the representatives of Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats and European Democrats), Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats of Europe, Group of the Greens/Europe and Free Alliance and Independence/Democracy Group. Some of these are also member of Iraq Desk from the European Commission External Relations. We also had lobby activities for the UN Conference of Iraq which took place in Sweden. For this we had meetings with the different party representatives and we participated to some meetings before the conference.

**We know that according to ESU an autonomous area for our people in Iraq is the best solution. For this what are the activities of ESU in short and long term?**

In Iraq there is a parliament which manage autonomous region preparation. The Parliament determines the best activities. We as ESU try to make international lobby activities and presentation of support to autonomy of our people to this project. At the short term most important point is to actualize this project in the international



arena and looking for the international support. Increasing awareness and approaching our people to this project and then working on the returning back plans of our people will be our long term activities.

**Lastly, what is the opinion of international arena about autonomous region and for this issue do you have any relations with the organisations of our people that are based in Iraq?**

Demand of autonomy is well known to UN, US authorities and to the Vatican. The subject was very little known in the Europe. For this we have informed EU countries during last month with our lobby activities. Until now any side did not show any support or any contrary opinion. It is known that opinion of North Iraq Regional Parliament is positive for autonomy. Also there is statement of Iraqi Foreign Minister Mr. Hoshiyar Zebari declared that "Chaldean-Assyrians have the rights to demand autonomy region". Our important relation is with the Parliament of Autonomy Region and with some of the politic institutions of our people that are based in Iraq and at the top of these come Bethnahrin Patriotic Union.



## Meetings of ESU at the EU Parliament and the European Commission

On May 6th and 7th 2008, ESU delegation composed by Mr. Fikri Aygur (ESU Vice-chairman) and Mr. Suleyman Gultekin (ESU Belgian Representative) had different meetings at the European parliament with most of the Political Groups, followed by a meeting at the European Commission.

These meetings were related to the Christians of Iraq and the demonstration organised in Brussels on 19th April 2008 to support the Chaldean-Syriac-Assyrians in Iraq.



On Tuesday 6th May, the ESU delegation met the MEP Mrs. Baroness Nicholson of Winterbourne (ALDE, UK) who is the Iraq Delegation Chairwoman for the European Parliament.

ESU exposed the issues faced by the Christians in Iraq to the Baroness who was already aware of the problematic and the tragedy of the Chaldean-Syriac-Assyrians.

Mrs Baroness Emma Nicholson asked ESU how EU could help the Christians in Iraq and more specifically what is ESU requesting in order to help the Chaldean-Syriac-Assyrians in Iraq.

ESU delegation had expressed their opinions about autonomy project at the north Iraq and the benefits of Syriac-Chaldean-Assyrians from this project.

The ESU delegation also provided the Baroness with a folder containing information about the situation of the Chaldean-Syriac-Assyrians in Iraq and the request for the autonomous area in the north of Iraq.

The Baroness suggested to ESU delegation to also meet with the European Commission Iraq Desk.

On the other hand she requested further information from ESU about the request for the autonomous area.

After meeting the Baroness Mrs Emma Nicholson, the ESU delegation also met with the MEP Mr. Patrick Louis (ID, FR) and later with the MEP Dr. Charles Tannock (EEP, UK).

ESU similarly exposed to the MEPs the issues and the tragedy that the Christians of Iraq are living. They also explained the reasons of the request for an autonomous region in north Iraq for the Chaldean-Syriac-Assyrians, while requesting the support of the European Union.

On 7th May the ESU delegation also met the MEP and 2nd Vice-President of the EP Iraq Delegation Mr. Cem Ozdemir (EFA, DE) to whom it exposed the situation of the Christians in Iraq and the urgent need to have an autonomous area for the Chaldean-Syriac-Assyrians in Iraq.



Mr. Ozdemir informed ESU that a delegation from European Union will visit two areas of Iraq. The first visit will be in the centre area of Iraq and the second visit in the north of Iraq.

After that meeting, the ESU delegation also met Mrs. Karin Gutt-Rutter from the European Commission who is Political and Economic responsible in the Iraq Desk and is from the External Relations Directorate-General.

The request for an autonomous area for the Chaldean-Syriac-Assyrians has been received with attention during all meetings and as well as with Mrs. Karin Gutt-Rutter.

The autonomous area has been discussed in detail to some extent. Financial and political questions have also been raised and discussed about the autonomous area.

## E.S.U. delegation meeting with U.S.A. Embassy in Brussels

23 April 2008 - Following the demonstration of 19th April in Brussels, an E.S.U. delegation has been received at the U.S.A. Embassy in Brussels.



The E.S.U. delegation explained the reason of the demonstration and the urgent need to help the Christians (Chaldean-Syriac-Assyrians) of Iraq who are facing systematic attacks and are forced to flee their country.

During this meeting it has also been stressed that an autonomous region under international protection is needed for the Chaldean-Syriac-Assyrians.

The E.S.U. delegation also provided the U.S.A. Embassy representative with a folder containing detailed information about the situation of the Chaldean-Syriac-Assyrians in Iraq and their needs in order to continue to live in their homeland.



Brussels Demonstration

The US Embassy assured the E.S.U. delegation that all information will be communicated to the government people in Washington DC and as well as in Iraq.

## Syriac Union of Lebanon became a political party

Lebanon Syriac Union became a political party in the Lebanon politic sphere. After three year of activities with a declaration to the world press representatives declared they officialisation as political party.



With the period of three years SUL had important activities and working for Syriac people within Lebanon. For the several times they meet with the Lebanese leaders and representatives to discuss situation of the Syriac.

The new party is named as "Lebanon Syriac Union Party" and the Chairman of the party Mr. Ibrahim

Mourad with the press conference said that at this moment it very important to achieve this step.

Mr. Mourad added that "with great hopes we are gathered here and for this we have to be parallel to the politic developments of our country.



To gain the rights of our Syriac people we will work very hard and we will be active in all aspects."

Lebanon Syriac Union Party works and has activities and projects for Syriac people in the Lebanon at the same time the party demands all rights of Syriacs people without difference of names.

## 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 Chairm: 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

Bethnahrin Informations Netz  
Switzerland

Union der Assyrer-Suryoye Vereinigungen in Deutschland  
Germany

Union der Freien Frauen Bethnahrin UFFB  
Germany

Syrianska-Assyriska Riksförbundet i Sverige  
Sweden

Renyo Hiro Magazine  
Sweden

Assyrian-Chaldean-Syriac Union  
Netherlands

Stichting Bethnahrin Informatie Bureau  
Netherlands

Centre Culturel du Peuple de Mesopotamie  
Belgium

Institut Mesopotamie de Bruxelles  
Belgium

Assyrer-Suryoye Kultur Verein  
Austria

## Support for the Iraqi Christians

Hundreds of people gathered in Stockholm on Sunday seeking support for the Christians in Iraq, days before a United Nations conference on Iraqi peace and development opens in Sweden.

"Our goal is to draw the attention of the US, the EU and the UN to the ongoing terror, violence and most importantly, the murders of Chaldean, Syriac and Assyrian Christian clerics in Iraq," Behiye Hadodo, the Swedish representative of the European Syriac Union, told the participants.

Syriac-Chaldean-Assyrians for another time they show their support to the Christians in Iraq and they draw attention of the world media about ongoing terror and violence.



Last month, around 5,000 people marched in Brussels to protest against the persecution of Christians in Iraq.

"A new wave of ethnic cleansing is going on in Iraq. If these atrocities continue, the Chaldean, Syriac and Assyrian communities there will be wiped out altogether, creating a new catastrophe for humanity," Hadodo declared.

Following the collapse of Saddam regime half million of Iraqi Christians fled out of the country because of the terror attacks and violence.

Widespread persecution including the bombing churches, killing clerics and forcing young girls to veil themselves are the main problems.

Sweden is home to nearly half of some 70,000 Christian Iraqis living in Europe, according to the European Syriac Union.



Sunday's demonstration came four days before the UN is to host an international conference near Stockholm aimed at increasing international involvement in Iraq's political development.

Hundreds of delegates will be present for the Iraq Conference as well as the Condoleezza Rice United States Secretary of State.

Syriac-Chaldean-Assyrians are the target of violence, terror attacks and different type of pressure including forcing the young girls to veil themselves and according Islamic laws. European Syriac Union is very active for the Iraqi Christians and the Union has several activities for this issue.

## ESU Sweden Book Exhibition



**Bethnahrin Bokmässan**

"Bethnahrin Bokmässan", it is second time that ESU prepares such activity.

Most of the Syriac writers were present during the activity with their books and studies. Also European writers concerning to the Syriacs were present for the exhibition.

Gabriella Yonan, Auguste Thierry, Prof. David Gaunt and Prof. Ulf Börklund were among writers with their studies.

Semon Oğuz from Organizing Committee said that during the activity they had more 30 stands, which means more than 30 writers, were present for the day. More than 500 person visited the activity and they had chance to meet with the writers. Semon Oğuz added that, "for us this activity is very important. We have many positive points from first one. This time also the day passed very nice and the atmosphere was very good. Our purpose in this

activity is to meet our writers and people together and having possibility for changing opinions and to encourage writers for their plans and future. We organize this activity every year but for the future we have more plans to enlarge this activity".

During the day there was also different activities such speeches, photo show and panoramas. With the activity also a present in done for Dr. Fuat Deniz Fund.

ESU - Sweden has several activities for the people and only politic but also cultural, social and so on. ESU-Sweden is active at his domaine and with all aspects of Syriac people.

