

Newsletter

The Voice of the Syriacs



CHAIRMANS MESSAGE

Dear readers,



During last three months Middle East region continues to be at the top of agenda in international arena. Despite the events in Egypt and protests waves in Turkey and new President in Iran, Syria constantly holds the top priority and urgency. As ESU, we follow very closely all developments in the region especially these which are related to Syriac people and Christians as well.

Few weeks ago, Turkish Minister of European Affairs Egemen Bağış once again shows his true face regarding Syriac people and their historical values. During a meeting with journalists Mr. Bağış downplay the value of Mor Gabriel Monastery and take it only as material understanding. The Mor Gabriel Monastery has very distinctive place among Syriac people and for entire Christianity. From the first day of the unjust process against Mor Gabriel Monastery, Turkish state authorities do not show any good will and willingness to find solution to the matter and give back all rights to the Monastery. We have demonstrated our firm stand against these kinds of acts with a press release to media and world public opinion attention.

The outcome of Iranian elections is important for the region with election of reformist candidate. Meanwhile, grievances between Shia and Sunni are deep and it looks that this situation will continue for decades. We follow closely the Iranian issue. On the other hand, Egypt events come once again to the world attention. The uncertainty reigns for the moment in the streets of Egypt. The de escalation of nerves is must and the situation of Christian Copts needs close attention.

Meanwhile, the conflict in Syria continues from all sides. The ongoing conflict affects all Syrian people. Christian entities in Syria became target of Islamist-Jihadists terrorists by kidnappings and barbarous killings. The issue of two Bishops of Aleppo continue to be top priority. The killing of Priest Francois Murad indicates clearly savagery and cruelty of some groups.

On the other hand, Syrian state authorities try all means to push Christians and Syriac people to the conflict. State authorities call to the youth to participate in army. To date, until now there is no clear support to the Syriac people from international community and either from responsible countries. Syriac people give their struggle by their own means and capabilities. While Syriac Union Party in Syria demands and seeks the rights of Syriac people, we as ESU, have conducted a humanitarian aid campaign to Syria. During the campaign our people and institutions have showed great act of generosity. With the help of our people, we send nearly 150 tons of food to Syria. Syriac Union Party in Syria is at the charge of the distribution.

International community and regional actors have moral and democratic obligations to support the minorities, religious groups and other vulnerable entities in the Middle East region.

Lahdo Hobil
President of European Syriac Union

SYRIACS AROUND EUROPE PROTESTS FOR KIDNAPPED BISHOPS

Syriac people around Europe raised their voices against the kidnapping of the two eminent bishops in Syria, Syriac Orthodox Bishop of Aleppo Hanna Ibrahim and Greek Orthodox Bishop of Aleppo Boulos Yaziji. Protest call made by ESU gathered thousands of Syriac people and Christians in Brussels and Stockholm.

Below we provide you entire press release of organisational committee regarding the issue.

all means to stop and crash this uprising. Thus, the country had turned into the ruins and hundreds of thousands families fled their country. While the rebels fighting against fascist practices of the regime, on the other hand some marginal groups and gangs belonging to the regime terrorise people and civilians. With these terror acts all Syriac people are affected as well as Syriac people and their religious institutions. Until today hundreds of Syriacs

when the ransom is not provided the victims are killed with barbaric ways. Business establishments and domiciles had been priority for the attacks and the gangs.

The terror attacks reached the tipping point on April 22, 2013 against Syriac people in Syria. This day, the bishop of Syriac Orthodox Church in Aleppo Hanna Ibrahim and the bishop of Greek Orthodox Church Boulos Yaziji had been kidnapped by unknown persons around Aleppo. At the same time their driver Fethallah Robin Kabud had been killed.

In order to protest against this inhuman attack and sensibilise the world public opinion around Syriac people problems, we are organising protest meetings in Brussels, Belgium and in Södertälje, Sweden on April 28, 2013.

We kindly ask the support, sensibility and empathy of world media organs and institutions to the cry of Syriac people. The attention of media organisations to the protestations is vital and fundamental during these difficult days that face Syriac people.



*Syriac Orthodox Bishop of Aleppo
Hanna Ibrahim*

*Greek Orthodox Bishop of
Aleppo Boulos Yaziji*

TO THE WORLD PUBLIC OPINION

The Uprising in Syria, which started on March 2011, continues constantly. The regime of Assad tries

had been killed because of their Christian belief. Hundreds of Syriacs had been kidnapped for high amounts of ransom and

OUR DEMANDS

- 1 Unconditionally immediate release of two bishops.
- 2 Immediate cease of attacks against the religious values, properties and other assets of Syriac people.
- 3 Immediate release of Syriac Christian hostages and prisoners at the hands of various gangs and of the regime.
- 4 Immediate cease of bloodshed and finding solution to the human tragedy. Release of prisoners, stopping torture, exodus and destruction of the country. Inviting international community, regional actors and humanitarian organisations to act immediately.
- 5 Christian Syriac-Assyrian-Chaldean-Aramean people in Syria face the same threats and difficulties as it was in Iraq. In order to avoid and put aside all threats and difficulties, United Nations, European Union, Arab Union and Islamic Union have to act immediately.

Syriac Christians in Syria



As the political crisis in Syria continues and affects all segments of society, Syriac people are also suffering from these incidents deeply. Syriac people have a long history in Syria. They made important contributions to the social fabric and they continue to be active in all domains of life.

In order to take attention and create a public opinion around the issues of Syriac people in Syria, we have made a visit to the United States of America for meetings, consultations and other activities. The delegation was headed by Mr. Bassam Ishak, President, Syriac National Council of Syria, Mr. Said Malki, Vice-President, Syriac National Council of Syria and Vice-President, Syriac Union Party of



Syria, Mr. Robert Özgün, Head of Foreign Affairs, Syriac American



Association and Mrs. Rima Tüzün, Head of Foreign Affairs, European Syriac Union, respectively.

During our visit, the delegation met with different actors, politicians, members of NGOs, Think-Tanks as well as other related personalities and institutions concerning the Middle East and more specifically the current issue of Syria.

As a delegation, we have also participated in a demonstration of Coptic Christians where I made a speech and highlighted the importance of solidarity and cooperation among Christians of the Middle East and also we had been present at the 8th anniversary of the "Cedar Revolution" which was hosted by the Lebanese-American Organizations on Capitol Hill.

As the head of the delegation, I can affirm very clearly the interest and the concerns of American politicians concerning the situation of Syria and more precisely about Syriac Christian people.

Syriac Christians of Syria, who make up 12 % of Syria's population (more

than 2.5 million), have a dual identity: a religious identity as Christians and an ethnic identity as Syriacs. The very name, Syria, means homeland of the Syriac people. Yet the current crisis threatens us to drive out of our homeland.

During our meetings with various powerful politicians, we highlighted the demands of the Syriac people and their expectations from the post-Assad era. I confirm the importance of democratic, pluralistic and equal establishment of a new Syria.

I believe that our visit served our struggle tremendously in order to progress the situation of the Syriac people, their recognition and as well their expectations from the new process. We will continue to exchange our views in the future in order to avoid all misunderstandings. Finally, on behalf of the delegation, I would like to present my deep gratitude to all our interlocutors for their hospitality, interest and concerns concerning Syriac people.

Bassam Ishak

ESU presents Annual Report to EU Commission

On 11 June, European Syriac Union, ESU represent its annual report to the European Commission regarding the situation of Syriac people in Turkey. ESU represents and informs European authorities regularly concerning the situation of Syriac people and their demands. The team consisting from Tony Vergili, ESU Belgium representative and David Vergili, member of Administrative Committee met with the responsible of Turkey desk, Mr. Christos Makridis at the European Commission

close monitoring of Turkey developments and added "during the successive governments of Justice and Development Party, AKP in Turkey, there had been several changes that alter the political, social and economical landscape of the country. Meanwhile, from last 5 years the reforms speed in Turkey had been stopped and another agenda had been put in place. During last years we clearly observe the authoritarian and conservative attitude of AKP government."

also have problems with state regarding land cadastral works.

ESU stated in the report that, "Turkish state authorities continue in different methods and ways to establish crucial relations with the Syriac people inside and outside Turkey. Turkey Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu made several declarations concerning their policies and the will of rapprochement with the Christian minorities. On the hand other hand, Syriac face still bureaucratic difficulties in many field, the land cadastral work problems continue and overall the Mor Gabriel Monastery trials are still on the agenda. The decade governance of Justice and Development Party (AKP) changed the economic, military and political structure of Turkish state. Today, Turkey is enjoying its economic boom and its new role of supremacy in the Middle East. On the other hand, minorities and especially Syriac people still faces great problems and they are treating with old status quo methods. Turkish state authorities admit the presence of Syriac people in Turkey. They met with Syriac people in different periods. There is slightly change of attitude within Turkish authorities. Meanwhile, there are also doubts about this new position. While the state acknowledges the Syriac, the same state refuses to bring solutions for some chronic problems."



Enlargement Directorate.

On behalf of ESU, Tony Vergili had presented the report to his counterpart by detailing the incidents of last year which face Syriac people. Tony Vergili stated the necessity of

Concerning the situation of Syriac people, Tony Vergili highlighted the ongoing unjust land cases of Mor Gabriel Monastery and as well Monastery of Mor Evgin in Nusaybin. Several Syriac villages

ESU report is presenting historical information on Syriac people, their present situation in Turkey and their demands from Turkey. ESU holds regular meeting with European authorities in order to update them with latest information on Syriac people.

Establishment of the Students Affair Organization in Syria



Recently, the news has put Syria in the spotlight because of the civil war that is currently destroying the country. Inside Syria, there are many different ethnic groups that are suffering. One of the provinces, Al-Hassake, has a large number of the ethnic minorities, such as the Kurds and Syriacs, who live together with the Arabs. The Al-Hassake province suffers from the struggle between the different armed forces of the country, the large number of internally displaced persons (IDP's), the bad conditions of transportation, the rising of prices (including school

items), the destruction of several schools, and the struggling education system because of all these circumstances.

Because of the difficulties facing the education system, all the students of Al-Hassake province (the Kurds, Syriacs and Arabs) group together in cities like Al-Qamishli, Al-Hassake, Derik, Al-Qahtaniya, and Ras Al-Aain, to form organizations that take care of the students' needs. After several months of discussions and debates between these separated organizations, it was decided that a single organization must be formed, the Student Affairs Organization.

At the first founding conference of the Student Affairs Organization on May 2nd, 2013, 125 students participated in the conference. Kurd, Syriac and Arab students made speeches about

their problems and difficulties they are facing and suggested solutions for them. After that, they created the constitution of the organization and made proposals, such as refusing to learn the Baath National Book and insuring the availability of the Kurdish and Syriac books to teach them in the schools. This resulted in connecting and making allies with other organizations, such as the Kurdish Language Institution and the Syriac Cultural Association.

We believe these kinds of organizations, in which different ethnic groups work together, will help create a new, democratic Syria, where everyone can live freely and peacefully.

Student Affair Organization

20.06.2013

The ARTA FM Radio for Arabs, Kurds and Syriac people

It is common knowledge that media is one of the most important things that society can use in order to educate people. Today in Syria, we are not able to do more eminent media projects because of the civil war that our country is facing. This is why we are starting off small, with a radio, so that we can build up to bigger projects in the future.

The ARTA FM Radio Project is a joint project in Al-Hassake province in Syria, which includes the three ethnic groups of the region, the Arabs, Kurds, and Syriacs. We are working together as a team. Our radio channel currently broadcasts on an experi-

mental basis on the Internet in three languages: Arabic, Kurdish, and Syriacs.

Our three ethnic groups came together and decided upon ways to get our message out there, and the idea of a radio channel emerged. This idea was supported by a number of media workers in Germany and America. The SCCCK Organization in Sweden supports this project; along with the U.S. group CREATIVE. Our staff members went to workshops and classes to learn about media and how to run a radio station.

The Radio operates with demo online broadcasting system, and

will continue in this way until the month of June, where it will begin broadcasting live from inside Syria, as soon as possible.

We believe that through media, we can emphasize to our people that living together peacefully is possible. The radio station will show that Arabs, Kurds, and Syriacs are able to work together as one, and that a new, democratic Syria can be created.

ARTA FM Radio

14.06.2013



The Voice of the Syrians

IMPRINT

Information bulletin about the social position of the Syrians in and outside the Middle East.

It appears periodically, published by the European Syriac Union (ESU) in Brussels-Belgium.

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Union der Suryoye Vereine in der Schweiz
Switzerland

Bethnahrin Informations Netz
Switzerland

Bethnahrin Kultur Verein
Germany

Bethnahrin Frauen Union Deutschland-
Sweden-Switzerland

Syrianska-Assyriska Riksförbundet i
Sverige, Sweden

Stichting Bethnahrin Informatie Bureau
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Centre Culturel du Peuple de
Mesopotamie
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Lifelong Learning Programme

Opening for Education

The European Commission has integrated its various educational and training initiatives under a single umbrella, the Lifelong Learning Programme.

The Lifelong Learning Programme enables individuals at all stages of their lives to pursue stimulating learning opportunities across Europe. It consists of four subprogrammes: Comenius (for schools), Erasmus (higher education), Leonardo da Vinci (for vocational education and training) and Grundtvig (for adult education).

Since 1 January 2007 the Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP) has been revisited.

types of action GRUNDTVIG meet the educational challenges caused by the aging of the population.

It covers not only teachers, trainers, staff and organizations working in the sector, but also learners in adult education. These include relevant associations, counselling organisations, information services, policy-making bodies and others such as NGOs, enterprises, voluntary groups and research centres.

From May 16 th to May 20 th the "Union Freie Frauen Bethnahrin" organized a Workshop for Syrian women in Switzerland. The title of this Workshop was "Opening for education". Syrian women from Germany, Sweden, the Netherlands,

tion. Through the "access to lifelong learning", the Syrian women leaved their role binding them to the proper house as housewives and mothers to build up more self confidence and strength.

During the 5-day Workshop following topics were discussed:

- "History of the Syrians" (Who we are? Where do we come from?) - Getting to know their own identity
- "Syriacs in the Diaspora" (cultural, linguistic and social difficulties)
- "Culture- and generations conflicts" (upbringing is influenced by tradition rather than education; from backwardness to modern thinking)
- "Integration and Education in Europe" (to integrate consciously and healthy, what is the meaning of being an active citizen of Europe?)
- "The role of a women's organization" (by organization with like-minded building up self-esteem, motivation and self-confidence)

The Workshop sessions have been led by external speakers from Sweden and Germany. The education offer was tailored to the target group. Through the sessions, group meetings and discussions experience from the different countries were inserted. Thus, during the Workshop, learners as well as instructors were involved. The women, which participated to the Workshop „Opening for Education“ are encouraged to exchange their gained experiences in their countries.



With a budget of nearly €7 billion for 2007 to 2013 the largest European Education Programme funds a range of actions including transnational exchange of learners and teachers of all ages as well as European cooperation of educational institutions.

The single programme GRUNDTVIG is aimed to all those involved in adult education. With a total of nine

Belgium, France, Turkey and Switzerland attended this Workshop, in total 35 women.

The objective of the Workshop was to offer the chance for women to communicate with women in comparable situations to their individual needs. Women acquired the possibility to find access to educa-