



Chairman's Message

Dear readers,

24th July this year, it was the 85th anniversary of the Treaty of Lausanne. The Lausanne treaty has a different meaning for Turkey, for the Western countries and for the non-Muslim minority groups of Turkey. For Turkey, it means the foundational Treaty defining the national borders of the Turkish Republic, which was founded on a rescued geographical part of the abolished Ottoman state. For the Western countries, it means an assurance that closes the strait of Bosphorus before the Soviet Union, preventing it to reach the Mediterranean Sea. However, for the Christian minorities of Turkey and especially for the Syriacs, the Treaty of Lausanne means the primary source of their annihilation and their denial.

The Treaty of Lausanne was concluded between the representatives of the İttihat Terakki (The Committee of Union and Progress) who were not controlled by Germany and the Western countries. Unfortunately, this nationalist movement has been governing the Turkish Republic as the most dominant ideology up until now. Therefore, the Treaty of Lausanne and its representatives, the members of the Nationalist movement, have only one single meaning for us the Syriacs; and this is the annihilation of us and other native minority groups who share similar circumstances with us.

The toll of the losses of the Syriacs during the last 30 years as a result of the official pro-nationalist policies of Turkey and its illegal organizations are: 50 thousand people (%85) forced to fleeing abroad, 50 people being murdered, the denial of the status (privileges) given to non-Muslim minorities and keeping them under constant fear and oppression.

On the other hand, as a result of the Turkey-EU relations, even though very frail, the means for the return of the Syriacs who migrated some 30 years ago had begun to be formed. Unfortunately, those who have returned as well as those who are willing to return are experiencing so many problems and their return is made more difficult by the official bureaucracy and the Village Guards.

As it is the case with all the Middle East, also Turkey is having an exam of democracy. The outcome of this exam is depending on the improvement of the democratic rights of the Syriacs, which are mainly the duty of Turkey and to a lesser degree the duty of Europe.

Best regards,
Iskender Alptekin

Occupation of St. Gabriel Monastery

St. Gabriel Monastery is trying to be occupied by the Kurdish villages.

St. Gabriel Monastery acquired congregation foundation status during the Ottoman era, thus became one of the oldest known foundations in Turkey.

As a result of the new initiative taken by the current government of Turkey since 2004. In 2005 the cadastral land registry work begun at St. Gabriel Monastery. The monastery is situated between Çandarlı and Eğlence villages to the north, Yayvantepe to the west (the inhabitants of these 3 villages are Arabs), Daurik village to the East and Güngören village to the Southeast (the inhabitants of these two villages are Kurds). In 2005, when the Eğlence villagers attempted to occupy some of the lands of the Monastery, the incident was brought to the attention of the Turkish Government and to the European Union. Especially following the intense pressure that came from Europe the occupation attempt was stopped, but the cadastral land registry works were not finished.

In July 2008 the cadastral land registry works restarted in the lands of St. Gabriel Monastery and its surrounding villages. Whilst the cadastral works to determine the boundaries between St. Gabriel Monastery and its surrounding villages were continuing, the Eğlence and Yayvantepe villagers occupied the centuries old lands of St. Gabriel Monastery.

These acts of the villagers of Eğlence and Yayvantepe are being supported especially by the local Kurdish Aghas (tribe leaders) and by the state-sponsored village guards. Even the judge of the Court of Cadastral who came to the area for investigation in order to determine the disputed boundaries was threatened. Thus, the land registry was attempted to be determined by force. Also, in order to succeed with their attempt of occupation, the occupiers are instigating the local Muslim population against Christianity and are accusing the Archbishop of St. Gabriel Monastery with being against Islam.

This attempt of occupying the historical lands of St. Gabriel Monastery is a joint and organized effort by the Arab and Kurdish residents of the surrounding villages together with the Kurdish Aghas as well as the state-sponsored village guards. However, their real ambition is to occupy all the lands and properties of the historical Monastery of St. Gabriel so that they could abolish the most important Christianity centre in the region.

According the Article 42 of the Lausanne Treaty the Turkish Republic is "bound to provide a full protection for the churches, synagogues and worship places of the non-Muslims, their cemeteries and all their religious institutions".

Further, it is stated under the Section 15/1 of the Turkish Foundations Act that "the charity lands and properties of the foundations cannot be sequestrated or seized and no time-limit shall be applicable against the ownership and easement rights of such properties".

Also, according the Article 1 of the 1st Protocol of the European Convention on Human Rights on the protection of the property and ownership rights, "every natural or legal person is entitled to the peaceful enjoyment and the inviolability of his possessions."

The continuous attacks against the St. Gabriel Monastery have become a systematic campaign since 1980s. And since mid 1980s, the St. Gabriel Monastery has been subject to the force of the state authorities. In 1997 the then government of Turkey banned the Syriac language education in the St. Gabriel Monastery. And now in 2005 and in 2008 the land of St. Gabriel Monastery is being subject to occupation.

•It is incomprehensible that Turkey as an applicant state in the process of negotiations to join the European Union cannot protect its native citizens against such attempt of occupation, because they are members of different faith (Christians), especially when these attempts are being carried out by the state-sponsored village guards.

•It is incomprehensible that such an important and historical cultural heritage as the St. Gabriel Monastery being subject to the attempts of the looters. Especially, it is not acceptable that the incident is looked at as a simple boundary dispute.

•The fact that once every few years the St. Gabriel Monastery is facing a new threat is showing that these are not isolated incidents but part of a large systematic campaign.

The Monastery of St. Gabriel under these difficult circumstances needs the attention of the international community and its help.

As the European Syriac Union, we kindly appeal to you to pay a close attention to this incident and to do what ever you can to save the St. Gabriel Monastery from this difficult situation.

ESU Meeting with the Patriarches

Last month a committee from European Syriac Union (ESU) with the head of Chairman Iskender Alptekin had a meeting with the Patriarch of the Syriac Orthodox Church Mor Ignatius Zakay Iwas.

ESU Chairman Iskender Alptekin said to our bulletin that was a courtesy visit to the Patriarch and nearly two hours they discussed and changed their views and ideas about last events within the Syriac community.



Alptekin added that, they discussed also last developments between community in Europe and discussions over the church situation and problems. Especially ESU committee had a possibility to explain their vision, missions and politics about Iraq situation. ESU committee described their opinions about autonomy safe region project for the Iraqi Christians and also they noted that autonomy is the good solution for our people in the Iraq.

During the meeting the Patriarch stated that they are satisfied with the ESU activities and they added that activities which have done are in good way. Also they noticed the importance of Suroyotv between the community. The Holiness of Patriarch pointed the role of education and they said that importance of education is vital element for the future.

During the meeting also a group from the Suroyotv was present. They present the views, politics and also activities of the channel for the future. As it's well known Suroyotv is most important TV station between the Syriac community.

ESU Chairman said that the meeting was very useful and had positive aspects. Finally, two sides agreed to continue such meetings in the future giving possibility to exchange the opinions.

At the other hand ESU met also with the Patriarch of Eastern Assyrian Church Mar Khanenya Denkha IV.

At this meeting also ESU members had opportunity to deliver their opinions and point of views to the Patriarch. The main topic of meeting was the situation of Christians of Iraq.

ESU Chairman Alptekin said that we have a chance to transfer our policies and missions more specifically about autonomy safe region in the Iraq for our people.

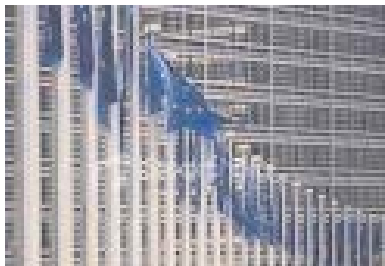


ESU Delegation at the European Commission

On 24 September 2008 ESU delegation composed by Mr. Fikri Aygur (ESU Vice-Chairman) and Mr. Suleyman Gultekin (Belgian ESU Representative) was received at the European Commission regarding the situation of the Syriacs in Turkey.

ESU delegation submitted an annual report to the Commission about situation of the Syriacs in the Turkey.

The detailed report indicates date by date the problems and any developments within the year.



Submitted report indicates that "the Ottoman Empire during its final era recognized the Syriacs as Millet (nation) and admitted them into its Millet System. With the foundation of the Turkish Republic in 1923 the Millet (nations) system was abolished. Accordingly, the rights of the

various ethnic groups, especially the rights of the non-Muslims were determined by the Treaty of Lausanne. In articles 37-44 of the treaty of Lausanne which was also signed by some of the current members of the European Union, a number of rights were to be given to the non-Muslim minorities in Turkey. However, in reality, throughout its history the Turkish state has never given these rights to the Syriacs who are a non-Muslim minority. As a result of this most of the Syriacs had to leave their native region and immigrated to the Western countries."

Report also demand from the Commission if Turkey will fulfil its commitments or not and continue "Following a long procedure Turkey has entered the negotiations phase with the European Union. During these negotiations the rights of the Syriac People should be considered under the Criteria of Copenhagen. Unfortunately, since the Treaty of Lausanne, Turkey has not left a positive impression in regards to fulfilling in practice the decisions and the commitments it has made. Therefore, at least from the Syriacs point of view, we would like to bring to the attention of the European Union whether or not Turkey is fulfilling in practice the program of the commitments it has undertaken in accordance with the Copenhagen criteria."

Report continues with the brief historical information about Syriacs and about Syriacs of diaspora. Also another phase is opened about region of Turabdin.

Related to the situation of the Syriacs in the Turkey report declared that "during the year 2008 there has not been any significant positive development for the Syriacs in Turkey. Although the Commission of the EU in its progress reports on Turkey has been constantly expressing its concern that the Syriacs should be regarded as a minority under the Treaty of Lausanne and that they should have their religious-cultural rights, however the Turkish state has not shown any progress in these matters. Further, after a 30 year long migration, there is still no programme for the return of the Syriacs from the Diaspora and the state has not taken any serious steps to protect those who returned nor to provide job opportunities for them. On the other hand, especially the life of the Syriacs in Tur Abdin region is getting more and more difficult and they are systematically being subject to attacks and pressures. The Syriacs who try to protect their lands are constantly being threatened by the state sponsored Village Guards. Moreover, attacks and defamations against the Syriac priests and clergymen were intensified during the year 2008."

Report indicates also some real incidents during 2008 example, "On 28th November 2007, the Syriac monk (priest) Edip Savci of the Monastery of Mor Yakup (St. Jacob) in Baristepe (Salih) village was kidnapped by the state sponsored village guards. Following the concerns and the pressure that came from the European countries he was rescued.

A part of the lands of the Syriac village of Der Salib have been occupied by the neighbouring Kurdish village and the mayor of Batman (city) who is a state official is supporting this unlawful occupation. The matter of occupation was brought to the attention of the law courts; however, in order to stop them from further demanding their rights the Syriacs are being constantly threatened.

The report concluded with the rights that need Syriacs in Turkey and also list of names of persons that killed between 1987-1998.

At the conclusion phase stated that, "Therefore, from the Syriacs point of view, it is possible to state that Turkey has not made any progress in fulfilling its commitments with line to the protection of the minority rights which is one of the main points of the Copenhagen criteria in 2008."

The Monastery of Mor Gabriel

The Monastery of Mor Gabriel is the heart of the region of Turabdin the motherland of Syriac people. The monastery is located on one of the hills covered with oak trees in the southeast of Midyat. It draws tens of thousands of visitors with its beauty to come and visit the monastery and see this 1600 year old holy place.

The Monastery was founded by Mor Samuel (died in 409) and Mor Simon (died in 433) in 397. Later, the monastery became so well known that its fame reached the Emperors who were then settled in Istanbul and Rome. Some of the buildings which were constructed with the contributions from the Roman Emperors such as Arcadius (395-408) and Honorius (395-423) then Theodosios II (408-450) and Anastasius (491-518) are still standing undamaged.



Besides its gorgeous and impressive features dating back to the 5th and 6th centuries such as; the rare mosaics from the Byzantine period, domes, cloisters, belfry, terraces, doors, motives and decorations on the buildings carved in lime

stone of Midyat, the monastery is one of the most important religious centers of the Syriac Church.

The Monastery of Mor Gabriel is at least 400 years older than any monastery which is built on the famous Mount Athos in Greece and it is regarded as the "second Jerusalem" by the Syriac Church. The monastery was established 80 years before the Monastery of St. Saba in Palestine, and about half a century before the Monastery of St. Katherine in the Sinai region of Egypt. So Mor Gabriel Monastery, which is one of the oldest and active Christian Monasteries in the World, is one of the very rare monasteries which managed to continue its monastic life style and traditions for 16 centuries (except for some short periods of interruption when the monastery was deserted due to wars or civil disorders). For this reason it is possible to say that Mor Gabriel Monastery is one of the most valuable and unique buildings of historical and cultural heritage of our country; Turkey and the World in general.

During its history, the monastery was given various names. In the beginning, it was named as the Monastery of Mor Samuel and Mor Simon with



reference to its founders. Later it was also known as "Dayro d'Umro" which means "the Dwelling of Monks" and from this name, first the name Deyrel-Umur and later in Turkish the name Deyrulumur was derived from the Syriac origin. At the

same time, it was named as the Monastery of Kartmin because of its nearby village called Kartmin which is today known as Yayvantepe. The name Mor Gabriel Monastery, which is used today, comes from the name of Mor Gabriel (634-668), the 7th century bishop of the Monastery and Turabdin. He performed many miracles, including the bringing of four people to life. He reached the rank of sainthood by living a simple life, and with his good and sound management, played a very important role in the development of the monastery.

The reason the monastery has buildings of various architectural styles is because the buildings were constructed at different times in history. The ground floor of the monastery, mostly constructed in the 5th and 6th centuries is of great historical value and all visitors have the opportunity to see it. The second and especially the third floors of the monastery con-

sist of the administrative parts which were constructed according to the needs after the second half of the 20th century.

The monastery has a magnificent history although it has experienced wars and plunders throughout its history; the surviving buildings we have mentioned briefly are sufficient to indicate this.



Besides its historical and cultural importance, it is one of the most important centers for liturgy, language, culture and customs of the Syriac Orthodox Church. It's for this reason that it holds a special place in the Syriac Church and the Christian world. Throughout its history, which goes back to more than 1600 years, the monastery was one of the important centers of the Syriac Church for religious education. Especially from the 5th to the 12th century the monastery's school was a very important educational, philosophical and scientific center in the region of Mesopotamia. Beside the theological education, the school taught philosophy and medicine and had a reputation in the fields of religious and scientific education.

Important characters of the Syriac Church and famous writers such as Philoxenos of Mabbug (d.523), Patriarch Theodosios Rumanos (d.896) were just two of the other famous patriarchs, bishops, monks, priests, deacons and teachers who had the opportunity to study and graduate at one of the best schools of their time.

At its golden age, the school of the monastery also had a very rich library. Countless handwritten books decorated with calligraphic miniatures were lined up on the shelves of this library. There were also calligrapher monks serving at the library and their duty was to copy any religious or historic books needed by the library. According to one of the most important writers of that period, Bar Hebraeus, the books written at the library of the monastery were unique. However, unfortunately nearly all these books were lost during wars and plunders. The rest of the books which survived those bad times are now exhibited at the British Library and at some other European libraries.

The monastery is still one of the most important centers of the Syriac Church. It is still one of the most active and effective centers passing on the Syriac language, which is a dialect of the Aramaic language spoken by Jesus, onto new generations by using the language in prayers and church services. The monastery also serves as the seat of the Archdiocese of Turabdin which is one of the oldest Syriac archdioceses in the region. Today, the residence and the office of Mor Timotheos Samuel Aktas, the Archbishop of Turabdin and the Abbot of the Monastery of Mor Gabriel are located here.

Mor Gabriel Monastery, which attracts visitors not only from the Syriac community but also from all over Turkey and internationally, has a valuable role in representing the region and makes a valuable and important contribution to the development of the tourism industry in the region.



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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Target of Ergenekon: Christian Communities of Turkey

Last months in Turkey, the main agenda was lawsuit processes of ruling party Justice and Development Party (AKP) and finding out the underground illegal organisation of Ergenekon. The opened lawsuit case is turn back with the decision of the judges. So Turkey had turned back from a governmental crisis.

Despite all of the politic chaos of last months, with great efforts of government, the operations were started against underground organisation Ergenekon which killed hundreds of people at last years.

Ergenekon organisation was founded by the nationalist part of Turkish Republic, specifically headed by retired generals, nationalists from the left-wing parties, university professors and businessmen. Ergenekon is bloody organisation. Last twenty years this organisation killed hundreds of Turkish intellectuals, Syriacs, Armenians and Kurds. Between 1986-1988 years this organisation killed more than 40 Syriacs in Turkey and with these methods they accelerate the escapes of Syriacs from Turkey.

Because of their support and protection from some state authorities, until today no one of the Ergenekon members that caused massacres had been arrested. As a result, the massacres that carried out to intellectuals and writers have been passed to the registration as "unknown assailants" events.

sErgenekon and attached groups appeared at the scene when they had committed actions against Armenian ASALA militants which had activities in the Europe. Between 1982-1984 years, Ergenekon militants had many attacks against Armenians and Armenian Institutions and they killed so many people in Holland, France and Greece.

Syriacs which live in Europe also had been target of Ergenekon attacks. On 07 August 1983, at Hengelo Holland, Syriac café house had been hit by the arms from the Ergenekon militants and on 08 August 1983, Syriac institution had been instigated. These actions are at the secret archives of Ergenekon investigation.

Ergenekon is also behind actions of Catholic monk Andrea Santoro in the 2006 at Trabzon, at the murder of Armenian intellectual Hrant Dink in the 2007 and the murder of three missionary at the city of Malatya.

Last days the government of Turkey had started a huge prosecution against Ergenekon members. On August an indictment of 2455 pages was prepared about Ergenekon. According to this, tens of persons related to Ergenekon are at the lawsuit by the crime of "provocation to revolt with the arms against Turkish Republic sovereignty".

Forrest Fires in Tur Izlo

Mount Izlo is situated in the middle of Tur Abdin region. Mount Izlo has an important place in the lives of the Syriacs for the following reasons: Firstly, with its steep mountainous hills it served as a shelter place for them in the times when they felt danger. Secondly, it has been an area where the Christian missionaries and monks settled and founded monasteries since the dawn of Christianity. And thirdly, the villages of Mount Izlo have always been inhabited by the Syriacs.

Since the very early years of Christianity, the Syriacs who were facing oppressions because of their conversion into Christianity founded many churches and monasteries in Mount Izlo. Some of the monasteries founded in Mount Izlo are: Mor Augin (St. Eugene) Monastery (3rd Century AD.), Mor Malke Monastery (4th Century AD.) and Mor Yoreth Monastery which was founded at about the same time, Mor Yunhanun (St. John) Monastery, Mor Abrohom Monastery, Mor Yahkup (St. Jacob) Monastery, Mor Aho Monastery, Mor Şemun (St. Simon) Monastery, Mor Eşahyo Monastery, Mor Şomrin Monastery, Mor Qaume Monastery, etc.

Since time immemorial, there have always been inhabited Syriac villages in Mount Izlo. Some of these villages are: Mhare (Marine), Sederi (Üçyol), Harabemişka (Dağıcı), Badibe (Dibek), Arkah (Üçköy), Ihwo (Güzelsu), Arbo (Taşköy), Kafro (Elbeğendi) and Beth Menham. Only the village of Arbo towards the end of the 18th century AD was home to 1200 Syriac families.

The Syriacs of Mount Izlo, also like the other Syriacs living in Europe had begun to migrate to Europe at the end of 1970's. Following an intensive wave of migration, with the exception of the village of Arkah, all of the Syriac villages of Mount Izlo were

evacuated. In the 1980's the Turkish security forces banned the entry to these villages for the reason that it is a very mountainous area. They had even planted landmines around some of the villages in order to prevent the PKK fighters from entering them and they had declared them as No-Entry zone.

Since the early 2000's, due to the positive developments as a result of the EU-Turkey relations, the Syriacs of Mount Izlo prepared themselves for the return to the homeland. In 2004, 13 Syriac families returned from Europe to live in Kafro. The return of the Kafro villagers to their homeland encouraged the rest of the Syriac villagers of Mount Izlo who are still living in Europe, to start renovating and re-building their houses in all of the other villages of Mount Izlo. Accordingly, since 2004, hundreds of houses have either been renovated or re-built in the above mentioned villages.

However, these efforts of the Syriacs to return must have affronted some powers so that every year the woods and the vineyards of Kafro village are being burnt down on purpose. To make matters worse, the biggest fire was started in June 2008. As a result of this latest fire all the woodland area between Sederi (Üçyol), Harabemişka (Dağıcı), Badibe (Dibek), Arkah (Üçköy), Habab (Güzelsu), Arbo (Taşköy) has been destroyed. Together with the woods all of the rest of the vineyards and the agricultural products that belong to these villages have been destroyed. Moreover, the state officials have not shown serious concern and have not acted properly to extinguish or to stop the fire from expanding.

Thus, it was too late when the fire was extinguished by itself, without any serious intervention by the state officials.