



Dear readers,

On June 9, 2019 the European Syriac Union held its annual meeting at its new Netherlands office in Hengelo. With delegates from Germany, Sweden, Belgium, Switzerland and the Netherlands, the European Syriac Union looked back at a tough but successful year and set the agenda for hopefully a new successful ESU-year.



In the new ESU-year the European Syriac Union will again put much effort in the internalization of the Sayfo (Genocide of 1915) within our Syriac (Aramean/Assyrian/Chaldean) people with lectures, conferences and media coverage on Suroyo TV. In the field of politics and lobby, ESU will continue its work with its partners and friends in the European Parliament and in the national European parliaments. We will represent our Syriac people in all forums and all European countries.

We hope to count on your support in the new ESU-year and see you at one of our events.

Co-chairs Hulya Gabriël & Tony Vergili

### Bombing of St. Mary Church in Qamishli

On Thursday 11 July 2019 another cowardice bomb attack on a Syriac-Orthodox church was carried out in the city of Qamishli, Al-Hassaka province, northeast Syria. The bomb was planted in a van and parked in front of the St. Mary church. The bomb targeted civilians. It wounded several people and caused a lot of material damage. Human casualty would have been much more if the bomb would have exploded five minutes later when worshippers would exit church mass. On the same day motorbike-bombs were planted in the provincial city Al-Hassake and a car bomb blast in Afrin killed eleven people, including children, and wounded many others. Afrin was captured by Turkey-backed rebels in March 2018.

Christians are a continuous target in the Democratic Self-Administration of Northeast Syria. These bombings show that it is still not safe for Christians in Syria and in the Middle East. Christians are consciously targeted. These acts of terrorist intimidation perpetrated by barbaric and dark forces aim to create disorder and insecurity amongst Syriac Christians. With these targeted attacks we Syriacs are to be frightened, but we will not be frightened by anyone. We will not be expelled from our homeland!

The European Syriac Union condemns these cowardice acts of terrorism that seek to end the security and stability provided by the Democratic Self-Administration in Northern Syria created collectively by Arabs, Kurds and Syriacs. We stand strong with our Syriac brothers and sisters in Syria against these barbaric and dark forces. We will not give in to terrorist goals and not give in to chaos. We call on our Syriac people in Syria to stand steadfast and

continue the path taken of building civil peace, inclusive life and strong democratic relationships between the communities. Most of all we hope for a full recovery of the wounded.



**Bethnahrain Patriotic Union, Yezidi Exile Council of Sinjar and ESU visit ChristenUnie Dutch MP Joël Voordewind on Sinjar & the Nineveh Plain**



Tuesday 25 June 2019, the Bethnahrin Patriotic Union from Iraq, the Yezidi Exile Council of Sinjar and the European Syriac Union, together with partner Sallux, visited the House of Representatives in The Hague for a meeting with MP Joël Voordewind of the ChristenUnie (CU). Chairman Fikret Igrek from Germany spoke on behalf of the Yezidi Exile Council of Sinjar. President Yousif Yaqoob Matti Danoo from the Nineveh Plain in Iraq represented the Bethnahrain Patriotic Union.

The visit follows the sad events of recent years. Mosul was taken over by ISIS in June 2014, after which a huge number of refugees from the Nineveh Plain fled for the Sinjar Mountains, the Kurdish Autonomous Region,

Northern Syria, Turkey and to the West. ISIS committed genocide against the Yezidis and non-Muslim minorities. In the words of the European Parliament resolution (4 July 2018): "...whereas thousands of Iraqi citizens, including from minority communities, and in particular women and girls, were inhumanly exterminated or enslaved by Daesh in acts of war crimes and crimes against humanity;...; whereas more than 1,5 million Christian Iraqi citizens (Chaldeans, Syriacs, Assyrians and members of other Christian minorities) were living in Iraq in 2003, and whereas they constitute an ancient, native population group which is in serious danger of persecution and exile; whereas millions of Iraqi citizens, including Christians, were forced to flee the violence, either leaving their country completely or being displaced within its borders...".

The Yezidi Exile Council of Sinjar and the Bethnahrain Patriotic Union both criticized the political attitude of the Iraqi government and the KDP because they use or create local tensions to divide and rule through proxies. A joint Chaldean-Syriac-Assyrian-Yezidi plea was made and the ChristenUnie was asked to argue their case with the Dutch government and the office of the European Commission:

- 1) help with the reconstruction of the Nineveh Plain for the hundreds of thousands of IDPs to be able to return to their homes on the Nineveh Plain;
- 2) more and direct humanitarian aid directly to our people;
- 3) rapid and full implementation of the EP resolution which calls for self-rule for the Syriac and Yezidi people: "the European Parliament Encourages the international community and the EU to provide support for preserving the diversity of ethnic, cultural and religious identities in Iraq; calls, within the framework of the Constitution of Iraq, for ways to be explored to recognise, protect and enhance the local self-rule of ethnic and religious minorities living in areas where they have historically had a strong presence and lived peacefully alongside each other – for example in the Sinjar mountains (Yazidis) and the Nineveh plains (Chaldean-Syrian-Assyrian peoples); calls on the Iraqi authorities to allow Kurds, Christians and Yezidis to return to their original areas of residence and to ensure it is safe for them to do so";

## Q&A on “A Future for Christians in Iraq” and the current political situation of the Nineveh Plain with ESU Foreign Affairs representative Metin Rhawi



On 28-30 June 2017 ESU co-partnered the conference "A Future for Christians in Iraq". The conference was hosted by the EPP, ECH and ALDE European Parliament political groups and took place in the

European Parliament in Brussels. Representatives from different political Chaldean/Assyrian/Syriac parties and churches, NGO's and representatives from the Iraqi government and KRG attended the conference. The main goal of the conference was to give the Chaldeans/Syriacs/Assyrians a platform on an international diplomatic level to support the demand for an Autonomous Region in the Nineveh Plain in Iraq for our Chaldean/Syriac/Assyrian people.

### **Q: ISIS has been defeated on the ground. How is the situation now on the Nineveh Plain?**

Our Chaldean/Syriac/Assyrian people are returning but obviously a big part of our people has fled the region and even the country. There are demographical changes going on. Unfortunately, this is a continuous process going on for more than 100 years now i.e. since the time of the Sayfo - the Genocide of 1915 - on Chaldean-Syriac-Assyrian, Armenian and Pontus-Greek Christians in the Ottoman Empire. What is going on, now that ISIS is defeated on the ground, is that the Iran-backed militias of Hashed-al-Shabi are pushing new demographic changes in the region, in particular in the city of Bagdede (Karakosh): where Christians are leaving, Shi'a Muslims move in. When it comes to the infrastructure more than 50% needs to be rebuilt, more than 70 % of private family homes and almost all official public sites need to be rebuilt. As you understand there is a great amount of work that needs to be done.

### **Q: 2 years ago, ESU co-partnered the conference ‘a Future for Christians in Iraq’ in the European Parliament in Brussels. Could you elaborate on the background of this conference? Why the conference?**

Since its establishment the Beth Nahrain Patriotic Union (HBA) party has requested the Iraqi Government to

denominate the Nineveh Plain as an Autonomous Region for the Chaldean/Syriac/Assyrian people. A decision was taken by the Iraqi cabinet of ministers in January 2014 to acknowledge the Nineveh Plain as an Autonomous Region for the Chaldean/Syriac/Assyrian people. After the rise of ISIS all minorities in Iraq and Syria were threatened with genocide. Clearly many attempts were made on Chaldean/Syriac/Assyrian and the Yezidis.

In late 2015 the European Parliament approved a unanimous but non-binding resolution with regards to the atrocities on minorities in Iraq to be recognized as Genocide and that the Nineveh Plain should be supported in the struggle to be given an autonomy status. We as ESU made a lot of journeys to Iraq and to the Kurdish Autonomous Region (KRG) and on many of these trips we took MEPs with us for them to see with their own eyes what is happening on the ground. The MEPs Lars Adaktusson (Sweden) and Branislav Skripek (Slovenia), together with Johannes de Jong from Sallux, played a central and driving role to try to arrange a conference on European Parliamentary level in order to show and express the will and vision of the Chaldean/Syriac/Assyrian people's political parties on their future in Iraq. The result was the conference called 'A future for Christians in Iraq', where 7 out of 10 of our political parties signed a Position Paper declaring they want the Nineveh Plain to be an Autonomous Region for our Chaldean/Syriac/Assyrian people. In addition to the political parties we invited Chaldean/Syriac/Assyrian militia leaders, NGO's and religious leaders. Of course, we invited members of the Iraqi Government and the KRG. We also invited the Patriarch of the Syriac Orthodox Church and the Patriarch of the Syriac Catholic Church as guests of honor. In total we invited more than 60 persons from Iraq.

### **Q: What were the goals of the conference and why was ESU partnering this conference?**

The main goal has always been to give the Chaldeans/Syriacs/Assyrians a voice on different EU levels. The conference was hosted by the EPP, ECH and ALDE European Parliament political groups. Especially the EPP-office of Lars Adaktusson was involved. As you know, we as ESU support our people politically and try to do all the necessary lobby work to promote our political parties in the Middle East on all applicable European Union

platforms. Most of our parties still demand the Autonomous Region for the Chaldean/Syriac/Assyrian people.

**Q: Why this big commitment by the European Parliamentarian(s)? Who were the other participants to the conference?**

Now that you're asking, almost all political groups in the EP supported the conference we co-arranged in 2017 in the EP. Everybody could see and acknowledged that the minorities of Iraq were under serious threat by ISIS. And that the Iraqi Government did nothing to defend its citizens from the atrocities carried out against them.

**Q: ISIS has been defeated on the ground. How is the situation now on the Nineveh Plain?**

Our Chaldean-Syriac-Assyrian people are returning but obviously a big part of our people has fled the region and even the country. There are demographical changes going on. Unfortunately, this is a continuous process going on for more than 100 years now i.e. since the time of the Sayfo, the Genocide of 1915, on Chaldean-Syriac-Assyrian, Armenian and Pontus-Greek Christians in the Ottoman Empire. What is going on now after the defeat of ISIS is that the Iran-backed militias of Hashed-al-Shabi are pushing new demographic changes in the region, in particular in the city of Bagdede (Karakosh): where Christians are leaving Shi'a Muslims move in. When it comes to the infrastructure more than 50 % needs to be rebuild, more than 70 % of private family homes and almost all official public sites need to be rebuilt. As you understand there is a great amount of work that needs to be done.

[Read the full Q&A on our website](#)



### Fires in Syriac villages in Tur Abdin

After fires in the month of July in Northeast Syria and Northern Iraq, new fires have burned and destroyed (farm)land around the villages Bethzabday and Midin in the Tur Abdin region of Turkey. July 27 saw the burning of olive orchards belonging to the Deyrulzafaran monastery (Mardin). Also read: the comments by Evgil Türker (Federation of Syriac Associations in Turkey) and Syriac MP in the Turkish parliament Tuma Celik: [Fires in Syriac Villages: 'Even if It is Not Sabotage, There is Gross Negligence](#)



### Campaign: in memory of the martyrs of the Genocide of 1915, ESU calls for the establishment of Sayfo monuments in all our Syriac public places

The European Syriac Union on June 15th, Sayfo Remembrance Day, started a new 1-year campaign. ESU makes a call to all our Syriac (Aramean-Chaldean-Assyrian) people for the establishment of Sayfo memorials and monuments in Syriac/Suryoyo public spaces and buildings in memory of our Suryoyo/Suryaye martyrs of the genocide of 1915. Over the last 3 decades, many steps have already been taken to create greater awareness within our own Syriac people about the Syriac Sayfo and the Christian genocide. A recent step was made by the Syrian Orthodox and Syrian Catholic churches by introducing an official yearly day of commemoration on 15 June. The European Syriac Union welcomes and endorses this initiative for an own Syriac Remembrance Day. However, and unfortunately, the number of Sayfo memorials and monuments is still limited. To achieve a true internalization of the Sayfo within our people, ESU is of the opinion that every cultural, ecclesiastical, political organization and social and sporting club should have a Sayfo memorial or monument within its public space. As an organization that defends the fundamental rights of the Syriacs, ESU calls upon all cultural, ecclesiastical, political organizations and social and sporting clubs to establish Sayfo memorials and monuments in the Suryoyo public spaces in memory of our Suryoyo/Suryaye Sayfo martyrs.



### Upcoming

22 September 2019 Hengelo Netherlands: Manifestation and Information day for a Democratic Syria and the freedom of Syriac Union Party Said Malke.