

# Dossier on the situation of the Syriac people on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the treaty of Lausanne

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On 24 July 2023, it will have been a century since the signing of the Treaty of Lausanne, an international document that led to the denial of recognition of the Syriac-Assyrian-Chaldean-Aramaic people. It is of vital importance that the states and international powers concerned reconsider the future of the Syriac people and correct the mistakes made in the course of history to ensure the preservation of their identity and existence. The rights of non-Muslim minorities defined in the third paragraph of the Treaty of Lausanne, in Articles 37 to 45, have in no way been applied to the Syriac people.

The Treaty of Lausanne is an international treaty signed on 24 July 1923, between the representatives of France, United Kingdom, Italy, Japan, Greece, Romania, and the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and Turkey. The Treaty determined the borders of the national territory of the Republic of Turkey, recognized Turkey as an independent state, and placed it in the international arena. Since its foundation, the Republic of Turkey has implemented assimilationist, negationist, and oppressive policies against ethnic, religious, and cultural minorities. Although the rights of non-Muslim minorities set out in the third paragraph of the Treaty of Lausanne were partially applied to Armenians, Greeks, and Jews, other identities were ignored and their languages and cultural were prohibited.

The Syriacs, whom the Republic of Turkey has so far tried to deny and destroy through oppressive policies, are the oldest indigenous people in Mesopotamia, the cradle of humanity. The Syriac people created the Sumerian, Akkadian, Babylonian, Assyrian, Aramaic, and Chaldean civilizations, passed on a rich culture to the peoples of the world and played a major role in history. However, the leaders and collaborators of the Ottoman Empire perpetrated a genocide beginning in 1915 and massacred approximately half a million Syriacs. As all the dynamics of development of the Syriac people were destroyed by this genocide, it was weakened and therefore could not occupy an effective position in international platforms.

During the negotiations and conferences that began at the end of the First World War, the Syriacs remained in the shadow of powerful states. Based on their own interests, these states have restructured the Middle East through the creation of different states. At present, the international community speaks of universal values such as democracy, peace, human rights, economic prosperity, and so on. The Syriac

people also wish to live under these values. Although the Republic of Turkey has an obligation to respect the requirements of many inter-state agreements on human rights, it has implemented racist and negationist policies. In order to ensure that the rights of the Syriac people are no longer violated, it is important that they be guaranteed by international and regional powers.

## **We must prevent the conclusion of new treaties that deny the Syriac people**

The Syriac people, like the Armenian and Hellenic peoples, were victims of one of the greatest genocides in history. The pain and destruction caused by this genocide is still felt, passed from generation to generation until today. It left deep and indelible marks in the hearts and minds of every Syriac. The signing of the Treaty of Lausanne was a further blow to the Syriac people. With its signing, our homeland, Bethnahrin, was divided between different powers and identity and the historical and cultural values of the Syriac people were denied.

For 100 years, the Syriac people have been displaced from their homeland by policies of denial and oppression, with the aim of rendering them stateless. With the Treaty of Lausanne, the homeland of the Syriac people was fragmented, its cultural values denigrated, and the social fabric and unity of its people destroyed. Divided by borders, the Syriacs were isolated from each other and weakened in all areas.

Some Syriac intellectuals and organizations have tried to rise up against these unjust policies at different times and to bring them to the attention of international platforms. However, from the date of the Treaty of Lausanne up to the present, the demands of the Syriac people and the suffering they have endured have not been taken into account in international decision-making. International powers and states concerned need a new treaty to put an end to the injustices suffered by the Syriac people and the danger of them being erased from history. Turkey has so far not recognized the identity and national social existence of the Syriac people. Since Turkey was confronted with the reality of taking many democratic measures and achieving the Copenhagen criteria during the application process to become a member of the European Union, it has taken a step back and continued on his anti-democratic and authoritarian path. The Turkish state has therefore not renounced its policy of assimilation and extermination.

## **The treaty of Lausanne must be abolished**

Throughout history, there have been events that brought joy and success to individuals and peoples, as well as errors and crimes that caused irreparable damage and grief. The 20th century, in particular, witnessed tragic events that resulted in great disasters and claimed the lives of tens of millions of people. Genocides were committed against various peoples during the First and Second World Wars. Lands were divided and resources were exploited in the interest of powerful states, leaving people divided along ideological and political lines. Internal conflicts escalated, exacerbating regional tensions. It was a century in which some of the bloodiest chapters in human history were written. The development of weapons of mass destruction posed a threat to all of humanity. Amidst this relentless period, there were also great revolutions, inventions, and uprisings. Religious and cultural differences, while representing valuable diversity, also became sources of contradictions and conflicts. Humanity found itself trapped by rigid ideological approaches and uncompromising politics.

With the outbreak of World War I, a genocidal campaign was launched by Turkish-Islamic forces predominantly against the Christian peoples of the Ottoman Empire. Consequently, the Syriacs, Armenians, Pontic Greeks, but also Kurds, Arabs, and other peoples under its control, were transformed into enemies. Seeds of mistrust, hatred, and hostility were sown among Christians, Muslims, Alevis, Jews, and Yazidis. Violence became the default solution to all problems, and demands for rights were brutally repressed. This practice persisted and became the policy of the states that emerged in the region.

Particularly, the genocide committed against the Syriac people in 1914–1915 resulted in the massacre of more than half a million individuals, while millions of others from different ethnic groups also lost their lives. The defeat of the Ottoman Empire at the end of the First World War did not bring an end to the region's problems. On the contrary, the subsequent arrangements further complicated matters. The Middle East was reassigned through the Treaty of Lausanne signed on 24 July 1923, which led to the denial of the Syriac people's identity and the division of their homeland among the newly established states in Mesopotamia. Not only the Republic of Turkey, but across the region also all the regional states, approached the Syriac people with a policy of denial, empowered by the Treaty of Lausanne. For a century, the rights and freedoms of the Syriac people have been ignored under this policy.

The world entered a new era after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the subsequent dissolution of the Soviet Union. The first significant step in this process was taken in 1991 with the first Gulf War. The political impact of this new period brought about a positive change in the international powers' approach towards the Syriac people. The United States and the European Union, who were envisioning a new, post-Soviet world order, particularly demonstrated a more favourable stance.

The tragic events of 11 September 2001 emphasized the importance of the various social structures in the Middle East and the role of the Syriac people in the region. As a result, international and Middle Eastern developments laid the groundwork for new policy research and roadmap. Opportunities arose during this process to involve the Syriac people, to some extent, in new projects developed in Iraq and the wider region. The status quo in the Middle East began to shake with these new developments, leading to violations of the Treaty of Lausanne. The unique characteristics of this period and the aspirations of the people created an environment conducive to the establishment and development of a democratic system.

## **Identity and historical definition of the Syriac people**

Ignoring the existence and historical realities of peoples through politically motivated treaties is a manifestation of injustice, inequity, and denial. The Treaty of Lausanne, for instance, created a fertile ground for massacres, genocides, looting, and demographic changes through the implementation of negationist policies against the Syriac people. It is neither reasonable nor conscionable to disregard or attempt to destroy the identity, civilization, culture, and language of a society that has evolved over thousands of years of history. Such an approach only yields discriminatory, marginalizing, antagonistic, and genocidal consequences. Openly denying the reality of the Syriac people and failing to recognize their identity is not only illogical but also a blow to democratic principles when international powers turn a blind eye and remain silent in the face of the injustices committed. It is deeply painful and tragic to defend oneself against the mindset of ignoring and denying the values of an existing and well-established people. Therefore, it is crucial for those who are compelled to affirm the Syriac identity and existence to take measures that foster a democratic culture and promote peace for the better development of the world and humanity.

The Syriac people, as one of the oldest indigenous peoples of the Middle East, embody an ancient culture. They have shaped and developed their popularization, cultural values, and language within this geographic region over thousands of years. The Syriac people are not a community that migrated from other regions to the Middle East; their origins can be traced entirely to this geography throughout their history. Consequently, they possess a rich and deeply rooted history among the peoples of the Middle East. The ancestors of the Syriac (Assyrian–Chaldean–Aramaic) laid the cultural foundations of the Middle East region through their political, religious, and cultural contributions, as well as their economic, technical, and scientific advancements, playing a pioneering role in the development of world civilization. The process of establishing political authority and a state can be traced back to 2350 BC to the Akkadians. Despite the challenges they faced, this culture has managed to preserve its language, culture, and unique way of life in the same geographical region throughout a history spanning at least 6,000 years. The last political entity of the Syriac people, who exerted significant influence in the Middle East region and on the global political

stage under various formations and political names (Akkadian, Assyrian, Babylonian, Aramean, Chaldean, etc.), was the Kingdom of Abgar in the city of Urfa which endured until 244 AD.

## **Homeland of the Syriac people**

Mesopotamia stands as one of the most fertile and significant geographical regions in the world, serving as the initial settlement for human communities and a place of flourishing civilizations. Its boundaries encompass the lands embraced by the Euphrates (Efrat) and the Tigris (Deklath) rivers, as well as the surrounding geography. Until the arrival of the Macedonians in 300 BC, Mesopotamia was known by various names. It was the Macedonians who referred to the area between the Euphrates and the Tigris as “Mesopotamia” meaning “the country between two rivers” in their language. The Syriac people, on the other hand, use the term “Bethnahrin” as the Syriac equivalent of Mesopotamia to designate this land.

The history of the Syriac people has unfolded and developed within their ancestral homeland of Mesopotamia. To comprehend the essence of the Middle East and Mesopotamia, one cannot disregard the distinctive characteristics of Syriac society, which has contributed to the establishment of civilizations across this vast geographic region extending from the Zagros Mountains in the east to the Taurus Mountains in the north and from the Mediterranean in the west to the Persian Gulf in the south. Their cultural presence has been maintained in numerous regions.

Southern Mesopotamia primarily consists of swamps, central Mesopotamia is characterized by deserts and plains, while northern Mesopotamia encompasses broad plains, plateaus, and mountainous terrain. The mountainous parts of northern Mesopotamia experience snowy and cold winters, while the lowlands of southern Mesopotamia enjoy a mild climate. Mesopotamia has diverse climates within the same season. Its rivers, plains, mountains, and sea breathe life into the region. Furthermore, Mesopotamia holds immense wealth in terms of natural resources, including water, oil, and agriculture, making it an important area of production regionally and globally.

Situated at the intersection of historical trade routes, including the Spice and Silk Roads from the Far East, Mesopotamia occupies a highly significant geostrategic position. It has long been hailed as paradise on Earth and the cradle of civilization due to its remarkably fertile soil and abundant sources of wealth. The convergence of different tribes and peoples in Mesopotamia transformed the region into the homeland of a vibrant civilization thanks to the amalgamation of diverse cultures. Prior to the institutionalization of colonialism, Mesopotamia had reached an advanced level of culture. As such, any external community that arrived either assimilated and further developed the sophisticated sedentary culture they encountered or experienced its influence in various ways.

The culture of Mesopotamia, the ancestral homeland of the Syriac people, took shape and flourished through their contributions. The Syriac people are deeply rooted and intricately intertwined with this geography, with their civilization, culture, and artistic achievements evolving over thousands of years of history. Consequently, the history of the Syriac people is inseparable from the history of Mesopotamia.

## **Names and churches of the Syriac people**

Over the last 2000 years, particularly since the advent of Christianity, the Syriac people have embraced Christian traditions and customs, which have become a central aspect of their culture. Consequently, the Church plays a pivotal role in guiding and educating the Syriac people. However, throughout their history within the Christian faith, Syrians have found themselves under the rule of various sovereignties, impeding their ability to determine their own future within a unified Church. Pressured by dominant powers, the Churches of the Syriac people have experienced numerous divisions, resulting in the fragmentation of the people themselves into different ecclesial communities. Presently, the Syriac people are often referred to

by various cultural and Church names, including Assyrians (Nestorians), Jacobites, Chaldeans, Arameans, Maronites, and Melkites. Although the lack of strong national unity among the Syriac people has led to these different denominations, it is essential to recognize that they all belong to the same people.

The division of the Church of Antioch, a symbol of Syriac unity, began in the fifth century, leading to the establishment of new ecclesiastical centres. Consequently, within the religious sphere, the Syriac people became divided into three branches: Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant, each governed by separate patriarchates. These patriarchates are as follows:

1. Syriac Orthodox Church of Antioch (Jacobite), with headquarters in Damascus (Syria).
2. Apostolic Church of the East (Nestorian) with headquarters in Baghdad (Iraq)
3. Assyrian Church of the East (Nestorian) with headquarters in Erbil (Iraq)
4. Chaldean (Babylonian) Church, with headquarters at Baghdad (Iraq)
5. Syriac Greek Orthodox (Antiochian, Melkite) Church, with headquarters in Damascus (Syria)
6. Greek Catholic (Antiochian, Melkite) Church, with headquarters in Damascus (Syria)
7. Church of Maroni, with headquarters in Beirut (Lebanon)
8. Syriac Catholic (Antiochian) Church, with headquarters in Beirut (Lebanon)
9. Protestants

## **Massacres of 1895 and 1909**

Between 1890 and 1893, a series of massacres targeted Eastern Christians, including Syriacs and Armenians. In the city of Sason alone, over 20,000 people were brutally killed during these massacres. The violence further escalated in 1895. In an effort to halt the bloodshed, Patriarch Abd al-Mülûh II of the Syriac Orthodox Church in Antioch wrote a letter expressing his concerns to Sultan Abdülhamit, the ruler of the Ottoman Empire. However, even this plea from the patriarch failed to prevent the continuation of the massacres. Despite instructions given by the leader of Diyarbakır to the authorities in Mardin, Midyat, and Cizre, the attacks persisted and grew in intensity. Muslims launched assaults from Diyarbakır, indiscriminately massacring and killing individuals from Hasankeyf to Sivas, regardless of gender. Christians residing in the region had their gold, silver, belongings, and properties looted.

The massacre, which commenced on 20 October 1895, persisted until April 1896. In various regions such as Sivas, Revaniye, Şervan, Kefrin, Avtan, and Bemürd, numerous Syriacs lost their lives, and their villages were largely destroyed. The city of Urfa alone witnessed the tragic deaths of approximately 13,000 Syriacs. Massacres also occurred in Mardin, Kızıltepe, Bitlis, Siverek, Bilecik, and Malatya. Following the 1895 massacre, another devastating event unfolded in Adana in 1909, where both Syrians and Armenians were subjected to mass killings. The number of Syriacs massacred between 1890 and 1909 exceeds 100,000.

## **The First World War**

The First World War, a European conflict that became a global conflict, commenced on 28 July 1914, and concluded on 11 November 1918.

In 1895, the process of reshaping the world order was initiated through a meeting held in Berlin among major European powers. Germany emerged from this meeting with the smallest share, while countries like Great Britain and France, which had acquired vast territories through colonization, experienced increased prosperity due to the wealth amassed in their colonies. Germany, confined to Central Europe, sought new territories to sustain its growing economy. This economic disparity among the major European powers created significant tensions and necessitated a redivision of global territories. The declining Ottoman Empire, known as the “sick man of Europe”, had already lost the Balkan countries and was at risk of

further disintegration. Thus, it found itself compelled to take sides in a conflict between Germany and the alliance of England and France, which had the potential to engulf the entire world.

The Ottoman Empire's primary concern was the southward expansion of Russia and its potential occupation of the Empire's eastern territories. The fear was that such an advance would create conditions for Christian communities in the east to seek independence, similar to what had occurred in the Balkans. Since the late 19th century, the Ottomans had fostered strong relations with Germany, and the Berlin-Baghdad railway project further solidified their ties.

The assassination of heir to Austro-Hungarian throne, Franz Ferdinand, by a Serbian assassin on 28 June 1914, served as the trigger for the outbreak of the First World War. Austria, backed by Germany, declared war on Serbia on 28 July 1914, with Russia siding with the Serbs. Germany subsequently declared war on Russia on 1 August 1914. France, Belgium, and England also aligned themselves with Russia. The flames of war spread across Europe and the Middle East, leading the Ottoman Empire to join the conflict on the side of Germany.

The declaration of war was followed by a mobilization effort. Heavy war taxes were imposed, disproportionately affecting non-Muslims. Ottoman armies engaged in battles on multiple fronts, including Eastern Anatolia, Azerbaijan, Iraq, Syria, Palestine, and Galicia. During the Dardanelles campaign (1915–16), Ottoman forces successfully thwarted British and French attempts to reach Russia. Exploiting the chaos of war, the Unionist government led by Enver Pasha embarked on a policy of ethnic cleansing against Armenians and Syrians in Eastern Anatolia. Autonomy in Lebanon was abolished, and numerous Arab nationalists were executed between August 1915 and May 1916.

Throughout the war, the Allied powers (Great Britain, France, and Russia) negotiated a series of agreements regarding the division of Ottoman territories. According to the March–April 1915 agreement, Constantinople and the straits were to be handed over to Russia, while Syria and Cilicia were designated as French spheres of influence. Britain had already annexed Cyprus and established a protectorate over Egypt. The Sykes-Picot Agreement, signed between Britain and France on 3 January 1916, extended French influence to Mosul in Iraq, while a British sphere of influence was established around Baghdad, Haifa, and Akka. Palestine was placed under international administration. In return, Trabzon, Erzurum, Van, and Bitlis were to be ceded to Russia. The Treaty of London on 26 April 1915, promised Italy 12 islands in the Aegean Sea, with additional territories, including Izmir and much of southwestern Anatolia, added through the Treaty of Saint-Jean-de-Maurienne in April 1917. Britain made various promises of independence to Arab leaders, including the Hussein-McMahon correspondence of 1915–16, and expressed support for the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine through the Balfour Declaration of 2 November 1917.

By the end of 1916, the Ottoman Empire faced worsening economic conditions, and the burden of the war became unbearable. Desertions within the army multiplied, and the October 1917 Soviet Revolution forced Russia to withdraw its troops from the conflict. With the Bolsheviks coming to power, Russia was excluded from the Anglo-French alliance, resulting in the non-implementation of previous agreements between the two countries.

British forces advanced northward from Basra, occupying Kirkuk in May 1918 and Mosul in November 1918. The Ottoman resistance in Syria, under the command of Von Sanders, persisted for some time. However, by September 1918, coastal towns such as Acre and Haifa fell one after another. Damascus was captured on 1 October, followed by Aleppo and Homs shortly thereafter. The French fleet also seized Beirut on 6 October. While the Ottoman forces retreated to Adana to regroup for a new resistance, Tripoli and Iskenderun were also wrested from their control.

Following the resignation of the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) cabinet, a new cabinet was

formed on 14 October 1918, under the leadership of Ahmed İzzet Pasha. The defeat and disintegration of the Ottoman Empire were embodied in the Mondros Armistice Convention signed on 30 October 1918. Subsequently, Britain, France, Italy, and Greece began to assert control over various parts of the remaining Ottoman territories.

Immediately after the armistice, the partitioning of the Ottoman Empire commenced among the victorious nations. German generals and officers were dismissed and replaced by Turkish counterparts. The French occupied cities in the Cilicia region, while eastern Anatolia witnessed the establishment of an Armenian state encompassing six cities, including Kars, Ardahan, and Batum. Britain occupied Mosul, which had been assigned to France under the Sykes-Picot Agreement. In northern Anatolia, a Pontic state was established in the provinces of Samsun, Amasya, and Sivas, incorporating the ancient Pontic kingdom. Conferences were convened by the victorious powers to determine the future partition of the Ottoman Empire.

## **1915 Genocide (Sayfo)**

The Deportation Act, officially known as the Relocation and Settlement Act, was an immigration law enacted by the Ottoman government on 27 May 1915. Its purpose was to relocate internal elements that were deemed a potential threat to the Ottoman army during the First World War to areas far from the State's war zones. However, prior to the enactment of this law, the Ittihad-Terakki and the progressive movement had already devised plans to eliminate Christian populations in line with their objectives based on their Turkic-Islamic ideology. As early as 1912, massacres were planned against the Greeks residing in the Aegean region, and in 1914, this genocidal policy was extended to Hakkari with attacks aimed at expelling the Syrians from their ancestral lands. The ultimate goal of this genocidal plan was to eliminate all Christians in Anatolia and further Turkify and Islamify the region. In conjunction with the Ottoman Empire's mobilization decision, paramilitary groups were formed to unite the Turkish world, mainly operating in Eastern Anatolia, and comprised of prisoners, immigrant Turks, and members of Kurdish tribes.

On 11 November 1914, the Ottoman Empire officially entered the First World War, and German generals assumed key positions within the Ottoman army. The Turanist (pan-Turkic) ideology of the Unionists and the German strategy to unite Muslims from India, Central Asia, and North Africa to reduce British influence were pursued simultaneously. In November 1914, state-sponsored militias commenced attacks on the Eastern Syriac population in the Hakkari and Van regions. In February 1915, the first deportations of Armenians began. Initially, the attacks were not systematic, but in March 1915, during a series of meetings organized by the Committee of Union and Progress in Istanbul, the decision was made to systematize the genocide. The German authorities were also informed of this decision, and the plan was set in motion.

In April 1915, following an Armenian uprising in Van, Armenian intellectuals and notable figures were arrested in various cities. On 24 and 15 April 1915, hundreds of Armenian intellectuals and personalities were detained in Istanbul. Many of those arrested were subjected to torture and public executions, serving as a means of intimidation. From May to August 1915, the systematic implementation of the Armenian and Syriac genocides took place. This genocidal policy inflicted one of the darkest periods in the history of the Syriac people.

The genocide of 1915, also known as Sayfo (meaning “sword” in Aramaic), shattered the social fabric of the Syriac community and left deep wounds. Over 500,000 Syrians fell victim to this genocide in regions under Ottoman rule.

## **Population of Syrians Living in the Ottoman Empire and Iran Before the 1915 Genocide**

The Syriac population figures in various regions were as follows:

Urmia region: 70,000; Hakkari and border region: 153,000; Sivas province: 25,000; Harpout city: 5,000; Diyarbakir province: 60,000; Van region: 98,000; Bitlis region: 15,000; Turabdin region: 200,000; Mosul: 100,000; Sapna: 10,000; Zibar: 15,000; Botan: 5,000; Bass Pervari: 5,000; Urfa: 5,000; Siirt: 25,000

The total population affected in these areas was approximately 791,000.

It is important to note that the Syriac populations of Baghdad, Erbil, Kirkuk, Basra and its surrounding areas, Kars, Antakya, Syria, and Lebanon are not included in these statistics.

Massacres against the Syriac people began on 15 April 1915, in the regions of Van, Bitlis, and Siirt. From May 1915, the atrocities spread to Hakkari, Urmia, the province of Diyarbakır (including Mardin, Turabdin, and Urfa), Sivas, Malatya, Adıyaman, Elazığ, Adana, Antakya, Maraş, Antep, Erzurum, Kars, and other areas. While the Syriac population lived alongside Muslim communities in many regions, the province of Diyarbakır and its surrounding areas were predominantly inhabited by Western Syrians, the areas of Van, Bitlis, and Siirt by the Chaldeans, and the regions of Van, Hakkari, and Urmia by the Assyrians. The Syriac genocide came to an end in 1918.

## Articles of the treaty of armistice of Moudros and summary of the period

The armistice treaty, known as the Mudros Armistice, was signed on 30 October 1918, at the borders of the port of Moudros on the island of Lemnos. It was signed between Rauf Bey, Minister of Marine representing the Ottoman Empire, and the allied powers. This treaty played a significant role in shaping the end of the Ottoman Empire as it divided the lands previously occupied by the Ottoman Empire among different powers.

As the First World War neared its conclusion, the states aligned with the alliance no longer had any hope of winning the war. They signed treaties with severe sanctions as they faced defeat. The Mudros Armistice Treaty consisted of 25 articles that outlined the terms and conditions of the armistice.

Several key articles from the Treaty are as follows:

- **Article 4** stipulated that all prisoners of war from the Entente powers and Armenian prisoners would be unconditionally handed over to the Entente powers in Istanbul.
- **Article 5** called for the immediate demobilization of the Ottoman army, with the exception of forces necessary for border protection and maintaining internal order.
- According to **Article 7**, the Entente powers had the right to intervene in any strategic point if a situation arose that threatened their security.
- **Article 11** required the withdrawal of Ottoman forces from all territories occupied within Iran and the Caucasus.
- **Article 16** specified that the forces of Hijaz, Yemen, Syria, and Iraq would surrender to the commanders of the nearest allied states.
- **Article 24** granted the allied powers the authority to establish a presence in any of the six provinces known as the vilayet-i Sitte (Erzurum, Van, Harpout, Diyarbakır, Sivas, and Bitlis) in the event of unrest. The term vilayet-i Sitte refers to these six provinces, as defined in the Treaty of Berlin on 13 July 1878.

These articles and others within the Mudros Armistice Treaty shaped the post-war landscape and had significant implications for the future of the Ottoman Empire.



## Paris peace conference

In 1919 and 1920, a series of conferences took place in Paris leading up to the signing of the Treaty of Sèvres. These conferences were pivotal in determining the fate of the peoples living under Ottoman rule and the division of territories. Representatives from the victorious states, the Ottoman Empire, and the peoples under Ottoman rule participated in these conferences.

Three Assyrian (East-Syriacs) delegations attended the Paris Peace Conference. The first delegation represented the Assyrians from Iran and had the least connection with the British. Unfortunately, this delegation had to suspend its work and leave Paris due to the hostile attitude of the British representatives.

The second delegation was the American delegation, which included members such as Said Raji, Musa Sukhur, Bishop Afrem Barsaum, Piyer Pakus, Aho Aram Ablahad, A.K. Yusuf, Rustem Najib, Jan Zabuni, Yuvel E. Varda, and Said Antun Namik. This group, known as the Othur-Kaldo delegation, comprised representatives from the three Syriac Churches (Syriac Orthodox, Eastern Apostolic, and Chaldean). At the conference, the American delegation advocated for the establishment of an Assyrian state under the auspices of one of the major powers. They proposed that the historically Assyrian region of Upper Mesopotamia (from the lower Zap River to the north) and the mountains of Diyarbakir and Armenia be included in the envisioned Assyrian state. However, this delegation also faced opposition from the United Kingdom and the United States, which ultimately led to their efforts being unsuccessful. President Wilson, who presided over the conference, argued for the division of the Ottoman Empire while granting non-Turkish peoples living there the opportunity for appropriate development.

The third delegation represented the Assyrians from Iraq and was led by Mrs. Sürme. The British government initially prevented the Iraqi delegation from going to Paris and allowed them to attend only on 21 July, with the condition that they first visit London. According to the British, the Assyrian issue could only be resolved in London. Sürme Hanım presented the Assyrian problem in the House of Lords from 17 to 19 January 1919. After the two delegations returned empty-handed from the conferences, Ms. Sürme Hanım adopted a more flexible approach. She did not pursue discussions on the establishment of an Assyrian state but instead requested guarantees for the return of the Assyrian people to their homeland. However, even this reasonable request was rejected by the British, citing its difficulty to achieve.

The negotiations among the victorious countries before the signing of the Treaty of Sèvres (1918–1920) aimed to develop plans for the Middle East in order to dismantle the defeated Ottoman Empire and establish their own influence in the region according to their respective interests.

## Treaty of Sèvres

The Treaty of Sèvres, signed on 10 August 1920, between the Allied powers and the government of the Ottoman Empire, marked a significant event following the First World War. The signing took place at the Ceramic Museum, located in the outskirts of Sèvres, 3 km west of Paris. However, the Treaty of Sèvres lost its validity with the signing and implementation of the Treaty of Lausanne on 24 July 1923. The Turks emerged victorious in the Turkish War of Independence, which was ongoing during the signing of the Treaty of Sèvres. The Treaty of Sèvres consisted of 433 articles and outlined various provisions, including the control of Iraq by England and Syria and Cilicia by France.

According to the Treaty, these regions were to be established as mandates, and an Arab state or a confederation of Arab states was to be formed there. The Treaty also proposed the creation of an Armenian state and the establishment of an autonomous Kurdistan, although the precise borders for the latter were unclear.

Article 62 of the Treaty of Sèvres stipulated that the rights of the Assyrian people would only be guaranteed under the auspices of an autonomous Kurdistan. However, this article, being vague and lacking concrete meaning, resulted in the Syrians falling entirely under British authority. Another widely accepted article stated that “Turkey must facilitate the return of non-Turkish people to their homeland and compensate them for the damage they have suffered.”

As negotiations for the Treaty of Sèvres began, changes also occurred within the Committee of Union and Progress. Key figures of the CUP, Talat, Cemal, and Enver Pashas, fled on a German ship on 2 November, following the Ottoman and German defeat in the war. Meanwhile, Mustafa Kemal was gaining increasing prominence. In reaction to the Sèvres negotiations, the Turks revolted, leading to a new struggle fueled by rising nationalism. The Turkish side initiated an ethnic cleansing movement against the Pontic Greeks.

During the Erzurum Congress (23 July 1919) and the Sivas Congress (4–11 September 1919), the proposed creation of Armenian and Greek states, as outlined in the preliminary negotiations of the Treaty of Sèvres, was rejected. The Muslim peoples of Anatolia were called upon to unite and fight against Christians on 1 March 1920. Furthermore, to prevent imperialist countries from gaining access to the Black Sea, the Bolsheviks met with Mustafa Kemal and decided to provide assistance. On 19 March 1920, as an alternative to the Istanbul government, Mustafa Kemal established a new parliament in Ankara known as the Grand National Assembly. He was elected as its president during its first meeting on 23 April, while his close confidant İsmet İnönü assumed the role of head of the state-major-general.

In June 1920, the Turks launched a new war against the Armenians to thwart the Sèvres process. The war with the Armenians concluded with a peace treaty in December, which defined the eastern border of Turkey. On 10 August 1920, when the Government of Istanbul accepted the Treaty of Sèvres, it presented an opportunity for the Government of Ankara, which denounced all signatories of the Treaty as traitors. Following the Armenian-Turkish war, the Bolsheviks entered Yerevan, leading to Armenia becoming a Soviet republic. The proposed project of Greater Armenia outlined in the Treaty of Sèvres did not come to fruition.

On 16 March 1921, the Moscow Treaty was signed between the Turks and the Soviet Union. This definitive agreement established the borders between the two parties and explicitly rejected the provisions of the Treaty of Sèvres. With the signing of the Moscow Treaty, the Treaty of Sèvres lost its relevance and influence.

The Turkish victory in the War of Independence had a profound impact on the political landscape of the region. Mustafa Kemal's leadership and the establishment of the Grand National Assembly in Ankara provided a strong platform for the Turkish nationalist movement. As the Turkish forces successfully repelled foreign interventions and asserted their independence, negotiations and discussions surrounding the Treaty of Sèvres became obsolete.

The Treaty of Lausanne, signed on 24 July 1923, replaced the Treaty of Sèvres and became the new framework for the resolution of issues related to the Ottoman Empire. Under the Treaty of Lausanne, the Republic of Turkey was recognized as an independent and sovereign state. The Treaty defined the modern borders of Turkey, addressed population exchanges, and resolved various political, economic, and territorial matters. It laid the foundation for a new era in Turkish history and marked the end of the Ottoman Empire.

In summary, while the Treaty of Sèvres was signed with the intention of dividing the Ottoman Empire among the victorious powers, it lost its validity due to the Turkish War of Independence and the subsequent signing of the Treaty of Lausanne. The events that unfolded during this period reshaped the political landscape of the region and led to the establishment of the Republic of Turkey as a modern nation-state.

# Treaty of Lausanne

Following the war and the subsequent treaties, Turkey's borders with Syria, Greece, and the eastern regions of the country were delineated. However, there remained one border that was yet to be finalized — the border with the British Mandatory Iraq, particularly concerning the region of Hakkari and northern Iraq, where the fate of the Eastern Syriacs (Assyrians, Chaldeans) would be determined. The dispute over Mosul played a significant role in the challenges faced in defining this border, and it became a central issue during the negotiations at Lausanne.

The negotiations commenced on 21 November 1922, at Ouchy Castle in Lausanne, Switzerland. Representatives from Great Britain, France, Italy, Japan, Greece, the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, Romania, and the newly formed Turkish government participated in the talks. It is important to note that the Syriac (Assyrian, Chaldean) representatives were not included in the higher-level meetings at Lausanne. However, Lord George Curzon, representing Great Britain, made it clear that he would advocate for the interests of the Syriacs. The discussions on minority issues began on 12 December 1922, under the chairmanship of Lord Curzon. In his opening speech, Lord Curzon addressed the problem of minorities, focusing on a religious basis and acknowledging both Christian and Muslim minorities. He emphasized the equality of the Christian minority in Asia and the Muslim minority in Europe.

On 13 December, İsmet Pasha, attending the meeting as the representative of Turkey, expressed Turkey's desire to foster good relations with the Nestorians and Armenians. Aga Peter, who represented the Syriacs (both eastern and western) and Yazidis, participated in the sub-meeting on minorities in Lausanne. During the meeting, negotiations took place between İsmet Pasha and Aga Petrus. Ultimately, İsmet Pasha stated that the Turkish government would accept minority rights on the same principles established in recent European treaties, but under the condition that Muslims in neighbouring countries enjoyed the same rights.

In a speech delivered on 9 January 1923, Lord Curzon expressed his hope that the articles of the Treaty related to minorities would provide adequate protection. However, he remained sceptical about whether these provisions would completely resolve the existing contradictions. Finally, on 24 July 1923, the Treaty of Lausanne was signed. The proposed borders outlined in the Misak-i-Milli were accepted by the Turks, with the exception of the Mosul region.

After 16 meetings of the Subcommittee on Minorities, the Treaty included several articles addressing minority rights. These articles, contained in Part III of the Treaty (Articles 37 to 45), outlined the rights and protections for minorities in Turkey:

- **37** ensured that the provisions contained in Articles 38 to 44 would be recognized as fundamental laws, preventing any conflicting or incompatible laws, regulations, or official acts.
- **38** mandated that the Turkish Government would ensure the full protection of the life and freedom of all individuals residing in Turkey, regardless of their birth, nationality, language, ancestry, or religion.
- **39** guaranteed that Turkish nationals belonging to non-Muslim minorities would enjoy the same civil and political rights as Muslims, emphasizing equality before the law, regardless of religion.
- **40** stipulated that Turkish nationals belonging to non-Muslim minorities would receive equal treatment, guarantees, and protections, both in law and in practice. They were granted the right to establish, manage, and control charitable, religious, and social institutions, as well as schools, freely use their own language, and practice their religious rites.
- **41** required the Turkish Government to take appropriate measures in provinces and districts where a significant proportion of non-Muslim nationals resided to ensure that the children of these Turkish nationals received primary school instruction in their mother tongue. However, this provision did not prevent the Turkish Government from making the teaching of the Turkish language compulsory in these schools.

- **42** addressed family status, family law, and personal status of non-Muslim minorities. The Turkish Government pledged to take all necessary measures to address these issues in accordance with the customs and traditions of the minorities involved. Special committees, consisting of an equal number of representatives from the Turkish government and each relevant minority, would be responsible for organizing these measures. In case of disagreement, a superior arbitrator chosen jointly from among European jurists appointed by the Turkish Government and the Assembly of the League of Nations would resolve the matter.
- **43** ensured the full protection of churches, synagogues, cemeteries, and other religious institutions belonging to the concerned minorities. The Turkish Government committed to granting all necessary facilities and authorizations to the foundations, religious organizations, and charitable institutions of these minorities, without discrimination, and to support the reestablishment of religious and charitable institutions similar to those granted to other private institutions.
- **44** acknowledged that Turkish nationals belonging to non-Muslim minorities should not be compelled to act against their faith or religious practices. Furthermore, they would not be deprived of their rights for non-appearance in court on working days or failure to comply with acts prescribed by law.
- **45** stipulated that the rights granted to non-Muslim minorities in Turkey, as outlined in the preceding articles, would also be recognized in Greece for the Muslim minority within its borders.

Unfortunately, the Treaty of Lausanne did not guarantee the identity and rights of the Syriac people explicitly, leading to subsequent oppression and attacks against them. The Republic of Turkey, born out of the aftermath of World War I, became a hostile environment for the peoples residing within its borders, especially the Syrians. The provisions on non-Muslim minorities in the Treaty of Lausanne, upon which the foundation of the Republic of Turkey was built, were designed in a way that deprived minorities of their rights.

While certain decisions regarding non-Muslim minorities outlined in the Treaty of Lausanne were partially implemented for the Armenian, Greek, and Jewish communities of Turkey, aiming to create a favourable impression on the world stage, the same rights were not granted to the Syriac people. The Syriac people, lacking legal and constitutional guarantees, were disregarded as an ethnic identity and subjected to policies of denial and extermination from the early years of the Republic. In regions such as Tur Abdin, Hakkari, and Urfa, where Syriac communities were concentrated, they faced restrictions and embargoes in social, political, economic, and cultural spheres. Economic development was stifled, education in their mother tongue was denied, and the ecclesiastical administration, a unifying force for the Syriac people, was placed under constant pressure, while the expression of religious and cultural values was forbidden.

The Turkish authorities employed various methods, including land seizures, unequal treatment in courts, compulsory military service in harsh geographical conditions, religious discrimination, heavy taxation, physical aggression, and policies promoting fear-based immigration, to erase the existence of the Syriac people — the oldest indigenous group in the region. As a result, only a few thousand Syrians remain today, and the past century has witnessed a systematic campaign against their culture, language, religion, and overall identity.

## **The situation of Syrians in Turkey in the last century**

In 1924, the Republic of Turkey's army conducted its first operation against the Syrians of the East (Assyrians) who lived in Hakkari and northern Iraq. After 1922, the Assyrians started returning to their villages in the Hakkari region, which they had abandoned in 1915. Since the Turkish-Iraqi border had not yet been defined, the return intensified in 1923 and 1924. The Assyrians gathered in Urmia, Hakkari, and northern Iraq, arming themselves for self-defence with limited assistance from the British. During that time, Iraq was under British mandate, and Iran was under British influence. The Turkish leaders, unable to resolve the Mosul issue with the British, perceived the Assyrians as a dangerous factor that could

jeopardize their plans for Mosul.

As a result, all movements and relations of the Assyrians were monitored by the Turkish state. Turkish military units were assigned by the civilian authorities to gather information about the strength and capabilities of the Assyrians. On 7 August 1924, Turkish officials encountered a reaction from the Assyrians during their explorations. The uprising that commenced on that date hastened the Turkish state's preparations for an attack. On 13 August 1924, the report and operational plan submitted by the Chief of the Turkish General Staff were accepted by the Council of Ministers on 14 August 1924. In accordance with the decision, military units were relocated from various areas to Cizre, Hakkari, Van, and Bitlis regions. Eight planes were dispatched from Izmir to Mardin, and all necessary supplies and ammunition were prepared. Relations were established with Kurdish tribal leaders, and bribes were paid. Tribal forces were organized and mobilized, while intensive measures were taken against any potential aid from the Assyrians in the Urmia region.

Consequently, on 3 September 1924, an attack was launched against thousands of Assyrians in the Hakkari region. The assault employed various weapons and targeted areas such as Beytüşşebap, Hakkari, Oramar, Çukurca (Çal), Amadiye, and their surrounding regions. The operation persisted until the end of September 1924, resulting in the massacre of hundreds of Assyrians, the burning down of dozens of villages, and the forced emigration of those who remained to Iran and Iraq.

During the rebellion of Sheikh Sait that began in 1925 and the persecution of Haco Agha in Turabdin, many Syriacs were massacred. Consequently, numerous Syriacs had to migrate from Tur Abdin to Syria. On 15 December 1925, the border between Turkey and Iraq, known as the Brussels line, was officially accepted as the official border in accordance with the decision of the Hague Court of the League of Nations. On 5 June 1926, through intense diplomatic efforts, the Mosul issue was resolved with a treaty signed between the leaders of Britain, Iraq, and Turkey.

At the onset of World War II, the Turkish state implemented specific policies against non-Muslims. All young Syriac men were mobilized under the mobilization law and subjected to strenuous labour in various fields such as railways, airports, roads, construction works, and iron foundries. While economic investments were made in the newly developed western part of Turkey, the areas where Syriacs lived were deprived of these investments. The resulting economic difficulties and poverty created conditions that facilitated Syriac emigration. Syriacs faced religious, psychological, and physical oppression in schools, military service, and all aspects of life. Over time, these pressures became increasingly systematic. State forces deliberately provoked ethnic and religious differences, inciting the masses to stand against each other and accelerating emigration.

Between 1962–1963, under the pretext of the events in Cyprus, a march was organized in the city of Midyat in Tur Abdin, where the Syriacs formed the majority. This march involved fanatical masses and was organized by special units of the State with the objective of launching an attack against the Syriacs. Subsequently, the Syriacs, especially those in and around Midyat, were sporadically targeted and attacked. These provocations, oppression, and economic hardships forced Syrians to migrate as workers and refugees, initially to Istanbul and later to Europe, which opened its doors in the 1960s. Furthermore, the state also targeted monasteries and churches. In 1978, the monasteries of Mor Gabriel and Deyrulzafaran, located in the province of Mardin, were closed under the pretext that these monasteries were recruiting militants for the Armenian organization ASALA. Additionally, on 29 October 1978, Endravos Demir, a prominent figure of Kerboran, was shot in front of his gate and received five gunshot wounds to the chest. Following this murder, all Syriacs who remained in Kerboran emigrated to Europe, including Sweden. This migration also spread to other Syriac villages in Tur Abdin, Botan, and Hakkari.

With the military coup of 12 September 1980, the policies of oppression and emigration became more overt. The 1982 constitution introduced compulsory Islamic religious courses into schools, which had a

profoundly negative impact on the Syriac people whose Christian religious identity was paramount. Since the compulsory Islamic religious courses also included Christian students, families chose not to send their children to school and instead opted for emigration. This impact, combined with the systematic facilitation of migration opportunities to Europe (such as expedited passport procedures, lax controls on illegal immigration at airports, establishment of migrant networks, etc.), led to a significant wave of Syriac migration to Europe in the early 1980s. During this period, the movable and immovable assets of the Syriacs were confiscated.

On 15 August 1984, in response to the armed struggle initiated by the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), Turkish army units were extensively deployed in the eastern and south-eastern regions. Among the many measures taken by the Republic of Turkey to suppress the actions of the PKK, the system of village guards was officially introduced in May 1985. Kurdish Hezbollah, which exploited religion against the Syriacs and received tacit tolerance from the state, committed numerous murders and kidnappings targeting Syriacs. In addition to the village guards and Hezbollah, special forces and secret state units resorted to various oppressive tactics to force the Syriacs to flee the region. Despite these efforts, dozens of Syriacs who refused to leave their country were massacred between 1987 and 1998. Furthermore, like all minorities in Turkey, the Syriacs were monitored by the Minority Monitoring Council, secretly established by the state in the 1960s. The perpetrators of numerous incidents and attacks remain unknown.

As a result of the systematic oppression of the Syriacs, more than 90% of the Syriac population emigrated abroad after the establishment of the Republic of Turkey. Moreover, due to the oppressive policies implemented in Turkey, national political ideas failed to develop among the Syriacs. However, since the 1980s, political ideas began to emerge among the Syriacs as a response to these negative policies.

## **Important Dates and Events in the Oppression of Syriacs in Turkey After the 1915 Genocide**

- In **1924**, Syriacs living in and around Hakkari became the target of a large-scale campaign that resulted in the murder of thousands of people, the destruction of hundreds of villages, and the expulsion of tens of thousands of individuals into Iraq. In this densely populated region of Syriacs, nearly all villages were evacuated with few exceptions.
- Between **1924–25**, the Syriacs from Urfa and the surrounding area were forcibly displaced, particularly to Aleppo, Syria.
- In **1925**, the Syriacs faced repression under the Takriri Silence Act enacted by the Grand National Assembly of Turkey.
- In **1928**, the last Syriac school in Mardin was closed.
- On **1 November 1928**, a law was passed prohibiting all languages other than Turkish. This law went into effect on 1 January 1929.
- On **3 November 1928**, the use of any alphabet other than the Turkish alphabet was prohibited within the borders of the Republic of Turkey, including the ancient Syriac script that had been used for thousands of years.
- In **1932**, the Turkish government expelled the Patriarch of the Syriac Orthodox Church from Turkish territory, leaving the Syriac people without a religious leader and dissolving the organization of the Church. Mar Elias Shakir, Patriarch of the Syriac Orthodox Church at the time, went into exile in India and passed away there. Subsequently, the patriarchal seat of the Syriac Orthodox Church was relocated to Syria, which was under French control.
- On **21 June 1934**, in accordance with the Family Names Act, Turkish surnames were made mandatory to replace surnames that reflected the ethnicity and cultural characteristics of individuals. Consequently, everyone had to adopt Turkish-language surnames, abandoning their traditional ones.
- During the Second World War (**1939–1945**), heavy taxes were imposed on the Syriac people under

the pretext of the “Wealth Tax”, resulting in impoverishment and economic decline in the regions where they resided.

- Immediately after World War II, the governments and authorities of the Republic of Turkey continued to terrorize the Syriac people, leading to the massacre of many Syrians. In **1963**, following a provocation by state authorities due to the events in Cyprus, a new mass attack was organized in Midyat, the largest Syriac settlement.
- In **1963**, Syrians were spied on and tracked by the secretly established Minority Monitoring Committee of the State.
- In **1979**, the state decided to introduce compulsory Islamic religious classes.
- Until **1980**, the identity cards of Syrians were marked with “Süryani” and “Christian”. After 1980, the word “Süryani” was removed, and only “Christian” was entered. In **2000**, the word “Christian” was also eliminated, and the identification of religious identity in Turkey ceased.
- Since the early **1980s**, tens of thousands of Syrians from Tur Abdin have emigrated to Europe under pressure. Additionally, thousands have had their citizenship revoked and their properties confiscated. Within a short period, the regions of Tur Abdin and Hakkari were completely emptied of Syrians, with only a few thousand individuals remaining. Those who chose not to emigrate faced intense pressure and attacks by armed forces, resulting in the murder of over 50 Syrians by unidentified assailants. The region of Tur Abdin has witnessed ethnic cleansing, and the pace of migration has escalated.
- In **1997**, the Turkish government closed two Syriac monasteries, Mor Gabriel and Deyrulzafaran, which were remnants of a rich Christian culture. Furthermore, teaching in the Syriac language was prohibited within other monasteries.
- On **10 October 2000**, Pastor Yusuf Akbulut of Diyarbakır stood trial at the Diyarbakır State Security Court on charges of separatism because he had spoken about the massacres endured by the Syriac people. Individuals and organizations advocating for recognition of the 1915 genocide still face threats.
- In **December 2002**, the new bill on foundations, drafted by the Directorate-General for Foundations of the Republic of Turkey, was rejected by the Council of Ministers without being presented to Parliament. Even after 99 years, the Turkish state continues to deny the recognition of the Syriac people as a Christian community within the framework of the Treaty of Lausanne, effectively denying their existence.
- In **2008**, state institutions and a few neighbouring villages initiated legal proceedings to seize the lands belonging to the Mor Gabriel Monastery, engaging in lobbying efforts for their confiscation.

Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, names of geographic areas and localities where the Syriac people lived were changed and given new Turkish names.

The highlighted events reflect a history of discrimination, persecution, and cultural suppression against the Syriac people in Turkey.

## **Rights of the Syriac People Must Not be Denied in New Treaties**

The Republic of Turkey applied to join the European Union several years ago. However, it failed to meet the criteria set by the European Union, leading to the suspension of its application. The reason behind this is that the Republic of Turkey perceives any progress in the realm of democracy as a threat to its racist policies. It persists in pursuing assimilationist, genocidal, and negationist policies, aiming to eradicate diverse identities permanently. Since the Treaty of Lausanne, most of the regional and international treaties signed by Turkey have been characterized by security measures, anti-democratic actions, and disregard for the rights of its peoples. Despite signing human rights treaties, many of them remain mere words on paper without any actual implementation. Turkey’s withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention serves as an example of Turkey's tendency to disregard such treaties whenever it sees fit.

On 8 November 2000, the joint document prepared for EU accession, which was presented to the global public, revealed the true strategy of the Republic of Turkey. This partnership document, driven by economic interests, directly contradicts the principles laid out in the Helsinki Final Act, the Paris Charter, the Vienna Convention, and the Copenhagen criteria. The partnership document between the European Union and Turkey, although prepared, was never implemented. It falls short in safeguarding the rights of Syriac, Armenian, Greek, Kurdish, and other minority groups, in comparison to the provisions of the Treaty of Lausanne. It ignores the fundamental rights of these peoples.

Based on historical experience, we have concerns that the same negationist policies will persist in future treaties signed with the Republic of Turkey. While the partnership document acknowledges individual and cultural rights, it fails to prioritize the present and future conditions of these peoples and their legitimate rights, as the European Union primarily focuses on expanding its market. We call on all European countries to address and recognize the genocide of the Syriac people (Sayfo) alongside the Armenian people in 1914–15 and to base any new treaty with the Republic of Turkey on the principles of democratic values and the ethnic and cultural rights of the Syriac people.

Therefore, as the European Syriac Union (ESU), we urge the signatory states of the Treaty of Lausanne, the European Union, and the United Nations institutions and authorities to act rationally, acknowledge the reality of the Syriac people, and put an end to centuries-long oppression of their national, social, and ethnic identity.

## **Our Requests**

- The signatories of the Treaty of Lausanne should fulfil their obligations and take necessary actions to end the negationist policies targeting the Syriac people.
- The European Union and the United Nations should officially recognize the identity of the Syriac people and establish a mechanism to ensure the protection of their rights.
- The Republic of Turkey and the United Nations should acknowledge and recognize the 1915 Syriac genocide.
- An international conference should be organized to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the Treaty of Lausanne, providing a platform for discussions and dialogue on the rights and challenges faced by the Syriac people.
- A comprehensive investigation should be conducted into the crimes committed by the Turkish state against the Syriac people over the past century, aiming to hold accountable those responsible and address the damages caused.
- A representative office at the United Nations should be established to monitor the situation of the Syriac people in Turkey, ensuring their rights and well-being are safeguarded.
- The Syriac people should be officially recognized as indigenous people within the borders of Turkey, and their rights should be constitutionally guaranteed.
- Syriacs should be granted equal status to other Turkish citizens, irrespective of religion, language, race, ethnicity, or region of origin, eliminating all forms of discrimination.
- The right to individual and collective education in the Syriac language should be acknowledged and protected.
- The freedom of the Syriac people to live and develop their own culture, traditions, and customs should be recognized and respected.
- The freedom of worship for the Syriac people should be acknowledged and safeguarded.
- The restitution of Syriac settlements, properties, and assets that have been abandoned since the establishment of the Republic of Turkey should be pursued.
- All political, social, and cultural institutions and organizations of the Syriac people should be officially recognized, or their right to establish such institutions should be protected.
- The right to publish in the Syriac language should be acknowledged and supported.
- The democratic rights of the Syriac people should be acknowledged and upheld.



- The national identity of the Syriac people should be officially recognized.
- The partnership documents developed by the European Union for Turkey's accession should align with international agreements and encompass the rights and inclusion of the Syriac people.
- The rights granted to non-Muslim minorities in the Treaty of Lausanne should be expanded and updated to include the Syriac people, considering contemporary circumstances.
- Turkey should recognize the Syriac people as an ethnic identity rather than solely as a religious minority.
- The right to education in the Syriac mother tongue should be legally guaranteed, and the establishment of Syriac-language schools should be facilitated.
- Religious oppression targeting the Syriac people should be stopped, ensuring the protection of churches and the restitution of all Church property.
- The establishment of social and cultural associations, sports clubs, institutes, academies, and foundations should be supported.
- Publications, including newspapers, magazines, books, brochures, dictionaries, encyclopaedias, and catalogues, should be printed and distributed in the Syriac language.
- Syriac-language broadcasting and television organizations should be established.
- Favourable conditions should be created for the return of the Syriac people to their homeland, fostering an environment of trust and security.
- Perpetrators of massacres against the Syriac people from the 1980s until the present should be prosecuted.
- Laws prohibiting the construction, restoration, and protection of churches and monasteries should be repealed.
- A museum should be established to preserve and showcase the historical and cultural artifacts of the Syriac people to the world.

## Conclusion

As mentioned previously, the Treaty of Lausanne recognized only non-Muslim communities as minorities. The rights granted to minorities, as stipulated in Article 44, are internationally guaranteed. However, in practice, the bureaucracy and other organs of the Republic of Turkey often refer to minorities as only Greeks, Armenians, and Jews, denying other groups the enjoyment of these rights. Some state institutions also designate non-Muslim minorities according to Lausanne as Greek, Armenian, Jewish, Bulgarian, Georgian, Syriac, and Chaldean.

This viewpoint was further reinforced by the latest regulation on foundations dated 24 January 2003. However, obstacles associated with the negationist mentality persist. The regulation specifically lists all the minority foundations falling within the scope of Lausanne, including Greek, Armenian, Jewish, Bulgarian, Georgian, Syriac, and Chaldean foundations. This approach, aligned with Lausanne's scope, has been limited to foundations and not extended to other aspects.

Regarding the Syriacs, when questioned about why they have not benefited from the rights granted to minorities by the Treaty of Lausanne, authorities claim that this community renounced these rights when the Republic was established. This statement is completely false. Even if such a renunciation were to exist, it would be legally invalid since minority rights have been individual rights since the time of Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679). In other words, although these rights are exercised collectively, they are granted to individuals rather than groups. Groups have no inherent rights, and, therefore, the leaders (for example patriarchs and metropolitans) of a group cannot waive the rights of individuals belonging to that group. Especially when these rights are established through an international treaty, and it is explicitly stated that they cannot be abolished under any circumstances (Article 37). In this context, the alleged renunciation mentioned in Article 42/1 is legally invalid.

No article of the Treaty of Lausanne states that “only Greeks, Armenians, and Jews are minorities”.

Consequently, the views and practices that deny minority status to Syrians are entirely contrary to the letter and spirit of the Treaty of Lausanne. Despite being a non-Muslim community, Syrians are unable to establish schools and are denied admission to schools established by other communities on the basis of not being Armenians or Greeks. Their right to education in their own language, guaranteed by the Treaty of Lausanne, has been revoked. The fact that the Syrians, the first Christian people of Mesopotamia, are unable to benefit from the “positive rights” recognized by the Treaty, solely due to political attitudes, is a clear violation of the Lausanne Treaty and disregard for international human rights law and treaties. The Republic of Turkey discriminates among its citizens who have the same status, legal standing, and characteristics, designating certain non-Muslim citizens as minorities recognized by the Treaty of Lausanne while depriving others of this status.

This practice by Turkey continues to violate the Treaty of Lausanne, international laws, and democratic rights. The concerns and discomfort arising from this situation among the Syrians were also reflected in the European Union's monitoring report published on 5 November 2003. In the latest progress report dated 6 October 2004, the non-Muslim Syriac minority still lacks the authority to establish schools, which constitutes a violation of their rights. The Treaty of Lausanne, as an international agreement, bestows positive rights on non-Muslim citizens to maintain their own identity and culture, distinct from the rights granted to all other citizens. Although the Treaty of Lausanne held importance for minorities at the time, it did not emphasize the significance of state institutions, governmental practices, and the protection and development of minority values. Nevertheless, the Treaty of Lausanne remains an official international document on minority rights, signed by the Republic of Turkey and numerous other states.

We firmly believe that the first step toward establishing a multicultural, human rights-respecting, democratic, and secular rule of law is the full and sincere implementation of the section of the Treaty of Lausanne that encompasses minority rights. Furthermore, these rights should be further developed in accordance with contemporary standards. By fully implementing the Treaty of Lausanne for all minorities based on democratic principles, the Turkish state will enhance its importance and prestige on the international stage. This will also greatly contribute to the process of Turkey's full membership in the European Union, facilitating the resolution of existing problems between Turkey and the European Union regarding this issue.

**European Syriac Union (ESU)**  
**24.04.2023**