



Members of ESU

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Mr. Charles Tannock
European Parliament
Brussels

Brussels, 01st of September 2008

Stichting Bethnahrin
Informatie Bureau
Esrein 30a
NL-7553 CZ Hengelo

Re: The ongoing occupation attempt of St. Gabriel Monastery

Dear Mr. Tannock,

I hereby would like to draw your attention to the occupation of St. Gabriel Monastery, which is one of the most important monasteries in the Syriac history.

St. Gabriel Monastery, which is among the most ancient Christian monasteries, was founded in 397 A.D and is situated in TurAbdin region (South East of Turkey). This monastery is considered as a very important religious site by the Syriacs. St. Gabriel Monastery, as a tradition, has been helping the poor and the needy people throughout its history and in order to sustain this tradition it has owned a large estate of lands and woods in its vicinity.

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.

We thank you, in advance for your help and possible cooperation.

Yours sincerely,



Fikri Aygur
Vice chairman of ESU