



Assyria Council of Europe

13th March 2008

Press Release for Immediate Release

European Union Foresees Bigger Future Role in Iraq

Brussels - The European Parliament celebrated its 50th anniversary in its latest plenary session in Strasbourg which took place between the 10th and 13th of March 2008. One of the items on its agenda was a resolution on the European Union's (EU) role in Iraq after a report prepared by the Committee on Foreign Affairs. The resolution was adopted by the Parliament by a resounding 506 votes for and 25 against, statistics which themselves affirm the importance of this resolution.

The resolution is an important initiative taken by the Parliament and is of specific concern to minorities in Iraq, including the Assyrians. The resolution makes it clear at paragraph J that 'the EU needs to be more strategic in supporting Iraq in its progress towards becoming a democratic federal state', a sentence which is important in that it reflects the EU's acceptance of Iraq choosing to become a federal state.

Of specific importance however are the Parliament's recommendations to the Council of the European Union. The Parliament urges the Council to adopt with the Commission a new strategy that will help the UN in building a safe, stable and united Iraq which, amongst other things, 'protects its minorities and promotes inter-ethnic tolerance'. Furthermore, the Parliament urges the Council to ensure that electoral procedures at the local level are strengthened, a factor especially important this year with Iraqi elections coming up. It is hoped that this emphasis on strengthening electoral procedures prevents the voting irregularities which took place in 2005 from recurring so as to ensure fair and free elections for all Iraqis.

Some points of the resolution are of specific concern to the Assyrian minority in Iraq. For example, paragraph 1.g) urges the EU, under its new strategy, to:

"support the reconciliation process, namely on Kirkuk and other internally disputed territories, including the Assyrian areas known as the Nineveh Plains with their Christian minorities; [...]"

encourage European NGOs to engage with their Iraqi counterparts - which are already particularly active in the Kurdish region - and make extensive use of the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) in providing technical and financial assistance to civil society organizations, in order to address the following issues: [...] *the rights of indigenous peoples and of persons belonging to minorities and ethnic groups, including the Assyrians (Chaldeans, Syriacs and other Christian communities), the Yazidi and the Turkmen;*

increase EU support - namely through the Commission's Directorate General for Humanitarian Aid (DG ECHO) - for NGOs and international organizations in their efforts to alleviate the plight of Iraqi refugees in neighbouring countries, as well as internally displaced persons (IDPs), *including the 4,000 Assyrian families who have principally sought refuge in the Nineveh Plains; [...]"*

The Assyria Council of Europe (ACE) has been instrumental in urging the European Parliament to take a deeper interest in Iraq's minorities such as the Assyrians, and the points in the resolution mentioned above are a product of such efforts. Mr. Ninos Warda, Project Director of ACE, stated the following: "This resolution in general, but particularly the new impetus it gives with regards to the protection of minorities such as the Assyrians, is a welcome and timely development which reflects the EU's increased awareness and anxiety about the problems faced by Iraq's minorities at present. ACE hopes that the Council and Commission will act on the Parliament's recommendations as soon as possible so that the exodus of minorities from Iraq can be halted, thus helping Iraq become a truly pluralistic and democratic federal state. We would also like to thank the members of the Parliament from across the wide range of parties who voted to make sure this resolution is passed."

It should be noted that the Assyrian community in Iraq is made up of various denominations including the Syriac and Chaldean Catholic churches, the Assyrian Church of the East and the Ancient Church of the East, the Syriac Orthodox Church and also Protestant churches.