

2009 - 2014

### Delegation for Relations with Iraq

D-IQ\_PV(2013)0620\_1

#### **MINUTES**

of the meeting of 20 June 2013, from 09.15 to 11.15
Brussels

The meeting opened at 09.25 on Thursday, 20 June 2013, with Struan Stevenson (Chair) in the chair

### 1. Adoption of draft agenda (PE 505.120)

Draft agenda was adopted.

# 2. Approval of minutes of the meetings of 25 April 2013 (PE 505100)

Minutes were approved.

#### 3. Chair's announcements

Mr Stevenson welcomed the guest speakers and strongly condemned the recent terrorist attacks in Iraq, expressing condolences to the families of the victims.

Then, he made a comprehensive overview of the existing minorities in the country. He defined Iraq as the cradle of civilization and, in particular, he digressed on the following important pieces of the Iraqi colourful mosaic:

- Turkmens: the number of Turkmens living in Iraq is pretty uncertain estimates vary from 500.000 to 3 million. They have been targeted and often denied their rights by both Kurdish and Iraqi authorities, due to their presence in the disputed territories.
- Yezidis: Many consider them ethnically Kurdish; therefore they are often put under pressure by the KRG to identify themselves as such. In reality, they speak their own

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language and practice their own religion, the most ancient in the world today! Some Muslims consider them as devil worshippers. This subjected Yezidis to numerous deadly attacks.

- The Iraqi Christian Community is often violently targeted by extremists and other groups. Apparently over half the total population of Iraqi Christians has left the country, leaving approximately 500.000 down from 1.4 million.
- The Shabak community numbers around 400.000 people. They have their own language which is however not taught at schools, traditions, clothing and culture. Some Islamic militias see them as infidels, although they are Muslims. Community members also report pressure to identify as Kurdish.
- Black Iraqis are thought to have emigrated from East Africa around 1.500 years ago, largely trafficked as slaves. They are located predominantly in Southern Iraq, and live in extreme poverty with nearly 80 percent illiteracy and reportedly over 80 percent unemployment. They are systematically discriminated, due to their past as slaves.
- Bedouins of Iraq include tribes living a traditional nomadic life. They suffer from disproportionately high rates of illiteracy, poverty and unemployment.
- Faili Kurds follow the Shia'h Muslim religion. They suffered a lot under Saddam's dictatorship, being stripped of their citizenship and expelled to Iran, although nowadays apparently their citizenship has been restored.
- Mr Stevenson also listed other minorities, such as the Palestinian refugees, the Circassians, a Roma community, a Mandean-Sabean community, Baha'i and Kaka'i religion followers, and some remaining Jew families.

Subsequently, the Chair passed the floor to the keys speakers, starting with Mr Zozo.

## 4. Situation of ethnic minorities and religious groups in Iraq

**Mr Zozo** started by reminding that June 20 is the UN Day of the Refugee.

He continued by saying that several massacres of Christians took place under Saddam. From 2003 on there was a huge hope that the fall of the dictatorship would lead to democracy and elections, but this happened not to be the case, at least not for the Christian community. There continued to be systematic killing at the detriment of various communities. Iraq signed up many international Agreements about minorities, but does not respect and apply them. After 2003 there has continued to be a demographic change in Christian areas, due to massive migration, which has been caused by several factors, often interlinked:

- Unemployment in the region is very high.
- There is a problem of desertification, and no aid to agriculture.
- There are no infrastructures, no investment and very scarce economic activity in the region;
- In several cases, the land belonging to members of the Christian community has been expropriated illegally, extorted with a very low compensation or bought at very low prices;

Therefore, the most urgent need would be to stop the expropriation of properties, and then to improve services, the investment climate and in general, and the economic situation. Only this

can stop the constant draining of Christians from Iraq. Mr Zozo recalled that, according to some estimates, there are even less than 300.000 Christians today in Iraq, while once they were 1 million and a half.

**Mr Ajgely** thanked for the opportunity to present the situation of Kurdistan. He started by saying that the primary choice of the Kurdish Regional Government was to rebuild Iraq in a democratic and pluralistic way.

He recalled that, during the long and harsh Saddam's years, there had been a long lasting brutal and bloody repression with the final aim to eradicate Kurds from Iraq. Things changed radically after the liberation of the Region in 1991. First Parliamentary elections took place in 1992. They were a true reflection of diversity: Yezidis, Turkmens, Shabaks, and Kaka'i participated.

Today, the Kurdistan Region remains safe and stable. Peshmerga forces, also in mixed areas like Kirkuk, gave a great contribution to peace and stability, through huge sacrifices, not always recognized as they would deserve.

Mr Ajgeiy continued by presenting some facts and figures, elaborated by independent international organizations like UNAMI:

- Kurdistan Draft Constitution guarantees complete religious and language rights; in this context, Kurdistan Regional Government shall ensure the sanctity of shrines, mosques, churches and all other religious objects;
- All forms of discrimination are prohibited in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region;
- Multiethnic composition is enshrined in the Constitution;
- Self-role is foreseen in areas where minorities constitute a majority of the population;

Several thousand Christian families found shelter in the Kurdistan region, and there are several statistics confirming this fact. Not only: Sunni and Shia Arabs, Yezidis and others found shelter in Kurdistan. Also educated people came, in a search for employment, given the flourishing of the economy of the Region. Furthermore, KRG is also giving grants, financial and material aid to internally displaced people. Pope Benedict, in March 2009, hailed the Kurdistan commitment towards Christian minority.

Seats are reserved to the numerically consistent minorities in the Kurdistan Regional Parliament, including to the Turkmen and Syriac components.

Minorities are granted education in their mother tongue, as well as a comprehensive set of other cultural facilities, such as independent media in their own language.

Mr Ajgeiy concluded that the KRG is and will remain fully committed to multi ethnic and multi religious society in the Kurdistan autonomous Region.

**Mr Jerjis** started by clarifying some geo-political and historical factors.

During the governance of the Baath regime, all Iraqis were oppressed. There were also semi-famine periods.

The fall of the regime therefore left a lot of anger and resentment. There was no state able to protect anybody and minorities, especially the consistent Turkmen minority, were even more vulnerable.

Turkmen population has often been underestimated by the statistics, or inaccurately calculated due to the lack of available information.

Turkmen live mainly in the North of Iraq. Kirkuk is considered to be their Capital. Erbil once had a predominantly Turkmen population as well. In addition, Turkmens are located in Salahaddin and Diyala provinces, as well as in Baghdad. They are thus settled on a very fertile agricultural plateau, which also encompasses big oil and natural gas reserves.

Kurds claim ownership of core Turkmen regions. Turkmen population is at present under continuous terrorist attacks, and the Kurdish Peshmerga forces do not act to prevent these attacks. Mr Jerjis continued by making a long sad list of people recently dead or wounded in these attacks. Many Turkmens were assassinated or kidnapped, while other had to pay ransoms to kidnappers. An impressive number of attacks took place in the last 5 months.

Moreover, the Kurdish Regional Government is heavily changing the demography of the Turkmen regions by settling in Kurdish population, at the detriment of the Turkmens. Kurds are seizing lands, changing administrative boundaries, and so on. Kirkuk changed more in the recent years than in entire Baath - dominated period. About half million Kurds came to Kirkuk.

The support of the Iraqi government is inadequate, despite Constitutional guarantees. This is largely due to the fact that KRG is not letting Iraqi troops enter into the Turkmen regions in order to prevent terroristic attacks. Moreover, also in the rest of Iraq, Turkmen interests and rights are not high on the agenda. As a matter of fact, in the Iraqi CoR Turkmen members often asked for putting on the agenda issues such as the confiscated and expropriated land problem, but these topics are systematically rejected by the CoR and its Speaker, Mr Al-Nujaifi. International organizations often cast a blind eye on what is happening with the Turkmen population, and this has to change.

**Mr** Chapman first pointed out that the attention is shifting away from minorities in Iraq, primarily due to the increase of terrible sectarian violence between Sunni and Shi'a communities.

He continued by presenting two cases of severe discrimination and mismanagement: the (Shi'a inspired) followers of Imam Eli Ammani have been ruthlessly and repeatedly attacked by government forces, leaving in one single attack 18 victims by summary executions. Many were arrested and tortured. The second case concerns the Baha'i which, although officially recognised, are having problems in obtaining documents: therefore, they are in a position of being virtually stateless.

Mr Chapman also said that even after the recent local elections, there are still not enough seats for minorities in the Governorate assemblies, in the sense that the number of seats is not yet completely proportional to the numerical consistency of a minority.

Lastly, Minority Rights Group made a series of concrete proposals to be followed in order to PE514021v01-00 4/12 PV\1001247 EN.doc



increase security for minorities - and the fact that minority members are politically divided should be clearly seen as normal, and not as an obstacle:

- 1. There must be more effective prosecution: to this aim, police must use much more forensic evidence. Otherwise convictions are questionable, and the reality is that many of them are obtained with the use of torture.
- 2. More cooperation between the police and minority communities: it would be useful to set up committees and early warning systems, in addition to information sharing.
- 3. Strengthening protection of villages and worship places.
- 4. Police have to improve recruitment of minority individual members and allow them to serve in their own minority.
- 5. A special unit on hate crimes should be established, paying attention on gender balance.

**Mrs De Vries** said Pax Christi has been working in Iraq since 2001. She described a program called "Kullina Muwatinin - we are all citizens", that Pax Christi is implementing in Iraq with the aim to overcome the sectarian divides.

When an oppressive state collapses, people close themselves in identities often opposed to each other. Young people grow up in segregated communities. UN researches show that Iraqi youngsters are growing up with conservative ideas. In addition, young people are not aware of their rights and obligations as citizens. There must be a change of attitude in order to include more the minorities. The program does not treat minorities as something exceptional. For example, as the Bishop of Qaraqosh pointed out, Christians must not be addressed as such, but instead as Iraqi citizens with full rights and obligations.

Based on this **citizenship approach**, the "Kullina Muwatinin" program works with multiple components: it has an educational component, a participatory component and a lobby & advocacy component. Activities are designed to target multiple target groups: youth, students and intellectuals, religious leaders and politicians.

The educational component consists of raising the awareness of young people of the different ethnic and religious groups present in Iraq, and aims to train them to conduct dialogue sessions with mixed groups of peers on issues relating to citizenship, identity and freedom of religion.

In addition, universities are involved to organize lectures for students on minorities' rights, legal frameworks and social cohesion between communities. Researches are published, such as the "Guide to minorities in Iraq". Religious leaders and politicians are engaged in dialogue and targeted by youth who organise lobby campaigns to encourage them to speak out against hate speech and violence.

Mrs De Vries expressed deep sorrow for the murder of Mr Jalal Dhiab, leader of the Black community in Basra and partner in the program. With his murder years of work for the emancipation of his community have been halted. Mrs De Vries pointed out that it is essential that the EU speaks out when civil activists and community leaders like Jalal are killed and the crimes do not get investigated.

Mrs De Vries concluded by making three recommendations to the EU:

1.) The EU should engage in more pro-active international diplomatic and political support to PV\1001247 EN.doc 5/12 PE514021v01-00

Iraqi activists that are working to bridge divides between communities and by doing so challenge existing sectarian boundaries.

- 2.) Anchor this support by promoting a "civil society enabling environment" policy which promotes a wide interpretation of existing human rights defenders policies to include community peace builders that bridge divides.
- 3.) Actively promote legal reform concerning minority rights protection and promote a conflict sensitive approach in doing so, which avoids reinforcing the sectarian mind-set.
- 4.) In any debate on freedom of religion in foreign policy, in particular on the Middle East, stress the need for a citizens' rights approach to rights as the best way to reach human security.

Mrs Ekmektzoglou, EEAS Desk Officer for Iraq, pointed out that what emerged from the discussion so far is in line with the EEAS priorities concerning minorities.

She continued by pointing out that EEAS has been linking a comprehensive Human Rights approach to the rights of minorities.

Moreover, on 17 June 2013 HRVP Ashton visited Iraq and called Government and opposition to work together in order to address political and governance issues through dialogue. Mrs Ashton underlined the recent Foreign Affairs Council conclusions to build a solid, long term and mutual beneficial relations with Iraq. This requires Iraq to build a stable political, judicial and economic system, which would promote a democratic and pluralist society.

Mrs Ekmektzoglou continued by illustrating 3 elements of partnership between EEAS and Iraq:

- 1. Human Rights dialogue;
- 2. EU Delegation is meeting minority groups on the ground, thus fostering cooperation and dialogue. Usual diplomacy instruments are also used for the same goal (demarches, etc...),
- 3. Technical capacity and transfer of expertise consistent funds have been given to Iraq. In this framework, there has been, last year, the first call for Iraqi NGOs (and it was the first time EEAS was opening a call) for presenting projects and actions;

**Mr Belder** inaugurated the debate-part of the meeting. He congratulated the Delegation for organising the meeting.

He stated that he feels particularly close to Christian minority. Sunni and Shia extremists have the same goal, which is to make Iraq a country without Christians. Close eye must also be kept to what is happening to Turkmen, Yezidis, and others.

Mr Belder was a journalist travelling often to Iraq in Saddam times, especially in Kurdistan. He felt that minorities in the Kurdistan autonomous region were well protected, so he was astonished to read about land grabs in the province of Dohuk at the expense of Assyrians,

with the involvement of the Kurdish Peshmerga forces. He asked, therefore, Mr Ajgeiy to clarify this situation.

Mrs Gomes thanked for organising the meeting. She agreed that there are very serious problems related to minorities, which have little visibility in Iraq, due to the difficult situation of the country.

On the other hand she believes that the Delegation for Relations with Iraq is not acting very well. According to her, the Delegation dedicated too much time to one single issue, i.e. Camp Ashraf/Liberty and the PMOI. This did not contribute to create a very positive atmosphere.

Many minority members are fleeing away from Iraq. It is important for the EP, if it wants to be efficient, to enter in direct contact with the reality on the ground. In this sense, Mrs Gomes regretted that the mission of the Delegation to Iraq, foreseen for February 2013, had been cancelled. She suggested travelling to Iraq in private capacity, at least to reach more secured places such as Erbil or Sulaymaniyah, and to link with KRG authorities and Kurdistan Regional Parliament in order to bring up minority related questions and to play a role in helping to create a sort of platform to fight for their rights.

She concluded by making a question to the EEAS: she asked if our (EU) Delegation in Baghdad is able to travel to meet representatives of minorities and what is the Delegation doing in order to improve their situation?

**Mr Stevenson** pointed out that he indeed suggested going to Erbil, when the mission to Baghdad was considered unfeasible, but that this was not possible on a diplomatic and protocol basis. He added, however, that he had a recent meeting with a UN representative and they agreed that UN would inform him on their planned missions to Iraq with a view of joining, if possible, some members of EP Delegation to a UN mission.

**Mr Zozo** asked Mr Ajgeiy both about the problem of unemployment of minority members in the Kurdistan autonomous Region, as well as about non investigated violence towards minorities in the Region.

**Mr Ajgeiy** started by expressing his agreement that D IQ should be more active and urged it to come, to talk to minorities, to people really representing minorities, not to people from NGOs here. He supported therefore the suggestion of Mrs Gomez to travel in private capacity to Kurdistan.

He answered to Mr Belder that Peshmerga forces have no right to expropriate lands. If an episode like this did happen it is certainly not systematic. Anyway, he asked for clarification his counterparts in Erbil and will send any answer as soon as possible to Mr Belder and to the Delegation.

Furthermore, he invited Mr Zozo to give him the names of the concerned villages of Dohuk: he will be glad to speak to the Governor of Dohuk to clarify the situation.

He mentioned that Kurdistan is receiving much of the around 150.000 refugees coming from Syria to Iraq and that the KRG is acting with its full capacity to help not only refugees from Syria, but also refugees coming to the Kurdistan Region from the rest of Iraq.

**Mr Jerjis** commented on the statement of Mr Ajgeiy by saying that Turkmen representatives PV\1001247 EN.doc 7/12 PE514021v01-00

that a hypothetical Delegation would meet in Kurdistan would probably be paid by the Kurds themselves to illustrate a non existent situation. As a matter of fact, there are 7 Turkmen fictitious political parties, sustained by the KRG, that do not promote any activities, nor do they publish press statements.

**Mr Ajgeiy** invited Mr Jerjis to suggest meeting people for which he feels they are independent, when a Delegation will come to Kurdistan. Mr Jerjis accepted this proposal.

**Mr** Chapman said that, despite being true sometimes that NGO representatives are under undue influence, the independent NGOs are well known and it is useful to meet them when visiting Iraq.

Mrs De Vries invited a possible visiting Delegation to speak also with religious leaders and with ordinary citizens, not only with politicians.

**Mrs Ekmektzoglou** replied to Mrs Gomes that EU Delegation in Iraq is meeting all interested parties, minorities included.

She herself, when visiting Iraq, had two meetings with civil society, and in these meetings the most consistent and representative groups were exactly minorities and women.

On the other side, the EU Delegation cannot travel around the country easily, due to security reasons. Nevertheless, minority representatives can come to pay a visit to the Delegation; they are always welcome and well received. Moreover, EU Delegation in Baghdad has numerous contacts with representatives of minorities in the CoR.

**Mr Al-Hayani** started by citing the Article 2 of the Iraqi Constitution, which guarantees full freedom of belief and religious expression to everybody.

He continued with Article 125, which foresees political, cultural and educational rights to minorities, and with Article 4, which allows Turkmen and Assyrian languages to be the official languages in constituencies where the density of respective populations is consistent.

He reminded that each minority has a minimum guaranteed quota for the number of seats in the Council of Representatives. This is not true however for Turkmens, simply because they have MPs in all political blocks and cover many important high level posts in Iraqi administration. They are actually not considered a minority, therefore Mr Al-Hayani showed astonishment that the EP considers them as such.

In addition to this extended set of rights, in many public and private schools languages and religions of minorities have been taught. All minority members have the right to join Security Forces and Administration. Christians and others are fleeing the country, it is true, but not since 2003, they started to go away much before, in 1993, due to general bad conditions and sanctions. He invited not to take out of the context the problems minorities are facing: actually, all the Iraqi population is facing severe problems.

**Mr Stevenson** concluded the meeting by agreeing with Mrs De Vries that a really representative sample of members of a minority, in their different capacities of politicians, citizens, and NGO representatives, should be listened to and met if possible.

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Πο ποκαμα μα πρεσσεσατεπα/Por invitación del presidente/Na pozvání předsedy/Efter indbydelse fra formanden/Auf Einladung des Vorsitzenden/Esimehe kutsel/Με πρόσκληση του Προέδρου/At the invitation of the Chair(wo)man/Sur l'invitation du président/Su invito del presidente/Pēc priekšsēdētāja uzaicinājuma/Pirmininkui pakvietus/Az elnök meghívására/Fuq stedina tal-President/Op uitnodiging van de voorzitter/Na zaproszenie Przewodniczącego/A convite do Presidente/La invitaţia preşedintelui/Na pozvanie predsedu/Na povabilo predsednika/Puheenjohtajan kutsusta/På ordförandens inbjudan

Mr Kamel Zozo, Chair of the Christian Human Rights Organisation for the Assyrian Community in Iraq;

Mr Delavar Ajgeiy, Head of the Mission, Kurdistan Regional Government Mission to the European Union;

Mr Sheth Jerjis, Chairman of the Iraqi Turkmen Human Rights Research Foundation, The Netherlands;

Mr Chris Chapman, Minority Rights Group, London;

Mrs Thirsa de Vries, Senior Programme Officer Iraq, IKV Pax Christi, Utrecht;

Съвет/Consejo/Rada/Rådet/Rat/Nõukogu/Συμβούλιο/Council/Conseil/Consiglio/Padome/Taryba/Tanács/Kunsill/Raad/Conselho/Consiliu/Svet/Neuvosto/Rådet (*)	
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Wakas Saad Alhayani - Iraqi Embassy, Muddathir Sabir - Iraqi Embassy, Alix Bricteux - UNPO, Souheir Edelbi - UNPO, Zana Kurda - KRG, Astrid Schrama, Merry Nelly M. Fitzgerald, EU-Turkmen friendship, Hassan Tawfiq-Walli Aydinli

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PPE	GIANNELLA Roberto
S&D	GUIRAO GALDON Maria Soledad
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DG FINS	
DG ITEC	
Правна служба/Servicio Jurídico/Právní služba/Juridisk Tjeneste/Juristischer Dienst/Õigusteenistus/Νομική Υπηρεσία/Legal Service/ Service juridique/Servizio giuridico/Juridiskais dienests/Teisės tarnyba/Jogi szolgálat/Servizz legali/Juridische Dienst/Wydział prawny/ Serviço Jurídico/Serviciu Juridic/Právny servis/Pravna služba/Oikeudellinen yksikkö/Rättstjänsten	
Секретариат на комисията/Secretaría de la comisión/Sekretariát výboru/Udvalgssekretariatet/Ausschusssekretariat/Komisjoni sekretariaat/Гραμματεία επιτροπής/Committee secretariat/Secrétariat de la commission/Segreteria della commissione/Komitejas sekretariāts/Komiteto sekretoriatas/A bizottság titkársága/Segretarjat tal-kumitat/Commissiesecretariaat/Sekretariat komisji/ Secretariado da comissão/Secretariat comisie/Sekretariat odbora/Valiokunnan sihteeristö/Utskottssekretariatet	
Rok KOZELJ, Robertine	o BABIC
Сътрудник/Asistente/Assistent/Assistent/Assistent/Boηθός/Assistant/Assistente/Palīgs/Padėjėjas/Asszisztens/Asystent/Pomočnik/Avustaja/Assistenter	

- \* (P) = Πρεμςεματεπ/Presidente/Předseda/Formand/Vorsitzender/Esimees/Πρόεδρος/Chair(wo)man/Président/Priekšsēdētājs/Pirmininkas/ Elnök/President/Voorzitter/Przewodniczący/Preşedinte/Predseda/Predsednik/Puheenjohtaja/Ordförande
  - (VP) = 3aместник-председател/Vicepresidente/Místopředseda/Næstformand/Stellvertretender Vorsitzender/Aseesimees/Αντιπρόεδρος/ Vice-Chair(wo)man/Vice-Président/Priekšsēdētāja vietnieks/Pirmininko pavaduotojas/Alelnök/Viċi President/Ondervoorzitter/ Wiceprzewodniczący/Vice-Presidente/Vicepreşedinte/Podpredseda/Podpredsednik/Varapuheenjohtaja/Vice ordförande
  - (M) = Член/Miembro/Člen/Medlem./Mitglied/Parlamendiliige/Μέλος/Member/Membro/Deputāts/Narys/Képviselő/ Membru/Lid/Członek/Membro/Membru/Člen/Poslanec/Jäsen/Ledamot
  - (F) = Дπъжностно πυще/Funcionario/Úředník/Tjenestemand/Beamter/Ametnik/Υπάλληλος/Official/Fonctionnaire/Funcionario/Ierēdnis/Pareigūnas/Tisztviselő/Uffiċjal/Ambtenaar/Urzędnik/Funcionário/Funcţionar/Úradník/Uradnik/Virkamies/Tjänsteman