

WRITTEN QUESTION E-1750/06

by Heide Rühle (Verts/ALE) and Cem Özdemir (Verts/ALE)
to the Commission

Subject: The situation of refugees from south-east Turkey and their problems returning to their villages

According to the Commission's reports, more than 1.5 million people fled their villages and hamlets in the predominantly Kurdish provinces of Turkey between 1985 and 1999 as a result of the ongoing civil conflict. Members of religious minorities in particular, such as Yezides and Assyrians, were caught between the two fronts. The refugees, who include a large number of Yezides and Assyrians, now live mainly in Turkish cities or in the EU Member States. The political situation has now stabilised to a point where a return would be possible in theory. However, this is often made impossible by the conditions in the places the refugees fled, e.g. the destruction or illegal occupation of homes, and local power structures. So-called village guards, generally paid and armed by the Turkish authorities, till the abandoned fields themselves. In order to prevent the rightful owners from returning, refugees who wish to return are threatened or deterred by demands for compensation for work carried out. The Turkish Government has set up a compensation programme for farmers that have been driven out, but it has not only proved inadequate but is also rarely used in practice, owing to the restrictive conditions. Given that refugees living in EU Member States are also set on returning, such as the Yezide families from the village of Magara in Idil (in the province of Sirnak), and many other predominantly Kurdish families, can the Commission answer the following questions?

1. Does the Commission have knowledge of the current situation of refugees who are victims of the political development described above?
2. Does the Commission intend to support the return of these refugees and to ensure their safety? What has been the Commission's experience in this regard under the EU's Return programme? How many applications were made, how much was given in funding and how much has remained unused? Should the application procedure be changed so that legal migrants may also benefit from it?
3. Is the Commission aware that some refugees wish to remain in cities e.g. Diyarbakir and Adana, for the time being and that these cities are overwhelmed by the resulting social problems? Does the Commission intend to aid the integration of these refugees and, if so, under which EU programme?
4. Is the Commission aware that religious minorities such as Yezides and Christian Assyrians are particularly under threat and that their return is often hampered by a lack of safety? How should the return of refugees be made easier or supported?