

WRITTEN QUESTION P-3137/09
by Georg Jarzembowski (PPE-DE)
to the Commission

Subject: Mor Gabriel monastery - recognition of the Aramaeans as a religious minority in Turkey

The Mor Gabriel monastery in Midyat, Mardin province, which was built in AD 397, is the spiritual centre for Syriac Orthodox Christians, the Aramaeans, in Turkey. Around 70 monks and nuns live in the monastery. It is visited by thousands of Aramaeans every year.

Since 2008, this over 1 600-year-old monastery has been the subject of a flood of court cases, in which the monastery stands accused of, among other things, 'unlawful settlement'. Certain of these proceedings have been brought by neighbouring villages represented by leading AKP politicians. If these proceedings are successful, there is a danger that the Aramaean monks and nuns will be forced out of the Mor Gabriel monastery, bringing to an end a 1 600-year-old non-Muslim tradition in south-eastern Turkey.

The Aramaean faith community is not recognised as a religious minority in Turkey. Communities not recognised as religious minorities in Turkey do not enjoy minority rights and are not allowed to train young people or to teach, and thereby pass on to the next generation, their faith or their language. Since 6 October 1997, the teaching of Aramaic, the language of Jesus used in the Syriac Orthodox Church, has been officially prohibited in the Republic of Turkey.

In the light of the above, I ask the Commission the following questions.

1. Is the Commission monitoring the proceedings against the Mor Gabriel monastery?
2. How does the Commission assess the proceedings against the Mor Gabriel monastery?
3. In the Commission's view, what status do the Christian Aramaean people have in Turkey?
4. Against this background, is religious freedom guaranteed in the Republic of Turkey?
5. Does the Commission view the facts that the teaching of Aramaic is prohibited and that the Aramaeans are not recognised as a religious minority as being a hindrance to the accession negotiations with Turkey?
6. Does the Commission intend to ensure, in the context of the accession negotiations with Turkey, that religious (but not officially recognised) minorities in Turkey obtain more rights and better protection?