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Aramaic – the language of Jesus

Motion for a resolution
tabled by Ms Carina HÄGG and other members of the Assembly

This motion has not been discussed in the Assembly and commits only those who have signed it

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Aramaic is best known as the language Jesus spoke. It is a Semitic language originating in the middle Euphrates. In 800-600 BC it spread from there to Syria and Mesopotamia. The oldest preserved inscriptions are from this period and written in Old Aramaic. In the Persian Empire, Aramaic became one of the official languages, today known as Biblical Aramaic. The Arabic texts in the Old Testament are in Biblical Aramaic. And Peshitta is a Bible translation from circa AD 100-200.

After the birth of Christ, Aramaic dialects were used as a literary language by Jews, Christians and Gnostic groups. These dialects are still used as a liturgical language by Jews, by Christians who refer to themselves as Assyrians, Syrians, Chaldeans and Nestorians, and by Mandeans. The dialects are grouped in West Aramaic and East Aramaic branches.

After the Muslim conquest, Aramaic declined as a spoken language and was replaced by Arabic. Today, four versions of Aramaic are spoken by some 3 000 000 speakers: Turabdinic, Urmic and Neo- Mandean, based on East Aramaic dialects, and the language of Maaloula in Syria, which has its roots in a West Aramaic dialect. Only Urmic and Assyrian are written languages. The Aramaic script is based on a version of the Phoenician alphabet. Both Hebrew and Arabic scripts are developments of the Aramaic script.

Studies of Aramaic are important in linguistics and philosophy, but are also relevant to other disciplines in the humanities such as history, cultural studies, comparative religion and comparative literature. But in its regions of origin the language is currently facing the threat of extinction. An enquiry is urgently needed into the status and condition of the language and the support it requires in order to develop and survive.

In recent decades, immigrant communities have taken the Aramaic language and its traditions with them to a number of countries, but at the same time the original language groups have been thinned out and the transmission of these traditions to new generations has been made more difficult. The language is important both as a form of communication and as a tradition for those groups whose native tongue it is. In addition, the language is of great significance for theological studies in the fields of Judaism, the early Christian Church and Islam. Currently, however, Aramaic has no “home”, there is no centre with responsibility for the language. It requires responsibility and co-operation between countries and seats of learning, and a dialogue with the language groups concerned to be able to develop the written language and ensure that the language survives.

Signed (see overleaf)

Signed[1]*:*

HÄGG Carina, Sweden
AGUIAR Manuela, Portugal, EPP/CD
BARGHOLTZ Helena, Sweden
DROMBERG Kaarina, Finland
ERR Lydie, Luxembourg, SOC
KROHN Irina, Finland
MORGANTI Fausta, San Marino
NAGHDALYAN Hermine, Armenia, ALDE
OHLSSON Carina, Sweden, SOC
PAPADOPOULOS Antigoni, Cyprus
SHAKHTAKHTINSKAYA Naira, Azerbaijan, EDG
VERMOT-MANGOLD Ruth-Gaby, Switzerland
ZULUETA Tana, de, Italy

1. ALDE: Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe
EDG: European Democrat Group
EPP/CD: Group of the European People's Party
SOC: Socialist Group