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Expropriation of the lands of the Mor Gabriel Monastery in Tur Abdin, Turkey

Written question No. 563 to the Committee of Ministers

by Mr Pieter OMTZIGT, Netherlands

The Mor Gabriel Monastery was founded in 397 AD. It is one of the oldest Christian Monasteries in the world. Apart from a number of short spells, it has been a place of worship for more than 1600 of the Syrian Orthodox church.

Cadastral decisions and a number of court cases threaten to take away most or all of its grounds, which the Monastery has possessed for ages and over which it has been paying taxes. This will be a direct threat to the survival of this religious and cultural heritage.

At present the Turkish authorities do not seem to be willing to recognize the Syrian Orthodox church. The community is therefore forced to teach its own language, Aramaic at for instance Oxford University but not in Turkey. The protection of minority rights under the treaty of Lausanne is not extended to the Syrian Orthodox community. This leaves Turkish citizens of the Syrian Orthodox community with less rights than for instance the Judaic, the Armenian-Orthodox or the Greek-Orthodox community, let alone the Muslim majority.

Mr Omtzigt,

To ask the Committee of Ministers,

- Does the Committee of Ministers regard the Mor Gabriel Monastery as a religious place, where people should be free to worship in the way they have been doing for more than 1600 years and does it agree that land should not be taken away from the Monastery and that the Monastery should be protected in its entirety as a place of great religious, cultural and historic importance?
- Should it in the eyes of the Committee of Ministers be possible for the Syrian Orthodox community to use and teach its own language, Aramaic in schools and benefit from at least the protection of the provisions for religious minorities in the treaty of Lausanne? Which action will the Committee of Ministers take towards Turkey to reach this higher degree of protection and minority rights for the Syrian Orthodox community?
- Will the Committee of Ministers send an observer to the court cases against the monastery to observe their fairness and report back to the Parliamentary Assembly?

Signed:

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