



Doc. 11971

24 June 2009

Rights of minorities in Turkey

Written question No. 570 to the Committee of Ministers

by Ms Kerstin LUNDGREN, Sweden

Throughout history there have been many changes in the territory where Turkey today exists. Different cultures and various regimes have influenced the daily life. That is the reason why this region is looked upon as the bridge between different people and different cultures. Of course it is also a big challenge for all of us.

During the years different rules have been applied to religious institutes working in the area. Since the year 397 there has been a Monastery in Midyat – Mor Gabriel. Today it is recognized as one of the oldest still functioning monasteries and of course of tremendous value for the people who have lived in the south-eastern part of Turkey for the last 3000 years. It is a cultural and religious heritage of great importance for all humanity – no matter of religious beliefs.

In the old days it was not possible for Non-Muslim institutions to own property or land. New interpretations of laws and regulations have recognized some religious minorities and their rights to own land. Others not. Due to the Constitution forests are state property. A once forested property might be developed – others are still open area. The way the authorities handle these problems may cause quarrels – even in a civic society.

In the now on-going process of new land registration it is inevitable that the past events create special problems. On top of the land registration process new questions have been raised about fairness in the judicial system and the status of property-rights when land is expropriated by the state even if the “owners” by custom have been paying taxes to the state for the now disputed land throughout the years. Can pictures taken more than 50 years ago, be a better proof of ownership than the accepted taxation? If so, does the state treat all discovered “de-forested” land in the same way, no matter who the owners are, whether developed or not?

If it is a question about Mor Gabriel it might also be a question whether their rights are handled in an equal way compared with other religious institutes.

It is of great importance that the rights of minorities are improved in all our member states in compliance with the Council of Europe conventions and that our common history is safeguarded.

In respect of this, Ms Lundgren,

To ask the Committee of Ministers

What initiatives is the Committee of Ministers ready to take to insure that the rights of Mor Gabriel, of religious minorities, are safeguarded in the ongoing process of land registration in Turkey?

Signed:

LUNDGREN Kerstin, Sweden, ALDE

