

## **Iraqi Turkmen: Minorities Need EU Support**

**Metin Kazak, Member of European Parliament, voices his concerns regarding EU's role in Kirkuk.**

*Below is an article written by Metin Kazak, MEP*

When people are kidnapped in Kirkuk they disappear. Some do return to their families after large ransoms are paid while others become the victims of their kidnapers. Bombings are a daily occurrence and no one knows the target of two terrorists that accidentally killed themselves assembling a bomb on Sunday. It is no wonder that the Turkmen community of Kirkuk and other so-called disputed areas are under siege. Many are searching either for a way out or the support at home and abroad needed to sustain their centuries-old communities that, like others, have been rocked by the instability that is only now beginning to ebb from Iraq.

As many of my colleagues that deal with Iraq have agreed, the European Union has to play a more joined-up and constructive role in Iraq as the United States draws down its forces before exiting completely on 31 December 2011. To date I have not seen the signs that this is happening. This sentiment is shared amongst colleagues, civil society, and observers from all manner of backgrounds, party, and experience.

The EU's delegation within Iraq remains woefully small, under-resourced, and under-staffed. More worrying is the complacent, or at worst disengaged, attitude that seems to characterise the approach to Iraq from the European Commission, and newly formed EEAS. The EU has projected itself as an international actor and has been believed, especially by those that follow it from afar, and in this I include Kirkuk.

Kirkuk reflects many of the gnawing deficiencies within Iraq today. The 2005 constitution has still to be formally adopted, a process for normalising relations between communities remains dormant, and all the while demographic change, dislocation and insecurity is eating away at Turkmen communities, livelihoods and futures as the city's cultural fabric is eroded bomb by bomb. Every week Turkmen professionals, including much needed doctors, are leaving after facing death threats, intimidation or discrimination in the workplace. Their children have limited prospects with little if any tuition in their mother tongue, excluded from state jobs, and with no signs that the thousands of property claims will be resolved soon.

But when the Subcommittee on Human Rights convened on 5 December 2011 it did so with a clear desire – to raise awareness of the situation facing the Turkmen of Iraq and to make the first step in identifying the action that should – and can – be taken to safeguard the future of Iraq's communities, of which Turkmen are the third largest. It was a meeting believe strongly has been long overdue and the interest from colleagues and the public was a demonstration of the European Parliament acting in concert with the real interests of policy makers and European citizens.

The message from invited academics was also clear, namely that the situation in Kirkuk *is* acute and the risks *are* real. In identifying the dangers, the existing and mostly failed initiatives to solve them, and drawing comparisons I believe we are closer to understanding one of the world's most complex conflicts.

We cannot pretend that a solution is easy or imminent but we know that time is running. The coming year will be a time when my colleagues and I intend to support the discussions into community security, property reparations, multi-lingual education, confidence building measures, and parliamentary capacity building needed to help make a solution realisable. The European institutions must be part of this and I hope to bring to their attention the realities facing Turkmen and their neighbours today.

Soon a new year will be dawning for the EU in Iraq and with new years should come resolutions. The EU has to resolve to demonstrate its commitment to the people of Iraq as a whole and to the Turkmen especially. As a community the Turkmen have been listening to the EU make promises for too long and for almost a decade they have seen nothing. That must change in 2012.