

Doc. 11006

7 July 2006

The cultural situation of the Kurds

Report

Committee on Culture, Science and Education

Rapporteur: Lord Russell-Johnston, United Kingdom, Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe

Summary

With this report the Assembly draws attention to the cultural situation of the 25 to 30 million Kurds who live mainly in the mountainous region where Iran, Iraq, Syria and Turkey meet and who constitute one of the largest "stateless nations" in the world.

The Assembly reaffirms that cultural and linguistic diversity are precious resources that enrich the European heritage and reinforce the identity of each country and individual. It proposes the assistance of the Council of Europe to help the countries concerned in the protection of this particular culture.

The Assembly encourages Turkey, as a Council of Europe member state, but also Iran, Iraq and Syria to acknowledge that the Kurdish language and culture are part of the heritage of their own country, that they are a richness that is worth being preserved and not a threat to be combated and asks them to take the necessary measures.

A. Draft Resolution

1. Further to its reports on Gypsies in Europe (1993), on Yiddish culture (1996), on the Aromanians (1997), on endangered Uralic minority cultures (1998) and on the Csángó minority culture in Romania (2001), the Assembly wishes to draw attention to the cultural situation of the Kurds.
2. The Parliamentary Assembly dealt with other issues related to the Kurds in its reports on the honouring of obligations and commitments by Turkey ([Doc. 9120](#) of 2001 and [Doc. 10111](#) of 2004); and on the humanitarian situation of the displaced Kurdish population in Turkey ([Doc. 9391](#) of 2002)
3. The question of precisely where the Kurds come from remains an enigma. For the purpose of this resolution, the Kurds are an ethnic group whose mother tongue is Kurdish. They come primarily from the Zagros-Taurus mountain systems, the mountainous areas where Turkey, Iran and Iraq meet.

4. The number of Kurds is not known as none of the countries where they mainly live (namely Iran, Iraq, Syria and Turkey) include ethnicity in their population census. Estimates range from 25 to 30 million, making them one of the largest "stateless nations".
5. Kurds are speakers of Kurdish, a member of the north-western subdivision of the Iranian branch of the Indo-European family of languages. It is fundamentally different from Semitic Arabic and Altaic Turkish. Modern Kurdish divides into several major groups, the larger of which being the Kurmânji group. These are supplemented by scores of sub-dialects.
6. The situation of the Kurds varies considerably between the different countries where they live. In Iraq some 5 million Kurds have been enjoying a status of almost independence since the 1991 war. In Iran Kurds have no rights other than cultural: music and folklore but no education. In Syria they have no rights at all and even their music is forbidden.
7. For many decades the Kurds were not recognised by the Turkish authorities. In 2004, this situation changed with the broadcasting in Kurdish dialects on the Turkish National Television and the permitting of Kurdish language courses. Books, records and concerts in Kurdish are no longer forbidden. Two private regional television channels and a radio station started brief Kurdish-language broadcasts for the first time on 23 March 2006.
8. Some Kurds have been associated with so-called "honour killings" but this barbaric practice does not concern Kurds alone. It prevails in the most backward (rural) areas of the Middle East. Education and economic development go hand in hand with the decrease of such practices. Women's associations are playing an important role in Iraq and in Turkey.
9. Many inhabitants of the whole region need to modernise their attitudes. The great majority of Kurds are aware that Europe is a positive thing and place hope in their common future either within or with Europe. They should also be aware that a country where "honour killings" is still accepted by some as a part of their "traditions" is a country which has no place in the Europe of human rights.
10. More than one million Kurds live in Western Europe and there are Kurdish cultural institutions in most European countries where a significant Kurdish population is settled. The Kurdish diaspora has also played a major political role in making known, to Western public opinion, the fate of the Kurds in the various countries of origin.
11. The Assembly recalls other texts which it has adopted on related matters, notably [Recommendation 928](#) (1981) on the educational and cultural problems of minority languages and dialects in Europe, [Recommendation 1283](#) (1996) on history and the learning of history in Europe and [Recommendation 1740](#) (2006) on the place of mother tongue in school education.
12. Diversity of cultures and languages should be seen as a precious resource that enriches our European heritage and also reinforces the identity of each country and individual. Assistance on the European level, and in particular from the Council of Europe, is needed to protect this particular culture.
13. The Assembly would therefore encourage Turkey, as a Council of Europe member State, to address the "Kurdish issue" in a comprehensive manner and not only from a security point of view.
14. In the field of culture, the Assembly recommends that the competent Turkish authorities take the following measures:
 - 14.1. ensuring the protection of the main Kurdish languages by signing, ratifying and implementing the European Charter for Regional and Minority languages with reference to the Kurdish languages spoken in Turkey;
 - 14.2. ensuring the possibility of education in the mother tongue, in addition to the official language, in particular through teacher training;
 - 14.3. informing Kurdish parents of the different linguistic possibilities and issue instructions on how to apply for what is available;

- 14.4. encouraging university courses on Kurdish language and literature;
 - 14.5. recognising and supporting Kurdish cultural associations and engaging in a dialogue with them with a view to co-operation in the protection of the Kurdish language and culture;
 - 14.6. putting an end to the unreasonably high administrative hurdles faced by Kurds in their cultural activities;
 - 14.7. paying particular attention to the correct registration of the Kurds at the next official census;
 - 14.8. promoting access to modern mass-media facilities to Kurdish speakers. Financial support should come from within the Kurdish community to enable the development of the written press, radio and television;
 - 14.9. setting up further local centres in Turkey for the promotion of Kurdish culture with a view to raising awareness of and respect for minorities.
15. The Assembly also urges the governments of Iran, Iraq and Syria to acknowledge that Kurdish language and culture are part of the heritage of their own country, that they are richness worth being preserved and not a threat to be combated and asks them to take the necessary measures in the light of the present resolution, and in particular in the field of language.

B.Explanatory memorandum,

by Lord Russell-Johnston, Rapporteur

I. Foreword

1. The Parliamentary Assembly dealt with issues related to the Kurds in its reports on the honouring of obligations and commitments by Turkey ([Doc. 9120](#) of 2001 and [Doc. 10111](#) of 2004); on the humanitarian situation of the displaced Kurdish population in Turkey ([Doc. 9391](#) of 2002) and indirectly on the cultural aspects of the Ilisu Dam Project ([Doc. 9301](#) of 2002).
2. The aim of the present report is to draw the Assembly's attention to the cultural situation of a people of between 20 and 35 million who can be found not only in Turkey and in many places in Europe but also in Iran, Iraq and Syria. It is not my intention to provide political solutions to political problems.
3. The fact that many millions of Kurds live in Council of Europe member states justifies the Assembly's interest in their cultural situation.
4. For the purpose of this report, the Kurds are those whose mother tongue is Kurdish. They come primarily from the Zagros-Taurus mountain systems, the mountainous areas where Turkey, Iran and Iraq meet.

II. Introduction

5. A first motion for a resolution on Kurdish cultural heritage was tabled in February 2001 and referred to the Committee. Different rapporteurs were successively appointed and then the war in Iraq made impossible any fact-finding mission.
6. A second motion on the cultural situation of the Kurds was tabled in March 2004 and referred to the Committee. I was appointed rapporteur.
7. In June 2004 I visited Diyarbakir, Mardin, Van, Hakkari, Ankara and Istanbul and met Kurdish institutes and cultural centres, local authorities, non-governmental organisations, Turkish MPs from Kurdish regions, the Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs – Abdullah Gül, the Minister of State responsible for broadcasting and the Director of Turkish Radio and television. Two important events took place during this visit: the release from prison of Leyla Zana and

three other former parliamentarians of Kurdish origin and the first ever broadcast in the Kurdish language by the Turkish National Television. It was not envisaged at that time to visit Iran or Syria and a short visit to northern Iraq was not authorised by the Assembly Bureau.

8. In November 2004 I took part in and addressed a conference on "The EU, Turkey and the Kurds" at the European Parliament in Brussels.

9. In the impossibility of visiting Kurdish communities in Iran, Iraq and Syria, the Committee organised a hearing on the cultural situation of those communities and also that of the Kurdish diaspora, which took place in Paris on 18 January 2006. (see appendix)

III.

The name of the Kurds

10. Dr Mehrdad R. Izady says that there is evidence to push the origin of the word 'Kurd' back at least to the early 4th millennium BC, if not earlier⁷. According to Piotr Steinkeller, professor of Akkadian and Sumerian languages at Harvard University, the Akkadian term 'Kurtei' denoted an indeterminate portion or groups of inhabitants of the Zagros (and eastern Taurus) mountains. On the other hand, to their end in the 6th century BC, the Babylonians loosely (and apparently pejoratively) referred to almost everyone who lived in the Zagros-Taurus system a "Qutil," including the Medes. But Babylonian records also attest to many more specific sub divisional names such as the Mardi, Lullubi, Kardaka and Qardu, the last two of which have all been used frequently in the controversy over the roots and antiquity of the ethnic term 'Kurd' and the question of the presence of a general ethnic designator.

11. Polybius in his history reporting the events of 221-220 BC and Strabo in his geography seem to be the earliest Western sources having made mention of the Kurds with their present ethnic name, Cyrtii the Kurti. Historians Livy, Pliny, Tacitus and much later, Procopius, also mention this ethnic name for the native population of Media and parts of Anatolia in classical times. Ptolemy inadvertently provides us with an array of Kurdish tribal names when he records them as they appear as toponyms designating their locations. For example, Bagraoandene for the Bagrawands or Bakrans of Diyarbakir, Belcanea for the Belikans of Antep, Tigranoandene for the Tirigans of Hakkar, Sophene for the Subhans of Elazig, Dersene for the Darsimis and Bokhtanoi for the Bohtans (Bokhtans). These tribes are still with us today.

12. The northern Zagros and Anatolia once teemed with a variety of related groups who spoke Iranian tongues. About 2000 years ago, many, such as the Iranian Pontians, Commagenes, Cappadocians, Western Medes and Indic Mitannis (like the earlier Hurrian Mannas, Lullubis, Saubarus, Kardakas and Qutills) had been totally absorbed into a new Kurdish ethnic pool. They are among the many mountain inhabiting peoples whose assimilation genetically, culturally, socially and linguistically formed the contemporary Kurds. Kurdish diversity of race, tradition and spoken dialects encountered today point in the direction of this compound identity.

13. Reflecting on the gradual assimilation of one of these groups into the larger Kurdish ethnic pool, Pliny the Elder tries to reconcile what appeared to him to be a name change for a familiar people. Enumerating the nations of the known world, he states, "Joining on to Adiabene (region centred on Arbil in modern Iraq) are the people formerly called the Carduchi and now the Cordueni, past whom flows the river Tigris...".

14. These Carduchi mentioned by Pliny are the same people whom Xenophon and his ten thousand Greek troops encountered nearly three centuries earlier when retreating through the area in 401 BC. Xenophon called them the Kardukhoi. The name is the same as that of Kardaka (the people who provided a portion of the Babylonian royal guards before 530 BC), and the Qarduim mentioned frequently in the Talmud.

15. Alternatively David McDowall indicates that the term "Cyrtii" was first (in the second century BC) applied to Seleucid or Parthian mercenaries from the Zagros and that by the time of the Islamic conquests one thousand years later the term "Kurd" had a socio-economic rather than ethnic meaning².

IV. Language

16. Kurds are speakers of Kurdish, a member of the north-western subdivision of the Iranian branch of the Indo-European family of languages. It is fundamentally different from Semitic Arabic and Altaic Turkish. Modern Kurdish divides into major groups supplemented by scores of sub-dialects. The most popular vernacular is that of Kurmânji (also known as Kirmancha or Bahdinani), spoken by about two-thirds of the Kurds today primarily in Turkey, Syria, and the former Soviet Union).

17. Sorani, with about 6 million speakers, primarily in Iraq and Iran comes next.

18. To the far north of the region inhabited by the Kurds, along the Kizil Irmak and Murat rivers in Turkey, Dimili (less accurately but more commonly known as Zâzâ or Zazaki) dialect is spoken by at least 3 million Kurds.

19. In the far south of the area, both in Iraq and Iran, the Gurâni dialect is spoken by about 3 million Kurds. Gurâni, along with two related sub-dialects: Laki and Awramani, merit special attention for its wealth of sacred and secular literature stretching over a millennium.

20. In Iraq and Iran a modified version of the Persian-Arabic alphabet has been adapted to Sorani. The Kurds of Turkey have recently embarked on an extensive campaign of publication in the Kurmânji dialect by publishing houses in Europe. These employed a modified form of the Latin alphabet. The Kurds of the former Soviet Union first began writing Kurdish in the Armenian alphabet in the 1920s, followed by Latin in 1927, then Cyrillic in 1945, and now in both Cyrillic and Latin. Gurâni dialects continue to employ the Persian alphabet without any change. Dimili now uses the same modified Latin alphabet as Kurmânji for print.

V. Literature

21. This chapter is based on work by Joyce Blau, Professor of Kurdish language and civilization at the National Institute of Oriental Languages and Civilization of the University of Paris.

22. There has always been an intellectual elite amongst the Kurds who, for centuries, expressed themselves in the conqueror's language. Numerous Kurdish intellectuals wrote just as easily in Arabic and in Persian as in Turkish. This is shown in the 13th century by the Kurdish historian and biographer, Ibn al-Assir, who wrote in Arabic, whilst Idris Bitlisi, a high Ottoman dignitary, of Kurdish Origin, wrote the *Hesht Behesht* (The Eight Paradises) in 1501, which recounts the first story of the eight first Ottoman sultans, in Persian. The Prince Sharaf Khan, sovereign of the Kurdish principality of Bitlis, also wrote his "History of the Kurdish nation", at the end of the 16th century, a brilliant medieval source on the history of the Kurds, in Persian.

23. It's difficult to date the origin of Kurdish literature. Very little is known about the pre-Islamic culture of the Kurds. Moreover, only some of the texts have been published and it's not known how many disappeared in the torment of endless conflicts which have been occurring on Kurdish territory for several centuries.

24. The first well-known Kurdish poet is Ell Herîrî, who was born in 1425 in the Hakkari region and who died around 1495. His favourite subjects are already those which his compatriots will treat most often: love of the motherland, its natural beauties and the charm of its girls.

25. The first famous literary Kurdish monuments date from the 16th century. They are born at the same and in opposition to the consolidation of Ottoman and Persian neighbours.

26. The most famous poet from the end of the 16th and beginning of the 17th century is the sheik Ehmede Nishani, known as Melaye Jeziri. He was born in Jezire Bohtan, and like many well read people of the time, he knew Arabic, Persian, and Turkish well. He was also influenced by Arabo-Persian literary culture. His poetic work of more than 2,000 verses has remained popular and is still republished regularly. He travelled much and made numerous disciples, who tried to

imitate their master by adopting his language, which from then on became the literary language.

27. Gradually the feeling of belonging to the same entity develops amongst the Kurds. This epoch will see the birth of the poet Ehmedi Khani, native of the Bayazid, who defines in his *Mem-o-Zin*, a long poem of more than 2,650 distiches, the elements of Kurdish independence.

28. In the 19th century, following the general expansion of national liberation movements at the heart of the Ottoman empire, and although strongly tinged with tribalism, a Kurdish national movement will slowly develop. A new literature blossoms with a certain delay due to distance and isolation. The authors who had received a classical education during their youth, given at a high level in the *Imedrese'*, the Koranic schools, know Arabic and Persian well. The themes and images of their poetry are inspired, to a large extent by the Persian tradition, but the poets display great imagination in the renewal of symbols and the musicality of verse.

29. This poetry has firstly a religious tonality, - this is the epoch of the blossoming of mystic brotherhoods - but it is the patriotic and lyrical poets who have the most success. Mela Khidri Ehmedi Shaweyisi Mikhayill, better known as Nali is the first great poet to write his poetry mainly in central Kurdistan.

30. The birth of the press accompanies the progress of the Kurdish national movement and the first review, with the significant name "Kurdistan" appears in Cairo, in Egypt, in 1898.

31. Having lived until then in multi-cultural and multi-lingual societies, at the end of First World War the Kurds find themselves divided between four states: Turkey, Persia, Iraq and Syria, legally sovereigns but politically subordinated to the world game of superpowers. These states very quickly found themselves confronted with the problems of the diversity of languages. The literary production of the Kurds and the development of the language will from now on be dependent on the freedoms they acquire in each of the states, which share their territory.

32. Iraq, under British mandate, recognizes a minimum of cultural rights to its Kurdish minority. Although the latter only comprises 18% of the total Kurdish population, the centre of the Kurdish cultural life is transported to Iraq, where production will develop from the second half of the 1920s. The Kurds come out of isolation and contact with the West - translation of Pushkin, Schiller, Byron and particularly Lamartine - completely changed the basic ideas in the poetic field.

33. The beginning of modernity distances poetry from its traditional paths. An effort of "kurdisation" of the Kurdish language, stripping it of the lexical and formal loans from the dominant languages, is pursued by the authors of the time.

34. In a second stage many new styles are adopted, including the Lyric-epic drama and dramatic poetry. The incomparable Goran was certainly the greatest artist of the rupture with tradition. In the 1930s, the syllabic verses close to popular poetry, the prose poem and the free verse make their entry in poetry.

35. Prose springs with the development of reviews and magazines, which convey the first poetic and narrative essays, novels and historic-legendary novels, which confirms the vitality of Kurdish. The Romantic Movement is reinforced and the themes are characterized then by a more dynamic development of the subject. They deal with social problems, women, education, family. Others however point more clearly against the injustice and the exploitation of the peasants. One of the most brilliant representatives of this style is Ibrahim Ahmed who publishes, in 1959, *Körawarî* (misery) a collection of realistic novels, and especially *Janî Gal* (the suffering of the people) which is published in Baghdad in 1973, the first novel written in central Kurdish.

36. In the USSR, in spite of their small number - they represent less than 2% of the Kurdish total population - the Kurds are recognized as a "nationality", without autonomy but with the

recognition of their language. For this reason, their communities enjoyed the encouragement of the State and had schools, printing presses and publishing houses. An elite developed there. The collections of poems of Djasimê Djalîl, born in 1908, are published after the second world war. Arab Shamo, the most fertile of the novelists, publishes its works since 1935.

37. In Syria under French mandate, the inter-war period marks the blooming of Kurdish literature. Kurdish and French intellectuals gather in Damas around prince Djeladet Bedir Khan and his brother Kamuran. They become the principal artists of the renaissance of the northern literature. They develop a Latin alphabet that they disseminate through the Hawar review, around which an intense work reveals the possibilities of northern Kurdish as a modern literary language.

38. In Turkey, after the military success of Mustafa Kemal against Greece, a new treaty signed at Lausanne in 1923, confirmed Turkish sovereignty over a large part of the Kurdish territory and over more than 52% of the total Kurdish population. In the name of State unity, Mustafa Kemal did not authorise the teaching of Kurdish and its public use. Most of the intellectuals left the country. Between 1950 and 1971 the Turkish regime gave itself a tinge of bourgeois democracy and use of the Kurdish language was authorised again. A new Kurdish intelligentsia formed.

39. In Iran, where more than a quarter of the Kurdish population live, the authorities conduct a harsh policy of assimilation of their Kurdish minority.

40. The great period of Kurdish literature in this area is that of the Republic of Kurdistan which only last eleven months at the end of the Second World War. Despite its brevity, it provokes a remarkable development in Kurdish literature. Numerous poets emerge, such as the poets Hejar and Hemin. The repression which follows the fall of the Republic forces the intellectuals to go into exile, mostly in Iraq.

41. Under pressure from Kurdish revolutionaries gathered around Dr. Abdul Rahman Ghassemlou, the Iranian authorities were forced to tolerate the publication of various Kurdish works. If literary creation remains forbidden, censorship authorizes the publication of monuments from the Kurdish literature of the 19th century, some of which will be translated into Persian. Manuscripts depicting the history of Kurdish dynasties are finally published and dictionaries, grammar books and encyclopaedias by Kurdish personalities who marked their epoch, religious or not, appear in Kurdish and Persian.

42. The Kurdish literary life in Iraq suffered the repercussions of the failure of the long Kurdish insurrection and the pitiless war between Iran and the Iraq.

43. The Kurdish intellectuals choose the path of exile and take refuge in most of the Western countries and, remarkably, they will be at the source of a real renaissance of the "Kurmanjî" literature. Supported by several hundred thousand Kurdish emigrant workers, the Kurdish intellectuals gather together and make every effort to promote their language. Poets and writers print their works firstly in the reviews published by the Kurdish publishing houses in Sweden. The Swedish authorities, in fact, who favour the cultural development of emigrant communities, allocate the Kurds a relatively large publication budget. Around twenty newspapers, magazines, and reviews come out from the end of the 1970s. Children's books, alphabet primers and translations of historical works on the Kurds come out. Literary creation is encouraged. Mr Emin Bozarslan brings out charming children's stories and Rojen Barnas collections of poems, whilst the journalist Mahmut Baksi, member of the Swedish Writers' Union, publishes a novel and stories for children in Kurdish, Turkish and Swedish; Mehmet Uzun brings out two realist novels. Also in Sweden Malmisanij publishes the first Zazaki-Turkish dictionary.

44. Two hundred titles have appeared in ten years. It's the biggest Kurdish literary production, outside Iraq. This new blossoming of Kurdish intellectuals, poets and writers illustrates in a most striking way the parallelism between cultural freedom and development.

VI. History of the area

45. The contents of this section are drawn mainly from a lecture on "Exploring Kurdish Origins" given by Dr Mehrdad R. Izady at Harvard University on 10 March 1993.
46. The question of Kurdish origins, who the Kurds are and where they come from, has for too long remained an enigma. A short answer could be, for example, that Kurds are the end-product of numerous layers of cultural and genetic material superimposed over thousands of years of internal migrations, immigrations, cultural innovations and importations. But identifying the roots and the course of evolution of present Kurdish ethnic identity calls for the study of each of the many layers of these human movements and cultural influences, as many and as early in time as is currently possible. At present, at least five distinct layers can be identified with various degrees of certainty: Halafian, Ubaidian, Hurrian, Indo-European and subsequent.
47. The earliest evidence thus far of a distinct culture shared by the people inhabiting the Zagros-Taurus mountains relates to the period of the '**Halaf Culture**' which emerged around 6000 BC. Named from the ancient mound of Tel Halaf in what is now Syria, this culture is best known for its style of exquisitely painted, delicately designed, pottery.
48. The Halaf cultural period ends with the arrival, circa 5300 BC, of a new culture, and quite likely a new people: the **Ubaidians**. 'Ubaid Culture' expanded from the plains of Mesopotamia into the mountains. The Ubaidians, or proto-Euphratians, as they are sometimes called, caused a hybrid culture to emerge in the mountains, comprised of their own cultural heritage and that of the earlier Halaf. It predominated in most of the region and in Mesopotamia for the ensuing 1000 years.
49. Of the language or ethnic affiliation of the Ubaidians we know nothing beyond conjecture. However, it is they who gave the names Tigris and Euphrates to the rivers of Mesopotamia, as well as the names of almost all of the cities we now recognize as Sumerian. The cultural impact of the Ubaidians on the mountain communities could have been vast, though apparently it was not particularly deep.
50. By approximately 4300 BC, a new culture, and possibly a new people, came to dominate the mountains: the **Hurrians**. Of the Hurrians we know much more, and the volume of our knowledge becomes greater with time. We know, for example, that the Hurrians spread far and wide into the Zagros-Taurus mountain systems and intruded for a time on the neighbouring plains of Mesopotamia and the Iranian Plateau. However, they never expanded far from the mountains. Their economy was surprisingly integrated and focused, along with their political bonds, which ran generally parallel to the Zagros-Taurus mountains rather than radiating out to the lowlands, as was the case during the preceding Ubaid cultural period. Economic exchanges between mountain and plain remained secondary in importance, judging by the archaeological remains of goods and their origins.
51. The Hurrians spoke a language or languages of the north-eastern group of the Caucasian family of languages, distantly related to modern Lezgian and, by extension, to Georgian and Laz. The direction of their expansion is not yet understood and by no means should be taken as having been north-south, in other words, as an expansion out of the Caucasus. (It may well be that it was the Hurrians who introduced Caucasian languages into the Caucasus.)
52. By the middle of the 2nd millennium BC, the culture and people of the area appear to have been unified under a Hurrian identity. The fundamental legacy of the Hurrians to the present culture of the Kurds is manifest in the realm of religion, mythology, martial arts, and even genetics. Nearly two-thirds of Kurdish tribal, topological and urban names are also likely of Hurrian origin: Buhtan, Talaban, Jelali, Barzan; Mardin, Ziwiyah and Dinawar, to name a few. Mythological and religious symbols present in the art of the later Hurrian dynasties such as the Mannaeans of today's Iran, and the Lullus of the south, present in part what can still be observed in the Kurdish ancient religion of Yazdanism, better known today by its various denominations, such as Alevism, Yezidism, and Yarsanism (Ahl-i Haqq).
53. Many tattooing motifs still used by traditional Kurds to decorate their bodies are replicas of those which appear on Hurrian figurines. One such is the combination that incorporates serpent, sun disc, dog and comb motifs. In fact some of these Hurrian tattoo motifs are also present in the religious decorative arts of the Yezidi Kurds.

54. The portrait of a culturally homogenized region was not to last. As early as 2000 BC, the vanguards of the **Indo-European** speaking tribal immigrants, such as the Hittites and Mittanis, had arrived in south-western Asia. While the Hittites only marginally affected the mountain communities, the Mittanis settled in the area and influenced the natives in several fields worthy of note, in particular the introduction of knotted rug weaving. Even rug designs introduced by the Mittanis and recognizable in Assyrian floor carvings remain the hallmark of Kurdish rugs and kelims. The modern mina-khani and chwar-such styles are basically the same as those the Assyrians depicted nearly 3000 years ago.

55. The avalanche of Indo-European tribes, however, was to come about 1200 BC, raining havoc on the economy and settled culture in the mountains and lowlands alike. The north was settled by the Haiks, known to us as the Armenians, while the rest of the mountains became targets of settlement for various Iranian peoples, such as the Medes, Persians, Scythians, Sarmathians and Sagarthians (whose name survives in the name of the Zagros mountains).

56. By 850 BC, the last Hurrian states had been extinguished by the invading Aryans, whose sheer numbers of immigrants must have been considerable. They succeeded over time in changing the Hurrian language(s) of the people in the area, as well as their genetic make-up. By the 3rd century BC, the Aryanization of the mountains was virtually complete.

57. When the ethnic Medes and Persians arrived on the eastern flanks of the Zagros around 1000 BC, a massive internal migration from the northern and central Zagros toward the southern Zagros was in progress. By the 6th century BC, many large tribes which we now find among the Kurds were also present in the southern Zagros, in Fars and even Kirman. As early as the 3rd century BC, the 'Cyrtii' ('Kurti') are reported by Greek, and later by Roman authors, to inhabit as much the southern (Persia or Pars/Fars) as the central and northern Zagros. This was to continue for another millennium, when early Islamic sources also enumerate tens of Kurdish tribes in the southern Zagros. In time they were assimilated into the local populations. In fact, this has been a source of puzzlement for many modern writers who now find very few if any Kurds in the southern Zagros.

58. The Aryan influence on the local Hurrian people must have been very similar to what transpired in Anatolia two thousand years later when Turkic nomads broke in after the battle of Manzikert. This did not mean that the old legacy ceased to exist. On the contrary, the rich and ancient Anatolian cultures and peoples continued their traditional existence under the new Turkish identity, albeit with the addition of some genetic and cultural material brought over by the nomads.

59. Architecture, domestic and monumental, farming techniques, herding practices, decorative arts and religion remained much the same in Hurrian region following Aryan settlement, while progressively the people came to speak an Iranian language and to admit new deities into their earlier pantheons. No abrupt changes can be seen in the culture of the area while, under Aryan pressure, this linguistic and genetic shift was taking place. Nearly every aspect of contemporary Kurdish culture can be traced to this massive Hurrian substructure, with the Aryan superstructure generally quite superficial.

60.

From the time the Kurds are Aryanized until the 16th century of our era Kurdish culture remained basically unchanged despite the introduction of new empires, religions and immigrants. The Kurds remained essentially the followers of the ancient Hurrian religion of Yazdanism and, according to certain linguists, spoke an Iranian language that medieval Islamic sources termed Pahlawani. Pahlawani survives today in the dialects of Gurani and Dimili (Zaza). Other linguists propose that Kurdish is closer to other ancient languages such as that of the Parths, the language of "Avesta" (supposedly Zarathushtra's book) and the language of the Medes. Only the loss of the southern Zagros, via metamorphosis of Kurds into Lurs, and the expansion of Kurds into the Elburz, Caucasus and Pontus mountains are noteworthy events.

61. After the Aryan settlement, the region continued to receive **new peoples and cultural influences**, none however stronger than the Aryan influence in altering Kurdish cultural and ethnic identity. Large numbers of Aramaic-speaking people never seem to have settled in the area, although through the introduction of Judaism, and later Christianity, many Kurds relinquished Kurdish and spoke Aramaic instead. In examining contemporary Kurdish culture, Judaism appears to have exercised a much deeper and more lasting influence on indigenous

Kurdish culture and religion than Christianity, despite the fact that most ethnic neighbours of the Kurds between the 5th and 12th centuries were Christians.

62. The role of the Arabs and the impact of Islam on Kurdish society and culture are less difficult to survey. The Arabian peninsula was experiencing a runaway population explosion when the advent of Islam translated that pressure into a massive outburst of Arabian nomads and brought about their settlement of foreign lands. Arab tribes settled near almost every major town and agricultural centre today inhabited by the Kurds. By the 10th century, the Islamic historians and geographers report Arabian populations living among the Kurds from the northern shores of Lake Van to Dinawar and from Hamadan to Malatya. These eventually assimilated, leaving behind only their genetic imprint (as the darker-complexioned city Kurds) and little else. The same was true of the Turkic settlement and its cultural influence. Several centuries of Turkic nomadic passage through the region, beginning with the 12th century, rained havoc on the settled Kurds and their economy, as Aryan migrations had done some 2000 years earlier. The Turkic cultural legacy was in itself nil, but the forces of internal change it unleashed within Kurdish society turned out to be nearly as decisive as the Aryan invasion and settlement. The area would surely have been Turkified under this tremendous nomadic pressure and destructiveness, had it not been for the Kurdish nomads, the Kurmanj, who swiftly came out of the Hakkari highlands to fill nearly every niche left vacant by the agriculturist Kurds and less energetic nomads. The Turkic nomads were primarily steppe nomads, and proved less of a match for the Kurmanj mountain nomads in the rough terrain of the Zagros-Taurus mountains. Some Kurds were Turkified to be sure; e.g., the tribes of Dumbuli, Barani, Shaqaqi and Jewanshir. Conversely, many Kurdish tribes with Turkic names (e.g., Karachul, Chol, Oghaz, Devalu, Karaqich, Chichak) are in fact assimilated Turkish and Turkmen tribes who kept only their names and were in every other respect Kurdified.

63. This massive tribal dislocation that could have subsided over time became more destructive in the 16th century. The decisive turn for massive nomadization of the Kurds was made by the long Persian-Ottoman wars and particularly the Safavids' "scorched earth" policy. More important still was the deadly economic blow brought about by the shift to sea transport of East-West commerce which also commenced at the turn of the 16th century. Together they heralded the beginning of the end for much of the social fabric and sophisticated culture of the Kurds as it had existed since the time of the Medes. The agriculturalist, urban based Kurdish culture and society were to shift to a nomadic economy under a newly assumed identity. The nomadized Kurdish farmers eventually accepted Shafiite Sunni Islam from the Kurmanj nomads and began speaking the vernacular of Kurmanji a close kin to the old Pahlawani. In time the older Kurdish society - religion and language notwithstanding - was marginalized and physically pushed to the peripheries of the region. Today, nearly three quarters of the Kurds speak various dialects of Kurmanji and similar numbers practice Shafute Sunni Islam. In a sense, the "Kurmanj" assimilated the "Kurds" and in the process they assumed the old ethnic name and inherited all that was left of the older culture.

64. There is, as should be expected, a strong correlation between the practice of the ancient Yazdani religion and the speaking of Pahlawani, as there is also a close connection between being a Muslim and speaking Kurmanji. The shift from the former to the latter identity is accelerating and seems very likely to totally submerge the residual Pahlawani-Yazdani identity of the past. Only a shrinking number of Kurds still speak Pahlawani in the form of the dialects of Dimili (pejoratively known as Zaza) in Turkey, and as Gurani, Laki and Awramani in Iran and Iraq. The old religion of Yazdanism too is still practiced as Alevism, Yezidism and Yarsanism (Ahl-i-Haqq) but these too are shrinking in number.

VII.

Current situation

65. The number of Kurds is not known as none of the countries where they live include ethnicity in their population census. Estimates range from 25 to 30 million, making them one of the largest "nations without state".

66. However, as Mehrdad Izady stated in 1992, "it is an astonishing fact, if not an outright embarrassment, that not a single archaeological object has ever been identified as "Kurdish" in any museum anywhere in the world"³.

67. The situation of the Kurds varies considerably between the different countries where they live.

Turkey

68. A large minority of Turkish citizens are Kurds, mainly concentrated in south east Anatolia but also in large cities such as Istanbul (there are no official statistics but estimates indicate from 12 to 15 million Kurds in Turkey).

69. South east Anatolia is also the least developed region in Turkey. Several reasons contribute to this: its isolation, the social structure (which still features some remnants of feudalism – such as the Agas), the economic structure (based mainly on agriculture and livestock).

70. Some claim that an increase in religious fundamentalism is also responsible for the backwardness of this region but no evidence of this was to be seen and information was given of Mullahs supportive of those who campaign against honour killings.

71. The surge of PKK terrorism in the south-east part of Turkey in 1984 and its combat by the Turkish army has made the situation much worse. From the cultural point of view, for instance, literacy rates in the region have decreased dramatically in the last 15 years, in particular those concerning women, as a direct consequence of the "war" (parents are afraid of sending their daughters to school, not least because teachers and schools have been targeted by the PKK).

72. For many decades the Kurds were not recognised by the Turkish authorities, they were not allowed to use their language and there was no mention of the Kurdish language (or languages) in education or in the media. Perhaps a little bit of folklore was allowed every now and then. All those who tried to speak in favour of their cultural rights were seen as traitors and treated accordingly. During what was a "de facto" civil war the Liberal Group in the Assembly was joined by a Turk who flatly denied the existence of Kurdish culture.

73. By their attitude of rejection, the Turkish authorities fuelled the very Kurdish separatism that they contested and which they fought at such a high price for Kurds and Turks and for the country as a whole.

74. In 2004 this situation seemed to be changing, in particular with the new Government. Whether this was because of pressure from European institutions, as many Kurds suspect, or because of Government awareness, as it claimed, does not appear to be really relevant: what is important is the fact that changes were taking place both at official level and within the opinion of the Turkish public as a whole.

75. The changes witnessed in the cultural field include the broadcasting in Kurdish dialects (Kurmânji and Zâzâ) on the Turkish National Television and the permitting of Kurdish language courses. Books, records and concerts in Kurdish are no longer forbidden but I was told that they still face unreasonably high administrative hurdles. During my visit I noticed a concert by the famous Kurdish singer Ciwan Haco announced in the Turkish newspaper Radikal. Based on this our colleague Mr Tekelioglu tells me that that statement is exaggerated.

76. There are some 1440 public libraries in Turkey, of which some 200 in the areas where Kurds are the majority. Mr Tekelioglu informed me last January that in 2005 alone more than 100 new Kurdish books had been published in Turkey. However it is impossible to find one single book in Kurdish (either published in 2005 or not, either in Turkey or abroad) in any of those public libraries.

77. Another example of the unreasonably high administrative hurdles faced by Kurds is given by the latest book fair organised in Diyarbakir in cooperation with the Prefect's office. Those who published books in Kurdish had not been invited. When they asked to participate they were not authorised to and when they asked other publishers to present some of their books they were told that the authorities had instructed them not to.

78. The changes that have been implemented are hesitant: the broadcasts took place too early in the morning, the subjects treated were trivial and the whole exercise was carried out

without any involvement of the Kurds themselves; the very few language courses that functioned were in the format of Kurdish as a foreign language (and therefore of no use for the Kurds). After a couple of months these courses came to an end because of insufficient demand.

79. In January 2006 it was announced that two private regional television channels and a radio station would start brief Kurdish-language broadcasts for the first time in Turkey. Representatives from Gün TV, Söz TV and Medya FM, all based in the mainly Kurdish southeast (Diyarbakir and Sanliurfa), signed a deal with Turkey's broadcasting watchdog to begin airing their programs from Thursday 23 March. This was confirmed by a letter from the Turkish permanent representation to the Council of Europe. Television broadcasting in Kurdish is however limited to four hours a week and at most 45 minutes a day (I am informed that these time limits do not include feature films and music programmes).

80. If these changes are compared with the situation of not very long ago when it was not conceivable that a Turkish politician or official would even pronounce the word "Kurd" one must realise that they do represent a deep change.

81. They mean that a process has been set in motion, a process which should be irreversible. They are but very little steps but steps in the right direction. It is for Europe and its institutions, but also for the Kurds themselves and for the many Turks that support the preservation of Kurdish culture, to keep the pressure on the Government of Turkey to widen and to accelerate the process of change.

82. It should be noted however that, while laws can be changed in a day, attitudes and mentalities take much longer. And many Kurds and Turks need to revise and reconsider some attitudes.

83. In the beginning of April 2006 violent clashes between Kurds and security forces erupted in the south-east of Turkey. Reports state that at least 15 people have been killed in protests and concern exists that the limited gains made by Kurds in recent years might be reversed in a few days.

Iraq

84. There are 5 million inhabitants in Iraqi Kurdistan, the main centres of which are Dohuk, near the Turkish border, Erbil and Suleimaniya. The Kurmanji dialect is spoken in the north and the Sorany in the south.

85. After the end of the 1991 Gulf War, operation Provide Comfort was set up to implement a safe haven for Kurds in northern Iraq. Under its umbrella, allied western troops on the ground persuaded the Kurds to descend from the mountains into the plains, where camps were set up. The area of Iraq above the 36th parallel—which includes Arbil, Mosul, Zakho, and Dahuk—was declared a no-fly zone and regularly patrolled by aircraft from the United States, Great Britain, France, and Turkey.

86. By October 1991, the Government of Iraq withdrew its administration from the Kurdish region. The first regional elections occurred in mid-1992 and the first Iraqi Kurdish Government and Parliament were formed. Since then, the Kurds in Iraq have been de facto autonomous and self-managing.

87. Since 1991/92 Kurds can teach their languages and, according to the Iraqi new constitution, Kurdish is now the second official language in the country. Until 2003 Kurds were not admitted in Iraqi universities and therefore developed their own universities.

88. The successes of the Iraqi Kurds in the field of language and education have enabled them to create an impressive literature and a fully adequate written language, and have produced a generation of Kurds whose primary and secondary education have been in Kurdish. Such achievements will undoubtedly help the Kurds of Iraq in their future efforts to preserve their cultural and ethnic identity.

89. Apart from some Kurdish music groups from Iran there is very little contact with the outside world. Until recently the Kurds had no passport. Isolation is still the main problem.

90. Honour killings are a barbaric practice which does not concern Kurds alone. It prevails in the most backward (rural) areas of the Middle East. Economic development went hand in hand with the decrease of such practices. Women's associations are playing an important role in Iraq.

Iran

91. According to 1997 official figures there are some 7 to 8 million Kurds in Iran (7% of the population). According to the opposition there are some 11 to 12 million. In Iran the Kurds are to be found in the west and northwest, bordering Turkey, Iraq and Azerbaijan but also in large cities such as Teheran and in the Khorasan area, bordering the eastern shores of the Caspian Sea. From an economic point of view these are the less developed areas in Iran. The average income is 4 USD per day in urban areas and only 1USD per day in rural areas. There is no industry.

92. Since the times of Reza Shah (1925-1941) the official language of Iran is Persian. Legislation adopted by the Islamic republic allows for regional languages but the authorities do nothing to implement such legislation.

93. There are media in the Kurdish language but this is subject to censorship as any other media in the country. For instance media are not allowed to deal with political issues. Self censorship is widespread. There is no Kurdish television channel but some programmes are broadcast in Kurdish on the general channels.

94. There are no Kurdish public schools in Iran. There are however Kurdish courses in both public and private universities but in Teheran and not in the areas inhabited by Kurds. Publications by students are however forbidden.

95. Many eminent Kurdish intellectuals are unable to write in their own language. After 6 years in the search of funding, work on a project for a Persian-Kurdish dictionary will hopefully start in 2006.

96. Music and folklore are thriving, as are cinema and theatre, despite the total lack of state support. Some film makers have been awarded mentions at film festivals abroad.

97. The situation of women is one of the worst in the area: girls may get married as from the age of 9; there is polygamy, stoning and "honour crimes". As a result suicide (in particular by immolation) rates among women are very high.

98. Kurds have no rights other than cultural in Iran. The Islamic republic is not neutral and the recent surge of Salafi fundamentalism could be a danger for democracy in the country. Life is not always easy for Sunni Moslems, as most Kurds are, in a Shia country. Satellite broadcasts in Kurdish are seen as a danger by the authorities who are on the look out for dishes. There is not a single Kurdish minister or governor in Iran.

99. There is very little exchange with Kurds from Turkey, in spite of a common language.

Syria

100. There are between 1 and 2 million Kurds in Syria (out of a total population of nearly 19 million).

101. In the 1940s there were two Kurds Heads of State, one supreme chief of the armies and many high ranking officials. Today however there is not a single corporal in the police forces. Ever since Syria's independence in 1946 the Kurds had been persecuted and speaking Kurdish at school was strictly forbidden.

102. Kurds represent around some 60% of the school population in the northern areas of Syria, but they have no books or other publications and no associations. 200 000 of them have been deprived of their nationality and have no rights at all. More than 750 cities and villages have had their Kurdish names changed into Arabic. Kurdish names are not allowed either for persons or for companies.

103. In 1972 Kurdish students were expelled from schools, in 1986 the police shot at a Kurdish crowd, in 1989 Kurdish music was forbidden at weddings and Kurdish intellectuals are regularly fired from their jobs.

104. Since the death of President Hafez al-Assad in June 2000, Syrian authorities have been accused of capturing PKK members and handing them to Turkish authorities.

Diaspora

105. In the course of their turbulent history, the Kurds have experienced a series of deportations which resulted in the creation of a large number of scattered Kurdish communities, sometimes thousands of miles from Kurdistan.

106. Living evidence of these deportations still exist in countries as far apart as Kirghizia, Kazakhstan, Yemen, Somalia and Eritrea. Communities that have retained their languages and customs are present in Turkmenistan (40,000), Azerbaijan (150,000), Armenia (45,000), in Georgia (60,000) Afghanistan (200,000), Lebanon (80,000). One of the largest of these communities is that of Kurds deported by Shah Abbas in the 17th Century to Khorassan, in Eastern Iran, which, today, is almost 700,000 strong. They still use the Northern dialect (Kurmançî). The Kurdish communities in central Anatolia, formed from tribes deported from Southern Kurdistan to the provinces of Konya and Ankara by the Ottomans, have also preserved their language and customs.

107. The political events of the last few decades have driven millions of Kurds towards the great metropolitan centres like Istanbul, (3 million Kurds), Izmir, Adana and Mersin, in Turkey; Baghdad, in Iraq; Tehran and Tabriz, in Iran, to such an extent that it is estimated that, today, about a third of the Kurds live outside Kurdistan.

108. The formation of a Kurdish diaspora in Europe is a recent phenomenon. In the 1960s, Kurds from Turkey began arriving in Germany, the Benelux countries, Austria, Switzerland and France as immigrant workers under contracts based on inter-government agreements regarding immigrant labour. Following the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979, the Army coup d'état in Turkey in 1980 and the Iraqi regimes long drawn out and murderous extermination campaign against the Kurds (Anfal), successive waves of Kurdish political refugees arrived in Western Europe and, to a lesser extent, North America. The campaign, launched in 1992, of forced evacuation and destruction of Kurdish villages, coupled with a policy of political assassination of Kurdish elites, followed by the inter-Kurdish clashes in Iraqi Kurdistan after 1994, have increased the Kurdish exodus to Europe.

109. No precise and reliable census of the Kurdish diaspora in Europe has been recently carried out and statistics would register the countries where they come from but not their ethnicity, but the most widely accepted estimates set their number at about 1,300,000 in Western Europe, distributed as follows:

Germany	700,000	800,000
France	120,000	150,000
United Kingdom	80,000	100,000
Sweden	80,000	100,000
Netherlands	70,000	80,000
Switzerland	60,000	70,000
Austria	50,000	60,000
Greece	20,000	25,000
Belgium	10,000	15,000
Denmark	8,000	10,000
Norway	4,000	5,000
Italy	3,000	4,000

Finland	2,000	3,000

110. There are also about 15,000 to 20,000 Kurds in the United States and over 6,000 in Canada.

111. Nearly 85% of the Kurdish diaspora in the West comes from Turkey, the Kurds from Iraq come second and form a large part of the communities in Great Britain, the Netherlands, the United States and Sweden.

112. The last, because of a generous immigration policy initiated by Prime Minister Olof Palme and the material incentives for publication and artistic creation was able to attract a major part of the Kurdish intelligentsia while Germany mainly took in immigrant workers. The Kurdish diaspora plays an important cultural and political role. It has given a new impulse to the development of the written language, to Kurdish literature and music, forbidden in Turkey, and thus aroused a fresh interest in Kurdish culture.

113. The Kurdish diaspora has also played a major political role in making known, to Western public opinion, the fate of the Kurds in the various countries where they are persecuted.

114. After a period of indecision, the Kurdish diaspora, following the example of other peoples, gradually set up its own institutions, both to preserve the Kurdish language and culture, to popularise the Kurdish cause and to contribute towards a better integration of the Kurds into their host countries. A number of Kurds now take an active part in the political and cultural life of their host countries as writers, journalists, artists, musicians and even as Members of Parliament.

115. There are Kurdish cultural institutes in most European countries where a significant Kurdish population is settled.

116. Since 1983 the Kurdish Institute of Paris has been working for the protection and the promotion of Kurdish culture. It was created at the moment when Kurdish refugees who wished to preserve their culture came to Europe to escape persecution in their countries of origin. Kurdish culture played an important role in the introduction of music in the Arab world and was at the origin of "flamenco".

117. The Institute has received grants from the governments of France, Norway and Sweden and from the European Union. Its activities include the training of Kurdish language teachers in Sweden, the training of Kurdish cultural élites, some of which played an important role in Iraq, conferences on "honour killings" and in general raising international public awareness for Kurdish issues.

118. There were up to 150 000 Kurds in France, mainly of Turkish origin.

119. The Kurdish community in the UK constituted a rich fabric of cultural expression and talent from which the rest of society could benefit. A number of significant Kurdish cultural projects had been located in the UK, and Kurds had received a degree of acceptance in mainstream culture. Such integration could be strengthened through accurate ethnic monitoring and through the encouragement of Kurdish-language education both by educational fora and by parents, by according political rights to refugees, and through developing relationships between the Kurdish community and bodies such as the new Commission for Equality and Human Rights.

120. In Germany, 700 000 to 800 000 Kurds make up one of the largest immigrant groups. From 70 to 80% of them came from Turkey either as labour migrants or as refugees. Kurds are however disadvantaged in comparison with other immigrant groups as there are no teaching

materials in Kurdish and most of them do not have access to radio or television programmes or to printed media.

121. Most Germans expect immigrants to integrate into German society and not to worry too much about their cultures of origin.

122. The organisation that later became the Kurdish Institute of Brussels was set up in 1978. Its current activities comprise language courses, social services, translation services and many cultural activities: Newroz celebrations, cultural excursions, exhibitions, literature, dance, music, folklore and conferences. The Institute published 41 books, it publishes a bi-monthly magazine and manages a library and an information centre.

VIII. Conclusion

123. The governments of the countries where Kurds live should realise that Kurdish language and culture are part of the heritage of their own country, that they are richness worth being preserved and not a threat to be combated.

124. Many inhabitants of the whole region need to modernise their attitudes. The great majority of Kurds are aware that Europe is a positive thing and place hope in their common future either within or with Europe. They should also be aware that a country where so-called "honour killings" is still accepted by some as a part of their "traditions" is a country which has no place in the Europe of human rights.

125. The member countries of the Council of Europe vary in their approach to regional or minority languages and to the role of mother tongue in education. It is only normal that the official languages in Iran, Iraq, Syria and Turkey are the languages of education provided by the respective national education systems. But Kurdish is the mother tongue of a large part of their populations and it is only normal that Kurds are also able to study their own language at school.

126. Turkey should be encouraged to address the "Kurdish issue" in a comprehensive manner and not only from a security point of view.

APPENDIX

Record of the Hearing

held in Paris on 18 January 2006

A. Opening of the Hearing

Mr Jacques Legendre, Chairman of the Committee, opened the hearing at 2.45 p.m. and welcomed all participants. He informed them that the Committee on Culture, Science and Education had decided that the hearing would not be open to the press.

The Rapporteur, Lord Russell-Johnston, had presented an outline report based on his visit to Turkey in June 2004, on a Conference entitled "the EU, Turkey and the Kurds" in the European Parliament in Brussels (November 2004), and on existing documentation. This outline, which had been discussed by the Committee in March 2005, was available. In 2004 and again in 2005 the Rapporteur had tried to go to Iran, Iraq and Syria to visit the Kurdish communities in these countries. As that had not been possible, the Committee had decided to hold this hearing to supplement the information of the Rapporteur. It would therefore concentrate on the cultural situation of the Kurds in Iran, Iraq and Syria and also in the diaspora. As Chairman he would make sure that all interventions remained within this framework.

Further to the wish expressed by the Turkish delegation, two members of the Turkish Parliament and a Turkish journalist had been invited. The members of parliament however had not come.

He regretted that Ms Feleknaş Uca, member of the European Parliament, and Mr Mehmet Üzün, novelist from Sweden had not been able to attend.

B. Introduction

Lord Russell-Johnston, Rapporteur, pointed out that culture was a difficult word to define. It began with language, literature, poetry but encompassed also architecture, the media and the way of living. The borderline between culture and politics was not easy to identify.

There was no Kurdistan as an independent political entity and Kurdish culture was everywhere in a minority situation. He had visited Turkey, where broadcasting in Kurdish had started on state television and where Kurdish language courses were now allowed. He looked forward to hearing how Kurds from other regions regarded the way in which their culture was treated.

Cultural situation of the Kurds in Iran, Iraq and Syria

Mrs Soheila Ghaderi-Mameli described the situation in Iran, based on exchanges of views she had had with cultural personalities from Iranian Kurdistan. According to 1997 official figures there were some 7 to 8 million Kurds in Iran (7% of the population). According to the opposition there were some 11 to 12 million. In Iran the Kurds were to be found in the west and northwest, bordering Turkey, Iraq and Azerbaijan but also in large cities such as Teheran and in the Khorasan area, bordering the eastern shores of the Caspian Sea. From an economic point of view these were the less developed areas in Iran. The average income was 4 USD per day in urban areas and only 1USD per day in rural areas. There was no heavy industry.

Since the times of Reza Shah (1925-1941) the official language of Iran was Persian. The Constitution adopted by the Islamic republic allowed for regional languages but the authorities did nothing to implement such legislation.

There were media in the Kurdish language but this was subject to censorship as any other media in the country. For instance media were not allowed to deal with political issues. Self censorship was widespread. There was no Kurdish television channel but some programmes were broadcast in Kurdish on the general channels.

The universities in Kurdistan, both public and private, taught courses but in Persian. The Kurdish language as only taught at the University of Teheran, not in the areas inhabited by Kurds. Student publications were very often banned.

Music and folklore were thriving, as were cinema and theatre, despite the total lack of state support. Some film makers had been awarded mentions at film festivals abroad.

The situation of women was one of the worst in the area: girls could get married as from the age of 9; there was polygamy, stoning and "honour crimes". As a result suicide (in particular by immolation) rates among women were very high.

Mr Gérard Gautier apologised for the absence of Mr Saywan Barzani, representative in France of the Autonomous Kurdish Government in Iraq. He knew the situation well as he had lived there from May 1999 to July 2004. There were 5 million inhabitants in Iraqi Kurdistan, the main centres of which were Dohuk, near the Turkish border, Erbil and Suleimaniya. The Kurmanji dialect was spoken in the north and the Sorani in the south. Since 1991/92 Kurds could teach their languages and, according to the Iraqi new constitution, Kurdish was now the second official language in the country. Until 2003 Kurds had not been admitted in Iraqi universities and had therefore developed their own universities.

Apart from some Kurdish music groups from Iran there was very little contact with the outside world. Until recently the Kurds had no passport. Isolation was still the main problem.

Mr Bachar Al Issa stated that the situation in Syria was completely different. In comparison, Iran and Iraq seemed European countries. In the 1940s there had been two Kurds Heads of State, one supreme chief of the armies and many high ranking officials. Today however there was not a single corporal in the police forces. Since the unification with Egypt in 1958, the Kurds had been persecuted and speaking Kurdish at school was strictly forbidden.

Kurds represented around some 12% of the population of Syria and 60% of the school population in the northern areas, but they had no books or other publications and no

associations. 200 000 of them had been deprived of their nationality and had no rights at all. More than 750 cities and villages had had their Kurdish names changed into Arabic. Kurdish names were not allowed either for persons or for companies.

In 1972 Kurdish students had been expelled from schools, in 1986 the police had shot at a Kurdish crowd, in 1989 Kurdish music was forbidden at weddings and Kurdish intellectuals were regularly fired from their jobs.

Lord Russell-Johnston asked what, apart from language, were the main cultural differences between Kurds and Iranians in Iran; what the situation was as regards so called "honour killings" in the three countries and what could the Council of Europe do to help Kurds facing cultural persecution in Syria.

Mrs Ghaderi-Mameli pointed out that Kurds had no rights other than cultural in Iran. The Islamic republic was not neutral and the recent surge of Salafi fundamentalism would be a danger for democracy in the country. Life was not always easy for Sunni Moslems, as most Kurds were, in a Shia country. Satellite broadcasts in Kurdish were seen as a danger by the authorities who were on the look out for dishes. There was not a single Sunni Kurdish minister or governor in Iran.

There was very little exchange with Kurds from Turkey, in spite of a common language.

Honour killings were a barbaric practice which did not concern Kurds alone. It prevailed in the most backward areas of the Middle East. Economic development in Iran and elsewhere went hand in hand with the decrease of such practices. Women's associations were playing an important role in Iraq.

Mr Gautier confirmed that honour killings were more likely to be perpetrated in isolated rural areas. The Kurdish diaspora together with foreign NGOs had a role to play in education in such areas.

Mr Al Issa regretted that Kurdistan, the richest area in Syria as far as natural resources were concerned, was also the poorest area as regards public services. 90 to 95% of women were unemployed. All cultural activities were forbidden and therefore the Kurds were very keen on broadcasts from abroad, such as those provided by Roj TV.

The international community should recognise Kurdish language and culture, as Unesco had recognised the Palestinian language, as a first step to making Syria recognise Kurdish culture.

Mr Coşkunoğlu asked about schools in Iran; how was language transmitted in Syria; what were the main differences with Iraq and whether Newroz (Kurdish new year festival) was celebrated in the three countries.

Mrs Ghaderi-Mameli confirmed that there were no Kurdish public schools in Iran. There was a chair on Kurdish language and literature in Teheran. Many eminent Kurdish intellectuals were unable to write in their own language. She had only learned to read and write in Kurdish at the age of 18. After 6 years in the search for funding, work on a project for a Persian-Kurdish dictionary would hopefully start in 2006.

Mr Gautier added that many Arab words were used in spoken Kurdish. In northern Iraq there was a technology magazine in Kurdish.

Mr Al Issa spoke in his mother tongue but cannot read nor write in Kurdish as the language was transmitted only orally from parents to children. Newroz was a celebration for all the Kurds in every country.

C. *Kurdish diaspora*

Mr Kendal Nezan spoke about the Kurdish diaspora in France. Since 1983 the Kurdish Institute of Paris had been working for the protection and the promotion of Kurdish culture. It had been created at the moment when Kurdish refugees who wished to preserve their culture came to Europe to escape persecution in their countries of origin. Kurdish literature existed since the 7th

century and Kurdish culture played an important role in the introduction of music in the Arab world and was at the origin of "flamenco".

The Institute had received grants from the governments of France, Norway and Sweden and from the European Union. Its activities included the training of Kurdish language teachers in Sweden, the training of Kurdish cultural élites, some of which played an important role in Iraq, conferences on "honour killings" and in general raising international public awareness for Kurdish issues.

There were around 150 000 Kurds in France, mainly of Turkish origin. The Council of Europe should encourage Turkey into signing the European Charter on regional or minority languages.

Ms Rochelle Harris spoke about Kurdish culture in the United Kingdom, where there were some 100 000 Kurds and about the cultural activities of the Kurdish Human Rights Project⁴.

The Kurdish community in the UK constituted a rich fabric of cultural expression and talent from which the rest of society could benefit. A number of significant Kurdish cultural projects had been located in the UK, and Kurds had received a degree of acceptance in mainstream culture. Such integration could be strengthened through accurate ethnic monitoring and through the encouragement of Kurdish-language education both by educational fora and by parents, by according political rights to refugees, and through developing relationships between the Kurdish community and bodies such as the new Commission for Equality and Human Rights.

Mr Metin Incesu spoke about the Kurdish diaspora in Germany, where 700 000 to 800 000 Kurds made up one of the largest immigrant groups⁵. From 70 to 80% of them had come from Turkey either as labour migrants or as refugees. Kurds were however disadvantaged in comparison with other immigrant groups as there were no teaching materials in Kurdish and most of them did not have access to radio or television programmes or to printed media.

Most Germans expected immigrants to integrate into German society and not to worry too much about their cultures of origin.

Mr Hugo van Rompaey spoke about the Kurdish diaspora in Belgium, where 15 000 Kurds lived⁶. The organisation that later became the Kurdish Institute of Brussels had been set up in 1978. Its current activities comprised language courses, social services, translation services and many cultural activities: Newroz celebrations, cultural excursions, exhibitions, literature, dance, music, folklore and conferences. The Institute had published 41 books, it published a bi-monthly magazine and managed a library and an information centre.

During its history the Kurdish people had suffered from genocide, "ethnocide", "linguicide" and "onomatocide". The last three concerned culture: destruction of their identity, denial of their language and prohibition to use their names. Linguistic diversity was as important as biodiversity but was disappearing faster than biodiversity.

Lord Russell-Johnston noted that the situation of Kurdish diaspora was very different from that in their countries of origin as they were free from persecution. He asked what percentages of migrant Kurds returned to their countries or stayed in Europe. How could an institution such as the Council of Europe contribute to improve the situation of Kurdish culture?

Mr Walter asked whether the different diaspora communities met with one another.

Baroness Hooper asked about the role of religion.

Mr van Rompaey informed members that the Newroz festival was an occasion for Kurdish communities to meet. In addition there were contacts between Kurds from as far apart as Moscow, Almaty and Yerevan. Religion played a role but not an important one as Kurds were the least religious people in the Middle East.

Mr Nezan added that many Kurds were now returning to Iraq but not to the other countries, where the situation was not favourable. Diaspora Kurds kept links with the places they came from. Of the European countries where they lived; Sweden was the most exemplary: there were

80 to 100 thousand Kurds in Sweden and more than 800 books in Kurdish had been published there, thanks to the support of the Swedish government.

Most Kurds were Sunni Moslems but some were Alevi, Yezidi or Shia. He agreed that the Kurds were the least fanatical in the area and indicated that this could be linked to the more important role played by women. This was however in regression as compared with the situation one century before: since then many intellectuals had disappeared without being replaced.

There were more than one million Kurds in Europe and many different sensibilities co-existed. There was good cooperation between Kurdish institutes in the diaspora.

Mrs Ghaderi-Mameli indicated that religion was an extremely sensitive issue in Iran, in particular since Mr Ahmadi Nejad had been elected president in 2005.

Mr Al Issa also agreed that Kurds were not a very religious people. When he was a child, he had attended a private Christian school and his family had maintained social and business relations and ties of friendship with Christians and Jews. In addition, unlike other Muslim communities, Kurdish communities in Europe had no mosques.

D. Kurdish literature and media

Mr Manouchehr Zonoozi spoke about Kurdish media and in particular about the television channel Roj TV⁷. The first newspaper in Kurdish had been published in Turkey in the beginning of the 1990s and the first television broadcast in Kurdish took place in 1995. Roj TV started broadcasting, from Denmark, in 2004. It broadcast in four Kurdish dialects but also in Turkish, Arabic, Assyrian and Persian.

He complained about the present hearing being closed to the media with Roj TV journalists not being allowed in the room.

Mr Hasan Cemal had been a journalist and political commentator in Turkey for 15 years and had written a book on the Kurds. He wished to criticise Roj TV for its links with the PKK but this was clearly a political issue outside the scope of the present hearing. He wondered why he had been invited to the meeting if he was not allowed to speak about what he knew.

Lord Russell-Johnston pointed out that Mr Cemal had been invited at the request of Mr Mercan, head of the Turkish delegation.

Mr Jařab recalled the importance of radio broadcasting from abroad in countries under totalitarianism. Radio Free Europe, Radio Liberty and BBC broadcast to central and Eastern Europe had been instrumental during the communist dictatorship.

Mr Nezan informed members that Voice of America broadcast 6 hours per day in Kurdish and was widely listened to, as was the BBC. Kurds were eager for reliable information and every Kurdish household, both in their countries of origin and in the diaspora, had a satellite dish.

Mr Walter pointed out that the position of the Kurds was quite strong in Iraq and wondered how this influenced Kurdish culture in neighbouring countries.

Mr Nezan said that indeed the Iraqi experience was being followed with great attention and with great hope by the entire Kurdish nation. The examples of the United Kingdom, Canada and Spain had been studied in the drafting of the Iraqi constitution.

Mr Zonoozi hoped that the Iraqi experience would ultimately lead to recognition of the rights of the Kurds.

E. Closing of the Hearing

Lord Russell-Johnston thanked all those who had taken an active part in the hearing.

The Chairman concluded by saying that it was sometimes difficult to separate culture from politics. He welcomed the fact that the present hearing had succeed in concentrating on the cultural situation of Kurdish communities outside Turkey.

He **closed** the hearing at 5.45 pm.

List of participants

Parliamentarians, members of the Committee on Culture, Science and Education

Mr LEGENDRE, Chairman, France

Baroness HOOPER, Vice-Chairman, United Kingdom

MM JARAB, Vice-Chariman, Czech Repblic

CHERNYSHENKO, Russia

COŞKONOĞLU, Turkey

DALY, Ireland

Mrs DROMBERG, Finland

Mrs FERNANDEZ-CAPEL, Spain

Mr FREIRE ANTUNES, Portugal

Mrs INCEKARA, Turkey

MM. LENGAGNE, France

LETZGUS, Germany

Mrs LUCYGA, Germany

MM McINTOSH, United Kingdom

MERCAN, Turkey

Mrs NĚMCOVA, Czech Republic

MM. O'HARA, United Kingdom

de PUIG, Spain

Lord RUSSELL-JOHNSTON, United Kingdom

Mrs SAKS, Estonia

Mr TXUEKA, Spain

WALTER, United Kingdom

ZINGERIS, Lithuania

Permanent Representation:

BILGIC, Deputy to the Permanent Representative of Turkey

Invited:

MM Bachar AL ISSA, historian, painter

Hasan CEMAL, Senior Columnist, Milliyet Daily Newspaper, Istanbul

Gérard GAUTIER, Representation of the Iraqi Kurdistan Government in France

Mrs Soheila GHADERI-MAMELI, Association of the Kurds in France

Mrs Rochelle HARRIS, Public Relations Officer, Kurdish Human Rights Project, London

MM. Metin INCESU, Director of Navend (Centre for Kurdish studies) Bonn

Kendal NEZAN, Chairman of the Kurdish Institute of Paris

Hugo van ROMPAEY, Secretary of the Kurdish Institute, Brussels

Manoucher ZONOOZI, Director of Roj TV, Denmark

Secretariat of the Parliamentary Assembly:

MM. GRAYSON, Head of Secretariat for Culture, Science and Education

ARY, Secretary to the Committee on Culture, Science and Education

DOSSOW Co-Secretary to the Committee on Culture, Science and Education

Mrs NOTHIS, Administrative Assistant

Reporting committee: Committee on Culture, Science and Education

Reference to committee: [Doc. 10089](#), Reference No 2958 of 26.04.04

Draft resolution adopted by the committee on 28 June 2006 with one vote against and no abstentions

Members of the Committee: Mr Jacques Legendre (Chairman) (Alternate: Mr Philippe **Nachbar**), Baroness **Hooper**, Mr Josef **Jařab**, Mr Wolfgang **Wodarg**, (Vice-Chairpersons), Mr Hans **Ager**, Mr Toomas **Alatalu**, Mr. Kornél **Almássy**, Mr Emerenzio Barbieri, Mr Rony **Bargetze**, Mrs Marie-Louise Bemelmans-Videc, Mr Radu-Mircea Berceanu, Mr Levan Berdzenishvili, Mr Italo Bocchino, Mr Ioannis **Bougas**, Mrs Anne **Brasseur**, Mr Osman **Cořkunořlu**, Mr Vlad Cubreacov, Mr Ivica **Daćić**, Mrs Maria **Damanaki**, Mr Joseph Debono Grech, Mr Stepan **Demirchyan**, Mr Ferdinand Devinski, Mrs Kaarina **Dromberg** (Alternate: Mrs Sinikka **Hurskainen**), Mrs Åse Gunhild Woie **Duesund**, Mr Detlef Dzembritzki, Mrs Anke Eymer, Mr Relu Fenechiu, Mrs Blanca Fernández-Capel (Alternate: Mr Iřaki **Txueka**), Mrs Maria Emelina **Fernández-Soriano**, Mr Axel **Fischer**, Mr José Freire Antunes, Mr Ian Gibson (Alternate: **Lord Russell-Johnston**), Mr Eamon **Gilmore**, Mr Stefan **Glävän**, Mr Luc Goutry, Mr Vladimir Grachev, Mr Andreas Gross, Mr Kristinn H. **Gunnarson**, Mrs Azra Hadžiahmetović, Mr Jean-Pol Henry, Mr Rafael **Huseynov**, Mr Raffaele Iannuzzi (Alternate: Mr Giuseppe **Gaburro**), Mr Fazail **Ibrahimli**, Mrs Halide **İncekara**, Mr Lachezar Ivanov, Mr Igor Ivanovski, Mr József **Kozma**, Mr Jean-Pierre Kucheida, Mr Guy **Lengagne**, Mrs Jagoda Majska-Martinćević, Mr Tomasz Markowski (Alternate: Mr Zbigniew **Girzyński**), Mr Bernard **Marquet**, Mr Andrew McIntosh, Mr Ivan Melnikov (Alternate: Mr Alexander **Fomenko**), Mrs Maria Manuela **de Melo**, Mr Paskal **Milo**, Mrs Fausta **Morganti**, Mrs Christine **Muttonen**, Mrs Miroslava Němcová (Alternate: Mrs Alena **Gajdůřková**) Mr Jakob-Axel Nielsen, Mr Edward O'Hara, Mr Andrey Pantev, Mrs Antigoni **Pericleous Papadopoulos**, Mrs Majda Potrata, Mr Lluís Maria **de Puig**, Mr Anatoliy Rakhansky, Mr Johannes **Randegger**, Mr Zbigniew **Rau**, Mrs Anta **Rugāte**, Mr Piero Ruzzante, Mr

Volodymyr Rybak, Mr Pär-Axel Sahlberg, Mr André **Schneider**, Mr Vitaliy Shybko, Mr Yury Solonin (Alternate: Mr Anatoliy **Korobeynikov**), Mr Dušan Proroković, Mr Valeriy **Sudarenkov**, Mr Mehmet **Tekelioğlu** (Alternate: Mr Murat **Mercan**), Mr Ed van Thijn, Mr Piotr **Wach**, Mrs Majléne **Westerlund Panke**, Mr Emanuelis **Zingeris**.

N.B. The names of those members present at the meeting are printed in bold

Head of Secretariat: Mr Christopher Grayson

Committee secretariat : MM. Ary, Dossow

¹“Exploring Kurdish Origins”, lecture given at Harvard University on 10 March 1993.

²“A modern history of the Kurds”, London, 2004.

³The Kurds : A Concise Handbook, USA, 1992.

⁴The full text of the communication is available.

⁵The full text of the communication is available (in German).

⁶The full text of the communication is available.

⁷The full text of the communication is available.