

Presse release

For a decentralized and neutral Syria

Delegates of Syrian Organisations established consensus on principles of the future constitution

by Leo Gabriel – International Coordinator of www.peaceinsyria.org

From April 27th to 30th, 2016 the Austrian Institute for Intercultural Research and Cooperation (IIRC) hosted in the Castle of Schlaining (100km south of Vienna, close to the Hungarian boarder) a Conference on the principles of a future Syrian constitution. Among the 28 exclusively Syrian participants, among whom there were renowned politicians from the opposition, experts in Law, Islamic Sheiks and representatives of women's organisations as well as leaders from ethnic minorities and some international observers from Austria, Norway, Greece and Germany.

“Syria is a democratic, non-sectarian State based on the principles of equal citizenship, political pluralism und decentralisation...” With these somehow utopian sounding words starts a declaration containing 8 substantial points which has been presented to the Austrian and foreign press by the International Initiative www.peaceinsyria.org, a network of personalities like the Nobel laureate Adolfo Perez, Esquivel, the Mexican bishop Raúl Vera, the Greek coordinator of the Ship-to-Gaza initiative Evangelis Pissias and the Austrian anthropologist Leo Gabriel, dedicated since 4 years to find a political solution to the war in Syria.

“Although neither the radical Islamists nor the hardliners from the Syrian regime were present, we could cover a broad spectrum of the Syrian civil society, “declared Sheik Riad Drar from the Institute of Islamic Studies from Deir Azzor who had been one of the principle animators of the conference. “All participants had the courage to sign the consensus, although they did not agree fully with all of the items raised”, he said. The spectrum he referred to reached from the National Coordination Committee (NCC) to the Kurdish Democratic Party PYD; but also the Yezidy and the Assyrian-Christian communities were present and Madjoleen Hassan as well as Salim Herbek came directly from the negotiations in Geneva.

The future State of Syria should be decentralized and remain neutral towards all religions and ethnicities who were claiming their right for self-determination throughout the conference. A special working group dealt with the separation and mutual control of the executive, legislative and above all the judicial power which should be completely independent. The overwhelming majority was in favour to transform Syria from a presidential to a parliamentary Republic with a Prime Minister as the head of a future government.

A particular attention was given to the access of women to positions in the public administration and in all elected entities of the State there should be established a women's ratio “from at least 30 percent until equity.”

Attempts to discredit the representativity of the conference by saying that the minorities had been overrepresented in comparison to the majority of the sunni-arab population of Syria were rejected during the press conference which concluded the event. “The four sunni Sheiks represented a sufficiently large sector of the Syrian society in order to defend their interests”, said Sheik Riad Drar.

The 8-points of the final declaration on the future constitution of Syria which some qualified as the roots of a “new social contract” also represent, according to Nicolas Michel from the mission

headed by the UN-negotiator Steffan de Mistoura, a valuable compliment to the ongoing peace negotiations in Geneva, Switzerland, which only deals with the process and not with the content of the future constitution of Syria.

The conference was supported financially by the KARIBU-Foundation in Norway und the World Council of Churches (WCC) and it could count with the recommendation of the Austrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.