

*Muhammet Ekber Kutlu*

## **Life in Ulupamir Köyü**

Selam ve Teşekkür

I come from the City of Van, Ercis District, Ulupamir Village, Turkey. I am the son of Rahmankul Khan. I am working at Van Yüzüncü Yıl University's Faculty of Fine Arts as a sculpture lecturer.

The Kyrgyz immigrated from the Pamirs of Afghanistan to Pakistan in 1978 and later immigrated to Turkey in 1982.

For four years we lived in Karagunduz, which is a suburb of Van City in the eastern part of Turkey. Four years later, the government built 300 houses and moved us to these houses in Altindere, which is located about 30 km from Ercis, another suburb of Van. When we first came to Turkey, we were 1,200 people in total belonging to 250 households. The government gave each family 10,000 m<sup>2</sup> land for farming, 20,000 m<sup>2</sup> land for animal breeding, and 10 sheep. We planted shamrock on our farms since the land was not suitable for growing grains like wheat or barley. Thus, our main income source became animal breeding. However, due to the lack of flat lands this was limited. Most families survived through animal breeding and government funds only.

However, schoolchildren were sent to schools, and adults were taught how to read and write. Women learned handicrafts in public courses, and men were taught animal breeding techniques. A healthcare unit provided healthcare services. Thus, we easily adapted to our new lives in Turkey. Later some families moved to more central cities to work or study. Today our community is distributed in Turkey in the following way: 60 families live in Ankara, 40 families are based in Istanbul, 17 found new homes in Malatya, twelve moved to Van, and 52 remained in Ercis. In total, 181 families live in different parts of Turkey.

When it comes to education, there is a primary and a secondary school in our village and 306 students currently are receiving an education there. In addition, there are 256 students who are receiving a high school education - some of them in our district centre, and some of them in other cities. Currently, 75 students are receiving a university education. We also have 450 graduates who are currently working in the State's different foundations as doctors, engineers, advocates, lecturers, teachers, and nurses. The Turkish Government and State has always given support for this. Everybody and every family has a full understanding of the importance of education and they make great efforts to ensure their children obtain an education. Therefore, the education status that we have is one of the highest compared to other districts of Van.

When we look at the medical services, everyone has social security and we benefit fully from doctor and hospital services. Furthermore, we are free to use our own language and practice our own religion. Over the last thirty years, we have been able to set up Kyrgyz festivals in May and June in order to make our culture and manners widely known. Hand-made products are exhibited on these occasions, Kyrgyz food is offered, and cultural entertainment such as Kyrgyz dances and music have been presented. These events strengthen the connection between Turkish, Kurdish, and Kyrgyz people.

When I evaluate the current position of our people in comparison to those in the Afghan Pamirs, we are in a far better condition in terms of health, education, and quality of life. This quality of life is at a high level, and it remains promising for the coming generations.



*Altindere or Ulupamir Köyü*  
*Photograph © Hermann Kreutzmann 22 August 2005*

*Gönül Açıksari*

#### **Addition to Muhammet Ekber Kutlu's speech**

I am the first Kyrgyz child that was born in Turkey, in 1982. I am the first doctor of our village. Now, I work for Istanbul Medeniyet University Göztepe Research and Training Hospital as a senior Cardiologist. I understand the importance of the migration from Afghanistan to Turkey via Pakistan, and I believe that our leader Rahmankul Khan was a forward looking leader and he did his best for us.

I thank our families who completed this hard migration, leaving their own lands and finding a new homeland for us. We also have seen what can be done if the opportunity is given to the Kyrgyz people from the Pamirs of Afghanistan.