

## **Motion**

**tabled by the parliamentary groups of the SPD, CDU/CSU, ALLIANCE 90/THE GREENS and the FDP**

Remembering and commemorating the expulsions and massacres of the Armenians in 1915 - Germany must make a contribution to reconciliation between Turks and Armenians

The Bundestag is requested to adopt the following motion:

The German Bundestag bows down in commemoration of the victims of violence, murder and expulsion which the Armenian people suffered before and during the First World War. It deplors the deeds of the Young Turks government of the Ottoman Empire, which led to the almost total annihilation of the Armenians in Anatolia. It also regrets the inglorious role of the German Reich which, in the face of the wide variety of information available regarding the organised expulsion and annihilation of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, did not even attempt to stop the atrocities.

With this commemoration, the German Bundestag honours the efforts of all those Germans and Turks who, under difficult circumstances and against the resistance of their own governments, supported the rescue of Armenian women, men and children in words and deeds. Particularly the memory of the work of Dr Johannes Lepsius, who fought energetically and effectively for the survival of the Armenian people, should be saved from being forgotten, and instead be kept alive and maintained in order to help improve relations between the Armenian, the German and the Turkish peoples.

The German Bundestag, due to its own long experience, is aware of how difficult it is for any people to acknowledge the dark sides of its past. It nevertheless firmly believes that honestly confronting the past is necessary and represents the most important foundation stone for reconciliation. This applies

in particular in the framework of a European culture of remembrance, which involves countries openly confronting the dark sides of their national histories.

Against this background, the German Bundestag regrets the fact that comprehensive discussion about the events which took place at that time in the Ottoman Empire is still not possible in Turkey today and that academics and writers who wish to confront this part of Turkish history are liable to prosecution and public defamation. At the same time, however, the German Bundestag believes the first positive signs can be seen that Turkey is increasingly tackling these issues in the spirit of the above-mentioned European culture of remembrance. Examples of this are:

- The Grand National Assembly of Turkey has, for the first time, invited Turkish citizens of Armenian descent to take part in discussions on the crimes against the Armenians and Turkish-Armenian relations.
- A Turkish-Armenian women's dialogue has taken place in Vienna.
- Initial contacts between Turkish and Armenian historians have led to the beginning of an exchange of documents.
- Prime Minister Erdogan, together with the Armenian Patriarch Mesrob, has opened Turkey's first Armenian museum in Istanbul and has openly proposed the establishment of a bilateral Turkish-Armenian commission of historians.

In this context, however, the German Bundestag is again deeply concerned by the fact that the conference on the Armenians due to take place from 25 to 27 May 2005 in Istanbul, involving internationally esteemed Turkish academics, was prevented from taking place by the Turkish Minister of Justice and that the positions of these Turkish academics, which did not conform to the government view, were defamed as a "dagger in the back of the Turkish nation". Prime Minister Erdogan's proposal of establishing a joint Turkish-Armenian commission of historians can only be successful if it is implemented on the basis of free and public academic discourse.

Germany too, which contributed to the denial of the crimes against the Armenian people, has an obligation to face up to its own responsibility. This includes supporting the Turks and Armenians in their efforts to overcome the rifts of the past and find paths towards reconciliation and understanding.

For many years, the two major churches in Germany in particular have been advocating the integration of the Armenians from Turkey. The Armenian

communities that have emerged here offer opportunities for encounters and for remembrance. Especially in view of the large number of Muslims from Turkey living in Germany, recalling the past and thereby contributing to reconciliation is an important task.

However, confronting these historical events is also of direct importance for the present. The normalisation of relations between the Republic of Turkey and the Republic of Armenia is today of particular interest for the future of the entire region. Confidence-building measures in line with the OSCE principles are urgently needed on both sides. The opening of the border by Turkey, for example, could put an end to the isolation of Armenia and promote the establishment of diplomatic relations.

Because of the role it has played historically in German-Turkish-Armenian relations, Germany today has a special obligation in the framework of the EU's Neighbourhood Initiative. The aim must be to help to bring about a normalisation and improvement of the situation between Armenia and Turkey, thus contributing to the stabilisation of the Caucasus region.

The *Länder*, or federal states, can make an important contribution to remembrance. Education policy is tasked with helping to ensure that the subject of the expulsion and annihilation of the Armenians is also confronted in Germany in the context of confronting the history of ethnic conflicts of the 20th Century.

The German Bundestag calls on the Federal Government,

- to help ensure that the situation between Turks and Armenians is resolved through confronting the past, reconciliation and forgiveness of historical guilt,
- to advocate parliament, government and society in Turkey unconditionally confronting their past and present role vis-à-vis the Armenian people,
- to actively support the establishment of a commission of historians, including not only Turkish and Armenian academics, but also international experts,

- to actively support both the relevant files of the Ottoman Empire and the copies given to Turkey by Germany from the Federal Foreign Office's archives being made accessible to the public,
- to help ensure that the conference planned in Istanbul but postponed in response to pressure exerted by the state does actually take place.
- to actively support freedom of speech in Turkey, in particular also with regard to the fate of the Armenians,
- to help Turkey and Armenia in the process of normalising their bilateral relations.

Berlin, 15 June 2005

Franz Müntefering and parliamentary group

Dr Angela Merkel, Michael Glos and parliamentary group

Katrin Göring-Eckardt, Krista Sager and parliamentary group

Dr Wolfgang Gerhardt and parliamentary group

## **Explanatory Memorandum**

Ninety years ago, on 24 April 1915, the members of the Armenian political and cultural elite in Istanbul were, at the command of the Young Turks movement ruling the Ottoman Empire, arrested and deported to the interior of the country, where the great majority of them were murdered. This day became the day of remembrance of Armenians across the world for the expulsions and massacres of the Armenian subjects of the Ottoman Empire which began at the end of the 19th Century, but increased during the First World War.

When the Ottoman Empire entered the War, the recruited Armenian soldiers in the Ottoman army were grouped into work battalions and the majority of them murdered. Women, children and the elderly were sent on death marches through the Syrian desert, starting in spring 1915. Those deportees who had not yet been murdered or died on the way met this fate in the inhuman camps in the desert around Deir ez-Zor at the latest. Some massacres were committed by special units set up specifically for this purpose. The resistance of high-ranking Turkish officials to these actions, and also criticism raised in the Ottoman parliament, were brutally dismissed by the Young Turk regime. Many regions from which the Christian Armenians had been deported were settled with Kurds and Muslim refugees from the Balkan wars. Similarly, members of other Christian ethnic groups, especially Aramaic/Assyrian and Chaldean Christians, but also certain Muslim minorities, were the victims of deportation and massacres.

According to independent calculations, over 1 million Armenians fell victim to the deportations and mass murders. Numerous independent historians, parliaments and international organisations describe the expulsion and annihilation of Armenians as genocide.

The legal successor to the Ottoman Empire, the Republic of Turkey, denies to this day, despite the facts available, that these events were systematically planned, and that the deaths occurring during the resettlement treks, and the massacres committed, were intended by the Ottoman government. There is an admittance that the Armenians were treated harshly, but this has always been justified by arguing that, both in 1878 and in 1914/15, many Armenians had fought on the Russian side against Turkey, and that there was a danger that the Armenians would betray the Ottoman Empire during the First World War. Other Turkish justifications cite Armenian violence against Turks which occurred in the armed resistance to the Turkish resettlement measures. The terrorist attacks

carried out by Armenians against Turks until the 1980s are also used to justify the Turkish position.

Overall, the scale of the massacres and deportations is still played down and largely denied in Turkey. This Turkish stance is at odds with the idea of reconciliation that is the foundation of the community of values existing in the European Union. To this day, historians in Turkey are not free to address the history of the expulsion and murder of Armenians and, despite the fact that the previous regulations on liability to prosecution have been toned down, are still subject to considerable pressure.

As the principal military ally of the Ottoman Empire, the German Reich was also deeply involved in these events. Both the political and the military leaders of the German Reich were thoroughly informed of the persecution and murder of the Armenians from the outset. The files of the Federal Foreign Office, which are based on reports from the German ambassadors and consuls in the Ottoman Empire, document the systematic implementation of the massacres and deportations. Despite urgent petitions submitted by many prominent Germans from academic, political and church spheres, including politicians like Philipp Scheidemann, Karl Liebknecht or Matthias Erzberger and major figures from the Protestant and Catholic churches, such as Adolf von Harnack and Lorenz Werthmann, the leaders of the German Reich failed to exert an effective influence on their Ottoman ally.

When Protestant theologian Dr Johannes Lepsius presented the results of his research, conducted in Istanbul in July/August 1915, in the German Reichstag on 5 October 1915, the entire subject of the Armenians was placed under censorship by the government of the German Reich. Similarly, in 1916, the German military censors banned and confiscated the documentation of Johannes Lepsius' "Report on the Situation of the Armenian People in Turkey". Copies of this documentation that were sent directly to the members of the German Reichstag by Lepsius were intercepted by the authorities and only handed out to the members in 1919 after the end of the War.

The German Reich's policy of denial, which has almost been forgotten, demonstrates that this chapter of history has still not been confronted satisfactorily in Germany either.