

The Baroness Caroline Cox of Queensbury

Please let me explain, why I decided to support the Memorandum, that had been forwarded today to the members of the European Council, of the Council of the European Union, to the European Commission and to the members of the European Parliament.

The European Parliament adopted a resolution on June 18, 1987, which called on the Turkish government to recognise the genocide committed against the Armenians in 1915-17 as a precondition for Turkey's accession to the EU. In more recent years, the European Parliament has made it very clear on several occasions that this decision is still valid and that the government and the lawmakers of Turkey are expected to acknowledge publicly the annihilation of 1.5 million Armenians during WW1 as a matter of fact. As reasons for this demand the European Parliament named both the fostering of democracy inside Turkey and in particular the recognition of the Armenian genocide as a confidence building act, and also as a factor in stabilising its foreign relations, in particular towards its neighbour, the Republic of Armenia.

Having twice appealed to my own national parliament for the recognition of the Armenian genocide, I am convinced that such an affirmation of historical facts is of outstanding importance both for the descendants of victims and for survivors, as well as for Turkey as heir of the once multi-religious and multiethnic Ottoman Empire. Not only does such a public and official recognition re-establish the historical truth, but it helps the survivors and the descendant to heal their trauma. During the 57 humanitarian missions, which I led to Nagorno Karabakh since 1992, I had the opportunity to observe on many occasions the profound impact of the Turkish genocide denial on the psyche and political mentality of the Armenian population both in Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh. The consistent denial of the genocide as a matter of fact both by the Turkish government and the opinion leaders of Turkey is perceived by many Armenians as a direct threat. 70 years of Azerbaijani misrule over Nagorno-Karabakh, the slaughters in Sumgait, Kirovabad and Baku from 1988 until 1990, the expulsion of many thousands of Armenians from Azerbaijan and the deportation of further tens of thousands from Nagorno-Karabakh in 1990 and 1991, the deliberate destruction of valuable Armenian cultural monuments by Azerbaijan are perceived by many Armenians in the South Caucasus as a continuation of the Turkish genocide. Turkey's moral, political and material support to Azerbaijan, its co-operation in an illegal blockade since 1993 despite decisions made by the European Parliament and the similarity of threatening chauvinist Anti-Armenian statements by Turkish and Azerbaijani opinion-leaders are quoted as proof of the widely spread belief, that in the long term Turkey is still intending to wipe out the remaining Armenian nation, as it wiped out the majority of Turkey's Christian population during the last decade of Ottoman rule. In all, 3.5 million Armenian, Greek and Arameans Christians were massacred, starved, worked or walked to death, when the nationalistic leaders of the Ottoman Empire tried to convert the multiethnic state into a monoethnic "Turkey for the Turks".

I know from own experience, that the European Parliament was right in demanding the recognition of the Armenian genocide as an element of stability in the South Caucasus. And let me please add, that the same is true for the improvement of Greek and Turkish relations and for the relations between Turkey and the Syriac-Aramean nation. It would improve the situation immensely, if Turkey would admit at least now, that crimes against humanity were committed - not only against the Armenians of Ottoman citizenship, but also against Greek and Aramean Ottomans. It is very disturbing to note that not even now, on the threshold of accession to the EU, is Turkey willing to meet these expectations. On the contrary, the Çelik

decrees came like a slap in the face to all who work for international reconciliation on the foundations of justice and genocide prevention. This latest denial by the Turkish government came as a further humiliation to the remaining Christians in Turkey, for the children of these minorities were compelled to participate in the public denial of the state mass murder of their ancestors.

Europe can and should not accept such a development. European societies of today share a value system, which was shaped by their experiences during WW1 and WW2 and a century of genocide in Europe and other continents. As a result, we at least try to develop a critical approach towards the bleak pages in our own national histories and we implement genocide awareness as an instrument of genocide prevention. If the government and lawmakers of Turkey are ready to adopt and implement these values, we will happily embrace them.

For that reason I would like to take the opportunity to thank those Turks inside Turkey and in the Turkish Diaspora who had the courage and the dignity to demand the public recognition of the genocide despite the threat of legal prosecution as „traitors“, and I feel privileged to be here together with Ms Engin, who represents such a Turkish NGO. And if we feel serious about our own European declarations and values, we should support these Turkish colleagues in a much more effective moral and material way, than has happened until now.

I conclude by congratulating all who have arranged this important event, for its significance reaches beyond Armenia, Turkey and the EU. The fundamental issue is one of truth and justice. We cannot build a future for our children and grandchildren and for the nations of the world which is based on a lie. It is only truth which can provide a foundation for freedom, justice and peace. I therefore add my voice to all those who urge the nations of the European Union to respect this principle in their consideration of applications for membership of any new nation and I urge once again urge the Turkish government to have the courage, the integrity and the honesty to acknowledge historic truth and to move in a spirit of truth to promote peace and reconciliation with its neighbours, as well as to protect the rights of all communities living within its own land. Such developments would bring international acclaim and open new chapters of peace and prosperity for the people of Turkey and all people who live in that historic, beautiful part of our world.