

Motion

tabled by the parliamentary groups of the CDU/CSU, SPD and Alliance 90/The Greens

Remembrance and commemoration of the genocide of the Armenians and other Christian minorities in the years 1915 and 1916

The Bundestag is requested to adopt the following motion:

I. The German Bundestag notes:

The German Bundestag bows down in commemoration of the victims of the expulsions and massacres of the Armenian people and other Christian minorities in the Ottoman Empire, which began more than one hundred years ago. It deplors the actions of the Young Turk government of the day, which led to the almost total annihilation of the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire. Members of other Christian communities, particularly Aramean/Assyrian and Chaldean Christians, were also affected by deportations and massacres.

On the orders of the Young Turk regime, the systematic expulsion and murder of more than one million ethnic Armenians began in the Ottoman city of Constantinople on 24 April 1915. Their fate exemplifies the history of mass murder, ethnic cleansing, expulsion, and indeed genocide, which were horrific hallmarks of the 20th century. We are aware of the uniqueness of the Holocaust, for which Germany bears guilt and responsibility.

The Bundestag regrets the inglorious role of the German Empire which, as the Ottoman Empire's principal military ally, made no attempt to stop these crimes against humanity, despite having reliable information at its disposal, some of it provided by German diplomats and missionaries, about the organised expulsion and mass murder of the Armenians. Commemoration by the German Bundestag is also an expression of special respect for the Armenians, thought to be the oldest Christian nation on earth.

The German Bundestag reaffirms its resolution of 2005 (Printed Paper 15/5689), which was dedicated to the remembrance of the victims and the historical appraisal of these events and aimed to support reconciliation between Turks and Armenians. Members from all parliamentary groups who spoke in the centenary debate held in the German Bundestag on 24 April 2015 and, in particular, Germany's Federal President, speaking on the eve of that debate, condemned the genocide of the Armenians, remembered the victims and called for reconciliation. The German Empire bears complicity for the atrocities.

The German Bundestag acknowledges Germany's special historical responsibility. This includes supporting efforts by the Turkish and Armenian people to overcome the rifts of the past and seek paths towards reconciliation and understanding. This reconciliation process has stalled in recent years and urgently requires fresh impetus.

With its commemoration of these unspeakably brutal crimes, the German Bundestag honours not only the victims but all those in the Ottoman Empire and the German Empire who, more than one hundred years ago, under difficult circumstances and in the face of resistance from their own governments, supported the rescue of Armenian women, children and men in a multitude of ways.

A task for school, university and political education in Germany today is to study the expulsion and murder of the Armenian people as part of the appraisal of the history of ethnic conflicts in the 20th century by integrating these events into curricula and teaching materials and passing on this knowledge to future generations. The German *Länder* (federal states) have a particularly important role to play in this respect.

The German Bundestag takes the view that commemoration of the victims of the massacres and expulsions of the Armenian people, in a manner which acknowledges the part played by Germany in these events and conveys this information to our fellow citizens of Turkish and Armenian origin, also contributes to integration and peaceful social relations.

The German Bundestag welcomes the increasing number of academic, civil society, arts and cultural initiatives and contributions, also in Turkey, which aim to address the crimes against the Armenians and promote reconciliation between the Armenian and Turkish peoples.

The German Bundestag encourages the Federal Government to continue to devote attention to commemoration and appraisal of the expulsions and massacres of the Armenians in 1915. The German Bundestag welcomes any initiative which aims to lend impetus and support to this endeavour.

Germany's own historical experience shows how difficult it is for a society to face up to the dark chapters of its past. Nevertheless, honestly confronting the past is surely the most important foundation stone for reconciliation within society and with others. A distinction must be made between the guilt of the perpetrators and the responsibility of those alive today. Moreover, the commemoration of the past reminds us to remain vigilant and to prevent hatred and annihilation from threatening people and nations ever again.

The German Bundestag recognises the attempts undertaken since 2005 by representatives of Armenia and Turkey to move closer on issues of memory and the normalisation of bilateral relations. Nevertheless, relations between the two countries remain strained and are marked by mutual distrust. Germany should support the Turkish and Armenian people in their efforts to build a closer relationship. A constructive appraisal of history is the basis for mutual understanding now and in future.

The easing of tensions and the normalisation of relations between the Republic of Turkey and the Republic of Armenia are also important for the stabilisation of the Caucasus region. Due to its historical role in German-Turkish-Armenian relations, Germany considers that it has a special responsibility in this regard within the framework of the EU's Neighbourhood Policy.

II. The German Bundestag calls on the Federal Government:

- in the spirit of the centenary debate in the German Bundestag on 24 April 2015, to continue to contribute to a broad public debate about the expulsion and almost total annihilation of the Armenians in 1915/1916 and the role of the German Empire in this context,

- to encourage Turkey to engage openly with the issue of the expulsions and massacres, in order to establish the necessary foundation stone for reconciliation with the Armenian people,
- to continue to engage for closer relations between Turks and Armenians and for reconciliation and the forgiveness of historical guilt, based on an appraisal of history,
- to continue to support and, as far as budgetary capacities permit, provide funding for academic, civil society and cultural activities in Turkey and Armenia which promote dialogue, build closer relations between Turks and Armenians and support an appraisal of history,
- to actively support the appraisal of the historical events by Turkey and Armenia as a first step towards reconciliation and the long overdue improvement in Turkish-Armenian relations, for example, by providing scholarships for academics or supporting civil society initiatives from the two countries that engage for an appraisal of history and for reconciliation,
- to encourage Turkish and Armenian government representatives to restart the process for the normalisation of bilateral relations, which is currently stalled,
- to encourage the Turkish and the Armenian governments to ratify the Zurich Protocols, signed in 2009, which provide for the establishment of a commission to undertake an academic examination and appraisal of the historical records and for the resumption of diplomatic relations and the opening of the shared border,
- to advocate that the preservation of Armenian cultural heritage in the Republic of Turkey, recently initiated, be continued and intensified,
- to the extent that budgetary capacities permit, to continue to support initiatives and projects in Germany's academic, civil society and cultural spheres which promote debate about the events of 1915/1916.

Berlin, 31 May 2016

Volker Kauder, Gerda Hasselfeldt and parliamentary group
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Explanatory Memorandum

The annihilation of the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire during the First World War was the greatest disaster, with the most severe consequences, ever to befall the Armenian people in their thousands of years of history. According to independent sources, more than one 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 commemoration of these expulsions and massacres is therefore of central importance to Armenian identity, alongside language and religion.

The German Bundestag commemorates these events, also in the current context of remembrance of the First World War. The German Empire was the Ottoman Empire's principal military ally. The German Imperial Government was informed about the persecution and mass murder of the Armenians but took no action. The Federal Republic of Germany considers that it has a responsibility to promote an appraisal of these atrocities and to keep remembrance alive.

To this day, Turkey denies, contrary to the facts, that the expulsion, persecution and murder of Armenians were systematically planned or that the mass deaths during the resettlement treks and

the massacres perpetrated were the result of deliberate intent on the part of the Ottoman government.

The extent of the massacres and deportations is still contested in Turkey. However, shifting trends can also be discerned. In 2008, there was reason to hope for an easing of relations when the Presidents of the two countries attended a football match together and thus demonstrated their willingness to engage in further talks. In 2009, the two countries' Foreign Ministers signed joint Protocols which envisaged, among other things, the establishment of a commission to undertake an academic examination and appraisal of the historical records. However, neither of the two parliaments has yet adopted the Protocols.

Reconciliation between the two nations is conceivable only if the events which occurred one hundred years ago are investigated thoroughly and the facts are no longer contested. As the prerequisite, Turkish academics and journalists working on the history of the expulsion and mass murder of Armenians must be able to work freely and without fear of reprisals. There are already numerous initiatives in Turkey which are engaged in addressing the topic of the massacres. In recent years, more controversy has arisen in the Turkish public debate about this issue. These developments are to be welcomed, as are cross-border civil society projects, for which the German Federal Foreign Office has provided financial support for many years.

As the Ottoman Empire's principal military ally, the German Empire was also deeply involved in these events. Both the political and the military leaders of the German Empire were informed of the persecution and mass murder of the Armenians from the start. When the Protestant theologian Dr Johannes Lepsius presented his research, conducted in Constantinople in July/August 1915, in the German Reichstag on 5 October 1915, the entire subject of the Armenians was placed under censorship by the German Imperial Government. Similarly, his *Report on the Situation of the Armenian People in Turkey*, which he had sent directly to Members of the Reichstag, was banned and confiscated by the German military censors in 1916 and was not released to Members of Parliament until 1919, after the end of the First World War. Despite urgent petitions from many prominent Germans from the academic and political spheres and the Churches, including politicians such as Philipp Scheidemann, Karl Liebknecht and Matthias Erzberger and leading figures from the Protestant and Catholic Churches, including Adolf von Harnack and Lorenz Werthmann, the German Imperial Government failed to exert effective pressure on its Ottoman ally.

The files held by the German Federal Foreign Office, which are based on reports by the German ambassadors and consuls in the Ottoman Empire, also document the systematic manner in which the massacres and expulsions were carried out. They constitute the most important official record of the events of that time. The German Federal Foreign Office made these files accessible many years ago. In 1998, a complete set of the files on microfiche was presented to Armenia. Turkey subsequently acquired a set as well.