

## **Motion**

**tabled by the members of the German Bundestag Dr. Christoph Bergner, Dr. Friedbert Pflüger, Hermann Gröhe, Erwin Marschewski (Recklinghausen), Dr. Wolfgang Bötsch, Anke Eymer, Erich G. Fritz, Karl-Theodor von und zu Guttenberg, Klaus-Jürgen Hedrich, Joachim Hörster, Claudia Nolte, Ruprecht Polenz, Dr. Klaus Rose, Bernd Schmidbauer, Dr. Andreas Schockenhoff, Dr. Hans-Peter Uhl and the CDU/CSU parliamentary group**

Commemoration of the 90th anniversary of the beginning of the expulsions and massacres of the Armenians on 24 April 1915

Germany must make a contribution to reconciliation between Turks and Armenians

The Bundestag is requested to adopt the following motion:

The German Bundestag notes:

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 occurrence marked the start of the deportation and massacre of the Armenian subjects of the Ottoman Empire, which took place in the shadow of the events of the First World War. According to independent calculations, between 1.2 and 1.5 million Armenians fell victim to the subsequent deportations and mass murders. When the Ottoman Empire joined the War, the recruited Armenian soldiers in the Ottoman army were grouped into work battalions and the majority of them murdered, while women, children and the elderly were sent on death marches through the Syrian desert, starting in spring 1915. As noted in retrospect in 1967 by one of the 20th century's most respected historians, Arnold J. Toynbee, in his book "Acquaintances", one of the intended consequences of these deportations was to destroy as many lives as possible *en route*. 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 Zōr 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. In the regions from which the Christian Armenians had been deported, the Ottoman government settled Muslim subjects, who were

considered to be loyal and were mostly 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.

The legal successor to the Ottoman Empire, the Republic of Turkey, denies to this day 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. This dismissive attitude is contradictory to the idea of reconciliation that is the foundation of the community of values existing in the European Union, of which Turkey wishes to become a member.

The state most deeply involved in these events, alongside the Ottoman Empire, was its principal military ally during the First World War, the German Reich. 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 to the Chancellor of the Reich by many prominent Germans from academic, political and religious spheres, the leaders of the German Reich failed to exert an influence on their Ottoman ally by any means other than mere diplomatic notes; these were intended more to rebut the accusations raised against Germany by the Western Entente than to sway Germany's Turkish ally.

When Protestant theologian Dr. Johannes Lepsius presented the results of his research, conducted in Istanbul in July/August 1915, to the Press Association in the German Reichstag on 7 October 1915, the entire subject of the Armenians was put under censorship by the government of the German Reich, contrary to Lepsius's intentions. Similarly, on 7 August 1916, the German military censors banned and confiscated the documentation of Johannes Lepsius's "Report on the Situation of the Armenian People in Turkey", which had been published in Potsdam in book form just one month previously. 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.

One of the particular characteristics of the states of the European Union is that they acknowledge their colonial past and the dark sides of their national history. To this day, however, historians in Turkey are not free to address the history of the deportation and murder of Armenians in 1915/1916. Turkish academics and publishers are still liable to prosecution in Turkey, not only for publishing historical investigations relating to the Armenian massacres, but also for publishing novels, such as the world-famous work by Franz Werfel "The Forty Days of Musa Dagh", which deals with the fate of the Armenians. Consequently, not even the fundamental prerequisite for academic discussion can be met as long as it remains punishable to admit guilt on the part of the Turkish/Ottoman state, or systematic intent behind the deportation and

massacre of Armenians in Turkey, or even merely to mention the crimes against the Armenians.

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, which suffer greatly under the burden of an unresolved conflict in the past, is today of particular interest for the future of the entire region. For example, lifting of the border blockade by Turkey could put an end to the isolation of Armenia. The end of Armenian isolation would offer new opportunities for peaceful resolution of the Karabakh conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan. In the framework of the EU's Neighbourhood Initiative, and because of its problematic role in German-Turkish-Armenian relations in the early part of the 20th century, Germany has a special obligation to support this kind of normalisation and improvement of the situation between Armenia and Turkey. It is in the interests of the EU to promote the economic development of Armenia and stability in the region by opening the land route through Turkey.

The German Bundestag bows in commemoration of the victims of state violence, murder and expulsion among the Armenians. It regrets the dubious role of the German Reich, which had information from the Foreign Office regarding the organised annihilation of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, but still did not even attempt to intervene. With this commemoration, the German Bundestag also honours the work of all those Germans who, under difficult circumstances and against the resistance of their government, supported the rescue of Armenian women, men and children in words and deeds. Particularly the memory of the work of Johannes Lepsius, who fought energetically and effectively for the survival of the Armenian people, should be saved from suppression and oblivion, and instead be kept alive and maintained in the spirit of improving relations between the Armenian, the German and the Turkish peoples.

Today, there are roughly 4.5 million Armenians living outside the Republic of Armenia, some 40,000 of them in Germany alone. Above all, the two major churches in Germany have been advocating the integration of the Christians from Turkey since the 1970s. The Armenian communities that have emerged here also offer opportunities for encounters and for remembrance. Especially in view of the large number of Muslims from Turkey living in Germany, it is an important task to recall the past and thereby contribute to reconciliation.

As Germans, we bear a special responsibility and therefore appeal to Turks and Armenians alike to seek paths towards reconciliation and understanding in order to overcome the divides of the past.

The German Bundestag therefore calls upon the Federal Government,

- to advocate that Turkey unconditionally examine its role vis-à-vis the Armenian people, in history and in the present day,

- to advocate the granting of freedom of speech in Turkey, particularly also as regards the massacre of Armenians,
- to work towards Turkey immediately normalising its relations with Armenia,
- to make its own contribution to achieving agreement between Turks and Armenians through reconciliation and forgiveness of historical guilt,
- to make a contribution to the expulsion of the Armenians also being confronted in Germany, as it is an integral part of confronting the history of ethnic conflicts in the 20th century.

Berlin,

Dr. Christoph Bergner, Dr. Friedbert Pflüger, Hermann Gröhe, Erwin Marschewski (Recklinghausen), Dr. Wolfgang Bötsch, Anke Eymmer, Erich G. Fritz, Karl-Theodor von und zu Guttenberg, Klaus-Jürgen Hedrich, Joachim Hörster, Claudia Nolte, Ruprecht Polenz, Dr. Klaus Rose, Bernd Schmidbauer, Dr. Andreas Schockenhoff, Dr. Hans-Peter Uhl, Dr. Angela Merkel, Michael Glos and parliamentary group.