

Prof h.c. Dr phil. Tessa Hofmann

Dear Mister President,

Distinguished members of the Boghossian Foundation,

Dear Mr Albert Boghossian,

Your Excellency Morell, Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany to the Republic of Armenia

Ladies and gentlemen,

Please accept my sincere gratitude for the decision to award me with the 2012 Presidential prize for the recognition of the Armenian genocide. I also thank you for your acknowledgment of nearly 40 years of tireless efforts in genocide research and genocide awareness education, focusing on Ottoman genocide against more than three million indigenous Christians in Western Armenia, Asia Minor and Mesopotamia. I would very much like to include into this acknowledgment my long-standing Armenian collaborators Dr. Gerayer Koutcharian and Varujan Babakhan. Without their dedicated support I could never have achieved the impact that we jointly produced in international collaboration of Armenian, German and Turkish colleagues. On a more general level I would like to express my gratitude to the Armenian nation which despite all odds continues to insist on the international condemnation of the numerous crimes that had been committed against their ancestors nearly one hundred years ago.

The Armenians' insistence on justice and remembrance is truly inspiring, not only for me personally, but more so for the descendants of fellow sufferers of the Armenians, namely the Aramaic speaking Christians in the Ottoman Empire and Ottoman occupied territories of Iran, and for the Greeks of Pontos and Asia Minor. I firmly believe that the contribution of the Armenian nation to genocide prevention cannot be overestimated, for the joint insistence of the people in Armenia and her Diaspora on recognition bears a clear signal that crimes of the past are well remembered and condemned by future generations.

For me, a second source of inspiration and consolation lies in the fact that a gradually increasing number of Turkish citizens critically question their country's past. They research and condemn the crimes and articulate in many ways their empathy with the descendants of the Armenian genocide victims. This becomes particularly obvious in countries such as Germany where immigrant communities comprise both ethnic Turks and Armenians. Legislators and governments in central and Northern European states are therefore well advised to enhance reconciliation by supporting special programs of genocide awareness education in Turkish migrant communities without shying away from possible chauvinist protests. To this aim it is not good enough to simply bring together young Turks and Armenians in concerts or other cultural events without attending the latter's needs for official genocide recognition.

I would like to use the opportunity of the presence of my country's representative, Excellency Morell, to express my hope that the German legislators and government will at least at the occasion of the centennial commemoration articulate a legally qualified opinion on the state induced extermination of 1.5 million Armenians and in its wake at least half a million Aramaic speaking Christians. In 2005, the German parliament had explicitly acknowledged German liability for massacres and deportations throughout 1915. This liability stems from Germany's material benefits from Armenian slave labour at the Baghdad railways construction, from loans of murdered Armenians at German banks, the involvement of German servicemen into the crimes and most of all from the inactivity of the German government to intervene despite the profound knowledge of the dimension of overall and complete extermination. On the contrary, the Imperial German government decided that its military alliance with Turkey ranked above all other considerations. In 2005 and despite profound own evidence in the archives of the German Foreign Office the German legislators had avoided to explicitly acknowledge the historic facts as a genocide or crime against humanity. Their halfhearted resolution disappointed not only Germany's Armenian community, but also scholars and human rights NGOs, including the *Working Group Recognition* that I chair. For many German residents of Turkish origin the way in which Germany deals with crimes committed during the Nazi reign and Second World War has become a benchmark and role model for dealing with one's nation's criminal past. I sincerely hope that my decision-making compatriots will in time realize their educational and legislative responsibilities and act accordingly.

The following two years offer ample opportunities for educational and memory initiatives. 2014 will see the centennial of the beginning of the First World War. Europe's and in particular Germany's failure to learn immediate lessons from this disastrous war resulted in another and even more disastrous Second World War and in further genocides of even larger dimensions.

I also hope that we shall succeed in completing an Ecumenical genocide memorial for the Christian victims of the Ottoman genocide in the German capital city Berlin. I shall donate most of the prize money to that aim, but the overall costs of the memorial are estimated to be 140,000 EUR, and therefore a lot of fundraising is still ahead. Again, one hopes for the timely support of German decision-makers, including the Federal government.

Already today I pledge to donate the remainder of the prize money for a project of translation and public reading from the texts of 16 of the many Armenian authors who were arrested on the 11th /24th of April in Constantinople. And this reading by Armenian, German, Turkish and Kurdish residents of Berlin will become a second, albeit literary memorial for those countless, nameless and silenced for ever victims that had never been given a grave.

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http://www.oei.fu-berlin.de/soziologie/mitarbeiter/mitarbeiter_lehrstuhl/savvidis.html