

Association Switzerland-Armenia

Press Release

Monday, 16 June 2003

The Federal Council facing denial measures from Turkey

On 14 April 2003, a directive of the Turkish National Education Ministry was sent to directors of all Primary and Secondary schools in Turkey asking the pupils to deny the Armenian, Assyrian and Pontus Greek exterminations in the early XX Century. According to the Turkish newspaper "Radikal", on 30 May 2003, the authorities have increased their repression on Freedom of Expression by prosecuting six teachers for having contested the said directive. A teacher, Ms. Hülya Akpınar (Department of Elbeyli, Province of Kilis) was sentenced with a very high fine.

These acts are in contempt of the European Parliament report on the Turkish application for membership in the European Union (Oostlander Report). Further, the « brain-washing » of pupils to maintain the State's denial of Genocide constitute a flagrant violation of many international Conventions, mainly Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and Article 29 of the International Convention on the Rights of the Child.

In its Press Release of 25 May 2003, the Association Switzerland-Armenia called upon Swiss politicians to take a firm and clear position in relation to this new attack on the memory of victims of Turkey's crimes, particularly the Armenian Genocide of 1915.

Six Members of the National Council from six different parties have replied to this call and submitted on Monday, 16 June, 2003, during the interrogation hour, their questions pertaining to the most recent act of denial by the Turkish Government. The questions related to the attitude of the Federal Council in relation to the evident violation of the Rights to Freedom of Expression and Rights to Education.

In its response of 15 May to the Vaudroz Postulate (02.3069) aiming at the recognition of the Armenian Genocide, which is to be dealt with by the Federal Chambers in the September Session, the Federal Council invited the National Council to reject the Postulate, affirming its conviction that "*pertaining to a painful incident in history, the exercise of collective memory should be done in the place in question and more importantly by the countries concerned*". It added that "*the external politics of Switzerland aims at contributing in a Turco-Armenian agreement through political dialogue, which has been established by Switzerland and Turkey and which focuses particularly on Human Rights.*" The questions of the six deputies at the National Council, therefore, demand the Federal Council to question this political dialogue with Turkey in light of these new facts, as well as to intervene to the Council of Europe and to Turkey.

While being aware of the directive, the Head of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, Ms. Micheline Calmy-Rey, considers in her response that the bilateral process is more recommended than an intervention to international instances. The Head of the FDFA has the intention to discuss the questions raised by the six deputies with her Turkish homologue, Mr. Abdullah Gül, during her forthcoming visit to Turkey, next Autumn. However, in light of the gravity of the directive, the response of the Minister does not show any intention to condemn these violations, since she maintains her belief that the dialogue with Turkey has shown to be useful as far as the questions pertaining to Human Rights are concerned, considering Turkey's endeavors to progress in this domain.

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