



Bureau de Contact et d'Information auprès de l'Union européenne
European Union Contact and Information Office

PRESS CONFERENCE

Turkey's accession to the EU – Blind spot for the European Union

Non-Muslim minorities in Turkey as targets of a recent hate campaign

Wednesday, September 22, 2004, 14:00
Residence Palace – International Press Center
Rue de la Loi 155, Brussels, Salle « Passage ».

Embargo until 14:00, 22 September 2004

Brussels, September 14, 2004

Will the European Commission, in its report of October 6, 2004, consider Turkey as « ready » for the EU accession? Will the European Council start the negotiations for Turkey's accession to the EU at the end of this year?

In recent years, Turkey has made certain legal and administrative progress. Nevertheless, at the same time, it has significantly hardened its position towards fundamental rights, such as the freedom of opinion and has adopted a repressive policy towards the minorities living in Turkey. In particular, traditional prejudice towards Non-Muslim minorities is kept alive by the public education system and the state controlled media. Such an attitude, however, is incompatible with the Copenhagen criteria required for accession negotiations of a new member State.

In this regard, a Memorandum, initiated by the *Working Group Recognition – Against Genocide, for International Understanding (Berlin)* and the *Switzerland-Armenia Association (Bern)*, was submitted to the attention of the European Council, Council of the European Union, members of the European Commission and European Parliament. Recalling the Copenhagen Criteria, the Memorandum explains the concern of the signatories for a lasting improvement of the minority situation in Turkey. The dozens of national and international NGOs which signed this Memorandum protest against the hate campaign of Turkey's minister for education, Dr. Hüseyin Çelik, which includes the official denial of the genocide, committed on the Christian population of the Ottoman Empire and resulting in 3.5 million victims (1912-1922). For this reason, the signatories want to draw the EU's attention to the necessity of safeguards and profound reforms in the education system and in media control, for public education and mass media are the main "opinion leaders" and directly responsible for an extremely negative perception of these minorities in Turkey and for subsequent attacks on institutions (churches, synagogues, schools and representatives of Non-Muslim communities), which did not even cease during Turkey's reform process of late.

The Assembly of Armenians of Europe, together with the initiators of the Memorandum are inviting you to the Press Conference for the presentation of the above mentioned document.



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Speakers to the Press Conference (by alphabetical order):

- § **Mister Baastian Belder**, Independence/Democracy Group, Member of the European Parliament, Netherlands
- § **Mister Michalis Charalambidis**, writer, member of the Central Committee of the *International League for the Rights and Liberation of Peoples*, expert on the genocide of Greeks in Pontos, Athens;
- § **Baroness Caroline Cox of Queensbury**, Deputy Speaker of the House of Lords, United Kingdom, Chairperson of the *Christian Solidarity Worldwide*, London;
- § **Ms. Hülya Engin**, Committee member of *TÜDAY*, organization for the defence of human rights in Turkey and Germany, Cologne;
- § **Dr. Tessa Hofmann**, scholar of Armenian studies and sociology; scientific documentarist at the Free University of Berlin; writer, human rights activist; chairperson of the *Working Group Recognition – Against Genocide, for International Understanding*;
- § **Monsieur Johnny Messo**, chairman of the Foundation Study Centre Aramea, main representative of the *Syriac Universal Alliance (SUA)* to the United Nations Office in Geneva;
- § **Prof. Dr. Yves Ternon**, doctor, historian and writer, researcher and expert in genocide studies, in particular the genocide of Armenians and its denial, Paris.

Mr. Nicolas Tavitian, expert in international political relations, Brussels, will assume the role of the moderator. Simultaneous translating from English and French is offered. A welcome coffee is offered at 13 :30 at the entrance to the salle "Passage", Résidence Palace.

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Brussels

All the documentation regarding the Memorandum will be available in the following web sites from 14:00, 22 September 2004 (in English and French; some documents are also available in German):

<http://www.aga-online.org/de/aktionen/index.php>
<http://www.armenian.ch>

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