

M E M O R A N D U M
FOR THE ATTENTION OF THE MEMBERS
OF THE EUROPEAN COUNCIL,
OF THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,
OF THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION AND
OF THE MEMBERS OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

T U R K E Y ' s
CANDIDACY FOR MEMBERSHIP OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

1. Introduction

New developments in the sphere of human rights violations in Turkey led the co-signatories to draft this memorandum. There is intensified repression against minorities in Turkey. Of particular concern is a directive¹ imposed by the Turkish Ministry of Education on all school directors requiring written work from all pupils in primary and secondary schools in Turkey denying the extermination of Armenians, Syriacs² and Pontiac Greeks, perpetrated at the beginning of the 20th century.

The co-signatories consider that the recognition of these genocides by Turkey is a precondition to the establishment of a constructive dialogue between Armenians, Syriacs and Pontiac as well as Asia Minor Greeks on the one hand and Turks on the other hand, since a genuine reconciliation of peoples is possible only on the basis of historical truth.

2. Context

On the occasion of the 80th anniversary of the Treaty of Lausanne (1923) and the foundation of the Turkish Republic, the Forum of Armenian Associations of Europe (FAAE) commissioned a research study³, the preface of which says:

"Eighty-seven years after Turkey's Armenian population was exterminated, the country's small remaining Armenian minority is still the target of intense prejudice, often nurtured by part of the country's media and political establishment. Armenians are still subject today to an impressive array of discriminatory measures, whose apparent purpose is to make life as an Armenian impossible in Turkey.

"Turkey is now knocking insistently at the door of the European Union. Should not the country's current policies towards the survivors of the genocide be an essential litmus test of its willingness to adopt 'European values' and consolidate democracy?"

The parliamentary elections held in December 2002 considerably modified the political composition of the Turkish legislature. Having regard to the now insistent wish of the Turkish

¹ Cf. Point 5 of the present Memorandum. As consequences of this directive, teachers who manifested against it have been denounced and arrested. Armenian schools in Istanbul have been concerned by the directive too

² I.e. Christian Arameans, whose native tongue is Aramaic.

³ Hofmann, Tessa: Armenians in Turkey Today: A Critical Assessment of the Situation of the Armenian Minority in the Turkish Republic. Belgium, October 2002 (2nd ed. by The Union of Armenian Associations in Sweden, Uppsala, Sweden, March 2003). Website: <http://www.ecoi.net/doc/de/TR/content/5/2520-2545>

Government and society to join the European Union, the signatories of this memorandum question whether Turkey meets the political criteria of Copenhagen set forth in the Agenda 2000 – democracy, rule of law, human rights as well as respect of minorities -, where it is said that

"Countries wishing to become members of the EU are expected not just to subscribe to the principles of democracy and the rule of law, but actually to put them into practice in daily life. They also need to ensure the stability of the various institutions that enable public authorities, such as the judiciary, the police, and the local government, to function effectively and democracy to be consolidated. (...)

"The integration of minority populations into society is a condition of democratic stability. A number of texts governing the protection of national minorities have been adopted by the Council of Europe, in particular the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities which safeguards the individual rights of persons belonging to minority groups".⁴

3. Accepting the past as a prerequisite to EU accession

Since 1987 the European Parliament has on several occasions called on the Turkish government to recognize the genocide committed against the Armenians in 1915-17⁵ and has made this recognition a precondition for EU accession in its resolution of 18 June 1987⁶. In another resolution adopted on 15 November 2000, the European Parliament reiterated this requirement, in particular with regard to a better policy towards minorities (cf. article 10):

"(The European Parliament) Calls, therefore, on the Turkish Government and the Turkish Grand National Assembly to give fresh support to the Armenian minority, as an important part of Turkish society, in particular by public recognition of the genocide which that minority suffered before the establishment of the modern state of Turkey."⁷

In its Motion for a resolution adopted on 28 February 2002, the European Parliament demands that Turkey (Article 15) lift the blockade imposed on its neighbour Armenia and thus, together with the recognition of the Armenian Genocide in conformity with the resolution of the European Parliament of 18 June 1987, "... calls upon Turkey to create a basis for reconciliation."⁸ In two further documents, the first published on February 2, 2004⁹ and the second on March 19, 2004¹⁰, "the European Parliament reiterates its position set out in its Resolution of 18 June 1987 on a political solution to the Armenian question".

⁴ "The Copenhagen Criteria"; in: *Agenda. 2000*; For a Stronger and wider Union. Document drawn up on the basis of COM(97)2000 European Commission Bulletin of the European Union. Supplement 5/97 p. 39-47.

⁵ The first time through the resolution entitled "On the political solution of the Armenian Question", adopted by a majority on June 18, 1987 (Doc. A2-33/87).

⁶ Article 4 of the resolution: "The European Parliament (...) believes that the refusal by the present Turkish Government to acknowledge the genocide against the Armenian people committed by the Young Turk government, (...) are insurmountable obstacles to consideration of the possibility of Turkey's accession to the Community".

⁷ European Parliament resolution on the 1999 Regular Report from the Commission on Turkey's progress toward accession (COM(1999) 513 - C5-0036/2000 - 2000/2014(COS)).

⁸ European Parliament, Committee in Foreign Affairs, Human Rights, Common Security and Defense Policy: Report on the communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament on the European Union's relations with the South Caucasus, under the partnership and cooperation agreements (COM(1999) 272 - C5-0116/1999 - 1999/2119(COS); FINAL A5-0028/2002; RR/302039EN.doc; p. 9.

⁹ European Parliament (same committee): Report with a proposal for a European Parliament recommendation to the Council on EU policy towards the South Caucasus (2003/2225(INI)); Final A5-0052/2004; RR\329338EN.doc; Point 1, al. 4, p. 8. The report has been adopted by the European Parliament on February 26, 2004.

¹⁰ European Parliament (same committee): Report on the 2003 regular report of the Commission on Turkey's progress towards accession (COM(2003) 676 – SEC(2003) 1212 – C5-0535/2003 – 2003/2204(INI)); Final A5-

In recent public debates, it is no coincidence that the capacity and will for self-criticism of the darker sides of past national events are emphasised. The above quotations show that the European legislature considers the recognition of the genocide of 1.5 million Armenians committed in 1915-17 as an indispensable prerequisite for the improvement of the policy towards minorities in Turkey and the stabilization of Turkish relations with her neighbours, which will serve as a guarantee for stability and democracy in the South Caucasus¹¹.

4. Background

Armenians were not the only victims of the nationalist 'Young Turks' (ruling alone since 1913) and of their heirs, the Kemalists. Between 1912 and 1922, three and a half million people of at least five million Christian citizens living in the Ottoman Empire have been killed. Forced labour, massacres in particular of the male population and death marches were the prevalent forms of mass murder.

Until now the official Turkey has drily rejected the request for recognition and condemnation of historical facts claimed by human rights organizations, scholars, associations of survivors and their descendants. Genocide studies prove that the denial of the genocide is an integral part of the crime, and appears as its last stage. For 90 years, the denial of the genocide is a constant pain in the hearts of the descendants of those victims who were even accused of having committed crimes against Turks and other Muslim ethnic groups during and after World War I. In the regional museums of Van, Erzurum and other regions, such alleged "crimes" are still being recalled. At the same time the official Turkey continues to consider as heroes Enver and Talaat or their servant executors such as "Topal" Osman, all of them politician responsible for the extermination and expulsion of Christian citizens in the Ottoman Empire.

5. The circular of the Turkish Ministry of Education of 14 April 2003

A few years ago, the Turkish Minister of Education revealed his true intentions by deciding to brainwash university students and secondary school pupils and make them regard accusations concerning the genocide committed by Turkey as "lies about genocide". Through a circular from Dr. Hüseyin Çelik, the current Turkish Minister of Education, teachers of primary and secondary schools are obliged to create resistance among the pupils to the so-called "unjustified accusations of Armenians, Pontiac Greeks and Syriac Orthodox" and to organize competitions of essays on this issue. The participation of Armenian and Greek schools in such competitions was also required. Consequently, school programs and manuals of history were modified. In Elbeyli (Kilis District) six teachers, who had raised questions in an instruction meeting held on May 30, 2003, were accused of "provocation of social disorder" by the public prosecutor. The teacher Hülya Akpınar was temporarily imprisoned and later released on bail.¹²

We think that such a development is a significant regression which obviously does not comply with the criteria set forth by the Agenda of 2000 quoted above. Actually, Christian minorities are neither protected nor respected and the descendants of the victims are exposed to painful humiliations.

0204/2004; RR\329363EN.doc; *Turkey's external relations*, Point 43, p. 12. The report has been adopted by the European Parliament on April 1st, 2004.

¹¹ Cf. European Parliament, op. cit., (2003/2225(INI)); Final A5-0052/2004; RR\329338EN.doc; Point 1, al. 4, p. 8 and op. cit., (COM(2003) 676 – SEC(2003) 1212 – C5-0535/2003 – 2003/2204(INI)); Final A5-0204/2004; RR\329363EN.doc; *Turkey's external relations*, Point 42, p. 12.

¹² Keskin, Adnan: "Arrested for Asking A Question", *Radikal*, 4 June 2003 (summary translation in English by Taner Akçam).

6. “Racist and chauvinist” - Protests in Turkey

In spite of continuous violations of basic civil rights such as freedom of opinion and of press, for the first time Turkey is experiencing massive protests against the policies of inter-ethnic defamation implemented by the Turkish Ministry of Education. The Turkish Teachers' Union condemned the measures taken by the Ministry of Education and qualified them as "racist and chauvinist". On 4 October 2003, an initiative called "Baris için Tarih" (history for peace)¹³ published a declaration which was signed by 400 prominent persons, among them artists, lawyers, professors of universities, teachers, members of trade unions, retired military judges, journalists and historians. The declaration says, among others things:

"As citizens and parents we are deeply concerned by the decree of the Ministry of Education regarding the modifications of school curricula and history textbooks" (...). We would like to see our children being educated in a climate of respect and tolerance towards others, of communication between people and groups, and of mutual comprehension and confidence. 'Education through history is the basis for democratic Europe', as it is stated in the Resolution of the Council of Europe dated 31.10.2001 and signed by Turkey as well.

International treaties, as well as our constitution and laws forbid the misuse of history as an instrument for discrimination of groups and violation of human rights.

In the textbooks required by the above mentioned decree, Armenians, Greeks and Syriacs¹⁴ are presented as enemies. Our study and monitoring group mentions that in new editions of textbooks Armenians, Pontiac Greeks and Syriacs are once more qualified as "enemies", "spies" and "barbarians". Synagogues, churches and schools of minorities are considered as "noxious communities". The Church is considered as a terrorist element."¹⁵

7. Danger for minorities, threat to the regional stability

The language of the Turkish Ministry of Education used in the curricula and textbooks is the same as that of the genocide perpetrators - the Committee Union and Progress - when stigmatizing the future victims of their assault, first of all Armenians and Greeks, calling them "enemies", "traitors", "spies", before dehumanising them as being "useless" and "microbes".

By using anew such a vocabulary, the Ministry of Education adds to the intimidation of the Christian communities in Turkey, which are already deeply scared. Only six Syriac Orthodox families and their priest, father Yusuf Akbulut, still live in Diyarbakir, once a prosperous centre of Aramean Christianity. In 2000, father Akbulut was denounced by Turkish newspapers as "the traitor among us", because he had mentioned the issue of the Armenian and Syriac Orthodox genocides in the presence of journalists. The ensuing court case for alleged "unrest of the people" was suspended in April 2001, on the basis that the number of Christians in the region had declined to such a degree that the judge found that any "unrest" was no longer possible due to the lack of Christians. Nevertheless, the tiny Christian community does not live peacefully. On 27 June 2002, the newspaper *Aksam* qualified the Syriac Orthodox as "separatists". During the night of 6 to 7 January 2003 (Christmas Eve in Oriental churches), the Syriac Orthodox Church of St. Mary of Diyarbakir was attacked and precious items of ritual importance were stolen. Icons of saints were thrown to the ground and profaned. Secrets

¹³ Cf. also <http://www.bolsohays.com/haberac.asp?referans=1612>.

¹⁴ By "Syriacs" is meant Syriac Orthodox and other Christians, whose native tongue is Aramaic.

¹⁵ Quoted and translated from the press release of TÜDAY (Association for the defence of human rights in Turkey, based in Germany), October 10, 2003. The press release is based on the following sources: *Tarih Lise 2 MEB İst. 2003 4. Baskı* (History, 2nd class of secondary school, Ministry of education, Istanbul. 4th Edition, 2003), and *Tarih Lise 2. Kemal Kara, Ferhat Yayinlari İst. 2003* (Kara, Kemal: History, 2nd class of secondary school, Ferhat Yayinlari Editions, Istanbul 2003).

agents, who sometimes enter the church with their arms, now regularly control Father Akbulut's Sunday service.¹⁶

The measures taken by the Turkish Ministry of Education are also marked by considerable regression regarding regional policy and produce exactly the opposite to what the European Parliament would like to obtain by its resolution of 28 February 2002 "On the stability and security of the South Caucasus"

8. Conclusions and Recommendations

In view of the dramatic deterioration of Turkey's policy on minorities for the past year, and because of the lack of respect shown by Turkish authorities towards decisions and conditions set forth by the European Union¹⁷, the co-signatories recommend:

1. An intensified control of effective implementation of legal modifications in the policy towards minorities. The European Union and its institutions cannot just wait and hope that Turkey comply with the European norms. European institutions should immediately react against extreme nationalist measures such as the decree of the Turkish Ministry of Education. Otherwise the European Union will be conceived as having low standards of accession.
2. One day after the publication of the Ministry of Education's decree, the EU Council of General Affairs adopted on 15 April 2003, a Revised Accession Partnership Document, ensuring Turkey an additional financial aid of 250 million Euros for the year 2004, 300 million for 2005 and 500 million for 2006¹⁸. The Commission accorded 100 million to Turkish Education for 1995-1999 and plans to accord the same amount for 2003-2009¹⁹. However, in blatant cases of violations of international as well as national legislation on minorities, as well as in cases of violations of the political and legal principles of the European Community, we consider that such financial support should be cancelled until the situation leading to the criticism is corrected.
3. On the other hand, it is urgent to provide stronger moral, political and financial support to civil initiatives in the field of minority rights and protection.
4. In its resolution of 18 June 1987, the European Parliament decided to "concretely contribute to the initiatives for the purpose of launching negotiations between Armenians and Turks" (Article I.14). On the basis of the recognition of the Armenian genocide in conformity with the United Nations Convention on Genocide, we think that it is necessary to organize a joint Armenian-Turkish conference on textbooks, with the advice and the support of the international community.

Brussels, the 22nd of September, 2004

¹⁶ Rabo Gabriel: "L'Eglise syriaque orthodoxe de la Mère de Dieu à Diyarbakir pillée" Suryoyo Online's News, 09.01.03; <http://www.suryoyo-online.org>.

¹⁷ Cf. European Parliament, Committee in Foreign Affairs, Human Rights, Common Security and Defense Policy: Report on the 2003 regular report of the Commission on Turkey's progress towards accession (COM(2003) 676 – SEC(2003) 1212 – C5-0535/2003 – 2003/2204(INI)); Final A5-0204/2004; RR\329363EN.doc; *Explanatory Statement*, p. 16.

¹⁸ Target and Priorities of Turkey's Foreign Policy: EU Enlargement and Turkey. Website: <http://www.byegm.gov.tr/YAYINLAROMOZ/newspot/2003/jan-apr/n27.htm>.

¹⁹ Press release of the European Armenian Federation for Justice and Democracy, "Armenian Pupils of Turkey are commanded to deny the Genocide", 24 May 2003.

The cosignatory organizations (in alphabetical order)

AAE-Assembly of Armenians of Europe / Brussels
ACSA - Assyrian-Chaldean-Syriac Association / Sweden
AGBU - Armenian General Benevolent Union - Section of Switzerland / Geneva
Abovian Armenian Cultural Association / The Hague
ADL - Ramgavar France (Arménien Démocrate Libéral) / Paris
“Amarantos” – Association of Greeks from Pontos in Wernau / Germany, Wernau
Association “House of Asia Minor” in Corinth (Μικρασιατική Στέγη Κορίνθου) / Corinth
Association of Greeks from Pontos in Munich / München
Association of friends of the people of Nagorno Karabakh (Artsakh) / Berlin
AUS - Armenian Union of Switzerland / Geneva
Centre for Information and Documentation on Armenia / Berlin
Centre for Studies in Pontos (Κέντρο Ποντιακών Μελετών – ΚΕ. ΠΟ. ΜΕ.) /
Thessaloniki
Christian Solidarity International / Zurich
Christian Solidarity Worldwide / London
Europe-Third World Centre - CETIM / Geneva
FOAN - The Federation of Armenian Organizations in The Netherlands / The Hague
FSPC - Federation of Swiss Protestant Churches / Bern
FASD - Föderation der Aramäer (Suryoye) in Deutschland e.V.
Society for Threatened Peoples – Germany / Göttingen
Society for Threatened Peoples – Switzerland / Bern
Human Rights Without Frontiers / Brussels
Humanitarian Association “Humanitas” Berlin / Berlin
IADL - International Association of Democratic Lawyers
Institute of Armenian Studies / Munich
Institute Tchobanian / Paris
Interfaith International / Oxford, UK
International Council of Jewish Women
International Educational Development / Los Angeles
LICRA - The International League against Racism and Anti-Semitism / Geneva
LIDLIP - International League for the Rights and Liberation of Peoples / Geneva
Marangopoulos Foundation for Human Rights / Greece
MRAP - Mouvement contre le racisme et pour l'amitié entre les peuples / Paris
RAA - Research on Armenian Architecture / Aachen, Jerewan, Los Angeles
SAA - Switzerland-Armenia Association/Bern
SUA – Syriac Universal Alliance/Netherlands
The Union of Armenian Associations in Sweden / Uppsala
TÜDAY - Menschenrechtsverein Türkei/Deutschland e.V. / Köln
UASD – Union of Assyrian-Suryoye Associations in Germany / Gütersloh
Verein der Völkermordgegner e.V. / Frankfurt a.M.
WILPF - Women's International League for Peace and Freedom / Geneva
Working Group Recognition – Against Genocide, for International Understanding /
Munich, Berlin

Working Group for the Recognition of the Genocide on Greeks in Asia Minor (Pontos, Cappadokia, Ionia and others) and in East Thrace / Berlin