



# 4 QUESTIONS REGARDING... TURKEY AND THE ARMENIAN GENOCIDE

European Armenian Federation  
for Justice and Democracy

## 1. How is today's Turkey responsible for the Armenian Genocide?

Turkey continues to be politically and legally responsible for the Armenian Genocide [1] on several levels:

- o Simply by virtue of the continuity of the state, according to the Vienna Convention. After the fall of the Ottoman Empire, the Turkish Republic signed the Treaty of Lausanne, assuming then the prerogatives and commitments of the former state, and therefore its responsibility for the Genocide. [2]
- o Moreover, the current Turkish state became guilty of continuing and even “exporting” the Genocide beyond its borders. In 1920, it was directly responsible for additional genocidal massacres in the Republic of Armenia and in Cilicia in 1921. [3]
- o Turkey is also responsible by virtue of the anti-Armenian policies it maintains to this day [4], a veritable “white genocide” that includes: destruction or turkification of the vestiges of the Armenian heritage, the relegation of the Armenian minority to second class citizen status, the totally unacceptable limitations on the right to property ownership by the Armenian community and even the blockade of Armenia.
- o Finally, Turkey today is particularly complicit in the Armenian Genocide through the campaign of denial that it is waging throughout the world [8]. Denial of the Genocide represents a vital element of its policy. The recent creation of a so-called “Turkish Armenian Reconciliation Commission” is a good example of it.

## 2. Why does Turkey persist at denying this Genocide?

The first motive, but perhaps not the most important, lies in the gains that this crime afforded Turkey. Turkey secured a grip on a large part of historic Armenian territory--a strategic zone stretching from the Caucasus to the Middle East, rich with mineralogical and especially in hydrological resources. Furthermore, the Turkish state was deliberate in reaping the spoils of the Genocide, seizing entirely the personal and real property of its victims [5,6]. These thefts were even “legalized” by a law of seizure of “abandoned properties”. For example, the Armenian Apostolic Patriarchate held in 1914 more than 2000 churches, close to 80 episcopal sees and more than 200 monasteries. Today, the same Patriarchate has only six churches. After World War I, the Armenian delegations presented to the Peace Conferences an approximate account of financial losses suffered by the Armenian people. It amounted to 20 billion old francs of the time.[5]

The second motive for Turkish denial is related to the close relationship between the Armenian Genocide and the genesis of the Attaturk republic [7]. First, the construction of the nation-state became possible only through the destruction of the country's minorities, with Armenians being among the first. Then, burgeoning Kemalists drew their human resources from the ranks of the perpetrators of the Genocide, who found, in joining the Kemalists, a way to keep the stolen properties and a way to escape punishment. Thus, recognition of the Genocide would discredit entire chapters of official Turkish historiography, which strive to present this era of the country's history in a favourable light as a struggle for freedom against imperialist authorities.



### 3. Why should the European Union demand that Turkey recognise the Armenian Genocide?

The main objectives of the European Union's policy toward Turkey are related to achieving the true democratisation of Turkish society, assisting in Turkey's economic development and at the same time ensuring the eradication of its archaic and violent policies. However, it is clear that this culture of violence and of impunity is rooted in the Genocide and in the fact that it never has been punished. If Turkey is not required to recognise this Genocide, its efforts to join the Union will continue to be strictly for tactical reasons – not to build a civil society based on the shared values of democracy, justice and a constitutional state.

As such, whether or not it joins the Union, Turkey will continue to be an unstable and threatening country at the eastern fringe of the Union, always ready to revert to extremism, be it fascist or Islamic. Is it not significant that Turkey currently has conflicts or serious disagreements with 6 of the 9 countries surrounding it? Without the recognition of the Genocide, which would lead to a true awakening of the country's consciousness, we can only fear that the Union's current efforts toward a peaceful resolution of the Kurdish conflict, the Turkish disengagement from Cyprus, the improvement of jail conditions or the effective abolition of torture will forever be in vain. We can therefore also anticipate that the whole region may remain economically stagnant, or worse yet, continue in economic recession – a reality from which the European Union stands to suffer more than anyone. Today, Turkey is the cause of regional instability at the doorstep of the Union and will remain so without Genocide recognition, because the impunity it has enjoyed only reinforces its tradition of diplomatic blackmail and coercion.

### 4. What practical measures could the Union demand from Turkey from this point forward?

In 1987, the European Parliament took a stand for a political solution to the Armenian question [9]. The Parliament clearly recognised the Genocide and declared that “the refusal by the present Turkish government to acknowledge the Genocide ...constituted... an insurmountable obstacle to consideration of the possibility of Turkey's accession to the Community”. Furthermore, this resolution called upon Turkey to “treat the Armenian minority in Turkey fairly with regard to their identity, language, religion, culture and school system” and to protect its religious architectural heritage.

For more than 15 years, these demands have been nothing but words and it is important that they be restated, for example, in the next parliamentary report on Turkey's progress towards accession. It is the natural next step for the Parliament to take address the range of issues which continue to remain unresolved year after year (Cyprus, Kurdish minority, torture, etc.)

Nevertheless, the Parliament could also make a few specific, symbolic yet meaningful demands including: calling for the destruction of the mausoleum of Talaat Pasha, one of the main Turkish leaders responsible for the Armenian Genocide, on “Martyrs' Hill” in Istanbul, as well as the renaming of streets and places named after these perpetrators (Talaat, Enver, Nazim...); the closure of museums dedicated to the “Turkish genocide by Armenians”, designed to deny the Armenian Genocide, including the ones located in Van, Igdir and Erzeroum; the abolition of laws forbidding the mention of the Genocide or the formation of associations in memory of the Genocide; the establishment of school programs teaching the Genocide and the elimination of educational programs designed to deny it.

#### Summary Bibliography

- [1] For a general introduction to the Armenian Genocide, *Les Arméniens: Histoire d'un Génocide*, Dr Yves Ternon, Le Seuil 1996 or <http://www.armenian-genocide.org>
- [2] The Genocide Against the Armenians: International Law, Impunity and the Right to Reparations, Dr. Alfred De Zayas, [http://www.cdca.asso.fr/cdca/forum/cdca-forum\\_dezayas.htm](http://www.cdca.asso.fr/cdca/forum/cdca-forum_dezayas.htm)
- [3] *The Complete History of the Armenian Genocide*, Dr. Vahakn Dadrian, Stock 1996.
- [4] Armenians in Turkey Today, Dr. Tessa Hofmann, <http://www.armenianforum.org/site/english/eu-contact/docs-news/Armenians%20in%20Turkey%20MOD.pdf>
- [5] *La confiscation, par le gouvernement turc, des biens arméniens...dits abandonnés*, Baghdjian, Kevork. Saint-Lambert, Quebec: Payette & Simms Inc, 1987.
- [6] *Confiscation of Armenian Property and the Destruction of Armenian Historical Monuments as a Manifestation of the Genocidal Process*, Dr. Digran Kouymjian, <http://armenianstudies.csufresno.edu/faculty/kouymjian/speechs/confiscation.htm>
- [7] *Le Tabou du Génocide Arménien Hante la Société Turque*, Dr. Taner Akcam, *Le Monde Diplomatique*, Juillet 2001, <http://www.monde-diplomatique.fr/2001/07/AKCAM/15341>
- [8] On the methods of denial, *L'Hydre à Quatre Têtes du Négationnisme: Négation, Rationalisation, Relativisation, Banalisation*, Dr. Richard G. Hovannisian, *in l'Actualité du Génocide des Arméniens*, Edipol, 1998
- [9] Resolution on a political solution to the Armenian Question, European Parliament, June 18<sup>th</sup>, 1987, OJ n°190/119