

ASSYRIAN GENOCIDE 1915

SEYFO



Genocide, Denial
and the Right of Recognition

European Parliament Conference

Monday 26th of March 2007

SEYFO CENTER

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and the Right of Recognition

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SEYFO CENTER

Dedicated to study , research and
affirmation of the Assyrian Genocide

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Assyrian Genocide (SEYFO)
Genocide, Denial, and the Right of Recognition
Monday, March, 26th of 2007
European Parliament
Rue Wiertz in Brussels
Conference room P7C050

Press Release

During the years surrounding World War I more than half of the Assyrian population in the Ottoman Empire was systematically murdered. The majority of those that remained were either slaughtered, deported and forced to leave their homeland. That genocide of over half a million Assyrians at the hands of the Ottoman Empire in 1915 is a fact, but has largely been forgotten by the world. The pain of Seyfo – the Assyrian Genocide – is still a dark shadow over the Assyrian people. This pain and suffering continues in the collective memory of the Assyrians as Turkey continues to deny and publicly denounce responsibility for this largely forgotten crime during the First World War. Obviously, the Turkish Republic as the lawful successor of the Ottoman Empire keeps on advocating a denialist policy and refuses the genocide that was committed against the Christians despite the overwhelming facts.

Nowadays, Turkey is a country pursuing to access the European Union, which is a political construction as such based on democratic principles and cultural diversity. Due to that, Turkey has to commence with tackling the fundamental issues such as the genocide in order to move towards building a democratic basis according the European standards. The Turkish state has to comprehend that minorities and thus the existing ethnic and cultural diversity within its country is one of the key elements to progress the process of its access to the European Union.

Therefore the European Union should act in accordance with its own values and bylaws, and oblige Turkey to come to terms with this dark page of her history. The discussion on the genocide should not be a stumbling block for Turkey, but a constructive symbol for a legitimate equality for those minorities still remaining in the country and their statutory acceptance. Although the recognition of the genocide is not an official admission criteria for the accession negotiations, the European Union should apply political pressure on Turkey to ensure a potential candidacy in order to boost the democratization process and have equal rights for all its members and future citizens.

Eventually, Turkey has its fate in its own hands. Either the given chance will be taken or the pace of negotiations will stonewalled and maybe even brought to a stop.

Eva-Britt Svensson, GUE/NGL

Sabri Altan, SEYFO CENTER

Mechtild Rothe, Vice President of the European Parliament

Prof. David Gaunt, Södertörns University College, Sweden

Markus Ferber, EVP-ED, Member of the European Parliament

Willy Faeutre, Human Rights Without Frontiers



Foreword

Just over 92 years ago, approximately two-thirds of the Assyrians – also known as Syriacs and Chaldeans – were murdered within the territories of the Ottoman Empire and at the hands of the founders of the modern state of Turkey. After much destruction in the Assyrian homeland, immense pain in the hearts of our brothers and sisters and continuous fear in the eyes of our children, we have begun, 92 years later, to rise against the treacherous genocide and massacres that slaughtered two thirds of the Assyrian nation in one region.

The Assyrian Genocide is generally a forgotten and an ignored genocide; to be ignored is to be killed twice!

We delight to announce the progress made in the last few years for the recognition of SEYFO. Now, and after much pain and peril: the Assyrian genocide is being discussed in major European cities, day by day more people are being educated regarding the Assyrians and the Assyrian genocide, and of course we now see many more new documentaries made, and new books published on SEYFO related topics.

Assyrian Federation in Sweden, Germany and Holland and other Assyrian institutions around the world were very active to bring this issue to the forefront, and draw international attention to this much neglected topic. As a result of these collective efforts the Assyrian genocide was debated not only in the House of Commons in London but in the Swedish and the EU parliaments also.

This can mostly be contributed to the fact that the

Children of the Assyrian Diaspora, the fruits of those few survivors are now graduating from universities. The childhood of this young diaspora was strewn with painful memories and stories they heard from their elders. Thus these young Assyrians that are well equipped educationally and suffer much pain as a result of their collective memory will make great strides towards the recognition of SEYFO in the very near future.

Many people participated in the conference we – together with GUE/NGL (European United Left, Nordic Green Left) - held in the EU parliament. Our only regret was the fact that we could not accommodate for 577 individuals that requested to attend the conference because the conference room could only seat around 300 people. We were of course supported by many individuals and organisations that had an input in making this conference successful but the efforts of the Assyrian Associations of Wiesbaden, and Gutersloh must be highlighted.

The contents of this booklet which you hold in your hands are mostly the speeches presented in our conference which we held in the EU parliament, however, included you would find the speech made by the MP Stephen Pound in the House of Commons in one of the debates sponsored by Firodil Institute - one of our sister organisations – and another speech made by Prof. Ove Bring in the Swedish Parliament in a conference organised by the Assyrian Federations of Sweden.

SEYFO CENTER

August 29, 2007



Necme Seven - Moderator



**Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,
Respected representatives of organizations,
politicians and members of the press,
Shlomo (meaning peace in Assyrian),**

I would like to take this opportunity and welcome you to this conference on the Assyrian Genocide, SEYFO, here in the European Parliament in Brussels, organized by the European United Left/ Nordic Green Left and the SEYFO Center.

The EUL/NGL is the left winged party in Sweden which puts pressure on Turkey to recognize the Assyrian Genocide. The SEYFO Center is an internationally found institution determined to achieve recognition of the genocide committed against the Assyrians. Through activities like such conferences which have already been held in the House of Commons in London and in the Swedish Parliament in Stockholm, the SEYFO Center intends to demonstrate the suffering of the Assyrians to the international public. Therefore, it works hand in hand with human rights' groups and political parties like this one to put forward its appeal of acknowledgement on the respective levels.

As the head of the SEYFO Center said a couple months ago at a meeting here, "If not now, then

when will we be able to talk about the genocide against the Assyrians, Armenians and Greeks? At this time it is only about breaking that taboo and thus breaking with the silence," Mr. Atman stressed. In fact, Turkey is now in a crucial stage in their request for EU-membership. The Cyprus issue was just the first of several points of contention. The process of reform efforts in Turkey slowed down and stopped almost completely with the murder of the Armenian journalist Hrant Dink. That significant incident showed the continued lack of adequate treatment towards the minorities. This proves that the measures taken by the Turkish government fall short of the requirements set forth by the EU and thus fails to protect the correspondingly low number of ethnic groups left in Turkey.

Whereas prior to World War I more than one third of Turkey's estimated population was of Christian faith, today there remains less than 1 percent of the total amount. What happened to these people? Where did they go and why did they go? Would not ethnic diversity be a great capital to a country like Turkey, especially in terms of joining the European Union, which is at the mean time based on cultural diversity?

Hence, under the theme "Genocide, Denial and the Right of Recognition" various specialists had been invited to speak at this conference here in order to shed some light on the slaughter of the Assyrians, Armenians and Greeks, its coherence to nowadays and the EU. The focus therefore will not be on facts but on Turkey's position and path especially in terms of access to the European Union.

Accordingly, the following speakers will talk on the subject:



Mrs. Eva-Britt Svensson;
Mr. Sabri Atman;
Mrs. Mechthild Rothe;
Professor David Gaunt;
Mr. Markus Ferber; and
Professor Willy Fautré

Consequently, such conferences shall serve as key elements to gain international recognition of SEYFO. Besides, the purpose of these activities is also to analyze how democratic Turkey is and to improve Turkey's treatment of minorities which is at the same time an excellent test for Turkey's commitment towards freedom, democracy and human rights.

Therefore let us open the panel with our first speaker, Mrs. Eva-Britt Svensson.

Mrs. Svensson is a Swedish politician and Member of the European Parliament. She is a representative of the Left Party, called Vänsterpartiet. Currently she is vice-chairwoman of the EUL/NGL group and of the European Parliament's Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality. As such, she was involved with the hearing on the report about the role of women in the society, economy and politics of Turkey.

Our next speaker is Mr. Sabri Atman, head and founder of the SEYFO Center. He is an intellectual and author who has researched extensively on the Assyrian Genocide. He has published already three books on different Assyrian related issues, however in the past years he has put all his focus on the Genocide and thus gave numerous lectures and organized activities on that theme worldwide.

Now we welcome Mrs. Mechthild Rothe, a German politician of the Social Democrats (SPD). Since 1984 she is a member of the European Parliament. Her focus is on the Cyprus issue and therefore also that of

the relations between the European Union and Turkey. Recently Mrs. Rothe was elected as Vice-President of the European Parliament on Germany's current presidency.

Professor David Gaunt is our next speaker on this panel. He is a professor of history at Södertörn University of Stockholm. David Gaunt is a social historian who has written widely on the history of minorities and has done a lot of research about SEYFO, which he published in his first book on that theme. With the title "Massacres, Resistance, Protectors: Muslim-Christian Relations in Eastern Anatolia During World War I", he put together the many different sources he used, amongst them also Turkish ones, that confirm that genocide did indeed take place. Recently he is engaged with uncovering the story on the found mass grave in South Eastern Turkey in the village of Dara around Nusaybin.

Now we call Mr. Markus Ferber to speak. Mr. Ferber is a German politician of the Christian Social Union (CSU). With his various activities on the regional level, he is also a member of the European Parliament since 1994 and president of the CSU-European group. His party is in favour of a privileged partnership, but against a full-membership of Turkey in the European Union due to both the economical and political polemic of Turkey.

The last speaker at this conference is Professor Willy Fautré. He is director of the NGO group "Human Rights Without Frontiers" and a language professor for Germanic languages. He is author of numerous articles on freedom of religion. He has in particular extensive knowledge of Turkey's human rights records and the forced assimilation of the Assyrians. Therefore he has participated already in various panels and discussions on the Assyrian cause.



Sabri Atman - SEYFO Center

**Ladies and gentlemen,
our distinguished guests,**

Only two months ago, on 19 January 2007, we witnessed a great tragedy. An activist's life Hrant Dink, was taken cowardly, for the sole reason of working with human rights organizations in Turkey and for struggling to have the Genocide 1915 acknowledgment.

Hrant Dink, the prominent Armenian intellectual of Turkey, the editor-in-chief of the Armenian weekly Agos was shot dead on 19th January on one of the busiest streets of Istanbul. Hrant Dink was known as a vocal and true defender of people's fraternity, equity and freedom of expression.

We know the killers, we know they are well organized and we know the dark power behind these killers. We are aware about the mentality that exists in Turkey today. The same killers who murdered Hrant Dink have murdered also hundreds and hundreds of thousand of my People.

I am an Assyrian, also called Arameans, Chaldeans, and Syriacs. All these names are used by my people and in spite of these references, we are one and the same people and we form one holistic whole, one nation. I along with others will speak about a well hidden forgotten genocide today, about the Assyrian Genocide 1915.



Grant Dink was a very well known individual and for this reason hundreds of thousands of people flooded the street all around the world to manifest their, grief, anger and emotion.

But how about my people? How about thousands upon thousands of Assyrian individuals, why does nobody speak about them, why this ignorance, why this silence?

Is it because they were not very well known individuals or because Assyrians do not merit the same rights? In democratic societies, it doesn't matter which nation or ethnic background we belong to but all citizens are worthy and enjoy the same rights! So why do the EU- Parliament and the rest of democratic institutes not give the same attention to the Assyrian People? Why don't they give the same attention to Assyrian Genocide 1915?

Ladies and gentlemen,

Today, 92 years on, we are here to talk about a genocide that took place in Turkey during the First World War. We also want to inform the international community and international organisations about the genocide, the pains of which are still prominent today. We are gathered here to demonstrate to you that we, the grandchildren of those survivors, who were raised with the horrifying stories of that genocide, have not forgotten it; we have no right to forget it, nor allow it to be forgotten. In the First World War, as it occurs in all wars, tragic

events took place, and in the shadow of such pain, humanity witnessed the first genocide of the 20th century. This genocide was perpetrated against the Christian people (Assyrians, Armenians and Greeks) living under the rule of the Committee for Union and Progress, which governed the Ottoman Empire.

What we learn from the Ottoman Documents is that Armenian deportations and massacres were not isolated acts and only directed against the Armenians. The proclamation of Jihad (which was propagated as a Holy War against the Christian infidels), on 14 November 1914, was not a proclamation specific to the Armenians but the Assyrians were also targeted. The general plan was to homogenise Turkey. This plan had two primary methods of execution: One was directed against the Muslim population of non-Turkish origin, such as Kurds and immigrants from Balkan; they were relocated and dispersed among the Turkish majority with the purpose of Assimilation. The other was the removal with the aim of annihilating the non-Muslim peoples from Turkey, as a result of which over 2 Million Armenians, Assyrians and Greeks were deported, massacred, and starved to death or driven to such conditions where they became the fodder of wild beasts.

Three major forces were utilised to implement this plan and massacre the Assyrians, Armenians and Greeks (mainly the Christian population):



- 1.The Kurdish tribes
- 2.The Muslim immigrant from Balkan and Caucis.
- 3.Special Organization (Teskilat-i Mahsusa)

Prior to the First World War, the population of Turkey was fourteen million; four million and a half of those were Christian peoples. In other words, thirty three percent of the population was Christian. Today in Turkey, the total number of Christian people only amounts to 0.1 percent of the population.

What happened to these people? What happened to the Assyrians, Armenians and Greeks? Where are they? Where did they disappear to? Would not this diversity of people be a great wealth to a country? Then, what happened to Turkey's greatest asset, its ethnic diversity? The annihilation of this mosaic of colors and diversity was deliberately and strategically accomplished. More than two million people were massacred and over two million people were forced to face migration. No one who can see wars, massacres and tortures taking place in many parts of the world today, has the right to think that our appeal to recognize a supposedly forgotten genocide is meaningless.

This is because opinions like these are not right. Genocide is a crime against humanity and there is no statutory limitation for a crime such as this. Such a crime should not be forgotten and if it is to be forgotten, it can lead to enormous disasters.

This is why we speak to the silent majority! The aim of bringing the issue of the genocides of the past to the fore today and discussing them, is not just to con-

demn them. This cry is equally important for people from different religions, races and cultures coexisting in democratic societies and continuing to live in security.

Only such societies, which possess a democratic mechanism and functions, may remain distant from all kinds of oppression and massacres. It should be clear that the massacres and the genocides that have been carried out until today share a unique characteristic, which is that they were all implemented in undemocratic countries, and by forces opposing democracy. It is therefore important for us to know in what kind of society and world we would like to live!

Do we want to live in a society of equality and fraternity between people from different racial, religious and ethnic backgrounds; or, in societies where some brutal forces do not show even a modicum of tolerance? The source of the problem is not the diversity of ethnic backgrounds. The source of the real problem is the inability to accept and tolerate diversity and beauty!

The source of the problem is not the diversity of ethnic backgrounds. The source of the real problem is the inability to accept and tolerate diversity and beauty! This is what Turkey did in the shadows of the First World War.

They wanted to exterminate the Assyrian people who have a civilisation going back more than seven thousand years. Two out of three Assyrians were



beheaded by the sword. That is why the Assyrians call this genocide SEYFO (sword). Today's Turkish Republic is established upon the blood of two million Armenians, Assyrians and Greeks, and the forced evacuation of two million and seven hundred thousand Greeks. Turkey homogenised this wealth of diversity. Turkey perpetrated genocide against the Christian Assyrians, Armenians and Greeks; and those that remained became subject to various massacres and assimilation methods in order for them to be obliterated.

Today, Turkey wants to construct [a society of] one flag, one language, one religion and one nation. Besides, it is said that „there is democracy in Turkey“. It is said that, „the Turkish state is governed by the rule of law“. Can a society that does not settle the account of the murder of two million people, be a state where the rule of law is respected? Without accounting for these crimes, can Turkey become a democratic state? Furthermore, can Turkey enter the European Union?

First and foremost, Turkey must reconcile with her past. A nation that is afraid of reconciling with the past has no future! In the aftermath of the discussions and resolutions that passed in the American senate, and the French and European parliaments, the debates that took place, the threats [that were issued] and the profanities that were uttered in Turkey are a big disgrace. Those who participate in these debates turn a blind eye on the genocide of two million people. Are they not embarrassed? Have they no shame, they claim that this figure is not correct. Even the

official Ottoman newspaper statistics state that eight hundred thousand people were massacred. Yet, they still debate the issue with no sign of any empathy or shame. They claim that this figure is not correct either. They shamelessly debate a three number figure. Pick any European capital city and it will have a population that approximately equals to 800,000. Can you justify the extermination of babies, children, the youth, the elderly, the men and women, everyone who lives in that city? Can such an act have any excusable or justifiable dimension? Turkey is trying to cheat the democratic opinion by saying it was war, illness, hunger and etc. during the first war. And they say, yes we deported the Armenian for security reason. Security reason!!! We are painfully aware that deportation also included the Assyrians, many of which were young children and elderly. But many Assyrian's were killed in their villages and in their cities. Armenian's and Assyrian's were deported for many reasons from Turkey but sadly alas to be eliminated.

The second argument that Turkey propagates is that some Armenian organisations were fighting against the Turkish authority for independence and for that reason hundreds of thousands of Armenians lost their lives is just complete fabrication. How about the Assyrians, which Assyrian organisation was fighting for independence? It is also pure fabrication. But I must ask it!

When the genocide topic became a daily debate, typically, the Turkish officials embraced a nationalistic

propaganda. As usual, they listed their customary lies. „They ‚collaborated‘ with a foreign enemy in order to destroy our ‚state‘ from within“, they said. „Some of those who migrated were affected by bad weather conditions and fell sick and died of hunger“, they said! „Some incidents happened which we neither wanted nor approved off“, they said!

They are trying to say there is no need to magnify these events. These people are not embarrassed by the genocide, and they are not ashamed to be the grandchildren of those that perpetrated this genocide! And what is worse is that when they are pushed a little into a corner, they threaten: „do not enrage us“, or else we will „repeat“ it.

Is there a difference between the mentality of the perpetrators of genocide and those that deny one? This mentality that I am talking about is in power in Turkey today. This is the mentality we are opposing here today! Other than that, we have no intention to foster hostility or hatred against Turkey or the Turkish people; absolutely not.

Let us be aware that Turkey's dirty past cannot be cleaned away by such threats as „We will do it again“ or „We will crush you again“. First and foremost, the Turkish state, which carries on its shoulder the historic responsibility of the Assyrian and Armenian genocide, owes us, the grandchildren of the victims and humanity, an apology!

The initial condition for eliminating the problems between peoples is not to compromise with history's brutality; on the contrary it is about not compromising. It's possible to encounter disgraceful pages in the history of any nation. What is important is what the nation does to save itself from these shameful and disgraceful pages!

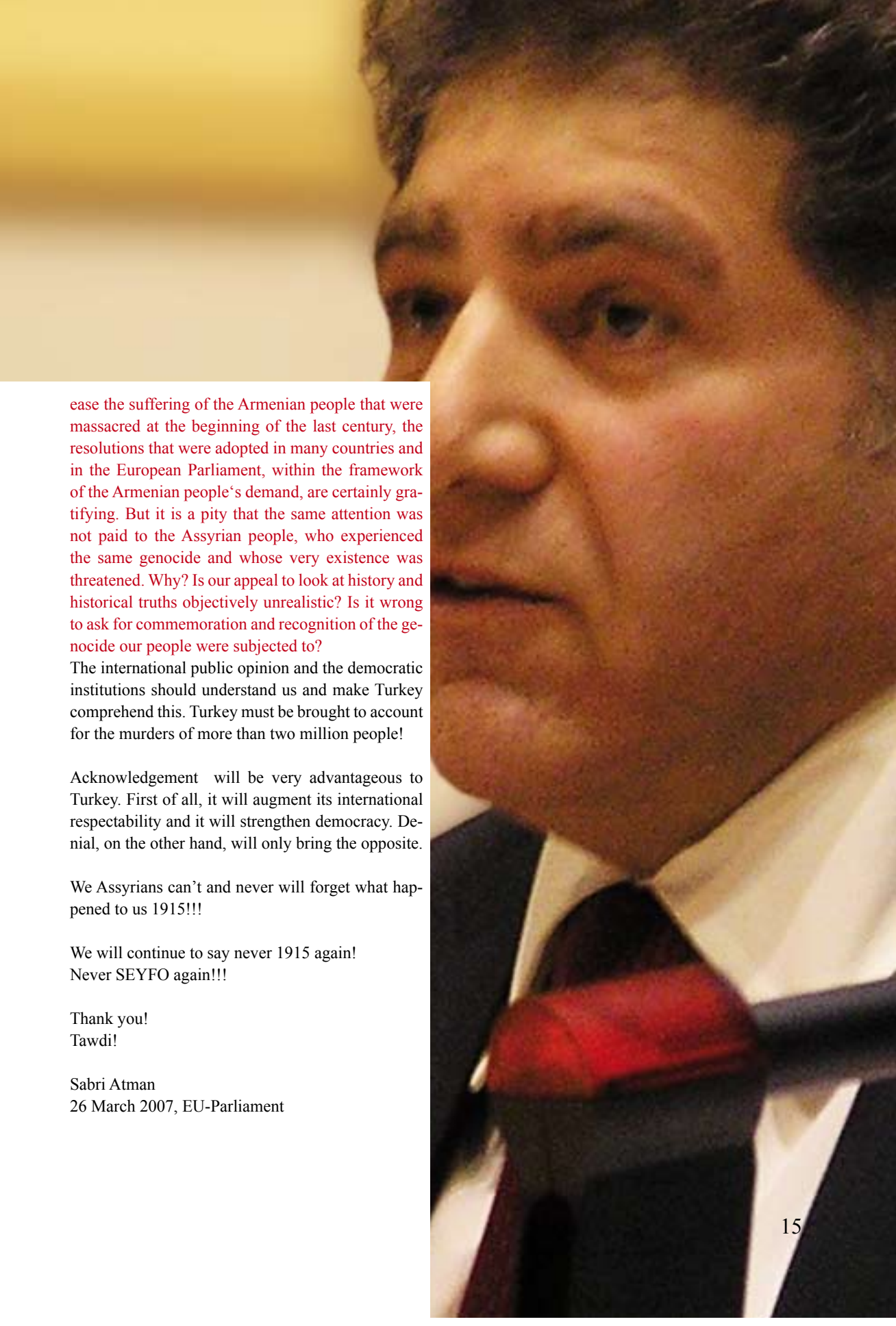
The Turkish Republic lives with its shame. It lacks the courage to settle the accounts of the past. The ruling powers and the Turkish media are only busy slandering the countries that treated the genocide as a current issue, recognised it and passed resolutions on it. In Turkey, they are striving to forbid the teaching of the French language in the schools and boycott French products. When these countries started to debate the genocide that happened in Turkey, Turkey tried to remind everyone what „France did in Algeria“, „what the colonising Americans did to the indigenous Red Indians“ or do the Europeans Countries have the face to dare and speak about Minorities rights in Turkey“. By this Turkey is trying to draw attention away to other parts of the world, in order to cover her own cruelty and filth. „Look they are doing the same elsewhere“.

Distinguished Guests,

We the children of a people that were subject to genocide, have some expectations from the international public opinion and its democratic institutions.

Our people did not suffer just any tragedy. Our people suffered genocide. This should be known and remembered as such. Our childhood passed while listening to the tales of brutality perpetrated against our grandparents; when told of these, we shed blood instead of tears. We want to be understood. In this planned and systematic genocide which came to life by orders from the top, our people were not only massacred by the sword. Moreover, a significant section of our remaining population was uprooted from their ancestral homeland, which they had inhabited for thousands of years.

Turkey does not want to remember her own history; some people must remind her of her own past. To



ease the suffering of the Armenian people that were massacred at the beginning of the last century, the resolutions that were adopted in many countries and in the European Parliament, within the framework of the Armenian people's demand, are certainly gratifying. But it is a pity that the same attention was not paid to the Assyrian people, who experienced the same genocide and whose very existence was threatened. Why? Is our appeal to look at history and historical truths objectively unrealistic? Is it wrong to ask for commemoration and recognition of the genocide our people were subjected to?

The international public opinion and the democratic institutions should understand us and make Turkey comprehend this. Turkey must be brought to account for the murders of more than two million people!

Acknowledgement will be very advantageous to Turkey. First of all, it will augment its international respectability and it will strengthen democracy. Denial, on the other hand, will only bring the opposite.

We Assyrians can't and never will forget what happened to us 1915!!!

We will continue to say never 1915 again!
Never SEYFO again!!!

Thank you!
Tawdi!

Sabri Atman
26 March 2007, EU-Parliament



Mechthild Rothe -
Vice President of the EP (SPD, Germany)

Conference about the Assyrian Genocide at the European Parliament on 26 March 2007

The conference that took place on 26 March 2007 at the European Parliament in Brussels dealt with a very important and sensitive issue: the Assyrian Genocide, Denialism and the Right to Recognition.

This year it is the 92nd time that we commemorate the genocide perpetrated on the Assyrians by the Young Turks of the Ottoman Empire. Up to now, the legal heir of the Ottoman Empire, the Republic of Turkey, has refused an open investigation and has denied that there had ever been any plan to commit massacres. The official version is that the massive death toll occurred during their internal displacement but was not the will of the Ottoman government. The recognition of the guilt and the expression of the truth are however important before starting any reconciliation process between the Turks and the Assyrians. The Turkish government must fulfill the necessary conditions to facilitate a wide open debate about the massacres committed against the Assyrians in Turkey. In a country that wants to join the EU it is still not possible to discuss about this part of the



Turkish history without risking to be prosecuted or to be exposed to public defamation.

It is not fair either that opponents to the adhesion of Turkey to the EU repeatedly instrumentalize the massacres perpetrated on the Assyrians.

The possibilities of reconciliation between the Turks and the Assyrians must have a central position of every discussion.

Last but not least, panelists with various backgrounds – there were politicians, historians and human rights defenders from several countries – debated in a balanced way about the genocide of the Assyrians during the conference held at the European Parliament. For this reason, the conference was a very successful and informative event.





Eva-Britt Svensson,
GUE/NGL (European United Left/Nordic Green Left)

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It has now been nearly 100 years since a half-million Assyrians, Syrians and Chaldeans became the victims of Turkish ultranationalists whose aim was to “homogenize” the country’s population; one hundred years of being made invisible by the surrounding world - in particular by Turkey, which has yet to confront its history and take responsibility for the systematic slaughter. Neither Turkey nor any other nation has as yet recognized the genocide, and Turkey stubbornly denies its existence. This, ladies and gentlemen, is unacceptable - for all parties involved.

Genocide in what was then the Ottoman Empire is a trauma not only for the victims - it is a trauma for Turkey as well. Reconciliation cannot be achieved with anything less than the unrestricted opening of the Ottoman archives for research, and the encouragement of open debate. Publication and discussion concerning the genocide must be entirely decriminalized. It is worth repeating that Turkey should officially recognize that it was indeed a question of genocide on the part of the Ottoman state.

Most countries’ nation-building histories have their dark chapters. In democratic countries they are re



searched, charted, freely discussed and openly debated. Turkey should not be an exception. The Turkish state’s inability to deal with its past, undermines faith in Turkey’s commitment to fulfilling the EU’s Copenhagen Criteria for membership; and thereby even faith in Turkey’s commitment to solving the problem of respect for human rights.

The Swedish Left Party believes that an eventual membership for Turkey could contribute to the EU becoming more open to Asia, as well as speeding up democratization in Turkey itself. Membership, however, must be preceded by Turkey complying with the Copenhagen Criteria and assuming a reasonable stance with respect to Turkey’s nation-building history and prehistory.

The present situation is still unacceptable. Those who have spoken openly about the genocide in Turkey have been persecuted. Repression continues against Christian minorities in the country, and according to the reformed penal code it is a criminal act to even mention the genocide. Decisive changes in Turkey are required for the country to be able to join the EU. We are on your side.



On several occasions the Swedish Left Party, via parliamentary motions and interpellations, has taken up the case with the Swedish government.

We have proposed that the genocide of Armenians, Assyrians, Syrians and Chaldeans be taken up at the yearly Holocaust conferences the government plans to hold.

We insist that democracy and human rights requirements shall have been fulfilled in concrete terms with respect to Kurds, Armenians, Assyrians, Syrians and Chaldeans, in order for Turkey to be granted membership in the EU.

We have said that the Swedish government should recognize the genocide carried out against Assyrians, Syrians and Chaldeans as historical fact.

We have asked the government to demonstrate the urgent need for an official accounting, and recognition of the fact that the genocide of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire was also directed at Assyrians, Syrians and Chaldeans.

We urge the government to work to ensure that Turkey opens its archives to independent international research on the genocide in the Ottoman Empire. This we see as a step in strengthening Turkey's democratic identity and credibility.

We have stressed the need for the Swedish government to convince Turkey to preserve its archive material on this genocide in an appropriate manner, so that researchers can make use of it.

And we have called for the decriminalization in Turkey of all discussion, publication and debate on the genocide.

These demands are in no way too severe or too sweeping. They are, rather, the minimum decency requires. In order to continue on the path we have taken, we need your help. I ask for your continued cooperation on these issues. I want you to know that the Swedish Left Party is with you in this struggle.

Thank you for your time.



Markus Ferber,
EVP-ED Member of the European Parliament

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

With my speech contribution on the Assyrian Genocide and the European Union, I would like to give only a tightened review into decades of cruel crimes, which occurred during the Ottoman Empire. Because my attention will lie today rather on the consequences that we are able to draw for us and for the European society from what happened, and also, on how much we are able to cope with the past, which can positively affect our future. In my opinion denial of committed crimes or efforts to undo them completely is not justifiable according to our current European solidary patterns of thinking.

Today's Turkey is considered as a legal successor of the Ottoman Empire. Approximately 70 nations of different nationalities, religiosity and cultures lived 700 years long together within the Ottoman Empire. Ethnic or even religious homogeneity, the way for instance Sultan Abdulhamit (1894-1896) tried to achieve brutally, was not existent; rather it was a multi-coloured mixed-cultural patch-work: Christian Assyrians lived together with Muslim Turks, orthodox Greeks and Christian Armenians in a community. It should be mentioned here however that non-Muslim groups of peoples were tolerated by the Ottoman aristocracy only as long as they recognized the supremacy of the Muslims, whereby even during this time discriminations of economic kind were already normal case.



With the ascent of the so-called young Turks/It-tihadists (1908-1918), the massacres and forced homogenizations of the Ottoman people got the aftertaste of a radical nationalism, which aimed to destroy all religious and differently thinking minorities of the Christian population through forced assimilation.

The complete Ottomanisation of all Turkish subjects was the goal of the Young Turks, who held political power in the Ottoman Empire up to the end of the World War I. The 2000 years long existence of the Christianity in Minor Asia was supposed to find an end. Assyrians, Armenians and Greeks were considered as enemies within. Accordingly the argumentation of the Young Turks was based on a systematic and organized destruction as the only way in order to protect the Ottoman Empire from encroachments, no matter what kind.

Even if numbers only insufficiently can express the extent of these terrible acts, they must be mentioned here nevertheless, so that we today at least get a vague imagination of the cruel crimes, which were committed against humanity: approximately 3 millions of Christians - Assyrians, Armenians, and Greeks - found death due to this genocide.

Even if internationally, and in particular by Turkey, this Genocide is denied, the international scholars are in fact united around the opinion that this crime in the first decade of the 20th century can be designated as genocide in line with the dominant legal standards and in the sense of the corresponding UN Convention.

However, Turkey sees this differently: Because the official Turkish historiography rejects the committed genocide, it confesses though the massacres, however they are called as "accompaniment of war circumstances of that time".

In accordance to our current enlightened thinking it



is an absurdity, that those, who engage for a complete clarification of historical facts see themselves confronted with bait media campaigns or have to fear arrest because of the offense of Turkishness (Article 301 of the Turkish penal code).

Freedom of opinion stands on the European agenda right at the top - and that should be the case in Turkey, if Turkey is interested further in an accession to the European Union. I do not want to dwell on details whether Turkey fulfills the Copenhagen Criteria - political, economical or Acquis criterion. But liberty of opinion is in the European Union and in the European society an important property, for which was fought for centuries long and which is part of an European identity. In addition, liberty of opinion means to recognize minorities as such and to accept and protect them. **In addition and in my opinion a consciously responsible handling of the complete past, its clearing-up and the confession to committed acts belongs to that as well. State organisations and judicial system must be ready to create free spaces for a public debate for controversial topics like those of the genocide against the Assyrians.**

We must not make the same mistake today which was often made in our history, which means: religious differences may not be declared automatically to political and social boundaries. We talk much about the European identity. Exactly by the nature of its multi-cultural and various regionally and nationally-shaped characteristics, the European identity is in the position to avoid exclusions due to religious differences. However, exactly this factor in the phenomenon of the European identity must be recognized, so that even today minorities are taken into complete guardianship of political and economic regulations.

Approximately 15 million Muslims live today in the European Union. With new integration attempts and politics again and again it is tried to bring movement and loosening into those often rigid minority situation.

In order to keep the negotiations of the accession going, Turkey is able to report progress in certain areas, e.g., reform of the public administration according to Turkey's progress report 2006, but many fields resemble still social construction place.

With respect to the minority question, it is clear that Turkey has not yet sufficiently "Europeanized". Turkish authorities define the term minority solely as non-Muslim religious communities in accordance with the Lausanne agreements of 1923 – even though and in conformity with European standards also other minorities would have to be regarded as minorities. In practice, Turkey recognizes only Jews, Armenians and Greek, but not the Assyrians as minority. Until today, Turkey does not treat the Assyrians as equivalent members in the political society. Thus, for example, Assyrians who do not possess the Turkish nationality any more, cannot register their possession in the land register leave; also and according to the progress report seizing of Assyrian property increased.

The dispute about the genocide against minorities during the Ottoman Empire must be seen today as a compelling and useful indication of the legal equalization of remaining minorities. No matter if other entry criteria are fulfilled or not - as long as Turkey cannot "Europeanize" itself in this aspect, in my opinion, also the negotiations over a possible entry to the European Union do not need to be continued. Ladies and Gentlemen, the remembrance of the genocide against the Assyrians, Armenians and Greeks must give us at present, and above all, also in the future the opportunity to examine, whether decisions - be those politically, economically and culturally - are not only compatible with the political culture of Europe, but also with our European conscience.

(Translation from German by Abdulmesih BarAbraham)



Prof. David Gaunt
Södertörns University College, SWEDEN

EU- Parliament
March 26, 2007

When World War I was over the world leaders assembled in Paris to establish a lasting peace. Many mistreated minorities sent delegations to place their claim for independence based on the principle of national self-determination. Among them was the Assyro-Chaldean delegation claiming to represent the Syriac speaking groups in eastern Antolia and northern Mesopotamia. Their claim for a state was based on two arguments: that they had suffered from dreadful massacres orchestrated by the Ottoman government; that high Russian and British military commanders and officials had promised them an independence state if they would join the allied cause, which the Nestorian branch of the Assyrian people did when they were pushed out of their Hakkari mountain homelands.

After the world war the traditional heartlands of the Assyrian peoples were deserted and in the process of resettlement by other refugees. Their situation was similar to that of the Armenians, who lived in areas mostly just north of the area of Assyrian settlement. The Assyro-Chaldean delegation to the Paris peace conference presented the figure of 250,000 deaths during the war, making up about half of the pre-war population. These numbers may actually be too low. First, contemporary calculations for the province of



Diyarbakir gave much higher proportions of population loss and were 90 percent for the Chaldeans, 72 percent for the Syrian Orthodox and 62 percent for the Syrian Catholics. Second, the delegation seemed to have not counted the various Catholic churches that Assyrians belonged to. Third, the delegation had no information from the isolated Assyrian communities in northern and central Anatolia, which were mixed with the local Armenians.

The scale of killing, the comprehensiveness of ethnic cleansing, the participation of high government officials in the planning and decision-making, the repeated presence of a handful identified officials in the role of perpetrators (often from the Teshkilat-I Mahsusa “Special Organization), the willingness to commit regular army units to destroy the least pocket of resistance, all this attests to the systematic nature of the Ottoman anti-Christian campaign. It fulfills the legal definition of genocide established in the UN convention of 1948. Under cover of “military necessity” the Assyrians were to be deported from the front-line area accused of being in contact with the Russians, as they resisted deportation the situation quickly escalated into forced ethnic cleansing carried out by the military together with voluntary bands recruited locally. Afterwards it has been stated that this was a civil war, but the Ottoman government had taken the first violent measures and events

themselves show that the Assyrians had no preparations for such a war (neither militarily or politically) and succeeded in mounting effective resistance only in exceptional cases.

My research has built on material from the Turkish archives in an effort to make the first historical narrative of the war experience of the Assyrian peoples. I have then combined this with testimony taken from British, French, German, Iranian and Russian archives as well as contemporary Assyrian testimony and oral history. Testimony taken from the most disparate sources confirm or elaborate on each other. Very little documentation in Turkish archives indicate that a full scale Christian revolt was in process, rather they show that officials were in panic and were annihilating Christians, with flimsy or no evidence, as precautions based on fears of future disloyalty.

When the war began the Assyrians were very divided. Geographically they were spread from northwestern Iran to western Mesopotamia and contacts between regions were few. Religiously, the Assyrians were divided into several rival churches: the Nestorian in the Hakkari mountains and western Iran, the Chaldean (an oriental rite branch of the Roman Catholic Church) in western Iran, Bohtan and Mosul regions, and the Syrian Orthodox Church based in northern Mesopotamia and central Anatolia. On

top of this were sections that had joined the Catholic or Protestant religions. Ingrown religious dislike made it tragically difficult for the Assyrians to mount a common front against the Ottoman anti-Christian policy based on confessional solidarity, and enabled the success of “divide-and-conquer” approaches. There are many accusations of betrayal by the one Christian group against the other.

The first Assyrians to come into conflict with the Ottoman government were the autonomous Nestorian tribes of the Hakkari Mountains. On October 26, 1914 just a few days before the outbreak of the Russian-Turkish war, Minister of the Interior Talaat, decreed that Nestorians living along the border with Iran should be sent to the provinces of Konia and Ankara. They were to be dispersed so that they nowhere would be the dominant element in the population. The reason: suspicion of disloyalty and being the potential instruments of Russia. Government sanctioned massacres broke out in the area and violence escalated throughout the winter and spring of 1915, causing a de facto state of siege. When the Russian army was approaching the area in May 1915 on its way to relieve the Armenians in the city of Van, the Assyrian leaders agreed to combine with the Russians. Immediately the Ottomans organized a full military campaign. The Assyrians with their flintlock rifles put up a heroic defense, but were outnumbered and outgunned. After violent fighting, starvation in the high mountains, and the loss of many people, the remnant of the Nestorian tribes entered Iran in September 1915. Despite some later attempts, they were never to return.

Assyrians in the Iranian province of Urmia had a different, but just as brutal experience. These were Nestorian and Chaldean farmers who lived in a peripheral part of Iran plagued by the expansionist ambitions of the Russians and the Turks. During five months from January to May 1915 the province was occupied by the Ottoman empire who placed here a rag-tag army of gendarmes, Kurdish volunteers and special organization operatives. It was a military force better equipped for sabotage than ruling civilians, and the situation rapidly deteriorated. A major massacre of more than 700 the adult male

Assyrians and Armenians took place in Haftevan at the end of February 1915. This was perpetrated by military units under the command of Jevdet Bey, the governor of Van. In Urmia, persons were taken from their place of asylum in the French mission complex and were executed. This may have been a form of revenge for the formation of Assyrian and Armenian self-defense units armed and trained by the Russians. Early in May 1915

Turkish reinforcements led by Halil (uncle of war minister Enver) lost a major battle at Dilman forcing the withdrawal from Iran. Armenian and Assyrian volunteer brigades under the command of the Armenian Antranik, played an essential role in defeating the Turks. From that moment Halil executed the Turk-Armenian soldiers and officers in his army. As they retreated the troops massacred all Christians that were encountered and annihilated them in the towns of Sairt and Bitlis.

In the southern part of Diyarbakir province the Assyrian population belonged as a rule to the Syrian Orthodox or Syrian Catholic churches and they were often mixed with Armenian Catholics. This was in an area far from the front line and the governor, the former military doctor Reshid Bey, began the persecution months before any written order had come from Constantinople. Here it would seem that local politicians belonging to the Committee for Union and Progress determined an eradication of all Christians in the region and in correspondence with Constantinople they had no qualms about terming Assyrians “Armenians” or using the diffuse term “rebels”. In cities and large towns with mixed Christian population the Armenians were taken first, then the Catholic or Protestant Syrians, and finally the Syriac Orthodox. A sizeable number of Ottoman officials protested over the anti-Christian plans which were transmitted orally and they were either transferred to other provinces or were assassinated. The governorship organized a special committee for the annihilation, and this set up local militia units known in the south as Al-Khamsin (Arabic for the fifty) because they had fifty members. The militia would surround and massacre villages. In larger places or where resistance was expected a call would go out and some Kurdish tribes would assemble. Often the survivors mentioned the same tribes

(foremost the Rama tribe and the Haco branch of the Haverkan confederation), and apparently some tribes were opposed to the massacres and some (the Chelebi branch of the Haverkan confederation and Yezidi Kurds) actively protected Christians. The villages of Azakh and Aynwardo managed to withstand months of sieges, including attacks by the regular army, until a truce was made in November 1915. Most villages and towns, however, were empty of Christians. In September 28, 1915 the governor reported that he had dealt with 120,000 “Armenians” in his province and that there were none left.

After the war some trials were held with the most notorious perpetrators. Accused of war crimes for the annihilation of Diyarbakir’s Christian population, Reshid stated that he considered them to have been harmful bacteria, and wasn’t it a doctor’s duty to get rid of bacteria. He committed suicide before the trial was over. Most of the suspects were transported to Malta for investigation, but they never faced trial and were later released as part of a settlement between the British government and the up-coming Turkish leader, Kemal Atatürk. Some of the perpetrators and organizers continued their political or administrative careers in the Republic of Turkey. There was never any full-scale investigation at that time of the war crimes committed on the Assyrians by the agents of the Ottoman government.

Just as in the case of the Armenian genocide, the various Turkish governments have continued a policy of non-recognition of the systematic annihilation of the Assyrians. However, the growing amount of documentation that historians have assembled is very conclusive and convincing. There was a genocide of the Assyrian peoples.

David Gaunt
Professor of History
Södertörn University College
Stockholm





Willy Fautré
Human Rights Without Frontiers

SEYFO, THE GENOCIDE AGAINST THE ASSYRIANS

Revisionism and Negationism of WW I Ottoman Genocide in Belgium

The Ottoman Empire's widespread persecution of Assyrian civilians during World War I constituted a form of genocide, the present-day term for an attempt to destroy a national, ethnic or religious group, in whole or in part. Ottoman soldiers and their Kurdish and Persian militia partners subjected hundreds of thousands of Assyrians to a deliberate and systematic campaign of massacre, torture, abduction, deportation, impoverishment and cultural and ethnic destruction.

Up to now, the international community has been hesitant to recognize the Assyrian experience as a form of genocide. However, the Assyrian genocide is indistinguishable in form for its Armenian counterpart. Both are narrowly intertwined.

My presentation will deal with the debate about the genocide issue on the Belgian scene in the form that it has explicitly taken, the Armenian genocide, and implicitly and indirectly the Assyrian genocide, SEYFO. My analysis will identify a number of nega-



tionist actors in Belgium, highlight their objectives and their strategies, their links with Belgian political parties, with the Turkish embassy in Brussels and with not very commendable organizations in Turkey.

The Belgian State and the Ottoman Genocide

In 1998, the Belgian senate recognized the genocide committed by the Ottomans against the Armenians during WW I.

On June 6, 2005, the Justice Commission of the Belgian Senate rejected a draft bill (Ref. 51/ 1284) meant to extend the March 23, 1995 law criminalizing the negationism of the Nazi genocide against the Jews to all the genocides and crimes against humanity legally recognized.

The issue of the Armenian genocide which was recognized by all the parties was sneaked in during the debate, especially by the MRAX (Movement against Racism, Anti-Semitism and Xenophobia), but was excluded from the draft law because it had not been recognized by an international jurisdiction. The draft bill extending the criminalization of negationism divided the parties in power and was finally rejected with twelve 'no' votes to two 'yes' votes. If it had



been approved in Parliament, Belgium would have been the first country to punish those who deny the Armenian genocide allegations.

Revisionist and Negationist Players in Belgium

Several Turkish nationalist organizations based and operating in Belgium but linked to sister-organizations based in Turkey are opposed to the qualification of genocide attributed to the mass-scale massacres of Armenians during WWI and even deny the very existence of such massacres.

The Association of Atatürk's Philosophy in Belgium/ Association de la Pensée d'Atatürk en Belgique (APAB-BADD) is a non-profit association linked to the Turkish Labor Party, a nationalist maoist party which is hostile to the United States and to the European Union. It receives public subsidies.

EYAD/ The House of Turkey is a social association. Strange though it may be, its chairman Metin Edeer is also a member of the municipal council of the Turkish town Emirdag (22,000 inhabitants) although he lives in Belgium. He was elected in 2004 on the list of the MHP (Green Wolves), the nationalist extreme-right party in Turkey.

The Turkish Islamic Religious Foundation of Belgium / Fondation religieuse islamique turque de

Belgique (FRITB-BTIDV), better known under the name Diyanet whose president is the adviser for social affairs at the Turkish embassy in Brussels, Omer Faruk Turan.

The Belgian-Turkish Coordination Council (CCBT-BTKK), which was created in March 1996, is an umbrella organization for more than ninety Turkish associations. It gathers together nationalist extreme-right movements depending directly from the Turkish embassy in Brussels. Its leader, Kenan Daggun, was sentenced to nine days in prison due to the incidents that took place during the demonstration against the monument erected in memory of the Armenian genocide in Ixelles.

The Sports Federation of the Turks of Belgium/ Fédération sportive des Turcs de Belgique is an organization depending from the Turkish embassy in Brussels.

Yeni Belturk is an association which published a magazine and runs a nationalist and negationist website bearing the same name.

The symbolic target of the revisionist and negationist actors operating on the Belgian territory, and especially in Brussels, is an Armenian monument.



In 1995, the Armenian community in Belgium proposed to the municipal council of Ixelles (Brussels) to erect a monument in memory of the victims of the Armenian genocide at Square Henri Michaux in Ixelles (Brussels) The proposal was unanimously adopted.

The Revisionist and Negationist Campaign in Belgium

In March 2003, the Association of Atatürk's Philosophy in Belgium (APAB-BADD) organized a non-authorized demonstration in front of the monument dedicated to the Armenian genocide and spattered it with painting. The police had to intervene and to arrest several demonstrators. Elected members of Turkish descent belonging to several francophone political parties in power supported this campaign.

In the same year, during the campaign for the parliamentary elections, the APAB-BADD and the Belgian-Turkish Coordination Council (BTKK) pressured the mayor of Ixelles to remove the monument commemorating the Armenian genocide.

On May 29, 2004, during the political campaign for regional elections, Turkish extremists held a demonstration in Brussels under the slogan "Reject the assertions of genocide." On this occasion, the Committee for the Coordination of the Turkish Associations claimed the destruction of the Armenian monument in Ixelles. Emir Kir, who was to become State Secretary of the Brussels Parliament in charge of Monuments after those elections participated in the demonstration. It was also the case for a number of Belgian elected candidates of Turkish descent belonging to the Socialist Party, the Liberal Party, the Green, the Democrat and Humanist Centre. Among the participants, it is worth mentioning Afyon Mahmut Koçak, a member of the Turkish Parliament belonging to the party of the Prime Minister,

the president of the Turkish Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the mayor of the Turkish town Emirdag and a number of Brussels municipal councilors of Turkish descent.

On December 16, 2004, Yves de Jonghe d'Ardoye addressed a question to the then mayor, Willy Decourty, and the councilors of Ixelles about a demonstration for the demolition of the Armenian monument. The opponents to the Armenian monument raised the issue of the legality of that construction but their attempt was unsuccessful. In his answer, the mayor admitted that Turkish movements had exerted pressure on him to remove the monument but he did not yield to it.

On February 15, 2007, a number of negationist associations organized a conference called "A look at the so-called Armenian genocide" with a controversial guest-speaker, Mr. Yusuf Halaçoğlu, President of the Turkish History Foundation. This foundation is not an academic institution but has always served the political agenda of Atatürk and his ideological heirs since its creation in the 1930s. Mr. Halaçoğlu is currently prosecuted by Swiss justice on the basis of article 261 bis of the Swiss criminal code pertaining to racial discrimination after he delivered a speech in Winterthur in 2004. Despite these charges, the Socialist mayor of the commune of Saint-Josse (Brussels) failed to prohibit this meeting.

Freedom of Expression and Negationism

Another tactic that was used to try to silence anti-negationist activists was to prosecute them on the grounds of defamation.

In November 2004, State Secretary of the Brussels Regional Parliament Emir Kir (Socialist Party) sued



the persons in charge of the website Suffrage Universel who had called him “a negationist, a liar and a delinquent” regarding the issue of the Armenian genocide and his expenses during the last electoral campaign.

In the part of his complaint related to the genocide issue, Emir Kir declared : “It is a fact that the Ottoman Empire ordered the massacre of the Armenian populations and internal displacements (...). This policy can only be unconditionally condemned (...) but I cannot make the next step consisting in affirming that it is a genocide to be assimilated to the genocide of the Jews by the Nazis as long as an independent commission of historians has not qualified these facts.”

The defendants were Pierre-Yves Lambert, an independent researcher, and Mehmet Koksak, a journalist of Turkish descent. Both are running the website in their personal capacity.

The trial started on September 14, 2005. Emir Kir was defended by a famous barrister, Marc Uyttendaele, the husband of Minister of Justice, Laurette Onkelinx, who belongs to the Socialist Party.

The King’s Procurator Valéry de Theux de Meylandt said about the accused that “the incriminated remarks were not off the acceptable limits.”

The court decision was released on October 28, 2005. It was 100% in favor of the courageous defendants.

Links Between the Belgian Political Parties and the Revisionist Players

Due to the election system of proportionate representation, the political parties court the various



cultural groups of foreign origin heavily present in Belgium, and in particular in Brussels, by putting Belgian citizens of Turkish, Moroccan, Congolese, etc... descent on their election lists to garner as many votes as possible from their respective communities. In the last local elections in Brussels, more than 50% of the candidates of the same political party were sometimes of foreign descent.

The problem is not their origin but the fact that the major political parties have failed to screen them on the basis of a number of legitimate criteria and that they have put extreme-right and extreme-left nationalist candidates on their election lists. A number of them have campaigned in their native language and are said to have held a double language within and without their communities. They have now been elected at various levels of the legislative and executive institutions and some are accused of double allegiance, which is incompatible with the Belgian institutions.

It must also be said that ministers and party leaders have campaigned in the premises of Turkish associations known to be negationist.

Conclusions and Recommendations



The debate around the terminology “genocide” or not is outdated. Those who delay their position on this issue until “an international independent commission of historians is put in place and publicizes its verdict” just do not want to recognize the first genocide of the 20th century. Such a commission exists: it is the international community of historians who throughout the last 90 years have amply demonstrated that a genocide was perpetrated by the Ottoman Empire against the Armenians and the Assyrians during WW I.

The Ottoman genocide of the Armenians and the Ottoman genocide of the Assyrians are the two sides of the same coin. They cannot be separated from each other. They are one and the same genocide.

Our organization “Human Rights Without Frontiers Int’l” recommends

to the Belgian political parties

to recognize that genocide unambiguously
to ask their elected members to recognize it
to screen their candidates for the upcoming parliamentary elections.

to the Belgian elected people of Turkish descent

to have one and sole allegiance: the Belgian state

to the MRAX, the Centre for Equal Opportunities, Armenian, Assyrian and civic organizations

to lodge complaints against negationist statements, conferences and demonstrations on the basis of the legislation prohibiting racism and negationism.

Willy Fautré
Director

Sources:

Hannibal Travis, “Native Christians Massacred”: The Ottoman Genocide of the Assyrians during World War I.’, Genocide Studies and Prevention 1,3 (December 2006): 327-371.

Suffrage Universel: <http://www.minorities.org>
<http://www.suffrage-universel.be>

Info-Turk : <http://www.info-turk.be>



The genocide on Assyrians and Armenians

The Swedish Parliament 2007-01-31
Prof. Ove Bring

In March 2003 the Swedish organisation „Levande historia“ arranged a seminar in the town of Uppsala with the theme „The genocide on Armenians and other Christian groups in 1915“. I attended in my capacity as a legal expert on international law, but the two most important contributions were presented by two historians, Klas-Göran Karlsson from the university of Lund, and David Gaunt from the university college of Södertörn. They both confirmed that genocide, in a general sense, had taken place in the then Ottoman empire during the First World War.

The strange thing with this seminar in Uppsala was that Turkey's embassy in Stockholm had sent a historian from Ankara to give a contrasting picture to the picture they suspected the seminar would confirm. The discussion between the historians reached a complete deadlock and the event was commented on later by Turkey's largest newspaper, describing Swedish scientists with derisive words of abuse.

This controversy should never have taken place from a purely historical point of view because the scientific research done on this issue is relatively clear.

There are very many witnesses from 1915: missionaries who were there in the Christian areas; consuls from western countries who reported back to their

embassies about what happened; German military attachés who reported in the same way; and the American ambassador Morgenthau in Constantinople who gave reports about his contacts with the government of the Young Turks, especially about a conversation with Turkish war minister Enver Pasha, in which the minister assured that what took place was ordered by the government.

A document was published already in 1916 entitled The Treatment of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, 1915-1916 by James Bryce, British expert in political science, and Arnold Toynbee, a historian. Bryce had previously been ambassador to the USA and had led an investigative commission during WWI about alleged war crimes in occupied Belgium. Toynbee was in the beginning of his career as a world famous historian.

Johannes Lepsius, a German missionary in Anatolia, was given a task by the authorities in Berlin during the same period of time. He was ordered to compile German diplomatic correspondence concerning Armenia. The documentation of Lepsius was published in 1919 in Potsdam. A number of scientific works published in modern times have completed the picture. Prof. David Gaunt published his book Massacres, Resistance, Protectors 2006. It covers the fate of all the Christian groups of eastern Anatolia during WWI.

It all started in Constantinople on 24th April 1915 when several hundred leading Armenian intellectuals



were arrested, deported and murdered. It was assumed that their Orthodox belief made them friends of the Russians and thus a security risk. Orders followed demanding cities and villages in the east to be emptied on their Christian population. The Armenians were to be removed southwards and death marches and massacres followed. The camps they were removed to in the Syrian desert were not any new settlements; they were an end station of starvation, assault and misery.

The western allies issued a proclamation on 24th May 1915 in which they described what was going on as a “crime against humanity and civilisation“, announcing court proceedings against guilty individuals after the war. No such court proceedings, apart from a few exceptions, ever took place, but the expression „crime against humanity“ was coined.

According to The United Nations Convention on Genocide ratified in 1948, the affected population must constitute an ethnically or religiously definable group in order for the term genocide to be applied to them. This criterion is fulfilled retroactively in the case of the Assyrians and Armenians.

It also requires an intention from the perpetrators to annihilate the group entirely or partly. This criteria of intention is the most difficult to prove. Yet I advocate that the research of history has been able to prove since long time ago such an underlying political purpose: to clear the Ottoman Empire from foreign elements and build a homogenous Muslim state.

The order of the regime of the Young Turks from

April 1915 to clear cities and villages from Armenian elements is documented. The following order, on how to handle the people who are driven together and deported, is lost, probably destroyed in an early stage. But the certainty of the existence of such a brutal order, in practise an order for partial annihilation, is made clear from a later order by Talat Pasha, Minister of Interior, to the governor in Diyarbekir. It is made clear in a telegram from Constantinople from 12th July 1915 that the regime needs to put itself in a more positive light because of the international protests. Talat Pasha issues directives saying that the killings which are lacking in discrimination against Christian groups (in general) must stop, i.e. the special treatment issued for the Armenians must not befall the Assyrians. This was the meaning of the telegram; the genocide committed against the Armenians was acknowledged, but it was not to spread to other Christian groups.

The Swedish word for genocide, folkmord, has been used by Hjalmar Branting (a famous Swedish prime minister) during an Armenia-meeting on 27th March 1917. He said:

„We are not talking about minor assaults but about an organized and systematic genocide (folk-mord), worse than we have ever witnessed in Europe. It has been about annihilating the population of the entire area, drive the survivors out in the desert with the expectation that they will not endure but that their bones will whiten in the desert sand. This genocide is unparalleled among all appalling acts of the war. Our



hearts have ached when we have read about it.“

(Socialdemokraten, the official publication of the Swedish Social Democratic Party, 28th March 1917).

There was no juridical term for these events during WWI, but the term used by the allies „crime against humanity“ was to gain political validity through the regulations of the Nuremberg trials in 1945. What a Swedish government, minister, parliament or parliamentary committee could say about the Armenian and Assyrian tragedy is that it is about massacres that were described as a crime against humanity in 1915 and which could today, from a juridical point of view, be described as genocide. The current Turkish republic has no juridical responsibility for these events as it is a successor state of the Ottoman Empire, but today's Turkey has a democratic identity to guard and it has a responsibility to make sure that freedom of speech is functioning. To be able to freely debate the past and sometimes take a moral responsibility for the damage inflicted on others is a feature of civil democratic societies.

An investigation was launched in 1997 in Sweden to find out about our trade revenue from Germany during the Second World War. A report named „The Nazi gold and the Bank of Sweden“ (SOU 1998:96) established that gold ingots had been received from looted occupied countries and we had even possibly received gold taken from teeth from the death camps in the east. Sweden then gave around 40 million kronor to the Jewish centre in Stockholm as a form of moral compensation.

Swiss banks had enriched themselves in a corresponding way during the war. As the years passed the banks even incorporated the bank accounts of

murdered Jews with their own funds. A storm of protests in the USA in 1998 led the Swiss banks to form a solidarity fund to be used for compensation of survivors. A court in New York announced later that one of the banks would pay compensation amounting to 1.25 billion dollars.

There are more examples of how a debate in democratic states has led to compensation. The money itself cannot compensate for lost lives, but the willingness to pay compensation marks guilt and responsibility and a will for reconciliation. The fact that one is recognized as a victim, as an object of a historical and massive injustice, gives a confirmation of ones identity from the perspective of the affected group.

It is obvious that an open discussion in Turkey about the events of 1915-1918, without any obstacles from article 301 of the Turkish penal code, would benefit Turkey's application for EU membership.

Our politicians are eager to claim that the Assyrian and Armenian genocides are an issue for the historians. But the same thing is not claimed about the Holocaust. The fact that the events of 1940-45 are an issue for politicians and diplomats was recently confirmed by the United Nations General Assembly when it adopted a resolution condemning all denials of the Holocaust. But Seyfo, the year of the sword as it is called by Assyrians (1915), is considered immature for political judgements. I like to uphold that the historians have done their job and they have done it well when it comes to the genocides of 1915-18. They cannot point to documents from any Turkish equivalence to the Wannsee-conference, but they have collected enough material to show there was a deliberate intention to commit what we today call

genocide. One cannot ask scientists to agree totally; they have not agreed totally regarding the Holocaust either. But the stage of knowledge about the Assyrian and Armenian genocides is not insufficient to the degree that allows timid politicians to hide behind arguments of claimed indistinctness.

With this said, I do not claim that now is the right occasion to mediate historical truths on the international stage. It might not be the correct time. But it is concurrently time for our politicians to inform themselves about the factual matter and handle it in a moral manner. What we today call genocide did really take place in the eastern part of the Ottoman Empire year in 1915 and even the years that followed. Furthermore, the affected were different Christian groups -- Armenians and Assyrians. It is time for our politicians to acknowledge that serious historians have confirmed this historical writing and that there is no reason to question their conclusion.

By Prof. Ove Bring

Prof. Ove Bring is one of Sweden's foremost legal experts on international law. He is a member of the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague and a member of the International Law Delegation of the Swedish Foreign Office. This speech was delivered by him during the conference on the Assyrian genocide in the Swedish parliament on 30th January 2007.

Translated from Swedish by Munir Gultekin.



Steven Pound
British MP (Labour)

HOUSE OF COMMONS PARLIAMENTARY DEBATE

Wednesday 7 June 2006

Genocide (Armenia and Assyria)

3.57 pm

Stephen Pound (Ealing, North) (Lab): It is a pleasure to appear before you this afternoon, Mr. Cook, and a particular honour that my right hon. Friend the Minister for Europe will be responding for the Government. Few Ministers, if any, know more about the subject and I could not have chosen a better Minister to respond.

I start with a minor point. The subject of this Adjournment debate appears on the Order Paper as “Genocide in Armenia and Assyria”. I am not seeking to apportion blame, but that is not the title that was submitted. The original title was “Recognition of the genocide of Armenians and Assyrians”. It would be obvious to you, Mr. Cook, and to many people, that to talk about genocide in Armenia, a country that has existed in its present form for a comparatively short time, and Assyria, a country that might have a millennia-old history but is not recognised in international boundaries, would be superfluous.

I wish to speak about the incidents in the then Ottoman empire, particularly in the spring of and throughout 1915, that led, I hope indisputably, to the



planned, calculated genocide of the Christian community, which consisted principally of Armenians, Assyrians and Greeks. I shall seek to persuade my right hon. Friend that the time has finally come for Her Majesty’s Government to join so many other countries, Parliaments and legislatures in recognising the genocide that occurred in that year.

I hope that it will be comparatively uncontentious to state a few basic facts. One and a half million Armenian residents of the former Ottoman empire died



between 1915 and 1923 as a result of calculated genocide. I hope that it is not contentious to say that 3.5 million of the historic Christian population of Assyrians, Armenians and Greeks then living in the Ottoman empire had been murdered—starved to death or slaughtered—or exiled by 1923. I hope that those are not contentious points. I hope that no one would seek to deny that the process started on 24 April 1915 in Constantinople, where 1,000 Armenians were identified, taken from their homes and murdered. I hope

that it is not contentious to reaffirm that 300,000 Armenian males were then conscripted into the Turkish army, unarmed and then murdered, and that death marches into the Syrian desert took place.

Mr. Andrew Dismore (Hendon) (Lab): I do not wish to contest what my hon. Friend says, but I point out that the oppression of the Armenians started much earlier, in the 19th century, particularly under the reign of Sultan Hamid, who was one of the really evil people in this history.



Stephen Pound: Were I to attempt to address the history of the Armenian and Assyrian peoples, I would require far longer than the time that Mr. Speaker and you, Mr. Cook, have allocated to me. I shall refer later to the Caliph Sultan Abdul Hamid. For the record, I confirm that my hon. Friend is correct—massacres took place in 1895 and 1909, and throughout this period—but I am concentrating on 1915, because it is

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the first example of ethnic cleansing and genocide in the 20th century. For that reason, it is vital that we identify the full horror of what occurred.

I say that the events are uncontentious, yet Turkey's greatest living writer, Orhan Pamuk, is currently the subject of attack and vilification, and even a court order, for stating that the Armenian and Assyrian genocides took place. The modern Turkish Government, of whom I am no enemy and who are not entirely responsible for their precursor Ottoman empire, deny to this day that genocide took place.

Mr. Dismore: The real problem is that article 301 of the Turkish penal code makes it an offence to insult Turkishness, and that is what Orhan Pamuk has been charged with. During the past year, 29 other journalists have been charged under that article, and eight have been convicted. Article 305 talks of acts against the fundamental national interest—

Frank Cook (in the Chair): Briefly.

Mr. Dismore: It applies in respect of the Armenian genocide and, of course, advocating troops going out of Cyprus. Article 318 is being used to oppress journalists in a similar fashion.

Stephen Pound: I freely and publicly admit that there are few in the House who have a deeper knowledge of the Turkish penal code than my hon. Friend. He is absolutely correct. To deny genocide is bad enough, but for a state to structure within its legal framework a formal legalistic denial of it seems to be taking us into another area.

I said earlier that I hoped that what I was saying was not contentious, but we have heard that it is. I put to the House the simple question, "Did it happen?" There are those in modern Turkey who would say that there was no genocide—that there was inter-communal fighting, and that a movement of people chose of their own free will to march into the desert and die; and that the decision was freely taken by people in the eastern Ottoman empire to leave their homes, in which their families had lived for hundreds of years, and to move away from their livelihoods and their ancestral lands and to choose instead a lonely death.

I find that view unconvincing, and I cite as evidence one of the most remarkable books that I have ever read. It is by Viscount Bryce and Arnold Toynbee. That book was published during the first world war at the express instigation of the then Foreign Secretary in



order to respond to the reports that were then reaching Her Majesty's Government, particularly via the United States Ambassador Morgenthau, of what appeared to be a systematic programme of genocide.

Toynbee, a distinguished Oxford historian, produced one of the most thoroughly researched and empirically backed volumes that I have ever read. Over and over again, it lists evidence from people who were there at the time. The original version was censored, because it did not name the witnesses. I am grateful, as is the House, to Ara Sarafian, who has published the full uncensored edition of "The Treatment of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, 1915-1916: Documents Presented to Viscount Grey of Fallodon", which identifies those

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who were there at the time—those who witnessed with their own eyes the horrors to which I refer.

I give credit to Lord Avebury, known to many of us as Eric Lubbock, who with me and the tireless campaigner Odette Bazil, presented a copy of the book to Downing street last year. We know that Lord Avebury is not well, and I am sure that we all send our best wishes to him. I also pay credit to Ninos Warda, whose famous book "SEYFO: the Assyrian Genocide in International Law" was recently published.

I also cite as evidence the "Blue Book"—provable, substantiated and sustained evidence. It contains 102

specific eye-witness reports by neutral or belligerent nationals—neutrals such as the United States, and belligerent nationals such as German missionaries. It also contains 10 full statements by missionaries and missionary societies and 66 reports from Armenian clergy, local residents and refugees, as well as the extraordinary documents released by the American State Department—the state papers of Edward Nathan, the US Consul in Mersina. To read his reaction to the unfolding horrors is to realise that this truly was the first genocide of the 20th century.

We have from the then Ottoman empire the evidence of the orders of the Minister of the Interior, Talaat Pasha, to the man whose position might roughly be described as analogous to that of a deportation Minister, Abdulahad Nuri, in which the Minister of the Interior orders Nuri to increase deportation and destruction finally to "solve the Eastern Question".

Genocide did happen—3.5 million people were killed or died in the desert. Why did it happen? Armenians, Greeks and Assyrians had lived in the Ottoman empire for many hundreds of years, and some for even longer; and there was not a systematic programme or pogrom until late in the 19th century. Without doubt there were isolated incidents, but something changed, particularly during the caliphate of Sultan Abdul Hamid, and especially with the election of the Committee for Union and Progress.

İttihadve Terakki, normally referred to now as the Young Turks, were heavily influenced by ideologues such as Vahdettin and Behaeddin Şakir, and created an ideology of Turkification. They harked back to an earlier Turkish empire, which they wanted to see freed of those who were not Muslims and not Turkish speakers. The Christians were the obvious target.

On 12 November 1914, the sultan-caliph addressed an imperial declaration to the Turkish army and navy, demanding their participation in what he described as a “jihad”—a word that few of us knew 10 or 15 years ago, but which now sadly resonates throughout Westminster and the city. “Jihad” was the word that he used on that day. The ruling triumvirate of Talaat Pasha, Jemal Pasha and Enver Pasha were all enthusiastic supporters of the process of Turkification.

If one asks modern Turks why they still deny it, in addition to giving the theory that people willingly wandered to their deaths, they will say that the Armenians in particular were traitors. The Turks will refer to the huge Armenian community around Van lake in Van province, and the fact that some Armenians fought with General Nicolaïeff, who led the Russian troops south to the Van lake and the vilayets in the area. This is an argument that constantly arises. General Nicolaïeff’s fighting took

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place in July, long after the massacres had started. By May 1915, despite strong border censorship, reports were already being taken outside the Ottoman empire by travellers, missionaries and particularly employees of the Baghdad railway. Ambassador Morgenthau received a report that the River Euphrates was so choked with bodies that the water was breaking the banks and flowing beyond its course.

At that time, further evidence was identified. Previously, forced conversions to Islam had been demanded to spare people’s lives, but the rule was changed so that, to be spared, families could convert only in groups of no fewer than 100, or they would not be allowed the protection of Islam. By late May and early June, wounded orphans and widows were arriving in Aleppo, Marash, Aintab, Tarsus, Adana, Sivas, Konia and Smyrna. Refugee bodies throughout the world were begged to help those people, who were arriving in such huge numbers.

I have referred to the slaughter in Van, one of the traditional Armenian centres. That was matched, if not exceeded, by the genocide that took place in Cilicia in the vilayet of Adana and sandjak of Marash. That population had already endured a massacre as recently as 1909. Despite that, the population had increased and it was a stable community that had established



hed its own churches and schools. There was little unemployment and a strong tradition of arable land and animal husbandry. Yet that community had the great misfortune to live on a strategic route through the empire and, more than that, to be the chosen target for Muslim refugees from the Roumelian vilayets that had been ceded by Turkey in 1913 as a consequence of the Balkan war. Those refugees wanted the area around Cilicia, and they got it—over the dead bodies of the established local community.

Zeitoun was ethnically cleansed from April 1915; its inhabitants were driven into the Anatolian desert to die. Those who did not were harried to Sultania and beyond; we do not know where they ended up nor what happened to them. We have records of who they were, but none about what happened to them. We know only that they ceased to be.

It is intensely difficult even to describe what was happening in the Ottoman empire at that time. Typically, the pattern was that Turkish regular army troops—I underscore that; they were regular army troops—would surround a village or community such as Ourfa. The local community would defend itself, as Ourfa's did for a month. Then, inevitably, through force majeure, the Turkish regulars would surround, overcome and kill.

The one exception to that horrific repetition of

slaughter was in Jibal Mousa in the vilayet of Aleppo. A French naval squadron lying offshore witnessed the inhabitants' defence of Jibal Mousa, aware of the horror—the certain death—that awaited them should the Turkish regular army manage to breach their defences. The squadron rescued the inhabitants and carried them to Port Said, where they came under British protection.

Mr. Dismore: That account was very moving. It is a pity that when the same happened in Smyrna in 1923, the navies of the world stood by and let that city burn to the ground with the slaughter of hundreds of

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thousands of its inhabitants—Greek, Armenian and other Christian minorities. Ultimately, that led to an exchange of populations. My hon. Friend mentioned an example of when something was done by the rest of the world. Since then, however, the rest of the world has stood by and allowed the Armenians to suffer.

Stephen Pound: As I said, if I took right hon. and hon. Members down every bloodstained byway of the 20th century, I would exceed the time that I am allowed, Mr. Cook. My hon. Friend mentions the sacking of Smyrna and its replacement by Izmir. That is a scar on the history of our globe and our people. We know that.





I seek recognition of the genocide that occurred in the Ottoman empire. One might think that that ideologically motivated, militarily enforced genocide was so horrific, appalling and awful that recognition would be almost an irrelevance; after all, it would not bring anyone back to life. However, the relatives of those who suffered have experienced what they see as a double death: the deaths of their relatives and the death—the pain and agony—that they feel, knowing that those deaths are denied by those responsible. When we take those feelings into account, we begin to understand why recognition is so crucial and important.

I am massively indebted to the work of people whom I am proud to call my friends, such as Dr. Harry Hagopian, Raffi Sarkissian, Ninab Lamasso, Andy Dharmoo and so many others. They tell me over and again that until there can be recognition of the genocide, there can be no peace. Only when the denial has been confronted and the reasons for it analysed, and when the modern, secular Turkish Government

finally understand what their ancestor Government did, can there be peace.

The friends whom I mentioned make that demand for the sake of remembrance, recognition, respect, redemption—and, yes, recompense. How otherwise can a people move on? The Armenian and Assyrian community has now spread to France, San Francisco, Australia and to our islands, where its people provide a service as ideal, model citizens. They are hard-working decent people, whom we are proud to call British and our brothers and sisters. Every time we look them in the eye, we see reflected the pain of the denial of their history. We simply cannot allow that situation to pertain.

I understand how difficult matters diplomatic are, and how Turkey is becoming increasingly important in the European context. It is a country for which I have no enmity; I have affection and respect for modern Turkey and only hope that it can do as this country has in respect of the crimes committed by our ancestors in centuries past. I hope that modern



Turkey can accept what happened in its name and bring some peace.

Since 1965, many countries and bodies have recognised genocide: Uruguay, Cyprus, Argentina, Russia, Greece, the United States House of Representatives, Belgium, Sweden, Lebanon, the European Parliament, the Italian Parliament, the French Assembly, the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly, the Swiss Parliament, the Canadian House of Commons, the Slovakian Parliament, the Dutch Parliament, the Polish Parliament, the German Bundestag, the Venezuelan Parliament, the Lithuanian

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Parliament and recently even bodies such as Edinburgh city council and the legislative body of British Columbia. The Holy See recognised genocide on 10 November 2000. They have all recognised that genocide occurred, and I cannot see how we can fail to follow where they lead.

Mr. Dismore: There is another reason why we should remember that first genocide of the last century: to

be able to look to the future. I remind my hon. Friend of what Adolf Hitler said some 30 years after that genocide: “Who remembers the Armenians now?” That was one of his justifications for what he was doing to the Jewish community during the second world war.

Stephen Pound: My hon. Friend’s words are so prescient and important that I almost felt like pausing when I heard them. I remember standing on the steps of Downing street with the noble Lord Avebury, who repeated those words in the original German. As we know, when people said to Hitler, “You will never be forgiven for the genocide of the Jews”, he said, “Who remembers the Armenians now?”

Genocide was the new horror of the 20th century. Technology had progressed in such a way that whole populations could be slaughtered. The 1915 Armenian and Assyrian genocide in the Ottoman empire was the first; sadly it was not to be the last, either in the last century or this one. Now no one seeks to deny that genocide took place.

I hope that we can be realistic, because only when we accept that ethnic cleansing and genocide take place can we confront their horrors. We owe that not only to our Armenian, Assyrian and Greek friends, or only to our Christian friends from the former Ottoman empire, but to ourselves. How can we seek to combat the evil of genocide when the very existence of such a major example is denied?

My hon. Friend the Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore) quoted Adolf Hitler. I would like to close by quoting a contemporary of Hitler’s, but a man who walked in the light rather than the darkness. In 1929, Winston Churchill stated:

“In 1915 the Turkish Government began and ruthlessly carried out the infamous general massacre and deportation of Armenians in Asia Minor...There is no reasonable doubt that this crime was planned and executed for political reasons.”

Churchill was right then, and he is right now. I look to my right hon. Friend the Minister and to this Government and this country to play their part in assuaging the agony of those whose relatives died so horribly by recognising in this country the fact that genocide took place. I hope that by such recognition in this House of Commons, in this Parliament, ultimately we may influence the Turkish Government, because

as long as we refuse to recognise that genocide took place, they have the perfect excuse for denial.

Frank Cook (in the Chair): Mr. Hoon, you have nine minutes in which to reply.

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4.21 pm

The Minister for Europe (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): Thank you, Mr. Cook. It is obvious from the passionate presentation of my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Stephen Pound) that he has a thorough and detailed interest in this difficult and painful subject, and we are all grateful to him for setting out his arguments with such clarity and, indeed, for securing this debate.

This matter has been debated in this House on many occasions, not least, as I am sure my hon. Friend is aware, in the immediate aftermath of the 1915-16 massacres that left so many dead and forced survivors into exile. What happened to ethnic Armenians and other smaller Christian minorities living in the Ottoman empire, including the Assyrians, was roundly and rightly condemned at the time. I extend the Government's deepest sympathies to the relatives and descendants of the victims.

That the events took place, and that the then rulers of what is now Turkey should bear some degree of responsibility for encouraging, allowing or failing to prevent them, is not a matter of dispute in this House, but the main concern of this Government is not what we call such horrific events but ensuring that the lessons are learned, and that relationships are rebuilt to ensure a peaceful and secure future for everyone living in the region. To that end, we shall continue to encourage the Governments of Armenia and Turkey to improve co-operation and understanding between their countries.

I want to deal with my hon. Friend's call for the United Kingdom legally to recognise the events of 1915-16 as genocide. The fact is that the legal offence of genocide had not been named or defined at the time when the atrocities were committed. The United Nations convention on genocide came into force in 1948, so it was not possible at the time of the events that we are considering legally to label the massacres as genocide within the terms of the convention.

I recognise that it is perfectly possible intellectually

to try to apply the definitions of genocide from the convention to appalling tragedies that occurred, in this case, some 30 years before. The common practice in law is not to apply such judgments retrospectively. It is not possible for us properly to provide a substitute today for the submission of evidence, cross-examination or arguments that necessarily would have arisen in mitigation in a court of law, whether a local or international one, had there been one with the necessary jurisdiction and had the crime already been recognised and defined. Not least would be the issue of who should be charged with the offence in the circumstances. That is why I hope that my hon. Friend will accept that the legal process that he is asking for would not necessarily be appropriate at this stage.

In any event, as I hope he will accept, historians question each other's accounts of what took place. The debate has primarily been about the causes of the events, those responsible for them and the extent to which the wartime security context may have been a factor, perhaps obscuring the motives of those who were involved. As a result, neither this Government nor previous British Governments have judged that the evidence is sufficiently unequivocal to persuade us that the events could be categorised as genocide, as defined by the 1948 UN convention on the subject.



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However, I emphasise that that in no way diminishes the scale of the terrible individual and mass tragedies that occurred between 1915-16 and both before and after, as my hon. Friends the Members for Ealing, North and for Hendon (Mr. Dismore) have made clear. The key now is to ensure that the full truth about those events is brought to light and that both Armenia and Turkey look to the future.

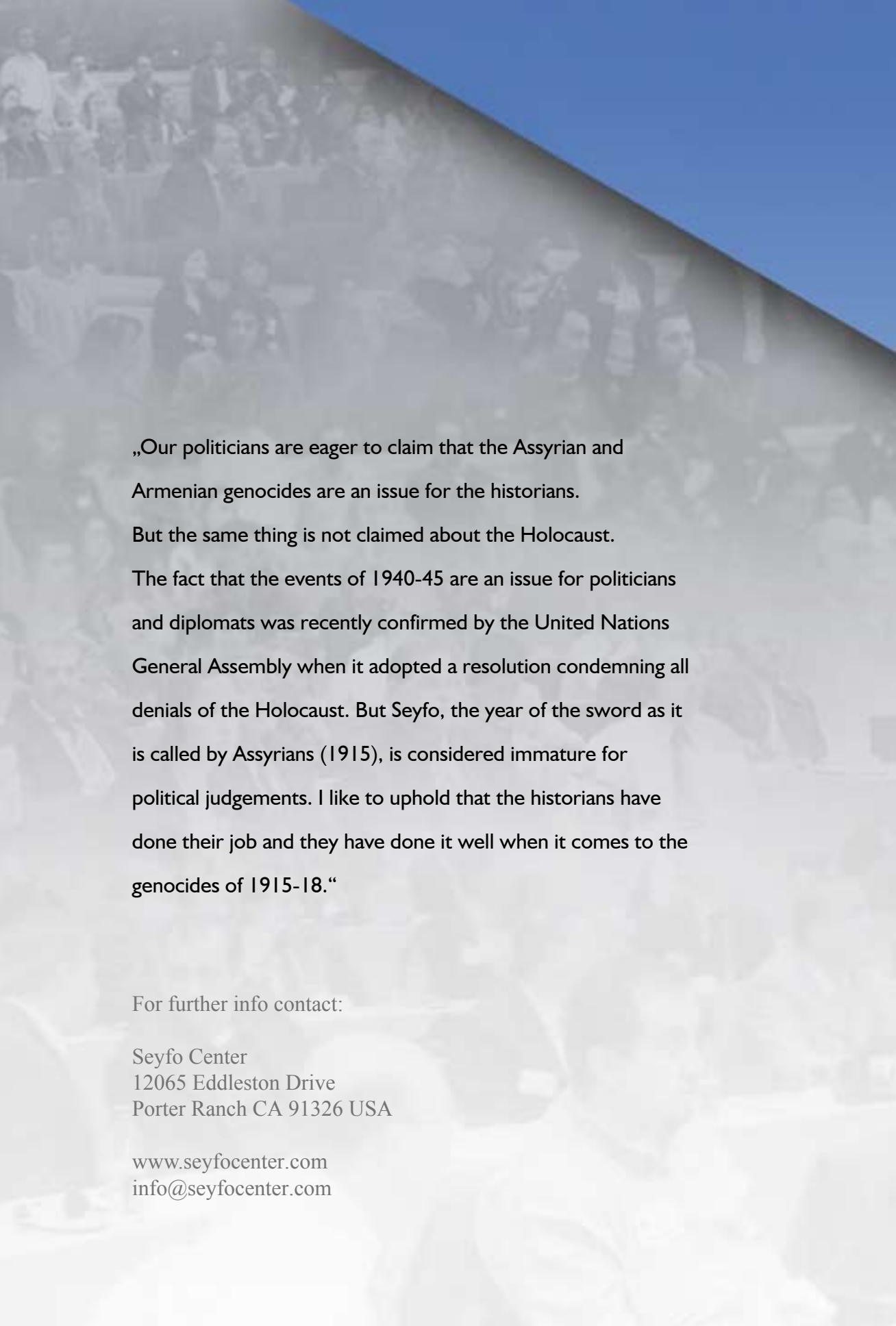
In that context, my right hon. Friend the Member for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane), my distinguished predecessor as Minister for Europe, raised the need for an independent inquiry on the events of 1915-16 at a European Union ministerial meeting with Turkey in March 2005, in an attempt to promote a truth and reconciliation process. I share the view that the work of establishing truth, if it is indeed to help towards reconciliation, must be conducted as a joint exercise by the parties directly involved. Outsiders can commend the idea to them, but they should not try to do the work for them, as the doing of the work by the parties themselves is an important part of the confidence-building and reconciliation process.

Last year, shortly after that idea was proposed, Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan and the leader of the main Turkish opposition party joined forces to call for an impartial investigation by Armenian and Tur-

kish historians of the allegations. I understand that the Armenians felt unable to accept the proposal at that time, but we believe the Turkish proposal to be a welcome signal that Turkey wishes to engage with its neighbour and re-examine the issue. My conclusion is that the idea, or some variant of it, is not at an end, but that further developments in the international situation will be needed before the idea can be explored again and constructively developed.

Obviously, I cannot give the House an absolute assurance that Armenia and Turkey will undertake to move relations forward this year or even the next, although I certainly hope that they will, but I commend to the House the idea that the resolution of the questions raised by my hon. Friend should be pursued through some kind of truth and reconciliation process undertaken by the people of Armenia and Turkey. This Government will continue to encourage the parties to embark on such a process. In the meantime, we should resist the temptation to pre-empt its conclusions.

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„Our politicians are eager to claim that the Assyrian and Armenian genocides are an issue for the historians. But the same thing is not claimed about the Holocaust. The fact that the events of 1940-45 are an issue for politicians and diplomats was recently confirmed by the United Nations General Assembly when it adopted a resolution condemning all denials of the Holocaust. But Seyfo, the year of the sword as it is called by Assyrians (1915), is considered immature for political judgements. I like to uphold that the historians have done their job and they have done it well when it comes to the genocides of 1915-18.“

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