

# TEHLIRIAN'S SPECTER RETURNS

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✘ [Ludér Tavit Sahagian](#), Berlin, 17 June 2016

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The symbolic resolution entitled "Remembrance and Commemoration of the Genocide of Armenians and Other Christian Minorities in the Years 1915 and 1916" passed overwhelmingly, with one dissenting vote and one abstention via an open ballot in a nearly half-attended quorum.

The unified text, agreed upon by the parliamentary factions of the Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union, Social Democratic Party and Green Party, is built on a series of premises, followed by policy prescriptions for the federal government and a justification statement.

It is a significant upgrade over the Bundestag's June 2005 resolution entitled "Remembrance and Commemoration of the Expulsions and Massacres of Armenians in 1915."

The Bundestag vote was preceded by consecutive passionate speeches by German parliamentarians urging their colleagues not to be cowed by Turkish President Recep Tayyip

~~Erdogan's admonitions of harm to Berlin-Ankara relations and to vote in favor of the motion.~~

Expensive "Say the Truth" advertisements with Forget-Me-Not flowers representing the Armenian Genocide's Centennial were placed in top national newspapers in the days leading up the vote. Several conscientious letters were also sent in by leading German grassroots activists, academicians and church heads in conditional support for the pending resolution.

Additionally, two widely-promoted, but poorly-attended counter-protests organized by local and regional Turks were held in front of Brandenburg Gate, Berlin's central and most-visited location, waving Turkish and Azeri flags and spreading genocide denial over the microphone. Their main mottos were "Parliaments Are Not Courts of Law," "The Bundestag is Not a Tribunal" and "The Bundestag is Not Competent ." Per police estimates, no more than 1,500 out of approximately 3-3.5 million German Turks, with "special guests" including fervent denier Dogu Perincek, who had flown in from Turkey for a day, attended each of the controversially-permitted actions.

Immediately following the vote, the "Recognition Now" civil society initiative held an hour-long commemorative vigil in front of Brandenburg Gate with representatives of all communities which have suffered genocide in the former Ottoman space, who alongside their worldwide compatriots expressed appreciation for the resolution's passing. Ruling Turkish politicians and some right-wing Turkish newspapers issued slanderous words and threats of prosecution, loss of Turkish citizenship and direct physical harm to the eleven principled German MPs of Turkic extraction who had voted for the human rights measure following years of silence, hesitation or opposition to doing so. This unfortunate targeted vilification could have been partially avoided had the measure been prudently promoted mainly by ethnic German MPs representing all four parties in the Bundestag, instead of by German-Turkic MPs like Cem Özdemir of the Green Party and Sevim Dagdelen of the Left Party, in the period leading up to the vote.

The 2016 resolution, to be explored in detail in the following sections, has special meaning for all of humanity, considering Germany's owning up to its past genocidal crimes and the fact that the Armenian Genocide was carried out right before the eyes of German military officers and officials, who as key allies of the Ottoman Empire directly assisted the Turks in the planning, execution and cover-up of this great crime against humanity.



## Humanism Up Close

The Bundestag "pays tribute to the victims of expulsion and massacres, which were committed against the Armenians and other Christian minorities of the Ottoman Empire...deploras the actions of the former Young Turk government, which led to an almost complete annihilation of the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire." Armenians' "fate exemplifies the history of mass extermination, ethnic cleansing, expulsions and even genocides, which characterized the 20th century in such a terrible way" – taken verbatim from German President Joachim Gauck's April 23, 2015 speech at an Armenian

## Genocide Centennial event in Berlin and the Bundestag debate the day after.

The Bundestag "regrets the inglorious role of the German Empire, which, as a principal ally of the Ottoman Empire, did not try to stop these crimes against humanity, despite explicit information regarding the organized expulsion and extermination of Armenians, including also from German diplomats and missionaries...The German Empire bears complicity in the events."

Per the Bundestag, "honored" are not only victims "of the unimaginably cruel crimes," but also all of those good Germans and Turks who defied respective government orders and "devoted themselves to the rescue" of genocide survivors.

This "commemoration of the German Bundestag is also an expression of particular respect for the probably oldest Christian nation on earth."

The Bundestag calls for "an honest appraisal" and "constructive analysis" of history and emphasizes the importance of "face the dark chapters" of one's own past and for "the Turkish side to openly deal with the former expulsions and massacres." "The commemoration of the Armenian victims of the massacres and displacement" should be seen as a means "to stay alert and to prevent that hatred and destruction threatening people and nations over and over again" and "a contribution to integration and peaceful coexistence." "Germany sees itself in a particular responsibility in this regard" and remains committed "to contribute to a broad public discussion" on this issue as well as "supporting scientific, civic and cultural activities in Turkey and Armenia...within budgetary capacity."

The resolution urges the continuation and intensification of "the recently started preservation of the Armenian cultural heritage" in occupied Western Armenia and Cilicia, in today's eastern and southwestern part of Turkey, as well as "support, within budgetary possibilities, German initiatives and projects in science, civil society and culture which deal with the analysis of the events of 1915/1916."

The text's concluding justification section delineates the "greatest and most serious catastrophe in the several thousand-year old history of the Armenian people," stating that "numerous independent historians, parliaments and international organizations consider the expulsion and extermination of the Armenians as genocide," whose commemoration, along with their religion and language, constitute a fundamental part of Armenian identity. It adds that "the former government of the German Empire was informed about the persecution and murder of the Armenians, but remained inactive...refrained from putting effective pressure on their Ottoman ally," ignoring the pleas of German Protestant missionary Dr. Johannes Lepsius, among other prominent German public and private figures, through his quickly-banned and -confiscated "Report on the Situation of the Armenian People in Turkey." It posits: "Contrary to the facts, Turkey denies to this day that the expulsion, persecution and murder of Armenians was based on systematic planning or that the mass extermination during the resettlement measures and the massacres committed were intended by the Ottoman government...A reconciliation between the two nations is only imaginable if the events

that occurred 100 years ago are fundamentally clarified and the facts are no longer denied."

The Bundestag resolution concludes with a reference to the wartime archives of the German Foreign Office. Based on the reports of German ambassadors and consuls in the Ottoman Empire, they "document the systematic execution of massacres and expulsions" and "constitute the most important government record of the events of that time."



### **Atypical German Imprecision**

Despite its constructive elements, the Bundestag resolution is rife with errors and deficiencies, some of which are dangerous to the advancement of the Armenian Cause and attainment of restorative justice.

First, the resolution's title implies that the genocide victims were not majorities in their occupied homelands, but minority subjects of an empire whose human rights were greatly violated in acts of genocide that now should only be remembered and commemorated.

Shades of its 2005 resolution, the Bundestag hides mostly behind the statements and quotations of third-parties, shrouded in evasive, superfluous and denial-friendly speech, instead of issuing its own statement on the genocidal crimes using direct, precise and first-person formulations that are not subject to arbitrary interpretation. A single sentence such as "the Bundestag publicly recognizes the Armenian Genocide," as is found in the succinct French Law of January 2001, does not exist in the resolution. There are only two explicit references to the Armenian Genocide – one each in the title and the text. The remainder of the text deals only indirectly with the Genocide.

The resolution also presents a victims' hierarchy, placing Jews on top, followed by Armenians, Arameans/Assyrians and Chaldeans, and omitted Greeks at lower levels. These genocides are equally "unique," as cited in the resolution concerning the Jewish Holocaust, in the totality of the cataclysmic loss and pain they have inflicted on each victim group.

Furthermore, the main genocides in the former Ottoman space occurred not just during 1915-1916, the dates specified in the resolution, but lasted up until the founding of the Turkish republic in 1923 and continue to the present-day.

The resolution regrets the actions of only the German Kaiser Reich (1871-1918) and not the political assistance and support that four German successor states have provided Turkey to this day. It also renders German complicity strictly in the manner of knowing and staying neutral, offering not one clause that implies apology, responsibility and steps toward reparations by the German state to the Armenian people for its chief accomplice role in this genocide, including benefits gained from Armenian slave labor during the construction of the Berlin-Baghdad Railway.

It also lauds that the Bundestag with all party heads had occupied itself with this genocide on April

24, 2015, while refraining to explain why the resolution was not passed on that important centennial date.

Displaying commitment to "the special historical responsibility of Germany," the resolution stresses the need for "new impulses" to "overcoming old divisions" and "seeking paths of reconciliation and understanding" between Armenia and a Turkey that continues the crime of genocide, enjoys all the fruits of genocide, suppresses within its current borders victims and recognizers of genocide, occupies the bulk of indigenous Armenian lands annexed by genocide, and assists ally Azerbaijan to finish along Armenia's and Artsakh's eastern borders the act of genocide.

In open support for reviving the defeatist Armenia-Turkey Protocols of 2009, the Bundestag backs "the long overdue improvement of Turkish-Armenian relations," "the memory and the normalization of inter-state relations," "the resumption of diplomatic relations and the opening of the shared border," "the commemoration and reappraisal of the expulsions and massacres of the Armenians of 1915," "a commission for the scientific study of the historic events," the "rapprochement, reconciliation and a forgiveness of historical guilt between Turks and Armenians" and "the stabilization of the Caucasus region." The words "commemoration" and "reconciliation" are explicitly used nine and ten times respectively throughout the text.

The resolution's calls for wider inclusion of the genocide "issue" in German school and out-of-school curricula, teaching materials and research initiatives dealing with the history of ethnic conflicts of the 20th century can only be welcomed if it is introduced mandatorily and part of examinations, as German public schools' self-driven learning structure quite often emphasizes only voluntary reading and instruction. A pilot program has already been run in the federal state of Brandenburg.

The resolution frees modern Turkey of guilt for the ongoing crime of genocide. The text adds that "a distinction has to be made between the guilt of the perpetrators and the responsibility of those alive today." There is nothing on eliminating or overcoming the consequences of this great crime, specifically on land return, reparations and concrete liability of Turkey. It is no wonder that official Ankara's fervent reactions immediately following the vote have speedily softened.

Rejecting, upon the recommendation of the German Foreign Office, the Left Party's petition for unconditional admittance of co-responsibility in the Genocide was another major mistake.

The resolution's justification section repeats "expulsions" and "massacres" several times, downplaying the fact that these were all systematically-planned death marches of an unprecedented genocide.

An international law council or expert must also determine if use of the term "Völkermord" (literally "the murder of peoples" and historically a synonym for "war" and "mass murder") carries the exact juridical meaning and implications as the term "genocide" ("Genozid" in German) per the 1948 UN Genocide Convention.

Dynamic Armenian and Greek diplomacy during the resolution's drafting may have ensured the adoption of a more valuable resolution.

Errors and deficiencies aside, the Bundestag resolution is an unforgettable testament to the German people's cardinal respect for human rights and justice.



### **"Never Again" or "Yes Again"?**

"Armenia-Resolution," "Armenian-Resolution" and "Armenians-Resolution" (and very rarely "Armenian-Genocide-Resolution") are the main headlines dominating the German-speaking media and press landscape since the resolution's June 2<sup>nd</sup> adoption – a minimization or soft form of denial. These have been juxtaposed by generally-favorable editorials, opinions and letters by several enlightened German writers and readers, especially in *Berliner Morgenpost*, *Bild*, *Der Tagesspiegel*, *Die Tageszeitung*, *Die Welt*, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, *Junge Welt*, *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, *Neues Deutschland* and *Süddeutsche Zeitung* – all of which include one or two descriptive sentences on the Armenian Genocide. *Stuttgarter Zeitung* of Germany's manufacturing hub and prominent weeklies *Der Spiegel*, *Die Zeit*, *Focus* and *Stern*, some of whose latest printed editions include not a single word on the subject or cite the "G-word" strictly in quotation marks, are among the exceptions. Owing to increasing Turkish threats against German parliamentarians of Turkic extraction, never in recent decades has the Armenian Genocide received such continuing coverage in Germany than this month.

Armenia's country profile on the German Foreign Office's website still denies the veracity of the Armenian Genocide, using defamatory terms like the "accusation of genocide against 1.5 million Armenians raised by Armenia" and the "massacres and deportations of 1915/1916." German Ambassador to Armenia Matthias Kiesler's dodging of the crucial "G-word" and talk of this world not being "black and white," when Armenians are incontestably unacknowledged and unrequited victims of genocide, during a June 7, 2016 interview on Yerevan-based CivilNet TV, is another clear case of government denial. Additionally, unconfirmed reports state that Germany is finalizing a deal with Turkey to upgrade housing and aircraft facilities for German forces at Turkey's Incirlik airbase – on lands forcefully seized from Armenian Genocide victims – to support airstrikes against ISIS targets. With some 280 German troops already at the base, this implies Germany's continued complicity in the Armenian Genocide.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel was controversially absent alongside the vice-chancellor, foreign minister and other senior officials on the day of the vote that she indirectly backed – also meant to reaffirm Germany's international commitment to "Never Again." Immediately following the vote, in an attempt to quell Turkish ebullition, she stoically presented the fact of the Armenian Genocide as "a difference of opinion on an individual matter" with Turkey, while showering words of praise on the strategic and multi-vectoral character of German-Turkish relations. There is no known evidence of

her ever having used the "G-word" publicly in reference to the Armenian Genocide in her entire political career. At a recent press conference with visiting Azerbaijani President Aliyev, she reiterated her support to the formation of a commission of historians between Armenia and Turkey, which would imply starting anew all attained research and conclusions on the Genocide. Had she dared to act in a same manner regarding the Jewish Holocaust perpetrated by Germany's predecessor state, she would certainly have been pressured to resign.

Political and legal action against acts of genocide in the timeliest, most unambiguous and justice-oriented manner is always essential. Otherwise, the message to the entire world is "Yes Again" to similar crimes against humanity.

### **Resolution's Significance**

The adopted Bundestag resolution, neither a law nor a binding legal statement signed and sealed by the country's Bundesrat and President, is a legislative piece serving mostly German national interests and predicated on political gamesmanship ahead of summer recess. Since senior government officials responsible for foreign policy, trade and defense deliberately skipped the vote, the positive threads of this vote will not translate into government policy. The Green and Left Parties appear to be the main winners of this resolution process in the eyes of the German electorate.

The resolution effectively serves as a straightjacket to restrain increasingly authoritarian and aggressive Turkish leaders, especially swellhead President Erdogan, whose hysterical and baleful words of late toward European leaders have reached new, unacceptable heights. Furthermore, it is a distanced face-saving move for Chancellor Merkel following several recent grandstanding trips to Turkey and months of intensive pandering to Turkish whims to stem the refugee flow into Europe at the expense of democracy and human rights even within Germany. It is also a yellow card to Turkish citizens expecting visa-free travel in the Schengen Area and furtherance in relations between still-genocidal Turkey and the civilized EU in the near future.

The resolution is, nevertheless, a one-stop moral victory over a century of German pragmatism and a partial step forward in the noble quest for restorative justice for the Armenian, Aramaic/Assyrian, Chaldean and Greek peoples. The parliament of yet another major country – never mind the EU's largest Turkey ally and trade partner, host of the world's largest Turkish Diasporan community and itself responsible and apologetic for the Jewish/Roma/Sinti Holocausts, among others – can be checked off for having indirectly recognized the genocides against Armenians and other Orthodox Christians, symbolically regretted its high-level of participation in the genocides and increased global perception and denunciation of these great crimes.

Germany is no longer the missing piece on the global map in terms of parliamentary acknowledgment and remorse for the Armenian Genocide. It still remains one, however, in terms of the necessity for univocal state and government recognition and condemnation, criminalization of the Genocide's ubiquitous denial, official permission for the erection of Armenian Genocide

Memorials on central public lands nationwide, the renaming of infrastructure and removal of graves glorifying genocidaires in Germany, and the provision of long-overdue German remands to the Armenian people. The same applies in handling Germany's genocide of Herero, Nama and other indigenous peoples in modern-day Namibia during 1904-1908.



## **Weight of Armenian Genocide**

The massive weight of the Armenian Genocide – the longest-running and most-complete genocide in modern human history – is indeed shifting, adding fresh momentum to 101 years of sociopolitical unity, activism and scholarship by principled peoples of all backgrounds across the globe.

Thanks to the Bundestag's and several other parliaments' measures on the Armenian Genocide over recent years, as well as Pope Francis' 2015 watershed reaffirmation, the denial genie is finally out of the bottle and there is no going back. Countless front-page press articles as well as primetime television and radio emissions worldwide are circulating on this pressing issue weeks in a row, sending a powerful signal to world leaders – including Australian PM Turnbull, British PM Cameron, Chinese President Xi Jinping, Georgian President Margvelashvili, Japanese PM Abe, Indian PM Modi, Iranian President Rouhani, Israeli PM Netanyahu and U.S. President Obama – that it is high time that they too follow suit in domino-like style. Turkey and Germany are slowly headed to the docks to adjudicate their co-responsibility in this great crime against humanity, unless, of course, they take higher ground to amicably settle their accountabilities outside of court. And, Armenians are slightly closer to reclaiming their Mount Ararat and reestablishing vibrant Armenian life in the golden plains of Western (Wilsonian) Armenia, abutting democratic and prosperous Armenia and Artsakh.

Righteous Soghomon Tehlirian, deeply disturbed by the sudden decimation of two-thirds of his ancient nation in just a few years, was compelled to assassinate chief genocidaire Mehmed Talaat Pasha on Hardenbergstrasse in Berlin on the morning of March 15, 1921. It was a post-war, though still-genocidal, period when Germany and the rest of the world were looking completely the other way and providing safe haven to major perpetrators of the Armenian Genocide. Tehlirian testified that he could not sleep then. With a new political paradigm today emerging based more so on Wilsonian-style human rights and self-determination principles, strongly embodied by this June 2<sup>nd</sup> decision (ironically 95 years to the day of Tehlirian's trial start and subsequent acquittal), he and many others revering his specter globally can sleep now in more complete peace.

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