

Answer to written question 2006/07:24 on October 20th, 2006

The genocides on Armenians, Assyrians/Syrians, Caldéers and Pontians in the Ottoman Empire

Hans Linde asks me what initiatives I intend to take so that Turkey will recognize the genocides on the Armenians, Assyrians/Syrians, Caldéers and Pontians, that took place in the Ottoman Empire in 1915.

The Ottoman Empire's disbandment affected many ethnic and religious groups in Anatolia very hard. It is important that these assaults are thoroughly investigated by historians. There is still dissonance among experts about the course of events, the background causes and how the assaults shall be classified. A bigger sincerity and candor about all of this should contribute to improved relations, not only between groups in Turkey, but also with Armenia and Greece.

The question about the Armenian tragedy was for a long time almost taboo imposed in Turkey. During later years however, a cautious positive development has taken place. Conferences have been arranged in the subject and a line of books have been published. The question has been debated in media and been noticed by Turkish individual organizations. Here has Turkey's EU-process had a positive influence.

Turkey's government has also suggested that a Turkish-Armenian history commission should be appointed to study the question together. They have also spoken about the need of respect for different opinions. According to Turkish authorities, the Ottoman archives are now open for independent researchers. I assume that many will test the material's actual availability is truly increased.

If politicians anticipate research results and lay down historic presentation of facts, it will risk the fragile openness which have made out. I am judging from some reactions in Turkey, on the French law motion that Hans Linde mentions, that it can even complicate the situation for those who wants to promote continuous reforms in the country. In that case, it is a serious development that we have all reasons to try and obstruct. I note that EU:s expansion commissioner Olli Rehn has express himself in the same spirit.

The Swedish government wants in this stage if anything to urge to a strengthen support for Turkey's continuous EU-process. It has been till today a very strong driving force for a more profound democracy and increased respect for human rights.

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