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25 January 2008

The state of cultural heritage in Turkey

Motion for a resolution

tabled by Mr Raffi HOVANNISIAN and other members of the Assembly

This motion has not been discussed in the Assembly and commits only those who have signed it

The genocide of the Armenian people in the final years of the Ottoman Empire is duly documented by incontrovertible evidence housed in the official archives of France, Germany, Italy, Austria, the United Kingdom, Canada, the United States, and other nations around the world. It resulted not only in the death and dispossession of more than 2 million human beings but also in the decimation of the Armenian patrimony, its ways of life, and its fundamental contributions to western culture and world civilisation.

Today, virtually no Armenians remain upon their historic homelands, currently incorporated in the Republic of Turkey, and thousands of churches, monasteries and other spiritual and secular treasures of European architectural heritage have been destroyed or have fallen into disrepair.

Despite Turkey's long-standing official denial of the genocide and its attendant dispossession, a happy exception to the general rule has been the recent restoration of the Armenian Church of the Holy Cross on the island of Aghtamar in Lake Van. Hopefully, this trend will continue into the future, but it must be recorded that the Turkish authorities have forbidden the placement of a cross atop the church. Holy Cross stands without a cross and, having been converted into a museum, is closed to prayer, worship and religious ceremony.

Turkey is a member state of the Council of Europe subject to a full undertaking of all commitments thereto and duties thereunder, and has long sought ultimate accession to membership of the European Union. In particular, it is a party to the European Cultural Convention and the Convention for the Protection of the Architectural Heritage of Europe.

Taking the foregoing into account, the Parliamentary Assembly invites Turkey to take the following measures pursuant to its international obligations and the European identity to which it aspires:

- in the finest example of integrity and leadership proffered by the Federal Republic of post-war Germany, to face history and finally recognise the ever-present reality of the Armenian genocide and its attendant dispossession, to make restitution appropriate for a European country, and so to achieve reconciliation through the truth;
- to provide a vision and a plan of action worthy of a truly and fully European Turkey, including a comprehensive resolution of issues relating to the freedom of expression and reference to the genocide in state, society and education; and to the freedom of conscience, the unrestricted training of seminarians, and the repair of religious and other cultural sites and their return to the Armenian and other relevant minority communities;
- in particular, to conduct in good faith an integrated inventory of Armenian and other cultural heritage destroyed or ruined during the past century, based thereon to develop a strategy of priority restoration of ancient and mediaeval capital cities, churches, fortresses, cemeteries, and other treasures located in historic Armenia, and to render the aforementioned cultural and religious institutions fully operational;



- and, finally, to launch the long-awaited celebration of the Armenian cultural heritage based on a full Turkish-Armenian normalisation anchored in the assumption of history, the pacific resolution of all outstanding matters, and a complete Europeanisation of their relationship.

The Assembly also invites the Monitoring Committee, in the framework of the post-monitoring dialogue on the honouring of commitments and obligations by Turkey, to accord continued attention to the recognition, restoration and restitution of our common European heritage as tendered herewith.

Signed (see overleaf)

Signed¹:

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1. ALDE: Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe
EPP/CD: Group of the European People's Party
SOC: Socialist Group