

Ignoring history and snubbing international law, Dutch parliament recognizes “Armenian genocide”

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The lower House of Representatives (Tweede Kamer) of the Netherlands approved a motion on February 22 to recognize “Armenian genocide” relating to the 1915 events in Ottoman Anatolia. The decision was taken ostensibly for “moral reasons.”

Considering the solemnity of their decision, one would think that the morally motivated Dutch parliamentarians would take their time to debate the issue. But that, evidently, was not the case. The parliamentarians officially took only 6 days to reach their decision.

Solid support

The vote on the motion in the 150-member parliament was 142 in favor and 3 against. So, the support for the motion was overwhelming. Both the ruling and opposition parties backed the motion. The 3 nay votes came from the Denk (“Turkish”) party.

Comparing the voting with that in the Bundestag, where the “Armenian genocide” motion was approved in 2016 with 153 in favor, 1 against, and 1 abstention, but with only 156 members out of total 640 participating in voting, the relative support for the genocide motion in the Dutch Parliament was far greater than that in the German Parliament.

Likewise, when the French lawmakers adopted “Armenian genocide” in 2011, the support both in the National Assembly and the Senate was much lower than the Dutch parliament’s current support.

Why, then, such strong pro-Armenian, anti-Turkish sentiment in the Dutch Parliament? It is most likely that such sentiment stems from the country’s turn to a relatively conservative mindset in reaction to extremist Islam activities in Europe in recent years. This is best manifested by the growing popularity of the anti-Islam, anti-immigrant Dutch politician Geert Wilders. The Party of Freedom (PVV) he heads is the second largest party in the parliament. Traditionally, Dutch people are known for their tolerant and liberal outlook; so the transformation in the political landscape in the Netherlands must be a fairly recent phenomenon.

The Turk-bashing frenzy of recognizing “Armenian genocide” in the Austrian, Luxembourg, German and Czech parliaments recently may have also influenced the Dutch voting – in the sense of the “join the club” mentality.

Whether and to what extent the currently highly strained relations between Turkey and the Netherlands, and the unfortunate “Fascists, Nazi remnants” epithet directed at the Dutch, had also a role, is a matter of speculation. But it is difficult to write off their potential role.

Whatever the reason, however, the Dutch politicians should know that recognizing “Armenian genocide,” amounting to a pronouncement that the Ottoman Turks were guilty of a heinous crime, is a pretty serious responsibility. The Armenian question is a complex historical issue with underlying judicial ramifications. How conscious or knowledgeable were the Dutch politicians vis-à-vis their solemn responsibility? Not much, it appears.

Ignoring history

Regarding history, did the Dutch politicians know that the “Armenian genocide” is baseless because the Ottoman government had no intent to harm the Armenian refugees during the 1915 Relocation, that many Armenians including those in western Anatolia were exempted from Relocation, that the tragic event was merely an inter-communal strife, that the so-called “Andonian (Talaat Pasha) files” and the infamous “Hitler Quote” are fakes, that “Ambassador Morgenthau’s Story” lacks credibility, and that the claimed killing of 1.5 million Armenian refugees by Ottoman Turks is an obscene exaggeration?

That, in reality, Armenians subjected to Relocation numbered only 438,750, of which 382,150 (87%) reached their destination safely, that those perished during the Relocation itself numbered only 56,000 (13%), due to a combination of chaos, disease famine and massacre, the total loss of Armenians, caused by fighting on war fronts on the Allied side, deprivation during their flight to Caucasia, starvation and epidemics amounting to 585,000 in Anatolia during 1912-1922, and an additional 195,000 in the First Republic of Armenia (1918-1920)?

That, on the other hand, the Armenian narrative of the 1915 events we hear so often shamelessly ignores the massacre of more than half a million civilian Muslim victims (Turkish and Kurdish) at the hands of Armenian revolutionaries during 1910-1922?

The heart-wrenching eye-witness reports of the massacres and atrocities inflicted on the Muslims are never heard in the West.

It is very doubtful that the Dutch politicians had heard of the 1923 Manifesto of Hovannes Katchznouni, the First Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia, and the 1919-1921 Malta Tribunal held by the British – the two topics the genocide proponents diligently avoid because they vindicate Turks and easily negate the genocide thesis.

We can also safely assume that the Dutch politicians didn’t know about the March 1, 1920 statement of the League of Nations Secretary Sir Eric Drummond , that “... *in Turkey, minorities were often oppressed, and massacres carried out by irregular bands who were entirely outside the control of the central Turkish Government ...*”

Or about the *Algemeen Handelsblad* article of May 25, 1920, where the war correspondent, in alluding to the inter-communal warfare ravishing Anatolia, and observing that “there are two sides to every truth,” describes how the stories coming from the war zone are twisted in the West in favor of the Armenians due to religious prejudice, and how he witnessed “Turkish settlements ... killed down to the last man ... in a bestial form.”

The list goes on.

Snub of international law

But the “Armenian genocide” allegations are not just about history. In rushing to judgment, the Dutch parliamentarians have failed to take notice of the 1948 UN Convention on Genocide, with its stipulation that the crime of genocide can only be established by a competent court.

There is no court verdict on “Armenian genocide.” None.

The European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR), in its 2013 and 2015 rulings on the Switzerland-Perinçek case, and France’s Constitutional Council, in its January 2016 decision, reminded us of the controversial aspect of “Armenian genocide,” making a distinction between the Armenian claims and the court-proven Holocaust, underlining that parliaments - and governments, municipalities, etc. – have no authority to pass judgment on the crime of genocide.

The International Court of Justice (ICJ) also reminded us, in its 2015 Croatian vs. Serbia decision, that for a violation to be called genocide, there must be specific intent (*dolus specialis*). The mere harm or killing, e.g., during deportation, cannot be called genocide. The specific intent element cannot be proven for the 1915 events in Anatolia. What can be proven, in fact, is just the opposite.

Given these facts, one must ask: What led the erudite Dutch parliamentarians to ignore these judicial rulings in their rush to judgment? Politicians can perhaps be forgiven for their ignorance on history. But what about the judicial imperatives?

Why give short shrift to due process – a fundamental universal right for the accused?

It is bitterly ironic that the Dutch politician Joel Voordewind, who introduced the genocide motion in the parliament, and who, boasting, “Our country houses the capital of international law after all,” and playing the guardian-angel of law, sadly deserted all pretenses of deference to international law when the right moment came. Yes, the ICJ is in The Hague, and the Strasbourg-based ECtHR is not far. Did this fact make any difference for Mr. Voordewind and his colleagues?

The Dutch parliamentarians should also ponder why Armenia, instead of pressing its genocide claim in public forums such as the media or parliaments, doesn’t take its case to an international court. “Armenian genocide” is a hotly contentious issue between Turkey and Armenia, and the IJC has jurisdiction on disputes submitted by its member states. What is Armenia afraid of? Due process? Inadmissibility of hearsay or propaganda? Archival evidence?

Hypocrisy

The Dutch Parliament’s vote also brought forth hypocrisy on the part of the Dutch government. Well aware of the judicial imperatives, the Dutch government ostensibly took the high ground and declared that the parliament’s decision is not binding on the government, and that it would not formally recognize “genocide.” “The government would show restraint,” said the Foreign Ministry spokesperson Sigrid A. M. Kaag.

How convenient? Are we to assume that the executive and legislative branches in the Netherlands do not speak to each other? Are they living on different planets?

Certainly there must have been talks between the two branches before the parliamentary vote, and the government knew what was to transpire. After all, the PM Mark Rutte's own party in the parliament, People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD), fully supported the genocide motion.

Interestingly, the German government took the same "not me" posture when the Bundestag recognized "Armenian genocide."

When it comes to the Armenian question, evidently there is no shortage on hypocrisy.

And Pope Francis, the paragon of rectitude, is no exception to this hypocrisy. When he visited Bosnia in June 2015, His Holiness refused to use the term "genocide" when he condemned the Srebrenica killings even though he was warned in advance by Bosnian academics that these killings had been officially designated genocide by a special UN court, a ruling later upheld by the ICJ.

Somehow, the Muslims are capable of committing genocide, but not the Christians!

The Dutch government also made it known that, as per the parliament's supplementary motion adopted, a high-level official would attend Armenia's genocide remembrance day on April 24. It dutifully added, however, that this attendance should not be taken as the recognition of "Armenian genocide."

How sincere is such statement? Certainly, a visit like this would mean tacit recognition of "Armenian genocide."

Summing it up

With history far from their forte, and with a cavalier attitude toward international law, in recognizing "Armenian genocide" the Dutch parliamentarians, like the other European colleagues before them, failed dismally in embracing justice and fairness.

Have these politicians ever given consideration how their action, vilifying Turks, would impact the 485,000 Turkish immigrants in the Netherlands?

And have they given any thought to the Armenian JCAG/ASALA terror that took the lives of more than 70 innocent people including 40 Turkish diplomats in the 1970s through 1990s? Three of these terror acts took place on Dutch soil, one resulting in the murder of the 27-year old Ahmet Benler, post-graduate student at Delft University and the son of Turkish Ambassador Özdemir Benler.

The allegation of "Armenian genocide" has no historical and legal basis, and the recognition granted to such allegation is no more than the product of Armenian propaganda driven by ethnic and religious prejudice, even hatred, feeding on anti-Turkish, anti-Islam rhetoric. The hatred

borne by Armenian extremists has turned into vengeful assassinations targeting Turkish statesman and diplomats in various countries.

Is it a mere coincidence that the chief champion of the genocide motion in the Dutch parliament, Mr. Voordewind, is a member of the Christian Union party (CU), an evangelical Protestant group that bases its policies on Bible? And religion played no role in the parliament's voting?

After all, when the Armenian side pushes for "genocide" recognition, it never fails to mention that Armenians were the "First Christian Nation."

The Dutch politicians should have also been more prudent when they voted on the genocide resolution. It brought back the memories of the Srebrenica massacres in 1995 as a Dutch battalion under UN command stood by passively. As noted above, the Srebrenica massacres have been officially designated as genocide.

And finally, if the Dutch parliamentarians had a genuine concern for humanity, they could have remembered the Khojaly massacre on its 26th anniversary. Committed by Armenian armed forces in 1992, the event was a modern-day pogrom and ethnic cleansing of horrific cruelty, resulting in the killing of at least 613 Azeri civilians, including 106 women and 63 children.

What should Turkey do?

What should Turkey do about such unfounded charges? A good start is to take the "genocide" resolutions to the UN or ECtHR and seek their annulment. Defamation lawsuits should also be considered.

An effective campaign to educate the domestic and foreign public, supported by scholarly research and publications, should be a long-term objective. In this effort translation of the scholarly publications in Turkish into English should be given due priority.

Turkey should also build a memorial dedicated to the memory of more than half a million Muslims that perished at the hands of Armenian revolutionaries during the WW-I era. A good location might be the city of Van in eastern Turkey of which pre-war population of 308,000 dwindled down to 100,000 after the war due to massacres and forced migration. Perhaps foreign dignitaries including the Dutch can pay respect to these victims when they visit Turkey.

With their long history, Turks have never felt the need to publicize their sufferings and losses. But in the case of Armenian atrocities, an exception seems well justified.

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