

# **EFFORTS TOWARDS THE RECOGNITION OF THE ARMENIAN GENOCIDE BY THE SWISS PARLIAMENT**

ZAVEN MESSERLIAN

Although there was a pre-Genocide Armenian Diaspora, the Armenian Diaspora really took shape after the Genocide perpetrated on the Armenians by the Ottoman Turkish authorities during 1915-1923. The post-Genocide Armenians of the Diaspora were after survival and in a great state of shock; they did not seek official recognition of the Armenian Genocide by the countries where they were then living. After the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Armenian Genocide, the new generation born in the Diaspora started to demand recognition of the Armenian Genocide.

In this article we shall refer to the efforts made in Switzerland, particularly our own.

In late September 1998 I received a circular from the Switzerland-Armenia Association signed by Martin Bitschnau and Rupen Boyadjian requesting newspaper clippings in all languages containing “insults against Armenians: the cruder, the better. For example there are insults such as dogs, microbes, generalization such as Armenians are... thieves, traitors, and terrorist... discriminations such as: do not buy in Armenian stores, do not mix with Armenians, do not trust Armenians, Armenians cannot accede to leading positions in Administration, the Army etc., cases where Armenians have been indicted for anti-Turkism, hatred between nations...”.

The Association wrote that the more recent these clippings, the better. They added “the recognition of the genocide by [the] French Senate, for example, has caused something like hysteria, with insults in newspapers and on television as well. This kind of material would be highly relevant. Also the cases should explicitly name Armenians”. Furthermore all entries had to be impeccably reliable.

Martin Bitschnau had also written a note in German, dated 21 September 1998, to a lady named Diana giving, amongst other instructions, my work place address and, in English, concerning myself, “He is an historian and when we were friends decades ago he used to clip out all documents from papers and keep them organized. I imagine he still does that and could produce the material for you.” I was given a copy of this note.

The reason the material was requested was given to me in a circular letter signed by Rupen Boyadjian, from which I quote:

“On March 24, 1995 Angeline Fankhauser, member of Parliament, submitted a ‘parliamentary Interpellation’ to the Swiss government (co-signed by 29 other members of Parliament) asking if it was ready to officially recognize the Armenian Genocide. In its response of August 16<sup>th</sup> the government (Conseil Federal) condemned “the tragic events”. Parallel to this, the Armenian community wrote a petition to Parliament with the same content on April 24<sup>th</sup> 1995; it was handed over on September 26<sup>th</sup> with approximately 5000 signatures. On January 30<sup>th</sup>, 1996, the Coordination Body of Turkish Associations in Switzerland handed over

a counter-petition (approx. 4200 signatures) condemning the Armenian campaign. No parliamentarian expressed himself or herself on either of those petitions at the parliament's session of 4<sup>th</sup> of March 1996: the proposal of the Commission on Foreign Policy to "notify" the government of the petitions' existence was adopted without discussion.

Finally, on April 24<sup>th</sup> 1997 the ASA, together with 12 other Swiss and Armenian organizations (among them Caritas and the humanitarian aid organization of the Protestant Church, Organisation Mondiale Contre la Torture, the International League for the Liberation of Peoples, and 5 more organizations that joined later) drew the attention of the authorities- the investigating judge in the city of Berne- to the denial of Genocide in the Turkish petition. The authorities had to start an investigation."

As the next paragraphs are inscribed confidential, at this time only part can be disclosed.

"As the case did not seem to advance until the end of 1997 (we did not have access to information), Professor Niggli advised ASA to go for 'civil participation' in the process, which allows access to the court's files, and said that we should also bring a civil law case (treated together with the Criminal case), which would allow us to carry the process up to the federal court (highest instance) in case the judgment was not favorable. At the beginning of March 1998 ASA engaged a lawyer, who asked for civil participation. In the court's file it was then discovered that the case had already been transferred from the investigating judge to the penal judge on September 19<sup>th</sup> 1997 and thus the process had been opened against all 17 representatives of the Coordination Body of Turkish Associations (2 representatives per assoc. plus the president of the coordination body- I will now refer to it as CB). CB's president had been questioned beforehand by the police on the origin of the petition. This revealed that the text had been elaborated together with the Turkish Embassy in Switzerland. The civil case will be brought, as soon as we know more about the Turkish side's legal representation (our financial risk in case of defeat depends on the number of the opposite side's lawyers).

The Swiss anti-racism-law of 1995 forbids denial of Genocide without specifying which Genocides. The relevant part reads: (paragraph 4)... "who publicly, through word, writing, image, gesture, violence or in other ways reduces (disparagement) or discriminates a person or a group of persons because of their race, ethnic background (German: Ethnie) or religion, offending the human dignity, or out of one of these reasons denies, grossly reduces or tries to justify Genocide or other Crimes against humanity,... (par. 6 :) is punished with imprisonment or a fine."

Then the Association Switzerland-Armenia mentioned they were looking for material with "discriminatory content."

"- Newspaper articles

- Statements of Politicians and other Turkish personalities
- Conspiracy theories.
- Nationalist/racial theories (and their influence)
- Laws and their application (e.g.: obstacles for church to inherit funds, buildings)

- Cases of Armenians being denied Turkish civil rights, insults, beating, killings etc., etc.”

Rupen Boyadjian further informed us that the organizers of the Bernard Lewis process were to be consulted.

He added the need to study the identity of Turkish “historians” who denied the genocide, the connection between Ittihadists and the Attaturk movement and the deliberate destruction of Armenian cultural heritage and the exclusion of any reference to Armenians.

The circular ended by stating to those to whom it had been sent: This was sent to Dr. Rouben Adalian, Aram Arkun, and Prof. Stephan Astourian, Prof. Vahakn N. Dadrian, Dr. Tessa Hofmann, Prof. Richard G. Hovannisian, Hilmar Kaiser, Gerayer Koucharyan, Prof. Dickran Kouymjian, Dr. Ashot Manutscharjan, Prof. Robert Melson, Ara Sarafian, Dr. Yves Ternon, Prof. Roger W. Smith, CDCA (Hrayr Ayvazian)

In reply to their request I wrote to them the following letter:

5 October 1998

Association Switzerland-Armenia  
Attention of Martin Bitschnau & Rupen Boyadjian  
Dear friends,

I read your circular dated 15 September 1998. Unfortunately the clippings that I have do not fall in the category of news items described by Prof. Niggli and Dr. Bertossa. I have contacted the Armenian Popular Movement, who has a collection of news items, concerning Armenians, from the Turkish press. If they have the kind of items you want, I shall mail them to you.

However, I am sending here with the following APPEL (an appeal- signed by 90 prominent Swiss intellectuals, in 1915) which I got from the British public Records office F.O. 371/ 2488)

Photocopies of Swiss newspaper news concerning the genocide, again from 1915, and from the same source.

Photostatic copies of my articles

- 1) *The premeditated nature of the Genocide perpetrated on the Armenians.*
- 2) *A United Nations Report in 1918 related to the Armenian Genocide.*

In this last article- see p. 475 of my article- the U.N. restricted document of 1948 finds that the “1915 crimes against humanity” (which in fact was genocide) and the subsequent Allied warning to the perpetrators in May 1915 and Article 230 of the Treaty of Sevres, constitute the legal basis for articles 6 (c) and 5 (c) of the Nuremberg and Tokyo charters, for trying the World War II war criminals.

I wish you success in your endeavors to have the Armenian Genocide recognized by Switzerland. Please acknowledge the receipt of the items I am sending and keep me posted about the results of your efforts.

Sincerely,  
Zaven Messerlian

For its historical importance I am giving below the Appel, signed in September-October 1915 by well-known Swiss personalities, most of them professors.<sup>1</sup>

## APPEL

Tandis que la guerre absorbe toutes les forces des grands Etats d'Europe et distraie l'attention du monde, la Turquie est le théâtre d'événements qui dépassent en horreur tous ceux auxquels nous assistons ailleurs et aussi tout ce qui s'est précédemment accompli dans les mêmes régions.

Il ne s'agit de rien moins que de l'anéantissement systématique d'un peuple, les ARMÉNIENS, dans l'intention arrêtée d'établir dans l'Empire turc la domination exclusive de l'Islam.

Déjà des centaines de mille d'Arméniens ont été massacrés, ou bien, expulsés en masse de leurs villes et de leurs villages, transportés dans des lieux déserts en Mésopotamie et dans d'autres régions, ils périssent misérablement. Un très grand nombre, surtout les femmes et les enfants, sont contraints de se convertir à l'Islam.

Ces faits sont établis par l'affirmation de témoins oculaires, impartiaux, irrécusables en raison de leur caractère et de leur situation.

Les soussignés, tout en appelant le peuple suisse à venir matériellement en aide à ce qui reste du malheureux peuple arménien, attirent l'attention du monde entier sur ces faits et font appel à l'opinion publique dans tous les pays, afin que la sauvegarde des Arméniens survivants soit sans retard prise en mains par ceux qui peuvent exercer une influence à Constantinople.

### MM.

Pfr. II ANDRES, Bern  
Prof. C BÉGUELIN, recteur, Neuchâtel.  
Prof. Br. BLOCH, Basel.  
Prof. P. BÖHRINGER, Basel.  
Eug. BONHÔTE, conseiller national, Neuchâtel.  
  
Félix BONJOUR, conseiller national, Lausanne.  
Louis BONNARD, syndie, Nyon.  
Prof. E. BOVET, Zürieh.  
II. BOVEYRON, président du Grand Conseil, Genève.  
A. BRÜSTLEIN, Avocat, Bern  
Chr. BUCHMANN-SCHARDT, Basel.  
Prof. CASTELLAZ, Fribourg.  
Francesco CHIESA, Tessin.  
  
Pfr. P. FLURY, Sehiers.  
Pfr. Osk. FREI, Alt St. Johann.  
Pfr. K. FUETER, Olten.  
Dekan J. GANZ, Zürich.  
Prof. Lucien GAUTIER, Genève.  
  
Dr. Rud. GEIGY, Basel.  
Prof. Philippe GODET, Neuchâtel.  
Kirchenrat U. GUHL, Frauenfeld.  
C. GUTZWILLER, Basel.  
  
Stadtammann II. HÄSSIG, Aarau.  
Pfr. J. HAURI, Davos.  
Dr. Friedrich HEGAR, Zürich.  
Dr. Karl HENKING, Schaffhausen.  
Dr. Ed. HERZOG, Bischof der christ.-kat.

### MM.

Prof. Rob. CHODAT, Genève.  
Dr. H. CHRIST-SOCIN, Riehen.  
Th. DIETHELM, St- Gallen.  
Pasteur H. Du Bois, Neuchâtel.  
DUSSEILLER, curé de Notre-Dame, Genève.  
Prof. Louis EMERY, Lausanne.  
Pfr. E. ETTER, Rorschach.  
Nat.- Rat H. EUGSTER-ZÜST, Speicher.  
Emile FAVRE, Lausanne.  
Leopold FAVRE, Genève.  
Henri FAZY, conseiller national, Genève.  
Pfr. H. FIGHTER, Basel.  
Dr. Jos. FRAGNIÈRE, notaire apostol., Fribourg.  
Pfr. C. PESTALOZZI, St-Gallen.  
Dr. PESTALOZZI-PFYFFER, Zug.  
Ern. PICOT, juge fédéral, Lausanne  
Prof. Conradin PLANTA, Chur.  
Ed. QUARTIER-LA-TENTE, conseiller etat  
Prof. de QUERVAIN, Basel.  
Prof. L. RAGAZ, Zürich.  
Gonz DE REYNOLD, Fribourg.  
Dr. Eug. RICHARD, anc. Prés. Conseil etat  
Pfr. A. ROTHENBERGER, St- Gallen.  
Dr. César ROUX, Lausanne.  
Pfr. E. RYSER, Bern.  
Pfr. A. SALIS, Basel.  
Alfred SARASIN, Basel.

schw. Kirche, Bern.  
 Prof. Andreas HEUSLER, Basel.  
 Alt Pfr. HUGENDUBEL, Bern.  
 Stadtrat Aug. HUGGLER, Bern.  
 Dir. E. IMHOF, Schaffhausen.  
 Dr. Hans ISELIN, Basel.  
 Pfr. Paul. - H. KIND, Schwanden.

Stadtrat Samuel SCHERZ, Bern.  
 Pfr. A. SCHLATTER, Herisau.  
 Pfr. Th. SCHLATTER, St-Gallen.  
 Pfr. E. SCHNYDER, Schaffhausen.  
 Pfr. Emil SCHULTZE, Chur.  
 Ed. SECRÉTAN, conseiller national,  
 Vaud

Prof. K. KIRCHHOFER, Schaffhausen. Paul SEIPPEL, Genève.  
 Stadtrat Conr. LEU, Schaffhausen. Prof. G. SENN, Basel.  
 Alt. Reg. - Rat F. MANATSCHAL, Chur. Prof. Fr. SIEBENMANN, Basel.  
 Prof. K. MARTI, Bern. Jean SIGG, conseiller national, Genève.  
 Prof. Alf. MARTIN, Genève. Pfr. Ant. SPEHN, Zürich.  
 Dekan J. MEIER, Frauenfeld. Prof. E. STAEHELIN, Basel.  
 Al. DE MEURON, conseiller national, Lausanne. Dir. Rud. STAUB, Baden.  
 Prof. G. MEYER VON KNONAU, Zürich. Dr. von TAVEL-STETTLER, Bern.  
 Pfr. E. MIESCHER, Basel. Pfr. C. TÜCHLER, Herisau.  
 G, DE MONTENACH, conseiller aux Etats, Fribourg. E. USTERI-PESTALOZZI,  
 Zürich.

Past. Alex. MOREL., Bern. VIRIEUX, directeur Banque cantonale,  
 Prof. Paul MORIAUD, Genève. Prof. Eberh. VISCHER, Basel.  
 Obrichter P. MÜRL, Aarau. Dr. Willi VISCHER, Basel.  
 Dr. T. MUSY, présid. Du Conseil d'Etat, Fribourg. Jean DE WATTENWYI, Bern.  
 Gustave-L. NAVILLE, Zurich. Ständerat Dr. O. WETTSTEIN, Zürich.  
 Prof. Ed. NAVILLE, Genève. Pfr. G. WIKEMANN, Rothrist.  
 Ern. PERRIER, procureur général, Fribourg. Leo v. WYSS, Thalwil.

#### Septembre-Octobre 1915.

As to the articles in *Journal de Genève*, they were two. One entitled "Pauvres Arméniens!" on 10 July 1915 was sent to Sir Edward Grey at the British Foreign office by a concerned personality hoping he might "find a way of putting an end to such barbarous proceedings" and the other, "L'extermination d'un peuple", was published on 8 September 1915. We are giving below this second article, as it was published then.<sup>2</sup>

#### BULLETIN

L'extermination d'un peuple

Un fait qui dépasse en horreur tout ce que l'humanité contemple depuis un an s'accomplit à cette heure : l'extermination violente et systématique de tout un peuple.

L'acte est peut-être sans précédents dans l'histoire. Lorsque les Assyriens réduisirent les Juifs en esclavage, ils laissèrent la vie sauve et Cyrus leur permit plus tard de rentrer à Jérusalem et d'y reconstruire le temple. Sous Abdul Hamid- qui vit encore et qui assiste, dans son palais blanc du Bosphore, à la renaissance triomphale de son programme- les massacres se limitèrent certaines localités. Aujourd'hui, c'est le peuple entier, partout où il réside, sur tout le territoire de l'empire ottoman, qu'il s'agit d'anéantir. Enver pacha l'a déclaré lui-même avec un cynisme souriant.

Nous avons accueilli avec une prudence extrême et beaucoup de réserves les premières nouvelles qui nous parvenaient d'Arménie. Nous savons combien facilement se répandent dans ce moment troublé les nouvelles imaginaires. Malheureusement les renseignements

que nous possédons et que nous avons publiés en partie ne permettent plus aucun doute. Le forfait est en train de s'accomplir.

L'ordre a été donné sur une décision du comité jeune-turc, par Enver pacha, ministre de la guerre, de déporter la population arménienne de toutes les provinces d'Anatolie et de Cilicie dans les déserts de l'Arabie, au sud du chemin de fer de Bagdad.

Les provinces (vilayets) de Trébizonde, Erzeroum, Sivas, Bitlis, Karpout, Diarbékir, Adana ont été complètement évacués. Dans la province d'Ismid, l'opération est en bonne voie. Seuls ont été épargnés jus-qu'ici les Arméniens de Constantinople, de Smyrne et de la ville d'Adana, ceux qui sont dispersés en dehors des districts arméniens et 250.000 habitants du vilayet de Van qui ont fui dans le Caucase.

Il résulte en outre de témoignages incontestables que des centaines de mille Arméniens ont été massacrés depuis la proclamation de la guerre sainte, des centaines de mille ont été convertis de force à l'islam. Les hommes valides sont enrôlés pour la guerre, et ne peuvent même pas défendre leurs foyers. Désarmés, employés à la construction de routes beaucoup auraient été fusillés par leurs camarades armés. Les Arméniens qu'on déporte dans le désert ne sont plus qu'un troupeau misérable de vieillards, de femmes, d'enfants, poussés en avant sous le fouet des gendarmes. Cette déportation n'est qu'un massacre déguisé.

Pour empêcher les Arméniens de faire entendre leur cri de détresse, on a arrêté dans la nuit du 28 au 29 avril, à Constantinople, leurs chefs intellectuels, députés, écrivains, médecins, professeurs ; ils ont été envoyés dans l'intérieur, Angora, Konia, Diabekir. On a procédé de même dans d'autres villes importantes.

La déportation en masse et les massacres dans les provinces arméniennes ont commencé le 20 mai. On a donné aux familles quelques heures à peine pour laisser leur maison. On calcule que le quart de ces malheureux est arrivé à destination. Les autres sont morts ou ont été massacrés en route.

Il s'agit ici d'un peuple d'un niveau supérieur qui détient presque tout le commerce et la plupart des métiers manuels en Asie Mineure. Parmi ces jeunes filles et ces femmes vouées aux traitements les plus honteux, des milliers ont fréquenté nos écoles européennes en Suisse, en France, en Allemagne, et les collèges européens et américains existant en Asie Mineure.

Le gouvernement ottoman ne manquera pas, comme Abdul Hamid, d'alléguer de prétendus complots pour justifier ses actes. En réalité, il s'agit d'extirper de l'empire tout élément non musulman. C'est le programme du sultan rouge appliqué par d'autres hommes.

Ces hommes étaient arrivés au pouvoir il y a sept ans, salués avec enthousiasme par tous les chrétiens de Turquie et par tout les parti libéraux d'Europe. Reçu par Talaat bey, ministre actuel de l'intérieur, il y a deux ans, dans les bureaux du *Tanine*, nous avons recueilli de sa bouche des assurances admirables. Démocratie, égalité, justice, progrès... Dans la même pièce, Ismail Hakki bey, professeur de philosophie, autre chef de parti, approuvait de la tête : « Toute notre révolution, s'écria-t-il, a été fait contre un homme qui incarnait un régime détesté. »

Or c'est ce régime qui sévit plus horrible, plus terrible que jamais. Nous avons cru à la sincérité de ces jeunes-turcs. Etaient-ils sincères ? Sont-ils entraînés par l'orgueil de leurs victoires, l'instinct de race ou la fatalité historique ? Sont-ils le jouet d'Enver, ce jeune ambitieux, dont l'extraordinaire carrière fait penser à quelque conte des mille et une nuits ? C'est ce que l'histoire nous révélera.

Nous savons que des hommes de cœur tentent à cette heure d'empêcher que le crime s'accomplisse jusqu'au bout. Il nous paraît impossible que les deux empires alliés de la Turquie restent indifférents. L'inaction de leur part serait de la complicité.-

G.W.

Later I sent to the Association Switzerland-Armenia a few newspaper writings obtained from the Armenian Popular Movement.

There was no further communication with the Association Switzerland-Armenia; however, I did not stop my part in the efforts of securing the recognition of the Armenian Genocide by Switzerland.

Newspapers reported that on March 13, 2001 the Swiss parliament rejected by 73 votes a resolution recognising the Armenian Genocide presented by the Labor party deputy Joseph Zisyadis. 70 deputies, mostly leftists and deputies from the French speaking cantons, voted in favor. Before the vote the "Swiss Minister of Foreign Affairs Joseph Deiss appealed to the parliament not to accept the resolution as it would damage Swiss-Turkish relations". He said the term genocide should be decided by a court, not the Swiss government. The Swiss government, however, condemned the "tragic events" which had caused the death of a great number of Armenians.<sup>3</sup>

Vahe Gabrache, a prominent member of the Swiss-Armenian community, expressed his disappointment at the outcome of the vote.

The Armenian Genocide was not recognized, lacking only three votes.

Upon receiving the above news, I wrote two letters to Swiss parliamentarians Joseph Zisyadis of the populiste Vaudoise party, who had supported the bill, and Hans Fehr who, without denying the fact of the Armenian Genocide, had voted against the recognition. Both letters are given below.

March 30, 2001  
Mr. Joseph Zisyadis  
Partie Populiste Vaudoise  
Parlement Suisse  
Berne  
Switzerland

Dear Mr. Zisyadis,

I wish to commend you for the effort you put to have the Armenian Genocide recognized by the Swiss Parliament.

Do not despair for justice shall prevail, we are hopeful you can have a majority with further efforts. 3 votes difference is not much.

I have enclosed herewith three documents an Appeal signed by prominent Swiss personalities in 1915, photocopies of Swiss newspaper accounts in 1915 concerning the Armenian Genocide and the U.N. recognition document of the Armenian Genocide in 1985. I had sent these to the Association Switzerland-Armenia (of Martin Bitschnau and Roupen Boyajian) in October 1998. Perhaps you have them and have already made use of them.

Wishing you success in this matter.

Yours sincerely,  
Zaven M. Messerlian  
Principal of the  
Armenian Evangelical College

March 30, 2001  
Mr. Hans Fehr, UDC-ZH  
Member of Parliament  
Swiss National Assembly  
Bern, Switzerland

Dear Mr. Fehr,

According to newspaper reports although you have declared "It is impossible to deny the Armenian Genocide", you have voted against the recognition of the Armenian Genocide by Switzerland. It is a pity that a civilized country like Switzerland, which in the past loudly condemned the annihilation of the Armenian people in its 3000 year old homeland in the Eastern provinces of the Ottoman Empire 1915-1923, by a majority of 3 votes, will not be among those who have recognized the Armenian Genocide, namely the United Nations, the European Parliament, the U.S.A. Congress (in 1975), Russia, Canada, France, Italy, Belgium, Sweden, Greece, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, Argentina, Uruguay, Cyprus, Lebanon. The U.N. recognition is enclosed herewith.

Enclosed herewith are two documents one a newspaper account from *Journal de Genève*, another one an Appeal by Swiss personalities in August-September 1915, at the height of the Genocide. You cannot disown your own past and your history for the sake of some temporary economic gain.

I hope the Swiss Parliament will rectify its error and be among those who have recognized the Armenian Genocide.

Sincerely,  
Zaven M. Messerlian  
Principal of the  
Armenian Evangelical College

A few days later I wrote a letter on my own letterhead to the Swiss Minister of Foreign Affairs, Joseph Deiss, and sent it by registered air mail. The letter speaks for itself and is given below.

April 3, 2001  
H.E. Josef Deiss  
Foreign Minister  
Bern-Switzerland

Your Excellency,

According to newspaper reports Your Excellency's meeting with the Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs Ismail Cem on January 25, 2001 bore fruit and your intervention, apparently to preserve Swiss economic interests, was successful, by the difference of 3 votes to prevent Switzerland being among those countries that have recognized the Armenian Genocide.

Enclosed herewith are two documents one a newspaper account from *Journal de Genève* another an Appeal by Swiss personalities in August-September 1915 at the height of the Genocide, as well as the statement by the International Federation of Human Rights, in 1985.

The Genocide of the Armenians was successful. 1.5 million Armenians, two-thirds of the Armenians living in the Ottoman Empire, particularly in its Eastern provinces (until 1844 called the province of Armenia), were annihilated. There are no Armenians left in this 3000 year old homeland of Armenians. The survivors have been scattered to the four corners of the world. Out of the 2200 Armenian Churches within Turkey only 35 remain. 221 Armenian monasteries and 1439 Armenian operated schools were destroyed. The money and property of Armenians was appropriated by the Turkish Government.

Many Swiss personalities were eyewitnesses of the genocide. Most well known amongst them was Jacob Kuenzler, whose daughter Ida Alumuddin wrote a well known-

book *Papa Kuenzler and the Armenians*, giving witness to the Genocide perpetrated on the Armenians.

Even the ambassadors of the war time allies of the Ottoman Empire. Imperial Germany and the Austria-Hungarian Empire sent secret reports, respectively to Berlin and Vienna clearly stating the terrible premeditated plan of the extermination of a subject people of the Ottoman Empire. Below is such a report by Ambassador Hohenlohe “The systematic butchery of the uprooted and deported Armenians have assumed such a scope... It wasn’t only tolerated but openly promoted by the government. It meant the extermination of the Armenians” (Die Ausrottung der Armenier) *Turkei* 183/38, A 24507, 12 August 1915). The Austria-Hungarian Ambassador Palavicini, informed Vienna, “The Armenian population which is being expelled from its homeland is not only being subjected to the greatest misery but also to a total extermination” (12 *Turkie/209/*, No. 50/ p.c. 27 June 1915).

The Swiss newspapers and public opinion in 1915 strongly condemned the genocide as the enclosed documents prove it. Switzerland, in our opinion, should not disown her own past on this matter.

One should remember that the oblivion cast on the Armenian Genocide encouraged the Holocaust, it was Hitler who said in Obersalzberg on August 21, 1939 “After all who remembers today the extermination of Armenians”. (Documents of British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, London 1954, pp. 257-260).

The Armenian Genocide was termed as “crimes against humanity” in 1915, in an Allied warning to the Ottoman government on May 24, 1915. This allied warning and Article 230 of the Treaty of Sevres, constituted the legal basis of articles 6© and 5© of the Nuremberg and Tokyo charters for trying the war criminals, (see U.N. restricted document E/CN. E/W.20 and F.O. 371/72810). It is upon these precedents that war criminals are now being tried in The Hague. One can’t disregard these legal facts.

We regret that your Excellency succeeded in preventing the recognition of the Armenian Genocide, by your highly respected country Switzerland. We only hope this is a temporary success, for justice shall prevail sooner or later.

Sincerely,

Zaven M. Messerlian  
Principal of the  
Armenian Evangelical College

The Swiss Head of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs Federal Councillor Joseph Deiss, replied to my letter after almost five months. Below is his reply.

Berne, 20 August, 2001  
Mr.  
Zaven M. Messerlian  
P.O. Box 129  
Beirut  
Lebanon

Dear Sir,  
I have taken note of your communication relating to the vote of the National Council rejecting the parliamentary request (postulat) presented by Mr. Zisyadis for the recognition of the Armenian "genocide" of 1915.

The Federal Council had indeed proposed to the National Council to reject this parliamentary request. The Federal Council recalled that it had previously condemned the tragic events leading to the death of an extremely high number of Armenians, especially through massive forced displacements and wide-scale massacres during the unrests and conflicts which characterized the end of the Ottoman Empire, from 1894 to 1922, but more especially in 1915.

In Turkey itself, the existence of the massacres is recognized, but the responsibilities and the circumstances of these massacres are subject to often contradictory interpretations. For the first time, a debate amongst intellectuals and other circles of the population is taking place in Turkey itself on this dark chapter of the history of the whole region.

Switzerland is engaged in a political dialogue with Turkey on human rights issues and will continue its efforts in this regard. The Armenian question is an integral part of this dialogue.

Yours sincerely,

Joseph Deiss  
Federal Councillor

The Swiss Federal Councillor, Head of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Joseph Deiss, had put the word genocide in quotation marks, thus throwing doubt on its existence. So I wrote to him once again, and sent him a copy of my book *The Premeditated Nature of the Genocide Perpetrated on the Armenians*. I received no reply this time. Below is my letter.

Head  
of the Federal Department  
of Foreign Affairs  
CH-3003 Bern

Berne, 20 August, 2001

Mr.  
Zaven M. Messerlian  
P.O. Box 129  
Beirut  
Lebanon

Dear Sir,

I have taken note of your communication relating to the vote of the National Council rejecting the parliamentary request (postulat) presented by Mr. Zisyadis for the recognition of the Armenian "genocide" of 1915.

The Federal Council had indeed proposed to the National Council to reject this parliamentary request. The Federal Council recalled that it had previously condemned the tragic events leading to the death of an extremely high number of Armenians, especially through massive forced displacements and wide-scale massacres during the unrests and conflicts which characterized the end of the Ottoman Empire, from 1894 to 1922, but more especially in 1915.

In Turkey itself, the existence of the massacres is recognised, but the responsibilities and the circumstances of these massacres are subject to often contradictory interpretations. For the first time, a debate amongst intellectuals and other circles of the population is taking place in Turkey itself on this dark chapter of the history of the whole region.

Switzerland is engaged in a political dialogue with Turkey on human rights issues and will continue its efforts in this regard. The Armenian question is an integral part of this dialogue.

Yours sincerely,

  
Joseph Deiss  
Federal Councillor

September 21, 2001  
H.E. Joseph Deiss  
Federal Councillor  
Head of the Federal Department  
Of Foreign Affairs  
CH-3003 Berne  
Switzerland,

Your Excellency,

I acknowledge receipt of your Excellency's letter dated August 20, 2001. You have made your country's present policy in regards to the Armenian genocide of 1915-1923 very clear.

Your Excellency has put quotation marks to the word genocide. I have enclosed herewith my recent book *The Premeditated Nature of the Genocide Perpetrated on the Armenians* for your perusal.

The Genocide convention of December 9, 1948 clearly defines genocide "killing members of the group, causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group, deliberately inflicting on the group the conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction or in part, imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group, forcibly transferring children of the group to another group." All the above apply to the Armenian Genocide. The deportations were done to annihilate the Armenian men, women and children (please read the testimony on pp. 34-36 of my book). Two-Thirds of the Armenian living in the Ottoman Empire, i.e. 1.5 million people were killed, 50% of the world's Armenians. There are no more Armenians in the Eastern provinces which were for 3000 years the homeland of Armenians. The Armenian homeland was appropriated. Armenian children were abducted, forcibly Turkified, later many were killed (see p. 69 of my book). This is purely genocide. The parliaments of Greece, Cyprus, Uruguay, Argentina, Russia, Canada, Belgium, France, Sweden, Lebanon, Italy and the U.S.A. House of Representatives and the European Parliament have recognized and condemned the Genocide perpetrated on the Armenians. I hope Switzerland will be among them in the future.

Sincerely,

Zaven M. Messerlian  
Principal  
Armenian Evangelical College

Thanks to the efforts of the Swiss Armenian community, the Armenian National Council, Armenian Rights Committee, Swiss-Armenian personalities and other concerned individuals, in 2001 the Armenian Genocide was recognized in Switzerland. The Genève Swiss Canton's authorities,<sup>4</sup> then the Vaud Swiss canton (by 74 votes in favor, 64 against and 9 abstentions<sup>5</sup>) and finally on 16 December 2003, the Swiss Parliament (by 107 votes in favor, 67 against and 11 abstentions) recognized the Armenian Genocide.<sup>6</sup>

When the Vaud canton recognized the Armenian Genocide, Turkey retaliated by cancelling the visit of the Swiss Minister of Foreign Affairs to Turkey, and after the recognition by the Swiss parliament, Turkey threatened consequences.<sup>7</sup>

As it is a federal offense to deny any recognized genocide in Switzerland, all those who broke the rule were legally prosecuted and sentenced.

## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> F.O. 371/2488.
- <sup>2</sup> *Journal de Genève*, Genève, 10 July 1915, from F.O 371/2488; *Ibid.*, 8 September 1915, from F.O.371/2488.
- <sup>3</sup> “Zvitserio Khorhertarane merjets Haygagan Tseghasbanoutian Djanachman Panatseve” (The Swiss Parliament refused the Armenian Genocide’s recognition resolution), *Aztag* (daily), Beirut 15 March 2001, p. 1.
- <sup>4</sup> “Haygagan Tseghasbanoutyan Djanachman Kordzentatse 2000-in” (The process of the recognition of the Armenian Genocide in 2001) *Aztag special issue*, 1 January 2002, pp. 101-102.  
The Genève canton parliament had already recognized the Armenian Genocide on 25 June 1998. This time it was the canton government which recognized it.
- <sup>5</sup> “Zvitserio Vaud Kantone ge hedevi Genevi cantoni orinagin yev ge djanchna Haygagan Tseghasbanoutioun” (The Vaud canton of Switzerland follows the Genève canton’s example and recognizes the Armenian Genocide), *Aztag* (daily) 25 September 2003, p. 1.
- <sup>6</sup> “Zvitserio Khorhertarane ge vaveratsne djanachoume Haygagan Tseghasbanoutian”, (The parliament of Switzerland approves the recognition of the Armenian Genocide), *Zartontk* (daily), 17 December 2003, p.1, and “E hechouggs Tourkio sbarnalikneroun Zvitserio Khorertarane djantsav Haygagan Tseghasbanoutioun” (Despite the threats of Turkey the parliament of Switzerland recognized the Armenian Genocide), *Aztag* (daily) 17 December 2003, p. 1.
- <sup>7</sup> *Aztag daily*, 17 December 2003.

ԶԱՆՔԵՐ՝ ԶՈՒԻՑԵՐԻՈՅ ԽՈՐՀՐԴԱՐԱՆԻՆ ԿՈՂՄԷ ՀԱՅՈՑ  
ՑԵՂԱՍՊԱՆՈՒԹԵԱՆ ՃԱՆԱԶՄԱՆ ԳԾՈՎ

ԶԱԻԷՆ ՄՍԸՐԼԵԱՆ

Հեղինակը կ'անդրադառնայ Զուիցերիոյ կողմէ Հայոց Ցեղասպանութեան ճանաչման գծով 1998-2001ի ընթացքին գուիցերիահայ համայնքին եւ իր թափած անձնական ջանքերուն: Կ'անդրադառնայ Զուիցերիա-Հայաստան Ընկերակցութեան իրեն ուղղած նամակին, Հայկական Ցեղասպանութեան գծով անոնց թափած ճիգին: Ան կը նշէ թէ անոնց կը դրկէ 1915ին գուիցերիացի անձնաւորութիւններու կողմէ եւ *Journal de Genève*ի “L’Extermination d’un Peuple” գրութիւնը, որպէսզի իրենց պայքարին մէջ օգտագործեն: Ապա կ'անդրադառնայ Մարտ 2001ին մամուլին մէջ լոյս տեսած լուրերուն թէ՛ 70ի դէմ 73 քուէով մերժուած էր ճանաչումը:

Հեղինակը կու տայ իր նամակները՝ ուղղուած հայասեր երեսփոխաններու պարագլուխներուն եւ Զուիցերիոյ Արտաքին Գործոց նախարար ժոզէֆ Տէյսին: Հինգ ամիս ետք պատասխան-նամակ մը կը ստանայ թէ գուիցերիացի պետական անձնաւորութիւնը ընդունելով հանդերձ եղեռնը, չակերտած էր Ցեղասպանութիւն բառը: Ան նոր նամակով մը կը հիմնաւորէ թէ եղածը Ցեղասպանութիւն էր:

Ի վերջոյ գուիցերիահայ գաղութի, Հայ Դատի մարմիններու եւ այլոց - որուն կարգին՝ իր - ջանքերով, Զուիցերիոյ խորհրդարանը 16 Դեկտեմբեր 2003ին 67ի դէմ 107 քուէով եւ 11 ձեռնպահութեամբ կը ճանչնայ Հայոց Ցեղասպանութիւնը: