

# What is behind the Armenian resolution passed by the German parliament?

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On Thursday, the Bundestag (German parliament) passed a resolution, virtually unanimously, describing the mass murder of up to 1.5 million Armenians in the Ottoman Empire as “genocide.” All parliamentary parties, including the Left Party, voted for the resolution, which was tabled jointly by the Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union (CDU/CSU), the Social Democratic Party (SPD) and the Greens. It was adopted with only one vote against and one abstention. Bundestag president Norbert Lammert described it as a “remarkable majority.”

The one-hour debate took place in the absence of Chancellor Angela Merkel (CDU), Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier, and Vice Chancellor Sigmar Gabriel (both SPD). Government and opposition representatives repeatedly justified their support for the resolution by saying it would help “work through” history and achieve “reconciliation and understanding” between Turks and Armenians.

The resolution states, “The German Bundestag is of the opinion that the remembrance of the victims of the massacre and expulsion of the Armenians, taking into consideration the German role, including conveying this to Turkish and Armenian citizens, represents a contribution to integration and peaceful co-existence.”

This is obviously absurd. Even the government’s integration commissioner Aydan Özoguz (SPD) said on the ARD TV channel that it “could be expected that this vote would rather close doors and even impede the working through of the history between Turkey and Armenia.”

Even before the vote was taken, more than 500 Turkish organisations in Germany, under the umbrella of the Turkish Community of Berlin Association, had drafted a letter stating: “Over 90 percent of the Turkish population rightly rejects the accusation of genocide and interprets it as slander.” Should the resolution be passed, it added, it would be “poison for the peaceful co-existence of Germans and Turks here, but also in Turkey.”

Unsurprisingly, the Turkish government recalled its ambassador immediately after the vote in Berlin. In its initial reaction, Ankara described the resolution as “null and void.” The Bundestag had categorized the massacre of the Armenians in the First World War as genocide on the basis of “distorted

and unfounded insinuations,” and had thus committed an “historical error,” wrote government spokesman Numan Kurtulmus on Twitter.

On Tuesday, speaking to journalists in Izmir, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan warned against a deterioration of bilateral relations. If Germany “falls into this trap, it would damage our future relations—the diplomatic, economic, political, commercial and military relations between the two countries.” At present, bilateral relations were “at a very, very high level,” Erdogan declared.

Previously, the German government had shied away from adopting a resolution on the massacre of Armenians for domestic and external political reasons. Last year, an already drafted resolution on the 100th anniversary of the massacre was initially delayed and then finally shelved. The project was suddenly revived in recent weeks, and hastily pushed forward.

What is behind this U-turn and the near-unanimous adoption of the Armenian resolution in the Bundestag?

An editorial that appeared in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* on the day of the vote is very illuminating. Under the headline “A good feeling,” Nico Fried, the head of the paper’s Berlin office, writes that “The timing and circumstances of this decision” showed that it was “not only about the events of 100 years ago, but at least as much a statement against the current political backdrop.”

With a view to the refugee deal forced through between the EU and Turkey, Fried writes that the resolution had to be passed solely “because otherwise, parliament stood accused of having betrayed its moral principles in favour of closed borders and the goodwill of a gruff autocrat.”

In conclusion, Fried then explains that the real value of the resolution will only become clear “when the Bundestag has to vote not on the remembrance of a past genocide, but the possible attempt to prevent an impending genocide with German help.”

To put it in a nutshell: the Armenian resolution is not about peace, but is a declaration of war. The Bundestag is insisting on “moral principles” in order to prepare the next intervention by the Bundeswehr (Armed Forces) in the name of the “prevention of genocide.” Both the Yugoslavia war in 1999 and the Libyan war of 2011 were justified using this pretext.

The memory of past suffering also serves to cover up the crimes of today. While at least 2,500 refugees have drowned in the Mediterranean since the start of the year as a consequence of the EU's policy of sealing off its external borders, the Bundestag is setting itself up as a guardian of morality when it comes to events that took place a century ago.

Among the pioneers of the resolution is President Joachim Gauck, who better than any other politician understands how to justify the return to an aggressive foreign and great power policy with pastoral phrases concerning the crimes of the twentieth century.

On 23 April 2015, during an ecumenical service at the Berlin Cathedral, when Gauck advocated the recognition of the genocide of the Armenians, he said: "Yes, we continue to speak about unloved knowledge, about denied responsibility and about old guilt. We don't do it to bind us to a depressing past, we do it to be vigilant, to react in good time when destruction and terror threaten people and peoples."

The Greens, whose chairman Cem Özdemir is one of the authors of the resolutions, also have a long experience justifying wars for raw materials and geopolitical interests with cynical references to the historic crimes of German imperialism. While then-Green Party Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer justified German participation in the 1999 Kosovo war with the cry, "Never again Auschwitz," Özdemir used his speech in parliament in order to prepare a possible military intervention in Syria.

Towards the end of his speech, to the applause of all the parliamentary groups, he said, "When we look in the region today, we see that Christians are again persecuted—in Iraq, in Syria and in Turkey. The places where those Armenians have arrived who survived the trek following their expulsion are located in the Syrian war zone, such as Aleppo and Deir ez-Zor."

Among the most notable political developments of Thursday's vote is the complete integration of the Left Party into the government's foreign policy offensive. Although it did not depend on its votes, the Left Party unanimously supported the resolution. Had it been up to the Left Party, it would even have tabled the resolution alongside the government parties and the Greens. However, this failed due to a (still) existing parliamentary group decision by the CDU/CSU that precludes cooperation with the Left Party.

With the Armenian resolution, German imperialism is trying to open up new policy options in the Middle East. Above all, right-wing circles in the CDU/CSU have long attacked the refugee deal, which the EU concluded with Turkey on the initiative of Chancellor Angela Merkel. They believe this binds German foreign policy too closely with the interests of Turkey, making it dependent on Ankara.

Now the Bundestag has made a corresponding foray. It is consciously taking a worsening of relations with Ankara into its calculations in order to win greater influence in the strategically

important Caucasus region and more room for manoeuvre in the Syrian conflict. Armenia, which welcomed the resolution, plays an important role in this.

For the moment, the German government is staying in the background because it is still trying to save the dirty refugee deal with Ankara. This was why Merkel, Steinmeier and Gabriel stayed away when the vote was taken.

Although, to its chagrin, the Left Party was not allowed to jointly table the resolution, it played an important role in its preparation. In a parliamentary paper tabled on April 15, the Left Party parliamentary group accused Turkey of encircling Armenia—at the same time, pointing to the strategic importance of the Caucasus.

Under the heading "Turkey in the area of tension of EU policy towards Azerbaijan and Armenia," the paper, signed by Left Party parliamentary group leaders Sahra Wagenknecht and Dietmar Bartsch, says, "It is not without risk that Turkey has long tried to involve Georgia in a strategic partnership in the 'encirclement' of Armenia against Russia." Armenia was "wedged between Turkey and its close allies Azerbaijan and Georgia." These were organizing "joint military exercises to protect oil and gas pipelines running from Azerbaijan through Georgia to Turkey."

The paper went on to stress, "Control of Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan means control of the corridor between the oil and gas rich countries of the Caspian Basin and the Black Sea, and therefore to Europe."

As before the First and Second World Wars, German imperialism is again looking towards the resource-rich Caucasus and is seeking ways to exploit the growing conflicts in the area to advance its own economic and geostrategic interests, if necessary through military intervention under the pretext of preventing genocide. That is the real significance of the resolution passed by the Bundestag.



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