

From: **[redacted]**
RuSCCAD
Date: 15 July 2009
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| To: | Michael Davenport PS/Minister for Europe | |
| | PS/Foreign Secretary | |

ISSUE

1. Seeking agreement of the Legislation Committee to oppose a Private Members Bill tabled by Andrew Dismore MP seeking "To introduce a national day to learn and remember the Armenian genocide".

TIMING

2. The Foreign Secretary needs to write to the Legislation Committee by 21 July.

PREFERRED OPTIONS

3. That the Foreign Secretary agrees to send the attached letter (annex A) to the Committee opposing this Bill.

AGREED BY

4. Yerevan, Ankara, Legal Advisers, PRT and Press Office.

PARLIAMENTARY AND MEDIA

5. This Bill had its first reading on 26 January 2009 and is due to be read a second time on Friday 16 October.
6. Mr Andrew Dismore is also supported by Mr John Austin, Mr Virendra Sharma, Mr Clive Efford, Ms Karen Buck and Mr Rob Marris (all Labour MPs).
7. Mr Dismore regularly presents Private Members Bills on varied topics. It is likely his objective for this Bill is primarily to raise the profile of the issue, as opposed to having the Bill passed.

RISKS

8. We may receive criticism from the Armenian government and diaspora for our refusal to recognise the events as genocide. We regularly receive letters from members of the public on this issue and our position is well known and long standing. The Armenian Government is well aware of our position, which is in line with that of most other countries. **[redacted]**

ARGUMENT

9. HMG does not recognise the events that took place in 1915-16 as genocide, therefore, should not support this Bill. HMG's long standing position remains that the evidence available is not sufficiently unequivocal to persuade us that the events that took place in 1915-16 should be categorised as genocide as defined by the 1948 UN Convention on Genocide.
10. **[redacted]**

BACKGROUND

11. Between 1915 and 1916, an estimated 1.5 million ethnic Armenian citizens of the Ottoman Empire were killed (following earlier pogroms and massacres in the 1870s and 1890s). Many were massacred; others were victims of civil strife, starvation and disease which ravaged the whole population of Eastern Anatolia during the First World War. Others also died during deportation (relocation) from their towns and villages (to the Syrian desert), allegedly for reasons of national security. A number of other minorities also suffered. The Turkish government disputes these allegations.
12. It is generally accepted that there were significant and systematic massacres of Armenians in 1915 - 1916, but there is some disagreement among historians about the precise numbers and whether the massacres constituted genocide as defined by the UN Convention on Genocide of 1948. Expatriate Armenians, including diaspora in France and the US, lobby hard for recognition of these events as genocide. The Armenian government has made clear that, while they do not forget the past and want Turkish recognition, this is not a prerequisite for restored relations.
13. **[redacted]** although a small number of countries, including France, Canada, Russia and Switzerland, have done so. During his campaign, President Obama committed himself to US recognition, as have other senior Democrats. However, in his 24 April Genocide Memorial Day statement, he stopped short of referring explicitly to genocide instead using an Armenian term meaning 'Great Calamity' to describe the events. He also reiterated that his own previously expressed views had not changed. It is likely that the issue will return to Congress, **[redacted]**
14. Turkey and Armenia have taken steps to normalise their relations (including with the announcement of a Swiss-mediated and US-backed roadmap on 23 April). **[redacted]**
15. We believe that it is very important that Turkey and Armenia address the historical issues together and that this process is owned by them. Recent progress in this direction is encouraging and it would be unhelpful if we or other external parties were pressed to adopt public positions on these issues or attempted to pre-empt the outcome of the reconciliation process.

Private Member's Bills

16. All (non-ministerial) MPs and Peers have the right to introduce a Bill to Parliament on any subject, which is known as a Private Member's Bill (PMB). While they usually

stand a small chance of being passed by both Houses, PMBs are often used to highlight a particular issue with the aim of increasing the pressure on the Government to act, or to demonstrate that an MP or Peer is taking action on an issue.

17. At Second Reading, a Minister from the relevant Government Department needs to take part in the debate, and indicate the Government's stance on the Bill.
18. There are thirteen PMB Fridays in the Commons every Session. In the Lords PMBS are often but not always considered on Fridays, usually one Friday per calendar month that the House is sitting.
19. A Ten Minute Rule Bill is a type of Private Member's Bill, but the Government does not normally take a position on Ten Minute Rule Bills unless they reach Second Reading.

RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

20. None

[redacted]

Cc: PS/Bryant
Charles Lonsdale, Yerevan
Justin McKenzie Smith, RuSCCAD
[redacted]

