

## Memorandum

To PS/Minister for Europe  
Cc: APS/Foreign Secretary  
PS/Minister Burt  
From **[redacted]**  
Date 26 March 2012  
Pages 3

---

### **US SENATE RESOLUTION ON THE RECOGNITION OF ARMENIAN GENOCIDE – THE PROCESS AND RISKS TO US AND TURKISH RELATIONS**

#### **SUMMARY**

On 19 March, nine members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee (SFRC) introduced a draft non-binding resolution that will recognise the massacre of Armenians in 1915-1917 as genocide. **[redacted]** The UK does not use the term “genocide” to describe the massacres. Genocide is a precise term and the use of the term is best assessed by a competent court. It is for Turkey and Armenia to address their shared history. Ministers will be updated as the issue progresses.

#### **Background**

1. Between 1915 and 1917, an estimated 1.5 million ethnic Armenian citizens of the Ottoman Empire died. 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 died during deportation 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 accepts some atrocities were committed, but disputes the scale of the deaths, and argues that they took place in the context of a war in which many Turks also died.
2. Expatriate Armenians, including substantial diaspora in France and the US, lobby hard for recognition of these events as genocide. The diaspora largely derives from those forced to leave Turkey. **[redacted]**
3. **[redacted]**
4. In January 2012, the French Senate passed a bill that criminalises the denial of the Armenian genocide. However, the French Constitutional Court, ruled the law as unconstitutional on freedom of expression grounds. **[redacted]**

#### **What has happened so far?**

5. [redacted]

6. Turkish reaction has been relatively muted and Turkish press coverage factual. This has not drawn the same attention and reaction as the recent French bill to criminalise the denial of genocide, although when a similar resolution left the House Foreign Affairs Committee in 2010, Turkey recalled its Ambassador to the US. The Speaker of the House, at the time (Nancy Pelosi), decided not to bring the resolution to a vote on the House Floor.

7. [redacted]

8. [redacted]

### **Parliamentary and media interest**

9. Although this particular issue will not attract significant media attention, there is some parliamentary and public interest in the UK for recognising the Armenian genocide. In 2009, the Armenian Diaspora commissioned Geoffrey Robertson QC to write a legal opinion on HMG's decision not to use the term genocide when referring to the massacres. In December 2010, Ealing Borough Council was lobbied by the Armenian diaspora community to recognise the Armenian genocide, which the Council consequently recognised. We anticipate an increased lobbying effort as we approach the centenary of the events in 2015.

10. Welsh-Armenian lobby groups consistently lobby the office of the Welsh First Minister for recognition of the "genocide" around Armenian Genocide Memorial Day, 24 April and a 'statement of opinion' is currently being considered by the Welsh Assembly. [redacted] Armenian groups also erected a Welsh Genocide Memorial in Cardiff in 2007, which led to protests by members of the Turkish community.