

## ***Statement of the Society for Turkic, Ottoman and Turkish Studies (GTOT)***

### **Research on the Armenian genocide after 100 years**

In recent months, in many countries, more intensively than ever, attempts have been made to exercise influence on the Ottoman and Turkish Studies. Time and again, efforts are made to mobilise researchers to subscribe to exceedingly simplified and gross notions. Those trying to preserve their intellectual independence are easily labelled as traitor, particularly if they have a Turkish background. In the current situation, political and moral polemic prevails concerning the critical reflection on the extermination of the Armenian presence in the Ottoman Empire 1915/16.

We are seriously concerned about the fierce hostilities against the head of the Institute for Turkistik at the University Duisburg-Essen, Professor Kader Konuk, but also against other scientists. As her colleagues we firmly oppose any attempt to restrict the freedom of research and teaching, and, we strongly condemn the hostilities against Konuk.

There should not even be any controversy: the teaching of the history, culture and the fate of the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire is part of the Ottoman and Turkish Studies. Particularly for students for teaching (but not only for them) the scientific discussion of Ottoman/Turkish history is essential, that enables to critically reflect and analyse ideologically informed assumptions and positions.

Hundred years ago the Armenians living in Asia Minor through mass murder of civilians and deportations, orchestrated by relevant parts of the Ottoman government, have been exterminated systematically. The conditions of World War I meant that this annihilation took place in a context of general violence. The alliance between the Ottoman Empire and the powers of the axis entailed also the partly involvement of the German Reich in the genocidal activities. After the World War, Turkish politics have prevented the survivors from rebuilding their communities and being an integral, equal and empowered part of republican society.

Despite the relatively long time that has elapsed since the events, neither a way of mourning has been found that would unify the descendants of victims and perpetrators nor has research elucidated many of the historical problems connected with the systematic atrocities. That the Armenians were subjected to ethno-religious „cleansing“ and extermination, however, is clear.

We consider the study of the Armenian genocide an important issue for Ottoman and Turkish studies. Scholarly work in history cannot solve the emotional, moral, economic and political problems involved, but it can contribute to a better understanding, perhaps even reconciliation. In order to be able to do so, though, it needs to acknowledge the plight of the victims, the overall circumstances and the intent of the perpetrators. It has to take into account the preconditions and the traumatic consequences of mass-murder and denial that often last until today. Such historical work inevitably has a political dimension to it. In order to be sound and efficient in furthering understanding, however, it needs to be independent and free of pressure from any interested party.