

\* Universiteit van Amsterdam, ASCA

\* Université libre de Bruxelles

\* Musée de l'Europe

\* Fondation Bernheim

## **International Conference**

### ***Négationnisme(s)      Genocide and Denial***

21<sup>st</sup>-22<sup>nd</sup>-23<sup>rd</sup> November 2007 in the European Parliament –

Free University of Brussels (ULB)

The French term “négationnisme” and the less often used English term “negationism” was originally coined to invoke the negation or contestation of the reality of the genocide perpetrated by Nazis and their allies during World War II. The use of the words “negationism” and “denial of genocide” has been extended to apply also to other genocides.

At the beginning, denial of genocide, through the minimization of the Jews' genocide, was meant to make anti-Semitism more palatable. Nevertheless, denial of genocide aims not only at perpetuating racism, but also at warranting a “nationalist consensus” to the detriment of the genocide's victim—as in the Turkish official position relating to the Armenian Genocide—this way certain parties mistakenly imagine that the genocide's perpetrators can be granted immunity from prosecution—as in Rwanda and Burundi. Finally, the goal of revisionism may be to avoid the painful excuses and compensations—let's think of some colonial countries' behaviour towards the colonized people—or to support a geopolitical strategy—of which is the Iranian president's denial of Holocaust is a clear illustration.

Even in cases in which the crimes against humanity are not unanimously recognised as genocide (let's think of Cambodia, Kurds or Bosnia-Herzegovina), one may notice a disguised denial aiming at proving the perpetrators innocent and/or to write a so-called official history that takes into account none of the victims' points of view.

Now, reconciliation of divided countries often demands that they remain conscious of History, however cruel it may have been. Indeed, only memory makes advancement possible.

It is in Europe—witness and source of many genocides—that denial of genocide is a matter of great discussion, as the same remark applies to its criminalisation in international law; historians circulate petitions in favour of freedom of speech, especially in university environments, since History is not synonymous with Memory.

The issue of denial of genocide needs to be raised; integration of cultures is not possible without a close examination of one's own past.

Moreover, denial of genocide casts some light on the links between justice, reconciliation and diplomatic relations between States.

The problem, which initially stemmed from discussions among historians, has become an important topic in human sciences in general. Indeed, speeches and representation of that sort of negation nowadays pertain to philosophy, political science, sociology, psychology, media studies and literature.

This conference wishes to deal with the following questions: How is denial of genocide expressed, spread and construed? In what way could the denial be an infringement of other people's liberty? Is denial compatible with freedom of speech? In what sense does denial of past hide a discourse of violence? How do law and politics differ as to that question? How do the artists, filmmakers and writers react to this phenomenon?

Our conference's purpose is to propose a multidisciplinary approach to the denial of genocide—not to check the existence of genocide. On the contrary, the objective is to reflect upon history and its typology. By so doing, we hope to contribute to this debate, from a civic as well as scientific point of view, about which a lot still needs to be said.

**Scientific committee**

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