Motion

tabled by theSPD, CDU/CSU, Alliance 90/The Greens and FDP parliamentary groups

The Holodomor in Ukraine: Remembrance – Commemoration – Exhortation

The Bundestag is requested to adopt the following motion:

I. The Bundestag notes:

Ninety years ago, the Holodomor (from the Ukrainian *holod* meaning 'hunger' and *mortyr* meaning 'kill') reached its most terrible stage in the winter of 1932/33. This deliberate and large-scale killing of people by starvation claimed millions of lives in Ukraine. The mass starvation was not the result of bad harvests but the responsibility of the political leaders of the Soviet Union under Joseph Stalin. The Holodomor therefore constitutes a crime against humanity. In Germany and the European Union, there are now not many people who know about the Holodomor.

Firstly, the famine was a direct result of the policy of forcing peasant farmers to collectivise – that is, the implementation of the Soviet top-down governmental and economic model reaching right down to rural areas and villages. Stalin wanted to advance the consolidation of his power and the industrialisation of the Soviet Union at all costs. Human lives were of no import in that endeavour. From 1928 onwards, millions of farmers had their harvests taken away to supply cities and factories. On top of that, grain was exported to bring in foreign currency and Western-built machinery. Supposedly prosperous farmers, denigrated as "kulaks", were brutally persecuted and deported. With every passing year, forcible requisitions increased in rigour and brutality.

Already in the winter of 1931/32, hundreds of thousands of people died of undernourishment in the countryside and villages. Despite this, the violent forcible requisitions continued. Hunger was also used as a punishment; when the set quotas were not fulfilled, many times those quantities of grains and other

foodstuffs would be demanded and confiscated. The affected regions were sealed off to prevent the starving fleeing to the cities and food being transported to those regions. In the winter of 1932/33 alone, this caused the death by starvation of 3 to 3.5 million people in Ukraine. Hundreds of thousands also died in Kuban, a region east of Ukraine and north of the Caucasus, which was chiefly populated by Ukrainians.

Secondly, the mass killing by starvation also had the objective of politically suppressing the Ukrainian sense of nationhood. After the end of the Russian Tsarist empire, Ukraine had experienced a short phase of independence starting in 1917/18. The Bolsheviks conquered Ukraine by military force and integrated it into the Soviet Union. For a short time in those early years of the Soviet Union, they promoted local languages and culture as well as, to a minor extent, elements and symbols of autonomy within the Soviet Union, within the framework of the Soviet nationalities policy, in part to secure Ukraine's loyalty to Moscow.

Stalin ended that policy after his complete takeover of power. The Russian language and culture were back at the undisputed top of the unofficial hierarchy within the Soviet Union. Now, members of the Ukrainian elite in the church, the arts, academia and politics were the first to be persecuted, imprisoned and murdered in large numbers by the Soviet secret police, with the aim of destroying that elite as a repository of cultural identity. Ukraine's national communists were also persecuted. Then, the policy of forcible collectivisation was accompanied by the persecution and brutal repression of Ukrainian peasants purportedly or actually resisting forcible requisitions. Stalin found all things Ukrainian deeply suspect, recalcitrant and necessarily to be subordinated. At the same time, as territory and in view of its economic significance – Ukraine and the Kuban region together produced more than half of the entire Soviet Union's grain – Ukraine was of the utmost importance to the Soviet leadership and was imperatively to be kept under the strict control of the centre of Soviet power in Moscow.

It can thus be seen that the Soviet leaders' desire to control and suppress the peasants, the peripheries of the Soviet power project and the Ukrainian way of life, language and culture was amalgamated in the political crime that was the Holodomor. The famine and repression affected all of Ukraine, not just its grain-producing regions.

From today's perspective, this suggests it should be categorised historically and politically as a genocide. The German Bundestag agrees with that categorisation.

In terms of absolute numbers, the Ukrainians were worst affected by the catastrophic famine that was politically brought about by the Soviet leadership. Moreover, the reductions – introduced late – in the grain quotas demanded were not applied to Ukraine. This is not to deny that millions of people died in other areas of the Soviet Union as a result of politically caused famines at that time. In Kazakhstan, an estimated two million lives were lost. Hundreds of thousands more starved to death because of forcible requisitions in the territory of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic, particularly along the Volga and Don rivers.

The Holodomor falls within a period when the European continent saw the most egregious crimes against humanity, of an atrocity that had been unimaginable before. These include the Holocaust against the Jews of Europe in it historical singularity, the war crimes of the Wehrmacht and the planned murder of millions of innocent civilians as part of Germany's racist war of annihilation in the east, for which Germany bears historical responsibility. Places like Wola, Babyn Yar or Leningrad epitomise those countless crimes. The German Bundestag derives a special responsibility from Germany's own past to flag up and examine crimes against humanity within the international community.

Ukraine suffered under two totalitarian systems for long stretches of the last century. It was a victim of the pact between Hitler and Stalin – the criminal, military dividing up of eastern Europe between two self-appointed great powers – and, from 1941 onwards, saw a great number of Germany's crimes against humanity in the Second World War.

The Holodomor was systematically denied and treated as taboo in the Soviet Union; mentioning it was punishable. The suppression of information about the famine started even while it was going on. Death registers were destroyed, critical officials removed, the regions sealed off and journalists forbidden to travel to the affected regions. Many European states did have diplomatic reports and isolated press stories about widespread famine in the Soviet Union. They, however, turned a blind eye, especially as they were benefiting from cheap grain imports from the Soviet Union.

As late as the beginning of the 1980s, the Soviet representative was still denying the Holodomor in front of the United Nations General Assembly. It took decades before, in the context of *glasnost*, the Soviet state leadership under party leader Mikhail Gorbachev admitted that there had been a famine in Ukraine, archives were opened up and reports could spread openly.

While academics in Ukraine have long been researching into the Holodomor and thereby advancing the cause of facing up to and examining these crimes, the authoritarian state leadership in Russia under Vladimir Putin have been forcing an ideologised history policy that prevents examination of Stalinist crimes, including the Holodomor. The closure by court order of Memorial International at the end of 2021, a human and civil rights organisation focused on, among other things, examining Soviet crimes, underlines the revisionist ideologisation of Russia's history policy.

II.   The Bundestag declares:

We remember the victims of the Holodomor. For Ukraine, the Holodomor is a deeply traumatic, horrific and painful chapter in its history. The Holodomor shapes the national consciousness of this great European country which has moved on from the Soviet past. Ukraine has set out on the road towards the European Union in recent years and received candidate status in June 2022. The Holodomor is part of our shared history as Europeans. It is one of the many inhuman crimes perpetrated by totalitarian systems, especially in the first half of the 20th century, in the course of which millions of human lives were wiped out in Europe. In that context and in view of our own history, we feel a responsibility to spread knowledge about this crime against humanity and promote the further examination it demands. This includes creating a European audience for the subject, in order to bring the background to the Holodomor to greater prominence in the European consciousness. During these days of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, which simultaneously constitutes an attack on our European peace order and system of values, we are more adamant than ever that great-power ambitions and repression must never again have a place in Europe.

III.   The Bundestag calls on the Federal Government

1. to continue to support remembrance of the victims of the Holodomor and international awareness-raising on the subject by political means – such as various educational programmes;

2. to continue to robustly counteract all attempts to launch one-sided Russian narratives on history;

3. to promote self-reflection and mindfulness at every opportunity in our outlook regarding our eastern neighbourhood and its varied and complex history, in order to apprehend the historical experience of those places and illuminate blind spots in the German view of our common European history;

4. to continue within the limits of the available budget to provide Ukraine with political, financial, humanitarian and military support as the victim of Russia's illegal war of aggression and Vladimir Putin's imperialist policy.

Berlin, […]

Dr Rolf Mützenich and the SPD parliamentary group
Friedrich Merz and the CDU/CSU parliamentary group
Katharina Dröge, Britta Haßelmann and the Alliance 90/The Greens parliamentary group
Christian Dürr and the FDP parliamentary group