

GERMAN-TURKISH ENCOUNTERS OVER THE GENOCIDE OF THE ARMENIANS

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Among the millions of guest workers, refugees, asylum seekers, and other wanderers that have made the Federal Republic of Germany their home, some estimates will tell us that there are perhaps 25,000 ethnic Armenians while others go up to about 40,000. In either case, is it too small a minority to bother about?

Not much is known about this small minority by the general German public. The average German might possibly recall Armenia in connection with a devastating earthquake that happened not very many years ago or the Karabagh conflict. There is the stereotype of the "Ugly Armenian", the brother of the Wandering Jew, that haunts a number of the travel books and novels that have provided the staple diet for generations of young German readers. Our average German might also recall from history lessons that the great emperor Frederic Barbarossa died during one of the Crusades somewhere in Armenia. But that happened centuries ago. Concerning more recent events, the media have been reporting now and then that there was much bloodshed on Turkish lands during the early decades of the last century, but how can one be sure about who did what to whom? All this happened, after all, in far away places and a long time ago. Isn't it true that the Turks suffered at the hands of their rebellious minority populations of Greeks and Armenians - at least that is what the Turkish neighbors, "unsere tuerkischen Mitbuerger" (our Turkish fellow citizens), the newcomers to Germany - are saying.

The image of the Armenians in Germany tends to be very prejudiced in favor of the Turks, and the political and economic pressure exerted by Ankara on the German government and private institutions, as well as the sheer power of the public opinion of the great majority of the possibly more than five million of Turks living in Germany, are trying to do their best to keep it that way. And a good host, no matter what, respects the sensitivities of his guests and often overlooks things that are annoying. Thus Turkish pressure has, especially in recent decades, become very forceful. It is the purpose of this paper to examine some of the more high profile instances in which this Turkish stranglehold on German public and political life has manifested itself, especially as far as the recognition of the Genocide of the Armenians is concerned.

Anti-Turkish sentiments in Germany are rampant, and the names of towns like Moelln, Solingen, and Hoyerswerda¹ exemplify a new wave of xenophobia that has swept over the country. Yet, at the same time, things Turkish do exert a strange fascination over the imagination of the general public. German tourists flock to the Turkish Riviera while German gourmards, both at home and abroad, have discovered the delights of Turkish cuisine. As we all know, travel supposedly

broadens the mind, and the appreciation of our neighbors' food is the first and a very important step towards accepting them and their culture. Nevertheless, there are the latent fears buried deep in the collective European "psyche" of the Other, the Turk, who for centuries threatened the very existence of a Christian Europe. The victory over the Ottoman fleet during the Battle of Lepanto in 1571 and the final defeat of the Turks at the walls of Vienna on September 12, 1683, certainly are two of the high points in European history. But the fear lingers on; I recall the tradition that goes back to Luther's times (1483-1546) of what is called the "Tuerkenlaeuten" in large parts of rural Bavaria and Franconia. It is the daily tolling of church bells one hour before noon to warn the public to beware of the Turkish danger. Turkey and Germany—it certainly has been a complicated and complex relationship, at which I can only hint but of which we must be aware.

Mutatis mutandis. The Age of Enlightenment did much to exorcise some of these dark fears of the religious and ethnic Other coming from the East; the new philosophies of tolerance and understanding shamed many Europeans for not having opened their hearts and minds to the "Noble" and wise man from the East. Which educated and sensitive modern Germans at one point or other in their lives have not fallen under the spell of the grand figures of Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's (1729-1781) *Nathan der Weise*, and who can forget that truly generous and forgiving ruler, Sultan Selim, of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's (1756-1791) opera *The Abduction of the Seraglio*? The greatest of the European heroes pale in the company of these representatives of the East. And modern Turkey, after all, is heir to such a grand tradition. These are very romantic and idealistic notions and have very little to do with reality, yet they influence and shape our thinking. The church bells, however, still toll every day, though they certainly no longer remind very many in a post-modern Germany of any danger at all.

On an official and political level, the relationship between the two countries is perhaps even more complex. A bond forged by supposed loyalty and friendship unites the two countries, often unquestioningly so on the part of Germany, with realpolitik definitely lurking somewhere in the wings. German school children are often reminded of how Turkey stood faithfully shoulder to shoulder with a defeated Germany during and after the two devastating World Wars; how Turkey served during the days of the Cold War as a bastion against the threat of Communism; and how a modern and secular Turkey can now act as a cultural bridge between Europe and the Arab world. Doesn't Turkey share a border with Iraq? The image of Turkey as a trusted friend and ally on whom one can depend in good and bad times *but* whose good will has to be cultivated with great care has for many decades guided German diplomatic and economic relations with Istanbul and later Ankara.

Turkey at the cross roads of trade, of export and import – exporting the millions of guest workers of recent times and importing German technology and military expertise even back in Ottoman Turkey and still doing so - has been a

trade partner whose good will certainly has to be cultivated. Chancellor Bismarck (1815-1898) and his contemporaries, who were haunted by nightmares of an overpopulated Germany in their daydreams opened up as new "Lebensraum", the vast Anatolian plains, to energetic and God-fearing German colonialists. That the Armenians, who were also a God-fearing people, had settled there several millennia before was a problem that could be solved with Turkish assistance when it arose; what mattered immediately was the need of a functional and efficient transport system: the Baghdad Railroad. Berlin provided the technology and the experts. The Ottoman Empire was crumbling; the army was a disgrace – Berlin again provided the technology and military experts to train, supervise, organize, even command the Turkish army to make it functional. Here arises a nagging question: How involved were these German technical and military experts, who knew their bloody business well, in the Genocide perpetrated by their "students"? The diplomatic correspondence and the eyewitness reports by Germans residing in Turkey make it obvious that these experts must have seen what was happening, yet most of them did nothing and shrouded themselves in silence.² That, too, is as great a crime as committing the act itself. The military histories of the two countries are indeed very much intertwined.

It is not the purpose of this paper to examine the shared guilt of imperial Germany and Ottoman Turkey; much has been written on the topic already.³ Unfortunately, however, the crime of silence has been compounded by each successive German government, be that government associated with Berlin, Weimar, Bonn, or the new Berlin. It is precisely this crime of silence that has determined a great part of the official relationship between Germany and Turkey as far as the Armenians are concerned. Annette Schaefer in her essay "Der Voelkermord an den Armeniern als Thema in der deutschen Politik nach 1949" summarizes the situation: "The German politicians of the Federal Republic of Germany have up till now not taken an official stand as far as the recognition and condemnation of the Genocide of the Armenians are concerned. Their attitude has always been characterized by passive acceptance and repression."⁴

The government may have been reticent in sharing information and taking a passive stance versus the Genocide; nevertheless it has been possible for the general public to gain information about their "fellow Armenian Citizen" – and that not only from their new neighbors or the prejudiced Turkish propaganda literature that is freely distributed by Ankara to university and municipal libraries abroad. Franz Werfel's novels that were publicly burnt in the days of Hitler, especially *The Forty Days of Musa Dagh*, have had a comeback. The churches had all along, through various groups and organizations, supported Armenian charitable institutions.⁵ Several universities offer Armenian studies, and there has been a number of learned and dedicated scholars who have written and lectured on the subject. Very little of this effort, however, has reached the general public.

If there is to be an awakened German interest in human rights and justice for

Armenia, it has to be initiated by the Armenians themselves. This started to happen around the mid 1980s, with the approaching 70th anniversary of the Genocide, when the international Armenian community – and the small group in Germany also – publicly demanded to have one of the great crimes against humanity recognized. The world, perhaps not enthusiastically, responded. And Germany as well.

Now and then newspapers and magazines were publishing articles that recalled former and current bloodshed and disasters and terrorist activities all somehow related to Armenians.⁶ More information was needed. And who for Germans is the best and most trusted authority on things Armenian than their very own Turkish neighbor? The latter gladly obliged; and together with their local leaders, preachers, their local newspapers and radio and TV stations – with the able assistance of Ankara of course – have ever since been keeping diligent watch over what information should be filtered down to the unsuspecting German public, which needs to be guided.

I had not realized that I needed guidance as well; I thought that the many years I had lived and worked among Armenians at Haigazian University in Beirut, Lebanon, had prepared me. With the outbreak in the early 1990s of the Karabagh conflict, there was a renewed flurry of interest in the Armenians. Thus the local Lutheran church in the town in Bavaria where I was then living asked me to give an informal lecture about Armenian history and culture. The response was not overwhelming; a handful of old ladies came – but suddenly I found myself surrounded by a good dozen vigorous young manly Turks claiming their democratic right of equal time to present “their” side of the truth and uphold their national honor. I could not see their points; nevertheless I knew I had to be careful and not provoke an incident. What, in the final analysis, did I accomplish with my effort? I failed the old ladies who wanted information and who faded into insignificance in the back of the room while I, up front, was trying to say the “right” things for Turkish ears, at the same time trying not to compromise my integrity. It was an experience not to be repeated.

My friends had tried to warn me beforehand when they raised questions and made observations like these: Why not leave such a dangerous problem alone? What good does it really do to bring up long forgotten events? Why not simply let the historians write learned footnotes about them? Why do you bother me with all this bloodshed? We Germans have enough of that in our own history – how dare we with our own history accuse others of such heinous crimes? Why should you bring up all those supposed misdeeds by those Turkish Muslims of years long past against Christians when we here and now are fighting a losing battle against our own Christians and their attitude towards the Muslim Turks? It is difficult enough to eradicate prejudice against the Turk in our own midst. By your own logic, isn't it dangerous for those 60,000 or so Armenians still remaining in Turkey if their neighbors are reminded through all your sympathy of their existence? How can

you be so sure that the Turks did all those bloody things in the first place? We know for a fact that the Turks are the most hospitable and gentle and tolerant people on earth – haven't we seen this with our very own eyes when we were tourists in Antalya on the Turkish Riviera? Maybe you have gotten the facts wrong. Anyhow, we Germans now should concentrate on overcoming and atoning for the sins committed on German soil against the Turks. My friends, for once, were very much in agreement with the politicians in Berlin. One cannot help but get the feeling that should one in Germany like to express interest in or sympathy for the Armenians, one has to ask for Turkish indulgence and permission first. That was the experience of the sister of a former colleague of mine at university. She had been sent by the Lutheran church as social worker to Jerusalem. There she became fascinated by the Armenian Quarter. When her term was up, she visited eastern Anatolia and back in Europe deepened her relationship with Armenian history and culture by visiting the Armenian monasteries in Venice and Vienna. She then recorded her memories in the book *In jedem Kreuz ein Lebensbaum: Aus Armeniens Erbe und Gegenwart* (1988). Her name is Lore Bartholomaeus. There is very little, if anything at all, in her book that could possibly undermine Turkish national honor – perhaps it was the haunting memories of her visit to the Island of Aghtamar in Lake Van and its crumbling cathedral, always closely watched over by Turkish security eyes and machine gun muzzles? Be that as it may, I know from her brother that for quite a while after the book was published, she was nightly harassed by obscene telephone calls and threats, even death threats. Her book did not appeal to the Gray Wolves, a Turkish terrorist organization outlawed in Turkey but, it seems, tolerated in Germany.

Living with death threats – this also came to be the experience of one of the most dedicated modern German Armenophiles: the novelist and journalist and television producer Ralph Giordano.⁷ As he says of himself, he “discovered” the Armenians rather late in life since he had first to come to terms with his own past and with that of his family. Giordano belongs to an old Jewish family that has been at home in Hamburg for centuries.

On April 21, 1986, between 9:05 and 9:45, the viewers of the *First German TV Program* could watch his documentary: *Die Armenische Frage existiert nicht mehr...Tragoedie eines Volkes*. (The Armenian Question no longer exists...The tragedy of a people). More than six million viewers watched the documentary; what they saw provided for most of them a revelation. They simply had not known the facts of the Genocide; had not known how much the Germany of their grandfathers had been involved; had not known who all those strange Christians were to begin with. Many viewers had been so impressed that they wanted to see the film again – that, of course, was not to be. Long before the TV magazines carried the programs for April, local Turkish pressure groups and emissaries from Ankara had tried to hinder by any means the TV station from broadcasting such anti-Turkish slander and defamation, as they called it. Naturally they had not

previewed the program, yet they "knew" all about its contents well in advance and were publicly outraged. The directors of the television station were men of character who remained adamant and refused to compromise and cancel the program, even though the government strongly urged them to reconsider. When the request was made for another showing, Bonn however entered the picture forcefully. The government likes to oblige its Turkish brother.

The Turkish embassy in Bonn had somehow gotten the information long before the German TV magazines had printed about what was to be presented on the screen that evening in April. Its staff then vented their anger loudly to local German government officials and the directors of the *First German TV Program*. The latter then called on Giordano to use his diplomatic skills and calm down the situation. Giordano tells how he paid the authorities in the Turkish embassy in Bonn-Mehlem a visit to confront the "opposition" from the very beginning of the planning sessions with the facts and outline of the documentary. The producer was politely received and was given coffee along with an introduction to the "correct" Turkish version of the "genocide" as well as lots of Turkish propaganda material to ponder over on his way home. Then, about a week later, the harassment over the telephone, the death threats, started.

The day after the broadcast, the Turkish community of Cologne, where the TV station is located, took to the streets, and many thousands of young and old, of male and female Turks vented their anger and outrage under the windows of Giordano's office. He recalls that he had never before seen so much blind and stupid anger and hatred anywhere. But what scared him to the marrow of his bones and reminded him of Hitler-times was the constantly repeated cry of "Yahuda assili...Ralph Giordano!"

He did survive the months of harassment, but Giordano is no longer able to make a statement about the Armenians and the Genocide on German television and broadcast it during prime time. No matter; he did have one chance to do so. The German public reacted enthusiastically, and there were even a dozen or so timid Turkish voices that thanked him over the telephone for telling them the truth about their country's history - timid because they could not identify themselves because they, too, should take the threats of the Gray Wolves and similar fanatics seriously.

It turned out that Giordano had done good pioneer work. On April 25, 2005, the TV station *3sat* broadcast two documentaries, one about the activities of an Armenian choir in Paris, the other providing background information to "Franz Werfel - *Die 40 Tage des Musa Dagh*". The following evening the same channel showed the movie *Ararat* featuring Arsinee Khanjian. The choice of these films and their being broadcast, if not exactly on April 24, did demonstrate daring, though the choice of time did less so. On both evenings the films were shown after midnight, when the great majority of respectable Turkish and German citizens are asleep. Most of those viewers still awake at that ungodly hour, more than likely,

will entertain themselves with porno shows.

But let us return to the 1980s. The year is 1987 and the place the Hauptfriedhof of Stuttgart, located in Stuttgart/Bad Cannstadt. In one of its corners of this vast cemetery about fifty Armenians have been laid to rest. Now in the spirit of commemoration following the activities of the 70th anniversary of the Genocide, the Stuttgart Armenian community wanted to erect a simple granite block with an inscription to recall the year 1915 in their section of the cemetery. They had applied properly, informed all the authorities, paid the fees, and submitted the text of the inscription. Permission was granted, though Dr. Manfred Rommel, Lord Mayor of Greater Stuttgart, objected to the date and decided that the inscription should be shortened and state no more than "In memory of the victims of the Armenian people" in both Armenian and German. He had to trust the Armenians that they would play no tricks on him when they translated these words into Armenian. And so the stone was erected. This innocent act, however, proved to be round one of a vicious war of words and accusations and threats that often degenerated into farce and, on the level of language, often skirted the obscene. The feud, nevertheless, added entertainment and spice to the newspapers of the region of Stuttgart throughout the somewhat dull summer months. It is inexcusable that this had to happen at the expense of the memory of so many dead.

I pursued the ups and downs of this feuding as reported in the summer months of 1987 by the *Heilbronner Stimme*. The following is a somewhat bowdlerized paraphrase/summary of these reports.

It is not clear how the Turkish community had been informed about the stone, but when the then most respected living member of the Turkish community in Stuttgart, the Consul General Rasit Gueren, on his tour of inspection of the German *champs du mors* had espied the stone and the word "jeghern" on it, which he interpreted as "genocide", his Turkish sense of honor was outraged. He expressed his feelings in a strongly worded letter to Dr. Rommel. The Turkish gentleman turned out to be not only an expert interpreter of the Armenian language but of German law pertaining to tombstones as well. He freely referred to paragraphs and sub sections in the local law books against which both the German officials and Armenians had offended. He minced no words as he accused the German authorities of being derelict in the carrying out of their duties and having encouraged anti-Turkish feelings. And all this in a grave yard where innocent Turks are buried as well!

Rommel did not need any reminder, and he enthusiastically entered the ensuing controversy on the Turkish side. He reminded everyone that he had not been sympathetic to the Armenian request for the erection of the memorial in the first place, and when "they", i.e., the Armenians, had wanted to mark the date April 24, 1915, he had refused to give his permission. He knew only too well how upset his fellow Turkish citizens would be – though he did not have all the background information why they should be so offended. Still, he had been

generous when he had allowed "them" to add the inscription. How ungrateful "they" had turned out to be!

One just couldn't trust those "sly" Armenians, especially that Grigor Minassian, though he might be one of the most prominent members of the Armenian community in southern Germany. "They" had abused German generosity, and though "they" were told not to, "they had gone ahead and had put the controversial date in bronze numbers" on the stone anyhow. The German authorities had espied this offense all by themselves – without Turkish help. They could not tolerate such a misdemeanor, such an offence against Turkish sensibilities, and the numbers were ripped out of their sockets. Now "they" had sneaked in this word "jeghern" that caused so much grief to our poor maligned Turkish neighbors. The stone should go! It should be carted away – that would be expensive – or it could be stored in a tool shed, if the Armenians were to bear the cost. Better yet: Let it be dumped into a pit! Thus the battle raged on, and accusations were thrown wildly back and forth.

Soon not only Germans and Turks and Armenians on the local level were involved. If "those" foreigners wanted to make a political statement, a German graveyard was not the place to do so. Let "them" do it on the streets; or better yet, let "them" do it in Anatolia where they belong. Let "them" split their heads there – thus the graveyard authorities. German cemeteries really belong to Germans, and only this group can in extreme cases use them to make a political statement. Of course the Jews are welcome to commemorate their dead and the Holocaust on German consecrated soil – after all, Germans have to atone for their collective guilt – but just any "foreign injustice" should under no circumstances be remembered there. If we were to give in to the Armenians, pretty soon "the American Indians might demand the right to erect memorials in German cemeteries to commemorate their genocide at the hands of the Americans"! What an outrage that would be! These latter sentiments were uttered by the Lord Mayor of Stuttgart himself. The wisdom expressed by Manfred Rommel in this affair did not add much honor to the "house" of Rommel; the then Lord Mayor is the son of the general who fought in North Africa during WWII.

Eventually the officials in charge of the cemetery came to realize, this time with the help of properly certified translators, that they had been fooled by a "wily" Turk when the Consul General had translated the word "jeghern" as "genocide". No apology went to the Armenian community, and the stone remains in its place with gaping holes in the granite where the date had once been.

At least the stone remains - other earlier efforts to commemorate the Genocide had not been successful. The Berlin based radio station *RIAS* - a station called into being and funded by the US military forces - had planned a program for May 22, 1985, entitled *Der geleugnete Voelkermord - das Schicksal der Armenier 1915* (Genocide Denied - The Fate of the Armenians). Despite the protests of the director of the station and his board, the broadcast was cancelled. The Turkish

consul in Berlin had protested to the US military authorities, who represented the final authority over the radio station. Similarly, the symposium planned by the *Evangelische Akademie Muelheim* came to naught. The Turkish consul stationed in Essen visited in early spring of 1985 the director of the academy, and nothing further was heard about any Armenia symposium.⁸

The old Hanseatic town of Bremen fared a bit better, but she was to have her share of trouble as well.⁹ Bremen in 1985 - with a population of about half a million - is home to about 27,000 Turks. The church community of St. Stephani in Bremen had neglected to consult the local Turkish leadership when they planned a week-long conference to remember *Genozid und Holocaust* (April 19-24, 1985). The church authorities and Dr. Frank Boldt, the officially appointed director for political education by the Senate of the State of Bremen, discussed the project with the proper German authorities, especially with Senator Horst-Werner Franke, who approved of it. Then the organizers went ahead with their planning of the program, and the printing of the booklet that was to accompany the activities of the symposium. This was too much for all the local Turkish clubs and pressure groups, and they organized their campaign. In due time several representatives of the Turkish variant of the CIA visited the office for political education of the Sovereign State of Bremen. On April 3, Acar Germen, Turkish Consul General, personally appeared in the office of Senator Franke. The latter recorded in his notes of the day that the Turkish gentleman seemed very agitated and demanded that the Senator exert his influence to the utmost so that the conference would be cancelled. It was his duty to stifle the demands of the office for political education as well as those of the local Protestant church. The Senator was "thrashed into submission by this Turkish visitor" as the *tageszeitung - Bremen-Lokal* of April 4, 1985, reported on the front page.

Dr. Bolt was instructed to change the program, limit his participation in the activities, and *was ordered not* to participate in the press conference that had been scheduled. The booklets that were to accompany the lectures and exhibitions were impounded. Concerned German citizens, who had thought that the days of Hitler were long gone, were shocked. Turkish pressure continued.

Threatening letters were sent to anyone of importance. On the streets, fliers were handed out that expressed the deep hurt and anguish felt by the Turks of Bremen who were forced "to regard such a provocation as an unfriendly act" directed against the Turkish state. Germans were reminded that they should not put any genocide at the door of Turkey; the first genocide of the twentieth century, after all, happened in Africa when Germans slaughtered Hereros. And there was the Holocaust. What a shame that the German taxpayer's money was wasted to perpetrate lies and slander about Turkey, "our dear motherland that feels such close ties with Germany". The remarks uttered about Armenians are not fit to be repeated.

Bonn had all along been exerting its pressure as well. The Turkish foreign

secretary had visited the German capital and had vehemently protested – and Bonn happily obliged and promptly let the Senate of Bremen know that if they were to continue in their misguided behavior as far as their fellow Turkish citizens were concerned, all trade transactions of Bremen-City and Bremen-State with Turkey would be terminated. That would hurt the Federal Republic greatly but would definitely bring about the end of the once free Hanseatic town. This the city fathers and the senators could not risk, and so they played the role cut out for them by Ankara.

Their obligingness as well as their public “justification” in the meeting of the Senate on May, 15, 1985, make for one of the most unpleasant and demeaning chapters in the history of a proud city. St. Stephani did host a pale version of the conference – but as in the case of the Stuttgart cemetery, an event that was meant to honor the dead degenerated into farce and a battle of wills.

Again, Turkish permission had not been asked for when the expression “Genocide of the Armenians” was put before the European Parliament in Strasbourg. This was not the first world body that had been confronted with a proposed resolution to accept the events of 1915 as historical fact, as the first Genocide of the century. This had happened already in 1973, and the organization was the United Nations; on Turkish pressure the resolution was rejected. The World Council of Churches, on the other hand, passed in 1983 a resolution at their general assembly in Vancouver, Canada, in which Christian communities were urged to inform their congregations about the Genocide.

A report was eventually presented to one of the committees of the European Parliament concerning a political solution of the Armenian problem. On June 26, 1986, it was put to the vote; 19 members wanted to accept the resolution while 20 members were against it. Among this latter group were the two representatives of the German Federal Republic. Ankara’s emissaries had been busy again in Bonn. The leadership of the two major parties, the CDU (Christian Democrats) and SDP (Social Democrats) did appreciate the feeling of a NATO brother. Thus the representative of the SPD to Strasbourg Klaus Hensch several times went on record objecting to the use of the term “Genocide”, which should be translated into “injustice done to the Armenian people”. On several other occasions he expressed in public that the Armenian matter should never have been brought before Strasbourg at all since “the European Parliament is not a conference forum for historians”.¹⁰ After long and heated debates about the wording of the document, a resolution was finally passed on July 18, 1987.

Those delegated to the European Parliament who had fought for the cause of the Armenians, especially Jack Vandemeulebroucke – he had been responsible for drafting the report – were to learn the lesson what it means to incur Turkish displeasure. Vandemeulebroucke and his family had to live with threats, again with death threats, and could no longer go anywhere without police protection. All this happened in the heart of Europe, not in far-away Anatolia!

At the same time as the parliamentarians were preparing and debating, the Turkish community residing in Berlin on the streets and through the news media worked themselves into a frenzy of hatred over the issue.¹¹ The demonstrators on the street had found a very useful champion in the local Turkish TV channel called *Avrupa Tuerk Televizonu*. Together they indulged in an obscene orgy of xenophobia not only against the Armenians, but against Christians generally, and anyone who was so misguided as not to side with the Turkish interpretation of the "truth", especially those "arch criminals" in Strasbourg. It came to bloody demonstrations, for not all Armenians and Germans were intimidated. Other towns became involved; for instance on July 4, 1987, Nuremberg, too, experienced its share of Turkish violence. All this happened right under the very noses of the German authorities – and the government said and did nothing; they had no notion what was happening, so they claimed, since they were ignorant of the Turkish language, in which most of the campaign of hatred was conducted.

After the 80s, the encounters have been somewhat less dramatic and high profile. That, however, does not mean that the Turks in Germany – their pressure groups and clubs and news media – and the government in Ankara have slackened in diligence concerning the goings on in Germany. For instance, to mention a few, there was the incident in Karlsruhe in April 2004, the time when the city was hosting the seventeenth *European Culture Days*. The city fathers had hit on the idea to open the festivities with an exhibition entitled *Call Me Istanbul* and had included in the program a performance of Richard Kalinoski's play *Beast on the Moon*. The Turkish community objected since they and all other Turks alive would be deeply hurt and insulted if the play, which deals with the lives of two young Armenian survivors of the Genocide, was allowed to be performed. No persuasion was necessary, and the city fathers as well as the director of the *Karlsruhe State Theater* obliged immediately. They had been made to realize, through Turkish intervention, that any European culture days definitely included the Turkish community and should not provide an occasion to upset anyone, especially not "our Turkish friends", and so they conceded.¹²

In the words of Helmut Donat, "It seems that official Turkish agencies are greatly concerned to put those Germans who appear not sympathetic to the Turkish line of thinking into their proper place i.e., to limit their sphere of influence."¹³ He is referring in particular to Steffen Reiche. Reiche, in 2002 still Minister of Education of the State of Brandenburg, had been very much involved in revising the curriculum on the elementary and secondary levels in his state. One of his concerns was the revision of existing history texts; what bothered him greatly was the fact that nowhere in them were the students told about 1915. When he presented his plans for the new history program to the *International Forum for Truth, Justice, and Reconciliation* held in 2002 in Stockholm, the Turkish participants and observers of the conference were outraged. His German colleagues withdrew behind the usual wall of silence. But Reiche was not to be

intimidated, and he recalled in front of the august Forum the witness of Johannes Lepsius, the favorite son of Potsdam. Potsdam is the capital of the State of Brandenburg.

The events in Stockholm, however, do not mark the end of the textbook affair. Back in Brandenburg, the appointed team of textbook writers went ahead and presented the Genocide – they did not use any euphemisms – in the materials intended for classes 9 and 10. The new material was approved by the ministry of education. Brandenburg is the only German state that has ever considered dealing with the Genocide in the classroom.

On January 12, 2005, the Prime Minister of the State of Brandenburg Matthias Platzeck had a luncheon date with the General Consul of the Republic of Turkey, Aydin Durusoy, in the noble restaurant *Ristorante Villa von Haacke* in Potsdam. As they were savoring the *carre* of lamb simmered in red wine, the Muslim gentleman broached the subject dear to his heart: The Armenian matter had to be removed from the German textbooks. No problem; the Turkish gentleman had his way even before dessert was served, as it seems. The Turkish side agreed, though, that it was permissible to refer briefly in the German textbooks to the Armenians in a long list of other peoples, including the Turks, that suffered during the 20th century.¹⁴

Matthias Platzeck belongs to the SPD, the Social Democrats, and in the fall of 2005 was appointed as the new Chair of the party.

Before judging Platzeck's behavior in the textbook affair too harshly, we need to know that this luncheon provided not his first encounter with Turkish pressure and blackmail. He feels now that to deal with such a serious topic as the Genocide of the Armenians over lunch does show bad taste, to say the least. He was not unprepared when the topic arose, for his office had been inundated with Turkish letters of protest and death threats well in advance of January 12. Nobody, though, can say that the letter writers and the Consul General had "thrashed him into submission". He, by himself, had come to the realization that there had been many mass killings throughout the twentieth century and the mention of the Armenian Genocide had all along been "something of a pedagogical Achilles heel" in his opinion.

One cannot but wonder what led him to this profound insight. We need to recall here that several years before this notorious luncheon, Platzeck was mayor of Potsdam. During his stay in office, the good citizens of Potsdam, who had always felt close to Johannes Lepsius, wanted to renovate the house in which the great Armenophile was born and dedicate it to his memory. As head of the city government, Platzeck sponsored the project. This is when it all started. The Turkish campaign of hate mail and death threats lasted for two years. Who would not be intimidated?

In the meantime the decision pertaining to the history text has been amended – still, January 12, 2005, marks one of the saddest days in the history of German

education.

The outrage did not go unnoticed. This time German fathers and mothers and educators were angry. The media even raised the question "Bosporus in Brandenburg?" But to any avail? Any official answer? The emasculated history texts. Was this response just another of those disappointments so lavishly dished out to the public in 2005, this year of German discontent? That this should happen in Germany! In Turkey, well, we can understand. Had not the Ministry of Education in Ankara in 2003 made it mandatory that every Turkish school child on the elementary as well as secondary level participate in an essay competition on the topic of the eradication of all the troubling minorities, Arameans, Armenians, Greeks, Assyrians, during the early decades of the 20th century? The winner would be the child that managed most cleverly and convincingly to deny any accusations of Genocide. Those teachers who were not happy with such an "undertaking" had to be very careful, for they were treading on thin ice.¹⁵ When we look at Turkish attitudes, there is little evidence of a "thaw" with regard to the Armenians as some optimistic observers would like us to believe.¹⁶

But where could interested German students readily find truthful information about the Genocide that addresses their level? The best source would be Franz Nuscheler's *Nirgendwo zu Hause: Menschen auf der Flucht*, an encyclopedic account of the various persecutions and genocides witnessed by the twentieth century. Among them, the Genocide of the Armenians takes a prominent place. The author presents the reasons and events leading up to 1915 and describes the deportation and suffering of the million and a half who died. He has given a whole chapter to the Genocide. It is very much a thought-provoking book, a book that jolts and might irritate the complacent reader. Nuscheler, an academic writer, wanted to write for once a book that his own teenage children could read and understand, and he has succeeded.¹⁷

Trying to untangle the complexities of German-Turkish encounters over Armenians and the Genocide has proved to be a veritable Pandora's box for Sascha, the young Turkish-German narrator of Zafer Senocak's novel *Gefährliche Verwandtschaft* (Dangerous affinities or family relationships).¹⁸ Senocak is perhaps the most prolific contemporary Turkish-German writer. Sascha Muhteschem in turn, is a well-educated modern young German, who at the outset of the story is completely unaware of the history of his family, and according to the logic of the book, has no identity since he is very much the product of the "multi-culti" milieu of the modern German metropolis where he has grown up. This changes when both his parents die in a car accident. Suddenly he is no longer protected by his mother; he has to find out about himself, about his family and roots. What he discovers is unsettling. Of course he has known all along that his mother was German and his father Turkish. Yet there is much more to the family connections. He learns that his mother's family is Jewish, and that many of her close relatives died in the Holocaust. She had managed to protect her son from

such an unpleasant truth.¹⁹ During WWII she and her father had found refuge in Istanbul, where she met her future husband. They returned later to Germany, where Sascha was born. Eventually our young seeker for his roots finds out that his German-Jewish grandfather had fought "gallantly" in 1916 under the command of Mustapha Kemal. This strand of family history, however, is not pursued.

There is hidden guilt also in the father's family. The father wanted to break the silence, but he died before he could share the family secrets with his son. Sascha senses that his grandfather must have been driven by great shame and guilt when he committed suicide in 1936; thus Sascha becomes obsessed by the need to break the wall of silence that surrounds the old man. The only way to discovering his identity, his affinity with his roots, for Sascha seems to lie in entering the life of the grandfather through the memory of the old man and recreating whatever is missing with the help of the imagination of the grandson.

The path of memory is provided by the diary that his paternal grandfather kept when he was a soldier. Nowhere does it contain a hint of any crime committed, no obvious connection with the Genocide, just one remark, the entry for February 1921 while he was fighting on the Anatolian front: "Guilt is a personal matter. A person is always alone with his guilt." For Sascha this amounts to a confession of having participated in the Genocide of the Armenians; it is time that the silence be broken and the facts remembered.

At this point the creative imagination of the narrator enters the picture. Why did the grandparent kill himself in 1936? Eventually Sascha's imagination spins out a tale of love and vows of faithfulness and betrayal, all hidden behind a wall of silence that needs to be broken. So he writes a "novel" in which the Turkish soldier had a love affair with a beautiful Armenian woman, how he vowed that he could not live without her and would kill himself were something to happen to her, and how she was swallowed up by the carnage. She was gone, he grieved, forgot, and continued to live. But one day in 1936 he receives a letter written by her in which she accuses him of having broken his vow and forgotten her. She survived the deportation and now lives in Paris together with their daughter, or is the girl the offspring of one of the many Turkish rapists that violated the young woman? The guilt-ridden man of honor now has to live up to his vow made so long ago. Dangerous affinities and family relations and encounters indeed!

Underlying all this complicated intertwining of ethnic conflicts, crimes, and xenophobia, the Genocide of the Armenians is the theme of the novel: The crime can no longer be forgotten, and the wall of silence has to be broken. In the novel, Genocide and Holocaust are presented as "Parallelgeschichte" – parallel historical events. Yet the author has not completely broken with the official Turkish interpretation of 1915. He lets the hero of the book theorize that, for instance, Western condemnation of Talat Pasha as a mass murderer is rooted in Western anti-Muslim prejudice, and in this line of interpretation the Armenians accordingly are portrayed as victims of Turkish/Muslim barbarism. This interpretation is

hypocritical, for the West, too, can look back to a very bloody past.

German – Turkish encounters over the Genocide of the Armenians – it is a grim picture. Yet perhaps not all is darkness, as it might seem. Of course, the German official stance is not likely to change, though some of the politicians when approached outside their offices speak a different language²⁰. Concerned citizens will continue to petition Berlin to change its policies.²¹ Turkey? Though some optimistic media accounts assure us that there is a thaw in Ankara, such an assertion seems far fetched. What better proof do we need than the nation-wide essay competition, the trial of the novelist Orhan Pamuk, and Ankara's putting a stop to the conference of historians that was to be held on September 23, 2005, in Istanbul? The Genocide was on the agenda. But the very fact that the conference was planned at all and that Turkish artists and intellectuals like Orhan Pamuk and Taner Akcam in public have recognized the Genocide is, indeed, a thaw.

There are also the effort and the publications of the Catholic and Protestant Academies and the work of the publishing house Donat, that has made accessible again the works of the generation of early Armenophiles, of men like Johannes Lepsisus, Armin T. Wegner, Heinrich Vierbuecher, Eduard Bernstein, Otto Umfrid, and Georg Gradnauer. Let us not forget the man of the textbook, Steffen Reiche, the TV producer Ralph Giordano, the academicians Elisabeth Bauer and Tessa Hofmann...the list is by far not complete.

And there remain the two memorial stones.

The first is one of the 27 pillars of the *Strasse der Menschenrechte* (The Street of Human Rights) that was dedicated on October 23, 1993, to commemorate our basic human rights. The colonade of pillars leads the visitor of Nuremberg right up to the entrance of the National German Museum. The artist, Dani Karavan, and the city fathers have hoped that the dedicated pilgrim on his way to this shrine of German history and culture will become pensive and reflect on the basic rights of all of us, for even the shortest moment of reflection will bridge the gap not only between Jews and Germans, but between man and his fellow man, as he/she ponders the engraved articles on the pillars, each in the language of a people that has, or is still, deprived of its independence and human rights. There, on Pillar 14, facing the entry gate to the museum, he will read the demand for the right for asylum in case of persecution in Armenian letters. A statement in Turkish he will not find anywhere in this Street of Human Rights.

The second is that stone in the Stuttgart cemetery whose gaping holes speak a much more eloquent language than any letters and numbers in bronze could ever do.

ENDNOTES

1 Moelln, Solingen, together with Hoyerswerda, three small towns in Germany, have become synonymous with murder and arson because of the way the local skinheads dealt with their Turkish neighbors, both women and children.

- 2 The Genocide of the Armenians at the hands of Ottoman Turkey is well documented by hundreds of reports sent to the imperial German embassy at Istanbul by German diplomats, teachers, missionaries, and other concerned Germans residing in the Ottoman capital and provinces. These documents are found in the *Politisches Archiv des Auswaertigen Amtes*, Turkish File 183, vols. 36-46, formerly Bonn and now Berlin (www.auswaertiges-amt.de). Many of these documents have been made easily accessible by Johannes Lepsius's *Deutschland und Armenien 1914-1918* (Potsdam, 1919; rpt. Bremen, 1986). And there are the haunting pictures taken by Armin T. Wegner that he smuggled out of Turkey. The plates of many of these photographs are found, together with his whole literary legacy, in the *Deutsches Literatur Archiv/Marbach-Stuttgart*.
- 3 For example: Jehuda L. Wallach, *Anatomie einer Militaerhilfe-die preussisch-deutschen Militaermissionen in der Tuerkei 1835-1939* (Duesseldorf, 1979); Vahakn Dadrian, *German Complicity* (Cambridge, Mass., 1996); Ulrich Trumpler, *Germany and the Ottoman Empire 1914-1918* (Princeton, 1999/68).
- 4 Annette Schaeffgen, "Der Voelkermord an den Armeniern als Thema in der deutschen Politik nach 1949" in *The Armenian Genocide and the Shoah*, eds. Hans-Lukas Kieser and Dominik J. Schaller (Zurich, 2002), p. 570. All translations from German that appear in the text are mine.
- 5 Uwe Feigel, *Das evangelische Deutschland und Armenien: Die Armenierhilfe deutscher evangelischer Christen seit dem Ende des 19. Jahrhunderts im Kontext der deutsch-armenischen Beziehungen* (Goettingen, 1989).
- 6 For example: *Die Zeit* (50, Dec. 7, 1983, pp.17-19, and "Dossier") responded to a terrorist attack by ASALA to take up "Armenian matters". One Turkish and two German journalists "handled" the subject. The article is a variation of the typical Turkish propaganda line. The same can also be said about Wolfgang Schrap's "Auf der Suche nach dem verlorenen Volk," *Geo* (March 3, 1986, pp. 102-124). The author for his preparation forgot to consult either Lepsius or the Turkish files then found in Bonn, but he made the effort and traveled to eastern Anatolia. There he felt very sympathetic towards the lot of the former population, so he says.
For his research, however, he relied completely on the official propaganda that was fed to him in the political offices of Ankara. Though the editors of the reputed journal had no objection to being the mouthpiece of Ankara, a number of readers did. Thus in the June issue of the periodical there appeared a reply article written by Tilman Zuelch, a renowned journalist and advocate for human rights. This gentleman was so outraged that he threatened the editors that he would publicly return to them the award for outstanding journalism which they had awarded him four years before. His "blackmail" worked.
- 7 Ralph Giordano, "Die armenische Frage existiert nicht mehr" in *Der Voelkermord an den Armeniern*, ed. Armenischer Kulturverein Hamburg, (Bremen, 1986), pp. 13-47; "Kleines Volk mit grossem Erbe: Zur Geschichte der Armenier" in ed., Wilm Sanders, *Kleines Volk mit grossem Erbe* (Hamburg, 1989), pp. 9-39.
- 8 *Armenier deutsch behandelt*, ed., Armin T. Wegner Gesellschaft (Bremen, 1985), p. 1; *Der Voelkermord and den Armeniern*, p. 8.
- 9 The "Bremen Affair" is well documented in the collection of newspaper clippings and flyers published as *Armenier deutsch behandelt*. The booklet includes a transcript of Session 32 of the Senate of Bremen as well. Not only Bremen, other cities, too, have their very own "Turkish story" to tell, among them Tel Aviv. Elie Wiesel, the Nazi hunter,

back in 1982 had been asked to chair a symposium on the Holocaust and the Genocide. Shortly before the conference was to take place, the Turkish government exercised blackmail on the Israeli government. Were the conference to deal with the Armenian matter as planned, this "would threaten the lives and livelihood of Jews in Turkey". Elie Wiesel along with a number of other Jewish speakers withdrew; a pale version of the planned event took place. Peter Balakian, *Black Dog of Fate: A Memoir* (New York, 1997), pp. 266-267.

10 Helmut Donat, "Voelkermord und Zivilcourage—ein deutsches Problem?" in ed. Helmut Donat, *Armenien, die Tuerkei und die Pflichten Europas* (Bremen, 2005), p. 11.

11 This Turkish campaign of blackmail and slander is well documented in *Armenische Frage Tuerkisch behandelt* (Bremen, 1980). See Appendix.

12 Steffen Reiche, "Rede zum Gedenktag des Genozids an den Armeniern in Berlin am 24. April 2004" in *Armenien, die Tuerkei und die Pflichten Europas*, p. 133.

13 Donat, *Armenien, die Tuerkei und die Pflichten Europas*, pp. 15-17.

14 "Bosporus in Brandenburg?", *Der Spiegel*(5/2005), pp. 14-16; Donat, *Armenien, die Tuerkei und die Pflichten Europas*, pp. 14-16.

The "Brandenburg textbook affair" is not a unique case. Peter Bakalian recalls what happened to him. He had been asked by the New York State Department of Education to be an advisor for a textbook on 20th-century genocide "that would be used in public schools. Not long after I and a group of scholars had begun putting together the chapter on the Armenian Genocide, the Turkish Embassy got wind of the project and began harassing the Department of Education, insisting that 'this genocide business' was invented by Armenians, and if the chapter were included it would hurt U.S.-Turkish relations." The state bureaucrats with whom he consulted "were horrified by the Turkish assault, to hold firm on the chapter. The Turkish contingent was threatening to call President Reagan. Letters went back and forth. The Education Department grew increasingly befuddled. Before it was over, the Turkish government had succeeded in forcing changes to the textbook (*Black Dog of Fate*, p. 266).

15 Donat, *Armenien, die Tuerkei und die Pflichten Europas*, p. 13.

16 In fact, a goodly number of Turks seem to have become possessed by a frenzy of nationalistic fervor; at times one is even reminded of the excesses of Addul-Hamid-times. For instance, the type of sheep that all over the world is known by its Latin classification as *ovis armeniana* in Turkey from 2005 on is officially recognized as *ovis orientalis anatolicus*. *Der Spiegel* (12/2005, p. 100). In the spring of 2005, the German ambassador to Turkey hosted an official party at Erzurum. He almost committed unwittingly a most heinous offence against the sovereign state of Turkey—had not a Turkish dignitary physically stopped him. The diplomat had wanted to honor his guests with a cake that was decorated to resemble the Turkish flag. As decorum demands, the host should cut the cake – in Erzurum a Turk might do so, but definitely not a foreigner. That would be a hostile act, the desecration of the flag. Recently the "Soykirim Muezesi" – the Genocide Museum has been opened to the public. Of course, Turkey recognizes the term "genocide", only for them it is the genocide of Turks perpetrated by the Armenians that is commemorated in its catacombs. Above ground, gigantic swords (40m in height), majestic reliefs sporting an assortment of wolves, eagles, and noble Turkish warriors jar the peaceful landscape near the town of Igdir at the foot of Mt. Ararat (*Der Spiegel* (18/2005), p. 114).

- 17 Franz Nuscheler, *Nirgendwo zu Hause: Menschen auf der Flucht* (Munich, 1988).
- 18 Zafer Senocak, *Gefährliche Verwandtschaft* (Munich, 1998).
- 19 We are reminded of Madeline Albright whose mother was as protective.
- 20 Hans-Dietrich Genscher in his address to the *Armenian World Congress* held in the spring of 2000 in Halle-Wittenberg referred twice to the "Genocide of the Armenians". At that point in time, Genscher no longer held any public office (Schaeffgen, p. 565).
- 21 For instance, in April 2000 the German Bundestag (Lower House of Parliament) was handed a petition entitled "Es ist Zeit: Voelkermord verurteilen" (It is time to condemn the Genocide). The petition had 16,000 signatures (Schaeffgen, p. 565). There is also the spirited proposal by Gunnar Heinsohn, "Der Genozid am armenischen Volk und die Verbesserung der tuerkisch-armenischen Beziehungen: Wie eine Resolution des Deutschen Bundestages lauten koennte" in *Armenien, die Tuerkei und die Pflichten Europas*, pp. 141-146.

APPENDIX

Excerpts from various speeches delivered during an officially recognized public gathering on July 1, 1987, on the Oranienplatz (one of the major squares) at the center of the then West-Berlin. These speeches were given in Turkish, but they are typical of the *historical background* information found on the flyers usually handed out to German audiences and of the boundless contempt expressed for the Armenians by the Turks in Germany:

'... My most precious people: The Armenians are an ethnic group that at no point in history has ever managed to form a state of its own, a group that does not possess the necessary characteristics that would enable it to form a nation. They lived scattered here and there in a region bordered in the north by the Black Sea, in the south by Iran and Syria, in the west by Asia Minor, and in the east by the Caspian Sea....For centuries they suffered under the yoke of the Macedonians, Romans, Persians and Byzantines. They finally found peace and quiet and protection and prosperity with the coming of the Ottomans....At first they worshiped the moon and later the idea of fire. Later, at the beginning of the 4th century A.D. they turned Christian because of the calculation that this act would be politically profitable....Both Russian and European experts in philology and linguistics have come to the conclusion that the Armenians have actually no language of their own. Armenian is a mishmash of vocabulary items derived from Assyrian, Hebrew, Persian, Georgian, Urartarian, Greek, Arabic, Kurdish, Turkish, Mongolian, and Russian....Though they were guests and given many privileges, they took over. They constituted a mere 8-9% of the population of Ottoman Turkey when in Anatolia they attacked innocent and harmless people, destroyed and burnt the countryside, attacked and butchered the population...'

From the speech given by Nevzat Oezberitoglu on the same occasion:

'...We are gathered here to carry out our sacred duty to history. The European Parliament is composed entirely of representatives of Christian nations, and thus through its decision has given the signal for the resumption of the Crusades in

the 20th century. In their resolution, which violates the Declaration of Human Rights, the concept of Liberty, as well as international law, they have been emboldened by their shameless brazenness and disrespect to demand Turkish territory to be given to the Armenians – part of our Motherland where every inch is drenched with the blood of millions upon millions of slain Turks. Our response to these people will be in a language that they can understand. Nobody will be able to cut from 'our' Turkish Motherland not even the tiniest particle of territory. Should *you* Armenians, however, absolutely have to possess part of our Anatolia, you just come and we will show you! The price for our Turkish lands is very high – the question is: Will you be able to pay it? This region has cost us a million fighters, one million widows, and many millions of war casualties. If you are able to pay the price, just come and we will show you....Dearest Bretheren, these intrigues have to stop. These murderous intrigues involving our precious Anatolia are merely part and parcel of the wheeler-dealing of the Bearers of the Cross, these modern Crusaders. They have drenched the soil of Muslim nations in blood and are ever greedy for more: Here in the Lebanon, there in Iran/Iraq; here Palestine, there the Philippines; here Eritrea, then the whole of Africa; here the situation of our compatriots in Bulgaria, and then there finally our glorious Motherland: Turkey. The propagators of these insidious and bloody intrigues have to be spat at:

Spit on the whores who do not know any gratitude!
Spit on the whores who applaud them!
Spit on the shameless faces of the Bearers of the Cross!
Spit on their promises that cannot be trusted!
Beat that ridiculous creature that calls itself 'civilization'!

These excerpts provide a very small sampling of the rhetoric to which the good citizens of Berlin were treated during that summer of 1987. Were they able to read what was written on the placards carried by the demonstrators through the streets of Berlin, they would be informed that if they had any sympathy for the lot of the Armenians they would be cursed: 'Cursed be the propagators of that fairy tale of the massacres of the Armenians' and that 'Armenian cruelty be damned'. Most other placards had been inspired by the maledictions pronounced by Nevzat Oeberitoglu in his speech. *Armenische Frage-tuerkisch behandelt* (Bremen, 1988), pp. 82-85, 95-97.