

Cem Özdemir (ALLIANCE 90/THE GREENS):

Mr President, Your Excellencies, Your Eminences, ladies and gentlemen,
Many representatives of the Arameans, the Armenians, the Assyrians, the Chaldeans and the Pontic Greeks and also, by the way, of Turkish civil society are in the visitors' gallery today. We warmly welcome all of you.

(Applause)

There is never a good time to speak of something so inconceivably barbaric as genocide. After lengthy and laborious deliberations, we are voting today on a motion that speaks of genocide, clearly refers to German complicity and establishes that this complicity virtually binds Germany to work for the normalisation of relations between Turkey and Armenia and for rapprochement between the two countries.

(Applause from ALLIANCE 90/THE GREENS and from CDU/CSU and SPD Members)

May I take this opportunity to thank the Grand Coalition for keeping their word by subscribing to this joint motion. I would also like to express my thanks to the churches for their support in this matter and to our Federal President and our President of the Bundestag for their unambiguous words. Without them, today's joint motion would not have been possible in this form.

To our Turkish friends, I would like to say that this is not about us pointing the finger or claiming the moral high ground. It is not in any way because we feel morally superior or seek to interfere in others' affairs that we have tabled this motion but precisely because it revolves in part around an episode in Germany's own history. Allow me to quote Imperial Chancellor Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg, who said,

“Our sole object is to keep Turkey on our side until the end of the war, no matter whether or not Armenians perish as a result.”

The result was then reported to Berlin by Count Siegfried von Lüttichau, chaplain to the German Embassy in Constantinople, in 1918:

“In the eastern provinces, that is to say with the exception of Constantinople and Smyrna and other places in western Turkey, 80 to 90% of the entire population and 98% of the male population are no longer alive. ...

As far as the clergy are concerned, they have been almost entirely exterminated.”

It is for this very reason that we have a veritable historical obligation to encourage Armenians and Turks, out of friendship, to be reconciled with each other.

(Applause throughout the House)

As regards the Armenians living in Germany, let me say that this explicitly applies to them too.

Ladies and gentlemen, the fact that we were accessories in the past to this dreadful crime must not mean that we aid and abet those who deny it today. Coming to terms with the Shoah has been the foundation of our democratic Germany. It is therefore time for us to come to terms now with other crimes committed by predecessor states of the Federal Republic of Germany. To this end, I wish to make explicit mention of the genocide against the Herero and Nama peoples. That genocide also awaits re-examination.

(Applause from ALLIANCE 90/THE GREENS, the SPD and THE LEFT PARTY as well as from CDU/CSU Members)

In 1915, when the Governor of Kütahya received orders to deport the Armenian population of his district, he announced publicly that he would not obey those orders. The Governor of Konya and the members of the Mevlevi Order of Dervishes in Konya did exactly the same. They listened to their hearts. Their human instincts did not fail them. In many cases it was people's Muslim faith or their conception of humanity that would not allow them to obey those despicable orders from Istanbul. We revere their memory and that of all the courageous heroes, who were to be found among the Turks too, who refused to carry out those orders.

(Applause throughout the House)

It is these Turkish Schindlers, and not the murderers Talat Pasha and Enver Pasha, of whom people in Turkey, but also people from Turkey living in the Federal Republic of Germany, have every reason to be proud.

By recognising the genocide, acknowledging German complicity in it and stepping up our efforts to come to terms with it, we also seek to provide people in Germany from Turkish backgrounds with answers to their questions that are not addressed in Turkish history books. I know what I am talking about. As our Federal President clearly emphasised in the speech he made last year, those who are alive today bear no guilt – this also applies to us, by the way, with regard to the Shoah – but they do bear responsibility. We Germans bear this responsibility just as the people in Turkey do.

(Applause throughout the House)

We do not wish to stigmatise anyone. On the contrary, we want to encourage those who ask questions. I would like to take this opportunity to call to mind the suffering of the Muslims who were displaced from the Balkans. I would like to call to mind the suffering of the Circassians, including my father's ancestors, whose tribulations, according to many an expert, could likewise be described as genocide. Their stories, too, are waiting to be told, so

that future generations can be presented with a picture of Turkish history that is not simply black and white but multi-coloured and complex.

When we look at the region today, we see that Christians are once again being persecuted – in Iraq, in Syria and in Turkey too. Those displaced Armenians who survived the death marches arrived in places which are now in the middle of the Syrian war zone, such as Aleppo and Deir al-Zour. After a number of years in which all of us in this House have had reason to rejoice at the restoration of churches in Turkey, churches are now being expropriated and closed down again. Seminarians are no longer able, in practice, to train for the priesthood in Turkey. What is perhaps the bitterest pill is that, while ‘You Armenian’ has always been used as a term of abuse in Turkey, today it is more widely used than ever. Even I am addressed as ‘you Armenian’. I do not regard it as an insult to be called an Armenian.

As someone who comes from a Sunni Muslim family, I am very concerned when I think of eastern Christianity. Christian communities are threatened with extermination in the very cradle of Christianity.

“If the Armenians were still alive today, Van would be the Paris of the East”. The one who said this was my murdered Turkish-Armenian friend Hrant Dink, a journalist who campaigned like nobody else for reconciliation between Turks and Armenians in Turkey and paid for it with his life.

I am grateful to the President of the Bundestag for referring to the fact that Members of the Bundestag must not be subjected to threats on account of their opinions. But I find it difficult to speak of this here, ladies and gentlemen, because I know that, when I leave the Bundestag after this sitting, I shall not be arrested, that on my way home my immunity is unlikely to be lifted and I shall not be beaten up or killed. The same does not apply to all our counterparts in Turkey. It does not apply to those in Turkey who are calling for the examination of these crimes. That is why our solidarity is with those people. They truly have reason to be afraid. They are paying a high price.

Thank you very much

(Applause throughout the House)