

First of all I'd like to thank the organizers of this commemorative event and express my appreciation to you all for being with us today.

We have gathered here again, as we do every year, to pay tribute to the memory of 1.5 mln of our compatriots, who fell victim to the first Genocide of the 20th century, carefully planned and meticulously carried out by the Ottoman Empire 97 years ago. This crime against humanity has been acknowledged by many states across Europe, Asia and the Americas. These nations put aside the sensitivity of their bilateral relations with Turkey and officially recognized the crime of Genocide, committed by the Ottoman Empire against the Armenian people. For that we are grateful to them.

However, despite the persistent calls of the international community to come to terms with its own history, Ankara intensifies its policy of Genocide denial. Obviously, impressive economic growth enables Turkey to resort to more sophisticated rhetoric and contrivances. But is such rhetoric and actions befitting a country aspiring to become a fully fledged member of European family? I doubt it. Moreover, I believe if Turkey is serious in its ambitions for European integration, it must demonstrate also a miraculous democratic transformation. It would help for Turkish society to overcome psychological barriers to confront its past instead of suppressing it. Denial of crimes against humanity committed by Ottoman Empire and interpretation of this policy within the context of protection of national prestige is inappropriate for modern Turkey. Denial traumatizes both sides hampering any possibility for de-linking the present and the future from the past. Acknowledgment of the deeds of a past government and the responsibility of the current generation, although not culpable, to recognize and to condemn the crime is an indispensable component of reconciliation. Some nations, including Germany, undertook this painful experience of recognition in order to be relieved of the traumatizing consequences of their history.

Bilateral Armenian-Turkish relations are not confined solely to the Genocide. There are other pending problems that hinder development and poison politics in the South Caucasus. The two decade blockade of Armenia and the refusal to establish diplomatic relations with a country that Turkey is not in war with is a direct disregard of international law. We acknowledge the efforts of the international community working for the resolution of these problems. However, the calls of some mediators and advocates of Turkish-Armenian reconciliation, for solving the abovementioned issues by discarding the Genocide question are doomed to failure. Deblockading Armenia and establishing diplomatic relations with Turkey are issues that we can still negotiate. However, our history, our losses, and the memory of innocent victims are non-negotiable. We can draw lessons from our common past to build a better future but we cannot revise the history.

I'm confident that the Truth will prevail, bringing peace to all those who have perished during the Genocide. The noblest way to pay tribute to their memory and due respect to the survivors is to strengthen the foundations for our future – the Armenian statehood: a state which is a custodian of our legacy and is in charge of our interests.

Hamburg, 21.04.12