



1829: Russia

Anton Rubinstein, a renowned Russian pianist and composer was born. He was a rival of Liszt and a pupil of Chopin. Rubinstein founded the Russian Music Society and became the first head of the St. Petersburg Conservatory.

Swiss minister wants to legalise genocide deniers

By Oliver Bradley




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Swiss justice minister Christoph Blocher

BERN (EJP)--- Switzerland's justice minister has called on the Swiss government to reverse a law which makes historical revisionism illegal.

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Minister Christoph Blocher is on a campaign to change the law, according to the Neue Zuercher Zeitung (NZZ) newspaper – even if it will impinge upon the sensitivities of minority groups, including the country's Jewish communities.

Blocher claims that freedom of expression is more important than protecting the sensibilities of minority groups, NZZ wrote.

Blocher just returned from a trip to Turkey where a public discussion of the Armenian genocide is de facto punishable by a court of law. Upon his return home, Blocher said that he believes that Swiss laws needs to be a beacon for other nations.

As far as the minister is concerned, a ban on free speech in Turkey has made an effective public discussion of the Armenian genocide and Kurdish issues there impossible. In effect, he claims that widening the possibilities for freedom of speech in Switzerland might entice other countries to do the same.

International relations

The minister, however, is also disgruntled because he claims that such a law is an impediment on Switzerland's relationship to other countries.

Article 261 of the Swiss criminal code punishes genocide-denial. Currently, anybody is punishable in Switzerland if they "deny, belittle, or relativise genocide or crimes against humanity," NZZ wrote.

Because of this law, Swiss lawmakers who travel abroad are required to discuss this topic with their counterparts in those countries which have been accused, by the global community, of genocide.

Blocher's trip to Turkey is a case in point. He believes that his

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having been required to bring up the topic of the Ottoman Empire's Armenian genocide with his Turkish colleagues will have created unnecessary friction during his meetings in the Eurasian nation. However, the minister's failure to guarantee that two Kurdish activists, held in Switzerland would be extradited to Turkey has also put a damper on Swiss-Turkish relations, in recent years.

Holocaust denial

The minister is apparently very much aware that a change in the law will only entice Holocaust deniers to question the existence of gas chambers as well. "I do not want that an opinion cannot be uttered only because someone will be offended by it," the minister said.

According to the minister, the definition of genocide needs to be decided by historians. "A debate on the subject, however, will have no basis if diverse opinions are banned," he said.

According to NZZ, the minister made this very point to his Turkish colleague, Justice Minister Cemil Cicek. In response, Cicek told Blocher that Turkey would allow an international historian commission to research the topic of the Armenian genocide and Kurdish matters.

The Turkish government had already announced its intention to form a commission in the past. However, no commission has been set up, to-date. Armenia and Turkey do not hold diplomatic relations. The Armenians fear that a Turkish commission would be mostly composed of revisionist minded historians, NZZ writes.

Although several of Blocher's meetings were strained by the talk of the Armenian genocide, the minister does believe that his meetings have "created a giant step towards an improvement" in Switzerland's diplomatic relationship to Turkey.

The reason for the two nations' extremely strained relationship is Switzerland's blocking of a Turkish request for the extradition of two activists of the banned Kurdish Communist Party. The Kurds (Turkish citizens) are protected under Swiss law because their extradition to Turkey, which has historically curbed Kurdish freedom of expression, is contradictory to Swiss law – something that Blocher would like to see changed.


During his trip to Ankara, Blocher did say that he would make every effort to have the Swiss legal code changed in order to make an extradition easier. In other words, he hopes that the Turkish government would eventually follow suit and allow the Kurdish political opposition the opportunity to speak its mind, publicly.


However, the extradition will certainly not happen anytime soon – because not only would Swiss codes need to be changed, via parliamentary propositions and a general referendum. However, Turkish laws would also need to be amended.

Most political parties have shown their dismay at Blocher's proposal – in particular because the Swiss law only went into effect in 1994 after years of debate and compromise.

The Swiss Ombudsman against Racism, Georg Kreis, told NZZ that Blocher's statements would make everyone believe that the law places sole attention on the Armenian genocide. Kreis went further to criticise Blocher's promise to his Turkish colleagues in regards to the Kurdish Communist Party.

Blocher's visited Turkey in order to commemorate the 80th anniversary of the Eurasian country's civil code which was modelled after that of Switzerland.

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