

October 14, 2006

## **Turkish Laureate Criticizes French Legislation**

By Sebnem Arsu

ISTANBUL — Orhan Pamuk, the Turkish novelist who won the Nobel Prize in Literature this week, went on television Friday to criticize the French parliamentary vote that would make it a crime to deny that the Ottoman Turks' mass killing of Armenians constituted genocide.

In a telephone interview broadcast live on the private television network NTV, Mr. Pamuk, who faced criminal charges for his statements acknowledging the massacre, said France had acted against its own fundamental principles of freedom of expression.

“The French tradition of critical thinking influenced and taught me a lot,” he said. “This decision, however, is a prohibition and didn't suit the libertarian nature of the French tradition.” The legislation was approved by the lower house of Parliament, but it is uncertain whether the upper house will concur.

In any case, Mr. Pamuk urged his compatriots not to let their frustration with France get out of hand. He used a Turkish proverb to get his point across. Roughly translated, it means “Don't set the blanket on fire for a flea.”

Some analysts fear that widespread anger against the French legislation may turn more Turks against joining the European Union. A Turkish opinion poll released in July showed a decline in support, to 58 percent from a high of 74 percent in 2003, in part because of the prolonged road to admission.

Mr. Pamuk's statement came after some in the country voiced suspicions that the award was politically motivated. Mr. Pamuk owes part of his celebrity in Europe to his criticism of Turkey's stance on the Armenian genocide. Many in Europe feel that Turkey should acknowledge that the mass killings during and after World War I were genocide, and the country's refusal may complicate its attempts to join the European Union.

Some of Mr. Pamuk's supporters called it unfortunate that the prize was awarded on the same day as the French parliamentary vote. They fear that Turks will see the two events as more evidence that Europe is treating their country unfairly.

Bulent Arinc, the speaker of the Turkish Parliament, challenged Mr. Pamuk on Friday to tell the world what he thought about the French legislation, which Mr. Arinc said “massacres freedom of expression.”

Mr. Pamuk was charged last year with making “anti-Turkish” remarks when he called attention to the Armenian genocide during an interview with a Swiss magazine. Turkish nationalists initiated the criminal case using a law that makes it a crime to insult Turkish

identity. Europeans and others who decried Mr. Pamuk's treatment said Turkey was violating his freedom of expression. After much outside pressure, the charges were dropped on a technicality.

While the French legislation drew mostly negative reaction here, Mr. Pamuk's award inspired praise as well as criticism. Newspaper writers and some other authors showered him with praise. But others were more critical.

An arts critic, Ozdemir Ince, implied that Mr. Pamuk had won only because he presented the view of Turkish history that many Europeans wanted to hear. "Pamuk, who is given the Nobel Prize, accepts the Armenian genocide," Mr. Ince said. "Turkey has been put on sale, and Turkish history has been sold in an auction at the lowest price."

Alev Alatli, a novelist, criticized Mr. Pamuk during an interview on NTV.

"One of the most powerful institutions of the diaspora Armenians is in Sweden, and they are very powerful there," she said. "Can you imagine that one could have been even nominated without being in good terms with these circles?"

Sema Munuklu, 38, a restaurant owner, said: "I don't think that he didn't deserve it. After all, he is a great writer. But I can't help thinking that things he said might have been an influence on the prize."

Ms. Munuklu said the French Parliament's action displayed European hesitancy in accepting Turkey into the European Union.

Ibrahim Unseli, 55, who runs an electronics shop, said he was as appalled by the French Parliament's attitude as he was by Mr. Pamuk's position on the Armenians and added that he hoped that Turks would boycott French goods.

Copyright 2006  
The New York Times Company