

Popular Turkish Novelist on Trial for Speaking of Armenian Genocide

By REUTERS
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ANKARA, [Turkey](#), Dec. 15 (Reuters) - Turkey's best-selling novelist, Orhan Pamuk, will go on trial in Istanbul on Friday in a case over freedom of expression that risks straining the nation's ties with the European Union.

Mr. Pamuk, 53, the author of "My Name Is Red" and "Snow," is accused of insulting "Turkishness" with his comments to a Swiss magazine in February. In the interview, he referred to the Armenian genocide committed by the Ottoman government during World War I, and to the Turkish government's more recent clashes with Kurds. "One million Armenians and 30,000 Kurds were killed in these lands and nobody but me dares talk about it," the magazine quoted him as saying.

International scholars have widely agreed that more than a million Armenians were killed in the genocide. But the topic is still off-limits in Turkey, and the government still denies that the killings were part of a genocidal campaign. Mr. Pamuk's comments provoked outrage in the country, and he was charged under Article 301 of the revised penal code, which criminalizes criticism of "Turkishness," of state institutions and of the revered founder of the republic, Ataturk.

The author faces up to three years in prison if convicted.

The trial is embarrassing for the government, which blames zealous prosecutors for bringing the charges. But the fact that the case has come this far has also raised questions about whether Turkey is ready for the steps it must take to be accepted for European Union membership.

"It is not Orhan Pamuk who will stand trial tomorrow, but Turkey," said the European Union enlargement commissioner, Olli Rehn, who oversees Turkey's entry talks with the bloc.

"This is a litmus test whether Turkey is seriously committed to the freedom of expression and reforms that enhance the rule of law," he said in an unusually strong statement.

Mr. Rehn said the trial of a novelist expressing a nonviolent opinion cast a shadow over accession talks, which began Oct. 3.

European Union skeptics who contend that Turkey is too big and culturally different for Europe to absorb will seize on the trial as proof that Turkey still does not respect basic human rights, said Can Baydarol of Istanbul's Bilgi University.

Turkey's judicial establishment is the front line of resistance to changes urged by Europe, many Turks say.

"The Pamuk trial shows us one of the most urgent aspects of our E.U. accession process is transforming the judiciary," said Mehmet Dulger, the chief of Parliament's foreign affairs commission and a member of the governing Justice and Development Party.

Mr. Pamuk is one of dozens of writers and scholars facing charges under Article 301.

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