

I would like to thank you the chairperson for giving me the opportunity to talk about the Armenians in Turkey. My name is Cafer Sarikaya. I am a PhD candidate at Bosphorus University in Istanbul.

Ethnic identity has been a sensitive issue in Turkey since the end of the heterogeneous Ottoman Empire and the establishment of the Turkish Republic. As a result of the deportations and massacres in the last years of the Ottoman Empire, the fact that the Armenian population, which used to be the most crowded non-Muslim population in the empire in the past, decreased considerably during the founding years of the republic, which facilitated the work of the founders who wanted to create a homogeneous citizenship phenomenon. The fact that the few Armenians who remained in the region moved away from openly living their own identity for various reasons and that the Armenians, who had to change their religion in order to survive, were pushed to completely ignore their "Armenian identity", led to the elimination of differences that would harm the "homogeneous" citizen understanding of the new republic over time.

My Armenian great grandmother made it possible for herself and her family to stay in the region by marrying my great grandfather and becoming a Muslim. She was an exception in that she was a lucky woman who was never pressured by her Muslim husband for her original religious conviction despite the conversion. Unfortunately, we don't know very much in detail about the nature of such conservations if we don't have our family secrets. I hope women like my grandmother could and did practice their pre-conversion faith.

Based on my personal experience, I can say that the presence of a different ethnic and religious origin in the family history, which has been ignored or covered over for decades, leads to a significant vulnerability in one's identity construction and sense of belonging. For these reasons, I believe that the way for individuals who are pushed into various contradictions in the construction of self-identity to get out of this mess is to develop a more inclusive citizenship awareness. I believe that individuals who have the opportunity to learn about the social and cultural heritage of their ancestors and internalize these old identities, no matter how different their current identity definitions are, can take more solid and safe steps both for themselves and for future generations.