

Transcript of the interview with Knut Abraham (CDU), member of the German Bundestag

Date: July 3, 2023, 11.00

Place: Premises of the Committees of the German Bundestag, Berlin (Germany)

Persons present: Knut Abraham (member of the Bundestag, CDU), Francesca Knaus (parliamentary assistant to Mr. Abraham), intern from the office of Mr. Abraham

Interviewer and compiler: Viktor Savinok, project assistant

Question: Can you, please, introduce yourself?

My name is Knut Abraham, I am a member of the German Bundestag. I am a member of the Christian Democratic group in the parliament, and I am a member of the foreign affairs committee as well as of the human rights and humanitarian aid committee, and the European affairs committee. Moreover, I am a member of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. My main focus is on Ukraine because I am the rapporteur of my parliamentary group on Ukraine and the ongoing war against Ukraine.

Question: Do you have any professional or research interest in the field of the politics of memory due to your educational profile or research background?

No. I am a politician and [therefore have] no professional background. As the current situation (as always) is dominated by history, especially the complicated [historical] circumstances in Central Europe, I have been [dealing with] these issues for decades. But not professionally. So, I am not a scientist or historian.

Question: Did you take part in the preparation of the Bundestag's resolution on Holodomor?

Well, yes. And this is an important point. The initiative of [proposing] this resolution came from us. The background was that there has been a long-standing petition (*Ger. – Petition*) in the committee on petitions to recognize Holodomor as genocide. And this has been a subject of various discussions, hearings etc. And then, to be very precise, it was an initiative of my colleague Sabine Weiss, who is the member of the petition committee and addressed me as a rapporteur on Ukraine [asking], if it would not be a good idea to take an initiative on this petition. Later, we had a meeting with our foreign affairs spokesperson, Jürgen Hardt, and we came to the conclusion that now [in 2022] it was a good time to table a resolution. And then it was Francesca Knaus who wrote the draft. So, we

had it compete resolution drafted. And that was also known for many journalists here in Berlin as well as in Ukrainian Embassy. And then we addressed the governing coalition, informing them that we were planning to table that resolution.

[suggestion to forward the draft resolution prepared by the CDU to the research group]

[Our draft] was much clearer than the [text], we agreed upon later. The main point is that we were building up pressure on the coalition to do something [in the matter of Holodomor]. It took a long time, couple of weeks. And they came up [with their own draft].

Abraham: I think they had our text.

Knaus: Yes, we sent it to them.

Abraham: Yes, we provided [the coalition] with the text. And then they came up with a text. And later we had several discussions, but [there was also] one main meeting, in which we, together with Robin Wagener, who took the initiative from the side of the ruling coalition, [worked on] changing the wording, so that we had this recognition of the genocide. We wanted a clear sentence that German Bundestag is recognizing the Holodomor as genocide. That was not possible because of the resistance [coming from] the Social Democrats. They wanted to have this quite complicated sentence. But for us the main point was to [achieve] the success in having the recognition of the Holodomor. And so, we agreed within the group of MPs – Lechte [FDP], Wagener [Union90/The Greens], Nietan [SPD] and me – on this text. And so, it is true [that] the text as it is, was a compromise of all engaged parties. And the initiative on that text came from Robin Wagener and the others. But the history of the resolution is linked to Francesca [Knaus], Sabine Weiss and my initiative. Without our pushing and pressing [Ukraine] would still wait for a [resolution]. And our interest was to have a joint resolution. And so, I am not frustrated that the glory goes to Robin [Wagener].

Question: Were the representatives of the “Alternative for Germany” and *Die Linke* not present during the discussions?

They were not invited. We are not talking to them.

Question: What was your role in the preparation of the resolution? Who initiated it? And why was it initiated?

I think, I have explained it already. So, we [meaning the CDU/CSU group] have prepared the draft within our own activities. A month before the text was drafted by Francesca [Knaus], we were meeting with scientists, historians and politicians

to prepare the atmosphere a little bit in our spectrum. But I think, I have explained, how it [looked like].

The initiator of the text, which was finally adopted by the Bundestag, is Robin Wagener [Union90/The Greens], who was living through extremely complicated process within the coalition. But you have to ask them [about it]. For us, the wording of the whole resolution was not a decisive thing. In my view, [the adopted version] is much too long. But that was okay for us. For us, the important point was to have the recognition. And that happened. That text, which was adopted, was tabled by the coalition.

Question: In your opinion why the resolution was adopted this time, whereas the previous initiatives were not that successful?

Very honestly and frankly, [2022] was the political momentum. We had a political momentum [then]. Before, there were doubts on the definitions of the genocide, on historical details, and all that. And they were still there. But we have to ask the others. I think, [a plenty] of their discussions were caused by these previous [doubts on Holodomor]. But we always wanted it, I can say it for myself, my team and my group. We wanted a resolution. But we did not [bring it up earlier]. [The reason was] that we did not want to [enter] into a dispute in the parliament. So, it makes no sense to [gain] quick political attention in the media or in Ukraine by tabling it and get it voted down later or by [entering] into a complicated parliamentary process or something like that. And [in 2022], we identified [that point] as a right time for this [step]. Because simply it became clear, and I mentioned it in my speech [in plenary] back then, that the way Russia is treating [Ukraine] is not only war, but it also again shows signs of genocide. And this was the main difference [in comparison to] the situation two, five or ten years earlier. Because now everyone could see, how Russia is treating Ukraine. And that was certainly a very decisive aspect of the momentum we had.

Question: Is it a routine for the German Bundestag to consider the issues of the politics of memory in its activities?

Yes, well, it has never been a routine, when it comes to the politics of memory, especially [dealing with] the German history. So, there is [a plenty of] deeply rooted and very intensive discussions in the Bundestag on historical developments, memory, anniversaries, and all that. But mainly they touch upon German history. We do not, as you are certainly aware of, have a tradition of quick [recognition] of any historical development as genocide. So, it was [a first step], and it took, [if I remember correctly] 15 years to recognize the developments between Turkish and Armenian population in the [former] Ottoman Empire as

genocide. And there has been a long-lasting intensive debate. There are parliaments in the world, which are much quicker in that, which have different approach to the issue. The second time the [German] parliament [passed respective motion], when we used the momentum in a way and adopted a resolution, considering the developments related to the Yezidi [community] as genocide.

Question: In your opinion, how important are the issues of the politics of memory in general for the German politics?

Well, they are extremely important. You can only understand German politics through [the lens of] the recent and not so recent German history. Everything you see, I do not want to open an another debate now, [for instance] on [Germany's] relations [with] Russia is based on [the experience] of the World War II and the World War I. So [the issues] play a tremendous role, at least in my group and in my understanding of the situation in the [German] parliament.

Thank you very much.