

Germany: Interior Minister Schily bans Turkish newspaper

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At the end of February, in an overnight operation, Germany's interior minister Otto Schily (Social Democratic Party-SPD) banned the company Yeni Akit, which is based in the German state of Hesse and publishes the Islamic newspaper *Anadolu Vakit* (*Anatolian Times*). The assets of the company were also confiscated.

Anadolu Vakit is the European edition of the newspaper *Vakit*, which is published quite legally in Turkey. A press statement issued by the German Interior Ministry stated: "The legal bases for the ban are paragraphs 3 and 17 (association statute) together with paragraph 130 penal code (incitement). The Yeni Akit company opposes the concept of understanding between nations, its aims and activities contravene the penal statutes. A large number of articles deny or play down the Holocaust and spread anti-Semitic/anti-Western propaganda."

According to press reports at the end of 2004, a deputy of the Christian Democratic Union had already drawn the attention of the interior minister to an article in the newspaper in which the existence of the Holocaust is denied. According to *Spiegel Online*, the paper described the Holocaust and "so-called gas chambers" as "lies" and as "nothing other than Zionist music."

The interior minister does not reveal whether the ban is actually based on a "large number" of articles that deny the Holocaust or whether most cases are just "anti-Western propaganda." He simply maintains that its decision is not based on isolated cases but rather on "systematically pursued incitement," which it is "by no means prepared to tolerate." He continues: "Despite a large number of investigations on the part of the state attorney's office over past years, the shareholders and managers of the publishing house have failed to show

any response and instead clearly increased the intensity and frequency of articles with an inflammatory content."

This is a remarkable statement to back up the banning of a newspaper. The claim of "systematically pursued incitement"—i.e., the continued violation of criminal law—is declared proven by the fact that the state attorney's office has carried out a "large number of investigations" over the past few years. Following an enquiry by the WSWs, the German interior ministry reported that there had in fact been a total of eight such investigations. In none of these cases was an official complaint lodged—on merely formal grounds, according to the Interior Ministry.

The newspaper was banned, therefore, because over several years, the state attorney's office had attempted on a number of occasions to pursue investigations along the lines of popular incitement—without success. Despite pressure from the state attorney's office, the newspaper failed to "show any response"—i.e., had refused to make changes along the lines demanded by the police and German government. This is a clear case of arbitrary state censorship.

In Turkey, *Vakit* reacted to the ban in Germany by proclaiming Schily to be a Nazi and featuring him on a number of cover stories sporting a swastika. Schily, along with representatives of the CDU, expressed his outrage at such a parallel. The deputy chairman of the CDU parliamentary fraction, Wolfgang Bosbach, addressed Schily directly in the Bundestag and declared: "When we see how you are being abused in the Turkish media, how you are presented as Adolf Hitler, then the opposition sides with the interior minister, because we also feel we have been offended."

Schily could have tried to take action against *Vakit* for slander, but instead he wrote a letter to his Turkish

counterpart, Abdulkadir Aksu, calling upon him in more-or-less open terms to take action against the newspaper. According to the letter, such “denigrations” were “unacceptable.”

The chairman of the social democratic fraction in the European parliament, Martin Schulz, was even more forthright: “The issue is what someone from a government led by a moderate Islamic party says about such a crazy Islamic organisation as that which is behind this publication. Here is a test for the readiness of the government in Ankara to take on the radicals and extremists.” Schulz demanded that “the measures that have been taken by Germany be supported by Turkey”—e.g., through the legal persecution of the journalists and editorial staff of *Vakit*.

This comment is notable because until now, the repressive activities of the Turkish government and judiciary against the press and politicians from the opposition camp had always been used as an argument against entry by Turkey into the EU. Now, however, a prominent EU politician is calling upon the Turkish government to take action against “radicals and extremists”—terms that are regularly used by the Turkish state to describe left-wingers and supporters of the Kurdish national movement.

Nearly two years ago, Schulz was also compared to the Nazis by Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi after Schultz had asked the latter a few critical questions in the chamber of the European parliament. Although Berlusconi expressly refused to apologise for his remarks, the German government sought to play down the affair and continued to support Berlusconi in his post at that time as president of the EU council.

Berlusconi, it should be noted, is the head of government of one of Germany’s most important partners in the EU. He is also the richest inhabitant of Italy and a close ally of the Bush administration in the US. He is a man who embodies the sort of “Western values” that Schily is seeking to protect by trampling all over basic democratic rights.



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