

German Chancellor Angela Merkel threatens Turkey

Johannes Stern
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German-Turkish relations have reached a new low point after the Berlin government threatened to impose a ban on public appearances by Turkish politicians in Germany.

At the opening of the CEBIT industry fair in Hannover, German Chancellor Angela Merkel demanded “that the Nazi comparisons from the Turkish side must stop ... without any ifs or buts.” Germany would “not tolerate that the end justifies the means and all taboos are ignored.”

Merkel then cited a so-called verbal memo from Germany’s Foreign Ministry to Ankara. In it Turkey had “been unambiguously informed that public appearances of Turkish politicians in Germany can only take place if they occur on the basis of the principles in the Basic Law.”

The memo made the ability of the 1.4 million Turkish citizens living in Germany to vote on the Turkish constitutional referendum on Monday conditional upon the establishment of “reliable and constructive cooperation from the Turkish side on the preparations for, and conducting of the vote, particularly in affairs related to public security and order.” This applied especially to campaign appearances by Turkish politicians.

Turkey’s governing AKP responded to the threat to withdraw permission to hold the election in Germany by cancelling all planned appearances by Turkish ministers in the country. This was welcomed enthusiastically by German politicians.

“At the current point in time I see this as a sign of reason,” Social Democratic Party (SPD) leader and chancellor candidate Martin Schulz said on Tuesday in parliament at a meeting of his party’s parliamentary group. SPD parliamentary group chair Thomas Oppermann expressed his “relief that Turkey no longer intends to send its ministers to Germany.” Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union (CDU/CSU) parliamentary group chair Volker Kauder (CDU) stated that he was

“happy that no more politicians are coming to Germany to campaign.”

The German government’s offensive against Turkey has been accompanied by a hysterical campaign with racist undertones.

In a comment headlined, “The end of Merkel’s patience,” co-editor of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* Berthold Kohler raged, “It is time to show the Turks that Erdogan’s scorched-earth policies have severe consequences. Erdogan is leading Turkey into isolation. He is separating it from the free, democratic West and transforming it ever more into a form of Asiatic despotism.”

Stefan Kornelius adopted a similar tone in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* on Tuesday: “There were times when states went to war because of insults against their leaders. Luckily, they are in the past.” However, he continued, “along with the usual diplomatic pressure – recalling of our own, temporary expulsion of the Turkish ambassador,” there were measures “in trade and European policy,” which could be used to sanction Turkey.

In no circumstances could the German government appear “weak,” he added. And if “this archaic test of strength [has] perhaps become unusual to Western Europeans,” against Erdogan “it is necessary, above all and especially for self-protection.” The Turkish president was encouraging “not just extremism in his own country,” but has “long had plans for Germany.”

As was to be expected, the most aggressive statements came from the Greens and Left Party. “I warn against selling the AKP cancellation of all campaigns in Germany as a political success and returning now to a self-satisfied silence towards Ankara,” stated Claudia Roth from the Greens, who is the vice president of parliament.

In an interview with the conservative daily *Die Welt*, Roth called on the German government to punish Ankara

further. “If the German government wants to credibly oppose Erdogan’s course, they have to finally end the refugee deal, immediately stop arms exports to Turkey and reject the recently requested financial help to limit the impact of the economic crisis,” she said.

Sevim Dagdelen, spokeswoman for the Left Party parliamentary group on international relations, called on SPD Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel to “immediately recall the ambassador to the Republic of Turkey.” Her statement went on, “Given the continued downplaying of the crimes of German fascism, the mocking of the victims and the incredible accusation that the EU would like to establish gas chambers, the German government can no longer look the other way.”

Merkel and Gabriel had to “finally act and make a stand against Erdogan,” she demanded, and presented the following catalogue of demands: “The government must withdraw German soldiers from Turkey and campaign in the EU for the halting of membership talks. The pre-membership assistance for Turkey of €630 million must be frozen. The campaign offensive of Erdogan and his Islamist AKP in Germany must be stopped. Among Turks willing to become citizens, the Turkish certificate of discharge [from Turkish citizenship] should be ignored in the future, otherwise one is playing into the hands of the Erdogan dictatorship.”

The hysterical demands from Dagdelen and the Left Party deserve some comment.

The demands for bans on public appearances and sanctions against Ankara are precisely the opposite of a struggle against dictatorship. In fact, the Left Party’s arguments strengthen dictatorial tendencies not only in Turkey, but also in Germany. In Turkey, Erdogan is using the attacks from Berlin to stoke nationalism and mobilise support for his authoritarian constitutional referendum. In Germany, a precedent for the suppression of undesirable opinions is being created. It will ultimately be up to the state or the government to determine what can and what cannot be said publicly.

The Left Party’s desire to suppress Erdogan’s reference to the Merkel government’s “Nazi methods” speaks volumes about its pro-imperialist character. As a party of German militarism, it finds it intolerable when someone draws a parallel between the German government or European Union and the Nazis. The Left Party is not primarily concerned with the statements by Erdogan, who himself resorts to authoritarian methods, but with suppressing any critique of German militarism. The majority of the population oppose rearmament and

military interventions precisely because they recall the horrors of the Nazi period.

There are also geopolitical considerations behind the Left Party’s aggressive stance. A significant section of the German bourgeoisie believes that too close a relationship with Ankara ties Germany’s hands in the pursuit of its interests in the Middle East. For this reason, the refugee deal, negotiated by Merkel in the name of the European Union, has been met with criticism from right-wing circles from the beginning.

A section of the German bourgeoisie is ever more openly considering collaboration with the Kurdish Workers Party (PKK), which is currently banned in Germany. The PYD, which has ties to the PKK, is playing an important role as a proxy force for Western interventions in Syria. The Left Party, which has close ties to the Kurdish organisations, has long campaigned for such an orientation.

Significantly, the police did not intervene at the weekend at a large demonstration for the Kurdish festival of Newroz when PKK flags bearing the likeness of its imprisoned leader Abdullah Öcalan were displayed, even though this is officially banned. On the other hand, many planned pro-AKP rallies were called off due to absurd reasons.

On Monday, Dagdelen shared a comment by Georg Restle from the Tagesthemen. In it, the presenter of public broadcaster ARD’s “Monitor” magazine asked, “Who is actually the terrorist here? The leader of the PKK, who has been closely watched in a Turkish prison over the past 18 years—or the President of Turkey, who is persecuting tens of thousands of opposition supporters and having them detained, among them politicians from the now outlawed pro-Kurdish HDP.”

The Turkish bourgeoisie, and this applies not solely to Erdogan’s AKP, is combatting the PKK as a terrorist organisation and attempting with all of the methods at its disposal to prevent the emergence of an autonomous Kurdish state in Syria.



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