

Media and politicians agitate against Turks living in Germany

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A hysterical smear campaign against Turkey is underway in German political circles following the Turkish referendum last Sunday which, based on a small majority, grants President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan broad dictatorial powers.

The fact that Turks living in Germany voted by 63 percent for Erdoğan's authoritarian plans, while he gained only a wafer-thin majority of just over 51 percent in Turkey, is being exploited to justify this witch-hunt. What is barely mentioned is that only 46 percent of eligible Turks in Germany voted, while turnout in Turkey was above 85 percent.

The extreme-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) has used the referendum vote to launch a "Turks out" campaign, while Christian Democratic Union (CDU) right-winger Thomas Strobl is demanding an end to Germany's dual nationality policy, thereby making xenophobia a prominent issue for this autumn's federal election. At the same time, some of the most extreme witch-hunting of Turks originates from the Left Party and the ostensibly left-liberal political milieu.

A typical example is the commentary on Wednesday evening's "Tagesthemen" news broadcast by Sonia Seymour Mikich. She began her contribution with an attack on all those who, given the above-average support for Erdogan, call for better integration of German-Turks and renewed efforts to win the hearts and minds of Turks living here.

Mikich's dismissive comment in this regard is hard to beat for arrogance: "A little pampering because integration had worked out badly." This is something she decisively rejects. It was not true that the Germans had driven the German-Turks into Erdoğan's arms, she said. The real reason was a lack of respect by German-Turks for the German constitution, which provided "everyone with air to breathe," protected minorities and

established law.

Such xenophobic nostrums have hardly been heard in the state-owned media following the controversy a few years ago centred on right-wing demands for "recognition of a leading German culture" (*Deutsche Leitkultur*), recalling the old imperialist slogan "The German spirit will heal the world."

Mikich then stepped up her demagoguery: "I was shocked when, after the coup, Turks living here lionised their president, accompanied by loud cries for the [introduction of] death penalty." Then insistently: "On the soil of a democracy, people—some with a German passport—called for the death penalty."

It must be remembered that the mass Turkish demonstration in Cologne in late July last year, to which Mikich refers, took place just two weeks after the failed coup attempt in Turkey. President Erdoğan only very narrowly escaped an assassination squad. The coup was organized from the NATO air base at Incirlik, and there are many indications that US and German military were at least informed about it, if not actively involved.

Mikich acts as if the call for the death penalty had been the main demand of the rally, and then finished her comment by saying: "Those who support this, may have to give up their German passport!" She added, "I do not want to argue about this again. This is a red line! On this point, I am an integration refusenik."

The sordid, vulgar way in which the slogan of the far right—"Foreigners out!"—is now put forward does not differ from the AfD and is repugnant. It makes clear how far the official political spectrum has moved to the right.

Sonia Mikich is not just anyone. The chief editor of broadcaster WDR has worked there for over 30 years, and has been a correspondent in Moscow, Paris and

New York. She leads investigative programmes like the political magazine “Monitor” and moderates the “Sunday Press Club” on broadcaster ARD. In her student days in the 1970s, Mikich was a member of the International Marxist Group (GIM), the German section of the Pabloite United Secretariat.

Her right-wing, xenophobic commentary is an expression of a turn to the right by many of these former “lefts,” which can currently be observed in all countries. In the name of the defence of democracy and human rights, the situation in Turkey and the development of Erdoğan’s authoritarian regime is being used to advance the interests of Germany, or rather to better represent the new great power interests of German imperialism.

To avoid any misunderstanding: The Erdoğan regime is a reactionary bourgeois government and the constitutional reform is a step towards dictatorship. A few days ago, the WSWs published a statement of the Turkish organization Toplumsal Esitlik (TE, Socialist Equality Group), which is in political sympathy with the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), advocating a “no” vote in the referendum.

But the fight against the Erdoğan government is not the task of the German government and its lackeys in the media, but rather the Turkish and international working class.

The claim that Germany, or rather, the German government, acts in Turkey—or in any other country—for democracy and human rights is pure propaganda, and is false through and through.

One need only look at Greece to see the reactionary role Germany plays via the institutions of the European Union. The economic and social system in this neighbouring country of Turkey has been ruined by the dictates of German Finance Minister Wolfgang Schäuble. Thousands of working families have been forced into destitution and despair.

Although the death penalty has not been introduced in Greece, the number of suicides by the elderly and infirm who can no longer be supported by their families exceeds the number of state executions in any other country many times over.

But that is of no interest to Sonia Mikich and many other ex-lefts. Mikich’s flirtation with the socialist movement in the 1970s was never serious, and primarily served her own personal career advancement.

Many from this pseudo-left milieu have become rich and powerful, and are now important propagandists of resurgent German power politics.

Sahra Wagenknecht and the Left Party are also moving ever further to the right. When Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte stirred up anti-Turkish and anti-Muslim sentiments in the recent election campaign, to outdo the extreme right-winger Geert Wilders, the parliamentary leader of the Left Party applauded. She praised Rutte’s decision to refuse entry to Turkish government members, and accused German Chancellor Angela Merkel and Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel of failing to show “as much backbone.”

The rightward shift of these ex-lefts is a response to the global crisis of capitalism and the intensification of the class struggle. In face of mounting social conflicts, growing resistance against exploitation, militarism and preparations for war, they see their privileged position in society under threat. They respond by calling for a strong state and developing sympathy for right-wing slogans.

Mikich’s provocative commentary is aimed above all at the working class. Many German-Turks are from working class families who came to Germany in the 1960s and ’70s as so-called “guest workers.” They have been involved in many labour disputes and form an important part of the working class.



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