

Berlin intensifies agitation against Turkey

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Foreign policy relations between Berlin and Ankara have reached a new low amid hysterical denunciations of the Turkish government by German politicians.

On Tuesday, Christian Democratic Union (CDU) official Roderich Kiesewetter questioned Turkey's NATO membership, and called for sanctions against Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his family. "For example, I see the lever that we can freeze the foreign assets of the Erdogan clan," Kiesewetter told broadcaster Berlin-Brandenburg. "On the other hand, we are freezing the foreign assets of Russian oligarchs, but are not doing anything regarding Turkey."

Social Democratic Party (SPD) parliamentary party chief Thomas Oppermann went even further in the *Passauer Neuen Presse* on Monday. He accused Erdogan of the destruction of democracy and the rule of law in Turkey, and threatened: "If one employed his political methods in Germany, he would not be at the head of the government but in prison."

Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel and Justice Minister Heiko Maas (both SPD) published a joint guest contribution in *Spiegel Online* on Tuesday under the headline: "There is no place for Erdogan's cultural battle in Germany." In it, they speak of "a massive threat to our free democratic state" by Erdogan, and plead for stronger control of Turkish clubs and mosques in Germany.

Earlier, Gabriel had called the Turkish President's call to Turkish voters in Germany not to vote for the SPD, the CDU or the Greens, an "intervention in the sovereignty" of Germany and personally blamed Erdogan for an alleged assault on his wife. "Some obviously feel motivated about the way Erdogan does this and try to pester and harass my wife."

The Left Party is even more aggressive. Its spokeswoman for international relations, Sevim Dagdelen, said: "The federal government must take the

initiative to exclude Turkey from the Interpol Convention. Erdogan is consciously violating the Interpol Convention and is abusing Interpol to be able to prosecute [his] political critics abroad." In general, "the government should adopt clear lines towards Erdogan. Any further appeasement and restraint only endangers the security of German citizens."

Who do Gabriel, Dagdelen and Co. want to impress with their hysterical agitation against Turkey? Clearly, the conservative Erdogan government is acting arbitrarily against oppositionists and journalists, and is setting up an authoritarian regime in Turkey. But in Germany, it is not the Turkish president who is attacking the "free democratic" state, but the German government itself. The German government also has no scruples when it comes to censoring the Internet, abrogating fundamental rights, and using brutal violence against journalists and demonstrators. This was recently shown by the G20 summit in Hamburg.

The German government's criticism of the arrest of the writer Dogan Akhanli by Interpol in Spain as a result of a Turkish arrest warrant is also particularly hypocritical. The German government has gone much further in the past. In June 2015, it arrested the international journalist Ahmed Mansour at Berlin-Tegel Airport. Mansour had not violated German, European or international law, yet he was sought by Interpol. The only thing against him was an arrest warrant from the bloodthirsty military dictatorship in Egypt, with which Berlin works very closely.

The aggressive campaign against Turkey has nothing to do with the defence of human rights in Turkey or Germany, but is aimed at securing the foreign policy goals of the German ruling elite. Even before the failed Turkish coup in mid-July 2016—which enjoyed the silent support of sections of ruling circles in the USA and Germany—Berlin had systematically undermined relations with Turkey. In June 2016, the Bundestag

(federal parliament) adopted a resolution describing the mass murder of up to 1.5 million Armenians in the Ottoman Empire as a genocide. At the time, Erdogan warned of “damage to the diplomatic, economic, political, and military relations between the two countries.”

Since then, the German government has further heightened the conflict with Ankara. Before the Turkish constitutional referendum in April, the German authorities imposed a ban on Turkish government members travelling to speak at meetings in several German cities and openly supported the Turkish opposition. In June, the Bundestag decided by a large majority to transfer Bundeswehr (Armed Forces) units from the Incirlik air force base in Turkey to the Muwaffaq Salti Air Base in Jordan, after Ankara repeatedly banned members of the Bundestag from visiting German soldiers stationed in Incirlik.

About a month ago, German Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel announced that policy towards Turkey would take a new direction. “It cannot go on like this. We cannot continue as before,” declared the Social Democrat, questioning, among other things, the EU’s pre-accession aid to Turkey and negotiations on the extension of the customs union. “We will now have to look at how we are adapting our policy towards Turkey in relation to the aggravated situation,” he said.

Four weeks before the Bundestag election, all the establishment parties are agitating against the predominantly Muslim Turkey in order to split the working class and appeal to right-wing layers. Significantly, some of the foulest rabble-rousers come from the ranks of the SPD, the Left Party and the Greens. With their calls for a strong state, Gabriel, Dagdelen and Co. are reacting to the fundamental crisis of capitalism and the growing resistance to exploitation and war.

Moreover, behind the aggressive confrontation with Ankara lie military and geopolitical conflicts. As a component of German imperialism’s offensive in the Middle East, the Bundeswehr has armed and trained Peschmerga units—the armed forces of the Autonomous Region of Kurdistan (ARK)—in northern Iraq since the summer of 2014. The ARK announced an independence referendum for 25 September 2017, which was strongly criticized by the Turkish government. Ankara wants to prevent the emergence of

an independent Kurdish state under all circumstances, criticizes Western support for the Kurds and threatens a new military operation in Syria and Iraq.

German imperialism fears not only a Turkish attack on its Kurdish allies, but also considers Ankara’s new orientation towards Russia and China a threat to its own economic and geo-strategic interests in the region.

According to a recent paper issued by the Federal Academy of Security Policy, entitled “Can Turkey play the Shanghai card?”, the “alarm bells should shrill in the face of the Turkish charm campaign offensive towards the SCO [Shanghai Cooperation Organization]. Turkey still has a high strategic value for Europeans and Americans in dealing with a variety of regional security policy challenges.” Now, “Turkish aspirations towards a strategic reorientation could further reduce the need for positive relations with Brussels.”



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