

WAKEUP CALL

Erdogan Doesn't Speak for All Turks

Germany needs to recognize Turkey as a worthwhile ally – and realize there are more political players there than President Erdogan, according to our guest authors.

BY SOLI ÖZEL AND VOLKER PERTHES

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Source: Reuters

German-Turkish relations are not going well. Germany is disgruntled by Turkey's dramatic turn away from Europe and virulent criticism from President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

Disappointment runs deep on both sides as talks on admitting Turkey to the European Union slog painfully along.

European doubts about Turkey have grown with political crackdowns that infringe on the nation's fundamental rule of law. The state is being molded in the president's character and effective separation of powers is being swept away. New threats by the Islamic State terrorists haven't helped either.

WHY IT MATTERS

Turkey is the only country shaped by Muslims that shares the values of the West as a NATO member.

FACTS

For the first time in years, opinion polls show the majority in Turkey supports joining the European Union.

Official negotiations to admit Turkey to the E.U. started in 2005.

A number of E.U. states have argued against Turkish membership, citing, among other things, concerns about the government's judicial interference and restrictions on press freedom.

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But there is a glimmer of hope and it comes from the Turkish people. For the first time in years, opinion polls show the majority once again supports Turkey joining the European Union - despite President Erdogan's anti-Western outbursts.

“Turkey, with its historical and political experience, is ideally situated to act as mediator in the growing conflict between Islamic societies and the West.”

So we shouldn't let ourselves be diverted too much by day-to-day politics. Yes, Mr. Erdogan and his Justice and Development Party have made their mark on

Turkey. They will not, however, run Turkish politics forever.

More importantly, the “new Turkey” does not belong to Mr. Erdogan alone. During his rule, new social and political actors have come onto the stage and are increasingly being heard.

The economic, social and demographic potential of Turkey is just now unfolding. In the coming years it will be increasingly important as a strategic ally of the West. Perhaps the most important lesson for Germany and the European Union is to remember that and to focus on taking Turkey seriously again.

The recent [terror attacks in Paris](#) illustrate that Turkey is the only country shaped by Muslims that shares the values of the West as a NATO member.

And yet we shouldn't assume that Turkey's desire to be admitted into the European Union will continue for ever. Europe's zigzagging on the matter is no longer convincing.

It is true that the current Turkish power elite has a limited concept of free speech and free media. Their stance on religion and religious influence on the state is also different.

But the West must ask itself whether hidden or unconscious prejudices against Muslims are also getting in the way. Turkey, with its historical and political experience, is ideally situated to act as mediator in the growing conflict between Islamic societies and the West.

The time has come to take Turkey at its word and give it a fair chance to be admitted into the Western community of values. Certainly it is not an easy task, but that just makes it all the more urgent.

Source: Ullstein Bild



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Source: FTI Consulting

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