

Germany's New Cabinet on Turkey's EU Accession: Implications for U.S. Policy

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Brief Analysis

On October 25, a coalition government in Germany, comprising the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), Christian Social Union (CSU), and Free Democrat Party (FDP), formed a new cabinet. The following statements by prominent representatives of Germany's new coalition partners -- voicing both strong opposition to Turkey's EU accession by the CDU-CSU and a milder but skeptical anti-Turkish stance by FDP -- demonstrate the serious challenges for U.S. policy posed by Turkey's push for EU membership.

Strongly against Turkey's EU Membership

- "Not membership, but privileged partnership."

-- Angela Merkel (CDU), German chancellor, May 11, 2009

- "Accepting Turkey to the EU is out of question."

-- Angela Merkel, May 10, 2009, in a conference with French president Nicolas Sarkozy

- "Turkey's accession would overtax the EU."

-- Wolfgang Schauble (CDU), German minister of finance, October 28, 2009

- "Six reasons against Turkey's EU accession:

1. Germany's primary interest is the success of European integration ... Europe has geographic borders. Nobody would feel like they are in Europe if they border Syria, Iran, and Iraq.
2. Nobody wants to repel our Turkish friends. We are highly interested in a strong partnership with Turkey. But that does not mean, therefore, that all of our strong partners should belong to the European Union.
3. That Turkey is a great example of a democratic Muslim country has nothing to do with the question of Turkey's EU membership. If so, we would have to think about Pakistan or Indonesia's EU membership next. Even now, Turkey's changing role in the Arab world is suspicious. As a full member of the Union, Turkey could not perform its role as a bridge -- because a bridge does not belong to one of the sides.
4. People who say that Turkish integration in Germany would be endangered if Turkey were not to become a part of the EU are endangering peaceful social coexistence between Turks and Germans. The integration of Turks in Germany would succeed without Turkey's EU membership.
5. We do not help Turkey by concealing problems. As long as it prohibits the building of churches or having priests for its Christian minorities, no one can really talk about freedom of religion in Turkey as we know it in Europe. [Turkish] prime minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan easily scored a goal on his own team with his defamatory bluster "Club of Christians" [in reference to the EU].
6. It would be better if we keep offering Turkey a privileged partnership. A failure after ten years of accession talks would be as disastrous as the failure of Europe's political unity."

-- Wolfgang Schauble, from his official website

- "Turkey's EU accession is and was an illusion. Turkey has insisted for years now on an automatic pilot [for accession talks], instead of doing extensive reforms in order to fulfill the criteria for EU accession. This permanent insistence turns more and more into an empty promise. Turkey should recognize that neither the Europeans nor the Turks would accept Turkey's full membership. Turkey should cooperate with the Union in economic and security policy. This could happen best within a privileged partnership."

-- Karl-Theodor zu Guttenberg (CSU), German minister of defense, October 28, 2009

- "Christians are still discriminated against.... In Turkey, freedom of religion is still understood as tolerance, rather than a fundamental part of human rights."
- "We do not want Turkey's EU accession.... Not even being allowed to say that religious-motivated violence is a particular problem for Islam is worrying. And calling Christians "unbelievers" is a form of an insult. I ask myself how a country that discriminates against Christian churches could be a member of the EU. It

is obvious that Turkey has made some progress, but it will not be able to join the EU."

-- Ronald Pofalla (CDU), German chancellor's chief of staff, from his official website

- "A clear 'yes' to Europe, but also a clear 'yes' to European borders. No full membership, but privileged partnership. We want open-ended accession talks."
- "Brussels again surrenders to Turkey.... A new chapter for the desired accession will be opened. Prime Minister Erdogan has shown again how easy it is to make use of the EU's tiredness, which is tired from enlargements. Through additional allegations against France and Germany, he has achieved acquiescence from the EU."

-- Peter Ramsauer (CSU), German minister of transportation, building, and urban development, from his official website

Skeptical Stance

- "Turkey is not ready for accession; the EU is not ready for Turkey's accession either. But we want to keep Turkey as an ally and NATO partner. We have a strong interest in avoiding Turkey's slipping to the East and to religious fundamentalism.... We seek a solid and excellent relationship with Turkey.... Turkey has to show democratic reforms, in order to achieve a democratically strong Turkey under the rule of law with a strong civil society. These will show that Turkey is on the right way to full membership."
- "It is possible that accession is not what will come out in the end, but rather a privileged partnership. Turkey, for its part, does not expect to be given a date for its membership. However, it does expect, and justifiably so, that Europe does not fundamentally reject its desire to join the EU."
- "Turkey is not in a position to join at the moment, nor is the EU in a position to accept it as a member. But I do expect, of course, that existing agreements will be upheld in a coalition government with the conservatives. Under the agreement with Turkey, accession will be examined in an unbiased manner. This process will continue for several years. Turkey is trying to satisfy constitutional and economic criteria, and to orient itself toward the West and not toward fundamentalism. Despite all setbacks, we can only encourage them in this effort."
- "Stopping Turkey's accession process will be the end of an intelligent foreign policy."

-- Guido Westerwelle (FDP), German foreign minister, May 5, 2009

- "In the foreseeable future, Turkey will not become a member of the EU. Currently, Turkey is not ready to join the EU, and the EU is not ready to take Turkey as a full member. The FDP is for an open-ended accession process."

-- Dirk Niebel (FDP), German minister of economic cooperation and development, October 28, 2009

Implications for U.S. Policy

Based on the rhetoric of its members, the new German government will either block Turkey's EU membership or, at best, show benign neglect toward the process. The new German cabinet's vehement-to-mild opposition to Turkey's EU accession challenges U.S. policy, which views Turkey's EU membership as a strategic goal for both the United States and Turkey. Turkey's EU accession is not only an important step in pulling the country toward the West, it is also a fail-safe that guards Turkish democracy -- as it spasms between the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) and its opponents -- and promotes Turkey's halted liberalization process. In this regard, Washington could implement the following policy suggestions to break the German impasse and to jumpstart the Turkish drive toward the EU:

- Prod the Turkish government to reembrace the EU process. The AKP should not only be legislating reforms, it should also be implementing those reforms;
- Pressure the AKP to drop its anti-EU and anti-Western rhetoric, a problem that is becoming a key concern in German political rhetoric.
- Make Turkey's EU accession a part of the U.S. strategic conversation with the German government.

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