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Sharing a similar vision that is based on the conviction that Christianity and Islam are worlds apart, both Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and German Chancellor Angela Merkel are content with the largely static status quo in ties between Turkey and the European Union, says a politics scholar



If there is going to be any positive change in Turkey-EU relations, it should come from the 28-member bloc, political professor Ayhan Kaya (L) says amid continuing tension between the two. DAILY NEWS photo, Emrah GÜREL

Following an overwhelming electoral victory that gave [Angela Merkel](#) the mandate to rule Germany for the third time, not much is expected to change in Turkish-EU relations, as the [German](#) chancellor is known to object to Turkey's membership bid. The continuation of the status quo, however, suits both Merkel and Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who both believe Islam and Christianity should remain apart, according to a scholar.

Ultimately, Turkey already closed the door on the [European Union](#) in 2005, Professor Ayhan Kaya, the director of the European Institute at Istanbul's Bilgi University, recently told the Hürriyet Daily News.

How do you think Merkel's victory was perceived in Europe?

It was relatively welcomed. When I look at the comments in EU countries the first thing that pops up in the media is that the euro is becoming stronger again. I think one of the reasons why some are positive about her winning is that financial experts especially expect her to loosen the strings; she was very much in favor of austerity and thus very skeptical about European money being pumped into the Spanish, [Greek](#) or Italian economies. She is a clever politician. Probably she really knew she was going toward an election; now that she has a new mandate, I think she will become more flexible in funding the economies of those countries hit by financial crisis.

When you look at the Merkel years, what do you think has been her legacy in the EU?

In the first place, Merkel is not a Europeanist at all. She is very different from her predecessors in the CDU [Christian Democratic Union], like [Helmut] Kohl or [Konrad] Adenauer, who was a Europeanist. She was mainly interested in the well-being of the [German](#) nation at the expense of the European project.

She is actually consistent with herself when you look at the financial economic policies she has been pursuing. But this is not an issue being brought to the agenda; we don't really have a solid Europeanist figure in the entire EU.

What do you think has been the consequence of this fact?

After Merkel came to power in 2005, the EU underwent a tremendous transformation in a very negative way, I would say. The EU which was very much in favor of Turkey's entry prior to 2005 is gone; this visionary transnational, trans-governmental union is gone. Instead, another union came to the fore, including one in which the power of the commission has declined. Maybe the power of the European Parliament has increased but certainly the power of individual leading countries like Germany and France has increased.

Together with the reign of Merkel, the EU in different spheres of

life has become more and more idle in shaping the agenda. If you look at migration and integration policies, we have not seen any kind of Europeanization since 2005; we have seen the Germanization of EU policies on integration, immigration and foreign policy.

The EU has lost its magnetic affect, and it has surrendered itself to the national interests of the leading states.

Then what does this tell us about the near future of the EU?

I don't think that Merkel is going to change that much and become a true Europeanist. What will happen in the EU very much depends on what will happen in Germany. Most probably it will be grand coalition [with the Social Democratic Party (SPD)].

What is certain is that what we now have is not sustainable in terms of the EU. There is a lack of visionary politics; there are growing tendencies of xenophobia, Islamophobia and racism. There is a lack of European foreign policy on key issues like the Middle East.

What should one expect from Turkey-EU relations in the near future?

I don't expect much. I don't really find the government to be persistent on the EU perspective anyway. The government closed the [EU] chapter in 2005 when the European Court of Human Rights issued its verdict in the Leyla Şahin case [ruling against Turkey on the headscarf issue], when Islamophobia and xenophobia were becoming visible in [Europe](#) – they closed it when enlargement fatigue hit the EU. Because of internal and external dynamics, the Justice and Development Party (AKP) in a way became more and more Euroskeptic. My hunch is that if there is going to be any positive change in Turkey-EU relations, it should come from the EU. If the government sees a positive gesture, it will be more than willing to revive the European perspective because Turkish foreign policy has failed in so many areas.

Turkey doesn't really have anything but the European perspective to hold on to.

Do you see that happening though?

I guess not. I find the Merkel government to be too Christian and the Erdoğan government to be too Muslim; both are investing in civilizational fault lines and religious fault lines. If we focus on both leaders, I think the current position is what they really want to see; that is, the status quo: Muslim Turkey and Christian Germany or [Europe](#) – this is in parallel with the way they see the world.

That's my hunch. That's why there is so much emphasis on civilizational alliance, on the one hand, and the clash of civilizations, on the other hand; but these are the same things: they both come from the idea that Christian civilization and Islamic civilization are two different things and they should stay apart and that we need some actors to bridge them. This is the way Erdoğan administration perceives the world, from a [Sunni](#) Muslim perspective, while the Merkel administration sees the world from a soft Protestant perspective. That is why they understand each other perfectly well and they are rather happy with the existing status quo.

How would you describe Turkish-German relations during the Merkel-Erdoğan era?

There is always a discrepancy between the [German](#) and Turkish states' way of understanding each other. Turkey has always looked at Germany as an economic partner. The trade volume between the two countries shows that actually. The [German](#) political elite hardly look at Turkey from an economic perspective. Germany sees Turkey through the German-Turks rather than from a cultural and immigration perspective. These two paradigms have never matched. I don't think it will match soon anyway. But in terms of a societal level, the linkages are very strong between the two countries.

So we should not expect much change in Turkish-German relations?

Merkel's position will not change. But I have to add that racism, Islamophobia and xenophobia will go on being the important

issues in the [German](#) context under the new reign of Merkel because such aspirations see a conservative political environment as the right context to pop up in.