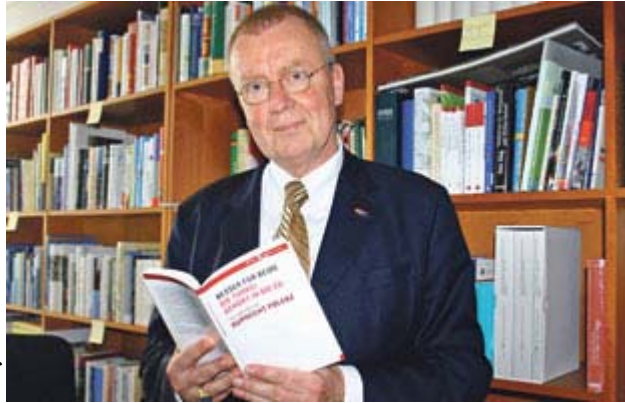


# TODAY'S ZAMAN

## 'Turkey's entry into EU will present model against clash of cultures'

Ruprecht Polenz, chairman of the German Bundestag's Committee on Foreign Affairs, has said Turkey's full membership in the European Union will be a model to a world in which there is still a debate over the clash of cultures.

"If Turkey joins the EU, the European peace model will also be a model for conflicts of the 21st century because we'll have a challenge to overcome growing tensions between the countries with Muslim [majority] populations and the West. And the message is that Europe does not want a clash of cultures because we are able to incorporate countries like Turkey," he told Today's Zaman for Monday Talk.



Introduced by Chancellor Angela Merkel to Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan during their official visit to Turkey at the end of March as one of the few Christian Democratic Union (CDU) members who staunchly support Turkey's full membership in the EU, Polenz also recently wrote a book to make his point.

In his book, "Besser für beide: Die Türkei gehört in die EU" (Better for both: Turkey belongs in the EU) -- which has yet to be translated into English -- Polenz argues that one of the challenges that the West faces is how to fight "international Islamic terrorism" and says, "We want to fight it together with our Muslim allies."

With Turkey and the EU able to have one more chapter opened before the EU presidency passed to Belgium, Polenz said Germany and Merkel are not the major obstacles to Turkey's accession negotiations with the EU.

In our telephone interview, Polenz, who was in Berlin, answered our questions.

**'If Turkey joins the EU, the European peace model will also be a model for conflicts of the 21st century because we'll have a challenge to overcome growing tensions between the countries with Muslim [majority] populations and the West. And the message is that Europe does not want a clash of cultures because we are able to incorporate countries like Turkey'**

*Mr. Polenz, first of all, congratulations on your book.*

Thank you.

*This is your first book, and your topic is EU-Turkey relations. This must be an important issue for you.*

I have always talked about the issue by giving interviews, but it was not in a systematic fashion. I got the feeling that, because of the importance of the question, I should explain my position in depth and in a more clear way for my fellow party members and the broader public. That was the starting point a year ago.

*What would you say are the first and foremost advantages of the European Union having Turkey as a full member?*

First, if you look at common security strategy, the EU is rightly convinced that we are interested in a situation in which the neighbors of the new and larger European Union are countries that are peaceful, economically prosperous and friendly to the EU. From our own experience, we believe that this goal can be achieved if states are democratically run within the rule of law, and if they are based on a market economy. If you look at the new neighboring countries, for instance in the Caucasus, in the Black Sea region and in the Middle East, we can influence such a direction of political and economic development better with Turkey than without Turkey, and better than against Turkey.

The second point is that energy is one of the key questions for the EU. We are trying to achieve much success with better energy efficiency. But even though we are doing much better than we expected, we will need increasing imports of oil and gas in the mid and long terms. If we don't want to depend on only one source -- meaning gas coming from Russia -- we have to diversify. And the regions where we can get it from are Central Asia and the Middle East. You see Turkey like an energy bridge that [hosts] pipelines from Central Asia and the Middle East to Europe. So the role of Turkey in the EU's energy supply and security is of key importance. And, finally, the most important one, which I should have started with...

If you look at the big challenges of the 21st century, for the West and the EU, it is how to deal with the political implications of Islam

### **'EU process keeps Turkey on the right track'**

*You put the issue of Turkey's EU accession into a much bigger picture and say that it would greatly benefit the stabilization of the Black Sea region, Turkey's neighboring countries and the EU's ties with the Muslim world. If Turkey is ultimately not allowed to enter the EU, do you think that would then lead to a severe destabilization or radicalization of the region?*

Hopefully not, but if you can prevent a situation which would be negative to all, you would do it. Black Sea cooperation and what's happening around the region can be much better influenced in a positive direction with Turkey than without it. The same is true for the Caucasus and the Middle East. Also, the EU process keeps Turkey in a certain corridor of politics. Every country has some temptations that could eventually make it fail in its policies. For Turkey,

from within and without. If Turkey is able to fulfill the Copenhagen criteria, not only on paper but also in daily practice, then it is proven that our understanding of human rights, democracy and rule of law fits also in countries with Muslim (majority) populations. This would be a very strong message to many countries with Muslim populations still looking for the right model to overcome their problems.

There are two additional elements: The starting idea of getting the states of Europe united in a European Union was to have a lasting peace because the European continent in the previous century was one of the bloodiest in the world. The idea has been very successful in the last 60 years. If Turkey joins the EU, the European peace model will also be a model for conflicts of the 21st century because we'll have a challenge to overcome growing tensions between countries with Muslim (majority) populations and the West. And the message is that Europe does not want a clash of cultures because we are able to incorporate

countries like Turkey. And, finally, it is about how to fight international Islamic terrorism. We want to fight it together with our Muslim allies.

there are two temptations: One is an overemphasized nationalism, and the other is an Islamism like that we saw in the political ideas of (former Prime Minister Necmettin) Erbakan. The EU process keeps Turkey on the right track.

*You mention in your book that a change in the Turkish Constitution is necessary, among other things, to improve the situation of the Kurdish citizens and to increase civilian control over the military. What changes in the Constitution do you think are most pressing?*

The general problem is that, because of historical reasons, the state has always played a central role. Civil society was more or less obedient. In EU member countries, we have a more balanced relationship between the state and civil society; the state is seen as a servant of the people. Punishing people who say something "anti-Turkish," whatever this means, is not acceptable. Of course, it is not easy to have the right balance between Parliament, the government and the judiciary. The judiciary in Turkey has been used in the recent past as part of opposition policies. To ensure checks and balances, there needs to be a readjustment in the Turkish Constitution, and it is up to Turkey how to do it.

### **'There are prominent people who share my position in the party'**

*Your views run against public opinion in your country. Polls have shown that less than a third of the German population favors having Turkey as an EU member. So what is needed to convince these skeptics of the benefits of Turkey's accession that you mention?*

Regarding public opinion, we have a small majority only in Britain with 52 or 53 percent in favor of Turkey's EU accession, and the next best is Hungary with 48 percent. All other public opinion polls in EU member states are negative, and you already mentioned the case in Germany. Of course, this can change depending on how Turkey moves forward with reforms. Political leadership in EU member states is also important to deal with prejudices. In Germany, we have a particular problem because we haven't been able to solve integration problems with some of the Turkish immigrants up until now. This is one of the big obstacles regarding public opinion. I appreciate that the present Turkish government is better than the

previous one in arguing that the Turks living in Germany should become German citizens, should do what they can to learn the German language and find proper jobs in German society. The more we move in that direction, the less concerns there will be.

*You talked about the politicians' role... When we look at your party, it seems like you are the only one who supports Turkey's membership in the EU. I don't know if that is entirely right. Is that right?*

It's not exactly right.

*OK, please elaborate on that, too. And what were the reactions to your book from your fellow party members and Chancellor Merkel, who prefer a "privileged partnership" for Turkey?*

First of all, I should tell you that I am not only able to publish such a book, I have also always been able to present my views in interviews openly. It is accepted in our party that we have to have a debate to deal with a problem. This is why I am proud of this party. Secondly, I am not alone. The mayors of the big cities who belong to my party, like Petra Roth in Frankfurt, Wolfgang Schuster in Stuttgart and former Cologne Mayor Fritz Schramma, they support my views because they know that it facilitates their efforts to integrate Turkish immigrants in their local communities. There are also some prominent people who share my position in the party, like former Defense Minister Volker R  he and former MP from Saxony Kurt Biedenkopf. We are, of course, in the minority, but I wrote the book to change this.

*You aim at changing the CDU's position in support of only "privileged partnership" with Turkey?*

This position is already being reviewed. I accompanied Angela Merkel during her recent visit to Turkey. She said in her final press conference that she saw in her visit that labeling privileged partnership for a certain type of relationship is perceived very negatively in Turkey, and one should probably think about how to change this position. The CDU wants Turkey as close to the EU as possible, but not as a member. My position is that I also want the relationship between Turkey and the EU to be as close as possible, but to get this we must not only offer Turkey the way to become a member but also be ready -- if Turkey fulfills the Copenhagen criteria -- to say yes and welcome Turkey as a member of the EU. Otherwise, it won't be possible to have Turkey as close to the EU as possible.

**'We opened three chapters for negotiations under the German presidency'**

## **Ruprecht Polenz**

Chairman of the German Bundestag's Committee on Foreign Affairs, of which he has been a member since 1994, he is also a member of the German delegation to the NATO Parliamentary Assembly. The focal points of his work are foreign and security policy, with regional emphasis on the Middle East, in particular Iran and Turkey. He follows the political effects of Islam both in this region and beyond. With good transatlantic relations especially important to him, he was a rapporteur on this issue in the NATO Parliamentary Assembly. In 2000 Polenz was secretary-general of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU). Today he sits on the executive committee of the North-Rhine/Westphalia CDU and is a member of the CDU's Federal Committee on Foreign and Security Policy as well as its Federal Committee on Media Policy.

*Have you had any heated debates with Angela Merkel about the topic?*

Not really. She knows my position very well. I am a loyal member of the party. I was also the secretary-general of the Christian Democratic Union. In Turkey, she introduced me to Prime Minister Erdoğan as one of the few CDU members who supports Turkey's full accession to the EU. So if I disagree, I have my reasons.

*How much influence do German foreign policy makers who support Turkey's full accession to the EU have on Angela Merkel?*

I'd like to remind that, under the German presidency, we opened three chapters for negotiations. It was the most successful EU presidency compared to others. Now the Spaniards were luckily able to open one chapter. In addition, during our presidency, we had the crisis solved with Turkey over opening the ports of Turkish Cyprus. There were also some in Germany who argued for the end of negotiations with Turkey. But Merkel resisted and negotiations continued. Moreover, Germany has not blocked one single chapter so far, while France has blocked five chapters. It is not Germany and Angela Merkel who are the major obstacles with regard to negotiations with Turkey.

*Do you think Turkey and the EU will be able to open more than one chapter during Belgium's EU presidency?*

Many things depend on how Turkey deals with the Cyprus issue. I know this is not a black and white issue. I know how the Cyprus issue is important with regard to domestic Turkish politics. But the idea of using the Cyprus issue as a bargaining chip for the end game will not only not work but will also lead to a larger slowdown in the negotiations process. In other words, Turkey will not be able to join the club without recognizing another member of the club. And yes, we have to improve trade relations

### **'We will see a more confident Turkish society in the future'**

*You also mention in your book that Turkey at the moment of its accession would be a different Turkey than it is today. What would an EU-member Turkey look like?*

We would see a stronger civil society, a more tolerant society with regard to different political opinions and different religious behaviors. We would see a more self-confident society. The pull factors to integrate Turkey will become stronger than the push factors. Turkish society would be more attractive for Turkish citizens than it is right now. For instance, the Kurds would be more attracted to being Turkish citizens than they are right now.

*You regularly mention the recent EU enlargement toward the east and southeast to point out that many arguments against Turkey's accession are not new and not really valid. Are there any lessons that the EU can learn from recent EU enlargement when it comes to Turkey's accession?*

Yes, I do think so. If you explain to the people that there were same considerations and concerns, for instance in Germany regarding the accession of Poland, and all those fears did not come true, and that we are gaining much more from Poland's accession, this might encourage my fellow citizens to say that hopefully it will be the same with Turkey. And I am sure it will.

with northern Cyprus. There is some activity in the European Parliament with regard to this question, and the EU should be more active in solving the conflict on the island. Many of the reasons related to security on the island are no longer valid because of Cyprus's membership in the EU.

*You say in your book that Turkey's accession would be an opportunity for the EU to come to a better and unprejudiced understanding of its identity. What is that identity of the union? How would Turkey's accession change it?*

There were many parts in our history that show more conflict than cooperation. We also have large parts of cooperation in our common history. Secondly, Islam has always played a role in European history. Finally, through the French Revolution and the Enlightenment, we achieved an understanding how the relationship among state, politics and religion should be organized. It is organized in different ways in different European states. But we have a common understanding that we have some kind of separation. Turkey's own system is laicism, but if you look closer, you see that the state has a certain role in Islam due to the Diyanet (Directorate of Religious Affairs) and its influence governing Islam in Turkey where there are problems stemming from this situation -- like problems faced by Alevis and (other) religious minorities.

*Yannick Brusselmans contributed to the research prior to conducting this interview.*

05.07.2010

Interviews

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