

Angela Merkel's visit to Turkey

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On 24–25 February Germany's Chancellor Angela Merkel visited Turkey, where she expressed her support for the continuation of Ankara's accession negotiations with the EU, after France unblocked the negotiating chapter on regional policy. At the same time, however, she emphasised her scepticism as to whether Turkey should join the EU. Besides EU issues, German and Turkish representatives discussed the situation in the region, co-operation in fighting terrorism, human rights situation in Turkey, and establishment of a Turkish-German university. Merkel and Turkey's prime minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan took part in a bilateral economic forum. Turkey is one of Germany's more important trading partners from outside the EU – the volume of trade between the two countries is approximately 30 billion euro a year. Angela Merkel was accompanied by a delegation of 15 representatives of German companies interested in co-operation in infrastructure and energy projects. In November 2011 the German economy minister, Philipp Rösler, and Turkey's energy minister, Taner Yildiz, signed a declaration on energy co-operation. In April 2013 a German-Turkish energy forum will be held.

Commentary

- The visit did not bring about a breakthrough in any of the contentious issues between Ankara and Berlin. From Berlin's point of view, it was above all an opportunity for consultations in areas such as security (the presence of German troops in Turkey, the situation in Israel, Iran and Syria), the economy and energy. Despite Ankara's demands, Germany is not ready to introduce dual citizenship for Turks living in Germany. Chancellor Merkel also reiterated the EU's position that the ratification of the readmission agreement is a precondition for visa liberalisation for Turkish citizens, and that the inclusion of Cyprus in the Turkish-EU customs union is a condition for the full resumption of EU membership negotiations. Nevertheless, the visit confirmed that, in spite of a raft of differences of interest, both countries remain interested in co-operation in the areas of mutual benefit, i.e. in the economy and issues related to regional security.
- For Turkey, Germany is a key political and economic partner. Ankara regards Germany as the most influential EU country, an important NATO member, and as a country of residence of about 2 million Turkish emigrants. Germany is also Turkey's main trading partner and investor. From Ankara's point of view, the crisis of the euro zone has

contributed to strengthening Berlin's position in Europe making Germany an even more desirable partner despite some divergences of interests. Currently Ankara is particularly interested in Germany's support over the Syrian crisis, and in combating terrorist organisations fighting Turkey (the Kurdistan Workers' Party, PKK, The Revolutionary People's Liberation Party–Front, DHKP-C), for whom Germany is an important outpost.

- Although Germany is in favour of a resumption of accession EU talks with Ankara, this does not mean that it endorses Turkey's EU membership. Unblocking of one of the negotiating chapters by France has not lifted all formal obstacles to the full resumption of talks (Cyprus and France are still blocking 12 chapters). More importantly, most EU states remain sceptical of Turkey joining the EU. The declarations made by Merkel and other German politicians are intended mainly warm up the atmosphere between the two countries and as a means of making it easier for Berlin to achieve its goals.