

Report from Bonn by Rainer Apel

Can Turkey find allies in the West?

Squeezed between Moscow, Khomeini, and the International Monetary Fund, Turkey needs Western support.

The West owes a lot to the Turks. Five hundred years ago, the famed world map of Turkish sailor Piri Reis charted a route to the "land across the Atlantic Ocean." Today, Turkey's strong conventional army guards NATO's southeastern flank between Soviet Russia and the radicalized, anti-Western Islamic nations between the Mediterranean and the Persian Gulf. This fact is often neglected in the West's recurring official criticism of "the lack of democracy in Turkey."

Western critics of the current government in Ankara should be warned, however, that the Turks' alliance with the West is not uncontested. It came about by a fierce internal struggle, which the "European" movement of Kemal Ataturk won after World War I, and has had to be renewed by subsequent political leaders of Turkey, including military of the Kemalist faction.

Turkey's State President, Kenan Evren, who completed a five-day visit to Germany Oct. 17-21, belongs to the Kemalist faction. A retired 73-year-old army general, he is a crucial factor of political stability behind current Turkish Premier Turgut Özal. Evren is known for speaking directly.

Two years ago, he accused the German government in Bonn of lending support to extremists working for the destabilization of Turkey from their German exile. Numerous leftist Moscow-controlled organizations, the Kurdish irregulars of the PKK, and Islamic groups operating under the control of Teheran, have their main logistical bases abroad in Germany.

Again and again, bombings, arson, and political assassination, like the recent armed attempt on Turgut Özal, have been designed and carried out by exiles living in Germany. There is a grave problem here, in Germany, that does aggravate relations with Turkey.

Evren felt it directly soon after his arrival in Bonn, when exile radicals provoked fistfights with his supporters at the Cologne-Bonn airport. When he signed into the official guest book of the Bonn municipality, he was attacked by radicals with eggs and stones while walking to his car. One of the eggs hit him. German President Richard von Weizsäcker hurried to play the incident down, telling Evren, "Hopefully, this one egg won't damage our mutual relations." Evren rejoined sarcastically: "Not one egg, for sure."

Later, in his official speech at the state banquet for him, Kenan Evren shocked the guests with a reminder of the incident. "This was just an egg, but it could have been a shot, like the one fired on Premier Özal recently, or the one that hit President Reagan" in 1981.

In his three speeches here in Bonn, the Turkish President minced no words on the lack of Western support to Turkey. He recalled that the Turkish army, Europe's largest in manpower, has a crucial assignment protecting the West along a 800-kilometer border with the heavily armed Soviets, and a 1,600-kilometer border with several radical, anti-Western Islamic states.

Turkey's armed forces, Evren explained, intervened in 1980, when the

country was close to civil war, and helped to reinstate democratic rule by a central government in Ankara. Who, then, should profit from recurring attacks on the "role of the military"?

It was not just for the Turks that the military intervened, but for the Western alliance, Evren said. He raised the question: What would have happened, if Turkey had fallen into the hands of the radical groups that attacked the central government then, under the guise of "democratic rule in Turkey"? Not unlike Khomeini in Teheran, various anti-American, pro-Soviet, and other radical groups would rule Turkey now.

It is not self-evident that the pro-Western current will stay in power, the Turkish President warned. The European Community's refusal to accept Turkey as a full member, and official attacks on the role of the military in Turkish politics, will undermine the Western position in Ankara.

The economic aspect that Evren addressed, when speaking about the European Community issue, is key. In the mid-1980s, Premier Özal tried to get international bank support for several major infrastructure projects, including a nuclear power complex. The Soviets protested, the IMF and Western banks said "no." Western governments, including the one in Bonn, told Özal to "democratize Turkish politics first, then credits will be granted."

The economic embargo against Turkey still holds, and Evren's Bonn visit has not, as far as is known, done much to change this. His calls for the Germans to lend economic and political support to Turkey yielded only vague promises. One reason was that Chancellor Helmut Kohl was preparing his visit to Moscow (Oct. 24-27), and the Soviets hate the Turks. Kohl prefers an "untroubled atmosphere" with Gorbachov.