

## „Erdogan wird enden wie Hitler oder Stalin“

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"Sein Hauptfeind ist er selbst": Fethullah Gülen über Erdogan

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### "Erdogan will end up like Hitler and Stalin"

Interview by Alain Jourdain

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The preacher Fethullah Gülen was once a close ally of the Turkish President. Today, Erdogan accuses him of being behind the coup attempt in July 2016, and Gülen is in exile. In his interview, he explains the weaknesses of the Turkish President.

Fethullah Gülen, number 1 enemy of the Turkish State, has lived for many years in the US. The meeting with him took place in his house in Pennsylvania under police protection.

The health of the 78-year-old, who the Turkish government sees as a threat, is fragile. Ankara demanded, in vain, his extradition from the United States. Ankara accuses the preacher, claiming that he and the Hizmet Movement are behind the failed coup d'etat of July 2016, a claim which Gülen consistently denied.

He witnesses powerlessly how his supporters are pursued even in the corridors of the UN. The Turkish government has done everything to withdraw their accreditation to the NGOs run by Gülen supporters. They will not have a say when the session of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), dedicated to the situation in Turkey, is held in front of the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva.

**Welt: Why does Erdogan hate you so much? You have been his ally in the past, haven't you?**

Fethullah Gülen: The Hizmet Movement never had a close relation with him. Erdogan seemed to share our ideas on democracy. That's it. He was fighting for the same things. But once in power, he showed a completely different face. We couldn't support that. Our schools defend a vision of education that is incompatible with a drift toward authoritarianism. We defend, for example, the rights of Kurdish citizens, to use their language along with the Turkish language. He's the one who considers me his enemy. I never considered him as such.

I just asked him to keep his promises. His main enemy is himself. He sees himself as the most intelligent human in the world, but in reality, he is driven by feelings of jealousy, hatred and revenge. His government sank into paranoia. My older sister has to live in hiding and everyone who has the same surname as me is arrested.

**Welt: So your disagreement roots in the Kurdish Question, if we understand you right?**

Fethullah Gülen: Erdogan is not on the same wavelength with me. Former President Turgut Ozal, when he was Prime Minister, partially resolved the problem by including Kurdish ministers in his cabinet as well as Social Democrats and representatives of other political currents. I believe that more freedom must be ensured and the Kurdish language should be allowed in the schools. This requires a more decentralized state. If one day there is a new constitutional reform, I recommended them to study the model of the American constitution, which grants great freedom to the citizens.

**What is your opposing approach regarding freedom? Erdogan believes that women belong in the kitchen. Is that also a reason for your disagreement?**

Gülen: (Smiles.) I personally am not in favor of the patriarchal model because it is a step backwards from the history of the beginnings of Islam. Women must be able to find their place in society everywhere. If a woman wants to be a judge or pilot, nothing should stop her.

**Erdogan also strives to play a role on the international and regional stage. What do you think of the military operation launched by Erdogan in Syria in 2019?**

It was a diversion operation. He wanted to divert people's attention so that they did not focus on internal problems in Turkey. It was also a new opportunity for him to pose as a strong man in the Muslim world. But we can see the result in Syria. He became a murderer by supporting an unrealistic uprising. He has a big responsibility in everything that happened. Thousands of dead, millions of refugees, all these horrid things. One of his former ministers asked me what the solution was to get out of the Syrian crisis. I replied that a pact had to be made in order to move towards democracy step by step.

I said that it is important to support a gradual democratization process in Syria and, if necessary, help Assad stay president for a term or two, while also ensuring that every ethnic group, whether majority or minority, is in parliament and is represented. But they just ignored my advice.

**Is it also Erdogan's mistake to influence the situation in Libya??**

There has always been tension between different regions in Libya. Again, Erdogan plays a negative role by supporting certain groups. He aspires to be the new leader of the Muslim world, but how can he claim such a place while supporting and encouraging actions that lead to conflicts between Sunnis? He is trapped in his contradictions. All narcissistic dictators and tyrants like Hitler and Stalin have a bad ending. Their reign always ends in fury. He will suffer the same fate.

**Meanwhile, Erdogan continues to exert pressure on the West by threatening to exit NATO. Do you think he would really do that??**

Erdogan seems to be maneuvering to get closer to Russia and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization for a collaboration, but that's just a bluff. In fact, he's just trying to blackmail. He cannot do without the West. He needs them to protect himself. He uses this rhetoric to convince his supporters. Personally, I believe that Turkey must maintain its relations with NATO and Europe.

**In any case, the question of Turkey's accession to the EU seems to be definitely off the table. Do you regret that?**

Currently, with this totalitarian government I do not see how it would be possible to become a member of the European Union. There is nothing to expect from people who keep themselves in power through violence, hatred and revenge. In the eyes of France and Germany, Turkey has lost all credibility for the time being. Our movement will always defend a rapprochement with the European Union because we can learn and benefit from it.

**Erdogan seems more inclined to approach the Muslim Brotherhood. What do you make of it?**

He is Machiavellian. If he got close to the Muslim brothers, it was by calculation. If they lose influence, he will quickly let them down.

**How do you see the future role of your movement?**

Hizmet will continue to be a humanitarian foundation because it is our primary vocation. Unfortunately, this is made difficult by the unfavorable context. We are a very small movement, but we will continue to defend our model of social harmony and mutual respect, tolerance and diversity. My belief is that humanist values can unite us beyond our religious affiliations.

Recently, I was treated in a hospital center. I met Christian and Jewish doctors there who treated Muslim patients with the greatest respect. I was touched by their humanity. God evaluates people on their action not on their appearance.