

# German-Turkish Relationships: "Do we want to be right, or find a solution?"

Icy to hostile—the German-Turkish relationships have reached bottom. And the conflict is being stoked daily. In the interview with heute.de, negotiation expert Matthias Schraner urges the parties to initiate talks quickly and without any threatening gestures. "Waiting makes everything only worse."

**heute.de:** The German-Turkish relationships are pretty fraught right now, as we know. Are deadlocks between nations part of political life, or are we witnessing an extreme situation here?

**Matthias Schraner:** This is indeed extreme. Especially among partners, and Turkey is one of Germany's partners, there should be no place for such an escalation. Currently, more and more oil is poured onto the fire, the remarks keep getting worse. This is the wrong way.

**heute.de:** But why this escalation?

**Schraner:** Conflicts never arise just so, out of nowhere; they always have their history. This current escalation is also caused by the fact that the conflict between Germany and Turkey has been going on for too long. For months, we have been hearing only negative remarks in Germany, and at this point we have reached the point where Turkish events are canceled and Turkish government representatives are insulted in Germany—and where in return Erdogan reproaches Germany to employ Nazi methods. And an end of this development isn't even in sight.

**heute.de:** That means that Germany also did something wrong?

**Schraner:** Not the German government, but many politicians made negative comments about Turkey and about Erdogan. But they should not have talked about each other; rather, they should have started to talk with one another a long time ago. This opportunity was missed.

**heute.de:** At this point, what could the beginning of a constructive approach look like?

**Schraner:** To do that, Angela Merkel would have to say what the goal of such negotiations would be. And she would have to issue a so-called license to negotiate, which means to send out a team that has her mandate to initiate talks with a team from Turkey. Without such a mandate and without clearly stated goals, any beginning would be difficult. But we see that, right now, there are no or not enough talks with Turkey.

**heute.de:** Which aces would Turkey and Germany have up their sleeves to strengthen their respective negotiation positions?

**Schraner:** I think it would be the wrong approach to enter the negotiations with the threat of consequences. Turkey will remain a partner of Germany in the future. A common solution is needed that is tolerable for both sides. Threats to damage the opponent will get you nothing right now.

**heute.de:** What potential solutions are there so that both parties can get closer again and save face?

**Schranner:** I think that a comprehensive package is needed. For instance, the subject matter of German-Turkish collaboration in 2017—including the areas of economy, politics, safety and security, and counter-terrorism. Both negotiation parties could then present such a package as a plus. Essentially, what is needed are subject matters that are so complex that they cannot be presented in black and white, which is the case right now. The current polarization can only produce losers.

**heute.de:** But from the German perspective, the Turkish government argues completely out of touch with reality.

**Schranner:** And Erdogan thinks the same from his perspective! This is the essence of such a situation, where the parties no longer understand one another. But we have reached a point where it is not about understanding anymore, but about solutions. This is also not about harmony, too much damage has been done by now. This is indeed a type of peace negotiation so that the parties can reasonably work together again. And they must come to the table quickly and get results, for the longer we wait, the worse the situation will become.

**heute.de:** Which is the main criticism that can be leveled against Germany in this conflict?

**Schranner:** Germany evaluates mainly along the lines of right and wrong. From a German viewpoint, Trump, Putin, and Erdogan, too, are on the wrong path. This may well be the case, but it does not get you anywhere in a negotiation. The question arises, do we want to be right or find a solution? I am for a solution—and quickly.

Interview by Christian Thomann-Busse.

### **Matthias Schranner...**

...is a negotiation expert and CEO of the Zürich-based Schranner Negotiation Institute in Switzerland.

A former police negotiator in hostage-takings, he now advises decision makers in politics and business in more than 40 countries (including the USA, China, Russia, Ukraine, and Japan). He also supports the UN, global corporations, and political parties with his institute during difficult negotiations.