# BILD-INTERVIEW WITH THE TURKISH OPPOSITION-LEADER|“Erdogan is a dictator!”

*By Viktoria Dümer and Peter Tiede, Ankara*

**He is the opposition leader in Turkey and one of President Erdogan’s sharpest critics.**

BILD met with Kemal Kilicdaroglu (67) for an interview.

**BILD:  Mister Kilicdaroglu, give us three reasons why you think that Erdogan is a dictator.**

**Kemal Kilicdaroglu:**  “1. He is convinced that he alone knows and speaks the truth. 2.  He wants to lead and rule over his party alone. 3. He ignores the constitution – the legislature, the judiciary, the basis of any democracy.”

**Which despot are you most inclined to compare him to?**

**Kilicdaroglu:** “Erdogan is a unique dictator. It is hard to compare him to anyone.”

**Did Chancellor Merkel trust the wrong people - that is, the Erdogan clan - when completing the refugee deal?**

**Kilicdaroglu:**“No. She has followed democratic rules and, in accordance with the constitution, negotiated with the elected Prime Minister, Mister Davutoglu.”

**Do you trust Erdogan?**

**Kilicdaroglu:**„No. I ask you: how can you trust someone who tramples democracy under his feet, who does not acknowledge his country’s constitution, and under whose rule there is no freedom of the press? Plus, it is clear that the new Prime Minister will also be Erdogan’s puppet.”

**Prime Minister Davutoglu, with whom Chancellor Merkel negotiated the refugee deal, was forced by President Erdogan to step down last week. Now Europe is worried: will the deal with Turkey crumble?**

**Kilicdaroglu:** “No. The agreement was made with the State of Turkey, not with an individual person. Erdogan is not Turkey, nor will he ever be!”

**But is Erdogan not in the powerful position of being able to blackmail the EU, to flood Europe with refugees again, at his discretion?**

**Kilicdaroglu:**  “It would be shameful to act like this, at the expense of the refugees. That would not be part of the Turkish mentality. And one thing is clear: the refugee agreement with the EU is not in danger, regardless of who becomes the new Prime Minister.”

**Last Friday, Erdogan seriously affronted the EU in a speech. With respect to the refugee question and the agreement, he said: “We are going our way, you are going yours” …**

**Kilicdaroglu:** “Erdogan acts as if he is the state. I think the EU gave the right response –agreements are made with states and not with individuals. In general, I think that Europe is too concerned with Erdogan the person. This weakens the European position and, worse, the position of the Turkish democrats.”

**Do you think that Turkey will be able to fulfil the EU’s requirements for the visa-free travel of Turkish citizens by the end of June?**

**Kilicdaroglu:**“Parliament will decide this, not the President. And in parliament, there is a majority support for these reforms. It would be an enormous contradiction if the members of parliament were to demand that Turkey becomes an EU member on the one hand, while refusing to agree to European standards on the other.”

**One of the EU’s demands is that the arbitrary anti-terror laws be mitigated, so that they cannot be used at will against anybody and anything. Why does Erdogan resist this so persistently?**

**Kilicdaroglu:**  “Erdogan uses the fight against terrorism in order to promote his own interests and to present himself as the sole potential saviour of the nation.”

**One thing is striking: while Erdogan is fighting the Kurdish PKK by every means, he has also massively helped ISIS.**

**Kilicdaroglu:**  “Objection! Erdogan has supported both – including the PKK. This is his routine. He supports terrorist groups, allowing conflicts to escalate in order to then intervene as the saviour. It was the same in Southern Turkey where he told the governors not to take action against the PKK’s weapons stashes.”

**Now that Head of State Davutoglu is gone, is there a risk that Erdogan will achieve his goal: a monopoly on power by way of introducing a presidential rule, on which he will let the people vote?**

**Kilicdaroglu:**  “He will not win this fight against the Turkish people and the freely elected, proud Turkish parliament. We will never accept such a change to the constitution.”

**All major Turkish newspapers are currently running a campaign selling Erdogan’s plan as the only solution to all problems.**

**Kilicdaroglu:** “That proves, once again, that he is indirectly controlling all of the major media companies. This is how he can systematically spread his propaganda.”

**How do you intend to oppose this?**

**Kilicdaroglu:**  “By means of a kind of information battle on the streets. We have to go everywhere in the country, go to the squares, and we will tell people the truth.”

**But more than 50 percent of Turks have voted for Erdogan …**

**Kilicdaroglu:** “Yes, but do you seriously think that his voters can be persuaded to destroy our 150-year-old constitutional tradition? Our question to the Turks is quite simple: do you want a single family, a single man, to rule the entire country?”

**Something completely different: do you know Jan Böhmermann?**

**Kilicdaroglu (laughs):**  “Yes, I’ve heard of him.”

**You two have something in common: you are both – along with about 2000 other Turks – being sued by Erdogan for insulting him. Böhmermann is being sued because of his defamatory poem. What was your crime?**

**Kilicdaroglu (grins):**  “I called him ‘a kind of dictator’. He then sued me and scolded me for being a ‘political pervert’. That is why I have now sued him. This is how things go back and forth between us …”

**At the beginning of our conversation, you talked about the suppression of the free press in Turkey. Is a country where journalists are being arrested, where the state closes down newspapers, and where demonstrations by women’s rights-activists are brutally supressed, a democracy?**

**Kilicdaroglu:**  “No. We do not have a democracy. We have been fighting to become a democracy for a long time now. With Erdogan, however, we keep moving further away from this goal.”

**Is Erdogan’s aim to establish an “Islamic State of Turkey”?**

**Kilicdaroglu:**  “No. He wants the country to become his empire. Islam merely serves as a tool for him. If he were serious about his faith, he would hardly abuse millions in tax money for his splendour and luxury – for instance, for his gigantic show-off palace.”

**Modern Turkey – in which state and religion are strictly separated – was born with the founder of the Turkish state, Kemal Atatürk. Is Erdogan now about to destroy Atatürk’s legacy?**

**Kilicdaroglu:** “That is Erdogan’s aim. However, he is too minor and weak to destroy Kemal Atatürk’s legacy.”