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## VON DER LEYEN'S GAFFE COMPLICATES EU RELATIONS WITH TÜRKİYE

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Ben Aris

The EU is in a slow-moving identity collapse crisis. Disunity in the EU is growing more obvious each month and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen is casting about for ways to rebuild a consensus without much luck. Last week she called on [Türkiye] to step up as a strategic partner, but in the very same breath, included it in a list of enemies together with China and Russia.

In what is now widely seen as a gaffe, it was more of the half-in, half-out attitude to [Türkiye] the EU has had since accepting it as an EU candidate country over 27 years ago. The EU wants [Türkiye] in as it has the biggest army in Europe, is a major manufacturer, and has real pull in the south east of Europe extending into the Middle East. But the problem is that the elite in Brussels have never seen [Türkiye] as particularly European. When she was Chancellor, Angela Merkel let slip that [Türkiye] would never join the EU.

Now von der Leyen has made the same slip. Speaking at a gala dinner in Hamburg on April 19 to mark the 80th anniversary of the German newspaper Die Zeit, von der Leyen was making the case for EU enlargement as a geopolitical necessity. Then came the phrase that stopped diplomatic circles across three continents:

"We must succeed in completing the European continent so that it does not fall under Russian, Turkish, or Chinese influence," she said.

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