



Between opportunity and self harm

Michael Thumann Süddeutsche Zeitung
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A new film shows Turkey's enormous opportunities in the 21st century – but also how the country might knowingly slide into the abyss.

Afraid of people switching off their TV sets? In Istanbul, the director just needs to let the camera roll to catch the audience's attention. The grandiose churches of the Byzantine Empire, the palaces and mosques of the Ottoman Empire, the legendary Golden Horn, the imposing 19th century embassies of the European powers, the party scene of the hedonistic Turkish youth, the Bosphorus, the cut and thrust of Asia and Europe in one city. All this is fascinating enough to put away the remote control and just watch.

The film „Return to Europe: Turkey“ by Peter Beringer uses these wonderful images and yet goes far beyond them. Its sponsor, the NGO European Stability Initiative (ESI), was keen to present Turkey, its enormous opportunities and its constant self harm through the prism of the Turkish metropolis. The result is a fascinating kaleidoscope of impressions of a modern country.

The film takes its viewers from Rumeli Hisari, an old village on the Bosphorus in the middle of the teeming city, as far as Kadikoy, a vibrant modern district in up-and-coming Asian Istanbul. Mehmet the Conqueror built a castle in Rumeli Hisari in 1453 to conquer Byzantine Constantinople. In Kadikoy, self-confident young women and members of the old elites are about to modernize and change the Turkish republic.

What makes the film politically explosive are the interviews with liberal thinkers and conservative politicians, with committed lawyers and Jewish-Turkish entrepreneurs. It describes the rise of a new elite that moved from

the Anatolian periphery to Istanbul. The old elites now fear to lose their ancestral positions in state and society. The economic boom and Istanbul's breathtaking growth have created winners and losers of modernization and change who are fiercely struggling over Turkey's future. Radicalised members of the old elite have set up a terror network named Ergenekon to stall changes in Turkey with targeted attacks and to lead the country back to authoritarianism and isolation in the ensuing atmosphere of fear and chaos. Brave journalists have uncovered the many connections of this network that lead up to the highest ranks of Turkey's bureaucracy and army. They are now threatened by the old establishment and the General Staff. But they get on with their work and talk about it in this film.

The cowardly murder of the Armenian-Turkish journalist Hrant Dink in the beginning of 2007 shows how dangerous the fight for a more open and modern Turkey can be. Turkish nationalists killed him to silence a voice of Turkish diversity once and for all. The film shows an interview with the Dink family's lawyer and describes her hard work with unwilling investigators against a hesitant judiciary and Turkey's deep state. It is getting ever clearer that Hrant Dink's murder was in all likelihood also sponsored by the Ergenekon terror network. Turkey's modernization also depends on whether the terrorists from the deep state can be stopped.

Return to Europe: Turkey
Sunday, 19 October 2008, 21:00 on 3sat.