



PISM | POLSKI INSTYTUT SPRAW MIĘDZYNARODOWYCH  
THE POLISH INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

# BULLETIN

No. 44 (894), 20 July 2016 © PISM

Editors: Sławomir Dębski (PISM Director) ● Katarzyna Staniewska (Managing Editor)  
Jarosław Ćwiek-Karpowicz ● Karolina Borońska-Hryniewiecka ● Anna Maria Dyer ● Patryk Kugiel  
Zuzanna Nowak ● Sebastian Płóciennik ● Patrycja Sasnal ● Rafał Tarnogórski ● Marcin Terlikowski

## The Consequences of the Failed Military Coup in Turkey

Konrad Zasztowt

*The failed coup in Turkey will have serious consequences for its domestic and foreign policy. It will lead to further consolidation of power in the hands of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who will use the current situation to eliminate groups he finds to be disloyal among the prosecutor's office, the army and elsewhere under the pretext of the fight against the Hizmet movement and its leader Fethullah Gülen, whom Erdoğan blames for the coup attempt. In the foreign policy aspect, possible tensions in Turkey's relations with the U.S. and the EU, which will criticise the Turkish authorities' methods in their fight with their political opponents, may be expected. The weakening of the Euro-Atlantic ties may see Turkey move closer to other partners, including Russia.*

**The Course and Results of the Attempted Coup.** On the night of 15 to 16 July, units of the Turkish army took over the offices of the country's public television network TRT and the headquarters of the General Staff of the Turkish Armed Forces, taking hostage Gen. Hulusi Akar, who is the head of the military and loyal to President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. There was also an unsuccessful attempt to assassinate the president. The hotel on the Aegean Sea where Erdoğan had been staying on holiday was fired on from helicopters. It turned out the president had already left. The Turkish parliament and the headquarters of its intelligence agency (MIT) were also targeted. The somewhat rapid defeat of the coup attempt was mainly because most of the military remained loyal to the government. Among the alleged leaders of the coup were, however, representatives of the military elite, including the commander of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Army, Gen. Adem Huduti, the commander of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Army, Gen. Erdal Öztürk, the commander of the Air Force, Gen. Akın Öztürk, the commander of the Incirlik Airbase, Gen. Bekir Ercan, and military adviser to the president, Col. Ali Yazıcı. In total, at least 7,500 people have been arrested, including 118 generals and admirals and officials from the prosecutor's office and the courts.

**Why a Coup?** Erdoğan swiftly accused religious leader and former partner Fetullah Gülen of being the mastermind of the coup attempt. Gülen has been in exile since 1999 in the U.S. state of Pennsylvania. He is the main ideologue of the Islamist, nationalist movement Hizmet. However, he has condemned the coup and stated that it would be absurd if he, himself harmed by military coups in past decades, had supported the current coup attempt. He even suggested that it could have been orchestrated by Erdoğan and aimed at eliminating his political opponents.

The day before the coup attempt, the Turkish prosecutor's office had announced the preparation of an indictment against members of what it called the Fethullah Gülen Terrorist Organisation (FETÖ), which allegedly comprised officials in the police and prosecutor's office. The charges included fraud, money laundering, illegal wiretapping, blackmail and sentencing of dozens of people based on false evidence. Gülen himself and his followers were facing life sentences. It is likely that the prosecutor's actions were planned to also hit in the near future Hizmet supporters in the army. It cannot be ruled out that these indictments instigated the decision by groups in the military reluctant to follow Erdoğan to stage the coup, including not only followers of Gülen but also those who see the rule of Erdoğan's Justice and Development Party (AKP) as a departure from democracy and Turkish model of secular republic.

The dispute between the Gülen milieu and Erdoğan broke out at the end of 2013 after more than a decade of consistent cooperation between Hizmet and the ruling AKP party. Gülen's concepts of combining Turkish nationalism and religious conservatism with the desire to modernise the country and keep good relations with representatives of other religions and nationalities did not differ from Erdoğan's AKP, moderately Islamist and initially pro-European and reformist. The common political opponent of Hizmet and politicians from Erdoğan's circle were the secularist (Kemalist) elite and the political leadership of the army. Officials associated with the Gülen movement in the

prosecutor's office reportedly had led it to prosecute the highest military ranks through controversial charges and evidence.

In December 2013, Gülen's sympathisers within prosecutor's office prepared the arrest of the sons of four ministers in the AKP government, accusing them of corruption. The response from the authorities was to fire the official responsible for the anti-corruption investigation. Soon, Erdoğan announced publicly that state institutions were under the influence of what he said was a Gülen-controlled "parallel structure" aimed at taking power through conspiracy. An important step in the political struggle came in March 2016 when the newspaper *Zaman*, associated with the Hizmet movement and the largest publication in Turkey, was taken over by the authorities. After a change of the *Zaman* board imposed by the court, the newspaper ceased to publish articles critical of the government.

**Consequences for Turkey's relations with the U.S. and the EU.** American support for the Kurds in Syria (the Democratic Union Party, or PYD) and its military units (YPG), politically and ideologically associated with the Turkish Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), has been a main source of tension in relations between Turkey and the United States. The government in Ankara believes that the Syrian Kurdish organisations and the PKK are terrorist groups. According to the United States, only the PKK is a terrorist structure, while the PYD and YPG are an important ally in the fight against the so-called Islamic State (ISIS/ISIL).

Another contentious issue will be the American attitude to Gülen's presence in the U.S. President Erdoğan has demanded extradition of the religious leader from the United States. Turkish Labour Minister Süleyman Soylu accused the U.S. of directly supporting the coup by giving asylum to Gülen. Shortly after the start of the coup, President Barack Obama and Secretary of State John Kerry expressed U.S. support for the democratically elected authorities in Ankara. Kerry noted, however, that Gülen will not be extradited if Turkish authorities do not provide evidence of his links with the coup plotters. He also offered U.S. assistance in the investigation of the events and criticised statements by Turkish politicians suggesting that the U.S. supported the coup attempt. The attempted coup was condemned by the High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Federica Mogherini. Both Mogherini and Kerry stressed in the days after the coup attempt failed that any punishment of those responsible for it must be in accordance with the principles of the rule of law. Mass arrests of officials in the prosecutor's office and army officers that end with non-transparent trials will be subjected to powerful criticism from both the U.S. and the EU. This, in turn, will halt Turkey's accession process and deteriorate Turkish relations with its allies in NATO.

In that case, further rapprochement between Turkey and Russia, already initiated in June, should be expected. Turkish-Russian relations—frozen for months as a result of the shooting down of a Russian Su-24 flying in Syria that had violated Turkish airspace—warmed in the days before the coup, and the interest of Erdoğan and the government of Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım in deepening political and economic relations with Russia is growing. Turkey has also recently repaired relations with Israel. Russia, Israel and China are comfortable partners for the government in Ankara as they do not question Erdoğan's internal actions. For NATO countries, this will mean a further weakening of interest in joint initiatives with Turkey, such as strengthening the capacity of the Alliance in the Black Sea or the coordination of activities in relation to the Middle East.