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## Turkey after the Failed 15 July Coup: A Challenge for the EU and the U.S.

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*Turkey's domestic and foreign policy after the failed coup raises concerns for the European Union and the United States. Current developments in Turkey increase the political costs of Western leaders' closer cooperation with President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. At the same time, Turkey accuses its allies of hypocrisy and a lack of understanding. Thus, relations between Turkey and its Western allies remain at an impasse, which could force Turkish decision-makers to look for alternative solutions in the political and security spheres. This constitutes a challenge for the EU and the United States, especially in the face of a deterioration of relations with Russia and the migrant crisis.*

**After the Failed Coup.** One of the 15 July coup attempt's most important consequences<sup>1</sup> was the declaration of a three-month state of emergency by the Turkish authorities (in October parliament extended it for a further three months). The government was granted the right to issue decrees which were later used to conduct repressive measures against people and institutions connected with the Gülen movement (its leader, a Muslim cleric called Fethullah Gülen, who has been living in the United States since 1999, was accused by the government of inspiring the coup). Apart from the arrest of alleged coup-plotters, those measures included mainly firing civil servants, judges and teachers, expelling soldiers from the army, seizing private businesses, arresting journalists, and closing down some of the opposition media.

The Turkish government's actions raised concerns in the EU and the United States. Above all, Turkey's Western allies were afraid that the state of emergency would contribute to restricting Turkish citizens' rights and weakening the rule of law in the country. These concerns grew even deeper with the intensification of Turkish authorities' operations. To date, various repressive measures have affected tens of thousands of people who are accused of having links with the Gülen movement and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (which is considered a terrorist organisation by Turkey, the EU and the U.S.). What is more, the fact that the government's clamp-down was not restricted to soldiers engaged in the putsch attempt strengthened suspicions among Turkey's Western allies that the authorities are taking advantage of the post-coup situation to strike at the opposition and bolster their own standing. It seems that Western public opinion perceived the actions of Turkey's government in a similar manner, viewing repressive measures as a sign of Erdoğan's more authoritarian policy rather than as a necessity. This puts additional political pressure on Western leaders who have already been criticised by voters for cooperating too closely with such a leader.

The concerns of the EU and the U.S. revolve around state of the Turkish Armed Forces (TSK). This was a consequence of a purge in the army which saw the expulsion of around 45% of Turkish generals. Furthermore, this affected officers who had been educated in the West and had good working relations with their counterparts in the NATO armies, which increased the concerns of Turkey's allies. NATO members were concerned that future Turkish units would not share their predecessors' Euro-Atlantic orientation. Doubts mounted as reports emerged, suggesting that the new TSK elites may have a different outlook (Euro-Asiatic, more independent, anti-American and reluctant towards NATO) on Turkey's security and foreign policy actions. Western allies were chiefly concerned by the rapprochement between Turkey and Russia, which began before the coup attempt. Although in normal circumstances this process would not have been considered a cause for alarm (as it will diminish the risk of new tensions between the Alliance and Russia), it came at a time of worrying developments in relations between Turkey, the EU and the United States.

<sup>1</sup> K. Zasztowt, "The Consequences of the Failed Military Coup in Turkey," *PISM Bulletin*, no. 44 (894), 20 July 2016.

**Impasse.** Relations between Turkey and its Western allies had not been easy even before the coup. The most serious problems were the result of EU and U.S. criticism of the Turkish government's actions concerning the Gezi Park protests in 2013, as well as its different perspective on the Syrian civil war (mainly about the solution to the problem and support for the Kurdish Democratic Union Party, PYD, which Turkey views as a Syrian branch of the PKK). Nonetheless, the 15 July coup attempt brought relations between Turkey and its Western partners to a new low. It was a repercussion of Turkey's decision-makers' reaction to, in their opinion, their Allies' passive and inadequate approach to the putsch attempt. Turkish leaders were particularly inflamed by the fact that their Western counterparts underlined in their post-coup statements that any measures undertaken against the coup-plotters should be conducted within the framework of the rule of law. Turkey argued that the Allies should have been more sensitive, voiced their support for Turkey's government, and paid tribute to Turkish democracy.

In fact, the reactions of EU and U.S. politicians to the coup attempt were not as passive as Turkish leaders claimed. Nevertheless, this had some vital consequences. First, it strengthened Turkey's distrust towards its Allies. Secondly, it provoked a chain of West-bashing statements from Turkey's leaders (Süleyman Soylu, the Turkish Labour Minister, led the charge when he claimed in an interview for the Habertürk channel that "America was behind the coup"). This, in turn, raised Western leaders' suspicions and, in effect, further deepened misunderstandings between Turkey and its Allies. The fact that Turkey's leaders' critical remarks did not stop even after their counterparts had adjusted their own statements to more clearly state support for the Turkish government, fed notions that Turkey's decision-makers use anti-Western rhetoric to put pressure on their Allies and to mobilise their own electorate at home. This impression was strengthened by Turkey's temporary closure of the Incirlik Air Base, used by U.S. military aircraft on bombing missions against Islamic State (IS/ISIL/ISIS). Washington, in particular, saw the decision as an attempt to blackmail and pressure the U.S. to extradite Gülen.

Hence the failed coup attempt led to an impasse in relations between Turkey, the European Union and the United States. While Turkey considered criticism as a sign of Western hypocrisy and a lack of understanding about the country's problems, the EU and the U.S. looked askance at most of the actions of the Turkish leaders. In these circumstances, Turkey may look for alternative solutions in political and security domains. Even though it seems that membership of NATO is still a big asset for Turkey and that joining the EU remains its "strategic aim" (at least, so Turkish leaders claim), it cannot be excluded that misunderstandings may in the long term lead to the further weakening of Euro-Atlantic tendencies in Turkey. In the short term, this may result in Turkey's growing reluctance and assertiveness towards EU and NATO initiatives (especially regarding the migrant crisis or policy towards Russia).

**Conclusions.** From the EU and U.S. point of view, relations with Turkey cannot be merely transactional since this may result in Turkey's growing assertiveness and reluctance towards NATO and EU initiatives. Only by reinforcing bonds through mutual understanding of political and security interests among the Allies might relations between Turkey, the EU and the U.S. be strengthened. Thus, an effective Western strategy towards Turkey should comprise components from both the political and security spheres. On the political front, actions by the European Union are of greatest importance, while NATO and the U.S. have a bigger role to play on the security front.

With regard to the political sphere, the impasse in relations could be broken by the acceleration of Turkey-EU accession negotiations, specifically by the opening of chapters 23 and 24 (Judiciary and Fundamental Rights, and Justice, Freedom and Security). On the one hand, this would help to develop a more constructive dialogue between Turkey and the EU in fields about which the latter has concerns, while on the other it may suppress some of the critical comments of Turkish leaders (this solution was recently suggested by Nathalie Tocci, who is an advisor to Federica Mogherini, the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy). Relating to the security area, measures by both the NATO and the U.S. should concentrate on convincing Turkey that the North Atlantic Alliance is still the most reliable guarantee of its security (this conviction has lately been undermined in Turkey because of some serious misunderstandings between Allies with regard to the Syrian Civil War, particularly as a result of American support for the PYD). This would require improving the security dialogue between the Allies, in order to develop a joint and realistic strategy regarding the Syrian Civil War. Achieving this may help restrain Turkey's willingness to seek other partners to achieve its interests in the security sphere. It is worth noting that Russia does anything it can to exploit tensions between Turkey and its Allies.

Nonetheless, enforcement of this strategy may be extremely difficult for many reasons. On the political front, it seems that the biggest obstacle may be the concerns of the EU Member States that opening new chapters with Turkey may, under current circumstances, be considered as rewarding Turkish politicians for measures that have caused Turkey to drift away from the Copenhagen Criteria. The stance of Turkey's leaders is also unfavourable, as it seems that they are currently more interested in consolidating their power than meeting the EU's membership conditions. Furthermore, chapters 23 and 24 are blocked by the Republic of Cyprus, as a result of the unresolved Cyprus issue and Turkey's lack of recognition of this EU Member State. On the security front, finding a joint solution to the Syrian problem would require both sides to change their positions significantly. Turkey would need to soften its attitude towards the PYD, while its Western allies would have to help find a solution that would not constitute a threat to Turkey's territorial integrity. This would also require a compromise in Turkey's domestic policy, something that has been highly unlikely, because, since the renewal of the conflict between Turkey and the PKK, Turkish decision-makers have taken an even stricter position on the PYD. In addition, it seems that Erdoğan aims to begin his campaign to introduce his long-desired presidential system, and to achieve this goal he needs to mobilise his electorate. All these circumstances suggest that the impasse in relations between Turkey, the EU and the U.S. is unlikely to be broken in the next few months. It is highly possible that, in the coming months, there will be more tensions between the Allies. This would create an opportunity for other international players (primarily Russia), as well as further strengthening the transactional nature of relations between Turkey, the EU and the United States.