

## Turkey after July 15: The view from Ankara

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*Dr. Ibrahim Kalin, Ambassador and Presidential Spokesperson, speaks to ECFR about the July 15 coup attempt and its aftermath.*

*The following is a transcript of an interview with Dr. Ibrahim Kalin, Ambassador and Presidential Spokesperson, on the July 15 coup attempt and its aftermath.*

Q: The failed coup attempt had a tectonic affect on Turkey—domestically and in terms of foreign relations. Can Turkish democracy ever go back to July 14?

A: The military coup was an illegitimate attempt at harming Turkish democracy. However, Turkish people bravely stood against this attempt in unity and solidarity and proved their faith in democratic values and individual liberties. All political parties have taken a principled stance against the coup. President Erdogan held a meeting with opposition leaders Kemal Kilicdaroglu and Devlet Bahceli to discuss the coup attempt and the post-coup process. All political parties have acted with a sense of responsibility and maturity, which gives me much hope for the future of our democracy and political system.

Q: Where were you on the night of July 15th?

A: I was in Antalya where we were preparing for a program for the President on July 16. When we were informed and heard about the coup attempt, we immediately coordinated with our President, Prime Minister, security forces, the media and the people to resist and thwart the coup attempt. I spent the night with the coordination of anti-coup moves but also travelled to Istanbul under rather unusual circumstances.

### Foreign Relations

Q: You have been critical of the response by EU governments in the aftermath of the coup attempt. Why do you think the response has been below your expectations?

A: The Turkish people expected full support from Western countries. The condemnations of the coup attempt only came together with warnings for Turkey to respect the rule of law and human rights when prosecuting the coup-plotters. Some criticisms were way beyond any reasonable limits; some in politics and media attacked us as if we had staged the coup!

We were surprised that our allies downplayed the severity of the coup when we lost so many innocent civilians, instead making accusations against the government about “witch hunts” and purges. We would have expected our European partners to stand by pro-democracy forces from the beginning. We expected an unequivocal condemnation of the coup attempt from the international community along with their support for our democratically elected government. Questioning Turkey’s EU accession bid right after a deadly coup attempt is utterly disrespectful to everyone who was severely affected by the events of July 15.

It does not make any sense to condemn the coup without taking action against the coup plotters. Our Western allies have condemned the coup but are yet to say anything about the putschists.

Q: President Erdogan has made clear that he would ratify a law bringing back capital punishment but Europe has responded that this would effectively end Turkey's EU orientation. How do you square this with the existing accession process? What are your thoughts on the idea?

A: Families lost their loved ones and people are demanding the restoration of the death penalty. Emotions are running high. It is falsely portrayed that the President put forth this idea, when in fact it was a bottom-up demand by the people.

It will be up to the Turkish Parliament to put this issue on the table and it is only the Parliament that is entitled to discuss the reinstatement of this punishment. Since it is a constitutional change, it necessitates the approval of a two-third majority of the Parliament, which means a wide compromise between the ruling party and the opposition parties.

Q: What do you think the role of Turkey's European partners should be in helping Turkey overcome this moment of crisis?

A: We expect all our European partners to stand firmly against this illegitimate coup attempt. We want to see our European partners stand by us in our rightful fight against terror threats.

We invite leaders and delegations from the EU and Europe to visit Turkey and show solidarity with the Turkish people. We invite them to come and see the places destroyed by the coup-plotters, like the Turkish Parliament, the Presidential Complex, headquarters of police forces, the National Intelligence Agency, and various media outlets. We invite them to join us in honoring our martyrs, visiting the wounded and talking to them first hand.

It is hard to believe that no EU head of state, minister or high-ranking official has visited Turkey since July 15. It is a shame that EU officials say one thing to condemn the coup and ten things to criticize the Turkish government for going after the Gulenist coup-plotters and their supporters in the armed forces, the police, the judiciary and other public sectors. On Sunday July 31, President Erdogan was barred from attending an anti-coup and pro-democracy rally in Cologne, Germany, via videoconference. Instead of supporting and participating in the rally, the German authorities sought to cancel it. I think the EU is losing its strategic outlook grip at multiple levels.

We also urge Europeans to understand the depth of the Fethullah Gulen threat in Turkey and its potential threat to regional and global stability. The Gulenist infiltration in the Turkish state has caused much harm and instability, resulting in the July 15 coup. Like the PKK, the Gulenists are abusing the legal and political system in Europe and the US for their own protection. While they present themselves as peaceful educators, their dark

side has become apparent even before the coup attempt. Their hand in the Ergenekon and Balyoz cases is well known now. Their tactics of illegal wiretappings, leaking of official documents, running smear campaigns against their opponents within the judiciary and security services, etc. are well known in Turkey. It is rather hard for us to understand how Europeans and Americans turn a blind eye to these facts.

The testimonies and evidence collected so far point to Fethullah Gulen as the prime suspect of the coup. In his testimony, Levent Turkkan, the aide-de-camp of Hulusi Akar, the army chief, confessed to being a member of the FETO organization and said that he executed orders given by his 'big brothers' (i.e., the Gulenist superiors). Hulusi Akar said that the coup generals who forced him to sign the coup declaration offered to have him speak to Fethullah Gulen directly. There are other documents such as prayer papers signed by Gulen that establish the Gulenist connection to the coup attempt. A team of seventy judges is leading the July 15 coup investigation. As evidence is collected, a clearer picture will emerge and we will share it with the public.

Q: The United States regards the request for the extradition of Gulen as a legal matter, but Turkey regards it as an existentially important political matter. You have laid out a case in the NYT. But beyond the extradition of Fethullah Gülen, what are your expectations of the U.S. government?

A: We are confident that the US government will collaborate with us on Gulen's extradition process. He is a national security threat for us here in Turkey and a dangerous criminal for the US. As the head of a terror network known as FETO, Gulen and his followers in the Turkish Armed Forces attempted to stage a coup. We need to bring them before justice in order to ensure our nations' security and wellbeing.

Fethullah Gulen's extradition is our priority but we also urge Americans to understand the magnitude and severity of what happened in Turkey. We would like to see their close cooperation in combating this terrorist organization. With this cooperation, our strategic partnership will be strengthened. Furthermore, Gulen is a Turkish citizen. Why should he become a source of tension between Turkey and the US?

Q: President Erdogan is heading to Russia on Aug 9. Many observers note that the failed coup attempt and the ensuing TR-US tensions would likely bring Ankara closer to Russia once again. Is this based on Russia's response to the coup? Are we talking about a new strategic alignment?

A: Russia is a critical partner. After the downing of a Russian jet, we experienced a turbulent period in our bilateral relations. Currently our relations have improved as both sides showed leadership and determination to put that period behind. We have several issues on the agenda. Both leaders will come together to discuss issues facing both sides, which makes the August 9 visit important. President Erdoğan and President Putin agreed on improving relations and set up the meeting before the coup attempt. We constantly pointed out the importance of developing relations with our neighboring countries. Russia is an important actor on both a regional and global level. We also appreciate President Putin's support for our government after the failed coup attempt.

## Democracy

Q: There are concerns about widespread purges within the bureaucracy – aimed at followers of Gulen but not necessarily people who took part in the coup attempt. How do you respond to allegations that Turkey is overreaching in the post-coup crackdown?

A: The current work is aimed at individuals who took part in orchestrating the coup attempt. The National Intelligence Agency has done extensive investigation on the suspects and their links to the coup-plotters. Among them are journalists and lawyers. Those who are not guilty will be free and those found guilty will face fair trial. As a matter of fact, a number of rank and file soldiers as well as civilians have been released after presenting their testimonies.

These harsh times taught us that we have to be vigilant and we can't leave room for mistakes. Democracy was under siege on July 15th and it was the people who rescued it. People from different political, religious, and ethnic backgrounds united for democracy, freedom and rule of law.

The leader behind the coup attempt, Fethullah Gulen, is constantly trying to give the message that people affiliated with the opposition are supporting him. This is a distortion of reality. Some also claim the “purges” are conducted against those who are against AK Party. This is simply false. The arrests are made against those who deliberately participated in and supported the coup plot. In fact, people from all different political backgrounds came together and voiced their support to sentence the coup-plotters to prison. Thousands of people gathered in Taksim for a rally led by the main opposition party CHP. Gulen does not have the support of the opposition or in fact any other group in Turkey. On July 26, CHP leader Kemal Kilicdaroglu also called for Gulen's extradition. A recent survey conducted by a respectable research company (Andy-Ar) showed that 77.7% of Turkish people said Gulen and his sympathizers constitute a threat to the present order and future of Turkey.

## Fethullah Gulen Network

Q: It is now evident that followers of Fethullah Gulen played a key role in the organization of the coup. Were they alone? Did they assume others within the military would join the effort – a false assumption that perhaps led to the failure of the coup?

A: All the evidence gathered so far show that FETO group within the military was behind the coup attempt. The current investigation underway will reveal the full picture about who did what and who ordered who before and during the coup. What is clear, however, is that it was planned and executed by Gulenist soldiers in the army, with support from others in the police, gendarmerie, the judiciary and the media. Most of them are either members of FETO or people with links to them. Some may have acted out of fear that if the Gulenists win, they will punish anyone who did not join them. This is a well-known tactic used by them.

Q: It is very difficult for Westerners to grasp the notion that there was a clandestine organization that infiltrated the state infrastructures and had sleeper cells who were activated at a moment like this. There are examples of this in movies but not in recent

European history. I imagine this complicates your efforts in explaining what happened to the outside world. People that I have spoken to find it difficult to believe that Gulenists were able to hide their identity all these years. How do you go about explaining all this?

A: I agree. We understand that this cultish and clandestine organization is hard to grasp from the outside. In its more cynical and dangerous aspects, the Gulenist movement is comparable to such Western cults as the Illuminati with its goal of placing its members within state institutions. As a typical Gulenist tactic of lying and dissimulation, the Gulenist deny that they have any members anywhere. They deny they own schools, companies, media outlets, banks, etc. If you ask them they don't even exist. But everybody knows that they are everywhere.

Its infiltration within the military and police forces was decoded and documented by numerous researchers and investigators including Hanefi Avcı, Ruşen Cakır, Mustafa Önsel, Ahmet Şık, Nedim Şener and others. There have been countless publications on this network.

As the military prosecutor Ahmet Zeki Üçok stated in his report following the coup attempt, this organization began infiltrating strategic institutions of the Turkish state in the 1980s. Secrecy is one of the core values of this organization. We were aware of the organization for some time but we had no concrete evidence to charge them until the first coup attempt in December 2013. Later on, the government, in collaboration with the Intelligence, gathered evidence that linked the Gulenists to the coup-plotters. In 2013 Gulenists were expelled from the judiciary and the police forces. It was not a coincidence that the military coup attempt took place before the Supreme Military Council (YAŞ). The YAŞ meeting was a critical date because, measures were going to be taken to clean out the rest of the Gulenists in the military.

In his numerous sermons addressed to his choice disciples, Gulen openly talks about infiltrating the state, “going into the arteries of the system”, hiding themselves, always giving the impression that they are right, likeable, humble, etc., standing by the law, and so on. They present themselves as an alternative to radical Islam and thus seek the support of Western governments and public. But in reality, they taint the name of Islam by introducing cultish beliefs about Fethullah Gulen, whose many followers take to be ‘Mahdi’, the Islamic version of the Messiah. Gulen uses a number of downright heretical notions to present himself as being in touch with the Prophet of Islam. He employs all these tactics to establish unquestioned authority over his followers. We saw what he did with that authority on July 15.

Q: Most people arrested for the coup are those that were promoted as a result of the purges during the military trials in 2009-2013. In retrospect, would you say the Sledgehammer, Ergenekon and perhaps other cases that were hailed as significant steps in strengthening civilian rule in Turkey ended up strengthening another form of anti-democratic control within the state?

A: Civil-military relations in the past have always been problematic in Turkey. With AK Party in power since 2002, the balance shifted in favor of the civilian control of the armed forces – a key cornerstone of democracy.

The Gulenists exploited this process to place their own members in the Turkish army. As a result, the Gulenist network consolidated power within the main organs of the state. They fabricated evidence and planted them in the offices of hundreds of generals and academics, framing them as “coup-plotters.” They were threatened by those who were working to reveal their organization. This did not happen overnight. These men have been infiltrating the state since the 1980s and they disguised themselves as civil servants. Today, their real identity is exposed.