

Washington and Brussels step up pressure on Turkey

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Washington and Europe have stepped up their pressure on the Erdogan government following the failed July 15 coup in Turkey. To this end they are using the wave of arrests of army personnel and judges by the Turkish government in the immediate aftermath of the coup attempt.

US Secretary of State John Kerry indirectly warned Turkey of losing its NATO membership. “NATO also has a requirement with respect to democracy and NATO will indeed measure very carefully what is happening,” Kerry told journalists in Brussels on Monday.

Previously, European Union foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini had warned Turkey against reinstating the death penalty for those alleged to be responsible for the coup, insisting countries that applied the death penalty could not be EU members.

The German government also warned Turkey not to take “disproportionate measures” after the failed coup. “Germany and the EU have a clear position: we categorically oppose the death penalty,” declared government spokesman Steffen Seibert in Berlin. “The introduction of the death penalty in Turkey would therefore mean the end of EU accession negotiations.”

Prior to a meeting with their EU counterparts, the foreign ministers of Austria and Luxembourg, Sebastian Kurz and Jean Asselborn, also warned Turkey against authoritarian measures and the reintroduction of the death penalty. “There must be no arbitrary purges, no criminal sanctions outside the constitutional framework and the judiciary,” Kurz said in an interview with the newspaper *Kurier*.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has repeated his call for the extradition of Islamic preacher Fethullah Gülen. Gülen lives in the US and has been accused by Erdogan of being behind the coup. Erdogan

said he would formally request the extradition of Gülen and submit evidence on his role in the coup attempt.

At the same time, the wave of purges launched in Turkey has aggravated social and political tensions. On Monday, the Turkish Interior Ministry suspended 8,777 persons, including 7,899 police officers and 614 gendarmerie officers, along with 30 provincial and 47 district governors. The move came a day after the Ankara Chief Public Prosecutor’s Office issued arrest warrants for some 2,750 judges accused of links to the “Fethullah Terrorist Organization” (FETO), named after Gülen.

Speaking to the state-run broadcaster TRT on Sunday, Turkish Justice Minister Bekir Bozdag said that more than 6,000 people, including some 3,000 military personnel and dozens of high-ranking generals, had been arrested for alleged links to the failed coup.

Within the last two days, 103 generals and admirals have been detained across Turkey, while investigations at various military headquarters, including the Incirlik airbase, continue. The ongoing purge and prosecution of thousands of military, security and judiciary officials will be, in the words of the Turkish justice minister, “the most extensive case ever seen in Turkey’s history.”

Speaking Sunday at a funeral for people killed in the coup attempt, Erdogan vowed that his government would “continue to cleanse the state institutions of all these viruses [i.e., FETO members].” He said, “Since yesterday, the judiciary has been cleansed of these elements. They have been put in custody—dismissed and imprisoned. This was necessary, but that is not enough.”

By Tuesday, an estimated 50,000 public servants were estimated to have been either arrested or sacked, including over 15,000 teachers.

The ongoing purge and arrests have failed, however, to calm the tense situation. Rather, they have served to intensify conflicts within the state apparatus. Thus, the Turkish president instructed military combat planes to conduct patrols across Turkey, and the Istanbul Security General Directorate ordered its forces to shoot down any unidentified helicopters without warning.

The scale of ongoing operations, the number of suspended and arrested people, and the elevated positions of many of those arrested, especially in the military, belie the claims that the failed coup was a desperate “kamikaze” action organised by a small minority within the military.

Erdogan has not limited himself to government agencies in his purge of political opponents from the state apparatus. His government has mobilised tens of thousands of Islamist militants, mainly members of the pro-AKP Ottoman Societies, within the larger mass of AKP voters who took to the streets against the attempted coup following Erdogan’s call early Saturday morning.

After preventing large sections of the population from taking part in anti-coup demonstrations, these Islamist mobs are increasingly directing their attacks against AKP opponents. Hundreds of Islamist demonstrators in Istanbul vandalised the central office of a local newspaper and blocked the main entrance of a barracks while shouting jihadist and religious slogans.

Similar reactionary forces are active in other cities. In an attempt to provoke sectarian conflicts, Sunni Islamist mobs have gathered in largely Alawite-populated neighbourhoods in the eastern province of Malatya, shouting pro-AKP and Sunni Islamist slogans.

It was this angry religious mob that provided Erdogan and his government the opportunity to initiate a debate on reinstating capital punishment. Their demands for reinstating the death penalty to punish coup plotters were positively answered by Prime Minister Binali Yildirim on July 15. Yildirim declared that his government could not remain indifferent to such demands.

Three days later, he repeated this view, saying, “People on the streets are chanting for ‘capital punishment’... Our citizens’ demand is an order for us... Our parliament will consider the issue. We will act in line with public opinion.”

Yildirim’s remarks came after Erdogan vowed on

July 17 that Turkey would consider reinstating the death penalty. “In democracies, decisions are made based on what the people say. I think our government will speak with the opposition and come to a decision,” he said.

Turkey abolished the death penalty in 2004 as part of reforms aimed at obtaining European Union membership.



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