

Massive police operation for pro-Erdogan demonstration in Cologne

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Less than two weeks ago police and security forces were mobilised in Munich in a huge emergency and civil war exercise following a terror attack by an 18-year-old youth. That mobilisation has now been followed by a massive police deployment Sunday in the city of Cologne for a Turkish demonstration.

Under the slogan “Yes to democracy, No to the coup,” the Union of European Turkish Democrats (UETD), which has close links to the ruling AKP party in Ankara, had called a mass rally to oppose the attempted military coup in Turkey two weeks ago.

Turkey’s president, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, had narrowly escaped assassination on July 15 during the coup attempt. Two-hundred-sixty-five people died in the coup and evidence indicates that not only the US, but also the German government had reckoned with the success of the coup. Since then Erdogan has seized the opportunity to neutralise his opponents in the state apparatus and army and consolidate his power with dictatorial measures.

As soon as the rally was announced, politicians of all parties in Germany spoke out against it. Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier (Social Democratic Party, SPD) warned participants against “transferring domestic tension from Turkey to Germany,” and told the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*: “Intimidating people with different political beliefs from whatever quarter, is unacceptable, and we will not permit it.”

In similar vein, the SPD chairman Sigmar Gabriel declared on Facebook in German and Turkish that expressions of social divisions in Turkey could not be tolerated in Germany. Earlier this year, the very same Gabriel praised the hangman of Cairo at a press conference in the Egyptian capital as an “impressive president.” Gabriel favours close economic cooperation with the Egyptian despot, General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi.

But with respect to Turkey, Germany is adopting a different tack.

Christian Democratic Union (CDU) General Secretary Peter Tauber told *Welt am Sonntag*: “Whoever applauds the dismantling of Turkish democracy has nothing in common with our constitution.” Prior to the demonstration, Green Party leader Cem Özdemir warned that any rally in Germany, for or against the Turkish leadership, must be based “on the principles of our legal system.”

The Left Party adopted a particularly aggressive stance. Sevim Dağdelen, the representative of the Left Party on the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Bundestag, demanded that Chancellor Angela Merkel be firmer in her dealings with Erdogan and told the online newspaper *n-tv.de* on July 24: “Erdogan’s program is civil war. ... I think the federal government must take a hard line, and that means: Not a cent more for Erdogan’s rampage against democracy and the rule of law. ... We need sanctions against Erdogan, a travel ban and a freezing of his accounts.”

In the German media, the Cologne rally in support of the Turkish president was presented as a provocation, which would inevitably end in violence. The city administration and police tried initially to ban the rally completely, and then insisted on restrictive conditions.

No less than five counter-demonstrations were allowed. The fascist ProNRW announced a march through the city centre of Cologne with the slogan: “No tribute for Erdogan in Germany, stop the Islamist autocrats from Bosphorus.” Its demonstration was planned to pass directly by the Turkish rally and had been approved by the Administrative Court in Cologne and opposed the motion by the city’s chief of police.

The Young Socialists, Left Youth, Green Youth and JuLi (the youth organisations of the SPD, the Left

Party, the Greens and the neo-liberal FDP, respectively) organized their own rally “For democracy and human, rights” under the slogan “Stop Erdogan’s madness.”

At the same time as the Cologne Administrative Court approved the provocative rally of ProNRW despite police concerns, it banned a live video link to allow Erdogan to speak to the rally in Cologne. This then led to a fierce legal dispute.

Police had initially prohibited both the use of video screens and the transmission of speeches by Turkish government members. This ban was then confirmed by the Administrative Court, which limited the use of video screens to speakers on the spot. For their part, the rally organizers requested the Constitutional Court to issue a temporary injunction.

On Saturday night this claim was unanimously denied by the 3rd Chamber of the First Senate. The brief two paragraph-long justification of the Constitutional Court read: a “constitutional complaint on the same matter” would have “obviously no prospect of success.” There was “no evidence that the contested decisions have violated the basic rights of the applicant.”

The Turkish government protested strongly against the decision and accused the Federal Constitutional Court of violating the basic right of free speech and assembly. In fact, the ruling has far-reaching significance. Germany’s post-war Basic Law Article 5, Section 1 explicitly defends the right to free speech and assembly and forbids the forms of censorship that prevailed under the Nazi dictatorship.

Special broadcasts and live blogs reported all day Sunday on the police operation in Cologne. A huge police contingent was mobilised in the cathedral city. The central Deutz bridge was completely blocked for several hours with water cannon and other armoured vehicles situated at both ends of the bridge. More than 2,800 police officers were deployed, according to the mayor of Cologne Henriette Reker (Independent). Eight water cannon and numerous other vehicles were in use, including a police helicopter.

In the event, the rally of about 40,000 Erdogan supporters passed without incident and resembled a festival involving many families with their children. This was largely due to the prudent response of the Turkish organisers who accepted all the legal restrictions and then read out a written message from Erdogan at the end of the rally—to great applause. When

a group of fanatical Erdogan supporters began calling out for the “death penalty,” politicians on the stage demanded they stop.

A minute’s silence was held not only for the victims of the attempted coup of July 15, but also for the victims of the terrorist attacks in Paris and Nice and the school shooting in Munich.

Despite the peaceful nature of the rally, Mayor Reker called for a “broad discussion” on the issue of limiting the right to demonstrate. She had received “countless letters, emails and phone calls from concerned citizens.” The mayor declared, “I understand their concerns very well and take them very seriously” and promised to raise the issue in the city parliament and other forums.



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