

# What is behind the campaign against Erdogan?

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Since the failed military coup in mid July, the drumbeat against Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has been incessant. Leading German politicians are demanding firm measures against the Turkish government and the break-off of accession talks to the European Union. The Left Party and Green Party are demanding economic sanctions against Ankara, and the mainstream media are agitating against the “Sultan of the Bosphorus,” as the *Bild* newspaper calls Erdogan.

At the same time, information is mounting about the involvement of the United States and potentially other countries in the attempted coup. The media campaign makes clear that the governments in Washington, Berlin and other NATO capitals have not accepted that the coup failed. They are preparing the next stage of the regime change operation in Turkey.

Erdogan responded to the failed coup with the adoption of authoritarian measures. He has sacked or arrested tens of thousands of public servants whom he has described as traitors or opponents, and he is seeking to strengthen his personal power. The current media outcry, however, is not concerned with the defence of democracy in Turkey. In reality, an elected government is to be removed from office because it is an impediment to the war plans of Washington and Berlin.

The situation strongly recalls the Ukrainian crisis in the winter of 2013/14. The then president in Kiev, Victor Yanukovich, was an ally of Moscow and an obstacle to NATO’s encirclement of Russia. When he refused in November 2013 to sign an Association Agreement with the EU, the media initiated a fierce campaign against the “undemocratic and corrupt” regime in Kiev. In reality, the main concerns were the restriction of Russia’s sphere of influence and the expansion of NATO’s territory to Russia’s western border.

The United States and Germany systematically promoted the pro-EU opposition, which organised the

demonstrations against Yanukovich. They not only based themselves on right-wing oligarchs like Julia Timoshenko, but also on openly fascist parties such as Svoboda and the paramilitary militia, Right Sector.

Reliant on these forces, they organised a coup and brought an oligarchic regime to power led by Poroshenko and Yatsenyuk, which plunged the east of the country into civil war, and fueled the danger of war with Russia. It has since collaborated closely with Washington and the EU. The social and political conditions of the Ukrainian population have worsened dramatically.

It is now Turkey’s turn. Erdogan’s nationalist politics, with which he aims to consolidate his right-wing, Islamist regime, has previously resulted in tensions with Berlin and Washington. In 2003, Ankara refused to allow the US to attack Iraq from Turkish territory. In 2010, it opposed US efforts to secure UN sanctions against Iran. And in 2013, it shocked the US and NATO by announcing its intention to purchase a Chinese missile defence system.

Relations deteriorated further with the war in Syria. Turkey continued to rely upon the Islamic State militia to overthrow the Syrian regime, when the US had already carried out an about face and begun bombarding IS. While Washington closely cooperated with Kurdish militias in Syria, which are aligned with the PKK, Ankara feared strengthening the Kurds and attacked them politically and militarily.

In Germany there was opposition, primarily from right-wing circles, to the deal on refugees negotiated by Chancellor Merkel in the name of the EU with the Erdogan regime. The concern was that too great a reliance on Ankara could prove an obstacle to the increasingly aggressive pursuit of German interests in the Middle East. When in May, Erdogan removed Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu, who was seen as a guarantor of close relations with the EU, there was outrage in Berlin.

When Erdogan then apologised at the end of June in

Moscow for the downing of a Russian fighter jet last November, initiated close ties with Russia and hinted that he could improve his stance towards Iran and the Syrian government, alarm bells rang in Washington.

American imperialism is not prepared to accept such a strategic reorientation in the region, and Washington has therefore been stepping up pressure on Ankara since the failed coup.

The German government supports the US government's actions, but is pursuing its own aims.

This is why an attempt to militarily overthrow the government by NATO's second largest army, which has close ties to the US and German armed forces, did not produce any serious protests. On the contrary, in the wake of the failed coup, pressure from all sides increased against the Turkish government, which only narrowly avoided the attempted overthrow.

Washington and Berlin have evidently not given up their plans for a regime change operation.

When 40,000 Turkish people living in Germany gathered for a rally in Cologne last Sunday to celebrate the defeat of the coup, no German politician was prepared to speak. Instead, proposals were initially floated to cancel the rally on security grounds. It was ultimately allowed to proceed, under a major security build-up.

President Erdogan, who only narrowly escaped with his life during the coup, was not permitted to deliver a video message to the participants. The German Constitutional Court, which normally takes months to issue rulings, dismissed an application from the event organisers in an emergency session. Prior to this, the Superior Administrative Court in Münster arbitrarily ruled that the constitutional right to assembly did not permit any involvement by speakers from abroad.

The political hostility to a rally explicitly directed against a military coup was significant. There were five counter-demonstrations, ranging from one organised by the far right to another by a coalition of the youth organisations of the Social Democrats, Greens, Left Party and free market FDP under the slogan "Stop Erdogan." All of them protested against an elected government which had just survived an attempted coup.

The campaign against the Turkish government has continued. It involves not only the traditional right-wing papers *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, *Die Welt* and *Bild*, but also the formerly more moderate *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, *Frankfurter Rundschau* and *taz*. Above all, representatives of the Greens and Left Party are seeking to outdo each other with poisonous tirades against the

Turkish president.

Characteristic is an article by Claus Staeck entitled "Turkey: professional counter-coup" in the *Frankfurter Rundschau*. The SPD functionary and graphic designer, who produced election posters for Willy Brandt in the 1970s and was president of the Academy of Arts in Berlin until a year ago, raged against Erdogan.

Complaining about the failure of the coup and describing its leaders flatteringly as rebels, Staeck wrote, "Without investigating the rebels' motives, the Erdogan regime immediately received the guaranteed solidarity of the free world from the media and politicians: stability and NATO were at risk. As if, amid all the outcry about values there was anything left to defend in, or with Turkey." Then he stated that the struggle against the military was preparing the road to dictatorship.

Staeck speaks on behalf of a privileged layer of the cultural elite, which with the return of German militarism has rushed, with its human rights bombast, into the camp of imperialist great power politics.

A particularly prominent role in this army of human rights imperialism is played by the Left Party. Its representative on the parliamentary foreign affairs committee, Sevim Dagdelen, demanded that Chancellor Merkel use "more firmness" against Erdogan. Concerning the rally on Sunday in Cologne, she told the *Neue Osnabrücker Zeitung* that there should "not only be a ban on video links. We finally need sanctions against Erdogan due to his brutal repressive policies of torture and mass detention. His bank accounts must be blocked."

The chairwoman of the Greens' parliamentary group, Katrin Göring-Eckardt, called on the EU no longer to be blackmailed by Turkey. The "orgy of violence by Erdogan against democracy and the constitutional state" had to stop immediately, she said.



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