

France recalls ambassador to Turkey over Turkish criticisms of law on Islam

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Yesterday, the French Foreign Ministry announced that French Ambassador to Turkey Hervé Magro will be recalled to Paris for consultations over Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's criticisms of French President Emmanuel Macron.

This exchange between two NATO member states points to the tensions tearing apart the trans-Atlantic alliance. The recalling of an ambassador is the most serious diplomatic gesture that can be taken between states short of a complete breakdown of diplomatic relations and war. It comes as French and Turkish proxy forces wage war against each other in a broad arc of conflicts from Libya to the eastern Mediterranean, Syria and the Armenian-Azeri war in the Caucasus.

Erdoğan criticized Macron's planned "anti-separatist law," the far-right proposal of Prime Minister Jean Castex's new government, which would establish state control over Islam in France and impose oaths of loyalty to the state on political and social organizations. The draconian law would trample upon France's 1905 secularism law, which forbids state interference in religious life. Amid an explosive resurgence of COVID-19 in France, officials are stirring up anti-Muslim and anti-Semitic hatred, denouncing halal and kosher foods in supermarkets.

In the midst of public debate over this reactionary legislation, a young Chechen Islamist brutally murdered a school teacher, Samuel Paty, in Conflans-Sainte-Honorine for showing obscene caricatures of the prophet Mohamed to a class to discuss freedom of expression.

As calls for boycotts of French goods spread from Kuwait to Qatar and across the Muslim world, Erdoğan publicly criticized Macron. "What is the problem this individual called Macron has with Islam and with the Muslims?" Erdoğan asked during a speech in the central Turkish city of Kayseri on Saturday. "Macron needs mental treatment... What else can be said to a head of

state who does not understand freedom of belief and who behaves in this way to millions of people living in his country who are members of a different faith?"

Erdoğan also implied that Macron, who is bitterly unpopular for his anti-worker social policies and his "herd immunity" policies in the COVID-19 pandemic, would lose the 2022 elections. He said, "You are constantly picking on Erdoğan. This will not earn you anything. There will be... We will see your fate." Speaking of Macron, Erdoğan added, "I don't think he has a long way to go. Why? He has not achieved anything for France, and he should do for himself."

On Twitter, Turkish government spokesman Fahrettin Altun also criticized the Macron administration's "anti-separatist" law, writing: "This is about intimidating Muslims and reminding them that they are welcome to continue to make Europe's economy work, but that they will never be a part of it." Altun added that this policy is "eerily familiar," noting that it recalls "the demonizing of European Jews in the 1920s."

French officials immediately declared that these statements could not be tolerated and would provoke a harsh response. "President Erdogan's comments are unacceptable. Outrage and insult are not a method," staff of the Elysée presidential palace told AFP.

Yesterday, the French Foreign Ministry published a communiqué claiming: "In the absence of any official token of condemnation or solidarity from the Turkish authorities after the terrorist attack in Conflans-Sainte-Honorine now comes hateful and slanderous propaganda against France in recent days, expressing a will to stir hatred against us and in our midst, as well as direct insults against the president of the French Republic, expressed from the highest level of the Turkish State. This conduct is unacceptable, especially from an allied nation. The French ambassador to Turkey has been recalled and is returning to France this Sunday 25 October 2020 for

consultations.”

France’s junior minister for European affairs, Clément Beaune, also denounced Ankara. “It is very serious so we are responding with a very serious gesture, we are recalling our ambassador for consultations. This is very rare,” Beaune said. He attacked Turkey’s “provocative, aggressive, offensive political strategy” against French-backed forces: Greece in the eastern Mediterranean gas conflict, the Libyan National Army in the Libyan civil war, Kurdish nationalist militias in Syria, and Armenia. He pledged to deploy more French warships to waters off Turkey’s coast.

Again asserting that Turkey had made “no official reaction” to the Conflans-Sainte-Honorine murder, Beaune all but blamed Ankara for the killing. “We believe that Mr. Erdoğan represented a moderate form of political Islam. But there is no such thing as political Islam with a human face.” He said the European Union might adopt stricter economic sanctions to strangle Turkey’s economy.

In fact, the accusations of the French Foreign Ministry and Beaune against Turkey are false. Astonishingly, in their haste to recall their ambassador, none of the French officials noticed that Turkish officials had officially condemned Paty’s murder.

On October 17, the day after the killing, Turkish Ambassador to France Ismail Hakki Musa tweeted in French: “I’m horrified by the appalling murder of a teacher in Conflans-Sainte-Honorine. Nothing can justify this. My condolences to his family.” The Turkish Foreign Ministry issued a statement recalling this yesterday and stressing again that it was “saddened by the murder of Samuel Paty.”

For now, however, it appears that Macron will nevertheless follow through and recall Magro from Ankara to Paris for consultations.

Macron’s decision to withdraw France’s ambassador, effectively threatening to cut off diplomatic relations and work to encircle Turkey militarily, is a reactionary provocation. After three decades of imperialist war since the Stalinist bureaucracy’s dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, the entire Mediterranean-Middle East-Central Asian region is a powder keg. The region has teetered on the brink of all-out war throughout 2020, and these conflicts are now intersecting with toxic internal conflicts in Europe bound up with the bourgeoisie’s “herd immunity policy” on COVID-19.

Amid a rapid resurgence in Europe of the pandemic, with France logging over 52,000 cases yesterday, Macron

is doubling down on nationalist appeals to anti-Muslim, law-and-order hysteria. While Interior Minister Gérald Darmanin has stressed his respect for neo-fascist presidential candidate Marine Le Pen and called for banning Muslim community organizations, he is spearheading denunciations of kosher and halal foods taken straight from the political arsenal of the far right.

Erdoğan’s populist posturing as a defender of Muslims is undoubtedly hypocritical. The Turkish bourgeoisie is, in fact, an accomplice in the imperialist plunder of the Middle East, having supported NATO proxy wars waged by CIA-backed Islamist militias in both Libya and Syria and provided its territory as a NATO base for military operations across the region. Its policies on the COVID-19 pandemic have also been disastrous. However, French officials’ attacks on Erdoğan’s statements are false and have dangerous implications for democratic rights.

Millions in France are appalled by Macron’s disastrous handling of the pandemic, his savage police repression of workers’ protests, and unabashed appeals to political racism and neo-fascism from top administration officials. Macron himself is perhaps France’s most widely hated president. Yet a press campaign is unfolding denouncing all criticism of Macron’s law as “Islamism,” effectively equating opposition to Macron with support for terrorism.

The way forward is a rejection of attempts to divide the working class with appeals to religious and ethnic hatreds, and the unification of the working class and youth in struggle against imperialist war, “herd immunity” policies and far-right attacks on democratic rights.



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