

## From purges to a ‘new Turkey’ – the final stage of the state’s reconstruction

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The purges in the state apparatus which have been underway in Turkey since the failed military coup represent a decisive stage in the construction of a ‘new Turkey’, involving both the final elimination of the remaining elements of the old Kemalist establishment and the crackdown on the group centred around Fethullah Gülen, a preacher and former government ally accused of plotting the coup. The authorities view him as the greatest threat. In a broader context, the aim of the purges is to ultimately replace the present elites with new ones. This may lead to the elimination of any conceivable opposition capable of threatening the rule of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan.

The interim measures taken by the authorities involve the elimination of their enemies and the strengthening of both the President’s rule and his personal control of key institutions (the announced constitutional reform and the introduction of a presidential system will seal the change which is happening right now). As a result of the purges, a unique revolution in personnel is taking place. The dismissed officials are being replaced with those who benefited from the period of government of the Justice and Development Party (AKP), which lasted more than a decade, and with representatives of the old republican elites who are expected to contribute to the creation of the new order. They are considered necessary for maintaining the continuity of the functioning of public institutions. The scale and momentum of this replacement, as well as its institutional backbone, suggest that this is a revolutionary process which will lead to the emergence of a new political order.

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### Fethullah Gülen – public enemy number one

The attempted coup of 15 July 2016 was carried out as a military coup. The army had until then been considered one of the major forces able to threaten Erdoğan and a potential alternative to his rule. However, these events have become a pretext for the authorities to carry out the ultimate crackdown on the Fethullah Gülen movement – a group the authorities consider their most dangerous opponent (see Appendix). The true scale of Gülen’s influence in the Turkish military is difficult to ascertain, even though he might have played a part in plotting the coup.

The authorities have used the attempt to overthrow the government to ultimately discredit and eliminate whatever influence the charismatic preacher holds within state structures. The purges, which have been underway since the coup attempt across the entire state apparatus, are a continuation<sup>1</sup> of the campaign tar-

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<sup>1</sup> Until 2013, Fethullah Gülen used to be Erdoğan’s main ally. In December 2013, a rift occurred between the government and the movement, resulting from a corruption scandal involving four ministers and Erdoğan’s closest collaborators. Since then, the movement has been viewed as a ‘parallel state’, aiming to overthrow the democratically elected government. For more see Dexter Filkins, Turkey’s Thirty-Year Coup, *New Yorker*, 17 October 2016, <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/10/17/turkeys-thirty-year-coup>

getting the group centred around Gülen, which has been ongoing for several months now. Actions by the authorities directed at Gülen's supporters, of which the precise numbers of those who infiltrated the state apparatus are difficult to estimate, have reached unprecedented proportions in the history of the modern Turkish

**Although the attempted coup was a military coup, the purges are directed at the Gülen movement, considered by the authorities to be the greatest threat.**

state. One of the main reasons for the purges being on such a large scale seems to be the amorphous nature of the Gülen movement (no formal membership structure, non-homogeneous social base, non-transparent mechanism of personal, financial and political connections) and its massive reach (the number of active members across the world is estimated at 3–6 million<sup>2</sup>, including around 1 million in Turkey<sup>3</sup> alone).

The purges took the form of a series of measures carried out on a mass scale and having a pre-emptive nature. By 5 November 2016, more than 34,000 people had been arrested, more than 105,000 civil servants had been dismissed and 3,600 judges and public prosecutors had been removed from their posts. Most of the individuals affected by repressive measures are accused of supporting the organisers of the coup. Other areas of the state apparatus covered by the repressive measures include: the education sector (more than 6,000 academics and 20,000 teachers were dismissed, more than 2,000 educational institutions having been closed down) and the media (in all, 186

newspapers, TV stations, web portals etc. were closed down; 142 journalists were arrested)<sup>4</sup>. Up until now, both the education sector and the media had been the target of particularly intensive actions by the Gülen movement – the confrontation in this field between the government and the movement began in 2013. Over the following years, educational institutions offering private follow-up courses for prospective students (the so-called *dershane*) were closed down and media holdings associated with the movement were gradually taken over. These included daily newspapers and TV stations (the biggest of them being *Koza Ipek* and *Feza Gazetecilik*, taken over in October 2015 and in March 2016, respectively).

The failed coup served merely as a catalyst or even a pretext for the authorities to carry out a final crackdown on the movement. The government began to view the movement as an extreme threat back in December 2013<sup>5</sup>. The reason for this was its mass-scale nature and the fact that its goal involved educating new Muslim elites and transforming the Turkish state and society in a process referred to as the “long march”. This was also the reason behind the large presence of Gülen's supporters in various state structures. Due to the movement's amorphous nature the authorities decided to eliminate its members in a large-scale campaign and to simultaneously launch repressive measures against individuals who were merely suspected of having ties to the group considered hostile towards the government. To illustrate the scale of abuse associated with the purges it is sufficient to quote the fact that since the coup attempt the Constitutional Court (from which two judges were removed in the purge campaign) received more than 40,000 complaints (which

<sup>2</sup> Murat Bilginan, Everything you've ever wanted to know about Fethullah Gulen, Turkey's most controversial cleric, *Al-Monitor*, 19 April 2016, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2016/04/turkey-fethullah-gulen-cleric-opposition-erdogan-akp.html>

<sup>3</sup> Maciej Kochanowicz, Turcja. Gülen i Erdogan. Kruk krakowi oko wykole, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 6 August 2016.

<sup>4</sup> Data after the analysis prepared by the authors of the website [turkeypurge.com](http://turkeypurge.com), updated every two weeks. The numbers quoted refer to the situation as on 5 November 2016. See <http://turkeypurge.com/>

<sup>5</sup> Marek Matusiak, Turkey: former allies in conflict, *OSW Analyses*, 8 January 2014, <https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2014-01-08/turkey-former-allies-conflict>

was considerably more than the average annual number of complaints estimated at 20,000<sup>6</sup>.

## The army is cornered

One of the most significant consequences of the failed military coup involves actions by the government directed at the army. The thwarting of the attempt to overthrow the government by the supporters of the authorities has revealed the lack of homogeneity within the military, the lack of public support, and the ultimate reversal of the system which had hitherto operated since the beginning of the Turkish Republic. In this system, it was precisely the military that served as the conciliation force in Turkish politics. Despite this, the relations between the government and the army remain tense and it seems that the authorities continue to view the army, which they depend upon, as a threat.

**According to military officials, the mid-July events were directed equally at the armed forces and at the government.**

Immediately after the coup, 30% of the generals and admirals were dismissed and 15,000 servicemen were arrested. Until recently, in his policy Erdoğan strove to build influence within the army by stepping up his control of it and carrying out personnel reshuffles. The President had limited opportunities to influence a change in the ideology prevalent within the army. En masse, the army remains largely secular and nationalist. Moreover, the military leaders continue to nurture the feeling that they are the main guardians of the heritage of the Kemalist republic.

The purges carried out by the authorities have significantly strengthened the position of the

government versus the army. At the same time, they have enabled the army to smoothly transform to a new order which is being shaped anew (and under control of the authorities). A dramatic decline in the army's prestige has become the main reason for servicemen to express their loyalty to the government and to consent to the unprecedented increase in civilian control over the armed forces.

Both sides have acted in an extremely cautious manner. In the current situation, it may be stated that the government's actions are aimed at encircling an enemy which continues to be dangerous. The army continues to be a hermetic and a relatively homogeneous structure in terms of ideology. However, its image has eroded dramatically, which is why its representatives interpret the events that happened in mid-July as directed at the government and at the armed forces equally<sup>7</sup>. In this way, the army is demonstrating its loyalty to the government and is involved in active cooperation with it, as proved by the participation of Turkish troops in Operation Euphrates Shield in northern Syria and their readiness to get involved in operations in Mosul. Erdoğan, for his part, cannot be sure of the army's loyalty, and, according to some reports, he sees another coup attempt by representatives of the military as a real threat<sup>8</sup>. In this configuration, the strengthening of the government's position is progressing in the following manner: aside from their participation in the operation targeting the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which has been ongoing since July 2015 in the south-eastern part of the country, the armed forces are involved in the operation in Syria and some troops are being relocated to the

<sup>6</sup> Constitutional Court receives over 40,000 individual petitions since coup attempt, 17 October 2016, <https://www.turkishminute.com/2016/10/17/constitutional-court-receives-40000-individual-petitions-since-coup-attempt/>

<sup>7</sup> Cf. the statement by former head of General Staff İlker Başbuğ, sentenced in one of the show trials, later released from prison when cooperation between Erdoğan and Gülen ended. Başbuğ: Bunu yapanlar asker değil, terörist, *Diken*, 17 July 2016, <http://www.diken.com.tr/eski-genelkurmay-baskani-basbug-darbeyi-yapanlar-asker-degil-terorist/>

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Kadri Gürsel, Musul'u almak için savaşa mı gidiyoruz?, *Cumhuriyet*, 7 October 2016, <http://kadirgursel.com/Musul-almak-icin-savasa-mi-gidiyoruz/7206>

border with Iraq. Alongside this, the army is being treated as an essential partner, which by its involvement in these operations can save its deteriorating image, avoid a deep reorganisation and the threat of losing its privileges and take part in the shaping of the new political order.

**The reconstruction of the state is to involve increased coordination of state institutions, while the intelligence service is to be transformed into a unique ‘command centre’.**

The army command has consented to further actions aimed at fully subordinating the armed forces to civilian government – the General Staff will be controlled by the President, the command of specific forces will be taken over by the Ministry of Defence, secondary military schools will be closed down. Moreover, the generals have allowed the graduates of *imam-hatip* schools (officially, secular general secondary schools albeit with an advanced religion curriculum, which educate future imams and hatips, i.e. preachers in mosques<sup>9</sup>) to join the army. Military academies for their part will be taken over by the Ministry of Education. These are unprecedented measures to which the generals have consented in exchange for restoring and promoting to the rank of general those colonels who were sentenced in the show court trials, Balyoz and Ergenekon (as a result of these trials, held in 2008–2012, several hundred officers were expelled and sentenced – see Appendix). Owing to the recent series of reshuffles in the army, ten colonels sentenced in the above-mentioned trials were promoted to the rank of general and appointed members of the Supreme Military Council. Among the promoted officers

<sup>9</sup> This move can be considered a fundamental change. The authorities had tried to achieve this long before the coup, although they always met with major resistance. Cf. Gonul Tol, Turkey’s Next Military Coup, *Foreign Affairs*, 30 May 2016, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2016-05-30/turkeys-next-military-coup>

there are individuals stemming from the radical Kemalist wing of the army, which supports the Eurasian re-orientation in Turkish foreign policy<sup>10</sup>. The Turkish army also includes pro-Russian and anti-Western groups influenced by the ideology of Neoeurasianism that is promoted in Turkey by groups associated with the Patriotic Party (Vatan Partisi), whose ideology is a combination of Kemalism, secular nationalism and geopolitical concepts devised by Russian ideologist Aleksandr Dugin<sup>11</sup>. Due to the alliance established on the initiative of the government, this group is gaining prominence at the expense of the officers educated in the West. Despite various gestures of unity and loyalty, mutual distrust between the army and the government continues to exist. Given the fact that both forces remain in fundamental ideological opposition, this cooperation should be viewed as strictly temporary.

### **The intelligence service – the key to ruling the new Turkey**

Due to the fact that Erdoğan can only depend on the army to a limited extent, the position of the National Intelligence Organisation (Turkish: *Milli İstihbarat Teşkilatı* – MIT) has been strengthened in recent months. The head of intelligence, Hakan Fidan, has long been considered one of the President’s favourites and his institution enjoys the President’s extraordinary trust. It is being seen as key to building the new state order. Therefore, the actions carried out in recent months have led to a significant strengthening of the intelligence service.

For this to be possible, two other departments (supplementing the existing four) have been established in the intelligence structures, with their

<sup>10</sup> Gonul Tol, Omer Taspinar, Erdogan’s Turn to the Kemalists, *Foreign Affairs*, 27 October 2016, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/turkey/2016-10-27/erdogans-turn-kemalists?cid=soc-tw-rdr>

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Sezin Öney, 15 Temmuz Sonrası Türkiye’nin Yeni “Normal”i, *Birikim Dergisi*, 4 August 2016, <http://www.birikimdergisi.com/haftalik/7834/15-temmuz-sonrasi-turkiye-nin-yeni-normal-i#.WCsu0Mm2pMw>

heads occupying the rank of undersecretaries of state. The first new department is intended to coordinate cooperation between various state institutions, while the other is a department for special operations, mainly those carried out abroad with the involvement of the army<sup>12</sup>.

The motivation behind the actions targeting the MIT stems from the assumption adopted by the authorities according to which the ongoing institutional reconstruction of the state is to be based on increased coordination of specific state institutions (mainly the office of the President and the government) and their close cooperation with the intelligence service. To achieve this, the authorities have been striving to open channels of communication between these institutions. The MIT for its part is to be transformed into a unique 'command centre'.

**The dismissed officials are being replaced with individuals who so far have not been closely linked to Islamic conservative groups.**

The transformation described above is connected with the emerging defence doctrine, which provides for carrying out pre-emptive and preventive strikes abroad. According to this assumption, threats to domestic security may come equally from inside Turkey and from abroad<sup>13</sup>. In the situation where the government is forced to cooperate with the military, the MIT is becoming the main institution on which the president's power is to be based. In the context of its expansion and enlargement of competences, it can be concluded that the

intelligence service is becoming the key actor in both domestic and foreign policy. As such, it is expected to follow the policy of a unique 'escape into the future' that Erdoğan has pursued for some time now.

### **The police and the judiciary – continuation of the former situation**

Aside from the actions carried out in key institutions, including the army and the intelligence service, the government in Ankara has gradually stepped up its control of the judiciary and the police. The purges that have been underway in these two institutions since July can be seen as a continuation of the crackdown which had started long before the attempted coup. In the present situation, the measures taken by the authorities have reached considerable proportions. The personnel reshuffle also entails the opening of a path for the social advancement of AKP supporters, including those who actively objected to the coup and are willing to serve the state as it undergoes reconstruction<sup>14</sup>. On the other hand, due to the limited power base and the lack of competences on the part of the most loyal supporters, officers stemming from outside conservative groups (as broadly understood) are also being recruited. They represent such political views as centre right, nationalist and even liberal. This type of personnel policy is intended to minimise the threat posed by the Gülen movement and to expand the power base of the ruling party. In this way, the present project of constructing the new order is gaining an international dimension and a mass reach. So far, the Gülen movement has managed to build its greatest influence within the police

<sup>12</sup> Pinar Tremblay, Post-coup shake-up at Turkey's intelligence agency, *Al-Monitor*, 6 November 2016, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2016/11/turkey-post-botched-coup-shake-up-at-turkish-intelligence.html>

<sup>13</sup> Şaban Kardaş, Önleyici ve dönüştürücü yeni güvenlik doktrini, *Yeni Şafak*, 25 October 2016, <http://www.yenisafak.com/hayat/onleyici-ve-donusturucu-yeni-guvenlik-doktrini-2553195>

<sup>14</sup> This is proved by the fact that around 280,000 individuals applied for joining the police special forces, whereas there are plans to recruit 10,000 new officers. See Some 285,000 people appeal to Turkish Police Special Operations, *Hürriyet Daily News*, 17 November 2016, <http://www.hurriyetaidailynews.com/some-285000-people-appeal-to-turkish-police-special-operations.aspx?pageID=238&nID=106241&NewsCatID=341>



force. The judiciary too was infiltrated by the movement's supporters, as proved by its involvement in the crackdown on the army carried out in 2008–2012<sup>15</sup>. In these two sectors the purges and the process of consolidating the government's control are progressing in a less refined manner than in the case of the army and the intelligence service. Police officers are subject to dismissals and reshuffles despite the fact that the police were one of the main forces whose involvement prevented the coup's success<sup>16</sup>.

**The government's control of the media used to be strong still even before the coup, whereas in the education sector the final crackdown is currently being carried out.**

In the judiciary in recent months there has been an acceleration of measures aimed at eliminating people associated with Gülen and dismissing those employees of the judiciary who were independent of the government. Back before the coup the government managed to install people loyal to it in the Supreme Council of Judges and Prosecutors (HSYK), the highest disciplinary body in the Turkish judiciary. This body is currently coordinating the reshuffle underway in the Turkish judiciary. The reshuffle mainly covers the actual and suspected supporters of Gülen. As a rule, specific officials are being replaced with individuals who are loyal to the present government. However, it remains an open question as to whether their loyalty is a consequence of their political views, whether it is their opportunism or simply an expression of their willingness to serve the state.

<sup>15</sup> When Erdoğan strove to ultimately eliminate the threat posed by the army, the Gülen movement which cooperated with him used its supporters in the courts and in police structures to allegedly fabricate evidence against officers in the Ergenekon and Balyoz court trials. See Dexter Filkins, *Turkey's...*, *op. cit.*

<sup>16</sup> The number of suspended and dismissed police officers is around 13,000, including around 2,500 individuals holding prominent posts. See *Turkey purges 13,000 police officers over failed coup*, BBC, 4 October 2016, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-37551889>

## The media and education – the new (old) order

The media and education sectors are separate domains both subject to reconstruction. The remaining supporters of the Gülen movement have been removed from the media. In the education sector, 2,000 institutions (secondary schools and universities) were closed down. In addition, this sector is witnessing a crackdown on the members of the Gülen movement, whose structures used to be well-developed here. The autonomy of universities is being limited, for example, by a decree pursuant to which vice-chancellors of universities will be appointed by the President (until recently they were elected).

The government's control of the media used to be strong even before the coup. As a result of recent events the problem of self-censorship in secular and liberal media has increased, though over time it appears to have subsided. The narrative according to which terrorism is the biggest threat (mainly Kurdish terrorism and the terrorist activity of the Gülen movement, which has been categorised as a terrorist organisation) continues to be valid. Anti-Western resentment is an inherent element of this narrative.

The media discourse remains strongly nationalist, elements of a uniquely Turkish Islamism are present mainly in pro-government media, but they sometimes emerge as elements of a general national identity. This is favourable for the army, for nationalist groups and for new state officials with a moderately conservative or secular orientation. The blame for the coup is put squarely on Gülen, which lessens the responsibility of the military and additionally justifies the inefficiency of certain institutions. For example, the negligence which enabled Islamic State to stage the attack in Ankara on 10 October 2015 is interpreted as a consequence of acts of sabotage by members of the Gülen movement<sup>17</sup>.

<sup>17</sup> 10 Ekim Ankara garı saldırısının ByLock notları..., *Sabah*, 10 October 2016, <http://www.sabah.com.tr/gundem/2016/10/10/10-ekim-ankara-gari-saldirisinin-bylock-notlari>

In the education sector, more than 20,000 teachers have been dismissed (the total number of teachers being 850,000), more than 2,000 institutions have been closed down, and they are planned to be replaced with around 3,000 new schools. Though the media sector was dominated by the government even before the coup, the education sector has not yet undergone the full transformation planned by the government. In this sector the authorities seem to have less room for manoeuvre and the recent purges have caused serious disturbances in how educational institutions work<sup>18</sup>.

This does not mean that the government has abandoned its ambitions and is unaware of the importance of this change for the future shape of Turkish society. In the present situation it is extremely important for Erdoğan to maintain the feeling of threat within society and to present himself as the only force capable of restoring domestic stability. More ambitious projects involving a change in national identity, which might be achieved by changing the education system, need to be postponed due to the lack of funds and insufficient human resources<sup>19</sup>.

<sup>18</sup> Milli Eğitim reform paketini açıkladı, *Haberturk*, 6 October 2016, <http://www.haberturk.com/gundem/haber/1306347-milli-egitimde-radikal-degisiklik>

<sup>19</sup> However, it should be noted that so far the actions carried out by the authorities in this respect have been relatively successful, as proved by priority treatment of *imam-hatip*-type schools, which emerged as a result of the transformation of ordinary secondary schools, often against their students and their parents. Tulay Cetingulec, Turkish judiciary halts school firings, *Al-Monitor*, 24 June 2015, <http://m.almonitor.com/pulse/ru/sites/almonitor/contents/articles/originals/2015/06/turkey-education-judiciary-halts-purge-in-schools.html>

## Conclusions

The accelerated reconstruction of the state, which is happening alongside the purges which have been ongoing since the failure of the coup, generally covers all the institutions which are of major importance for Erdoğan. These include the army, the intelligence service and the structures of the Ministry of the Interior. In these institutions, the authorities are behaving in the most methodical manner and are pursuing a well-thought-out plan. All of these measures are plainly aimed at consolidating presidential power. The expected constitutional change will merely formally seal the present process. This process is well advanced and one might assert that the reconstruction is likely to endure.

So far, the construction of the new order has been rather technical and institutional. The implementation of more ambitious goals requiring a cultural transformation has been planned for a longer period. Taking over the institutions of the state, their reorganisation, working out a new model of relations between the government and the army, control of the media and the education sector, can be seen as preparations for the building of a new Turkey, including the social dimension. Social consolidation is being achieved with nationalist and republican slogans, with a slight emphasis on religious identity. However, the present Turkish foreign policy, which includes a turn towards the Middle East, Russia, and in the longer term also China, may become a factor fostering a further transformation of identity.

## APPENDIX

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### The Fethullah Gülen movement (Cemaat)

An informal religious movement centred around a Muslim preacher, Fethullah Gülen (b. 1941). Its roots date back to the 1970's. The teachings of its leader are based on the tradition of Turkish Sufism. Officially, the movement promotes the ideas of tolerance, interreligious dialogue and respect for the rules of liberal democracy. Unofficially, its operation aims at educating new Muslim elites to seize power after infiltrating the most important institutions, and then triggering the political and cultural transformation of Turkish society. The movement's membership structure is informal and based on loyalty to the leader and subordination to those members who have a more prominent place in the hierarchy. Though movement has no official structure it operates in a coordinated manner. Its members are obliged to transfer 10% of their income for the benefit of the community. The supporters are mainly recruited from the lowest classes of society. The movement enables them to get educated and then find a job in business or in public institutions.

In practice, Fethullah Gülen is a figure overseeing an entire business and education empire with a global reach. Its branches operate in more than 180 countries across the world (including African countries, former Soviet republics, Poland, the USA). From 2001 until 2013, Cemaat functioned in alliance with the AKP as an instrument for building Turkish influence worldwide. The most spectacular example of its activity was its cooperation with the government over the issue of neutralising the influence of the army within the Turkish state. The years 2008–2012 saw court trials involving the cases of Ergenekon and Balyoz, in which 254 officers of the Turkish army were expelled from military service and 325 were sentenced to many years in prison, similar to businessmen and civil servants. In 2016 the Supreme Court considered these two trials to be show trials and the supporting evidence was found to be fabricated. The rift between the movement and the government happened around 2013, caused by mounting frustration among Gülen's supporters triggered by the ever stronger position of President Erdoğan in Turkish politics. Its culmination was the corruption scandal of December 2013.

Since then, the authorities have viewed the movement as a so-called parallel state. This is a reference to the concept of a 'deep state' popular in Turkish politics since at least the times of the Cold War. It involves an informal structure spreading across politics, the military, business and the criminal world, which in practice wields a major influence on the politics of the Kemalist republic. Since the emergence of the scandal, the authorities have been carrying out a crackdown on the movement's members and supporters in the media sector, in business and in the state apparatus. A few weeks before the July coup the supreme command of the armed forces reportedly notified the authorities of several hundred officers which it had identified as members of the movement.

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