

July 15: The Siege of Democracy in Turkey and the People's Unprecedented Resistance

Zeyneb Çağlıyan İçener*

Abstract

On the night of July 15, the Republic of Turkey was attacked in the most treacherous way ever. The FETÖ-linked army officers attempted to overthrow the elected president, Erdoğan, and the AK Party government. However, the July 15 was not a mere military coup. It was the manifestation of the parallel structuring within the state that has recently become the top-priority issue of Turkey. This paper aims to investigate the unprecedented nature of the July 15 incident and its heroic aftermath. Unexpectedly, international community failed to see the big picture regarding the coup attempt. This study hence concentrates on the factors behind this failure. The influence of FETÖ diaspora network in the West over generating the discourse on Turkey is significant in that sense. The study problematizes the usage of false analogies as a part of this manipulation process. The paper concludes that contrary to the efforts of FETÖ and its international collaborators, New Turkey is in the process of its formation and this time with the historic opportunity for creating a plural and truly democratic republic that should not be missed.

Keywords

July 15, military coup, Fethullah Gülen, FETÖ, New Turkey, democracy

* Dr., Political Scientist - Bursa / Turkey
zeyneb.icener@gmail.com

Introduction

Civil-military relations centered on modernization and secularism debates have always been among the controversial topics of Turkish politics. The fear of an attempt at overthrowing the secular republican regime has continuously shaped the formative political landscape of the republic. From the foundational years of the republic onwards, there was a belief among the republican elites that the emergence of political parties responding to the needs and priorities of pious people would only endanger the existence of a secular republic. This unsubstantiated fear of reactionary movements turned against pious people in an unfair way. The elites were indifferent to the side effects of the failure to establish vigorous relations between the people and the state. In democracies, political parties function as vital links not only for the sake of representation, aggregation, and mobilization, but also for political socialization and integration, which are important for ensuring loyalty to the political system. However, this function of political parties had long been given short shrift in Turkey.

The rise of Islamic political movements in the 1970s in Turkey, which were synchronized with the Iranian Islamic revolution, engendered the hysteria that the Turkish republic was under the threat of sharia-oriented politicians. The only way for the secularist state elites to deal with such a threat was by banning all types of collective formations, social and political, that were believed to have an agenda of incorporating Islam into the public sphere. This logic was also behind the military takeovers. The arduousness of designing a political path for pious Muslims to articulate their demands actually paved the way for the emergence of hypocritical figures who constructed their alternative paths to politics. While hiding their real intentions, these figures acted as if they kept themselves aloof from politics. The leaders and supporters of the National View movement (*Milli Görüş Hareketi*) chose to strive for their ideas and ideals openly in the political arena, but could not escape being labeled as dissimulators (*takiyyeci*). On the other hand, Fethullah Gülen—a US-based cleric who is widely known for his activities focusing on inter-faith dialogue between the Abrahamic religions—and his followers have cunningly eluded skeptical looks as their movement was built on the basis of sugar-coated charity activities focusing on education. Gradually, the Gülen movement became a locus of (political) power not

only in Turkey but also in more than 140 countries all over the world. In addition, the real intentions of Gülen could not be fully determined until the July 15 coup attempt in Turkey.

To analyze the heinous failed coup attempt of July 15 and the Turkish people's heroic resistance, the changing nature of the Fethullahist Terrorist Organization (FETÖ) should be examined. This is vitally important not only for Turkey but also for the countries under the threat of the FETÖ and global society. The objective of this paper is to explain what makes the July 15 incident and its aftermath unprecedented. Unity achieved around the concept of democracy is one important consequence of the incident at home. There is already a consensus about who the perpetrators of the incident are and their aims. For Turkey, the issue at the moment is how to combat this menace without endangering the rule of law and democracy. The challenge outside Turkey is how to make sense of the incident. This is particularly important for foreign observers who are still far from getting the real picture. This paper will shed light on why they fail to grasp it. It will also concentrate on the false analogies used in explaining the July 15 coup attempt and its aftermath, and problematize their intentional usages. The concluding section looks at the significance of popular resistance to the coup attempt and its implications for the future of Turkish democracy.

The Background of July 15: FETÖ Activated

July 15, 2016, has marked the biggest insurrection in the republican period threatening the secular democratic regime in Turkey. This military coup-like attempt is alleged to have been orchestrated by Gülen to capture, unseat, and mock President Erdoğan, and topple the AK Party government. The Gülen movement has never manifested itself in the West as reactionary or Islamist. Quite to the contrary, Gülenists have devoted great efforts to attributing these labels to the AK Party, especially since 2012. In a similar vein, the Gülenists have cunningly used some of the analyses and academic research on Erdoğan and the AK Party by prominent scholars of the Turkish academic community to legitimize the context that they had set for overthrowing Erdoğan. “Competitive authoritarianism” (Özbudun 2014a, Kalaycıoğlu 2015, Sayarı 2016: 16, Esen & Gümüşçü 2016), “electoral authoritarianism” (Özbudun 2014b), “rising authoritarianism” (Öniş 2015), “authoritarian retreat” (Esen & Gümüşçü 2016), and “democratic

backsliding” (Özbudun 2014b) are among the trendy descriptions within academia used to imply the negative change in the nature of AK Party rule since 2009. This discourse served the purpose of Gülenists and strengthened their hands, particularly in the propaganda campaigns they conducted in the West. Indeed, some words and deeds of Erdoğan and his party provided a convenient ground for such arguments to convince significant portions of the international community that there is an ongoing trend towards authoritarian rule in Turkey.

Operations conducted on December 17–25, 2013, directly targeted then-Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and his cabinet on the basis of claims that they established a system of massive corruption.¹ In the early 2000s, the Turkish electorate punished mainstream political parties embroiled in corruption scandals by leaving them out of parliament. The AK Party’s birth coincided with these feelings of irritation caused by widespread corruption. The abbreviation chosen for the party carried a message to the voters. It is “AK,” the Turkish equivalent of white, which symbolizes cleanness. Hence, since its foundation, the party has claimed to be a clean political actor. However, with the 2013 corruption allegations, opponents of Erdoğan have often quoted the phrase “power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely” to turn the tide against the AK Party, which after a decade in government is believed to have degenerated. 2014 and 2015 were the years of local and parliamentary elections, respectively. Accordingly, Erdoğan interpreted the probes into corruption allegations as a pretentious move intended to degrade him. Gülen also effectively used his influential media power to manipulate the investigations so that the bulk of people would vote against Erdoğan in the elections. This was the prediction of the political engineers of the Gülenist network making an inference from pre-2002 experience. The rift between the AK Party under Erdoğan and the Gülenist organization was widened to the extent of a battle that could only end with the extermination of one side by the other. It became evident later that the police officers, prosecutors, and judges who had taken part in these investigations and trials were affiliated with Gülen. That is why Erdoğan and his circles have dubbed the December 17–25 operations as a “bureaucratic coup attempt” (Ayдын 2014).

The July 15 Coup Attempt: FETÖ's Fatal Attack

From the very first moment of the night, the July 15 incident has been considered as an insurrection staged by a faction within the army. Nevertheless, it cannot easily be classified as a military coup since there are important differences with previous ones. A striking feature of the July 15 coup attempt is that its alleged leader is a theologian. This means that the putsch is planned outside the chain of command of the armed forces. Yet if the link between Gülen and the putschists is legally proven, this will be the first coup attempt under the guise of a military coup in Turkish political history as it was organized by army officers owing allegiance to a cleric in an alternative chain of command outside the armed forces. This is an anomaly that needs to be evaluated to expose the perils of FETÖ's parallel state structure.

The plotters of the July 15 coup attempt named their executive body "Peace at Home Council" (*Yurtta Sulh Konseyi*) demonstrating inspiration from Atatürk's famous motto, "Peace at home, peace abroad." They thus wanted to give the impression of being loyal to Kemalism to gain legitimacy. References to certain words such as negligence (*gaflet*), perversion (*dalalet*), and treason (*hıyanet*), which are well remembered from "Atatürk's Address to the Turkish Youth," are mentioned to draw obvious parallels between Mustafa Kemal's depiction of those who hold power and are negligent, perverse, and traitorous, and Erdoğan and the AK Party government officials who are overtly identified by referring to these words.

The previous coup plotters had always underlined their main motivation as fulfilling the self-assumed guardianship role of the Turkish Armed Forces (*Türk Silahlı Kuvvetleri*, TSK). The Peace at Home Council repeated this in its statement. One other common point is that all three statements read on air, on May 27, 1960, September 12, 1980, and July 15, 2016, interestingly mention Atatürk's principle of "peace at home, peace abroad."² Parallel to that, one of the other shared features is that the statements confirmed the commitments to already existing alliances and engagements in the international arena. Whether these similarities give us clues about the international dimension of the coups and a reiteration of the foreign policy principle as a message to global actors is worth examining.

For Cemil Koçak, a prominent scholar of republican history, it is possible to argue that the failed coup attempt was inspired by the May 27, 1960, military coup (Değirmenci 2016). The way the scene had been made convenient for a coup was not very different from what was observed in the pre-July 15 period. By means of corruption rumors and allegations, the main target was to demean the leaders (Menderes in 1960 and Erdoğan in 2013). Similar to the demonstrations of university students criticizing the “anti-constitutional” acts of the DP government in the late 1950s, the youth protests gained momentum against the “anti-democratic” policies of the AK Party starting from 2013. Paradoxically, all coups, including the recent coup attempt, justified the overthrowing of an elected government with the assertion that the armed forces retained power for the purpose of finding a way out from the crisis of democracy and restoring the constitutional order. After a painful learning process, the Turkish people matured enough to realize that these statements were nothing but smoke and mirrors.

Blaming the politicians has been the main theme of all previous documentary justifications of military coups and interventions. A caricature of a politician as greedy, self-seeking, fickle, and corrupt is typical of coup statements and memorandums. Not surprisingly, political parties have also been downgraded in coup statements. Hence, an understanding of being above political parties was highlighted overtly in the statement of May 27 and the memorandum of March 12, 1971.³ This was even transformed into an anti-politics stance, which manifested itself in the extreme decision of the National Security Council (*Milli Güvenlik Konseyi*), the junta of the September 12 coup, to impose a ban on all political parties and suspend all types of political activities. Differing from previous coup statements, the one released on July 15 specifically held the president and the government solely responsible for the course of events. Thus, the other political parties are not considered as addressees. A remarkable point in the statement is a lack of information about what kind of government Turkey would have in the post-coup period. It says that the Peace at Home Council will rule the country, but the questions of “until when” or “how” are left unanswered. This vagueness is quite terrifying. Neither elected government nor elections are mentioned. When one looks at the previous coup statements, there was always a reference to elections, even if it was noted that elections would take place after the constitutional order was restored and under an interim

government. In the statement of May 27, 1960, an above-party —hence impartial—administration was said to supervise and arbitrate the process that would take the country to fair and free elections as soon as possible. Indeed, just one year after the coup, elections were held. Likewise, the September 12, 1980, coup statement gave detailed information about the post-coup administrative structure referring to transferring executive power to the Council of Ministers after a while. This transition period did not last very long and elections—while not as free as they should have been in a democratic country—were held three years after the coup. Certainly, it would be misleading to jump to conclusions about the intentions of the putschists only through examining the statements. Yet the texts have the potential to give us clues about the putschists' mindset. How they perceive the political issues and what they deem as problems waiting to be urgently solved may tell us much about their political disposition.

Considering this, when the July 15 statement is scrutinized, it is noticeable that the issues emphasized in the text have striking parallels with the highlights of anti-Erdoğan and anti-AK Party propaganda of pro-Gülen media outlets. Some of them are as follows: a) the president (denoting Erdoğan) and the government (denoting the AK Party) are in a state of negligence, perversion, and treason; under their rule, b) fundamental human rights are violated; c) Turkey lost the prestige it deserves in the international arena; d) Turkey has plunged into an autocratic regime built on fear; and e) corruption and larceny within bureaucracy have skyrocketed. It is a well-known secret that certain journalists and academics who now appear to have been either taking orders from or having close contact with Gülen insisted on keeping corruption and bribery allegations on the agenda in the post-December 17–25, 2013, period. It should be noted here that most of them who are directly connected with Gülen left the country before the coup attempt claiming that “free media is silenced” by Erdoğan's “autocratic regime.”

Although Gülen immediately rejected the allegations that he gave the order to his followers in the army to stage a coup, all available evidence points to him⁴. The Chief of General Staff, General Hulusi Akar, testified that the putschists who detained him said that they could make him speak to Gülen on the phone. A theology scholar, Adil Öksüz, who is considered the head of the plotters, was caught at Akıncı Air Base on the night of July

15. The presence of a civilian at the base where the coup attempt had been directed was quite bizarre. However, this was not as bizarre as his claim that he had been there looking for land to buy. The bizarreness continued as such a preposterous explanation allowed his release. This in fact demonstrated that Öksüz was aided and protected so that he could escape. What is of relevance to Gülen in this story is that his once close aides disclosed that Öksüz was one of the senior members of the Gülenist organization. It is also revealed afterwards that he travelled to the USA very often. Remarkably, he arrived in Turkey from his last visit just two days before the July 15 coup attempt. This strengthens the claim that Gülen was the mastermind of the coup realizing his plan via Öksüz. Further evidence includes some putschist military officers' confessions about their allegiances to Gülen. All of this evidence gathered from testimonials reflects the truth about the coup attempt's connection with FETÖ.

FETÖ: A Global Threat Not to be Ignored

The Gülen movement's suspected aim of seizing the state and turning the regime into a totalitarian one has showed its true colors. No verdict has yet been given about the link between Gülen and the thwarted coup attempt. However, the aforementioned evidence and public opinion have already led to FETÖ being construed as a viper's nest. Daring to shed the blood of civilians in Turkey on July 15, FETÖ emerged as both a national and a global threat. This section deals with decomposing these threats through analyzing the way the Gülen movement has transformed itself into a menace.

The (political) efforts by Gülen and his followers to discredit the AK Party have become pivotal to understanding the Gülen movement's real intentions in recent years. That said, up to 2012, no overt conflicts arose between the two. Although both follow up on two different Islamic traditions, what they have in common is their success in building novel movements. This novelty indeed eased the process of joining around the similar motivation to "normalize" the state-society relationship in the post-February 28, 1997⁵, era. Hence, they could cooperate with each other on the issues critical for eliminating the long-lasting tutelary regime. This was vitally important for the survival and continuation of both movements. However, it is realized today that they are different in terms of the structure they wanted to build after the end of tutelage. Once the common "enemy" was neutralized, the

next move for both became putting an end to the issue of who the real decision-maker was. Needless to say, as the properly elected government, the AK Party was expected to have the upper hand. However, the Gülen community gradually emerged as a rival political entity aspiring to master the AK Party. The long-term investments of Gülen in terms of infiltrating the civilian and military bureaucracy, security forces, and judiciary, and playing an active role in universities, business circles, and media made Gülenists think that they would be powerful enough to dominate the system.

The first explicit sign of the war was the decision of the AK Party government to close down the cram schools (*dersane*), most of which were owned by the Gülen community. They were important to recruiting new young members for the organization just before they began their university life. In fact, the community increased its prestige and credibility through the success of their cram schools. For many parents, these schools were like an oasis combining success in the exams and safe surroundings, which would protect their children from the wicked circles that might endanger the youth. Moreover, the Gülen network provided opportunities for low-income families' children to continue their studies. Seeing only the visible part of the iceberg, people had built trust on the sincerity and honesty of its members.

The Gülen community stated its preference for being known as either a *bizmet* (service) movement or a movement of volunteers (*Gönüllüler Hareketi*). It had gained respect by making people believe that its point of origin was Islam, based on a Sunni understanding with Sufi tendencies. However, this is just the beginning of the story. In fact, for different circles, depending on their levels of intellectual and cultural sophistication and/or worldviews, Gülenists resorted to varied rhetoric to recruit more supporters. Hence, the domestic rhetoric can sometimes be colored with nationalism, as obviously seen in the Turkish Olympics (*Türkçe olimpiyatları*), a Turkish-language competition for non-Turkish speakers from different parts of the world, whereas the package prepared for the Western world included items that had a high potential to be welcomed by the West. Emphasizing dialogue and toleration is one part of this strategy. One can observe this in the way Gülenists wanted to reap the benefits of Sufi teachings and practices, particularly the tradition emanating from Mevlana Celaleddin Rumi, to get the attention of a Western audience. For instance, one of

the foundations established in the USA to pursue inter-faith activities was named after Rumi. Furthermore, the rise of transnational radical Islamist networks –having blended with terror that has heightened Islamophobia in the Western countries– created an urgent need to tame these sentiments. This created a suitable ground for the Gülen network to shine amongst others as the “smiling face of Islam.” Remarkably, the timing coincided with the rising popularity of the “moderate Islam” narrative.

Preparing such an *à la carte* menu compelled Gülenists to refer to, use, and even consume many diverse ideas and principles so as to construct a practical image that would match their audiences' profiles. The ideologically amorphous nature of the Gülen network made it easy to produce flexible rhetoric. Therefore, the movement underwent a fast transformation from being a Nursî-inspired local congregation supposedly far from politics to being a transnational religious network having global ambitions. It should be noted here that the so-called refraining of Gülen and his adherents from politics has always been controversial.

The academic community's growing interest in the Gülen movement started in the late 1990s, coinciding with Gülen's move to the USA. These articles written in English and published in distinguished academic journals show that the Gülen movement was intentionally put in a process of reconstruction. The pioneering articles written by Turkish scholars (Aras 1998, Yavuz 1999) were primarily aiming at introducing Gülen and his understanding of Islam to Western circles. Referring to the concepts of “modern,” “moderate,” and “liberal” together with Gülen's approach to Islam is very common in these articles. Since the 2000s, the number of articles written by non-Turkish scholars has also gained momentum. The efforts then veered towards decontextualizing Gülen's ideas from their place of origin, or more precisely, recontextualizing and reconfiguring them. One can find many studies examining his words and deeds using the Western theorists and their approaches as tools of analysis (Özdalga 2000, Esposito and Yilmaz 2010) or comparing the Gülen movement with particular Western missionary movements (Özdalga 2003). After a while, as the Gülen network has become financially powerful, it has invested more in the industry of knowledge production. As a result, several chairs and institutes researching Gülen and the movement were opened at different

American and European universities. In the meantime, Western academia has produced far-fetched analyses (Carroll 2007) revering the “uniqueness” of Gülen’s ideas compared with the founders of Western thought such as Kant, Mill, Plato, and Sartre as if they are of equal worth. This intellectual image-making put Gülen under the spotlight. His views on international political matters were made public through interviews, articles, and op-eds in media outlets like the BBC, CNN, The New York Times, The Washington Post, The Wall Street Journal, etc.

The Western elites had a distaste for political Islam. Only a religious network that is “non-political” could grow in Western countries. That is why this image-making was vitally important for the Gülen network. As mentioned above, the scholars and journalists played an important role in constructing an image of the Gülen movement stripped of any political ambitions. Özdalga (2000: 104) defined it as “religious activism” that claimed to be different from “political ambition.” The former was said to be about rebuilding society, whereas the latter is about controlling the state. In reality though, the movement has never been distant from politics. In its failure to establish a direct and proper relationship with politics, a double-faced and immoral way of doing politics has become embedded in the so-called non-political style of Gülen.

The ambivalent character of the Gülen movement has not long been evident. During the February 28 process, a prosecutor brought an indictment against Gülen. He was accused of plotting against the republican regime. Some books also questioned the genuine motivation of Gülen. However, the oppressive exercise of secularism alienated the conservative-pious portions of society from the secular regime. Consequently, the victims of this period included all groups that had become targets of authoritarian secularism. In that polarized atmosphere, pious Turks considered the claims about Gülen to be part of a wider defamation campaign. The early 2000s set the scene for the emergence of the AK Party and a relative relaxation of the strained “secularist versus Islamist” relationship that previously hindered democracy. The EU reform process gave impetus to further democratization. In such a favorable atmosphere both inside and outside Turkey, the Gülen network disproportionately grew as a global movement. A tacit alliance had already been formed between the AK Party and Gülenists to the extent that they

took the advantage of Turkey's expanding economic, diplomatic, and cultural relations.

The popularity of Erdoğan and his party has become a regular pattern of Turkish politics despite the hard times Turkey experienced since 2007. The reaction of the military to the presidential candidacy of Abdullah Gül was so negative that it led the TSK to release an e-memorandum on April 27, 2007. The AK Party stood strong in opposing the military's interference. In that political atmosphere, the public widely supported the *Ergenekon* and *Balyoz* (Sledgehammer) trials against the higher echelons of the military. The AK Party approached this development as an opportunity for civilianization and democratization. The outcry of the convicted generals and their alleged civilian collaborators about the fabricated evidence of the so-called coup attempts was not considered convincing at that time. All these charges were dropped after the active involvement of FETÖ (via its members in the judiciary and media) in these trials became evident following the Gülenists' coup attempt against Erdoğan on December 17–25, 2013.

The parallel structure of Gülenists in state institutions became clear after December 17–25. This was a stab in the back not only for the AK Party but also for pious Turks who had trusted the sincerity of Gülen's charity network. Those people did not consider the accusations made about Gülen and his shadowy network in the late 1990s as true. Conservative circles have always been motivated to protect a religious group from being crushed by the "authoritarian secularists." Nonetheless, this blanket protection has resulted in disregarding the weakness it has caused within the system, while Gülenists rampantly reorganized the state apparatus as they wished. In their rhetoric, "salvation as a result of good deeds" (Özdalga 2000: 96) should be the aim of a Muslim in this life. Gülenists appear to advocate the rule of law. However, when their deeds are examined, their recklessness about sticking to one of the cardinal principles of Islam, *hak* (right), is apparent. For instance, some FETÖ members eliminated (removed from a position/forced to resign/imprisoned) opponents and/or critics of Gülen or put obstacles in the way of realization of their objectives with fabricated evidence in the army, the police, and the judiciary. That is the manifestation of FETÖ's ambivalent nature. Based on the current evidence and testimonies of former members of FETÖ, it appears that Gülen ordered his adherents to infiltrate

the military. Many of them were promoted following the dismissals as a result of the *Ergenekon* and *Balyoz* trials.

Gülenists argued that the *hizmet* movement is a civil society organization. However, the aforementioned efforts of FETÖ to seize state power reveal the inner contradictions *per se*. In addition to these organized crimes in the judicial field, some of the FETÖ-affiliated bureaucrats are charged with leaking top-secret documents and wiretapping the Prime Minister, ministers, the chief of intelligence, politicians, etc. Some members of FETÖ were also accused of involvement in video-recording the private lives of politicians, bureaucrats, and businessmen to blackmail them. The political parties were designed that way. The criminal record of the alleged FETÖ members includes condoning Turkish-Armenian journalist Hrant Dink's assassination in January 2007. These are a small part of the crimes FETÖ is claimed to be responsible for. After the July 15 coup attempt, the investigations are extended to uncover the secret connections within different institutions.

Any outsider who looks at what is happening in Turkey right now will most probably focus on the extensive purges, suspensions, and dismissals. Failing to grasp the extent to which FETÖ has harmed not only the state but also society, a foreigner may jump to a hasty conclusion that this might be about suppressing the AK Party's opponents. Indeed, FETÖ has left nearly nothing undamaged in social and political life: state, institutions, economy, value systems, and religion have all suffered badly from its secret operations. Values such as solidarity, charity, and altruism are made empty and trivialized by Gülenists. The manifestation of dishonesty and immorality of a religious network has become detrimental to social trust, and thus democracy, in the long run. Apart from vandalizing the social assets, FETÖ harms Turkey's relations with the global actors as well. Several senior FETÖ people fled to Western cities before the July 15 coup attempt and formed a diaspora network lobbying against Turkey. In terms of manipulating the July 15 coup, FETÖ militants have become very active and influential in the West. They successfully promoted the idea that Erdoğan had plotted the coup himself and used it to justify the follow-up "witchhunt." On the other hand, Gülen keeps staying in Pennsylvania, USA, which for so long has become the headquarters of this shadowy network. The hesitancy of the USA and several European countries, Turkey's long-time allies, to condemn the coup plotters on the night of July 15 and declare their support for the elected government in Turkey frustrated the masses and was sufficient for

the Turkish people to consider the USA as the usual suspect behind the July 15 coup attempt. In the aftermath of the incident, Turkish authorities put the extradition of Gülen on the table. There is a widely held perception that Gülen is a protégé of the USA and will not be extradited. Although US Vice President Joe Biden underlined in his August 24 visit to Turkey that the extradition decision should be taken by US judicial organs in accordance with US laws—and hence was not related to the political stance of his administration—neither the Turkish authorities nor the people gave credit to this explanation. These are the main factors behind the rise of anti-Western sentiments among the Turkish people in general and anti-Americanism in particular.

Western circles mostly disregard the seriousness of the threat FETÖ poses to the global order. So far, it made empty the values championed by the West such as democracy, pluralism, human rights, and free media for the sake of the sublime interests of FETÖ. The international media has long presented Gülen as a respected peace-loving Muslim cleric living modestly. He was conspicuous for his activities in support of inter-faith dialogue activities. That his adherents call him “imam of the universe” is not widely known. As can be inferred from this title, Gülen definitely has leadership ambitions. What he has in mind though is not mere religious leadership. Gülen is after comprehensive global authority. Thus, the secret agenda of FETÖ is not limited to Turkey.

Foreign authorities, international organizations, and global society should fully realize the seriousness of the FETÖ menace. It is easy to observe that so far certain countries have supported the Gülen network, provided its members with shelter, promoted an upmarket image through media coverage, and shaped public opinion in favor of Gülenists. Under the influence of these policies, the people living in these countries failed to grasp the perils of the July 15 coup attempt and the inside story. Unfortunately, biased and partial analyses centered on Erdoğan were given greater space than the coup attempt targeting democracy. In line with this, false analogies (see Kadioğlu 2016) are drawn between the rise of fascism under Hitler and Erdoğan's call to safeguard the democratic regime and the nation's enthusiastic participation in pro-democracy vigils. It is quite odd to see how the heroic resistance of the whole nation on the night of July 15 was largely ignored by international media. Instead of reporting how determined Turkish citizens were to protect independence, democracy, and the state at the expense of their lives, the international broadcasters portrayed the nation as a “mob” responding to Erdoğan's “fascist” call. Those who rhapsodized about the

Gezi protests interestingly either neglected or denigrated the spirit of July 15 and pro-democracy vigils.

It is crystal clear that a considerable challenge for Turkish authorities is to make Turkey's case heard in the global arena. For this purpose, the 9/11 analogy is suggested to make Americans and Europeans understand, by means of empathy and psychology, the reactions of the people in Turkey and FETÖ operations (see Daily Sabah 2016, Akyol 2016). Although striking parallels can be found, the 9/11 analogy is inadequate to fully explain the disastrous nature of FETÖ's July 15 putsch. All of the nineteen 9/11 attackers were militants of Al-Qaeda's terrorist organization. They were not American citizens, and none of them had been living in the USA more than a year, whereas the July 15 coup plotters are Turkish citizens. As mentioned above, in appearance it was a military coup. The putschist military officers cold-bloodedly ordered soldiers to open fire on unarmed civilians. Tanks crashed into people; helicopters opened fire on the National Intelligence Agency (*Milli İstihbarat Teşkilatı*, MİT) headquarters; and F-16 fighter jets bombed the Parliament, Interior Ministry, and police headquarters. The presidential compound and chief of general staff building were attacked. President Erdoğan and his family had a near miss when plotters raided the hotel they were staying at in Marmaris. For the first time in Turkish history, men wearing military uniforms as if they were enemy soldiers have bombed their own parliament building, taken their generals hostage, and killed their fellow soldiers and citizens. When the MİT announced that the coup plotters are connected with FETÖ, this led to an outburst of popular anger. The trauma the July 15 villainy has produced is hence incomparable with that caused by the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Contrary to the suicide attacks that were organized by the "others" who were "hostile aliens" on 9/11, the July 15 putsch was a concerted attack of "native traitors" who were "some of us." Thus, it was much more disheartening and cast a chill over people. Urging the people in the US and Europe to imagine that their parliament/congress buildings were bombed is a good start to take them one step closer to the real story. However, one should not disregard the great difference between the psychology of people who are being attacked by the "hostile others" and those who are deceived by the "traitor us."

Concluding Remarks: Implications for Turkish Democracy

The heinous July 15 incident will always be remembered not as a mere coup attempt against Erdoğan and the AK Party rule, but rather as an assault on

Turkey and all its institutions and people. All to the good, children woke up to a brighter Turkey the next morning on July 16. When they grow up, they will better sense the epic struggle of their fellow citizens to protect the country's independence and defend democracy. In the aftermath of the July 15 coup, the long-time polarization dominating the political discourse of the leaders was replaced with the unification of the Turkish people around democracy and the republic. Politicians fortunately began to embrace some forgotten concepts such as moderation, conciliation, and consensus. Previously, the New Turkey ideal emerged as the AK Party's project. It was not widely welcomed by the opposition. The triumph of July 16 changed the course of events. New Turkey is now in the making, this time hopefully in a more inclusive way. It is really a promising sign that Turkey's people and institutions have embraced democracy and stood up against the coup attempt in unison. The infiltration of FETÖ into the state institutions has reached such an immeasurable level that it obviously necessitates an urgent action plan. The need to reform state institutions on the basis of a refreshed vision freed from favoritism and partisanship appears a must. The great challenge for Turkish officials in a post-July 15 period is handling this problem in a just and fair manner without violating the rights of innocent people. This is really important for the fabric of society. On the other hand, many purges from the military, bureaucracy, judiciary, and education sector, and detentions/arrests are already manipulated by the diaspora network of FETÖ. Their aim is to convince global public opinion that Erdoğan is taking advantage of the thwarted coup attempt to consolidate his power. The already biased commentators who have demonstrated a staggering ignorance and incompetence about the history, politics, and sociology of Turkey set the ground for the claims of Gülenists to be taken seriously.

Turkey will continue its march towards consolidation of democracy notwithstanding. Turkish academia has produced an extensive literature on the Gezi movement that grew in the early summer of 2013. Gezi is commonly considered "a critical turning point in Turkish politics" (Öniş 2015: 29) and "a new threshold for democracy" (Göle 2013: 8). It is portrayed as resistance to the "majoritarian" or "authoritarian" understanding of the AK Party under Erdoğan. The "Gezi spirit" is praised for its bottom-up nature and its potential for opening alternative spaces for creative democratic experiences. Gezi becomes the demonstration of the "empowered Turkish society" as a result of "the change process the Turkish society is undergoing since the

last hand-over to civilian elected politicians of the political power by the putschists, in 1983” (Aktar 2015: 468). Post-July 15 pro-democracy vigils can also fit this argument as being another manifestation of this process of change. However, the enthusiasm that Gezi created in many circles has not been observed yet in these rallies. Despite the fact that they are much more widespread and inclusive in terms of participation, there is a disparaging approach towards these rallies. Those who rhapsodized about Gezi ignore the way the people participating in these gatherings demonstrate their loyalty to the democratic regime. Rather they solely concentrate on the fact that Erdoğan initiated these rallies through calling people to the streets on the night of July 15. This way of thinking somehow paves the way for a gloomy picture. As one example, the usage of the Hitler analogy gives the impression that the people participating in pro-democracy vigils organized in 81 provinces are crowds enchanted with Erdoğan’s propaganda techniques. Indeed, not all the participants were the supporters of the AK Party. The sincere democrats are fully capable of understanding that there is no difference between the participants in Gezi protests and pro-democracy vigils in terms of being conscious and active citizens. The gist of the message this “empowered Turkish society” wants to convey is that democracy, freedom, and human rights are rooted in these lands.

It is true that it was predominantly the religious-conservative sections of society who were motivated by Erdoğan’s call to take to the streets and resist tanks on the night of the coup attempt. Nonetheless, examining it as a mere leader-crowd relationship means nothing more than employing simple reasoning. A sociological analysis instead can shed light on the extent to which the AK Party’s “conservative democracy” understanding is espoused by its grassroots. The concern over Turkey’s trajectory towards conservatism has recently been a dominant issue. This led to emergence of “concerned moderns” who are worried about the potential of this process to undermine civic-mindedness. The significance of the popular resistance against the July 15 coup attempt is quite relevant here. The religious-conservative masses cast doubts as their understanding of conservatism has been perceived as a potential threat to the secular republican regime. Ironically, the quick reflex of those religious-conservative people ready to martyr themselves for the country thwarted the heinous coup attempt that would strike a fatal blow to the republican regime. Gülen has a penchant for power. He has abused the religious feelings of the people and exploited their sacred values to establish

a one-man tutelage. However, the hunter becomes the hunted. The plot backfired because of the people of Turkey who thereby offered themselves a historic opportunity for creating a plural and democratic New Turkey.

Endnotes

- ¹ On December 17, 2013, 89 people, including sons of ministers, bureaucrats, and businessmen, were detained on charges of “bribery, conspiring to rig bids, misconduct and smuggling.” The operation in which 47 of those people were arrested was coordinated by Zekeriya Öz, the then-Chief Public Prosecutor of Istanbul. Erdoğan strongly denied the allegations and defined them as ambushes by Gülenists. However, later the wiretapped conversations claimed to be of Erdoğan, some ministers, government officials, bureaucrats, and businessmen were posted online. A massive reshuffling of the police and judicial personnel involved was the follow-up response of the Erdoğan government. At the same time, some ministers resigned, and the Cabinet was reshuffled. The second judicial attack came with the December 25, 2013, investigation opened by public prosecutor Muammer Akkaş. Ninety-six people were charged with setting up a gang, conspiring to rig bids and commit bribery. This time, Erdoğan and his son were the direct targets of the investigation. Later, Öz and Akkaş were found out to be linked with the FETÖ. It was revealed that they had left the country before the July 15 coup attempt. The investigations continued with newly appointed public prosecutors, and the verdict was non-prosecution.
- ² For the statements of the 1960 and 1980 military coups, see Aydın and Taşkın (2014: 62, 518).
- ³ For the March 12 memorandum, see Aydın and Taşkın (2014: 205).
- ⁴ For a comprehensive account of the July 15 coup attempt, see the report prepared by Daily Sabah Centre for Policy Studies (2016).
- ⁵ The February 28 process is named after a monthly meeting of the National Security Council (MGK) that took place on February 28, 1997. The mounting worries of the secular bloc due to the policies of the Welfare Party (RP)-True Path Party (DYP) coalition government escalated the political tension. This was most clearly observed in this MGK meeting. What made it a prominent event in Turkish political history were the ultimatum-like recommendations given to the coalition

government led by Necmettin Erbakan as a reaction to the increase in the “relentless pro-Shari’a actions and hostility against the secular order.” The confrontation between the military and the RP did not end up in a direct military take-over. However, as the February 28 process consolidated the military tutelage over civilian politics and increased the pressure over religious people and groups, it was popularly dubbed a “post-modern coup.” Four months after the notorious MGK meeting, Erbakan resigned, and thus the coalition government fell in June 1997. A year later, the Constitutional Court closed down the RP.

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15 Temmuz: Kuşatılan Türk Demokrasisi ve Halkın Emsalsiz Direnişi

Zeyneb Çağlıyan İçener*

Öz

15 Temmuz gecesi Türkiye Cumhuriyeti daha önce yaşamadığı şekilde haince bir saldırıya maruz kaldı. FETÖ bağlantılı oldukları ortaya çıkan askerler, seçilmiş Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan ve AK Parti Hükûmetini devirmek üzere girişimde bulundular. Ancak bu, sıradan bir askerî darbe değildi. Son yıllarda Türkiye'nin bir numaralı meselesi haline gelen devlet içindeki paralel yapılanma tüm varlığıyla gün yüzüne çıkmıştı. Bu makale 15 Temmuz hadisesinin ve destansı ertesinin emsalsizliğini incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Hadisenin ardından gelen uluslararası tepkiler meselenin iç yüzünü anlamaktan umulmadık biçimde uzak olmuştur. Bu çalışma, ayrıca, uluslararası çevrelerin meseleyi algılama hususundaki başarısızlığına yol açan faktörler üzerine eğilmektedir. Bu minvalde FETÖ'nün diaspora ağının Batıdaki söylemin oluşmasındaki rolü kayda değerdir. Çalışma, bu manipülasyon sürecinin bir parçası olan yanlış analogilerin kullanımını da sorunsallaştırmaktadır. FETÖ ve uluslararası işbirlikçilerinin tüm aksi çabalarına rağmen, Yeni Türkiye kaçırılmaması gereken tarihî bir fırsat yakalayarak çoğulcu ve gerçek anlamda demokratik bir cumhuriyet olma yolunda oluşumunu sürdürmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler

15 Temmuz, askerî darbe, Fethullah Gülen, FETÖ, Yeni Türkiye, demokrasi

* Dr., Siyaset Bilimci - Bursa / Türkiye
zeyneb.icener@gmail.com

15 Июль: Осажденная Демократия в Турции и Уникальное Сопротивление Народа

Зейнеб Чалыйан Иченер*

Тезис

Ночью 15 Июля, Турецкая Республика подвергался предательской нападению. Солдаты связанные с ФЕТО устроили переворот чтобы свергнуть с правительство ПРС и Президента Эрдогана. Это не был обычным переворотом. Параллельная структура внутри страны в последние годы стала важным вопросам и всплыл в тот же день со всеми его активами. Цель данной работы рассмотреть событию 15 Июля и уникальность результата. Международные реагирования после события была далеко неудачным образом чтобы понять внутреннюю сторону вопроса. В данной статье изучается факторы влиявшие на эту восприятию. Таким образом, заслуживает внимания роль диаспоры ФЕТО в формировании дискурса в Западе. В исследовании также проблематизируется использование неправильной аналогии, которая была частью процесса манипуляции. Несмотря на усилий Фето и международных союзников. Новая Турция не пропуская шанс продолжает свой путь в создании демократической республики.

Ключевые слова

15 Июль, военный переворот, Фетхуллах Гюлен, ФЕТО, Новая Турция, Демократия

* Доц.док, Политолог - Бурса/ Турция
zeyneb.icener@gmail.com