

REFLECTIONS OF THE 15 JULY COUP ATTEMPT ON RUSSIA

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Attitude of the Russian Administration toward 15 July Coup Attempt

The Russian Federation is the first of the foreign countries that condemn the 15 July coup attempt. Russian President Vladimir Putin stated that they stand by the administration of the Republic of Turkey and that they were opposed to any kind of intervention, both inside and outside. It is possible to explain Putin's approach in a few points. First and foremost, the Kremlin opposes all kind of coup, coup attempts, "colorful revolution", "Arab spring" etc. in general and, in accordance with the concept of its foreign policy², supports existing regimes with elected governments. It is possible to consider this approach within the framework of its political and administrative structure.

We can also explain Putin's support to Turkey in terms of his desire for the development of relations in response to Turkey's getting down to alleviating relations after the plane crisis (Turkish Republic President R. T. Erdoğan sends a letter to Vladimir Putin expressing sadness due to the downed plane). In other words, Russia too had pecuniary injury due to the plane crisis with Turkey

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² For the foreign policy concept of Russia and the foreign policy during Vladimir Putin's period see İlyas Kamalov, *Moskova'nın Rövanşı Putin Dönemi Rus Dış Politikası*, Yeditepe Yayınları İstanbul 2008.

and wants to redevelop cooperation³. Putin's quick explanation of Russia's position and his taking side with the Turkish authorities positively affected the course of the Turkish-Russian cooperation in the following period.

The last and most important factor determining the position of Russia is that the organization called FETO after the coup attempt was banned in Russia in 2002 and characterized as an "extreme organization". The Russian authorities made a statement about their attitude towards the coup attempt after the coup attempt was understood to have been made not by the army but by an organization in the army. The fact that FETO was behind the coup attempt and that Russia saw it as an "extreme organization" also identified the official position of the Kremlin. Therefore, the attitude of Russia to the coup attempt in Turkey can be dealt with in the framework of three main factors (its general view of such cases, the Turkish-Russian relations, its approach to FETO). While the official approach was in this frame, 15th July coup attempt was interpreted differently in the Russian press, which can be better understood if we mention about the existence of FETO in Russia.

Existence of FETO in Russia

The demolition of the USSR and the Eastern Bloc was the beginning of a new era - the period of growth - for the structure regarded as FETO nowadays. At the beginning of the 1990s, the Russian Federation, which suffered a multidimensional crisis, went to the process of softening the relations with the West and launched some "democratic" initiatives in this context. In this framework, foreign institutions and organizations were allowed to open associations, foundations, schools and similar structures in Russia. The best beneficiary of this situation was the Fethullah Gülen Community, which was called with that name then. Dozens of schools were opened especially in regions where Turks and Muslims lived (Idil Ural, North Caucasus, Siberia), then in Moscow and St. Petersburg. . After the dissolution of the USSR, the schools attracted great interest

³ For the Turkish-Russian relations in the year of 2016 see İlyas Kemaloğlu, "Türk-Rus İlişkileri Kaldığı Yerden Devam Edecek mi?", *Karar*, 11.08.2016.

particularly in the republics within the Russian Federation⁴. These schools were "the schools of sister and Muslim Turkey" for the people who had been under Soviet pressure for almost 70 years and who did not understand the structures of congregational – religious sects. Central Russian administration did not oppose the opening of congregational schools due to the fact that these years were also the beginning of the development of Turkish-Russian relations. Apart from this, it was also headed for scientific organizations in Russia such as Dialogue Eurasia and Russian-Turkish Cultural Center and for businessmen organizations such as TUSCON.⁵ But the situation changed at the beginning of 2000's. There are two important reasons for this. The first of these is Fethullah Gülen's settlement in the US in 1999. This has immediately attracted the attention of the Russian government, and in particular the FSB, which is the continuation of the KGB. The second reason for the change is the change of power in Russia and the politics that changes accordingly. Vladimir Putin, who took power from Boris Yeltsin in 2000, began to question the unilateral regime of the US in foreign policy as well as starting the centralized policy in the country. As a result, the foreign schools and organizations in the country were tightly controlled. In 2002, there was a development that determined the fate of the Gülen schools in Russia. Chairman of the FSB Nikolay Patrushev claimed that the foundations and associations that founded the schools were linked to the US secret service, and even cooperated with the CIA and provided intelligence service.⁶ From this date, the schools in the Russian Federation started to be closed down. Parallel to this, officers in the schools were deported, deportation order is imposed banning entry to Russia, some were arrested, and graduates of Gülen schools were removed from the state rank. In 2008, it was declared as an "extremist organization". Both Said-i Nursi's and Fethullah Gülen's books were also banned.⁷

⁴ Edvard Çesnokov, "Vdohnovitel Perevorota v Turtsii: Agnt TSRU I Propovednik-Milliarder s Biznesom v Rossii?", *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, 17.07.2016.

⁵ For the examples of such organizations see Ekspert Evgeniy Bahrevskiy: Gülen K Perevorotu v Turtsii Otnoşeniya Ne İmeet", *Moskovskiy Komsomolets*, 31.07.2016.

⁶ "Rossiyskaya FSB Okazalasy Prava? F. Gülen -Provodnik İnteresov SŞA i İzrailya?", *Golos İslama*, 26.03.2014, www.golosislama.com/news.php?id=22750

⁷ S. V. Moiseev, "Ekstremstskaya Organizatsiya "Nurcular": İstoriya Proishojdeniya, Deyatelnosty", *Altayskiy Yuridicheskiy Vestnik*, No. 12, 2015, s. 12-16.

However, the organization continues its activities within the framework of various associations and centers. Despite being proclaimed as "extremist organization", FETÖ can continue its activities in Russia even if it is at a more limited level. This is mainly due to the fact that the members of the organization are citizens of the Russian Federation because of their marriage with Russian citizens. Another method they have recently applied for is bribery and "feeding". FETO takes famous people who have a voice in their own field to Turkey and to world and support their projects (the system in Russia is very convenient for this), and, in turn, uses these names as a "showcase" of the organization. In other words, these intellectuals are making propaganda for Fethullah Gülen in Russia and in international scientific circles. After the 15 July coup attempt, organization members in Russia and the community showcase displayed a different attitude than the Russian official authorities.

15 July Coup Attempt and the Russian Press

The 15 July coup attempt was interpreted differently in the Russian press. It is possible to talk about three main groups in this context. First of these are the press organs and journalists who reflect the attitude of the Russian authorities. These are articles that condemn the attempt and support the Kremlin's step. The second group constitutes the writings and opinions of those who represent far-right Russian nationalism and extremist Armenian and Kurdish diasporas. What is important for them is the existence of bad developments in Turkey, Turkey's struggle with problems in internal and external politics, and its economic decline. Therefore, they continued the policy of "denigration" during the plane crisis. Their main aim is to denigrate Turkey by the media. Therefore, constant negative news comes out, developments are exaggerated, events of civil war, demonstration, protest, etc. are stated to happen in Turkey, and it is underlined that insurrection is the continuation of these events. One of the important aims of this second group is to prevent the development of Turkish-Russian relations. Because the problems in Turkish-Russian relations mean that Russia attaches more importance to the Armenian and Kurdish issue and that these two issues

will come in different forms. Another aim of this group is to prevent Russian tourists from coming to Turkey. For this reason, even the small negative events in Turkey are exaggerated by these circles, and good developments have never been mentioned.

The third group consists of the writings and evaluations of the aforementioned people who are members of the organization and who are used as showcase by the organization. At the same time they are confronted as the most dangerous group. Because especially showcase people are academicians, turkologists, orientalist and other intellectuals who are respected for their words. In other words, they are accepted as experts on Turkey. After the last 17-25 December incidents, representatives of the last group launched a policy of denigration against the AKP and President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. In these writings, it is written that there is an anti-democratic politics in Turkey, that corruption is increased, the people are disturbed and they make protests, and the coup attempt is a game played by the government.

However, what accounts for Russia are the attitudes and statements of the official authorities. Because a large part of the press organs is under the control of the state and reflects the official view of the Kremlin. This approach is also valid for Russian propaganda against Turkey during the plane crisis, and also for the process of Russian support of Turkish administration while Russian-Turkish relations are improving.

It seems that the resurgence of the Turkish-Russian rapprochement will bring the cooperation between the two countries back to its former level soon. It will become more of an issue to give importance to the scientific and cultural issues as well as the cooperation in fields such as politics, economy and energy which will be developed from this date. Establishment of the joint Turkish-Russian University, which was brought to the agenda in recent years, is important in this context. The cooperation that will be developed in the fields of science and culture will contribute to the elimination of perception problems between the parties and will prevent the manipulation of societies by the groups and organizations that oppose the bilateral cooperation.

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