

Turkey after the failed coup of 15 July – AEJ Meeting with Mehmet Öğütçü on 8 November 2016

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15 July 2016 is a date very firmly inscribed in the minds of all Turks and followers of Turkish affairs. The coup attempt of last July and its aftermath was the subject of discussion at the AEJ UK section meeting on 8 November at Europe House in London. "Turks love conspiracy theories" said Mehmet Öğütçü, chairman of Global Resources Partnership, a London-based international energy and finance consultancy who was the guest speaker of the meeting. A former diplomat and OECD executive Mr. Öğütçü gave an excellent presentation about the failed coup attempt and its aftermath to a packed audience of AEJ members and invited foreign correspondents.

What happened on the 15th of July is still the subject of many conspiracy theories in Turkey, almost four months after the coup attempt. President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has called the failed coup a "godsend." So, was this a real or an engineered coup attempt? Mehmet Öğütçü, like almost everyone in Turkey, is of the opinion that without a doubt it was mainly the Gulenists, followers of Fethullah Gulen, the fugitive Muslim cleric who lives in Pennsylvania, USA, who were behind the coup. Öğütçü said only four people probably know what actually happened that night: Mr Erdogan, his son-in-law (who is the Minister of Energy), the Chief of the Defence Staff, and the Head of Intelligence Services. "The Gulenists had infiltrated all the state institutions, the judiciary, and the army," said Öğütçü. "Russia was the first to call Turkey after the coup attempt. The United States was too late. They claimed it was because it was the beginning of the weekend and it took a while to assess the situation. Their ambassador in Ankara took his time, too. It was a complete PR disaster."

The state of emergency declared by the AKP government in Turkey after July's failed coup and the sweeping crackdown on President Erdogan's opponents, Gulenists as well as those who are against the Islamist policies of the present government, is of great concern not only to the Western governments but many in Turkey. Mehmet Öğütçü said that people in Turkey are concerned about what is going on at present and about their future. He said, "Many

people cannot see a light at the end of the tunnel. Even among the ranks of the AKP there is anxiety. The business community is particularly worried. Already, at least 10 holding companies have been taken into administration. This will create a serious legal backlash in the future."

Another worry in Turkey is whether it will be sucked into war in Syria, and Iraq. The future of Mosul is a topic hotly discussed in Turkey. Öğütçü says Turkey has legitimate concerns about its security but if it does get sucked into those conflicts, the situation will become even more complicated. According to Öğütçü Russians seem to have said to Turkey, "Don't mess with Aleppo but go ahead and deal with your security concerns. "

The deterioration of Turkey-EU relations was a key point of discussion during the meeting on 8 November. Mehmet Öğütçü believes the Turkey-European Union 'engagement' has lasted far too long and that there is no chance of it now developing into a marriage! "The EU dealt with Turkey in a humiliating way, particularly by prematurely accepting Cyprus as a member after the Greek Cypriots had voted to reject the Annan Plan for a lasting political settlement between the two sides while the Turkish Cypriots had voted for the plan;, and by not taking a clear line against terrorist activities of the PKK, (the Kurdish guerrilla organisation fighting in Turkey.) The stick and carrot policy of the EU is not working. The recent EU-Turkey agreement on the return of (mainly Syrian) refugees to Turkey has been badly done, too.

Turkey applied for full membership of EU in 1987 but gained candidate status only in 1999 and membership negotiations did not start until the autumn of 2005. Öğütçü said that he himself is not now in favour of Turkey becoming a member of the European Union. He thinks the EU would become a straitjacket for Turkey. "I do not think the EU is the best thing for Turkey now, but having it as an anchor has been useful and will be useful in the future" said Öğütçü. Turkey and the former European Economic Community had signed an Association Agreement, the so-called Ankara Agreement in 1963. This agreement, which Turkey considered as the first step on the road to full membership resulted in the implementation of a Customs Union Agreement in 1995. Öğütçü said this outdated agreement is expected to be upgraded next year to redress certain terms and conditions that have long been disadvantageous to Turkey. Turkey has also complained that trade

agreements that the EU signs with other countries do not take Turkey into account and so have cost the country billions of dollars. The new customs agreement is expected to include services and most agricultural goods whereas the existing agreement only covers trade in manufactured goods.

The confiscation of private businesses after the coup attempt is a cause for serious worry among the business community and foreign investors. "Existing foreign investors are preparing their exit strategy. However, the economy is still relatively strong and several big infra-structure projects are on schedule" said Öğütçü. In his opinion, Turkish economy has resilience because it had become immune to shocks and had overcome several crises in the last 15-20 years.

"Unless you recognise the complexities of Turkey, it will move away towards more like minded countries such as Saudi Arabia, Russia or Iran, and become part of a new axis" said Öğütçü. Would Turkey prefer a deal in arms with China over a deal with the West? In Öğütçü`s opinion Turkey is applying an effective form of old-fashioned bazaar bargaining tactics. He says that Erdogan seems to have been in some ways inspired by Putin, clamping down on the opposition and opting for an adventurous foreign policy. As for Turkey-Russia relations, "One may call it a marriage of convenience but the downing of the Russian plane by Turkey has shown how delicate and volatile this relationship is" Öğütçü concluded. Once President Erdogan had apologised to Mr Putin, Russia`s damaging economic sanctions were lifted at once and Russia allowed Turkey the room for manoeuvre it wanted to send its own army over the Syrian border to secure it against a series of devastating terrorist attacks over recent months and years.