

Analysis of public discourse on religious minorities in Turkey after the coup attempt of 15th July 2016¹

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to follow and analyse the public discourse on religious minorities in Turkey after the failed coup d'état of 15th July 2016. However either Turkish state's policy or social attitudes towards these groups have always been controversial and their real position has always differed from their legal status, the author decided to put a hypothesis that the coup attempt is indeed what has significantly affected the way they are being perceived by mass media in Turkey and hence, by Turkish public opinion. Thus, the purpose of this analysis is to study the chosen media content concerning religious minorities and to answer the question how the post-coup reality affects the situation of persons belonging to these groups. In order to achieve this goal several research methods specific for political science and humanities are applied and Polish, English and Turkish language sources are widely referred in the article.

Keywords: Turkey, coup d'état, religious minorities, 15th July 2016, Jews, Greeks, Armenians

Analiza dyskursu publicznego na temat mniejszości religijnych w Turcji po nieudanej próbie zamachu stanu z 15 lipca 2016 roku

Streszczenie

Celem publikacji jest prześledzenie dyskursu publicznego dotyczącego mniejszości religijnych w Turcji po nieudanej próbie zamachu stanu z 15 lipca 2016 roku. Jakkolwiek polityka tego państwa, jak również społeczne postawy wobec tych grup zawsze budziły kontrowersje, a ich rzeczywiste położenie odbiegało od formalnego statusu, autorka tekstu zdecydowała się na postawienie hipotezy, że to właśnie nieudana próba zamachu stanu wpłynęła szczególnie znacząco na postrzeganie i traktowanie tych grup przez mass media i, co za tym idzie, turecką opinię publiczną. Celem analizy jest więc prześledzenie wybranych treści medialnych i odpowiedź na pytanie o to, jak po-zamachowa rzeczywistość wyżywa na sytuację osób należących do tych grup. Osiągnięciu tego celu służy zastosowanie szeregu metod badawczych specyficznych dla nauk społecznych, w tym nauki o po-

¹ The publication is a result of the research grant of National Science Centre (Preludium 9, UMO-2015/17/N/HS5/00436).

lityce, jak również odwołania do źródeł polsko-, angielsko- i turekojęzycznych, będące warunkiem rzetelnej analizy zjawisk, których tekst dotyczy.

Słowa kluczowe: Turcja, zamach stanu, mniejszości religijne, 15 lipca 2016, Żydzi, Grecy, Ormianie.

The aim of this article is to analyse the public discourse on religious minorities in Turkey after the failed coup d'état of 15th July 2016. In other words, the author aims to examine whether any changes in media and social attitudes towards minority groups have occurred after this date or their situation remains unaffected regardless of the events of 15th July. Falling on July 2018 the second anniversary of the coup attempt is in the author's opinion a good occasion to make an effort to summarize how the situation of persons belonging to these groups looks like and thus, to answer the question asked above. In order to reach the goal of examination, it is necessary to refer shortly to terms used in the title of this paper as some of them are not as clear as it may appear.

The first thing requiring to be clarified briefly is the term 'discourse' widely used either on the scientific or journalistic ground. According to Norman Fairclough, one of the founders of critical discourse analysis applied to sociolinguistics, "discourse is a difficult concept, largely because there are so many conflicting and overlapping definitions formulated from various theoretical and disciplinary standpoints" (Fairclough 1992: p. 3-4), what is strictly related to the fact that the term lost its original meaning deriving from linguistics and is nowadays commonly used also in social theory and humanities, not to mention every-day colloquial language. Moreover, although it is readily used, there is no generally agreed definition what was accurately articulated by Polish sociologist Jerzy Szacki: "The word *discourse* has made in contemporary humanities a stunning career and it is becoming increasingly difficult to be certain if it still means anything or not, because it is used in many different ways and quite not infrequently simply as a *quasi*-scholar term to determine any longer speech or any text" (Szacki 2005: p. 905). Despite these discrepancies many academic attempts to unify this term may be indicated, with special regard to works of N. Fairclough who rejects 'discourse' in the meaning of "extended samples of spoken dialogue, in contrast with written texts" in favor of discourse as "interaction between speaker and addressee or between writer and reader, and therefore processes of producing and interpreting speech and writing, as well as the situational context of language use" (Fairclough 1992: p. 3-4). This kind of approach is not only close to conceptions of precursors of theory of discourse as M. Foucault or J. Habermas but is also widely represented on Polish academic ground where the term 'discourse' is defined *inter alia* as "Transmitting ideas and influencing people through language, strongly conditioned by the social position of senders and receivers, their purposes and needs, knowledge, hierarchy of values, understood also as a social context of communication and the specificity of communication through mass media" (M. Lisowska-Magdżiarz 2006: p. 9). In this meaning, discourse is a sequence of communication events so study on it shall focus on "relationships of causality and determination between (a) discursive practices, events and texts, and (b) wider social and cultural structures, relations [...]; investigate how such practices, events and texts arise out of and are ideologically shaped by relations of power

and struggles over power" (Fairclough 1992: p. 132). Exactly this meaning of 'discourse' is being applied in this paper. In other words, as it was stated above, the author aims at exploring the content of public discourse referring to religious minorities and thus, to follow and analyze the evolution of social attitudes towards them.

The next term which requires to be clarified is the specificity of the minority concept valid in contemporary Turkey.

The main source and basis of Turkey's minority policy is until today the Treaty of Lausanne (1923), an international agreement officially settling the conflict between The Kingdom of Greece supported by the Allied Powers and the Ottoman Empire. One of the most important goals that the Turkish delegation to Lausanne was supposed to achieve was to put through own standpoint on minority issues which already in those days seemed to be one of the most significant matters in the new proclaimed Republic of Turkey. In other words, contents of the treaty in whole and particularly its section III regarding minority rights protection were supposed to reflect an ideology that became a basis of new Turkey and was aimed at building unitary state with one Turkish nation speaking Turkish language. This brand new vision created by architects of post-Ottoman order like Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and his supporters is reflected in articles 38 and 39 of the Treaty of Lausanne. According to first of them "Non-Moslem minorities (tur. *gay-rimüslim akalliyetler*) will enjoy full freedom of movement and of emigration, subject to the measures applied, on the whole or on part of the territory, to all Turkish nationals, and which may be taken by the Turkish Government for national defense, or for the maintenance of public order" (Library of Congress 2007: p. 959). The another one stipulates that: "Turkish nationals belonging to non-Moslem minorities will enjoy the same civil and political rights as Moslems. All the inhabitants of Turkey, without distinction of religion, shall be equal before the law. Differences of religion, creed or confession shall not prejudice any Turkish national in matters relating to the enjoyment of civil or political rights, as, for instance, admission to public employments, functions and honours, or the exercise of professions and industries. No restrictions shall be imposed on the free use by any Turkish national of any language in private intercourse, in commerce, religion, in the press, or in publications of any kind or at public meetings. Notwithstanding the existence of the official language, adequate facilities shall be given to Turkish nationals of non-Turkish speech for the oral use of their own language before the Courts." (Library of Congress 2007: p. 959). Although apparently it seems to be a guarantee of minority rights it actually became a pillar of policy which is until today in contrary with standards of the universal and regional systems of minority rights protection. According to the interpretation of cited articles that was adopted by new nationalist authorities of Turkey, only non-Muslim communities may be granted a legally sanctioned status of minority and thus, are entitled to benefit from related privileges. In compliance with the literal wording of both the regulations, 'minorities' are these which are 'non-Muslim' what became a basis of an interpretation stating that only groups professing religion other than Islam are legally entitled to be granted a minority status in the meaning of the treaty. The act itself as an international agreement concluded for an indefinite period remains in force

until today and still is a main factor shaping the minority policy of the Republic of Turkey. The pillar of this policy is negation of existence of non-Turkic elements of the society and adoption of the religious factor as the one and only criterion of 'being a minority'. Hence, from a legal point of view groups like Kurds, Arabs, Circassians, Laz people, Zaza people or Azeris do not even exist. Moreover, although in the treaty itself there are no legal obstacles to grant the minority status to all groups professing religion other than Islam in practice only Greeks, Armenians and Jews enjoy privileges resulting from it. Some other religious communities like *inter alia* Roman Catholics and Assyrians belonging to one of the Eastern Christian churches remain in a specific legal vacuum. Although there are no legal obstacles to grant them a minority status it still hasn't have occurred so that their members are perceived neither as a minority nor as an equal element of Turkish society (Bardakçı et al. 2017: p. 62–63). A completely different issue are the Alevis – a spiritual group a status of which is not clear not only in context of the Treaty of Lausanne but first of all in a religious meaning. As the Alevis' denomination consists of various elements derived from either Islam or Christianity and local animistic beliefs they are being accepted neither as Muslims nor are Christians. As the Alevis are not officially recognised as minority and thus, are not a research subject of this paper they shall become a theme of separate analysis dedicated strictly to their position in a society of contemporary Turkey (Hanoğlu 2017: p. 13–14).

Thus, according to Turkish state's minority policy, whenever the term 'religious minorities' is used in the paper, the author refers to these groups which are recognised under the Turkish law as religious minorities: Jews, Greeks and Armenians.

The next term which is used in the title and needs to be shortly clarified is "coup attempt of 15th July 2016". 15th July 2016 is a date of the abortive coup which started in evening hours of 15th July when tanks led by members of rebellious faction of Turkish Armed Forces appeared on the Bosphorus Bridge in Istanbul. The intention of taking power in the state was officially proclaimed by the self-appointed Peace at Home Council (tur. *Yurtta Sulh Konseyi*) via Turkish public television channel TRT but as it proved in later hours lack of sufficient control over media establishments was indeed what significantly inflicted defeat of the coup attempt. In the meantime, in various locations of Istanbul, Ankara and few other cities some further successes of the putschists were reported but in literally few hours course of the events took a completely unexpected turn. In other words, the coup ended before it began and the scale of social support shown to the legal authorities went beyond all expectations the consequences of what are widely discussed below. The response to president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's call to take to streets exceeded expectations of maybe even himself as within not even one hour the streets of Istanbul, Ankara and many other cities were flooded by crowd of hundreds of thousands coup-opponents rising slogans not only of support for president and the ruling Justice and Development Party (tur. *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, AKP) but in general regarding Turkey's greatness and independence, resentments against the European Union and the United States and restoring the significance of Islam in public life (Republic of Turkey is a secular and democratic rule of law since its proclamation in 1923). Despite the fact that

pro-coup tanks remained on the Bosphorus Bridge until early morning of 16th July and some attempts to take control over other strategic points and buildings were undertaken by the putschists during whole night, failure of the coup was obvious from the moment when the presidential aircraft safely landed in Atatürk Airport in Istanbul. Despite the fact that the coup attempt failed and the legal authorities remained in power Turkish society suffered a significant damage as only during two days up to 300-350 people were killed and over 2000 wounded including among others pro-coup soldiers lynched by pro-president civilians (Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi: p. 390). Regardless of failure of the coup and apart from being supporter or opponent of AKP and president R.T. Erdoğan there is no doubt that Turkish society has been surviving a deep trauma, especially taking into consideration the fact that it is not a first time when army takes an attempt to remove legal authorities from power.

According to official version the coup attempt was inspired by the US-resident Turkish preacher Fethullah Gülen titled by his supporters *hocacafendi* what means more less 'Honourable Teacher' and refers to person who possesses an outstanding knowledge and experience in teaching and interpreting rules of Islam and is at the same time commonly respected and recognised as an authority. F. Gülen regarded as one of the most influential Muslim scholars and thinkers is at the same time founder of Hizmet Movement (*hizmet* – Eng. *mission, service*) known also as Gülen Movement or Cemaat (eng. *The Assembly, The Community*), a transnational religious and social movement which on the one hand has been for a long time appreciated for its scale and effectiveness but simultaneously criticised because of lack of transparency and its political commitment. As the coup itself and responsibility for events of 15th July are not the subject of the analysis it is sufficient to finish these considerations in this moment and focus on a 'by-product' of process of looking for The Guilty – the groups which are under Treaty of Lausanne recognised as minorities: Jews, Greeks and Armenians.

With a purpose of achieving the research goals indicated above, several ways of scientific proceeding have been applied. Especially methods of legal-institutional analysis, content analysis and critical discourse analysis turned out significant for realisation of aims indicated by the author. (1) Legal and institutional analysis of documents constituting frames of Turkey's minority policy – a method which at the same time enables analyzing theoretical and practical dimension of implemented changes and applied mechanisms; (2) Content analysis examines "who says what through which channel to whom with what effect" (Lasswell 1948: p. 117), so in practice it includes media content analysis, what must be distinguished from (3) critical discourse analysis which also bases on textual sources analysis but is less than content analysis focused on reality as it exist, more on reality as it is produced (Hardy et al. 2004: p. 20-21). In other words, while the content analysis serves first of all the purpose of following public texts, speeches, articles, on-line statements etc. as they are, the discourse analysis aims at interpretation, reading between lines and trying to understand what the author intended to say. Thus, the content analysis method is always more objective, measurable and estimable while discourse analysis is characterised by high level of subjectivism and susceptibility to interpretation. Simultaneously,

also elements of other research methods specific for political science and humanities have been applied (historical analysis, decisional analysis etc.).

15th July coup d'état and minorities

As stated in the introduction, the author intends to focus on public discourse on non-Islamic groups recognised as minorities under the Treaty of Lausanne. The main reason for undertaking this topic is intention to study the paradox which consists in the fact that on the one hand the abovementioned groups are the only ones which are protected in any way under the Turkish law and on the other hand seem to be an 'accidental victim' of post-coup looking for The Guilty.

Literally, Treaty of Lausanne provides the minority groups – in the meaning sanctioned by the document itself – a wide range of rights and privileges with a purpose of protection of their religious identity in Muslim society. However actual living conditions of persons belonging to religious minorities have always been far from legal status of these groups what shall become a research topic for a separate article, the author decided to focus on their situation after the 15th July coup d'état as exactly this date seems to be a turning point in contemporary history of Turkey and its society. As social position of these groups prior to the coup attempt is not a research subject of this paper it is enough to emphasize that Turkey's minority policy based on the Treaty of Lausanne has been full of discrepancies and paradoxes since the moment of proclamation of the republic in 1923. In other words, despite the fact that in the light of document the minority rights are widely protected, in practice this protection has been always far from the letter of the act what results from *one nation policy* implemented by new nationalist authorities of the Republic of Turkey. Hence, dissonance between formal and real status of these communities is not a new phenomenon so the author doesn't intend to prove something what is commonly known. The question that the author would like to answer is whether the special status and legal protection granted to these groups under the Treaty of Lausanne saves them in any way from post-coup process of looking for The Guilty or in the contrary, makes them particularly exposed to social dislike and media hate campaign.

The trauma of 15th July and both real and stimulated by government fears and suspicions became a great ground for wide-ranging process of looking for The Guilty what in short time began to remind a 'witch-hunt' in which the further 'witches' have been consecutively found in various social and occupational groups like among others journalists, academicians, ethnic and language societies (with Kurds at the forefront), supporters of parties other than the ruling one, foreign enemy powers (with USA, EU and Israel at the forefront) and many others. In other words, although the main driving force behind the coup was according to the official version the Gülen Movement, the were no obstacles to look for The Guilty among circles strongly denying to have any connection with controversial preacher. One of such groups, appearing more and more often in public speeches of president Erdoğan and other prominent politicians are exactly the religious minorities. In order to analyze the evolution of discourse on these groups in the post-15th July reality

it is necessary to refer widely to words articulated by prominent Turkish politicians immediately after the coup and during the incoming months.

As repeatedly stated above, it is almost impossible to indict a group not affected by the 15th July coup d'état, especially after entering a state of emergency on 20th July 2016 that had been extended for seven times and was finally lifted on 19th June 2018. However religious minority groups were not the first who was declared a public enemy number one, it didn't take a long time when they began to be blamed for engagement in the coup as well. The first alarm signal indicating that religious minorities will not be passed over within the process of looking for The Guilty were the words of president R.T. Erdoğan, prime minister Binali Yıldırım and the leader of coalition Nationalist Movement Party (tur. *Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi*, MHP) Devlet Bahçeli, one after another giving a speech condemning the coup and enemy forces standing behind him. Although none of the minority groups was indicated by its name it is obvious that statements like "flock of heretics" by R.T. Erdoğan (tur. *kafir sürüsü*), "army of crusaders" (Tur. *haçlı ordusu*) by B. Yıldırım or "Byzantine germ" (tur. *Bizans tohumu*) by D. Bahçeli were a broad hint that The Guilty hides beyond Sunni majority dominant in Turkey. What is especially interesting, the heads of Jew, Greek and Armenian communities were present at the "Democracy and Martyrs Rally", where the words were said, at the invitation of president Erdoğan himself. In other words, the fact of invitation of the religious leaders may suggest that the groups they are representatives of are recognised as integral parts of Turkish society not only on a legal basis but on the actual ground as well and thus, were invited to joint celebration of fail of the coup and will take part in creation of post-15th July reality. In fact, words addressed formally to unspecified "heretics", "crusaders" and "Byzantine germs" were widely interpreted as a harbinger of upcoming 'witch-hunt' that in short time became an axis of public life in Turkey and lasts until today.

Words cited above were only a prelude to a multi-dimensional process of assigning the responsibility for the coup to various groups with a special regards to foreign forces and their alleged Turkey-inside supporters considered as a 5th column interested in overthrowing the AKP government. In other words, it was only few days after 15th July when first accusations towards governments of West countries began to be addressed. Yet at the beginning of September 2016 during the assembly of National Security Council president Erdoğan said that all those who did not condemn the coup attempt in a clear, unambiguous way are at least as guilty as its direct perpetrators: "There are some powers and persons who claim that the coup d'état of 15th July was allegedly a game or a theatre prepared by ourselves. Whoever can talk about the coup like that and does not clearly condemn it at the same time, is an integral part of 15th July tragedy and its wilful supporter. All those who remain in this mistaken belief will not save from account before our martyrs and the whole Nation!" (BBC Türkçe 2016). After the words about 'heretics' and 'crusaders' it was one of the most meaningful statements of Turkish leader who thereby gave an unlimited permission to blame not only the Gülen Movement but 'foreign powers' in wide meaning, including first of all the European Union and its inside-Turkey representatives who religious minorities became to be perceived, irrespective of having any tights with

the coup or not. In short time this state of affairs turned out to be an impulse for starting a public discourse on minorities' role in the coup, including not only mass media but also academic or, rather more pseudo-academic, and journalistic events focusing on proving correctness of the thesis put forward by Mr. Erdoğan.

One of the most significant examples of this phenomenon was a conference organised under the patronage of among others Anadolu Agency, the biggest and pro-governmental media agency in Turkey, the Center for Middle Eastern Strategic Studies (ORSAM), Prime Minister's Directorate General of Press and Information and Prime Minister's Department of Coordination of Public Diplomacy and others. The meeting took place on 21st July 2016 so almost right after the coup attempt and its main goal was to analyze the Western discourse on these events, with a special regard to mass media and their actual or alleged involvement into their development. According to the statements of members of the conference, either European political leaders or the most influential media adopted a wait-and-see policy and have been consequently avoided condemning the coup attempt despite the fact that it was obviously against the principles of democracy. In other words, the common denominator of European politicians and commentators were to refrain from unambiguous opinions or assessments on the events of 15th July as long as the situation is not clear enough to be sure whether president R.T. Erdoğan and the AKP government will be overthrown or not (Yüzbaşıoğlu et al. 2016). Moreover, according to words of İlnur Çevik, the spokesman of president R.T. Erdoğan, also many examples of support for the putschists may be found among Western media representatives like for instance American Fox TV experts openly interested in a success of the coup (Anadolu Agency 2016). The author of this paper took an effort to verify such claims and the result is that while there are no unequivocal manifests of support for the putsch, some controversial statements and opinions may be indicated. Just to illustrate some attitudes taken towards the coup it is enough to quote the words of Dr Sebastian Gorka, political scientist and deputy assistant to president Donald Trump, who justifies the events of 15th July as a remedy for authoritarian trends increasing under the rule of AKP and president Erdoğan, and his silent consent for ISIS activities in northern Syria (Gorka 2016). However interpreting these words as an obvious support for the putschists is a far-reaching simplification, it must be admitted that there is same logic in the way these words are understood by a vast majority of Turkish public opinion. In other words, society suffering an emotional trauma was and still is particularly susceptible to all suggestions, views and opinions putting the coup attempt in a positive light. Although Turkey is deeply divided with regard to political views and the number of opponents of current authorities is almost identical to number of their supporters, antipathy towards ruling powers shall be never equated with support for the coup. Despite the fact that president Erdoğan arouses bad feelings in a significant part of the society, vast majority of it would never accept a military and violent change of government or president, what was observed during 15/16 July night when hundreds of thousands of people took to the streets not to defend R.T. Erdoğan but to protect democracy and own future. Considering that fact, it is understandable that most of Turkish people do not share or even take into

consideration any idea in favour of the perpetrators of this trauma and remain distrustful about all attempts to justify it. In this atmosphere, all the symptoms of binding hope for a better future with the coup attempt is being perceived by a dominant part of society an act strictly aimed at Turkey's vital interests. Thus, opinions similar to these published by Fox TV, presented also in some European mass media, are used by Turkish authorities as a perfect propaganda tool shaping in common people conviction that the trauma of 15th July was inspired from abroad. This is a short and simple way to allocate the reasons of own fears and doubts beyond Turkey – in United States, European Union, Israel, Armenia and even Vatican, as sources of never ending Christian and Jewish imperialism. An obvious consequence of such a state of affairs is blaming for the coup attempt not only the external enemies but the closer ones: Turkey-resident religious minority groups perceived as an extension of foreign powers interested in overthrowing president Erdoğan and the AKP government. This is exactly how Greeks, Armenians and Jews became, next to Fethullah Gülen movement and unnamed 'external powers', one of those who are suspected of being involved in the coup attempt.

Turkish media and looking for The Guilty

The post-coup political and social moods and fears stimulated intentionally by the authorities found in a short time a reflection in mass media majority of which began some kind of competition in seeking The Guilty. Although a comprehensive analysis of condition of Turkish mass media is not possible due to the limited volume of this paper, it must be mentioned that the date 15th July became a turning point also on media market subjected from this moment to a deep revolution leading to a dichotomy in which media institutions were *de facto* obliged to define themselves either as pro-government or anti-government. National and local newspapers, TV and radio channels as well as web portals found themselves under a pressure to choose being among pro-government establishments or not. In other words, all those who did not declare own support for legal authorities have been automatically considered as tools in hands of enemies and 5th column of Hizmet Movement (*vide: case of Today's Zaman*). The most distinct harbinger of forthcoming polarization of media establishments were the words of president Erdoğan himself who claimed that "(...) all those who do not condemn the coup attempt in a certain way are at least as guilty as its main perpetrators (BBC Türkçe 2016). Hence, remaining neutral proved to be impossible and these of media institutions which took effort to stay objective became in a short time object of purges and even closure procedures – everything under the pretext of being related to organizers of the coup. As a result, hundreds of media outlets were shut down in the course of the 2016 purges and those which managed to remain unaffected are at the same time those which more or less openly declared own support for legal authorities. However, as staying not engaged turned out not to be enough to prove being not related to the coup perpetrators, the establishments which decided to survive post-coup repressions began a wide-ranging process of looking for The Guilty.

That is exactly how the coup attempt gave a strong impulse to outflow of hate speech towards all those whose involvement in the events of 15th July was at least suggested by the authorities. In other words, all the groups, powers or even individuals who were directly or indirectly indicated as allegedly guilty for the coup attempt became an object of unambiguous insinuations by almost all significant media jointly and openly supporting the ruling forces. As stated above, one of those whose involvement into coup attempt was quickly and undoubtedly ascertained by pro-government newspapers, TV channels and Web portals were exactly religious minority groups. One of the earliest voices throwing into question the minorities leaders' attitude towards the coup attempt was an article by Mahmut Övür entitled "Why do the leaders of minorities stay silent?" (tur. *Azınlıkların ruhani liderleri neden sessiz?*) published in "Sabah", one of the main daily newspapers, on 25th July 2016. As it appears from the title, objection raised by the author concerns controversial behaviour of spiritual leaders who refrain from immediate condemnation of the coup attempt what results, according to the article, from wait-and-see policy aimed at choosing the better option in case of success of the coup. Moreover, indicated by name leaders of Jews, Greeks and Armenians are openly blamed for no reaction on coming from European countries accusations that events of 15th July were actually faked and controlled by political background of president Erdoğan. However beyond Turkey's borders various theories on genesis of the coup are still being discussed, in Turkey the 'FETÖ option' (tur. *Fethullahçı Terör Örgütü*, Eng. *Terrorist Organization of Fethullah's Supporters*) is one and only taken into consideration and exactly in this context the author severely criticizes all the three leaders who should in his opinion have unambiguously distanced themselves from any speculations. According to his opinion, official representatives of religious minorities which are an integral part of Turkish society are more than obliged to take an attitude towards events of 15th July and stand on the side of own government. At the same time, the author responds own questions about reasons for postponing the univocal condemnation of the coup attempt and claims that this controversial behaviour results directly from minorities' connections with Gülen Movement. Övür refers to project entitled 'Dialogue between religions' which was initiated symbolically in 1997 when the leader of Hizmet met with pope John Paul II what in his opinion clearly indicates that religious minority groups living in Turkey are with a high probability internal tools used by US-resident Gülen with a purpose of overthrowing the government in Ankara (Övür 25.07.2017: p. 18). However the author leaves these suggestions without continuation and does not unambiguously dispel doubts resulting from such claims, those who the suspicions have been raised against are obvious and clear.

This kind of speculations opened a door for an outflow of hate speech within which the main and most conspicuous theme pursued widely and eagerly is the role of Jews – traditional main characters of conspiracy theories present in Turkish political life from time immemorial. Although the "Jewish finger" theory has been never literally articulated by the Turkish authorities, pro-government media became an Ankara's voice in process of explanation of the genesis of the failed coup. In other words, as the political interests refrain president Erdoğan from expressing this kind of opinions openly, this role is being

played by TV channels, newspapers and web sites competing in devising the most conspiratorial theory ever. One of the best examples of this phenomenon are considerations by Fuat Uğur, journalist of "Türkiye", one of the most popular nation-wide daily newspapers. Since the date of 15th July 2016 he has spent long hours on attempts to prove that there is a secret connection between the events of that time and US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) allegedly interested in overthrowing current authorities with the purpose of establishment of new ruling forces close to Fethullah Gülen. Moreover, citing anonymous sources he claims that in the night of the coup attempt at least one high ranked CIA agent came to Turkey in order to control the course of events from inside and moreover, he made his journey directly from nowhere else than from Israel (Uğur 23.07.2016: p. 8). In a series of articles he presents a thinking process which led him to surprising conclusion that The Guilty lively interested in determining the legal forces in Ankara is the Jewish lobby in United States whose local governor is no one else that leader of Hizmet Movement. Thus, what is more than natural, the suspicion falls on Turkey's Jewish minority – a group of about 20000 – 25000 thousand (Oran 2004: p. 51) people led by rabbi Isak Haleva perceived by those who share similar views as a 5th column of Jewish imperialism striving strongly to take control over the Turkish state.

Jews are not the only ones whose role in the coup attempt is widely discussed among pro-government journalists entirely devoted to find The Guilty. Another group suspected for active support for the putschists are Armenians, next to the Jews 'usual suspect' in conspiracy theories accompanying all the significant political occurrences in Turkey. As difficult bilateral Turkey-Armenia relations are a completely different problem, here it only shall be indicated that as a result of not easy joint history both sides are still being perceived by each other as enemy and real threat for own security. In other words, as the Armenians have always been considered by the Turkish side as traitors, plotters and creators of the biggest falsity in history called 'Armenian genocide', counting them as potential perpetrators of the coup attempt seems quite naturally. Similarly to Jews, also Armenians became an object of more or less logical journalistic analysis' which in fact is a voice of many Turkish politicians who want to avoid public expression of own views. However many examples of this phenomenon may be given, in the author's opinion particularly interesting are these conceptions which find the roots of alleged Armenian involvement in the coup attempt in events from over 100 years ago. According to Hasret Yıldırım from daily newspaper "Yenisöz", understanding the genesis of 15th July requires looking back in the past until the end of 19th century when the Janissaries corps were being formed by Kazım Karabekir, one of the most influential politicians of late Ottoman Empire. With a purpose of reinforcing the formation, hundreds of thousands of Armenian children inhabiting the eastern borders of the Empire were forcibly recruited and then brought up as Ottoman, Turkish and Muslim citizens. All the problems, including further military coups, faced by Turkish army during 20th century result in Yıldırım's conviction exactly from the fact that a significant part of Turkish Armed Forces (tur. *Türk Silah Kuvvetleri*) is still dominated by descendants of Armenian Janissaries. Moreover, as they grown up, started own families and their children also had own descendants, nowadays,

according to Yıldırım, there is about 100 000 'crypto Armenians' (tur. *kripto Ermeniler*) living in contemporary Turkey (Yıldırım 7.10.2016: p. 16) and looking for an opportunity for a revenge for murdering their ancestors by Ottoman army. The author clearly suggests that previous military coups as well as the coup attempt of 2016 were inspired by Turkish Armenians in cooperation not only with Armenian state but also with Gülen Movement. First victim of this kind of thinking became of course the Armenian minority perceived, similarly to Jews, as the 5th column of Armenia – not only Turkey's historical enemy but also a state which in mass perception is responsible for creation of false and unjust image of Turkey as a perpetrator of Armenian genocide of 1915–1916.

However vast majority of this kind of views and opinions is articulated not by politicians themselves but by pro-government mass media, several examples of blaming minority groups directly by decision makers may be indicated. Deputy of ruling AKP, Mehmet Erdoğan (unrelated to president Erdoğan, convergence of names) during one of his public speeches said that if the coup had been successful establishment of Kurdish-Armenian state in the eastern borders of Turkey would be more than certain (Koçyiğit 2017). While the fear of birth of Kurdish statehood is not so unjustified as the Kurdistan Workers' Party (Kurd. *Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê*, PKK) has been operating in the East for over 40 years, the same panic about Armenian territorial expansion seems to be exaggerated. In other words, however Turkey-Armenia bilateral relations are indeed complicated and have never been good, it would be difficult to legitimize theories that concerns existence of alleged Armenian lobby interested in territorial division of Turkey and absorbing its lands. As answering the question whether this kind of public statements reflects real fears of ruling forces or are more a propaganda tool aimed at making the voters worry about stability of own state and support current authorities is not possible, it must be said that regardless of which of the answers is correct, both versions have the same effect: increasing reluctance towards Armenian minority in Turkey. Particular symptoms of this phenomenon, analogously as in the case of Jews, will be indicated in further part of the text.

Third group granted a minority status under the Treaty of Lausanne – the Greeks – also became an object of media witch-hunt, especially after the helicopter with generals suspected for preparing the coup attempt crossed the Turkey–Greece border on 16th July. Although Greece is another of historical enemies of Turkey, the orthodox minority does not inflame Turkish imagination as much as Jews and Armenians, what is probably a result of its very low number and the fact that Greece less often than Armenia and Israel becomes a main character of conspicuous theories beloved in Turkey. Thus, there is high possibility that Greek minority would have never become a suspect in process of seeking The Guilty if the helicopter issue hadn't have occurred. In other words, once the news about eight Turkish officers who passed illegally Turkey's border and landed in Greece's territory spread, a wave of suspicions and accusations appeared in media and political commentaries. It reached its climax when Supreme Court of this state refused to extradite them to Turkey and the proper authorities decided that their asylum requests will be considered in accordance with

international humanitarian law. As a response, all pro-government Turkish media immediately announced a verdict that Greece openly supports the coup and uses the Greek minority living in Turkey as a tool of strengthening own influences (Bila 1.02.2017: p. 10). Despite the fact that spiritual leader of orthodox minority, Ecumenic Patriarch Bartholomeus as well as other leaders was present during the Democracy and Martyrs Rally in Istanbul and condemned the events of 15th July, the Greeks living in Turkey became another 5th column acting in cooperation with foreign forces interested in overthrowing legal authorities in Ankara.

Seeking The Guilty and its consequences for members of minority groups

The media witch-hunt and its silent support by the AKP government quickly resulted in concrete events aimed directly at members of religious minorities as well as buildings, places of worship and their other possessions. One of the first consequences of discourse created by mass media was attack on two Christian churches in Malatya conducted on 16th July 2016 by the participants of pro-government demonstration. Orthodox place of worship was thrown with stones, all the window panes were broken and at the same time, over a ten-member group tried to get inside the building of neighbouring Catholic church. Despite the fact that there were no serious victims, both the attacks were only a harbinger of repressions that were yet to come. Lack of condemnation by officials became an additional contribution to the increase of social antipathy towards these people what is perceptible until today. Malatya events were not the only one against minorities' worship places as almost 2 years after the coup attempt, on 30th April 2018, similar attack took place in Kadıköy, part of Istanbul. Surp Takavor Armenian church was covered with insulting and discriminating inscriptions among which "It is only our motherland! Thanks God!" (utr. *Bu vatan bizim! Allaha şükür!*) is the most delicate one. With the purpose of emphasising the message, in front of the church several dozens of rubbish were tipped (Cumhuriyet 30.04.2018). However this time the incident was criticised by the Kadıköy municipality on its Twitter profile, it was at the same time reduced to hooligan prank, not a racist attack on a religious basis. During last two years there were dozens of similar attacks in whole country but none of them has been officially commented by high level authorities. Moreover, the mainstream media also take conformist attitude and thus, either do not discuss such occurrences at all or present them as unfortunate excess of insubordinate youth but never as a symptom of increasing discrimination of minority groups.

While the abovementioned attacks were prepared by anonymous individuals formally not related to the ruling forces, there are also examples of repressions towards persons belonging to minorities used directly by state services as a part of seeking The Guilty. One of the most ridiculous post-coup acts taken against its alleged perpetrators was closing of the in-vitro clinic owned by doctor Aret Kamar, Turkish citizen with Armenian roots. According to his statement for newspaper "Agos", the hospital

was closed without any investigation or other proceedings, only on a basis of unspecified information obtained by the intelligence services (Kuyumciyan 26.07.2016: p.4). In order to specify what 'closure' means it needs to be said that not only documents and financial resources were seized, but also test tubes with embryos fell into hands of agents looking for a proof of relations between the clinic and its owner and Fethullah Gülen and related entities. Despite the fact that Mr Kamar repeatedly emphasised being an Armenian and Christian what is by definition in contrary to membership to Sunni Hizmet community, none of his arguments was take into consideration. Thus, medical documentation of over 40 000 of patients got under control of state clergies and, what is particularly interesting, fate of embryos remained unknown for a long time as all of them were due to safety reasons transferred to one of public hospitals. It resulted in panic among patients subject to in-vitro therapy as after the test tubes left primary storage place no one could be sure whether they were replaced correctly or not. One of the most striking examples of consequences of these events was the case of Ayşe Öztürk who was forced to transfer own embryos in a special flask, as she decided not to use the services of doctor who she was assigned to in the public hospital the test tubes were transferred to (CNN Türk 2016).

Not only Christians but also Jews became a victim of post-coup repressions supported by media accusations and reluctance of Turkish majority. What is specific for antisemitism all over the world, not only in Turkey, members of Jewish community are often perceived through the prism of own economic situation what occurs also in context of 15th July. According to information of anonymous, close-to-prosecutor's office sources thousands of weird operations were made on Turkey's stock exchange just before the coup attempt and over 50 businessmen with Jewish roots sold own securities and withdrawn from the stock market at all (Özgan 2018). However these kind of news may be not confirmed and any reliable source is not given, it inflames imagination more than any rational attempts to clarify the situation. Thus, a ground for anti-Jewish conspiracy theories was given, regardless of lack of evidence or any other reason for considering them a bit likely. Although Jewish Community of Turkey explicitly distanced oneself from the coup attempt and publicly condemned its perpetrators whoever they are, its members are still being perceived as 5th column of Israel deeply interested in overthrowing the ruling forces. Moreover, as the content of accusations aimed at Turkish Jews applies first of all to their financial relations with Fethullah Gülen the main repressions towards them harms their business enterprises. Countless tax controls, seizing of documentation, lasting many hours interrogations are only examples of Turkish state's acting towards this minority. As a result, about 600 Turkish Jews decide to leave their motherland after 15th July and settle down in Israel despite having no job or place to live or even knowledge of Hebrew (Ekin 25.02.2018: p. 4). However number of 600 people may seem low it shall not be forgotten that according to various sources total population of Turkish Jews is about 20000–25000 what means that 2,5%–3,5% of Jewish minority was forced to leave their country as a result of the coup attempt.

Conclusions

However difficulties and obstructions as well as manifestations of physical aggression mentioned above are only few examples of media and social pressure on religious minorities and much more may be given, information referred in the paper are in the author's opinion enough to answer the question put forward in the introduction. The aim of this paper was to examine whether any changes in the way the minority groups are being perceived has occurred after 15th July 2016 or their situation remains unaffected regardless of these events. It is certain with any doubt that these groups not only became a victim of media 'witch-hunt' but are also considered by a significant part of Turkish society as a 5th column of main perpetrators of the coup attempt. Moreover, according to some accusations mentioned above, Armenians and Jews did not stop at silent support for putschists but actively engaged themselves into preparations of the coup. At the same time, it must be admitted that none of the minority communities enjoyed social sympathy before 15th July but attitudes towards them have been deteriorating day by day, stimulated by mass media and silent permission by main politicians. In other words, however followers of religions other than Islam have always aroused distrust in Turkish people, the coup attempt made them particularly susceptible to power of conspiracy theories and seeking The Guilty among strangers. A deep need of rationalization induced common people to looking for a real and material object for blaming for the trauma of 15th July what has been skilfully used by pro-government media and politicians themselves, particularly interested in consolidation of social moods what in turn entails consolidation of political support. Religious minorities proved to be ideal for this function: small number of members, lack of political representation able to defend their good name, already weak position in Turkish society and first of all religion different than Islam – all these circumstances made Greeks, Jews and Armenians a perfect candidate for being a 5th column of Fethullah Gülen and his worldwide network of influences.

It is significant not to confuse the purpose of this paper with the decision whether any of the minority groups as themselves or their particular members do have any relation to events of 15th July. While the goal of this text has been achieved and the analysis leaves no doubt that on the ground of public discourse the religious minorities groups became one of the Guilties, the latter issue one remains unclarified, just like real reasons and circumstances of the coup attempt of 15th July.

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