



AFSV response to Turkish Government's Irresponsible and Desperate Effort to Divert Attention from Lapse of Security Surrounding the Assassination of Russian Ambassador to Turkey

New York (December 22, 2016) - We categorically deny and protest Turkish Government officials' allegations trying to link the assassin of Russian ambassador to Turkey with Mr. Gulen or Hizmet movement. Mr. Gulen immediately condemned the heinous terrorist attack and sent his condolences to Russian people.

While the assertion is wrong and irresponsible, it is not unexpected since Mr. Erdogan blames Mr. Gulen for any and all harm that besets Turkey.

There are many facts emerging that contradict President Erdogan's claim, including the fact that the assassin's mother has refuted the claim that the young man attended a hizmet affiliated college prep school. Moreover, the grade school that his uncle is linked with, Ata College, has no connections with the movement. The claim that he shared an address with a pro-hizmet journalist, Abdullah Bozkurt, was refuted by the journalist himself who produced government records of his address. He was alleged to have been named as a suspect along with Gulen sympathizers in an investigation into the civil service admission exam (KPSS) in 2010. This is an anachronism, as a 16-year old in 2010 he was too young to take the exam. He obtained his leave after the July coup attempt with a doctor's report. Finally the claim that he graduated from a police academy dominated by Gulen sympathizers is highly speculative. In any event, having graduated from the same school with others does not imply having the same worldview with them. The government certainly had access to this information in their screening process and he was not eliminated from the police force during the post-2013 purges.

Through this baseless allegation, Erdogan government is attempting to divert attention from the glaring lapse of security that allowed this and other tragic terrorist attacks recently, and the international criticism for the reports of tacit support that the terrorist groups allegedly received in the country.

Since 2014 Erdogan government has shuffled, fired and imprisoned hundreds of police detectives and counterterrorism officers for alleged connections to Mr. Gulen. Many experts have pointed out that this political witch-hunt led to a lapse in security, especially in the area of counterterrorism.

The young attacker, apparently an off duty police officer, was reportedly hired in 2014.

He is reported to have spoken the beginning part of Al Nusra march in Arabic. A Russian media outlet reported that he has been part of President Erdogan's security detail in two recent trips, presumably after a detailed vetting process [1].

In May 2016, Turkish authorities jailed Can Dundar, editor in chief of Cumhuriyet Daily for publishing photos and videos of arms shipments to Syria, allegedly headed for terrorist groups such as Al Nusra [2,3]. Turkish government denied those charges.

Recent reports by Atlantic Council [4,5], Foundation for Defense of Democracies [6,7], reports by Columbia University's Institute for the Study of Human Rights [8] and major U.S. news outlets like Washington Post [9] and New York Times [10] all pointed out in the past how members of terrorist groups such as Al Nusrah and ISIS got tacit support in Turkey and the security apparatus some times turned a blind eye to their activities.

We once again condemn the heinous attack on Russian Ambassador and send our condolences to Russian people.

References:

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