

Turkey summons German envoy in row over pro-Erdogan rally in Cologne

MalaysiaKini.com

Aug 2nd, 2016

Shabtai Gold & Can Merey, dpa

Germany's ambassador to Ankara was summoned to the Turkish Foreign Ministry late yesterday over a German court decision banning President Recep Tayyip Erdogan from addressing supporters at a Cologne rally over a live stream video link.

Representatives of the ministry expressed "disappointment and irritation" with the decision, Turkish state news agency Anadolu said.

German envoy Robert Doelger, a deputy of Ambassador Martin Erdmann, responded to the summons on behalf of Martin, who currently is on holiday.

Germany's Constitutional Court issued the ban to prohibit the live stream, which was proposed by organisers of a pro-Erdogan demonstration on Sunday that drew an estimated 40,000 people to the western German city.

Doelger was told such a decision by the authorities of an "ally" that relies on shared democratic values was "unacceptable". According to Anadolu, the ministry also complained that because of the ban the president's message had to be read aloud at the demonstration.

Representatives of the Turkish government on Sunday sharply criticized the ban. Justice Minister Bekir Bozdag spoke of a "disgrace" for democracy and rights.

Government spokesperson Numan Kurtulmus, speaking after a cabinet meeting and ahead of the planned meeting, said Germany had acted with "double standards" by banning the Erdogan address, the Anadolu news agency reported.

Diplomatic ties between Ankara and Berlin, which have been deteriorating for months, have been further strained by the failed coup attempt in Turkey last month and the crackdown that followed.

Turkey claims that US-based cleric Fethullah Gulen has links to the attempted coup on July 15, and has demanded that Germany extradite his alleged followers.

Gulen has an estimated 100,000 followers in Germany, which is home to about 3 million people of Turkish heritage.

Ambassador Erdmann has not been able to book a meeting with either the Foreign Ministry or other departments since June 2, when the German parliament recognized the Ottoman Empire's killing of ethnic Armenians a century ago as genocide.

Turkey withdrew its ambassador to Berlin following that resolution.

Ankara also blocked German government officials from visiting soldiers at its Incirlik airbase, but subsequently agreed to a trip by German Defence Minister Ursula von der Leyen. A visit by members of the Bundestag's defence committee to Incirlik, planned for later this year, has yet to be approved by Turkey.

Further tensions

There have been further tensions between the two countries over a migration deal reached earlier this year between Turkey and the European Union. The agreement aims to drastically reduce migration flows to the bloc in exchange for humanitarian aid to refugees and fast-tracking visa-free access to Europe for Turks.

Turkey has said if visa liberalization is not reached, it will distance itself from the migrant-return arrangement.

Turkey is currently in a state of emergency, allowing Erdogan to rule by decree. Nearly 70,000 civil servants have been suspended. More than 18,000 people were detained, of whom 10,137 were arrested. There have been reports of torture of alleged coup plotters in jail.

Turkey has issued arrest warrants for dozens of journalists since the July 15 coup attempt, of whom 23 have now been arrested. Most have worked for Gulenist media.

Meanwhile, pro-government media in Turkey has claimed that the United States, a key Nato ally, backed the coup. None of the reports contains evidence, and they have been repeatedly rejected by the US government.

Gulen lives in the US in self-imposed exile, and Turkey is demanding his extradition. The US has said it would weigh the merits of a proper extradition request. The preacher denies any involvement in the coup.

- dpa