

Turkish president in conflict with government and military

By Justus Leicht
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A conflict described by Turkish Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit as a potential “state crisis” was shakily resolved last week in Turkey, and may in fact have only been shelved temporarily. The immediate cause of the conflict was the reluctance of the Turkish president, former Constitutional Court Chairman Ahmet Sezer, to sign a government decree that would allow the authorities to fire politically “inconvenient” government officials and employees. The background to the legal squabble, however, is the increasing desperation and disorientation of the Turkish establishment, which is finding its expression in severe internal conflicts and the growing influence of the military.

Two weeks ago the coalition government comprising the social democratic DSP, the conservative ANAP and the fascist MHP presented a decree to President Sezer which would enable the civil service to be purged of several thousand employees who are accused of separatist, Islamic fundamentalist or other “anti-state” activities. The testimony of two inspectors would be sufficient grounds for firing someone, and there would be no possibility of lodging an appeal. But, in a surprise move, the president did not sign the decree. A statement issued by his office announced: “The president has returned the decree because he is convinced that the regulations contained within it need to be enacted by Parliament.”

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