



European Integration & Civil-Military Relations

Over the fifty years of its existence, the European project has grown from a small, exclusive club of western European nation states to include some twenty-seven countries from the entire continent. Successive enlargements have united an array of countries with diverse political, economic and social systems, some of which have only recently emerged from authoritarianism. Indeed, it has often been pointed out that the carrot of EU membership has been a key element in helping former dictatorships to make a smooth transition to democracy. To this purpose, since 1993, the European Union has enforced certain general norms for EU membership, embodied in the so-called Copenhagen Criteria that include: “the achievement of institutional stability as a guarantee of democratic order, the rule of law, respect for human rights and respect and protection of minorities”, as well as an efficient market economy. Although not formally included within these criteria, another prerequisite for EU membership has been the civilian control of military institutions, a key principle of all western democracies. Establishing civilian control over the military is considered essential for national stability and, therefore, for guaranteeing the political stability of the European Union as a whole.

While the Copenhagen Criteria simply express some basic principles of democracy, their importance lies in the fact that they provide the basis for EU negotiations with accession countries. It is in the process of these negotiations that more detailed prerequisites for EU membership are established, including the adoption of the EU’s *acquis communautaire* – the established body of EU rules and regulations – by every applicant country. In general, this process led to the adoption of a western model of civil-military relations, under which the armed forces are subjected to the control of the civilian authorities. However, is it really a wise strategy to force a western model of civil-military relations on countries where the military remains the major guarantor of political stability? A case in point is Turkey, where the military is seen as necessary for guaranteeing the territorial unity of the country and guarding against the rise of fundamentalist Islam. Imposing western standards of civil-military relations on Turkey, therefore, is often seen as a risk. At the same time, interventions by the Turkish armed forces, intended to preserve Turkey’s secular tradition, have regularly achieved the opposite and further aggravated the Islamist opposition. Faced with this situation, it might be worthwhile to recall that some European countries, like Spain, traditionally granted a very similar role to their armed forces. However, in the case of Spain, EU membership has made the military’s past role as guarantor of the country’s political stability obsolete, and allowed for a democratization of civil-military relations. By critically comparing the development of civil-military relations in Spain and Turkey, this brief intends to investigate the impact of European integration on the civilian control of the military.

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Civil-Military Relations in Spain: A Complete Transition?

Spain's democratic transition has regularly been upheld as a prime example of how the European Union has been able to support the evolution from authoritarianism to democracy. Spain, until the late 1970s, had been ruled by an authoritarian regime under the control of General Francisco Franco. Only with Franco's death in November 1975 did a transition process begin, initiated by King Juan Carlos, leading to the gradual creation of democratic structures. This transition resulted in the first free elections in Spain in 1977 and the adoption of the Spanish Constitution by referendum in 1978. However, disputes between the government of Adolfo Suarez and the Spanish armed forces – Franco's old power base – soon emerged. The first signs of unease amongst the ranks of the armed forces began to show with the legalization of the Spanish Communist Party in 1977, which led to a failed coup attempt the following year¹. In order to reassure the military, guarantees were given by the civilian government to preserve Spain's territorial unity and the status of the armed forces, and promises were made about future increases of the defense budget. Nevertheless, tension continued to build over the process of decentralization and the treatment of Basque separatism – both seen by the military as a challenge to Spain's territorial unity – leading to the collapse of the Suarez government and another military coup. In February 1981, a unit of the Spanish *Guardias Civiles* under Lieutenant-Colonel Antonio Tejero stormed the Spanish *Cortes* and took the government hostage. In the end, the coup was put down after three days, due to the decisive intervention of King Juan Carlos.

The coup of 1981 demonstrated the vulnerability of Spain's young democracy and highlighted the need to control the Spanish military and keep it from meddling in the domestic political process. In this regard, Spain's application for membership in both NATO and the European Community (EC) played a positive role in establishing the preconditions for effective civilian control of the military. After Spain's 1962 application for association with the EEC had been rejected on the basis of Spain's undemocratic political system, the acceptance of Spain as an EC applicant in 1978 marked a big success for the Suarez government. The EC offered the critical external guarantees to business and the propertied classes that encouraged them to accept democracy. Traditionally, these elites had been hostile to democratic reform and had relied on the military to protect their privileges. With the EC now functioning as an external guarantor, the privileged middle classes withdrew their support from the military. Moreover, EC criticism of the coup lent the democratic government additional legitimacy, even in the eyes of the military. Of almost equal importance for the establishment of civilian control of the military proved Spain's accession to NATO in 1982. NATO provided a welcome outlet for the modernization of the Spanish armed forces and contributed to the reorientation of the military from domestic politics.

Thus, broadly as a consequence of Spain's accession to NATO in 1982 and the EC in 1986, civil-military relations in Spain were brought in line with the established western norm. How complete this transition to a civilian control of the armed forces has been, was recently demonstrated by a scandal evolving around the remarks made by one of

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Spain's most distinguished officers. In early 2006, the head of the land forces of the Spanish army, Lieutenant-General Jose Mena Aguado, was relieved from his duties after publicly calling for a "military response" should any of Spain's regions be granted greater autonomy. His remarks were directed at Catalonia, which is in the process of renegotiating its status within Spain – with greater levels of autonomy for the region being expected. While some commentators have interpreted this incident as a sign of the continuing immaturity of civil-military relations in Spain, this seems to be exaggerated. Indeed, the recent public remarks by Sir Richard Dannatt, Britain's Chief of the General Staff, should suffice to put the scandal surrounding General Mena in perspective². Thus, while both Dannatt and Mena crossed the boundary of their official responsibilities, it is the determined response by civil authorities and the wider public that signifies the maturity of civil-military relations in both countries. Coming twenty-five years after Tejero's coup attempt, the public outrage that followed Mena's remarks and his speedy dismissal seem to indicate that Spanish civil-military relations have been completely democratized – partly as a result of EU membership.

Civil-Military Relations in Turkey: An Incomplete Transition?

Since the foundation of the Turkish Republic in 1923, the Turkish Armed Forces (TAF) have represented an important, autonomous force in Turkish politics. Following Turkey's War of Independence, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk established the modern Turkish military as the armed guardian of democracy and protector of the unitary and secular character of the state. Based on its role as the guardian of the Constitution, the TAF has justified its frequent interventions in the political life of the Republic. While the military's involvement in Turkish politics has varied, Turkey has witnessed three direct military interventions during the Cold War in 1960-61, 1971-73, and 1980-83, as well as the so-called "postmodern coup" of 1997, when the TAF forced the resignation of the Islamic Welfare Party (Refah Partisi). Following the first military coup in 1961, the TAF's guardianship role was formalized, with the adoption of a new Constitution and the establishment of the National Security Council (NSC), designed to convey the military's views to the government. Turkish public opinion, critical of the incompetence and division of Turkey's political elite, has largely supported the military's special role. Moreover, since Turkey was seen as an important bulwark against communism and political Islam, during the Cold War, the West was happy to turn a blind eye on the TAF's role in the political process.

The end of the Cold War, initially, changed very little with regards to the well-entrenched powers of the military. Faced with the twin challenge of Kurdish separatism and political Islam during the 1990s, the TAF played its traditional "guardian" role. When it saw the unity of the state challenged by the PKK (Kurdish Workers' Party), the TAF declared a state of emergency in south-east Anatolia and engaged in an increasingly bloody struggle with the Kurdish insurgency. The Kurdish rebellion only came to an end in 1998 with the capture of PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan and the subsequent declaration of a cease-fire. Similarly, drawing on its role as the defender of secularism, the TAF was not willing to accept the electoral victory of Necmettin Erbakan and his religiously-oriented Welfare

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Party in 1996. While the military decided that the time for military coups by now was over, the TAF mobilized public opinion and engineered the resignation of Erbakan in what became known as Turkey's first "postmodern coup". The methods used to accomplish the coup of 1997 were chosen primarily to protect Turkey's prestige in the eyes of the European Union, as EU membership is considered an important long-term goal for the western-oriented TAF.

However, the 1997 coup and allegations over human rights abuses by the TAF in south-east Anatolia contributed to the 1997 Luxembourg European Council decision to reject Ankara's application for EU membership. Not surprisingly, when the 1999 Helsinki European Council finally recognized Turkey's status as an applicant country, a thorough reform of civil-military relations was stressed as one of the most crucial concerns. More specifically, the European Union, in its annual Progress Reports on Turkey's EU Accession, has repeatedly demanded institutional reforms in three areas. First, and above all, the EU has emphasized Turkey's obligation to "adapt the functioning of the National Security Council in order to align civilian control of the military with practice in EU member states"³. Since its foundation in 1961, the NSC has been the TAF's prime vehicle for influencing the political process and has often been portrayed as a kind of shadow government. Another criticism from the EU concerns the status of the Chief of General Staff, which in Turkey is responsible to the Prime Minister. The EU has demanded that the Chief of Staff, as is custom in other democracies, should be answerable to the Ministry of Defense. Finally, the EU has called for greater parliamentary control of the defense budget.

While European demands for a change in the institutional power of the Turkish military had previously been rejected, the end of the PKK insurgency, as well as a change of guards at the head of both government and armed forces, opened the way for reforms. With the nomination of Gen. Hilmi Özkök as Chief of General Staff in August 2002⁴, and the electoral victory of the moderate Islamist Justice and Development Party (AKP) under Tayyip Erdogan in November 2002, two pragmatic reformers acceded to power that united around the goal of EU membership. While Özkök adopted a more liberal interpretation of Kemalism than his predecessors, Erdogan presided over a reformist government that refrained from provoking the military. The result has been the establishment of a *modus vivendi* between AKP and TAF that has allowed the current government to push through a series of wide-ranging reform packages, in order to prepare Turkey for EU membership. Thus, as part of the seventh reform-package of the Turkish government in 2003, several changes have also been made to the legal and institutional powers of the TAF, including:

- Changes in the composition, functioning and role of the National Security Council, introducing a majority of civilian members to NSC and reducing the frequency of its meetings;
- Removal of NSC representatives from the Supervisory Board of Cinema, Video and Music, from the Higher Education Board, and the High Audio-Visual Board;

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- The Secretary General of the NSC will henceforth be nominated on proposal of the Prime Minister, including from amongst civilian candidates, and his power within the NSC has been considerably reduced;
- Transparency of the defense expenditures has been enhanced by the authorization of the Court of Auditors to audit state properties owned by the armed forces;
- Military jurisdiction over civilians has been suspended.

These reforms have marked a significant reduction in the legal-institutional powers of the Turkish military, and the EU has acknowledged these changes in its latest Progress Report, noting that “since 2002, Turkey has made good progress in reforming civil-military relations.”⁵ However, have these changes really brought about a fundamental shift in the power of the Turkish military and, if so, would that represent a positive development for Turkey and the European Union? To start with, it has to be noted that recent reforms of the TAF do not address the full array of EU demands (i.e. role of Chief of Staff, status of Cyprus, etc) and some have only been incompletely implemented. More importantly, however, these reforms only address the formal mechanisms of the military’s influence, exemplifying so-called *first generation* security sector reform. Analysts have emphasized that these reforms are likely to lead to a partial reduction of the TAF’s influence and that further *second generation* reforms, which concern the engagement of civil society and the implementation and consolidation of democratic oversight, will be of much greater importance. To this day, the EU has abstained from any attempt to challenge the TAF’s ability to use its informal channels of influence and, on occasions, has turned a blind eye on its meddling in civilian affairs.

The EU has, in fact, abstained from demanding any changes in the TAF’s Internal Service Directive that stipulates that it is the mission of the TAF to protect “the Turkish homeland and the Republic, by arms when necessary, against internal and external threats.” These threats include any challenge to the unity and secular character of the state, and an excessively broad definition of the nature of these challenges – including in the political, social, cultural and economic spheres – grant the TAF authority to intervene in virtually any sphere of political life. Indeed, regardless of the 2003 reforms, military meddling in civilian affairs has continued, largely ignored by the EU. Thus, the TAF has issued blunt warnings to the government in early 2003 to not allow women wearing headscarves back into universities and governments institutions. Although criticized by Human Rights Watch, the EU has not commented on these actions by the TAF. On another occasion in 2004, the EU has abstained from criticizing warnings issued by the General Staff that a current education bill would be in contradiction of the secular character of the Republic⁶. Finally, the EU has not reacted to the General Staff’s dismissal of several officers in 2004 on ground of their religious believes.

All this indicates that the European Union has had a certain influence on civil-military relations in Turkey, but that this influence has not been as far-reaching as some have argued. Far from imposing a western model of civil-military relations on Turkey, the EU has contended itself with some formal institutional reforms, while abstaining from any change to the Kemalist mission and character of the armed forces. This has left the TAF

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in control of three significant veto points in Turkey's political system: secularism, the preservation of Turkey's territorial unity, and the status of Cyprus. While the TAF has shown itself willing to compromise on the latter, and will most likely do so before long, it has been adamant about retaining its role as the guardian of secularism and territorial unity. Neither does the EU seem to be inclined to push the TAF on these points given the current wave of resurgent Kurdish separatism and fundamentalist Islamism. Concerned about admitting so volatile and large a country as Turkey to the European Union, EU member states seem to have accepted the traditional status of the Turkish military as guarantor of political stability as a necessary evil. In return, they have compromised on their demands for the establishment of civilian controls over the military. This is a risky gamble, especially since some of the TAF's past actions seem to have actually fermented Islamic extremism.

Conclusion

As this brief review of civil-military relations in Spain and Turkey has demonstrated, the European Union has had an important and lasting impact on the establishment of civilian controls over the military in both countries. However, while in Spain European integration seems to have led to a wholesale adoption of a western model of civil-military relations, in Turkey geopolitical concerns have meant that this model has been compromised. Instead of insisting on complete civilian oversight of military forces in Turkey, the European Union has contended itself with a few formal changes. Essentially, this leaves two of the traditional competencies of the TAF untouched – secularism and territorial unity. At the moment of writing it remains unclear whether the EU will be willing to tolerate the special role of the TAF beyond the possible accession of Turkey to the EU. For the time being, however, much as during the Cold War, the EU seems to give preference to a militarily strong Turkey, able to act as a bulwark against political Islam, over a Turkey that adheres to western standards of democracy. Of course, whether the Turkish military will be the most appropriate actor to solve the twin-challenge of Kurdish separatism and political Islam remains questionable. Indeed, the case of Spain has shown how civil-military relations can be democratized over a relatively short period of time. Moreover, the political process in Spain has shown itself more than capable of dealing with questions of regional autonomy and there has been no need for direct interference of the Spanish armed forces. While it remains difficult to compare the situation in Turkey and Spain, encouraging the establishment of civilian controls over the Turkish military through Turkey's EU accession seems to offer the most hopeful option for the future.

¹ The so-called *Operación Galaxia* was meant to take place on November 17, 1978, to prevent the transition to democracy. However, plans for the coup were discovered and the leaders of the coup, Lieutenant-Colonel Antonio Tejero and Captain Ynestrillas, were detained. Both Tejero and Ynestrillas received a very light sentence and were soon released.

² In fall 2006, Sir Richard Dannatt publicly called for a withdrawal of British troops from Iraq, which according to him, exacerbated security problems in the region. Dannatt has been criticized for his remarks as undue military interference in the political process.

³ European Council (2003), Progress Report on Turkey's Accession

⁴ In fall 2006, Gen. Hilmi Özkök has been succeeded by Gen. Yaşar Büyükanıt, who is known to share the same moderate approach in regards to Europe with his predecessor.

⁵ European Council (2006), Progress Report on Turkey's Accession

⁶ The bill proposed to grant wider access to university education for students graduating from religious and prayer schools.