

The role of the military in the Turkish Democracy: Are the Military the Guardians of or a threat to the Turkish Democracy?

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Abstract: The military have played an influential role in Ottoman/Turkish society since the 13th century – the founder of the modern Republic of Turkey also had a military background. Forming the elite and entrenched in the spirit of Kemalist heritage, they have considered themselves the guardians of secularism and democracy in Turkey since the inception of the Republic.

Nevertheless, a particularly ardent pursuit of the defence of these principles very often lead them to relatively direct forms of intervention in political and civil issues with the apparent support of Turks, among whom the military forces are very popular. In regards to the implications for the European Union, however, this situation is not conducive to the consolidation of Turkish democracy and, consequently, for the process of accession. In fact, it creates an outcome, which is diametrically opposed to it, eroding the quality of democracy and perverting this group's ideology.

Bearing in mind the role of the military in the last decades, this paper attempts to analyse this paradox and to understand the evolution of their behaviour, as well as the position of the EU. The intention is also to establish how much an unstable and unpredictable military elite may harm Turkish democracy and its path towards the Union – even though that might not be their intention.

Keywords: Turkey; European Union; democracy; civil-military relations; democracy promotion; Turkish history; EU's accession process; conditionality.

Introduction

There are, in Turkey's path towards the European Union, many obstacles that hamper the accession process. And one of the most visible of those obstacles is in the area of civil-military relations, which the EU has negatively assessed in its last Annual Progress Reports, identifying a retrocession in the country's commitment to this area. In Turkey, this issue entails a very important discussion as such relations are embedded in a specific historical, cultural and social context, which cannot be ignored when dealing with this thematic. Considering this situation, some questions are raised regarding the role of the military in relation to the democratic

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consolidation of Turkey. Although they can be perceived as an important element of democratisation, due to its contribution to the establishment of a Republican Turkey with no theocratic features involved (safeguarding the nature of a secular country), the Turkish Armed Forces are also seen as a group to blame for harming the democratisation process, as still perpetuate a limited conception of democracy. This paper holds an eclectic position and argues that, although the Turkish military was important in the early stages of democratisation (as guardians), any political involvement at this point would only harm the quality of democracy and subsequently deteriorate Turkey-EU relations, as well as the path towards accession.

In order to prove this point of view, several arguments will be presented in the next sections of this paper, based on three main points: the historical importance of the Turkish Armed Forces (TAF) for the implementation of democracy and their excesses; the complex relationship between the TAF and the modern European-oriented style of democracy; and the EU's position regarding the civil-military relations in this country. In the last section, there will be a brief synthesis of the arguments and some conclusions will be drawn on this issue.

I. Historical Background

To understand most of today's features of Turkish civil-military relations and the way Turks perceive them, it is essential to have several key events in Turkey's history in mind. At the end of the 13th century, the warlord Osman inherited a principdom that he enlarged through the progressive conquest of the Byzantine Empire (Fernandes, 2005: 32, 33). This expansion went on until the 17th century and marked the birth of a "warrior state" that struggled to survive "on the borderland of two rival religions and civilisations." (Heper & Güney, 2000: 636). And although the Ottoman Empire was manifestly religious, it developed an affinity to Europe, as the Tanzimat period illustrates. This 19th century movement toward modernisation brought important reforms on different levels, all of them inspired by the Western model (Losano, 2009: 12, 13). The education and judicial systems are two examples, to which many others could be added. This moment was also especially important to the Armed Forces, as they first were the object of this modernisation, and later became the subject of modernisation (Heper & Güney, 2000: 636).

In the beginning of the 20th century, several transformations raised the level of freedom in the Empire and despite the opposition of the conservatives, their counter-revolution was defeated by the military, that intervened politically, putting its Commander in a position of power: "We can consider this moment the beginning of the tendency of the Turkish military to act as the guardians

of the Constitution²." (Losano, 2009: 16). Indeed, this military intervention was declared legitimate by the Parliament, which confirms Losano's statement – there is a tendency towards political involvement by the military that begins at this point, being consolidated over the following decades, allowing the Turkish Armed Forces (TAF) to be present at the most crucial moments of the Turkish History. Two further examples may be given in support of that idea: first, in 1912-13, when the Ottoman Empire was defeated in the Balkan War and the military led a coup d'état, showing their discontent with the political leaders (Faucompret & Konings, 2008: 2). The other example is related to the establishment of the Turkish Republic led by a military figure, Mustafa Kemal, who was able to replace the Sèvres Treaty and give the military the credibility for the defeat of the Greeks in the war of Independence and for the establishment of the Republic in 1923, "saving" the Turks.

These two examples epitomise how the TAF perceived themselves as the guardians of the Turks. After the establishment of Kemal's own party (the Republican People's Party) and its six basic pillars (reformism, secularism, republicanism, nationalism, populism and statism) (Fernandes, 2005: 48), the military started to perceive themselves as the guardians of the Kemalist heritage. Thus, those principles became the main values the Turkish Armed Forces believed it needed to protect. In fact, democracy wasn't one of them, which proves to be a point of great relevance. Nonetheless, in the years after the establishment of the Republic, many measures were taken to apply those principles and all of them had Europe as a point of reference – the Constitution followed a Western model, the Civil Code was based on the Swiss one, the reference to Islam as an official religion was removed from the Constitution and the Latin alphabet was adopted (Idem: 48, 49). The biggest aim of these changes, apart from the approach to Europe and the Western world, was to build a Turkish nation. In fact, some democratic structures were established in this period; however, as Mango (2005: 17) wrote, they existed without a functioning democracy. Still, some social and economic results were accomplished and, for Atatürk Europe was the only civilisation that represented the material and moral progress of humanity.

After Mustafa Kemal's death, the TAF reinforced their perception as guardians of the Turkish Republic and the Kemalist principles; and they used this argument to legitimise their political involvement, although Atatürk had proclaimed before that "... all officers wishing to remain in the Party must resign from the Army. We must adopt a law forbidding all future officers

2 Author's translation. Original: "Si puo fare iniziare com questo momento la tendenza dei militari turchi ad agire come tutori della costituzione."

having political affiliations” (Atatürk apud Brown, 1987: 235). Notwithstanding the position of their ideological leader, the Turkish Army continued to try to exert some political influence, as may be demonstrated by the coups led in the second half of the 20th century.

The 1950s were marked by the government of Adnan Menderes and a period in which there was a high concentration of power in the Parliament; the opposition rights were decreased and a severe economic crisis raised social discontent (Mango, 2005: 19, 20). The Prime Minister used troops to suppress the students who protested their disagreement with the government’s measures and martial law was arbitrarily applied (Faucompret & Konings, 2008: 8; Brown, 1987: 238). This context meant an erosion of the Kemalist principles, which, when coupled with the fact that Menderes was using the TAF to follow his intentions, led to the coup of May 1960. The Prime Minister was deposed and executed, a new and more liberal Constitution was written and approved in referendum, and a better system of checks and balances was set up. On the other hand, the National Security Council was formed in 1961 (Mango: 2005: 20), allowing the military a more active and influential role in politics – “Since the 1960s, the prestige of the generals has been further enhanced because it became clear that they alone could safeguard Atatürk’s state system.” (Faucompret & Konings, 2008: 10).

The 1971 intervention was known as the “intervention by ultimatum” (Brown, 1987: 240) and was caused by social instability, radical movements (that took advantage of the more liberal Constitution), the absence of a strong government and the imminence of violence (Mango, 2005: 21). This intervention brought a more restrictive Constitution in order to avoid future instability, where civil liberties were harmed, and the powers and autonomy of the military were strengthened, namely through the National Security Council (Ibidem). Until 1973, all the civil governments were approved as necessary by the TAF, which effectively meant an indirect style of governance.

However, the solution to the different problems that affected Turkey was not found in this intervention – the economic crisis, the political violence, PKK separatism and Islamic fundamentalism (Faucompret & Konings, 2008: 13). From this dark scenario, and the risk of civil war, came the longest (three years) and most repressive intervention, during which all the parties were dissolved, newspapers closed, an even less democratic Constitution was adopted and more power was given to the President. (Idem: 13, 14). Once again, the military stated that those problems were the reasons for the intervention, given the fact that they constituted clear or potential threats to Kemal’s principles and it was the Army’s duty to avoid them, in order to protect those principles.

In the 1990s, besides the residual problems inherited from earlier decades, Erbakan's³ pro-Islamic attitude and actions raised concerns in the TAF, culminating in the Jerusalem Night of February 1997, when people were demonstrating in favour of the return of the Sharia. The military's response with tanks was a way of intimidating the population, but there was no clear and direct intervention (Heper & Güney, 2000: 640-642) – Wilkens (1998: 8 apud Faucompret & Konings, 2008: 13) named it the "bloodless coup by the Army". The truth is that the military's pressure worked effectively and the Erbakan's government collapsed, which meant that the TAF forced the resignation of the head of the Executive.

The Islamist threat was one of the most sensitive questions for the Turkish military, as "these elite perceived secularism as the most important dimension of the Republican ideology" (Heper & Güney, 2000: 636) and worked as its guardians, as the previous examples indicate. Secularism was part of Kemal's modernisation process, in which they followed the Western model but democracy, which was one of the cornerstones of this model, was not the military's concern. Therefore, in order to preserve secularism, the military did not mind eradicating democratic principles such as the rule of law (representative of Machiavellian logic); nevertheless, we are led to believe that if the political Islam was not constrained by the TAF, it would have been very likely that they would have introduced the Sharia, thereby transforming Turkey to a theocratic state, which would mean the end of democracy. It is clear then that neither political Islam nor military intervention gave Turkish democracy the quality it required.

Perception is of particular importance to this topic, as "Neither the TAF nor the Turkish electorate regarded any of this as fundamentally anti-democratic behaviour but, rather, as extraordinary action fully necessary to safeguard democracy in the country." (Greenwood, 2006: 40). That explains in part the attitude of the 91,7% of the Turkish population that in 1990 trusted in the military, in opposition with a mere 49,7% that trusted in the political system of the country⁴. General Kenan Evren, the Chief of the General Staff of Turkey in the late 1970s said of the 1980 coup: "We have not eliminated democracy. I would particularly like to point out that we were forced to launch this operation in order to restore democracy with all its principles, to replace a malfunctioning democracy." (Evren apud Brown, 1987: 242). This discourse emphasises the TAF belief that, although they are using anti-democratic

3 Erbakan was the leader of the Islamic "Welfare Party" and the first Islamist Prime-Minister (1996-1997).

4 Figures presented by Heper & Güney, 2000: 646.

means, the end will be positive for democracy (a further indication of the presence of a Machiavellian logic). This feeling is also shared by the Turkish community and by a considerable number of the intellectual elites of the time. Indeed, they may be regarded as the “democracy guardians”, but are subject to criticism regarding an over zealousness that paradoxically jeopardised democracy.

Thus, we come to our main argument: first, it is advisable to consider that every democracy, in its incipient times, has to overcome a great amount of problems so that it can be regarded as being exemplary – the very definition of democratic consolidation; secondly, considering the specificities of the country, it may be observed that the Turkish military was very important for safeguarding democracy from other possible threats, namely Islam, even though we cannot ignore the fact that they, sometimes, harmed it. For that reason (as will be argued in following chapters), we believe that the TAF helped democracy in the past, but now, given the new context, Turkey has to make the transition from the commonly held perception of the military as being the guardians of democracy to a new situation in which the population trusts the democratic institutions as capable of protecting those principles and the society in general. At the same time, the officers should remain inside their barracks, respecting the boundaries of the political sphere and not intervene in political issues, even if they might feel Kemalist’s principles are in jeopardy. Only then, can Turkey emulate a modern Western country – Kemal’s ultimate goal.

II. The Military And Democracy

According to Dagi (1996: 124), there are two conflicting political traditions within the Turkish military: one is marked by an interventionist strategy, trusting politicians little and assuming the role of “guardians” in a considerably authoritative sense; the other political tradition may be termed a “moderniser” highlighting the importance of democracy and being comprised of Western-oriented governance. This dilemma derives from the declaration made by the TAF stating that they are the “only cohesive and uncorrupted state elite” (Idem: 125), and according to most opinion polls, the majority of Turks feel the same way. Sarigil (2009) concludes that the military are very popular in Turkey⁵, not only among common citizens, but also within specific professional groups, such as the academics. The answer again lies in the popular perception – the Turkish military are seen as “the most egalitarian,

⁵ 61% of the Turks have a “great deal of confidence” in the military, in contrast with the 33% of the Americans and the 7% of the Spaniards (Sarigil, 2009: 709, 710).

non-politicised, and professional public institution compared with the political class that was often unstable, corrupt and unreliable.” (Aydin & Keyman apud Sarigil, 2009: 709).

For the author the dynamics behind this phenomenon are unknown. We don't propose a solution to this area of uncertainty; however, this section of the paper will try to present some of the possible reasons behind that popularity. The idea is that the prestige the military enjoy is fundamental to their capacity for influencing the political process, as their actions can be regarded as legitimised by popular support. So, in order to decrease the military's influence over the population and politics, as well as to enhance the trust in accountable, democratic institutions, it is very important to understand why the Turks still feed those perceptions.

a) Geography and Security

The likening of Turkey to a “bridge” forms the most widely used and well known metaphor regarding the country's position between two continents, two religions, two civilisations. But aside from this symbolic position, which cannot be disregarded, the region in which Turkey is situated is significantly volatile generating a sense of unease and insecurity – one of the contributing factors to the respect felt toward the military corps by the public, granting them license to intervene in political issues. Whether considering the more distant Soviet threat and Islamic Revolution (during the Cold War) or the more recent PKK terrorism, the Aegean dispute and Turco-Greek relations (Kuloğlu & Şahin, 2006: 91, 92), the population perceives the country as being under continual external and internal threat, putting the survival of their State in the hands of the military.

b) Religion

Secularism is one of the most important Kemalist principles to the military. And although the great majority of the Turkish population is Muslim, Turks opted for a moderate variation and most of them are against a Muslim theocratic State, refusing Sharia as the law of the country. Once again, Turkey's population regard the military as being responsible for saving them from the eventuality of political Islam as well as being the faction who remain capable of maintaining religion in separation from politics.

c) Socio-cultural aspects

Another reason for the positive light in which the population perceives the Armed Forces is rooted in Turkish culture and identity. However, as outlined by Constructivism, both facets are changeable and it is therefore possible that these traditions, which shape the relationship between the military, and the populace may be altered and replaced by a different kind of relationship.

Kuloğlu & Şahin (2006: 89) explain that patriotism and ceremonies are a very important part of the Turkish culture: values like loyalty, self-sacrifice, courage and strength are esteemed in this society and allow further rationalisation of the military's popular support. Turks also emphasise the collective rather than the individual (Konijnenbelt, 2006: 161) and the education system itself reinforces ideas such as "all Turkish heroes are warriors" or that "every Turk is born a soldier" (Ibidem). These, and others, are social phenomena that apart from being of academic interest, might be an important element in explaining the intimate relationship between both parts – the celebration of a son's departure for and the return from the military service or his letter with a photograph in uniform received with joy and pride (Varoğlu & Bicaksiz, 2005: 585) exemplifying the cultural importance of and the meaning attributed to the fact.

d) Historical and political legacy

The role of the military during the Cold War, the alliance with the United States and accession to NATO improved the TAF's prestige both worldwide and within the country. Furthermore, the legacy of the Ottoman Empire, the Independence War and Kemalism, as well as the lack of a strong democratic tradition (Güney & Karatekelioğlu, 2005: 442, 443) reinforce the military's role in the country and its wide acceptance. Regarding this last point, they emerge as an alternative to the "petty party politics" (Ibidem), to corruption, or the civilian's alleged inability to solve crisis. Bringing together this legacy and Demirel's thesis that "the nature of an outgoing authoritarian regime has a significant impact on a new democracy" (2005: 246) and that a positive evaluation of a military rule makes it very hard to regard democracy "the only game in town" (Ibidem), logical reasoning brings us to the very complex relationship between the military and democracy, and mainly between the common Turk and the democratic system. As Narlı wrote:

*"Cultural and institutional factors offer a clear explanation of civil-military relations in Turkey. (...) This ruling style is the product of Turkey's specific cultural, social and institutional context, featuring a stratified society and political culture as well as historic conflicts with neighbouring states. Such conditions significantly influence the military's role in the nation."
(Narlı apud Güney & Karatekelioğlu, 2005: 442)*

Democracy has been central in the discussion regarding civil-military relations, an occurrence resulting from the rule of law and its principle of civilian control over the military as one of the cornerstones of the democratic regime. The most common theory regarding civil-military relations centers around the principle that the military should be subordinate to civilians and

never encroach on politics. In Turkey, notwithstanding, the situation is not as transparent as this basic rule dictates, as we have realised. The civil military relations in Turkey are especially difficult to manage and to categorise, due to all those above-mentioned specificities. In regards to democratic consolidation, though, the TAF's political participation is a serious impediment, and this area remains very problematic, for example, in the European Commission Annual Reports – as we will see further on. And although authors like Satana (2008: 358) affirm that “absolute military disengagement from politics is unrealistic for countries like Turkey”, the European Union is not very likely to take that into consideration. But before we present some of the Turkish civil-military problems, let us just go through some key ideas regarding the theories of civil-military relations followed by an analysis of the current Turkish disposition.

2.1. Theory of civil-military relations

The empirical area of civil-military relations is, as Burk (2002: 7) explains, very wide, and therefore it becomes especially hard to find a general theory applicable to all, or most cases. Nevertheless, the most widely accepted theory is the one that states that civil political control over the military is preferable to the military control over the state (Ibidem) – then, the central question of the civil-military studies may lie on the explanation divulging how civil control is established and maintained. Such relations, as may be foreseen, are uneasy – and the Turkish scenario would suggest, as the Armed Forces are supposed to support and protect democratic values, while their own set of values and practices is different from that of a liberal democracy. The same author explains:

“What values are at risk? One is the reliance on coercion as opposed to reason and persuasion should be minimised as a method for resolving conflicts. Another one is that sovereignty of and respect for people who live within a democratic jurisdiction should be institutionalised.” (Idem: 8)

Of course, this would imply transparency and accountability in public policies, which is evidently a problem in the Turkish scenario. On the other hand, Rebecca Schiff (1995: 7) proposes an alternative for the dominant theories of civil-military relations; the “Theory of Concordance”, according to which the three interested parties (military, political elite and citizenry) should look for a relationship of cooperation that may or may not entail separation, but which does not require it. Schiff identifies the institutional and cultural conditions that affect the relationship between those three parties while predicting that, if they agree on the four indications the author suggests, military intervention is less likely to occur – “Concordance theory (...) considers the unique historical and cultural experiences of nations and the various other possibilities for

civil-military relations” (Idem: 8). This perspective presents some alternative possibilities for the analysis and comprehension of the Turkish scenario, whose legacy and culture were briefly presented above. Nonetheless, Turkey may not be able to rely on this perspective, given the fact that the EU perceives the question in a more traditional way, setting the Western example as the model to be followed and addressed by Ankara.

2.2. Civil-military relations in Turkey

It is not essential to explore this question in great depth, as this is already widely studied, but it is though imperative to set the particular context in which we are operating, i.e., the current state of civil-military relations in Turkey.

With the end of the Cold War and the approximation to Europe, Turkish civil-military relations had to be redefined, as Turkey no longer played the same role as it used to play during the struggle between the East and the West; in the words of Satana (2008), they needed to shift to a “post-modern military paradigm”. Satana analysed the different dimensions of civil-military relations in the country and assessed if it was at this advanced level, or still in the “late modern paradigm”. In order to do so, Nil Satana used ten indicators and concluded that “the Turkish military is in transformation and is following the Western trend slowly but eminently. The armed forces seem to realise the changes from modern to postmodern realities and adapts in time.” (Idem: 380).

So, if we are to follow the reasoning of Satana, the TAF are transforming, i.e. there have been changes and improvements. However, according to the EU, they have not reached a desirable stage. What has failed, or is still failing? The central point is that, aside from what happened in Greece, the power of the Turkish military after the 1980 intervention remained considerable, complicating the consolidation process, given the fact that the Armed Forces should not keep tutelary powers within the context of a healthy consolidated democracy (Gürsoy, 2008: 312). This power has been utilised over the last few decades to allow the TAF to exert some influence on political issues, not directly connected with the military institution, namely political Islam. Akay (2010: 6) exposes the key problem of the Turkish civil-military relations:

“Security has been and is a problematic and contentious area in the Turkish political system due to both the structural, functional, and organizational significance of the security sector within this system and to the autonomous and leading role that the security sector plays.”

Therefore, one of the problems concerning these relations is the 1982 Constitution, stemming from the military coup and consisting of a legal system characterised by a focus on national security within the society, transforming Turkey into a “state of security” (Idem: 8).

A second issue, tightly linked with the previous one, concerns the Ministry of Defence and the fact that this institution has to act according to the defence policy of the Armed Forces and in line with the principles and priorities of the Chief of Staff (Idem: 9), who, in turn, answers directly to the Prime-Minister and not to the Minister of Defence (Faucompret & Konings, 2008: 153). This is undoubtedly a question of an authority that is diverted from the democratically elected government to a body that not only is not directly accountable to the population, but that is also very poorly controlled by accountable institutions: “This situation can be described as a textbook case of ‘distorted authority-accountability relationship’.” (Bayramoğlu apud Akay, 2010: 9).

The influence of the National Security Council (NSC) (Milli Güvenlik Kurulu), on the other hand, has been decreasing due to EU proposals, but since its creation, this body set the perfect example of how the TAF wanted to intervene in politics: essentially composed of military staff, its decisions had priority in the Council of Ministers and both the Prime-Minister and the Chief of Staff had the same power to set the agenda of the NSC. As mentioned above, this situation has changed in recent years; nevertheless, Faucompret and Konings (2008: 153) believe this institution is (or at least was) a “shadow government through which the generals can impose their will on Parliament and the government.” In actuality, the status of this body detracts from the healthy functioning of democracy, again subverting the rule of accountable institutions.

In practice, the Internal Service Law, which states in its article 35 that “The role of the Armed Forces is to guard and protect the Turkish homeland and the Republic of Turkey” (Akay, 2010: 15), is in practice regarded as superior to international agreements (Ibidem). The Internal Service Regulations of the Turkish Armed Forces is another legislative document that one can regard as supportive of the military interferences (Heper & Güney, 2000: 637), but, although these famous articles are quoted to legitimise the interventions, article 43 of the Internal Service Law also forbids military staff to enter politics – and there are few who cite it. The concept of the Armed Forces as the protectors of the Turkish Republic has, as we realised, historical groundings; however, that need to protect the state from the profusely mentioned internal and external threats no longer makes sense, as the Turkish democracy has matured enough to protect itself against those threats, even more so if we frame the country as a European Union candidate. So, the action of the

Armed Forces (or their eventual opposition to the changes in their institution) generates the result they pretend to avoid, damaging the country's path towards a consolidated democracy.

Some other issues might be pointed to as clear threats to that consolidation: for instance, the parliamentary oversight is problematic (Akay, 2010: 15, 16), obviously raising concerns regarding democracy. The range of the Parliament's action is very limited in practice – the Parliament's commission responsible for the military does not possess the authority to deal with the budget or security policy and is only authorised to review the drafts of the legislation (Ibidem); the same happens with investigations and inquiries which are very rarely subject to control. The existence of a "military judiciary" and blurred boundaries within the civil courts (Idem: 16, 17) are two other important factors, which should not be disregarded, as well as the military schools that are outside the scope of control of the Ministry of Defence. In addition, it is still possible to mention the TAF's monopoly of arms' production (Idem: 19) and the fact that some personnel, despite not being trained, are armed and very often enjoy a high degree of impunity (Idem: 20-24).

These are some of the failures that Akay reported in the quoted document, but many others can be located therein. They have a single aspect in common: the TAF's high degree of independence is contrary to the European pattern of civil-military relations. That autonomy also means that a body that is not accountable exerts a lot more influence than it is supposed to in a democratic society – even though they believe they are protecting that same society. The consolidation of democracy and the path towards the European Union are the ones that suffer most from the excessive influence of the military.

To conclude this chapter and to present a final argument, we introduce Bastiaan Konijnenbelt's (2006) article, in which the author analyses the public statements of the Turkish General Staff (an informal mechanism of public influence) and of the government, in seven different fields. The results are meaningful: in contrast with the EU practice, the Turkish General Staff adopts positions on national policy issues not in accordance with the position of the government, making statements before the government cleared its position and on matters outside the scope of defence and security, never alluding to the fact that the statement is under the authority of the government (Idem: 189). Such an example is very significant, because it shows how the military perceive themselves, acting completely independently from the civil authorities: the TAF are "acting as an autonomous actor in Turkish politics. Not *de iure*, but *de facto*" (Ibidem) and this situation is not in line with the European model.

III. The Eu Vis-À-Vis The Turkish Civil-Military Relations

Turkey-EU relations have always been challenging, but the successive coup d'états' period was especially tense; they also functioned as excuses for postponing the accession, showing how immature Turkish democracy was. The European Parliament was always the most active body against the interventions and there was some pressure exerted upon Turkey, namely after the 1980 coup, to suspend the Association Agreement with Turkey; however, conditionality worked differently: in June 1981 the European Economic Community (EEC) raised the level of assistance provided for Turkey in 94%, a great increase, released according to the developments of internal politics. Due to the length of time taken by the military to give the power back to a civil government, the Commission decided not to resume the discussions on that 4th protocol. The tension diminished in 1982/83 with the referendum on the Constitution and the elections, but the relations between both factions were not yet cordial, the European Parliament remained suspicious about the military, democracy and Human Rights in Turkey, and the regime had to continually explain itself to the European institutions as there was a group inside the Council of Europe that wanted to punish the military regime for the suspension of democracy and expel Turkey from that body (Dagi, 1996: 130-135).

Although a more lenient stance was adopted, the subject remained in the agenda of the Council, and the international pressure was very effective not only in encouraging faster withdrawal of the military, but also in the country's commitment to its own democratisation. Amnesty International played a pivotal role in keeping the issue alive in the European institutions through the persistent spread of the reports documenting the state of Human Rights in Turkey, and the EEC also had a vested interest in the internal policy developments within the country. It should be noted that General Evren stated publicly that elections needed to be scheduled so as not to deteriorate the Turkish image among its European counterparts, demonstrating the influence of the interest of this international organisation:

"in the absence of any significant popular demand for a speedy return to civilian rule at the home front a very important factor was the international-European environment and pressures from it." (Idem: 139)

The example provided by this episode in Turkish-EU relations confirms our main argument: the European Union considers the military involvement in politics a damaging experience for the Turkish democracy, implying that the military should be controlled by a democratically elected government and should not interfere in the country's political life.

Düzgit and Keyman (2007) wrote that, since 2000, Turkey has been more deeply committed to its own democratisation and the EU has triggered the main democratic changes in the country, allowing it to consolidate its democracy and get closer to accession. Many constitutional reforms have been carried out in the country and they have achieved very positive effects; yet, as Romani Prodi once stated, “the full alignment of civil-military relations on EU standards is one of the areas where more progress is needed” (Prodi apud Drent, 2006: 71). In fact, the Union has been very critical in several areas, but especially in the ones related to Human Rights and the lack of civilian control over the military. In general, the Armed Forces across the EU are subordinated to governments and have no voice in public affairs (which is in stark contrast to what happens in Turkey). This implies two previously stated assumptions: first, that when power legitimately changes hands, the military should serve the new political leaders; and secondly that their job is to safeguard national security and not the security of the regime (Greenwood, 2006: 29, 30). In that sense, the Armed Forces are naturally very limited in planning and budgeting and not directly controlled by the head of the government, but by Ministers.

These are integral features of most European countries, and stating that Turkey should align with Europe is a vague mandate, because there is no such thing as a standardised European practice (Drent, 2006: 79); at the same time, the EU also lacks an acceptable degree of precision when defining what it requires from Turkey at this level (Idem: 71). Several clues have been given in recent years: in 1998 the concern was the political role of the NSC; in 2000 the Chief of Staff’s accountability to the Prime-Minister; in 2002 they asked for implementation; in 2003 contestation regarded the military influence through informal mechanisms and the need for parliamentary control over military expenditure (Idem: 33-35). This is a very fragmented approach to adopt in relation to such a complex theme, and if the EU has been critical at this level, then it should voice its concerns in a more coherent, clear and exhaustive way, otherwise Turkey may not feel motivated to carry on with the much needed reforms, because they will only be expecting more criticism in the next Progress Reports.

Greenwood (2006: 36, 37) developed a model that he had inferred from the Union’s documents, proposing the following list of how civil-military relations should be defined: a) a clear division of authority; b) governmental executive direction of the general staff and the commander through a Ministry; c) effective legislative oversight of the defence organisation; d) wider democratic oversight by analysts, academics and other qualified personnel; e) “a popular perception that there is civilian and democratic ‘control’ of the armed forces”, i.e. military answerable to accountable civilians.

Authors like Düzgit and Keyman (2007: 76) believe that the area of civil-military relations is the one where more progress has been shown as they both consider that, besides the legislative and institutional reforms, there has been a generalised discussion in the public sphere concerning the subject. The authors give further examples to support their thesis: the decrease of the defence's expenditure by approximately a third and the less significant, yet notable tendency among the military to intervene (Idem: 77). Notwithstanding, Düzgit and Keyman argue that the remaining problems in this area are related to the military's position in the population's beliefs and expectations, which is something that takes time to change and requires a "deeper socialisation process" (Ibidem).

The European Union Annual Progress Reports, however, are less optimistic, pouring scepticism on Turkish efforts in this particular area. As we have noted in a prior research, the evolution from 2004 to 2009 was negative:

"since 2005, the country's performance in this area [military interference] has suffered an accentuated and continuous decrease, according to the data from the Economic Freedom of the World. This same opinion is shared by the European Commission" (Matos, 2010).

In 2004, the European Commission seemed to be satisfied with the changes introduced in the functioning of the NSC or the increasing of transparency in the civil-military relations, warning that there were still situations to alter. The conclusion was that "Overall, reforms over the last year (...) have further shifted the balance of civil-military relations towards the civilians" (European Commission, 2004: 23). In the following year, this positive evaluation was reaffirmed by the European Commission who, despite the persisting problems, assessed the effort as constituting "good progress" (European Commission, 2005: 14). 2006 was the turning point of this positive wave of enthusiasm: the report pointed to failures that were not improved or corrected (see below) – "Overall, limited progress has been made in aligning civil-military relations with EU practices" (European Commission, 2006: 8) was the conclusion of the Commission for this year. In 2007 and 2008 the tone was even harsher: "Overall, no progress has been made" (European Commission, 2007: 9; 2008: 9). 2009 was a better year and "some progress" was the less scathing expression used by that European institution (European Commission, 2009: 11). Last year's document reported a set of reforms that improved the civilian control over the military and concluded that "Overall, progress has been made" (European Commission, 2010: 12), praising the efforts and changes achieved, but, nevertheless, remembering that some members of the TAF continue to make public non-security related statements and that

there was no progress on the parliamentary control over the military funds (Ibidem).

In the highlighted years, Turkey has registered considerable changes and progress and that effort should not be belittled, as this is likely to evoke sensitive feelings, owing to the traditions and history of the nation. Many regulations were altered and improved (namely, concerning the field of action of the NSC), the theme was brought to the public arena, and expense has decreased overall. Yet simultaneously, many problems remained throughout the years and, as we can see, most of them are directly related to the non-democratic nature of civil-military relations. A few examples collected from the Reports dating from 2004 to 2010 can be recounted here: some structures are still not accountable to civilians; civilians are judged in military courts; the TAF still exercise influence through informal channels outside the security scope; legislation still allows the TAF to have a high degree of autonomy due to the lack of definitive control, and possible manipulation of legal loopholes; and also of importance as a frequently employed mode of government practice, that has been repeated over the last four years is the lack of parliamentary control over the Armed Forces actions, budgeting, expenditure, ... (European Commission, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010).

Thus, in summation, the problems that the European Commission identified were typically the same issues that numerous authors had found in the Turkish defence sector. And it is evident that the EU assesses the military elite as being harmful for the democratisation process, which implies that it urges tighter control over them by civilian forces in order to protect the democratic system. In the next section, some general conclusions and reflections will be drawn on this subject.

Reflections and Conclusions

The aim of this text was to establish whether the Turkish military functions as an elite group that damaged, or contributed to the democratisation process in Turkey. We have argued that although the Turkish Armed Forces might have played an important role in defending democracy in past decades, at present their political intervention can only be seen as detrimental to the democratic regime.

Hailed as a "warrior state" since its inception, in Turkey, the military has always had a level of prestige attributed to them, garnering the support of different social groups, and therefore perceiving themselves as the guardians of a state, perpetually in peril, both internally and externally. As an important pillar against political Islam and other threats, the TAF have indeed played a vital role in safeguarding democracy.

Nevertheless, in the present context of European candidacy and democratic consolidation, the political interference of the military is regarded as negative, because their involvement deteriorates basic fundamental features of a Western-like democratic country, such as the rule of law. In this sense, the EU, despite the vagueness of its orientation, has been very critical of the state of Turkish civil-military relations and has demanded a range of changes and reforms – some of which have already been institutionalised, while others are to follow, but many are still to be appropriated.

Turkey still has a very long way to go to consolidate its democracy, as this is a process that implies that people behave in accordance to a democratic regime without reverting to other forms of governance, a *modus operandi* not currently exercised in Turkey. As the Armed Forces' popularity was heavily reliant upon the perception of continual threat, the more peaceful environment that is offered by the European Union could only placate this feeling. People have to understand that whether any kind of internal or external threat presents itself, democratic institutions are the "only game in town" and they will be capable of solving the problem. A perception, which will strengthen and legitimise democracy.

Furthermore, the positive evaluation of the military by the population damages the 'habituation phase' as people will fail to internalise the habits of democracy. This perception of the military rule as a success, together with TAF's self-perception that it is part of their duty to safeguard certain principles, make it harder for democracy to be truly consolidated. The Greek episode shows that it is possible for the military to remain in their barracks, but this is not very likely to occur until their own notion of what constitutes a prospective threat is diminished, and the general population as well as the elite refuse to support their interventions.

In terms of formal or legal reforms, the list is considerable. Many authors make recommendations designed to ensure that Turkish civil-military relations approach the standard of European patterns. All of them point in the direction of civilian control over the military: redefining and clarifying security terms and references, abolishing secrecy, avoiding a security-centred culture, reassessing the military's impact on education, promoting parliamentary control over defence budgeting and auditing, abolishing the TAF's informal mechanisms, and so on, are some of the examples of amendments that would inevitably enhance civilian power over the military, while simultaneously improving the quality of democracy in the country.

Nonetheless, Turkey is not starting from zero; as already stated, the Turkish government has accepted many European suggestions and made many reforms

over recent years, even if some of them hoisted opposition to the military. And there is a shared position occupied by some officials, according to which is now better to digest recent changes before moving on to further reforms. Although this can be regarded as a way of avoiding unwanted changes, the truth is that there should be better dialogue between Turkey and the EU, because the Union still views the status quo as being reminiscent of recent years – both factions would therefore benefit from a more eclectic position: additional changes may be superfluous as they would risk undermining current achievements by alienating the military (“reform fatigue”), although it does not imply stagnation. Communication would play a key role in this dilemma, as a unilateral decision would raise avoidable discontent.

In 2007, the diaries of a former Commander of the Navy were published and revealed a military conspiracy against the AKP in the years 2003 and 2004: more than 100 people were involved (not only military staff, but also journalists and academics) and the trial began in 2008. The reasons behind this conspiracy were the reforms led by the AKP government to meet the Copenhagen political criteria, which decreased military independence, creating their discontent – they believed this was part of the AKP’s hidden agenda to weaken the guardians of the secular Republic. The adoption of European rhetoric, the recognition of minorities’ rights and the revision of the policy regarding Cyprus were other AKP measures that displeased the TAF. But the AKP’s strength and the divisions within the Armed Forces led to the abortion of the coup and the judicial investigation brought the role of the military to the public arena.

In relation to the topic of EU membership, the Turkish Armed Forces were, and are, also divided: they are in favour of the economic benefits, but they won’t accept concessions on issues such as the Kurds, Cyprus, Armenia or the Aegean Sea. Furthermore, the military believe that some of the EU’s requests endanger secular democracy, as they curtail the action of the TAF who, completely submitted to the civil forces, would not be able to defend secularism.

The European Union considers this one of the democratic failures of Turkey, which means that Turkish civil-military relations are an impediment to accession. And in spite of the vagueness of European indications and expectations, Turkey has tried to improve this area, in order to fall in line with Europe, which reveals the success of conditionality – changes have been made in order to meet the set criteria and to please the EU.

The improvement in this area and the subsequent positive evaluation of the European Union may lie in the capacity of this organisation to provide a

feeling of security to the Turks (the population in general, and the military in particular), so that the latter would consider that it is time to abandon the interventionist tendency and ease the reforms in this field. It means that the EU's pressure and external impetus brought by its harmonisation reforms are undeniable and helped nurture the internal desire of the citizens for more transparency, as well as improvements in this particular area.

Thus, it seems fair to conclude that in the eyes of the European Union, the military, which has been promoting Turkey's democratisation, are not the guardians of the country but a serious threat to the process. And although the TAF was favourable to democracy, they seem to have supported it, only when it was convenient for them – but will such an Army be welcomed in the European Union? Both the public and the military should understand that, for the sake of Turkey's democratic consolidation and approximation to Europe, their perception regarding the Armed Forces' political intervention should be abandoned and replaced by a more democratic *Weltanschauung*, once the context in which Turkey is situated is far removed from that which it once occupied in the past century – while it is logical to assume that perceptions should shift with the passing of time.

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