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## What happens to the Turkish army?

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It was November 2005. Three years had passed since the AKP had come to power. The acceleration of the European Union membership process was one of then-Prime Minister Tayyip Erdoğan's foremost commitments.

This is why negotiations with the EU accelerated during the very first phase of the AKP government. In this context, the union initiated a project on the democratization of civil-military relations in Turkey which was then dispatched to the Center for European Security Studies (CESS), a think tank based in the Netherlands. As a fresh master's graduate, I had the chance to contribute to the expert report written by Turkish and European experts.

It was a tough period. After all, the Turkish military had always been distant toward civilian politicians since the foundation of the republic. Yet this time a conservative government had come to power which had multiplied this distance. Hence our report had raised the eyebrows of many in Turkey.

Much has changed since then. First of all, a subject which used to be a taboo and was then opened up for public discussion for the first time, becoming an object at issue today. More importantly, military tutelage was lifted. The leverage of the military over politics has been restricted to a great extent. However, the armed forces have still not come totally under the

supervision of civilians. This is actually one of the main factors which paved the way for the coup attempt on July 15.

Nowadays, Turkey is entering the second phase of this reform process. Today, the goal is to shift the civil-military equation in favor of civilians, just like in all developed countries. Hence, the Turkish public is now discussing what is right and wrong about these structural changes. Yet first of all we need to understand the basis of this discussion: What do civil-military relations really mean? Do they consist only of subordinating the chief of staff to the presidency and the service commands to the Defense Ministry?

The civil-military equation has five aspects. The first is the relationship between the military and the state. The “Western” norm here is that armed forces are unambiguously subordinated to the lawfully elected government-in-office. So when power legitimately changes hands, the armed forces dutifully serve their new political “masters.” In other words, the military’s job is just to safeguard national security, rather than the regime.

The second aspect is the relationship between the military and the executive branch of government. In other words, the subordination of the armed forces requires that they are firmly and unambiguously under civilian political direction. In advanced democracies, such “control” is normally exercised by a departmental minister, usually a defense minister –though chiefs of staff may have a right to direct access to the prime minister in certain circumstances, as in the United Kingdom.

Moreover, “control” is much more than nominal. In matters of defense policy-making, planning, budgeting and spending, the authority and autonomy of the military are strictly circumscribed.

In this context, subordinating the service commands to the Defense Ministry is a vital step for Turkey. Yet while doing that, the ministry needs to be strengthened. First and foremost, civil experts in the security field need to be trained and employed.

On the other hand, there are worries that these reforms might make the military politicized and open to partisan affiliations. This is exactly what the government and president are most responsible for by first and foremost securing meritocracy.

In addition, it is also widely argued that the subordination of the chief of staff to the presidency might disrupt the chain of command in the army since the service commands will be attached to the Defense Ministry. Yet at this point, we need to recall the following: The coup d’état in 1960 was not executed hierarchically; in other words, it was conducted outside the chain of command. Therefore, military power was totally gathered in the hands of the chief of staff afterwards in order to prevent similar attempts in the future. In 1980, however, the army conducted a hierarchical coup! In other words, structural reforms do not suffice.

This is exactly the third aspect of civil-military relations: The mentality. Most importantly, Turkey needs to transform the mentality of the military by reforming its education system and thereby implanting a democratic understanding regarding the status and role of the army.

Another key aspect of the civil-military equation is certainly the role of the legislature which is of central importance. Here, accountability and transparency are definitely the watchwords. The military should be required to reveal, explain and justify what is done (policy accountability) and what is spent (financial accountability).

Finally, the term “civil-military relations” extends or ought to extend to embrace the relationship between the military and society-at-large. Patterns of recruitment and resettlement, the organization of military education and popular attitudes to the armed forces are among key factors that determine whether a nation’s armed forces are well-integrated in society or whether they exist as a “state within a state.” It goes without saying that the former one is preferred in an open democratic society.

A key phase is awaiting Turkey. It could be a quantum leap in civil-military if the reforms are conducted comprehensively.