

Europeanization and the Role and Attitude of the Turkish Military toward Europe

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Over the past decade, Turkish politics has been confronted with two conflicting developments: in the first place, the Turkish military structure has placed far greater emphasis on its self-appointed role as “**guardian**” of the basic principles of the Turkish state at the expense of its longstanding mission of playing a “**vanguard**” role in Westernization. On the other hand, the European Union (EU) has prescribed a package of political preconditions that must be fulfilled if Turkey is to successfully gain entry into the European fold. While the military’s guardian role by definition requires that it remains as the final source of authority in Turkey, this prominence is one critical factor negatively affecting Turkey’s full inclusion into the EU. The guardian and vanguard roles have come to a clashing point.

Against the background of the historical preponderance and the recently expanding parameters of the Turkish military, this paper's primary concern is to unpack the rationale that underpins the above major paradox. To do that, it critically assesses two clusters of problems, revolving around Turkey’s “new” security understanding within the context of her intensified bid for EU membership in the new millennium. The first is an analysis of the root causes for the “new” security conceptualization which jeopardizes Turkey’s accession process into the EU, and the second is the boundaries and the trajectories of the discourse the TAF has deployed toward the EU to sustain this paradox.

I. If we begin with the first, the main instrument effecting a threshold shift in the military's expanded influence over Turkey's political development and its autonomy from civilian actors has been the redefinition of the ‘national security concept’ in the 1990s in such a way as to address domestic threats with global dimensions, i.e., Kurdish separatism and rise of radical Islamic politics.

What assumptions have guided the national security policy in the wake of the 21st century?

- Historical- cultural legacy which legitimize a predominant role for the military and lay down the normative as well as legal foundations of Turkish democracy.
- Geographical determinism. Or the increased geostrategic importance of the country?
- What I call the “reinvention of a state-centric security concept” in global conditions in such a way as to reinforce the bias in the Turkish system toward the “**guardian**” role of the TAF even in the post-Cold War period.
- National security and “public policy” link allowing the military a free entry into policy making and manifesting itself in the codification of the national security concept in laws pertaining to internal security, anti-terrorism and maintenance of public order. In its fight against such internal enemies as Kurdish nationalism and political Islam, expansion of freedoms in Turkey represents too high a price for the military to pay to in order to be accepted into the European fold.

II. The stages and mechanisms through which the EU requirements for democratization shaped and changed the TAF’s discourse toward the EU

- Denial and repression phase (1980s to mid-1990s)
- Tactical concessions stage (1995 Customs Union to 1999)
- Argumentative rationality stage (post-Helsinki era)
- The crisis over Iraq and its impact over the military- EU interaction