

# EVALUATING THE DEMOCRATIZATION OF THE TURKISH ARMED FORCES FROM A NORMATIVE PERSPECTIVE

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## **ABSTRACT**

*Turkey made its first significant efforts to democratize civil-military relations in line with Western standards in the early 2000s, as part of the European Union harmonization reforms. Although legal and institutional arrangements for the democratic control of the military have progressed compared to the past, the country has still experienced military memoranda and coup attempts, indicating that civil-military relations have not been fully secured over the last two decades. This study examines the causes of this issue through a survey conducted with 160 retired officers from the Turkish Armed Forces. The findings suggest that the failure to achieve comprehensive democratization stems from neglecting the normative aspects of the transformation process and not viewing the armed forces as a social institution and.*

## **KEYWORDS**

*Turkey, Turkish Armed Forces, democratization, normative transformation*

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Civil-military relations refer to two key aspects: first, the distribution of power between civilian and military elites within national governance; and second, the relationship of the armed forces with society, or their position within that society. The former aspect relates to the fact that armies are typically the most critical institutions for the establishment and security of states. The latter aspect stems from the reality that armies are also social institutions. Following the emergence of regular armies, the armed forces held a prominent position in Western countries for an extended period, and civil-military relations were not questioned in either aspect.

This situation began to change after the Second World War. This shift was largely due to the establishment of democratic norms in these countries and the recognition that the military could not directly or indirectly intervene in government (Finer, 1962, p. 87). Consequently, during the 1950s and early 1960s, the debate on civil-military relations focused on the distribution of power. From the mid-1960s onwards, attention increasingly shifted to the position of the armed forces within the social structure and their normative characteristics. The acceleration of technological development, coupled with ongoing changes in political and social values, further eroded the traditional position of the military. Several factors, such as the decline of the Fordist/Taylorist production model and traditional disciplinary society (Caforio, 1996, p. 3), the rise of individualism and utilitarianism (Segal & Segal, 1983), and the spread of pacifist views (Mellors & Mckean, 1984, p. 27), contributed to this shift. Consequently, the concept of the citizen-soldier gradually lost its former significance.

The global triumph of the liberal democratic paradigm in the post-Cold War era brought about a profound transformation that affected militaries. While the issue of power distribution in civil-military relations has become almost obsolete, the armed forces as a social institution have been restructured in line with the more liberal value system of Western societies. There has been an increased emphasis on norms such as openness, transparency, credibility, legitimacy, and pluralism in regulating the military's relations, not only with political elites but also with society as a whole (Born et al., 2006, p. 5). Additionally, due to the reassessment of security and threats, armed forces are now expected to fulfill not only traditional defense missions but also a range of civilian and humanitarian missions. As a result, they are increasingly seen as soldiers of democracy rather than soldiers of war, as expressed in the concept of the "democratic soldier" (Mannitz, 2013).

Similar changes have taken place in Central and Eastern European countries, driven by aspirations for EU membership. Foster found in the early 2000s that in almost all Western European states, there was no longer a significant gap between the armed forces and the rest of society in terms of equality, diversity, and employment rights, while most Central and Eastern European states had made significant progress towards convergence (Foster, 2006). As a result, in the US and European democracies, the concept of the citizen-soldier has been replaced by the concept of the "citizen in uniform," which transforms military personnel into citizens with the rights and freedoms of every individual in a democratic society.

In countries where democracy has not matured to the level seen in Western nations, changes in military service since the Second World War have revealed differences depending on the degree of democratization and the extent of orientation towards Western-style production and lifestyles. The political, technological, and social conditions that emerged in the 1990s have left the armed forces in these countries in a much more uncertain position. It can be argued that the armed forces in these countries are caught between a more liberalized world and traditional understandings of security and authority.

Turkey constitutes one of the most striking examples of immature democracies in terms of examining the position of the armed forces. Since its founding, Turkey has been oriented towards building a secular nation-state and transitioned to a multi-party democratic system after the Second World War. However, it did not abandon the traditional army-nation approach for a long time. As a result, civil-military relations remained unchanged until the 2000s. The first legal-institutional arrangements for democratic control of the armed forces were implemented only in the early 2000s, within the context of the country's EU harmonization reforms. However, after the intensive reform period from 2000 to 2005, the country experienced a military memorandum, a coup attempt, and other instances in which hundreds of military members were investigated for alleged coup attempts. Additionally, discussions of a possible coup have persisted in the country's agenda. Also, it has been frequently reported that members of the armed forces in Turkey face various issues regarding their rights and freedoms. Despite significant progress compared to the pre-2000s, all these developments indicate that the military in Turkey has not been fully integrated into a democratic system.

The core thesis of this article is that despite rapid and extensive legal-institutional reforms, the democratization of the Turkish Armed Forces (TAF) remains incomplete due to the neglect of the TAF as a social institution. Considering the TAF as a social institution implies that it also has a normative dimension. While the reforms have achieved a certain degree of civilianization in administrative terms, the transformation has fallen short of fostering a normative change that is a shift in mindsets and behaviors. Drawing on a survey of retired officers from the TAF, this study will attempt to substantiate this argument. The normative transformation mentioned here is not limited to members of the TAF; it also encompasses the democratization of those who interact

with the military, such as politicians. The attitudes of politicians towards the military, for instance, must also be considered within the scope of normative transformation.

The following section will outline the role and significance of the armed forces in Turkey up until the 2000s. The civil-military relations in the 2000s, a period marked by democratization efforts and the primary focus of this article, will be discussed in the second main section. In this section, the study will first provide information about the survey-based research. Subsequently, it will discuss developments centered around the TAF during the 2000s and analyze the varying perspectives of officers based on the survey results.

## **2. ARMED FORCES IN TURKEY UNTIL THE 2000S**

The establishment of the TAF dates back to 209 BC, when the Great Hun Emperor Mete Khan formed the first land army. This long history highlights the special significance the armed forces have always held for the Turks. Since its foundation in 1923, the Republic of Turkey has strictly adhered to this tradition, with the armed forces prioritizing their duty as the guarantors of Atatürk's principles and the unitary state structure. The TAF's Internal Service Law, in force under different names since 1935, designates the 'protection and safeguarding' of the Republic as one of the military's duties. This law has frequently been cited as legal justification for military coups in the country. When Finer described the Turkish army in the early 1960s as "a self-important armed force beyond professional pride," he was referring to this deeply ingrained mission of regime protection (Finer, 1963).

The TAF has consistently demonstrated this mission throughout its history. Turkey experienced military interventions in 1960, 1971, 1980, and 1997. Even when the democratic system was re-established after these interventions, the military's influence over the government persisted. The National Security Council (NSC), which existed under various names since 1933 and became a constitutional institution after the 1960 coup, emerged as the highest center of military influence. Although its decisions were officially advisory, civilian governments treated them as mandatory policy directives. The NSC's influence extended to a wide range of issues, from determining school curricula to regulating television broadcast hours, from lifting the immunity of (Kurdish) parliamentarians to shaping the content of many laws (Sakallioğlu, 1997, p. 158). In addition, many public institutions, such as the Council of Higher Education, the Radio and Television Supreme Council, and the Communication Supreme Board, included military members who played the role of overseers. A practice unique to Turkey was also observed in the Turkish Parliament: one of the observation boxes set up for those wishing to follow parliamentary sessions was entirely reserved for the top commanders of the armed forces. The 'privileged' presence of the military could be seen even in the very heart of an institution considered central to a democratic system.

Despite the active role the armed forces played in the governance of the country, military members themselves remained largely out of the public eye. When Mehmet Ali Birand (1986, p. 159), a prominent journalist, published his book *Emret Komutanım (Yes Sir)* in 1986, based on his visits and interviews with military staff, it garnered significant attention. The following lines from the book summarize how military personnel were shaped: "The civil-military divide, or the separation of their worlds, begins gradually from the day a young officer cadet enters military high school or military academy and continues until his retirement. After a long period of mutual alienation from the civilian society from which he came, the officer, who must face the difficulties of entering a new world he has never known before, is also disturbed by this situation." As seen, members of an institution that played a significant role in shaping many policies affecting people's daily lives were trained in a highly isolated environment. It would not be wrong to say that these members of the military were often out of touch with the changes in

the outside world, and this was likely one of the most critical challenges for Turkey's democratization.

In summary, Turkey did not follow the changes in civil-military relations experienced by Western democracies, particularly in terms of power control, after the Second World War. While civil-military relations in Western democracies underwent profound changes after the end of the Cold War, the Turkish military remained largely unaffected by these developments throughout the 1990s. The untouchable, unquestioned, and elitist position of the military remained almost unchanged from the founding of the country until the 2000s.

### **3. CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS IN TURKEY IN THE 2000S**

The shift in the political and social role of the TAF began with Turkey's EU candidacy in December 1999. Between then and the start of accession negotiations in October 2005, Turkey undertook the most significant and intensive democratization efforts in the history of the Republic. Comprehensive legal reforms during this period led to substantial changes across various areas and institutions. More than a third of the Constitution was revised, and numerous critical legislative changes were introduced. These amendments brought about significant legal and institutional reforms, expanding rights and freedoms, strengthening civil society, protecting women and children, preventing torture, addressing past grievances of non-Muslim communities, and dealing with the issues of ethnic groups, particularly the Kurds, in a more democratic manner (Directorate for EU Affairs, 2007).

As part of these efforts to strengthen democracy, important changes were made regarding the military's role in Turkey's political order. The State Security Courts were abolished, military members were removed from the governing bodies of many institutions, the Secretary General of the NSC was no longer a military officer, and the number of civilian members in the NSC was increased. These legal reforms were positively acknowledged in the EU's 2004 and 2005 progress reports on Turkey (Directorate for EU Affairs, 2024).

However, to fully democratize civil-military relations in Turkey, it is not sufficient to ensure democratic control of the military through legal and institutional reforms alone. The TAF also needs to be seen as a social institution, that is, a normative transformation is needed. Without this, the regulations introduced for democratic control would not be truly transformative. They weren't anyway. Despite the reforms, particularly during the first decade of the 2000s, the TAF continued to exhibit a tendency to "look down" on civilian authority (Bilgiç, 2009; Toktaş & Kurt, 2010). All EU progress reports on Turkey up until 2010 emphasized this issue, noting that the TAF maintained its influence through both formal and informal mechanisms (Directorate for EU Affairs, 2024). More tangible signs of some TAF officers' reluctance to abandon their old "habits" emerged in the form of memoranda and coup attempts.

On April 27, 2007, a statement signed by the Chief of General Staff was published on the official website of the General Staff. This memorandum expressed concern about the spread of practices threatening secularism in the country and emphasized that the TAF was determined to fulfill its duties in protecting the fundamental principles of the state. The April 27 memorandum was intended to prevent Abdullah Gül, the ruling Justice and Development Party's candidate, from running for the presidency. From one perspective, despite the military's efforts to obstruct the process, the civilian government, unlike in the past, did not back down. Furthermore, many articles were written criticizing the military's intervention in civilian politics after the memorandum, and studies were published showing that the majority of the public did not support military interventions (Narlı, 2009, p. 71). However, from another perspective, this incident

revealed that, despite all the civilianization efforts, Turkey still faced serious challenges in the civil-military power struggle.

The EU's 2010 report noted for the first time that the military's influence had declined, and the 2015 report stated that the military no longer exerted undue influence on politics (Directorate for EU Affairs, 2024). In the meantime, several reforms were implemented: the military's reserved box in Parliament were abolished in 2011, the National Security Knowledge course—an important tool for military indoctrination in schools—was removed from the high school curriculum in 2012, and the phrase "protecting and safeguarding the Republic" was removed from the Internal Service Law in 2013.

Despite these steps, a coup attempt in July 15, 2016 demonstrated that significant challenges to the democratization of the military remained. This coup attempt, orchestrated by a so-called religious group known as the Fethullah Terrorist Organization (FTO), was thwarted by the resistance of other military members, the civilian government, and the public. In the aftermath, new institutional arrangements were made: In 2016, the Land, Naval, and Air Force Commands; in 2018, the Chief of General Staff were placed under the Ministry of National Defense. Additionally, military high schools and academies were closed immediately after the coup attempt, and military education was restructured. Military courts were abolished in 2017, with their duties transferred to civilian courts. These changes were largely influenced by the presence of a large number of FTO-affiliated personnel in these institutions.

Despite the suppression of the 2016 coup attempt and the subsequent public humiliation and judicial punishment of those responsible, the fear of future coups has not entirely disappeared in the country. Time to time, analyses and discussions mentioning the possibility of another coup appear in the media and elsewhere (Gürsel, 2020; Şahin, 2021), revealing what could be termed a 'military coup syndrome.' Furthermore, despite the significant time elapsed since the initial democratization reforms, the government's introduction of new and radical changes after July 15 suggests that coup fears also persist within political circles.

Meanwhile, investigations known as Ergenekon in 2007 and Sledgehammer in 2010 were launched into alleged coup preparations by certain groups within the armed forces. These investigations led to the prosecution of hundreds of retired or active officers, many of whom faced lengthy court proceedings. It was later revealed that these allegations were unfounded and that FTO members were attempting to eliminate others through intimidation and threats to strengthen their own position. Nevertheless, these events, which dominated the public agenda for years, significantly contributed to the persistence of the coup syndrome in the country. These investigations also showed that the armed forces, which should be impartial and subject to civilian authority in a democratic system, had instead become a battleground for the unlawful strategies of a so-called religious group for much of the 2000s. The fact that this group managed to infiltrate key positions throughout the military, from education institutions to military courts, indicates that the reforms inadvertently paved the way for congregationalism rather than democratization.

Analyzing the period from the implementation of the reforms to the present, it is clear that the normative dimension of democratization in Turkey has been neglected. Evidence of this neglect will be presented under separate headings. Before proceeding with this evidence, the study will provide information about the survey conducted among retired officers, which serves as an important primary source for this research.

### **3.1. Methodology**

A questionnaire with 20 questions was administered to 160 retired military officers on a voluntary basis during December 2023. The participants were reached through channels confirmed to belong to retired officers, particularly communication groups of military academy graduates. Choosing retired officers rather than active ones was not out of preference, but due to a necessity directly related to the level of democratization in the country. This necessity, a critical point in the context of the study, will be explained in a relevant section. On the other hand, the TAF officers, even after retirement, possess a unique vantage point from which to observe the evolution of their profession and their institution in the aftermath of Turkey's democratization reforms. Given this perspective, their insights can be invaluable, both for drawing comparisons with the past and for addressing current issues. By capturing these insights through targeted questions, a contemporary snapshot of the democratic standing of the TAF can be effectively obtained. In addition, questions were also included to obtain the respondents' views on the country's foreign policy preferences and problems in order to be evaluated in another article.

To maintain respondent confidentiality, no questions were included that would reveal participants' identities. The form containing all these questions was prepared using Google Survey and the link to the survey was sent to people who were confirmed to be TAF retirees. The collected data were analyzed statistically. Responses to open-ended questions were qualitatively examined and categorized according to relevant concepts to provide a deeper understanding of the participants' perspectives.

The majority of respondents completed their education (military high school and military academy) in the 1980s or 1990s (82.2 percent). As a result, they served as active officers in the armed forces during the 1990s and 2000s. Nearly half of the respondents (49.4 percent) retired in 2016 or later, 23.1 percent retired between 2010 and 2015, and 14.4 percent retired between 2000 and 2009. The proportion of those who retired before the 2000s is 13.1 percent.

A comparative analysis of survey responses based on variables such as service duration, branch of service, overseas assignments would undoubtedly enhance the effectiveness of this study. However, due to the perceived anti-democratic pressures felt by the retired officers, the limited number of participants has constrained the ability to achieve sufficient distribution for a comparative analysis across such parameters. Despite this, the study's unique and boundary-pushing nature is hoped to serve as a precursor for more comprehensive investigations in the future.

Birand's previously mentioned book, which includes interviews with active-duty officers and military cadets, is significant. However, it was conducted within a controlled framework approved by military authorities. Although there are numerous academic studies on civil-military relations in Turkey, especially after the 2000s, most of them focus on the power dynamics between the military and civilian authorities. Few have examined the armed forces as a social institution (Sarigil, 2011; Gürcan, 2016; Koydemir Avcı, 2019). In terms of both the questionnaire's content and the consideration of the armed forces as a social institution, our study holds a certain degree of originality.

### **3.2. Two Major Concerns Regarding the TAF: Congregationalization and Politicization**

Given that the proportion of officers who supported the July 15 coup attempt remained small, it can be inferred that the likelihood of a future coup has decreased following the purge of FTO elements. However, the absence of a coup is not sufficient to claim that the TAF has been fully

democratized. Based on the views of survey participants, other issues related to the normative democratization of the TAF can be identified. For instance, when asked, "What is the most important problem facing the officer profession in Turkey today?" participants' responses highlight two key concerns: congregationalism and politicization.

Starting with congregationalism, the systematic intimidation and harassment carried out by FTO for years against those outside their ranks (Gülener & Öztürk, 2018) undoubtedly contributed to the high level of this answer. Despite the purge of FTO elements, 20.6 percent of respondents cited the recruitment of congregationist cadres in the armed forces as the most important current problem. This suggests that the issue extends beyond FTO. While democracy requires non-interference in military personnel's religious beliefs or affiliations, the situation described as congregationalism by respondents likely goes beyond freedom of belief. We emphasize this possibility because most of the participants were in a position to observe all types of FTO activities and their outcomes, and to compare these with the current situation. Therefore, they attributed a negative connotation to congregationalism and highlighted it as the most significant issue facing the TAF. Moreover, in recent years, reports in the media have surfaced about the arbitrary staffing of the TAF by different religious sects. While allegations about FTO's infiltration into the TAF were denied or ignored by official authorities for many years in the past, in Turkey's current context, rumors of new congregationalism cannot be dismissed outright.

Politicization has been raised as another critical problem of the military profession. 18.8 percent of the respondents identified politicization as the most significant issue facing the officer corps. Their complaints were not about the military being under the command of democratic and civilian politics, but rather about the TAF being turned into a "pawn of politicians" through arbitrary and unfair practices. This topic will be explained in more detail in the next subsection, through the concept of "civilian tutelage."

The largest portion of respondents (35 percent) emphasized that the most pressing issue for the officer corps was a lack of meritocracy and of adequate military education. Furthermore, 12.5 percent cited the "discrediting of the military" as their response. The reasons given by these respondents suggest discomfort with both congregationalism and politicization in the military: the influx of unqualified individuals into the TAF, injustice in recruitment and appointments, deviation from Atatürk's principles, particularly secularism, favoritism within the army, the unjustified closure of military educational institutions, the loss of military impartiality, and the erosion of TAF traditions.

Most participants approached the question of the officer profession's biggest challenge with an idealistic view, focusing on protecting the institution's and the profession's quality rather than taking a utilitarian approach that prioritized economic issues (5.6 percent). The responses from these idealistic officers indicate that the problems related to the democratization of the armed forces in Turkey have become increasingly complex. Legal and institutional democratization has not been sufficient to eliminate the coup syndrome in the country; instead, it has introduced new concerns among officers about their institution and profession. As will be discussed further from a different perspective, the politicization of the TAF, in particular, suggests that the armed forces have not been adequately treated as a social institution and that democratization has not been pursued within a normative framework.

### **3.3. Growing Sense of Civilian Tutelage among Officers**

In Western countries, particularly since the end of the Cold War, there has been a growing body of research focused on active military personnel. These studies examine the changing framework of the military profession, its working conditions, and its relationship with society. In many of

these surveys, respondents were recruited either with the assistance of military officials or through military trade unions, depending on the country. The reason for highlighting this is that, in Turkey, military officers are prohibited from forming trade unions and are subject to strict limitations on establishing associations. Consequently, it is nearly impossible to seek the opinions of active military officers. Even when it is possible, the content of the questions is tightly controlled and limited. Preliminary discussions held during the development of the framework and questionnaire for this research confirmed these challenges, leading to the decision to focus the research on retired officers.

However, the difficulties did not end there. Even after retirement, the TAF officers exhibit significant hesitation and anxiety when it comes to expressing their opinions on any issue. This attitude is likely rooted in the country's recent history, which provides ample grounds for such concerns. For instance, a retired colonel who shared his views with a journalist about Turkey's cross-border operations in Northern Iraq in late 2023—while this survey was still being conducted—was promptly banned from entering TAF social facilities (Terkoğlu, 2024). Similarly, in 2016, another retired officer was subjected to the same ban after warning in his writings about a potential coup attempt by the FTO (Önsel, 2017). Furthermore, on April 4, 2021, a public statement signed by 103 retired admirals and one retired general raised concerns about proposed amendments to the 1936 Montreux Convention, which governs Turkey's sovereignty over the Istanbul and Dardanelles Straits. The civilian government perceived this statement as a potential coup attempt rather than an exercise of free speech, leading to an investigation of the retired officers involved. Although they were eventually acquitted, they had to endure lengthy legal proceedings. Regardless of the outcome, the Ergenekon and Sledgehammer investigations created a highly damaging and publicly humiliating situation not only for those accused but also for all members of the armed forces (Gürsoy, 2012).

As a result, many retired officers are reluctant to express their views due to restrictions on individual rights or the possibility of legal proceedings. Retired officers' associations were wary of distributing the survey among their members, fearing potential legal repercussions. Nevertheless, those retired officers who overcame this 'fear threshold' and participated in the survey responded sincerely, sometimes providing detailed explanations to open-ended questions, 'as if they were expecting to be treated this way.'

As Janowitz (1960, p. ix) suggests, "the task of civilian leadership includes not only the political direction of the military but also the prevention of the growth of frustration in the profession, of felt injury, and of inflexibility under the weight of its responsibilities." In democratic systems, the armed forces should be under civilian political control. However, while this is being achieved, measures must be taken to prevent military personnel from becoming disillusioned or developing other negative feelings. In Turkey, the challenges in exercising the most fundamental right to freedom of expression appear to have led to significant frustration, even among retired officers. Moreover, instead of accepting the military institutions and their personnel as part of the democratisation process, the civilian government, through populist discourses, has virtually turned the TAF (and many other institutions in the meantime) into the 'other' of the people (Dinçşahin, 2023). When issues of politicization and congregationalization are added to this, it is clear that there is a general fear of a repressive civilian oversight among officers.

The survey responses reflect this situation. A significant 83.8 percent of participants stated that being an officer was better in the 1990s compared to today. Only 2.5 percent believed it was better now, while 3.8 percent saw no difference between the two periods. Those who viewed the 1990s as better cited frustration and a sense of injustice. They frequently mentioned the decline in the reputation and prestige of the profession, the weakening sense of belonging among new generations of officers, the increase in politicization and/or congregationalization within the



army, and the deterioration of merit and education. Those who spoke of a decline in the profession's reputation often referred to the coup attempt and the Ergenekon and Sledgehammer investigations. Additionally, those concerned about the loss of a sense of belonging or the weakening of merit described the new generation of officers as hesitant to take responsibility, distrustful of colleagues, lacking professional satisfaction, disregarding military hierarchy, and straying from Atatürk's principles.

The views of those who were positive about the 1990s seem to stem more from perceived deterioration in their profession rather than nostalgia for the military's past authoritarian and tutelary roles. The frequent emphasis on concepts such as reputation, prestige, belonging, and merit underscores this sentiment. Another piece of data reinforces this judgment. When asked whether military authorities are sufficiently consulted when national policies are being determined on issues related to defense and security, only 6.9% of the participants answered affirmatively. Meanwhile, 43.1 percent felt that even if they are consulted, it is insufficient, and 35 percent said they are not consulted at all. In the EU's progress reports until 2010, the "formal or informal influence of the armed forces on political issues outside their areas of responsibility" was frequently criticized. According to the participants' responses, there is now a widespread belief that the military is not taken into account, even on matters within its own purview. Ironically, civil-military relations in Turkey seem to have swung from one extreme to another, based on the participants' views: As military tutelage has receded, a sense of civilian tutelage has begun to take hold among the officers.

In summary, during Turkey's democratization process after the 2000s, which focused on the administrative regulation of civil-military relations, military personnel were not considered as a social group. This omission seems to have led civilian governments from one extreme to another in their attempts to eliminate the fear of military coups and tutelage. Consequently, pressures on officers have increased, while political interference in the armed forces has grown. In the perception of officers, the armed forces, destabilized by these interventions, have likely become an arena for contention between different sects and factions. It appears that this uncontrolled strategy by political powers has created a sense among officers of being under civilian tutelage. In such an environment, the rights and freedoms of TAF personnel have predictably fallen far behind those in Western countries.

### **3.4. Limited Framework of Rights and Freedoms**

Decisions about military service and defense may not always align with the views of members of the armed forces. On issues such as trade unions, sexual orientation, and working conditions, rights and freedoms may not be granted equally in every democratic country. However, in any regime that claims to be democratic, there should be an environment that fosters open debate on these topics, where all parties can exercise their fundamental right to freedom of expression within a broad framework (OSCE and DCAF, 2021). In Turkey, retired officers, let alone active ones, face serious restrictions on their freedom of expression. Many rights and freedoms that have been expanded and refined in developed democracies since the 1990s have not even reached the level of public discussion within the TAF. This is particularly evident when considering two specific issues: the right to join civil society organizations and the freedom of sexual orientation for those serving in the military.

First, active officers are not granted the right to form or join trade unions, and their right to join civil society organizations is only minimally recognized. The TAF Internal Service Law stipulates that members of the TAF may only join associations whose names are published by the Ministry of National Defense or sports clubs as inactive members (TAF, 1961: 3457). These associations, which have a very narrow scope, are mostly limited to those that allow officers to

assist and communicate among themselves, such as associations formed by their academy cohorts. None of these associations have the critical function of voicing the problems and expectations of armed forces personnel. Inactive membership in sports clubs is already largely ineffective in practice. Moreover, social and cultural associations established among retired officers are subject to strict supervision by the Ministry of National Defense in almost every aspect, from recruiting members to conducting activities.

Half of the survey respondents expressed a desire for more opportunities for active-duty officers to join civil society organizations. While 46.9 percent believed that membership in some civil society organizations should be allowed, 3.8 percent argued that membership in all civil society organizations should be permitted. On the other hand, 45 percent felt that membership should be banned. Nearly all respondents (98.8 percent) had graduated from the Military Academy in the 1990s or earlier, completing their military education and early professional years in a relatively isolated environment, as previously mentioned. In this context, it is notable that one in two respondents has a positive view of civil society organization membership. The increasing availability of information and communication technologies in the internet age likely influences this perspective. Regardless of the reason, the positive attitude toward such organizations—potentially serving as a medium of communication with the civilian public—can be seen as a reflection of officers' desire for greater socialization. This trend could also help reduce society's "coup syndrome."

Despite the increasing visibility of pro-LGBT organizations and activities, especially since the 2000s, the traditions and religious structure of the country make LGBT rights and freedoms a sensitive issue, with homophobia widespread in society (Orta and Camgöz, 2018). Consequently, in the armed forces—where normative transformation in the context of Europeanization already faces challenges—LGBT rights have never been addressed as a matter of rights and freedoms. Regulations often state that there should be no discrimination based on language, race, color, sex, political opinion, philosophical belief, religion, sect, or similar grounds (TAF, 2013, p. 11), but they do not include sexual orientation, which is recognized in nearly all Western-based documents on rights and freedoms.

A significant proportion of respondents (85 percent) believe it is unacceptable for LGBT individuals to serve in the military. Only 6.9 percent thought that they should be allowed to serve, while 3.8 percent were undecided. A similar question was included in Gürcan's 2016 study. 3.6 percent of respondents answered positively to the question, "Should gays be allowed to serve in the army?" while 96.3 percent answered no, and 0.1 percent gave no answer. Compared to these results, there seems to be a notable increase in the proportion of those with a positive view on the issue in recent years. The increase in undecided respondents also suggests a shift towards a more liberal understanding, given the sensitivity of LGBT issues in the country.

Finally, the vast majority of respondents (73.1 percent) support the country's EU membership. When asked about the two most important reasons for this support, idealistic motivations outweighed pragmatic or utilitarian ones. Compared to those who supported EU membership for a better economy (11.6 percent), a better quality of life (7.8 percent), better educational opportunities (2.2 percent), the right to free movement (1.3 percent), and other utilitarian reasons (1.3 percent), those who cited reasons such as civilization (19.7 percent), rule of law (21.5 percent), democracy (4.4 percent), human rights (3.1 percent), secularism (2.5 percent), national interests (2.5 percent), scientific development (1 percent), and other idealistic reasons (2.5 percent) made up a larger proportion of the total. Approximately 20 percent of respondents gave only one reason instead of two, and when analyzing the reasons given, the following picture emerges: About three in four respondents supports EU membership, with 71.4 percent of them citing idealistic reasons, while 28.5 percent cited pragmatic or utilitarian reasons. This data

suggests that members of the armed forces tend to aspire to the values of European societies. It can also be anticipated that when these idealistic and pro-European individuals gain greater freedom to express their thoughts and a more democratic environment for discussion is established, their views on issues such as association rights and LGBT rights may shift towards a more liberal stance.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

The last coup attempts in democratic Western countries occurred in Greece in 1975 and Spain in 1981. Most Western nations addressed the issue of democratic control over the armed forces in the 1950s and 1960s, and this issue largely disappeared by the 1990s. In contrast, Turkey only began to address this matter in the 2000s, primarily in the context of EU harmonization reforms. Although significant progress was made in civilianizing the country's administration and reducing military influence, the experience of the last two decades has shown that these reforms have not fully democratized the TAF.

As this article emphasizes, fully integrating the armed forces into a democratic system requires more than just regulating the relationship between civilian and military elites at an administrative level. Changing political, economic, and social conditions also necessitate a normative transformation of civil-military relations. In Turkey, however, this aspect of the issue has not been addressed properly, and the armed forces has not been considered as a social institution during the democratization efforts after the 2000s. As a result, the measures aimed at ensuring democratic control of the armed forces have not fully achieved their intended outcomes.

The study has presented two seemingly contradictory situations regarding civil-military relations. On one hand, it has been mentioned that there is still a military coup syndrome present generally in society and particularly among the ruling elites. The TAF has still been perceived as an institution capable of orchestrating a potential coup. On the other hand, it has been expressed that the TAF officers, in stark contrast, now desire a path centered on democracy and the rule of law, wish to conduct their profession within its proper limits but with dignity, and are particularly disturbed by the tutelary politicization and congregationist degeneration within the military. Many of them also support Turkey's EU membership, hoping to attain democratic values. In this context, if the feelings and opinions of the participating officers are taken as accurate, it could be argued that the fear of a coup in society is now unfounded or exaggerated. The most significant reason for the emergence of this contradictory picture is related to the thesis that this article has argued from the very beginning: Throughout all these years of democratic transformation, the TAF and its personnel have not been seen as social actors and have not been given role in the democratization process. As a result, they have been unable to express their feelings externally and have consistently been judged based on their former tutelary profiles.

But how can this normative transformation be accomplished? It was the civilian elites who failed to view the TAF as a social institution. Therefore, it is these elites who should first undergo a normative transformation. During the transformation process, officers have been treated as potential coup plotters rather than as individuals whose feelings and expectations should be considered. Given the military's history of coups and influence over civilian politics, this approach may seem reasonable at first glance. However, if the goal is to move beyond the negative memories of the past, then a more constructive and effective approach could be pursued. Within the framework of the "citizen in uniform" concept, expanding and securing the rights and freedoms of military personnel, and integrating them into democratic society appears to be the most successful approach adopted by liberal democracies so far. Civilian leadership in Turkey could create a more democratic and respectful space for military members, allowing them to contribute to the national agenda with a new, modern profile.

When this space is opened, it will pave the way for a more advanced normative transformation of officers. If military personnel are given more opportunities to improve their communication with society, gain a better understanding of the outside world, and express themselves via different channels, their democratic perspective is likely to become more inclusive and diverse. In the same context, the lack of data on the views of the armed forces members on various issues makes it difficult to analyze civil-military relations in Turkey, particularly from a normative perspective. As part of the transformation process, both political and military authorities could be more flexible and cooperative in providing opportunities to conduct studies and collect data among military personnel.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author acknowledges the retired officers of the Turkish Armed Forces who participated in the survey and provided valuable insights for this study.

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