

**DIMINISHING INSTITUTIONAL AUTONOMY OF TURKISH
ARMED FORCES:
IS POLITICIZATION AND TRANSFORMATION OF ITS
INSTITUTIONAL IDENTITY ON THE WAY?**

Abstract: This article analyzes the interconnectedness of the transformation of the institutional autonomy and identity of the Turkish Armed Forces (TAF), asserting that by losing its institutional autonomy within the state system, the TAF now faces difficulties to sustain their institutional identity, based on secularism and Kemalist ideology. The transformation of civil-military relations and socio-political processes after the July 15 failed coup pave the way for the politicization of the TAF. The politicization of the armed forces, will have an important impact on both the internal and foreign political processes of that country, simultaneously contributing to its institutional identity and value-oriented transformation. The ruling AKP party and President Erdoğan's authoritarian regime, not only attempt to induce their political dominance and control over the TAF, but also strive to reshape its identity in accordance with their own ideological and cultural assumptions. The maintenance of the TAF's identity and secularism now becomes more challenging.

Keywords: *Turkish Armed Forces, General Staff, AKP, institutional autonomy, institutional identity, civil-military, coup d'état*

Introduction

The Turkish Armed Forces (TAF) are in the process of large-scale modernization and transformation, which involves both armament and military-technical renovation, as well as structural, institutional and legislative changes. During the rule of the Justice and Development Party (hereinafter referred to as the AKP), the modernization and armament programs of the TAF were put on new bases and scales.¹ Simultaneously, the introduction and strengthening of civilian control over the army have been replaced by a new dimension in the civil-military relationship in

¹ For more details on the modernization of the TAF, see Levon Hovsepyan, "*Turkiyai pashtpanakan hamakargi ardiakanatsumy ev anvtangtyan volorti barepokhumnery*", (Yerevan: EPH hratarakchutyun 2014, in Armenian), "*Modernization of Turkish Defense System and Security Sector Reforms*", (Yerevan: YSU Publishing, 2014).

Turkey, which was unprecedented in the history of the Turkish Republic. As a result, the army was deprived of its traditional dominant positions and levers of social and political life. The AKP government has gradually managed to neutralize the powerful role of the army in the country's social and political spheres. The factor of the role of the army in Turkey and the relations between the military and the civil authorities continue to be topical in scholarly and analytical discussions. The experience of the *coup d'état* on July 15, 2016 and the subsequent developments have also raised a number of questions related to the trends and prospects of the TAF's institutional identity change and systemic transformation.

The civil-military relationship in Turkey is in the limelight of researchers and numerous studies have been conducted addressing the political role of the army, its interference in political life, its diminishing role during AKP rule and the increase of civilian control. Despite the diversity of research, studies on the transformation of the TAF's value system and identity, current trends and the factors affecting them are quite scarce. Within the analytical framework issues related to the process of the transformation of the army's identity and tendencies accompanying this process have been discussed in recent years, a number of questions about the transformation of the army's institutional identity have arisen. Therefore, the subject is topical in terms of revealing current realities and trends.

From the Loss of Institutional Autonomy to Institutional Identity Transformation

The institutional identity of the TAF, where Kemalism and secularism have been of foundational significance, is undergoing a continuous transformation, which is *inter alia* associated with the weakening and neutralization of institutional autonomy in the state system. Ü. C. Sakallioğlu, a well-known specialist in civil-military relations in Turkey, considers the TAF's autonomy at two levels: institutional and political. According to her, the first refers to the protection of the professional sphere of the army from external undesirable interventions, and on the second level, to the ideological and behavioral role of the latter, which enables the TAF to refrain from civilian control and to interfere in social and political processes.² It was ideological autonomy and behavior that enshrined the guardian's role of the army in Turkey. We see the Turkish army in the state system as an institution in terms of the level of its autonomy, combining its professional and value-oriented components. The institutional autonomy of the TAF and the belief in the national state and republican regime as the defender and guarantor of Kemalism's value system were formed by the long-standing single-party regime (1923-1950) of Mustafa Kemal's

² Ümit Cizre Sakallioğlu, "The Anatomy of the Turkish Military's Political Autonomy", *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 29, No. 2, (1997): 152

Republican People's Party (RPP) and the subsequent legislative and institutional fixation of its guardianship and after recurrent military coups and political interventions.³

The transformation of the institutional identity of the TAF is directly related to the weakening of its strong autonomy in the state system. Parallel to the weakening of autonomy, the preservation of a uniform system of values in the army and the identity built upon it becomes a serious challenge. The ideological and value transformation in the country does not bypass the army as it has already lost its former leverage, and thereby the highly ideological political power will try to impose its values on the army as well. Significant steps have been taken in Turkey to revise civil-military relations and establish democratic control, but modern processes show that along with the weakening role of the army, there is a process of establishing political influence over the latter. This is also accompanied by its transformation.

Recep Tayyip Erdoğan was reelected as president in the snap elections held on June 24, 2018. As the AKP was unable to secure a simple majority in the Parliament necessary to form a single-party government⁴, the wide powers assigned to the president within the framework of the transition to a presidential system gained crucial significance for the political viability of that force.⁵ Consequently, this means that in the future, during Erdoğan's presidency, to which too much power has been assigned, the ongoing transformations of the country's social and political spheres will continue, including those in the defense and security sector. The authoritarian tendencies in Turkey and their own ideological-value system prioritizes that the authorities require a new approach to the relationship between the army and the civilian authorities, where the army is to be considered the "*protector of its own regime*" for authoritarian regimes.

The legislative and institutional reforms launched by the 1999 Helsinki process that restrict the political role of the armed forces also created favorable conditions for the AKP government as they gave an opportunity to influence and revise the collective identity of the army.⁶ The

³ Tuba Eldem, "Democratic Control and Military Effectiveness of the Turkish Armed Forces", in *Reforming Civil-Military Relations in New Democracies: Democratic Control and Military Effectiveness in Comparative Perspectives*, eds. A. Croissant, D. Kuehn, (Springer International Publishing AG, 2017), 173.

⁴ Erdoğan was reelected president by 52.59% of the vote. As the AKP was unable to secure a simple majority, the electoral bloc (Cumhur İttifakı) enabled the party to have a majority in parliament, forming a coalition government. "24 Haziran 2018 Seçim Sonuçları: YSK kesin sonuçları açıkladı", <https://indigodergisi.com/2018/07/24-Haziran-2018-secim-sonuclari-ysk/> (accessed July 6, 2018)

⁵ Amanda Paul and Demir Murat Seyrek, "Constitutional changes in Turkey: A presidential system or the president's system?", (Commentary, European Policy Center, 24 January 2017), (Accessed May 1, 2017) http://aei.pitt.edu/83866/1/pub_7374_conschangesinturkey.pdf.

⁶ At the EU Helsinki Summit in 1999, Turkey was granted the status of candidate for EU membership, assuming commitments to reform democracy, rule of law, and socio-economic reforms. Within this framework, the reform of military-civilian relations in line with

General Staff⁷, which has been deprived of legitimate leverage and lost its autonomous role, has an ideologically disintegrated, disunited top brass, and changes in public perceptions of the role of the army pave the way to redesign the latter's value orientations and system. The TAF, as an institution, does not have the capacity and capabilities to confront alternative ideological penetrations into the army.

The primary issue of the Turkish army's ideological transformation is the existence and future viability of Kemalism and secularism as a dominant ideology in the army. The collective value system of the TAF is changing, which would be misleading to associate with the attempted *coup d'état* of July 2016 or to consider the event as the start of that transformation. For many years, the Turkish high-ranking officer staff was no longer homogeneous in its value orientations, geopolitical and ideological thinking and mentality, or rather did not represent the consistency that existed historically.⁸ This transformative process has been going on for a long time, and the systemic changes in the AKP over 17 years of power have contributed to those changes. Certainly, since the July 15 coup attempt, the process has been accelerated and more importantly, has become open and unrestrained, with no obstacles on the authorities' way.

The period between 2009-2010 can be truly described as a phase of power base consolidation for the AKP when the judiciary and the police as counter-forces were transformed, as the Kemalist-secular cadres were replaced by pro-AKP or pro-Islamist ones.⁹ According to M. Sezal and I. Sezal, the previous praetorian and guardian military was replaced with a politicized law enforcement system loyal to Erdoğan. There were some suspicions in Turkey that the AKP's hidden objective with the Constitutional amendment of 2010 was, in fact, to have a final showdown with the secular establishment and clear the way for an Islamist transformation.¹⁰

democratic standards was one of Turkey's important commitments. For more details, see Ersel Aydınli, Nihat Ali Özcan, Dogan Akyaz, "The Turkish military's march towards Europe", *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 85, no. 1, (Jan.-Feb. 2006):

⁷ The General Staff was fluent in informal and non-formal mechanisms and levers of control over socio-political life, and the Chief of Staff was the 3rd most influential state official after the President and Prime Minister in accordance with state hierarchy and protocol.

⁸ For a long time, there were differing ideological and geopolitical visions and orientation poles, with which there was tough competition. Still, in 2003, one of America's secret documents, released by Wikileaks, describes the approaches and visions of groups in Turkey, according to which three major groups, Atlanticists, Eurasianists and extreme nationalists formed the supreme command. "The Turkish General Staff: A fractious and sullen political coalition", *Wikileaks*, https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/03ANKARA2521_a.html (accessed May 5, 2016). Nowadays, the wing of conservative in the army can be added to these groups, which is mostly inclined towards religious values.

⁹ Mustafa Sezal and Ihsan Sezal, "Dark taints on the looking glass: Whither 'New Turkey'?", *Turkish Studies*, Vol.19, No.2 (2017): 9

¹⁰ Ibid.

The processes taking place in the socio-political, cultural and informational fields of the country directly affect the army as an institution, causing value-based transformations. Formerly, state institutions embodied the Kemalist value system and ideology, including the Constitutional court, the judicial system, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Kemalist-oriented parties and the RPP, the secular press, but have now essentially been changed, weakened or neutralized. Together with the army, they were the main defenders of the country's Kemalist movement. In this sense, Turkish researcher, A. Kuru, has correctly linked a gradual decline in the political role of the army and the gradual diminishing of the institutional autonomy with the weakening and neutralization of the allies' role and influence in the political field and state system, noting that the autonomy and the political power of the army stemmed from those institutions and actors being a serious factor that united the overall vision of the country and existing threats. Ideological allies in the judiciary, the political parties, and the media, in addition to some segments of society, provided the Turkish military with necessary political power and encouragement.¹¹ Along with the weakening of the army's position during the AKP's rule, the influence of its allies in the socio-political field has been significantly limited (or neutralized), which is interconnected and interchangeable. The significant growth of the Islamist, conservative elite, as well as its socio-political, socio-economic influence and sudden dominance in the judicial, media field took place at the expense of the old, ideologically close-to-the-army secular elite. Thus, the army was deprived of its supportive segments within the state structure.¹² In this regard, it should be stated that the army in Turkey was also “a system-instituting” body that was in organic communication with other state institutions, and the role of the army was positioned within that general system. The weakening of these systemic ties, as well as those in the social and public domains, contributed not only to the elimination of the army's systemic function, but also to the weakening of political levers.

In its turn, the diminution (or *elimination*) of institutional autonomy may lead to the transformation of identity and values. In other words, the Turkish army is moving to a new way of post-modernist modernization where the axis of primary transformation is the revision of the previous collective value system. It can be stated that maintaining the institutional identity of the army was directly related to its role (*role-playing character*) and autonomy. Therefore, the neutralization or limitation of this functional role of the army challenges the viability and the possibility of further existence of a single or unitary value system. For many years, it was the Supreme command's strategic priority to keep the army officers free from various public ideologies and currents, forming and preserving the officers'

¹¹ Ahmet Kuru, “The Rise and Fall of Military Tutelage in Turkey; Fears of Islamism, Kurdism, and Communism”, *Insight Turkey*, Vol. 14, no. 2 (2012): 37-57.

¹² Ibid.

value system and worldview homogeneity under strict control.¹³ According to analyst M. Gurcan, the conservative majority in Turkey now believes that after the recent military coup attempt, the army has started to shrink the burden of secularism, a process that the political elite must support. The TAF is known for its hard-line secularist character and for decades, it adhered strictly to the principle that the army should be kept off-limits from political Islam.¹⁴ Additionally, the Islamization of the army is rather a troubling issue for the secular circles. They view the secularism and the relationship of the army to Islam not only in terms of military culture, but also in the context of socio-cultural transformation of the country. The concern is that if the TAF leave their traditional secularism, the public will also follow it.¹⁵

We believe that it is not the abandonment of the secular identity by the army that will lead to the Islamization of society and the weakening of secular identity, but vice versa. The social, socio-cultural, and value transformations, one way or another, have their own influence on the identity and military culture of the army. In this transforming(ed) environment, the socio-cultural and, dominant ideological values more easily penetrate the army since the latter has been deprived of its institutional autonomy and the levers of resistance deriving from it.

The Final Blow to the Institutional Autonomy of the TAF

The army is no longer “a system-basing institute” in Turkey and has lost its role as the most important autonomous institution. Especially after the failed July 15 coup, the undertaken legislative and structural changes in the military and defense spheres could not only be a serious blow to the institutional autonomy of the army, but also opened a new way for its collective identity and value transformation. Formerly, the unified army value-base (Kemalism, secularism) and institutional self-cognition, as well as institutional culture, served to carry out its coordinating mission, and now the systemic functions have been distributed between state, political and social actors. The vivid proof of the above was the transfer of three main commands of the TAF (Land Force, Air Force and Naval Force) from the General Staff under the control of National Defense Ministry (hereinafter referred to as the NDM), as well as the full integration of the Gendarmerie and Coast Guard commands to the Ministry of Internal Affairs.¹⁶

¹³ Aydinli, Ozcan, Akyaz, “The Turkish military's march towards Europe”, 80-82.

¹⁴ Metin Gurcan, “Turkish military’s tradition of secularism facing tough test”, *Al-Monitor*, Sep. 4, 2018, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2018/09/turkey-military-facing-tough-secularism-test.html#ixzz5X32O4bkS> (accessed September 6, 2018).

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ “Kuvvet Komutanlıkları MSB'ye bağlandı”, *Hürriyet*, July 31, 2016, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/kuvvet-komutanliklari-msbye-baglandi-40176771> (accessed August 10, 2016).

Additionally, the military education system was essentially reorganized, removing it from the General Staff's control to the NDM and the Ministry of Education and Science.¹⁷

One of the key components and pillars of the army's institutional autonomy was the self-contained military education system, which was of crucial importance for the formation and maintenance of the collective identity and value of the TAF. Military education was exclusively under military jurisdiction and ideological control.¹⁸ On the other hand, the transformation of the institutional identity of the army contributes to the new phenomena that were previously under strict supervision and control, which were considered threats to the state, such as the reversal of the ban on religious headscarves in the army, the possibility of Imam-Hatip school graduates being promoted to the rank of officer, the permission for mass prayers in military units and more.¹⁹ The authorities are continuing to take steps to eliminate the former taboos in the army, as the solid Kemalist value system undergoes revision. The Islamic-conservatism (*irtica*), which used to be a threat and a "red line" for the TAF, penetrates into the army with different manifestations. Some analysts and secular circles began to speak out regarding the threat of Islamization of the army. While discussing the consequences of the July 15 coup attempt in the military, S. Waldman and E. Caliskan argue that "the opportunity of Imam-Hatip graduates higher up in the military would have significant repercussions for the identity of the armed services, challenging their traditional self-perceived role as staunchly secular bastions of the Turkish state".²⁰

In regards to the institutional autonomy of the TAF, the problem of socio-economic self-sufficiency is also very important. This is ensured by the Army Assistance Organization (OYAK - Ordu Yardımlaşma Kurumu). It is an important system that offers solutions to the social problems of around 300,000 military personnel, which also has considerable financial and economic resources in the country's economic and industrial life. OYAK employs around eight dozen different companies and businesses, with more than 30,000 employees. As of 2015, OYAK's total economic capital is estimated at about \$20 billion, with annual exports of more than

¹⁷ "Kapatılan Harp Okulları ile ilgili sürpriz gelişme!", InternetHaber, November 2, 2016, <http://www.internethaber.com/kapatilan-harp-okullari-ile-igili-surpriz-gelisme-1728028h.htm> (accessed November 7, 2016).

¹⁸ Muge Aknur, "Civil-Military Relations During the AK Party Era. Major Developments and Challenges", *Insight Turkey*, Vol. 15, no. 4, (2013): 145.

¹⁹ "TSK'da artık turban serbest", *Oda TV*, November 11, 2016, <http://odatv.com/tskda-artik-turban-serbest-1111161200.html> (accessed November 11, 2016), "Bakan Fikri Işık: İmam hatipliler de TSK'ye girecek", *Birgün*, <http://www.birgun.net/haber-detay/bakan-fikri-isik-imam-hatipliler-de-tsk-ye-girecek-122146.html> (accessed August 1, 2016).

²⁰ Simon Waldman and Emre Caliskan, "*The New Turkey and its Discontents*", (New-York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 47.

\$3 billion. Due to OYAK's existence, the TAF has been characterized as “a large industrial and economic entrepreneur” in the country for many years.²¹ In May 2016, OYAK's governing board's chairman, O. Özbahadır, and General Director, C. Ulusoy, unexpectedly resigned. S. Erdem, who worked during Erdoğan's premiership as well as in his presidential administration, was appointed to be the new head of this organization. The Turkish media qualified these reshufflings as “a step towards the AKP's self-control over the OYAK and an attempt to remove it from the army”, noting that the army's era ended in that structure. The AKP's era is being launched instead.²² OYAK has always been a factor in the socio-economic self-sufficiency of the army, under the strict control of the military, where the entry of unwanted civilians was banned. OYAK personnel changes sparked questions about the secret agenda of the AKP, which not only falls under the control of civilian authorities, but directly moves under Erdoğan's control.²³

The legislative and structural changes aimed at reducing the political role of the army through the years have essentially affected the role of the latter as an autonomous and self-sufficient institution. In Republican Turkey, the army had a special “veto” right in the political system when it nurtured society and the bureaucratic apparatus and imposed its values, thus making the military hegemonic and dominant in the political system.²⁴ Reforms on the establishment of civilian control over the army and the reduction of its political role scaled down the role of the army as an autonomous institution, which changed the essence of the civil-military relations.

Apart from systemic changes, social-value processes that affect the transformation of the latter's institutional identity are also crucial. The army as a social system also carries the influence of the social processes that affect the collective identity of the army. Taking into account the traditions of the civil-military relationship and the role of the army, it should be noted that despite the fact that legislative and institutional reforms in the sector significantly contributed to the weakening of the role of the army, non-

²¹ Arsen Avagyan, “Banaky dery Turkiayi tntesakan hamakargum”, *Haykakan banak*, 4 (50), (2016), in Armenian, (“The Role of the Army in the Turkish Economic System”, *Armenian Army*, 4 (50), Yerevan, 2006).

²² Metin Münir, “OYAK'ta ordu dönemi bitti, AKP dönemi başladı”, *T24*, May 26, 2016, <http://t24.com.tr/yazarlar/metin-munir/oyakta-ordu-donemi-bitti-akp-donemi-basladi,14641> (accessed May 26, 2016); Şehriban Kırar, “AKP, OYAK'ı böyle ele geçirdi”, *Cumhuriyet*, June 12, 2016, http://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/turkiye/549749/AKP_OYAK_i_boyle_ele_gecirdi.html (accessed June 13, 2016).

²³ Metin Gurcan, “OYAK'ta rutin görev değişimi mi yoksa sivil darbe mi?”, *Al-Monitor*, May 31, 2016, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/tr/originals/2016/05/turkey-civilian-coup-military-owned-enterprise-oyak.html#ixzz4a1CRtfjy> (accessed June 2, 2016).

²⁴ Metin Gurcan and Megan Gisclon, “From Autonomy to Full-Fledged Civilian Control: The Changing Nature of Turkish Civil-Military Relations”, *IPC-Mercator Policy Brief*, (August 2016): 15.

formal institutions, traditions, norms and military culture still play an important role. According to Turkish researcher Z. Sarigil, "legislative, institutional reforms are necessary, but insufficient factors ... and it is necessary to pay more attention to the institutional culture of the Turkish army, which also defines the collective identity of the military."²⁵ In this context, deprived of its leverage and powers in political life, the army cannot remain indifferent to the processes taking place in Turkey's social and political life. As a result of favorable or persistent impositions of ideological authoritarian regimes, the ideology of the ruling regime penetrates into the army. Such regimes typically seek not only to subdue the army, but also to maximize their own control over it in order to bring it into their own ideological field. In such a situation, the control of the army, even though it may legally belong to the parliament, is actually passed into the hands of the ruling regime. Gradually, the "conquest" of the army and the political regime occurs when the army is not only in the ideological field, but is also the beneficiary and defender of that system. In case of such consolidation, when the mechanisms of democratic control do not work, the army becomes an instrument for the authorities both in internal and foreign policy. Typically, such systems become more unpredictable and aggressive, as the army is entirely under the control and influence of the government, and the internal mechanisms of detention are absent or not functioning. As some analysts mention, the generals who survived the massive purges following the abortive coup were so terrified of President Erdogan's vengeful wrath that they moved troops into Syria²⁶ — a prospect they once resisted — without a whimper.²⁷

The legislative weakening of the role of the army caused changes in the self-consciousness of an officer relating to their former role. The consciousness of an ordinary officer, regarding the army as a dominant institution of political life, was changed. No matter how strong the traditions are, the self-consciousness of the officer is formed within the framework of those realities. On the other hand, in the army, a group of officers with new guidelines appears, which is a consequence of the prolonged governance and socio-cultural policy of the ruling Islamist power. Of course, it should be stated that the formation of such a class requires a certain period of time. The transformation of the social and cultural life of the country does not overlook the army as a social organism over time. In other words, the dominating system of values inside society penetrates state institutions, including the

²⁵ Zeki Sarigil, "Civil-Military Relations Beyond Dichotomy: With Special Reference to Turkey", *Turkish Studies*, Vol. 12, no. 2 (June 2011): 273.

²⁶ A month after the coup attempt, the Turkish army launched a cross-border operation (named Euphrates shield) with aligned Syrian opposition groups in Syria which led to the Turkish occupation and control of northern Syrian territories.

²⁷ Leela Jacinto, "Turkey's Post-Coup Purge and Erdogan's Private Army", *Foreign Policy*, July 13, 2017, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2017/07/13/turkeys-post-coup-purge-and-erdogans-private-army-sadat-perincek-gulen/> (accessed August 10, 2017).

army, when it is deprived of its systemic levers and its role. The society and the ruling party gradually nurture the army by their ideology and value preferences, in an attempt to bring it to their own ideological field.

Ü. C. Sakallioğlu observes that non-democratic regimes, in the context of civil-military relations, as a rule, tend to subject themselves to the military elite, and although civilian control over the army is exercised by civilians, it is not always democratic. The Erdoğan-model of civil-military relations is more like the one-party regime of the Turkish Republic in the 1920-30s,²⁸ when together with the ruling party and the state apparatus there was a coalescence of the supreme command of the army and the political elite, and the army was the protector and the pillar of the regime. Large-scale reshuffles undertaken by the Turkish government in the army and defense since the July 15 coup attempt widely opened the door for Erdoğan to establish direct control over the General Staff and power agencies, as well as to transform the army into his own power source.²⁹ Such a statement becomes more convincing in the case of a change in the governing system of the country and transition to the presidential system, which heralds a return to the civil-military power relations to the model of the 30-40s of the previous century.

The Turkish President's decrees of July 15, 2018, made serious changes to the defense system, which was the logical continuation of the transformations that took place in 2016. Particularly, the General Staff, as well as the commanders of the three main military units, were attached to the NDM. A number of civilian members of the Supreme Military Council (YAŞ) were also added and the NSC General-secretariat was attached to the president.³⁰ The unprecedented powers and levers given to the president by the Constitution within the framework of the transition to the presidential system enable total control over the armed forces. According to one of the decrees, the President of the country can issue orders to the Chief of the General Staff and Commanders of the Army, which, without the approval of any state institution, should be immediately implemented. One Turkish journalist qualified that decree as a victory proving supremacy over the

²⁸ Ümit Cizre, "Turkey in a Tailspin, The Foiled Coup Attempt of July 15", *Middle East Report*, August 10, 2016, <http://www.merip.org/mero/mero081016> (accessed September 1, 2016).

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ "Bakanlıklara Bağlı, İlgili, İlişkili Kurum ve Kuruluşlar ile Diğer Kurum ve Kuruluşların Teşkilatı Hakkında Cumhurbaşkanlığı Kararnamesi" (Kararname Numarası: 4), "Yüksek Askeri Şûranın Kuruluş ve Görevleri Hakkında Cumhurbaşkanlığı Kararnamesi" (Kararname Numarası: 8), "Millî Güvenlik Kurulu Genel Sekreterliğinin Teşkilat ve Görevleri Hakkında Cumhurbaşkanlığı Kararnamesi" (Kararname Numarası: 6), *Resmî Gazete*, <http://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/main.aspx?home=http://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/eskiler/2018/07/20180715.htm&main=http://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/eskiler/2018/07/20180715.htm> (accessed December 20, 2018).

military by political power.³¹ Earlier, the amendments to the law regarding the Staff of the Armed Forces in order to adjust to the presidential administration system gave broad powers to the President, in particular with regard to personnel interference, such as extension, reduction or dismissal of officers. According to the Turkish press, the President was granted the authority to carry out any high-ranking officer raids and abductions in the TAF without a decision by the YAŞ.³² On that occasion, one of the opposition newspapers released a publication titled. "*Erdoğan's Turkey. with full powers in the TAF*", noting that granting such powers to the President is unprecedented in the history of the Republic.³³

Current Trends and Future Prospects

The process of transition to a strong presidential system of governance, the trends towards authoritarianism and profound value system transformations not only deprive the army of its traditional Kemalist character, but also introduce and impose a new image of value. The coup attempt in 2016 gave Erdoğan a new opportunity and freed his hands to reshape the state system and TAF. It can be argued that Erdoğan turned the threat to an opportunity and started his own "*unprecedented coup*". In this context, the loyalty of the supreme command of the army to the current authorities of the country gives the opportunity to lead the full and collective transformation of the army in a smoother way. In the circumstances of such tendencies, which is highly probable to occur, and in the context of the current logic in Turkey, the convergence of the army and political authority can take place. The army appears to be not only under the full political control of the AKP, which has the power of the country in its hands, but is also under its ideological influence.

In April 2018, the Turkish press published information regarding the head of the Turkish General Staff, H. Akar, and Turkey's 11th President, A. Gül's, meeting. The opposition circles qualified it as an intervention by the army – "*a military memorandum*" – to Gül.³⁴ Opposition RPP MP B. Yarkadaş stated that by President Erdoğan's instructions, the aim of the visit

³¹ "Son dakika: Genelkurmay Başkanlığı, Milli Savunma Bakanlığına bağlandı", *Habertürk*, <https://www.haberturk.com/son-dakika-genelkurmay-baskanligi-milli-savunma-bakanligina-baglandi-2059351> (accessed July 15, 2018).

³² "TSK'daki terfi ve atamalarda düzenleme... Bir üst rütbeye atamalar Cumhurbaşkanlığı tarafından yapılacak", *Hürriyet*, July 10, 2018, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/tskdaki-terfi-ve-atamalarda-duzenleme-bir-ust-rutbeye-atamalar-cumhurbaskani-tarafindan-yapilacak-40891755> (accessed July 10, 2018).

³³ Sertaç Eş, "Erdoğan Türkiye'si: TSK'de de tam yetkili", *Cumhuriyet*, July 10, 2019, http://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/siyaset/1022056/_Erdogan_Turkiye_si_TSK_de_de_ta_m_yetkili.html (accessed July 10, 2018).

³⁴ "Vahim iddialar", *Sözcü*, <https://www.sozcu.com.tr/2018/gundem/vahim-iddialar-2377300/> (accessed April 30, 2018).

was to keep Gül away from running in the upcoming presidential elections.³⁵ For a long time, the media circulated information according to which Gül could be nominated as a presidential candidate by the “Saadet” party. After the aforementioned meeting, Gül announced that he would not be running.

In May of the same year, during a pre-election rally in Malatya, Erdoğan's sharp speech directed at M. Ince, the presidential candidate from RPP, was applauded by the Commander of the 2nd Army of the Land Forces, T. Metin.³⁶ This act by a high-ranking officer became a source of serious debate in the political field and in the press. The Speaker of the RPP, B. Tezcan, announced the need to investigate T. Metin, calling on the Chief of General Staff and the prosecutor's office to challenge.³⁷ The presidential candidate, M. Ince, promised to “tear the general strap” after being elected.³⁸ The General's behavior was interpreted as interference by the army in the electoral process and support for the ruling AKP. One of the opposition newspapers ran the headline, “*The party commander of the army*”.³⁹

The above-mentioned two cases make the tendencies of the Turkish army's politicization process clear as the army becomes a political instrument for the authorities. After the July 15 coup attempt, a number of analyses on the consequences of the reorganization of the TAF began to raise the issue of establishing political control over the army by the authorities and the trends and prospects of bringing it into their political-ideological field. In his observations, Norwegian researcher, L. Haugom, notices that the government, along with the increasing the civilian control mechanisms over the TAF, has the objective of establishing political control upon the latter, as opposed to civilian democratic control, due to the weakness of the parliamentary mechanisms. Instead, the executive power and the president assume a serious role in that regard. As a consequence of this, the Armed Forces will become more politicized, with stronger

³⁵ “Kalin ve Akar'ın Abdullah Gül'ü ziyaretinin perde arkasını CHP'li vekil açıkladı”, *Cumhuriyet*, April 27, 2018, http://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/siyaset/965386/Kalin_ve_Akar_in_Abdullah_Gul_u_ziyaretinin_perde_arkasini_CHP_li_vekil_acikladi.html (accessed April 27, 2018).

³⁶ “Komutan dört köşe: Erdoğan, İnce'yi eleştirdikçe Korgeneral Temel alkış tutu”, *Diken*, June 2, 2018, <http://www.diken.com.tr/komutan-dort-kose-erdogan-inceyi-elestirdikce-korgeneral-temel-alkis-tuttu/> (accessed June 10, 2018).

³⁷ “CHP'li Tezcan Erdoğan'ı alkışlayan 2. Ordu Komutanı için savcılar görevi çağırdı: Derhal işlem başlatılmalıdır”, *T24*, June 4, 2018, <http://t24.com.tr/haber/chpli-tezcan-erdogan-alkislayan-2-ordu-komutani-icin-savcilar-goreve-cagirdi-derhal-islem-baslatilmalidir,643449> (accessed June 4, 2018).

³⁸ “2. Ordu Komutanı'na ağır sözler: Senin apoletlerini sökmezsem ben de Muharrem İnce değilim”, *HaberTürk*, June 2, 2018, <http://www.haberturk.com/tv/gundem/haber/1997800-2-ordu-komutani-na-agir-sozler-senin-apoletlerini-sokmezsem-ben-de-muharrem-ince-degilim> (accessed June 3, 2018).

³⁹ “Partili ordu komutanı!”, *Birgün*, June 3, 2018, <https://www.birgun.net/haber-detay/partili-ordu-komutani-218197.html> (accessed June 4, 2018).

competition among the existing groups.⁴⁰ In his interviews, Turkish analyst N. Ali Özcan pointed out that military appointments and promotions carried out by the civilian government pursue political objectives, so that the ruling party can increase control that will lead to the politicization of the army.⁴¹ A researcher of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, S. Çağaptay, believes that as a result of the military coup failure, President Erdoğan was able to complete his takeover of the army and the police by turning them into so-called “*pro-Erdoğan*” in the context of Turkey's socio-political polarization. Moreover, according to him, in the future, political intervention by the army will not be directed to overthrow Erdoğan, but to protect him.⁴² According to Turkish researchers G. Tol and O. Taşpınar, Erdoğan's plan for the influence of conservative values and the inclusion of Islam in the army and the loyal elements invested by the current authorities in the army structures, may politicize the army officer ranks and contribute to a decline in the professionalism of the army. In addition to this, Erdoğan's primary goal is to establish loyalty and full control over the army, which is already underway.⁴³ Besides politicization trends within the military, it is obvious that politicization affects the institutional identity of the TAF, leading to further ideological transformation.

Institutional and legislative mechanisms for the weakening of the role of the army and socio-political processes undoubtedly pave the way for a change of the collective identity and value-system of the army. However, over the past decade, due to formal and informal influences, the army has found itself in the domain of institutional transformation, value and ideological imposition of the current authorities. Despite the reforms in the civil-military relationships in Turkey, where the center of gravity is tilting towards the civilian authorities, it does not imply civilian and democratic oversight of the army, as they do not ensure the involvement of state and civil institutes in civilian control mechanisms. In this case, a monopoly of control over the army taking place, where exclusive jurisdiction is given to the president's institution. With the constitutional amendments of

⁴⁰ Lars Haugom, “The Turkish Armed Forces Restructured”, *The Turkey Analyst*, September 30, 2016, <https://www.turkeyanalyst.org/publications/turkey-analyst-articles/item/566-the-turkish-armed-forces-restructured.html> (accessed October 15, 2016).

⁴¹ Nihat Ali Özcan, “Post-coup attempt restructuring means Turkish army may no longer be functional”, interview by B. Yinanc, *Hurriyet Daily News*, November 7, 2016, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/post-coup-attempt-restructuring-means-turkish-army-may-no-longer-be-functional-ozcan-105805> (accessed March 15, 2018).

⁴² Soner Çağaptay, “Erdoğan is dividing Turkey against itself”, *The Atlantic*, March 31, 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/03/turkey-erdogan-kurds-pkk-isis-syria-coup-gulen/521487/> (accessed May 9, 2017).

⁴³ Gonul Tol and Omer Taspınar, “Erdoğan’s Turn to the Kemalists. How it will shape Turkish Foreign Policy”, *Foreign Affairs*, October 27, 2016, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/turkey/2016-10-27/erdogans-turn-kemalists> accessed (December 20, 2016).

April 2017, the transition to the presidential system and the increasing power of the president, especially in the context of modern trends, control over the army can be placed into the hands of the president and the presidential administration. This, in its turn, assumes the politicization of the TAF, simultaneously contributing to its institutional identity and value-oriented transformation, which will have a major impact on both the internal and foreign political processes of that country.