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## The EU's role in averting the coup in Turkey

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In the 1990s, all the journalists and therefore the public in general knew the name of the General Chief of Staff and the secretary-general of the National Security Council (MGK).

Turkish press members used to cover the meetings of the MGK, attributing the same importance to them as they gave to cabinet meetings.

Until the July 15 coup attempt, I would not have been able to say the name of the General Chief of Staff. And if you were to ask me today the name of the secretary general of the MGK, I would have to google it.

Talking about the European Union does not prompt warm feelings among Turks especially after July 15, due to the Europeans' tepid reaction.

But I thought it might be an interesting exercise to recall how Turkey's accession process helped curb the power of the military.

Among the accession requirements to the EU was effective civilian control over the military.

The military's sensitivity to secularism and its dislike of Arab regimes where religion weighed

heavily in daily lives kept Turkey anchored to the West via organizations like NATO and the Council of Europe. Yet by contrast, by the 1990s, the army's role had taken an obstructive characteristic in terms of Turkey's integration into the EU. Not only was the army omnipresent in civilian institutions, but they used their presence to block democratization. For instance, their stance complicated the Kurdish issue as they were against granting certain rights like education and broadcasting in Kurdish.

The military also objected to changes in the penal code that restricted fundamental freedoms and resulted in several activists ending up in jail just for having expressed their views.

When the EU recognized Turkey as a candidate country in 1999, a comprehensive reform program started in order to fulfill the Copenhagen criteria that was necessary to start membership negotiations.

Between 2001 and 2004, several harmonization packages that aimed at aligning Turkish laws with that of the EU were endorsed by parliament.

Turkish diplomats negotiated the legal amendments not only with the EU, in order to guarantee that the changes would fulfill the criteria, but also with the military, which paid lip service to the idea. Yet at the end of the day, the endorsement of these harmonization packages ended with a historic transformation in civil-military relations.

The role of the MGK as well as the military's role within it was curbed. The amendments increased the number of civilians on the MGK and replaced its military secretary-general with a civilian leader. The amendments emphasized the council's advisory role and deprived the council of its executive powers, like the authority to request reports from government institutions.

Following these changes, the MGK's weight in daily politics ceased significantly in practice.

The military judges serving on the state security courts which had jurisdiction over cases involving crimes against state security were removed and the courts became entirely civilianized.

Most importantly, the General Chief of Staff's authority to appoint a military member to government agencies like the Higher Education Council (YÖK) or the television watchdog, RTÜK, was abolished. The military no longer had a representative in certain key government agencies.

These amendments put in force more than a decade ago also had their effect on changing the mindsets of both civilians and soldiers in terms of the army's role and mission.

Some might say that EU reforms have had no effect since the military attempted its takeover.

But what we faced on July 15 was not a traditional military coup. It was the attempt of the Gülen movement to topple the government using its loyalists within the army and other institutions.

Perhaps we can even speculate that the change in civil-military relations played a role in averting the coup.