

The Evolution Civil-Military Relations and Democratization in the Balkans

NIHAT CELIK*

Kadir Has University, Turkey

Abstract: Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, in addition to the political and economic orders, the structure of civil-military relations also began to change. The paper will provide an insight into the patterns of civil-military relations from a historical perspective. The main argument of the paper is that even though serious and mostly successful first generation reforms are made in the field of democratic civil-military relations, there are still some problems regarding the second generation reforms. In order to address these problems, the evolution of civil-military relations in the post-Communist era will be analyzed with a focus on successes and failures. After sorting out current problems, it will secondly try to answer the question what should be done in order to establish a more democratic structure of civil-military relations.

Keywords: civil-military relations, Balkans, security sector reform

Introduction

The modern state concept is based on the premise that only the state has the monopoly over the legitimate use of force in a country. Its first duty is to provide security to its citizens. The state fulfils this mission mainly by its armed forces. However, creating a strong body as such brings some risks together: “through its management of organised force, the military contains the potential to pose a threat to the democratic polity itself or the values on which it is based.”¹ With the advance of democratic regimes in many parts of the world, no matter how mature they are, the course of civil-military relations has also begun to change. Tax-paying citizens who finance the expenditures of military, started to question the role of military in the society.

Civilian democratic control of the armed forces has become one of the vital and essential aspects of democracy. This principle has become almost universal norm by finding its place in the *acqui* of many international organizations. Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)² has identified this norm as a condition for its members and NATO also included it in Membership Action Plans. It can be described as:

1 Born et al. 2006, 4.

2 OSCE 1994.

* *nihat.celik@khas.edu.rs*

not only a matter of preventing the military from seizing power. It is about aligning the goals of political and military leaders sufficiently that military interests do not overtake the broader societal interests. It is about not allowing the military to subvert democratic constitutional authority or to absorb a disproportionate amount of resources relative to other societal values and priorities, while ensuring that the military can and does fulfil its functions through the provision of adequate resources.³

Political scientists working in this field developed different theories on the civil-military relations. Samuel P. Huntington⁴ proposed that it is possible for the civilian authorities to control the armed forces in two ways: First is subjective control which occurs in undemocratic regimes where the armed forces are highly politicized through maximization of civilian power on all matters, thereby leaving the armed forces no autonomy. Second way is objective control which occurs in democratic regimes and envisages a clear division of responsibilities and roles between the political authority and armed forces. In those regimes, while military refrains from intervention in politics, at the same time civilian authorities also refrain from intervening in military affairs and leave military a defined room for manoeuvre that enables autonomy and professionalization. Huntington was later criticized by others. Morris Janowitz⁵ argued that contrary to Huntington, as a result of the changes in technology and society, the modern military is more active politically while Bengt Abrahamsson⁶ argued that far from being active in politics, military itself is a politicized interest group.

The mechanisms for democratic civilian control of the military may vary according to the political system (presidential, semi-presidential, parliamentary etc.), administrative structure (unitary or federal), political and security culture, historical experiences, levels of the development of civil society etc. The biggest problem in the field is that it is very hard to employ a unified theory to fit all countries. As has already been emphasized, "... currently no explicit, comprehensive and consistent system of democratic governance of the armed forces exists."⁷ In the case of former communist countries, the weaknesses emanating from applying a narrow theoretical framework becomes more apparent. Even in the non-Soviet Warsaw Pact countries, notwithstanding some fundamental similarities, civil-military relations varied considerably.⁸ These weaknesses were also underlined by Christopher D. Jones and Natalie Mychajlyszyn:⁹

3 Born et al. 2006a, 4–5.

4 See: Huntington 1957.

5 See: Janowitz 1960.

6 See: Abrahamsson 1972.

7 Born et al. 2006b, 235.

8 Barany 1997, 21.

9 Jones and Mychajlyszyn 2002, 376.

At the theoretical level, efforts to democratize civil-military relations in the former Eastern bloc and Soviet Union expose the limitations of applying Western frameworks to transition cases, raising more questions for democratic civil-military relations theory rather than confirming its core tenets.

Against this background, however it is still possible to determine some elements for an effective democratic control of the military:

- constitutional, legal and/or institutional constraints forbidding the involvement of the military as an institution (as distinct from individual soldiers as voters and perhaps as candidates for election) in domestic politics;
- a clear chain of command for the armed forces, with democratically elected leaders at its head;
- a civilian Minister of Defence and a Ministry of Defence staffed at least in part by civilians (in particular at higher levels and key policy-making positions);
- the subordination of the military General Staff to the Ministry of Defence;
- a degree of transparency with regard to the defence budget¹⁰

Since the fall of communism, Balkan countries entered into a process of transition including civil-military relations. Analyzing the structure of civil-military relations in those countries from a historical perspective may contribute a lot to the theories in the field while allowing us find the root causes of current problems.

Patterns of Civil-Military Relations in the Balkans

With their different historical experience, political and socioeconomic structures Balkan countries present us a very varied picture. In the 19th century, during their national independence wars, irregular forces constituted the core of future national armies. There were problems in creating a unified chain of command and leaders of irregular forces changed sides sometimes with important political outcomes in Serbia and Greece. After the establishment of monarchies, the military itself was a promoter of nationalist ideals. The militaries played an important role in nation-building and unification processes. In Serbia, Greece, Ottoman Empire, Bulgaria and Romania, the military establishments played a role in politics in varying degrees at different periods. In the interwar era, the intervention of the militaries increased. Following the Second World War, communist regimes were established in Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Romania and Albania. Though it is possible to label them as communist regimes, they applied communism in different ways.

For the communist regimes, control over the military, which had the power to overthrow or support the new regimes, was a vital issue. There was a need to create officer corps loyal to the communist values:

¹⁰ Cottey et al. 2002a, 7.

The Communists' suspicions of the armed forces manifested themselves in recurring purges, the numerous political control mechanisms intended to ensure the armed forces' reliability, the high Communist Party membership rates among professional military personnel, and the party's maintenance of special security forces and militias, its last line of defence after the questionable political reliability of the regular armed forces.¹¹

In 1947, one third of the officer corps in Bulgaria was dismissed.¹² Thus the officer corps was restructured with political appointees and politically motivated promotions. Political officers who had equal authority like the commanding officers were deployed in military units to ensure their loyalty and provide political training to the soldiers. Soviet military institutions became the main centres for the training of officers. After the Tito-Stalin split, Yugoslavia followed a more independent way than other Communist countries. After 1968, Romania under Ceausescu's rule shifted away from the Warsaw Pact¹³ and he had more trust in his special forces named *Securitate* than the regular armed forces. Matters related to defence such as military planning and defence policy-making were mostly under the monopoly of military personnel. Defence ministries were filled with military personnel with an active duty general serving as the minister of defence. Communist regimes did not need to recruit, train and employ civilian experts in these areas and the lack of civilian defence experts can be attributed to the communist legacy. This system brought two significant and contradictory legacies:

“First, the military was highly politicized, in the sense that it was closely tied to the ruling Communist Party and substantial efforts were made to embed communist political values and institutions within the armed forces. At the same time, however, the military was also subject to quite strong and direct civilian control and was not directly engaged in domestic politics as an institution in its own right.”¹⁴

It may be said that this legacy made it easier for post-communist governments to develop a stronger civilian control over the military. For that reason it would be fruitless to apply the approaches that are useful in the Latin American case where the armed forces returned to their barracks after the fall of military regimes they established. After evaluating the patterns of civil-military relations from a historical perspective, we can proceed to analyze the current state of affairs, which is the subject of the next chapter.

11 Barany 1997, 23.

12 Johnson 1995, 493.

13 Nelson 2002, 430.

14 Cottey et al. 2002a, 3.

Civil-Military Relations Today

The last decade of the 20th century witnessed wars, crisis and conflict in the Balkans. In addition to these challenges, communist regimes based on command economies collapsed and an uneasy transition process to establish democratic regimes based on market economy began¹⁵. Unfortunately for some Balkan countries, the 1990s was a lost decade. Contrary to the very optimistic expectations, this transition was not to happen overnight.

In general, the dissolution of communist regimes developed in a peaceful manner. However Romania proved to be a tragic exception, where the *Securitate* killed more than a thousand protesters but the Romanian Armed Forces refused to shoot the protestors and at the end sided with the people and organized a palace coup to eliminate Ceaucescu¹⁶ and this move certainly paved the way for transition to a democratic regime. As a result of the dissolution of Yugoslavia and the emerging conflicts, democratic civil-military relations in Serbia and Croatia did not develop quickly in the 1990s. War brought many problems such as paramilitary forces, criminal networks, corruption etc. Countries like Croatia, Slovenia and Bosnia-Herzegovina had to establish their armed forces and institutions after gaining their independence.

New governments elected by popular vote, severed the institutional and official links between the Communist Party and the armed forces by promulgating new constitutions. Even though sometimes blurred, open to different interpretations and amended many times after their promulgation, legal frameworks were set up for the armed forces, executive and legislative bodies.¹⁷ With the encouragement provided by the visions of NATO and EU membership, important reforms were made. In this respect, the international support provided by programmes like Partnership for Peace (PfP) played a crucial role.¹⁸

In order to analyze the challenges facing the establishment of democratic control of the armed forces, it is suggested to focus on the aspects of those reforms. First generation reforms are structural reforms that set up institutions and relationships. Most Balkan states completed the first generation reforms with varying degrees of success. Bosnia and Herzegovina with its unique administrative structure can be regarded as an exception in applying first and second generation reforms thesis.¹⁹ However there are still many steps that should be taken to complete the second generation reforms that are:

...about the consolidation of these frameworks and the democratic substance that fills the structures. In practice, these second generation reform issues are largely related to the issues

15 Gallagher 2003, 11.

16 Pond 2006, 74.

17 Zulean, 2004.

18 Sava, 2002.

19 Especially see Herd and Tracy, 2006.

of state; that is, the ability of democratic structures to provide for the effective management of the armed forces and defense policy.²⁰

The 1990s was also a period of 'civilianisation' for the ministries of defence. Civilians were appointed to the post of Minister of Defence. However, there are still problems and challenges to be addressed in order to establish democratic control over the military. The biggest challenge for these regimes is the lack of civilian experts in the areas of defence who are vital for crosschecking the information and policy suggestions provided by the military and also increasing control over defence policy-making and budgeting.²¹ Sometimes the civilians appointed to posts in defence structures are retired military officers.²²

Oversight of the military by the Parliament is a fundamental issue for the democratic control of armed forces especially by the commissions related to defence. In this field too there are important challenges emanating from the lack of interest or expertise in defence matters on behalf of the members of the parliament. Thus the quality of this oversight is below the necessary levels.

Creating public awareness and discussions over the defence matters by the general public is also crucial for the democratic control of the armed forces. NGOs and free press with available means and knowledge will have the ability to direct the attention of the public opinion to these matters. They are necessary as the watchdogs of democracy.

On the other side of the coin, while establishing frameworks for the civilian control of armed forces it should be kept in mind that civilians have the potential to abuse the military as can be seen in the examples of the Bucharest municipal elections and the Miners' Protests in Romania.²³ Civilian intervention for political benefits in the technical and professional matters related to military, may damage civil-military relations as military intervention in politics does. Instead of perceiving civil-military relations as a hostile relationship, it should be perceived as sharing of responsibilities for common purposes accompanied by mutual trust and respect. Armed forces may also have a stabilizing influence on foreign policy as argued for the Bulgarian Armed Forces that promoted a peaceful and good neighbourly regional policy while the politicians and political parties advocated a more nationalist and assertive foreign policy.²⁴ At this point a critique of current understanding of civil-military relations may be useful:

Civil-military relations are not simply a command relationship in which both sides trade 'tit-for-tat' on various issues and have different sources of power with which to convince the other side. The contemporary prevailing (Western) concept of democratic control of the armed

20 Cottey et al. 2002b, 40.

21 Johnson 1995, 502.

22 Pantev 2002, 147.

23 Nelson 2002, 439.

24 Pantev 2002, 148.

forces is not adequate insofar as it suggests a static relationship, while in practice, civil-military relations refer to an open process of mutual influences between various actors within the context of a complex political system.²⁵

Conclusion

Balkan countries made important reforms in the last two decades for the democratic control of armed forces. Even though there are some challenges regarding the second-generation reforms, they are on the true path. International community, especially Western countries and organizations should encourage and support them. Also it should be kept in mind that those reforms need more time to give their fruits when compared to the first generation reforms. Increasing the numbers of civilian students enrolled in programmes related to security studies; encouraging NGO members, journalists and MPs to join those programmes; financially supporting NGOs and think-tanks working on this field; establishing communication channels between the armed forces, ministries of defence, NGOs and journalists; activities fostering democratic principles; and providing information on the defence issues to the public would help establishing a better civil-military relations.

In order to provide a fertile ground for the development of more democratic regimes, focusing only on the military establishment can lead us to mistakes. In addition to the military, civilian-democratic control of the internal security forces, paramilitary structures and intelligence services should be regarded very important. These institutions also have the capacity and capability to threaten democratic regimes. Perceiving the civilian-democratic control as a broader concept that also includes these institutions will help developing a more democratic society.

25 Born et al. 2006b, 252.

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