



## **Umit Cizre**

Umit Cizre (born in 1946) is one of the most eminent experts on civil-military relations in Turkey. In 2006 she authored the “[Almanac Turkey 2005 – Security Sector and Its Democratic Oversight](#)”, the first-ever publication to critically examine this issue and take stock of all the relevant actors. The handbook provoked a fierce debate in Turkey, with the Chief of Turkish General Staff criticising it as an attempt to undermine the military.

In her interview with ESI, Cizre calls the Turkish army “still an extraordinary institution which has special positions, privileges and special procedures.” The military and its dominant role in Turkey has been the central focus of Cizre’s extensive academic career.

Cizre graduated with a degree in political science from London University in 1968. In 1982 she obtained a master’s degree at the Middle Eastern Technical University in Ankara and in 1987 she received her doctorate from Ankara University. She worked for many years at Bilkent University in Ankara before becoming the director of the [Centre for Modern Turkish Studies](#) at the Istanbul Sehir University in 2010. She has been a Fulbright Research Scholar and a visiting professor at Princeton University, a Jean Monnet Research Fellow at the [European University Institute in Florence](#) and a Public Policy Scholar at the [Woodrow Wilson Center](#) in Washington DC.

One of the countries Cizre has studied to learn about the transition from authoritarian to civilian rule is Spain. She is an admirer of former Spanish defence minister Narcis Serra. In his book “[The Military Transition: Democratic Reform of the Armed Forces](#)” (2010), Serra underlines the key role played by the Spanish defence ministry in bringing about, as Cizre puts it, the “civilianisation of all aspects of life.” In 2006 Cizre co-wrote an academic paper, “[Drawing lessons from Turkey’s and Spain’s security sector reforms for the Mediterranean](#)” that found that the “guardian role’ of the Turkish Armed Forces precluded civil society, political parties and its own officer cadres from exerting effective pressure towards

democratic reform and readdressing the civil-military balance,” while in Spain both civil society and political parties broke the resistance of the military.

Cizre’s work on civil-military relations and the 2005 almanac – which was published by TESEV ([Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation](#)), an independent think-tank in Turkey, and the [Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces](#) – has catapulted her to fame. She has also written on other topics, such as Turkey’s AKP party, which has been in power in Turkey since 2002. Her work includes the book “[Secular and Islamic politics in Turkey. The making of the Justice and Development Party](#)“ (2007) and various articles including “[Turkey at the Crossroads: from ‘Change with Politics as Usual’ to ‘Politics with Change as Usual’](#)”, in which she analyses the AKP’s “new roadmap” after the elections in June 2011.

In the article “[Conceiving the New Turkey After Ergenekon](#)” (2010), Cizre and Joshua Walker, a Transatlantic Fellow at the German Marshall Fund in Washington, examine the impact of the Ergenekon case on civil-military relations. Her conclusion, which she also discusses in her interview with ESI, is that “Ergenekon creates the opportunity for a smarter, intelligent leadership that sees the benefits of democratic, civilian control.”

In her interview with ESI, Cizre talks about civil-military relations, the changes of the recent months and years, the different actors, and the indictments of military staff in the Ergenekon case. She is an optimist. “I am happy to see that the country is on the right path. It has taken long, it has been painful, very difficult and very tiresome,” she says. “However, we have come to the right point now... This ideology in Turkey, this Kemalism, this guardianship role has been the source of Turkey’s problems, problems of not making progress in democracy.”