

TÜRKİYE'S ROLE IN EUROPE'S CHANGING SECURITY STRATEGY

Özge Emine ÖZÇELİK

Scholar in Residence

Analysis No : 2026 / 10

16.03.2026

This is the English translation of a Turkish language article that was originally published by AVİM on 4 March 2026.

Held under the theme Under Destruction, the 2026 Munich Security Conference (MSC) summit revealed significant signs of change in Europes approach to security. Throughout the conference, topics such as Europes strategic autonomy, boosting defense industry capacity, strengthening NATOs European flank, and reducing dependence on the U.S. came to the forefront.[1] In this context, the approach proposing that the European Union establish a more limited security coordination with specific partners such as the United Kingdom, Norway, and Canada is particularly noteworthy. However, the most notable aspect of this new security discourse is the insufficient consideration given to Türkiye, one of the significant actors of Euro-Atlantic security. While the European security architecture is being redesigned with a special emphasis on partners in the Indo-Pacific, the fact that Türkiye, a key country on NATOs southern flank, is not included in these frameworks cannot be considered a coincidence. The emerging picture shows that Europe is increasingly restructuring its security architecture with a more selective and politically coordinated club mentality.

This approach highlighted at the Munich Security Conference is the result of Europes efforts to deepen security coordination with a narrower but more cohesive group of partners. The emphasis on the United Kingdom, Norway and Canada demonstrates that Europes security is increasingly being redefined along the axis of like-minded partners.[2] What is even more remarkable is the increased emphasis at the conference on Indo-Pacific actors such as Japan, South Korea, and Australia. This reveals that Europes security strategy has begun to be shaped more by normative proximity and economic priorities than by geographic realities. However, this new club mentality does not fully align with

the hard geopolitical realities of European security. Security architectures are built not only on political alignment but also on concrete power elements such as geography, military capacity, and operational access. In this case, the insufficient consideration of Türkiye indicates a structural rupture in Europes security vision.

Türkiye is not a peripheral element of the Euro-Atlantic security architecture, but one of its central actors. Possessing one of NATOs largest armies, Türkiye plays a critical role in the operational dimension of European security with its access to the Black Sea, geographic proximity to the Middle East and Eastern Mediterranean, its position on energy and transport corridors, and its developing defense industry capacity. Especially following the Russia-Ukraine war, the prominence of Black Sea security has further increased Türkiyes geostrategic value. The implementation of the Montreux Convention, balance policies in the Black Sea, and advances in defense technologies □□□□□□□□□□□□ unmanned aerial vehicles □□□□□ made Türkiye a hard-to-ignore actor in terms of European security. [3] Nevertheless, the insufficient consideration of Türkiye in security planning shows that Europe has still not fully established a balance between geographic necessities and political preferences.

Europes turn toward more cohesive security formats with specific partners may increase decision-making speed in the short term. However, this approach carries significant risks in the medium and long term. First, European security is shaped in a multilayered and multifaceted geography. Without operational access in regions such as Black Sea, Eastern Mediterranean, the Middle East and the Caucasus, it is difficult to sustain its security claims. Türkiye is located at the intersection of these regions. Second, Europes defense industry and military mobility still depend on NATO infrastructure and the geographic contributions of allies.[4] Türkiyes logistics, bases and transit capabilities are critical to the practical functioning of the European security architecture. Third, in areas such as migration management, energy supply security, and counter-terrorism, Türkiyes role is an inseparable part of Europes security agenda.[5] This reality demonstrates that the normative club approach does not always align with on-the-ground needs. The over-institutionalization of narrow-format collaborations carries the risk of creating gaps between power and cohesion in Europes security architecture.

The topics raised and discussions held at MSC highlight the question of how selective Europe can be in security cooperation. European capitals increasingly aim to establish deepened security cooperation with more cohesive and predictable partners. However, unlike economic cooperation, the security domain is one in which geography and military capabilities play a far more decisive role. Therefore, when Europe limits security cooperation to partners with closely aligned norms, there is a risk of misalignment between plans and the real conditions on the ground. The insufficient consideration of Türkiye in this approach should be read as a concrete indicator of the tension between Europes short-term political comfort and narrow-minded selectivity on the one hand, and long-term geopolitical necessities on the other.

The Munich Security Conference discussions reveal Europes push toward a more selective and comprehensive security approach. The limited consideration of Türkiye reflects the increasing strain between Europes preferred norms and the hard geopolitical realities it

faces. A lasting and effective European security order depends not only on the deepening of narrow formats with high political cohesion but also on maintaining an inclusive strategic mindset required by the distribution of power on the ground. Pushing a geopolitically central ally like Türkiye into a secondary position in security matters carries the potential to conflict with Europes long-term security objectives. In the coming period, the success of the European security architecture will be determined by the balance established between selective cooperation efforts and geopolitical necessities. The current trajectory, however, shows that this balance has not yet been fully achieved.

Picture: EUobserver

[1] Munich Security Report 2026 Executive Summary, MSC, February 2026 https://securityconference.org/en/publications/munich-security-report/2026/executive-summary/

[2] Security and defence partnership,Council of European Union, January 28, 2026, https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/security-defence-partnerships/

[3] GUARDIANSHIP UNDER PRESSURE: DRONE ESCALATION, RUSSIAN MILITARIZATION, AND TÜRKIYES LEGAL ORDER IN THE BLACK SEA, AVİM, January 9, 2026, https://www.avim.org.tr/public/index.php/en/Yorum/GUARDIANSHIP-UNDER-PRESSURE-DRONE-ESCALATION-RUSSIAN-MILITARIZATION-AND-TURKIYE-S-LEGAL-ORDER-IN-THE-BLACK-SEA

[4] Europe remains highly vulnerable and dependent on US defence production report, Euronews, June 20, 2025, https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2025/06/20/europe-remains-highly-vulnerable-and-dependent-on-us-defence-production-report

[5] Transatlantik ittifakın sarsıntıları ve Avrupa güvenlik mimarisi: Türkiye'nin stratejik rolü, Independent Türkçe, August 11, 2025, https://www.indyturk.com/node/763150/t%C3%BCrki%CC%87yeden-sesler/transatlantik-ittifak%C4%B1n-sars%C4%B1nt%C4%B1lar%C4%B1-ve-avrupa-g%C3%BCvenlik-mimarisi

About the Author :

Özge Emine Özçelik graduated from the Department of English Language and Literature at TED University in 2026. She completed a secondary field in International Relations. She has been working as a Scholar in Residance at the Center for Eurasian Studies since October 2025.

To cite this article: ÖZÇELİK, Özge Emine. 2026. "TÜRKİYE'S ROLE IN EUROPE'S CHANGING SECURITY STRATEGY." Center For Eurasian Studies (AVİM), Analysis No.2026 / 10. March 16. Accessed October 30, 2026. https://www.avim.org.tr/en/Analiz/TURKIYE-S-ROLE-IN-EUROPE-S-CHANGING-SECURITY-STRATEGY

Süleyman Nazif Sok. No: 12/B Daire 3-4 06550 Çankaya-ANKARA / TÜRKİYE
Tel: +90 (312) 438 50 23-24 • **Fax**: +90 (312) 438 50 26
@avimorgtr
https://www.facebook.com/avrasyaincelemelerimerkezi
E-Mail: info@avim.org.tr
http://avim.org.tr

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