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and Turkish Conservative Think Tanks**

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**ABSTRACT**

Think Tanks are known as expertise-based, independent or quasi-independent organizations, which produce alternative public policy advices and analyze existing policies for governments, policy makers and bureaucracy. Although Turkey's Think Tank field is relatively new, it has been increasing in terms of number and effectiveness especially over the last decade. In this development, the role of conservative Think Tanks, which are growing under the leadership of ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) by governmental funding and public relation support of media under the control of political power, is very important.

General public's view regarding conservative Think Tanks consist of some experts being criticized for offers nothing beyond the political advocacy while speaking about different topics on TV programs and op-ed pages of newspapers. The main aim of this study is to analyze the relations between media and conservative Think Tanks more in depth by considering the functions and positioning of these institutions in power structure and their vision and paradigms directing their activities.

The Pierre Bourdieu's term called 'Fast Thinker' to describe mediated intellectuals offering superficial and quick comments and repeating 'received ideas' will be referred. This term is very useful to understand the media activities of Think Tanks and experts affiliated to them, contrasts in terms of standpoints of these two fields on specific issues and their expectations from each other.

**Keywords:** Conservative Think Tanks, Think Tank Experts, Media, Fast Thinker

## **Introduction**

It is possible to describe 2000's as think tank boom by considering increase in number and effectiveness of think tanks. In this process, the role of conservative think tanks act as organic intellectual of rulling Party AKP (Justic and Development Party) is very important. It is also a fact that the current Turkish media, which is now largely under the control of the capital groups and people close to the political power, provide important advantages to the conservative think tanks and their affiliated experts in terms of being more visible and shaping public opinion more effectively. In this research, the relationship established by the conservative think tanks with the media, the interaction of media and the think tank field and the hegemonic function of such alliance tried to be understood under the light of qualitative and quantitative data.

Two interviews from SETA (Ankara Office, General Coordinator Assistant Muhittin Ataman and Istanbul Office General Coordinator Assistant İsmail Çağlar) and one interview from SDE (President) are made. Also the views of one media professional who works in the state television TRT, where such think tanks are most visible and one of whose job is to call the experts and invite them to the programmes, are included. Media visibility of 8 high profile think tank organisations in Turkey, including SETA (Foundation for Political Economic and Social Research) and SDE (Institute of Strategic Thinking) are measured between the dates of 1<sup>st</sup> November 2015 and 30<sup>th</sup> December 2015.

In this research, Pierre Bourdieu's allegory of 'fast thinker' is referred to describe media activities of conservative think tanks and their experts. In his book 'On Television', Bourdieu use the term 'fast thinkers' to describe mediatic experts. According to him fast thinkers are a "special kind of thinker" who can serve media as available comantators in emergent situations. These experts "think in clichés, in the 'received ideas' (banal, conventional, common ideas) that received generally". Thats "why and how they can think under these conditions in which nobody can think (Bourdieu, 1996;30)". Fast thinker also provides an usefull analytical framework to understand conservative think tank experts and their media activities.

### *Conservative Think Tanks In Turkish Context*

It is not possible to talk about a full consensus in the literature about the content of the think tank concept. The reason for such uncertainty and vagueness about the definition of the concept is due mainly to the variability of its content in distinct historical processes and geographies. The Anglo-Saxon definitions of the concept emphasise that the think tanks are non-profit organisations which are independent from the state, political parties and the interest groups and which try to influence the political decision making processes by ideas or by proposals of solutions which they produce about

certain specific issues.<sup>1</sup> However when the concept is defined as such, it becomes non-inclusive for the countries outside the West, where a civil society culture independent from the state is yet not fully developed and the role of the state is decisive.

If a definition shall be made about the concept specific to Turkey, all mentioned variables must be taken into consideration. Aydın in his thesis defines the think tank as “an organization or institute that is engaged in policy-oriented research and analysis to influence the public opinion or public policy (...) without taking into account its being nongovernmental or not” (Aydın, 2006, 8). Güvenç who especially studies the think tanks and the Turkish foreign policy, instead of starting from the Western definitions, prefers to use a more comprehensive definition in his studies which also includes the “units operating within a government agency, non profit independent civil society organisations or fully profit-seeking commercial” organisations (2006, 159).

In US. context “a think tank may be labelled ‘conservative’ or ‘right-of-centre’, if it promotes a combination of at least two of the following issues and concepts: the free market system (including low taxes, privatisation and deregulation), limited government, individual liberties and values, and/or strong religious expression, traditional family values, and a strong defence (Thunnert, 2003;229)”. In Turkish Context, a think tank may be labelled as ‘conservative’ if it positions itself in conservative ‘power block’, funded by ‘Muslim-Anatolian Capital Groups (Government-Backed capital Groups)’, promotes national, traditional and religious values, emphasize national security and national interest against individual rights and liberties. The Conservative intellectuals mostly utilize Western political language based on an advocacy for democracy, human rights, freedom of expression and rule of law to justify government’s authoritarian discourses and practices (Dagi, 2004;143).

If we classify the think tanks in Turkey according to their ideologies there appears a quinary category as composed by liberal, nationalist, conservative, and nationalist-conservative and without a definite ideology. There are 38 think tank organisations which are active in Turkey. Think tanks operating within the government agencies, those which are with foreign origins and opened up offices in Turkey and organisations which are inactive or partially active are not included in this number. 18 of them are organisations that may be positioned as conservative or nationalist-conservative and 11 of them are close to the AKP paradigm. SETA and SDE, the largest conservative organisations both in terms of their influence over the public opinion, political influence and

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<sup>1</sup> If we summarize such Western centred definitions; Pautz defines the Think Tanks as “organisations intellectually, institutionally and financially independent from the state, the political parties and the interest groups, which aim to influence the political processes” (Pautz, 2011, 423). Similarly Rich also in his book titled as “Think Tanks, Public Policy and The Politics of Expertise” takes the Think Tanks as “independent, non-interest-based, non-profit, political organizations that produce and principally rely on expertise and ideas to obtain support and to influence the policy making process (2004, 11). And for Weaver and McGann, the think tanks as policy research organizations “have significant autonomy from government and from societal interests such as firms, interest groups, and political parties (2009, 5)”.

media visibility and their budget and personnel numbers are taken as the sample in this study. Before passing to the relationship of these organisations with the media, it shall be useful to briefly introduce them by using the findings of three in-depth interviews made with their top officials.

Foundation for Political Economic and Social Research (SETA)

The headquarters of SETA is in Ankara. In addition to this, it has offices in Istanbul, Washington DC and Cairo. The foundation is headed by the General Coordinator, under that seat there is a structure constituted by a director, researcher and research assistant. The directors head the departments which concentrate in seven different topics and there is a flexible structure where all departments are autonomously operating both from each other and from the headquarters (see Table 1). SETA has nearly 100 personnel employed either on full or part time basis and most of them are constituted by academics and post graduate students. For the employed positions, internalising the organisational culture, working method and think tank expert skills are rather more significant criteria than the academic title.

**Table 1. Conservative Think Tanks (SETA and SDE)**

NAME	Date& Place	Research Departments	Target Audiences	Activities
Foundation For Political Economic and Social Research (SETA)	Ankara 2005	Domestic Policy Foreign Policy Law and Human Rights Security Economy Culture and Society Media and Communication	-Public -Opinion Leaders -Policy Makers -Academicians& Intellectuals	-Research -Report and Analysis -Organize Conferences -Media services
Institute of Strategic Thinking (SDE)	Ankara 2009	Foreign Policy Domestic Policy Economy Defense&Security History&Memory	-Public -Opinion Leaders -Policy Makers -Academicians& Intellectuals	-Research -Report and Analysis -Organize Conferences -Media services

Deputy General Director Muhittin Ataman defines SETA as an organisation “conservative and along the AKP line”. Although he claims not to have any “formal connections” with the AKP”, they do not conceal that the leading cadres of the AKP (including President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu) are persons who had active roles in the founding of SETA and who gave the ideological colour of the organisation. As a matter of fact, Ataman clearly expresses that the foundation is created due to the need felt after the foundation of the AKP and its coming to power (Muhittin Ataman, Personnel Communication). Also the Media and Communication Research Director of SETA, İsmail Caglar, expresses that the think tanks are positional organisations in terms of ideology and party politics not only in

Turkey but also in the whole world and confirms the conservative and pro-AKP attitude of SETA. Although SETA does not state the size of its budget and by which persons and organisations it is funded, it clearly states that it is funded by conservative capitalist groups.<sup>2</sup> Caglar expresses that the SETA team is constituted by persons having similar life styles and ideas. In that regards SETA experts may have important positions in politics and bureaucracy, and even the Foundation may be used by certain people as a political spring board (İsmail Caglar, Personel Communication). However according to both Caglar and Ataman, the organisation has a critical distance with the political power although in term of technical issues.

The subject about which SETA is most assertive and concentrated is the foreign policy. The most important goal of SEAT is to present an original, Ankara and Turkey-centred perspective about the questions of Turkey and the world and to transmit this perspective to the whole world. According to Ataman, in Turkey “there is an intellectual ground which is constantly fed from abroad (from the West)” but Turkey is a “Muslim” country and it contains “Anatolian, Eastern and Western orientations. Our cultural heritage is a pool which is fed by two sides. We have to show an original pause which is independent from both of them (Muhittin Ataman, Personel Communication)”. SETA in order to transmit such Turkey-centred position both to the East and to the West publishes two magazines named as Insight Turkey, in English and Ru’ye Turkiyye, in Arabic.

#### Institute of Strategic Thinking (SDE)

SDE is another conservative Ankara-centred think tank and is it is founded in 2009. In order to develop a strategic vision for making Turkey a regional force and a country globally minded, it draws alternative strategies in five different areas, primary of which are domestic and foreign policy, makes research, organises national and international activities, publishes files, reports and analysis and runs civilian diplomacy, training and lobbying activities. SDE is headed by a board of trustees constituted by the representatives of nearly 50 SMEs. In addition to this, there is also a board of directors constituted by the coordinators of five different programmes and a consultation board constituted by academics, bureaucrats and politicians and called several times annually (see Table 1). SDE, like SETA, has a structure where academics constitute the majority. About 30 personnel are employed in the organisation. The coordinators of the departments are constituted by “academics that had well proven themselves”. Under them there are two or three research assistants. SDE (and the think tank organisations in Turkey in general) are not transparent in terms of their income sources and budgets. However according to the information obtained from the interviews, 75% of the organisation’s income

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<sup>2</sup> SETA is one of the largest think tanks in Turkey in terms of its personnel number. Despite that, it does not have any budget bottlenecks contrary to the other organisations. Size of the headquarter offices in Ankara and Istanbul is also confirming this argument.

comes from project revenues and 25% comes from the contributions taken from the companies which are in the board of trustees. The organisation obtains its project revenues mainly from the state organisations. They are unwilling to enjoy foreign funds on the basis that this shall affect their academic independence (Birol Akgun, Personel Communication)

SDE positions itself as the “Vision Centre of the New Turkey” in actual politics<sup>3</sup>. The “New Turkey” paradigm which constitutes the main discourse of the AKP may be perceived as the efforts of AKP, as the representative of the conservative movement with Anatolian origins, to form an alternative elite segment and a counter hegemony which shall transform the political, economic and cultural spheres and the ultimate achievement of this final goal<sup>4</sup>. And SDE is positioning itself as one of the forces which shall perform such transformation (Birol Akgun, Personel Communication).

SDE President states that absolute commitment to objective criteria is not possible in the area of social sciences and especially in the think tank area and moreover this is not the desired case. To be the spokesperson of the conservative counter hegemony movement whose roots go back to 1980’s and to assume the advocacy of the “political reforms” performed during the AKP power are the sources of the commitment of SDE. The experts of SDE were mainly grown up in conservative families with country origins, and then were graduated from the best universities in the largest Turkish cities and in part of their academic careers they found educational opportunities in the USA or in European countries. The most important financial source of SDE which represents the conservative organic intellectuals is again the Anatolian conservative capitalists which support the AKP (Birol Akgun, Personel Communication).

### **Relationship Between Conservative Think Tanks and Media**

Media and think tanks relations in Western politics has begun to deepen parallel with the rise of the ‘New Right’ ideology in 1980’s. According to Kent Weaver Advocacy tanks emerged after this decade “combine a strong policy, partisan or ideological bent with aggressive salesmanship and an effort to influence current policy debates”. This think tanks relatively establish more complex relationship with media (or some media groups) to gain indirect influence on policy making process and shaping public opinion in accordance with their ideas. When state monopoly on TV and radio broadcasting ended in 1990’s, demands of Turkish media for ‘experts and expertise’ started to increase. In this process, Conservatie-Nationalist think tanks was more advantageous in terms of media visibility.

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<sup>3</sup> See (SDE at a Glance, <http://www.sde.org.tr/en/content/learn-about-sde/826>)

<sup>4</sup> For more comprehensive information about “New Turkey” ideals of government officials and conservative intellectuals see (Alaranta, 2015; 10-12)

Today's conservative think tanks more inclined to cooperation with media and respond to expectations of media. Findings of interviews and visibility analysis clearly shows that, expectations of media from think tanks or think tank experts can be analysed in four categories:

1. Experts should be eager to be visible.
2. Their views should be predictable.
3. They should respond to urgent agendas as quickly as possible.
4. They should speak on different topics, including issues out of their field of expertise.

### *Media Preference*

Some think tanks or think tank experts don't prefer to be visible on certain media groups. Also the representatives of the conservative think tanks, whom we interviewed, evaluate the media environment in Turkey as unhealthy and too much polarized. It is stated that there is a strong polarization among the conservative (pro government) media (including the state televisions) and opposition media. Representatives of SETA and SDE are relating the cause of the unhealthy media climate to the attitude of the oppositional media.

According to the representatives of SETA and SDE, making partisan broadcasting openly, assuming the "advocacy of a certain political party and being dependent to capital etc. are normal situations for the media not to be regarded as strange situations. It shall be a mistake to expect absolute neutrality from the media". According to Caglar from SETA, what is important for the media is to pose such an attitude openly. According to him, the real troublesome situation of the oppositional media is that it pretends making independent and neutral broadcasting by giving place to different views. The audience knows what it is watching when it turns on a pro-government TV channel; however it is possible to confront with very sophisticated manipulation techniques under the appearance of neutrality in the oppositional media. Those media groups is constantly changing its political position due to the interests which it is connected and behaves irresponsible. In this context, Caglar says that he supports the oppositional media to be forced and subjected to sanctions by the government at a certain degree. As in the eyes of the conservative think tank organisations, the oppositional media is one of the most important forces, positioned against the "New Turkey" ideal". They also believe that, "Even the AKP has the political power, it could not be yet fully dominant in the cultural sphere and the media sphere and the influence of the public opinion created by the oppositional media is still stronger than the other media groups".

The representatives of SETA and SDE mainly stated that they are visible in pro-government TVs and newspapers. When briefly summarized, television news channels such as A Haber, 24, TVNET, TRT (and state televisions affiliated to it) and the op-ed pages of the newspapers such as Sabah, Yeni Safak, Star and Turkiye are the primary ones. In addition to that, channels such



as NTV and Haberturk TV, which are not in the conservative tendency and although not making directly pro-government broadcasting which have a more moderate position on the axis of the interests of the capital groups to which they are affiliated are among the channels which such think tanks are visible (see table 2).

**Table 2. Most Visible 6 Turkish Think Tanks**

<b>NAME</b>	<b>Visibility on TV</b>	<b>Cited TV Channels</b>	<b>Visibility On Newspapers</b>	<b>Cited Newspapers</b>	<b>TOTAL VIS.</b>
Fundation For Political Economic and Social Research ( <b>SETA</b> )	<b>118</b>	-TRT Haber (43) -A Haber (38) -TVNet (15) -24 (8) -Habertürk (5)	<b>77</b>	-Sabah&Daily Sabah (10) -Milat (9) -Akşam (7) -Yeni Şafak (6) -Türkiye (6)	<b>195</b>
Institute of Strategic Thinking ( <b>SDE</b> )	<b>77</b>	-TRT Haber (37) -Habertürk (8) -CNN Türk (7) -TVNet (5) -Ülke TV (4) -24 (4)	<b>36</b>	-Star (5) -Yeni Akit (5) -Yeni Şafak (3) -Güneş (3) -Diriliş Postası (3)	<b>113</b>
The Economic Policy Research Foundation of Turkey ( <b>TEPAV</b> ) (Liberal)	<b>15</b>	-NTV (5) -CNN Türk (4)	<b>97</b>	-Hürriyet (16) -Dünya (15) -Ekonomi Gazetesi (7) -Sabah (5) -Zaman (5)	<b>112</b>
International Strategic Research Organization ( <b>USAK</b> )	<b>18</b>	-CNN Türk (7) -NTV (3)	<b>20</b>	-Sabah (2) -Posta (2) -Star (2) -Yeni Yüzyıl (2)	<b>38</b>
Center For Middle Eastern Strategic Studies ( <b>ORSAM</b> )	<b>4</b>	-CNN Türk (3) -Habertürk (2)	<b>26</b>	-Hürriyet (3) -Yeni Şafak (3) -Diriliş Postası (3)	<b>30</b>
Wise Man Center For Strategic Studies ( <b>BİLGESAM</b> )	<b>17</b>	-CNN Türk (6) -NTV(4) -Habertürk (2)	<b>11</b>	-Yeni Yüzyıl (4) -Akşam (2)	<b>27</b>

It is possible to tell that SETA is more selective in choosing the channel and format in which visibility shall be attained. For instance if we start from the expressions of Çağlar, it is possible to talk about a general consensus, though not rigid, among the SETA experts for not being visible in the oppositional media or in hot debate programmes where opposite views are argued. The SETA experts express that they rather prefer to participate in programmes where there is a moderator and small number of guests, as expert view and commentator. In the TV programmes in which they participate in general all guests have similar opinions and for this reason no hot debates are made. The results of the visibility analysis also confirm this argument. Actually for SETA there is no problem in terms of finding channels for sharing its views with the public and to be visible as most of its experts are at the same time columnists or TV Presenter. On the other hand, they find it risky to come together with experts and/or journalists with opposite views in TV channels to which they are not accustomed, in terms of the efficiency of the debate and their images.

However SDE is more aggressive and outward oriented in terms of sharing its views with distinct sections. In this sense, they do not have such criteria as not taking place in certain media organisations or in some formats. Even a TRT employee, interviewed, tells that the SDE experts give priority to the news channels of the oppositional media for being visible, which have more rating and public opinion influence (Anonymous TRT Employee, Personnel Communication). According to the results of the visibility analysis, SDE is mostly visible in TRT news channel by a long way. It has the second and the third rank in CNN Turk and Haberturk channels (see table 2). The SDE experts appear in the oppositional media on behalf of representing the pro-government view and sometimes enter in debates with oppositional intellectuals and journalists.

Target audiences are main criteria for evaluating media activities of think tanks. According to the expressions of SETA representatives, to be visible in the media, to influence the public opinion in this way or to determine the quality of the public discourse have secondary importance. The real aim of the organisation is to influence the decision-makers and media visibility and achieving influence over the public opinion are a part of the effort to gain indirect influence over decision-makers. Thus media visibility is important for the organisation but it is not a success criterion by itself. However the validity of this argument may be questioned by looking at the intensity of the media activities of SETA. According to Birol Akgun from SDE, general public is a target audience by itself (see table 1). They see the media texts they produce or speeches they deliver as one of the main outputs of the organisation. They aim to “share” their research “with different sections” and hence to overcome “intellectual chattering”.

### *Giving Response to Urgent Agendas*

According to the representatives of SETA and SDE, the think tank organisations stay at a privileged position between the media and the academia. The media is interested in short term, hot agendas. It is not interested in the theoretical, cultural and historical backgrounds of the issues and it rather pursues information, news and comments in brief forms. Sensational events which may rather more easily attract the attention of the audience and received discourses or ideas which are taken granted by all but content of which are not fully checked may more easily circulate within the media. However academic knowledge is on the contrary to that, long termed and it is not interested with the current and the sensational. It is over theoretical and much more comprehensive (Ataman Personnel Communication). The think tank experts express that they reconcile these two areas and they perform the mission of interpreting the current but theoretically based comprehensive issues for the media and the public opinion in an understandable language. In this context the basic expectation of the media from the think tank organisations is the ability of the expert to interpret distinct current issues in a short and concise form, at an understandable level

Both SETA and SDE largely follow the agenda of the media while determining the subjects over which they shall write research and reports. They avoid too abstract and theoretical subjects. Such an orientation may be understood as a part of the aim of the conservative think tanks to attract the interest of the media and the public opinion. The structuring of SETA and SDE has elasticity at a level which may rapidly respond to urgent agendas. Such elasticity stems from the ability of the organisations to update their research agendas due to urgent developments in shorter terms, after they establish them on an annual basis. For SETA following up the media and the current agenda is a more institutionalised activity. One of the most basic tasks of the research assistants, who work within the body of distinct coordinators in SETA, is to “follow up the national, international and regional media in different languages about the area of their studies and to report them. When the issues in circulation are determined, short analysis or reports may be written over them (Ataman Personnel Communication)”.

The SETA and SDE experts, as the result of the direct and strong relations that they have with the media professionals, have the ability and opportunity to give responses to the agenda with extraordinary speed. The data obtained from the visibility analysis enables us to make significant determinations in this sense. For instance, in order to make comments on the general elections made in Turkey on 1<sup>st</sup> November 2015, two SETA and two SDE experts were guests for three live broadcasts in the same day. Another example is the crash down of the Russian airplane on 24<sup>th</sup> November 2015, at 09:24. The experts, immediately after the event, even when the official statements about the details were not yet heard, started to make comments either by participating in the live broadcasts or by phone connections.<sup>5</sup> Also after the terror attack in Paris, on

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<sup>5</sup> For instance Mehmet Şahin, the most visible international relations and Middle East expert of SDE and Turkey in the media has connected by phone to live broadcasts just after the event at

the 13<sup>th</sup> November, a similar event occurred (see table 3). All such examples may give an idea about the time pressure over these think tank experts and about the quality of the comments they produce under such pressure.

**Table 3. Giving Response to Urgent Agendas**

<b>AGENDA</b>	<b>Date-Time</b>	<b>SETA</b>	<b>SDE</b>
<b>Parliamentary Elections in Turkey</b>	<b>01.11.2015</b>	2 Experts attended 3 live broadcasts in the same day.	2 Experts attended 3 live broadcasts in the same day.
<b>Terror Attack In Paris</b>	<b>13.11.2015 22:16</b>	4 Experts attended 5 live Broadcasts in 14.11.2016 (3 TV Channels) <b>First Response: 09:07</b>	3 Experts attended 5 live Broadcasts in 14.11.2016 (5 TV Channels) <b>First Response: 08:30</b>
<b>Russian warplane shot down by Turkish Forces</b>	<b>24.11.2015 09:24</b>	3 Experts attended 4 live Broadcasts during the same day. (2 TV Channels) <b>First Response: 10:04</b>	2 Experts attended 5 live Broadcasts during the same day. (3 TV Channels) <b>First Response: 10:30</b>

*Predictability of Expert Views*

Media professionals want to be able to predict the views and political-ideological attitudes of experts to give place them in a certain media content. There is no doubt that; there is a strong ideological alliance between media and think tank experts. Akgun approve this alliance and extends this to include the audience. According to Akgun, “in the media who is visible in which channel is an issue closely related with the fact that to whom such channels trust. Appearance of distinct voices in the media is something important but the audience actually already knows to whom it shall trust (due to religion, ideology and identities).” Consequently, conservative think tanks are available source of experts, whose ideas can be predictable for the pro-government media (Akgun, Personnel Communication).

Media professionals usually have a ready list containing the names and phone numbers of the experts who may be invited. This list is formed by including the experts who had been previously invited to the programme and who are in ideological closeness and/or have personal acquaintance with the media organisation. It is both troublesome and risky for the media professional to search new people and invite them to the programme, who have high quality

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10:30 o'clock to CNN Türk and at 10:46 o'clock to TRT News, and after at 12:12 o'clock and at 13:21 o'clock he participated in two more broadcasts. And SETA expert Murat Yeşiltaş participated in A Haber broadcast 40 minutes later (see table 3).

and innovative opinions about the considered issue and important words to tell (Anonymous TRT Employee, Personnel Communication). Such a situation is the one of the most important factors which restricting diversity and quality of views presented in conservative media.

Another contradiction stems from the inclination of the conservative media to force the conservative think tanks to take more clear political positions and to repeat the stereotypical expressions which are already in circulation. The media is inclined to use too much generalising discourses and arguments based on simple adverseness which are currently in circulation and over which the conservative ideological bloc has a consensus without subjecting them to any questioning and also to impose them to the others. In contrast, the conservative think tank experts, though again using similar arguments, are careful to present the discourse which is posed in order to support such argument under the appearance of “scientific objectivity”. The SETA experts, due to his/her position, feels the pressure for avoiding generalizing and stereotypical discourses and placing the argument on a relatively stronger logical basis. However certain organisations such as the SDE, in order to be more easily related with the media and to be more visible, despite the risk of damaging the organisational image, gets more closer with the demands of the media.

#### *Speaking on Issues Out of Expertise Areas*

However it is not possible to talk about a full orientation among the media and the think tanks. One of the issues which the think tank experts mostly complain about is the media’s inclination to force them to make comments on issues which are out of their expertise areas. For instance, an expert who is invited to talk about the Syrian policy may confront with questions about the internal security, the law or the energy policies which are totally out of their expertise area when urgent agendas develop. The media professionals take the easy way and invite a single expert, and try to make the expert to interpret as many subjects as possible regardless of their field of expertise.

Although the think tank experts are unwilling to talk about issues which are out of their areas, for their academic backgrounds, in order to be visible, frequently they have to compromise about such principle. Akgun from SDE tells that when questions which are out of his expertise are asked to him, he shares his views with the media by making a short preliminary research. According to the findings of visibility analysis, for the SDE experts, their inclinations to make comments in areas which are out of their expertise are stronger both in the mass media and in the printed press. As the number of experts in the SDE are more limited and for this reason a few number of people has to make comments on more issues.<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, it may be observed

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<sup>6</sup> In SDE there are eight experts who are visible in the media but only four of them have intensive visibility. Mehmet Sahin, though he is an international relations and Middle East expert and General Coordinator assistant, can also talk about issues such as the internal politics, policies, security and terror. And it is also seen that Murat Yılmaz, Internal Politics

that also the media especially prefers the experts who can talk on every subject; these are the President and the Vice President of the SDE. And the Programme Coordinators are not preferred by the media if they are unwilling to talk on subjects out of their area of expertise (Table 4).

**Table 4. Most Visible SETA Experts (More Than 10 Times)**

EXPERTS	Position	Field of Expertise	TOTAL VISIBILITY
<b>Fahrettin Altun (Dr.)</b>	General Coordinator, Istanbul	Sociology (Media and Communication Sociology)	16
<b>Ufuk Ulutaş</b>	Director of Foreign Policy Program	Foreign Policy	15
<b>Burhanettin Duran (Prof.)</b>	General Coordinator	Political Science and International Relations	12
<b>Murat Yeşiltaş (Dr.)</b>	Director of Security Program	Political Science and International Relations	11

And as SETA has a more crowded team it shows less inclination to talk on subjects out of its expertise areas. The organisation has sixteen experts who are visible in the media and eight of them have more intensive visibility. When compared with SDE the distribution of their visibility number by people is more balanced. As the programme directors make fewer comments on subjects out of their expertise, they are not so visible in the media. However the General Coordinator and Office Coordinators who comment on distinct issues have more visibility (Table 5).<sup>7</sup> When we look at the visibility rates in the newspapers the situation is just the converse. In the national newspapers the Programme Directors have more references and along with this, expertise becomes more significant in comments and statements. And SETA introduced a referee institution where a text is controlled by at least two people from different departments related with the subject when short analysis are to be written for the newspapers. But they are able to give answers which may save the situation against surprising questions which are asked to them during the TV programmes.

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and Democratisation Programme Coordinator talks about foreign policy with a nearly equal rate.

<sup>7</sup> He most visible expert of SETA İS Fahrettin Altun. Altun is originally a Sociologist but he can comment on nearly all political issues. It is possible to say the same things for Burhanettin Duran and Murat Yeşiltaş. Only Ufuk Ulutaş doesn't talk out of his field of expertise (foreign policy) but he has own TV programme on TRT (see table5).

**Table 5. Most Visible SDE Experts (More Than 10 Times)**

<b>EXPERTS</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Field of Expertise</b>	<b>TOTAL VISIBILITY</b>
<b>Mehmet Şahin (Prof.)</b>	Vice Chairman, Coordinator of Foreign Policy and International Relations Program	International Relations (Middle East)	25
<b>Birol Akgün (Prof.)</b>	Chairman	Political Sciences	22
<b>Murat Yılmaz (Dr.)</b>	Coordinator of Domestic Policy and Democratization Program	Political Sciences	11

### **Conclusions**

There is no doubt that; a pluralistic media environment and access to qualified information is very important for a democratic society. European Commission’s 2015 Progress report include significant criticism about freedom of expression and media environment in Turkey. Commission notes that; “a small number of media groups dominate the media market which affiliated businesses have interests in energy, construction, real estate, trade, finance and tourism. Lack of transparency on media ownership casts doubts on the independence of editorial policies (European Commission, 2015, 23)”. Commission (and also many human rights NGOs) criticize Turkish Government’s legal and administrative sanctions, censorship and self-censorship mechanisms to control and intimidate oppositional journalist, media groups and websites<sup>8</sup>. In the light of this research, we can say that, not only those sanctions, but also logic and the way of functioning of media restrict the quality and diversity of opinions.

Television as a tool of getting information and politicization is still very effective in shaping political opinions for large part of population. As Bourdieu said; “Television enjoys a de facto monopoly on what goes into the heads of a significant part of the population and what they think” (Bourdieu, 1996, 18). Therefore examining who and which organized bodies are visible on TV, provide valuable findings to understand hegemonic relations in society and social functions of media. This study clearly shows that, small number of privileged conservative fast thinkers, dominating nearly all space of opinion in

<sup>8</sup> For detailed information about internet and media restrictions in Turkey see the reports of Freedom House (<https://freedomhouse.org>) and Committee to Protect Journalists (<https://www.cpj.org>).

Turkey (see table 2). The fast-thinkers actively utilize television to reproduce conservative hegemony.

Conservative think tanks owe their privileged positions to their strong relations with conservative media and their experts (fast-thinkers) with inclination to respond to media's expectations. It is not possible to explain the alliance between media and conservative think tanks by only political or ideological conformity. Those experts have also ability to adopt with media logic based on speed and superficiality. In parallel with the Bourdieu's allegory, they think in clichés, give quick responses to mediatic agendas and talk on different subjects regardless their field of expertise. It also can be seen that, there are significant differences between SETA and SDE in terms of media relations. In this sense, despite the risk of damage to their academic credibility, SDE and their experts prefer to establish more problematic relations with media than SETA.

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