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**The News Media as a Political
Instrument: The Turkish Case**

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**The News Media as a Political Instrument:
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Abstract

This paper discusses the relationship between media and politics on the basis of political parallelism. The Turkish media is analyzed within a historical process on three levels: state intervention and legislative regulations, the organic link between political parties and newspapers and journalistic professionalization. Following Hallin and Mancini's analysis of the media systems, the polarized pluralist model can be used to typify the Turkish media. In the polarized pluralist model, political parallelism does not emerge because the media is instrumentalized by the contingent interests of the groups, individual politicians and business persons. The study aims to analyze the Turkish media in historical processes and to show the major forms of instrumentalization in the Turkish media case. This approach shows the historical roots of the problems of Turkish media, especially in terms of, state intervention, the organic link between political parties and the media and the professionalization of journalism.

Keywords: Media Instrumentalization, Media Systems, Political Parallelism, Professionalization.

Introduction

During the last decade the Turkish news media has been discussed broadly. Although, the Turkish media has never been exempt from political power and never faced historically ideological polarization, it can be claimed that, within the last decade severely excessive politicization divisions taken place. Especially after the 2007 parliamentary elections, the Turkish national media spaces faced serious threats of freedom of expression and collided with each other under the pressure of the government. Discussions often centre on questions related with state censorship and legislative constraints concerning the limits of media pluralism, tolerance of ethnic/cultural diversity, the structural changes of media ownership and freedom of expression in Turkey. The Association of Turkish Journalists proclaimed that, in 2014 alone, 559 journalists and media employees were dismissed, 83 journalists resigned and the government imposed a broadcast ban on 30 events. Also, a large number of journalists were detained and imprisoned in 2013 (Freedom House 2014). The corruption of news media became more apparent especially, at the time of the Gezi protest in 2012 and the 17-25 December 2013 corruption operation that led to extensive bribery probes into the affairs of four ministers of the majority Justice and Development Party (AKP) government. Although political pressure has intensified recently in the era of the AKP government, the Turkish media has always been under such pressures and the media has been instrumentalized in Turkey. That is, while the media practices of AKP government have become increasingly intolerable, the current situation of the Turkish news media is actually a consequence of past experience. To understand these developments the Turkish media must be evaluated from a historical perspective which consists of an examination of state-press relationships, the organic link between political parties and media and journalistic professionalization.

Political Parallelism and Instrumentalization

In scholarly work, it is agreed that the media has gained prominence in social and political life by gradually consolidating power. In this context, there are a number of contradicting viewpoints, along with many areas of agreement regarding the position of the media in the wider processes of social and political communication. From the existing historical studies on journalism, it can be said that since its beginnings, journalism has been linked to politics. In most countries, journalism was born as a political tool, an instrument to differentiate religious ideas or beliefs of the new bourgeois elite (Hallin and Mancini 2004, Schudson 1978).

Colin Seymour-Ure (1974) used for the first time, the concept of political parallelism. In "*The Political Impact of Mass Media*", he discussed party/press parallelism, which he defined as follows: a newspaper is paralleling a party if it is closely linked to that party by organization, loyalty to party goals and the partisanship of its readers. In turn a press system can be defined as paralleling a

party system when such links exist between each newspaper in the system and a party (Seymour-Ure 1974: 173-174). Seymour-Ure also distinguished party/press parallelism between party/press system parallelism. In the former, he refers to the existence of parallelism between a single newspaper and a single party, whereas in the latter, he indicates the possibility that an entire political system is structured along the lines of an existing parallelism with the media system. Ure's definition of party/press parallelism categorizes three types of links: (1) organization, (2) goals and (3) members and supporters (Mancini 2012: 263).

According to Mancini, the concept of political parallelism is less clear and more volatile than that of party parallelism. The structural links between party organizations and newspapers are uncommon today. But, historically in countries where the organizational connections between media and political parties or other kinds of organizations were once strong, their influence can still be seen in these countries. And it is also related to the tendency of media personnel to be active in political life that connected with the strength of the advocacy traditions in journalism. Hallin and Mancini (2004: 28) claimed that "[I]n systems where political parallelism is strong, the culture and discursive style of journalism is closely related to [the] politics".

Hallin and Mancini (2004: 21) identify four major dimensions that can be useful for comparing media systems in Western Europe and North America. These dimensions are (1) the development of media markets; (2) political parallelism (an indicator of the degree and nature of the links between the media and political parties); (3) the development of journalistic professionalism; and (4) the degree and nature of state intervention in the media system. Hallin and Mancini by using these four criteria identify three models that mark the media-politics relationship for each case. These "ideal types" are the Liberal Model, the Democratic Corporatist Model and the Polarized Pluralist Model (2004: 21). The first prevails in Anglo-American countries; the second in the consensus democracies in Northern Europe and the Polarized Pluralist Model is typical of the countries in Mediterranean Europe. The Polarized- Pluralist Model is characterized by an "elite-oriented press", in terms of first dimension, circulation is small and press freedom and the development of commercial press generally came late. With regard to the second dimension political parallelism tends to be high, newspapers are often in need of subsidies; they are commentary oriented or advocacy journalism persists. With regard to the third dimension instrumentalization of media by the government, by journalists and by industrialists with political ties is common. And lastly with regard to the fourth dimension, journalistic professionalization is not strongly developed and journalistic autonomy is often limited (Hallin and Mancini 2004: 73). In this study we used a historical approach to discuss the Turkish media system with respect to the peculiarities of the polarized-pluralist model.

Common Characteristics of the Turkish Media System

State Intervention

The differing roles of the state as an owner, a regulator, and a founder of the media are clearly rooted in more general differences in the role of the state in society. Turkish media history seems to verify Gurevitch and Blumler's assertion that "all political systems generate principles derived from the tenets of their political cultures for regulating the political role of the mass media" (Gurevitch and Blumler 1979: 282)

After the foundation of the Turkish Republic in 1923, during the single party rule, it can be easily said that press freedom did not exist in practice. However, after the new Press Law was enacted in 1931, oppositional views became more or less tolerated by the single party regime (Kaya and Çakmur 2010), but it may be said that, the new regime still needed to preserve itself (Alemdar 2009).

Transition to a multiparty system in the political instrumentalization of the press became visible with the Democratic Party's alliance of itself with the oppositional press. DP's approach toward the press caused the freedom of the press to become the central theme of the political opposition (Gürkan 1999, Alemdar 2004, Kaya and Çakmur 2010: 515).

After the electoral victory of DP in the 1950 elections, the promised Press Law was adopted and unions protecting the freedom of the press and journalist' rights were formally recognized by the state. But, due to the economic situation in the country as the press began to criticize the government's policies, clientelistic relations began to develop in this era. The DP government provided state subsidies and commercial benefits that favored newspaper owners and journalists (Topuz 2003: 194, Kaya 1994, Kaya and Çakmur 2010: 515).

During the 1980s, with the introduction of neo-liberalism led by the Özal governments (Önis 2004), the nature of journalism in Turkey became more sensationalistic. Newspapers changed hands, owners preferred to earn profits rather than to adhere to journalistic ideals. In the 1990s there was an acceleration of this process within the context of economic transformation of the media through convergence and concentration where big business groups acquired newspapers and TV stations to create media empires (Adaklı 2009, Kaya 1994, Sönmez 1996, 2010).

During the 1990's, the relationship between political elites and the media strengthened the economic power of the media. But this alliance led to editorial censorship and prevented the exercise of trade unions rights (Finkel 2000, Tılıc 2000, Tunç 2003).

After Turkey's EU membership candidacy was accepted, Turkey made progress in democratizing its legislative framework in terms of media. Because the policymaking process was limited to legislative adaptation, the transformation in the recognition of media freedom could not be implemented (Sümer 2010).

After the 2002 elections, AKP came in to the power and started to change the media structure of Turkey. During the period of 2002-2007, in line with the conservative-democrat approach and the EU membership goal, AKP adopted a moderate policy to provide support to the capital and the counter viewers. But in the electoral process of 2007, this balanced policy started to change and the authoritarian tendency of AKP came to the forefront to overtake the previous conservative-democrat approach. These authoritarian tendencies strengthened when AKP's vote increased to 42% after new elections. AKP's election victory led to acceleration in the reshaping of media ownership patterns because the government needed a medium to influence and persuade the masses about the governments' political decisions.

In 2007, for example the country's second biggest media group Turkuvaz Media, was sold to the Çalık Group, which has close ties to the government and where the Prime Minister's son-in-law serves as the chairman of the board. The Çalık Group used credits provided by two major public banks and recently resold another pro-government construction company which acquired a number of important public procurements for infrastructure projects. In 2014, TMSF once again seized the media outlets of another big media group, the Çukurova Group, due to its public debt eventually sold these outlets. A businessman, Ethem Sancak, who declared to be "lovesick for the prime minister" acquired a television channel and a newspaper in this transaction. The government used its power to suppress the opponent media. The biggest media group Dogan Media and its journalist recurrently criticized and reprehended by Prime Minister was also threatened with the tax audits.

The Organic Link between Political Parties and Media

Turkey is a country in which there are organizational connections between parties and media organizations. The first newspaper was published to support and serve the State in the Ottoman Period (Kaya and Çakmur 2010: 520). During the years of the war of independence, *Hakimiyeti Milliye* was the semi-official newspaper of the TBMM and was published for the purpose of protecting the regime. The lead writer was the Member of Parliament, Falih Rıfki Atay (İnuğur 1992: 353). The other newspaper, *Cumhuriyet*, began publishing under the directive to represent the republic and the governmental actions, in 7 May 1924 (Tellan 2009: 31). *Ulus* was in the part of the government that published for the purpose of the channel or communication with the public during the single party years. After 1945, it became the official newspaper of CHP. Between 1946-1950 *Ulus* was the publication in charge of official announcements but in the government of DP *Zafer* newspaper was placed at the top because of its close relationship with the government (Emre 2009: 34-37). *Zafer* was the written and pictorial performance archive of DP throughout all the years it was published and closed right after the 1960 coup d'état (Emre 2009: 182). During the single party regime and the multi party system before 1960, newspapers were an apparatus of the political parties. But, the single party era was the basis of the constitutive power of the new regime. In the early years of the Republic, even though the government comprehended

the effectiveness of the press and considered the freedom of the press a necessity for public administration. Deliberations about the limitation of the press freedom started the damage of the nation by using this freedom (Alemdar 2009: 18).

Even though, after 1939 the bans were increased on the opposition newspapers and journalists, this could be evaluated in terms of extraordinary conditions of the period. But during the DP era, especially between the years of 1955-1960, 2,300 press cases were brought to action and 867 journalists were condemned; the right to this evidence was denied; paper and printing machines were assigned to the proponent journals; official advertisements which were the main income of the newspapers allocated the proponents and all opponent press and critical journalist were restrained. A "nylon press" was created in the DP era. As a result of the authoritarian approach of the DP's strong clientelistic ties emerged between the political party and the newspaper owners, resulting in the instrumentalization of the press.

In the period of the DP Government besides the "nylon press", *Hürriyet* and *Milliyet* were launched in 1948 and targeted the underclass. Their context was composed mainly by popular culture. *Hürriyet* and *Milliyet*, in their purpose to make money, represented a new kind of commercial press, and were differentiated from the other newspapers (Adaklı 2006: 118).

During the 1960's and 1970's it's difficult to mention closely associated links between the political parties and the newspapers. While newspapers supported the political parties with similar opinions the party-press parallelism began to decline. Clientelistic relationship began between political parties and journals or journalists and this opened the way for the conglomeration of the media in 1980's.

In the late 1980's and early 1990's a transformation occurred in the Turkish media landscape. Private broadcasting and cross media ownership emerged. After the 1980 Coup D'état and during the ANAP governments the Turkish media faced both economic pressures and was diverged from public functions. One of the most striking characteristics of this period was the face to face meetings between the media owners or chief editors, who were in need of the state credits or subsidies for media conglomerates (Adaklı 2009: 299). The development of "clientelist" relationships between media owners and the state resulted in the deregulation of media markets in 1990's.

The financial crisis of 2000-2001 badly affected media conglomerates because of their investments in sectors outside of the media. So the financial crisis exacerbates the Turkish media conglomerates' use of media profits in areas other than media investments. For media conglomerates, media was only an instrument for the expansion of their investments into the construction, energy and finance sectors that used state loans. As Aslı Tunç (2003: 310) stated, this is the period that "the media owner has the last word in Turkey". The Oxford Business Group (2010) also noted that "for Turkish media conglomerates, broadcasting was primarily a mean of wielding the political and economic muscle".

After the 2000-2001 economic crises, the power shifted under the rule of AKP government. Opponent mainstream media companies "reconfigured" or "proponent" media companies by the way of transferring them to TMSF (Saving Deposit Insurance Fund). These media companies were sold to the proponent entrepreneurs. For scholars who considered that the current situation is a result of the media structure before the crisis of 2001. The withdrawal of the financial sector from the media sector and the entry of new capital to fill the gap is believed to have caused the crisis (Sözeri and Güney 2011).

Journalistic Professionalization

According to the Hallin and Mancini assert that media systems and journalistic practices are directly related to the peculiarities of countries including different political system characteristics, in the countries "where political parallelism is very high media organizations are strongly tied to political organizations and journalists are deeply involved in party politics" (2004: 26).

It is well-known that, during the single party regime the Turkish press was under the control of the political power. Generally this view could be accepted but one must consider that, during the foundation phase of the Turkish Republic, the political power needed to take precautions to protect the new regime, and the press was one of these precautions. In this period, while on the one hand the south legislated new regulations for the press, on the other hand it also aimed to establish the news agency and radio stations. The first press law of the Turkish Republic enacted in 1931, has two important features. The first one was to build a responsible press to strengthen the new regime and act as an advocate; and the second one was to initiate steps to improve the journalistic profession. But the 50th Amendment of this law involved the ban of the journals. Following the first press law, the Press-Association Law of 1938 established to secure the journalistic profession that defines the profession of journalism, journalists' rights and responsibilities. The Press-Association law, obligated journalists to become members of the Press-Association in order to be able to practice their profession; the association also had the task of monitoring journalists to rule the ethical issues (Alemdar 2009: 14-16).

In the new political environment after the Second World War, repealed of legislation about press, the Democratic Party prepared a new law in 1950 which constituted the liberal principles. This press law gave journalists the right to form unions and to sign a contract with their employer. But it was not long, in the "Golden Era" of the press, until the press started to criticize the DP government, -new constraints and oppression of the press started as well. The DP governments practices with respect to the press started the first self-control debates and after the 1960 coup d'état the first Court of Press Pride was established. The Courts function had been limited and the press councils could only deal with complaints about the press, additionally it didn't have any power of sanction. The only authorization was the ex-probation and warning so, it was not effective in the long run because of the political and social

conditions (Uzun 2009: 23). In 1963, the Turkish Journalist Union (Türkiye Gazeteciler Sendikası-TGS) was established.

At the beginning of 1971 journalists little by little lost union rights through several methods and an inclination to subordinate journalists emerged. Furthermore, this inclination found legal ground in the period after the 1980 military intervention.

By the 1990s the "de-unionization" process became apparent in the Turkish media system. New media owners appealed to several methods to eliminate unionization of journalism and the pressure of the media owners TGS had diminished. According to Kaya, no profession in Turkey has encountered such desperation as journalism. Today, a union journalist -except for some exceptions- means "unemployed journalists", the unionization movement is being eliminated and "associationization" is spreading. Aside from the journalist communities, the number of associations founded according to different fields of activities has increased extensively. For Kaya, these associations strive to meet their members' extraprofessional individual hedonistic interests rather than the execution and moral principles of their profession (Kaya 1999: 652).

These efforts about the professionalization of journalism in Turkey underwhelm against the market-oriented forms of media. Weaker professionalization of journalism could not eliminate the political instrumentalization of news media and competitive pressures hindering the development of a neutral journalistic professionalism.

Media Instrumentalization

Hallin and Mancini conceived the idea of media instrumentalization in the "Comparing Media Systems". Media instrumentalization was defined as "the control of the media by outside actors -parties, politicians, social groups or movements or economic actors seeking political influence- who use them to intervene in the world of politics" (Hallin and Mancini 2004: 37, Hallin and Papathanassopoulos 2002).

Instrumentalization is closely linked to the very origin of news media. In most Western countries, the press was born to diffuse the ideas of different religious, political, or bourgeois groups; it was an instrument. Even today, the news media can be used not only to communicate news, but also to spread new ideas, support particular groups, and promote particular behaviors (Mancini 2012: 263).

After the September 12 1980 military coup d'état, the 1980's and the 1990's are the years that the Turkish media started to conglomerate. In those years the media had lost its relative independency from the government because media capital groups started to integrate mainly with governmental sectors in Turkey such as energy, finance, banking and building. Capitalist interests rather than journalistic ethics have taken a prominent role during those times and the media has been instrumentalized.

Especially in the 1990's the media positioned themselves in favor of the capital and focused their content on social events, the avoidance of the labor-

capital relationship and so on. Particular interests designed by the media outlets and the defamation were a determinant factor of competition rather than of content quality. These situations resulted in the "confidence crisis" and became distant from public broadcasting.

Conclusions

During the first decades of the Republic, it was seen that the efforts to institutionalize journalism as a profession were made, but these efforts remained inclusive. After the multi party system established the clientelistic relationships between the politicians and press owners it was started the instrumentalization of the press. Political parallelism, in the means of Hallin and Mancini, was seen only in the period of the 1960's and 1970's. During these years the opinion of the press was increased but this term declined with the 1980 coup d'état. In the economy-politic ethos of the 80's and 90's the Turkish press was not lost the traditional legitimacy patterns of liberalism and also lost the independency from the political power.

Almost all scholars believe that the "limited" and "oppressive" political formation set up after the coup in 1980 still remains in its essence. According to Kaya, albeit the significant quantitative developments that took place after 1980, the media fell short in providing a qualitative contribution to the democratization of society, in increasing the level of participation and the improving of societal diversity and pluralism. Media, with its current operation and discourse, has transformed from being an instrument that freely informed the citizens about the universe they live in, to an "insidious, shameless if need be, propaganda tool" (Kaya 1999).

In the 1990's, there are three major forces that make news media powerful vis-à-vis the governments. These three forces are deregulation policies in the media sector, the use of media profits in areas other than media investments and the clientelistic relationships between the media patrons and politicians. During this period the media owner had the last word in Turkey but this fragile structure lasted until the 2000-2001 economic crises. After the 2002 elections, the power balance was changed in the favor of the government. As of 2015, the situation of the Turkish media still rests on the media structures of 1990s. The AKP government created its own media and used it as a propaganda tool in its favor. The current media structure doesn't need professional ethics of journalism nor professional journalists. The historical, political, economic and social conditions of Turkey did not allow the consolidation of professional journalism but created the news media as a political instrument. Journalists have always been doing their job as per compliance to their work ethic. The negative conclusions of the new ownership structure, along with the heritage of former suppressive policies of political powers and the prevailing strong role of the state in society did not facilitate the attempts to develop free media.

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