

TURKEY

1. GENERAL INFORMATION ON MEDIA AND MEDIA USE

According to the Turkish Statistical Institute (TUIK) the population is exactly 70,586,256 (TUIK 2008). Of these 87.4 per cent are adults, defined as people 15 years of age and older. The illiteracy rate among adults is 13.5 per cent. Enrolment in schools between 1990 and 2006 indicate a distinct gender gap. Despite social responsibility projects and campaigns like Baba Bizi Okula Gönder ('Dad, Send Us to School') and Haydi Kizlar Okula ('Come on Girls, Let's Go to School') to encourage poor families to send their daughters to school, the illiteracy rate among the female population is approximately 21 per cent. The Eight-Year Compulsory Basic Education Law, which was passed in 1997 and extended primary education from five to eight years, is expected to improve the literacy rate over time. The secondary school enrolment statistics for girls have been lower than those for boys, mostly as a result of economic and cultural factors (Gök/Ilgaz 2007). According to the OECD indicators on education, girls spend approximately 11.2 years in education (OECD 2006).

Literacy and education

At present in Turkey there are 43 national daily newspapers with a total circulation of 5 million. The circulation numbers of some of the national newspapers are listed in Table 1. Among those dailies, there are four sports newspapers (Pas Fotomaç, Fanatik, Efsane Fotospor, Fotogol) with a strong emphasis on Turkish soccer teams and league. The circulation of those four sports newspapers is 513,000 (almost 10 per cent of total circulation). There are also nine newspapers that are printed in languages other than Turkish. Those are Agos Weekly published both in Armenian and Turkish, Apoyevmatini in Greek, Azadiya Welat in Kurdish, Iho in Greek, Salom Weekly in Ladino and Turkish, The New Anatolian in English, Today's Zaman and Turkish Daily News in English and finally Türkei Kurier in German. Moreover, there are 212 local newspapers in 61 different cities. Finally, 3,450 periodicals, half of them weekly, are published in Turkey. The average daily circulation of local newspapers varies between 1,000 and 15,000.

Media landscape

CIRCULATION NUMBERS OF NATIONAL NEWSPAPERS (SELECTION)

Title of publication	Circulation number
Zaman	768,057
Posta	736,473
Hürriyet	504,175
Sabah	432,718
Milliyet	275,147
Aksam	202,108
Star	173,311
Türkiye	143,841
Yeni Safak	128,226
Bugün	100,169
Cumhuriyet	70,118
Radikal	31,612
Taraf	13,325
Birgün	6,231

Daily circulation numbers between January 21-27, 2008.

Source: <http://www.medyatava.net>

The public broadcaster TRT (Turkish Radio & Television Broadcasting Corporation) has four national television channels: TRT 1 (general), TRT 2 (culture and art), TRT 3 (youth channel with sports and music programmes and broadcasts live from the Turkish National Grand Assembly at specific hours), and TRT 4 (education). TRT also has a regional channel, TRT-GAP, for the south-eastern region of Turkey and two international channels, TRT-INT for Europe, USA and Australia, and TRT-AVRASYA for Middle Asia and Caucasus.

Beside the TRT channels, 24 national, 16 regional and 224 local television channels and 36 national, 108 regional and 944 local radio channels broadcast in the country. There are also 76 TV channels on cable, of which 10 are foreign. There are five radio channels operating on cable. Kurdish-language broadcasts, banned for many years, were introduced by the state broadcaster in June 2004 as part of reforms intended to meet EU criteria on minorities. Some overseas-based Kurdish TV channels broadcast via satellite.

Party media No political parties run their own radio, TV stations and newspapers. However, this picture might be deceptive given the complexity of political involvement by the media in Turkey. For instance the daily Cumhuriyet, which is a staunch defender of secularism in the country, acts like an official publication of moderate leftist party CHP (Republican People's Party). Cumhuriyet is widely read among military, diplomatic and academic circles because of its opposition to conglomerate trends

in the media and also its anti-American and anti-globalist positions. Its editorial line mainly focuses on the possible dangers of Islamisation of the country, coming with the rise of the AK-Party (Justice and Development Party) in government.

Starting with Turgut Özal's tenure between 1982 and 1991, religious communities, cults, and sects came to realise the power of the media and have been encouraged in this by the right-wing, conservative political parties for the last three decades. They have gradually become extremely powerful during the current AKP government, recognising the myriad opportunities (economic and political) this particular party could offer them. Despite the complexity of the Islamic media scene in Turkey, there are well-known, dominant actors that have become more visible as a result of their close links with the political establishment. For instance, Fethullah Gülen, a religious cult leader who lives in the United States, has been using the daily Zaman, to spread his message to his Nursi community, whose name comes from the village of Nurs, but which brings to mind the word Nur, meaning 'light' in Arabic. Starting with the wealthy businessmen of Izmir, Gülen mobilised resources allowing him to control Zaman, a television channel (Sanyolu TV), 25 radio stations and two weekly magazines (Aksiyon and Sizinti). His wealth is claimed to be 25 billion dollars (Akyol 2008).

Various Islamic newspapers support different religious sects and congregations such as the daily Türkiye (Isikcilar sufi sect), Yeni Asya (Nur sect) and Yeni Mesaj (Icmlal sect) and maintain close relations with the AKP government. However, there is one particular newspaper that has direct links with the AKP. Yeni Safak was founded by Yakup Yönten and Tufan Mengi, who were known as close friends of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Because of financial problems, the newspaper was sold to Ahmet Sisman in 1995 and eventually the Albayrak family purchased it. The Albayrak family changed Yeni Safak's editorial line from defending the ideas and beliefs of radical Islamist ideology 'Milli Gorus'(National View) – whose manifesto indicates "just order" will overcome the "worthless order" in the West, because it is based upon violence, injustice and exploitation' – to a moderate Islamist position. When one of the columnists, Sadik Albayrak became an in-law of the prime minister, he had to quit his job. However, Yeni Safak continues to support the AKP government with a conservative, moderate Islamist editorial line. In 2005, Ahmet Tasgetiren, the chief columnist, resigned when his article critical of Tayyip Erdogan was rejected by the newspaper. In short, the AKP government is gradually creating its own media conglomerate with various newspapers, magazines, television and radio stations in an effort to defend itself from the harsh criticism of the opposition.

The number of internet users in Turkey increased from 7.5 million to 20 million between 2002 and 2007. There are approximately 60 internet news portals in the country. Since overall trust in the mainstream media is extremely low, younger people prefer to get their news from these news portals. Some of the most popular news portals are Independent Communication Network (bianet.org), internethaber.com, gazeteport.com, iyibilgi.com, stargundem.com, gazeteci.tv, objektifhaber.com, aktifhaber.com, sansursuz.com, and imedy.com. There is no censorship of these internet sites unless they tackle sensitive matters, such as the alleged Armenian issue, criticisms of Atatürk, etc.

Internet media

Independent internet newspapers and blogs create a promising platform for the quest for hard news in Turkey. Since scepticism and cynicism about the mainstream media's reliability has grown, readers have turned to the internet in search of more objective and less biased news and analyses. Censorship is not explicit, but self-censorship occurs among online journalists, who are concerned about violating many restrictions. Furthermore, media organisations are nearly all owned by giant holding companies with interests in many sectors beyond the media, and they therefore influence news to serve their own business interests, in addition to allegedly trading positive coverage for political favours.

Of the total of 17.5 million households in Turkey, adult viewers spend 5.5 hours in front of the television set daily, while children spend 3.5 hours, on average. According to Nielsen AG reports, the rating for TRT dropped from the 5th place to 8th in 2007. Only 4 out of 100 households watch TRT programmes. In a week, Turks listen to the radio for 13.3 hours and surf on the internet for 10.6 hours (NOP World Culture Score Index 2008). According to AC Nielsen Research, 7 million

Media consumption

households have a digital satellite TV receiver.¹ Also, around 1.5 million digital satellite STB units are deployed in Turkey annually. There are only 1 million households currently using pay-TV services. This represents about 6 per cent of the total market. Today there are over 20 million internet users in Turkey, most with ADSL broadband access, and the infrastructure is rapidly shifting to fibre-to-home delivery.

Media influence on political opinion The influence of the media on the formation of political opinion in Turkey is rather low. Since the Turkish press has a history of becoming the mouthpiece of governing political parties and of large corporations, in order to receive social, political, and monetary benefits, the public does not trust the press.

State-owned media The official abolition of the state broadcasting monopoly was brought about by an amendment of Article 133 of the 1982 constitution, which defined the public broadcaster TRT as an 'autonomous' corporation. Following this change in the constitution, the long-awaited Radio and Television Law was passed by parliament on 13 April 1994, to regulate both private and public service broadcasting. The bill provided for the establishment of a Radio and Television Supreme Council (RTÜK) to determine whether all broadcasts followed the basic guidelines put forward in the law. This new council was made up of nine members, appointed by parliament. The RTÜK Board includes six members nominated by the AK-Party and three by the Republican People's Party (CHP). As its structure indicates, RTÜK is not an independent entity. Most of the members are elected by the AKP and supporters of the government. RTÜK has the authority to sanction broadcasters if they do not comply with the law or its expansive broadcasting principles; the sanctions it has used include fines and the cancellation of programmes or licences. The broadcasters criticise the broadcasting law for being too vague and restrictive and the penalties of RTÜK for being harsh and disproportionate. For instance, on 2 October 2007 Deputy Prime Minister Cemil Çicek ordered the broadcast media to restrict their reporting on the death of 12 Turkish soldiers who were killed by an attack of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK). Çicek sent a letter to the Radio and Television Supreme Council (RTÜK) asking it to censor coverage of the fighting.

State-owned media and published opinion Around 70 per cent of TRT's funding comes from a tax levied on electricity bills and a sales tax on television and radio receivers. As these are hypothecated taxes, as opposed to the money coming from general government funds, the principle is similar to that of the television licence levied in a number of other countries. The rest of TRT's funding comes from government grants (around 20 per cent) with the final 10 per cent coming from advertising.

In the past TRT has been used as a propaganda tool by numerous governments. However, after the deregulation of the media scene, as described above, TRT began to lose its dominance in Turkish politics. Yet, still today, as a public broadcaster, TRT has to follow the official ideology and discourse. If the present coverage of TRT was to be evaluated, 'friendly towards the government' would be an appropriate rating.

2. LEGAL ENVIRONMENT

Freedom of expression The preamble to the 1982 constitution initially stated that 'no protection shall be afforded to thoughts or opinions contrary to Turkish national interests.' On 17 October 2001, a number of constitutional amendments were adopted to improve freedom of expression and of the press in order to improve the country's prospects of joining the EU. The new preamble does not mention 'thoughts or opinions'; the term 'activity' has been substituted instead.

Free media coverage Although Article 28 states that 'the press is free and shall not be censored,' a number of provisions make it an offence to write or print any news or articles that threaten the security or 'the indivisible integrity of the state within its nation and territory'. Similarly, although Article 31 states that '... individuals and political parties have the right to use mass media and means of communication other than the press owned by public corporations. The conditions and procedures for such use shall be regulated by law. The law shall not impose restrictions preventing the public from

receiving information or forming ideas and opinions through these media, or preventing public opinion from being freely formed, on the grounds other than national security, public order, public morals, or the protection of public health ...,' Article 13 allows extensive exceptions and permits restrictions on the grounds of protecting national security, public order, public peace, public interest, public morals, and public health (Çatalbas 2007). In a former version of Articles 26 and 28 before the 2001 amendments, there was a clause that banned the use of languages 'prohibited by law'. That prohibition was removed from the amended Articles 26 and 28, allowing Kurdish-language broadcasting and publishing.

Article 7 of the Anti-Terror Law was amended to restrict the context in which publishing propaganda could be prosecuted as a criminal offence; it was re-defined to read as 'propaganda which encourages terrorism.' An amendment to Article 8 reduced the upper time limit for the suspension of broadcasts – from 15 days to 7 days – that can be imposed on radio and TV stations for broadcasting propaganda against the territorial integrity of the state. It also changed the aggravating situation clause (use of printed mass media) to limit the increase in the penalty to 'one-third' instead of 'from one-third to half.'

In May 2002, the parliament passed a new Media Law. The law, intended to strengthen the powers of RTÜK, hastened the concentration of media ownership by letting the country's private media barons bid on public contracts and trade on the stock exchange. The law also prohibits broadcasts that 'violate the existence and independence of the Turkish Republic, the territorial and national integrity of the state, the reforms and principles of Atatürk,' or imposes similar restrictions on the internet. In June 2002, the Constitutional Court temporarily froze certain parts of the law, but censorship and other restrictive provisions remain in effect.

*Regulation of
media coverage*

Another major change to the justice system was the abolition of State Security Courts in May 2004. These courts, comprising both civilian and military judges, tried cases against the integrity of the state and had been accused of human rights abuses and an absence of due process.

The enactment of the amended Turkish Penal Code (TCK in Turkish) on 29 June 2005 fell short of the expectation that it would promote freedom of the press. Some provisions, which the authorities had used before to breach international standards related to freedom of expression, were carried over from the old penal code. For example, Article 159, which criminalised acts that 'insult or belittle' various state institutions, re-appeared as Article 301 of the new penal code in the section entitled 'Crimes against symbols of the state's sovereignty and the honour of its organs'.

Article 301 of the Turkish penal code is certainly the best known of Turkey's restrictive speech laws, but in fact there are a number of others that, taken together, effectively undermine freedom of expression. Article 301 states, '1. Public denigration of Turkishness, the Republic or the Grand National Assembly of Turkey shall be punishable by imprisonment of between six months and three years. 2. Public denigration of the government of the Republic of Turkey, the judicial institutions of the state, the military or security structures shall be punishable by imprisonment of between six months and two years. 3. In cases where denigration of Turkishness is committed by a Turkish citizen in another country the punishment shall be increased by one third. 4. Expressions of thought intended to criticise shall not constitute a crime.'

The attempt to draw a distinction between criticism and denigration is highly problematic. The lack of legal certainty about the crime leads to arbitrary interpretation by prosecutors and judges. Notoriously, Article 301 has been used against scholars, writers, and journalists and has been invoked with increasing frequency in 2006 and 2007. It gained notoriety when Nobel laureate Orhan Pamuk and Turkish-Armenian journalist Hrant Dink were charged under the law for speaking out about Turkey's role in alleged mass killings of Armenians in the early 20th century. In 2006, 55 people were brought to trial under Article 301 of the Turkish Penal code, and six of them were sentenced. Of 199 people on trial, 37 were tried for 'insult' or 'slander', 23 for 'inciting to hatred and hostility', 14 for 'influencing the judiciary', eight for 'alienating the public from military service,' and one

for 'membership in an illegal organisation.' Eighty-three people faced 'terrorism' charges. The year 2007 started with the murder of Agos editor-in-chief Hrant Dink. The charges under Article 301 against Hrant Dink were dropped posthumously, but his son, Arat Dink was convicted in the same case. The Turkish government announced that it would revise the law and bring it to parliament for a vote.

Besides Article 301, many of the penal code violations have an impact on the newsgathering profession and the wording is extremely vague. For instance, Article 278, section (1) indicates 'a person who fails to inform the competent bodies about the crime being committed shall be imprisoned or a term of up to one year'. Similarly, Articles 329 and 336 made it impossible for investigative journalists to expose political or military corruption. Article 329, section (1) indicates: 'A person who discloses information whose nature requires it to be kept secret for reasons relating to the security, or internal and external political interests of the state shall be sentenced to imprisonment for a term of five to ten years', while Article 336, section (1) reads: 'A person who discloses information whose disclosure has been prohibited by the competent authorities through laws or regulatory procedures and whose nature requires it to be kept secret shall be sentenced to imprisonment for a term of three to five years.'

The new penal code also increased prison sentences where the media are involved, in contrast to the Press Law. As an example, where journalists write about an on-going police investigation, the current Press Law (Article 19) provides for large fines, while the new penal code (Article 288) carries prison sentences from six months to three years.

Changes in the past five years Article 318 of the penal code has not been modified as part of the reforms which are aimed at a rapprochement with the European Union, although in February 2002, a 'mini-democracy package' (Law No. 4744) was adopted in the process of preparing for EU accession. It provides for jail terms of six months to two years for distributing propaganda or encouraging activities that could divert the population from military service. Similarly, the government has not touched Law No. 5816, under which insulting the founder of the Republic, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, is punishable by one to three years in prison. In this case, the sentence has increased by a half for journalists and news media.

In June 2006 the Turkish parliament revised the Law to Fight Terrorism, greatly widening the scope and number of crimes punishable as terrorist offences, introducing articles likely to further restrict freedom of expression, and failing to restrict the use of lethal force by law enforcement officials. In July the president approved the law but applied to the Constitutional Court for the annulment of two articles relating to sanctions against the press. Freedom of the media 'could be undermined by provisions allowing the suspension of periodicals and introducing the liability of chief editors and of press and media owners for publishing terrorist propaganda or praise them in press and media organs' (CEU 2006: 6).

Although many positive steps have been taken such as abolishing the death penalty, removing restrictions on minority language education and broadcasting, protecting civil liberties including women's rights, broadening freedom of association and religion, taking stronger measures to protect against and prosecute torture, expansion of some articles to widen the types of cases that can be penalised, it is debateable how real the Turkish government's alleged commitment to human rights is. Besides, how these changes are put into practice is more important than their existence on paper. These modifications can be rated as a slight improvement, however.

Monopolies and cartels Corporate entities in Turkey have a maze-like ownership structure. This is not Turkish idiosyncrasy since there has also been rapid and uncontrolled spread of free-market policies and deregulation trends in the post-1980s 'nascent democracies' of Spain, Greece and Portugal (Önis 2003). Although the concentration of ownership is a global phenomenon, there remain major problems in Turkey regarding the legal protection of media workers (the lack of unions) and free speech rights.

Dogan Media Group (DYH), Turkey's leading media conglomerate, includes newspapers, magazine and book publishing and distribution, printing, television and radio broadcasting and new media. It operates eight national newspapers, 24 magazines and six printing facilities in Turkey, as well as one in Germany. The holding is also involved in media distribution, broadcasting (Dogan TV) and retail online sales, including music and book stores.

Axel Springer AG, the German media giant, owns 25 percent of the shares of Dogan TV Holding. This is the leading broadcasting company in Turkey, with an estimated 24 per cent audience share and a 36 per cent estimated market share. The multimedia groups again are the main actors in the private broadcasting market: Dogan Group owns Kanal D, Star TV and CNN-Türk; Çukurova Group owns Show TV and Sky-Türk, Digitürk; Dogus Group owns NTV, e2, Cnbc-e; Feza Group owns Samanyolu TV, and MNG Holding owns TV8.

As the sole bidder, Çalik Group tendered USD 1.1 billion for ATV and Sabah newspaper and purchased those media outlets. The group led, by businessman Ahmet Çalik, has good relations with the government, and Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's son-in-law Berat Albayrak is a part of Çalik's management. Çalik Group is currently engaged in the textile, energy, construction, finance and logistics sectors. The Savings Deposit Insurance Fund (TMSF) seized control of Sabah, Atv and other assets of Merkez Yayın Holding in April 2007. This attempt is a result of seeking to recoup debts of about USD 900 million from Dinç Bilgin, the previous owner of the media titles, whose lender Etibank collapsed in 2000. TMSF sent the results of the ATV-Sabah tender to the Radio and Television Supreme Council (RTÜK) and the Competition Board and the necessary approval was received at the beginning of 2008.

Sabah sells nearly 430,000 copies a day, making it the country's fourth-biggest newspaper (see Table on page 190), and ATV was the second most-watched channel with a 9.5 per cent audience share in July 2007, according to AGB Nielsen Media Research. In September 2007 Rupert Murdoch entered the broadcasting market in Turkey by acquiring a 51 per cent-share of Ihlas Group's TGRT channel.

3. POLITICAL CONDITIONS

Media coverage of the Kurds, the largest minority in the country (approximately 15 million), is weak and mostly one sided. Kurds are mostly associated with terrorism (the PKK), and are portrayed as divisive and as putting forth unreasonable demands (Sezgin/Wall 2005). Scholarly research also confirms the nationalistic coverage of the mainstream press, tending to define the nation via perceived internal and external threats (Yumul/Ozkirimli 2000). The coverage of the mainstream press treats Kurds as enemy others, belittling and discrediting their existence and cultural values. The choice of words and pictures to describe Kurds is mostly biased. While news coverage is expected to build bridges between different cultures, the mainstream press continues to reaffirm and reproduce prejudices.

Coverage of marginal groups

In contrast to the official line, there are sensitive issues which are off limits, such as criticising Atatürk and his legacy, the military, publishing news and articles about the 'alleged' Armenian genocide and the Kurdish issue. One example is Law No. 5816 under which insulting Atatürk is punishable by one to three years in prison.

Self-censorship

Article 318 of the criminal code has not been modified as part of the reforms which have been carried out since 2002 aimed at rapprochement with the European Union. It provides for jail terms of six months to two years for distributing propaganda or encouraging activities that could persuade people to avoid military service. The sentence is increased by a half for journalists and news media. The concept of 'conscientious objection' as a human right is a taboo in the Turkish media. If a columnist or reporter publishes anything on this subject, they are very likely to be charged under Article 218 of the Turkish Penal Code, which criminalises 'alienating the public from military service', and to face several years in prison.

As a result of these articles of the penal code, self-censorship among columnists, reporters and political cartoonists is extremely common. Cartoonists are not immune from these legal restrictions so there are many charges against editorial cartoonists who draw for dailies and weekly humour magazines (Tunç 2002). As a sign of his determination, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan has targeted cartoonists by putting them on trial between 2005 and 2008.

Although discrimination on the basis of personal characteristics is illegal under the penal code, it is still common to see stereotypical images, anti-Semitic expressions and sexist discourse on Turkish newspapers and news magazines. Approximately 25,000 Jews, 3,000 Greek Orthodox Christians and 50,000 Armenian Orthodox Christians live peacefully in Turkey as minorities. Though they are integrated in the Turkish establishment, it is still difficult to openly publish about being a non-Muslim or a non-believer, however.

Obstacles to internet access A bill passed by parliament on 4 May 2007 allowing the authorities to block websites with content deemed to have insulted the memory of Atatürk, was signed into law by the former President Ahmet Necdet Sezer on 22 May 2007. As a result of this law, an Istanbul court has ordered the national telecommunications company Turk Telecom to block the video-sharing site YouTube on numerous occasions in 2007 and 2008 because of content regarded as being 'insulting' to Atatürk.

As this reveals, legal restrictions extend to the internet. Article 8 of Law No. 5651 on the Prevention of Crimes in the Computer Domain calls for content to be blocked if it violates the Law on Crimes Against Atatürk. The article states that '[w]hen there is sufficient evidence of the improper aspect of content (...) access must be blocked.' As well as punishing crimes against Atatürk, Law No. 5651 also punishes 'inciting suicide' (Article 84), 'sexual abuse of children' (Article 103), 'prostitution' (Article 227) and 'inciting drug use' (Article 190).

Changes in the past five years Actual state pressure against the media has changed for the better during the past five years with the help of the prospect of European Union membership. Turkey has seen strong improvement. However, there are still instances of state repression, such as Kanal Türk TV channel's being intimidated by the ruling party because of their critical reporting in February 2007.

4. ECONOMIC PRESSURES

State subsidies The only source of income for the private media is advertising revenues. Private channels especially cannot survive without commercials. According to the recent RTÜK regulations, the duration of commercials has been cut down from 20 minutes to 6–7 minutes. This resulted in a sharp increase in advertising prices on national television stations. However, the public broadcaster, TRT, is not in a vicious competitive environment where ratings are the key criteria for success. TRT's financial status is secured by state subsidies but it still tries to get a share of the advertising.

In Turkey the whole advertising market is worth 3.7 billion YTL (1 YTL = 1.7 EUR). Two-fifths of this is spent on television commercials (approximately 1.4 billion YTL), of which 90 per cent goes to Dogan, Merkez and Dogus Groups.

In 2007 TRT's total income was around 590 million YTL, with 168 million coming from the taxes levied on television and radio equipment, 270 million from the taxes levied on electricity bills and only 55 million from advertising revenues. TRT employs some 7,500 people. TRT's total annual expenditure was approximately 696 million YTL in 2007. As a result, the public broadcaster's financial situation is not very promising. According to Nielsen AG reports, its ratings dropped from 5th to the 8th place in 2007. Only four out of 100 households watch TRT. There has been ongoing mismanagement in the institution, which for the past decade has been over-staffed and broadcasting unappealing programmes.

Although political advertising is banned in the country, the Television Producers Association (TVYD) and the CEOs of private channels are currently trying to negotiate with RTÜK to lift the ban.

One of the biggest concerns in terms of diversity of the media in 2007 was the attempts by the government to establish its own supporters in the media. Television channels, radio stations and newspapers enjoy financial support and favours from the government and in return they are used as propaganda tools. Islamic newspapers such as Zaman, Yeni Safak and Vakit are open supporters of the ruling party whereas Sabah has been sold to a businessman who has close links to the prime minister. Similarly, Kanal 24, Fox TV and Samanyolu are big supporters of the AKP government. In 2008 ATV will be in the hands of the Çalik Group, who also purchased Sabah. As a result, the issue is not that the public broadcaster TRT has become friendly towards government but, rather, the unconditional support that comes from the powerful private media conglomerates. Given its relatively low market share, TRT's role has become almost negligible compared to the big private media companies and their close links to the government. This could be damaging for the alternative and oppositional voices that never get heard in society.

Further aspects

5. NON-STATE REPRESSION

Following Hrant Dink's assassination, debates about the concept of the 'deep state' reappeared on the nation's agenda. The criminal organisations within the state are believed to be behind Dink's murder. The Turkish political system consists of high-level elements within the Turkish military, the security and intelligence services, and the judiciary. There have been allegations, still not proved, that the deep state is in close contact with foreign intelligence agencies, mafia, drug and arms dealers, and even human traffickers. The notion is similar to that of a 'state within the state', but additionally the deep state operates in the dark, using extra-judicial means, such as death squads.

Repression by non-state groups

The members of the deep state are wedded to a fiercely nationalist, statist ideology and if needs be they are ready to block or even oust a government which does not share their vision. They believe they act on behalf of the nation and the state and so may sometimes be willing to ignore the law.

Since Turkey is still going through a strong nationalist backlash, the influence of the deep state makes it difficult for journalists to write critically about five major areas: Atatürk, the Kurds, the security forces, the Armenian killings, and the Turkish presence in Northern Cyprus. There is no direct evidence that the deep state is behind the Article 301 prosecutions, and only circumstantial evidence that it has had a hand in the spate of ultra-nationalist films, books and television programmes that have flooded the market over the past two years (Freely 2007). It is believed that the more Turkey breaks free of the deep state, the more it will become an open, transparent society.

The fear of deep state repression against the liberal media has increased over the past five years and can be rated as a strong aggravation. In addition to the deep state's existence, one of the major problems in the media sector is the anti-union environment. Trade unions are constantly under attack by corporate media owners. Prior to the 1990s, many journalists were members of the Journalists Union of Turkey (TGS). TGS protected journalists' rights and negotiated collective bargaining agreements with the Turkish Newspaper Owners Trade Union. However, after the 1990s, union organisations began to fade away across all publishing and broadcasting in Turkey. This situation left the journalists vulnerable to all kinds of economic and social crises (Tunç 2002). Media owners used blunt tactics, such as threatening journalists with the loss of their jobs if they did not leave the union; journalists were also forced to sign clauses from the labour code classifying them as 'ordinary' labour (Clause No: 1475), as opposed to the clause (Clause No. 212) which offered journalists special legal protections, a minimum salary and working entitlements (Christensen 2007).

Changes in the past five years

6. CONCLUSIONS

Freedom of the media: general situation Freedom of the media in Turkey has improved over the last two years, particularly because of the country's attempts to adjust to EU laws and norms. However, freedom of the media is also restricted. The media landscape is characterised by a combination of the concentration of ownership, the lack of labour rights and problematic press/speech laws.

Major obstacles to free media coverage From the point of view of journalists who live and work in Turkey, major obstacles to free media coverage are the infamous Article 301 of the penal code, and many other vague clauses in the code used to penalise journalists and the sensitive issues that cannot be challenged – such as criticising Atatürk and his legacy, the military, publishing news and articles about the 'alleged' Armenian genocide, and the Kurdish issue.

Asli Tunç

1| Interview with Mustafa Gözalan, Executive Board Member, Dogan Media Group for World Vision Issue 8, July 2007 at http://www.nds.com/worldvision/thirty_eight/article_1.html.

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